

# A Brief Guide to NJTPA Planning



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*Illustrations by Dean Stanton*

# A Brief Guide to NJTPA Planning

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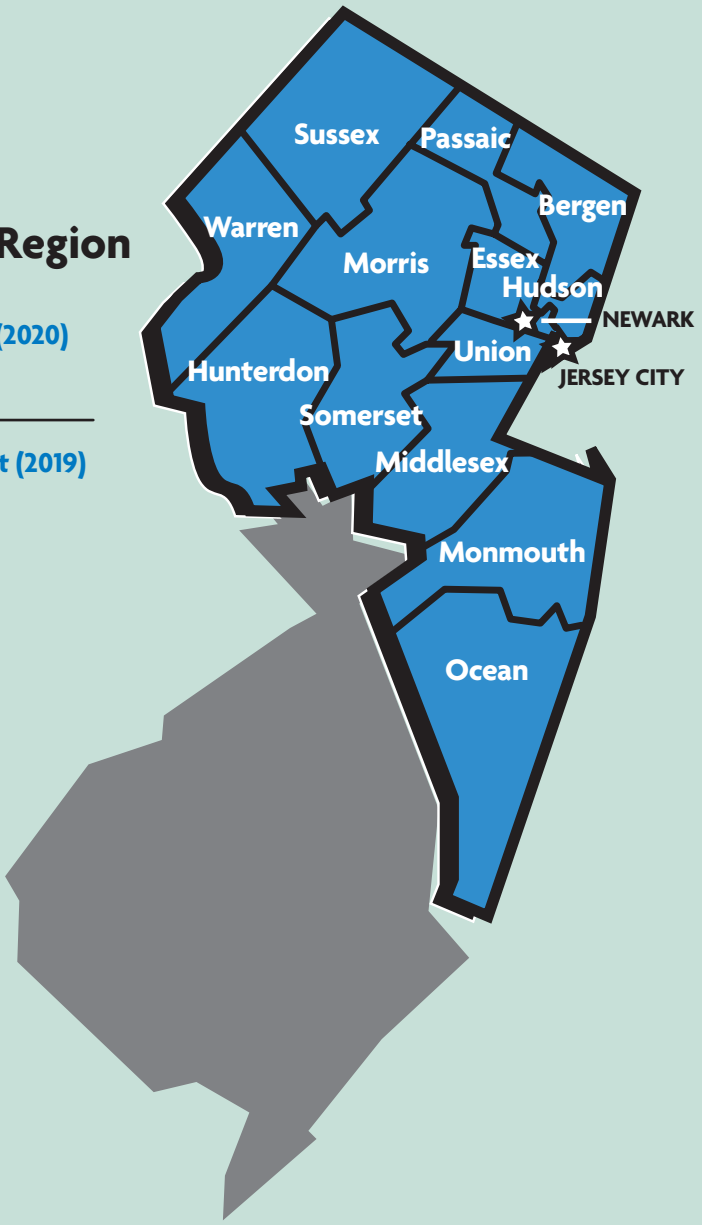
[njtpa.org](http://njtpa.org)



# NJTPA Region

Population (2020)  
7 million

Employment (2019)  
3.1 million





## A Brief Guide to NJTPA Planning

**T**his guide provides an overview of how the NJTPA conducts regional transportation planning—and it lets you know how you can participate in this important process, pointing out various opportunities to get involved. One thing to remember is that the earlier you participate in the process, the more you can influence investments in the transportation system you care about.

Many important decisions regarding a transportation project are made years before a shovel breaks ground, during the early stages of regional planning and project development. The NJTPA thinks about the region's transportation system in the decades to come and sets broad goals and priorities that are then reflected in regional investments.

Early and active involvement means greater influence over how millions—even billions—of public dollars get spent in our region.

