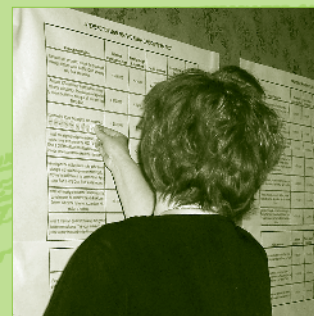


IMPROVE
ACCESS TO
PUSH BUTTON

- Robinson Town
- The Commons
- The Mall at Ro
- ← The Pointe



Moving Around Within a Suburban Commercial Area

Challenges, Solutions...and Lessons



**AIRPORT CORRIDOR
TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION**

In one sense, it's an old issue: a popular suburban retail/entertainment venue designed primarily for access by car—not for today's pedestrians, cyclists, or public transit. In another sense, it's something new: a busy suburban highway corridor morphing into an “edge city”—but with random growth and no overarching plan.

Both situations can help enhance an area's vitality—but both also bring major challenges involving safety, difficulty getting around, and perhaps even inhibition of future economic growth.

A southwestern Pennsylvania Transportation Management Association decided to work on both issues. To explore potential solutions, the Airport Corridor Transportation Association (ACTA) undertook a study with competitive funding by the Federal Highway Administration and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's Central Office (through the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission).

At its heart, the work is a classic mobility study: how can people get around the area more conveniently, safely, and sensibly?

But it's also much more. It's a way to encourage residents, local municipalities, and businesses to think about the daily mobility-related choices they make and to become involved in planning potential improvements to the existing infrastructure. The strategic public involvement has proved exceptionally successful, promoting awareness, support, and buy-in.

Ultimately, the study produced potential solutions that are innovative and practical—and that are applicable in similar suburban areas across the country.



PLACE



In Pittsburgh's western suburbs, the sprawling Robinson/North Fayette Township commercial area is a cluster of 19 distinct centers that together are home to nearly 250 stores, 70 restaurants, 11 hotels, a cineplex, multiple business headquarters, office complexes, higher education facilities, and more. The area—the centerpiece of the busy “Airport Corridor” running between downtown Pittsburgh and the region's airport—spans four townships (Robinson, North Fayette, Findlay, and Moon).

As the area has developed, so have opportunities for confusion: for example, two completely separate plazas are both named “Montour Church Place.”

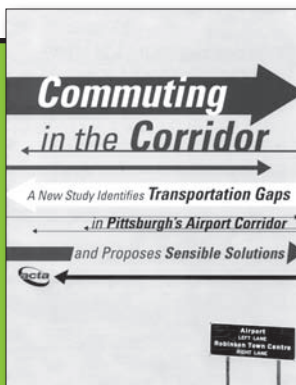
A related issue is that, because of its location, the commercial area is the region's de facto “town center”—but it has no focal point, no geographic “heart”. Additionally, in many places, walking is possible only within busy parking lots—there are no sidewalks or other walkways. The area is also not optimized for public transit, although many people choose to bus to the area's jobs and recreation sites.



PLAN

The plan for ACTA's Mobility Study was built around ten goals.

ACTA MOBILITY STUDY	
1	Retrofit a large suburban retail area built for access by vehicles to encourage access for all modes.
2	Improve traffic flow and integrate vehicular (including transit), pedestrian, and bicycle traffic.
3	Stabilize the retail area and improve economic development.
4	Make the retail area the intermodal hub for the airport corridor.
5	Make the best use of the natural and man-made resources, such as the transit hub and clustering of retail.
6	Engage local municipalities in a problem-solving project resulting in implementation and a funding plan.
7	Engage the community in a process to make the retail area a community center.
8	Make use of community experts and resources, such as architects and engineers who live and/or work in the area, to help with the plan and build the sense of community ownership.
9	Foster a shared community vision and commitment to achieving the vision.
10	Improve the quality of life for residents, businesses, and visitors in the area.



Earlier Study Looks at Commuting

An earlier, related ACTA study—*Commuting in the Corridor*—examined commuting options in the area, and recommended ways to bridge gaps. For a free copy of the Executive Summary, go to acta-pgh.org.



PROCESS



The first step was setting up the study's "infrastructure": a large Stakeholder Committee comprising representatives of both the public and private sectors in the area; and a smaller Steering Committee comprising representatives from PennDOT, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, the Port Authority of Allegheny County, ACTA, and two organizations that would consult throughout the study—Brean Associates (planning) and Mackin Engineering (engineering). Technical support was provided by URS Corporation.

INPUT—AND AWARENESS

For years, virtually everyone who worked, recreated, or traveled in the commercial area had a sense of its challenges—but nobody had precisely defined the issues. To change that, the study reached out to the public—the people who use the area.

