



**WHITE PAPER**

**HOW NEW YORK'S MPOS  
ADDRESS PLANNING FOR  
SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION  
AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES**

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**PREPARED FOR:**  
NEW YORK ASSOCIATION OF METROPOLITAN PLANNING  
ORGANIZATIONS

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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The New York Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (NYSAMPO) Climate Change Working Group acts as a forum for sharing practice on planning for climate change mitigation and adaptation, and integrating sustainability considerations into metropolitan planning processes throughout the state. They accomplish this by identifying areas or programs to which sustainability elements can be incorporated to improve existing practices. In support of the Climate Change Working Group, RSG staff interviewed staff from each of New York's MPOs to understand how they address sustainability. RSG conducted the interviews in mid-2013. For the purposes of this White Paper, the consultant requested updates from the agency representatives regarding recent and updated information on sustainability practices.

Based on the information collected in the interviews and subsequent follow-up, NYSAMPO recognizes that each MPO addresses sustainability in its planning work. The range of practice, however, is large and the capacity to which each plan, program, staff, and member agency is involved varies by MPO. This White Paper contains the following sections to summarize sustainable practices at MPOs throughout the state:

- (1) **The Definition of Sustainability:** to identify and compare how each region views the concept of sustainability.
- (2) **Grant Funding Opportunities:** to review funding sources utilized by MPOs to support their sustainability projects and initiatives.
- (3) **Long Range Transportation Plans:** to showcase the ways in which MPOs integrate sustainability into their long range transportation plans (LRTPs) in terms of policies, performance measures, and overarching themes.
- (4) **Transportation Improvement Programs:** to highlight how MPOs incorporate or prioritize projects in their Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) based on their ability to support sustainability principles.
- (5) **Unified Planning Work Programs:** to understand how MPOs incorporate planning for sustainable transportation and sustainable communities in their Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) given the level of commitment to sustainability in their LRTP and TIP processes.
- (6) **Sustainability Assessment Tools:** to distinguish technical methods for assessing sustainability metrics employed by MPOs for planning purposes.
- (7) **Staff Involvement:** to review how MPO staff promote environmental, social, and economic stewardship in their duties.
- (8) **Member Agency Involvement:** to describe how MPO staff engages and collaborates with their member agencies to champion sustainability in their local plans and policies.

## 2.0 THE DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABILITY

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The New York State Department of Transportation GreenLITES (Green Leadership in Transportation Environmental Sustainability) Program defines sustainability as “a philosophy” that:

- ensures protection of the environment,
- conservation of energy and natural resources,
- preservation of historic and aesthetic project contexts, encouragement of public involvement in the planning process,
- integration of Smart Growth practices, and
- encouragement of new and innovative approaches to sustainable design.

When defined using the traditional Brundtland Report<sup>1</sup> Triple Bottom Line concept of environment, economy, and equity, sustainability extends past environmental concerns in a way that involves matters of public health and regional economic stability and growth.

Most of New York's MPOs do not have a formal, adopted definition of sustainability. There is, however, broad acknowledgement of the importance of addressing sustainability in planning work. Some MPOs focus more on the land use side of the equation, others on transportation.

While the Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation Study (BMTS) used the Triple Bottom Line definition in its LRTP “Transportation Tomorrow 2035 - Creating a Sustainable Future,” other MPOs were less overt in their explanations.

The Genesee Transportation Council (GTC) includes “preservation and maintenance of infrastructure” in their working definition of sustainability. The Ithaca Tompkins County Transportation Council (ITCTC) and GTC share the sentiment of having sustainability integrated into all MPO planning activities. Rather than being a standalone goal or performance measure, these agencies view sustainability as an overarching element engrained into all part of the plan. In this sense, it is a value supported through various actions rather than an action itself. The Orange County Transportation Council (OCTC) on the other hand demonstrates the importance in viewing sustainability in terms of its ability to extend the lifespan, value, and capabilities of infrastructure and operations. The Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council (PDCTC) uses four guiding principles in *Moving Dutchess*, its long range transportation plan, one of which is sustainability. PDCTC defines sustainability as “establishing an environmentally and fiscally sustainable way forward to meet our future transportation challenges, with the intent of creating livable communities that improve our quality of life.”

While lacking in concrete or uniform definitions, New York's MPOs illustrate a commitment to sustainability through their plans, staff, activities, and encouragement of member

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<sup>1</sup> The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), designated by the United Nations, published the Brundtland Report, also known as “Our Common Future” in 1987 to address sustainable development globally.

participation in sustainable practices. This White Paper will demonstrate how MPOs incorporate sustainability in project financing, long range transportation planning, TIP development, UPWP planning, encouraging staff activities, and supporting relationships with member agencies.



### 3.0 GRANT FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

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Financial resources are often one of the major deterrents to implementing sustainable programs or policies; therefore, the acquisition of resources through grants is very helpful in progressing sustainability measures at each MPO. MPOs in New York generally support their planning programs with funds from the Federal Highway Administrations (FHWA) PL and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Metropolitan Planning programs, various grants or funding opportunities are available at the state and federal level to encourage sustainable planning practices.

