



JRTA JOINT REGIONAL
TRANSPORTATION
AGENCY

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

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Message from the Minister



Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq People. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which Mi'kmaq, Maliseet and Passamaquoddy Peoples first signed with the British Crown in 1726.

We acknowledge that people of African descent have been in Nova Scotia for over 400 years, and we honour and offer gratitude to those ancestors of African descent who came before us to this land.

About the JRTA



MISSION

Championing regional collaboration to advance transportation solutions through joint planning, partnerships, data-driven analysis, and strategic investments.



MANDATE

Plan for all modes of transportation consistent with the region's growth and development to ensure the safe, efficient, and coordinated movement of people and goods.

Transportation plays a significant role in the day-to-day lives of all Nova Scotians.

It enables access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. It allows for the movement of goods to support people and the economy. It fosters independence and can help address issues of isolation and social and economic exclusion.

The Joint Regional Transportation Agency (JRTA) is a provincial Crown corporation tasked with addressing transportation issues associated with rapid growth in Halifax and surrounding communities.

To achieve this mandate, the JRTA is collaborating across organizations and governments to develop a Regional Transportation Plan to ensure the transportation system is prepared for the future.



Background

Nova Scotia achieved a major milestone in 2021 as the province surpassed a population of one million people, following a period of record growth.

This region has been growing at a rapid pace in recent years at roughly 2% per year, with Halifax Regional Municipality exceeding an estimated 4% between 2021 and 2022.

This pace of growth has exceeded even the most optimistic population growth rates and represents some of the most significant growth for Canadian municipalities.

Population and economic growth are both key priorities for the province.

The Government of Nova Scotia has identified a target to double the province's population to two million people by 2060, with much of that growth anticipated to occur within Halifax and surrounding communities.

Planning for such growth requires collaboration across all levels of government, businesses, communities, and interest groups along with a long-term strategy to ensure the region's transportation system can support this growth in a sustainable and resilient manner.

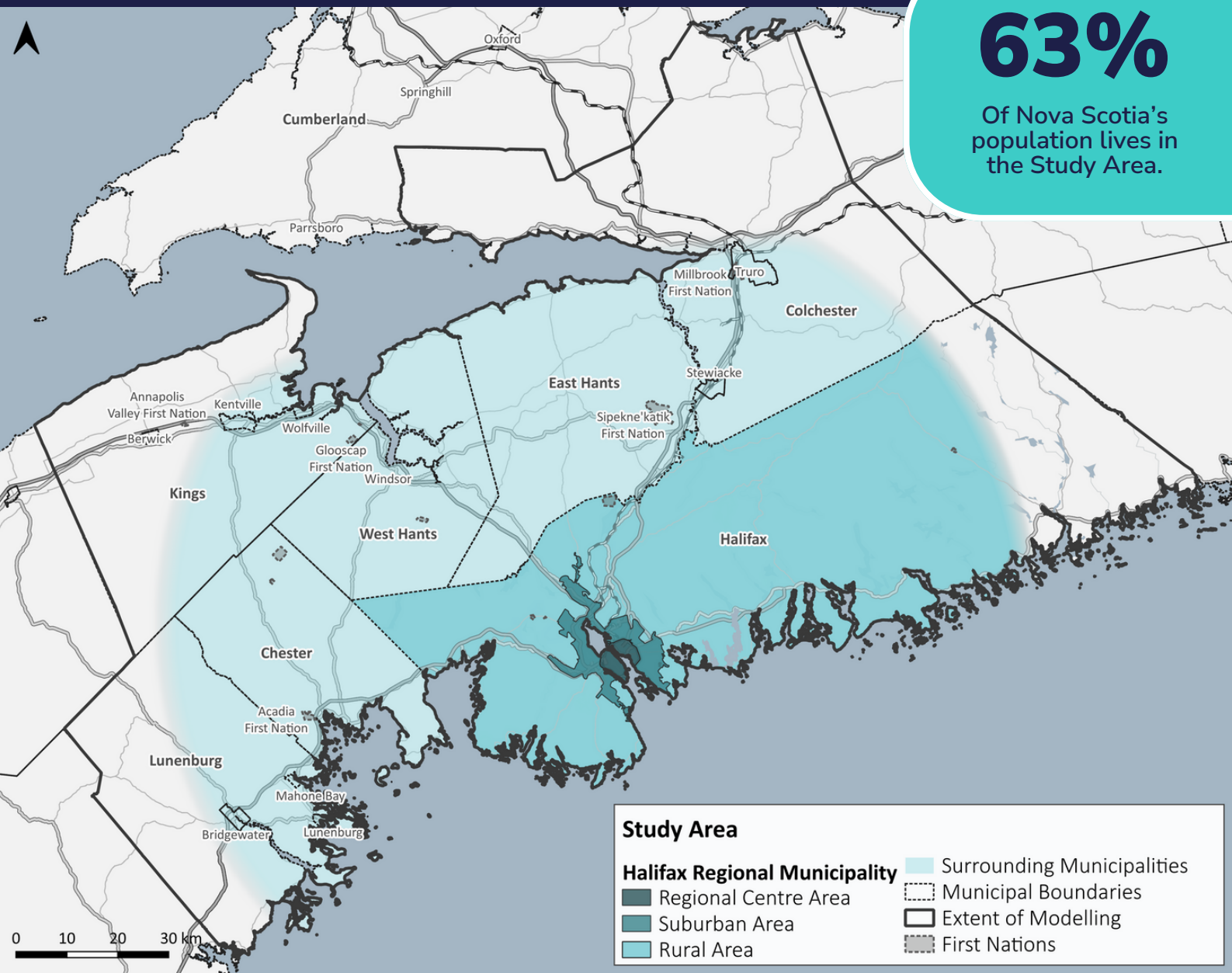
The region's transportation infrastructure and services are under the jurisdiction of all levels of government or managed by various organizations and agencies. This creates challenges and opportunities for planning and developing a regional transportation system that supports future population growth in a coordinated way.

