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ROUTES 611/263 CORRIDOR STUDY MONTGOMERY COUNTY PHASE I REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

June 2008

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was guided with the support and involvement of the Study Advisory Committee members through a series of meetings and presentations. Thanks is hereby given to all participants for their input during the planning process.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GENERAL BACKGROUND

The interconnected 9- and 12-mile corridors along Route 611/Route 263 (Old York Road and Easton Road) are situated in eastern Montgomery County between the boundaries of the City of Philadelphia and Bucks County. The study corridors include parts of five municipalities: Abington, Cheltenham and Upper Moreland townships and Hatboro and Jenkintown boroughs (See Map 1).

A key approach towards issues and problems along a transportation corridor is to foster inter-municipal cooperation and coordination to identify projects and programs to achieve needed solutions. In recognizing the value of this approach, the "Multi-Municipal Workshop" forum was formed consisting of the five corridor municipalities. These municipalities, along with Montgomery County, and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), funded this study.

This study provides an opportunity to address transportation, land use and environmental challenges in a coordinated effort. This synergy can enhance the creation of economic development opportunities within the corridor.

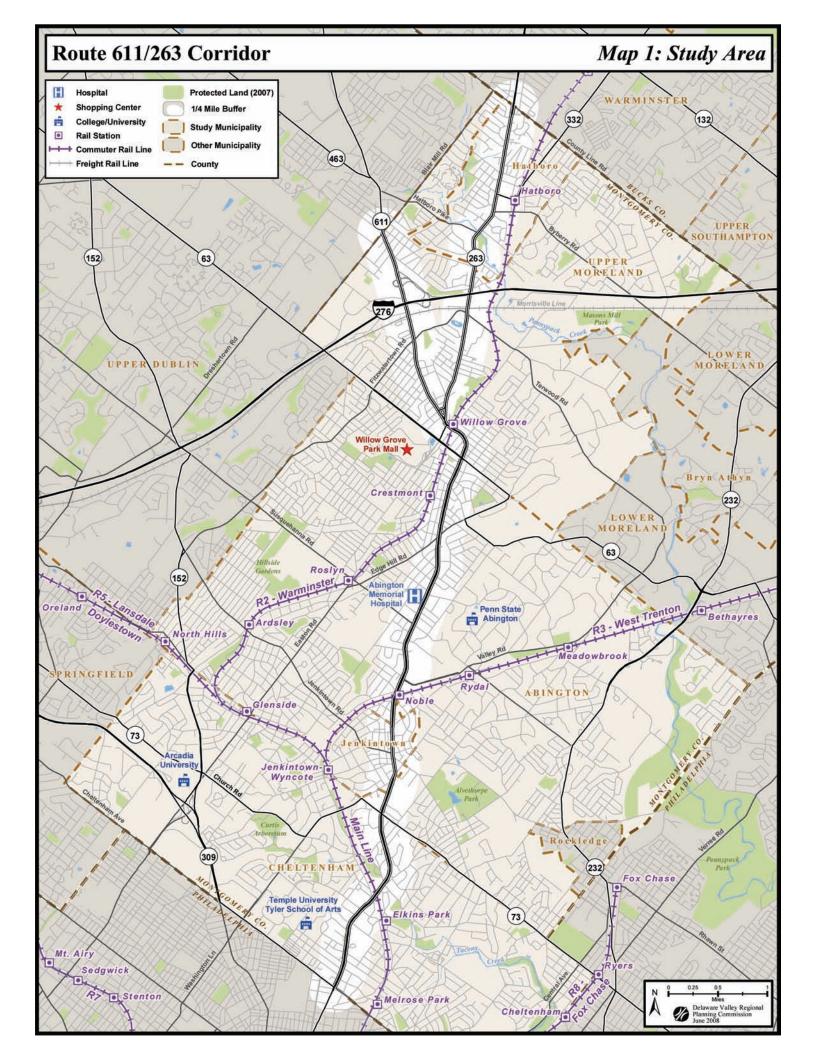
In an effort to understand the issues important to those who live and work in the corridor, a Study Advisory Committee (SAC) was formed. It includes state, local and regional agencies and organizations, business owners and educational institutions, as well as municipal representatives. The SAC has held three meetings to date. DVRPC and the SAC also sponsored a public open house. In addition, individual meetings have been held with each of the five study municipalities to gather information on their plans and vision for the corridor. The study team also met with several transportation and environmental organizations operating in the corridor to gain their perspective on corridor issues and needs.