#### ***Federal***

Half of New York's MPOs interviewed either received or applied for a Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant. HUD awards these grants to proposals that support development, investment, community engagement, and data-driven performance measurement to support regionally significant issues<sup>2</sup> related to the Six Livability Principles<sup>3</sup>:

1. Provide more transportation choices.
2. Promote equitable, affordable housing.
3. Enhance economic competitiveness.
4. Support existing communities.
5. Coordinate policies and leverage investment.
6. Value communities and neighborhoods.

The New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) co-sponsored a \$3.5 million HUD grant with 16 cities, counties, and regional planning organizations as the New York-Connecticut Sustainable Communities Consortium (the Consortium). The agencies under the Consortium collaborated to develop an implementation plan to integrate and enhance existing sustainability plans in terms of housing, economic development, transportation, and environmental planning along Metro-North Railroad, Long Island Railroad, and other transportation/rail corridors. For example, the Consortium supported a Federal Housing Evaluation Assessment that supplied \$100,000 in funding to four of the organizations within the Consortium to support the creation of transit-accessible, affordable housing options.

The work of the Consortium extended to small-scale studies, as well. The HUD grant financed two studies for waterfront community resilience and livability improvement at the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT), which included:

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<sup>2</sup>[http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/economic\\_resilience/sustainable\\_communities\\_regional\\_planning\\_grants](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/economic_resilience/sustainable_communities_regional_planning_grants)

<sup>3</sup>[http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/economic\\_resilience/Six\\_Livability\\_Principles](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/economic_resilience/Six_Livability_Principles)

- (1) Designing for Flood Risk, the creation of guidelines for building design and construction in flood zones to create withstanding infrastructure that matches high-density urban character, and
- (2) The Urban Waterfront Adaptive Strategies study, the development of a reference for assessing coastal flooding hazards in the metro region, identifying strategies for coastal protection, and evaluating alternatives for preservation and mitigation. NYMTC participated in the Waterfront Adaptive Strategies Study as a Steering Committee Member.

Further, under the efforts of the Consortium, 18 subareas funded location-specific studies. For example, a subarea study in East New York involved long-term sustainability planning for two neighborhoods in Brooklyn to maximize transit access, create mixed-income housing opportunities, build safer/more complete streets, increase healthy food options, preserve the environment, and increase energy efficiency. Strategies to achieve these goals included traffic calming, zoning changes, and partnerships with local development corporations.

The Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) was also involved in a HUD grant for the development of “One Region Forward,” a regional climate change action plan.

Other MPOs have acted in a more peripheral and technical support role for HUD programs. Additionally, several other funding opportunities are available at the Federal Level for different planning efforts:

- The Elmira Chemung Transportation Council (ECTC) is directly involved with the health community to increase safe access to parks within the City of Elmira through the Environment Protection Agency’s (EPA) Healthy Communities Grant program.<sup>4</sup>
- The Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) hosts the Department of Energy (DOE) Clean Cities program<sup>5</sup> with a team of dedicated staff incorporating sustainability into the regional community.
- ITCTC played a minor role in local jurisdiction EPA grant acquisitions including the EPA Climate Showcase Communities grant<sup>6</sup> for the EcoVillage at Ithaca’s Center for Sustainability.
- NYMTC is one of nine partners involved in a Transportation Vulnerability and Adaptation Assessment funded by an FHWA grant, which provides funds for engineering assessments on ten transportation facilities in the New York-New Jersey region. Six of these facilities are located in New York State. These vulnerability assessments will serve as examples of resiliency projects for the region. Future work anticipated under the grant includes a scenario assessment of potential areas of

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.epa.gov/region1/eco/uep/hcgp.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www1.eere.energy.gov/cleancities/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.epa.gov/statelocalclimate/local/showcase/index.html>

vulnerability given various climate changes. NYMTC assisted in organizing the Project Guidance Committee to provide local guidance and input in the grant activities. Partner agencies include NYSDOT, New Jersey DOT, Connecticut DOT, North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, Southern Western Regional Planning Agency, Greater Bridgeport Council, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey.

### ***New York State***

Most of the MPOs interviewed collaborated with local jurisdictions on New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) funding, including Cleaner, Greener Communities Grants. MPO participation in the development of individual Regional Sustainability Plans<sup>7</sup> varied from data and information proprietor roles to membership on the committees that developed the plan.

CDTC reported that between the DOE program, NYSERDA grants, and other funds set aside in the TIP, the agency is able to drive change for greater sustainability in local communities, illustrating how federal, state, and local funds can homogenize to augment the capacity for sustainable projects in regional planning.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.nyserda.ny.gov/All-Programs/Programs/Cleaner-Greener-Communities/Regional-Sustainability-Plans>

## 4.0 LONG RANGE PLANS

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There is a broad range of practice regarding the incorporation of sustainability in MPO long range transportation plans (LRTPs). While almost all MPOs address the topic of sustainability in their LRTPs, half of the MPOs interviewed noted a lack of explicit or comprehensive language regarding sustainability within their plan.

