

Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee Meeting



Friday, October 16th 2020 9:00 – 10:30 AM
Remote Zoom Meeting

The Chair of SRPC has found that, due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with the Governor's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-18, SRPC and committees thereof are authorized to meet electronically.

Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to this meeting, which was authorized pursuant to the Governor's Emergency Order.

SRPC is utilizing Zoom for this electronic meeting. All members of the Committee have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through this platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in the meeting as follows:

Online Access: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85240887267>

Telephone-only Access: 1-646-558-8656 and Meeting ID: 852 4088 7267

These instructions have also been provided on the SRPC website at www.straftford.org. If anybody is unable to access the meeting, please email clentz@straftford.org. In the event the public is unable to access the meeting, the meeting will be adjourned and rescheduled.

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| 1. Introductions | |
| 2. Staff Communications | |
| 3. Action Item(s) [Motion required] | 10 mins |
| Draft minutes from September 18 th , 2020 | |
| 4. Discussion Items | 20 mins |
| Provide feedback on draft Metro Plan theme content (see memo included in packet) | |
| 5. Project Updates | 5 mins |
| Current SRPC projects and progress | |
| 6. Commissioner roundtable – Updates from your community | 15 mins |
| What should SRPC be focused on for COVID-19 recovery planning that would help your community? | |
| 7. Other Business | 10 mins |
| 8. Citizen's Forum – Citizens of the Strafford region are invited to speak on the subject matter of the meeting. Statements shall be limited to three minutes | |
| 9. Adjournment | |

Reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities are available upon request. Include a description of the accommodation you will need including as much detail as you can. Also include a way we can contact you if we need more information. Make your request as early as possible; please allow at least 5 days advance notice. Last minute requests will be accepted but may be impossible to fill. Please call (603) 994-3500 or email srpc@straftford.org.

Rules of Procedure

*Strafford Regional Planning Commission
Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization, and
Strafford Economic Development District*

Meeting Etiquette

Be present at the scheduled start of the meeting.

Be respectful of the views of others.

Ensure that only one person talks at a time. Raising your hand to be recognized by the chair or facilitator is good practice.

Do not interrupt others, or start talking before someone finishes.

Do not engage in cross talk.

Avoid individual discussions in small groups during the meeting. When one person speaks, others should listen.

Active participation is encouraged from all members.

When speaking, participants should adhere to topics of discussion directly related to agenda items.

When speaking, individuals should be brief and concise.

The Strafford Regional Planning Commission & Metropolitan Planning Organization holds both public meetings and public hearings.

For public meetings, guests are welcome to observe, but should follow proper meeting etiquette allowing the meeting to proceed uninterrupted. Members of the public who wish to be involved and heard should use venues such as citizen forum, public hearings, public comment periods, outreach events, seminars, workshops, listening sessions, etc.

Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee

Meeting Minutes

Friday, September 18th 2020 9:00 – 11:00 AM

Strafford Regional Planning Commission
Virtual Meeting Via Zoom
Rochester, NH

The meeting was called to order at 9:05am
Prior to beginning the meeting, the Chair read the following statement:

As Chair of the Strafford MPO Policy Committee I have found that, due to the COVID-19/Coronavirus crisis and in accordance with Governor Sununu's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-17, this Committee is authorized to meet electronically. Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to the meeting, which was authorized pursuant to the Governor's Emergency Order. However, in accordance with the Emergency Order, this is to confirm that we are:

a) Providing public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possibilities by video or other electronic means;

We are utilizing the Zoom platform for this electronic meeting. All members of the Committee have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through the Zoom platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in this meeting through dialing the following phone # 1-646-558-8656 and meeting ID 852 4088 7267, or by clicking on the following website address:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85240887267>

b) Providing public notice of the necessary information for accessing the meeting;

We previously gave notice to the public of how to access the meeting using Zoom, and instructions are provided on the SRPC website at Strafford.org, and clicking on the link for the May Policy Committee.

c) Providing a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are problems with access;

If anybody has a problem, please call 603-559-3500 (ext. 102) or email Colin at:
clentz@strafford.org.

d) Adjourning the meeting if the public is unable to access the meeting.

In the event the public is unable to access the meeting, we will adjourn the meeting and have it rescheduled at that time. Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by Roll Call vote.

Let's start the meeting by taking a Roll Call attendance. When each member states their presence, also please state whether there is anyone in the room with you during this meeting, which is required under the Right-to-Know law.

1. Attendance:

Committee Members

Don Hamann (Rochester), Tim White (NHDES), Leslie Schwartz (Durham), Michael Williams (COAST), Mark Richardson (Somersworth), Bill Fisher (Farmington), David Landry (Dover), Richard Michaud (Somersworth), Victoria Parmele (Northwood), Barbara Holstein (Rochester), Peter Nelson (Newmarket), Michael Bobinsky (Somersworth), Joe Boudreau (Rochester), Glenn Davison (NHDOT).

Staff

Jennifer Czysz, Colin Lentz, Nancy O'Connor, Jackson Rand,

2. Staff Communications

J. Czysz explained that SRPC had a regional roundtable on recycling the day before the Policy meeting. It was the first of a series and participants discussed the various regional challenges around recycling and solid waste, and potential collaboration between communities to address those challenges.

J. Czysz said the SRPC resilience sub-committee would be meeting for the first time next week. She added that the quarterly commission meeting was scheduled for Thursday September 24th. At that meeting the commissioners will be reviewing the proposed municipal dues, Shayna Silvia will have a draft of the 2020 Annual report, Jackson Rand will be demonstrating how to use SRPC's ArcOnline mapping features, and the resilience sub-committee will have a brief recap of their meeting.

C. Lentz noted that the November Policy meeting will be kept to 45 minutes (9:00 – 9:45) because at 10:00 staff from NHDES will be offering a separate special training for municipal staff on the process for permitting and installing electric vehicle charging infrastructure. The presentation will be geared for municipal technical staff and the intent is to advertise to other RPCs in addition to SRPC.

