

INTRODUCTION



A TALE OF TWO CITIES

## INTRODUCTION

“If you plan cities for cars and traffic, you get cars and traffic.  
If you plan for people and places, you get people and places.”  
– PPS.org



CITIES OF: SHARON AND HERMITAGE | MERCER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

## Why Do We Need A Study?

The purpose of the State Street/Irvine Avenue Corridor Study is to develop feasible transportation planning and design concepts. The objective is to improve vehicular congestion problems in both Sharon and Hermitage, enhance safety and accessibility for pedestrians and bicyclists, and enhance the aesthetic pleasantness of the corridor. Ideally, these improvements will result in economic and social benefits to the region. This study will aid officials in both Cities in guiding future land use development in such a way as to achieve a balance among modes of transportation and to obtain funding for transportation improvement projects.

The report that follows is the second in a series of reports that will result in an overall study document. This report summarizes the Key Findings discovery process and results. This task included an inventory and analysis of existing conditions, culminating in a Needs and Opportunities assessment of the study teams' results.

At the beginning of the study, a Steering Committee was formed to establish corridor-wide priorities and to guide the study in the best interest of both Cities. Members of the committee include represen-



Steering Committee Meeting

tatives from the Shenango Valley Initiative, Sharon Economic Development Commission, Sharon Career Link, Hermitage planning staff, Sharon City Manager, Hermitage public officials, the Sharon City School District Superintendent, and Sharon Regional Health Systems. Other members include representatives from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and the Mercer County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC). MCRPC is the regional planning council which assists their member municipalities in undertaking and implementing a variety of community and economic development plans/projects each year. MCRPC also serves as the staff of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for transportation. As the MPO overseeing the region including the Cities of Sharon and Hermitage, MCRPC is overseeing and administering this Study. They are responsible for the disbursement of federal aid monies for transportation-related projects, programs, and initiatives.

## Community Background & Study Area Description

The Cities of Sharon and Hermitage are located in southwestern Mercer County. The two municipalities are close, yet so different.

The City of Hermitage was settled in 1796 and was declared the Township of Hickory. A home rule charter was declared on January 1, 1976 which then changed the name to Hermitage. Hermitage consists of many retail businesses signaling its role as a major retail and service center in the region.

The City of Sharon was settled in 1795, according to legend, by a bible reading settler thought to have named the municipality after the Plain of Sharon in Israel. It then became incorporated into a city on December 17, 1918. Sharon was the center of the coal mining industry which transitioned to steelmaking and other heavy industry during the Industrial Revolution. The City of Sharon has a small city feel with

a main street that serves as its downtown business community as well as a primary travel route. Business Route 62, also known as Irvine Avenue and State Street within the Cities of Sharon and Hermitage, is similar to other major roadways throughout Pennsylvania in that it serves the dual purpose as a primary travel route as well as the heart of both an active Central Business District and built up commercial corridor.

The area included in this Corridor Study encompasses Business Route 62 beginning at the Pennsylvania line to the west and passes through downtown Sharon and Hermitage east to Keel Ridge Road. Business Route 62 is the original alignment of the US Route 62 corridor before a new alignment for US Route 62 was constructed to the south in 1958. Business Route 62 provides connections to several Pennsylvania highways including PA 18, PA 60, PA 418, and PA 518. Business Route 62 is functionally classified as a principal arterial highway but also serves to provide access to businesses in downtown Sharon, Sharon Regional Health Systems, three Sharon City Schools and other commercial development between downtown Sharon and Keel Ridge Road. As a result of the dual role, conflicts have arisen between typical "Main Street" type activities (i.e. pedestrian activity, accessing local business, and accessing Sharon Regional Health Systems) and motorists traveling through the corridor to reach destinations beyond. It is also important to note that the location of the Sharon Middle and High Schools and Case Avenue Elementary School along the corridor have resulted in high volumes of young pedestrians and bicyclists traveling the corridor on a regular basis.

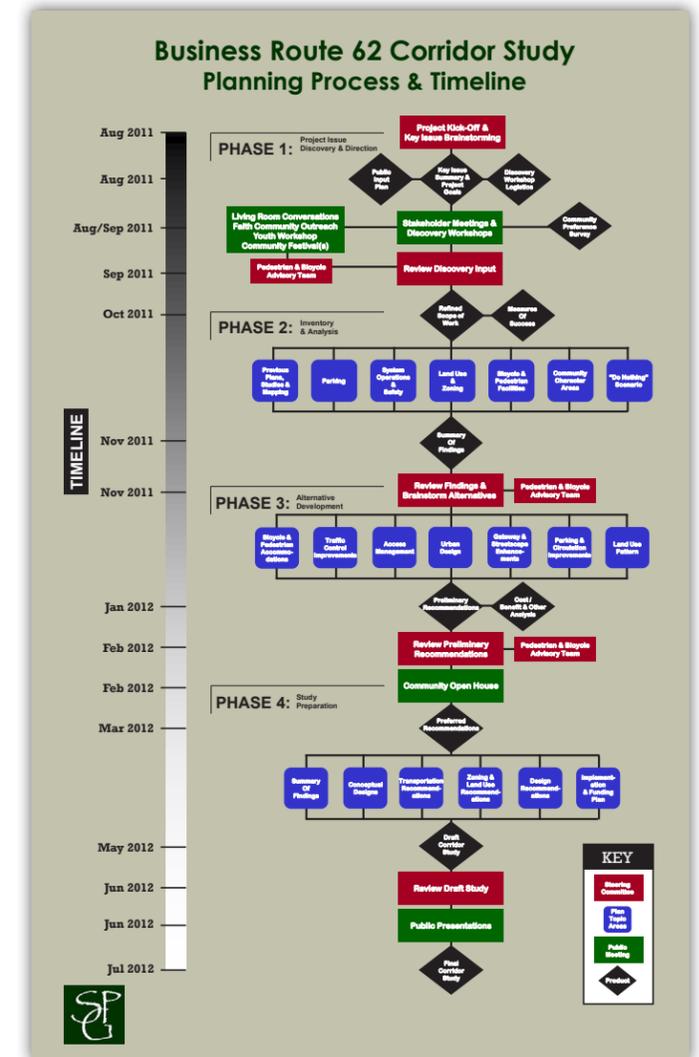


Chart 1: Business Route 62 Corridor Study Planning Process and Timeline



“In successful corridors, the transportation system unites adjacent communities. It fits into the context of each community and is accessible to drivers and non-drivers alike.”

