

## A REGIONAL STRATEGIC VISION FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SERVING SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SUMMARY

The Regional Strategic Vision for Public Transportation Serving Southwestern Pennsylvania set forth a long-range plan for creating a comprehensive regional public transportation system in the region, a plan that is closely linked to existing and future land uses. The plan is the result of an intense planning process involving hundreds of citizens as well as business persons, government officials, community leaders, and transportation agencies. The following statement was identified as a goal for the Strategic Regional Transit Visioning Effort:

To preserve existing transportation and land use investment while making future investment decisions that enhance the equality of life and the economic viability of southwestern Pennsylvania.

In addition to identifying long-range transportation needs and services in the region, the vision plan also identified land use scenarios, financing options, and potential arrangements for managing the regional transit system. The following is a brief summary of the reports findings and recommendations.

### Land Use

The vision plan evaluated two land use scenarios and the effectiveness of public transit to serve the two types of development. The characteristics of the land use scenarios include the following:

- **The Trend Scenario:** The trend scenario reflects the “status quo” type of development characterized by more land being consumed for low-density residential development in outward-growing suburban and exurban rings supported by expanding infrastructure with a stable or declining role for public transportation. Over the course of 25 years it would require the consumption of about 169,000 additional acres of land.
- **The Focused Growth Scenario:** This scenario features policies that encourage infill development, higher density housing, mixed-use development, walkable communities, and investments in public transportation. It would require approximately 29,000 acres of land for development over 25 years.

The two land use scenarios were evaluated according to a number of qualitative and quantitative criteria and the ability of each to 1) connect people to jobs, 2) connect people to major activity centers such as downtown Pittsburgh, Oakland, and the Pittsburgh International Airport, and 3) connects people to activity centers within each county. The Focused Growth Scenario was selected as the land use framework for developing the regional transportation vision because it:

- Can support connections among all the counties;
- Provide residents who do not have vehicles with better access to jobs and services;
- Is environmentally friendly;
- Provides faster commuting times to major activity centers; and
- Meets the goals and aspirations of the majority of stakeholders who participated in the public process

### Public Transportation Services

The vision, as illustrated in the following graphic, includes the following components:

- **Light Rail Transit:** More than 40 miles of new light rail service connecting regional activity centers in the urban core.
- **Bus Rapid Transit:** New busways, bus lanes, and preferential treatments for buses on highways and arterials.
- **Commuter Rail:** Commuter rail along four routes using existing railroad lines in the region.
- **Expanded Regional Bus System:** Includes more than 50 new suburban local and cross-jurisdictional bus routes.
- **Circulator Transit Systems:** Circulator transit systems are recommended to serve the region’s mixed-use centers, connecting residential and commercial areas and making connections to the regional bus system.
- **Intermodal Facilities and Customer Amenities:** The plan recommends adding intermodal facilities as well as simple customer amenities throughout the region.

## Railroad and Water Transportation

The vision study assessed the current demand for rail lines in the region for freight transportation. Lightly used or unused rail corridors offer opportunities for rapid transit such as commuter rail or busway. It found that two of three lines owned by Norfolk Southern are needed to accommodate existing demand and that one line could potentially be available for other uses. Similarly, CSX could consolidate its traffic onto one of its two lines.

The study also investigated the possibility of providing passenger transportation on the region's rivers. Due to the lock-and-dam system, commuter and water taxi service would only be feasible between downtown and the first lock and dam on each of the three rivers. Commuter service would require support services such as park-and-ride lots and feeder transit services.

## Funding and Implementation

The cost to implement the vision plan is approximately \$9.5 billion for capital costs between 2003 and 2025 and approximately \$410 million per year in operating costs. The plan's sponsors do not expect that all projects described in the plan will be implemented in 25 years. Rather, they view the plan as a menu of projects that could be considered for implementation as funding becomes available and as potential corridors are further investigated for transit improvements.

## Regional Transit Management

Crucial to the success of the vision plan is a coordinated approach to planning, funding, constructing, and operating the regional transit system. Thus, the study examined numerous national examples of regional transit operations. The sponsors reviewed the current approach, regional authorities, and joint powers boards among others in addition to assessing the potential of the region's existing Transit Operators Committee (TOC) to serve in an enhanced role. The vision plan recommends that the TOC become the transit planning forum for the region. In the future, the TOC could evolve into a joint powers board or other entity to provide cross-jurisdictional transit services.

## Components of the Transit Vision

