

Spring  
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LACKAWANNA/LUZERNE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

# CONNECTIONS

## MPO Supports Governor's Call for Action

The Lackawanna/Luzerne Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) heartily endorses the Governor's "Call to Action" to the legislature to devise a plan that will provide a sufficient, stable and continuing source of funding that will address current and future transportation needs. The MPO issued this statement of support following the special session called by the Governor to address the chronic underfunding of the state transportation network.

Speaking about the lack of sufficient transportation funding, Adrian Merolli, Executive Director of the Luzerne County Planning Commission, said, "No new projects have been added to the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) within the past two update cycles, and other projects that had been previously programmed had to be deferred due to insufficient funding."

Approximately \$122 million is needed yearly to maintain the more than 1400 miles of state highways and over 1100 state and local bridges in the 2-county region. For the 2009 TIP cycle, the MPO received an average of \$68 million/year.

Due to the absence of stimulus funding, the uncertainty of bond funding, and substantial reduction in Act 44 funds due to I-80 not being tolled, the 2011 TIP allocation will be reduced to an average of \$56 million/year.

Of that yearly allocation, 90 percent will be used for system preservation projects, and only 10 percent will be used for capacity-adding projects (new roadways or widening or extension of existing roadways).

The monies realized from the I-80 tolling would have added about \$9.5 million to the MPO's yearly TIP allocation. While helpful, even this amount of funding would not have substantially reduced the annual funding deficit between project needs and available funding resources.

Without sufficient funding over the long-term, PennDOT District 4-0 will be hard-pressed to perform adequate surface treatment on its crumbling roadway system, or address the acute needs of its nearly 260 structurally-deficient bridges. New construction projects or existing roadway expansion

projects, that benefit economic development in the region, will continue to go unfunded in the foreseeable future.

Lack of sufficient transportation funding is an urgent need that must be addressed now, said Merolli. "State and federal elected officials must realize that the needs of our transportation system far outweigh the resources available. It is imperative that they support solutions to this crisis without the political or election concerns that interfere with the decision-making process."

Harry Lindsay, Executive Director of the Lackawanna County Office of Planning & Economic Development, echoes Merolli's feeling. "Simply put, the existing financial resources are inadequate to maintain our deteriorating roadways, yet alone [address] our future needs. I urge our legislators and governor to meet and resolve the transportation funding crisis now."

If the driving public wants to see better roads and safer bridges in the future, we must be willing to pay more for that infrastructure, either through an increase in the gas tax, an increase in vehicle registration and licenses fees, tolls or other revenue-producing measure.

## House Transportation Committee To Hear Testimony

The State House Transportation Committee is planning several hearings across the state within the next several weeks to hear testimony about the transportation funding crisis in Pennsylvania.

The hearing for the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO and PennDOT District 4-0 region is scheduled for June 10th at Marywood University. The hearing will be held in Naz-

areth Hall between 2pm and 5pm.

The committee is holding these hearings in an effort to try to find ways of addressing the nearly \$3.5 billion needed annually to maintain Pennsylvania's existing highway, bridge, and public transit systems, and to try to develop a plan to adequately fund transportation needs in a sustainable manner.

The hearing was announced jointly by Chairman Joseph Markosek (D-25) and Republican Chairman Rick Geist (R-79). The hearing will include an examination of the transportation issues specifically affecting Northeastern Pennsylvania. Six other hearings will be held across the state.

# Linking Transportation Planning, Land-Use, and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

PennDOT Central Office, PennDOT District Offices and all the MPOs/RPOs across the state are engaged in an effort to better link the concepts of Transportation Planning, Land-Use Planning and the NEPA policies. The acronym being used to describe this process is LPN.

The impetus for the LPN effort comes from the federal transportation legislation known as the Safe, Accessible, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act—Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), and the lack of sufficient funding to meet transportation needs.

The purpose of the LPN effort is to develop projects that are affordable and appropriate for their location, using Smart Growth principles. Developing the best cost estimate of projects is a key element



Transportation planners meet in Harrisburg to discuss the LPN effort

of developing Transportation Improvement (TIP) and Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) projects that can be delivered within an MPO's fiscal constraints and projected inflation rates.

