

OFFICE OF SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

## December 19, 2016

#### District Executives:

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) is committed to bettering our transportation system and our communities through collaborative planning. We must find creative solutions to sustain and expand mobility throughout the Commonwealth. This means improving our planning process to reflect changing demographics and technological innovation. We are broadening the benefits we deliver and taking a more holistic approach to planning. We are tasking PennDOT staff and our planning partners to consider community needs at the beginning of the planning process to ensure the best allocation of our resources. This new approach, *PennDOT Connects*, will make our planning processes more efficient and cost effective to the benefit of all Pennsylvanians.

# **Collaboration Requirements**

To formalize the *PennDOT Connects* policy into PennDOT's program development and project delivery procedures, collaboration meetings with Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO), Rural Planning Organizations (RPO) and local governments must become a routine element of our process. Collaboration provides the opportunity for details unique to communities to be identified and discussed for each project in planning, prior to developing project scopes and cost estimates.

Specific areas to be discussed during collaboration include, but are not limited to:

- Safety issues/concerns
- Bicycle/pedestrian accommodations
- Transit/multimodal considerations
- Stormwater Management
- Presence of/impacts from (current/future) freight-generating land uses
- Utility issues
- Transportation operations considerations
- Emergency Services accommodations
- Planned development
- Long Range Transportation Plans
- Regional planning studies, e.g. corridor studies, resource management studies, watershed studies, etc.
- Consistency with current community comprehensive or other plans
- Consistency with current and/or proposed zoning

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- Other proposed transportation improvements
- · Impacts on the natural, cultural, or social environment
- Right-of-way considerations
- Anticipated public opinion
- · Community or cultural events in the candidate project area
- Maintenance Agreement requirements

A common issue in many PennDOT projects is the lack of thorough collaboration with the community during project planning. Without early community input, crucial elements may not be included at the outset of project scoping. Identifying those elements later results in project delays and higher project costs. Our goal is to make every investment as safe and effective as it reasonably can be for every community, and improve efficiencies for the overall project delivery process. To further the goal of addressing community needs to the fullest extent practical, District Office staff, with support from the Center for Program Development and Management (Program Center), will meet with Planning Partner and local government planning staff as early as possible during project planning.

This new approach to planning will make the decision-making process for developing project scopes more transparent, allowing the opportunity for better planning at the local and regional levels. More transparency provides the opportunity for community input into our project scopes earlier in the process, providing better understanding of local contextual issues, and avoiding delays later in project delivery. More transparency can also serve to provide better information to local governments, allowing them to better plan other improvements in their communities. Providing more information for local governments can avoid conflicts with our transportation projects later in construction.

# **Planning Considerations**

Local government outreach should involve consideration of local planning objectives and community mobility needs, including, but not limited to, bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, transit access, stormwater management, and green infrastructure. Planning partners and local governments must demonstrate the need to include community mobility and related objectives in project scopes. Ideally, decisions should be based, in-part, on comprehensive planning, corridor studies, resource management studies, multimodal studies or other related planning studies that demonstrate a need for community features.

If no documented planning is available, community features must be well thought-out and consistent with the current and future land uses within the community. If suggested community-related project features are well thought-out and justified, they should be incorporated into project scopes of work for consideration during project delivery.

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# Other Considerations

It is important to note that it will not be possible to address all community features through our transportation program. There is no mandate to formally reach consensus on all issues related to community collaboration. However there is a mandate for PennDOT's due diligence to justify and document why decisions are made, either to include or not include recommended community features on projects. If the issues discussed during local government collaboration are not justified based on a lack of adequate planning documentation, unacceptable impacts to environmental resources, excessive right-of way impacts, lack of willingness to maintain by local government, or other issues related to impacts or excessive cost, justification must be included in the Project Initiation Form, discussed under Documentation Requirements, below.

Cost will always be a factor in transportation planning, but it will no longer be a justification not to include elements in a project without some level of cost analysis compared to the potential community benefits. The *PennDOT Connects* process will ensure cost/benefit reviews of every unique addition to a project. Issues that could impact our ability to cost effectively address community needs include, but are not limited to, excessive utility relocations, excessive right-of-way requirements, excessive environmental impacts, excessive impacts to underground drainage facilities, excessive stormwater management requirements, and the need to construct or relocate retaining walls or other structures. PennDOT staff will strive to plan projects that improve economic competitiveness, access to work, and overall quality of life.

