

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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Fix it first.

This is a plan that puts a primary focus on road, bridge and transit maintenance and safety rather than capacity-building projects. It calls for nearly \$2 billion in transportation projects through 2045. Although we have made progress in reducing the number of poor bridges and in bringing our county transportation infrastructure to modern standards, there is plenty to do. The problem grows worse and gets more expensive each year as our roads and bridges age.

Welcome to the Berks County Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), our full-length report that provides context and detail to support future transportation funding and projects. This report addresses how we can meet the expectations for the Berks County transportation system over the next 20 years.

Over the past two years, we spoke with many Berks County residents about their opinions, needs and concerns about the transportation system. The challenges for us to build, operate, and maintain a system that meets the needs of the county have never been greater. To meet these challenges, this plan presents quality information in understandable terms, and is flexible enough to adapt to a constantly changing landscape of needs and resources. We have endeavored to make this a plan for the people of Berks County. It is part of our effort to bring transparency to the tough decisions we make.

Our transportation system is complex. Berks County is a large county – at nearly 900 square miles. It is the 18th largest in the state by area. It has nearly 3,400 miles of roads and nearly 900 bridges. The highway network is the backbone of its transportation system. Although most households have at least one car for transportation, some people remain transit dependent. Local bus service, as well as a paratransit service for persons with disabilities and elderly residents, is provided in and around the Reading metro area. Intercity bus service links the region to adjacent counties, Philadelphia and New York City. Taxi service is available in the region. Although trucks handle most of the region’s freight shipments, rail service is available via Norfolk Southern and several local railroads. The county’s primary aviation facility, Reading Regional Airport, provides general aviation, corporate, and charter passenger services. Walkways, bikeways, greenways, and other transportation enhancements are growing alternatives to motorized transportation.

Vision Statement

The Reading Area Transportation Study will provide and maintain a balanced, multimodal transportation system that will safely and efficiently move people and goods.

The Reading Area Transportation Study

Transportation decision making and funding is spread among many partners — legislators, PennDOT, local governments, this MPO, the Berks County Planning Commission, transit providers, privately-owned rail freight operators, transportation stakeholders and many others. In this report, we offer a snapshot of how these partners relate and how their respective transportation assets interconnect. Together, these pieces and partners form the county’s transportation system.



Queued traffic on the Penn Street Bridge in Reading.

Each urbanized area in the United States with a population of 50,000 or more is required by federal regulation to have a designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to facilitate transportation on the local level. In Pennsylvania, there are 19 MPOs. The Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) is the regional transportation planning organization for the Reading, Pennsylvania metropolitan area. The Reading MPO covers all of Berks County. RATS facilitates the regional, performance-based planning process that serves as the basis for spending state and federal transportation funds for improvements to streets, highways, bridges, public transit, bicycle and pedestrian networks allocated to Berks County.

Created in 1964, RATS is comprised of two committees – the Technical Committee and the Coordinating Committee. The Technical Committee reviews items brought before the group and recommends actions to the Coordinating Committee. The Coordinating Committee is the policy body that formally adopts items reviewed by the Technical Committee. The

eight-member RATS Technical Committee consists of representatives from PennDOT Central Office in Harrisburg (1), PennDOT District 5-0 Office in Allentown (1), the City of Reading (2), the Berks County Planning Commission (2), the South Central Transportation Authority (SCTA) (1), and the Reading Regional Airport Authority (RRAA) (1). The ten-member RATS Coordinating Committee consists of one representative each from the PennDOT Central Office, PennDOT District 5-0, Berks County Board of Commissioners, Berks County Planning Commission, City of Reading, Boroughs, 1st Class Townships, 2nd Class Townships, SCTA and the RRAA. RATS is responsible for prioritizing approximately \$80 million annually to advance transportation improvement projects throughout the county. PennDOT, SCTA and municipalities are responsible for project implementation.

The transportation planning staff of the Berks County Planning Commission serves as the technical staff to RATS. The staff coordinates and administers these committees, their meetings and leads development of the package of federally required MPO products including, but not limited to: the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), short-range Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), associated transportation conformity determinations (if required), the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), and the Congestion Management Process (CMP).

The TIP is a capital-funding program that contains all surface transportation projects eligible for federal funding and programmed for implementation over the next four years. The UPWP is developed each year to identify work tasks that RATS will accomplish to meet the goals and objectives outlined in the LRTP. Since Berks County is a Transportation Management Area (TMA), RATS uses the CMP to monitor and manage traffic congestion in an effort to maximize the use of existing roads and improve air quality.



