

ANNE STRAUSS-WIEDER ADDRESSES EXIT 8A WORKING GROUP

Anne Strauss-Wieder, an internationally renowned expert on goods movement, addressed the fourth meeting of the Exit 8A Working Group on March 9th. Ms. Strauss-Wieder talked about the growth of the Exit 8A region as a major warehouse and distribution center for the east coast of North America. She also placed the region in both national and international perspective. Her presentation included ways that local governments might mitigate the effects of increased truck traffic related to the region's growth as a major distribution center.

People in the logistics business view this region today as a "major inland port," strategically located half-way between New York City and Philadelphia and also half-way between Boston and Washington D.C. Its continued expansion as a warehouse and distribution center is likely to grow exponentially as a result of dredging and growth taking place at Port Newark and Elizabeth.

Although stakeholders in the Work Group generally view the warehouses in a positive light because they generate ratables, the truck traffic that accompanies them is a concern. Trucks sometimes travel through nearby residential neighborhoods, perhaps because of poor signage or simply because there are no "truck stops" for truckers to use as they wait to deliver their goods. Gail Toth from the NJ Motor Truck Association and Anne Strauss-Wieder both emphasized the importance of the market demand in this area, and underscored the fact that trucks will be delivering goods to this market, whether from the warehouses currently located in the area, or as a result of the goods being ordered online and delivered to consumers.

The Work Group's goal is to foster increased planning coordination across municipal boundaries. MLUC had begun to frame land use and transportation issues with municipal planners throughout the region even before December, 2005, when MLUC convened the first Exit 8A Working Group meeting, inviting Mayors, and other representatives from the two counties and nine municipalities in the vicinity of New Jersey Turnpike Exit 8A to participate. Since that time, the Group has met monthly and now includes stakeholder representatives from Congressional and State Legislative offices, the NJ Office of Smart Growth (OSG), NJ Turnpike Authority (NJTP), the NJ Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA), The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), NJ Motor Truck Association (NJMTA) and the NY Shipping Association (NYSA).

Ultimately, three deliverables are expected to result from this NJ DOT funded project. The Voorhees Transportation Center (VTC) at Rutgers University is working to develop municipal characterizations which will provide valuable insights into present and future land uses in the region.

The second deliverable will be a municipal interactive mapping tool that will remain in municipal control after the project is completed. This tool will support increased coordination across municipal boundaries and begin to build regional identity. Vertices, LLC, has been enlisted to help with this effort. Thus far, three municipalities, at the core of the Exit 8A region, have participated in this aspect of the study—Monroe, Cranbury and South Brunswick.

Finally, the monthly meetings will yield a set of policy recommendations for the three government levels – State, county and municipal. These policy recommendations will be informed by the characterizations, the internet mapping and the facilitated discussion that takes place at the monthly meetings.

Between Work Group meetings, Dr. Bierbaum has been meeting with municipal representatives to learn about each municipality's perspective on the issues. For example, Hightstown, a relatively compact community in the midst of the region, has benefited little from warehouse construction in terms of tax ratables, but has experienced the increased truck traffic that regularly traverses the region. Hightstown Mayor Robert Patten concluded the March 9th meeting by saying, "This was the most interesting meeting I've attended in a long time. Although this was my first meeting, I don't intend to miss another one."