



CONNECTIONS

THE REGIONAL PLAN FOR
A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

LINK

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the LINK is the long-range plan newsletter of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

DEVELOPING the PLAN THROUGH PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation allows stakeholders and residents to participate in the creation of the Plan.

Public participation is an integral part of the long-range planning process, allowing stakeholders and residents to learn about issues facing the region and participate in the creation of the plan. Over the past year, DVRPC has undertaken a number of outreach activities to gather public input for *Connections 2035*, the Long-Range Plan. The purpose of these outreach activities was to give the people who live and work in the Delaware Valley an opportunity to share their vision of the region's future and to provide input as to how they would like to see the region grow and prosper.

DVRPC used diverse outreach strategies to capture the many concerns and recommendations of the region's residents, activists, politicians, government officials, and stakeholders. Special emphasis was put on attracting individuals and organizations who have not participated in previous DVRPC planning exercises, as well as those representing environmental justice concerns and underserved communities.

DVRPC began this campaign with an extensive online survey to identify what types of issues were priorities for the citizens of the Delaware Valley. Staff then analyzed and used the survey results to develop key planning principles to drive the development of the Long-Range Plan. The key planning principles were presented to focus groups comprised of members of the general public, municipal officials, and other stakeholders who have an impact on the growth and development of the region. Finally, a series of workshops were conducted in each of the region's nine counties to collect the public's opinion on the Plan's principles and vision.

This issue of *The Link* will highlight the public outreach efforts for *Connections 2035*, the Long-Range Plan, and summarize the public input and findings from the online survey, focus group interviews, and county workshops. It is DVRPC's hope that these efforts will help shape a long-range plan that has widespread support and reflects the goals and desires of the region's residents and stakeholders.



NEXT STEPS

Public Comment Period for the Connections 2035 Long-Range Plan: May 22 - June 22, 2009

The draft Plan will be available at public meetings, public libraries, DVRPC and online at www.dvrpc.org/connections

Public Meetings:

June 4, 2009

DVRPC Offices, 8th Floor
190 N. Independence Mall West
(6th and Race Streets)
Philadelphia, PA
From 4-6 PM

June 11, 2009

Cherry Hill Public Library
1100 Kings Highway N
Cherry Hill, NJ
From 4-6 PM

DVRPC will utilize the information collected from the public outreach efforts to refine the goals and implementation strategies of *Connections 2035: the Regional Plan for a Sustainable Future*. Staff members are currently working on a financial plan and evaluation criteria to aid in the selection of transportation projects to be included in the Plan. The financial plan will be used to ensure that selected projects have a reasonable expectation of funding and that the *Connections Plan* is fiscally constrained within the projected levels of available funding.

Evaluation criteria will be used to guarantee that Plan investments are consistent with goals and will assist in the selection of transportation projects to be included in the Plan.

Once the financial plan and selection criteria are finalized, a selection committee comprised of DVRPC member governments and stakeholders will propose and select transportation investments for the region. The next issue of *The Link* will include an executive summary of the draft *Connections Plan*, which is scheduled to be adopted by the DVRPC Board in early summer 2009.

There are still opportunities for the public to learn about the regional issues presented in *Connections* and to comment. A public comment period will be opened and public meetings will be held in the spring of 2009, before the Plan is finalized. This opportunity will be advertised through various means, including the DVRPC website, local publications, and the DVRPC *Connections* e-mail list. After plan adoption, DVRPC will continue to work with regional stakeholders and residents to implement the policies of the Long-Range Plan.

The *Connections Plan* is just one of the various programs and plans that DVRPC manages. There are also other opportunities for the public to get involved in DVRPC activities, including membership in the DVRPC Regional Citizens Committee (RCC). The RCC is an advisory arm of the agency; it has been established to provide citizen access to the regional planning and decision-making process. For more information about the RCC, or to join the DVRPC public participation mailing list, please contact Jane Maconi at 215.238.2871.

**More information on
DVRPC's long-range
planning activities:
www.dvrpc.org/connections**



The average household in core cities and developed communities is more compact; uses less energy to heat and cool; has lower rates of vehicle ownership and drives fewer vehicle miles. Core cities and developed communities have better transit—leading to more usage; and tend to complete more trips by walking or bicycling. Average households in growing suburbs and rural areas are larger; requiring additional land to be developed and more energy to heat and cool. They are less likely to have transit access, meaning more auto dependence, while walking and biking tends to be for recreation.

