

SPRING

2003



LUZERNE/LACKAWANNA METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

CONNECTIONS

Davis Street Project Proceeding on Schedule

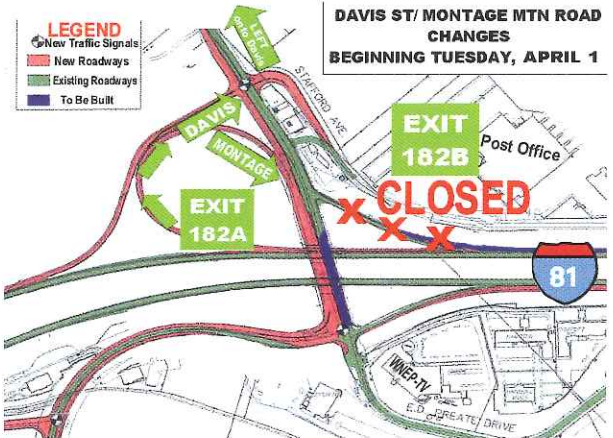
Construction on the Davis Street reconstruction project is continuing on schedule. To date, three new ramps have been constructed, half of the new Davis Street Bridge has been constructed, the old bridge has been razed, the old ramps have been lengthened, and new traffic signals have been installed.

Upcoming work on the project will include the installation of high mast lighting which will begin in late March and continue through April. Lane restrictions will be necessary on Monday nights during this phase of the project.

Beginning April 1, the I-81 southbound off ramp to Davis Street (Exit 182B) will be closed for approximately three months while crews reconstruct it. Southbound traffic wishing to access Davis Street during this period will use Exit 182A (the loop ramp). This ramp will split about halfway through the loop--the Davis Street traffic will bear left at the split and

proceed to the traffic signal at the intersection of Davis Street and Stafford Avenue. Once drivers reach the traffic light at this intersection, they will be allowed to make a left turn onto Davis Street.

During the upcoming summer, construction of the second half of the Davis Street Bridge will be done, and several other ramps will be completed. The entire project is expected to be done by September of this year.



Schematic of Davis Street Project Improvements

2003-2004 Unified Planning Work Program Adopted

The 2003-2004 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) was adopted by the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO on February 12, 2003. This approval was made contingent on any future comments received from one or more of the planning partners.

The UPWP is a document that outlines all of the work activities that the planning commissions and transit operators from Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties will do as part of their contract with PENNDOT for the next fiscal year. The state fiscal year begins on July 1.

Most of these work items are standard ones which the planning commissions and

transit operators perform every year, such as doing traffic counts, reviewing the federal functional classification system, and supporting the administration of the para-transit operations in both counties, to name a few.

The 2003-2004 UPWP contains three new items in regard to highway planning efforts as well as a transit study.

The planning commissions will partner with PENNDOT and other regional agencies and groups to create an I-81 Task Force to study traffic congestion problems along the I-81 corridor between Scranton and Wilkes-Bare,

and make recommendations for possible short and long term solutions to those problems.

The planning commissions will also study the possibility of diverting traffic from the heavily-traveled I-81 corridor to the PA Turnpike to help reduce congestion.

The Lackawanna County Planning Commission will study the signal systems and important intersections along Main Avenue in Scranton, Dickson City, Blakely and Archbald in an effort to promote better traffic flow along that corridor.

(Continued on page 2.)

Scenic Byway Program Gaining Momentum

The Department of Transportation is encouraging all Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations (MPOs and RPOs respectively) to make the Scenic Byways program better known within their districts by placing it as a work item in their Unified Planning Work Programs.

The Scenic Byways Program parallels the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) National Scenic Byways Program and is gaining momentum throughout the country.

In the past two years, two corridors in Pennsylvania have been designated and applications for two more corridors have been received by the Department. Getting a highway designated as a Scenic Byway provides enhanced opportunities for funding from various state funding programs including Transportation Enhancement Funds.

Pennsylvania Byways are designated by PENNDOT in support of local planning efforts to enhance and improve the visual impact of specific routes, maintain the natural resources and intrinsic qualities along specific routes, educate residents and visitors on the history and culture of the Commonwealth, and provide enhanced funding opportunities.

Any governmental entity can nominate a federal, state or local highway, or any portion thereof, to PENNDOT for consideration as a Scenic Byway. If the road is not a state-maintained highway, the local government or federal agency that owns the highway must first designate the route

as a Pennsylvania Byway. The proposed route must also have a Corridor Management Plan designed to preserve and enhance the unique qualities of the Byway, including marketing and visitor services.

In order to be nominated, a highway must possess one or more of the following six intrinsic qualities:

Archeological: physical evidence of historic or pre-historic life that is visible and capable of being inventoried and interpreted.

