Imagine Transportation 2.0
A Vision for a Better Transportation Future in Southwestern PA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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RegionalTransportationAlliance.org

March 8, 2017
An Open Letter to the Greater Pittsburgh Region

If you’re spending a lot of time thinking about transportation, that’s probably not a good thing.

Because it means you’re stuck in a traffic jam that’s making you late for work or class. Or you’re trying to figure out whether or not you can find a bus that runs from where you are to where you want to be. Or you’re inching your way through a construction zone on a street being torn up again, even though it was just repaved a couple months ago.

And you might be thinking: Why does it have to be this way? Why can’t it be better?

We’ve spent a lot of time over the last 18 months asking those same questions. And we have some ideas that we want to share with you.

Our conversations started nearly three years ago when some of us joined a group of business and civic and political leaders that traveled to Denver to learn how that region was solving its challenges. One lesson we brought home was how the broad community came together to embark on a new and different and imaginative way to solve its transportation problems.

At the same time, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission – the formal transportation planning body for our region – was preparing its plan for the next 25 years. It said there were a lot of improvements people talk about but never really go anywhere. If we really wanted change, we would need an “ongoing regional discussion” to find new solutions.

So that’s what we’re doing.

With the support of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, public- and private-sector representatives from across the region formed the Regional Transportation Alliance to ask the question: How can we do better at transportation?

And we asked you, the people who live and work here, since you’re the best experts on how transportation needs to work in your life.

We reached out to nearly 1,000 different groups across the region to ask that question. We held focus groups. We talked to technologists looking at the future. And engaged with the state officials who deal with it today.

The result is imagine Transportation 2.0. Today, we’re living in Transportation 1.0. Let’s think about what’s next.

We’ve come up with Seven Principles to help guide investment. And we’ve included 50 Ideas to Explore that could help us live up to those principles and address the problems you told us about.

We think they’re good ideas, but we know they’re not the only good ideas out there. Advancing any of them will require new ways of thinking about our region. New levels of collaboration. Community champions who are willing to push. And active public support from you.

We want to know what you think of our ideas. But we need to do more than just talk about the future.

We all want things 20 years from now to be better than they are today.

But if we don’t get started now, we won’t get anywhere new.

So let’s get started.

Signed,

The Regional Transportation Alliance of Southwestern PA Steering Committee

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Co-Chair: Brian Heery, Mitsubishi Electric Power Products, Inc.
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Imagine Transportation 2.0

VISION STATEMENT

Better Mobility for All

People in our region want better transportation. Better roads, better tunnels, better transit, better bike lanes and trails, better sidewalks. Better connections between places, and better ways to get from here to there. For people and for goods.

Better, because we need to be. To serve the people and businesses that are located here, and to attract new ones. People want better connections to jobs and education, more convenience, safety, and reliability. People want more options.

Yesterday’s solutions simply won’t work for tomorrow’s challenges.

Big data, smart phones, self-driving cars, intelligent traffic signals, service-on-demand: What technology did for communications, it can do for transportation.

But if we want things to change, then we have to try something new – and we can’t be afraid to fail.

Defining a Balanced Vision

Our region is complex: 2.5 million people, 7,000 square miles, urban, suburban, rural, new economy and traditional, short-term fixes and long-term strategies. One size will not fit all.

After a year of reaching out, asking questions, researching opportunities, and sizing up the competition, the Regional Transportation Alliance recommends this path forward to a transportation future of better mobility for all.
Seven Principles for a Better Transportation Future

1. **Optimize our existing assets**
   We need to make the most of everything we already have. Where there are opportunities to optimize existing transit assets, roads, trails, and other infrastructure with strategic connections and innovative designs, let’s start there.

2. **Prioritize connections to jobs and education**
   Connecting population centers more effectively to job and education opportunities across the region enables people to live and work in different places more easily. We are a region, not just a collection of counties. By making improvements in key regional corridors, neighboring counties can combine their rural lifestyle with access to Pittsburgh’s jobs and urban amenities, and city residents can enjoy better access to suburban job opportunities and amenities.

3. **Embrace new operating models**
   Taking full advantage of the rise in ubiquitous real-time information can improve mobility. This means new ways to think about public transportation beyond 40-foot buses, and new ways to think about congestion improvement beyond just widening highways.

