

## Introduction

Monroe County has many elements of a superb transportation network. The County's challenge is to work with PennDOT to formulate a multi-modal transportation systems plan that will integrate these elements to meet the needs of future growth.

The 43,000 vehicles that daily pour over the I-80 Delaware River Bridge make Monroe County the second busiest gateway to the Commonwealth, and the 45 miles of Interstate highways (with 15 interchanges<sup>30</sup>) that traverse the County are backed up by other facilities and services:

- Major arterial highway corridors under PennDOT jurisdiction which link residential and commercial areas with each other and with the Interstate system. These include Routes 209 and Business 209, 611, 115, 940, 447, 715, and others.
- Secondary roads maintained by the boroughs and townships.
- A rail line of approximately 30 miles currently operating part of its length for freight service to the north and west. Soon connections to the east will be restored and, under a \$160 million authorization from the Transportation Act of 1998, passenger rail service between Scranton and New Jersey/New York will be activated.
- A local bus transit system with over 40 stops in residential and commercial areas that also operates paratransit service for the elderly and disabled.
- An intercity bus system carrying over 1000 passengers daily to New York, recently joined by a second company with four daily round trips to New York.
- The Pocono Mountains Municipal Airport located between Route 611 and I-380 in Monroe County's new Economic Development Corridor, also served by the railroad.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to PennDOT and the municipalities, four other entities are involved in "managing" transportation:

- The Monroe County Railroad Authority (MCRA) handles the rail system and is examining site options for passenger stations and identifying industrial/distribution sites that can be served by rail.
- The Monroe County Transportation Authority (MCTA) operates the transit system.
- Martz Trailways operates the commuter buses, shares maintenance facilities with MCTA in Scotrun, and is exploring a new station with ample park-and-ride capacity at Delaware Water Gap.
- Star Shuttle is a new bus company with limited service between Mt. Pocono, Tannersville, Delaware Water Gap and New York.

The various parties communicate with each other and with the County, but no formal coordinating mechanism exists and, unlike metropolitan areas, there is no Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to prepare an overall transportation plan.

<sup>30</sup> Providing access comparable with more developed metropolitan counties.

<sup>31</sup> The County does not yet have a system of bikeways and pedestrian trails, but creation of these is a major objective of the Pocono Mountains Vacation Bureau and the Monroe 2020 Open Space Policy. A Bikeway and Pedestrian Plan, once established should be incorporated in the Transportation Systems Plan.

## Part II . . . The Analysis

Preparation of such an overall transportation plan will be crucial to the success of Monroe 2020. Monroe County is the logical entity to prepare such a plan, but the County lacks the technical expertise, authority, or even a designated office to do such a job. Thus, the need for partnering with PennDOT. Following are some of the subjects such a long-range plan must consider.

### *Future of the Arterial Road System*

#### *The Issues*

Monroe County's arterial roads are under extraordinary stress. According to mid-1990s traffic counts conducted by the County, traffic in the municipalities from the mid 1980s grew by 90 percent while population growth was only 40 percent. Because of topographic and resource (state/federal/local) constraints, it is highly unlikely that new arterial corridors or relief routes can or will be created (with the notable exception of the Marshalls Creek bypass). That means the capacity of current corridors must be protected and enhanced by retrofitting the existing roadways, as has been accomplished in many New Jersey arterials and in Metropolitan Allentown. Adaptive techniques range from jughandle turns, to median barriers, alternative access through service roads, to additional lanes where right-of-way can be made available.

Unfortunately, no mechanism exists for conducting corridor-wide, not to mention county-wide, traffic analysis to analyze the demand and feasibility of such measures. Take the following dramatic and potentially costly examples where such expanded area analysis is essential to determine viable solutions:

- (1) *Marshalls Creek*. PennDOT has expended considerable time and resources to analyze the need for a Marshalls Creek bypass on Route 209 (and to bring options to the community). Following an Environmental Impact Statement, a route was chosen, and implementation is scheduled after the year 2000. But the very basic traffic assumptions upon which the bypass project are based are now under scrutiny. Two shopping centers have been announced on commercially zoned sites in Smithfield Township between Exit 52 on I-80 and the Route 209/Business 209 intersection. This is outside the bypass study area, but will be generating traffic to affect it.

