

## THE I-79 CORRIDOR

### ***The I-79 Corridor – Pittsburgh to Erie Regional Thruway***

I-79 was constructed through Mercer County in the early 1960s. The portion north of PA 965 opened in 1961 and the segment south of PA 965 the following year. The I-79 corridor is known as the Pittsburgh to Erie Regional Thruway and traverses the entire County north to south. The corridor serves commercial, tourist and commuter travel. The corridor was identified as a corridor of statewide significance in PennPlan, PennDOT's previous long range transportation plan. It is known as the Rivers of Steel corridor in PennPlan.



#### **CORRIDOR PROFILE ►**



Deer Creek  
New Vernon  
Lake  
Jackson  
Findley  
Springfield

I-79 is the primary transportation facility in western Mercer County. As a NAFTA trade corridor, the interstate is part of a larger corridor of national significance.

Growth in traffic volumes throughout the corridor is expected, with increases in tourism traffic destined for such locations as the Allegheny National Forest, Erie, weekend traffic to Pymatuning and Conneaut Lake, and shopping outlets at Grove City. Currently approximately 22,000 vehicles per day use the Mercer County portion of the corridor. That number is projected to double by 2017.

I-79 provides motorists with connections to the following major highways: I-80, PA 358, PA 965 and PA 208.

The corridor also includes BicyclePA Route A, a cross-state roadway-based bicycle route, which generally follows US 19 parallel to I-79.

The corridor provides overland connections between the water ports of Erie and Pittsburgh and has been identified as a key International Trade route connecting the South and Canada.



## Key Findings and Corridor Highlights

- Maintenance needs on I-79 consume a significant percentage of the Shenango Valley MPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). I-80 and I-79 are the two largest outlay items on the MPO TIP.
- There are no major commercial truck stops in the I-79 Corridor.
- The outlets at Grove City represent a major source of trip generation in the corridor. A new Wal-Mart has been discussed as a possibility for the area. The northeast quadrant of the I-79/ PA 208 interchange is still vacant and could be developed.
- There are concerns with growth "leapfrogging" into northern Butler County and southern Mercer County. Development is currently occurring in the Grove City and Slippery Rock areas.
- To illustrate the demand for land in southern Mercer County along the I-79 Corridor, there have been some discussions of developing a large scale golf course community in southern Mercer County near the Grove City area. The area is arguably the most economically stable area of the county.
- There is a desire for an ITS traveler warning systems in the corridor to alert travelers of traffic accidents, weather conditions and other emergencies.

## Recommendations for the I-79 Corridor:

- **There is a desire for enhanced traveler information.** Though congestion in the corridor is not expected to be a problem through 2025, the I-79 corridor lacks intelligent transportation system (ITS) facilities similar to other Pennsylvania interstates. The MPO should work with PennDOT to identify locations where variable message signs and other ITS components could prove useful to users of the roadway.
- **TIP funding needs to spread more equitably throughout the County's various roadway facilities, not concentrated on I-79 and I-80.** I-79 and I-80 consume a disproportionate share of the regional transportation improvement plan (TIP) funds. The MPO's annual four-year TIP allocation historically has been approximately \$70 million. The Shenango Valley MPO should request that PennDOT District 1-0 provide candidate projects for the State's Smoother Roads Initiative as one way to supplement TIP projects countywide.



