South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN (RTP)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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South Jersey
Transportation
Planning Organization

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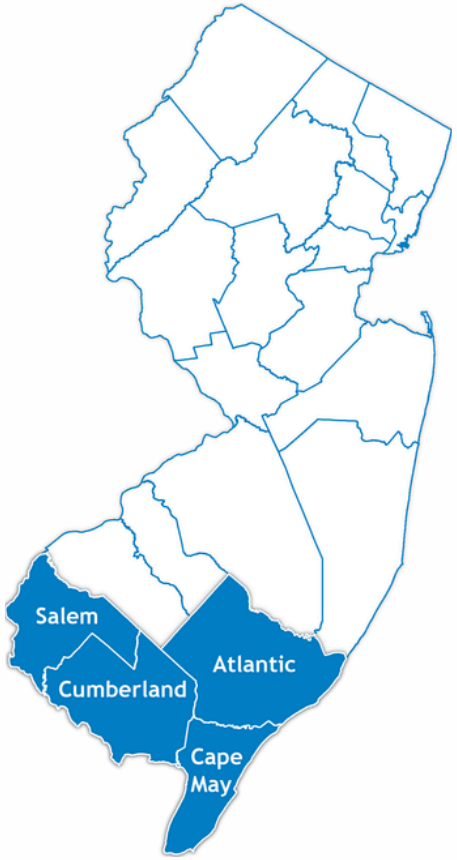
SJTPO is the federally recognized Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the southern New Jersey region, serving Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, and Salem Counties. Under federal law, the formation of an MPO is required for any urbanized area (UZA) with a population greater than 50,000, permitting the MPO to carry out transportation planning and decision-making for the UZA(s). Formed in 1993, SJTPO replaced three smaller existing MPOs and incorporated areas not previously served. The formation provided a stronger regional approach to solving transportation problems and brought new opportunities to southern New Jersey. SJTPO is vital to the region, as the MPO serves as a technical resource, provides access to funding, and works to provide a regional approach to address transportation planning and engineering issues.



Four counties, one mission:
to create a transportation system, based on regional collaboration that moves people and goods in a safe and efficient manner, inclusive of all modes and users.

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SJTPO and the Regional Transportation Plan

The South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO) is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for southern New Jersey. MPOs are required in urbanized areas with a population of 50,000 or more and ensure that existing and future expenditures of governmental funds for transportation projects and programs are based on a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive ("3-C") planning process. Formed in 1993, SJTPO replaced three smaller MPOs while incorporating other areas that were not previously served. Covering Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, and Salem Counties, SJTPO serves as a technical resource, provides access to funding, and works to provide a regional approach to address transportation planning and engineering issues. Learn more about SJTPO at www.sjtpo.org/about.

Forward 2050 is SJTPO's federally required long-range plan that guides investment decisions about the region's transportation network. The RTP is updated every 4 four years.

Forward 2050 guides how over $1.37 billion**[1] in federal transportation funds will be spent on SJTPO regional projects over the next 25 years. A significant portion of this money will be allocated towards projects that preserve the system and ensure its continued smooth operation. This is due to the need for extensive system maintenance, tight fiscal constraints, and stringent environmental regulations that make system expansion very challenging. While municipalities and the state fund a significant portion of the transportation improvement projects throughout the SJTPO region, federal funds constitute a larger component of the overall funding package. Without an RTP in place, the region would not receive the federal transportation funds necessary to maintain its transportation network.

The overarching vision that guides Forward 2050 is:

> *A transportation system based on regional collaboration that moves people and goods in a safe and efficient matter, inclusive of all modes and users.*

The vision represents the ultimate outcome that SJTPO and its partners envision for the transportation system in 2050.

Goals and Strategies

Underlying the vision is a series of 10 goals. The goals are a series of broad statements that will help to achieve the vision. Each of SJTPO's goals is based on Metropolitan Planning Factors, as outlined in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), the current federal transportation legislation that governs metropolitan planning nationwide. Underlying each of SJTPO's 10 goals are strategies, which are actions that SJTPO could take to achieve its goals. The strategies for Forward 2050 were initially developed for the RTP 2050 and were developed in partnership with the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the public. The 10 goals and accompanying strategies are below.

