

Notes from SPC Pedestrian-Bicycle Advisory Committee

March 9, 2011

Attendees:

Lynn Heckman, Allegheny County
Bob Dudash, URS Consultants
Jon Smith, resident
John Turak, Penn State Cooperative Extension
Jerry Green, resident
Bill Evans, Beaver County
Lisa Kay Schweyer, SPC
Mavis Raney, Oakland Transportation Management Association (OTMA)
Chuck Imbrogno, SPC
Hannah Hardy, Pennsylvania Environmental Council/Steel Valley Trail
David McCoy, Bike Pittsburgh
Roy Weil, Freewheelin' Easy
Mary Shaw, Freewheelin' Easy
Chris Ziegler, Butler Freeport Community Trail
Doniele Andrus, Beaver/Lawrence/Mercer County Trails and Greenways
Chuck Davey, Butler Cycling Commission
Ryan Gordon, SPC
Dill DeGufferoy, Indiana County
Chris Blackwell, Penn Hills Borough
Howard Davidson, Penn Hills Borough
Ed Zullo, Penn Hills CDC
Kathryn Larkin, PennDOT District 11
Chris Goswick, Allegheny County
Lynn Manion, Airport Corridor Transportation Association (ACTA)

The meeting was opened with a round of introductions.

Transportation Authorization – A seven month extension of the SAFETEA-LU legislation was approved late last week. This will keep the transportation systems operating until October, which is the start of the new federal fiscal year. The extension is good news, in that it keeps current programs operational at the State and Federal levels, and permits highway and road construction activities to advance as planned this summer. However, it provides for an extension of a program that we already know generates too little money to fund needed transportation improvements, and adds no new programs or policies to address issues of climate change, air quality concerns or other emerging issues.

The absence of a multi-year (new) federal Transportation Authorization will also make it difficult for SPC to prepare a “fiscally constrained” Long Range Plan this summer, or to project revenue and cash flow for the four year Transportation Improvement Program, an effort that is scheduled to get underway late this summer. We will continue with the preparation of these documents, but the fiscal projections will be based on existing programs, and will likely be superseded by new funding and operational programs at such time as a new transportation authorization bill is signed into law. Projections on when that happen range from late this summer to sometime after the Presidential elections in 2012.

Also left somewhat uncertain by the absence of a long term federal transportation bill is the SPC **Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality (CMAQ) program**. At present, no federal funding programs extend beyond October of this year. Under normal circumstances, SPC would open the CMAQ program application window in August or September of this year, in association with the development of the 2013-2016 Transportation Improvement Program, which would be slated for adoption in the summer of 2012. However, may not know how much funding would be available through the CMAQ program for expenditure after October 2011. It is our intent to proceed as though the CMAQ program will remain viable, either through the further extension of existing transportation authorization legislation, or through the adoption of new federal transportation authorization. That means that SPC expects to have approximately \$25 million per year available for “commuter type” projects that have the effect of reducing congestion or enhancing air quality in the region. About half of that \$25 million per year is already committed for the completion of previously identified projects. The likely schedule of CMAQ activities is the solicitation of project applications in late summer, with applications accepted in September and October. The CMAQ technical review committee would review these documents, and make recommendations by sometime in December. The pedestrian-bicycle liaison on the CMAQ Technical Review Committee is Stephen Patchan, Pedestrian-Bicycle Coordinator for the City of Pittsburgh. As an important reminder, the CMAQ program is a *reimbursement* program, not a grant program. Successful applicants will be required to provide all funds up front, with the federal portion of the project activities being reimbursed to the project sponsor.

The Pennsylvania Rail Freight Advisory Committee has recently created a new focus group that is looking at the question of **railbanking**, and the process and issues associated with the **process of reactivation** of an abandoned or railbanked corridor for the resumption of rail service. When railroads determine that lines are no longer financially viable, they may decide to a) sell the corridor outright, often in small pieces to the adjoining land owners, b) abandon the line outright or c) preserve the corridor by “railbanking” it. A railbanked corridor remains in transportation use, usually as a rail trail. The rail trail is developed by a local municipality or a 501(c)3 non-profit, which agrees to build and operate the trail. The Notice of Interim Trail Use (NITU) and all grant agreements entered into in association with trail development acknowledge that the rail corridor may be “reactivated” for rail use upon filing – by a railroad - of a request to do so with the Surface Transportation Board. It is important to note that not all rail trails operate on railbanked corridors. Many trails groups own their rights of way in fee simple. These trails are not subject to the same “reactivation” threat. However, two trails in Western Pennsylvania are currently working through the reactivation process. The Kiski Junction railroad is currently in the process of re-establishing rail operations along a portion of the Armstrong Trails, and

the RJ Corman Railroad has filed a petition with the STB to reactivate a portion of the Snow Shoe Trail in Centre County.