4. **Make flexible, future-proof investments**
   We should invest in infrastructure that will be most useful regardless of when and how autonomous vehicles and other advanced technologies, including energy, develop. The smartest investments are those that can provide us with maximum utility today, but also adapt to future technology trends, such as the rise of “shared mobility” services.

5. **Adopt best management practices**
   Every level of government that touches transportation should be using best-in-class practices and processes to provide mobility for people and freight. An important part of this is having an overall focus on the outcomes we want – connectivity, convenience, choice – and then implementing policies that will get us there.

6. **Support multiple mobility options**
   We need to include giving people choices when we plan, design, and build our network. The traditional road system should integrate with transit, car sharing, and bike and pedestrian connections. Though not every community will have the same connections as others, we should strive to develop as broad a portfolio of options as possible to allow maximum mobility and flexibility.

7. **Operate as an integrated system**
   Transportation is about making connections. There are many parts to our transportation “system” operated by different public entities. They might overlap each other, but they don’t always work together. People need to move seamlessly across borders for the system to work successfully. A deliberate effort to plan, design, build, and operate the “system as a system” and work across these jurisdictional lines will benefit mobility across the entire region.
50 Ideas to Explore

01. Complete Trail Network
02. Fort Pitt Tunnel Entrance Improvements
03. Squirrel Hill Tunnel Entrance Improvements
04. Expanded Park-and-Ride Capacity
05. Access Upgrade: New Highway Interchanges
06. Access Upgrade: Route 228
07. Access Upgrade: Route 422
08. Access Upgrade: Route 21
09. Access Upgrade: Laurel Valley Connector (Route 981)
10. Access Upgrade: Oakland/Bates Street
11. Access Upgrade: Busways and T Lines
12. Service Upgrade: Busways and T Lines
13. Commuter Transit: Pittsburgh-Cranberry Corridor
14. Commuter Transit: Airport Corridor
15. Commuter Transit: Downtown-Oakland BRT
16. Commuter Transit: Route 28/Alle-Kiski Valley Corridor
17. Commuter Transit: I-79/Washington Corridor
18. Commuter Transit: Route 65/Ohio River Corridor
19. Commuter Transit: Oakland to Hazelwood/Almono
20. Transit Agency/Rideshare Pilot Programs
21. Paratransit/Rideshare Pilot Programs
22. Paratransit Operational Reform
23. Grocery Delivery as a Mobility Service
24. Strategic Transit-Priority Traffic Corridors (Ex: Route 30)
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32. Smart City Challenge “Smart Spine” Projects
33. Streamlined Oversize/Overweight Freight Permitting
34. Coordinated Construction Projects
35. Alternative Fuel Sources
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47. Engagement Between Initiatives
48. Tourism Signage Improvements
49. Shared Platform for all Mobility Providers
50. A “Riverlife Task Force” for Transportation
01. Complete Trail Network
Trails are much more valuable when they connect with each other. The Pittsburgh region is central to more than 1,450 miles of current and planned bicycle trails throughout western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, northern West Virginia and the southwest corner of New York. Most of these trails follow along rivers and former railbeds through classic communities and beautiful natural areas that are a fundamental part of our area. However, there are still many gaps in these trails that keep them from being a complete network, and our region from enjoying the benefits a complete network could provide in terms of realizing the potential of this tourism and recreation asset.

02. Fort Pitt Tunnel Entrance Improvements
The Fort Pitt Tunnel is a major pinch point for commuter, freight, and transit traffic entering Pittsburgh from Pittsburgh International Airport or other points to the west of the city.

03. Squirrel Hill Tunnel Entrance Improvements
Congestion on the Parkway East caused by the Squirrel Hill Tunnel and the nearby interchanges is a major impediment for commuter, freight, and transit traffic heading into and out of Pittsburgh.

04. Expanded Park-and-Ride Capacity
Public transit works most efficiently when you have large numbers headed to or from a single destination. Transit agencies are constantly looking for the most creative solutions to the “last mile problem” – how to get people from a stop along a transit route to their final destinations (or vice versa.) Park-and-ride lots are one approach to providing commuter transit service in low-density outlying areas. They can provide a common gathering spot in communities where it is impractical to run transit routes that run within walking distance of the passengers' homes. Expanding park-and-ride capacity, particularly along routes that use the Port Authority's T and busway network, has the potential to provide more transit access in a cost-effective manner.

