



GREAT PLACES WITH TRANSIT

Summer 2002

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A Special Offer for You

With all the recent attention on the proposed Schuylkill Valley Metro (SVM), the critical role of TOD in successful public transit projects has been in the limelight. If our newsletter has piqued your interest in TOD and you want to know more, let us make a TOD presentation to your community, conservation agency or professional organization. The Pennsylvania Environmental Council and McCormick, Taylor & Associates, Inc. have prepared an illustrated presentation on the design elements and benefits of TOD and essential means to accomplish implementation. If you would like, a focus on SVM station area development opportunities can also be included. To inquire about a presentation for your group, contact Patrick Starr at pstarr@pecphila.org or 215-563-0250.

About This Newsletter

Welcome to the final issue of the first series of *Great Places With Transit*. (Another series may be published in the future.) Recognizing that our nation has spent the past 50 years diminishing the role of transit and investing overwhelmingly in auto-dependent communities – breeding sprawl with its road congestion, pollution and culture of isolation – we have explored some alternatives. This newsletter has aimed to bring you inspiring examples of local, regional and national efforts to revive the lost art of creating vibrant places where people can walk, bike and take public transit – the sort of places people love to visit and in which many would choose to live, if given the option.

Unfortunately, building great places with transit isn't always easy. In past issues, we discussed some of the barriers to creating these types of places, such as lack of zoning, lack of financing, lack of inter-governmental cooperation and even citizen hostility based on erroneous notions about aspects of transit-oriented development (TOD) and what is good for the environment. We have also presented solutions to some of these problems.

In this issue, we review the Schuylkill Valley Metro (SVM) Station Area Study, led by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), and discuss next steps (page 1). Next is an update on plans for an intermodal transportation center in Paoli (page 3), and the Smart CommuteSM Mortgage Program (page 4) encourages home ownership and transit usage in transit-friendly parts of the region. We then look at how several South Jersey communities around the PATCO High-Speed Line are planning for revitalization and better integration of transit (page 5).

Finally, we discuss an update on the status of pending legislation that would facilitate establishment of Transit Revitalization Investment Districts (TRIDs) to promote TOD throughout Pennsylvania (page 5). It is our hope that the information we've shared with you will help promote the creation of more great places with transit. Thank you for coming along for the ride.

— Patrick Starr
PEC Vice President,
Southeast Region

Schuylkill Valley Metro Station Area Study

This fall marks the end of the SVM Corridor Station Area Planning and Implementation Study. The study, which kicked off in the fall of 2000, was conducted by a team of consultants led by the Philadelphia planning and design firm Wallace Roberts & Todd (WRT) under contract to DVRPC.

Throughout the two-year study, the team prepared plans for TOD around five of the station areas along the proposed Metro rail line in Douglassville, Pottstown, Phoenixville, Port Kennedy and 52nd Street in Philadelphia. WRT is now completing final station area plans, including zoning recommendations, with input from Community Task Forces (CTFs) from each station area and other study team members. In this issue, we take a look at the final plans and talk about next steps.

Douglassville Station Area

The Douglassville CTF worked to address issues such as preserving the historic and rural sections of the station area, protecting wetlands and floodplains and addressing the

(Continued on page 2)

current configuration of Route 422. This regional highway carries large volumes of high-speed traffic and creates a dangerous environment for pedestrians as it splits into separate westbound and eastbound arteries in Douglassville. With community input, WRT developed a station area plan that centers on combining east and westbound traffic in the current westbound right-of-way. This realignment would permit the former eastbound road to be returned to its historic character as the "main street" of the community.

The SVM station is proposed to be located in the center of the mixed-use main street area that contains offices and retail (approximately 115,000 square feet [SF]) and more than 50 residential units on second floors, along with a new village center park to help to support a pedestrian-oriented environment. An underpass under the train tracks provides access to and from the Schuylkill River (Thun) Trail system. Also included in the plan are a center-loaded train station platform and shared parking facilities.

