

Centre County Metropolitan Planning Organization (CCMPO)
2020 Centre County Air Quality Conformity Determination Report
2021-2024 Centre County Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Public Comment Period Summary

I. When Was the Draft Air Quality Conformity Determination Report, and Draft 2021-2024 TIP Made Available for Public Comment?

- May 7, 2020 The Draft Air Quality Conformity Report and Draft 2021-2024 TIP documents were posted on the CCMPO’s website. The website included the option of submitting an online comment form.
- May 7, 2020 The 30-day public comment period was formally initiated. Classified advertisements were placed in The Progress (Clearfield/Philipsburg), The Express (Lock Haven), and The Centre Daily Times (State College) newspapers. Notices included the dates for the start and conclusion of the comment period; the locations at which the Air Quality Conformity Report and TIP were available for review; the date, time, and location of the public meeting; and the date, time, and location of the meeting at which the Coordinating Committee would consider approving the Conformity Report and the TIP.
- May 7, 2020 A notice about the public comment period was placed on the C-NET public access cable television bulletin board. A press release was sent to 67 broadcast and print media outlets, including web-based community news publishers and three newspapers serving Centre County. A Facebook post was created and shared; 59 people were reached.
- May 7, 2020 A notice was emailed and mailed to the municipal managers or secretaries for the 35 municipalities in Centre County. The notice included the website address to access the documents, the dates for the start and conclusion of the public comment period and the public meeting.
- May 7, 2020 A notice was emailed to 263 persons on the mailing list for CCMPO meetings and reports. The notice included the website address to access the documents and the dates for the public comment period and public meeting. The mailing list includes local officials and citizens, committee members, and staff members for federal and state legislators.
- May 7, 2020 A notice was emailed to 91 organizations designated as “interested parties” in the CCMPO’s Public Participation Plan (PPP). The interested parties include: affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other entities. The notice included the web address to access the documents and the dates for the public comment period and public meeting.
- May 20, 2020 A Public Meeting was held via the Zoom Meeting platform from 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM

Staff members from the Centre Regional Planning Agency (CRPA), the Centre County Planning and Community Development Office (CCPCDO), Centre Area Transportation Authority (CATA), The Centre County Office of Transportation (CCOT), and the PennDOT District 2-0 Office were present to respond to questions and receive comments.

June 5, 2020 A notice was emailed and mailed to eight Native American Tribes and Nations whose ancestors had at one time lived in Centre County. The notice directed tribal representatives to the website, where all documents could be accessed.

June 8, 2020 The 30-day public comment period concluded at 12:00 p.m.

II. Virtual Public Meeting

Format and Attendance

A virtual public meeting was held on May 20, 2020 from 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm via Zoom. The virtual meeting included:

- Instructions for how the public could access the documents made available for public comment
- Instructions for how participants could pose questions and provide comments during the virtual meeting
- Opening remarks from CCMPO Chair L. Eric Bernier
- Presentation from the MPO staff
- Time for comments and questions from the public and other participants.

Staff members from the CRPA, the CCPCDO, CATA, the Centre County Office of Transportation, PennDOT Central Office, PennDOT District 2-0 Office, and the Federal Highway Administration were present to respond to questions and receive comments.

Following the presentation by MPO staff, PennDOT District 2-0 provided additional remarks about the State College Area Connector project, and CATA staff provided remarks about current transit issues, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on transit operations. Five (5) members of the public and officials participated in the session. The virtual public meeting was recorded and is available on the CCMPO's website.

