

DELAWARE VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Highlights of the Central New Jersey Transportation Forum Meeting of February 22, 2002

Attendees (62):

Name	Organization
Jacqueline Alberts	West Windsor Township
Chris Altomari	Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association
Rosemarie Anderson	Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC)
Nicholas Angarone	Monmouth County Planning
Brent Barnes	New Jersey Transit
William Beetle	New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT)
Peter Bilton	Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association
Dianne Brake	The Regional Planning Partnership, Inc. (RPP)
Sandra Brillhart	Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association
David Campbell	Princeton Packet
Peter A. Cantu	Keep Middlesex Moving, Inc., Plainsboro Township
Jon Carnegie	Rutgers Transportation Policy Institute
John Coscia	Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC)
Elizabeth Donahue	Sarnoff Corporation
Donna McDonough	Ridewise of Raritan Valley
Jon Edwards	Hopewell Township
Andras Fekete	New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT)
William Feldman	New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT)
George Fries	West Windsor Township
Michael Fuhrman	Michael Baker Corporation
Hamid Ghadimy	New Jersey Turpike
Denise Goren	Michael Baker Jr., Incorporated
Constance Grieff	Borough of Rocky Hill
William Guhl	Lawrence Township
Pam Hersh	Princeton University
Jim Hess	The Regional Planning Partnership, Inc. (RPP)
Jack Kanarek	New Jersey Transit
Jerry Keenen	New Jersey Alliance for Action
Peggy Killmer	Regional Citizens Committee, DVRPC
Katherine Kish	Princeton Area Chamber of Commerce
Michael LaPlace	Plainsboro Township
Donna Lewis	Mercer County Planning Board
Bradford Lyon	Hopewell Borough

Phylis Marchand	Princeton Township
Thomas Marchwinski	New Jersey Transit
Craig Marshall	South Brunswick Township Planning Board
Alison Miller	West Windsor Township
Diane Murphy-Atkins	Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC)
Joseph O'Neill	Princeton Borough
Jules Oroszvary	New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT)
Carmen Orta	Federal Transit Administration
David Parris	Penns Neck Communities
Tushar Patel	URS Corporation
Anita Perez	Ridewise of Raritan Valley
Jim Pivovar	New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT)
Stanley Platt	Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC)
Laine Rankin	New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT)
Pete Rayner	Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association
Marvin Reed	Princeton Borough
Sarah Roberts	Montgomery Township
Richard Rohyuk	Michael Baker Jr., Incorporated
Roger Sager	Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission
Walter Schmidlin	Sarnoff Corporation
James J. Schwarzwald	New Jersey Transit
Charles Scott	New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
Don Shanis	Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC)
K. Spells	Office of Senator Shirley Turner
Lee Solow	Princeton Regional Planning Board
Ron Tindall	North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA)
Paul Truban	New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT)
George Ververides	Middlesex County Planning
Louise Wilson	Montgomery Township

The meeting of the Central Jersey Transportation Forum took place February 22, 2002 at Sarnoff Corporation in Princeton, NJ. A revised and updated Action Plan was presented and discussed. The Forum was given an update of the activities of the organization and legislative committees, which provoked discussions. A proposal to develop and refine a bus rapid transit alternative scenario was discussed. The meeting concluded with brief reports from Forum participants.

1. Introduction of Attendees

John Coscia, Executive Director of DVRPC, welcomed guests and thanked Sarnoff for hosting the Forum meeting. Guests were asked to introduce themselves and say which organization they represented. Mr Coscia told everyone that it is important that they participate in the process.

2. Summary of the September Meeting's Highlights

Mr. Coscia asked for changes to the September meeting highlights. Chris Altomari of the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association requested that the highlights be amended to reflect what Wendy Benchley, Pam Mount and Marvin Reed referred to on pages 8 and 9 of the highlights that 40-50% of the people commuting up Route 1 come from Bucks County in Pennsylvania. Alison Miller also pointed out a typographical error on page 3 in Section 2 where it says "Jacqueline Miller" it should be "Jacqueline Alberts".

With those corrections the highlights were approved.

