



VISTA 2025 Goal 5:

Support critical infrastructure in targeted corridors of opportunity

Initial Goal 5 Team Meeting

June 8, 2016

Meeting Notes

Team Members Attending: Diane Disney, Phil Eastman, Mike Fili, Charles Fleischmann, Matt Hammond, Mike Hankin, Michelle Kichline, Gary Krapf, Steve Krug, Greg Newell, Bob Schoenberger, Coleen Terry, Chris Williams

Also Attending: Mike Grigalonis, Mary Frances McGarrity, Brian O'Leary, Tim Phelps, David Sciocchetti, Gary Smith, Randy Waltemeyer

Michelle Kichline

Welcomed goal team members and called for introductions. She then asked for comments on the meeting notes from the March 9, 2016 meeting. No comments were offered.

She proceeded to Introduced Randy Waltemeyer to discuss passenger rail transportation in the County.

Randy Waltemeyer

Noted that rail transportation was a key issue in VISTA 2025 and noted that Chester County was fortunate to have the Keystone Corridor.

Commented that passenger rail ridership on the Keystone Corridor was at its highest point ever in 2015 at more than 7,000 riders per day. Added that daily weekday ridership was 1,600 at Paoli and 1,000 at Exton

Stated that the vision for the next 20 years included doubling the available parking spaces, connecting the “last mile” via shuttle and restoring rail service to Phoenixville and West Chester

Michelle Kichline

Commented that SEPTA had entered into a pilot program with Uber, a concept that may have potential for Chester County

Randy Waltemeyer

Reported that work on the Paoli SEPTA station would start this summer and would consist of three phases, including: high level platforms, a Darby Road extension and a parking garage

He also reported that work on the Exton station was in progress and included high level platforms and a modern building. He added that a bus loop and a parking garage were part of a EDVRPC design study and that connections to the Main Street at Exton were being explored.

He further reported that \$70 million had been added to the TIP for improvements to the Downingtown station

He further reported that that site assembly at the Coatesville station was complete and that the 3rd Avenue streetscape was set to begin later this year. That would be followed by a re-alignment of Fleetwood Street, new high level platforms and, eventually, a parking garage.

He noted that an extension of SEPTA service to Coatesville and Parkesburg was being studied with a 2025 horizon.

Mike Grigalonis

Asked the significance of 2025 and was advised by Mr. Waltemeyer that that was the modeling horizon and any actual service extension would be based on completion of projected station improvements.

Charles Fleischmann

Asked about autonomous vehicles and was advised that this was an emerging issue and was being evaluated.

David Sciocchetti

Commented that this was part of what is being technically described as “mobility on demand”.

Randy Waltemeyer

Stated that this would be a game changer and that it was an evolving issue.

Tim Phelps

Asked about the relationship between SEPTA, Amtrak and PennDOT.

Randy Waltemeyer

Noted that Keystone Corridor service is paid for by PennDOT (\$12 million currently) and provided by Amtrak. He added that SEPTA leases some stations and provides regional commuter rail service.

Steve Krug

Asked about who would be responsible for proposed parking structures.

Tim Phelps

Responded that it depended on who was providing the service, Amtrak or SEPTA.

Diane Disney

Asked if tracks would be improved to European standards and was advised that speeds on the Keystone Corridor could be improved from its current 110 miles per hour to 125 miles per hour, but would not achieve higher European speeds.

Randy Waltemeyer

Addressed the issue of extending SEPTA service to West Chester by noting that there are many demands for capital for the regional rail system with SEPTA having a \$15 billion back log. He added that on a "funding per capita" basis the Philadelphia region was much lower than other metro areas. He did add that SEPTA would be conducting a more detailed study to follow up on the study prepared for West Chester.

He also addressed rail service extension to Phoenixville, noting that any significant progress was somewhat dormant but that the need remained.

Mike Grigalonis

Asked if a more organized effort at the local level would help and was advised that it could.

Diane Disney

Noted that service workers in the County had a greater need for improved transit options and was advised that SEPTA was aware of this issue and looking at it.

Tim Phelps

Asked if the Keystone Corridor would be seeing any new rail cars and was advised that it would, possibly including some double deckers.

Randy Waltemeyer

Then provided an overview of rail freight service in the County focused on the East Penn Railroad, Chester County's primary rail freight hauler. He noted that East Penn was considered a short haul line that connected local clients with long haul service, in particular, Norfolk Southern and CSX. He added that this service tended to lower the volume of truck traffic to East Penn clients.

He noted that East Penn operated on approximately 110 miles of track and delivered 3000 car loads in 2015 up from 1, 355 in 2007. He added that East Penn had invested \$5 million in improvements to its tracks and facilities and had recently been awarded \$665,000 in grant funds for additional improvements.

He added that additional funding was needed to further improve service and added that the Rail Freight Assistance program and other programs were targeted for such funding.

Diane Disney

Asked if there was anything we could do to help and was advised that working with local municipalities to better recognize the economic importance of rail freight when they address issues related to rail freight would be significant. In particular, issues like reserving and properly zoning the limited land that fronts on the East Penn railroad.

Diane Disney

Questioned whether an op-ed could have value and was advised that it could.

Gary Smith

Noted that if not for East Penn, the rail line could have been abandoned and the service lost, adding that this rail service was critical for Chester County.

He then asked a question about the economic challenges facing public transportation in southern Chester County

Colleen Terry

Responded that it was critical to work with legislators adding that it was currently budget season.

Gary Smith

Noted the need for collective action and setting priorities.

Brian O'Leary

Suggested that the voice of the private sector was critical, especially on a case-by-case basis for key needs.

Tim Phelps

Asked about transportation issues facing the mushroom industry and what can be done to further invest in the success of that industry.

Chris Williams

Responded that there was a need to look at the truck flow issue at Toughkenamin and Baltimore Pike.

Brian O’Leary

Added that this was an excellent example of a specific problem to be addressed on a case-by-case basis

Mike Hankin

Agreed with the case-by-case approach for public support noting that developers often get asked to bear the burden for these types of public improvements.

Charles Fleischmann

Noted that land use conflicts and competition for land for the mushroom industry were issues.

Brian O’Leary

Cautioned about converting limited industrial land to residential.

Mike Grigalonis

Provided a quick overview of the Take The Pulse survey noting that over 400 responses had been received.

Noted that the general feeling about Chester County as a place to do business was very positive. Commented that the majority of the respondents were small businesses many of which were located in Chester County because they started here or because the principal decision maker of the company lived here

Pointed out that the majority of the respondents identified “quality of place” issues as business climate factors important to their business.

Michelle Kichline

Thanked all for attending and adjourned the meeting.