

Spring  
2007



LACKAWANNA/LUZERNE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

# CONNECTIONS

## Steve Shimko, DE, and Bob Doble, ADE for Design, Retiring in June

District 4-0 will lose two veteran employees when District Executive (DE) Steve Shimko, and Bob Doble, Assistant District Engineer (ADE) for Design, retire in June.

Both have been employed by PennDOT for over thirty years in a variety of managerial positions in several departments at the District, and both have worked with the MPO. Bob Doble started working with the MPO in 1997 when he became ADE for Design, and Steve, when he became District Executive in 2004.

The following comments were submitted by some of the MPO members who wanted to offer some tributes to Bob and Steve:

**George Parker:** "Steve is a golfer and Bob is a fervent jogger...both should have good hobbies to continue to pursue in their retirement. Both were dedicated employees of the Department. They weren't always in the notable positions they now hold. They both had difficult assignments at times during their careers, but they persevered and carried out those assignments through good times and bad. Also, both of them served in positions in all three divisions (Design, Maintenance, and Construction) during their careers. District 4-0 is losing a lot of knowledge, savvy, and skill as they move on to a more relaxing lifestyle."

**Donna Palermo:** "The Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce congratulates both Steve and Bob on their retirements. Both have provided long-standing assistance to the Greater Hazleton Area and have been very active with our Chamber's Transportation Task Force. They have been

instrumental in many road improvement projects in our area, as well as completely built roads. Their professionalism and expertise will surely be missed by our Chamber. We wish them the best of luck in their future endeavors."

**Judy Rimple:** "Chuck Mattei built a small portion of the Back Mountain Trail at Harris Hill Road to assure the future of the trail. After Chuck died, Bob Doble was instrumental in providing support for the second phase of the Back Mountain Trail. There have always been issues about ownership and following procedures. Since Anthracite was essentially forging the future of rails/trails, Bob Doble listened to concerns and found solutions. He is an outstanding listener, a steady fact-finder, and virtually enabled the Back Mountain Trail to move!!"

**Ted Patton:** "Focus 81 would not have existed without the invaluable assistance of Bob and Steve over the past several years. We wish them the best in their retirements."

**Harry Lindsay:** "The knowledge and experience these two gentlemen have will be a tre-

mendous loss to PaDOT and the residents of Northeastern Pennsylvania. I only hope they are both willing to come in and work on weekends during the transition. Steve, get another dozen golf balls and take a lesson to improve your game. Bob, time to get a new pair of jogging shoes! Best of luck in your retirement!"

**Adrian Merolli & Nancy Snee:** "We're still not accustomed to the fact that Steve and Bob won't be there after June. After years of relative stability on the MPO, the last few years have seen some major changes, and Bob and Steve will be sorely missed. How do you replace 70+ years of experience? We will miss your expertise, your presence, and your availability to us. It's been a pleasure working with you!"

**Jim Finan:** "I've known Bob Doble since George Washington Elementary School in Dunmore. Let's just say in the 50's! Bob introduced us to spelling our names backwards - he's

*(continued on page 2)*



Steve Shimko, DE, and Bob Doble, ADE for Design

## Update on Passenger Rail Project

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A meeting of the Lackawanna Cut-Off Bi-State Executive Committee was held on January 3, 2007 at the Edwards & Kelsey Office in New Jersey. There were two purposes for the meeting - to introduce Vincent Truncellito, the new project manager for New Jersey Transit, and to outline the requirements and procedures for the series of public meetings that were held in January.

The first public meeting was held at the Hilton Hotel & Conference Center in Scranton on January 17, 2007. The consultant team conducted two formal presentations at different times of the day at which the public could comment as part of the formal testimony on the project. There were information boards set up in the room and a stenographer was present to record comments by those in attendance. All the comments were presented to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) as part of the review process. This format was repeated at the Stroudsburg and the two New Jersey meetings.

There were 577 attendees at the four public meetings who generated 281 comments on the plan. Over 92% of the comments favored resumption of passenger rail service between Scranton and New Jersey.

The major concern expressed was related to noise in developed areas. The consultants have developed a number of alternatives to help mitigate this concern.

Among the many reasons for restoring passenger service and extending the line to Scranton is the availability of a site in Scranton that was a rail yard. Normally these yards are located at the end of the line to facilitate ease of maintenance. If the line ended in the Poconos, a site for the yard would be needed there, and topography and environmental concerns would be an issue. Due to the existence of an existing rail yard in Scranton, ending the line there makes more sense.

There is a major economic benefit to having the rail yard in Scranton. The yard will require approximately 50 positions in the railroad trades and a payroll of nearly a quarter of a million dollars will be generated.

