North Central PA
2045 Long Range Transportation Plan

Prepared for:
North Central PA Regional Planning and Development Commission
49 Ridgmont Drive
Ridgway, PA  15853
(814) 773-3162
www.ncentral.com

By:
Michael Baker International
4431 N. Front Street
Harrisburg, PA  17110
(717) 213-2900

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The contents of this plan reflect the views of the authors, who are responsible for the facts and accuracy of the data presented. The contents do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of either the U.S. Department of Transportation or the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania at the time of publication.

This plan does not constitute a standard, specification, or regulation.
Message from the RPO Chair

Dear Reader -

The adoption of our 2045 LRTP demonstrates the commitment the North Central Rural Planning Organization (RPO) will be making in continuing to improve the condition of our transportation system, particularly our roadways and bridges. This includes improving the smoothness of the roadway surface and overall condition, as well as addressing our inventory of structurally deficient bridges. These improvements will be accomplished even as we address our transportation needs holistically, considering the role of other modes and surrounding land use.

In addressing these and other challenges, the North Central RPO has updated the region’s LRTP with an organization around three principles:

- Create Sustainable Communities
- Build the Regional Economy, and
- Establish a Modern Multimodal Transportation System.

In doing so, the LRTP establishes a revised transportation direction for the region, as well as an updated investment portfolio of recommended projects to help us get there. These projects will be considered as we develop future plans and programs.

Other significant initiatives stemming from the LRTP’s adoption include the need for the region to take a harder look at the impacts of Interstate 80. The interstate carries a quarter of all the region’s traffic: this is more fully understood when incidents occur and the resulting congestion snarls our communities and secondary roadways. The opportunity costs associated with these events in lost time and productivity are enormous, not to mention the loss of life. We must develop an approach that allows us as a region to be better able to plan for and respond to these events as they occur.

The LRTP update has also revealed a need for us to update our region’s functional classification scheme of roadways. The classifications we currently have in place have not been updated in over 25 years. Over that timeframe, land use and travel patterns have changed, necessitating we take a closer look at the currency of our roadway network designations. At stake are federal and state dollars that could be allocated to our region.

Our region’s population continues to grow older: this has special planning implications for the delivery of public transit services, as well as a declining demand for travel in general that affects our highway funding allocations. There are other challenges in front of us, not least of which includes improving our bicycle and pedestrian networks, maintaining Essential Air Service for our airports, and supporting rail
freight service, all of which help serve to keep our region connected to the state, national, and global economy.

The adoption of our latest LRTP also coincides with exciting new initiatives from PennDOT in “PennDOT Connects.” This new initiative is expected to reinvigorate planning at a local level by encouraging a greater degree of collaboration among state and local partners as together we consider what community needs are at the beginning of the planning process. This will help ensure the best allocation of the resources we have available. The LRTP will be an important resource as this effort begins in earnest during 2017.

We look forward to continuing our work for the region as we implement our latest long range transportation plan. I encourage you to read our blueprint for the future and to partner with us as we work toward the improvement of our region’s critically important transportation assets and services.

Sincerely,

Jodi Brennan, Chair
North Central Pennsylvania Rural Planning Organization
Geographic Position
The North Central Rural Planning Organization (RPO) region is one of the largest geographically in Pennsylvania. The six-county region includes Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean, and Potter Counties and is 5,080 square miles in size. With an estimated 2016 population of only 218,600, the region is largely rural, yet includes the economic centers of Bradford, DuBois, and St. Marys. It is served primarily by Interstate 80, as well as US 6 and US 219. The Allegheny National Forest, at nearly 241,000 acres, is a major natural feature of the region, as is nearly 610,000 acres of state forest. The City of Bradford at the region’s northern extent is just 80 miles, or a 100-minute drive, from the Peace Bridge and the Canadian border at Buffalo, NY.

Who We Are
The North Central RPO operates through an agreement with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) to commission studies and program capital improvements for highways, bridges, public transportation services, railroads, and bicycle/pedestrian facilities. In addition to the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), the Commission also develops a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), a Public Participation Plan (PPP), a Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan, and a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).
Acknowledgements

Rural Transportation Advisory Committee Voting Members (*Alternate*)