Cultural: expressions of the customs or traditions of a distinct group of people such as crafts, music, dance, rituals, festivals, speech, food, special events and vernacular architecture.

Historic: physical elements of the landscape, whether natural or man-made, that are of such historical significance that they educate the viewer and stir an appreciation of the past.

Natural: features in the visible environment that are in a relatively undisturbed state and pre-date the arrival of human populations; may include geological formations, fossils, landforms, bodies of water, vegetation and wildlife.

Recreational: outdoor recreational activities that are directly associated with, and dependent upon, the natural and cultural elements of the landscape of the corridor.

Scenic: qualities that heighten the visual experience derived from the view of natural and/or man-made elements of the

visual environment.

Resolutions of support from the municipalities and counties in which the corridor lies are required as part of the application. These resolutions must include a statement indicating the intent of the governing body to uphold the Scenic Byways designation.

Letters of support from the MPO or RPO and Tourist Promotion Agencies are also required, in addition to letters from members of the General Assembly in whose districts the proposed corridor lies.

Written and graphic descriptions of how the proposed Byway meets one or more of the intrinsic qualities must be included in the application, as well as a preliminary description of key resources along the corridor, and an explanation of how the Byway complements other regional economic development strategies.

If the proposed Byway is on the Interstate System, Federal-Aid Primary System, or the National Highway System, the application must specify how the installation of new signs, displays, or devices will be prohibited along the corridor in conformance with 23 U. S. Code Section 131(s).

Applications have to be sent to PENNDOT for review. The deadline for construction projects is May 15. The deadline for non-construction projects is May 31. Applications have to be submitted online and via hard copy.

For more information on this program, contact Barbara Mason-Haines at (717) 787-0782.

2003-2004 Unified Planning Work Program Adopted (continued from page 1)

The Luzerne County Transit Authority will prepare a Transit Alternatives Analysis to determine a cost-effective method of providing commuter and inter-city passenger service between Wilkes-Barre and Scranton. An important element of this study will be to determine if it will be feasible to re-institute passenger rail service between the two cities. This will be viewed as an extension of the Scranton to Hoboken project.

This 100% federally-funded study was made possible through the efforts of Congressman Paul Kanjorski who secured \$200,000 for the study.

An on-going part of the UPWP for the past few years is the Bicycle Plan for the two counties. Primary bike routes in each county have been identified and the planning commissions are working with District 4-0 to coordinate the local plan with

the statewide BicyclePA Plan. The current Transportation Improvement Program has funds set aside for shoulder widening and shoulder construction work.

A new BicyclePA route, Route V, will travel through central Luzerne County connecting Tannery, Freeland, Hazleton, Tomhicken, and continue into Columbia County.

Allen Biehler Named Secretary of Transportation

On January 21, 2003, Allen Biehler was sworn in as Secretary of Transportation for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Biehler succeeds Brad Mallory who served during the Ridge and Schweiker Administrations.

The new Secretary's experience in the transportation field is long and varied. After graduating from the University of Pittsburgh with a degree in civil engineering, he attended Yale where he received a Master Degree equivalence in Highway Transportation. Biehler first worked for the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County before spending 17 years with the Port Authority in Pittsburgh. During his tenure with the Port Authority, Secretary Biehler held positions in planning, construction, and engineering. He left the Port Authority position in 1996 to serve

as Vice-President of DMJM+Harris, Inc., an international transportation consulting firm in Pittsburgh.



Allen Biehler, Secretary of Transportation

Two of his first duties as Secretary were to get up-to-date on the TEA-21 reauthorization process and to get all appropriate parties involved to help streamline the Department's construction process.

Shortly after being nominated, Governor Rendell told the nominee to find ways to cut through the bureaucratic red tape and to tie major highway development into economic opportunities.

Secretary Biehler echoed those sentiments in this way, "It is very important to understand the importance of the linkages between potential development locations and the transportation system--whether it's the highway, rail, transit, airport linkages, whatever it might be--and not all of those require a brand new project, but it may call for just linking various development sites to the various transportation elements."

District 4-0 Develops New Rail Crossings Database

District 4-0 Grade Crossing Manager, Joe Strok and GIS Coordinator Joe Popple have developed a Microsoft Access Database that will be used to locate, organize, and analyze all railroad crossings on the state system.

This new database describes the condition at the crossings, such as the existence of potholes and determines if the surface at the crossing, whether it be blacktop, concrete, wood, or rubber, is in good condition.

As part of the data-gathering phase of the project, the District inspected every rail-

road crossing. In doing this, they discovered that some crossings which had been part of the old system were no longer active. As a result of the inspections, the District was able to decrease the number of active crossings from 100 to 76.

