

DVRPC

WHITE PAPER

Voices of Environmental Justice Communities

Shaping an Equitable Long-Range Plan



JANUARY 2024



The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Greater Philadelphia region, established by an Interstate Compact between the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the State of New Jersey. Members include Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties, plus the City of Chester, in Pennsylvania; and Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Mercer counties, plus the cities of Camden and Trenton, in New Jersey.

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DVRPC's vision for the Greater Philadelphia Region is a prosperous, innovative, equitable, resilient, and sustainable region that increases mobility choices by investing in a safe and modern transportation system; that protects and preserves our natural resources while creating healthy communities; and that fosters greater opportunities for all.

DVRPC's mission is to achieve this vision by convening the widest array of partners to inform and facilitate data-driven decision-making. We are engaged across the region, and strive to be leaders and innovators, exploring new ideas and creating best practices.

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Voices of Environmental Justice Communities

Shaping an Equitable Long-Range Plan

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Executive Summary

Overview

Transportation infrastructure gets us where we need to go, but it can also come with challenges related to travel costs, access, community cohesion, loss of open space, air quality, noise, and visual quality. Historically, negative impacts from transportation investments have been disproportionately experienced by communities of color and low-income persons. The planning profession has had a history of excluding and not meeting the needs of what is frequently referred to as underserved groups, particularly Black, Brown, and low-income communities. In preparation for an updated long-range plan and associated region-wide environmental justice (EJ) analysis, DVRPC staff sought to engage members of these communities to understand their needs and perceptions of various transportation projects.

Staff hosted four focus groups in July and August of 2023 to discuss the impact of transportation projects affecting daily life for underserved groups. Participants were selected from a pool of applicants to convene a regionally representative sample of low-income and racial and ethnic minority populations. Engagement was aimed at better understanding the perceptions of regionally funded transportation investments and to solicit feedback on a sample of projects already funded in the current Board-adopted Long-Range Plan (Plan), *Connections 2050*. Each attendee received a stipend of \$100 or \$125 for their participation. The funding was necessary to ensure that the voices of these underserved populations are heard, and their experiences and needs are taken into account when identifying transportation investments for the region's Plan. Beyond meeting federal outreach requirements, these focus groups are a key component of ensuring the Plan advances the vision for an equitable, sustainable, and resilient Greater Philadelphia.

Key Findings & Recommendations

The focus group discussions underscored the urgent need for investment in environmental justice (EJ) communities, with a particular emphasis on transportation and recreational infrastructure. Participants expressed a desire for roadway preservation and safety, sidewalks, accessible parks, digital bus shelters, ADA-accessible transit stations, and expanded bike lanes and bike-sharing programs to enhance their local communities and reduce the need to travel to other regions for recreation. While some participants acknowledged the positive aspects of example transportation projects from the Plan, many felt these investments were not being made for their benefit. That said, small improvements enhancing safety and state-of-good repair were, overall, more important to participants from these communities than any major investments. Five key themes emerged across focus groups and are further explained in this report; these included Need for Investment in EJ Communities, Mitigation of Negative Impacts, State of Repair, Safety & Security, Mode Choice & Connectivity, and Communication.

The feedback collected throughout these focus group discussions is valuable to Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) staff and to DVRPC's planning partners. Project team staff heard clearly the need for increased community engagement and enhanced communications and transparency in transportation planning throughout the lifecycle of a project. In addition to identifying communications best practices at the project level, DVRPC staff are incorporating feedback into the long-range planning process by informing project-level analysis, region-wide system-level analysis, and project candidates for inclusion in the Plan.

Introduction

Background on Environmental Justice

As the MPO for the nine-county region, DVRPC is guided by federal Title VI and Environmental Justice (EJ) mandates, and the Commission strives to not only meet these mandates, but to create an overall transparent, inclusive planning process. DVRPC recommends early, often, and ongoing public participation in developing transportation projects at the sponsor level, whether that be municipal, county, or state.

Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act¹ and the Executive Order on Environmental Justice (#12898),² MPOs are directed to create a method for ensuring that equity issues are investigated and evaluated in transportation decision-making.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act states that “no person in the United States, shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

Environmental justice (EJ) is defined by the federal government as, “identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations in the United States.”

In January 2007, the DVRPC Board approved the Commission’s Title VI Compliance Plan,³ which established a framework for DVRPC’s efforts to ensure compliance with Title VI as well as with other EJ and non-discrimination mandates. Updated in January 2024, the plan outlines how Title VI and EJ considerations are reflected in the Commission’s Work Program, publications, communications, public involvement effort, and general way of doing business.

DVRPC firmly believes that Title VI and EJ statutes are inherent to all work completed by the organization and should be incorporated into all aspects of DVRPC’s public participation activities. The Public Participation Plan,⁴ and environmental justice at DVRPC⁵, work with Title VI concurrently to integrate federal mandates throughout DVRPC’s Work Program.

Community engagement is specifically promoted in both Title VI and EJ as a method to ensure the full and fair participation of potentially affected and burdened communities. By prioritizing the perspectives, needs, and feedback of environmental justice populations in the decision-making process, those priorities can be

¹ “Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 42 U.S.C. § 2000d et Seq..,” Civil Rights Division, June 6, 2023. <https://www.justice.gov/crt/fcs/TitleVI-Overview>.

² Federal Actions To Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations.” Federal Register Presidential Documents. Vol. 59, No. 32 (Feb. 16, 1994). <https://www.archives.gov/files/federal-register/executive-orders/pdf/12898.pdf>.

³ “Equity and Opportunity: DVRPC Title VI Compliance Plan.” DVRPC. Accessed Dec. 19, 2023. <https://www.dvrpc.org/products/tm14010>.

⁴ “DVRPC Public Participation Plan: A Strategy for Citizen Involvement.” DVRPC. Accessed Dec. 19, 2023. <https://www.dvrpc.org/products/tm18012>.

⁵ “Environmental Justice at DVRPC - Fiscal Year 2014.” DVRPC. Accessed Dec. 19, 2023. <https://www.dvrpc.org/products/tm15017>.

incorporated to create fair and just plans, programs, and projects that support the needs of underserved communities. This layer of prioritization is particularly important in a fiscally constrained environment. An EJ community is a neighborhood, composed predominantly of persons of color and/or persons living below the poverty line, that experiences a significantly reduced quality of life relative to surrounding or similar communities. Paramount to understanding the needs and priorities of EJ communities, is being able to balance benefits and burdens in transportation projects. Almost all transportation projects have some amount of burden, and it is DVRPC's responsibility to identify, avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate those burdens to deliver the benefits of those projects to the region.

Purpose and Objectives

As the MPO for the nine-county Greater Philadelphia region, DVRPC is committed to making Title VI and EJ central to our planning process, integrating it in all our programs and plans and making it a guide for our public participation efforts. In preparation for an updated region-wide EJ analysis (a federally required portion of the region's long-range plan update), staff sought to engage members of EJ communities directly to better understand their perceptions of benefits and burdens created as a result of regionally funded transportation investments and to solicit feedback on a sample of Major Regional Projects already funded in the current, Board-adopted Plan, *Connections 2050*. The purpose of this engagement is to inform funding and other decisions made in the next plan update, in coordination with the Financial Planning Subcommittee of DVRPC's Regional Technical Committee (RTC). This effort directly addresses guidance from USDOT and FHWA that the metropolitan planning process actively "seek[s] out and consider[s] the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households, who may face challenges accessing employment and other services."⁶

DVRPC uses the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation to guide the Commission's public participation methods used for a given project or program.

⁶ 23 CFR § 450.316. Code of Federal Regulations.

Figure 1: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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Source: IAP2, 2023

DVRPC staff sought to meaningfully meet the intention of equitable planning by including underserved and marginalized groups in the decision-making process. With this intention, staff applied IAP2 best practices under the “Collaborate” public participation goal to guide the design of focus groups allowing a high-touch, facilitated discussion out in the field, using questions that would highlight the needs, preferences, and opinions of participants on various project categories before a call for new projects was made to regional planning partners.

Scope and Methodology

Framing

DVRPC staff set out to convene a regionally representative sample of low-income and racial and ethnic minority populations to participate in each of four focus groups, with two held in person at accessible locations in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, respectively, and two held online via Zoom video conference. The methodology for organizing the focus groups was informed by federal guidance and additional best practices for equitable, inclusive planning. Guidance comes from the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) EJ recommendations (2017),⁷ FHWA's Title VI and Additional Non-discrimination requirements (2017),⁸ Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) EJ policy guidance (2012),⁹ and the FTA's Title VI requirements and guidelines (2012).¹⁰

The project team consulted with DVRPC's Public Participation Task Force (PPTF) to prepare a script of questions to ask the focus groups.¹¹ The Task Force membership strives to represent the racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, age, education, and economic diversity of the region, with members from throughout Greater Philadelphia bringing their own individual experiences to the planning table. After a short presentation, PPTF members were organized into small breakout groups. In these groups, members were asked to reflect on and respond to questions (See Appendix) such as, "How would you want to give feedback on benefits and burdens?" and "What should we ask as part of EJ outreach?" DVRPC staff reviewed and incorporated feedback from four different breakout groups into the development of questions for the focus groups.

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

The project team developed a landing page via the EngagementHQ community engagement platform, which hosted general information about the focus group project as well as a recruitment form via Google Forms. Members of the public could submit their interest in participating in an EJ focus group by filling out this Form (see Appendix for both resources).

DVRPC advertised the focus group recruitment in a number of ways:

- Landing page, linked from the long-range plan webpage at www.dvrpc.org/plan;
- Advertisement in DVRPC's monthly newsletter to over 13,000 recipients;
- Social media posts on DVRPC's channels (X/Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook);

⁷ "Environmental Justice, Title VI, Non-Discrimination, and Equity." U.S. DOT. Updated: May 14, 2019. https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental_justice/equity/.