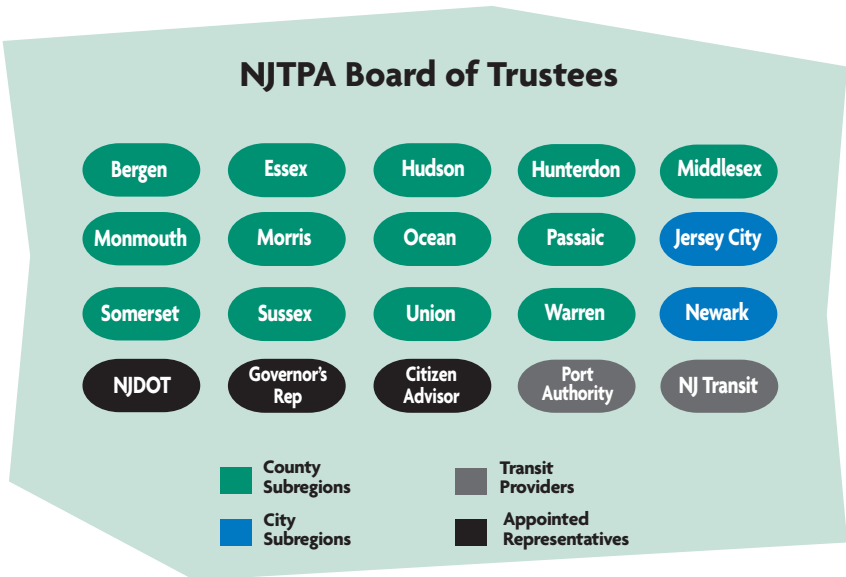


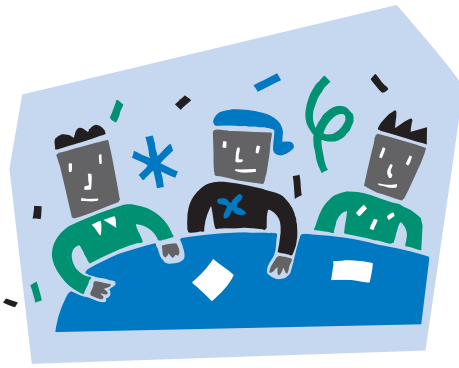
## What is the NJTPA and what does it do?

The NJTPA is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for 13 counties in northern and central New Jersey. The federal government authorizes MPOs to conduct regional transportation planning and oversee transportation investment. This planning process ensures wise investment of federal transportation dollars to improve mobility, promote economic activity and safeguard the environment.

Ultimately, all projects that use federal transportation dollars must be planned and approved through the NJTPA. The NJTPA oversees the investment of more than \$1.5 billion a year in federal transportation funding in our 13-county region.

The NJTPA evaluates and approves proposed transportation improvement projects and programs. We also provide a forum for cooperative transportation planning efforts involving counties, municipalities and government agencies. We sponsor various transportation and planning studies, assist county and city planning agencies and monitor our region's compliance with national air quality goals.





## Who makes NJTPA decisions?

The NJTPA Board of Trustees ultimately makes the critical regional planning and funding decisions that shape our region's future. The NJTPA staff works for the Board, providing techni-

cal guidance and support. The host agency for NJTPA is the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT), which provides human resources and administrative support for the agency. The 20-member board consists mostly of elected officials from the region as well as representatives of key agencies. Board membership is shown on p.4.

The Board meets the second Monday of every other month (commencing in January) either virtually or at the NJTPA offices in downtown Newark. All meetings are open to the public.

Standing committees of the Board meet to review potential NJTPA actions, discuss agency activities and make recommendations to the full

Board. The committees—Planning and Economic Development, Project Prioritization and Freight Initiatives—meet in the months when the Board does not.

Many of the counties and cities represented on the NJTPA Board—known as “subregions”—have transportation committees or advisory boards that meet regularly. Planners and engineers from the subregions participate in a Regional Transportation Advisory Committee.