The Long Range Transportation Plan

The LRTP discusses socioeconomic trends affecting travel, the current state of the county transportation network and characterizes transportation needs and multimodal transportation strategies to address these needs. The plan must be reviewed and updated every four years; the plan was last updated in 2018. The RATS LRTP must be consistent with both federal guidelines and the Pennsylvania statewide LRTP.

This plan uses performance-based and data driven planning to support more effective and structured project selection and programming decisions. In addition, this plan incorporates a lowest life-cycle cost approach, focusing on making improvements to extend the life cycles of roadways and bridges. The plan outlines the region's long-range transportation vision and identifies the projects that are necessary through the year 2045 in order to attain that vision. Most importantly, federal funding cannot be allocated to transportation projects unless they are included within the list of projects that is included in this plan. The projects must be fiscally constrained, meaning that RATS cannot plan to spend more money than it reasonably expects to receive.



BARTA's fixed-route service served nearly 2.4 million customers in 2020

The primary focus of this plan is "asset management" - to maintain and improve the county's transportation system with an emphasis on making better use of existing highway, bridge and transit facilities, while seeking to improve safety and reduce traffic congestion, energy consumption, and motor vehicle emissions. Due to its size and topography, Berks County has countless transportation assets - ranging from thousands of miles of roads, nearly 900 bridges, hundreds of miles of rail track to fleets of buses. Many parts of the county transportation network have reached the end of their designed life span and have deteriorated over time. The amount of financial resources we have to preserve every bridge and road is small in comparison to need. This plan leverages expected revenues to best address the needs of maintaining the transportation system through proper asset management and the implementation of low-cost operational improvements where feasible.

RATS has considered all locally available modes of transportation in compiling this plan, including the existing and future highway system, railroads, air travel, public transit, bicycle and pedestrian travel, and methods for improving intermodal connections for freight. Elements of the plan include an inventory of the county's transportation system, a listing of current and future problems that will need to be addressed, and a discussion of strategies to alleviate or eliminate these

problems and achieve the stated goals and objectives by the year 2045.

It is important to address one issue encountered during the development and update of this Plan which is the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has had worldwide impacts to everything from politics and culture to economy and ecology. The transportation system was not exempt from the impacts of the pandemic. As a result, information gathered yielded skewed results in the data and delays in data availability and project delivery. In an effort to present a more concise representation of the transportation system prior to the pandemic, and due to the delays in data availability, the data in this plan including but not limited to crash data, employment data, mode of transportation data, and freight data is primarily derived from pre-pandemic datasets that were available at the start of the update to this plan. The COVID-19 pandemic will be addressed in the datasets and information discussed in the next update of this plan.

Plan Consistency

RATS considered previously developed plans and policies to ensure consistency in direction. At the federal level, it must be consistent with applicable laws, rules, and regulations. It must be consistent with the state's transportation plans, programs, and policies. It must also be consistent with the policies and objectives of the Berks County Comprehensive Plan. Those requirements are summarized below.

Federal Transportation Requirements (Map-21, FAST Act, and IJIA)

The RATS 2045 LRTP is governed by many pieces of federal legislation which include the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) of 2012, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act of 2015, and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021.

The goals of MAP-21 include strengthening America's highways, establishing a performance-based program, creating jobs and supporting economic growth, supporting the United States Department of Transportation's (USDOT) safety initiatives, streamlining Federal Highway transportation programs, and accelerating project delivery and promoting innovation. These goals are illustrated through eight planning factors identified by Map-21 and two factors added by the FAST Act for special focus within the metropolitan planning organization's (MPO) long range transportation planning program. The RATS 2045 LRTP addresses these planning factors as appropriate, given the scale and complexity of many of the issues, including transportation system development, land use, employment, economic development, human and natural environment, and housing and community development.



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 of 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 of the transportation system, across and between modes, people and freight.**
7. **Promote efficient system management and operation.**
8. **Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.**
9. **Improve the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate stormwater impacts of surface transportation. (Added by the FAST Act)**
10. **Enhance travel and tourism. (Added by the FAST Act)**

MAP-21 also required MPOs to develop a performance-based approach to transportation decision-making to support the eight national goals of the federal aid highway program. This performance-based approach to transportation planning involves establishing performance measures and targets that track progress towards specific goals and objectives. In

general, performance measures identify strengths and weaknesses in the transportation system by evaluating whether specific components of the system are getting better or worse over time.

The Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act was signed into law in December 2015. This Act continued the emphasis and focus on highway safety, strengthening the relationship between planning and NEPA, federal grants for highway freight movement, restoration of funding for bus and bus facilities cuts by MAP-21, and the inclusion of discretionary transit grant programs.

