

# To Move New Jersey Forward

By Ernest Erber, Area Director, Regional Plan Association

## I. "WE HAVE REACHED THE DAY OF RECKONING . . ."

New Jersey's voters will decide this November whether their State government should borrow \$990 million to build transportation facilities, colleges, health and welfare institutions and housing to meet a backlog of needs that has been permitted to accumulate over decades. This referendum is so fraught with far-reaching consequences for the very quality of life for New Jersey residents that even sedate businessmen and pragmatic politicians speak of it in apocalyptic pronouncements. Thus Governor Richard J. Hughes, whose political style is usually devoid of histrionics, chose these words to describe the State's looming crisis in his message to the Legislature last April:

"We have reached the day of reckoning. And I tell you very seriously and respectfully that we must act in these two months before us or this State, over the next six years, will sink into stagnation and despair that will take a quarter of a century to overcome."

### Broad support

Republicans and Democrats have joined in endorsing the \$990 million program. The State Chamber of Commerce and the New Jersey Taxpayers Association are taking a leading role in a public information campaign to sell the bond issue to the voters. The press, both in editorials and special feature articles, is seeking to educate readers to an understanding of the crisis and how it came about.

For example, the *Asbury Park Press* summarized the bond proposal well under the headline "Billions Needed to Erase Years of Neglect, Politics":

"For years, a 'no new tax' plank formed part of the platform of New Jersey's political parties. Today, the state's citizens are learning that the policy was penny wise and pound foolish.

"Frugality was achieved at the expense of public services and institutions and now, it is estimated up to \$5 billion is needed to put New Jersey on a par with neighboring states.

"Last fall, the New Jersey Committee of the Regional Plan Association decided that it was time to take stock of the state's deficiencies and do something about them.

"The committee called on the Governor to name a nonpartisan commission to inventory the state's needs, fix priorities, and recommend a course of action.

"In February, Governor Richard J. Hughes appointed 14 state business and civic leaders to a capital needs commission and called on the commission to submit a report in time for action by this year's session of the Legislature.

"Working with a speed unheard of in government, the commission in two months prepared a 154-page report which estimated that \$1,948,900,000 is needed to meet the state's immediate critical needs.

"Governor Hughes and the Legislature took the recommendation of the commission and finally agreed on a scaled-down bonding program totaling \$990 million."

The readiness of so many diverse leadership groups to approve the present bond proposal testifies to the trust they had in those who composed the Governor's Commission to Evaluate the Capital Needs of New Jersey and to the effectiveness of their report. That which would have been dismissed as a prophecy of doom and gloom a year ago, or at best received with skepticism if not incredulosity, is now accepted as a mandate for action. Even

leaders of the Legislature felt compelled to explain its failure to endorse the entire amount recommended by the Commission by arguing that it would endanger voters' acceptance to exceed a billion dollars in a single referendum and that it would be wiser to propose the additional amounts in succeeding elections.

### Three commissions

The findings of the Capital Needs Commission came in sentences that drove home the truth:

"Everywhere that this Commission looked, it saw the





### III. SHALL NEW JERSEY ENTER THE TWENTIETH CENTURY?

This review of conditions reveals why the widely-held image of New Jersey remains little changed since expressed in the 1920's by the distinguished literary critic, Edmund Wilson, who wrote of his native State:

... Its cities are indifferent and dingy; the people are seedy and dull; a kind of sloppiness and mediocrity seems to have fallen on the fields themselves as if Nature herself had turned slattern and could no longer keep herself dressed.

Wilson joined scores of native New Jerseyans of talent and sensitivity who became expatriates and passed from the Jersey scene, except to aim a barbed shaft its way from time to time.

Others have been attracted to New Jersey because it was possible to escape paying for a life of quality or adequately helping those in need.

#### For the majority: the facts

The majority of New Jersey residents, Regional Plan believes, is neither unhappy enough to flee nor indifferent enough to continue to say no to the Twentieth Century. It is only necessary to put the facts in their hands, as the Capital Needs Commission has done.

Until now, there has been very little truth in New Jersey's political dialogue. Both parties have told the voters what they wanted to hear—State taxes can remain low. Localities will take care of the problems, they pretended. "Home rule" has been a safe slogan since the earliest communities of the State were founded by followers of different religious leaders—Calvin, Luther, Fox and Knox. Each settlement was satisfied to keep to itself so long as the others did the same. Since no ethnic or religious group could dominate the State's politics, all agreed to keep the State weak. To keep State government weak, they kept it poor. In time, the original divisions were blurred, but new interests appeared to support home rule; rural, suburban, industrial "tax havens," associations of local officials, etc. New Jersey was the next-to-the-last state to impose a broad-based tax—which is still too little and came much too late.

