

# CONSHOHOCKEN TRAIN STATION

## *vision plan*

New landscaping  
along stairs



Widened sidewalks and  
new streetscaping

9000 SF ground-floor  
retail with 1-2 levels of  
parking above

Widened sidewalks and  
new streetscaping

Gateway art

300+ car garage

Cafe/Retail

Outbound  
Station

Matching plazas



Parallel street parking  
and drop-off area

New sidewalks

**Borough of Conshohocken  
Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission**

submitted by:

*Kise Straw & Kolodner, Inc.*





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**Delaware Valley  
Regional Planning  
Commission**

*Kise Straw & Kolodner, Inc.*

## BACKGROUND

Conshohocken has seen impressive levels of both residential and commercial development along the Schuylkill River in recent years. Much of this development is within easy walking or shuttle distance of the Conshohocken SEPTA R6 Regional Rail station. This study looks at ways to maximize the use and value of this community asset that gives local residents and employees access to a variety of high quality transportation options. To explore the future possibilities for expansion of the station's role in Conshohocken's transportation system, the Borough completed the Conshohocken Station Vision Plan in cooperation with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), who provided funding through their Transportation and Community Development Initiative (TCDI) program. This plan looks at the station itself and opportunities to implement transit oriented development in the surrounding area.

### ***Transit Oriented Development (TOD)***

TOD recognizes that a train station is more than just a functional building, it can also be the centerpiece of community revitalization and redevelopment; a proud symbol of a community's prosperity and

position; a gateway. According to the Urban Land Institute, a national organization devoted to real estate development and land use planning, TOD is characterized by 10 elements that do not all have to be present, but which work together to provide an environment where riding transit is easy and convenient:

1. Have a vision;
2. Think development and transit;
3. Get the parking right;
4. Build a place, not a project;
5. Apply the power of partnerships;
6. Make retail market driven, not transit driven;
7. Mix uses, but not necessarily in the same place;
8. Incorporate buses;
9. Encourage every price point to live around transit; and
10. Engage corporate attention.

This Vision Plan incorporates these elements, setting the stage for Conshohocken to pursue quality development and redevelopment of its station area.



*A view across the Schuylkill River to some of the recent development that has occurred in West Conshohocken and Conshohocken.*



*The Conshohocken Station as seen from Fayette St. At its best, a train station is a welcoming experience, a representation of how a town views itself.*

