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Introduction

TRANSPORTATION . PEOPLE . OPPORTUNITY .

These themes are the focus of this plan and the work of the NJTPA. They signify not only the goal of investing wisely to improve the roads, rails and other infrastructure, but to shape these investments to meet the needs of transportation users and support a thriving, sustainable regional economy for the benefit of all. ■ Those themes have deep roots in the work of the NJTPA in its three-decades-long history as the region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). But, today, emerging from the tumultuous and life-altering events of 2020-2021—pandemic, social isolation, racial reckoning and environmental threats—the themes take on new and different meanings and prompt us to explore new priorities for the future of transportation. ■ This plan inaugurates those efforts, though many uncertainties remain about the long-term impacts of recent events. At the same time, this plan is one of





Cedar Grove, Essex County

continuity, carrying out NJTPA's responsibilities and mandates for ensuring the safe and efficient functioning of the extensive transportation system serving North Jersey which forms the foundation for the regional economy and quality of life.

Policies and investments in this plan will set the trajectory for future development of the region and its transportation system—stretching out to this plan's horizon of 2050.

Transportation. People. Opportunity.

North Jersey's multimodal transportation network is a vital economic asset. In many ways, it is a defining feature of our region, which is home to the largest marine port on the east coast; a major international airport; one of the nation's busiest roads (the New Jersey Turnpike) and rail lines (the Northeast Corridor); the nation's third largest mass transit network; and freight rail yards that are the end point of transcontinental supply chains; and more.

In recent years, the daily onslaught of cars, trucks and buses travelling the road network has resulted in severe congestion in some locations, hampering commerce and commuting, and causing growing

safety and environmental concerns. While the mass transit system offers a convenient alternative for many trips, constrained funding has left it struggling to meet demand. All aspects of the transportation system are hampered by aging infrastructure. And not all segments of the population share equally in the benefits of transportation access.

These problems have demanded attention and investment—\$2 billion or more annually in recent years—and this plan discusses much more that needs to be done. Still, judging by transportation performance in recent years, by-and-large the system has worked well in its essential functions, underpinning the region's dynamic economy and supporting the lives and livelihoods of the region's residents. The transportation system makes possible future growth and progress—the “opportunity” that is a central theme of this plan.

Yet the pandemic and other events, as noted, have presented challenges that require changes in how the transportation system is planned, managed and financed. Some of these changes can be made immediately, while others may take years to fully address. Among the new realities:

- The pandemic has raised public health to a top concern, prompting new public health protocols

for transit systems and requiring new designs and standards for workplaces.

- Some employers have come to rely on remote work arrangements, resulting in fewer commuters, which has reduced revenues, particularly for transit.
- New recognition has been given to addressing the needs of essential workers—many of whom work with low pay and inadequate benefits.
- The impacts of inequality and racial discrimination have gained new national attention, with minority and low-income families suffering disproportionately from both the virus and the economic downturn, and protests nationwide demanding action on racial injustice and institutional discrimination.
- The pandemic greatly increased e-commerce, adding delivery traffic to local roads, challenging freight logistics and altering industrial real estate markets.
- The growing impacts of climate change have added urgency to efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, particularly the large share the transportation sector contributes.

Along with these and other complex challenges, there have been some decidedly hopeful developments, relevant to this plan’s themes:

- People have rediscovered streets in their communities for dining, recreation, and other activities, giving new impetus to “complete streets” designs that serve all modes and people.
- More people have been walking, biking and using other “active” transportation to get around, reducing dependence on vehicles and encouraging residents to spend more time shopping and socializing in their communities.
- People have embraced technology in new ways including greatly expanded remote work, online education, virtual doctor visits and e-commerce. This may help remove transportation barriers for people with mobility limitations and bode well for acceptance of emerging transportation technologies.
- While the pandemic exposed some divisions in society, for many people the shared experience has bolstered their civic spirit, with increases in volunteering and charitable giving. It also prompted many organizations and companies to help those in need, make commitments to undo racial discrimination and take action on climate change.

