

Where We Are Today •

THE 13 COUNTIES of the Together North Jersey planning region are located at the heart of the Boston-to-Washington northeast corridor — among the world’s most vital markets for trade, politics, media, research and entertainment. This location, and particularly our proximity to New York City, provides many strategic advantages. But location isn’t our region’s only strength. North Jersey is also home to robust transportation networks, a range of successful businesses and industries, a highly educated workforce and a varied landscape of great places to live, work, play and do business, all of which contribute to a high quality of life for many residents. Many parts of our region, especially its newer suburbs and historic town centers, have thrived in recent decades.

Since the first Together North Jersey plan was issued in 2015, our region has had to contend with both long-standing and new challenges that threaten a sustainable future. In 2020, peaceful protests as well as violent clashes across the United States highlighted the issue of systemic racism and racial disparities that continue to plague our region and the country. Hurricane Ida and other storm events showed our continued vulnerability to the increasingly tangible impacts of climate change. Despite a robust response to COVID-19, the pandemic has claimed tens of thousands of lives in New Jersey and continues to disrupt many aspects of daily life.

The tragedies and challenges of recent years also present us with opportunities to continue working to secure a sustainable future for North Jersey communities. Some sectors of the economy have struggled due to COVID-19 and public health measures, but we have also learned new ways of working, doing business and socializing as we adapted to a new reality. The threat of climate change is an opportunity to innovate and build an equitable, green economy that provides living wage jobs. Increased awareness of the dramatic disparities in wealth, health and other aspects of life in the region have created a new sense of urgency to work toward an equitable and inclusive society.

In this section, we take a detailed look at both long-standing and new challenges that face our region, as well as the strengths and assets we have to meet them.

Strengths and Assets •

Robust Transportation

Our transportation system is a defining characteristic of North Jersey and is essential to the region’s economic competitiveness. We have a roadway network of over 25,000 miles that accommodates about 150 million vehicle miles of travel each day in a typical year.¹ Interstate highways and toll roads make it easy to travel throughout New Jersey, and afford convenient access to Pennsylvania, New York, Delaware and beyond. In addition, thousands of miles of sidewalks, paths and trails provide residents and visitors with bicycling and walking access to residential, retail and service, employment and recreational destinations.

Our region has a well-developed network of public transit services: 10 commuter rail lines² with 141 stations³; two light rail lines with 41 stations⁴; the PATH commuter rail service that connects Newark, Harrison and Jersey City with Lower and Midtown Manhattan; 250 bus routes; and three ferry companies providing service to New York City from 13 terminals in New Jersey.⁵ Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, these services supported nearly a million transit trips each weekday—among the highest public transit use of any state in the nation. In recent years, the region’s transit system has played a major role in efforts to revive and enhance the region’s city and town centers, with new multi-family housing and mixed-use development appearing in areas around transit stops.

¹ [New Jersey’s Roadway Mileage and Daily VMT by functional Classification Distributed by County](#)

² [Passenger Railroad Lines in NJ](#)

³ [Passenger Rail Stations in NJ](#)

⁴ [Passenger Rail Stations in NJ](#)

⁵ [New Jersey Ferry Terminal Embarkation Points](#)

Many communities in our region have kept pace with emerging transportation technologies. App-based options, such as bikeshare, e-scooter and on-demand shuttle service programs are increasingly common in the region's urban centers. In addition, New Jersey is a leader in electric vehicle (EV) adoption, with the number of registered EVs increasing from 338 in 2011 to 41,096 in 2020.⁶ There are over 700 EV charging stations available in the state.⁷

The region also hosts the Port of New York and New Jersey—the largest seaport on the East Coast and the third largest in the nation, serving as a gateway to North America for both imports and exports. Newark Liberty International Airport is an important hub for the movement of airline passengers and air cargo. And the region's rail freight system, offering connections to points throughout North America, is comprised of Class I carriers and major rail arteries that carried upwards of 15 million tons of freight in 2020.⁸

