



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

PLAN Regionally ACT Locally

Connections – *The Regional Plan for a Sustainable Future* was developed through extensive public participation, and adopted by the DVRPC Board in July 2009, as a vision for the Greater Philadelphia region to the year 2035. *Connections* is about creating the vibrant communities we want to live in and providing a variety of options for how we get around. The plan is a guide for how we want to develop, where we should conserve open space and farmland, how we can enhance our existing communities, and how the region can be both more sustainable and competitive in a global market. However, it will remain only a plan unless we all work together to implement it. This newsletter contains a number of actions that citizens and businesses alike can take to help implement the plan.

The *Connections* plan is built around four key principles: manage growth and protect resources; create livable communities; build an energy-efficient economy; and modernize our transportation system. Taken together, these principles will promote a more sustainable future, one that will ensure that we address the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Specific targets have been identified for each of the principles. Reaching these targets will take a significant change from a business-as-usual approach. By thinking about the future and the consequences of our individual and collective actions we can achieve the vision for a more sustainable region.

MANAGE GROWTH and PROTECT RESOURCES

Goal: **Preserve 500,000 Acres of Open Space**

Open space improves air and water quality, protects against flooding, raises property values, boosts tourism, promotes exercise and reduces obesity rates, provides wildlife habitat, and connects people to their communities. Greater Philadelphia's farmland is some of the most productive in the nation, and local farms ensure the region's access to fresh, healthy, and locally produced food. Recognizing these and the many other benefits from open space and natural resource protection, the *Connections* plan proposes to permanently preserve 500,000 acres, or about half of the region's remaining undeveloped land.



PHOTO BY LAND CONCEPTS

*Preservation of the 426-acre Erdenheim Farm in Whitmarsh and Springfield Townships was completed in 2009. This land has been in continuous agricultural use since the time of William Penn. After a multiyear 'Campaign for Erdenheim Farm,' Tax Increment Financing (TIF) was used to purchase and preserve the open space. This action—taken by the Whitmarsh Foundation, the Natural Lands Trust, state, county, and local agencies, and private citizens—helps to implement the *Connections* plan. For more information about the Erdenheim Farm preservation see www.whitmarshfoundation.org.*



Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds were used to create this bike and pedestrian trail near Green Lane Park in Montgomery County. Opportunities to access and use open space can enhance quality of life for the region's residents and in turn increase support for additional land preservation.

What You Can Do!

Connections recognizes the value of local agriculture in the Greater Philadelphia region. As a citizen, you can support this valuable part of the region's economy and heritage by purchasing fresh locally grown foods from a nearby farmers' market, or join a community supported agriculture (CSA) farm and have fresh produce delivered to your area every week. If you have the space, consider growing your own garden, or planting a tree. Planting native grass and tree species can lower water use as well as herbicide and pesticide pollution. Using permeable paving or less impervious cover will decrease stormwater runoff, and maintaining natural vegetation along stream channels can lessen erosion. You can start or join a neighborhood composting program, or team up with local efforts to collect leaves, yard waste, or seasonal items such as Christmas trees, for municipal composting. Take advantage of our region's extensive park and trail network by getting exercise or enjoying the outdoors. Lastly, further protect open space by supporting and voting for funding referendums.

CREATE LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Goal: **INVEST** in 100 Centers

Where should future development occur? How about in the region's existing network of livable communities? The *Connections* plan identifies over 100 centers in the region, ranging from large metropolitan and suburban centers to traditional town centers and rural hamlets. While they vary in size, each of these centers has existing infrastructure in place and provides the amenities people want: walkability; unique architectural character; access to transit; social connections; a mix of housing stock, including affordable housing; and proximity to employment opportunities. In such settings, taking transit, biking, or walking to work, or for any short trip is much more feasible and enjoyable. This reduces the need to travel by personal vehicle, consume energy, and emit greenhouse gases.



PHOTO BY LAND CONCEPTS

Pennsylvania Real Estate Investment Trust (PREIT) invested \$100 million in the conversion of the former Echelon Mall into Voorhees Town Center. The project included right-sizing the mall by reducing its size by 40 percent and adding a landscaped boulevard with retail, office, restaurant, and service uses to complement 425 new residential units and providing pedestrian access to nearby neighborhoods.

*The Voorhees Town Center site is about one mile from PATCO's High Speed Line Ashland and Lindonwald stations, and is served by NJ Transit Routes 403 and 489. The development improves pedestrian accessibility, and incorporates strong design elements. As a result of this investment, the *Connections* plan recognizes Voorhees Town Center as a regional development center.*



DVRPC's Home Town Streets program helped to renovate South Chester Road in Swarthmore. Streetscaping improvements can enhance community livability by making the area more attractive and inviting, calming traffic, increasing public safety, encouraging residents to get out and walk and bike, and providing green infrastructure.

