



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Old York Road Corridor Improvement Plan is the product of a year-long study by Abington Township examining the current circumstances of the Old York Road (PA Route 611) corridor, a 2.5-mile-long segment of roadway and adjoining parcels of land from Rydal Road in the north to Moreland Road in the south, and advancing the linked causes of economic development, multi-modal mobility, and improved visual quality.

The impetus for the study was the Township's preparation of a new Comprehensive Plan, which recognized the significance of the Old York Road corridor to the economy, transportation system, and image of the community. From the Township's perspective, the Old York Road corridor has been underperforming as a setting for business and a reflection of character of the community and this has affected its tax base and its quality of life. In order to maximize benefits to Abington Township, measures need to be taken to improve the support the corridor offers for commercial, residential, and community activity.

The Old York Road Corridor Improvement Plan study process involved the oversight of a Steering Committee and technical work by a consultant team. The team documented existing conditions in the corridor and then, in cyclical fashion, explored a variety of alternative approaches with the Steering Committee that could possibly be applied in the corridor over the next five-to-twenty years. This exploration of alternatives was open ended, and a variety of ideas were probed. At various points in the process, public information meetings and stakeholder interviews were held to achieve broad input into the ongoing discussions from residents, business operators, and other interested parties.

The exploration of alternatives revealed both the possibilities and limitations for development and redevelopment along the corridor. An availability of land for additional development is present, although the area is highly developed already. There are potential market prospects, but these will need to be actively pursued in the context

of regional, national, and international trends. Transportation improvements are possible, but not necessarily easy to implement.

With respect to land development, opportunities for "infill" development on vacant and underutilized sites along the corridor are present. A greater intensification and mixing of land use on parcels is also possible.

Access and parking are challenges along the corridor. A tightly-constrained right-of-way is relatively consistent along Old York Road through Abington Township. The model for a successful traditional "Main Street" shopping district includes on-street parking on both sides of the street, as well as generous-width sidewalks, and pedestrian amenities such as street trees. The inclusion of all of these Main Street features would necessitate giving up moving lanes of traffic, a condition that conflicts with Old York Road's widely-accepted role as a major commuter corridor.

Traffic congestion and broad societal changes occurring as a response to higher energy prices and changing demographics prompted a look at the role of alternative transportation modes. The need for improvement to pedestrian and bicyclist facilities, a reorganization of the operations of the existing Abington Township Shuttle, and a potential expanded role of the existing R-3 Noble and R-2 Crestmont Regional Rail train stations for commuting and for accessing Center City Philadelphia, were examined. In particular, the presence of passenger rail service along the corridor is believed to present the opportunity to establish a mix of transit-oriented land uses in close proximity to the stations and to reduce reliance on single-occupant vehicle trips in the future life of the township.

Early on in the process it was proposed that, given limited fiscal resources and the complex property ownership and land use conditions of a dynamic corridor, wholesale change for the entire 2.5-mile-long corridor could not, and should not, be done all at once. A more realistic approach

would be to choose spots—to determine the portions of the corridor with the greatest potential and target these areas for development and investment. Eventually, as these strategic successes occur, they can be utilized to leverage improvements along the balance of the corridor. This approach was supported through Steering Committee endorsement of four target or priority areas along the corridor.

From south to north, a first priority area was recognized near the intersection of Old York Road and The Fairway. Several key attributes contribute to the potential of the area, including the following aspects:

- Access to the area and to Center City Philadelphia by way of the R-3 Regional Rail service to/from the Noble Station;
- Significant parcels of vacant and/or underutilized land;
- Concentration of existing retail activities;
- Effective depth of the corridor through the access provided laterally by The Fairway;
- Position of the area to be able to act as a gateway into Abington Township from the south.

The next priority area was designated near the intersection of Old York Road and Susquehanna Road. Conditions at this intersection that are favorable include the following elements:

- Historic ambiance;
- Existing locally-oriented businesses;
- Nearby school district and assisted living facilities;
- Availability of vacant and/or underutilized land.

From Keith Road to Edgehill Road was specified as the third priority area. The advantageous circumstances of this area include the following attributes:

- Underutilized land;
- Concentration of existing retail activities;


- Proximity to large institutions, including Abington Memorial Hospital and the campus of Penn State Abington.

The northernmost priority area was delineated between Chester Avenue and Old Welsh Road. Important conditions here include the following features:

- Linear extent of existing small businesses;
- Presence of Crestmont train station;
- Underutilized land.

