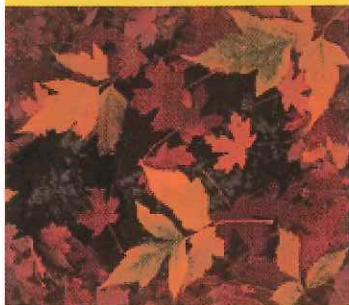


Autumn

2005



LACKAWANNA/LUZERNE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

CONNECTIONS

New Transportation Bill Passed

After being passed by Congress on July 29, 2005, President Bush signed the new transportation bill into law on August 10. Known as the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act—Legacy for Users, it is more commonly referred to as SAFETEA-LU. The new bill guarantees a total of \$286.4 billion for the 2005-2009 period. Of that total, \$1.89 billion is designated for highways and \$52.6 billion is designated for transit. This represents a 38% increase in funding over the last transportation bill, TEA-21.

Pennsylvania will receive an average of \$1.646 billion over the 5-year period, which is about \$263 million more than the average annual funding received under TEA-21, and represents approximately 4.5% of the national total. This is slightly less than the 4.96% the state received under TEA 21.

Local Impacts

On the local level, the Lackawanna/Luzerne Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) will receive \$48.9 million for Fiscal Year (FY) 2007, \$49.3 million for FY 2008, and \$49.5 million for both FY 2009 and FY 2010, with the total approximating \$197 million. (These figures may be modified somewhat in the next few months.)

New Provisions

One of the new provisions of SAFETEA-LU is the Equity Bonus program. Federal transportation funding comes from the Highway Trust Fund (HTF). Each state contributes to this trust fund via

federal gas and other highway taxes. Traditionally, some states receive less funding than they contribute to the trust fund, while others receive more than they contribute. Those receiving less than they give are called donor states, and those that receive more than they give are called donee states.

Because Pennsylvania has the 4th largest highway system in the country with 25,000 bridges and 40,500 miles of state highway, it is a donee state.

The Equity Bonus Program is an attempt to balance out the difference in the amount of HTF funds donor and donee states receive. It ensures that each state's return on its share of contributions to the HTF is at least 90.5% for 2005, 91.5% for FY 2006 and 2007, and 92% by 2008. Every state is guaranteed a specific rate of growth over its annual TEA-21 funding level regardless of its HTF contributions.

Pennsylvania will receive 117.75% of its donation in 2005, 119.4% in 2006, 115.83% in 2007, 113.33% in 2008, and 133.15% in 2009.

Highway Safety Program

Another new feature of SAFETEA-LU is the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP). The purpose of this program is to reduce highway accident fatalities. The bill provides almost double the funds for infrastructure safety, and requires strategic highway safety planning focused on results.

The new program targets specific areas of concern such as construction work zones, older drivers, and pedestrians, especially children who walk to school.

The funding for the HSIP will be distributed to states based on the following formula: 1/3 lane miles, 1/3 Vehicles Miles Traveled (VMT), and 1/3 fatalities on Federal Aid Highways.

Other Provisions

Listed below are some other areas of interest contained in SAFETEA-LU:

Congestion Relief:

SAFETEA-LU gives states more flexibility to use road pricing techniques to manage congestion, promotes real-time traffic management to help improve transportation safety and security, and provides better information to travelers and emergency responders.

Efficiency:

The Highways for Life pilot program will advance longer-lasting highways by using innovative practices and technologies to speed construction of safe highways and bridges.

Environmental Stewardship:

SAFETEA-LU retains and increases funding for the environmental programs of TEA-21 and adds new programs focused on the environment, including a pilot program for non-motorized transportation and a Safe Routes To School program.

To review the SAFETEA-LU bill in its entirety, go to www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu.

FOCUS 81 Committee Testifies Before the State Transportation Commission (STC)

Representatives of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance's (NEPA) Focus 81 Committee testified before the STC on August 5, 2005 in Scranton to support the I-81 expansion project. The purpose of the expansion project is to widen the approximately 35-mile stretch of I-81 between the Nanticoke and Waverly exits from four lanes to six lanes. Severe congestion, high traffic volumes and a high rate of reportable accidents have led local officials to explore options to address these issues. Testifying on behalf of the Focus 81 Committee were Cameron More, President and CEO of NEPA and Ted Patton, Vice President of Travel for Martz Trailways.

The STC conducts public hearings across the state every two years to gather input for the development of the Transportation



Congested Area on I-81 near the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport

Improvement Program (TIP). The Commission then evaluates the condition and performance of the transportation system and assesses the resources needed to preserve, restore, extend or expand that system.

