



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, August 21, 2024 Joint Technical and Coordinating 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. Rick Molchany chaired the Coordinating Committee portion of the meeting, and Mr. Brendan Cotter chaired the Technical Committee portion of the agenda.

Mr. Molchany welcomed the members and the public participants and called the meeting to order.

Roll Call

Mr. Dinkel took Roll Call.

Attendees:

Technical Committee

Becky Bradley, AICP	LVPC
Nick Raio	PennDOT Central Office
Jennifer Ruth	PennDOT District 5
David Petrik (Alt)	City of Allentown
Darlene Heller (Alt)	City of Bethlehem
Salvatore J. Panto Jr.	City of Easton
Brendan Cotter	LANTA
Ryan Meyer	LNAA

LVTS Coordinating Committee

Rick Molchany (Alt)	Lehigh County
Lamont McClure	Northampton County
David Petrik (Alt)	City of Allentown
Michael Alkhal (Alt.)	City of Bethlehem
Salvatore J. Panto Jr.	City of Easton
Becky Bradley, AICP	LVPC
Owen O'Neill	LANTA
Jim Mosca	PennDOT Central Office
Chris Kufro	PennDOT District 5-0

Members Absent:

Technical Committee

Matthew Tuerk	City of Allentown
J. William Reynolds	City of Bethlehem
David Hopkins (Alt)	City of Easton

LVTS Coordinating Committee

Matthew Tuerk	City of Allentown
J. William Reynolds	City of Bethlehem
David Hopkins (Alt)	City of Easton
Thomas Stoudt	LNAA

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

Public Present: Andrew Batson (WSP), Brett Webber (All Aboard LV), Brian Harman (Pidcock), Brian Hare, Brian Miller (Upper Milford Twp), Brian Teles, (PennDOT District 5 Consultant) Craig Beavers, David Alas (PennDOT Central Office), Elizabeth Hynes, (WSP), Elliot Fink (Michael Baker Int'l), Evan Jones, Gene Porochniak (FHWA Pennsylvania Division), Hillary Kwiatek, James McGee (HNTB), Jay Bradley (Lehigh Valley News), Jeff Rai (PennDOT District 5 Design), Kerri Cutright (PennDOT District 5), Kurt Bresswein (Lehigh Valley Live & The Express Times), Lawrence Peterson (PennDOT District 5), Lee Rackus (Whitehall Twp), Nyomi Evans (PennDOT Central Office), Olivia Marble (Lehigh Valley News), Ralph Eberhardt (Michael Baker Int'l), Scott Harney (Pennoni), Scott Slingerland (Coalition for Appropriate Transportation), Scott Vottero (PennDOT District 5), Sherri Penchishen (City of Bethlehem), Steve Glickman, William Laird (HDR Engineering)

Courtesy of the Floor

Mr. Molchany introduced new LVTS Committee members from PennDOT Central Office – Nick Raio and Nyomi Evans.

Mr. Molchany asked if there were any additional comments or questions from the public about items not on the agenda, and there were none.

Minutes

Mr. Cotter stated that the last Technical Committee was held on July 17, 2024. Mr. Dinkel noted the actions voted on:

- Minutes from the June 12, 2024, meeting
- Minutes from the June 27, 2024, special meeting
- Lehigh Valley Passenger Rail Feasibility Analysis Phase II Recommendation to the Coordinating Committee
- Reading Area Transportation Study Urbanized Area Memorandum of Understanding
- Adjournment

Mr. Cotter asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Heller made the motion, and the motion was seconded by Ms. Bradley. There were no questions or comments from members or the public. Mr. Cotter asked Ms. Bradley to call for a vote and the motion was approved.

Mr. Molchany stated the Coordinating Committee meeting was held on June 12, 2024. Mr. Dinkel noted the actions voted on.

- Minutes from the May 15, 2024, meeting
- Minutes from the May 15, 2024, Special Passenger Rail Meeting
- 2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program Amendment – Route 22 Safety Corridor
- 2023-2026 Draft Transportation Improvement Program Amendment – Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton Airport Northside Logistics and Cargo Complex
- Adjournment

Mr. Molchany asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Mosca made the motion, seconded by Mr. McClure. Mr. Molchany asked for any questions or comments from the members and the public. Hearing none, Mr. Molchany asked Ms. Bradley to call for a vote and the motion was approved.