This is Phase 1 of a two-phase process. This phase examines the existing conditions of the corridor, which will be followed by detailed improvement recommendations in Phase 2.

This study is organized into three main categories - environmental, land use and transportation. The study team documented and analyzed existing conditions of transportation facilities in the corridor. The analysis included traffic volumes, crash history, major intersections, and arterial roadways. In addition, a travel time survey and trip origin and destination analysis were conducted. A general overview of each bus and rail route was completed as well as an evaluation of the condition and adequacy of transit facilities and infrastructure. The connectivity of corridor bus routes and regional rail stations, including schedule coordination, was also assessed. Improvements to intermodal connections were recommended. Non-SEPTA transit services within the corridor were inventoried. Priority bicycle routes were identified by using two broad goals. The first goal was to create connections between residential neighborhoods and downtown areas. The second goal was to create alternative routes that parallel major roads such as Route 611 and Route 263. Priority road segments were also assessed for their fitness as bicycle facilities.

Land use plans, municipal zoning codes and demographic trends have also been documented. A toolkit of strategies was identified to promote smart growth in the corridor. The goal of these strategies is to revitalize older town centers, concentrate new development around growth nodes, enhance access to transit, and promote development of mixed-use corridors.

In these new growth centers, municipalities should ensure development that is dense and pedestrian-friendly, similar to the corridor's older, historic areas, but with new construction. Zoning for these areas could require narrower frontages, permitting taller buildings, with front entrances sited along the street frontage, parking hidden or structured, and with streetscaping to enhance the area. Development form can be regulated to have similar scale and dimensions with historic building types, to retain a character in new areas that is sympathetic with the historic town centers, elsewhere along the Route 611 corridor.



In addition to the identified new growth nodes, untapped markets may exist for commercial and residential growth around rail transit stations. This type of concentration of new development around transit hubs is known as transit-oriented development (TOD). Areas around the Noble, Elkins Park (by Church Road), and Willow Grove train stations may be ripe for this type of development.

An issue that is inherently tied in with that of building town centers is to portray a strong sense of place. It is important to build a sense of place, and maintain the building form and scale of each community's historic areas, if the desire exists to retain and strengthen the commercial competitiveness of these town centers.

In order to revitalize growth nodes, develop a sense of place, support transit-oriented development, and restore the competitiveness of historic town centers, it is critical to support the pedestrian environment with elements such as benches, street trees and planting, pedestrian scale lighting, continuous unobstructed sidewalks and curbs in good condition, and pedestrian-oriented development. It is also important to have well-marked crosswalks, frequently sited, and with pedestrian signal heads.

The natural resources of the Route 611/263 corridor communities and the ecosystem services these resources provide are critical to the area's sustainability, overall health, and quality of life. The preservation and restoration of these resources, future redevelopment and growth, and changes to the area's transportation infrastructure are all interlinked.

One important topic addressed during Phase 1 was stormwater, which is affected by land use, geology and soils, surface and ground water, riparian buffers, woodlands, floodplains, wetlands, and slope. A direct environmental impact of stormwater runoff is the degraded water quality of the corridor's waterways. A large part of a municipal stormwater program can be the implementation of a "Green Streets" program that incorporates stormwater controls into the built environment through streetscape improvements, traffic calming devices, and greening efforts. Improvements to landscaping and parking regulations can lead to designs that capture rainfall and reduce runoff.

