



Image: Chester County Planning Commission

## Part 4 | Conclusions

### Overall Station Site Evaluation

This study determined that there are two feasible locations for a train station in East Whiteland Township, Chester County: Immaculata and Three Tun. Each of two potential sites hold distinct advantages and disadvantages. However, it would be possible to construct, allow access to, and provide service at either location.

Many factors went into the determination that these two sites could support a train station, as detailed in Parts 1-3 of this study. The key factors that should be considered for implementation include:

- Consistency with Local and Regional Plans
- Train Service Frequency
- Relationship to Other Planned Railroad Improvements
- Site Constraints
- Property Ownership
- Competing Uses for the Site
- Access & Circulation
- Ridership
- Capital Cost
- Constructability
- Local Support

These considerations are detailed on the table on the following page. The table highlights factors where one of the station sites offers a distinguishable advantage in comparison to the other site.

### Stakeholder and Public Input

Stakeholders reviewed and provided input regarding the overall station site evaluation and potential next steps. Additionally, draft findings were presented to the public.

Overall Site Evaluation Table

*Shaded boxes represent distinct advantage for the particular site.*

	Immaculata Station Site	Three Tun Station Site
<b>Consistency with Local and Regional Plans</b>	– Strongly supports East Whiteland Township’s plans to revitalize Route 30 due to a more direct connection and walking access to/from Route 30	– Generally supports East Whiteland Township’s plans to revitalize Route 30
<b>Train Service Frequency</b>	– ~60 minute headways for weekday service with current track infrastructure – Potential for ~30 minute headways for weekday service with planned track improvements	– ~30 minute headways for weekday service with current track infrastructure
<b>Relationship to Other Planned Railroad Improvements</b>	– May require coordination related to improvements to Glen Interlocking – See note above regarding Train Service Frequency	– Need for close coordination with Amtrak’s planned improvements for Frazer Interlocking and Frazer Yard Access
<b>Site Constraints</b>	– Topography requires regrading	– Steep topography requires significant regrading
<b>Property Ownership</b>	– Potential public-private partnership for use of property owned by the Sisters of IHM – Requires property from Norfolk Southern and 2–3 private property owners for access and circulation improvements	– Requires property from two private property owners for station facilities – Requires additional private property for access and circulation improvements
<b>Competing Uses for the Site</b>	– Site is not likely to be developed in the near term due to property ownership and existing access limitations	– Significant potential for the site to be developed with a commercial use in the near term given the existing zoning and recent development activity along Three Tun Road
<b>Access &amp; Circulation</b>	– \$24,049,000 Estimated Cost for Access and Circulation improvements – Requires new access roadway – Opportunities for multiple points of access	– \$13,340,000 Estimated Cost for Access and Circulation improvements – Existing roadway access
Route 30	– Direct multimodal access to Route 30 with proposed Planebrook Loop	– Less direct access to Route 30, particularly for bicyclists, pedestrians, and bus/shuttle
Immaculata University	– Direct multimodal access to campus and other related destinations	– No direct access to campus
Regional Highways		– More direct vehicular (park-n-ride) access to/from Route 30 and regional highway network
Bus/Shuttle	– More direct access to/from Route 30 for existing bus routes and potential shuttle operations with proposed Planebrook Loop	– Requires longer diversion from existing bus routes on Route 30
Bike/Ped	– Convenient access and shorter walking times to/from Route 30 and Immaculata University	– Longer walking times to/from Route 30, Immaculata University, and nearby residential neighborhoods
<b>Ridership</b>	– 530 weekday boardings forecasted in 2035 with half hourly service – 385 weekday boardings forecasted in 2035 with hourly service – Higher ridership from non-drivers and higher number “new” riders to the regional rail system (approximately 230 for half hourly service and 130 for hourly service) – Greater potential for growth in ridership beyond 2035	– 360 weekday boardings forecasted in 2035 with half hourly service – Higher ridership from drive-trips – Lack of “new” riders to the SEPTA system compared to ridership forecast for the “no-build” alternative
<b>Capital Cost</b>	– \$121,567,000 Estimated Total Station Project Cost (2019)	– \$92,852,000 Estimated Total Station Project Cost (2019)
<b>Constructability</b>	– Potential site access constraints due to Frazer Yard – Requires new access roadway to station site for construction – Requires coordination, approvals, and right-of-way from Norfolk Southern	– Limited site access due to steep slopes and residential neighborhood on south side of the tracks – Existing roadway access – Requires limited coordination with Norfolk Southern – Platform/track configuration and railroad infrastructure may be impacted by planned improvements for Frazer Interlocking and Frazer Yard Access
<b>Local Support</b>	– General preference expressed for station site at public meeting, particularly given relationship to Route 30 and Immaculata University, as well as opportunities for multiple points of access – Strong support from Sisters, Servants of IHM and Immaculata University	

