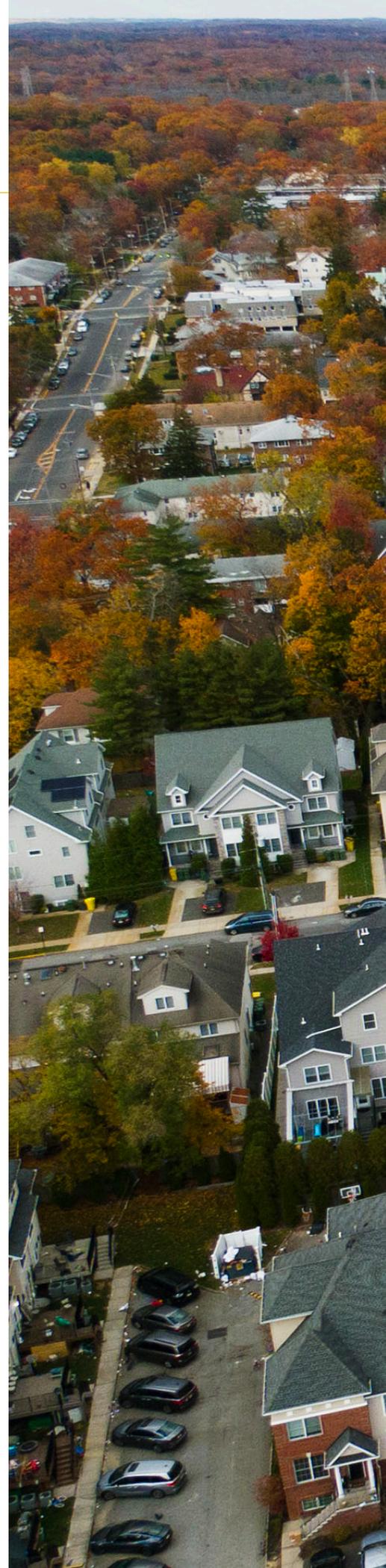


# THE NJTPA AND ITS REGION

**THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM** connects our region's residents with the places they need to go and to the people in their lives, whether they're traveling to work or school, grocery stores and doctors' offices, or to see family and friends. The region's vast transportation network of 25,000 miles of roadway, 500 miles of passenger rails and over 3,000 buses connect 7 million people, 384 municipalities and 13 counties across more than 4,200 square miles. This plan pays particular attention to the role the transportation system plays in supporting the lives of the people who live and work in our region, reflected in the title *Connecting Communities: The NJTPA Long Range Transportation Plan*.







#### Montclair, Essex County

Our transportation system supports a thriving regional economy and plays a pivotal role in the movement of goods and people throughout the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast. It includes some of the nation's most heavily traveled highways, mass transit, port, airport and freight rail facilities. A network of bike lanes and multi-use trails connects many destinations and provides additional low cost, healthy travel options.

Communities within the NJTPA region form a microcosm of the nation, spanning urban, suburban and rural areas, from the bustling cities of Newark, Jersey City and Paterson, to suburban municipalities dotted by industry, offices and commercial development, to the towns built around the attractions of the famed Jersey Shore, to still-bucolic rural areas, with large swaths of farmland and open space preserved in the face of ongoing development pressures. The region is home to a diverse population consisting of a growing share of older people and many cultures and languages, also reflecting the nation.

As the most densely populated part of the nation's most densely populated state, the NJTPA region is close knit, with residents routinely traveling and inter-

acting for work, entertainment and other endeavors, often taking advantage of multiple means of travel—driving, riding buses or trains, walking or biking. The dynamic and interdependent communities contribute to a quality of life in the region that—though not without its challenges and tensions—continues to attract a diverse, growing population, helping over the years to spawn world-renowned talents in business, industry, music and the arts.

#### Since the Last Plan

*Connecting Communities* is the latest update of the long-range transportation plan (LRTP) mandated by the federal government for Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) like the NJTPA. MPOs must update long-range plans every four years as a condition to receive federal transportation funding, which has been up to \$3 billion annually in recent years in the NJTPA region. This plan is consistent with and takes guidance from state and federal plans and regulations, as touched on in Chapter 2.

A lot has changed since the NJTPA adopted its last plan in September 2021, just as the region and the nation were emerging from the pandemic. A significant share of the population now works from home for all or part of the work week, adding to local travel

and filling communities with increased activity during the day while changing traditional peak-hour travel volumes on major routes. More residents are taking a greater interest in and adopting alternatives to the automobile for many trips, including walking, biking, micromobility, demand-responsive transit, ride hailing services and more. At least partly in reaction, communities have increasingly sought to enhance the safety and quality of life on their streets and in their neighborhoods by taking a Complete Streets approach to their roads. Complete Streets is designed to ensure the safe and adequate accommodation of all users of the transportation system, including people walking, biking or driving, public transportation users, children, older individuals, people with disabilities and freight vehicles, like delivery trucks.

