



## Transportation Needs and Opportunities

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### **Needs for Preservation and Opportunities for Enhancement**

Cambria County's transportation system needs a certain focus on system preservation to serve and support its current communities and economy. Yet, local communities are desiring to shift declining 20<sup>th</sup> century population and economic trends toward 21<sup>st</sup> century stability and growth, which will require a modern transportation system—one that supports a broad range of practical choices for travel and goods movement.

### Transportation System Needs and Opportunities

Continued maintenance of highways and bridges—to sustain pavement conditions and to address limiting bridge conditions, highway safety risks and travel delays—should remain a priority throughout the County. Modernization of highways and operations should also be pursued to update intersection design and controls and to apply technology that improve mobility and safety. Both priorities apply to highways in Cambria County as well as to those connecting the County with nearest interstates.

Beyond highways and bridges, modernization of the airport, passenger rail and rail freight services, and public transportation services should be pursued to strengthen opportunities for economic investment.

Finally, expansion of the bicycle and pedestrian network should be advanced 1) as an active alternative to motorized travel for all ages, 2) as a functional component of economic development efforts to keep and attract younger age cohorts, 3) as an essential part of transit accessibility and 4) as a recreational feature that allows people to experience the landscape, history and character of Cambria County from the City of Johnstown and its neighborhoods to towns and villages to the rural landscapes.

Multimodal improvements such as these demonstrate commitment to offer practical travel choices at a range of costs for residents, the workforce, investors and entrepreneurs, and visitors, as well as shipping choices for business and industry. These types of investments are critical to enabling Cambria County to compete with other counties for population growth and economic investment.

Table 4-1 summarizes Cambria County’s system-wide transportation needs and opportunities, their value to the County and potential planning approaches.

**Table 4-1 Transportation System Needs and Opportunities**

Needs and Opportunities	Value and Effects	Planning and Mitigation Approaches
Resurface highways	Maintains highway pavement conditions for passenger and freight mobility; retains business and industry	Continue to work with District 9-0 as it prioritizes highway preservation projects; when appropriate, suggest revised priorities based on economic development and business retention needs; identify multimodal needs in the highway corridor in advance of resurfacing activity
Continue to rehabilitate and replace structurally deficient state and local bridges	Maintain highway access; removes and/or reduces weight restrictions, detours, and delays in emergency response	State bridges: Continue to work with District 9-0 as it prioritizes bridge preservation projects using the PennDOT Bridge Risk Assessment Tool; when appropriate, suggest revised priorities based on economic development and business retention needs; identify multimodal needs along the highway corridor in advance of bridge work design
		Continued

**Table 4-1 Transportation System Needs and Opportunities**

Needs and Opportunities	Value and Effects	Planning and Mitigation Approaches
		Local bridges: Continue to work with Cambria County and local municipalities in reviewing bridge conditions, needs and local funding
Improve highway access to City and community business clusters and other economic development generators	Retains and supports expansion of existing business and industry; encourages economic development, retains/adds jobs and revenue	Identify and advance minor highway improvements, e.g. widening, to support economic development
Improve highway safety, including highway alignment, sight distance, and intersections	Reduces crashes and fatalities; lives, time, and costs saved	Review annual highway safety data findings with District 9-0  Suggest corridors for road safety audits and specific locations for District 9-0 field investigation/evaluation and potential safety improvement
Reduce recurring congestion	Reduce travel delay for passengers, freight and emergency responders and reduce crashes related to congestion	Document locations and conditions of recurring congestion  Study alternatives, i.e. more efficient operations, intelligent transportation systems (ITS) and additional connections (i.e., alternative routes)
Expand/Enhance bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure	Improve safety/safe routes for walking and biking as active transportation for public health  Support use of public transportation  Support civic/heritage tourism	Coordinate with municipalities, trail groups, and transit agencies on gap analysis and priority project development.  Coordinate with District 9-0 to identify simple, low-cost opportunities to improve conditions for bicycles and pedestrians as part of preservation and restoration projects.
Expand and enhance public transportation services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local and intercounty routes</li> <li>• Provider coordination for service and transfer</li> <li>• Fleet efficiency</li> <li>• Customer service technology, e.g. real-time data</li> <li>• Fare collection efficiency</li> <li>• Marketing to prospective transit riders</li> </ul>	Serve additional civic and employment destinations and multimodal hubs  Increase ridership and revenue  Support civic/heritage tourism	Support exploration of costs/benefits of transit service partners  Encourage quality development and infrastructure that plans for transit service with appropriate turning radii, bus pull-offs, standards for road construction, sidewalks from door to street.
Improve the airport for air freight	Expand freight handling	Support air freight improvements and passenger

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Needs and Opportunities	Value and Effects	Planning and Mitigation Approaches
service	capacity and incentivize opportunities for interstate and international commerce; increase employment	service enhancements to the airport  Ensure that all transportation connectivity and capacity issues are addressed such to include both road infrastructure and transit service to the site to support future business and workforce.
Increase frequency of passenger rail service	Enhance regional multimodal access to/from in Johnstown; promote economic development related to Pittsburgh markets	Support increase in frequency of passenger rail services  Support improvements and enhancements to the train station
Increase utilization of the rail freight system	Promote rail service and rail-served sites; add jobs and revenue	Encourage coordinated land use and economic development planning along rail lines.
Improve navigational signage to multimodal transportation hubs e.g. airport, transit services (including transit service for special events)	Promote awareness and use of transportation choices	Assess highway and multimodal approaches to transportation hubs for appropriate navigational signage.