3. Action Plan

Don Shanis, Deputy Director of Transportation Planning, DVRPC, presented an updated Action Plan. He spoke about what we had learned. He said we had examined municipal master plans and found out there was more growth than was expected. The modeling showed that traffic congestion would increase considerably over the next 20 years; land-use action gives the biggest impact in helping to alleviate congestion in the region. He said that continued education is needed to help municipalities make the right choices to address transportation need and potential demand. Dr. Shanis went on to say for meaningful solution to the problem of congestion in the region a four-pronged approach had to be instituted. This approach included highway improvements, transit improvements, land-use reform and employing transportation demand management (TDM) strategies. In discussing "where do we want to go", Dr. Shanis talked about maintaining a balanced approach. This would include comprehensive planning to encourage coordination and integration of land use and transportation planning; provision of a mix of capacity additions to highways and operational improvements to existing roadways; addition of new types of transit services to improve connectivity and choice; encouragement of mixed use compact land use pattern in the region and a variety of TDM strategies to reduce single occupant vehicle (SOV) trips. To examine "how do we get there" he spoke of advancing highway projects included in the "Highway II modeling scenario; addressing Millstone River capacity needs; replacing and upgrading bridges crossing the Northeast Corridor line; and including context sensitive design in highway projects. To explore transit Dr. Shanis said that since the Forum's examination of light rail transit (LRT) shows it is not economically

feasible, the door is now open to examine bus rapid transit (BRT). He said to look at the possibilities of feeder bus service to the rail station. He said private sector should be brought more into the transit business, not only financially, but also in terms of the demand for these services. He said an Action Agenda for the Forum had been put together which the Forum could use as a guide or a “running tab” for its accomplishments when an agenda item is completed it can be crossed off the list and new items could be added. He mentioned the two committees established to look at the future direction of the Forum and to identify and advocate changes to the New Jersey’s land use legislation and policies. He said that NJDOT and DVRPC had earmarked additional funding to keep the Forum going for the next year and a half but this did not include money for special projects if the need arose. Included on the agenda was analysis of BRT which the Forum would be embarking on in the near future; focus on county and municipal needs and how they could be integrated regionally; continuation of efforts to advance all highway projects included in the “Highway II” model scenario; as an on-going process obtain funding for feeder bus service to the area train stations and determination of capital and operating costs needed to advance highway and transit improvements at the scenario level – this would afford the Forum better judgements about costs and benefits.

In the ensuing discussion, Katherine Kish of the Greater Princeton Chamber of Commerce said that looking at a balanced approach is a move in the right direction but the thinking is in the abstract. She explained that the township of Plainsboro is a good existing example of a balanced approach in planning. Their village center project coupled with intersection improvements has made enormous benefits to traffic congestion and reflects a balanced approach to land use and transportation planning.

Peter Cantu, Mayor of Plainsboro agreed to make a presentation to the Forum at a latter date about the village center project in the township.

Marvin Reed, Mayor of Princeton Borough, said work at the Forum has shown that whatever roadway improvements are considered, there is still the need to consider public transit, TDM, and land use solutions. The Penns Neck Area Environmental Impact Study (EIS) will not consider these solutions in its problem statement. He stated the need for legislative changes to empower towns to implement such solutions.

Pam Hersh, Princeton University, suggested that the Forum legislative agenda include this issue.

Mr. Coscia said that the Penns Neck Area EIS was a more narrowly defined study than is the Central Jersey Transportation Forum.

William Beetle, Director of Transportation Systems Planning Division, NJDOT, said

that there is a need to look at all the possibilities, the two studies are in different arenas but are not exclusive.

Nicholas Angarone, Monmouth County Planning Board said that the county was in the process of setting up feeder bus service to rail stations in the county. There would be two services to the Hazlet station and one to the Middletown station. He said the planning board would be happy to share the results with the Forum.

4. Committee Presentations

Dianne Brake, President of Regional Planning Partnership Inc., who is the chair of the Organization Committee gave the report. She began by stating that the committee had one meeting at which they came to a consensus quickly and the decisions made at that meeting are now being turned over to the Forum. Hopefully, a consensus can be reached by the larger group as quickly. She said the committee agreed that the Forum should continue but the focus should be now changed from examining the problems to finding solutions. Although there was a range of opinions, the committee agreed that the boundaries for the study area should remain the same except in as far as implementation required. The committee also recommended preparation of a final report of the analysis that the Forum has completed.