The US 422/PA 662 intersection is proposed as a highway-oriented commercial area, similar to and including many of the businesses already there. Traffic flow and safety improvements would help make this area more inviting. The plan includes a mixture of office and residential development on about 26 acres in the PA 662/Leaf Creek area to the

north of US 422. Approximately 155,000 SF of office space would take advantage of visibility and access from US 422, and those living in the approximately 115 residential units would be able to walk to the SVM and village center.

The station area plan recommends an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan to include the SVM area as a village core, as well as the PA 662/Leaf Creek mixed office and residential development. A historic district designation is proposed for a large portion of the station area. It is also recommended that most of the station area be rezoned to permit and encourage the desired mix of land uses. Suggestions include a new Transit-Oriented Mixed Use District and a Historic Overlay District.

Pottstown Station Area

Pottstown has a fair outlook for development potential. Population and employment are expected to increase steadily between 2000 and 2025, as the Borough is located in the path of continued real estate development occurring west of Limerick Township. Also, the west campus of Montgomery County Community College is slated to expand into the SVM station area, and there is potential for the redevelopment of the former Mrs. Smith's Pies complex, also near the proposed station.

While much of the southern portion of the station area is located in the floodplain, most of the area considered for development lies outside of the floodplain. Other considerations in the station area are the existing freight railroad tracks, which present a physical barrier to pedestrians, and a large area of wetlands.

The station area plan includes reuse of the historic train station for the SVM, as well as a variety of existing and proposed uses, including Borough Hall, the transit plaza, Montgomery County Community College expansion, redevelopment of portions of West High Street for mixed commercial and live/work uses, a shared parking structure (east of Hanover Street, between the railroad tracks and the back of buildings fronting on High Street) and redevelopment of the former Mrs. Smith Pies complex into commercial/retail/residential uses. Extensive pedestrian connections will link the downtown, the SVM and related development, and the Schuylkill Greenway trail system.

While the Borough's most recent Comprehensive Plan is quite old (1986), the June 2001 Western Riverfront District Redevelopment Draft Plan includes appropriate recommendations for the station area. The existing Downtown Gateway zoning district, recently adopted, plus a number of districts proposed in the draft plan, would work effectively to encourage and shape desired development in the station area.

Phoenixville Station Area

Of all the potential station sites on the SVM, Phoenixville has made the greatest progress toward construction of a TOD, partly because it was one large parcel of land with one owner. Thanks to the Vision Partnership Task Force, the Landscapes 2020 Comprehensive Plan, the Chester County Planning Commission, energetic community leadership, and a committed developer, development is already underway on the former Phoenix Iron and Steel Works site – the location of the proposed Phoenixville SVM station. Developer Delta Properties is planning for French Creek Center, a large mixed-use infill development that will include new homes, retail and office space.

Central to the plan is an attractive transit station, 39 acres of parkland along the French Creek, and careful connections to the downtown and newly restored Phoenix Iron Works Foundry Building. The developer's master plan and zoning amendments have been adapted by the Borough to allow the project to be realized. The Borough is also seeking federal infrastructure funding.

