



Design and Infrastructure BPAC Subcommittee

May 5, 2020

Online Meeting

Meeting Attendees

Betsy Mastaglio - DVRPC
Cassidy Boulan - DVRPC
Mike Viscardi - NJ Transit
Elise Bremer-Nei - NJDOT
Keith Skilton - NJDOT
Keith Hamas - NJTPA
Aashna Jain – VTC
Liza Betz - Union County Bureau of
Transportation Planning

Ian Baker - Municipality of Princeton
Sonia Szczesna - Tri-State Transportation
Campaign
Patrick Farley - Cross County Connection TMA

Steve Wong - Sam Schwartz
Mike Dannemiller - NV5

Meeting Notes

Subcommittee Chair **Betsy Mastaglio** opened the virtual meeting by introducing herself along with a quick update on the status of the cancelled subcommittee meetings in March, following which she called for updates on bicycle/pedestrian efforts related to the Covid-19 stay at home order in NJ.

Betsy then talked about some of the projects that DVRPC is working on, one of which included analyzing their permanent trail counters data to identify changes in user volumes as the weather gets warmer. So far, the analysis found a 100 percent increase in the usage of some of the trails compared to March. Additionally, crowded and typically more popular trails saw a flattening of volume, while typically less crowded/popular trails saw a relatively higher increase in volume, indicating that people were spreading out more than usual for social distancing purposes. Betsy mentioned that the groups can access this data from DVRPC's Eco Counter website and the analysis results will be posted on their newsroom.

Secondly, DVRPC also conducted a municipal Covid-19 and technical assistance needs survey through their newsletter, reaching out to municipalities with questions on how they can assist in the current situation. In response to the results, DVRPC is developing a webpage that will include local examples of short-term bicycle and pedestrian improvement projects that were undertaken to provide people with sufficient walking/biking space while social distancing.

Lastly, Betsy mentioned that DVRPC is working on a bike sharing, bike library, bike matching program to provide bikes to essential workers for commuting purposes. The program will be launched through an online platform where people will be able to fill out forms for donating or requesting a bike. **Sonia Szczesna**, from Tri-State Transportation Campaign then asked if the program will extend to the NJ Circuit Trail region, to which Betsy responded that it depends on the availability of donors in the local and surrounding communities, as the program is planned to take in only functional bikes, and will not



include repairing/maintaining dysfunctional bikes in order to minimize in-person exchanges and interactions.

Cassidy Boulan, from DVRPC talked about the South Eastern Pennsylvania Region Pedestrian Count Program in which DVRPC is trying a new statistical method to see if there are any patterns in how pedestrian usage is changing during Covid-19. More information on the project is available at www.dvrpc.org/traffic. Cassidy further mentioned that DVRPC is also working on a survey for people on regional rail stations to understand their opinion on biking to transit during Covid-19. She indicated that the group could contact her for more information on the survey and its findings. More information on a some of these projects is also available here: <https://www.dvrpc.org/COVID19resources/>

Ian Baker, from Princeton Township mentioned that they have witnessed an uptake in the number of bicyclists and pedestrians on roads, and are currently updating and installing the signage on their bicycle boulevard, mainly to educate people about the boulevard and its route. He further mentioned that they are seeing a shortage in available resources in moving forward and physically putting the signage on roads, in response to which Betsy mentioned that one strategy they came across in Montgomery was utilizing the low stress network streets along with the local trails network where people can walk/bike without any physical improvements at the moment. Betsy, then inquired if Ian has an update on the Princeton Bike Sharing Program, to which he responded that he is not aware of the current status of the project. Sonia shared that a lot of the Princeton Zagster Bikes were given to their bike exchange program where they were repaired for reselling. As operating bike share programs with proper social distancing measures is a challenge, Betsy mentioned that she is interested in learning more about ongoing initiatives to maintain and sanitize bikes in rental and bike sharing programs.

Steve Wong, from Sam Schwartz talked about some of the ongoing projects that his colleagues in New York City and Washington, D.C. are working on, including plans for installing barriers to widen sidewalks in D.C. and an open streets program for NYCDOT, which is essentially a guide for closing streets in specific locations where equity and social depression issues, and covid-19 hot spots essentially concentrate. The guide includes a screening methodology to select streets for open streets initiatives along with various techniques to close streets and build partnerships with residents and other local stakeholders. Another project that Sam Schwartz's New York City office is working on is a case study investigating closing the Broadway Street in Manhattan to traffic permanently post-lockdown, following which Cassidy shared a Berlin-based guide on implementing short-term bike lane projects with the group. See the link for more information: https://mobycon.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FrKr-Berlin_Guide-EN.pdf.