Regional impact

The need for public education and outreach surrounding the key planning principles was another common theme among the forums.

.....money appropriated to transportation projects should not be diverted to other programs or state and local government "general funds" in tough economic times.

Results from the focus groups and nine county workshops provided a broad spectrum of reactions to the Plan's growth scenarios and subsequent planning principles. There were, however, some key areas where responses converged. These intersections are important aspects to consider when identifying issues critical to developing a plan that reflects the goals and desires of a region as diverse as the Delaware Valley. The first common thread to emerge from the public outreach was that respondents overwhelmingly noted that the region's transportation infrastructure is a valuable asset. While the focus groups could not agree on a funding mechanism, both groups felt that funding needs to increase and should be transparent, as well as dedicated to transportation investments. There was common agreement between respondents that money appropriated to transportation projects should not be diverted to other programs or state and local government "general funds" in tough economic times.

The second common thread between the focus group interviews and workshops was trepidation about increased density, mixed income, and mixed-use development. The common fear was that these land uses lead to increased crime and diminished quality-of-life issues. The need for public education and outreach surrounding the key planning principles was another common theme among the forums. Both groups responded that if these concepts are to be successfully implemented, DVRPC must have an active role in educating both the public and local governments, as well as dispelling misconceptions and myths surrounding some of the more controversial topics.

to the PUBLIC

Community responses from the county outreach meetings largely supported the recentralization scenario and proposed planning principles of the Long-Range Plan.



Land Use

The topics of land use and recentralization sparked significant discussion within the break-out groups. The groups expressed widespread support of revitalizing traditional towns and population centers and recommended incentives to redevelop in existing centers and areas where infrastructure already exists.

Attendees provided comments regarding the need for regional and multi-municipal government cooperation and good zoning policies as a prerequisite for livable communities. The benefits of transit-oriented development, mixed use, and mixed income land uses were also noted.

Environment

Support for protecting the region's green spaces was common across all of the county workshops. Attendees pointed out that green space provides such valuable functions as groundwater recharge, stormwater management, and recreational opportunities. Participants specifically pointed out the importance of protecting the region's unique natural resources, preserving agriculture, using green infrastructure to protect water resources, as well as linking natural corridors for recreation and wildlife, and enhancing community livability.

Workshop participants discussed a number of ways to finance green space preservation, ranging from purchasing open space with special bonds and taxes to preserving open space through municipal land use tools and easements. The need for urban green space and neighborhood parks in population centers was identified as critical to the success of recentralization and quality-of-life.

Economic Competitiveness

Responses from the county workshops acknowledged the need to improve energy efficiency, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and grow "green collar" jobs if the region is to compete in the global economy and remain economically strong.

Two major themes surrounding economic competitiveness emerged at the county workshops: energy efficiency and investment in alternative sources of energy.

The first was expressed as the need to capitalize on the region's built environment and existing infrastructure as a way to grow a more energy-efficient economy.

The region's existing transportation system allows for the revitalization of existing development as opposed to more resource-intensive greenfield development. Participants expressed the need to incentivize redevelopment and energy-efficient construction.

A second theme emerged around the need to support and invest in alternative forms of energy. Wind, nuclear, and solar energy sources, as well as increased use of hybrid vehicle technologies, were highlighted as ways to reduce dependence on imported energy sources and greenhouse gas emissions. Early investment in these technologies will position the region as a leader in the emerging "green" economy.

Focus groups expressed wide-spread support for revitalizing traditional towns and population centers.

REACHING OUT

Connections 2035 Long-Range Plan County Workshops

LOCATION	DATE
PHILADELPHIA	10/21/08
GLOUCESTER	10/29/08
CAMDEN	10/30/08
MERCER	11/04/08
BURLINGTON	11/12/08
DELAWARE	11/13/08
BUCKS	11/17/08
CHESTER	11/18/08
MONTGOMERY	11/20/08

SOURCE: DVRPC 2008

DVRPC staff took the Plan to the public by holding outreach workshops in each of the nine counties in the region. Approximately 500 people participated in the workshops. Many people were participating in the planning process for the first time. The workshops began with presentations of the What-If Scenarios, which analyzed the impacts of future growth alternatives of recentralization, continuation of the current trend, and accelerated sprawl.

