

FRANKLIN REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

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Executive Director • Linda Dunlavy



NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2007

New Hires

The FRCOG is pleased to announce the hiring of several new staff:

Teri Koopman is our new Homeland Security Grants Manager. Teri comes from Arizona and has good experience that has allowed her to start the job running. Teri can be reached at 413-774-3167 ext. 118 or teri@frcog.org.

John Peterson of Hadley joins the staff today as our second full time Public Health Emergency Planner. John can be reached at 413-774-3167 ext. 114 or jpeterson@frcog.org.

Roger Brechner has just been hired as the Region I MRC Coordinator. He will be a FRCOG employee but will be responsible for working with and expanding the capacity and service of MRCs throughout Western Massachusetts. This is similar to the Homeland Security program in that we are the fiduciary for the funding to western Mass.

Glen Ayers as Regional Health Agent. Glen joins the FRCOG with experience as Board of Health Chairman, Clerk, and Health Agent. He is a Registered Sanitarian with certifications in food service, lead determination, septic system inspections and soil evaluation. Glen is replacing long-time Health Agent Sharon White, who left in November to become the Health Director in Amesbury, MA. Glen can be reached at 413-774-3167 ext. 108 or glenayers@frcog.org.

For information on joining the Regional Health Inspection Program, please contact Co-Director of Community Services, Phoebe Walker at 413-774-3167 ext. 119 or health@frcog.org.

Chapter 43D. Expedited Permitting

The State of Massachusetts recently passed new sections of Chapter 43D to support economic development activities throughout the Commonwealth. The Franklin Regional Council of Governments and other Regional Planning Agencies throughout the State have been selected to provide technical assistance to communities to identify "Priority Development Sites". Priority Development Sites can be commercial or industrial zoned properties which the community would like to see developed or redeveloped for business uses. Chapter 43D allows communities to streamline the permitting process for these sites and to have priority for State funds under certain programs such as the Community Development Action Grant (CDAG) Program and Public Works Economic Development (PWED) program, and for Brownfields remediation. The FRCOG will be holding information sessions this Spring to explain Chapter 43D and to provide technical assistance to communities interested in identifying Priority Development Sites. For more information contact Director of Planning & Development, Peggy Sloan, at 413-774-1194 ext. 105 or psloan@frcog.org.

Work Underway to Produce Videos to Promote Bicycling in the Connecticut River Valley

The Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) is working with Paul Hake Productions and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) to produce a four-part media campaign to promote bicycling as transportation in the Connecticut River Valley. Paul Hake Productions was hired to produce a thirty minute documentary film and two thirty second public service announcements (PSA) which are to be aired on local television stations.

Paul Hake Productions has worked closely with the FRCOG and the PVPC to develop inspiring productions that are intended to encourage people to use their bicycle as a fun and rewarding means of transportation whenever they are able. The film and PSAs feature local cyclists from Franklin, Hampshire and Hamden Counties who tell their stories of how, when, and why they choose to bicycle instead of driving. The thirty minute documentary also includes some educational information about bicycling including proper equipment, rules of the road and tips on how to handle the challenges that often face those who commute by bicycle. The media campaign is scheduled to begin airing in the Spring 2007.

Paul Hake Productions is collaborating with documentary producer, Carlyn Saltman of Your Story Matters, and post-production editor Scot Broderick of Lightspeed Productions, to create these promotional materials. The production team also includes the talents of voice-over artist Jill Connolly and sound engineer Darren Blondin.

For further information or if you are interested in airing the videos at a local bicycling event, please contact Senior Transportation Planner, Elizabeth Giannini, at 413-774-1194 ext. 104 or giannini@frcog.org.

2010 Census

It may seem early to talk about the 2010 Census; but the U.S. Census Bureau is beginning preparations and will need your town's help. Soon, the Census Bureau will be initiating the

Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) program in support of the decennial census. This will be an opportunity for local governments to contribute their knowledge to review and comment on the accuracy of the Bureau's address database. An accurate count of all housing units and group quarters (like nursing homes and dormitories) is very important because the information gathered from the census survey is used for grant eligibility, political representative redistricting, and planning for future municipal needs and services. A review of the address database is particularly important for any town that shares a zip code with their neighboring towns (for example some Leverett residents have an Amherst zip code in their mailing address). It is believed that shared zip codes have led to problems with accurate population counts in the past. In the coming months, the Census Bureau will contact your town government and ask for a person to be designated to review their address database. We encourage every town to participate in this process when they are contacted. For more information, contact Economic Development Planner, Jessica Atwood at 413-774-1194 ext. 101 or jatwood@frcog.org or go online to www.census.gov/geo/www/luca2010/luca.html.

Connect Wireless Beta Test Program

The Berkshire Connect and Pioneer Valley Connect will soon implement a test of wireless broadband network technologies. At least three communities in Western Massachusetts that currently do not have access to DSL or cable television broadband will be selected to participate in this beta test. This program is part of The Underserved Communities Project being pursued by the Connects through a grant from the John Adams Innovation Institute of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative. Communities interested in participating should check the Connect websites (www.pioneervalleyconnect.org and www.bconnect.org) for updates. The Pioneer Valley Connect Steering Committee is co-chaired by FRCOG Executive Director Linda Dunlavy and has staff supported by FRCOG Economic Development Planner Jessica Atwood.

