

Capital District Data

Fall 2017

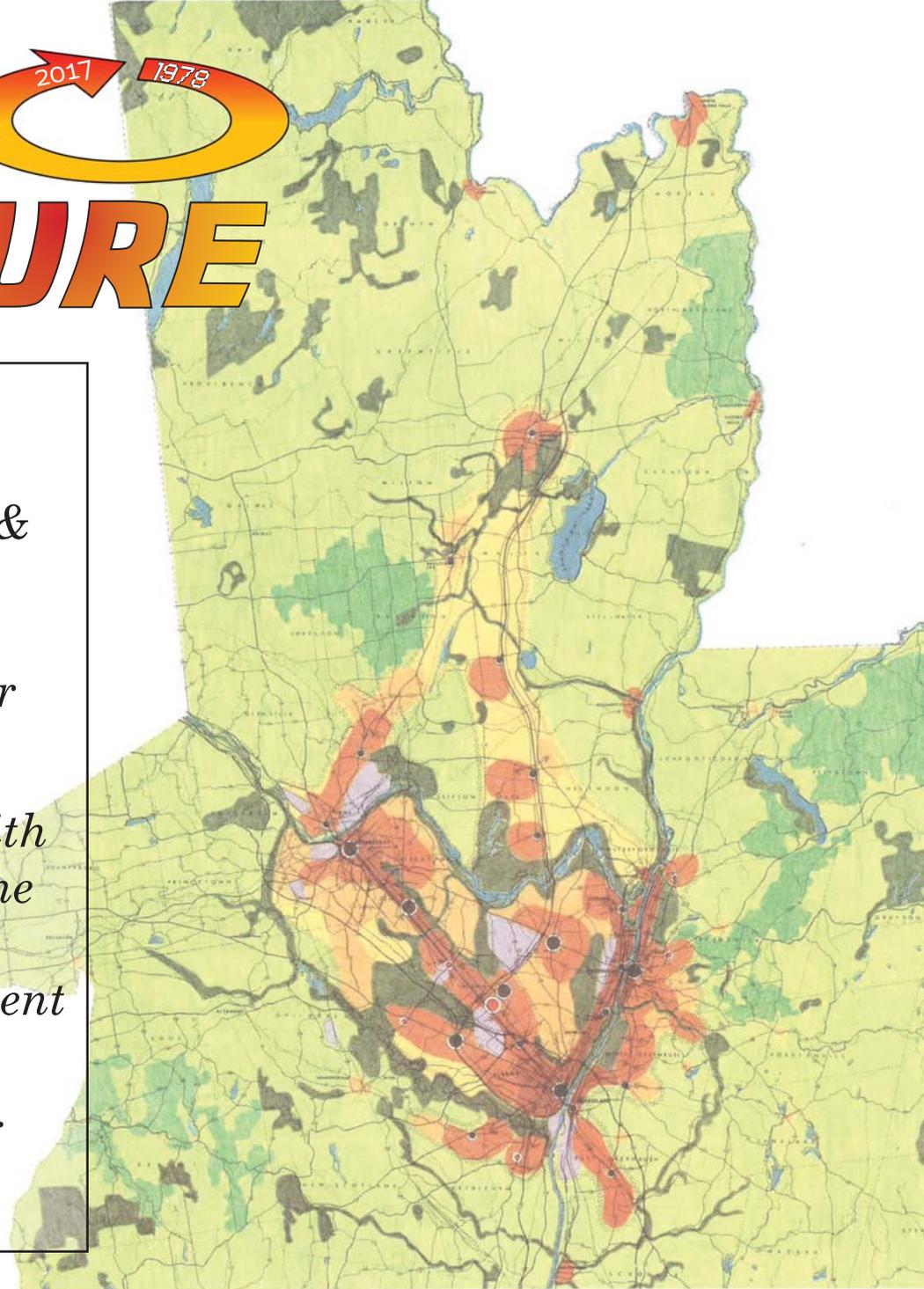
Volume 40, # 3

The Regional Development Plan- years ahead of its time:
A letter from the editor

BACK 
TO THE FUTURE

The 1978 Regional Development Plan & its policy goals, are still relevant today and hold lessons for the future.

Take a trip back with us to explore how the policy goals in the Regional Development Plan are being implemented today.



CAPITAL DISTRICT
Regional
Planning
Commission

★ CELEBRATING 50 YEARS ★ 1967-2017 ★

50 years of service to Albany, Rensselaer,
Saratoga, & Schenectady Counties

The Regional Development Plan- years ahead of its time

For 50 years, CDRPC has served the Capital Region by providing a broad array of services and support. Everything from data services, coordinating with six municipalities to form the Albany Pool Communities, administering the region's only Foreign Trade Zone, coordinating efforts for the Juvenile Detention Center, and much more, CDRPC has been here to provide objective expertise to our member communities.

In celebration of 50 years, we wanted to look back at a seminal project from CDRPC, the 1978 *Regional Development Plan*. This was the first comprehensive plan developed for the Capital Region, and we thought it was appropriate to examine some of its policies to see how current projects are advancing the goals established 40 years ago.