At the same time, national, state, and local policymakers have become more aware of the high cost of housing in the region and the need to coordinate land use decisions and transportation investments. Increasing housing construction around transit-oriented development (with homes and businesses more accessible to bus and rail transit) is recognized as a means not only to improve local mobility, jobs and revenue but to improve air quality and create more livable and sustainable downtowns and neighborhoods for the long term. Similarly, expanding development to include new multi-family housing and new services such as local shuttles can help create more inclusive communities, helping redress disparities in transportation access and opportunities among the region's communities.

Since the last plan update, the NJTPA has bolstered these and related innovations in community planning, supporting progress not only at the regional level but among its subregions—the 15 city and county local governments that make up the NJTPA Board—and increasingly working directly with municipalities. The NJTPA has also partnered with state agencies, particularly the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) and NJ TRANSIT, on community-building initiatives and programs along with support for local transportation investment. The NJTPA **annual report** for Fiscal Year 2024 details some of this progress.

This plan seeks to take lessons from and build upon insights from these efforts to guide future plan-

ning and regional investment in the transportation system—better *connecting communities* for the benefit of all residents.

### Infrastructure Progress

To better connect communities, this plan also seeks to continue progress since 2021 to enhance and improve the economically vital transportation infrastructure linking and spanning the region.

Maintenance and preservation of the region's major infrastructure—arterials, highways, bridges, passenger and freight railways, gateways to port terminals, ferry landings, light rail lines, walking and biking trails and more—requires more than half the region's annual transportation funding. This includes fixing and replacing bridges, resurfacing highways, addressing safety hazards, support for strategic transit investments and implementing technological fixes. As detailed in the financial element of this plan, this leaves only a relatively small portion of available funds to make enhancements or to realize new capacity such as expanding the transit network to meet future travel demands.

Yet in recent years, significant progress has been made, thanks to strong state support for transportation and an influx of federal funding. Average annual transportation funding in the first four years of the NJTPA's Transportation Improvement Program

Asbury Park, Monmouth County





### West New York, Hudson County

(TIP) has grown from \$2.9 billion in the 2022 TIP to \$3.7 billion in the 2024 TIP, and further to \$4.1 billion in the FY 2026 TIP. While much of this was realized through increases in federal formula funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021, the region was also the beneficiary of awards from competitive federal grant programs.

Of note is the long planned \$16 billion Hudson Tunnel Project, which will eliminate one of the biggest risks of failure on the Northeast Corridor by building two additional tracks and rehabilitating the existing North River Tunnel, resulting in four modern tracks between New York and New Jersey. The new tunnel will be in service by 2035, and the full rehabilitation of the existing tunnel will be completed by 2038. The project has received \$12 billion in federal funding—the largest federal commitment to a rail transportation project in modern history—with contributions from New Jersey, New York and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Work is underway. Federal funding has also improved the condition of the region's roads and bridges (see Chapter 3, Section 3.6).

The NJTPA has worked with its subregions since the last plan to contribute to infrastructure improvements by funding and offering engineering and other assistance for key local bridge and other projects, initiated and sponsored by county and city governments. It has also continued support for crucial safety upgrades

through its Local Safety and High Risk Rural Roads programs, among others. The NJTPA also supports critical goods movement investments by working with counties through the Freight Concept Development Program and has initiated a similar program to support Complete Streets infrastructure improvements.

### The Way Forward

This plan seeks to prepare for the continued growth and development of the region through the horizon year of 2050. The population, which grew 5 percent since the last plan to just over 7 million, is projected to grow by almost 13 percent to 7.9 million in 2050. Regional employment is anticipated to grow 23 percent, from 2.9 million jobs today to 3.6 million in 2050. These are reflected in the maps and charts in Chapter 3.

The region's growth will add travel demand to a transportation system already at or above capacity in many locations. Vehicle miles traveled (VMT) on the region's roads is expected to increase from 154 million miles traveled per day to 170 million miles traveled per day in 2050, an 11 percent increase. At the same time, demand for bus and rail transit will likely continue to grow, with ridership surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Freight volumes are also projected to grow 25.8 percent from 399 million tons per year to 502 million tons in 2050. The continued growth in demand will require coordinated planning and investments at all levels of government to support the regional economy and quality of life in the region's communities.