What is not clear from the federal railbanking regulations and reactivation processes is what the real impact on the existing trail might be. These are the issues currently being worked out, and that the PA RFAC hopes to examine. Among the issues, are the question of when and under what parameters it is appropriate for a railroad and a trail to operate along a shared right of way. The State Bureau of Rail Freight will be leading the RFAC's investigation into the question over the coming months.

Other new federal provisions are in the works that will also affect trail operators nationally. New federal guidelines go into effect this month that require trail operators to permit access to trails for users **requiring "Other Personal Mobility Devices"** which may include anything from electric wheelchairs to any other form of motorized transportation, such as snowmobiles, ATV's, motorcycles and even automobiles. Trail operators will be obligated to be in compliance with these new motorized access provisions by March 15, 2011, unless the trail group has prepared an assessment to stating WHY such motorized access is not feasible, and has published that assessment. There are a number of criteria that can be used to limit the types of motorized "OPMD" that can be accommodated, including trail design considerations, natural character and safety, among others.

Previously, trails have pretty much had a "no motorized vehicle" policy, making monitoring of trail use and enforcement of the approved uses fairly straightforward. Under the new provisions, the trail user needs only to make a declaration that they have a mobility impairment, and that enable use of the motorized vehicle of their choice. Many trail groups are struggling with how they might impose reasonable limits to the types of vehicles permitted, from the imposition of speed limits, horsepower limits, weight limits, or limits on the width of a permitted vehicle. A blanket authorization for wheelchairs is included in the Regional Trail Corporation's new Mobility Device Policy that is under consideration, and presumably that of most other trails.

Among the concerns brought up at this meeting included the potential (adverse) interaction between motorized vehicles and horses on trails where they are permitted; the questions of wear and tear on the trails, and the potential use of a strategy comparable to the posting of roads to recoup the increased trail maintenance costs resulting from use by heavier, motorized vehicles; and the exploration of options to place "hours of operations" limits on motorized vehicles, which would include trail maintenance vehicles.

More information is available on the American Trails website at www.americantrails.org, including a pre-recorded webinar on the key issues. The Regional Trails Council will consider this issue at their next meeting, which is scheduled for next week.

SPC provided a summary of the Spring/Fall anticipated **Bike Count** program. SPC staff will conduct peak hour counts at about a dozen locations, all located in the City of Pittsburgh. Volunteer labor will be solicited to enable us to expand the bike count program to other locations as well. SPC will provide

training materials and bike count forms for to anyone wishing to conduct bike counts in their community.

SPC is currently in the process of updating two key planning documents, the Transportation Long Range Plan, or 25 year vision for the region, and the Regional Operations and Safety Plan, which makes recommendations on how the roadways may be made to operate more efficiently and move people more safely. SPC is soliciting input for pedestrian and bicycle considerations in each document.

For the ***Regional Operations and Safety Plan***, meeting attendees made the following suggestions:

- more sensitive loop detection systems at signalized intersections to detect cyclists
 - additional consideration of pedestrians at signalized intersections, including greater use of countdown pedestrian signals and pedestrian only phasing in high (pedestrian) traffic locations
 - Consideration and advancement of plans and improvements identified in Active Allegheny and other local, multi-municipal or county comprehensive plan
 - Bridge improvements for bicyclists and pedestrians
 - Inclusion of pedestrian and bicycle traffic in PennDOT/local Maintenance and Protection of Traffic Plans so as to ensure availability of ped-bike appropriate detour during roadway construction
 - Expanded consideration of surface treatment at railroad crossings during roadway construction
 - Notify pedestrian and bicycle community of proposed roadway improvements earlier (PennDOT), not just during scheduled public meetings, so that proper design elements may be incorporated into project design (for all projects, not just new capacity projects)
 - Identification of pedestrian and bicycle priorities for regional partners (Counties, City of Pittsburgh, TMAs, etc).
 - Identification of pedestrian and bicycle priorities for PennDOT; rescission of “if funding available” mentality, to full integration of multi-modal design. Time for PennDOT to step up.
 - More proactive use of pedestrian and bicycle checklists, with wider input from planning partners and users
- More transparency in completion/use of pedestrian-bicycle checklists

For the ***2040 Transportation and Development Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania***, meeting attendees made the following suggestions:

