

**The next meeting of the Central Jersey Transportation Forum will be on
Friday, March 3rd at 9:00 AM (Refreshments at 8:30 AM)
Sarnoff Corporation - 201 Washington Road, West Windsor, New Jersey**

DELAWARE VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

**Highlights of the
Central Jersey Transportation Forum
Meeting of November 14, 2005**

Attendees (64):

Name	Organization
Richard Amodei	STV Incorporated
Morteza Ansari	Keep Middlesex Moving, Inc.
Martin Bierbaum	Municipal Land Use Center
Dianne Brake	Regional Planning Partnership
Tom Clark	NJ Transit
Edward Cohen	East Brunswick Township
Paul Cohn	NJ Department of Transportation
John Coscia	DVRPC
Stephen Decter	West Windsor Township
Michele Fisher	Office of Assemblywoman Linda Greenstein
Ernie Freeman	Plainsboro Township
Linda Geevers	West Windsor Township
Basil Giletto	A-1 Limousine Corporate Offices
Danielle Graves	NJ Department of Transportation
Linda Greenstein	NJ State Assembly
Robert Grimm	NJ Turnpike Authority
Eric Grugel	DVRPC
William Hearon	Princeton Township
Pam Hersh	Princeton University
James Hess	DMJM + Harris
John Hogan	Middlesex County
Michele Hovan	Hopewell Borough
Howard Immordino	NJ Department of Transportation
Jack Kanarek	NJ Transit
Dennis Keck	NJ Department of Transportation
Barry Keppard	Greater Mercer TMA
Katherine Kish	Princeton Future/Princeton Regional Chamber of Commerce
Heidi Kleinman	West Windsor Township
Miki Krakauer	NJ Department of Transportation
Joung Lee	Federal Highway Administration
John Lettiere	NJ Department of Transportation
Jim Lewis	NJ Department of Transportation
Donna Lewis	Mercer County
Bruce Looloian	The Advance Realty Group
Jerome Lutin	NJ Transit
John Manzoni	STV Incorporated
Thomas Marchwinski	NJ Transit

Craig Marshall	South Brunswick Township
Robert Marshall	NJ Department of Transportation
Alison Miller	Friends of W. Windsor Open Space
John Miller	Dewberry-Goodkind Inc.
Pamela Mount	Lawrence Township
Mary Murphy	NJ Turnpike Authority
Zoe Neaderland	DVRPC
Bill Neary	East Brunswick Township & KMM
Daniel O'Connell	NJ State Legislative Board/United Transportation Union
James Parvesse	West Windsor Township
Robert Patten	Hightstown Borough
Marvin Reed	Princeton Regional Planning Board
Rebecca Reyes-Alicea	Federal Transit Administration
Walter Schmidlin	Sarnoff Corporation
James Schwarzwaldner	NJ Transit
Charles Scott	NJ Department of Environmental Protection
Don Shanis	DVRPC
Sandra Shapiro	West Windsor Citizens for Transportation Alternatives
Lee Solow	Princeton Regional Planning Board
Linda Spalinski	Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission
Gene Strupinsky	Hillsborough Township
Sue Tilden	Heyer, Gruel & Associates
Pat Ward	West Windsor Township
Aaron Watson	Mercer County
Ken Wedeen	Somerset County
Louise Wilson	Montgomery Township
Bob Wolfe	Picus Associates
Jim Yeager	Michael Baker & Associates, Inc.

Overview

NJDOT Commissioner Lettiere spoke about reauthorization of the Transportation Trust Fund and answered questions from Forum participants. There were also updates on the Route 1 Bus Rapid Transit study, Route 1 Regional Smart Growth Strategy project, and other Forum tasks.

1. Introductions

John Coscia, DVRPC Executive Director, opened the meeting and encouraged everyone to participate. Each person then introduced himself or herself.

2. NJDOT Commissioner Lettiere on Reauthorization of the Transportation Trust Fund (TTF)

Commissioner Jack Lettiere explained that the TTF is going to run out of money, dispelled various myths, encouraged everyone to be part of finding a solution, and answered questions from the Forum. He addressed the following myths:

- Myth: All gas and fuel taxes are constitutionally dedicated to transportation
Reality: The one-cent tax generates \$53 million, of which \$45 million is dedicated
- Myth: By statute, \$114 million is committed to the TTF per year
Reality: Considerable funds have not actually made it to the TTF
- Myth: The fund is used for boondoggles
Reality: The Riverline is appreciated by the people along it. The AC Tunnel was a partnership where the NJDOT provided one-third of the funds, just slightly more than was going to be needed already, for a project with major economic effect
- Myth: The funds go to contracts with political contributors
Reality: Contracts go to the low bidders and the process is regularly audited.
- Myth: The funds are used for operating costs and salaries
Reality: Some projects are designed by engineers who work for consultants and some by NJDOT engineers. Their work is the same and both are considered eligible expenses. Trust funds are not used for grass cutting, pothole fixing, or other regular salaries
- Myth: Basic federal transportation funds would be enough
Reality: To keep the transportation system in its current state requires approximately \$2.6 billion per year. New Jersey receives \$1.2 billion in federal funds per year of which only \$700-800 million could be used for capital projects. Further, without the TTF, the state could not meet the reasonable effort test and would lose those federal funds.

