

1.0: Plan Purpose and Development

The **Regional Transportation & Development Plan** will guide transportation, community, and economic development planning activities for the Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association (OMEGA). This plan will provide a comprehensive framework to align the goals and strategies of the entire planning organization to achieve the best results for our members.

This plan is a collaborative effort of all OMEGA staff, in conjunction with the Transportation Advisory and Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committees. Public input was used to develop appropriate goals and strategies for the region. Special acknowledgements are given to the North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning & Development Commission, Buckeye Hills Regional Council, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, and Ohio Department of Transportation for the technical assistance and guidance provided throughout the planning process.

This plan, once adopted by the OMEGA Executive Board, will supersede the *Regional Transportation Plan* (adopted June 2015), and the *2017 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* in fulfillment of the requirements of a long-range transportation plan and a comprehensive economic development strategy as laid out in federal legislation. This plan will be reviewed annually and fully updated every five years, unless otherwise specified in federal or state legislation.

This plan fulfills the requirements of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) under the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, signed into law as a reauthorization of surface transportation programs through Fiscal Year 2020. According to requirements of the FAST Act, locally developed coordinated public transit-human services transportation plans must be updated to reflect the changes established by the FAST Act legislation. The FAST Act applies new programs and rules for all Fiscal Year 2016 funds and authorizes federal highway and transit programs for five (5) years.

This plan also fulfills federal requirements (13 C.F.R. § 303.7) governing the development of the CEDS. This document contains sections that include:

- Summary Background
- SWOT Analysis
- Strategic Direction/Action Plan
- Evaluation Framework.

This plan also includes concepts relating to economic resilience, as prescribed by the Economic Development Administration (EDA)¹.

¹ <https://www.eda.gov/ceds/>

1.1 Introduction

The **Regional Transportation & Development Plan**:

- Documents the ongoing transportation planning process carried out by the OMEGA and its partners,
- Documents the ongoing economic and community development planning efforts carried out by OMEGA and its partners, and
- Identifies strategies and projects to maintain and improve communities and regional networks between 2020 and 2045.

Local governments conduct studies on and complete improvements to the transportation system. OMEGA is the principal public agency conducting regional transportation studies for the East Central Ohio region because it serves as the designated Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) for the Carroll, Columbiana, Coshocton, Guernsey, Harrison, Holmes, Muskingum, and Tuscarawas counties. Furthermore, OMEGA is the Economic Development District as designated by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and the Local Development District as designated by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) for the aforementioned counties with the addition of Belmont and Jefferson counties. Transportation planning for Belmont and Jefferson counties is conducted by Belomar Regional Council and Brook-Hancock-Jefferson Metropolitan Planning Commission, respectively.

What is a Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO)?

The Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association (OMEGA) is organized as a Council of Governments pursuant to Section 167 of the Ohio Revised Code. OMEGA is a collaborative body of member governments that serves as a facilitator between state and federal government agencies and local entities to provide opportunities in economic and community development through networking, education, planning, research, and allocation of resources. On January 27, 2016, Governor John Kasich, pursuant to United States Code, Title 23, Section 135 (m), officially designated OMEGA as an Ohio Regional Transportation Planning Organization. Our mission is to provide a pathway to enhance community and economic growth in our region.

What is a Local Development District (LDD)?

To ensure that federal funds are used effectively and efficiently, and to strengthen local participation, ARC works with the Appalachian states to support a network of multicounty planning and development organizations, or local development districts (LDDs), throughout the region. The 73 LDDs cover all 420 counties in Appalachia, including the 10 counties in the OMEGA region.

The LDDs' most important role is to identify priority needs of local communities. Based on these needs, the LDDs work with their board members and other local citizens to develop plans for their communities' economic development, to target and meet the most pressing needs, and to build community unity and leadership².

In Ohio, four LDDs work with the Governor's Office of Appalachia and the Office of Community Development to administer state and Appalachian Regional Commission funds. Using a "bottom up"

² <https://www.arc.gov/about/LocalDevelopmentDistricts.asp>

approach, local communities and the LDDs prioritize projects in their regions. The ARC Code, the Commission's and State's plans and strategies, and the LDDs project scoring criteria all include provisions to focus additional support, funding, and resources on counties designated as "distressed" by the Appalachian Regional Commission. The designation recognizes "...counties within Appalachia with persistent, long-term problems that have resulted in extraordinary levels of economic and human distress."³ Ohio's four Local Development Districts are the Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission, Buckeye Hills Regional Council, **OMEGA**, and the Eastgate Regional Council of Governments.