Key plan principles and challenges were also presented to the public in the four categories of Transportation, Land Use, Environment, and Economic Competitiveness. Participants then broke up into smaller, facilitated groups to discuss their visions for the future and the role of the key plan principles. Community responses from the county outreach meetings largely supported the recentralization scenario and proposed planning principles of the Connections 2035 Long-Range Plan. While support for the principles was widespread, the workshop attendees noted repeatedly the importance of public outreach and education as requirements to promote these principles. According to the responses from the workshops, addressing quality-of-life issues associated with high-density development was a major consideration for the success of the recentralization scenario. The quality of schools, crime, housing affordability, and the desire for personal space all play a role in people's choices of where to live. Attendees pointed out that unequal resource distribution across the region's communities poses a challenge to addressing some of these issues. Many participants called for tax breaks and economic incentives to encourage investment in traditional population centers. Regional revenue sharing and greater county and local financial support for the transit system were recommended as ways to address inequality of community resources. Much of the focus of the remaining discussions centered on the challenges and benefits of the proposed planning principles. The highlights of those conversations are summarized to the right.

Transportation

Participants agreed that there is a need to improve the existing transportation system. Attendees expressed support for various kinds of user fees to provide funding for infrastructure improvements.

Participants expressed a desire for transparency with regard to spending these funds and wanted to be assured that money collected from transportation taxes and user fees would be used exclusively for transportation projects, such as enhancing transit or repairing and maintaining highway and bridge infrastructure.

Transit issues were discussed extensively at the outreach meetings; people largely supported efforts to increase public transportation ridership and extend transit service. Participants supported reviving rail lines to traditional population centers where service had been discontinued in the past. Participants cited frequency of service, maintenance of facilities, and station cleanliness as important factors in attracting riders to transit. Everyone agreed on the need for more local and county-level financial support for transit.

Comments also highlighted the need for improving bicycle and pedestrian facilities as alternatives to driving.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL ATTITUDES



In the summer of 2008, DVRPC contracted with Portfolio Associates, a Philadelphia-based research, planning, and communications firm, to conduct focus groups and in-depth interviews with public officials, members of the general public, and private developers. The goal of the interviews was to identify how these groups value the key principles underpinning the Plan; how these individuals would support the principles through their policies, practices, and behavior; and what barriers might prevent stakeholders from supporting the principles of the Plan. The focus groups were asked to respond to the following key challenges:

INVESTING in Existing Centers

There appeared to be fewer perceived barriers to this principle than the other principles, although many stakeholders struggled with definitions of density and mixed-use development. There was general support for reinvestment in existing and older communities, as well as areas with existing infrastructure, and stakeholders believed that this type of development would help reduce urban sprawl.

Many of the focus group recommendations placed DVRPC in the role of regional resource for advocacy, technical guidance, and education of these various issues.

CREATE a Regional Funding Stream for Transportation Improvements

There was near unanimous agreement that transportation and access are the region's greatest assets. While stakeholders generally value this principle, they are not always supportive of the principle through their practices and behavior. There was a general aversion to enacting or raising existing revenue tools for the specific purpose of transportation improvements. Stakeholders were particularly wary of regional means of raising revenue because they believed that the funds could be abused by the administering body. The general public and developers both worry that revenue raised for transportation will be spent on other activities. Public officials were concerned that funding would favor improvements where voters are concentrated or where influential elected officials have jurisdiction.

PRESERVE Open Space, Natural Areas and Farmland

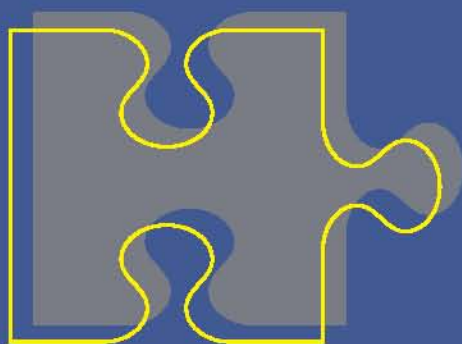
Stakeholders viewed open space as an important recreational and aesthetic asset, but did not necessarily equate the value of open spaces to maintaining air and water quality in the region. They prioritized projects that green the community at a lower level than other pressing needs. There was also a higher value placed on open space that could be utilized for activities, such as playing fields. Municipal officials, pressured to increase their tax revenues, often do not view preserved open space as the most valuable use of a parcel of land.