PennDOT leadership recognizes that emergency projects must be delivered under very short time constraints to restore essential services to the public. *PennDOT Connects* is not applicable to projects declared to be emergencies by the President, Governor, or the Secretary of Transportation or my designee for PennDOT emergencies.

# Implementation Timeframe

The *PennDOT Connects* process will be applied to projects on the 2017 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Collaborative meetings will be required for all projects that had no project phase included on a prior TIP, as well as for all other TIP projects that have not started Preliminary Engineering or started Preliminary Engineering after July 1, 2016.

#### **Documentation Requirements**

Until the current screening forms are updated, the enclosed Attachment 1, PennDOT Connects Project Initiation Form, shall be used to document community needs in planning before projects are programmed on a TIP. These forms shall be attached to the screening form. The Project Initiation Form includes signature blocks for the PennDOT Engineering District, Program Center, and MPO/RPO. District Executives Page 4 December 19, 2016

#### **Future Direction**

Local government collaboration meetings must occur before new projects are added to future TIPs, and are strongly encouraged for projects added to Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) updates. If local collaboration for *PennDOT Connects* does not occur during the collaboration process prior to LRTP or TIP updates, the meeting must be conducted prior to adding a new project during the TIP update process. The objective is to fully consider community features for future projects in planning before projects are programmed on a TIP.

# **Quality Assurance**

As a component of their role in supporting MPOs/RPOs and District Offices during the LRTP update, TIP update, and TIP revision processes, Program Center Program Managers will provide quality assurance throughout the planning and program development process, with a specific focus on MPO/RPO and local government collaboration to meet the objectives of *PennDOT Connects*. District Office personnel must notify Program Center staff in advance of *PennDOT Connects* meetings with local governments. Program Center staff will participate in *PennDOT Connects* meetings, as appropriate, and are responsible for ensuring that *PennDOT Connects* meetings are occurring on all new projects, as outlined in the policy.

# **Ongoing Collaboration**

Decisions reached on community features during planning must be communicated to the local government. As the District Office will manage the future project, the District is ultimately responsible for informing the municipality of the decision to consider identified community features through future project phases. The District Office and Planning Partner may agree on an alternative approach for communicating decisions to local governments, so long as the decision is clearly communicated.

Collaboration with local government staff must also occur during project delivery. In addition to collaboration during the process prior to TIP approval, MPO/RPO and local government staff must be invited to participate in Environmental and Engineering Scoping Field Views once a project moves into preliminary engineering. Local government collaboration must consider comprehensive planning, other planning products, community mobility needs, and related community features. The community features identified during planning must be reviewed and refined at the Scoping Field View.

#### Ongoing Documentation

Local community features identified and accepted in planning or early in preliminary engineering must be documented in a scoping document in the Categorical Exclusion Expert System. The removal of previously identified community features from the scope of work during the scoping process must be properly justified and

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documented as part of the scoping field view minutes and recorded on the "results" form of a scoping document. The ADE-Design, or their designee will be responsible for ensuring that decisions related to *PennDOT Connects* are properly documented during project scoping, including consideration of local maintenance responsibilities.

# **Local Government Outreach**

Another key component of *PennDOT Connects* is local government training. The Planning Deputate is developing a training strategy to raise awareness and understanding of *PennDOT Connects*, its value, and the basic framework for a partnership approach going forward for local government employees. This includes a review of the responsibilities of District Offices, Central Office, Planning Partners, and local governments. The training is also intended to manage the expectations of local governments, and encourage planning at the local level today to support opportunities for better projects in the future.

## Central Office Executive Collaboration

To allow the Executive-level management staff to collaborate with the Districts on the implementation of *PennDOT Connects*, Program Center staff will schedule meetings with each District to discuss all new TIP projects that have proceeded with the *PennDOT Connects* policy to share experiences, and learn from best practices. Districts will work with the Program Center to create an agenda for these meetings. New TIP projects must be presented and reviewed by Executive staff before proceeding through preliminary engineering. Completed *PennDOT Connects* Project Initiation Forms provide the documentation for these meetings. Issues to be addressed in these meetings shall include:

- An overview of community collaboration outcomes with a summary of community features incorporated into each project
- Individuals in each District and Planning Region who participated in the collaboration process, as well as a summary of local government staff who responded to requests for collaboration
- Examples of how local government input influenced the scope of projects
- · Challenges experienced during the collaboration process
- Recommendations to improve future collaboration
- Any issues that cannot be resolved through collaboration among the District Office, Planning Partner, and the Program Center Program Manager

MPO/RPO staff may be invited to participate in the *PennDOT Connects* management meetings. These meetings will be Chaired by the Secretary or her designee and conducted bi-monthly, or as needed to meet project delivery schedules.