Commissioner Lettiere's points included that unless funding is found for the TTF, counties and municipalities will lose over \$175 million per year, the state will increasingly lose businesses to other states, and our children will have to shoulder tremendous debt. He noted that if the TTF debt were paid off today, it would save \$3 billion in future interest. New Jersey is currently one of the top ten debt issuers in the country. He estimated that there is a six to seven month window left to find a solution.

To give a sense of the impact of a gas tax solution, Commissioner Lettiere sketched out a scenario in simplified numbers. Where the Blue Ribbon

Commission estimated a 12.5 cents tax increase would keep the system at its current level, he used a ten cents tax as an example. If the gas tax were increased by ten cents, for a person who drives 20,000 miles per year and gets 20 MPG, that would amount to an expense of \$100 per year. He compared what a person can buy for under \$2 per week—a fancy coffee, a newspaper, or a transportation system. He emphasized that it is a question of what we value and of taking responsibility for what we own.

Quite a few planners have visited NJDOT from China to learn about the American transportation system. China already has an interstate system bigger than the one in the United States and they expect to double it within three years. Commissioner Lettiere reported that the one thing the planners who visited him could not understand was American complacency about the future of our transportation system.

Following is a summary of the extended question and answer period:

Q: What about zonal gas pricing?

A: Petroleum firms price their products by geographic zone. Pennsylvania has a 31-cent gas tax as compared to 14 cents in New Jersey, but the average price of gas is similar in both states. This would appear to mean that petroleum companies are just making more profit in New Jersey.

Q. What about county gas taxes for county transportation services?

A. It is hard to provide transportation services that stop at county boundaries.

Q. The TTF Board has not been meeting; what can members do?

A. Work with elected legislators now and be there for them when the subject comes up.

Comment: The discussion should be phrased as percent of what is paid for gas rather than number of cents.

Q: This should be positioned as a 100-year issue shaping the role of the region. As the economic analysis work prepared by Michael Gallis shows, New Jersey is in the middle of a key corridor. How can we help the business community understand and step forward to maintain the transportation network?

A. I have spoken to almost every big business group in New Jersey. They usually understand why it is important, but what would help is action such as speaking with representatives and testifying at committee hearings.

Q: Is there a lobbying group we can join?

A: There is a list the Commissioner's office can provide.

Q: Dedicated funding for transit is being discussed in Pennsylvania. Should that be added to reauthorization of the TTF or would it become too big of a lift?

A. In New Jersey, half of transportation capital investment already goes to transit, the largest congestion-buster strategy in the state. Also, in Pennsylvania the gas tax legislation is structured so those funds can only be used for highway investments. In New Jersey their use is already set up to be multi-modal.

Q. What about the section of SR 92 from the NJ Turnpike to US 130?

Mr. Coscia followed up by reshaping this question to whether certain projects should be earmarked in the TTF reauthorization bill.

A. Once a bill is opened to earmarks, it tends to become a Christmas tree like the federal transportation bill did. Also, the debate for and against specific projects dilutes support for the basic, essential bill.

Comment: Involve the EPA, Smart Growth community, education community, and others in advocating for this needed transportation investment. For example, school buses lose considerable time due to congestion and it should be made clear how much worse and more dangerous transportation could become.

Q: How much funding is needed to put the state transportation system in a good position and how are projects chosen in this era of new thinking about transportation?

A: What is needed is approximately \$3.4 billion per year, which would provide about \$800 million dollars for capital investment. Priorities are set by the three MPOs and then in consultation with the legislature and governor.

Mr. Coscia wrapped up the discussion thanking the Commissioner and inviting him back in three or four months so he can tell the Forum how it can help at a key point in negotiations on reauthorizing the TTF.

3. Route 1 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Study Follow-up

Jack Kanarek, NJ Transit Senior Director of Project Development, introduced Rich Amodei, Vice President of STV Incorporated. Mr. Amodei went through a PowerPoint presentation that included changes in the proposed BRT service since the last meeting. Director of Systems Planning, Tom Marchwinski, provided additional information on efforts to maximize ridership while minimizing cost based on modeling different scenarios. One resulting change is that the proposed service was extended to Bucks County. Mr. Kanarek presented for discussion several possible near term services and facilities.