3. Action Item(s)

3.1 Minutes from August 21st 2020 [VOTE]

M. Bobinsky made a motion to approve the minutes as written.

Seconded by D. Hamann

Vote: R. Michaud and L. Schwartz abstaining, otherwise unanimous in favor (via roll call vote)

3.2 Ten Year Plan Project ranking results [VOTE]

C. Lentz provided a recap of the current state of Ten Year Plan (TYP) project development and scoring. He noted that NHDOT needs a list of candidate projects so they can conduct an engineering review since SRPC does not have engineering staff. NHDOT requested that the list include projects that fit in the region's allocation of TYP funding (\$4.9 million), plus up to two contingency projects. Seven projects came out of the project solicitation process that were ready for submission to the TYP. C. Lentz said he developed scopes and cost estimates with municipal staff and various resources. He recapped what had occurred through the scoring process to this point:

- TAC recommended a set of weights for the project scoring criteria
- Policy requested some modifications to shift weight from the "mobility" criteria to the "state of repair" criteria
- TAC supported Policy's requested changes and C. Lentz averaged the TAC and Policy weights to conduct preliminary scoring
- TAC reviewed the draft ranking of projects and recommended to the Policy Committee that the projects be submitted as follows:

Projects approximately within the regional allocation:

- Rochester (L14001) Route 11 and Nashoba Drive: to replace an existing TYP project
- Barrington (L01001) NH125 and NH9 Intersection: \$761,944
- Rochester (L14002) Route 11: \$3,620,000
- Farmington (L05001) Route75, 153 Downtown Corridor: \$1,233,902

Two contingency projects

- Milton (09001) Dawson Street and Silver Street: \$543,200
- Durham (L04001) Main Street/NH155A/Mast Road Intersection: \$969,600

- The project list originally included three possible contingency projects but TAC recommended removing that project to meet NHDOT's request because it scored the lowest
- The Farmington project made the total slightly over the regional allocation (by about \$600,000) but C. Lentz said NHDOT was comfortable with that since the costs were conservatively estimated

C. Lentz explained that there were two primary decisions before the Policy committee: 1) confirm the proposed averaged criteria weightings, and 2) discuss and approve the list of candidate projects. He noted that the list needed to be sent to NHDOT by the end of October.

C. Lentz explained that even if projects were not included on the candidate project list, they would be retained in the Metro Plan for refinement and so they could be ready for other funding sources. He explained that once NHDOT has the list of projects they will conduct their engineering review between November and December. During that time SRPC staff will be compiling additional data on demographics and crashes. Once NHDOT finishes their review, they will share the results with RPCs. RPCs then need to conduct a second round of discussion about the candidate projects to refine the list to only those projects that fit within the regional allocation.

C. Lentz said he proposed forming a sub-committee of TAC and Policy members to meet and discuss the projects in greater detail. They would review additional data on each project. The sub-committee would recommend a final list of projects for TAC and Policy review. The final list needs to be submitted to NHDOT by the end of March.

M. Bobinsky made a motion to approve the weights averaged between TAC and Policy
Seconded by D. Hamann

D. Hamann made a motion to approve the list of candidate projects as recommended by the TAC.
Seconded by L. Schwartz

4. **Project Updates**

C. Lentz asked for volunteers for the TYP project scoring sub-committee. He said he imagined the sub-committee would meet around three times.

J. Boudreau, M. Richardson, and B. Fisher volunteered.

5. **Other Business**

C. Lentz said staff were developing a program to better utilize SRPC's three bicycle and pedestrian counters. They were going to start identifying priority locations to set counters to get baseline data for pedestrian and bicycle activity around the region.

Commissioner Roundtable

D. Hamann said NHDOT and the City of Rochester had recently agreed on the initial safety improvements at the intersection of Tebbetts Rd and Old Dover Rd.

B. Fisher said Farmington had installed a temporary bridge on Hornetown Rd while the permanent structure was under development.

P. Nelson said he was working with the Newmarket energy committee to explore ways to reduce local energy costs and increase sustainability. This would involve a community power agreement, which other communities could join. He said people could contact him about joining that agreement and he was developing a template for prospective communities.

D. Landry said the Dover community trail expansion through the high and middle school to the Bellamy park was underway and he hoped it would be completed soon. He added that local development and real estate market is the highest he's ever seen, in spite of – or maybe because of – COVID-19. C. Lentz said he had heard of a general migration out of heavily populated cities, but he said Dover's housing market had been on the rise for several years (from his experience looking for houses in the region). J. Boudreau added that the people who have been able to continue working from home are realizing they can live wherever they want regardless of proximity to their job.

G. Davison noted that the changes were already having an impact on transportation. Imagine the positive impact on congestion if some people only had to drive one day a week for work and could work from home the rest of the time.

V. Parmele asked for confirmation about the construction of a park and ride at the Lee traffic circle. C. Lentz confirmed that it was an NHDOT project funded through the CMAQ program. The park and ride is the last part of the group of projects associated with the Newington-Dover highway and bridge expansion. C. Lentz said the park and ride would be an expansion of the parking lot behind the Wentworth Douglas urgent care facility just north of the traffic circle.

6. **Citizen's Forum** – Citizens of the Strafford region are invited to speak on the subject matter of the meeting. Statements should be limited to three minutes.

No members of the public were present to provide comments

7. **Adjournment**

B. Fisher made a motion to adjourn; seconded by D. Hamann

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00am

Meeting Prep Memo

Recap of Metro Plan Update and Reorganization

Context: We're working on a full update to the Metro Plan to be finalized and published by June 2021. The goal for the reorganization of the plan is to reduce the volume of text, increase data visualization, and better tie the goals, objectives, and projects together through data analysis.

The written content will be in a few sections:

- Foundational information about MPO framework and requirements
- Introduction to the region (geography, overarching demographics, etc.)
- Public outreach results
- Planning area "Themes" (see below)
- Fiscal constraint (planned projects and how they will be paid for)

The rest of the plan will dedicate a lot of space to data, metrics, and project information. For instance, there are quite a few transportation metrics that will be presented in one-/two-page "snapshots" that readers will be able to navigate to.

At this meeting I'd like to get your feedback on the themes. The main goal of the themes is to succinctly establish a foundation for readers to understand the context and major transportation planning issues facing the region. They are meant to be readable!

- Organize the plan into major topic areas (economics, housing, modes, infrastructure conditions, etc.)
- Describe central issues being addressed (e.g. senior population growth, funding sustainability for transit)
- Provide a reference point for readers to interpret the data and analysis in the plan and recognize why specific projects were programmed

Each theme will focus on a single topic have a standardized outline:

- Topic: Infrastructure Conditions
 - Topic-specific goals
 - Major issues (central challenges and trends)
 - Implementation – "what we can do"
 - Policy actions (how SRPC can affect this issue through advocacy and engagement)

Please consider the following questions when reading the draft themes:

- Are they readable for a wide audience?
- Do they provide adequate context of the major planning issues?
 - Are there major planning issues you think we missed?
- Is there enough content for people to connect it with the metrics and projects in the plan?
- Do they give you a clear idea of how Strafford MPO is going to address the planning challenges discussed?
- The goals are primarily based on feedback from outreach and previous discussion with SRPC committees. Do you feel they are accurate and reflective of the individual topics?