### Specific Opportunities to Enhance the Economy and Quality of Life

While this plan ultimately addresses numerous transportation projects across Cambria County, a few key project opportunity areas have been identified based on the economic analysis, demographic changes and high value assets found within the region. Each helps to address key challenges facing Cambria County and align with larger national trends.

#### Advance Process to Establish an Airport Foreign Trade Zone

Cambria County is advancing plans to establish a federal Foreign Trade Zone designation at the John Murtha Johnstown-Cambria County Airport. As noted, manufacturers are increasingly adopting global marketing strategies and are addressing demands through digital technologies to be closer to their customer base. Reducing cost at all levels, including those associated with import/export tariffs can create a competitive advantage for communities. The Foreign Trade Zone Resource Center points out benefits for manufacturers located within a zone include relief from inverted tariffs, duty exemption on re-exports, duty elimination on waste, scrap, and yield loss, weekly entry savings, and duty deferral. Beyond establishing the zone, Cambria County should ensure that all transportation connectivity and capacity issues are addressed such to include both highway infrastructure and transit service to the site to support future business and workforce.

**Transportation opportunity areas can help to address key challenges facing Cambria County.**

## Route 56 Improvement

Over the last several decades, major road improvements have been made to Cambria County's central East-West corridors (Route 22) and North-South corridor Route 219, Route 56 to Route 22. Each of these corridors serves to connect and provide access to Cambria County's major employment Centers in Johnstown and Ebensburg including the John Murtha Airport.

However, access to Cambria County from the southeast – to the PA Turnpike and all points along the Washington, D.C./Philadelphia metroplex – remains challenged. The most direct route requires people and goods to use the Pennsylvania Turnpike, to I-99 North, to Route 56 West into Johnstown. Improvements to Route 56 would greatly enhance the travel experience, speed, and safety and increase the overall competitiveness of Cambria County as a potential destination for new investment. Improvements currently being considered include major curve reduction/rerouting and widening of Route 56 from Bedford County through Cambria County. Truck traffic traveling through the West End neighborhood is another concern that needs further study to improve safety. Such improvements would contribute significantly to Cambria County's economic viability and should be considered priority projects.

## Interconnecting Campus and Community

Local stakeholders recognized the importance of connecting the County's institutions of higher learning with the local communities they serve. Specifically, there are two current examples where county and local leaders are working to enhance pedestrian access between college campuses and nearby commercial/retail centers. The University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown is working towards the development of a sidewalk network that would connect the university with the Richland Town Center shopping complex. Stakeholders in Cresson are exploring the development of a pedestrian link between Mount Aloysius College and downtown Cresson that would improve safety, improve the marketability of the College, and help local businesses tap into the student market.

## Transit, Bicycle, and Pedestrian Projects to Enhance Quality of Place

The ability for Cambria County to grow its overall population and attract new talent is an economic development priority. While many programmatic ideas have been advanced through previous study efforts, transportation investments can also play a critical role. Much research has been done into the "Millennial Generation" which captures many younger and skilled professionals generally between the ages of 21 and 37. This large age cohort is generally highly educated, entrepreneurial and values living in communities that offer a high degree of walkability, transit connectivity and with ease of access to a mix of retail, recreation and workplace options. One recent survey study completed by the Urban Land Institute in 2015 entitled *Gen Y and Housing, What they Want and Where They Want It* highlighted that:

*...only 13 percent of the total sample lives in or near downtown areas. Therefore, even though in-town Millennials are much discussed by journalists, they are not representative of their generation as a whole...When asked to describe themselves:*

- 37 percent say they are “city people.”
- 36 percent identify as “suburbanites.”
- 26 percent are “small-town/country persons.”

*Among the “city people,” three-fourths live in central-city neighborhoods outside downtowns. Even so, a significant contingent of “non-downtowners” is attracted to denser, mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods from which their trip to work or social engagements – by bus, bike, or car – will be short to moderate in length.*

Cambria County offers a diversity of neighborhood options and character that can be attractive to this next generation workforce. It will though require that transportation investments in “complete streets,” transit services and active transportation for cyclists and pedestrians be a priority as part of any transportation plan. The Johnstown Urban Connectivity Project is an example of a broad initiative with the potential to generate individual transportation-funded projects.

### **Trails and Tourism in the Great Outdoors**

Cambria County is strategically located among the Laurel Highlands and Southern Alleghenies – regions with a growing reputation as a high value outdoor recreation and destination location. Key attractions like the Ghost Town Trail, the Youghiogheny River and nearby destination points such as Ohio Pyle, Seven Springs and Bedford Springs, are drawing new and repeat visitors from the nation’s largest population centers such as the Washington, D.C./Philadelphia metroplex in larger numbers each year. Such tourism is a key economic driver, as visitors may become investors and part-time or permanent residents. Several trail development projects have been identified and align well with the character of Cambria County and national investment trends. These trails not only can address tourism demands, but also serve to enhance the overall quality of life experience for new resident/workforce attraction. Trail development efforts led by the Cambria County Conservation and Recreation Authority could be considered for transportation funding.

### **Riverlife: An Environmental Restoration Initiative in Johnstown**

The City of Johnstown is working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop a plan to beautify and rehabilitate the floodwalls in the City of Johnstown. The City expressed interest in the addition of bike trails along the floodwalls, which the Corps has accomplished in projects such as on the north shore of the river system in Pittsburgh. A “Riverlife” project would integrate flood protection system improvements, shoreline restoration, ecosystem restoration, and park/recreational/trail improvement. A \$100,000 feasibility study prepared and funded by the Corps would be the first step. If feasible, subsequent planning and design would be jointly funded by the Corps and a non-federal match, e.g. from state, local and private sources.