Jodi Brennan (*Rob Thomas*), Chair, Clearfield County Planning Commission  
Sara Andrews, Bradford Community and Economic Development  
Joe Barber, Barber Trucking, Inc.  
Richard Castonguay (*Perry Bowser*), Sandy Township  
Cliff Clark, Cameron County IDA  
Dave Cook (*Doug Dupnock*), PennDOT District 10-0  
Coletta Corioso (*Kristie Marsten*), ATA  
Dustin Dennis, McKean County Redevelopment and Housing Authority  
Terri Dennison, PA Route 6 Alliance  
Jodi Foster (*Tracy Gerber*), Elk County Planning Commission  
Frank Hampton (*Dean Roberts*), PennDOT Central Office  
Will Hunt, Potter County Planning Commission  
Amy Kessler (*Tom Buck*), North Central  
Brad Lashinsky (*Bill Setree*), Jefferson County Department of Development  
Jeremy Morey (*Sherri Geary*), McKean County Planning Commission  
Tim Potts, (R.J. Corman Railroad)  
Vickie Rusnak (*Tom Zurat*), PennDOT District 2-0  
Robert Shaffer, DuBois Regional Airport  
Kristen Vida, DuFAST  
Rick Viglione, PA Downtown Center

Long Range Transportation Plan Advisory Committee

Jodi Brennan, Clearfield County Planning Commission  
Tom Buck, North Central  
Richard Castonguay, Sandy Township  
Cliff Clark, Cameron County  
Dave Cook, PennDOT District 10-0  
Jodi Foster, Elk County Planning Commission  
Frank Hampton, PennDOT Central Office  
Amy Kessler, North Central  
Vickie Rusnak, PennDOT District 2-0  
Matthew Smoker, Federal Highway Administration  
Rick Viglione, PA Downtown Center

Consulting Team

Brian Funkhouser, AICP, Project Manager  
Jamie Lemon, AICP  
Tracey Vernon, AICP, PP
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Executive Summary

Who initiated the plan update?
The planning process was facilitated by the North Central Regional Planning and Development Commission, which provides the administrative staffing support for the North Central Rural Planning Organization (RPO). The Commission contracted with Michael Baker International to assist in the plan update.

Why was this plan update initiated?
The RPO works under the auspices of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) in implementing a regional transportation planning program. A primary responsibility of the RPO’s transportation planning program includes periodic updates to its long range transportation plan (LRTP). The North Central PA Commission adopted its current LRTP in October 2012. LRTPs are typically updated every four or five years. This LRTP update was completed in July 2017 and anticipates a planning horizon year of 2045.¹

Who participated in the planning process?
The plan was shaped through the input of an 11-member steering committee, which met four times over the course of the plan update. NCPRPDC also conducted a series of focus group meetings across the region, as shown in Table 1. A total of 66 individuals participated in these meetings. Meeting summaries are available in Appendix E.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
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<th>Location</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Economic Development</td>
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<td>NCPRPDC, Ridgway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce Development</td>
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<td>July 12, 2016</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Leaders (Northern)</td>
<td>July 12, 2016</td>
<td>Lantz Corners Getaway, Kane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Leaders (Southern)</td>
<td>July 13, 2016</td>
<td>Senior &amp; Community Center, DuBois</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aging/Veterans Partners</td>
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Source: NCPRPDC

¹ It should be noted that forecasts to the year 2045 were used throughout the plan, where possible. In some instances, data for the year 2040 was used as the nearest alternative.
The Commission also leveraged the work completed by the State Transportation Commission (STC) as it developed the 2017 Twelve Year Program. The Commission used the STC’s work in assessing public preferences regarding needed transportation improvements throughout the region.

**What are the plan’s major findings?**

- **Total population has continued to decline.** Most recent data from 2015 indicate that the region continues to lose population (Figure 1). Every county has registered losses since the 2010 Census. In total numbers, Elk County experienced the greatest population loss (4,240), while Cameron County registered the greatest rate of decline (20.8%). Forecasts have the region stabilizing at a number between 225,000 and 230,000 by 2040. The region’s share of population age 65+ is expected to climb to 30 percent over the same period.

- **Socio-economic trends have stabilized since the financial crisis.** Unemployment rates remain above state rates. Potter and Cameron County have registered some of the highest such rates in the state. A majority of those receiving unemployment benefits were once employed in the construction and manufacturing industries. The region is forecasted to post modest gains in the health care and transportation and warehousing industry sectors, offsetting declines in educational services, and finance and insurance.

- **Commutation Patterns.** The region is a net exporter of labor, yet a majority of the region’s resident workers are employed in one of the region’s six counties. Major commuter travel axes include Clearfield to State College, and Bradford to Jamestown, NY.