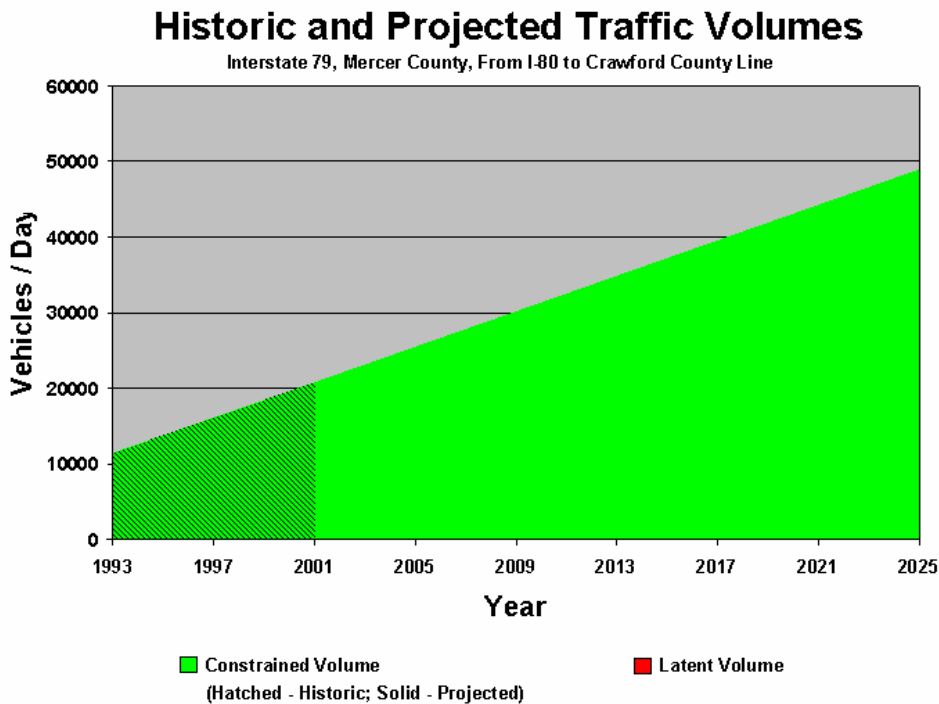
## Traffic Volumes

The I-79 roadway is one of PennDOT’s 28 corridors of statewide significance. As part of the development the long range plan (PennPlan), PennDOT organized the I-79 Corridor into “Super-segments” which coincide with the roadway’s junctions with other roadways on the National Highway System (NHS) or where the corridor crosses a county line.

Traffic volumes on the I-79 Corridor have been increasing steadily over the past 20 years. Data from PennDOT's HPMS show that volumes on I-79 south of I-80 have grown from 12,200 in 1987 to a present-day total of 18,560. North of I-80, volumes have increased from 8,600 in 1985 to 21,300 in 2004. Despite the increases in traffic volumes, congestion is not expected to be an issue on I-79 through 2025.

Also as part of PennPlan’s development, a level of service (LOS) analysis was performed for each so-called “Super-segment” in the I-79 Corridor. Historical data is given for years 1993 to 2000 and was used to project demand for 2010 and 2025.

The chart below illustrates historical and projected LOS for one of the I-79 Super-segments. I-79 is expected to experience steadily increased demand to 2025, the end year of the modeling analysis.





## Mode Split

Given the decentralized development patterns and employment destinations in western Mercer County, commuters rely primarily on the private automobile. Table 1 outlines the mode split reported in Census 2000 for workers residing in the I-79 Corridor.

**Table 1: Mode Split (in %) – 2000**  
**THE I-79 CORRIDOR**

LOCATION	SOV	CARPOOL	TRANSIT	WALK	BICYCLE	OTHER MEANS	WORK AT HOME
DEER CREEK TOWNSHIP	78.4	8.8	0.0	2.6	0.0	0.0	10.1
NEW VERNON TOWNSHIP	82.5	7.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	8.5
LAKE TOWNSHIP	71.6	10.9	0.0	3.3	0.0	0.0	14.2
JACKSON TOWNSHIP	84.5	7.1	0.4	3.5	0.0	0.7	3.9
FINDLEY TOWNSHIP	89.1	6.4	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.4	3.1
SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP	86.3	7.4	0.6	1.1	0.0	0.4	4.1
I-79 CORRIDOR	84.2	7.5	0.3	1.8	0.0	0.5	5.7
MERCER COUNTY	83.2	9.2	0.3	3.2	0.1	0.7	3.2

The prevailing feature of work-related travel for corridor-area residents is the high degree of individual automobile use. Significant findings regarding journey-to-work mode split along the I-79 corridor are listed below:

- Over 84 percent of corridor workers commute to work alone (SOV).
- The use of carpooling in the corridor is less than the county average of 9.2 percent. Approximately 7.5 percent of the corridor's resident workers carpool; Lake Township has the corridor's highest percentage of carpoolers at 10.9 percent.
- None of the corridor's workers reported using a bicycle as a means of commuting to work.
- Approximately 6 percent of the corridor's working population works at home; Lake Township has the corridor's highest percentage of population that works at home, at over 14 percent.

## Travel Time to Work

Travel times to work in the I-79 Corridor are generally longer than they are for workers in other parts of the county. Table 2 and Table 3 show how journey to work travel times in the I-79 Corridor have changed over the past decade.