**Stakeholder Meeting #3 (May 21, 2019):** The focus of the third and final stakeholder meeting was reviewing the ridership forecasts, cost estimates, and potential next steps. Stakeholders identified the need for an additional ridership forecasting model run (half hourly service to the Immaculata Site) and provided input on additional potential next steps that would lead to implementation. The stakeholders also expressed their support for the Immaculata site being selected as the preferred station site.

**Final Public Presentation (June 12, 2019):** The draft findings and recommendations from the report were presented to the public at a regularly scheduled East Whiteland Township Board of Supervisors meeting. Comments and questions received from the public included: how this project is consistent with East Whiteland Township’s goals for creating a walkable village in Frazer; what is included in the cost estimates and how the project would be funded; concern about how the station would be accessible to people of all abilities; the possibility of shuttle buses to Immaculata University and other destinations; and support for half-hourly service to the Immaculata Station.

### Factors for Success—Preferred Station Site

While a variety of factors need to fall in line in order for a new station in East Whiteland to become a reality, one of the key factors for success is local and regional support. Project support and leadership is critical for identifying, advocating, and securing funding for continued planning, design and construction of the train station.

During the study process, all of the local stakeholder organizations and institutions expressed their strong support and preference for the Immaculata Station site. More specifically, the Immaculata Train Station is supported by East Whiteland Township, Immaculata University, Sister Servants of the IHM, and the Transportation Management Association of Chester County. Support from Immaculata University and Sister Servants of the IHM and TMACC is documented in Appendix 4.1. These stakeholders noted the following key factors for why the Immaculata Station site is their preferred site for the new station.

- **Consistency with community vision and goals** —East Whiteland Township envisions Frazer as a walkable, inviting downtown. This is documented in the township’s Comprehensive Plan and the [Route 30 Corridor Master Plan](#). The Immaculata site, with the Planebrook Loop and pedestrian overpass, is closer and better connected to one of the potential western mixed-use centers

identified in the Route 30 Corridor Master Plan. The Immaculata site presents opportunities for the train station to support mixed-use and walkable development along Route 30. Additionally, the train station is consistent with Immaculata University's plans to attract and expand opportunities for students and staff.

- **Access to Route 30**—The Immaculata site, with the proposed Planebrook Loop, has the potential to provide a better connection to Route 30 for all user types than the Three Tun Site. This is supportive of the township's goal to create a village setting in Frazer with a mix of land uses that are accessible to pedestrians, bicycles, transit users, and motorists. Additionally, development of the Immaculata Station provides a pedestrian connection between Immaculata's campus (and the related institutions) and Route 30.
- **Competing uses for the site and future development potential**—A portion of the property needed for the Immaculata Station site is owned by the Sisters, Servants of IHM. At this point, the Sisters, Servants of IHM support use of their property for a train station and do not have any other immediate plans to develop the site for other purposes. Whereas, the property needed for the Three Tun Station site is privately owned and one lot is for sale. Given recent development activity along Three Tun Road, there is a strong potential for the Three Tun Station site properties to be sold or developed in the near term. Development of the Three Tun Station site properties would make construction of the train station at that location more challenging and more costly. Additionally, the size of the available property and proximity to Immaculata University provides the potential for future transit oriented development surrounding the Immaculata Station. If the Sisters of IHM (or a subsequent property owner) would elect to develop this area, there are several considerations and constraints that influence the development potential and those are highlighted in Appendix 4.2.
- **Ridership**—Based on DVRPC's ridership forecasts, the Immaculata Station supports higher ridership, particularly with half hourly service. The Immaculata Station also supports a higher number of non-drivers and a higher number of "new" riders to the regional rail system. Additionally, the site has greater potential for future growth in ridership beyond 2035 given the proximity to Immaculata University and the connection to Route 30.

