

# Hear Every Voice

## Case Study: Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission Dots & Dashes



Meeting activity used to educate participants, prioritize plan elements, and create consensus in the public transit planning process

Philadelphia metropolitan area, encompassing the City of Philadelphia and adjacent cities and counties in Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC)

### Project Details

### Location

### Organizations

Visualization

**Context:** Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) is the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the Delaware Valley. Spanning two states, nine counties, and three public transit systems, the DVRPC addresses key issues for the Philadelphia region.

**Public Involvement:** The DVRPC provides many opportunities for public participation, and the Dots & Dashes game is one successful way the Commission has engaged the public in transportation planning. Conceived of as a way to engage the public in a new way beyond the typical open house or public meeting, the intent of the Dots & Dashes game is to capture regional priorities, educate stakeholders regarding the tradeoffs required to compose a plan, and provide consensual input into the public transit planning process (Hacker n.d., a). Dots & Dashes was funded by the Federal Transit Administration Public Transportation Participation pilot program.

An extension of an earlier exercise named the Dollar Game, the Dots & Dashes game is a hands-on group exercise used to gather input and ultimately inform DVRPC's Long Range Plan, a new Regional Transit Vision Plan, and other future projects. The game consists of a large game board, game pieces, group worksheets, and game instructions.

The game board is designed to "balance simplicity... with sufficient information to inform players' decisions and generate constructive conversation" (Hacker n.d., b). The board shows a map of the area and includes elements such as major roads and all rail routes for orientation to the existing transportation network; significant employment, shopping, and commercial centers to use as player landmarks; Smart Growth Development Centers from DVRPC's Destination 2030 Long Range Plan; and areas with population and job densities that are most supportive of transit are shaded in gray (DVRPC 2008).

### Case Summary

Internet

Meeting Activity

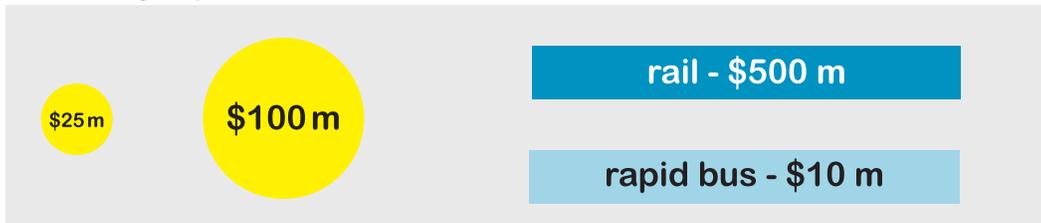
### Dots & Dashes game board



Source: <http://www.dotsanddashes.org>

Dot and dash adhesive stickers are used as game pieces. The dots and dashes are two different sizes and have different monetary values which reflect the rough cost of the improvements covered by that game piece, inflated to 2030 dollars and in scale with the game board (Hacker n.d., b). The dots are for node (or spot) improvements and the dashes are for corridor (or line) improvements.

### Dots & Dashes game pieces



Source: <http://www.dotsanddashes.org>

Group worksheets consist of a group decision sheet, a game log, and a list of projects that were selected as potential projects as part of a previous effort called Destination 2030. The group decision sheet indicates the total amount the group can spend between now and 2030 (\$5 billion), and has some additional information and questions for the group to complete prior to playing the board game. The game log is for group members to indicate nominated projects, project locations, estimated costs, and running group total. This is a helpful worksheet when group members have to narrow the list of nominated projects to those that the group ultimately chooses to fund on the game board.

### Group worksheets

**DOTS & DASHES – Group Decision Sheet**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Team Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Dots & Dashes Dollars budget to spend between now and 2030: \$5.0 Billion**

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1. Decide as a group how much of your budget, if any, you would like to spend on System Improvements (i.e. improvements to the existing transit system). If you choose to invest money in System Improvements, you need at least a billion dollars to make a noticeable difference over 20+ years. Examples include:

- Modern fare systems, including 'smart cards'
- Fares that can be used on SEPTA, PATCO, and NJ TRANSIT
- Trains and/or buses with more amenities
- Faster or more frequent train and/or bus service
- Real-time information and better signage (e.g. 'next bus/train in X minutes') throughout the system

System Improvements Budget: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

2. If your group has chosen to allocate money to System Improvements (Step 1), please list up to three (3) priorities for improvements you'd like to see this money spent on:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

3. The remaining money after System Improvements (Step 1) are subtracted from the initial \$5 Billion is available for System Expansion. This is the Dots & Dashes budget to be spent over 20+ years on transit system expansion projects such as:

- New rail lines and/or 'rapid bus' routes
- New transportation centers
- New stations and/or parking garages

This is your Dots & Dashes System Expansion Budget: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please **carry over this dollar amount to the Game Log** on the next page.

**DOTS & DASHES – Game Log**

Re-write Dots & Dashes System Expansion Budget here: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

As projects are agreed among the group as final, subtract each from the number above in the running total column.

| Nominated Project Description | Project location (from / to) | Estimated Cost (measured) | Running Total (for final projects) |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
|                               |                              |                           |                                    |
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Source: <http://www.dotsanddashes.org>

Prior to playing the game, participants watch a presentation that provides background information on the DVRPC's efforts and clearly describes the game, game pieces, and the game tasks. Participants work in groups, and the first task is for participants to decide how to split their spending between two options: (1) improvements to the existing system or (2) network expansion. Improvements consist of efforts like fare modernization, greater transit frequencies, or transit station enhancements. Expansion is considered new development in the system, such as new rail or bus rapid transit (BRT) corridors, new transit stations, or major transit station expansions.

During the game, participants have a chance to voice their opinions and nominate projects for consideration. All nominated projects are added to the game log, which is collected along with the game board at the end of the evening. After participants nominate projects, the group is required to agree on a set of projects to fund, and only when this consensus is reached do participants put the dots and dashes on the game board.

Participants are given one hour to complete this task, and facilitators are available to answer questions or provide help if necessary. As groups conclude their work, all participants are asked to initial or sign the game board to indicate that group members agreed on the final results. Participants can follow up by tracking the results from the meetings posted online at the Dots & Dashes website [www.dotsanddashes.org](http://www.dotsanddashes.org).

*“A communicative, consensus building approach to public participation in planning takes stakeholders beyond their own immediate needs, or those of just a specific project. Instead, planning issues are views in a broader, more holistic way. This type of outreach is especially imperative to public transportation planning, which, by its very nature, crosses many communities in a given region, and affects many different stakeholder groups” (Hacker n.d., a).*

a. Hacker, J. N.D.a. DVRPC and public participation in transit planning. Retrieved from <http://www.dvrpc.org/Transit/PublicParticipation.htm>

b. Hacker, J. N.D.b. What is the dots and dashes game? Retrieved from <http://www.dvrpc.org/Transit/Game.htm>

DVRPC. 2008. What is the dots & dashes game? Retrieved from <http://www.dotsanddashes.org/game.htm>.

## References

### Hear Every Voice Contact Information

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