Chris Altomari said that she was disheartened that the Forum was ignoring 40-50% of people who use the Route 1 corridor; the impact of commuters from Bucks County, as well as the significance of travel to and from Trenton, New Brunswick, and other areas outside the existing study area.

William Beetle emphasized that the Forum technical work has and will continue to consider the impact of Bucks County, Trenton and New Brunswick commuters. He said the traffic model includes these trips.

Donna Lewis, Director, Mercer County Planning, stated the objective was not to solve all the transportation problems of the region but to maintain focus on the current study area.

Jon Edwards, Mayor of Hopewell Township, indicated concern that his previous comments regarding expanding the scope of the study area have not received adequate consideration. He is especially interested in including Trenton in the study area and exploring ways of encouraging new development in the city. He said that the region has a quest to bring in ratables but the infrastructure is not adequate. He suggested the Forum expand its boundaries to address some of these problems. Mr. Edwards is concerned that this project will look at certain issues and alternatives without considering their broader context.

Peter Cantu agreed with the need to consider broader issues, but he also stated his desire for this project to generate definite results. Mr. Cantu fears that expanding the study area would be an impediment to maintaining a manageable process.

Marvin Reed acknowledged concerns about the impact of traffic coming into this area from Trenton, but agreed that the Forum should focus on the existing study area and its problems, developing a solid base before considering expanding.

Chris Altomari agreed that there is the local problem, but 40% of the region's local problem comes from Bucks County and Bucks County Planning should be invited to sit at the Forum.

Jon Carnegie, Transportation Policy Institute at Rutgers, questioned the origins of the "40+%" statistic to which Ms Altomari referred.

Mr. Coscia said that the DVRPC technical staff could follow up on this issue.

Donna Lewis pointed out that the ongoing Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission study, of which Mercer and Bucks County Planning Departments are included on the technical task force, is currently looking at travel patterns and is considering adding a rail bridge across the river instead of adding more car capacity.

Ms. Altomari asked if the Forum could include Bucks County representatives in the study process.

Mr. Reed questioned the value of having Bucks County planners participate; the main problem that we need to address is the availability of affordable housing in this region. He said we need a better jobs-housing balance.

Peggy Killmer, DVRPC Regional Citizen Committee, noted that DVRPC provides a framework for including Bucks County in the process.

Mr. Coscia stated that there are a number of studies in progress and getting into inter-county as it relates to inter-state aspects are beyond our scope. But, he is open to the idea of inviting the Bucks County Planning director to participate in our meetings. He called for a show-of-hands in support of the organizational committee's recommendation to maintain the current study area, and most participants indicated their support.

William Beetle also proposed that the forum ask representatives of Trenton and New Brunswick to attend our meetings as guests.

Donna Lewis agreed and suggested that these persons could give presentations on land use and transportation issues in their cities. Ms. Lewis emphasized that an

important point to consider in urban development and redevelopment is whether the cities have the capacity and desire to accommodate new development. She said Trenton is near capacity, there are potential development areas, but they are currently brownfields.

Louise Wilson, Mayor, Montgomery Township asked that a concerted effort be made to bring the cities up to speed on what the Forum is doing.

The participants then engaged in some discussion about the prospects of having the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) play a more active role in this project.

William Beetle suggested that participants from within the NJTPA coverage area (including Somerset and Middlesex Counties) request NJTPA to support the Forum, not only with their presence, but also with funding.

John Coscia said that he has spoken with NJTPA's executive director, Joel Wiener, about this issue.

Peter Cantu asked that NJDOT also make the same request of NJTPA.

Mr. Beetle indicated that NJDOT could do this but noted that requests from the County Freeholders may carry more weight. To date, NJDOT, DVRPC and NJ Transit have been funding the effort. NJTPA, which has two of the three counties, has taken a back seat.

Louise Wilson, Mayor, Montgomery Township, suggested that NJDOT and local representatives coordinate their requests of NJTPA.

Mr. Coscia affirmed the need for NJTPA to be involved in this project, especially as it moves into implementation.

