

William Penn Avenue Prospect Corridor Plan

Identifying transportation-related areas of improvement along the William Penn Avenue Corridor in Johnstown, Pennsylvania.



Acknowledgments

The Cambria County Planning Commission would like to thank the following stakeholders and project partners for their role in developing this plan:

Reverend Sylvia King, Johnstown City Councilwoman, formerly Cambria County Planning Commission member

Deacon Jeffrey L. Wilson, resident & stakeholder

Pastor Charles Johnson, resident & stakeholder

Elder James Britt, resident & stakeholder

Michael Cashaw, resident & stakeholder

Chris Hull, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, District 9-0 (PennDOT)

John Dubnansky, City of Johnstown



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Table of Contents

Introduction & Purpose	4
Geography & Study Area	5
Existing Conditions	6
Public Outreach & Input	8
Stakeholder Participation	8
Public Engagement	9
Public Meeting	14
Action Plan	17



Introduction & Purpose

The idea for this corridor plan sprang from public comments received during the 2020 Cambria County Long Range Transportation Plan update, as well as discussions with the United Neighborhoods group within the City of Johnstown.

William Penn Avenue is a heavily-travelled vehicular and public transit corridor, and the Prospect neighborhood through which it runs can be considered an important gateway to Johnstown. Further, this community is one of the closest residential neighborhoods to the downtown area.

For all of these reasons, the Planning Commission determined that the section of William Penn Avenue through the Prospect neighborhood would be an excellent candidate for a corridor study.

The plan that follows is the result of a thorough evaluation of existing conditions, as well as extensive public outreach efforts and stakeholder collaboration. The overall objective has been to establish priorities for future investment in the project area, develop a list of implementable improvement projects, and assist municipal officials and community stakeholders with securing funding to get those projects underway.



Northern view of the corridor, featuring the demolition site of the old Penneco homes.



Prospect neighborhood playground, located just south of the William Penn/Ore Street intersection.

Geography & Study Area Boundary



The study area for the corridor begins at the intersection of William Penn Avenue and Prospect Street and ends at the intersection of William Penn Avenue and Cronin Avenue, which is also the city line. This reflects the boundaries of the Prospect neighborhood beginning at the approximate site of the former Greater Prospect Store and ending above the site of the now demolished Penneco houses. The project includes William Penn Avenue and the area approximately one block back from the road. The entire study area is located within the City of Johnstown. It is important to note that while residents of the entire neighborhood were included in the public outreach sessions, the focus of the plan is the William Penn Avenue corridor with a primary focus on transportation-related initiatives.

The predominant land use along the corridor is residential. There are two sections zoned “traditional neighborhood district,” which is defined by the City of Johnstown zoning ordinance is being a “mixture of light-intensity commercial and residential uses.” In Prospect, the non-residential uses in this district are churches.

There is also a small commercial district at the bottom of the corridor which currently contains the now-closed Greater Prospect Store and an automotive garage.

A few large billboards that obscure the view shed of the city are also within the commercial district. There is a small conservancy district along the corridor, which is the location of the Washington School Playground.

There are several vacant lots along the corridor in varying degrees of neglect, particularly in terms of vegetation control. The largest vacant area is the site of the now-demolished Penneco houses, which has yet to be redeveloped. The demolition of the houses was carried out by the Johnstown Redevelopment Authority, who had purchased the lots from a private developer. Initial proposals called for the empty lots to be redeveloped for community use with talks of a fruit orchard or walking paths. Some of the lots have since been sold to private property owners for the purpose of being placed back into the tax base and there are presently no plans for public redevelopment of the lots.

The neighborhood is serviced by CamTran’s Route 16 (Prospect), which had a ridership of 26,522 riders in fiscal year 2021-2022. There are several bus stops along William Penn Avenue and within the neighborhood on the roads off of the corridor.

In March 2023, shortly before the final public meeting for the plan was held, the Johnstown Housing Authority ordered an emergency evacuation of all 110 units of the Prospect Homes. At this time, the long-term affect that this will have on the community and the plan is unknown.



