



A CALMING PRESENCE

*Making the congestion management
process work*

By **Zoe Neaderland**, AICP, Manager, Office of Transportation Safety and Congestion Management and **Jesse N. Buerk**, Transportation Planner, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

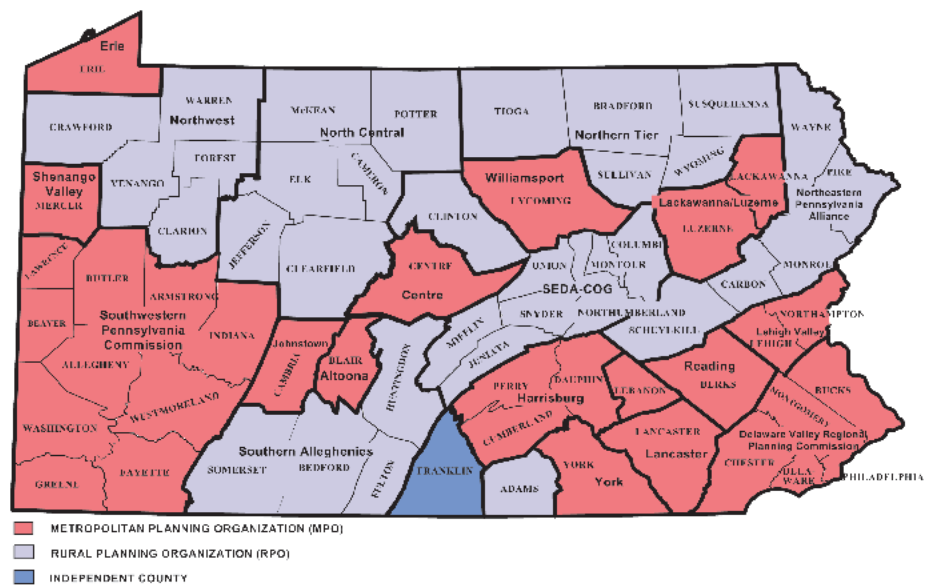
People and goods stuck sitting in traffic equal lost time and money, not to mention wasted fuel and increased pollution. So, is there a solution? The answer is yes.

You can reduce traffic snarls in your borough as a citizen, as a participant in government and by taking part in the regional planning process. The truth is, there are many ways to reduce congestion in your borough, most of which do not involve building more roads. Many of the solutions do not cost much and can improve the overall character and quality-of-life of your community. Regional planning efforts, including a robust congestion management process (CMP), can provide the tools a borough needs to help people and goods get to where they need to go.

Why does Regional Planning Matter?

Many major transportation planning decisions in Pennsylvania are guided by a metropolitan planning organization (MPO) or a rural planning organization (RPO), which are forums made up of representatives from different levels of government, transportation planners and others. In urbanized areas of 50,000 or more people, an MPO is a condition for federal transportation assistance. The more rural areas of Pennsylvania participate in RPOs. For more information, including a map of Pennsylvania's planning organizations, see <ftp://ftp.dot.state.pa.us/public/Bureaus/Cpdm/PA%20Plan%20Profile/PA%20Planning%20Partner%20Profile.pdf>.

Regional planning links the areas of transportation, land use, environmental planning, and economic development. It is important to link these issues, because decisions made in one area will inevitably have consequences for the others. For example, land development decisions create transportation demand, which has



COORDINATING THE PLAN The map of Pennsylvania's MPOs and RPOs, available through PennDOT, shows the coordinated regional efforts

effects on economic development and environmental quality. Regional planning efforts include many stakeholders, which helps to balance the needs of individual communities with regional goals, resources and limitations.

What is the Congestion Management Process?

Reducing congestion has traditionally been accomplished by expanding road capacity in other words, building new roads or widening existing ones. But new road capacity is expensive and can have negative impacts on the community and environment. New lanes often fill up quickly as people decide to drive more because of their presence. At the same time, new road capacity encourages development further from our community centers.

We cannot build our way out of traffic congestion. Even if we could, the money simply is not available.

Across the country and the world, communities are turning to more integrated approaches to reduce congestion. Many of these approaches forge stronger links between transportation and land use planning, and incorporate all modes of transportation. Strategies include making the existing system more efficient, employing transportation

demand management (TDM) strategies and providing alternatives to each person driving alone in a car.

At a project level, a "Complete Streets" policy helps communities plan for projects that help everyone from the pedestrian to the truck driver by considering all modes of transportation, not just cars.

At a broader level, the CMP helps a community figure out where to invest limited funds and how to develop a package of strategies that will best advance agreed-upon goals.

The CMP is a tool used by transportation planners to reduce congestion. It is a systematic process that begins by analyzing the regional transportation network to understand the current situation. Next, it suggests specific strategies that can help people and goods get to where they need to go. The CMP helps translate these strategies into action, then evaluates what was done to see if it worked.

How does the CMP Work?

The CMP assists transportation planners and members of government in their decisions about where to focus investments. By identifying congested transportation corridors and strategies to improve them as described above, the CMP helps guide the selection of projects



PROCESS MANAGEMENT The CMP is organized in a manner that encourages a logical progression to addressing issues

to funds in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP is an agreed-upon, prioritized set of transportation projects in a specific region that are eligible to receive federal transportation funding.

