

LEHIGH VALLEY HIGHWAY AND BRIDGE NEEDS

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**Presented by:
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Good afternoon. My name is Joe Gurinko and I am the Chief Transportation Planner for the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, the regional planning agency for Lehigh and Northampton counties. Today I am here on behalf of the Planning Commission and the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study (LVTS), the metropolitan planning organization for Lehigh and Northampton counties. LVTS has representatives from Lehigh County, Northampton County, the cities of Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton, the LVPC, the Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANTA), the Lehigh-Northampton Airport Authority, and PennDOT. LVTS is responsible for setting transportation priorities for the region. My purpose is to give you an overview of the highway and bridge needs for the region. You've already heard from Armand Greco, Executive Director for LANTA, on the Lehigh Valley's transit needs.

Through LVTS, we work closely with the counties of Lehigh and Northampton, PennDOT and the Lehigh Valley's 62 municipalities in developing the program of projects. Projects are prioritized using investment policies contained in the long range transportation plan. That plan is consistent and coordinated with the regional comprehensive plan, which covers a wide range of topics in addition to transportation, including land use, natural resource protection, agricultural preservation and economic development.

The Lehigh Valley is now going through a period of extraordinary population growth due to migration from New Jersey and, to a lesser degree, Philadelphia. From 1990 to 2000, the Lehigh Valley grew by 7.6%. According to 2009 U.S. Census estimates, the Lehigh Valley has grown by 10.9% since 2000. LVPC forecasts predict the Lehigh Valley will be home to nearly 650,000 by 2010. Increased congestion and

safety problems are a byproduct of that growth. We are trying to resolve traffic problems in our plan. But, just as important, we are trying to use elements of our transportation plan to renew the region's three cities. These are just some of the issues that help define our transportation needs.

Recently, two reports were released that made an assessment of the Commonwealth's transportation needs at the state level. The Pennsylvania State Transportation Advisory Committee's *Transportation Funding Study* and the American Society of Civil Engineers' *2010 Report Card for Pennsylvania Infrastructure* both documented significant investments that must be made in order to protect the State's transportation network. The situation in the Lehigh Valley parallels the story in those documents. Working closely with PennDOT to develop future revenues and information for the maintenance of highways and bridges, I have attached a handout which attempts to quantify highway and bridge needs over the next twenty years and compare that to anticipated revenues. The handout separates highway projects by the problem they fix, i.e. maintenance, mobility, safety or transportation enhancement (which often address non-motorized transportation issues).

Mike Rebert, District 5 Executive for PennDOT, will present details of highway and bridge maintenance in the six-county area of District 5 so I'll leave the details to him. However, even with local (non-state) network needs that I am sure are underestimated, more than \$1.64 billion will be needed to address highway and bridge maintenance needs in Lehigh and Northampton counties over the next 20 years. Maintenance alone exhausts the \$1.535 billion expected in transportation funding to the Lehigh Valley over that time period. Unfortunately, our needs go well beyond maintenance.

We identify more than \$1.2 billion in mobility projects in the Lehigh Valley. This list includes the Lehigh Valley's "Main Street," US Rt. 22. In 2001 the LVPC studied the long term needs for the Rt. 22 corridor and concluded that widening the corridor was necessary to meet future safety, mobility and maintenance needs. Currently, the highest priority section from Airport Road to 15th Street was the subject of downscoping efforts by PennDOT because the funding for the original scope of the project is just not available. As you know, funding unavailability does not make the need go away; it just makes the project more expensive due to the impacts of inflation. So this portion of Rt. 22 will now be segmented into 3 phases. The remainder of Rt. 22 from Rt. 33 to I-78 must still be addressed at a rough cost of \$900 million in 2010 dollars. Not included in the overall shortfall of transportation dollars are the 11 corridors listed at the bottom of the handout. These corridors have been identified through the planning process as having insufficient capacity at some point over the next 20 years. However, since these corridors must undergo additional study, we cannot estimate the improvement costs at this time.

Safety is a high priority for the region and \$171 million worth of needs have been identified for the 20 year period. Lehigh Valley fatality rates have been trending downward since 2005 and that is one trend that we want to see continued. Safety needs range from new interchange configurations down to low cost improvements such as improving signage and cutting back foliage to increase sight distance. These projects have small costs but save lives. The transportation enhancement, or non-motorized, projects often have a safety component attached to them, whether it be providing crosswalks at busy intersections, providing trails that are separate from streets or providing sidewalks in areas that are used by schoolchildren.