



CENTRE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

November 11, 2022

Dean D. Ball, P.E., Assistant District Engineer - Design
PA Department of Transportation, Engineering District 2-0
70 PennDOT Drive
Clearfield, PA 16830

Re: October 2022 Meeting Comment

Dear Mr. Ball:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the State College Area Connector transportation project. The Centre County Historical Society (CCHS) was founded in 1904 and is the oldest and largest history organization in the county, serving as the official historical society of Centre County.

PennDOT proposals to build highways in the Rt 322 corridor have emerged since the 1960s, starting with the Mount Nittany Expressway. The Centre County Historical Society has had a voice in all of these discussions and has sought to provide historic background and context to PennDOT and the general public. We have done this through actions such as leading efforts for the Penns-Brush Valley Rural Historical District, National Register eligible determination, and through public programming such as hosting nationally renowned landscape architect, Grant Jones, to speak about context sensitive design for these types of projects in the late 1990s. He and his firm successfully modified plans for traditional large highways, such as the Paris Pike in Kentucky, and redesigned them as scenic roadways and wildlife highways, considering them a vital form of green infrastructure.

We are currently working with Dr. Dan Marriott, Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture at Penn State, and his Landscape Architecture 414 studio to stimulate constructive public conversation. They were invited to help CCHS and other advocacy groups investigate more flexible and contextually sensitive solutions to help the community understand alternative strategies to ensure that this project could improve safety in the least environmentally damaging way, while also being sensitive to historic, cultural, and natural resources that may be lost. Dr. Marriott has consulted for FHWA and advised state transportation agencies across the United States on how they might address community needs and values in project design.

CCHS recognizes the critical need to improve safety in the project area but believes there are multiple options to do this in a manner that protects the unique historical, cultural, environmental and recreational resources abundant within the landscape in this corridor. These resources at risk

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have been identified throughout project area in the Penns-Brush Valley Rural Historic District eligible nomination and by way of the conservation easements of Clearwater Conservancy and the Centre County Farmland Trust. Other organizations like the Nittany Valley Environmental Coalition, Cedar Run Communities, Hidden Valley HOA, Nittany Mountain Biking Association and individuals have identified yet other resources.

We would strongly urge PennDOT to:

- Take advantage of flexibility in highway design policies to develop solutions to avoid sensitive areas and resources.
- Engage with Penn State and other local organizations like CCHS and the abovementioned groups collectively in developing a broader vision for the future of this highway corridor and valley.
- Identify appropriate national environmentally and contextually sensitive model projects to use as basis of design for this project.

The State College Area Connector transportation project is the gateway to the Commonwealth's leading public institute of higher education and research as well as a major economic engine. We feel that it deserves the treatment that respects these values. This project is worthy of being an outstanding national example of contextually and environmentally sensitive design for, not only citizens of Centre Region and the University Community, but for PennDOT's own stature in execution of this important project.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Centre County Historical Society Board of Governors,

Mary Sorensen
Executive Director

Roger L. Williams
President

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