What is an Economic Development District (EDD)?

Economic Development Districts (EDDs) are multi-jurisdictional entities, commonly composed of multiple counties and in certain cases even cross-state borders. They help lead the locally based, regionally driven economic development planning process that leverages the involvement of the public, private and non-profit sectors to establish a strategic blueprint (i.e., an economic development roadmap) for regional collaboration⁴.

What are Regional Transportation Plans?

RTPOs are required to complete a long-range regional transportation plan every five years, with a horizon year 20-25 years into the future. This plan will inform federal and state transportation officials about the needs and priorities for improved highways, transit, rail, aviation, maritime, and active transportation facilities throughout the region. With a five-year update cycle, the long-range plan remains current and reflects changes that occur within intervening years.

RTPOs are also required to maintain a Regional Transportation Improvement Plan (RTIP). This plan complements the long-range plan and is the short-term plan that documents projects that have funding for at least one phase within the upcoming four (4) state fiscal years. The current RTIP can be found on the OMEGA website⁵ at any time.

What is the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)?

The CEDS is a locally developed, regional planning process undertaken by Economic Development Districts (EDDs) every five years. The plan develops strategies for local leaders to build capacity and guide economic prosperity and resiliency throughout the region. The goals and strategies are developed by a diverse group of public and private economic development professionals, facilitated by a regional planner at the EDD. This planning effort is intended to leverage additional federal, state, local, and private capital to develop a robust economy.

Why merge the Regional Transportation Plan and CEDS?

By merging our long-range Regional Transportation Plan and our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) into one document, the organization will be able to minimize the amount of duplicative work and reallocate the time and cost savings into projects that directly benefit our members. The merged plans will also formally align all organizational goals and ensure the region is best prepared to move forward, utilizing knowledge and resources from a variety of different programs, professions, and funding sources.