Guiding future updates to the RATS LRTP will be the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) signed into law in November 2021. The IIJA includes the authorization of \$351 billion for highway and bridge programs and \$91 billion for transit programs over the next 5 years. Pennsylvania’s allocation for highway and bridge programs is anticipated to be approximately \$13 billion with approximately \$2.8 billion for transit programs over the 5 years. Funds are also allocated for safety programs, climate change mitigation, expansion of the electric vehicle (EV) network, airport infrastructure improvements, and various discretionary grant programs. As rules and regulations are developed to guide the use of these funds, RATS will continue to incorporate those principles into future transportation planning documents.



Interstate 78 in Berks County is a major trucking route.

The Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) developed rules to guide the development of performance measures at the state and regional levels. Both PennDOT and RATS use performance measures as they carry out Federal-aid highway programs to assess system performance. This LRTP has addressed MAP-21 requirements, FAST Act requirements and, to the extent possible, the IIJA. It is anticipated that there may be new or revised national performance measures because of the IIJA. RATS, in coordination with PennDOT, will incorporate these measures and targets in future LRTP updates.

In addition to MAP-21, FAST Act and IIJA, a number of other federal and state laws, regulations, executive orders, policy directives, and planning frameworks influence and guide this plan:

- **United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) 23 CFR (Code of Federal Regulation) Parts 450 and 500, and 49 CFR Part 613**
- **Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990**
- **United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Conformity Regulation (40 CFR Parts 51 and 93).**
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**
- **Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and related Presidential Executive Orders**

State Transportation Requirements

PennDOT established a Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan and a comprehensive Freight Movement Plan (FMP) that were adopted in December 2021. Those plans too, are required to be MAP-21 compliant.

THE 6 PRIMARY GOALS OF THE STATEWIDE LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN ARE:

SAFETY: Enhance safety and security for both motorized and non-motorized modes of transportation.

MOBILITY: Strengthen transportation mobility to meet the increasingly dynamic needs of residents, businesses, and visitors.

EQUITY: Improve transportation access and equity.

RESILIENCE: Strengthen transportation resilience to climate change and other risks and reduce the environmental impacts associated with transportation improvements.

PERFORMANCE: Improve the condition and performance of transportation assets.

RESOURCES: Structure transportation funding and finance approaches that allocate sufficient resources for system, safety, maintenance, preservation, and improvement.

THE 4 PRIMARY GOALS OF THE FREIGHT MOVEMENT PLAN ARE:

LAND USE: Align freight mobility with economic development and land use.

MOBILITY: Advance project investments that enhance freight mobility.

ANALYTICAL TOOLS & PROCESSES: Provide planning, data, and analytical tools for improved decision-making and collaboration with freight stakeholders.

OPERATIONS/SAFETY: Improve multimodal freight transportation operations and safety.

The RATS LRTP is consistent with the overall goals and policies of state and federal guidance. PennDOT continues to enhance and reassess performance measures and targets for the state. RATS has adopted the performance measures and targets set by PennDOT. It should be noted that this LRTP uses PennDOT-sourced data for pavement and bridge condition, crash statistics and relevant freight data so that our local performance targets and the data supporting them are consistent.

Berks County Comprehensive Plan

The Berks County Planning Commission updated the County Comprehensive Plan in 2020. This LRTP supports those goals within the County Comprehensive Plan. The transportation section of the plan had six primary goals:

1. The Reading Area Transportation Study will provide and maintain a balanced, multimodal transportation system that will safely and efficiently move people and goods.
2. To maintain and improve the transportation system and services we enjoy today where financially feasible.
3. To keep travelers safe and secure, no matter the mode of transportation.
4. To invest in projects that strengthen the ability of Berks County commerce to access national and international trade markets, and support regional economic development and tourism opportunities.
5. To give travelers a variety of well-designed transportation choices that are in good condition.
6. To enhance the performance of the county transportation system in environmentally sustainable ways that increase resiliency to both climate change and vulnerability to natural disaster.

Plan Adoption

The LRTP is adopted by RATS and is provided for information purposes to decision makers of its member jurisdictions, the FHWA, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), PennDOT, SCTA and most importantly, the public. Once the plan is approved, projects identified in the plan are eligible for federal and state funding. Inclusion of a project on either the LRTP or TIP is not a commitment of funds, an obligation of funds or a grant of funds. Projects included in the project lists will be scheduled for funding and construction within current and future RATS Transportation Improvement Plans (TIP). All projects programmed in these TIPs must first be identified in the LRTP or consistent with LRTP goals.

Though it is anticipated that projects identified in the LRTP that are on the short-range project lists will be programmed first, it is likely that some of the projects from the mid-range and long-range lists will also be programmed for funding and construction before this plan is updated again within the next four years.



Bartram Trail in Tilden Township

