



**PennDOT Connects Workshop – *Building Momentum in 2018***  
**Dixon University Center – Administration Building**  
**May 30, 2018**  
**Workshop Summary**

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**Document Purpose**

This document provides a summary of major themes and key points from the PennDOT Connects Workshop held in Harrisburg on May 30, 2018. It is designed to support several uses including further analysis by the District Planners and others toward a Strategic Work Plan for PennDOT Connects. More detailed meeting notes are available for those interested.

**Workshop Objectives**

- ◆ Review what is working well with PennDOT Connects implementation to date
- ◆ Share Best Practices from District and MPO/RPO experiences
- ◆ Identify Challenges and Opportunities, including remarks by Secretary Leslie Richards
- ◆ Make Recommendations for Moving Forward



**Sharing Best Practices**

*The best practices discussion covered three overlapping and related areas—progress, challenges and opportunities, and issues for attention. These provide a base of information for the District Planners to address with Central Office staff.*

**Progress**

- Face-to-face meetings among the District, MPO/RPO, and municipality are working well—they are informative and educational, and assistance is being provided.
- Municipal Service Representative involvement has been helpful in several ways, including relational.
- District Planners are well-suited to facilitate the Connects meetings.
- A pre-populated PIF and mapping are helpful in meetings.
- PIF can be reviewed during scoping field views.

**Challenges and Opportunities**

- Lack of multimodal input, especially bike-ped and transit; county involvement may leverage greater input.
- Best practice for efficient documentation and sharing of map comments/mark-ups; some District Planners use a table or a database.

- Lack of clarity in District planners' role with LRTP and the LRTP tie-in with Connects overall.
- Best balance of effort across preparation and meetings, i.e. less preparation for the meetings and more dialogue, interaction, and organized, purposeful free-flow communication.
- Communicating and sharing of the positive project impacts of Connects as success stories for various purposes, including assessment and learning.
- Early recognition for community priorities that have implications for long-term maintenance.
- Greater collaboration with forthcoming Connects system platform.
- Need for more P and E 360 training sessions for additional project managers.
- Freight issues and opportunities noted in the context of June Freight Summit.

### Issues for Attention



- Consistency of District staff involvement.
- Consistency of District Planner roles and responsibilities.
- With flexibility, effectively right-sizing the Connects effort to all projects.
- Earlier engagement of municipalities before projects are programmed.
- Effective hand-off of PIF from District Planner to Project Manager and ensuring Project Manager follow-up (quality assurance).
- Determining the shelf-life of a PIF.
- Ensuring that locals know the implications of selecting "no meeting".
- Lack of a system to track status of Connects follow-ups between Districts and Planning Partners.

### PennDOT Connects System Re-Platforming Demonstration

*Participants' comments and questions raised several salient themes and topics during the demonstration of the new PennDOT Connects System.*

- The availability of a tutorial to help users with the system.
- Training and train the trainer approaches for the system.
- Ability to add layers such as local GIS data.
- MPO/RPO role with the system and prompts for taking any action, etc.
- Future full integration with MPMS.
- Various access and interaction levels, including municipal access, read-only, etc.
- Discussion about the Connects System and incorporation of Connects follow-up activity as a management tool.



## Secretary Richards Challenge

*Secretary Richards joined the Workshop to challenge participants to work through the growing pains of new methods to achieve better transportation solutions for Pennsylvania's communities.*



- The District Planner concept is important and is a specific focus for an upcoming AASHTO study.
- Interest in PennDOT Connects is strong among other DOTs and their leaders— Secretary Richards is often asked about lessons learned.
- PennDOT Connects is about impacting communities and that is the ultimate measure of PennDOT Connects success.
- Municipalities are appreciative and know that PennDOT is listening.
- Secretary Richards encouraged participants to persist and to provide feedback about tools needed, frustrations, ideas for improvement, etc.
- Workshop attendees expressed interest in how other agencies are getting involved in municipal outreach and state actions overall to benefit local communities.



## Leadership Support for PennDOT Connects

PennDOT Connects is succeeding for many reasons—first and foremost, because it's a good business practice. Ultimately, major initiatives succeed because of visible and tangible support and ownership among leaders.