Betsy then mentioned that she saw a New York City study discussing how the scale of sidewalks in the city compares to other cities and asked Steve if that data/report is available, to which Steve responded that he is familiar with the report and will share it with Betsy. Betsy then added that she is noting down the things that could be of interest to the group and will share those in a follow-up email.



Mike Viscardi, from NJ Transit mentioned that NJ Transit is thinking of ways to subsidize transit in order to provide service with social distancing measures when things start to reopen as that will reduce their maximum capacity. He further added that NJ Transit is also moving forward with a couple of bicycle and pedestrian projects, including the Henry Hudson project. They are also working with Cyndi Steiner, from NJBWC, to set up a bike station with free bike racks at the Trenton Station, and are in the middle of conversations with the real estate developers and other stakeholders to develop a plan for maintaining and sanitizing the proposed racks and the station.

Sonia then talked about TSTC's efforts to engage with the Trenton Health Team as more people are riding on safe routes to encourage neighborhood rides through low stress neighborhood roads and the canal trail which is now open. TSTC is currently gathering more information from people who are riding, and is thinking of ways to orchestrate bike giveaways without in-person interactions, in addition to preparing for applying to upcoming CMAQ and other regional grants.

Mike Dannemiller, from NV5 then shared that their greenway design and implementation projects are also moving forward, to which Sonia added that the Greater Mercer Trails Network Plan presentation on May 14, 2020 by GMTMA will highlight all those trail segments.

Patrick Farley, from Cross County Connection TMA then mentioned that they will soon release a South Jersey Bicycle and Pedestrian Funding Guide that lists all the types of funding resources that have been used for bike/pedestrian funding in South Jersey along with tips to write grant applications, which were prepared with Leigh Ann Von Hagen, VTC's help.

Another program that they are working on is about teaching kids how to walk/bike to schools in order to have them feel comfortable doing so when the schools reopen. The initiative has stemmed from health and safety concerns associated with implementing social distancing measures in school buses, in response to which Betsy gave an example highlighting issues with sanitizing buses if the schools adopt staggered schedules to keep social distancing measures.

She further expressed interest in a survey on kids' interest towards bicycling and how that has changed, to which Patrick responded that he was working on a survey on telecommuting and could potentially include few questions on biking/walking. He then mentioned that he will be reaching out to Collingswood, NJ as they had expressed interest in planning an open streets event in their virtual bicycle and pedestrian meeting. They were planning for an open streets demonstration project prior to Covid-19 as well.

Matthew Carmody, from AKRF talked about the Essex Hudson Greenway Trail project from Montclair to Jersey City asking for ideas on progressing on traditional planning projects virtually, in response to which Mike Dannemiller responded that while it is not possible to have current traffic counts, NV5 has been reaching out to peer firms for sharing resources and have been able to find relevant historic data. He further indicated that online community engagement through webinars and virtual meetings may actually get more responses and reach more people compared to traditional public meetings.



Mike Viscardi then discussed about an emerging concern that traffic could worsen post-lockdown as people will switch to cars away from transit and walking/biking, to which Aashna Jain from VTC responded that the Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center (BPRC) at VTC is currently working on a blog post highlighting what some of the European cities are planning to address this concern and expand their bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

She further mentioned that BPRC is working on providing complete streets technical assistance to 8 NJ municipalities, and have been thinking of ways to conduct walk audits virtually through individual stakeholder surveys. Steve then shared that Sam Schwartz has been planning to send out their own staff in small groups with cameras to have a livestream of real conditions which will be discussed live in a virtual meeting, in response to which Betsy pointed out that managing the camera, taking notes and managing the traffic simultaneously may get challenging for a team on the field. Liza Betz, from Union County suggested that the audit team could visit the site individually and then collectively discuss their findings or discuss at the time when one person is on the site so that everyone has a firsthand experience of the conditions on the site.

Lastly, **Elise Bremer-Nei**, from NJDOT added that NJDOT Office of Bicycle and Pedestrian Programs (OBPP) is working on local planning studies in Trenton, Elk Township, Maple Shade and Pennsauken, Passaic County, Hightstown and Absecon. They have also reviewed 35 DOT road projects last month for Complete Streets, and are analyzing 5 years of bike/pedestrian crash data on state highways. Elise then added that they will be sending everyone a survey about a possible reorganization of the BPAC soon.

Meeting closed.