

# Citizen's Guide to Transportation Planning in Northern New Jersey



*2009 Edition*



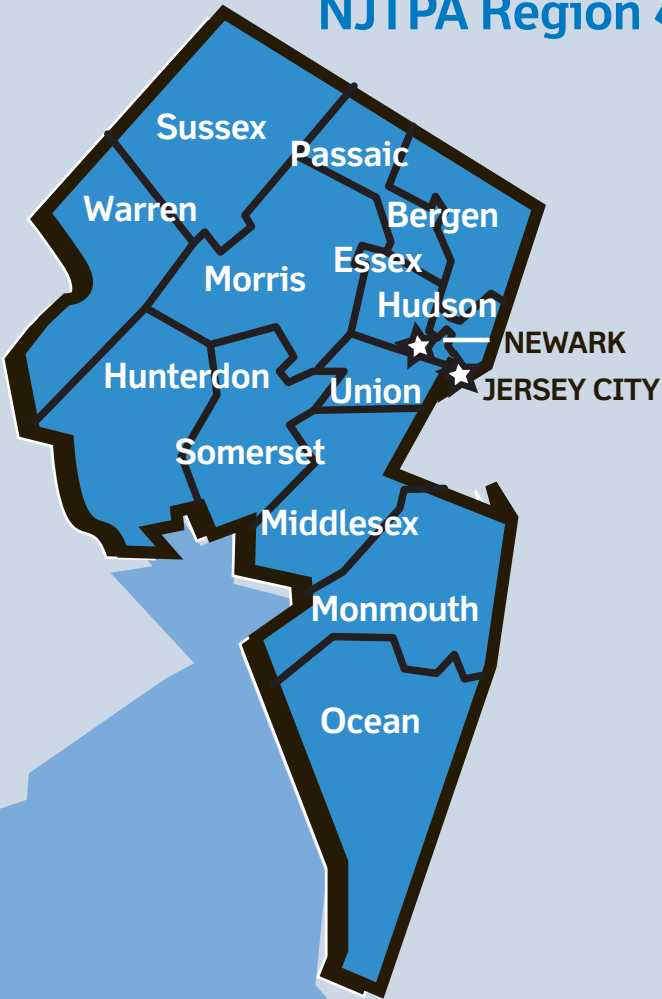
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[www.njtpa.org](http://www.njtpa.org)

# NJTPA Region



Population (2008): 6.5 million

Employment (2007): 3.0 million

# Citizen's Guide to the NJTPA and Transportation Planning

## Introduction

The purpose of this Citizen's Guide is to give an overview of how regional transportation planning takes place in northern and central New Jersey and to let you know how you can participate in this important process. The guide points out various opportunities for public involvement during the planning process. One thing to remember is that the earlier you get involved in the process, the more you can influence the future of our region, your county, your municipality and even your own neighborhood.



Many of the most important decisions regarding a transportation project are made years before a shovel breaks ground, during the early stages of regional planning and project development.

The NJTPA thinks about the region's transportation system in the decades to come and sets broad goals and priorities that are then

reflected in regional investments. Early and active involvement means greater influence over how millions—even billions—of public dollars get spent in our region. ■

## What is the NJTPA and what does it do?

The NJTPA is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for 13 counties in northern and central New Jersey. The federal government authorizes MPOs to conduct regional transportation planning and oversee transportation investment. This planning process ensures your transportation taxes are invested wisely to improve mobility, promote economic activity and safeguard the environment. Ultimately, all projects that use federal transportation dollars must be planned and approved through the NJTPA. The NJTPA oversees approximately \$2 billion a year in transportation investments in our 13-county region.

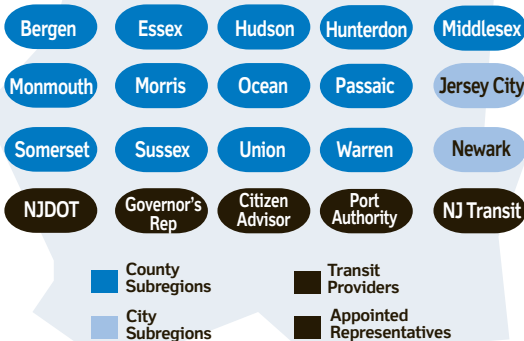
The NJTPA evaluates and approves proposed transportation improve-

ment studies and projects. We also provide a forum for cooperative transportation planning efforts involving counties, municipalities and government agencies. We sponsor various transportation and planning studies, assist county and city planning agencies and monitor our region's compliance with national air quality goals.

