



**NORTHERN TIER
Regional Planning &
Development Commission**

**Long Range
Transportation Plan
2003-2023**

Executive Summary

*A corridor by corridor, county by county
analysis of the Northern Tier's 15 corridors
of regional significance*



**A Message from the
Director**

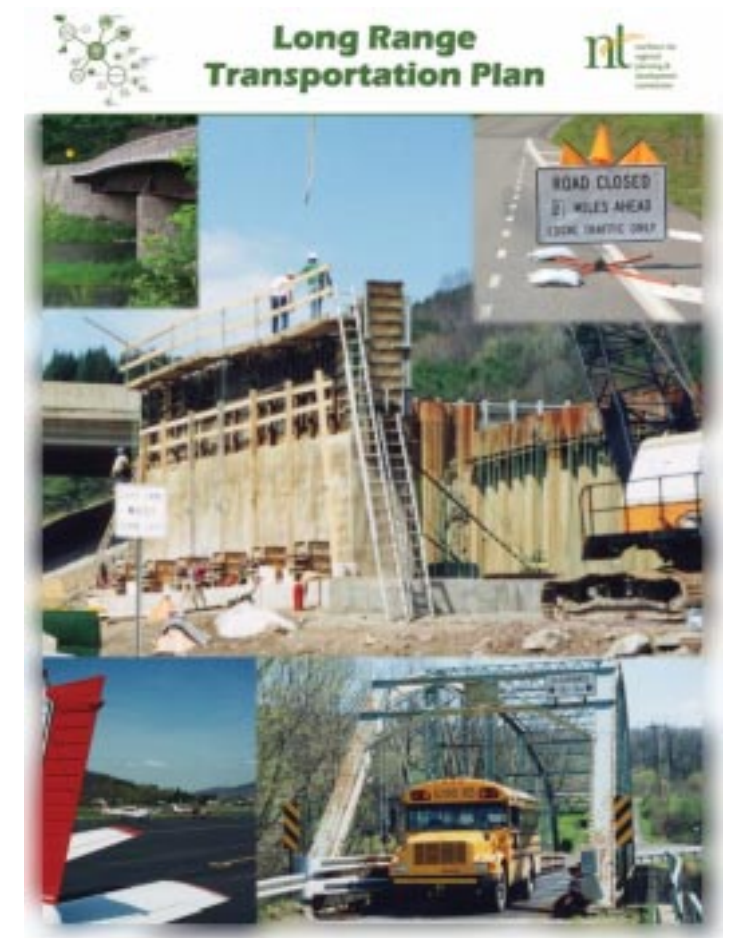
Our region has enjoyed substantial transportation investment. The recently completed Tunkhannock Bypass and the bright, new US 15 Welcome Center, along with ongoing work on the Towanda River Street extension project all speak to progress and the commitment of many. Improvements at the Bradford County Regional Airport underscore the importance of the Northern Tier's national and international access and the multimodal elements of a strong transportation system. As we look to the future, we anticipate the promise and potential of the new I-99 interstate corridor serving our region.

As important as our region's transportation system assets are, future mobility of both people and goods will be challenged by 2020 without a defined transportation improvement strategy. This Northern Tier Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) was developed to make the right investments to ensure our longer-term mobility and the related economic and community benefits. Indeed, now is the time to plan for a transportation system that recognizes the importance of safety, congestion relief, economic development, and connections between modes.

Our agency's work on the LRTP seeks to proactively plan for our region's future transportation needs. It could not have been accomplished without the commitment, ideas, and time volunteered by so many stakeholders and citizens in each of the Northern Tier Counties. PENNDOT has also formally designated the Northern Tier Regional Planning and Development Commission as the Rural Planning Organization (RPO) through which funding for transportation projects are planned and coordinated.

The LRTP follows PENNDOT's recent corridors-based approach to transportation planning. Our agency's Rural Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) identified 15 corridors of regional significance to guide future planning efforts. Each corridor is unique with respect to travel and improvement needs. Our public involvement affirmed that planning process participants relate very well to travel corridors as a planning focus.

The Northern Tier region has a wonderful quality of life, vast natural resources, and a proud history. We can be optimistic about our future, because it is ours to make as public and private partners for a brighter tomorrow. Transportation plays an important role to that end. The LRTP provides the basis for transportation to achieve its part in achieving overall regional progress well into the 21st cen-



... tury. It will be a dynamic plan in implementation, allowing us to fine tune goals, directions, and priorities as changing conditions and new opportunities dictate.

This Executive Summary is intended to inform and engage you in this regional initiative. The Plan is only as good as the commitment of all of us— who call the Northern Tier home or place of business— to ensure its implementation. The Executive Summary is also one more step in a continuous communication approach to keep you informed and involved as we plan together for our region's long term mobility. We look forward to receiving your comments, questions and ideas.

Kevin D. Abrams

**KEVIN D. ABRAMS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

The Northern Tier's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is the first of its kind in Pennsylvania. It follows a new methodology pioneered by the state's Long Range Plan (2000-2025), known as PennPlan. This plan also takes a *corridors-based* approach to long range planning and examines issues, opportunities and trends for 15 high-priority corridors throughout the Northern Tier as its foundation.

