

Executive Summary

Moving Forward:

The Ulster County Transportation Plan



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Moving Forward: Multi-modal Transportation and Quality Communities

Overview and Highlights of The Transportation Plan

The Ulster County Transportation Plan addresses short, medium and long-range issues concerning transportation's role in shaping the County's future for the next twenty years. The goals of the **Plan** are to encourage the formation of partnerships and establish the basis for the adoption of policies, programs, and implementation funding that

"Provides for a safe and efficient multi-modal transportation system that supports the present and future needs of residents, visitors, and businesses of Ulster County and the region, that strengthens preferred land use patterns, protects the environment, preserves and enhances quality of life and can be achieved at a publicly acceptable cost."

The **Plan** recognizes that a finite availability of resources is likely to constrain new facility options and, as a result, a high priority is placed on maintaining and improving existing highways, bridges, transit services, pedestrian facilities and bicycle facilities. Priority capital improvements are identified that include capacity additions for selected roadways, new transit service, and additional sidewalks, shoulders, and trails. The **Plan** identifies the fundamental link between land use and transportation needs. It provides a series of primers and strategies designed to aid decision-makers in utilizing transportation investment to help create quality communities. Above all, it seeks to build consensus on the transportation/land use link and establish a coordinated approach to develop a multi-modal transportation system.

The **Plan's** recommendations are for the creation of a multimodal transportation system. They include highways, transit, bicycle and pedestrian, trails, freight, harbors, and airports.

These recommendations are designed to achieve multiple goals of:

- *Efficiency- Congestion Relief*
- *Condition – Maintaining the Transportation System in Good Condition*
- *Safety*
- *Equity*
- *Environmental Quality & Quality of Life*
- *Long-Term Land Use and Economic Development*

Each is described below:

Efficiency – Congestion Relief

The ***Plan*** utilized a traffic model to look at present and future travel demand. The modeling identified roadways that are currently congested and also identified roadways that are likely to experience congestion in the future. A number of transportation demand and system management techniques are discussed in the plan to better balance transportation supply and demand. Additionally, a number of typical transportation problem sections were studied to show what can be done to improve transportation in the City of Kingston, villages and hamlets throughout Ulster County.

For example:

Route 9W in the Town of Marlborough has experienced congestion that impedes through north-south movement while at the same time disturbing the character of the hamlet of Marlboro. Using the strategies recommended in the ***Plan***, illustrations show changes that could be made to the street system that would benefit the hamlet. These include adding a signal at Western Avenue and making King Street a dead-end, as well as improving sidewalks and adding streetscape enhancements. The changes offer opportunities to:

- Improve efficiency by reducing turning movement conflicts
- Provide a safer highway system
- Improve the visual appearance of the hamlet
- Promote additional growth and positive land use change

The ***Plan*** provides similar illustrations and improvement strategies for Port Ewen (Route 9W), Stone Ridge (Route 209), and Washington Avenue in Kingston. Detailed studies are proposed for Saugerties, the Town of Lloyd, Route 9W in the Town of Ulster, and at numerous specific intersections. These studies should be guided by the same principles of multiple goals that go beyond simply adding highway capacity.

Condition – Maintaining the Transportation System

Overall, State and County highways and bridges in Ulster County are in better condition than many other areas in the State. Within the County, the percentage of State highways in good condition is the third highest in the State. County and local highway departments have also made efficient use of limited resources in maintaining their roads however, no objective measure of current pavement conditions exists. The ***Plan*** recommends implementing the Pavement Maintenance Management System, provided through the Cornell Local Roads Program, for all non-state highways in the County. This system can provide better documentation to establish highway condition at the local level, establish priorities and support funding level requests. In addition, the ***Plan*** provides support for enhancement of

current maintenance funding, particularly equipment and staffing, both central to getting the job done.

Safety

Safety considerations are inherent in all the recommendations. The ***Plan*** also includes proposals for safety improvements in three major areas – crash monitoring systems; provision of consistent shoulders on all roads; and stepped up efforts on guide rails, centerline painting, warning signs, and pedestrian crossings.