³ https://development.ohio.gov/cs/cs_goa_ldds.htm

⁴ <https://eda.gov/edd/>

⁵ <https://omegadistrict.org/programs/transportation/rtip/>

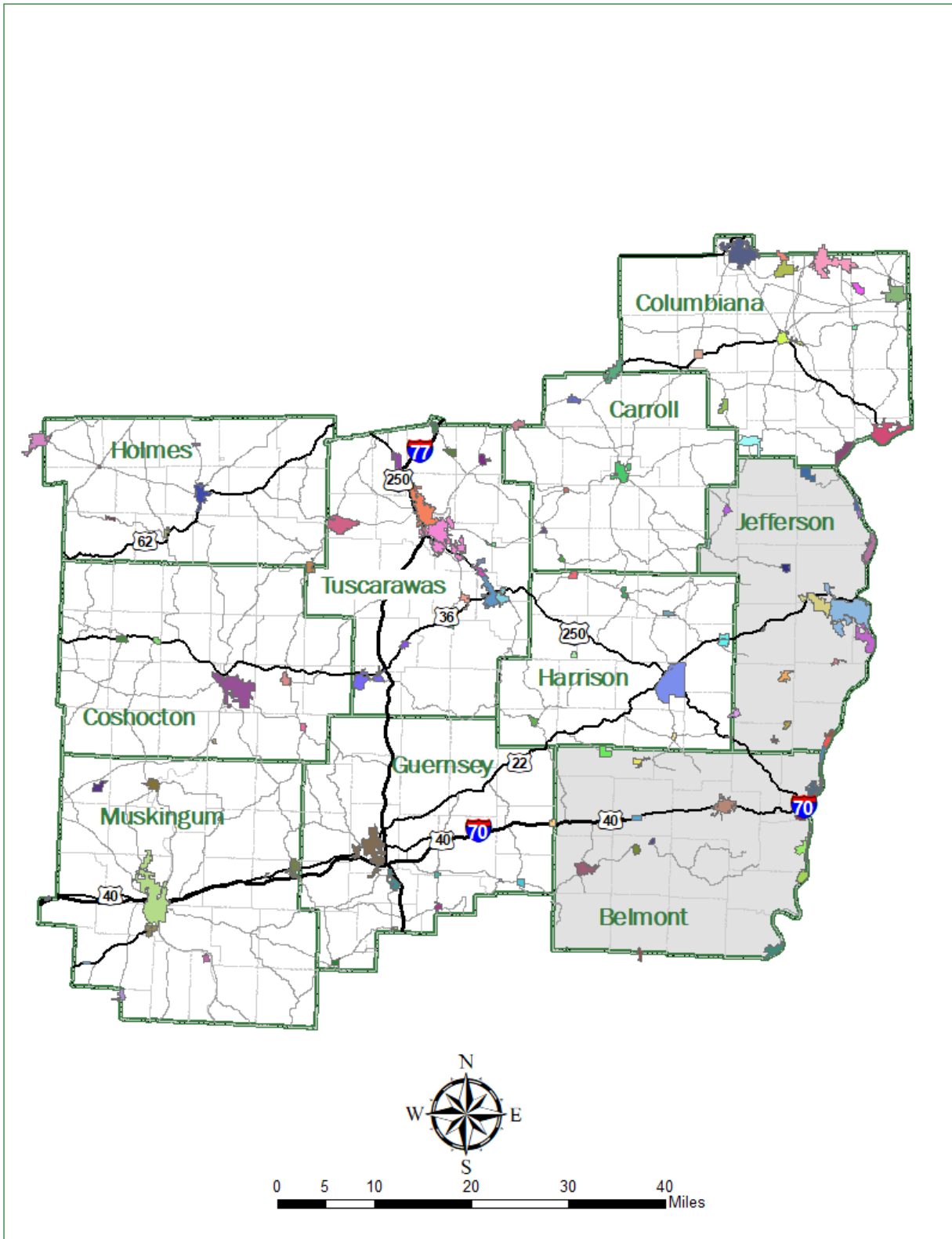


Figure 1-1: OMEGA Transportation Planning Area

What is the OMEGA region?

OMEGA is comprised of ten counties in east-central Ohio. All ten counties are designated as Appalachian counties by ARC. Overall, these counties are primarily rural in nature, with extensive acreage covered in forests, cropland, and other non-urbanized uses. The region is bounded on the north by the Akron/Canton and Youngstown metropolitan areas; to the east by the Ohio River, and by the Wheeling and Weirton/Steubenville metropolitan areas; to the south by additional Appalachian counties in the Buckeye Hills Regional Council planning area; and to the west by the Licking County Area Transportation Study (LCATS) and the Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization (CORPO), which is Ohio's newest RTPO. The cities of Columbus and Cleveland in Ohio, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania are all approximately 80-100 miles from the center of the OMEGA region.

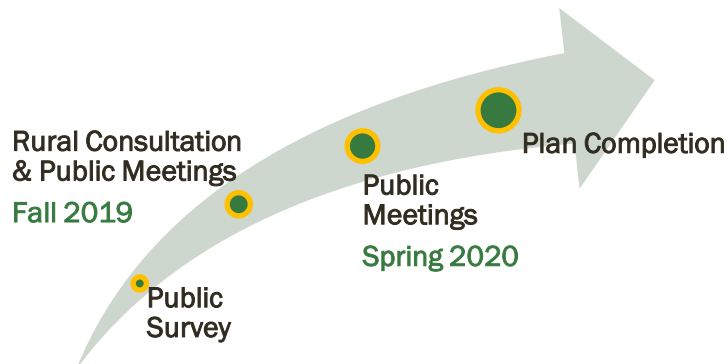
1.2 Planning Process & Public Involvement

OMEGA adopted a Title VI Plan in December 2019. This plan included an updated Public Participation Plan. The Title VI Plan outlines a framework for all public involvement efforts undertaken by OMEGA staff. The Title VI/Public Participation Plan can be found on the homepage of the OMEGA website⁶.

To initiate the public involvement process, OMEGA staff developed a non-scientific sixteen-question survey to gauge the priorities of the general public. The survey was released online, with printed copies available upon request. Completed printed copies were then entered into online survey platform and saved digitally. OMEGA's Communication Manager distributed the survey link through a press release to media outlets throughout the region, to include radio, print, and television. Social media was also utilized, with stakeholders sharing the survey on their respective platforms.

A webpage⁷ for the plan was created and maintained throughout the planning process. This page was updated as information was made available and will host the 2020 plan until it is superseded by the next update in 2025.

Public outreach meetings were scheduled in tandem with the Regional Transportation Improvement Plan (RTIP) Rural Consultation period in September and October 2019. Elected officials and members of the public were invited to provide comments, insight, or other information to guide the development of the plan for the region. Additional public meetings were held in May 2020.