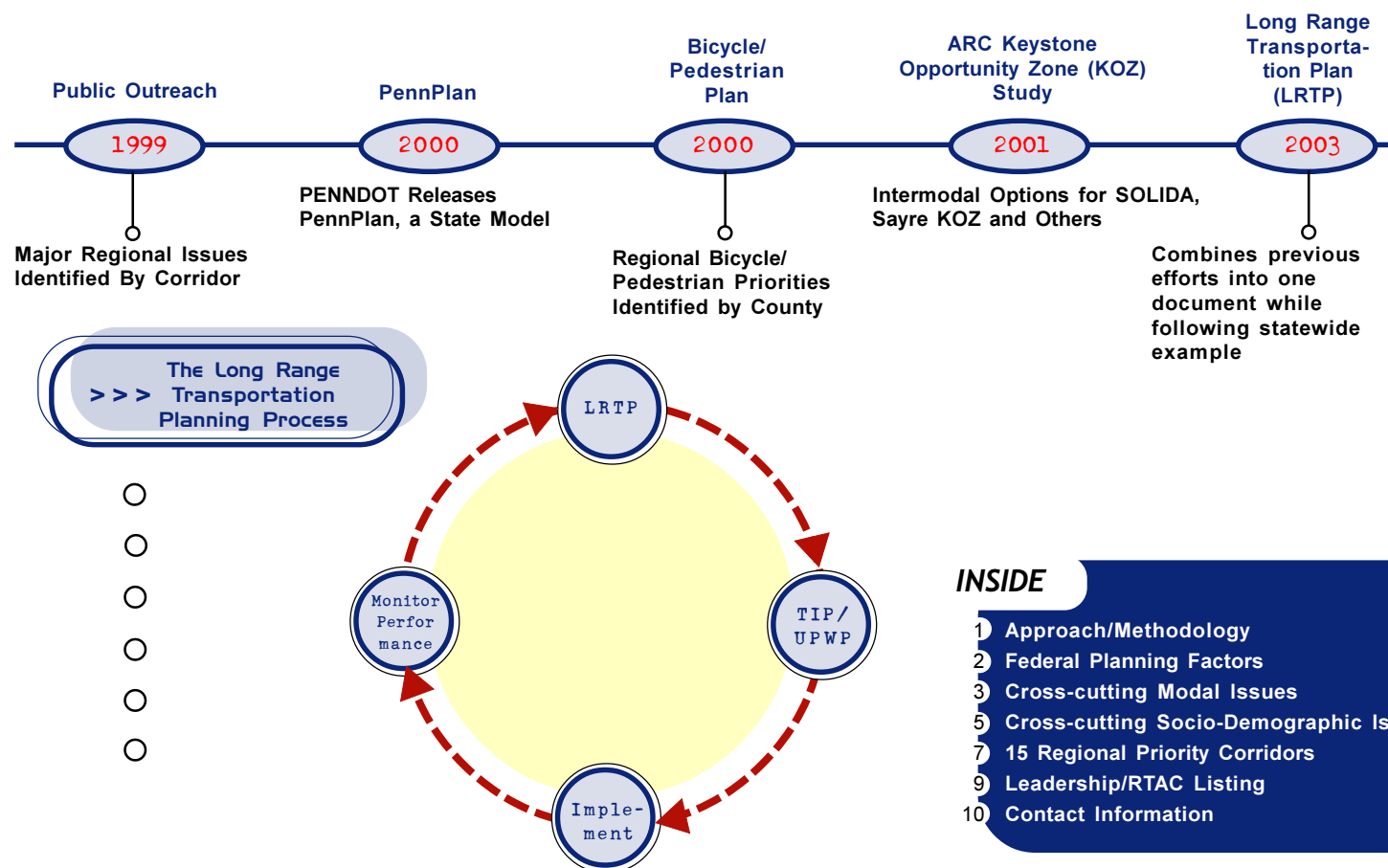
The LRTP also incorporates recently completed planning efforts conducted by NTRPDC, including a bicycle/pedestrian transportation plan, and a study that analyzed and recommended intermodal improvements for the region's five Keystone Opportunity Zone (KOZ) sites.

The planning team conducted interviews with various modal operators, transportation stakeholders and included a "Beyond The Borders" component, which looked at transportation trends in New York's Southern Tier, as well as in the Williamsport and Scranton/Wilkes-Barre metropolitan areas. Member counties also hosted transportation forums

to allow area transportation stakeholders an opportunity to review and update the region's transportation deficiencies as identified through public outreach meetings conducted in 1999. Finally, each county planning commission prioritized the candidate projects on a high-medium-low basis for inclusion in the regional LRTP.

After the adoption of this LRTP in the Fall of 2003, the plan results will be used by NTRPDC and its affiliates in developing future planning products and processes, including the biennial update of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), annual Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), PENNDOT District Business Plans, and others. Gannett Fleming, a Pennsylvania-based planning firm served the Northern Tier as consultant for the LRTP development.

The LRTP itself is less a planning *product* than it is a portion of an ongoing planning *process*. The following graphics depict the context of the LRTP and its role in the overall transportation planning process.



