

# CENTER CITY DIGEST

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTER CITY DISTRICT AND CENTRAL PHILADELPHIA DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION  
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## Report from the Executive Director: Too Much of a Good Thing?

On many Saturday evenings, traffic jams on the Schuylkill Expressway approaching Center City are longer and slower than those during the weekday morning rush hour. Given the dramatic expansion of entertainment venues, a 170% increase in fine dining restaurants during the last decade, and the steady growth in the number of people who are living and entertaining downtown, this should come as no surprise.

A recent report by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) noted the long-term trend: in 1960, 53% of all trips into Center City—by workers, residents, visitors, tourists and shoppers—were made by public transit. By 2000, 73% were made by private automobile. No wonder people complain about congestion, the proliferation of parking garages, rising rates, and the amount of space devoted to valet parking.

Is this a national trend we can't reverse? The price of success we must learn to endure? Whining by an affluent elite over problems that pale in comparison to neighborhood blight? An argument for limiting, or stopping all growth?

It is, I suggest, none of the above; but rather, a compelling case for substantial improvements to how we manage and coordinate parking and transportation systems.

Let's start with the good news. A 2001 CPDC survey of Center City office workers found that 70% use public transit to get to work, 8% walk and only 19% drive in cars. These impressive numbers are possible because of an integrated regional transit, subway, trolley and bus system that provides frequent rush-hour service to the central business district. While national journey-to-work data is not yet available from the 2000 Census, the 1990 report showed Philadelphians used transit at a rate five times the national average.

Most planners and highway engineers learned long ago you can't solve traffic congestion simply by increasing capacity. Cars usually fill up every new lane that is added. In a historic city like Philadelphia, the challenge is greater, since street widths were set before the automobile. But we can

respond through better management of limited resources, improved information technology, enhanced enforcement and new alternatives that enable motorists to leave their cars behind.

## Better Management

The Streets Department installs traffic lights and approves rush-hour clearance zones and other traffic regulations. The Police Department directs traffic flow and enforces moving violations. The Parking Authority installs and enforces meters and on-street parking regulations and tows violators. SEPTA plans bus routes and schedules, locates stops and operates vehicles. Private parking operators choose the location for their lots and garages, getting approval for entrance curb cuts from the Planning Commission and Streets Department.

The professionals in all these organizations talk regularly with each other and often work together to address particular problems. But the fragmentation of governance limits their ability to set priorities, adjudicate disputes, or evaluate transportation impacts in a coordinated manner.

Need an example? How often have you seen a SEPTA bus unable to make a turn because an illegally parked vehicle is blocking a corner? Traffic backs up onto surrounding blocks, tempers flare, horns blare. But until recently, SEPTA lacked a simple mechanism for its bus drivers to make a radio call directly to a Parking Authority tow truck.

No single agency has the authority to remove parking meters, adjust transit stops, alter truck loading or rush-hour clearance zones, deploy enforcement officers, change the timing of a light, or alter the length or location of entrance lanes to a parking facility.

For over 20 years, through the administrations of Mayors Green, Goode and Rendell, Philadelphia had a cabinet-level deputy mayor for transportation, who was the liaison to federal and Commonwealth agencies, sat on the boards of SEPTA and DVRPC, convened diverse city departments, and spoke with the authority of the Mayor.



DVRPC

While many cities have gone even further, creating an integrated Department of Transportation, Mayor Street recently moved in the opposite direction, diminishing this role to a line position within the Office of Strategic Planning. The Mayor should reconsider this decision.

### Better Information Technology

Shortly before the opening of the Kimmel Center, the Avenue of the Arts, Inc. commissioned a study of parking supply and occupancy in the vicinity of the new arts complex. They found that while garages were filled to capacity on South Broad Street on Saturday nights, there was plenty of room just a few blocks away. They produced a map, which is distributed to season ticket holders, showing the location of all the major lots and garages in the area. A similar approach is used for the Flower Show at the Convention Center.

