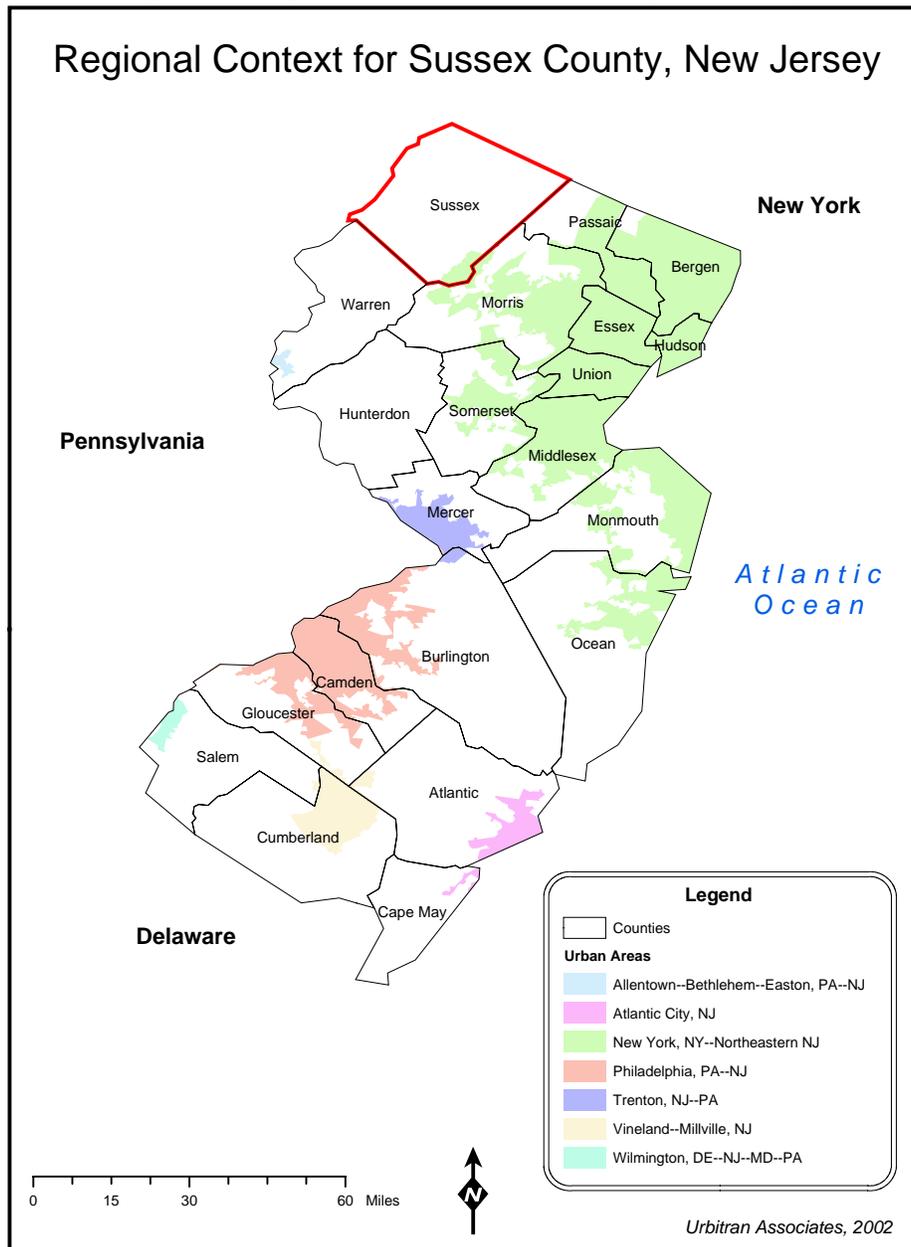


Introduction

Sussex County, New Jersey is located in the northwest corner of the state and maintains a population of 144,166 persons (U.S. Census 2000). The county is bordered by three New Jersey counties: Warren, Morris, and Passaic Counties; and two counties in neighboring states, Orange County, New York and Pike County, Pennsylvania. Figure I-1 displays the regional context of the county. The county is lightly populated and considered by many to be a “bedroom” community, as many county residents work outside of the county itself. This presents many challenges for the Sussex County government structure, of which transportation and congestion (addressed in this study) are a major part.

Figure I-1: Regional Context for Sussex County, New Jersey



Population growth in Sussex County outpaced the statewide average of New Jersey between the period between 1990 and 2000. The majority of this growth took place in the southern and eastern portions of the county, in close proximity to major roadways and neighboring New Jersey counties. Overall population growth is expected to continue in the county, concentrated in those areas that are currently experiencing growth and creeping inwards over time, based on current projections. The increase in population in the county has spurred the increase of retail and commercial opportunities in the county, which have a major impact on the county's transportation infrastructure.

Employment in the county is noteworthy in the respect that equal numbers of persons are employed outside of the county as are employed within Sussex County itself. This statistic, combined with a relatively high median income, further indicates that Sussex County can be considered a "bedroom" community. Daily commuters travel to neighboring counties, primarily in New Jersey, and as far as Newark and New York City to access employment sites. Persons employed within the county are employed by an array of companies providing many different services. The largest private employer in the county is Selective Insurance, which has just fewer than 1,000 employees. Other large employers, all with in excess of 800 employees, are Newton Memorial Hospital, the County of Sussex, Mountain Creek/Intrawest, and the Andover Subacute and Rehab Center.

The setting in Sussex County makes it an attractive place to live based on access to employment, a primarily suburban and rural setting, access to major roadways and highways, and access to community and recreational activities. These facets of the community have contributed to the population growth in the county in recent years. Along with these increases, however, come necessary increases to the services provided by the county, the municipalities, and the roadway infrastructure in the county. This study process has been undertaken to address the transportation network needs and to develop strategies for the coming ten-year period.

Roadway congestion occurs on the major routes in Sussex in different patterns than are seen in urban and suburban areas. The fact that many persons are employed outside of the county and have long commute times makes early morning and late evening hours prone to congestion on routes that provide access to surrounding counties. Three of those routes were the primary focus of data gathering in this study: NJ-23, US-206, and NJ-15. Roadside surveys were conducted on each to identify origins and destinations of commuters during peak periods. This data provided an understanding of the travel patterns that will need to be addressed throughout the ten-year period of the implementation plan.

The public transportation network in Sussex County provides limited service to residents due to overwhelming reliance on the single occupant vehicle. New Jersey Transit offers rail service, although stops are not located in Sussex, but rather in close proximity in neighboring counties. Bus service is offered by both NJ Transit and Lakeland Bus, although this is primarily commuter service. Sussex County Transit (SCTS) offers "lifeline" deviated fixed route and demand response service to county residents, and principally serves the elderly and disabled populations. While it is unlikely that the use of the single occupant vehicle will be subsumed by other modes, efforts will need to be made to address congestion and transit needs for both inter-county and intra-county transportation.

The goal of the study is to develop strategies to address transportation needs in the coming decade. This will be a critical step in maintaining the quality of life that is now enjoyed in Sussex County. A web-based survey provided an avenue for input by Sussex County residents, and public meetings provide access to the populace for additional input. The study team worked closely with county staff to ensure that the strategies developed properly meet the needs of the county and provide an acceptable and implementable plan for Sussex County.