## Who makes NJTPA decisions?

The NJTPA Board of Trustees ultimately makes the critical regional planning and funding decisions that shape our region's future. The NJTPA staff works for the Board, providing technical guidance and support. The majority of the 20-member board is made up of elected officials from the region. The Board membership is shown at the left.

### NJTPA Board of Trustees



The Board of Trustees meets the second Monday of every other month (commencing in January) at the NJTPA offices in downtown Newark. All meetings are open to the public. The Board of Trustees also has standing committees that review potential NJTPA actions,



discuss agency activities and make recommendations to the full Board. The committees—Planning and Economic Development, Project Prioritization and Freight Initiatives—meet in the months when the Board does not. All meetings are open to the public.

Many of the counties and cities represented on the NJTPA Board—known as “subregions”—have transportation committees or advisory boards that meet regularly.

## History & Legislation

Regional planning bodies like the NJTPA were created to address a simple fact about transportation facilities: They span and link numerous communities over wide areas. A problem at one location, like a bridge closure or traffic tie-up, can spill over into surrounding areas and hamper the movement of large numbers of travelers. Conversely,

improving a facility, like adding an overpass or opening a new rail station, can have widespread benefits.

Recognizing this reality, the federal government in the early 1970s required urbanized regions of the country—areas with more than 50,000 people that constitute distinct “commutersheds”—to establish formal planning bodies for transportation. Composed of local elected officials and state agency representatives, these Metropolitan Planning Organizations or MPOs were to achieve regional agreement on transportation investments.

In 1991, the federal Intermodal Transportation Efficiency Act, or ISTEA, greatly enhanced the authority of MPOs. It required their approval for allocating federal funding for many types of highway and transit projects. MPOs were also given responsibility for overseeing compliance with air quality standards. Subsequent federal laws, including

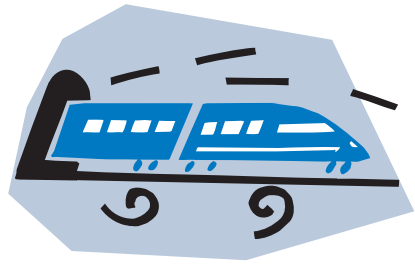


the current law, SAFETEA-LU, have continued to strengthen the regional planning conducted by MPOs.

In New Jersey, the NJTPA is one of three MPOs; the two others are the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization which covers four counties in the southeastern part of the state; and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission which covers Philadelphia and surrounding counties including four in South Jersey.

As explained below, the NJTPA's investment priorities guide the state's "implementing agencies"—principally, the New Jersey Department of Transportation and NJ Transit—which oversee project design, engineering and construction.

Nationwide there are over 500 MPOs. The NJTPA, serving over 6 million people, is the fourth largest in terms of population.



## The Regional Transportation Plan

A key NJTPA function is developing and updating the region's Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). This long-range plan is a blueprint for 25 years of transportation investment. It is a critical document, because all federally funded transportation projects in the region must flow from the plan. Inclusion in the plan is the all-important first step toward making a transportation project idea into reality.

The NJTPA updates the plan every four years to reflect our region's ever-evolving conditions and priorities. Federal regulations put some key limitations on the plan. It can only contain projects that the region can reasonably expect to afford over the life of the plan.

In developing the plan and in conducting its ongoing planning activities, the NJTPA analyzes data on many aspects of the region and its transportation system. These data include where and how people travel, pavement condition ratings, accident





## Online Project Info & Mapping

The NJTPA Online Transportation Information System or NOTIS offers citizens an interactive online tool to search and map a wide range of information about transportation projects and studies in the region. Access NOTIS at the NJTPA webpage: [www.njtpa.org](http://www.njtpa.org)

rates, trends in housing and commercial development and a host of other measures. Analyzing this data allows the NJTPA to assess how the system is performing and identify current needs for improvement.

The NJTPA often uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to array data on maps to better assess patterns and relationships—for instance, how population growth in one area is affecting traffic volumes or transit ridership there.

