

# PLAN SLATE BELT



- Bangor • East Bangor • Lower Mount Bethel • Pen Argyl •
- Plainfield • Portland • Roseto • Upper Mount Bethel •
- Washington • Wind Gap •

## Infrastructure Discussion Notes

From the Plan Slate Belt discussion held on August 18, 2021. The discussion is intended to add detail to the draft goals outlined in the fall 2019 *Issues and Opportunities Report* and assist with policy and action development. Working Goals include:

1. A balance between growth and preservation.
2. A high regional quality of life.
3. Efficient local and regional governments.
4. A resilient transportation and infrastructure network.
5. A strong farming community.
6. A prepared student body and workforce.

**Question 1:** What are the biggest sewer and water infrastructure challenges, existing and future, in the Slate Belt?

- Sewer and water capacity is an issue, both existing and future. There is a greater need for more capacity with new development and increased population.
- The Bangor wastewater treatment plant has capacity issues, which affects other communities.
- Existing infrastructure is aging.
- Stormwater infrastructure is an issue in several of the Boroughs. Stormwater is infiltrating into the sewer system, which in one Borough is 50% terra cotta and 50% plastic. The cost to replace with plastic is \$9 million, not including laterals to homes that are also primarily terra cotta. The Borough has seen a 200% increase in stormwater to the wastewater treatment plant during wet weather events., resulting in the plant being over capacity.
- Sewer systems range from 12 years and over 60 years old. In the Slate Belt Replacing/upgrading these systems would be a huge expense. Most are living past their design life, which is generally around 50 years.
- Maintaining a skilled workforce is a problem. People are retiring, and it's difficult to hire for sewer plant jobs. People aren't interested in these types of jobs.
- Once a public system is built, it costs money to operate and maintain, plus it leads to denser development. Communities don't want public systems because they want to stay rural.
- Every once in a while, private companies ask about taking over public systems with problems. They want to make money, so rates would increase to customers by 30-50%.
- Rates will increase annually regardless of public/private ownership.

- Lehigh County Authority is a good example of a public system controlled by a county. They have taken over a number of package plants constructed years ago. Northampton County may be the only entity large enough to negotiate a system installation of such scale to offset the huge financial impacts. The larger the system, the lower the costs since costs would be spread out over a larger customer base.
- Wastewater treatment plant or sewer main problems impact streams such as the Little Bushkill Creek, which is impaired.

**Question 2:** What opportunities do you see to resolve these infrastructure challenges?

- Act 537 planning is an opportunity. Act 537, the PA Sewage Facilities Act, requires all municipalities to have a plan in place to address their existing and future sewage needs and problems, including on-lot systems. Municipalities are responsible for the proper operation and maintenance of all systems. The plan must address wastewater treatment capacity, allocation, collection and conveyance, including intermunicipal agreements.
- Comprehensive planning is an opportunity to coordinate sewer planning and land development planning.
- There are grants/loans available for failing systems, including from PennVEST.
- Public/private partnerships could be an opportunity, similar to PennDOT's P3 program on aging bridges. It is a county-wide initiative, with one large contract to attack the problems.

**Question 3:** Are there any infrastructure issues of concerns that occur during wet weather events, certain community events or certain seasons of the year?

- The infiltration of stormwater into sewer systems is a problem.
- The size of water lines is important for pressure, especially for fire-fighting purposes.
- The lack of fire hydrants is an issue.
- Wastewater treatment plants have to be able to handle industrial wastes, which have to be treated differently depending on the source.
- Water table levels are an issue. In some places, the water table has dropped significantly, with some people having to drill 350 feet to reach water, while other have been having issues with on-lot septic systems failing due to high water table levels, which has been worsening over the past 10-15 years.
- There are water quality issues due to failing on-lot septic systems. Small lots with on-lot system problems are an issue because the lots are not big enough for system replacement, considering setback requirements.
- A public system is astronomical in cost. All alternatives should be evaluated before going with a wastewater treatment plant.

**Question 4:** What are the biggest transportation infrastructure challenges and opportunities in the Slate Belt?

- Route 512 is a fixed LANTA route. Paratransit service is available for medical and special conditions. Flex service is a door-to-door service in the region that started five years ago.
- A big obstacle is connections for pedestrians to access transit, the gaps in pedestrian sidewalk and train infrastructure.
- An opportunity is a connection via trails between East Bangor and Bangor. People walk on the road to get around, and it's a tragedy waiting to happen.
- There is a need to envision more multimodal aspects in all development and how to fill in the gaps.
- LANTA reviews ridership needs three times per year, and they just completed a comprehensive review, which is done every five years. Some changes were made in the Slate Belt.
- An obstacle for PennDOT is funding. The pandemic affected the gas tax revenue for the state. Traffic volume is back to 95% of where the region was pre-pandemic. Projects have been cut because revenue is down. They are trying to find ways to fund infrastructure, such as bridge/corridor tolling, mileage user fees. These won't impact this area any time soon though.
- There is a need to balance development with maintaining community character.
- Opportunities include a strategy to coordinate land development and transportation needs rather than reacting to development as it is occurring.
- Developing a comprehensive study on freight for the entire region, looking at freight flow issues, is an opportunity.
- Working together on these issues is the biggest opportunity.
- With the warehouse boom, bridge weights are an issue, interchanges are deficient and need to be addressed, however, the studies won't help unless there is funding to resolve the problems.
- Mapping companies need to direct truck traffic away from small streets. Mapping out some basic maps can get the conversation started.
- A lot of gaps need to be built. Opportunities should be prioritized for when grants become available.
  - Slate Belt Heritage Center is working on a plan for trail connections.
- The biggest transportation problem is developers taking any property zoned for industrial without looking at the logistics (roads, bridges). They think someone else will take care of it. Pen Argyl/Plainfield/Wind Gap area is a problem area.
- How do we triage the problems when we don't have these studies done?
  - Over the last five years, 50 million square feet of warehouse have been proposed. Upper Macungie is doing the best job possible in slowing things down as much as possible. These large, multi-national corporations can help offset the costs of road improvements, within limits. They also have a transportation infrastructure plan that requires an impact fee. The Township brings everyone to the table, including PennDOT. The key is negotiation.

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- LANTA has a land use planner that reviews every plan.
- Developers are not stepping up to the plate. No one will come to the table to come up with solutions.
  - They will if they want to be successful.

**Additional Comments Received:**

1. What are the biggest infrastructure challenges, existing and future, in the Slate Belt?
  - There has been no traffic planning on the northern end of the county.
2. Are there any infrastructure issues of concerns that occur during:
  - wet weather events?
    - We need more cooperative agreements with PennDOT and municipalities.
  - certain community events or seasons of the year?
    - We have poor traffic planning. Emergency routing is limited in the northern end of the county.
3. What opportunities do you see to resolve these infrastructure challenges?
  - We need to step up to the plate and get some major state road projects going in the northern end of the county.

Anything missed? Think of something after the roundtable discussion? Please email Sue Rockwell, srockwell@lvpc.org, with your thoughts.