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## In Conclusion

The *PennDOT Connects* policy for program development and project delivery may require additional time and financial resources in the planning and early preliminary engineering phases. However, the benefits that community features such as sidewalks, bike lanes, and transit accessibility can provide in terms of improving economic competitiveness, access to work, and quality of life, as well as the potential to avoid delays later in project delivery, can far outweigh the additional resource requirements. If District or MPO/RPO staff require additional human resource support to conduct the above activities in the Planning Phase, the Program Center has Open End Agreements available for meeting or field view coordination, meeting documentation, and support for the screening process.

I look forward to working with you on the successful implementation of this important collaborative planning process on PennDOT projects. If you have any additional questions regarding *PennDOT Connects* policy on enhanced community collaboration, please contact Brian Hare, P.E., at <a href="mailto:bhare@pa.gov">bhare@pa.gov</a> or 717.783.9359.

Sincerely,

Leslie S. Richards

Secretary of Transportation

Losie S. Richard

# **Enclosure**

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bcc: Edna Weaver, Office of the Secretary

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Karen Heath, Office of the Deputy Secretary for Planning

# PennDOT Connects Project Initiation Form

Meeting Date
This form should be completed in conjunction with the proposal screening process. Upon completion, this form should be attached to the screening form. This form is meant to expand on and enhance the information provided in the screening form and to document coordination with local planners.
Project Name:
Project Location:
Project Purpose:
Project Need:
Short Project Description and Scope:

Every transportation project should begin its life as a project that improves safety, mobility, and accessibility for all users: drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, transit passengers, freight carriers, and area residents and businesses. Early scoping should ensure that the design and development process clearly documents considerations that meet as many objectives as reasonably possible, including maintenance considerations. If the decision is made to not include specific considerations in the project scope, those decisions should be documented, as well. The following sections document various considerations related to these objectives. Supportive web maps are available as a resource for those completing this form on MPMS IQ.

Attachment 1

Pedestrians			
elements lil		ts. Depending on the project's context, these may include lements like flashing beacons. In rural areas, a wider shoulder can	
elements lil	ke a multiuse trail, sidewalk, and crosswalks with supportive e	Pedestrian facilities will NOT be accommodated because (at least one):  Location is greater than .25 mile from any existing pedestrian facility or public transit stop, and is not recommended for a pedestrian connection in any local, county, or regional plan.  Location has unique site constraints, such as steep slopes.  Safer pedestrian accommodations would drastically increase the overall anticipated project cost (in such cases, consider opportunities to ensure future pedestrian accommodations are not precluded by the design).	
a multiuse t markings in			
	Bicycle facilities to be considered:	Bicycle facilities will NOT be accommodated because (at least	
	<ul> <li>☐ Multi-use trail</li> <li>☐ Protected bike lane</li> <li>☐ Striped bike lane (buffered or standard)</li> </ul>	one):  Location is greater than 0.5 mile from any existing bicycle facility or public transit stop, and is not recommended for a bicycle connection in any local, county, regional, or state plan.	
	☐ Marked shoulder with supplemental pavement markings	Location has unique site constraints, such as steep slopes.	
2.	☐ Share the Road Signage ☐ Additional element(s):	Safer bicycle accommodations would drastically increase the overall anticipated project cost (in such cases, conside opportunities to ensure future bicycle accommodations ar not precluded by the design).	
	Notes:	Additional reasons(s) and notes:	
	ş <del></del>		

	lly, or other elements.	cient transit operations, signal schemes that accommodate transit
3.	Public transit improvements to be considered:    Improved bus stops   Sidewalks or pedestrianways providing access to stops or stations   Transit curb extensions or bus pullouts   Other transit-preferential elements, including signal treatments   Additional element(s):  Notes:	Public transit improvements will NOT be accommodated because (at least one):  Location is not served by any public transit routes and no new service is identified in any public transit agency plans.  Location has unique site constraints, such as steep slopes.  Improved public transit accommodations would drastically increase the overall anticipated project cost (in such cases, consider opportunities to ensure future public transit improvements are not precluded by the design).  Additional reasons(s) and notes:
Transportatevaluated for elements no	6 Enhancements  ion Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) and Intellige  or all highway projects. Depending on the project's context and	
		I the nature of the needs (if any), this category would include e variety of solutions to address congestion including traffic signand integrated corridor management.  TSMO and ITS Enhancements will NOT be accommodated because (at least one):

