

# Smart Transportation **Quarterly**



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## **Have Questions or Ideas about Smart Transportation?**

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## **What's Inside?**

- Letter from Secretary Biehler
- Updating the HOP Process
- Smart Chat with Natasha
- Pennsylvania Community Transportation Initiative (PCTI)



## **Coming Next Quarter**

The next edition of *Smart Transportation Quarterly* will include information on selected PCTI projects and Smart Transportation Award winners.

## **Welcome to Smart Transportation Quarterly**

Welcome to the first edition of *Smart Transportation Quarterly*, a new newsletter from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT). This publication will keep you updated on the latest news and events related to PennDOT's adoption of Smart Transportation. In this edition, you'll find a wealth of information about the principles of Smart Transportation, some of the primary changes that are happening at PennDOT, an update on the Pennsylvania Community Transportation Initiative (PCTI), and much more.

Future editions will spotlight the selected PCTI projects and Smart Transportation award winners, as well as other examples where Smart Transportation themes are being applied in communities throughout Pennsylvania.

Have ideas for future articles? Send them to us at [smarttransportation@state.pa.us](mailto:smarttransportation@state.pa.us)! We look forward to receiving your feedback about how to ensure this newsletter remains informative and interesting.

## **What is Smart Transportation?**

A number of trends are rapidly changing the needs and demands of our transportation system. The current recession is restricting revenue sources, yet construction costs are still higher than average. Energy costs have fluctuated wildly over the past year, affecting travel preferences and behaviors. Concerns about climate change and the loss of farmland to development have increased.

To adapt to this changing world, PennDOT is changing the way they do business by embracing a concept called "Smart Transportation."

Smart Transportation requires embracing the evolving financial, environmental, technological, and community contexts when approaching the next generation of transportation challenges. It is about consistently applying the most innovative tools and ideas to meet these new challenges. Smart Transportation also means more flexibility and less design constraints; more listening and less conflicts; more community-building and less sprawl. Fundamentally, Smart Transportation is about two things: building partnerships, and coordinating land use and transportation decisions.



## A Message from Al Biehler, Secretary of PennDOT

This is a very exciting time for PennDOT as we seek to find new and innovative ways to tackle the complex challenges confronting the transportation industry.

The department has already completed a number of important steps in making Smart Transportation the way we do business. We have published the *Smart Transportation Guidebook*, and have adjusted our policies to make the *Guidebook* a central component of our design documents. We have started spreading the message of Smart Transportation within and outside of the department, and have evolved the program based on the feedback we received from our staff and our partners.

Through the Pennsylvania Communities Transportation Initiative (PCTI), we have dedicated \$60 million to kick-start several Smart Transportation pilot projects that will serve as examples for communities throughout Pennsylvania. Additionally, we will be focusing the “stimulus” money we receive from the federal government on rehabilitating our existing infrastructure, which is a core tenet of Smart Transportation.

But we know there’s still a lot more to do. We are working on a number of critical initiatives to further integrate Smart Transportation into our department’s way of doing business. We are revising our Highway Occupancy Permit process and our design manuals. Perhaps most importantly, we are beginning the process of revising the main part of our business—the process for how innovative solutions to our transportation problems are planned, designed and built. The new process will have a much greater emphasis on effective planning up front, which should help streamline the later stages of a project. Smart Transportation themes will be woven directly into the fabric of this new process.

Although we are making a lot of progress, PennDOT understands that there is simply no way to make Smart Transportation “real” without effective partnerships with local governments, planners, advocacy groups and, of course, the public. As we continue our journey on this effort, we will continually reach out to all of our partners and seek ways to better communicate and implement Smart Transportation. We look forward to your help in making Pennsylvania’s communities safer, stronger and more sustainable through better transportation systems.

*Allen D. Biehler*

### Smart Transportation in Action

#### The Bayfront Parkway in Erie, Pa.

The Bayfront Parkway in Erie follows the shoreline of Lake Erie. The road was experiencing congestion problems, and some in the community wanted to see the Parkway widened. However, a road widening would be very expensive on this corridor, and could lead to detrimental impacts on current and future development opportunities.

Additionally, there was more than enough capacity in downtown Erie’s grid of streets to handle the traffic demand in the area. A traffic study found that there needed to be about 7 to 9 east-west lanes in downtown Erie, but 15 lanes already existed. Instead of widening the Parkway, a much cheaper and simpler solution was designed to more efficiently utilize those 15 lanes.

The solution included new signage, signal coordination, streetscaping and other measures. To evaluate the effectiveness of this set of approaches, the team looked at performance measures such as travel times, safety improvements, potential for economic development and quality-of-life gauges—not just level-of-service (LOS).

A separate but related project was undertaken to look at parking and transit in downtown Erie. The study explored solutions to Bayfront Parkway’s congestion through coordinated transit and land use measures.



Rather than widening Bayfront Parkway, the capacity on other downtown streets, such as 12th Street, was better utilized through simple and inexpensive solutions such as new signage, streetscaping and signal coordination.



Brian Hare, a Division Chief at PennDOT, and Barry Seymour, Executive Director of DVRPC, accepted the Award of Excellence on June 16, 2008 in Baltimore, Maryland.

## The Smart Transportation Guidebook

In the spring of 2008, PennDOT partnered with the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) to develop the *Smart Transportation Guidebook*. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) also played an important advisory role in the project.

