

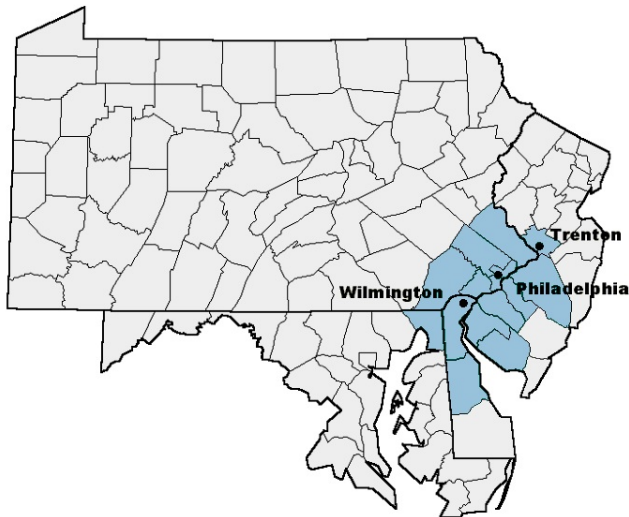


The Oil Drum Meets Philly Regional Planning

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Today I attended a historic moment in US transportation history. In attendance were all the local transportation authorities at the federal, state and local level in the region around Philadelphia. The final segment of the I-95/PA Turnpike Interchange was approved by the [Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission \(DVRPC\)](#), thus completing the Federal Interstate Highway System as it was designed in the 1950s. In one of those great ironic twists of fate, I was invited there to present the concept of peak oil on behalf of The Oil Drum community and to urge them to address their oil addiction by reducing automobile dependency. Typical Top-Down Planning - Just as one project is finally completed, it no longer fits the community's needs!

Background on the DVRPC:

Serving the Greater Philadelphia, Camden, Trenton area for more than 40 years, DVRPC is the federally designated metropolitan planning organization for the region who works to foster regional cooperation in a nine-county, two-state area. Representatives from city, county and state agencies work together to address key issues, including transportation, land use, environmental protection, information sharing and economic development.

Increasing energy costs were already on their radar, as I imagine it is becoming more important to everywhere now. In their [long range plan](#), they already identified runaway energy costs as a potential scenario, but one that had been considered a low probability back in 2003, but their interest has reawakened over the last year. They now have a draft report Titled "A Post-Global Economic Development Strategy to Energize Our Economy and Secure Our Future" that quotes

Robert Hirsch, Colin Campbell, Matt Simmons, the Post Carbon Institute, Amory Lovins and other usual suspects.

To set-up the peak oil problem, I presented a brief history of the oil age (including that it all started in Pennsylvania!), some of Stuart's great data charts on production levels over the last few years, how OPEC / Russia have hit their limits in production and an example of Prudhoe Bay's production curve. Then I talked about how Hybrids and bio-fuels will only get us so far. The efficiency gains from hybrids will take time to replace existing car stock (10-20 years) and are constantly stripped away by increasing costs of fuel. I told Ethanol/Biodiesel can serve useful niches, but are not scalable to replace gasoline and they have a [questionable Energy Return on Energy Invested \(EROEI\)](#).

Then I urged them to consider how conservation oriented planning may be a more effective alternative planning technique to reduce their oil addiction. If you eliminate the need for auto-use through transportation alternatives like good mass transit, biking, mixed use walkable shopping districts, you can design a system that requires fewer energy inputs, particularly liquid fuels, to sustain it. I also urged them to consider the positive impacts on quality of life by lower ground level pollution, noise, easing traffic congestion by reducing automobile usage.

Then a guy from the [Sustainable Development Fund](#) gave a presentation on how they are investing in a wide range of alternative energy development projects.

The DVRPC then did a presentation of their analysis of the situation and some of the proactive policy alternatives. Rather than viewing peak oil as a threat, they are trying to turn this into an opportunity to stimulate the development of a regional green economic sector, bringing alternative energy production and green technology companies to the area. They were also talking about restoring their rail and port facilities, restoring small town center retail areas to re-localize commerce and perhaps even light industry.

We did a little Q&A session, talked about clean coal technology, carbon sequestration, Coal Gasification, Liquid Natural Gas facilities. In particular Pennsylvania's governor seemed interested in leveraging all their nearby coal deposits. Following the addiction theme, I compared those ideas to treating a heroine addiction with methadone - you simply change the addiction, but the root dependency remains. But they might serve as a useful bridge fuel to a more sustainable future. There was also a lot of talk of stimulating the development of alternative energy. I kept emphasizing conservation ideas as a way to save people money and stop simply shipping local wealth outside the region, when you could have that all being spent locally. They agreed that it really came down to showing how international energy prices created a good opportunity to spur local economic development.

All in all, I thought it was a productive start to what will be a long process of rethinking their regional transportation system's infrastructure. In many cases they just talked about how reactivating their 19th Century freight & passenger rail and port infrastructure will serve them well in the 21st Century. The meeting underscored how the answers to peak oil will be different in every region.

With the NY Times Article from yesterday, there has never been an easier time to start talk about peak oil in your local area.



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