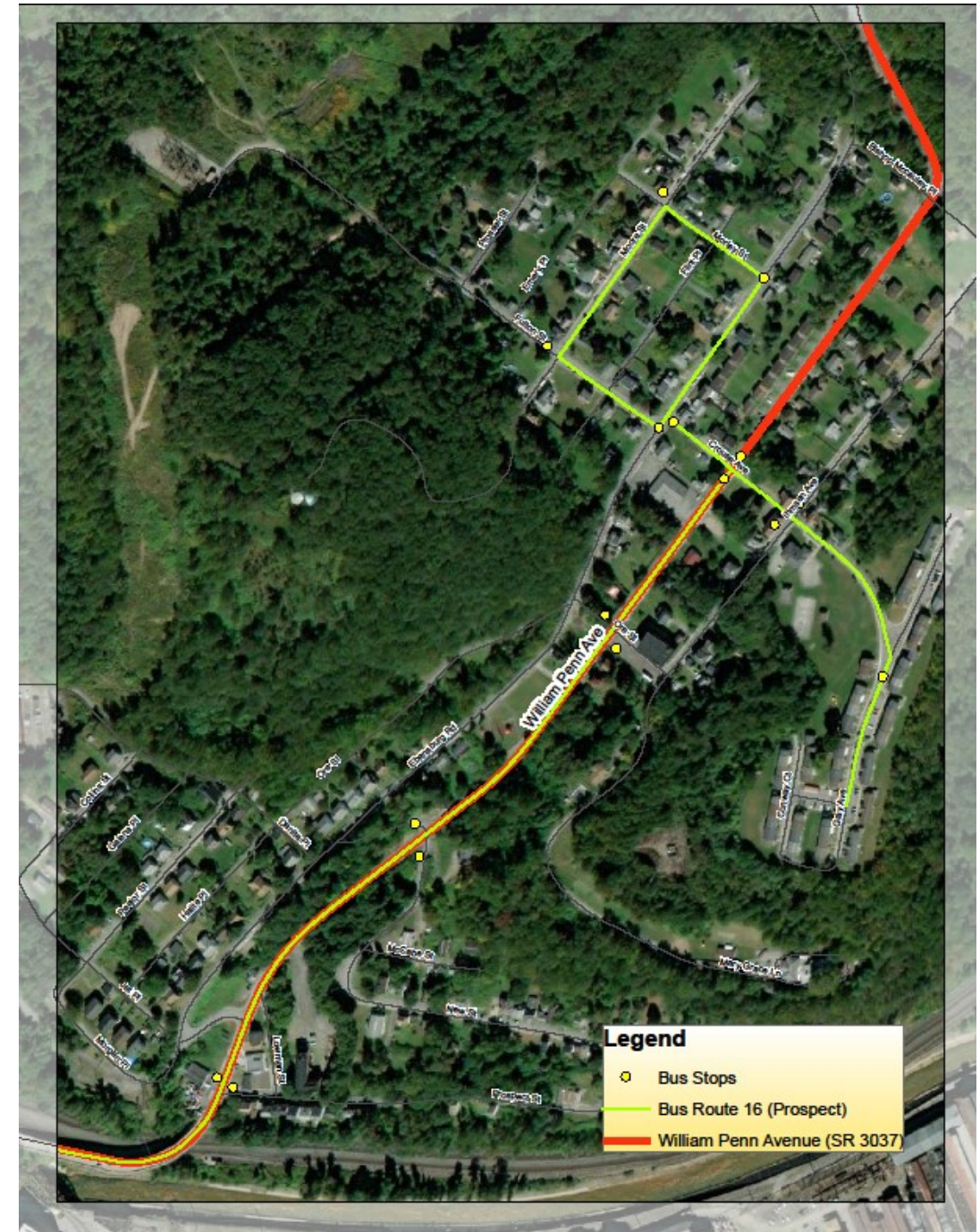
Existing Conditions



Crash Data

The CCPC analyzed crash data from PennDOT from the years **2015-2021** (2022 data is not yet available). There were **nineteen reportable crashes** within the study area in this time period. There were no crashes involving pedestrians or cyclists and no crashes were fatal. Sixteen of the crashes involved only automobiles and three of them involved busses and automobiles both. Two of these crashes involved school busses in the exact same spot and one involved a mass transit bus. A report from CamTran indicated that the crash involved a CamTran bus and an automobile and was minor and did not occur at a transit stop. CamTran personnel informed the CCPC that they have not received any reports of drivers complaining of any safety hazards along the Prospect route.

Mcllwain Bus Lines, the company that operates the school busses for Greater Johnstown School District, was able to provide information about one of the crashes and explained that it took place while the bus was crossing William Penn Avenue at Crouse Street and was the result of the driver being unable to see around a substantial blind spot caused by a utility pole and the speed of oncoming traffic. Mcllwain personnel suggested rumble strips to calm traffic and the possible relocation of the pole that creates the blind spot. They also expressed considerable challenges making the turn from William Penn onto Ore Street, citing insufficient turning radius and safety hazards created by having to make the wide turn. Approximately 100 students from the Prospect neighborhood ride the bus to school and most of them utilize the bus stop closest to the Prospect Homes. Mcllwain confirmed that most of the stops are located on the door side of the bus and very few students are required to cross William Penn Avenue to enter and exit the bus.



Crash Data cont...

To further analyze any potential safety issues, the CCPC obtained traffic stop data the Johnstown Police Department. There were eighty-eight traffic stops located along the corridor over that time period analyzed. An officer with the police department explained that most of the stops were speed related. The posted speed limit on that section of William Penn Avenue is 25 MPH but the slope of the hill makes it easier for traffic to travel at speeds considerably higher than that. Lowering the speed limit is likely not feasible but traffic calming methods will be explored as part of the plan. A digital meter that measures the speed of oncoming traffic and speed lines were added going downhill near the intersection of Crouse Avenue and William Penn Avenue, however it appeared non-operational during a recent field visit. During the last community meeting, CCPC staff learned that the digital speed meter was only intended to be a temporary measure and has been removed. The installation of a permanent digital speed meter and addition of a second meter going uphill are recommended to provide a long-term traffic calming measure.



Public Outreach & Input



Stakeholder Participation

The CCPC held its first virtual stakeholder meeting for the plan on January 12, 2021. The CCPC staff was joined by representatives from PennDOT District 9-0 and two community members of the Prospect neighborhood. After introductions, Mr. Allison gave an overview of the scope of the plan, its' geographical limits, schedule, and what the Planning Commission hopes the plan will accomplish. The meeting was then opened up for general discussion.