The second topic addressed is "Green Infrastructure," which is also based on land use, geology and soils, surface and groundwater, and natural vegetation, but also includes infrastructure investments like multi-modal trails and sidewalks, and capital investments like greenways, wildlife corridors, and parks. An understanding of the study area's Green Infrastructure will promote better decision-making with regard to transportation issues within the Route 611/263 corridor. Investing in and protecting Green Infrastructure is vital to protecting the ecosystem services natural areas provide.

This document is the study's Executive Summary that details the project goals, objectives and preliminary recommendations. This Phase 1 report examines the existing conditions of the corridor, which will be followed by detailed improvement recommendations in Phase 2. The Phase 2 report is scheduled to be completed by June 2009.

ASSETS, CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

An analysis of the corridor included documenting its Assets - unique and positive characteristics; Constraints - factors or conditions that impede the advancement of the corridor; and Opportunities - possibilities to effectuate positive change.

Assets

- Commuter rail service provided by SEPTA R-1, R-2, R-3, and R-5 trains with direct access to Center City Philadelphia.
- Frequent bus service by SEPTA buses with the #55 serving the length of Route 611 with connections to major employment centers.

- Business districts with regionwide access.
- Historic and human scale main street frontages in the boroughs of Jenkintown and Hatboro.
- Sidewalks throughout the length of the corridor that provide pedestrian access.
- Institutions such as Abington Memorial Hospital and Penn State University Abington through which partnerships could be brokered to achieve mutual goals.

Constraints

- A narrow cartway along Route 611 in Jenkintown that restricts pedestrian and vehicular circulation improvements.
- Discontinuous and deficient sidewalks throughout the corridor
- Small parcels with a high density of driveways and curb cuts
- Unattractive streetscape at some locations
- Uninviting pedestrian environment at some locations
- Spacing between traffic signals deter pedestrian movement across the corridor.
- Older stormwater infrastructure

Opportunities

- Potential to improve traffic circulation through intersection improvements
- Potential to consolidate and rationalize property access points that disrupt pedestrian activity along sidewalks
- Potential to improve sidewalk network and pedestrian crosswalks
- Potential to develop a corridor identity
- Potential to promote the history and culture of the corridor
- Potential to reinforce pedestrian scale development by orienting new buildings to street and sidewalks and placing off-street parking behind buildings
- Potential to implement Transit Oriented Development at rail stations
- Potential to reinforce central business districts along the corridor
- Potential to make use of large redevelopable sites to create new mixed use complexes
- Potential to combine streetscape and pedestrian improvements and traffic calming devices with improvements to stormwater management practices.
- Potential to link pedestrians and bicyclists to public transportation, incorporating on-road bikeways, greenways, and green streets.

CORRIDOR-WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Corridor-wide recommendations are those that can provide benefits to road users along the length of the corridor through improved mobility, safety and aesthetics.

Transit

- Install bus stop shelters at peak boarding locations.
- Update bus and train schedules to promote bus-to-train transfers and commuting.
- Improve crosswalks and sidewalks in the vicinity of bus stops that are deficient.
- Expand parking at rail stations.
- Find parking alternatives for at-capacity rail stations.
- Improve rail station amenities.
- Install wayfinding signs to indicate the location of rail stations.
- Improve peak rail capacity.
- Install high-level platforms at stations with peak loading.
- Study potential for southern-corridor circulator shuttle.

Highway

- Expand left turn lanes to improve traffic flow.
- Landscape medians as traffic calming and stormwater management tools.
- Install man/hand pedestrian signals with countdown timers and continental-striped crosswalks at all signalized intersections.