A Varied and Diverse Landscape

The Together North Jersey region is part of an area originally inhabited by the Lenni-Lenape tribe. The tribe's territory stretched from the headwaters of the Delaware River in the north to Delaware Bay in the south. The Lenni-Lenape consist of three main dialect clans, the Munsee, Inami, and Unalachtigo. In the centuries following the arrival of Europeans in the area in the 1600s, most Lenni-Lenape were killed, forcibly removed from their land or fled encroaching settlers. Today, the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Tribal Nation, with a tribal government recognized by the state of New Jersey, includes Lenni-Lenape who remained in or returned to their ancestral homeland, mostly residing in southern New Jersey. There are also four federally-recognized tribes — the Delaware Nation in Oklahoma, the Delaware Tribe of Indians in Pennsylvania, the Shawnee Tribe in Oklahoma, and the Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians in New York — which have an interest in the TNJ region.⁹

The Together North Jersey planning region is large, comprising over 4,200 square miles of land – approximately half of the state of New Jersey. It may surprise some people, accustomed to the region's well-known infrastructure and major cities, that North Jersey's urban and built-up areas account for only about a third of its total land area. The remaining two-thirds include agricultural and forested land, parks and preserved expanses. Our region is nationally recognized for its diverse range of landscapes, from the forested ridges and rolling farmland of the Highlands in the northwest, to the pine plains and cedar swamps of the Pinelands in Ocean County and miles of white sand beaches and boardwalks along its beautiful Atlantic coastline.

We are also home to a varied range of community settings, including beach towns and bayshore communities in the east, rural communities in the west and northwest, cities and older suburbs in the region's urbanized northeast, and suburban towns in the region's center. Our communities are a rich tapestry of diverse cultures, languages, cuisines, artistic expression and local traditions. Some of the oldest and most historic places in the U.S. are in the Together North Jersey region, including important Revolutionary War landmarks, the homes of luminaries including the poet Walt Whitman, Thomas Edison and U.S. President Grover Cleveland, and some of the first cities settled in North America by Europeans, including Jersey City and Elizabeth. The region continues to be a major hub of international immigration. Together, these settings form a colorful tapestry of great places to live, work, play and do business.

⁶ [NJDEP](#)

⁷ [Alternative Fueled Vehicle Fueling Stations for New Jersey](#)

⁸ [Regional Freight Profile North Jersey Region](#)

⁹ <https://nlltribe.com/about-us/>; <https://nanticoke-lenape.info/history.htm>

Highly-Educated Workforce and Citizenry

New Jersey has long been recognized as a state rich in talent and educational opportunities. In the Together North Jersey region, the labor force numbers more than 3.4 million workers.¹⁰ New Jersey is among the top 10 in the U.S. for the attainment of a bachelor's degrees among people age 25 to 44¹¹ and has the greatest concentration of engineers and scientists per square mile in the U.S.¹² The high levels of education in the North Jersey region are an important asset in confronting the many challenges facing our region. Educational achievement supports participation in the innovation economy as well as civic and democratic participation.

Highly Quality of Life

Many communities throughout our region boast a high quality of life. The 13 counties that make up the Together North Jersey planning region are among the safest in New Jersey, with an average life expectancy of 81.3 years¹³, and in nine counties the arrest rate is below the statewide rate of 2.1 per 1,000 people.¹⁴ New Jersey's public school system is regularly ranked among the best in the country; US News & World Report reports the top 10 high schools in New Jersey are in North Jersey, nine of which are ranked in the top 100 nationally. High test scores for reading and math proficiency, low drop-out rates and school safety all contribute to these high rankings.¹⁵

The region also enjoys a robust arts and culture sector. Our vibrant arts, cultural assets, and historic sites help to create distinctive communities that are attractive places for businesses and families. In 2017, almost half of New Jersey residents reported attending live music, theater, or dance performances, and over half attended art exhibits. In 2017, the arts and culture sector in New Jersey added \$23 billion to the state's economy and employed over 137,000 workers.¹⁶ A number of communities, such as New Brunswick, Woodbridge, Hackensack and others have opened new performing arts centers in recent years. In 2019, New Jersey became the first state to offer arts education in all public schools.¹⁷ New Jersey is also home to nine national parks, 36 state parks and hundreds of local parks, many of which are located within or near our region. Close proximity to New York City provides opportunities to access even more amenities and cultural resources.

