

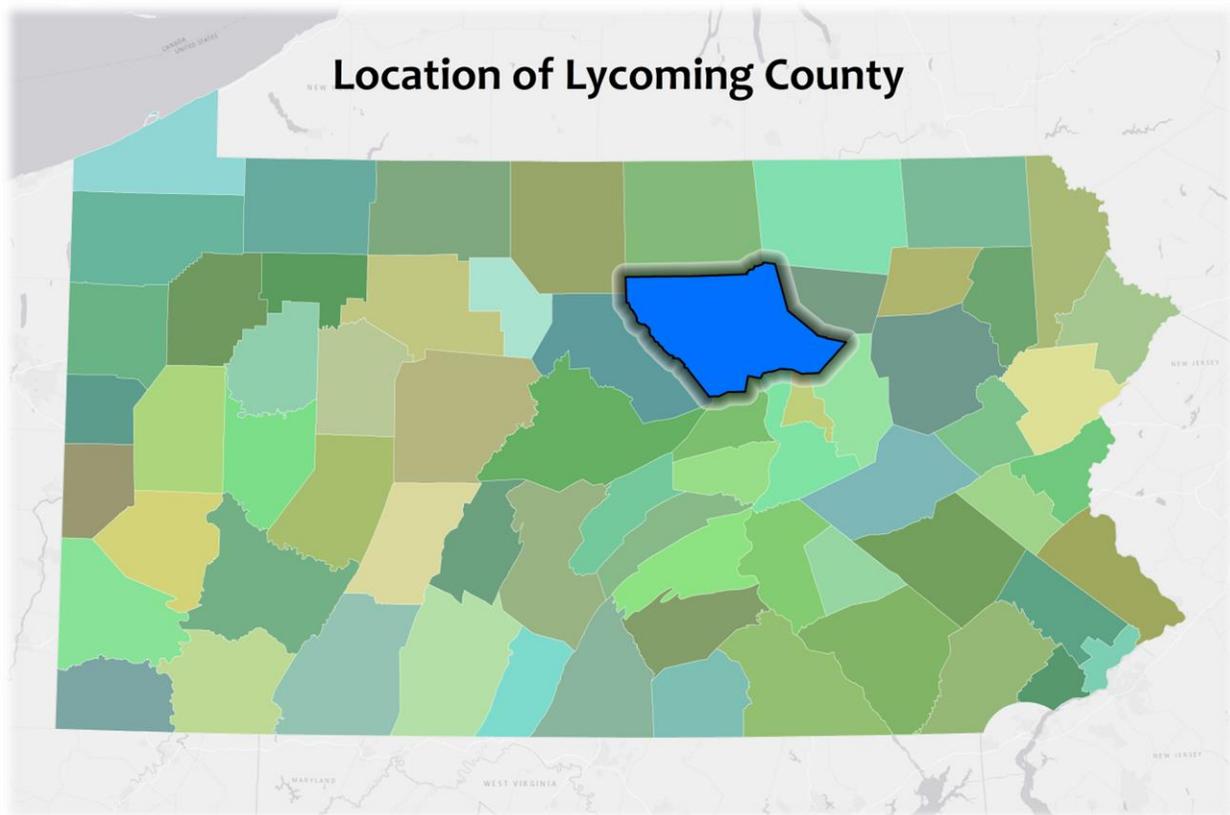
# Williamsport Area Transportation Study Metropolitan Planning Organization

LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN  
2018 - 2038

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

## Purpose of a Long Range Transportation Plan

Transportation infrastructure is arguably the most critical segment of public infrastructure. Whether it is being used to access employment, homes, commerce, medical services, recreation, or industry, the transportation system serves as the links that bind our modern society together. Transportation investments produce significant impacts on community and economic development patterns, public safety and security and the availability of travel choices offered to the public. Overall transportation needs can be complex and ever changing so the planning process needs to rely on accurate and current data-driven methods. This approach allows for correctly identifying problems and targeting sustainable and cost effective solutions to those problems. This plan shall serve as a framework for guiding a transportation planning process that yields positive community results when formulating and assessing transportation options and making the best possible choices.



