



2004 Regional Progress Report



**Executive Summary
September 2004**

Executive Summary

Since the adoption of its first Long Range Plan in 1996, the WILMAPCO region has worked to meet the objectives of its Regional Transportation Plan (RTP 2025). This document is designed to summarize the efforts WILMAPCO and its member agencies have undertaken to fulfill the goals set out in our RTP. By providing performance indicators for each goal and objective, we can determine which aspects of the plan are moving in the right direction, as well as those that need attention.

First, it is important to understand what has changed in the region between 1996 and 2003:

- **Nearly 18,000 new households added (8.6% increase)**
- **Over 46,000 more people in the region (8.3% increase)**
- **28,200 jobs created (9.7% increase)**
- **178,000 additional daily trips made (11.0% increase)**
- **Average Trip lengths increased from 7.9 to 8.9 miles (12.6% increase)**
- **2.35 million more vehicle miles of travel (14.1% increase) despite only a 4.2% increase in lane miles**

Areas of Success— In spite of the challenges we face, progress can be seen towards meeting several of the goals set by the RTP:

- **Nearly 67,000 acres of open space and farmland preserved in both counties** - Through various state, county, municipal and nonprofit group efforts, thousands of acres of land have been permanently protected from development.
- **VOC & NOx emissions remain below mandated levels** - Based on the emissions budget set by the EPA, both Cecil County and New Castle County are currently below those levels. Through cleaner fuels, transit increases and several other mitigation strategies, we have achieved compliance.
- **Scenic Byway designations** – Since 2000, a total of 79 miles of roadways have been designated as scenic byways throughout our region.
- **Increased use of carpooling in New Castle County** – According to annual surveys, there has been a 7.8% increase in workers carpooling to work. The Transportation Management Association (TMA) has aided in implementing the Rideshare Delaware program which has paired workers for van/carpooling. Since 1997, the TMA has estimated a reduction of nearly 1.2 million work trips, subsequently decreasing the vehicle miles traveled.
- **Significant increase in multimodal project funding** – Instead of traditional projects that include only road improvements, projects now contain sidewalks, bike paths and transit stops. Multimodal projects now represent around 40% of the total transportation projects investment, up from only 5% of the budget in FY1997.
- **Increased E-ZPass usage** - A proven effective method to reduce congestion along our toll roadways, usage of E-ZPass has been on a steady increase. In its short history, we have seen usage up 4.1% along US 40 and I-95 locations in Maryland between FY2002 and FY2003.

- **Population growth remains highest in the desired Center/Community Investment Areas** - 70% of population growth has occurred in these two areas since 1996. This is in line with the goal of the RTP to focus investments within these locations, where roughly 85% of TIP spending has been allocated.
- **Unemployment rate remains below regional and national trends** - A low unemployment rate is another solid measure of good job diversity within a region. Avoiding large spikes in unemployment rates can be viewed as being a result of having the right mix of employment type to minimize the impacts of a downturn in any particular job sector. With the exception of 1996 and 2000, the region has generally been below the rates of the surrounding metro areas as well as the nation.

Areas in need of improvement – In some cases however we have found some indicators showing signs of strain on the transportation system.

- **Ozone exceedences above EPA allowances for both 1 hour and 8 hour standards** - We have yet to have a 3 year period in which we have met the standard set by the EPA for ozone levels. In 2005 the stakes become greater. A new 8-hour standard will be instituted for compliance, making this challenge all the more difficult.
- **Slight decrease in population within ¼ mile of a transit stop** – With an increasing number of housing developments taking place in previously unsettled parts of our region, these areas have little to no transit access. These auto-dependent neighborhoods make it very difficult to achieve our goals of reduced VMT and air quality standards.
- **Transit ridership growth falling below long range plan target trend** – Since 2002 we have begun to fall below the target trend set by the DTC Long Range Plan. The plan called for a 130% increase in ridership by 2025. Fixed route ridership has been the source of the falloff, while SEPTA and paratransit ridership has increased.
- **Increased demand in paratransit routes straining DTC budget** – Paratransit, while seeing the largest percentage increase in ridership since 1996, is unfortunately the costliest per trip. With transit funding remaining relatively constant, this level of service may not be sustainable. With a cost of roughly \$27 per trip, DTC has had to increase its paratransit funding from \$7.3 million to \$15.7 million in 7 years, a 115% increase.
- **Park & Ride usage falling despite increased facilities** – While there has been a successful effort to add Park & Ride facilities, they are not being used extensively. The overall usage has shown a decrease in recent years. Between 2000 and 2003, the overall usage for park and ride (and park & pool) facilities has fallen from 35.6% to 33.8%.

