



# **METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION GUIDE**

*Federal law requires all metropolitan areas with populations greater than 50,000 people to designate a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to develop transportation plans for the region. The content of this publication reflects the views of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the Department of Transportation, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, or the Federal Highway Administration.*

*The Lehigh Valley Transportation Study (LVTS) Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is committed to compliance with nondiscrimination requirements of civil rights statutes, executive orders, regulations and policies applicable to the programs and activities it administers. Accordingly, the MPO is dedicated to ensuring that program beneficiaries are not excluded from participation in or denied the benefits of its services based upon race, color, national origin, religious creed, sex, age, disability or economic status.*

*Documents will be made available in alternative languages or formats if requested. Persons requiring additional accommodation or those with questions should call Hannah Milagio, Program Associate for Community Engagement at 610-264-4544.*



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# **Are you a resident of the Lehigh Valley? Do you want to learn more about how the regional transportation planning process works?**

## **This guide will help you understand:**

- How the Lehigh Valley complies with federal regulations for transportation planning
- What process must be followed to be eligible for transportation funds
- What kind of transportation plans the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study (LVTS) develops and adopts
- The committees that support the transportation planning process
- How the public is involved in transportation decision-making

# THE WORK THE LVTS PRODUCES TODAY WILL CREATE THE FUTURE.

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## **A seamless network where roads, trails, sidewalks and technology connect everyone to every place — that's the goal.**

The Lehigh Valley Transportation Study (LVTS) recognizes the complexities of transportation planning and investment, and integrates road, bridge, transit, rail and air assets, as well as walking, biking, and rolling into a comprehensive and managed system that supports all aspects of the regional economy and society.

The LVTS allocates federal and other transportation funding resources that reflect the region's shared vision for the future. Adequate transportation planning requires a comprehensive examination of the region's future and investment alternatives. As a Metropolitan Planning Organization, the LVTS acts as a Council of Governments by facilitating collaboration of governments, interested parties, and residents in the transportation planning process.

The LVTS has planned more than \$4.3 billion in transportation investments over the next 25 years through *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*. The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC) staffs the LVTS and actively monitors, plans, and manages programs for safety, maintenance, development, hazard mitigation and resiliency, as well as freight and technological advancement. This work and collaboration support mobility for all people in the Lehigh Valley now and in the future.

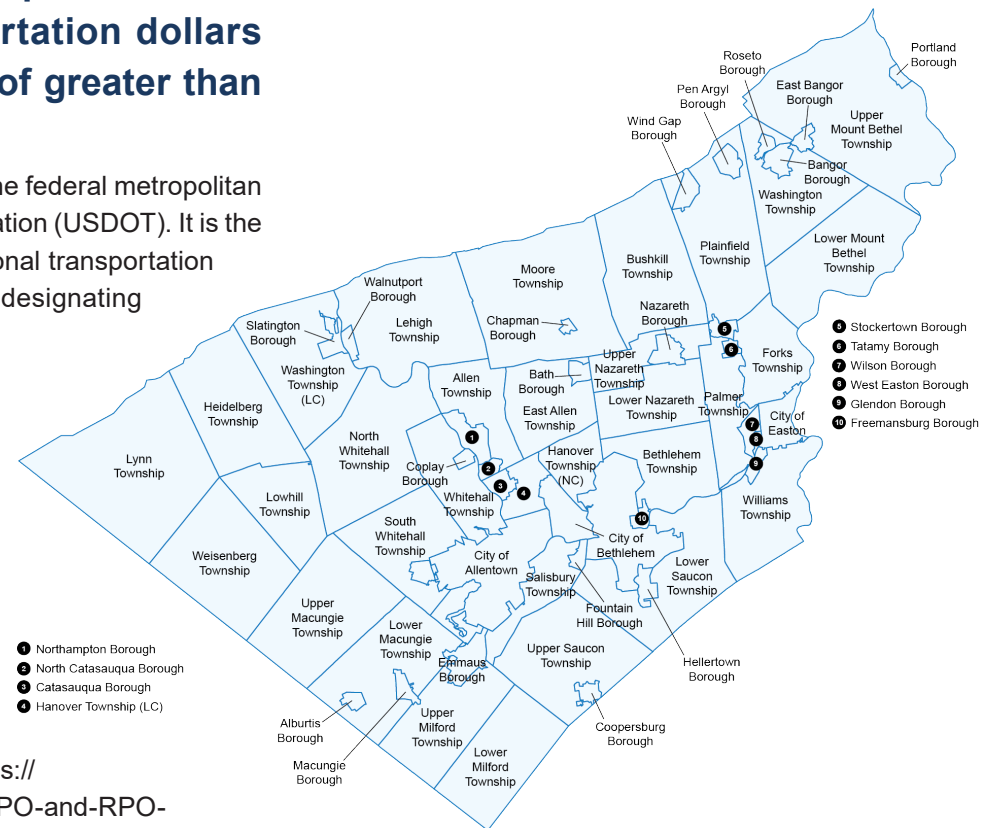
# WHAT IS AN MPO?