Based on the information provided by each MPO, sustainability typically resides within the LRTP as a policy, performance measure, or overarching theme. The interviews also indicated that sustainability is of increasing interest, as most MPOs that did not have sustainability integrated into their current LRTP indicated the intent to incorporate these concepts in their next LRTP update.

### **Policies**

Policies that support regional sustainability may address either land use or transportation issues, with an understanding that there is a close intersection of these principles. Some policies, for example, focus on the implementation of Smart Growth development principles with the understanding that compact mixed-use development may result in fewer and shorter automobile trips. Other policies may underpin investment in alternative-fueled vehicles as a means to reduce energy consumption and GHG emissions, even without reductions in vehicle-miles of travel.

The New York Smart Growth Public Infrastructure Policy Act<sup>8</sup> (SGPIPA) was signed into law in 2010. It specified ten Smart Growth criteria to be used by public agencies to evaluate the impact of development proposals on the demand for extending roads, water, sewer, and other public infrastructure. The intent is to highlight the public cost of sprawl development and encourage developers to use Smart Growth principles.

OCTC found that by incorporating federal, state, and local policies, they have integrated sustainability into their LRTP. The federal planning factors and air quality standards encourage MPOs to emphasize sustainability in the planning process. Additionally, the New York SGPIPA delineates priority growth areas for the MPO to consider. At the local level, Orange County's Comprehensive Plan has incorporated Smart Growth principles for over 20 years. Taken together, these policies support sustainability at the regional level.

ECTC's newly updated LRTP encourages sustainability in planning through the enactment of a Complete Streets policy to integrate multimodal options to local corridors. The agency also produced a standalone Bicycle/Pedestrian/Trails plan in the LRTP update to focus on policies and projects geared to promote non-motorized transportation.

GTC's LRTP focuses on transportation policies, including system expansion for transit, bike, and pedestrian infrastructure rather than for the private automobile. GTC developed a Regional Trails initiative to outline priority corridors for non-motorized transportation. The agency received seven proposals for the update without solicitation, illustrating local

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://open.nysenate.gov/legislation/bill/S5560B> for text of the Act.

enthusiasm for non-motorized infrastructure in the region, which already has over 1,000 trails. Additionally, the MPO assisted many of the first-ring suburbs, large towns, and small towns in developing bike master plans. The MPO intends to assist and fund additional non-motorized plans where possible.

The GTC LRTP also facilitates the use of alternative fuel vehicles through expanding infrastructure and financially supporting purchases of energy efficient vehicles. GTC explained, "When identifying the region's needs, we look beyond pedestrian/bike facilities and frequency of public transit service to enhancing and expanding mobility for pedestrians/bicyclists and reducing direct and indirect energy usage."

CDTC's LRTP works more on the land use side of sustainability. These general policies include support of Smart Growth, mixed used development, transit oriented development, and intelligent transportation systems. These policies then bridge to transportation, leading to investments in transit, demand management, and bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure, which ultimately support sustainability in the region. The agency strongly favors an operations approach to traffic rather than physical capacity additions, as well as supporting non-motorized transportation as an alternative to driving and underscores these solutions in the plan.

Additionally, CDTC's LRTP includes a land use planning program to emphasize the ties between land use, transportation, and sustainability. Specifically, the agency supports urban reinvestment in the LRTP to encourage equitable funding to support smart growth and encourage vehicle miles traveled (VMT) reduction between cities and rural areas. The Capital District Clean Communities Coalition (CDCC) also stressed that CDTC incorporate both (1) the potential for all-automated vehicles to impact highway and bridge design and (2) anticipation of technology with flexibility and smart near-term investments into the next LRTP to minimize reliance on automobiles and greenhouse gases.

NYMTC's Plan 2040 identifies a broad range of land use designations that provide a framework for the strategic transportation improvements in the Plan's Shared Vision. The designations range from desired growth areas to transit-oriented development targets and development projects with distinct transportation needs. These locations are where transportation resources can attract residents and businesses while providing efficient, sustainable and cost-effective mobility. The concept of sustainable development in this long range planning is built around attempting to focus growth around maximized mobility.

### ***Performance Measures***

Some MPOs incorporate sustainability into the LRTP with goals, objectives, and performance measures. By setting these goals and objectives and assessing progress via performance measures, agencies improve their accountability to the public and decision makers for the environmental, economic, and social consequences of their plans.

ITCTC and GBNRTC conducted scenario analyses to assess various LRTP project and program alternatives based on their ability to affect the built environment. ITCTC's scenario

analysis relates to emissions and energy to assess the possible future impacts of multimodal development, biking, transit, and programs like carshare and rideshare. GBNRTC conducted extensive testing of land use scenarios in the community. Using these tests, the agency was able to determine potential land use implications of various scenarios on the distribution of population, infrastructure needs, costs, and revenue.