There was discussion of whether the Forum should focus on passage of the proposed Transportation Enhancement District (TED) bill as a way to help the BRT. Mr. Coscia said that innovative funding would be crucial, as it doesn't seem to him like \$600 million for 30,000 trips will meet the FTA formula for funding. The BRT will need to be a public/private partnership designed at the right size, phased, and thought through in innovative ways. Donna Lewis,

Director of Planning for Mercer County, expressed concern that TED has a significant public sector cost and this might not be a good time for that. Dianne Brake, President of Regional Planning Partnership said the BRT offers many benefits but could slip away without action by the Forum and municipalities. Marvin Reed, Chairman of the Princeton Regional Planning Partnership Master Plan Committee, said that municipalities would need to know the specific benefits and trade-offs involved if they are to provide funding.

Regarding the DINKY improvement recommendations, Philip Craig said his experience with rail projects led him to believe that the desired ten minute service could be achieved less expensively. NJ Transit Project Manager Jim Schwarzwaldner said it was the most efficient approach based on comparison of different options, especially due to the cost of required signaling devices. Mr. Reed said that even though he has recommended ten minute service in the past, given the amount of money involved he would rather just add a third car to the existing DINKY and see the rest of that potential funding used for the Penns Neck improvements.

There was general consensus on the importance of phasing the BRT project. Some people suggested having a subcommittee of the Forum meet to refine details of possible phasing of the BRT and priorities. [This could be done through the joint Forum/NJ Transit BRT Subcommittee, but the next steps were not set.] Bob Wolfe, Chair of the Forum Legislative Committee and President of Picus Associates, said preserving right-of-way for the BRT and needed park and ride lots should be a priority.

4. Route 1 Regional Growth Strategy (RT1RGS)

Danielle Graves, NJDOT Principal Engineer and manager of the RT1RGS, covered a PowerPoint presentation on its current status. This included a summary of Event #4 on defining regional strategy elements. Ms. Graves also addressed the role of the Forum for the RT1RGS. She suggested it provide feedback/input; assist with the coordination of related regional activities; and facilitate continued participation coordination and education among stakeholders. Ms. Graves ended by covering next steps underway for the project.

Mr. Reed said he thought that the RT1RGS would provide specific answers about how to improve east-west access. It was clarified that the RT1RGS has a broader focus but that the Forum was continuing to work on this matter.

Mr. Coscia said it would be helpful for the Forum to start to see RT1RGS technical work as it progresses. It was agreed that maps already prepared for that project should be set up half an hour before the next Forum meeting for participants to review. Don Shanis, DVRPC Assistant Executive Director for Transportation Planning, recommended showing the draft BRT system on

RT1RGS maps. Ms. Brake spoke in support of addressing the role of transit and land use along with discussion of roads in the RT1RGS.

5. Brief Information Items

a) Approval of July meeting highlights

Mr. Coscia asked for amendments to the highlights of the July 26, 2005 Forum meeting. The motion was carried to approve the highlights as written.

b) Discussion of draft results for the first round of lining up circulation elements for existing east-west corridors

Zoe Neaderland, DVRPC Senior Transportation Planner, provided an update on the east-west existing corridors task. The first one is CR 571 based on responses from municipalities. The five municipalities along it within the Forum area had met and hope to have a draft package of short-medium term improvements for the Forum to discuss at the next meeting. The Forum could adopt the package and press for it to get done; DVRPC offered to help it move into the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). A related task is preparing a one-page summary map of the circulation element of each Forum municipality, starting with the ones along CR 571. These maps are to facilitate a regional, cooperative approach to solving problems.

c) Progress report on Forum Action Plan

A progress report on the Forum Action Plan is being included in the folders of each Forum meeting, starting with the July 26, 2005 meeting. The first column shows the Action Plan items. They are now a year old and any comments for updates should be directed to Steering Committee members or DVRPC staff. Follow-up items from the previous meeting are attached to the progress report. Ms. Neaderland noted the interest expressed by respondents to the survey on policy-based transportation strategies distributed at the last meeting in having a speaker or model materials on growth management and Smart Growth as they relate to transportation. The press release on reauthorization of the TTF requested at the July Forum meeting and distributed in October was also attached.

d) Cross-acceptance

There was no update on the cross-acceptance process.

e) Draft New Jersey Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan

Ms. Graves highlighted the handout on the NJDOT 2030 Long-Range Plan in the meeting folders. She said outreach is underway and the final plan is expected in December 2006. She said a website for this project would be going up within the week.

7. Dialogue

Ms. Brake announced that RPP is launching a regional planning blog at www.planningpartners.org/blog.html. She also noted that RPP may go for a Smart Growth grant and perhaps that would be an option for the Forum.

Barry Keppard, Transportation Planner at the Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association, noted work with the Greater Mercer Chamber of Commerce on a US 130 corridor study.

Next Steps

The next meeting date will be set in the near future and DVRPC will notify Forum participants.