



Jan
2022

Regional Plan Association's 100- Year History in New Jersey

RPA explores our history in New Jersey through archival reports, photographs, and more as we celebrate our centennial.

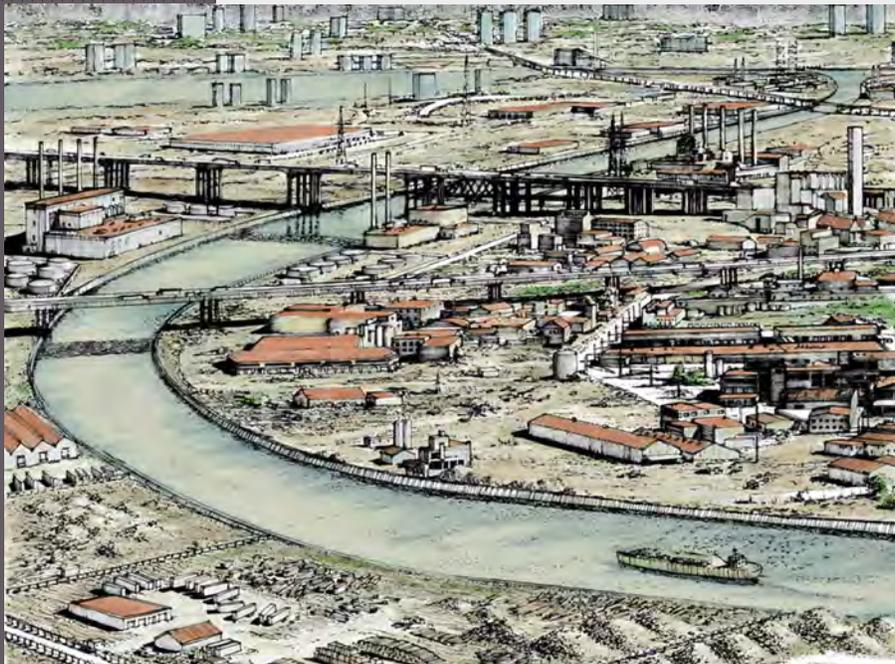


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Regional Plan Association has been active in the tri-state metropolitan region for nearly a century. As we gear up for our centennial, RPA 100, we are excited to highlight RPA's contributions across the region. Below are some reflections on our contributions to the Garden State's built and natural environments.

1920s - 1940s: Connecting NJ to the Region and Determining which Land to Protect

RPA's original definition of the New York metropolitan area was more limited than it is today. In the first *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs* published in 1929, RPA included Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, and Union counties. This would later be expanded to include the counties of Hunterdon, Mercer, Ocean, Sussex, and Warren by the time the *Second Regional Plan* was published.

Hon. J. Raymond Tiffany, Assistant Attorney General of the State of New Jersey, was a mainstage speaker during the May 27, 1929 presentation of the *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs*. Delegates from more than 140 organizations in New Jersey attended the event. They included various state departments like the Departments of Agriculture, Health, and Labor, and the State Highway Commission, and more than 50 cities and towns. Paterson and Newark were identified as specific opportunities in the first *Regional Plan* and RPA made several proposals for them, including new civic centers.



McKim, Mead and White, Architects

Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company

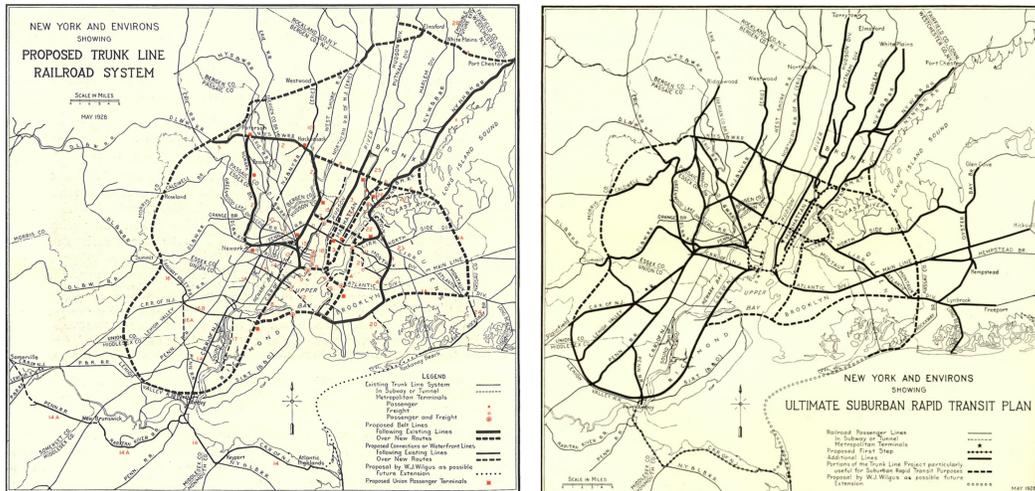
PHOTOGRAPH OF MODEL OF PROJECTED NEW PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD PASSENGER STATION AT MARKET STREET, NEWARK

This station will accommodate both Pennsylvania main line and Hudson and Manhattan trains. At the right is Market Street; at the left is the proposed Raymond Boulevard.

Proposal for Newark Penn Station from the *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs*

A large number of proposals in the first *Regional Plan* focused on improving New Jersey's connections with the rest of the metropolitan region. In terms of public transportation, recommendations included the development of direct railroad connections between New Jersey and Brooklyn, the electrification of main railroad approaches from New Jersey to New York City, and a suburban transit line between Newark and Paterson.

Connecting New Jersey to the Region



Some of the first *Regional Plan's* public transportation recommendations have taken a very long time to be implemented. For example, RPA proposed a quarter-mile connection between two rail lines in Montclair that would consolidate rail services in Essex County and provide better access to Penn Station. The Montclair connection finally opened in 2002, 73 years after RPA's initial recommendation. In 2017, RPA proposed reactivating the line between Newark and Paterson and adding light rail service, reviving an idea from the first *Regional Plan* to the *Fourth Regional Plan*. The possibility is now being evaluated by the Passaic County Planning Board.

RPA's design principles for neighborhoods, such as garden apartments, walkable shopping centers and minimal through-traffic, were put in place in areas such as Radburn, in Fair Lawn, NJ. Though construction was halted by the Depression, Radburn is still upheld as a prime example of excellent neighborhood design.

Several first *Regional Plan* recommendations focused on parks and open space preservation. One major proposal included constructing a park on top of Garret Mountain in Paterson/Woodland Park, which is today a 568-acre county park and National Natural Landmark. Other proposals included the acquisition of land in several key locations, including parcels along the top of the Palisades to supplement the

Palisades Interstate Park, in the Newark and Hackensack meadows, in the Watchung and Ramapo Mountains with extensions in the lake region of Passaic County, and along the Passaic River.

