

Summer

2001



LACKAWANNA/LUZERNE METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

# CONNECTIONS

## New Davis Street Exit To Relieve Traffic Woes

Long lines of traffic on Montage Mountain Road following a Red Barons game or a concert at the Amphitheater will be a thing of the past once the Davis Street project is completed.

Improvements at the Davis Street Exit on I-81 (Exit 182, old exit 51) are scheduled to get underway in October. The \$20 million project will provide better access to the business and residential community along Davis Street and Montage Mountain Road.

Some of the major features of the completed project will include:

A new direct northbound access from I-81 onto Montage Mountain Road (south of the existing exit) near the Boy Scout headquarters;

A new southbound I-81 exit ramp which will provide 2 free-flowing lanes of access across the new Davis Street bridge and onto Montage Mountain Road;

A lengthened 2-lane northbound on-ramp to access I-81;

Replacement of the existing Davis Street bridge with a new 6-lane bridge.

PaDOT recently completed the environmental clearance phase of the

project. The final hurdle was cleared when a search for endangered plants thought to be in the area revealed none existed within the project limits.

CECO Associates of Scranton designed the project. They were assisted by Skelly & Loy of Harrisburg, Bogart Engineering of Moscow, DKS Associates of Tampa, Florida and Oakland, California, and Patel Chen of Harrisburg.

According to Bob Doble, Assistant District Engineer/Design for PaDOT District 4-0, the District is anxious to get the project started. "This year we will work on widening I-81 and Montage Mountain Road in the vicinity of

the project. This widening will be temporary and will help keep traffic flowing in both directions for the duration of the project. The I-81 bridge over the SLIBCO Railroad will also be widened early next year to accommodate a switchover of traffic, and that will allow traffic to flow in both directions while work progresses".

Mr. Doble also lauded the cooperation the District received from municipal officials, business and property owners, local police officials, and local emergency service providers.

The project is expected to be completed in the fall of 2003.



New Davis Street Exit Configuration:

LACKAWANNA COUNTY  
DAVIS STREET  
SR 0081 SECTION 295  
LOCATION MAP

- New ramps shown in **RED**
- Relocated Montage Road in **BLUE**
- Relocated Stafford Avenue in **GREEN**
- New Davis Street Bridge 6-lane in **BLACK**
- Direction of travel
- Traffic Signal

## Transportation Planning: Federal Certification Review Held

The 2001 Federal Planning Certification Review was held for the Lackawanna/Luzerne Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) on May 17 & 18, 2001.

The purpose of this triennial review is to ensure that the transportation planning process being followed by the MPO meets all federal standards and requirements.

The MPO staff responsible for transportation planning consists of the planning commissions of Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties and the PaDOT District 4-0 staff.

Among the main topics discussed at the certification on May 17 were: financial planning, Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Development, the Long-Range Transportation Plan, Air Quality, Congestion Management System (CMS), Intelli-

gent Transportation Systems (ITS), Intermodal & Freight Issues, Transit Ridership, Traffic Forecasting, and Public Involvement/Environmental Justice.

Representatives from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) conducted the 2-day review.

In addition to meeting with the MPO staff, the review committee met with transit operators and directors of the two county rail authorities.

On May 18, members of the MPO and the certification review team met with public officials and citizens to hear how they think the transportation

planning process meets their needs.

One of the issues of concern to the FHWA and FTA is Environmental Justice (EJ). To comply with the President's Executive Order regarding EJ, agencies using federal funds must identify and address "disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority and/or low-income populations."

The MPO addressed this issue when the 2001 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) was adopted last fall. The minority and low-income populations were identified, contacted and given (see page 2)



## 'Tis the Season for Paving and Curb Cuts

Federal regulations define the term "curb cut" as "the removal or termination of a portion of a continuous street curb to permit a ramped connection between two surfaces at different elevations; e.g., driveway entrance."

Keith Williams, Associate Director of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Center for Independent Living and a wheelchair user, defines that term in a more personal way, "I see them as tools that increase independence for people with disabilities and these tools allow us greater access into all facets of everyday life—employment, recreation, and social activities."

Such access was not always available to Keith and other wheelchair users. Things started to change in the mid to late 1970's after passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which required all recipients of fed-



*Keith Williams easily navigates through the intersection of Vine Street & Penn Avenue in Scranton thanks to the curb cuts.*

eral funds to provide access to people with disabilities. In time, laws became more specific as to the types of access that must be provided. The Americans With Disability Act of 1990 specifically mentioned curb cuts, but the strongest mandate regarding curb cuts came out of a U.S.

Court of Appeals, 3rd Circuit court case in 1993. The ruling stated that anytime paving of a road occurs, curb cuts must be provided. This applies to local roads as well as state roads. Earlier legislation limited the provision of curb cuts to instances when sidewalks were replaced or installed, and many municipalities used this provision as a loophole to avoid installing curb cuts when roads were paved.

