



FOCUS AREA 3: Support and build great places●

WHAT AND WHY World-class infrastructure and other amenities have made North Jersey a global hub for people and goods. Long-term investments in freight distribution, transportation infrastructure, and agricultural practices provide an essential foundation for targeted economic development activities that can strengthen and grow our region's economy. In addition, proximity to New York City and superior transportation connections to extensive consumer and business markets in the northeast, mid-Atlantic, mid-west states and the world give our region a strategic locational advantage. Our region must build on our unique assets and infrastructure and embrace new consumer needs such as e-commerce to strengthen the regional economy while transitioning to a greener economy. Public and private partnerships in economic development are critical for an effective and sustainable use of existing resources and emerging technologies.

New Jersey's agriculture is another lever to support our region's focus on building great places. New Jersey is at the forefront of cutting-edge indoor farming practices and has been proactive in preserving farmland. This two-pronged approach to agriculture will ensure our competitiveness. Lastly, new farmers, especially women and minority farmers, should receive further attention and support, with access to learning about best practices. These activities expand access to fresh and affordable foods. This will promote economic development and tourism, which can grow businesses and create jobs. These assets also contribute to the attractiveness of our communities, making them desirable places to live, work and visit.

HOW Asset-based economic development is an approach that recognizes the important role existing infrastructure and unique local resources can play in strengthening the regional economy. It is an approach that seeks to leverage local arts, cultural, natural, historic and recreational assets into sustained economic growth that can benefit the entire region. Toward this end, we need to use our region's public transit network, agriculture, and global consumer market as a framework for future investment. We should also continue the progress made over the past decade by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to ensure our region's seaport maintains its strategic advantage while bringing needed tax revenue and jobs to the port's host cities. Finally, we should focus on building and expanding agriculture as a viable economic and workforce activity for new farmers, especially women and minority farmers.



STRATEGY 3.1: Use our region's transportation infrastructure as a framework for future investment

Our region boasts 25,000 miles of roads, 16 rail lines serving nearly 200 stations, 18 passenger ferry routes crossing the Hudson River to New York City, and public and private bus systems that includes thousands of buses operating on more than 250 routes. In addition, the region's Transportation Management Associations (TMAs), counties, and private entities operate numerous shuttle and other transportation services to support businesses and employees. This extensive network gives workers many options for commuting; however, these are not shared equally among lower and higher-income areas and places with greater racial and ethnic diversity. The transportation system is also critical for businesses to reach customers and supports economic growth. Transportation best serves this growth by utilizing existing assets such as transit stations and stops along highway corridors in strategic locations. Once identified, public and private investment, including economic development incentives, should be targeted in these areas to spur job growth in places well served by existing transportation infrastructure. Municipalities, counties, non-profits and the private sector can participate in leveraging transportation to support growth in ways that are sustainable and make good use of existing resources and emerging technologies.

STRATEGY 3.2: Leverage the region's role as a major freight distribution hub

The Port of New York and New Jersey is a leading international gateway located in one of the world's most concentrated and affluent consumer markets. It is the largest seaport on the East Coast and vies with the Port of Long Beach to be the second largest in North America. With its central location and connected transportation infrastructure, the NJTPA region has been and continues to be a leading supply chain platform for the multi-state region, North America and the world. Particularly, as New Jersey and the nation emerges from the pandemic, the region can continue to build on these strengths to capture opportunities to increase domestic production capacities and thoughtfully grow to meet the shift to greater e-commerce demand. To do so, the region needs to address workforce shortages, continue to adapt legacy infrastructure to 21st century needs, improve connectivity to new job locations, and encourage sustainable and resilient practices.

STRATEGY 3.3: Leverage and support efforts of local economic development organizations to enhance the prosperity of our communities

Local economic development organizations (EDO) are important in driving and growing economies in our region's municipalities. An EDO is typically an entity that works to enhance the prosperity of the communities it serves. This might look a bit different in every community, but many include attracting new businesses, helping to bring visitors/customers to the town, helping existing businesses grow or undertaking activities that promote the overall brand of a community (festivals, placemaking initiatives, etc.). Our region should undertake initiatives and activities that support these local economic development organizations and their activities to ensure they successfully create vibrant, exciting places around the region. This work should be grounded in primary research to understand these organizations' needs better. It can be done through partnerships with other organizations already working in this area (such as Downtown New Jersey and the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs) by providing additional technical assistance, facilitating the fruitful exchange of information, and developing/sharing resources for communities, especially low-income communities.

STRATEGY 3.4: Support and expand the region's agricultural sector, especially small-scale and urban farming, businesses, and agritourism

Our region is home to more than 6,000 farms covering more than 366,000 acres. More than 20 percent of the region's farmland assets—80,000 acres—are permanently preserved. In fact, there are farms in every one of our region's counties except Hudson. While many farms—especially those in the western parts of the region—continue larger-scale operations producing feed corn, alfalfa hay, other grains and livestock production, the number of smaller niche market farms is growing. These smaller operations produce vegetables and fruit, flowers, herbs and a variety of other specialty products. The increased popularity of locally-sourced food, organic farming and small-scale food processing have allowed smaller farming operations to flourish and remain economically viable. To support and expand the agricultural sector in our region, we should continue efforts to permanently preserve farmland through existing acquisition programs. In addition, our region's economic development and tourism organizations should partner with the Rutgers Cooperative Extension, the N.J. Department of Agriculture, the N.J. Farm Bureau, the N.J. Farmer's Direct Marketing Association and others to develop a coordinated marketing campaign and strengthen farm-to-table initiatives. We should also build partnerships between farmers and community leaders in our region's cities to foster growth in urban farming and improve urban residents' access to healthy, locally-grown foods.