The impacts and implications of all this are still unfolding. Throughout this plan, NJTPA takes the initial steps to integrate lessons and insights from 2020-21 into its vision for the future.

Developing the plan

This plan fulfills federal requirements for MPOs like the NJTPA, which must update long-range plans every four years as a condition to receive federal transportation funding. This requirement in federal law (23 CFR 450) reflects the need for transportation investments to be based on a “continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive” (3C) planning process that provides “for the development of an integrated multimodal transportation system ... to facilitate the safe and efficient movement of people and goods in addressing current and future transportation demand.” It recognizes that infrastructure improvements made today can last and serve the public for a generation or more to come. The NJTPA’s goals and federal guidance (see sidebar p. 12)

A Future Vision



- **Transportation**, underpinning the regional economy, must be more efficient, safer, more responsive to changing needs and conditions and environmentally sustainable.
- **People**, in all the region’s communities, must be the focus of transportation policy and investments, aimed at equitably enhancing options and access and removing barriers.
- **Opportunity**, in all its facets—for realizing healthy and fulfilling lifestyles, for expanding jobs and commerce, for enhancing access to education, housing, and other needs—must continue to be pursued as the ultimate goal of all transportation policy and investment.



Rahway, Union County

helped shape the content of this plan.

In keeping with the people-focus of this plan, extraordinary efforts were undertaken during the plan's development to gather input from the region's residents and users of the transportation system. While the pandemic made public outreach more challenging, it also opened new opportunities for residents who cannot easily go to physical events. More than 3,000 people submitted online surveys or participated in virtual public meetings, symposia, or targeted outreach to engage underserved populations, including focus groups and a children's activity.

The NJTPA found people and organizations were eager to share their experiences and views. The outreach, summarized in Chapter 2, provided a wealth of insights for helping shape this plan and the ongoing planning work of the NJTPA. Among the most expressed concerns:

- Transit is oriented toward New York City and North Jersey's major cities but often falls short in meeting intrastate travel needs within cities and towns and between less dense communities.
- Affordability of housing and transportation are barriers for many to access opportunity.
- Technology, such as real-time transit information and fare integration, are within reach and are critical to improving access and mobility.
- People want to continue the flexible use of streets that give more public space for walking, biking, and socializing instead of just for vehicles.
- Transportation policies often discriminate against minority communities and fail to meet their needs.

Insights from this public outreach were integrated with the findings of a variety of technical planning activities in developing this plan including forecasting and modeling, preparation of four background policy papers (see Appendix A), and studies of local needs and strategies. This work was conducted in close collaboration with partner agencies, including member city and county "subregions," the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT), NJ TRANSIT, the state's eight Transportation Management Associations (TMAs), and the Together North Jersey (TNJ) consortium, among others.

Collaboration has also been essential to NJTPA's implementation of regional transportation performance measures. Under federal law, MPOs are required to track measures of various aspects of transportation performance, set data-driven targets for the measures, and select projects to help meet those targets. The NJTPA has worked with its partners to develop agreed-upon measures and targets—including for safety, infrastructure preservation, congestion reduction, freight movement and other areas.

This is the first NJTPA long range plan update to include a reporting of the region's progress toward performance targets (Chapter 4, Appendix B). This performance-based planning and reporting ensures accountability and transparency and provides for better investment decisions.

Plan Priorities

In addition to assessing the near-term disruptions and impacts of the pandemic, this plan looks at the long-term prospect that the region's population and economy will continue to grow, adding travel demand to a system already at or above capacity in many locations. Regional population is projected to grow by 15 percent to 7.7 million, vehicle miles of travel will grow by 11 percent and freight movement will grow by 16 percent by 2050. (These projections do not take into account new Census figures released in August 2021).