Mr. Molchany stated the Coordinating Committee meeting was held on June 27, 2024. Mr. Dinkel noted the actions voted on.

- 2025-2028 Transportation Improvement Program Air Quality Conformity Report
- 2025-2028 Transportation Improvement Program Air Quality Conformity Resolution
- 2025-2028 Transportation Improvement Program Self-Certification Resolution

- 2025-2028 Transportation Improvement Program Metropolitan Planning Organization Procedures for Transportation Improvement Program Revisions
- Adoption of the 2025-2028 Lehigh Valley Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
- 2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program Amendment – 309 and Center Valley Interchange - Preliminary Engineering Increase, and
- Adjournment

Mr. Molchany asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. O'Neil made the motion, seconded by Mr. McClure. There were no questions or comments from the committee or public. Ms. Bradley to call for a vote and the motion passed unanimously.

Old Business

ACTION ITEM: Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) Urbanized Area (UA) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Ms. Bradley explained the MOU with RATS. The LVPC Executive Committee voted to approve the MOU contingent on Coordinating Committee approval.

Mr. Alkhal made a motion to approve the MOU. Mr. Mosca seconded the motion. There were no questions or comments from the committee or public. Ms. Bradley called for votes and the motion passed unanimously.

INFORMATION ITEM: ITEM: 2023 – 2026 TIP Administrative Actions

Ms. Ruth explained 15 administrative actions and 1 interstate administrative action.

Ms. Bradley commented on bringing more funds into the region and using up funds before the TIP expires.

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

ACTION ITEM: ITEM: 2023 – 2026 TIP Amendment – 309 & Tilghman Interchange Reconstruction

Ms. Ruth explained the amendment is \$4,454,380 for the construction phase and is pending PennDOT Program Management Committee (PMC) approval.

This increase for the low bid for the construction phase is attributed to clearing and grubbing, mobilization, construction surveying, maintenance and protection of traffic, bridge structure, and incorporated utility costs.

Funding Sources:

- The utility phase of the Hill-to-Hill Bridge Rehabilitation project Multimodal Project Management System (MPMS #93630) the funding being reduced due to reduced estimate/need.
- The construction phase of the Fifth Street Bridge project (MPMS #94873), which is Toll Credited on the draft 2025 TIP.
- The utility and construction phase of the 611 Retaining Wall Rehab – Easton project (MPMS #110179) due to the Categorical Exclusions (CE) Clearance not being received prior to the 2023 TIP expiration.
- The preliminary engineering phase of the State Route (SR) 22/SR 191 Interchange Improvements project (MPMS #117606) funding is being released to match obligation/need.
- Various de-obligations returned to the region for reassignment.
- The Urban/Carbon Reduction Program Reserve Line Item (MPMS #82810)
- And the LVTS Highway & Bridge Reserve Line Item (MPMS #102201)

Ms. Ruth asked Chair Cotter to hold a technical committee vote.

Chair Cotter asked if there were any questions or comments from the committee or public. Ms. Bradley commented about Surface Transportation Urban (STU) and Carbon Reduction Program (CRP) funding selection process is upcoming and there were no additional comments. Ms. Bradley made the motion and Mr. Raio seconded the motion.

Ms. Bradley called for a vote and the motion passed unanimously.

Chair Cotter sent the meeting back to Chair Molchany for Coordinating Committee Approval.

Chair Molchany asked for a motion to approve the amendment. Mr. Mosca made the motion, adding the amendment is still contingent on PMC approval, which is expected on August 26th and Mr. Petrik seconded the motion.

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

Ms. Bradley called for a vote and the motion passed unanimously.

INFORMATION ITEM: Hill-to-Hill Bridge Project Update

PennDOT Consultant Project Manager Brian Teles presented on the Hill-to-Hill Bridge Project.

He shared the history of the bridge and some relevant data. It carries SR 378 over the Lehigh River and is a major link in the region connecting downtown Bethlehem with the Southside of Bethlehem. He also shared the key features, utilities, railroads, environmental and historic resources. He shared the four major aspects of the project: safety, congestion, structure condition, and mobility. He added project goals are to maintain four lanes of traffic, communicate road typology, minimize impacts to cultural resources, preserve Main Street and not to preclude future improvements. The project stakeholders are Bethlehem City, Fountain Hill Borough, St. Luke's Hospital, ArtsQuest, Coalition for Appropriate Transportation, and others.