Economic Linkages

Goals

- Improve multimodal connections that increase mobility and accessibility of people and freight and strengthen inter-regional and interstate economic linkages
- Support the development of walkable community centers that promote local businesses and create a sense of place
- Increase capacity of existing rail infrastructure for passenger and freight

Discussion –

The transportation system is critical to the region's economy. It gets us to work, school, and other daily tasks, gets goods to and from markets, connects visitors to the region, gives us access to recreation, and keeps us connected socially. The highway network is relied on for freight movement; over 80% of freight to and from New Hampshire is on large trucks, which cause the greatest amount of wear and tear on roads due to their weight. Trucks passing through small, rural towns can contribute to safety hazards and damage local roads when major highways are closed.

Truck freight is still vital for local last-mile delivery of goods, but the safest, most efficient way to move large volumes of freight over longer distances is by rail. It has its own dedicated infrastructure, has limited interaction with passenger vehicles, is more fuel-efficient, and can move huge volumes. New Hampshire Northcoast Rail (NHN) was built to transport sand, aggregates, and other raw materials from Ossipee and Rochester for construction projects. NHN moves more freight by tonnage than any other short line railroad in New Hampshire; an average of 600,000 tons annually of freight consisting primarily of concrete sand, propane, and steel. That's the equivalent of removing 40,000 large tractor-trailer trucks - and the associated wear and tear—from local and state roads. In Rollinsford, the NHN line joins rails owned by Pan Am, which are shared by additional freight trains and the Amtrak Downeaster. Aside from a few spots where trains can pass each other, most of the track through the Strafford and Rockingham Regions allows only one train in one direction. Since NHN and Amtrak share these rails with other freight providers, the number and length of trains that can operate on the tracks is very limited.

The closest large airport is Pease Tradeport in Portsmouth. Skyhaven Airport in Rochester cannot handle large commercial flights or freight, but the airfield has been expanded recently and the adjacent manufacturing complex with Albany and Safran is a logical partnership for expanding air services. Close to half of all homes in New Hampshire rely on fuel oil for heat, and 90% of that comes through the Port of New Hampshire and Sprague Terminal in Newington. From there the network of state and local roads is relied on for home delivery. Fuel oil is by far New Hampshire's largest import by value, and its largest exports by value are electronics, machinery, and precision instruments. For additional statewide freight planning efforts, check out the [State Freight Plan](#) published by NHDOT.

Tourism is New Hampshire's main economic driver and again, the highway network is depended on by visitors and residents alike. There are famous tourist destinations in the north, but the Strafford region has plenty of beautiful places, interesting historic sites, and local restaurants to visit. Strafford MPO works with several municipalities on two registered scenic byways that are designed to give drivers a unique experience. The Mills Scenic Byway tours the cities and towns with river mills that were the core of manufacturing in their heyday and are being revitalized. The Branch River Scenic Byway is being

expanded to integrate unique places in the northern part of the Strafford region. This expansion effort is in collaboration with [Explore Moose Mountains](#), an initiative to promote tourism and economic development in the Moose Mountains region.

Climate change represents an existential threat to New Hampshire's economy. The impacts may be most obvious on the tourism industry. Global climate change is impacting New Hampshire's regional environment and what attracts people to the state for a quintessential Northern New England experience. Winters are getting shorter; ponds are freezing later and melting earlier, snow pack on ski slopes is shallower. Unpredictable patterns in precipitation and seasonal temperatures are affecting the famous fall foliage. Summers are getting hotter and drier. Some of the state's iconic wildlife is threatened by the large-scale changes: more ticks are surviving the warmer winters to reduce moose populations; brook trout are unable to survive in many of the streams and rivers in which they used to thrive.

What We Can Do

Improving the multimodal capacity of the freight network is a priority for the region. New Hampshire's reliance on truck freight increases the cost of highway maintenance and makes the freight network and economy more vulnerable to potential disruptions. Strafford MPO will continue to work with MPO colleagues, freight stakeholders, and decision-makers to improve the multimodal connectivity of the region's freight network. This includes identifying upgrades to NHN and Pan Am railroads to improve efficiency and capacity of passenger and freight rail service. The Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) has proposed and implemented several expansions of track siding that allow trains to pass each other. Strafford MPO assisted UNH in expanding the passenger rail station to accommodate more passengers and be more accessible for people with disabilities. Capacity is currently the limiting factor for passenger and freight rail along the Pan Am line. Most of the route comprises a single track with few places for trains to pass each other. Currently, the Amtrak Downeaster is at capacity and adding a car to accommodate more passengers isn't possible without additional track or siding.

Strafford Regional Planning Commission also operates as an Economic Development District (Strafford EDD) to collaborate with community and business leaders in developing the region's economy. Transportation plays a critical part of economic development by enabling a wider range of people to be mobile and access businesses, recreation, and social engagement. Strafford MPO will continue to work with regional stakeholders to improve accessibility through a multimodal network. Public transit service provided by the Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation (COAST) is an essential transportation service for a broad range of workers in the region. Strafford MPO is working with COAST and economic development stakeholders to expand COAST service and link local economies.

Strafford MPO will continue to collaborate with Explore Moose Mountains initiative to promote tourism and economic development in the northern rural section of the region. This includes expansion of the Branch River Scenic byway in partnership with the Lakes Region Planning Commission.

The COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020 had wide ranging impacts on the economy, many of which will require long-term recovery. Some of the initial impacts to the transportation system were ironically positive, with lower traffic volumes and reduced emissions. Many people also took the opportunity to walk and bicycle around their communities, and the number of people visiting local parks spiked sharply. The long-term impacts are far less certain but will likely not be positive. Such a massive economic downturn will inevitably have long-term impacts on municipal and state budgets, and their ability to

maintain critical infrastructure. Public transit service in the region shut down almost entirely during the Governor's stay-at-home order. COAST receives no state funding to support its operations and relies on local funds to match federal dollars, and municipal budgets will be hurt by the COVID-19 shutdown.

While it is not a transportation issue strictly speaking, access to high-speed internet remains inconsistent across New Hampshire. Main Street storefronts are the classic image of economic development in our rural region. But websites, social media, and online networking are just as critical as a vibrant streetscape. COVID-19 demonstrated how important it is to have reliable highspeed internet service, for continued business operations and local government decision-making.

Policy in Action

Strafford MPO will continue to plan and advocate for a truly multimodal transportation network. This includes projects to improve connections between modes (such as COAST and C&J Buslines), and projects to improve transit frequency (such track siding that can increase Amtrak capacity, and adapting traffic signals to increase efficiency of bus travel). Personal vehicles are required for much of the travel in a rural region, so if someone can't drive alone or doesn't have access to a vehicle, they may be limited in the education, nutrition, employment, healthcare, and recreation resources they can access. This means they may also be unable to fully participate in the local and regional economy.

Strafford MPO will continue to support and advocate for public transit service which provides equitable mobility and accessibility throughout the region. Multimodal improvements will require innovative and flexible sources of revenue. Strafford MPO will continue to engage state legislators to develop novel revenue sources that reflect modern needs.

