



# “Planning for the Unplanned: Future Disruptions” Event Summary

Location: Online event

Date: Thursday, April 16, 2020, 6:00 to 7:00 pm



## About UpNext North Jersey

UpNext North Jersey (UpNext) is a pilot emerging leaders group that engages young North Jersey residents in a dialogue with the NJTPA regarding important regional issues. The NJTPA seeks to better understand the values and needs of this demographic group related to regional transportation and land use issues. The NJTPA provides UpNext members with unique opportunities to engage with regional thought leaders and decision-makers and also provide creative and fun ways for participants to “give back” to communities.

The Public Outreach and Engagement Team, part of the Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers University (Rutgers-POET) is working with the NJTPA to plan four events for UpNext members throughout FY 2019-2020. The first event, the program kickoff, occurred in September 2019 at the NJTPA offices in Newark. The second event took place at the Paterson Museum in January 2020. Rutgers-POET worked to plan a third event in Asbury Park in March 2020; however, this event was canceled due to NJTPA and Rutgers policies related to COVID-19 that canceled group events through the spring and summer. In order to make up for this event, Rutgers-POET proposed holding a virtual program that allowed members to discuss the impacts of the pandemic. This report describes Rutgers-POET’s event planning and promotion work for the event, memorializes the presentations that took place, and summarizes comments made by UpNext members during a discussion about the pandemic’s impacts on the transportation system.

## Overview of the *Planning for the Unplanned: Future Disruptions* Event

This online event featured presentations and discussion on how we can better adapt to the “continued unanticipated change and further structural disruptions” forecasted for the coming decades by Dean James Hughes of the Bloustein School for Planning and Public Policy. Lois Goldman, Director of Regional Planning at the NJTPA, gave a presentation and facilitated a discussion on the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and how the NJTPA can account for these impacts in the agency’s next Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for the region. Several UpNext North Jersey members also gave presentations on potential disruptions that the region may face and possible adaptations.

### Promotion

Rutgers-POET promoted the event through social media and email invitations to UpNext members. Members received a save-the-date invitation, followed by several rounds of emails to request RSVPs and provide more information about the event agenda and day-of logistics. Rutgers-POET also promoted the event on the private UpNext Facebook group by creating an event page where Facebook users could RSVP.

### Planning

Leading up to the event, Rutgers-POET worked with NJTPA staff to develop an event agenda, secure speakers, and test the video conference platform. NJTPA communications staff worked with planning staff to craft a presentation and discussion questions regarding the impact of COVID-19 on planning considerations for the LRTP. Rutgers-POET reached out to members to request several volunteers who would give a presentation on a topic of their choice related to the theme of “future disruptions.” Four members volunteered to give short presentations and worked with Rutgers-POET to develop presentation material, however one presenter was unable to attend.

### Agenda

*6:00 to 6:10 pm – Welcome remarks:* David Behrend, NJTPA Deputy Director, kicked off the event with welcoming remarks and introductions. Ted Ritter, NJTPA staff, then gave a brief overview of the LRTP process and how it seeks to account for disruptions and uncertainty. To further set the stage for the event’s focus, the group viewed a short clip from Dean Hughes’s presentation to the NJTPA Board in which he forecasted that “widespread and unrelenting technological, economic, and demographic disruptions and structural change will continue to characterize our future.”

*6:10 to 6:30 pm – Member presentations:* Three UpNext members gave the following presentations:

- » Marc Lincer presented on options for diversifying the North Jersey region’s transportation system to include a wider range of modes that would enable system-wide resilience in the event of extreme weather or other disruptive hazards.
- » Kyrillos Girgis presented on the risk of sea-level rise in Hudson County, showing the areas that would be most impacted and how urban land uses are prevalent in these areas and increase the need for adaptation strategies. Kyrillos’s presentation was interrupted due to technical issues, but he was able to give the remainder of his presentation at the end of the event.
- » Vincent Marchetto presented on engineering strategies to adapt coastal urban communities such as Jersey City to sea-level rise and increased flooding.

