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Federal-aid Program Overview Transportation Planning Process and Requirements

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Stakeholder involvement throughout the transportation planning process will help ensure success.



Transportation planning helps shape our community's economic health and quality of life. Transportation planning is more than listing highway and transit projects; it requires developing strategies to meet the area's long-term goals and requires transportation planners to involve stakeholders throughout the process. Federal regulations require State departments of transportation, called DOTs, and metropolitan planning organizations known as MPOs, to conduct statewide and metropolitan transportation planning.



Agencies coordinate public involvement and input by using a cooperative, continuing and comprehensive planning model. This joint effort known as the "three C" process results in defining common ground about what the transportation system should be and developing solutions to meet that vision. Public agencies at different levels of government conduct transportation planning to improve transportation

systems. State DOTs are the largest units of government that develop transportation plans and projects. They set transportation goals for the State and oversee the safe operation of the transportation system. State DOTs also plan the safe and efficient transportation of people and goods among the States, cities, towns, and neighboring States.



State DOTs develop a statewide transportation plan by working with other transportation organizations, local governments, and interested parties to consider stakeholder needs. MPOs are created to carry out transportation planning in urban areas. An MPO works in cooperation with state and local agencies to develop an area's transportation system.



MPOs seek public involvement, and the public and interested stakeholders influence the MPOs direction and approach. MPOs assess regional travel for transit and highways. At the local level, local governments carry out many transportation planning functions such as scheduling improvement and maintenance for local streets and roads. Local governments and transit agencies also generate project proposals and take them to the MPO and the State. Public transportation, or transit agencies, also play a crucial role in the planning activities of the MPO. Public transportation agencies may provide services using busses, various rail options, or ferry boats to support needs and solutions identified through the planning process.



The last key participant is the Federal government. The U.S. Department of Transportation oversees the planning and project activities of the MPOs, the State DOTs, and transit agencies. The department provides advice and training on transportation topics ranging from project finance to the efficient design and operation of highway systems.



The department provides funding for transportation planning and projects and approves the State's list of projects known as the State Transportation Improvement Program, or STIP. Before transportation planners start their work, stakeholders should have a long-term transportation vision. A vision sets broad goals for what the region or State will look like, and reflects what is important for the future.



Transportation planners help the public and elected officials translate the vision into Long Range Transportation Plans, or LRTPs. Long-range plans outline transportation solutions that cover twenty or more years. In developing these plans, planners evaluate transportation alternatives.



The public and other agencies also weigh in to select alternatives that work best for an area and use funds effectively.



After a region or State develops a Long Range Transportation Plan, the MPO and State DOT develop their own short-term Transportation Improvement Program or TIP. These programs identify all highway transit bicycle and pedestrian projects proposed within a metropolitan area. The MPO and State DOT update the programs at least once every four years. The STIP and TIP are a four-year list of projects proposed for federal funding and must include a reasonable cost estimate for each project. The comprehensive STIP compiles all the MPO TIPs for metropolitan areas and adds all projects in non-metropolitan areas. Transportation planning plays a fundamental role in a community's vision for the future.

Your involvement throughout the process is a key component for what we want our communities to be. Go to public meetings, express your opinion about a proposed project, or volunteer for a transportation Advisory Committee.



To find out how to get involved, contact your local transportation planning organization, your State DOT, or the FHWA Division office in your State.

Additional Resources

- A listing of training opportunities from NHI and other sources
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/tmip/resources/training.cfm>
- Information on the Travel Model Improvement Program (TMIP) and the Travel Analysis Toolbox
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/tmip/>
- FHWA's certification checklist for travel forecasting methods for new and experienced travel model practitioners
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/certcheck.cfm>
- The TMIP maintains this email list to promote the open discussion of issues related to transportation modeling, simulation and analysis
http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/tmip/community/list_serv.cfm
- Interim guidance on the application of travel and land use forecasting in NEPA, FHWA memo dated April 2010
http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/projdev/travel_landUse.asp
- Regulations that implement provisions of various laws requiring each State to have a statewide multimodal transportation planning process, 23CFR450
<http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=0d252cffe99df89c0c91d3a755688f8&mc=true&node=pt23.1.450&rqn=div5>
- The Transportation Conformity Rule, 40CFR93 regulation to implement section 176(c) of the Clean Air Act (CAA) within the Federal-aid program
<http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=0d252cffe99df89c0c91d3a755688f8&mc=true&node=pt40.20.93&rqn=div5>

The content of this document is not a substitute for information obtained from State departments of transportation, appropriate FHWA Division Offices, and applicable laws. Scenarios have been simplified for emphasis and do not necessarily reflect the actual range of requirements applicable to the scenario or this topic. This document was created under contract number DTFH61-11-D-00023 by the Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, and is offered to the public to heighten and focus awareness of Federal-aid requirements within the local public agencies community and reinforces the importance of these necessary policies, procedures, and practices.

This Companion Resource is the script content for the video production of the same name.