- **A decline in the demand for travel.** The region has nearly 6,500 linear miles of roadway supporting over 7 million vehicle miles of travel, daily. Over the longer term, the demand for travel within the region has been declining, mirroring a statewide trend. Declines have come even as gasoline prices have fallen from their historic peak in 2008. Nearly 80 percent of all travel within the region occurs on state-owned roadways such as Interstate 80, US 219, US 6, and PA 255.
• **Roadway conditions have been improving.** The RPO and PennDOT have done a good job in addressing the region’s roadway conditions. Indices measuring pavement quality identified 6648 segment-miles of roadway as being in poor condition in 2016. However, a majority of this mileage was on lower-order networks. Interstate 80 has 6.3 miles of fair or poor segments.

• **Improving roadway safety.** Since recording a total of over 2,500 crashes in 2008, the region’s total number of crashes has declined every single year, reaching a decade-low of 2,068 in 2015. Crash rates within the region are better than that of Pennsylvania overall, but fatality rates are higher than the state rate (per 100 million vehicle miles of travel), at 1.37 versus 1.2, respectively. Distracted driving continues to be a concern, entailing a greater share of crashes throughout the region. The share of crashes involving drivers older than 65 years old has also been steadily increasing (Figure 2).

• **Unsatisfactory, yet improving bridge conditions.** The region has 239 state-owned bridges greater than 8 feet in length that are structurally deficient, yet still safe for travel. This equates to just over one in six bridges. On the locally-owned network, the rate is two in five structurally deficient.²

• **Steady ridership on public transportation services.** The region’s providers of public transportation continue to provide a mix of fixed-route and shared-ride trips. ATA has served over 425,000 passenger trips over the past three years, while DuFAST recorded nearly 60,000. Both operators have experienced declines in senior ridership. DuFAST restructured its fixed-route service during 2016. The board of directors for both ATA and DuFAST made a decision to enter into a consolidation agreement in February 2017. The changes took place in July 2017, when all DuFAST operations were transferred to ATA. The agreement eliminates the local match requirement that the municipalities of DuBois, Falls Creek, and Sandy Township have had to pay each year.

• **Aviation service has been preserved.** Both Bradford Regional and DuBois Regional secured Southern Airways Express during 2016 to continue proving Essential Air Service (EAS) to Pittsburgh and Baltimore/Washington International. Many of the region’s municipalities that host or border airports have not adopted airport hazard zoning.

• **A reliance on trucks to move a greater share of goods.** There are nearly 24 million tons of freight that move into, out of, and through the region. The value of this freight is estimated to be in excess of $17.7 billion. Over 80 percent of the region’s freight is moved by truck. The
region is a net exporter of freight, with nearly 15 million tons of goods valued at $11.6 billion. Total freight tonnage through the region is expected to increase by 73 percent by the year 2040. Top destinations for the region’s goods include Buffalo and the Port of Baltimore. Top commodities being moved include petroleum products, coal, and broken stone or riprap.

**What are the Plan goals?**

The plan’s goal statements are based on the ten Federal planning factors from the FAST Act. These include statements related to:

- Economic Vitality
- Safety
- Security
- Accessibility and Mobility
- Environmental
- Integration and Connectivity
- Management and Operations
- Preservation
- Resiliency and Reliability
- Travel and Tourism

The Plan’s strategies are supported by a series of objectives, strategies, and performance measures. Eight of the 10 planning factors were carried over from the FAST Act’s predecessor legislation (MAP-21). The FAST Act added two new factors: system resiliency and reliability, and enhancing travel and tourism. The North Central RPO endorses the Federal planning factors and has incorporated them as part of its planning policy for areas related to transportation, land use, and economic development.

**How much money is available for the region’s transportation projects?**

The long range transportation plan includes a financial section with an estimate of the level of funding that will be needed over the life of the plan, and how the RPO can reasonably expect to fund the projects included, including anticipated revenues from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), state government, regional or local sources, the private sector, and user charges. Projected funds for the North Central region were derived based on data from PennDOT financial guidance documentation. To summarize, in today’s dollars, the region can expect to have $200 million available in transportation funding over the next four years, $619 million over the next 12 years, and $1.55 billion through the year 2045, or the horizon year of the LRTP.

**What happens next?**

The plan is a living document – a physical manifestation of an ongoing process. The North Central PA Regional Planning and Development Commission will continue to maintain and modify its LRTP as needed as part of a continuous, collaborative, and comprehensive planning program. A first step will involve an update of the 2019 Twelve Year Program, which will begin in earnest immediately after the LRTP is adopted. Projects from the LRTP will be used as candidates for placement onto this program. More information regarding North Central and its LRTP are available at its website: [rpo.ncentral.com](http://rpo.ncentral.com).
Downtown Emporium