

NEW JERSEY COMMITTEE

Regional Plan Association



... a research and planning agency supported by voluntary membership to promote the coordinated development of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut Metropolitan Region.

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MEADOWLANDS PLAN NEEDS REVISION

"The Meadowlands Commission and the state must act now to ensure that the vision of the 14 year old Hackensack Meadowlands Master Plan is not lost in traffic jams and garbage mountains," said Thomas Stanton, Chairman of the Regional Plan Association's New Jersey Committee.

In a publication released today the Association calls on the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission to update the Master Plan. Many of the conditions on which the original Plan was based have changed, making it increasingly difficult to implement the statement observed. The revisions should encourage the diversified development foreseen by the original planners, according to Regional Plan, and should also include transportation plans and strategies to cope with the area's growing traffic problems.

"The many successes of the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission show that a regional approach to planning can be effective," according to Mr. Stanton. "A comprehensive update of the Plan is required so that we can continue to point to the Meadowlands with pride. As part of the Plan, the state should specify its long range capital plans for the area. The Commission's plan cannot be effective unless it is related to the capital program for major roads and bridges of the state, and the New Jersey Turnpike Authority."

In addition, Regional Plan recommends that New Jersey modify the Meadowlands District's solid waste obligations. The District's landfills are filling up; and Hudson and Bergen Counties have tentatively sited new landfills in the Meadows. "Unless the state provides for an eventual end to dumping in the District, landfills could again dominate the area, to the detriment of the development, recreation, and environmental improvements which the Commission has worked so hard to secure," said Mr. Stanton.

Regional Plan Association is a non-profit research and advocacy organization working for over 50 years on transportation, housing, environment and other development-related issues in the tri-state New Jersey, New York, Connecticut Region. The New Jersey Committee is composed of 35 business, education, labor and civic leaders from the 11 counties in Northern New Jersey.

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Attachment
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April 9, 1986

The Region's Agenda

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REGIONAL PLAN URGES HACKENSACK MEADOWLANDS PLAN UPDATE, NEW STATE GUIDANCE

In its first 16 years, the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission (HMDC) has made progress toward the goals set for it by the state: coordinated development of the district, restoration and preservation of the environment, and ecologically sound disposal of solid waste. It has transformed the Meadowlands from the Region's dump into an area of booming development. However, problems have emerged with important implications for the future of the Meadowlands District:

- Although the New Jersey Department of Transportation (DOT) has major improvements planned for Routes 3 and 17, it expects continuing severe traffic congestion.
- Landfills are near capacity, and the HMDC must rely on voluntary agreements to end the flow of wastes to the district.
- Federal regulations placing new restrictions on wetlands development conflict with some district zoning.

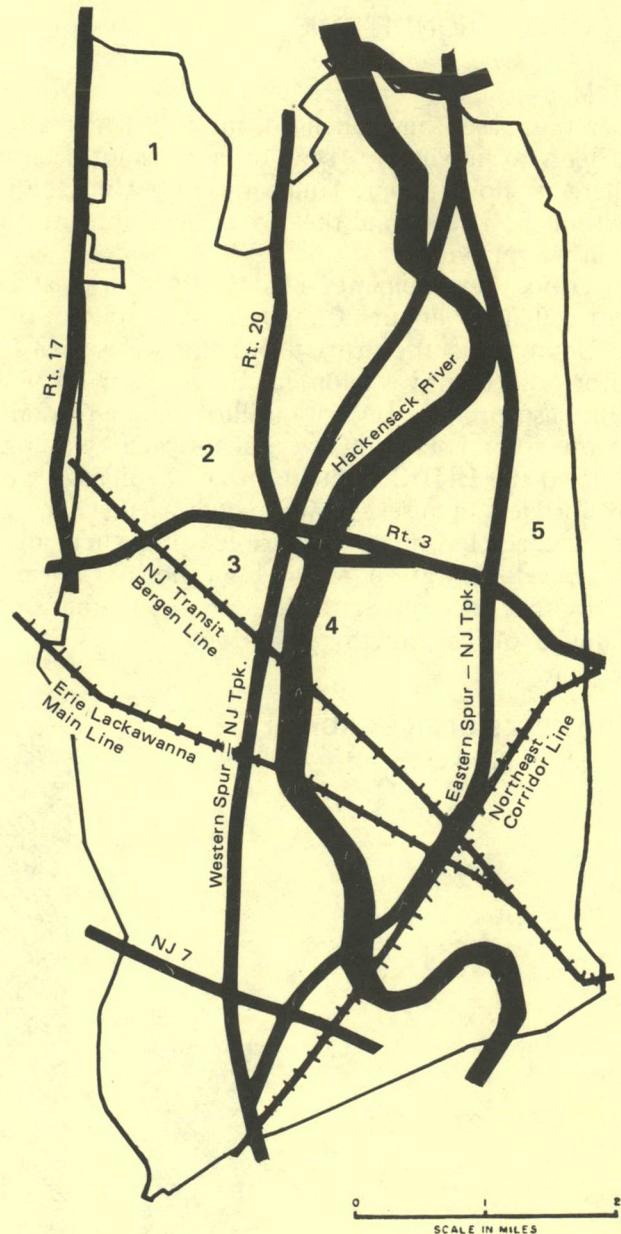
Some parts of the Master Plan have been revised, but the revisions lack the integrated approach which was one of the strengths of the original plan. Continued success in meeting the district's three goals demands that both the Meadowlands Commission and the state revise their plans for the Meadowlands. They must consider the infrastructure required to support proposed levels of development; alter regulations and incentives to produce a better balance of different types of development; and agree on the ultimate amount of solid waste which the district can hold.