⁸ "Title VI of The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Additional Nondiscrimination Requirements." U.S. DOT. Updated: Dec. 13, 2023. <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/civilrights/programs/tvi.cfm>

⁹ "Environmental Justice Policy Guidance for Federal Transit Administration Recipients." U.S. DOT. August 15, 2020. https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/FTA_EJ_Circular_7.14-12_FINAL.pdf

¹⁰ Title VI Requirements and Guidelines for Federal Transit Administration Recipients." U.S. DOT. October 1, 2012. https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/FTA_Title_VI_FINAL.pdf

¹¹ The mission of the PPTF is to provide ongoing access to the regional planning and decision-making process, to review timely issues, to serve as a conduit for DVRPC information to organizations and communities across the region, to assist the Commission in implementing public outreach strategies, and empower citizens to get involved in regional planning. <https://www.dvrpc.org/committees/pptf/>

- Direct email with a partner toolkit to over 40 community groups focused on equity, with a request to share the recruitment form with their audiences;
- Direct email with a partner toolkit to over 150 of Philadelphia’s Registered Community Organizations (RCOs);
- Printable flyers sent to 60 public libraries to post on their community bulletin boards;
- Paid advertisements on Facebook and Instagram, targeting communities in Camden, NJ and Upper Darby, PA; and
- Paid advertisement in the regionally circulated, Spanish-language print publication *Impacto*.

Compensation Plan

In addition to paid advertising, the project team requested up to \$5,800 to support the facilitation of focus groups to engage people living in environmental justice communities. The request included \$100 stipends for participants, and an additional \$25 for participants that attended an in-person focus group to cover transportation costs. It also included up to \$500 to cover facilities and food for each of the in-person focus group meetings. .

There are several reasons why providing stipends was necessary to ensure the success of the focus group research:

1. **Economic Barrier:** Low-income populations may face economic barriers that prevent them from participating in focus groups. Providing stipends can help offset the cost of transportation and childcare, making it easier for participants to attend.
2. **Compensation:** Participants in the focus group are taking time out of their busy schedules to share their experiences and needs. Providing a stipend as compensation for their time, effort, and expertise shows that their input is valued and respected.
3. **Representation:** Low-income, racial, and ethnic minority populations are often underrepresented in research and decision-making processes. By providing stipends, DVRPC can ensure that a diverse group of participants is included in the focus group and their voices are heard.
4. **Informed Decision Making:** The information gathered from this focus group will be used to inform policy and program decisions. By including low-income, racial, and ethnic minority populations, DVRPC staff can ensure that their decisions are informed by the experiences and needs of those who are most impacted by these policies and programs.

Compensation was distributed via ACH direct deposit or mailed checks made payable to the participants. DVRPC was unable to provide compensation by other means than ACH direct deposit and mailed checks. This limited the participant pool as the focus groups were not entirely accessible to the region’s unhoused or unbanked populations. Participants who showed interest in online participation and requested gift cards or digital transfers were far more likely to reject invitations to participate or fail to show up to confirmed focus groups.

Focus Group Participant Demographics

To assist staff in selecting a representative segment of the region's population to invite to a scheduled focus group, DVRPC asked a number of questions in its recruitment form, largely focused on demographic information (see Appendix for complete form). Information requested included:

- Availability by focus group date and location
- Home ZIP code
- Age
- Spanish, Hispanic, or Latin origin
- Race
- Household size
- Household income
- Gender
- Mode of travel to work
- Time of travel to work
- Vehicles per household

The recruitment form was open for nine weeks. In that time, DVRPC received 422 responses expressing interest in participating in a focus group. Responses from participants who lived outside the nine-county DVRPC region and those who did not qualify as low-income¹² (40 percent of the responses) were filtered out of the selection pool. The remaining respondents were then organized by the applicants' availability and prioritized based on demographics needed to create a representative sample of underserved communities in the region. Direct invitations to each of the four focus groups were sent on a rolling basis to account for the demographic makeup of attendees in the previous events and prioritize the communities that still needed representation to strive for an overall representative sample. After seeing initial low response rates from Asian and Native American community members, DVRPC pursued responses by reaching out directly to local community organizations such as the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC), to ensure a regionally representative sample for the focus groups.

Ten to eleven participants were sent direct invitations to each event. In-person events garnered less interest in the registration forms but had a higher attendance rate. Additional demographic information is included in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic makeup of focus group participants

	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Focus Group 4
Location	Upper Darby Free Library Municipal Branch	Cherry Hill Library	Zoom (Online)	Zoom (Online)
Invited	10 invitees	10 invitees	10 invitees	11 invitees
Attendee Demographics	7 attendees	6 attendees	3 attendees	3 attendees
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 72% Black or African American 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 60% Black or African American 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 67% Black or African American 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 33% Black or African American

¹² Low-income status was determined using a combination of household size and household income. DVRPC uses the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' definition of low-income, which is 200% of the Federal Poverty Income Level.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 28% White ● 0% Hispanic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 20% White ● 20% American Indian or Alaska Native ● 0% Hispanic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 33% Asian or Asian American ● 0% Hispanic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 33% White ● 33% Puerto Rican ● 67% Hispanic
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 72% own a car ● 28% carless households 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 80% own a car ● 20% carless households 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 100% own a car ● 0% carless households 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 100% own a car ● 0% carless households
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 57% Female ● 43% Male 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 100% Female ● 0% Male 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 100% Female ● 0% Male 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 100% Female ● 0% Male
Core Group	Mix of transit/car-based activity	Walkers/Regular Transit Users	Pennsylvania residents	New Jersey residents

Source: DVRPC, 2023

Despite the multi-platform and multi-lingual regional outreach, the focus groups failed to attract enough interest from some minority groups that would have created a true representation of the region. Minorities that were not represented in part or full were Asian or Asian American, Spanish, Hispanic, or Latin origin, and Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

Logistics and Facilitation

For the location of the two in-person focus groups, project team staff identified local libraries and community organizations in locations that were transit-accessible to large EJ populations. It was important that the spaces were large enough to accommodate 10-person focus groups and an additional three-person facilitation support staff. The Upper Darby Municipal Branch and Cherry Hill Library were selected for in-person events for meeting these criteria. DVRPC collaborated closely with library staff to arrange the facilitation space and materials that would accommodate audio-visual and recording needs as well as catered dinner for focus group participants. Selected participants, once invited and confirmed, were made aware of logistics via email, including the process for payment.

For each of the four events, at least three staff members from the project team were assigned the roles of facilitator, notetaker, and set-up coordinator/recorder. At least one back-up facilitator was also identified in case of a last-minute illness or conflict. Facilitators were staff from DVRPC’s Office of Communications and Engagement who made introductions, asked questions of participants, and called on participants to share their experiences. This was all done according to a script drafted by the project team to ensure consistent communication to focus group participants and allow enough time for all questions to be asked. A complete facilitation guide is available in the Appendix. Notetakers were staff from DVRPC’s Office of Long-Range Planning, who listened closely to the feedback provided, recorded important points in writing, and also shared specific examples of Major Regional Projects from the region’s Long-Range Plan for participants to react to. Finally, set-up coordinator/recorders were staff

from either office who were responsible for checking in participants, setting up recording devices, and being on hand for any side conversations that may have occurred.

Data Collection & Analysis

To record each meeting, project team staff used Zoom, which generated a transcript of each conversation for later reference. For in-person meetings, this required the addition of a mobile Wi-Fi device as well as a 360° conference camera/microphone to capture images and sounds from around the room. Staff notes supplemented these recordings and helped to flag times in the discussion that should be referenced in analysis. The research team employed thematic qualitative coding as a systematic method to identify, analyze, and interpret recurring themes and patterns within the responses provided by focus group participants. Project team staff reviewed the typed notes, auto-generated transcripts, and recordings of each focus group discussion to identify quotes, ideas, or reactions that should be highlighted in reporting. Staff wrote brief focus group reports for each discussion that identified attendees in an anonymous way, provided a meeting overview, listed Major Regional Projects presented for discussion, and synthesized key takeaways from that specific group. These reports were used to generate the larger findings listed in the next section.

Findings

Summary of Feedback

The focus group discussions underscored the urgent need for investment in environmental justice (EJ) communities, with a particular emphasis on roadway and transit preservation, and recreational infrastructure. Participants expressed a desire for improved roads and sidewalks, accessible parks, digital bus shelters, ADA-accessible transit stations, and expanded bike lanes and bike-sharing programs to enhance their local communities and reduce the need to travel to other regions for recreation. While some participants acknowledged the positive aspects of Major Regional Projects, many felt these investments were not being made for their benefit. The participants emphasized the importance of modernization, safety, and affordability, and prioritized safety and state-of-good repair projects over other types of investments. Additionally, concerns were raised about potential negative impacts during construction and the need for mitigation strategies. Ensuring maintenance and accessibility in EJ communities, addressing safety issues, and enhancing communication and community engagement in transportation planning and construction were key takeaways from the discussions.

Key Themes and Recurring Issues

Upon reviewing recordings and notes from each of the four focus group discussions, staff was able to pull several key themes from the conversations where issues were raised across focus groups and demographics. The following sections discuss those themes and offer direct quotes from the conversations around these topics.