**Table 2: Travel Time to Work (in minutes by percent) – 2000  
THE I-79 CORRIDOR**

LOCATION	< 15		15-29		30-59		60-89		90+	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
DEER CREEK TOWNSHIP	34	16.7	96	47.1	72	35.3	2	1.0	0	0.0
NEW VERNON TOWNSHIP	33	15.4	89	41.6	77	36.0	11	5.1	4	1.9
LAKE TOWNSHIP	92	35.4	90	34.6	64	24.6	6	2.3	8	3.1
JACKSON TOWNSHIP	130	23.9	238	43.8	149	27.4	22	4.0	5	0.9
FINDLEY TOWNSHIP	289	42.4	224	32.8	132	19.4	25	3.7	12	1.8
SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP	258	33.3	291	37.6	197	25.5	24	3.1	4	0.5
I-79 CORRIDOR	836	31.2	1028	38.4	691	25.8	90	3.4	33	1.2
MERCER COUNTY	22,293	45.0	16,568	33.5	8,532	16.7	1,253	2.5	829	1.6

**Table 3: Travel Time To Work (in minutes by percent) – 1990  
THE I-79 CORRIDOR**

LOCATION	< 15		15-29		30-59		60-89		90+	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
DEER CREEK TOWNSHIP	33	17.1	81	42.0	75	38.9	2	1.0	2	1.0
NEW VERNON TOWNSHIP	36	17.6	94	46.1	61	29.9	11	5.4	2	1.0
LAKE TOWNSHIP	93	45.1	52	25.2	50	24.3	6	2.9	5	2.4
JACKSON TOWNSHIP	74	17.9	188	45.5	118	28.6	22	5.3	11	2.7
FINDLEY TOWNSHIP	244	39.5	248	40.2	98	15.9	25	4.1	2	0.3
SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP	258	33.3	291	37.6	197	25.5	24	3.1	4	0.5
I-79 CORRIDOR	738	30.7	954	39.6	599	24.9	90	3.7	26	1.1
MERCER COUNTY	22,944	46.9	15,686	32.1	7,410	15.2	971	2.0	277	0.6

Overall, travel to work times in the corridor during the 1990s have remained constant, although some variations included:

- During the 1990s, the percentage of persons commuting less than 15 minutes to work actually decreased by 13 percent.
- The rate of increase for corridor commuters traveling longer than an hour to work remained generally flat, at just 4.6 percent of all commuters.



## Commutation Patterns

Table 4 depicts the top commuter destinations for workers residing in the I-79 Corridor. Data from the Census reveal that the boroughs of Grove City and Mercer attract the highest percentage of corridor workers. Other Census data reveal:

- Among corridor municipalities, Lake Township has the highest percentage of workers employed within the municipality of residence, at 22 percent.
- Findley Township exports over 91 percent of its resident workers to employment destinations in other municipalities. A majority of these commuters are destined for Mercer Borough.
- Nearly half of all corridor commuters working in Grove City Borough are from Springfield Township.

**Table 4: Top Commuter Destinations – 2000**  
**THE I-79 CORRIDOR**

Municipality	#
1. GROVE CITY	305
2. MERCER BOROUGH	248
3. PINE TWP	244
4. SPRINGFIELD TWP	222
5. HERMITAGE	131
6. JACKSON TWP	123
7. FINDLEY TWP	76
8. LAKE TWP	75
9. GREENVILLE	59
10. SANDY LAKE	56

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

## Population Trends

Compared to the rest of Mercer County, the municipalities along the I-79 Corridor are growing. Table 5 depicts the population trends during the 1990s along the I-79 Corridor.



**Table 5: Population Trends  
THE I-79 CORRIDOR**

LOCATION	1990	2000	% CHANGE
			1990-2000
DEER CREEK TOWNSHIP	497	478	(4.0)
NEW VERNON TOWNSHIP	469	547	14.3
LAKE TOWNSHIP	634	701	9.6
JACKSON TOWNSHIP	1,089	1,193	8.7
FINDLEY TOWNSHIP	2,284	2,305	0.9
SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP	1,892	1,972	4.1
<b>I-79 CORRIDOR TOTAL</b>	<b>6,865</b>	<b>7,196</b>	<b>4.6</b>
<b>MERCER COUNTY</b>	<b>121,003</b>	<b>120,293</b>	<b>(0.6)</b>

- During the 1990s, population growth among municipalities in the I-79 Corridor occurred at a rate of nearly 5 percent.
- New Vernon Township led all corridor municipalities in population growth, at over 14 percent.
- Lake Township and Jackson Township also grew significantly during the 1990s, at 10 and 9 percent, respectively.
- Deer Creek Township was the only municipality in the corridor to lose population over the past decade, at 4 percent decline.

### Age Group Distribution

Shifts within the corridor's population composition between 1990 and 2000 indicate that numbers of elderly population are increasing dramatically. Deer Creek Township was the only municipality in the Corridor that lost a portion of its population (9.4 percent).