For this issue, we chose to look at four policy goals from the original report including:

Residential Land use and Housing Opportunities- The Region's three land banks offer an exciting opportunity to address community revitalization in ways that were not possible in the 1970s. Long burdened by high poverty rates and a weak property values, many urban neighborhoods across the Capital Region saw blight/vacancy increase in the second half of the 20th Century. Land banks offer a new approach that can jump-start local housing markets, get vacant properties back into productive use, and revitalize communities.

Transportation- Every comprehensive plan should address transportation issues and the RDP was no exception. The plan identified the promotion and improvement of public transit as an important issue for the long term development of the Region. The Capital District Transportation Authority's "BusPlus" network is designed to cut travel time, improve amenities for riders, and inspire mode change for those that currently drive.

Recreational Open Space- By the 1970s, rail lines were falling into disuse, and the RDP saw this as an opportunity to promote recreational open space in the form of rail trails. Today, the network of rail trails is growing, producing both recreational space and alternative options for commuting. Two projects in the Capital Region have recently been completed and offer a glimpse of how rail trails can connect the Region to a larger state-wide system.

Sewer Services- Like many regions across the country, our aging sewer infrastructure continues to present a significant challenge. The RDP called for improvements to the system, and even identified the inter-municipal nature of the challenge. Decades later, the Region is still struggling to meet the challenge, but has recently begun the long process of addressing the issue of untreated wastewater during heavy rainfall.

So, take a trip with us back to a time when the Bee Gees ruled the charts, when Annie Hall won best picture, and Laverne & Shirley was the country's most watched TV show.



Dan Harp
Editor

BACK TO THE FUTURE

By Dan Harp

TABLE 20

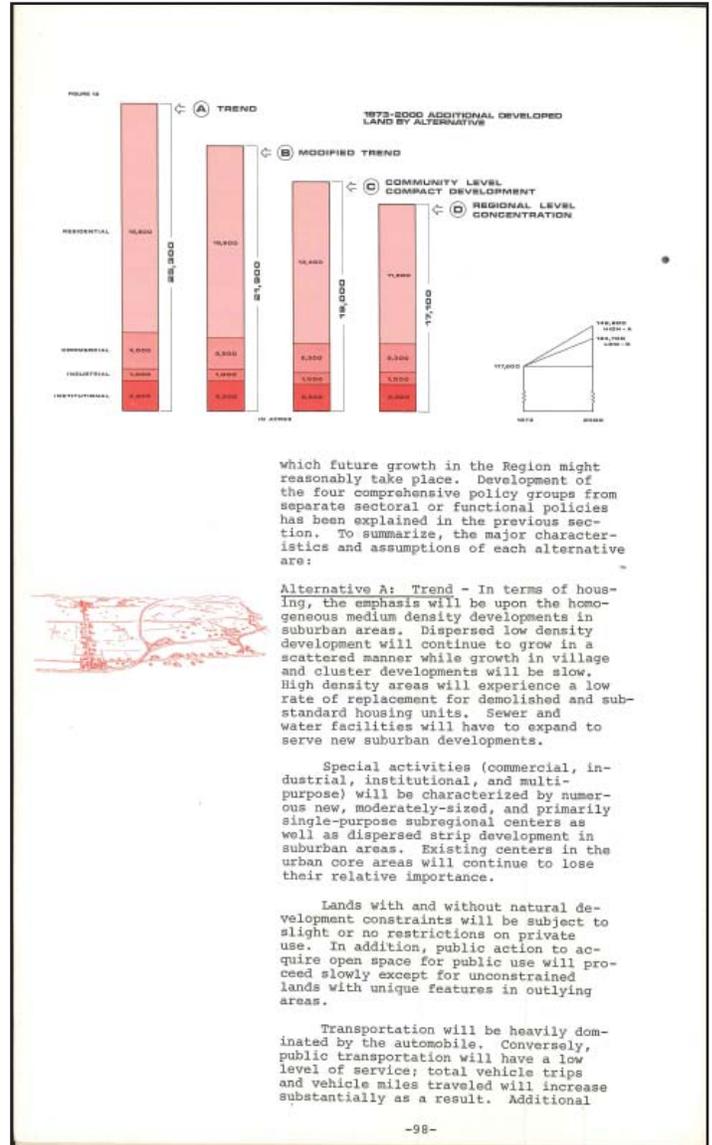
SUBREGION 1: MAJOR PLANNING PROPOSALS

Communities	Major Planning Proposals
1 Albany	-Renewal of central business district
2 Schenectady	-Provision of adequate housing through redevelopment, rehabilitation, and infill.
3 Troy	-Desirable use of the river fronts. -Improvement of public transportation services. -Preservation of unique features; establishment of historical districts and conservation of scarce natural resources. -Density standards applied to the new development are moderately higher than those for existing development.