*6:30 to 7:00 pm – “Plan 2050: Post Covid-19 Considerations” presentation and discussion:* Lois Goldman, NJTPA staff, led a presentation and discussion about the implications of COVID-19 for Plan 2050, the upcoming LRTP. The presentation included the “game changers”—new technologies, demographic trends, and land development patterns—that the NJTPA considered when completing the last LRTP, Plan 2045. Many of those game changers are still relevant to Plan 2050 and some, such as increased telecommuting and home deliveries, have intensified due to

the pandemic. Participants discussed the short-term, medium-term, and long-term impacts of the pandemic on land use and transportation and considered strategies for increasing the region's resilience and equity in the face of future hazards.

## Attendance

Of the approximately 30 people that attended the UpNext kickoff event in fall 2019, approximately 15 members participated in this virtual meeting. This attendance is comparable to the event at the Paterson Museum, which had 14 attendees.

## Feedback

This section summarizes the feedback the NJTPA received from UpNext members about changes in travel and land use patterns caused by the pandemic. UpNext members described their experiences and their observations of how the pandemic has caused a shift in travel mode preferences, such as a renewed interest in modes like biking and walking, as well as a change in transportation needs as more people work from home. The group considered how these short-term changes in the ways people travel may give way to long term, systemic changes, such as improved bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, an increase in telecommuting, and concerns about sanitation practices on public transit. The specific comments and ideas shared during the discussion are summarized below.

### *The pandemic has created more interest in biking and walking that could be translated into infrastructure improvements and open streets.*

- » On roads, there has been a shift from automobiles to bicyclists and pedestrians. Could biking and walking become more prevalent? Could people ask for more bike and pedestrian oriented infrastructure?
- » Changes in street design would be needed to adapt to an increase in biking and walking.
- » People better understand sharing the road now based on increased interactions with bicyclists instead of through traffic safety campaigns.
- » A successful example in converting transportation infrastructure: Somerset County shut down Division St. in Somerville and converted it into a well-lit pedestrian plaza, and it has now become a very popular and inviting space among residents.
- » Encourage Ciclovía or open streets year-round.
  - Open streets events can be an opportunity to evaluate the bike-friendliness of the streets that are closed to vehicle traffic. If a different set of streets is closed each year for the event, over time a town or city can evaluate most of its streets.
  - The general public gets used to street closures as more of these events happen.
  - New Brunswick has run successful Ciclovía events for the last few years

### *Increased telecommuting creates new policy considerations and opportunities.*

- » Telecommuting can be used for more than just a pandemic. There is an opportunity to use it on days with poor air quality/high ozone levels or during inclement weather. There could also be city-ordained telecommuting days, where employers agree to a program of alternating telecommuting days for their employees.
- » The people who are able to telecommute hold white-collar jobs. Therefore, the commuting demographics will consist of people with lower incomes. Transit agencies should consider changing fare structures to support lower income commuters.
- » Many types of jobs cannot support telecommuting. Policies should be considered to help low-income commuters.

### *Reduced vehicle traffic has created opportunities to improve and expand infrastructure for other travel modes.*

- » Towns may be more willing to engage in tactical urbanism in the realm of bike/pedestrian infrastructure
- » The reduced flow of traffic created opportunities for express bus service and to reorient existing infrastructure to being more transit friendly to learn more about their results

- » Participants mentioned an easier buy-in for temporary solutions since municipalities are willing to participate in experiments rather than commit to wholesale changes in infrastructure.

*Future reopening prompts questions about health and safety at work and while commuting.*

- » We will learn a lot from manufacturing and warehousing businesses because they will be the first businesses to reopen. How are these firms adhering to social distancing? What PPE will they provide once they reopen?
- » How do we know public transit is sanitary? What do we want to see that gives us confidence in the safety of public transit infrastructure?

*Other comments.*

- » Homelessness remains a big problem that becomes even more difficult to address during a pandemic.
- » Government policy to open “slow streets” but close parks seems contradictory and should be rethought. Were parks closed due to budget shortfalls in local governments?