

4. Needs Assessment

Once the existing conditions of the SR 31 West Corridor were documented and the projected future conditions developed and analyzed, the next step was to ascertain what the local residents and elected officials want to see happen along the corridor. The vision for SR 31 West is a response to the question “**Where do we want to be?**” To determine the answer, residents and stakeholders were asked to identify features in the corridor and in their communities that they value along with real and perceived threats to those features.





Methodology

A variety of public participation methods were used in the development of the vision for SR 31 West. Local elected officials, residents, businesses, agencies, and organizations were strongly encouraged to participate throughout the planning process. Specific public participation and public education for the study included Advisory Committee meetings, three public workshops, two elected official workshops, a focus group meeting, and a property owner survey.

Advisory Committee Meetings

An Advisory Committee was formed that consists of 24 active members, plus representatives from state agencies, county government, and township government. The committee met on a bi-monthly basis to brainstorm ideas and issues, develop a vision for the Corridor, and review draft recommendations. A complete list of the members can be found in the Acknowledgements section at the beginning of the study.

Public Workshops

Three public workshops were held during the course of the project. The initial meeting included a visioning session, the second meeting included a presentation of the draft design guide and development scenarios, and the final meeting was held to present the final plan to the public.

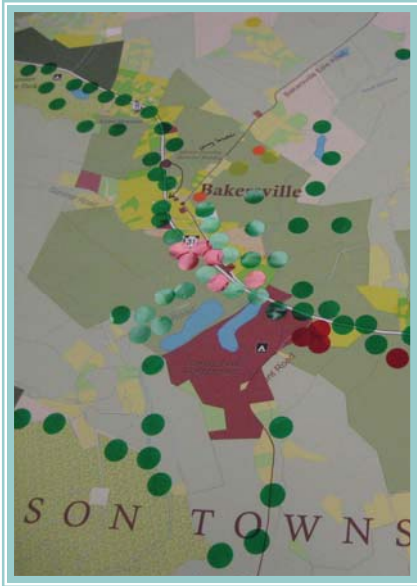
Workshop #1 – September 23, 2008

The first public workshop was held on September 23, 2008 at the Bakersville Volunteer Fire Department to introduce the Corridor Study to the public and identify priority needs of residents, business owners, and stakeholders. The meeting's purpose was to also garner input on topics such as transportation issues, environmental concerns, and the potential for land use controls. The meeting was an open house format, which allowed attendees to visit five stations.



*Public Workshop #1
(Source: Mackin, 2008)*

The stations included the following:



*Public Workshop #1
(Source: Mackin, 2008)*

- ❖ **Station 1: Presentation** – a short presentation and handout explaining the study in detail
- ❖ **Station 2: Land Use Identification** – an exercise where residents placed colored dots on a map to indicate what type of development they would most want to see along SR 31; where residents could choose preservation (green), low-density residential (yellow), medium-density residential (orange), and commercial (red).
- ❖ **Station 3: Issues Identification** – an exercise where residents were asked to identify transportation issues and concerns along the SR 31 Corridor as well as existing historic and environmental assets that should be preserved
- ❖ **Station 4: Community Imaging Survey** – an exercise where residents were shown 52 images and asked to rate each image, depending on the intensity of their dislike or like of the image and if it would be appropriate for the SR 31 Corridor
- ❖ **Station Five: Land Use Management Tools** – an exercise where residents were asked how they felt about land use controls such as zoning and what they liked or disliked about zoning

Approximately 107 people attended the meeting. All attendees were also asked to complete an exit survey to gather more information regarding issues along SR 31 West. A copy of the results of the exercises and exit survey can be found in Appendix 2.

Workshop #2 – March 25, 2009

The second public workshop was held on March 25, 2009 at 6:30 PM at the Bakersville Volunteer Fire Department. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the potential impacts on traffic and land use along the SR 31 West Corridor as a result of projected development scenarios. A presentation was given at the meeting to reflect the effects of uncontrolled development vs. controlled development. The draft design guideline was also presented.

Approximately 64 people attended the meeting. All attendees were asked to complete an exit survey regarding land use regulations, specifically zoning along the State Route 31 Corridor. A copy of the results of the exit survey can be found in Appendix 3.



Workshop #3 – June 3, 2009

The third and final public workshop was held on June 3, 2009 from 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM at the Bakersville Volunteer Fire Department. Approximately 50 people attended the meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to present the recommendations of the study. The recommendations were compiled into seven different categories; transportation, land use, aesthetics, environmental and historical, infrastructure, municipal partnerships, and economic development. Participants were then given green, yellow, and blue dots to rank their top three recommendations. Participants were also asked to complete an exit survey regarding the recommendations and future land use. A copy of the results from the exit survey and recommendation ranking can be found in Appendix 4.