He shared a new bridge carrying northbound traffic will be built on the east side of the bridge. This will allow for double left turn lanes of traffic southbound on the bridge. And a new one-way connection from 2nd Street to Route 378 northbound.

He said the current construction funding is over \$69 million, and another \$8.4 million of local money is expected through grants for the city-owned structures.

The project is estimated to be let in late July but may get pushed back but remain in Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

Mr. Molchany asked for questions to be asked later so we can move on to the next agenda item.

DISCUSSION ITEM: Passenger Rail Feasibility Analysis Phase II Recommendation from the Technical Committee

Technical Committee Chair Brendan Cotter shared a summary of the Phase II from the Technical Committee Meeting in July. A memo from the technical committee was included in the packet on page 44. The memo outlined the process for phase II, what it entails, and the estimated cost moving forward.

Ms. Hynes gave an overview of phases I and II. Establishing the project sponsor, who will have legal responsibility over the project, establish which market pair, establish decision-making criteria, assess the technical and financial feasibility, and conduct an alternative analysis.

Mr. Cotter shared the cost estimate to be \$450,000 for the consultant, travel demand analysis, technical and financial feasibility study, defined decision-making criteria, and LVPC & LANTA staff time. The cost may change based on the scope of work.

Mr. Cotter acknowledged that the passenger rail project will likely cost billions and is a commitment not only for our region, but neighboring regions, too. This is only the first of many phases. There are no guarantees. A system-based approach from Bus-Rapid Transit to light rail is documented in *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*. And lastly it cannot stop the required critical work for the region.

Mr. Cotter added that Phase II is worthy of pursuit if critical components are in place, trail and freight networks should not be disrupted, connections to other modes, (BRT, sidewalks) are systemwide, and acknowledgement of existing interregional services and opportunities that exist here. Phase II is worth pursuing once there is an understanding of land use, community, economic and infrastructure impacts and whether resulting changes can be supported regionally, and adequate funding and staffing. He noted this is only phase 2 of 14, and all LVTS partners must be committed to a joint approach as a regional initiative.

Ms. Bradley presented on the list of *Key Initiatives* directly from *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*. She noted there are federal requirements and passenger rail was not included when *FutureLV: The Regional Plan* was adopted.

Mr. Cotter said the next steps for the Coordinating Committee is to raise funding, develop a scope of services, include as an item on the 2025-2027 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), and a target for July 2025 to release a Request for Proposal (RFP), assuming funds are raised.

Mr. Molchany raised concern over developing a scope of service for Phase 2. If we use Ms. Hynes to help develop the scope, then she may be ineligible to submit a proposal when the RFP is released next year.

Mr. O'Neil said developing the scope may come from other consultants we've been working with but doesn't know if funding for them would have to come from the 450,000 we need to raise.

Mr. Molchany asked Mr. O'Neil if Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANTA) would be willing to be the project sponsor. Mr. O'Neil said it would be a decision for LANTA's board of directors.

Ms. Bradley noted that there are components that must be done by LANTA, LVPC, PennDOT and US DOT, and others.

Mr. Molchany asked if the LVPC can produce a draft scope of work, including responsibilities of the project sponsor, to help understand what's next. Ms. Bradley answered it would have to be a part of the 2025-2027 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) which will be presented at the October LVTS meeting.

Mr. Mosca said the PennDOT Multimodal Deputate must be included in the discussion too.

Mr. Cotter recommended not to rush through the scope of services development process because of the high cost and magnitude of the project for the region.

Mr. Molchany wants to see LVPC and LANTA's progress on securing funding at the October Technical Committee Meeting, but Ms. Bradley said it must be in the UPWP before we can start working on it. Ms. Bradley explained the UPWP process, that it's beginning now, our partners will have a period to comment, we send it to PennDOT in January, and it takes effect July 1, 2025.

Mr. McClure suggested that Amtrak be asked to appear before LVTS to give advice on upcoming process.