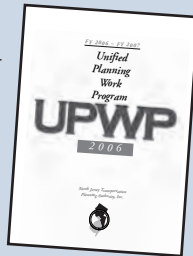
The NJTPA also develops forecasts of future conditions and needs. This involves using computer models—essentially, desktop simulations of the transportation system—to predict how current trends will affect future transportation system per-

formance. This allows the NJTPA Board to develop policies that can help shape the future of transportation. For instance, recognizing that freight will dramatically increase in coming decades, the Board can include policies in the

## Organizing the Work

Hundreds of planners, engineers and other professionals work on transportation planning in northern New Jersey. This includes the 48-person NJTPA staff as well as the staffs of the 15 city and county "subregions" and of state agencies. Two planning tools help organize, direct and coordinate this work:

**Strategic Business Plan** – Establishes the operational policies, goals and objectives of the Board to support the mission of the NJTPA. Updated every five years.



**Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)** – Summarizes the transportation planning activities of the NJTPA staff and other agencies in the region. Updated annually.

plan to better manage truck traffic in the region.

In developing the plan, the NJTPA meets extensively with its planning partners—cities, counties and state agencies—throughout the region. And, of course, the public plays a key role in putting together this important transportation plan. The NJTPA and its subregions host public meetings and workshops to develop this long-range vision for our region. This is your opportunity to get involved on the ground floor of the planning process.

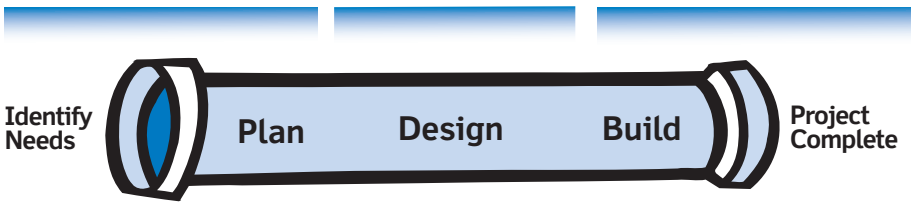
The RTP is the beginning of what’s commonly called the “project pipeline,” the process by which a

project undergoes the various stages of work needed to make it a reality (see chart below).

## Project Development Work Program

What happens after a transportation need is included in the Regional Transportation Plan? The next step is the Project Development Work Program, or PDWP. Because the region’s needs far outstrip available resources, the NJTPA Board must choose the most pressing—and practical—needs to tackle. Dealing with some concerns (such as enhancing access to a growing regional center) may

# The Project Pipeline



### Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

- Updated Every 4 Years:**
- Forecast Demographics & Transportation Performance
  - Set Regional Goals & Investment Priorities
  - Identify Specific Needs & Improvements

### Project Development Work Program (PDWP)

- Updated Yearly:**
- Develop Concepts for Projects
  - Investigate Project Feasibility
  - Begin Design

### Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

- Updated Yearly:**
- Prioritize & Select Projects to Implement
  - Identify Funding
  - Schedule Property Acquisition, Design & Construction



involve in-depth study of a variety of strategies and alternatives. Others (such as repairing a bridge) may involve more straightforward engineering questions.

In either case, the needs the region will address are included in the PDWP, the list of all project-specific transportation planning work underway in the region. The PDWP contains a variety of work, from technical studies focusing on highly specific, localized issues to major corridor studies that cover large stretches of our regional transportation system. Most of these studies are conducted by NJDOT, NJ Transit, or one of the region's counties or cities.

Corridor studies call for examination of a wide variety of transportation alternatives—road, rail, bicycle, pedestrian and possibly more. In all these studies, public participation is crucial. The sponsor of the study must ensure that the public has an oppor-

tunity to make recommendations, express concerns and ask questions about the project.

The PDWP covers the following phases of work, in sequence:

- **Concept Development:** In this phase, a need is studied further to more precisely define the problems and the best strategies to address them. Both technical work and community involvement are used to reach agreement on defining the problem.

- **Feasibility Assessment:** During this phase, project alternatives are evaluated and a preferred alternative is selected. In addition to examining preliminary engineering, environmental, historic and financial constraints on the potential project,



this phase calls for community involvement to determine if sufficient public support exists to justify further work.

