

A. PURPOSE AND NEED

Orange County has undergone a tremendous period of growth over the past thirty years as it has been transformed from a predominantly rural environment to a suburban setting that has become a part of the greater New York metropolitan area. Since 1970 the population in Orange County has increased by over 50 percent. In the 1990s, Orange County's population has grown from just over 307,600 people in 1990 to over 341,400 people, as reported in the 2000 Census. This 11 percent increase in population is the fourth largest in the entire state, with Putnam being the only county, outside the five boroughs of New York City that exceeded Orange County's ten year growth rate. This trend of increased growth is expected to continue, with projections from the Orange County Department of Planning estimating that by the year 2025 the County's population is expected to grow by an additional 36 percent to over 464,000 people.

The Towns and Villages in the southeastern portion of the County are at the leading edge of the development cycle as these communities have become the logical place to settle for people and businesses moving away from the older, more densely developed areas of downstate New York. The populations in the Towns of Blooming Grove, Monroe, and Woodbury have increased by more than 21 percent over the past ten years, which is almost double the County's rate of growth. Projections by the County's Planning Department indicate that the populations in the Towns and Villages making up the southeast portion of Orange County are all anticipated to undergo substantial growth over the next twenty-five years, with many of these municipalities faced with a doubling of its population by 2025. As more people move into this area the demand for the roadways, schools, and infrastructure will also increase. One of the most visible impacts of this increased demand is traffic congestion. With segments of the main thoroughfares already operating at or above their design capacity, the growth projections and the subsequent effect on the transportation systems are major concerns for both the residents and elected officials in these municipalities.

B. PROJECT EVOLUTION AND STAKEHOLDERS

In 1998 a grass roots Traffic Task Force was formed focusing on traffic congestion in the Monroe-Woodbury area and the types of regional, inter-municipal, solutions that could be advanced to address these issues. The Task Force consists of elected officials and planning and zoning board members representing the Towns of Monroe and Woodbury, as well as from the Villages of Harriman, Kiryas Joel, and Monroe. Meeting on a monthly basis, the Traffic Task Force discussed potential transportation improvement measures and land use controls that could be initiated to help preserve the area's unique character and maintain the quality of life that makes this portion of Orange County such an attractive place to live and do business. By 2000, the Task Force had gained the attention of the County Executive's Office and the major agencies and providers of transportation services in the region, including the New York State Department

Southeastern Orange County Traffic and Land Use Study

of Transportation (NYSDOT), the New York State Thruway Authority (NYSTA), MTA Metro-North Railroad (MNR), and the Monroe-Woodbury School District. These agencies became members of the Task Force. In addition, the scope of the group’s effort was expanded to include the growing concern over the demand for water, sewer, and the limited capacity of the area’s existing infrastructure and how development in the surrounding Towns would affect these services. Recognizing the magnitude of the challenges facing the Traffic Task Force, Orange County and NYSDOT issued a Request for Proposals for consulting firms in March of 2001 to conduct a comprehensive study of the transportation system within the Towns of Monroe and Woodbury.

Responsible development and smart growth became an important issue in the November 2001 elections. These same issues formed a portion of newly elected County Executive Edward Diana’s platform and by the middle of 2002 a consultant for the Monroe-Woodbury Transportation Study was selected and introduced to the Traffic Task Force. The project study area was expanded to include the Town of Blooming Grove so that a truly regional approach to both land use and transportation solutions could be studied and representatives from the Town of Blooming Grove were added to the Task Force. To more accurately reflect the size and scope of the project it was renamed the Southeastern Orange County Traffic and Land Use Study. As a “home-rule” State, the participation by each of the municipalities in the study area made the Traffic Task Force the likely organization to act as the project’s Steering Committee, since the Towns and Villages will ultimately be responsible for initiating and implementing any future land use recommendations. For a complete list of the Project Advisory Group, see Table 1-1.

**Table 1-1
Project Advisory Group**

Name	Affiliation	Title
Michael Amo	County Legislature	County Legislator, 1st District
Roxanne Donnery	County Legislature	County Legislator, 14th District
Frank A. Fornario, Jr.	County Legislature	County Legislator, 5th District
Spencer M. McLaughlin	County Legislature	County Legislator, 7th District
Charles J. Bohan	Town of Blooming Grove	Supervisor
Sandy Leonard	Town of Monroe	Supervisor
Sheila Conroy	Town of Woodbury	Supervisor
G. Bruce Chichester	Village of Harriman	Councilman
Gedalye Szegedin	Village of Kiryas Joel	Village Clerk
Joseph Mancuso	Village of Monroe	Mayor
Captain Martin Hansen	New York State Police	Zone Commander
Richard A. Peters	NYS Dept. of Transportation	Regional Planning Manager
Ramesh Mehta	NYS Thruway Authority	Division Director
Wai Cheung, PE	NYS Thruway Authority	Traffic Systems Engineer
Edmund A. Fares	Orange County DPW	Commissioner
David Church	Orange County Department of Planning	Commissioner
Clifford Berchtold	Monroe-Woodbury School District	Director of Transportation
Robyn Hollander	MTA Metro-North Railroad	Capital & Long Range Planning
Jean Shanahan	Newburgh-Orange County Transportation Council	Staff Director
Patricia Gilchrest	Orange County Citizens Foundation	Executive Director
Tom Falzer	The Chelsea Group	

