

RATS FFY 2027 - 2050 LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN (LRTP)
GOALS AND OBJECTIVES PUBLIC OUTREACH MEETING #5
VIRTUAL MEETING, OCTOBER 15, 2024

Meeting Notes:

Mr. Piper started the meeting at 1:05 PM. He welcomed everyone and gave a brief overview of the purpose of this afternoon's meeting which was to review and gather public input on the Goals and Objectives of the current LRTP and revise them based on public input. He mentioned that specific projects will be discussed at the end of the meeting.

Ms. Timochenko next shared a PowerPoint presentation (see attachment at the end of these notes).

Ms. Timochenko described the Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) and the Committee structure.

Ms. Timochenko explained what the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is along with some of the necessary items to be included under federal requirements; planning horizon and update process; performance measures; and serving as the foundation for the development of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

The next few slides detailed the LRTP Plan Components, by Chapter.

Chapter 1 is the Introduction. This provides the context for why the plan is done and its relationship with other federal, state, and local plans. The **Vision Statement** is included in this chapter: *The Reading Area Transportation Study will provide and maintain a balanced, multimodal transportation system that will safely and efficiently move goods and people.*

Chapter 2 contains the background Information, including demographics, economics, environmental integration, and resiliency.

Chapter 3 is the State of the System. Individual sections examine Roads and Bridges, the Congestion Management Process, Safety and Security, Transit, Freight, Non-motorized Transportation, Aviation, and Issues & Needs.

Chapter 4 is the recommendations of the plan. These include Goals/Objectives/Strategic Performance Measures, Project Prioritization, Project & Financial Planning, Travel Demand Modeling, and Air Quality Conformity.

Contained in the Appendix is documentation of the Public Participation Process, Amendment Procedures, and detailed tables/descriptions of the Highway and Transit Program Funding assumptions and calculations.

There are ten (10) Federal Planning Factors that must be incorporated into the LRTP:

- Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.
- Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
- Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
- Increase accessibility and mobility of people and freight.
- Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvement and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns.
- Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.
- Promote efficient system management and operation.
- Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.
- Improve the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate stormwater impacts of surface transportation.
- Enhance travel and tourism.

The LRTP must be consistent with state and local transportation plans and programs.

Ms. Timochenko introduced Goal #1: Keep Travelers safe and secure, no matter the mode of transportation. The five (5) Objectives attached to Goal #1 were also read. She asked for questions/comments regarding the Goal and Objectives.

- Mr. Bingaman responded in the Chat feature, “Looks good to me”.
- No other comments were received.

Ms. Timochenko reviewed Goal #2: Maintain and improve the transportation system and services we enjoy today where financially feasible, then read the associated seven (7) Objectives. Ensuing discussion included:

- Mr. Roche questioned if this goal includes specific support for the proposed re-establishment of passenger rail service? Mr. Piper responded that specific support is contained in Goal #3.

Ms. Timochenko reviewed Goal #3: Invest in projects that strengthen the ability of Berks County commerce to access national and international trade markets and support regional economic development and tourism opportunities, then read the associated eight (8) Objectives. Ensuing discussion included:

- Ms. Timochenko pointed out that this Goal is ‘wordy’ and it would be revised to make it more readable.

- She also mentioned the last Objective, Coordinate with agricultural community to identify and address obstructions to the movement of equipment and products, was added.
- Mr. Burns stated that the while overall Goal sounds very nice, it can have unintended consequences. For example, a community in Georgia made extensive accommodations for cyclists and pedestrians which resulted in lengthy lines of traffic having to yield for them. He further stated that we need to balance bike/ped accommodations with those for vehicular traffic.
- Mr. Burns mentioned how difficult it is traveling to and through Philadelphia Intl. Airport and, if an airport is successful, so is economic development. We need to get passenger reestablished at Reading Regional Airport.
- Mr. Burns asked if the reestablishment of passenger rail service is fiscally responsible, and will it pay for itself? Mr. Piper responded that we must provide balanced systems. He agreed with the need for fiscal responsibility. The Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority is working through the study process now. RATS will support whatever findings the studies report.
- Mr. Roche asked if Goal #3 should be separated into two Goals, as national/international opportunities can be separate from local/regional economic development and tourism. Ms. Timochenko answered that this will be considered. This could also help address some of Mr. Burns' concerns.