In the County of Lycoming (a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania), the transportation system is a critical foundational element of the local economy. The County of Lycoming encompasses a land mass that is geographically larger (1,246 square miles; 796,387 acres) than any other county in Pennsylvania and is even larger than the State of Rhode Island. The multi-modal transportation network connects a small core urbanized area with outlying suburban areas and a large rural area. The transportation system consists of highways and bridges, public fixed route transit, shared ride van service, freight railroads, a commercial service airport, a general aviation public use airport, and multiuse trails.

The Federal Highway Administration, (FHWA) describes the purpose of transportation planning as “to identify broad goals to meet transportation needs.” Federal law and regulations require the

development of Long Range Transportation Plans as part of statewide and metropolitan planning programs that documents transportation investment needs and outlines a strategy regarding how best to address the needs. The plan serves as the official plan for a metropolitan area and federal funding for certain types of transportation capital project improvements (i.e., highways, bridges and public transit) cannot be approved unless these projects are identified in the Long Range Transportation Plan adopted by a Metropolitan Planning Organization. This plan will fulfill the federal requirement for the development of a Long Range Transportation Plan for the County of Lycoming and WATS MPO.

Federal regulations require that Long Range Transportation Plans:

- Consider all transportation modes
- Cover at least a 20 year time period
- Consider eight key planning factors
- Be fiscally constrained
- Provide for public participation
- Be updated at least every five years in air quality attainment areas such as Lycoming County

In addition, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, (PennDOT) provides guidance “[Developing Long Range Transportation Plans](#)” that notes this process is a tool to help planning agencies influence development by guiding transportation and economic investment in a manner that supports transportation goals. PennDOT identifies numerous characteristics that are found in successful long range transportation plans which include:

- Create local / regional ownership
- Emphasize planning, not programming
- Collaborate with other stakeholders
- Support other relevant plans
- Articulate clear goals and objectives
- Address quality of life issues
- Maintain an open and transparent process
- Capitalize on the experiences of others
- Consider multiple futures (Scenario planning)
- Develop an evaluation framework
- Employ strong technical analyses
- Link solutions prioritization to goals, objectives and policies
- Support multi-modal and intermodal future
- Integrate land use and transportation
- Distribute investments equitably (Environmental Justice)
- Organize solutions in a relevant format
- Structure the plan to be relevant to local issues
- Include an implementation plan
- Be creative

Therefore, it is our intent that this WATS Long Range Transportation Plan consider the above characteristics to foster efficient mobility and access for people and goods throughout the county, promote regional intermodal connectivity, ensure efficient system performance and adequate

preservation, promote economic development and public safety as well as maintain the County's outstanding quality of life.

This Long Range Plan is critical toward achieving Lycoming County's comprehensive plan vision during a 20 year planning horizon by realizing managed and well planned growth and development through the adoption of sound public policies that target strategic infrastructure investments consistent with federal, state and local planning factors. Given scarce transportation funding resources at all governmental levels, the plan will enable transportation decision-makers to prioritize competing needs and make the best use of available funding to address the most important transportation needs.

This plan will be updated at least every five years in accordance with Federal regulations or more frequently if determined necessary to respond to changing circumstances that may affect the transportation system planning and decision-making process.

### Overview of the WATS Transportation Planning Process

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Federal law and regulations require the establishment of a Metropolitan Planning Organization, (MPO) to oversee the transportation planning process in all urbanized areas of the nation having a population of 50,000 or more persons as documented by the U.S. Bureau of the Census as part of the decennial census. The Williamsport Area Transportation Study, (WATS) serves as the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Williamsport Urbanized area established under a legal Agreement with PennDOT approved in 1968. The WATS jurisdictional boundary was further extended in 1991 to encompass the entire geographic area of Lycoming County. Therefore, the federal transportation planning and programming process within Lycoming County is undertaken by WATS, including the development and approval of this Long Range Transportation Plan.