- **Preliminary Design:** This phase involves refining the engineering solution and conducting more detailed environmental studies required by federal regulation. These environmental regulations must be satisfied for a project to move to the next step: the NJTPA's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), where project concepts become reality.

## The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

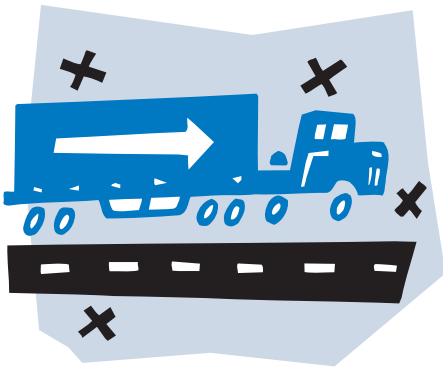
The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) lists all projects for which federal funds will be spent. Developing this capital program allows the NJTPA Board to set priorities among the region's many trans-

portation projects. That in turn allows the agency to get the maximum benefit from available federal and state transportation dollars. The TIP includes public transit, road, bicycle, pedestrian and freight-related projects.

The TIP covers a four-year span and is updated every year. It does more than simply list projects—it spells out the anticipated schedule and cost for each phase of the project. The TIP can serve as a year-by-year accounting of how government is spending transportation tax dollars on behalf of citizens.

By the time a project has reached the TIP, it is in its final stages. If you want to influence a project, it is wise to get involved at the earlier project development stages, when the exact nature of the project is still taking shape. Nevertheless, the NJTPA encourages public input on the TIP, which is updated annually.

To help decide which projects should be included in the TIP, the NJTPA makes use of a "Project Prioritization Process" that scores projects on a variety of criteria. Points are awarded based on measures of how well projects will fulfill goals for transportation set in the NJTPA Regional Transportation Plan.



# Acronym Guide



Bewildered by acronyms that you come across in transportation planning documents? As in most technical fields, transportation planners make liberal use of language shortcuts — TIP, SIP, GIS, EIS, ITS, NEPA to name a few. Get help with the *NJTPA Acronym Guide*. Find it at [www.njtpa.org](http://www.njtpa.org) click on “publications” or call 973-639-8400.

For instance, projects that will improve safety in locations with high accident rates receive extra points, as do projects that support "Smart Growth" policies such as helping redevelop abandoned industrial sites or channeling growth to improvement districts designated by the state.

Once projects have been scored, NJTPA consults with county and city representatives on the proposed project rankings, discusses the rankings at open public meetings of its Project Prioritization Committee and, finally, engages in negotiations with NJDOT to mesh NJTPA priorities with those of the state and

Governor. A final TIP is usually approved by the NJTPA Board in July of each year. It must then be approved by the US Department of Transportation.

The finalized TIP funds and schedules the following phases of work, which culminate with a completed project:

- **Final Design:** During this phase, detailed project specifications are developed and a contractor is selected. In addition, a utilities phase may occur during or after Final Design in which utilities are moved if necessary.
- **Right of Way:** This phase involves acquisition of property needed for the project. This phase can be time-consuming and costly, as negotiations must take place and legal issues may need to be sorted out.



- **Construction:** This phase can last two or more years on major projects and is usually the most expensive.

In addition to funding projects at specific locations—such as redesigned intersections, resurfaced roads, rehabilitated bridges and upgraded traffic signals—the TIP also funds transportation "programs" which typically involve ongoing activities such as snow removal, bridge painting, maintenance of railroad tracks, etc.

## Financing

The \$2 billion or more invested in improving transportation each year in the NJTPA region derives from both state and federal sources—in most years, about evenly split between the two.

Both the State of New Jersey and the federal government maintain special transportation accounts, called transportation trust funds, which receive proceeds from motor fuel taxes and

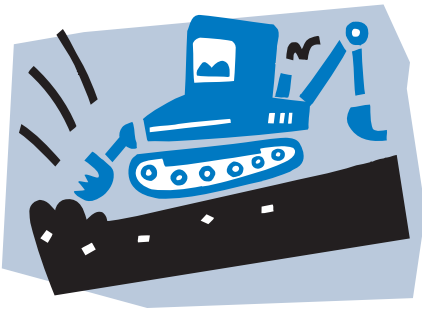


selected other transportation fees and taxes. Outlays from the trust funds are largely dedicated to fulfilling transportation needs.

