

TRIANGLE COMMUTER NEWS

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Ozone Action Program Revs Up for Summer Heat

Never mind this year's unusually cool spring weather. The members of a diverse clean air coalition including power utilities, manufacturing firms,

transportation organizations, private associations and public agencies were busy spending their time looking ahead toward the hazy days of summer.

Advance preparations by the Southwest Pennsylvania Ozone Action Partnership for a third annual campaign designed to raise public awareness and encourage private citizens to help fight smog, were marked by an official kickoff at the Carnegie Science Center on May 22. The area's first actual Ozone Action Days took place June 10 and 11. Two weeks later, despite widely broadcast Ozone Action Day alerts, a stagnant high pressure weather system pushed ozone levels above the federal ceiling of 125 parts per billion for the first time in two years.

Pittsburgh's Ozone Action Program, which began in 1995, encourages voluntary steps by organizations as well as individuals to reduce ground-level

ozone concentrations. Meteorologists determine if weather conditions are ripe for ozone formation and, if they are, an Ozone Action alert is issued by the Partnership.

Ozone, which is created when volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and oxides of nitrogen combine under conditions of heat and sunlight, is a component of smog and a recognized respiratory hazard, particularly for children and the elderly. Sources of VOCs include exhaust emissions, paint solvents, dry cleaning fluids and other petroleum-based vapors released into the atmosphere. NOx is a byproduct of combustion.

Among the anti-pollution measures advocated on Ozone Action Days are increased carpooling and transit use, as well as avoiding certain activities including the use of power lawn mowers and charcoal grills. These efforts are targeted at keeping ozone levels below the current federal ceiling. Any amount in excess of 125 parts per billion would exceed EPA requirements and could result in the region being assigned a more severe level of non-attainment, subject to federal economic sanctions.

Although no exceedences were recorded in the region during 1996, ten Ozone Action Days were called when weather conditions conducive to ozone formation occurred. Cooperation from the public as well as cooler weather, helped to keep measured levels within federal standards. However that was not the case in 1995. During 18 Ozone Action Days that summer, the region's 11 ozone monitoring stations registered 17 incidents in which federal standards were exceeded. Those high readings jeopardized a petition by regional leaders who were then seeking to upgrade southwestern Pennsylvania's status from Moderate Non-Attainment to Attainment. Today, with the prospect of even tighter clean air rules now on the horizon, the region's ability to conform with federal ozone standards will grow even greater.

"Right now the standard is a one-hour reading of 0.12 parts per million," according to Andy Reser of SPRPC who serves as the program's treasurer. "EPA's proposed new ozone standard would be 0.08 ppm averaged over eight hours. Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection did a study last

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Pittsburgh's Biggest-Ever Garage Sale Gets Underway

Revenue from the sale of eight City-owned parking garages could help to pay for the construction of two new downtown parking facilities if any of the purchase bids received on May 30 are found acceptable. The Parking Authority's board will decide later this summer whether to accept, reject or further negotiate any of the proposals which were submitted by three competing bidders.



The garage sale, which specified a minimum bid of \$78 million, included a series of restrictions intended to govern certain aspects of the facilities' operation. The sale was designed to generate enough revenue to repay \$53 million in current debt and then to use the surplus to finance additional new parking garages in Pittsburgh's central business district.

Well before that happens, however, a new 785-space fringe parking lot along Second Avenue will start serving downtown commuters. The new parking facility, which will open for business in mid-summer with final completion slated for early October, joins another new surface lot, holding 500 cars, adjacent to the city's new Municipal Courts Building. Both lots feature an all-day rate of \$3.50 and free shuttle service into downtown. ▲

Detours, Delays and Diversions



With an impressive backlog of maintenance work and a windfall of additional funds with which to do it, PennDOT launched the 1997 construction season with one of its busiest road work programs ever. Among the highlights:

I-79. Repair, replacement, and reconstruction of the concrete pavement along a succession of segments on this key north-south artery will continue through October with lane restrictions and crossovers used to maintain traffic flow. Work will resume again in 1998, particularly along the stretch between Bridgeville and Southpointe.