- Consideration and advancement of plans and improvements identified in Active Allegheny and other local, multi-municipal or county comprehensive plan
- Creation of a continuous trail connection all regional parks
- Accommodation of pedestrians and cyclists on all major bridges, existing or proposed (neither pedestrians nor bicycles were considered in the feasibility study for the new bridge at New Kensington)
- Conduct systematic assessment of bridges in the region, identify quick fixes for enhanced pedestrian-bicycle safety, and incorporate pedestrian and bicycle friendly design elements (scuppers, grates, ramps, etc) as a matter of course
- Exploration of “Park and Pedal” opportunities, where safe/secure bike parking is provided in close proximity to transit; 24/7 bike storage at such locations is deemed highly desirable.

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Roundtable discussion – Reports from Around the Room

Mavis Raney (OTMA) –Just completed a ***Study of Pedestrian Mobility in Oakland*** (excerpt in handout packet). The Study looked at the interaction of all traffic modes, and the Phase II recommendations were recently released. These recommendations include the establishment of cycling routes, better signage, and safer pedestrian crossings and transit access. They will continue to work on planning and engineering for such improvements in coming months. In following up on earlier discussion items, Mavis agreed that there should be more standardization of treatments in the region that assist pedestrians, including enhanced pedestrian signal features, standard criteria for handicapped ramps, and other features that might enhance safety for senior citizens and other users.

Sean Bridgen is working with ***Penn State Cooperative Extension and WEDIG on a five community multi-municipal plan (New Kensington, Upper Burrell, Lower Burrell, Allegheny Township and Arnold)***. He’s finding that area residents are open to the consideration of pedestrian and bicycle enhancements such as bike lanes and sharrows, but they still view it as a “fringe” transportation element. He indicated that they are also concerned about potential legal issues/liability in the event that the municipality installs bike lanes or sharrows.

Ed Zullo of the Penn Hills Community Development Corporation (CDC) reports that they have a goal of creating a more walkable/bikeable community.

Howard Davidson, also of Penn Hills, specifically sought advice on how to proceed with their efforts to ***create a bikeway*** along the south shore of the Allegheny River, from Arnold to the Strip District (or at least that portion of it falling in Penn Hills). He was referred to the Allegheny Green River Boulevard effort and planning team, which proposes a walkable/bikeable/riverfront accessibility program from the Strip District to the Penn Hills/City of Pittsburgh line, near Highland Park.

Chris Blackwell, also from Penn Hills, indicated that Penn Hills has a riverfront plan, but seeks options to advance the project more expediently, stating that theirs has been a “very slow process to date.”

Bill DeGuffero, Indiana County, indicated that their recently developed Bike/Ped Plan will be adopted with their County Comprehensive Plan, probably this summer. A Trail Feasibility Study for the connection of the West Penn and Hoodlebug Trails near Blairsville is almost done as well. They are also looking at options to expand a trail from Clymer to Dixonville, a distance of about 3 miles, along a sewer easement, but that project is only feasible if the decision is made to extend a waterline along the same easement. The County is also trying to determine whether a trail connection could be made in the

vicinity of Arlene Drive to connect the trail to Smicksburg Park. The trail connection would have to cross US Army Corps of Engineers property. The trail connection was proposed in the Smicksburg Park Master Plan. Indiana County will be participating in the SPC Roadway Safety Audit for State Route 22 in the Blairsville area, and discussions on the pedestrian and bicycle safety elements needed in that area, as well as the need for any roadway improvements to accommodate future connections of two trails across Route 22 at Blairsville have already been discussed with the project team.

Chuck Davey, is a member of the newly established **Butler Cycling Committee**. They continue to work on the placement of additional sharrows in the City of Butler, and will tackle the signage question next. Their first initiative in that regard will be a sign inventory, which will serve as a permanent record of what signs have been posted, and where. They have a form that they use for this purpose, and will make that form available to anyone interested in seeing it.

Doniele Andrus, Beaver/Lawrence/Mercer Trails and Greenways Coordinator, mentioned the Tri State Trail Meeting which is coming up on March 29th, and reminded folks interested in participating in the event to RSVP before March 21st. The Ohio River Trail development efforts continue, with the Feasibility Study of the South Shore route well under way, and the RFP for the North Shore Feasibility Study to be ready in early April. They are also working on the placement of sharrows in New Brighton, Beaver Falls and Fallston. The Veterans Bridge, also in Fallston, will have sidewalks and bike lanes when reconstructed. In Lawrence County, the Neshannock Trail in New Castle and Hickory Township is advancing, and if one remaining property owner agrees, a Spring 2011 let date for trail construction is feasible. The rehabilitation of the Stavich Trail is complete, with the exception of sign placement. Union Township is now interested in extending the trail to their municipal building, with a possible sharrow extension into New Castle. With the water trails, the southern trailhead of the Shenango/Beaver Trail is complete, and the proposed trailhead in Millenium Park is fully funded. Construction will take place this summer. They are currently looking for a volunteer to do some concrete work in order to completed the Shenango boat launch. At this time, they have seven boat launches in place.