**A Metropolitan Planning Organization, or MPO, is a federally designated organization that provides local officials and residents input into the planning and implementation of projects funded with federal transportation dollars for metropolitan areas with populations of greater than 50,000.**

To receive federal aid, an urban area of this size must follow the federal metropolitan planning process outlined by the US Department of Transportation (USDOT). It is the job of an MPO to carry out this process by developing a regional transportation vision, directing the planning process and implementation, designating federal funding and engaging the community in the process.

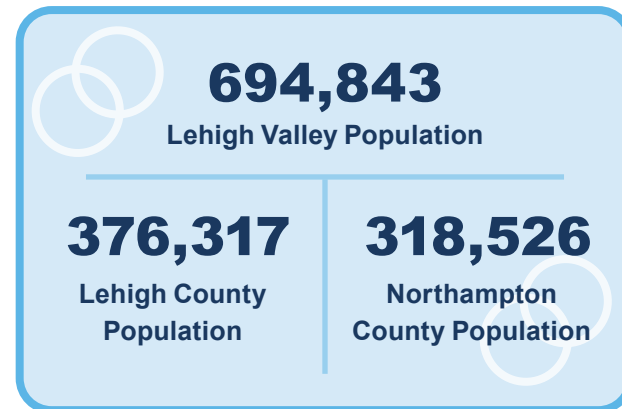
There are currently 18 MPOs in Pennsylvania. LVTS is the federally designated MPO for the Lehigh Valley, which consists of Lehigh and Northampton counties. LVTS is the federally designated MPO for Lehigh and Northampton counties, which consists of 62 municipalities (3 cities, 27 boroughs, and 32 Townships).

Rural Transportation Planning Organizations (RPOs) are designated to develop transportation improvement programs and long-range plans for non-metropolitan areas with populations of less than 50,000. More information about MPOs and RPOs in the Commonwealth can be found at <https://www.penndot.pa.gov/ProjectAndPrograms/Planning/Pages/MPO-and-RPO-Contact-List.aspx>



# WHAT IS THE LVTS?

As the MPO, the LVTS completes and implements three major foundational planning products, along with additional plans, studies and reports. This work is done with the input of local officials, transportation agencies and the public through collaboration and meetings of the LVTS Technical and Coordinating Committees.



# CLEANER AIR IMPROVES PUBLIC HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE

**Clean air is a fundamental right supported by the Pennsylvania Constitution, Section 27: “The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment.”**

All projects supported by the LVTS must meet federal air quality conformity standards. For each proposed project, LVTS is required to perform travel forecasting to determine transportation network demand and its impact on air quality.

Transportation investment and policy choices — what we build and repair, where we put it, who builds it, how we operate it

and what energy powers it — have an enormous impact on our economy, our climate and our health. These decisions should be designed to strengthen a region where all people can participate and prosper.

Environmental Justice aims to provide transportation equity through the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, income, national origin or educational level. Fair treatment in this context means that no population is forced to bear a disproportionate burden of negative health and environmental impacts, including social and economic effects resulting from transportation decisions, programs and policies.