With strong local support for the Immaculata Station site and lack of clear and distinct advantages for the Three Tun Station site, continued planning efforts should focus on advancing the Immaculata Station site.

### Next Steps

A new train station in East Whiteland Township is a long term capital project that will require significant investment of time and resources. Notably, local and regional support needs to be built, a funding strategy needs to be developed, and key supportive infrastructure projects need to be advanced. These key next steps are outlined below and will help to advance implementation of a new train station in East Whiteland Township.

#### **Form a Train Station Coalition**

High levels of local and regional support are required for a project of this scale and magnitude to succeed. One or more committed champions must be prepared to see this project through a long-term process that could take many years and likely decades before the first passenger service is provided in Frazer. One key individual or organization to carry the torch and provide continuity and persistence needs to be identified. Local and regional support may strengthen or fade over time, so a consistent message will be vital to this projects success.

Currently, the Immaculata Train Station is supported strongly by East Whiteland Township, Immaculata University, Sister Servants of the IHM, and TMAAC. This small group can be the foundation of a coalition of supporters and build upon the momentum from this study to gain additional support for the project. This group should set realistic and achievable short and medium-term goals to work towards the ultimate goal of providing passenger rail service in East Whiteland Township. Some of the short-term goals are listed below.

1. Identify the core stakeholders to make up a coalition group to meet regularly and monitor the progress of the train station.
2. Engage legislators, planning partners (i.e. SEPTA, Amtrak, PennDOT, Chester County, etc.), and other stakeholders by inviting them to coalition meetings and voicing a clear mission to decision makers.
3. Build local community support from residents and businesses that would benefit from the train station in Frazer, and keep the community engaged with regular updates.

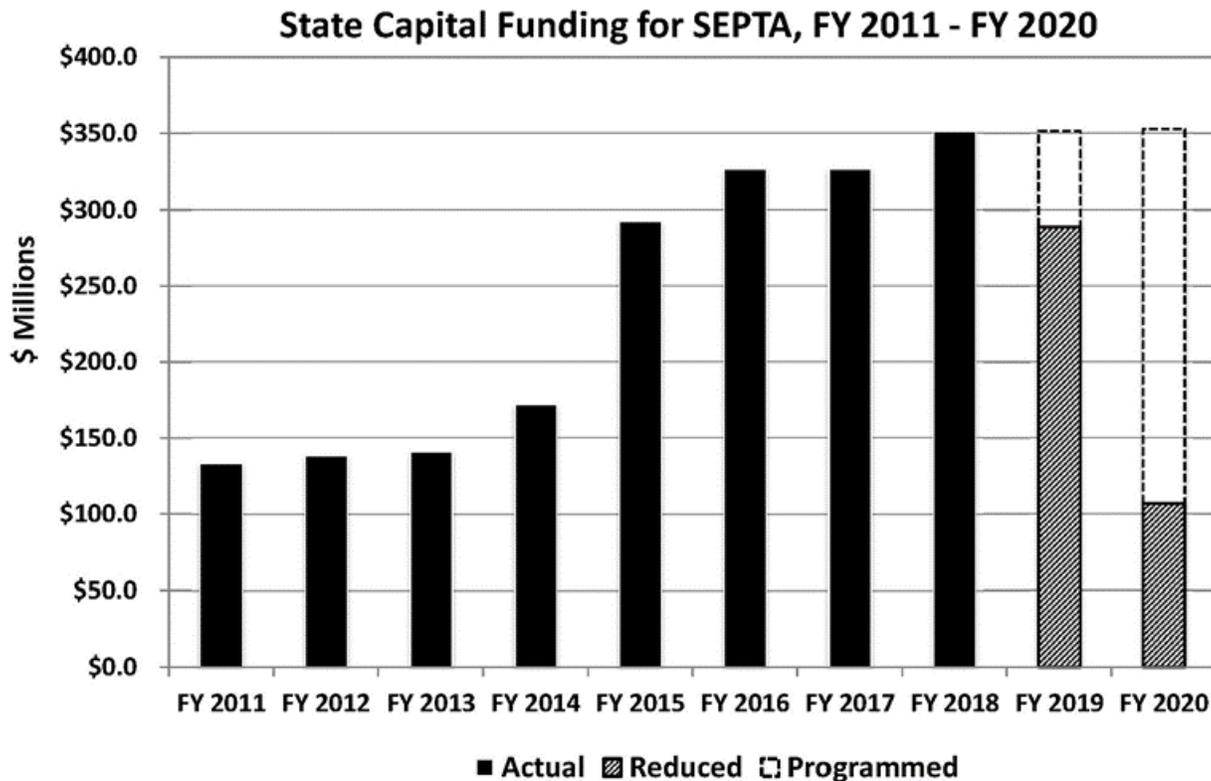
The primary short-term goal for the coalition should be to advocate for the train station project to be included in Chester County's Transportation Priority Projects. This list is updated every two years, and it serves as the basis of projects considered for inclusion in DVRPC's Long Range Plan. It is also submitted for consideration to the