Leader in Healthcare and Public Health

The North Jersey region is a leader in healthcare and public health. The region is home to world-class research universities and life sciences R&D sector and clinical research facilities, as well as three medical schools.¹⁸ According to U.S. News & World Report rankings, the North Jersey region is home to eight of the top 10 hospitals in New Jersey, three of which are nationally ranked. In addition, New Jersey is ranked second nationally for health outcomes.¹⁹

New Jersey mounted a robust public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. New Jersey went into a state of emergency a week after the first confirmed case was detected, and the state and counties quickly opened testing centers. A widely-used COVID-19 saliva test was developed in a Rutgers University laboratory in the early months of the pandemic. Johnson & Johnson, headquartered in Middlesex County developed one of the three COVID-19 vaccines approved by the Federal Drug and Food Administration.

10 [NJ Dept of Labor and Workforce Development, Current Employment Statistics](#)

11 [Population Reference Bureau](#)

12 [ChooseNJ](#)

13 [New Jersey State Health Assessment Data](#)

14 [2020 Uniform Crime Report](#)

15 [U.S. News Best High Schools Rankings](#)

16 [National Endowment for the Arts](#)

17 [Arts Ed NJ](#)

18 [Choose New Jersey](#)

19 [US News & World Report, Public Health Rankings](#)

Issues and Challenges •

Uneven Job Growth and Economic Recovery

In the years leading up to the Great Recession of 2007-2009, New Jersey job growth was flat. The New Jersey job market was slow to recover from the recession, with the state only achieving pre-recession levels of employment levels in 2016. Following a decade of continuous job growth and dropping unemployment, the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting public health measures brought the economy to standstill in March 2020. New Jersey COVID-19 response measures required restaurants and other businesses to close their doors to contain the spread of the virus.

The pandemic initially caused a steep decline in employment, with New Jersey losing 717,200 jobs by April of 2020²⁰, and unemployment rates exceeding 16 percent.²¹ The state has now recovered over 95% of the jobs lost during the pandemic, which is higher than the national recovery rate.²² As of June 2022, New Jersey has added jobs for 18 consecutive months.

Employment in the Leisure and Hospitality industry was hit particularly hard in the early months of the health emergency and continued to struggle throughout the pandemic.²³ Workers in this industry are disproportionately women, people of color and low-wage workers. These groups are also over-represented among essential workers who continued to work in-person during the course of the pandemic, increasing their risk of exposure to COVID-19.²⁴

Through periods of economic stagnation, growth and tumult, the availability of living wage jobs has been a constant concern. Many families in the region with fully-employed adults struggle to make ends meet. While the unemployment rate prior to the pandemic was at historic lows, 36 percent of households in the North Jersey region did not earn enough to support their families in 2018, according to the annual ALICE Project report.²⁵

Changing Demographics

Policy makers and planners have been slow to respond to changing demographics in our region. In 2019, North Jersey was home to an estimated 6.7 million residents — more than 75 percent of the state's total population.

Over the past 30 years, the racial diversity of our region has grown steadily. In 2019, nearly half of residents in the North Jersey region were racial minorities. In 2010, Essex County was the only county in North Jersey that was “majority-minority,” meaning people from minority groups made up a majority of the county's population; today, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Passaic and Union Counties are majority-minority. This pattern is expected to continue in coming decades, with much of the region's population growth likely to come through international immigration.

²⁰ [NJTPA RTP](#)

²¹ [Federal Reserve Economic Data](#)

²² [NJ Dept. of Labor](#)

²³ [NJ Dept. of Labor](#)

²⁴ [New Jersey Policy Perspective](#)

²⁵ [ALICE Project](#)

At the same time, our population is aging. Today over 41 percent of the region's population is between the age of 35 and 64 and almost 17 percent of the region's population is 65 or older. The number of seniors will continue to increase over the next 20 years, as the large baby boomer generation matures and average life expectancy increases. The number of adults 65 years and older is projected to increase from 16% of the population in 2019 to 18% of the population in 2050.²⁶ Over a quarter of households in the region consist of a single person, and nearly 8 percent are single-parent households. While the traditional nuclear family may have at one time been the norm, today young adults are increasingly putting off marriage and parenthood, more people are raising children on their own, and the aging of the baby boomer generation is creating a wave of empty-nesters. Of the 2.4 million households in the region in 2019, 26 percent consisted of only one person and nearly 8 percent consisted of single-parent families.