The campaign for the \$990 million bond issue is therefore important not only for what the money will build but also because it is New Jersey's first exercise in telling it like it is about taxes and State government.

#### Several layers of decision

The \$990 million bond issue is only the first decision New Jersey residents must make: whether to vote "yes" or, in the words of the Capital Needs Commission, to condone "conditions which could ultimately destroy" the State.

**To provide for growth:** But the bond issue provides very little capacity for the tremendous growth the State can expect—lying as it does between the powerful magnets of New York City and Philadelphia and forming the center of the urban corridor stretching from North Carolina to Maine. Nor does the bond issue begin to address the problems of growing with grace and amenity befitting a place that will, if recent economic trends continue, have twice the per capita income in 2000 that it has today (in dollars of constant purchasing power) with almost three-quarters of its households earning \$10,000 a year or more (in 1965-value dollars) compared to only one-quarter in 1965.

The growth cannot be accommodated well under present planning practices. Barring so great a deterioration in public services that business refuses to invest in New Jersey and young people leave the State when they leave their parents' home, we can expect about twice the addition of population over the next thirty-five years that the State experienced over the last thirty-five. In the northern fourteen counties (those under study by Regional Plan Association), office jobs are projected to increase by one-and-a-half times between 1965 and 2000. These new jobs would require thirty-five office buildings the size of Prudential in Newark to house high-level corporate jobs plus 2,000 smaller suburban office buildings to house more routine office activities. And all the other appendages of urban life will crowd around the highways, the homes and the offices.

So, even when it passes the \$990 million bond issue, the State must still decide whether to build a better future appropriate to its sharply rising income or continue to let growth overwhelm it.

**To build more satisfactorily** will require not only higher State taxes but more conscious State involvement in shaping development.

Greater State investment automatically introduces the State as an important development force:

*Whether* the State shall build more highways, the question the bond issue poses, will determine a great deal about the population and pattern of development of the State.

And once that is decided, the question of *where* the new routes will go, *what types* of roads they will be and the *balance of investment in rail or highways* in any corridor will affect localities tremendously.

For example, the State Transportation Master Plan proposes the westward extension of Route 24 beyond Morristown. This will open to suburbanization portions of western Morris County, Hunterdon and Warren, *mainly rural*. Is this desirable?

Two new State colleges will be built. Their location will shape the areas around them. The basic decision



about these college locations is foreshadowed in the debates going on in almost every county now considering a community college: shall higher education be conducted in urban centers or in remote and quiet sites. Corollary questions are: (1) should all students have to own a car to take advantage of public higher education, which is supposed to serve those who cannot afford to go away to school? (2) should the older cities be passed over with public facilities so they gradually thin out and house only those who cannot afford to live elsewhere while development sweeps through natural open space, or will the cities remain the important centers of the State, giving all residents access to urban activities and a choice between living in a good city or a good suburb?

In the first major confrontation on this issue, the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry was located in Newark. The State, after initial indifference, determined that it would not pass by its older cities.

In short, the decision that the State must build more for the future of New Jersey is only a prelude to decisions that only the State can make about the quality and shape of development. The State will be expected to determine issues which now are made by default—to no one's satisfaction.

### Better machinery for more active participation

If State decisions will affect our lives more, it is time to look at the processes through which its decisions are made.

Much of the foundation for efficient and responsive State government is in place. The Constitution is modern. Pioneering when adopted in 1947, it can adequately frame the machinery of government for the future. The new Departments of Transportation and Community Affairs define current public issues in a way that encourages rational response. Vigorous leadership and imaginative programs are emanating from these agencies and from the Department of Conservation and Economic Development.

The Executive Branch does require, however, better means of coordinating proposals of each agency, much better capital budgeting (a recommendation of the Capital Needs Commission) and inauguration of a systematic Plan-Program-Budget System (PPBS). The Governor needs a staff of specialists to permit him to play the strong leadership role required by the State's needs and provided for in the State constitution.

New Jersey also is organized to meet many interstate problems with membership in thirteen interstate organizations. However, lack of adequate State policy determination and continuing resistance to the idea that some problems can only be solved by several states together often leave New Jersey dragged along rather than leading.

The weakest link in State government is the Legislature. Reapportionment on the basis of one-man one-vote makes it somewhat more representative, but only

more staff and more time to study legislation will make it an effective democratic instrument.

