

DRAFT
READING AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY
MINUTES OF THE COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD IN-PERSON AND
VIRTUALLY
SEPTEMBER 19, 2024

ATTENDANCE

COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Chris Kufro, PennDOT District Executive, Chair*
Michelle Adolini, PennDOT Central (V)
Commissioner Michael Rivera, County of Berks
Lisha Rowe, 1st Class Townships (Cumru Township)
Dante Santoni, Jr., Reading Regional Airport Authority
Arthur Lambert, 2nd Class Townships (Upper Bern Township)
Donna Reed, City of Reading
Brian Hoffa, Boroughs (Sinking Spring) (V)
Alan Piper, Berks County Planning Commission, MPO Secretary (Alternate)

*Tie-breaking vote only

(V) Attended Virtually

COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEMBERS NOT ATTENDING

Greg Downing, Executive Director, South Central Transit Authority

OTHERS

Brian Rasiul, PennDOT Design Team (V)
Kenana Zejcirovic, Federal Highway Administration (V)
Michael Donchez, PennDOT 5-0 (V)
Scott Vottero, PennDOT 5-0 (V)
Lawrence Peterson, PennDOT 5-0 (V)
Matthew Boyer, CommutePA (V)
Lauri Ahlskog, South Central Transit Authority (V)
Jennifer Ruth, PennDOT Central (V)
Nick Raio, PennDOT Central (V)
Jeff Rai, PennDOT Central (V)
Lynne Burns (V)
Tim Benner (V)
Earl Armitage (V)
Barbara Lopez (V)
Amanda Timochenko, Berks County Planning Commission
Michael Golembiewski, Berks County Planning Commission
Shanice Ellison, Berks County Planning Commission
David Hunter, Berks County Planning Commission
Ashley Showers, Berks County Planning Commission (V)
Devon Hain, Berks County Planning Commission
Matt McGough, Berks County Planning Commission (V)
Heather Berger, Berks County Information Systems (V)
Carl Long, Berks County Information Systems
Steve Henshaw, Reading Eagle

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Kufro called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM.

Mr. Piper stated that there will be no representation from South Central Transit Authority (SCTA) at the meeting today. Mr. Piper added that he was contacted prior to the meeting by committee member Mr. McKeon to let him know that he will be unable to attend. Mr. Piper will take his place since he is the alternate voting member in Mr. McKeon's absence. Mr. Piper stated that he will be serving in that capacity on the two votes encountered on today's agenda.

2. BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR

There was no business from the floor. Mr. Golembiewski stated that there was no public comment at this time.

3. REVIEW/APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM JULY 18, 2024, COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETING

Chairman Kufro asked if there were any questions or comments on the July 18, 2024, Coordinating Committee meeting minutes. There were no questions or comments.

MOTION: Ms. Reed made a motion to approve the July 18, 2024, Coordinating Committee meeting minutes. Ms. Rowe seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

4. RECOMMENDATION ON MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) – MPO BOUNDARIES AND COORDINATION OF TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING BETWEEN THE READING MPO AND LEHIGH VALLEY MPO AND DELEWARE VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (PHILDELPHIA) MPO

Mr. Golembiewski stated that in July the Coordinating Committee approved updated MPO boundaries and MOUs between RATS, the Lebanon County MPO, and the Lancaster County MPO. Mr. Golembiewski stated that at the time we had not received updated MOUs from the Lehigh Valley MPO (LVTS) and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC).

Mr. Golembiewski stated that since the July meeting we have received the signed MOUs from both LVTS and DVRPC. At the September 5, 2024 Technical Committee meeting, a recommendation was made to fully execute the MOUs with LVTS and DVRPC. Mr. Golembiewski stated we are looking for a vote to finalize execution of these MOUs.

