

Route 1 Regional Growth Strategy
New Brunswick Sub-Area Workshop – Round 1
Meeting Notes
February 11, 2009



Elk's Building
40 Livingston Avenue, New Brunswick

Purposes

This was one of four meetings designed to re-launch the Route 1 Regional Growth Strategy initiative at the subarea level. The meeting served to reiterate the study purpose and objectives in the current context; elicit participant input on transportation investment preferences; review the land use concept scenario; and look ahead to next steps in the process.

Stakeholder Participants

Bruce McCracken, Ted Chase, Jack Kanarek, Carmen Valentin, Ron Schmalz, Gail Yazersky, Tom Vigna, Tony Gambilonghi, Jenn Lane, Barry Ableman, Steve Fittante, Hamou Meghdir, Tom Clark, Frank Gambatese

Congestion Problem Areas

Participants brainstormed locations in the subarea where congestion is worst.

- Route 1 in various locations, depending upon the intersections
 - Bottleneck – Aaron Rd - Finnegan's and south
 - South Brunswick
 - North and New Brunswick intersections
 - Sandhill, New, Raymond, Ridge
 - Both flows, south and north
 - Frequent signals along US 1 slow traffic
- US 1 problems are especially acute at narrowing from 3 to 2 lanes southbound between Aaron Road and Finnegan Lane. The problem is exacerbated by the four signals at Finnegan, Black Horse Lane, Henderson Road, and Deans Lane
- North Brunswick – roads accessing Rte 1 are a problem – Finnegans, Cozzens
- Turnpike 8A area – vehicles traveling to and from Rt 130 and US 1
- Route 27 congestion occurs at intersections including Bennett's Lane, Cozzens Lane, and Beekman Road, that do not have adequate capacity.
- Parts of Easton Ave are getting worse
- The Franklin area experiences through traffic, oriented to I-287, on local roads such as Middlebush. Building the previously-proposed alignment of I-95 may have prevented this situation.
- The County has proposed the concept of grade separating the US 1 & Finnegan Lane intersection
- Another problem area is along Route 18 in East Brunswick between US 1 and Edgeboro Road, which may be a candidate for grade separation. Related problems are at the interchange of US 1 and Route 18 and the NJTP interchange.
- Incidents along Route 18 can create major traffic jams in the city
- Turnpike – limited on/off, bottleneck at lane drops
- In and out of New Brunswick – incident management needed
- Parts of Livingston Ave & Jersey Ave

- Limited NEC access & P&R capacity
- Need ARC tunnel
- Observing increasing traffic and congestion farther south along US 1 – more reverse commuting
- The US 1 intersection with Cozzens Lane / Adams Lane is a major problem, including for vehicles trying to reach US 1 from the side roads. There is major congestion along How Lane between Route 27 and Livingston Avenue.
- NJDOT is delaying progress on the Route 27 Renaissance improvements
- Due to the city having many visitors, there is a need for better signage, information, etc.
- The US 1 & Ridge Road intersection is a problem. Ridge Road has a flooding problem, but an upcoming project will address it.
- There is limited access to and parking for the Northeast Corridor stations
- NJTP is root of major traffic problems in region. Many people use Exits 10 and 9 as part of north-south travel.
- Various previous studies, including Congestion Busters, have identified essentially the same issues, and nothing has been done.

TDM Discussion

Participants were asked how supportive they are of these measures. Their comments:

- Pricing for roads and parking would have to be broad-based
 - Broad-based parking charge not likely in short term
 - Right-size parking requirements
 - Economic disincentive
- State previously had trip reduction program but dropped it.
- State dropped the I-287 HOV lanes. Was it because they were not used, not enforced, or what? Need more time to give these a chance to work.
- Voluntary
- TDM is difficult
- Parking charges may be good, especially for office developments
- Look at minimum parking requirements. Franklin has routinely waived 50% of the requirement for development projects.
- Concern over impacts of parking fees on workers, especially in tough economy
- People like the convenience of driving
- Increase the gas tax instead of parking fees
- VMT-tax would be hard to administer; privacy issues
- Need alternatives to SOV
- Roll back tolls as incentive to get cars and trucks back on Turnpike
- Need to improve interagency coordination
- Many unused shopping center parking spaces could become park-ride locations

