TRANSFORM

HOW STREETS HELP BUILD COMMUNITY CHARACTER

A downtown street in Media, Pa., provides a sense of place and attracts pedestrians.

Are your downtown streets public destinations, or are they simply throughways to and from the workplace? Is the transportation element of your comprehensive plan nothing more than a discussion of the network of arterial, collector, and local roads? Do your streets and parking facilities help make or break your community's character, sense of place, and identity?

Where once streets were the exclusive domain of cars and trucks, they are increasingly becoming public space — places for people, bikes, and automobiles. Neighborhood streets can be places where parents feel safe letting their children play. Commercial strips can be designed as boulevards, safe for walking and cycling, attractive to business, and allowing for both through and local traffic.

But streets need to be planned and designed appropriately. That authority and responsibility rests, in part, on municipalities, beginning with a community vision.

PLAN FOR COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Communities need to first envision what kinds of places and interactions they want to support and then plan a transportation system consistent with this collective community vision. Whether establishing a broad vision (think comprehensive plan) or focusing on specific objectives (think bike/ped plan or updates to zoning and development regulations), land use planning always involves elements of transportation. They are intimately linked.

Transportation — the process of going to a place — can be wonderful if we rethink the idea of transportation itself. If we remember that transportation is the journey, enhancing the community must be the goal.

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pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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While urban and suburban municipalities may have more in-house resources to devote to planning for transportation, rural or financially strapped municipalities can still communicate local priorities by participating in county or regional planning efforts through comprehensive plans, bike/ped plans, greenway plans, or long-range transportation plans. Having your priorities reflected in such plans can mean funding down the road for projects in your community. The key is to participate.

With an established broad vision in place, your municipality can then use land use controls to change or maintain your desired sense of place. Safe speeds can be attained with a number of design tools, including changes in roadway widths, curvature, and intersection design. Roadside strategies, such as building setbacks and sidewalk activity, can also impact the speed at which motorists comfortably drive while also building neighborhood vitality.

PennDOT Connects offers new training, both in-person and web-based, that can help your municipality understand the land use and infrastructure management controls that serve to maintain or build your desired community character.

These training modules are a great resource to see where such management controls have worked well in Pennsylvania. Eight submodules are now available as online, recorded training segments that require only 15 minutes to view (see box). All training modules are designed for non-technical audiences. For more information, go to www.paconnects.org or ask your MPO/RPO for help in arranging an in-person training session.

Online Training Modules

- Access Management Regulations and Coordinated Highway Occupancy Permit (HOP) Processing
- Loan and Funding Reimbursement Programs
- Site Design and Roadway Standards
- Transit Revitalization Investment District (TRID)
- Capital Improvement Programming
- Integrating Transportation and Land Use in Comprehensive Plans (PennDOT Pub 688)
- Traffic Operations
- Transportation Impact Fees

DO YOU WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNITY'S SENSE OF PLACE?

A PennDOT Connects Knowledgebase
TECHSHEET | GOAL **Maintaining or Improving Community Character**
Tools to Achieve Common Comprehensive Plan Goals

Download the **Maintaining or Improving Community Character** tech sheet for information on land use planning tools that can help obtain your desired community character.

Tools include:

- Site Design and Roadway Standards
- Adaptive Reuse of Land and Buildings
- Urban Growth Areas/Rural Preservation
- Traditional Neighborhood Development
- Zoning for Mixed Uses and Higher Densities

PennDOT and its Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Rural Planning Organization (RPO) partners have a long-standing relationship jointly preparing transportation studies, plans, and programs to make the best possible transportation project investments with available resources.

This strategic alliance is now of even greater importance for implementing PennDOT Connects. Together, the MPO/RPO planning partners and PennDOT can effectively collaborate and communicate with municipalities — and other community stakeholders (e.g., transit operators, economic development agencies, etc.) — to improve transportation system performance and achieve more livable communities.

Municipalities, MPO/RPO planning partners, and PennDOT must collaborate to ensure that opportunities to improve transportation and communities are realized. MPO/RPO contacts can be found at:

www.penndot.gov/ProjectAndPrograms/Planning/Pages/MPO-and-RPO-Contact-List.aspx.

ON THE GROUND

SUCCESS STORIES from the FIELD

Bath Multimodal Safety & Parking Analysis

What started as a parking study by the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission for the Borough of Bath in Northampton County grew into a detailed analysis of the borough's transportation network and its impact on the safety of motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.

Like many small towns in Pennsylvania, Bath is located at the intersection of important state routes with both local and through-traffic passing through its downtown commercial, residential, and historic areas. Analysts looked at features of the road network, types of accidents, parking perceptions, pedestrian safety, and future PennDOT road projects that can help shape the direction of funding priorities for the borough.

