

TRIANGLE COMMUTER NEWS

JUNE 1995

A Publication of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission

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Liberty Tubes to Get a New Southern Interchange

In an extraordinary display of intergovernmental cooperation, planners from federal, state and local agencies have agreed to move ahead quickly and build a new partial interchange at the southern portal of the Liberty Tunnels. The project, which is directed at one of Pittsburgh's most persistent traffic bottlenecks, will carry traffic along Route 51 up and over its current intersection with West Liberty Avenue.

The new interchange, which is projected to cost \$28 million, has been put on a fast track in order to have work completed by the time of the 1999-2000 Ft. Pitt Bridge and Tunnel closing. A recently announced year-long postponement in the rehabilitation project, which was intended to allow PAT's Airport Busway to be completed, will help to accommodate the Liberty Tube interchange as well. Construction of

the interchange, which is expected to begin in early 1997, will take two years and require the acquisition of rights of way through some adjacent properties. A number of nearby intersection improvements are also visualized. As much as eighty percent of the project's cost will be paid out of federal funds.

On April 10, SPRPC amended its Transportation Improvement Program — which sets priorities on the use of federal transportation funds in the six-county region — to accommodate the project. A 30-day public comment period and a May 10 PennDOT public hearing about the project, provided opportunities for approximately 150 local residents to offer their input to the project's development. An initial assessment of minimal environmental impact and a preliminary determi-

nation that there was no need for a detailed major investment study, will also expedite work on the project.

A West Liberty Avenue ramp, which is proposed as part of the new interchange, will allow traffic leaving the tunnel and headed for southbound Rt. 51 to use a loop ramp.

Although it represents a permanent and long-awaited improvement, construction of the new interchange will create temporary delays for commuters in both directions. Repainting and reconstruction of the Liberty Tunnel floor will take place in 1996, just in advance of the interchange construction, forcing one direction at a time to close while work is under way. Work on the interchange itself will not require tunnel closings. ▲



Those Hazy, Crazy Ozone Action Daze of Summer

A coalition involving an assortment of public agencies, auto service station owners, environmental organizations and a power company, has been formed to promote practical, voluntary responses to dangerous ozone levels in Pittsburgh during hot summer weather. The alliance, called the Southwestern Pennsylvania Ozone Action Partnership, was formally launched in a June 1 ceremony at a North Side Sunoco station. Similar programs have been implemented in eight other cities.

The purpose of the Ozone Action Days program is to scale back air emissions from both stationary and mobile sources whenever weather conditions force ground level ozone toward health-threatening levels. Ozone, an allotrope of oxygen and a chemical building block of harmful smog, is formed by the interaction of heat

and sunlight with oxides of nitrogen and hydrocarbon exhaust gases. Dangerous episodes can cause respiratory problems, choking, coughing and lung damage. Although children and the elderly are most susceptible to the effects of ground-level ozone, even healthy adults exercising outdoors on days when ozone levels are high can experience reduced lung function.

The program works by alerting the public to days when problem levels of ozone are most likely to occur. In Pittsburgh, the high ozone "season" typically runs from June through September. The program's broadcast alerts ask industries, individuals, and government agencies to voluntarily refrain from certain activities, and to participate in others, which can help the area avoid exceeding safe ozone levels. For example: combining automobile-based errands to minimize cold starts; avoiding gasoline spills when refueling; maintaining gas engines; conserving electric use; defer-

ring lawn mowing; and limiting daytime driving by carpooling or taking transit.

The Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, or CAAA, established air quality standards for urbanized areas throughout the country. Computer models and on-site monitoring stations are used to verify compliance. Failure to attain those standards could force EPA to impose sanctions, including the withholding of federal transportation funds.

As originally enacted, CAAA designated the seven-county southwestern Pennsylvania region as a "moderate non-attainment" area for ozone. However on May 26, the federal EPA approved a request from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources to redesignate the region as an attainment zone. That change relieved officials of the need to reduce the area's volatile hydrocarbon emissions by 15 percent. But it still

continued on page 3.