Freight trans project's cor weight allow	nomic Activity/ Manufacturing (Trucking, Rail, Ports, Pipeline, sportation needs such as those arising from truck operations shatext and the nature of area freight generators and operations, vances, pavement design, turning radii, intersection geometry, bull/off waiting areas, alternate access, and traffic control devices.	nould be evaluated for all highway projects. Depending on the , these may include considerations like vertical clearances, bridge signage, pavement markings, highway-railroad grade crossings,
5.	Freight considerations:    Freight operators currently use this roadway   There are existing freight generators adjacent to this facility   This project is a designated NHS intermodal freight connector and/or serves a concentration of freight generators like industrial parks.   There is a future vision/plan for freight operations on this transportation facility   Additional element(s):	Freight improvements will NOT be accommodated because (at least one):  Location is currently not used by any freight operators, there are no significant adjacent freight facilities, and no new operations are identified in any development or freight plans.  Improved freight accommodations would drastically increase the overall anticipated project cost (in such cases, consider opportunities to ensure future freight improvements are not precluded by the design)  Improved freight accommodations would pose significant conflict with other modes.  Additional reasons(s) and notes:
Many storm These may in	and Green Infrastructure water retention and infiltration options are available to addres nclude elements like rain gardens, vegetated bioretention area rm water tree trenches, permeable pavements, etc.	
	Stormwater and Green Infrastructure to be considered (including appropriate maintenance agreements):	Stormwater and Green Infrastructure will NOT be accommodated because (at least one):
6.	□ Rain garden         □ Vegetation bioretention areas         □ Vegetated swales         □ Vegetated infiltration gardens         □ Appropriate stormwater elements to be determined. Determination on specific elements to be made during project design         □ Additional element(s):         Notes:	<ul> <li>Stormwater is currently not an issue within the project's limits or adjacent to its limits.</li> <li>Improved accommodations would drastically increase the overall anticipated project cost (in such cases, consider opportunities to ensure other improvements are not precluded by the design).</li> <li>Stormwater problems are the result of previous development with inadequate or no stormwater control. The developer/municipality have been made aware of this issue.</li> <li>Additional reasons(s) and notes:</li> </ul>

Other needs category wo may be oppo project to in	ies, Health, Community/Cultural Events, etc.) should be evaluated for all highway projects. Depending on the uld include elements necessary to mitigate these issues. Utilition tunities to incorporate them into the project or the need to reprove public health through transportation by increasing physods and services that support public health.	es may be present in the area of a proposed project and there nove them to a new location. There may be opportunities for a	
	Other improvements to be considered and maintenance considerations have been made:	Other improvements will NOT be accommodated because (at least one):	
	☐ Utility Relocation ☐ Public Health Improvements (increasing physical	<ul> <li>Utilities are currently not an issue within the project's limit or adjacent to its limits.</li> <li>No opportunities currently exist to improve healthy living within the project's limits or adjacent to its limits.</li> <li>Improved accommodations would drastically increase the overall anticipated project cost (in such cases, consider opportunities to ensure other improvements are not</li> </ul>	
	activity, decreasing air and noise pollution, increasing access to good and services that support public health)		
7.	☐ Timing of Community/Cultural Events will be considering during construction ☐ Additional element(s):		
	Notes:	precluded by the design).  No Community/Cultural Events currently take place within the project's limits and no known events are planned for the future.	
		Additional reasons(s) and notes:	
residential a	substantial public controversy surrounding the project should and commercial displacements, long detour routes, long constructions are sources. Identifying potential public controversy early allows	be considered. Examples of reasons for public controversy include uction times, and impacts to environmental, historic or for the identification of increased public involvement measures	
	Public controversy is anticipated because:	Public controversy is NOT anticipated (at least one):	
	Likely residential and/or commercial displacements	Construction impacts will be minimal	
	Long detour route/long construction time	No/minimal detour involved	
8.	Business impacts	No/minimal displacements	
	Impacts to environmental, historic or community resources	Additional reasons(s) and notes:	
	☐ Other:		
	Notes:		

consulted	eferences  any source or reference documentation used in cold during the project analysis process. Include websit Specifically identify any existing plans that include to	es, studies, concept plans, etc. tha	at were used to support the information on
9.	Sources/References Consulted:		lividuals Consulted:
	ed By:		Date
Reviewe	d By MPO:		Date
Reviewe	d By PennDOT District:		Date
Reviewe	d By PennDOT Program Center:		Date