

Section 9. Consideration of Environmental Mitigation in the 2007 Update of the 2035 Transportation and Development Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania

SAFETEA-LU Requirements for Environmental Mitigation

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Act: a Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), which was passed by Congress and signed by the President in August of 2005, established new requirements for the preparation of long range transportation plans (LRPs). One of these new requirements is that plans include a discussion of potential environmental mitigation activities associated with proposed development, and potential implementation strategies for such activities.

In general terms, environmental mitigation activities are strategies, policies, programs, actions, and activities that, over time, will serve to avoid, minimize, or compensate for (by replacing or providing substitute resources) the impacts to or disruption of elements of the human and natural environment associated with the implementation of a long range statewide or regional transportation plan. The human and natural environment includes, for example, neighborhoods and communities, homes and businesses, cultural resources, parks and recreation areas, wetlands, and water sources, forested and other natural areas, agricultural areas, endangered and threatened species, and the ambient air.

In addition, SAFETEA-LU requires that potential environmental mitigation activities be developed in consultation with federal, state, and tribal wildlife, land management, and regulatory (resource) agencies.

The SAFETEA-LU requirements are designed to provide a more consistent consideration of environmental issues at all stages of the transportation planning process. None of the changes in SAFETEA-LU alters how the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) relates to a long range transportation plan. The environmental mitigation strategies and activities are intended to be regional in scope, and may not necessarily address potential project-level impacts.

Southwestern Pennsylvania is a geographically and geologically diverse area, with a generally rolling to mountainous terrain. The varied terrain and the natural and environmental resources found in the region have done much to shape the history of the region, and the future.

Natural resource extraction has been a leading industry for more than 200 years, and remains a leading employment sector in many areas of the region. Many of the region's natural amenities, including waterways, forested areas and hillsides have been protected from future development through preservation as State or Regional Parks, viewsheds or conservation areas.

The regional landscape also reflects the presence of some operating surface mines, old strip mined areas, and many reclaimed stripping areas. In areas, valley sides and hillsides can be

moderately steep and may be susceptible to landslides, which create a range of development opportunities and limitations.

The 2035 Transportation and Development Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania (which is scheduled for adoption on June 28, 2007) promotes and protects the many environmental *resources* in the southwestern Pennsylvania region. The Plan also identifies the many environmentally based development limitations in the region, and makes deliberate efforts to divert development away from such areas.

For example, in the identification of the alternative development scenarios for future growth, the region's many state and regional parks were clearly identified as "non-developable areas", as were areas of steep slope, wetlands, or flood prone areas. Development scenarios that impinged on such areas were eliminated from further consideration. The region's goals to enhance quality of life, promote recreation based tourism and protect our natural environment were evident in the identification of a preferred development scenario that promotes future growth in the region's existing town centers and the highway corridors that connect them, thereby preserving open space and agricultural areas from future development.

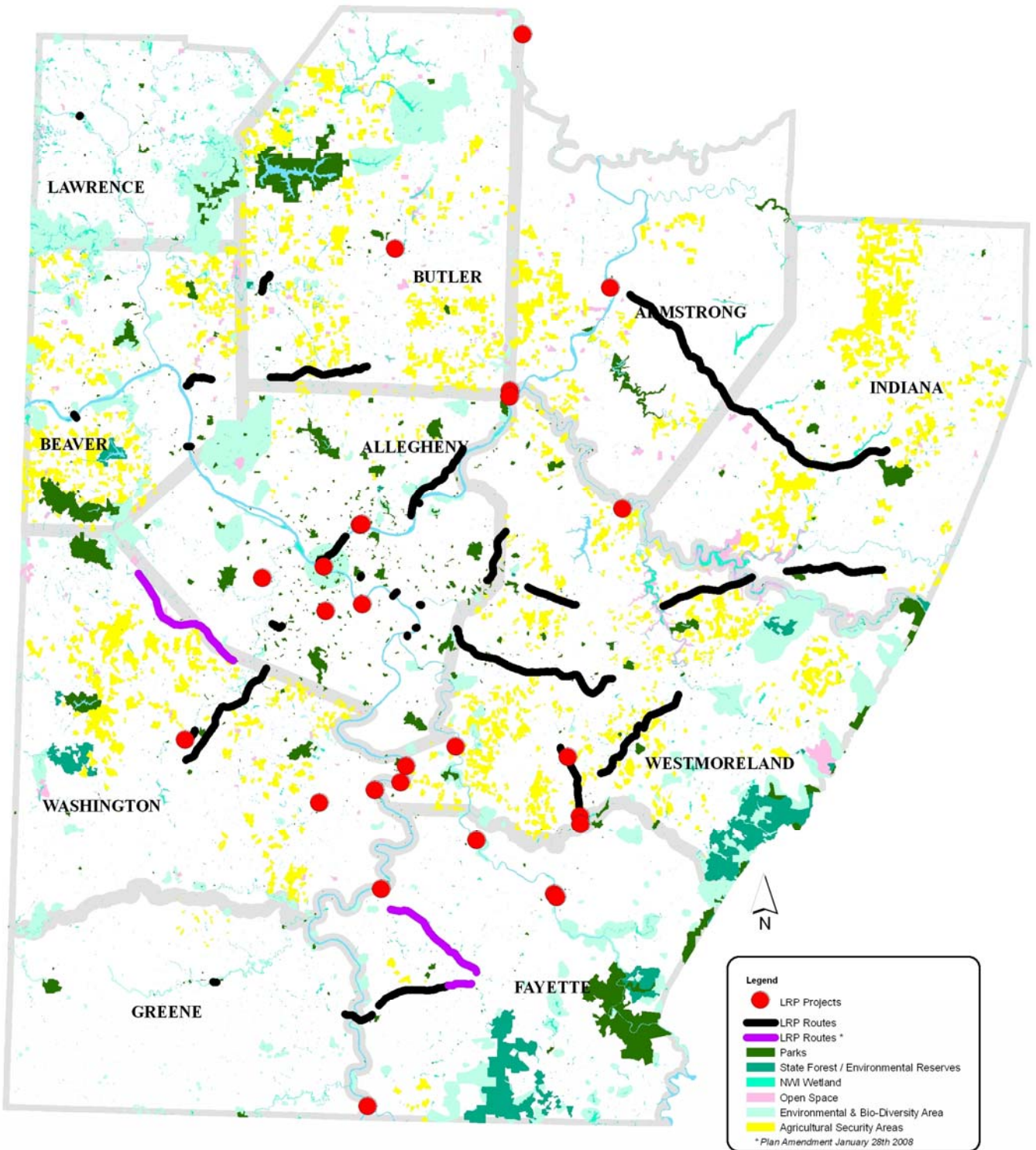
Identification of Environmental Resource Impacts