***In addition to development and adoption of the Long Range Transportation Plan, WATS other core functions include:***

- *Establish and manage a fair and impartial setting for effective regional decision-making in the planning area.*
- *Identify and evaluate alternative transportation improvement options: Use data and planning methods to generate and evaluate alternatives. Planning studies and evaluations are included in the MPO Unified Planning Work Program, (UPWP).*
- *Develop a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP): Develop a short-range (four year) program of transportation improvements based on the long range transportation plan. The TIP should be designated to achieve the area's goals, using spending, regulating, operating, management and financial tools.*
- *Involve the public: Continually involve the general public and other affected constituencies in the essential functions listed above.*

### WATS Committee Structure

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The WATS MPO is organizationally structured with two Committees; a Technical Committee and a Coordinating Committee with defined functions and membership. In addition, WATS bylaws provide for two advisory committees

## Technical Committee

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The purpose of the Technical Committee is to oversee the development of detailed transportation planning documents, special studies and other technical analysis that documents multi-modal transportation issues and needs and provide advice and recommendations to the Coordinating Committee. The Technical Committee consists of seven (7) voting members, as follows:

- PennDOT Center for Program Development and Management Representative
- PennDOT Engineering District 3-0 Representative
- Lycoming County Planning and Community Development Director
- Lycoming County Planning Commission Member
- River Valley Transit General Manager
- Williamsport Regional Airport Executive Director
- City of Williamsport Engineer/Community Development Director

The PennDOT Center for Program Development and Management Representative serves as Chairman of the Technical Committee.

The Technical Committee voting members are designated by their respective member organizations and serve without term limits at the discretion of their member organizations. Each member organization designates the individual serving on the Technical Committee as their voting member at the beginning of each calendar year and provides written documentation to the WATS MPO Chairman for WATS MPO files maintained by the Lycoming County Planning and Community Development Department. Member organizations designate an alternate voting member that may vote on behalf of the designated member in the case where the designated voting member is unable to attend a specific meeting.

In addition to the seven voting members, the Technical Committee includes four (4) non-voting members, as follows:

- Federal Highway Administration
- Federal Transit Administration
- PA Department of Community and Economic Development
- Susquehanna Transit Company

Non-voting members of the Technical Committee receive WATS reports and meeting notices and agendas and participate in WATS discussions, but serve without a vote.

## Coordinating Committee

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The purpose of the Coordinating Committee is to review and act upon the recommendations of the Technical Committee and serve as the official policy decision-making body of the WATS MPO. The Coordinating Committee consists of eleven (11) voting members, comprising elected and appointed officials as follows:

- PennDOT Engineering District 3-0 Executive
- PennDOT Deputy Secretary for Planning
- Two Lycoming County Commissioners
- Mayor, City of Williamsport
- Council Member, City of Williamsport
- River Valley Transit General Manager
- SEDA-COG Joint Rail Authority Executive Director

- Williamsport Regional Airport Executive Director
- Lycoming County Association of Township Officials Representative
- Lycoming-Sullivan Boroughs Association Representative

The PennDOT Engineering District 3-0 Executive serves as Chairman of the Coordinating Committee. Again, the Coordinating Committee voting members shall be designated by their respective member organizations and serve without term limits at the discretion of their member organizations. Each member organization designates the individual(s) serving on the Coordinating Committee as their voting member(s) at the beginning of each calendar year and provides written documentation to the WATS MPO Chairman for WATS MPO files maintained by the Lycoming County Planning and Community Development Department. Member organizations also designate an alternate voting member that may vote on behalf of the designated voting member in the case where the designated voting member is unable to attend a specific meeting.

In addition to the 11 voting members, the Coordinating Committee includes four (4) non-voting members, as follows:

- Federal Highway Administration
- Federal Transit Administration
- US Department of Housing and Urban Development
- PA Department of Community and Economic Development

Non-voting members of the Coordinating Committee receive WATS MPO reports and meeting notices and agendas and participate in WATS MPO discussions, but serve without vote.