DRAFT

Housing and Jobs

Goals

- Increase public transit service in the region
- Support coordination of affordable housing development with public transit and multimodal transportation improvements
- Improve accessibility in areas with low income and limited transportation options
- Increase workforce mobility

Discussion – Where People Live and Work

The Center for Neighborhood Technology maintains a national level [Housing and Transportation Cost Index](#). It shows that for the average household in the region, housing and transportation costs account for 45% of total income. Generally, a home is considered affordable when total housing cost is less than 30% of household income. 26% of households are above this threshold. However, according to the index the Strafford has the lowest combined housing and transportation cost in New Hampshire, with some rural regions like Coos County reaching a combined cost of 62%. Within the Strafford region, rural municipalities have slightly higher combined costs. This is a critical factor for rural residents who are low-income or on a fixed income such as the growing number of seniors in New Hampshire.

According to 2018 American Community Survey data, nearly 60% of people living in the Strafford region commute outside the region for jobs. The highway network is critical for reliable travel outside the region; public transit and alternative modes should be emphasized for mobility and accessibility within the region.

The Strafford region is a beautiful place to live and housing prices are rising as the region grows. Affordable housing for the region's workforce is key to ensuring economic sustainability and quality of life for a broad range of people.

[Detailed geographical analysis of vulnerable populations is in-progress. This will be a discussion of parts of the region where people have reduced access to jobs, healthy food, and other critical services due to transportation-related limitations (income, age, etc.)]

The COVID-19 pandemic had an immediate economic impact throughout the country. Municipalities and the state will be challenged by the ripple effects for years to come. Decreased vehicle traffic meant a sharp decline in state and federal gas tax revenues that fund transportation programs. New funding mechanisms are required to ensure a stable and equitable revenue stream. The pandemic will likely have long-term effects on transportation demand; many businesses and public services may permanently adjust to online and virtual interaction with customers and clients.

What We Can Do

Transportation should not be a limiting factor in someone's access to essential services and quality of life. Strafford MPO will increase collaboration with the Seacoast Workforce Housing coalition and related agencies to find way to better coordinate housing and transportation in the seacoast. Strafford MPO will increase focus on communities and populations that are more transportation limited (such as

low income and seniors). Strafford MPO will also continue working with regional partners to increase transportation options for employment accessibility. One example is the collaboration between the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Southern Maine MPO, and Rockingham MPO to improve transportation access for shipyard employees who travel from throughout the region. Geographical analysis of the region's vulnerable populations will enable Strafford MPO staff to identify and develop projects that increase transportation access.

Policy In Action –

The affordability of housing is paired with transportation access and cost. Equity for residents of the region will require continuing collaboration between planners, housing advocates, municipalities, and developers. Strafford MPO will advocate for residential development in town and city centers that is paired with public transit and walkable, bikeable infrastructure.

DRAFT

Infrastructure Conditions

Goals

- Keep public roads in good condition
- Restore or upgrade bridges and culverts critical for local safety and infrastructure resilience
- Increase adoption of alternative transportation modes to reduce wear and tear on roads

Discussion – Transportation Infrastructure in the Strafford Region

In general, the highway network is in good condition. In 2017 none of the highway miles or bridges on the National Highway System routes in the region were rated as being in poor condition. However, there are 17 municipally owned bridges that are on the red list because part of their structure is in poor condition or near failing (per national bridge inspection standards). Three of those bridges are officially closed because of a structural failure. Local bridges may be on small routes with low volume, but they can be vital links for local travel and freight. Multiple red-list bridges in the region are on the border with Maine, such as in Milton and Wakefield. Municipalities are responsible for maintenance of locally owned roads and information on the condition of locally owned roads is locally managed. Strafford MPO participates in a program to assess the condition of local roads – the Road Surface Management System (RSMS). This includes data collection and development of a local road maintenance plan. In a rural area like the Strafford region, even the smallest route or bridge may be a critical link for evacuation or emergency response. Climate change is leading to more frequent extreme storms, which will put more pressure on vulnerable roads, bridges, and culverts.

Implementation – What We Can Do

Strafford MPO supports NHDOT's emphasis on maintaining existing highway infrastructure, not build new infrastructure that will add to statewide and local costs. Strafford MPO is not directly involved with the maintenance of the highway network, but it can prioritize other efforts that have a positive impact on infrastructure conditions. Decreasing the number of trips people take alone in their cars reduces congestion, reduces wear and tear on roads, and improves safety. Strafford MPO will continue to work with NHDOT and municipalities to coordinate improvement projects with paving schedules so work is completed efficiently. RSMS assessments have been completed in Wakefield, Rollinsford, Nottingham, and New Durham. The assessment results are used to develop a 10-year road maintenance plan with municipal staff. Strafford MPO will continue to conduct RSMS assessments with municipalities to provide technical assistance with local pavement management.

Policy in Action

Much of the revenues for highway maintenance and improvement come from fuel taxes (known as the gas tax). Emission reductions from more fuel-efficient cars has improved the environment and human health, but this has also meant decreasing revenues for transportation system maintenance and operations. NHDOT prioritizes road and bridge maintenance through the statewide Ten Year Plan and has needed funding through additional sources (such as a government loan through the TIFIA program) to make progress on highway paving and red list bridges. Strafford MPO has given testimony at legislative hearings on proposed revenue bills and will continue to advocate for new revenues for transportation maintenance and improvement to the New Hampshire legislature

Inter-Regional Transit

Goals

- Improve linkages to existing intercity bus service for pedestrians, cyclists, and local transit
- Support policy and develop projects that expand inter-city bus service to new destinations
- Increase passenger capacity and service frequency on Amtrak Downeaster

Discussion – Our Connection to other Regions and States

The Strafford region is situated approximately one hour from economic centers in Portland Maine, Boston Massachusetts, and Manchester and Concord in New Hampshire. Connecting to these metro areas is vital to the economic vitality of the Strafford region. Currently, passenger rail connects the Strafford region to Boston and Portland on the Amtrak Downeaster and Intercity bus connects the region to Boston (and New York City). Ridership makes it clear that these services are in-demand and that people value alternatives to personal cars and trucks. In 2019 ridership on the Amtrak Downeaster grew for 9 out of 12 months during the year (<https://media.amtrak.com/2020/01/amtrak-downeaster-achieves-record-ridership-in-2019/>). Total ridership for the year was 574,404, 7.8% higher than 2018, and broke the all-time record of 546,056 set in 2017. 44.3 million passenger miles were logged that year and vital ticket revenues were generated. Yet Amtrak service is constrained by the capacity of the tracks that run through the region. Because most of the route consists of single track, only a certain number of trains can operate at any given time because of the lack of “track siding” where trains can pass each other. Amtrak shares the limited space with freight rail traffic as well. Starting on September 15th 2020, the Downeaster allowed riders to bring their bicycles into the passenger compartment with them. The number of bikes per car is limited, but this adds another

C&J Buslines provides essentially 24-hour service that connects stations in Dover and Portsmouth New Hampshire and Newburyport Massachusetts to South Station and Logan Airport in Boston. C&J also travels to New York City. Ridership has grown steadily since service started and has reached the point where C&J has become the victim of its own success. Parking has become a critical issue as the Dover and Portsmouth stations, which also serve as regional park & rides for commuters. The lots have become packed year-round because of growing C&J ridership, use by commuters for carpooling, and unfortunately some abuse of their purpose.

