

**CENTRE COUNTY METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION (CCMPO)
TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**

**Wednesday, September 10, 2008
9:30 a.m.
College Township Building**

Minutes

Voting Members

Bill MacMath	Spring Township
Michele Barbin	Mountaintop Planning Region
Karen Michael	PennDOT District 2-0
Dave Modricker	Ferguson Township
Amy Story	State College Borough
Bob Jacobs	Centre County Planning and Community Development
Sue Hannegan	Centre County Planning and Community Development
Kent Baker	College Township
Karen Brown	Halfmoon Township
Frank Hampton	PennDOT Central Office
Hugh Mose	CATA
Doug Weikel	Benner Township

Non-Voting Members

Dallas Gallo	Bellefonte Borough
Teresa Davis	Penn State University
Matt Smoker	Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Others Present:

Tom Zilla	Centre Regional Planning Agency (CRPA)
Trish Meek	CRPA
Greg Kausch	CRPA
Mike Bloom	CCPCDO
Vickie Rusnak	PennDOT District 2-0
Dean Roberts	PennDOT Central Office
Barry Schoch	PA Turnpike Consultant Team
Deb Hoover	PA Turnpike Consultant Team
Mark Whitfield	State College Borough Public Works
Bert Kisner	Citizen
Mike Joseph	Centre Daily Times

1. Call to Order

Mr. Baker called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m.

2. Approval of Minutes

Mr. MacMath made a motion to approve the July 9, 2008 minutes. Ms. Story seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

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3. Citizens' Comments

There were no citizen comments.

4. Member Reports

Mr. Zilla introduced Frank Hampton from the PennDOT Central Office. Mr. Hampton will be taking Harold Nanovic's place on the Technical Committee. He also noted that Jim Simler, Philipsburg Borough Manager, will be representing the Moshannon Valley Planning Region on the Technical Committee. Mr. Simler has been appointed by both Rush Township and Philipsburg Borough. Bob Crum was a Technical Committee member, representing the Centre Regional Planning Commission (CRPC), and staff will be talking to the CRPC to see if they want to appoint a temporary representative. Historically, the Director of the Planning Agency has been appointed as the Technical Committee representative.

College Township – Mr. Baker reported that PennDOT recently finished the Branch Road and Pike Street overlay project. College Township has a drainage project in Lemont and will be working on that starting next week.

Centre Area Transportation Authority (CATA) – Mr. Mose said that Penn State classes have started, bringing more riders back. CATA is serving more riders this year than they ever have in the past. He noted that 53 buses were dispatched one morning, which is the highest number they have ever had on the street at one time. The new vanpool program is going strong. CATA started with 6 vanpools and they are now up to 11, with at least 7 more groups formed and waiting for vans. Mr. Mose said that they are also seeing a resurgence of interest in their natural gas program.

State College Borough – Ms. Story said the Water Authority project is coming to a close. There is a sewer line project and a street light project still to be done, so there will be a few more weeks of construction.

Spring Township – Mr. MacMath reported that Centre Hall Mountain is closed to traffic right now except for school buses and emergency vehicles. PennDOT will be holding a public meeting tonight at the Spring Township building to take public comment about going back to two lanes on this road over the mountain. There have been a series of crashes there and hopefully this will result in a safer road.

Benner Township – Mr. Weikel said that the sewer project is wrapping up and those roads will now be paved. There is a signal application into PennDOT right now for Route 150 between I-99 and Bellefonte. There will be another signal further down associated with the Amberleigh development.

Ferguson Township – Mr. Modricker said that the Township awarded a contract to install the traffic signal at Blue Course and Westerly Parkway. Also, Trans Associates will be doing a study to determine the need for the Old Gatesburg Road extension from Science Park Road to Blue Course Drive. On Whitehall Road from College Township to Tadpole Road, the Township has been authorized to move utility poles to one side, do some widening, and put bike lanes on both sides. That may coincide with the project that PennDOT has planned for Whitehall Road from College Avenue to Atherton Street.