The Northern Tier's Long Range Transportation Plan advances many recommendations for transportation improvement in the region through both projects and policy.

The Seven Federal Planning Factors

Current federal transportation law requires transportation planning organizations such as the Northern Tier to consider seven planning factors in developing transportation plans. Some highlights of the LRP's recommended transportation-related policies are highlighted below and are organized around these federal planning factors as specific strategies, or action steps.

1 Economic Viability - As a rural area, our region sees multimodal transportation as a key to promoting economic development.

Strategies:

- Target transportation improvements to serve Keystone Opportunity Zones and other existing economic generators
- Advance improvements to the region's airports
- Monitor changes in Class 1 railroad service
- Upgrade any bridges that pose as bottlenecks to regional shipping needs
- Support financial backing of shortline railroads

2 Safety & Security - NTRPDC will continue to work with PENNDOT in considering safety and security as a primary planning factor in all planning and programming activity.

Strategies:

- Consider PENNDOT crash data and trends in TIP and LRTP development and updates
- Increase police enforcement in corridors where high speeds have been documented

3 Accessibility & Mobility Options for People and Freight - These are factors that are core to the LRP and to ongoing planning activity.

Strategies:

- Remain in active leadership roles in state rail freight and aviation advisory committees
- Consider the establishment of an RPO Goods Movement Task Force with involvement of the region's shippers and carriers

4 Environment, Energy Conservation and Quality of Life - Through this LRP, NTRPDC strongly supports further improvements to all modes of transportation that will serve to make our system more efficient and environmentally compatible.

Strategies:

- Promote the development of greenways and trails
- Promote the use of transit and carpooling
- Encourage corridor municipalities to enact sign regulations as a way of mitigating visual blight

5 Transportation Connectivity - NTRPDC promotes the use of all modes in a seamless fashion for the effective transportation of people and goods.

Strategies:

- Focus on needed access to the National Highway System (NHS) and this Plan's high priority corridors
- Continue to coordinate with NYSDOT on matters related to NY 17/I-86

6 System Management and Operation - This will largely be a focus in the areas of monitoring state and national trends and determining applicable areas for the Northern Tier RPO.

Strategies:

- Implement Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) and other technologies such as AVL for improved system performance
- Develop a Bridge Management System
- Complete a comprehensive analysis of the Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS) with PENNDOT
- Continue public involvement efforts

7 System Preservation - The region currently receives \$40 million annually in transportation funding. The limited state of resources mandates this as a continued major focus.

Strategies:

- Continue to provide input to PENNDOT on regional maintenance and betterment needs

Roadway

The highway network constitutes the backbone of the transportation system, especially in a rural region like the Northern Tier. Ongoing projects such as the modernization of US 15 and NY 17 will do much to improve the region's mobility and connect regional industry to major markets, while improvements such as the River Street extension in Towanda and the Wyalusing Bypass will improve accessibility and separate freight from local traffic.



A southerly view of US 15 between Presho, NY and the Northern Tier



Truck climbing and passing lanes are needed on some corridors such as US 6 at Sylvania Mountain, US 220 at Laddsborg and on PA 49 in order to remove the "frustration factors" for commuters who experience much in the way of "windshield time" behind slow-moving trucks and recreational vehicles.

An additional regional highway issue involves the USDOT's Federal Aid Highway System (FAHS). The FAHS is a network of highways that is eligible for federal funding assistance. In the Northern Tier, this includes all 15 priority corridors, with the exception of PA 167 north of Montrose.



Transportation stakeholders expressed a desire for additional truck climbing lanes throughout the region, including south of Laddsborg in Bradford County.

PA 309 in Wyoming County poses another designation need. The roadway is currently functionally classified as a Rural Minor Arterial and should be upgraded to reflect its function as a major commuter route between Wyoming and Luzerne counties.

A summary of the top issues by corridor can be found in the center of this Executive Summary.

Bridges



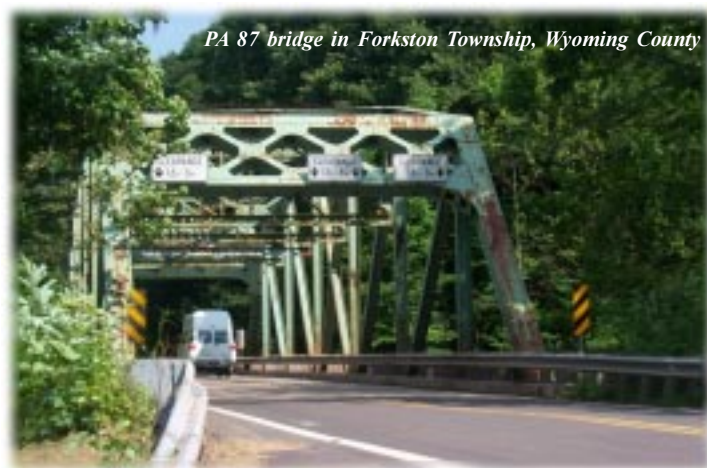
Keeping abreast of the region's aging bridge inventory has become a serious issue in the Northern Tier. During the last update of the region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), approximately 60 percent of all projects requested by municipal officials were bridges. In Bradford County alone, there are 51 county-owned bridges to maintain. Wyoming County's rate of bridges in need of rehabilitation or replacement is now at 36 percent - the seventh-highest such percentage in Pennsylvania.