Need for Investment in EJ Communities

A prominent theme among focus group discussions was the need and desire for investment in the communities where the participants live—specifically for transportation and recreational facilities. Lack of nearby recreational opportunities presents a transportation burden for residents of many EJ communities. Participants also cited needs for better roads and sidewalks, accessible parks, digital bus shelters, ADA-accessible transit stations, and the expansion of bike lanes and bike-sharing programs. After hearing about a sample Major Regional Project (see Appendix), a common reaction was supportive of an investment, but noted that it is not being built for residents of EJ communities. Some participants—especially women who have children—would travel outside of their neighborhoods for recreation (due to the lack of facilities and safety concerns) to Center City or county parks throughout the region. Others said they would not travel to use a facility such as a recreational trail but would like one in their own neighborhood. Of particular note is the Penn’s Landing cap project over I-95 in Center City, Philadelphia. This project had many perceived benefits from participants, but it was pointed out that it would increase property values in an area that is already thriving. Increases in property value in EJ communities would be viewed as positive by some participants.

That said, *small improvements enhancing safety and state-of-good repair were, overall, more important than any major investments.* Participants saw the benefits of modernization and safety projects, as well as those that improved mobility and affordability of transportation.

"We don't have spaces like this where I live."

"Why do I have to choose between potholes and parks?"

"In [my neighborhood], we don't have spaces that we would go. I go down to Center City because it's nice down there...but we should be able to walk outside of our house and go to a neighborhood park."

Mitigation of Negative Impacts

Several focus groups spent a considerable amount of time discussing the potential negative impacts that come with transportation investments, largely during the construction period. For one all-female group, the topic came up in response to sample Major Regional Projects. When viewing the US 1 reconstruction and widening project in Bucks County, one participant asked how many businesses could be negatively impacted by construction. When viewing the Walter Rand Transportation Center, someone also said they would be worried about the project's impacts on businesses, as well as "spillover effects" of displacing the homeless population that is currently at the station. In a second all-female group that represented various physical disabilities and relied heavily on cars because of them, the topic similarly came up while viewing sample Major Regional Projects. One participant asked what alternative transportation routes would be available during construction of the I-76/I-676 Bridges and Pavement Reconstruction project, noting that wayfinding a detour might be confusing. She also worried about traffic and large trucks taking detours into neighborhoods that are unable to accommodate the freight traffic. Another participant agreed and cited concerns of induced demand—"the theory...that as roadways become wider and able to accommodate higher volumes of traffic, additional vehicles will materialize as drivers feel incentivized to use the expanded road due to the belief that added lanes have reduced congestion."¹³ This concern came up in reaction to the US 322 Widening project in Gloucester County as well, though the concern for this project was more focused on the disruption of communities and foot traffic to businesses than congestion.

¹³ "What Is Induced Demand?" Planetizen. Accessed Dec. 19, 2023. <https://www.planetizen.com/definition/induced-demand#:~:text=The%20theory%20of%20induced%20demand,added%20lanes%20have%20reduced%20congestion>

“A bridge has been closed for like 20 years. It’s a real inconvenience because you have to go 10 minutes out of the way to get around to the highway.”

“We know it doesn’t take 10 years to fix things.”

“I stepped in a pothole and fractured my foot while I was pregnant. They fixed the pothole once legal action came up.”

“[Redacted transit station] is always leaky. [Second redacted transit station] is like a dungeon.”

State of Repair

Another clear theme among focus groups was the pressing need to focus on state-of-repair transportation improvements in environmental justice communities. Issues related to road and sidewalk maintenance were brought to the forefront, highlighting the adverse impacts of potholes and “quick fixes” on overall pedestrian and driver safety, especially for those with disabilities. Access to the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) system was a prominent topic of discussion among participants, with varying levels of comfort expressed regarding its use. Concerns about elevator availability, escalator functionality, and other station issues within SEPTA were raised, indicating the importance of improving public transportation accessibility and reliability. The focus groups explored various types of transportation projects, including enhancements to Roosevelt Boulevard, bridge repairs, and road renovations as potential solutions to address pressing maintenance issues, aiming to enhance the overall condition of transportation infrastructure.

“During construction... what alternative is there? It is a long time for people who would use [the bridge] regularly.”

“When 309 was under construction, there were a lot of accidents and tailgating.”

“If the bridge is going to be widened, it’s going to open up more room for people who don’t use it regularly, so naturally, I think it’s going to see a huge increase in traffic.”

“They rerouted the [redacted] bus into our neighborhood. It’s an inconvenience; some of the neighbors are complaining about the houses even shaking. So that’s been a big issue, but they say that if it’s temporary they don’t have a problem with it. But you know how long construction takes.”

Safety and Security

Participants emphasized the importance of addressing safety issues and investing in additional police presence in their community. Several people expressed concerns about safety when riding public transportation or at train stations—particularly for women, Black individuals, and those traveling with children. The need for bike lanes and safer routes for cyclists was emphasized. In Tacony and other areas, trails exist, but the presence of significant dumping issues has raised concerns regarding safety. Participants emphasized the necessity of making these trails safe for public use. They cited the need for awareness, and education of residents—especially children—on safe use of the system to enhance overall transportation safety. Participants shared their experiences with ongoing projects, such as speed table installation and bridge closures, highlighting both the positive impacts on safety and concerns about traffic disruptions.

“If you could keep the riff-raff out, I might [use transit more].”

“At times we have a rowdy or unruly passenger, and you don’t know if they have a medical issue, they’re nonverbal, or they’re high. The operator is not equipped to deal with that individual.”

“Maybe SEPTA could outsource security guards to aid them with the policing of buses and trains because the increase in crime happening on buses and trains is crazy. The reason I do rideshare is mainly for my daughter.”

“One beneficial thing that we’ve fought for are speed tables, and we’re happy with them.”

Mode Choice and Connectivity

Mode preferences and difficulties in getting around were a key topic in all focus groups. Participants discussed their favorite destinations and neighborhoods, reflecting diverse interests in trails, restaurants, libraries, and community centers. When it came to their regular modes of travel, some groups had varying preferences including public transportation, bicycling, walking, paratransit, private cars, and rideshare services. Some participants preferred driving due to the convenience it offers, while others said that owning a car is preferable, but is cost prohibitive. They also noted that the lack of free transfers makes public transit expensive. Factors influencing their choice of transportation mode included independence, affordability, and convenience. Participants raised coordination between different modes of transportation and concerns about changes in transit routes and accessibility for seniors. They highlighted the difficulties they face when getting around by transit, such as limited options, driver shortages leading to long waits, long commutes, inconveniences for trips like grocery shopping, and concerns about unruly passengers on buses. There were also some who experienced discrimination while using public transportation and faced limitations due to personal circumstances like autism. In one group, electric vehicles (EVs) and EV charging infrastructure came up several times, with participants highlighting the need for more charging stations and accessibility to EVs, especially as a cost-saving

measure when paired with e-bikes. The discussions highlighted the complex relationship between transportation choices, preferences, accessibility, and connectivity. Participants emphasized the importance of early and continuous community engagement to address these factors in shaping transportation projects and policies.

“Uber drivers don't want to sit around making 2 jobs an hour for \$10...they avoid [redacted city], making rideshare unavailable.”

“Why do I have to drive 5 miles...when I should be able to go to a local grocery store and get [an electric charger]?”

“I like the convenience of waiting no more than 12-15 minutes for a bus.”

“There's absolutely no public transportation in my area; that's a problem.”

Communication

Communication was a theme that emerged in all four focus groups and was cited as a need in various stages of the planning and implementation of projects. First, many cited a need for more community engagement, transparency, and opportunities for input in project design, particularly when it came to transit services and infrastructure improvements. Some showed interest in being personally involved in transportation decision-making processes and appreciated opportunities to provide input. Suggestions were also made for involving young people in focus groups to gather their input on transportation preferences and safety. The second communications theme focused on improvements for signage, wayfinding, and overall customer service on public transportation. Finally, the need for better communication and transparency regarding project updates and detours during construction was emphasized.

“When they close a certain road, and you don't get any input, and you don't get any warning.”

“I know a lot of the agencies have Twitter pages, but not everybody is on social media. So a lot of [detour announcements] skip over a lot of people. If there were a commercial or digital advertisement while we're waiting for the bus, to “text 12345” and you can get updates on certain detours and things like that...”

“I would just say, add to the signage, even beyond some of those signs around City Hall. I've gotten lost, just walking and walking before I realized I've gone the wrong direction.”

Recommendations

Community Engagement Strategies

Effective planning cannot be achieved without the consideration and cooperation of residents. DVRPC has developed a *Planner's Methodology*,¹⁴ which is designed to provide guidance to staff in meeting federal non-discrimination mandates and in structuring a public participation plan at the project or study level. Meaningful public participation may differ widely, depending on the type and scope of a project. The *Planner's Methodology* sets a framework for developing public involvement for specific projects, offers a “toolkit” of public participation strategies to meet the goals in DVRPC's *Public Participation Plan*, and builds upon the Commission's philosophy of placing public participation at the forefront of our priorities.

Project team staff heard clearly the need for increased community engagement and enhanced communications and transparency in transportation planning throughout the lifecycle of a project. DVRPC recommends early, often, and ongoing public participation in developing transportation projects at the sponsor level, whether that be municipal, county, or state. The public should be involved early in defining the issues, in identifying public participation processes, and in providing input before decisions are made. Even if there are no public events scheduled, communications should be sent regularly to the public. DVRPC's *Planner's Methodology* can be used by partner organizations to identify a variety of techniques to consider as project sponsors plan their public participation programs.

Some best practices in engagement with EJ communities include:

- seeking out and considering the needs of EJ communities;
- adequate public notice of public participation activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points;
- timely notice and reasonable access to information about transportation issues and processes;
- visualization techniques to describe projects or programs;
- making public information (technical information and meeting notices) available in electronically accessible formats;
- holding any public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times;
- demonstrating explicit consideration and response to public input received during the development of the project; and
- providing an additional opportunity for public comment, if the project differs significantly from the version that was made available for public comment initially.

