

Spring

2004



LACKAWANNA/LUZERNE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

CONNECTIONS

Bi-County Open Space/Greenways/ Outdoor Recreation Plan Garners Local and State Recognition

The Bi-County Open Space/Greenways/Outdoor Recreation Plan sponsored by Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties has garnered a local award and state certification.

Locally, the Plan received the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber 2004 Northeastern Pennsylvania Community Progress Award, sponsored by PNC Bank. Each year this award is given to local governments who, "through their cooperative efforts, improve the quality of life, the general welfare of their residents, and/or institute programs that better utilize government resources on a regional or multi-community basis."

In addition to the planning commissions for each county, the Pennsylvania Environmental Council of Northeast Pennsylvania and the Lackawanna River Corridor Association played important roles in bringing the Open Space Plan to life.

At the award ceremony Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber President Steve Barrouk stated, "At a time when cooperation is the key to a successful and revitalized future in Northeastern Pennsylvania, the Luzerne-Lackawanna Open Space, Greenway[s] and Outdoor Recreation Master Plan is a milestone in inter-municipal cooperation within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and is

actually the first in the Commonwealth to have been created as a multi-county cooperative by both sets of planning commissions." The Plan is also the first bi-county plan in the state to be adopted by both sets of County Commissioners as part of their Comprehensive Plans.

Harry Lindsay, Director of the Lackawanna County Department of Strategic Planning & Special Projects accepted the award on behalf of the Lackawanna County Commissioners. "We are thrilled to be the recipient of this prestigious award for the multi-county Open Space Plan in the Commonwealth. Preparing the Plan was the easy task, the real challenge before us is the implementation of the Plan. However, working together, we can find a way to protect and preserve our valuable natural resources for future generations."

The inter-governmental cooperation trickled down to the municipal level with five local townships and/or boroughs who agreed to audits and reviews of their comprehensive plans and zoning/subdivision ordinances.

Through these audits and reviews, EDAW, the consultant for the Plan, advised the

municipalities as to how they could revise their codes to meet *Growing Greener* conservation standards.

The timeframe of the Plan is 20 years with plan recommendations broken down into short, mid and long-term priorities. Trails development received priority for being regional connectors. Development of 140 miles of trails in the area will be pursued in the first five years after implementation.

On April 30, the Luzerne and Lackawanna County Commissioners received a Certificate of Completion from the Department for Conservation of Natural Resources Secretary Michael DeBerardinis in regards to the Open Space Plan. The certificate "recognizes the foresight and dedication required by the Lackawanna and Luzerne County Commissioners and their partners in the development and adoption of a Greenway and Open Space Network Plan."

The final version of the Plan can be found on the web sites of each county. The web site addresses are as follows:

Luzerne County—
www.luzernecounty.org

Lackawanna County—
www.lackawannacounty.org



One of the open space areas identified in the Open Space Plan - Forty-Fort Reach of the Levee Trail, Luzerne County

State Transportation Commission Approves Nearly \$36 Million For Transportation Enhancement Projects

On April 29, the State Transportation Commission (STC) approved \$36 million to be used for Transportation Enhancement projects across the state. Transportation Secretary Allen Biehler made the announcement stating, "The Transportation Enhancement Program enables communities and groups to improve their quality of life through pedestrian and bicycle, scenic beautification, and historic preservation projects. It's just one example of how we can target transportation investments to projects that will help reclaim our communities and enhance the quality of life of our citizens."

Congress created the Transportation Enhancements Program in the original Intermodal and Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, or ISTEA, back in 1991. Ten percent of a state's surface transportation funding authorization is dedicated to the enhancements program. The program is

very popular locally. Every two years, the Luzerne and Lackawanna County Planning Commissions receive numerous applications for enhancement funds—many more applications than there are available funds to satisfy all the requests.

For the 2003/2004 round, the MPO received 17 applications requesting a total of nearly \$5 million. The amount of available funds for each county was \$698,000.

In contrast to the previous 2 enhancement funding rounds, the MPO was not able to supplement the enhancement funds with TIP highway/bridge funds this time to insure that all applicants would receive at least sufficient funds to cover one phase of their projects.

Therefore, only 7 applicants received enhancement funds this round.

In Lackawanna County, the Restoration of Boston & Maine 3713 Steam Locomotive,

Erie Lackawanna Dining Car 741 Restoration, and Dalton Streamside Walking Trail were fully funded while the Phase II Providence Square Redevelopment Project was partially funded.

