New Hampshire Transportation Business Plan
The Report of the Community Advisory Committee to the NHDOT: Executive Summary

New Hampshire is undergoing rapid change. Our population is growing faster than our neighboring New England states, our economy is diversifying, and our sprawling land uses are straining our roads and pocketbooks. These changes affect the health and character of every community and region of the state. Over the next 25 years the pace of change will accelerate. Will we manage this change or will this change manage us? That is the challenge before us.

In 2004 the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation and the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) created the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) to help NHDOT understand the impacts of this change and to develop strategies to manage it. In this report, the CAC offers initial initiatives we recommend NHDOT undertake to demonstrate its commitment to the principles outlined in this plan.

A Transportation Vision for 2030

In the year 2030, transportation in New Hampshire plays a critical role in preserving the state’s unique character and quality of life, enhancing environmental quality, and promoting sustainable economic development and land use.

Transportation in New Hampshire provides safe and secure mobility and travel options for all the state’s residents, visitors and goods movement; is well maintained, efficient and reliable; and provides seamless interstate and intrastate connectivity.

How Transportation is Funded in New Hampshire

NHDOT received about $539 million in transportation funds in 2005. About $255 million came from the state highway trust fund; $68 million from Turnpike toll receipts; approximately $20 million from Turnpike construction bonds; and $165 million from the federal government. Another $31 million came from other sources.

And how did the NHDOT spend the money? About $40 million was provided to cities and towns to build and maintain local streets and bridges. Approximately $366 million was spent to maintain, modernize, and expand the state highway system. In addition to funds received and expended by NHDOT, about $9 million in federal transit funds are received and expended by Health and Human Services and municipalities, as well as transportation funds from public-private partnerships and local sources.

Recommended Transportation Investment Strategies

If we are to meet the challenges outlined in this plan, new transportation financing strategies are needed, including diversifying funding sources and expanding transportation choices. In addition, if we are to keep pace with the growth in travel and congestion, and keep our roads and bridges in good condition, funding above current levels is required. Ultimately, as fuel economy increases and alternative fuels (such as ethanol, biofuels, natural gas) begin to replace petroleum-based fuels, the state gas tax will decline in importance as a source of transportation revenue. We need new, innovative sources of transportation funding to supplement the gas tax, and we need to act now to develop these financing strategies. Available options include:

1. Leverage public funds with private investments, such as cost-sharing of new road capacity projects with private developers seeking access to this new capacity;
2. Set up tax-increment financing (TIF) where new road or transit investments are bonded against incremental property tax revenues from land development benefited by such investments;
3. Pursue federal grants for transit, bicycle and pedestrian programs such as Safe Routes to School and special transit grants;
4. Combine transportation funding with other public funds such as Health and Human Services transportation funds, economic development transportation funds and the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP);
5. Adopt measures to assess impact fees for use in traffic relief;
6. Expand the voluntary $5 motor vehicle registration fee for “transportation” purposes to improve transportation choices;
7. VMT-based charges, congestion pricing, and tolls.

Toward a comprehensive vision for growth, transportation and development

New Hampshire is a small, beautiful, but threatened state. We cherish our heritage as a collection of small communities that work together to manage the duties of public governance, and to get things done. However, the problems of growth and development are upon us. A strategic transportation plan only makes sense in the context of an overall vision for the state and its regions. We call on our state leaders to set that vision so we can further calibrate this plan in the context of broader societal goals. As stated at one of our public hearings on this plan “We are a small state, but that means we can do things bigger states can’t do – we can learn to help each other.” That is the spirit in which we submit this transportation plan to you, our fellow citizens of New Hampshire.

To read the full report and get more information, please visit www.nhtranplan.com.

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“Transportation is the game board that everything else is played upon.”

— NH DOT Commissioner Carol Murray
Recommended Local Action Items

One of the most pressing needs is to better coordinate land use decisions with transportation decisions. The best forum to do this is within our cities and towns. To enhance transportation and our communities, a number of ideas are recommended, including:

1. Promote town centers;
2. Allow for flexibility and common sense solutions in our historic town centers;
3. At local option, consider reclassification of state highways that are main streets as Class V town roads where adequate regional access exists;
4. Promote pedestrian traffic – especially in downtown areas;
5. Require connections between roads to provide alternative local routes, and connectivity between neighborhoods;

6. Promote infill development, density and redevelopment in town centers;
7. Create incentives to coordinate land use and transportation at the local level.