TABLE 21

SUBREGION 2: MAJOR PLANNING PROPOSALS

Communities	Major Planning Proposals
1 Bethlehem	-Compact clusters derived from existing large-scale developed areas through the infill process. The density standards should be compatible with the existing levels.
2 Clifton Park	
3 Colonie	
4 E. Greenbush	-Concentration of community services and facilities within compact cluster areas only.
5 Glenville	
6 Guilderland	-Protection of the natural environment; establishment of agricultural districts, forest districts, acquisition of scenic and unique resource areas; control of urbanization on sensitive resource lands such as water aquifer recharge areas.
7 Halfmoon	
8 Niskayuna	
9 N. Greenbush	
10 Rotterdam	



The 1975 "Consultation Document" laid out the framework of the 1978 Regional Development Plan with extensive illustrations, maps, and charts. This would have been presented to the public for their feedback. The "consultation document" is, ironically, closer to how a comprehensive plan today would look. The 1978 RDP is a technical document, with very little in the way of images or illustrations. Today, comprehensive plans like the RDP have more in common with the 1975 Consultation Document, with a higher emphasis placed on visualizations.

When

the Regional Development Plan (RDP) was released in 1978, it was simultaneously a report out of time, and ahead of its time. Nearly four decades later, many RDP findings are as pertinent as the day they were written. As the Region's first comprehensive plan, the RDP identified challenges that the Region still faces today. Updating the Region's aging sewer infrastructure, improving mass transit, reclaiming railroad rights-of-ways for recreational use, and addressing urban housing issues, were all policy goals of the plan.

When CDRPC was founded in 1967, urban planning enjoyed robust support from the federal government. At this time, many planners were focused on large scale planning efforts similar to those of the RDP. By the mid-1970s, while many planners were evolving in their philosophy to urban planning, the top-down, heavy handed practices to which the profession had become associated, had become passe, and new approaches were needed. The new approach was represented in a move towards a smaller-scale, bottom-up orientation that was less regionally focused, and more locally focused. Later, in the 1980s, cuts to federal funding for urban planning projects ensured that large-scale regional planning projects would remain rare. It was in this changing environment that the RDP was released.

With one foot in an earlier, highly technical era, and the other foot in the later, post-modern era, the RDP is a document that lays out the goals and policies for the Region with exacting precision, while trying to address the need for planning at the human-scale. Gone are the calls for ever expansive interstate highways, but the language of urban renewal remains. It both recognizes the challenges of suburban development, while also identifying opportunities for its expansion. With the end of federal funding, and the emergence of renewed focus on "small government", broad region-wide planning initiatives, like the RDP, became increasingly rare.

The RDP identified more than 40 policies across ten program areas. While the original intent was for these policies to be implemented by the year 2000, reality has a way of delaying even the best ideas. While all the policies are noteworthy, we identified four in particular to highlight their successful implementation.

Residential Land Use and Housing Opportunities

"Policy: To promote the restoration and preservation of inner city neighborhoods through the rehabilitation of salvageable housing stock and the replacement of dilapidated units to attract households of all income groups into these neighborhoods and ensure a suitable demographic mix."

By the 1970s, many inner city neighborhoods had been in physical decay for many years. This decay led to depressed property values which further expanded blight through whole neighborhoods. Urban renewal projects, such as Albany's Empire State Plaza and large public housing projects, offered the promise of improved conditions, but ultimately may have done more harm than good. This continued decline of urban neighborhoods created a feedback loop in which blight beget blight. As vacancy and neglect increased, property values weakened, and the feedback loop gained momentum. Market forces that normally spur responsible investment and redevelopment were unable to overcome the combination of concentrated poverty and neighborhood blight. A new approach was needed that would promote the sale of abandoned/foreclosed properties while also prioritizing the sale of properties to locals who were invested in improving their community.

Nearly 40 years later, a possible solution has emerged in the form of "land banks." First established in New York State in 2012, land banks are designed to replace the existing system for dispersing foreclosed properties which



During the development of the RDP, the maps often needed to be designed and colored by hand. This took extensive time and patience, but resulted in maps that are in some ways richer than what are generated today.

are currently on a municipality's books. Land banks are funded in multiple ways, but in New York State they have received a significant amount of funding through the NYS Attorney General's Office as part of a settlement with major banks. This funding is used to stabilize properties, and prepare/market them for sale. Land banks prioritize the sale of properties to local buyers who have an interest in putting the property into productive use. The Capital Region has three active land banks, each with their own approach to finding solutions to blight and vacancy.

Capital Region Land Bank

With a focus on the cities of Schenectady and Amsterdam, the Capital Region Land Bank, with the Schenectady Metroplex Development Authority, have invested millions of dollars into some of the hardest hit neighborhoods. The Capital Region Land Bank works to change the perception of neighborhoods by focusing on strategic nodes for redevelopment and investment.

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In this way, they hope to achieve a critical mass of investment that will help property values rise and be a catalyst for private investment. This strategy has been most heavily concentrated along Eastern Ave, earning praise from the local community. New restaurants, parks, homes, and businesses, have been opened in former Capital Region Land Bank properties in just the last couple of years. This has helped to breathe new life into the neighborhood, changing its perception, and making it an attractive area for private investment.

