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Where will all the workers live on Route 1 corridor?

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Between 1980 and 2005, the Route 1 corridor from New Brunswick to Trenton gained more than 100,000 jobs, a key driver of economic growth statewide. Also known as Einstein's Alley, the corridor spurred job growth in high-value industries, including biotechnology, pharmaceutical and private-sector educational firms — industries that engender competition between states for their substantial tax rates and jobs for a highly educated workforce.

A new study finds that the Route 1 corridor, in the absence of substantial policy change, is poorly positioned to attract similar private sector investment as the economy rebounds. The main reason? Too little zoning for housing and uncoordinated planning policies.

The study included an analysis of the impact of municipal zoning conducted by PlanSmart NJ. If future development follows the zoning limitations in the corridor, there will be an estimated four jobs to every home in the region.

This is very different from the one-to-one ratio (about one job to one home) that existed in 1980. By 2000, the ratio had jumped to almost two to one — there were almost two jobs to every home. This imbalance causes traffic congestion to increase during rush hour, as commuters travel farther and farther distances from their homes to reach jobs in the Route 1 corridor.

The analysis, commissioned by the New Jersey Department of Transportation, estimates that traffic jams will increase an astounding sevenfold by 2025. Roads will approach Los Angeles-type conditions, and homes will be so scarce that prices will be out of reach for most middle-class families.

That's not an environment that will attract corporate investment.

The study comes on the heels of a major court decision released recently that finds the state's regulations on zoning for housing are woefully inadequate — something we can confirm from our on-the-ground experience.

One of the corridor's major employers, Educational Testing Service, has more than 3,300 people at its Princeton headquarters. ETS has grown in the Route 1 corridor because of many advantages to doing business here — including close proximity to the area's universities and the state's highly educated workforce.

However, ETS also has had to face reality. "Looking at the license plates in the ETS parking lot," company president Kurt Landgraf said, "one would think ETS was a Pennsylvania-based company."

He pointed out that the lack of desirable housing options for the majority of ETS' employees — including secretarial and janitorial staff, recent college graduates and midlevel managers — is a challenge for ETS' future growth in New Jersey.

Similarly, at K. Hovnanian Homes, a New Jersey-based company, the main growth market as the economy rebounds will be in the starter-home sector. There is simply not enough land zoned to meet this market demand in the Route 1 corridor.

How do we fix this? It starts with state housing and planning policies recognizing that the cumulative impact on a region of fragmented and uncoordinated decision-making ends up with economically disastrous results. Municipal governments along the corridor simply have too many incentives to put too much land off-limits to the housing that the market demands. PlanSmart NJ, Einstein's Alley and other business groups strongly encourage Gov. Chris Christie and the Legislature to recognize, as they focus on revisions to state planning and housing policy, that the future of our economic prosperity turns on finding solutions that work.

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