

PROJECT BACKGROUND

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The primary purpose of the Old York Road Corridor Improvement Study is to define a comprehensive vision to guide the economic, functional, and aesthetic future of the Old York Road corridor. The study area is a 2.5-mile-long corridor along Old York Road, a major arterial that runs north-south through Abington Township. Serving as both Main Street to township residents and as access between Center City Philadelphia and northern suburbs, the Old York Road corridor offers daily commuter vehicular passage and a local and regional draw to the corridor's commercial and institutional services. This dual identity, coupled with the physical complexities of the study area, have created a corridor with multiple, if sometimes competing, functions. A comprehensive transportation, land use planning, and market analysis study is needed to determine the best economic approach for the corridor's long-term viability and to organize the physical components of the corridor to provide a logical, practical, and attractive environment.


The Old York Road Corridor Improvement Study takes place at a timely planning stage for Abington Township. In 2007, Abington Township Commissioners adopted a new Comprehensive Plan for the township. The Plan describes visionary concepts for the township with regard to managing growth in a smart way by strategically balancing land use and transportation goals in a way that improves the quality of life in Abington. The Old York Road Corridor Improvement Study applies these recently adopted planning concepts in a way that defines physical improvements in real locations along the corridor, and identifies the strategic implementation steps to realize the recommendations.

PROJECT COORIDOR

As with many state highway corridors passing through older, "first ring" suburbs, the Old York Road corridor has felt the effects of the country's shift from urban centers to suburban living during the latter half of the 20th century. As populations moved out to the suburbs, an increased reliance on vehicular travel, over other modes, strained traffic capacities on community Main Streets. Corridors were widened to accommodate additional and faster-moving traffic sometimes leaving minimal, if any, pedestrian amenities. Businesses now tend to locate in suburbs where new residential neighborhoods indicated a strong market demand and large commercial development parcels offered flexibility and the opportunity to maximize surface parking spaces. This paradigm left many older suburbs' long corridors with small parcels, fragmented shopping districts, high traffic demands, and a dwindling pedestrian presence.

The Old York Road corridor has been more fortunate than most of these corridors. Its inherent assets have kept Old York Road a regional and local retail destination as well as an effective vehicular passage route. The study area is characterized by wooded, rolling terrain offering periodic views of building pinnacles piercing through treetops and architectural assets such as the former Strawbridge & Clothier building and many colonial style dwellings. Abington Township has done much to ensure developer and business owner interests in the corridor through various incentive programs including BRIC, grant and loan funding for façade and property improvements, and special tax incentives. The Township has also supported operational and aesthetic improvements such as "undergrounding" utilities, streetscape improvements, and New Vision guidelines for business corridors.

Important shopping centers exist at the intersection of Old York Road with London Road and Old York Road and The Fairway, providing large, anchor stores that attract shoppers to the



corridor. Existing bus and rail services connect the corridor to the region. And community facilities such as the Abington Library, the Abington Township Building, and numerous attractive churches and synagogues contribute to the livability of the adjacent neighborhoods.

A variety of SEPTA transit facilities are located within the corridor. The SEPTA R3 commuter rail line, operating between Center City Philadelphia and West Trenton, New Jersey, crosses the corridor at the southern end, near The Fairway. The Noble train station is located just north of the boundary with Jenkintown Borough and south of the Fairway. Additionally, the R2 Warminster commuter rail line parallels a portion of the corridor in the northern part of the study area and the Crestmont Station is located about two-and-a-half blocks north of the Old York Road corridor, near Roy Street.

The SEPTA bus route 55 runs the length of the corridor connecting south to Center City Philadelphia and north to Doylestown. Bus stops are located every one or two blocks.

PROJECT PROCESS

The study consisted of four major phases: Identifying Opportunities, Visioning, Draft Plan, and Final Report. Three streams of activities, comprised of Land Use Planning and Urban Design, Circulation, and Market Analysis elements allowed for parallel investigations relevant to each respective stream, while at the same time emphasizing cross-referencing and interaction among the streams in the course of the work through the four phases. The Final Old York Road Corridor Improvement Plan represents a full integration of the recommendations of the Plan relative to Land Use Planning and Urban Design, Circulation, and Market Analysis.

The study planning process was guided by a Steering Committee (SC) consisting of representatives from Abington Township Board of Commissioners, Abington Township staff,

Abington Township Planning Commission, Abington Memorial Hospital, Penn State Abington Campus, and Eastern Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce. SAC members, as well as other residents and business operators in the corridor, took part in focus group and interview activities to inform the land use planning and urban design, market analysis, and circulation components of the project (see the inside cover for names of SC representatives).

The first phase, Identifying Opportunities, included meetings with the SC, focus groups and interviews, a site tour, and an analysis and mapping of the existing conditions. The second phase, Visioning, included several rounds of exploring various themes for the corridor's future. Upon defining the preferred framework for the future of the corridor, the team worked on the Draft Plan. The project process was completed with the fourth phase, the Final Report.

The planning process included three Town Meetings with Abington residents. The first Town Meeting was held on March 19, 2008 and included a summary the Identifying Opportunities phase. The second Town Meeting was held on July 23, 2008 and included a review of the Visioning Phase and resulting Preferred Concept. The final and third Town Meeting was held on DATE TO BE INSERTED. Each Town Meeting included a presentation of the recent project status followed by a question and answer period with attendees. The second Town Meeting included a workshop session in which attendees were given an opportunity to work directly with Steering Committee Members and the consultants on planning issues.

