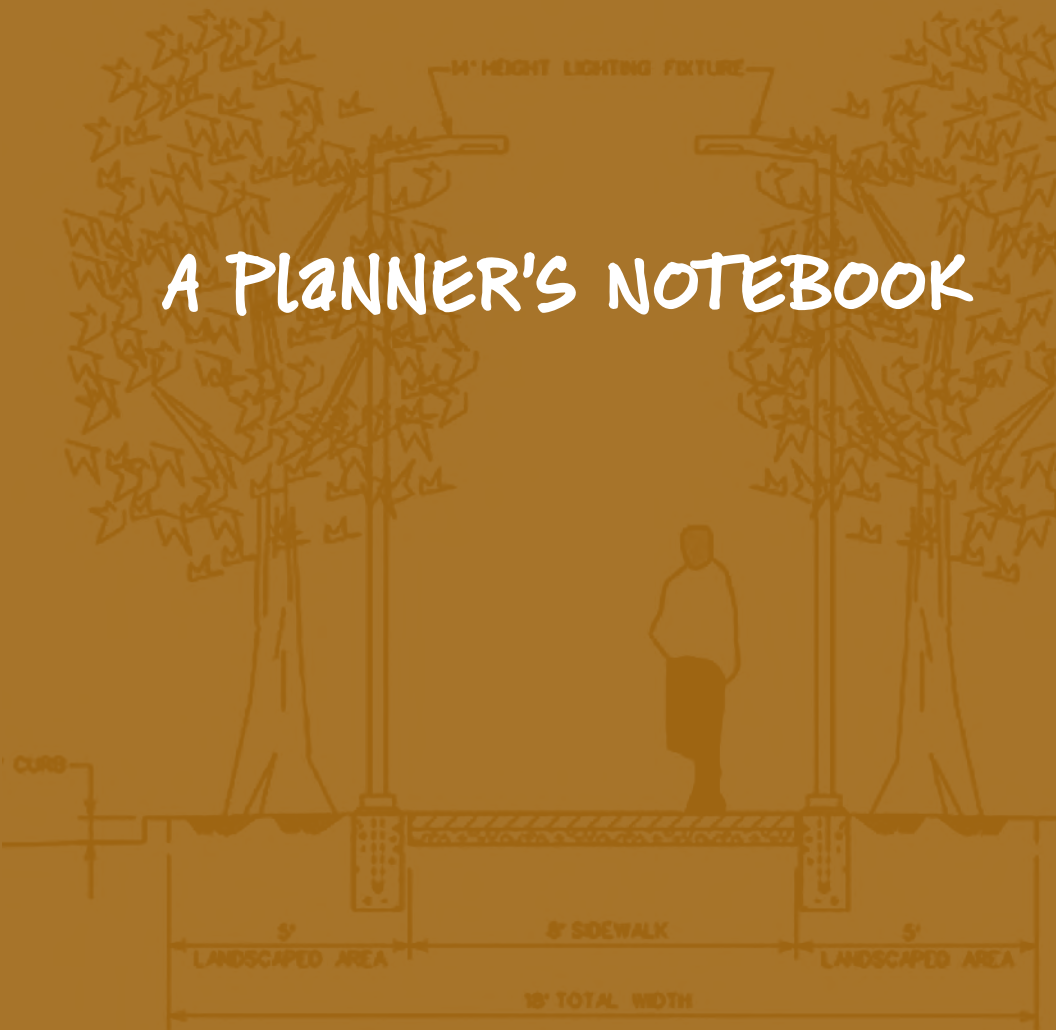


Lessons Learned from  
the Airport Corridor  
Transportation Association's  
Mobility Study

# A PLANNER'S NOTEBOOK



TYPICAL PROPOSED SIDEWALK SECTION







## BACKGROUND

*In Pittsburgh's western suburbs, the sprawling Robinson/ North Fayette commercial area is a popular destination. But it was originally developed for access by automobile, and is not optimized for pedestrians, cyclists or even—in many places—public transportation. That situation limits easy movement, compromises safety and convenience, and may inhibit further economic development.*

*To explore solutions, the Airport Corridor Transportation Association (ACTA) undertook a study with funding by the Federal Highway Administration and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (through the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission). With input from hundreds of stakeholders in both the public and private sectors, consulting engineers developed possible solutions and associated costs. Because many areas of the country have similar commercial centers, the solutions are replicable elsewhere.*



ACTA is now working to encourage implementation, and is presenting study results to various constituencies.