MOTION: Mr. Rivera made the motion to accept the MOUs with LVTS and DVRPC. Mr. Santoni seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

5. PENNDOT REQUESTED AMENDMENTS/MODIFICATIONS TO FFY 2023-2026 TIP

Mr. Donchez gave an update on PennDOT's requested Amendments/Modifications to the FFY 2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) from July 3, 2024, to August 28, 2024.

- There are ten (10) Administrative Actions – the adjustments deal with shifting funds for addressing constructability reviews, value engineering studies, needed ROW acquisition, phase cost estimates, work orders, low bid amounts, accrued unbilled costs, advance costs to align with para projects and, increases due to inspections.
- There are two (2) Interstate Management Administrative Actions – the adjustments deal with swapping funds from state funds to federal funds for the I-176 Cold-in-Place project for a low bid cost increase and for the I-78 Midway/Shartlesville project increase due to inspection costs.
- There is one (1) Statewide Administrative Action – the adjustment to the Krick Lane Extension Multimodal Transportation Fund project - adding the construction phase to the agreement.
- There are no Amendments

All of the modifications presented in the chart do not adversely affect the project delivery schedules or air quality conformity.

6. UPDATE ON USDOT FEDERAL CERTIFICATION REVIEW – OCTOBER 30-31, 2024

Mr. Piper stated that every four years RATS must complete a Federal Certification Review of our planning processes. The way it occurs is the FHWA and FTA review all of the planning documents that we produce. Mr. Piper informed the committee that FHWA/FTA have already been supplied with these and they are currently under review (desk review). The in-person Federal Certification Review for RATS will take place on October 30 and 31st. Mr. Piper stated that they will review and comment on each of our planning activities and documents.

Mr. Piper stated that based on this review FHWA/FTA will make either commendations or recommendations or request corrective actions. Mr. Piper added that he does not foresee any adverse outcomes based on the federal certification review. Mr. Piper noted that on October 31st there will be an opportunity for the public and municipal officials to attend a public meeting with the federal review team and provide feedback on our work. Mr. Piper stated that agendas and meeting information will be forthcoming.

7. UPDATE ON EASTERN PA FREIGHT ALLIANCE FREIGHT STUDY

Mr. Piper explained that the draft document has been changed/reformatted and the draft is now formalized enough to distribute out to the committees. Mr. Piper stated that the

consultant for the project (WSP) has finalized the draft and each of the member transportation organizations (LVTS, NEPA, LEBCO MPO, Lackawanna Luzerne MPO, RATS) have it for their review. Mr. Piper stated that there is a confirmed virtual briefing to review the study on October 9th at 1:00PM. Mr. Piper stated he has sent out calendar holds for this briefing and links to all of the parts of the study to all members of the MPO committees.

Mr. Piper went on to describe how the Eastern PA Freight Alliance was originally formed for the study purposes. Mr. Piper described that one of the recommendations to come out of the plan is to formally create an alliance of the five MPOs so that there is continued coordination over time. Mr. Piper said to formalize the alliance we would be looking to enact an updated MOU between the five MPOs. This MOU would provide for continued cooperation, sharing of data, and planning of freight and freight movements in the region. The thought being that there is greater influence working together rather than individually.

Mr. Piper asked the committee to please review the documents prior to the October 9th meeting and if anyone has any comments or questions please contact him. After the meeting on the 9th we will be able to further discuss the documents. After which, it will come back to the MPO for formal adoption of the document and potentially the MOU. Mr. Piper stated that he was unsure if that was going to happen at the November 2024 meeting. This is dependent on schedules between the member MPOs. If we cannot adopt in November then we would be looking at January 2025 for adoption.

8. UPDATE ON FFY 2027-2050 LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Timochenko reminded everyone that at the last meeting nominations to add Donna Reed and Lisha Rowe to the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Steering Committee were made. Ms. Timochenko stated that the steering committee has been officially formed and the first meeting was held on August 19th. At that meeting the structure of RATS as well as what the LRTP is, was discussed. Also included in the discussion were the federal requirements for the LRTP, state and local regulations, and other plans and programs the LRTP must be consistent with. The anticipated timeline for development and the roles of the steering committee were also set forth.

