



Back Mountain Trail Extended

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held on a new one-third mile section of the Back Mountain Trail (BMT) on September 9, 2009. Sponsored by the Anthracite Scenic Trails Association (ASTA), the new trail section, called the Luzerne Creek Walk Along Toby Creek, was designed by Thomas McLane & Associates. The new trail runs along a beautiful stretch of Toby Creek through Luzerne Borough, and offers bikers, runners, and walkers the opportunity to enjoy a quiet, off-street trip through the downtown section of the borough.

Generous donations have been given toward the construction of the new section of trail over the past several years. These donations have provided the funding to obtain the necessary Rights-of-Way, complete the design of the new trail section, and provide the required federal match guidelines for construction costs. Easements along the

trail were donated by the Luzerne Bank, Jim Keller, Mary Ellen Gianuzzi, Bernard Leandri, and Kurt Santayana.

From Luzerne, trail users can connect to the Luzerne County Levee Trail in two ways - through quiet residential streets in Swoyersville Borough where they can pick up the trail in Wyoming or Forty-Fort Boroughs, or through local streets in Edwardsville Borough where they can pick up the trail on US Route 11.

The new section of the Back Mountain Trail in Luzerne Borough serves as the official terminus on the southern end. ASTA is currently working on the next linkage of the BMT which will run through Dallas Borough and end at the Misericordia University campus.

For more information on the trail, or to get involved with ASTA, contact ASTA President Judy Rimple at 675-9016.

Submitted by Judy Rimple, President of ASTA



From left to right: Kurt & Chase Santayana, Janet Flack, Beth Shilabeer, Bob Snyder, Frank Donahoe, Judy Rimple, Anthony Perzia, Jim Keller, Bob Skulsky, Mike Jancuski, Mary Ellen Schell, and Paul Franzoni.

COLTS Receives ARRA Funds

Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) recently announced that the County of Lackawanna Transit System (COLTS) will receive a \$2.6 million grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Of the \$2.6 million, \$2,165,160 will be used to purchase four diesel-electric hybrid buses, which have been ordered and are expected to become part of the COLTS fleet by the end of June, 2010.

“This money is great news for COLTS and all of Northeast Pennsylvania”, Senator Casey said. “These new hybrid buses will be more energy-efficient and environmentally-friendly. This is another example of recovery funding bringing green technology to Pennsylvania.”

COLTS Executive Director, Robert Fiume said that the an-

nouncement signifies the “dawn of a new era” for the transit agency. “Because of this funding, we are able to implement our long-term sustainability plan”, Mr. Fiume said. “We are grateful for Sen. Casey’s help in securing this important funding. We would not be able to make such progressive strides without the help of our legislators.”

Mr. Fiume said that he is looking forward to the savings that COLTS will enjoy in its operating costs. The diesel-electric hybrid, low-floor buses are expected to be up to 40 percent more fuel-efficient than conventional diesel buses.

The agency hopes to replace the remainder of its fleet with hybrids by the end of 2012.

COLTS was able to obtain the

option of purchasing the buses as part of a contract with Kanawha Valley Regional Transportation Authority (KVRTA) in Charleston, West Virginia, which already had a contract in place. “We are thankful to our friends at KVRTA for allowing us to piggyback on their order”, Mr. Fiume said.

The remaining \$434,840 in federal funds will be used for technology and communications projects, including AVL equipment for COLTS buses.

COLTS will also be able to make security upgrades at its headquarters that will include the installation of a key-card entry for employees.

Submitted by Gretchen Wintermantel, Communications Manager, COLTS

Insufficient Resources vs. Needs - Familiar Theme at State Transportation Commission Hearings

The State Transportation Commission (STC) Hearings were held on Thursday, September 3, 2009 at the East Mountain Inn, Plains Township. The STC requested that the Planning Partners for the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO, the NEPA RPO and the Northern Tier RPO regions present an overview of the current roadway/bridge system, its condition, and the needs of the region versus the resources required to maintain it. The STC also wanted to hear about the MPO/RPO project selection process, and how each region links transportation land-use, and economic development projects.

Nancy Snee, Transportation Planner for the Luzerne County Planning Commission, and Vice Chair of the MPO Technical Committee, made the presentation on behalf of the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO.