Halfmoon Township – Ms. Brown said that Charlotte Street has been repaved. Glenn O. Hawbaker will be hauling material from the I-99 site, which will result in 125 trucks a day.

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Centre County – Mr. Jacobs noted that there have been discussions between the MPO staff and the County with Philipsburg and Rush Township to see if commuter bus service could be extended out to that area on a daily basis. He said he appreciated the staff effort.

Ms. Hannegan reported that the Planning Commission is working to develop a workshop for the Marcellus shale gas drilling, tentatively scheduled for mid-October. The topics will be road bonding, water and sewerage. She said there are six gas drilling locations at the present time.

Federal Highway Administration – Mr. Smoker said that at the end of July the Administration came out with their proposal for the replacement of SAFETEA-LU. They are not calling it a reauthorization, but a new transportation plan called Refocus, Reform, and Renew. This is on the FHWA web site. He also noted that it was announced last week that new projections show that the Highway Trust Fund is going to reach a deficit much earlier than anticipated, probably by the end of this month. This is due to the high gas prices over the summer. People are switching to transit, which results in less money coming into the trust fund. There are efforts and discussions going on in Washington to address this issue.

PennDOT District 2-0 – Ms. Michael reported that the District continues work on the bridge list. They are waiting for the TIP to be adopted, but they have also pulled a lot of bridges into this year in order to start them. There are 49 bridges in the District that have to be bid by June.

PennDOT Central Office – Mr. Roberts said that the 2009 Program was approved by the State Transportation Commission on August 8. Shortly thereafter, the statewide TYP was submitted to FTA and FHWA. PennDOT is awaiting their approval.

Mountaintop Region – Ms. Barbin noted an ongoing concern over the I-80 tolling project, bridge conditions and gas well drilling impacts.

Penn State University – Ms. Davis said that after many years, the University has agreed to a new Bike Plan, which opens much more of the campus to bicyclists. There is also online bicycle registration now. She noted that the Big Apple Express will operate again this year, running Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays. This New York City run is open to the entire community. A new student ride share program has also been instituted.

Bellefonte Borough – Mr. Gallo said the downtown streetscape project will be starting very soon and hopefully the Rite Aid project on Bishop Street will get underway this month.

5. I-80 Toll Conversion Project

Mr. Zilla said that the tolling of I-80 was authorized in 2007 when Act 44 was passed. In July, the Turnpike Commission consultant team met with staff to discuss some of the issues related to the Capital Improvement Program, potential toll locations, and to receive input. At staff's request, the consultants agreed to make a presentation to the MPO. Mr. Zilla introduced Barry Schoch and Doug Hoover from McCormick Taylor and Associates.

Mr. Schoch said that Act 44 was passed into law a year ago, with two methods of finance. One was the modernization of the Turnpike, where the Turnpike Commission asked to only raise enough bonds to fund their Capital Program. They were directed by the legislature to increase their rates and borrow against those future rates to provide PennDOT funding for mass transit and highway/bridge projects. They have made payments of about \$1 million through PennDOT thus far.

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Act 44 had two structures to it: one was the idea that the Turnpike Commission could provide more revenue to the state beyond what its needs are for the Turnpike and the second was the tolling of I-80, which would also pay for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of that road plus provide PennDOT with money for roads and bridges.

Referring to the Federal Trust Fund deficit, Mr. Schoch said that the federal government has been given strong incentives to reduce the reliance on the gas tax because of the energy policies and realities. Act 44 has no revenue tied to gas taxes.

The Turnpike Commission has been working on the tolling for about one year. McCormick Taylor and Associates (MTA) has been managing the studies. The modernization of the Turnpike is well underway and will continue. Mr. Schoch noted that the number of bridges being rehabilitated has increased due to the funding created by Act 44.