05. Access Upgrade: New Highway Interchanges
The movement of freight is essential to the success of our region. Freight is easier to move when trucks can utilize highways as much as possible instead of local roads. Improving or adding interchanges in strategic locations could have a big impact on improving freight mobility, while reducing truck traffic and wear-and-tear on our smaller, local roads.

06. Access Upgrade: Route 228
Route 228 is the main road through the fast-growing residential and business areas in the southwest corner of Butler County. In many places, the road is two lanes, and the increased residential development and business attraction has created bottlenecks that are affecting reliability for multiple users, including commuters, students, freight, and local area residents. Opportunities have been identified to improve strategic intersections and select portions of the road's geometry to improve the overall flow and multi-user access of this important local corridor.

07. Access Upgrade: Route 422
Route 422 is the primary east-west option to cross the north portion of our region. A two-lane road in many sections, significant truck traffic creates bottlenecks where there are steep hills without climbing lanes, particularly between Indiana and Kittanning. Opportunities have been identified to improve strategic intersections and select portions of the road's geometry to improve the overall flow and safety of this important local corridor.

08. Access Upgrade: Route 21
Running from the West Virginia state line through Greene County and Waynesburg over to Uniontown in Fayette County, Route 21 is the major east-west route in the southern part of our region. Despite being the primary artery for rural truck traffic to connect to I-79, many parts of this road are just two lanes and in disrepair. Additionally, Route 21 passes through Waynesburg's downtown, and traffic bottlenecks create issues for local businesses to attract patrons. Opportunities have been identified to improve strategic intersections and select portions of the road's geometry to improve the overall flow and multi-user access of this important local corridor.
09. Access Upgrade: Laurel Valley Connector (Route 981)
Route 981 is an important connection to the major east-west corridors of Route 30 and the Pennsylvania Turnpike in eastern Westmoreland County. Improvements to this corridor have been considered for decades due to the need for better freight access to the Pennsylvania Turnpike and to alleviate traffic issues on Route 30 in order to be more attractive to industrial employers who might otherwise locate in the area. Opportunities have been identified to improve strategic intersections and select portions of the road's geometry to improve the overall flow and multi-user access of this important local corridor.

10. Access Upgrade: Oakland/Bates Street
The Bates Street entrance to Oakland creates a safety hazard and traffic congestion problem that threatens to limit regional economic development opportunities, but private-sector interest in investing in the corridor creates the potential for a public-private partnership approach to solve the problem.

11. Access Upgrade: Busways and T Lines
The Port Authority's fixed guideways are significant assets that need to be better connected physically to their surroundings to maximize rider accessibility and convenience, which in turn could maximize usage. Many stations and facilities along the three busways and two T light rail lines in the core of the region have not been upgraded since they were built decades ago.

12. Service Upgrade: Busways and T Lines
The Port Authority’s three busways and two T lines are significant assets for the Pittsburgh region, ideally located in the dense urban core of Pittsburgh. With increased frequency of service and coordination of schedules, those dedicated transit routes could serve as the backbone of regional transit operations.

13. Commuter Transit: Pittsburgh-Cranberry Corridor
The area from Cranberry to Pittsburgh has continued to be one of the fastest growing corridors in our region. Congestion is growing, as new communities and job opportunities continue to increase. Yet, there is currently no public transit option connecting this area to the major job center in downtown Pittsburgh, or vice versa. There is the potential to provide coordinated, reliable rapid transit service in this corridor to meet commuter, business, and local resident demand while decreasing congestion.

14. Commuter Transit: Airport Corridor
The Parkway West corridor contains our region’s major airport, multiple company headquarters, significant retail destinations, post-secondary education providers, and residential areas. It is an important shared regional corridor with well-known traffic congestion issues and long-expressed desires for a better public transit connection. There is the potential to provide coordinated, reliable rapid transit service in this corridor to meet commuter, business, local resident, and visitor demand while decreasing congestion.

15. Commuter Transit: Downtown-Oakland BRT
An effective, high-quality Bus Rapid Transit link between Downtown Pittsburgh and Oakland would create an attractive mass transit link between the two largest job centers in our region and stimulate development opportunities in the three-mile-long corridor.

