

CHAPTER 7 - TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS AND STUDIES

Road and Bridge Projects

Road and bridge construction projects are designed for current traffic volumes according to state standards and national guidelines published by the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO). Funding is contingent upon complying with these standards and guidelines; however, state and federal design guidelines and standards do introduce some flexibility for addressing a project's local context.

County road and bridge projects have been the subject of much public debate as increased traffic volumes have become increasingly visible. Public concerns have focused on major projects, which include safety items, such as roadway straightening, bridge widening and the addition of travel and turning lanes, as well as minor projects, including shoulder widening, installation of drainage pipes in lieu of roadside ditches, the use of earthen banks/berms and tree removal and replacement.

The County has a statutory obligation to provide a road which is safe and convenient for travel during all seasons of the year. As such, the County has a history of engaging the townships and public in a process known as 'Context Sensitive Design', through its public outreach program. Context Sensitive Design considers the stakeholders' needs to balance concerns and to achieve excellence in design.

In addition to road and bridge projects, the County has statutory responsibility to review subdivisions and site plans for possible impacts on County infrastructure. Through this process, the Planning Board evaluates development proposals, and requires that any impacts be mitigated as a condition of approval. Planning Board requirements are focused on ensuring that traffic from new developments can safely access County roads without aggravating impacts to existing traffic conditions. Presently, Hunterdon County roads are primarily two-lane country roads that pass through woodlands, agricultural lands, newly suburbanizing areas and historic towns and villages.

In an effort to address public concerns over County bridge projects, the County Planning Board coordinated meetings with municipalities and the County Roads, Bridges and Engineering Department in the development of a draft Bridge Management Plan. The Plan introduces County policies regarding

future bridge projects, which attempt to balance the need for safety and efficiency with public concerns about traffic impacts, historic preservation and community character.

See Appendix G for a list of major transportation projects that are currently under development in Hunterdon County.

Project Funding

Funding for maintaining County roads and bridges is provided primarily through the County's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and NJTPA's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Project Development Work Program (PDWP). The County's CIP includes a one-year Capital Budget and a five-year Capital Improvement Plan. Federal and state funds are available to supplement County funding for a limited number of projects. Projects are placed in the County's CIP based on a series of criteria, and are prioritized based upon existing traffic volumes, road conditions and accident history. Roadway corridor improvements, such as drainage and intersection improvements, typically occur when the road is due for resurfacing, which generally occurs on a 12-15 year cycle. Particular roadway sections may be placed in the County's CIP in advance of this cycle if, for example, accident records dictate the need for immediate improvement. Likewise, major proposed developments may trigger the need for more immediate improvements. Bridges are evaluated based on a sufficiency rating (classification based on safety, serviceability and essentiality for public use), level of service criteria (load capacity, clear deck width, vertical over- and under-clearance) and accident reports.

The NJTPA TIP program lists nearly \$10 billion in state and federally funded capital transportation investments over the next four fiscal years. The investments include projects and programs to rebuild, improve and maintain the State's roadway and transit systems. To be eligible for federal funds, proposed projects must be approved by the NJTPA Board of Trustees for inclusion in the TIP which is updated annually.

The TIP, which is updated every year, includes projects for which design, right-of-way purchase, and construction take place. The current TIP covers fiscal years (FYs) 2008 through 2011, and went into effect on October 1, 2007. The NJTPA PDWP program is a schedule of project planning, project scoping and preliminary design work that will be conducted during the coming year. At the conclusion of this project development work, projects become candidates for inclusion in the TIP program. There are

currently 13 Hunterdon County transportation projects that are budgeted for the FY 2008-2011 TIP and 11 projects budgeted for the 2008 PDWP.

Completed Transportation Projects

Since the 1993 Hunterdon County Transportation Project was published, there have been several major transportation projects completed within the County. See Appendix G for a listing of selected projects completed.

Current Studies

There are currently several major transportation studies being undertaken in order to help find solutions to the safety and mobility issues that are affecting the County's road network:

I-78 Corridor Transit Study – Phase I & II

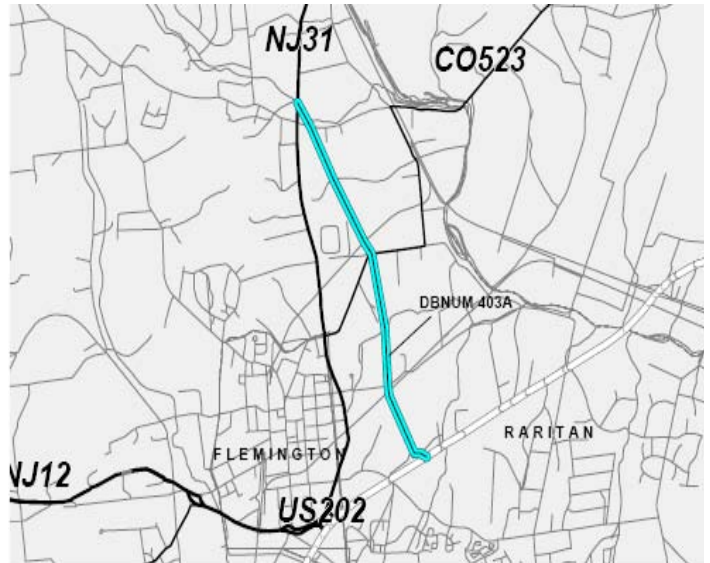
This NJTPA lead study is assessing the need, impact and feasibility of various transit strategies along the I-78 corridor between Lehigh County, Pennsylvania to the west and Somerset County, New Jersey to the east. The I-78 corridor has experienced significant growth in population and employment and the growth is expected to continue. Recognizing the mobility and accessibility needs of this growing population, the study seeks to enhance transit options for current and future residents. There are eight municipalities in the County that are transversed by the I-78 corridor.