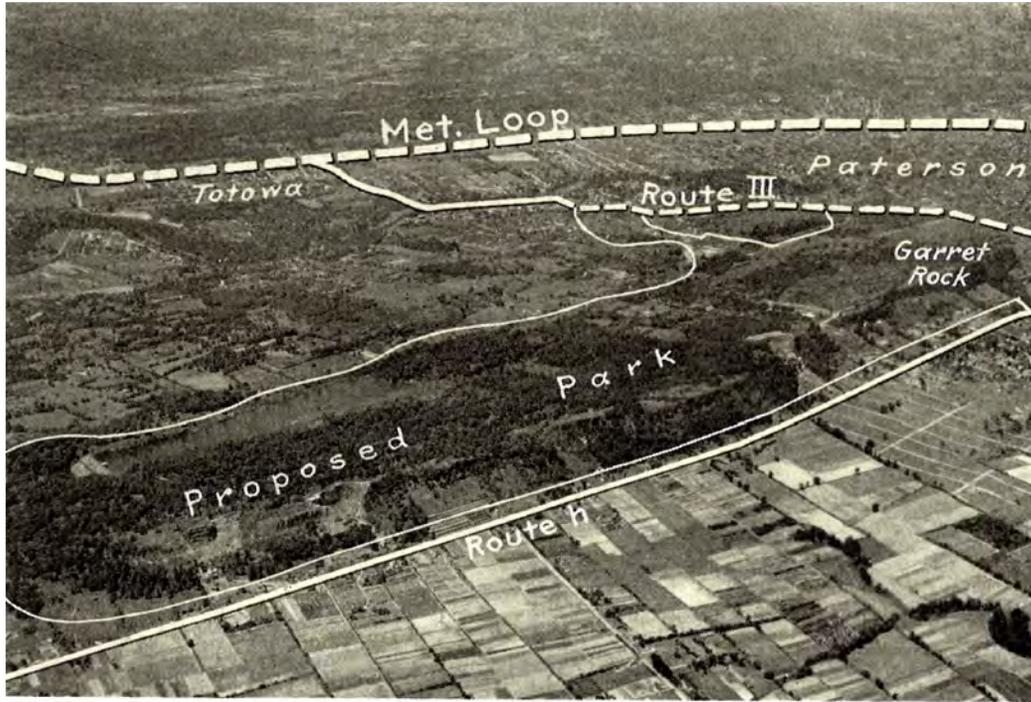
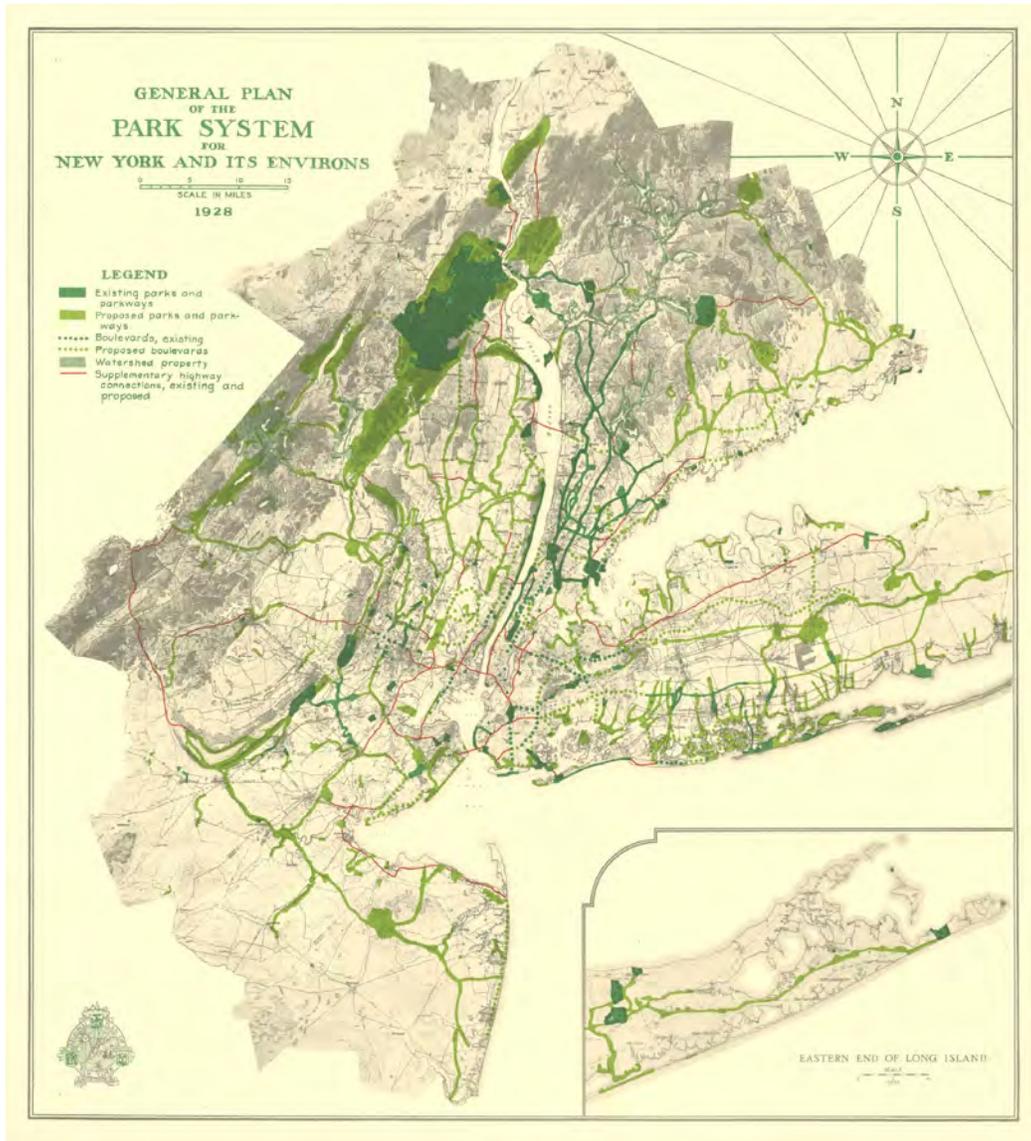


Photo by Fairchild Aerial Surveys, Inc.

PROPOSED PARK SOUTH OF PATERSON

The thin white line represents the suggested boundary of the park where it is not bounded by a highway.

Prior to the publication of the First *Regional Plan*, RPA created a series of maps documenting parks, rail lines, highways, and land use in the region and proposing improvements.



Not all of RPA's recommendations for New Jersey were implemented, and sometimes, that was for the better. For example, while RPA proposed protecting the lower part of the "Hackensack meadows" on the western side as a public reservation and a bird sanctuary, we also recommended filling in much of the "Newark and Hackensack meadows" and the Upper Bay by the Bayonne peninsula and using the land for industrial purposes. RPA was not the first group to think of this. At the turn of the century, several planners in Newark and New York wanted to develop rather than preserve the Meadowlands as open space.