Pam Hersh, Director of Community and State Affairs, Princeton University noted that Princeton University has property within both MPO boundaries and asked if there was a public Forum to lobby the support of NJTPA to the process.

Ms. Wilson indicated the need to ensure that NJTPA adequately address the issues of the towns in the southern portion of its coverage area.

William Beetle stated that the Forum came out of the Millstone Bypass study. Therefore, NJDOT and DVRPC became natural partners. The Forum is now at a different juncture where the full support of NJTPA is needed as we move forward. If they are helping to fund the process rather than just showing up, it will get them more seriously involved.

Dianne Brake then presented a report on the work of the Forum Legislative Committee. She said the Committee was charged with framing a legislative agenda made up of bills or actions that the group would evaluate and recommend to the Forum as items to be advocated. She referred to her handout where she had outlined the committee's progress and told the group that the committee was looking for their input and feedback as to whether the committee should continue in this light and recommend strategies to proceed. Ms. Brake explained that the minutes do not list the items in priority order, but existing initiatives in these areas may help to further shape the forum's implementation agenda.

Pam Hersh noted that there is a distinction between legislative proposals and policy issues. She said tax reform could be considered a policy issue and its feasibility and timing should be considered.

Marvin Reed emphasized the need for specific details. He noted that some proposals, e.g., property tax reform, have been on the table for a long time with little progress. He said that too often Tax Reform is thought of as the ultimate solution and the others are left alone without much consideration. He suggested presenting the legislative agenda to the new state Smart Growth Policy Council.

William Beetle reported that NJDOT is planning to hire a consultant to review the state highway access management code, including its relation to the New Jersey State Plan. Mr. Beetle asked if it would be possible for some Forum participants to serve on the property tax reform sub-committee.

Mr. Reed said that some already are serving and they should be encouraged to be here. Working by themselves does not solve the problem. A series of transportation improvements is needed to make any noticeable change, and this should be part of that.

John Coscia suggested two new items for the legislative committee to consider - proper funding for NJ Transit and adequate funding for implementing the State Plan including the staffing of the Office of State Planning (OSP). He said the OSP is in a difficult situation and is critical to the Forum's work in land-use planning.

Ms. Brake suggested adding to the Action Plan, the funding for smart growth planning grants, now in danger because of budget cuts at the state level.

Donna Lewis stated the importance of preparing a final report documenting the first phase of work done by the Forum. This report should include broad legislative agenda items, a framework statement on what is needed to attempt to solve the problem and give the work some meaning.

Mr. Coscia said that DVRPC staff would prepare the final report.

Mr. Cantu urged quick work on the final report, and he agreed that the report should include conceptual legislative recommendations, not detailed items.

Mr. Coscia noted that state budget work will begin in March and decisions on NJ Transit and OSP would be made in spring. He suggested the forum show its support for these items.

Marvin Reed proposed adding “transportation user fees” to the legislative agenda. This issue would address items such as the motor fuel tax, transit fares, and relative funding for highways and public transit.

Pam Hersh stated that it is a basic fact that mass transit gets the short end in terms of funding and there is a need to get it into balance with highway funding.

Jon Carnegie informed the participants that timed growth legislation is under consideration. In addition, a new bill for Transportation Development Districts (TDD) has been drafted. The key proposed revisions to the existing TDD law include removing thresholds thus providing greater flexibility in locating TDDs, providing additional sources of funding allowing fees to be imposed on existing development, and authorizing revenues to be used for public transit operating expenses.

Tom Marchwinski, Director of Transportation Demand Modeling and Air Quality, NJ Transit, noted that some parts of the state, including Union County, are anticipating the possibility of using only TDD money to fund transit improvements.

