

LACKAWANNA-LUZERNE
COME, SHAPE THE FUTURE



CHAPTER 1

THE SETTING



Introduction

Located in northeastern Pennsylvania, Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties are comprised of 116 municipalities and home to over a half-million people. Over the years, these two counties have demonstrated a strong history of governmental cooperation and regional collaboration. This association represents a shared vision for collaborative planning and decision-making on a wide range of challenges and opportunities affecting the future of both counties. Chief among these are land use, economic development, transportation, and sustainable environmental quality.

Past collaborations include the creation of the Lackawanna/Luzerne Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), as well as the preparation and adoption of the first two-county open space, greenway, and outdoor recreation master plan in the Commonwealth – a plan that the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources uses as a model of quality planning in Pennsylvania. Continuing with that precedent, Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties have now joined together to prepare a two-county comprehensive and long-range transportation plan. The *Lackawanna-Luzerne Regional Plan* presented in this document is therefore comprised of two critical and related planning elements, as follows:

- A *Comprehensive Plan* focused on providing an overall planning guide for the two counties and their municipalities. It establishes a framework for future growth, conservation, and preservation that strengthens existing communities and responsibly stewards natural, agricultural, and cultural resources.
- A *Long-Range Transportation Plan* (LRTP) to develop, maintain, and manage an adequate, safe, accessible, and environmentally-sound transportation system. This system will support communities and provide for the reasonably efficient movement of people and goods within and through Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties.

A Hazard Mitigation Plan for Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties was developed in conjunction with this Regional Plan. As a result of this collaborative effort, future development is being directed to avoid known or possible hazard areas. In addition, identifying possible mitigation areas for future purchase and developing transportation planning to incorporate improving evacuation routes into and out of the area was part of the overall strategy in these planning efforts. This is the first time that all three planning emphasis areas – the Comprehensive Plan, Long-Range Transportation Plan, and Hazard Mitigation Plan – have been addressed concurrently for two counties in Pennsylvania.

Purpose of the New Comprehensive Plan

The preparation of a comprehensive plan serves four purposes:

- First, and foremost, it establishes a common planning database for Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties. The database, which is detailed in Chapter Four, includes

Comprehensive Plan
Establishes common planning database
Identifies basic direction and structure
Specifies goals, policies, and individual elements
Provides specific implementation strategy and program

surveys of natural and cultural features, the current land use pattern, the road system, the systems of public services and utilities, analyses and projections of population and housing, and an examination of the rate and types of change in each county over the last 20 years.

- Second, it identifies the basic direction and structure recommended for the future of the two-county region, derived from extensive evaluation of alternative scenarios for development to the year 2035. The framework for the future is described in Chapter Two.
- Third, it specifies the goals, policies, and individual elements that will form the basis for development, conservation, redevelopment, and preservation. This information is also presented in Chapter Two.
- Fourth, it provides a specific implementation strategy and program to help achieve the goals of the Plan. This strategy and program is laid out in Chapter Three.

A comprehensive plan for the Lackawanna and Luzerne County communities provides local officials with a highly-effective planning tool. This tool will support day-to-day decisions about future development so that planning may be thoroughly rational and consistent and at the same time move the communities together in a desirable direction in terms of revitalization, open space conservation, mobility, historic resource preservation, environmental protection, community facilities, and fiscal balance.

This comprehensive plan is fully responsive to the needs of the residents of Lackawanna and Luzerne County communities. These needs were identified based on input from the Advisory Committee, public meetings, and stakeholder sessions. It contains both long-range and short-range programs, balances local needs and perceptions with regional requirements and perspectives, and has its own logic and strategy for implementation. A good comprehensive plan also serves as a “road map” for the study area, both in terms of informing and improving the practice of reviewing and approving development plans, and in projecting a coherent and mutually agreed-upon development framework and visual image of the area.

The comprehensive plan should serve as an everyday working document to be referred to regularly in the review of development proposals and in the planning of long-range capital improvements. The comprehensive plan for Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties also needs to relate to and be coordinated with local municipal and multi-municipal comprehensive plans, but at the same time must reflect the unique characteristics and setting of all of Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties. The comprehensive plan must also meet the requirements of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s Municipalities Planning Code as to content and the procedure for the preparation and adoption of comprehensive plans.