16. Commuter Transit: Route 28/Alle-Kiski Valley Corridor
This corridor follows the Allegheny River northeast, which has a string of classic communities and a strong residential base, in addition to a strong employer presence. This corridor is known for long commute times and congestion. Though some transit options exist, this corridor has been the focus of several ideas over the years to greatly improve commuter transit options for residents here. There is the potential to provide coordinated, reliable rapid transit service in this corridor to meet commuter, business, and local resident demand while decreasing congestion.
17. Commuter Transit: I-79/Washington Corridor
Washington County has been steadily growing in the last decade, due in large part to the momentum of being the hub for many shale gas operations. The route between Washington and Pittsburgh is a major commuting corridor in both directions today. Some public transit options do exist, but there is the potential to provide coordinated, reliable rapid transit service in this corridor to meet commuter, business, local resident, and visitor demand while decreasing congestion and preparing for long-term growth.

18. Commuter Transit: Route 65/Ohio River Corridor
This northwest commuter corridor follows the Ohio River Valley, and has a strong residential and industrial core, with many historic districts along the way. Already a major commuting corridor, this area is set to see an increase with development hopes surrounding the new ethane cracker. Some public transit options do exist, but there is the potential to provide coordinated, reliable, and enhanced transit service in this corridor to meet commuter, business, and local resident needs while decreasing congestion and preparing for long-term growth.

19. Commuter Transit: Oakland to Hazelwood/Almono
The redevelopment of the 178-acre former LTV Coke Works site known as Almono in Hazelwood holds promise to boost an economically disadvantaged area of Pittsburgh. To realize its full potential, the site requires a robust, high-quality mobility connection to education and research centers in nearby Oakland.

20. Transit Agency/Rideshare Pilot Programs
Transit agencies around the country are exploring whether the emergence of transportation network companies (TNC) such as Uber and Lyft provide an opportunity to improve the nature of public transit. Partnerships with TNCs have the potential to address our transit deserts and ongoing challenges with first mile/last mile connections to core transit lines.

21. Paratransit/Rideshare Pilot Programs
Initiating pilot programs with emerging transportation network companies (TNC) such as Uber or Lyft would allow paratransit service agencies to see if there is a way to leverage new technology and new business models to improve service for its customers and/or provide service at a lower cost.

22. Paratransit Operational Reform
Pennsylvania law prohibits transit agencies from providing shared-ride service for the elderly and people with disabilities on the same day it is scheduled. Removing this limitation could lay the foundation for more innovative and responsive service.

23. Grocery Delivery as a Mobility Service
As technology provides new ways to match transportation supply and demand, it also provides an opportunity to rethink “mobility” to include more than it does today. Currently, our public transportation assistance only allows for moving people to places. But, we could develop options to move basic items like groceries to the people who would normally need transportation assistance to get to the grocery store.

24. Strategic Transit-Priority Traffic Corridors (Ex: Route 30)
Our transportation network should respond to the goals we want to achieve. If quality commuter transit is a desired goal, then prioritizing buses carrying dozens of people through traffic could be a strategic decision in some corridors by implementing traffic signal prioritization, intersection modifications, and other improvements.

25. Bus-on-Shoulder Highway Transit
“Bus-on-shoulder” (BOS) is a way that some metro areas are implementing high-quality bus service in congested highway corridors. Allowing transit buses to drive on shoulders at slow speeds can provide a safe way for them to bypass traffic slowdowns. Bus-on-shoulder here would require some road modifications, but at a much lower cost than building dedicated new rights-of-way for buses.
26. East Busway Extension
The East Busway is one of our dedicated bus guideways that runs from Downtown to Pittsburgh’s eastern edge. Due to the large number of commuters coming from the east of Pittsburgh into Oakland and Downtown, there is an opportunity to extend the busway further east and further extend its benefits to more of our region.

27. South Busway/Route 51 Improvements
Route 51 is the main road for the entire densely populated area south of Pittsburgh and in southern Allegheny County. The corridor is critical to life in this part of the region, but is constrained by topography, narrow right-of-way, and existing businesses and residences. The narrow road must accommodate local pedestrians as well as frequent transit service and 40,000 cars a day, and is an example of where multimodal improvements could improve the experience of all of its users.