Mr. Williams thinks that access for wheelchair users is generally good in the MPO area but adds, "We cannot afford to become complacent. All municipalities in the MPO area must be proactive to assure that people with disabilities have access to every sidewalk in Northeastern Pennsylvania."

For more information on this issue, contact Keith Williams at 344-7211 or PaDOT District 4-0.

## State Transportation Committee Hearings To Be Held

The State Transportation Committee (STC) will hold hearings across the Commonwealth in the fall. These hearings will precede the preparation of the 2003 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the Twelve Year Plan.

The hearings in the MPO area will take place on October 11, 2001 at the Radisson Hotel in Scranton. The following time slots have been designated for interested parties to present testimony:

Lackawanna County: 9:15 -10:45 AM

Luzerne County: 10:45 AM-12:15 PM

Booklets from the STC office will be available at the end of June. The MPO will distribute this information when it becomes available to those interested in testifying. The information contained in these booklets will also be available on the PaDOT web site. (See page 4 for web site address.)

The STC is comprised of 15 members. Bradley Mallory, Secretary of the Department of Transportation, serves as Chairman. The minority and majority chairmen of the Senate and House Transportation

Committee hold standing positions on the Committee. The remaining ten members are appointed by the Governor for a 6-year term. Among those ten is Ron Ertley, owner of Tech Aviation in Avoca, who represents the interests of Northeastern Pennsylvania.

The STC is charged with determining and evaluating the condition and performance of the state's transportation system, and assessing the resources needed to preserve, restore, extend, and expand those facilities and services to conserve our communities and promote economic development.

## Transportation Planning...(continued from page 1)

the opportunity to comment on the proposed TIP. Those efforts will be expanded when the 2003 TIP is put out for public comment. In addition to telephone conversations and correspondence with the organizations that work with minorities and low-income people, the FHWA would like to have the MPO staff make personal contact with the target groups.

The Congestion Management System (CMS) is another program important to the federal transportation agencies. By

identifying and studying areas of congestion within the region, the MPO can use this system as a tool for planning and programming projects for inclusion on the TIP to address these problems. Some of the congested areas initially pinpointed by the MPO are being addressed via projects on the current TIP.

Other corridors or intersections on the CMS list may be positively impacted by projects that are currently underway. No action will be taken on these areas until that

impact can be assessed. The FHWA recommends that the MPO keep the CMS list updated.

The LLTS MPO is unique in that it is comprised of 2 counties with 2 different governing bodies and 2 planning commissions. The review team lauded the spirit of cooperation that exists between the 2 counties and between the counties and the PaDOT District 4-0 staff.

A formal report on the certification review is expected from the FHWA later this summer.



## Transportation Enhancement Applications Available in August

Webster's New World Dictionary defines the word "enhance" in this way: "to improve the quality or condition of; to make greater in value or attractiveness". This definition aptly describes the types of projects that qualify to receive enhancement transportation funds.

Enhancement projects are designed to provide better access for non-traditional modes of transportation, such as biking and walking. The acquisition and conversion of abandoned railroads to trails comprise a large percentage of the enhancement applications received in the Lackawanna/Luzerne Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) area. Landscaping and beautification projects as well as historic preservation efforts have also received enhancement funds in recent years.

All enhancement projects must have a direct relationship to the intermodal transportation system. (Intermodal refers to the interaction between two or more transportation modes; e.g., Taylor Yards in Lackawanna County where rail freight is loaded onto trucks or vice versa). This intermodal relationship can be one of function, proximity or impact. An independent bike trail is an example of a functional relationship, removal of outdoor advertising (billboard) located next to a highway qualifies based on its proximity, and creating a wetland to filter runoff from a highway qualifies based on impact.

Federal guidelines stipulate that applicants can be reimbursed for project costs on an 80/20 basis—80% federal funds and 20% non-federal funds.

According to Bob Horutz, Enhancement Coordinator for District 4-0, "Federal law requires project sponsors to make payments to contractors and then be reimbursed for the costs they incurred. That's what makes this program a reimbursement program and not a grant program. The applicants pay for all their costs up front and then we reimburse them for the phase of the project for which federal funds will be used."

Pennsylvania provides 2 options for applicants to follow regarding the 80/20 funding split. The preferred approach is for project sponsors to cover the costs of all pre-construction activities such as environmental clearance, project design, property

acquisition, and utility clearances with non-federal funds. The federal funds would then be used for project construction. The advantage of this option is that applicants can proceed at their own pace for all pre-construction activities. PaDOT staff is available for consultation during this phase to insure that proper environmental clearances are secured and to verify that a set of biddable plans have been developed.

Because federal funds will be used for construction, federal guidelines must be followed during this phase of the project.

Under this option, a project may not have an exact 80/20 division of costs between the federal and non-federal funds, but historical trends indicate that overall costs usually approximate the 80/20 split. Under this option, any cost overruns on pre-construction costs are the applicant's responsibility. If costs for the construction phase exceed the amount of federal funds awarded, they must also be covered by the applicant.