[1] **Total project funding (originally $866M) was calculated as the summation of all TIP Cycle Projects and RTP Funded Projects (Tables 26,27,28 in Forward 2050). The new total project funding (S1.37B) was calculated using the summation of all Regional Projects in the 2nd TIP Cycle and updated funded RTP Projects in Tables 27 and 28 in the Amended RTP.

1. Promote accessibility and mobility for the movement of people and goods

a. **Advance transit for the transportation disadvantaged**
b. **Evaluate transit service**
c. Include all users in projects
d. **Promote transportation alternatives**
e. **Improve truck routes**
f. **Promote new connections between travel modes**
g. **Ensure projects have equitable benefits and burdens**
h. **Inclusive of all users**
i. **Reduce barriers to job access**

2. Mitigate traffic congestion and promote efficient system operation

a. **Improve Incident Response**
b. **Promote transportation alternatives**
c. **Promote technology in transportation**
d. **Measure congestion impact of projects**
e. **Develop congestion/air quality projects**
f. **Identify congested locations**
g. **Include all users in projects**

3. Restore, preserve, and maintain the existing transportation system

a. **Prioritize system maintenance**
b. **Improve pavement conditions**
c. **Prioritize greatest needs**
d. **Incorporate Proven Safety Countermeasures**

4. Support the regional economy

a. **Improve truck routes**
b. **Infrastructure that supports businesses**
c. **Expand role of businesses in MPO process**
d. **Promote new connections between travel modes**
e. **Reduce barriers to job access**
f. **Projects that support the economy**
g. **Projects that enhance tourism**

5. Improve the resiliency and reliability of the transportation infrastructure, particularly along the Atlantic and Delaware Bay shorelines

a. **Address transportation vulnerability**
b. **Prioritize evacuation projects**
c. **Emergency preparedness plans**
d. **Emergency preparedness education**
e. **Resiliency partnerships**
f. **Support resiliency funding**
g. **Resiliency education**
h. **Stormwater management**

6. Increase and enhance opportunities for travel and tourism

a. **Reduce summer congestion/delay**
b. **Advance South Jersey Trails**
c. **Projects that support the economy**
d. **Projects that enhance tourism**
e. **Identify congested locations**

7. Improve transportation safety

a. **Promote and Advance Safety Projects, including Countermeasures**
b. **Safety in all projects**
c. **Bicycle and pedestrian safety projects**
d. **Reduce barriers to safety**
e. **Align safety with state priorities**
f. **Safety outreach and education**
g. **No roadway death is acceptable**

8. Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system

a. **Advance transit for the transportation disadvantaged**
b. **Evaluate transit service**
c. **Include all users in projects**
d. **Promote new connections between travel modes**
e. **Evaluate connections between travel modes**
f. **Transit oriented development**
g. **Support connectivity projects**
h. **Advance South Jersey Trails**

9. Protect and enhance the environment and complement land use planning

a. **Strengthen collaboration with resource agencies**
b. **Promote transportation alternatives**
c. **Educate the public about environmental impacts**
d. **Promote projects that reduce emissions**
e. **Incorporate land use in transportation**
f. **Transit oriented development**

10. Improve security

a. **Improve incident response**
b. **Prioritize evacuation projects**
c. **Emergency preparedness plans**
d. **Emergency preparedness education**
e. **Advance security planning**

Critical Issues

For numerous years, several recurring issues have arisen in SJTPO's transportation planning process. These issues make it difficult for SJTPO to assist its member jurisdictions in advancing projects. The critical issues are as follows:

1. Funding Imbalance

The amount of transportation funding allocated to jurisdictions in the SJTPO region is not in proportion to their population, seasonally adjusted population, vehicle miles traveled, roadway mileage, or the number of persons in poverty. SJTPO examined five different metrics—population, population adjusted for the influx of seasonal visitors and residents, vehicle miles traveled, miles (centerline) of roadway, and the percentage of the population in poverty—and found that SJTPO does not receive a share of transportation funding in proportion to these indicators.

