Spring

2005

LACKAWANNA/LUZERNE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

CONNECTIONS

Emergency Bidding Process Used To Repair I-81 Bridge

The age of the interstate system in our area, coupled with the freeze and thaw cycles of Northeastern Pennsylvania winters, have taken their toll on bridges on I-81, particularly the bridge over Rocky Glen Road in Moosic Borough, Lackawanna County.

This bridge deteriorated quickly over the summer and fall of 2004 to the extent that one lane has been closed almost weekly for repairs, causing tremendous traffic backups and delays for vehicles traveling south on I-81.

Since the normal contract bidding procedures can be time-consuming, PENNDOT District 4-0 District Executive, Steve Shimko, requested permission to use emergency bidding procedures to replace the bridge deck. On January 18, 2005, Gary Hoffman, PENNDOT Deputy Secretary for Highway Administration, issued an emergency proclamation allowing the Department to greatly accelerate the bridge deck replacement process. The proclamation allows PENNDOT to eliminate the competitive bidding requirements and select a qualified contractor to do the work as quickly as possible. On January 21, 2005, the Department chose Nyleve Bridge Corporation of Emmaus, PA to do the work. The contractor is responsible for both the design and construction of the project under a concept known as design-build. This also hastens the replacement process.

One stumbling block with the Rocky Glen Bridge is its width. The existing bridge is too narrow to maintain two lanes of traffic while replacing the bridge deck. Therefore, a temporary roadway or bridge is required. In order to eliminate the cost and delay of using a temporary bridge, PENNDOT, with the support of Moosic Borough and the Riverside School District, elected to build an embankment across Rocky Glen Road to provide a temporary roadway for I-81 southbound traffic. This step will save taxpayers over $1 million and several months work.

The contractor has begun work on construction of the embankment, clearing trees and placing permanent and temporary pipe in preparation for putting the temporary roadway embankment in place. The roadway should be in place by the middle of April. The new bridge deck is slated to be completed by Memorial Day, and Rocky Glen Road is expected to reopen to traffic by July 1.

Submitted by Richard Cochrane

The underside of the I-81 bridge over Rocky Glen Road

State Transportation Commission Hearing To Be Held in Scranton

The update of the 2005-2008 Transportation Improvement Program will kick off on August 5, 2005 when the State Transportation Commission (STC) convenes its first public hearing in Scranton.

This hearing will give the public and other interested parties the opportunity to present projects for possible inclusion on the 2007-2010 TIP. The TIP is a four-year document that is updated every two years.

Testimony before the STC can be submitted orally at the meeting or in writing, which is the preferred format. Presenters are limited to a five-minute oral presentation.

The hearing in Scranton will include testimony for projects in the areas contained within the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO, the Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance RPO, and the Northern Tier RPO.

The exact location for the hearing in Scranton has not yet been determined. All interested parties will be notified when the location has been decided, and the guidelines for presentations become available.

PENNDOT Local Technical Assistance Program

The PENNDOT Local Technical Assistance Program, more commonly referred to as LTAP, is aimed at helping municipalities across the state better maintain their local road systems. It is based on the premise that new technologies and procedures developed at the state and federal level should be transferred to local municipal officials and employees at little or no cost for the purpose of improving the overall transportation system.

PENNDOT and elected officials receive numerous calls from constituents and customers every year concerning the maintenance and safety of roads and bridges. Some of their concerns relate to state-owned roads which come under the purview of the Department's District Offices. However, many of their concerns relate to locally-owned roads over which PENNDOT has no jurisdiction. To help municipalities address these problems, PENNDOT, through the LTAP program, provides training and information to municipalities to help them deal with safety and maintenance issues.

The services available through the LTAP include workshops and road shows, Roads Scholar Training, technical assistance, demonstrations, library and informational materials, newsletters, and conferences and symposia.

Workshops consist of hands-on technical assistance that can be scheduled by any municipality on a diverse range of maintenance and/or safety issues, and are tailored to the specific road conditions and audience needs.

The Roads Scholar Training consists of a core grouping of training courses that provide a solid foundation for new and seasoned local governments employees on the basics of maintenance and traffic safety issues.

Demonstrations provide LTAP specialists an opportunity to partner with government, the private sector and educational institutions on proven new technologies.

Library and information services include newsletters, technical information sheets, a video and publications library, and a web site (www.ltap.psu.edu). The newsletters are published quarterly and distributed to local, state and federal government agencies. They highlight practical information, new technologies, upcoming events and include many helpful and timely tips.

Conferences and symposia educate and provide instruction on specific topics that are of general interest to local governments, such as the Roadway Management Conference and the American Public Works Association Conference.

There are approximately 225 LTAP training sessions offered each year that are attended by about 4,000 local officials. There are 340 on-site technical assists each year and 51,000 newsletters and related publications distributed across the state.