In Luzerne County, the Ashmore Pedestrian Bridge and Gateway Enhancements in Hazle Township were fully funded and the Susquehanna Warrior Trail was partially funded.

The MPO Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) made the decisions on which projects would get funded based on their evaluations of the applications and the presentations made by the applicants in early February. The TAC used an evaluation form developed by the MPO and based on PENNDOT criteria regarding how closely the projects met the purposes of an enhancement project, the local funding commitment, and whether the project was "ready to go."

Congress and President Fail To Agree on Transportation Bill

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, better known as TEA-21, expired in September of 2003. In lieu of the passage of another 6-year transportation bill, Congress has extended the current bill twice to keep highway and transit funds flowing to the states and MPOs/RPOs so that work associated with transportation projects can continue.

Significant discrepancies between the amount of funds the Senate, House and President want authorized in the transportation bill have tied up passage of another bill to replace TEA-21. One of the stumbling blocks is that Senate Minority Leader, Sena-

tor Tom Daschle, wants assurances that the Democrats will not be excluded from negotiations.

The Senate has approved a \$318 billion transportation bill for the 2004-2009 period. House Speaker Dennis Hastert trimmed the House bill to \$275 billion, although the White House argued that the real cost was \$284 billion. The President has proposed a bill totaling \$256 billion. The Administration has threatened a presidential veto of bills passed by both the House and Senate, arguing that neither version was fiscally responsible in a period of mounting budget deficits. A two-month

extension of the bill was passed in late April by a vote of 410-0.

Dennis Lebo, Manager of the Transportation Program Development for PENNDOT in Harrisburg sees the situation as troublesome, "The lack of a transportation bill made the entire Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) update process very difficult. Assuming a bill passes above our assumptions, we will need to work with all the planning partners to determine how additional funds will be distributed. The bottom line is that we continue along with a TIP update which is only an assumption of the future."

Volunteers Turn Out To Rid Hazleton Area of Litter and Debris

Over 1600 volunteers from all walks of life joined forces during this year's "Great Pennsylvania Clean-Up" on Saturday, April 24 in the Greater Hazleton Area.

Donna Palermo, President of the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce, who coordinates the clean-up effort with PENNDOT for the Greater Hazleton Area said, "The weather was beautiful and our volunteers turned out in force to help rid our area of

litter and debris. The Chamber wishes to thank each and everyone for doing their part for this most worthwhile event. It is disheartening to see how careless people are concerning our environment, and we thank all our volunteers for cleaning up after those who don't respect our

area by littering." The Greater Hazleton

Chamber of Commerce has been involved in the annual Clean-Up effort for 22 years. PENNDOT added in the Clean-Up effort by providing gloves, vests, and bags for the volunteers. Local businesses assisted in the effort by providing coupons or goodies from Byorek's Knotty Pine Inn, Burger King, KFC, Hershey Foods, McDonald's and Wendy's.



PSU Hazleton Students help clean the Arthur Gardner Highway in Hazleton.

Home Town Streets/Safe Routes To School Program

During his budget address in February, Governor Edward G. Rendell directed PENNDOT to establish a Home Town Streets program to prioritize the repair, redesign, and reconstruction of main streets, commercial corridors and major boulevards in older communities to support local revitalization efforts. In response to the Governor's directive, Transportation Secretary Allen Biehler responded, "We are excited about PENNDOT playing a key role in making this program work well and spur reinvestment and redevelopment of our downtowns. The program also will help communities establish safe walking routes for our children."

Governor Rendell has called for a \$200 million investment over a four-year period in the dual-purpose program. Awards will range up to \$1 million per project. Project sponsors will be reimbursed for eligible activities after submittal of invoices to PENNDOT.

The program is intended to improve the quality of life in our communities by sprucing up streets that run through the centers of cities and towns across the Commonwealth. Some of the eligible improvements include sidewalk improvements, planters, benches, street lighting, pedestrian crossings, transit bus shelters, traffic calming measures, bicycle amenities, kiosks, signage and other visual elements. The program will not be responsible for funding improvements to buildings, facades, or personnel costs for a Main Street manager.

General street paving, traffic signals or stormwater improvements are not generally covered by this program, but there may be some instances where it would be appropriate to combine these types of improvements with other more direct Home Town Streets improvements.

