

Regional traffic planners offer report on area study

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Regional traffic planners heard updates on a full plate of issues last week, including the Swamp Road reconstruction project and a traffic signal enhancement initiative along the Newtown Bypass.

Meeting at the Lower Makefield Township building, the Regional Traffic Planning Task Force opened the session with a report on an open house held last month regarding the Bucks County Regional Traffic Study now underway in the corridor.

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The study area encompasses Lower Makefield, Yardley Borough, Newtown Township, Newtown Borough, Upper Makefield, Wrightstown and Northampton.

Twenty professionals were on hand at the Bucks County Community College to explain and answer questions on four project displays, outlining the background of the study, addressing various engineering elements and providing updates on the Traffic Signal Enhancement Initiative Project and the Swamp Road reconstruction project.

The study, which is being funded in part by the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), will compile key roadway and traffic data with traffic engineering and safety studies to formulate a comprehensive region-wide traffic planning and oversight report containing recommendations for improvements.

The study will incorporate input received during a series of informational meetings held with local police departments, municipalities, school districts, the Bucks County Community College, and businesses including several Wrightstown Township quarry owners and operators.

According to Jerry Coyne, of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, the 73 people who attended the open house raised concerns with traffic mobility, the speed of traffic, truck traffic, quality of life issues, etc.

"In general, most of the comments were directed toward mobility," said Coyne. "Quality of life was also important. That got to things like speed of traffic, cut through traffic and providing alternative modes of transportation as opposed to promoting auto travel."

Additional comments, said Coyne, were divided equally among safety and trucks. "The speed of traffic was generally the most frequent comment submitted."

The task force also heard a report from Stephen Rozyckie of Gannett Fleming. He provided an update on a Traffic Signal Enhancement Initiative (TSEI) study now underway along the Newtown Bypass between Durham Road and Interstate 95.

The goal of the TSEI, said Rozyckie, is to reduce corridor travel time and delay through low-cost improvements, including re-timing signals, improving coordination between signals and adjusting signal phasing.

"A 10 percent travel time savings on a corridor such as Newtown Bypass would save the equivalent of over 40 total hours during the PM peak hour," Rozyckie told the panel. "In Pennsylvania, delay and fuel costs due to traffic signal congestion is estimated at \$120- to \$160-million annually. Inefficient operation of signals results in unnecessary delay, pollution and wasted time."

Rozyckie said he anticipates having signal modification recommendations ready within about a month with the new timings expected to be implemented sometime this spring.

"Once those new timings are in, we're going to go out and do some field time adjustments," said Rozyckie. "After we feel comfortable with what's out there, we will go out again and do another set of travel time and delay studies to measure the reduction in delays."

Sue Herman, the president of Residents for Responsible Traffic Solutions, said while she eagerly awaits the re-timing of the lights, she said the traffic signals should not be timed for any speed below 50 mph.

"Will it be 50 mph so as to maximize the use of the Newtown Bypass from a functionality standpoint? Will you post signs along the bypass once the lights are timed to inform the public of the speed? Will you recommend that Newtown Township retime the lights every three to five

years to ensure continued optimal progression of through traffic on the bypass," Herman asked the consultant.

It has long been RRTS's position that traffic should be encouraged to use arterial routes like the Newtown Bypass, a road built for heavy volumes, and not collector roads like Lindenhurst and Stoopville roads, which are predominately residential in nature.

The task force also heard from the traffic service manager for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, who provided an update on the Swamp Road reconstruction project.

He said initial design work to upgrade Swamp Road is moving forward, but he stressed that the project is very much in its infancy.

"PennDOT will initiate a separate and specific public information and involvement campaign this spring," said the PennDOT manager. "We will hold separate independent meetings geared specifically toward the Swamp Road project itself."

Very preliminary designs are now available for review online at [www.dvrpc.org/BCRTS](http://www.dvrpc.org/BCRTS) (meeting page).

Swamp Road residents in attendance at the meeting voiced concern over the pending improvements, worried that an improved roadway would increase speeds and create a dangerous mix of speeding vehicles, quarry trucks and college students.

They asked the planners to strongly consider keeping Swamp Road rural in nature and not to turn it into an extension of the Newtown Bypass.

At one point during the discussion, Newtown Township Supervisor Anne Goren suggested the idea of exploring the creation of an alternative entrance to Bucks County Community College via Tyler Road.

Lower Makefield resident Irene Koehler told the panel that while she sympathizes with the feelings of the Swamp Road residents, "We begged the regional traffic commission 20-25 years ago to keep Lindenhurst rural in nature. Nobody paid attention to us, because of backdoor politics, which kept restrictions on the culvert on Swamp Road...What has protected you all these years, has hurt us," she said.

"We're fighting the same battle with the gravel trucks," added Koehler, "but I don't know the answer except that Lindenhurst no longer has that rural feel, which you're trying to keep."

Herman also raised issues with the scope of work for the regional traffic study, questioning why it now includes an examination of the functional classification of the roadways. Herman said after the meeting, she's worried the inclusion of that wording is a backdoor way to reclassifying Lindenhurst and Stoopville roads from collector to arterial highways.

Herman also questioned the elimination of a sentence from the final RFP stating RRTS's request that the municipal, county, regional and state consider traffic calming measures along Stoopville, Worthington Mill and Lindenhurst roads. Herman said her group fought hard to include the language in the RFP and that it should be re-instated.