



Lehigh Valley Transportation Study

RICHARD MOLCHANY
Chair, Coordinating Committee

BRENDAN COTTER
Chair, Technical Committee

BECKY A. BRADLEY, AICP
Secretary,
Coordinating Committee +
Technical Committee

Lehigh Valley Transportation Study Minutes from the Wednesday, July 17, 2024 Technical Committee Meeting

Prior to the call to order, Mr. Dinkel stated the agenda and materials for the meeting were posted on the LVPC website. He provided directions on how to participate in the virtual meeting and protocol for the meeting to flow smoothly. The meeting was advertised in the Lehigh Valley Press on January 10, 2024.

Mr. Brendan Cotter chaired the meeting and welcomed the members and the public participants and called the meeting to order.

Roll Call

Mr. Dinkel took Roll Call.

Attendees

Technical Committee

Brendan Cotter	LANTA
Ryan Meyer	LNAA
Becky Bradley, AICP	LVPC
David Petrik (Alt)	City of Allentown
Darlene Heller (Alt)	City of Bethlehem
David Hopkins (Alt)	City of Easton
Jennifer Ruth	PennDOT District 5
David Alas	PennDOT Central Office

Members Absent:

Technical Committee

Matthew Tuerk	City of Allentown
J. William Reynolds	City of Bethlehem
Salvatore J. Panto Jr.	City of Easton

Staff Present: Becky Bradley, Brian Hite, Evan Gardi, Ben Dinkel, Matt Assad

Public Present: Adam Rust, Brett Webber (All Aboard Lehigh Valley), Brian Harman (Pidcock), Brian Miller, Chris Kufro (PennDOT District 5-0), Craig Beavers (APA PA), Daniel Kim (PennDOT District 5-0), Elizabeth Hynes (WSP), Evan Jones, Gene Porochniak (FHWA – PA Division), Jay Bradley, Jeff Rai (PennDOT District 5-0), Justin Backover, Kerri Cutright (PennDOT District 5-0), Kim Shaffer, Kurt Bresswein, Lee Rackus, Mariska van Aalst (Sen. Casey), Matthew LeBlanc, Michael Emili, Nicki Jacobs (GPI), Nyomi Evans (PennDOT Central Office), Ralph Eberhardt (Michael Baker Int'l), Rich Ames (WSP), Richard Molchany, Scott Harney (Pennoni), Scott Vottero (PennDOT District 5-0), Steven Glickman, Tony Klapatch.

Courtesy of the Floor

Becky introduced a new LVPC staff member, Scott Greenly – Director of Planning. Scott shared some information about himself.

Minutes

Mr. Cotter stated that the last Technical Committee was held on June 12th, 2024. Mr. Dinkel noted the actions voted on:

- Minutes from the May 15, 2024, Meeting
- Minutes from the May 15, 2024, LVTS Special Passenger Rail Meeting
- 2023-2026 TIP Amendment – State Route 22 Safety Corridor
- 2023-2026 TIP Amendment – ABE Airport INFRA Award
- Adjournment

Mr. Alas made the motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Meyer seconded them. There were no questions or comments. The motion passed with one abstention.

Mr. Cotter stated the next set of minutes up for approval are from the Special Joint LVTS meeting held on June 27th, 2024. Mr. Dinkel noted the actions voted on:

- 2025-2028 TIP Air Quality Conformity Report
- 2025-2028 TIP Air Quality Conformity Resolution
- 2025-2028 TIP Self Certification Resolution
- 2025-2028 TIP MPO TIP Revisions
- 2025-2028 LVTS TIP Adoption
- 2023-2026 TIP Amendment – 309 Center Valley – Preliminary Engineering Increase
- Adjournment

Mr. Hopkins made the motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Alas seconded them. There were no questions or comments. The motion passed with one abstention.

Old Business

INFORMATION ITEM: Lehigh Valley Passenger Rail Study Next Steps

Chair Cotter initiated the conversation, saying the Lehigh Valley Passenger Rail Study is an information, discussion, and potential recommendation item. He added we will be covering the process for passenger rail, required Step 2 study, estimated costs, funding and a potential recommendation to the Coordinating Committee. He turned it over to Elizabeth Hynes, Vice President, Senior Transportation Project Manager for WSP.

Ms. Hynes started her presentation with the timeline and project lifecycle from the Lehigh Valley Passenger Rail Feasibility Analysis released in March. The study and previous presentation are available at lvpc.org. This timeline presents the general path a the project would follow. It's not tied to any specific federal program like corridor ID. It covers the steps and decision points along the way.

Step 3 is when you look in more detail the potential approaches and specific alignments that market pair corridor would use. In the study, by WSP, they looked specifically at existing and former rail rights of way. But we could also look at greenfield alignments or other modes to fill the transportation purpose and need. We come out of Step 3 with a well-defined project and a preferred alternative, this will give direction on potential application to the ID program.