Chris Ziegler, Butler Freeport Community Trail – construction continued all winter on the trail, and they will have a ribbon cutting on June 4th (National Trail Day). The Sarver to Cabot section has been resurfaced and the bridges redecked. They will hold a fundraising dinner on April 10th. Their half marathon is scheduled for October 15th. This year they will increase the number of participants from 600 to 1000 by offering a rolling start time.

Mary Shaw, Free Wheelin' Easy – The news of the impending completion of the Great Allegheny Passage into Pittsburgh is wonderful, but let us not forget that there is a key missing section in the heart of downtown Pittsburgh. With the Mon Wharf switchback, and Mon Wharf connection to the Point still not under construction, there is no “official” connection from the Smithfield Street Bridge to Point State Park. There is a possible connection using Fort Pitt Boulevard, or the sidewalk to it, between Smithfield and Wood Streets, a distance of one block. While this block features a 12 foot sidewalk that could, in theory, be designated a Shared Use Path, formal designation would be required to make sidewalk riding legal in that downtown location. Such designation would serve westbound users primarily, as there is

no sidewalk on the inbound side of that roadway. It was suggested that perhaps such a project could be examined as part of the Point Park University Wood Street Commons project, which is looking at Fort Pitt Boulevard and Wood Street a few blocks to the west. Mary also recommended that the concept of establishing “Park and Pedal” or “Park and Bike” lots merits strong consideration in the region. As envisioned, this would be a park and ride type lot that featured secure bike storage for overnight storage of bikes. Users would then use the park and pedal locations as they would a normal transit park and ride, but substituting bicycle use for the transit component of the commute. A surface lot with free car parking during the day, and access to a trail or dedicated bike lane would be essential. Bike lockers would be the defining element. Users are already using Millvale Riverfront Park in this way. Other locations are probably also available.

Roy Weil, Free Wheelin’ Easy- Roy mentioned that the Pittsburgh Foundations’ “The Working” program provides funds to local groups in need of a few hundred to a few thousand dollars in order to take advantage of volunteer labor. Recent “investments” have been made in the Red Bank corridor, for bridge decking materials; in the Steel Valley Trail for a mower; and in the City of Butler for paint and sparkles to be used in the sharrows. Roy also announced that the new edition of Free Wheelin Easy is at the printer, and can be made available at or near cost to any organization interested in using sale of the book as a fundraiser. He noted that only trails to the north of the City are included in this version of the book, as they did not have time to redo the entire trail network at one time. The north trails are the first section of trails to be reviewed and released. All proceeds from the sale of the book go back into trails in the region. Roy also shared information on the Canoe Access Fund, which is a \$4000 grant to build and/or a \$1000 grant to maintain a canoe access on a Class II or Class III stream. This program is administered by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

Bob Dudash, cyclist – noted that sharrows are still considered “experimental” by PennDOT. They are included in the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices, or MUTCD. However, Pennsylvania has not yet adopted the MUTCD. As such, formal approvals from the local PennDOT District are required for the placement of sharrows on State roads at his time. PennDOT District 11 has approved sharrows in multiple communities, and PennDOT District 10 has approved sharrow placement in the City of Butler. The process generally calls for the local municipality to make a request for sharrow placement to the PennDOT District Office, and the District then submits the request to Central Office for issuance of the necessary waiver.

David McCoy, representing Bike Pittsburgh - pointed out that Bike Pittsburgh will be kicking off their Spring Visibility program very soon, and is making plans for another season of Car Free Fridays. They are also very pleased to announce that nine employers in the region were recently awarded Bike Friendly Employer Status.

