

Recommended Policies and Strategies

The prior chapters outlined for the City of Norwalk a process for establishing local priorities through clear and transparent methods of comparing and contrasting project needs and benefits for the City. They discussed how to reduce travel demands through Travel Demand Management actions, implement Traffic Calming on City streets, and conduct traffic impact and access studies within the City.

This chapter lists strategies and policies that can and should be implemented to support the development of the transportation system in the City of Norwalk. These policies and strategies represent best practices in transportation system development that are appropriate for the City and help ensure that future capital investments will provide the expected benefits. The recommendations presented here are not intended to supersede the existing plans and policies within the region (SWRPA), state (ConnDOT), and/or the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

5.1 Land Use Policies and Strategies

Preparing for the expected growth in the City of Norwalk through rational, ordered land use planning will minimize required transportation system expenditures and support multimodal transportation systems. Many of the most densely populated areas of the City of Norwalk have developed according to auto-oriented land use principles. This style of development has contributed to the current levels of traffic congestion experienced by many residents and motorists in the region.

It is strongly recommended that future development and redevelopment be accommodated through Smart Growth principles to promote activity centers and more dense development in designated growth areas and to mitigate potential negative environmental impacts. This should be accomplished using transit-friendly land use strategies to allow for transit services to be expanded and improved in step with new development and allow for transportation corridors, including highways, to be maintained in a safe and efficient manner. A balance in transportation and land use is essential to maintain a healthy quality of life in the city. This includes key elements such



as multimodal transportation planning, integrated planning, promoting transit and non-motorized transportation uses (trails), ridesharing, and access management.

While the City has implemented many of these guidelines in the development of their TOD and Priority Development sites, but future efforts should continue to consider these actions moving into the future.

The following land use policies and strategies, if implemented, will enable the City to meet the thresholds of population and land use densities required to create highly functioning and progressive transportation systems.

- ◆ ***Develop a Local and Regional Growth Strategy.*** While the Southwest Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA) takes the lead on regional transportation and land use decisions, the City should continue to administer its own comprehensive plan.
- ◆ ***Continue to develop and implement access management strategies.*** While the City has access management policies in place, these will need to continue to be developed as part of the comprehensive planning process, corridor planning, and review of new developments. Given the future of the City of Norwalk, it is especially important that new developments provide an effective local network so that the regional highway system can effectively provide for interregional and through trips.
- ◆ ***Focus Majority of Development in Activity Centers.*** Land use patterns are one of the largest influences on trip-making. Concentrating new development can positively impact transportation systems and enhance the viability of alternative modes of transportation.
- ◆ ***Ensure a Mix of Uses Within Each Node.*** Transit, walking, and biking to and within an activity center is easier when people have access to multiple types of development. The concentration of various types of activities also improves transit viability.
- ◆ ***Continue to Refine and Develop Design Guidelines.*** Design guidelines focus at the site level, facilitate pedestrian access to transit, and allow for efficient transit operations. Focus on transit when conducting development and site plan reviews. As the City conducts development reviews, it should include criteria to consider transit accommodation, from both the customer and operator perspectives.
- ◆ ***Focus on transit customer needs.*** Accessibility of transit service should be considered when reviewing plans for new developments or changes to existing developments.
- ◆ ***Focus on transit operator needs.*** Efficient transit operations require maneuverability. Appropriate design ensures that transit vehicles are accommodated and can quickly enter and leave bus stops and transit stations.

- ◆ ***Transit-Oriented Development/Smart Growth*** Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) initiatives generally operate at the community level, and aim to create neighborhoods that are compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, and near transit stops. TOD and smart growth recommendations include forming partnerships between land use planners and transit operators and developing planning studies in priority areas. This is something that the City is currently doing very well and should continue to pursue into the future.
- ◆ ***Form partnerships between land use planners and transit operators.*** Land use planners should work closely with local bus operators, Metro North, and Norwalk Transit Operations to ensure that land use plans are consistent with transit plans.

5.2 Transit Policies and Strategies

Through the extensive public outreach efforts, the primary transit strategies and policies for the City of Norwalk to pursue have been identified in the areas of park-and-ride lots, bus service, coordination between regional and local transit providers, transit information and dissemination, and high-capacity transit service. To fully realize the potential of transit to improve the quality of life in the City, the land use strategies outlined in the previous section must be implemented.

