

Freedom Road History and Master Planning Process

Plans for major road improvements to Freedom Road, a state road that connects Routes 19 and 228 with Beaver County to the west of Cranberry Township, have been under active discussion since the mid-1980s. Much of that discussion was prompted by businesses along the Ohio River in Beaver County which had difficulty accessing the Turnpike and I-79. That led PennDOT to propose a project known as Crows Run – a new, limited-access highway linking Beaver Valley to both Interstate roads.

During the Crows Run project, three different alignments were proposed for the roadway, all of which were opposed by the affected communities. As a result, in 2001, PennDOT abandoned the idea and instead proposed a series of smaller improvements to roads in the area which were already being used for traffic to and from Beaver County, including Freedom Road.

Cranberry actively partnered with PennDOT on several phases of improvements including securing rights of way, signalizing intersections, adding turning lanes, improving drainage, paving shoulders, and assisting in plans for a five-lane Turnpike crossover. But in the summer of 2007 – even though preliminary design for the Turnpike bridge had already been completed – the General Assembly enacted Act 44 which required PennDOT to put repair projects ahead of new capacity ones like the Freedom Road expansion.

Although it is unclear when or whether state policy will change and make financing available for the needed improvements to Freedom Road, what is certain is that the long-term health and viability of the corridor will depend upon incremental decisions related to transportation and land use.

Questions about the essential character of the future upgraded Freedom Road and its relationship to nearby properties were not resolved in the Township's comprehensive planning process that concluded in April, 2009. Because of the unique and highly detailed concerns affecting that roadway, the Cranberry Plan's recommendations included Action Strategy #6J, which is ranked as a high priority:

“Work with residents and businesses impacted by the Freedom Road Corridor to develop a land use and transportation master plan that will guide future land use decisions and implementation of road improvements in the Freedom Road Corridor.”

The Township Board of Supervisors, upon review of the challenges facing the corridor, approved implementation of a special planning process to fulfill the Cranberry Plan recommendation, pursuant to Resolution #2008-63, dated September 4, 2008 (attached). The intended outcome was to collect input from community stakeholders that would be used to make recommendations that will have the greatest positive affect on the corridor.

Freedom Road Study Committees were formed and tasked with analyzing land use and transportation together under the assumption that additional improvements would be needed to relieve congestion and improve traffic flow in the corridor. The group considered what the road might look like, what land uses would be appropriate in the corridor, and how those land uses could affect traffic.

Their mission was to generate ideas that could be used create a Master Plan that addressed key issues of both transportation and land use. Specifically:

Transportation

- Implement a context sensitive design.
- Control traffic flow through access management.

Land Use

- Maintain property values.
- Mitigate impacts of new development.

The Master Plan process involved six sequential steps. The Planning Advisory Commission meeting on December 7 is step four in that process.

STEP 1: Approval of planning process and creation of committees.

- Three committees created; one for each study area.

STEP 2: Hold a stakeholder meeting. (Haine School - December 15, 2008)

- All potential stakeholders were notified via US mail.
- Input was collected from all stakeholders regarding the entire corridor.
- Request for committee volunteers was made.

STEP 3: Hold committee meetings.

- Each of the three committees met separately on the same date to discuss the challenges and opportunities specific to each study area.
 1. Committee Meeting #1 – January 15, 2009
 2. Committee Meeting #2 – February 18, 2009
 3. Committee Meeting #3 – April 22, 2009
 4. Committee Meeting #4 – May 27, 2009
 5. Committee Meeting #5 – June 22, 2009
 6. Committee Meeting #6 – September 22, 2009

STEP 4: Planning Advisory Commission review of committee findings. (December 7, 2009)

STEP 5: Planning Advisory Commission recommendation to the Board of Supervisors. (TBD)

STEP 6: Review and consideration by the Board of Supervisors. (TBD)

Freedom Road Transportation and Land Use Master Plan Recommendations

GOALS

The following goals were identified throughout the planning process:

1. Create an interconnected street system.
2. Improve safety.
3. Preserve the character of existing residential neighborhoods.
4. Protect and maintain the living standard of existing nearby neighborhoods.
5. Address the challenges facing this corridor in a way that doesn't just delay the issues.
6. Keep traffic on nearby neighborhood roads to a minimum.
7. Minimize negative views of commercial development from residential areas.
8. Maintain property values.
9. Maintain quality of life in the entire corridor.
10. Promote a road design that is something other than a five-lane "highway"; sensitive to the surrounding development.
11. Look forward and plan for the inevitable change that is coming to the corridor – manage the growth.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation and mobility are key components in the Cranberry Plan. The Citizen Advisory Panel ranked transportation as a high priority:



“Annually pursue state and federal funding programs to achieve the transportation capital improvements program goals. High priority projects include: Rochester Road Turnpike Bridge, Freedom Road Turnpike Bridge, Rt. 228 Corridor, Freedom Road, and additional connections to Interstate 76 and Interstate 79.” *The Cranberry Plan, Chapter 4*

Citizen Advisory Panel Transportation and Mobility Task Force

The Task Force spent one of its meetings focusing specifically on the Freedom Road corridor. The resulting observations served as the starting point for the Freedom Road Master Plan process.

