Chapter 1

Introducing New Connections

New Connections represents the fourth Metropolitan Transportation Plan in the twenty-five year history of the Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council (PDCTC), continuing a long tradition of metropolitan transportation planning for Dutchess County. From its designation in 1982 as the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Poughkeepsie Metropolitan Area to its present role in the three county Mid-Hudson Valley Transportation Management Area, the PDCTC has sought to meet the transportation needs of its residents, workers, and visitors. This fundamental mission sat at the core of previous Metropolitan Transportation Plans in 1994, 1998, 2003, and endures now with New Connections. Similarly, the basic purpose behind all these plans remains the same: present a set of policies and projects designed to not only maintain the existing transportation system, but to also prepare it to meet the challenges in the coming decades. What has changed is how the PDCTC has tried to accomplish these goals.

Just as Dutchess County has changed in the past quarter century, the PDCTC, as an organization and through its policies, adapted itself to meet new challenges, while still adhering to its core transportation mission. The need to adapt to shifting norms, be they based on population, human behavior, technology, or the environment, stands as a necessity for any organization wishing to remain relevant. This certainly holds true for transportation planning, where simply meeting a statutory requirement runs the risk of making an organization irrelevant. Recognizing this fact, the PDCTC seeks to maintain its relevancy through New Connections, by not only addressing traditional transportation issues but also looking at areas that have historically been outside the routine transportation planning process.

The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

Federal transportation laws require that all Urbanized Areas\(^1\) be represented by a MPO, which is responsible for ensuring that Federal transportation dollars (highway and transit) are committed through a locally driven, comprehensive planning process. The purpose of a MPO is to provide a forum for state and local officials to discuss transportation issues and, in turn, reach a consensus on transportation plans and specific programs of highway and transit projects. The US Department of Transportation (USDOT) relies on each MPO to make sure that federally funded projects are the products of a credible planning process, meeting the goals and priorities of the metropolitan area. To guide this planning process, a MPO must regularly develop three critical documents: a Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), and a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). In addition to these base requirements, a MPO located in a Transportation Management Area

\(^1\) The U.S. Census Bureau defines an Urbanized Area as a central place(s), including adjacent territory, with a general population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile of land area that together have a minimum residential population of at least 50,000 people.
(TMA) must also develop a Congestion Management Process (CMP), while a MPO located in an air quality non-attainment area must demonstrate conformity with Federal environmental regulations.

The Mid-Hudson Valley Transportation Management Area (TMA)

The PDCTC lies within the Poughkeepsie-Newburgh Urbanized Area, which was designated by the U.S. Census Bureau in May 2002. This Urbanized Area (UA) includes parts of three counties: Dutchess, Orange, and Ulster, with a total population of almost 352,000. The new UA combined the previously separate Poughkeepsie UA with the Newburgh UA, thus surpassing the 200,000 person threshold used by USDOT to establish a Transportation Management Area (TMA). The TMA denotation, a standard first instituted by the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), remains today and carries with it additional responsibilities for a MPO. These include requirements for a Congestion Management Process (CMP), a system to disburse Section 5307 Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds, and a formal federal certification review every four years.

Prior to the 2000 Census, two MPOs – the PDCTC and the Orange County Transportation Council (OCTC) – operated within the Mid-Hudson Valley. This changed in 2002 when a third MPO, the Ulster County Transportation Council (UCTC), received its formal designation as the MPO for the new Kingston UA. And though each is a separate, independent organization, the three MPOs must work together in managing the TMA, since the three share a portion of the larger Poughkeepsie-Newburgh UA (See Figure 1).

The OCTC, PDCTC, and UCTC participate in a collaborative planning relationship that focuses on addressing regional transportation issues and meeting the federal requirements for a TMA. An example of this partnership is the development and use of a single CMP instead of three separate programs; another example is the work done by the OCTC and PDCTC on joint air quality conformity determinations for their Metropolitan Transportation Plans and Transportation Improvement Programs.

