

# SUBURBAN TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS



*Notes from a professional design workshop  
for teens and teachers*

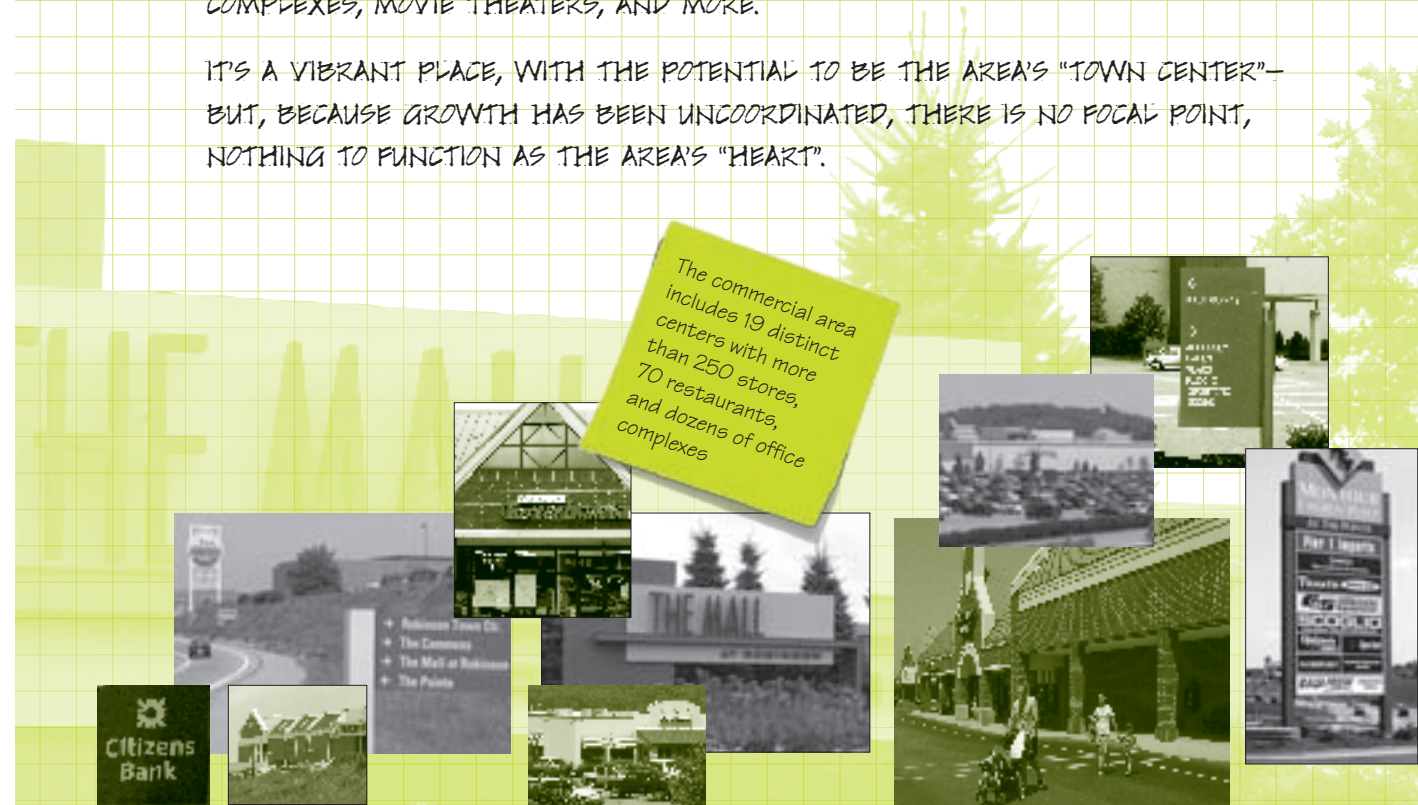
In the summer of 2007, a small group of area high school students, educators, and design professionals participated in a four-day workshop focused on the Robinson-North Fayette commercial area in the western suburbs of Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. The Airport Corridor Transportation Association (ACTA) partnered with Carnegie Museum of Art's Heinz Architectural Center to offer the workshop to look at suburban mobility, design and livability issues.