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in early 2020 had a major, immediate impact on Amtrak Downeaster and C&J service. The Downeaster was fully suspended between April 13th, and June 15th of 2020. C&J also shut down in April and was not able to resume service until August 23rd. The pandemic will have lasting effects on the demand for inter-city services. C&J staff noted that they expect ridership to take over a year to return to pre-pandemic levels (personal communication). A large percentage of their ridership was for leisure travel or long-distance work trips. Working remotely and holding virtual meetings has become more common and will likely continue to alter travel patterns across the country.

The Strafford region has good multi-modal connections to metro regions to the south and north, but employment and educational opportunities in Concord and Manchester are only accessible by car. The 2020 Statewide Strategic Transit Assessment Study funded by NHDOT looked at communities and areas of the state that lacked transit service. The region is well-covered by fixed route through the Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation and by demand-response service through the Alliance

for Community Transportation. But the NHDOT Transit Assessment identified east-west service as a priority service gap. It estimated that commuter bus service (primarily for employment) from Rochester to Concord would have around 23,000 riders per year and service from Portsmouth to Manchester would have around 26,000 riders. The assessment also identified rural areas that lack connection to the existing inter-city network. A Portsmouth to Concord connection could have around 11,500 riders. It also identified the need for a north-south connection from the Strafford region to communities in the North Country, though it was a lower priority. A new connection between Dover, North Conway, and Berlin would provide better mobility along the eastern border in those currently underserved communities. The lasting impacts of COVID-19 will have to be taken into account as these new services and routes are considered in the future.

Developing a stronger multimodal network is one strategy for increasing workforce mobility and mitigating climate change and regional air pollution. In the United States, motor vehicles are responsible for approximately one-third of all carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions – which are accelerating global warming and climate change. These emissions can be reduced by increasing options for alternative transportation and incentivizing people to leave their cars at home. Regional air quality is also affected by the reliance on cars and trucks. In the United States, motor vehicles are responsible for up to half the chemical by-products that cause smog and ground-level ozone; they release more than 50 percent of hazardous air pollutants; and they emit up to 90 percent of the carbon monoxide found in urban air. Owning, operating, and maintaining a personal vehicle is expensive. That expense limits the mobility of people with low-income, especially in rural areas where critical services may be many miles apart.

What We Can Do

The lack of east-west transit service has been a topic of concern for many years. Strafford MPO will work with Rockingham, Southern, and Central Planning Commissions to further assess the feasibility of the new commuter and inter-city services identified in the Statewide Transit Assessment.

In 2016, the New Hampshire Legislature established a Public-Private Partnership Infrastructure Oversight Commission that was chaired by the Commissioner of NHDOT. Public-Private Partnerships (known as P3) are used to finance new infrastructure. In 2019, the P3 commission prioritized developing a new long-term lease agreement for the maintenance and operation of the Dover and Portsmouth bus terminals. In 2020, the commission released a request for proposals, citing the parking capacity challenges and the need to continue the vital bus service. It identified possible expansion of the current park and rides and implementation of fee-based parking to manage capacity and abuse, and to fund improved maintenance and operations at the facilities. C&J is an applicant and an obvious candidate given that they already operate bus service and currently maintain the lots. C&J has proposed that they would allocate some of the fee-based parking revenues to the Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation to increase local public transit service to the intercity bus terminals. Strafford MPO will continue to support the implementation of the long-term lease agreement and P3 at the Portsmouth and Dover bus terminals.

Strafford MPO will continue collaborating with municipalities, planning partners, and agencies like the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA), which operates the Amtrak Downeaster, to expand and enhance passenger rail service in the region. Past efforts have included applications for funding through the Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Program to improve tracks and capacity for trains. Strafford MPO will continue to work with stakeholders to identify additional rail improvements.

Policy in Action

Strafford MPO regularly advocates for the advancement of a multimodal transportation system in NH. Investments in transit, passenger rail, and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure were all top priorities identified by Strafford MPO staff in testimony on the Statewide Ten Year Plan.

Strafford MPO has also been able to communicate the need for more multimodal improvements to congressional representatives. Most notably, transportation planners and staff from New Hampshire's four MPOs met with Congressman Chris Pappas to discuss ongoing transportation challenges as he worked on an update to the federal transportation authorization. One of the overarching issues was that NH receives the least about of federal transportation funding out of the 50 states. This hampers New Hampshire's ability to develop a modern, multimodal transportation network.

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Intra-Regional Public Transit

Regional Public Transit Goals

- Increase funding for public transit
- Increase ridership on regional public transit
- Increase frequency on existing public transit routes
- Increase service coverage and coordination of demand-response transit service for seniors and people with disabilities
- Coordinate new development with public transit access
- Increase transit access for seniors and people with disabilities

Discussion – Public Transit Need, Value, and Sustainability

In July of 2020, The Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation (COAST) launched a new, more efficient system of routes that provides better connections throughout the region. There are 68,708 people and 55,611 jobs within a half mile of the new route system. People want more public transit and mode options for getting to work and other daily tasks. Ridership on the COAST fixed route system has grown over 150% since 2000. This is 14 times faster than population growth in the Seacoast (data from COAST). Rider surveys show that people ride the bus primarily for employment, shopping, medical appointments, and education (generally in that order). Most people who ride COAST for critical work and shopping trips are doing so more than 3 times a week. Riders also reported using COAST regularly during the week for recreation and entertainment.

In early 2020, the COVID-19 Corona virus caused many private businesses and public agencies to adapt their operations to slow the rapid spread of the disease. COAST service was completely suspended for all of April and part of May 2020. When service resumed, ridership was predictably low, but has steadily returned to pre-COVID-19 levels. The rapid recovery in ridership shows the value of public transit for residents in the region.

