

LEBCO MPO Project Prioritization and Selection Process



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**Prepared for the LEBCO MPO
by the transportation staff of the
Lebanon County Planning Department**

Introduction...

The Lebanon County Metropolitan Planning Organization (LEBCO MPO) employs qualitative and quantitative processes and techniques to identify, evaluate, prioritize and select projects for inclusion in the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). This document summarizes the MPO's project prioritization and selection process.

Federal Regulations...

The LEBCO MPO is the federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for a major portion of Lebanon County. As such, LEBCO MPO has a mandated responsibility to determine how Federal transportation funds and state and local/private matching funds will be spent within that area. The urbanized area encompasses the City of Lebanon, four (4) boroughs and twelve (12) townships. Lebanon County includes over 133,500 people and encompasses 363 square miles with 26 municipalities.

Federal regulations based upon current and past federal surface transportation laws and rules for metropolitan transportation planning (23 CFR Part 450.324 (1)(1)) state, *“As a management tool for monitoring progress in implementing the transportation plan, the TIP should identify the criteria and process for prioritizing implementation of transportation plan elements, including multimodal tradeoffs, for inclusion in the TIP and any changes in priorities from previous TIPs.”*

LEBCO MPO Project Prioritization and Selection Process...

LEBCO MPO employs mainly a qualitative process to prioritize and select projects for inclusion in the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). However, numerous quantitative pieces of information are used to make qualitative judgments. Staffing and funding constraints will probably prohibit the LEBCO MPO from utilizing tools like travel demand models or candidate project ranking criteria matrices, and they may not be needed here on a county-wide basis due to the size and nature of the urbanized area and the county's very small transportation budget.

The **adopted Lebanon County Comprehensive Plan** and the **LEBCO MPO's LRTP** were developed together to link land use and transportation decision-making to enhance existing communities and to protect resources. Planned and well-managed (“smart” and sustainable) growth and resource conservation are the focus of both plans. This takes many forms, including but not limited to:

- 1. Encourage distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.**
 - a. Direct development toward existing communities and utilities to strengthen and revitalize them.
 - b. Encourage the appropriate redevelopment of existing vacant, blighted or underutilized sites.
 - c. Discourage zoning that encourages sprawl.

- d. Coordinate land use, utility and transportation planning to make development and redevelopment attractive to developers and sustainable by local government.
- 2. Plan for economic growth and development and redevelopment that expands employment, promotes businesses and provides family-sustaining jobs.**
- a. Enhance the stability of the local economy through business retention, expansion and diversification efforts.
 - b. Prepare “shovel-ready” sites for target industries.
 - c. Provide an educated, trained workforce sufficient to maintain economic prosperity and meet modern technological demands.
 - d. Implement multifaceted strategies to enhance the agricultural and forestry industries through land protection, workforce training, and sustainable production and harvesting practices.
- 3. Protect the natural and cultural landscape that defines our local identity as Lebanon County.**
- a. Acknowledge, enhance and protect the open space, farmland, scenic views, historic resources and critical environmental areas that are important to the county. Facilitate acquisition or preservation of key sites.
 - b. Link these resources with existing communities through open space planning, conservation greenways, and recreational paths and trails, where appropriate.
 - c. Enhance this green infrastructure by conserving and managing vegetation in greenways and woodlots; by establishing street trees in developments; and by restoring vegetation along stream banks.
 - d. Encourage the continued use of historic building patterns and designs with modern materials. Promote an understanding of these resources among citizens.
 - e. Protect threatened natural features and implement appropriate restoration for damaged resources, with emphasis on water resources.
 - f. Enhance and restore the interconnections of natural systems to sustain them.
 - g. Coordinate conservation and preservation activities on a resource scale, by watershed, mountain range or other holistic approaches.
- 4. Encourage compact building and development designs.**
- a. Mix compatible land uses, especially within larger developments or revitalization projects, to reduce vehicular travel and encourage walkable business and residential neighborhoods.
 - b. Promote energy efficient site design to reduce energy consumption for heating and cooling.
 - c. Promote the use and production of alternative energy sources.
- 5. Broaden the range of housing opportunities and choices.**
- a. Encourage sound maintenance and modernization of existing housing units, as well as the utility infrastructure that serves them.
 - b. Increase the range of housing types in new housing construction.