The report proposes short, mid, and long-term strategies, such as the following design proposal that addresses issues of speeding, parking, pedestrian safety and place-making.

Design Proposal: West Main & South Chestnut Streets

Current Intersection

Proposed Intersection

Proposed design elements include sidewalk extension and widening, clear pavement markings, a gateway sign, striped parking spaces that maximize on-street space, paid meters that disincentivize parking in a high-demand area, additional street lights that better illuminate the area at night, the addition of a historic sign marker that clearly identifies points of interest for visitors and residents, and a blinking red or yellow light that forces drivers to slow down and creates more controlled vehicle flow from both directions.

Swatara Township Sidewalk Study

Swatara Township, Dauphin County, received $20,000 from the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission (Dauphin and Perry counties/City of Harrisburg) toward completion of a sidewalk study in 2018. The grant funds were awarded under the Regional Connections Grants Program, which helps municipalities implement the commission's regional growth management plan.

INSET #5
1 INCH = 1/8 MILE

LEGEND

—— NO SIDEWALK		—— SIDEWALK ON NORTH / WEST
—— SIDEWALK ON BOTH SIDES		—— SIDEWALK ON SOUTH / EAST

According to Bob Ihlein, township zoning officer, the completed study reflects how past development led to today's lack of sidewalks, particularly along commercial corridors. Because development did not occur linearly along corridors, sidewalk waivers were routinely awarded. Additionally, there was no formal mechanism in the township's land development regulations to collect payments promised in lieu of sidewalk construction. The township has since adopted and is now enforcing a sidewalk ordinance to collect these fees for new development.
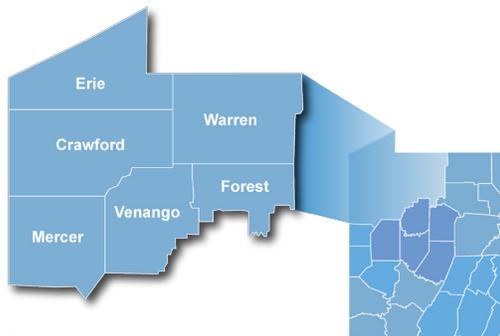
The sidewalk study provides various maps illustrating the locations of existing sidewalks, missing links, sidewalk conditions, and locations in need of updates to comply with ADA regulations.

"There's a lot of work to do," says Ihlein. "We hope to select a few projects and add them to our comprehensive plan." Finding funding is the next challenge, but having the sidewalk study in place will serve to improve the township's competitiveness under available grant programs.

FEATURED DISTRICT: DISTRICT 1

PLANNER ADVOCATES FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Meet Lyndsie DeVito, the first person to be hired as a district planner under the PennDOT Connects initiative and an early contributor to the program's development. For the past three years, DeVito has been a rural voice for the program, sharing unique challenges that municipalities face as local partners in transportation planning in District 1's northwestern counties.

PennDOT District 1

"Under PennDOT Connects, communities that didn't have an outlet to speak to their wants and needs now have someone in their corner to help turn their community plans and aspirations into realities," explains DeVito. "We have communities that don't have internet service; some have part-time staff who only have time to handle complaints and immediate issues. While we are employed by PennDOT, we seemingly work as advocates for the municipalities. We are the liaison, if you will, between them and PennDOT."

DeVito brings experience in multiple disciplines to her district planner role. As a PennDOT civil engineer, DeVito managed projects in the design and traffic units before joining District 1's planning and programming unit in 2016.

As she advocates for a municipality, the engineer in DeVito ensures that she uses sound engineering judgment when exploring local plans and ideas.

"I do not see a benefit in making false promises," says DeVito. "If we discuss an 'ask' that is not feasible, I point it out. With that being said, I absolutely capture all requests on the project initiation forms (PIFs). I want to build a relationship on trust, not a false sense of reality to make municipalities happy at the moment. We are focusing on long-term relationships."

Do You Know Your MPO/RPO?

About one year ago, DeVito's district created a quarterly planning partner meeting during which the metropolitan and rural planning organizations (MPO/RPOs) meet with the district to discuss how things are going, what needs to change, and how they can help one another.

"Greater transparency has been a huge thing for us," says DeVito. However, she believes that many municipalities do not know what a MPO or RPO is and how they can go to them to ask for help. So DeVito fields questions and artfully directs issues to the appropriate planning organization or provides the best contact for the issue at hand. At the same time, she educates communities on the importance of building relationships with regional planning partners, whose support is often required to make things happen.

Be Prepared

The biggest thing that DeVito has helped with at the municipal level are comprehensive plans (comp plans). To communities that rely on county comp plans, DeVito asks whether they have provided input specific to their municipality.