PA 414 at Blackwell

A good network of bridges is essential in improving Northern Tier residents' access to activities, goods and services. Ongoing preservation, improvement and expansion of the region's bridges can serve to bolster both economic development and mobility.

Regional bridge needs range from improvements to the superstructure, such as at Elkland on PA 49, to functionally obsolete bridges such as those on PA 87 (below) which can become weak links in the highway network - bottlenecks that can hinder goods movement and adversely affect drivers of school buses and emergency response vehicles with lengthy detours.



PA 87 bridge in Forkston Township, Wyoming County

Bicycle/Pedestrian



Bicycle and pedestrian modes of transportation have increasingly become recognized as important modes of transportation. Planning for their use within the context of an overall transportation system has been a priority within the Northern Tier, as evidenced by the creation of a regional Bicycle/Pedestrian Transportation Plan in October 2001. "Bike-ped" quality is often an indicator of tourism attractiveness.

NTRPDC identified a network of both roadway-based as well as off-road trails for planning purposes. The network's most prominent roadway based segments are part of a broader, statewide network, such as the BicyclePA routes which were formally signed in 2001. The region is blessed with three such routes, including Route Y (which generally follows US 6), Route L (PA 171) and Route G (generally follows US 15 and PA 287).

At the local level, municipalities - and particularly boroughs - are encouraged to conduct "walkable audits" to gauge the "walkability" of their communities. This step is especially important in such boroughs as Mansfield and Factoryville which have large student populations.

The ease of connections between bicycle/pedestrian and other modes (particularly public transportation) are also important considerations raised by the LRTP, one example including the Endless Mountains Transportation Authority's efforts at placing bicycle racks on its buses.

Public Transportation

Providing public transportation service in a region where there are no major congestion problems and only 46 persons per square mile (versus 274 per square mile statewide) is a major challenge. Yet the Endless Mountains Transportation Authority (EMTA) has experienced the greatest increase in ridership among providers its size in Pennsylvania. EMTA recognizes that it will never be the first choice for the



Aviation



The region's three airports fulfill an important service in the region's overall transportation system. While the airports do not transport much in cargo, Skyhaven and Grand Canyon specifically are important for tourism and charter flights, while the closure of Blue Swan in Athens Township has further elevated the importance of the Bradford County Airport.



Despite major capital improvements, Bradford County is still in need of a Business Plan to guide decisions related to runway extensions, jet fuel farms and various maintenance improvement needs.

Rail Freight

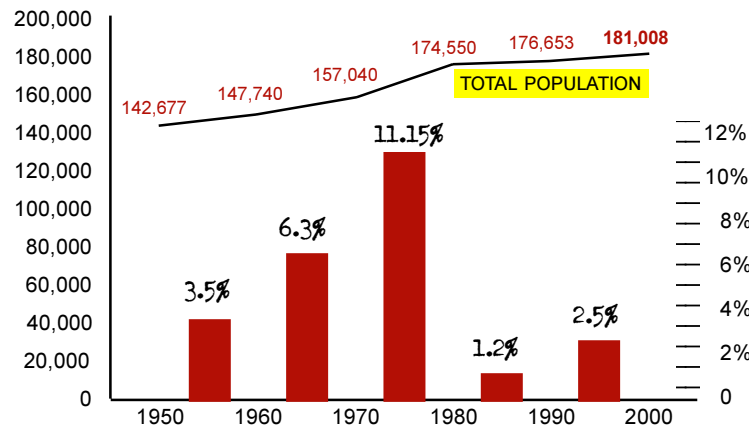


Railroads still play an important shipping role in the Northern Tier. NTRPDC needs to continue to monitor changes in this very dynamic industry as it impacts goods movement. Norfolk Southern is currently evaluating the future of its tactical lines (the former Lehigh Valley line and Sotuhern Tier lines) through Bradford and Susquehanna Counties, respectively, while CP Rail operates a major strategic line through Susquehanna County, linking Pennsylvania with New England.

Complementing the Class 1 service is that of the shortlines, namely the Wellsboro & Corning, Towanda-Monroeton Shippers Lifeline, and the Reading, Blue Mountain & Northern. Financial assistance is critical to the future of these railroads, even as major state rail assistance program budgets [such as the Rail Freight Assistance Program (RFAP)] have been cut in half in recent years.

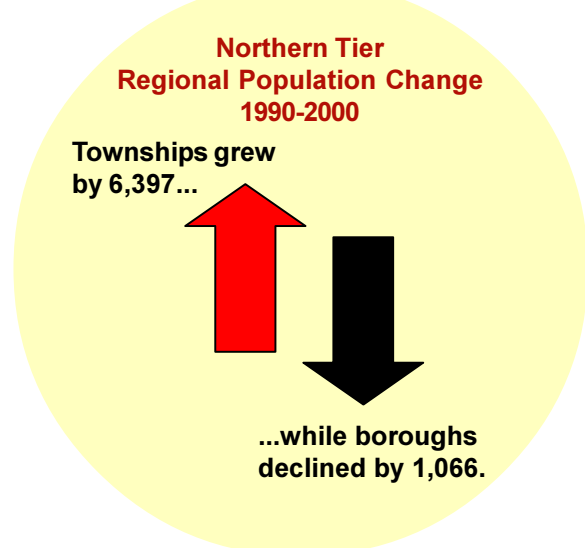
Population and employment data convey valuable trend information as they relate to the delivery of transportation services by PENNDOT and others. Some major trends are highlighted here.