Albany County Land Bank

Established in 2014, the Albany County Land Bank serves the entire county with an initial focus on the city of Albany. While vacancy exists in every municipality within the County, Albany's Sheridan Hollow, Arbor Hill, West Hill, and South End neighborhoods are among some of the most highly impacted. There are also pockets of vacancy in the smaller river cities of Watervliet and Cohoes. As the largest land bank in

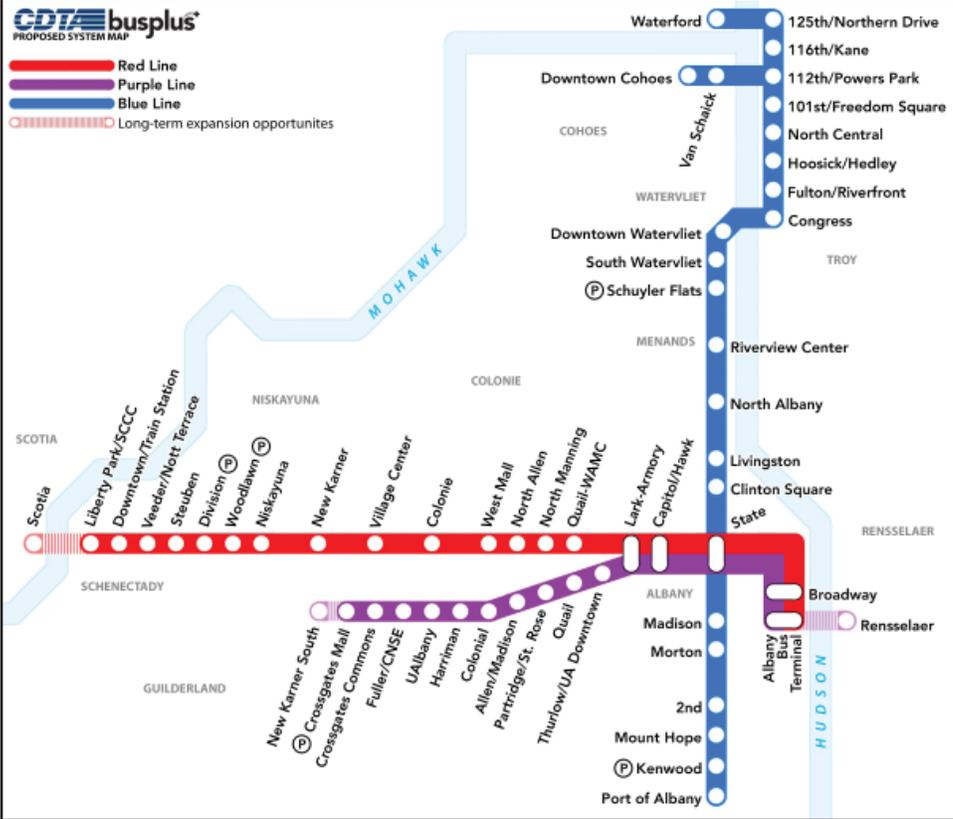
the Capital Region, the scope of the challenge facing the ACLB is monumental. Thousands of properties are vacant across the county, and most have little to no value on the open market. The ACLB has acquired hundreds of properties across the county, and works diligently to connect interested applicants with resources to assist them in rehabilitating properties. With the lessons of heavy handed urban renewal well learned, the ACLB is approaching attempts to revitalize these neighborhoods with the concept of social justice in mind. The ACLB is committed to serving the residents of these neighborhoods by connecting them with helpful programs. The Tenant to Homeowner program, for example, helps renters prepare for owning their own properties through the land bank. The ACLB also assists residents by leveraging grant funding to make properties affordable.

To date, the ACLB has sold, or approved for sale, 237 properties. According to the ACLB, for every \$1.00 of operating assistance it receives from Albany County, it generates \$13.50 in value for the county's municipalities.

Troy Community Land Bank

The most targeted of the Region's three land banks, the Troy Community Land Bank (TCLB) is primarily focused on rehabilitating Troy's North Central and Lansingburg neighborhoods. While Troy's downtown has recently boomed with new shops and eclectic energy, pockets of poverty and vacancy remain. North Central, a neighborhood located within short walking distance of downtown, has long experienced disinvestment. According to its 2016 Annual Report, the TCLB had roughly 3 dozen properties in their inventory. While this may not seem like many compared to efforts in Albany County, the TCLB's focus on North Central allows for a tight focus than the more regionally focused land banks. This presents an opportunity to maximize activity in a way similar to the Capital Region Land Bank's Eastern Ave projects. What makes the situation in Troy unique is that the neighborhood is one of the most impoverished in the Capital Region. With a median household income of just over \$22,000 and weak market forces, but with its close proximity to Troy's thriving downtown, North Central is uniquely positioned to benefit from the land bank.