Referring to the toll system design, Mr. Schoch said the plan for I-80 is different from the Turnpike. This would be over-road tolling, with up to ten gantries placed along the length of I-80. Every 30-40 miles, a vehicle would pass through a gantry and pay a toll. A toll would not be charged if a vehicle gets on or off in between the gantries. The intent is that the regional users, or the long distance drivers, are going to pay for the maintenance and reconstruction of the facility. The local drivers are not. MTA studied both cash lanes and open road tolling. Open road tolling is the future of all tolling, being all-electronic and less expensive to build and operate. Travelers can purchase an EZ pass or high resolution cameras will record license plates and the owner will be billed. This is the way the Turnpike works today. Mr. Schoch stated that the rates would be the same as those charged on the Turnpike, which will be 8 cents per mile for a car and 30 cents per mile for an average truck in 2010. This will increase by three percent a year to address inflation and as a response to trucking companies that use the PA Turnpike. The last time the Turnpike raised its rates in the 1990's, they jumped by 40 percent. The trucking companies would rather see a steady increase every year so that they can prepare for it.

There are two incentive programs in the fee structure. One is for commercial vehicles, based on a volume discount. The other is for passenger cars enrolled in the EZ Pass program and addresses instances where people live on one side of the plaza and get off at the other. The Turnpike Commission has addressed this by saying that the first toll would not be charged, but would be charged at the second tolling gantry. Now a passenger vehicle would have to travel 60-70 miles before having to pay a toll. This increases the daily users who do not have to pay a toll to about 70 percent.

Mr. Schoch showed the location of where tolling stations are being considered. There are several options for each location and the Turnpike Commission is considering which of the options would have the least impact on diversions off of I-80. He showed an example of passenger vehicles getting on and off the interstate without having to pay a toll. If a car got on I-80 at Clarion, coming to State College, the DuBois plaza would be the first and a toll would not have to be paid. The first place a toll would be collected would be between Woodland and Kylertown.

Ms. Davis said that a lot of people from the university live in the Snow Shoe and Mountaintop area. Mr. Schoch said that if they are coming from Kylertown, they would probably come down I-80, then get on I-99/220. He said they would only hit one plaza in that case and would not have to pay a toll. He noted that anyone coming into State College from DuBois, Ridgway or Snow Shoe would not have to pay a toll. Only people coming from east of Route 15 or west of Clarion would hit two plazas and have to pay a toll.

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Ms. Hannegan asked if there was a time limit on the trip. Mr. Schoch said another trip starts after four hours. The idea is that in a work day, on the way in and the way back a vehicle would hit one plaza without a charge.

Mr. Weikel asked about the impact of Route 45 since there would be a toll coming from the Lewisburg area to State College. Mr. Schoch said that Routes 45 and 192 would be diversion routes for people on the east side of Route 15. McCormick Taylor will forecast what the final trip diversion will be after final plaza locations are determined and also assess whether improvements are needed on diversion routes. The Turnpike Commission would be responsible for those improvements.

Ms. Barbin asked if MTA was aware of the number of Amish buggies that travel along Routes 45 and 192 and Mr. Schoch said that they were aware of that.

Mr. Mose said that the arrangement for going through two plazas before paying a toll is something that could be changed in the future. He asked how those decisions would be made and how would the people be represented in that decision-making process. Mr. Schoch thought that from a revenue standpoint, that solution would be highly unlikely. The two-gantry system is designed to eliminate some of the diversion off of I-80, where revenue would not be realized anyway. The solution to a shortfall in revenue would be to look at the overall rates and that will be a reflection of what the traffic is. Mr. Schoch said that a decision like this would be made by the Turnpike Commission and would not require legislative action. However, they have never done a toll increase without consultation with the legislature.

Mr. Baker asked what the impact would be once a vehicle passes through the second toll and pays a fee. Mr. Schoch said that a decision has not been made about whether the first toll would be charged once a vehicle passes through the second gantry. Another option would be to charge a portion of that. He said that decision would be finalized this fall, after a Traffic and Revenue Study is completed. He noted that it was a relatively small number in revenue that is affected. What has to be balanced is whether charging the first toll will increase diversions, creating cost in upgrading those diversion routes.

Ms. Barbin asked what happens if a person passes through a gantry on their way to work and then later in the day passes through the same gantry on their way home. Mr. Schoch said this would count as one trip and a toll would not be charged.