Hannah Hardy, Pennsylvania Environmental Council - Hannah reminded everyone that the Laurel Highlands Summit will be held on April 4th. The event, which is tourism based, will have a trails “track” that includes sessions like “the economic impact of trails” as well as trails and conservation. More information is available at www.pecpa.org. The Erie to Pittsburgh Trail Alliance continues its efforts to

link existing trails into a continuous link from Pittsburgh to Erie. More locally, the Steel Valley Trail Council will solicit bids for completion of the trail from Grant Avenue to the new pedestrian bridges that were installed last summer in Duquesne. These are expected to be fairly quick efforts to connect the trail to the ped bridges, which will then make the section of trail from McKeesport to the Waterfront complex in Homestead usable. The Friends of the Riverfront are working on a Trail Feasibility Study along the Ohio River between Pittsburgh and Coraopolis that would eventually connect with the trail that Doniele is working on.

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Jerry Green, north side resident – Commented that efforts to make the North Side more bikeable and walkable are going strong. They’ve designed and sold T shirts as a fund raiser, and are finding it hard to keep them in stock. They also have a new group that is leading rides out of the Buena Vista Coffee shop. They remain concerned about trail accessibility in the vicinity of the Casino during events, and continue to reach out to Casino management (which seems to change with some regularity) on addressing the concerns of local residents.

John Turack, Penn State Cooperative Extension – is focused on economic and community development, in a strategic planning/visioning/empowerment mode. Two recurring questions seem to be “now what” and “who is you?” as community groups work on such planning efforts. Their goal, in their five community multi-municipal plan, is to link pockets of population density, work to identify and map desire lines within the communities, and assess the impacts of rising fuel costs on transportation and decision making in their community. They are also evaluating the impacts of Marcellus Shale on their communities, and wonders if pipeline easements might present an opportunity for trail development. A webinar series on Marcellus Shale is currently under development.

Jon Smith, Allegheny County Transit Council – expressed concern over road accessibility/safety issues for school aged children, and roadway and trail access issues for pedestrians.

Lynn Heckman, Allegheny County – Referenced the County’s pedestrian and bicycle plan, **Active Allegheny**, and the need for the SPC pedestrian-bike program and long range plan to work with the County in the implementation of plan recommendations.

Susheela Nemani-Stranger, of the Urban Redevelopment Authority shared information on the status of the **South Shore Riverfront Park** upgrades that are currently underway. The first phase of park improvements are expected to open in July, and the second phase in about June. The kiosk near Railroad Street was recently hit by a drunk driver, causing a slight setback in getting everything in order. When the new improvements open, the South Water Street detour will be eliminated. She also noted that in order for these improvements to become public, a maintenance plan, and funding for on-going maintenance must be identified/committed. Susheela also mentioned that efforts are progressing on the Shadyside Pedestrian Bridge. In an observation about trail etiquette and safety, she noted that in other Cities, use of the expression “on the left” by an overtaking cyclist was common. She sees that less in Pittsburgh. Trail etiquette reminders might be useful as we enter the Spring biking season. On a final note, she mentioned that Joy Ackerly of the Department of City Planning was hit by a van while attempting to cross Second and Ross Streets in downtown. The intersection is dimly lit, and the City hopes to add lighting to this intersection to alleviate pedestrian and bicycle safety concerns. An overall look at the intersection, and possible other improvements, is expected to take about two years to complete.

Chris Goswick, Allegheny County, mentioned that the County is working with **ARTEZ** (the Allegheny River Enterprise Zone Towns – Millvale and Shaler) on the development of overlay zones that will focus on Green Buildings and on the Riverfront. These efforts will feed into the Trail Feasibility Study currently underway by Friends of the Riverfront.

Ned Williams of the Montour Trail Council reminded everyone of the need to continue the dialogue with the Borough of Carnegie, and others, on the need for a connection between the transit station in Carnegie and the Panhandle Trail, three miles to the south. He also offered his congratulations on the Active Allegheny Plan.

Ron Steffey, Allegheny Valley Land Trust, reported that the Land Trust now owns 90 miles of corridor, but that at present, less than 20 miles of trail are complete. The incomplete sections include four tunnels and dozens of bridges. The Land Trust estimates trail completion to take at least 5-10 years. However, the trail group is exploring new, less expensive options for trail development. In the past, it has cost \$200,000 or even \$300,000 to build a mile of trail. They are now using volunteers to lay gravel 1 inch deep and 8 feet wide, and find they can build a mile of trail for about \$6,000. Even the coal companies are helping out. They recently had 12 miles of trail graded and rolled by the coal companies, and the companies were able to deliver limestone for one trail section by railcar. The group plans to purchase the limestone, pipe and redecking materials for the bridges, then use volunteers for installation. They’ve also developed a new strategy for accurately recording volunteer hours. They will be using Criminal Justice interns from Slippery Rock University. One will be based in the office, to help with paperwork, while two will be used as managers for the work completed in the field.

- End.

Edited to add comments from HHardy