# HOW DOES THE LVTS OPERATE?

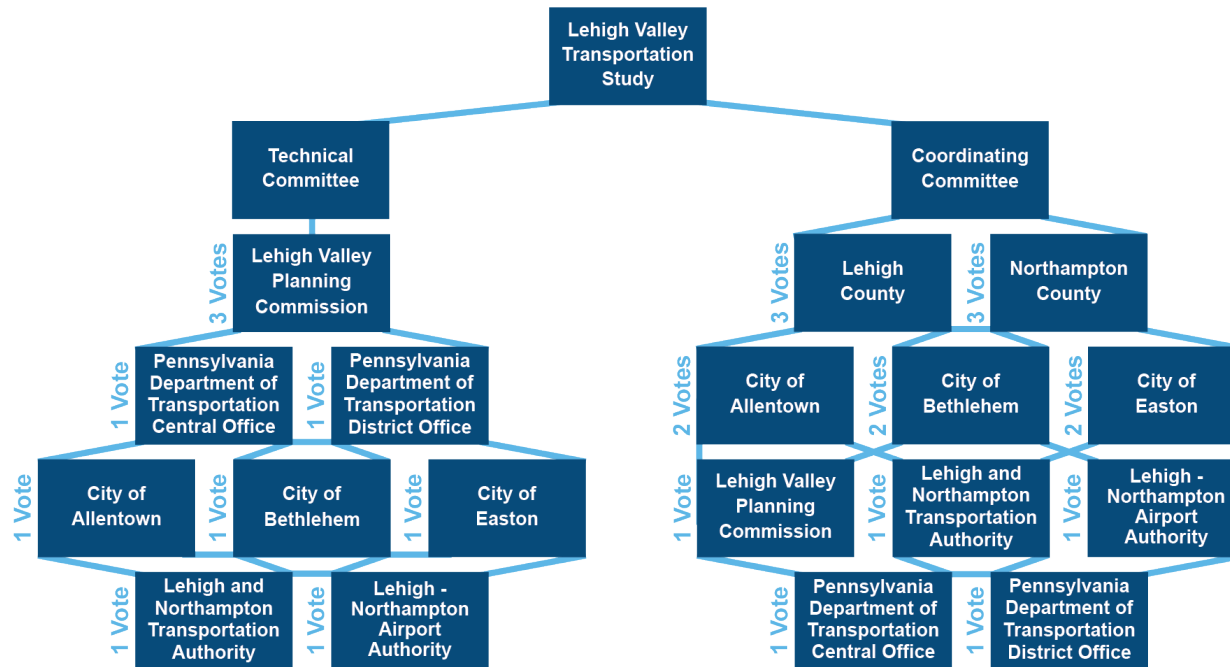
The LVTS consists of two committees. Voting members on the committees include the two County Executives, the Mayors of the three cities (Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton), and representatives from the LVPC, PennDOT Central Office, PennDOT District 5, Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANTA), and the Lehigh-Northampton Airport Authority (LNAA).

## Coordinating Committee

The policy body which formally adopts items reviewed by the Technical Committee.

## Technical Committee

An advisory body to the Coordinating Committee, reviewing plans, programs, and various other items brought before them for review and recommendation to the Coordinating Committee.



# WHAT DOES THE LVTS DO?

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The LVTS must meet the requirements of the US code 23 USC section 134 which is the federal metropolitan transportation planning regulations and other applicable federal or state laws. These requirements include three essential products:

## **The Long-Range Transportation Plan – *FutureLV: The Regional Plan***

*FutureLV: The Regional Plan* combines the Bi-County Comprehensive Plan and Long-Range Transportation Plan and sets the vision and direction to carry the Lehigh Valley to 2050 and beyond. It provides a blueprint for managing future growth, making the most of our assets and creating a Lehigh Valley where everyone has access to health, opportunity, and a livable neighborhood. <https://lvpc.org/transportation-plans.html>

## **Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)**

The TIP is the Lehigh Valley's four-year plan to maintain and enhance the transportation system in the Lehigh Valley. The TIP is a fiscally constrained, high-priority list for a four-year program of Highway, Bridge, Transit and Multimodal projects, all proposed to be implemented with federal, state and local funds. Projects included in the TIP align with the vision of *FutureLV: The Regional Plan* and its 25-year Long-Range Transportation Plan. <https://lvpc.org/transportation-plans.html>

## **United Planning Work Program (UPWP)**

The UPWP is developed semi-annually and documents MPO activities for a two-year period. It documents metropolitan transportation planning activities performed with federal, state and local transportation funds in the Lehigh Valley. <https://lvpc.org/transportation-plans.html>

The LVTS also produces many other transportation-related plans, studies and reports that provide insight to the latest trends, most up-to-date data, and general guidance for transportation planning in the Lehigh Valley. They include:

- *Walk/RollLV: Active Transportation Plan*
- Eastern PA Freight Infrastructure Plan
- *Lehigh Valley Greenhouse Gas Assessment*
- *Lehigh Valley Priority Climate Action Plan*
- *Traffic Safety Plan*

# HOW ARE TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS CHOSEN AND FUNDED?

**For a project to receive funding, it must meet a long list of state and federal guidelines for traffic safety, air quality and environmental justice. It also must align with the vision of *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*, and its 25-year Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).**

A core concept of *FutureLV* is Centers and Corridors, a long-range transportation investment plan that directs redevelopment, reuse and new construction to 57 economic and housing activity Centers around the Lehigh Valley and along the Corridors that connect them.