In the exploration of alternatives phase, different ideas for each of the four priority areas were looked at, although thematic ties between priority areas were important. For example, sets of mobility and land use opportunities consistent with some broader concepts about the future of the township could represent a theme to be applied along the corridor at each of the four priority area locations. Such themes included notions of sustainability, healthy living, creating an Abington Town Center, reinvigorating local institutions, and broadening the types of commerce found along the corridor. The cyclical process by which the Steering Committee could look at alternatives allowed for a gradual narrowing to a “preferred” alternative for each of the priority areas and the identification of an overall framework for the future evolution of the entire corridor. Such a framework would offer the best opportunity for long term mobility, quality of life, and economic wellbeing in the corridor.

The Corridor Improvement Plan reflects the convergence on preferred alternatives in the form of recommendations for the corridor as a whole and for each priority area. Corridor-wide recommendations include steps toward providing visual continuity and improved mobility along the corridor, and incorporate consolidating access points, planting street trees, landscaping medians, repairing curbs, undergrounding overhead utility lines, enhancing transit stops, and improving conditions for pedestrians at intersections and along the length of the corridor. When implemented, the common



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physical elements of the streetscape will provide visual unity for the entire two-and-a-half-mile-long corridor and make it a safer and more comfortable place for all modes of travel.

For the Noble Fairway priority area, recommendations are to create a new mixed-use, walkable, center for Abington Township focused around the Noble train station. Proposed new streets expand upon the existing roadway network and contribute to making the station more accessible and to making the area more walkable. The Fairway is proposed to be transformed into much more of a “Main Street” environment, with mixed-use buildings, wide sidewalks, and landscaped medians and verge areas. Proposed land uses include a mix of residential, retail, office, community, open space and recreational elements. Buildings are proposed to be built up to the street with structured parking and off-street parking lots located in the rear.

Recommendations for the intersection of Old York Road and Susquehanna Street are to establish a small, neighborhood-oriented, commercial crossroads that provides services to residents and to the patrons and staff of the nearby Abington High School, Sunrise Assisted Living, Abington Presbyterian Church, Abington Free Library and Abington Township Municipal Building. Reconfiguration of the cartway and properties on the northwestern corner will facilitate improved vehicular and pedestrian circulation. New “infill” businesses proposed include small offices, cafes, restaurants, hobby shops, book stores and educational facilities.

London Center area plans focus on accommodating residential and hotel uses identified in the market analysis as having strong demand and building on the success of existing business such as Target, Abington Pharmacy and the Kitchen Bar with additional, similar uses. London Center is recommended to include a wide mix of uses arranged in a walkable setting as an important destination for Abington


Township residents for eating and drinking, shopping, entertainment, living and working.

Recommendations for the Roy Rubicam area include both transportation and land use changes that are intended to improve pedestrian and vehicular safety while creating a village-like environment with retail uses that serve nearby residents. Properties along Old York Road are proposed to be redeveloped into mixed-use, multi-story buildings. Roy Avenue is recommended to be realigned so that both east and west portions meet at a signalized intersection along Old York Road, providing safe pedestrian crossing. Rubicam Avenue is proposed to be converted to a bicycle-and-pedestrian-access only way between Old York Road and the Crestmont train station and a new open space along the eastern side of Old York Road is recommended to provide an airy green space amid a highly built-up area.

The recommendations do include many aspects that may be begun immediately, even while further planning studies occur to determine the feasibility of certain actions. A two-pronged effort is required, one to implement more tangible recommendations, the other to continue to study longer-term planning and urban design ideas.

The Implementation Strategy that concludes the Plan lays out a step-by-step set of actions for Abington Township and its planning partners to pursue. The highest priority is the establishment of a Priority Area Task Force to guide the implementation process. Its appointment and commencement of work should begin immediately. The rest of the implementation strategy in the Plan represents a “best guess” as to how to phase in the recommendations of the Plan, but this will need to be messaged over time by the Task Force as it responds to various market, fiscal, environmental, and situational circumstances.

Taken all together, the recommendations for the corridor as a whole and for the priority areas



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offered the promise of a better future, but the cost of some of the public improvements would be high and the time required to implement them could be lengthy. Abington Township is anxious to get started on something soon even if an initiative would not deliver a full package of features such as contained in many of the alternative concepts. 🐉