A key deliverable for the JRTA is the development of the plan.

To address the challenges associated with a multi-jurisdictional transportation system, the Government of Nova Scotia passed **Bill No. 61, The Joint Regional Transportation Agency Act**, in the fall of 2021 to establish the JRTA.

The plan will focus on the safe and efficient movement of people and goods to, from, and throughout Halifax and surrounding communities (approximately one hour driving time from Halifax).

63%
Of Nova Scotia's population lives in the Study Area.



Within the Study Area are five First Nations and seventeen historical African Nova Scotian communities, as well as urban Indigenous and African Nova Scotian populations.

The Study Area includes:

- Halifax Regional Municipality
- Municipality of the County of Colchester
- Municipality of the County of Kings
- Municipality of the District of Chester
- Municipality of the District of Lunenburg
- Municipality of West Hants
- Municipality of East Hants

- Town of Berwick
- Town of Bridgewater
- Town of Kentville
- Town of Lunenburg
- Town of Mahone Bay
- Town of Stewiacke
- Town of Truro
- Town of Wolfville



Technical Advisory Board & Governance

Technical Advisory Board

The JRTA works closely with a Technical Advisory Board (TAB) to help inform and guide the work. This key collaborative mechanism is comprised of senior leaders representing transportation authorities and agencies in the region, including:



The TAB is a critical forum to support advancing the development of the plan - and creates an opportunity to advance aligned partner transportation projects.

Each core partner owns, operates, or funds transportation in the region, and have existing plans, strategies, and studies that are important to, dependent on, or that will inform the plan.

The focus of this collaboration is a multi-purpose approach to planning and infrastructure decision-making to maximize investments and enhance Nova Scotia's well-being and drive sustainable growth.

