Outlining the Contours of Our Future:

Mobility for Everyone

GENESEE TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL

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In our region, as in much of the country, personal mobility is directly related to social mobility. Our age and income largely determine how independent we are in terms of transportation. In other words, mobility may be a concern for youth, the elderly, single parents, the unemployed, low-income workers, the disabled, those who do not drive or own a car, and those for whom transportation costs are a burden.

For this study, mobility is defined as the ability of *everyone* to travel conveniently where he or she needs to go in a reasonable amount of time. The objective of this paper is to begin to outline the contours of a policy framework for responding as a region to the forces that affect mobility.

Driving Forces and Trends

There are 528,500 residential units in the Genesee-Finger Lakes region dispersed over 4,700 square miles. About 12,500 miles of roads connect people with one another.

These investments are paid for by tax dollars. They represent personal and financial security to 1.2 million residents, and are rarely surrendered willingly. In fact, new home finance mechanisms, Internet-based services, and aging-in-place strategies are making it easier for people to stay in their homes, as well as work, shop, bank, and even receive medical care from home.

While our land use patterns — particularly our roads and residential land use patterns — are relatively fixed, other forces change steadily and affect our need, our ability, and our options for traveling from place to place.

Age Structure

Following national, indeed global, trends, the share of older persons in our region is increasing relative to that of younger age groups. By 2035, the region is expected to have 72,000 more residents over age 65 than in 2010, and 37,000 fewer residents younger than 25.

Age	0 - 14		15 - 44		45 - 64		65+		85+	
	2010	2035	2010	2035	2010	2035	2010	2035	2010	2035
	18.2	18.1	39.1	38.1	28.4	23.0	14.3	20.9	2.3	3.0

Percent Distribution of Region's Population by Age 2010 - 2035

Sources: 2010 U.S. Census; Cornell University Program on Applied Demographics

As detailed in two previous GTC studies, *Our Burgeoning Senior Population: Remaining Mobile* and *Retaining Seniors to Revitalize Our Region*:

- Aging baby boomers are accustomed to traveling whenever they want and will be determined to maintain a high level of mobility; many, if not most, will likely have the financial means to do so.

- Aging-in-place is highly (almost exclusively) valued over living in group quarters, such as senior housing. Government and medical policy is moving towards helping people live independently. Living alone, however, is dependent on being able to shop, go to the doctor, socialize, and so on.

- Most of the region's elderly live in low-density suburban and rural areas where the need for mobility is greater.

In 25 years — the length of one generation in the United States — another major demographic shift will occur, and the fastest growing population group, and perhaps the largest, will no longer be seniors but children.

Income

Over 148,000 people in the region live below the federal poverty level. People fall into poverty for many reasons, including unemployment, divorce, retirement, disability, single-parenthood, and illness.

A recent GTC study, *Expanding the Conversation: Race, Income, Ethnicity, and Transportation*, found that:

- Poverty is increasing faster in the low-density suburbs than in the City of Rochester; about 60 percent of all persons in the region with incomes below the poverty level live outside the City, where there are fewer alternatives to the car.

- Transportation costs are a family's second largest expense after housing, accounting for about 16 percent of a typical household's spending.

- In our region, where jobs and services are spread over a vast area, opportunity is strictly linked to mobility. In particular, a car can increase employment potential and the ability to enter the economic mainstream.

Lifestyle

There is a small but notable trend, particularly in Monroe County, towards creating higher-density, mixed-use developments that are served by public transit. Single and two-person households historically are more disposed to locate in such developments.

However, the 2010 Census shows that by far the greatest movement of people in our region continues to be from cities and village centers to low-density suburban towns.
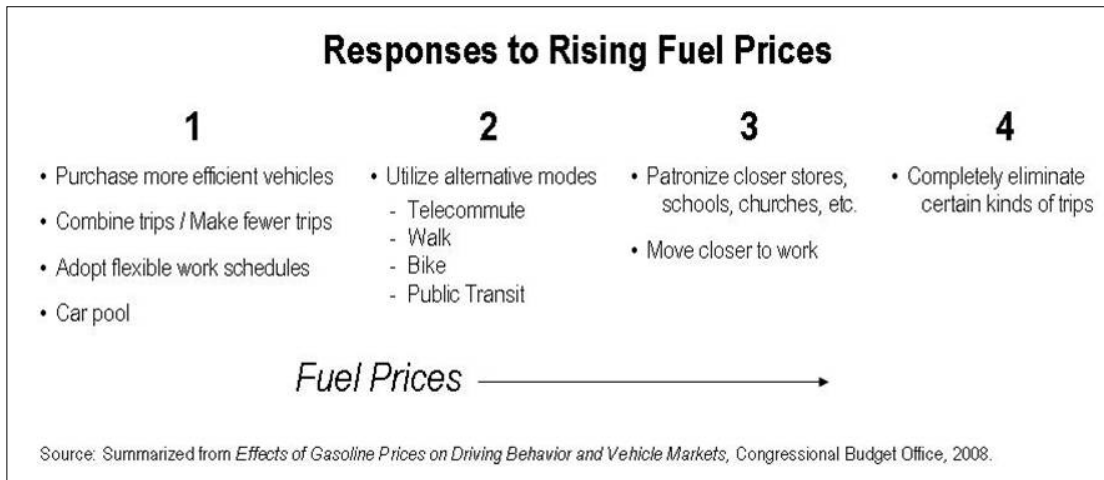
Population Change by Type of Municipality 2000 - 2010

