



July 2009

Traffic: Breaking the Grip of Gridlock

Traffic congestion has become an inescapable fact of life throughout central New Jersey in recent years, and the area around the Princeton Junction train station is no exception. Route 571, Alexander Road, Vaughn Drive, Wallace Road and any number of local streets become seriously clogged, especially during the morning and evening rush hours, as the number of cars exceeds the capacity of the roadways.

This doesn't just frustrate motorists. It also harms the region's economy and damages the environment. Businesses lose countless hours of productivity when their workers are stuck in traffic. Congested highways increase the time it takes for a company's goods and services to reach their destinations — and time, to these companies, is money. Environmentally, all those cars inching along in stop-and-go traffic emit excessive amounts of greenhouse gases, fouling the air we breathe and endangering our quality of life.

The problem of traffic congestion will not be solved overnight, and the Princeton Junction Area Redevelopment Plan is not the silver bullet that will magically remove cars from area roadways. What the Plan *will* do, however, is take systematic, targeted steps to relieve congestion in three ways: by improving area streets, roads and intersections; expanding bicycle and pedestrian access; and providing transportation options.

Street and Road Improvements

The Plan establishes 10 districts within the Princeton Junction Redevelopment Area, each with a different set of permitted uses, as well as development criteria, design standards, architectural guidelines and other detailed zoning regulations. Concurrent with redevelopment activities in each of the districts, the Plan calls for specific street, road and intersection improvements, including:

- Realignment, reconstruction and extension of Vaughn Drive from Alexander Road to Washington Road;
- Realignment and reconstruction of Washington Road between the railroad and Little Bear Brook;
- Construction of new local streets to provide internal circulation in the immediate vicinity of the train station;
- Construction of additional pick-up and drop-off facilities at the station;

- Improvements to Route 571 between the railroad and Clarksville Road; and
- Construction of Sarnoff Drive linking Route 1 with a further extension of Vaughn Drive.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Access

Many West Windsor residents enjoy biking and walking for recreation, and many more would welcome the opportunity to bike or walk to work, the train station and nearby shops, restaurants and other destinations. Some steps, such as adding sidewalks and a bike lane to the reconstructed Alexander Road Bridge, have already been taken — but the Redevelopment Plan anticipates several more, including:

- Adding bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly features to Vaughn Drive and its extension;
- Substantially improving bicycle and pedestrian safety along Route 571;
- Providing housing options close to jobs and/or transit, encouraging biking and walking to work and/or train; and
- Constructing continuous sidewalk and bike path connections throughout the Redevelopment Area.

Transportation Options

The Redevelopment Plan acknowledges that the Princeton Junction train station is not only a railway depot, but also a major transportation hub for the Township and the region, and the Plan envisions the station as an integral part of a new "town center." As such, it will be a place where many modes of transportation come together, including:

- A Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, establishing dedicated rights-of-way for bus use, with possible later conversion to light rail, to serve the train station, Route 1 employment centers, downtown Princeton and the surrounding area;
- Innovative congestion management strategies, such as township-wide van or shuttle service; and
- Additional short-term waiting areas for buses, shuttles, taxis and automobiles.

(continued on page 2)

About this newsletter ...

This is the second of three newsletters West Windsor Township is producing regarding the Redevelopment Plan for Princeton Junction. The newsletters are being supplemented by regular updates on the Township website, www.westwindsornj.org, describing the progress of the Plan and answering frequently asked questions about it. The newsletters, website postings and other public education and outreach activities are being funded by a grant from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission and are being prepared under the auspices of the Municipal Land Use Center at The College of New Jersey. No Township funds are being expended in the preparation or dissemination of these materials.

Traffic (continued)

All of these improvements will cost money, and the Plan makes clear that the primary responsibility for them belongs to the state and federal governments, as well as to the redeveloper(s) chosen to implement the Plan. The Plan stipulates that all on-site improvements, including internal streets, sidewalks and bike paths, will be paid for by the redeveloper(s).

Other major expenditures are specifically identified in the Plan as the responsibility of federal agencies, the state Department of Transportation, NJ TRANSIT and private entities, such as Sarnoff Corporation. Moreover, a key provision in the Redevelopment Plan adopted by the Township Council states that “any plans to serve as a major Central Jersey transportation hub shall not be implemented without the prior commitment of state and/or federal resources to pay for the improvements needed to accomplish this objective.”

Parking: Shrinking the Waiting Lists

As anyone who has tried to get a permit to park in the vicinity of the Princeton Junction train station knows all too well, the demand for parking far exceeds the supply of available spaces.

The numbers tell the story. The combined capacity of the parking lots owned by NJ TRANSIT and the West Windsor Parking Authority — the Wallace Road, Alexander Road, Vaughn Drive and Station Drive surface lots — is 3,634 spaces. Private lots at Station Drive and Washington Road add approximately 75 more spaces, bringing the total number in the immediate vicinity of the station to 3,709.

The West Windsor Parking Authority maintains waiting lists for permits at its own lots, as well as those owned by NJ TRANSIT. The waiting list for a permit in the Wallace Road lot, reserved for West Windsor residents only, is seven to eight years. The waiting list for the Alexander Road lot is five years, for the Vaughn Drive lot about two and a half years. The Wallace Road and Station Drive daily lots, which contain nearly 1,000 unreserved spots, usually fill up by 6:30 a.m.

As difficult as it is to find parking today near the Princeton Junction station, the situation is likely to get much worse. Plans are proceeding to construct a second rail tunnel under the Hudson River, which will

allow NJ TRANSIT to double both the number and the capacity of its rush-hour trains between Princeton Junction and New York. This dramatic increase will help meet the growing demand for commuter rail service, but only if it is accompanied by a commensurate increase in available, convenient parking.

The Princeton Junction Area Redevelopment Plan places a high priority on providing additional parking for West Windsor residents. Working with NJ TRANSIT and the West Windsor Parking Authority, the Township proposes to use the publicly owned compost site for displacement parking while a new garage is built. This would be financed entirely by private sources. The Wallace Road surface lot would remain as it is. Together, these steps would more than double the number of parking spots designated for West Windsor residents only, from 935 to 1,885.

The Plan also commits the Township to providing more convenient short-term parking and kiss-and-ride parking on both sides of the station, and to locate additional parking garages along the Dinky line that provides service between Princeton Junction and downtown Princeton. This would not only provide parking for commuters displaced by construction in the Redevelopment Area, but would also facilitate development of Bus Rapid Transit and increased use of the Dinky.

West Windsor Township
Redevelopment Newsletter



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