Even more challenging, however, has been the recent announcement that the Pittsburgh Symphony may make its summer home at Unity House in Pike County, and thus serve as the nucleus of a potential Performing Arts Center comparable with Massachusetts' Tanglewood. The Arts Center's performance area is proposed to have 19,000 seats, and Unity House can be efficiently reached only via Route 209. More than 10 years ago, when the Commonwealth was considering a substantially smaller performance center within Monroe County, also accessed by 209, an extensive feasibility study was performed<sup>32</sup>. Its traffic improvement recommendations called for two additional lanes on Route 209 (from its intersection with Business 209) as well as several intersection enhancements. Those recommendations and the summer traffic volumes which drove them were not considered in the Marshalls Creek analysis. This potential new Arts Center prospect, with one-third more audience capacity, has only recently been proposed and its prospective traffic and potential impact on the National Recreation Area have not been factored into the Marshalls Creek Bypass project at this time. It is quite clear, however, that, if the proposed center comes to fruition, even greater

---

<sup>32</sup> *The RBA Group; Feasibility Study for the Pennsylvania Center for the Performing Arts, Dept of Environmental Resources, June 1986.*

traffic can be expected through the Route 209 intersections along with even greater demand on the capacity of the arterial system in that part of the county.

- (2) *Route 611 in Stroud Township*. Here, two large shopping complexes have been proposed and one is under construction. Developer-commissioned traffic studies for these centers have not considered downstream linkages with other traffic generators (especially impact of the Crossings on 611). Developer-proposed traffic mitigation contributions for these centers are modest and confined to site access. No impartial, public-agency sponsored traffic analysis has been conducted to place generation from these two proposals in a regional setting and realistically evaluate impacts and needed improvements.

### *The 1980s Route 611 Study*

More than a decade ago, PennDOT did commission a much more systematic traffic evaluation of a component of the Monroe County network, specifically the entire length of Route 611 from Stroudsburg to Mt. Pocono (15 miles), involving multiple municipalities. The objective was to evaluate alternatives that improved capacity, flows, and safety utilizing the existing right-of-way (with widenings where practical). Many capacity enhancement measures were examined and priorities proposed. The major recommendations were not implemented, but the study itself can act as a guide for more systematic county-wide traffic evaluation and improvements. Below is a set of paragraphs spelling out its recommended improvements. These are placed here as examples of capacity enhancement measures to be examined in a systematic county-wide evaluation. MacArthur Road in the vicinity of the Lehigh Valley Mall and Route 22 is perhaps the closest area to Monroe where PennDOT has undertaken several of these measures.

*A. Suburban Arterial* - Throughout this section it is proposed that all business access points be curbed, defining ingress and egress to each location. The curb set back distance and curb radii will be held constant throughout this section to eliminate any driver confusion.

Retime the four signal corridor and rechannelize the intersections to function as one coordinated corridor, rather than four separate intersections. The lane channelization will be kept constant to eliminate weaving between each intersection . . .

*B. Three Lane Highway* - The proposed alternative for this section is to widen to a four-lane divided highway with jughandles. The highway will be curbed in areas such as Tannersville and Bartonsville to limit the right-of-way acquisitions necessary. Business access throughout the entire section will also be curbed to define the points of ingress and egress. Where not limited by right-of-way acquisitions, an 8' shoulder will be provided.

Jughandle locations will be signalized, where warranted, to provide sufficient gaps for the left-turn and the U-turn movements. Jughandles will be placed to make the best use of the existing signals and intersections of the corridor.