The rising senior population is a familiar trend in New Hampshire. The number of people older than 65 is growing throughout the region and is projected to double by 2040. Enabling seniors to maintain their independence and quality of life as their desire or ability to drive diminishes is a significant transportation challenge in a rural region. Through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), COAST provides door-door service for people who live along bus routes but can't reach bus stops on their own. Demand for this service has grown 880% since 2008 (data from COAST). Because it is door-to-door and on-demand, this type of service is the most expensive to provide. Multiple agencies in the Strafford and Rockingham regions provide demand-response transit and coordinate their services through the Alliance for Community Transportation (ACT). Demand-response services include non-emergency medical appointments, shopping trips, food delivery or transportation to meal sites, and social activities. ACT recently developed a central call-taking and ride scheduling platform called TripLink which will further coordinate existing services and make it easier for clients to find the service that best fits their needs. ACT is a model for transportation service delivery, and yet there is growing unmet need in the region due to the growing senior population and lack of resources for transportation and healthcare providers.

COAST provides critical service for people with mobility challenges, but it is an unfortunate and incorrect stigma that public transit is mainly for people who can't drive because they're poor or old or disabled. In

COAST's most recent survey of riders, half of the respondents said they ride the bus for reasons other than lack of vehicle access or mobility. Many noted wanting to reduce congestion and environmental impacts, reducing wear on their own vehicle, or that they simply liked riding the bus rather than driving alone. Public transit is also a huge economic driver. The estimated annual regional economic impact of COAST is over \$24M (data from COAST). Averaged out across the country, every \$1.00 invested in public transit yields \$4.00 of economic return. The economic benefits of public transit are diverse, and the financial benefits stay in the region where service is provided. Public transit improves transportation options for individuals and reduces congestion and emissions. It increases access to businesses without the need for additional parking. Access to public transit is a valuable attribute for properties and those along transit routes will have higher value. Transit oriented development describes the approach of clustering development close to transit service (usually fixed route bus or passenger rail). Even better if development is mixed use; combining residential with shopping and other services in walking distance of transit. This also helps the transit system since the most efficient route is a straight line. Downtowns and town centers are perfect opportunities to use a transit-oriented approach to increase property values, develop spaces designed for people, rather than cars, and create affordable housing.

Funding for public transit in New Hampshire is a critical issue. Federal funds for operating public transit require matching dollars and in New Hampshire this burden is currently borne exclusively by municipalities. The state provides some assistance for replacing buses, but operations are the bulk of the cost of public transportation service. In addition, under the current FAST Act, the amount of federal transit funding available is projected to increase by only 1.5% per year (FTA apportionments). New Hampshire is 48th in the country for federal and state funding for public transit.

State	2017 Population	2017 State Funding	2017 Per Capita Funding	2017 State Funding for Operating	Per Capita Funding for Operating
Massachusetts	6,859,819	\$2,005,445,417	\$292.35	\$1,973,598,935	\$287.70
Connecticut	3,588,184	\$632,110,145	\$176.16	\$364,010,145	\$101.45
Rhode Island	1,059,639	\$57,309,695	\$54.08	\$48,420,242	\$45.70
Vermont	623,657	\$7,928,915	\$12.71	\$6,745,749	\$0.82
New Hampshire *	1,342,795	\$1,846,351	\$1.38	\$0	\$0.00
Maine	1,335,907	\$1,263,595	\$0.95	\$1,147,845	\$0.86
* NH saw a sizeable jump in State funding in 2017. Included \$1.161M of Turnpike Toll Revenues used for short-term Spaulding Turnpike construction mitigation projects.				Per Capita Funding National Average: \$58.47	
				Per Capita Funding National Median: \$5.45	

Implementation – What We Can Do

Funding Advocacy

Funding is arguably the central challenge for COAST over the next three years. NHDOT awarded funds to COAST through the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality improvement program (CMAQ) to implement their new route system. But that funding will be spent in 3 years and new revenues must be found to make up the difference. Strafford MPO will be working during that time to study COAST's economic

impact, promote its value throughout the region, and advocate to state legislators for the need for sustainable funding for public transit in New Hampshire.

Technology opportunities

New technologies could support public transit operations and improve the on-time performance of buses. Traffic signals could be upgraded to sense when a bus is approaching an intersection and keeps the light green until it passes. This is not the same as emergency vehicle *preemption* which turns all lights red as an emergency vehicle approaches. Strafford MPO will collaborate with municipalities and COAST to investigate implementation of transit signal prioritization within the COAST service area.

Strafford MPO staff will continue to participate on the boards of COAST and ACT and advocate for increased funding to support these critical transportation services. Strafford MPO is currently researching connections between public transit and economic development in the region. This research includes interviews with major employers and other local agencies and businesses. Current transit research speaks broadly about the economic benefits of public transit in rural and urban settings, but lacks specific perspective that reflects the NH Seacoast.

Policy in Action

Strafford MPO will continue to advocate for public transit to increase the sustainability of transit service in the region. The regional study on public transit and economic development will include specific focus on communication to state decision-makers regarding the value of public transit to residents and the economy. The Statewide Ten Year Plan is updated every two years and allocates all funding for New Hampshire's transportation needs for the next ten years. The Ten Year Plan is reviewed by the House and the Senate and Strafford MPO takes every opportunity to advocate for public transit and other regional priorities.

Overall System Performance

System Performance Goals

- Maintain and improve the reliability of the highway system
- Reduce congestion and travel delay
- Increase accessibility to alternative modes of transportation
- Increase safety for non-motorized modes of transportation

Discussion – Service of the Highway Network

The Strafford MPO is a growing region where public transit is a critical service and municipalities are investing more in growing local networks of bicycle and pedestrian routes. But it's also a rural region where cars and trucks are required for most trips. Over 80% of trips are made by people driving alone in a personal vehicle and the average household logs nearly 23,400 miles per year. Many people live in the region and commute to jobs elsewhere, including Manchester, Concord, and the Boston Metro area.

The highway network comprises a good mix of roads with high-capacity and local access. Due to large volumes of commuters in the morning and evening, there is some predictable congestion at specific points on the highway network. Aside from a few isolated spots congestion is minimal throughout the region. **Travel times on the National Highway System routes (NH16, NH125, US4, NH9, and NH11) are consistently reliable.** More detail and data on congestion and how people travel is provided in the **indicators section**. The Spaulding Turnpike, NH125, and US4/NH202 are critical corridors for inter-regional travel and freight. Tourism is critical to the New Hampshire economy and the many visitors travel to and through the Strafford region on their way to vacation spots and second homes. This causes congestion at specific locations such as the junction of the Spaulding Turnpike and Rt 11 in Rochester.

The highway network facilitates reliable truck freight travel in the region. **Based on data from 2020, segments of the National Highway System in the region are _____% reliable for truck travel.** In some cases, large volumes of trucks choose to travel at night to avoid higher traffic volumes during the day. Some major routes like US4 and NH125 bisect municipalities like Northwood and Barrington. High traffic and freight volumes through these towns restricts the development of their community centers and creating safety hazards.