The following are **key highlights from the open discussion:**

“Traffic on William Penn Ave. gets stalled and delayed by transit bus stops.”

“The community is a diamond in the rough, with great views, however it is not well-known.”

“There is sidewalk only on one side of the street and it is in disrepair, as well as overgrown in many places.”

“Street lighting is poor and should be improved, especially on William Penn Ave.”

“Sidewalk on William Penn Ave. is overgrown, forcing pedestrians to walk in the street in some places.”

“Buses have a difficult time making the turn at the William Penn Ave. and Crouse Ave. intersection .”

“There are sight distance problems for motorists at the intersection of William Penn Ave. and Prospect St.”

“Sidewalk winter maintenance is an issue; residents have been told the property owner is responsible for clearing snow, however, many properties are vacant, with no apparent owner to maintain the sidewalk.”

“There are several blighted buildings along the corridor.”

- Comments are color-coded by the following topical categories:
- **Bike/Ped Concerns**
 - **Mode of transportation/Mass Transit Concerns**
 - **Safety Concerns**
 - **Other**

Public Outreach & Input



Public Engagement

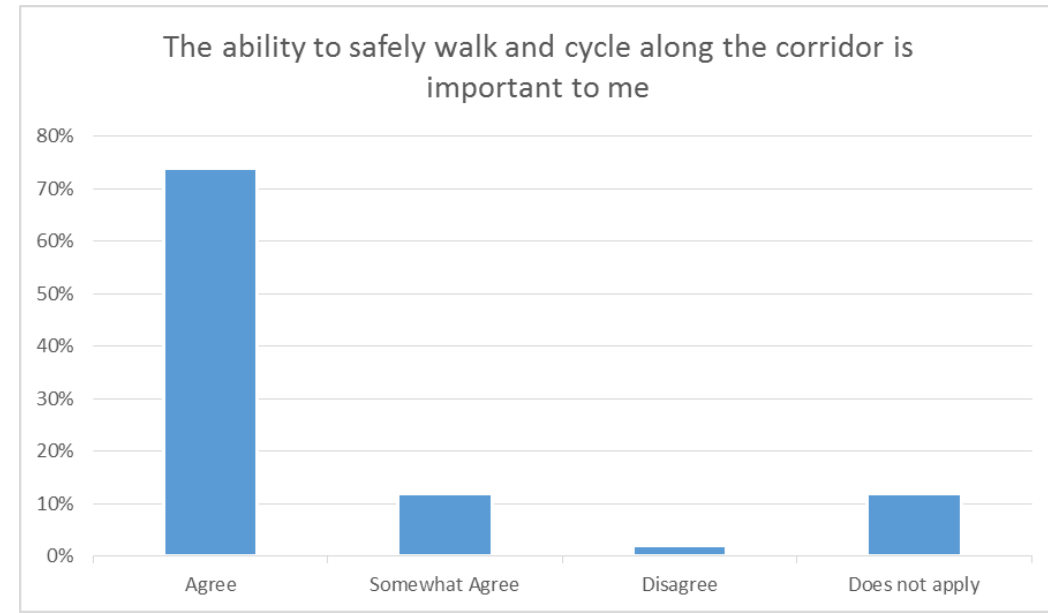
In spring of 2021, CCPC staff developed and distributed a community survey to the Prospect neighborhood to gather input regarding existing opportunities and challenges along the corridor as it pertains to transportation-related improvements. Surveys were mailed to every residential and business address within the study boundary. Thanks in large part to the assistance of our project stakeholders, **51 total surveys were returned**; 96% of the responses were from existing residents, 2% were from existing business owners, and another 2% were from folks who identified as former residents of the neighborhood.

Key survey results are highlighted below in the following major categories:

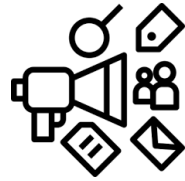
- **Bike/Ped Concerns**
- **Mode of transportation/Mass Transit Concerns**
- **Safety Concerns**

Bike/Ped Concerns

The majority of respondents value the ability to safely walk and cycle along the corridor but the following responses indicated that there is a rather large need for improvements to the pedestrian infrastructure, in particular sidewalk repairs and routine maintenance, crosswalks and additional lighting.



