RPA is a research and advocacy organization that develops and promotes ideas to improve economic opportunity, mobility and sustainability in the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan region. In Connecticut, this metro region includes Fairfield, Litchfield and New Haven Counties. In the nearly 100-year history of our organization, we have developed four, once in a generation, long-range plans, each addressing the major issues of its time. RPA released our Fourth Regional Plan last October, which identifies the challenges facing the states in our region today and proposes solutions that will help us achieve a more prosperous future.

Regional Plan Association’s work on the Fourth Regional Plan began by talking with and listening to people in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. What we heard is that people love living here, but they also have some serious concerns. Housing is too expensive. Commutes are long and unreliable. The destruction brought by Hurricane Irene and Superstorm Sandy have underscored our vulnerability to climate change, and raised questions about how prepared we are for the storms to come.

But the most distressing thing we heard was that many people believed these and other problems were just too big to solve.

For Connecticut, the unifying theme underlying all of these concerns is the condition of our state’s economy. Many of the forces that once propelled our state now pose challenges to our future success. Connecticut’s recovery from the 2008 recession has been shaky. Many of the jobs that we’ve regained post-recession pay less than those that were lost and we’re feeling the impact in our state budget. Income tax revenue continues to decline, while debt service payments on pension obligations continue to rise.

At the same time, a third of our state’s homeowners and half of renters spend more than 30% of their income on housing, which strains individual household budgets and limits consumer spending, creating a further drag on our economy. From a big-picture perspective, when incomes don’t keep pace with housing prices, the difficulties of living here outweigh the advantages. It becomes harder to attract and retain talented workers; and people and companies leave. Our state needs to correct course to escape this vicious cycle.

The backbone of our state is its roadway and rail infrastructure, which gets people between work and home. But Metro-North is chronically underfunded, and service on its century old system is deteriorating. Our roadways are showing signs of age and are severely congested; mobility options are limited. These factors impact business location decisions for both residents and workers.

And while our natural resources and coastlines have been one of our most important assets attracting residents and visitors to our state, our coastal communities are becoming increasingly vulnerable to storms, flooding, and sea-level rise due to climate change. While significant investments are being made to increase resilience, our natural systems don’t conform to municipal boundaries and local efforts to plan and adapt remain uncoordinated.

For more information, visit fourthplan.org
How will we achieve a more sustainable future?

People used to go where the jobs were, now jobs are going where the people are and they’re leaving auto-oriented, suburban office parks for more vibrant, walkable, and transit-accessible communities. While this imbalance is particularly acute here in Connecticut, our state is not alone. We are part of an interconnected region with tremendous physical and natural resources that we can leverage to strengthen our economy.

Building on the assets that have underpinned our success for decades — our roads and railways, our nature and coastlines, our cities and towns, and our residents and businesses — we can and must boldly address our challenges.

The Fourth Regional Plan provides a clear roadmap for how we can get there:

1. Invest in a reliable transportation system that gets people to work on time
   - Invest in Metro-North’s New Haven Line to improve inter-city service, reduce travel time between our own regional job centers, and provide faster service to jobs in New York City.
   - Connect our commuter rail lines into an integrated regional rail system to give Connecticut cities better access to destinations throughout the tri-state area.
   - Reduce highway congestion without adding new lanes by more effectively managing traffic – fix urban bus routes, prioritize multi-occupancy vehicles and toll highways, which will also provide new revenue that can be reinvested in our transportation systems.

2. Build more multifamily and affordable housing near transit to expand supply to meet demand
   - Remove barriers to transit-oriented and mixed-use development.
   - Make it easier for people to access job centers.
   - Ease pressure on our roadways by improving alternative transportation.

3. Encourage and incentivize partnerships between anchor institutions, municipalities, and local communities in cities to leverage financial and human resources
   - Build relationships and unlock resources to move the needle on health and equity.
   - Train and hire local residents to create a strong local workforce.
   - Keep money spent by institutions in local neighborhoods through local purchasing.
   - Coordinate anchor and municipal capital improvements to multiply the impact of their planned investments.

4. Curb overreliance on local property taxes to fund local services and reduce inequities between rich and poor communities
   - Provide resources, incentives and guidelines for shared services and programs.
   - Encourage municipalities to diversify sources of revenue.

5. Help communities prepare for rising seas and more intense storms
   - Create a regional coastal commission to facilitate inter-municipal resiliency planning.
   - Create a climate adaptation trust fund to implement necessary resiliency investments.