Pitt, PAT Push Pact

Pitt students, staff and faculty members can now take any PAT bus between Oakland and Shadyside or Squirrel Hill, free of charge. The new arrangement, which went into effect May 1, replaces a private contract service to those same communities which was formerly provided by Lenzner Coach Lines.

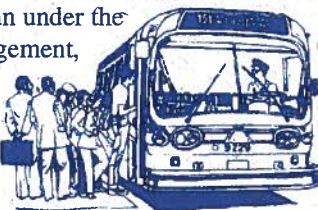
Fare-free rides are available to any members of the university community who can show a current and valid Pitt ID card. However the free rides are limited to the "U-Zone" — an area bounded by Pocusset Street, Forward Avenue, and Beechwood Boulevard in Squirrel Hill, and by Centre Avenue in Shadyside. Riders who want to travel beyond those boundaries — which are identified on bus stop signs within the service area — must pay PAT's normal fares.

In addition to regularly scheduled PAT buses, the service includes two new evening routes developed specifically for this year-long demonstration project: the 74U to Shadyside and the 64U to Squirrel Hill. Their schedules are coordinated with

Pitt's class change times. But unlike the previous university shuttles, PAT's new routes are open to the public for a normal zone one fare.

The new arrangement with PAT took effect after the conclusion of Pitt's Spring session, when the university's enrollment approached 30,000. Since Pitt's summer registration is only about 5,000 students, the system will not be able to fully prove itself until September, when the Fall session begins and additional bus service is added. Both Pitt and PAT will use the four-month interim period to work out any initial kinks in the service.

Because of the large number of PAT routes which routinely serve Oakland, the new arrangement makes more seats and more frequent runs available to the university community than under the previous arrangement, according to Pitt Transportation Manager John Morgan.



Uptown, Downtown Parking Garages Studied

The feasibility of building a new multi-story public parking garage in the Golden Triangle on a lot adjacent to the United Way building along Ft. Pitt Boulevard is currently under study by city officials. A new garage on what is now a 70-space surface lot could help to mitigate downtown's parking shortfall which is projected to be 2,800 spaces in two years and 6,000 by the end of the decade. But initial cost estimates for the structure, which far exceed the amount that could be recovered from parking fees, do not favor its construction, according to city planners.

However, the final conclusion about whether to pursue a new city-operated garage in the heart of downtown hinges on a related decision, expected this summer, about the prospects for another project. A 1,400 space parking garage and LRT stop, which could be upgraded at some future time into a full-featured Intermodal Transportation Center, has been proposed for the eastern fringe of the Golden Triangle. The initial phase of that project, which includes a First Avenue garage between the Liberty Bridge and PAT's LRT bridge, would cost less than \$20 million, according to Pittsburgh Parking Authority Director Guy Costa. However, that figure does not include the cost of building a new PAT LRT stop, which Costa says is needed to make the Center feasible. Nor is it clear at this time how the entire project would be financed.

A short-term solution is also under study by the Parking Authority: new on-street parking. Meters for 200 short-term parking spaces on a variety of streets in the Golden Triangle during off-peak hours, as well as 100 new all-day metered spots on streets near the Civic Arena and Connolly Vocational School in the Lower Hill, are also being evaluated. "We'd like to get started on that," Costa said.

Wharf Parking Down, Up, and Out

Parking on the city's 107-space Allegheny Wharf, which fell to less than 45 percent of capacity following a sharp January rate increase from \$4 to \$6 a day, has now recovered to about 90 percent of capacity, according to the Pittsburgh Parking Authority. Overall parking revenue for the wharf, which had fallen by approximately one-third after the rate hike, prompted the Authority to scale its day rates back to just \$4.50. "Most of our customers came back once we lowered the rates," city Parking Authority Director Guy Costa reported.

But the rate rollback will have only a temporary impact on parking if a plan proposed by the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust with the support of city and PennDOT officials is approved. According to the plan, a two-level area along the Allegheny between Stanwix Street and the Convention Center would be transformed into a river path featuring trees, boulders, vines and mini-amphitheaters. Traffic lanes through the upper area would be reduced and all parking along the wharf would be eliminated.

Detailed design of the park is expected to begin this summer; construction could begin as early as next summer or the following spring. Funding would come from a combination of public and private sources.

