

PLAN the KEYSTONE



Parquesburg Train Station Stakeholder Interview and Field View Summary 09.15.11

Background and Stakeholder Interviews

On July 7th and 8th, 2011, the Plan the Keystone Team met with Parkesburg area community leaders, municipal officials, and representatives from public institutions to gain a better understanding of the community's issues and concerns regarding redevelopment within the Borough and the opportunities presented from potential new investments in the Amtrak train station. Discussions were held with the following individuals:

Richard Irwin, Emergency Services Director
Randy Waltermeyer, Chester County Planning Commission
Justin Smiley, Chester County Planning Commission
Sandy Thomas, Borough Resident
Pat Geiger, Rider
Ty Williams, Borough Resident
Brad Sinrod, Business Owner

Rocco Pirozzi, Business Owner
David Jones, Borough Resident
Sharen Wolf, Borough Council Member
Mark Agen, Borough Council Member
Jim Thomas, Borough Manager
Alex Baldivieso, Rider

Through the discussions held at these interviews, several important areas emerged as critical to the success of the station and of Parkesburg. They are:

Access - Access seems to be the highest priority problem at Parkesburg. Access to the west bound platform is severely restricted due to various factors:

- Underpass underneath tracks has a very narrow sidewalk on only the east side of the road
- Poor lighting in the underpass
- Underpass frequently floods
- Access to platform from underpass is an unpaved path adjacent to the tracks
- Weather conditions can create safety issues when attempting to cross under the tracks and access westbound platform.

Overall the station exhibits poor sidewalk conditions, insufficient streetscapes, lack of intermodal connections, and a lack of regional wayfinding.

Parking – The parking supply is inadequate. The parking lot on the eastbound side of the tracks was just recently paved by Amtrak but parking spaces are not defined. The parking lot is close to capacity. The parking on the westbound side of the tracks consists of a dead end road and no defined spaces.

Safety – Security does not seem to be a major concern at the Parkesburg Train Station, however the safety could be improved. Platforms on both the westbound and eastbound side of the tracks are made of uneven brick which can be very dangerous when icy. Lighting is poor when using the underpass to cross from the eastbound to westbound side of the tracks. Due to the poor access from the eastbound to westbound side of the tracks, pedestrians often enter Amtrak right of way and cross directly over the tracks. Some community members feel that fencing along the tracks could prevent such dangerous crossings.

Use of the station building – The station building is currently used as a break room for Amtrak maintenance staff. However, this historic building could offer a space for small business opportunities and a waiting area for the train station. Potential options for small business include a coffee or sandwich shop. Other amenities that should be offered include bathrooms and real time information.

Location of the station – Community members began to discuss options for relocating the station building. Four main options were discussed:

- 1) Keep the station in its current location and extend the 500 ft high level platforms west from the station building to East Bridge Street
- 2) Move the station west to W. 1st Avenue and West Bridge Street
- 3) Move the station east to the location of the current signal building (N. Gay Street)
- 4) Move the station east to Route 10 and W. 1st Avenue

Image and Character – Parkesburg could benefit from positive branding. Parkesburg is labeled by locals as the “Gateway to Chester County” and offers an attractive place for commuters to live. An improved station, upgraded streetscapes, and attractive and useful wayfinding can assist in the short term, along with eventual economic development.

Economic Development – Chester County’s priorities involve multimodal corridors, revitalized urban centers, and preservation of the character of urban centers. Parkesburg has two competing central business districts (CBD). One exists on W. 1st Avenue near Rt. 10 and the other one centered on Main Street and N. Gay Street. The CBD located at W. 1st Ave and Rt. 10 is defined by a small shopping center that contains a large, vacant Acme Store. The CBD located at Main and N. Gay Streets is defined by small businesses in particular Rocco and Anna’s Italian Restaurant. These two central business districts are divided by the train tracks and will remain divided until better access across the train tracks is created.

West Bridge Street Bridge –the opening of the West Bridge Street Bridge to vehicular and pedestrian traffic is critical to the economic development of the west side of town. Currently, several, large vacant buildings exist at the corner of West Bridge Street and Main Street. These were once active businesses but closed shortly after the closing of the West Bridge Street Bridge.

Through this information, four key themes have been identified to guide the remainder of the project. They are:

1. ***Improve the Station.***
2. ***Connect the Station with key Parkesburg Assets.***
3. ***Improve Mobility in Parkesburg.***

Field View Summary



1 Existing Train Station Site – South Side



Platforms

The existing Parkesburg Station Site consists of two low level platforms that are shorter than the Amtrak minimum platform length for the Keystone Line (500 ft), and are a mix of concrete and brick construction. The platforms are located on a portion of the line through Parkesburg that is relatively narrow, providing for the shortest distance between the two platforms within the Borough. The platforms are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant with the addition of a portable wheelchair left on both platforms, although this is only used as a temporary solution and may not truly meet the requirements of ADA.