5. Bus Rapid Transit

Don Shanis reviewed the Forum technical work, which found that a light rail transit (LRT) is not economically feasible in the study area, but a bus rapid transit (BRT) system may be viable. Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association (GMTMA) has initiated a BRT study for its service area. He said that DVRPC has proposed that the Forum sponsor a separate but related BRT study. A technical team including NJ Transit, NJDOT, GMTMA and DVRPC will conduct the analysis for this study. Dr. Shanis provided a presentation of the proposed BRT study. He noted the inherent difficulty in evaluating a BRT system because of its flexibility of route options, but a “simulation package” will be available for testing. One key task of the study will be a workshop similar to the charrette previously conducted for the land-use/transit modeling scenario. This workshop will be used to develop alignment concepts and gauge community support for a BRT system. Another key task will be to analyze a draft alignment and report the results. This analysis will seek to project the BRT ridership and document the benefits. An idea of how many trips would be diverted to transit from highway and the feasibility of proceeding to the next step would also be an outcome.

Tom Marchwinski explained that the new BRT analysis will build upon the previous technical work for the LRT; the previous conceptual alignment will serve as the basis to develop bus service at a sketch planning level to see if it is feasible to go further. The workshop will result in selecting one alignment for testing. The analysis will also consider supporting land uses.

Sandra Brillhart, GMTMA, noted that the TMA is working with the municipalities and other entities. The study will be looking at concepts that have potential in the corridor. A few alternatives will be chosen for evaluation. The TMA study team is just beginning to collect data. Ms. Brillhart sees good coordination between the two studies. She reiterated that it was a sketch and conceptual planning effort and would provide enough information to make a decision for more in-depth future study.

George Ververides, Director, Middlesex County Planning Board, asked that NJTPA be included on the technical committee for the new study, since Plainsboro and South Brunswick may be part of the conceptual service. He also suggested “meshing” the separate studies into one study with directions from one group and not two individual groups.

Don Shanis emphasized that DVRPC will coordinate work on the two studies.

Tom Marchwinski added that NJ TRANSIT will use the same analytical methods for both studies.

John Coscia acknowledged some mild concern about having two separate studies, but he is confident that both studies would be done with close coordination. He also pointed out that both studies are only pre-feasibility and will not involve major resources. He said it is helpful to do this to see how BRT fits into our process.

Pam Hersh said that she is interested in going beyond the pre-feasibility phase. Major employers in the region have problems moving people and hope that the TMA is an impetus. She indicated that hopefully there is no duplication in the studies and they can move beyond pre-feasibility and not get bogged down.

Peter Cantu also noted some concerns having two separate studies but also supported moving forward with preliminary analysis to gauge the potential of BRT. He pointed out that the Forum steering committee should have an input in the process.

In reply to Louise Wilson’s question if the new study will address the need for connecting transit service; Tom Marchwinski said that it would.

Jacqueline Alberts, West Windsor Township Council, stressed the need to link population and employment centers. She said, looking at alignments similar to LRT will have the same failures if connecting transit service is not available.

Mr. Coscia said that the final product of the BRT study will be a report written by consultants and presented to the Forum.

In answer to Louise Wilson's question if the report will also include the other linkages; Tom Marchwinski said it would incorporate as much as possible in the service plan.

After some discussion about dates and location, Mr. Coscia announced that the workshop would take place on March 25, 2002 at Sarnoff.

Don Shanis said that the Forum steering committee would meet beforehand to discuss preparations for the workshop.

Ronald Tindall, NJTPA, commended the DVRPC staff for their efforts in coordinating work on the Forum.

6. Dialogue

Forum participants were asked to give a short report on any major activity which had occurred since our previous Forum meeting.

Jon Edwards reported that Hopewell Township has initiated discussions with Bristol Myers Squibb and Janssen Pharmaceutical to prepare a comprehensive traffic management plan. This plan would include measures such as ridesharing, park and ride, and flex time. Mr. Edwards thanked other mayors for opposing the recent NJDOT proposal to lift the 102-in truck ban along certain roads in the region, noting the success of the ban in reducing truck traffic along Route 29 and Route 31. He is working to expand the ban to 96-in trucks and to increase the level of truck regulation enforcement by local police.

Andras Fekete, NJDOT, noted the watershed study of Raritan River Basin by the NJ Water Supply Authority addressing watershed problems may affect the work of the Forum. Permitting in the future will have to be consistent with the watershed plan.

7. Next Steps

Mr. Coscia said that the next CJTF meeting will be scheduled for late May or early June, based in part on the progress of the BRT study. He thanked the participants and adjourned the meeting.