Core PDCTC Responsibilities:

- **Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)**
  The Metropolitan Transportation Plan acts as the central guiding document for improving transportation in Dutchess County over the next twenty-five years. The Plan establishes long and short range goals and recommendations, which propel the types of projects and studies pursued in the five year TIP and the annual UPWP. Federal law requires an update to the Plan every four years for a MPO in an air quality non-attainment area; the law also requires that the Plan be developed under fiscally constrained conditions. *New Connections* is the fourth Plan of the PDCTC, preceded by Plans completed in 1994, 1998, and 2003.
• **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**
  Covering a five-year period, the TIP lists the funding sources, locations, schedule, and sponsors for federally funded transportation projects. The TIP implements the short range goals and recommendations of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan. The PDCTC, working with member agencies, updates the TIP on a biannual basis, with project scheduling based on a Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) calendar. In addition to federally funded projects, the TIP also lists major transportation projects supported by other funds for several of the larger transportation agencies: the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), NYS Bridge Authority (NYSBA), NYS Thruway Authority (NYSTA), and NYS Department of Transportation (NYSDOT).

• **Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)**
  The UPWP is an annual work program and budget that describes the activities and planning studies the PDCTC will complete during the upcoming year. As done with the TIP, the UPWP must support the actions promoted in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan; this especially holds true for PDCTC staff work on local planning studies and the program initiatives. The PDCTC organizes its annual UPWP around the New York State Fiscal Year (SFY).

Additional PDCTC Responsibilities:

• **Air Quality Conformity**
  Federal transportation and environmental laws require that transportation activities conform to national and state air quality standards before receiving federal transportation funding. These standards, set forth in the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), set limits on the levels of air pollution that can exist in a region. Dutchess County sits in the Mid-Hudson Moderate Ozone Non-attainment Area, as designated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which also includes Orange and Putnam Counties. The PDCTC must therefore demonstrate that future Plans and TIP projects do not violate air quality standards, worsen existing conditions, or delay timely attainment of the NAAQS. Such a demonstration was made for *New Connections*.

• **Congestion Management Process (CMP)**
  A MPO located within a designated TMA must create a CMP, which institutes a formal process to measure and manage the performance of a transportation system. Such a process must describe methods to collect and analyze transportation network data, with the intent of developing effective strategies to mitigate identified congestion. The OCTC, PDCTC, and UCTC adopted a joint Congestion Management System in 2005.  

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2 *The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA), signed into law on August 10, 2005, maintains the requirement that a TMA actively measure and manage congestion. However, the law describes this requirement as a Congestion Management Process (CMP) instead of Congestion Management System (CMS).*
PDCTC Organization:

The PDCTC organizes itself around three components: two committees (Executive and Technical) and a shared staff section. In use since its inception, this structure satisfies the PDCTC’s mission to meet the transportation needs of Dutchess County through a collaborative planning process. An essential part of this process includes participation from locally elected representatives, public transportation agencies, and the general public. The mechanics of how the PDCTC carries out its mission, to include how it involves the public, are codified in its Operating Procedures, which were updated in 2007.
• **Executive Committee:** The Executive Committee acts as the final decision-making authority on all PDCTC actions. This authority covers approval actions on the Plan (e.g. New Connections), TIP, and UPWP, but also additional actions such as approval of the joint CMP and air quality conformity determination statements. The primary challenge of the Executive Committee is to make decisions on transportation planning issues and projects, while understanding the competing needs for limited resources. The Executive Committee operates by consensus and usually meets at least once a year, with all meetings open to the public.

• **Technical Committee:** The Technical Committee, consisting of representatives for each member of the Executive Committee, provides oversight and guidance to the staff regarding transportation planning issues and program work. Actions requiring approval from the Executive Committee are first reviewed by the Technical Committee. The Technical Committee meets approximately eight to ten times a year and all meetings are open to the public.