The brick portion of the south side platform causes problems for patrons of all types. Riders interviewed suggest that the uneven surface poses a tripping hazard and has significant ice issues in the winter.



Station Building

The Parkesburg Station building has a long history and is somewhat of a town treasure in Parkesburg. Most notably, the station was featured in the 1980s movie *Witness*, as the rural train in a prominent scene. Since that time, the station building has been largely unused and has fallen into disrepair. At times, the building has housed the historical society, but insufficient funding to cover payments to Amtrak led the society to another location.

The building currently serves as a break facility for Amtrak construction forces working on signaling of the Keystone Corridor. Amtrak reports that the signal group is using the building out of convenience, and has no long term plans to occupy the building. In addition, the building sits close to the railroad tracks (approx. 10 feet). This effectively prohibits the installation of high-level platforms in front of the building, and will require either moving the building or shifting future platforms.



Parking Lot

Until recently, the south side parking lot at Parkesburg station was unpaved and informal, with cars parking wherever there was available space. Several months ago, Amtrak provided asphalt paving, however no subgrade was installed and the parking lot is already deteriorating. Additional engineering and construction will need to occur as soon as possible to prevent further parking lot degradation.

The lot has a capacity between 60-70 vehicles, the official number is difficult to determine as a result of informal parking on travel lanes. The lot is sufficient for current ridership, however it is nearly at capacity daily. There is additional land to the west to expand the parking lot that is currently reserved for Amtrak use. Observations made over several days indicate that Amtrak personnel do not park in the designated area and instead use passenger parking spaces near the station building,



Vertical Circulation South Side

Access from the south side to the north side of the station is accomplished via a sidewalk on the east side of the street and an underpass. The underpass is too narrow for two-way vehicular traffic, and the sidewalk is too narrow to meet ADA requirements (4-5 feet). Passengers must cross Culvert St. with no crosswalk to access the sidewalk from the parking lot.

Access

Vehicular and pedestrian access to the south side of the station is accomplished by First Avenue (east/west) and Culvert Street. Culvert street has sidewalks on both sides of the street varying from 6-8 feet in width. Pedestrian access is generally good, although it is reported that few people walk to the station regularly.

Vehicular access to the parking lot is accomplished via a driveway off of Culvert Street. The driveway is narrow, and informal parking in the driveway prohibits two way traffic. Exit is somewhat difficult due to the proximity of the Culvert Street underpass creating a short sight distance for traffic. Vehicular access is considered to be functional yet not ideal.

2 Existing Train Station Site – North Side



Platforms

The north side platform consists of a shelter and a macadam platform. Riders report that the north side functions well and it is predominantly used in the morning for commuters traveling to Philadelphia. There is a mobile wheelchair lift at the far end of the platform, the furthest point from the underpass, and informally established parking.

Notably, Amtrak uses this section of the Keystone line for vehicular access to the right of way.

Parking

Parking on the north side is done informally, and encroaches on the neighboring properties. It is estimated that 15-20 informal parking spaces are used daily.

Access

-Access to the north side of Parkesburg Station is via Main Street and Wright Street. Wright Street and Main Street have sidewalks varying from 6-8 feet in width. Access from the parking lot to the south is established with steps on the east side of Culvert Street that lead riders over a wooden walkway over Culvert Street. However, it has been observed that most passengers use an informal path on the west side of Culvert Street that connects directly with the platforms, choosing to forgo the sidewalk in the underpass entirely. This leads many riders to walk in the street, creating the potential for dangerous automobile-pedestrian conflicts.



3 East Bridge Street and West Bridge Street



East Bridge Street Bridge

East Bridge Street Bridge was closed over two decades ago to vehicular traffic. Reasons for closing the bridge are somewhat inconsistent, but a common theme is that the bridge, along with the West Bridge Street Bridge, were being used with increasing frequency by large/heavy trucks accessing the warehouses on the south side of the railroad tracks, thereby increasing the maintenance costs and accelerating bridge deterioration. A decision was made at the local level to abandon and close the bridges at that time.

While officially closed, the barricade at the East Bridge Street Bridge is designed as such to allow pedestrian traffic. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that some pedestrians may have been injured on the bridge, however this is unconfirmed at this time. The pedestrian access at East Bridge Street is one of only three grade separated crossings in Parkesburg.

There are no current plans to reopen or alter the East Bridge Street Bridge. Some residents expressed interest in the bridge being considered part of the train station project to be used as vertical circulation for the existing station as an alternative to the Culvert Street underpass.

West Bridge Street Bridge

Unlike the East Bridge Street Bridge, West Bridge Street Bridge is barricaded to prohibit both vehicular and pedestrian access. Efforts have been underway for some time to reconstruct the Bridge to provide a third grade separated crossing in Parkesburg. Local officials have had little success in reaching agreement on the design of the bridge with Amtrak and Norfolk Southern Railroad engineering departments, but a refocused effort has been launched by PennDOT with the intent to expedite the process.

