

On the Move...

**A Basic Guide to
Transportation Planning**



Southwestern
Pennsylvania
Commission

On the Move...

A Basic Guide to Transportation Planning

- A Familiar Story: Planning Transportation Projects Is Like Budgeting Home Improvements
- Who Does What?
- A Timeline For Our Plans And Programs
- Funding Issues: Why Is It So Complicated? Why Does It Take So Long?
- How Can You Get Involved? How Can You Influence Transportation Decisions?

July 2009

Prepared by:

Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission

425 Sixth Avenue, Suite 2500

Pittsburgh PA 15219-1852

(412) 391-5590

FAX: (412) 391-9160

e-mail: comments@spcregion.org

www.spcregion.org

Planning Transportation Projects Is Like Budgeting Home Improvements!

Owning and maintaining a home is a responsibility many of us understand. Whether you're the homeowner or you have a landlord, you know that a building has many needs that can't all be taken care of at once. The region's decisions regarding our transportation system involve many of the same issues of planning and budgeting! There's never enough money to satisfy all our wants and needs. How do we set priorities? How do we find the money? Take a look at these parallels.



Who pays?

Suppose a brother and sister jointly own a house.

The brother has 80% interest in the property and normally pays 80% of costs.

[This is comparable to the Federal transportation funds administered by our region.]

The sister has 20% interest in the property and normally pays 20% of the costs.

[This is like the State transportation funding we receive.]

Sometimes Mom pitches in, to help them pay for projects on the house.

[We may receive a local match or special earmarks for transportation projects.]

The sister shares responsibility for the property and cares about its upkeep. She gives her advice and helps make decisions.

[PennDOT works closely with SPC, although SPC is responsible for setting priorities.]

The brother's wife and kids live with him and have their own ideas about the house. He discusses plans with them, and they may influence his decisions.

[We listen to the needs of Counties, Cities, Boroughs, and Townships.]

Plan ahead!

For the home, they develop a budget. [For transportation we adopt a long-range plan.]

What do they need or want?










New roof? Replace windows? Replace carpet? New furnace? Update kitchen?
New siding? Update bathroom? Build a deck? Reconstruct driveway?

How much money will they have to spend and when will it be available? Not including their many other financial obligations, what can the owners afford to spend on home maintenance and improvements?

Suppose a 10-year plan...



Approximately how much will each proposed project cost?

New roof		Replace windows		Replace carpet	
New furnace		Update kitchen		New siding	
Update bathroom		Build a deck		Reconstruct driveway	

Not enough money! Tough choices.

What's essential?

And how soon will it be necessary?

Replace furnace first. It's getting old; they can't let it fail.

Replace windows two years later. Save on fuel bills.

Replace roof the fourth year. It should last until then.

New siding two years later. Important maintenance.

Major driveway reconstruction in the seventh year.

Update bathroom in the ninth year. It can wait.

Build deck in the tenth year. Use old patio till then.



Some projects were on the list, but don't fit into the budget:

Update kitchen

Replace the carpet — no, just shampoo the old carpet



...unless they find more money.

Is Mom going to pitch in on these projects? Can Cousin Harry do some of the work?
[In transportation, we look for a local match.]

Home improvement loan? Will the owners qualify? Can they afford the interest?
[Special bond issue for transportation.]

Ask Uncle Joe to help pay? Can he afford it? Does he like the plans?
[New tax revenue or other new sources for transportation.]

Next, the budget for the first stage

[For transportation funding, we develop the TIP. This is a specific strategy for the first four years of the long-range plan.]

Make specific choices regarding the furnace...

model, contractor, actual cost, schedule the work.

Think about the new windows and the roof, even though they can't be installed immediately. Compare costs, styles, and contractors.

[This is like the engineering phase of a transportation project.]

Did they decide to take out a loan? Or did Uncle Joe come through? If so, perhaps another project can start sooner. If not, they stick to their plan and their budget.

The owners have to agree on the plan and budget for it.