28. Adaptive Parking Garage Designs
Significant land and expense is dedicated to parking vehicles in our urban areas which limits development or redevelopment opportunities. The continuing development of autonomous vehicles raises questions about how much space for parking will be needed in the future. Encouraging the new parking garages to be designed so they can be converted to office or living space later could provide flexibility if the needs of our region change over time.

29. Real-Time Park-and-Ride Availability Information
For suburban commuters, often the closest commuter transit option is accessible via a Park-and-Ride location. One challenge with this system is that commuters don't know the availability of parking before heading for a particular lot. Real-time space availability information at our Park-and-Ride lots could help alleviate this issue, making it that much easier for suburban commuters to take public transit into our most congested areas.

30. Online Reservation Service for Paratransit
The only way to schedule paratransit service in southwestern PA today is with a phone call. Providing an option for online reservations for paratransit service would improve the quality of service for some paratransit customers.

31. Widespread “Smart Traffic Signal” Deployment
Ever sit in traffic at a busy intersection at rush hour and waited for the light to change while no one was coming the other way? Or been in a lane where the light to turn was too short? In the world of transportation, seconds stack up, so “smart traffic signals” adapt to user demand. Multiple projects in the region demonstrate that we can decrease congestion for a fraction of the cost of building new traffic lanes by upgrading traffic signal technology. Given their low relative cost, there is an opportunity to prioritize sufficient funding to upgrade signals in our key corridors and improve congestion and overall flow for all users.

32. Smart City Challenge “Smart Spine” Projects
The forefront of autonomous vehicle technology research is taking place in our region. As we invest in transportation infrastructure, we should be thinking about how we will adapt to the transportation technology that emerges. Pittsburgh “Smart Spine” projects developed as part of the Smart City Challenge create a foundation to build upon.

33. Streamlined Oversize/Overweight Freight Permitting
Manufacturers and other heavy industry companies in our region, when asked what their biggest transportation challenges were, overwhelmingly said obtaining permits to move large products in Pennsylvania is significantly more challenging than in the other states they work with, causing delays and extra costs that make them less competitive. There are ideas for process improvements that could make this process work much more smoothly.

34. Coordinated Construction Projects
As an older region with an extensive set of roads and bridges, it is not surprising to anyone that road maintenance and construction is an ongoing part of life here – but that doesn’t mean we can’t continue to try to minimize the disruption that construction causes to the network. Coordinating construction projects among different agencies in the region has the potential to lessen the negative impacts of shutting down a road, especially since there often are not good alternative routes available for many users.
35. Alternative Fuel Sources
Alternative fuel vehicles, including those powered by natural gas and particularly electricity, are increasing in popularity. These new options should be analyzed to understand the cost and/or environmental benefits they could provide to our region, as well as the challenges, and to understand what infrastructure improvements would be needed to accommodate them.

36. Sustainable Transportation Funding
Across the country, cities and regions are struggling with how to make new investments at a time when there is a need to pay for maintaining an aged existing infrastructure. The greater Pittsburgh region and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are not exceptions. Changing trends are jeopardizing the way transportation has traditionally been paid for, and understanding this problem is a necessary step toward solving it.

37. Tools to Address Local Roads
Local governments in Pennsylvania own nearly twice as many miles of roads as the state does. That local network is the glue between our major corridors, getting us from our front doors to our final destinations. If traditional funding can't keep up, we need to look for other tools we might use to help pay for local roads.

38. Paratransit Funding Reform
Paratransit for people with disabilities and shared-ride services for people 65 and older provide critical mobility options for some of the most vulnerable populations in our region. However, the complex web of government programs and funding streams that pay for these programs make it difficult for agencies to plan service on the back end, and sometimes results in inconvenient service for customers on the front end.

39. Implementation of PA Transportation Partnership Act
The Pennsylvania Transportation Partnership Act passed in 1985 gives municipalities the authority to work with business property owners to establish a “fair and reasonable” assessment to pay for transportation improvements, though few municipalities have made use of the law.