Ms. Timochenko stated that the next step would be to have public outreach meetings so that the committee can start to develop goals and objectives. The meetings have been scheduled and an email blast will be going out shortly to inform of the upcoming meetings. Ms. Timochenko stated that there will be 5 in-person meetings in each of the County's 5 planning regions and one virtual meeting. All of the meetings, with the exception of the virtual meeting, are from 6PM-7PM. The virtual meeting will be held at 1PM via MS Teams. The following is the list of LRTP public outreach meetings:

- Southern Highlands Region, Tuesday October 1st at Robeson Township Municipal Building
- Tulpehocken Region, Wednesday October 2nd at Jefferson Township Municipal Building
- Metro Region, Thursday October 3rd at Muhlenberg Township Municipal Building

- Hawk Mountain Region, Thursday October 10th at Perry Township Municipal Building
- Oley Hills Region, Wednesday October 16th at Washington Township Municipal Building
- Countywide Virtual Meeting, Tuesday October 15th

Ms. Timochenko stated that registration is requested for attendance at all of the meetings. A survey was developed in the event that people are not able to attend any of the meetings. That way they can still submit recommendations and input on the goals and objectives and also submit any issues or needs. Ms. Timochenko also stated that we have a LRTP website on the BCPC webpage. Ms. Timochenko went on to show the audience/committee the website and how it is designed to be used. She stated that the LRTP website will be a place to view the timeline and plan development and follow progress.

The next meeting of the LRTP steering committee is scheduled for November 18th, 2024. Mr. Golembiewski added that the website will be open and available during the whole time the LRTP update is being developed. As information becomes available it will be posted on the website. It will be a continuously updated portal so the public can check on progress of the plan.

Additionally, Mr. Piper stated that the advertisement for the public meetings was in the September 19th Reading Eagle newspaper. He also stated that more information will be forthcoming. Mr. Piper expressed to the committee the importance of their forwarding information to anyone who may be interested and wants to provide input into the process.

9. PENNDOT MAJOR PROJECT UPDATE – US 422 WEST SHORE BYPASS RECONSTRUCTION -PHASE 1

Chairman Kufro introduced this agenda item by describing how important this project is for the region and how long it has been in design. Currently it is in final design and this presentation is to inform everyone of where we are at in the project and give everyone an update on the timeline, project purpose and what it will look like. Mr. Kufro stressed that this is just one of many meetings to come on the project. Mr. Piper stated that there will be a public officials meeting with all of the municipalities along the project corridor. The date of which has yet to be determined. Following that will be an online community forum regarding the project through the Berks Alliance. The community forum cannot be scheduled until we meet with public officials. Once a date for the public officials meeting is confirmed then we will schedule the community forum accordingly.

Chairman Kufro turned the presentation over the Mr. Earl Armitage from the PennDOT design team. Mr. Armitage stated that they have a short presentation that will review the project, schedule, and costs. After which he will entertain any questions from the committee. Mr. Armitage introduced Tim Benner as project consultant. Mr. Benner will proceed with the presentation.

Mr. Benner started the presentation by reminding everyone of the location of the project – SR 422 section 29m (Phase 1). Approximately 5.3 miles of full reconstruction on the West

Shore Bypass extending from PA 12 to the bridge just east of I-176. Mr. Benner went on to say that after the project is complete it will be a six-lane cross section from PA 12 to I-176.

Mr. Benner continued his presentation by showing multiple slides depicting the location of the project. He stated that the project will be broken into phases with the first one being from roughly the Buttonwood Street Bridge through both the Penn St / Penn Ave and Lancaster Avenue interchanges. In addition, Mr. Benner stated that also included in this phase will be the replacement of the bridges over Norfolk Southern Railroad and the Schuylkill River immediately west of the I-176 interchange. This part of the project is to alleviate the short acceleration lane between northbound I-176 and westbound US 422.