BACKGROUND

Through the 1960s, the Meadowlands was used for transportation, warehousing, and as a disposal ground. By 1969, industrial and household wastes, dredge spoils and sewage produced serious environmental problems. Despite these abuses, the district clearly had great potential. New Jersey created the HMDC in 1968 to realize that potential, and in 1972, the commission created its Master Plan and Zoning Regulations.

Regional Plan Association first proposed coordinated development of the Meadowlands in 1929. In the 1960s RPA was a major force in the creation of

HACKENSACK MEADOWLANDS



- 1 Teterboro Airport
- 2 Sports Complex
- 3 Berry's Creek
- 4 Harmon Cove
- 5 Harmon Meadow

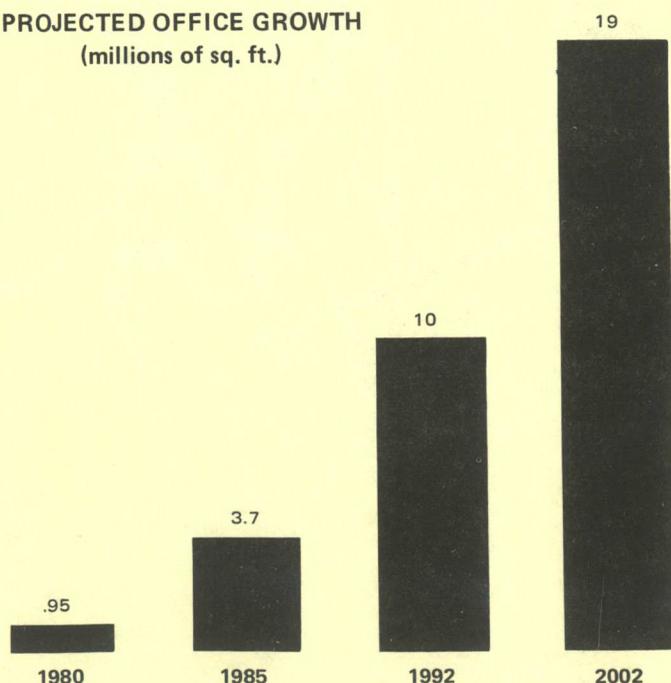
the Meadowlands Commission. It has praised some of HMDC's work, but there have also been persistent areas of disagreement. These stem from RPA's belief that Meadowlands development should complement rather than compete with surrounding areas. As an experiment in regional planning, the Meadowlands District has been successful. Its continued success is important as a model for other areas with problems beyond the capacity of individual municipalities to solve.

CHANGING CONDITIONS

Many of the conditions on which the original plan was based have changed, making it increasingly difficult to implement. Development is not occurring where it should, some lands are not getting the protection they need, and the mix of development is not what was planned.

Office development. The HMDC's original concept called for about 20 million square feet of office development in the district, but this was scaled back before the plan was adopted. Estimates in 1978 and 1985 also projected twenty million square feet. Many on the commission staff were skeptical, however, and in 1980 the HMDC estimated that the market would produce less than seven million square feet. Completed office space has more than tripled since then, and office developers are eager to build not only in office zones, but also in light industrial and other zones. HMDC's office growth projections through the next 15 years:

PROJECTED OFFICE GROWTH
(millions of sq. ft.)