How SJTPO Will Work to Help

- Work to promote awareness of the issue among the public and elected officials
- Work with partners to focus discussions on more equitable funding formulas in New Jersey

- Work with national partners to ensure there are conversations focusing on the need for greater funding equity for rural areas
- Work to merge roadway and transit funding conversations, so all trip needs are considered

2. Major Projects

Despite the vast amount of state revenue generated by Shore areas in Atlantic and Cape May Counties, localities face a significant challenge in moving major shore-oriented infrastructure investments forward and are often left to bear the full costs of these improvements.

The New Jersey Shore has a tremendous economic benefit to the SJTPO region, in the form of local property tax revenue, employment, and increased outside investment. However, this economic activity does come at a cost. Among other costs, the infrastructure needed to provide access to these millions of users poses a large burden on local governments. In addition, due to the unique nature of many of these shore communities, particularly those situated on barrier islands, many of the infrastructure solutions greatly exceed the cost of typical infrastructure solutions. For example, bridges that connect the mainland to the barrier islands must cross very wide waterways and do so in ecologically sensitive environments, such as wetlands.

How SJTPO Will Work to Help

- Work to promote awareness of the issue among the public and elected officials
- Work with partners to identify funding opportunities for megaprojects
- Work to better quantify the revenues generated in Shore communities and communicate that effectively to the public and elected officials

3. Inequitable Access

In comparison to the rest of the state, vulnerable communities in the SJTPO region typically have limited access to mobility for their daily needs and face significant challenges in improving their mobility. It is equally important to note that the SJTPO region, comprising Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, and Salem Counties, is a disadvantaged region relative to the state, with significant barriers to mobility. There is a notable lack of public transportation, particularly when compared to the rest of the state. Furthermore, overall incomes are lower, even relative to the cost of living; access is limited; traffic fatalities are higher; poverty rates are higher; educational attainment is lower; social issues associated with poverty are more pronounced; health outcomes are worse; and ultimately, lifespan is shorter.

How SJTPO Will Work to Help

- Work to promote awareness of the issue among the public and elected officials
- Work with partners to remove barriers and/or provide assistance when that is not possible
- Work with NJ TRANSIT to identify transit concerns and better incorporate equity into service decisions

4. Regulatory Burden

Environmental regulations, especially in the Pinelands, are often disproportionate to the impacts of projects, making it challenging to advance low-impact safety and quality of life projects. The SJTPO

region largely falls under one of two very important environmental regulatory areas, the Pinelands and Coastal Area Facilities Review Act (CAFRA) of 1973. The Pinelands Area is a million-acre mosaic of forests, farms, and towns that lies above trillions of gallons of water. The CAFRA is administered by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) and covers waterfront development, freshwater wetlands, coastal wetlands, flood hazard areas, and tidelands that extend from Middlesex County down to the coastal areas of Salem County. While these stringent environmental regulations make the SJTPO region an attractive place to live and work, they incur many additional costs and burdens on the municipalities and the counties in the area, which makes it challenging to advance transportation projects.

How SJTPO Will Work to Help

- Work to promote awareness of the issue among the public and elected officials
- Convene a gathering of Pinelands jurisdictions to discuss issues and sensible solutions

5. Infrastructure at Risk

Sea level rise, increased storm severity, and increases in precipitation — put aging, already taxed infrastructure in the SJTPO region at significant risk. Most scientists and researchers believe that the average intensity and frequency of storms, in terms of maximum wind speed and rainfall, are likely to increase, which is expected to result in more flooding. Although many of SJTPO's subregions have implemented effective adaptation measures, such as armoring coastlines with bulkheads or revetment walls, these measures are expensive and highly regulated, thereby slowing the opportunity to address these issues proactively.

How SJTPO Will Work to Help

- Work to promote awareness of the issue among the public and elected officials
- Continue to promote projects and plans that reduce vehicle emissions
- Work to advance mitigation and adaptation efforts
- Work with partners on emergency preparedness planning and education, as well as stormwater management.