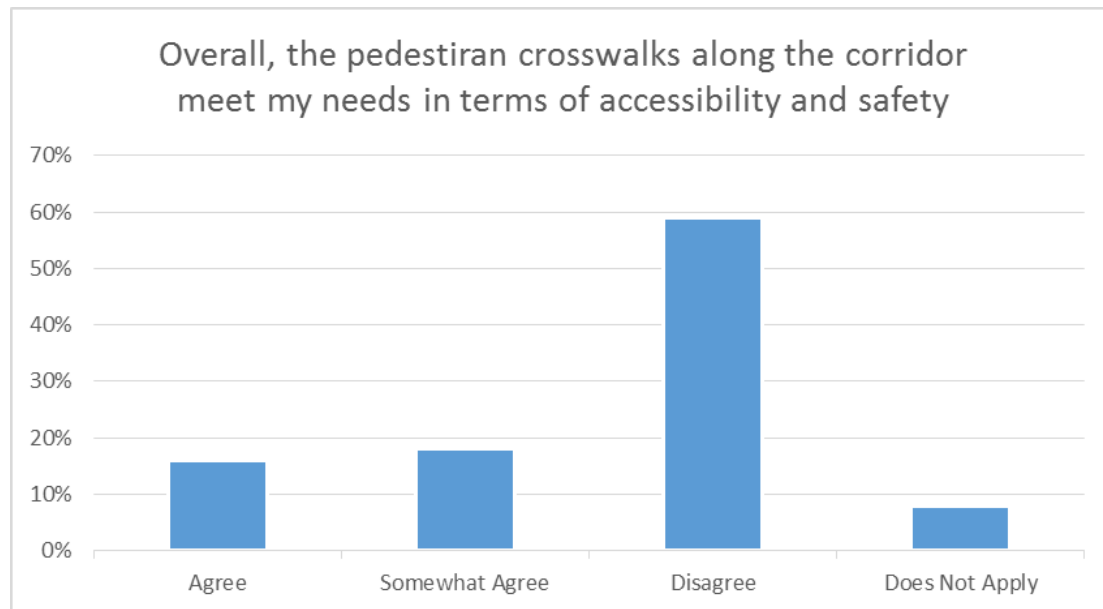
Public Outreach & Input



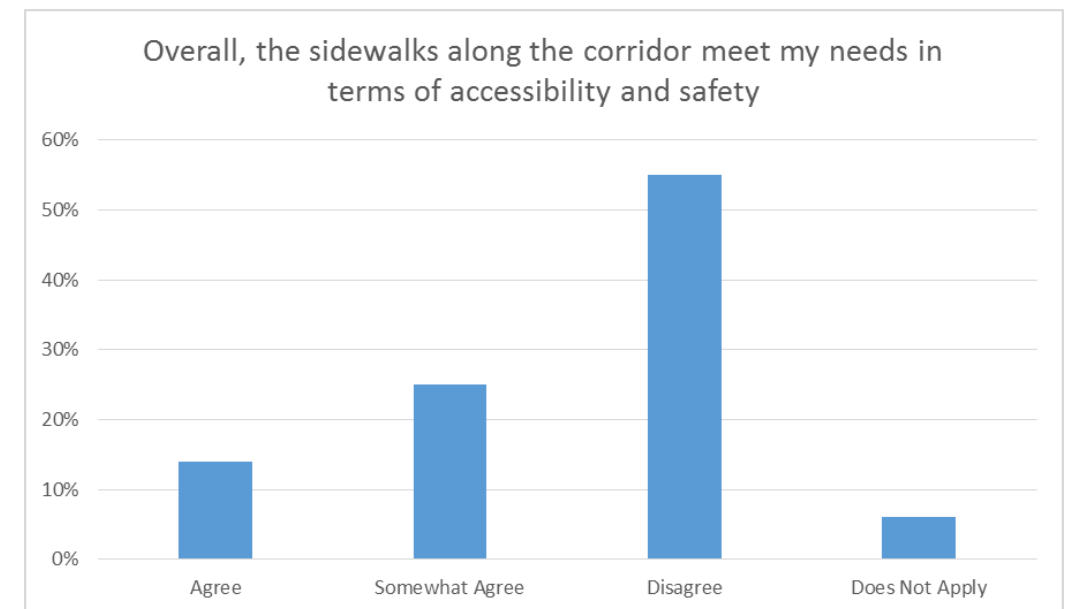
Public Engagement cont...

Bike/Ped Concerns

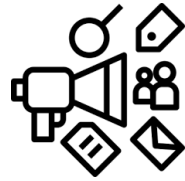
The addition of crosswalks was also a common concern, particularly at the intersection of Crouse Avenue.



Sidewalks are in poor condition. Pedestrians forced to walk on road due to lack of accessibility to sidewalks. Overgrowth in vegetation is a problem on the sidewalks. There were several comments requesting ADA compliant sidewalks and curb cuts. There were also comments regarding lack of winter maintenance on the sidewalks.