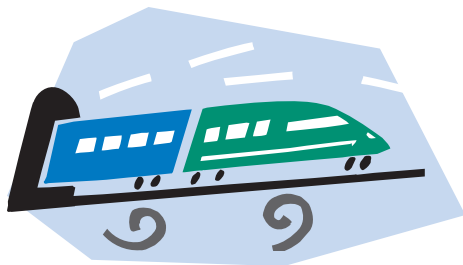
## History & Legislation

Regional planning bodies like the NJTPA were created to address a simple fact about the transportation system: It spans and links numerous communities

over wide areas. A problem in one spot, like a bridge closure or traffic tie-up, can spill over into surrounding areas, hampering the movement of many travelers. Conversely, new services, such as additional bus lines or rail stations, can offer new travel choices to commuters traveling from near and far.

Recognizing this reality, Congress required urbanized regions of the country—areas with more than 50,000 people that constitute distinct “commutersheds”—to establish formal planning bodies for transportation in the early 1970s.

Composed of local elected officials and state agency representatives, these MPOs were tasked with achieving regional agreement on transportation investments. Their approval was required for allocating federal funding for many types of highway and transit projects. MPOs were also given responsibility for overseeing compliance with air quality standards.



The NJTPA is one of three MPOs in New Jersey; the two others are the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization, which covers four counties in the southeastern part of the state, and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, which covers



Philadelphia and surrounding counties including four in South Jersey.

As explained below, the NJTPA's investment priorities guide the state's "implementing agencies"—principally, the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) and NJ TRANSIT—which oversee project design, engineering and construction.

Nationwide, there are 420 MPOs. The NJTPA, serving 7 million people, is the seventh largest in terms of population.

## What is Regional Planning?

As a planning agency, the NJTPA assesses how the transportation system functions and explores approaches to address problems. This includes analyzing data on where and how people travel, freight movement, accident rates, trends in housing and commercial development and a host of other measures. A number of

technical performance measures and targets developed in cooperation with partner agencies help guide the analysis. It often involves using computer models—essentially, desktop simulations of the transportation system—to understand and forecast regional travel and environmental impacts. Often data are arrayed on maps using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to visualize trends and relationships.

NJTPA planning activities include opportunities for public review and comment, with a particular focus on involving traditionally underserved communities. See the end of this guide for specific steps you can take to get involved.

### Online Project Info & Mapping

**Online Transportation Information System (NOTIS) offers citizens an interactive online tool to search and map a wide range of information about transportation projects and studies in the region. Access NOTIS at [notis.njtpa.org](https://notis.njtpa.org).**

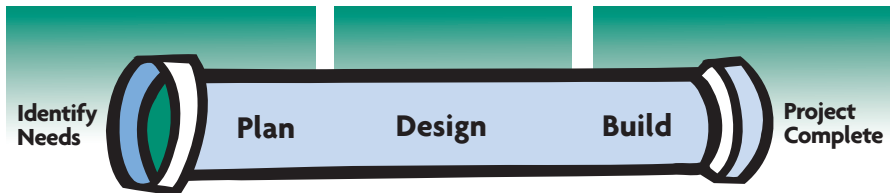
Studies of transportation needs, at both the regional and local levels, are a key means for developing specific improvement projects to repair or improve roads, rails and bridges. The studies typically take a “multimodal” approach, examining a number of transportation alternatives—road, rail, bicycle, pedestrian and possibly more. Many of these studies are conducted in cooperation with the NJDOT and NJ TRANSIT. Others are initiated by city and county subregions, focusing on local needs, with funding and assistance from the NJTPA.

At the same time, NJTPA projects and programs directly help improve regional transportation—including promoting awareness of pedestrian safety through [BeStreetSmartNJ.org](http://BeStreetSmartNJ.org); working with municipalities to make streets more accommodating to all users (complete streets); funding and supporting local shuttles and commuting services; funding small scale projects to address road/intersection hazards; and more.