Steps 4 through 8 loosely align with what happens during the corridor ID program. Steps 4 through 6 focus on service development planning, coordination with the partner railroads, and determine how the service would run.

Steps 7 and 8 are the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental clearance processes and 30% design.

Steps 9 through 11 are the preconstruction steps, lining up environmental approval, satisfying NEPA commitment, procuring equipment, including lead time in ordering equipment, and final design.

Steps 12 through 14 are construction and operation.

Ms. Hynes added that Step 2 can be broken down into two parts. To be eligible for USDOT money, we must prove that the project meets an existing transportation need. We need to determine which market pair corridor, if any, fulfills that need. Step 2 looks at which market pair makes the most sense and demonstrates meeting an existing need, which is done through a travel demand analysis. A travel demand analysis looks at where people are coming and going, and if it would be improved by introducing passenger rail and transferring some trips to that mode.

In addition to the geographic market, we also need to determine the travel market we want to serve, such as commuter rail on weekday peak periods, or intercity service that focuses on leisure or non-work trips. It could be both.

This step is also where you'll define decision-making criteria. Example criteria would be *any feasible alternative must be consistent with FutureLV*, or *any feasible alternative must not reclaim rail right of way that has been converted to a rail trail*. These are example criteria that have come up at previous meetings. LVTS needs these criteria to define and assess alternatives moving forward.

Part 2 of Step 2 is to do a full technical and financial feasibility study of the selected market pair. This is the step where we get more detailed and specific feasibility of the project.

We estimate the cost of the next step as \$450,000, including the cost of hiring a consultant. We estimate it'll be about \$100,000 for the first part of Step 2, and about \$150,000 for part 2, plus staff time for LVPC and LANTA.

We also need to formalize the project sponsor, because they will be the organization to apply for the corridor ID program and beyond.

Ms. Bradley added the travel demand modeling will need to be calibrated with passenger rail data, and if this project moves forward, an additional LVPC Planner position will need to be created. She added additional money will be needed for the steps beyond Step 2, as we won't be able to apply for corridor ID until later, per WSP's outline. We need to know what the corridor will be and what the project is before we pursue the corridor ID program.

Ms. Bradley added we cannot take money from the TIP, because the TIP is not for the planning process. The money for planning must come from somewhere else.

Mr. Molchany asked about funding the consultant management costs and funding LVPC and LANTA staff members. Could this funding help towards the update of *FutureLV*?

Ms. Bradley answered we were following the process Ms. Hynes outlined, and the edits for *FutureLV* would be in the next step. A piece of the econometrics would be done first with the

technical and financial feasibility studies, and then we go into *FutureLV* with its regular 4-year update cycle.

Mr. Molchany added that Lehigh County leadership has committed to paying for half of the costs to move the project forward.

Ms. Bradley asked Mr. Molchany if he spoke with Northampton County. He has not because he wanted more definite information from this meeting. He hopes to have the funding lined up with Northampton County by the LVTS Coordinating Committee Meeting in August.

Mr. Hopkins said passenger rail has been studied before by others and a number of impediments between the Lehigh Valley and New York City were identified. None of the previous efforts moved forward. He asked if anyone is doing a “true” assessment with this effort. He expressed that public dollars to be utilized wisely, and this effort not be like previous efforts.

Ms. Bradley answered Step 2 should tell us that. She explained this process is like a funnel, and the beginning was us standing on the rim looking in. With each step, we have to go through a “filter” to see if we’re eligible for the next step. She added the Step 2 study will determine what we can or cannot do, and then we decide on what happens after that.

Ms. Bradley added that the LVPC has prioritized the Express Bus Service as the centerpiece in *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*, which is the precursor to light rail in the Lehigh Valley. How can we build passion and excitement for the EBS like we have for passenger rail service and move it forward towards a light rail system in the Lehigh Valley. We need to ensure adequate resources are available so we are not choosing one over the other.

Ms. Hynes said the reason Step 2 was broken into 2 parts was because just the travel demand analysis may determine that none of the routes are feasible and then we won’t need to do the market pair analysis

Mr. Kufro added that the funding for the next step cannot come from the MPO budget or the TIP. He asked about partner railroads, if they have been involved and if they have a financial stake? Ms. Hynes said the railroads know the study exists, but were not involved with the initial study. She said in the second part of Step 2 is when we start working with the railroad companies. Mr. Kufro added he thinks federal money will need to come into the region to move this forward.

Mr. Brett Webber, All Aboard Lehigh Valley, suggested Amtrak as a partner, because they promoted the Allentown to New York Corridor. They have the experience and the authority to work with freight railroads and may be able to help bring in outside funding. He encouraged Rick to reach out to Northampton County. He said passenger rail service is an economic multiplier and will work to control development. He added an article from 1981 is still relevant today about how intercity passenger rail and city bus services work together, and how train stations can also be hubs for buses.