Additions to Forward 2050

As part of the development of Forward 2050, several new items were incorporated that had not been part of previous RTPs. These included:

- Solicitation from subregions for RTP Projects
- Scoring of RTP projects, using recently adopted RTP project evaluation criteria
- Allocation of RTP projects to a specific fund and year

These are described in a little more detail below:

Solicitation from subregions for RTP projects

While project solicitation has been a standard part of the TIP preparation process, it has not been a standard part of the SJTPO's RTP development process outside of soliciting "Critical Needs." The call for projects was issued in the spring of 2024 to subregions, the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT), and New Jersey Transit (NJ TRANSIT). Subregions were asked to provide as much information as possible on their projects.

SJTPO staff received over 100 projects as part of their solicitation. Depending on the project's anticipated completion date, the projects

were split into Years 1-10 (which translated to CY 2025-2034) and Years 11+ (which translated into CY 2035-CY 2050).

Once the projects were separated into Years 1-10 and Years 11+, they were evaluated and given scores, using a slightly revised version of SJTPO's existing Project Evaluation process. The process was primarily carried out by SJTPO staff, with input and oversight from the TAC and Policy Board.

Project Evaluation Process

Once projects were received from the subregions, SJTPO staff scored the projects using SJTPO's newly updated Project Evaluation Criteria and Scoring Process, a holistic process intended to prioritize projects that will help the region meet Forward 2050's goals as well as its performance-based targets. The RTP Project Evaluation process was based on the existing TIP project evaluation process. The process consists of two core elements: a Pre-Evaluation Process, which determines if there are reasonable ways to enhance projects as they come in, and a Scoring Process, which evaluates final project candidates to determine which projects will be funded. The scoring process was bifurcated into a process that evaluated projects scheduled to be open to traffic in Years 1-10 (CY 2025-2034) and Years 11+, (which translates into CY 2035-CY 2050). While the process will be carried out primarily by SJTPO staff, it included input and oversight by the TAC and Policy Board.

For Forward 2050, there were some slight changes made to each of the two scoring processes, as summarized below:

The main evaluation criteria on which projects for years 1-10 were scored included:

- **Contributions to Performance-Based Planning Targets:** The score for this criterion was based on whether the project will improve traffic congestion, pavement or bridge condition, freight movement, fatalities and serious injuries, and on-road mobile source emissions.
- **Advances Emphasis Areas from SJTPO Planning Initiatives:** This criterion centered on how well the project advances emphasis areas from SJTPO Planning Initiatives, including Resiliency, Tourism, Complete Streets, and Evacuation Routes.
- **Impact of Project:** This criterion focused on the project's duration (which typically applied only to roadway or bike/pedestrian trail projects), as well as the volume of the corridor.
- **Cost-Effectiveness**: This was calculated by determining a benefit-to-cost ratio and comparing it with that of all other projects.

For projects anticipated in the out-years (Years 11+), a scaled-back scoring process was utilized. How the project "Contributes to Performance-Based Planning Targets" and "Advances Emphasis Areas from SJTPO Planning Initiatives," but the Impact of the Project and Cost-Effectiveness Criteria were excluded. The rationale behind this less elaborate scoring process is that there is more limited information available, and given these projects' long-term nature and the developmental stages of these projects, it is challenging to determine the projects' specific impacts on these areas at this stage.

The SJTPO Policy Board approved this revised project scoring process for both RTP and TIP projects on July 22, 2024.

Funding

There are two TIP funding cycles for each RTP. At the time of the initial adoption of the RTP, January 2025, only the first FFY 2024-2033 TIP was included as approved in September 2023. Inclusive of the first TIP, Forward 2050 guided transportation investments of over

$866 million*[2] over the next 25 years. In addition to the "funded" projects, Forward 2050 included almost $1.0 billion in unfunded RTP projects that could not be funded, either because they were too expensive or because they could not be funded under programs under which SJTPO has discretion. It also includes more than $1.64 billion in "unfunded" critical needs projects, which are projects deemed critical by their respective sponsors for safety or other compelling reasons. Forward 2050 has since been revised to reflect the incorporation of the second FFY 2026-2035 TIP. As such, transportation investment funding has been updated to $1.37 billion**[3]. Additionally, almost $2.18 billion in unfunded RTP projects could not be funded and there is $1.49 billion in "unfunded" critical needs projects. As has been the case for some time now, the needs far exceed the actual funds. Furthermore, most projects within the SJTPO region fall under System Preservation and Maintenance, rather than Expansion. While system expansion or capacity enhancement projects are a potential solution to some of the problems with the current system, such as congestion, most of the committed funds in Forward 2050 are allocated towards System and Roadway Preservation projects. While not as flashy as a new highway or rail transit line, these System Preservation projects, which include roadway resurfacing, drainage, and capital maintenance, are crucial to maintaining a safe and functional transportation system.