FTA provides further guidance in *Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making*.¹⁵ At the MPO level, DVRPC has updated its project evaluation criteria for the TIP and Plan and incorporated a requirement for community engagement. Projects that are more burdensome

¹⁴ “DVRPC Planner's Methodology.” DVRPC. February 2015. <https://www.dvrpc.org/products/tm14005>

¹⁵ “Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making.” U.S. DOT. Updated Nov. 2023. <https://www.transportation.gov/priorities/equity/promising-practices-meaningful-public-involvement-transportation-decision-making>

than beneficial will need to document engagement in order to be listed in the Plan. This requires documented community engagement to be conducted by sponsors that includes participation by “interested parties” who are given a reasonable opportunity to comment on the project.

Incorporating Feedback

The feedback collected throughout these focus group discussions is valuable to MPO staff and to DVRPC’s planning partners. Staff shared a high-level overview of the key themes and recurring issues with the Financial Planning Subcommittee of the RTC, and this report will be shared with those members once it is published. Feedback is being incorporated into the long-range planning process by informing:

1. **Equity Benefits and Burdens as part of the *Plan–TIP Project Evaluation Criteria*.** This applies to the Plan’s goals to foster racially and socioeconomically integrated communities and advance EJ for all the region’s inhabitants. Major Regional Project and smaller TIP project candidates are screened and evaluated based on whether they are potentially burdensome for historically and currently marginalized populations. Each project is scored based on the benefits and/or burdens it might create. Feedback from focus groups directly informed the scoring key used in the evaluation criteria.
2. **System Level EJ Analysis Protocol.** MPOs are required¹⁶ to analyze whether proposed transportation investments have a disparate impact on low-income and minority populations on a region-wide basis. DVRPC is incorporating the feedback from these focus groups into its methodology.
3. **Planning Partner Project Submissions and Selection for Fiscal Constraint.** When DVRPC makes a call to its planning partners for projects for inclusion in the Long-Range Plan next fiscal year, not only will those projects be evaluated on an individual basis, but they will be compared with the region-wide EJ Analysis and its findings. It will be important to see that projects are investing in EJ communities and not disproportionately burdening them. The feedback from these focus groups should inform which projects are proposed and ultimately funded.

Finally, DVRPC has implemented a separate work program for Transportation Planning and Project Development Support for Disadvantaged Communities. The goal of this project is to conduct analysis and outreach work at various scales to identify, develop, and implement transportation projects that are suitable for available federal funding, are consistent with regional planning principles, and would particularly benefit historically marginalized communities. Partnering with this program to identify projects eligible for inclusion in the Long-Range Plan would be a practical next step in bridging the gap between EJ communities and Plan funding.

Future Focus Group Outreach

This was the first instance in recent memory that DVRPC has facilitated focus groups as part of its Long-Range Plan outreach. In recent years, other offices at DVRPC have organized focus groups to

¹⁶ 23 CFR § 450.316. Code of Federal Regulations.

connect with members of EJ communities and other members of the general public. Project team staff were able to learn from these experiences and can build on them with additional recommendations for future focus group-based research and engagement.

1. **Gift cards as compensation for time.** Per legal stipulations around state and federal funding, DVRPC compensated focus group participants via ACH transfer or mailed checks, depending on a registrant's preference. These forms of payment, however, require that the recipient is banked and exclude members of underserved communities who may be unbanked. Indeed, many registrants and participants asked for payment in other forms, including physical or electronic gift cards, electronic transfers/payment, or electronic vouchers. Project team staff coordinated with accounting staff to discuss using DVRPC's general fund to purchase gift cards so that unbanked persons can participate.
2. **Prioritization of in-person discussions.** While online focus group dates garnered more interest via the online registration form, the in-person events had a much higher attendance rate. Perhaps because joining a zoom meeting is so easy, it's equally easy to decide at the last minute not to join or to forget the commitment.
3. **Over-seating to account for no-shows.** Both in-person and online groups had several people who registered but did not attend. Project team staff invited 12 people to each focus group with the aim to have 6-10 participants present for each discussion. This was not enough of a buffer, as each group only had 3-7 participants show up. Future engagement should account for this and over-seat each group even more.
4. **Partnerships with local organizations.** This project had a regional focus and aimed to convene participants from a variety of counties. For future outreach aimed at engaging residents in specific geographic areas, partnering with a local host organization to recruit focus group participants would be beneficial.

Conclusion

Transportation investments have an impact on quality of life, especially to communities that have already been burdened by pollution, endured underinvestment in infrastructure and critical services, and are suffering disproportionate impacts from climate change. The focus groups conducted by DVPRC reveal a compelling need for investment in EJ communities that addresses safety, security, and the state-of-good-repair of transportation infrastructure. The overarching themes were the need for investments in state-of-good-repair and safety, along with investments in recreational and natural spaces in EJ communities.

While some participants acknowledged the positive aspects of Major Regional Projects, there was a prevailing sentiment that the sample investments were not sufficiently benefiting their communities. Safety and state-of-good repair emerged as top priorities, as did the financial cost of travel whether by car or public transit. Participants expressed a desire for improved road conditions, intersections, and sidewalks; accessible and more efficient and frequent buses; digital bus shelters with real time information; and expanded and safe bike lanes and bike-sharing programs. Focus group participants also raised concerns about potential negative impacts during construction, emphasizing the importance of mitigation strategies and effective communication throughout all stages of transportation planning and construction.

Members of EJ communities who spoke with project team staff have highlighted the need for early, often, and ongoing public participation in developing transportation projects at the sponsor level, whether that be municipal, county, or state. Member governments and project sponsors have a responsibility to meaningfully engage community members in developing transportation projects from start to finish. The public should be involved early in defining the issues, in identifying public participation processes, and in providing input before decisions are made. Even if there are no public events scheduled, communications should be sent regularly to the public.

The findings underscore the importance of holistic and inclusive approaches to transportation planning that prioritize the needs of EJ communities, address concerns about safety and construction impacts, and enhance communication and transparency throughout the planning and implementation of transportation projects. Incorporating this feedback into the long-range planning process and list of Major Regional Projects will be key to ensuring the Plan is advancing the regional vision for an equitable, sustainable, and resilient Greater Philadelphia.

Appendix

Acknowledgements

DVRPC would like to thank a number of people and organizations who helped to organize and facilitate the focus group discussions. Thanks to the over 40 community groups focused on equity and over 150 of Philadelphia’s Registered Community Organizations (RCOs) who shared the recruitment form with their audiences and garnered such interest in this project. Special thanks to the Upper Darby Free Library Municipal Branch and Cherry Hill Public Library and their staff who posted flyers to recruit participants, provided space for these conversations, and coordinated logistics to ensure their success. Finally, this project would not have been possible without the 19 individuals who participated in a 90-minute conversation to share their experiences and hopes for the regional transportation network.

Community Groups Contacted

Bucks

- Bucks County Opportunity Council
- Welcoming the Stranger
- NAACP Bucks County
- Bucks County Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Burlington

- Servicios Latinos de Burlington County
- NAACP Willingboro & Vicinity Branch
- Burlington Community Action Partnership
- CASA for Children of Mercer and Burlington Counties

Camden

- Cherry Hill African American Civic Association
- Camden County Partnership for Children
- Puerto Rican Unity for Progress
- Urban Promise
- Center For Environmental Transformation (CFET)

Chester

- Casa Guanajuato
- West Chester, PA NAACP
- Coatesville Youth Initiative
- North Star of Chester County

Delaware

- Main Line Youth Alliance
- Delaware County Chinese American Association
- Delaware County Center for Hispanic Resources
- Delaware Council Literacy Council

Gloucester

- Gloucester County NAACP
- CATA – The Farmworkers Support Committee
- Mosaic Family Success Center
- People for People Foundation

Mercer

- Trenton Branch NAACP
- The African American Cultural Collaborative of Mercer County
- New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance
- Mercer County Hispanic Association
- East Trenton Collaborative

Montgomery

- Ambler Environmental Advisory Council
- Norristown NAACP
- Pottstown NAACP
- Literacy Council of Norristown

Philadelphia

- Amparo de la Niñez Inc. / Children's Safe Harbor Inc.
- Asian Americans United
- APM
- Community Integrated Services

Regional or multi-county

- Food Bank South Jersey
- Hispanic Family Center of Southern NJ
- Filipino American Association of Central New Jersey
- Greater Delaware Valley NAACP

PPTF Breakout Group Questions

To prepare a script of questions to ask in focus groups, the project team sought the help of DVRPC's Public Participation Task Force (PPTF). After a short presentation, members were organized into small breakout groups, where they were asked to reflect on and respond to a number of questions. These included:

Breakout 1

1. What community are you from?
2. What has been your experience with a large-scale project being implemented in your community?
3. Did it address the needs of your community? Why/why not?

Breakout 2

1. Think of the list of Benefits & Burdens (B&B). Which of these make the biggest difference where you live?
2. How would you want to give feedback on B&B?
3. What are ways you would be excited to interact on B&B as a topic?
4. What should we ask as part of EJ outreach?

Focus Group Discussion Guide

The following is an outline of the script used to facilitate focus group discussions:

Opening Remarks

Purpose of focus group, logistics, consent to be filmed, background information on DVRPC and the regional geography.

Introductions

Please share with us your name, the town or neighborhood you live in, and a place you like to go to in your community.

Questions

Prompt #1. How do you usually get around or go places regularly? How do you get to work? Or to school? Or to your preferred grocery store?

Prompt # 2. Do you have any problems getting around this way? What are the specific problems you experience? Additionally, what do you like about getting around this way? Why do you use this method?

Prompt #3. Thanks for sharing all of this. For the rest of this discussion, we're going to talk about some large-scale transportation projects. To get ready for this discussion, let's come up with a list of different types of projects that we see or experience.

Are there large-scale transportation projects that have impacted your life or you have heard about? These can include road repaving, bicycle and pedestrian improvements, roadway or transit safety, roadway expansion, or transit expansion. [Allow attendees to answer before next question]

Of these categories of projects, which ones do you believe would be beneficial to you or your community? Which would be inconvenient or have negative effects?