During the study process, we at ACTA learned a number of lessons, ten of which are included in this “planner’s notebook.” We hope they’ll prove useful in other areas where suburban development has produced both economic vitality and some issues in getting around. Funding for this publication was provided by the Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development.

We welcome questions and comments. Contact us at **[acta@acta-pgh.org](mailto:acta@acta-pgh.org)** or **412-809-3505**. The study’s executive summary will be available on our website: **[www.acta-pgh.org](http://www.acta-pgh.org)**.

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

**↑ → The Mall at Robinson**

Call us first.  
177-Caring





## LESSON 1

# STAKEHOLDER INPUT IS INVALUABLE

Inviting stakeholder input at multiple points during the study—for example, as issues were being defined, when consultants formulated possible solutions, and when we needed to prioritize the action plan—let us know what people were thinking. It also kept stakeholders informed about what the issues were and how we were dealing with them. Results: awareness and involvement were built, and the study dealt with real concerns in a realistic way.

Sometimes public input comes in unconventional forms. One example: while people might not always think to say “We need a walkway from here to there,” we found that looking at “desire lines”—footpaths and bike-paths worn by people taking logical but unofficial routes from point to point—told us clearly where stakeholders wanted walkways.







## LESSON 2

# EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MOTIVATES INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement, especially through experiential, “hands-on” situations, is enormously beneficial to a study. For example, a series of walking tours in which we pointed out issues got people excited about those issues—and about potential solutions. We saw enough “aha” moments that we invited the study’s engineers and planners to participate—and they, too, told us they saw the issues in a new light.

✧ Another example: in partnership with Carnegie Museum of Art, we presented a special suburban design workshop for high school students—and it motivated high-energy involvement. With a little education by design and planning professionals, young people who hadn’t given a thought to the area except as a place to catch a movie and grab a snack became deeply involved in developing solutions that were both sensible and innovative. That’s great—because they’re the generation that will design the spaces where we’ll live, work, and shop tomorrow.

### LESSON 3

## TRANSPORTATION MODES MAY NEED RE-BALANCING

There's been a change in suburbia. Most retail/entertainment complexes were designed for use by single-occupancy vehicles—but that's not how those complexes are used today. Health and environmental concerns have motivated walking, cycling, and increased use of public transit, but traditional suburban retail areas often find it difficult to accommodate newer ways. It's time to re-balance emphases so everyone can get around more easily, comfortably, and safely. Our study found issues for users including...

- > Pedestrians, who often have no sidewalks and no safe ways to move from one point to another.
- > Cyclists, who often have no dedicated bike lanes or bike parking racks, and certainly no contemporary amenities like borrow-a-bike facilities.





> Drivers, who often face confusing signage, uncoordinated traffic signals, and no easy way to drive from one part of a commercial area to another.

> Public transit systems, because suburban land use patterns often result in office complexes being built in distant cul-de-sacs. That can make conventional transportation solutions—for example, big-bus service—inefficient.



We learned that educating each user group about not only its own issues but those of other groups promotes understanding, involvement—and, ultimately, safety and convenience.





## LESSON 4

### TRANSIT RIDERS WANT AMENITIES

In many suburban commercial centers, including this study's focal area, bus shelters and transfer facilities are inadequate. That's not simply inconvenient; our surveys and focus groups showed that it's a real disincentive to the use of public transportation. What does "adequate" mean? At a minimum, it means safe, well lighted, thoughtfully located, large enough, and providing good protection from the elements. Improved shelters and transfer facilities can encourage more use of public transportation.