Recent surveys by CPDC and the Planning Commission have noted similar “hot spots” of parking scarcity with ample supply and capacity as close as two blocks away. By better distributing parking demand and encouraging people to walk a few blocks more, we can reduce congestion while increasing business at more adjacent shops and restaurants.

Several cities have gone beyond paper maps by electronically connecting parking garages to information signs on the street so that motorists not only know the way, they can see in real time how many spaces are left.

It is also now possible to have the “E-ZPass” system used on toll roads and bridges connected to parking garages to eliminate rush-hour back-ups. It’s possible for parking meters to accept debit and credit cards. It’s possible for transit stops to display the arrival time of the next trolley or bus. The higher a priority Philadelphia assigns to improving transportation management, the quicker we can adopt these technologies.

### Enhanced Enforcement

At the recent National Baptist Convention, when 30,000 guests filled the Convention Center, traffic police were placed at key intersections on surrounding blocks. This was an expanded version of a deployment strategy that is used successfully for the Flower Show. At the sports complex, traffic police are similarly assigned for special events.

If you add up rush-hour traffic, the impact of events throughout the year at the Convention Center, the Avenue of the Arts, Old City galleries and several hundred restaurants and entertainment “hot spots” downtown, it is not hard to reach the conclusion that nearly every day in Center City has become a “special event.”

New York City long ago came to this conclusion, assigning enforcement officers throughout Manhattan to ensure that motorists don’t “block the box,” delivery trucks don’t abuse their privileges, and pedestrians have the right to cross safely at intersections. Recognizing the constraints on traffic police, New York also has pioneered the use of uniformed civilians to supplement traffic police. This is clearly a path that Philadelphia should explore.

### Better Alternatives to the Car

Philadelphia is doing exceedingly well in encouraging office workers to use public transit. Private employers are bulk-purchasing transpasses, subsidizing their costs, or are participating in TransitChek and other commuter benefit programs. (See story on page 3.)

But we can do better. In partnership with SEPTA and PATCO and with the support of PennDOT and the DVRPC, Central Philadelphia Transportation Management Association (a subsidiary of CCD and CPDC) recently launched a new public information campaign to encourage even greater use of transit. As more commuters use transit, fewer parking operators need to tie up all-day parking with “early-bird specials,” and more short-term spaces are available for shoppers and other visitors to the downtown.

Once again, it is worth looking to New York City where the greatest gains in transit use have come not from commuters, but from visitors who have found that the subway is the most efficient way to get to theaters, museums, restaurants and other attractions. Visitors to London and Paris also know how integral the Underground and the Metro are to the tourist experience.

SEPTA, in particular, needs assistance in breaking out of the chicken-and-egg conundrum: given the limited demand for evening and weekend service, frequencies drop back to once an hour on most regional rail lines. A few well-promoted pilot programs that increase hours of operation could test the public’s willingness to avoid those growing evening traffic jams on the Schuylkill Expressway and I-95.

Thanks to decades of wise public investments, Philadelphia is blessed with an extensive transportation system that enhances our competitiveness, even as the suburbs struggle with traffic jams and sprawl. The last decade was one of extraordinary revival in Center City, but it has come with a price. We are well attuned in Philadelphia to dealing with problems of scarcity. We ignore at our peril the problems that come with success.

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## Preaching the Transit Gospel to Center City Commuters



Office workers get information about transit benefits at a CPTMA event.

In its first year of operations, the Central Philadelphia Transportation Management Association (CPTMA) has encouraged alternatives to the automobile in Center City. Since commuters generate much of downtown traffic, CPTMA has focused on an educational campaign directed both at workers and their employers.

CPTMA staff meet face-to-face with thousands of workers in office building lobbies at monthly Smart & Safe Fairs, hosted by the Center City District. They provide information about transit options and benefits, distributing maps, fact sheets, information on the TransitChek program and other materials. Contests at which workers can win free TransitCheks, good on SEPTA, PATCO, New Jersey Transit and Amtrak, also raise awareness.