Over a period of six months, focus groups, community events, and public hearings were held, and presentations made to civic, business, and government groups. Hundreds of surveys were administered—to shoppers, commuters, and more. Meanwhile, newsletters, newspaper articles, TV news mentions, ACTA's website, and posters in public places kept people informed.

After the input was analyzed, several major issue areas had been defined. Over the next twelve months, the engineering consultant examined the issues and worked to develop feasible potential solutions, including conceptual drawings and likely costs.

The result of the engineering work was a major document that described each issue and proposed detailed potential solutions. In "Reader's Digest" form, the issues and some proposed solutions include:

Issue: The Summit Park Drive bridge across the Penn Lincoln Parkway West (PA Route 60) connecting the study's two commercial areas—Robinson Towne Centre and the Pointe at North Fayette

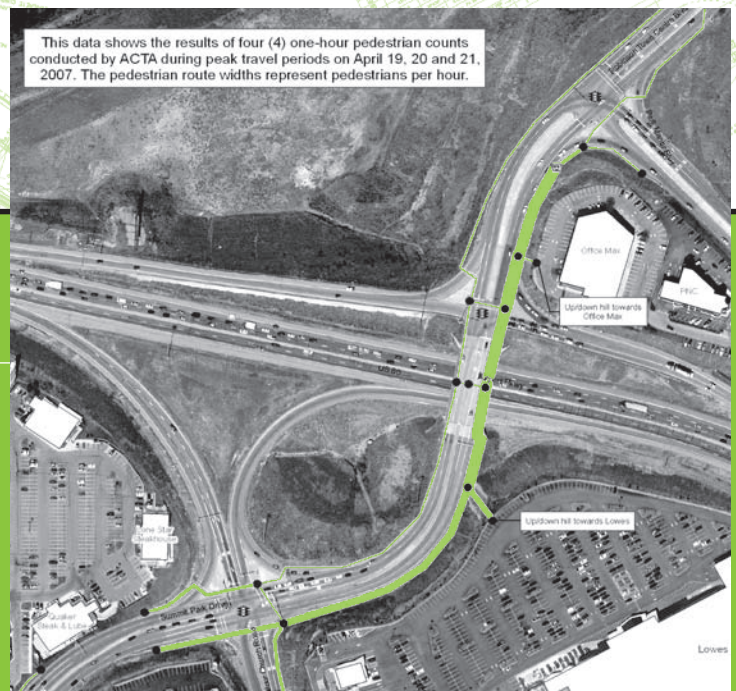
Connecting two major commercial centers, the bridge is heavily used by pedestrians—but it's not pedestrian-friendly: it has no sidewalks, so people walk on either a two-and-a-half-foot shoulder or the median.

The potential solution: shift the travel lanes on the bridge. Narrow the travel lanes and the median, so the shoulder becomes a six-foot pedestrian walkway, which could be extended to the bus shelter at the corner of Robinson Towne Centre Boulevard and Park Manor Boulevard to the north, and to the Wal-Mart driveway to the south.

The likely cost: \$146,000 for a concrete walkway, less for other options (for example, a crushed limestone surface). Raising the crosswalk above the grade of the existing roadway, and including Americans

The Tool Kit

In order to determine large-scale patterns, the study employed multiple tools—for example, geographic information systems (GIS), satellite and aerial photography, and computerized mapping. Visual images produced by the tools provided evidence that change is needed (and indicated to what degree), helped sort fact from opinion—and are proving an invaluable aid in building consensus.





with Disabilities Act (ADA)-required wheelchair-accessible curb ramps plus a railing on the bridge parapet, would increase the cost to \$203,000.

Issue: The left turn onto Park Manor Boulevard at the PNC Bank exit

An issue of concern to many people surveyed involves exiting the IKEA and PNC/DSW Shoes driveways in the Robinson Towne Centre area: motorists have great difficulty making the left turn during peak travel periods. A lack of traffic signals contributes to the problem. Additionally, there are no sidewalks along Park Manor Boulevard, making pedestrian access to local stores challenging. And, with few gaps in traffic, crossing the Boulevard on foot can be challenging for even the most fit pedestrian.

A long-term solution involves eliminating left turns out of the PNC/DSW Shoes driveway, and constructing a “reverse jug handle” on the Boulevard to send vehicles back toward Robinson Towne Centre Boulevard. The IKEA driveway could be relocated, and traffic signalization installed. The likely cost: approximately \$214,000, not including property acquisition or engineering. A traffic signal, if implemented, would cost an additional \$120,000.



