



# THE REGIONAL CENTER

Fall 2006

BRIDGEWATER • RARITAN • SOMERVILLE

*A partnership for a better tomorrow*

IN SOMERSET COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

## ROUTE 22 SAFETY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The New Jersey Department of Transportation Division of Project Planning and Development has made several trips to Somerset County to present of the preliminary short term improvement plan scheduled to be implemented on Route 22 through the Regional Center.

The scope of the "U.S. Route 22 Sustainable Corridor Plan" extends from the North Branch of the Raritan River, west of Ethicon, to the Bridgewater Township Corporate Boundary, east of Voessler Avenue. The "Short-Term Needs" addressed at the present time focus on alleviating crash "hot spots" while enhancing pedestrian connectivity. Already completed are the sidewalks at the Grove Street overpass and the Mountain Avenue pedestrian bridge. The Chimney Rock Road interchange is currently in design.

The five key areas on which NJDOT will focus in the "Short Term Plan" are:

- Mitigate crash problem at the Lone Star Restaurant and North Bridge Street
- Mitigate the crash problem at the North Gaston Avenue U-turn
- Mitigate the crash problem at the Adamsville Road U-turn

Cont. pg. 3

## SOMERVILLE LANDFILL DESIGN INITIATIVE CONTINUES

The Borough of Somerville is continuing an extensive public initiative designed to reach a public consensus on the most appropriate use for the former landfill site. The 86+- site is bordered by the New Jersey Transit rail line and U.S. Route 206.

The overriding goals of the redevelopment of the site are to invigorate the economic viability of the central business district; to improve pedestrian and vehicular circulation; to reinforce the neighborhoods south of the rail line; to provide new recreation and open space opportunities; the create a southern gateway to the central business district; to restore the environment of the brownfield site; and to link resources and destinations including the greenway connections to Peters Brook, the Raritan River, Old Dutch Parsonage, and the Wallace House.

Somerville, in addition of its function as the county seat of Somerset, is at the core of the Regional Center, and as such, is an important catalyst for effective planning to future development of the region.

The plan, developed by a multi-faceted group of Somerville officials and citizens, planners, and business people, will be "environmentally sustainable, transit friendly, and supportive of the economy and the community."

It is imperative that the final redevelopment of the site be a seamless extension of the central business district while ensuring a diverse, mixed-use project. Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is critical to the success, as the Somerville Train Station, along the Raritan Valley Line with one-seat access to Newark and two-seat access to New York, is adjacent to the development site. TOD relates to the creation of compact, walkable communities centered around active rail systems, limiting dependency on the automobile. Communities created through application of TOD principles are dense and walkable, reducing the need for driving.

Cont. pg. 3

### IN THIS ISSUE

- Somerville Landfill Design Initiative
- Ongoing Project Updates
- STS Tire Expansion
- Strategic Master Plan Update
- Route 22 Safety Improvements
- Green Design for Somerset County
- Route 202 Corridor Study
- 2006 Challenge Grants Awarded

# ONGOING PROJECT UPDATES

## REGIONAL CENTER BUS SHUTTLE UPDATE

The Regional Center Partnership's plans to establish a Shuttle Bus program has been tabled for the current budget year. Determining that the project was "not a practical use of funds" at this time, the request will be resubmitted to the Freeholders by the Regional Center Partnership for the next County budget cycle.

## IN THE MEANTIME...

The Regional Center Partnership had allocated \$200,000 in the 2005 and 2006 budgets to supplement the Bus Shuttle program. These funds will now be equally re-allocated to the three Regional Center municipalities to fund other transportation related projects. Each municipality submitted a proposal for use of the \$66,667 available.

Bridgewater has requested funding for design and construction of the missing section of sidewalk on Milltown Road in the vicinity of North Branch Park. This missing link will connect residential development to the County park system.

Raritan has requested funding for pedestrian access improvements at the municipal complex, including new sidewalks, ADA accessible ramps, crosswalks, improved lighting, and new "way-finder" signage providing direction to the complex from a multiple block radius.

Somerville has requested funding for implementation of a traffic calming initiatives around Somerville Borough schools. Planned improvements will include sidewalk replacement, enhanced lighting, signage, pavement markings, raised crosswalks, and/or speed tables. Funds will allow improvements in areas in proximity to schools and will be used as a model for similar requests in the future.

## ORLANDO DRIVE VISIONING

A proposal has been submitted to the Municipal Land Use Center for a \$40,000 grant for design of Orlando Drive from Route 206 to the Basilone Statue at Old York Road in Raritan. The purpose of the grant will be to create a scenic corridor, including a safe pedestrian crossing at Route 206, connecting Raritan to Somerville through the soon to be developed landfill site. Determining that the project was "Regional Center-appropriate," the Partnership approved a grant for engineering of the project.

