

# 1. Introduction

The Rockingham Planning Commission region’s vitality and the quality of life for its residents depend greatly on the mobility of people and goods, the accessibility of destinations by multiple modes of travel, and the safe accommodation of all users of the transportation system. The region enjoys a strong interregional backbone transportation system, with an excellent highway network, airport, deep water port and intercity bus and rail access. Public transit and human service transportation are more readily accessible in the region than in many parts of the state, between the COAST and CART public transit systems and non-profit providers. The region has seen improvement in travel options in the past decade, with the expansion of transit services and greater attention to bicycle and pedestrian accommodation.

At the same time the region, and the state as a whole, face significant challenges in maintaining, modernizing and improving the safety of our transportation system. Among these are changing travel demand patterns associated with economic change and demographic shifts; and perennial funding constraints. New Hampshire suffers from a lack of funding for the transportation system in general, including system maintenance and operation, and there is a particular lack of funding for modes other than highways. Public transportation availability varies significantly across the region by community, with major gaps in access in the middle of Rockingham County. Total traffic volume, which had leveled off and in fact declined during the economic

downturn, has again begun to climb with potential implications for congestion and capacity. Observed and projected patterns of more severe coastal flooding related to storm events and sea level rise will increasingly impact transportation infrastructure along the coastline. Lastly, the aging of the Baby Boom generation will result in a near doubling of the senior population in the coming 25 years, creating demands for new transit options and other changes to the build environment to support aging in place. These existing conditions, system needs and challenges are set out in greater detail in the following pages, together with regional goals and strategies to improve mobility, accessibility, and safety; and otherwise maintain and enhance the region’s economic vitality and quality of life.

## Purpose and Scope

This Transportation Plan serves as the short and long-range transportation planning document for the Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC), which is the designated

### RPC Communities covered by this Plan:

Atkinson  
Brentwood  
Danville  
East Kingston  
Epping  
Exeter  
Fremont  
Greenland  
Hampstead  
Hampton  
Hampton Falls  
Kensington  
Kingston  
New Castle  
Newfields  
Newington  
Newton  
North Hampton  
Plaistow  
Portsmouth  
Raymond  
Rye  
Salem  
Sandown  
Seabrook  
South Hampton  
Stratham

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the area and includes 27 Communities in Southeastern New Hampshire (**Map 1-1**). The plan examines current regional conditions, takes into account updated socioeconomic projections and changing growth patterns, and describes the financial resources available through current law and policy and how well those meet the identified transportation needs for the region.

Shaped by these factors, the plan sets out the region's adopted goals, strategies for achieving those goals, performance metrics for measuring progress in implementation, and specific project proposals to improve the transportation system through 2045.

It is in compliance with the ***Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act*** (FAST Act), and addresses a minimum twenty-year planning horizon (26 years at adoption) as directed by the FAST Act's planning standards.

The plan has been developed as part of the region's continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process, which considers all transportation modes and supports metropolitan community development. It reflects the goals and objectives of member communities in their own master plans and policies, of the NH Department of Transportation in its Long Range Transportation Plan, as well as those established by the RPC via the Regional Master Plan and the MPO process.

The responsibilities for carrying out transportation planning are specified in a Memorandum of Understanding between the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT), Rockingham Planning Commission and the three transit agencies serving the region: the Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation (COAST), the Greater Derry-Salem Cooperative Alliance for

Regional Transportation (CART – now merged with Manchester Transit Authority or MTA), and the UNH Wildcat Transit system.

## The Planning Process

The Long Range Plan is generally developed by the RPC as illustrated in Figure 1.1. In accordance with FAST Act, the MPO must review and update the transportation plan at least every five (5) years in air quality attainment areas. Updates must, at a minimum confirm the validity and consistency of the Plan's major assumptions regarding forecasted land use and transportation assumptions for the region. To maintain consistency with the State's two-year update cycle of the New Hampshire Ten Year Transportation Plan, the MPO will update the project-specific aspects of the Plan every two years as needed. Such shorter term updates will be timed so as to occur concurrently with the biennial TIP development process.

