



# Moving Forward

THIS PLAN HELPS CHART a course through uncertain and

challenging times to continue progress towards a more efficient and sustainable transportation future, holding to the themes of Transportation, People, Opportunity. While the worst of the pandemic appears to be ending as this plan is being finalized for approval in fall 2021, the crisis has altered much about life in North Jersey, including the essential functioning of the transportation system and expectations for how, when and where we travel. ■ Even before the pandemic, other changes, such as the growth of e-commerce, were occurring that only accelerated with the crisis. The NJTPA has been challenged to meet emerging new economic, social, and environmental priorities in its planning work. This includes making our plans and programs more inclusive for the benefit of all and meeting the growing threats of climate change. At the same time, technologies have advanced to offer prospects for new approaches



#### Readington, Hunterdon County

to enduring problems. But despite the changes, many fundamental needs and issues continue—the needs to repair or replace aging bridges, support and expand bus and rail transit, upgrade signals and intersections and much more. As discussed in this plan, meeting these needs and the new priorities will grow more difficult without fresh approaches as demands on the system increase.

The way forward offered by this plan foresees the investment of some \$120.6 billion through 2050, as discussed in Chapter 7. This averages \$4.2 billion per year (factoring in inflation)—a reasonable and fiscally constrained path for future investment. If additional funding can be secured, the region could fulfill a more aspirational approach to improving regional transportation with investment of \$5.1 billion per year.

Despite this and many other possible directions for the future in this plan, it is only a foundation. Much of the analysis, strategies and implementation steps offered are based on conditions over a relatively brief—and tumultuous—period of time since the last plan update in 2017. Congress, in creating the requirement that MPOs update their long-range transportation plans every four years, recognized that the vision

of the future they create must evolve with ever-changing circumstances and opportunities. Thus, many of the prescriptions and recommendations in this plan are likely to evolve based on new realities.

Most immediately, in the coming months and years, the state and region will be on its way to recovering from the deep economic disruptions of the pandemic. Some who lost employment or engaged in remote work likely will return to workplaces in large numbers. At the same time, many employers may adopt new work arrangements that could include continued remote options, new health precautions and less centralized operations as they may move some operations closer to where employees live. These changes will impact commuting patterns, transit ridership, office markets, transportation revenues and much more, requiring a reassessment of trends and key assumptions underpinning NJTPA's transportation planning. There is also recognition that simply returning to the ways of 2019 will not build a more equitable and sustainable future for everyone.

In addition, new federal programs targeted to supporting recovery and improving infrastructure will take full effect and prompt new initiatives at the state, local and regional levels. These efforts will

take advantage of new data from the 2020 Census and ever-improving computing and transportation technologies.

The foundation provided by this plan will allow the region to flexibly meet the challenges and opportunities ahead. As always, this will require close coordination with regional partners, notably the 15 subregions, NJDOT, NJ TRANSIT and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (all of whom sit on the NJTPA Board), as well as Together North Jersey partners, who have collaborated with the NJTPA on many planning initiatives. All of these parties face and are responding to challenges brought on by the pandemic. Notably, NJ TRANSIT and the Port Authority have lost substantial revenue needed for essential operations and improvements due to reduced travel demand during the pandemic.

Like the NJTPA, partner agencies have plans and planning mechanisms to build for the future. Among the key plans and vision documents which were drawn upon in developing this plan and which will continue to guide its implementation are:

- Together North Jersey Regional Plan
- New Jersey 2020 Strategic Highway Safety Plan
- NJTPA Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan (in coordination with the TMAs)
- NJTPA Transportation Demand Management Plan
- Port Authority 2017–2026 Capital Plan
- NJDOT Statewide Freight Plan
- NJT2030 (NJ TRANSIT 10-Year Strategic Plan)
- NJDEP 80x50 Report
- The Fourth Regional Plan (Regional Plan Association)

NJTPA's coordination with partner agencies and organizations is facilitated not only by ongoing communications, including extensive collaboration at the staff level, but by the fact that there is a remarkable degree of consensus reflected in them about regional priorities and investments. This agreement includes support for the critical Hudson River Tunnel project to safeguard current transit commuting between New Jersey and New York and the larger Gateway Program to realize additional trans-Hudson capacity on which the future of efficient rail travel along the multistate Northeast Corridor depends. The interagency consensus also encompasses essential priorities in all areas

cited in the introduction as the focus of initiatives in this plan—safety, accessibility, equity, active transportation, climate change, transportation technologies and freight.

NJTPA's coordination and collaboration to meet common goals extends to agencies in the wider metropolitan region, particularly neighboring MPOs: the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council, the MPO for New York City and downstate New York with which the NJTPA collaborates on forecasting and other efforts affecting the bi-state region; the two other MPOs in New Jersey, the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission; the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, the MPO for the Allentown, Pennsylvania area adjacent to the NJTPA's western border; and the Metropolitan Area Planning (MAP) Forum, a consortium of 10 MPOs from New Jersey, New York, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. Members of the MAP Forum regularly share data and analysis on issues faced across the tri-state region and, among other efforts, are collaborating to address a critical shortage of truck parking and rest areas in the region.

To pursue this collaboration while implementing NJTPA's long range priorities and adapting to a changing region, NJTPA develops detailed tasks and product descriptions for its annual Unified Planning

**North River Tunnel, Hudson County**



GDC

Work Program or UPWP. This work program guides the ongoing transportation planning activities of the NJTPA staff, its member agencies and other transportation agencies in the region.

The current UPWP was updated with tasks specifically oriented to fulfilling priorities identified as this plan was being crafted. These include tasks to develop an active transportation plan to promote walking and biking, revalidate the agency transportation model, enhance the agency's ability to meet Title VI civil rights requirements, examine freight rail crossings, further evaluate and measure transportation system performance, fund new rounds of subregional studies and local safety projects, assist municipalities in implementing complete streets, investigate concepts for key local infrastructure improvements and a host of other tasks. UPWP tasks in coming years will have to build upon these efforts and address changing conditions and trends. This work will set the course for the next

update of this long-range plan, which must be completed in 2025.

The next long range plan update and the plan updates that follow may have different titles and reflect new assessments of the region, but they will need to maintain the essential approaches signified in the themes of this plan, Transportation, People, Opportunity. Those themes reflect that transportation is not an end in itself but serves wider progress—improving the health and well-being of people, including our quality of life and the environment around us, together with fostering a growing and equitable economy that supports people, their families and businesses in all communities.

#### Montclair, Essex County