Mr. Benner then went on to identify the next phase (phase 2) of the project. Mr. Benner stated that this phase will include the portion of the West Shore Bypass from PA 12 to its connection to Phase 1 at the Buttonwood Street Bridge. It will also be widened to three lanes in each direction, the interchanges with PA 12 and North Wyomissing Boulevard will be modified and a new railroad bridge will replace the existing overhead structure between the two interchanges. It will also include widening the section east of the Lancaster Avenue interchange to I-176 and will include three additional bridge replacements over Brentwood Drive and the Schuylkill River (2) and additional upgrading of the I-176 interchange. Mr. Benner's presentation included visuals depicting the full project.

Mr. Benner's presentation went on to include details of the project. He started by reviewing the Penn St/ Penn Ave interchange. Mr. Benner stated that this part of the project will include a Divergent Diamond Interchange design, 2 traffic signals on Penn St/ Penn Ave with two (2) traffic signals on the ramps, pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, a new bridge over SR 422, a minor modification of the existing Penn Street Bridge over the Schuylkill River, and utility relocation. Mr. Benner stated that all traffic movements will be maintained during construction as they build them into their new configurations.

Mr. Benner then changed slides to an overall view of the project area. This slide better reflected all of the parts of the project that will be taking place. This slide provided more detail of the limits of the project so that the audience can see more clearly what is going on. Mr. Benner then moved onto the slide depicting the Lancaster Ave interchange reconfiguration/reconstruction. Mr. Benner stated that this part of the project includes constructing an offset interchange, new ramps to PA 10, one (1) traffic signal on Lancaster Avenue, bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, and utility relocations. The Bingaman St bridge will also be replaced to accommodate the new interchange. Along with that new bridges will be constructed to accommodate the Thun trail.

Mr. Benner stated that Phase 1 ends just east of the Lancaster Avenue interchange. The final part of Phase 1 will include the reconstruction of the bridge over the Schuylkill River and one over the Norfolk Southern RR tracks west of the I-176 interchange. Mr. Benner went on to state that there is a lot going on in this phase. In addition to the two main bridges (422 and Bingaman Street) there are 14 additional bridges and sixteen retaining walls in this project.

Mr. Benner then provided the anticipated schedule for the project. Mr. Benner stated that the environmental clearance was met in August of 2023. To date, three (3) core boring

contracts have been completed and 2 more are planned. Final design will begin in October 2024. There will be a noise specific public meeting in the Fall of 2025, ROW acquisition will begin in spring 2026, permitting will take place in Spring of 2026, and the date to open project bids will be around July 2027. Mr. Benner stated that Section PH1 will take about 6 years of construction.

Mr. Benner continued with a slide depicting costs associated with the project. Section PH1 (Phase 1) Construction \$362M, Utilities \$7.2M, ROW \$5.8M, CENG \$36.2M.

Section 29M (Phase 2) Construction \$182.8M, Utilities 3.7M, ROW \$1.4M, and CENG \$18.3M.

Mr. Kufro thanked Mr. Benner for his presentation and then opened the floor for any questions.

Ms. Reed inquired about the estimated construction time for Phase 2. Mr. Benner responded that he would estimate at least 4 additional years.

Mr. Kufro then asked Mr. Benner to describe why all of the bridges needs to be replaced as opposed to just widened. Mr. Benner stated that the main line 422 bridges are designed as twin-girder structures. That means that only two beams carry all of the traffic. This type of bridge cannot be widened and will need to be replaced as part of this project.

Mr. Kufro asked Mr. Benner about the project website 422westshorebypass.com and if all of the information from the presentation was available on it. Mr. Benner said it does, with exception of the cost estimates.

Mr. Piper reminded everyone that PennDOT has set aside statewide discretionary funding for the project but they also have a grant application in to the US DOT requesting \$216 million in additional funding for the project.