Shoulders are particularly important meeting the multiple goals of:

- Increasing pavement life
- Providing safer motoring, bicycle and pedestrian environments
- Reducing conflicts from stopped vehicles
- Easing some maintenance activities such as providing snow storage areas.

Equity

Transit service is critical to an expanding segment of the County's population. The ***Plan*** recommends continuing to fund specialized services as well as capital funding for replacement vehicles, and system infrastructure to improve service and maintain reliability. Transit service is an important part of a multimodal transportation system that meets multiple goals of:

- Serving special need populations as well as commuters and others
- Reducing congestion in critical corridors such as the Hudson River Crossings
- Providing an alternative trip mode, particularly in activity centers including Kingston and New Paltz
- An important component for economic growth that integrates employees and employers

Environmental Quality & Quality of Life

A well functioning multi-modal transportation system is a cornerstone for measuring environmental quality and quality of life in most communities. Transportation and land use development can have positive and negative impacts on our natural and manmade environments. This ***Plan*** seeks to guide transportation and land use development to preserve and enhance environmental quality. The ***Plan*** takes this as the baseline and recommends design objectives as part of implementation. Initiatives included in the ***Plan*** are the use of context sensitive design as part of project implementation, landscaping and lighting recommendations, and designation of scenic byways. Corridor illustrations found in Section IV graphically show the impact of these. They include gateways, streetscapes, transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities and landscaping to help create not only safer and more efficient facilities, but also a "quality community".

Long-Term Land Use and Economic Development

One of the key objectives of the ***Plan*** is to foster an understanding of the transportation/land use link mentioned earlier. The ***Plan's*** separate report on

Transportation and Quality Communities Strategies was specifically designed to emphasize the linkages between land use and transportation. It provides a "tool kit" of methodologies that includes overall land use regulations and specific means to address corridor management, congestion, transit access, site access, pedestrian friendly environments, etc. The objectives are to achieve a linked multi-modal system that reinforces preferred land use patterns, enhance quality of life and environment, and be responsive to growth.

Future Growth

Trends Effecting the Transportation System

Ulster County has the potential to experience a faster pace of growth in the future than seen in recent decades. To account for this the **Plan** considers a baseline growth scenario with a population increase of 12 percent and an employment growth of 31 percent, as well as a high growth scenario with a 21 percent population growth and a 48 percent employment growth. These higher growth rates should be considered realistic given the substantial upswing in residential development proposals and interest in commercial real estate since September 2001, as well as State legislation that would permit casinos in the Catskills.

Without improvement to the existing highway system or changes in development trends, the **Plan** concludes that the high growth scenario would result in the number of congested locations on the County's highway system increasing by 50%. Generally, this congestion would occur during the peak commuter hours and could be addressed with improvements at problem intersections and highway segments. Major exceptions are the Hudson River Bridges. The **Plan** provides recommendations that would reduce this need by creating a well-developed multi-modal transportation system, and addressing quality of life and economic issues. These include:

- Corridor and access management techniques
- Supporting alternative development patterns, including mixed use, that combine trips and encourage alternatives to the automobile
- Enhancing transit operations
- Recognition of the need to undertake comprehensive transportation and land use studies in New Paltz, Saugerties, Stone Ridge and other areas
- Considering alternatives to increase the capacity of the Hudson River Crossings

Key to Success

Organizing for Change

The **Plan** provides the foundation for addressing the County's multimodal transportation needs over the next 20 years. Its success is ultimately based on support for its policies, programs, and actions by the citizens of the County and elected officials. Toward that end, the County is fortunate that it has been designated as a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). This designation will provide federal support for the planning process and offers a unique opportunity for elected officials

to participate in a structured process that can coordinate their efforts. The *Plan* wholeheartedly endorses the formation of a separate MPO for the County and suggests a broad organizational structure that is seen in other MPOs. To guide MPO discussions the *Plan* includes goals grouped into four broad themes that could act as a basis for future transportation investment decisions. These are:

