

Proposal to Make the Forum More Effective

July 14, 2010 Version

Goal

- Agree on concrete changes to the Forum to make it more effective
- Generate ownership of the group's shared context, challenges, and opportunities

Recent Discussions

A work session was held on June 30th to consider changes that could increase the Forum's impact. This representative subset of the Forum consisted of five municipalities from Mercer, Middlesex, and Somerset counties; the counties; MPOs; NJDOT; NJ Transit; and NJ Future.

In advance of the work session, an online survey of Forum members was conducted, which received over 100 responses. The survey results indicated support for enabling the Forum to take more action. When asked how the Forum could be more effective, the following were the top responses:

- Provide more support for municipalities interested in advancing an integrated transportation and land use vision for the corridor (50%);
- Develop action teams to advance the region's goals (47%); and
- Take more actions as a group, such as writing letters or issuing press releases (40%).

Respondents overwhelmingly supported continuing to attend Forum meetings (85%) and participating in one or more action teams (68%).

Work Group Recommendations

1. Create Action Teams - The Forum should agree on a limited number of action teams which would investigate an issue, then report back to the full Forum with recommendations. The Forum would discuss the recommendations and vote. The action team could then proceed, with the endorsement of the Forum as a tool. Action teams would report back on progress.
2. Update the Forum Steering Committee - Each action team should have a chair. These representatives would be added to the existing Forum Steering Committee. The Steering Committee will meet in between Forum meetings. One purpose of these meetings will be more in-depth discussion of the work of action teams than is possible with the big group and to keep everyone pulling toward the region's goals. A municipal representative from each county may also be added to the Steering Committee.
3. Adopt a Formal Voting Structure - For votes taken by the Forum to carry useful weight, there should be a formal voting structure. For the Forum to speak for its municipalities and counties, they should be the majority of participants. On the next page is a potential voting structure.
4. Further Engage NJTPA - The Forum started as a shared effort among NJDOT, DVRPC, and NJTPA. Each of the three break-out groups at the work session independently asked that NJTPA become more involved. The ability to work with both MPOs in this corridor is highly regarded. A possible step is to have the Forum co-chaired by the two MPOs, or otherwise identify a more meaningful role for NJTPA.

Action Teams

All action teams should advance regional goals. There may be criteria for creating action teams, such as: immediate need, regional impact, and ability to implement changes. There should be a limited number of action teams, perhaps five. Action teams should include a range of viewpoints in order to produce viable recommendations.

Some potential action teams follow to start discussion:

1. Route 1 BRT (existing, hosted by the Forum)
2. Integrating Land Use and Transportation (to be oriented to providing support for municipalities, building on the survey input and the Rt1RGS recommendations)
3. Bicycling and Walking
4. Funding
5. Route 1 Congestion

Note: A related item is ongoing coordination with the Mayors' Coalition (independent of the Forum, existing group of six mayors working together, with funding for Penns Neck Improvements a priority)

Voting Structure

For votes to carry more weight, there should be a formal voting structure for the Forum. To be a voting member, each municipality or agency would need to write a letter recognizing that being a voting member involves representing their entity at Forum meetings and reporting back to their leadership. The option would remain to just be on the e-mail list and attend meetings.

A potential list of voting members follows to start discussion. Further details would be worked out by the Steering Committee or at a work session of all who wish to be voting members.

- > Municipalities – Invite all below, expecting that some will not want this level of commitment.
 - o NJDOT Rt1RGS participants: Trenton*, New Brunswick*, Cranbury, Ewing*, Franklin, Hamilton*, Lawrence, Monroe, North Brunswick*, Plainsboro, Princeton Township, South Brunswick, West Windsor, Jamesburg, Princeton Borough (*not Forum member, though they receive the e-mails)
 - o Rest of the existing 21 municipalities in the Forum: East Amwell, East Windsor, Hillsborough, Hopewell Township, Montgomery, Robbinsville, Hightstown Borough, Hopewell Borough, Millstone Borough, Pennington Borough, Rocky Hill Borough
- > Counties: Mercer, Middlesex, Somerset
- > State Agencies: NJDOT, NJ Transit, and a representative for land use/economic development such as NJOSG, SPC, or the Governor's Office
- > MPOs: DVRPC, NJTPA
- > Other Important Voices:
 - o Non-profit regional planning entities such as PlanSmart NJ and NJ Future
 - o Transportation Management Associations (also represent major employers)
 - o Limited others, to be determined