



Route 1 Regional Growth Strategy

Corridor Working Group Briefing Note #5



Current Land Use and Build-Out

What We Did and Why It Is Important

The project team prepared a summary of existing land use, including developed land and environmentally sensitive land, and used this information to analyze how land would be used in the future if it were completely developed under existing zoning (build-out) for all fifteen towns in the study area. We will use the results of the build-out analysis as inputs to the regional transportation model to assess the transportation impacts of build-out and alternative future scenarios.

The analysis found that the study area has a substantial amount of undeveloped land, but most of this land is environmentally constrained. Although towns have zoned most available land for housing, the allowable densities of residential development are relatively low. Thus, non-residential development potential far outweighs residential; this is reflected in a jobs-to-housing ratio for new development in the study area of more than 13:1. In other words, 13 jobs will be available for every worker who lives in the study area, meaning that workers must travel to and through this area to get to their jobs.

In addition, demographic trend projections for the year 2025 for most towns in the study area show that the projected amount of housing is greater than residential build-out, indicating that these towns will no longer have any available land for residential development after 2025, even though sufficient housing will not be present to enable most workers to both live and work within the area. Instead, workers will have to spend valuable time and resources commuting, placing significant demands on the transportation network.

What You Need to Know

The study area has a substantial amount of undeveloped land; as of 2000, 54% of the land was undeveloped. On the other hand, most of this land is permanently preserved as farmland, parks, or open space and/or consists of environmentally sensitive wetlands or has steep slopes. These categories account for more than 50% of the total undeveloped land. Thus, only 25% of the study area is undeveloped and unconstrained (see the map on page 3).

Summary of Developed and Constrained Land

	Acres	Acres	Acres	% of Total
Total Land	195,162			100.0
Developed Land		89,043		45.6
Undeveloped Land		106,120		54.4
Constrained			57,249	29.4
Unconstrained			48,871	25.0

- Monroe, South Brunswick, and Hamilton have the greatest amount of undeveloped land.
- Most of the developable land is zoned for housing, but towns have zoned most of this land at densities that do not support center-based “smart growth” land use. Towns have zoned more than 60% of available residential land at a density of 1 unit or less per acre and more than 80% at a density of 2 units or less per acre. Furthermore, towns have zoned a minimal amount of land, only 2% of available land, for “mixed use.”

- The study area has a total potential residential development of about 37,000 units, which would support an increase in population of just over 100,000.
- Total potential non-residential development is more than 200 million square feet, which would generate nearly 500,000 new jobs.
- Non-residential development potential far outweighs residential, reflected in a jobs-to-housing ratio for new development of over 13:1.
- For most towns, the projected 2025 trend increase in housing and population exceeds the projected build-out increase in housing and population because trend projections do not consider available land. This difference indicates that these towns will run out of residentially zoned developable land by 2025.
- On the other hand, the build-out projections for employment are much greater than the 2025 trend projections for employment. This difference indicates that towns have much more non-residentially zoned developable land than they need to accommodate projected employment growth.

Build-Out Summary

	Developable Acres	Build-Out Increase	New Total at Build-Out	2025 Trend Total	Trend as % of Build-Out
Total Developable Land	48,871*				
Residential	28,509				
Housing Units		36,948	222,302	239,252	108%
Population		102,476	618,927	638,062	103%
Non-Residential	16,979				
Employment		487,514	824,042	405,540	49%

* Includes land zoned for "conservation."

How We Did It

The project team assembled available mapping in geographic information system (GIS) format. We obtained land use/land cover mapping from each of the three counties in the study area, and we obtained mapping of environmental features from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. This approach enabled us to prepare presentation mapping of individual or multiple futures, as well as to analyze related data.

The project team used the Regional Planning Partnership's GOZ[®] Model to conduct build-out analysis. The model uses mapping for developed land, environmental constraints, and zoning to calculate zoning yield, or build-out. We prepared and updated digital zoning maps for each town to use with the model. Based upon the zoning classification for land that is undeveloped and not environmentally constrained, the model calculates build-out for each zone. The result is the theoretical maximum amount and type of new development that would happen if development occurred on all developable land according to the zoning ordinance.

Available Land in the Study Area



Map Legend: The land in light shading is land that is developed, and the land in dark shading is land that is permanently preserved or environmentally constrained (wetlands or steep slopes). Only the land in white is available for development.