

EASTERN CORRIDOR TRANSIT STUDY

The travel patterns of thousands of people who live, work and visit the eastern sector of the Pittsburgh region – among southwestern Pennsylvania’s most densely populated and heavily traveled areas – are currently under study.

The Eastern Corridor Transit Study (ECTS), which began in February 2002, is examining methods to enhance mobility to determine what types of public transit improvements could efficiently and effectively serve the transportation and development needs within eastern Allegheny County and the western portion of Westmoreland County.

Port Authority of Allegheny County, Westmoreland County Transit Authority (WCTA) and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) are leading this effort to identify future public transportation improvements and enhancements that would provide additional transit options and improve the reliability and quality of existing public transit services.

Among other tasks, the study team is examining how fixed-guideway transit investments such as light rail transit, bus rapid transit and commuter rail can build upon the existing transportation infrastructure and generate additional economic development opportunities.

STUDY UNDERWAY TO IDENTIFY TRANSIT SOLUTIONS IN BUSY EASTERN CORRIDOR

“Through an extensive public involvement and comment process and a thorough review of former studies of this area, the project team is working collectively to identify, evaluate and recommend a comprehensive array of public transportation improvements for the eastern corridor,” said Henry Nutbrown, Port Authority’s Assistant General Manager of Engineering and Construction. “The study team will also examine public transportation access to the economic centers of this corridor, as it accounts for 40 percent of all public transit trips in Allegheny County and includes the growing business centers of Monroeville Mall, Business Route 22, Oakland, Greensburg and the new Waterfront development in Homestead.”

The ECTS will also be closely coordinated with the public comments and proposed alternatives derived from other planning studies currently underway in the region such as the 20/20 Vision (Strategic Regional Transit Visioning Study), Airport Multimodal Corridor Study and the Pennsylvania High-Speed Maglev Project.

“From a considerable amount of public comments gathered thus far, many people are saying that in order to use public transportation, transit choices within the corridor should be convenient and efficient,” said Larry Morris, Westmoreland County Transit Authority’s Executive Director. “By offering effective public transit solutions to address traffic congestion, we can also increase transit usage by promoting the many benefits that transit can bring to the entire community.”

This year-long \$1 million undertaking will conclude in Spring 2003 with recommendations for transit improvements in the study area, as well as financial and implementation plans. These recommendations will then be considered for further study phases and for inclusion on the region’s Long-Range Transportation Plan.

Have you ever wondered how an idea for a transit project advances to implementation? The information below offers a brief overview of the federal-prescribed public planning process that is commonly required to implement major public transportation projects.

During an Alternatives Analysis (AA) study, corridors within a specified area are identified for further study, the need for improvements is established, and public transit improvements and projects are recommended. Extensive public input is sought and incorporated into the study’s findings. Recommendations from the AA study that are low cost and with minimal community and environmental impacts can usually proceed directly to implementation, once funding for them is secured. This phase can take one to three years to complete. The ECTS is involved in this study phase.

If the AA study recommends major projects for further analysis, the next phase of the planning process may begin, which is the preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). This phase evaluates environmental factors, ridership, operational costs and engineering feasibility. The proposed alignments are further refined.

Extensive public participation and feedback is sought and incorporated into the study’s findings. A document is produced and sent to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for approval with the study area’s locally preferred alignment identified. Prior to federal approval of the locally preferred alternative, it must be added to the region’s Long-Range Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program. This phase can take two to five years to complete.

After the DEIS process and FTA approval, more in-depth environmental studies are conducted and the locally preferred alternative is further refined. Construction mitigation measures are also evaluated. This stage is called the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Public input is sought and incorporated into this document. This phase can take one to three years to complete.

The FTA conducts a review of the FEIS, and if deemed eligible, issues the green light for the project to proceed into preliminary engineering and final design. Property acquisition also begins at that time. In the DEIS and FEIS phases, strong local support, a credible financing plan and clearly identified project benefits are some of the keys to federal approval. This phase can take two to four years to complete.

After preliminary engineering and final design is complete, construction can begin. This phase can take two to five years to complete.

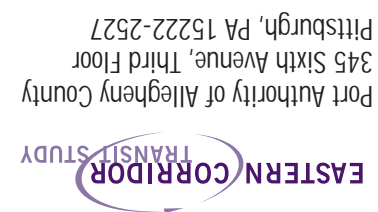
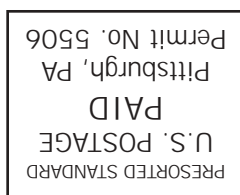
The length of time it takes to complete any one of these phases is dependent upon several factors, including, among others, availability of funding, public support for the project, complexity of the project and environmental issues.