Working with SEPTA, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission and the federal Environmental Protection Agency, CPTMA also meets regularly with human resource administrators of Center City employers to discuss how they can gain tax advantages by providing employee incentives for commuting via transit. Commuter benefits

also provide Center City companies with a competitive edge, helping to attract and maintain a skilled workforce in Philadelphia.

### Don’t Drive It. Transit

Now, CPTMA, in partnership with SEPTA, PATCO and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, has launched a marketing campaign to educate drivers about the advantages of public transit. The messages, funded by PennDOT, are a catchy, in-your-face reminder of why public transit is the best way to get to Center City.

Listen for the ads on radio transit reports and look for posters on SEPTA buses, PATCO station platforms and a billboard on I-95. Among the taglines:

- “Run into people without inflating your airbag;”
- “Make conversation in traffic without rude gestures;”
- “Beat the clock, not the dashboard;”
- “Read books, not buses;”
- “Traffic crawls, trains run;”
- “Time is money. Driving is a waste of both.”

The campaign was created by The Weightman Group, a Center City-based advertising agency, for CPTMA.



## Jefferson Takes the Pain Out of Commuting

Thomas Jefferson University and Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, one of Center City’s largest employers, is leading the way on promoting sensible commuting practices for its 12,000 employees and 4,000 students.

Jefferson offers a generous 20 percent subsidy of the cost of commuting via mass transit—incorporating a wide range of options including SEPTA subway, buses and regional rail, PATCO and NJ Transit. Jefferson also

allows its employees to save even more by purchasing their tickets, tokens and passes on a pre-tax basis through payroll deduction. Since boosting its subsidy to 20 percent in July 2000, Jefferson official Kevin J. Donahue estimates that public-transit use has grown by 14 percent.

Jefferson also acknowledges that, especially due to the 24/7 nature of its operations, some employees will

always drive to work. To accommodate drivers—an estimated 35 percent of its workforce—Jefferson maintains a low-cost remote lot on Delaware Avenue and shuttle service to work that helps reduce congestion in Center City.

Jefferson also operates a Commuter Services Office with a fulltime, dedicated staff to help students and staff with transportation and parking.



A parking sign in Melbourne, Australia.

## Improving Transit Around Center City

On these pages, *Center City Digest* takes a look at the status of a number of major transportation initiatives that affect Center City.



SEPTA's new glass-enclosed headhouse entrance at 15th and Market.



Bower Lewis Thrower's vision for Dilworth Plaza is under consideration by SEPTA.

SEPTA continues to move forward on improvements in Center City. Construction barriers came down this summer, revealing the renovated stairway at 15th and Market and a new, more open entrance to the courtyard and concourse below.