Table 6 and the points that follow provide more detail on the age group distribution within the corridor and its municipalities.

**Table 6: Percent Change by Age Group – 1990, 2000  
THE I-79 CORRIDOR**

LOCATION	Total	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	85+
DEER CREEK TOWNSHIP	(9.4)	(5.0)	10.2	33.3	29.4	133.3
NEW VERNON TOWNSHIP	6.3	65.38	(25.0)	35.1	43.7	(25.0)
LAKE TOWNSHIP	8.4	48.5	(1.5)	28.8	58.3	(50.0)
JACKSON TOWNSHIP	10.7	69.4	48.3	25.7	12.5	233.3
FINDLEY TOWNSHIP	0.9	156.3	5.0	5.4	3.5	20.0
SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP	4.2	72.0	(0.6)	3.0	(4.0)	53.3
<b>I-79 CORRIDOR</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>84.8</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>40.4</b>
<b>MERCER COUNTY</b>	<b>(0.6)</b>	<b>32.2</b>	<b>(9.4)</b>	<b>(10.0)</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>28.1</b>



- Nearly half (46 percent) of the corridor's population in 2000 was between the ages of 25 and 54. This compares to the county average of 40 percent.
- Lake Township had the corridor's greatest percentage of young persons in 2000, with a quarter of its population being less than 15 years of age.
- Overall, from 1990 to 2000, the corridor increased its population by approximately 3.7 percent.
- The largest age group increase from 1990 to 2000 included persons 45-54, with an over corridor increase of 84.8 percent.

### Racial Composition

Table 7 and the bullet points below provide information on the racial composition of the I-79 Corridor.

**Table 7: Racial Composition – (in %)  
THE I-79 CORRIDOR**

LOCATION	Total	White	Black	Native-American	Asian	Other
DEER CREEK TOWNSHIP	478	99.4	.4	0	.2	.2
NEW VERNON TOWNSHIP	547	99.8	0	0	.2	0
LAKE TOWNSHIP	701	99.3	1.0	.6	0	.1
JACKSON TOWNSHIP	1193	99.7	0	.4	0	.4
FINDLEY TOWNSHIP	2305	84.9	14.8	.4	.1	.1
SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP	1972	99.2	.3	.6	.4	.1
I-79 CORRIDOR	7196	97.05	2.75	0.3	1.5	1.5
MERCER COUNTY	120,293	94.2	3.6	.1	1.0	1.1

- The corridor is more racially homogenous than the county as a whole, with over 97 percent of its population white.
- Findley Township has the highest percentages of minority populations within the corridor, with over 15 percent - a majority of which are black.



### Per Capita Household Income

Of the corridor households, 38% have per capita household income of between \$25-50,000. Households in both Findley and Jackson Townships have average annual incomes in excess of \$42,000 (1999 figures). New Vernon Township has the corridor's lowest average annual household incomes, at just \$32,031. A corridor anomaly, Deer Creek Township has the corridor's highest percentage of households earning less than \$25,000 a year (33 percent), and the highest rate of those earning more than \$100,000, with 7 percent. Table 8 and the bullet points below provide more information concerning per capita incomes in the I-79 Corridor.

**Table 8: Per Capita Household Income (2000)  
THE I-79 CORRIDOR**

LOCATION	Households	< \$25,000		\$25-49,999		\$50-74,999		\$75-99,999		\$100,000+	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
DEER CREEK TOWNSHIP	157	52	33.1	52	33.1	24	15.3	17	10.8	11	7.0
NEW VERNON TOWNSHIP	196	57	29.1	102	52.0	28	14.3	7	3.6	2	1.0
LAKE TOWNSHIP	234	74	31.6	88	37.6	35	15.0	28	12.0	9	3.8
JACKSON TOWNSHIP	433	96	22.2	171	39.5	89	20.6	58	13.4	19	4.4
FINDLEY TOWNSHIP	539	133	24.7	212	39.3	142	26.3	46	8.5	6	1.1
SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP	718	192	26.7	250	34.8	180	25.1	52	7.2	44	6.1
I-79 CORRIDOR	2,277	604	26.5	875	38.4	498	21.9	208	9.1	91	4.0
MERCER CO	46,755	16,073	34.4	16,259	34.8	8,629	18.5	3,246	6.9	2,548	5.4

- Just over 60 percent of the corridor's households have annual incomes in the range of \$25,000 to \$74,999.
- Over 13 percent of the corridor's households has a per capita income in excess of \$75,000.
- Less than 27 percent of corridor households earned less than \$25,000.



## Economic

Table 9 depicts characteristics of the corridor's civilian labor force for the year 2000.