CDTC emphasized sustainability in its New Visions 2035 Plan through performance measures gauging vehicle miles traveled (VMT) reduction per capita and reduction of energy consumption. The agency applies a travel demand model to assess these performance measures and intends to integrate their model with the EPA air quality model MOVES (MOtor Vehicle Emissions Simulator) to more accurately estimate these measures. The agency's Environment and Technology Task Force identified these performance measures. As CDTC updates their LRTP, the Task Force will review additional performance measures related sustainability for possible inclusion in the next version of the plan.

The Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) cited their LRTP Study Advisory Committee as responsible for developing a list of regional and local planning goals to support in the LRTP. The list includes:

- Support of locally adopted plans and community character;
- Support for Smart Growth development patterns and mixed-use development;
- Preservation of open space and rural land;
- Support for economic development particularly at economic development nodes;
- Incorporation of Complete Streets principles and limiting single occupancy vehicle (SOV) capacity;
- Incorporation of green infrastructure and materials;
- Minimization of impacts to sensitive environmental areas;
- Respect for historic resources and community landmarks; and
- Maximization of resiliency to natural and manmade hazards.

The MPO thus proposes new transportation system performance objectives and related performance measures for the LRTP, such as reducing VMT, increasing bicycle/pedestrian and transit mode share, strategically preserving existing facilities, and providing access to jobs. These all address elements of sustainability, and support local planning goals.

GTC developed performance measures in the LRTP that integrate sustainability within the plan and measure social, economic, and environmental impacts of transportation infrastructure. These performance measures include:

- Gaps in Core Multi-use Trails Network;
- Federal-Aid Highways in TMA with Complete Sidewalks;
- Emissions of Nitrogen Oxides;
- Emissions of Volatile Organic Compounds;
- Emissions of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent; and
- Direct Energy Use.

The PDCTC transportation plan also establishes a variety of performance measures related to sustainability. In addition to measures related to reducing VMT and increasing walking, biking, and transit use, the agency also focuses on overall environmental impacts and smart growth. The agency includes the following performance measures to assess the “Reduce environmental impact of transportation” objective:

- Average county-wide per capita gasoline usage (most recent three years).
- Average annual mean ozone level (in parts per million) (most recent three years).
- Average number of Air Quality Action Days for ozone in the Downstate Metro Area (over most recent three years).
- Data required: Per capita gasoline usage (from NYSERDA), measured ozone levels (from NYSDEC’s Millbrook monitor), and Air Quality Action Days (Clean Air NY/NYS DOT).

The agency also proposes the following performance measures for the “Promote smart growth planning” objective:

- Number of housing units within a half-mile of a rail transit station.
- Percentage of housing units within 1/4 mile of a trail or sidewalk (500 feet or longer).
- Percentage of housing units within a half-mile of an existing or emerging center.

### ***Overarching Themes***

Some MPOs found that sustainability was not so much a policy or performance measure in their planning strategy, but more of an all-encompassing ideal addressed by the entire content of the plan. For example, ITCTC cited their LRTP’s three-page preamble<sup>9</sup> that includes their position on climate change and energy and serves as a foundation for the plan. ITCTC staff felt as if the themes of climate change and energy permeate into their work and throughout the plan itself. Every action in transportation affects these topics, so ITCTC’s goal is to follow the MPO’s missions by contributing locally to the minimization of climate change, energy, environmental, and economic impacts.

BMTS’ plan, “Transportation Tomorrow 2035 ~ Creating A Sustainable Region” is based on a broad view of sustainability. After reviewing issues of climate change and energy consumption, the plan asks “What makes the Greater Binghamton Region a sustainable place over the next twenty-five years?” The answer, in part, is this goal statement: “In 2035, Greater Binghamton will be a successful, livable, and vibrant region, and its regional transportation system will have the following characteristics. Community sustainability will be supported in terms of reduced energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions; and improved public health and social equity.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <http://tompkinscountyny.gov/files/itctc/lrtp/2030lrtp-chapters/2030lrtp-final-pdfs/CCEPositionStatement-2030lrtp-final.pdf>

<sup>10</sup>

<http://bmtsonline.com/files/bmts/pdfs/TRANSPORTATION%20TOMORROW%202035%20FINAL%20Web.pdf>

GTC also illustrates a general commitment to sustainability throughout the plan. The agency identified six emerging opportunities in the LRTP, of which four fall under the umbrella of sustainability: Stability and Enhancement of Regional Food System, Public Health; Impacts of Climate Change; and Energy Requirements of the Nation. The agency also has a multitude of standalone plans including the ITS Strategic Plan, the Regional Freight Plan, the Human Service Plan, and the Transit Plan, which are viewed as extensions of the LRTP to ensure the regional plan is comprehensive in looking at all modes and transportation features in the region. These opportunities help to drive investment toward activities that support sustainability. Additionally, when SAFETEA-LU placed an emphasis on non-air environmental resources in 2007, GTC responded by performing a study to identify the effects of the transportation system on public health and other environmental factors as an appendix to the agency's LRTP.