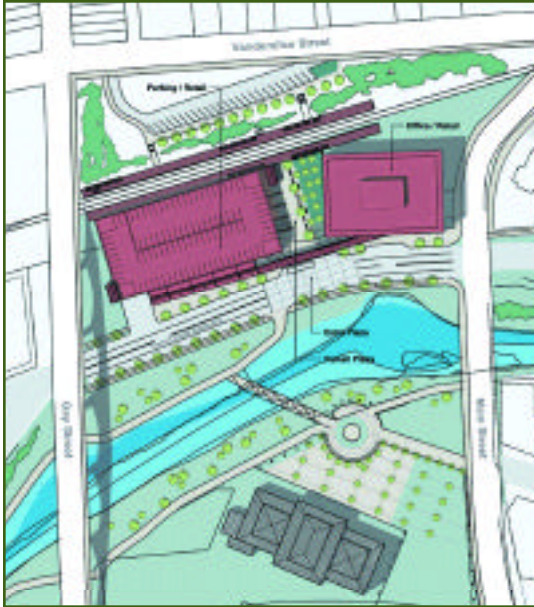
While it appears that aspects of the development will proceed whether or not the SVM is built, the design is transit-oriented and pedestrian friendly. The larger redevelopment area is mixed-use in character, with 800,000 SF of commercial space (to house roughly 5,000 new jobs), 500 units of corporate apartments and townhomes and 50,000 SF of retail that may include more apartments and/or live-work units on the upper floors. The proposed Metro station will be no more than a half-mile from all parts of the development.

Port Kennedy Station Area

The Port Kennedy station site, adjacent to the Schuylkill River in Upper Merion Township, includes a portion of West Norriton Township

For more information about the SVM Corridor Station Area Planning and Implementation Study, visit the project's web site at <http://www.dvrpc.org/planning/tod/svm.htm>. ■

(Station Area Study, continued from page 2)



A detail of an illustrative plan for proposed mixed-use TOD and streetscape improvements at the former Phoenix Iron and Steel Works site in Phoenixville. (Plan courtesy of Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC.)

on the north side of the Schuylkill River. The primarily residential area includes vacant industrial space along the river where a major mixed-use project has already been proposed.

Working with the Port Kennedy CTF, WRT prepared a plan with a mix of commercial and residential development on the site, with an extension of the Schuylkill River Trail. The residential and commercial areas would be separated by a new access road. The 210 residential units are to be upriver from this road in their own neighborhood, with pedestrian access to the SVM station and to a proposed extension of the Schuylkill River Greenway on the south side of the river with access to the north side via a proposed pedestrian bridge. The commercial portion of the station area

could contain about 360,000 SF of office space, a 200-room hotel and parking.

One of the challenges facing this site is the desire of one of the landowners to begin a project soon – possibly before all zoning and access issues can be worked out. Current zoning permits a variety of commercial and office uses, but not residential. In addition, site access is constrained by the capacity of the existing road system. From the developer's perspective, these zoning and access road issues require quick resolution if the proposed development plan is to proceed. As a part of the SVM study, recommendations were prepared to keep the base zoning and add a TOD overlay to permit more intensive uses with discretionary review and approval by the township.

52nd Street Station Area

The 52nd Street station location and surrounding area exhibit signs of disinvestment. However, the area has great potential due to its high density of residences, location relative to transit lines, proximity to the section of Fairmount Park that contains the Mann Center for the Performing Arts and on-going reinvestment programs. Implementation of a SVM station in this location would dramatically improve local access to the regional transit system and enhance regional access to the area's assets.

WRT worked closely with the CTF, as well as City of Philadelphia Planning Commission and Commerce Department staff, to develop a plan based on infill and redevelopment opportunities. The plan allows for approximately 150,000 to 200,000 SF of mixed office/retail development, a 100,000- to 120,000-SF shopping center (previously proposed), a community center, 160 units of infill residential development, an 80-unit apartment building, and mixed ground-floor commercial/upper-floor residential units along 52nd Street. It is the hope of community residents that the shopping center will help anchor new commercial development in the area.

The station area plan also includes modifications to the existing street system to enhance the quiet character of residential areas while

improving access to commercial areas and the station, providing safe and attractive pedestrian and bicycle routes, and promoting better traffic flow. The circulation component of the plan is designed to be able to accommodate the proposed City Branch trolley and existing bus service, creating a multi-modal transfer center at the SVM station.