Source: HMDC

It is not surprising that the Meadowlands has attracted this development. It is only six miles from Times Square, and land and building costs are well below those in Manhattan. Decentralization of businesses is a well-established trend, and the Meadowlands combines many advantages of both the cities and the growth suburbs, including an inner ring location and large tracts of undeveloped land. Nonetheless, the pattern and timing of office development was not anticipated in the plan:

- Berry's Creek Center was to contain a major concentration of office space; nothing has been built there.
- Each of three transportation centers was also to have office concentrations; none has been developed.
- Much office space is accessible only by automobile, in contrast to the plan's emphasis on office concentrations served by many transit modes.

This spread pattern has contributed to traffic problems, and has changed the potential for transit demand in ways not anticipated in the Master Plan.

Wetlands protection. Wetlands reduce both flooding and drought by regulating stream flow; their plant life cleanses both water and air of organic pollution; they provide many recreational opportunities. On a less tangible level, the beauty, space, and ecological diversity of wetlands areas also are valuable.

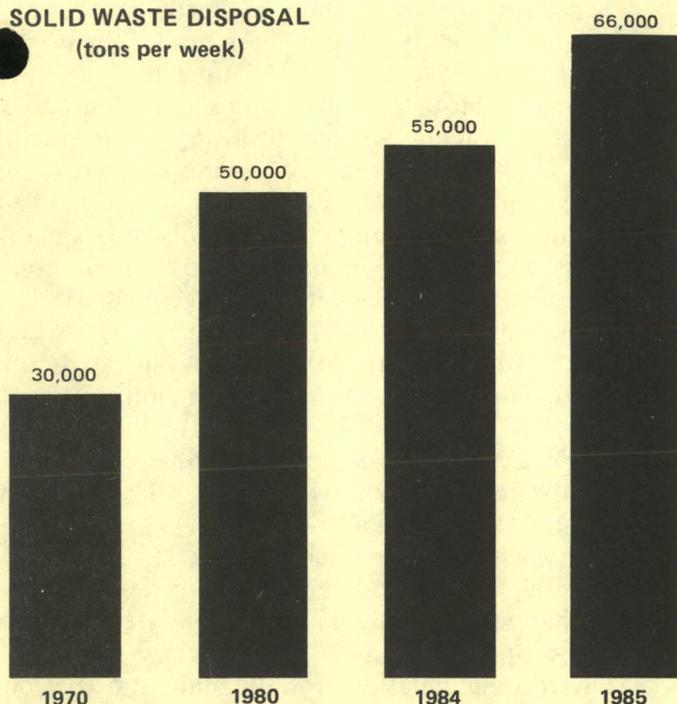
The 1972 Clean Water Act gave the Corps of Engineers jurisdiction over development on some wetlands. Subsequent court decisions greatly expanded that jurisdiction. A 1980 amendment requires developers to show that there is no practical development alternative and to agree to preserve wetlands elsewhere as mitigation.

In the 1970s, the Corps allowed most development approved by the HMDC. However, in the 1980s the Corps began active enforcement of the more stringent regulations. Developers now face two different sets of regulations on some 5,000 acres of wetlands which lie in development zones, and new development proposals face long delays.

Both developers and those most concerned with wetlands preservation would benefit if federal regulations and the HMDC Master Plan were in agreement. The time required to obtain permits could be reduced, developers would know in advance where development would be allowed, and preservation of existing wetlands could be better assured.

Solid waste. The legislation which established the district requires it to accept, in perpetuity, the flow of solid waste which it was receiving when established. In 1985, the district received 35 percent of all solid waste generated in New Jersey—more than double the tonnage it received in 1970.

SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL (tons per week)



Source: HMDC

Currently Essex, Passaic, Hudson, and Bergen Counties send raw garbage to the Meadowlands. All four have agreed to end that practice by 1988, when they plan to have resource recovery plants in operation. Delays in implementing resource recovery could prevent their honoring those agreements.