Parking

- The number of parking spaces required for residential and commercial structures may be accommodated through shared parking arrangements. By facilitating and incentivizing shared parking, while consolidating entrance and egress points, municipalities may simultaneously maximize the potential of available land for parking, while creating more desirable areas for pedestrians and removing impervious surfaces.
- For development within the town center growth nodes, parking should be located in the rear of properties, should be on-street only, or should be shared in off-site, surface facilities or structured facilities.
- The minimum parking space dimensions should be reduced within municipal land development ordinances to accommodate compact vehicles, bicycles, motorcycles, and car-sharing, and allow for the installation of vegetated swales and landscaped medians to mitigate stormwater runoff.
- Where appropriate, such as on residential cross-streets and under-used and oversized commercial property parking lots, require the use of porous paving materials when surfaces must be repaved.
- Amend the municipal subdivision and land development ordinance to require that large parking lots have tree canopies to reduce stormwater runoff and urban heat island effect.

Pedestrian

- Widen and upgrade sidewalk pavement and remove obstacles.
- Create continuous sidewalk network.

• Install pedestrian amenities such as benches, street trees and planting, pedestrian scale lighting, sidewalks and curbs in good condition. Streetscape improvements are an integral part of a comprehensive "Green Streets" program, which employs the use of tree trenches and contained planters to mitigate stormwater runoff.

Bicycle

- Install "Share the Road" signs along designated bike routes.
- Install bicycle lanes along designated bike routes.
- Add elements of a comprehensive "Green Streets" program, such as street trees, to key cross streets and parallel side streets to create linear parks and bicycle paths that lead to transportation hubs and growth nodes.

Gateway treatments

- Install gateway treatments along municipal boundaries.
- Create a civic/business program to sponsor landscaped gateway treatments and other landscaping projects.
- Recognize the contributions of area businesses and organizations that establish innovative landscaping projects through an annual Corridor Award.

Wayfinding signs

• Wayfinding signs should be placed for the benefit of all. If one needs to travel through one municipality to get to an attraction in another, then the municipalities need to work together for sign placement.

PRIORITY AREA RECOMMENDATIONS

These areas (1-14) were identified through individual meetings with the study area municipalities as well as the Study Advisory Committee. These are listed as they occur geographically from south to north, and not in order of importance. The locations are displayed on the Priority Area Recommendations Map on page 8.

1. Route 611 at Cheltenham Avenue (Cheltenham Township)

ISSUES:

- Peak period congestion which is compounded by unsafe vehicular conditions.
- Traffic at this location is regulated by two, closely-spaced traffic signals.
- Lack of gateway treatment.
- Bridge area not attractive or welcoming.
- Shopping center too auto-centric, despite significant pedestrian activity.
- Poor connectivity between pedestrian crossing points and transit stops.

Recommendations:

• Provide northbound left-turning vehicles with a protected movement.

- Relocate the southbound lane-drop to the segment upstream of the intersection.
- Install planted gateway elements, such as a contained planter or infiltration planter, to reduce stormwater runoff, and add visible signage.
- Reface the upper level of the bridge, replacing the chain-link with attractive material, such as brick.
- Improve pedestrian crossings to be ADA compatible.
- Encourage development of street edge parcel where there is currently parking on the corner of the shopping center.
- Widen sidewalks and add pedestrian amenities along the west side.
- Create better connectivity between pedestrian crossings and transit stops.
- Create shared parking and reduce curb cuts for commercial conversion buildings on western side of Old York Road.

2. Route 611 at Ashbourne Road (Cheltenham Township)

Issues:

- The westbound approach is along a 7% uphill grade, severely reducing sight distance for westbound vehicles.
- The signal plan is currently split-phased.
- This intersection operates at a LOS of C and B for the morning and afternoon peak hours, respectively.
- Development proposed along Ashbourne Road will increase traffic volumes.

Recommendation:

• Realign and re-grade Ashbourne Road.