In areas of the state where air quality is a problem (also known as non-attainment areas), federal law requires any transportation project that adds major single-occupancy vehicle capacity to be consistent with the CMP. The MPO is responsible for assessing if the problem can be solved by means other than pouring more pavement for roads. When careful study shows that the only solution to congestion

is more capacity, the CMP helps identify additional strategies that, combined with the new capacity, can help get the most long-term value from the investment.

The CMP also encourages communities to take proactive steps to prevent congestion where it has yet to become a big problem. This might include making sure land use plans are updated or thinking about how many driveways to allow along a roadway before unsafe conditions develop.

CMP Products your Borough can Use

The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) is the MPO for the Philadelphia region. If

your borough is in Bucks, Chester, Delaware or Montgomery Counties, you may wish to visit www.dvrpc.org/CongestionManagement.

The DVRPC CMP can also be useful outside of southeastern Pennsylvania. It is made up of discreet sections, some of which can be directly used in your work (credit is appreciated). For example, there is a set of 100 strategies, with a short definition of each, which can be reused or shortened to fit various contexts. There is a section on strategies for special populations that could be modified for your area’s unique population make-up. DVRPC also offers technical help to other MPOs/RPOs as resources permit.

Federal requirements state that regions with more than 200,000 people must maintain a CMP and use it to inform transportation planning and decision-making. If your region has a CMP, then it probably has strategies for your borough. These strategies are developed at a regional scale—the regional agency may not know your specific neighborhood as well as you do, but they provide a starting point for discussions. The federal categories of CMP strategies generally include ways to make roads operate more efficiently and to fully use transit, as well as TDM and policy approaches.

These days, you probably consider pedestrian safety in your borough as a natural step in planning, though this hasn’t always been the case. There are other strategies, like pedestrian safety, that are often relatively low-cost, and that address several goals at once. These include:

- Safety improvements
- Better signage
- Basic upgrades to traffic signals and traffic signal timing
- Marketing and outreach for transit and TDM policies, such as carpools, vanpools, ridesharing

programs, alternate work hours and telecommuting

- Updates of existing land use and/or transportation regulations

CMP in Action

One of the most important parts of the CMP is that it is inclusive and considers multiple modes of transportation, in addition to cars. A collaborative, inclusive planning process is key to the success of any effort to improve a community.

Understanding how groups of strategies can complement one another to equal something greater than the sum of their parts is something MPOs and RPOs around the country are working hard to accomplish.

Imagine, for example, a congested road in your community. Traffic is backing up at the intersections, and everything is at a standstill.

Perhaps there isn't money or interest in adding more lanes to the road. But, there is enough money to add turn lanes at the intersection, so people turning left don't back up all traffic. While the intersection is being improved, the timing of the signals should also be adjusted, and even coordinated with other nearby signals.

But let's not stop there. Maybe there's a bus that could serve more people. Now imagine building a park-and-ride lot, improving the bus shelters along the route, adding better lighting and crosswalks to

Making a Difference

What can I do as a citizen?

- Combine trips when you can, take transit or use park-and-ride facilities, participate in a carpool or join a local ridesharing program.
- Take advantage of local shopping and recreation opportunities, especially when accessible by transit, walking or bicycling.
- Participate in local transportation and land use planning.

What can I do as a municipal official or employee?

- Be aware of the long- and short-term opportunities to shape your locale.
- Review your community's comprehensive plan, zoning and regulations to ensure that they reinforce each other and work toward common goals (your local MPO or RPO can help).
- Coordinate with surrounding municipalities and with county studies.
- Communicate with representatives on the board of your local MPO or RPO.
- Think creatively – there may be more ways to fund transportation and land use improvements than you realize. A summary of resources is available at www.dvrpc.org/asp/pubs/publicationabstract.asp?pub_id=09061. **(B)**

make people feel safer, beefing up bus service so it's more convenient and building a trail network to connect neighborhoods to the park-and-ride. Perhaps some local employers can also be encouraged to provide incentives for their employees to use the lot in conjunction with a car pooling program.

It's not hard to imagine these pieces coming together to accomplish more than any one of them would in isolation and yet all together still costing less than building a new road. Even better,

if the project managers and the community track conditions before and after these improvements, they might learn more about what worked and what didn't in helping reduce congestion. This knowledge could be applied to grant applications that could, in turn, secure funds for future improvements.

In this way, an inclusive, collaborative regional planning process and a robust CMP can help reduce congestion in your community. **(B)**

STAY ONE STEP AHEAD

ANTI-ICING OPERATIONS

involve applying an ice melting product to the pavement in order to inhibit development of a bond between snow or ice and pavement surface. Our Direct Application Anti-icing Systems are designed to directly apply liquid de-icers to road surfaces.



**EZ MOUNT
DAS SYSTEM**

**FOR ALL OF YOUR LIQUID
APPLICATION NEEDS**



GVM SNOW
374 HEIDLEBURG RD.
BIGLERVILLE, PA 17307
800-458-5123

CALL TO DISCUSS OUR COMPLETE PRODUCT LINE

snovequipmentsales.com