OVER THE PAST DECADE, THE REGION'S POPULATION GROWTH HAS BEEN SLOW, LAGGING BEHIND EVEN STATE RATES.



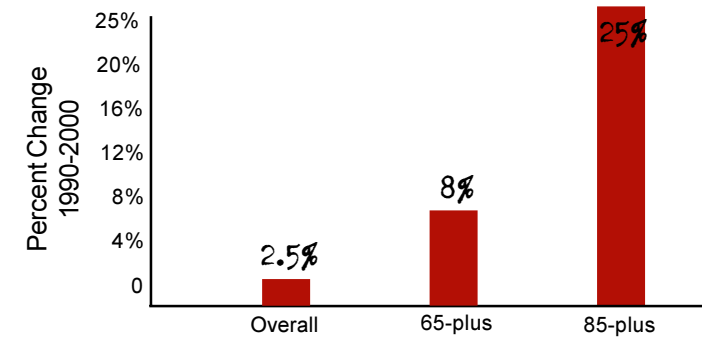
During the 1990s, the region's population grew by 2.5 percent, less than the state rate of 3 percent.

BOROUGHES CONTINUE TO LOSE POPULATION TO ADJOINING SUBURBS AND RURAL TOWNSHIPS.



The fastest growing municipalities in the region (e.g., Clinton and Charleston Townships, etc.) are not major employment centers. Population in general has been moving away from traditional employment centers. These trends have implications for the delivery of transportation services by PENNDOT and others, including greater commuting distances and potentially greater infrastructure requirements.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE REGION'S POPULATION IS AGING AT SIGNIFICANT RATES...



The region's fastest-growing age groups are 65-plus. These age groups have special transportation needs; public transportation and pedestrian facilities are just two components of the transportation system that will need renewed focus in coming years.

...MIRRORING THE GENERAL INCREASE OF THE REGION'S MEDIAN AGE.

The median age of the region's population has increased in nearly every Northern Tier municipality (against county averages) is shown below.

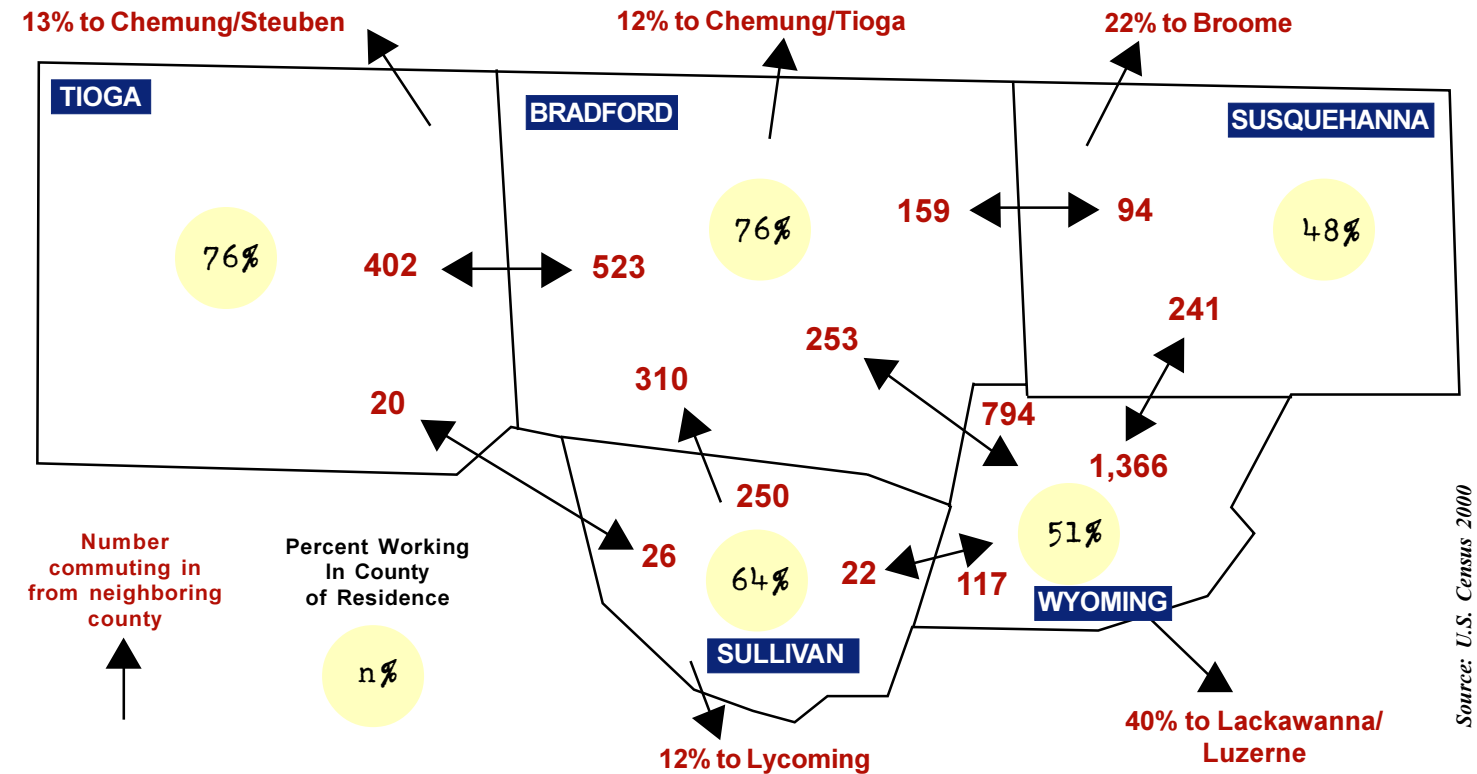
| | 1990 | 2000 |
|-------------|------|------|
| BRADFORD | 34.6 | 38.9 |
| SULLIVAN | 38.0 | 43.0 |
| SUSQUEHANNA | 34.9 | 39.5 |
| TIOGA | 34.2 | 38.5 |
| WYOMING | 33.1 | 37.8 |

