



FOCUS AREA 5: Connect people and places with safe, convenient and reliable transportation ●

WHAT AND WHY North Jersey's transportation system includes a diverse and extensive network of facilities and services. While our transportation system serves many of us well, others in the region have difficulty getting where they need to go. Travel options are limited in some places and overcrowded and inconvenient in others. Congestion causes delays on the region's roadways, with walking and biking being impossible or unsafe in many areas. Northern New Jersey needs a safe, convenient and reliable transportation system that is well-maintained and in which all the parts connect seamlessly. A safer system would save lives and reduce the suffering and costs associated with crashes and accidents. Improving transit stations and stops and connecting services will increase residents' access to well-paying jobs, good schools, shopping, needed services, recreation and arts and cultural resources. Greater support for shared-ride modes, including public transit and shuttles for people, expands access to opportunity for individuals without a private vehicle and helps reduce energy use and harmful pollutants. Furthermore, creating more options for walking and bicycling will contribute to better public health and healthier communities.

HOW Connecting people, places, and goods with safe, convenient and reliable transportation will take coordinated action by a range of agencies, stakeholders and communities. It will require fiscally prudent transportation projects and investments and close coordination with local economic activity, development projects and land use. Given the combination of budget constraints and strong demand from residents and businesses for improved transportation, diverse stakeholders across the region will need to work together to make the most of existing transportation infrastructure and expand the transportation system's capacity in economically feasible and environmentally sound ways. The following strategies are recommended to improve transportation operations, strengthen linkages among modes, create a more convenient, safe, and seamless travel experience, and maintain the system over time.



STRATEGY 5.1: Maintain transportation infrastructure in a state of good repair

As population and freight movement in the region continue to grow, the condition and capabilities of our transportation infrastructure experience increasing strain. Scarce resources must be used strategically and efficiently to maintain and improve the performance of our transportation network. Federal requirements for asset management developed for the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) passed by Congress in 2012 are now in place to help inform and prioritize preventive maintenance and avoid costly repair and replacement. Jurisdictions and agencies must continue to collaborate to ensure transportation infrastructure is preserved, rehabilitated and restored to maintain it in a state of good repair.

STRATEGY 5.2: Promote and implement Complete Streets policies

Complete Streets are designed to balance all users' access and mobility needs, regardless of age, income, or physical ability, across travel modes (driving, public transportation, walking, biking and goods movement) in shared roadway environments. Complete Streets (CS) policies and designs can improve safety, balance pedestrian and vehicle access needs and benefit economic development and quality of life. Many counties and communities in the North Jersey region have adopted Complete Streets policies. Although the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) has released updated guidance on CS design and policy that can streamline implementation, challenges remain in gaining funding, local engineering/roadway operations acceptance and allaying fears over parking impacts. Because Complete Streets improve multimodal travel opportunities, encouraging more municipalities and counties to adopt CS policies and to approve flexible designs for roadway (re)construction should be a high priority. Efforts to promote CS could include public and stakeholder education; model subdivision and zoning ordinances; training for transportation and land use professionals; and encouraging elected officials and agency leaders to prioritize Complete Streets implementation.

STRATEGY 5.3: Improve Transit Hub locations

Transit hubs are areas surrounding a transit station or stop with diverse land uses and various activities that meet the needs of residents, businesses, and station users. They can prioritize people over vehicles to create walkable, vibrant, culturally exciting places with lively, active public spaces and a rich mix of amenities. Transit hub strategies can help revitalize historic train stations and bus stops in downtowns and business districts, many of which enabled the growth of many of the region's communities until personal automobiles changed the travel, land use and economic and cultural landscapes around them. In less densely populated areas, these strategies can remove barriers built into the decades-old park and ride lots and access roads surrounding transit stops to make walking to nearby shops, restaurants and other attractions possible.