New residential development

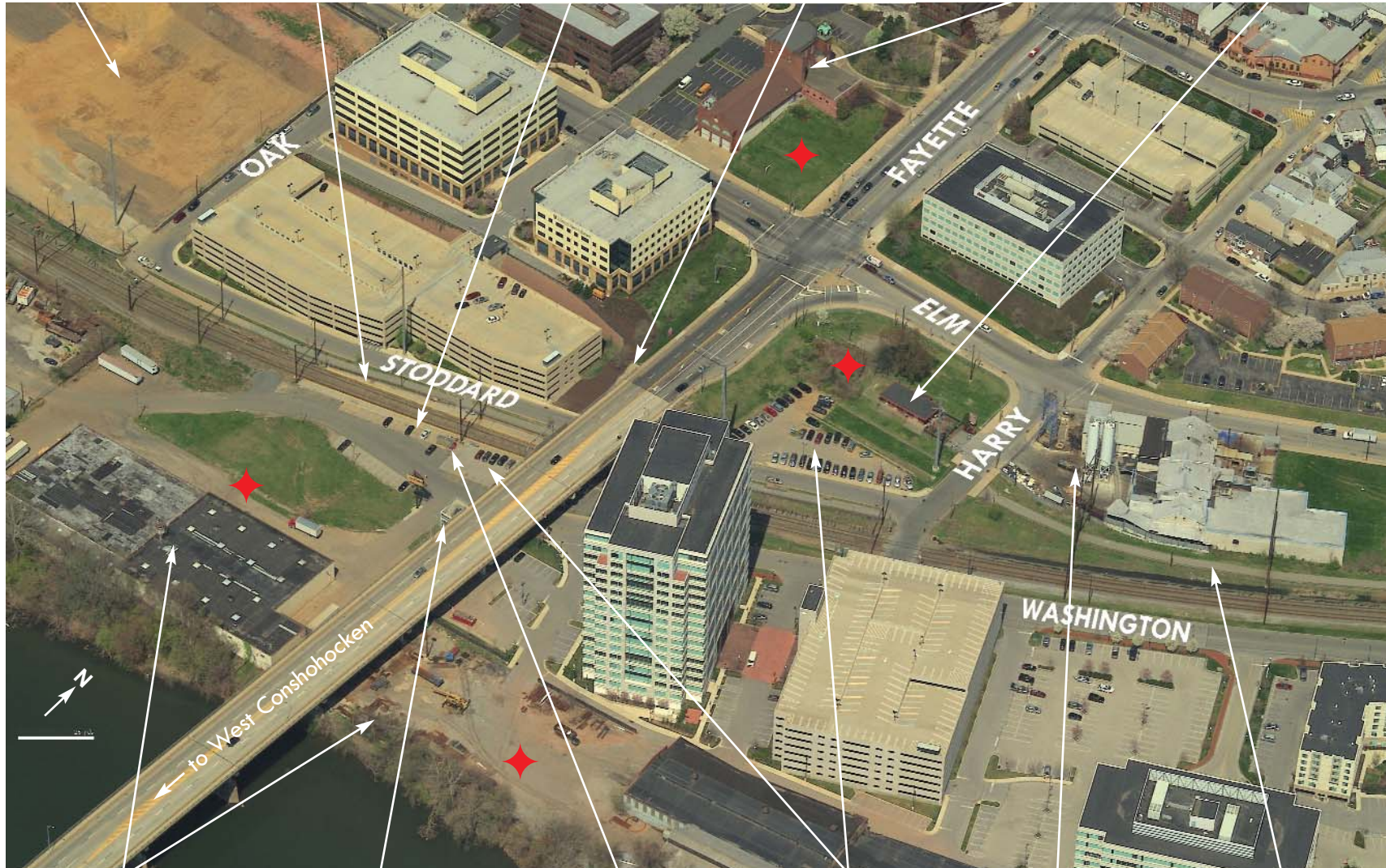
Outbound platform (from Philadelphia)

Inbound platform (to Philadelphia)

Staircase from bridge to Outbound platform

Fire Station

"Outbound Station" cafe/historic station



Industrial land uses

Staircase from bridge to Inbound platform

Ticket booth and waiting room

Station Parking

New office development

Schuylkill River Trail

Existing Conditions

◆ Potential infill and redevelopment sites

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

The current SEPTA train station at Conshohocken is located on the site of the former Reading Company station. At one time, both the Reading and Pennsylvania Railroads ran competing rail service between Norristown and Philadelphia with stops in Conshohocken. The station formerly owned by the Pennsylvania Railroad is now the Outbound Station antique, gift, and snack shop and is seen as an important historic building by many community members.

Currently, the station consists of two simple low level platforms, located approximately 150 feet west of Harry Street roughly centered under the Fayette Street Bridge. These platforms are at grade with the street and require stepping up via steep stairs within the passenger cars. The inbound platform hosts a construction trailer that acts as waiting room and ticket counter during morning commuting hours. There is no restroom at the station. The nearby Outbound Station store provides a variety of useful items for commuters.

The station has seen increasing ridership, especially as office, hotel, and residential uses have developed on the waterfront areas of



*The inbound platform and parking along Washington Street. Crossing the tracks to downtown requires climbing 40 feet of steps or walking 3 blocks out of the way.*

Conshohocken and West Conshohocken. Ridership on weekdays in 2007 was 521 boarding riders, up 31% from 398 in 2003. Currently, 25 Regional Rail trains travel in each direction on weekdays and 17 in each direction on weekend days. An unusual characteristic of ridership at Conshohocken is the large number of people who ride out from Philadelphia in the morning (often referred to as "reverse commuters") to work at the many employers within walking distance: 45% of morning rush station users at Conshohocken are arrivals. All trains that stop at Conshohocken operate on the R6 line, which also includes well-used stops at Norristown, Manayunk, Wissahickon, East Falls, Temple University, and Center City Philadelphia.

Access to the station is achieved in a variety of ways. Parking lots are located on Stoddard near Harry, and on Washington Street next to the inbound platform. A total of 95 spaces exist, and the lots are typically 100% full on weekdays. There are anecdotal reports that riders also use on street parking and even at nearby private parking garages.