Focus Group Meeting

A focus group meeting was held on February 23, 2009 at 7:00 PM at the Somerset County Office Building. A presentation was given on land use management tools, specifically comprehensive plans, zoning, farmland preservation, design guidelines, and access management. The purpose of the presentation was to educate the Advisory Committee on the options and tools available to the municipalities, County, and residents to preserve the State Route 31 Corridor for future generations.



*Public Workshop #3
(Source: Mackin, 2009)*

Property Owner Survey

A survey designed to identify local concerns of residents and business owners who own property directly abutting SR 31 West was mailed to a random sample of 50 property owners along the Corridor. The mailing list was provided by Somerset County Planning Commission. A copy of the results of the survey is included in Appendix 5.

Visioning

T&B Planning was part of the consulting team and led stakeholders through several visioning sessions and public meetings, which took place between June 2009 and February 2009. Stakeholders who participated in the process included municipal officials, business owners, residents, and land owners/developers.

The ultimate goal for the visioning sessions was to help in the creation of a Design Guide for the State Route 31 Corridor. A Design Guide is a document that contains ideas and recommendations about how to establish or maintain a particular community character. It covers topics such as architecture, building materials, building placement, landscaping, outdoor signs and lighting. Design Guides have been used in the United States for decades, but their use in Pennsylvania has become more popular in recent years with the resurgence of public interest in creating vibrant communities, reducing impacts on the environment, and stimulating the economy based on outdoor recreation and historic resource-based tourism. A Design Guide can apply to geographic areas of all sizes, from a large region, to a single community, to an individual development project.

A majority of the road remains attractive to the eye, but with no zoning controls in place, there is a potential that new development of all shapes, sizes, and characters could be constructed along the roadway.

State Route 31 West is worthy of special attention because it serves as a primary travel route and gateway to a number of attractions and outdoor recreation opportunities in the Laurel Highlands. A majority of the road remains attractive to the eye, but with no zoning controls in place, there is a potential that new development of all shapes, sizes, and character could be constructed along the roadway. The Design Guide sets forth a vision for the future and gives ideas and recommendations about how to achieve that vision.



The Design Guide applies to properties visible from Route 31 West in Jefferson and Somerset Townships. The use of it is voluntary. The Design Guide should be consulted when making decisions about how to use land and improve buildings, signs, and other man-made features visible from Route 31 West.

In order to create the Design Guide three stakeholder meetings and one public meeting were focused on visioning. The goals of the first stakeholder meeting were to establish an understanding of the existing conditions, to define the experience of traveling along State Route 31 West, and to determine forces of change that could affect the area positively and negatively in the future.

A Community Image Survey (CIS) was used in the second stakeholder meeting and a general public meeting was held in late 2008. A total of 83 persons participated in the survey. CIS participants viewed a series of 60 images and were asked to rate their preference for each image. Through this process, T&B Planning determined what type and style of architecture, building features, and other improvements were most desired along the Corridor. Also, participants identified key issues that should be addressed and identified common design themes that the community wants to support. Shared goals for the Corridor's future were then established.

During the third stakeholder meeting, a conceptual vision and draft design recommendations were presented. Stakeholders reacted to the initial concepts and assisted in revising and refining the vision and design concepts. Some of the initial recommendations were removed and others were modified or added. Through this visioning process, T&B Planning assisted Jefferson and Somerset Townships in developing the final version of the Design Guide.

The future vision for the Route 31 West Corridor is to preserve its agricultural, outdoor recreational, and mountainous characteristics, encourage development to cluster together and be attractive and complementary in style, and to preserve agricultural lands, woodlands, open spaces, and scenic vistas. Along extended stretches of the road, no development would be visible. The traveler would enjoy scenic views of woodlands, mountain vistas, and agricultural fields and farms. Properties would be well-maintained and visually appealing.



*Community Image Survey
(Source: Mackin, 2008)*

In activity areas (such as in and near the villages of Bakersville and Lavansville, near the entrance to Hidden Valley Four Seasons Resort, and east of Coxes Creek Road), development would visually complement the natural surroundings and reflect building styles traditionally used in the region.

The theme that would best suit the State Route 31 West Corridor is Pastoral-Agrarian-Mountain Village. With application of the design recommendations described in Section 5, the Corridor will retain its scenic characteristics, embrace its more than 100 years of agricultural and outdoor recreation history, and visually reflect a pastoral-agrarian-mountain village theme in ways that are appropriate for the Corridor yet fitting with a modern lifestyle.

The vision and theme for the State Route 31 Corridor is explained in more detail in the Design Guide.