[SPC develops and adopts a Long-Range Plan and TIP, to allocate federal and state transportation funds. Following the project priorities set by SPC, PennDOT develops a STIP and 12-Year Program which incorporate SPC's TIP, allocating state transportation funds.]

More family parallels:

Family members in your own household may not always agree.

You are the one who has to decide on a responsible plan and you want everyone to have some satisfaction.

Some projects are for the good of all...but they're not necessarily the most exciting.

Roof, furnace, windows, siding, driveway

Some projects please one family member more than others.

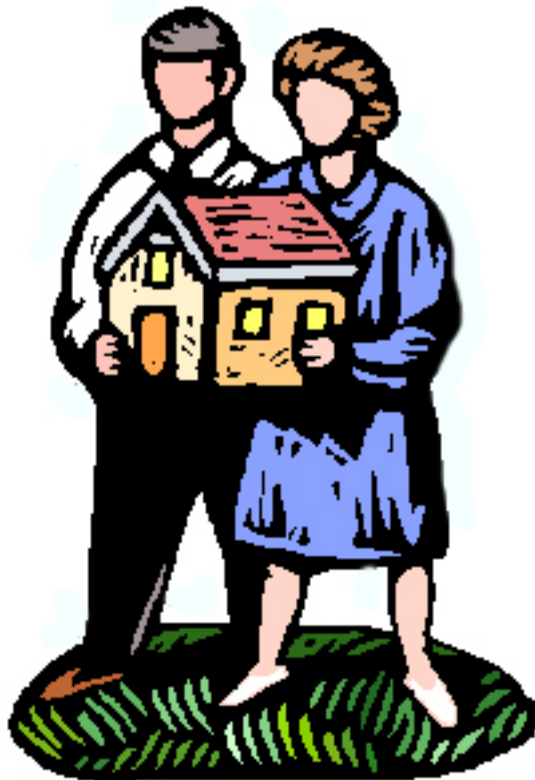
Kitchen, bathroom, deck, carpet

Discuss the budgeting problem.

Outline the realities.

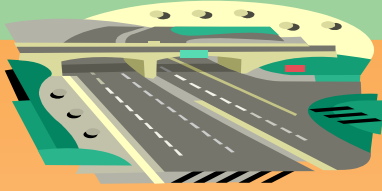
Agree on priorities.

Some people are satisfied sooner... some later.



Transportation Planning and Programming

Who Does What?



Federal government

Collects federal fuel and excise taxes and distributes revenues to the states.
[This is like the brother in our family analogy.]

U.S. Department of Transportation: Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration

- ◆ Oversees plans that are prepared by states and metropolitan regions, to satisfy standards required for federal funding.
- ◆ Operates under criteria set by federal legislation

U.S. Environmental Protection Administration

- ◆ Comments on environmental impact of federally funded projects under National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).
- ◆ Comments on air quality conformity assessments, which are required by the federal Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 and prepared by the Metropolitan Planning Organization to determine the impact of federally funded transportation plans on regional air quality.

State government

Collects state fuel and vehicle taxes. [This is like the sister in our story.]

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT)

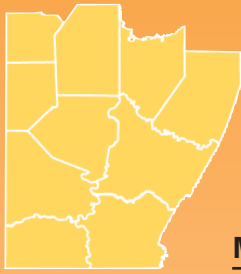
- ◆ Oversees the planning and allocation of funds for transportation projects throughout the state. These include interstates, highways, state roads, bridges and other eligible transportation projects.
- ◆ Prepares a four-year Statewide Transportation Improvement Program for submission to U.S. DOT, combining TIPs of Pennsylvania's 15 MPOs and funding programs of 7 Rural Planning Organizations and 1 independent county.
- ◆ Develops a statewide Twelve-Year Program, scheduling state funding for specific projects over 12 years (For our region, the 1st four years is identical to SPC's TIP).
- ◆ Three districts in southwestern Pennsylvania:
 - ◇ District 10 – Butler, Armstrong, Indiana Counties (office in Indiana)
 - ◇ District 11 – Allegheny, Beaver, and Lawrence Counties (office in Bridgeville)
 - ◇ District 12 – Washington, Greene, Fayette, and Westmoreland Counties (office in Uniontown)

State Transportation Commission (STC)

- ◆ Sets policy direction regarding the state's Twelve-Year Program.
- ◆ Holds hearings each odd-numbered calendar year on transportation projects for consideration on the next Twelve-Year Program. In Southwestern Pennsylvania, the Public Participation Panels collect testimony and take it to the STC, so individuals can testify more conveniently.

Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission

- ◆ Plans, constructs and operates toll roads in Pennsylvania.
- ◆ Independent agency appointed by the Governor.
- ◆ Draws upon separate, designated funding sources — primarily revenues from tolls, oil franchise tax and bonding.



Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC)

- ◆ The designated MPO for 10 counties (Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington, Westmoreland) and the City of Pittsburgh.
- ◆ Responsible for developing and adopting a long-range transportation plan that sets priorities for transportation improvements that will receive federal and state funds. This plan must stay within projected revenues and must meet federal air quality standards. It must cover at least a 20-year planning period, consider all modes of transportation, and support the region's community development goals.
- ◆ Develops and adopts a four-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to fund specific projects and implement the long-range transportation plan. The TIP may not exceed projected revenues.
- ◆ Works cooperatively with county and municipal governments, transit authorities, and state and federal agencies.
- ◆ Serves as the regional consensus-building body.
- ◆ Provides technical assistance to member governments, such as traffic counts and forecasts, mapping, census and other statistical data.

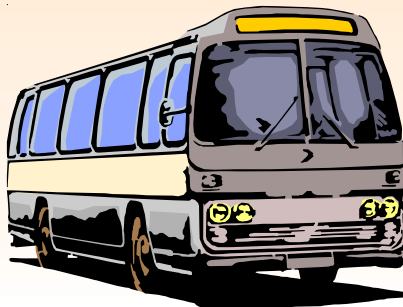
Public transit operators

- ◆ Separate systems operate in each county.
- ◆ Construct, maintain and operate bus, light-rail and paratransit (van) services.
- ◆ Work in conjunction with the MPO and State.

Local governments

Counties and municipalities

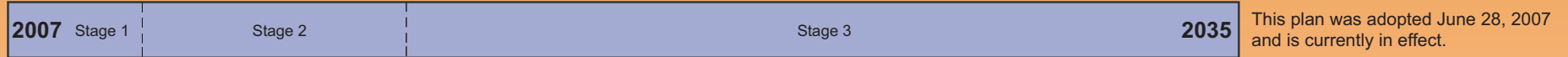
- ◆ Construct and maintain local roads and bridges.
- ◆ Some of these facilities qualify for state and federal funding, which is allocated through the region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).
- ◆ Counties and municipalities may operate public transit systems.
- ◆ Municipalities are responsible for land use regulation.



TRANSPORTATION PLANS AND PROGRAMS

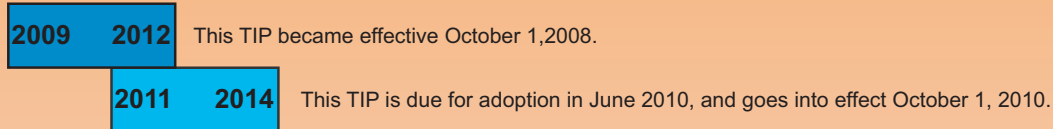
SPC's Long-Range Transportation and Development Plan

A comprehensive strategy for transportation and development in the ten-county region, covering 20+ years and updated every 4 years. Contains a transportation plan with costs not exceeding projected revenues, a supplementary list of projects for any additional funds that become available, and a plan for economic development.



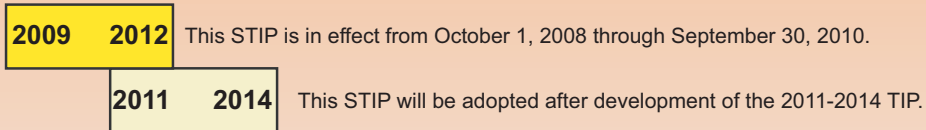
SPC's Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)

A specific, four-year program to fund transportation projects, not exceeding revenue estimates, updated every 2 years. To receive federal funding, a project must be included in the TIP. As priorities or project readiness change, the TIP is amended between the regular update cycles.