A parking study was completed which recorded the license plate numbers of all cars parked in the station lot. Each license number was checked against PennDOT records to determine where the car was registered. This provided a profile of where inbound station users were beginning their journeys and what other regional rail options might be open to them. A total of 82 cars were counted in the lot on the day of the survey out of the 95 spaces available. While most of the cars were registered in Conshohocken or the surrounding municipalities, a wide diversity of locations was represented with cars from 26 municipalities:

- Conshohocken Borough - 23 cars or 28%;
- Plymouth Township - 17 cars or 20.7%;
- Lower Merion - 9 cars or 11%; and
- Other - 33 cars or 40.3%.

Two SEPTA bus lines stop at the station - Route 95, which runs between Gulph Mills and the shopping centers of Plymouth Meeting, and Route 97, which runs between Norristown and Lafayette Hill. Greater Valley Forge MTA's "Conshohocken Rambler" service also links the station to Plymouth Meeting Mall. Meanwhile, the Schuylkill River Trail runs next to the station, providing a bicycle link between Valley Forge and Philadelphia. This trail is heavily used and on weekends bikers and rollerbladers often use parking facilities near the station.

Because of the topographic nature of the area, pedestrian access to the outbound platform is problematic. From most of Conshohocken, the inbound platform is reached only by a 40-foot tall open staircase from the Fayette Street bridge or the sidewalk-less, though legal, at-grade crossing along Harry Street. Pedestrians are often seen illegally crossing the tracks near the station. The outbound platform is reached via a long set of open stairs along the west side of the Fayette Street bridge embankment. A few more steps separate the platform level from the street. There are no sidewalks along Washington or Stoddard Streets, causing pedestrians to use streets and the bicycle trail (with fast moving cyclists), and the bridge piers dangerously obscure views of both pedestrians and cyclists.

Several potential redevelopment sites ideal for TOD are near the station. The block bounded by Fayette, Elm, Harry, and Stoddard has long been looked at for development, though issues with ownership exist that need to be solved first. The industrial uses along the river also present future opportunities, but development there will need to address floodplain regulations. Finally, the vacant lot at the northwest corner of Fayette and Elm is another good site for infill development.

*From top-left: Stairs from inbound platform to Fayette St.; stairs from outbound platform to Fayette St.; pedestrians use the Schuylkill River Trail where no sidewalks exist; the parking lot on Stoddard St. and embankment constitute a prime development site.*



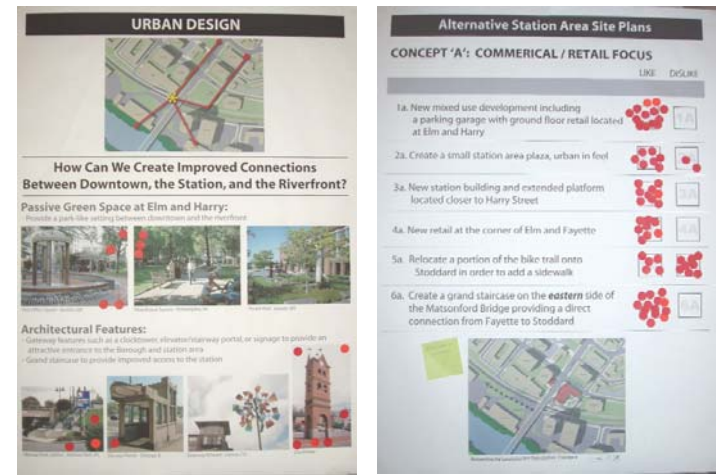
## STUDY PROCESS

Conshohocken's train station, and the opportunity sites nearby are well located to connect the traditional downtown commercial area, the nearby neighborhoods, and the new riverfront development. This Vision Plan suggests the train station will play an important part in the future of Conshohocken, and its improvement can be used as a catalyst for community-oriented, walkable development. As such, community involvement was a focus of the planning process. Three phases of the process included elements of research, analysis, and planning that was then presented to the stakeholders and the public. The first step was a field workshop attended by various stakeholders including Borough staff, County staff, SEPTA, and Kise Straw & Kolodner, all of whom toured the station area, examining its conditions, challenges, and opportunities.

In the second phase the consultant produced a series of conceptual maps and drawings to focus the conversation of a stakeholder workshop on the types of improvements that could be made around the train station. This information was presented at a public discussion which set the general direction of the next round of design.