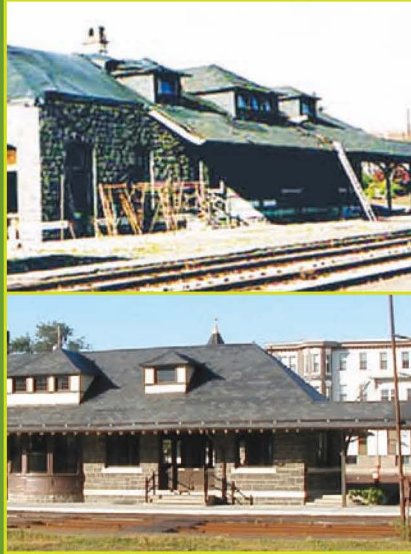
What You Can Do!

The region's centers are more than just places on a map. They are livable communities that contain a variety of housing options, job opportunities, shopping, recreation, and cultural amenities all within close distance to each other. Based on this mix of amenities and choices, centers are excellent locations to live, work, and locate a business. Businesses located in centers can reach a broader segment of the population, increase employees' job satisfaction by giving them commuting options and access to retail and services during lunch and after work, and can be greener by reducing automobile trips and greenhouse gas emissions. Support our regional centers by patronizing their local businesses and restaurants; attending "main street" festivals and events; organizing or participating in park or neighborhood cleanups; and backing pro-community, mixed-use development proposals.

BUILD an ENERGY-EFFICIENT ECONOMY

Goal: **REDUCE** Greenhouse Emissions by 50 Percent

The economic future of the region, nation, and world is closely tied to rising energy prices and the realities and regulations of climate change. The regions that are best equipped to deal with these two issues will be the ones that thrive in the future. Promoting eco-enterprises and green collar jobs will make our region more economically competitive. These growth fields for the 21st century will help to produce products and services in a more energy-efficient manner, generate new jobs and revenue, and create jobs for the underemployed. These are but a few of the many critical steps the region will need to take to reduce its 2005 greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by 2035.



DVRPC's Transportation Enhancement program helped to restore the historic Quakertown train station. Connections plans to reactivate the line to Quakertown. Restoring and expanding the region's transit system will help to build a more energy-efficient economy.

Serving Up Sustainability at Cosmic Catering

Cosmic Catering has been committed to sustainability since first opening its doors in 2000. The company has made a commitment to measure their success based on the triple bottom line principles of people, planet, and profit. Cosmic Catering buys all of its meat, dairy, and produce from local farmers who are committed to sustainable farming practices, and uses only compostable containers, plates, forks, knives, and spoons. At the Chestnut Hill Farmer's Market, Cosmic organized vendors to dispose of their waste responsibly by recycling and composting. As a standard practice, they organize all of the waste collection at catered events. Cosmic Catering's commitment to local, sustainable business practices is at the core of the Connections goal of building the eco-economy.

What You Can Do!

The region's households are major generators of greenhouse gases, representing about 24 percent of Greater Philadelphia's total. To decrease emissions, start by purchasing energy-efficient LED or compact fluorescent light bulbs and Energy Star-certified appliances. Try setting your thermostat to 75° or higher in the summer and 68° or lower in the winter. These first steps can help you begin to reduce energy use and lower utility bills. A next step is to weatherize and ensure that your home is properly insulated. State and federal rebates are available to help reduce the cost of professional energy audits, energy conservation investments, and energy-efficient products. Lastly, do your part to recycle. By reducing your waste stream you are decreasing municipal expenses, which will help to keep taxes lower. Businesses can also benefit economically from these actions and receive positive publicity for being a "green" company. A good place for businesses to start is to appoint an individual or committee to review how different sustainability practices can be integrated into day-to-day operations.⁷ This can spur innovation, increase employee morale, save energy, and reduce costs.

⁷The Philly Green Business Commitment Checklist is a useful resource: http://www.cumby.com/html/PDFs/Green%20Business%20Checklist%20for%20website_06.30.09.pdf.

CIGNA's GreenSTEPS

CIGNA Corporation is a global health service company headquartered in Center City Philadelphia. Befitting this location, CIGNA is commuter friendly, offering tax benefits to mass transit commuters, while also allowing more than 5,000 employees to telecommute nationwide. CIGNA uses video-teleconferencing to reduce travel and encourages the use of Amtrak when travel cannot be avoided. CIGNA's GreenSTEPS program has identified a number of sustainable business operations from using virtual desktops and servers to reduce hardware and energy needs; to requiring green supplies for cleaning offices nationwide; to attaining Energy Star and LEED building certifications for construction projects. CIGNA's sustainability efforts are helping to green Greater Philadelphia's business practices, which helps to implement the economic competitiveness goals of the Connections plan.