The Public Utility Commission (PUC) has ordered PENNDOT to maintain pavement markings and advance warning signs at most at-grade crossings. The new database will require yearly inspections to determine if those elements are adequate. If they are not adequate, there is a mechanism in the program to track and record when the corrections have been made.

The new database can be updated easily and can be combined with databases from other districts to form a state-wide database. It can also be used in a GIS application. A map depicting the location of all railroad crossings in the county can be created, and by using the cursor, the user can highlight a site on the map to find out all of the pertinent information about that particular crossing. The database can also be linked to the Roadway Management System and used to electronically send the required yearly update of the National Railroad Inventory to the Federal Railroad Administration. For more information on the database, contact Joe Strok at 963-4995.

State Transportation Commission Hearings Set

The planning process to develop the next update of the Twelve Year Program will officially get underway in late summer/early fall when the State Transportation Committee (STC) begins to hear testimony from MPOs, RPOs and the public at public hearings across the Commonwealth.

The 2005-2008 TIP, which comprises the first four years of the Twelve Year Pro-

gram, will be initially developed based on input from all of the planning partners within each MPO or RPO. In the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO, the county planning commissions and District 4-0 staff will work very closely to decide which projects will be selected for inclusion on the TIP. The selection of projects is based on many factors including input received from all interested parties, and the fiscal constraint and air quality conformity limits that must

be followed.

The STC hearing for the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO will be held on October 16, 2003 in Williamsport.

More details regarding the preferred format of testimony as well as the designated time slot and the location of the hearings will be forthcoming in the next few months.

Published By:

Luzerne County Planning Commission

Contact: Nancy Snee

Telephone: 825-1560

Fax: 825-6362

E-Mail: Nancy.Snee@luzernecounty.org

Check out the District 4-0 web site at

www.neparoads.com

Bi-County Open Space Plan Will Emphasize Greenways

The Planning Commissions of Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties, in conjunction with the Lackawanna River Corridor Association and the Northeast Regional Office of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, have embarked on a groundbreaking cooperative effort in developing the *Luzerne/Lackawanna County Open Space, Greenway, and Recreation Master Plan*. EDAW, Inc., Greenways, Inc. and Borton-Lawson Engineering, Inc. are serving as the consultants for this project.

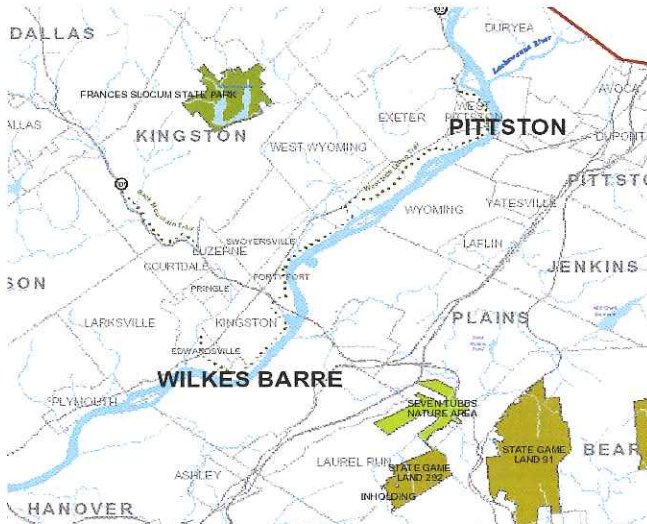
The Plan will emphasize the importance of establishing a local and regional network of Greenways, as per the Pennsylvania Greenways Plan: *An Action Plan for Creating Communities*. In particular, the two counties will seek to complement the Statewide Plan by creating a plan for local greenways in communities, adopting the Plan upon completion, increasing opportunities for diverse communities to enjoy the open space, greenways, and recreational opportunities identified in the

Plan across rural, urban and suburban landscapes, promoting a trail system that can be used as an alternative form of transportation, and identifying strategically-located greenways that protect natural resources and environmental quality. The Plan will also consider options for motorized and non-motorized recreation users and for people with disabilities.

The trails component of the Plan will become part of a multi-modal transportation network and will provide opportunities for people to get out of their cars, not only for recreational purposes, but for day-to-day tasks like running errands and commuting to work. This will be accomplished by making safe connections between the trail sites and the places where people work and live.

The desired outcome of the Plan is that it will result in fewer cars on the road, less congestion, less fuel consumption, less demand for parking, and less air pollution, all of which should result in healthier residents of the two counties and more alternatives for those who like to walk or bike in a safe environment.

Comments on the Plan are welcome and can be directed to the Planning Commissions in Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties.



Open Space and Trail Sites in Luzerne County