

Chapter 6: Transportation

GOAL: A safe, equitable, and affordable multi-modal transportation system that enhances mobility and access, phases out fossil fuel dependency, connects communities, supports a resilient supply chain, and decreases GHG emissions.

For thousands of years before European settlers arrived, the Haudenosaunee and other Indigenous people of North America understood the Western New York geography as critical to the movement of people and trade throughout the region. The location and geography of what is now called Erie County remains important to the efficient transportation of people, goods, and services locally, regionally, and throughout North America.

Unfortunately, the rise of the automobile and reliance on fossil fuels have resulted in a wide range of adverse environmental, social, and economic impacts. Decades of “sprawl without growth” have created land use patterns that are increasingly difficult to provide convenient, reliable, and energy efficient transportation options, leaving our urban, suburban, and rural communities disconnected from one another. Sprawl and the expansion of auto-oriented highways and road infrastructure have also resulted in dramatic social, health, housing, and mobility inequities that primarily impact low-income and minority neighborhoods.

As the impacts of climate change become increasingly evident in our region, how we choose to transport goods and services, connect people and communities, and promote energy efficient modes of transportation will determine the resiliency of Erie County.

New technologies and emerging trends offer unprecedented opportunities to build a transportation system that works better for our environment and our health. Expanded and improved public transportation, electric vehicles, and ride-sharing services, as well as improved cycling and pedestrian infrastructure, offer ways to reduce GHG emissions, make land use more efficient, and connect people to employment opportunities.

One of the lessons that the COVID-19 pandemic has made clear is the need for more resilient supply chain networks. The supply chain is a critical element of our transportation network and it has a direct impact on our quality of life. Developing a more resilient supply chain requires that we rethink how we integrate our economic and industrial development, workforce development, energy management, agriculture and food systems delivery, and electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure into land use decisions.

Transportation is what connects our economy, communities, and environment. How we develop and use our region’s transportation system is a key to reducing GHG emissions, and allowing us to make the most of the many opportunities to increase resilience as we face an uncertain future.

DEFINITIONS FOR ACTIONS SPECIFICATIONS
Short-term: By or before 2030
Medium-term: By 2040
Long-term: By 2050
Direct: County government can directly control the action - relating to County government operations and infrastructure
Indirect: Regional agencies and municipalities have control and/or County government can support/influence
Support: State or Federal policies and programs

STRATEGY 1: Active Transport

According to a 2017 National Household Transportation Survey, 45.6% of vehicle trips within Erie County are three miles or less. These shorter trips provide a significant opportunity to utilize various types of transportation that reduce GHG emissions, improve public health, and promote economic vitality and community, including active transportation and micromobility, like electric scooters. Furthermore, expanding options for active transportation and micromobility will improve safety and quality of life for all residents, including those who do not have access to personal vehicles.

Active transportation is any form of human-powered, non-motorized transportation, such as cycling and walking. Substituting motorized vehicles with zero-emission, active transportation choices can reduce a person’s personal carbon footprint from transportation by as much as 25%, in addition to improving one’s health and quality of life. Additionally, there are emerging micromobility options which can further decrease one’s carbon footprint by reducing the number of vehicle trips and providing convenient and cost-effective methods of transportation for shorter trips.

Enabling active transportation and micromobility in Erie County means improving infrastructure such as trails, sidewalks, streets, and intersections to provide safe and accessible routes to key destinations, services, and educational and employment opportunities. Educating residents about the benefits of active transportation in daily life, creating linkages to transit, and expanding connectivity to existing on- and off-road cycling facilities will promote lower-emission transportation in a way that centers equity, sustainability, and public health.