Prompt #4. Let's discuss a few examples of large-scale projects that are planned for, or recently completed in the region. These are projects that typically take several years to complete, like more lanes on the highway, a new station on a train line, or reconstructing an existing major bridge or road.

We want to know if you would personally benefit from these investments, or whether they might present problems for you or your community. Would you use this facility and/or would you want something similar to this in your community?

Prompt #5. Have you ever been involved in any transportation planning or decision-making processes where you were asked to provide input? If not, would you like to be involved? In what way?

Prompt #6. Is there anything else you want to share with us about the topics we have talked about?

Focus Group Reports

The following provides summaries of each of the four focus groups independently, all of which contributed to the findings in the main body of this report.

Focus Group 1

7/10/23 6pm - 7:30pm

Upper Darby Free Library Municipal Branch

Attendees

Invited: 10

Attended: 7

Attendee Demographics:

- Race:
 - 72% Black or African American
 - 28% White
 - 0% Hispanic
- Car Ownership:
 - 72% own a car
 - 28% carless households
- Gender:
 - 57% Female
 - 43% Male

Core group: Mix of transit/car based activity

Meeting Overview

The focus group discussion revealed several key themes. Participants expressed concerns about transportation safety and accessibility, emphasizing issues with road maintenance and the need for improvements in public transportation infrastructure, including SEPTA stations and bike lanes. They highlighted the importance of community engagement in urban planning, advocating for better signage, wayfinding, and customer service. Environmental sustainability and the expansion of electric vehicle infrastructure were discussed, along with the desire for accessible green spaces in local neighborhoods. Overall, participants called for a more holistic approach to urban development that addresses both transportation and community needs while involving the community in decision-making processes.

Projects Discussed

- PA 291/Second St/Industrial Hwy Safety & Operations, Delaware
- Penn's Landing Cap over I-95, Philadelphia
- Transit Station Enhancements, Delaware/Philadelphia
- Newtown Square Branch Trail, Delaware

Key Takeaways

1. Transportation Safety and Accessibility:

- Participants expressed concerns about safety when using public transportation, particularly with children.
- Issues related to the maintenance of roads, potholes, and quick fixes were raised, impacting the overall safety of driving in the city.
- Access to Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) was discussed, with some participants feeling comfortable using it while others expressed reservations.

2. Public Transportation Infrastructure:

- The condition of SEPTA stations and their accessibility were discussed. Elevator availability, escalator functionality, and other infrastructure issues were mentioned.
- Participants highlighted the need for improvements in SEPTA's services and stations, including community input in project design.

3. Urban Planning and Mobility:

- The need for bike lanes and safer routes for cyclists was emphasized, along with concerns about traffic congestion and industrial truck routes.

4. Community Engagement and Empowerment:

- Participants stressed the importance of involving the community in urban planning and transportation improvement projects.
- Suggestions for improving signage, wayfinding, and overall customer service on public transportation were put forward.
- The desire for accessible and safe green spaces, especially for families, was a common theme.

5. Environmental Sustainability:

- Electric vehicles (EVs) and EV charging infrastructure were discussed, with participants highlighting the need for more charging stations and accessibility to EVs.
- Suggestions were made to use green spaces as water catchment areas to reduce flooding and improve environmental sustainability.

6. Local Neighborhood Concerns:

- Participants expressed a strong desire for improvements in their local neighborhoods, including better roads, parks, and facilities.
- The importance of having accessible parks and amenities within walking distance of residences was emphasized.

7. Civic Engagement and Advocacy:

- Some participants mentioned their involvement in community organizations and efforts to engage with public transportation authorities to bring about positive changes.
- Advocacy for increased EV charging infrastructure and accessibility was discussed.

Focus Group 2

7/24/23 6pm - 7:30pm

Cherry Hill Public Library, 1100 Kings Hwy N

Attendees

Invited: 10

Attended: 6

Attendee Demographics:

- Race:
 - 60% Black or African American
 - 20% White
 - 20% American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0% Hispanic
- Car Ownership:
 - 80% own a car
 - 20% carless households
- Gender:
 - 100% Female
 - 0% Male

Core group: Walkers/Regular Transit Users

Meeting Overview

Participants discussed their travel habits and preferences, highlighting the diversity of transportation methods and favorite destinations within Philadelphia. They also raised concerns about transportation challenges, including issues with transit reliability, coordination, and safety. Infrastructure improvement projects and their benefits, such as safety enhancements and modernization, were discussed, along with concerns about potential negative effects and the need for transparent communication. Additionally, participants shared insights into planned large-scale projects and expressed a desire for community involvement in decision-making processes, including the inclusion of young people's perspectives on transportation preferences and safety.

Projects Discussed

- Vision Zero Safety Improvements, Philadelphia
- US 422 Reconstruction, Chester/Montgomery
- US 1 Widening, Bucks
- Walter Rand Transportation Center, Camden
- Delaware River Heritage Trail, Camden

Key Takeaways

1. Travel Habits and Preferences:

- Participants shared their regular modes of transportation, including walking, driving, using public transit (SEPTA), and rideshare services like Lyft.

- They discussed their favorite destinations and neighborhoods within Philadelphia, reflecting diverse interests in trails, restaurants, libraries, and community centers.

2. Transportation Challenges:

- Participants highlighted difficulties they face when getting around, such as limited transit options, driver shortages leading to long waits, and concerns about unruly passengers on buses.
- Coordination between different modes of transit and concerns about changes in transit routes and accessibility for seniors were raised.

3. Transportation Projects and Infrastructure:

- Various transportation projects were discussed, including road repaving, sidewalk maintenance, digital bus shelters, ADA-accessible transit stations, and the expansion of bicycle lanes and bike-sharing programs.
- Participants expressed the need for improved signage at transit stops and the importance of addressing uneven sidewalks for people with disabilities.

4. Benefits and Negative Effects of Projects:

- The discussion touched upon the benefits of infrastructure projects, such as improved safety and modernization, as well as concerns about increased traffic during construction.
- The need for better communication and transparency regarding project updates and detours was emphasized.
- Concerns about the potential impact on businesses, safety, and the overall community were expressed.

5. Involvement in Decision Making:

- Some participants shared their involvement in transportation planning, such as participation in SEPTA's bus revamp and reimagining regional rail.
- Suggestions were made for involving young people in focus groups to gather their input on transportation preferences and safety.

Focus Group 3

8/3/23 6pm - 7:30pm

Online via Zoom

Attendees

Invited: 10

Attended: 3

Attendee Demographics:

- Race:
 - 67% Black or African American
 - 33% Asian or Asian American
 - 0% Hispanic
- Car Ownership:
 - 100% own a car
 - 0% carless households
- Gender:
 - 100% Female
 - 0% Male

Core group: Pennsylvania residents

Meeting Overview

Participants discussed their diverse travel preferences and methods, highlighting factors such as independence and affordability. Challenges in getting around included issues related to discrimination on public transportation and limitations due to personal circumstances like autism. They also emphasized the importance of transportation projects that enhance safety and awareness while expressing support for initiatives like ADA improvements, pedestrian crossings, and Bus Rapid Transit. Participants showed an interest in community involvement in decision-making processes and shared concerns about potential disruptions to local communities posed by large-scale projects. Overall, the discussion underscored the intricate interplay between transportation preferences, accessibility, safety, and community engagement in shaping transportation initiatives and policies.

Projects Discussed

- Walter Rand Transportation Center, Camden
- I-76/I-676 Bridges and Pavement, Camden
- South Jersey Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), Camden/Philadelphia
- US 322 Widening, Gloucester

Key Takeaways

1. Travel Preferences and Methods:

- Participants discussed their regular modes of travel, including paratransit, public transportation, bicycling, and private cars.

- Each participant highlighted their preferences and the factors influencing their choice of transportation, such as independence, affordability, and convenience.

2. Challenges in Getting Around:

- The group shared challenges related to transportation, including difficulties in affording private cars, experiencing discrimination while using public transportation, and facing limitations due to personal circumstances like autism.
- Concerns about safety, particularly for women and Black individuals at train stations, were raised.

3. Transportation Projects:

- Participants discussed various transportation projects, such as ADA improvements, pedestrian crossings, and initiatives to reduce idling cars.
- They emphasized the need for safety, awareness, and retraining of citizens, especially children, to enhance overall transportation safety.
- Overall, the group expressed support for projects that improved mobility, safety, and affordability while raising concerns about potential disruptions to local communities and businesses.

4. Community Involvement in Decision-Making:

- The group showed interest in being involved in transportation decision-making processes, with some participants having experience in participating in focus groups and providing input on issues related to transportation and shelter development.
- The discussion highlighted the complex relationship between transportation preferences, accessibility, safety, and community engagement in shaping transportation projects and policies. Participants emphasized the importance of addressing these factors in planning and implementing transportation initiatives.

Focus Group 4

8/9/23 6pm - 7:30pm

Online via Zoom

Attendees

Invited: 11

Attended: 3

Attendee Demographics:

- Race:
 - 33% Black or African American
 - 33% White
 - 33% Puerto Rican
 - 67% Hispanic
- Car Ownership:
 - 100% own a car
 - 0% carless households
- Gender:
 - 100% Female
 - 0% Male

Core group: New Jersey residents

Meeting Overview

The focus group discussion unveiled several key themes. Participants discussed their regular travel methods, emphasizing the importance of accessibility and convenience in their transportation choices. Challenges such as limited public transportation options and long commutes were highlighted, leading to a preference for driving. The group discussed ongoing and planned transportation projects, stressing the significance of safety and addressing specific local issues. They also expressed interest in community involvement and effective communication in transportation decision-making processes. Overall, the discussion underscored the importance of convenience, safety, and community engagement in shaping transportation preferences and policies.