The Plan for West Philadelphia, written before the SVM was contemplated, should now be updated. Existing base zoning supports much of the proposed new plan, with minor changes needed to allow for mixed commercial/residential uses along 52nd Street. WRT also prepared a transit-oriented overlay district to incorporate design guidelines that, if adopted, could strengthen the station as the area's focal point. ■

Update: Paoli's Plans for New Transportation Center

Located on SEPTA's busiest commuter rail line – the R5 – and a hub of bus and Amtrak activity, Chester County's Paoli station is a prime example of an existing transportation center on the SEPTA system that can provide improved access and transfers for transit users and support future TOD if the station is modernized and relocated and highway access is improved. A variety of agencies have been working toward making this happen, in conjunction with SEPTA's implementation of improvements along the rail line and adaptive reuse of a Superfund site.

Paoli is 18 miles northwest of Philadelphia and minutes from bustling Valley Forge and King of Prussia. The long-neglected Paoli Station is cramped and lacking in modern amenities, despite the fact that it is the most-used Regional Rail station beyond the three Center City stops. Serving about 3,000 patrons a day, the station serves as a focal point for various bus and van services to employment centers along the US 202 corridor. Parking deficiencies, access problems and a dangerous pedestrian crossing plague the train station. It is adjacent to a 30-acre Superfund site – a former SEPTA rail car maintenance yard (owned by Amtrak), which

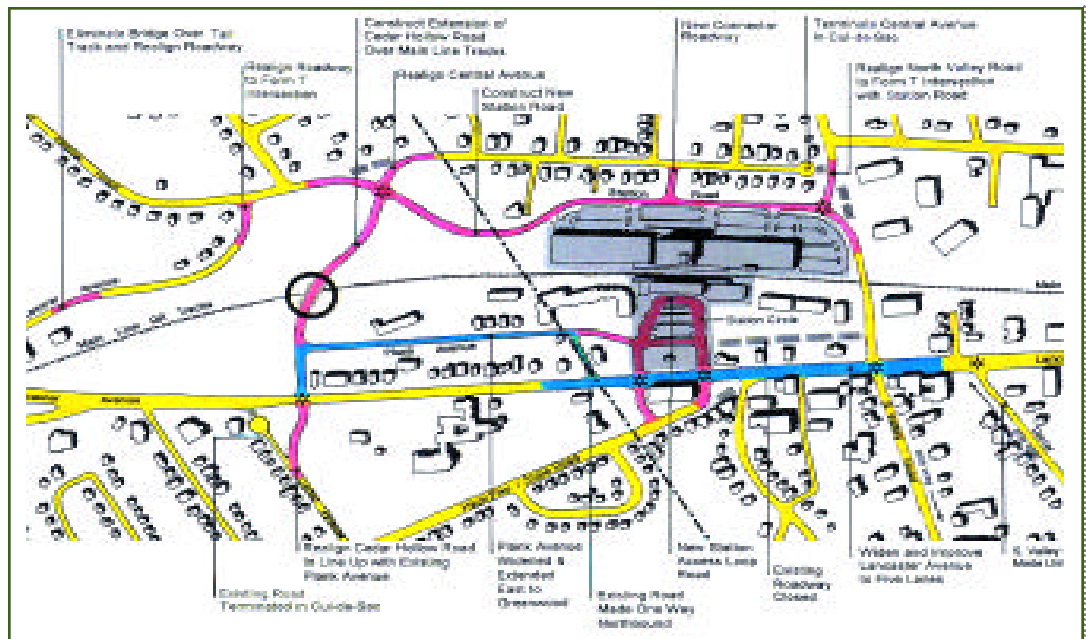
Paoli's Plans, continued from page 3)

is being cleaned up for reuse. Clean-up should be complete by 2003.