• **PDCTC Staff:** The PDCTC staff performs operational and tactical level work on all UPWP task items and other transportation related actions as needed. The staff coordinates with member agencies to meet program requirements and prepares materials for review by the Technical Committee and subsequent approval by the Executive Committee. The Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development and the New York State Department of Transportation-Region 8 provide administrative and logistical support for PDCTC staff.

**Federal Laws**

The PDCTC, as with any MPO, must adhere to a set of federal laws and regulations that govern the metropolitan planning process and, in turn, establish the requirements for receiving Federal transportation funds. These regulations prescribe the basic roles and responsibilities of a MPO, while also guiding the minimum level of content for actions such as the Metropolitan Transportation Plan. Indeed, the requirement to produce a twenty year plan first appeared in 1991 with passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), which, in addition to providing federal funding for traditional highway and transit programs, laid the groundwork for a number of new metropolitan planning initiatives that remain to this day; the Congestion Management Process is one example. Subsequent legislation in 1998, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), modified, and in some cases,
expanded federal planning requirements for MPOs. This tradition continued with the current transportation law: the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA), which was enacted in 2005. This fifteen-year span of federal law has shaped the manner by which the PDCTC has sought to meet the transportation needs of Dutchess County, and formed a precedent that will likely remain for years to come.

**SAFETEA**

The current five-year transportation law programs over $244 billion towards highway and transit projects and programs, while modifying or amplifying previous guidance on MPO planning processes. Two notable highlights for metropolitan planning include a four-year update cycle for Metropolitan Transportation Plans and Transportation Improvement Programs in Non-attainment Areas, and the designation of eight planning factors. The eight planning factors are of particular importance, because they directly impact the scope and focus of the PDCTC planning process. That impact becomes most apparent with how *New Connections* was developed.

**SAFETEA Planning Factors:**

- Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area.
- Increase the safety of the transportation system.
- Increase the security of the transportation system.
- Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and for freight.
- 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.
- Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.
- Promote efficient system management and operation.
- Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

**Other Federal Laws**

Beyond traditional transportation laws, the PDCTC must also adhere to a separate set of Federal laws that apply to all programs that receive Federal funding. The following laws play an important part in the MPO process:

- **Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI):** Prescribes that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

- **National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA):** Establishes a national policy to promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment.

- **Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA):** Institutes enforceable standards to prevent discrimination against individuals with disabilities.
Development of New Connections

The PDCTC initiated New Connections through a review of existing Federal, State, and County land use and transportation planning laws and guidance. This review sought to identify those planning policies and recommendations that support the mission of meeting the current and future transportation needs of Dutchess County. More often than not, the same themes arose from each of these sources, whether they originated from legal statutes, regional plans, or best practices. The task then was to organize these themes into a set of transportation strategies that fulfilled Federal SAFETEA requirements, but also fulfilled the internal goals of the PDCTC.

In addition to the goals and recommendations promoted in the previous long range plan, Connections 2025, two planning documents from two of our traditional planning partners proved particularly valuable during the development of New Connections: the Dutchess County Planning Department’s Greenway Connections and the New York State Department of Transportation’s Transportation Strategies for a New Age: New York’s Transportation Plan for 2030. These two documents, coupled with Connections 2025 and SAFETEA planning guidance, did the most to shape the strategic direction of New Connections.

Greenway Connections

In early 2000 the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development completed Greenway Connections—a guidebook that not only demonstrates the benefits of the Greenway Compact Program, but presents a set of policies and site specific design guidelines that promote sustainable development. The guidebook was developed in cooperation with the Hudson River Valley Greenway Council, a state-sponsored, regional planning agency that provides technical assistance and funding to the thirteen counties in the Hudson River Valley.