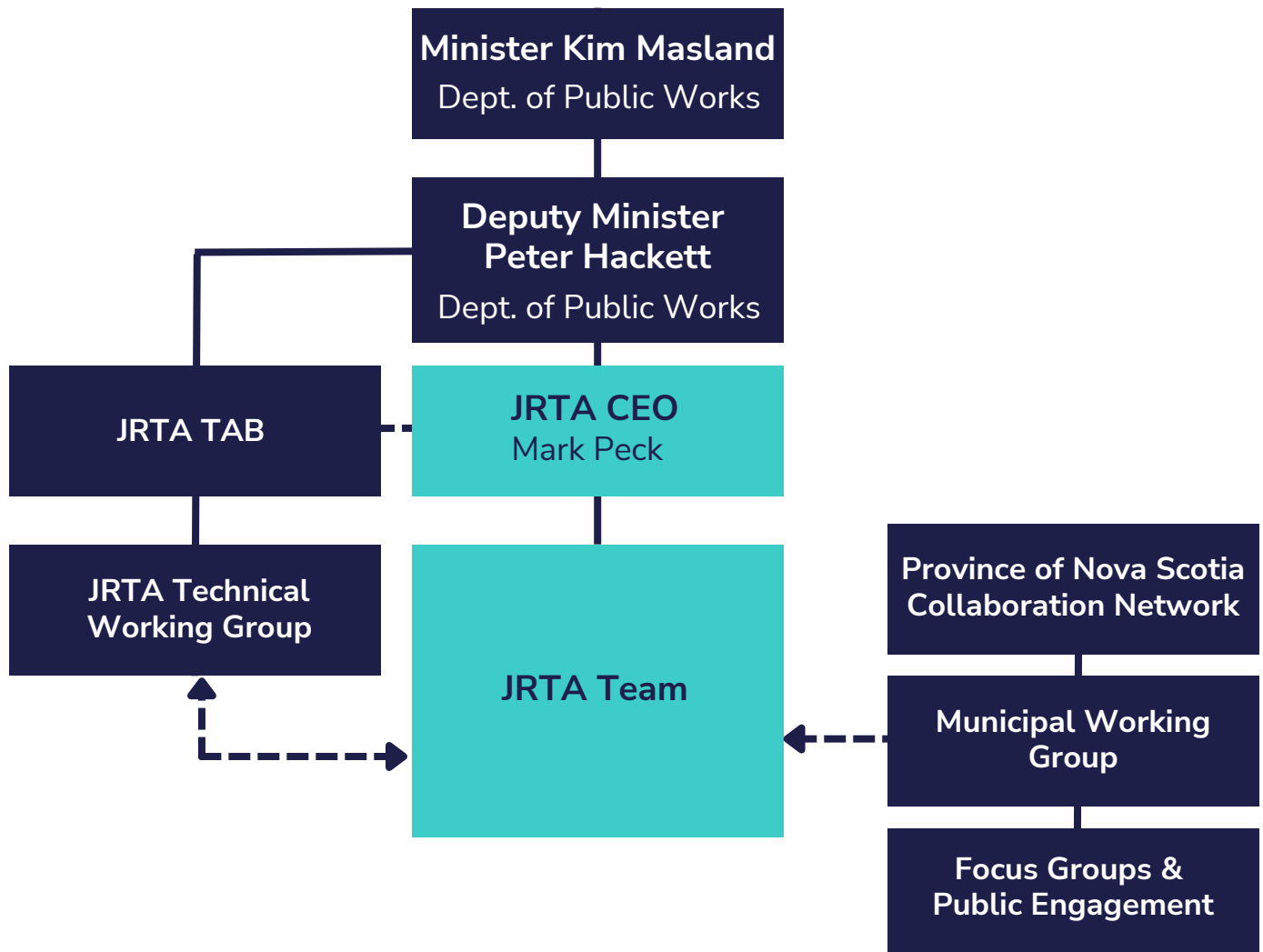
In October 2023, **Canadian National Railway Company (CN)** has joined the TAB as an Associate Member.

As a major infrastructure owner and operator of an essential trade corridor, CN brings an important lens to the work of the JRTA.

Reporting Structure

The JRTA is a provincial Crown corporation, and the Minister of Public Works is the sole shareholder of the Agency. The CEO reports to the Deputy Minister of Public Works who is also the Chair of the JRTA Board.

The Agency reports to an interim Board of Directors made up of the Deputy Minister/Chair and the Chief Engineer of the Department of Public Works.



Accountability

The JRTA submitted our 2022-23 Accountability Report, which tracks our progress against our mandate and the priorities of government. We also completed audited financial statements, and our 2023-24 Business Plan is also now available online.

Our Team

The JRTA operates with a small, dedicated team that works to further the mandate, build and strengthen relationships, and develop the RTP.

In 2023, the team was strategically expanded to include staff with planning, communications, policy, modelling, and engineering expertise.