Action Item: We recommend that NHDOT apply these recommendations to the design and redevelopment of Route 16 through the town of Conway to restore it as a traditional main street, while supporting a bypass that implements the town master plan goal of compact development.

Recommended Regional Action Items

Strong local-regional partnerships can foster support for both improved transportation capacity to assist local problem-solving and regional connectivity. The nine Regional Planning Commissions are the logical forum for such cross-jurisdictional collaborations. Recommendations for action to improve regional efforts include:

1. Create peer-to-peer exchanges to increase RPC capacity to serve local needs for technical assistance and education, especially in connecting transportation and land use in local master plans and projects, as well as across local jurisdictions;
2. Increase public involvement through public education campaigns and inclusion of citizens and non-governmental organizations representing broad societal goals on regional Transportation Advisory Committees (TACs);
3. Develop highway corridor plans to protect road investments and better coordinate transportation and land use;
4. Partner with state agencies and all nine RPCs to develop a Statewide Action Plan for ridesharing, transportation brokerage, and other forms of inter-regional public transportation.

Action Item: We recommend that NHDOT expand the Community Technical Assistance Program (CTAP), developed to help communities along the I-93 corridor deal with corridor-related growth and development issues, and to provide similar tools, techniques and programs to all communities in the state.

Action Item: We recommend that NHDOT work with the RPCs, sister state agencies, non-profit organizations and consultants to develop a Statewide Action Plan for ridesharing and other inter-regional public transportation services.

Recommended Statewide Action Items

The NHDOT cannot do it alone. Effective management of the state’s transportation system in the future will increasingly rely on a unique set of partnerships at almost every level: across state agencies; between state, regional and local governments; and between the public and private sectors.

1. Develop a truly comprehensive statewide transportation plan that serves a broader vision for the state;
2. Compile updated data on transportation trends, alternatives and financing for local, statewide and regional planners;
3. Adopt and fully implement the “Common Sense Solutions” approach to transportation and land use, using placemaking tools to identify strongly-felt community values and special places for protection in the project development process;
4. Develop new performance measures for transportation that go beyond vehicle speed and congestion, such as measures for increased reliability and safety;
5. Manage the growth of freight traffic;
6. Clarify transportation language to make the process transparent and accessible to all;
7. Broaden and coordinate transportation services across all state agencies to improve transportation choices.

Action Item: We recommend that NHDOT support the creation of a Capital Area Transportation Management Association (CATMA) in cooperation with Concord Area Transit (CAT) and in support of the Concord 2020 “City of Villages” Vision Plan.

If you don’t link land use and transportation, both will fail. - Carol Murray, NHDOT Commissioner

FINDINGS

1. New Hampshire is growing at a faster rate than the other New England states.
2. Growth in travel by people and freight (measured in vehicle miles traveled, or VMT) is growing at a faster pace than the growth in jobs and population in New Hampshire.
3. Open space land is being developed even more quickly than our population is growing. Much of this growth is taking place in spread-out suburban development, which incrementally places greater stress on the transportation system.
4. New Hampshire’s population is aging, which means an increasing number of our citizens – our seniors – will be unable to drive themselves to appointments, shopping and other places.
5. Fewer than 30 of New Hampshire’s 234 towns and cities have regularly scheduled bus service. Nationally, New Hampshire ranks 42nd in state funding to public transportation. Towns and cities have difficulty in raising the money required to match federal funds for bus and train service.
6. On average, households spend 20% of their budget on transportation, second only to housing. For lower income households, the percentage approaches 35%.
7. The state lacks adequate regional and inter-regional public transportation services to meet the needs of our economy. Citizens and visitors need transportation choices for access to all destinations in our state for tourism, recreation, business and personal travel.

More road connections provide improved travel route options for cars, bikes and pedestrians.

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The cycle of sprawl (courtesy of FHWA)

Growth in VMT is expected to continue to outpace population growth.

Findings

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