IDEAS TO IMPLEMENTATION

Printed on recycled paper.

To receive additional information about the Eastern Corridor Transit Study or on any one of Port Authority’s major capital projects or transportation studies, please contact Carmen Bray at (412) 566-5137. Also call if you would like to be placed on the mailing list.

The Eastern Corridor Transit Study newsletter is distributed by mail and at libraries and other community facilities.



Q&A

Q. Will transit investments in the Eastern Corridor improve air quality?

A. As the driving public begins to see the benefit of public transit as a viable transportation option, an increase in the use of both bus and rail transit systems will result in lower levels of air pollution.

In response to the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, diesel engines for transit buses have been designed so that particulate matter in bus exhaust is reduced by more than 90 percent from 1988 emissions standards. Port Authority and other transit operators in the United States are pursuing strategies to further reduce emissions through use of low-sulfur diesel fuel and additional engine controls.

New engine technologies using hybrid fuel systems combining either diesel/electric or natural gas/electric propulsion are being deployed. Buses powered by fuel cells, which use clean burning hydrogen, are being tested. The ECTS will also examine the feasibility of the introduction of electric bus technology into the existing network of public transit services.

Q. Will Oakland be considered in this study?

A. As one of the most congested segments of the study area and the study area’s job, university and health center hub, public comments have identified the need for stronger transit connections to Oakland from Downtown and other destinations in the study area. Bus rapid transit, light rail transit and local bus service improvements are all being evaluated.

Q. Can railroad rights-of-way be preserved for future transit uses?

A. The ECTS is analyzing several railroad corridors for possible public transit improvements. Railroad corridors can not be used for transit improvements until the planning, environmental assessments and preliminary engineering has been completed. Once complete, one of the next steps is to purchase railroad rights-of-way from either the railroad industry or a private for-profit company. However, to ensure minimal costs and system continuity, railroad rights-of-way can also be preserved if local, state or regional agencies or private or philanthropic organizations could legally purchase, retain and identify the railroad rights-of-way for future public transit investments. This method of preserving railroad rights-of-way is being accomplished in Minnesota, Texas and Utah.

[Check Out Answers To Other Frequently Asked Questions On The Project Web Site](#)

PROJECT SCHEDULE

What’s Accomplished – (February – August 2002)

- Conducted the first round of public meetings
- Convened meetings with community groups and organizations
- Solicited public comments
- Established goals, objectives and evaluation criteria to gauge the alternatives’ effectiveness
- Analyzed previous studies of the corridor
- Developed transportation and development needs from public comments
- Began developing a preliminary set of potential public transit improvements

What’s Next – (September – December 2002)

- Continue public outreach activities
- Refine preliminary list of potential public transit improvements
- Conduct station and community design workshops
- Hold second round of public meetings (October)
- Develop ridership projections
- Develop preliminary capital, operating and maintenance costs
- Evaluate the alternatives’ effectiveness via the goals, objectives and evaluation criteria

GETTING THE WORD OUT—AND BACK PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IS THE KEY

A thorough public involvement and comment process is underway to inform the public about the study and to gain ideas and input about potential public transportation improvements.

As part of the continuous outreach efforts, public meetings and community group meetings offer a venue for the public to ask questions of and offer comments to the project team. Information exchanges with elected officials, transportation groups and environmental resource agencies are also underway.

The study team has also convened business leaders and representatives from the various community groups who have agreed to act as public information liaisons. These liaisons participate in one of five ECTS Working Groups in their area: City of Pittsburgh, Allegheny Valley, Eastern Suburbs, Westmoreland County or the Mon Valley. These working groups will meet regularly with the project team, offering insight into community concerns and ideas for improving public transportation within their communities.

All public comments obtained are vital to the study's success and essential in identifying the best possible transit alignments. Based on comments obtained from public outreach activities, the study team has identified the primary transportation and development needs in the study area.