*C. Four-Lane Highway* - To maintain continuity, the median barrier/jughandle option is proposed in this section. Since right-of-way is not a constraint, 8' shoulders are recommended through this section. Business access points will be curbed outside of the shoulder limits to define ingress and egress. Signals, where warranted, will be used at the jughandle locations to provide sufficient gaps for the left-turn and U-turn movements. Jughandles will be spaced, when possible, to make the best use of existing intersections and equal distances between access locations<sup>33</sup>.

---

<sup>33</sup> *Kidde Consultants, Inc.; Route 611 Feasibility Study, 1988, unpagged*

## Part II . . . The Analysis

- *Rail-Highway Interface* - Soon, an operating railroad will need to be linked with the county's Interstate and arterial highways. Buoyed by the Federal authorization to re-institute passenger service and by completion of the Amber Milling plant at Pocono Summit, MCRA is looking to position Monroe County once again as a freight rail/highway distribution center. Amber Milling's receipt of grain by rail from the west, processing the grain to flour in Monroe County, and then shipping the finished product by truck to consumer markets throughout the Northeast is the model. MCRA officials are working with the Planning Department and its GIS to identify suitable industrial or distribution sites with direct rail access. The county's recent purchases in the Coolbaugh-Mt. Pocono area of the Senda property and negotiations on Camp Tegawitha could add close to 800 acres of economic development land that can be serviced both by rail and by the interstate highway system, positioning Monroe County even more effectively to take advantage of its location in the Northeast. Formulating the most efficient links between the rail freight access sites, the passenger stations, and the roadways should be part of a county-wide transportation systems plan.
- *Integrating the Services with The Systems* - Meshing schedules and equipment requirements of the inter-county and long-distance transit systems (bus and rail) is yet another challenge to be addressed in a transportation systems plan. The rationale for such service integration was well put as a "Profile of a Pocono Corridor Rail Passenger" in the study accompanying the decision to reinstate commuter rail:

A Stroudsburg resident arrives Friday morning at 6:30 a.m. at the Delaware Water Gap intermodal facility via an MCTA bus. He catches the 6:45 a.m. train to Hoboken, where he switches to the PATH train, arriving at his job in the financial district in Manhattan at 8:30 a.m. After an afternoon meeting in Midtown Manhattan, he takes a nearby Martz bus home arriving at Delaware Water Gap at 6:30 p.m. to catch the MCTA bus home. At 9:00 p.m. he drives his car to the East Stroudsburg station to pick up a friend from Summit visiting for the weekend. The next morning they catch the 12:00 p.m. train to Scranton to visit Steamtown and ride the tourist train. Sunday night the Summit resident takes the rail service back home, arriving about 7:00 p.m.<sup>34</sup>

As the county becomes more populous and complex, meshing of transit services becomes essential.

### ***Why PennDOT as a Partner?***

Ideally, Monroe County would prepare a county-wide transportation systems plan, utilizing its own staff or outside experts. However, Monroe County has no transportation department/staff. Moreover, it lacks the financial resources to create such a department professionally capable of analyzing the county's transportation needs and preparing a comprehensive transportation plan.

Unlike jurisdictions that are part of a Metropolitan Area, moreover, Monroe County is not a member of a Metropolitan Planning Organization with capacity and responsibility to make an area-wide transportation plan in close association with PennDOT. The County is part of the Economic Development Council of Northeast Pennsylvania (EDCNP) which has rural transportation planning responsibilities, but the Council has limited staff and resources to perform a transportation plan for Monroe - especially since five rural counties make up the Rural Transportation Committee.

---

<sup>34</sup> *LS Transit Systems Inc., Transportation Options, A Study of Regional Accessibility for the Pocono Corridor, 1995, p. 9, Lackawanna County Regional Planning Commission and Monroe County Planning Commission.*

At the same time, however, Monroe County's future is vital to the future of the Commonwealth. A strong case can be made for the Commonwealth (PennDOT) to provide technical assistance in transportation planning to ensure the viability of Monroe's economic future.

