



River Street Project Nearing End of PE Phase

The traffic calming/safety project for River Street in Wilkes-Barre City is nearing the end of the preliminary engineering phase. The purpose of the project is to slow down and re-direct traffic on the 4400-foot section of River Street between North Street, near the Luzerne County Courthouse, and South Street which cuts through the Wilkes University campus. This is the only section of River Street inside and outside of the city that has four lanes.

The objectives of traffic calming are to reduce vehicle speeds, improve safety for both pedestrians and drivers, and enhance quality of life.

The proposed traffic calming and re-directing will be accomplished via the use of landscaped and concrete islands down the center of the road. The landscaped islands

will be located between South Street and E. Northampton Streets on S. River Street, and between Union and Jackson Streets on N. River Street.

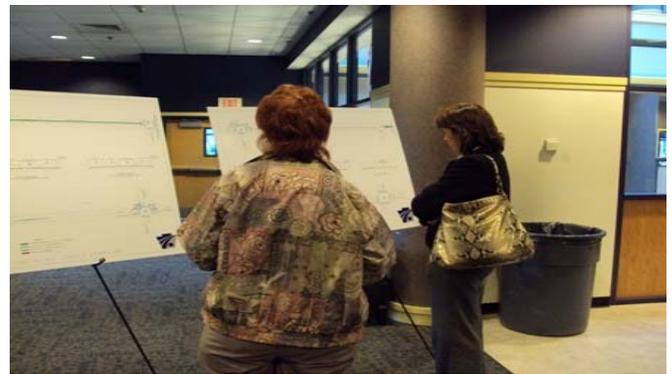
The concrete islands are proposed to be placed between E. Northampton and Market Streets, and between Market and Union Streets.

Refuge islands, places situated in the middle of the road where pedestrians can walk across one

lane before crossing the other lane, will be located at Market Street and in front of the courthouse.

New Americans With Disability (ADA) curb ramps will be constructed at each intersection, and a new sidewalk will be placed on the park side of the street between Union and Jackson Streets.

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Interested citizens view proposed River Street project renderings

Fall/Winter LTAP Courses Scheduled

The following LTAP courses are scheduled for the fall/winter period:

Pavement Markings: Applications and Maintenance Monroe County

November 2, 2011 8:30 AM - 12:30 PM

Smithfield Township Building
155 Red Fox Road
East Stroudsburg, PA 18301
Telephone: 223-5082

Work Zone (Temporary) Traffic Control - Carbon County

November 29, 2011
8:30 AM - 12:30 PM

Carbon County Emergency Management Services Building

1264 Emergency Lane
Nesquehoning, PA 18240
Telephone: 325-3097

Equipment & Workers' Safety - Schuylkill County

February 2, 2012 8:30 AM - 12:30 PM

Schuylkill Community Education Center
1-7 Centre St. Mahanoy City, PA 17948
Telephone: 773-1270

Managing Utility Cuts - Lackawanna County

February 21, 2012
8:30 AM - 12:30 PM

Clarks Summit Borough

Building
304 South State Street
Clarks Summit, PA 18411
Telephone: 586-9316

Common Sense Solutions to Intersection Problems

Luzerne County

January 10, 2012
8:30 AM - 3:30 PM
NEPA Offices
1151 Oak St., Pittston, PA 18640

Telephone: 655-5581

For additional information on the LTAP courses, contact Kate McMahon at 655-5581, Extension 249

As a transportation planner, I tend to notice transportation-related items when I travel. On a trip to Montana in August, one of the first things I noticed was the difference in road construction practices. When I landed in Bozeman, my friend Chris, a high school classmate, told me that the trip back to Helena would probably take longer than usual because of construction on State Route 287. So, I expected to see the orange barrels a mile or so before the construction area, and lane cross-overs as we have here in Pennsylvania. I was quite surprised to find none of those things. When we reached the construction site, the pavement ended and we were traveling on a dirt road, with its fair share of ruts and potholes, and no lane markings. "Welcome to the wild, wild, West!", I thought. Riding through this site at night while my friend dodged potholes, not to mention on-coming traffic, was interesting to say the least.

During my week in Montana, my friend and I did a lot of traveling around the state. When I wasn't enjoying the scenery, I noticed that Montana posts different speed limits for cars and trucks and designates different speed limits for daytime driving versus nighttime driving. We also saw a few signs designating "Cell Phone Pull-Offs" - Montana's attempt to reduce cell phone calls and texting while driving.

The scarcity of traffic and the flatness of the terrain became apparent early on while riding on the 2-lane state routes. The lack of traffic there made the traffic situation in our area seem like New York City in comparison. I guess that shouldn't have been surprising given that Montana just hit the million mark in population as of the 2010 census. So, the whole state has just 500,000 more people than we do in Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties alone. I guess that's what they mean by the "wide open spaces".



