

VII. Planning and Implementation Agenda

Middlesex County lies in the central part of New Jersey, the nation's most densely populated state. In the 1980's, a strong economy and housing market resulted in substantial growth throughout most of New Jersey and especially Middlesex County. Between 1980 and 1990, Middlesex County's population increased by 15 percent while employment increased by 30 percent, further increasing the densities of residents and workers. Such dynamic growth in housing and employment opportunities also placed increasing demands on the road, water, sewer, stormwater, and recreational systems in many locations. However, growth was not evenly distributed within the County. Older urban areas experienced declines in jobs, while the greatest increases were in suburban areas. Employment by industry was uneven, too. While manufacturing employment grew by 19 percent between 1984 and 1993, including growth in office jobs at the expense of production jobs, retail, wholesale and services employment rose by 97 percent during the same period.

At the same time, the existing infrastructure systems of Middlesex County were increasingly unable to serve new demand from growing residential and worker populations. Concerns were expressed by the County's residents that road systems were becoming congested, that open space and agricultural lands were being lost, that opportunities for economic growth were declining in older urban areas, and that the character of the towns was changing as new development patterns altered the landscape.

The availability of water, sewer and road system infrastructure facilitated Middlesex County's strong economic growth in the 1970's and 1980's. In a similar way, studies conducted for the County indicate that better coordination of growth among municipalities, preparation of regional designs to protect existing community character, and more efficient land use patterns (to reduce infrastructure expansion costs and protect the environment) would facilitate continued economic expansion. The timing and location of future growth should be consistent with infrastructure capacity improvements. This can only be accomplished through coordinated planning at the State, County, and municipal levels.

Four major strategic planning goals that address these problems can be summarized as follows:

- * to facilitate the provision of housing and jobs at reasonable cost and the achievement of sustainable economic growth;
- * to provide for adequate infrastructure capacity (roads & transit, water, sewer, open space and recreation), timed and equitably financed to support continued growth, without stimulating inefficient growth and capital investment patterns;
- * to provide for management and protection of important environmental resources within and outside the County and upon which the County depends for public health and quality of life; and

- * to provide greater coordination of local, county, and state planners and officials, thereby securing a broader perspective in solving regional problems, preserving/improving the character of existing communities and conserving important natural and other resources (fiscal, cultural, historic, and human).

Growth management studies conducted for the County by Camp, Dresser, McKee, Inc. (CDM), completed in 1990, identified the need for significant infrastructure investment on a county-wide basis to meet the demands of projected growth. The 1990 examination of the capacity of sewer, water, stormwater, parks, and road systems, as well as affordable housing with respect to anticipated growth, identified a need for \$2.4 billion in infrastructure improvements to maintain current levels of public services in the County through 2010. While those studies were based on trends and experience during the unprecedented growth that occurred in the 1980's, Middlesex County continues to grow in population at a rate of approximately 5000 persons per year. It is clear that it will not be possible to expend \$120,000,000 in capital costs annually just to maintain a Countywide infrastructure system to support continued growth. To achieve a reasonable infrastructure investment level and live within our means in the future, Middlesex County must direct its resources to specific areas of the County where growth can take advantage of existing infrastructure and resources in the most cost effective manner. This has been accomplished by identifying seven strategic planning areas.

The major objectives of such a strategic planning effort are to:

- * Focus attention on implementable economic development strategies that foster public-private partnerships;
- * Equitably balance the long-term costs of infrastructure needed to support economic development between the government and the private sector;
- * Reduce and/or prevent traffic congestion and facilitate the efficient movement of people and goods within and between planning areas and regions;
- * Protect natural resources, preserve open space and provide recreational opportunities both within the strategic planning area and in the land areas around and between them that compose their "environs";
- * Assure that water quality and air quality objectives established by the State and Federal governments are met; and
- * Identify centers and downtown and suburban development and redevelopment areas within the strategic planning area framework that can be recognized as appropriate pursuant to State Development and Redevelopment Plan criteria and the endorsed plan process.

