

Working Together for Cleaner Air



What is transportation conformity?

Transportation conformity is an assessment that is used to determine whether or not transportation programs and projects conform to the New York region's goals for air quality. In order to receive federal funding, transportation projects and programs must contribute to compliance with the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments. Transportation programs that don't conform to federal air-quality standards cannot be approved or funded.

States decide how they will achieve cleaner air in their region, and explain their approach in a State Implementation Plan (SIP). The SIP includes regulations, plans to control ozone and ambient air standards in order to reduce air pollution.

The New York Metropolitan Transportation Council, which secures federal funds for the region's transportation system, has been working with area agencies and organizations to develop programs to reduce ground-level ozone. NYMTC also is insuring that the projects in its long-range Regional Transportation Plan and the medium-range Transportation Improvement Program will contribute to the achievement of the air-quality goals contained in the New York State Implementation Plan.

Why is conformity important?

Although there are differing opinions about the best way to achieve cleaner air, we do know that reducing smog is essential. Smog is bad for your health and particularly harmful to young children and people who suffer from respiratory ailments, such as asthma.

The New York metropolitan region is in severe non-attainment for ozone, which means the area exceeds Federal guidelines for acceptable levels of ground-level ozone. The region has until September 30, 2005, to demonstrate conformity with air-quality milestones. An earlier deadline was postponed by Congress in order to provide the State of New York sufficient time to assess the impacts on the transportation network and air quality of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.



What is ozone and what causes it?

There are two types of ozone. The good kind, which we call the ozone layer, is high up in the air. It protects the earth from the sun's ultraviolet rays (UV) that can damage our skin and other living organisms. Ozone is bad when it is close to the ground where we breathe. Ozone, also called smog, is formed when pollutants from cars and factories react when heated up by sunlight.

Vehicles contribute to bad ozone, and so do gas-powered machines, such as lawnmowers, weed-whackers and industrial equipment. Almost 70 percent of the pollutants that cause ground level-ozone come from these sources.

How does air pollution affect you?

Ground-level ozone is bad for your health. It can be especially harmful to kids, the elderly and people with respiratory problems. It can cause shortness of breath, coughing, wheezing and eye and nose irritation.

The Federal Government requires that levels of smog be lowered—areas in severe non-attainment can be in danger of losing federal transportation funding if action isn't taken to clean the air. That would put business development, job growth and expansion in the area in jeopardy, which can impact the region's quality of life.

What is being done to correct the problem?

Keeping the air cleaner requires a whole range of activities – no single strategy offers a fast, easy or economical way to improve air quality. We know, for example, that reducing auto trips offers measurable results. Better transit service can provide people with an important choice to make a positive impact on the quality of the air we breathe. New strategies for freight transport will help reduce emissions from heavy trucks, and the development and use of alternative fuels can be an important smog-fighting tool.

The answer to cleaning the air is in a combination of new technologies and changes in behavior. That's why NYMTC is working with its members, environmentalists and the community to assess ways to improve air quality in the region. Several programs with the potential to yield significant results are being implemented.

Regional Commuter Choice is an umbrella program covering several initiatives aimed at increasing the number of commuters using alternatives to driving alone. Commuter benefit programs include offering pre-tax mass transit vouchers, providing bicyclists amenities such as showers and lockers, and offering flex-time work schedules. Among these programs is Best Workplaces for Commuters, which recognizes companies that incorporate commuter benefit programs meeting the US Environmental Protection Agency's national "Standard of Excellence".

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Ozone Action Days provide alerts for travelers within New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, encouraging them to reduce auto usage on days, particularly during the hot summer months, when ozone levels are expected to be at high levels. An enhanced program starts this summer.

Regional Clean Fuels supports the implementation of new technologies to reduce vehicle fleet emissions in the region, including pilot programs for new fuels, new design solutions for truck and car engines, alternative energy infrastructure development and vehicle fleet partnerships for purchasing "green" technologies. NYMTC is working with fleet owners and operators to inventory fleets and determine how best to introduce emission retrofit devices on heavy trucks and on-road diesel vehicles.

Regional Signal Timing means coordinating traffic lights to keep traffic flowing, ease congestion and reduce emissions. Implementation is expected throughout the NYMTC region by 2006.

What can I do?

Everyone has a part to play in improving air quality. A shift in how you do everyday things can have a big impact on air quality. Any of the following can help reduce ground-level ozone:

- Vanpool, carpool or take public transportation.
- Get your car tuned up—a tuned engine produces lower emissions and keeps your car running more efficiently.
- Don't top off your tank—and try filling up after 6 p.m.; that's when smog is less likely to form.
- Avoid idling your car—turn off the engine while waiting at drive-thrus or when picking the kids up at school.
- Combine your errands into one planned trip—it's a great way to get things done and reduce traffic congestion and pollution.
- Walk or ride a bike instead of driving—you'll help clean the air and stay in shape.

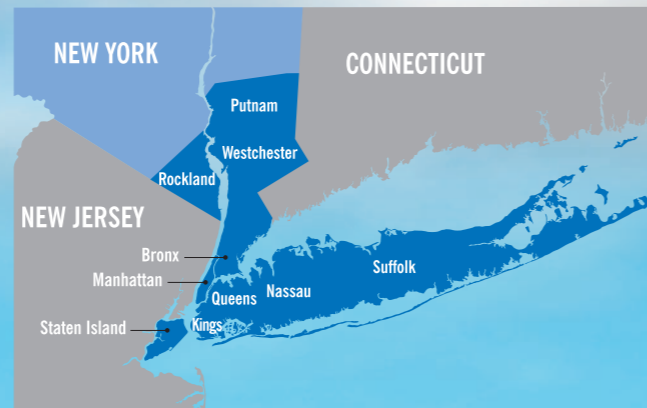
The more you know, the more you can help.

NYMTC members involved in the effort to attain higher air-quality standards are:

- Counties of Nassau, Putnam, Rockland, Suffolk, Westchester
- Metropolitan Transportation Authority
- New York City Department of Planning
- New York City Department of Transportation
- New York State Department of Transportation

Advisory Members

- Federal Highway Administration
- Federal Transit Administration
- New Jersey Transit
- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
- North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority
- Port Authority of New York & New Jersey
- US Environmental Protection Agency



The NYMTC region comprises New York City, Long Island and the lower Hudson Valley, encompassing an area of 2,440 square miles and a population of 12 million, approximately 65% of New York State's population. 826,000 people move between New York, New Jersey and Connecticut each day by rail and bus, and thousands more via roads, bridges and tunnels.



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