The goals, needs and strategies identified in this Plan have been developed based on extensive public input gathered as part of the most recent update to the RPC's Regional Master Plan and other public engagement efforts over the past five years. These efforts have included outreach to stakeholders already active in the transportation planning process, but also input from the community at large that may not otherwise attend a transportation planning forum. As part of the MPO's Environmental Justice and transit coordination work, there has also been targeted outreach to groups particularly likely to have unmet transportation needs, and from specific sectors such as senior citizens and individuals with disabilities and low income populations. These outreach efforts have included:

- A telephone survey of 2,935 randomly-selected households across New Hampshire, including 400 in the

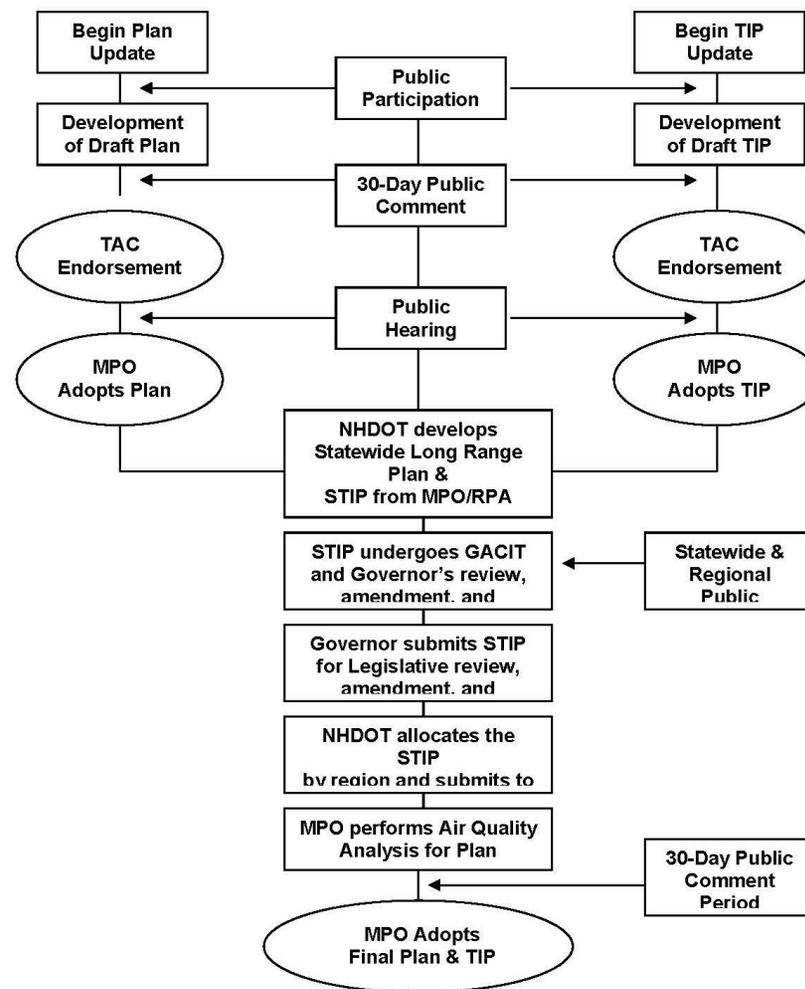
MPO region, conducted by the UNH Survey Center; a non-random-sample on-line survey of key MPO stakeholders and other members of the public using the same survey instrument;

- Three public forums around the region focused on transportation needs as well as broader regional issues;
- Focus groups with professional planners, senior citizens and individuals with disabilities in the MPO region;
- Surveys of local welfare officers, non-profit human service agencies, and populations likely to have unmet transportation needs (seniors, individuals with disabilities, low income individuals);
- Collaborative work with the other New Hampshire MPOs to evaluate potential performance metrics, including an extensive set of stakeholder interviews;
- Several working sessions with the MPO Technical Advisory Committee regarding plan structure as well as goals and strategies.
- Public comment period for review of the Draft Long Range Plan documents.

A full description of findings from the public participation process is included in Appendix A – Public Participation Summary.

The plan is ultimately adopted by the MPO Policy Committee, made up of representatives from the twenty-seven member communities as well as agency representatives from the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and the Air Resources Division of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Resources (NHDES). Also involved in the MPO planning process are representatives from three regional transit providers: the Cooperative Alliance for

**FIGURE 1.1  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRANSPORTATION PLAN &  
TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP)**



Acronym Glossary: MPO = Metropolitan Planning Organization; NHDOT = NH Department of Transportation; TAC = Technical Advisory Committee; TIP = Transportation Improvement Program; STIP = State Transportation Improvement Program; GACIT = Governor's Advisory Committee on Intermodal Transportation; RPA = Regional Planning

Seacoast Transportation (COAST) and the Cooperative Alliance for Regional Transportation/Manchester Transit Authority (MTA/CART), University of New Hampshire Wildcat Transit; and the Pease Development Authority (PDA). A full list of current Commissioners is included on the MPO website (<https://www.therpc.org/commissioners>).

## Plan Structure & Contents

The Long Range Plan is composed of both FAST Act required elements as well as other components that, while not required, help provide a more complete picture of the transportation system and future needs. The plan is organized into seven chapters. The intent is that the structure enables readers to more quickly find the information that they are seeking by simplifying the organization and developing chapters that can each be considered a standalone document, or all taken together. The seven chapters are:

**Chapter 1: Introduction.** This chapter summarizes the MPO's responsibilities under the Federal transportation planning process, the scope and structure of the plan, and the extensive public input process that has shaped the plan.