The Southeastern Orange County Traffic and Land Use Study involves a detailed analysis of traffic conditions on the state-owned corridors in the area including Route 17, Route 17M, Route 208, Route 32, and the heavily traveled Route 17/6/32 interchange area. The study also evaluates potential solutions that include modifications to the New York State Thruway and County Route 105 as well as improvements to transit and pedestrian operations and the provision of multi-modal transportation centers.

C. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A number of goals were established as part of this Federally funded study including:

- Determining the current operational characteristics and deficiencies of the transportation system;
- Forecasting future conditions of the transportation system;
- Recommending improvements to enhance the efficiency, capacity, and safety of the transportation system;
- Developing and recommending sustainable development guidelines that are compatible with and help preserve the capacity of future transportation improvements; and
- Building a consensus for proposed transportation improvements and sustainable development through public forums.

D. STUDY AND CONSENSUS BUILDING PROCESS

Throughout the study process the consultant team met monthly with the Traffic Task Force and solicited input from the public through three visioning sessions, the project web site, and a public opinion survey that was distributed to over 1,000 residents of the study area. The insight gained from the public's comments was combined with traditional data collection efforts regarding traffic volumes, safety, highway characteristics, physical features of the corridor, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, transit systems and other relevant features to develop a comprehensive analysis of existing and future travel conditions and to identify deficiencies and problems with the transportation infrastructure. The analysis of the existing transportation systems and recommendations to improve future operations were reviewed by a Study Technical Group consisting of Orange County, NYSDOT, NYSTA, and Metro-North. Each of the Towns and Villages in the study area were also consulted, with their input being an instrumental component in the development of transportation and land use solutions that could be administered within their jurisdictions. Upon concurrence by the Study Technical Group and the involved municipalities, the analyses and resulting improvement options were presented to the Traffic Task Force. Acting in its role as the project's Steering Committee, the Traffic Task Force was used to build public consensus for potential improvement alternatives.

E. TRAFFIC AND LAND USE FORECASTING

EARLY ACTION INITIATIVES

As part of the project, short term transportation management strategies (0-3 years) were developed to address the impact of trips being generated by existing and approved development, as well as the growth of through traffic in the study area. These short-term solutions were generally lower cost improvements focusing on existing safety and operational problems along the project corridors. The majority of these early action projects maximize the effectiveness of the existing roadway infrastructure by optimizing signal timings and coordinating the phasing of adjacent traffic lights to allow for a smooth progression of flow. Additional turning lanes at high volume intersections along with the establishment of consistent speed limits, safe passing zones, and landscape design features are also being proposed to alleviate congestions bottlenecks while respecting the land uses and character of the adjacent areas.

LONG-TERM MODELING

Projections of traffic conditions on the study area corridors for the horizon year 2020 and for full build-out (maximum development permitted by zoning) were developed by the Orange County Department of Planning utilizing a four-step travel demand model for several future scenarios and a No-Build Scenario, which assumes that no significant changes to land use regulations or the current transportation system are made beyond those currently committed to by the transportation providers and local municipalities. Potential visions for future development, building off of comments and recommendations from the public visioning sessions, were developed. These scenarios were then assembled into a matrix for comparative purposes using the County's four-step travel demand model (see Figure 1-1). The Land Use and Transportation Scenarios are described briefly below and in more detail in Chapter 3.

LAND USE SCENARIOS

- ***Existing Zoning*** – Development of existing vacant or underdeveloped parcels according to existing zoning codes.
- ***Village Center Scenario*** – Changing land use patterns to increase densities and expand the limits of the villages and hamlets in the study area while reducing the amount of developable land in the outlying areas.
- ***Reduced Density Scenario*** – Limit commercial development to the established business zones with no expansions allowed beyond the existing commercial boundaries. Reduce residential development by increasing required lot sizes.
- ***Infrastructure-Based Zoning Scenario*** – Concentrate both commercial and residential development in the areas that contain sufficient sewer infrastructure. Development outside of these areas would be required to install, and/or make financial provisions for, the utilities and services necessary to support the additional expansion.

12.2.04

TRANSPORTATION	LAND USE	1 Existing Zoning Build-Out	2 Village Center	3 Reduced Density	4 Infrastructure Based Zoning
1 No Action Current Improvements Only					
2 Transportation Management Strategies					
3 Roadway Focused Investment					
4 Transit Focused Investment					