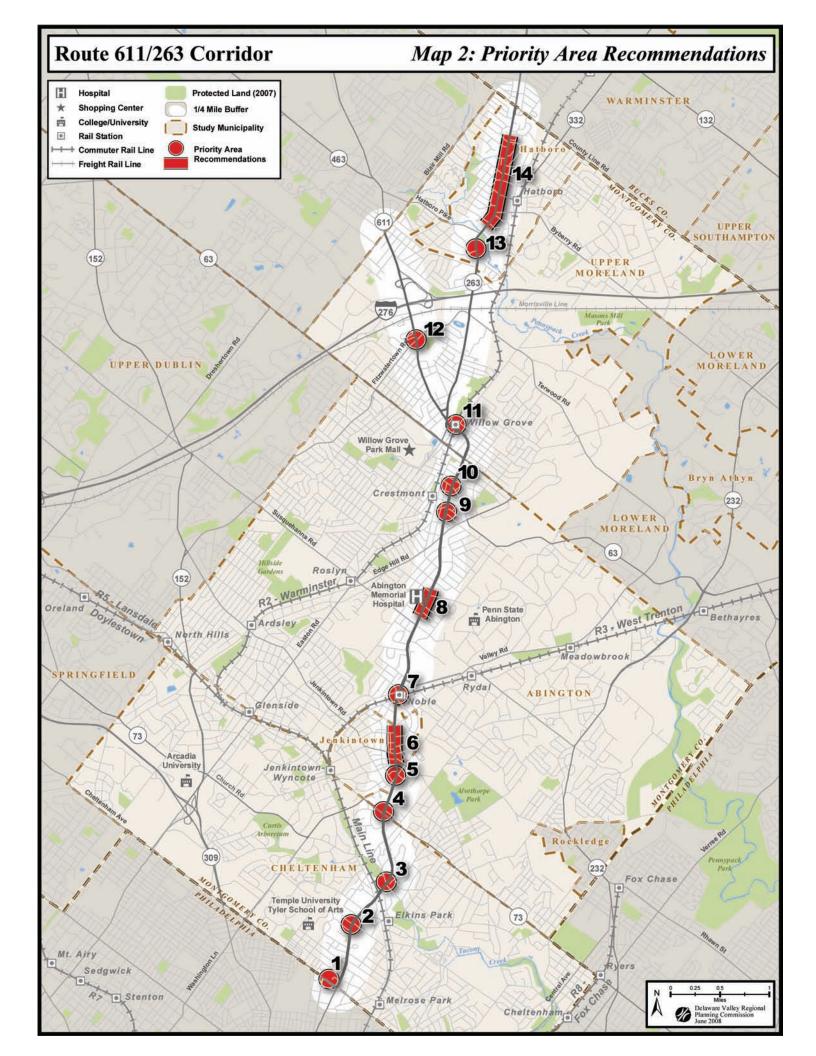
3. Route 611 Near Church Road (Cheltenham Township)

Issues:

- Lack of pedestrian amenities.
- Density too low to develop a town center environment.
- Intersection with Church Road forbids pedestrian crossing at certain points.
- No sidewalks at some points; cluttered and unattractive visual impact.
- Uses are not transit-supportive.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Allow and encourage higher density and mixed-use development.
- Install "Town Center" overlay district with design controls, requiring street-wall development.
- Limit auto-centric uses such as repair shops and gas stations.
- Install continuous sidewalks and widen existing sidewalks.



- Investigate feasibility of constructing new sidewalk on northbound Route 611 from Church Road to Green Briar Road.
- Utilize a sign ordinance to regularize signage and reduce clutter.
- Install pedestrian amenities, placemaking elements, and Green Street elements, such as pedestrianscale lighting, trees and infiltration planters, banners, colored pavement treatments, and benches.
- Permit pedestrian crossings at all legs of Church Road intersection.
- Increase visibility of pedestrian crossings, possibly by installing a vegetated bump-out that also mitigates stormwater runoff.
- Visibly mark shared parking facilities off the corridor.

4. Area Around Intersection of Route 611 and Township Line Road (Cheltenham and Abington Townships)

Issues:

- Development is too auto-centric.
- Sea of parking hurts the viability of the roadway.
- Few pedestrian amenities, especially in shopping center areas.
- Lack of gateways to Jenkintown.