Listed below are some of the specific programs available through the LTAP:

Roads Scholar: Asphalt re-surfacing, Asphalt Roads-Common Maintenance Problems, Drainage, Equipment & Worker Safety, Risk Management & Tort Liability, Roadside Vegetation Control, Traffic Signs, and Superpave.

Highway Safety: Work Zone Traffic Control, Walkable Communities, Engineering & Traffic Studies, Traffic Calming, Roadway Safety Improvement Program, and Low-Cost Safety Improvements.

PA State Association of Township Supervisors: Winter Maintenance, Spring Maintenance, Equipment Operator Training, Liquid Fuels E-Filing, and QuickBooks.

PA State Association of Boroughs: GASB 34, Taming the Parking Beast, Public Works Training, GIS Road Inventory, and Creating Pedestrian Friendliness.

All municipalities across the state are eligible to participate in the LTAP at little or no cost.

For more information on the program, contact Bill Pogash or Kim Ferroni, Bureau of Planning & Research, PENNDOT Central Office, at 717-787-1964 or 717-787-8685 respectively.

Home Town Streets/Safe Routes To School Projects Receive Funding

On January 27, 2005, the State Transportation Commission (STC) approved funding for the Home Town Streets/Safe Routes To School projects across the state.

The Luzerne County projects that received funding are: Dallas Borough Streetscape, Butler Township Walking Path to Drums Elementary School on E. County Road, West Hazleton Streetscape, Hazleton Beautification, and Hanover Township Curb and Crosswalk Improvements. The amount of funds allocated for these projects totaled approximately $1.25 million.

The Lackawanna County projects that received funding are: Lackawanna Avenue Revitalization, and the Lackawanna Heritage Valley Greenway. The funding for these two projects totaled approximately $1.27 million. On Friday, February 11, 2005, Deputy Secretary for Transportation, Larry King, presented checks to Sara Hailstone and Ray Hayes representing the City of Scranton for the Lackawanna Avenue project, and to Natalie Solfanelli from the Lackawanna Heritage Valley Heritage Authority for the Greenway project.

Deputy Secretary for Transportation, Larry King, present check to Sara Hailstone and Ray Hayes.

Those applicants who received funding in this round should now contact April Hannon, PennDOT District 4-0, at 963-4076 to find out how to proceed with their applications.

Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Architecture Adopted

The Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO adopted the ITS Architecture for the District 4-0 area at the Coordinating Committee Meeting on February 22, 2005.

Simply put, ITS is a method used to increase roadway capacity and improve traffic flow through means other than adding lanes or changing roadway configurations. Architecture can be defined as a framework or system, or the manner in which components of a computer system are organized and integrated into a unifying and coherent form. Therefore, the ITS Architecture provides a framework, or protocol, which is used to manage traffic flow under some circumstances, the most common being traffic accidents.

The ITS Architecture is an outgrowth of the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Area Strategic Deployment Plan prepared for PENNDOT District 4-0 by JHK & Associates in July, 1997. That plan evaluated the methods of disseminating roadway information to the public through the use of Variable Message Signs (VMS), Overhead Message Boards (OMB) and Highway Advisory Radio (HAR). The roadway condition information was collected through remote closed circuit television, traffic loop detectors (roadway, overhead, etc.), environmental sensors and other means. The Strategic Deployment Plan recommendations have been implemented throughout the District 4-0 area via the placement of VMS and OMBs at major decision points on the roadway system, and with HAR providing additional specific information where and when needed. Closed circuit television and weather sensors provide valuable data on changing weather and traffic conditions on the major routes in the area.

However, the Strategic Plan was just that—a plan for the placement of hardware where needed. It gave only an overview of what would be needed to complete the architecture, or method, of how to coordinate this data and data from other sources.

The ITS Architecture was developed by the consulting firm of PB Farradyne who sought input from a variety of regional transportation stakeholders ranging from school districts and trucking companies, to emergency services managers and highway planners. Their knowledge of the transportation system and its needs played an important role in the preparation of the plan.

The Architecture identifies the parties that need the information, lays out the interrelationships among those parties, and directs the format in which the information should be presented.

The following scenario illustrates how the use of an ITS architecture in a real-life situation can reduce delays and improve coordination of services:

Highway Advisory Radio Sign along the interstate

The PENNDOT Traffic Control Center operator is scanning the video screens when a closed circuit camera picks up a slowdown of traffic on I-81 at the Davis Street interchange. The technician focuses the camera and sees a tractor-trailer on its side on the deceleration lane to Montage Mountain Road. He zooms in closer and sees the truck placard listing UN 1624. Accessing the computerized chemical listing, he determines that the truck is carrying mercuric chloride, a chemical which is hazardous if inhaled. Meanwhile, numerous cell phone calls are being placed to 911. Due to the location of the accident, the 911 centers in Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties are receiving reports of a truck overturned at Davis Street.