1. Preserve and Manage: Preserving the existing system of highways, bridges, transit service, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, Hudson River access, aviation and freight service in good condition is the highest priority. Managing these facilities through better inventory systems and evaluation methods will mean that investment decisions will not be made based on which level of government owns the facility but rather on where the needs are.
2. Link Transportation and Land Use: Land use and site design decisions made by all parties have a profound effect on the transportation system. Implementation of the policies that link the transportation and land use issues illustrated in the three primers prepared for this *Plan* would help to insure that the County's transportation system matures into a true multi-modal system that reaches to this Plan's vision statement. The primers are:
 - Access Management Guidelines,
 - Bicycle and Pedestrian Primer: A Handbook for Local Communities,
 - Transportation and Quality Communities Strategies for Ulster County.
3. Provide for all Modes: The *Plan's* recommendations address needs of all modes. All have a role and must be considered as part of a unified system that fosters safety, convenience, and growth. For the highway system, this means that decisions and funding must consider pedestrian and bike access, abutting land use, transit service, and trucking needs. All transportation projects must be viewed as context sensitive solutions and seek to meet multimodal transportation needs and help create quality communities.
4. Support the County's Growth Potential: A well designed, implemented, and maintained multi-modal transportation system offers substantial potential for future community development. Found within the *Plan* are policies that support the following:
 - economic growth driven by technological innovations and quality of life
 - encouraging mixed use neighborhood additions to existing community centers with compact pedestrian and transit friendly design
 - working landscapes with enhanced access to recreational trails connected to activity centers.

Moving Forward :
Summary of Policies, Programs, and Actions

Within the ***Plan*** for each mode, key sections provide a set of programs policies and projects to attain the ***Plan*** goals and objectives and guide future decisions. Included are specific actions to implement these programs as well as policies to reach the ***Plan***'s goals.

- Policy recommendations address broad goals for the transportation system,
- Program recommendations implement the policies, and
- Project and Action recommendations are location specific activities.

The ***Plan***'s wide range of short-, medium- and long-range programs and actions adhere to the “transportation and quality communities” philosophy contained in NYS Quality Communities Interagency Task Force Report. Below are the five major ways implementing ***Plan*** recommendations will create a positive environment for the County’s future

Protect and preserve valuable natural, scenic, historic, and cultural resources, and enhance the quality of life

- Incorporate context sensitive design into transportation decisions
- Include environmental and quality of life factors in local planning board checklist for all new projects
- Identify areas that need additional enhancements and landscaping along transportation corridors
- Evaluate use of environmentally sensitive materials and “clean” bus technology
- Evaluate the effectiveness of Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Community Solutions for Transportation (CST) and provide for future funding
- Develop a Countywide Trail System by adding connections and expanding the County's trail system including coordination with appropriate parking areas, connecting bike and transit routes, sidewalks, and bridges.
- Sign bike routes and trails
- Add signing and access improvements to serve the Hudson River Greenway, Route 209 Corridor, and Route 44/55 corridors.
- Improve river transportation access including areas in Marlborough and Highland as well as rebuilding the former dayliner docks and other facilities in Kingston
- Designation of scenic byways and recognition of other scenic road corridors
- Identify roads appropriate for low impact development, low speeds, “naturally” calmed traffic, and narrower traveled ways

Make efficient and safe use of existing infrastructure

- Conduct detailed traffic engineering intersection studies at critical locations and implement improvements
- Implement an accident (crash) monitoring system to prioritize and identify safety improvements.

- Expand installation of guide rails on County and local roads
- Review and modify passing zones on state routes
- Fund and program annual shoulder construction and widening on State, County and Local Roads so that a 4' to 6' standard can be provided where contextually appropriate
- Implement a pavement management system for County and Local Roads that provides a basis for funding decisions
- Evaluate roadway functional classification and jurisdiction (ownership) as a way to better coordinate funding with function
- Continue to rehabilitate and reconstruct highways and bridges to improve overall condition ratings
- Evaluate critical rail at-grade crossings and consider consolidations or possible grade separation
- Establish pedestrian zones in activity centers and include pedestrian needs as part of system capital needs and approvals
- Implement traffic calming program and projects

Encourage the development of preferred land use patterns, while accommodating economic expansion and population growth in existing centers