The workshop incorporated both field work and studio time. Sessions were held on-site in the Robinson-North Fayette retail area and at Carnegie Museum of Art's Heinz Architectural Center in Oakland. The museum's collections of paintings, architectural drawings, and models inspired creative thinking about what makes the places where we live, work, and play unique and memorable and how they evolve over time. The week was designed to be exploratory and investigative and to result in fresh thinking about the suburban landscape and the role individuals can play in shaping their environment.

The summer design workshop is replicable in high school classes during the school year and in future summer programs. For more information, contact Lynn Manion at [manion@acta-pgh.org](mailto:manion@acta-pgh.org).

THE ROBINSON-NORTH FAYETTE COMMERCIAL AREA, IN PITTSBURGH'S WESTERN SUBURBS, IS AN ACCUMULATION OF STORES, STRIP MALLS, RESTAURANTS, OFFICE COMPLEXES, MOVIE THEATERS, AND MORE.

IT'S A VIBRANT PLACE, WITH THE POTENTIAL TO BE THE AREA'S "TOWN CENTER"—BUT, BECAUSE GROWTH HAS BEEN UNCOORDINATED, THERE IS NO FOCAL POINT, NOTHING TO FUNCTION AS THE AREA'S "HEART".





ACTA is a non-profit, membership-based Transportation Management Association that creates and supports programs to increase travel options and foster responsible economic growth



This is a "desire line"—a path created by people where there isn't (but probably should be) a walkway... this area has many desire lines

**THE RESULT:** IT'S DIFFICULT TO GET AROUND, AND SOMETIMES EVEN DANGEROUS—FOR PEDESTRIANS, BUS RIDERS, AND DRIVERS.

THE SITUATION ISN'T UNIQUE—IN FACT, IT'S THE SAME IN SUBURBS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

ACTA, THE AIRPORT CORRIDOR TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION, LAUNCHED A STUDY TO INVESTIGATE WAYS TO IMPROVE MOBILITY, CONVENIENCE, AND SAFETY—AND TO POSITION THE COMMERCIAL AREA AS A VIABLE TOWN CENTER.



ACTA's Commercial Center Mobility Study, administered through the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, was funded by the Federal Highway Administration and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation

AS THE STUDY PROGRESSED, IT BECAME APPARENT THAT TEENS ARE A MAJOR USER GROUP FOR THE AREA.

SO ACTA DECIDED TO INVITE TEENS TO PROVIDE THOUGHTFUL INPUT FOR INCLUSION IN THE STUDY.

THE MECHANISM: A FREE PROFESSIONAL DESIGN WORKSHOP FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS—AND TEACHERS.

Designed as a replicable pilot, the limited-enrollment workshop had multiple goals:

- > to provide participants with a background about the emergence of suburbs across the U.S. and about suburban planning and design
- > to help participants develop an understanding of the issues involved in moving around a commercial area
- > to involve an interdisciplinary group of design-related professionals in developing solutions
- > to test the concept of public participation in a hands-on solutions development experience
- > to increase awareness about the importance of design, and to help students and teachers see design as an appealing career possibility

Ambitious—but achievable





Some of the things we learned,  
like the importance of a town  
center, I don't think we'll ever forget.  
- Nancy Pile, librarian

I NEVER KNEW HOW HARD IT WAS  
TO WALK HERE BECAUSE I NEVER  
HAD TO. NOW I REALIZE THESE  
PEOPLE NEED A SAFER PLACE TO  
WALK. - PATRICK BAER, STUDENT

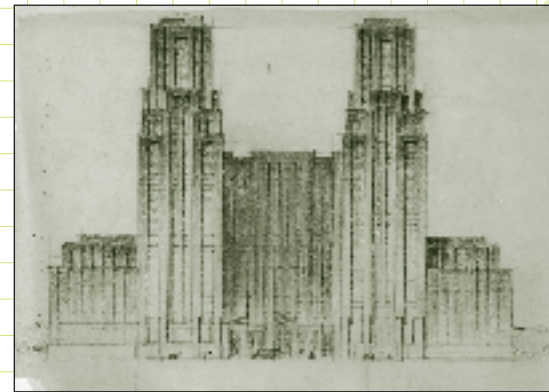
At first I thought, I'm just a teenager,  
what can I do? Getting an idea down on  
paper and put out there is a start.  
- Lindsey Smith, student

ACTA AND CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART PARTNERED TO PRESENT THE WORKSHOP.