### More State action and "Home Rule"

The increase in State activity discussed here need not cut into local prerogatives or weaken home rule. These are obviously issues localities cannot handle. We are simply proposing that New Jersey residents begin to make conscious, positive decisions about the direction the State should move rather than leaving development patterns to the haphazard process of today, which is no more the conscious choice of local government than it is of the State government. To illustrate: a State highway must be more than the sum of local streets and roads, and a conscious plan for State highways does not weaken a locality's ability to plan its local roads. Rather, it makes rational planning possible. Similarly, there are other State actions that only the State can do and which do not eliminate or weaken local powers. State colleges supplement county community colleges; state parks are quite different from county and local parks; State pollution regulations protect the many from the self-indulgence of the few—no locality can do that; a State water management plan provides a framework of coordination without which private and municipal water systems are grossly inefficient and undependable.

In short, home rule remains—for those actions which localities can meaningfully fulfill, for those decisions for which localities can see a problem whole. Most problems in the modern world, however, have aspects which spill over local boundaries. To retain home rule under these circumstances requires the sharing of powers with higher levels of government. Aspects of a problem on which a locality can be effective should be left with a municipality. Where a locality simply cannot confront the problem whole, a higher level must do it or share in doing it.

Fundamentally, the change we are advocating is not that New Jersey act in place of its localities but rather that it act like a state.

### Blunt talk

The New Jersey Committee of Regional Plan Association (whose members are listed on page 19) concluded eighteen months ago that New Jersey residents *would* let their State emerge into the twentieth century if there were honesty in the public forum so that the facts were known. Many newspapers promptly agreed. In the words of *The Record*:

... It is true that for a quarter of a century New Jersey political leadership has held the contemptuous theory that people in this state are dull, cheap and self-despising. In their own way people at large can convince their political institutions that they want and demand a chance to go first-class and pay their way. Such blunt talk as the RPA's can equip them for this showdown with any leadership that underestimates their brains and courage.



# STATUS REPORT

## Action toward RPA airport recommendations

"The time has come to move non-airline flights—which carry fewer than three persons per plane including the pilot, on the average—from the three major airports at times when they are overcrowded," Max Abramovitz stated for Regional Plan Association February 23, 1967.

Since then, four steps have been taken in that direction:

- The Federal Aviation Administration has proposed regulations (still under discussion) to eliminate all non-airline (general aviation) flights at Kennedy Airport between 5 and 8 p.m. and allocate a limited number of landings and takeoffs for non-airline planes at all three airports at all times, particularly during weather requiring instrument flight rules.
- The Port of New York Authority has raised minimum landing fees to \$25.
- Limousine service to Manhattan has been started from Teterboro, an airport exclusively for general aviation.
- New York State's Metropolitan Transportation Authority has programmed a network of general aviation airports serving the metropolitan area.

Eighteen months ago, Regional Plan's call for "an immediate start on a system of special airports to handle general aviation planes, leaving the three major airports free in rush hours to handle commercial airliners which carry 98 percent of the passengers arriving at those terminals," received a cool reception from news editorialists and public spokesmen, but the policy seems widely accepted now.

## New Jersey legislative commission to study water management

A commission to "study the advisability and practicability of formulating and implementing a comprehensive water policy and program to meet the long-range needs" of New Jersey has been established by the Legislature.

The Legislature's resolution cites "numerous studies of water supply problems . . . including a report by the New Jersey Committee of the Regional Plan Association, dated July 1967, and the Report of the State of New Jersey Commission on Efficiency and Economy in State Government, dated November 1967," as clearly indicating "the need for improved long-range planning, coordination and organization of our water supply. . . ."

The Commission plans public hearings in early October.

## Second Regional Plan: open for comment November 19

The Second Regional Plan, product of a decade's work by Regional Plan Association, will be presented for comment at the 23rd Annual Regional Plan Conference November 19, 1968 at the New York Hilton Hotel. Everyone is welcome.



The Governmental Research Association, established in 1914, coordinates the work of member local, state and national civic agencies which do research on government organization and programs. The Association offers annual awards in two categories: "Most Distinguished Research" and "Most Effective Presentation of Research." Regional Plan Association, for its six recently published background volumes to the Second Regional Plan, is the 1968 winner of the top national award for "Most Distinguished Research."

Regional Plan Association also received an illuminated scroll from the Municipal Art Society, the oldest civic improvement organization in the country. It was given mainly to honor the late Stanley B. Tankel and RPA's "Urban Design: Manhattan" exhibit sponsored by the Architectural League of New York at its headquarters in February and March, 1968. The Society, with a membership of 1,300 interested citizens, is dedicated to landmark preservation and planning for New York City.

