

Autumn

2003

LACKAWANNA/LUZERNE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

Connections

Davis Street Project Completed

The \$20.4 million Davis Street project that began in November of 2001 was officially completed on September 26, 2003 at a ribbon-cutting ceremony that featured a pair of snow skis used to cut the ribbon. The interchange reconstruction project at Exit 182 (formerly Exit 51) will benefit skiers, Red Barons fans, movie-goers, golfers, concert-goers and all other drivers who use Montage Mountain Road or Davis Street for work or recreational purposes.

According to Bob Doble, Acting District Executive who presided at the ribbon-cutting, "The old Davis Street Exit was built in the 1960's when there was no road to Montage Mountain. This new re-built Davis Street/Montage Road Exit is designed to handle our 21st century traffic to all the businesses and attractions on the Mountain and Davis Street."

The interchange reconstruction project has been in the

works for a decade. CECO Associates engineering firm was given the "go ahead" to start preliminary engineering on April 23, 1993. Final design of the project was

started on March 9, 1999, and construction began on November 5, 2001.

The improvements completed in this major reconstruction project include: a new I-81 southbound loop ramp to Montage Mountain Road, a new exit from I-81 northbound to Montage Mountain Road, and a new entrance ramp from Davis Street to I-81 southbound; the reconstruction and lengthening of the old exit ramp from I-81 southbound to Davis Street and the reconstruction and lengthening of



State Senator Mellow cuts the ribbon as Commissioners Corcoran and Castellani look on.

the entrance ramp from Davis Street and Montage Mountain Road to I-81 northbound; construction of new, 6-lane Davis Street Bridge and demolition of old bridge; widening of I-81 southbound bridge over railroad tracks, concrete repairs to I-81 northbound bridge over the railroad tracks, three new signalized intersections, widening of Montage Mountain Road, relocation of Stafford Avenue, new highway lights, new signs and drainage improvements.

Keyser Avenue Project Nearing Completion

The \$7.6 million widening and reconstruction of Keyser Avenue at the intersection with the Morgan Highway is nearing completion. The ribbon-cutting is expected to take place in mid November.

In addition to widening Keyser Avenue, a new 6-lane railroad bridge was constructed to replace the old bridge built in 1908.

The final paving was done during the week of October 20 by American Asphalt Paving Co. from Shavertown. The design consultant for the project was Clough Harbour & Associates LLP from Moo-

sic. A cast-box-culvert that runs diagonally beneath the railroad bridge, and a 12-inch high pressure gas main at the same location presented many challenges during the project. The fact that Keyser Avenue has a traffic volume of about 30,000 vehicles/day

and the railroad bridge carries 14 freight trains/day added to the problem.

The project begins at the Keyser Oak Shopping Center and extends to Ferdinand Street.

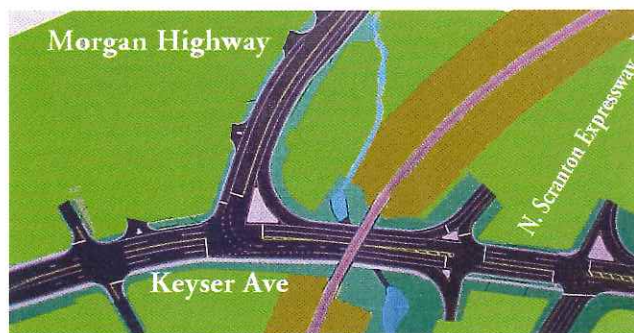


Diagram of Keyser Avenue/Morgan Highway project.

State Transportation Commission Hearings Held

The State Transportation Commission (STC) hearings for the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO area were held on Thursday, October 16, 2003 in Williamsport.

Eight people from the MPO area presented oral testimony to the STC on a variety of projects.

President Michael MacDowell of College Misericordia testified about a proposed roundabout at the Five Points intersection in Dallas Borough. It is thought that this roundabout could help alleviate traffic congestion and improve safety at this busy intersection.

Fred Lohman, Vice-President/CFO of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business & Industry testified in regards to the South Valley Parkway which is slated to connect the Sans Souci Highway in Hanover Township with Prospect Street in Nanticoke near the Luzerne County Community College. An extension to Robert Street is possible, provided funding can be found.