STRATEGY 5.4: Enhance and improve existing public and private transit services

Public transit systems, in addition to private bus companies and jitney operators, provide millions of trips each year and are vital to our region's economy, our essential workers and people who cannot or choose not to drive. Although the pandemic of 2020 halted the growth in public transit use, the current return to work and travel will present a host of new challenges to accommodate travel needs likely to be different than those of the past. Transit services have historically been oriented toward suburb to city peak service and capacity; in the post-pandemic period, our region should pursue opportunities to balance existing service with more inter-regional routes, all-hours service and new multi-ride discount fare formats.

Notably, though, long-standing issues will require continued efforts; we must continue working toward increasing the speed, reliability and efficiency of bus transit; modernizing transit system infrastructure; creating new and innovative service models for transportation serving seniors and people with disabilities and low-income people with limited travel options; improving linkages between public and private transportation services; and managing the deployment of entrepreneurial transportation services such as Uber, Lyft and other ride-hailing services. Implementing actions listed under this strategy will be contingent upon stable and increased sources of revenue and sufficient return on investment. Policymakers should ensure that transit service investments are strategic: compatible, complementary or supportive of long-deferred capacity projects, including the Gateway trans-Hudson passenger tunnel (See Strategy 5.5) and of regional providers, including private bus carriers, private jitney operator services, and community transportation service providers.

STRATEGY 5.5: Increase transit system capacity in strategic locations

Although the pandemic of 2020 halted growth in public transit use, most pre-pandemic transit capacity challenges remain vital, post-pandemic needs that must be addressed for North Jersey to remain economically competitive and reliably accessible. Expanding and strengthening trans-Hudson rail and bus capacity, improving the state of good repair and resilience of core system components in the face of climate change, and designing and implementing transit-supportive roadways that prioritize faster and more reliable regional and local bus routes are just some of these critical capacity needs. Specific examples include the trans-Hudson Gateway Tunnel, Hackensack River Portal Bridge and North Jersey Coast Line Raritan River Bridge replacements, NJ TRANSIT's Hudson-Bergen Light Rail system extension, the Northeast Corridor mid-line train loop, protective emergency train storage yards and distributed back-up power systems, and new and replacement bus garages. Implementing actions listed under this strategy will be contingent upon stable and increased sources of capital funding and require policymakers to pursue strategic transit capital investments.

STRATEGY 5.6: Improve transportation safety

The statewide Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP), adopted in 2020, is not only a federal requirement for spending safety funding but also a critical "blueprint" document that guides cooperative efforts to improve roadway safety. The plan recommends projects and programs that address seven emphasis areas (Lane Departure, Intersections, Driver Behavior, Pedestrians and Bicyclists and Other Vulnerable Road Users - all relating to equity and data emphasis areas) and process improvements through engineering, enforcement, education and emergency response strategies. A core SHSP principle is Towards Zero Deaths (TZD), a policy that seeks to reduce fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads through long-term integration of safety countermeasures, advancements in technology and the development of a positive safety culture that changes attitudes and behaviors leading to reductions in the frequency and severity of crashes. Promoting and applying the principles identified in the NJ SHSP throughout the region will help raise awareness about safety and reduce the number of preventable injuries and fatalities.

STRATEGY 5.7: Use technology to improve transportation

The emergence of intelligent transportation system (ITS) technologies will transform the North Jersey travel landscape in the coming years. Emerging technologies allow us to envision a future of connected and automated (driverless) vehicles, transit vehicle priority systems on highway corridors, and smart two-way information and response communications between our mobile devices and roadside infrastructure. These technologies offer safer, better informed and more efficient travel if they are implemented equitably and integrated with other regional priorities including sustainable land use, renewable energy, and shared-ride travel.

To achieve this goal, our region should pursue multimodal assessments of connected technologies across Northern New Jersey transportation corridors and a statewide ITS Architecture platform to help agencies effectively coordinate projects. In addition, our region will need to strengthen partnering through efforts such as The Connected Corridor and The Complete Team in New Jersey to advance cost-effective technological solutions and institutional cooperation.