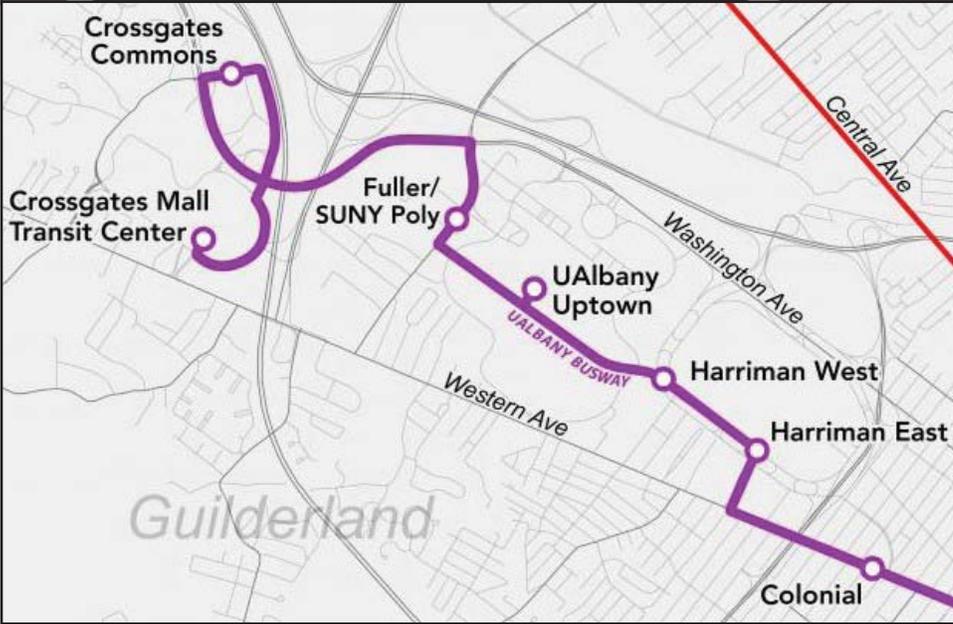
In order to help grow the TCLB and to maximize its potential, the board has recently hired a full time Executive Director. Anthony Tozzi, formerly the



Left: CDTA's proposed BusPlus network. The three lines will intersect in downtown Albany where transfers can easily be made. These three lines should help reduce travel times and create mode change through improved services.



Left: A rendering of the proposed bus terminal in downtown Troy. Located on Fulton Street between River and 4th streets, this new terminal will provide enclosed passenger accommodations, and act as a hub for lineup/transfers currently done on River Street.

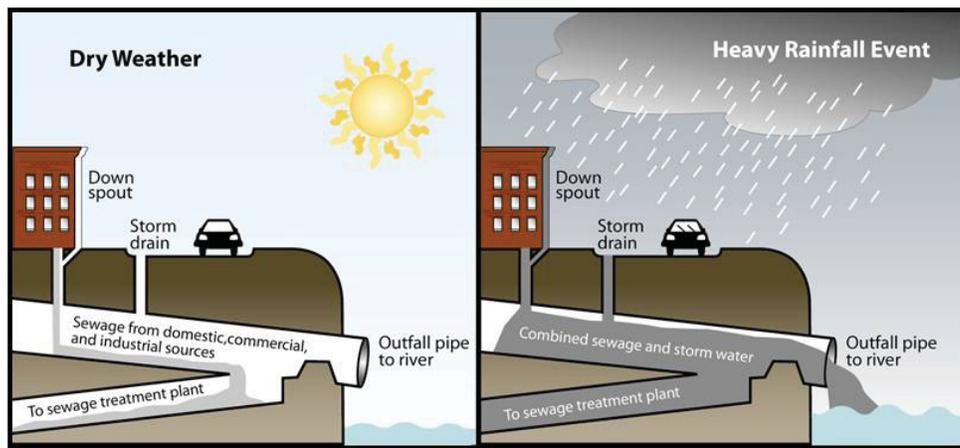


Left: An exclusive feature of the Purple Line will be the addition of a dedicated busway from the Harriman Campus to the UAlbany Campus. The Purple Line would have a stop near the Campus Center. From there, the dedicated busway would lead to Fuller Road, where the Purple Line would merge back onto surface streets.