Racial Disparities and Unequal Access to Opportunity

A legacy of systemic racism, discrimination, residential segregation and urban disinvestment have created dramatic racial and geographic disparities in our region. Nearly 10 percent of the 2.4 million households in the region live in poverty. Over 17 percent of Black households and 16.8 percent of Hispanic households in our region live below the federal poverty line, compared to 7.8 percent of white residents. In New Jersey, 33.5 percent of Black households and 32.6 percent of Latino households have zero net wealth, compared to 10.4 percent of white households.²⁷

There are many communities in our region where residents can attend high-performing schools, live in clean, safe neighborhoods, get to well-paying jobs in a reasonable amount of time, buy healthy foods without going far from home and receive quality local government services. In other areas, a history of urban disinvestment, redlining and other forms of residential segregation have left a lasting legacy of racially concentrated pockets of poverty, especially in cities.

Although there are pockets of poverty in each of the region's 13 counties, households in poverty are more concentrated in the majority-minority counties of Hudson, Essex, Passaic and Union. In the 2019-2020 school year approximately 37 percent of students across the region were eligible for Free and Reduced-price Meals (FARM). But in our majority-minority urban centers we saw much higher rates. Eighty-three percent of students in Newark qualified, along with 73 percent of students in Paterson, 79 percent of students in Elizabeth and 99 percent in Passaic.²⁸

Unfortunately, the high cost of housing combined with limited transportation options, makes it impossible for many of our region's residents to access higher-opportunity areas, whether to live, work or study. While these patterns are not new, they persist and have gotten worse in recent decades, and in the North Jersey region overwhelmingly affect people of color.

Shifting Market Preferences

Several trends drove housing markets and location decisions of businesses in the decades prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The millennial generation, comprised of people born between 1980 and 2000, is now the largest generation in the U.S. The millennial generation is now becoming the backbone of the labor force. This generation has a well-documented preference for walkable and culturally interesting places that provide a range of amenities and transportation options.

²⁶ [NJTPA 2050 Plan](#)

²⁷ [Prosperity Now Scorecard](#)

²⁸ [National Center for Education Statistics](#)

Baby boomers, the second largest generation, have also had an outsized influence on the region. Many baby boomers are downsizing as they enter retirement, with many favoring the same types of places that appeal to Millennials. Some seek to remain within their communities during their retirement (aging in place), but struggle to find appropriate housing options.

In the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, these demographic trends drove shifts in neighborhood preferences and housing demand. Professionals looking for flexible work-live settings sought out well-connected neighborhoods with amenities, services and business opportunities close at hand. Companies prioritized urban locations that offer 24-7 amenities to attract the rising generation of young professionals. Many North Jersey communities, both urban and suburban, made significant progress in responding to changing needs and preferences over the last decade by revising zoning ordinances and creating distinctive downtowns. The pandemic has introduced uncertainty into future demand for housing and neighborhood types and threatens our region's progress in maintaining vibrant downtowns and town centers. In parts of the region, many main street and downtown businesses have closed or are struggling to stay in business. Transit systems that support downtowns continue to see reduced ridership.²⁹

Some residents abandoned urban living for larger, suburban living spaces more suitable for working or studying from home. Property values and sales jumped in suburban and rural locations, while home values and rents declined in urban areas.³⁰ Some of the shift to "work from home" caused by the pandemic may prove permanent, possibly leading downtowns to suffer from significant office vacancies.

High Cost of Housing

Housing in the region is unaffordable for many working families, young people, and retirees — especially renters. Half of North Jersey renters spend more than 30 percent of their income for housing. More than a quarter of all renters pay more than half of their monthly income on housing. The average fair market rent (FMR) in the region has increased to \$1,587 for a two-bedroom apartment; the National Low-Income Housing Coalition's 2020 "Out of Reach" report ranked New Jersey as the seventh most expensive state to rent this type of home.

Renters aren't the only ones facing steep housing costs in North Jersey. The cost of owning a home in the region is also high. Housing prices are much higher in North Jersey than in many other regions of the U.S., and property taxes in our region are among the highest in the nation. The average residential property owners in our 13-county region pays an annual property tax bill of over \$8,000. The highest property taxes are paid in Essex, Bergen and Union counties, where average annual property tax bills exceeded \$12,000 per unit.³¹

The cost of housing is one factor driving persistent rates of homelessness in recent years. The USHUD Point In Time survey counted 7,232 homeless persons in the North Jersey region on a given day in January 2020. With COVID-19-induced job losses, many New Jerseyans are facing possible eviction and foreclosure without continued federal and state protections and financial support. New Jersey's eviction moratorium expired at the end of 2021 and there were over 40,000 eviction filings in the first five months of 2022; this is much higher than the 18,500 cases filed during this period in 2021 but is less than the 60,000 filings during the first five months 2019 before the pandemic.³²