Recommendations:

- Redesign the intersection with Township Line Road to be friendlier to pedestrians.
- Install Gateway treatments for Abington and Jenkintown at appropriate locations.
- Rezone areas between Wyncote Road and Washington Lane to develop a walkable growth node, with mixed-use development on both sides of Old York Road.
- Encourage the installation of structured parking and mixed-use development on some of the large parking lots.
- Encourage new residential development to support enhanced retail growth in this area.

5. Route 611 at Washington Lane (Jenkintown Borough and Abington Township)

Issues:

- The intersection is large and skewed. Route 611 stop bars are approximately 350 feet from each other; Washington Lane stop bars are approximately 370 feet from each other.
- There are delays in the morning and afternoon peak hours.
- Signal plan is split-phased for Washington Lane approaches.
- Two significant developments are proposed close to this location.

Recommendations:

• Construct a gateway treatment at this location, such as a contained planter or infiltration planter to reduce stormwater runoff, and add visible signage.

 Convert Washington Lane west of Route 611 to one-way westbound to reduce delays at the intersection.¹

6. Route 611 and Adjoining Streets in Downtown Jenkintown Borough

Issues:

- Old York Road frontage is not welcoming to pedestrians.
- Lack of connectivity with retail corridors off of Old York Road.

Recommendations:2

- Install enhanced pedestrian amenities, such as bollards, contained planters, and infiltration planters, to separate the sidewalk from the roadway and mitigate stormwater runoff.
- Install a consistent treatment of banners, signage, and streetscaping connecting Old York Road frontage with interior roadways.
- Through streetscaping, new development, and signage work, encourage visbily moving the center of pedestrian activity, so that growth is radial from the existing Town Square, rather than linear, from Summit Avenue to Hillside Avenue.
- Jenkintown should develop a structured parking facility in its business district.
- Amend zoning to ensure all new development along Old York Road is built to the sidewalk edge or has minimal setback. No parking or internal curb cuts should be permitted along the Old York Road frontage.
- Extend Fox Chase Trail to Meetinghouse Road; other proposed bicycle facilities would allow bicyclists to continue to Jenkintown using Meetinghouse Road and Jenkintown Road.

7. Area Around Noble Train Station (Abington Township)

Issues:

- Existing development is too auto-centric to be transit supportive.
- Potential for significant infill development.
- Single-use parking.
- Poor pedestrian crossings at Harte Road.

Recommendations:

- Create Transit-Oriented Development overlay district, ensuring higher-density development, with transit-supportive uses.
- Rezone parcels on the west side of Old York Road, to ensure street-edge, mixed-use development, with transit-supportive form.

¹ Jenkintown Borough has expressed concern that this recommendation could re-route eastbound traffic into Jenkintown's neighborhood streets.

² Jenkintown requests that DVRPC recommend their proposal to consolidate traffic lanes in its business district from four lanes to three lanes and install bicycle lanes along each curbside to separate the sidewalk from the roadway. This proposal is intended to enhance the pedestrian experience in Jenkintown while rationalizing the flow of traffic during peak periods, and providing bicycle access.

- Connect existing commercial parking and encourage shared parking arrangements with the transit station. Structured parking should be supported.
- Enhance pedestrian pathways and crossings, building easy accommodations between the Noble Station, retail, and parking facilities.
- Adapt zoning to facilitate higher-density, street edge development along the Fairway.
- Develop a bicycle corridor on Highland Avenue and Rockwell Avenue by adding lane striping or paving materials and street trees; other improvements would provide access to the Fairway and Noble Station.
- Create an official map to establish a new street network as this area is developed.

8. Abington Hospital Area (Abington Township)

Issues:

- Too many curb cut access points, leading to individual parking lots.
- Businesses in older structures seem to be struggling.
- Narrow sidewalks and poor pedestrian amenities.