Ms. Reed asked a question about the bridges owned by Norfolk Southern and how the negotiations with NS were going. Mr. Benner went on to describe the parts of the project that deal with the NS bridges at the west end of the project. These are all in Phase 2.

Mr. Piper asked Mr. Benner to describe how the Lancaster Ave interchange is going to be redesigned to eliminate the left lane exit / entrance ramps. Mr. Benner explained this complex reconfiguration using the graphic from his presentation. He also noted that the configuration is impacted by the need to maintain traffic during reconstruction.

10. UPDATE ON TRAVEL DEMAND MODEL VALIDATION

Mr. Golembiewski prepared a presentation regarding the Travel demand model for the committee. Mr. Golembiewski stated that this is one of the tools we use for TIP and the LRTP development. Mr. Golembiewski wanted to give an update on it because it is not something we do very often. His presentation included background on what the model is, how it works, and how we use it. Mr. Golembiewski stated that the main reason for using a model is to make sure that transportation projects do not have adverse effects on air quality.

Mr. Golembiewski informed the committee of why we validate and our next steps in doing a new validation. Mr. Golembiewski stated that FHWA guidance calls for a validation every ten years. The last time of our validation was 2015. We are starting a new validation this month and it is anticipated to last about 6 months.

Mr. Golembiewski stated that the initial estimate for cost for a validation was between \$75,000 and \$85,000. Mr. Golembiewski stated that this cost will not be incurred by the County but rather PennDOT is paying for it out of their existing air quality contract with their consultant. Mr. Golembiewski thanked PennDOT for their support.

11. COMMUTEPA UPDATE

Mr. Boyer shared his August 2024 Monthly Activity Report detailing that CommutePA outreach staff continues to meet with local employers and organizations conducting meetings and on-site events. The outreach team has been in contact with Unique Snacks, Ashley Furniture, Berks Career Link, Penn State Berks, the Reading Housing Authority, Berks County Probation, Berks Technical Institute, and others.

Mr. Boyer stated that they just completed an outreach event called Clash of the CareerLinks, wrapping up car free month, and starting college month. Mr. Boyer stated that they have had 142 new members join the program. Creating 7,429 greener trips, reducing 62.6 tons of CO₂, reducing 150,039 miles traveled by vehicle, saved people \$100,526, and saved about 6,384 gallons of fuel.

Mr. Boyer stated that CommutePA is involved in the regional Congestion Management Process (CMP) with the Susquehanna Regional Transportation Partnership and described the reasons for the regional CMP and associated federal requirements.

12. REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF RATS LOGO CONCEPTS

Mr. Piper opened by stating that we have been discussing for some time creating a logo for RATS. Mr. Piper stated that basic concepts have been distributed to both the Tech and Coordinating committees at previous meetings. Mr. Piper went through all of the examples and showed some different iterations of logos for the committee to see.

Mr. Piper discussed all of the logo examples by displaying the original concept and then showing the new versions based on previous input received. Mr. Piper stated that what we are looking for today is some feedback on what has been presented. Members provided some feedback.

Mr. Kufro suggested that Mr. Piper send out the concepts in an email and request everyone to respond with their input within a certain amount of time. Mr. Piper stated we will continue to receive feedback and then go from there. The goal is to select a logo by the end of the year or early next year.

13. OTHER BUSINESS

- Ms. Reed went on to describe her visit to Reading UK and began detailing her visit to Reading Busses – Reading UK’s transit provider. Ms. Reed relayed about how impressive their transit system is and how there ridership continues to grow. Ms. Reed encouraged anyone who would be interested to visit to see the transit system for themselves either by visiting or just taking a look at the transit provider website. Ms. Reed stated that we could learn a lot from their system.
- Mr. Hunter provided an update on the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority and their upcoming in-person meeting to be held at Sacony Creek Brewing on October 28th. Mr. Hunter invited the committee to attend and provided a timeline for the event.

14. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Mr. Kufro made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Santoni seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 2:34 PM.

Date: _____

Alan D. Piper, MPO Secretary