- In rate of population and job growth, Monroe County is increasing faster than the three adjacent Metropolitan Areas in Pennsylvania (Scranton-Wilkes-Barre-Hazleton; Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton; Newburgh, NY-Pike County).
- Monroe has the third largest county tourism economy (next to Philadelphia and Allegheny) in the Commonwealth, and its environmental significance is outstanding.
- As an economic growth generator for the Commonwealth, Monroe can arguably compete more effectively than any other county in Northeast Pennsylvania. It has major expanding industries (Aventis Pasteur, formerly Pasteur Meriéux Connaught), has attracted new industries of regional significance (Amber Milling), is successfully competing for high technology enterprises that might otherwise locate in the New York-New Jersey metropolitan areas (Sales Plus CorNet, formerly CorNet), and is listed as one of the top 18 discount retail markets (Tannersville) in the United States.
- Intersecting in Monroe County (east-west and north-south) are two major transportation corridors for which PennDOT intends to do multi-modal planning in the second phase of its state-wide transportation plan. One is focused on I-80. The second, a north-south corridor, extends from the Northeast Extension (I-476) to I-380 and the railroad. The I-80 toll bridge at the Delaware Water Gap is, moreover, the second most heavily traveled gateway to the Commonwealth.
- Because of its natural attractions, high level of visitation, and the commitment of the Pocono Mountains Vacation Bureau and the Monroe County Planning Commission to encourage bikeways and pedestrian paths, Monroe County would be an excellent venue for testing ways to meet one of PennDOT's targets in its Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan:

Half of all Pennsylvanians will enjoy the natural resources of the state by bicycling (up from 39 percent in 1992) as will an increasing number of out-of-state visitors.<sup>35</sup>

### ***The State Plan***

PennDOT's support to Monroe County to plan an effective transportation system would, moreover, comport with all seven of the goals of the State Transportation Policy Plan:

- 1. Maintain, manage, and improve Pennsylvania's transportation systems to meet the needs and requirements of people and goods movement in both urban and rural regions. Provide transportation choices where feasible.*
- 2. Provide efficient, accessible and connected transportation systems, services and facilities as an incentive to support positive economic change statewide.*
- 3. Maintain, manage and improve a transportation system which preserves and reinforces environmental quality and livable communities. Provide access to Pennsylvania's recreational, natural and historic/cultural resources.*

---

<sup>35</sup> *The RBA Group, et al: Statewide Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan Executive Summary, p 7, PennDOT, Harrisburg, 1996.*

## Part II . . . The Analysis

4. *Ensure adequate, stable and predictable funding, from both public and private sources, to meet priority transportation needs consistent with transportation goals and objectives, policies, plans and programs.*
5. *Strengthen the planning, programming and decision-making process, supported by performance-based management, monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems which are used cooperatively at the statewide and regional/county levels.*
6. *Conduct transportation decision-making through continuing, understandable, open, proactive and responsive processes, based on mutual trust, communication and cooperation to build consensus among all stakeholders.*
7. *Implement the Policy Plan based on public and private sector commitments to make appropriate changes, to accept new roles and responsibilities, and to establish cooperative working relationships.<sup>36</sup>*

Dialogue with PennDOT and Penn State's Pennsylvania Transportation Institute on the matter of support for a county-wide systems transportation plan was initiated by the Monroe County Planning Commission staff and consultants in late 1998. Response was quite positive, and discussions on implementation should continue. Monroe County can lead the effort, but the County needs PennDOT assistance in developing an overall transportation plan to accompany the land use, open space, and environmental conservation proposals of Monroe 2020.

### ***An Interim Transportation Coordinator***

Transportation issues are now so significant that Monroe County should look to retain at least one skilled transportation planner for the Planning Department. That individual should work on initial multi-modal interface studies and continue the liaison with PennDOT to establish the plan support. Appointment of a senior professional would demonstrate to PennDOT the County's seriousness about the effort.



<sup>36</sup> As depicted in Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, *Pennsylvania Transportation Policy Plan*, Harrisburg, 1995 pp. 27-43.