

FALL

2002

LACKAWANNA/LUZERNE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

CONNECTIONS

Work Continues on PA Route 315

Work continues on the \$5.7 million widening project on PA 315 in Plains Township. Widening from 3 or 4 lanes to 5 lanes will take place on this 1.8 mile stretch of Pa 315 from the North Crossvalley Expressway to Pocono Downs. In addition to the widening, the project also includes new, upgraded traffic signals at three intersections, bridge work, sewer work, underground utility work, new signs, and drainage work.

The following travel restrictions are in effect while this project is underway:

PA Route 315 traffic is restricted to a single lane in each direction in two work areas between the North Crossvalley Expressway and the Sunshine Market.

There is one lane of traffic in each direction in a work area near the Woodlands Inn and Motorworld, and in a second work area from Giant Floor to Jumper Road. There is no center turning lane in this area except at intersections that have traffic signals.

A center turning lane is open to traffic (at most times) between the Woodlands Inn and Jumper Road.

PA 315 is open to traffic wishing to access the many businesses along the highway, although drivers should be prepared for possible delays and should watch for turning vehicles in those locations.

Drivers not wishing to access businesses in this area are urged to consider alternate routes such as Interstate 81 between Wilkes-Barre City and Dupont Borough.

Begun in September of this year, the project is expected to be completed by the fall of 2003. Contractor for the project is American Asphalt Paving Company of Shavertown.



Traffic is restricted to 2 lanes in this section of PA 315 near Pocono Downs

USDOT Endorses Pennsylvania's 2003 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program

The United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) approved the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) on September 27, 2002. The 2003 STIP represents the first four-year element of the state's Twelve Year Program which consists of highway, bridge, and transit projects that have been developed by PENNDOT and its planning partners across the state. The endorsement by USDOT means that federal transportation dollars can now be spent on projects found on the regional Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs).

Commenting on the 2003 Twelve Year Program endorsement by the State Transportation Commission (STC) on July 8, 2002 in Wellsboro, STC Chairman and PENNDOT Secretary Bradley Mallory stated, "The 2003 Program is a financially responsible and fiscally-constrained program anchored in PENNDOT's 'maintenance first' philosophy".

The 2003 STIP, which covers years 2003 through 2006, contains projects totaling \$13.4 billion—\$7.9 billion for highways and bridges, \$5 billion for transit, \$372 million for aviation and \$87.7 million for rail freight.

Key regional projects include continued funding for the Davis Street Interchange project, the Sans Souci/LCCC Connector project, and a revamped I-81 interchange at Exit 178 coupled with the access road extension at the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport.

Significant regional safety and maintenance projects, as well as important transit projects for the three transit providers in the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO, are also key components of the 2003 STIP.

For more information on the STIP, contact Bob Raves, PENNDOT, at (717) 787-7393.

Passenger Rail Project Moving Ahead

Support for restoring passenger train service between Scranton, the Poconos, northern New Jersey and New York City has grown since the project began over 15 years ago. Growing traffic congestion, quality of life issues, environmental concerns, and other factors have led to widespread support for the new railroad service in the I-80 and I-380 corridors.

Traffic congestion on I-80 in northern New Jersey, particularly in areas of Morris County and at the Delaware River bridge crossings, often reaches Level of Service (LOS) F, which is Failure. That translates into stop and go traffic or traffic moving at very slow speeds. Due to the terrain, the many bridges, air quality restrictions, and relatively dense development along the highway, it is not financially feasible to add lanes to the interstate. Thus, the idea of restoring rail passenger service began to look more and more attractive.

The cost of adding one new lane of interstate highway in each direction is about \$20 million to \$50 million per mile. The cost of restoring passenger rail service is about \$200 million overall, or about \$2.4 million per mile. This is based on 84 miles of railroad, which includes building 28 miles of new railroad that was torn up in the 1980's as well as building stations, parking lots, and a storage yard with a servicing facility in Scranton and purchasing five new train sets (locomotives and cars).

A single track railroad has the same carrying capacity as a 16-lane highway and is not impacted by traffic congestion. Also, the impact on the environment and quality of life is radically different between the two modes of transportation with the railroad having a much lower

environmental impact.

Increasing bus service between Scranton and New York was considered to help alleviate the congestion on I-80, but buses are subject to the same traffic congestion and delays as other vehicles. Thus, there were no traffic reductions to be realized using this option. A monorail was also considered, but the extremely high cost of construction, estimated at over \$500 million per mile, and operational constraints made that option impractical.