The NJTPA has responsibility under federal law for the investment of federal transportation funding. To be eligible for federal funds, a proposed project must be included in the NJTPA-approved TIP, discussed above. Each year in developing the TIP, the NJTPA cooperates with the New Jersey Department of Transportation and NJ Transit to determine how both federal and state transportation funding can be most cost effectively applied to meeting transportation needs.

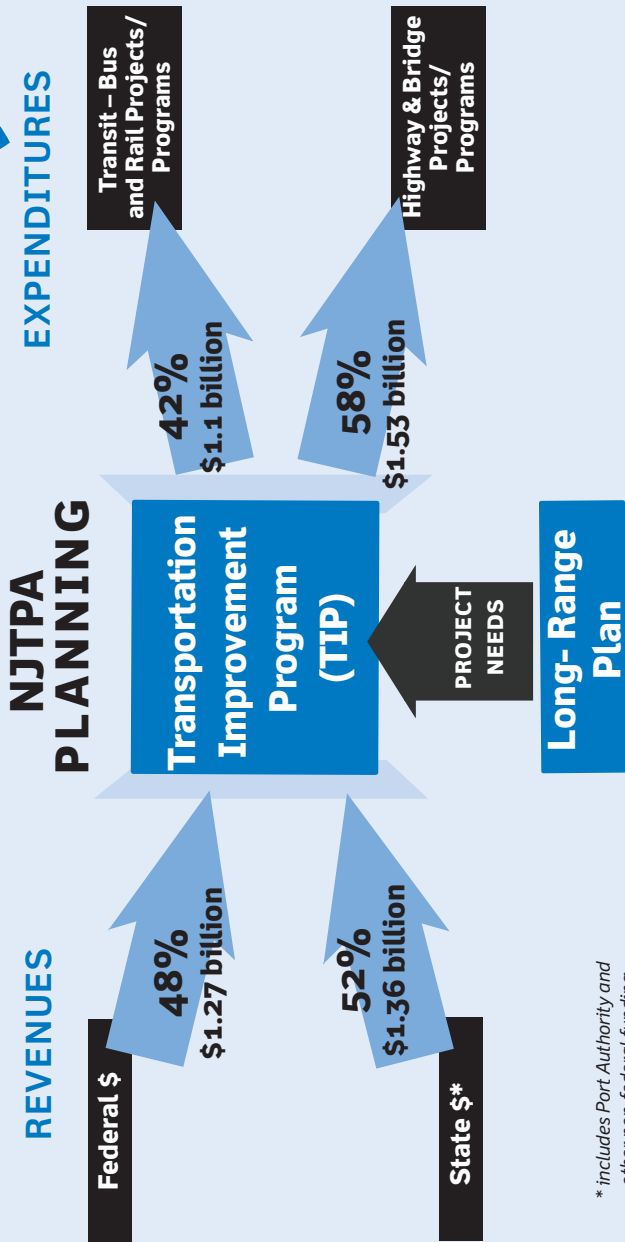
Like the long-range plan, the TIP is required to be "fiscally constrained." That is, it must be based on reasonable estimates of available funding.

Nearly half of all the funding in the TIP is allocated to improving highways and bridges, with the remaining amount allocated to bus and rail



# Snapshot of North Jersey Transportation Funding

Fiscal Year 2009: Total 2.63 Billion



\* includes Port Authority and other non-federal funding



transit. The large allocation for transit reflects the NJTPA's commitment to safeguarding the environment and providing increased travel choices for residents.

The vast majority of funding allocated through the TIP—whether for highways, bridges or transit—goes toward maintaining or upgrading existing facilities rather than expanding the transportation system. This reflects a "fix-it-first" approach to investments that is among the guiding principles adopted by the NJTPA as part of its long-range Regional Transportation Plan.

## Air Quality

Regions such as northern New Jersey which have been designated as in "non-attainment" of federal air quality standards are required under federal law to take special steps to reduce pollutants.