Tredyffrin Township, Willistown Township, Chester County, Amtrak (the major landowner), SEPTA and DVRPC came together in 1995 to conduct a study of the station area to plan for an intermodal transit facility. The Environmental Protection Agency, PA Department of Environmental Protection and PA Department of Transportation are also involved in planning efforts, since road improvements and remediation of the Superfund site are included in the overall station plan. Norman Day Associates, a planning and urban design firm based in Philadelphia, was commissioned to head a consultant team to do the study. According to Steve Aichele, the chair of the Paoli Transportation Center Task Force (an ad hoc committee with an interest in the project), "It's remarkable the way the goals of all involved parties have coalesced."

The proposed Paoli Transportation Center would be fully accessible by pedestrians, cars, taxis and vans. SEPTA buses and the R5 and Amtrak trains would serve the new station, which would be equipped with ticket offices, retail shops, a waiting area and expanded parking. The station area plan also includes a small park, improved roads, retail and commercial development and possibly residential development.

Both Willistown and Tredyffrin Townships have adopted the Paoli Community Master Plan as components of their comprehensive plans. Zoning amendments



A proposed master plan for the Paoli station area, including a multi-modal transportation center. (Plan courtesy of McCormick, Taylor & Associates, Inc.)

undertaken by Tredyffrin and Willistown, which formed a Joint Zoning Task Force, are expected to be completed in late 2002 or early 2003. Longer-term components of the project include highway and bridge improvements, construction of the new transportation center and TOD implementation, all planned for completion within the next 2 to 3 years.

One major hold-up is finding a suitable location for an auto dealership that occupies a key site for the proposed transportation

center. Until one is found, the project cannot proceed. It is also necessary to maintain the cooperation of Amtrak and to enlist the participation of private developers and area employers.

According to DVRPC's Rich Bickel, "Now that the planning process is moving along, what's really needed is for the two participating municipalities to form a management entity with a full-time person to oversee the details of project implementation." ■

Smart CommuteSM Mortgage Program

If you are house hunting for a home near a SEPTA bus or rail stop, you may qualify for more mortgage dollars than traditional mortgages have allowed. A new Fannie Mae product called The Smart CommuteSM Mortgage is based on the notion that places near bus and rail lines generally offer greater lifestyle efficiencies than traditional suburban, auto-dependent locations, resulting in reduced transportation costs (i.e., easy access to shops, restaurants, work, school and other amenities). Proximity to such everyday places allows residents to walk, bike or take public transportation rather than always driving.

DVRPC, with assistance from WRT, recently completed TOD plans for five stations along the proposed SVM. As part of the plan to promote TOD in southeastern Pennsylvania, DVRPC called on The Reinvestment Fund (TRF; www.TRFund.com) to coordinate the introduction of a location-based mortgage product. This fall,

TRF and Fannie Mae will partner with Citizens Bank to bring The Smart CommuteSM Mortgage to customers considering buying a home in selected, transit-friendly areas in the Philadelphia region. Any of these customers would qualify, regardless of income.

The Smart CommuteSM Mortgage, which has already been sold in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, allows qualified buyers an increase of \$200 to be factored into their monthly income, permitting them to get a larger loan.

On September 3rd, at 11:00 a.m. at the Norristown Transportation Center, Congressman Joe Hoeffel, Citizens Bank, SEPTA, DVRPC, TRF and Fannie Mae will announce the initiation of the Smart CommuteSM Mortgage. For more information about the program or the press briefing, contact Barry Seymour at DVRPC (215-238-2831). ■

Transit Revitalization Investment Districts Update

In the Spring/Summer 2001 issue of *Great Places With Transit*, pending legislation was described that would facilitate establishment of Transit Revitalization Investment Districts (TRIDs) to promote TOD throughout the Commonwealth. On March 27, 2002, State Representative Carol Rubley (Chester County) and 46 bipartisan cosponsors, including Rep. Stephen Stetler (York), introduced the TRID bill (House Bill 2464, Printer's Number 3530). It was referred to the House Transportation Committee, Chaired by Rep. Rick Geist (Altoona).

