TRANSPORTATION PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING
Thursday, July 27th, 2023 at 5:30 pm
AGENDA


Roll Call

Staff Introductions

Courtesy of the Floor

Reports for July 2023:
1. INFORMATION ITEM: Lehigh Valley Transportation Study’s Long-Range Transportation Plan Update Status Report (BB, BH)
2. INFORMATION ITEM: PennDOT District 5-0 Highway Projects Status Report (BH)
3. INFORMATION ITEM: Monthly Traffic Count Report (BH)
4. INFORMATION ITEM: Update on Various Climate Initiatives (BB, CM)
5. INFORMATION ITEM: Walk/RollLV and Age-Friendly Communities Walk Audit Project Progress Update (CM)
6. INFORMATION ITEM: Monthly Status Reports:
   • Lehigh Valley Passenger Rail Analysis (BB)
   • Eastern Pennsylvania Freight Alliance Freight Infrastructure Plan (BB)

Next Transportation Committee Meeting:
August 24, 2023 at 5:30 pm
LEHIGH VALLEY TRANSPORTATION STUDY
HIGHWAY STATUS REPORT
MEETING JULY 19, 2023

US 22, Section WDN Widening (C-C. Frey)
Whitehall, South Whitehall, and Hanover Townships, and City of Bethlehem Lehigh County;
Hanover Township, Northampton County
MPMS 96384 – est let N/A
- Phase I ESAs for area west of the Lehigh River Bridge approved; Phase I ESA for east of the
Lehigh River Bridge to Airport Road still under review by CO
- Preliminary POA study comments returned on May 25, 2023
- Preliminary Noise Analysis is being revised to current project limit just west of Airport Road and
break-out project strategies discussed with CO and FHWA
- Due to anticipated ROW displacements in EJ area, a streamlined Environmental Assessment
(EA) will be required for NEPA clearance; due to time restrictions of EA, the EA will be initiated
once the Preliminary POA and Preliminary Noise Analysis are closer to approval
- Design team continuing work to identify EJ community leaders (Hispanic, Syrian, and Asian
populations) in preparation of public involvement process

SR 145, Section MLT 7th Street Multimodal Corridor (C-R. Prophet)
City of Allentown and Whitehall Township, Lehigh County
MPMS 99697 – est let April 1, 2027
- Final Design is being delayed aligning with funding, currently programmed in FFY 2026

SR 145, Section 13S Route 145 Safety Improvements (C-M. Fallon)
City of Allentown, Lehigh County
MPMS 109971 – est let August 24, 2023
- Final signal plans signed by City June 22, 2023
- General Counsel is in waiting period to give last 3 parcels deposit notices for ROW
- Utility clearance received June 20, 2023
- Phase III ESA approved May 8, 2023
- Sidewalk agreement executed April 5, 2023
- Proprietary Item approval received May 23, 2023

SR 309, Section 14M Betterment (C-M. Fallon)
North and South Whitehall Townships, Lehigh County
MPMS 102312 – est let May 9, 2024
- Utility field meetings scheduled June 27 and 28, 2023
- Right of Way plans signed February 28, 2023
- NPDES and JPA permits submitted to District May 8, 2023, and comments received June 6, 2023
- Coordination with Traffic Unit is ongoing
- Structure Foundation Report for Culvert Extension comments received February 6, 2023
- Railroad coordination ongoing
- CE reevaluation submitted to District June 25, 2023
- Retaining Wall TS&L and Structure Foundation Report recommendation acceptable by District
  on June 6, 2023
- Pavement Design resubmitted June 21, 2023

SR 309, Section 12M 309 & Tilghman Interchange (K. Cox)
North and South Whitehall Townships, Lehigh County
MPMS 96432 – est let April 11, 2024
- ROW acquisition ongoing
- Conditional Letter of Map Revision (CLOMR) approved, LOMR to be completed after
  construction
- Permit coordination ongoing
- Utility coordination ongoing, fifth utility meeting held June 1, 2023
- Final Noise report approved, working on setting up noise related public meeting
- Structure Foundation Reports - remainder of sign structures, comments received; all of the noise
  wall reports to be submitted
- Final Structure plans for bridges ongoing, sign structures and noise walls are pending
SR 378, Section 04M SR 378 Lighting (M. Patel)
City of Bethlehem, Lehigh County
MPMS 110398 – est let April 1, 2027
  • A virtual meeting was held to discuss existing and proposed lighting related to SR 378 on June 7, 2023
  • Working on Lighting agreement with City of Bethlehem