Applicants can also follow a more traditional 80/20 approach that funds all project phases on an 80% federal funds/20% non-federal funds basis. If project sponsors choose this option, they must keep in mind that every phase that is paid for with federal funds must meet all applicable federal laws and regulations. In some cases, this requirement can increase the overall project cost and cause delays in project completion.

Applicants can also use in-kind contributions of services, land, materials, and funding as their non-federal share of the project. PaDOT staff can work with the applicant to help determine the financial value of these in-kind services.

Federal funding for the enhancement program comes from federal transportation legislation known as the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, or TEA-21. Each MPO and Local Development District in the state receives an allotment of enhancement funds. The amount of funds received by the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO is determined by a formula

based on population and square miles of the 2-county area, with population accounting for 80% of the formula and square miles accounting for the remaining 20%.

In 1999, the MPO received approximately \$1.4 million in enhancement funds that were evenly split between the two counties. The MPO received 20 applications requesting close to \$9 million, creating a major discrepancy between the amount of funds allotted and requested.

Instead of awarding all of the enhancement funds to just a few recipients, the MPO decided to fund all of the projects for at least 1 phase. Even this action required more funds than were available from the enhancement pot, so the MPO took an unprecedented step and allotted highway funds to supplement the enhancement pot.

Applications will be mailed to past applicants, and any new groups who request them, around August 6, 2001. Applications will also be posted on the PaDOT web site (see page 4.) Workshops will be held on the application process before the application deadline on October 26. Three copies of the application need to be submitted: 1 to the county planning commission, 1 to PaDOT District 4-0, and 1 to PaDOT Central Office. The approved projects will be submitted to the State Transportation Committee on May 1, 2002.

A pre-application meeting for all applicants will be held in late July or early August. Applicants will be notified regarding this meeting once a date has been set.

Questions regarding the enhancement application process can be directed to Bob Horutz at PaDOT District 4-0 at 963-4079.



*Pittston City received enhancement funds for the Riverfront Park Project. Pictured are Gerard Mullarkey (left) and Mayor Michael Lombardo (right).*



Connections is published by the  
Luzerne County Planning  
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Courthouse Annex  
Corner of Jackson & River Streets  
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Check out the PaDOT Web Site at:  
[www.dot.state.pa.us](http://www.dot.state.pa.us)  
Click on "regional information" for  
updates from District 4

## New Exit Numbers Appear on Area Interstates

The answer to that age old question, "Are we there yet?", is now much easier than it used to be, thanks to the new exit signs that were recently installed on all interstate highways in Lackawanna & Luzerne Counties. Now that the exit signs are based on distance, Mom or Dad can readily calculate the distance to their destination and tell the little ones in the back seat, "We have ten more miles to go before we get to the motel."

For north-south interstates, such as I-81, the exit numbers run from south to north, meaning that the first exit sign on I-81 after you cross the border from Maryland into Pennsylvania will correspond to the distance of that exit to the Maryland/Pennsylvania boundary. For a more local example, the exit number for the First Union Arena (old Exit 46) is now Exit 168, indicating that it is 168 miles from the Maryland border.

For east-west interstates, such as I-80, the exit numbers run from west to east. The

exit at White Haven (old exit 40) is now Exit 273 indicating that it is 273 miles from the Pennsylvania/Ohio border.

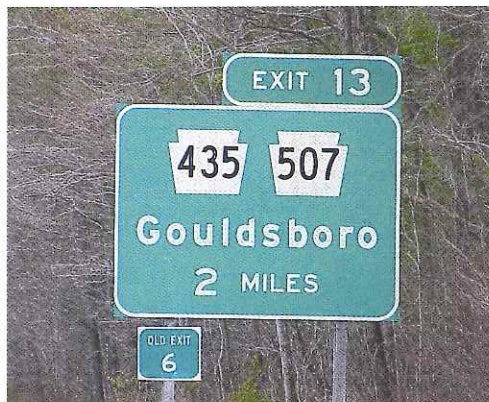
PaDOT District 4-0 was responsible for changing the exit signs for all of I-380 and I-84 located within the state. PaDOT Dis-

trict 8 is responsible for the exit re-numbering for all of I-81 located within the state. They have recently completed this process in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties. The new exit number is located in the upper right corner, while the old exit number is located in the lower left corner.

The old exit numbers will remain posted for two years to prevent confusion and to allow tourist attractions and the motel/hotel industry to change their brochures or other advertisements.

The change in the exit numbering was prompted by motorists who travel from state to state on a regular basis, and were accustomed to the mileage-based system, and by the tourism industry.

Any questions regarding the exit re-numbering can be directed to Dave Kriksanda, District 4-0 Press Officer at 963-4044.



*This Gouldsboro Exit sign on I-380 shows the new exit number in the upper right corner and the old exit number in the lower left corner.*