The two SPAs described in this plan are as follows:

- * The Arthur Kill/Raritan Estuary/Raritan Bay area including Carteret, the Port Reading, Sewaren, and Keasbey sections of Woodbridge, the Raritan Center area of Edison, Perth Amboy, the shoreline portions of Sayreville, South Amboy, and the shoreline areas of Old Bridge
- * The Metropark area in Edison and Woodbridge

The significant transportation corridors for these strategic planning areas are as follows:

- * Arthur Kill/Raritan Estuary/Bay – Route 35, N.J. Turnpike, North Jersey Coastline Rail (NJ Transit), The Arthur Kill, Raritan River, Raritan Bay shipping channel complex
- * Metropark – Route 1, Route 27 and the Northeast Corridor Mainline Rail (NJ Transit, Amtrak)

Arthur Kill/Raritan Estuary/Raritan Bay Strategic Planning Area

Strategic Planning Area Boundary

The Arthur Kill/Raritan Estuary/Raritan Bay SPA is located along Middlesex County's coastline and encompasses all of Carteret, Perth Amboy and South Amboy and sections of Edison, Woodbridge, Sayreville and Old Bridge.

Major Land Development Areas/Projects

The Arthur Kill/Raritan Bay area offers a unique opportunity for future growth along its waterfront. The reclamation of the waters of the Arthur Kill and the Raritan Estuary as a result of the closure of the former sewage treatment plants that once dotted the waterfront and the major decline in industrial point source wastewater discharges has greatly improved the water's recreation potential. Issues of combined sewer overflows and nonpoint pollution still need addressing, but significant progress has been made in that regard. The control of drift materials from deteriorating piers and derelict vessels is a remaining priority but attention has been focused on this in recent years. Middlesex County has made a major investment in developing recreation in the County's new Raritan Bay Waterfront Park in South Amboy and Sayreville. The County has entered into an agreement with Old Bridge for the development of the Bayshore Walkway along the Bay from Cheesequake Creek to Whale Creek. The Walkway has been completed from Cheesequake Creek to Margaret's Creek. When completed the Walkway will provide a significant extension of Monmouth County's Bayshore Trail. North of the Raritan River the County has developed the Alvin P. Williams Park on the Sewaren Peninsula in Woodbridge. Planned for many years, this park increases the amount of waterfront open space along the Arthur Kill. The potential for marina expansion will

greatly enhance the use of Raritan Bay and Estuary for sailing, fishing, and other recreation. This will increase the need for services and other economic activity to support water-based recreation activities. The area will also continue to grow as a result of its proximity to the New York City Metropolitan area. These economic forces give this area a bright future. However no positive growth can occur unless appropriate infrastructure investments are made.

Major redevelopment projects and proposals in the area include Tufts Point/ Port Carteret in Carteret, Harbortown in Perth Amboy, the three Focus 2000 Redevelopment Areas identified by Perth Amboy, the north, central, and south mixed use redevelopment zones in South Amboy, and the NL Industries Area in Sayreville. Additional waterfront sites are located in Sayreville along the Raritan Bay. Potential redevelopment is possible in Woodbridge at the Port Reading Rail yard site and the Woodbridge Creek site. Old Bridge has identified the Alfieri Mixed Use project at Garden State Parkway Exit 120 and the potential sites for marine commercial development at Seidlers Beach on the Bay and at Cheesequake Creek and Whale Creek. Major recreation improvements are also planned in the area, including new waterfront parks in Carteret and Woodbridge along the Arthur Kill and the expansion of the marina facilities in Perth Amboy. The Borough of Sayreville is considering extending Main Street to open additional waterfront areas to commercial and recreation use.

The Raritan Center industrial and office park is located in southern Edison and Woodbridge Townships along the Raritan River. At 2,000 acres, it is the largest industrial/office park in New Jersey. Plans for Raritan Center include increased office, warehousing, and industrial capacity. Redevelopment of former industrial sites and transportation infrastructure expansion is hindered by the presence of hazardous waste areas and significant wetland areas. Transportation improvements are under way to improve access to Raritan Center. Edison Township is proposing a recreational corridor along the Raritan River that will provide important waterfront access to the public. The presence of extensive terminated landfills may, however, make this a long-term goal.