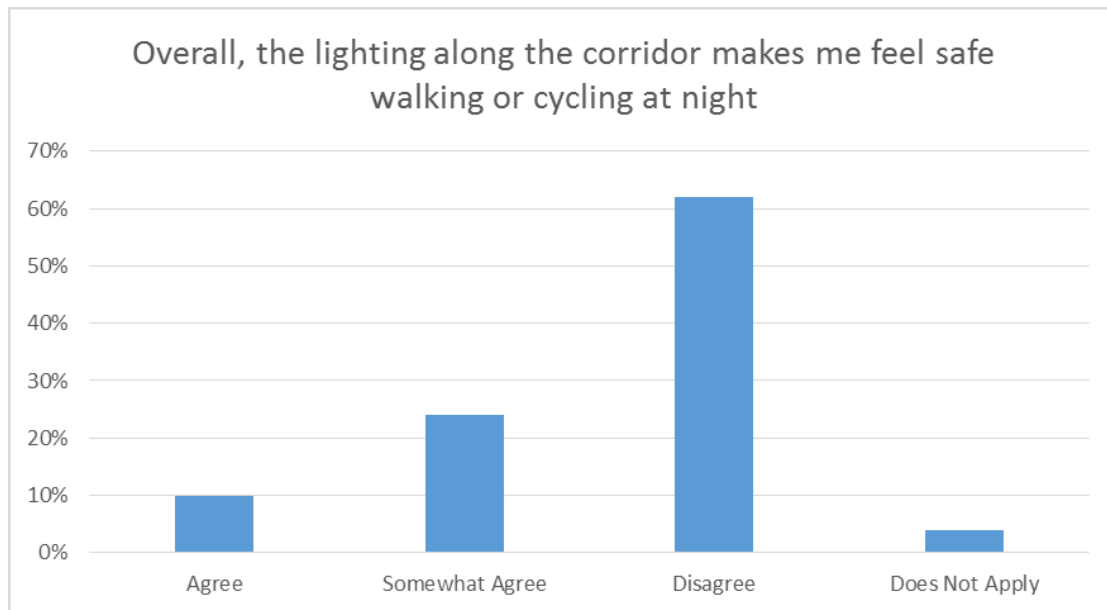
Public Outreach & Input



Public Engagement cont...

Bike/Ped Concerns

Lighting appears to be another concern. The majority of respondents (62%) do not feel safe walking or cycling at night. The area in front of the playground was cited as dark area where lighting could be added.



Access to downtown was unsurprisingly a common community asset. This could be another reason to consider enhanced pedestrian infrastructure so residents can safely access the amenities downtown.

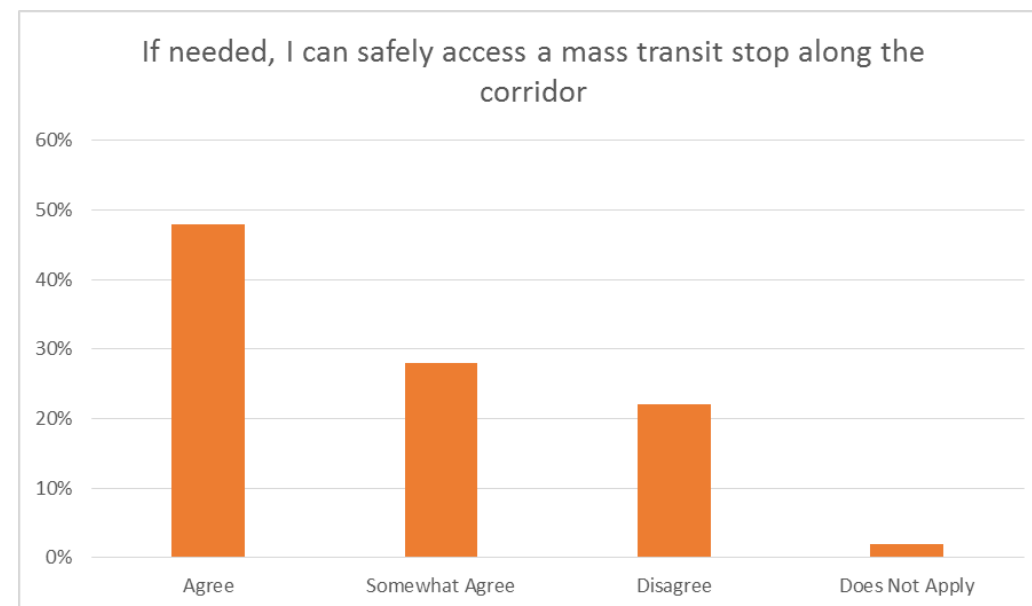
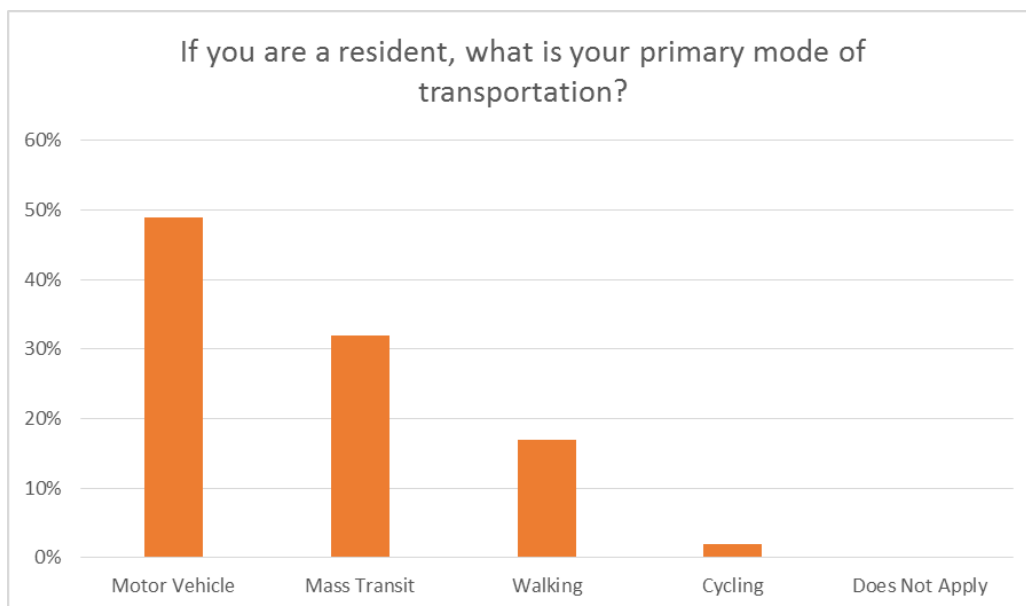


Public Outreach & Input

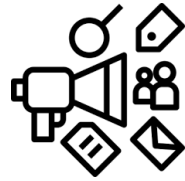
Public Engagement cont...