In the third phase, KSK refined the TOD ideas and grouped them into three alternative visions that were presented to the public for comment and suggestions at a public workshop. The format of the workshop included an introductory presentation that reviewed the work done to date, discussed the principle of TOD, and described the three alternatives that the group was about to see. Designs were displayed on poster boards around the room with photos, site plans, and renderings. Questions related to the public's support or opposition to the alternatives and other ideas were included on the boards and the attendees were asked to use sticker dots to answer the questions in a way that allowed for easy identification of the preferred answers to each question.

Alternative A suggested moving the station platforms to the at-grade track crossing at Harry Street and developing the Outbound Station block directly north as a large parking garage, with ground floor retail and a small plaza. Pedestrians would be encouraged to use Harry and Elm Streets to reach downtown, or use a new staircase on the east side of the bridge.



*Large posterboards allowed the public to express opinions on design ideas and station alternatives.*

Alternative B improved the station where it is, with an emphasis on widening and improving the pedestrian bridge crossing over the tracks. Two new elevator towers would connect the bridge and the platforms - one in a new parking garage along the west side of the bridge.





Alternative A

However, to accommodate traffic and pedestrian access to the station, a new crossing at Oak Street would be needed. The Outbound Station block would be redeveloped as an informal park that offers a pleasant pedestrian connection between downtown and the waterfront area.

Alternative C once again moved the station to the east to emphasize the track crossing at Harry, but instead of a parking garage, proposed an outdoor amphitheater park and a better organized parking lot of the same size that currently exists.

Ideas common to each alternative include moving the bike trail onto Stoddard Street in the station area, extending Washington Street westward, a mixed-use development on the firehouse site, and redevelopment of the industrial parcels on the waterfront to include public access fronting the river.



Alternative B



Alternative C

## THE VISION

The vision created by stakeholders and the public for the Conshocken train station area includes a new train station with improved features and facilities to make it a pleasure for train riders to use, a new parking garage both for train riders and people shopping in downtown, new retail space to provide services that the Borough currently lacks, and improved landscaping including new street trees and a small park. Conshohocken's design standards would guide the design of the station, garage, and other street and site improvements. This section describes these features in more detail.

**Ticket office** - Not all travelers ride every day. The ability to buy tickets provides a convenience for less frequent riders and speeds the conductor's work on board the train. SEPTA's policy on Regional Rail is to install a ticket office at all stations where demand warrants it. Growing ridership at Conshohocken now warrants a ticket office. A temporary structure was installed at Conshohocken toward the end of 2006 to house a new ticket office and waiting room. The new station would include a permanent structure that would include a ticket office.



**Vision Plan: detail of the proposed station and garage area.**



The final Vision Plan concept represents a combination of the most favored elements of the alternatives

## THE VISION

A ticket office also provides someone to monitor the waiting room and other facilities, providing an extra level of security.

*Waiting room* - A comfortable and secure place to wait for the train is an important amenity for passengers. It is especially important in Conshohocken because many passengers are reverse commuters who walk or are dropped off from work at the station in the afternoon and do not have an auto in the parking lot to use to wait for the train home. The Vision Plan recommends that the waiting room be set to a timer that would lock the doors at a certain time with a motion detector to make sure that no one is left behind. This would make the waiting room available for riders returning home from work in Conshohocken when the ticket office was not open.

*Platforms* - SEPTA's standard for new or rebuilt stations is to provide platforms 520 feet in length, long enough for a six-car train to stop with all doors on the platform. The platforms would extend from Harry Street to just west of the Matsonford Bridge. All associated features such as access points, ramps, crosswalks, shelters, and buildings would be fully ADA compliant. This plan shows the inbound platform as 20 feet wide where the ticket office and waiting room are, narrowing to 10 feet wide to the west. The outbound platform would be 10 feet wide throughout.

*Pedestrian circulation* - One of the key functions of a train station is to form an interface between modes of transportation and adjacent land uses. Convenient, ADA compliant, and attractive connections between the parking, bus stop, platforms, and surrounding streets is included.

*Track crossing* - A formal track crossing would be located at the east end of the station at Harry Street. No other grade crossings are included, but passengers can also use the stairs to Fayette Street on the west end of the platform to cross the tracks. This provides two safe

and secure crossing points on both ends of the new station platforms.