Study Area Needs Developed From Public Comments

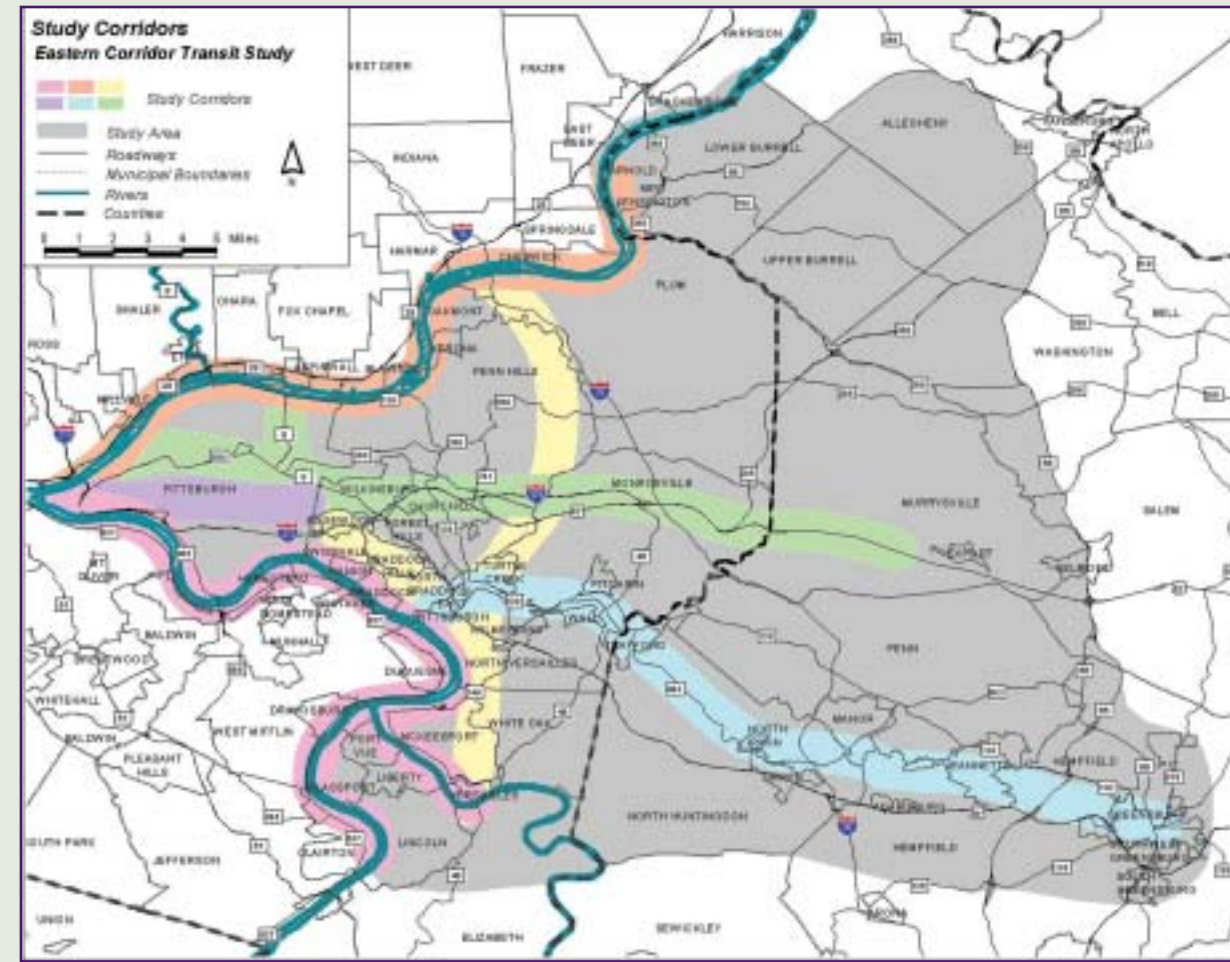
- Improve transit choices in the study corridor
- Improve quality of service and amenities at stations and transfer points
- Preserve, protect and utilize existing transportation infrastructure and resources
- Enhance environmental quality
- Coordinate public transit and community planning to enhance economic development and quality of life
- Develop a public transit network that conveniently links people, job centers and economic hubs in both counties
- Reduce congestion with effective public transit solutions

How Can I Learn More?

The second round of public meetings will be held in October 2002. These meetings will highlight the progress of the study, public input obtained and discussion regarding the preliminary alternatives being considered. Meeting notices will be mailed to the public and posted on the project Web site.

In addition to the public meetings, the project team is hosting meetings with community groups and organizations. These meetings offer additional study-related information, present opportunities to obtain input from the public and address questions and concerns.

At the request of the organization, members of the project team attend the organization's meeting with display boards and informational handouts. A presentation can last from 10 minutes to one hour, depending upon the time allocated by the organization. For more information or to request a meeting for your organization, please call 412.244.3445.



RESEARCHING THE PAST

Past planning studies of the corridor have analyzed various ideas for public transit improvements in the study area. A more detailed review of these previous proposals, alternatives, public comments and agency input is being incorporated into the ECTS.