BUILD a More Energy-Efficient Economy

Stakeholders in general viewed energy efficiency as an important topic, but not necessarily an urgent one, compared to other challenges facing the region. While there was great support in theory for energy-efficient policies, many participants struggled to adopt energy-efficient practices and behaviors. However, there was general support for increased public sector participation in developing energy-efficient policies, although some felt that requiring energy efficiency should not be a government function, and that the private sector should drive energy-efficient practices without government intervention.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, participants supported the vision and goals presented in the Plan, but had difficulty in changing existing behavior or advocating for policy changes to implement the Plan's goals. The focus groups helped to identify barriers to implementing the vision of the Plan. One recurring barrier was a lack of information, as well as a regional proponent, for many of the principles. Several participants suggested a more prominent role for DVRPC as a regional resource for advocacy, technical guidance, and education in these various issues. In this way, DVRPC can supply residents, municipalities, developers, and other stakeholders with the information that they need to make decisions and address the issues that will significantly impact their own communities, as well as the region, in the next 25 years.





KEY PLAN PRINCIPLES

FIX IT FIRST

The region's infrastructure is aging and maintenance has been deferred in the past at the expense of expanding the system. Many of our bridges, roads, and transit infrastructure are deficient. Finding the funding to meet these maintenance needs, as well as improve and expand the system, is a key challenge.

INVEST IN LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Investing and reinvesting in the region's centers not only helps create a sense of community, but also saves money by reducing infrastructure, energy, and commuting costs.

PROTECT THE REGION'S GREEN SPACES

Investing in livable communities also reduces sprawl, which in turn protects open spaces and agricultural areas, and protects natural resources.

BUILD A MORE ENERGY-EFFICIENT ECONOMY

Reducing greenhouse gases and curtailing energy prices will become more critical components of economic development in the future. The regions that are best positioned to deal with these issues will be the ones that thrive.

ASSESSING PUBLIC OPINION

Over 5,000 people responded to the survey and, while it is not considered statistically valid due to the fact that it was conducted online, the volume of responses provides a representative sample of the region's demographic make-up.

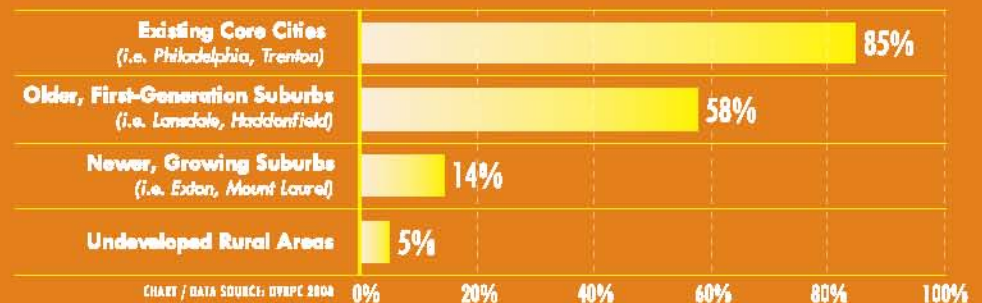
DVRPC conducted an online survey to gather public feedback to prioritize transportation, land use, environmental, and economic issues to help develop vision for the *Connections 2035* Long-Range Plan. The survey was targeted to adults who live or work in the nine-county DVRPC region. The survey was available in four languages (English, Spanish, Chinese, and Russian) and was posted for 10 weeks between January 25 and April 21, 2008.

The *Connections* online survey responses showed strong regional support for smart growth and investing in improvements in the existing transportation system.

Four major planning principles were developed from the survey results in the key issue areas of transportation, land use, the environment, and economic competitiveness. The principles of Fixing it First (Transportation), Investing in Livable Communities (Land Use), Protecting the Region's Green Spaces (Environment), and Building a More Energy-Efficient Economy (Economic Competitiveness) were then vetted through focus group interviews and county workshops to gauge wider public support for the underpinning principles of the Plan. For more information, and to view the complete results of the survey, visit www.dvrpc.org/connections/surveyresults.htm

Results of Survey Question Regarding Future Development in the Region*

Where in the Delaware Valley region should most future development be encouraged?



The Commission strives to educate the public on transportation and regional planning issues as well as provide opportunities for ongoing public involvement to all residents of the region. Special effort is made to engage all facets of the public, including those traditionally underserved in transportation planning. For outreach related to the long-range plan workshops, DVRPC sent announcements and information to individuals and organizations in the Commission's Environmental Justice/Public Participation database. In addition, DVRPC worked with Portfolio Associates in recruiting a diverse audience to participate in the county workshops. Portfolio Associates gathered contact information for environmental justice community organizations and interest groups for all nine counties, reaching many individuals who had not previously participated in a DVRPC event.

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FUTURE

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