Ft. Pitt Bridge. While bridge ramps to and from Carson Street are under repair, traffic is being detoured along the West End Bridge and Circle.

Rt. 65. A road widening project on either side of the Eckert Street Bridge has traffic restricted to a single lane between the McKees Rocks and West End Bridges. Another Rt. 65 project, at Cross Street between Ambridge and Leetsdale, will also limit traffic to one lane each way.

West End Bridge. A ramp-widening project associated with the Ft. Pitt Bridge and Tunnel rehabilitation will close off

traffic at various times between the West End Bridge and Three Rivers Stadium.

West End Bypass. Lane restrictions will continue as work to expand the roadway progresses.

Parkways East and West. Milling and resurfacing of the Parkway will take place this year and next along the full length of the roadway except for the central section, between Greensburg Pike and the Ft. Pitt Bridge.

Montour Run interchange. Improvements to the roads in and around the interchange of Montour Run with Route 60 will involve some widening and realignment of the intersections as well as new signals. Traffic will generally be maintained, but there could be delays in the area due to the construction. The project is expected to last into next year.

Ewing Road interchange. The construction of a new interchange with business Route 60 in the Ewing Road area will continue to require single lane traffic on Business 60. The project is expected to resume in 1998.

Route 8 in Shaler. The construction of a left turn lane on Route 8 southbound into Elfenwild in Shaler will involve restrict-

ing traffic to single lanes in each direction.

Route 51. A road improvement project include better drainage, new surfacing and improved signals along Route 51 between Lebanon Church and Coal Valley Roads will force single lane traffic in each direction, creating significant delays. The project is expected to conclude in 1998.

Route 19 South Hills. A series of improvements is underway along Route 19 in Upper St. Clair from McMurray Road down to the County Line. The project, which includes the McMurray Road Bridge, should be completed by the end of the 1997 construction season. Some traffic restrictions, occasionally including single lane movement in each direction, will be required.

Liberty Tubes south portal. For the next six months, utility line relocation in the recently cleared West Liberty Avenue area, just to the south of the Liberty Tunnel, is being done in preparation for the new ramp system which will start construction next year. For the time being, no significant traffic impact is contemplated. ▲

Advanced Technology Guards HOV Against Wrong-Way Travel

By next fall, Pittsburgh's 5.2 mile reversible HOV lane along I-279 North is expected to have what many believe will be the world's most sophisticated traffic control and monitoring system in place and operating. The new control equipment will join more than 30 new warning signs which were installed over the past two years by PennDOT as part of a determined effort to prevent wrong-way traffic following a disastrous head-on collision in 1995 that claimed six lives.

A state-of-the-art HOV management center will share a Traffic Operations Center building now under construction in Collier with PennDOT's new incident management program for the Parkways East and West. The center will feature a battery of high-tech monitoring and control devices to safely operate the roadway.

Included will be computers to activate directional signs and gates, TV monitors displaying images from cameras mounted on towers along the lane, communication equipment to expedite telephone connections to emergency services, and displays linked to sensors on ramps signaling possible wrong-way vehicles.

Fiber optic cables to carry the electronic signals that operate the equipment and tie it into the remote management center are being installed in conduits which were built into median barriers and under travelling lanes at the time of the road's original construction. Specially-trained operators will monitor the high-tech center's console whenever the HOV lanes are in operation. However by automating the operation of gates and related equipment, PennDOT expects to reduce its

labor costs, which now involve two employees who are typically paid on an overtime basis, to manually raise and lower traffic barriers.

