

Winter

2007

LACKAWANNA / LUZERNE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

CONNECTIONS

June Flood–Damaged Bridges Replaced

The June floods of 2006 wreaked havoc on 29 bridges, most of them located in the Back Mountain region of Luzerne County. Due to the scope of the damage, PennDOT worked with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and PennDOT Central Office to get permission to use a modified design-build procedure. Under this process, the contractor, as part of the bidding process, also does the permitting, Right-of-Way (ROW), utilities, and actual design as part of the contract package. This process has been successful in getting the bridge replacements done in a very timely manner. Of the 29 bridges that needed to be replaced, 26 have already been bid, and construction on 5 bridges has been completed. The funding needed to replace all 29 bridges totals \$35 mil-

lion. The cost of the 5 completed bridges comes to \$3.5 million

The five bridges that have been replaced are located on the following roads: SR 118; SR 4013 (Mossville Road); SR 1047 (Lake Street); SR 1021 (8th Street); and SR 1032 (Maple Tree Road/Outlet Road).

The SR 1035 (Cider Run Road/Village Road) bridge has not been bid yet.

Due to the fast and efficient way the modified design-build process worked in this situation, steps are being taken to use it for other bridge projects.

Submitted by Bob Doble, ADE for Design, District 4-O



New Bridge on SR 1032 Built to Replace Flood-Damaged Span

MPO Member Becomes Chairman of the Commonwealth's Rail Freight Advisory Commission

At the January 27, 2007 meeting of the Commonwealth's Rail Freight Advisory Committee in Harrisburg, the 24-member committee elected Lawrence C. Malski, Esquire, Chairman for the 2007 term. Mr. Malski is the Chief Operating Officer of the Pennsylvania Northeast Regional Railroad Authority. He was appointed to the advisory committee by Governor Rendell, and is one of the 18 appointees made by the Governor to the statewide committee whose role is to provide advice and recommendations to the Governor, the State Legislature, and PennDOT on issues regarding the growing rail freight

industry in Pennsylvania. Mr. Malski serves with Secretary of Transportation Allen Biehler, the Chairman of the PUC, the Majority and Minority Chairmen of the Senate and House Transportation Committees, and other members of the rail freight industry, including rail shippers and representatives of Norfolk Southern, CSX and Canadian Pacific Railway Class I railroads, as well as shortlines and regional railroads in the state. Pennsylvania has 65 operating railroads - the most of any other state in the country.

Acknowledging the importance of the growing rail freight industry in the U.S.,

Mr. Malski commented, "The expanding rail industry holds many of the answers to problems associated with highway congestion, pollution, and financial deterioration concerns that grow in severity and intensity every year. I look forward to taking the lead in the Keystone State to advance and expand the rail freight industry as a means of providing a better and more balanced transportation system as a model for the rest of the country."

Mr. Malski is a voting member of the Technical Committee and a non-voting member of the Coordinating Committee.

Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) Classes Underway

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance (NEPA) is administering the Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) for the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO area and the remaining five (5) counties that are part of their Rural Planning Organization (RPO). These classes began on January 30 of this year and will continue through May.

LTAP is aimed at helping municipalities 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, to improve the overall transportation system.

To register for the following courses, visit the web site www.ltap.state.pa.us and log in using your username and pass-

word. First time users must set up an account by clicking on "Create Account."

For technical assistance, call 1-800-FOR-LTAP (1-800-367-5827).

The following courses will be offered from January-May, 2007:

New Signing and Work Zone Rules for Local Government - January 30, NEPA Boardroom. (NEPA is located at 1151 Oak Street in Pittston Township, next to the Convention Center). The same course will be held on January 31 at the Monroe County Public Safety Center in Stroudsburg.

Asphalt-Common Maintenance Problem - May 1, NEPA Boardroom. (This course will also be offered in Lackawanna County on May 2 at the Penn State Worthington Campus).

Equipment and Worker Safety - May 2, Penn State Worthington Campus, 120 Ridgeview Drive, Dunmore. For directions, call 963-2500 or visit www.sn.psu.edu

All of the classes are **free** for all municipalities, counties, and governmental authorities and agencies; all courses will run from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM.