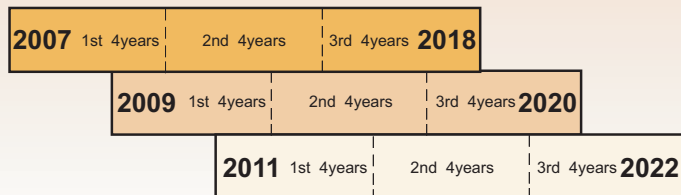
PennDOT's Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)

Four-year program for state transportation funding, which includes SPC's TIP.



PennDOT's Twelve-Year Program

A specific program of transportation projects for state funding, developed by PennDOT, directed by the State Transportation Commission, and approved by the state legislature. First four years of this program incorporates SPC's TIP, which qualifies those projects for state and federal funds. The second and third four years indicate next priorities.



Funding issues – Why is it so complicated? Why does it take so long?



Money – there never seems to be enough.

- ◆ The total cost of our transportation needs always greatly exceeds the funds we expect to receive.
- ◆ The region has to set priorities, making tough choices and compromises.

Pennsylvania has special problems.

- ◆ Pennsylvania has more miles of state highways to maintain than New York, New Jersey and all of New England combined.
- ◆ Because of our hills and valleys, we have an unusually high number of bridges to maintain. More than half of them are over 45 years old.
- ◆ On the interstate highways in Pennsylvania, 16% of the traffic is trucks.

Money – where does it come from?

- ◆ Federal and state taxes on the sale of fuels provide most of the transportation money for southwestern Pennsylvania.
- ◆ State fees on vehicle licenses also provide revenue.
- ◆ The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission operates on a separate budget. Its revenues include tolls, used to maintain the turnpike system.

Money - it comes in specific categories, each with its own rules for qualifying.

- ◆ Public transportation (buses, light rail, paratransit van services, etc.) receives “Title III” funding, broken into separate programs to support maintenance, operations, and capital improvements.
- ◆ Highways, bridges, and other surface transportation projects receive “Title I” funding, in specific programs for highways, bridges, intermodal facilities, and Congestion Management and Air Quality (CMAQ) projects.
- ◆ Transportation Enhancements — such as bicycle and pedestrian paths, restoration of rail depots, or other projects that enhance transportation facilities — are funded by 10% of the Surface Transportation Program monies.

Phases of project development

- ◆ On the TIP, funding is programmed year-by-year.
- ◆ The earliest phases may be study, rail crossing upgrades, and preliminary engineering including environmental evaluation.
- ◆ Next comes final design followed by purchase of right-of-way and moving utility lines, if necessary.
- ◆ The last phase is usually construction (including implementation of programs).

Carry-over from one program to the next

- ◆ Many projects appear on the TIP only for their initial phases.
- ◆ A large part of the next TIP can be consumed just to finish incomplete projects started earlier.

Flexibility within the program

- ◆ As a project progresses, cost increases may occur or sometimes the project isn't ready for construction as soon as expected.
- ◆ Therefore, as necessary, the TIP or Long-Range Plan can be amended between regular updates. The project sponsor (usually PennDOT or the County) proposes to move funding from one qualifying project to another. It is important not to tie up funds if a project is not ready when it was initially programmed.

Basic funding priorities

- ♦ Responding to federal and state guidance, SPC attempts to follow the 80/20 rule – programming 80% to maintain and upgrade the existing transportation system and 20% to construct facilities that add capacity (new highways, new interchanges, or new travel lanes on existing highways).
- ♦ SPC also tries to follow the principle of “finish what we started,” carrying projects to completion after initial stages have been funded.