- Encourage the evaluation of local land use regulations to improve corridor and access management, transit accessibility, and bicycle/pedestrian accommodations
- Consider interconnections as part of land use decisions
- Complete a truck access study that will address geometric constraints to truck movements on the highway system and develop improved truck routing
- Implement the expansion and promotion of bike routes, trails, and scenic roadways
- Resolve conflicting uses in the County's harbors and plan for recreational expansion as well as freight and marine repair services
- Define the role of aviation facilities and relationship between in-County facilities, Stewart Airport and economic development

Integrate transportation improvements with community enhancement

- Prepare and implement corridor improvement plans that will include access management, streetscape improvements, traffic calming measures, and bike and pedestrian facilities. Priority areas for implementation of these plans should be Kingston, Saugerties, Highland, Port Ewen, Marlboro, New Paltz, Stone Ridge, Ellenville and Woodstock.
- Implement environmental initiatives, context sensitive designs, and transportation enhancements
- Fund new bus shelters and transit information technology
- Provide for sidewalk improvements in pedestrian zones in villages, hamlets, and the City of Kingston
- Identify short connecting walking routes and establish a program to protect and maintain them

Make the transportation system more multi-modal

- Develop multi-modal transportation hubs with appropriate facilities in Kingston, New Paltz, Saugerties, Ellenville, and Woodstock
- Evaluate and modify local land use regulations and fund transportation projects that to make communities more transit, bicycle and pedestrian friendly
- Support alternative land use development that will encourage non-motorized travel and support transit
- Integrate schedules for all bus services in the County and coordinate with adjoining county systems and regional carriers
- Purchase replacement transit vehicles on a regular cycle
- Expand coordination between transit services and social service agencies
- Negotiate service agreements with SUNY New Paltz
- Investigate the potential for new transit services to Orange and Dutchess Counties.
- Complete the County's trailway system and continue development of a bike route system
- Promote bike tourism interconnection to transit system and supporting destination points in villages and hamlets
- Add or expand Park and Ride facilities at the Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge and Thruway interchanges
- Evaluate ferry service between Kingston and Rhinecliff

Plan Implementation

Next steps to successful implementation

The **Plan** identifies the need for increased transportation funding for new initiatives in the County of approximately \$9,000,000 per year while maintaining existing funding levels. Projections from the New York State Department of Transportation and the Ulster County Planning Department indicate that for the most part this level of funding will be available. However, to complete all of the projects recommended, there is a shortfall in local funding of approximately \$700,000 per year. If this additional funding is not available, local decision makers will need to establish project priorities. The new MPO, being implemented, will play a lead role in seeking and allocating funds and can help build the support of all constituencies to achieve these levels of investment. The MPO can provide a forum to reach consensus, build positive partnerships, and support for the **Plan's** goals and implementation of the recommended programs, projects and studies through the Transportation Improvement Program and Unified Planning and Work Program. Included in the discussions should be:

- Improving transportation related quality of life in hamlets and villages by working with Federal, State, County and local governments to provide the type of transportation enhancements described in Section III and IV of the **Plan**
- Improving the condition of the County and local roads and bridges to reduce the percentage rated fair or poor
- Enhancing the crash reporting system and use the information collected to improve safety on the road system

- Improving and constructing pedestrian and bicycle facilities and traffic calming measures over the coming years so that safe and connected opportunities exist for walking and cycling as alternatives to driving particularly for short trips and in activity centers
- Incorporating quality community strategies as part of land use and multi-modal transportation decisions and projects
- Encouraging developer participation in financing demand management, bicycle, pedestrian and transit improvements as part of traffic mitigation during project approvals
- Implementing appropriate transportation management systems
- Considering expansion of transportation funding mechanisms especially at the County and Local Government level
- Actively pursuing public/private partnerships to maximize the benefits of public funds
- Identifying fees and approval processes that implement transportation improvements
- Advocating for the County's transportation program with State and Federal officials
- Involving local citizens in transportation decisions

Ulster County now has a unique opportunity to recreate its transportation system in a multi-modal fashion that will continue to support growth and community development goals. The keys to the successful creation of this system are working together, at all jurisdictional levels, with commitment, coordination, cooperation, and emphasizing citizen involvement.