Projects Discussed

- Trenton City Traffic Signal Upgrades, Mercer
- SEPTA Trolley Modernization, Delaware/Philadelphia
- Atglen Regional Rail Extension, Chester
- Penns Landing Cap over I-95
- US 422 Reconstruction, Chester/Montgomery

Key Takeaways

1. Regular Travel Methods:

- Participants discussed their regular modes of travel, including driving, public transportation, and the challenges and convenience associated with these choices.

- They emphasized the importance of accessibility and convenience in their travel preferences.

2. Transportation Challenges:

- Participants highlighted challenges such as the lack of public transportation options in some areas, long commutes, and the inconvenience of using public transit for tasks like grocery shopping.
- They expressed their preference for driving due to the convenience it offers.

3. Transportation Projects:

- The group discussed various transportation projects, including improvements on Roosevelt Boulevard, bridge repairs, and road renovations.
- They expressed support for projects aimed at improving safety and addressing specific local issues.

4. Benefits and Negative Effects of Projects:

- Participants shared their experiences with ongoing projects, such as speed tables installation and bridge closures, highlighting both the positive impacts on safety and concerns about traffic disruptions.
- They emphasized the importance of prioritizing maintenance and safety in transportation projects.

5. Examples of Planned Large-Scale Projects:

- The group discussed several planned projects, including traffic signal upgrades, trolley modernization, rail extensions, and highway reconstruction.
- Participants shared their views on the potential benefits and challenges associated with these projects, including safety, convenience, and community involvement.

6. Involvement in Decision Making:

- Participants expressed interest in being involved in transportation decision-making processes and appreciated opportunities to provide input.
- They emphasized the importance of community engagement, transparency, and effective communication in transportation planning.
- The discussion highlighted the significance of convenience, safety, and community involvement in shaping transportation preferences and policies. Participants emphasized the need for accessible public transportation, efficient project implementation, and addressing local transportation issues effectively.

Web Landing Page



Home / Environmental Justice Focus Groups

Environmental Justice Focus Groups



Consultation has concluded

Transportation infrastructure gets us where we need to go, but it can also come with challenges related to travel costs, access, community cohesion, air quality, noise, and visual quality. Historically, negative impacts from transportation investments have been disproportionately experienced by communities of color and low-income persons.

Join a Focus Group!

DVRPC is the Metropolitan Planning Organization for Greater Philadelphia. We work with different levels of government and the region's residents to prioritize transportation infrastructure needs and available funding—from rebuilding I-95 to installing sidewalks along a well-traveled road, and from upgrading public transit vehicles to building new train stations and transit centers.

If you live in an Environmental Justice (EJ) community, we want to hear from you! An environmental justice community is a neighborhood, composed predominantly of persons of color and/or persons living below the poverty line, that experiences a significantly reduced quality of life relative to surrounding or similar communities.

We're hosting several paid focus groups to discuss the impact of transportation projects affecting your daily life or your community. **Participants will receive a stipend of \$100 for online or \$125 for in person focus groups.** If you or someone you know is interested in participating, please fill out this interest form. **Focus groups will be held between July 10, 2023 and August 9, 2023.**

Visit <https://forms.gle/8JsSk75D2qAhLWaB6> to complete the interest form!

DVRPC plans to hold four 90-minute focus groups. Focus groups will include between 6 and 12 participants each and will be recorded to create a transcript. Participants consent to being recorded. Audio and video recordings will be erased 90 days after recording.

If you are selected to participate in a focus group, DVRPC staff will contact you to confirm your availability and arrange payment. Please note that submitting your information does not guarantee you will be selected to participate.

Who's Listening

- [Terms and Conditions](#)
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Important Links

- Focus Group Interest Form
- Long-Range Plan for Greater Philadelphia

Focus Group Recruitment

Thank you for your interest in DVRPC's upcoming focus groups on transportation planning projects. To help us determine if we are reaching a representative segment of the region's population, please answer the following questions. For more information, visit publicparticipation.dvrpc.org/ej-lrp or email public_affairs@dvrpc.org.

Focus group participants will participate in an in-person or online meeting. Focus groups will include between 6 and 12 participants each, and participants consent to being recorded to create a transcript. Responses will not be attributed to any individual, will only be used for this project, and erased by October 31, 2023.

Selected participants who complete the meeting will receive a stipend of \$100 to \$125 based on attendance at an assigned focus group. If selected, DVRPC staff will contact you to confirm your availability and arrange payment. Please note that submitting your information in this form does not guarantee your participation in a focus group. The information you submit in the interest form will be kept confidential, used only for this project, and also be erased by October 31, 2023.

* Indicates required question

1. Email *

2. First name *

3. Last name *

4. What is the best phone number to reach you?

If you do not want to be contacted by phone, skip this question.

5. Which focus group would you be interested in attending? *

Check all that apply.

Check all that apply.

- July 10th - Upper Darby Township, PA
- July 24th - Cherry Hill, NJ
- August 3rd - Online via Zoom
- August 9th - Online via Zoom

Demographics

This information is used by DVRPC to make sure the focus groups are a representative sample of the region.

6. What is the ZIP code of your home address? (enter 5-digit ZIP code; for example, 00544) *

7. What is your age? *

Mark only one oval.

- Under 19
- 19 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 54
- 55 - 59
- 60 - 64
- 65 - 74
- 75 - 84
- 85 and over

8. Are you of Spanish, Hispanic or Latine origin or descent? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

9. What is your race? *

Select all that apply.

Check all that apply.

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian or Asian American

Black or African American

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

White

Other: _____

10. Interpretation will be provided for you if needed. Do you require an interpreter to participate? If yes, select the language you need. *

Mark only one oval.

I speak English and do not need an interpreter

Spanish

Chinese

Cantonese

Mandarin

Vietnamese

Russian

Korean

Other: _____

11. Do you need a Sign Language Interpreter? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

12. How many people live in your household, including yourself? *

Your household is defined as every person who lives in your house for 6 or more months out of the year. This includes yourself, children under 18, and grandparents.

Mark only one oval.

1

2

3

4

5

6 or more

13. What is your household income? *

Mark only one oval.

Less than \$10,00

\$10,000 - \$14,999

\$15,000 - \$24,999

\$25,000 - \$34,999

\$35,000 - \$49,000

\$50,000 - \$74,999

\$75,000 - \$99,999

\$100,000 - \$149,999

\$150,000 or more

14. What is your gender? *

Mark only one oval.

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Non-binary

15. How do you usually get to work? *

Choose the method of transportation used for the majority of the distance. Example: if you drive 1 mile to the subway and take a 4.2 mile subway ride, you would check "Subway or elevated rail".

Mark only one oval.

- Car, truck, or van
- Bus
- Subway or elevated rail
- Long-distance trail or commuter rail
- Light rail, streetcar, or trolley
- Ferryboat
- Taxicab
- Motorcycle
- Bicycle
- Walk
- Work from home
- Do not work or retired
- Other: _____

16. How many minutes does it usually take for you to get home from work? *

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 10 minutes
- 10 to 14 minutes
- 15 to 19 minutes
- 20 to 24 minutes
- 25 to 29 minutes
- 30 to 34 minutes
- 35 to 44 minutes
- 45 to 59 minutes
- 60 or more minutes

17. How many cars, vans, and/or trucks are kept at your home for use by members in your household? *

Mark only one oval.

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3 or more

Stay connected!

18. Are you interested in subscribing to DVRPC's Newsletters? If so, tell us what you want in your inbox!

Select all that apply.

Check all that apply.

- DVRPC Events
- Educational Opportunities
- Grant Opportunities
- Consulting Opportunities
- Partner Events
- Public Participation and Public Notices
- Data Releases and Updates

Thank you for your interested in participating in this focus group.

You will receive a confirmation email with your responses. If you are selected for the focus group, a DVRPC staff member will contact you with next steps.

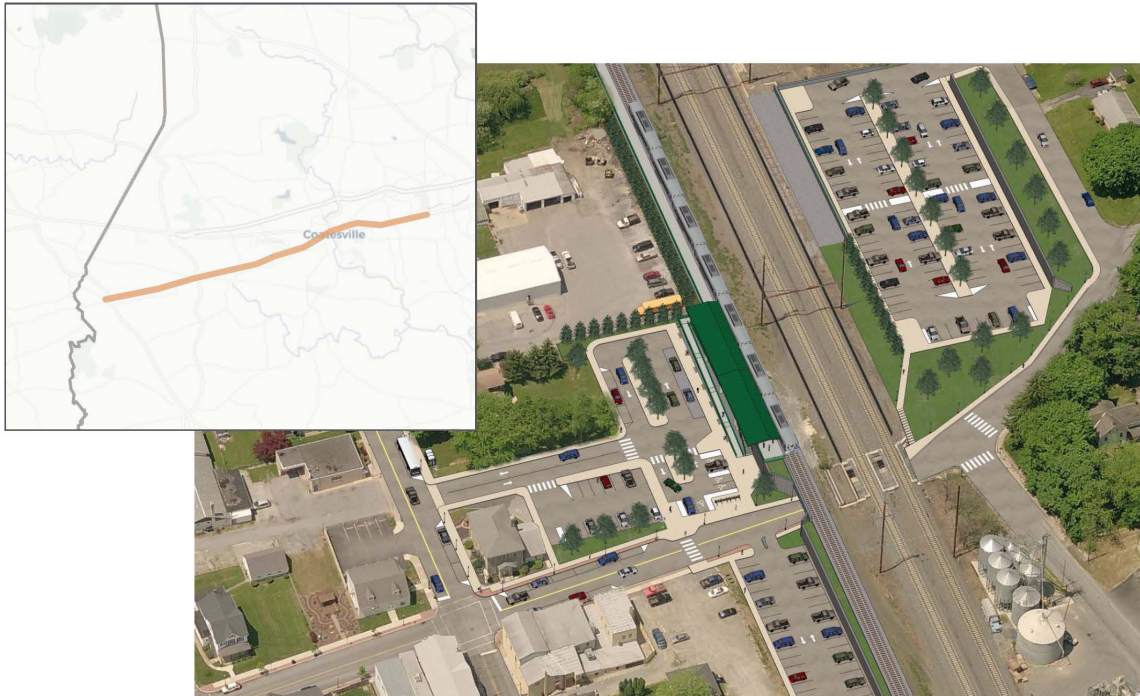
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Example Major Regional Projects