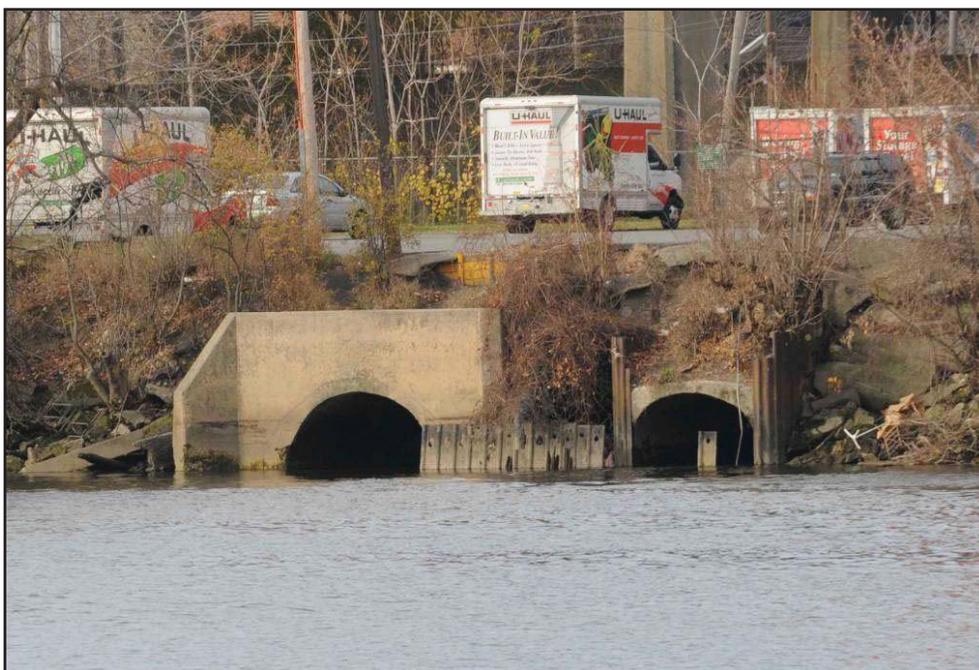


Above: A before and after image of a Albany County Land Bank site in Albany's West Hill. On the left, the property is vacant, unkempt, and degrades the streetscape. On the right, the property has been converted into a community farm and helps provide fresh produce to the neighborhood.

Photo: Albany County Land Bank



Left: An illustration of how a combined sewer system operates. During dry weather, the sewers easily transport untreated waste to the treatment plants where it is processed. But during heavy rainfall, the sewer is forced to transport both rainwater and sewage, but the treatment plant can handle only just so much. To prevent the system from overloading and damaging the treatment plant, the combined rainwater and sewage is allowed to flow out of the sewer into a nearby waterway untreated.



Left: The largest outfall in the Region, located under the U-Haul building in Albany. When the LTCP is complete, the amount of untreated wastewater released into the Hudson will be greatly reduced, leading to a cleaner Hudson River that meets environmental standards.

Photo: Courtesy of Times Union

director of planning for the town of Malta, is set to take over for outgoing Executive Director Joe Fama. Mr. Tozzi, in an email, expressed excitement for the progress made by the TCLB, and foresees it branching out from just the North Central neighborhood to service the entire city of Troy. Perhaps by expanding to new neighborhoods, the TCLB can invest more resources into North Central.

Transportation

“Policy: Improve transit service by: providing expanded services; providing new types of equipment services; increasing and improving park and ride services; providing shelters and other passenger amenities; improving passenger information services; and, simplifying fare collection systems and policies.”

Most urban planners would tell you that a good regional plan should address adequate public transportation. Public transportation relieves stress on the Region’s road network and relieves pollution, by reducing the number of vehicles in use. The goal of any regional public transportation service is to develop a robust system which appeals to all users and can entice those with personal vehicles to choose public transportation.

Regionally, one of the most significant innovations in public transportation services in decades is the implementation of our version of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). Marketed by the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) as “BusPlus”, this is a modified version of BRT networks implemented across the globe. Normally, these networks are found in large cities or major metro areas, so it is very unique to have such a network in a Region of only roughly 850,000. BusPlus, like other BRT networks, attempts to decrease travel time, improve customer experience, and promote mode change by making the bus a realistic alternative to driving. CDTA’s BusPlus makes use of features such as dedicated bus lanes, traffic signal priority, queue jumping, real-time passenger information displays, and improvements to pedestrian and shelter infrastructure to improve the overall customer experience.

Red Line

The original BusPlus line, the Red Line (Route #905), connects downtown Albany with downtown Schenectady via the Route 5/Central Avenue corridor. Implemented in 2011, the line has been a major success for CDTA. Total boardings for the line last year

exceeded 1.9 million, and boardings have increased by 27% along the entire corridor.

Roll-out of all the features has been gradual for this line. Installation of the traffic signal and queue jumping features have only come online in the last two years, while dedicated bus lanes exist in only a small section around Wolf Road. Just recently, improvements to amenities at a handful of stations have been installed, including greater user information displays. In all, though it opened nearly six years ago, the line is still being upgraded to meet the higher standards envisioned by CDTA.

Purple Line

The proposed Purple Line will connect downtown Albany and Crossgate Mall via Western Avenue and the Harriman Campus. This is a very busy corridor, recording around 3 million boardings annually. This line will specialize in serving the student population of the area and will include the following features:

- Busway through the UAlbany Uptown Campus
- Crossgate Mall Transit Center
- Transit signal priority at key intersections
- Nearly 24 hour/day service

When completed, and based upon the rate of increased boardings from the Red Line, the Purple Line could see boardings increase to upwards of 3.6 million annually. The Purple Line will have the unique features of a dedicated busway connecting the Harriman Campus and the uptown UAlbany Campus. This dedicated busway will contribute towards an estimated 20% reduction in travel times.