It is also important to note that while federal funds are administered through a myriad of programs, SJTPO has discretion over only a handful of these programs. These programs include:

- **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ):** This program funds projects that improve air quality and/or relieve congestion without adding new highway capacity.
- **Safety:** This includes work designed to enhance safety for the traveling public on the existing highway system. Program categories within this classification include safety improvements, safety management, and capital maintenance for safety.
- **Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP-SJTPO)**: This is a federal-aid funding category for NJDOT and NJ TRANSIT. STBGP funding may be used on highway projects, bridge projects, transit capital projects, planning and research programs, and a variety of other eligible project types. STBGP funding is suballocated to areas of New Jersey based on their relative share of the state's population.
- **Transportation Alternatives (TA) Set-Aside:** This program funds projects such as on- and off-road pedestrian and bicycle facilities; infrastructure projects for improving non-driver access to public transportation and enhanced mobility, community improvement activities, and environmental mitigation; recreational trail program projects; safe routes to school projects; and projects for the planning, design or

[2] *The original $866M project funding only included the 1st TIP Cycle when the plan was originally adopted

[3] **Total project funding (originally $866M) was calculated as the summation of all 1st TIP Cycle projects and RTP Funded Projects (Tables 26,27,28 in Forward 2050). The new total project funding (S1.37B) was calculated using the summation of all Regional Projects in the 2nd TIP Cycle and updated funded RTP Projects in Tables 27 and 28 in the Amended RTP.

construction of boulevards and other roadways largely in the right-of-way of former Interstate System routes or other divided highways.

System Performance

In accordance with the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) the FAST Act, and now the IIJA's emphasis on performance-based planning and programming, there is a heavy focus on system performance within Forward 2050, mainly with regard to assessing how well the region is doing in meeting each of the 10 goals. With guidance from both the TAC and the public, SJTPO has developed several proactive strategies to achieve each of these goals. Further, many of the programs and projects included within Forward 2050 meet at least one of these goals. Forward 2050's System Performance Report (Chapter X) details each of SJTPO's recommended performance measures and targets required under the Forward 2050 framework, as well as performance in these areas since the establishment of these targets. SJTPO has also included some non-federally required performance measures, and will continue to monitor the system regularly.

Air Quality

As is the case with every RTP that SJTPO releases, as a Nonattainment Area for 8-Hour Ozone, pursuant to Federal regulations, SJTPO must complete an air quality conformity determination to ensure that all projects conform to National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) as set by the US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA). Transportation conformity is demonstrated when future planned, federally funded, highway and transit projects are determined not to cause new air quality violations, worsen existing violations, or delay timely attainment of the NAAQS. Forward 2050 conforms with both the 2008 and 2015 8-Hour Ozone NAAQS.

Scenario Planning Study

Prior to the writing of Forward 2050, SJTPO conducted an extensive scenario planning study, which served as Phase I of the outreach. The FHWA defines scenario planning as an approach to strategic planning that uses alternate narratives of plausible futures to make more informed planning decisions today. With the assistance of a consultant, SJTPO looked at four perspectives relevant to South Jersey that directly impact South Jersey residents and other stakeholders. These included:

- **Weather and Climate:** The regional weather and climate, particularly the impact of sea level rise and coastal storm surges
- **Leisure and Entertainment:** The leisure and entertainment industry that provides an economic anchor for the region;
- **Personal Economic Opportunity:** The personal economic opportunity of those who live and work in the SJTPO region;
- **Quality of Life:** The quality of life of those who live and work in the SJTPO region

This study visualized the various potential future conditions and potential future outcomes through the lens of each of these four perspectives. Using input received from two workshops, as well as an extensive digital survey that yielded nearly 700 responses, valuable insights were collected. The study culminated in a detailed matrix that assigned a score to the most frequently cited strategies in Forward 2050.

