

# CONNECTIONS 2045

## AMENDMENT

### SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

July 2020

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## PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD OVERVIEW

A public comment period for the Amendment to the *Connections 2045 Plan for Greater Philadelphia* was held from May 26, 2020 until June 29, 2020 at 5:00 PM local time. The draft document was made available online. DVRPC's offices and public libraries were closed during this period due to various state and local stay-at-home orders as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The comment period was advertised by legal notice in area newspapers, on the DVRPC web page, and via email to over 12,000 recipients on DVRPC's distribution list. DVRPC also emailed the document to its list of tribal governments. As part of the comment period, two online public information sessions were held on June 17 at 2 PM and 7 PM, via webinar and a call-in function. Comments were able to be submitted at the June 17 meetings, by mail, email, fax, or online form at [www.dvrpc.org/longrangeplan](http://www.dvrpc.org/longrangeplan). Additional details were made available on DVRPC's Long-Range Plan webpage. Submitted comments are presented to the DVRPC Board at its July 2020 meeting, and all comments and responses are posted on DVRPC's Long-Range Plan webpage.

## COMMENTS AND RESPONSES

### ANNA PERNG, **General Public**

Public Comment submitted to DVRPC – June 17, 2020

By: Anna Perng, via email

As a Chinatown resident and advocate, I am glad to see Franklin Square PATCO mentioned in Draft Connections 2045 Long-Range Plan (LRP) Amendment.

As has been publicly reported, Franklin Square PATCO has opened several times throughout our City's history. Each time, government invested millions of dollars only to close the station due to underuse. In its 2018 proposal to U.S. Department of Transportation, DRPA/PATCO described the changing economic forecast for the region to project an optimistic vision for why a fourth attempt could be successful.

Over the past year, I have worked with local residents, park users, elected officials, Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (the RCO), Historic Philadelphia, which manages Franklin Square, Asian Americans United, FACT Charter School, and local leaders to raise equity concerns. In February, I organized a tour with PATCO officials and other stakeholders. We had a positive discussion and discussed the development of a community benefits agreement, which would include using some of the funds to slow traffic and make the park more accessible, bicycle and pedestrian-friendly.

Sadly, since then, our community has been hard hit by unexpected setbacks. With the President of the United State calling the coronavirus (COVID19) "Chinese virus" or "Wuhan virus," our community has experienced an uptick in anti-Asian attacks. Chinatown residents have reported safety issues when riding public transportation. Because of those racially motivated attacks, they began to avoid public transit even though they have needed to access free supports like free food or their children's School District-issued Chromebooks. Chinatown business owners have reported as high as 80% economic loss even before the local and statewide stay-at-home orders took effect. Despite PCDC's assistance, several Chinatown businesses were able to access City economic relief, out of over 100 small businesses.

The pandemic has also hurt Historic Philadelphia, which leases and operates Franklin Square from the Philadelphia Parks and Receptions department. As schools follow public health and state guidelines, they have cancelled school field trips to Franklin Square. Revenue-generating activities such as the Chinese Lantern Festival and its annual Evening at the Square fundraiser have been tabled. The elimination of the Office of City Representative means Historic Philadelphia will lose significant funding. There will be no additional financial support from Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, which is facing its own budget cuts. Our park, once described by DRPA and PATCO in the 2018 U.S. Department of Transportation as a regional attraction, now has to fight for survival.

In February, I felt so hopeful that we were finally moving to a space where Philadelphia Chinatown, Franklin Square, Old City, and Callowhill neighborhoods could unit and advocate for environmental justice, resulting in more accessibility, economic and social inclusion, too. Now, I worry that the pandemic will permanently wipe out our small businesses and pave the way for gentrification in an already gentrifying Census tract.

While this \$26 million project will bring greatly needed jobs, we must ensure that there is an equitable and inclusive approach to distributing jobs, contracting opportunities, and other equity goals. I ask DVRPC and other stakeholders to reconvene community engagement with our Mandarin-speaking community, residents, and park users, and ensure that the \$26 million addresses these current community needs.