Atglen Regional Rail Extension, Chester

Rail Line Extension from Thorndale to Atglen. Provides Coatesville and Atglen residents with rail service to Philadelphia, Lancaster, Harrisburg and Pittsburgh (Unfunded vision)



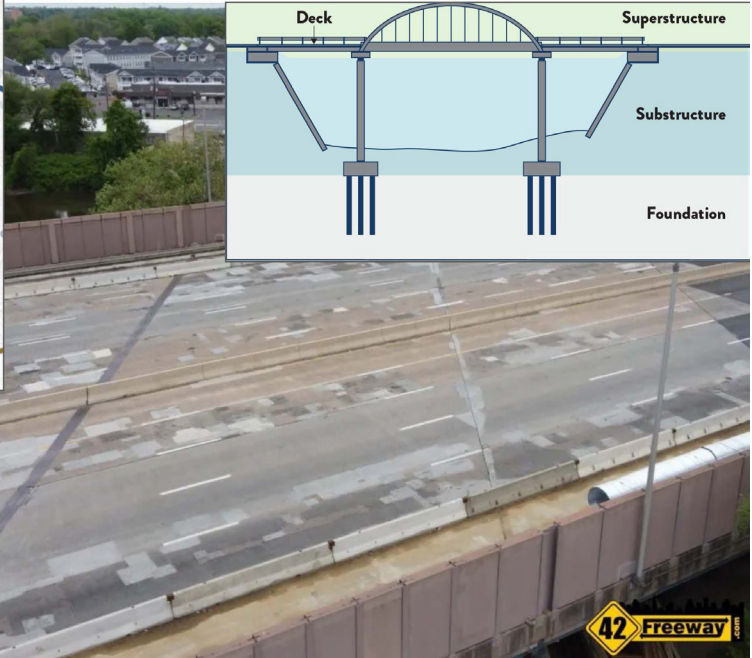
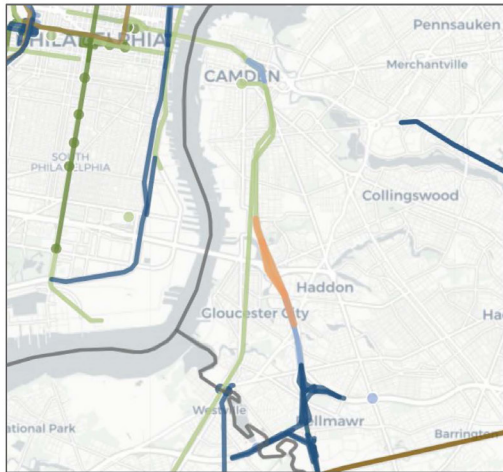
US 422 Reconstruction, Chester/Montgomery

Reconstruction and realignment from Sanatoga interchange to just east of the Stowe interchange; improve acceleration lane (aka speed-change lanes or auxiliary lanes) for westbound on-ramp; and reconstruct bridge over Schuylkill River in Pottstown. (2022–2032)



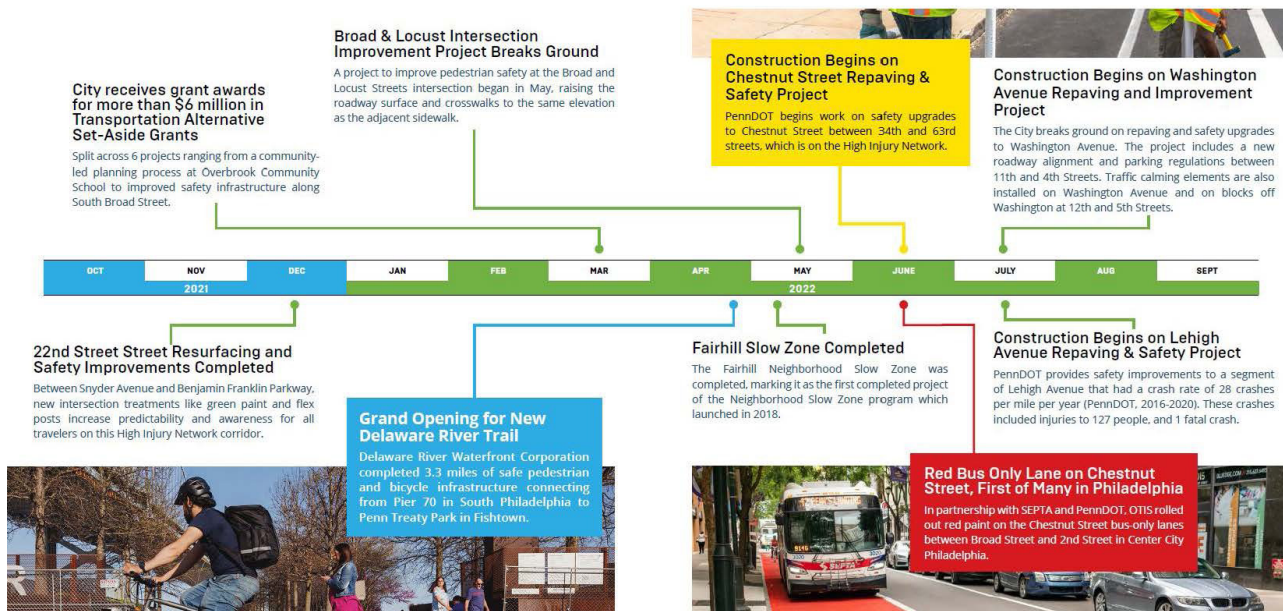
I-76/I-676 Bridges and Pavement, Camden

Replace bridge decks and superstructure of I-76/I-676 in several places. Two bridges will be widened. (2022–2025)



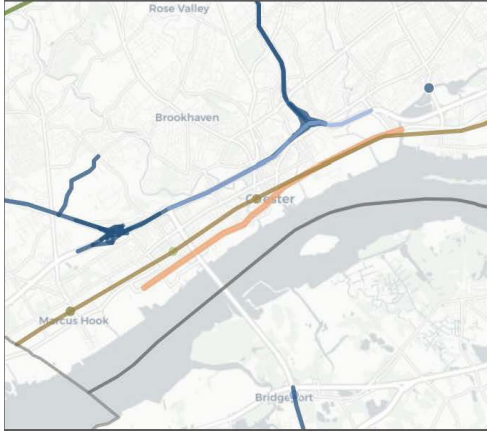
Vision Zero Safety Improvements, Philadelphia

Improve road safety with engineering enhancements at various locations in Philadelphia. (2033–2040)



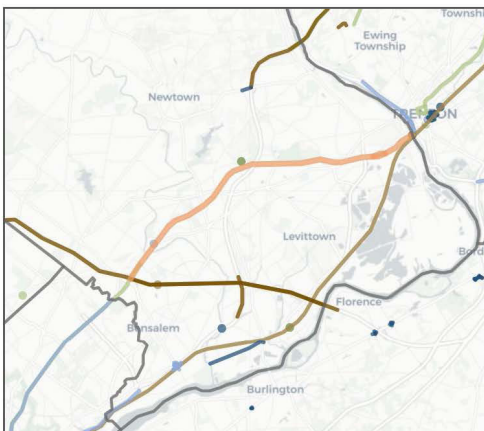
PA 291/Second St/Industrial Hwy Safety & Operations, Delaware

Slowing traffic speeds, making safer crosswalks, landscaping, new and upgraded traffic signals with new and connected technology, and facility for the East Coast Greenway in Chester City, Eddystone Borough, and Ridley Township. (2033–2040)



US 1 Widening, Bucks

Reconstruct from I-276 (PA Turnpike) to NJ state line; widen from PA Turnpike to PA 413; I-276 and US 1 interchange improvements. (2022–2040)



US 322 Widening, Gloucester

Widen from US 130 to NJ Turnpike. (2032–2050)



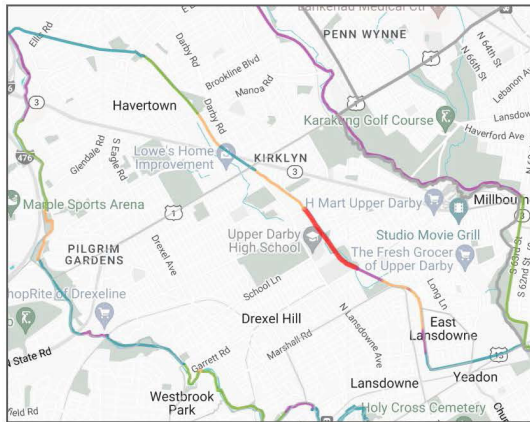
Penn's Landing Cap over I-95, Philadelphia

Access and community improvement via cap over I-95 and Columbus Boulevard from Chestnut Street to Walnut Street in Center City and extension of South Street pedestrian bridge. (2022–2026)