40. Unused Railroad Rights-of-Way Preservation
Unused railroad rights-of-ways are key assets that can be reused for other transportation purposes. For example, many of our bike trails were formerly rail lines. However, no particular public entity has the responsibility of keeping track of our inactive and abandoned rail assets that otherwise could be lost to other uses. A conscious effort to preserve unused railroad right-of-ways would maintain their potential for reuse in the future.

41. Commuter Rail in Freight Corridors
Providing commuter rail service on existing freight rail corridors could be a cost-effective way to provide a rapid transit option for commuters. Many of our existing freight rail lines parallel key commuter corridors in our region. This option has been examined in the past, and it may be worth revisiting.

42. Expansion of Transit Service
Increasing access to job and education opportunities is key to having a strong economy and thriving quality of life. Over and over again, we have heard that people were being left behind for job opportunities because they didn't have transportation to get there. Expanded basic transit service within counties and across county lines could help connect some of the residents in our region who are being left behind.

43. Strategic Bicycle and Pedestrian Connections
Apart from our impressive regional trail network, there is also a need to help pedestrians and cyclists move between neighborhoods and on our streets to their destinations in a safe way. There is not a “one size fits all” solution as to how this could be done, as it depends on the existing infrastructure and usage opportunities in each location.

44. “Park-and-Bike” Trail Lots
While bicycling has primarily been a recreational or exercise activity in the region, there is a growing interest in this mode as an active commuting option. For the education institutions and job centers in our region that are fortunate enough to have a trail nearby, there is the possibility of making it a viable commuting option through the thoughtful placement of “Park-and-Bike” lots.
45. Multi-Modal Perspective for New Projects
One thing that is unlikely to get any easier or cheaper is obtaining new right-of-way for infrastructure projects. Yet, we need our assets to do more for more users than ever before. Whenever we do build something new, or rebuild what we have, we have a unique and important opportunity to evaluate the needs of multiple users including pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders and accommodate them appropriately.

46. Regional Transit Operation
The 10 transit agencies operating in our region operate 195 routes that collectively provide over 1.9 million hours of service every year. Yet, these services are generally provided independently of each other. There could be an opportunity to coordinate operations among our region’s transit agencies to free up limited resources to provide broader service with new, more efficient connections.

47. Engagement Between Initiatives
More than $1 billion is spent each year in southwestern PA on transportation and there are dozens of groups that seek to influence that spending, from activist groups and industry associations advocating on behalf of their favorite projects (whether it’s bike/trails, public transit, highways, etc.) to the formal planning initiatives at the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. Proactive engagement among the various initiatives could lead to optimal outcomes.

48. Tourism Signage Improvements
The natural beauty that makes this an attractive region also makes it difficult to navigate. While GPS and smartphones make it easier for some, better tourism signage could have a big impact on helping people discover our regional assets, especially those in more rural or remote areas.

49. Shared Platform for All Mobility Providers
People will be more likely to explore different mobility options and choose the best one for a particular trip if there are fewer barriers in front of them. A shared information and payment system across multiple service providers gives riders the option to knit together their best options in real time. This has the potential to create a true system out of all the established and emerging mobility assets that exist in this region.

50. A “Riverlife Task Force” for Transportation
Transportation investment decisions are often made within a narrow context. Transportation engineers and planners make good-faith efforts to engage stakeholder groups and the general public, but issues are framed in technical jargon that make it difficult for non-experts to engage, ask questions, and make useful suggestions at the appropriate time. And because each state, county, and local department/agency is responsible for only its particular piece of the puzzle, no one is looking at the entire picture, the way Riverlife has done for riverfront development in Pittsburgh.

Explore all of these ideas in detail at RegionalTransportationAlliance.org
What’s Next?

We know that to realize this vision, we need to work together to energize the public and regional leaders to take action.

**Tackle Policies**
Let's identify and change existing practices that keep our transportation assets from working together like they should.

**Assess Priorities**
Let's look at how we spend more than $1 billion every year on transportation in this region to ensure that it is aligned with our shared goals.

**Find New Tools**
Let's work to figure out what new tools we need from Harrisburg to achieve the transportation system we want.

The Regional Transportation Alliance is asking stakeholders across our region to endorse and advance these Principles and to work together to achieve a better transportation future for southwestern PA.

To read and respond to the complete interactive digital report, visit [RegionalTransportationAlliance.org](http://RegionalTransportationAlliance.org)
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