⁶ www.omegadistrict.org

⁷ <https://omegadistrict.org/programs/transportation/plan2020/>

Date	Location	Meeting Type	County/Counties Covered
9/24/2019	Columbiana Co. Port Authority 7860 Lincolne Pl. Lisbon, OH	Rural Consultation & Public	Columbiana
9/25/2019	Carroll County District Library 70 Second St. NE Carrollton, OH	Rural Consultation & Public	Carroll
10/01/2019	Dover City Council Chambers 110 E. Third St. Dover, OH	Rural Consultation & Public	Tuscarawas
10/03/2019	Holmes County District Library 3102 Glen Dr. Millersburg, OH	Rural Consultation & Public	Holmes
10/09/2019	Crossroads Library 63500 Byesville Rd. Cambridge, OH	Rural Consultation & Public	Guernsey
10/15/2019	Puskarich Public Library 200 E. Market St. Cadiz, OH	Rural Consultation & Public	Harrison
10/16/2019	Coshocton Public Library 655 Main St. Coshocton, OH	Rural Consultation & Public	Coshocton
10/17/2019	John McIntire Library 220 N. 5 th St. Zanesville, OH	Rural Consultation & Public	Muskingum
5/04/2020	Virtual Meetings via Facebook Live & YouTube	Public	All

1.3 Regional Goals

Based on the existing literature and planning documents, and in conjunction with the Transportation Advisory Committee and the Executive Board, OMEGA has established the following goals and strategies for the **Regional Transportation & Development Plan**. This plan will provide a framework for guiding the long-term planning activities with a horizon year of 2045. This plan will fully integrate the goals and strategies of the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO), Economic Development District (EDD), and the Local Development District (LDD). The alignment of all program goals enables OMEGA staff to leverage this plan while pursuing funding and implementation of projects throughout the region. Each of the goals outlined will be discussed in greater detail in future sections, as strategies are assigned.

Preserve Regional Assets to Support Local Economies

The preservation of regional assets is vital to the long-term viability of the region. With a resurgent economy in the region, these assets will play an ever-increasingly important role in facilitating the movement of goods, people, services, and resources safely and efficiently.

Increase the Safety of Regional Infrastructure

Safety is an integral part of all networks that serve the OMEGA region. Transportation safety endeavors will be aligned with ODOT's new and existing efforts to make the regional network safer for all users. OMEGA will also work with communities to enhance or replace deficient water and wastewater systems to ensure safe drinking water is provided for all residents and visitors. Further assistance will be given to communities to provide safe public spaces and procure additional resources for public safety departments, such as police and fire.

Facilitate Economic & Community Development

Facilitating economic and community development is the bedrock of OMEGA's existence as an LDD and EDD. With the addition of the RTPO, these efforts will utilize additional tools in creating opportunities for new businesses to move into the region or to allow existing businesses to expand. Historically, the Appalachian region has lagged the rest of the nation in many indicators of economic success. With an assortment of instruments spanning several distinct programs, OMEGA is uniquely positioned to assist communities in broadening and growing their economies for the advancement of the region.

Develop & Maintain Regional Resiliency

Resiliency is fundamental for the continued growth and success of the OMEGA region. OMEGA will work with communities to incorporate resiliency in economic, community, and transportation planning projects. To mitigate adverse impacts, OMEGA will help communities plan for and/or mitigate economic downturns, extreme weather events, and other external factors that may impact the region.

The goals set by OMEGA were compared against relevant federal and state programs to ensure that the regional goals aligned with federal and state goals and priorities. Figure 1-2 displays the alignment with transportation goals set forth by the U.S. Department of Transportation and ODOT; Figure 1-3 displays the alignment with community and economic development goals set forth by the Appalachian Regional Commission, Ohio Governor’s Office of Appalachia, and the Economic Development Administration.