| Oldest | Municipality | County | 1990 | 2000 |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------|------|------|
| | Laporte Borough | Sullivan | 64.0 | 58.7 |
| North Towanda Twp | Bradford | 43.1 | 48.8 | |
| Ward Twp | Tioga | 39.4 | 48.0 | |
| Gaines Twp | Tioga | 40.0 | 47.7 | |
| Laporte Twp | Sullivan | 42.9 | 46.2 | |

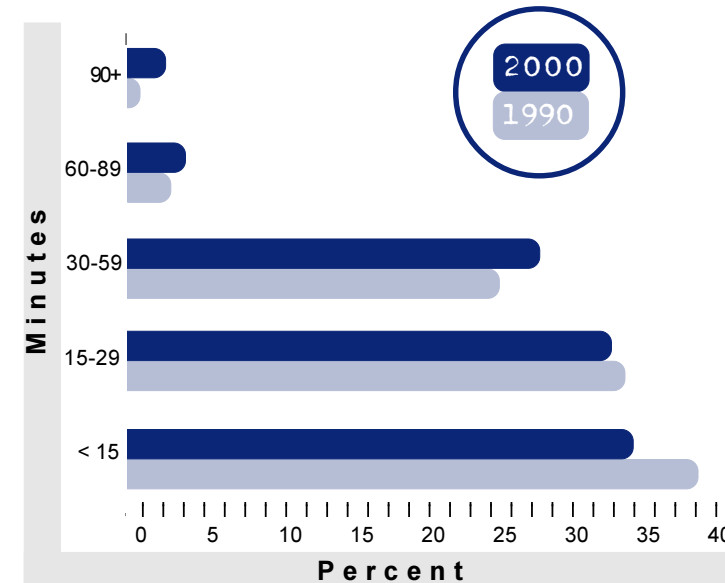
| Youngest | Municipality | County | 1990 | 2000 |
|--------------|--------------|----------|------|------|
| | Colley Twp | Sullivan | 22.0 | 21.7 |
| Mansfield | Tioga | 21.3 | 21.8 | |
| Factoryville | Wyoming | 20.7 | 24.1 | |
| Meshoppen | Wyoming | 32.8 | 28.6 | |
| Liberty | Tioga | 36.1 | 31.5 | |

MANY MAJOR EMPLOYMENT DESTINATIONS ARE OUTSIDE OF THE REGION.

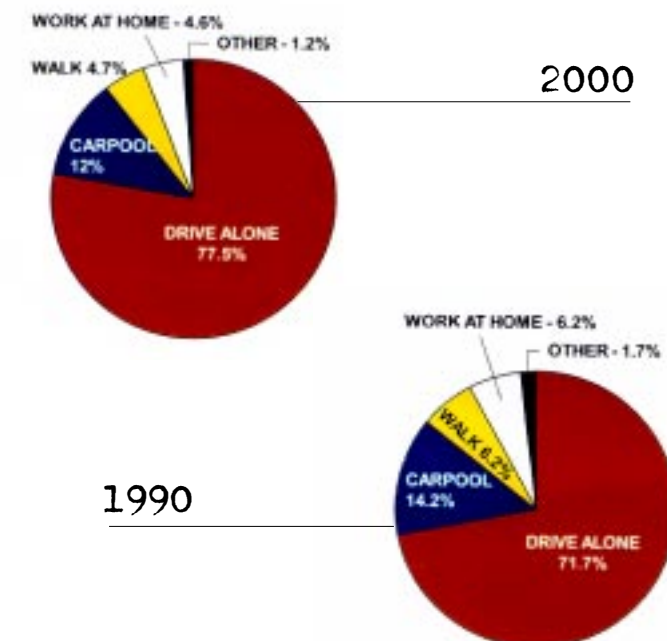
Approximately 22,912 Northern Tier residents are employed outside of the 5-county region. Susquehanna County in fact ranks as one of the state's top exporters of employees, with nearly 52 percent commuting to employers outside the county. There is also much cross-county commuting, with Wyoming and Bradford being net importers of Northern Tier commuters.