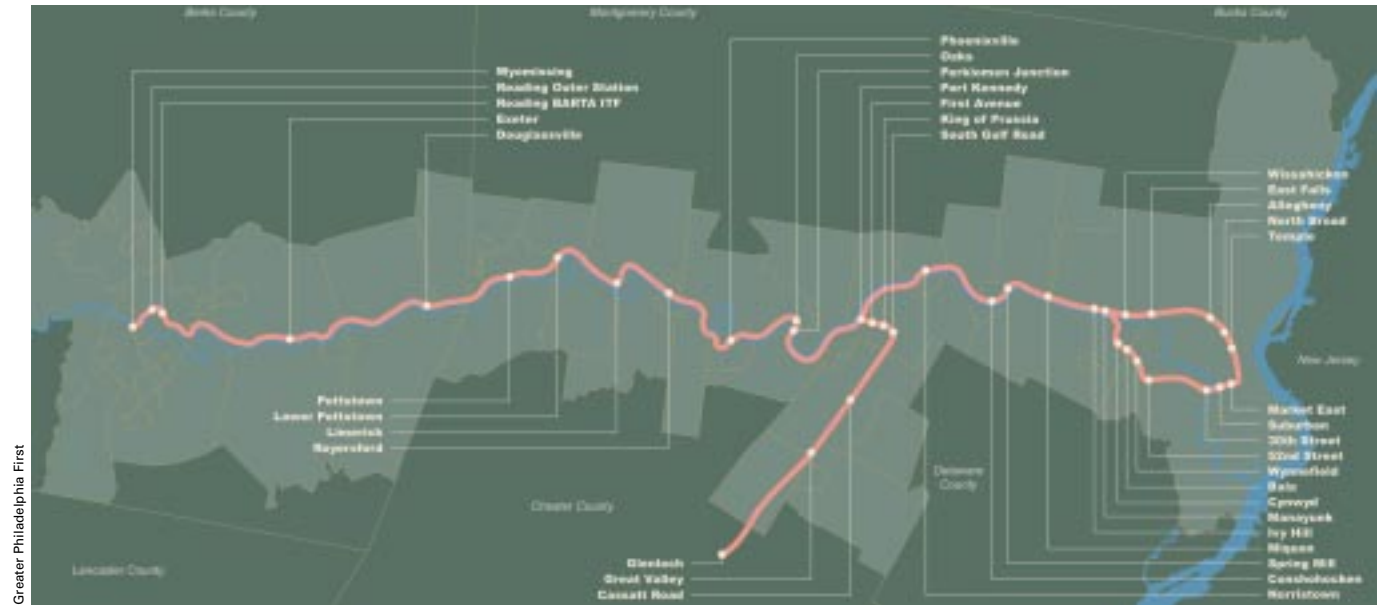
Now a major renovation of the Suburban Station concourse from 15th to 18th streets and from Market Street to north of JFK Boulevard is about to begin. Designed by Bower Lewis Thrower Architects, the \$30-million, three-year project includes restoration of some of the historic architecture below street level, new signs, a new audio-visual public address system and air conditioning throughout the concourse. Suburban Station will also be made accessible to people with disabilities. SEPTA intends to keep the station operating throughout the project.

In its master plan for the City Hall Station, Bower Lewis Thrower also developed plans for a new glass headhouse entrance to the subway station at Dilworth Plaza. At press time, detailed design of that project awaited negotiation of an agreement between the City and SEPTA.



Major improvements to the Suburban Station concourse are ready to begin.

The Delaware River Port Authority (DRPA) is moving forward with plans to create a new aerial tramway over the Delaware River, even though development of Penn's Landing is uncertain after the Simon Group dropped its plans for a family entertainment and retail complex. The DRPA has already built the foundations for the tramway's towers on both riverbanks and has set 2005 as a target date for completion of the \$32-million project. The tramway could have up to 54 gondolas, with a capacity of eight passengers each, transporting as many as 2,500 per hour during peak times.



The Schuylkill Valley MetroRail would bring commuters to Center City from as far away as Chester and Berks County exurbs.



The DRPA is also studying the feasibility of several transit improvements, including possible expansions of its PATCO Speedline. Among the possibilities being considered are re-opening the long-shuttered Franklin Square station to provide easier access to Penn's Landing and extending PATCO further west and north into Center City from the current terminus at 16th and Locust streets. The 14-mile rail line connects South Jersey with Center City.

PATCO is currently undergoing a \$100 million overhaul of tracks, stations and equipment and is moving ahead with plans to introduce an E-ZPass-style fare-collection system.

Plans are advancing for the Schuylkill Valley MetroRail, a proposed 62-mile regional commuter rail line that will connect Philadelphia to its western suburbs along the Schuylkill River, with a spur to Chester County. The proposed route would serve 52 municipalities and townships in urban, suburban and rural areas.

Among recent developments, the Federal Transit Administration rated the project as "recommended" and authorized preliminary engineering to begin. The Pennsylvania legislature appropriated \$2 million in state funds to meet a local match deadline required for \$25.7 million of already designated federal funds for design and engineering work. And, through a grant from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, Wallace Roberts & Todd is studying five of the proposed stations along the route to encourage transit-oriented development that takes maximum advantage of the new access provided by the stations.

Greater Philadelphia First has made MetroRail a priority, in the belief that "MetroRail's development will produce critical transportation, economic, environmental and social benefits for the Philadelphia region."