SMTC acknowledged sustainability as “an overarching goal” of the agency. The agency is currently working on a re-write of their LRTP and plans to incorporate sustainability in various aspects of the new plan's design while not addressing it as a specific goal.

## 5.0 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS

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The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a required MPO planning product that provides a four-year list of transportation projects to receive FHWA or FTA funding. About three-fourths of the MPOs interviewed believed that their TIP incorporates sustainability, while representatives from the remaining agencies noted that they would like to or intend to incorporate sustainability measures to their TIP in future iterations of the program.

In the last round of TIP updates, MPOs had minimal flexibility in project selection due to changes in NYSDOT policy. NYSDOT's "Preservation First" policy requires that the State direct at least 70 percent of expenditures toward pavement and bridge state of good repair. The policy also sets aside significant portions of funding for programming at the State level rather than MPO level. Some MPOs used elements of sustainability for project ranking and scoring in previous TIPs, including support of investment in compact land use and non-motorized transportation programs.

GBNRTC found that they were able to tier some of the projects identified in their scenario tests into the TIP. Using this strategy, GBNRTC was able to include projects that best responded to New York State Smart Growth law criteria given the available funding.

CDTC incorporated various components of sustainability into their TIP, including small alternative fuel projects and transportation demand management strategies. Furthermore, CDTC's Environment and Technology Task Force highlighted an exhaustive list of environmental features for consideration in TIP projects and linkage studies in a White Paper released in 2014.<sup>11</sup> CDTC policies encourage smart growth and investment in urban areas to protect these natural features. CDTC reviews natural and cultural resource mapping and consults with federal, State, and local agencies on environmental issues as part of the environmental mitigation process to select project candidates for the TIP.

GTC updated their TIP selection process to tie directly back to the 15 performance measures in their LRTP. CDTC is developing a project evaluation methodology for TIP project selection that awards points to project candidates for bicycle, pedestrian and transit improvements; positive contributions to smart growth and environmental justice; greenhouse gas emissions reduction; and alternative fuels support. The agency considers all modes equally in that they prioritize projects that respond best to the performance measures. CDTC also programs set aside funding for travel demand management, bicycle/pedestrian projects, and other categories.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://cdtcmpo.org/rtp2040/white/tech.pdf>

## 6.0 UNIFIED PLANNING WORK PROGRAMS

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The Unified Planning Work Program enumerates the planning tasks that the MPO will undertake over a one or two-year period. Most MPOs recognized that their UPWP echoed the considerations of sustainability found in their LRTP. MPOs shared sentiments of preserving the natural and built environment, supporting public health, and enhancing the local economy in these plans.

The Herkimer-Oneida Counties Transportation Study (HOCTS) redeveloped their UPWP in recent years to incorporate sustainability through the integration of alternative modes and a task for Regional Smart Growth and Sustainability. HOCTS works with NYSEDA, Cleaner Greener, and the Livable Communities Alliance in the development and financing of these programs.

As demonstrated in the LRTP, CDTC strives to make funding shares equitable between rural and urban areas. The agency also conducts inventories and assessments of culturally significant areas and environmentally sensitive areas to identify which locations require attention from the strategic planning level to investment decisions. The Environment and Technology Task Force plays a strong role in developing performance measures and strategies to select sustainable projects for UPWP inclusion.

GTC recognizes that both environmentally sensitive and culturally significant areas require attention from strategic planning phases through investment decision-making. The various standalone plans incorporated to the LRTP cycle, including ITS, Freight, Human Service, Transit, as well as individual Bike and Trail plans ultimately steer investments in the UPWP. For example, the agency's Priority Trails Advancement Program utilizes available Federal Funds to enhance regional trails. The program first required a solicitation process to identify projects, but now municipalities associate these applications with the general UPWP call for projects.

GTC's UPWP also focuses on active transportation and its relationship to all other modes. The agency seeks to accentuate and improve these connections by allocating money to transit authorities for studies to assess transit accessibility to non-motorized transportation, as well as energy efficiencies related to transit. While this commitment on non-motorized and multimodal transportation guides GTC investment, the agency places a significant emphasis on system management and operations to improve safety, increase efficiency, and reduce emissions. GTC will update their ITS Strategic Plan in 2015 and create dedicated UPWP tasks for Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSM&O), security, resiliency, and related staff activity. The agency is actively creating a Regional Critical Transportation Infrastructure Vulnerability Assessment, as well as diversion route plans for all principle arterials in the region.

In the past decade, GTC focused on expanding travel options throughout its region through activities including the development of:

- thirteen multi-use trail feasibility plans;

- a safe routes to school guidebook;
- five individual safe routes to school case studies;
- a commuter choice program (ROCEASYRIDE.org);
- an audible/tactile pedestrian signal device study in Monroe County;
- transit route evaluations, overhauls, and refinements;
- satellite and suburban transit center feasibility studies; and
- a transit signal prioritization study.