Mode of Transportation/Mass Transit Concerns

The majority of respondents use a motor vehicle as their main mode of transportation but there are also several mass transit users (32%) and most respondents responded that they can safely or somewhat safely access a bus stop, if needed. **Bus stops do not seem to be a big concern.**



Public Outreach & Input

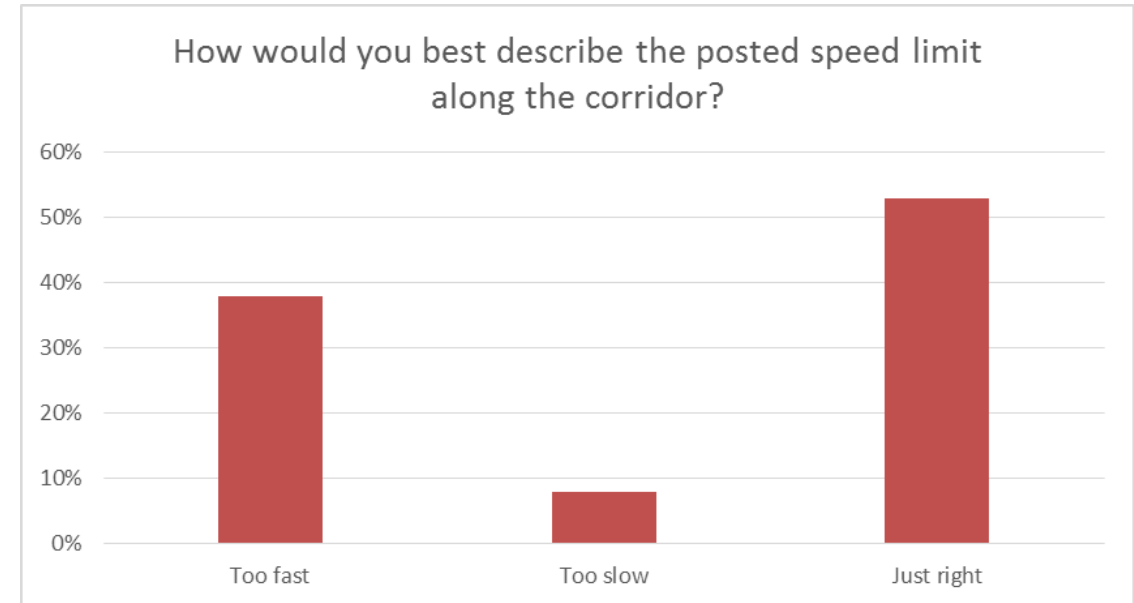
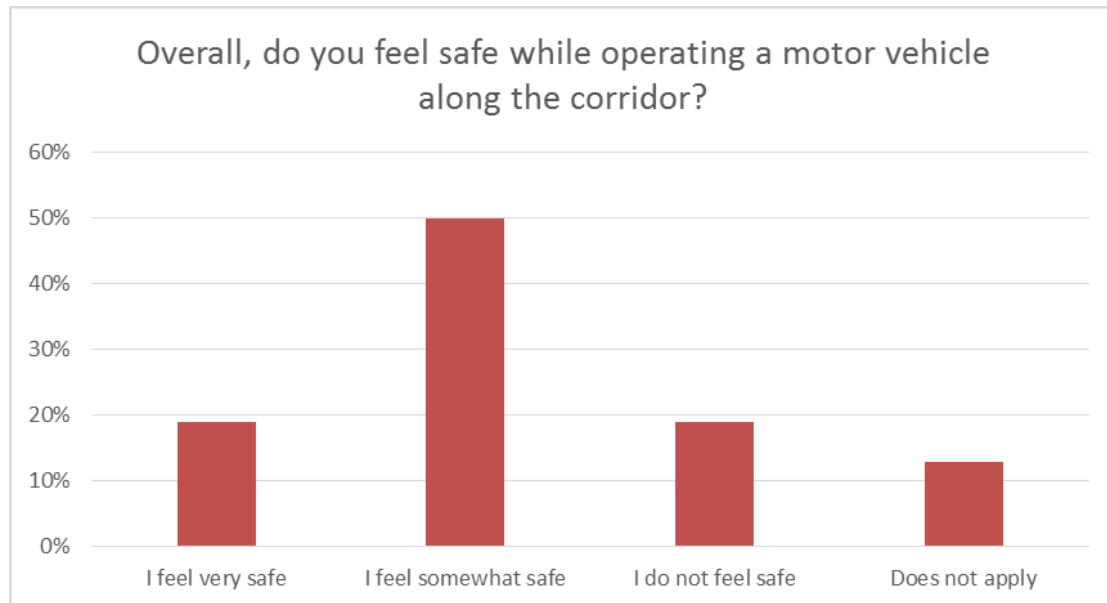


Public Engagement cont...

