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Project Abstract

Over the past several years, a number of policy threads have gained prominence in New Jersey. These include adapting to climate change, advancing social justice, and addressing the needs of overburdened communities. In addition, the disparate impacts the pandemic had on traditionally marginalized populations (low-income, black and brown communities, people with disabilities, and older adults) highlight the need to address mobility and accessibility issues in a more holistic way. In March of 2021, the New Jersey Climate Change Alliance Transportation working group launched an initiative that seeks to respond to the confluence of these threads. The initiative is intended to fill a gap in current transportation planning and policy discussions related to reducing emissions from the transport sector and to complement efforts to advance a transition to electric vehicles. The initiative is organized around a multi-goal framework that provides an opportunity to reimagine mobility in New Jersey in a way that is healthier, more just, resilient, and carbon-neutral.

The initiative includes two phases of work. Phase 1, which is nearing completion, included a leading practice scan, data analysis, and mapping that documents existing conditions in eight New Jersey counties and a series of engagement events framed around developing a shared vision for what 21st Century healthy, just, efficient, resilient, and carbon-neutral mobility should look like in urban, suburban, and rural places in New Jersey. The events included a statewide “thought leaders” visioning workshop conducted in December 2022 and a series of county-focused virtual workshops to be conducted in March 2022. Phase 2 will involve a robust community-driven, equity-focused, visioning and neighborhood-scale planning process. The planning process will include community residents and leaders in 3-4 locations that exemplify the challenges and opportunities facing overburdened communities the State. The neighborhood-scale vision plans developed during Phase 2 will provide a basis for assessing what it will take to scale-up the vision statewide in terms of planning and policy interventions and needed investments.

Introduction

Achieving New Jersey’s energy and emissions targets to address climate change will require a multifaceted and sustained effort. To date, most attention with regard to reducing emissions in the transportation sector has been focused on encouraging the uptake of electric vehicles through incentives and deployment of EV charging infrastructure. The transition to electric vehicles is important, but it will likely take several decades. Further, a focus on reducing emissions by increasing the use of EVs alone has equity and environmental justice implications, at least in the short term. EV technology remains expensive and out of reach for many New Jersey residents, even with subsidies and rebates. Finally, a strategy that seeks to achieve carbon neutrality through EV investments alone ignores other important economic, social, and environmental goals related to the future of transportation in New Jersey. Rather than a single goal, New Jersey policymakers and communities could pursue multiple goals simultaneously.

Overview

To expand the focus of carbon-neutral transportation planning in New Jersey, the New Jersey Climate Change Alliance (NJCCA) Transportation Working Group (TWG) has partnered with the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers University (RU-VTC) to undertake a project designed to demonstrate how a comprehensive, multi-goal transportation planning and policy framework can be used to achieve carbon-neutral transportation that also provides healthy, just, efficient, and resilient mobility for all New Jersey residents (see Figure 1). The NJCCA TWG project aims to explore what needs to be done to retrofit New Jersey's communities and infrastructure to accommodate next-generation transportation in a way that simultaneously reduces emissions makes it easier to travel, improves health, increases transportation system efficiency, improves the resilience of communities and infrastructure while also ensuring equitable mobility and access for low-income households, black and brown communities, persons with disabilities, older adults, people living in rural communities, and other traditionally transportation-disadvantaged individuals and groups.

While addressing the various components of mobility are challenging, the confluence of several policy threads, in particular, addressing climate change, social equity, environmental justice, and addressing the needs of overburdened communities presents New Jersey with an opportunity to reimagine mobility in a way that is healthier, more just, resilient, and carbon-neutral. Furthermore, the disparate impacts the pandemic had on traditionally marginalized populations highlight the need to address mobility and accessibility issues in a more holistic way.

The project is framed around developing a shared vision for what 21st Century healthy, just, efficient, resilient, and carbon-neutral mobility should look like in urban, suburban, and rural places in New Jersey. It will also include an assessment of what it will take to scale-up the vision statewide in terms of planning and policy interventions and needed investments.

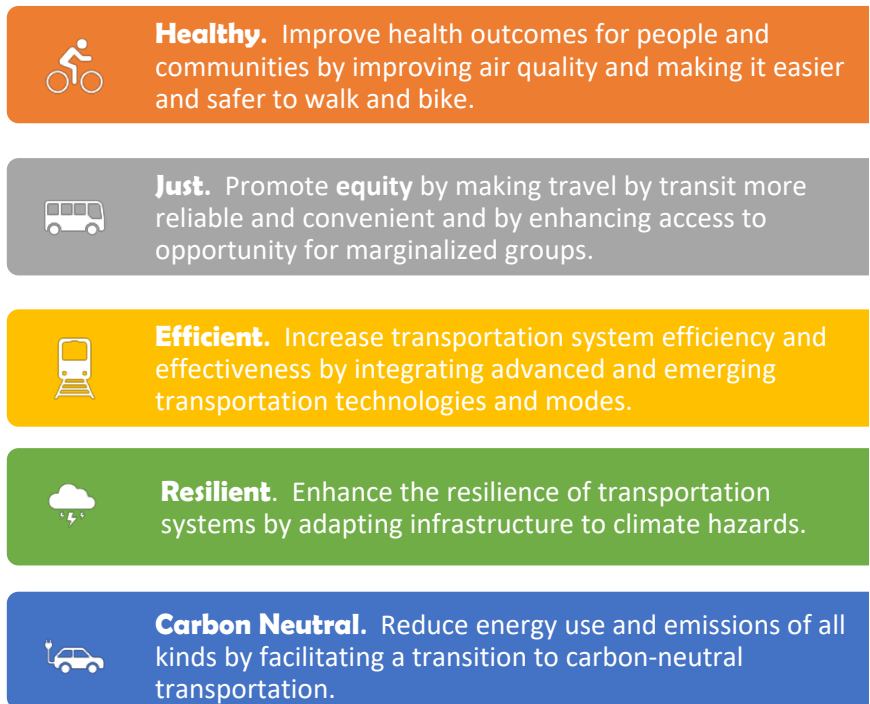


Figure 1. A multi-goal framework for achieving a healthier, more equitable, and cleaner transport future in New Jersey