MANY NORTHERN TIER COMMUTERS ARE TRAVELING LONGER TO GET TO WORK THAN THEY DID 10 YEARS AGO...

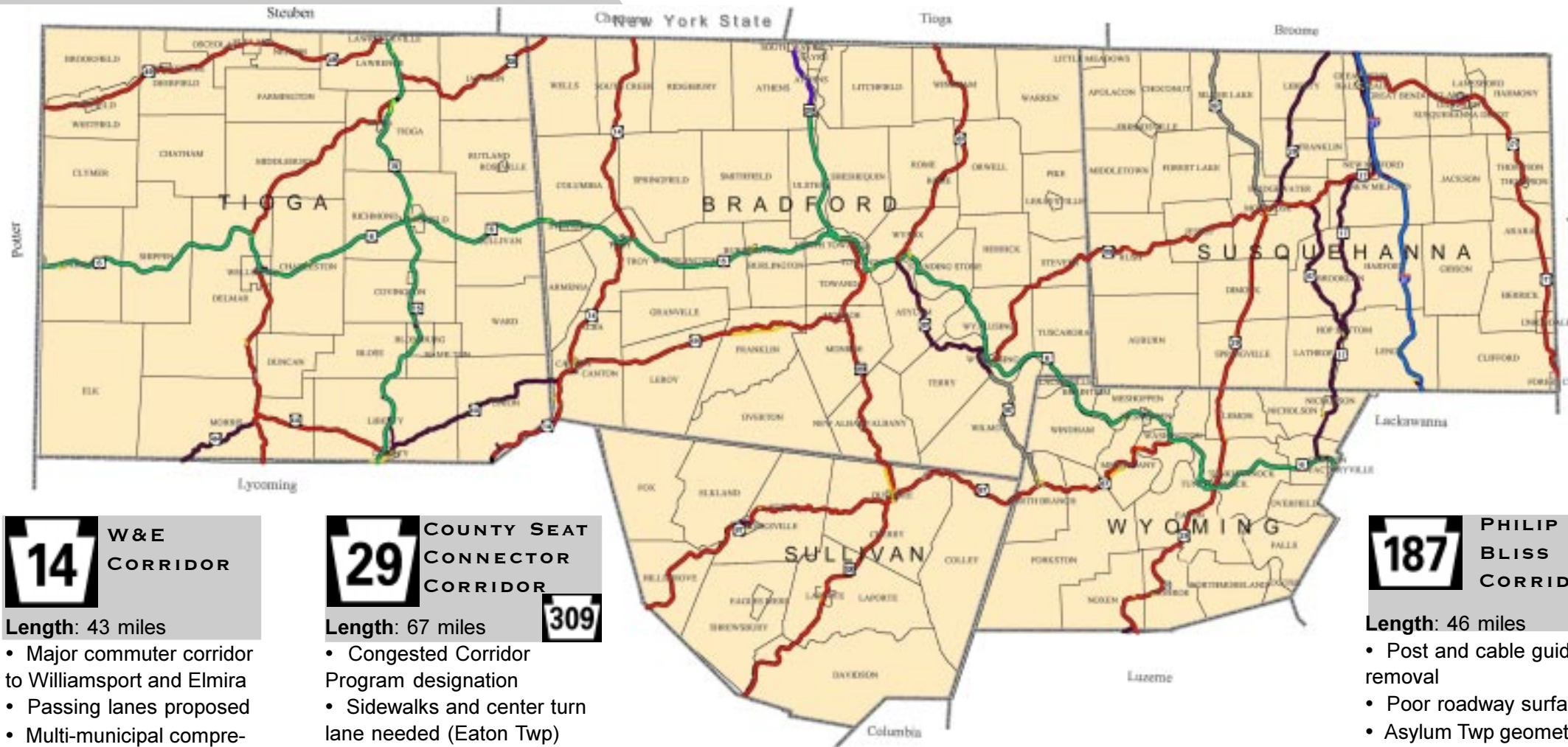


...AND ARE MORE FREQUENTLY DRIVING ALONE TO GET THERE.



15 Corridors of Regional Significance

Issues, trends and opportunities for each of the 15 corridors of regional significance. Each corridor is centered on the roadway shown.