Over 40% of greenhouse gas emissions in New Hampshire come from transportation ([NHDES](#)). It is the largest source of emissions after electricity generation (20%). While New Hampshire has good air quality overall, but emissions still contribute to ground-level ozone which causes respiratory illness and can reach dangerous levels in the hot summer months. Identifying and mitigating locations with reoccurring congestion is an effective way to reduce emissions. Even more effective is reducing the number of people driving alone by increasing public transit ridership and promoting alternatives like carpooling, telecommuting, biking, and walking. This is important as climate change is leading to more days over 90 degrees, impacting people who are more susceptible to heat and air quality impacts.

Communities are developing local and regional connections for bicycles and pedestrians, but safe routes for regular commuting and recreation by bicycle are still limited throughout the region. Strafford MPO has analyzed the regional network for bicycle safety (known as level of traffic stress). **only _____% of roads are safe for novice riders. [More detail will be included on bicycle level of traffic stress.]** The

Strafford region has its own network of trails developed by the state, municipalities, or private groups. Trails are important in a state where tourism is a central part of the economy. The Farmington Recreation Rail Trail connects to Rochester over 6 miles but is part of an extensive network of snowmobile trails. The Rockingham Recreation trail will take you from Newmarket all the way to Manchester or Windham. Municipalities are building their local trail networks to improve pedestrian safety and access. Dover's Community Trail begins along the Cocheco River, passes through the transportation center, past elementary, middle, and high schools, and connects to a large housing development. Somersworth has connected their schools with the downtown on an improved network of sidewalks and trails. Rochester is developing a Riverwalk for recreation and economic development. Several rail trails connect rural and urban communities in the region.

Electric vehicles are becoming more prevalent and in-demand. Municipalities, individual companies, and state government looking to make investments in electric vehicle infrastructure. Aside from specific charging locations in Rochester, Dover, and Durham, much of the Strafford region lacks public charging stations for electric vehicles ([electric and alternative fuels map](#)). Electric vehicles adoption is much higher in neighboring states like Massachusetts; more tourists visiting from out of state will be looking for charging stations on their way to the Strafford region or points north. Electric vehicle adoption is growing in New Hampshire and the public charging network needs to support that growth. Personal electric vehicles can be charged at home, but people will need more charging stations at or near their workplaces to ensure they have enough power to get back home.

Implementation: What We Can Do

Strafford MPO will take advantage of new tools to analyze travel patterns, congestion, and network gaps throughout the region. The regional traffic demand model is a powerful tool that will be used to identify specific locations where congestion occurs and develop potential solutions. Strafford MPO will continue to help municipalities continue to grow their local networks of bicycle and pedestrian networks to enable more people to bike and walk. The recent analysis of the highway network using a level-of-stress approach will help identify gaps and potential projects. Strafford MPO will also promote and support alternative modes through Seacoast CommuteSMART.

Technology is playing a growing role in the transportation system. All-electronic tolling will be installed at the Dover and Rochester toll plazas on the Spaulding Turnpike which will have a major impact on emissions and noise at those locations. Autonomous vehicles are in development but infrastructure is unprepared for widespread adoption. Strafford MPO will work to identify where the transportation network is vulnerable to climate change impacts. In addition to assessing congestion and travel patterns, the travel demand model can also be used to plan response and recovery efforts in emergency scenarios where important bridges may be damaged or closed by a storm or other event. Strafford MPO should conduct a regional planning effort around trails and outdoor recreation. Local planning and regional inventories could be built upon to create a regional trails and recreation plan.

Electric vehicle technology is maturing and more people are switching to them for their daily driving needs. However, electric vehicle charging infrastructure in New Hampshire is currently inadequate to facilitate rapid growth of electric vehicle adoption. Strafford MPO will conduct analysis and use planning tools to identify optimal locations for new charging stations. This includes both DC fast charging and level-2 charging. DC fast chargers can charge an average vehicle in approximately 20 minutes and are better suited to commercial centers for quick charges on longer trips. Level-2 chargers take about 6-8

hours to charge the average vehicle and would be better suited for employment centers where employees could charge their vehicles during the workday.

Policy in Action

Strafford MPO is in a perfect position to continue advocating for a multimodal transportation system. New Hampshire is a rural state and personal vehicles will continue to dominate, but there are plenty of opportunities to build support and investment for other modes. Southeast New Hampshire has the richest mix of transportation modes in the state: highways and turnpike, fixed route and demand response public transit, passenger and freight rail, intercity bus, commercial and freight air, and a marine port. The framework is there, it just needs to be built on.

DRAFT

Population & Demographics

Goals

- Increase transportation independence for a growing number of seniors
- Increase access to jobs and essential services for people with low income and limited vehicle access
- Increase funding for public transit

Discussion – People in the Strafford Region

The Strafford region is growing steadily around 1% per year. The NH Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI) project that this growth will continue. The headline issue in the region and the state is the increasing number of people over 65. The Census shows a steady increase over the past decade and OSI projects the senior population will more than double by 2045. The Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation (COAST) also has data that document the rise in seniors. COAST is required to provide demand response transit service for people who live within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of the nearest bus route and are physically unable to reach a bus stop. Demand for this service has risen by 880% over the last 10 years. This service is vital, but it is also the most expensive; COAST's ADA costs have risen over 500% during the same ten years. Imagine how a doubling of the senior population will affect demand for specialized transportation service. COAST is already limited by lack of state financial support and the cost of matching federal dollars for transit service falls to municipalities. Without ADA and transit service, people who are unable to drive would be reliant on family and friends or simply unable to accomplish essential tasks. Census numbers indicate that the largest increases in senior population have been in rural communities; this makes the transportation challenge more difficult where people and their destinations are spread out.

Transportation Equity

The region's minorities are primarily concentrated in urban municipalities. Somersworth has the most concentrated minority population in their active Indonesian community. Minority status is an indicator of potential transportation concerns if English is not someone's first language. Their access to jobs and income may be constrained by language proficiency and equitable transportation service could be a limiting factor. Similarly, if a family or individual has limited income transportation is a limiting factor when transportation costs can take a quarter of household income (on average). The census records how many vehicles each household has; many parts of the region have concentrations of households that have limited access to personal vehicles, or no vehicles at all. There are specific census blocks in the cities (Dover, Rochester, and Somersworth), and rural communities (Wakefield, Milton, and Farmington) where more than 100 housing units do not have a vehicle and are more than $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from the nearest supermarket.