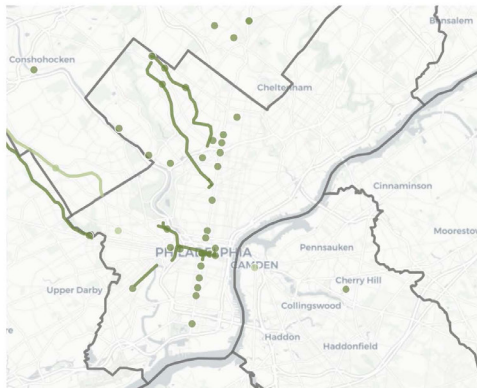
Newtown Square Branch Trail, Delaware

Unused rail right-of-way with some sections complete and some planned to be converted into a multi-use trail beginning at Route 252 near Goshen Road at the SAP business campus and ending near 69th Street in Upper Darby. (Various stages planned, in progress, existing)



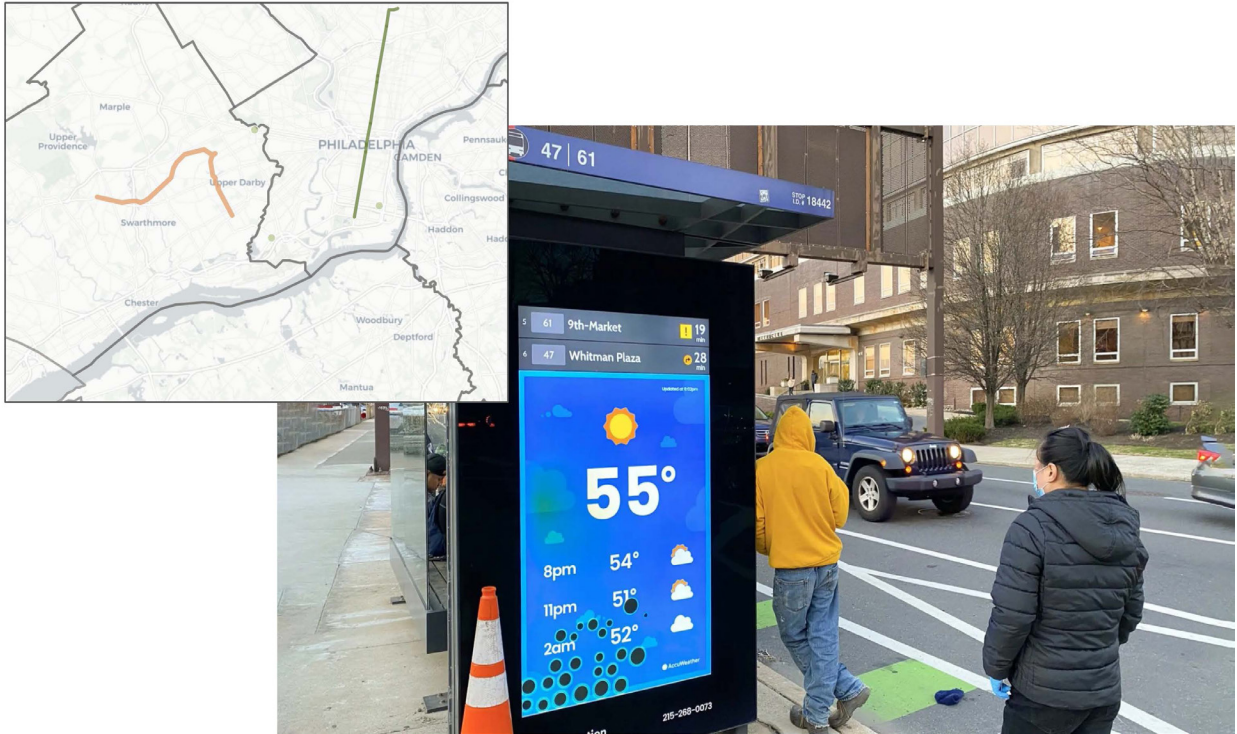
Transit Station Enhancements, Delaware/Philadelphia

Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility improvements along with signage, lighting, waterproofing, elevators, and security cameras during renovation of the stations: 8th St. Customer Service, 11th St., 30th St., 34th St., Spring Garden, Ellsworth-Federal, Erie, Fairmount, Hunting Park, Logan, Lombard-South, Snyder, Susquehanna-Dauphin, Tasker-Morris, Wyoming, Chinatown. (2022-32)



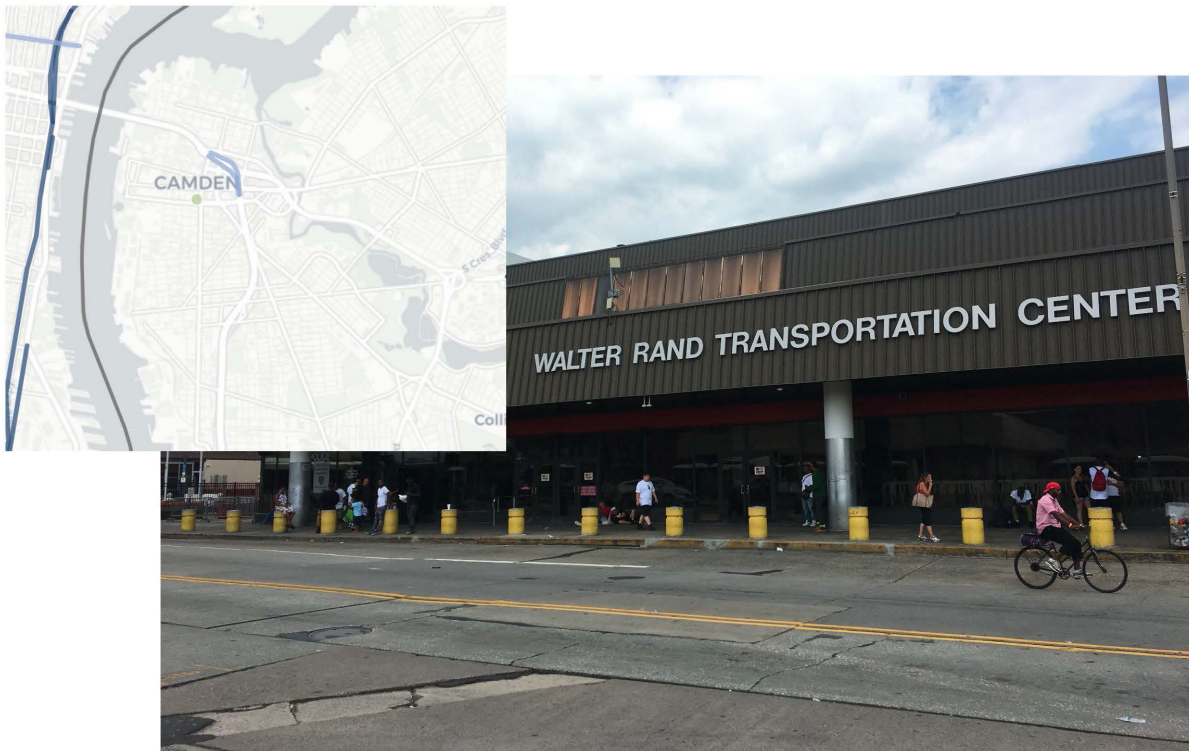
Media/Sharon Hill Positive Train Control, Delaware

Rt. 101 & 102 Positive Train Control (PTC) and Right-of-Way Improvements. Real Time trolley schedule and location display. (2022-26)



Walter Rand Transportation Center, Camden

Replace the existing facility with an expanded multi-purpose transit center with intermodal connectivity, including a bridge for access. (Funded) (2022-2028)



Atlantic City Line Investments for Added Frequency, Camden/Philadelphia

Siding and station improvements, as well as new vehicles for increased service frequency. (Unfunded Vision).



Delaware River Heritage Trail, Camden

Part of the East Coast Greenway, with some sections complete and some planned. Once complete, it will follow the east bank of the Delaware River from D&R Canal in downtown Trenton to the Ben Franklin Bridge in Camden.



South Jersey Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), Camden/Philadelphia

New BRT from Avondale Park and Ride and Delsea Drive to Center City, Philadelphia. (Unfunded vision)



Voices of Environmental Justice Communities: Shaping an Equitable Long-Range Plan

Publication Number: 24128

Date Published: January 2024

Geographic Area Covered: The nine-county DVRPC region, which covers the counties of Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia in Pennsylvania; and Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Mercer counties in New Jersey.

Key Words: access, bicycling, Civil Rights Act, communication, community, connectivity, engagement, environmental justice, equity, ethnic, focus group, investment, long-range plan, low-income, minority, mitigation, mobility, mode choice, outreach, pedestrian, PPTF, public, public participation, Public Participation Task Force, racial, safety, security, stakeholders, state of repair, Title VI, transit, transportation, walking.

Abstract: In preparation for an updated long-range plan and associated region-wide environmental justice (EJ) analysis, DVRPC staff sought to engage members of Environmental Justice communities to understand their needs and perceptions of various transportation projects. Staff hosted several paid focus groups in July and August of 2023 to discuss the impact of transportation projects affecting daily life for underserved groups. Participants were selected from a pool of applicants to convene a regionally representative sample of low-income and racial and ethnic minority populations. Engagement was aimed at better understanding the perceptions of regionally funded transportation investments and to solicit feedback on a sample set of projects already funded in the current Board-adopted Plan, *Connections 2050*.

Staff Project Team:

Jaclyn Davis, *Manager*

Shoshana Akins, *Manager*

Amani Bey, *Planner*

Windel Desir, *Public Participation Planner*

Elise Turner, *Manager*

Gina Myers, *Senior Communications Specialist*

Alison Hastings, *Associate Director*

Brett Fusco, *Associate Director*

Staff Contact:

Jaclyn Davis, *Manager*

Office of Long-Range Planning

jdavis@dvrpc.org



190 N Independence Mall West

8th Floor

Philadelphia, PA 19106-1520

215.592.1800

www.dvrpc.org



190 N Independence Mall West
8th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19106-1520
215.592.1800
www.dvrpc.org

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