GTC also created the Circulation, Accessibility, and Parking Program (CAPP), intended to evaluate options for addressing emerging issues through coordinated transportation and land use planning in the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region. This program funds projects that seek to improve circulation and parking access for all users, including multimodal users, by identifying physical and operational improvements and regulatory changes to enhance circulation and accessibility. The program reviews land uses to identify the effects of design on biking and walking, as well as economic development, to promote balance between modes and land use. For example, GTC reviewed several villages formed in the 1800s along the Erie Canal to identify areas in which these pre-developed areas can compete with development in the corridor's greenfields in terms of accessibility, circulation, and economic vitality. CAPP has been a highly successful program, to the point where respondents now apply without solicitation.

GBNRTC incorporates sustainability into their UPWP the same as their LRTP: through scenario testing. GBNRTC prioritizes projects that best suit the region in terms of transportation system improvements and sustainability in both plans.

The Ulster County Transportation Council (UCTC) integrates sustainability into the UPWP through multimodal and non-motorized projects. Corridor studies funded through the plan feature a complete streets component, for example, the Hudson Valley Greenway Study that focuses on “live-work-play” a testament to a sense of place and stewardship in the region. In future plan cycles, UCTC foresees infrastructure resilience as a forefront topic. The Council previously rejected a study on the weather's impacts on the environment, but recognizes the need to protect critical infrastructure from flooding after major events like Hurricane Irene. UCTC hopes to reinforce all major corridors to mitigate the impacts of severe weather events.

PDCTC includes a standalone task in its UPWP related to the promotion of federal livability principles. Titled Transportation Impact Reviews/Sustainable Development Practices, this task supports our evaluation of the impacts of proposed land use developments on the transportation system. The PDCTC, through the Dutchess County Planning Department, provides decision-making agencies (e.g. municipal planning, zoning, and legislative boards) with site plan alternatives, design improvements, and other recommendations to support PDCTC's objective of promoting livability and sustainable development. Recommendations focus on accommodating appropriate land uses and encouraging economic development,

while managing development to minimize adverse impacts on transportation infrastructure and improve safety and access.

UCTC's UPWP supports the New York State Energy Plan and similar statewide planning efforts. UCTC recognized the tendency to overlook maintenance in the sustainability conversation and long-term infrastructure needs worsen with the lack of annual maintenance projects. Therefore, the agency seeks to reengage decision-makers on new strategies for programming capital repairs.

## 7.0 SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT TOOLS

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FHWA and NYSDOT have developed tools that MPOs can use to self-assess their sustainability planning efforts. MPOs knew about FHWA's highway infrastructure sustainability self-evaluation tool, INVEST,<sup>12</sup> and NYSDOT's GreenLITES sustainability rating program. The agencies, however, were unsure how they could directly apply these programs for MPO planning purposes.

A majority of the MPOs interviewed did not report usage of a tool that assesses sustainability metrics. GBNRTC noted that the EPA's Guide to Sustainable Transportation Performance Measures<sup>13</sup> is helpful. CDTC cited the use of the FHWA air quality model MOVES for environmental assessment.

GTC used the INVEST tool to assess its LRTP 2035, adopted in June 2011. While this assessment was retrospective to the plan's adoption, the agency is also using the INVEST tool in the development of the LRTP 2040. GTC also acknowledged Transportation for Communities - Advancing Projects through Partnerships (TCAPP)<sup>14</sup>, a decision-support tool developed using examples from existing LRTPs and TIPs. GTC noted that this source does not focus on sustainability, but includes some of its elements in the examples.

As agencies begin to expand the prominence of sustainability in their plans and programs, it is likely that these evaluation programs will gain in popularity. NYSAMPO facilitated a webinar with FHWA on the INVEST tool. It is possible that more MPOs applied INVEST for planning or programming purposes after learning about the tool's capabilities as they align with the needs of MPO planning identified in the webinar.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.sustainablehighways.org/>

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.epa.gov/dced/pdf/Sustainable\\_Transpo\\_Performance.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/dced/pdf/Sustainable_Transpo_Performance.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [www.TransportationforCommunities.com](http://www.TransportationforCommunities.com)

## 8.0 STAFF INVOLVEMENT

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The majority of MPOs reported that their staff has a satisfactory awareness of sustainability and its relation to land use and transportation. Some MPOs host formal training or webinars for their staff. For example, ITCTC hosts speakers at its committee meetings to extend education opportunities to both staff and member agencies. Other agencies reported that their staff members learn about sustainability practices and knowledge simply through engagement in the development and review of regional plans. Most agencies indicated a desire to enhance their existing staff knowledge to delve further into best practices and implications of sustainability in transportation terms.

MPOs demonstrated staff commitment to sustainability through the development of regional plans, projects, and programs outside of the LRTP, TIP, and UPWP. These ancillary activities help to focus on sustainability-specific planning.