²⁹ [Bloomberg/NJ Transit](#)

³⁰ [NJTPA RTP](#)

³¹ [NJDCA, Property Tax Tables](#)

³² [North Jersey](#)

Transportation and Freight Challenges

Modern, efficient and resilient infrastructure are essential to New Jersey's long-term economic competitiveness and are necessary to maintain a high quality of life. In decades past, New Jersey's infrastructure, especially its transportation networks, set it apart from other states. However, most of New Jersey's critical infrastructure was built more than a century ago and is now in poor condition.

A history of widespread auto-dependent development in our region has created a pattern of highway-oriented and auto-dependent development that requires extensive and costly infrastructure. Thirty-seven percent of the state's roads are in poor condition; driving on roads in need of repair costs each driver an average of \$713 per year in extra vehicle repairs and operating costs.³³ Of the state's bridges, approximately 7.8 percent are structurally deficient.³⁴

Our transit system needs significant investments to upgrade infrastructure, expand capacity for regional routes and replace aging buses and trains. According to the NJ TRANSIT's 2020 Strategic Plan, the average NJ TRANSIT rail car is about 20 years old and some are 40 to 50 years old.³⁵ Much of NJ TRANSIT's rail infrastructure was built in the 1800s and requires significant maintenance; in addition, the layout of the rail system was not built to support the volume of traffic it carries today.³⁶

Major Trans-Hudson transit infrastructure projects are critical to securing our region's economic future. A dramatic increase in Trans-Hudson commuting, 44 percent between 1990 and 2015, has pushed transit service capacity to its limit.³⁷ In addition, the train tunnel connecting New Jersey to New York Penn Station under the Hudson River was damaged by flooding during Superstorm Sandy in 2012 and requires replacement. Needed Trans-Hudson infrastructure projects will require significant state and federal funding.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to steep declines in transit ridership across the U.S., including the North Jersey region. In early 2020, ridership on NJ TRANSIT trains and buses dropped an estimated 90 percent and then increasing by only 40 percent through the summer of the same year, before staying fairly steady through early 2021.³⁸ Weekday rail ridership is only at about half of what it was before COVID-19, and weekend ridership is at 80% of what it was during COVID-19.³⁹ Continued suppressed ridership may threaten NJ Transit revenues and efforts to encourage residential and mixed-use development around transit stations.

North Jersey, home to the second busiest port in the nation, has long been a center of freight and goods distribution. The dramatic growth of e-commerce and shifting international trade patterns in recent years has led a to major surge in development of distribution facilities throughout the region. These facilities are important drivers of economic growth, but if not carefully managed can lead to increased traffic congestion and air pollution, strained transportation infrastructure, and rapid consumption of natural and agricultural lands.⁴⁰ The volume of e-commerce our transportation network must handle is projected to increase to more than 390 million packages by 2050—growth of more than 400 percent.⁴¹

33 [ASCE, Report Card for America's Infrastructure](#)

34 [ASCE, Report Card for America's Infrastructure](#)

35 [NJ Transit Strategic Plan](#). Page 12

36 [NJ Transit Strategic Plan](#). Page 22

37 [NJ Transit Strategic Plan](#). Page 23

38 [NJTPA RTP](#)

39 [Bloomberg/NJ Transit](#)

40 [NJ Future. Warehouse Sprawl: Plan Now or Suffer the Consequences](#)

41 [NJTPA RTP](#)

Other Infrastructure Challenges

New Jersey's infrastructure challenges extend beyond transportation. Our region must also address disparities in access to broadband internet service. In 2018, fewer than 60 percent of households could go online in the cities of Perth Amboy, Salem, Bridgeton, Camden, and Trenton, which are home to large low-income and minority populations. At the onset of the pandemic, about 230,000 students out of the New Jersey's 1.4 million K-12 pupils lacked access to an internet connection or device needed for online learning.⁴²

According to the American Society of Engineers, there are 229 dams in New Jersey considered to be high-hazard potential, an estimated \$1.58 billion gap in school capital expenditures, and \$17.5 billion dollars in wastewater needs.⁴³

There are estimated to be as many as 350,000 lead water service lines in New Jersey, a threat to human health present in both urban and suburban communities throughout North Jersey. New Jersey communities also been working to fulfill a 2021 State mandate to inventory and replace all lead pipes by 2029.