Transportation project investments are then targeted to be consistent with that concept and must be identified in the *FutureLV: The Regional Plan* before they can be programmed in the TIP. *FutureLV* is updated every four years, whereas the TIP is updated every two years. New TIP projects not previously programmed on prior four-year TIPs are selected from *FutureLV* based on factors including safety, congestion, condition of the asset to be improved and life cycle of the infrastructure element(s) involved and whether they benefit underserved communities.

**These project selection steps were implemented for the current *FutureLV: Long-Range Transportation Plan*.**

## **Transportation Needs Assessment**

This involved meetings with municipal and communities stakeholders, as well as a communitywide survey, to determine the transportation needs in all 62 municipalities within the Lehigh Valley.

## **Project Selection**

The LVTS evaluated, ranked and selected qualified projects that were consistent with overall regional priorities and added qualified projects that could not be funded to the unmet needs lists of projects to be considered for future funding. The evaluation included a detailed scoring system based on more than 40 datasets designed to measure a project's value to the community.

## **Adoption**

The current list of Long-Range Transportation Plan projects was adopted by LVTS on October 18, 2023.

## **TIP Management**

The four-year TIP is a constantly evolving program that changes as project costs and schedules adjust. By federal statute, the program is what's known as "fiscally constrained", which means that the total cost of the projects on the TIP cannot exceed the money expected to be received by the LVTS. When costs increase for one project, the money often must come from another, just as savings on a particular project can be moved into one that needs more money. Managing the flow of money is equally as important as managing the project schedule. This funding strategy addresses high-priority transportation needs and is designed to promote a modern, efficient transportation network that highlights accessibility for everyone.

# FUNDING SOURCES

**Locally endorsed highway, bridge and transit projects are supported by the TIP with federal assistance – Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The federal and state governments designated the LVTS as the body responsible for preparing the TIP for Lehigh and Northampton counties.**

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) is an act to authorize funds for Federal-aid highways, highway safety programs, and transit programs, and for other purposes. State and local governments can seek funding from these new and expanded competitive grant programs in the IIJA that focus on climate change mitigation, resilience, equity, and safety for all users, including cyclists and pedestrians. These grant programs include:

**National Highway Performance Program (NHPP)** supports construction of new facilities on the National Highway System (NHS) geared towards achieving national performance goals for improving infrastructure safety, condition, mobility or freight movement established by the state asset management plans.

**Bridge Investment Program (BRIP)** is a competitive program to replace, rehabilitate, preserve or protect some of the nation's most important and economically significant bridges.

**Bridge Formula Program (BOF)** provides formula funding to states to replace, rehabilitate, preserve, protect and construct bridges on public roads. Notably, the program includes a 15% set-aside for off-system bridges. These are bridges often owned and maintained by cities, counties and towns — and typically located on roads normally ineligible for federal highway funding. The federal government will also cover 100% of the cost of off-system bridge projects under the Bridge Formula Program for bridges owned by a local government.

**Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)** fund projects that reduce pollution and relieve congestion geared towards helping metropolitan regions and states meet federal air quality standards. Funds are distributed to states and within states based on the level of pollution. Funds from this program go towards increasing transportation options as opposed to projects that will increase the use of single occupant vehicles.

**Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP)** supports efforts to reduce fatalities and injuries on public roads, paths and trails. HSIP funds projects on trails, paths, or roads included in state's Strategic Highway Safety Plan to improve safety.

**Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STU)** provides flexible funds for bridges, highways, pedestrian and bicycle projects, and some transit projects. States allocate portions of funds under this program for metropolitan areas of 200,000 people or more.

**Nationally Significant Freight & Highway Projects (INFRA)**

awards competitive grants for multimodal freight and highway projects of national or regional significance to improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of the movement of freight and people in and across rural and urban areas.

**Carbon Reduction Program (CRP)** funds are used to reduce transportation emissions through the development of carbon reduction strategies and funding projects designed to reduce emissions.

**Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT)**

provides discretionary funding grants and opportunities to support projects that address the climate change impacts to the transportation network through planning, resilience improvements, community resilience and evacuation routes.

**The Pennsylvania Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program (TASA)**

provides funding for projects and activities for multimodal transportation. These projects include pedestrian and bicycle facilities, community improvement activities, environmental mitigation, trails used for transportation and safe routes to school.

**The Multimodal Transportation Fund (MTF)**

provides an annual multimillion-dollar stream of state funding for ports, rail freight, aviation projects and bicycle and pedestrian improvements.