Issue: The overall pedestrian system

Improved pedestrian access and amenities surfaced as major needs. “Desire lines”—footpaths worn by pedestrians taking logical but unofficial routes from point to point—crisscross the study area. Additionally, the study found pedestrians frequently crossing major roads at midblock, with no crosswalks or traffic lights.

Particular concerns cited include pedestrian issues—particularly during hours of darkness—between the cinema and other youth-oriented destinations such as Applebee’s, Eat ‘n Park, and The Mall at Robinson.

Among proposed remediations: mid-block crosswalks, with the highest priority one on Park Manor Boulevard between the IKEA and Robinson Town Centre bus shelters (likely cost: \$11,200 or \$68,400, depending on whether a walkway through a parking lot is included); new sidewalks (likely cost of 3800 linear feet at the highest-priority locations: \$240,000); steps (likely cost of 156 feet at the highest-priority locations: \$31,000); and additional crosswalk treatments (likely cost: \$16,000).



Issue: Traffic signalization throughout the commercial area

There are 22 signalized intersections within the study area—and both the intersections themselves and the coordination of signals were cited as concerns for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians.

After intersections were field-viewed, traffic counts taken, signalization mapped, and crash data analyzed, a major recommendation was that an official traffic study be undertaken by professional engineers. Traffic studies typically cost at least \$40,000.

Interim recommendations included changing lane assignments at the intersection of Montour Run Road and Park Manor Boulevard / FedEx Drive, improving (or creating) pavement markings throughout the

“Sweat Equity”

Both to save money and to deepen its own understanding of the issues, ACTA staff performed many of the study’s pedestrian counts. Those counts produced critical evidence of the need for enhanced pedestrian options. ACTA also conducted walking tours for local officials to demonstrate the pedestrian situation.



Courtesy of Allegheny West Magazine

WAY IMPROVEMENTS SIGNS			
SIGN DESCRIPTION	SIZE W x H	DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY
0-0L	30"x36"	LEFT TURN SIGNAL	
0L	30"x36"	LEFT TURN SIGNAL	
0S	30"x36"	LEFT TURN SIGNAL	
0R	30"x36"	LEFT TURN SIGNAL	
1	30"x36"	LEFT TURN SIGNAL	
1L	30"x36"	LEFT TURN SIGNAL	
1S	30"x36"	LEFT TURN SIGNAL	
1R	30"x36"	LEFT TURN SIGNAL	
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area, advance pedestrian walk indicators and countdowns, and ensuring that interconnections among traffic signals are better coordinated. The recommended improvements would cost from a few hundred dollars to more than \$200,000.

Issue: Signage throughout the commercial area

For years, anecdotal evidence had indicated that signage in the commercial area was a confusing clutter—and field analysis proved that to be true: there are at least seven different types of directional signing, some of them not in accordance with state or federal standards. Inadequate signage not only creates confusion and lessens the effectiveness of messages—it can also pose a safety hazard by causing driver confusion: accident report analysis revealed that some drivers said their accidents occurred when they were lost and looking for information and direction.

The study recommends a comprehensive signage plan for the entire area. The development of a plan is beyond the scope of the study but would probably cost between \$20,000 and \$40,000; implementation could cost between \$100,000 and \$1,000,000, depending on a number of variables, including coordination between municipalities and property owners.



Issue: Transit transfer and intermodal facility

Public transit offers considerable service to the area—but there is no “super stop” with multi-route transfer capability and intermodal park-and-ride facilities; those amenities would further enable and encourage the use of public transit.

The bus stop at IKEA is heavily used—but the area is well developed, inhibiting the possibility of locating a super stop there. Additionally, the Port Authority of Allegheny County has purchased property near the interchange with the Penn Lincoln Parkway West and U.S. Routes 22 & 30, and is proposing using the site for a park-and-ride lot.

The study recommends locating the transit transfer center at or near the IKEA bus stop, with some modifications to the area (for example, sidewalk, crosswalk, bus shelter and traffic signal improvements) for commuter safety and convenience—and using the Port Authority site as the intermodal park-and-ride lot.



Issue: Connecting the Montour Trail and the commercial area

The Montour Trail—part of the Appalachian Bicycle Trail that extends from Washington DC to Pittsburgh—is a multi-use, non-motorized recreational trail running through the study area around several major retail and entertainment venues. But the trail has poor access to those venues, resulting in missed opportunities both for trail users and for the venues. The study found that two potential walk/bike path connections are possible—a western connection intersecting Summit Park Drive and an eastern connection close to The Mall at Robinson. Likely costs: \$21,400 for the western connection, and \$250,000 for the eastern connection; the latter amount is considerably higher because the steep grade requires a series of switchbacks.