6 PA ROUTE 6 HERITAGE CORRIDOR

- Length:** 157 miles
- A strategic corridor for tourism-related improvements
 - A major BicyclePA route
 - Truck climbing lanes and intersection improvements

11 ENDLESS MOUNTAINS CORRIDOR

- Length:** 27 miles
- Fastest-growing corridor in region
 - Substandard Interchange ramp lengths
 - Fast growth in rail freight traffic

15 WILLIAMSON ROAD CORRIDOR

- Length:** 37 miles
- \$100 Million in transportation investments 2003 to 2007
 - New Welcome Center asset
 - Missing links remain in New York State

220 NORTH BRANCH CORRIDOR

- Length:** 73 miles
- Major connector of people and jobs in Towanda & Sayre
 - Important link to NY 17
 - Various Bradford County Airport improvement needs

14 W&E CORRIDOR

- Length:** 43 miles
- Major commuter corridor to Williamsport and Elmira
 - Passing lanes proposed
 - Multi-municipal comprehensive plans in progress

49 COWANESQUE CORRIDOR

- Length:** 29 miles
- Enterprise Zone status
 - Significant manufacturing employment
 - Major recreation facilities
 - Passing lanes proposed
 - Elkland bridge painting
 - Land use at US 15 interchange

29 COUNTY SEAT CONNECTOR CORRIDOR

- Length:** 67 miles
- Congested Corridor Program designation
 - Sidewalks and center turn lane needed (Eaton Twp)
 - Potential U.S. Route designation for PA 309

87 NORTH SULLIVAN CORRIDOR

- Length:** 54 miles
- Over half of all corridor commuters destined for Mehoopany Township
 - Bridge clearance restrictions in Forkston and Mehoopany
 - Poor roadway surface in Wyoming County
 - Mehoopany Ridge Road closure

167 OWEGO TURNPIKE CORRIDOR

- Length:** 30 miles
- Not on Federal Aid System north of Montrose
 - Wayfinding signage needed
 - Complete Bridgewater Rail-Trail missing links

171 LACKAWANNA CORRIDOR

- Length:** 39 miles
- SOLIDA site requires improved accessibility
 - Pedestrian walkability
 - D&H Trail connection
 - Highest regional carpooling rates
 - NS' Southern Tier line future service

187 PHILIP P. BLISS CORRIDOR

- Length:** 46 miles
- Post and cable guide rail removal
 - Poor roadway surface
 - Asylum Twp geometric improvements

BLUESTONE CORRIDOR **706**

- Length:** 34 miles
- Susquehanna County's 2nd highest priority
 - Many bridge replacements programmed
 - Led by Camptown Bridge

PB&E CORRIDOR **414**

- Length:** 62 miles
- Growing Amish population
 - Truck traffic growth
 - Potential Scenic Byway

ELMIRA CONNECTOR CORRIDOR **328**

- Length:** 13.5 miles
- Former ARC corridor
 - Wells Twp second-fastest growing in Bradford County
 - Monitor roadway improvements on New York side

CENTRAL TIOGA CORRIDOR **287**

- Length:** 39 miles
- Wellsboro & Corning RR financial assistance needs
 - Roadway curvature in Antrim area
 - Population decline

Leadership

In 1990, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PENNDOT) introduced a rural transportation planning program designed to integrate rural planning with ongoing metropolitan initiatives. The resulting rural transportation program(s) are incorporated into the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

A primary objective was to develop a planning process based on cooperative decision-making between county, regional, and state agencies. The plan helped to ensure that priority goals and objectives were implemented with respect to both rural and metropolitan transportation planning.

NTRPDC partners with PENNDOT to carry out rural transportation planning and programming. Funding is allocated based on a formula that accounts for population, total land area, and the complexity of the area's transportation system. A work program that includes federal, state, and local funding is developed annually by PENNDOT and regional agencies. The work

program includes funding targets and proposed planning activities for the ensuing fiscal year. Only activities approved in the work program are undertaken in that fiscal year. In FY 2002-03, NTRPDC received \$40 million as part of its "fair share" allocation.

State, regional, and local decision makers participate in technical advisory committees and policy committees which identify issues and opportunities, conduct studies and offer informed recommendations for programming and implementing transportation projects. The advisory and planning committees are charged with evaluating all aspects of transportation planning, including highway, bridge, transit, rail, bicycle, and pedestrian issues. Short- and long-range plans are approved in each area of interest. Together, the planning partner and PENNDOT develop, negotiate and approve their rural portion of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). For the Northern Tier, an 18-member "Rural Transportation Advisory Committee" (RTAC) fulfills this obligation for each of the five member Northern Tier counties.

Rural Transportation Advisory Committee Members

Richard J. Biery*

Regional Planning Manager

Brian Baker*

Regional Planning Assistant

David Bubniak*

GIS Manager

Michael Castellano

Wyoming County Citizen

Erick Coolidge

Tioga County Commissioner

Cal Dean

Susquehanna County Commissioner

Kerry Gyekis

Director, Tioga County Planning Commission

Susan Hazleton, P.E.

PENNDOT District 4-0 Planning & Programming Manager

Michael Hufnagel

Director, Sullivan County Planning Commission

Fred LaVancher

US 15 Coalition

Anthony Litwin

Wyoming County Commissioner

Clyde Robbins

Bradford County Airport Authority

Michael Mausteller, P.E.

PENNDOT District 3-0 Planning & Programming Manager

Norman Miller

Sullivan County Citizen

William Ord

Susquehanna County Citizen

Robert Raves

PENNDOT Central Office Planning Liaison

Betty Reibson

Sullivan County Commissioner

Matthew Smoker**

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

John Sullivan

Bradford County Commissioner

Raymond Stolas, AICP

Director, Bradford County Planning Commission

Robert Templeton

Director, Susquehanna County Planning Commission

Paul Weilage

Director, Wyoming County Planning Commission

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