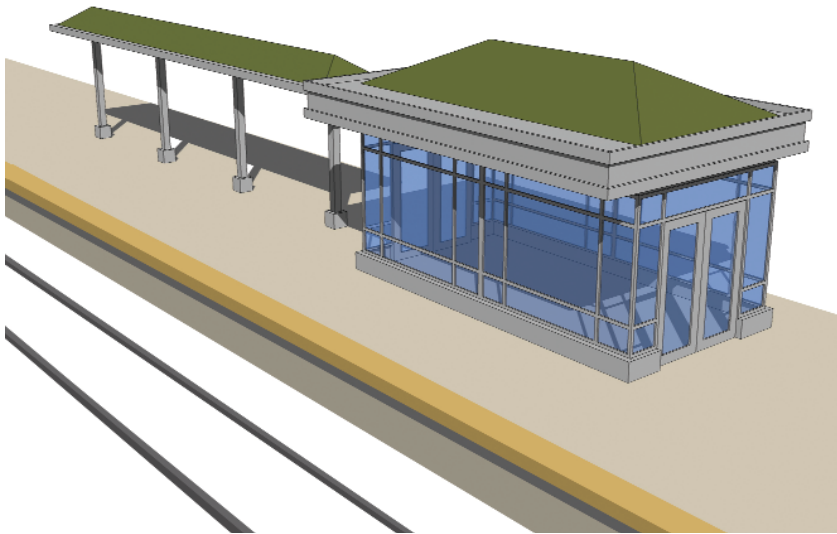
*Weather protected canopies* - In addition to the waiting room and ticket office, 100 foot long canopies would be included on both the inbound and outbound platforms to protect passengers boarding and alighting trains from inclement weather. Two enclosed shelters would be included as well to provide protection on windy days or at times when the waiting room is not open.

*Security systems* - Emergency call boxes directly to SEPTA dispatchers would be included on both the inbound and outbound platforms.

*Bus connections* - A bus stop would be located next to Harry Street so that passengers getting off the bus and heading for Philadelphia on the R6 would have the shortest possible walk to the inbound platform and the ticket office and waiting room. Buses would make the same loop they currently do from Fayette to Elm to Stoddard to Harry to Elm and back to Fayette. This would provide access to the station from along Fayette Street through the Borough and on to nearby communities like Plymouth Meeting.

*Bike parking* - Bike parking would be located along Washington Street near the waiting room. Space for at least 10 bikes would be included to encourage commuting to and from the station by bicycle.

*Public park and landscaping* - The Vision Plan includes a small landscaped park along Harry Street around the Outbound Station building. The park would include plantings and trees for shade and to provide a pleasant space to eat lunch or have a cup of coffee while waiting for a train. In addition, the landscaping around the site would be improved with street trees and other plantings to soften the look of the entire area. Washington Street and Stoddard Avenue would see significant improvements in their physical environment.



***A prototype station facility with shelter and weather-protected canopy.***

*New pedestrian connections* - The station area would include the improvement of pedestrian connections on all surrounding streets. New stairs and elevators would make overcoming the elevation difference between Fayette Street and the tracks much easier. The elevators would be located on the Stoddard Avenue side of the garage and would serve rail passengers going from the station to Fayette Street.

There would be one set of stairs from the Matsonford Bridge to the eastbound station platforms to make it easy to access the station from the west side of Fayette without having to cross the street. Westbound passengers would continue to use the stairs just across Stoddard Avenue from the platform on the west side of Fayette Street.

These connections are critical to tying together the major economic generators and residences recently constructed along the Schuylkill River and the traditional center of the Borough along Fayette Street. Easier communication between the two would lead to greater econom-

ic activity for all, making the new offices more convenient and attractive by giving their employees easy access to greater lunchtime and after work activities and by expanding the market for Fayette street retail businesses. It would also make transit a more convenient and easier option for more workers, reducing the overall need for parking and reducing commuting costs. The same would be true for residents of Conshohocken who would have a station that was easier to walk to, easier to park at, and a more pleasant place to wait for the train. This would provide Conshohocken with an additional amenity for residents and employees alike.