Mr. Baker asked if there would be an incentive for obtaining an EZ pass. Mr. Schoch said the incentives are only for people with the EZ pass. He said the EZ pass only costs a couple of dollars to get and is funded through your credit card. It is an easier way to pay the tolls this way rather than getting a bill and writing a check every month.

Ms. Barbin asked if EZ passes from other states would work on I-80. Mr. Schoch said there were a few different types of pass systems, although many of them would still work. He said that having a standard pass that works all over the country is being worked on.

Ms. Story asked if weather conditions affected the ability to read the license plates. Mr. Schoch said there would be high resolution cameras in multiple locations, so this would not present a problem. He said there has not been a problem on the Turnpike in inclement weather conditions.

Mr. Schoch reported on specific tolling plaza options and diversion routes. In the DuBois area, three options are being considered. A location between DuBois and Penfield has less of diversion

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impact because other routes are indirect. In the "E" zone, the "E2" option between the Kylertown and Snow Shoe exits creates the least chance of diversion. Options are also being considered for the Bellefonte and Milton areas. Mr. Schoch said that they would report the final decisions back to the MPO once those are finalized.

Mr. Kisner said that if there is no toll paid for the first gantry, it would substantially decrease the divisions on to other roads. Mr. Schoch agreed, saying that diversions would decrease 50 to 80 percent. He said that long-distance truck diversions are different. They are not a factor of where the gantries are located, but just the fact that there is a toll. He said that Route 322 experiences about 300-400 trucks a day that are avoiding the Turnpike and using I-80. Once I-80 is tolled at the same rate as the Turnpike, those trucks will go back to the Turnpike because that is the shortest distance.

Mr. Schoch stated that the Turnpike rates are going to go up 25 percent in 2009. If I-80 is not tolled, the forecast is that the number of trucks diverting from the Turnpike onto Route 322 will go up to approximately 700 trucks per day because more trucks will use it to avoid the toll. Traffic will also increase on I-99 to access I-80 if the tolls can be avoided.

Mr. Zilla asked about the I-99/Route 22 corridor to Pittsburgh and if there has been any discussion of diversions there. Mr. Schoch said that Routes 22 and 422 were long-distance diversion routes. However, those diversions have delays associated with getting through the Pittsburgh area, so the impact is not as significant as the diversions on Route 322.

Mr. Schoch reviewed that the funding for Act 44 comes from the Turnpike and I-80. He said that the tolling of I-80 creates a dedicated funding source for that interstate. PennDOT has put an average of \$60-\$80 million a year into I-80 statewide. A Capital Plan was developed that looked at the needs of I-80 and it is estimated that \$140 million a year will need to be invested to keep I-80 in good condition. The Turnpike Commission will be responsible for resurfacing, rebuilding, and preservation. They will also focus on structurally deficient bridges along the interstate. The I-99 interchanges account for the largest single dollar value in the interchange category of work to be done. A handout was provided listing the projects and timelines.

Mr. Weikel asked if there was a reserve in the Capital Plan for local road improvements. Mr. Schoch said there was a statewide reserve for diversion routes. This does not show in the Capital Plan because those diversion routes are not identified yet.

Mr. Modricker asked if diversions as a result of the construction projects on I-80 would be considered. Mr. Schoch replied that the Turnpike Commission is going to widen the facility to maintain two lanes of traffic in each direction. This cannot be done on some of the bigger bridges, so they are looking at what diversion might occur for individual construction projects. The plan is to include the expense of widening in the project costs.

Mr. MacMath asked what guarantee there was that these projects would occur if everything goes according to plan. Mr. Schoch said the Capital Plan is just like the Twelve Year Plan in that it has been adopted and approved. He said the guarantee is the same as with the TIP. MTA was tasked with putting a Capital Plan together that prioritized projects and this was approved by the Turnpike Commission. The only thing that will not be finalized is the approval by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). There could be an adjustment based on what their requirements are. Any adjustments to the Capital Plan must be brought back to each MPO and RPO and they will be back to coordinate every year.