Commuter bus service can be expanded by adding trips to existing routes and by adding new routes. Operational improvements can improve travel time reliability for bus riders and can provide a competitive advantage over use of a personal vehicle. Increasing the ridership on the commuter bus system improves the performance of the regional transportation system. The following strategies should be considered to expand and improve the commuter bus system in the City:

- ◆ ***Perform a comprehensive review of commuter bus service.*** Transit service providers should regularly review the services provided within the City to maximize their use and efficiency. In addition, the City of Norwalk should evaluate the commuter bus service and make recommendations for change if appropriate. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there could be a more robust market for reliable and regular bus service between the Metro North train stations and employment nodes within the City.
- ◆ ***Study the feasibility of operational improvements.*** Queue jump lanes, transit signal priority, and access to expressway shoulders for commuter buses can provide a competitive advantage over use of a personal vehicle. Norwalk Transit (WHEELS) and the City should jointly identify the potential for these types of improvements.
- ◆ ***Identify and improve amenities provided at all transit stops.*** These may include park-and-ride lots, bus shelters, and stations to limit exposure to rain, snow, sun, and cold temperatures.



- ◆ ***Provide easily accessible information.*** Provide information on the web and at transit stops, including routes and destinations served, schedules, maps, trailblazing signs, and, to the extent possible, real-time bus arrival and departure information at major hubs and locations.
- ◆ ***Provide local bus service to park-and-ride lots.*** If provided, this service's schedules should be coordinated with Metro North commuter trains.
- ◆ ***Develop intermodal transfer stations.*** This should help concentrate local bus routes around major transfer locations to help enable sharing of the operating costs of these facilities.
- ◆ ***Study regional coordination of local bus routes.*** To better serve riders, the City should continue to work with SWRPA to coordinate a regional approach to route planning, including increased cooperation and information sharing among local transit agencies; and formal coordination of decisions and actions among the agencies.
- ◆ ***Improve convenience for intraregional work trips.*** With increasing growth and traffic, local transit agencies should evaluate intraregional commuter services and local circulator services within major activity centers, such as with neighboring communities.

5.3 Roadway Policies and Strategies

The City of Norwalk is made up of a number of different villages and communities, each unique in its appearance and in its transportation needs and infrastructure. As a result, the region relies on elements of highway infrastructure to provide connections within the City to the rest of the region.

Primary roadway strategies and policies for the City of Norwalk to pursue have been identified in the areas of operations, and travel demand management. Roadway strategies should be implemented in conjunction with land use strategies to ensure an organized pattern of development in the City and increase the efficient use of the transportation system.

5.3.1 Operations

Different types of operational strategies can be used to address recurring and nonrecurring congestion. The City should continue to work with regional emergency response providers to address long-standing incident management needs along the I-95 corridor as well as along the Merritt Parkway. Programs should be implemented as soon as practical that reduce the impact to the local Norwalk street systems, including:

- ◆ Rapid deployment of dynamic message signs (DMS), closed circuit television cameras, roadway information systems, and traffic speed detectors at appropriate locations;
- ◆ Developing specialized signal timing programs aimed at handling the increased vehicle loadings along local street networks that can be activated when needed from a centralized location;
- ◆ Installing emergency/incident guide signs to assure traffic remains on dedicated routes; and
- ◆ Continuing to integrate the Freeway Incident Traffic Management Plan into the City's emergency response providers.

5.3.2 Safety

The City of Norwalk should develop a generalized policy that provides a framework for reducing roadway fatalities and serious injuries on all public streets and highways. The policy should be based on the current Highway Safety Manual and apply the 4E's of highway safety:

- ◆ Enforcement,
- ◆ Education,
- ◆ Engineering, and
- ◆ Emergency Medical Services

5.4 Access Management

As the population and employment within the City continues to grow, increased long distance commuting will result in greater demands on the city's arterials. Allowing unrestricted access to these arterials from new and existing developments will only serve to exacerbate congestion and safety issues over and above that caused by increasing through traffic. Implementing the following recommendations will help to preserve arterial capacity for through traffic and improve traffic safety.