Safe Routes to School

This program is designed to work with both school districts and pedestrian/bicycle advocates to make physical improvements that promote safe walking/biking to area schools. These efforts would help save on school busing costs and promote a healthy lifestyle for our children. Some of the improvements that would qualify for this program include sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes or trails, traffic diversion improvements, curb extensions, traffic circles, and raised median islands.

Federal funds and a 20% local match will be used to implement this program. Some examples of where the local 20% match can be found are Community Development

Block Grant Program, State grants, private contributions, and local funds. This will not be a grant program. Similar to the Transportation Enhancement Program, PENNDOT will reimburse project sponsors for eligible activities upon receipt of invoices for services performed. Preference will be given to projects requesting less than 80% of total project costs, projects that are physically ready to advance immediately to the construction phase, or projects located within areas with approved funding under the Main Street of Elm Street programs.

Any government agency, school district or non-profit organization is eligible to apply as a project sponsor for either or both of these programs. Applications can be accessed via the PENNDOT web site. After an initial review by the Department, they will be forwarded to the local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) or Rural Planning Organization (RPO) for evaluation, and inclusion in the program.



Street in Bethlehem serves as a good example of a Home Town Street Project

The Department of Community and Economic Development and the Department for Conservation of Natural Resources may also recommend projects.

"We look forward to hearing from applicants across the Commonwealth," said Secretary Biehler. "These investments will help us to improve the quality of life for the people of Pennsylvania."

Senator Robert J. Mellow Seeks Memorial to Chuck Mattei

Senator Robert J. Mellow introduced legislation on April 26, 2004 to name the newly-created Montage Mountain Road exit off I-81 for the late District 4-0 Engineer, Chuck Mattei.

"Chuck was very instrumental in the implementation and design of this interchange, and because of his tireless efforts, a very efficient and traffic-friendly interchange was made at a very busy and congested exit," the members of the Montage Mountain Safety

Awareness Team wrote in a letter to Senator Mellow. The letter was signed by all members of the team.

"Chuck was highly respected and well-liked by everyone who had the privilege to know him," Mellow said. "His early death from cancer was a tragedy in every sense of the word. This small tribute to his memory is really a symbol of everything he worked for." Mellow noted that

Mr. Mattei lived to see the interchange completed but was too ill to attend the dedication.

"Travelers on I-81 are safer because of Chuck, and that's his real legacy," Senator Mellow said.

PENNDOT will erect appropriate signs at each end of the interchange displaying the memorial to Mr. Mattei. The legislation will take effect within 60 days of its introduction.

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www.neparoads.com

PENNDOT Outlines 2004 Highway/Bridge Projects

The 2004 construction season is underway in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties, and PENNDOT District 4-0 will be undertaking numerous new projects to the tune of \$47.2 million, and continuing several on-going projects totaling \$16 million for the 2-county area.

The cost for new projects in Lackawanna County is \$28.2 million, while the cost for new projects in Luzerne County totals \$19 million.

Among the major projects in Lackawanna County is the \$8 million bridge replacement and widening along Business Route 6 at the junction with PA Route 347 in the boroughs of Dickson City and Blakely. The roadway will be widened to five lanes (two in each direction and a center turning lane), the intersection will be realigned and traffic signals, signs, guide rails, and pavement markers will be installed. Drainage improvements will also be made. Work is estimated to begin late this year with project completion slated for 2006.

The East Market Street Bridge in Scranton

will also be replaced. In addition to the new bridge, the roadway approaching the bridge will be realigned and improved. Work is currently underway on this \$2.8 million project which is estimated to be completed in the spring or early summer of 2005.

Among the major new projects in Luzerne County is the \$1.9 million replacement of the Waller Street Bridge in

One of the new highway projects is the \$636,000 Bear Creek Boulevard widening and rehabilitation project. As part of this project, the roadway will be widened to two 24-foot lanes with 6-foot paved shoulders on each side. The project also includes new pavement, drainage improvements, signs, and pavement markings. The estimated project completion time is later this summer.

One of the major continuing projects in Luzerne County is the \$5.7 million PA 315 corridor improvement project which involves widening 1.8 miles of PA 315 from PA Route 309 (at the North Cross Valley Expressway interchange) to Pocono Downs. The project is estimated to be done this summer.

\$7.6 million will be used for surface treatments covering a total of 93 miles of state roads in Luzerne County during this construction season.

Numerous surfacing, restoration and maintenance projects will also be done this year.



Widening of PA 315 continues

Wilkes-Barre which will begin late this year and be completed in 2005.