Solar thermal water heaters can reduce annual water heating bills by 50 to 85 percent, and can reduce CO₂ emissions by nearly what an average car would produce in a year.² Only after you have taken all steps to make your home or business more energy efficient, should you consider switching to renewable sources such as rooftop solar panels, micro wind turbines, or geothermal.

²U.S. Department of Energy, Heat Your Water with the Sun. Washington, DC. 2003.
<http://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy04osti/34279.pdf>

MODERNIZE the TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM:

Goal: RAISE \$100 Million Annually in Local Funding

As a mature region, Greater Philadelphia's highway system is largely complete. The current emphasis is on maintaining and preserving the system, and making it more efficient. The plan will help make the existing transportation system more functional through technological enhancements such as real-time traffic information, land use decisions that support alternative modes of transportation, transit fare modernization, and safety improvements. The region's transportation system can become more sustainable by encouraging the use of alternative forms of transportation, such as walking, biking, and transit. These options are particularly attractive for commuting to the workplace and short trips. Alternative transportation offers commuters the opportunity to reclaim their time and be more productive than when driving, by working, reading, or getting exercise. Compact development patterns, particularly transit-oriented and mixed-use development, and street connectivity increase accessibility between origins and destinations, making alternative modes easier to use.



The Safe Routes to School program helps encourage school children to get exercise and maintain healthy lifestyles. This project in Doylestown Borough added sidewalks in many areas near schools where there previously were none. This encourages children to walk or bike to school, which supports alternative transportation, a key element of Connections.

Investing in Our Future

The age of our infrastructure and decades of deferred maintenance have created a vast backlog of repair needs. DVRPC conducted a full needs assessment based on achieving a state of good repair for all transportation infrastructure in the region, and computed a \$45 billion funding deficit over the next 25 years. Federal and state funding is forecast to be stagnant or declining in the future. The Greater Philadelphia region contributes much less to its own transportation infrastructure than many other top metropolitan areas across the country. In order to ensure that the region's economic

growth is not limited by the state of the transportation system, it is essential to establish a local funding mechanism to contribute to the financing of transportation projects of regional significance. Establishing a local transportation funding source, of at least \$100 million per year, is a key plan principle in *Connections*. The plan identifies a number of possible mechanisms that could generate local revenue, including bonds, tolling, taxes or user fees, and public-private partnerships. Though the plan does not specify a particular funding option, it is important to consider the equity, difficulty of implementation, revenue adequacy, and stability impacts that each potential funding mechanism will provide.

Greater Philadelphia Transportation Funding Need Compared to Available Revenue

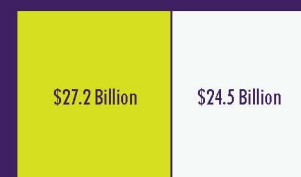
HIGHWAY

Total Need = \$58.4 Billion



TRANSIT

Total Need = \$51.7 Billion



■ AVAILABLE REVENUE ■ UNMET NEED

What You Can Do!

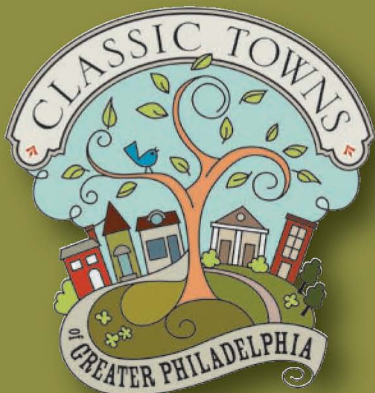
Transportation is responsible for 30 percent of the region's greenhouse gas emissions. To reduce emissions, take transit, bike, or walk to commute to work, or for any short trip. This will save money, improve health through additional exercise, reduce roadway congestion and maintenance needs, and allow you to interact with your neighbors. Employee-friendly travel demand management benefits such as flexible work hours, compressed work weeks, telecommuting, and TransitChek can support alternative transportation, and help attract and retain the best talent to your business.

When you need to travel by personal automobile, there are ways to do so more efficiently. When buying a new car, purchase one with the best available fuel efficiency to reduce your energy use and gasoline expenses. Join a carsharing program, and carpool or link trips and errands to reduce cold-engine starts and the number of miles traveled. You can also reduce emissions by refueling after dark when baseline emissions are lower and by not topping off your tank, and ensuring your gas cap is tightly sealed to avert fuel evaporation. Vehicles are most fuel-efficient at constant speeds between 35 and 55 miles per hour. Slowing down and observing the speed limit both improves fuel efficiency and increases roadway safety. Other efficient driving tips are to avoid rapid acceleration and unnecessary braking, keep your tires properly inflated, remove excess weight from your vehicle, maintain a steady speed and use cruise control, always drive in the highest gear, keep your engine tuned, and don't let your car idle for more than 30 seconds. Using these green driving techniques can reduce fuel consumption by 15 percent, and could save you \$200 annually.³

³This assumes a vehicle driven 10,000 miles per year, averaging 20 m.p.g. and \$3 per gallon gasoline. For more fuel efficiency tips see www.fueleconomy.gov.