Recommendations:

- Encourage the consolidation of curb cuts and the use of shared parking facilities.
- Rezone unbuilt parcels so that new development maintains street-wall frontage, and has ground level retail.
- Calm traffic, shorten crosswalks, enhance pedestrian crossings, and mitigate stormwater by installing vegetated bump-outs.
- Widen sidewalks where they are less than five-feet, and reduce the number of conflict points with pedestrians crossing over vehicle curb cuts.
- Invest in pedestrian amenities and "Green Streets" streetscaping.
- Adapt zoning to permit mixed use development, with higher densities and build to the sidewalk, along side streets and Highland Avenue.

9. Route 611 at Roy Avenue (Abington Township)

Issues:

- This is an unsignalized intersection that is offset by approximately 90 feet.
- There are few alternatives for crossing Route 611, as either a pedestrian or in a vehicle. The alternatives are Welsh Road to the north and Edge Hill Road to the south, both of which are approximately 1/4 mile away.

Recommendation:

- Further evaluate the realignment of Roy Avenue to create a four-leg intersection with Route 611.
- Improve pedestrian amenities and safety and mitigate stormwater runoff by installing elements of a comprehensive Green Streets program, such as street trees, infiltration planters, and vegetated bump-outs.

10. Redevelopment Area Around Old Welsh Road (Abington Township)

Issues:

- Vacant businesses.
- Suburban-style development with large front parking lots.
- Poor pedestrian amenities.
- Lack of sense of place.
- Potential for significant new development.

Recommendations:

- Zone vacant structures and redevelopment parcels with "Town Center" overlay, mandating mixed-use, street-wall, pedestrian-friendly development.
- Zone area to have parking behind the development, hidden, or structured,
- Invest in pedestrian amenities, placemaking elements, and Green Street elements, such as pedestrian-scale lighting, trees and infiltration planters, banners, colored pavers, and benches.
- Enhance pedestrian crossings and amenities, and mitigate stormwater runoff by installing elements of a Green Streets program.

11. Willow Grove Station (Upper Moreland and Abington townships)

Issues:

- Opportunity for new transit-oriented development.
- Businesses in older buildings seem to be struggling or are vacant.
- Blank walls facing the station area.

Recommendations:

- Create Transit-Oriented Development overlay district, ensuring higher-density development, with transit-supportive uses.
- Enhance pedestrian crossings and amenities.
- Construct sidewalk as necessary on Davisville Road between Willow Grove Station and the Mall; make Davisville Road a gateway.
- Develop a bicycle corridor on Fitzwatertown Road and Moreland Road; these roadways would be reconfigured and bicycle lanes would be added to create a connection between residential neighborhoods and Willow Grove Station.

12. Route 611 at Fitzwatertown Road (Upper Moreland Township)

Issues:

• Fitzwatertown Road is a major east-west connector between Route 63 and Route 263. Although volumes along PA 611 are dominant, heavy volumes are also experienced at the Fitzwatertown approaches, especially for eastbound left turning vehicles.

• Traffic exiting from the retail area (Staples, Dunkin Donuts) conflicts with traffic along Fitzwatertown Road.

Recommendations

- Close the exit from Dunkin Donuts to Fitzwatertown Road and direct traffic to the Route 611 exit or through the Staples Shopping center to Fitzwatertown Road.
- Make the exit from the Staples shopping center right-in/right-out only.

13. Route 263 from Warminster Road to Crooked Billet Road (Upper Moreland Township, Hatboro Borough)

Issues:

- Lack of sidewalks.
- Landscaping impeding pedestrian movement.

Recommendation:

- Construct new sidewalk on Route 263 to complete sidewalks on both sides of road between Warminster Road and downtown Hatboro.
- Implement a traffic calming strategy, specifically a lane reduction, north of Warminster Road.

