

THE ERIE COUNTY 2030 TRANSPORTATION PLAN

In an effort to remain prepared for the progressive future of Erie County and to meet various legislative requirements, the Erie Area Transportation Study Metropolitan Planning Organization, with funding from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PENNDOT) and the County of Erie, has developed the Erie County 2030 (Long Range) Transportation Plan (2030 LRTP or Plan). The Plan analyzes the current land use, traffic patterns and operations of all transportation modes in the County and develops projections of the future land use, traffic patterns and mode operations to the year 2030. Based on these projections, recommendations have been prepared addressing the needed improvements to the existing transportation system.

The 2030 LRTP was developed in partnership with PENNDOT; the Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority (EMTA), Erie Municipal Airport Authority (EMAA), and Erie-Western PA Port Authority (EWPPA); the County of Erie; and in coordination with the City of Erie and City of Corry; Township and Borough municipal officials; area transportation and planning agencies; stakeholder organizations; and the residents of Erie County. This partnership and coordination has led to a transportation plan that incorporates Intermodal accessibility and enhanced mobility for the entire population as integral components of the highway planning process. The plan includes recommendations for improving the existing highway network, transit system, rail, air and port transportation, and bicycle/pedestrian facilities. The program of recommendations in the plan are confined to the expected available funding for the Erie region and contain only those projects that can be implemented using current revenues while the existing system is being adequately operated and maintained.

THE NEED FOR A REGIONAL PLAN

The regional long-range plan is dictated by a number of factors, but is primarily regulated by federal legislation. The 2030 LRTP development is governed by the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), and the Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA) of 1990, which set the minimum standards and requirements for regional plans and define conformity with clean air goals. These laws require a planning process that considers all transportation systems and the movement of both people and goods.

SAFETEA-LU lists eight planning factors that all metropolitan plans must address, and as such, they serve as a basic set of guidelines for the 2030 LRTP.

SAFETEA-LU PLANNING FACTORS

1. Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency
2. Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users
3. Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users
4. Increase the accessibility and mobility for people and for freight
5. Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns
6. Enhance the integration and connectivity across and between modes, for people and freight
7. Promote efficient system management and operation
8. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system

The Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA) of 1990 mandate compliance with achieving designated air quality standard goals, as defined and enforced by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). As a result, the Erie MPO has collaborated with EMTA as the responsible agencies to address clean air and mobility requirements. The Erie region is currently in air quality 'non-attainment' status; therefore, the 2030 LRTP plan recommendations must also be evaluated through an air quality conformity determination to assess impacts to the region's air quality and ensure that CAAA goals are being met.

The 2030 LRTP serves a number of purposes for Erie County. It provides a vision of the region's future growth and development; identifies deficiencies in capacity, safety and access in order to locate and implement future transportation facilities and services; and provides guidance and direction for municipal, county and state agencies to make infrastructure and development investments. The plan sets the foundation and priorities for the distribution of federal transportation funds, and specifically serves as the framework for the development of the region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the capital and transit operating program of all federally funded transportation projects.

THE ERIE MPO ROLE

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1962 required that all urbanized areas having a population of 50,000 or more designate a single agency to administer federal transportation funds. The agencies that were established are called Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO). According to the federal law, the activities of an MPO must provide a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive (3-C) transportation planning process. The MPO has the primary role and responsibility in ensuring that the transportation planning process is being carried out in accordance with current federal and state regulations. The

primary planning responsibilities of the MPO include creating a Long Range (20 year) Transportation Plan, a shorter range (4 year) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and an annual Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).

The Erie Area Transportation Study Metropolitan Planning Organization (Erie MPO) was established August 24, 1964 to guide the 3-C planning process in the urbanized area of Erie County surrounding the City of Erie. However, as growth expanded throughout the County, so did the need for coordinated transportation planning for the entire region. In 1978, the boundary of the planning jurisdiction of the Erie MPO was expanded to include the entire County of Erie.

The Erie MPO is comprised of representatives from municipalities and organizations throughout the Erie urban area and Erie County, as well as state and federal representation. The role of the Erie MPO Committee members is to provide representation for their municipality / organization in order to facilitate an integrated and informed decision-making process which incorporates all concerns and issues into the development of policies and actions. The Erie MPO planning and program management functions are administered by the Erie County Department of Planning (ECDP), which provides staff, technical and clerical support, and serves as the designated Erie MPO Secretary.

THE ERIE MPO VISION

The vision for the transportation system in Erie County derived from the federal mandates, and involved input from a variety of persons and agencies with interest in transportation issues. The Erie MPO vision statement was crafted in 1993, forming the framework for the plan goals and objectives:

“TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL RESIDENTS AND VISITORS OF ERIE COUNTY BY DEVELOPING, OPERATING AND MAINTAINING A SAFE, EFFICIENT, USER FRIENDLY, INTERMODAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM THAT ENHANCES MOBILITY, ECONOMIC VITALITY, AND IS INNOVATIVE, AFFORDABLE AND ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE.”

REGIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The accompanying goals and objectives have been identified in an effort to accomplish the vision statement, and reflect the SAFETEA-LU planning factors and CAAA goals.

Goal 1

Manage, maintain, and improve Erie County's transportation systems to meet the needs and requirements of people and goods movement in both urban and rural regions. Provide transportation choices where appropriate and feasible.

Objectives

- 1A. Manage and operate safe, efficient, reliable transportation systems to move people and goods.
- 1B. Maintain systems and facilities on a life cycle basis, in a cost-effective manner, and in an operational condition.
- 1C. Support the development of intermodal connections and multimodal choices for passenger and freight transportation modes at the state, regional and local levels, and with other states and metropolitan areas.
- 1D. Promote the installation, operation and sharing of the best available technology among the public and private sectors.

Goal 2

Manage, maintain, and improve a transportation system that preserves and reinforces environmental quality and livable communities. Provide access to Erie County's recreational, natural and historic/cultural resources.

Objectives

- 2A. Promote transportation modes and practices which best achieve compliance with clean air, noise, and water quality standards, reduce congestion and promote energy efficiency.
- 2B. Cooperate with and support employer, community and public agency efforts to increase transportation operations that improve environmental quality.
- 2C. Plan, construct, operate and maintain transportation facilities in a manner which is compatible with the natural, scenic, historic and cultural resources of Erie County.
- 2D. Improve accessibility to transportation and provide equitable transportation service for all residents.
- 2E. Promote the incorporation of gateways, bikeways, and greenways concepts into infrastructure redevelopment projects throughout the county.

Goal 3

Strengthen the planning, programming and decision-making processes, supported by performance-based management, monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems that are used cooperatively at the county and regional/state levels.

Objectives

- 3A. Refine the existing planning and programming processes, procedures, roles and responsibilities consistent with SAFETEA-LU and the CAAA, and establish collaboration between the Policy Plan and the 12 Year Program, Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, Long Range Plans and Transportation Improvement Programs.
- 3B. Support informed decision-making through improved communications and responsive new planning and programming methods and techniques at the county, regional, and state levels.
- 3C. Institute improved accountability through a continuous cycle of management system monitoring, program evaluation, and feedback at the county and regional level.
- 3D. Streamline planning and project implementation processes.

Goal 4

Provide efficient, accessible, and connected transportation systems, services, and facilities as an incentive to support positive economic development throughout Erie County.

Objectives

- 4A. Promote and coordinate access and intermodal improvements which support specific employment generating opportunities, consistent with local, regional, and statewide economic and environmental land use policy.
- 4B. Identify strategic system improvements for all modes of transportation that increase the productivity and competitiveness of Erie County industries.
- 4C. Improve the management, streamline regulation, and extend operational coordination across all modes of the county's transportation systems to enhance the safety and productivity of shipping and distribution.
- 4D. Identify transportation initiatives that support tourism and recreational opportunities for the residents of Erie County and its visitors.

COORDINATED PLANNING INITIATIVES

The Erie County 2030 Transportation Plan must be coordinated with statewide, regional and local planning initiatives. These planning initiatives were reviewed and considered while developing the LRTP to ensure consistency.

State Level

At the State level, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation has developed its Long Range Transportation Plan, called Pennsylvania Mobility Plan. The plan is a product of collaboration between PENNDOT and its planning partners. While the plan leaves the identification and development of specific projects and programs to its partners, it does provide a context and framework for the development of those programs that help achieve the goals of the Mobility Plan.

Also on the State level, PENNDOT developed the Comprehensive Strategic Highway Safety Improvement Plan with the goal of reducing highway-related fatalities. The plan takes a comprehensive approach by not only identifying specific roadway locations that could be eligible for targeted SAFETEA-LU funded programs, but also presents strategies for changing how planners, designers and road users think and carry out their respective responsibilities.

County Level

The Erie County Planning Department and the Erie MPO are responsible for all transportation-related planning in the County. The Erie County Comprehensive Plan, portions of which have been adopted as of the effective date of this plan, includes a land use plan, a housing plan, a community facilities and utilities plan, and a historic and natural resources plan. When adopted, the LRTP becomes an element of the Erie County Comprehensive Plan.

All elements of the Comprehensive Plan are being developed in a manner that each element is coordinated and complementary of each other. The Erie County 2030 Transportation Plan made use of the demographic data and projected land use and development patterns identified in the Community Facilities and Land Use Plans.

The LRTP also coordinated closely with the County's economic development initiatives, in particular, the Keystone Opportunity Zones (KOZ). The Plan considered access to and mobility around the zones when identifying projects. The objective was to insure that each KOZ has the transportation infrastructure to succeed.

Local Level

At the local level, each municipal government adopts a Comprehensive Plan. These municipal plans provide an insight into local issues and initiatives that are of concern to municipal officials. These plans cover the same elements as the County Comprehensive Plan except from a local perspective. Each municipal comprehensive plan in place in Erie County was reviewed for initiatives and needs affected by the regional transportation system.