Road construction site on state highway 287 in Montana

In Pennsylvania, we're accustomed to seeing roadside memorials that designate the spot where someone lost their life in a crash. These are erected by family members or friends of the deceased. In Montana, the American Legion erects small white crosses at sites of fatalities - one cross per fatality. This practice started in 1952 when six lives were lost in a crash over the Labor Day Holiday in Missoula. A member of the local American Legion had the idea that putting up these crosses would remind people to slow down and drive carefully. Unfortunately, we saw several of these crosses - five at one spot - in our travels throughout the state.

After spending some time in Helena, the state capital, we headed to Yellowstone National Park. We drove south from Helena to Gardiner, a town that seems to exist solely to accommodate tourists, where we entered Yellowstone via the Roosevelt Arch, a stately stone gateway that proclaims, "For the benefit and enjoyment of all people". As we drove around the park, we discovered that the roads there are not used strictly by vehicles but also by animals - big animals - that sometimes opt to travel via pavement instead of meadow. On our way back to the park entrance one day, traffic came to standstill. The reason why became evident when a lone bison came plodding up in the other lane, totally oblivious to the traffic jam he was creating and the frenzied paparazzi vying to get his photo. We later heard from other travelers that some-

times several members of the herd take to the roads causing a bison jam.

After leaving Yellowstone through the West Yellowstone entrance, we headed back up north to Helena. From a planner's perspective, my friend lives in mixed-use, high-density nirvana. Her condo is located downtown in a historical building that fronts on a pedestrian mall called Last Chance Gulch. From her condo, she can walk to a variety of specialty shops and restaurants, the library, and a movie theater, and is able to bike to the community college where she teaches. This situation made it easy for me to explore the city when she was not available.

Our final road trip took us to Glacier National Park which is located near the state's northwest border with Canada. From a transportation standpoint, the most spectacular part of the park is the Going-To-The-Sun Road. Describing this road, its construction, and scenic qualities would require a whole separate article, so I will provide some highlights only.

The road, cut from the side of a mountain that serves as the axis of the Continental Divide, bisects the park from west to east for a distance of 50 miles. The road was built to "give the public the opportunity to see the magnificence of the park while keeping in harmony with the park's natural features and environmental functions." It offers breath-taking scenery that flaunts the handiwork of the glaciers that formed the mountains and scoured-out, U-shaped valleys below. There are only 25 glaciers left in the park and they are expected to be gone by 2020.

You can't travel this road and not wonder how in the world it was built. In doing some research, I found out that construction started in the early 1920s and the road opened to traffic in 1933. During the construction process, workers had to walk several miles just to get to the mountain and, once there, had to scale a distance of 2700 feet to reach the actual job site. I was surprised to learn that only three men died during construction, all of them related to the great stone wall.

Originally estimated at \$600,000, the actual construction cost was \$2.5 million. It's the only road in the country that has been designated both a National Historical Landmark and a National Civil Engineering Landmark.

There's currently a \$27.6 million restoration project being done on the road with stimulus funds to repair damage from rock slides and avalanches that have occurred over the years.



Far Left: White cross designating fatal crash location



Left: Bison in Yellowstone National Park sharing the road with tourists

Transportation Funding Situation Discussed at Annual PENNDOT Planning Partners Meeting

The chronic underfunding of the transportation system in Pennsylvania was a topic of discussion at the annual PENNDOT Planning Partners meeting which was held on October 18-20 in State College.

Transportation Secretary Barry Schoch addressed the MPO/RPO representatives regarding the problem stating that the current method of acquiring transportation funding is obviously not working. If it were, the state wouldn't be \$3.5 billion short.

The Secretary likened the costs of the transportation network to the costs people pay for access to other networks. For example, the average cost for access to cable television was \$7 per week in 1999. In 2009, it was \$12 per week which represents a 79 percent increase over 10 years.

Similarly, average cell phone costs were \$16 per week in 2007, and \$18 per week in 2010 representing a 13 percent increase over 3 years, or a 4 percent increase in cost every year.

The Secretary pointed out that increased costs for these networks come to us without discussion or options on our part. We pay the increased cost or we lose the service.

In contrast, when corrected for inflation, the cost to people using the transportation network has actually decreased by half since 1970. The actual fuel tax paid by an average driver who drives about 12,000 miles per year was approximately \$390 in 1970, and dropped to \$158 in 2010. This decrease has occurred in part because of the higher Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFÉ) standards for vehicles. This term describes the overall fuel efficiency of a vehicle

manufacturer's fleet of passenger cars or light trucks with a gross weight of 8500 pounds or less, manufactured in the U.S. for any given model year. The standard has risen slowly over the years and is currently at 30.2 miles per gallon for passenger cars and 24.1 for light trucks. So, even though gas is more expensive than it was 30 years ago, we pay less in gas tax revenues because vehicles get more mileage per gallon.

Inflation also plays a role in the cost of materials used to reconstruct roads. Assuming a 3 percent inflation rate per year, purchasing the same volume of asphalt, steel, concrete, and other materials in 10 years would require an additional 33 percent in funding.

