

## CHAPTER 8 – DRAFT HIGHLANDS REGIONAL MASTER PLAN

### **Summary of the Draft Highlands Regional Master Plan**

In 2004, legislation was adopted in New Jersey to oversee the planning and protection of New Jersey's Highlands. The legislation requires municipalities and counties to create master plans and regulations that conform to the Draft Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) that will be adopted by the Highlands Council in 2008.

The Highlands Law divided the Region into two parts – the preservation area and the planning area – and set very specific planning goals for both. The preservation area objectives included protecting water resource quality and quantity, preserving land in its natural state and protecting the Region's natural, scenic and other resources. The planning area goals were also environmentally-protective, but orderly development consistent with the State Plan and smart growth principles was to be encouraged.

Approximately one-third of the land area of Hunterdon County lies within the Highlands region and that area is split evenly between the Planning and Preservation Areas. Fifteen municipalities in Hunterdon County lie within the Highlands. (See Fig, 8.1 & 8.2)

In November, 2007 the Highlands Final Draft Regional Master Plan (RMP) was released for Review and Public Comment. The creation and adoption of this plan was a requirement of the Highlands Legislation. Once the RMP is adopted, preservation area counties and municipalities must conform their respective master plans and development regulations with its provisions. The Council will supersede local authority where there is nonconformance. The Highlands Law specifies that Transportation projects and programs shall be reviewed and approved by the council in consultation with the Department of Transportation prior to inclusion in the transportation component. For municipalities located in the planning area, the conformance process is voluntary and will be encouraged by means of incentives.

### **Impact of Draft Highlands Regional Master Plan**

Once adopted, the Highlands Regional Master Plan will have a profound impact on Hunterdon County's current and future transportation projects on the Municipal, County and State transportation network.

There are approximately 167 roadway miles that exist in the Preservation area of the Highlands region of Hunterdon County. This comprises 11% of the total public roadway mileage in the County. However,

large segments of State Route I-78 and State Route 31 intersect the Highlands Region as well as large segments of County Roads.

**Figure 8.1 - Highlands Area Acreage in Hunterdon County**

Hunterdon County			
Alexandria Township	15,039	2,719	17,758
Bethlehem Township	1,137	12,173	13,310
Bloomsbury Borough	0	625	625
Califon Borough	0	632	632
Clinton Town	781	141	922
Clinton Township	21,054	639	21,693
Glen Gardner Borough	0	998	998
Hampton Borough	134	823	957
High Bridge Borough	1,558	0	1,558
Holland Township	13,361	1,961	15,322
Lebanon Borough	577	0	577
Lebanon Township	7	20,257	20,264
Milford Borough	812	0	812
Tewksbury Township	6,860	13,475	20,335
Union Township	2,665	10,482	13,146
<b>Total Acres For Hunterdon County</b>	<b>63,984</b>	<b>64,924</b>	<b>128,909</b>

Source: Highlands Draft Regional Master Plan, 2006

Large portions of County roadways that are scheduled for repairs as listed in the 5 year County Improvement program transverse the Highlands Region. There are currently 13 projects listed in the NJTPA 2008 TIP and 2008 PDWP that affect transportation infrastructure within the Preservation and Planning areas within the Highlands region.

**Consistency with County Transportation Policies**

The Transportation Policies and Objectives as described in the Draft RMP attempt to implement Smart Growth principles by looking at transportation and land use planning in a comprehensive manner. The Draft RMP is consistent with the County’s current approach on the enhancement of transportation system by promoting smart growth strategies and principles which preserves mobility, promotes multi-modal transportation and maintains transportation infrastructure in the Highlands Region.

The RMP also supports the concept that building a stronger connection between land use and transportation planning would encourage non-vehicular modes of transportation. The following policy recommendations contained in the RMP are consistent with the County's transportation recommendations:

- The use of compact, mixed land uses combining jobs, housing and retail is supported.
- Compact development around existing transportation infrastructure by the use of Transit Oriented Development (TOD) should be promoted.
- Transportation improvements should incorporate safety features such as dedicated right-of ways and safe connections for pedestrians and bicyclists, traffic calming measures, and safe routes for children to travel to and from schools

The Highlands sub-area model and the Baseline Roadway Capacity Assessment, provides information on regional transportation conditions. This assessment indicates that many of Hunterdon County's roads in the Highlands area are at or approaching traffic capacity. Updating and improving traffic input data for this model can ensure accuracy of output over time.

### **Concerns with the Draft Highlands Regional Master Plan**

Despite the fact that the Highlands RMP policies are generally consistent with the County's transportation recommendations, there are some areas of concern. According to the RMP, any road improvements in the Highlands Region will require a Growth Inducing Study through either Plan Conformance or the HPR process. If this study demonstrates that these improvements are going to be growth-inducing for lands that do not have the capacity to support development, then those improvements will be prohibited. The RMP does not address what parameters will be used to define 'growth-inducing'. It also does not specify how the HPR process will address the issue of transportation improvement projects that traverse through both the Highlands Planning and Preservation areas. There is also no indication in the RMP of the consideration of the impacts of projects, whether beneficial or not, on areas that lie outside of the Highlands region. Additionally, there are no procedures included in the RMP in regards to the modifications that will be needed for projects that are deemed inconsistent through the HPR process.

Figure 8.2. Highlands Region  
Preservation and Planning Areas  
Hunterdon County