Blue Line

Proposed to connect downtown Albany with downtown Troy via Broadway and the Congress Street Bridge, this line could extend as far as Cohoes and Waterford. The Blue Line is geared most towards commuters and could help alleviate traffic on 787. Currently, bus lines from Albany to Troy account for 5,500 weekday boardings. CDTA estimates that the new BusPlus line will increase weekday boardings by 20% or more, bringing total boardings upwards of 8,000. CDTA anticipates a time savings of 15-20%, with most of that coming from the elimination of transfers for riders through the

downtown areas.

BusPlus represents a significant step forward for public transit for the Region. While it is unlikely that full BRT standards will be implemented (dedicated bus lanes for the length of the line, pre-boarding “proof of payment” systems, etc) due to costs, BusPlus is a feather in the cap for the Region.

Sewer Services

“Policy: Encourage area-wide and multi-municipal cooperation for the planning and management of all sanitary facilities. Improve and expand water supplies, wastewater disposal and storm drainage systems in existing urban centers to ensure their continued adequacy, safety, and efficiency.”

Perhaps no element from the RDP has come under more scrutiny lately than the Region’s aging sewer infrastructure. The need for updating the Region’s outdated sewer system has been understood for decades, but the complexity and expense of such updates is daunting. Under current conditions, during heavy rainfall the combined sewer/stormwater system can become over-burdened. In these storms, the treatment plants cannot handle the volume of water they receive, and as such are forced to expel untreated water into the Hudson River. While this discharge is allowed by law due to the age of the infrastructure, it is a situation that everyone agrees must be remediated. To address the problem six municipalities, (the cities of Albany, Troy, Cohoes, Watervliet, Rensselaer, and the Village of Green Island), have partnered to improve their sewer systems. These six communities formed the Albany Pool Communities and partnered with the Albany County Water Purification District, and the Rensselaer County Sewer District, to develop the Albany Pool Communities Combined Sewer Overflow Long Term Control Plan (LTCP). The LTCP commits the municipalities to a major initiative- implementing a comprehensive, regionally-administered 15-year \$136 million effort to improve water quality in the Hudson by cutting the volume of untreated water in half and bringing water quality in the Hudson into compliance with State standards.



Pouring water onto the new permeable surface as part of the North Swan Street green infrastructure project from the Long Term Control Plan. Permeable surfaces allow water to penetrate pavement to be absorbed by soil below. Traditional pavement is non-permeable and forces water to run into the combined sewer system, contributing to capacity issues during heavy rainfall.

As of October 2017, 41 projects have been completed as part of the LTCP. While these projects are dispersed among all of the participating municipalities, their aggregate affect will help limit untreated runoff across the entire Region. Chief among these projects have been green infrastructure projects including:

- Troy’s Monument Square Park
- Route 32/Green Street, Watervliet
- North Swan Street Park Revitalization, Albany

While individual projects may appear to be small, cumulatively, green infrastructure can prevent thousands of gallons of water from entering the Region’s sewer system, thus reducing the likelihood of CSO or localized flooding. For more information on projects and progress visit [http:// cdrpc.org/ programs/ water-quality/ combined-sewer-overflow-cso/](http://cdrpc.org/programs/water-quality/combined-sewer-overflow-cso/)

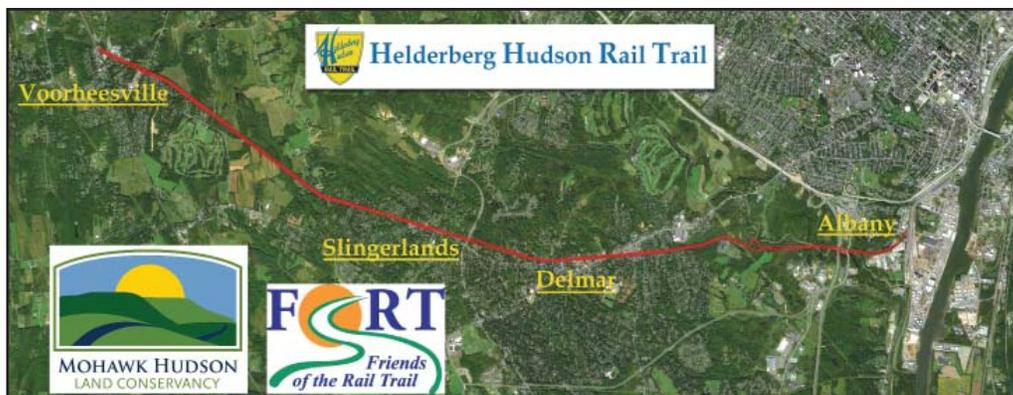
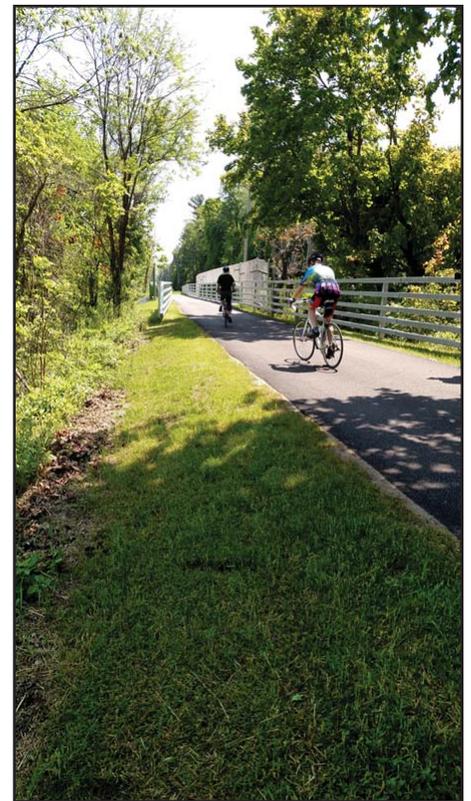


Above: A view from the Zim Smith Trail.