SR 1017, Section 02S Mauch Chunk Signal Improvements (C-R. Prophet)
South Whitehall Township, Lehigh County
MPMS 110174 – est let May 9, 2024
  • PMC Virtual Plans Display to take place in July 2023
  • Environmental documentation ongoing, approval pending virtual public meeting
  • Combined Safety Review and DFV submission is currently under review

SR 22, Section 15M SR 22/SR 191 Interchange Improvements (C-M. McGuire)
Bethlehem Township, Northampton County
MPMS 117606 – est. let April 1, 2030
  • Updating project mapping
  • Beginning environmental studies
  • Advancing traffic modeling for the design year

SR 191, Section 04S SR 191 Lower Nazareth Intersection Improvements (C-R. Himmelwright)
Lower Nazareth Township, Northampton County
MPMS 116936 – est. let March 12, 2026
  • Alternative Analysis Report accepted as noted June 27, 2023

SR 248, Section 05S Route 248 Realignment (C-M. McGuire)
Bath Borough, Northampton County
MPMS 86853 – est let March 14, 2024
  • Traffic Control and Signing and Pavement Marking Plans are under review
  • Utility companies are designing their facilities
  • Final Structure Plan are in for review
  • Right of Way acquisition is in progress
  • Permits are under review by DEP
  • ADA ramp plans are in for review
  • Bridge parapet design posted on project PATH for consulting parties’ review

SR 248, Section 06S Route 248 Signal Improvements (C-R. Prophet)
Lehigh Township, Northampton County
MPMS 110176 – est let July 13, 2023
  • Traffic Signal Plans, TCP and SPMP approved
  • PS&E package submitted and approved by District Contract Management
  • Project advertised for construction on June 21, 2023
  • Let date revised to July 13, 2023

SR 2018, Section 02S Freemansburg Ave (SR 2018) Safety Improvements (C-J. Besz)
Bethlehem Township, Northampton County
MPMS 117509 – est. let December 4, 2025
  • The Line, Grade and Typical Section Submission was made on May 8, 2023, and approved on June 2, 2023
  • Design team is working to set the APE and plan environmental studies
  • Planning and coordination for a Township Officials meeting is ongoing, the meeting will be held in mid to late July
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Lehigh Valley’s growth makes transportation upgrades necessary.

PHOTO: Becky Bradley, executive director of the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission speaks at the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce Transportation Forum. PHOTO/STACY WESCOE

Lehigh Valley’s growth makes transportation upgrades necessary

Stacy Wescoe//June 14, 2023

The Lehigh Valley’s population is growing and it’s growing rapidly.

That was the message from Becky Bradley, executive director of the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission.

She spoke Wednesday at the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce Transportation Forum at Mack Truck in Allentown.

With a Gross Domestic Product of $49 billion – more than some states – the Lehigh Valley is attracting people to the tune of about 4,000 new residents a year.

To keep that growth as a positive and not a negative thing, she said the region needs to be proactive in preparing for that growth.

“Change is occurring and it’s inevitable,” Bradley said.
She said traffic patterns and employment profiles are going to be significantly impacted as the region grows both in industry and population.

She said, for example, there are currently 96,000 people employed in the manufacturing and transportation industry, second only to the number of people employed by the health care sector.

And she said they are sectors that continue to grow.

She said the planning commission predicts that in the next six years the Lehigh Valley could have almost another 44 million square feet of industrial production in operation.

The increases in the manufacturing and transportation industries will have the largest impact on bridges and traffic.

And officials in the region are looking at the places where new industry and a larger population will impact the transportation infrastructure.

The Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANTA) is looking to bring efficiency to its routes to better get people from where they live to where they work.