NYMTC established a sustainability planning manager in its Planning Group for the purpose of developing initiatives in sustainability and resiliency. Initiatives included the HUD-funded Sustainable Communities Initiative, FHWA-funded Post-Sandy Transportation Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Analysis, and a variety of community planning workshops funded through the NYMTC UPWP. These initiatives built on, and will contribute to, the sustainable aspects of NYMTC's long range plan. Additionally, NYMTC convened a Development Subcommittee of its board to gather information on the various county-level master plans within its planning area.

CDTC recognized that their staff was heavily involved in the development of the Capital Regional Sustainability Plan as part of the Transportation, Land Use, and Livable Communities Committees. The Plan is a component of the Statewide Cleaner Greener Community Plan, and CDTC seeks to support the goals of the plan through its work.

CDTC developed a Complete Streets Advisory Committee in 2013. CDTC facilitates the Committee to review preservation projects for potential incorporation of complete streets improvements. CDTC also hosts the Environmental and Technology Task Force that provides recommendations to the Planning Committee and Policy Board as part of LRTP development. The Task Force examines issues such as opportunities for advancing fuel economy and alternative fuels, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, investigating future technologies to mitigate implications on the regional transportation network, investing in transportation demand management, impacts of smart growth policies, and other environment or infrastructure related considerations.

CDTC also demonstrated its commitment to sustainability when it adopted the Capital District Clean Communities program founded under the US DOE's Clean Cities Program. The CDCC collaborates with local transit agencies, jurisdictions, and businesses across the MPO to identify areas for alternative fueling opportunities and advanced vehicle technology mix to support sustainable operations and infrastructure.

PDCTC took the lead within Dutchess County to develop a Complete Streets Policy for the County. In 2014 the agency established a Complete Streets (CS) Committee that meets quarterly to promote Complete Streets principles across various County Depts., to include DPW, Planning, Public Transit, Health, Office for the Aging, Traffic Safety, and the Sheriff's Office. The CS Committee developed a Complete Streets Checklist for use by agencies when reviewing project proposals (e.g., by DPW during the design of federal and non-federal aid road projects). The Committee also developed the following vision statement:

“Dutchess County will strive to plan, design, construct, operate, and maintain transportation facilities and programs to promote safe, comfortable and convenient travel for users of all ages and abilities including people walking, bicycling, riding transit, and driving, as well as freight providers and emergency responders, to the greatest extent possible. This applies to all phases of public and private transportation projects over which the County has review or approval authority. Over time, these transportation facilities will be integrated into a network that promotes the health, safety, environment, and economic vitality of Dutchess County and makes it a more desirable place to live, work and visit.”

One of the ultimate goals of the CS Committee is to develop a CS policy statement that for approval by the County Legislature.

On the other hand, smaller MPOs - like ITCTC with only two staff members - must focus on a multitude of tasks and cannot dedicate as many resources to sustainability education and practices. Given limited staff, the MPO collaborates with member agency staff to encourage and facilitate programs that support environmental, social, and economic development programs. In this regard, the MPO is a catalyst of local stewardship.

## 9.0 MEMBER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

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Each MPO comprises a number of members, including local governments and regional and state agencies. New York’s MPOs reported that their member agencies are diverse in levels of sustainable transportation and land use practices. Some MPOs reported member agency awareness at the high end of the spectrum. BMTS notes, for example, that the City of Binghamton has a dedicated sustainability planner in their Department of Planning, Housing, and Community Development. Other agencies have no semblance of sustainability considerations in their daily practice or organizational structure.

OCTC found that of its 43 municipalities, each with their own zoning ordinances, decision makers, plans, districts, and land use laws, interest in promoting sustainability practices varied substantially depending on the location.

ITCTC, on the other hand found that most of its member agencies are well versed in sustainability issues. For example, each of the member agencies reviewed and provided feedback on the LRTP’s preamble, a pledge of advocacy to addressing climate change and energy issues.

NYMTC has a subcommittee focused on emissions reduction that helped to develop a replacement strategy for older commercial vehicles to increase fuel efficiency. Subsequently, the New York City Department of Transportation – a member agency – created \$25 million in financial incentives using Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds for increasing fuel efficiency (e.g., replace old diesel vehicles with new diesel vehicles, replacing old diesel vehicles with alternative fuel vehicles, or purchasing and installing diesel particulate filters on older diesel vehicles). The program, titled the “Hunts Point Clean Trucks Program,” specifically targets trucks serving the Hunts Point Market, one of the major food suppliers for the entire metropolitan area. NYCDOT expressed interest in seeking additional CMAQ funds for program expansion.

GTC recognized that sustainability commitment levels most often reflect county and state mandates. For example, Monroe County is an outstanding county in terms of sustainability, like maintaining an alternative fuels fleet and infrastructure. Within the county, the City of Rochester has a strong sustainability program, illustrating the trickle down effects of championship by membership agencies.