Status of RTP Projects

Although we are only a few years into our 25-year plan, we have made progress in completing several of the projects detailed in the plan. With the help of sub-regional studies such as Route 40, Churchman's Crossing and Wilmington Initiatives, we have been able to turn many concept ideas into completed projects. Since the adoption of the plan in 2002, 8 projects have been completed from the list:

- Wilmington Courthouse Area Streetscape Improvements
- Bulkhead Rehabilitation along Christiana River
- Water Street East Extension
- Wilton Boulevard and Appleby Road Sidewalk Improvements
- US202, Augustine Cutoff to Independence Mall Roadway Improvements
- Blue Ball Area Utility Relocation
- Harvey Road Traffic Calming
- US 202 West Side Roads

There have been modifications to the scheduling for 35 of the planned projects with 17 of these being moved forward and 10 being pushed back. Table 1 lists these projects in more detail including from which sub-regional study (if any) they emerged.

Table 1: RTP Project Status List

Projects with Changes in Completion Year	RTP In-Service Date	Comments	Legend
Churchmans Crossing Plan			
DE 4 / DE 7 Christiana Center	2005	Not Completed/ No Construction Funding	Project Not Completed or Funded for Construction
DE 273/ Harmony Rd	2005	Not Completed/ No Construction Funding	Project scheduled for completion AFTER RTP date
DE 273/W. Main St/ Christiana Connector East	2004	Not Completed/ No Construction Funding	Project Not Completed or Funded for Construction
DE 273/ Old Baltimore Pike	2003	Not Completed/ No Construction Funding	Project Not Completed or Funded for Construction
DE 2 / Harmony Rd	2006	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2007	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
DE 273/Chapman Rd	2007	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2005	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
I-95, Maryland Line to Churchmans Marsh			
New Toll Booth on I-95	2005	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2007	Project scheduled for completion AFTER RTP date
Wilmington Initiatives Plan			
West Street Connector	2006	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2007	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
King / Orange Transit Corridor	2008	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2007	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
Walnut Street Corridor Improvements	2008	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2005	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
Market Street Retail Corridor Improvements	2008	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2005	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
Downtown 4th Street Project	2008	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2007	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
Riverwalk VII	2009	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2006	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
Other Wilmington Improvements			
Interstate Access	2005	Not Completed/ No Construction Funding	Project Not Completed or Funded for Construction
Water Street West	2005	Project Scope Expanded	
West Street Connector	2006	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2007	Project scheduled for completion AFTER RTP date
Riverwalk VII	2009	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2006	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
US 40 Plan (2003-2008)			
Newtown Road Ramps-Full interchange with DE 1	2005	Not Completed/ No Construction Funding	Project Not Completed or Funded for Construction
DE 72/US 40	2008	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2006	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
Walther Road/US 40	2008	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2005	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
US 40 Plan (2003-2008) (Cont'd)			
Eden Square Connector	2008	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2005	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
Sidepaths - US 40 (DE 72 to DE 1)	2008	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2007	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
Walther Road (Old Baltimore Pike to US 40)	2008	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2005	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
US 202 / DE 141 Area			
Widen Tyler McConnell Bridge to 4 lanes	2005	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2006	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
I-95/US 202 Interchange - Widen NB I-95 off-ramps to 2 lanes	2008	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2006	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
DE 141 and Old Barley Mill Road	2005	Scheduled for Program Development in FY 2005	
Blue Ball Area			
US202, Broom Street to I-95	2005	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2006	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
City of New Castle			
Rebuild 6th/Chestnut/DE 9 Intersection	2008	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2006	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
Rebuild 3rd Street/DE 9 Intersection	2008	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2005	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
Other Intersection / Road Improvements			
Iron Hill Bikeway	2005	Not Completed/ No Construction Funding	Project Not Completed or Funded for Construction
DE 2 and Red Mill Road Intersection Improvements	2005	Scheduled for Program Development in FY 2007	
DE 7 North of Valley Road to PA line	2005	Scheduled for Program Development in FY 2005	
US 13 and DE 273 Intersection Improvements	2005	Scheduled for Program Development in FY 2008	
Brackenville Road, Lancaster Pike to Barley Mill Road	2004	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2006	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date
Possam Park Road from Possum Hollow Road to Old Possum Park Road	2009	Scheduled for Construction in FY 2007	Project scheduled for completion BEFORE RTP date

Conclusions and Future Challenges

“Opening the Door to Change” is the title of our latest long range regional transportation plan. Its goal was to lay the groundwork for changing policies, procedures and spending within our region. However, change comes at a price and, with our current economic climate, priorities must be set. With what may seem to be an endless list of challenges that face our region, we only have a finite level of funding to address them. Timely, efficient planning is critical to achieve the goals set forth by the plan.