- Perhaps in addition to promoting the remaining businesses that have survived, PATCO can partner with us on anti-racism PSAs on its transportation lines.
- Perhaps PATCO can write their RFP to ensure that their bids address racial equity and identify how its budget will outreach to our historically marginalized community.
- Perhaps PATCO can resume community engagement meetings so we have a community benefits agreement before shovels hit the ground.

By working together and centering historically marginalized communities, we can prevent another beautiful transportation project from shuttering due to underuse--- and even use this project as an example of how federal funds helped saved a community that has long been denied access to equitable green space, accessible transportation, jobs, and recreation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Anna

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## DVRPC RESPONSE

Thank you for providing the comments on the Franklin Square Re-Opening Project. Equity is a key principle for the *Connections 2045* Long-Range Plan. As we look at our vision for the future, it is vital that our work actively seeks to dismantle discrimination and systematic inequality, and provide opportunities for all. As planners and conveners, DVRPC commits to listening to everyone in our region, including those who have not had an equal voice to date in shaping their communities. Everyone deserves to live in a healthy and prosperous community with quality affordable housing. We all deserve safe, reliable transportation options that connect people to jobs, food, medical services, schools, and all the necessities of life. Everyone should be able to enjoy our region's many dynamic public spaces without fearing for their safety.

Yet today, access to housing, jobs, essential services, healthcare, education, recreation, and many other opportunities are not equitably distributed. Words have power, but our collective actions have more. DVRPC commits to further combat all forms of racism and inequity in our work. We commit ourselves to listen, learn, educate, support, and act to build a better future.

We have shared your comments with DRPA/PATCO, and they have responded that they remain committed to this project and to working with the community to cross-promote local businesses. The DRPA has a long history of ensuring equal employment and contracting opportunities beginning with their shared values of Diversity & Inclusion, and Fairness & Equity. DRPA has responded that for more than 25 years, their Office of Business Development & Equal Opportunity has led an award-winning Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Program. DRPA further stated that the Franklin Square project will include DBE participation goals, as this is a standard with all of their projects. These goals are closely evaluated and monitored over the course of the project to ensure compliance with the goals set forth for this project. DRPA is approaching the completion of engineering design & coordination with local agencies. They estimate that they will advertise this project for construction bid in the fall and that they appreciate your support for this important project.

### **Dedicated Funding for NJ Transit**

Prepared by Sanjeev Ramchandra, M.Ed.

I propose a sales tax increase dedicated to NJ Transit that is deposited into a transit lockbox. I recommend a two-tiered transit tax reflecting a higher sales tax rate for North Jersey since it has greater costs due to its population density and its demand for more transit frequency.

Northern Region is defined as these 14 counties: Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Ocean, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, Union, and Warren. These counties (except Mercer) are members of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority.

Southern Region is defined as these seven counties: Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem. These counties are in partnership with the South Jersey Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission.

Raise the 6.625% NJ sales tax by 0.575% and 0.375% for the Northern and Southern Regions, respectively, into a combined total of 7.2% for Northern Region and 7% for Southern Region. The 0.2% surcharge is for the extra cost of providing train and bus service into New York City.

A 7.2% combined sales tax rate for the Northern Region is still lower than the combined sales tax rate found in nearby regions: New York City (8.875%), Long Island (8.625%), Westchester County (8.375%), Rockland County (8.375%), Orange County (8.125%), and Philadelphia (8%).

A 7% combined sales tax rate for the Southern Region is still less than the combined sales tax rate in Philadelphia (8%) and represents a zero-net increase from a 7% sales tax rate in 2016.

This NJ Transit tax (0.575% or 0.375%) is still less than the 1% transit sales tax found in major cities: Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, and Seattle. This two-tiered transit sales tax will generate more than \$500 million per year for NJ Transit.