Department of Revenue Broadband Survey

The Massachusetts Department of Revenue's Division of Local Services, in collaboration with the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, is conducting a study to determine which municipalities are not served or are underserved by providers of Internet broadband services (like DSL or cable TV modem). The purpose of the survey is to help these agencies understand which town halls may experience significant problems using complex online applications because they have no or inadequate broadband access. An accurate survey will enable better estimates about the cost of achieving broadband access for every town hall throughout the Commonwealth. Pioneer Valley Connect encourages Franklin County towns to respond to this survey and provide as much information as possible.

Public Comment Period for the Regional Transportation Plan: Feb 5th - March 6th

A full draft of the 2007 Regional Transportation Plan has been completed and is now available for public review and comment. The draft plan can be viewed and downloaded through the FRCOG web site (www.frcog/pub/index.php) and is also available in paper form upon request.

The 30-day public comment period on the plan begins on February 5th and ends on March 3rd. Comments received on the plan will be incorporated into the final version. It is anticipated that the final Regional Transportation Plan will be endorsed by the Franklin Regional Planning Board and the Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization in March, 2007.

The Regional Transportation Plan, which was last updated in 2003, is a comprehensive long-range document that provides the basis for future transportation planning in the region. The Transportation Plan reviews current transportation infrastructure in the region and makes recommendations for future projects through the year 2030

The plan's 20 top recommended projects (unranked) for Franklin County through 2030:

- Route 2 East safety improvements in Erving, Erving Center, and Gill/Greenfield
- Construction of the Franklin Regional Transit Center
- Installation of ITS infrastructure along I-91
- Park-and-Ride lot near I-91 Exit 24 in Whately
- I-91/Route 2 Rotary safety and pedestrian improvements
- Construction of a climbing lane along Route 2 up Greenfield Mountain
- Rehabilitation of the Gill-Montague Bridge
- Rehabilitation of the General Pierce Bridge
- Safety and traffic flow improvements along Route 2 between I-91/Route 2 Rotary and Home Depot
- Rehabilitation of Route 2 bridges in Charlemont
- Route 2 West safety improvements in Shelburne and Charlemont
- Construction of a bikeway to connect the downtowns of Orange and Athol
- I-91 Northbound Exit 24 ramp realignment
- Route 116 safety improvements in Sunderland
- Acquisition of scenic easements along designated Scenic Byways
- Serve as a leader in promoting vehicle fleet conversions to alternative fuels
- Expanded bus service in Franklin County along Route 2 and along Routes 5/10
- Northfield streetscape and safety improvements
- Passenger Rail service from Boston to Franklin County

For more information on the Regional Transportation Plan or to request a paper copy of the draft plan, please contact Transportation and GIS Program Manager, Maureen Mullaney, at 413-774-1194 ext. 108 or trans@frcog.org.

Identification of the Most Hazardous Intersections in Franklin County

Approximately every three years, the FRCOG Planning Department analyzes crash data from the 26 communities of Franklin County reported to the Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) to identify the locations that have experienced a repeat occurrence of crashes. The latest analysis was recently completed utilizing data from the three-year period 2002 – 2004 and the report that identifies the most hazardous intersections in the County is now available.

The vast majority of the identified intersections are located within the most populated and/or traveled corridors in the County. The Greenfield Rotary at Exit 26 of Interstate 91 and Route 2 was found to be the most hazardous intersection in Franklin County in this analysis. The Greenfield Rotary has constantly been the location where the highest number of crashes has occurred and has been listed in the top 5 of previous hazardous intersection lists created. For these reasons the FRCOG initiated a safety study of the Rotary in collaboration with MassHighway District 2 back in 2004. This study has resulted in the design of improvements that include adding additional lanes to the busiest entries, providing lane markings on the circulating roadway, and directional pavement markings and signage. This project has been advertised by MassHighway and these improvements are scheduled to be implemented this Spring or Summer.

The FRCOG is currently working on a number of safety related studies and will concentrate for now on completing them and working to implement any recommendations that are identified. Additionally, the FRCOG will provide assistance to the extent possible to any community that wishes to investigate more closely the potential safety deficiencies of the intersections identified in this report.

This report will soon be available on the FRCOG website. For more information about this study or to request a copy of the report, contact Transportation Planning Engineer, Keith P.

Wilson at 413-774-1194 ext. 109 or
kwilson@frcog.org.

CCTs Annual Movie Fundraiser

Please join the staff and advisory board of the Community Coalition for Teens for their annual movie fundraiser, entitled "Cold Nights, Cool Shorts," an evening of short films about growing up. Thursday, Feb. 15 at 7 p.m. at the Greenfield Garden Cinema. The following restaurants will donate a portion of your bill to CCT when you dine on February 15: China Gourmet, the People's Pint, Mesa Verde.