

**PRINCIPLE**

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The functional capacity of the highway system should be maintained; the capacity and participation rates for transportation alternatives—including public transit, pedestrian and bicycling facilities—should be enhanced.

## The Growing Stress on Our Transportation Systems

Transportation issues are ubiquitous, ranging from a neighborhood wanting a stop sign at a busy intersection to land-use policies that can reduce the use of automobiles. Whatever the scale, every individual in our community is affected by transportation choices.

Transportation infrastructure, including highways and public transit, represents a huge and ongoing public investment. New York State, Tompkins County, and local municipalities struggle to maintain the existing network of roads, bridges, and public transit. Annual transportation expenditures by all levels of government within Tompkins County total about \$35 million.

At the same time, stresses on our transportation systems continue to grow. Low-density suburban and rural development patterns add to the length of trips and the number of

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vehicles on the road, resulting in increased traffic, congestion, and wear and tear on the infrastructure. This spread-out pattern of development, leading residents to live further from daily destinations and conveniences, typically lacks pedestrian and bicycle facilities that encourage physical activity and healthier lifestyles.

The geography of Tompkins County results in regional and intrastate traffic being funneled through the City of Ithaca. When this pass-through traffic is added to the already high volume of local traffic, it limits the effectiveness of strategies to channel vehicles away from urban neighborhoods in order to help maintain their livability.

On the other hand, Tompkins County is notable for its relatively high use of modes of transportation other than the single occupancy automobile, which may indicate that increased use of alternative modes of transportation is viable here.

**Census numbers for 2000 show that 18 percent of Tompkins County residents either walked or rode a bike to work.**

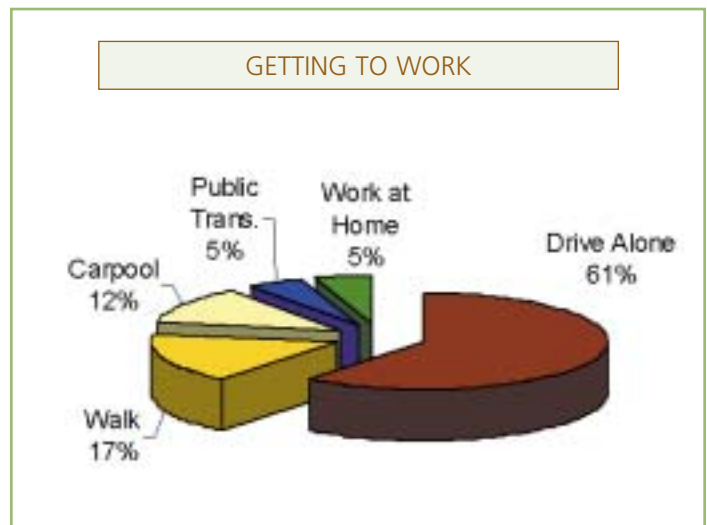
## How We Get Around

Studying the work trip is a good way to gauge how a community gets around. The 2000 Census reported that 60 percent of the total commuters (and 69 percent of non-students) in the county drove alone to work, as compared to 75 percent nationwide. Fully 40 percent of commuters used alternative modes of transportation, compared to only 25 percent nationwide. Tompkins County also has higher percentages of residents using public transportation, carpooling, walking, and working at home than in New York State as a whole. Non-automobile use is higher in the City of Ithaca and other areas where development is compact. Typically, if people need to walk more than 5 to 10 minutes to reach a destination, they choose to drive. Since low-density suburban and strip mall developments rarely are located within 10 minute walks of destinations, these types of development patterns result in increased traffic and congestion.

According to several indications, bicycle use is increasing in Ithaca and its environs. One measure is the number of bicycles people put on the public transit buses. Every Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit bus is equipped with a rack on the front to carry two bicycles at a time. The racks were used for 16,000 individual trips in 2002.

Census numbers for 2000 show that 18 percent of Tompkins County residents either walked or rode a bike to work. Public input on transportation issues often focuses on the desire for more and better opportunities to walk, bike, and take public transit. All this leads one to the conclusion that more emphasis should be placed locally on alternatives to cars.