The regional Greenway Compact Program is a voluntary partnership between the Greenway Council and local communities, which is guided by a policy framework that covers five major goals:

• Regional Cooperation
• Environmental and Cultural Protection and Enhancement
• Economic Development
• Public Access
• Heritage and Environmental Education
Greenway Connections implements the Greenway Compact Program in Dutchess County, describing basic Greenway goals and principles, outlining the benefits of community participation, and presenting practical “how to” guides for encouraging development that creates better communities. Greenway Connections describes the Compact as “a voluntary partnership between the Greenway Council and local communities to work toward Greenway goals, help build a network of connecting routes and use the Greenway Guides to improve their surroundings.” Greenway Connections endorses an integrated system of scenic roads and streets, bicycle and transit routes, open space corridors, waterways, and sidewalks linked to trails throughout Dutchess County and the region. It also lists several model trail, rail, access management, transit-oriented development, and pedestrian improvement projects that will help build this Greenway network.

New York State Transportation Plan

The Transportation Plan from the New York State Department of Transportation presents a comprehensive, twenty-five year outlook for transportation in New York State and includes new ideas for managing and operating the State’s multi-modal transportation network. The Plan is designed to foster the creation of a seamless, customer-friendly transportation network that is predictable, convenient, and accountable to the public. Released in 2006, Transportation Strategies for a New Age: New York’s Transportation Plan for 2030 starts out with a simple, but broad vision statement:

New York State’s vision for transportation in 2030 is of a seamless system in which travelers can conveniently shift between modes and operators to complete trips that meet their individual and business needs.

To achieve this vision, five priority result areas were developed, which will be used by NYSDOT to define measurable goals and monitor progress in achieving this vision, while also meeting customer expectations.

- **Mobility and Reliability** – Places a high priority on travel time predictability for both personal travel and the movement of goods. Reliable transportation requires that all systems be adequately maintained to support predictable, efficient, and safe travel.

- **Safety** – Safe travel is the highest priority for transportation customers. They expect actions to address transportation system safety deficiencies, operator errors, and effective enforcement.

- **Environmental Conditions** – Transportation investments should address environmental and energy concerns through the protection of human, natural, and built environments, and the conservation of New York’s non-renewable energy resources.
• **Economic Sustainability** – The transportation system should strengthen the economic sustainability and improve the quality of life in local communities. Transportation is an important component of the State’s Quality Communities Program.

• **Security** – Mitigate the vulnerabilities of the transportation system, develop emergency plans to assist with recovery, and protect critical data, information, and communication networks.

The twenty-five year plan recommends a mutually supportive approach to transportation planning and investment decision-making among the public and private owners and operators of the State’s diverse transportation network. The Plan also includes a discussion of transportation issues currently facing New York, along with some potential strategies.

**Other Planning Resources**

In addition to plans from traditional sources, staff studied the following resources to measure their benefit towards meeting the provisions of SAFETEA and accomplishing the PDCTC mission:


• *New York State Open Space Conservation Plan*, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, 2006.


• *A Region at Risk*, Regional Plan Association, 1996.

• *HVQoL = Transportation, A Strategy for Transportation and Quality of Life in the Hudson Valley Region*, Mid-Hudson Pattern for Progress, 2002.

**Common Themes**

The policies and recommendations presented in all of the resources mentioned above possessed a number of universal themes or ideas about the way ahead for transportation. Irrespective of some minor differences, the majority of the organizations endorsed a set of overlapping goals and objectives:

• Continue to invest in a “state of good repair” for transportation infrastructure.

• Support both community revitalization and open space and farmland protection activities to support orderly and sustainable growth.
• Regional, local, and public-private partnerships are necessary to implement common goals.

• Expand transportation choices to include more opportunities for walking, bicycling, and transit.

• Enhance connections between communities and between Dutchess and surrounding areas.

• Promote greater energy efficiency and explore alternative energy sources.

• Improve coordination between transportation and land use decision making processes.