## LESSON 5 .....

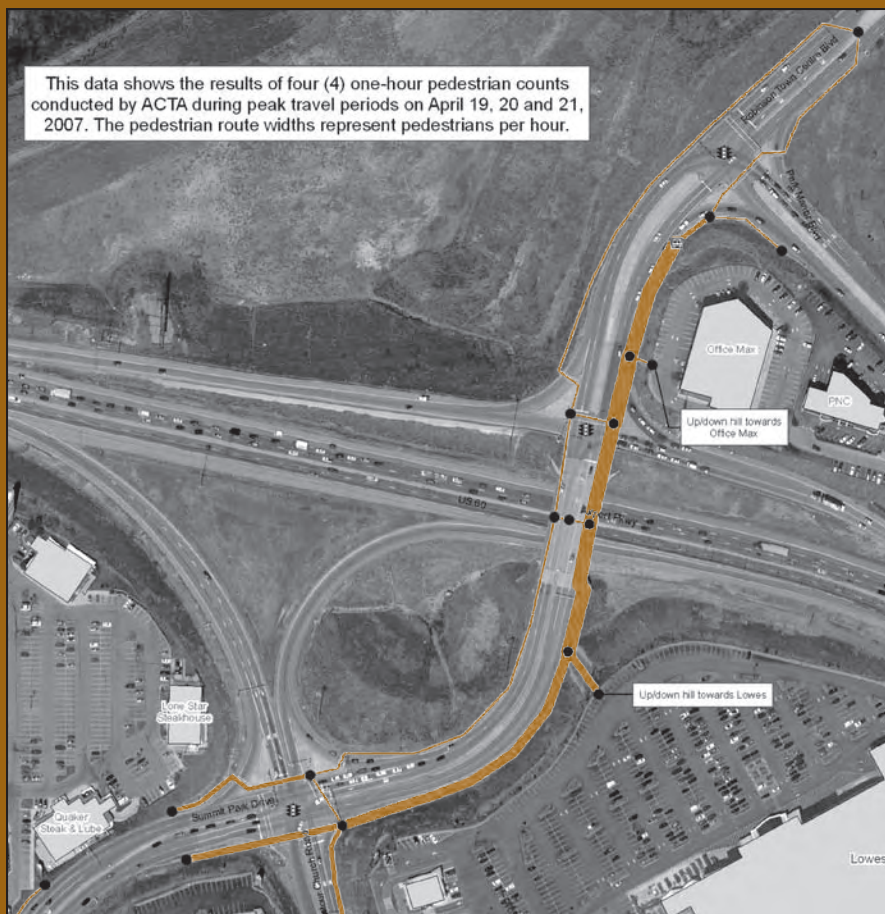
### A "TOWN SQUARE" CAN PLAY A VITAL ROLE

Most large suburban commercial areas that have grown up over decades offer a cornucopia of shops, restaurants, services, and offices—but no central core. However, both usage patterns and common sense indicate that people want a gathering place, a town square—a geographic “heart”. Retrofitting that role isn’t easy, but it’s possible: our engineers and even our teenage design workshop participants came up with multiple possible solutions—for example, a wi-fi-enabled greenspace with a gazebo, trees, and benches that would be perfect for performances, chatting with friends, or just sitting with a computer and a cup of coffee. Importantly, the gazebo area could serve as a central stop and transfer facility for bus lines serving the area. That approach could give an impersonal commercial area a new and vital role.





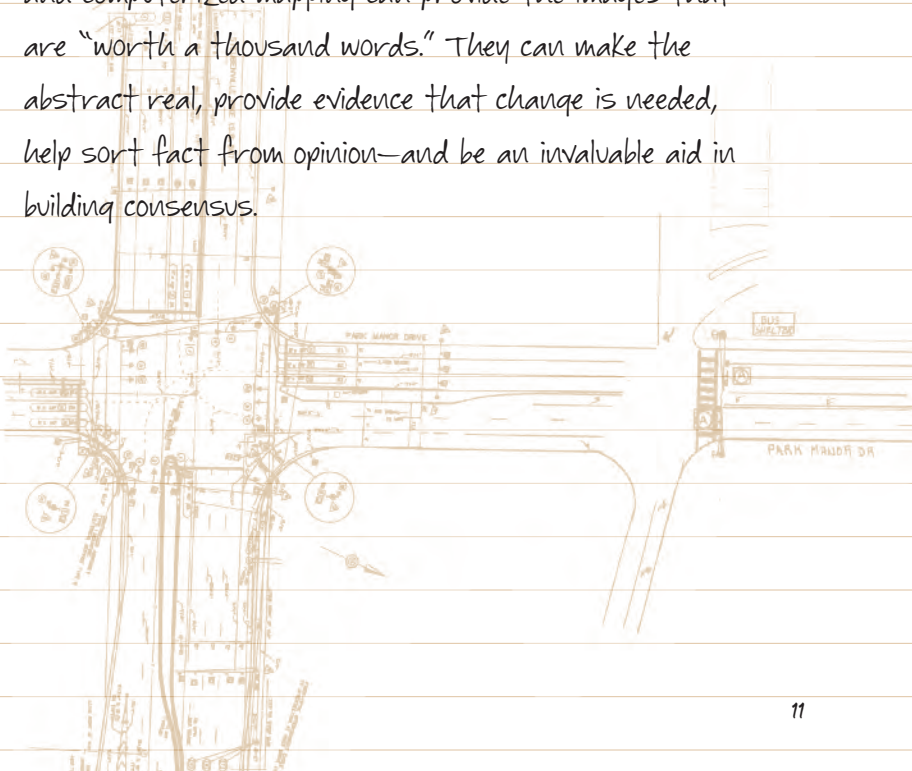
This data shows the results of four (4) one-hour pedestrian counts conducted by ACTA during peak travel periods on April 19, 20 and 21, 2007. The pedestrian route widths represent pedestrians per hour.



