

## FHWA's Livable Communities Case Study Series

### **Kansas City, MO-KS and Nashville, TN—Incorporating Livability into the Metropolitan Planning Organization Project Prioritization Process**

#### **Challenge**—Addressing Livability in the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) help urban areas develop, analyze, and implement shared regional transportation visions and goals through the metropolitan transportation planning process. These goals, expressed in long range transportation plans (LRTPs), often incorporate livability, which is about tying the quality and location of transportation facilities to broader opportunities such as access to good jobs, affordable housing, quality schools, and safer streets and roads. To implement goals on the ground, MPOs develop short-term project priority lists in Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs).

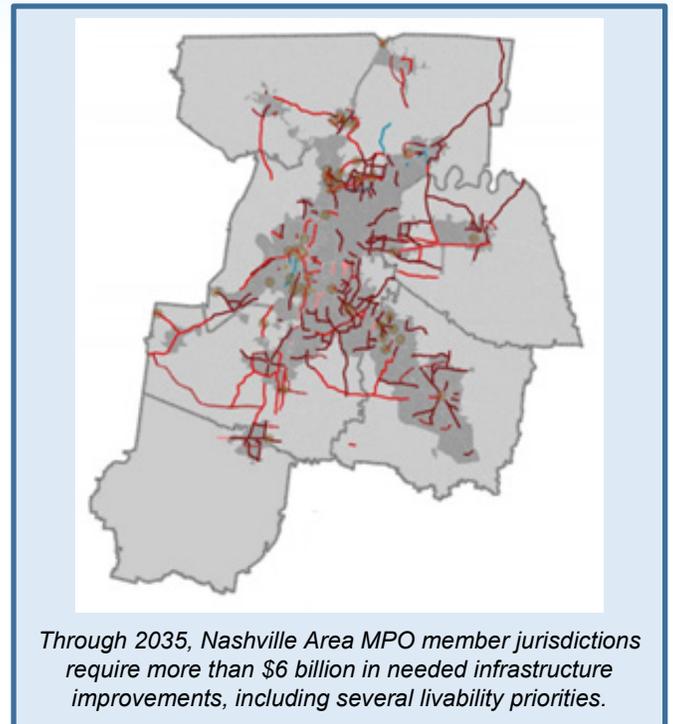
All Federally-funded transportation projects must be listed in a TIP, which in turn must be consistent with an MPO's 20-25 year LRTP. Increasingly holistic local priorities create a need to connect an MPO's goals and visions with specific projects in an LRTP or TIP. Traditionally, MPOs focus on improving traffic and congestion when selecting which transportation projects to prioritize and fund. In addition to those important concerns, MPOs are increasingly looking for ways to incorporate livability goals such as quality of life, health, equity, economic competitiveness, and environmental concerns into decisionmaking about projects and funding.

#### **Solution**—Project Selection Scoring Criteria

In an effort to identify projects in a more comprehensive and objective way, the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) and the Nashville Area MPO incorporate livability principles into the scoring systems that guide LRTP project selection.

#### *MARC (Kansas City Area MPO) – Transportation Outlook 2040*

MARC is an association of city and county governments and the MPO for the bi-state (Kansas/Missouri) Kansas City region. In developing [Transportation Outlook 2040](#), the region's LRTP, MARC drew heavily on its member governments' comprehensive plans and adopted plans. Beginning in 2008, MARC worked with member



Creating more livable communities through transportation choices



governments over a two-year period to identify broad policy goals for the region's transportation system. The goals included: supporting accessibility and economic vitality, environmental protection, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, creating livable communities, encouraging healthy living, improving safety and security, and ensuring that the region's transportation system is efficient and well-maintained.

MARC [developed a 100 point scoring system](#) that encompasses all of the policy goals in the LRTP. The scoring system was developed with input from MARC's transportation committee members, who then used the system to evaluate projects proposed for inclusion in the plan's regionally significant project list. In developing a project list for final adoption by MARC's Board of Directors, the scores served as one of the tools to inform project selection along with more detailed follow-up technical analysis and input from MARC committees, the public, and other stakeholders. As a result, MARC refocused 75 percent of its financially constrained projects to support higher-intensity lane use in identified regional activity centers in which 15 percent of growth is expected to occur over the next 25 years.

#### *Nashville Area MPO – 2035 Regional Transportation Plan*

The Nashville Area MPO serves seven counties in middle Tennessee. Working in consultation with regional coalitions, the MPO adopted four guiding principles (livability, sustainability, prosperity, and diversity) to align its decisionmaking with the needs and desires of the region. From these guiding principles, the MPO developed regional goals and major objectives for the transportation system. In developing the [2035 Regional Transportation Plan](#) between 2008 and 2010, the Nashville Area MPO placed a special emphasis on using quantitative means to translate the planning factors outlined in Federal transportation legislation to a local context.

The Nashville MPO developed a [priority scoring system](#) (Appendix B of LRTP), comprised of a comprehensive set of scoring criteria. Within the 100-point evaluation scale, 50 points relate directly to livability considerations such as quality of life, accessibility, health, and safety. These criteria are consistent with the Federal planning factors and LRTP principles, goals, and objectives. The evaluation criteria were applied both in determining which projects best addressed the region's long-term vision in the LRTP and in prioritizing projects for the MPO's TIP. The MPO also utilized a geographic information system to draw on existing data sets such as the MPO's regional transportation demand model. The scoring effort primarily focused on projects eligible to receive MPO-managed funds. It also considered projects more appropriate for State-managed funds in order to better communicate priorities to the Tennessee Department of Transportation. This scoring system allowed the Nashville MPO to better prioritize multi-modal and active transportation, health and safety, and a variety of other livability considerations.

#### **Conclusion**—Integrating Livability into Project Selection

For both MARC and the Nashville Area MPO, using a comprehensive set of project selection criteria provides an additional level of detail and objectivity to the project evaluation and selection process. By enabling MPOs to consider livability goals articulated by stakeholders in long range transportation planning processes, such criteria help reduce internal conflict associated with project selection. The result is a metropolitan transportation planning process in which decision-makers and planners consider projects holistically and account for a broad set of stakeholder priorities.

Federal Highway Administration: [www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability)  
Partnership for Sustainable Communities: [www.sustainablecommunities.gov/](http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov/)