WHAT DVRPC is DOING...

Classic Towns of Greater Philadelphia is a DVRPC initiative designed to foster the growth of the region's older communities by promoting what is unique about each community. The program functions as a regional marketing strategy by identifying individual community needs, developing effective messages, and creating strategies for targeted distribution, thus helping communities brand themselves.



As the federally designated MPO for the nine-county Greater Philadelphia region, DVRPC is working with elected officials, regional stakeholders, and the public to implement *Connections*. The plan defines regional policy and establishes a collective vision to enhance our environment, promote energy conservation, optimize transportation, guide investments, and improve the quality-of-life of residents throughout the area. DVRPC has a number of ongoing programs and projects that support the implementation of the region's long-range plan. The Classic Towns program markets the region's unique historical, older centers as livable communities. The Transportation and Community Development Initiative (TCDI) advances development and redevelopment in the region's core cities and developed communities. The Efficient Growth for Growing Suburbs (EGGS) program provides grants to suburban municipalities to improve growth management and community design, and to optimize the efficiency of the existing and planned transportation network by better linking land use and transportation planning. DVRPC also conducts numerous planning and technical studies, working directly with county and local governments on a regular basis. Each of these mechanisms provides opportunities for municipalities to undertake locally directed actions to improve their communities; this in turn implements municipal and county comprehensive plans and supports the goals and vision of the *Connections* plan.

STAYING Involved!

This issue of *the Link* highlights a number of action steps that we can all take to help realize the vision of the plan. Taking these steps will help you and the region to reduce energy usage, decrease greenhouse gas emissions, strengthen and enhance livable communities, support local economies, and improve the functionality of the region's transportation system. Many of these actions can also save you money and contribute to a healthy lifestyle.

The programs and policies recommended in *Connections* represent a major change of course from business as usual in Greater Philadelphia and will require some adjustments in lifestyle. But these actions will increase our quality-of-life, provide more choices, improve our communities, and make our region more sustainable and economically competitive in the future. You can join us in shaping the future by participating in public meetings, reviewing our website and publications, or joining the DVRPC Regional Citizens Committee. The *Connections* plan and more information about DVRPC is available on the web at www.dvrpc.org.

For more information about steps your municipality can take to implement the *Connections* plan, see *Implementing Connections: A Guide for Municipalities* at www.dvrpc.org/connections/implementation.htm

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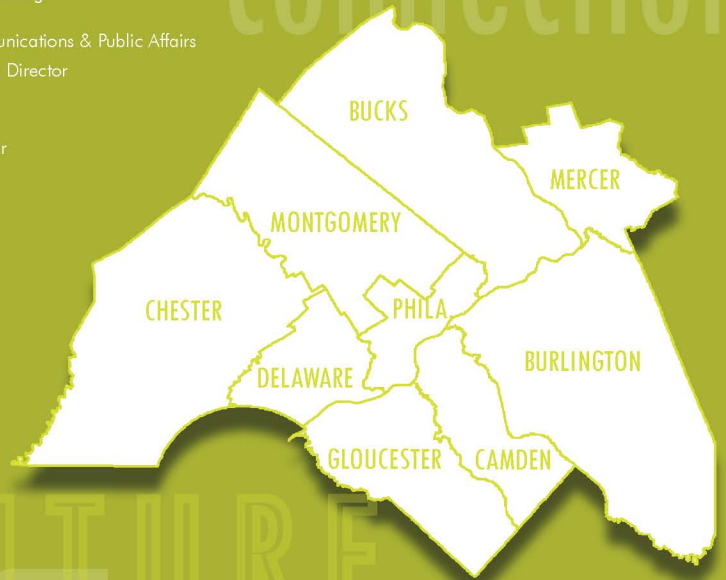
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Office of Long Range Planning and Economic Coordination
Michael Boyer, Manager

Office of Communications & Public Affairs
Candace Snyder, Director

Kimberly Meyer
Graphic Designer



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190 NORTH INDEPENDENCE MALL WEST, 8TH FLOOR
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19106-1520

PHONE 215.592.1800 / FAX 215.592.9125

WEBSITE WWW.DVRPC.ORG