FIG. 79
PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CENTRAL PORTION OF THE HACKENSACK MEADOWS
 Brown denotes industrial areas; yellow, residential; dark green, parks; light green, semi-public open areas; red, business centers. White lines represent highways of varying widths. Red and black lines denote existing railroads; solid red lines, proposed railroads. The blue appearing on the edges indicates high land bordering the meadows.

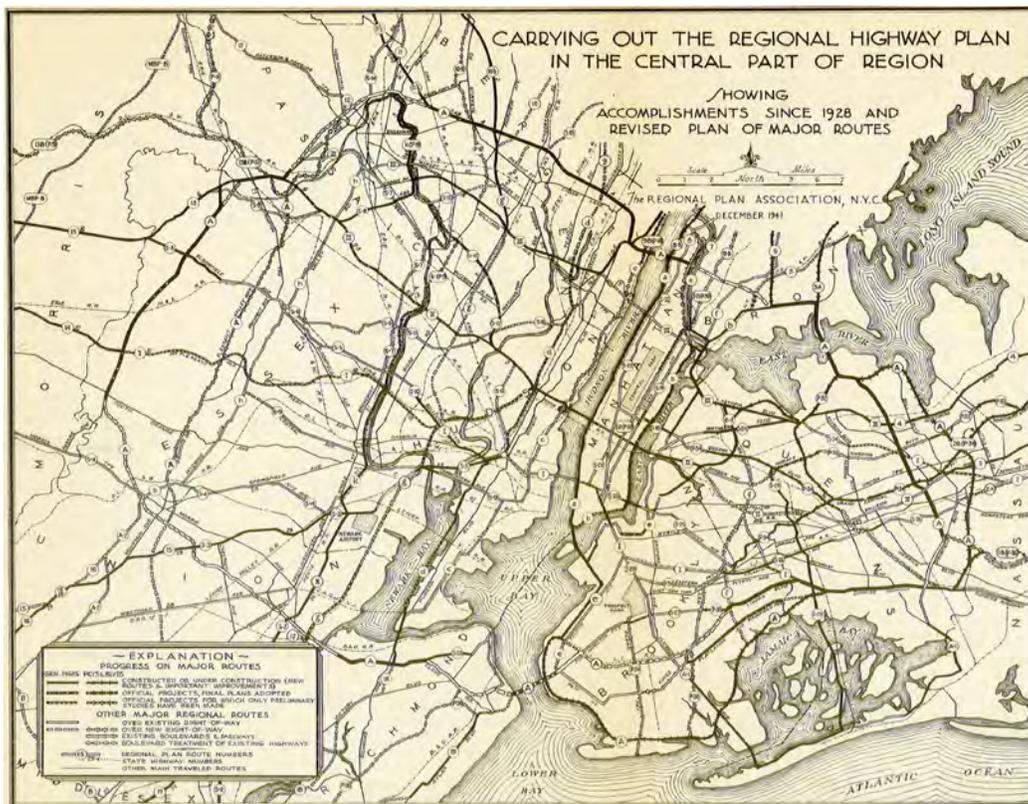
A Misstep by RPA in the Meadowlands

In 1930, RPA released a report which recommended filling in the Meadowlands to create a city large enough to accommodate five million people. The cost of filling in the “swamp lands” was estimated to be \$125 million in 1930. Thankfully, the project never got off the ground. In later years, RPA would come to recognize the importance of preserving wetlands in New Jersey, including the Meadowlands.

Some of RPA’s implemented recommendations had mixed results. The first *Regional Plan* had many suggestions about highways and parkways in New Jersey, several of which were implemented and improved connectivity in the region. However, New Jersey’s vast highway network also contributed to sprawl, increased air pollution, and devastated several low-income communities, predominantly immigrant communities and communities of color. For example, the first *Regional Plan* recommended several additional highway and parkway routes to bifurcate Paterson, several of which were eventually constructed. Today, asthma rates in Paterson are among the worst in the state — in 2014, Paterson residents made up the majority of hospital emergency room visits for asthma in Passaic County despite only making up a third of the County’s population.

There is a wealth of academic studies which have underscored the classist and racist nature of highway construction in our nation’s history. In the context of RPA, the first

Regional Plan's highway designs were informed by an advisory planning group which included Harland Bartholomew, the first full-time city planner in the United States. Harland was a close associate of RPA's, authored several landmark highway studies, was a member of the Interregional Highways Committee, and prepared plans for hundreds of cities, including Newark. Harland's plans advocated for building more highways, widening roads, and excess condemnation. There are arguments in *The Color of Law* and other texts that Harland's work was used to perpetuate and maintain racial, social and economic segregation across the country. In Newark, Harland's plans resulted in the destruction of immigrant enclaves like Little Italy.



At the time of the publication of the first *Regional Plan*, RPA did not predict highways dominating the landscape over rail. Rather, planners saw the highway and rail systems as complementary, and viewed airlines as a large source of competition for attention and passengers. However, the plan's authors did include a warning if highway development did outpace rail:

"It is hardly conceivable that the growth of transport by road will result in making it more restful traveling than an improved electrical service by rail will be... While the railroad and highway systems outlined on the Plan are so designed that they will be complementary

to one another, it is admitted that if a bold and comprehensive treatment of the highway system is pursued, in advance of actual need, instead of following far behind such need, a great deal of the expense in railroad and transit line construction may be avoided and the plan of those latter facilities may stop short of what is proposed... It is possible that railroads and rapid transit developments in the future will have to be adjusted to highway and airway developments, instead of the reverse.”

Between 1928 and 1940, more than a third of RPA’s proposed 2,548-mile highway program was completed or under construction, much of it in New Jersey. RPA was also a proponent of major projects such as the Garden State Parkway, though in later years, RPA pushed against widening the Parkway in Monmouth and Ocean Counties. While RPA continued to highlight the need for rail as early as 1942, RPA acknowledged that the railroads were losing out to highways, writing in a report that, “*rail commutation... has failed to hold its own against the convenience of passenger car and bus transportation,*” but that, “*(T)he Association holds that neither bus nor private passenger car is the solution for peak-hour mass transportation of people. A coordinated system of suburban rapid transit, along with a better urban distribution... is still needed.*”

In a 1980 interview, C. McKim Norton, an RPA President and son of Charles Dyer Norton, who kickstarted the effort to create a regional plan for the New York metropolitan area, reflected on the situation. C. McKim Norton explained that the highways were public enterprises and public entities took great interest in implementing RPA’s highway plan, while the rail lines in the 1930s and 1940s were owned by private corporations that, while they had been growing in the 1910s and 1920s, had started to struggle in the post-WWII era.