OVER FOUR SUMMER DAYS, SIX STUDENTS AND THREE TEACHERS GOT A FIRST-RATE  
BACKGROUND IN SUBURBAN DESIGN...

...A FIRST-HAND LOOK AT SPECIFIC CHALLENGES IN THE STUDY AREA...

...AND A FIRST-TIME OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR THE ISSUES.



Paul Philippe Cret: Apartment House; Proposed Design for 2601 Parkway Apartments, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, c. 1935. Carnegie Museum of Art, purchase; gift of the Drue Heinz Foundation

Carnegie Museum of Art houses one of the  
country's most distinguished collections, and is  
one of only a handful of museums that collects  
architectural drawings, models, and photographs

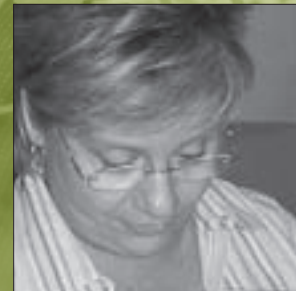
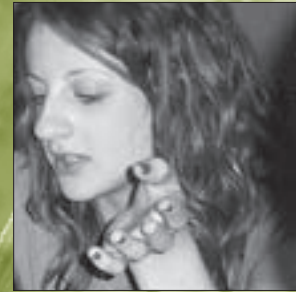
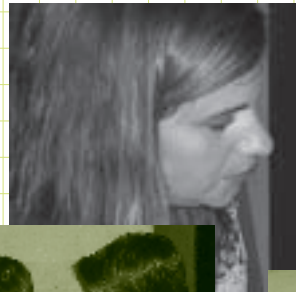


LTL Architects: New Suburbanism; 2000. Carnegie Museum of Art, gift of the Drue Heinz Trust

IT WAS A WHIRLWIND.

YOU COULD ALMOST SEE HORIZONS EXPAND AS THE WORKSHOP INTRODUCED A NEW AND INTRIGUING WORLD TO THE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS.

LOCAL TV STATIONS AND NEWSPAPERS FOUND BOTH THE TOPIC AND THE PROCESS EXCEPTIONALLY INTERESTING, AND RAN MULTIPLE STORIES.



*It's wonderful for me to be part of this*  
*-Natalie Rush, teacher*





MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE PARTICIPANTS PRODUCED EXCELLENT RESULTS.

ONE SOLUTION INCLUDED A NEW SHUTTLE BUS, A CENTRAL GAZEBO FOR RIDER SHELTER AND INFORMATION, AND A WIDER BRIDGE OVER THE PARKWAY WEST.

ANOTHER CALLED FOR TURNING AN UNDER-UTILIZED PARKING LOT INTO PARKSPACE THAT WOULD SERVE AS FOCAL POINT, OUTDOOR TEACHING CENTER, AND RECREATION/RELAXATION SPACE.

AND ANOTHER RECOMMENDED REPURPOSING AN EMPTY STORE TO BECOME A COMMUNITY ARTS CENTER; USING UNDER-UTILIZED OUTDOOR SPACE FOR COMMUNITY EVENTS AND A PLAZA; AND IMPLEMENTING A RANGE OF "USER-FRIENDLY" AMENITIES.