Secretary Schoch discussed the work of the Transportation Funding Advisory Committee (TFAC) and the set of recommendations they compiled on how to increase transportation funding over a period of ten years. The Commission came up with a three-pronged approach consisting of modernization techniques and strategies, a recommended funding package, and a Decade of Investment.

In regard to modernization, the challenge was to identify those changes that save money in the long run even though initial costs may be higher than existing ones. An example is the replacement of all traffic signal lights with LED lights in tandem with the synchronization of signals with PENNDOT oversight. At present, local municipalities have ownership of traffic signals in the state, and most of them cannot afford the proper upkeep of those signals. This step would lower energy costs, help traffic flow more smoothly, reduce congestion, which in turn improves air quality.

Other modernization techniques include: making vehicle registration renewals every two years and drivers license renewals every eight years; eliminating annual car inspections for vehicles less than two years old; and phasing out registration stickers. Since state troopers have computers in their vehicles, the stickers no longer serve the purpose they once did.

Among the proposed increased funding options are the following: cap or move State Police funding to the General Fund rather than having it come out of the Motor License Fund; increase vehicle and driver fees to keep pace with inflation at approximately 3 percent per year; uncap the Oil Franchise Tax; restructure Act 44 so that the revenues that currently go to highways and bridges would be redirected to transit.

The Decade of Investment refers to a programmatic approach to repairing and expanding the state's transportation infrastructure.

In his closing remarks, the Secretary urged the planning partners to consider how a revenue system based on Vehicle Miles Traveled, a system whereby every driver would pay according to the number of miles traveled per year, could be implemented.

The Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO received a briefing on the TFAC report and recommendations by commission member, Tom Lawson, at their meeting in August. Dealing with the funding shortage situation firsthand, the MPO decided to write a letter of support to the governor and to all local elected officials urging them to take action on the TFAC recommendations this fall.

Getting Around in Montana (continued from Page 2)

About 600,000 vehicles use the road every year despite the fact that it is only open for 3-4 months when free of snow.

We left the park via the east gate which took us through the Blackfeet Reservation. After traveling several miles through pretty isolated territory, I found myself actually looking forward to getting on I-15 where I was hoping we would see more traffic and perhaps some cities. We did see more vehicles on the interstate, but I'm sure I encounter more traffic driving between Wilkes-Barre and Scranton

on I-81 than we did during that 3.5-hour trip on I-15 to Helena. For a person from the more populous part of the country, those wide open spaces of the Treasure State take some getting used to.

So, if you're into escaping the crowded east coast in search of plentiful elbow room and beautiful, jaw-dropping scenery, I highly recommend taking in the Big Sky country of Montana and the national parks. You won't be disappointed.

Speed limit sign for trucks with daytime and nighttime speed limits.



**LACKAWANNA/LUZERNE METROPOLITAN
PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

Published By: Luzerne County Planning Commission
 Contact: Nancy Snee
 Telephone: 570-825-1564
 E-Mail: Nancy.Snee@luzernecounty.org

Web Page Link:
http://www.luzernecounty.org/county/departments_agencies/planning_commission/lackawannaluzerne-metropolitan-planning-organization

PENNDOT District 4-0 Web Site:
www.neparoads.com



River Street Project Nearing End of PE Phase (Continued from Page 1)

All work will be done within the existing alignment of the roadway, meaning that no permanent Right-Of-Way is expected to be taken, although some temporary easements will be required during construction.

Traffic signal upgrades will include improved pedestrian phases at all signals, countdown timer pedestrian signal heads, ADA-compliant push buttons and equipment, and signal timing/optimization of traffic signals throughout the project, including the signal at the corner of Ross Street.

A new mid-block crosswalk will be constructed between Market and Union Streets which will require new pavement markings and signing. There will be no signal here.

The width of the existing lanes is 10-11 feet. There are 2 lanes in each direction, although in most cases, one of the lanes serves as a turning lane at the intersections as

well as for driveways and other access points throughout the block.

The new proposed configuration calls for one lane in each direction which will be 11 feet wide with 1-2 feet offsets to curb, and 10-11-foot turning lanes at each intersection. The turning lanes are estimated to be 75 feet in length.

At a recent public meeting, citizens expressed

concern about the lane reduction from 2 to 1 in each direction. One of the issues raised concerned the ability of emergency vehicles to pass other vehicles if there is only one lane. The turning radius was also an issue for some people who questioned whether the proposed medians would interfere with tractor-trailers or school buses making the turn from South St. onto River Street. Another issue voiced by those in attendance

was how the flow of traffic coming off the Market St. Bridge would merge with the through traffic. They cited the inconsistency of the traffic signal at this location which sometimes allows a continuous right turn, and the traffic back-ups on the bridge that occur when that is not the case.

All of these issues will be considered before the project moves into final design which is expected to occur in December.



Proposed Rendering of Landscaped Median on section of River Street