- c. Encourage development that provides housing, business and employment opportunities close to one another.
6. **Provide transportation choices for residents, businesses and visitors.**
 - a. Maintain a safe, efficient, interconnected and accessible transportation system.
 - b. Enhance and expand the variety of travel modes in existing and future development, with particular emphasis on energy efficiency.
 - c. Target transportation investment for maximum local and regional benefit.
 - d. Maintain and improve the existing transportation system first; focus on affordable operational improvements second.
 - e. Encourage local and private financial support to help expedite transportation project delivery.
 7. **Provide adequate, cost effective public services to meet the needs of the community.**
 - a. Expand recreation programs and services for all ages.
 - b. Increase local parkland and interconnect parks with trails.
 - c. Maintain and expand services to protect human health, safety and welfare.
 - d. Share service contracts, where cost effective.
 8. **Think, communicate, and plan regionally; implement locally.**
 - a. Share knowledge and strive for effective public communication.
 - b. Encourage continuous dialogue among municipalities, government agencies and school districts regarding community growth and resource conservation.
 - c. Encourage community and stakeholder communication and collaborative decision-making.
 - d. Develop partnerships among public and private sectors -- public-public, public-private, and private-private -- to make community planning and associated projects affordable.

These and other comprehensive plan tenets form the basis by which all planning takes place in Lebanon County.

The **LEBCO MPO's vision statement, goals, policy statements and action plan recommendations** that are included in the LRTP serve as the initial "sounding board" for all candidate projects, programs, services and other transportation-related initiatives. The **federal planning factors** and the **Pennsylvania Mobility Plan's goals, objectives, strategies, and implementation actions** also assist during the initial screening process.

Pennsylvania's past ten (10) Keystone Principles and Criteria for sustainable economic development and resource conservation and **PennDOT's ten (10) Smart Transportation Principles** are qualitative sets of criteria that are considered when making transportation planning and funding decisions.

Combined with the above Federal, state, and county perspectives, **municipal plans and their specific goals, objectives, and recommended projects** are also used to determine consistency as projects, programs and services are proposed for implementation.

Existing conditions and trends provide valuable quantitative information about the performance, efficiency and effectiveness of the existing transportation system in Lebanon County. This information and analyses covers highways and bridges, transit, rail freight, aviation, and non-motorized transportation. The data, information, and analyses in the LRTP are provided by PennDOT or others or come from MPO-sponsored studies.

The Lebanon County Planning Department (LCPD) serves as the staff support for the LEBCO MPO, and they receive quantitative information and analyses from a variety of sources. For example, staff routinely utilizes the Highway Safety Network Screening tool made available by PennDOT to determine locations (road segments and intersections) for funding with Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) Funds. PennDOT District 8-0 does detailed evaluations and safety audits at key accident cluster locations, and provides the MPO with vetted candidate projects for funding. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) reviews and approves the eligibility of these candidate safety projects. Municipalities and the Pennsylvania State Police also share their accident reports and recommendations with the LCPD staff. The US Route 422 Road Safety Audit (RSA) that was completed in November of 2010 and the RSA for PA Route 241 that was completed in the summer of 2014 and most recently in 2022 an RSA was completed for Rt. 934 also provided valuable data and project recommendations for these two key corridors which have since led to implemented TIP projects.

PennDOT's existing transportation performance management and monitoring systems (e.g., safety (PM-1) pavement & bridge (PM-2), Congestion and System Performance (PM-3), Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan etc.) provide invaluable data and data sets to perform various analyses to better determine MPO project and program priorities. For example, PennDOT District 8-0 provides the LCPD staff with significant bridge data and analyses so the best decisions can be made on whether to rehabilitate a bridge now or to wait for a bridge replacement later, or to determine which set of structurally deficient bridges to advance at this time and which ones can wait until a later date. *The LEBCO MPO has taken prior action to support all recommended Transportation Performance Management (TPM) strategies proposed by PennDOT Central Office and PennDOT District 8-0 to ensure the maximum effort is made to reach require agreed upon targets for our regions' portion of the transportation network. The LEBCO MPO fully supports the utilization of the strategies laid out in the statewide TPM process and its process to utilize Performance Based Planning and Programming when developing the LEBCO MPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).*

The PennDOT District 8-0 **Regional Operations Plan (ROP)** provides significant operations and management data, analysis, and project/program recommendations related

to intelligent transportation systems (ITS) improvements on the county's interstates and principal arterials.

Interstate Management Program projects are shared with the LEBCO MPO by the staff from the central office of PennDOT. These projects are added to the LRTP and TIP as funding becomes available from the state. (Please note that Interstate Management Program project funding is outside of the regular allocation of Federal and State highway and bridge funds that come to the LEBCO MPO.)