Along with the overarching themes of Transportation, People, Opportunity, several clear priorities emerged for the region's transportation future, which are reflected throughout this plan:

Safety: Reducing crashes and ensuring the safety of all travelers must continue to be a primary focus across all policies, programs, and investments. New

Jersey updated its Strategic Highway Safety Plan in 2020 to guide investments towards reducing serious injury and fatal crashes for all modes. As the nation’s most densely populated state, New Jersey has suffered high rates of injuries and fatalities on its roads. Pedestrians are particularly vulnerable. With more people walking and biking, renewed safety measures are required, including NJTPA’s funding of local safety projects and support for Street Smart NJ pedestrian safety campaigns.

Accessibility: The region’s planning must continue to shift its focus away from moving vehicles to one of accessibility—that is, using a variety of modes to give people convenient and affordable access to jobs, education, and other opportunities. This shift requires support for a well-funded and responsive bus and rail transit system, promotion of Transit Oriented Development, support for implementing “complete streets” and cultivation of flexible shuttle and shared ride services such as those provided through TMAs, among other approaches.

Equity: The transportation system must more fully address the needs of low-income and minority communities, which have been traditionally underserved and faced with the effects of institutional discrimination. To this end, in January 2021, the NJTPA Board adopted an updated Title VI plan which outlines NJTPA’s civil rights and anti-discrimination policies and guides environmental justice efforts. It establishes the goals and framework for equity measures in this long range plan.

Active Transportation: Walking, biking and other active transportation modes have become increasingly popular in recent years and saw dramatic growth during the pandemic. They help make the transportation system cleaner and more efficient and support public health. A background paper for this plan identified infrastructure improvements and policies the NJTPA will pursue to support active transportation.

Climate Change: North Jersey is particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts due to its dense population and extensive coastline and waterways. A background paper explored measures the NJTPA will take to help reduce greenhouse gases generated by the transportation sector and to adapt infrastructure to meet climate impacts. This includes support for state climate change initiatives and policies.

Transportation Technologies: Technology, such as adaptive traffic signals and electronic tolling, is already making transportation more efficient, improving safety, and reducing the need for expensive capacity expansions. A background paper explored these and other technologies under development, including connected and automated vehicles which could transform future transportation. The NJTPA, through this plan, will continue to support transportation technology applications and guide the region in their use.

Freight: The region has long been a hub for goods movement serving the northeastern U.S. Continued growth of the region’s port and the expansion of e-commerce handled through the region’s distribution centers present important economic opportunities for the region. However, the pandemic has altered retail and business operations, requiring new approaches to key freight issues, as discussed in a background paper that informs this plan.

A Balanced Plan

Guided by these priorities and the NJTPA’s long-standing goals for the region (see sidebar p. 12), this plan presents a balanced vision for investment in the transportation system through the year 2050. Projections prepared for the financial element of this plan (Chapter 7) look to a full economic recovery from the deep impacts of the pandemic over the next five to

Red Bank, Monmouth County



ten years. The NJTPA, at its regular Committee and Board meetings, is prepared to adjust investments and policies in this plan to meet near-term contingencies as the region recovers. For the long-term, the region is projected to resume growth at a rate of 2.3 percent annually, in line with rates prior to the pandemic. While new methods of financing transportation will be needed—including to recoup fuel tax revenue lost to vehicle electrification—this plan foresees an average of \$4.2 billion in year of expenditure (YOE) dollars available annually to attend to current and future needs of the transportation system and make strategic expansions of capacity. This totals approximately \$120.6 billion YOE over the life of the plan.

As in previous long range plans the majority of available funding, 64 percent or more, must be devoted to maintaining and improving existing infrastructure—safeguarding the functioning of the extensive road and rail system that has served the region well, despite its limitations. The road network, as the principal means of moving both people and goods, in particular requires substantial investment for maintenance and improvement. NJTPA works closely with NJDOT and its subregions to identify and attend to these needs.

