



The Legislative Process Event Summary

Location: Online event

Date: Thursday, April 1, 2021

Time: 6:30-7:30 pm



About UpNext North Jersey

UpNext North Jersey (UpNext) is an emerging leaders group that engages young North Jersey residents in a dialogue with the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA). The NJTPA seeks to better understand the values and needs of this demographic group regarding key transportation and land use issues. The NJTPA provides UpNext members with unique opportunities to learn about and discuss timely topics related to regional planning and public policy, develop a network of peers who share similar interests, and engage with regional thought leaders and decision-makers.

The Public Outreach and Engagement Team, part of the Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers University (Rutgers-POET) works with the NJTPA to plan quarterly events for UpNext members. This is the fourth UpNext event for FY 2020-2021, following events on active transportation in September 2020, emerging transportation technologies in December 2020, and climate change in January 2021.

Overview of *The Legislative Process* Event

This event focused on the process for developing transportation legislation in New Jersey. The event consisted of a presentation and question-and-answer session with NJ Assemblyman Daniel Benson, Chair of the Transportation and Independent Authorities Committee in the General Assembly. Assemblyman Benson's presentation described the typical process by which policy ideas and solutions are developed and signed into law. He also answered questions from UpNext members about key transportation issues in North Jersey, such as funding for public transit, policies governing micromobility use, and updates on the Gateway tunnel and Portal Bridge projects.

Planning and Promotion

Leading up to the event, Rutgers-POET worked with NJTPA staff to plan and promote the event. Rutgers-POET promoted the event through social media and email invitations to UpNext members. Members received a save-the-date invitation, followed by several emails to provide more information. Rutgers-POET also promoted the event on the UpNext Facebook group and created an RSVP page. Prior to the event, Rutgers-POET circulated information about Assemblyman Benson's recent legislative priorities and encouraged members to come prepared with questions.

Agenda

6:30 to 6:35 pm – Welcome and Introduction: Mary D. Ameen, NJTPA Executive Director, welcomed attendees and introduced Assemblyman Benson.

6:35 to 7 pm – Presentation on New Jersey's Legislative Process: Assemblyman Benson provided an overview of how elected officials and their staff turn policy ideas into laws and described the steps and interests involved in that process. He then spoke about his work on the Transportation Committee, including bills he has recently sponsored and upcoming priorities. He also described how members of the public can help push for legislation.

7 to 7:25 pm – Q&A Session: Assemblyman Benson took questions from UpNext members about bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, how funding is managed for large transportation projects, the future of public transit in the region, and other transportation policy topics.

7:25 to 7:30 pm – Future Event Ideas Discussion: Miriam Salerno, Rutgers-POET staff, informed members about potential plans for the next event. She also encouraged members to suggest ideas for future events. These suggestions are summarized below.

Attendance

Sixteen UpNext members attended this virtual event. Rutgers VTC and NJTPA staff also attended.

Q&A Session Summary

UpNext members posed questions to Assemblyman Benson regarding his knowledge about various transportation policy and planning initiatives in the region. Members asked about the political feasibility of expanding bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, such as passing legislation to incentivize e-bikes, create more open streets, and develop a creative crosswalks program. Throughout the Q&A session, attendees expressed support for making biking and walking a more viable travel option by creating complete networks of connected sidewalks, multi-use paths, and greenways. Members spoke to the need to create a cultural shift that deemphasizes personal vehicles and prioritizes more efficient and environmentally friendly travel options. They suggested that demonstration projects like parklets and the increase of open streets could help people understand the benefits of alternate transit modes.

Members also were interested in learning about the role of the state legislature in large, multi-jurisdictional transportation initiatives, such as NJ TRANSIT's current bus network redesign process and the Gateway and Portal Bridge projects. They focused on understanding how large infrastructure projects receive funding, and whether there are plans to secure dedicated funding for NJ TRANSIT. Members also discussed the possibility of expanding and better connecting the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail.

Future Event Ideas

The event ended with a brief discussion of ideas for future virtual UpNext events. One member suggested that the group could be assigned a redevelopment area or corridor in the region and come up with ideas for how transportation safety and accessibility could be improved there. The group could also view historical satellite imagery of a given area to understand how transportation decisions of the past still influence the built environment, and how present-day decisions will impact future generations. This conversation could include a historian who specializes in transportation history.