- ◆ Formally address access management in all City transportation plans and State or regional corridor plans. The legal and policy components of access management should be in place in corridors before extensive development occurs. The City should require access control plans that meet their policy goals and minimize new accesses to arterials for new developments.
- ◆ Partner with the SWRPA and CT DOT to strengthen access management throughout the City. Regional and local planners should work together to ensure that the City's land use plans and arterial access management plans are coordinated. Since private interests frequently use the political process to



obtain direct access to arterials, local elected leaders and policy makers should be aware of the importance of access management to traffic flow and safety.

- ◆ Require circulation plans for new, large-scale development that conform to these access management guidelines.
- ◆ Increase spacing of signalized intersections on major arterials where possible. In locations where closely spaced signalized intersections already exist along arterials, one or more of the following actions should be considered:
 - ❖ Restrict cross movement from the side roads;
 - ❖ Limit arterial left-turn movements;
 - ❖ Remove the signalized intersection and force right-turn movements at the intersection or construct overpasses or underpasses, if financially feasible.
 - ❖ Build service or frontage roads to consolidate access points; or
 - ❖ Replace intersections with grade-separated interchanges.
- ◆ Reduce private access to arterials. Fewer driveways spaced farther apart allow for more orderly merging of traffic.
- ◆ Create an effective local roadway network that enables traffic to access local developments without using arterial roadways thereby preserving their functional capacity for through trips and provides alternate routes for local and through traffic in the event of a mainline emergency.

5.5 Bicycle and Pedestrian Policies and Strategies

Policies and strategies to promote bicycle and pedestrian activity relate to improved modal and neighborhood connectivity, improved facilities, and improved safety.

5.5.1 Improve Connectivity

To allow for increased bicycling and walking, connections among transit facilities, residential areas, activity centers, parks, and tourist attractions should be maintained where existing and established where missing. The following strategies support increased connectivity.

- ◆ Focus on improving Bicycle Level of Comfort along key roadway segments identified in the City of Norwalk Bicycle Master Plan.
- ◆ Expand the off-road trail system and create linkages among existing trails by implementing the recommendations of the City of Norwalk Bicycle Master Plan. Connect bike paths, sidewalks, and trails to fill in any gaps.
- ◆ Enhance and expand bicycle and pedestrian access to transit.

5.5.2 Improve Facilities

To ensure that bicycle and pedestrian facilities are improved and appropriately maintained, the following strategies are recommended.

- ◆ Integrate bicycle and pedestrian facilities into roadway development projects at both the State and local level. These facilities can include wider lanes, bike lanes, and paved shoulders, among other strategies. See Chapter 1-4 for more guidance on the approaches that are effective in the development of bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- ◆ Integrate bikeway and sidewalk maintenance and cleaning into established roadway maintenance routines.

5.5.3 Improve Safety

To improve safety for bicyclists and pedestrians the following strategies are recommended.

- ◆ Continue to develop bicycle and pedestrian safety plans for each project as it is introduced into the project development process.
- ◆ Plan, design, and construct bicycle and pedestrian facilities using appropriate design standards.
- ◆ Provide pedestrian and bicycle traffic control devices where appropriate.
- ◆ Provide bicycle and pedestrian route signage as appropriate.

5.6 Barriers and Challenges

The City of Norwalk will continue to face barriers and challenges to implementing those identified projects and strategies. These barriers and challenges generally fall into the following categories:

- ◆ Funding challenges;
- ◆ Growth, planning and zoning challenges;
- ◆ Political/Resident Challenges
- ◆ Geographical limitations.

5.6.1 Funding Challenges

It is expected that several projects for the City of Norwalk will inevitably require significant investments in new capacity, improved infrastructure, and/or right-of-way that can quickly escalate in cost and effort.



Major infrastructure projects, such as these, will require careful examination of potential revenue sources. In most cases, there will be no easy solutions, and the City of Norwalk, in conjunction with the Connecticut Department of Transportation may need to explore potential Federal funding options, pricing strategies, innovative financing arrangements, and other strategies.