Rail passenger service became the only viable option to explore. Since the restored railroad would operate on its own private right-of-way, it would not be subject to the frequent delays on I-80 and feeder roads. Nor would the trains be subject to delays resulting from the many accidents that close portions of the highways for hours.

Once restored, the railroad will offer a reliable, fast, convenient, comfortable, and affordable alternative to driving. This

service could be operational by 2006 if federal funds are appropriated on a timely schedule.

Conceptual design work, operations planning, and developing a bi-state financial plan will be the major objectives of the next phase of the project. The request for funds to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) states that the project is being jointly pursued by NJ Transit and PENNDOT, with NJ Transit acting as the grantee. The project also involves the counties of Morris, Sussex and Warren in New Jersey as well as Monroe and Lackawanna Counties in PA. Timely approval of the grant by the FTA has helped by allowing the selection of a consultant for the project—Edwards and Kelcey. Preliminary discussions have taken place between the two states concerning the sharing of capital, operating, and maintenance costs. The scope of the next phase of the project includes drafting a cost-sharing agreement between New Jersey and Pennsylvania.



This railroad viaduct over the Delaware River will be an integral part of the passenger rail service.

County Lines Available

The 2002 edition of *County Lines*, a 125-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, statistics, quality of life, elected and appointed

officials, directories, maps, trivia and more.

Transportation data found in *County Lines* includes roadway mileage and jurisdiction by municipality, railway owners and operators, public transportation providers, and air travel information. The book is free to schools, government and non-profit agencies (a limit of two per

school, government, or agency).

The cost to the general public is \$25.00 per copy.

For more information on *County Lines* and how to obtain a copy, please contact Mary Liz Donato, Lackawanna County Regional Planning Commission, at 963-6400 or via e-mail at dona-toml@lackawannacounty.org.

BicyclePA Hits Home

BicyclePA is the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's latest project to promote bicycle touring in the Commonwealth. Tourism is the second largest industry in the state, and more and more tourists are seeing the benefits of using a bicycle to see the sights and hear the sounds (yes, from a bicycle, you can hear the sounds) of the beautiful Keystone State. Several states, including many that are more mountainous than Pennsylvania, have made bicycle touring a mainstay of their tourist promotions. It is now Pennsylvania's turn to tout its tremendous history, scenery and other attractions of interest to bicyclists everywhere.

BicyclePA is identifying cross-Pennsylvania touring routes that will assist tourists in traversing the state on direct, safe and interesting routes. Sites such as the Francis E. Walter Dam and recreation area, the Pennsylvania Lumber Museum, the Lehigh Gorge State Park, and the Zane Gray House are some of the state's unique attractions that will be accessible from the BicyclePA routes.

In the Pocono Mountains, there are two routes—the eastern north-south route and the northern east-west route. The eastern north-south route, Route L, will pass

through our area from the Lehigh Gorge in the south, through Bear Creek, Thornhurst, Elmhurst, the Midvalley Area, and Carbon-dale before passing into Susquehanna County and into New York state. Future plans include a spur into downtown Wilkes-Barre and northward to Pittston and Scranton, joining with the primary route in Archbald.

The northern east-west route, Route Y, will enter the MPO area on Route 6 from Wyoming County and use Route 107 to get to the Lackawanna Valley. From there, the route will climb over Waymart Mountain into Wayne County.

The planning process is an important one for bicyclists. The current Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) has money set aside for bicycle-related highway improvements for the next four years. This money will be primarily used for shoulder construction and widening. In the past few years, PENNDOT completed shoulder improvements on SR 107 and SR 435 in Lackawanna County and on SR 2041 in Luzerne County between Bear Creek Village and White Haven Borough, all of which comprise sections of Routes Y and L.

A new BicyclePA route, Route V, is planned for central Luzerne County. This east/west route, which will be signed for the 2004 season, will connect Tannery, Freeland, Hazleton, and Tomhicken and continue into Columbia County.

In addition to the BicyclePA routes, PENNDOT is also working on improvements to the Rutter Avenue bridge over the North Crossvalley Expressway to allow better access for bikers to travel from the Church Street Levee Trail to the River Street Levee Trail. Minor improvements have also been made to the Back Mountain Trail at Harris Hill Road and efforts are continuing on the preparation of plans for the Susquehanna Warrior Trail along Route 11 as well as for the Delaware & Hudson Trail in northern Lackawanna County and the Lackawanna Heritage Valley Trail along the Lackawanna River.

The MPO needs input from the cycling community to help select locations appropriate for these types of improvements for inclusion on the TIP. Anyone interested in suggesting additional improvement project locations should contact Richard Coch-rane, PENNDOT District 4-0 at 963-3028.