Current System and Condition

In addressing the make-up and condition of the current roadway/bridge system, Ms. Snee explained that there are 1,410 miles of state highways in the 2-county area, 853 in Luzerne County, and 557 in Lackawanna County. There are 979 state bridges (measuring 20 feet or more in length) in the 2 counties, 564 in Luzerne County and 415 in Lackawanna County. There are 163 local bridges (measuring 8 feet or more in length), 99 in Luzerne County and 64 in Lackawanna County, bringing the total number of state and local bridges to 1,142. (There are more than 163 local bridges in the 2-county area, but data is only available for those that are at least 8 feet in length because they are required by federal law to be inspected every year.)

Of the 979 state bridges, 185 are designated as being Structurally-Deficient (SD), 114 in Luzerne County and 71 in Lackawanna County. There are 72 Local SD bridges, 43 in Luzerne County and 29 in Lackawanna County, bringing the total number of state and local SD bridges to 257.

Another bridge evaluation measure is weight restriction. There are 28 state bridges that currently have weight restrictions, 14 in Luzerne County (closed) and 14 in Lackawanna County (closed). There are 55 local bridges which are weight-restricted. Luzerne County has 36 weight-restricted bridges, 32 of which are posted and 4 of which are closed. Lackawanna County has 19 weight-restricted bridges, 15 of which are posted,



One of Several Bridge Deck Replacement Projects on I-81

and 4 of which are closed.

During 2004 and 2009, the MPO made progress in addressing SD bridges. During that time period, 91 SD bridges were either rehabilitated or replaced. However, during that same period, 90 additional bridges were added to the SD bridge list.

The MPO philosophy is to address system preservation priorities and to adhere to the policy of the Governor and Department of Transportation of allotting 80% of TIP funds to system preservation projects and only 20% to capacity-adding projects. This philosophy has been put into action through the types of projects the MPO has placed on the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Of the approximately 144 TIP projects, about 60% are either bridge preservation, bridge rehabilitation, or bridge replacement projects.

Resources vs. Need: For the 2009 TIP, the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO received an average annual allocation of \$68 million/year. However, the amount of funding needed to address all the highway/bridge needs is \$122.2 million/year.

Due to the American Recovery and Reinvestment (ARRA) funds, bond funds and Act 44 funds the MPO received in 2009, the difference between available resources and need was about \$10M. However, after this year, the ARRA funds will disappear, the bond money is uncertain, and ACT 44 funding will be significantly reduced if I-80 is not tolled. Consequently, after this year, the average annual deficit will rise to approximately \$53M/year.

Unfortunately, the situation will not im-

prove with the 2011 TIP. The average TIP allocation will be lower at \$56M/year, and not even assuming an increase in needs expenses, the average annual deficit will rise to about \$66M/year.

Project Prioritization Process:

The Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO is in the midst of updating its 2007 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). As part of this update, the MPO is developing a formal project prioritization system whereby projects will be viewed in terms of being of high, medium or low impact to the transportation system. The results of this analysis will be used as a guide as to how the MPO should use its limited resources (See article on page 3 for more details).

Linking Land-Use and Transportation

Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties are also involved in developing a bi-county comprehensive plan as well as a hazard mitigation plan. This has provided the MPO with a unique opportunity to coordinate transportation and land-use to some extent. Among the goals and objectives of the comprehensive plan are the revitalization of existing urban areas, the development of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) routes to connect the major cities in the 2-county area, and connecting the Cities of Wilkes-Barre and Scranton by a Light-Rail Line. Directing development to areas with existing infrastructure is another goal of the plan. Some of the criteria being used in the LRTP project prioritization process pertain to these and other goals of the bi-county comprehensive plan, thus forming a direct connection to land-use and transportation.

However, wide-spread linkage of transportation and land-use will remain to be challenging as long as land-use decisions are made by individual municipal governments.



New Box Culvert Over Ackerly Creek on SR 407

New Project Prioritization Process Being Developed

The required four-year update of the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO is currently underway. The plan is being done in concert with the development of a bi-county comprehensive plan and bi-county hazard mitigation plan. To date, the consultant heading up the project, McCormick Taylor, has completed the inventory of existing conditions, developed transportation and land-use scenarios which were vetted with the project steering committee as well as the public, and has developed a list of transportation projects that will facilitate the mobility goals of the 2-county region.

As part of the update of the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO is instituting a more formalized project prioritization process.

Based on a model developed by the Centre County MPO, the new tool is being used to ensure consistency with federal and state regulations and policies, as well as the goals and objectives of the LRTP, the Bi-County Comprehensive Plan, and the Bi-County Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Federal regulations require that eight planning factors be considered, analyzed, and reflected in the transportation planning process.

The Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO has condensed these eight factors into the following five:

Support the Economic Vitality of the region, in particular by enabling global

competitiveness, productivity and efficiency by increasing the accessibility and mobility options available to people and goods;

Increase the safety and security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;

Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and state and bi-county planned growth and economic development patterns;

Enhance integration and connectivity of the transportation system across and between modes for people and freight in an effort to promote efficiency in system management and operation; and

Emphasize preservation and connectivity of the existing transportation system for all modes.

There is a possibility of adding a sixth planning factor. That decision will be made over the next few weeks.

The evaluation of projects is done according to whether the project is of High, Medium, or Low impact, with High Impact garnering the most points at 3, Medium Impact receiving two, and Low Impact receiving 1 point. These categories have several criteria attached which apply to the particular planning factor being analyzed. If a project does not meet any of the criteria, it receives no points.

The MPO is going to use the new system as a guide for which projects get placed and/or priority on the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and LRTP. Funding availability for each particular project type will be a determining factor, as well as the Department of Transportation policy of allotting the majority of TIP funds to highway/bridge system preservation.

The MPO staff members worked with the consultant in three four-hour sessions to review and evaluate every project on the proposed LRTP listing. This process is expected to be completed within the next few weeks.

A draft version of the LRTP is expected to be available for review in early 2010, with the final version slated for adoption next summer.

The MPO, steering committee, and the public will have ample time to review and offer comments on the draft version when it becomes available.



MPO staff members and McCormick Taylor staff members discuss the project prioritization process.

Upcoming LTAP Courses Scheduled

The following Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) courses have been scheduled. These courses are free and available to local government personnel and planning agencies.

Drainage: The Key To Roads That Last

Tuesday, October 27, 2009, 8 am - 2 pm
Monroe County Public Safety Center
100 Gypsum Rd., Snydersville
570-992-4113

Traffic Calming

Tuesday, November 17, 2009, 8 am - 2 pm
Schuylkill Community Education Council
1-7 W. Centre St., Mahanoy City
570-773-1270

Engineering and Traffic Studies

Tuesday, December 8, 2009
8:30 am - 3:30 pm
NEPA Offices
1151 Oak St., Pittston
570-655-5581

Future Unscheduled Classes:

Spring Maintenance - Late February 2010, Carbon County

Spring Maintenance - March 2010, Pike County

Stormwater Management - March 2010, Wayne County

For more information on the LTAP courses, contact Kurt Bauman, NEPA at 655-5581.



**LACKAWANNA/LUZERNE METROPOLITAN
PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

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MPO Web Page:
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Two Intermodal Centers Nearing Completion, Another Set to Begin Construction

Construction on two of the three intermodal centers planned for the area is nearing completion.

The building interior of the Hazleton Intermodal Center, located at the corner of Church and Broad Streets in downtown Hazleton, was substantially completed as of July 31st. The contractors are currently working on the punchlist items. Completion of the facility is slated for October 5th of this year. The intermodal center will serve as the central point of Hazleton Public Transit (HPT) bus service, and will integrate inter-city bus service and other local transit services, such as taxi service, bicycles, and other modes of transportation. It will also provide over 270 off-street parking spaces.

The Wilkes-Barre Intermodal Center is also under construction. Located on South Washington Street between E. Market and E. Northampton Streets, the center will serve as the new location for 15 Luzerne County Transportation Authority (LCTA) buses and Martz Trailway buses, and provide over 750 off-street parking spaces.

The steel and concrete have been erected, the finish is about 90 percent completed, and the lobby is currently being constructed. The parking garage is slated to open in December of this year, while the offices and bus terminal are expected to open in January of next year.



Wilkes-Barre Intermodal Center Nearing Completion.

The County of Lackawanna Transportation System (COLTS) Intermodal Center is not yet under construction. The Final Design and Engineering phases of the project have been completed, and pro-

posals were received on August 28th for construction and architectural services. COLTS will decide on a firm to provide those services by October 15th, and once that step has been taken, ground-breaking will commence in November. Construction will take about a year and a half,

bringing the completion date to February of 2011.

The COLTS Intermodal Center will service COLTS and Martz buses, trolley excursions, and, eventually, the Scranton-Hoboken passenger rail service.



Hazleton Intermodal Center to open in October.