I-95 Corridor Northeast and Mid Atlantic Megaregion; multi-state priority area

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Location (loosely defined): The Northeast and Mid-Atlantic seaboard - From Northern Virginia to Southern Maine, bounded by the Appalachian Mountains to the west.

Principal Cities: Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington D.C. (Note: These five metro areas have a combined population of over 42 million people, more than 85 percent of the total population of the Northeast megaregion. Together, they constitute the largest continuously urbanized area in the United States.)

Population 2000: 49,563,296
Percent of U.S. Population: 18%
Population 2025: 58,124,740
Projected Growth: 18%
2005 GDP: $2,591,075,000,000
Percent of US GDP: 21%

Overview: The I-95 corridor, running through 10 Northeastern Area States and the District of Columbia, is the densest, most richly connected network of metropolitan areas in the nation (RPA, 2007). Its larger support area, encompassing fourteen Northeastern states, contains the unique natural landscapes and estuaries that provide the drinking water, food and fiber production, wildlife habitat, carbon sinks, and recreational amenities that support life along the corridor. But the I-95 corridor’s environmental assets are increasingly threatened by rapid growth at the metropolitan fringe, which consumes open space and fragments forests. The goal of protecting critical landscapes along the I-95 corridor is also challenged by the multiplicity of local governments, counties, and states, all with different land use policies and regulations, and a public often unaware of the many values these landscapes bring to their communities.

Context: The development patterns of the 5 metropolitan regions making up the I-95 corridor are pretty well understood; less well understood are the new patterns formed where such metro areas tend to blur together into larger complexes. These complexes have recently been labeled as “megaregions” (UPenn, 2004, RPA 2007). Many of the environmental and economic challenges faced by the five major metro areas within the I-95 corridor megaregion—Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C.—are not unique to each region but derived from their common experience of geography, history, culture, and global economic change. Taken as a whole, these areas comprise the
critical landscapes that help shape and define the megaregion and supply the natural resources on which its large population depends (RPA, 2007).

Commuting patterns offer compelling evidence that the I-95 corridor megaregion States and DC continue to cohere, with major implications for their transportation systems. In 2000, 8.5 percent of all commuters in the Northeast megaregion crossed state lines on the way to their workplaces in other parts of the megaregion (US Census, 2000). From 1990 to 2000, the number of people who worked in the Northeast but outside their metro area of residence increased by 19 percent, more than twice the rate of increase in total number of workers (US DOT, 2004).

**Landscape Character:** The University of Pennsylvania’s *Planning for America in a Global Economy: City Planning Studio Report*, provides a two-tiered definition of the Northeast megaregion, consisting of an “urban core” and a much larger “support zone” of farmland and forests, reaching north to the Northern Forests, west to the Appalachian Highlands, and south to the start of the Piedmont mountain range. Using this definition, the I-95 corridor connects diverse waterways, extensive shorelines, and a varied landscape where weather and physical climate vary dramatically. The contrasts, from mountain vistas and extensive forests to one of the most densely populated corridors in the US, are noteworthy. The Northeast includes the largest financial market in the world (New York City), the nation’s most productive non-irrigated agricultural county (Lancaster, PA), and the largest estuarine region (the Chesapeake Bay) in the US. The Northeast is dominated by managed vegetation, with much of the landscape covered by a mosaic of farmland and forest (RPA, 2006).

The majority of the population is concentrated in the coastal plain and piedmont regions, and within major urban areas. Over the next generation, the Northeast will add 1 million new residents (RPA, 2007). This population growth will demand infrastructure investments and economic growth to accommodate these new residents while preserving critical ecosystem services and quality of life.

**Economic Importance:** The I-95 corridor is a densely populated powerhouse of economic output, producing 20 percent of the nation’s Gross Domestic Product with 18 percent of the population and only two percent of the nation’s land area. Today, the megaregion has a largely service-based economy, specializing in sectors such as education, health care, and professional services (RPA, 2007). The economic activities along the corridor range from agriculture to resource extraction (forestry, fisheries, and mining), to major service industries highly dependent on communication and travel, to recreation and tourism, to manufacturing and transportation of industrial goods and materials (RPA, 2006).

**Challenges:** The rate of land consumption in the Northeast continues to accelerate, endangering natural systems like watersheds and estuaries, wiping out agricultural land and open space, and compounding congestion (RPA, 2007). Overriding trends in population growth, land use, and economic specialization,
along with common threats like the high cost of housing, rising income inequalities, and climate change, affect the health and future prosperity of the entire corridor.

In the coming years, the states within the I-95 corridor will need to work together to address common challenges that threaten the megaregion’s prosperity, environment and quality of life. Certain challenges – watershed management and impacts of climate change, require coordinated action to address ecosystem services, infrastructure, and economies that span multiple states. Other challenges – increasing canopy cover in center cities – can benefit from common strategies and approaches to shared challenges. The assumption made here is that the sum ecosystem benefits of I95 corridor States working together is greater than them working apart.

**Possible Collaborative Opportunities along the I-95 Corridor**

Build broad support across public and private sectors for a shared vision of conserving the Northeast’s critical landscapes. Promote understanding among these parties of the economic, environmental, and cultural/historic benefits that will result from the integrated landscape scale conservation planning.

- Link local open space and resource management efforts to broader megaregional conservation goals with meetings and research materials designed to build an understanding of larger, megaregional issues and trends;
- Link the conservation of critical landscapes and forests to broader public policy goals including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, protecting drinking water, and improving water quality in the Northeast;
- Enhance best practices and coordination across jurisdictional boundaries by convening and promoting partnerships between local, state and federal government agencies and other land use decision makers and natural resource managers;
- Expand conservation education programs across the region commensurate with the magnitude of the benefits, issues and trade-offs related to forest conservation. The ultimate outcome is greater integration of the benefits of forest cover, forestry, and natural resource conservation into public education and public policy decisions.

**References**


(Federal Highway Administration, 2005) State Freight Transportation Profiles.