### ***Parking Garage and Retail***

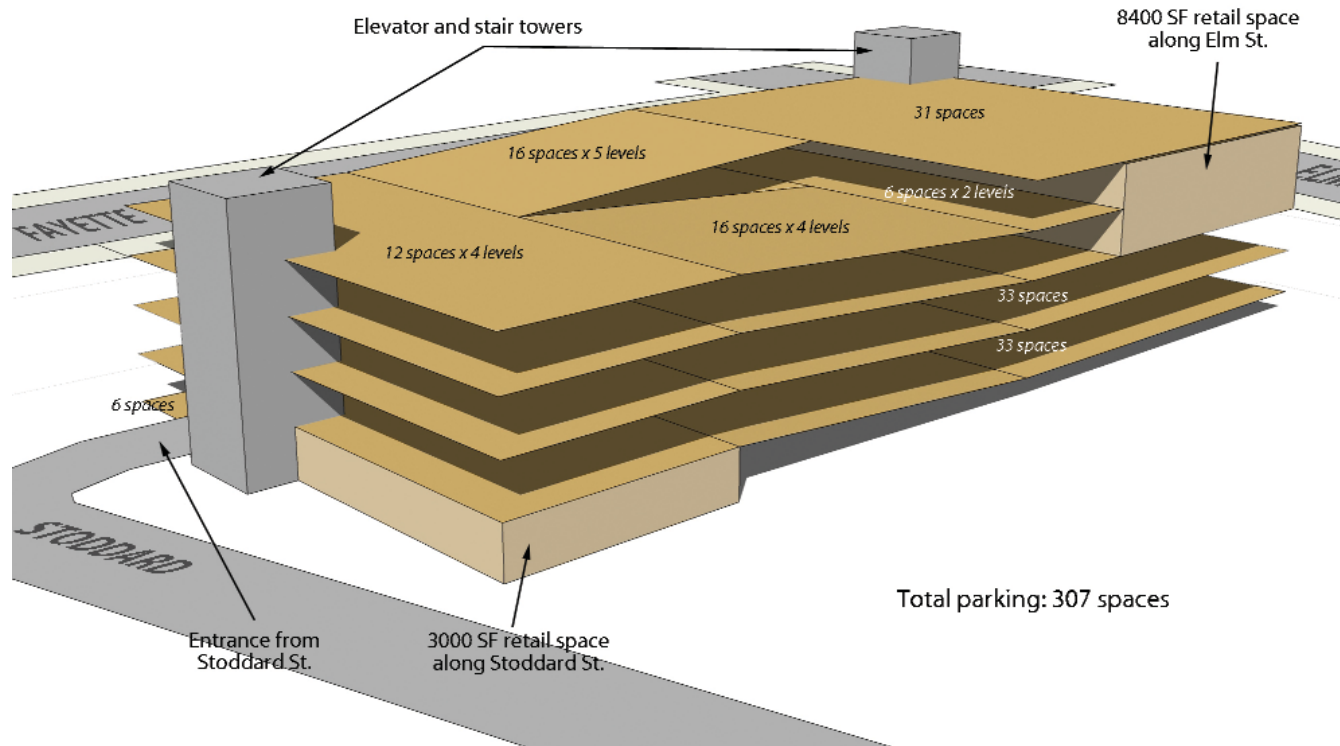
Regional Rail ridership is increasing throughout the SEPTA system and parking demand along with it. Ridership at Conshohocken has grown faster than at most stations with a 22% increase over the past two years, but parking supply has not kept pace. At the same time, the basic notion of TOD is to put more people within walking distance of the station and so reduce the total demand for parking. This requires a balanced approach that serves all access transportation modes.

*Auto parking* - The attendees at the public meeting felt that additional parking was needed at the station site both for commuters and to service retail and other commercial uses along Fayette Street. The preferred alternative includes a parking garage with 307 spaces located between Stoddard Avenue and Elm Street along Fayette Street. The garage would be four stories tall and would have two pedestrian entrances on Stoddard Avenue and Fayette Street and one auto entrance and exit on Stoddard. Another 42 spaces are located on the street near the station (primarily along Washington Street) and 30 could be retained at the surface lot at Washington Street until other development occurs there. The lot at the corner of Stoddard Avenue and Harry Street would be replaced by the garage.

## THE VISION

SEPTA figures indicate that the existing 95-space parking lot is typically 100% full on weekdays and anecdotal evidence indicates that there is a fair amount of parking in non-SEPTA spaces. While it is difficult to determine an exact demand for parking based on this analysis, it appears to be somewhere in the vicinity of 120 spaces. To account for growth over the next 10 years given current ridership growth rates, an assumption was made that from 150 to 180 spaces for commuters would be needed over time. Since a garage sized to fit the Fayette and Elm intersection would have space for 307 cars after two appropriate-sized retail spaces are included, this would leave 127 to 157 spaces for general use.