**MARY
AVERY**

Executive Assistant

**MEGAN
COUTURE**

Communications &
Engagement Strategist

**TANYA
DAVIS**

Vice President & Senior
Executive Director

**DAVE
ESPESETH**

Planning Lead

**AARON
MACMULLIN**

Director, Planning
& Research

**STEPHEN
MCCARTHY**

Transportation
Modelling Lead

**MATT
NEVILLE**

Principal Planner

**JASON
RAE**

Manager of Engineering

**MARK
PECK**

President & CEO

Regional Transportation Plan

The purpose of the plan is to establish a long-term coordinated and strategic vision for a regional transportation system that makes sustainable growth and development possible and improves the safe and efficient flow of people and goods into, out of, and throughout Halifax and surrounding communities.

The plan will play a critical role in advancing broader Provincial Government initiatives to tackle climate change, support growth and economic development, and improve Nova Scotia's health, well-being, and quality of life.



The Regional Transportation Plan is in development with a target completion date of November 2024.

The plan will consider all modes of transportation that facilitate the safe and efficient movement of...

PEOPLE



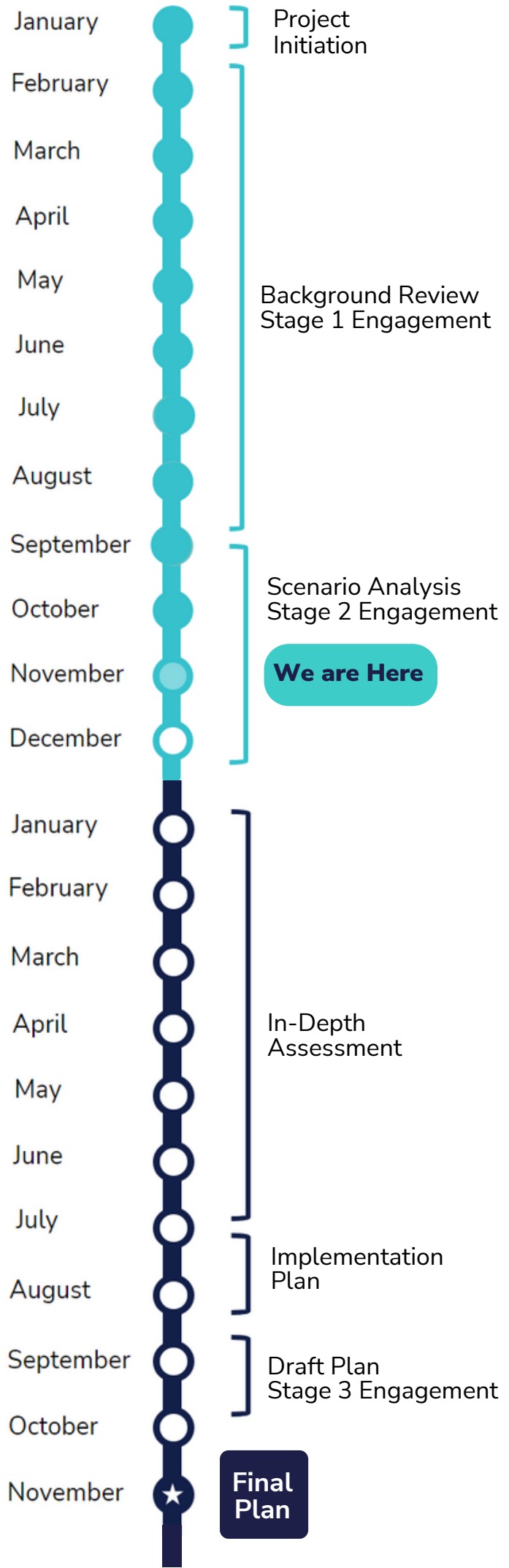
& GOODS



**+ ASSOCIATED
INFRASTRUCTURE**



Plan Timeline





Planning Framework

Following the awarding of the four contracts in January 2023, HDR Corporation, WSP Canada, and Believeco were onboarded and work on the plan began in February 2023.

HDR Corporation, the Transportation Planning Consultant, is leading the technical aspects of the planning process and supporting the engagement effort.

WSP Canada, the Communications & Engagement Consultant, is developing and executing an engagement strategy to support the Regional Transportation Plan.

Travel demand modelling is an integral part of transportation planning, providing key insight into the relationship between transportation, land use, and growth over time and space.

A new activity-based Regional Travel Demand Model is being developed by WSP Canada and the University of Toronto to support this plan and future collaborative planning efforts.