III. Public Comments and Responses

Comments were received via the virtual public meeting, written correspondence, online comment form, telephone, and email (copies of written correspondence are attached):

	Agency/Individual	Summary of Comment	Response
1	Vern Squier President and CEO Chamber of Business and Industry of Centre County (CBICC) (2021-2024 Centre County TIP Website: https://bit.ly/2MsSts4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The DriveFORWARD initiative is continuing to manifest the transportation improvements vision put forth by the MPO, PennDOT, elected officials, and other critical partners. This next chapter of the safety and efficiency improvements to the I-99/I-80 exchange is on track and will lead to the final components falling into place in the near future. Our thanks and appreciation goes out to all who are helping move this forward.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The CCMPO acknowledges the comment, and expresses its thanks to the CBICC for sponsoring the DriveFORWARD initiative and partnering with the efforts of PennDOT and the MPO to advance key major highway projects.
2	Don Albertson (2021-2024 Centre County TIP Website: https://bit.ly/2MsSts4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why does PennDOT detour traffic on a narrow state road which they refuse to stripe? Sending traffic onto Penns Cave Road that way isn't safe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The CCMPO staff will forward the concern to PennDOT District 2-0.

continued

3	Rob Watts (via virtual public meeting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If funding is further reduced from the (TIP allocation) forecast, what does the process look like for deciding how projects get reduced or removed from the TIP? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CCMPO staff, CATA staff and PennDOT staff responded to this comment during the virtual meeting. MPO staff indicated that in past instances where a reduction in funding required a reevaluation of projects on the TIP, typically the MPO has given priority to active projects that have advanced the furthest through the project development process, particularly safety improvement projects. <p>For example, when roadway project priorities for the TIP were being discussed with the understanding that the base allocation of funding was being reduced, MPO staff recommended that the Route 64/550 intersection project, the Route 26/45 intersection project, and the Route 26 Betterment project be given priority because of their focus on improving safety.</p> <p>CATA staff also responded about transit project priorities, noting that most of the projects on the Transit Element of the TIP are focused on maintaining a “state of good repair” of the bus fleet. If funding would be reduced, CATA would simply not move forward with the planned purchase of buses to upgrade the fleet.</p> <p>MPO staff added that prioritization decisions are policy actions taken by the CCMPO Coordinating Committee, with input and recommendations from the MPO staff, PennDOT, and the CCMPO Technical Committee.</p> <p>PennDOT staff concurred with the explanation, and noted that no information has been provided yet about the possible reduction in funding due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
4	Mel Kaulkin (via voicemail)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If PennDOT has already hired a consultant team to determine the preferred alternative for the State College Area Connector project, it seems that there is no opportunity for the public to provide comments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CCMPO staff responded via telephone and explained that there is a specific process the consultant team will follow to develop and evaluate alternatives. Public involvement is a key element in that process, and will include an opportunity for the public to provide comment early in the process via a public meeting tentatively scheduled for summer 2020.

continued

5	Steve Ross (via email)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appreciate priorities such as bridge safety and the need for improvements at the I-99/ I-80 interchange, but disappointed to learn of further delays in the improvements on US 322 (east of Boalsburg). Puzzled about why planning has not emphasized the need to lessen the bottleneck of two lanes on that road. Although many other roadways serving Centre County have been improved, US 322 remains a 2 lane road. <p>What are the planning priorities here, and who is making them?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CCMPO staff responded via telephone and explained the history of studies of potential improvements in this area of Centre County. Staff also explained that the most recent effort (South Central Centre County Transportation Study) was terminated in 2004 because of a lack of funding statewide for major projects. However, the CCMPO, state and local officials have continued to give the project a high priority and to advocate for a funding commitment to restart work on identifying improvements. <p>Staff described the project development process, including opportunities for public involvement, that will be utilized in the State College Area Connector project. Staff also reviewed the challenges associated with different opinions among the public and officials when the SCCCTS project was active.</p>
6	Jon Eich (via email)	<p>I would like to commend the CCMPO staff and PennDOT for the projects identified and funded in the proposed, fiscally-constrained Centre County MPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for highways and bridges covering FFY 2021-2024, and recommend its approval.</p> <p>The TIP designates funding for four types of projects: safety, bridges, high-volume roadways, and MISSING LINKS. This comprehensive program addresses a broad range of needs, and does so: 1) in spite of a 20% +/- reduction in the MPO's base allocation, and 2) with the help of additional project-specific funds from county, state, and federal funding partners.</p> <p>SAFETY: Safety has been given the most weight by the CCMPO in designating projects. In this TIP, significant progress is being made to achieve that objective through the following projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Route 26/Route 45 intersection has been allocated \$5.3 million for the construction of improvements. The Route 64/Route 550 intersection has been allocated \$3.4 million for the construction of improvements. <p>The Route 26/Route 150 intersection has been allocated \$350,000+ for final design work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The installation of a railroad crossing warning device on Struble Road has been allocated \$375,000 for construction of improvements. The installation of rail crossing improvements on SR 3017 in Port Matilda has been allocated \$400,000 for construction for construction of improvements. High friction surface treatments on three high-traffic routes has been allocated \$400,000. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CCMPO acknowledges the comment, and expresses its thanks for the support of the project priorities on the TIP.