Climate Change and Extreme Weather Events

In 2011, Tropical Storm Irene made land fall in New Jersey resulting in catastrophic rainfall, flooding and property damage throughout the state. Just one year later, in October 2012, Superstorm Sandy caused widespread flooding and destruction and resulted in 43 deaths. More recently, in September 2021, the impacts of Hurricane Ida claimed 30 lives in New Jersey, most of them in the North Jersey region,⁴⁴ and caused billions of dollars of damage to homes, businesses and infrastructure.

Scientists predict that extreme weather events will become increasingly frequent in coming decades due to the warming of the earth's atmosphere. As a coastal state, with interior rivers and other waterways, New Jersey is especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including severe precipitation. Climate change in New Jersey is advancing faster than the rest of the country. New Jersey's annual temperature has increased by 3.5 degrees Fahrenheit since 1895 with the potential to increase 4.1 to 5.7 degrees by 2050. New Jersey has seen a 7.9 percent increase in precipitation over the last decade, and storms accompanied by extreme rain increased by 71 percent over the last 50 years, a rate higher than any other state in the nation. By 2050, New Jersey will likely experience at least a 0.9 to 2.1-foot sea level rise, resulting in inundation in some areas and worsened flooding. Heat waves are expected to impact larger areas, with more frequency and longer duration by 2050.⁴⁵

Many low-income and minority communities are particularly vulnerable to impacts from climate change. These populations are more likely to live in areas with older or inadequate infrastructure and have fewer resources to protect their homes from extreme weather events or flooding or to relocate to safer locations. People in low-income and minority communities also suffer greater burdens from pre-existing health conditions and have more limited access to healthcare, making them vulnerable to climate change effects such as heat waves. North Jersey's growing population of seniors is especially vulnerable to the effects of extreme weather events.⁴⁶

42 [Broadband for All: The Geography of Digital Equity in New Jersey](#)

43 [ASCE, Report Card for America's Infrastructure](#)

44 [NJ.com](#)

45 [NJDEP, 2020 New Jersey Scientific Report on Climate Change](#)

46 [Rutgers, A Seat at the Table: Integrating the Needs and Challenges of Underrepresented and Socially Vulnerable Populations into Coastal Hazards Planning in New Jersey](#)

Persistent environmental and health disparities

As has been the case in many parts of the U.S., over the past half a century, the health of New Jersey residents has improved. Death rates due to chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes have declined over the past decade, probably due primarily to advances in medical care—the infant mortality rate has continued its century-long decline. Heart disease and cancer remained the leading causes of death in the state until 2020, when COVID-19 became the second leading cause of death.⁴⁷

At the same time, there are dramatic health outcome disparities amongst racial and ethnic groups, with non-Hispanic Blacks experiencing notably higher rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, infant mortality, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, substance abuse issues, and violence than other racial groups. Black New Jersey residents are twice as likely, and Hispanic residents three times as likely, to report lacking health insurance than white residents, and Black residents are 1.5 times more likely than whites to report delaying or not receiving needed medical care.⁴⁸

These health disparities leave minority New Jerseyans vulnerable to comorbidities, unemployment and food insecurity. Nationally, Black and Latino people have been three times more likely than white people to contract COVID-19 and nearly twice as likely to die from the disease.⁴⁹ Black and Latino people are more likely to live in multi-generational housing, rely on mass transit, and work lower-paying essential-worker service or gig-economy positions, putting them at greater risk of exposure to COVID-19.

New Jersey's industrial legacy, high population density, and traffic congestion create significant environmental and public health burdens for state residents, especially those that live in our region's cities, older towns and suburbs. Though air pollution has dropped significantly in recent decades, New Jersey continues to suffer from poor air quality. In addition, there are 18 municipalities in the Together North Jersey region served by combined stormwater and sanitary sewer systems, which discharge nearly seven million gallons of untreated sewage into the state's rivers and bays, compromising water quality. Sewer back-ups into homes, streets and waterways regularly threaten public health.

47 [New Jersey Department of Health](#)

48 [U.S. Census Bureau Health Tables](#)

49 [New Jersey Policy Perspective](#)