Decades in the making, a final decision on whether to proceed with an interchange between the Pennsylvania Turnpike and I-95 could come next year. Connecting the two roads would involve building a new interchange and associated roadways, a new bridge spanning the Delaware River and a new toll plaza, at an estimated cost of \$553 million. Construction, projected to take seven years, could begin as early as 2005, pending approval of funds and final design. A final environmental impact statement is currently pending while officials consider how to avoid or minimize the effect of the project on the remnants of the historic Delaware Canal. Other environmental issues involve noise and threatened and endangered species.

## Reconnecting Communities on the Vine Street Expressway



The intersection of Broad and Vine streets could become more pedestrian-friendly under a new initiative.

The Vine Street Expressway has dramatically improved access to Center City during the last decade.

Now, the Center City District and the New York City-based Project for Public Spaces (PPS) are collaborating on a new initiative to better connect the communities and businesses on either side of the Expressway, stimulate the economic viability of these areas, improve public safety and enhance the overall image and attractiveness of the corridor. With the growth of Center City in the past decade, it is ever more important to overcome Vine Street's barrier effect on neighboring communities. The project will focus on enhancing pedestrian access, improving landscaping and stimulating new development.

The planning initiative was recently launched with a series of community workshops in the Franklin Square, Chinatown and Logan Square neighborhoods where diverse groups of stakeholders, along with representatives from the City Planning Commission, Streets Department, Fairmount Park Commission and Police Department, engaged in creating a community-based vision for Vine Street. Ideas are already emerging, everything from installing a Ferris wheel at Franklin Square to reducing traffic lanes, extending traffic islands for pedestrians and better marking crosswalks.

The intersection of Broad and Vine streets has been identified as a key location where new streetscape enhancements could establish the area as a central gateway to Center City and the Hahnemann Hospital campus. Other ideas emerging from the community workshops can be viewed by logging on to [www.pps.org/vineonline](http://www.pps.org/vineonline).

At the same time, the consultant team has collected traffic data, conducted field surveys and assessed traffic and transit patterns. The final report, due by the end of the year, will include both a series of short-term, site-specific recommendations to be immediately implemented, and a set of long-term design and development recommendations that will require additional study and funding for implementation.

The project design and transportation consultants are Kise, Straw & Kolodner of Center City and Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin Lopez Rinehart, Inc., which is headquartered in Orlando, with an office in Philadelphia. Funding for the initiative is from the William Penn Foundation.

## CCD Effort Helps to Get Office Thief Off the Streets

A prolific office burglar has pleaded guilty and is awaiting sentencing, thanks in part to the Center City District, which, working with the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office and the Philadelphia Police Department, provided much-needed support and transportation for victims and witnesses.

A CCD van took seven victims and witnesses in June from downtown offices to the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in Northeast

Philadelphia, where the offender was positively identified in a prison line-up. "Many had never been to a prison, had never seen a line-up except on TV and didn't know what to expect," said Stacy Irving, the CCD's director of crime prevention services. "By providing transportation, support and practical information, we were able to alleviate their apprehensions. We then worked with the District Attorney's Office to encourage all of the victims and witnesses to attend

the court hearing to show this and other criminals that crime in Center City won't be tolerated. Working together, we helped get this offender off the street."

The offender subsequently pleaded guilty to 52 counts of burglary, 40 of which took place in Center City and Old City offices, where he stole laptop computers and petty cash. His sentence could be 50 years or more in prison.

## Real Change: CCD Launches New Campaign Aimed at Reducing Panhandling



This compelling message is at the heart of the CCD's new advertising campaign.

The Center City District has resurrected an advertising campaign aimed at discouraging well-meaning pedestrians from giving handouts to panhandlers on Center City streets. "The more you give change, the more things will stay the same," is the message on newspaper advertisements, flyers and posters.