The land-use element to be considered is whether projects align with the goals of municipal comprehensive plans.

The NEPA aspect of the process deals with evaluating the environmental impacts of projects earlier on in the project development process than is currently being done. This will help in developing the best cost estimate of projects up front.

Since most LRTP and TIP projects consist of asset management projects (preserving existing roadways/ bridges and other facilities), a process is being developed to come up with the best cost estimates for those types of projects.

The LPN process will be implemented through the use of three project screening forms - Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3.

Level 1 forms will be filled out by the project sponsor, which could be a citizen, a municipality, a business/industry organization or other type of organization. (continued on page 4)

## Railroad Tie Replacement Project Underway

A major new railroad tie replacement project has commenced on Pennsylvania Northeast Regional Railroad Authority's (PNRRA's) Scranton-to-Carbondale mainline, thanks to the receipt of a PennDOT Bureau of Rail Freight 70%/30% Rail Freight Assistance grant in the amount of \$455,000. PennDOT will contribute \$318,500, or 70%, of the total project cost. The PNRRA and its contract rail operator, the Delaware-Lackawanna Railroad, will pay the 30% local matching share of \$136,500 to help fund the replacement of 7,222 ties between Scranton and Carbondale.

"As rail freight traffic increases over our lines, and with new industries looking to locate their facilities along our property, this major upgrade will ensure safe and efficient rail freight transportation to continue over this portion of our 100-mile regional rail system", said Larry Malski, PNRRA President.

Over 25 active industries in Northeastern Pennsylvania rely on the freight rail service provided by the Authority's contract rail freight operator, the DLRR.

Major commodities carried over the regional rail system include, food, steel, plastics, lumber, paper, and many other consumer goods. "More and more freight is being shifted to rail because of its energy efficiency," said Malski. "One ton of freight can be moved 436 miles on one gallon of fuel by rail," he stated. "Rail freight transportation is becoming the "green" and most environmentally-friendly means of moving people and goods in our country."

Submitted by Larry Malski, President, PNRRA

## MPO Approves 2011-2014 Transportation Improvement Program To Be Put Out For Public Comment

On May 19th, the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO approved putting the 2011-2014 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) out for public comment, once the air quality conformity analysis has been completed and approved in early June..

The TIP lists the highway/bridge and transit projects for which funding has been authorized for the first four years of the Twelve-Year Plan and the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

In keeping with the directive of PennDOT Central Office, the MPO devoted 90 percent of its TIP funds to system preservation, or asset management, projects. The remaining 10 percent of funds were devoted to a few capacity-adding projects, most of which are tied to economic development interests.

Upon air quality conformity analysis approval, the TIP will be available at the following locations for review and comment: Offices of the Luzerne and Lackawanna County Planning Commissions, libraries in

Hazleton, Wilkes-Barre (Osterhaut), Scranton, and Carbondale. It will also be available at the offices of El Mensajero in Hazleton, and on the MPO web page (see page 4 for web address). Comment sheets will be available at those locations, but comments can also be forwarded to either of the planning commission offices.

The TIP is scheduled to be approved by the MPO at their meeting on July 28th at the PennDOT District 4-0 Office in Dunmore.

## Construction of New Control Tower at Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport Underway

Construction on the new control tower at the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport got underway in November of 2009.

The airport received \$13.3 million in federal funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to cover the costs of the new tower. The new tower will replace the existing tower which was built in 1960.

Congressman Paul Kanjorski, Senator Robert Casey, and Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood attended the announcement of the federal funding award to the airport last November. "The Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport is our region's gateway to the rest of the world and it provides the first impression for many new visitors," said Congressman Kanjorski. "The new air traffic control tower will ensure the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport remains a fully functioning [facility] and vital component of the air transportation network in the eastern United States."

Secretary LaHood echoed the congressman's remarks. "Thanks to the \$13.3 million, the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport will receive a new air traffic

control tower and radar control facility that will help this airport run more safely, smoothly, and energy-efficiently, while generating roughly 140 jobs over the next two years."