Phase I of the study addressed bus transit mobility needs through recommendations for bus service and shuttle enhancements, new park and ride locations, and bus priority treatments. Recommendations from this study phase were released in May, 2007. These recommendations included strategies such as: new and restructured bus routes, bus preferential treatments, and new and expanded park and ride facilities. The study also recommended the expansion of an existing park and ride location in White House Station in Readington Township as well as the development of new transit hubs and park and ride lots along I-78 on adjacent rail lines. See Appendix H for more detailed recommendations from the study.

The Phase II portion of the study will provide a more extensive and detailed environmental and planning assessment of the possible extension of NJ Transit rail service to Phillipsburg, New Jersey. This Phase II effort begins in Spring 2008.

South Branch Parkway

Congestion on Route 31 through Raritan Township and Flemington Borough has been a growing concern for area residents, business owners and elected officials for some time. For decades, an interstate-standard highway by-pass, complete with grade-separated interchanges, had been planned for the land east of Flemington through mostly vacant, industrial-zoned land. The aim of the proposed Flemington bypass was two-fold: to relieve congestion on Route 31, which went through the community’s commercial district and to provide access to the industrial land between Route 31, Route 202 and the South Branch of the Raritan River. This project is still in the design phase and the industrial areas around the proposed site remain relatively undeveloped.



South Branch Parkway (Proposed) / Source: NJTPA

The NJ DOT is now studying a scaled down and more context sensitive “by-pass” to provide an additional routing option to Route 31 while enhancing the area’s transportation network and celebrating the natural, historic and cultural resources of the area. The Route 31 Land Use and Transportation Plan proposes that the “South Branch Parkway” connect Route 31 and Route 202. The two lane parkway would define an edge between the area’s urban/suburban and rural/agricultural development patterns. This scaled down by-pass, along with the local network addition, would provide a better transportation system at about half of the cost of the original plan.

NJTPA Truck Rest Stop Study

The NJTPA has launched a Truck Rest Stop Study. Hunterdon County is part of the Study area. This study analyzes truck movements and the possible need for rest/service stops. This study will be coordinated with other truck stop studies being conducted by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council and the Connecticut Department of Transportation. A final tri-state regional report will result from the three studies.

The NJTPA Study stems from the lack of adequate truck rest and service stops — especially near the port — currently available to truck drivers who are subject to new federal rules reducing drivers’ hours of

service. As a result, truckers are often forced to pull over on streets or highway shoulders to rest. Few, if any of these locations, offer truck drivers legal parking space and amenities such as food, showers, and repair services. This raises safety and environmental concerns throughout the region and also creates a potentially dangerous situation for the drivers themselves.

The NJTPA, under guidance from its Freight Initiatives Committee, is assessing the availability and adequacy of truck rest/service stops throughout its thirteen County area. There are currently four truck rest stops in Hunterdon County, all along the I-78 corridor. Due to a largely negative perception of the impacts from truck stops, extensive stakeholder education and a public outreach program will be undertaken as a part of this study. Freight Initiatives Committee meetings in the future will include Truck Rest Stop Study reports and discussions among stakeholders. The result of this study will be recommendations for new candidate sites or expanding existing sites across the thirteen County areas.

Completed Studies

Bikeway Implementation Plan, Southwestern Loop

The purpose of this study was to promote safe access for bicycles in Hunterdon County by analyzing the transportation system and making recommendations for current and future bicycle compatibility. This study identifies physical impediments to constructing a bikeway including shoulder width, drainage structures, bridge crossings, vertical and horizontal geometry, speed limits and abutting land uses. These features were analyzed for a selected loop route with spur routes, which is a hybrid of routes contained in the Hunterdon County Bicycle and Pedestrian Element. Specifically, the study conducted a needs assessment that was used to develop strategies and concept statements for further advancement in the project pipeline as well as identifying potential funding sources.

The Southwest Loop traces County roads, except for a short stretch in the Borough of Stockton where SR29 is used as the connection from CR 523 to CR 519. The conceptual route goes through or touches Raritan Township, Delaware Township, Stockton Borough, Kingwood Township, Alexandria Township, and Franklin Township.

