



Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

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## FutureLV is Now The Regional Plan

It is the product of more than 240 public meetings, events and strategy labs attended by nearly 10,000 people had input from hundreds of community groups and stakeholders and been the subject of intense debate for the past three months.

Over the past three years, people in every corner of the Lehigh Valley have had a say in crafting the vision for *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*, and as of November 26, the plan designed to guide the region to 2045 and beyond has the approval of Lehigh and Northampton counties.

It has previously been adopted by the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study and the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission in October. It remains under review by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

“This really has been the work of so many people from across the region, from everyone who attended the planning meetings to the municipalities who sent us data to the county leaders who helped us refine the plan during the comment period,” said LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley. “I’d like to thank all of them. Their commitment to maintaining the Lehigh Valley as a great place to live work and play is unmatched.”

Now, the hard work begins.

The 200-page plan is designed to manage a region that’s growing by 4,000 to 6,000 people a year, while protecting the farmland, natural resources and recreation areas that help define its character and help it maintain a high quality of life. It includes \$2.5 million in spending for more than 200 roads, bridge, trail and public transit projects. At the heart of the plan is an innovative Centers and Corridors Concept crafted to build up economic centers, create more walkable neighborhoods and enhance our transportation network. It lays out 57 Centers -- ranging from downtown Allentown to Madison Farms in Bethlehem Township to Portland Borough’s commercial district – and recommends virtually all future development be focused around those centers, or along the road-and-trail-based corridors that connect them. Doing that will help preserve the region’s farmland and open space, while driving activity into business districts and creating more walkable neighborhoods. The resulting density will increase the activity and vibrancy of neighborhoods, while strengthening the transportation system in a way that makes it more usable for pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers.

“This plan is the greenest plan we’ve ever had in the Lehigh Valley,” said Northampton County Executive Lamont McClure, before Northampton County Council unanimously adopted it Nov. 21. “This is what we know our citizens want.”

It’s one of the first plans in the country in which transportation investment is tied to land use policy.

“The plan is ground-breaking not only for its matching of transportation funding and land use, but for its leadership in paving the way for more municipal cooperation,” said Lehigh County Executive Phillips Armstrong, before County Commissioners adopted it November 26. “The Lehigh Valley is leading the way and setting an example for the rest of the state and nation.”

It’s an ambitious plan that will require time and ultimately culture change in which people think about a Lehigh Valley where the environment is viewed as an economic engine and the transportation network is considered something that moves people – not cars.

And that effort has already begun as LVPC planners review all new development plans against the policies set by FutureLV. LVPC planners review every development plan filed in the region, and write letters detailing where the plans follow FutureLV or are inconsistent with the new regional comprehensive plan. Where there are inconsistencies, planners recommend how developers and municipalities can make the plans better. The plan suggests not only where develop should – and shouldn’t – be, but how it can be compatible with the community around it.

That includes future transportation planning.

But just as there is great optimism around the new plan, there are also big challenges. Adding bike paths and bus lanes are lofty goals with potentially big price tags, and these new policies come just months after the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation announced a more than 30% cut in transportation funding into the region.

Repurposing failing retail facilities into mixed-use centers where retail shops co-exist with offices, apartments and service providers is a promising vision, but it will require investors and municipalities willing to buy into that vision.

The plan also includes more than two dozen key initiatives that should be tackled in the coming years and decades. Such things as devising an Electric Vehicle plan, a Regional Climate Action Plan, An Autonomous Vehicle Plan or a Small Cell Technology Design Guide will take time, focus, money and partners.

The plan sets lofty goals that, even when spread across a 25-year horizon, are ambitious.

“None of these are easy issues, but this region has always proven to be resilient,” Bradley said. “We adapt and evolve as our world changes. We’ve done it before. This plan that so many people helped build gives us the best chance to do it again.”

The full plan can be found at [lvpc.org](http://lvpc.org).