*Coffee shop and retail* - The garage building as shown is designed to include retail at both the Elm/Fayette Street level and the Stoddard Avenue, or station, level. On Elm Street, space would be provided for small and medium sized retail stores such as clothing stores, shoe and other apparel shops, and sit down restaurants. These shops would be well located to attract customers from the large numbers of people who pass by on Fayette Street as well as the many train commuters who arrive to and depart from the station. Providing additional retail opportunities at this key location would serve to strengthen Fayette Street in general by building on the variety and depth of goods and services available there.



Retail that serves passengers at the station would be incorporated into the Stoddard Avenue side of the parking garage across from the station platforms. In addition, the Outbound Station would continue to serve its function as a convenience retail establishment.

**The garage design is complex, needing to house retail on two different levels.**

Conshohocken station and garage - view from Harry Street at Washington Street



New station buildings

Relocated ADA-compliant platforms

Gateway art and new staircase

Streetscape improvements

Safer pedestrian crossing

Ground-floor retail space

Commuter/shopper garage

New public space



## COST ESTIMATES

### Station

SEPTA has been in the process of modernizing several stations on the Regional Rail lines, some of which are very similar to the proposed program at Conshohocken. Fort Washington and Melrose Park stations provide recent, local examples to work from to estimate the cost of the new Conshohocken Station.

Melrose Park Region Rail Station is located on the R1, R2, R3 and R5, approximately 12 miles north of Market East Station in Center City. This station project was very similar in scale and scope to what was selected as the vision for Conshohocken. It includes two new high level platforms, a new station building with waiting room and ticket office, and the renovation of sidewalks, parking, and stairways. The total cost in 2005 was \$5,336,000.

### Garage

Cost estimates for the new garage are based on the reported costs being incurred at the Norristown SEPTA Regional Rail garage, which is currently under construction. The Norristown structure is similar in overall design and is slightly larger in size, at 500 spaces. It is projected to cost \$24,750,000 when complete, or \$49,500 per space.

Based on this comparative analysis, it is estimated that the new Conshohocken Station proposed here, which includes 307 parking spaces, would cost approximately \$15,200,000 dollars for the parking area and another \$2,500,000 for the retail space - a total planning-level cost estimate of approximately \$17,700,000. It should be noted that this figure does not include land cost.



*ADA ramp from parking lot to platform at Melrose Park.*



*Stairway from street to platform at Melrose Park.*



Implementation of the station vision will take diligence and persistence. Although supported strongly by the public and possessing clear benefits, the Conshohocken Train Station vision will be both expensive and complicated to implement. The following strategy is recommended to move the project forward.

*Step 1 - Publicize and build support* - The Borough should publicly announce the completion of the Vision Plan, contact stakeholders to elicit their support, and encourage elected officials to voice their support. The visible support of community leaders will make funding discussion easier and more productive at all levels.

*Step 2 - Incorporate the vision into official plans* - By making the project part of official plans for the Borough, it will be taken into account when other infrastructure and development plans are being implemented in the surrounding area. Information on the project would be available to anyone inquiring about development in Conshohocken, and any resident interested in the Borough's Comprehensive Plan will find information on the project in the Transportation element. Incorporation of the plan's requirements into local zoning would assure that no structures or uses that are incompatible with the vision are created while it is being implemented. In addition, the Borough should work with the County and DVCRC to list the station on the region's long range Regional Transportation Plan. (RTP).

*Step 3 - Early implementation improvements* - The Borough should identify a set of low cost, early implementation projects, like improved signage and lighting for the station, and implement these in cooperation with SEPTA. This would demonstrate to SEPTA and other potential funders the commitment of the Borough to the project and would build enthusiasm for the project among residents and property owners. As properties required to make the plan a reality come available for sale, the Borough should explore ways of purchasing them



*View showing high level platform at the same height as the floor of the rail car.*



*View of high level platform.*

## IMPLEMENTATION AND ACTION PLAN

with the future intension of reselling them to SEPTA or private developers for plan implementation.

*Step 4 - Seek funding from varied sources* - Using the Vision Plan as a tool, the Borough should partner with SEPTA and Montgomery County in selling the project to potential funders. The first step should be to find funding for preliminary design of the station. The next section of this report identifies a number of potential sources of funding.

