

## Abridgment

# Transportation Planning for Enterprise Development Areas

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## ABSTRACT

Several states have now passed legislation creating an enterprise development area (EDA) or enterprise zone. Several more are now considering such legislation. Pennsylvania's EDA program has among its features a transportation component targeted to improved access to EDAs through highway improvements. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation asked the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) to undertake this component, including surveying transportation problems in the two EDAs within its jurisdiction and recommending actions leading to resolution of the problems. The commission's study of the EDA in Chester City and Chester Township in Delaware County is summarized in this paper. The study consisted of a practical application of problem identification and solution development. The centerpiece of the study was an extensive series of interviews with the managers of private firms now operating in the EDA. The recommendations made by DVRPC included permanent, long-term solutions and interim solutions that could be implemented in the short term. How effective these might be and the kinds of reactions that might be expected from shippers and local elected officials are suggested in this paper.

The enterprise zone concept is founded on the premise that relief from taxes, regulations, and other government burdens will spur the formation of new business activity, which will then create employment opportunities. The lifting of these restrictions would be limited to designated distressed areas and would offer advantages to employers not available elsewhere. Through this cooperative effort of the public and private sectors, an environment will be created in which investment in distressed areas will be rewarded. Also, traditional forms of economic development assistance will be made more effective through promises of matching investment by local government and private firms.

## BACKGROUND OF ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT AREAS

### The Pennsylvania Program

State programs, including one in Pennsylvania, have come into being while efforts at the national level to pass a law have floundered. The concept of a Pennsylvania enterprise development area program was initiated in 1982. Central to awarding enterprise development grants was the communities' desire and commitment to reverse the downward economic spiral. A strong emphasis was placed on discovering the answers through innovative projects. According to a recent state publication, enterprise development initiatives "recognize that the ultimate solution to the problems of distressed areas rests in the joint ability of the public and private sectors to create environments which increase the rewards for investment, production, and employment. . .targeted on selected areas."

The state's commitment consists largely of a promise to focus existing programs into the Enterprise Development Area (EDA). Examples cited in a recent state publication include aid to airports, a program of bridge replacements, and highway maintenance. As a part of the state commitment to revita-

lize the area, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation agreed to award grants to transportation planning agencies, such as the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), to analyze transportation problems in EDAs and to recommend actions.

The objective of this study was to determine the transportation problems that hinder the development of industry and to make recommendations for improvements that will increase the attractiveness of Enterprise Development Areas located in Chester City and Chester Township. The study focused on the Chester waterfront and the I-95 Industrial Park and sought to provide a more effective connection between these areas and landside rail and road networks. Through these improvements (and other nontransportation improvements and incentives) it is hoped that private investments will be made in industrial and commercial operations, providing jobs for local residents.

### The Chester Enterprise Area

Governor Richard Thornburgh announced on August 3, 1983, the first communities to be designated as Enterprise Development Areas. A portion of Chester City and Chester Township in Delaware County, Pennsylvania, was so designated.

This EDA is well-qualified as a distressed area. The population has declined in recent years from 76,000 to 44,000. The central business district, once strong, has been decimated by the construction of four major shopping centers within a 15-min drive. Several large employers within the EDA and several more in adjacent communities have closed their facilities in recent years. Eighty percent of the residents receive some form of public assistance and 20 percent are unemployed. Although the crime rate is high, Chester laid off a quarter of its police force for lack of municipal funds.

The Chester waterfront has long been an active

industrial area. At least two companies have been located on the Chester waterfront for more than 80 years. Considerable truck traffic is generated by these firms, most of which ship their products using heavy (four- or five-axle) trucks. Several companies now plan to use twin trailers, which are currently not well accommodated by the old street system. The waterfront of the Delaware River lies parallel to I-95, the major access route to Chester, but is separated by about a mile of residential and commercial neighborhoods.