Partners in these efforts, in addition to state agencies and member subregions, include New Jersey’s eight Transportation Management



## The Project Pipeline



**Long Range  
Transportation Plan**

**Every 4 Years:**

- ▶ Forecast Demographics & Transportation Performance
- ▶ Set Regional Goals & Investment Priorities
- ▶ Identify Specific Needs & Improvements

**Project Development**

**Ongoing:**

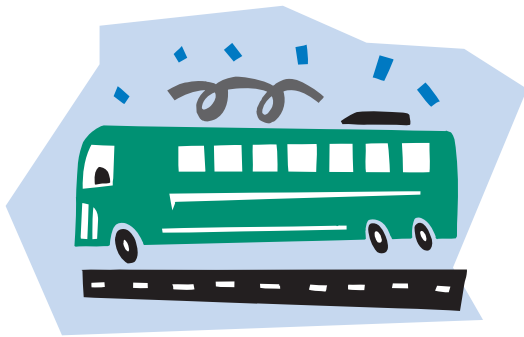
- ▶ Develop Concepts for Projects
- ▶ Environmental Reviews
- ▶ Selection of Preliminary Preferred Alternative

**Transportation Improvement  
Program (TIP)**

**Updated Every Two Years:**

- ▶ Prioritize & Select Projects to Implement
- ▶ Identify Funding
- ▶ Schedule Preliminary Engineering, Property Acquisition, Design & Construction





Associations and the Together North Jersey consortium (see sidebar p. 11).

## The Long Range Transportation Plan

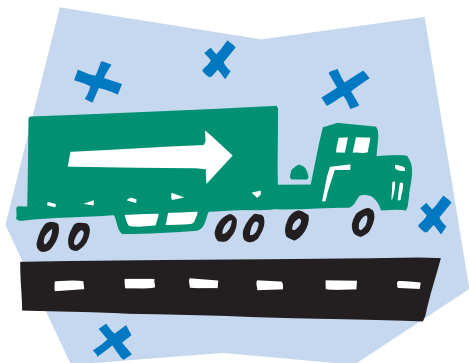
A key NJTPA responsibility is developing and updating the region's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). This long-range plan is a blueprint for 25 years of transportation investment. It is a critical document, because all federally funded transportation projects in the region must flow from and be consistent with the plan. The NJTPA is required to update the plan every four years to reflect our region's ever-evolving conditions and priorities.

In developing the long-range plan, the NJTPA meets extensively with its planning partners—cities, counties and state agencies—throughout the region. And, of course, the public plays a key role through public meetings and workshops, surveys, and other outreach activities, helping shape a long-range vision for our region. These are your opportunities to make your voice heard on key issues and to help set priorities for future investments.

## Which projects get funded?

The long-range plan is implemented through what's commonly called the "project pipeline," the process by which a proposed project addressing a need identified in the plan undergoes the various stages of work





needed to make it a reality (see chart p. 8).

Dealing with some challenges, such as enhancing access to a growing regional center, may require in-depth study of a variety of strategies and alternatives to find the best solution.

This often takes the form of a

Concept Development study in which a “preliminary preferred alternative” is developed. Other types of needs, such as a bridge in need of repair, may involve more straightforward engineering questions.

The NJTPA has special funding and assistance programs to help subregions advance locally important projects. This includes meeting federal environmental requirements and engineering standards, which for the most complicated projects can take years.

Because the region’s needs far outstrip available resources, the NJTPA Board must choose the most pressing and practical needs to address. Once projects are ready to advance to funding, they are subject to a “project prioritization process” in which they are evaluated and scored on criteria related to how well they will fulfill goals of the NJTPA’s Long Range Transportation Plan. For instance, projects that will improve safety in locations with high crash rates receive extra points as do projects that help disadvantaged communities or prepare for climate change impacts.

The NJTPA consults with county and city representatives on the proposed project rankings, discusses the rankings at open public meetings



## Together North Jersey

TOGETHER  
**NORTH  
JERSEY.**

Together North Jersey (TNJ) was created in 2011 to develop the first comprehensive plan for sustainable development for North Jersey. Funded by a \$5 million federal Sustainable Communities grant and nearly \$5 million in leveraged funds from members, the TNJ planning effort brought together a coalition of nearly 100 diverse partners—counties, municipalities, educational institutions, nonprofits, businesses and other stakeholders—to develop the TNJ regional plan.