Access Management Discussion

Participants were asked how supportive they are of these measures. Their comments:

- It's too late; retrofitting access management is difficult
- Strengthen state access management decisions; develop a regional plan
- South Brunswick is implementing "congestion busting" task force

Policy Issues

- Coordinate state agency actions
- MLUL – amend to allow ‘Form-based Codes’
- Change to MLUL?
- Smart growth and economic growth can be at cross purposes;
- COAH requirements drive some development decisions
- School impacts – allow impact fees for housing; broader-based funding for schools
- Need regional comprehensive approach to corridor development
- Regional compact or site plan review
- Note impact of development in one town on its neighbors
- Would regional controls like Highlands and Pinelands be acceptable?
- Get local leaders ‘off the hook’ for difficult decisions that need to be made
- Would be willing to follow state guidance in managing land use and development
- Note pursuit of rateables – a new science research park will have major traffic impacts.
- Franklin is trying to concentrate some development along Route 27 to increase potential transit use

Small Group Discussions – Transportation

Participants worked in two small groups, facilitated and scribed by team members. They discussed and marked up maps with ideas for improvements in various transportation modes that might add capacity and reduce congestion in critical places in the subarea.

A – Summary of Proposed Concepts – Transportation

Small Group A: Group Facilitator Jon Carnegie, Scribe Danielle Graves

Participants: Bruce McCracken, Middlesex County Planning; Ted Chase, Franklin Twp; Jack Kanarek, NJ Transit; Carmen Valentin, MLUC; Ron Schmalz, South Brunswick Twp; Gail Yazersky, City of New Brunswick

Rail

- NEC Stations – satellite facilities for parking/shuttles
- Reactivate West Trenton Passenger Rail Line
- New Rail station at J&J in North Brunswick
- South Brunswick Station still needed in addition to North Brunswick Station
- Rethink MOM corridor as LRT/BRT--operational issues, i.e. freight operations
- Park & Ride facility – Route 18 & Route 9
- More reverse commute service
- Increase parking capacity at Jersey Ave. Station – address constraints at NJ Transit yard

BRT

- New Brunswick BRT on Route 18, I-287, Route 27, Livingston Ave., Continental Ave., Stelton
- Connect Route 1 Princeton BRT & New Brunswick BRT systems

Bus/Shuttles

- Coordination of community shuttle systems – Mercer/Middlesex County systems & NJ Transit
- Intermodal bus facility
- Improve the wayfinding signs for mass transit services, particularly in downtown New Brunswick – Train & Bus Stations
- I-287 & Franklin Transit Study Recommendations – Franklin Twp. Requests review of recommendations
- More shuttles accessing New Brunswick Station
- South Brunswick shuttle services to Jersey Ave. Station (Earmark Project)
- Park & Rides locations – see shuttle study recommendations, i.e. New Rd., Beekman Rd., other locations.
- Add DASH & MCAT fixed/flexible ROW & services
- Tie shuttles into MCAT& Somerset Dept. of Transportation Services

Bike/Ped

- More bike/ped amenities at offices & other trip generators in New Brunswick
- Zoning required for bike racks/showers
- Sidewalks – Route 27, Bunker Hill NB
- Bike/ped lane on Livingston Ave., New St. end – borders New Brunswick
- Bike Trail connection to Jersey Ave. from Route 27, along freight corridor
- Bike Lane along South Middlebush

Road

- Intersection improvements from Large Group discussion
- Access Management along Route 27, where feasible
- More use of ITS, including notification of mass transit services and availability of parking, etc.
- Widen Route 27 – Somerset to Howe Lane, NJFIT multimodal access mgt.
- Route 27 – Bennets Lane, Cozzens & Beekman intersection improvements
- Finnigans Lane Extension
- Close jug handle at Blackhorse Lane and evaluate signal
- Route 1 Bottleneck Project