14. Route 263 and Adjoining Streets in Downtown Hatboro Borough

Issues:

- Lack of gateways.
- Single use buildings along the corridor.
- Insufficient parking capacity.
- Speeding traffic traveling along Route 263 to north of Newington Drive.

Recommendations:

- Install gateway treatments near Horsham Road by the Pennypack Creek.
- Rezone parking lots to permit higher-density residential development behind the retail facades.
- Encourage shared parking arrangements.
- Create a Transit-Oriented Development overlay district around the Hatboro Train Station.
- Install wayfinding signs leading to the train station.
- Explore the feasibility of a lane drop northbound from Newington Drive to Crooked Billet Road to reduce speeding.

NEXT STEPS

This Phase 1 report will be followed by detailed improvement recommendations in a Phase 2 report. That report, developed with the guidance of the Study Advisory Committee, will detail a strategic implementation plan for the corridor based upon the land use scenarios, the transportation needs and the economic development strategy, in conformance with the policy goals and objectives of the local municipalities.

It is intended that Phase 2 document will be used as a dynamic, long range tool for the systematic selection of projects to create a significantly improved transportation system within the study area. It will serve as a check list for the government agencies with a stake in the implementation of improvements. Municipal governments are key players in this process. Even though a highway may be maintained by the state or county, it is the welfare of the local residents which is affected the most. The study corridor municipalities should ensure that proposed improvements are advanced expeditiously by remaining involved in the study and implementation process.

A model resolution is being considered for adoption by Montgomery County and the five Routes 611 and 263 corridor municipalities, Abington, Cheltenham and Upper Moreland townships and Hatboro and Jenkintown boroughs. It endorses the findings of the Phase 1 report and recognizes the need to begin implementation of the Phase 1 recommendations through the continuing work to be defined in Phase 2 of the study.

ROUTES 611/263 CORRIDOR STUDY PHASE 1 REPORT – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Publication Number: 08045A

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Geographic Area Covered: The study area includes portions of the Montgomery County municipalities of Abington Township, Cheltenham Township, Upper Moreland Township, Hatboro Borough and Jenkintown Borough.

Key Words: travel time survey, intersection analysis, pedestrian facilities, bicycle mobility, smart growth, transit oriented development, stormwater, green infrastructure

Abstract: This study provides a unique opportunity to identify ways in which transportation and land use can be coordinated in concert with environmental needs. It is hoped that this synergy will enhance the creation of economic development opportunities within the corridor. The study was developed with the active involvement and cooperation of representatives from each of the study area communities, Montgomery County and the public. The study includes an assessment of existing corridor conditions, identification of strategic issues and identification and analysis of the corridors' vision, goals and objectives. The study is Phase I of a two-phase study process; the second phase will focus on implementing various Phase I recommendations, working with Montgomery County and the study corridor municipalities.

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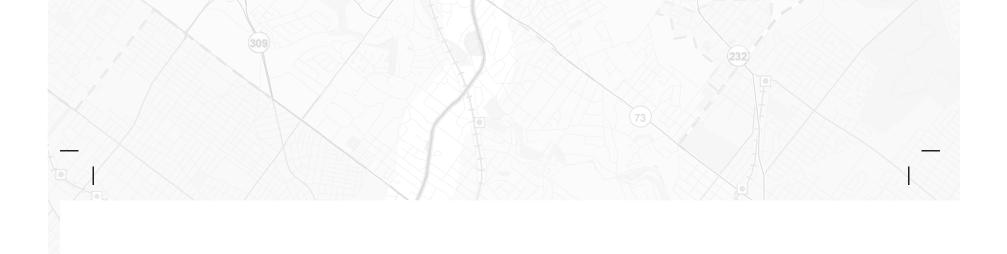
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Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

Phase 1 Report **Executive Summary**

ABINGTON / CHELTENHAM / UPPER MORELAND TOWNSHIPS

HATBORO / JENKINTOWN BOROUGHS

(463)



ROUTES 611 & 263 Corridor Study

Montgomery County