National Goals	State Goals	OMEGA Goals			
		Preservation	Safety	Development	Resiliency
<i>Transportation</i>					
Safety – Reduce transportation-related fatalities and serious injuries across the transportation system	Safety	✓	✓	✓	
Infrastructure – Invest in infrastructure to ensure mobility and accessibility and to stimulate economic growth, productivity, and competitiveness for American workers and businesses	Preservation	✓			
	Economic Development			✓	
	Accessibility & Connectivity	✓	✓	✓	✓
Innovation – Lead in the development and deployment of innovative practices and technologies to improve the safety and performance of the Nation’s transportation system	Mobility & Efficiency		✓	✓	✓
Accountability – Serve the Nation with reduced regulatory burden and greater efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability	Stewardship	✓			✓

Figure 1-2: Transportation Planning Goal Alignment

National & State Goals	OMEGA Goals			
	Preservation	Safety	Development	Resiliency
<i>Economic/Community Development</i>				
ARC - Invest in critical infrastructure (especially broadband); transportation; and water/wastewater systems	✓	✓	✓	✓
ARC - Invest in entrepreneurial and business development strategies that strengthen Appalachia's economy			✓	✓
ARC - Strengthen Appalachia's community and economic development potential by leveraging the Region's natural and cultural heritage assets			✓	✓
ARC - Increase the education, knowledge, skills, and health of residents to work and succeed in Appalachia			✓	✓
ARC - Build the capacity and skills of current and next-generation leaders and organization to innovate, collaborate, and advance community and economic development			✓	✓
EDA - Reduce Regional Unemployment			✓	✓
EDA - Increase Regional Income			✓	✓
EDA - Reduce Regional Poverty			✓	✓
EDA - Improve Regional Standard of Living			✓	✓

Figure 1-3: Economic & Community Development Goal Alignment

1.4 Plan Objectives & Targets

Goals	Objectives	Target	Benchmark	Progress*
Preservation	Reduce the # of bridges on the local system with a General Appraisal Rating of 4 or less	5 bridge replacements funded per year on local system	265 (2018)	
	Increase the # of miles in "Acceptable" pavement conditions on Federal Aid system	90% of all Federal Aid route pavements in Acceptable condition	84.89% (2019)	
Safety	Reduce the # and rate of fatal and serious injury crashes	1% reduction annually or support current statewide goal	5-year rolling average	
	Reduce the # of fatal and serious injury non-motorized crashes (includes bicycle, pedestrian, buggy)	1% reduction annually or support current statewide goal	5-year rolling average	
	Reduce at-grade railroad crossing crashes (motorized, pedestrian, etc.)	Zero at-grade incidents	5-year rolling average	
Economic & Community Development	Increase the # of commuters walking, biking, or riding transit	5% share of commuters using transit or as pedestrians/bicyclists	3.89% (2018)	
	Increase the average # of jobs accessible within 30 minutes by driving	75% of all commuters within 30 mins	67.8% of commuters within 30 mins (2018)	
	Increase the # of miles of trails or designated bike facilities	Assist 1 community per year to plan/implement/fund designated bike facilities	712 miles (2020)	
	# of households improved – Access to Safe Drinking Water	--	--	
	# of households improved – Access to Public Wastewater System	--	--	
	Track the MHI for the region vs. statewide	Increase MHI relative to state level	89.8% (2017)	
	Track the poverty level for the region vs. statewide	Reduce poverty level relative to state level	11.3% vs OH 10.8% (2017)	

Goals	Objectives	Target	Benchmark	Progress*
Economic & Community Development	Track the education attainment level for region vs. statewide	Increase educational attainment level relative to state level	2017 ACS Data	
	Increase the # of census tracts served by broadband (25:3 or as defined by FCC)	100% broadband coverage by 2045	2017 Connect Ohio Statistics	
	Track the transfer payments for the region vs. statewide	Reduce the total amount of transfer payments per county	\$5,855,647,000 (2018)	
	Track the # of manufacturing employees	Maintain/increase the total # of manufacturing employees	5-year rolling average	
	# of businesses improved - Infrastructure	--	--	
	# of businesses improved - Financed	1 business financed annually	6 financed (2015-2019)	
	# of students/workers improved - Workforce	--	--	
	Transit – Reduce Denials*	--	--	
	Transit – Reduce Cancellations/No Shows*	--	--	
	Transit – Increase Ridership*	--	--	
Transit – Track Call Volume*	--	--		
Resiliency	Consider Complete Streets Implementation	50% of all regional jurisdictions with policy/plan by 2045	1 municipality (2018)	
	Decrease the # locations of major roadways at risk of flooding/slipping	1 improvement programmed per RTIP cycle	68 major roads (2019)	
	Increase business diversification	Increase percentage of underrepresented industry sectors	5-year rolling average	

*No data currently available to set benchmarks. New benchmarks will be established in CY 2020 and tracked in CY 2021 and beyond.