Transportation Considerations

- Install sidewalks and crosswalks along entire corridor.
- Protected sidewalk on both sides of Turnpike Bridge.

- Landscaped median.
- Traffic calming elements.
- Street trees and landscaping.
- Street lights along entire the corridor.
- Concrete curbing instead of asphalt wedge curbs.
- Create on-road bike lanes.
- Interconnected signals.
- Safe pedestrian crossing.
- Mass transit elements (bus stops, Park 'n Ride access).
- Parallel roads to manage traffic circulation.

From the onset, the transportation focus of the Master Plan process was to gather input from each Freedom Road Study Committee related to:

- context sensitive road design;
- access management; and
- congestion management.



Smart Transportation principles and themes from PennDot provided a framework for the discussion:

Smart Transportation Themes

- Money counts.
- Leverage and preserve existing investments.
- Choose projects with high/value ratio.
- Safety always and maybe safety only.
- Look beyond level-of-service.
- Accommodate all modes of travel.
- Enhance local network.
- Build towns, not sprawl.
- Understand the context; plan and design within the context.
- Develop local governments as strong land use partners.

Smart Transportation Principles

- Tailor solutions to the context.
- Tailor the approach.
- Plan all projects in collaboration with the community.
- Plan for alternative transportation modes.
- Use sound professional judgment.
- Scale the solution to the size of the problem.

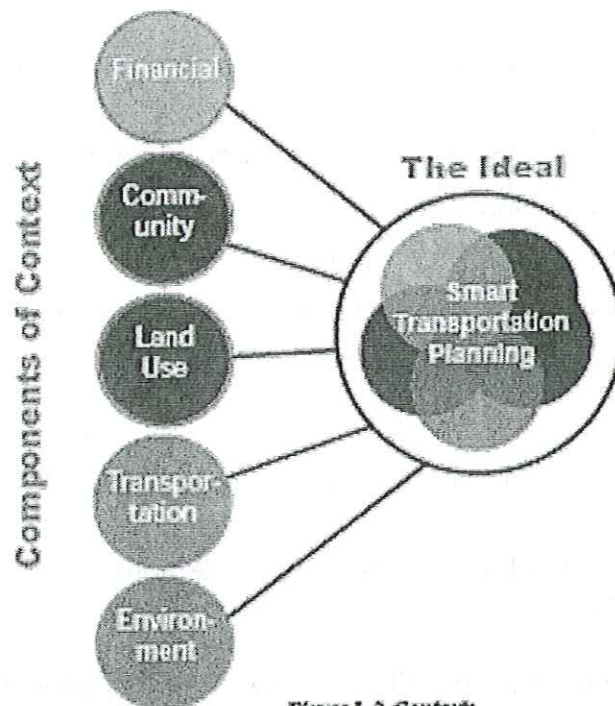


Figure 1.2 Contexts

Road Design and Traffic Management Recommendations:

- Central, landscaped median on Freedom Road, with controlled access.
- Controlled access to arterial roadways via parallel roads and shared access points.
- Access road paralleling Freedom Road.
- Design easily maintained green medians.
- Pedestrian access via sidewalks and crosswalks.
- Restricted turning movements from parallel roads that may connect to Laporte Drive and Rolling Road to minimize cut-through traffic in the neighborhoods to the south.
- Develop a context-sensitive roadway design that includes sidewalks, landscaping, signage, lighting and other streetscape elements.
- Create vehicular and pedestrian connections between developments.
- Buffer the existing residential development from the expanded roadway.
- Work to create an interconnected street system around Freedom Road to help alleviate congestion by providing alternatives.

LAND USE

The key action strategies for land use in the Cranberry Plan focus on mixed-use:



“Cranberry Township will be a community with a mix of land uses that maintains a diverse tax base and supports a high quality of life. Mixed-use development will permit residences, offices, shops, and services to locate together for the efficient use of space, mobility, and infrastructure.” *The Cranberry Plan, Chapter 4*

Additional priorities expressed by the Citizen Advisory Panel for land use include:

- Systematically adopt land use policies that implement the Preferred Growth Scenario and Future Land Use Plan.
- Utilize zoning and subdivision ordinances to promote Traditional Neighborhood Development, which will result in benefits including: reduced environmental impacts, increased opportunities to service-sector employees to live in the Township close to where they work, and creation of high quality of life developments where people can live, work, and play.