At the same time, this plan commits to continued improvements to the bus and rail transit system, advancing NJTPA’s priority for accessibility and meeting preferences widely expressed in public outreach. In total, 51 percent of funding



Guidance for Long Range Planning

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his plan builds upon NJTPA’s previous long range plan, Plan 2045, which was adopted by the NJTPA Board of Trustees in November 2017. This plan carries forward key guidance for shaping the future of transportation. In

particular, planning goals which were originally formulated in the 1990s and later expanded set directions for this plan and the work of the NJTPA:

- Protect and improve natural ecosystems, the built environment and quality of life.
- Provide affordable, accessible and dynamic transportation systems responsive to all current and future travelers.
- Retain and increase economic activity and competitiveness.
- Enhance system coordination, efficiency, safety and connectivity for people and goods across all modes of travel.
- Maintain a safe, secure and reliable transportation system in a state of good repair.
- Create great places through select transportation investments that support the coordination of land use with transportation systems.
- Improve overall system safety, reducing serious injuries and fatalities for all travelers on all modes.



Somerville, Somerset County

The NJTPA is also guided by federal planning factors which, under the federal law, must be addressed in MPO long range plans.

is allocated to support the transit network through 2050. A key to the future of the entire transit system, this plan recognizes, is the completion of two new rail tunnels across the Hudson River. If needed additional funding can be secured— as called for in this plan’s “aspirational” scenario—the full series of Gateway projects should be built, providing additional rail capacity serving the entire Northeast Rail Corridor.

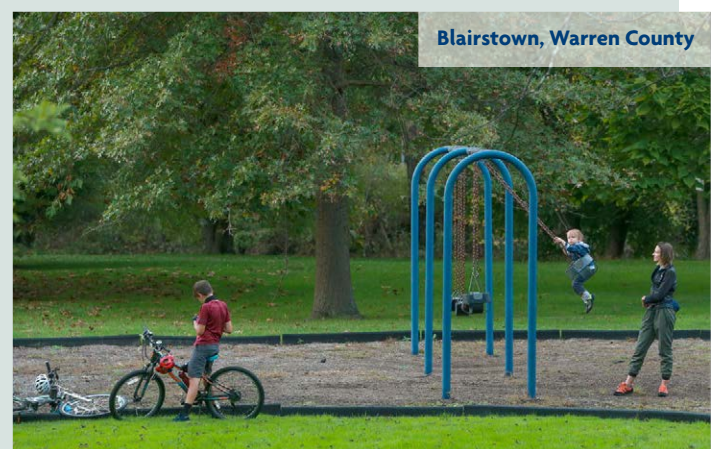
Such major regional investments in the road and transit networks must be matched with investments targeted to meet local needs. This plan includes many such projects, identified through the planning efforts of the NJTPA, its city and county subregions and partner agencies and made possible with federal funding through NJTPA programs. They span the range of

needs on the region’s system—upgrading intersection safety, creating new walk and bike trails, repairing and replacing aging bridges, installing computerized traffic signals, enhancing bus and rails stations, building roundabouts, addressing hazards on rural roads, and much more. Similar planning efforts conducted and supported by the NJTPA over the life of this plan must focus not only on current needs but preparing the region to meet future threats and challenges and realize new opportunities.

In guiding these efforts, this ambitious plan recognizes that maintaining and improving the transportation system, meeting the needs of people, enhancing opportunities and adapting to change is our path to 2050.

- Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity and efficiency.
- Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
- Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
- Increase accessibility and mobility of people and freight.
- Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns.
- Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.
- Promote efficient system management and operation.
- Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.
- Improve the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate stormwater impacts of surface transportation.
- Enhance travel and tourism.

The NJTPA also has established a Regional Capital Investment Strategy (RCIS)—see appendix C—consisting of nine principles and associated objectives to help guide where and how investments are made. All this guidance helps shape NJTPA’s responses to needs in the region and its vision for the future in keeping with the three overarching themes of Transportation, People, Opportunity.