Larry Malski, Director of the Lackawanna County Rail Authority, presents testimony to the State Transportation Commission

Tim Tremel of Crown American Reality Trust presented testimony about the reconstruction of Exit 190 (old exit 56) off I-81. A reconstructed exit will provide safer and easier access to the Viewmont Mall and other surrounding businesses.

Larry Malski, Chairman of the Rail Freight Advisory Committee, testified about the need to restore and increase the funding for the Rail Freight Assistance Program and the State Capital Budget. Robert Hay, Chairman

of the Monroe County Rail Authority, echoed Mr. Malski's concerns.

Carol Keup, Chief Operating Officer for the Elliot-Scranton plant of Valley Distributing & Storage Company, testified as to how the Rail Freight Assistance Program helped her Scranton facility ship their products all over the country. Shipping by rail rather than truck is less expensive since each boxcar equals the capacity of 3 1/2 truck loads.

Cameron Moore, President and CEO of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance, Eugene Kane of Kane is Able, Inc. and Fred Lohman presented testimony regarding the need for widening I-81 between Nanticoke and Clarks Summit. They provided data to the STC as to the increasing traffic volumes of 75,000 vehicles/day at certain locations along the corridor, as well as the large number of commercial vehicles on I-81.

The STC will review all of the material presented to them at the Hearing and make their decisions regarding which projects will be included in the 12-Year Program later in the year.

"Behind the shelter in the middle of the roundabout...."

The title words above are always the first thing that come to my mind whenever I hear the word "roundabout". Those of you who were (or still are) Beatle fans will probably recognize that line from the song "Penny Lane."

When I asked my boss what he thought of when he heard the word "roundabout", he said, "traffic circle"—clearly, a more apropos response when transportation options are being discussed.

But a roundabout is not a big, old traffic circle or rotary such as Dupont Circle in Washington, D.C. or the ones we've all driven at one time or another in the Garden State.

The modern roundabout gives priority to circulating vehicles, has a central or "splitter" island to help maintain lower speeds, and is designed to have vehicles travel in a counter-clockwise flow.

Some of the advantages of a roundabout include a reduced number of conflict points at an intersection, lower speeds

that lead to fewer accidents, decreased delay, lower costs than signals because the amount of right-of-way is usually smaller than that required for a conventional intersection, and reduced maintenance costs due to the lack of signals to install and maintain.

Eliminating the stop-start action at intersections lowers noise, air pollution, and fuel consumption, and landscaping the splitter island can improve the aesthetic quality of the intersection.

Of course, there are disadvantages as well. The average U.S. driver is unfamiliar with roundabouts and will probably be a bit anxious the first two or three times he or she travels through it. There is no preemption for emergency vehicles at roundabouts as there are at signalized intersections. Where a coordinated signal network can be used, a signal will help increase the overall capacity of the network. Some drivers may not like the geometric delays that force them from the "straight and narrow" path. Construction costs may be higher and roundabouts may require more illumination.

The closest thing to a roundabout in the MPO area is Public Square in downtown Wilkes-Barre. However, because of the traffic lights at each intersection within the circle, it cannot be considered a roundabout.

The proposed roundabout at Dallas Corners in Luzerne County will be the first such traffic control measure in our area.

Having recently experienced driving around roundabouts in Australia and Bermuda, I must say that I thought they worked very efficiently and kept the traffic flowing instead of having to stop at every stop sign or signalized intersection.

On a psychological level, if traffic keeps flowing, there is no need for a driver to honk his horn when the light turns green if he or she thinks you haven't stepped on the gas fast enough. Thus, the roundabout could help reduce one of the factors that leads to road rage. That alone might be a good reason to give it a try.

Nancy Snee

Groundbreaking for New Airport Terminal Held

The groundbreaking for the new terminal building at the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport was held on Friday, October 24, 2003.

The new terminal will consist of two levels and a partial basement totaling approximately 127,000 square feet. The concourse will house eight boarding areas—six with passenger boarding gates—as well as general circulation and holding areas.

Airline ticketing facilities, ticket queuing areas, baggage claim and car rental counters will be housed on the main level.

The upper level will be used for the public circulation area as well as the Meeter/Greeter area, and will provide access to food and beverages, a news/gift shop and a business center.