SUBURBAN TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS

Make this a professional design workshop
(for teens and teachers)



Teen Design Workshop Produces Solutions

Young people are a major user group in the study area—so, to involve them, ACTA created a suburban design workshop for high school students and teachers. Community organizations partnered, local professionals presented—and ultimately participants proposed thoughtful solutions. For *Suburban Transportation Solutions*, a brochure about the replicable workshop, go to acta-pgh.org.

PRIORITIES



After the engineering consultants completed their work, it was once again time to consult the people who work and live in the area. First, the stakeholders committee and then the general public reviewed the issues and solutions—and then ranked their priorities.

The results, in ranked order:

- | | |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | A walkway across the Summit Park bridge over the Penn Lincoln Parkway West (PA Route 60), with extensions on both ends. |
| 2 | A new crosswalk across Park Manor Boulevard between the IKEA and Robinson Town Centre bus shelters. |
| 3 | Connections and coordination among traffic signals throughout the commercial area. |
| 4 | A conveniently located transfer facility at which coordination of bus schedules allows timed transfers. |
| 5 | New steps from the corner of Park Manor Boulevard and Robinson Town Centre Drive down to the Mall ring road. |
| 6 | Construction of the eastern connection from the Montour Trail. |



PROGRESS

Even when study recommendations are excellent and priorities sensible, it still takes “face time” and extended discussion among developers, business owners, local municipal leaders, PennDOT, Allegheny County, and transportation providers and deciders to bring about change.

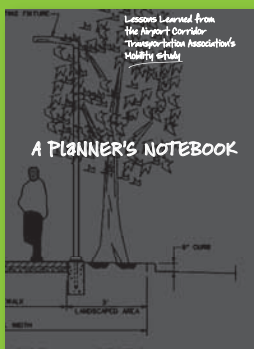
Convening those groups, presenting the recommendations, keeping the conversation going, and catalyzing action is ACTA's current focus. It's a painstaking process, and one of the first issues to address is funding: where will the necessary money come from?

The engineering consultant suggested multiple potential sources of funding, both public and private, for the recommended projects. They include, for example, Pennsylvania Departments of Conservation and Natural Resources, and Community and Economic Development; Transportation Enhancement Funds administered by PennDOT; local property owners; local townships; and businesses in the study area. All those possibilities are being investigated.

The process is beginning to produce results. Two early examples:

- A major retailer is working with the township and a developer on solutions in its immediate area.
- One township is working to obtain approval to include several study recommendations in its budget.

As it promotes implementation of the study's recommendations, ACTA continues to promote public awareness—and a sense of ownership, pride, and place. A month-long “walk challenge” has drawn considerable numbers of people, and is helping to position the commercial area as a gathering place. In addition to encouraging healthful exercise, the walk challenge has given many members of the public—voters and influencers—a close-up look at the opportunities waiting to be grasped in one of the region's most vital commercial areas.



Planner's Notebook Available

During the study process, ACTA learned a number of lessons, ten of which are included in a printpiece titled *A Planner's Notebook*. The lessons are applicable to other areas where suburban development has produced both economic vitality and some issues in getting around. For a copy of the Planner's Notebook, go to acta-pgh.org.

ACTA welcomes questions and comments about the mobility study. Contact acta@acta-pgh.org or 412-809-3505. This executive summary is also available at www.acta-pgh.org.



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Lynn Manion, Executive Director

The Airport Corridor Transportation Association (ACTA) is a non-profit Transportation Management Association located at Robinson Town Centre in Pittsburgh's western suburbs. ACTA works to optimize use of the transportation system in the Airport Corridor by supporting and implementing programs that increase travel options and foster responsible economic growth. ACTA members include area businesses, developers, building owners, stores, schools, hotels, local governments, and public entities that do business in the Corridor.

ACTA Commercial Center Mobility Study Steering Committee

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PennDOT District 11-0
Robert Dudash
URS Corporation
James Foringer
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Carol Uminski
Southwestern Pennsylvania
Commission

ACTA Commercial Center Mobility Study Stakeholders Committee

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Montour Trail Council
Rich Belotti
Allegheny County Airport Authority
Scott Brihart
Moon Township
Eric Buncher
Allegheny County Airport Authority
Sandy Burkett
Vital Signs
Steve Burkett
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Montour Trail Council
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ment Board
Ron Krusiensky
PennDOT District 11-0
Chris Lewis
Pittsburgh Airport Marriott
Dave McGaffin
The Mall at Robinson
Liz Nahm
OTMA
Jodi Noble
Moon Township
Terri Noble
Ikea
Henry Nutbrown
ACTA
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Dave Pecharka
Michael Baker Jr., Inc.
Maureen Pettnr
PNC Bank
Mavis Rainey
OTMA
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