There are few serious infrastructure problems that could inhibit growth in the SPA. Most of the infrastructure projects focus on transportation improvements to relieve traffic congestion. Others concern the elimination of combined sewer systems and tidal flooding. Although the area is expected to host some of the County's population growth, significant coastal-friendly redevelopment efforts are underway throughout the SPA. Economic development is a major component of that redevelopment. This area offers the potential for better utilization of mass transit opportunities provided by the N.J. Transit North Jersey Coast Rail Line and the potential for ferry service to New York City that may also serve local employment centers.

Strategic Planning Issues

- * Shoreline areas offer the opportunity for the redevelopment of under-utilized and abandoned heavy industrial sites as business, residential, and recreational sites. Redevelopment planning also needs to address environmental concerns regarding past contamination of land, water, and air quality along the shoreline. Remediation of such sites should be programmed. Efforts such as the Brownfields Initiative of the Middlesex County Improvement Authority, the Perth Amboy Focus 2000 Redevelopment Plan, Carteret's Special Improvement Districts, and Sayreville's Industrial Redevelopment Zone should be continued.
- * Improved road access is needed between (re)development parcels and major highways to avoid burdening local roads and provide needed accessibility. Separation of truck traffic from residential areas is a major planning concern. Local projects include the extension of the Carteret Industrial Road to the Port Reading area and the extension of the Route 440 connector to State Street north of Route 440 in Perth Amboy.
- * Because several areas along the Raritan Estuary, Raritan Bay, and Arthur Kill are subject to tidal flooding, a shore protection master plan should be extended to this area. Consideration should be given to requesting Federal and State beach replenishment efforts for the Bayshore.
- * Regional transportation improvements to be considered should include:
 - * Route 35 improvements;
 - * Route 9 improvements;
 - * Garden State Parkway access improvements;
 - * Consideration of a new Raritan River crossing;
 - * Rail station improvements in Perth Amboy and South Amboy to include expanded access to the stations;
 - * New rail station in Old Bridge;
 - * Ferry service to Manhattan;
 - * Transit improvements to make the area accessible from New York City, New Brunswick and the Bayshore communities of Monmouth County. (Consider transit links to Raritan Center from the New Jersey Transit Coast Line at Perth Amboy and the New Jersey Transit mainline at Metropark and Metuchen.)

- * A transit link from Carteret to the NJ Transit North Jersey Coast Line.
- * Improvements to water quality through elimination of sanitary sewer overflows and stormwater and non-point source management.
- * Economic development is heavily dependent on dredging of waterways for shipping and water transportation and for access by recreational boating. Planning for environmentally safe dredging and dredge spoil disposal should be completed.
- * Opportunities should be identified for residential development to allow employees to live closer to work.
- * Waterfront parks along the Arthur Kill, Raritan River, and Raritan Bay provide needed recreational opportunities and improve public access to the waterfront. The Raritan Bay walkway in Old Bridge should be extended northward. Feasibility studies should be conducted for this project.
- * Expanded marina and boat launching facilities should be provided.
- * Development of the southern area of Raritan Center is dependent on delineation of important environmental resources, the completion of the Industrial Highway, a second grade separated interchange to provide access to Raritan Center, the County College, and other economic development from Woodbridge Avenue, and improved transit service. An integrated resource delineation and special area design plan should be implemented for this area.
- * The presence of three closed landfills along the Raritan River will constrain extension of a proposed riverfront park to the west, until the sites are remediated and/or properly closed. Efforts should be made to expedite landfill closure.
- * Skill development and training is a critical factor for economic development in this area. Proximity to Middlesex County College and the new Perth Amboy Vo-Tech school offers opportunities to create an employer/college/Vo-tech task force to identify and implement training programs to benefit the area's employers and residents.
- * Identify downtown and suburban development/redevelopment areas.