– Great Communities, Great Corridors, 2008

### Where Do We Stand... Where Are We Going?

A positioning statement provides direction or focus to a municipality. It is a no nonsense statement of how your community is perceived in the minds of your residents, businesses, and visitors. The following position statements are based upon the input received during the first phase of public outreach for the State/Irvine Corridor Study.

#### City of Sharon

The City of Sharon is located in southwest Mercer County adjacent to the Ohio State Line. It serves as a gateway for travelers entering the State of Pennsylvania from the west. According to the most recent US Census, it has lost an average of 10% of its population every decade since 1970. As its population has declined, Sharon’s central role in the lives of residents of Sharon and adjacent communities has also declined. Shopping, social services, health care, and entertainment options continue to move out of Sharon and are locating in nearby communities; primarily in Hermitage. The loss of residential and commercial investment has significantly reduced municipal revenues and Sharon’s ability to maintain its aging infrastructure. These factors and trends have resulted in a strong feeling of apathy and a lack of community pride among many City residents.

Although the community’s negative mindset is understandable, Sharon has a number of assets on which to build. It has relatively convenient access to the state highway system and active freight rail service. Physical features such as its traditional downtown character, the Shenango River, and walkable neighborhoods provide the building blocks necessary to create a City that is attractive and feels comfortable. In addition, Sharon still boasts a number of regional destinations including the Penn State Campus and the hospital. These assets will be critical in any future community revitalization efforts by the City and its partners.

#### City of Hermitage

The City of Hermitage is located in southwest Mercer County. According to the most recent US Census, its population has remained relatively stable since 1970. However, it has experienced a significant amount of commercial development and has attracted major retailers, such as Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Lowes. In addition, national pharmacy, restaurant, movie theater and hotel chains have also opened establishments in Hermitage. Over the past two decades local health care and social service providers have also located in Hermitage. As a result of these trends, Hermitage has emerged as the center of activity in the daily lives of local and regional residents.

Despite the positive trends that Hermitage has experienced over the past twenty years, there is room for improvement. The suburban or “strip” style commercial investment has resulted in a development pattern that relies solely on accessing goods and services by the automobile. As a result, traffic volumes and congestion on local and State roads in the City continues to increase. These factors have contributed to increased driver frustration and accidents. The lack of adequate pedestrian and bicycle facilities along major thoroughfares mean residents and patrons have no other choice but to drive.

It is anticipated that investment will continue to occur in Hermitage and that each new development or re-development is an opportunity to improve access and circulation throughout the community.

#### What We’ve Discovered?

The broad outreach and discovery efforts accomplished early in the Business Route 62 Corridor Study planning process, serve to better articulate, reinforce and refine the direction and goals needed to achieve the desired vision for the corridor.

The following project goals support the position statements and **vision**:

- Developing a transportation system, land use pattern, and design elements that enhances our “**sense of place**” and instills community pride.
- Ensuring the **safety** of pedestrian, bicycle, and motor vehicle traffic while improving **accessibility** within and across the corridor.
- Providing an environment that **entices** residents to walk and bike to services; and promoting an **active lifestyle**.
- Managing congestion and preserving market area in order to improve our **economic vitality**.
- Celebrating the **gateways** into our communities and improving **wayfinding**.

#### Vision – Where We Want to Be?

Based upon the information gathered through this planning process, the collective vision for Business Route 62 Corridor is to have an **inviting corridor** that meets the needs of residents, businesses, and the traveling public. To accomplish this, the two cities and their partners will develop plans and strategies that **enhance the safety, mobility, and appearance** of the Business Route 62 Corridor, in a **collaborative** manner that promotes **economic vitality** and **community pride**.

#### Goals – How Do We Get There?

These elements form the basis of a transportation strategy that will guide decision-making over the next decade. In order to achieve this strategy, the two cit-



ies recognize that they will have to work closely with each other, MCRPC, PennDOT, local residents and the business community.

## Getting Involved

As part of the planning process, public participation was a vital component to create a reality based plan. Participation from elected officials, local residents, businesses owners, and property owners was the key to creating a Public Input Plan. This plan, and detailed results of the various surveys and public meetings are discussed in further detail under the Needs and Opportunities Assessment Section.

## How Do We Measure Success?

Measures of success are used for evaluating how changes to the corridor impact the two communities positively or negatively. Transportation improvements often involve trade-offs: pedestrian improvements may come at the expense of bicycle lanes; bicycle lanes may require narrowing travel lanes; and pedestrian crossing improvements may result in greater delay to motorists. Residents must decide which improvements meet their goals and objectives. To aid in this decision, the following measures of success were identified with the aid of steering committee input:

- Gaining support and buy-in from stakeholders and community – resident satisfaction increases
- Adoption of the Final Plan – Officials from both communities are willing to implement and administer the plan.
- Early Implementation of Simple, Low Cost Study Recommendations – plan recommendations are achieved quickly and cost effectively
- The number of trips by walking, cycling and transit increases



Steering Committee Meeting



Steering Committee Meeting



Steering Committee Meeting



Clergy Meeting