Right: A view of the Albany County Helderberg Hudson Rail Trail.

Bottom: Map of the Albany County Helderberg Hudson Rail Trail from Albany to Voorheesville.

Left: Map of the Zim Smith Trail from Coons Crossing to Ballston Spa.



Recreation

“Policy: Encourage development of utility easements and abandoned rights-of-ways as potential open space corridors or linear parks.”

The RDP’s call for redeveloping abandoned right-of-ways portended the future. Today, reclaiming unused right-of-ways is a popular strategy for creating more recreational space and even for providing options for commuting.

Zim Smith Trail

Located in Saratoga County, the Zim Smith Trail stretches 9 miles from Coons Crossing in Halfmoon, to Oak Street in the Village of Ballston Spa. Along the way it crosses through Clifton Park, the Village of Round Lake, Malta, and Ballston. Recently, another 3 miles of trail have been proposed, stretching from Coons Crossing to Mechanicville, which would connect it with the southern terminus of the Champlain Canalway Trail.

The location of the trail is ideal for providing an alternate route in an extremely busy corridor for commuting. The Zim Smith trail provides the only route free of vehicular traffic for crossing Route 67 and the Northway. Without the Zim Smith Trail, these roads would present an intimidating and unwelcoming obstacle for those looking to bike from Halfmoon to Ballston Spa. Now, those looking for a relaxing hike, or looking to commute by bike, have a safe and well maintained trail to utilize.

While there are plans to extend the trail from Coons Crossing to Mechanicville, there are additional long term plans to connect the trail further to the north. From its current terminus in Ballston Spa, there are hopes to extend the trail to Spa State Park in Saratoga Springs, where it could then connect users to other trails leading to both the Champlain Canalway Trail and others leading north towards the Adirondacks.

Albany County Helderberg Hudson Rail Trail

Originally opened in 2015, the Albany County Helderberg Hudson Rail Trail now runs 9 miles along the old Delaware & Hudson railroad right-of-way, from the Port of Albany to Voorheesville. This trail is part of a larger effort to connect a large, but disjointed, recreational network throughout the County. The trail

is well positioned to connect existing recreational trails at John Boyd Thatcher State Park, with the Mohawk Hudson Hike/Bike Trail at its trailhead near the USS Slater in Albany.

But the connections don’t end there. The reach of the Albany County Rail Trail is extended because of the related systems it could connect. By connecting to Thatcher Park, residents will be connected to the Long Path, 350 miles of largely dedicated trail that reaches all the way to New York City. If a dedicated connection from the Albany Rail Trail to the Mohawk Hudson Hike/Bike Trail is established, then not only would there be a continuous recreational trail network stretching the length of Albany and Saratoga County, it would create an extended continuous network that stretches across the State.

Review

While the RDP envisioned all of these policies being completed by the year 2000, it is still a testament to the vision of the RDP that its goals are still being pursued. In the four decades since the plan was written, results have been mixed, sprawling development has continued, and the cities have struggled to regain their footing, but there have been real successes. The massive scope of the LTCP to improve water quality by coordinating between multiple municipalities over a 15 year period, is likely to be a crowning project for the Region. When completed, the collective efforts of the LTCP will have been one of the most significant efforts made to improve water quality since the formation of the sewer districts. The land banks are a new solution to the persistent problem of vacancy and blight in the Region’s cities. The Region’s land banks offer a mechanism to provide reinforcement to depressed market rates which would otherwise doom properties to forever remain blighted and vacant. Meanwhile, CDTA’s BusPlus network is growing and continues to provide new alternatives for those using public transportation. This new approach will cut travel time, and provide a higher quality experience which may help attract new customers and cut the number of drivers on the road. And finally, by repurposing abandoned rail road right-of-ways into rail trails, the Region has greatly expanded recreational opportunities and is on the cusp of creating a network that could stretch from NYC, north to Canada, and west to Buffalo.



CAPITAL DISTRICT
**Regional
Planning
Commission**

One Park Place, Suite 102, Albany, New York 12205

Phone: 518-453-0850

Fax: 518-453-0856

E-mail: cdrpc@cdrpc.org

Web Site: <http://cdrpc.org>

Judith H. Breselor, AICP, Chair

Mark A. Castiglione, AICP, Executive Director

Daniel M. Harp Jr., Editor