The LEBCO MPO has completed its **Congestion Management Processes (CMP) Plan**. The CMP provides a tool box for managing/reducing recurring and non-recurring congestion by:

- ✓ Systematically monitoring performance of the transportation system
- ✓ Screening corridors to identify and prioritize problem areas
- ✓ Identifying potential solutions
- ✓ Targeting strategies to address special needs based upon special events
- ✓ Engaging interested parties, stakeholders and municipalities to verify potential projects
- ✓ Justifying investments and solutions for inclusion in the LRTP and TIP.

The CMP was updated in late June of 2014; the consultant study was called Lebanon County Moves, after which key projects were added to the LRTP and current TIP.

Traffic counts and Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS) data have been and will continue to be used to determine existing conditions and to predict future needs and solutions.

Transit data and trend information are provided by Lebanon Transit (LT) (formerly County of Lebanon Transit (COLT)) staff or Lebanon Transit's consultant(s). For example, the Northern Lebanon Transit Study that was completed in June of 2015 identified where new routes, bus stops/shelters, etc. could be located in the future to accommodate the growth hubs for warehousing, distribution centers and large-sale manufacturing in NE Lebanon County and NW Berks County. The recent results from the PennDOT Regional Transit Consolidation Study, Phase 2 will also will enable us to work locally and regionally on short and long-term recommendations for expanded transit service between Lebanon, Hershey and Harrisburg. Recently in 2023 LT completed a special study to evaluate existing service routes and identify needed route changes to enhance service with Lebanon County's continued growth.

Freight rail data and candidate projects are provided by Norfolk Southern, PennDOT's Bureau of Rail Freight, Ports and Waterway, and the ongoing work of the region's planning partners regarding goods movement in south central Pennsylvania. Rail freight projects come to the LEBCO MPO from various sources, such as municipalities, redevelopment authorities, economic development corporations, individual businesses, etc. The MPO reviews and comments on all candidate projects for

PennDOT's Rail Freight Capital Budget and Transportation Assistance Program, and they are incorporated into the LRTP as appropriate.

Aviation information is secured through various sources including Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA's) Airport Facilities Directory and Airport IQ 5010 Master Records and Reports Data Base, the state's various statewide and regional airport studies, the Lebanon County 2002 Airport Feasibility Study and Master Plan and any individual local airport studies. All candidate aviation projects that are submitted to PennDOT for funding in the Twelve Year Transportation Program are also shared with the LEBCO MPO for review and comment and inclusion in the LRTP.

Bicycle and pedestrian issues and opportunities are introduced by "grass roots" organizations such as the Lebanon Valley Rails-to-Trails (LVRT), Inc., the Lebanon Valley Bicycle Coalition (LVBC), individual advocates, elected officials, municipal agencies, etc. LVBC's bike map, for example, are excellent tools to identify needed shoulder widenings that will accommodate walking and bicycling. The MPO was also minimally involved in the Regional Bicycle Connectivity Study with the Harrisburg MPO and Derry Township. LEBCO MPO funding along with local/private funding could be the financial package that brings these types of projects to fruition.

The neighboring MPOs in Harrisburg, Lancaster and Reading also provide much needed information/analysis and proposed projects related to corridors of common concern, such as Interstates 78 and 81, US Routes 22, 322 and 422, and PA Routes 72, 419 and 501. These planning partners also work together on other intermodal and multi-modal initiatives such as goods movement, commuter services through the Susquehanna Regional Transportation Partnership, Commuter Services of Pennsylvania and major transit studies (Corridor 1 ... the Capitol – Red Rose Corridor).

Access management is a new tool being used by the LEBCO MPO. The county and three municipalities (North Cornwall Township, North Lebanon Township and Jackson Township) developed access management ordinances, in order to (1) promote safe and efficient traffic flow on higher order roadways, and (2) protecting the rights of abutting landowners to reasonable street access. These access management regulations and design standards are helping the LEBCO MPO to make sound project recommendations throughout the county.

As new federally-mandated **asset management and performance management analysis tools** become reality in the coming years, these data sets will greatly help us to make better transportation funding decisions.

MPO-sponsored studies, like the ongoing Cornwall Center Multimodal Transportation Study, Market Street Feasibility Study (Jonestown, PA), LVRT Phase 8 Study, Cleona Boro Complete Streets Feasibility Study and others key studies will provide valuable project recommendations for future LRTPs and TIPs.

Ambient air quality analyses are performed by PennDOT and its consultants for the LEBCO MPO. This work is done for LRTP and TIP amendments where regionally significant projects are being added, as well as, for the entire LRTP and the TIP when major updates occur (typically, every four years). These analyses help the MPO to prioritize and select the best mix of projects that improve our transportation system and air quality at the same time.

