

# **REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION STUDY**

## **Tompkins, Tioga, Cortland, Chemung, Cayuga, Seneca, Schuyler Counties**

### **Study Format**

The Regional Transportation Study (RTS) is a planning project led by the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council and its partners in the Regional Transportation Planning Coalition to study transportation in the seven-county area including the counties of Cayuga, Cortland, Tioga, Chemung, Schuyler, Seneca and Tompkins.

The study will be consultant-led and will result in a strategic plan of programmatic and policy solutions to address transportation infrastructure, systems and/or operational improvements and enhancements needed to accommodate projected transportation needs from all sectors in the Study Area.

### **Background**

A group of community leaders from the Study Area representing county governments, higher education, transit, human services and planning interests – the Regional Transportation Planning Coalition - have been meeting periodically to discuss the need for better coordinated transportation in the Study Area. The group has determined that a transportation study is needed as an initial step in this process.

There is significant intercounty travel in the Study Area. For example, approximately 15,500 persons per day travel for work into Tompkins from neighboring counties, while approximately 4,500 commute from Tompkins to employment in other counties. Presently, the great majority of intercounty trips (work based and other) in the region are made by car on state highways. Potential and likely increases in fuel prices are projected to create a significant hardship to commuting workers, particularly low-income workers. Persons without cars have very limited opportunity to consider regional employment and/or educational opportunities, and face great obstacles in completing medical, social, shopping and other regional trip purposes. Intercounty travel demand is particularly acute in Tompkins County being that it is a regional employment center centered around Cornell University and downtown Ithaca, however similar dynamics are found with other large employers such as Tompkins-Cortland Community College and SUNY-Cortland.

Currently, intercounty commuter bus service (transit) is the most visible alternative to driving alone. However, transit is primarily available for high volume, peak commuter bus trips particularly to and from the Ithaca area. Any expansion in transit needs to take into account the current transit service operational and funding structure and limitations.

Statement of Regional Transportation Need:

- Need to provide transportation options in advance of potential future increases in fuel costs.
- Need to provide transportation options for human services and other non-commuting trips.
- Need to provide transportation options that facilitate movement of people in the Study Area.

Other Factors to Consider:

There is a growing demographic shift towards an aging, transit dependent population. Additionally, there is a growing interest in the positive side benefits of transit and other shared ride/use strategies including reduction of vehicle emissions, providing higher levels of mobility for those without reliable access to personal transportation, reducing the demand on the existing highway infrastructure and providing greater

economic resiliency in the case of gasoline price increases. Likewise there is an increasing demand for facilities to support pedestrian and bicycle transportation both within densely developed centers and between them.

## **Objectives of this Project**

The proposed study is envisioned as a regional mobility study, not just regional transit study or a highway based study. Its purpose is to generate recommendations that will lead to the increase and better management of mobility alternatives for intercounty travel in the Study Area.

A regional approach to mobility management looks to:

1. increase the efficiency and effectiveness of existing mobility services across all modes of transportation,
2. develop and market real mobility choices to the public, and
3. enable coordination among counties to provide the best possible cost effective transportation programs for the Study Area.

The recommendations from the regional transportation study are to be comprehensive, including all alternatives to reduce drive-alone automobile trips and to provide realistic options to persons who are unable to or choose not to drive. With an effective regional mobility program we seek to reduce the volume, or at least reduce the growth rate, of commuter traffic on the highway network. The analysis of bus transportation in the Study Area, including commuter bus and intercity bus services, is expected to be a major component in the study. In addition to bus, there are mobility programs, such as van pools, guaranteed ride home, ridesharing, etc., which should be analyzed for coordinated implementation region-wide. Human service programs have intercounty travel needs which must be also be coordinated to reduce costs of public programs and provide access to needed services.