A transit sales tax guarantees that more out-of-state residents including tourists, commuters, customers, college students, and travelers are contributing to NJ Transit funding through their sales tax eligible purchases in New Jersey. The revenues from this tax will grow over time due to the rising populations of in-state and out-of-state residents in the Northeast Corridor along with NJ residents making Internet purchases which could be captured by this transit sales tax.

During the past 25 years, voters in many states across America have agreed to raise their sales taxes to offer a dedicated funding source for mass transit; New Jersey should be no exception. I ask the Legislature to use my proposal to create a 2020 ballot referendum to allow NJ voters a chance to establish a new, two-tiered transit sales tax that will fund a NJ Transit investment.

Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, I recommend that voters still make their decision during this year's 2020 elections but have the legislation delay the start date of the transit sales tax by one year until January 1, 2022. Voting during this presidential year ensures high turnout.

Sanjeev Ramchandra is a community college math instructor who lived his childhood in New Jersey.

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## DVRPC RESPONSE

Thank you for your comment. Ever since the publication of DVRPC's *Options for Filling the Region's Transportation Funding Gap* in 2007, the commission has been trying to raise awareness of the importance of local funding for transportation infrastructure and working to build consensus on an alternative. This is a well thought out proposal. Our latest estimate, in the *Connections 2045* Plan, found that a 0.5 percent sales tax in our four New Jersey counties could generate roughly \$100 million per year. As a benefit, such a tax would reach a broad swath of the economy, which transportation plays a critical role in throughout, without having major impacts on economic growth, the transportation system use, or development patterns. It wouldn't require any new collection mechanisms, tends to be relatively stable, and would grow over time with the economy. There are concerns, however, about the regressive nature of the sales tax, and the limited ability to use this fee to achieve other long-range plan goals such as reducing congestion or greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition to the sales tax, the *Connections 2045* Plan analyzes other 'user fee' type funding options such as access fees, carbon taxes, congestion pricing, raising the fuel tax or placing a sales tax on gas purchases, mileage-based user fees, tolls and toll surcharges, and vehicle registration fees. These fees would all require state legislature action, and it is important that any new fee(s) supports other regional goals, such as equity, improved energy-efficiency, and denser Centers-based development patterns that encourage more development in areas served by transit, along with bike and pedestrian facilities. It is also important to note that it is not likely that any single option could fill the funding gap on its own. DVRPC has not identified any of the options as a preferred alternative. Rather, the hope is to encourage discussion and develop consensus on the optimal funding mechanisms to help the region achieve its transportation goals.

DANIEL TRUBMAN, **General Public**

Public Comment Submitted to DVRPC June 29, 2020

By Daniel Trubman, via email

Stop prioritizing auto-infrastructure so much. That strategy has failed for decades.

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## DVRPC RESPONSE

Thank you for your comment. While this amendment is highly focused on road projects, largely as a result of shifting funding from regional formula funds to PennDOT's Interstate Management Program, the *Connections 2045* Plan maintains a transportation vision and goal of creating an integrated, multimodal transportation network. The Plan includes a financially-constrained set of transportation investments, and 41% of anticipated revenues are allocated to transit projects. In policy and practice, the Plan has capped expenditures in roadway new capacity at 4 percent of total roadway revenues. The Plan is also providing funding towards the construction of a more-than-800-mile regional trail network, and calls for the provision of complete streets. In addition, this amendment removes two large roadway system expansion projects from the fiscally constrained financial plan.

That being said, at least one-third of all households and jobs in the Greater Philadelphia region lack reasonable access to transit (source: <https://www.dvrpc.org/Reports/11045.pdf>), and roads and automobiles remain the primary way that people get around the region, both before and during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Ensuring that people and goods can safely and reliably move around the region is critical for quality of life, as well as health and well-being. Emerging shared mobility services are helping to fill some of the gaps in transit access, and can offer new modal options for the future of transportation. We hope that you will participate in the *Connections 2050* Long-Range Plan visioning exercise that is currently underway. For more information on the development of the forthcoming long-range plan please visit [www.dvrpc.org/2050](http://www.dvrpc.org/2050).