State Transportation Commission. This is a first step towards advocating for the project to be included on DVRPC’s Long Range Transportation Plan, DVRPC’s Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and SEPTA’s Capital Budget. The coalition can also take a leadership role in advancing the other next steps outlined below.

**Evaluate Funding Options**

Currently, there is uncertainty related to federal and state funding, particularly for public transportation capital improvements. At the state level, Act 44 (2007) and amended by Act 89 (2013) require the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission to provide PennDOT with \$450 million annually through June 2022 for transit capital improvements across the state. Starting in Fiscal Year 2022, the payments are reduced to \$50 million. This is illustrated by the graph below from SEPTA’s FY 2020 Capital Budget Proposal showing historic and expected state capital funding for SEPTA.

Without a new dedicated funding source for transit capital improvements statewide, projects that are currently in the planning or design phases may be delayed or suspended. This increases the backlog of transit capital projects and will impact SEPTA’s ability to advance future transit expansion projects, such as designing and constructing a new train station.



The possible funding mechanisms for a project of this scale are somewhat limited. The traditional method of funding the project through SEPTA's Capital Budget and the regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) can take many years due to financial constraints, focus on a state of good repair for transportation investments, and competition for limited funds. However, there are other funding options that may have the potential to accelerate project delivery. The list below outlines some of these funding mechanisms.

- **SEPTA Capital Budget / Regional TIP**—As outlined above, funding stability is a big question, and there are many other transit capital projects and even other station improvement projects ahead of this one in the queue.
- **Grant Funding**—There are various grants available for public transportation enhancements. However, due to the relatively localized impact, it is unlikely that this project would receive a grant large enough to cover the total cost of building a new train station. However, smaller federal and state grants could be applied to fund components of the project that have some independent utility.
- **Tax Increment Financing**—This is a public financing method that is used to subsidize infrastructure projects. Taxing bodies, including the County, School District, and Municipality, must approve utilization of all or a portion of taxes derived from future development to pay for certain improvements related to the development project.
- **Transit Revitalization Investment District (TRID) and Transportation Partnership Districts** — State legislation enables the formation of special districts that allow municipalities to cooperate with one another, transit agencies, and private sector partners to provide funding for transportation improvement projects that support economic growth and development.
- **Public / Private Partnership**— This is a cooperative arrangement between governmental entities and private corporations. They exist in many different forms, but generally are intended to provide innovative project delivery and financing models. For the Immaculata Station, the Sister Servants of the IHM have expressed an interest in partnering to advance the project by providing land specifically for the train station. (See Appendix 4.1.)

It is likely that, in order to get the required funding for a project of this scale, a combination of the funding strategies above will have to be employed. The coalition that is established to advance the train station

project will need to perform additional research into each of these strategies to determine what is appropriate and feasible in East Whiteland Township.