Competition for funding

- ♦ Many high-visibility projects are quite costly. Complete funding of any one could consume all the funds available to that county.
- ♦ Many needs cannot be met. Do we postpone an expensive maintenance project by doing a quick, temporary repair? Do we delay one project in order to be able to do another?
- ♦ Priorities may be based on safety considerations, urgency of maintenance needs, or whether the transportation facility supports economic development.
- ♦ Although there’s little room for new projects, we must keep our ears open for critical needs.
- ♦ Innovative funding, which finds new sources of revenue, will become increasingly important. This could help advance big projects – either upgrades or new capacity – and could free up money from our regular sources for other projects.
- ♦ Priority project needs in each county will receive a fair share of the money that’s available to the region, but negotiation and compromise must take place. Many projects benefit the whole region, beyond a single county’s boundaries, and sometimes counties decide to take turns funding major regional projects over the years.

Who is responsible for making these tough decisions on the Long-Range Plan and TIP?

- ♦ These programs are adopted by the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, whose members are the City of Pittsburgh and ten Counties in southwestern Pennsylvania, each with five voting representatives on SPC. In addition, PennDOT has two votes. The Governor’s Office, Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, Port Authority of Allegheny County, and another transit operator each has a vote.
- ♦ Details of these programs are developed, monitored, and maintained by SPC, working closely in conjunction with the Counties, City of Pittsburgh, PennDOT, and the transit agencies in our region, by way of the Transportation Technical Committee (TTC) and Transit Operators Committee (TOC).

What roles do the Congress and state legislature play?

- ♦ Federal legislation establishes basic requirements for transportation planning. The current legislation is called SAFETEA-LU.
- ♦ Federal legislation may include earmark funding for specific projects. SPC works closely with the Congressional delegation from Southwestern Pennsylvania, encouraging them to earmark projects that are already partially funded in our TIP and to avoid partial funding for projects we cannot afford to complete.
- ♦ Legislators can help us maintain existing programs and develop new sources of funding.
- ♦ The State Transportation Commission sets policy direction regarding the state’s Twelve-Year Program, and the Pennsylvania state legislature approves it. Our TIP becomes Stage I of the Twelve-Year Program.
- ♦ The Congress provides the appropriations to fund transportation. The House and Senate Appropriations and Transportation Committees are critical in advancing this legislation.
- ♦ Likewise, the state legislature provides the appropriations to actually commit state funds. Appropriations and Transportation Committees in the state House and Senate advance this legislation.



How can you get involved?

*Learn all you can about transportation planning and funding.
Speak up and share your ideas with the decision-makers*

Looking for information?

Visit the website of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission: www.spcregion.org

Other websites of interest include:

PennDOT: www.dot.state.pa.us
Federal Highway Administration: www.fhwa.dot.gov
Federal Transit Administration: www.fta.dot.gov
Port Authority of Allegheny County: www.portauthority.org
Beaver County Transit Authority: www.bcta.com
Butler Transit Authority: www.thebusbutlerpa.com
Fayette Area Coordinated Transportation: www.factbus.com
GG&C Bus Company, Inc: www.ggcbusride.com
Indiana County Transit Authority: www.indigobus.com
Mid-Mon Valley Transit Authority: www.mmvta.com
New Castle Area Transportation Authority: www.newcastletransit.org
Town and Country Transit: www.tandctransit.com
Westmoreland County Transit Authority: www.westmorelandtransit.com
Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission: www.paturnpike.com



Read *Region*, SPC's electronic newsletter. Contact SPC, if you would like to be added to the e-mail list.
(See our address noted below.)

Share your opinions and priorities. Tell decision-makers what's important to you.

Attend public meetings in your county, hosted by the Public Participation Panel (PPP).

- ◆ Each of SPC's member counties has a panel.
- ◆ PPP members are appointed for two-year terms by their own County Commissioners. (In Allegheny County the panel is appointed jointly by the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County.)
- ◆ The PPP represents all kinds of people around the county.
- ◆ The PPP is a connection between SPC and residents of the county. It hosts public meetings where you can comment on major transportation plans and programs before they are adopted by SPC. This is the best opportunity for the general public to be heard. Contact SPC, as described below for information on the schedule for PPP meetings.