## LESSON 6

## TODAY'S TOOLS PROVIDE PERSPECTIVE

People going about their day-to-day business can't see large-scale patterns, and can't know whether their particular experiences are truly representative. That can result in judgments based on personal opinion rather than on fact. Multiple tools used by today's designers and planners can help. For example, geographic information systems, satellite and aerial photography, and computerized mapping can provide the images that are "worth a thousand words." They can make the abstract real, provide evidence that change is needed, help sort fact from opinion—and be an invaluable aid in building consensus.



## LESSON 7

### FIELDWORK IS STILL NECESSARY

No matter what technologies are used, most studies still require some old-fashioned fieldwork—and we recommend that, when circumstances permit, any study's organizers undertake at least some of that work. Example: some of this study's most powerful conclusions were drawn from simple headcounts of pedestrians passing by certain points. We at ACTA did many of the pedestrian counts ourselves. Our initial motivation was to save money, but we reaped another benefit: we quickly learned that having our “feet on the street” deepened our own understandings of both the study process and the issues under examination.





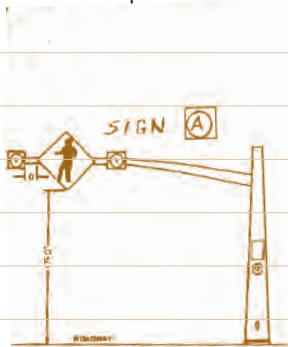


## LESSON 8

### MUTUAL BENEFIT PRODUCES RESULTS

In the study area, driving out of the parking lot of a major retailer was problematic, with heavy traffic producing long waits at the intersection. Pedestrians faced difficulties, too: crossing the intersection was harrowing, and the lack of sidewalks meant close encounters between cars and walkers. In talking with the retailer, we learned that they were considering ways to improve the situation for their customers.

✱ Their business issue dovetailed with our concern for driver and pedestrian safety. We provided data quantifying the problem and suggesting a solution—and now the retailer is considering remediation that may include a relocated parking lot exit and updated signalization.