A meeting of all the resource agencies in the rail corridor was held at the New Jersey Headquarters in Newark, at which time the agencies were given the opportunity to get a final review of documents, and express any concerns with the project. No fatal comments were received.

The consultants are therefore proceeding with preparation of the final documents for submission to the FTA in the spring. The hope is that the FTA will issue a Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI) by early summer. If that happens, preliminary engineering could be completed by the spring of 2008, and construction could begin soon after.

Submitted by Steve Pitoniak, Senior Planner, LCRPC

## Update on Regional Operations Plan

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In November 2006, the District 4-0 Regional Operations Forums began with the purpose of developing a Regional Operations Plan (ROP) for the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO. This plan will prepare the way for operational activity and interaction between the PennDOT District office and the various planning partners in the region.

The ROP is an extension of the Regional Intelligent Transportation Systems Architecture which, in turn, was an outgrowth of the Transportation Systems Operations Plan (TSOP) at the state level. The ROP is the local version of the TSOP which is being developed to reflect the conditions and transportation priorities in the MPO area.

After the initial forum was held, a series of workshops were held to explore how the region can adapt the statewide directions in the TSOP to the region's needs. The TSOP covers a range of statewide initiatives intended to enhance operational efficiencies, improve public safety and security, and reduce traveler delay due to accidents, construction, or event-generated traffic congestion.

At the workshop held in March of this year, the results of the January workshop were synthesized by the consultants and displayed in a format for development by the committee, and other invited stakeholders, into a framework for the final document. The discussions centered on two main topics - emergency response and public information. The group de-

ecided to form sub-committees focused on these two areas.

The sub-committees met and re-worked the 19 TSOP priorities into 12 regional priorities, and then further clarified which of the regional priorities were related to the two main topics.

In April, the two sub-committees met to determine how these priorities could be developed into an Operations Project List, and how to prioritize the list and begin to implement the projects through inclusion on the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The results of the prioritization will be released at an upcoming meeting and will be incorporated into the ROP.

Submitted by Steve Pitoniak, Senior Planner, LCRPC

## Shimko-Doble *(continued from page 1)*

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Elbod Trebor. I think we signed our names that way for a day or two before the teacher caught on. I've known Steve since 1990 when we became neighbors in Jefferson Heights. His 2 boys are the same age as mine. I'd just like them to enjoy their time - I'm sure they'll be around somewhere -

PennDOT guys don't go away, they just become consultants!"

**Karl Pfeiffenberger, Austin Burke and Andy Skip:** "Northeastern Pennsylvania is ever so grateful to have enjoyed the leadership and community service of both Steve Shimko and Bob Doble for their unselfish and unconditional com-

mitment to their job and community. Their partnership with the Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce has led to the creation of thousands of jobs for Northeastern Pennsylvania. We wish them well in their retirement years and thank them for their friendship!"

## Transit Plan To Be Adopted by the MPO

The MPO has been charged with developing a public transit/human services Transportation Plan by PennDOT Central Office. This plan will establish, unless already in existence, a public transit/human services Transportation Coordinating Committee which will include participation of representatives of public, private, and non-profit transportation and human service providers, and members of the public who use the para-transit services.

The TPO will review all Section 5310 applications to provide an assessment of local transportation needs for individuals with disabilities and senior citizens.

The goal of the Section 5310 program is to improve mobility for senior citizens and persons with disabilities throughout the country. The program provides financial assistance to meet the special needs of seniors and those with disabilities in urban, small urban and rural areas.

The program requires coordination of federally-assisted programs and services in order to make the most efficient use of federal resources. The program also requires maximum feasible coordination of

transportation services, assisted by the Section 5310 Program, with transportation services assisted by other federal funding sources.

Section 5310 applications are submitted to PennDOT Central Office (CO) by all para-transit providers for new or replacement vans as well as other equipment. In the recent past, CO has evaluated the applications and decided which requests would be funded. As part of this new process, the MPO was given the task of forming the Transportation Planning Organization and using the committee to help evaluate and rank the projects.

Some of the factors by which the applications were evaluated included: year/mileage of vehicle, whether the request was for a replacement or new vehicle for service expansion, whether the provider cooperates with other para-transit providers in the area, in particular, the county transportation departments.

The TPO committee consisted of the Transportation Advisory Committee for the MPO, representatives from the three transit operators in the area, the counties' transportation departments, a representative from a seniors' center and a user of the para-transit system.

The MPO received seven applications this

year, three from Luzerne County and four from Lackawanna County. Copies of the applications were sent to the TPO to review before the meeting on May 2. The committee engaged in a healthy discussion before prioritizing the applications.