At the same time, many aspects of the transportation network will almost certainly be transformed by innovative technologies. Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) may finally make automated vehicles and connected vehicles traveling on smart highways a reality. It may also alter how transit services are organized and delivered. New Jersey is already piloting smart intersection technology to help reduce pedestrian crashes on Route 1/9 in the City of Elizabeth, as discussed further in Chapter 3. Meanwhile, advances in battery and other technologies may decisively shift the transportation sector away from fossil fuels, even as sea level rise and extreme weather increasingly threaten the functioning of the transportation system.

To find a way forward through these changes while addressing key challenges affecting the region and its communities, the NJTPA sought wide-ranging input in the development of this plan and its vision. The groundwork was laid through a vision session with NJTPA Board members and subregional staff in October 2024. Subsequently, extensive public outreach and education was conducted, as discussed in the next chapter and in Appendix C.

In addition, data analysis, modeling and other technical planning activities, highlighted below, helped the NJTPA understand where and how transportation demand will likely grow, the nature of needs facing the region and the range of strategies that can support continued regional progress.

### Goals

The outcome of these efforts is a revised set of seven long-term goals for the region’s transportation system.

The NJTPA commits to collaboration, planning, and investments that:

- Ensure the transportation system provides access and opportunities to meet the needs of all users.
- Make the transportation system safer for all travelers, with the goal of reducing fatalities to zero by 2050.
- Enhance system coordination, efficiency, connectivity, and reliability for the movement of people and goods.
- Make the system resilient to the impacts of extreme weather and other hazards.
- Coordinate land use and transportation to create healthy and vibrant communities that reduce environmental and air quality impacts and support transit ridership, biking, and walking.
- Maintain the transportation system in a state of good repair.
- Increase the region’s economic activity, sustainability, and competitiveness.

These goals represent the NJTPA’s long-standing commitment to preserve and improve regional transportation while meeting the needs of its communities. The goals have been updated since the last plan to reflect updated guidance and new areas of emphasis.

This plan is organized around these seven goals, analyzing trends and projections related to each goal and identifying strategies to meet them through plan-

ning and investment. Each goal is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Progress toward all goals will be assessed through a performance-based planning approach, where system performance measures with quantitative targets will be monitored and used to guide mid-course corrections in plans and programs. Some of these performance measures are mandated under federal regulations; others have been developed by the NJTPA to address particular regional needs and issues. See Chapter 3 and Appendix D for details of this performance-based planning.

### Investments

While the goals are at the heart of this plan, providing overarching priorities for future development of transportation, *Connecting Communities* is more than a policy document. It identifies and makes choices about near-term, mid-term and long-term investments to be accomplished with reasonably expected available funding. The project index at the back of the plan includes:

- Near-term projects and programs drawn from the TIP. The TIP is the federally required mechanism for funding and scheduling projects for work leading to construction over the next four years;
- Mid-term projects stretching 10 years or so



### Plan Goals

- **Opportunity and Access**
- **Safety**
- **Efficiency, Connectivity and Reliability**
- **Resiliency**
- **Land Use**
- **State of Good Repair**
- **Economic Growth**

into the future that are consistent with the State of New Jersey capital program and the NJTPA Study and Development program. Many of these are still undergoing development, including engineering and environmental reviews, and their funding commitments and schedules could change; and

- Long-term projects, some of which have been identified in concept and still must be further defined and developed to gain federal funding and be scheduled for implementation.

For the near-term and mid-term, the project index includes \$39.9 billion in project commitments. Many billions more will be required for long-term investments as discussed in the financial element of this plan (Chapter 4).

Many of the projects in the index have long histories, having gone through various stages of evaluation and development. All the projects, except those that are still concepts for long-term consideration, have been scored and selected based on the NJTPA project prioritization criteria. These criteria award points based on how well projects meet regional goals. The criteria are being updated to reflect the revised goals in this plan and will be used for project selection during the life of this plan.

While all projects in this plan are thus screened to support long-term transportation goals and priorities, many also are oriented toward meeting specific federal

#### Cranbury, Middlesex County



and state mandates—for instance, realizing progress toward performance targets and to fulfill commitments to reduce pollutants to meet federal and state air quality standards, among other purposes.

Developing projects to cost-effectively improve transportation is especially difficult in North Jersey due to the region’s aging and often outmoded infrastructure and its need to handle heavy travel demand. In many locations there are limited options for physical improvements, with infrastructure hemmed in by homes, businesses and other development or by protected or environmentally sensitive lands.

In addressing a transportation problem—a congested roadway, a hazardous curve, a deteriorating bridge or lack of pedestrian access to a destination—planners often must consider many alternatives, conducting detailed traffic, engineering and environmental assessments. NJTPA programs support subregional studies and planning to begin these assessments, requiring the involvement of local officials, stakeholders and the public. The strategies and concepts they identify are often further refined in cooperation with state agencies as part of the “project pipeline” to prepare them for eventual funding and construction.