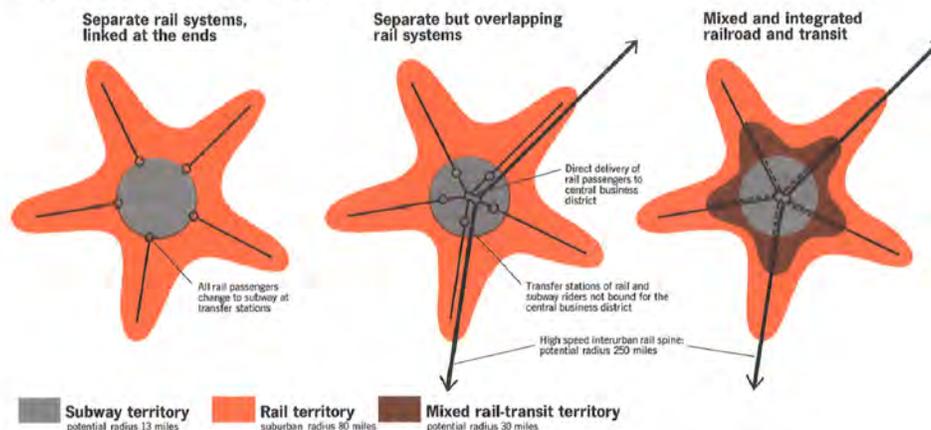
“I must say that we deplored this and it worried us, but it was so difficult to do anything about it because the railroads were private enterprises, and it was unthinkable... They were the big industry. These were the big moguls — the Harrimans and all these people. And the idea that you would tell them what to do was unthinkable. I mean, you were taking on giants. And the idea that they couldn’t do what they wanted to do or thought they should do was also unthinkable, and we didn’t realize how close to bankruptcy the Pennsylvania Railroad was when it happened.”

1950s - 1970s: Investing in Public Transit, Cities, and Open Space

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the railroad companies in the region approached bankruptcy. RPA discussed with legislators the idea of placing private railroads in public ownership and creating one agency that would own and operate a tri-state regional network. There were many obstacles, both physical and political, but eventually, a compromise was reached: multiple public rail agencies would be created.

In 1961, at an RPA conference on the 5-year and 25-year outlook for Northern New Jersey, Dwight Palmer, then State Transportation Commissioner, announced the state's proposal for consolidation and modernization of rail services. This eventually manifested as NJ Transit, which formed in 1979 and manages the state's rail, light rail and bus networks. Among the first hires of the new agency in 1980 was RPA staff member Jeffrey Zupan, who became their first planning director. RPA also advocated for the transformation of the NJ Highway Department to a NJ Department of Transportation and began advocating for rapid bus service in areas not likely to be served by commuter rail in the 1960s, which is still a key component of our advocacy work in New Jersey. RPA continues to support the development of a regional rail network.

VII. Alternate concepts of regional rail transportation.



Beyond transportation advocacy, RPA helped organize the Passaic Valley Citizens Planning Commission in 1948, which became the Planning Association of North Jersey. Recognizing that the number of issue areas in New Jersey required more dedicated attention, RPA created its first state-specific committee in 1960 and hired Ernest Erber, then the PVCPC Director, to lead its New Jersey office out of Newark. In addition to helping form the New Jersey Chapter of the American Institute of Planners, Ernest served on the Board of the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing and was a member of Newark’s Committee of Concern, an organization formed in the wake of the 1967 rebellion.

During the 1960s and 1970s, RPA called out the sprawl that was consuming New Jersey’s lands as well as how racially segregated its communities had become. RPA published several reports including *New Jersey: Issues and Action* and *To Move New Jersey Forward* outlining proposals for “the nation’s most urban state,” maintaining a focus on older city centers, such as Paterson and Newark. Released in 1968, RPA’s *Second Regional Plan* included reports such as *Public Service in Older Cities*, which outlined strategies for the U.S. to meet its responsibilities to low-income communities, for states to invest in public education, and for regional city centers to adequately finance community improvement programs. RPA also called for investments like the NJ College of Medicine and Dentistry to be located in Newark, rather in the suburbs. However, it soon became apparent that many Newark residents were deeply concerned about displacement by the development of the college, and the scale of the site was reduced in response to community feedback in an agreement known as the Newark Accords.

Related Report

May 1969

Public Services in Older Cities

A Report of the Second Regional Plan

The Potential of Paterson

as a Metropolitan Center in Northern New Jersey

*A Supplemental Report of the Second Regional Plan to the Planning Board
of the City of Paterson, New Jersey*

In 1972, RPA published *The Potential of Paterson*, which called for the Great Falls and the surrounding area to be transformed into a national park and recommended that the city preserve its historic factories and encourage office development downtown. In 1976, the site was declared a National Historic Landmark District, and in 2011, it was formally added to the National Park System as a National Historic Park.

To implement some of the recommendations of the *Second Regional Plan*, RPA called for public-private partnerships to strengthen regional city centers in Paterson and New Brunswick, NJ. New Jersey's newer suburbs and older city centers were also a focus of RPA's CHOICES for '76 project, an Emmy award-winning series of televised town hall meetings. Paterson, Newark, Mahwah, and Wayne were featured prominently in the series. For example, the *Housing* film highlighted the Ford Motor Company plant in Mahwah, a major employer of many Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) individuals at the time. Interviewees pointed out, however, that the 40% of the 5,000 employees at the plant who were BIPOC could not live in Mahwah because of high costs due to its exclusionary zoning. Also at the time, RPA was unaware of the damage that the Ford Motor plant was doing to the environment around Mahwah and to the land that the Ramapough Lenape lived on. Other individuals were also interviewed as part of the *Housing* documentary, like Junius Williams, a Newark attorney who was the Executive Director of the Committee on Minority Affairs (COMA). COMA was a committee created as part of the CHOICES project to better engage with BIPOC communities in the region.

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter announced the first National Urban Policy, which reflected many of RPA's recommendations regarding reinvestments in cities. In a telegram sent to RPA on the eve of its 50th anniversary dinner, President Carter stated that RPA's support and leadership had been critical for his administration's policy.

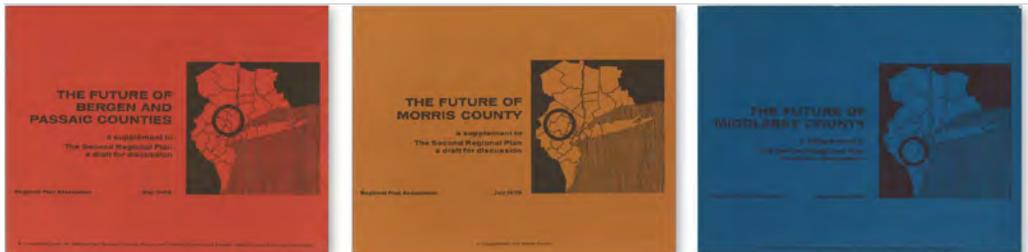
NEW JERSEY CITIES NEVER DID SINK AS FAR AS MOST PEOPLE THOUGHT, AND A LOT HAS BEEN HAPPENING LATELY TO ADD TO THEIR ATTRACTION.