The WATS MPO Coordinating Committee may establish advisory committees, ad hoc work groups, special purpose task forces or steering committees to gather specialized experience, technical advice and input that may be needed to help carry forth transportation planning related activities under the jurisdiction of the WATS MPO transportation planning process. The WATS MPO has established a Transit Advisory Committee that is comprised of WATS members, transit providers and various social service organizations to provide input and recommendations to the WATS MPO on public transit issues and needs in Lycoming County.

## Advisory Committees

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### *Transit Advisory Committee*

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The primary purpose of the transit advisory committee is to review transportation services provided by the fixed-route provider River Valley Transit and the shared-ride operator STEP, Inc. for all passengers, especially for individuals with disabilities.

### *Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee*

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The WATS MPO approved a bylaws amendment in September 2017 creating a new Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee to provide input to the technical and coordinating committees on prioritization of bicycle and pedestrian projects in Lycoming County.

## WATS Administrative Duties

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The administrative duties of the WATS MPO are conducted by the Lycoming County Planning and Community Development Department. The primary staff contact for the Department on WATS MPO

administrative matters is the Lycoming County Transportation Planning Supervisor who acts as WATS Secretary.

The Lycoming County Planning and Community Development Department is responsible for the following primary WATS MPO administrative duties.

- Develop and conduct all transportation planning work tasks contained in the WATS MPO approved Unified Planning Work Program contract that is executed between the County of Lycoming and PennDOT. The County of Lycoming subcontracts with the City of Williamsport to perform the Federal Transit Administration funded UPWP transit planning work tasks undertaken by River Valley Transit.
- Schedule, publicly advertise and convene all WATS MPO public meetings, as needed, in accordance with the PA Open Records Law and WATS MPO approved Public Participation Plan. All official business of the WATS MPO takes place at publicly advertised meetings to ensure opportunity for public comment.
- Prepare and distribute meeting agendas and related materials.
- Ensure that all WATS MPO adopted plans, programs and policies are implemented.

The WATS MPO website is maintained at

<http://www.lyco.org/Home/PlanningandCommunityDevelopment/TransportationPlanning/WilliamsportAreaTransportationStudy.aspx>

All WATS MPO administrative records and files are maintained at the Lycoming County Planning and Community Development Department, 48 West Third Street, Williamsport, PA 17701.

WATS MPO administrative related costs borne by the County of Lycoming and the City of Williamsport are reimbursable in accordance with the WATS MPO approved UPWP related contract terms and conditions executed between the County of Lycoming, PennDOT and City of Williamsport. Refer to Exhibit A in the Appendix to review the WATS MPO adopted bylaws for a more complete description of the WATS MPO roles and responsibilities, governance structure and administrative duties and processes.

## Structure of This Plan

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This plan has been intentionally structured in such a way to facilitate a data-driven, problem-solution approach to planning. The general structure of the plan will mirror that of the statewide Long Range Transportation Plan [PA On Track \(2016\)](#).

### Planning Context

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Chapter Two of this plan will first provide an overview of the transportation planning environment of Lycoming County in regards to state and federal government planning priorities, local planning priorities, demographic and economic development trends, and potential environmental impacts.

### Multimodal Transportation System Inventory

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Chapter Three of this plan will provide an inventory of existing transportation assets and services, assess the overall condition and adequacy of these transportation assets and services and begin to explore performance measures and targets associated with each mode.

### Strategic Direction and Implementation

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The fourth and final chapter of this plan will begin by summarizing the planning goals, objectives and needs identified in Chapter 2 and system deficiencies identified in Chapter 3. Based on these factors, a strategic direction for Lycoming County transportation investment over the next 20 years will be set. Then, the plan will outline the project programming process and a staged 20 year transportation capital improvements program will be developed in a manner that is fiscally constrained. The plan's public involvement process and Title VI environmental justice outreach efforts will be documented.