The following guidelines for land use decisions are from The Cranberry Plan:

- Integrated land uses.
- Land use policies that maintain a balanced tax base.
- A regulatory scheme that promotes and incentivizes mixed use development.
- A review process that reviews and mitigates land use conflicts.
- A philosophy that emphasizes form over use.
- Remain aware of the land use goals of adjacent municipalities.
- Attractiveness to existing and prospective businesses and residents.
- Efficient use of remaining land resources.
- A competitive business and residential tax environment.
- Maintain a balance of development and environmental protection.

Citizen Advisory Panel Transportation and Mobility Task Force

The Task Force spent one of its meetings focusing specifically on the Freedom Road corridor. The resulting observations served as the starting point for the Freedom Road Master Plan process.

Land Use Considerations

- Minimize and mitigate impacts of roadway construction on existing property owners within/adjacent to corridor; right-of-way impacts, noise, and lights.
- Minimize and mitigate impacts of new development on existing property owners within/adjacent to corridor.
- Restrict the timing of garbage pickup and snow removal to reduce noise.
- Create buffers using walls and landscaping.

Proposed Uses

Possible land uses for the Freedom Road corridor, by study area, include the following. It is recommended that non-residential developments of a certain size be required to include a mix of uses. Consideration should also be given to allowing the re-use of existing homes for non-residential uses.

Study Area A

1. Commercial and Private Recreation and Entertainment Facilities
2. Daycare center
3. Financial Institution without drive-thru facilities
4. Multiple Family Dwelling
5. Parking facility
6. Pharmacy
7. Professional office
8. Religious establishment
9. Restaurant
10. Single Family Dwellings Detached
11. Small retail
12. Veterinary

Study Area B

1. Bed and breakfast
2. Business office
3. Commercial and Private Recreation and Entertainment Facilities
4. Community based affordable senior housing
5. Continuing Care Facility
6. Daycare center
7. Intermediate-Care Facility
8. Mortuaries/Funeral Homes
9. Municipal buildings

10. Non-public educational institution
11. Open space
12. Personal services
13. Professional office
14. Professional office
15. Religious establishment
16. Single Family Dwellings Detached
17. Skilled Nursing Facility
18. Small retail
19. Townhouse or Row Dwelling

Study area C

1. Bakery sales
2. Community-based affordable senior housing
3. Continuing Care Facility 3
4. Intermediate-Care Facility
5. Live-work townhouse
6. Multiple-family dwelling
7. Municipal building
8. Open space
9. Parking facility
10. Professional office
11. Skilled Nursing Facility
12. Small retail

Mitigation of Development Impacts:

The overall goals of mitigation efforts would be to maintain the privacy and integrity of existing residential properties that will remain after new development takes place along the corridor.

Waste Collection

- Carefully locate trash dumpsters to minimize impacts on nearby residents.
- Require proper maintenance of garbage collection areas to avoid rodents and smells.
- Restrict hours of garbage pickup.

On-site Traffic

- Restrict truck traffic on new development sites to allow delivery trucks only.

Lighting

- Utilize footcandle restrictions on new developments to minimize light impacts to surrounding properties.
- Install light fixture shields on all fixtures facing existing residential development.
- Dim and/or turn off lighting when non-residential establishments are closed.

Building Size

- Utilize height restrictions on non-residential and mixed-use buildings to mitigate impacts of new buildings on nearby residences.

Buffering

- Develop a “sliding scale” buffering system that can be used to accommodate buffering on properties that are both large and small. This can include walls, fencing, mounding, and vegetation, or a combination of these elements.
- Use walls to buffer new non-residential development from existing homes.
- Developer, property owner, or tenant(s) in new developments will be responsible for maintenance of buffering.

DRAFT

DATE ADOPTED: 09/04/08

RESOLUTION NO: 2008-63

CRANBERRY TOWNSHIP

FREEDOM ROAD CORRIDOR
TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE PLANNING PROCESS

A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, CRANBERRY TOWNSHIP, A SECOND CLASS TOWNSHIP OF THE COUNTY OF BUTLER, COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA, APPROVING A PLANNING PROCESS FOR THE FREEDOM ROAD CORRIDOR AND CREATING STUDY COMMITTEES AS PART OF THAT PROCESS.