The TNJ planning process identified a shared and comprehensive vision for a sustainable future for North Jersey. The Plan is centered on land use and transportation, but also includes a broad range of topics such as housing, education, energy, water, the arts, and environmental stewardship.

Since 2016, TNJ partners have been working together to implement the Plan. TNJ advances the Plan's recommended strategies and actions through forums, outreach, local technical assistance and trainings.

of its Project Prioritization Committee and negotiates with the NJDOT and NJ TRANSIT to mesh NJTPA priorities with those of the state and Governor. The scored and ranked projects compose the “project pool” from which investments are drawn.

### How are projects funded?

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) allocates funds to the highest priority projects in the project pool and ensures that the region gets the maximum benefit from all available funding. A project must be



included in the TIP to receive federal funding.

The TIP includes public transit, road, bridge, bicycle, pedestrian and freight-related projects; covers a four-year span; and is updated every two years. It does more than simply list projects—it spells out the anticipated funding schedule and cost for each phase of implementing the project—engineering, design, land acquisition and, finally, construction. The TIP provides a year-by-year view of how government is allocating transportation tax dollars on behalf of citizens.

In addition to programming funding for projects at specific locations, such as redesigned intersections, resurfaced roads, rehabilitated bridges and upgraded traffic signals, the TIP funds transportation programs, which typically involve ongoing activities such as snow removal, bridge painting, maintenance of railroad tracks, etc.

The final TIP, like the LRTP, is subject to a public comment period and must be approved by the NJTPA Board and by the U.S. Department of Transportation.



## How much money is there and what is used for?

The \$3 billion or more invested annually to improve transportation in the NJTPA region includes both state and federal sources—in most years, about evenly split between the two.

Both the state and the federal government maintain special accounts, called transportation trust funds, which receive pro-





# Snapshot of North Jersey Transportation Funding

Fiscal Year 2022: Total \$3.15 Billion

## EXPENDITURES

Transit-Bus  
and Rail Projects/  
Programs

43%  
\$1.35 billion

Highway & Bridge  
Projects/  
Programs

57%  
\$1.80 billion

## NJTPA PLANNING

Transportation  
Improvement  
Program  
(TIP)

PROJECT  
NEEDS

Long-Range  
Plan

## REVENUES

Federal \$

49%  
\$1.54 billion

State \$\*

51%  
\$1.61 billion

\* includes Port Authority and other non-federal funding



ceeds from fuel taxes and other transportation fees and taxes.

The NJTPA has primary responsibility under federal law for the investment of federal transportation funding but it cooperates with the NJDOT and NJ TRANSIT to determine how all available transportation funding, both federal and state, can be most cost effectively applied to meet transportation needs.

Like the long-range plan, the TIP is required to be “fiscally constrained.” That is, it must be based on reasonable estimates of available funding. Nearly half of all the funding in the TIP is allocated to improving highways and bridges, with the remaining amount allocated to bus and rail transit and bicycle/pedestrian improvements. The large allocation for transit reflects the NJTPA’s commitment to safeguarding the environment and providing increased travel choices for residents.

The vast majority of funding allocated through the TIP goes toward maintaining or upgrading existing facilities—a so-called “fix it first” approach—rather than expanding the transportation system.



### **What about environmental impacts?**

Regions such as North Jersey that have been designated as in “non-attainment” of federal air quality standards are required under federal law to take special steps to reduce pollutants.

Each year the NJTPA must demonstrate that the projects it

approves through its TIP and long-range plan will have a net positive impact on air quality and contribute to the achievement of air quality goals—a process called “conformity.”



The NJTPA also administers programs and studies to help achieve state goals for reducing greenhouse gases, protecting natural resources and improving energy efficiency. The project development process discussed above evaluates and creates measures to address environmental impacts from road, bridge and rail projects.