The JRTA is coordinating the work of the consultant teams.





Working the with JRTA, the Technical Working Group, and WSP, the following work on the RTP was completed by HDR Corporation in 2023:

Existing Conditions and Foundational Analysis

The HDR team reviewed and synthesized the existing plans, policies, and study materials to date as well as compiling and analysing data as part of the existing conditions and foundational analysis and provided a consolidated background report.

HDR and CBCL completed a series of base maps to visualize current efforts related to transportation corridor presentation. These maps will serve as a baseline and inform decision-making throughout the development of the RTP.

Visioning and Goal Setting

Working with JRTA, HDR assisted in the preparation of the draft Vision and Goals for the RTP (more details on these can be found on page 14).

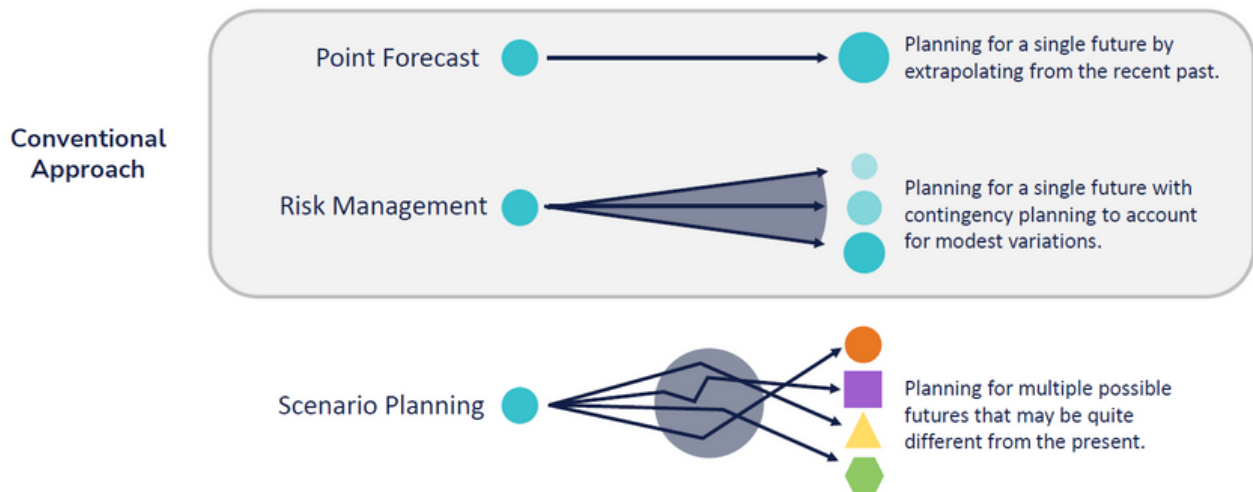
Scenario Analysis

HDR developed six scenarios (five unique scenarios and one “Business As Usual” scenario) as part of the RTP process, each with their own set of variables and assumptions. This stage involves the exploration of multiple possible futures to assess various development patterns, travel behaviours and future potential transportation projects and policies.

Traditional approaches to planning use existing data and assume the future is like the present. But the world we live in is increasingly uncertain, quickly dating plans that use this approach.

Instead, we are implementing scenario planning & analysis. Scenarios are fictional, but plausible descriptions of the future, and are designed to test the transportation system in different ways. They exist to help the plan cover a wider range of future possibilities.

This means we can be flexible, prepared, and empowered to make informed decisions even in the face of uncertainty.



One of the key steps in this phase included scenario validation workshops with the JRTA Technical Working Group, the Municipal Working Group, and the PNS Collaboration Network, which took place in September 2023.

After gathering feedback from these groups, HDR analyzed scenarios using a sketch modelling tool. Initial results of this modelling, including findings, needs, and implications of each scenario without changes / interventions for the regional transportation system, were provided back to these groups for additional feedback.

Travel Demand Model

The model (being developed as a joint effort with the JRTA and HRM) allows HDR to test the aforementioned scenarios against the transportation system. This helps us understand how changes to population and settlement disbursement impact the transportation system. The WSP team is developing the new Activity-Based Travel Demand Model, targeting completion for early 2024.

WSP compiled data to feed into the new activity-based travel demand model, in parallel completing updates to the HRM's existing (trip-based) model that was being used for ongoing projects. This work was critical, as HDR used the updated existing model briefing during the high-level scenario analysis phase.