Final Scoring

The analysis rankings discussed in the section above were tallied for each of the ten strategies across all four perspectives (Weather & Climate, Leisure & Entertainment, Personal Economic Opportunity, and Quality of Life). These scores were averaged with the Workshop 2 scoring by the SAC/TAC and a score based on each strategy's priority in the current RTP. This results in a total score out of ten for each strategy. This score represents each strategy's level of importance in SJTPO's future planning efforts.

STRATEGY SCORECARD

STRATEGY	Workshop 2 Score	RTP Alignment	Quality of Life	Leisure & Entertainment	Personal Economic Opportunity	Weather & Climate	TOTAL SCORE
Prioritize system maintenance	6.3	5	9.8	9.7	9.2	7.8	8.0
Advance transit for the transportation disadvantaged	4.7	5	8.5	5.6	7.1	5.9	6.1
Improve incident response	3.2	5	7.2	5.8	5.2	9.2	5.9
Promote and advance safety projects	5.1	4	5.8	8.3	6.9	5.5	5.9
Address transportation vulnerability	4.8	4	5.5	5.4	4.6	9.1	5.6
Promote transportation alternatives	4.1	6	6.2	5.4	6.8	4.9	5.6
Reduce summer congestion/delay	2.4	5	3.4	8.2	4.9	2.0	4.3
Promote projects that reduce emissions	1.8	2	5.1	3.3	3.5	6.5	3.7
Promote technology in transportation	3.1	3	1.6	2.3	3.1	3.0	2.7
Improve truck routes	1.5	3	1.8	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.6

SYNTHESIZED SCORE

These strategies were re-ordered in Forward 2050 based on the results of this study.

Phase II of the outreach commenced with the release of the draft Forward 2050 in November 2024 and continued through mid-December 2024. Members of the public were able to submit their comments via comment form, survey, email, social media (Facebook and X mail, or fax. Two hybrid meetings were held. The full list of comments and responses is listed in Appendix I.

Conclusion

In summary, building and maintaining a first-class transportation system is not easy, especially with all the different goals the region is striving for and the unique challenges it faces. First among these challenges is the increasingly scarce public funding available to support many of the transportation strategies and projects necessary to achieve the various goals outlined in Forward 2050. These goals encompass a wide range of objectives, including improvements in mobility and accessibility, system maintenance, safety, support for the regional economy, and resilience. Other challenges include dealing with flooding caused by increasingly frequent extreme weather events, the increasingly disparate and changing travel patterns induced by more people working from home, and the steadily increasing number of fatalities and serious injuries that have occurred on the regional roadways.

Like its predecessor, Forward 2050 continues the performance and outcome-oriented approach that the federal government has mandated since MAP-21 passed in 2012. Since the release of the previous RTP in 2021, the region has made significant strides in several key performance areas, including roadway and bridge conditions, ambient air quality, and bicycle and pedestrian trails. Most of the roadway segments owned and maintained by the State within the SJTPO region are in "good" condition. The majority of bridges under State jurisdiction in the region are in "fair" condition. Ambient air quality within the SJTPO region has improved over the past several years. Work continues to advance the South Jersey Trails regional trail network, with connections of the Atlantic County bikeway extending west to Camden County and the expansion of Cape May County's trail network into Atlantic County, ultimately connecting to Philadelphia, being studied. Since the last RTP, SJTPO has also developed and released a comprehensive and robust Regional Freight Plan, which provides a more in-depth examination of the region's freight network and identifies priority actions to improve and enhance it.

Despite all these improvements and advances made in the last four years, much more work needs to be done, and numerous challenges, as described above, remain. With its myriad of goals and actionable, proactive strategies, that have now been buttressed and thoroughly vetted via a robust scenario planning process, Forward 2050 charts a clear course for SJTPO to overcome these challenges, calling for a transportation system that is resilient, adaptable, and able to withstand a multitude of possible futures.