MOVING FORWARD

2050

A Vision for Transportation in Buffalo Niagara
One Region Forward gives us a starting point.

It reflects a regional voice of over 700 organizations and thousands of citizens. The community conversation on where we want to go as a region has been going on for decades and continues today. The plans we made in the past, and the citizens who played a part in their formation, are an essential part of this discussion. One Region Forward translated the shared values of these existing plans into a vision for our region’s collective future, and clearly defined that regional vision by gathering feedback from thousands of citizens, at public meetings, workshops, fairs, festivals and more. And with over 700 organizations engaged, One Region Forward formed a network of key actors to move the vision forward.

Objective data gives us more focused, targeted strategies and solutions to tackle short-term and long-term challenges. One Region Forward was a data-driven planning process. The plan provided relevant, compelling analysis and useful, original local data to help us craft smart decisions about our policy approaches and investments. It also developed online tools and numerous resources to support local decision making and collaboration, and metrics to tell us how our actions align with our shared values today and in the future.

Local-level planning aligns with state strategies and leverages federal support.

One Region Forward was grounded in the values of a strong foundation of local planning that will guide how we implement the region’s goals through specific strategies and targeted transportation projects. This vision is the foundation that will guide how we implement the future we want to see.

What does One Region Forward mean for transportation in Buffalo Niagara?

An engaged public shaped a wide range of recommendations to guide the work ahead. This list shows the strategies that our transportation system can move forward:

- Develop a land use pattern that supports our values.
- Manage the cost of public services.
- Promote a more compact pattern of development.
- Anticipate, accommodate and embrace demographic shifts.
- Improve access to healthy food for disadvantaged residents.
- Work for greater energy efficiency and conservation in our buildings and transportation system.
- Develop a regional “hub and corridor” transportation system.
- Create innovative financing mechanisms.
- Create a Buffalo Niagara International Trade Gateway.

Our future is tied to how we plan for transportation.

More than just a Transportation Plan

Metropolitan Transportation Plans are the primary tools that regions have for laying out significant, long term improvements in the regional transportation system. Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) such as the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council are tasked with developing and updating MTPs every four years in order to allocate federal, state and local dollars to transportation programs and projects throughout the regions they represent. While doing so, these plans need to follow certain guidelines, such as the ten planning factors stated in Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, and fulfill certain requirements. One broad legal requirement is for MTPs to be comprehensive (including all modes), cooperative (involving a broad array of stakeholders and other interested parties), and continuous (ever improving and evolving) in nature.

Metropolitan Transportation Plans give regions an opportunity to accomplish so much more than the basic requirements. The MTP approach laid out by legal stipulations and federal guidelines recognizes the critical impact a region’s transportation system has on its communities, economy and environment. In other words, these plans are not simply about improving a region’s transportation system, they give regions an opportunity to leverage transportation investments to realize goals for their economy, their environment and their quality of life. Likewise, Buffalo Niagara’s 2050 MTP will build off of where we are today and look at where we are headed tomorrow so we can realize what we want for our collective future. So this is more than just a plan, and it’s about more than just transportation – it is a regional vision for Buffalo Niagara, a better way for us to be Moving Forward to 2050.
Today marks a turning point for Buffalo Niagara. After decades of slow progress, our region is working together to take great strides in growing our economy, protecting our environment and revitalizing our communities. But transportation in Buffalo Niagara is still heavily car dependent. We pride ourselves as a “20-minute region,” but in reality, this only applies to those of us who drive. For residents who walk, bike or take public transit, as well as visitors flying in from out of town, getting around our region is often challenging and time-consuming. By limiting access to jobs, education, services and recreation, our current transportation system limits our opportunities to lead healthy, productive lives. And at some point, we will need to reduce congestion, in part by diversifying transportation options, to maintain that renowned “20-minute” efficiency for drivers while sharing it with travelers of other modes if we expect to turn recent signs of progress into lasting prosperity. Simply put, today’s transportation system falls short of our shared values and will not get us to our vision for 2050.

We moved away from compact neighborhoods built for people toward sprawling places built for cars.

OUR ECONOMY

After decades of stagnation, our economy has had more private sector job growth in the past five years than any point in a generation.

Buffalo Niagara, % Change in Private Sector Jobs
-1.2% to '90 to '95
-3.1% to '95 to '00
-2.4% to '00 to '05
5.5% to '05 to '10

WHAT WE’VE CONSUMED

Since 1992, we’ve consumed
64 square miles of undeveloped, open space.
3,532 linear miles of streams.
397 square miles of farmland.
2 Great Lakes, and Niagara Falls in our backyard.

WHAT WE STILL HAVE

693 square miles of undeveloped, open space.

OUR ENVIRONMENT

Public transportation is not an option for many in the region.

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Among Top 50 US metros
Buffalo Niagara’s Rank for Shortest Commute Times
...by Car #1 21 minutes
...by Other Modes #11 44 minutes
(Public Transportation, Walking, Biking, etc.)

Source: American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2015. NOTES: These ranks in the top 50 of population were excluded from ACS commute time data due to limited sample sizes: Washington, D.C.; Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL; Houston, TX; Las Vegas-Paradise, NV; and Birmingham-Hoover, AL. These were substituted by the next three largest metro areas (Buffalo-Niagara Falls, NY; Rochester, NY, and Grand Rapids, MI).