Three basic steps will be addressed as the initiative proceeds: Identification of elements and assessment of needs; Visioning; and Development of the Orlando Drive Corridor Design Plan. The project is being approached as an intermunicipal planning initiative in cooperation with the Somerset Landfill Site Visioning process.

The draft of the planning report is expected to be available in the fall with a townwide information session to be scheduled.

## SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL PROGRAM RECEIVES FUNDING

The State of New Jersey has received a grant in the amount of \$15 million to support the "Safe Routes to School (SRTS)" initiative.

The SRTS Program empowers communities to make walking and bicycling to school both a safe and routine activity by providing funding for programs and projects including safer street crossings and educational initiatives to encourage children and their parents.

The National Household Travel Survey

(2001) conducted by the Federal Highway Administration, showed that fewer than 15 percent of all school trips are made by walking or biking with over half of the school trips made by private automobile. The decline in walking and biking has had an adverse effect on traffic and air quality, and the associated sedentary lifestyle leaves children at increased risk for a variety of health problems including obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. (U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, fact Sheet, 2004)

Through the cooperation of RideWise, the Mayor's Wellness Campaign, and the efforts of the Somerset County Business Partnership, a plan will be developed to access a portion of the funds for Somerset County. The "Walking School Bus" programs, established by RideWise, will be used as a model for the grant submission.

## 2006 CHALLENGE GRANTS AWARDED

The Regional Center has awarded the following Municipal Challenge Grants for 2006. Each of the grants is in the amount of \$40,000.

### BRIDGEWATER - SIDEWALK STUDY DESIGN PLAN

A sidewalk needs and design plan will be developed for Garretson Road and Commons Way.

### SOMERVILLE - LANDFILL REDEVELOPMENT PLAN REVISION

A revised redevelopment plan will be produced in response to market changes since the completion of the original plan.

### RARITAN - ORLANDO DRIVE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Additional work on the corridor and vision plan will be completed.

## STS TIRE SERVICE PLANS EXPANSION

Ted Haas, Vice-President of Real Estate for Bridgewater's STS Tire Service, made a preliminary presentation to the Regional Center Partnership, detailing the proposed expansion plans. The STS facility is located at the eastern edge of the Regional Center, off Main Street near Commerce Bank Ballpark.

Mr. Haas explained that the current 100,000 square foot facility is no longer adequate as a result of expansion of STS retail centers to over 100 locations in the tri-state area. The proposed 200,000 square foot flex space will house both warehouse and office space and is expected to require the services of 50 to 100 new employees.

"STS needs the expansion to remain in this area," explained Mr. Haas.

The new facility will be constructed on the recently remediated brownfield site adjacent to the current facility.

## LANDFILL REDEVELOPMENT (cont.)

Through a series of public meetings, a Draft Statement of Goals and several Planning Framework Diagrams have been developed. The Framework Diagrams serve to create an effective balance between open space and land use, including a workable road system to move around and through the property.

A major consideration in the planning process is focus on market support for the proposed development and the need for the borough to attract ratables. Though the topography is conducive to active and passive recreation uses, it is imperative that Somerville attract tax paying entities to the site to continue to support the tax base.

The Final plan is expected to be released in the fall.

## STRATEGIC MASTER PLAN UPDATE

The long-awaited Regional Center Strategic Master Plan is nearing completion, with the draft report presented for review at the September 2006 Regional Center meeting. The final element for completion of the report was adopting of the municipal components of the individual plans by the Bridgewater, Raritan, and Somerville Planning Boards and governing bodies. The overall Regional Center component was then combined with the approved municipal plans. The draft report has been submitted to the municipalities for their review and comment prior to formal adoption by all entities.

The plan focuses on land use, circulation, community facilities, infrastructure, housing, cultural & historic issues, community designs, and environment and are based in large part of the results of the Spring 2005 Regional Center retreat.

## ROUTE 22 (cont.)

- Mitigate the crash problem at Grove Street
- Eliminate the bottleneck along Route 22 eastbound at Mountain Avenue and the Route 202/206 interchange
- Extend deceleration lane from Route 22 eastbound onto Finnerne Avenue
- Install signal at Foothill Road and Ronson Road
- Convert existing right through lane along Route 22 west, east of Foothill Road, into an exit only lane and west of Foothill into an acceleration lane.