Abington Township staff maintained the website www.oldyorkroad.net with project updates throughout the project process. The website included project process information, illustrations at critical milestones throughout the process, and video of each of the Town Meetings.

Simultaneous to the Old York Road Corridor Improvement Study, the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization, Delaware Valley

CHAPTER 1

Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), conducted Phase 1 of the Routes 611 and 263 Corridor Study in Montgomery County. This study included the interconnected 9- and 12-mile corridors along Route 611/Route 263 (Old York Road and Easton Road) in eastern Montgomery County which includes parts of five municipalities including Abington Township. As the DVRPC study includes the Old York Road Corridor Improvement study area as part of their study, the planning team was in frequent contact with DVRPC staff to coordinate the finding and recommendations of each study. Members of each study spoke on the phone and e-mail,

attended each others' respective meetings, and met for specific coordination meetings.

The final outcome of the planning process is this report, with a focus on Recommendations for the corridor (Chapter 4) and an Implementation Strategy (Chapter 5). These chapters are combined with ones that outline Existing Conditions (Chapter 2), and Market Analysis (Chapter 3).

Table 1.1 illustrates the process followed in the study.

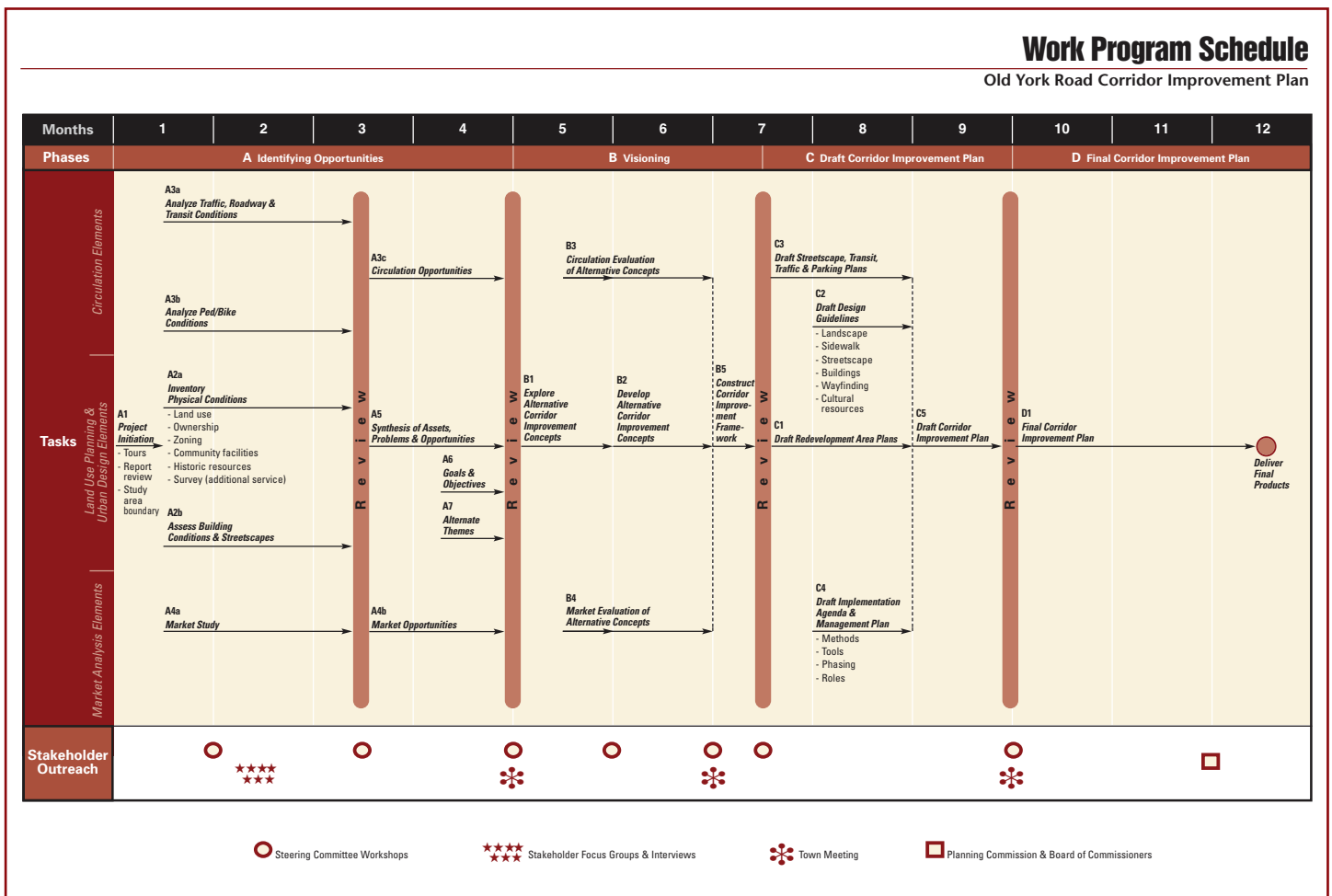


Table 1.1 Work Program Schedule