Among the topics covered in their presentation were: Corridor Background, National, Regional and Economic Significance, Level of Service, Congestion and

Safety Concerns, Project Costs and Time Estimates, and Exploration of Alternative Options. In his remarks to the STC, Cameron Moore said, "Efficient and safe traffic flow on I-81 is not only vital to the economy and quality of life of this region and state, but to the entire Northeastern United States. A broad coalition of business, community, and government leaders are united in the effort to improve the safety and capacity on I-81 in Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties. Ensuring that this project is viewed as a high priority by PennDOT is critical to moving forward on these important improvements."

For more information on Focus 81, visit www.nepa-alliance.org or www.focus81.com.

Submitted by Brian Langan

COLTS Receives State Grant for Welfare To Work Program

For the sixth year in a row, the County Of Lackawanna Transit System, more commonly referred to as COLTS, has been successful in obtaining a state grant for the Welfare To Work (w2w) program. The purpose of the program is to provide discounted bus transportation to low-to-moderate income individuals to and from work until the clients' earnings allow them to pay the full fare.

The service is "open door" in that it picks up regular fare-paying passengers, handicapped passengers and senior citizen passengers as well as the w2w clients. COLTS does not operate the service directly, but rather contracts it out to Northeast Transfer.

The w2w route includes the City of Scranton and Dunmore Borough, and operates between the hours of 8:00 PM and 12:00 AM, Monday through Friday.

Colts has established formal partnerships with the following agencies to assist in getting the word out about the w2w program:

Lackawanna County Assistance Office, Workforce Investment Board, Career Link of Lackawanna County, Child Care Information Service, United Neighborhood Centers of Scranton and Lackawanna County, Scranton-Lackawanna Human Development Agency, and Scranton & Lackawanna

County Housing Authorities.

For more information on the w2w program, contact Debbie Schrader, COLTS, at 346-2061, extension 1264.

Submitted By Debbie Schrader



Northeast Transfer Bus Used for Welfare To Work Program

Three Rail Freight Projects Receive State Funding

Governor Rendell recently announced the release of more than \$13 million in capital budget grants for 12 rail freight projects across the state. These grants will help create jobs, stimulate the economy, and reduce traffic, particularly truck traffic on highways. For every shipment of goods put on a rail car, the equivalent of four truckloads of goods are taken off the highway.

The local state grant recipients include the

following: Delaware & Hudson Railway Company, Inc., Taylor Borough; received \$501,000 to construct track and turnouts in order to expand capacity at Taylor Yards; five new jobs will be created. The D&L also received a \$840,000 grant for its facility in Laflin Borough to rehabilitate and construct a 2-mile passing siding which will provide more efficient rail service to Valley Distributing, and will help facilitate

increased traffic from the Port of Philadelphia to Canada. The grant is expected to create 20 new jobs.

The Reading & Blue Mountain & Northern Railroad received \$850,000 for the second phase of a 50-mile, continuous welded rail project located in White Haven Borough, Bear Creek Township, Dennison Township, and Jenkins Township, Luzerne County.

Getting Around in Pittsburgh By Bicycle

Submitted by Richard Cochrane, District
4-0 Bike/Ped Coordinator

While in Pittsburgh for the annual PennDOT Planning Partners Meeting in October, I had the opportunity to experience the City's growing network of trails. Pittsburgh is situated at the confluence of three major rivers—the Monongahela, the Allegheny and the Ohio. Until recently, the shores of those rivers were home to various industrial uses, most notably steel mills. Although many mills have closed and Pittsburgh has cleaned up its air quality, the remnants of the industrial era still littered the rivers' shores for many years. However, in the past few years walking/biking trails have been built along both shores of the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers and into other parts of the city.

On the advice and guidance of Sara Walfoort of Southwestern Planning Commission (SPC), I rode the South Side Trail, the Panther Hollow Trail, and the Eliza Furnace Trail.

The South Side Trail extends from Station Square, located across the Monongahela from downtown Pittsburgh, about 6 miles south along the river. This trail offers scenic views of the river and its industry, and surprisingly, some cool tree-shaded stretches. From the trail, you can see the impressive Pittsburgh skyline, river traffic and the Pittsburgh Steelers' and Pittsburgh Panthers' training facility. I happened to see the Panthers practicing on the day I rode.

Crossing the Hot Metal Bridge, I joined the Panther Hollow Trail. The bridge is named for the molten iron that once crossed the river on the bridge between the furnace and the mill. I had to ride in the travel lane, but soon there will be a trail cantilevered from the bridge which will provide a

direct link between the trails.

The Panther Hollow Trail consists of a combination of streets, paths, and park drives that took me up and up and up to the Oakland section of Pittsburgh, home of the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University.