WHEREAS, the Freedom Road corridor has a long history of proposed highway improvements, including the Crows Run Project, which was abandoned in the late 1990s for lack of a regional consensus and replaced with a community by community improvements approach; and,

WHEREAS, the Township is in the process of preparing a long-range comprehensive plan (the "Cranberry Plan") which will include recommendations for future transportation infrastructure needs and future land uses throughout the Township; and,

WHEREAS, a Citizens Advisory Panel ("CAP") is reviewing many aspects of the Township and providing input to the Cranberry Plan process to develop recommendations for the future of Cranberry Township that will help ensure a high quality of life for all current and future residents; and,

WHEREAS, the CAP Transportation and Mobility Task Force identified the Freedom Road corridor as an area in need of specific study to assure any future roadway improvements are implemented in a context sensitive manner and that current land uses are evaluated in light of future road improvements, the potential impacts of future improvements on properties fronting Freedom Road, as well as neighboring properties, the overall function of the corridor, and the long-term interests of the community as a whole; and,

WHEREAS, traffic volumes currently exceed the road's capacity and will continue to increase with the economic development that is occurring in the region, including development beyond Cranberry Township's western boundary; and

WHEREAS, the Township Board of Supervisors, consistently supports a process that actively solicits citizen input, respects the rights of all citizens, and provides property owners an opportunity to express their opinions through a process that assures an orderly and a comprehensive approach to community planning; and,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Supervisors hereby authorizes the following:

1. The undertaking of a planning process, that will result in a "Freedom Road Transportation and Land Use Master Plan", that will be created in the following manner:

STEP 1: Board of Supervisors approval of the Freedom Road Corridor Master Plan process which includes the authorization to create study committees to assist in that process. Three committees will be created: one for each of three study areas, as illustrated on Exhibit "A". Each committee will focus on the design of the entire corridor and on issues related to one of the study areas.

STEP 2: Hold a stakeholder meeting. Potential stakeholders will be notified by public announcement, website information and other appropriate means. Input will be collected from all stakeholders regarding the entire Freedom Road Corridor. The stakeholders will be asked to volunteer for one of the three committees.

STEP 3: Facilitate Freedom Road Corridor Committee Meetings. Each of the three committees will meet separately to discuss the challenges and opportunities specific to each study area, as well as collaborate together on corridor wide issues.

STEP 4: Review of Committee findings by the Planning Advisory Commission.

STEP 5: Planning Advisory Commission recommendation to the Board of Supervisors.

STEP 6: Review and consideration of the recommendations by the Board of Supervisors.

2. The three Freedom Road Corridor Study Committees, which are to be comprised of residents and business owners who have an interest in the future of the Freedom Road Corridor, will be in existence until the recommendations are made to the Planning Advisory Commission.

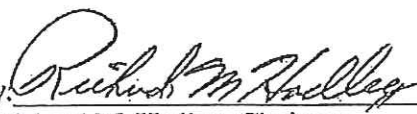
Adopted this 4th Day of September, 2008

ATTEST:



Jerry A. Andree
Township Manager/Secretary

TOWNSHIP OF CRANBERRY

By: 

Richard M. Hadley, Chairman
Board of Supervisors

CR-10000

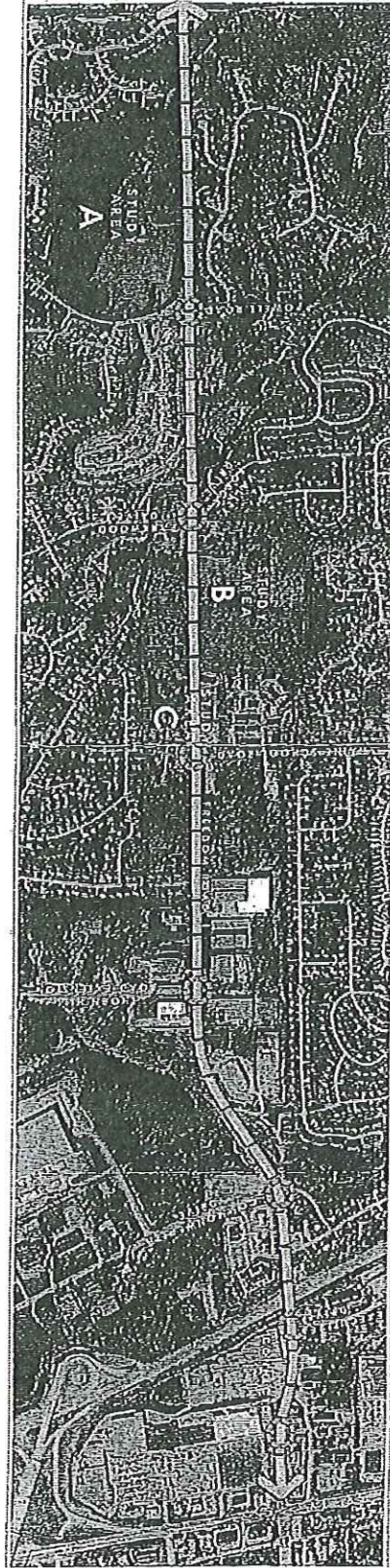


EXHIBIT
A



Freedom Rd Study Area A



Draft November 24, 2009





Freedom Rd Study Area B



Draft November 24, 2009





Freedom Rd Study Area C



Draft November 24, 2009