ACTION ITEM	HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
1.1: Create, update, and implement a Complete Streets Policy at the County level that may dually serve as a template for area municipalities. Include regular monitoring and reporting to the community.	Short-term/ Ongoing	Direct/ Indirect	DPW/DEP	GBNRTC, Local municipalities
1.2: Expand the County’s active transportation network, including filling in on-road, sidewalk, park, and trail gaps.	Ongoing	Direct	DPW, DEP/CDBG	GBNRTC, Local municipalities
1.3: Work with local governments to implement the Regional Bicycle Master Plan, including the Shoreline Trail. ²⁴	Medium-term	Direct	DEP	DPW, GBNRTC
1.4A: Educate County residents about the health and economic benefits of choosing active transport options.	Ongoing	Direct	DEP	LiveWell Erie, GOBike, Go Buffalo Niagara
1.4B: Educate all road users, including pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers, on the rules of the road and how to safely interact with each other.	Ongoing	Direct	DEP	Central Police Services, Sheriff’s Dept, GoBike Buffalo, County Clerk, DMV
1.5: Provide recommendations on projects referred to the County through the 239-M process to improve walkability and bikeability.	Ongoing	Indirect	DEP	Municipalities
1.6: Address barriers to active transportation through maintenance of sidewalks, paths, and trails; increased access to repair tools and bike racks; and installation of American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant pedestrian devices.1.6: Develop and implement a campaign	Ongoing/ Short-Term	Direct/ Indirect	DEP & Parks, DEP	Local municipalities, GBNRTC, local bike and trail organizations, local school districts, PTAs, Students

²⁴

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56ccbfd3c44d8670dbd1d84/t/60f710fe80c4d02ab34347c0/1626804481563/Bike_Buffalo_Niagara_Cover_and_Table_of_Contents.pdf

to get kids to walk to school and adults to walk to nearby destinations.				
--	--	--	--	--

Infographics/Call-Outs Boxes to Be Added Later:

- Complete Streets
- Another Means of Transportation During Road Closures
- Bike Master Plan
- 239-M Process

STRATEGY 2: Transit & Land Use

The transportation sector generates the largest share of GHG emissions in the United States. The greatest overall contributor to transportation GHG emissions is single occupancy vehicle use. According to the 2017 National Household Travel Survey, 44% of trips in the Buffalo-Niagara region are made in single occupancy vehicles, with 87% of trips made in private vehicles (single or multiple occupants). Improvements in transportation and land use will build community resilience, promote equity, and reduce GHG emissions throughout the region.

Future trends in public and multimodal transportation and land use will have transformative impacts on our environment, health, and quality of life. Prioritizing the expansion and improvement of transportation options, affordability, connectivity, and public education on the transport options available to County residents will allow for improved air quality, more efficient use of land, and the creation of recreational, educational, and economic opportunities for all. The County government has the opportunity to maximize success by building on its existing multi-modal systems in a way that allows affordable access for all.

Creating a safe, efficient, and affordable public transportation system will promote increased use by County residents, reduce the use of highly polluting, car-focused modes of transportation, and ultimately, reduce GHG emissions. Erie County will support the development of such a transportation system through representation on boards such as NFTA and the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC), while working with municipalities to update their comprehensive plans, provide technical assistance, and obtain funding. In order to promote climate resilience, the County will coordinate with its transportation system providers to improve connectivity to vulnerable neighborhoods during extreme weather events.

ACTION ITEM	HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
2.1: Support expansion of the County's current light rail system.	Short-Term/ Medium-Term/ Long-Term/ Ongoing	Indirect/ Support	DEP	NFTA, GBNRTC, EMC, City of Buffalo, Local municipalities
2.2: Support development of bus rapid transit service throughout the County.	Long-term	Indirect/Support	DEP	NFTA, GBNRTC, EMC, City of Buffalo, Local municipalities
2.3: Support expansion of the County's regional "hub and corridor" transit system.	Medium-term	Indirect/Support	DEP	NFTA, GBNRTC, EMC, City of Buffalo, Local municipalities
2.4: Develop alternative transportation programs, including microtransit options, that address transportation gaps.	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct/ Indirect	DEP	NFTA, GBNRTC, Private Sector Operators
2.5: Expand transit options for rural residents, including the County's Rural Transit Services program.	Short-Term	Direct	DEP	NFTA, local municipalities, private sector operators, GBNRTC