Buffered Places
Car-dependent Places
-9% Walkable Places
-12% Car-dependent Places

Since 1970, Buffalo Niagara’s Walkable Places have lost population while Car-dependent Places have gained population.
We can never know precisely where the future will take us, but we have a good idea of where we’re headed, and what challenges we’ll face along the way. Our future looks brighter today than in decades - our population is becoming more diverse, our economy is growing and our environment is being restored - but it will be strikingly different in ways we cannot predict. So our transportation will have to adapt to shifting preferences and future uncertainties, like a changing climate and advancing technology, in order to accelerate our progress while keeping traffic down and preserving our aging infrastructure. By collaborating to make smart investments that improve the safety and efficiency of all modes, transportation can get us to a future where our communities, environment and economy all thrive.

Where we are headed tomorrow

**OUR COMMUNITIES**

Our communities will grow stronger as we continue to invest in the places we live and work in today.

**OUR ECONOMY**

Our economy will continue to grow and provide more opportunities.

**OUR ENVIRONMENT**

We will continue to take better care of our environment - cleaning up contaminated land, protecting natural areas, and reactivating waterfronts.

**REMEDIATION SITES**

We’ve cleaned up **631 legacy sites and 11,600+ acres of land over the past 35 years**.

**LAND PROTECTION**

And we’ve protected over **180 square miles of natural land from future development**.
In 2050, our communities will be brimming with opportunities, providing residents with various lifestyle choices and attracting new, diverse residents, businesses, and investments from all over the world.

In 2050, our economy will be globally-competitive with shared prosperity that spreads economic opportunities and benefits to all residents in all neighborhoods.

In 2050, our environment will be ecologically healthy and easily accessible so that all residents and visitors have abundant opportunities to enjoy our region’s world class waterways and open spaces.

By 2050, we will be making transformative changes to the way we plan, fund and implement the region’s transportation investments through harnessing technological advances, making data-driven decisions, and utilizing creative and diverse partnerships and funding sources.

To get there, we will need transportation that connects our region with a variety of convenient options to promote opportunity, health and safety for all. At the same time, the system will bolster a globally-competitive economy with shared prosperity by encouraging efficient use of our resources and collaborating to make smart, forward-looking decisions that harness changes in the future.
What we’ll need to do to move our vision forward

Construct Complete Streets in strategic locations that work for all users.
Increase access to a variety of frequent, fast and reliable transportation connections.
Connect our natural assets via a network of parks, trails and waterfronts.
Create more quick and convenient ways for visitors to get to and around the region.
Improve opportunities for people to safely walk or bike for recreation, or for daily transportation.
Improve the safety of travel for all transportation modes—walking, biking, taking transit and driving.
Reduce congestion to maintain quick, convenient travel for drivers.
Provide reliable and equitable access to a range of housing, services, and education opportunities.
Support a diverse and changing population, including adults aging in place, young people and families just settling down.
Increase access to employment and job training opportunities, especially by making investments that revitalize and reconnect underutilized employment centers.
Promote active, healthy lifestyles in urban, suburban and rural neighborhoods.
Enhance access to health care, including preventative services, for residents of all ages in all neighborhoods.
Expand residents’ access to healthy foods in all neighborhoods by diversifying transportation options.
Develop a 21st century transportation infrastructure system that supports innovation, key regional industries and integrates evolving technologies.
Increase trade by improving our connections to key markets throughout our bi-national region and beyond.
Accelerate regional economic growth with efficient movement of goods and a well-connected workforce.
Better connect our region’s key strengths and unique assets, including recreational and cultural activities for tourists that reflect our regional heritage and values.
Increase mixed-use development that places services and opportunities near residents, employment centers and tourist destinations.
Invest in existing infrastructure to improve conditions for our current transportation system.
Reduce costs to maintain infrastructure while enhancing quality public services.
Revitalize unproductive industrial land and other underused areas that are already serviced by infrastructure, and reconnect them with a variety of transportation options.
Provide critical services like water, sanitation, electricity, and broadband in close proximity to transit infrastructure.
Make transportation investments that promote clean air and water for all neighborhoods.
Invest in transportation improvements that enhance the quality and quantity of our natural resources—waterways, waterfronts, wildlife habitats, and farmland.
Break our reliance on federal and state funding for transportation investments.
Leverage the private sector for transportation improvements.
Partner with a diverse and engaged public, including not-for-profits, community-based organizations, public bodies, and residents in general, to plan and implement transportation investments.
Institute a comprehensive project prioritization approach for transportation investments.
Increase the transparency of decision-making for transportation investments.
Integrate transportation into broader decision making networks that focus on the economy, land use, housing, and the environment to improve these systems in a coordinated way.
Make decisions that account for trade-offs in our capacity to achieve our multiple goals: managing and maintaining infrastructure, limiting costs, and diversifying our transportation system.

Connect our region with a variety of viable options
Promote healthy communities that are prim with opportunities for all
Bolster a globally-competitive economy with shared prosperity
Encourage efficient use of our resources
Collaborate to make smart, forward-looking decisions
Harness changes in the future

Some ideas to get there, we need our transportation to...

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These ideas and others will inform solutions and actions to move our vision forward.
Use rails and transit to capitalize on Niagara Falls and tourism.

Rails-to-trails, particularly for connecting rural areas with other parts of our region, are a strategy we need to pursue.

Everyone needs access to good transit. Transit access promotes economic equity.

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