The operator of the Traffic Control Center contacts the Lackawanna County and Luzerne County 911 centers via a dedicated computer network link to inform them of the accident and the chemical being carried. He also tells them that he will contact the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) via the same network in regard to closing I-81 at the River Street and Moosic Exits, both northbound and southbound. The Lackawanna County 911 center dispatches the Moosic and Greenwood Fire Companies, the Lackawanna County Emergency Management Agency, and a hazardous materials team, and informs command of the chemical on-board. They also reply via e-mail to PENNDOT about their actions, and all agencies can watch a scrolling message of the actions being taken and the agencies responsible for them.

While all of this is taking place, the traffic control technician advises the various bureaus in the PENNDOT District office of the need for detours, places the message about the accident on the overhead and variable message boards and Highway Advisory Radio throughout the area, and contacts the local TRAFFIXS network to inform them of the incident. E-mails and cell phone alerts are automatically sent to the registered motorists on the PENNDOT emergency notification list. All of this takes place within a matter of minutes.

Prior to implementation of the ITS Architecture, the cell phone calls would have given various locations for the accident, including Luzerne County, thereby delaying response time while the 911 centers tried to determine the incident location. The 911 centers would have placed calls to each other and to the PSP dispatcher to try to coordinate information. Notifications of the hazardous chemical and the request to close the road would not have happened until a responder arrived on-scene, putting many lives at risk by delaying action. Notification of the public would be haphazard, if done at all, resulting in major traffic back-ups and delays as well as possible secondary accidents.

The Federal Highway Administration requires that the development and implementation of an ITS Architecture be in place by early April of this year. Only MPOs and RPOs that have adopted an ITS Architecture will be eligible to access federal funds for ITS projects. The full ITS Architecture can be found on the following web site: www.paits.org.

Submitted by Steve Pitoniak, Senior Planner, Lackawanna County Regional Planning Commission

Lackawanna/Luzerne
Metropolitan Planning
Organization

LACKAWANNA/LUZERNE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

Published By Luzerne County Planning Commission
Contact: Nancy Snee

Telephone: 570-825-1560
Fax: 570-825-6362
E-Mail: Nancy.Snee@luzernecounty.org

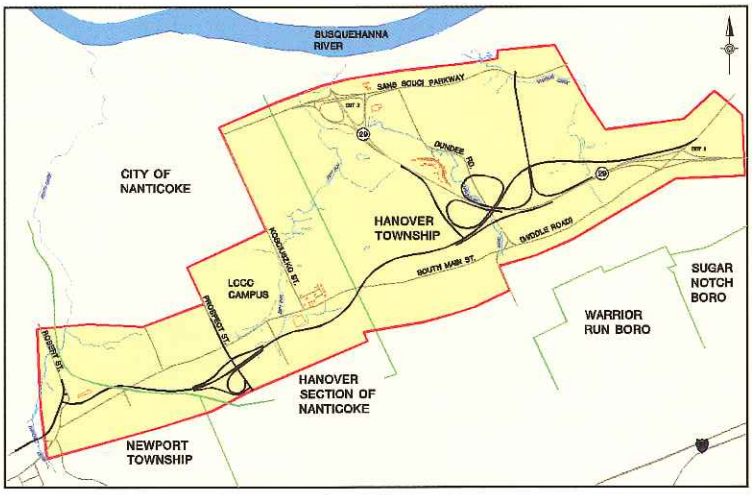
PENNDOT District 4-0 Web Site
www.neparoads.com

South Valley Parkway To Be Constructed in 3 Phases

The overall plan for the South Valley Parkway (SR 3046) consists of the construction of a 4-lane, limited-access highway that will stretch from the Sans Souci Parkway near the Maureen Alexander car dealership in Hanover Township to the Kirmar Parkway in Newport Township. The purpose of the new roadway is to relieve traffic congestion on Middle Road, offer better access to Luzerne County Community College (LCCC), and help boost economic development in Newport Township.

The overall cost of the project is estimated to be $67.1 million. Allocating the total cost for the project on the TIP would seriously impede the construction of many other needed projects in the area. Therefore, the project is being divided into three phases.

The first phase will include the construction of a new exit off the South Cross Valley Expressway (SR 29) just beyond the existing Middle Road interchange (Exit 2), and the construction of a two-lane highway segment from the new interchange to Prospect Street near LCCC. The existing ramp on SR 29 will be removed and a spur from Route 29 to the new SR 3046 will provide access to Middle Road.



Recommended layout for the new South Valley Parkway

Phase 2 will include the construction of a 2-lane segment from Prospect Street to the Kirmar Parkway.

Phase 3 will include the construction of the segment from the Sans Souci Parkway to the segment at the SR 29 junction, and the construction of the additional 2 lanes on the entire roadway.

Also included in the project are safety upgrades at the intersection of Espy and Kosciuszko Streets where a reverse curve improvement will be done, and signals possibly installed. The other safety upgrade relates to the construction of a turning lane on the Sans Souci Parkway.

The project consultant team is headed by Borton-Lawson Engineering. Several other firms are involved in various aspects of the project.