Sharon DeNardo, Staff,  
Senator John Pippy  
Jim Foringer, Pennsylvania  
Department of Transporta-  
tion, District 11-0  
Sally Haas, Pittsburgh  
Airport Area Chamber of  
Commerce



Jurors contributed their  
time and expertise to  
provide thoughtful critiques



I'm really excited about this

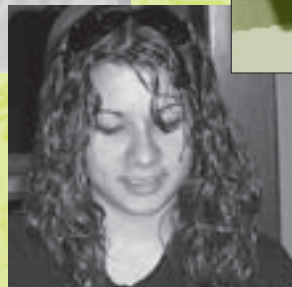


I like learning like this

Teachers/students = learners/teammates



County planner + botanist + traffic engineer + developer + more = new viewpoints, new role models, new energy, amazing interchanges



ALL THE PROPOSED SOLUTIONS ARE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE INCLUDED IN ACTA'S MOBILITY STUDY REPORT.

BECAUSE THIS AREA'S ISSUES ARE COMMON ACROSS THE COUNTRY, THE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE APPLICABLE IN MANY PLACES BEYOND SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA...

SO THE PILOT WORKSHOP WAS A SUCCESS... AND ALONG THE WAY ACTA AND CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART LEARNED SOME LESSONS THAT CAN HELP GUIDE FUTURE DESIGN WORKSHOPS—HERE IN WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA AND ELSEWHERE.

**LESSON LEARNED:** THE MULTI-GENERATIONAL APPROACH—WITH BOTH TEACHERS AND STUDENTS AS LEARNERS AND TEAMMATES—SPARKS ENGAGEMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY.

**LESSON LEARNED:** HAVING PROFESSIONALS FROM MULTIPLE DISCIPLINES EXPONENTIALLY ENRICHES THE WORKSHOP'S CONTENT.

IN ADDITION, THE PROFESSIONALS SAY THEY LEARNED FROM EACH OTHER—AND WERE ENERGIZED BY THE PROCESS.





**LESSON LEARNED:** PUTTING IDEAS ON PAPER EARLY IN THE PROCESS DEFUSES RESISTANCE, LESSENS SHYNESS, AND PROMOTES CREATIVITY.

**LESSON LEARNED:** ENGAGEMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY SOAR WHEN PEOPLE ARE PROVIDED WITH GOOD BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE, AND ENCOURAGED TO DEVELOP REAL-WORLD SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.



*This may have implications for public hearings around community issues: instead of having individuals stand and speak at a microphone, could communities try breaking people into groups led by professionals and charged with developing realistic solutions? Might be less confrontational and more productive...*

**BOTTOM LINE:** THE DESIGN WORKSHOP WAS WELL WORTH THE EFFORT INVOLVED IN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION...THE END PRODUCT WAS EXCELLENT; AWARENESS OF / INTEREST IN DESIGN INCREASED; AND STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND DESIGN-RELATED PROFESSIONALS ALL BECAME INTENSIVELY ENGAGED IN AN IMPORTANT REAL-WORLD ISSUE.



## WORKSHOP PRESENTERS

**Karen Brean**, Brean & Associates, Workshop Leader

**Lindsay Bond Totten**, Botanic Gardens of WPA

**Scott Brillhart**, Planning Director, Moon Township

**Darcy Cleaver**, Port Authority of Allegheny County

**Dave Cooper**, Johnson, Mirmiran & Thompson

**Darla Cravotta**, Allegheny County Dept. of Economic Development

**Ray Hack**, Mackin Engineering Company

**Lynn Heckman**, Allegheny County Dept. of Economic Development

**Vera Krofcheck**, Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board

**Gary Moshier**, Architect, Moshier Studio

**Tracy Myers**, Curator, Heinz Architectural Center, Carnegie Museum of Art

**Marilyn Russell**, Chair and Curator of Education, Carnegie Museum of Art

**Kristen Sheleheda**, Beaver County Transit Authority

**Dave Veights**, DMJM Harris Engineering

**Jason Vrabel**, Community Design Center of Pittsburgh

**Nate Wildfire**, East Liberty Development, Inc.

*These exceptional professionals volunteered their time... they were not only instructors but also professional role models for participants*





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**CARNEGIE  
MUSEUM OF ART**

*One of the four Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh*

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