	Genesee	Livingston	Monroe	Ontario	Orleans	Seneca	Wayne	Wyoming	Yates	REGION
Cities	-791	n/a	-9,217	-1,225	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	-11,233
Villages	-212	+282	+11	+659	-301	-314	-906	-874	+83	-1,572
Towns	+712	+781	+18,207	+8,273	-989	+2,223	+912	-395	+644	+30,368

Source: U.S. Census 2010

Energy Prices

Future oil prices are uncertain, but the general trend is towards sustained high prices. People's reactions to higher fuel prices are also uncertain, but it's not hard to envision a series of escalating responses from purchasing more efficient vehicles to changing driving habits to finding alternative modes of transportation to moving closer to work.

Responses to Rising Fuel Prices

1	2	3	4
• Purchase more efficient vehicles	• Utilize alternative modes	• Patronize closer stores, schools, churches, etc.	• Completely eliminate certain kinds of trips
• Combine trips / Make fewer trips	- Telecommute		
• Adopt flexible work schedules	- Walk	• Move closer to work	
• Car pool	- Bike		
	- Public Transit		

Fuel Prices ⟶

Source: Summarized from *Effects of Gasoline Prices on Driving Behavior and Vehicle Markets*, Congressional Budget Office, 2008.

According to the Census Bureau, median job tenure in the U.S. private sector is four years. Since job stability and income security are on the decline in the U.S., each set of responses to rising energy prices carries its own uncertainties. What kind of new vehicle will provide the best return on my investment, large or small, traditional or hybrid? Where is the best place for me to move to maximize job opportunities?

Other Uncertainties

Other factors, as yet unknown, will likely impact the demand for transportation services:

- Medical improvements and an increased retirement age that may keep seniors active longer.

- A possible influx of international immigrants, who tend to be young and aspire to the quality of life of mainstream Americans.

- Potential conflict between youth and elderly for limited public resources as our nation's age structure changes.

- A possible push by the federal government and businesses to produce relatively-affordable fuels from shale rock, biomass, and other resources that are unconventional but abundant in the United States.

- Future innovations to personal transportation that are cost-effective, quick, convenient, and safe.

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Outlining Our Future

In uncertain times, people want choices, alternatives, a Plan B. As someone famously said, "It's choice, not chance, that determines one's destiny."

For some in our region, there is no viable transportation alternative to a car, which they may or may not be able to afford, own, or drive.

Providing transportation choices that can result in mobility for everyone will likely require a series of actions that are coordinated under four broad policies:

1.   *Build partnerships with private operators to deliver transportation services.*

Because our region's population is widely dispersed, the ability to provide frequent public transit to key destinations is highly constrained. Buses, minibuses, and vans — whether operated by government or social service providers as fixed-route or demand-responsive service — require large public investment to avoid operating budget deficits.

Private sector involvement in transportation services, as sole provider or in partnership with government, offers the potential to lower costs, utilize new technology and expertise, share risks, gain access to increased capital, improve operating efficiency, and, ultimately, make regional transportation services more responsive to residents' needs.

The most plausible option for delivering transportation services to groups in our region with different needs, wants, and behaviors is through the use of small, maneuverable vehicles with flexible routes, longer operating times, and affordable fares. Such services, often referred to as jitneys or shared-ride taxis, are regulated in New York State to the point that they are financially unprofitable to operate.

> *Private jitneys, in theory, could tailor service to meet demand, picking people up at or near their residences and dropping them off at a desired location. Like other private enterprises, the constant pressure to maintain financial self-sufficiency would drive quality, contain costs, and ensure survival.*

If deregulated in New York, jitneys and shared-ride taxis likely could be run by private operators for a small portion of the cost of traditional public transit. To provide maximum flexibility for jitneys to meet unmet transportation demands while ensuring safety, routes, schedules, and fares would have to be deregulated, but safety standards and insurance coverage strictly enforced.

It's unclear whether jitneys could operate profitably in our region without at least a partial government subsidy; further analysis is warranted.

Self-service, 24/7 car-sharing is another private sector option worth exploring, particularly for people who do not need to drive every day, or perhaps as a complement to welfare-to-work programs.