**Table 9: Civilian Labor Force Characteristics – (2000)  
THE I-79 CORRIDOR**

LOCATION	Total	Not in Labor Force		Labor Force		Civilian Labor Force				In Armed Forces	
		#	%	#	%	Employed		Unemployed		#	%
						#	%	#	%		
DEER CREEK TOWNSHIP	380	144	37.9	236	62.1	229	97.0	7	3.0	0	0.0
NEW VERNON TOWNSHIP	402	144	35.8	258	64.2	240	93.0	18	7.0	0	0.0
LAKE TOWNSHIP	510	197	38.6	313	61.4	303	96.8	10	3.2	0	0.0
JACKSON TOWNSHIP	936	325	34.7	611	65.3	570	93.2	35	5.7	0	0.0
FINDLEY TOWNSHIP	2,033	1,282	63.0	751	36.9	713	94.9	38	5.0	0	0.0
SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP	1,527	484	31.7	1,043	68.3	990	94.9	53	5.1	0	0.0
I-79 CORRIDOR	5,788	2,576	44.5	3,167	54.7	3,045	96.1	161	5.0	0	0.0
MERCER COUNTY	95,664	40,113	41.9	55,551	58.1	52,142	93.9	3,353	6.0	56	0.1

- Unemployment rates in the corridor are slightly lower than those countywide. Deer Creek Township boasted the corridor's highest employment rate in 2000, at 97 percent. New Vernon Township had the lowest, at only 93 percent.
- Total corridor labor force participation rates are slightly lower than the county overall.

Table 10 displays the breakdown of employment by occupation for the municipalities along the I-79 Corridor.



**Table 10: Employment by Occupation (%) - (2000)  
THE I-79 CORRIDOR**

Municipality	Total	Mgmt./ Professional & Related		Service		Sales/ Office		Farming, Fishing & Forestry		Construction, Extraction & Maintenance		Production/ Transportation & Material Moving	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
DEER CREEK TOWNSHIP	229	46	20.1	40	17.5	57	24.9	2	0.9	24	10.5	60	26.2
NEW VERNON TOWNSHIP	240	62	25.8	27	11.3	31	12.9	16	6.7	27	11.3	43	17.9
LAKE TOWNSHIP	303	74	24.4	37	12.2	81	26.7	18	5.9	27	8.9	66	21.8
JACKSON TOWNSHIP	570	151	26.5	154	27.0	127	22.3	8	1.4	50	8.8	64	11.2
FINDLEY TOWNSHIP	713	168	23.6	154	21.6	144	20.2	6	0.8	72	10.1	169	23.7
SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP	990	176	17.8	185	18.7	268	27.1	8	0.8	107	10.8	246	24.8
<b>I-79 CORRIDOR</b>	<b>3,045</b>	<b>677</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>597</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>708</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>648</b>	<b>21.3</b>
<b>MERCER COUNTY</b>	<b>52,142</b>	<b>14,392</b>	<b>27.6</b>	<b>9001</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>13,203</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>4,281</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>10,946</b>	<b>21.0</b>

- The three most common employment occupations in the I-79 Corridor are management/professional (22.2%), sales/office (23.3%), and production/transportation & material moving (21.3%), which is consistent with the County as a whole.
- Over 21 percent of those that live along the I-79 corridor are employed in production/transportation related occupations, which is significantly higher than the County as a whole (only 2 percent).



### 2005 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

There are several projects within the I-79 Corridor that have been programmed. In addition to these planned improvements, PennDOT resurfaced the interstate in 2004 from Grove City to the Crawford County line. Other improvements in the corridor included new guide rail and drainage upgrades, including a waterproofing of the bridge decks. The 2005 TIP includes \$7 million in interstate pavement maintenance (IPM) line items. This money may potentially be used towards upgrades in lighting but as yet has not been programmed.

Another significant corridor project includes the reconstruction of I-79's interchange with PA 208 (Exit 113). PennDOT has programmed nearly \$20 million for this improvement, scheduled to be let during the summer of 2005. It is one of the most significant projects programmed as part of Mercer County's TIP.

**Table 11: 2005 -- 2008 TIP Projects (in (\$000s))**  
**THE I-79 CORRIDOR**

Municipality	Project/Description	Year				Total
		05	06	07	08	
JACKSON	Fox Mine Rd bridge repl	325				325
SPRINGFIELD	Grove City interchange	9,800	7,000	3,000		19,800
SPRINGFIELD	Milburn Rd bridge	95	750			845

Source: PENNDOT District 1-0 - numbers in thousands of dollars