The proposed plans are based on crash analysis of the impacted intersections, extensive traffic counts, and traffic projections into the year 2007. The preliminary indications dictate the proposed improvements as follows:

### Lone Star & North Bridge Street

- Provide auxiliary lane between North Bridge and Grove
- Provide acceleration lane east of Grove
- Reconfigure Lone Star driveways
- Eliminate truck weigh station
- Provide wider shoulders in both directions on Route 22 in the vicinity of Lone Star

### North Gaston/Adamsville U-turns

- Eliminate U-turns at North Gaston and redirect movements to the Grove Street and Foothill Road overpasses.
- Provide wider inside shoulders in both directions along Route 22 in proximity to the Bridgewater Diner.
- Provide auxiliary lane between ramp from North Grove and North Bridge

### Grove Street Overpass

- Divert all left turns from North Grove Street southbound onto Ivanhoe Avenue
- Provide exclusive left turn lane along Grove Street northbound

### Mountain Avenue & Route 22 eastbound

- Extend acceleration lane from Route 202/206 northbound ramp onto Route 22 eastbound
- Convert Mountain Avenue ramp into a stop condition

### Route 22 & Country Club Road

- Add a third through lane in both directions and a channelized right turn on Country Club Road with an acceleration lane.

The project continues under review and development with further public meetings to be scheduled by NJDOT.

## PEDESTRIAN, BICYCLE, AND GREENWAY SYSTEMS CONNECTION PLAN PROPOSED

Somerset County has applied for state grant funds to support the "Somerset County Regional Center Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Greenway Systems Connection Plan." If funded, the study will focus on creating a strategic planning framework that will improve the pedestrian and bicycle network within the Regional Center. The Plan will outline strategies to improve connectivity between existing transit services and neighborhoods and community facilities. The study will identify safety hotspots and missing linkages while assembling an inventory of proposed improvements.

The Plan is expected to improve the overall mobility and health of Regional Center residents by reducing traffic congestion and encouraging non-motorized transportation options for short trips. The project is expected to take two years to complete.

## GREEN DESIGN-SMART BUSINESS/SMART GROWTH

Mike Kerwin, president of Somerville's SSP Architectural Group, presented "Green Design - Sustainable Building Practices for Somerset County" to the September meeting of the Regional Center. He explained that Sustainable Green Design provides for a "complete approach to facilities design, operations and performance that leads to building cost savings and maximum user productivity."

Kerwin explained that Green Design is inexorably linked to the same Smart Growth principles for which Somerset County has become renowned as a leader in the state. Because of this link, it is important for the County to adopt green building principles and provide leadership in Green Design for public buildings constructed in the county.

Green Design is based on an integrated process in which designers, engineers, owners, operators, and users collaborate in the design process to develop facilities that meet the United States Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)

standards of energy efficient and cost effective design. The end result is a building that provides an indoor environment that makes people comfortable, maintains health, and facilitates personal performance.

The six major areas addressed by the LEED program are: Sustainable sites; Water Efficiency; Energy & Atmosphere; Materials & Resources; Indoor environment quality; and Innovation. Points are awarded for addressing each of these areas with a goal of LEED Certification.

Mr. Kerwin explained that the cost of green building is less than a 2% increase over the cost of conventional construction. These costs are more that recovered over the life of the building through increased efficiency of physical plant operation and increased efficiency of human resources for employees in a corporate or government facility or students in a learning environment.

Green Design for public building faces the barrier of the low bid

## ROUTE 202 CORRIDOR TO BE STUDIED WITH GRANT

The Route 202 corridor from the Somerville Circle to the Flemington Circle will be the subject of a \$250,000 "multi-modal and land use corridor assessment" to identify roadway and operational improvement and multi-mobility strategies to improve transportation between the two counties.

The 18 to 21 month project will establish a vision for the corridor, focusing on roadway improvements, transit enhancements, design strategies, and bicycle/pedestrian improvements.

requirement for public entities. Because of the slightly higher up front costs, Green Design either must be specified in bid requests or an allowance for consideration of longer term operation costs must be granted in bid acceptance. Mr. Kerwin explained the concept of "on time/on budget" is now a given in the industry and that sustainable building design is the over-riding factor in development of both public and private buildings.

The Board of Chosen Freeholders, County Administration, the Somerset County Business Partnership, and the Regional Center were all called upon to take a proactive approach to Green Design in Somerset County, both in the public and private sectors.

It was noted that the new municipal complex in planning for Bridgewater Township is striving to obtain Gold LEED Certification.

Further information on Green Design principles may be obtained at [www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org)

### THE REGIONAL CENTER

BRIDGEWATER, RARITAN, SOMERVILLE • SOMERSET COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

Contact: Somerset County Planning Board • Post Office Box 3000, Somerville, New Jersey 08876

Phone 908-231-7021 • [www.regionalcenterpartnership.org](http://www.regionalcenterpartnership.org)