#### Planning Support and Guidance

As a regional planning agency, however, the NJTPA seeks to ensure that local investments support and contribute to regional goals while also addressing local needs.

One of the means to accomplish this, the NJTPA Regional Capital Investment Strategy or RCIS (Appendix E), created with input from the Board, subregions and partner agencies, sets targets for funding various categories of projects and programs. There are three broad groups: system preservation, system improvement and system support. Each group has categories within it. It should be noted that each project and program can only be assigned to one category. So, for example, a road or bridge rehabilitation project may include safety or pedestrian and bicycle improvements, but these would not be reflected in the RCIS allocations, as the projects would predominantly be considered preservation and categorized as such. (See Figure 3.3.3 in Chapter 3 for allocations chart).



Paterson, Passaic County

The RCIS identifies principles and guidelines that can be consulted to develop and implement projects and programs in keeping with regional priorities. The RCIS recognizes that the precise levels of funding applied to the various spending categories may vary significantly from year to year. By comparing actual funding with RCIS categories and targets, the NJTPA and its partners have a means to better understand and monitor the nature of overall investments and the outcomes they support. The RCIS is a living document that can be updated and adjusted during the life of this plan.

In addition to the RCIS, technical planning at the NJTPA also guides where and how investments can best be made. A study called the *Accessibility and Mobility Regional Reassessment*—fulfilling federal Congestion Management Process requirements—makes use of the latest modeling tools and data resources to help assess needs throughout the region and the strategies to address them. It includes a focus on approaches for enhancing transportation access and opportunities benefiting all communities (Appendix G).

In addition, a host of other NJTPA initiatives and programs help guide and support regional planning and investment. Among them are programs to:

- Gather and assess regional trends including using computer modeling to forecast population and employment (Appendix F), to monitor progress on federally required performance measures (see Appendix D, System Performance), and to address federal air quality standards (called air quality conformity, Appendix B);
- Support studies at the regional and city/county subregional level to investigate key issues, such as safety, on- and off- road trail plans, Complete Streets, local goods movement, or leveraging transportation for economic vitality;
- Offer technical assistance to bolster local and sub-regional planning in areas such as Complete Streets and help develop project concepts for eventual federal funding;
- Support the work of Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) to coordinate with employers, local government, schools, community organizations, and the public to improve local transportation and improve services for special needs populations;



#### Lambertville, Hunterdon County

- Assist municipalities to realize more vibrant downtowns, coordinate land use and transportation decisions, promote transit-oriented development and other objectives;
- Promote local safety, including the development and implementation of local safety action plans;
- Encourage expanded opportunities for walking and biking through an active transportation plan and support for local trails.

These and other programs are updated each year and described in the federally mandated Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) adopted by the NJTPA Board. The UPWP provides a window into how the NJTPA is working to implement this plan on a year-to-year basis.

#### Funding the Future

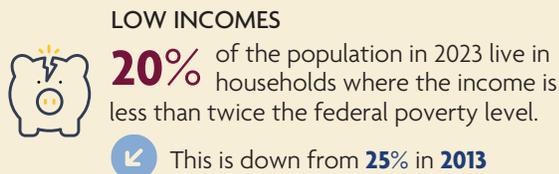
This plan envisions systematically improving the transportation system by making full and effective use of all available transportation funding.

To keep pace with growing population and travel, new methods of funding transportation will be needed. This plan foresees an average of \$4.9 billion in year of expenditure (YOE) dollars available annually to address current and future transportation system needs. This totals approximately \$123.5 billion YOE over the life of the plan. The financial analysis (Chapter 4) includes alternative funding scenarios in which greater or lesser funding realized over the long term could alter the target allocations among the RCIS project types.

*Connecting Communities* provides a framework of transportation policies and priorities to cost-effectively apply billions of dollars of funding each year to meet the most pressing needs of its region and communities. ●

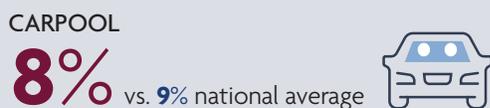
# THE NJTPA REGION

## TRENDS



## TRANSPORTATION MODE

Work commute trips by mode SOURCE: ACS 2023 1-year



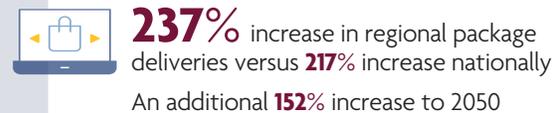
## FREIGHT



### BREAKDOWN OF HOW IT MOVES



### E-COMMERCE 2018–2023



## CRASH DATA