2.   Coordinate and integrate existing and future transportation services and facilities.

Public transportation in our region might be described as a patchwork of services run by RGRTA, Ontario County, and numerous social service agencies and funded by a variety of different government programs. Lack of coordination may inhibit coverage, frequency, and quality of service. It can also drive up the costs of providing such services.

Mobility management is an innovative strategy for coordinating transportation services to enhance access, minimize duplication, and deliver the most appropriate, cost-effective transportation possible to the widest number of residents.

Federal surface transportation legislation defines mobility management as "short-range planning and management activities and projects for improving coordination among public transportation and other transportation service providers." Eligible activities include: operating transportation brokerages to coordinate service providers, funding resources, and customer needs; coordinating transportation services for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and individuals with low incomes; supporting local partner-ships that coordinate transportation services; staffing for the development and implementation of coordinated plans; providing travel training and trip planning activities for customers; developing and operating traveler call centers to coordinate travel information, manage eligibility requirements, and arrange customer travel; planning and implementing the acquisition and purchase of intelligent transportation technologies to operate a coordinated system.

The Genesee Transportation Council currently is guiding the development of a business plan for a regional mobility management program that connects individuals, especially seniors, persons with disabilities, low-income workers, and those without private motor vehicles, with transportation services to meet their mobility needs.

3.   Promote the most efficient use of community infrastructure.

In the long-run, mobility for everyone depends on greater coordination between transportation and land use planning. While improved coordination is a complex challenge for any jurisdiction in a home rule state, an emphasis on transit supportive development, active transportation, complete streets, and good building and subdivision design would go a long way towards moving individual communities beyond their (generally) discrete, compartmentalized planning in which each chapter of a municipal comprehensive plan is devoted to a separate topic, such as transportation, infrastructure, environment, etc.

Perhaps the most powerful way of facilitating the coordination of transportation and land use planning is by promoting universal design. Universal design is easily understood by all sectors of the public, enjoys broad appeal and support wherever it is adopted, requires no new state legislation or regional cooperation, and can be fully implemented locally.

Universal design would also ensure that we are maximizing our infrastructure investments. In 25 years — a full generation of a human life and the useful lifespan of most infrastructure — the elderly will be replaced by youth as the region's and nation's largest population cohort. By designing our buildings and communities to fit the needs of everyone, we will ensure that the investments we make today will remain viable in the future.

4.   Involve the public meaningfully in identifying needs and developing solutions.

Presumably, a transportation system, particularly a coordinated, regional system, exists for the people it serves. Since mobility issues are different for each population group, each key group must be connected to the planning process and remain connected during implementation and, importantly, evaluation. The broader community must also be aware of, and support, the process from the beginning. Strong, continuous community buy-in will provide the foundation for coordinated transportation responses as issues and needs emerge in the future. Timely, adequate, well-communicated responses can help ensure a long, productive life for a coordinated transportation system.

> **Universal Design**
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> Universal design is the process of making a product, building, or public space both aesthetically pleasing and useful for all people, regardless of age, income, or ability.
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> For example, well-designed pedestrian environments increase the mobility of everyone including older adults, parents with strollers, children, people with disabilities, and anyone who chooses to walk to their destinations. Universally designed buildings, including homes, are accessible to all people, ensure safety and comfort, and can be easily adapted to meet changing needs.
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> By better meeting the needs and increasing the mobility of all residents, universal design is also a tool for facilitating social interaction, community participation, and general "neighborliness".

Planning for Mobility

Nonexistent or limited transportation choices have significant impacts on quality of life, including the ability to access employment, health services, social and recreational activities, and education. These factors, in turn, affect regional economic growth, local government spending and taxation, and the environment.

Mobility, in other words, is at the heart of the region's most pressing issues.

Coordinating transportation services to improve mobility is logical and desirable, but that doesn't mean it will easy. Institutional rivalries, funding conflicts, bureaucratic hurdles, and legislative barriers have the potential to confound the best mobility improvement initiatives.

Addressing the full range of mobility challenges will take creativity and time. Creating the right circumstances for success, especially for longer-term measures, will require careful planning and consideration. An emphasis on mobility in all regional transportation planning and investments must be a major priority. This is a responsibility that GTC, in concert with public, private, and not-for-profit partners, can fulfill beginning with the implementation of the regional Coordinated Public Transit/Human Services Transportation Plan and the forthcoming Regional Mobility Management Business Plan.

About GTC

The Genesee Transportation Council (GTC) guides transportation planning in the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region, which includes Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates Counties.

By federal law, every urbanized area of the country with over 50,000 people must have a formal planning organization for transportation. The Genesee Transportation Council fills that role in our region. GTC is authorized to conduct transportation planning and oversee transportation investment.

The Genesee Transportation Council assures that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, national origin, disability, age, gender, or income status, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity.   GTC further assures every effort will be made to ensure nondiscrimination in all of its programs activities, whether those programs and activities are federally funded or not.

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