### **Complete Additional Plans and Studies**

While this Feasibility Study provides a comprehensive planning foundation for the project, there are additional plans and studies that can be undertaken to advance implementation. Future plans and studies might be related to evaluating potential project benefits and funding options. Potential topics for studies include:

- Analysis of the potential economic development impact of the proposed station;
- Evaluation of potential transit oriented development or other private partnership opportunities; and
- Development of ridership forecasts for other build alternatives that reflect different train service/schedules.

### **Advance Design and Construction of Early Action—Access and Circulation Improvements**

Several of the access and circulation improvements will address existing transportation deficiencies and will also benefit a future train station. Many of these improvements were identified in previous local plans, including East Whiteland Township’s Act 209 Study and the Route 30 Corridor Master Plan. Advancing design and construction of these improvements will provide benefits to the community in the near term and decrease the cost for access and circulation improvements associated with the train station in the future. Listed below (in priority order) are access and circulation improvements that can be implemented in the near term given the relative cost.

#### **1. Route 30 and Sproul Road (Route 352) Intersection Improvements**

This intersection improvement was identified in East Whiteland Township’s Act 209 Study and the Route 30 Corridor Master Plan. The potential scope of improvements includes providing the following additional turn lanes:

- Eastbound Route 30 Right Turn Lane
- Northbound Sproul Road (Route 352) Left Turn Lane

The total estimated project cost is \$4.5 to \$5 million.

#### **2. Removal of Bridges for Abandoned Rail Lines on Ravine Road**

There are two existing railroad bridges for abandoned rail lines on

Ravine Road. The northernmost bridge is for the inactive Philadelphia and Thorndale Line and the southernmost bridge is for the inactive West Chester Branch. The bridges have lower vertical and horizontal clearances that limit traffic flow and create safety concerns. The northernmost bridge is located close to the intersection of Phoenixville Pike and Ravine Road and near the proposed alignment for the Planebrook Loop, which is part of the Immaculata Station concept plan. Removing this bridge would reduce the cost and complexity of implementing the Planebrook Loop. The southernmost bridge is located at a S-curve in Ravine Road and has stop signs for both directions of travel due to the limited width and sight distance. Removing this bridge would improve safety and traffic flow along Ravine Road. Developing cost estimates for the removal of these structures would require additional engineering evaluation.

### 3. Pedestrian Connections Along Sproul Road (Route 352)

Pedestrian access between the Route 30 corridor and Immaculata University and residential neighborhoods to the south is limited due to the lack of sidewalks and the constrained railroad bridge for Amtrak's Keystone Corridor rail line. Adding sidewalk connections and reopening the pedestrian tunnel under the railroad tracks to the east of Sproul Road (Route 352) would enhance pedestrian access to destinations on Route 30, Immaculata University and related institutions, and the proposed train station. The total estimated project cost is \$4 to \$5 million.

### 4. Sproul Road (Route 352) and College Avenue Intersection Improvements

Installing a traffic signal at Sproul Road (Route 352) and College Avenue was identified in East Whiteland Township's Act 209 Study. With College Avenue serving as a key access point for the proposed Immaculata Train Stations, turning lanes and additional improvements may be needed. The total estimated cost for the traffic signal and related improvements is \$1.5 to \$2 million.

The coalition can advocate for federal and state transportation funding for these projects through DVPRC's Transportation Improvement Program. Additionally, there are a number of competitive grant funding sources that can be considered and pursued for these early action access and circulation improvements, including:

- PennDOT Multimodal Transportation Fund
- Commonwealth Financing Authority (CFA) Multimodal

Transportation Fund

- DVRPC Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Program
- PennDOT and DVRPC Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program

**Support Track and Infrastructure Improvements along the Keystone Corridor/Paoli –Thorndale line**

PennDOT’s Bureau of Public Transportation, Amtrak, and SEPTA are actively planning and designing a number of railroad infrastructure improvements along the Keystone Corridor/Paoli-Thorndale Rail line. As plans and designs are advanced, the coalition should advocate for the future East Whiteland Train Station to be considered and not precluded in the design processes. For example, implementation of the new Potts Interlocking would benefit the future East Whiteland Train Station. The coalition can advocate for design and construction of the Potts Interlocking in the near term, which will likely expand train service options for the new station in the future.