Purpose of the New Long-Range Transportation Plan

The long-range transportation plan has been developed as a long-range (20+ years) planning strategy and capital improvement program and serves as a guide for

coordinated transportation planning throughout Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties. The LRTP identifies the location, size, function, and type of new or improved transportation infrastructure, focusing on a multimodal approach to transportation planning. It includes projects for highways, streets, sidewalks, trails, rail, ports, and airports, and for various modes of public transportation.

The LRTP serves as a resource to guide the wise use of public funds in the investment of a transportation system, so that cost effective infrastructure that will efficiently move people and goods throughout the region will result.

A LRTP is updated every four years, as required by federal law. To update the LRTP, population, and job growth trends are projected into the future, traffic levels are forecast and compared to the capacity of the road network, and the costs of needed transportation projects are estimated and compared with revenue forecasts. Many meetings are held to solicit public opinion on transportation needs and priorities. Finally, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Board adopts a list of projects considered to be the highest priority and affordable. The recommendations of the new long-range transportation plan for Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties are detailed in Chapter Two.

Long-Range Transportation Plan

Establishes coordinated
planning guide

Identifies details of new and
improved infrastructure

Guides wise investment of
public funds

A Regional Plan, Fully Integrated

The comprehensive plan and the long-range transportation plan for Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties have been combined and together are known as the **Lackawanna-Luzerne Regional Plan**. This innovative plan takes full advantage of new and evolving planning tools and provides guidance on sustainability and integrated environmentally-sound land use and transportation systems. The traditional definition of sustainability calls for policies and strategies that meet society's present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

During the development of the Regional Plan, existing assets of each county were identified, described, and mapped. At the same time, challenges and deficiencies were brought forward for consideration in the broader functions of regional, county, and municipal programs.

The planning process for the Regional Plan represented an opportunity for the region to focus in on its identity and its prospects. Given the scale and longevity of major land developments and transportation investments and the impact they have on an area's economy and quality of life, the plan for the region's future demanded thoughtful consideration. A twenty-year Regional Plan is critical in helping the two-county area realize its vision for the future. The Regional Plan reflects both counties' input on what kind of change will be acceptable, where and at what pace; what needs to be conserved and why; and what the future of the Lackawanna-Luzerne County area should ultimately look like to those who will stay, return, or move here to be the next generation of citizens and decision-makers.

A Snapshot of Both Counties

Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties are centrally located in Pennsylvania's Northeast Region (**Figure 1.1**). The area includes the region's largest city, Scranton, with additional population centers in Wilkes-Barre, Hazleton, and Pittston. To the east are Wayne and Monroe Counties; to the south, Carbon and Schuylkill Counties; to the west, Columbia and Sullivan Counties; and to the north, Wyoming and Susquehanna Counties. The figure identifies the study area's 116 municipalities, major roadways and railroads, streams and water bodies, parks, state forests, game lands, and other managed conservation areas.

The combined physical area of Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties is approximately 1,325 square miles, or approximately 850,000 acres, and includes roughly 22 square miles of water bodies.

The landscape of the central portion of both counties is dominated by two major river valleys, the Wyoming and Lackawanna. These two river plains bisect the area diagonally southwest from northeast and are the lowest elevations, as low as 530 feet above sea level. Both valleys are bordered by a series of mountain ridges and upland areas on either side. This geography has elevations exceeding over 2,000 feet above sea level in some areas.

The two counties historically developed along the Susquehanna and Lackawanna Rivers, connected by important routes branching out from these valleys and including what are today PA Routes 6, 11, 29, 115, 92, 93, 935, 435, and 309. Interstate highway access also plays an important role in more recent changes in development patterns, as well as regional mobility. Interstate 80 along the southern third of Luzerne County and Interstate 380 in southeastern Lackawanna County provide a link to the nearby New York City Metropolitan area. From Philadelphia, Interstate 476 (PA Turnpike NE Extension) follows the eastern edge of Luzerne County and terminates north of Scranton in western Lackawanna County. Interstate 81 bisects the two counties while connecting the cities of Hazleton, Wilkes-Barre, and Scranton to each other en route from Harrisburg and points south northward to New York State. Interstate 84 crosses the southeastern corner of Lackawanna County, providing access to New England. Construction of these roadways affected many of the municipalities in the two-county area, with new access and population and land use changes.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the combined total population for both counties is 535,355 persons. Lackawanna County has 40 municipalities, including 2 cities, 17 boroughs, and 21 townships. Luzerne County has 76 municipalities, including 4 cities, 36 boroughs, and 36 townships.