Ms. Timochenko reviewed Goal #4: Give travelers a variety of well-designed transportation choices that are in good condition., then read the associated four (4) Objectives. Ensuing discussion included:

- Mr. Burns mentioned the need for safe truck parking, knowing that this is a nationwide issue but local as well with all the recent warehouse growth. Mr. Piper responded that there will be specific recommendations coming out of the recently completed Regional Freight Study.

Ms. Timochenko reviewed Goal #5: Enhance the performance of the county transportation system in environmentally sustainable ways that increase resiliency to both climate change and vulnerability, then read the associated six (6) Objectives. She asked for questions/comments:

- Mr. Roche asked if there could be a specific objective to market public transit services? Mr. Piper answered that, here, we reference the relationship with Commute PA specifically instead of a generic objective.
- Mr. Burns stated that, under Environmental Sustainability, we need to be cautious with electrification as the supporting infrastructure is not yet widespread, is very expensive, and vehicle ranges (especially heavier duty vehicles) are still limited. Mr. Piper responded that we need to incorporate this Objective since this is a 20-year Plan.

Ms. Timochenko reviewed the anticipated LRTP development timeline:

- October 2023 – 30-month Kickoff Meeting
- July/August 2024 – Establish Steering Committee
- September/October 2024 – Public Outreach Meetings
- November 2024 – June 2025 – Gather background information.
- March-May 2025 – Gather public input on issues and needs (in coordination with State Transportation Commission [STC] public outreach on the State’s Twelve—Year Program Update)
- July 2025 – Review STC survey responses
- August-December 2025 – TIP and LRTP project meetings with PennDOT
- November/December 2025 – Present at Agency Coordination Meeting (ACM) meeting
- February 2026 – Complete Draft LRTP
- March/April 2026 – Begin 30-day public comment period and conduct public meetings.
- May 2026 – Response to comments
- May 2026 – Anticipated RATS Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Adoption
- September 2026 – Anticipated Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) approval.

Ms. Timochenko reviewed Slide #18 and asked the question: “If you could instantaneously make one change (big or small) to the transportation system without concern for cost or other potential obstacles, what would it be?” Responses included:

- Mr. Roche would ensure equitable and accessible transit throughout the region.
- Mr. Bingaman (chat) would lessen congestion and have smoother roadways.
- Mr. Burns would work to reestablish commercial passenger air service at Reading Regional Airport

Ms. Timochenko mentioned that the next step in the LRTP development process is continued public outreach. A survey is available in English and Spanish as part of this initial public outreach, and she encouraged the meeting attendees to take the survey and spread it among their peers to garner more input.

Ms. Timochenko asked for any final questions/comments, particularly related to roadways, bridges, or other transportation issues in the area that attendees considered problematic.

- Mr. Miller asked a general question about “What’s within the realm of possibility”?
- Mr. Burns mentioned that he’s noticed many repaired/replaced bridges in northern Berks County. Mr. Piper replied that we need a response to local bridge issues that is equivalent to that being given to state bridges.
- Mr. Bingaman (chat) mentioned PA 662, Old Airport Road, and Blacksmith Road (all in Amity Twp.) needing improvements, along with U.S. 422 from Exeter through Douglass townships.
- Mr. Piper followed-up to Mr. Burns’ comments that we need a response to local bridge issues that is equivalent to that being given to state bridges.

- Mr. Young mentioned the U.S. 222 corridor from Maiden Creek Township north to the Lehigh County line. Mr. Piper outlined the multiple projects planned for the corridor and their status to-date.

Hearing no other comments, Ms. Timochenko and Mr. Piper thanked the attendees for coming. The meeting concluded at 1:52 PM.

*Prepared by,
Michael D. Golembiewski
Transportation Modeler*

BERKS COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION