

SUMMER

2007



LACKAWANNA/LUZERNE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

# CONNECTIONS

## Project Updates

**Interstate 81:** Preventative Maintenance (PM) project between Exits 191 and 197. The project includes milling and overlay over the entire roadway (travel lanes and shoulders) and work on 11 structures (bridges). Deck repairs will be made to the structures and an overlay will be applied to provide a smooth deck surface. Strip seal dams will also be replaced, which with the overlay, will prevent water from seeping into cracks in the deck. Sub-structure repairs will also be made including pressure mortar surfacing, pier encapsulation, and beam repairs. New signing and Raised Pavement Markings (RPMs) will also be installed.

**I-81:** Bridge Project near the Moosic Exit. Re-decking and preservation work will be done on the 4 bridges,

northbound and southbound, located between Exit 178 (Avoca) and the Exit 180 (Moosic). 2 lanes of traffic will be maintained in each direction by using crossovers during construction. The project will be bid on December 13 and construction should start in February of 2008.

**Valley View Business Park Access Road:** This project involves a 2-lane access road that will eventually connect PA 247 and SR 1012. The first project section totaling

\$12 million will be bid in February with construction starting in the spring.

**I-380:** Bridge Preservation work will be done on 9 structures, 6 mainline structures and 3 overhead structures, in both northbound and southbound lanes. This \$6 million project will be bid on December 12, 2007 with construction scheduled to begin in the spring.

Submitted by George Roberts, ADE for Design, PennDOT District 4-0.



*Bridge work continues to be a priority for PennDOT in the MPO area.*

## MPO to Develop Web Page

The MPO is in the process of developing a web page on the Luzerne County web site.

The page will contain all pertinent transportation plans, background information on the MPO and the committees that comprise it, MPO committee membership lists, and a schedule of MPO meetings.

The page, currently under construction, can be accessed by going to the Luzerne County web site ([www.luzernecounty.org](http://www.luzernecounty.org)), clicking on "Departments & Agencies", clicking on "Planning Commission", and clicking the link in the upper right corner that says,

"Luzerne/Lackawanna Metropolitan Planning Organization".

The MPO hopes the web page will help the public better understand the transportation planning process and encourage them to participate.

**The MPO is in need of finding members of the minority communities to become involved in the transportation planning process through membership on one or more of the following committees:**

- 1. The Transportation Advisory Committee**
- 2. Public Participation Plan Committee**
- 3. Steering Committee for the Bi-County Comprehensive Plan, which will include the preparation of the update of the Long Range Transportation Plan.**

**If you would like to volunteer or can suggest someone to serve, please contact either Nancy Snee at 825-1564 or Steve Pitoniak at 963-6400.**

# New Transportation Bill Summary



Funding generated by Act 44 will go toward fixing bridges across the state.

On July 18, 2007 Governor Edward G. Rendell signed House Bill 1590 into law as Act 44 of 2007. This was landmark legislation for both public transportation and highways and bridges. The legislation creates a partnership between the Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission (PTC). The partnership will allow the PTC to lease I-80 from PennDOT and convert it to a toll road. The PTC, in turn, will provide annual payments to PennDOT which will be used to fund highway, bridge and public transportation improvements and operations.

The lease will run for 50 years. The PTC will apply to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for approval to toll I-80 under a pilot tolling program. It will take up to 3-4 years to begin tolling operations.

Statewide annual revenues will start at \$750 million in 2007-2008 and grow for the next 50 years. \$450 million of those funds will be allocated to highways/bridges and \$350 million will be dedicated to public transit.

Funding for transit projects has been completely restructured into a Public Transportation Trust Fund supported by dedicated, reliable, and growing funding sources.

Starting in 2010-2011, the funding will increase to \$900 million plus 2.5% annually.

On a local level, the Luzerne/Lackawanna Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) will receive approximately 3.57% of the funding from the

new bill. In 2007-2008, this translates into \$12.4 million. The funds will increase to approximately \$14.7 million by 2011-2012.

This new funding can only be used to preserve and restore roadways and bridges as well as for operations and maintenance of the highway system. Funding must be restricted to projects that focus on reducing the number of structurally-deficient bridges and improving ride quality on the highways. Projects that improve safety and capacity management, such as Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) and traffic signal optimization, may also be included.