A second focus of the study was a recently developed industrial park in Chester Township. The oldest companies located in the I-95 Industrial Park have only been there since 1977 when the park was opened. The park's proximity to I-95 and East Coast markets is attractive to firms, and growth has been steady. About 50 large trucks arrive and depart the industrial park each day.

Frequent contact was maintained with local officials of Delaware County, Chester City, and Chester Township. These local officials contributed much time in detailing area problems, in providing data and maps, and in carefully considering the alternatives that were studied.

#### PLANNING APPROACH

##### Overview of the DVRPC Approach

Consistent with staff discussions with county and municipal officials, DVRPC proposed the following major steps for the study:

1. View the identified Enterprise Development Areas and investigate the routes that truckers currently use;
2. On the basis of field view and subsequent analysis, propose alternative truck routes or new roads, or both;
3. Interview corporate executives to determine their specific transportation problems and the advantages and disadvantages of proposals in item 2;
4. Formulate permanent and interim strategies to address transportation problems; and
5. Propose further work to be performed next year.

Based on discussions with municipal and county officials, three major access problems were identified as critical to serving the targeted areas within the EDA. To conserve limited funds for the study, it was decided to omit all less important problems.

##### Development of Alternative Solutions

The site visits mentioned earlier as the first step in the process identified points of congestion, currently used truck routes, and opportunities for designating alternative routes, building new facilities, and improving existing ones.

Four alternatives were proposed to solve each of the access problems. Two of these alternatives could be implemented in the short-range future and one required enough lead time to be termed long range. A do-nothing alternative was also included, against which each of the others could be compared. It was assumed that if the long-range solution were to be selected, one of the short-range solutions or the do-nothing alternative would also be selected as an interim measure.

##### Survey of Current Highway Users

The central activity in this analysis was a series of extended interviews with officials of several of

the companies that now operate trucks within the EDA. At each interview, two staff members spoke with one or more company representatives. Requests were made to meet with the highest ranking manager who deals with transportation problems at the subject facility on a day-to-day basis. The discussions were open-ended, encouraging candor, but prompted by a list of 33 questions. The results of these interviews are discussed later in this paper.

The survey included questions in the following four categories: growth of truck traffic, currently used routes, problems on the road, and acceptability of the proposed solutions. Responses to these topics are summarized in the following paragraphs.

##### Growth of Truck Traffic

In interviews, some of the firms stated their plans to expand. If two major projects revealed by the interviews are carried out, the number of heavy trucks on Chester streets would be multiplied several times and the problems cited made much worse. The solutions proposed were designed to be able to meet the eventuality of both of the new facilities coming into being.

##### Currently Used Routes

Most of the persons interviewed had only sketchy knowledge of the routes used by truckers. This information was supplemented by earlier observations of truck movements. Interviewers learned that truck drivers, generally, are not vocal about the problems they face on the road and circumvent obstacles with alacrity and ingenuity.

##### Problems on the Road

Access to the waterfront from I-95 suffers from several problems, foremost of which is the lack of clear signing. Much of Chester between I-95 and the waterfront is residential. On-street parking is permitted on most streets in such neighborhoods and restricts capacity. Railroad underpasses of the Amtrak main line, which lies between I-95 and the waterfront, are another major restricting factor. Few streets pass under the railroad with clearances over 14 ft and some are as low as 12 ft. Signs well in advance of encountering these low clearances are not posted, contributing to unnecessary truck movements. Many streets are in need of resurfacing and new traffic signals.

The major access problem between the industrial park and I-95 is the lack of a direct route. The roadway used includes a narrow, heavily traveled residential street with parking allowed on one side. Trucks must also maneuver a 135-degree turn with a small turning radius.

##### Acceptability of the Proposed Solutions

Responses to most of the proposed solutions were positive. Each respondent chose from among the suggestions those that were most advantageous to the operations of his firm.

##### Analysis and Results

Following the interviews, the staff made draft recommendations for the consideration of local elected officials. In two of the three cases, the

permanent solutions involved long-range capital improvements. These were readily embraced by the officials, for they greatly relieved traffic on existing streets and involved very little condemnation. In the third case, the problem was readily eliminated through rerouting of truck traffic away from residences and through an industrial area, with only small increases in travel times.