CDTC acknowledged the effects of the New York State Climate Smart Communities program<sup>15</sup> on its member agencies. The program is an interagency effort involving NYSERDA, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the New York State Department of State, New York State Department of Transportation, New York State Department of Health, and the New York State Public Service Commission and promotes setting goals for action against climate change. Fifteen local governments in the CDTC planning area are designated Climate Smart Communities.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/50845.html>

Similarly, only two MPOs noted a strong “champions” of sustainability on their Policy Committee. Sustainability advocacy often warrants a mandate or champion to encourage the integration of sustainability economically, environmentally, or socially, to the planning process because these benefits are not always clear and present.

New York's MPOs commonly used the Comprehensive Plan development process to engage with member agencies in support of sustainable planning efforts. ITCTC, ECTC, and GTC cited participation in local Comprehensive Plan efforts to accommodate walking, bicycling as transportation alternatives. These plans result in recommendations that maximize the synergies of transportation and land use.

In addition to comprehensive planning efforts, various MPOs collaborate with member agencies on other local plans and programs. For example:

- ECTC is working with a local community to improve the walkability and bikeability to and from their commercial and governmental core.
- GTC created a Thriving Communities Toolkit<sup>16</sup> that uses CAPP studies and other examples of how communities improving their standards of livability. Member agencies can utilize the toolkit to gauge their community sense of livability, stay informed of community planning issues, continue education on small practices to support sustainable actions, and view case studies of areas that underwent livability initiatives.
- GTC commissioned a guidebook and compilation of exemplary land use ordinances, incentives, and other resources to address climate change and developed a traffic-calming manual. For example, GTC provided financial assistance to a fast-growing suburb to produce transit-supportive zoning codes for multiple areas within the town.
- GTC funded the Livingston County Transportation Connectivity Plan, which considers all modes of transportation with a specific emphasis on integrating auto with bicycle, pedestrian, and transit facilities. The study covered over twenty municipalities, provided enhanced route structures, and included a pilot project to demonstrate its value. The agency believes that public operators should work in concert with private providers to offer individual-centered transportation.
- GTC provided funding for and participated in eight community-led active transportation plans; a City of Rochester Bicycle Boulevards plan; bus stop optimization plan; and recently completed a NYSERDA-funded bike sharing business plan, vanpool feasibility study, and update to the Regional Trails Initiative.
- SMTC initiated a three-part “sustainable streets” project intended to provide guidance to municipalities, land use planners, and facility owners as they seek opportunities to make their transportation systems accessible to pedestrians,

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.gtcmppo.org/LinkingTransportation.htm>

bicyclists, and transit users. The first stage of this project identified places in the Syracuse region that blend the land uses and demographic characteristics to reinforce the community's walkability. The latter stage of the project included an inventory of the sidewalks in the region. The information compiled in the project effort provides a foundation on which to build neighborhood or town-wide pedestrian plans that promote pedestrian scale in future development.

- ITCTC is working to establish a transportation ride-sharing program throughout its region. The MPO expressed concern with limitations of home-rule nature of New York State. The ridesharing program will require crossing county lines, which complicates funding and other coordination issues. ITCTC noted that it would be helpful for NYSDOT to encourage communication among transit agencies to bridge county lines.

## 10.0 SUMMARY

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Each of the MPOs in New York indicated either existing or intended considerations of sustainability in their regional planning strategies. LRTP sustainability efforts ranged from various policy implementation strategies to promote complete streets and sustainable transportation design to dedicated sustainability performance metrics to overall themes throughout the plan of environmental, social, and environmental stewardship.

TIPs reflected LRTP practices, considering non-motorized modes, multimodal integration, smart growth, and sustainability performance metrics for project prioritization to compliment the “Preservation First” statewide policy. Similarly, UPWP practices typically involved integration of planning for non-motorized projects and preserving infrastructure and the natural environment in the program.

Agencies are increasingly interested in integrating sustainability metrics as illustrated by the examples of tools used by New York's MPOs. Increasing usage of tools like INVEST, GreenLITES, and other assessment methods will become more frequent as the concept of sustainability reaches into more of the state's plans and programs. Furthermore, the number of grant applications will most likely increase to broaden the resources from which the MPO can utilize for these transportation system enhancements.

MPOs recognize that their efforts to plan for sustainable communities are well supported by actions of New York State. Both the Smart Growth Public Infrastructure Policy Act, and the state's Complete Streets Act provide tools for encouraging sustainable growth and transportation solutions. Similarly, the work of NYSERDA is valuable in encouraging sustainable communities and models for alternative fueled vehicles.

Finally, this White Paper illustrates the criticality of top-down integration of sustainability elements in the planning process. As observed in the information from the interviews, most agencies support staff and member involvement in sustainability to support federal, state, and regional mandates or programs. Champions help to support the action and support for sustainable practices internal and external to the MPO to get all parties involved and integrate environmental, social, and economic stewardship in the regional planning process.