Even the implementation of resource recovery will not eliminate problems. The residue from incineration must still be landfilled, as must unburnable wastes. These two sources will produce much less volume, but still about 30 percent of the current total. Bergen and Hudson Counties have already chosen tentative residual landfill sites in the district; Essex County would like to send its residues and unburnables, as well. Active landfills are growing faster than planned and are approaching capacity. As a result, it is likely that by the end of the century, new landfill sites will be open in the district.

Already, some developers blame the solid waste mountains for difficulties in leasing office space. The continuing accumulation of solid waste could again dominate large parts of the district, threatening its desirability as a place to live and work.

UNREALIZED PLANS

Housing. In contrast to office development, market forces are acting against implementation of the housing aspects of the Master Plan. Only about 3,000 units have been built since 1972, and although the plan calls for 10 to 15 percent of new units to be for

low- and moderate-income households, no such units have been built. A number of factors contribute to the lack of new housing:

- The success of commercial development has escalated residential land prices well beyond those in the residential suburbs.
- The strict zoning code adds further to housing costs.
- The plan calls for average densities of over 20 units per acre. The reduced marketability of such high-density units more than cancels out the reduction in land costs per unit, according to developers and commission staff.
- National and local development experts say that large mixed-use complexes are economically riskier than more traditional residential developments.

Public transportation. A 1978 Port Authority/HMDC Transportation Report concluded that highway improvements alone could not accommodate the expected traffic. At this time, however, public transit is limited to bus service and one rail stop on NJ Transit's Bergen Line at Harmon Cove. None of the three transportation centers in the plan has been built.

It is imperative that the state and the HMDC decide on future highway and public transportation improvements so that development can be guided to appropriate areas. Current spread development reduces the potential efficiency and cost effectiveness of future transit systems, since it is difficult or impossible to serve with public transportation.

The Meadowlands downtown. Berry's Creek was the central focus of the Master Plan for the Meadowlands. It was planned as a district "downtown," with a large concentration of office and retail space, as well as housing. But a development proposal made in the 1970s was never realized, and in May 1985, the New Jersey Turnpike Authority announced plans to expand exit 16W, which would consume most of the site.

The concept of downtown for the Meadowlands District remains a good one. A high-density node for future development would benefit both transit and land conservation. But planning a new downtown requires a reexamination of the entire Master Plan. One alternative previously supported by RPA is a scaled-down version of Berry's Creek Center.

Another alternative, proposed by Allied Outdoor Advertising, would expand office and commercial development at the Secaucus Connection transportation center site, making it into a downtown. This proposal answers many RPA concerns: it could easily be served by transit and is smaller in scale than Berry's Creek. It may stimulate housing nearby; and it may be feasible to provide transit access to the New Jersey waterfront, complementing development there. There are also disadvantages: highway access is

poor; it is distant from existing concentrations of development in the district; and it would require large public and private expenditures on transportation infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The State Should Clarify its Policy Guidance:

The new State Planning Act requires the State Planning Commission to prepare a "Development and Redevelopment Plan designed for use as a tool for determining locations for capital facilities, housing, economic growth and conservation." In developing its plan, the State Planning Commission should specify the scale of Meadowlands development which is in the state's best interest and the capital project funding forthcoming to support it.

The state should also recognize that perpetual use of the Meadowlands as a solid waste dumping grounds is inconsistent with its goals for the Meadowlands District. Its solid waste disposal obligations should be modified to ensure that the district does not again become the Region's dumping ground.

The HMDC Should Update the Master Plan:

Since 1972, the HMDC has responded to changing conditions with several partial plan revisions,

but a comprehensive update is needed to ensure the various elements of the plan retain their integration. In its revision, the HMDC must address:

- **Housing** - How will the state's urgent need for low- and moderate-income housing be accommodated in the plan? How can zoning be used to encourage more housing development?
- **Wetlands preservation** - What tools are available to ensure preservation of wetlands? How should district and federal regulations be reconciled?
- **Transportation** - How much office space is consistent with transportation and other infrastructure requirements? What transportation improvements are needed to support development?
- **Berry's Creek** - Is it still a feasible site for the Meadowlands' "downtown"? Are other proposals, such as Allied Junction, better?
- **Solid waste** - How much garbage can the district ultimately accommodate? How can the new landfills that will probably be needed be integrated into the rest of the plan?

The recommendations for the state and the commission are interdependent. The state must look to the HMDC for expert knowledge about the potential and limitations of the district; likewise, the commission must have the benefit of state plans as it revises its Master Plan.