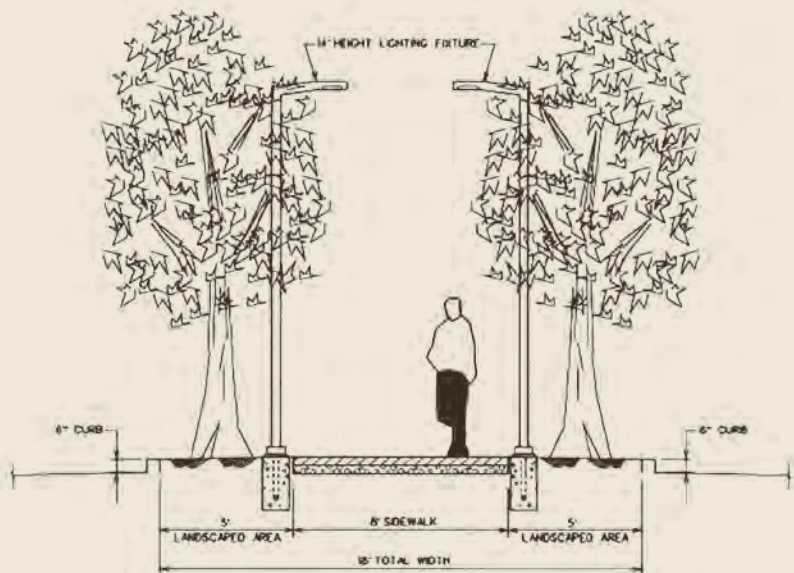
#### NOTE

PUSH BUTTON TO ACTIVATE  
FLASHING WARNING DEVICE  
SIGN TO BE ILLUMINATED AT ALL  
TIMES. YELLOW LENS TO BE FLASHING  
UPON ACTIVATION BY PEDESTRIAN.  
FLASHING OPERATION UPON ACTIVATION  
WILL LAST ONE MINUTE

ALTERNATIVE II  
PEDESTRIAN CROSSING  
FLASHING WARNING DEVICE

est cost ~\$32,500



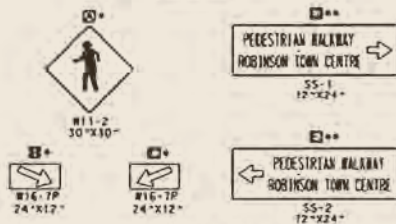


**TYPICAL PROPOSED SIDEWALK SECTION**

## SIGNS

### LEGEND

- DY/4" DOUBLE YELLOW PAVEMENT MARKING/WIDTH (IN)
- W/12" SOLID WHITE PAVEMENT MARKING/WIDTH (IN)
- PEO WHITE PAVEMENT MARKING LEGEND
- XING WHITE PAVEMENT MARKING LEGEND
- 4 SIGN



\* FLUORESCENT YELLOW GREEN

\*\* BLUE SIGN WITH WHITE LETTERING

ALL PAVEMENT MARKING LEGENDS AND CROSSWALKS SHOULD BE THERMOPLASTIC FOR DURABILITY

**PARKING LOT PATH FOR PEDESTRIANS**



## LESSON 9

# THE CONVENER ROLE IS CRUCIAL

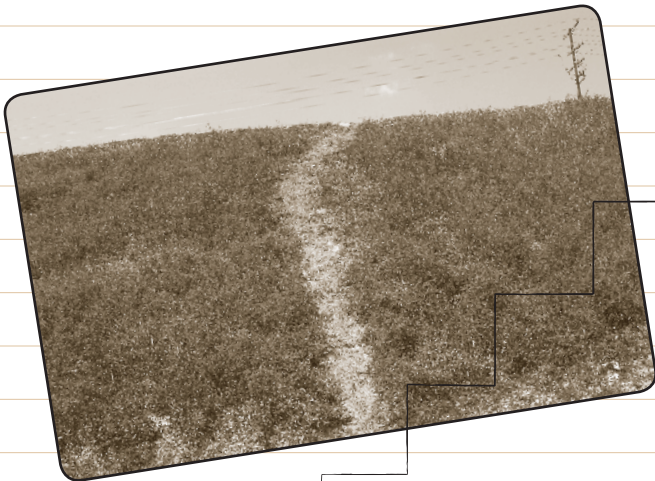
Even when study recommendations are invariably excellent, it still takes “face time” and extended discussion among developers, business owners, local municipal leaders, and transportation providers and deciders to bring about change. Convening those groups, presenting the recommendations, keeping the conversation going, and catalyzing action is an enormous job. Deciding early on who will take on that crucial responsibility can make the difference between a study that will bring tangible and positive results—and one that will gather dust on a shelf. (For this study, ACTA has taken on that role.)



## LESSON 10

### SOLUTIONS AREN'T ALWAYS EASY

Even when a study's methodology is impeccable, and the recommendations noncontroversial, there may be obstacles that simply cannot be overcome—at least in the shorter term. One example from this study: because of the area's topography, hillside steps would make it much easier for pedestrians to move between points separated by steep grassy slopes. But, for now, the issues involved with such steps—for instance, cost, maintenance, snow and ice removal, and accessibility—make them impractical, even impossible. So the steps became a recommendation not for today but for tomorrow. It's a lesson in life's practicalities.







**AIRPORT CORRIDOR  
TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION**

Robinson Plaza Two  
Route 60 & Park Manor Dr., Suite 420  
Pittsburgh, PA 15205  
412.809.3507  
[www.acta-pgh.org](http://www.acta-pgh.org)

Lynn Manion, Executive Director