The *Guidebook* was a critical first step to implementing the themes of Smart Transportation on real-world projects. The *Guidebook* helps agencies, local governments, developers and others plan and design roadways that fit within the context of the communities through which they pass. Detailed design parameters that address both the land use and transportation contexts are provided in a straightforward tabular format, making it easy for planners and engineers to determine the best solutions for the problems they are trying to solve.

The *Guidebook* recently received the prestigious Award of Excellence from FHWA and the Federal Transit Administration.

## Integrating Smart Transportation at the Department

For Smart Transportation to be successful, PennDOT must reform their policies and procedures to be aligned with this way of doing business. The Department is currently focusing on several important initiatives to do just that:

**New Decision-Making Process:** The current project delivery process is lengthy, and does not always result in the construction of projects that have gone through an adequate planning effort. The new process will involve stronger coordination among local governments, counties, Metropolitan Planning Organizations/Rural Planning Organizations and PennDOT, and will include a greater focus on planning and connecting transportation improvements to land use decisions. The process will also more tightly link the Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) with the Long Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs) and the State Mobility Plan.

**Revisions to Design Manuals:** PennDOT's design manuals, which guide the department's engineers and project managers as they design new projects, are being revised to incorporate the themes of Smart Transportation. This means that they will allow more flexibility for various contexts, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach.

**Other Efforts:** A number of other initiatives related to Smart Transportation are also underway. The department is beginning an extensive outreach effort to engage our partners throughout the commonwealth in this effort, as well as working with other state agencies to better leverage all of our programs to achieve more sustainable growth patterns.

## Revising the Highway Occupancy Permit Process

PennDOT has developed a new set of Transportation Impact Study (TIS) Guidelines for the Highway Occupancy Permit (HOP) process, which replaced the February 2004 Traffic Impact Study Guidelines. Property owners, both residential and commercial, who require driveway access onto a State Route, must obtain an HOP from PennDOT. Managing access by this process is a significant responsibility, with local and regional transportation system impacts on the line. If a development will have an adverse impact on the efficiency of the state road, those impacts must be mitigated by the developer. The extent of impacts and mitigation remedies are determined by conducting a TIS.

The goals of the new guidelines are to:

- streamline the overall process to ensure clearer and more predictable review times for PennDOT, local governments, and developers;
- engage PennDOT much earlier in the process, rather than after other approvals have been obtained by the developer; and
- allow for more flexible mitigation options, to ensure that transportation improvements fit within the local land use context.

The new TIS guidance can be downloaded from [www.smart-transportation.com](http://www.smart-transportation.com).



The HOP process is an opportunity for developers, municipalities and PennDOT to work together and ensure that transportation changes related to new developments support a community's goals.

## Pennsylvania Community Transportation Initiative

The Pennsylvania Community Transportation Initiative (PCTI) was launched in October 2008, with the goal of supporting projects that exemplify the Smart Transportation themes. The PCTI program provides \$60 million in funds over two years; applicants applied for grants that could be used either for planning or for construction projects.

PennDOT received over 400 applications requesting a combined total of over \$600 million in funding. The department is carefully reviewing each application to select the projects that will best help spread the message about Smart Transportation, and will be announcing the results later this Spring. Future editions of this newsletter will highlight the selected projects and provide examples that you can use in your communities. Also check for updates at [www.smart-transportation.com](http://www.smart-transportation.com).

The overwhelming interest in the program confirms that places across Pennsylvania are excited about the prospect of using Smart Transportation to help maintain great communities.

## Who Are The Partners In Smart Transportation?

**Local Governments:** Land use is a local government function, so Pennsylvania's municipalities and counties will be integral to the success of the effort.

**Pennsylvania Residents and Businesses:** As PennDOT's main customers, their involvement in influencing future land use patterns and transportation activities is critical to ensuring a continued high quality of life.

**Planners and Engineers:** From conception to implementation, planners and engineers must think creatively and push for more effective ways of solving the state's complex transportation problems.

**Transit Providers and Other Transportation Partners:** Pennsylvanians should have the widest and most efficient range of transportation choices possible. The engagement of transit providers, ports, airports and other entities is needed to help fulfill this goal.

**Economic Development Organizations:** Expanding the state's economic development opportunities, especially during recessionary times, is vital to Pennsylvania's continued prosperity. Transportation plays a major role in facilitating economic development.

## Smart Chat



Welcome to Smart Chat with Natasha! This section will be a regular, interactive feature of *Smart Transportation Quarterly*. Send your questions and comments to Natasha at [smarttransportation@state.pa.us](mailto:smarttransportation@state.pa.us), and we will select several to be printed in each edition of this newsletter.

**Today's question comes from Amelia Nico in Hershey, Pa. Amelia asks, "I'm not a transportation professional, a planner, or an elected official. What does Smart Transportation have to do with me?"**

We're glad you asked, Ms. Nico. Smart Transportation involves everyone in Pennsylvania. At its core, Smart Transportation is really just about ensuring that transportation projects have a positive impact on your quality of life and the character of your community. To make this happen, we need you to voice your ideas about the future of your community.

Do you want to be able to walk and bicycle more? Do you want to see your downtown or village center strengthened? Do you want economic development to occur in a specific place? Almost all community visions involve transportation, so it is vital to the success of Smart Transportation that you take an active role in defining this vision. Attend your township/borough's planning commission meetings, participate in public meetings for transportation projects, and voice your suggestions about new developments happening in your community.

We look forward to responding to more of your questions in the next edition of *Smart Transportation Quarterly*!

*Natasha*

For more information, please visit

[www.smart-transportation.com](http://www.smart-transportation.com)