Engagement & Communications

Working the with JRTA and HDR Corporation, the following engagement work was completed by WSP Canada in 2023:

Stage 1 Engagement Facilitation

WSP provided a Stage 1 engagement strategy including in person and online public engagement, marketing and promotions, and facilitation of virtual workshops with focus groups and working groups in May & June, 2023.

Stage 1 What we Heard Report

Following Stage 1 engagement, all data received was coded and grouped into themes. All feedback was summarized into six Key Themes – included in a What we Heard report, published in October 2023.

Stage 2 Engagement Facilitation

For Stage 2 engagement, WSP facilitated in-person and virtual workshops for the focus and working groups. They also supported the JRTA with marketing and promotion of a public online survey, with the goal of validating the draft vision and goals.

Brand & Website

Believeco worked with the JRTA to create a visual identity, including a logo and brand that reflected the modern and future-thinking nature of the Agency. The brand was adopted in March and has been used to define the JRTA going forward.

JRTA staff and Believeco launched jrt.ca in May 2023, which continues to be a valuable resource.

Vision, Goals & Principles

To guide the RTP through development and into implementation, the JRTA has drafted Vision, Goals, and Principles. The most recent draft (provided below) was formed based on what we heard during Stage 1 engagement, and includes input from the JRTA Technical Working Group, Provincial Collaboration Network, and Municipal Working Group.

The below will be further refined and finalized after Stage 2 engagement.

VISION

A safe, efficient, equitable, and resilient regional transportation system that supports sustainable economic growth and prosperity for Nova Scotians.

GOALS



Strengthen regional connections

Travel between communities and to regional destinations, regardless of mode or trip purpose is safe, easy, and enjoyable. A range of affordable and sustainable transportation options are available that lower household costs, reduce emissions, and enhance social connectivity.



Enable efficient and sustainable goods movement

Essential corridors for moving goods locally and regionally are identified, preserved, and well-maintained to enable the reliable movement of goods and support economic development and trade.



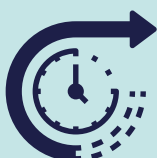
Lead strategic investments, alignment, and implementation

Infrastructure decision-making and service delivery is cost effective, integrated, and efficient. Actions included in the plan are ambitious yet achievable, ensuring their fulfillment.



Coordinate and collaborate on long-term planning

All orders of government work to align transportation and land use across departments and initiatives. The regional transportation system supports environmentally and fiscally sustainable development, recognizing the different needs of urban, suburban, and rural areas.



Develop a future ready regional transportation system

The transportation system is resilient and adaptable, able to respond to changing trends and uncertainty. There is consideration for technological advancements, societal changes, and the long-term needs of the system.

PRINCIPLES

Collaboration

Integrates a diverse range of ideas to advance regional transportation solutions that address challenges and maximize opportunities.

Sustainability

Prioritizes transportation solutions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and align with the province's climate change legislation and plan.

Equity

Addresses transportation needs for underrepresented and underserved communities so all Nova Scotians can travel easily throughout the region.

Accessibility

Provides access to affordable, efficient transportation essential for communities to thrive. The design of the system aligns with the province's goals for an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030.

Resiliency

Prioritizes solutions that reduce the transportation system's vulnerability to climate impacts and enhances the ability to recover from service disruptions.

Well-being

Better connections for Nova Scotians to one another and the goods, places, and services they need to help build prosperous and healthy communities.

Collaboration & Engagement

Engagement and collaboration are so critical to the work of the JRTA that they are enshrined in Bill 61. In 2023, significant effort was made to introduce the Agency to the public and other organizations, seek out interested parties, and build relationships with our core partners, municipal governments, provincial departments, and underrepresented and underserved communities.

While our core partners are key, a successful regional transportation system also requires strong relationships and alignment across provincial and municipal planning initiatives.

Focus Groups & Working Groups

Technical Working Group

In addition to the TAB, which meets quarterly but is regularly updated on the progress of the JRTA, the JRTA also works with a Technical Working Group (TWG), consisting of subject matter experts from each of our Core Partners.

Municipal Working Group

To ensure the plan includes perspectives from a variety of sources, the JRTA formed a municipal working group with planning / senior leadership representation from the fifteen municipalities within the study area.

Province of Nova Scotia Collaboration Network

The JRTA also worked to align with the work of other Province of Nova Scotia (PNS) departments, as transportation can affect the work of many other initiatives. The JRTA formed a PNS Collaboration Network which includes over 60 staff members across departments, with representation from:

- 
- Advanced Education
 - Agriculture
 - Communities Culture Tourism & Heritage
 - Community Services
 - Economic Development
 - Education & Early Childhood Development
 - Environment & Climate Change
 - Finance & Treasury Board
 - Health & Wellness
 - Intergovernmental Affairs
 - Justice / Accessibility Directorate
 - Labour, Skills & Immigration
 - Municipal Affairs & Housing
 - Natural Resources & Renewables
 - Office of Priorities & Planning
 - Public Works
 - Seniors & Long Term Care
 - Service Nova Scotia
 - Nova Scotia Health Authority
 - Build Nova Scotia

Focus Groups

To ensure feedback would be received from a range of perspectives throughout the development of the RTP, the team identified participants and invited them to Focus Groups, which provide informed input, representing their organization.

The Focus Groups include participants from:

Environmental, Transportation, and Accessibility Organizations
Community Organizations
Community Transportation and Local Transit Operators
Major Institutional, Commercial and Industrial Employers



Public Engagement

Stage 1

Stage 1 engagement, which took place May-June 2023, was intended to introduce the JRTA and the RTP to the public while gathering information about their needs / challenges with and desires for the transportation system.

The JRTA hosted thirteen pop-ups across the study area and hosted an online survey on engage.jrta.ca, our engagement website.



2,024 ideas



13 pop-ups

475 participants

Stage 2

Stage 2 engagement, which is currently underway, is intended to validate the Vision, Goals, and Principles of the plan, and to introduce some of the more detailed progress on the plan.

The JRTA offered an online survey for the Vision, Goals, and Principles from November-December 2023, and will be hosting open houses in early 2024.

Additional Outreach

The JRTA strives for a collaborative approach to the development of the RTP. The JRTA has received advice from community leaders on possible ways to encourage greater participation among historically underserved and underrepresented people and groups.

As work on the plan relies heavily on demographic and travel behaviour data collected through standard sources, first person accounts of experiences accessing transportation are an important layer to address systemic biases that have contributed to inequity in past transportation-related decision making.

We are supporting trusted, community-rooted organizations that are already working in areas where transportation acts as an enabler or barrier for their members/clients.

We recognize the need for more focused engagement with special interest groups, local knowledge experts, and groups / communities that have been historically or structurally excluded from such processes.

These organizations will be hosting a series of listening sessions to gather first person accounts and perspective on transportation issues.

Through this work, the JRTA is supporting the following organizations:

- One North End Community Economic Development Society is hosting a series of sessions with African Nova Scotian youth in six high schools in the region on the issue of transportation and access to employment, education and social opportunities.
- YWCA Halifax is hosting a series of sessions focused on the regional transportation needs of diverse women, youth, newcomers, and survivors of human trafficking and sexual exploitation in Nova Scotia.
- OSO Planning and Design is hosting a series of session with members of Millbrook First Nation to identify regional transportation needs between Millbrook communities and in accessing services in the region.
- The JRTA is working with the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre to host a session transportation needs of Urban Indigenous people throughout the region.

We provided financial support to these organizations to facilitate this work, including compensation for participants for their participation.



Engagement Summary

Type of Meeting	Number
Technical Advisory Board	4
Technical Working Group	4
Municipal Working Group	3
Focus Groups	8
Provincial Department	20
PNS Collaboration Network	3
Municipal Government	11
Additional Outreach	12
National Connections and Funding Alignment	7
Interest Groups	25



Looking Ahead

The JRTA is already preparing for the future of the Agency.

2024 will bring a critical milestone – **the delivery of the Regional Transportation Plan.**

We look forward to continuing to engage our core partners, interested parties, and the public on the RTP, with more engagement planned for early and mid-2024.

We intend to continue to strategically grow the team, adding as necessary as we explore the expansion of our mandate and ensure the JRTA is set up to move rapidly from delivery of the plan into implementation.

The JRTA is exploring several projects that strategically align with the RTP, benefit our partners and our province, and unlock new opportunities to strengthen our regional transportation system.