With the preferred development scenario selected, SPC prepared maps identifying the location of transportation projects (bridges, transit and highway) in relation to environmental resource and environmentally sensitive areas in the ten county region. Environmental areas evaluated for potential plan impacts include:

1. State, County and Municipal Parks
2. State Forests and Environmental Reserves
3. Major Wetlands
4. Environmental and bio-diversity areas
5. Agricultural Security Areas
6. Other Protected Open Areas

The location of these environmental resource areas are identified on Figure 9.1, 2035 Plan Project Impacts on Known Environmental Features in Southwestern Pennsylvania on the following page.

Figure 9.1 2035 Plan Impacts on Known Environmental Features in Southwestern Pennsylvania



With only two exceptions, the transportation projects identified in the 2035 Transportation and Development Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania occur in areas outside of environmental resource areas. In downtown Pittsburgh, the North Shore Connector project currently under development is located in the immediate vicinity of Point State Park, North Shore Park, and two regional sports facilities. The Central Business District of Pittsburgh is designated as a Biological Diversity Area, designed to protect Peregrine Falcon nesting areas on rooftops in the downtown area. The proposed North Shore Connector project has received NEPA level environmental clearance, and is therefore deemed unlikely to require additional environmental consultation or mitigation activities pursuant to its location in the Biological Diversity Area.

The other project having a physical correlation to known environmental resources or environmentally sensitive areas is the Capital Maintenance Project for the rehabilitation of the Greenfield Bridge in Allegheny County. This project calls for the reconstruction of an existing bridge adjacent to Schenley Park in the City of Pittsburgh's Oakland neighborhood. All other projects were found to occur in existing corridors, in previously disturbed areas, or in areas already subjected to a NEPA level environmental review.

Environmental Mitigation - Consultation

In accordance with SAFETEA-LU provisions, the 2035 Transportation and Development Plan was developed in consultation with state, federal, and tribal resource agencies responsible for wildlife, land management, and regulation. To facilitate the environmental mitigation process and ensure environmental review at the highest possible levels, SPC presented the draft scenarios of the 2035 Transportation and Development Plan to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's Agency Coordinating Committee at their October 26, 2006 meeting, initiating this consultation process.

The Agency Coordinating Committee (ACM) was established by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to ensure that projects throughout Pennsylvania that require extended environmental review times are identified as early as possible in the transportation planning process. The ACM is comprised of agencies that are responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation throughout Pennsylvania.

The role of the monthly Agency Coordination Meeting (ACM) is to provide for coordination between PennDOT and other transportation planning agencies in the Commonwealth and federal and state resource agencies. ACM participants include:

- US Army Corps of Engineers
- US Environmental Protection Agency
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection
- Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

- Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
- Pennsylvania Game Commission
- Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
- Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
- Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development

Meetings generally consist of general project presentations, field views, or workshops to discuss specific project and resource issues. Consultation through the ACM generally satisfies four key planning objectives: (1) timely project development, (2) providing an open communication forum for key issue discussion, (3) to increase awareness and understanding of the mission and objectives of participating agencies, and (4) to ensure that resource relevant issues and concerns are expressed early in the process and to acquire timely review and concurrence during project or program development.

Comments received by SPC from ACM participants were incorporated into the draft 2035 Transportation and Development Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania. Copies of the draft plan were also distributed to ACM coordinating agencies for review and comment during the 30 day public review process.

In the development of the 2035 Transportation and Development Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania, SPC conducted an extensive public involvement. Citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transit, and other interested parties were all provided with a multiple opportunities and mechanisms to comment on the proposed transportation and development plan.

In the public participation process, SPC reached out to a wide range of environmental interests, including federal, state, regional or local resource agencies; representatives of the region's extractive industries; non-profit groups seeking to protect, preserve and promote the region's environmental assets; and users of the region's many environmental amenities. A balanced plan that protects and promotes the region's environmental assets, while identifying and mitigating development impacts on the region's environmental issue areas has resulted from this extensive consultation process.