	<p>Jon Eich (via email)</p>	<p>BRIDGES: The CCMPO has utilized its base allocation to make significant progress on replacing bridges in poor condition and extending the life of other bridges. Centre County Government has joined this effort by implementing the optional \$5 vehicle registration fee, dedicated to transportation projects.</p> <p>The proposed 2021-2024 TIP includes approximately \$15 million for 19 bridge projects, including four new bridges, 12 bridge projects started in the current TIP, and 5 line items for bridge preservation projects.</p> <p>HIGH-VOLUME ROADWAYS The work to reconstruct Atherton Street (SR 3014), starting with the underground utilities, continues. The TIP provides \$14.5 million for Phase III. After a welcome respite from the reconstruction work, and associated traffic snarls, for Phases I and II, the bulk of the funds/work for this part of the project are scheduled for FFY 2023 and 2024.</p> <p>MISSING LINKS I-99/I-80 Interchanges A number of major upgrades are in the pipeline for MISSING LINK projects that have plagued Centre County for generations -- as far back as the opening of I-80. It has been 20+ years since I-99 was constructed through Centre County, bringing an end to the weekday traffic jams that choked Pleasant Gap and Port Matilda.</p> <p>This TIP, plus funding designated in PennDOT's Interstate Management Program, finally will complete I-99 in Centre County, by eliminating the I-99/I-80 MISSING LINK.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Centre County MPO used its base allocation to fund the \$6.8 million Jacksonville Road (PA 26) Betterment Project (the third element of this three part project). • This seed money helped attract state and federal funding for the new Local Access Interchange that is (or shortly will be) under construction (the first element of the project). Bids have been awarded for this \$50 million project, which is scheduled to be completed in 2023. • As part of the application that secured federal funds, PennDOT also committed funds for the High Speed Interchange (the second element) that will replace the existing I-80 Bellefonte interchange. This \$130 million project is scheduled to be completed in 2025. <p>While much of this work is not included in the CCMPO TIP, it is important to acknowledge the funding and support provided by MPO's state and federal partners to address this MISSING LINK.</p> <p>US 322 between Potters Mills and Boalsburg Work on the US 322 MISSING LINK continues. This must be one of the most studied corridors, originally considered when the "12 Year Program" was a "6 Year Program" back in the 1970's. I've somewhat lost track of how times this roadway has been studied.</p>	
--	---------------------------------	--	--