1.5 Plan Strategies

Stakeholders outlined strategies that may be undertaken at a regional or local level to achieve the regional goals, as stated above. OMEGA will assist communities in the refinement and implementation of these strategies, as needed.

Goal 1: Preservation of Regional Assets

- Facilitate communication between funding/regulatory agencies and political subdivisions
- Develop a prioritized list of infrastructure improvements based on current conditions/use
- Advocate for the ability for local communities to enact Road Use Maintenance Agreements (RUMAs) for additional industrial uses
- Increase flexibility to implement weight restrictions on local roads
- Provide current infrastructure condition data to locals via interactive web maps or ad hoc data requests
- Support Transportation Performance Management Statewide Target for Pavement
- Support Transportation Performance Management Statewide Target for Bridge Condition

Goal 2: Increase Safety of Regional Infrastructure

- Encourage communities to plan for safe use by all users of the transportation network, to include motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and Amish buggies (Complete Streets)
- Plan for wider travel lanes to accommodate slow-moving vehicles are frequent (e.g. Amish buggies, bicyclists, agricultural equipment)
- Support the development of interconnected active transportation networks
- Develop a regional list of dangerous intersections and road segments, updated annually
- Work with communities to develop access management plans for new and existing corridors
- Support Transportation Performance Management Statewide Target for Safety

Goal 3: Facilitate Economic & Community Development

- Research and disseminate funding opportunities for communities; assist in applying for and administering funds, if requested
- Advocate for the expansion and improvement of rural broadband access, safe drinking water, and wastewater systems
- Advocate for the development of the regionally significant corridors (US 30 & Columbus-to-Pittsburgh Corridor)
- Support community efforts to revitalize, rehabilitate, or develop economic/recreational spaces
- Lead or assist in regional corridor planning
- Develop short-term plans for communities to implement new programs (e.g. Safe Routes to School, Park Improvement Plans, etc.)
- Support workforce development programs
- Support Transportation Performance Management Statewide Target for Travel Time Reliability
- Support Transportation Performance Management Statewide Target for Truck Travel Time Reliability

Goal 4: Develop & Maintain Regional Resiliency

- Incorporate green infrastructure into the planning phases of projects to reduce environmental impacts from development (e.g. bioswales for improved drainage, permeable pavements in parking areas, etc.)
- Assist local governments in the development of access plans during extreme weather events, in coordination with local EMA directors
- Support area or site development efforts to diversify regional economies
- Facilitate educational opportunities for communities to learn/implement new strategies to make their local area resilient economically and physically
- Identify high-risk areas for extreme weather impacts
- Encourage enforcement of existing regulations to mitigate development in high-risk areas

****Note:** Due to the lack of large urbanized areas, the Transportation Performance Management Statewide Targets for Urbanized Area Peak Hour Excessive Delay and non-Single Occupancy Vehicle Travel do not apply to the OMEGA RTPO.*

1.6 Public Survey Result Summary

In July 2019, OMEGA staff released a non-scientific public survey to gain additional insight into the priorities and transportation needs of the region. From July through November, 257 responses were gathered. These responses represented all ten OMEGA counties, and some of the neighboring counties in Ohio and Pennsylvania as well. A full list of questions and their answers is provided in **Appendix A**.

The respondents ranged in age from the 15 to 24-year-old cohort to those 65+ years of age, with a majority being 45 years old or older. Due to the primarily rural nature of the region, a high percentage (76.7%) of the population drives alone to reach their primary destination (work, school, medical, etc.). Public transportation use was reported by 12.8% of the population, though there may be a reporting bias, as this survey was also distributed by a county transit agency to gather data for their locally developed coordinated plan update.

Slightly over half of respondents (54.5%) reported a commute time of 0-20 minutes, which is consistent with the travel time estimates provided by the US Census. Many trips (64.2%) also reported a total commute length of 0-20 miles.

The top five transportation priorities for survey respondents were, in order:

1. Maintain Roads/Bridges
2. Improve Roadway Safety
3. Relieve Traffic Congestion
4. Improve Public Transportation
5. Improve Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities

Other priorities were identified, but their ranking was significantly lower than the top five. When restricted to picking their highest priority only, Maintain Roads/Bridges was the highest ranked, followed by Improve Roadway Safety. These results influenced the development of the goals outlined above.