Federal Funding

One key funding challenge facing the City of Norwalk, as well as the State of Connecticut and the nation as a whole, is the growing surface transportation investment gap. There are a number of reasons for this gap in investment, but one thing is clear ~ the gap is not likely to be closed in the near future. In combination with rising construction costs due to increases in oil and material costs, it has become difficult for Municipal agencies and states to generate enough revenue to address major projects.

Similar investment gaps are evidenced throughout all states, regions, and localities, including Connecticut. The high demand for transportation infrastructure projects combined with limited funding results in an environment where even worthy projects may not be funded due to greater needs demonstrated somewhere else.

State and Local Funding

Similarly, state and local municipalities typically face funding gaps for all the projects that they would like to invest in. Ultimately, the trend in today's economy is that local government participation in projects, potentially combined with private financing, will be essential to further their development and advancement, including assisting in purchasing or otherwise preserving right-of-way for new transportation infrastructure. The City of Norwalk should continue to prioritize projects on an annualized basis so that City Staff can focus on those priority projects and not spend limited resources on non-priority projects.

5.6.2 Growth, Planning, and Zoning Challenges

If the City of Norwalk is expecting to continue its growth over the next 20 years, an increased need for new transportation investments and new planning and zoning approaches will need to be developed. This assessment has presented a set of potential strategies for the City of Norwalk to consider, several of which are oriented towards improving the efficiency of the transportation system through improved land use policies and investments in the transit and other multi-modal systems.

One challenge that the City will face is the difficulty that long-time residents may have in embracing the transition from the Norwalk of their past to a newer Norwalk of the future. This may include the advancement from a low-density land use pattern to higher-density suburban and urban land use pattern. Yet to prevent widespread sprawl, and the congestion associated with it, it will be vital to develop high-density, mixed-use centers to encourage transit use and walkable and bikeable pedestrian-oriented lifestyles.

5.6.3 Political/Resident Challenges

Undoubtedly, many projects advanced through this process will impact environmental, community, and natural resources, and will possibly have a perceived impact on the quality of life for the residents of Norwalk. Moreover, they may have high capital costs and/or appear to favor one group of constituents over another. This may, in certain instances, add time and complexity to the project planning and development process as these elements are discussed, debated, and ultimately addressed in an engineering AND political forum.

It is because of these challenges that the Plan itself requires projects to undertake a public outreach and stakeholder identification/engagement from the outset of a project. Ultimately, this process is geared towards identifying project needs, addressing those needs using flexible engineering and design solutions, and vetting those solutions through an open and transparent process from start to finish.

5.6.4 Geographical Limitations

Some challenges are related to the fact the City of Norwalk comprises a number of neighborhoods and geographies that are very different in nature and appearance. The guidance section of the Plan provides a number of approaches that do not take a “one-size-fits-all” approach to dealing with transportation solutions. Careful consideration must be given to not only the defined need for a transportation corridor, but also the context in which it resides.

5.7 Conclusion

The Norwalk Transportation Management Plan was developed collaboratively by an integrated team of staff from the City of Norwalk, SWRPA, CT DOT, and a highly skilled consultant team. Through an extensive outreach process and a detailed analysis of transportation system conditions and needs, a set of strategies to reduce traffic congestion and promote strategic funding for transportation improvements in the City of Norwalk was developed, including:

- ◆ Providing improved transit options through analysis of and investments in high capacity transit options, park-and-ride facilities, commuter bus routes, and local transit;
- ◆ Enhancing the extent of information available for transit and highway users on the web, at transit stops and park-and-ride lots, and on the roadside;
- ◆ Promoting access management, operational improvements, and travel demand management strategies, to improve the efficiency of the transportation system;
- ◆ Promoting strategic capacity expansions that address the mobility, safety, and accessibility of the transportation strategically; and



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- ◆ Providing multimodal trail, bike, and pedestrian infrastructure and connectivity where needed.

Given the significant transportation financing challenges facing both the State of Connecticut and the nation as a whole, it will become ever more important to identify alternative funding and financing mechanisms for new transportation infrastructure investments and for local governments to participate actively in the development of projects. The Norwalk Transportation Management Plan represents a good example of how local needs can work together with regional, state, and federal agencies to address important transportation investment challenges.