If you cannot attend the NEPA course due to a scheduling conflict, click on "Current Courses" at the web site mentioned at the beginning of the article to view a listing of courses statewide.

In case of inclement weather, call NEPA at 570-655-5581 for cancellation information. For more information on the courses, contact Kurt Bauman, NEPA, at the telephone number listed above.

Information for this article submitted by Kurt Bauman

Recommendations of the Transportation Reform and Funding Commission Made Public

After 16 months of hearings across the state regarding the serious shortfall in transportation funds, the Transportation Reform and Funding Commission (TRFC) has come up with the following 5 (five) recommendations to help PennDOT deal with rising construction costs and insufficient financial resources:

Provide additional funding for state-owned highways and bridges in the amount of \$900 million per year;

Implement more-disciplined asset management practices by performing preventive maintenance and preservation treatments to avoid more costly reconstruction;

Raise approximately \$750 million by adjusting the Oil Company Franchise Tax wholesale price floor and ceiling to a rate reflective of current prices, and/or by adjusting the millage rate which would translate to an increase of approximately 11.5 cents per gallon;

Raise approximately \$150 million by increasing various motor vehicle and driver licensing fees.; and

Aggressively explore the use of Public-Private Partnerships (P3s) as a way to reduce the need for increasing taxes.

These recommendations will be given to the Governor and the General Assembly to determine a workable solution.

Information excerpted from Highway Builder magazine

Current Funding Sources for Transportation Projects

The following information on the source of transportation funds and how they are distributed comes from the Pennsylvania AAA Federation Position Paper on Transportation Funding for the state:

Federal Gas Taxes: The 14.4 cents/gallon federal gas tax, which hasn't changed since 1993, supports the federal Highway Trust Fund (HTF) from which states are allocated funding for highway and transit programs. Because of more fuel-efficient vehicles and alternate fuel sources, the gas tax is declining. Federal funding accounts for 32% of the

PennDOT budget. In 2005/2006, the Governor authorized the flexing of \$412 million of HTF funds to mass transit operators.

State Gas Taxes: The PA Constitution requires that gasoline taxes and motor license fees be collected in the State Motor License Fund, and be used solely for construction and maintenance of highways and bridges. The state's gas tax, 31.1 cents/gallon, is the highest in the nation. The state gas tax provides 45% of PennDOT's budget. At a time when gas prices have soared, raising the gas tax seems unlikely.

Motor License Fees: State fees for vehicle and drivers' licenses account for 19% of PennDOT's budget. These fees are also required by the state constitution to be deposited in the Motor License Fund.

The approximately \$4.9 billion annual Motor License Funds are expended in the following way:

Highway & Bridge Improvements - 72%

State Police Budget - 18%

Local government payments - 10%.

Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO Regional Operations Plan Preparation Underway

At a time when PennDOT is emphasizing maintenance over capacity-adding projects, right-sizing of projects, and overall smart transportation, the Department recognizes that it has to find ways other than building new roads to manage traffic congestion.

PennDOT is developing a Regional Operations Plan (ROP) to help reduce/and or manage traffic congestion without new roadway construction. A similar plan, the Statewide Transportation Systems Operations Plan (TSOP) was developed at the state level, and the ROP will take the priorities and goals of the TSOP and mold it to fit the needs of Northeastern Pennsylvania.

The counties that will be covered by the plan are Lackawanna, Luzerne, Pike, Susquehanna, Wayne, and Wyoming. The Carbondale Technology Transfer Center (CTTC), the consultant for the project, is working with the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO, the Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance RPO, and the Northern Tier Regional Planning and Development Commission RPO to develop the operations plan.

The four key priority areas of the TSOP are:

Build and Maintain a Transportation Operations Foundation;

Improve Highway Operational Performance;

Improve Safety; and Improve Security.

A number of key actions are included in the TSOP and the items of importance for our area were discussed at a meeting of the work group in December, 2006 in preparation for the stakeholder's workshop that was held on January 17, 2007. The items designated as most important for the 7-county area include the following:

Provide consistent interstate response on all sections of the interstate system;

Provide timely, reliable traveler information through low cost/no cost media measures;

Manage the system cost-effectively through linked management centers;

Use standard computer software; and

Manage traffic signal networks via inter-municipal agreements.