Instead of giving loose change, which often only feeds drug or alcohol addiction, the campaign encourages contributions to an appropriate charity or to the Center City District Foundation, which provides job opportunities for disadvantaged individuals and supports needed social services at Philadelphia's new Community Court.

In the mid-1990s, Philadelphia instituted dramatically improved and better coordinated services for the homeless that became a national model. Over \$70 million in services, funded by the federal government, the Commonwealth and the City, ensure that no one has to sleep or go hungry on the street. But despite continued drops in the homeless population on the streets of Center City, we confront a new generation of panhandlers. Most are not homeless, but suffer from drug or alcohol addiction and use the money they collect on the street to feed their habit.

The new ads, designed by the Center City-based Weightman Group, are an update of a similar, highly successful campaign conducted by CCD in the early '90s.

## CCD Kudos

Center City District on-street personnel continue to win accolades from visitors and that toughest audience of all—Philadelphians.

One visitor, an Amtrak employee, found herself with a three-hour layover between trains and encountered Community Service Representative Ron Sistrunk. Ron went "the extra mile to show me where some of your wonderful sites were located." Now, she wrote, "not only will I visit more of your sites more often, but I will also do more shopping and perhaps do some banking, etc., in Philadelphia. Thank you."

Another visitor, an Oklahoma City official in Philadelphia for a training program, wrote to thank CSRs Maxine Barr and Jackie Ashburn. "They not only provided us with directions to sites, but they accompanied us until we reached the end of their territory. They were very professional and should be commended for their great customer service."

And the residents of Sterling Apartments at 1815 JFK Boulevard expressed their appreciation for the CCD's pavement power-washing crew. "We are so pleased with the results," wrote the residents' association president.

CCD Community Service Representatives, from left, Jackie Ashburn, Ron Sistrunk and Maxine Barr. At right, Lawrence Threadgill power washes a Center City sidewalk.



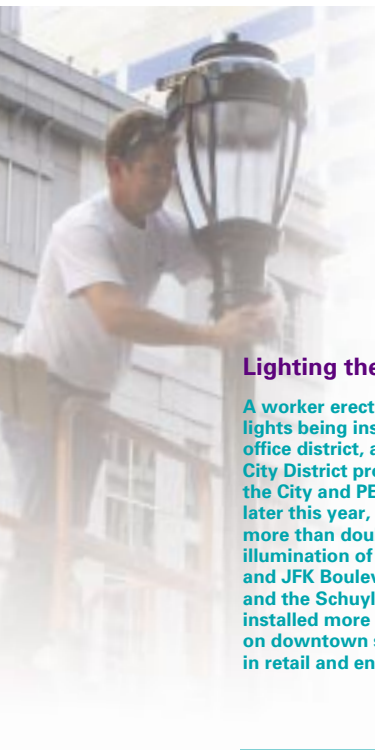
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## Lighting the Office District

A worker erects one of 226 pedestrian-scale lights being installed in the downtown office district, as part of a \$3-million Center City District project that is supported by the City and PECO Energy. Once completed later this year, the new lighting will more than double the level of nighttime illumination of sidewalks on West Market and JFK Boulevard between City Hall and the Schuylkill River. CCD has already installed more than 1,200 pedestrian lights on downtown streets since 1996, primarily in retail and entertainment areas.

## Improved Signs Point Way to Economic Vitality

The nation's most comprehensive wayfinding system is about to expand, thanks to the Delaware River Port Authority (DRPA) and the Center City District. CCD recently assumed responsibility for the Direction Philadelphia wayfinding system, consisting of more than 700 vehicular signs and nearly 500 directional signs and diskmaps for pedestrians. Direction Philadelphia was formerly managed by the Foundation for Architecture.

Now, a two-year grant from DRPA will fund improvements and updates, including new signs to accommodate

new tourist destinations, new interstate highway signs and new bridge trailblazer signs. As part of the project, the CCD will develop a program to fund and implement the ongoing maintenance for the new and existing signs outside the boundaries of the CCD.

Good signage helps motorists and pedestrians find their way to major destinations throughout the region, ensuring a positive visitor experience.