The Lehigh Northampton Airport Authority (LNAA) is almost 90% finished with its $35 million airport improvements to Lehigh Valley International Airport, which includes a new terminal connector and added TSA lanes to speed the process of getting travelers to their destination.

The Lehigh Valley International Airport also added direct flights to Denver on June 14 and is still looking to attract airlines to serve cities such as Boston, Las Vegas, Orlando and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Passenger rail is another improvement to the region’s transportation infrastructure that is being investigated, but officials warn they’re very early in the process.

Bradley said the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation recently invested $300 thousand in a feasibility study to bring passenger rail service between the Lehigh Valley and the New York City/Newark area.

PennDOT will be studying what current infrastructure exists now and what kind of improvements will need to be made.

“This is before we can even get in line for rail development,” Bradley said. After all the work, she said it may still not come to fruition.

Of course, the Lehigh Valley’s roadways are still the heart of transportation in the region and Mike Rebert, PennDOT’s deputy secretary for highway administration, said the department is investing in a $90 million, multi-year transportation study to assess repair and expansion needs.

“We want to catch problems before they get bigger,” Rebert said, referring to the long repair job that will be needed after the recent I-95 bridge collapse in Philadelphia, which will have a major negative impact on traffic throughout the corridor.

He said it’s important to address the structural integrity of the state’s bridges and roadways before there’s a catastrophe.
He said with current supply chain issues, the already long process of repairing the bridge will take even longer. He noted that it will take at least two-and-a-half months to get the steel beams needed for the project, before work can begin.

Rebert said work is needed in the western part of the Lehigh Valley right now. He said that the Route 222 bypass has succeeded in bringing new business and people to that part of Lehigh and Berks counties, but that growth has now necessitated additional road work to handle the added traffic in the area.

He said there are several projects planned for the stretch of I-78 that goes through the Lehigh Valley including upgrading interchanges and widening the roadway where possible.

Another major undertaking, which could get underway in 2025 is the widening of the 378/Hill to Hill Bridge in Bethlehem to ease traffic into the city’s south side.

Bradley also pointed to the environmental impact of the region’s growth and care needs to be taken to protect the Lehigh Valley’s air and water quality.

She said the region’s electric vehicle infrastructure is something that is being worked on, with PennDOT saying it’s shooting to have EV stations available every 50 miles on the state’s highways.

But Bradley said everything must be on the table.

“We really have to look at the infrastructure system differently,” she said.
Talking Business with Becky Bradley: Lehigh Valley residents welcome transportation alternatives

A LANTA bus on the 103 route is seen Tuesday, March 7, 2023, at Eighth and St. John streets in Allentown. LANTA is proposing several route changes that would take effect in June, specifically to its EBS Blue and Green Lines, as well as routes 103, 603, 213, 218 and 322. (April Gamiz/The Morning Call)

By BECKY BRADLEY | Special to The Morning Call

PUBLISHED: July 7, 2023 at 9:00 a.m. | UPDATED: July 8, 2023 at 5:49 a.m.

We really like our cars here in the Lehigh Valley. I get it. We have an extensive road network that makes it easy to get from point A to point B. Because we don’t have the density of big cities like Philly or New York, parking isn’t especially expensive or inconvenient. And save a few minutes a day during rush hours along Route 22, we’re not plagued by the congestion you see on the Schuylkill Expressway or Interstate 95 in Connecticut.

But every fiber of this planner’s being believes that the future of the Lehigh Valley rests with a more diverse transportation network. It’s healthy, better for the environment and will help prevent congestion on our roads. Plus it gives everyone options to get around. And, nothing is more American than choice. Selections provide opportunities. And opportunity is freedom. We want it all, and more than that we need every option we can reasonably create to support our economy, our environment and that ever critical balance, especially as the region grows.
The results of our recent regionwide transportation survey tell me we’re heading in the right direction. We’re still very much in love with our cars, but I believe we’re moving the needle on getting people to consider other options. The survey is part of our update of this region’s 25-year Long-Range Transportation strategy, and the answers impact how the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study, state and federal government decide to invest $4.3 billion on road, bridge, trail, technology and community projects through 2050. That amount is a more than 70% increase over our projected allocation from
2019, largely because of an infusion of money from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission negotiating to get more money funneled into this region.