Although HOV traffic has returned to the level it had reached prior to the 1995 incident, for many months following the accident, when operating hours were sharply curtailed, use of the facility declined. Even following the disaster, a series of new reports citing wrong-way travel along the lane persisted. The original accident, which occurred when a PennDOT employee disregarded safety procedures in reversing the flow of traffic, prompted a public commitment from state transportation secretary Bradley Mallory to rid the facility of risk from human error. ▲

Airport Busway Retrenchment May Buy More Time for Commuters

A long-planned and carefully choreographed series of road projects in and around the Golden Triangle suddenly came unglued this spring. The projects, many of which were predicated on the construction of a new Mon River Airport Busway - HOV bridge, will now face certain redesign and likely rescheduling now that the transit bridge proposal may have been abandoned. Officials remain unsure what the impact on traffic will be. What does seem certain is that the proposed changes will, at a minimum, require significant re-engineering and approvals - a process which could delay work by as much as a year. But simplified designs could also mean shorter construction times.

One of the proposals announced in early May by Port Authority Transit, which would shelve plans for a new bridge linking Market Street to Station Square, will profoundly effect both the timing and design of several closely related projects. These projects include measures designed and staged to help downtown commuters cope when the Ft. Pitt Bridge and Tunnel are closed for reconstruction, now expected to take place during portions of the 2001 and 2002 construction seasons.

PAT's need for an alternative plan was reached after preliminary cost estimates for the Airport Busway began soaring into the half-billion dollar range. If approved by FTA, PAT's proposal to forgo the bridge will have a ripple effect on other projects on the downtown side of the bridge where plans are simultaneously underway for rebuilding Ft. Pitt Boulevard, the Parkway East, related traffic ramps and the construction of a new riverfront park. However for most downtown workers, the first and most tangible impact of shelving the transit bridge is likely to be a short-term reprieve from a lengthy series of construction headaches while its effect on nearby projects is being sorted out. ▲

Vanpool Riders Needed

Weekday vanpools to downtown Pittsburgh depart from and return to communities throughout the region. Current passenger openings include the following:

From: Butler

Work Times: 7:30 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$90
Contact: Penny Furne
Phone: 281-8799

From: Butler

Work times: 7:00 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$94
Contact: Bill Shewalter
Phone: 562-6722

From: Cranberry Twp.

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$80
Contact: Sandy Barchetti
Phone: 359-2122

From: Greensburg, Jeannette, Irwin

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$85
Contact: Elaine Cutway
Phone: 434-2192

From: Greensburg

Work times: 7:30 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$90
Contact: Harry Keenan
Phone: 227-7750

From: Greensburg

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$92
Contact: Gary McConnell
Phone: 644-6695

From: Greensburg, Irwin

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$100
Contact: Colleen Stubbs
Phone: 471-5300 x252

From: Greensburg

Work times: 7:30 - 4:15
Monthly fare: \$93
Contact: Joe Lastik
Phone: 434-2765

From: Imperial

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$75
Contact: Ronald Senovich
Phone: 681-8311

From: Irwin, N. Huntingdon

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$95
Contact: Joe Goffner
Phone: 236-2913

From: Irwin

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$75
Contact: Rich Peer
Phone: 281-4052

From: Latrobe

Work times: 7:30 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$100
Contact: LuAnne Stepanic
Phone: 236-1945

From: Leechburg, Vandergrift

Work times: 7:30 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$87
Contact: Rob Reddinger
Phone: 644-4203

From: Lower Burrell, Vandergrift

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$90
Contact: Dom Antoniono
Phone: 594-5155

From: McKeesport, Versailles

Work times: 7:30 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$70
Contact: William Bury
Phone: 392-8773

From: Monaca, Ambridge

Work times: 8:00 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$95
Contact: Cindy Robinson
Phone: 234-0517

From: Munhall, West Mifflin

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$75
Contact: Dusty Kondas
Phone: 633-3892

From: Murrysville, Monroeville

Work times: 8:00 - 4:45
Monthly fare: \$85
Contact: Silvia Bins
Phone: 227-1085

From: New Kensington, Plum

Work times: 8:00 - 5:15
Monthly fare: \$83
Contact: George Carabin
Phone: 433-3432