Parking along the 863-vehicle Mon Wharf, which also experienced a January rate increase, remains high, according to officials. But there, too, the capacity will be cut, and eventually eliminated, by improvement projects.

Initially, more than 100 spaces are slated to be removed as Port Authority's new Mon River bridge piers are put into place. Subsequent reconstruction of the Parkway ramps leading to the Ft. Pitt Bridge will reduce the wharf's parking capacity even further. Then reconstruction of Ft. Pitt Boulevard's eastbound lanes will sever the wharf's entrance ramp. Finally, a new park spanning the Monongahela riverfront between the Smithfield and Ft. Pitt bridges will occupy the place of the already-closed parking areas.

Those hazy, crazy ozone action daze of summer *continued from cover.*

requires a maintenance plan to make sure emissions won't increase. And if air quality monitors show that the region's emission levels are again exceeding federal standards, the area could easily slip

back into a non-attainment status. SPRPC has agreed to administer the project's financial and bookkeeping requirements. In addition to providing broadcast alerts, the Ozone Action

Program issues brochures, tip sheets, and other information to interested residents. An Ozone Hotline, 1-800-333-7688, has also been established. ▲



Detours, Delays and Diversions

Commuters will continue to encounter a long series of repair and improvement projects involving the region's roads, bridges and interchanges. Key projects include:

Route 8. New left turn lanes will be added to Rt. 8 at Elfinwild and Kleber Roads in Hampton and Shaler townships. During their year-long construction, traffic flow will be restricted to one lane in each direction.

Smithfield Street Bridge. Rebuilt and reopened last fall, the bridge is closed again, this time for paint removal and repainting of the landmark structure. The three-month project is expected to conclude by the end of June.

Allegheny Valley Expressway. The replacement of five separate bridge decks along Rt. 28 between the Highland Park Bridge and the Blawnox exit will create a variety of lane restrictions and traffic crossovers until work is completed around Thanksgiving.

McKnight Road. A year-long resurfacing project along a two-mile stretch of McKnight through Ross Township will restrict traffic to one lane in each direction.

Lebanon Church Road. Resurfacing and the construction of three new left turn lanes will restrict traffic along Rt. 885 in West Mifflin to one lane in each direction through the end of the 1996 construction season.

Ohio River Blvd. Two road widening projects along Rt. 65 in Edgeworth and in Pittsburgh, will restrict traffic to one lane in each direction through November of 1996.

I-79. The northern junction of I-70 with I-79 will be rebuilt together with connecting roadways and bridges in a two-year project. Traffic detour plans are not yet set.

I-279. Work to widen the highway's bridge over Suffolk Street in the East Street Valley to include a shoulder lane will cause inbound traffic to be restricted to two lanes during morning rush hour and one lane at other times through the rest of the summer. ▲

Vanpool Riders Needed

Weekday vanpools to downtown Pittsburgh depart from and return to communities throughout the region. Current passenger openings include the following:

From: Butler, Route 8

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$85
Contact: Cory Lynn Simmons
Phone: 566-5521

From: Canonsburg, Eighty-Four, Houston

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$84
Contact: Jane Keener
Phone: 434-3644

From: Cranberry

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$85
Contact: Jack VanArsdale
Phone: 236-2864

From: Delmont, Export, Murrysville

Work times: 8:00 - 4:45
Monthly fare: \$95
Contact: Linda Zoskey
Phone: 565-7914

From: Export, Murrysville

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$90
Contact: Barry Ryan
Phone: 234-6152

From: Gibsonia

Work times: 7:30 - 4:15
Monthly fare: \$90
Contact: John Guadagnino
Phone: 433-5581

From: Greensburg, Jeannette, Irwin

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$85
Contact: Joe Lastik
Phone: 434-2765

From: Greensburg, Jeannette

Work times: 8:00 - 5:15
Monthly fare: \$95
Contact: Keven Bossart
Phone: 577-3475

From: Greensburg

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$95
Contact: Gary McConnell
Phone: 644-6695

From: Greensburg, Irwin

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$100
Contact: George Bialon
Phone: 234-1495

From: Imperial

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$80
Contact: Ronald Senovich
Phone: 681-8311