## Public Transit:

The General Fund funding sources will be replaced with a dedicated portion of the Sales and Use Tax to ensure that transit programs will have a reliable and growing funding source for the future.

Act 44 established five major public transportation programs:

## Operating Program

**Capital Improvement Program** - a portion of the Public Transportation Trust Fund will be distributed to transit agencies according to a formula based on number of passengers carried. In this way, transit agencies will have a steady, reliable stream of capital funding. There is no local match for this program.

## Asset Improvement Program-

Additional capital money will be distributed based on demonstrated need. Transit operators will be required to submit a four and twelve-year capital plan annually that coincides with the highway/bridge Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The local match is 3.3%.

**New Initiatives Program** - This new program provides a framework to advance new or expansions of existing fixed-guideway projects. Certain criteria must be met to qualify for these funds. The local match is 3.3%

**Programs of Statewide Significance** - Programs such as Persons With Disabilities, Welfare to Work, Job Access Reverse Commute, intercity bus and rail service as well as technical assistance and demonstration projects will be fully funded under this initiative, using a dedicated portion of the Public Transportation Fund. The match requirements vary by specific program.

New operating funds will be distributed to transit operators based on the following four factors: passengers served; senior passengers served; revenue vehicle miles traveled; and revenue vehicle hours of operation.

## Local Reaction to New Transportation Bill

Local reaction to the State Transportation Bill has been positive. Richard Cochrane, Acting District Executive (DE) for District 4-0, says of the bill "The new state transportation bill (Act 44) will provide additional funds to improve our highways and bridges in Northeastern Pennsylvania. As everyone by now knows, there is a tremendous need to maintain and improve our bridges, and this additional funding should move us toward the goal of reducing the

number of structurally-deficient bridges."

George Roberts, ADE for Design for District 4-0 echoed those thoughts, "The Revenue Enhancement funding recently approved by the legislature is significant to PennDOT, and is vital for maintaining our existing roadway and bridge systems. These funds are intended to be used for bridge preservation, bridge rehabilitation, roadway resurfacing, safety and ITS pro-

jects. Statewide funding for roads and bridges will total \$450-500 million over the next three years and then increase by 2.5% annually thereafter through the year 2047. This additional funding source will go a long way in helping maintain the existing highway system, and is an extremely important funding stream for preservation type work."

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# Regional Operations Plan Approved

The Regional Operations Plan was approved by the Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO Coordinating Committee on July 15, 2007.

The purpose of the Plan is to identify ways to ease congestion, especially on interstates and major state highways, through means other than constructing capacity-adding projects.

One of the main reasons for congestion and traffic back-ups on interstates and major highways are traffic incidents (accidents). Multiple events at entertainment venues also account for traffic back-ups as well as road construction projects.

The Regional Operations Panel provided input to the consultant, Carbondale Technology Transfer Center (CTTC), and identified a list of the following 12 priority projects:

## 1. Establish Incident Management Team (IMT)

Establish a regional group of incident responders who will meet on a regular basis. This will provide for better planning, communication and on-site incident management.

## 2. Establish Incident Management Procedures

Use members of the IMT to develop response procedures and protocols with all personnel who respond to traffic incidents.

## 3. Establish Incident Management Communications

Develop an early implementation protocol to allow conference call/

open line communications among all incident responders.

## 4. Create a 24 hour/7 days a week Traffic Management Center (TMC)

Develop, implement, and maintain a fully functional TMC at PennDOT District 4-0.

## 5. Establish a Traveler Information (TI) Team

Create communication and information collection and distribution methods.

## 6. Traffic Data Characteristics

Generate a clear understanding of traffic density characteristics, trends, and seasonal demographic changes in the region.

## 7. Regional Traveler Information Plan

Use members of the IT to determine how best to let the public know, in a timely, manner, about traffic congestion problems via all modes of communication.



Implementation of the ROP will help ease traffic back-ups seen here.

## 8. Pre-Planned Detour Routing

Develop pre-planned detour routes for the interstates and major state highways so that when an incident occurs, the traveling public will know immediately which alternate routes to take to avoid the incident area.