From: N. Huntingdon

Work times: 8:00 - 4:45
Monthly fare: \$68
Contact: Bill Conley
Phone: 433-4771

From: N. Huntingdon, Irwin

Work times: 8:30 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$93
Contact: Don Douglass
Phone: 236-2908

From: Pleasant Hills

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$70
Contact: Wade Fox
Phone: 391-5590 x 312

From: Robinson

Work times: 7:30 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$93
Contact: Ray Terpack
Phone: 633-3792

From: Steubenville, Weirton

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$90
Contact: Kim Sisinni
Phone: 255-4851

From: White Oak, N. Versailles

Work times: 7:30 - 4:15
Monthly fare: \$72
Contact: Debbie Manning
Phone: 762-2709

From: Weirton, Steubenville

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$94
Contact: Ted Marinich
Phone: 391-7834



Park 'n Ride Lots Advance at an Unhurried Pace

Although there has been progress on several Park 'n Ride lot projects in the region, for most of southwestern Pennsylvania, new fringe and suburban parking facilities designed to serve downtown Pittsburgh commuters are developing much more slowly. PennDOT, for example, now has eleven Pittsburgh-area Park 'n Ride lots in various stages of design and development for which \$6.5 million has been budgeted. Some of them had been proposed as mitigation measures for the Ft. Pitt Bridge and Tunnel rehabilitation project. However the need for those lots will not become critical until preparations for closure of the bridge-tunnel artery are further along, according to PennDOT engineer Tom Fox. And that could be several more years.

Prospective locations for new Allegheny County Park 'n Ride-lots include sites in Wexford, Monroeville, and along Route 51 in the South Hills. In Butler County, a 50-car site along Route 8 in Penn Township is currently under design. Along Rt. 51 at the Rostraver Airport, a new 75-space lot serving Mid Mon Valley Transit patrons is expected to be ready by late summer as is another of approximately 200 spaces near the airport in Latrobe, where it will serve Westmoreland Transit passengers. Three more, at key interchanges along I-70 and I-79 in

Washington County, are expected to come on line next summer. Others, for which no sites have yet been identified, are still several years from construction, according to PennDOT engineer Bill Piper.

Along its system's fixed guideways, Port Authority Transit has also come to appreciate how much its patrons value parking space. The limited number of free parking spaces now available adjacent to its "T" stations are typically filled by early morning. Those space limitations have, in turn, limited LRT ridership. Whenever additional new parking has been made available, it has translated immediately into more transit passengers.

Accordingly, more than 5,000 new Park 'n Ride spaces are contemplated as part of PAT's overall major capital projects plan. They include parking along the Airport Busway, Stage II of the South Hills LRT rehabilitation, and its East Busway extension. However, specific sites for those parking facilities have not yet been identified or procured, according to PAT spokeswoman Lynn Colosi. Although shopping center operators who currently make Park 'n Ride space available are continuing to cooperate with PAT, the agency has had little success expanding the program into new space controlled by other business owners, she reported. ▲

Ozone Action program revs up for summer heat

continued from cover.

year, when there were no exceedences of current ozone standards. If the proposed standard had been in place, it would have been exceeded 16 times."

The launch of the 1997 Ozone Action Days season, which runs from May through September, included the formal introduction of a pink and purple costumed mascot - "Coach Ozone" - and an official proclamation from Governor Tom Ridge recognizing the efforts of the Southwestern Ozone Action Partnership. An ozone monitoring station is currently under development at the Carnegie Science Center. When completed, real-time ozone level readings will be included as part of the weather tracking exhibit on permanent display.

Although most of the publicity associated with the Ozone Action Program is carried by broadcasters and newspaper publishers either as news or as a public service to their audiences, the Partnership is also looking for funds to underwrite commercial radio advertising during peak drive times, including a three-week rotation of four 60-second spots featuring Coach Ozone. ▲

What Do You Think?

If you would like to comment on any of the articles in this issue of *Triangle Commuter News* or if you have any story ideas or commuter-related issues that you would like to see developed in future editions, please write or call us at the address noted on the mailing panel, below. ▲



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