From: Industry, Beaver

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$80
Contact: Deborah Osman
Phone: 234-5397

From: Irwin, N. Huntingdon

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$75
Contact: David Onderf
Phone: 562-6248

From: Leechburg, Apollo

Work times: 7:30 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$87
Contact: Robert Reddinger
Phone: 644-4203

From: Monroeville

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$75
Contact: Harry Banks
Phone: 433-4835

From: Murrysville, Monroeville

Work times: 8:00 - 4:45
Monthly fare: \$77
Contact: Mark Gibson
Phone: 497-6792

From: New Kensington, Oakmont, Plum

Work times: 8:00 - 5:15
Monthly fare: \$79
Contact: George Carabin
Phone: 433-3432

From: Pleasant Hills

Work times: 8:30 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$65
Contact: Wade Fox
Phone: 391-5590 x 312

From: Plum Boro, Penn Hills

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$73
Contact: John Smith
Phone: 255-7717

From: Robinson, Forest Grove

Work times: 7:30 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$85
Contact: Ray Terpack
Phone: 633-3792

From: West Mifflin

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$70
Contact: Adesta Kondas
Phone: 633-3892



Telecommuting Consultant Outlines Benefits and Pitfalls of the Virtual Workplace

Pamela Tucker, a Maryland-based consultant who specializes in helping companies to organize and manage telecommuting programs for their employees, is an outspoken proponent of off-site work strategies. But Ms. Tucker, who spoke at a May 9 workshop on the subject sponsored by Bell-Atlantic in Pittsburgh, also knows first hand the shortcomings of commuting by phone, fax and modem.

As a pioneering practitioner of telecommuting during an earlier phase of her career, Ms. Tucker learned through personal experience that there are limits on reporting to work electronically. First of all, she discovered, you can't totally replace face-to-face contact; being on-site at least part of the time is essential. And second, telecommuting won't succeed as a work format unless your supervisor is really supportive. Telework for any given employee should average only 1 to 3 days a week, she now tells her clients, and all the participants in telecommuting programs should be volunteers, from top to bottom. A different set of supervisory skills is also required in order to manage a

workforce remotely, she said.

But despite these limitations — as well as a series of concerns involving liability, security, costs, supervision and staff availability — a growing number of corporations and government agencies have demonstrated an interest in evaluating the telecommuting concept for themselves. In fact, she said, the practice is growing at about 20% a year. And that doesn't count the much larger number of companies engaged in what she refers to as 'underground' telecommuting — informal arrangements to allow a geographically distributed workforce to connect with their home offices from hotels, client locations, and other non-traditional field sites.

The motives for today's heightened interest in telecommuting differ from one organization to another, as do their strategies. For example, in cities with high levels of air pollution, federal law requires employers to achieve reductions in solo driving among their employees. By substituting telecommuting for auto commuting, companies in these locations are attempting to satisfy U.S. environmen-

tal mandates. However Pittsburgh's pollution problem is not bad enough to require these types of programs locally.

Keeping a lid on office space costs is also a frequently cited plus for telecommuting, particularly among rapidly-growing firms. But its greatest benefits, according to Ms. Tucker, are in the area of human resources. Telecommuting raises employee productivity, she claims. It also reduces stress as well as stress-related costs such as absenteeism, turnover, and the recruiting and training of replacement workers.

Although resistance to the cultural changes associated with telecommuting is a frequent barrier to its adoption, carefully crafted pilot programs are helping companies all around the country to work out answers for themselves, she said. Their answers differ widely, she noted. But with approximately 60% of the American workforce now involved in information-based activity, and with most of it being done in electronic form, the pool of candidates for telecommuting programs is expanding rapidly. ▲

What Do You Think?

If you would like to comment on any of the articles in this issue of *Triangle Commuter News* or if you have any story ideas or commuter-related issues that you would like to see developed in future editions, please write or call us at the address noted on the mailing panel, below. ▲



4

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The preparation of this publication was financed in part through a grant from the United States Department of Transportation, the Federal Transit Administration, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Department of Transportation of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, as well as the counties of Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Washington, Westmoreland, and the City of Pittsburgh.