"It's about being present and responsive when county or regional comp plans come around," says DeVito. "You need to show up at a meeting and communicate your ideas."

Other important plans to consider developing at the municipal level include bike/ped, greenway, multimodal, five-year road plan, or stormwater management plans.

...the number one thing a municipality can do is show up and be prepared.

"The purpose of these plans is to show that you've put some thought into these things," she says. "It's about having skin in the game and taking the initiative."

You have to have a plan to get funding for projects, says DeVito. If you don't have the necessary planning, PennDOT and its planning partners can help identify and explain funding sources.

"Simply put," says DeVito, "the number-one thing a municipality can do is show up and be prepared. Be honest and forthcoming with your ideas. Turn those ideas into plans by reaching out to your MPO/RPO with thoughtful proposals to get your ideas implemented. Those plans are what gets projects funded."

LOOKING FOR GIS DATA TO SUPPORT LOCAL PLANNING?

Thanks to faster technology, user-friendly platforms, and more available sources of geospatial data, geographic information systems (GIS) are playing a larger role in local government. It's a key tool in better decision-making.

One such source of open data is the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's GIS Open Data Portal, which provides access to all of the department's published GIS data. PennDOT's GIS data is available for free download on the department's Esri ArcGIS Open Data Portal site.

Categories of data include:

- Layers and data for Pennsylvania's:

    - Roads, including traffic counts and administration
    - State and local bridges
    - Transportation improvement projects
    - Boundaries and districts
    - Airports, heliports, and seaports
    - Railways and intersections

- Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's facility and building locations

- Layers and data for Pennsylvania's safety devices and assets

Municipalities interested in stormwater GIS data should check out the RMSPIPE (Drain Pipes) layer, which includes the locations and attributes of drainage pipe structures that intersect with a state route.

If your municipality is just getting acquainted with GIS, contact the PennDOT Connects Support Hub for guidance on a logical approach to finding and identifying useful digital spatial data. The support team can provide information specific to your Pennsylvania county as well as helpful resources for finding useful spatial data at the state, national, and global levels. To request assistance, registered users can log in and select Request Assistance; follow the prompts. You can also call 717.325.4349 to ask for assistance.

Crash Data

PennDOT also offers crash data from 1997 to 2017. Data can be downloaded by county or the entire state. An easy-to-use map allows viewers to download the information. Just click on the county and then the year to begin the process. Go to PennDOT Crash Download Map.

View the Web Map to Download Crash Data by County and Year

Up Your Game using Public Outreach Technology

State and regional agencies are increasingly using virtual public involvement techniques to engage the public in transportation decision-making processes. Local governments can likewise employ these information-sharing and public engagement tools and platforms, many of which cost less than traditional methods and often reach stakeholders who do not routinely participate in local government affairs.

Virtual public involvement and education take many forms: online meetings, online surveys, podcasts, crowdsourced maps, pop-up outreach, meeting-in-a-box, story maps, real-time polling tools, social media following, blogging, and visualization.

For instance, the Pennsylvania State Transportation Commission hosts an online survey designed to prioritize transportation investment and pinpoint specific transportation needs throughout the commonwealth. Last spring, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission offered an online transportation improvement program (TIP) commenting feature as part of a brand new interactive mapping and public comment web-based outreach tool. Specific projects can be easily searched online on DVRPC's website.

If your municipality would like to learn more about these public outreach technologies, check out the Federal Highway Administration's Extending Our Reach videos and webinars. The techniques will be featured in a webinar series, beginning in April 2019.

Let Maps Tell Your Story

Story Map: Sharing Your Comprehensive Plan

The City of Proctor, a small town in Minnesota, highlights key sections of its latest comprehensive plan using a story map. The plan's transportation vision shares the residents' desire for improved sidewalk conditions and better connectivity.

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A story map harnesses the power of maps and geography to tell a story — any story. From a municipal perspective, the combination of maps with narrative text and images can add a highly visual experience to explaining any number of initiatives or local stories, such as comprehensive plans, bike/ped or multimodal strategies, important places to visit, and local history. Story maps are an effective way to communicate your vision and ideas to the general public, community partners, funders, and government agencies.

Esri, the builder of ArcGIS (a powerful mapping and spatial analytics software), has easy-to-use story map tools available free-of-charge. All you need is an ArcGIS Online account. Contact the PennDOT Connects Support Hub for help getting started.

A PennDOT Connects Resource • For more information, go to paconnects.org.   6

pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

PennDOT Connects
Planning with our communities

Transportation Planning: Connecting with Community Priorities

Mobility & Efficiency

Multimodal Transportation

Safety

Community Character

Project Funding

Accommodating Growth