Mr. Molchany said he shares Mr. Hopkin’s concerns, but data beats nonsense and we need the data to move forward. He added that when I-78 was built, there was an economic boom in the valley, and long-time residents weren’t happy with the changes to the community. The LVPC and LVTS had to work to keep up with the increased development and population.

He added that Amtrak, New Jersey Transit and SEPTA will all benefit from a rail expansion. He emphasized the need for data before moving onto the next step. Amtrak had spoken with the

LVPC and LANTA and their plan for the Lehigh Valley was to use buses to Lansdale and to New Jersey. They were not talking about rail in the Lehigh Valley. The data will help us determine who our Sponsor will be, what the economic benefit would be, and the possibility to partner with SEPTA, New Jersey Transit, or possibly others.

Ms. Bradley added it was disappointing to hear Amtrak recommend bussing in the Lehigh Valley over passenger rail service. The LVPC asked Amtrak to pay for the Step 0 study, that PennDOT ultimately paid for. And twice Amtrak declined to partner and did not offer any resources.

Mr. Meyer mentioned re-converting rails-to-trails back to rails. The project shouldn't hurt other critical projects, like trails, because we don't have much funding for them already and they provide great benefit to the region.

Ms. Bradley made a motion for the LVPC to create a summary memo of today's discussion for the Coordinating Committee in August, and to recommend Step 2 to the Coordinating Committee, subject to full funding availability.

Mr. Hopkins asked if Step 2 would determine the exact routes that are feasible? Mr. Hynes said not the routes, but the corridors. The WSP study looked at multiple corridors for each market pair. Step 2 would determine the corridor, but not the exact route.

Mr. Hopkins asked if Step 2 study determines which market pair are feasible or infeasible? Ms. Hynes answered the travel demand analysis in Step 2 part 1 will tell us if any, all, or none of the routes are feasible. Mr. Hopkins added I would like it to be a priority to determine which markets are feasible in Step 2, because that'll help decision making.

Mr. Meyer seconded the motion.

Ms. Heller added this step should lay out definitive action, where we should go from here, the data should show clearly that if we move forward, we have viable solutions here and it's economically feasible and that we have a path.

Mr. Petrik said the recommendation to the Coordinating Committee would be that we have an estimated budget developed, as well as identifying the need for a staffing plan, to even be able to start to pursue soliciting consulting for the Step 2 study. The next step is contingent on funding and associated staffing happening first.

Mr. Cotter called for a vote and the motion passed unanimously.

Chair Cotter left the meeting and Vice Chair Meyer began chairing the meeting.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION ITEM: Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Boundaries and Coordination of Transportation Planning and Programming, Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) and LVTS

Ms. Bradley explained the MOU details and the adoption process with the LVPC Executive Committee, and LVTS Coordinating Committee.

Ms. Bradley made the motion and Mr. Alas seconded the motion. Ms. Bradley called for votes and the motion passed unanimously. There were no questions or comments from committee members or the public.

INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEM: Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan

Mr. Dinkel presented the federal requirements of the Coordinated Plan, and the LVPC timeline to complete the plan.

There were no questions or comments from committee members or the public.

New Business

INFORMATION ITEM: Enactment of PA House Bill 797 – Native Vegetation Along Roadways

Mr. Dinkel shared information about the new Pennsylvania law.

There were no questions or comments from committee members or the public.

INFORMATION ITEM: 2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program Administrative Actions

Ms. Ruth presented 3 Administrative Actions. Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TASA) Consultant project management increase, Shimersville Hill Safety Improvements, and Walnut Street Bridge in Slatington.

There were no questions or comments from committee members or the public.

Status Reports

PennDOT District 5-0 Highway Project Status Report

Mr. Vottero presented on key highway projects advancing.

There were no questions or comments from committee members or the public.

Monthly Traffic Report

Mr. Hite reported on traffic count volumes in June. Route 309 North of Coopersburg had the highest number of vehicles recorded since the monthly traffic count reporting began.

There were no questions or comments from committee members or the public.

Eastern PA Freight Alliance – Freight Infrastructure Plan

Ms. Bradley shared a draft from the consultant should be ready soon.

There were no questions or comments from committee members or the public.

Public Engagement, Grants, and Education

Mr. Hite presented on the Plan Lehigh Valley Radio Show. The next radio show airs August 5th.

Mr. Hite presented on the LVPC Morning Call Column. The next column is scheduled for July 28th.

Mr. Hite presented on LTAP classes coming to the Lehigh Valley.

Mr. Dinkel presented three grants available to municipalities.

1. Safe Streets and Roads for All
2. Bridge Investment Program
3. Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program

There were no questions or comments on any of these items from committee members or the public.

Adjournment

Mr. Meyer stated the next regularly scheduled Joint LVTS meeting is August 21st.

The next Technical Committee Meeting is on September 18th.

Mr. Alas motioned to adjourn the meeting, and the meeting was adjourned.