continued

	<p>Jon Eich (via email)</p>	<p>This section of roadway has been referred to as "the last two-lane section of US 322 between Harrisburg and State College". The last study of this MISSING LINK, called the South Central Centre County Transportation Study (SCCCTS), was (I believe) terminated in 2004, after six years of work, at a cost of \$6 million. That study was weeks away from designating a route for the entire length of the MISSING LINK when the project was canceled due to a state-wide funding shortage.</p> <p>Four miles of the 12 miles of this MISSING LINK (known as the Potters Mills Gap project), has been under construction for the past four years, and is scheduled to be completed this fall.</p> <p>Completion of the Potters Mills Gap project leaves the portion of US 322 between Potters Mills and Boalsburg as a two lane roadway that carries a deadly mix of interstate truck traffic, regional commuters, and local traffic (including school buses making stops to pick up/drop off children, and drivers slowing/stopping to make turns to access local roads, business parking lots, and private driveways).</p> <p>The CCMPO's TIP for the FFY's 2021-2024 contains project-specific allocations of funding (so-called Spike funds) to eliminate this MISSING LINK (now dubbed the State College Area Connector). Preliminary engineering and environmental linkages have been provided \$10 million in FFY 2021 and 2022. Final Design is scheduled to receive \$16 million in FFY 2023 and 2024. The two phases will identify where the new four-lane, limited-access highway will be constructed. Other steps, including right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation, and construction of this MISSING LINK, are expected to be completed by 2030, but are outside the funding committed in this TIP.</p> <p>I am hopeful that the studies, engineering work, pre-construction phases, and construction actually are funded and the new roadway built according to the announced time line. But I am concerned by the past history of delays/stop work orders for this roadway. In addition, during 2019 PennDOT briefed the CCMPO on six state-wide threats to transportation funding that would peak about the time the State College Area Connector is expected to go to construction (a repeat of what happened as the SCCCTS work was completed). Add to that, the loss of transportation revenues due to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>So, while I heartily support this project and hope for it to come to fruition, I am going to figuratively "hold my breath" until each of the successive steps of this project are funded and completed. I, and no doubt may other users of this roadway, are hoping to see the State College Area Connector completed in our lifetimes. The funds allocated in the CCMPO's FFY 2021-2024 TIP, through the provision of Spike funds by PennDOT, are essential first steps for moving the project ahead.</p>	
--	---------------------------------	--	--

	Jon Eich (via email)	<p>CONCLUSION</p> <p>Given the financial constraints, the CCMPO staff and PennDOT, have done an amazing job of advancing a variety of important projects in the proposed CCMPO FFY 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical safety projects are being addressed. • With the help of County funding from the optional vehicle registration fee, bridges in poor condition are being replaced while investments are being made to extend the life of other bridges. • The next phase of the Atherton Street Project has been funded. • With the assistance of state and federal funding partners, long standing MISSING LINK projects, whose costs are far beyond the CCMPO's base allocation, are being addressed. These projects, on routes formerly known as Highways of National Significance, which have been carried over from the 20th century, go a long way to address safety issues for people and commercial traffic traveling to and through Centre County. 	
7	Janet Swim (via email)	<p>When thinking about 322 construction, I'd like to make sure the project makes our lives better rather than worse. Concretely this means:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make sure there is noise remediation built into the project for those living and working along 322. 2. Incorporate bicycle paths in the construction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an under or overpass that would allow people to bicycle or walk from Mountain View to Tussey Mountain and • connect this path to a bicycle path into downtown Boalsburg which could then link to paths in State College. Currently there are people who bicycle along 322. One person even rides their electric wheelchair. A bicycle path would allow the area to be thinking ahead in terms of alternative forms of transportation. 3. In terms of thinking about alternative forms of transportation, what is the relative addition to climate change does a road have versus a train that could possibly a) provide alternative forms of transportation for our many PSU commuters, PSU students, and visitors to PSU events and/or b) have a train line so that all the trucks that pass through and by our community would effectively and more efficiently go a different route? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CCMPO staff will forward the comments to PennDOT District 2-0 for consideration as part of the Preliminary Engineering (PE) phase of the State College Area Connector (SCAC) project. <p>The PE phase will include noise studies, and noise mitigation will be included in the construction cost if mitigation measures meet certain criteria and are determined to be feasible. PennDOT and the SCAC consultant team will provide more details about noise studies and mitigation process as part of the development and evaluation of alternatives in the study area.</p> <p>The CCMPO staff supports the need to incorporate multiple modes of travel into alternatives that may be developed and evaluated in the study area.</p> <p>Broad overall climate change impacts associated with particular alternatives are not necessarily considered during the project development process. An alternatives analysis for a large project such as the SCAC may consider different modes, but all alternatives are assessed by how they meet the project "need(s)" and "purpose". A mode such as freight and/or passenger rail, or a combination of modes, would be evaluated on how well project need is met, with the costs and impacts of implementing the alternative also being considered in the evaluation.</p>