Safety Concerns

The most prevalent **sight distance concerns** at intersections are due to overgrowth in vegetation and overhanging trees. 22% of respondents cited this concern. Correcting the sight distance shortcomings could make traveling the corridor a safer experience.

The majority of respondents (54%) felt that the posted **speed limit** along William Penn Avenue was “just right.” 38% felt it is too fast. The posted speed limit is 25 MPH and lowering it would likely be unfeasible and unnecessary. There were multiple comments citing speeding concerns on Ebensburg Road with calls for traffic calming and a lowered speed limit. The posted speed limit on Ebensburg Road is also 25 MPH.



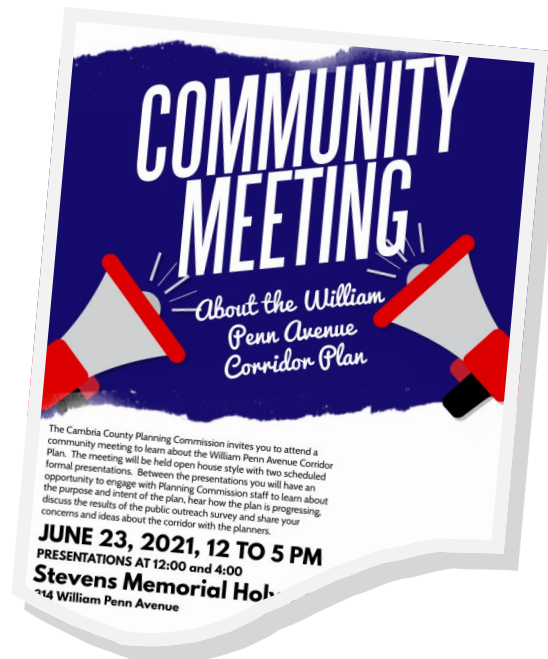
Public Outreach & Input



Public Meeting

On June 23, 2021, the CCPC held a **public meeting at Stevens Memorial Holy Church** to present the initial findings of the community survey and stakeholder input to the residents of the corridor. CCPC staff held an open house style meeting from noon until 5pm that allowed residents and business owners to visit and learn about the project at their convenience. The meeting was well attended, with over 20 local residents and stakeholders participating throughout the day. Staff was available to discuss community concerns for pedestrian safety and mobility, traffic regulation, and corridor beautification.

Throughout the day, staff formally introduced the plan to public meeting attendees, and facilitated a mapping exercise to identify physical areas of improvement and opportunity along the corridor. Attendees were encouraged to place a color-coded sticker in the location they were highlighting, and write reference notes directly on the map to add their input. The following summarizes the input received at the meeting:



Pedestrian Safety and Mobility

Sidewalk condition and winter maintenance were by far the most urgent concerns for the residents, many of whom regularly need to walk down William Penn Ave. to get to jobs or shopping. The sidewalks can be particularly difficult in the winter, when snow and ice can make the steeply-inclined sidewalks virtually impassable. Specific pedestrian-related concerns were:

- Sidewalks on William Penn Ave. in poor condition and missing in places
- Lack of winter sidewalk maintenance
- Safer pedestrian crossings needed at the Washington School Playground and the William Penn/Crouse Ave. intersection



CCPC staff, Chris Allison, delivers introductory remarks about the plan outside of Stevens Memorial Holy Church.

Public Outreach & Input



Public Meeting

Traffic Regulation

There were several areas that meeting attendees noted as being safety concerns for vehicular travel, notably:

- *Sight distance problems at the intersection of William Penn Ave. and New Street*
- *General concerns with the William Penn/Crouse Ave. intersection; suggestion to install a 4-way traffic signal*
- *Concerns with vehicles running through stop signs at the Crouse Ave./Imsen Ave. intersection as well as the Crouse Ave/Ebensburg Rd. intersection*
- *Concerns about the sharpness of the curve above Cronin Place*
- *Traffic volumes very high at peak times*
- *Concerns about speeding; additional enforcement suggested*

Storm Water

There were concerns about storm water management, drainage, and flooding all along the corridor. Specific locations included:

- *Flooding at bend of the road on New Street just West of the Bethel AME Church*
- *Poor drainage on William Penn Ave near the Washington School Playground*
- *Poor drainage at the upper end of the corridor near the Cronin Place intersection*

Lighting

Poor street lighting is also one of the biggest concerns for the residents, with improvements suggested all along the corridor, and on the side streets. Specific locations mentioned were:

- *At the William Penn and Crouse Avenues intersection*
- *Around the Washington School Playground*
- *On New Street near the Bethel AME church*
- *Along Imsen Ave on both sides of the Crouse Ave intersection*
- *Along Ebensburg Rd. North of the Crouse Ave. intersection*



The physical map used for the mapping exercise, with areas of improvement & opportunity identified using color-coded stickers and handwritten notes.

Public Outreach & Input



Public Meeting

Recreation

Several residents in attendance commented that more recreation opportunities were needed for young people in the community. Suggestions included:

- *Improving the Washington School Playground*
- *Build additional sports fields or basketball courts*
- *Refurbish playground on Prospect Street and stairs to New Street*

Beautification

Another topic of concern for the residents was vegetation control. It was noted that vegetation has overtaken many of the vacant lots in the neighborhood, and encroaches onto the sidewalks in many places, making them impassable. Specific locations included:

- *Along William Penn Ave, between Morgan Place and New Street*
- *Along New Street, especially near the William Penn Ave. intersection*



Members of the public engaging with the mapping exercise, along with CCPC staff, Chris Allison.