The results of that process are as follows:

### **Luzerne County:**

#1 - Luzerne/Wyoming County Transportation Department; full funding

#2 - Volunteers of America; full funding

#3 - Allied Services; full funding

### **Lackawanna County:**

#1 - Lackawanna County Transportation Department; full funding

#2 - Telespond Seniors; full funding

#3 - Keyser Transport; full funding

#4 - St. Joseph's Center; full funding.

These results, and the TPO plan, will be submitted to Central Office following approval of the recommendations at the June MPO meetings.

## Hazleton Recognized for "Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful" Work

2007 marked the 25th consecutive year in which the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce has played a major role in the "Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful/Great PA Clean-Up" campaign in the Greater Hazleton area. For their efforts, Steve Shimko, DE, District 4-0, presented a certificate to the Chamber in recognition of 25 years of service to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's "Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful Program" at the Chamber's April Red

Carpet Breakfast Program. Mr. Shimko praised the Chamber for their assistance and dedication in helping rid the area of litter and debris, and coordinating thousands of volunteers, making the Greater Hazleton Area the largest volunteer group in Northeastern Pennsylvania, and perhaps the largest group in the state.

Submitted by Donna Palermo, President, Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce



From l. to r.: Leann Scatton, Steve Shimko, Donna Palermo, and Gary Danish

## Draft Interim Long Range Plan to be Approved

The Luzerne County Planning Commission, with assistance from the Lackawanna County Regional Planning Commission and District 4-0, has prepared a Draft Interim Long Range Transportation Plan for the MPO region. This plan serves as the three-year update of the previous Long Range Plan which was

adopted in 2004. It will serve as the official Long Range Plan until the Bi-County Comprehensive/Long Range Transportation Plan is developed by the consultant team of McCormick Taylor.

The Plan is currently out for public comment and will be reviewed and recommended for approval by the MPO Techni-

cal Committee on June 13. The Coordinating Committee will meet on June 26 to review and approve the Plan.

The Technical Committee meeting will also serve as the Public Hearing where the public will have the opportunity to make comments. For an electronic copy of the plan, contact Nancy Snee. (See page 4)



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## Current Transportation Funding Levels Falling Short

Did you know that over the past four years PennDOT has paved 19,000 miles of roads? That is almost half of the 42,000 miles of state-owned roads, yet much more has to be done to repair not only our highways, but also thousands of bridges that are reaching their useful design life.

In 2006, PennDOT spent \$558 million on bridge repairs versus \$259 million in 2002. Seems like good progress until you analyze the needs further, and the real dimension of the funding issue begins to come into focus when \$8 billion is the amount of funding necessary just to repair the 5,600 critical need bridges.

Why are we now facing a funding crisis we never could have imagined even five years ago? The global economy is competing for commodities such as cement, steel, and oil, the basic materials we use to construct highways and bridges. Over the last two years, construction costs have risen 35%. Imagine your cost of living increasing that much while your income remained the same or decreased.

Economics 101 taught us about supply and demand. - when demand

outstrips supply, costs go up. China and India's economic growth (10% compared to our 2.5 to 3%) is creating demand for the same cement, steel and oil we need. They outbid us in the world marketplace, forcing prices up. This economic force causes erosion of our transportation industries' buying power. We better learn to live with it because this situation is not going to change any time soon.

Other factors affecting construction costs include the following:

Increasing truck traffic; Huge costs for traffic management during reconstruction projects; Fewer contractors due to bankruptcies & consolidation of the industry; Fewer workers in the labor pool; Fewer

bidders on projects (3.2, down from 4.0 a few years ago); Escalating fuel costs; Regulatory impacts on quarries & other material sources; Competition from private work; Escalating engineering costs due to labor shortages; Additional construction requirements due to environmental regulations; Natural disasters - the 2006 flooding damage costs in District 4-0 were \$75 million.

The general public sees the problem as inefficiency in PennDOT. *Nothing can be farther from the truth.* It is a fact that over the last several years, engineering firms are unable to estimate the costs of projects with any degree of accuracy. Cost overruns on bids of 30% - 60% are common, even on private projects.

Why is this so important? Because if the public does not believe that the cost of maintaining roads and bridges is rising at an alarming rate due to cost factors beyond the control of PennDOT, our legislators will find it difficult to make the tough decisions to adequately fund our transportation systems, including mass transit, to meet our future needs.

Submitted by Tom Lawson, Vice-President, Borton-Lawson Engineering, Inc.



*One of the many bridges that need repair on I-81*