The workshop held on January 17, 2007 included representatives from the New York Department of Transportation, the Pennsylvania Towers Association, regional industrial and shipping interests, and the ROP work group members.

Joel Ticatch, of Parsons Brinckerhoff consultants, reviewed the previous plans that have been done, such as the Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Architecture, the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Strategic Deployment Plan, the Twelve-Year Plan, and the Long Range Transportation Plan, and led the work group in a discussion of the

ROP. Those present focused on two areas of interest - incident response and traveler information. The group listed the following strategies that should be addressed in the plan:

Better efforts need to be made in order to have a coordinated response to incidents (traffic accidents, hazardous materials spills, etc.);

Agreements between PennDOT and local municipalities must be implemented in order for the Department to be able to control traffic signal networks during emergency incidents, highway construction work, and traffic-generating special events near the Wachovia Arena and Montage Mountain;

Better efforts need to be made in order to get accurate and timely information out to travelers; and

A wider distribution network should also be developed by inviting members of the media to be part of the discussion.

These items will be incorporated into the draft ROP by the work group and presented at a future meeting for adoption of the plan which will lead to the creation of a traffic control center for the area.

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

State Transportation Commission (STC) Hearings Scheduled

Even though the 2007-2010 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) was approved and adopted by the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO in July, 2006, preparations for the 2010-2013 TIP will begin this summer when the STC holds its hearings across the state.

Testimony for projects within the Luzerne/Lackawanna MPO area will be heard on August 16 in Jim Thorpe. The location and time of the hearings has not

been set. The STC will approve new guidance for the TIP update process in March.

Denise Soissons is the new STC secretary. She replaces Anita Everhard who has moved to another position.

Unified Planning Work Program

The Luzerne County Planning Commission and the Lackawanna County Regional Planning Commission are working

on the 2007-2008 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). The UPWP describes all the tasks pertaining to transportation planning that the planning commissions and transit agencies perform as part of their contract with PennDOT.

The UPWP will be reviewed and approved at the February MPO Meetings on February 13 (Technical Committee) and February 21 (Coordinating Committee) at the District 4-0 Office, O'Neill Highway, Dunmore.

**LACKAWANNA/LUZERNE METROPOLITAN
PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

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**Check out PennDOT District 4-0
web site
www.neparoads.com**

PennDOT Breaks Ground on PA Route 924 Widening Project in Hazle Township

In late September, the much-anticipated widening project for PA Route 924 in Hazle Township took place. The groundbreaking launched the first stage of a three-phase project that will improve traffic near the Humboldt Industrial Park. The Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce spearheaded the project by providing testimony to the State Transportation Commission for several years.

Chamber officials stressed the need for the project due to the extremely high traffic volumes and attending congestion that occurs because of the many industries in the Humboldt Industrial Park, and the continued growth of Eagle Rock Resort. According to Chamber Transportation Task Force Chairman Attorney Hludzik, "Safety and a reliable transportation system are important components of our area's continued economic development, and the Chamber is proud to partner with PennDOT on this most important

project. Travelers and employees working in the Humboldt Industrial Park have experienced congestion of up to one hour on the roadway, plus it has become a very dangerous situation to the point that traffic backs up directly onto I-81. This project will certainly assist us in alleviating this situation."

Construction on the first section of the widening project, which will span from a point east of the I-81 Exit 143 interchange to an area east of the Hazle Township Fire

Department entrance, is expected to be completed in late 2007. Part of the widening project includes expanding the number of lanes from 2 to 5, including center turning lanes. The turning lanes will accommodate traffic entering Barletta Road from both east and west for a total of seven lanes. In addition to widening SR 924, PennDOT will also widen the northbound and southbound off-ramps of Exit 143, which include dual turning lanes from westbound SR 924 onto I-81.



Groundbreaking of the PA 924 Widening Project

The second phase of the project includes widening SR 924 to Scotch Pine Drive. SR 924 will be widened to the Schuylkill County line in Phase 3.

Reilly Associates designed the project, and Hummelstown-based Pennsy Supply is the primary contractor for Phase 1.

Submitted by Donna Palermo,
President, Gr. Hazleton Chamber
of Commerce.