Mr. Schoch noted that \$2.5 billion is guaranteed for projects on I-80 and the only competition is other I-80 projects. He said that Act 44 also frees up \$80 million for PennDOT to use on other interstates in the commonwealth. Mr. Weikel asked if some of that \$80 million would be reapportioned to that area where it was originally intended. Mr. Schoch said it was just a statewide PennDOT pot for the interstate system.

Mr. Zilla said that one of the issues that came up in other areas was that, with the additional revenue generated by Act 44 going into the statewide pot that is used for spike projects, there was some push to try to have a portion of those spike funds rededicated for those planning partners in the I-80 corridor. This is in the early stages of discussion. Mr. Zilla said there is a financial workgroup that works with PennDOT, FHWA and FTA to set the funding formulas and work on how the money is allocated. He said that three of the eight members are in the I-80 corridor, so there is good representation on that workgroup.

Mr. Zilla said he hoped to put together the questions and responses from this meeting and give those to the Coordinating Committee at their meeting. Further comments should be passed on to Coordinating Committee members.

6. Centre County Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)

(Note: Item 6 was deferred until after discussion on Item #7)

Ms. Meek reviewed that the LRTP was updated in July, 2008. Staff is currently working on a schedule for the next major LRTP update, with the intent of having something in place by 2010. She said that supplemental planning funds were received to assist with the forecasting and background data.

The MPO should start discussing general concepts for the LRTP. Ms. Meek said some of the issues in the forefront included cost escalation on projects, fuel issues, what is happening with the trust fund and overall modes of travel. A list of questions was included with the agenda to be used for discussion. The first idea to think about is what some of the key objectives are for the future of transportation in Centre County.

Mr. Baker asked if there was anything in the current objectives that should carry forward. Mr. Zilla said that the list of objectives for the overall goal are good, but there were no performance evaluations tied to those or a way to assess how the projects and programs addressed them. He felt that some type of performance measure should be part of the next LRTP to show how progress is being made.

Mr. Modricker thought that public transportation should be addressed as a bigger issue than it is in the current LRTP. The cost of fuel is not going to go down much. Another issue is how to provide more service to the outlying areas that are feeding the workforce area.

Mr. Baker asked if land use planning was part of the current objectives. Ms. Meek said that the project ranking criteria includes community planning goals, but this was deemed as one of the weakest criterion. She said that an emphasis on land use could be listed as an objective. She said that the forecasting that was done when developing the current LRTP was a big part of generating where the trips were in the model.

Mr. Modricker referred to funding for park and ride and vanpools. He said this puts emphasis on the peak hour traffic. He thought less emphasis should be put on capacity adding projects and more should be put on the facilities already in place. Mr. Baker asked if focus should be put more on

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safety improvements as part of this, referring to the accidents on Route 322 between Boalsburg and Potters Mills.

Ms. Davis said that she receives a lot of calls about park and ride or vanpools. She also receives many calls about bicyclists and the lack of winter maintenance. She thought the connections throughout the Centre Region need to be emphasized so that people who want to bike can do so. Mr. Modricker noted that Ferguson Township will start winter maintenance on bike paths this year.

Ms. Davis said there is also a problem of regional modes and people who do not have vehicles, but need to get to some of the larger cities. She did not know if there was anything the MPO could do about this issue.

Mr. Mose thought that there is a sustained trend of declining automobile use, it changes the entire thought process. Alternatives and safety should be focused on versus increasing capacity. He thought the MPO needs to consider an entire paradigm shift when looking at the next LRTP.

Mr. Zilla said he would like to see the MPO start to establish goals and targets such as mitigating the single occupant vehicles by a certain percent, or increasing ridership in public transportation by a specific percent. He said this takes a lot of policy support and is a big shift in how the MPO is focusing on transportation.

Mr. Mose said the people who commute the furthest are the ones who are impacted the most by the high cost of gasoline. The people who travel the shortest distance have the greatest range of options. He said we need to think about what we want to do with our investments in alternatives to the single occupant automobile and refocus those dollars to help the people who have made decisions about where they live and work and are now dealing with prices for commuting being much higher than they ever imagined.