The existing terminal was constructed in 1954 and improved in 1980 and 1990.

In addition to the terminal building, a pedestrian tunnel from the parking garage to the terminal and airside apron improve-

ments are also part of this major project improvement package.

The cost for the improvements totals approximately \$43.7 million of which \$28.4 are federal funds, \$6.7 million are state funds, and \$5 million are joint county funds.

The remaining \$3.6 million will be contributed by other sources.

Several firms were involved in the planning and design of the project. Completion of the project is expected to occur within 20 months of the start of construction.



Artist's sketch of the new terminal, concourse, and gates

Long Range Transportation Plan Posters Now Available

The 24" by 36" poster, or brochure, version of the 2003/2025 Long Range Transportation Plan are now available. Copies can be obtained from the Luzerne or Lackawanna County Planning Commissions.

The poster is a fold-out form that provides a snapshot of the larger plan containing sections on the following topics:

Introduction, Goals & Objectives, De-

scription of the Study Area, Transportation Planning Process, Transportation History of the Area, Analysis of the Existing Transportation System, including Traffic Volumes, Congested Areas, and Crash Hot Spots, Public Transit & Railroads, Trails and Greenways, Park and Ride Areas, Centers of Future Development, and Projects of Regional Significance.

The purpose of the poster version is to provide information to the public on transpor-

tation issues that is informative and readily accessible.

Both Planning Commissions are distributing copies to all of the municipalities within their respective county.

Members of the public who would like a copy of the poster should contact the Luzerne County Planning Commission at 825-1560, or the Lackawanna County Regional Planning Commission at 963-6400.

2003 County Lines Available

The 2003 edition of *County Lines*, a 133-page resource on Lackawanna County, is now available from the Lackawanna County Regional Planning Commission.

Published annually since 1990, *County Lines* contains a wealth of information on the County, its 40 municipalities and 12 school districts, including history, geography, government, demographics, statis-

tics, quality of life, elected and appointed officials, directories, maps, trivia, and more.

The transportation data found in *County Lines* includes roadway mileage and jurisdiction by municipality, railway owners and operators, public transportation providers, and air travel information.

A 2-book limit per school or agency is free

to schools, government and non-profit agencies.

The cost to the general public is \$25.00 per copy. For more information, contact Mary Liz Donato, Lackawanna County Regional Planning Commission, at 570-963-6400 or via e-mail at donatoml@lackawannacounty.org.

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Check out PENNDOT'S web site at
www.neparoads.com

Bureau of Rail Freight, Ports & Waterways Aids Local Business

Valley Distributing and Storage Company, one of the industrial Northeast's largest and best-equipped facilities for fabricating and machining heavy metal, recently received financial assistance from PENNDOT's Bureau of Rail Freight, Ports & Waterways in the amount of \$280,000.

The funding was used for siding rehabilitation work, which included cross tie replacement, surfacing, and the extension of existing siding for eight additional indoor rail cars.

According to John J. Passan, President and CEO of Valley Distributing and Storage, "This brings the total of indoor siding rail cars to 12, which gives the company the distinction of having the largest indoor rail siding facility in Northeast Pennsylvania."

One boxcar can hold the contents of 3 1/2 trucks. Thus, not only is

shipping by rail less expensive for Valley Distributing, it helps decrease traffic congestion on area highways by lowering the number of trucks on the road.

According to John E. Brown, Director of PENNDOT's Bureau of Rail Freight, Ports & Waterways who attended the rib-

bon-cutting at Valley Distributing, "This is an economic development project. Valley Distributing's rail rehabilitation project is a good example of how state government and private business work together to further economic development within the region. The funding enabled Valley Distributing to increase their rail capacity, create jobs, reduce the number of trucks on the road, and preserve the area's rail infrastructure."

The Delaware-Lackawanna Railroad Company and the Lackawanna County Rail Authority were also instrumental in bringing this project to fruition.

For more information on Valley Distributing & Storage, contact Carol Keup at 654-2403. For more information on the Rail Freight Program, contact John Brown at (717) 783-8567.



Several dignitaries, Valley Distributing employees, PENNDOT personnel, and other supporters attended the ribbon-cutting.