Re-opening the West Bridge Street Bridge is critical to Parkesburg in many ways, including making the commercial parcel on the north side of the bridge viable again, as well as providing much needed access for emergency services.



4 West First Avenue



Function and Activity

West First Avenue is the main commercial corridor of the “New Town” section of Parkesburg. “New Town” is the area south of the railroad tracks and contains structures constructed mainly after 1903, with many modern structures moving towards Route 10 (Church Street). The street is characterized by a large commercial complex to the south located at the corner of Route 10 and West First Avenue that is largely occupied, with the notable acceptance of the anchor store, a former Acme grocery store that has been vacant for more than a decade.

In addition, West First Avenue holds all of the Borough services, including the Borough Hall, police station, and fire station. The street is rounded out with small retail businesses and multi-family homes, leading to single family homes at the eastern terminus of the street in Parkesburg.



Streetscape

West First Avenue has a wide variety of streetscape elements. It is clear that new development (i.e. Westminster Place, above left) has adopted the streetscape plan identified in the Borough Revitalization Plan (2009) with decorative streetlamps and wide sidewalks (8-10 feet) with brick edging. Throughout the rest of the street corridor, sidewalks vary in width from 6 to 8 feet, and there appears to be no clear vision for the streetscape. There is significant sign clutter, which will be discussed later in detail.



5 Main Street



Function and Activity

Main Street is the main commercial corridor of the “Old Town” section of Parkesburg. “Old Town” is the area north of the railroad tracks built between 1734 and 1903 with many historic structures. The street is characterized by smaller mixed use buildings with retail/commercial on the lower level and multi-family housing above. Main Street has a few newly renovated buildings, particularly at Strasburg Avenue and Main Street. Rocco and Anna’s, the Borough’s largest and most recognizable eatery, is located in the center of the commercial area of “Old Town”.



Main Street is largely cut-off from the rest of Parkesburg due to the railroad tracks and a lack of grade separated vehicular and pedestrian crossings. On multiple occasions more than a dozen Parkesburg residents have been observed walking across the railroad tracks in the center of “Old Town”. This practice is incredibly dangerous, and action should be taken to remedy the practice immediately.

Streetscape

Main Street consists of two-way travel with parking on both sides. Right of way width makes two-way travel difficult on this street, which is expected given the age of development. Sidewalks on both sides of the street are between 6 and 8 feet for the length of Main Street, with little to no streetscape elements (benches, trash cans, etc.).



6 Route 10 (Church Street)



Function and Activity

Route 10 (Church Street) is the main north-south access corridor to Parkesburg. Route 10 connects directly with Route 30, a main east-west thoroughfare in Pennsylvania. Route 10 also serves as one of two grade separated railroad crossings in Parkesburg, making it critical to transportation within the Borough.

Route 10 has heavy truck and passenger vehicle traffic for most of the day. However, there is little at the intersection to draw people to Parkesburg, save one gateway sign on the north-east corner of the Route 10 and West First Avenue intersection. The intersection is characterized by two gas stations on the southwest and southeast corners. A large shopping center is located less than 100 yards from the intersection, yet there is no signage or frontage to indicate the services available in the plaza.



Further north on Route 10 towards the Borough limits is a large quarry and apartment complex. Anecdotal evidence exists to suggest that this area is poised for large-scale residential development, with a several hundred unit single family/townhome community planned for the quarry on the east side of Route 10 and an expansion of apartments around the current complex on the west side. The status of the planned development has not been confirmed at this time.

Streetscape

Route 10 has an 8 foot sidewalk on the west side around the intersection with Main Street and First Avenue, but no other pedestrian or bicycle accommodations to speak of for the remainder of the corridor in the Borough limits.



Lack of Wayfinding



Train Station Wayfinding

A train station is inherently a regional resource, drawing people in from neighboring areas to take advantage of rail transportation. Parkesburg Train Station is in a unique position on the Keystone line as it is located at the end of the largest gap between stations on the corridor. As a result, Parkesburg station draws patrons from a much broader area, creating an increased need for regular and reliable signage to guide travelers to the station.

Unfortunately, Parkesburg has little wayfinding in place to direct people to the station. Field visits located three signs for the train station, only one of which led directly to the train station. For example, the sign located on Route 10 (Church Street) instructs travelers to continue driving south, while the station is directly east. This lack of signage creates a confusing environment and discourages new train passengers who cannot find the station.

Community Wayfinding

In addition to the train station, wayfinding can be used to locate important community assets including parks, civic buildings, and businesses. Some community signage exists in Parkesburg; however it is sparse and inconsistent. In addition, there is a high level of “sign clutter” along West First Avenue that creates an overload for travelers. The creation of a coordinated wayfinding program and a reduction of sign clutter would enhance the general Parkesburg experience.