Our highway corridors are critical to the economy of Tompkins County. They are the routes used by in-commuters and by virtually all freight service bringing goods into the community and taking locally manufactured items to other



Source: U.S. Census 2000

**We can reduce automobile traffic and support alternative modes of transportation by encouraging compact development.**

markets. Highway function is diminishing, however, as development extends along the major roadways.

Much commercial development, in particular, has occurred as unrelated, dispersed establishments. As a result, each tends to have two or more driveway cuts with few facilities to promote driver or pedestrian access between establishments. This development pattern places a strain on the functionality of the regional highway system. The primary function of arterial highways, which is to move traffic on a regional level, becomes more and more tied up with local traffic access to individual establishments along the length of the highway. If development patterns continue as they have – and as they are permitted by local zoning regulations – the functioning of our major highways will diminish. This will lead to more traffic congestion, longer commutes, and, in general, more time spent in vehicles. In addition, people with limited access to automotive transportation, such as teenagers, senior citizens, and the physically challenged, will be effectively excluded from these areas.

We can reduce automobile traffic and support alternative modes of transportation by encouraging compact development and by providing affordable housing near employment centers. Doing so will not only promote livable communities, but it will also keep overall transportation maintenance costs down. Even now, caring for our transportation network is a significant cost to taxpayers. If we continue to expand this infrastructure beyond existing population centers, these costs will continue to rise.

## Policies

Improving facilities for multiple modes of transportation, and focusing development in ways that reduce traffic generation and best utilize existing infrastructure networks, may be the only way we can hope to maintain a safe and functional system to provide mobility for access to jobs, goods, and services. Recognizing that most residents and travelers will continue to rely on the automobile, we need to maintain the functional capacity of our highway infrastructure by making investments in technology and design that increase the efficiency of the existing network. Additions or major modifications to the network should be made only selectively, and should be limited to those areas where transportation issues cannot adequately be addressed by other means. At the same time, we need to build the efficiency and participation rates for alternatives including transit, pedestrians and bicycling in order to limit the stress on our existing highway network.

### It is the policy of Tompkins County to:

- Preserve and maintain the design function and safety of the existing road network while making investments in technology and design that increase its operating efficiency.
- Make selective additions or modifications to the highway network to address capacity limitations that cannot otherwise be addressed.
- Coordinate land use and infrastructure planning to facilitate the use of multiple modes of transportation and to ensure that development occurs in a manner that maintains the design function of the road network.
- Enhance and promote the use of bicycles and walking as viable forms of transportation by supporting the provision of safe public facilities, including multi-use trails, bicycle routes, bicycle lanes, and sidewalks.
- Enhance transportation options and provide facilities that allow passengers to transfer easily and safely from one mode of transportation to another (e.g., biking to bus service).
- Provide affordable and accessible public transportation to important destinations among outlying nodes, the Ithaca urban area, and points outside the County.
- Promote a transportation system that supports nodal, compact development patterns and reduces negative environmental impacts.

## Action Items

*Action items are activities that Tompkins County government or community partners can undertake to implement policies.*

- TO DO** → Develop a bicycle suitability map for Tompkins County.\*
- TO DO** → Evaluate and implement transit stop improvements and a detailed transit passenger information system.\*
- TO DO** → Identify infill opportunities at nodes along transit lines.\*
- TO DO** → Determine feasibility of implementing a car sharing program in Tompkins County.\*
- TO DO** → Develop a County-wide State Route 13 Corridor Plan.\*
- TO DO** → Develop a traffic signal upgrade and intersection evaluation program.\*
- TO DO** → Develop a centralized, uniform accident reporting system.\*
- TO DO** → Conduct transportation infrastructure needs assessments for roadways, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians.\*
- TO DO** → Facilitate municipal review of local development regulations to address future performance of the transportation system.\*
- TO DO** → Implement recommendations in the Freight Transportation Study to minimize negative aspects of freight transportation, while increasing safety.\*