Hackensack, Bergen County



Hoboken, Hudson County

Together North Jersey

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ow does North Jersey remain a place where people want to live and where employers want to locate and expand their businesses? These were some of the key questions

nearly 100 partners—local governments, universities, nonprofits, businesses

and others—set out to answer through the regionwide Together North Jersey (TNJ) consortium formed in 2011.

With the support of a federal grant, TNJ developed the first comprehensive plan for sustainable development for the NJTPA region. Finalized in 2015, the plan provides a strategy to make the region more **competitive**, **efficient**, **livable**, and **resilient**—the four overarching themes that guide all its recommendations. It details 15 focus areas and over 70 strategies the region can pursue to meet these goals. TNJ's vision encompasses more than transportation. It addresses challenges and broad-based aspirations involving economic development, land use, the environment, education, housing, health, the arts, culture, and other issues. The TNJ plan recognizes that the decisions we make in all of these areas—as individuals and as communities—are all connected and affect the larger region.

Led by the NJTPA, Rutgers University and stakeholders across the region, TNJ has continued to shepherd implementation of these recommendations through local capacity-building programs, such as the TNJ Institute, and direct technical assistance to communities through the Local Technical Assistance program. The TNJ Forum and Task Forces also work to guide the implementation of the Plan. Comprised of stakeholders and subject-matter experts from around the region, there is one task force for each of the Plan's four key vision themes: **Competitive**, **Efficient**, **Livable**, and **Resilient**. These task forces convene several times per year to discuss sustainable development challenges in the region and develop actions to further implement the Plan. Currently, the many TNJ partners have been working to update the Plan. Below are some examples of TNJ's key efforts and accomplishments that Plan 2050 will support with long-term transportation investments, policies and programs.

COMPETITIVE



TNJ promotes increased prosperity and access to opportunities by identifying regional priorities that support businesses, workers, and places in the region. Recent Competitive Task Force activities include publication of a report that reviewed regional tourism and economic development marketing practices; research to better understand potential benefits of a regional marketing initiative; and a workshop on post-pandemic workforce and employer needs.

EFFICIENT



TNJ promotes a transportation system that is efficient and equitable for all the region's residents, with a particular focus on strategies that foster development around bus and rail transit hubs. The TNJ Efficient Task Force partnered with the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association to launch a Transit Hub Planning Initiative. This effort explored the creation of vibrant transit hubs in three locations—Dunellen Station, Passaic Bus Depot Transit Hub Project in the City of Passaic and Watsessing Station Transit Hub in Bloomfield. The program aimed to encourage the development of transit hubs around these existing stations, supporting the community's goals for economic development, land use, access to jobs, and cultural development. Other activities include completion of a guidebook for planning around transit and workshops on such topics as transit-oriented development, repurposing brownfields, roundabouts, and micro-mobility.

LIVABLE



A livable region allows all its residents to thrive through access to affordable housing, employment, medical care, healthy food, and attractive and safe communities enriched by arts and culture. To that end, TNJ conducts activities that enhance quality of life, foster community pride and boost local economies. This has included the application of public art and designs for a pedestrian plaza in Hackensack, development of a visitor's guide for Dover and a wayfinding plan for Bound Brook. Other activities include creation of a *Greenway Development Guidebook*, produced in partnership with the NJDOT, which helps communities interested in developing or expanding a greenway to better understand the process and a *Community Food Security Assessment Guidebook* aimed at assisting communities in improving access to healthy food.

RESILIENT



TNJ recognizes that a resilient region is one that equitably addresses the threats of climate change, transitions away from the use of greenhouse gas-generating fossil fuels, and sustainably uses materials and minimizes waste. Task Force initiatives include development of a three-part *Resilience Webinar Series* that explains approaches and tools available to local decision-makers to reduce their communities' vulnerability to climate change, and the *Sustainability & Resilience Toolkit for Local Master Plans*. The toolkit provides guidance on incorporating sustainability and resilience into municipal and county master plans, measures for fostering environmental justice, and guidance and resources on specific strategies for communities to consider.