Image from RPA's 1979 report *New Jersey Cities*

RPA went on to release *New Jersey Cities* in 1979, which promoted investments in older cities in the wake of white flight and a national decline in urban density. The report also highlighted the work of tenant cooperatives like those at the Stella Wright Housing Project in Newark, and polled residents of Elizabeth, Jersey City, Newark, Paterson, and Passaic as to whether they expected their cities to improve — and if they were satisfied with their city as a place to live. Over half of Newark's respondents said that they were satisfied with the city.

“Clearly, some New Jersey cities have bounced back from their nadir. They are beginning to offer some benefits that spread city does not. The new optimism and self-confidence in cities, the new public pronouncement and policies by states and federal government come at just that moment of rebounding. So there is hope that the tremendous thrust away from cities can be reversed.”



The Future of NJ Counties

Similar to its efforts after the first Regional Plan, RPA released a series of place-based supplemental reports for the Second Regional Plan between 1969 through 1974.

The 1960s and 1970s ushered in the modern environmentalist movement which highlighted the interplay between the natural and built environments as negative effects of the post-war suburban boom came to the fore. RPA was an early leader in environmental land use, and in 1960 released the seminal report, *The Race for Open Space*, which documented that New Jersey wasn't prepared for a population projected to double or triple in the coming 25 years. The report resonated deeply with the state and set off a new wave of park acquisitions including the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Great Piece Meadows, Lake Wawayanda, and Sandy Hook.

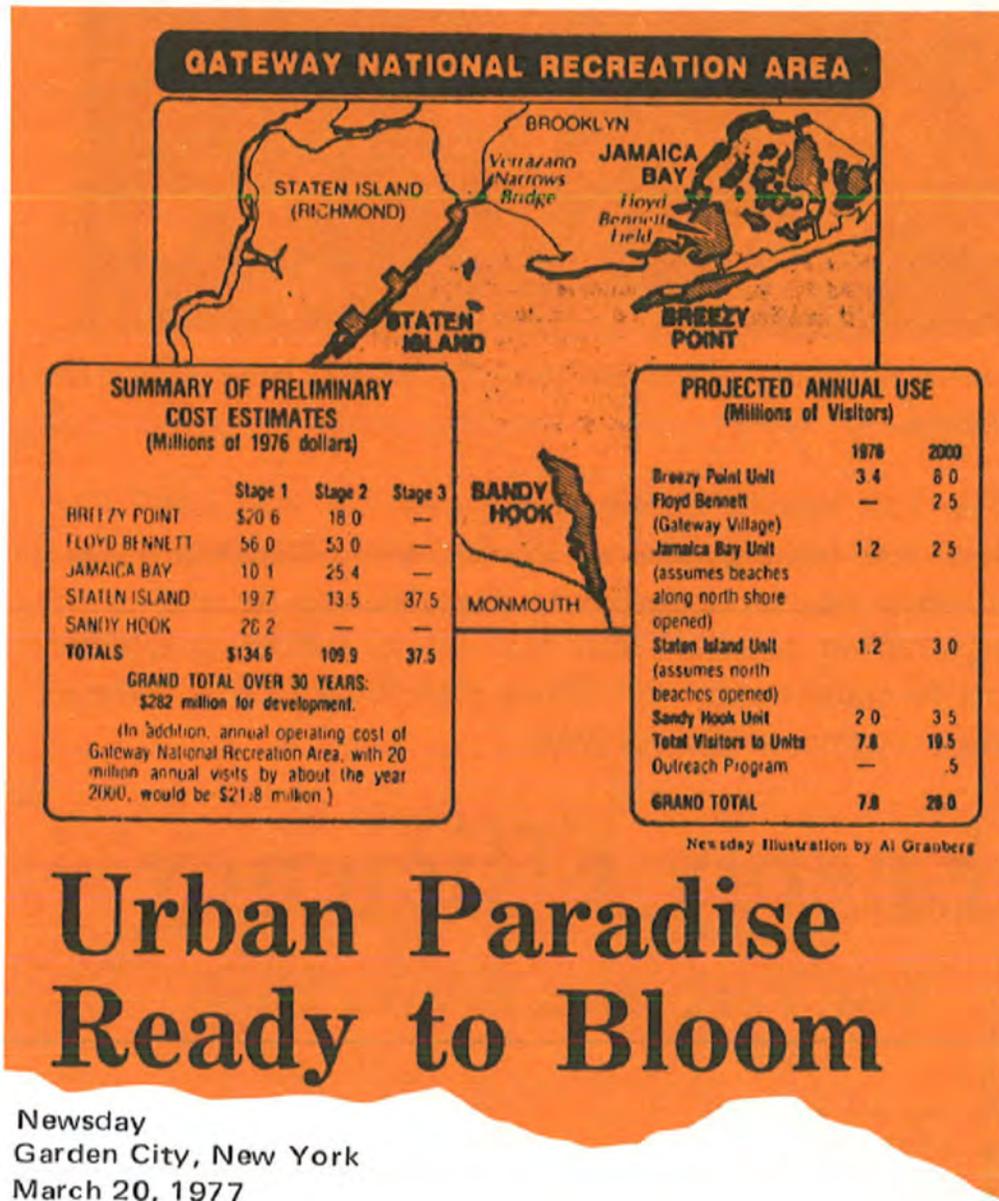
The following year in 1961, Governor Robert Meyner signed the first Green Acres Bond Act with the vocal support of RPA. Although intended to be a 10-year acquisition program, Green Acres was wildly successful and as of this writing, has protected over half a million acres of open space and provided hundreds of outdoor recreational facilities in communities around the State.

Related Report

Sep 1960

The Race for Open Space

Final Report of the Park, Recreation and Open Space Report



Preserving Sandy Hook

In addition to the Green Acres program, the *Race for Open Space* report boasted another long term victory—Sandy Hook was ultimately incorporated as part of Gateway National Recreation Area in 1972. RPA championed that effort for many years thanks in part to Eleanor Todd, mother of NJ Governor Christine Todd Whitman. Eleanor was an RPA Board member and served as co-chair of the Gateway Citizens Committee. RPA also incubated the Friends of Gateway organization, which spun off as its own non-profit in 1988.