After descending back to river level, I joined the Eliza Furnace Trail which connects the eastern neighborhoods with downtown (pronounced daan-taan) Pittsburgh. In the City, the trail is amazing in its ability to thread through a major interstate interchange and the city street network. This trail took me into the heart of downtown Pittsburgh. At the end of the trail in Pittsburgh is the Bicycle and Blade Station, which houses a privately-owned bicycle and rollerblade facility, a misting facility (for those hot days), a water fountain, and bicycle parking. It is also located at the base of the Pittsburgh Parking Authority garage that provides direct, covered access to the light rail transit system. This is a multi-modal hub designed to allow bicyclists to safely interact with transit and walking facilities.

I completed my ride sixteen miles later by crossing the Smithfield Street Bridge to return to Station Square. This bridge was built in 1883 and uses unique lenticular trusses. The only other place in Pennsylvania where you can find lenticular trusses on a bridge is on a small, single-lane span in Wyoming County.

In addition to the trails I rode, there are two other trails in Pittsburgh—the North Shore Trail and the Montour Trail system. The North Shore Trail extends east from downtown Pittsburgh along the north shore of the

Allegheny River. It extends east to the City limits and beyond, passing very closely to both PNC Park (home of the Pittsburgh Pirates), Heinz Field (home of the Pittsburgh Steelers), and the Roberto Clemente Monument (for you sports fans).

The Montour Trail forms a forty-mile semi-circle around the City in the western suburbs.

Even more ambitious is the Great Allegheny Passage. Parts of the trails I have described will feed into or connect with the Passage. Upon completion of the Great Allegheny Passage, riders will be able to travel from Pittsburgh to Washington, DC.

If you ever find yourself in Pittsburgh and feel like taking a bike ride, but don't have a bike—no worries. There will be a bike available for you through the Community Bikes Program. According to Sara Walfoort, "There are eight bike lockers on the South Side Trail that hold Trek City Cruiser bicycles (no speeds, coaster brakes, but upscale models). Participation in the program is free, but requires registration. A registration card unlocks the bike lockers and the participant is free to use the bike all day. Bikes are to be returned before evening. Additional bike lockers can be found along the North Shore Trail." Because of the hilly terrain and the three rivers surrounding the City, it may seem difficult to think of Pittsburgh as a haven for bike trail riders, but the community deserves credit for moving forward with a tremendous number of trails that allow commuters and recreational users many opportunities to ride. I highly recommend exploring Pittsburgh by bicycle.



Man enjoys ride on the Eliza Furnace Trail



Bike 'N Blade facility located on the Eliza Furnace Trail



Bike lockers along the South Side Trail



**LACKAWANNA/LUZERNE METROPOLITAN
PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

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Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Update

The process to update the 2005-2008 TIP for the next 4-year cycle of 2007-2010 began on August 5, 2005 when the State Transportation Commission (STC) held its first public hearing in Scranton.

The TIP is the document that contains all the highway/bridge, transit, rail and aviation projects for which funding has been designated. Although it covers a 4-year period, the TIP is updated every two years.

The TIP must be air quality constrained meaning that there must be a balance between projects that add capacity versus those that help move traffic more efficiently, such as synchronized traffic signals, to maintain the proper air quality standards for the region.

The TIP must also be fiscally constrained, meaning that the number of projects on the TIP cannot exceed the amount of available funding.

Prior to the STC hearing in August, the

MPO contacted local municipalities and other interested parties to tell them about the hearing and to solicit projects for the TIP update.

In the next few weeks, the MPO will meet to discuss the status of projects on the current TIP as well as the number of new projects received for placement on the new TIP. Although the MPO seeks to include all the requested projects on the new TIP, it is sometimes not possible to do so because of lack of available funding.

Before the MPO formally adopts the 2007-2010 TIP next summer, the public will have an opportunity to review and make comment on the plan.

New Interstate Maintenance Provision

As an outgrowth of developing financial guidance for the 2007-2010 TIP, PennDOT Central Office, in conjunction with representatives of MPOs and RPOs across the state, recommended the formation of a statewide Interstate Maintenance Program.

Under this proposal, all interstate maintenance projects will be controlled and funded at the state level rather than at the MPO level as is currently done.

\$350 million will be taken "off the top" of the state's allotment of federal funding for this purpose. Interstate projects that have already been programmed for years 2007 and 2008 will remain the top priority under the new system, but if non-programmed interstate funds become available for those two years, Central Office will select candidate projects from a pool submitted by the Districts.

The new program will not address interstate completion projects, major capital or capacity-adding projects.

The Districts will retain responsibility for completion of any interstate project within their boundaries, and will have an opportunity to review and comment on the projects selected under this new approach.