- * Prepare special area design plans for the Raritan Center Area, the Keasbey, Port Reading, and Sewaren sections of Woodbridge Township, the Sayreville (Melrose/Morgan)/ South Amboy area, and the Laurence Harbor area. These plans would incorporate recreation and open space, traffic reduction, pedestrian and bicycle movement enhancement, and mixed-use development as appropriate.

See Appendix IV for a complete listing of the major development and redevelopment projects and issues identified by the municipalities for the Arthur Kill/Raritan SPA. A map identifying the listed projects by number is also provided as a companion to this Report.

B. The Metropark Strategic Planning Area (SPA)

Location and Description

The Metropark SPA is located within portions of Edison and Woodbridge Townships and the Borough of Metuchen. One focal point of this SPA is the Metropark Rail Station and the surrounding office park. The existing Menlo Park Mall and Woodbridge Center Mall enclosed regional shopping centers are also major traffic generators. Office and retail business expansion is the anticipated form of growth, with opportunities in several unbuilt commercial parcels in the Metropark area. However, expansion is limited by scarce buildable land, traffic congestion and sewerage capacity constraints. Major infrastructure projects in the area focus primarily on transportation improvements and sewer system rehabilitation. In terms of regional design, the concentrated transit and office facilities do not have significant interrelationships with the surrounding residential areas. However, the presence of the major transit facility hub at the Metropark station with direct access from the Garden State Parkway offers enhanced accessibility. Improvements to SPA internal circulation and internal transit availability will encourage additional housing and economic activity within the SPA. The SPA offers the potential for a modern, urban concentration of development.

The northern Route One highway corridor redevelopment area in Woodbridge and the Route 35 Corridor are also within this SPA.

The extensive development of this SPA, which includes the bulk of the watershed of the South Branch of the Rahway River, has resulted in stormwater flooding impacts in downstream areas.

Strategic Planning Issues

- * Traffic congestion inhibits growth in the SPA. Access to Metropark is limited by the narrow rail underpasses and New Jersey Transit's parking expansion places an even greater burden on local roads. The new direct access provided from and to the Garden State Parkway has provided

some improvement. Transportation management measures should be implemented intensively for this area. Van pooling, ride sharing, and alternatives to the single occupancy vehicle are needed. Local road capacity improvements have been programmed. Improvements to the Route One and Route Nine interchange are underway and will improve traffic movement near Woodbridge Center Mall on both highways. Future improvements to Route One will support redevelopment in the highway corridor. Improvements for pedestrian and bicycle movement and safer bus transit stops are needed in the Route One and Route 35 corridors.

- * The New Jersey Transit parking deck project includes the construction of space for retail facilities to better serve commuter needs. Additional retail development to serve nearby office workers should also be planned. Pedestrian and local transit access to retail and other commercial activities in the SPA should be subject to feasibility study and programming.
- * Growth in this SPA is limited by increasingly scarce buildable land and the need for increased sewerage capacity. A stormwater management plan should be developed for the entire South Branch of the Rahway River drainage area in order to determine the most effective stormwater control measures. A sanitary sewer expansion project has been planned by Woodbridge for implementation in the near future.
- * Consideration should be given to mechanisms for stream corridor protection and prevention of stormwater borne pollution. Existing implementation of the County's 319 funded nonpoint pollution control planning effort should be continued.
- * Special area design plans should be prepared to incorporate recreation and open space, traffic reduction, pedestrian and bicycle movement enhancement and mixed-use development. Candidate areas are the Metropark Station area, the Woodbridge Center Mall-Route One area, the Menlo Park Mall area, the Route 35 Corridor and the northern Route One Corridor.
- * The existing Roosevelt and Merrill County Parks should be connected by an open space corridor that provides trails, and stream corridor and wetland protection.

See Appendix V for a complete listing of the major development and redevelopment projects and issues identified by the municipalities for the Metropark SPA. A map identifying the listed projects by number is also provided as a companion to this Report.