During this period, RPA pushed against development in environmentally sensitive areas, most notably with the Port Authority as it considered creating a fourth regional

airport in Hunterdon County. While in its early years RPA had championed smaller regional airports, it reevaluated estimates based on new data and the Port Authority's own projections on air traffic. In a major report released in 1969, RPA argued that the priority should be to improve capacity at the three existing large regional airports, and that investing in a fourth major airport far from the region's core would not solve demand issues.

In the Meadowlands, RPA shifted its thinking from development to preservation. One of the first successes of RPA's New Jersey Committee was the establishment in 1963 of a State Meadowlands Development Commission. Six of the Commission's nine members were appointed from a list submitted by the New Jersey Committee to the Governor and the State Legislature. Early brainstorming sessions of the RPA New Jersey Committee suggested creating a state park in the Hackensack Meadows.

“Thinking it justifiable to invest more money in less land if it served more people, the Committee recommended basing park purchases on population density. The 1963 policy statement called for ‘parks where the people are.’ Accordingly, the Committee was the first proponent of large parks in Great Piece Meadows (Essex County), the Hackensack Meadows, and along the Jersey City waterfront. The Jersey City site (Liberty Park) has since been acquired and 188 acres of 3,390 have been acquired of Great Piece Meadows. The forthcoming Hackensack Meadows comprehensive development plan will, the Committee hopes, contain a proposal for a great ‘Central Park’ for residents of densely populated urban areas of Hudson, Essex, and Passaic counties.”

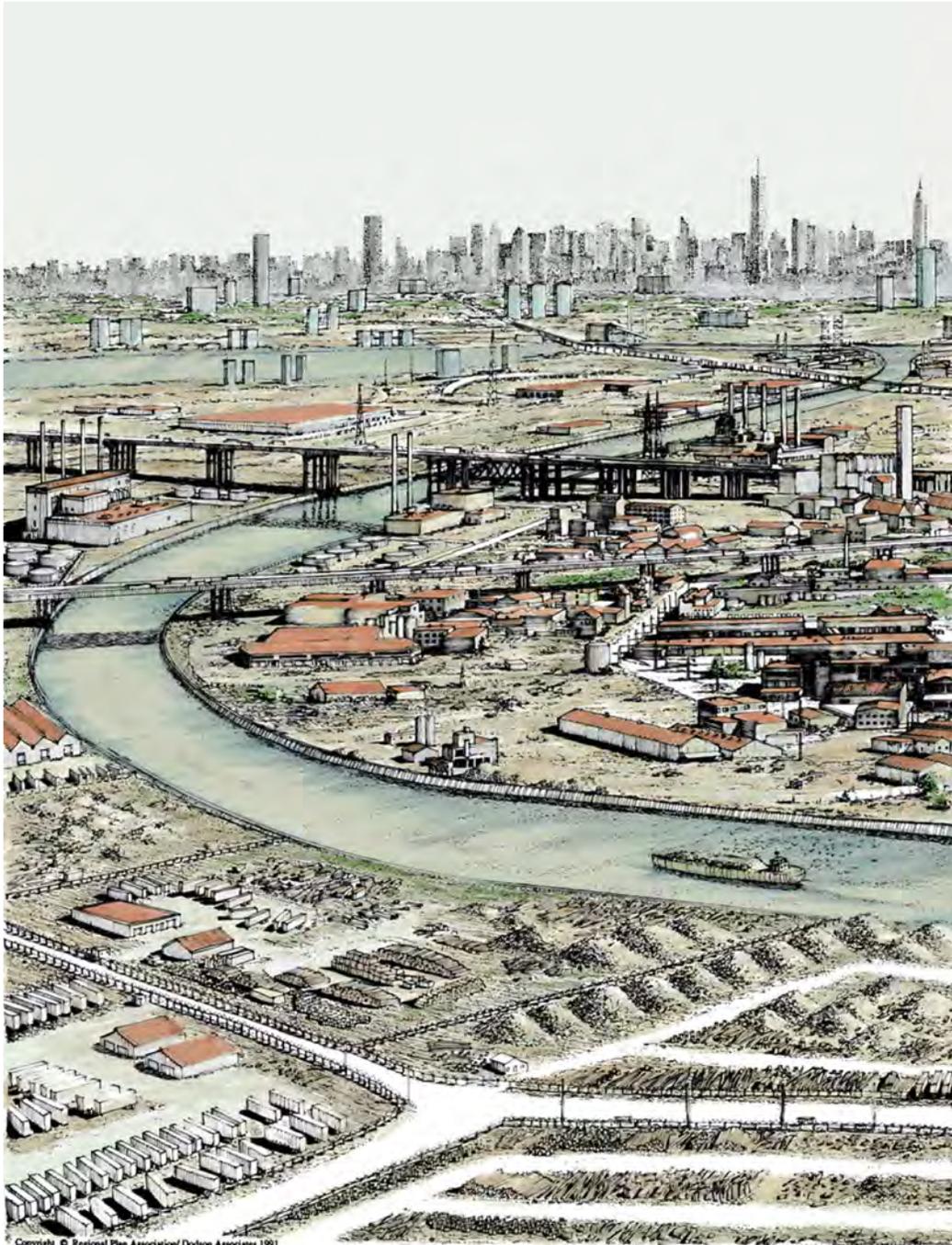
When the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission was created to coordinate land use in the wetlands, RPA proposed preserving more marshlands and reducing office construction, instead redirecting office development to Newark and Paterson and restricting parts of the Meadowlands for industries like warehousing and manufacturing. The land use plan for the Meadowlands was modified on RPA's suggestions.

1980s - 1990s: Reclaiming Brownfields and Waterfronts

The economic boom of the 1980s spurred a decade of almost wanton development, but RPA continued to call attention to New Jersey's shrinking open space. RPA's Morris 2000 project, which was a large community engagement project, suggested stronger planning and land use controls at the county level. In 1987, RPA found that a million acres of open space was developed in the region between 1964 and 1986 and that farmlands shrunk from 1.7 to 1.2 million acres between 1964 and 1982. At these rates, RPA warned that half of the metropolitan region's land would be developed by the year 2000.

RPA also called out the detrimental impacts of pollution and contaminated sites. RPA's New Jersey office strongly advocated for the federal Clean Air Act of 1990, and its contributions were recognized by New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection and others. The following year, RPA initiated the Union County Land Recycling Project, which identified more than 185 sites comprising 2,500 acres of re-developable land in the county, and found that development costs were about equivalent to those of non-contaminated parcels. As a result, in 1993 RPA was asked to help craft the groundbreaking NJ Hazardous Discharge Site Remediation Act and Industrial Sites Remediation Act, which established remediation standards and funding for clean up projects. The *Third Regional Plan*, released in 1996, built on those successes and gave rise to RPA's Metropolitan Brownfields Initiative, a multi-year project in the late 1990s that reviewed brownfields that could be remediated and revitalized within New Jersey.