Potential Development Scenarios

Visual simulations were prepared to demonstrate the overall vision of the State Route 31 Corridor and the future buildout scenario discussed in **Section 3: Future Conditions**. The visual simulations are included at the end of this section. **Visual Simulation 1: Future Vision for the State Route 31 Corridor** illustrates the vision of the State Route 31 Corridor by using the design guidelines recommended. Buildings are sufficiently set back from the roadway, use shared driveways, and are low in profile to allow views to the scenic backdrop. Natural materials such as brick, wood, and stone are used on building exteriors and for development features such as walls, fences and signs. Parking lots are attractively landscaped. Lighting is directed downward to protect the dark night sky. Buildings appear as though they “fit in” to an agricultural-pastoral-mountain village character. (Route 31 Corridor Design Guide, 2009). For more information, please consult the Design Guideline for the State Route 31 Corridor.

Visual Simulation 2(a): Potential Development Area-Existing Conditions is a photo of existing land uses, mainly agriculture, along the Corridor. **Visual Simulation 2(b): Potential Development Area-Effects of Uncontrolled Development** illustrates what could happen to the agriculture area based upon the development build-outs discussed in **Section 3: Future Conditions**. The commercial development shown in this simulation occurred due to the lack of land use management tools in place.



Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is an organized way of documenting the needs expressed by residents, business owners, and various other stakeholders along the State Route 31 Corridor. This assessment can become a blueprint for action within the Corridor as recommendations will be directly derived from the needs identified in this chapter. All comments received from the various public participation efforts detailed under Methodology earlier in the section have been condensed and included.

Table 3.1: Safety Issues documents transportation issues identified through the public outreach efforts as well as assessments made by Mackin Engineering during fieldviews.

Table 3.1: Transportation Safety Issues

Issue	Location	Condition Assessment
Speeding Concerns	Bakersville	Segment 1 – speed limit is assumed to be 55 mph as is not posted A field view revealed that 55 mph may be too high due the close proximity of residential homes to the road.
	Commercial area of Segment 3	Segment 3 – speed limit is posted at 40 mph and then drops to 35 mph in Somerset Borough A field view revealed that 40 mph may be too high due to the number of businesses and 30 mph or 35 mph may be more appropriate.
	Segments 1 & 2	Segment 1 – speed limit is assumed to be 55 mph as is not posted A field view revealed that 55 mph may be too high due to curvature and grade of the road. Segment 2 – speed limit is assumed to be 55 mph as is not posted A field view revealed that 55 mph appears to be appropriate.

Table 3.1: Transportation Safety Issues (continued)

Issue	Location	Condition Assessment
Large amount of truck traffic	All segments	Segment 1 has 9% truck traffic Segment 2 has 10% truck traffic Segment 3 has 6% truck traffic
		While 9-10% truck traffic seems high, these are mainly trucks going to and from the New Enterprise Stone Quarry, not tractor trailers.
Intersection Concerns	SR 31/Gardner Road	Sight distance looking to the left and to the right from Gardner Road may be insufficient based on the travel speeds and grade of the road.
	SR 31/Hidden Valley Entrance	A left turn lane on SR 31 at Hidden Valley Driveway might be beneficial with increased development.
	SR 31/Trent Road	A westbound left turn lane on SR 31 at the intersection of Trent Road (SR 3037) is planned for construction in 2010 according to a PennDOT representative.
	SR 31/Kimmel Road	Sight distance is sufficient.
	SR 31 and Samuels Road/Sportsman Road	Sight distance is sufficient.
	SR 31/Jimtown Road	Sight distance is sufficient.
	SR 31/Bakersville intersection at CoGo's	The acute angle between these two roads is an undesirable condition and the open access to the gas service station has probably led to several accidents.
	SR 31/Laurel Run Road	The sight distance looking to the right from Laurel Run Road may be insufficient based on the travel speeds and grade of the road.
	SR 31/ Marteeny Road	The sight distance looking to the right from Marteeny Road may also be insufficient based on the travel speeds and grade of the road.



Table 3.1: Transportation Safety Issues (continued)

Issue	Location	Condition Assessment
Bridge Replacement	Mt. Zion Road	The bridge on Mt. Zion Road in Bakersville is out and is a hardship for local residents. This is also causing a greater amount of traffic to utilize the Gardner Road and Bakersville Edie Road intersections.
Stormwater Runoff	Stone Quarry	While this was not seen during the field view, in the event that water is running from the quarry onto 31 and freezing, the quarry should examine their stormwater management plans and possibly consider redirecting the water off of the road.
Ingress / Egress	Trucks entering / exiting the New Enterprise Stone Quarry	At the western end of this segment, a long hill posts a “Trucks Reduce Gear” sign. “Truck” warning signs with flashing lights are also present on the approaches to the Quarry.
	Commercial area on SR 31 near Somerset Borough line	Estimated 23 driveways within a one-mile section, in addition to side streets. Numerous left turns off of SR 31 are being made in both directions. Several accidents were reported in this one-mile stretch
	Laurel Mountain Inn, Hidden Valley Outback Park, Oakhurst Tea Room	Parking lots for these locations are wide open and access is not limited.