Climate change increases the vulnerability of people living in rural areas. The Strafford region is crisscrossed by streams and rivers, and bridges and culverts in poor condition can be damaged or destroyed by intense rainstorms. Storms have been getting stronger and more frequent with climate change and evacuation routes may become suddenly impassible due to damage. Rural residents with mobility challenges are particularly vulnerable in emergency situations if the road network is damaged. Climate change is having the most immediate and visible effect on coastal communities, where high spring tides predictably flood roads, homes, and businesses. People are concentrated at the coasts and

may be forced to move inland as sea levels rise and coastal storms continue to impact communities. Both emergency evacuations and long-term, permanent migration will strain the services of the region's transportation system.

What We Can Do

Strafford MPO will ensure vulnerable and transportation-limited populations are specifically identified and addressed in planning efforts. This will include detailed demographic analysis to identify where vulnerable populations may be concentrated to develop targeted outreach efforts and project development. Staff will continue to participate on the boards of COAST and the Alliance for Community Transportation (ACT) and partner with them to expand transit service. ACT coordinates medical, nutritional, and social transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities throughout the region. Strafford MPO will work with ACT and Rockingham Planning Commission to implement recommendations in the Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan focused on demand-response service improvements. Strafford MPO can use technical tools like the travel demand model and bicycle level of stress analysis to identify obstacles to transportation accessibility and propose potential projects. These could include opportunities for transit-oriented development for downtown housing, or non-motorized transportation improvement projects (through the Transportation Alternatives Program). Strafford MPO will use detailed demographic analysis to identify areas of special concern for seniors. People 65 and older live throughout the region in both urban and rural communities. Public transportation services play the largest role in maintaining mobility for seniors, but localized infrastructure improvements can contribute to quality of life.

Policy in Action

Public transit is one of the best ways to ensure transportation equity and accessibility (to say nothing of the congestion, air quality, and safety benefits). Strafford MPO will continue to engage decision-makers and advocate for sustainable transit funding in New Hampshire. The State of New Hampshire does not provide funds for transit operations (the largest share of costs, by far). Strafford MPO staff will continue advocating for the need for new sources of revenue to support the state's transportation system, including transit. State law also prohibits the use of turnpike revenues for anything other than direct turnpike maintenance and improvement. Currently this restriction extends to public transit, but COAST's operating system is centered on the turnpike and reduces traffic congestion and infrastructure wear and tear. Strafford MPO supports COAST's request that turnpike revenues be eligible for transit operating assistance. At the federal, the fares that transit riders pay do not count as match for federal dollars. Strafford MPO has discussed this and other public transit funding challenges to be addressed in the next federal authorization of transportation funds.

Safety

Goals

1. Reduce the number of crashes on public roadways that result in fatalities and severe injuries
2. Reduce the number of crashes involving non-motorized users and build safer streets where bicycle and pedestrian activity is high
3. Reduce motorcycle crashes
4. Proactively identify high-crash locations

Discussion – Highway Safety in the Strafford Region

Safety is arguably the most important factor in transportation. People need a transportation system that enables them to accomplish their daily tasks without getting injured or killed. The ultimate goal for Strafford region and the state is zero fatalities on all public roads. This is the only acceptable number of fatal crashes when people's lives are at stake. New Hampshire is a Vision Zero state and Strafford MPO supports this philosophy.

Nationwide, the annual number of fatal crashes has been decreasing over the long term and New Hampshire follows that positive trend. Technology in vehicles and evolving laws have undoubtedly contributed. However, 101 people were killed on New Hampshire roads in 2019. Over the past five years there have been an average of 14 fatal crashes per year in our region; this is about 12% of the statewide total. There has been an average of 61 crashes resulting in serious injuries per year in the region which is about 13% of the statewide total. [\(See the safety metrics section for more data\)](#)

More people are walking and biking for work and recreation so communities and transportation agencies are investing more in infrastructure improvements for non-motorized users. Municipalities are especially focused on making town centers more walkable and bikeable. But this has also resulted in a rise in the number of pedestrian and cyclist injuries and fatalities. In the past 5 years, on average, 9 cyclists or pedestrians have been killed or seriously injured in the region per year.

The largest contributor to crashes is errors made by the humans driving - whether it is an honest mistake, distraction, or reckless negligence. Distracted driving, speeding, and alcohol or drug impairment are all primary factors in fatal and severe crashes. Frustratingly, because of human error, crashes tend to occur randomly because even the best designed infrastructure can only do so much if someone isn't paying attention.

Human behavior may be the largest factor in safety outcomes, but infrastructure improvements are still an effective way to improve the safety of the transportation system. Strafford MPO staff regularly collaborate with local public safety staff and NHDOT to identify locations in the Strafford region where improvements could reduce the possibility of crashes. Getting local crash data is critical because it is necessary to understand why certain crashes are happening at an intersection or along a stretch of road. In July 2020, NH House Bill 1182 was passed into law and enabled state agencies to access crash reports and share them with Regional Planning Commissions. This increased access will help Strafford MPO identify locations and factors that are causing crashes.

Autonomous and connected vehicle (cars, trucks, and transit vehicles that can operate without a driver) technology is an exciting advancement. This technology is advancing rapidly and has the potential to significantly reduce crashes by eliminating the human error factor. Modern cars already have some semi-automated features such as lane departure correction and obstacle-sensors that break automatically. Vehicle technology is advancing far more rapidly than infrastructure in rural areas. Poor road conditions (such as faded lane markings) reduce the viability of current automated vehicle technology. Significant investment in infrastructure will be required before automated vehicles are practical in New Hampshire.

What We Can Do

Road Safety Audits

Strafford MPO staff will continue to work with Police departments and state agencies to identify locations that are eligible for a road safety audit. These are facilitated by NHDOT and are focused on locations that have a history of fatal and severe crashes.

Collaboration for data accuracy and access

Strafford MPO will continue to collaborate with state agencies and police departments to ensure crash data are accurate. Advocate for new crash recording equipment and training for local police. This will include advocacy for Regional Planning Commissions to access data from crash reports that critical for identifying causal factors.

Bicycle and Pedestrian safety analysis

Strafford MPO can utilize Level of Traffic Stress (LTS) and related tools to identify gaps and develop potential projects to improve safety and accessibility for non-motorized users. This will be done in collaboration with NHDOT, partner RPCs, and municipalities.

Safety Hotspot Analysis

Increased access to crash data will help SRPC identify locations where crashes are occurring regularly and propose potential solutions. Safety hotspot analysis can also be conducted on major corridors like NH125 and the Spaulding Turnpike/NH16 in collaboration with NHDOT's Transportation System Management & Operations Bureau.

Policy in Action

Improving safety on public roadways is one of Strafford MPO's top priorities. Advocating for state policy changes and support for law enforcement are a significant factor in achieving safety improvement goals. This is arguably the most critical factor because human behavior is the central driver of safety hazards. Strafford MPO will continue working with state agencies and legislators to advocate for new policy and laws that improve safety for all users of public roads.