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TO BE RELEASED WED., JUNE 21, 7 P.M.

Connectivity Plan Presents Bold Ideas for Downtown Scranton

Two-way streets around Courthouse Square, all-way stop signs, and pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure among highlights of year-long study.

SCRANTON, Pa. – During a public presentation at the Peoples Security Bank Theater at Lackawanna College on Wed., June 22, 2023, urban planner Jeff Speck, FAICP, offered an ambitious envisioning of the future of downtown Scranton. Speck and Boston-based Nelson\Nygaard presented the results of a year-long study of the City's central hub.

"This in-depth study analysis of Scranton's downtown from Jeff Speck and Nelson\Nygaard offers a valuable roadmap to make our city safer," Mayor Paige G. Cagnetti said. "Making Scranton a more walkable, connected, and sustainable city provides opportunities to improve safety and generate traffic for our many small businesses."

"The changes this plan proposes are well in keeping with changes that have consistently brought street safety and economic vitality back to many downtowns across the country," Speck said. "We can have every confidence that, if they are implemented, the people of Scranton will witness in short order a downtown rebirth of a magnitude that cannot yet be imagined."

Scranton's American Rescue Plan Act funds paid for the \$239,800 study. Executing many of the plan's recommendations will take time, money, and approval from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) for changes and improvements along state roads.

The plan's key findings and recommendations include:

- From 2011 to 2020, nearly every intersection in downtown Scranton - from Olive Street to Lackawanna Avenue and from Mifflin Avenue to Monroe Avenue - had at least one car crash involving injuries, with many intersections experiencing up to 20.
- One-way traffic decisions made in the 1960s eliminated circulation of Courthouse Square, "worsening downtown navigation challenges."
- Two-way travel should be restored on North Washington, Adams, and a piece of Monroe Avenues, as well as Biden and Linden Streets.
 - Biden Street should remain one way between Jefferson and Adams Avenues for traffic exiting the Expressway. Further reconsideration of that block would require coordination with PennDOT.
- Multiple traffic signals could be replaced with all-way stop signs.
 - In fact, 23 of 30 downtown traffic lights are suggested to be replaced by all-way stops, and five could be converted to new two-way traffic lights based on changing driving patterns. Other similar conversions to all-way stops in major downtown networks "have not led to a temporary increase in crashes."



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- Push-button-enabled walk signs should be replaced with a concurrent signal system which would give pedestrians a walk signal at the same time cars receive a green light. Leading Pedestrian Intervals could also give pedestrians a brief head start to cross safely.
- Updating and maintaining crosswalks annually is critical. In particular, the report notes poor crosswalks along Olive, Vine, Mulberry, and Biden Streets, along with Lackawanna Avenue.
- Lackawanna Avenue could receive a “full rebuild.” The current configuration “is too wide and its treeless median is inappropriate for an urban setting,” both leading to poor pedestrian safety.
- Narrower driving lanes are suggested. Linden Street, for example, has 12-foot-wide lanes more commonly seen on American highways. Narrow driving lanes promote slower driving, reduce the severity of crashes, and offer opportunities for parking or bike lanes.

Additionally, the plan states:

- Based on traffic counts, "only Mulberry and Jefferson Avenue need contain more than two driving lanes" in a single direction.
- A more walkable Iron District and retail corridor along Cedar Avenue is possible as traffic leaves downtown and enters South Scranton, with greatly improved pedestrian crosswalks and curb extensions suggested along the path.
- Vastly improved biking infrastructure is pictured, including sidewalk-level cycle tracks along Lackawanna Avenue; street-level tracks along Mifflin Avenue; protected bike lanes along Wyoming, Lackawanna and Cedar Avenues as well as Olive and Linden Streets; buffered bike lanes on Cedar, South Washington, and Mattes Avenues; and striped bike lanes on Washington, Adams, and Monroe Avenues as well as Vine, Linden, and Birch Streets.
 - The introduction of buffered bike lanes would require updated legislation from the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

In all, the connectivity plan is filled with tales of success from other cities that have previously done the unthinkable, like reverting to two-way traffic and implementing all-way stop signs where traffic lights once hung. The results often include the revitalization of downtowns and their associated businesses from as nearby as Lancaster, Pa., and as far as Sacramento, Calif.

Residents can view the study on the City’s website, [scrantonpa.gov](https://www.scrantonpa.gov).

ABOUT THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) OF 2021: ARPA is a \$1.9 trillion federal economic stimulus bill. The City of Scranton has been awarded \$68.7 million in ARPA funds to respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency and its economic impacts. The mission of Scranton’s ARPA program is to give people access to resources, rebuild the infrastructure systems that impact their everyday lives, and foster equitable wealth generation that targets the needs of Scranton residents.