Mr. Molchany had no objection, but Ms. Bradley added that NJ Transit, Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) and LANTA, should all be invited too because we can't show favoritism to Amtrak. It must be a metric space analysis as part of Phase 2.

Mr. Batson, WSP, added that the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) corridor planning unit may be a better organization to have at the next meeting as opposed to Amtrak or another service provider. They can talk about corridor planning and what other organizations have done around the country.

Mr. Batson said he would provide the LVPC with contact information for the FRA corridor planning unit.

Mr. Webber added that Amtrak has data because they studied the corridor heavily and have expertise dealing with freight railroads.

Mr. McClure asked about how other regions are working towards adding passenger rail service. Mr. Batson answered the Reading-to-Philly corridor communities created the *Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority* and the Scranton-to-New York corridor is led by the *Pennsylvania Northeast Railroad Authority*, which already owns tracks and operates rail. Nationwide, many Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are in our position where they must raise money.

Mr. Molchany asked if we should create an authority.

Mr. O'Neil said the sponsor would be part of the next study, and we don't need to make that decision now. The LVTS or LANTA can issue RFPs.

Mr. McClure asked if the LANTA board knows about the study and if LANTA has the bandwidth to be the project sponsor.

Mr. O'Neil said the board knows about the study but hasn't taken official action. His staff may have the capacity, but it depends on the scope.

Mr. Webber said PennDOT could be a sponsor.

Mr. Molchany said an update will be needed at the October meeting.

There were no additional questions or comments at this time.

INFORMATION ITEM: Hill-to-Hill Bridge Project Update

Chair Molchany asked the committees if they had any questions for PennDOT Consultant Mr. Teles from his Hill-to-Hill Bridge presentation.

Mr. Slingerland (Coalition for Appropriate Transportation) commented on bike and pedestrian access on the project. He said the bridge connects three distinct parts of Bethlehem and has the opportunity to connect with the South Bethlehem Greenway trail. These improvements are a small percentage of the total project budget. Mr. Slingerland said six-foot sidewalks are insufficient and 10-foot sidewalks will

better suit pedestrian needs. Mr. Slingerland also asked about the pedestrian experience crossing Wyandotte Street.

Mr. Teles offered a follow-up discussion with Mr. Slingerland. He said that due to the historic nature of the project, widening the sidewalk on the north side / west side of the bridge is impossible. However, a larger sidewalk is proposed along the new bridge being built on the south side/east side. He also said pedestrian signal timings have not been set at this point in the project.

Mr. Molchany added that in other bridge replacements in the area, like the Cementon Bridge, a 10-foot wide sidewalk was proposed and met with no objections from federal or state partners and connected with the D&L trail. The Hill-to-Hill bridge is not a complete replacement, so the balancing act of historic preservation and bike and ped access is delicate.

There were no additional questions for Mr. Teles.

DISCUSSION ITEM: Passenger Rail Feasibility Analysis Phase II Recommendation from the Technical Committee

Mr. Cotter asked Chair Molchany if the Coordinating Committee would be acting on the Recommendation from the Technical Committee.

Mr. Molchany said the Coordinating Committee was not intending to act, but to only understand the recommendation, develop the next steps, and begin to gather data.

New Business

TRAINING ITEM: Transportation Planning Capacity Building (TPCB) Differences between the LVTS Technical Committee and Coordinating Committee

Mr. Molchany asked this presentation to be tabled due to the current length of the meeting.

There were no objections from the Committee.

INFORMATION ITEM: Upcoming Requests for Proposals

Mr. Hite presented on Upcoming Requests for Proposals for outside consulting services to support the LVTS.

- Open-End Planning, Engineering and Landscape Architecture Services
- Project Selection and Prioritization System
- Route 22 Improvements Plan

Mr. Molchany asked if there were any questions from members or the public, and there were none.

Status Reports

Mr. Molchany said the status reports were included in the meeting packet.

There were no questions or comments from the committees or public.

Adjournment

Mr. Molchany stated that the next LVTS meeting is a Technical Committee meeting on September 18, 2024, at 9 AM. The next Joint Technical and Coordinating Committee meeting is on October 16, 2024, at 9 AM. Mr. Cotter made a motion to adjourn, and the meeting was adjourned.