PDCTC Strategic Areas

Recognizing the similarities in how member agencies and other planning partners viewed the future of transportation in Dutchess County and its surrounding region, the PDCTC set out to shape these ideas into a targeted transportation strategy. To that end, the PDCTC identified five strategic areas for *New Connections*: System Management and Preservation, Mobility and Accessibility, Land Use and Economic Development, the Environment and Energy, and Safety and Security. While pursuing these strategic areas, the PDCTC participated in a consultation process that captured input from the public and applicable organizations to better focus long range planning efforts and inform the recommendations contained in *New Connections*.

The five strategic areas fully reinforce the intent of SAFETEA, its planning factors, and the mission of the PDCTC. To better capture this dynamic, the PDCTC will use these strategic areas to form the framework for future discussions with the Executive and Technical Committees, member agencies, community based organizations, and the general public. The recommendations presented in *New Connections* are organized around these five strategic areas.

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**Transportation Plan Goals**

1) **System Management and Preservation**: *Preserve the existing transportation system through appropriate maintenance, management, and operational improvements.*
The intent of this strategy is to ensure maintenance of the existing transportation system in a good state of repair, adjusting the system as necessary to improve its safety, efficiency, and reliability, and analyzing relevant demographic and traffic data to understand how the transportation system might be used in the future.

2) **Mobility and Accessibility:** *Provide reliable, efficient, and cost effective options for movement within the area and to and from other regions.*

This strategy goes beyond the traditional focus on infrastructure maintenance or of studying each mode of travel in isolation, but instead looks at strengthening the interconnections among the many modes of travel. This also includes strengthening the internal connections between the County’s communities and external connections to the greater region. An advanced objective of this strategy is to prepare the transportation system to absorb shifts in travel behavior resulting from outside forces, including changes in the economy, energy use, and security climate.

3) **Land Use and Economic Development:** *Integrate land use, economic development, and transportation activities to promote sustainable development in Dutchess County.*

Recognizing the direct correlation between land use decisions and their impacts on the transportation system, this strategy seeks to influence the design and scope of County land use patterns so that they support a safe, efficient, and reliable transportation system. Another objective includes reinforcing sustainable land use practices and techniques that promote the most efficient and safe use of the transportation system, while also minimizing future costs to maintain or redesign the system; the following are examples of such practices: access management enforcement, Transit Oriented Development (TOD), neighborhood centers, open space programs, and form based zoning codes.

4) **Environment and Energy:** *Protect natural and man-made resources to enhance quality of life. Conserve energy resources and improve air quality in the region.*

The focus of this strategy is to promote a transportation system that minimizes adverse effects on the natural environment and better prepares the system to transition to alternative energy sources. It will also ensure that the impacts of transportation decisions do not favor or harm various socio-economic groups disproportionately, a concept commonly referred to as Environmental Justice.

5) **Safety and Security:**
   a. *Improve safety of the transportation system for all users.*

   An important strategic pursuit in *New Connections* centers on improving the safety of all travelers whether they are pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, or motorists, and regardless of whether or not they are residents or visitors. The focus will be on ensuring safety is a key factor in the design and operation of facilities and systems, and behavioral changes through education and enforcement, with a goal of reducing crashes and their severity.
b. Cooperate with and support county, regional and state transportation security programs.

Ensuring the security of the transportation system is complicated by the numerous factors outside the control of the PDCTC. However, this does not negate the need to make a good faith effort to address those safety and security concerns that are within the power of the PDCTC to act on. Much of this effort relies on work being done by agencies with a direct need to address transportation security and emergency response efforts.

For each of these strategic areas, the PDCTC consulted with member agencies, locally elected officials, and the public to determine what transportation projects or studies best achieve the stated objectives – with the understanding that New Connections must remain fiscally constrained and that it must adhere to all applicable Federal laws, regulations, and guidance. In addition, this consultation process actively sought input and advice from community based organizations such as environmental conservation councils, local planning coalitions, human service organizations, historic preservation societies, and outdoor recreational groups.