In the 1990s RPA's Metropolitan Brownfields Initiative identified brownfields sites in New Jersey that could be remediated.



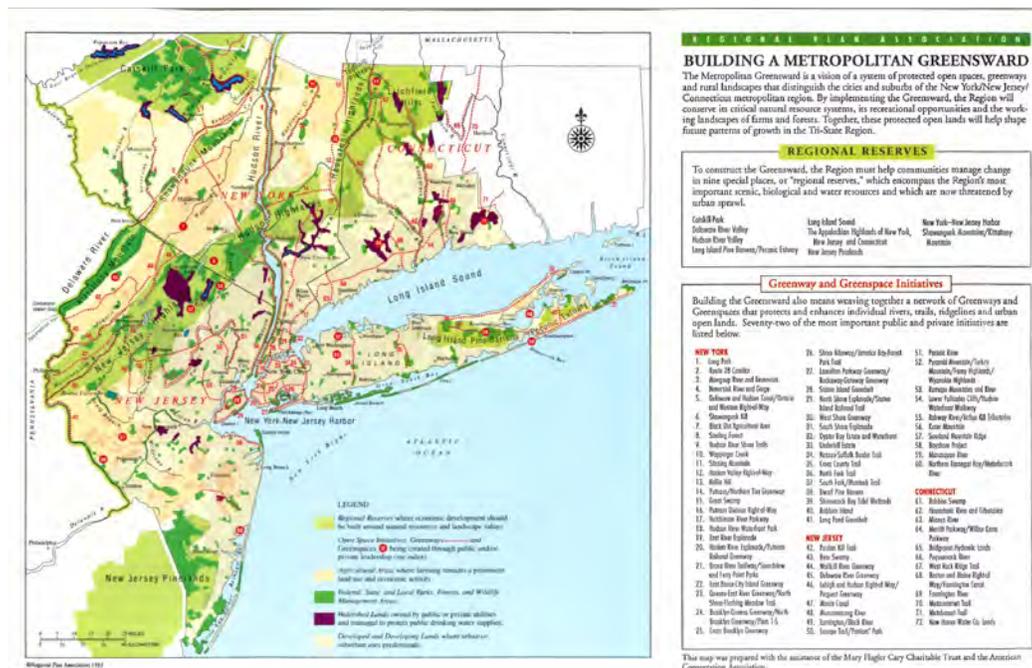
Dodson Associates

In addition to reclaiming brownfields, RPA looked to see if more of New Jersey's waterfront could be repurposed for public use. The New Jersey side of the Hudson River was still relatively underdeveloped in the 1980s. Building off of its 1966 report *The Lower Hudson*, RPA's 1985 *River City* report recommended coordinated development,

adequate transportation, and public access along the Hudson River waterfront from Bayonne to Fort Lee. RPA argued for the waterfront to be continuous as well as welcoming for pedestrians, cyclists, and boaters, and proposed light rail service. The Hudson-Bergen Light Rail was an idea drawn from these 1966 and 1985 reports. Ferry service across the Hudson was also restored later in the 1980s, and private development increased in the 1980s and 1990s, leading to a renewed Hudson River waterfront but also gentrification along the coast.

In 1986, Governor Thomas Kean signed the New Jersey State Planning Act, which created the Planning Commission and Office of Planning Advocacy. The law also mandated a State Development and Redevelopment Plan. RPA supported the initiative and helped foster the creation of NJ Future, a non-profit, non-partisan organization who early on monitored the process by which the State Development and Redevelopment Plan was being prepared.

Income inequality in New Jersey and in the region escalated sharply in the 1980s and 1990s. RPA and the United Way of Tri-State released a report in 1986 warning that inequality would strain the region. Then, a severe economic downturn hit, and from 1989 to 1992, the region shed 770,000 jobs, one of the largest job losses of any U.S. metropolitan region since World War II. Lack of investment in the region's schools, rail systems, community design, and natural resources slowed the economic recovery.



A Region at Risk

A Region at Risk: The Third Regional Plan, published in 1996, stated that success in the region could not be defined in simple terms of economic growth without accounting for social and environmental costs and benefits. The *Third Regional Plan* recommended expanding transit access to the Jersey City waterfront, as well as investing in regional downtowns, such as Newark, New Brunswick, and Trenton, to concentrate job growth and rebuild communities.

The Third Plan supported mixed-use districts and arts and cultural institutions in these city centers, and encouraged development of brownfield sites. The Plan also proposed eleven regional preserves, including the New Jersey Pine Barrens, the Kittatinny Mountain ridge in Sussex County, the NY-NJ-CT Appalachian Highlands, the Delaware River, the Hudson River, the NY-NJ Harbor, and the Atlantic seashore. To enact the Plan's recommendations, RPA led several successful preservation campaigns such as the protection of Sterling Forest, which straddles New Jersey and New York and serves as an important link in the Appalachian Highlands system. The park was created in 1998.

2000s - 2020s: Making Investments that Work for All Residents

Over the last 20 years, RPA has continued to advocate for investment in city centers, a more robust transportation network, and more protection for green spaces in New Jersey. Since the turn of the century, RPA has published several reports looking at specific New Jersey towns and villages, and prepared proposals to develop healthier communities and more transit-oriented development in places like Hackensack, Galloway, Kearny, Matawan, Netcong, and Trenton. Soon after his election as Mayor of Newark, Cory Booker enlisted RPA to create a Draft Vision Plan for the city. In partnership with the NJIT School of Architecture, RPA analyzed more than 100 plans prepared by community groups, previous City administrations, State and Federal agencies and non-profit organizations. Using this analysis as a starting point, RPA convened local partners and planning, design, and architecture professionals in a three-day workshop to help establish a new city planning office for Newark.