Figure 1.1

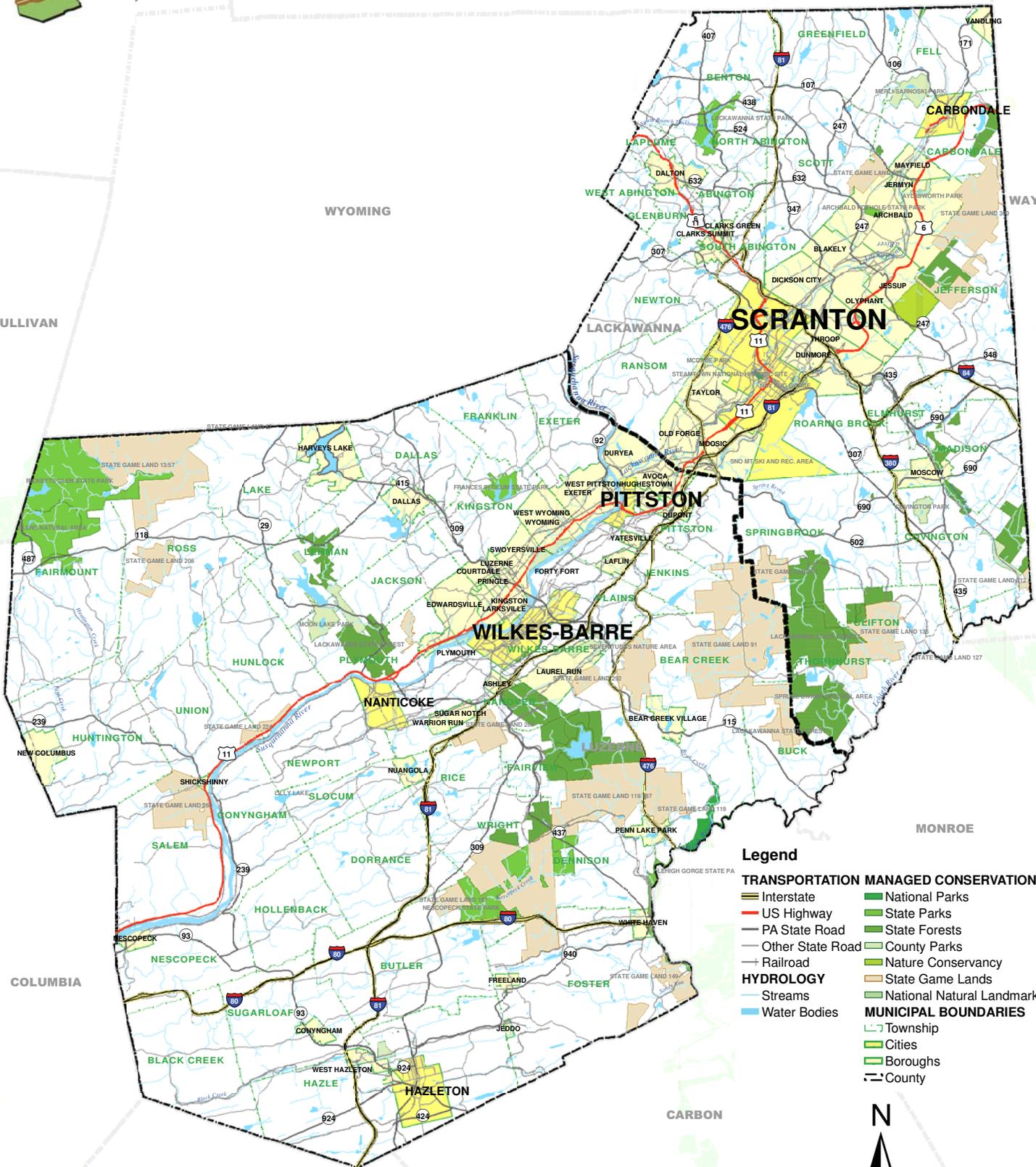
REGIONAL PLAN AREA

SUSQUEHANNA

WYOMING

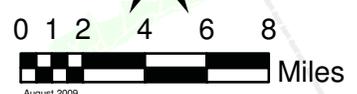
SULLIVAN

WAYNE



Legend

- TRANSPORTATION**
 - Interstate
 - US Highway
 - PA State Road
 - Other State Road
 - Railroad
- HYDROLOGY**
 - Streams
 - Water Bodies
- MANAGED CONSERVATION**
 - National Parks
 - State Parks
 - State Forests
 - County Parks
 - Nature Conservancy
 - State Game Lands
 - National Natural Landmark
- MUNICIPAL BOUNDARIES**
 - Township
 - Cities
 - Boroughs
 - County