2.6: Educate the community on the benefits of alternative commuting options such as work from home, alternatives to single occupancy vehicles, and public transportation incentives.	Ongoing	Direct	DEP	Go Buffalo Niagara
2.7: Advocate implementation of the NFTA Equitable Transit Oriented Development Plan for Metro Rail in alignment with state and federal initiatives.	Medium-Term	Direct	DEP	NFTA, GBNRTC, Municipalities
2.8: Identify opportunities to expand programs that make transit more affordable to low- and moderate-income residents.	Ongoing	Indirect	DEP	NFTA, Senior Services, Workforce Investment Board
2.10: Develop programs which ensure transportation for vulnerable residents during extreme weather events.	Short-Term	Direct	DEP	Health, Senior Services, UB, NFTA

Infographics/Call-Outs Boxes to Be Added Later:

- Our Transportation System: Jurisdiction, etc.
- Microtransit
- Modes of transport
- Federal Justice 40 Initiative
- Rural Transit Service

STRATEGY 3: Electric Vehicles

Light duty vehicles like cars and small trucks account for about 28% of Erie County’s carbon footprint, and reducing these emissions is key to achieving our GHG reduction goals. A recent development is the availability of practical, longer-range EVs that promise to quickly transform our light duty vehicle fleet to one powered by our relatively low-carbon electric grid, while also improving air quality in our neighborhoods and lowering costs for vehicle owners. This transition

is happening regardless of our actions and without large public investments. The County's challenge is to make sure it supports a quick and smooth transition to EVs that is equitable and addresses key challenges so that low- and moderate-income residents are not left behind. Zero-emission heavy duty vehicles are also on the horizon, although this transition will be slower and more challenging.

While technological breakthroughs will continue to improve EVs and make them more affordable, there are practical, local issues with EV adoption that require leadership from Erie County government. For most vehicle owners, the lowest cost way to charge EVs is at home and at night, when time of use meters make charging less expensive. Unfortunately, many residents, especially lower-income residents, are not able to easily install EV chargers for a variety of reasons. These issues disproportionately affect low- and moderate-income urban and rural residents, so to equitably transition to EVs, the County will need to exert leadership and help municipalities implement creative solutions to meet a variety of EV charging needs.

Business adoption of EVs will also be important to Erie County's clean energy transition. With the rise of online shopping and delivery services, commercial vehicle use is increasing. Where the County is involved in business development, it needs to inform businesses of the benefits of EVs and available incentives for EVs and EV infrastructure. WeErie County also needs to promote businesses providing EV charging stations to their workers, which may become a solution for increasing EV charger access to low- and moderate-income workers.

Although the transition to EVs provides important benefits, many impacts will remain, including the County's current transportation system centered around cars and trucks, which has contributed to sprawl and the need for County residents to own a single-occupancy vehicle. These vehicles often use prime public space for parking and they can create safety issues for bicyclists and pedestrians. Even as prices for EVs decrease, they will not be affordable or accessible for everyone. As the Erie County government supports an equitable transition to EVs, we must also continue to support initiatives that move away from our reliance on cars and small trucks, and towards a more multi-modal public transportation system that reduces urban sprawl and encourages dense, mixed-use development.