Of the more than 1,000 people who responded to the survey from 60 of this region's 62 municipalities, 88% said they've driven alone in their cars more than 25 times over the past year. That should surprise no one, and I confess, I'd be in that group, too. But another 27% said they've carpooled to a destination at least 12 times in the past year.

Top Videos - Cities Give Riders a Break With Free Public Transportation

Cities across the U.S. offer free public transportation.

That’s up from 10% in 2000. Perhaps even more encouraging is that 48% say they consider the region’s extensive network of more than 300 miles of multi-use trails part of the transportation system. No one even talked about that until 2018 when Northampton and Lehigh counties, the LVPC and LVTS began the process to merge the land use, environment, economic and transportation plans for the region into FutureLV. Roughly 29% said they’ve used a trail to get to a destination at least 12 times in the past year, and 44% said they’ve walked to a destination 12 or more times. Collectively we are making different choices now than even a few years ago and the infrastructure investment strategy should reflect this. But, that requires thinking very differently about alternative forms of transportation, whether it be using trails or public transportation or carpooling or simply walking.

It requires at least some people to believe that it’s perfectly reasonable for someone to hop on their bike in Bethlehem and ride the D&L Trail to their job in Allentown (more and more people do this now and our D&L partners have the trail data to prove it). Or to ride their bike a mile to the Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority bus stop, loading it on the bus’s bike rack – yes, all of LANTA’s 85 buses have bike racks – and take public transit to work or school.
Public transit is a perfect example. In the interest of full disclosure, I should mention I sit on the LANTA board. LANTA’s buses are clean, energy efficient and reliably on time. Users have access to a fantastic online app that tracks exactly where their bus is. But as LANTA Executive Director Owen O’Neil often says, most people consider it the option of last resort, rather than one to consider along with their car, bike, carpooling or feet as a way to get around. That’s largely because our lack of density makes it difficult for LANTA to make the scheduling convenient for a lot of people. But LANTA is working toward changing that as it builds its Enhanced Bus Service/Bus Rapid Transit program that features express service between some of the region’s most-used shopping and business centers. Last month (June 19), LANTA flipped the switch on its initial BRT routes through the core of the region, providing limited stop service that comes as often as every 15 minutes. All-in-all, if we start to take the bus, it will help make public transit a bigger part of our transportation future.

Perhaps the best indicator of changing priorities in our survey came in what was, literally and figuratively, the money question. When asked how to invest $100 for transportation people, on average, put $35 on roads and bridges, $24 to pedestrian and bicycle accessibility, $23 to infrastructure resilience and $18 to transit. It’s not surprising that the largest part of the money would go to roads and bridges, but committing nearly half the money to walking, rolling and resilience tells me people are thinking very differently than they did just a few years ago. Even $18 towards transit is encouraging.

Interestingly, when people ranked their priorities among eight different transportation issues, they scored freight seventh. Good traffic flow, road pavement, bridges and walking took the top spots. I believe that’s because people have accepted our place in this new online shopping economy, and they accept we’re all contributing to that every time we order from Amazon. In other words, their problem is not with freight, but rather its impact of bringing more trucks and warehouses which leads to more congestion and decreased air quality, among other things. We hear that as a key priority daily. But, then we all buy online, want it now and well that means more trucks and delivery vans. Hence, we create our fate, at least in part.

But that acceptance of our freight economy confirms what we already knew: Lehigh Valley residents are adaptable. It’s anecdotal, but from my travels in the community I see this shift happening. We are adapting. I don’t see us abandoning our cars anytime soon, but slowly people are beginning to consider those other options. If there was one benefit that came from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that usage of the trail and public parks skyrocketed – at the local, state and federal levels — and the spillover effect is that some of those people continue their ventures into the great outdoors.

There are so many factors helping to move this needle, whether it be the recent influx of federal money providing cash incentives, or the growing need to mitigate the impacts of climate change or the push by many to live healthier. As we work to map out this region’s transportation future, people are starting to realize that our task is not about moving cars and trucks. It’s about moving people safely and efficiently by expanding and connecting travel options.

*Becky Bradley is Executive Director of the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission.*