B – Summary of Proposed Concepts – Transportation

Small Group B: Group Facilitator Jim Hess, Scribe Marge Quinn

Participants: Tom Vigna, North Brunswick Twp; Tony Gambilonghi, Middlesex County Planning; Jenn Lane, Rutgers; Barry Ableman, OSG; Steve Fittante, Middlesex DOT; Hamou Meghdir, NJTPA; Tom Clark, NJ Transit; Frank Gambatese, South Brunswick Twp

Rail

- South Brunswick is still hopeful for a new rail station – public survey shows strong support. They are not sure how to handle development in the surrounding area – there is about 400 available acres. They do not want a lot of new housing – they

may want to look at developing about 100 surrounding acres. New COAH requirement is 500 units.

- There are several issues relating to the proposed rail station and TOD at the old J&J site in North Brunswick, including the market for proposed housing, retail, etc.; need for train turn-around; and need for local road improvements.
- People generally believe that both South Brunswick and North Brunswick stations could be viable.
- Jersey Avenue station? The group noted ideas for expanding / improving access to station, but it was their general sense that if we get South and North Brunswick stations, we won't need Jersey Ave.
- New Brunswick station / Gateway project – issues of bus connections / circulation and general traffic circulation are not yet resolved.
- All stations have general needs for increased parking capacity, improved information, increased transit and shuttle connections, and improved bike – ped accommodations.
- Link the NEC (and US 1 BRT) with the US 130 corridor.
- There is need for increased “reverse commute” service, i.e., westbound service.

BRT

- The group expressed general support for both proposed BRTs, as well as eventually connecting the BRTs, perhaps at North Brunswick.
- Design the New Brunswick BRT to provide access between Busch and Livingston campuses and downtown.

Bus

- Need to improve downtown bus service and links to train station.
- The biggest issue for RU buses is moving through downtown.
- RU has done an origin / destination survey for faculty, students, et al. to identify possible target markets. It is considering expanding service to Highland Park.
- RU is proceeding with its College Ave. greening project, which would convert College Ave into a transitway.
- The County is entering its route information into Google mapping.
- The County is conducting a study in the southern part of the county to evaluate existing various services and possible need for new services. It is seeking to coordinate existing services and expand services, as appropriate. One concept is for new service between Jamesburg and Plainsboro, particularly to serve the new medical center.
- The County is considering providing all-day service along Easton Ave. up to the Davidson Avenue area in Franklin (expansion of existing DASH service).
- Maintain and possibly enhance local bus service along Route 27, perhaps using “skip stop” scheduling. Consider adding park and ride capacity.
- South Brunswick would like eventually to connect its new bus service to Franklin to the north and Plainsboro to the south.
- South Brunswick is interested in buying and expanding the US 130 park and ride.

Roadways

- Widen US 1 in South Brunswick
- Improve intersections of US 1 with Cozzens Lane / Adams Lane and Finnegan Lane.

- Pursue implementation of Route 27 Renaissance project improvements
- Consider new Turnpike exit (8B?)
- Complete CR 522 extension
- Improve Livingston Avenue & New St. intersection, including pedestrian enhancements

Bike-Ped

- Implement New Brunswick bikeway system

Land Use

- Has there been any thought to formal regional governance approaches?
- Some towns do understand regional impacts of local decisions
- May need legislative change.
- Existing MLUL may provide foundation
- Need to look at jobs to housing. Housing lags because of resistance to schools and taxes. This is biggest issue of all. Amend MLUL to allow towns to assess developers for schools. Or, revise tax system, so that school funding is not solely dependent on property tax.
- Amend MLUL to allow form-based codes.
- Possible use of transportation improvement districts
- Towns won't be inclined to give up home rule

Summary Discussion

Feedback on the meeting was positive:

- The Magnetic North image provides context for thinking long term, and opens you up to more radical long term change
- The small size of the group (around 12 people) made it easier to stay on track and discouraged grandstanding
- Focusing break out work on the map was productive