The **Pennsylvania Turnpike** has an interchange in Lancaster County with PA Route 72, which services both Lebanon and Lancaster Counties. The Turnpike provides valuable automobile and truck data related to this interchange. They share their projects with the MPO, which helps to better understand how their mainline and this particular interchange might affect PA Route 72 and other Lebanon County roadways.

Municipal surveys and newspaper/website surveys are information gathering tools that are often used by the LEBCO MPO. The information received, the needs that are identified and the projects that are proposed are used by the LCPD staff to make recommendations through the LEBCO MPO decision-making committee structure.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and Environmental Justice mandates are another set of processes that help to sort out the appropriate mix of projects, program and initiatives that are supported by the LEBCO MPO. More details on this matter can be obtained from the LEBCO MPO's Public Participation Plan (PPP).

Revenue projections and year of expenditure (YOE) analyses are performed by the LEBCO MPO to determine the financial resources (Federal, state, local and private) that are available for various transportation projects, programs and services. These financial projections are completed for the LRTP and TIP to ensure fiscal responsibility.

PennDOT's Connects (formerly Linking Planning and NEPA (LPN)) Project Initiation Forms (PIF) are now beginning to be used by the Lebanon County Planning Department (LCPD) staff to better assess how candidate LRTP/TIP projects may address existing concerns and ensure communication and coordination among key stakeholders at the development of each project. The LCPD staff members have begun to work with the PIF forms for new plan/TIP projects. District 8-0 has also begun utilization of these new PennDOT Connects PIF forms as well.

Local/private commitments of funds is another very real way to help to sort out MPO priorities. If a municipality, for example, feels strongly enough to commit funding to a specific project, program or initiative, this commitment tells the MPO that there is local support, and minimal, or no public controversy.

With the current update of the LEBCO MPO's Long Range Transportation Plan, the MPO utilized the **PennDOT Mobility Plan Transportation Model** for various "what if" analyses. This was a valuable tool to assess differing land use and transportation futures.

LEBCO MPO Transportation Planning and Programming Decision-Making Process...

An MPO Policy Board and Technical Planning Committee consist of a broad spectrum of representatives from across Lebanon County and the state (PennDOT), and direct the LEBCO MPO transportation planning and programming process. The Policy Board is the MPO decision-making body and the Technical Committee advises the Policy Board. All plans and programs are presented to the LEBCO MPO Policy Board for approval and adoption.

The following charts reflect the current membership of the Policy Board and Technical Committee.

POLICY BOARD

Entity/Agency	Number of Votes
County Government – Commissioners	3
City Government – Mayor	1
Lebanon Transit – Director	1
Lebanon Valley Chamber of Commerce – President	1
Municipal Officials At-large – Township or Borough	2
PennDOT	2

The LEBCO MPO Policy Board also includes the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as ex-officio members.

TECHNICAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

Entity/Agency	Number of Votes
County Government	1
Lebanon County Planning Department (LCPD)	2
City Government	1
Lebanon Transit	1
Lebanon Valley Economic Development Corp. - President	1
Municipal At-Large – Township or Borough	2
Aviation	1
PennDOT	2

The LEBCO MPO Technical Planning Committee also includes representatives from the Lebanon City-County GIS Office, the Lebanon County Farm Bureau, the Tourist Bureau, the Community of Lebanon Association, Lebanon Valley Bicycle Coalition, the Lebanon Valley Rails-to-Trails (LVRT), Inc., the Emergency Management Agency and the City of Lebanon Authority as non-voting members to incorporate the expertise offered by these providers. The Lebanon County Community Action Partnership (CAP) has a voice and vote at Technical Committee meetings only for matters related to state and federal funding for coordinated public transportation services. The FHWA, FTA and EPA are ex-officio members as well.

Conclusion...

Project prioritization and selection is a lengthy and involved process within the LEBCO MPO. It involves the LCPD staff, PennDOT, FHWA, FTA, Lebanon Transit (LT), the Technical Planning Committee, the Policy Board and all of the other interested and involved parties mentioned above. This process and the techniques used are decision-support tools that can be and are being employed individually, or collectively to prioritize and select projects for the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Projects are added to the LRTP first; then they move into the TIP for implementation. The qualitative and quantitative tools listed above will continue to evolve and improve as the LEBCO MPO “ages” and becomes more sophisticated. But in the end, the vision remains the same –

... a transportation system for Lebanon County that will safely, efficiently and effectively serve the mobility, access and travel needs of residents, businesses and visitors.