Each year the NJTPA must demonstrate that the projects it approves through its TIP and Regional Transportation Plan will have a net



positive impact on air quality and contribute to the achievement of the air quality goals contained in the New Jersey State Implementation Plan (SIP). The SIP governs pollution from all sources—not only from automobiles but from power plants, manufacturing and other sources.

To annually demonstrate TIP/SIP "conformity," the NJTPA uses computer modeling to estimate the emissions impact of approved projects.

The NJTPA also administers programs and studies to help achieve state goals for reducing greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change and for improving energy efficiency.

## Getting Involved



There are many ways you can influence the transportation planning decisions that will shape our future. Here are a few:

- Attend meetings of your county's transportation board or committee. (see contacts, next page)
- Visit the NJTPA website ([www.njtpa.org](http://www.njtpa.org)) to keep abreast of meeting schedules, public comment periods, etc.
- Sign up for the NJTPA mailing

list at [www.njtpa.org](http://www.njtpa.org) or write to the address on the back cover.

- Attend NJTPA Board meetings (held every other month) and committee meetings (held on alternating months). A calendar is posted on the NJTPA website.
- Request a speaker for a meeting of your community organization, club or school.
- Visit New Jersey Regional Network Libraries which keep major NJTPA documents on file.

### Visiting NJTPA Offices

The NJTPA is located in downtown Newark in the "One Newark Center" office building which is attached to the Seton Hall Law School building. This is at the corner of McCarter Highway (Route 21) and Raymond Blvd., about one block from Newark Penn Station

which serves the Northeast Corridor, North Jersey Coast Line, Raritan Valley Line and PATH Trains. Office hours are 8:30a.m. to 5:00p.m. For further directions, call 973-639-8400 or click on "contacts-directions" at [www.njtpa.org](http://www.njtpa.org).

# Transportation Contacts



## **NJTPA**

One Newark Center  
17th Floor  
Newark, NJ 07102  
Phone: 973-639-8400  
FAX: 973-639-1953  
[www.njtpa.org](http://www.njtpa.org)

## **NJTPA Subregions**

### **Bergen County**

Department of Planning &  
Economic Development  
201-336-6438

### **Essex County**

Department of Public Works  
973-226-8500 x258

### **Hudson County**

Department of Engineering &  
Planning  
201-558-7018

### **Hunterdon County**

Planning Board  
908-788-1490

### **Middlesex County**

Planning Board  
732-745-3013

### **Monmouth County**

Engineering Department  
732-431-7760

### **Morris County**

Board of Transportation  
973-829-8101

### **Ocean County**

Office of Engineering  
732-929-2130

### **Passaic County**

Planning Board  
973-569-4047

### **Somerset County**

Planning Board  
908-231-7021

### **Sussex County**

Planning Department  
973-579-0500

### **Union County**

Bureau of Transportation  
Planning  
908-527-4086

### **Warren County**

Planning Board  
908-475-6532

### **City of Newark**

Department of Engineering  
973-733-3985

### **City of Jersey City**

Dept. of Housing, Economic  
Dev., and Commerce  
201-547-4205

## **Implementing Agencies**

### **New Jersey Department of Transportation**

P.O. Box 600  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0600  
609-530-2001  
[www.state.nj.us/transportation](http://www.state.nj.us/transportation)

### **NJ Transit**

One Penn Plaza East  
Newark, NJ 07105  
24-hour transit information:  
973-275-5555  
[www.njtransit.com](http://www.njtransit.com)

### **Port Authority**

225 Park Avenue South  
18th Floor  
New York, NY 10003  
212-435-7000  
[www.panynj.gov](http://www.panynj.gov)

## **Transportation Management Associations**

### **Morris County area:**

TransOptions  
973-267-7600

### **Bergen County/Meadowlands area:**

Meadowlink  
201-939-4242

### **Middlesex County area:**

Keep Middlesex Moving  
732-745-4465

### **Somerset County/Raritan Valley area:**

Ridewise of Raritan Valley  
908-704-1011  
[www.ridewise.org](http://www.ridewise.org)

### **Hunterdon County area:**

Hunterdon Area Rural Transit  
908-788-5553  
[www.hart.tma.com](http://www.hart.tma.com)

### **Hudson County area:**

Hudson County TMA  
201-792-2825  
[www.hudsontma.org](http://www.hudsontma.org)