Table 3.2: Land Use Issues documents issues with different land uses in the Corridor identified through the public outreach efforts as well as the possibility of land use management tools utilized within the Corridor. Assessments of each issue were made by Mackin Engineering during fieldviews.

Table 3.2: Land Use Issues		
Issue	Location	Condition Assessment
Concern regarding “sprawl” development (similar to SR 601)	All segments	The potential for “sprawl” development is real as there are no zoning controls in place. Projected development scenarios anticipate new residential, recreational, and commercial uses over the next 10-20 years.
Too many signs and billboards	All segments	There are 7 billboards throughout the Corridor; however, there are no sign regulations in place which would control the type, size, and location of signage.
Lack of landscaping and screening	All segments	Both municipalities fall under the auspices of the Somerset County Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO) which would address some landscaping / screening for new development along the Corridor; however neither municipality has zoning nor design guidelines in place, which would further assist in regulating landscaping and screening as buffers.
	State Route 31 at the New Enterprise Quarry	An interview with representatives from New Enterprise Quarry indicated that a 20 foot barrier is planned for construction that will visually buffer mining operations from SR 31.
Lack of property maintenance	Jefferson Township	Segment 1 in particular was noted to have a number of property maintenance issues. However, Jefferson Township does not have any ordinances in place to regulate property maintenance.
Agricultural lands are at risk for development	Segments 2 & 3	The potential for the conversion of agricultural lands to commercial / retail uses is a real threat over the next 10-20 years. While there are a number of parcels are enrolled in Clean & Green and in the Agricultural Security Area Program, there is only one agricultural conservation easement within 1,000 feet of State Route 31 that would protect farmland in perpetuity.



Table 3.3: Environmental and Historical Issues documents the issues and concerns with environmental and historical resources identified through the public outreach efforts as well as assessments made by Mackin Engineering during fieldviews.

Table 3.3: Environmental and Historical Issues		
Issue	Location	Condition Assessment
Too much water is being withdrawn from the Laurel Hill Creek Watershed	Laurel Hill Creek Watershed	A Water Resources Management Plan for Laurel Hill Creek is in the developing stages and preliminary results show that water use is exceeding water availability.
Lack of riparian corridors along streams	Laurel Hill Creek and West Branch of Coxes Creek	Riparian corridors can be encouraged on private property through education as well as incorporated requirements into zoning and other land use controls.
Impacts of mining operations on the watershed	State Route 31 at the New Enterprise Quarry	Water impacts are regulated by permitting process through the PA DEP.
Water use and chemical introduction from fracking due to gas well drilling	All segments	Water impacts are regulated by permitting process through the PA DEP.
Lack of stormwater management plan for SR 31	Laurel Hill / Coxes Creek Watersheds	Stormwater management is accounted for through the Somerset County SALDO. A Coxes Creek Watershed Act 167 Stormwater Management Plan was completed and Somerset Township has adopted the model ordinance. There is no Stormwater Management Plan for the Laurel Hill Creek watershed.
Preservation of historic sites	Samuels Church	Samuels Church is located on Samuels Road, not directly on SR 31. The church is in excellent condition and recognized locally for its historic significance. The site is not listed on the National Register.
	Glades Pike Inn	Glades Pike Inn is located directly on SR 31 and is currently a bed and breakfast. The site is in excellent condition and recognized locally for its historic significance. The site is privately owned and is not listed on the National Register.
	Other resources in all segments	Only one site is listed on the National Register throughout the SR 31 Corridor: Kooser State Park Family Cabin District in Jefferson Township.

Table 3.4: Infrastructure Issues documents the issues concerning current and proposed infrastructure within the State Route 31 Corridor as well as those issues and concerns identified through a review of previous studies.

Table 3.4: Infrastructure Issues		
Issue	Location	Condition Assessment
Public water is needed as private wells are drying up	All segments	The Quemahoning pipeline project could potentially provide an alternative to private wells if the project is extended to the State Route 31 Corridor.
Sewerage is needed for existing businesses	Segment 2	A six inch main is being constructed from Lavansville to the proposed development near the Village of Bakersville. Currently Jefferson Township is developing an Act 537 plan so the township can tap into the sewerage. The plan will determine what areas of the township will be serviced with sewerage.
Concern of the use of groundwater and wells for public water extensions	Laurel Hill Watershed	Water sources for Somerset Water Authority include two ground water sources, Shaffer Run and Coxes Creek, and one surface water source, Laurel Hill Creek. Preliminary results of the Water Resources Management Plan for Laurel Hill Creek have shown that water use is exceeding water availability.