Related Report

Oct 2006

Newark Draft Vision Plan

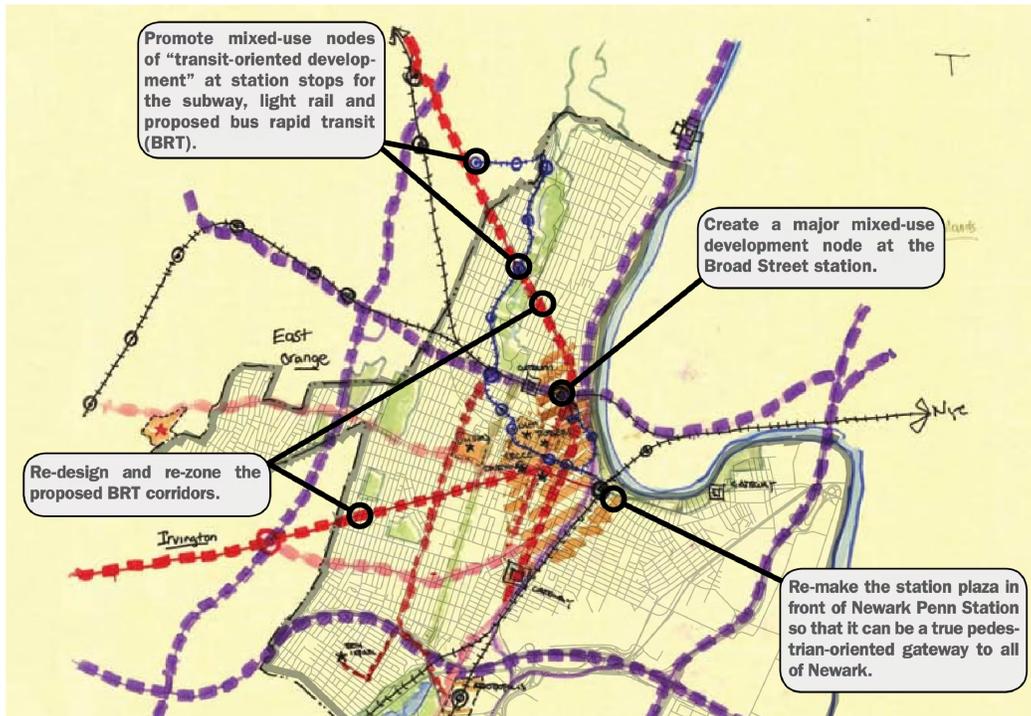


Image from RPA's Draft Vision Plan for Newark

RPA followed up with several reports on Newark regarding infill, parks on the waterfront, sustainability initiatives, and better bus service, and currently serves on the steering committee for Newark360, the latest master plan. In Paterson, in 2012, RPA worked with stakeholders to develop a strategic plan for how the arts could be synchronized into park planning and revitalization efforts, work which was cited in a 2021 draft neighborhood plan. More recently, RPA was invited to work in Camden, NJ on redevelopment analyses and neighborhood plans.

Property tax relief dominated public debate in New Jersey in the early 2000s. RPA published several reports identifying land use implications in the tax debate, and proposed criteria for property tax reform, including improving school funding equity, reducing incentives for sprawl, and improving the efficiency of government service delivery. RPA also emphasized that transportation funding was a pressing financial problem and released a series of reports sounding the alarm, suggesting guidelines for the effective and equitable use of public-private partnerships for funding transportation.

During this time, RPA also noted that transit developments such as Midtown Direct service by NJ Transit greatly improved commutes and property values for homes near train stations, and noted similar increases and commute improvements could happen with the construction of the Access to the Region's Core (ARC) project, which would have doubled rail capacity into Manhattan.



Building a Gateway

RPA began advocating for new Hudson River Rail Tunnels in earnest in 2003. After the ARC tunnel project was canceled in 2010, RPA worked with Amtrak to advance its replacement, the Gateway Program. RPA continues to lead the advocacy campaign for the project through its Build Gateway Now Coalition, a coalition of over 45 civic, labor, and business organizations formed in 2018.

In addition to its focus on surface transportation, RPA has been a vocal proponent for development of the region’s airports. In its 1947 report, *Airports of Tomorrow*, RPA advocated for the expansion of Newark Airport to a two-runway facility. It continued to push for infrastructure improvements at Newark Liberty International Airport with analyses in 2011 and 2018, and continues to champion better connections to the airport from within Newark itself and the region, such as extending PATH to Newark Airport.

RPA continued to build upon its legacy of environmental advocacy in the early 2000s, as it fought for passage of the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act and the federal Highlands Conservation Act, and released reports on sustainable development and regenerative design in the Highlands. More recently, it published recommendations on parklets and on enhancing regional connectivity and access to the Middlesex Greenway, as well as a proposal for the development of an integrated, 1,650-mile regional trail network to connect people and open spaces across the tri-state region.

As the climate crisis grew and New Jersey began getting battered by stronger storms and more extreme weather, RPA turned its attention to how New Jersey and the region could best adapt to this new reality and mitigate the worst of the damage. Hurricane Sandy, which made landfall in New Jersey on October 29, 2012, killed dozens of New Jersey residents and heavily impacted infrastructure systems, including utilities, transit networks, and the healthcare system. In the months that followed, concerns grew about the long-term loss of affordable housing stock, unfulfilled insurance claims, displaced communities, and job losses. RPA launched a scenario planning effort to help municipalities make reconstruction decisions and build more community resilience. RPA later helped coordinate Rebuild by Design, a post-Sandy design competition sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and published reports on buy-outs, the changing coastline, and how best to integrate community resilience around tidal wetlands.

Related Report

Sep 2018

The New Shoreline

Integrating Community and Ecological
Resilience around Tidal Wetlands

Why Chronic Floods are Coming to New Jersey

RPA Vice President for Energy and Environment Rob Freudenberg describes the role which New Jersey's Meadowlands play in softening the impacts of climate change.



Vox

With the torrential downpours and devastation brought by Hurricane Ida in 2021, RPA warned that previous developments on precarious land like marshlands and floodplains had put thousands of New Jersey residents in harm's way, and that communities and the State needed to reconsider current housing placements and future developments. As energy production greatly impacts climate change outcomes, RPA has also coordinated an Energy Task Force, which, among other priorities, has emphasized the importance of developing a robust offshore wind industry off the coasts of New Jersey and New York to reduce New Jersey's dependency on fossil fuels.

The Fourth Regional Plan: Making the Region Work for All of Us brought together interconnected issues such as more responsive transportation systems, reinvesting in urban centers, protecting the environment, and adapting to the climate crisis. Published in 2017, the *Fourth Regional Plan* emphasized the values of equity, health, prosperity, and sustainability in the region. RPA partnered with organizations like Make the Road NJ and Housing and Community Development Network of NJ to develop recommendations such as encouraging anti-displacement measures and investments in anchor institution networks. RPA also highlighted flagship places such as Paterson and the Meadowlands.

In the *Fourth Regional Plan*, RPA also noted that the Meadowlands were likely to be one of the first places in the region to be permanently inundated from sea level rise.



ORG Permanent Modernity for the Fourth Regional Plan

Preserving and Restoring the Meadowlands

RPA proposed that the Meadowlands become a climate resilience park, to demonstrate how properly managed natural landscapes could help mitigate the impacts of climate change. This would help preserve and restore the Meadowlands' natural habitats, protect nearby communities, and help make the Meadowlands a recreational resource, as suggested by the 1960s New Jersey Committee and also, though more limited, in the first *Regional Plan*.

RPA is proud of its extensive work in New Jersey. As RPA reflects on its history, we look forward to continuing to push for better and more equitable transportation, more investment in urban centers, greater protections for New Jersey's environment, and more resiliency measures to protect communities from climate change.

Looking Forward

Since 1922, RPA has guided the growth of the tri-state region with independent research and advocacy. Please make a donation today and help us continue this important work.

R P A

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