**Chapter 2: Planning Framework.** This chapter sets out the MPO's Goals for the regional transportation system and the transportation planning process, and describes the broader planning context in which the MPO works, including Federal requirements, the New Hampshire Livability Principles, and the Regional Vision for the RPC region as defined in the Regional Master Plan.

**Chapter 3: Existing Conditions.** This chapter provides the background information on the region. This includes a description

of land use patterns, demographic data and commuting travel patterns, as well as overviews of the modal components of the transportation system, including Highways, Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities, Public Transportation, Transportation Demand Management, and Freight Transportation facilities and programs.

**Chapter 4: Trends & Anticipated Future Conditions.** This chapter provides a context for future transportation system needs based on regional growth and forecasting. A needs assessment is structured around the Plan's nine goal areas. Scenarios for various growth patterns demonstrate alternative plans for future development. The region's needs are projected based on these scenarios.

**Chapter 5: The Constrained Transportation Plan.** This chapter lists those projects that are feasible given existing and expected financial resources as well as other limitations as required by the FAST Act. The project listing is organized into the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) which lists the first four years of projects (2021-2024) and the Plan projects which are the remaining years of 2025 to 2045.

**Chapter 6: Implementation Strategies.** This chapter sets out a range of actions for the MPO, member municipalities and other stakeholders to move the region toward attaining the Plan's stated goals. Implementation strategies are organized by goal area, including Mobility, Transportation Choices, Integrated Planning for Transportation & Land Use, System Preservation & Modernization, Energy & Environment, Safety, Economic Vitality, Resiliency, Public Health, Efficient Planning Process, and Resource Availability. Certain strategies are cross cutting and will help in attaining multiple goals, and these are identified accordingly.



## COVID-19 & The Transportation System

The impact of the novel coronavirus COVID-19 on the transportation system regionally and nationally during 2020 would be hard to overstate. The need for social distancing combined with more formal stay at home recommendations has greatly curtailed discretionary travel and reduced commute trips for many residents of the region able to work or participate in school from home. Many people in front line jobs that require a physical presence in the workplace have changed commute patterns too, reducing carpooling and transit use.

Highway traffic volumes statewide in New Hampshire dropped by as much as 56% in the spring of 2020 before gradually beginning to climb back up. More speed related crashes have resulted from fewer cars on the road. public transit agencies suspended fixed route transit service in March through May 2020 to allow time to procure safety equipment and retool operations to better ensure safety for riders and drivers. Bicycling and walking have conversely grown as many people sought options for outdoor activity after being isolated at home for extended periods.

This 2021 update to the RPC MPO Long Range Transportation Plan is intended to be a minor update, revisiting fiscal constraint and project timing but not fundamentally revisiting goals, objectives and policies established for the plan in 2018. For that reason this document does not comprehensively address impacts of COVID-19 on the various transportation system measures and travel trends described in Chapter 4 – Existing Conditions and Chapter 5 – Future Conditions.

COVID-19 is anticipated to have medium and potentially long term impacts on the transportation system through 2021 and likely beyond the point that most of the population has been vaccinated for the virus. Several of these are summarized here:

- **Telecommuting Growth & Implications** – COVID-19 has forced a massive experiment in working from home, and many employers have found that has worked surprisingly well for them, reducing traditional skepticism about productivity if employees aren't in the office. Certainly many employees will return to normal office situations once infection risk is lowered. To the extent that other employers determine they can realize cost and efficiency benefits by continuing telework after widespread vaccination is completed, this will have implications for traffic levels, emissions levels, transit ridership, the commercial real estate market and businesses near employment centers that rely on employees going out for lunch or running errands around their work day.
- **Funding Impacts** - Reduced commuter travel also means fewer gallons of gas sold and reduced revenue to the state and federal highway funds, with implications across modes.
- **Housing Market** – 2020 saw a spike in housing prices in the MPO region driven by home buyers moving out of cities such as Boston and New York but able to work remotely. Demand has tended toward single family homes with private outdoor space rather than downtown apartments or condominiums.
- **Impacts on Transit & Ridesharing** – Public transit agencies such as COAST have seen ridership rebound partially following short suspensions in spring 2020, but ridership remains 40%-45% below normal. Intercity bus services like C&J have been hit even harder with big drops in airline travel and many regular Boston commuters working from home.
- **Biking & Walking** have increased as office and gym closures have led many to seek fresh air and exercise outside walking and riding. Bicycle sales have set records and demand for parking at trailheads has outstripped capacity.