## Open Forum on Key Topics

*The Open Forum portion of the Workshop gave further feedback and direction to the development of the Strategic Work Plan. For a full listing of comments, the meeting notes can be made available.*

**Project Tracking** related to tracking all of projects, discussions, and follow up.

- Re-platforming of the Connects system and implications for project tracking.
- PennDOT commitments, Connects information retention, and the prospect of a NEPA process tie-in with Connects.
- Connects / MPMS relationship and interface now and as this expands.
- Strengthening the relationship between Connects, asset management, business planning and plans.
- Project Manager roles in Connects and timing—questions about the timing of involvement, i.e. inclusion from the start or ensuring that the PM has complete information when he or she is assigned and starts work.
- Consistency of approach with flexible decision-making—some see the need for a common structure across the state.
- Sustaining the Connects process over time will require accountability for follow-through.
- Municipal representatives need to know who the right contact is within the District.
- Because of staff turnover at the municipal level and PM changes, consistency in the Connects process is important.
- The need for communicating decisions back to local governments continues to be raised.
- A new perspective would be for communities to establish their values, vision, goals/priorities, etc. and present those to PennDOT, and possibly other state agencies, as opportunities for investment.
- The culture change associated with Connects still will need attention.
- The Connects / asset management integration also needs attention.
- PennDOT Connects will need performance measurement.
- Some Districts have educated municipalities about the project rating/ranking process as well as funding sources during Connects meetings.
- Other agency funding sources should be considered.
- MPO/RPO role in decision-making should not be lost—Connects is part of a larger system and decision-making process.



**Resources** related to time, effort, and therefore money that is spent on the process.

- Continued awareness-raising about Connects at all levels is still needed.
- Training needs should remain a focus—including training for local government.
- The effective use of planning studies within the Connects process.
- MPO/RPO staff time is a challenge, particularly for smaller planning agencies and for those with large geographic areas to cover; yet some indicate that they are all-in and that the benefit is already apparent.
- Connects has resulted in a multi-county comprehensive plan initiative and the recognition for a bridge management focus for another pair of counties—there is a general sense that Connects is making good things happen.
- The LRTP should be more project-focused. This may be a primary solution to some concerns about process and consistency.

### **Timing of the Process/Activities**

- As soon as the FY2019 TIP is submitted, it is time to start on candidates and PennDOT Connects process for FY2021 TIP.
- Implies the need to review lists of bridges and surface treatments now.
- Fleshing out problems and developing solutions is harder.
- Possible best practice in the York congestion management process (\$50k pilot for 13 locations, asking for the municipal perspective before addressing potential solutions).
- Relationship to LRTP updates—keeping both Connects and NEPA alternatives in view.
- DVRPC is considering years 3-5 for opportunities to address bike-ped needs – new striping plans, wider shoulders, etc.
- TCRPC is using the LRTP as a funneling process and is re-vamping its problem identification form.



### **MAINTENANCE PROJECTS** – Timing is a challenge.

- The basic PIF form does not work well for maintenance projects.
- There is minimal staff capacity in maintenance sections; Municipal Services help could be considered.
- Discussion of the applicability/scalability of Connects to all projects continues.
- Some have obtained valuable information regarding utilities, community events, etc. There has been at least one Connects meeting for all county maintenance projects and it pointed to bike-ped needs.
- If Connects is really planning, we wouldn't know the funding source or if it's a resurfacing vs. other capital project.
- The modified PIF used for maintenance type projects could miss critical issues.
- Conference calls in lieu of meetings may be sufficient to populate/review forms.

## Other Topics

- Culture Change – building momentum for 2018 and beyond.
- Ensuring Connects collaboration continues through all phases of project development.
- Utilizing other planning efforts as part of PE phase – e.g. access management ordinances, official maps, zoning ordinances.
- MPO/RPO awareness of project status in PE/FD.
- MPO/RPO awareness of Connects meetings - some meetings arranged without MPO/RPO knowledge or coordination.
- Are the District experiences and expectations different from the MPO/RPO?
- Visualization of Connects projects (TIP, LRP, surface treatment) in relation to all projects and location/municipal participation.
- Lehigh Valley is merging a bi-county comp plan with a bi-county LRTP into one plan.
- Are District Planners doing more than planning? If planners aren't planning, what are they accomplishing?
- District Planners wear multiple hats.



## Strategic Work Plan Development – *Building Momentum in 2018*

This short list of major themes summarized the workshop:

- ◆ Connects is having a positive impact as envisioned.
- ◆ Partners are using Connects in innovative ways for further benefits.
- ◆ More structure, consistency, and clarity are needed.
- ◆ Integration with other PennDOT practices and procedures is needed.
- ◆ District Planners need tools, especially tools and technology that help capture community input and that work in rural areas.
- ◆ Continued training toward all applicable staff and toward best practices is needed.
- ◆ A Connects Q&A document, including compilation and review of known questions as well as additional, to-be-identified questions, should be prepared and published.
- ◆ Additional actions may need to be considered in the Work Plan's development.