The interim solutions, however, were far more problematic. Local officials resisted these changes to the status quo because it would cause an adverse impact, although less than the current impact, on a different group of residents who could be expected to fight the changes.

Specific recommendations can be found in the report "Chester City/Chester Township Enterprise Development Area Transportation Survey," published by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission in July 1984. Copies may be ordered through the commission.

#### RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSIONS

DVRPC's final report recommended only those permanent solutions in which support could be found in all quarters. The interim solutions could not be recommended, although a few areas where significant hazards now exist have been recommended for study.

#### Role of Transportation Improvements in EDAs

Transportation improvement is one of many ways public entities can invest in EDAs to make them more attractive as employment locations. Other programs can focus on assembling land into packages large enough to accommodate large industrial operations or to be developed into office or industrial parks; improvements in utility infrastructure, particularly water and sewerage systems, or in other public services such as improved security or technical assistance to new businesses; direct financial assistance or low-interest loan programs for employers who locate in the zone; or acquisition of land and demolition of buildings to make reuse more attractive to developers and to enhance the visual environment.

Are highway improvements more important than any one of these alternatives? It is, of course, a subjective judgment as to which ranks highest. However, in many cases, transportation improvements are very important and the authors believe that this may be the case in Chester City and Township. Our conclusions were reinforced by the firm officers, who could not identify more pressing obstacles to doing business in the EDA.

Both municipalities have large parcels available for development with access to rail and water facilities. Today, however, the link to the Interstate highway system is critical for most industries whose flow of materials and products is significant. Although both subject areas are located within a mile of I-95, the impedance presented by the existing street network reduces this advantage greatly.

#### Importance of Signs

In the case of two access problems studied, permanent, major capital improvements were advisable.

The interim solutions that the DVRPC staff believed were needed, however, would have improved the attractiveness of the area for firms and the shipping companies with whom they contract. The interim solutions would have designated a truck route and would have recommended signs located on I-95 and the route leading trucks to the frontage roads of all the major firms. Such signs are almost totally lacking on the routes that truckers use today. The only signs meant for truckers are those that prohibit trucks. These are located on streets where the residents have been successful in having the municipalities ban commercial vehicles.

Truck routes with signs that indicate "Chester Waterfront Industrial Area" or "I-95 Industrial Park" would eliminate residents' problems with stray trucks and save time and money for shippers and truckers. But perhaps more important, they would serve to advertise the existence of industrial land accessible from I-95. Combined with promotion of the area, the option of locating there would be kept alive in the minds of entrepreneurs and other firm executives responsible for plant location.

#### Resolution of Land Use Conflicts

Many of the residential neighborhoods in the EDA through which trucks must pass are badly deteriorated. It is typical for declining residential areas and industrial areas to be adjacent. The problems of one appear to create problems for the other. For example, a deteriorated neighborhood is often threatening to commuters; it may also be offensive to the company's image of itself. On the other hand, the existence of nearby vacant industrial buildings and derelict land may be a deterrent to maintaining residences. Homeowners may deter maintenance, preferring to save for a new home away from the noisy and hazardous trucks. Emphasis, therefore, was placed on separation of plant-bound traffic from residential areas. In this way, both the industries in the EDA and the residents will benefit.

#### Summary

Major capital improvements were found to be necessary to remove the isolation of the waterfront area that was created when I-95 was built on the far side of a residential area and further restricted by low railroad underpasses. An expensive solution was also found to be necessary to remove the adverse impact of truck traffic generated by an industrial park. The park had been built to attract I-95 users, but on land that could be reached only by narrow residential streets. Interim solutions, which would ease the situation, were resisted by local officials, thereby applying pressure to execute the permanent improvements quickly. The improvements recommended were judged by DVRPC staff to be essential to making the Enterprise Development Area attractive to potential employers.

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