Third Annual Trail Symposium Held

PENNDOT District 4-0 held its third annual Trail Symposium on October 10 at the Holiday Inn in Dunmore, PA. The symposium focused on the transportation network in Northeastern Pennsylvania for those who prefer to travel by bicycle or on foot. Attendees at the symposium had the opportunity to learn about trail planning and potential funding of trail projects and to share their experiences and ideas with their fellow trail advocates.

46 people representing a mixture of trail sponsors, planners, state agencies such as the Department of Conservation of Natural Resources and PENNDOT, and other interested parties attended this year's meeting.

Dan Accurti, Enhancements Coordinator for PENNDOT, spoke to the group in the morning session regarding the enhancement application process. He emphasized that the enhancements program is not a grant program, but rather should be viewed as an award subject to all federal

regulations. He also stated that he expects the current level of funding for the Enhancements Program, about \$40 million per funding round, to continue for the foreseeable future because the program has become so popular. Future applicants were told not to apply until they had "all their ducks in a row" and that the best way to use the enhancement funds was for the construction phase of projects.

Amy Gruzesky, Director of Public Affairs for Earth Conservancy, has attended and presented projects at all three symposiums and has found the annual gathering to be very valuable. "The symposium provides an excellent opportunity for trails people throughout Northeastern Pennsylvania to share ideas, experiences, and information, and to broaden our professional contacts. It also helps to encourage us and let us know our efforts are appreciated and have positive impacts."

Richard Cochrane, Bike/Ped Coordinator for District 4-0 established the Trail Sym-

posium and was pleased with the turnout and the discussions that took place. "My objectives for the meeting were to promote interaction among trail sponsors, allow them to hear the latest information from PENNDOT and to give the Department an opportunity to hear firsthand the activities and problems the trail sponsors have been experiencing. I feel that we met those goals."



Richard Cochrane, Bike/Ped Coordinator for PENNDOT District 4-0



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

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Major Projects Update

Carey Avenue Bridge: The new \$27 million structure is between 85 and 90% complete and PENNDOT is hoping to have a ribbon-cutting ceremony before Thanksgiving. Remaining work includes roadway approach which will be completed this construction season and milling and paving which will be completed during the next construction season.

Davis Street Exit, I-81: Ramp A, the southbound on-ramp to I-81, was opened on November 15, completing the intersection of Davis Street and Stafford Avenue. PENNDOT is preparing to open up the new 6-lane Davis Street Bridge in the near future. During the winter, the old bridge will be demolished.

Keyser Avenue at the Morgan Highway: Work was recently completed on the east side of Keyser Avenue. Traffic will be switched to the eastern side of the roadway so that work can begin on the western side of Keyser Avenue. During the winter, the contractor will be working on the removal of the remainder of the existing railroad bridge, and on the construction of the upstream portion of the box culvert carrying Leach Creek under Keyser Avenue.

The Department recently awarded the following contracts:

Shoemaker Street and 8th Street in West Wyoming Borough:

This \$590,000 project involves the re-alignment of the intersection including extension of the left-turn lanes, the installation of new traffic signals, curbing, sidewalk drainage and pavement markings.

Wyoming Avenue, Kingston Borough:

This \$820,000 project involves the upgrading and synchronization of traffic signals on Wyoming Avenue throughout the Borough.

Wyoming Avenue, Forty-Fort Borough:

This \$885,000 project involves the upgrading of 6 existing signalized intersections, signalization of another intersection and interconnection of 7 signalized intersections.

The District is preparing to bid the following projects:

Main Street, Plymouth Borough: Expected to be bid in December, this project includes the upgrade and synchronization of traffic signals throughout Plymouth Borough.

Route 115, Bear Creek Township: Expected to be bid on December 19, this project includes the improvement of vertical geometry on Route 115 at the intersection with Meadow Run Road and the addition of a left-turn lane, resurfacing, drainage, and signing.

Wilkes-Barre Boulevard: Expected to be bid December 19, this project includes milling and paving of the Boulevard from Hazel Street to E. Northampton St. and will include signing, pavement markings, and some traffic signal modifications.

Route 309, Hazle Township: Expected to be bid in early 2003, this project includes traffic signal and intersection improvements at the intersection with Airport Road, widening of PA 309 from 4 to 5 lanes, drainage improvements, curbing, and pavement markings.

The District is preparing the following 3 projects to be submitted to PENNDOT Central Office for bid: Traffic signal upgrade at the intersection of Bear Creek Road & PA 315 in Dupont Borough, replacement of the Stanton Street Bridge in Wilkes-Barre City, and correction of a flooding problem on PA 115 in Bear Creek Township.