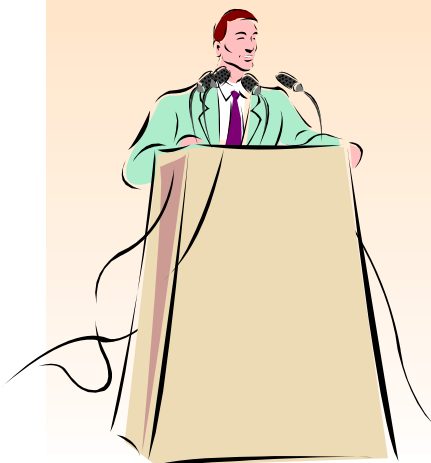
Submit comments to SPC via e-mail: comments@spcregion.org.

Or by mail to: Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission,
425 Sixth Avenue, Suite 2500
Pittsburgh, PA 15219-1852.

Your comments will be most timely if submitted during a special public comment period, related to a specific plan or program being considered by our Commission.

How can you influence transportation decisions?

- ◆ A County that presents a **united agenda** of its priorities will be the most effective in getting its projects funded.
- ◆ **Review the projects on the current TIP**, and express support for the ones that are important to you. Even though it's on the TIP now, it still needs your support. Remember that due to limited funds, there's **not much room for new projects** at this time.
- ◆ If you want funding for a major project, **be realistic**. Don't expect completion tomorrow. We may have to break it into sections and stage them over several years. It will be easier to program smaller projects, which can be realistically completed in the timeframe of the program. Understand that major projects may need to go through a lengthy review process to meet federal and state requirements.
- ◆ A municipality that **assists in funding** a project may see it advance more quickly. Perhaps they can provide right-of-way, or they have already done engineering studies for an intersection improvement. This sponsor has reduced costs and demonstrated that the project is ready to go.
- ◆ In your testimony, **emphasize the public benefits (or public costs) of a project**, rather than the personal impact on you.
- ◆ Help to improve the design of a project **at the earliest possible opportunity**. **Early input** may be more effective than criticism after a project has been designed, approved, and funded. Suggest realistic alternatives that still address the same transportation needs. Bring your concerns to the attention of local elected leaders.
- ◆ **Be aware of the schedule** SPC follows in developing its plans and programs, so you can provide input at the most effective times.
 - ◇ Long-range transportation and development plan is updated every 4 years, the current plan was adopted in June 2007. Each draft plan is under development for at least a year prior to adoption. The 30-day public comment period on the draft plan is scheduled about 6 weeks prior to the scheduled adoption date.
 - ◇ The TIP is updated in the summer of every even-numbered calendar year, taking effect October 1 of that year. Public meetings are held during the summer of the previous (odd-numbered) year, to learn the public's priorities before the draft TIP is developed. Once the draft TIP has been constructed, there is a 30-day public comment period, about 6 weeks prior to adoption, to give the public another chance for input..



- ◆ Communicate with your County Commissioners and County Planning Department. (In Allegheny County, contact the county Chief Executive, Mayor of the City of Pittsburgh, or their Planning Directors.) **Your County (or the City of Pittsburgh) represents you**, along with PennDOT and SPC staff, as plans and programs are developed. They also represent you on the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, casting votes for adoption of transportation plans and programs.
- ◆ Communicate with **your representative in Congress and your state legislator**. They can be influential, working to fund the region's transportation program. To identify your state and federal legislators, check <http://www.state.pa.us>, and click on "Contact Your Legislators."