The TRID bill was drafted by DVRPC, the Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) and 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania. It defines a planning process and facilitates partnerships among counties, municipalities, transit authorities (including AMTRAK) and developers to implement TOD. It also authorizes value capture of tax revenues generated by new real estate development within the TRID that may be shared by the local government and transit agency for TRID area capital improvements or maintenance activities.

The House Transportation Committee held a hearing on August 19th, at which various speakers advocated TRID and responded to questions posed by state representatives. Some amendments were proposed and will be reviewed with Rep. Rubley.

To read the bill, visit the Pennsylvania General Assembly's electronic bill room at <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/BI/billroom.htm>. DVRPC, PEC and 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania appreciate the strong legislative support and hope that the bill will be enacted as soon as possible. ■

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TOD Planning Along New Jersey's PATCO Line

With local government officials taking the lead, plans for TOD and streetscape improvements are underway for several southern New Jersey communities along Haddon Avenue and the PATCO High-Speed Line.

In the spring of 2001, Collingswood and neighboring Haddon Township and Haddonfield received a Smart Growth grant from the State of New Jersey. The communities were awarded the funding to create conceptual streetscape improvements for Haddon Avenue, which traverses all three communities, and to create TOD Master Plans around the PATCO High-Speed Line stations in the three communities and the Ferry Avenue station in Camden.

Kise Straw & Kolodner (KSK), a Philadelphia-based urban design firm, was retained by the communities to lead the planning efforts and create a unified theme for the area while preserving the existing character of each community. According to KSK Associate/Senior Planner Joseph Clemens, "This will be a challenge, as there is a desire by key stakeholders to make Haddon Avenue more of a shopping and entertainment destination with a consistent flavor; however, each community already has certain unique design elements it wants to keep."

These communities present ideal opportunities for TOD: With the exception of Camden's Ferry Avenue, they already have established business districts that attract shoppers from the area and beyond; the PATCO High-Speed Line is well-used and well-maintained; and, there is real cooperation among the local governments and other partners. Currently, the PATCO stations in the Haddon Avenue corridor are cut off from the surrounding communities by a sea of parking. Some of the land currently used for parking, plus nearby under-utilized property, can be used for new mixed-use development.

The Ferry Avenue PATCO station serves a hospital, several office buildings, a cemetery and Woodlynne Borough – a stable



A section of Haddon Avenue in Collingswood, NJ. Proposed TOD and streetscape improvements would better connect the downtown to the PATCO High-Speed Line station.



The current PATCO High-Speed Line station in Collingswood is cut off from the downtown area by a sea of parking. (Photos courtesy of Kise Straw & Kolodner.)

low- to moderate-income community. KSK recommends retail and health care components of TOD there. Collingswood, Westmont and Haddonfield already contain a mix of residential, retail and office uses but could benefit from improvements and new development; namely, retail, office and residential uses in Collingswood and Westmont and residential rental properties, offices and commuter-oriented retail in Haddonfield.



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According to Mayor M. James Maley, "TOD at the PATCO stations offers the opportunity to increase the High-Speed Line ridership in a way that will benefit our towns. Right now the stations are used to capacity with no spillover benefit to the local businesses. We're going to make the train's commuters a part of our downtown."

Market research was completed in early 2002, and community input gathering is ongoing. Implementation, to include preparation of a TOD ordinance and proposed zoning amendments, is expected to be completed by late 2002. ■

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The DVRPC's TOD project is partially funded by a grant from the Federal Highway Administration's Transportation and Community and System Preservation Pilot Program.

DVRPC is an interstate, inter-county and inter-city agency that provides continuing, comprehensive and coordinated planning for the orderly growth and development of the Delaware Valley region. It serves the southeastern Pennsylvania counties of Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia and the southern New Jersey counties of Burlington, Camden, Gloucester and Mercer.

PEC is a statewide membership-based educational nonprofit organization dedicated to the enhancement of the environment in Pennsylvania, with a regional office in Philadelphia.

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