

STEVEN GLICKMAN
Chair

CHRISTOPHER AMATO
Vice Chair

KEVIN SCHMIDT
Treasurer



LAMONT G. MCCLURE, JR.
Chair, Coordinating Committee

BRENDAN COTTER
Chair, Technical Committee

BECKY A. BRADLEY, AICP
Executive Director, LVPC
Secretary, LVTS



Federal, State, LVPC Partnership to Boost Climate Action

The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission has been focusing on climate action for more than a decade, but the regionwide effort now takes a giant step forward with new muscle from the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

That muscle comes in the form of a \$1 million grant, funded by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), for Climate Pollution Reduction. LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley appeared in Harrisburg earlier this month with DEP Acting Secretary Rich Negrin, EPA Region 3 Administrator Adam Ortiz and PENNVEST chairman Dr. Brian Regli.

Bradley said this is just the beginning.

“This really is a down payment to work on climate action for the foreseeable future,” Bradley said. “This provides us a monumental opportunity here to protect our land, air and water.”

It’s a downpayment because the \$1 million Climate Pollution Reduction Grant is the first funding from \$4.6 billion set aside in the IRA to mitigate the impacts of climate change – and that big step forward almost didn’t happen for the Lehigh Valley. That’s because the Climate Pollution Reduction grants targeted each state and the top 67 regions. The Lehigh Valley is actually the 69th largest region in the nation, but the LVPC lobbied the EPA to be part of the original pool, and despite initially being outside of the target, filed a letter to participate in the program. So, when Florida, Kentucky, South Dakota and Iowa failed to file letters to participate by the March 31 deadline, the Lehigh Valley moved into the program. The EPA has structured the program to span federal, state and local partners, so \$3 million went to Pennsylvania, and \$1 million each to the LVPC, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Commission.

“We are here today to celebrate Earth Month but also acknowledge the great partnerships we have to protect Pennsylvania’s clean air and pure water,” said Acting Secretary Negrin during a news conference April 14 in Harrisburg.

The LVPC must now file a work plan and budget for the project by May 31. The money will fund specific climate pollution reduction plans, and the LVPC has chosen to use its to reduce industrial-based carbon emissions, addressing the impacts of the region’s 30 million square feet of warehouse and logistics centers built over the past seven years – and the truck traffic they bring. The plan will take a look at reducing emissions throughout the industrial sector, through things like building design and innovation, and transportation policies. That plan must be done by March of 2024.

From there, the LVPC will embark on a regionwide climate action plan, likely funded by future EPA money not only to craft a plan, but pay to implement climate policies. That plan will likely be due in 2025.

“Climate change is not a problem that sprang up overnight and is surely not one that will be fixed in a day,” Ortiz said. “Addressing the climate crisis takes real plans, real dollars, real will and real work – and Pennsylvania has all of the above.”

And the LVPC certainly won’t be alone. Bethlehem and Easton already have climate actions plans, the mayors of the three cities are working together on new climate policies and many colleges and universities across the region are already implementing climate action policies.

“Our local governments, our education institutions and the healthcare sectors are all committed to fighting the many impacts of climate change,” Bradley said. “Residents across this great region have made it clear that they equate our quality of life to our environment. We all know what’s at stake here.”

The LVPC has been focused on environmental issues almost since its inception in 1961, but its climate action efforts have accelerated over the past 10 years. Its 2014 Climate + Energy Element provided an overview of climate change impacts and it set 10 goals that served as the foundation for all future plans by the LVPC, including FutureLV, the current regional plan. Other climate-centric plans developed in the last decade include Livable Landscapes plans for Lehigh and Northampton counties, Green Infrastructure Guidelines, a groundbreaking Return on Environment plan that estimated the economic benefits of a clean environment, the Lehigh Valley Hazard Mitigation Plan and the region's first-ever regional bicycle and pedestrian masterplan, Walk/RollLV: Active Transportation Plan.

The LVPC has already sent a letter of intent to apply for federal grants to advance:

- A Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANTA) Bus Rapid Transit Equity and Accessibility Project designed to provide fast, frequent, and comfortable transit service along a dedicated transit line or corridor.
- Equitable, Safe and Resilient Highway System Project that reduces the impacts along Interstate 78, Route 22 and Route 33 by re-envisioning the grass embankments, clover leaf interchanges, roadsides and median public rights-of-way green infrastructure corridors that use native grasses, trees and other plantings to reduce run-off and sedimentation, protecting water resources and endangered species. It will ultimately improve air quality, while enhancing pollination and improving the livability in historically disinvested communities.
- Regional Alternative Fuels Corridor and Connectivity Deployment Project designed to create a regional electric vehicle and alternative fueling infrastructure network that connects secondary and local corridors to the national system along Interstate 78.
- Lehigh Valley Watersheds Assessment to create a global (all 16 watersheds) Act 167/Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System Watershed Management Plan and best management practices stormwater management ordinance for the region to accomplish public health, safety and welfare goals, improve resiliency, protect water quality and supply and ensure our livability now and into the future.

“When you’re a region of our size, competing with the likes of the California Department of Transportation, you can’t assume this funding will come to you,” Bradley said. “You have to work for it. You have to go after it.”