ACTION ITEM	HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
3.1: Foster the development of EV ridesharing and car sharing programs to provide more clean energy options, particularly in disadvantaged communities.	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct/ Indirect	DEP	County Departments, NYSERDA, Go Buffalo Niagara, Ridesharing and taxi companies
3.2 Install public-facing EV charging stations at County facilities	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Direct	DPW	NYSEG, National Grid
3.3 Advocate for EV charging infrastructure on real estate development projects, especially for projects for which the County has direct involvement.	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Indirect	DEP	NYSEG, National Grid, NYPA, ECIDA
3.4 Participate in the regional planning of EV charging infrastructure and advocate for an equitable EV charging station network.	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Indirect	DEP	GBNRTC, NYSEG, National Grid, Clean Communities of WNY, NYSDOT
3.5: Expand publicly accessible EV charging stations for all by promoting their siting and installation through private and public programs throughout Erie County.	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Indirect	DEP, Municipalities	NYSERDA, NYSDOT, National Grid, Clean Communities of WNY, NYSEG, NYPA, NYSDEC, NYS Parks, AAA
3.6: Promote purchasing, replacing, and converting gas and diesel-powered vehicles and fleets, construction equipment, and generators with electric- powered alternatives through federal, state, and utility incentive programs.	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Indirect	DEP	National Grid, NYSERDA, NYSEG, NYSDEC, NYSDOT, Clean Communities of WNY, NYPA, AAA
3.7: Promote and educate about tax incentives, rebates, and trade-in programs to foster the equitable and affordable adoption of EVs.	Short-Term/ Ongoing	Indirect	DEP	NYSEG, National Grid, NYSERDA, NYSDTF, USIRS

3.8: Continue to promote low and zero emission fleet vehicles and the use of alternate fuels by municipalities and businesses throughout Erie County.	Ongoing/ Short-Term	Direct	DEP	Local municipalities, universities, school districts, EMC, Association of Governments, SBR
3.9: Consider the inclusion of conduit and other features that allow for eventual inclusion of EV charging stations in the design criteria for publicly accessible parking lots, construction projects, CDBG funded projects, 239-M review projects, and other County projects.	Ongoing	Indirect	DPW	DSM, local municipalities, Highways

Infographics/Call-Outs Boxes to Be Added Later:

- Installing EV chargers
- EVs are becoming more economical
- Governor’s goal to electrify school buses by 2035
- Transitioning to EVs

STRATEGY 4: Transportation Resilience

The Erie County government owns and operates more than one thousand miles of roadways and is responsible for ensuring that roads are safe during weather events. As the climate changes, the County is adapting to new threats in how it works with community partners to design, operate, and maintain the transportation system to be resilient in its response to and recovery from extreme weather events, especially for County-owned roadways. Extreme rain, snow, wind, and heat events all present different types of challenges and solutions. During extreme heat events, the County needs to work with partners to make sure that residents have safe ways to get to cooling centers or green spaces to cool off, including by promoting tree lined streets and bus shelters that provide shade. Likewise, for extreme snow events, ensuring a safe and reliable way to get to warming centers is essential. Finally, the County will support the transition to EVs that are fully integrated into the utility grid, providing distributed power storage that will serve the utility grid, and that will make homes and businesses more resilient during power outages.

Another aspect of transportation resilience is ensuring that our logistics and distribution systems are adapted to withstand supply chain disruptions as we have seen during recent extreme weather events, such as the recent late-fall snowstorms. The County government must work with partner organizations to achieve a diverse freight network and avoid interruptions that impact both businesses and residents. The County should also ensure that its transportation system

supports local businesses including agriculture, which will make us less dependent on long-distance transportation to meet community needs.

ACTION ITEM	HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
4.1: Incorporate changes in seasonal and extreme events into how the County designs and builds transportation infrastructure.	Short to long term	Direct	DPW	Local governments, NYSDOT, NFTA
4.2: Work with partners to make sure that streets, sidewalks, bike lanes, and transit stops are accessible during weather events, including snow.	Short to long term	Direct and indirect	DPW	Local governments, NYSDOT, NFTA, National Guard
4.3: Implement high-priority transportation freight infrastructure projects that serve to increase the efficiency and diversity of our freight network.	Short to long term	Indirect	DEP	GBNRTC, International Trade Gateway Organization
4.4: Work with food and goods distributors and freight operators to assure that the community has access to food and supplies during disruptive storms.	Long term	Indirect	DEP	NYSDOT, local governments

Infographics/Call-Outs Boxes to Be Added Later:

- None