Acronyms and Other Special Transportation Terms

FHWA	The Federal Highway Administration is an agency within the United States Department of Transportation. Through the Federal-Aid Highway Program, FHWA provides federal financial assistance to the States to construct and improve the National Highway system, urban and rural roads and bridges. FHWA also provides technical expertise to its partners in areas of design, construction, maintenance, policy and planning, and highway safety.
FTA	The Federal Transit Administration is an agency within the United States Department of Transportation. The FTA administers a national program of planning assistance providing funding, guidance, and technical support to State and local transit agencies. FTA provides capital and operating assistance to these agencies. It assists the transit industry and state and local authorities in providing safety and security for transit passengers and employees. FTA takes a lead in coordinating transit research and technology activities.
Long-Range Plan	A comprehensive strategy for transportation and development in the region, developed and adopted by the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission. This plan covers 20 or more years and is updated every four years. It contains a transportation element whose total costs may not exceed projected revenues. It also contains a supplementary list of projects for funding if additional revenues become available and a plan for economic development.
MPO	A Metropolitan Planning Organization is established in each urban area of the United States with population of 50,000 or more. An MPO is responsible for developing and adopting a long-range transportation plan and a short-range Transportation Improvement Program, that set priorities for use of Federal and State transportation funds in the region.
PennDOT	The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation is the state agency responsible for transportation in the Commonwealth.
Port Authority	The Port Authority of Allegheny County is the public transit operator for Allegheny County.
PPP	A Public Participation Panel is established in each county in SPC's region. County Commissioners appoint the members in their own counties – or in Allegheny County the County Chief Executive and the Mayor of the City of Pittsburgh appoint PPP members. Panel membership is designed to represent the diverse population of the county — geographically, demographically, and in terms of transportation concerns. The role of the PPP is to provide public input to SPC on its major transportation decisions and to hold public meetings at key decision points in the planning and programming process.
SAFETEA-LU	The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act-a Legacy for Users is the current Federal legislation that establishes basic requirements for transportation planning and authorizes federal funding, including financial earmarks for specific projects.

SPC	The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission is the designated metropolitan planning organization for the City of Pittsburgh and ten counties in southwestern Pennsylvania (Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington and Westmoreland Counties). Each of these counties and the City of Pittsburgh has five voting representatives on the Commission. PennDOT has two votes, and the Governor's Office, Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, Port Authority of Allegheny County, and another transit operator have one vote apiece.
STC	The State Transportation Commission sets policy direction regarding the State's Twelve-Year Program. This body consists of the state Secretary of Transportation, the majority and minority Chairs of the Senate and House Transportation Committees, and ten other members appointed by the Governor. Every two years the STC holds hearings around the state to receive public testimony regarding transportation programs and projects. This testimony is input for development of the next Twelve-Year Program.
STIP	The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program is a four-year program of funding for transportation projects throughout Pennsylvania, prepared by PennDOT and submitted to the U.S. Department of Transportation. It combines the TIPs of Pennsylvania's fifteen MPOs with programs of seven Rural Planning Organizations and one independent county.
TIP	The Transportation Improvement Program is a specific, four-year program of transportation projects to receive federal and state funding in Southwestern Pennsylvania. It is developed by SPC in conjunction with staff from the PennDOT districts, planning departments for each member county and the City of Pittsburgh, and transit authorities. It is updated and adopted by the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission every two years and amended when needed between those programming cycles. Projects on the TIP must also be consistent with the region's long-range plan. The TIP must be balanced each year within the region's projected revenues. Funds come in a number of specific categories, with specific project qualifying criteria.
TOC	The Transit Operators Committee is a standing committee of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, responsible for developing, monitoring and maintaining the public transit portion of the TIP and long-range plan. Its voting members include the region's nine fixed-route public transit providers and three Transportation Management Associations. The TOC is the region's forum for discussion and comment on public transportation operations, planning and funding issues. As needed, it may conduct planning projects and regional initiatives related to public transportation.
TTC	The Transportation Technical Committee is a standing committee of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, responsible for developing, monitoring, and maintaining project details of the Title I portion of the TIP. This committee consists of staff representatives from SPC, PennDOT, planning departments for each member county and the City of Pittsburgh, and the Port Authority of Allegheny County. The TTC is authorized to approve minor amendments to TIP Title I programs, although major actions, including TIP adoption, are by the SPC Commission.
Twelve-Year Program	Pennsylvania's priority list of transportation projects, revised every other year and developed in three four-year stages. The first four years of the State's Twelve-Year Program incorporates SPC's TIP. Projects using a mixture of State and Federal funding are included, as well as projects funded solely by the State.