*Step 5 - Preliminary design* - Preliminary design would provide more detailed design plans, renderings, and cost estimates that could be used to secure final funding.

*Step 6 - Implementation* - With funding in place and designs ready to be finalized, the vision would be ready to implement. Different elements of the project would be implemented by different agencies. Local street and landscaping improvements would be the responsibility of the Borough, the station itself would be the responsibility of SEPTA, and other elements, such as the garage and retail, might be completed by private developers. A Memorandum of Agreement would need to be executed covering the implementation, including topics such as land acquisition, zoning, TRID planning, and other items.

### **Funding**

Most funding for train station improvements in the SEPTA service area flows through the SEPTA Capital Plan, which is created in concert with the DVRPC, the conduit for federal funding in the region.

Few projects are funded by just one source. A successful funding strategy begins with a firm commitment by the project sponsor, in this case the Borough of Conshohocken, and engages a variety of funders to assemble a complete package. The support of

Montgomery County and SEPTA for the project is necessary to this end.

The standard means for programming public transportation funding in the region is through SEPTA's annual Capital Plan, which is incorporated into DVRPC's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP is responsible for funneling federal transportation funding to local projects. The primary fund for this type of project is the Rail Modernization Program. These funding sources are limited, however, and have been programmed many years into the future. To use them, funds would have to be diverted from other projects, an unlikely occurrence. It may be possible for SEPTA to redirect a portion of the funding needed for the project in partnership with other funding sources. This funding would be used for the station building and platforms.

Another source of federal funding is to work with local Congressional Representatives - Congressmen Joe Sestak and Jim Gerlach - to acquire what is known as an "earmark" for federal funding. An earmark is specific wording in an appropriations bill specifying a project and an amount of money that is to be directed to fund its implementation. This is a common source of funding for transit capital projects such as Conshohocken Station, especially if they are recent additions to the Capital Plan. The earmark would be included in the annual appropriations bill for SAFETY-LU, the national transportation funding legislation, and the funding would be channeled through one of the regular programs maintained by the Federal Transit Administration to SEPTA. Funding is still limited. Earmarks can be used for any legitimate purpose defined by the program they are funded through.

*TRID* - A Transit Revitalization Investment District (TRID) is an area set up in cooperation between a municipality or other local govern-

Step	Responsibility	Time line
1. Publicize and build support	Borough of Conshohocken	0 to 6 months
2. Incorporate the vision into local and regional official plans	Borough of Conshohocken, Montgomery County	0 to 1 year
3. Early implementation improvements	Borough of Conshohocken, SEPTA	1 to 2 years
4. Seek funding from varied sources	Borough of Conshohocken, Montgomery County, DVRPC	1 to 3 years
5. Preliminary design	Borough of Conshohocken, SEPTA, PennDOT	3 to 5 years
6. Implementation	Borough of Conshohocken, SEPTA, PennDOT, Private Developers	4 to 10 years

ment entity and a transit district, such as SEPTA. It allows the locality to devote a portion of new property tax revenue within the district to transit project construction and maintenance purposes. In this case, tax revenue increases from all new construction within a certain area around Conshohocken Station would be put toward the improvement of the station, most likely in the form of paying of bonds to build the new structure, for a certain amount of time until the bonds were paid off. Providing local funding in this way demonstrates a commitment by the local municipality, thereby making it easier to acquire funding from other levels of government. TRID funds are available for transit-specific parts of the project including the station building and platforms and the portion of the parking garage used by commuters.

*Private funds* - The Conshohocken Station's site in a highly accessible and visible location makes it desirable for private development. A developer may be interested in building the parking, plaza, or other elements of the station as part of a larger private project on an adjacent parcel. A close connection to the station would give the

developer the ability to benefit from this accessibility in the form of higher rents or sales prices. The benefits of being located near a train station will only grow as time goes on and gas prices and congestion increase. In addition, the parking garage would provide revenue in the form of parking fees which could go toward paying capital and operating expenses.

Other opportunities for public private partnerships include:

- Street improvements along Washington could be funded by the developer of the large parcel to the West of the Matsonford Bridge.
- Since the parking garage is well located and linked by direct and attractive sidewalks to the area around it, a long term lease of spaces to a developer may be possible.