## How can I get involved?

There are many ways you can influence the transportation planning decisions that will shape our future. Here are a few:

- 🌀 Attend NJTPA Board meetings (held every other month) and committee meetings (held on alternating months). A calendar is posted on the NJTPA website ([njtpa.org](http://njtpa.org)).
- 🌀 Attend meetings of your county's transportation board or committee (see contacts, p. 16).
- 🌀 Visit the NJTPA website and follow us on social media (we're on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#)).
- 🌀 Sign-up for the NJTPA **E-List** on the NJTPA website to stay informed and get notified of events.
- 🌀 Request a speaker for a meeting of your community organization, club or school.



# Transportation Contacts



## **NJTPA**

One Newark Center  
17th Floor  
Newark, NJ 07102  
Phone: 973-639-8400  
Fax: 973-639-1953  
[njtpa.org](http://njtpa.org)

## **NJTPA Subregions**

### **Bergen County**

Department of Planning and  
Engineering  
201-336-6428

### **Essex County**

Planning Board  
973-226-8500 x2580

### **Hudson County**

Department of  
Engineering & Planning  
201-369-4340

### **Hunterdon County**

Planning Board  
908-788-1490

### **Middlesex County**

Department of Transportation  
732-745-3061

### **Monmouth County**

Department of Engineering  
732-431-7760

### **Morris County**

Division of Engineering &  
Transportation  
973-829-8111

### **Ocean County**

Department of Engineering  
732-929-2130

### **Passaic County**

Department of Planning  
973-569-4045

## **Somerset County**

Office of Planning, Policy and  
Economic Development  
908-541-5773

## **Sussex County**

Department of Planning  
973-579-0500 x3

## **Union County**

Department of Economic  
Development  
908-558-2273

## **Warren County**

Planning Board  
908-475-6530

## **City of Newark**

Department of Engineering  
973-733-6452

## **City of Jersey City**

Division of City Planning  
201-547-4922

## **Implementing Agencies**

### **New Jersey Department of Transportation**

P.O. Box 600  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0600  
609-963-1982  
[state.nj.us/transportation](http://state.nj.us/transportation)

### **NJ Transit**

One Penn Plaza East  
Newark, NJ 07105  
24-hour transit information:  
973-275-5555  
[njtransit.com](http://njtransit.com)

### **Port Authority**

225 Park Avenue South  
New York, NY 10003  
212-435-7000  
[panynj.gov](http://panynj.gov)

## **Transportation Management Associations**

### **Avenues in Motion**

Serving western Passaic,  
western Essex, Sussex,  
Warren, and Morris counties  
973-267-7600  
[avenuesinmotion.org](http://avenuesinmotion.org)

### **EZ Ride**

Commuter Services  
Serving Bergen, eastern  
Passaic, eastern Essex, Union,  
and Monmouth counties  
201-939-4242  
[ezride.org](http://ezride.org)

### **Keep Middlesex Moving**

Serving Middlesex County  
732-745-4465  
[kmm.org](http://kmm.org)

### **Ridewise**

Serving Somerset County  
908-704-1011  
[ridewise.org](http://ridewise.org)

### **goHunterdon**

Serving Hunterdon County  
908-788-5553  
[gohunterdon.org](http://gohunterdon.org)

### **Hudson TMA**

Serving Hudson County  
201-324-6222  
[hudsontma.org](http://hudsontma.org)

### **Greater Mercer TMA**

Serving Ocean and  
Mercer counties  
609-452-1491  
[gmtma.org](http://gmtma.org)



## **Traffic/Travel Info**

### **511NJ**

Dial 511  
[511NJ.org](http://511NJ.org)



# Stay Informed—Get Involved

- Attend our meetings and events
- Sign up for our email list on [njtpa.org](http://njtpa.org)
- Follow us on  Facebook and  Twitter

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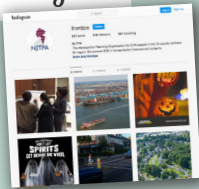
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