Mr. Baker said there are more people who are sharing rides and that should be encouraged by coming up with a program that encourages people to live closer to their work or closer to public transportation. Ms. Barbin said this gets into the affordable housing issue and there isn't a lot of that in the Centre Region.

Ms. Meek said the next question is what elements should constitute the County's transportation system in the next 20 to 40 years. Mr. MacMath said these are the same as what was discussed above, including intermodal connections and provisions for alternative modes.

The next question is about key land use and community development factors that should be considered when developing the new LRTP. Mr. Zilla said that one of these would be a way to coordinate land use patterns to help people who desire some alternative and have none. Ms. Hannegan said that the County planning staff is updating their Comprehensive Plan and will be looking at that. She said there is a lot of interest in developing economic opportunity in the smaller communities. People need to be able to work, find recreation and attend schools within their community without having to travel.

Mr. Mose said that a factor that needs to be considered is if the tolling of I-80 does go forward, how far out can that corridor extend? He thought there might be an opportunity to use funding dedicated for I-80 to include such things as the SCCCTS area. He wondered if this new approach to funding highways and bridges could be expanded to take in some of the big projects that may never get built.

Ms. Barbin said that some of the funding programs that are offered are not feasible for smaller municipalities that do not have full time staff. Mr. MacMath agreed, saying that even with adequate staff, there is not always the technical expertise to apply for those funds.

Ms. Meek said that comments would be forwarded to the Coordinating Committee for their discussion. Mr. Zilla said that staff has talked with the Coordinating Committee Chair about a special meeting in October if they want to continue the LRTP discussion. However, early in the month staff will be attending conferences and workshops, so a normal schedule for a Technical Committee meeting would not be able to take place. He said he would talk to Mr. Baker about the possibility of a meeting later in the month.

7. Federal Safe Routes to School (FSRTS) Program

Ms. Meek reviewed that this is a new program, with applications that were due on August 1. Projects can be 100 percent federally funded, but project sponsors are encouraged to provide a local match to make those federal funds go further. She said there is almost \$12.7 million available. Projects must be within two miles of a school that serves grades K through 8 and these are for infrastructure improvement only. School districts, individual schools, municipalities, county governments and MPOs are eligible to apply. There will be a Statewide Review Committee to review, rank and select the projects. The MPO is responsible for ranking and providing comments to the statewide review committee by October 1. A review process was approved by the MPO in July.

One local application was received for roundabouts in State College Borough that will serve the Easterly Parkway Elementary School. The funding requested is \$801,405 for two roundabouts. This is part of a larger project which will do improvements along Easterly Parkway that includes bike lanes. Ms. Meek showed a map with the location of the roundabouts.

The local Review Committee reviewed the application using the statewide criteria and transmitted some questions to the local sponsor, who provided a detailed response. The Committee felt that the way the application was set up, it did not give the Statewide Committee the answers they needed to effectively review the application. They felt that the answers would strengthen the application. Ms. Meek said the questions were general, including how many students walked to school, the commitment by the Borough, and documented safety issues.

Ms. Meek reported that the Review Committee's recommendation is to rank the State College Borough roundabout project as the number one Centre County project. In addition, when the application is submitted to the Statewide Review Committee, that supplemental project information be submitted to strengthen the application and to provide additional information.

Mr. Baker asked how the bike lanes and signals along Easterly Parkway would be funded. Mr. Whitfield said that the traffic signal upgrades would be part of the State College Borough's reconstruction project along the Parkway. Ms. Meek said there were additional municipal funds for signals and the on-street bike lanes.

Mr. Baker asked how big the roundabouts would be. Mr. Whitfield said they would be per ASHTO standards, which are 100 feet.

Mr. Weikel made a motion to recommend to the Coordinating Committee approval and submission of comments relative to the State College Borough FSRTS to the statewide review committee. Mr. MacMath seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

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8. Announcements

There were no announcements.

9. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Z. Shingler
Recording Secretary