The new tower will enable the airport to open up its second runway and provide controllers with full visibility of any moving planes at the airport. The current tower does not provide a full view of the second runway, which caused the closure of the second runway. With the new tower, and a second functioning runway, the airport will have the ability to handle increased plane traffic. The new tower will also provide better lines of sight for plane taxiways and other plane movements. Updated radar equipment to effectively track planes as they take off and

land will also be part of the new tower construction, as well as an updated generator and other advanced equipment that will ensure uninterrupted flights, even if the airport loses power.

The tower will consist of a 11,000 square-foot base building which will house the Terminal Radar Approach Control facility, electronic equipment for control of aircraft, an Uninterrupted Power Supply System, an engine generator, as well as administrative and building support space. The tower will stand 100 feet in height and have a 1.6 mile access road leading up to it. (See photo in masthead on page 1.)

Barry Centini, Airport Director, said of the new tower, "This tower will enable our employees to continue to do great work, but with upgraded tools."

Without the new tower and updated technology, it was possible that the federal employees could have been consolidated and sent to other airports throughout the state.

The total cost of the tower, roadway and related projects is estimated to be \$16 million. The commissioning of the facility is proposed for July, 2012.



Federal & local officials perform groundbreaking for new tower

## Greater Hazleton Rails-To-Trail To Celebrate National Trails Day

The Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership will celebrate National Trails Day on the Greater Hazleton Rails to Trails (GHRT) on Saturday, June 5th from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM. The celebration will include a Hike & Bike Event, a ribbon-cutting for the Greater Hazleton Leadership Class 2010 Environmental Education Area, and the dedication of 30 recently-planted trees which have been adopted as memorials.

National Trails Day was instituted in 1993 by the American Hiking Society as a way to make the public aware of the existence of more than 200,000 miles of trails in the

country and all the benefits they afford. Trails offer ample opportunities to explore, exercise, and find inspiration and solitude all in one place.

GHRT has led the way in using infrared trail counters to get accurate measurements of trail use. Over 53,000 people have used the trail between 2008 and 2009.

Three exercise stations have been installed along the first mile of the trail, three picnic areas have been installed along the first four miles, and interpretive signage is being installed. GHRT volunteers are now looking to preserve lands

along the trail that contain rare pine and heath barrens.

Additional activities scheduled for June 5th include distribution of free bike helmets for kids, free blood pressure screenings by the Hazleton Health & Wellness Center, and free pedometers for the first 50 people participating in the walking contest.

A free picnic lunch will also be served.

For more information on the National Trails Day celebration at the GHRT, contact Bob Skulsky, Executive Director, Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership at 455-1509.



Published By: Luzerne County  
Planning Commission  
Contact: Nancy Snee  
Telephone: 825-1564  
E-Mail:  
Nancy.Snee@luzernecounty.org



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## Linking Transportation Planning, Land-Use, and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (continued from page 2)

The draft Level 1 forms consist of 7 sections that deal with the following issues:

Section 1: categorization of the problem/project in one of the following ways: preventative maintenance, maintenance, congestion, safety, land use & economic development, transit, pedestrian and alternate travel modes, or freight;

Section 2: data on the specific location by municipality, State Route number, whether the project is on a federal-aid system roadway, and whether the municipality has done any preliminary work on the project;

Section 3: series of checklists dealing with zoning, land use, and inclusion in an existing LRTP or other municipal plan;

Section 4: checklist of potential environmental impacts;

Section 5: proof of community or agency support for the project;

Section 6: reserved for assessment of range of approaches/solutions at Level 2 screening;

Section 7: cost estimates and methodology used to develop cost estimate.

The success of this new project planning/programming process will be determined by how well MPOs/RPOs adhere to the follow-

ing principles when preparing their LRTPs and TIPs:

Determination of best possible project cost estimates up front;

Adherence to region's financial constraints;

Advancement of projects with local context and municipal goals/objectives in mind;

Construction of projects that fix existing problems or prevent future problems from occurring using Smart Growth principles.

These new guidelines for the transportation planning/programming process will be used for all new projects submitted to MPOs/RPOs for inclusion in their LRTPs.

The new project planning/programming process is scheduled to take effect in September of this year.



*PennDOT District and MPO/RPO staffs discuss LPN process.*