Action Plan



Introduction

After consulting with project stakeholders and gathering public input through both the community survey and the open house public meeting, CCPC staff analyzed this information and began to formulate tangible, implementable, and realistic goals for the corridor, in addition to actions, implementation partners, and potential funding sources associated with each of these goals. The matrix on page 18 highlights each goal and the subsequent actions to take in order to achieve them.

In late February 2023, the CCPC gathered community stakeholders to present the draft of the plan, focusing predominately on the goals and objectives. The stakeholders were in favor of the goals and objectives and mostly had questions regarding the timeline of implementation of the proposed goals and were eager to discuss possible maintenance-related projects that can be implemented quickly with the appropriate project partners.

In mid March, the CCPC held a community meeting with the residents of the Prospect neighborhood to present the draft of the plan. The meeting was well attended by 23 local residents and stakeholders. The community was in agreement with the goals and objectives, emphasizing the need for safer pedestrian infrastructure and beautification and maintenance measures. The community also had several questions regarding implementation and next steps, in which CCPC and PennDOT staff were able to explain the overall purpose of having the goals documented in the plan and what the implementation process could look like.



Digital speed monitor recently installed at the intersection of William Penn Avenue & Crouse Avenue, to encourage safe speed limits and traffic calming through the corridor.

Action Plan



Goal	Action	Implementation Partner(s)	Potential Funding Programs
Improve Pedestrian Infrastructure	Add street lighting along William Penn Avenue as well as sections of Ihmsen Avenue, Ebensburg Road and possibly New Street	City of Johnstown, Penelec	Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TASA), Multimodal Transportation Fund (MTF), Community Foundation for the Alleghenies (CFA)
	Repair existing cracked and broken sidewalks and add new sidewalks to fill in gaps where needed.	City of Johnstown	Apply for PennDOT Funding Source using competitive grant application.
	Develop a plan to regularly remove vegetation encroaching the sidewalks. Consider animal-based vegetation removal services such as “Goat Grazers” from Trinity Farms.	City of Johnstown, Community volunteer group	TASA, MTF, Apply for PennDOT Funding Source using competitive grant application.
	Address winter sidewalk maintenance concerns	City of Johnstown	

Action Plan cont...



Goal	Action	Implementation Partner(s)	Potential Funding Programs
<p>Enhance Vehicular Traffic Safety</p>	<p>Monitor and enforce speed limit by improving signage and considering use of a digital speed monitor</p> <p>Consider the installation of traffic calming devices.</p> <p>Explore reinstating the truck brake check pullout north of the neighborhood. A traffic study by PennDOT was completed and the result was a 5 ½ Ton Downhill Safety Posting (vehicles above that weight limit utilizing the route would be in violation of the posting)</p> <p>Regularly trim vegetation at intersections to improve sight distance</p> <p>Consider constructing bus pullout(s) and shelters on William Penn Avenue</p> <p>In lieu of additional pullouts, Consider moving school bus and CamTran bus stops from William Penn Avenue in favor of side streets</p>	<p>City of Johnstown, Johnstown Police</p> <p>City of Johnstown, PennDOT</p> <p>Middle Taylor Twp., PennDOT</p> <p>City of Johnstown, PennDOT</p> <p>City of Johnstown, CamTran, PennDOT</p> <p>City of Johnstown, CamTran, Johnstown School District</p>	<p>TASA, MTF, ARLE 100% - match not required, GLG 80/20%, Apply for PennDOT Signal Permit if permanent device is desired, Apply for PennDOT Funding Source using competitive grant application.</p> <p>Apply for PennDOT Funding Source using competitive grant application. PennDOT could coordinate with City/CamTran when roadway is planned for improvements to determine if bus improvements/shelters can be incorporated and explore the appropriate funding sources.</p>

Action Plan cont...



Goal	Action	Implementation Partner(s)	Potential Funding Programs
Manage Storm Water	<p>Clean out storm water catch basins</p> <p>Explore the possibility of installing a rain garden</p>	<p>City of Johnstown, PennDOT</p> <p>City of Johnstown, Cambria County Conservation District</p>	Cambria County Conservation District, CFA
Beautify and Recreate	<p>Removal or resize of billboards at the southern end of the corridor.</p> <p>Clear trees at the pullout North of the neighborhood to restore the scenic view.</p> <p>Address overgrowth of vegetation on empty lots Consider the addition of public art.</p> <p>Provide recreation opportunities for neighborhood residents, particularly children</p>	<p>City of Johnstown, Lamar Sign Company, PennDOT, Federal Highways, Community volunteer group</p> <p>Middle taylor twp., Community volunteer group, PennDOT</p> <p>City of Johnstown, Community volunteer group, Johnstown School District, CFA, RAC</p> <p>City of Johnstown</p>	CFA, SAP&DC
Organize Community Volunteers	<p>Consider the formation of a “neighborhood group” to assist with beautification and maintenance.</p> <p>Pursue cost/resource sharing program with the City.</p>	City of Johnstown, CFA, volunteer members of the community.	CFA Partner Fund