Planning Practices of Both Counties

Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties have a history of planning together. Joint transportation planning started on June 2, 1964 with the execution of a Transportation Study Agreement between the two counties, the Cities of Scranton and Wilkes-Barre and the Pennsylvania Department of Highways that created the Lackawanna-Luzerne Transportation Study. It also included a joint operating agreement for the region's largest full service airport, the Wilkes-Barre Scranton International Airport. The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the two counties was established as a result of the 1973 Federal Highway Act. The MPO is a body that determines how all federal and state highway/bridge funds are allocated. The Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO encompasses all areas of the two counties. The Lackawanna/Luzerne MPO consists of three committees: the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), the Technical Committee, and the Coordinating Committee.

The counties have also created other authorities, such as the Lower Lackawanna Sanitary Authority, to jointly treat wastewater from both counties.

New opportunities and incentives for multi-municipal planning now exist as a result of recent revisions to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, and current policies of the Commonwealth, including Pennsylvania's Keystone Principles for Growth, Investment, and Resource Conservation. Programs offered by the Governor's Center for Local Government Services and funding sources like LUPTAP to encourage joint planning and cooperation have proven important in recent years. Of current concern are two issues: the adequacy and consistency of local and regional plans, and the recent severe reduction of state funding for county and multi-municipal planning.

Recent Planning Activities

Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties have conducted or supported noteworthy planning activities over the past 10 years. Four of these efforts are detailed below.

Scranton-Abingtons Planning Association Comprehensive Plan, 2009

The Scranton-Abingtons Planning Association (SAPA) consists of 11 municipalities in Lackawanna County, including the City of Scranton; the boroughs of Clarks Green, Clarks Summit, Dalton, and Dunmore; and the townships of Abington (now called Waverly), Glenburn, Newton, North Abington, South Abington, and West Abington. SAPA was established so that the member municipalities could achieve the benefits of multi-municipal cooperation. Their multi-municipal comprehensive plan provides SAPA municipalities with the opportunity to develop cooperative zoning, in order to allocate land uses to the most appropriate locations in the planning area instead of providing for all types of uses in each and every municipality. This strategy holds the great potential for effective long-term management of growth and development. Concurrently, the municipalities must plan for changing demands and costs of community facilities and services. These municipalities continue to work together to manage growth and change in accord with well defined, yet flexible, goals and objectives aimed at achieving an overall vision.

Back Mountain Area Council of Governments Comprehensive Plan, 2006

The Back Mountain Area Council of Governments (BMACOG), made up of local officials from the four municipalities of Dallas Borough, Dallas Township, Kingston Township, and Lehman Township, guided the planning process. This comprehensive plan contains a set of initiatives proposed by residents, business owners and municipal officials. The Plan incorporates the key elements of three separate and simultaneous planning efforts -- a comprehensive plan, a detailed transportation plan, and an open space, greenways and outdoor recreation master plan.

Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties Open Space, Greenways & Outdoor Recreation Master Plan, 2004

This document provides Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties with a unified approach to protecting valuable natural resources, ecologically and environmentally sensitive areas, and a network of recreational opportunities. Through this effort, a planning framework for the preservation of open spaces and the development of greenways and outdoor recreation areas at the county level was developed. The Plan's recommendations balance natural resources with the built environment in a manner that allows the region to grow while benefiting from its natural, recreational, and cultural resources at the same time.

Scranton – Wilkes-Barre Rail Feasibility Study, 1999

This study provided an overview of the railroad assets in the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre corridor and evaluated their potential for passenger service or trolley/light rail service between the two cities. The study assessed each line on an individual basis, evaluating its present condition, regulatory, and institutional issues, and its anticipated market potential for passenger operations.

The Planning Process

In recognition of the need to develop a regional plan and an interest in both counties concerning the location, pace, and character of recent and future development, the elected officials of Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties agreed to participate together in the development and implementation of a Regional Plan and directed that a steering committee be formed to guide the preparation of the Plan and oversee the work of the consultant.