"The steady increase of traffic congestion on the corridor's key roadways, such as I-376 and Routes 22 and 28, is a strong indication of the transportation dilemma facing the eastern communities of Allegheny County and western neighborhoods of Westmoreland County," said Chuck DiPietro, SPC's Transportation Planning Director. "Although past studies have identified some transit improvements to address this issue, we are further refining and advancing aspects of some of these projects from planning to implementation."

The map and caption highlight the corridors, previous recommendations for transportation improvements and previous transportation projects within the ECTS area.

Martin Luther King, Jr. East Busway Extensions (yellow)

This corridor extends approximately 19 miles from downtown Pittsburgh to Penn Hills, paralleling the East Busway through Swissvale, along the railroad right-of-way via the communities of Braddock, Turtle Creek, Pitcairn and McKeesport.

Parkway East (I-376) and Route 22 Corridor (green)

This corridor extends approximately 24 miles from downtown Pittsburgh to Murrysville in Westmoreland County paralleling the East Busway, Parkway East and Route 22 via the communities of Wilkesburg, Churchill and Monroeville.

Spine Line Corridor (dark purple)

This corridor extends approximately 5 miles from downtown Pittsburgh through Oakland to Squirrel Hill either in an at-grade or subway alignment. The Spine Line studies, conducted in the 1990s, evaluated this corridor for light rail and bus rapid transit improvements.

Allegheny Valley Corridor (orange)

This corridor extends approximately 18 miles from downtown Pittsburgh to New Kensington via the communities of Lawrenceville and Oakmont. This corridor was the focus of an SPC study conducted in 1999 that examined the feasibility of commuter rail service on the Allegheny Valley Railroad.

Route 30/Norfolk Southern Corridor (light blue)

This corridor extends approximately 31 miles along the Norfolk Southern Railroad from downtown Pittsburgh to Greensburg, paralleling the Martin Luther King, Jr. East Busway and continuing to Braddock and through the communities of Trafford, North Huntingdon and Jeannette. During the reconstruction of the Parkway East in the 1980s, commuter rail service was offered.

Mon Valley Corridor (pink)

This corridor extends approximately 16 miles from downtown Pittsburgh to the communities of McKeesport, Clairton and Versailles paralleling the Monongahela and Youghiogheny rivers and the CSX and Norfolk Southern railroads. Commuter rail operated in this corridor until 1989.

PRELIMINARY LIST OF ALTERNATIVES

The project team is also using agency and public comments to develop a framework to select the best possible alternatives for the corridor. This evaluation framework - which includes the study area's needs, goals, objectives and evaluation measures - is called the screening criteria. These measures will evaluate, among other factors: costs, efficiency, effectiveness and engineering feasibility for each alternative. If the transit alternatives satisfy the screening criteria, the proposed projects then move forward into further refinement and study.

In addition to the major transit investments, lower cost improvements with shorter implementation schedules such as additional park and ride facilities, express bus service, multimodal transit centers and electric bus operations are also under consideration.

Over 30 alternatives have been identified so far. The complete list can be found on the project Web site. The text below offers a written overview of some of the preliminary transit alternatives being studied for the corridor.

- Develop a busway, light rail and/or commuter rail system from downtown Pittsburgh through the Strip District to Tarentum and Lower Burrell along the Allegheny River via the existing railroad right-of-way.
- Convert the existing Martin Luther King, Jr. East Busway (East Busway) from downtown Pittsburgh to Swissvale to light rail with possible further extensions.
- Extend the East Busway to Braddock, Monroeville and Penn Hills via the existing railroad right-of-way.
- Develop a busway, light rail or commuter rail system from downtown Pittsburgh to McKeesport, Clairton or Versailles along the Monongahela River on the existing railroad right-of-way. This system could also serve the new Waterfront development in Homestead.
- Construct an at-grade or subway light rail system from downtown Pittsburgh to Oakland, Squirrel Hill and beyond.
- Develop a commuter rail system from downtown Pittsburgh to Greensburg along the existing railroad right-of-way.
- Improve transit connections to the Port Authority Light Rail Transit System, the T, and East Busway.
- Develop alternatives that easily integrate with the North Shore Connector and proposed Airport Multimodal Corridor Study alternatives.
- Develop other transit improvements such as a Hill District-Strip District Incline, additional park and ride facilities, transit centers, new busway stations, additional bus routes and bus rapid transit services.

Questions,
Comments,
Mailing List,
Information or
Would you like to host a meeting?
Call us at: 412.244.3445

Link directly to project information from
the home pages of
Port Authority's Web site:
www.ridegold.com;
SPC's Web site:
www.spcregion.org; or
from WCTA's Web site:
www.westmorelandtransit.com