This progress report was designed to review these challenges and to gain a better understanding of which areas need the most attention. Since this report will be produced annually, it can serve as a catalyst to initiate modifications to planning activities such as data collection, regional studies and research analysis. These activities allow for continuous course correction as needs are identified, rather than waiting on the three-year RTP cycle. Based on the findings from this year’s effort, our indicators show that the following items need to be addressed, since they represent some of the more pressing issues:

Significant Trends

- The new stricter ozone standards will continue to challenge our ability to meet conformity. Beginning next year, additional requirements will be set for Particulate Matter (PM 2.5). New measure will need to be introduced to ensure we reach conformity for all air quality standards under the Clean Air Act.
- Auto crashes, and bicycle and pedestrian accidents in New Castle County remain higher than the national average. We need to work with our agencies to determine the causes and how we can reverse this trend.
- According to our residents, fear of accidents is their primary reason for not bicycling more. As our statistics show, this is a valid concern.
- A higher percentage of people are choosing to drive alone and carpool, while other multimodal usage (transit, walking or biking) has seen a decline. From a high of 6.8% in 2002, non-auto usage dropped to 3.9% in 2002.
- In New Castle County, bus ridership has not increased since 2001 when it dropped from 7.4 million riders to 6.9 million in 2003. In order to meet DTC’s goal of 18.57 million riders by 2025, we will need to begin promoting transit more or provide services that will attract more riders. Ridership in Cecil County has seen a steady increase of riders on The Bus where 1,600 riders in 1998 has swelled to 5,700 riders in 2003.
- Progress on the East Coast Greenways is slow. While the project goal is to see the entire stretch completed by 2010, less than 10% of the Greenway has been completed in our region.
- Respondents to our surveys are steadily accepting growth below the C and D Canal. But according to the other land use questions we have asked, they would like to see developments that provide better design for walking and biking and more access to transit, while preserving farmland and openspace.

Many of these trends may be the result of our current development patters. By rethinking how new neighborhoods and communities are built, we can provide safe multimodal alternatives. This will

require our agencies to encourage new land use patterns that reduce our dependency on the automobile, while still providing adequate services to maintain our much needed roadway system.

Future Challenges

Short Term (1-3 years)

- ***Revisit Transportation Investment Areas:*** Starting this fall, WILMAPCO will open up a discussion with state, county and local governments on possible revisions to our Transportation Investment Areas.
- ***Review and report on findings from recent municipal comprehensive plans:*** With virtually all municipalities completing comprehensive plans in the past two years, staff needs to review the plans and work with the municipalities to get their transportation goals implemented.
- ***Begin work on transportation equity analysis addressing the needs of the elderly:*** WILMAPCO is planning to produce a second Environmental Justice report dealing with the mobility issues of our aging population. It will review current and future demographic patterns and attempt to get a firm handle on how to address the needs of this growing group in our region.
- ***Continue to plan for multimodal projects:*** Efforts must continue to make transportation projects as multimodal as possible in order to reduce auto dependency by making options available.
- ***Examine transit funding levels to support changing ridership patterns:*** The growth of paratransit has created a strain on the operations budget, causing its portion of the total budget to rise from 26% (\$7.3 million) to 33% (\$15.7 million) since 1997. At this current rate, service cuts for this or other transit services may occur if funding levels do not match demand.

Long Term (4+ years)

- ***Help keep the Port of Wilmington competitive in the world market:*** In the highly competitive shipping industry, ports must remain accessible and convenient for a variety of goods and vessels. Efforts should be made to provide assistance to keep the port an active part of our economy.
- ***Make efforts to address "Knowledge Gaps":*** Throughout the document, there are identified areas that are important to monitor for which there is inadequate data. Efforts should be made to locate (or create) data that helps us track changing conditions. A section will be included in subsequent Progress Reports to maintain a status on these and what activity is occurring with each.
- ***Increase Rail Alternatives:*** Two rail studies are underway potentially linking existing commuter service in Wilmington, Churchmans Crossing and Newark with Elkton, Perryville, Middletown and Dover.