Work Plan

<p>PHASE 1 – Exploring key concepts, desktop analysis, looking toward the future (Mar 2021 to Feb 2022)</p>	<p><u>Activities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct leading practice research • Collect, analyze, and map data • Identify of potential community and equity partners • Convene “Thought Leaders” webinar and visioning workshops • Identify vision components • Select locations for neighborhood-scale analysis
<p>PHASE 2 – Field work, community engagement, and developing recommendations (Mar 2022 to Sep 2022)</p>	<p><u>Activities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct field visits and interviews to get to know the neighborhoods • Develop and implement community engagement plan • Identify local mobility and other community needs and concerns • Prepare concept plans for retrofitting existing neighborhoods • Identify infrastructure needs • Develop planning and policy recommendations • Prepare comprehensive final report • Convene “Thought Leaders” Forum #2 – How do we get there?

Progress to Date

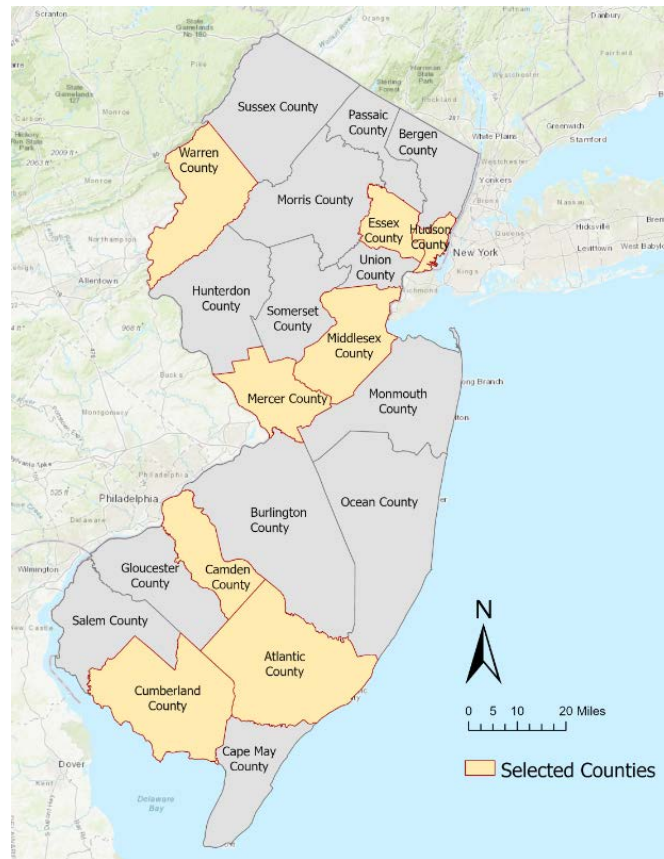
An important objective of the project is to inform the planning process with data, analysis, and mapping that can help community members, advocates, and decision-makers understand better on-the-ground conditions and the relationships between people, places, and the transportation systems that connect people to opportunity in New Jersey. Toward that end, we are nearing completion of Phase 2 of the project. Work products include:

- A **concept paper** that explores the current state of practice regarding healthy, just, resilient, and carbon-neutral mobility planning, including a look at the “15-minute” neighborhood planning movement which gains prevalence during the pandemic and the mobility-as-a-service concept.
- A series of **systems-level analysis case-study reports** that document existing conditions in eight New Jersey Counties. The case-study reports explore current conditions in terms of characteristics and geography of people and places and how people and places are connected from a transportation and mobility perspective.
- A **vision forum webinar** conducted in December 2021. This event brought together New Jersey state and local government leaders, staff and volunteers, statewide and local advocates, academics and others to listen and learn from a panel of national experts in the fields of planning, social justice, health, and carbon-neutral mobility. The program included talks by:
 - Brianne Eby, Senior Policy Analyst, Eno Center for Transportation
 - Calvin Gladney, President, and CEO of Smart Growth America, Inc.
 - Curtis Ostrodka, AICP, LEED AP, Director of Community Planning, VHB
 - Regan F. Patterson, PhD, Transportation Equity Research Fellow, Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc. (CBCF)

These phase one and two work products will provide the foundation for a community-driven visioning and neighborhood-scale planning process that will happen during Phase 3.

Next Steps – Visioning Workshops

An events committee was convened to plan a series of county-focused visioning workshops. This group includes representatives from the NJCCA transportation working group as well as community representatives and equity partners from each of the eight case study counties. Four workshops will be convened, each focusing on two counties. The workshops will be conducted in March 2022. The agenda for each workshop will include a short plenary presentation and a series of small group discussion related to community needs and aspirations related to: healthy mobility, transportation equity and just mobility, resilient mobility, and carbon-neutral mobility. The break-out discussions will be informed by the desktop data analysis and mapping described above, which will be shared with participants prior to the workshops. The input received at the visioning workshops will be used to inform the selection of three locations for more detailed neighborhood-scale community engagement and planning work in the Spring and Summer of 2022 as part of Phase 3.



Phase 1. Case Study Counties

More information on the project is available on the project website:

<https://vtc.rutgers.edu/health-just-carbon-neutral-mobility-for-all/>