# HOW IS THE COMMUNITY INVOLVED WITH LVTS?

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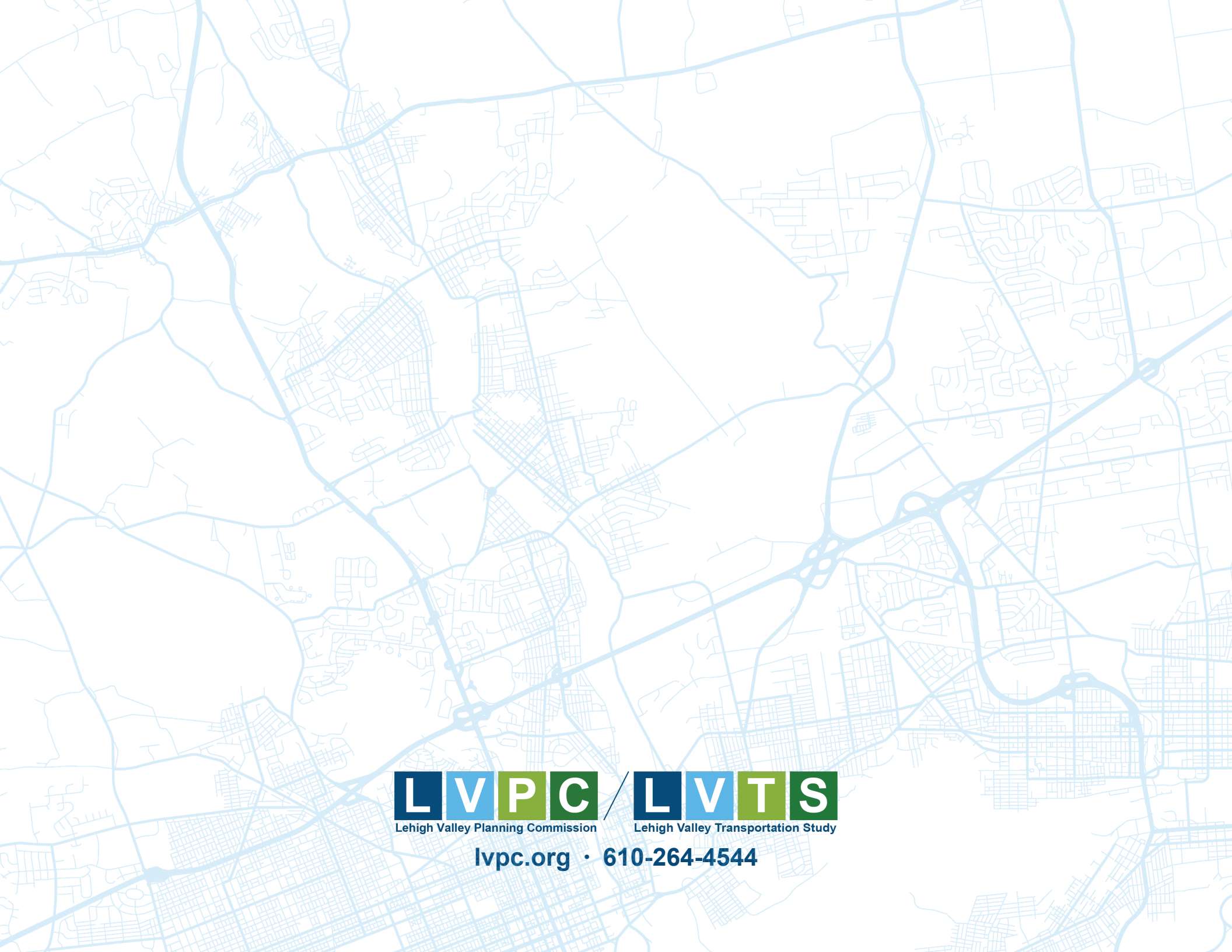
**Public participation is essential to LVTS and its planning products. All LVTS committee meetings are open to the public, and all LVTS work products have public comment periods. In accordance with federal and state laws, the LVTS has adopted a Public Participation Plan that outlines how the MPO engages the community in its work.**

Public participation begins early in the planning process and continues throughout each of the planning stages, helping to avoid, minimize and mitigate project impacts while providing the best solutions. This helps LVTS to:

- Inform the public of transportation meetings, issues and other relevant events. The public needs to be aware of their role in the transportation planning and decision-making process.
- Include all communities in the region to inform and involve those communities with people who have been underrepresented and/or underserved.
- Involve the public by providing opportunities throughout the transportation planning and decision-making process.
- Improve the public participation process by identifying and incorporating new tools and strategies.

Updated Public Participation and Limited English Proficiency Plans can be found at <https://lvpc.org/>.





Lehigh Valley Planning Commission



Lehigh Valley Transportation Study

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