Through the Regional Plan preparation development, the steering committee met on a regular basis with the consultant. The committee has had several critical roles to play, including:

- Monitoring progress on the Work Program, including scheduling and coordinating all Workshops and Public Information Meetings according to the Plan's Work Program Schedule;

- Providing information and ideas to the consultant and providing data/contacts/leads and direction to the consultant for upcoming tasks in the Work Program Schedule as the process was underway;
- Reviewing study products of the consultant, providing feedback to the consultant, and participating in the consensus-building process;
- Publicizing the Regional Plan, encouraging community participation and promoting the comprehensive planning process generally and the growth management ideas that emerged during the planning process.

Community participation was a hallmark of the planning process, in order to fully inform residents and to create a strong consensus as to the most desirable and achievable common future for the two counties. Three sets of three Public Information Meetings were held across both counties during the course of the Plan preparation, for a total of nine Public Information Meetings. Three initial Public Information Meetings were held from October 14-16, 2008, upon completion of Phase A of the project. These meetings served as an introduction to the studies being undertaken and as an opportunity for the steering committee and consultant to present the range of issues and choices to be examined in the overall Regional Plan preparation process and for the steering committee and consultant to hear public comment on current conditions and future prospects. The second round of three Public Information Meetings occurred from June 16-18, 2009 at the conclusion of Phase B. The purpose of these meetings was to review the alternative concepts for the future that the steering committee had explored and an emerging framework for the future of Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties. The third series of Public Information Meetings took place on December 1-3, 2009, in order to allow public review and comment on the recommendations of the Draft Regional Plan.

These Public Information Meetings served to update local residents, business operators, landowners, and other interested parties of the progress on the *Lackawanna-Luzerne Regional Plan*, and elicited feedback on the ideas being put forward as part of the planning process.

In addition, stakeholder focus group meetings were held in January 2008 in Lackawanna County at the Scranton Cultural Center and in Luzerne County at the county's Emergency Management Agency. The six meetings focused on the following topics: transportation, land development and housing, economic revitalization, utilities, historic preservation and natural resources and open space conservation.

Public Hearings on the Draft Regional Plan were held by Luzerne County on October 20, 2011 and by Lackawanna County on December 14, 2011, respectively, and adoption actions were taken by each county. The formal review process of a Public Hearing rounded out the extensive community participation program, including the nine aforementioned Public Information Meetings.

The MPO Technical and Coordinating Committees jointly also served as a reviewing body for the evolving Regional Plan during its preparation, and both PennDOT and FHWA were active stakeholder participants. Because the Regional Plan represents, in part, an update to the MPO's Long-Range Transportation Plan, the acceptance of the Regional Plan by both the MPO and FHWA was a required step in the overall process.

The Planning Work Program

The development of the Regional Plan progressed through four distinct phases that took place between 2007 and 2009.

Phase A is referred to as **Identifying Opportunities** and included the documentation of existing conditions and an analysis of those conditions. These tasks included all data collection and analysis steps and a critical examination of needs, trends, and anticipated future conditions in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties that have formed the foundation for this Plan. Phase A culminated with the preparation of a Trend Scenario, a picture of the future in twenty-two (22) years if current trends continue and there are no changes in policy on the part of the counties. Phase A also concluded with the first set of Public Information Meetings.

Phase B was the **Visioning and Land Use Framework** phase and incorporated a series of cycles in which the consultant team and steering committee explored a variety of alternatives to the Trend Scenario and the transportation implications of each of these scenarios. These alternatives proposed different approaches to the future of the two counties and began to set priorities for a transportation system that would support this framework, including the establishment of goals and priorities for the transportation system that were in concert with SAFETEA-LU planning factors. Work within this phase allowed for the gradual convergence of a set of preferred goals determined by the steering committee and a basic policy and land use framework for the future evolution of the two counties was its product. This framework became the central focus of the second set of Public Information Meetings, which concluded Phase B.

Phase C was the **Preparation of a Draft Regional Plan** worthy of examination by the general public and consideration for adoption by Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties. The Plan was prepared first as a preliminary draft with accompanying action plans and implementation strategies. Following a review, the project team prepared the Final Draft Regional Plan. During this latter part of Phase C a third set of Public Information Meetings was held.

Phase D featured the 35-day **Public Review Period** following procedures for Comprehensive Plans as required by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code and Long-Range Transportation Plans as required by the Federal Highway Administration. This phase included a formal Public Hearing on the Final Draft Regional Plan, any final revisions to it, and the preparation of a “camera-ready” Final Regional Plan. Formal action to adopt the Plan by each set of Commissioners and to accept the Plan by the MPO and FHWA is also part of this phase.