## 9. ITS Equipment Gap

Identify and seek to obtain essential Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) equipment to enable all of the proposed measures.

## 10. Event Venues Traffic Management Plan

Coordinate entertainment and sport franchise schedules with PennDOT and the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) to avoid major traffic back-ups onto the interstate ramps and highway.

## 11. Service Patrols

Develop a freeway service patrol that would travel the interstates and major highways looking to assist motorists with disabled vehicles and help remove debris from travel lanes; maintain contact with TMC as to travel and road conditions.

## 12. Quick Clear or Clear-The-Road Program

Generate protocols and procedures on how, when, and where to quickly remove major blockages to the traveling lanes following a traffic incident.

Contact Nancy Snee (see contact information on page 4) if you would like an electronic copy of the ROP.

## (continued from page 2)

Stan Strelish, Executive Director of the Luzerne County Transportation Authority (LCTA) also had praise for the bill, stating "Now that the funding crisis has been averted with the passage of Act 44, the LCTA can maintain its same level of service that is so important to all Luzerne County residents. The LCTA will be a greater force in the region, providing residents easy access to experience the amenities, health care, employment, and educa-

tion[al] opportunities. The LCTA is a transit authority that is growing in conjunction with Luzerne County and the surrounding area. With the funding issue resolved, the LCTA can grow and become a major player in the redevelopment of the county."

Bob Fiume, Director of Hazleton Public Transit had this to say about the new bill, "I believe that the new transportation bill

will benefit Hazleton Public Transit. The new funding will help us not only to avoid any further cuts in service, at least in the near future, but will also afford us the opportunity to add service to areas that have the need."



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site: [www.neparoads.com](http://www.neparoads.com)**

## To Toll or Not To Toll? That Is The Question!

Joseph Brimmeier, CEO of the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission (PTC), has submitted an application to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for permission to toll I-80 throughout the 311 miles of interstate contained within the state. The application is for a pilot project FHWA is conducting to allow federally-funded roadways to be tolled.

Under Act 44 of 2007, PennDOT is authorized to lease I-80 to the PTC to operate, maintain, and improve the highway under a 50-year lease agreement. The interstate will be converted to an "open toll" facility, consisting of up to 10 toll booths, or gantries, that will be equipped for electronic tolling.

PTC anticipates spending approximately \$1 billion on rehabilitation and reconstruction improvements over the next 10 years, and \$110 million to install the toll booths.

PTC's plan calls for a 3-year implementation to secure necessary governmental

approvals, complete design work, refine revenue projects and initiate tolling, debt financing and construction. It is assumed that the toll rate per mile will be the same as that on the mainline and northeast extension of the turnpike, which will be approximately 8 cents/mile by 2011, the year tolling operations are set to begin.

The tolls on I-80 will be used to re-invest in the interstate. The lease payments to PennDOT from the PTC will be used for highway/bridge projects in the I-80 corridor and around the state. Bond revenues from the fare increases on the turnpike will fund the transit systems across the state. Over a 50-year period, approximately \$85 billion will be generated as a result of Act 44.

Other states that are feeling the crunch of having more projects than funding to pay for them are investigating other means of raising revenue as well.

Starting early next year, 6 states will test new ways to pay for highway/bridge and transit projects. The plan involves eliminating the

gas tax and having people pay per mile for use of the roads. Computers and satellite equipment will be placed in about 2700 vehicles, and over the next 2 years, drivers will get a monthly mileage bill, much like they get a utility bill for gas or electricity. Devices will be installed on the dashboard of vehicles to track the number of miles traveled.

Since 1956, the gasoline tax has been the primary source for financing the Highway Trust Fund. With more cars getting better gas mileage or using alternate fuels, the gasoline tax has become less effective as a means of raising sufficient transportation funding. Some transportation experts believe that mileage fees, rather than the gasoline tax, will be the primary way of raising revenues in the next 15-20 years.

So, what do you think about these options - tolling I-80, and eliminating the gas tax for a monthly mileage fee? Send your comments to Nancy Snee at the e-mail address listed above.