

Planning fundamentals  
for public officials and  
engaged citizens

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# QUICKNOTES

## The Long-Range Transportation Plan

A long-range transportation plan (LRTP) establishes regional goals and priorities for public investments in transportation infrastructure and services. It includes short- and long-term strategies that consider how different parts of the transportation system interact to efficiently move both goods and people. It serves as a bridge between state and local transportation plans and provides an opportunity to align regional transportation initiatives with other regional priorities.

### BACKGROUND

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962 required states to collaborate with local officials to create regional transportation plans to guide the spending of federal highway funds in U.S. Census Bureau-defined urbanized areas (UZAs) with populations greater than 50,000. It stated that the regional transportation planning process must be continuous, cooperative, and comprehensive (3-C), but it did not explain how states should engage local officials in this process. This changed when President Nixon signed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973, which required states to designate a metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for each UZA with a population greater than 50,000.

Federal law requires MPOs to prepare their LRTP to guide regional transportation investments in accordance with a 20-year forecast, and to update that plan at least once every five years (23 USC §134(i) and 49 USC §5303(i)). In addition to preparing the LRTP, MPOs are responsible for developing the transportation improvement program (TIP) to schedule the expenditure of federal funds and establish and monitor performance targets. MPOs serving UZAs with populations more than 200,000 have additional planning responsibilities in accordance with the more complex transportation networks and challenges in larger metropolitan areas. These include development of a congestion management plan (23 USC §134(k) and 49 USC §5303(k)).

Outside of metropolitan areas, federal law requires states to cooperate with local officials on transportation needs, and it authorizes states to create regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) to facilitate this cooperation (23 USC §135(l) and 49 USC §5304(l)). RTPOs serve the same purpose as MPOs do in urbanized areas—preparing LRTPs and TIPs and help ensure that rural transportation needs are represented in statewide transportation plans.

### FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR LRTPS

MPOs must address 10 factors in their regional transportation planning processes (23 CFR §450.306(b)): (1) Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency; (2) Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and nonmotorized users; (3) Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and nonmotorized users; (4) Increase accessibility and mobility of people and freight; (5) Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns; (6) Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight; (7) Promote efficient system management and operation; (8) Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system; (9) Improve the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate stormwater impacts of surface transportation; and (10) Enhance travel and tourism.

The LRTP must address current and projected transportation demand, proposed transportation facilities, and operational and management strategies to improve the performance of existing transportation facilities. It must also include strategies to provide sufficient multimodal capacity and to reduce the vulnerability of the existing transportation infrastructure to natural disasters. Another required compo-

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Bus rapid transit in Eugene, Oregon.



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nent of the LRTP is the system performance report, which evaluates the performance of the transportation system against the established performance targets. Finally, the LRTP must include a financial plan, which demonstrates how the plan will be implemented with committed and available revenue sources.

MPOs must develop LRTPs through a performance-based process, as defined in 23 CFR §450.3069(d). Through this process, transportation agencies establish performance measures to evaluate how well the transportation system is achieving goals, including those related to access, mobility, and equity of the transportation system. MPOs define performance targets for achieving established performance measures and integrate performance data into plans. Performance targets set by MPOs are required to be coordinated with those set by states and public transportation providers.

Federal law requires each MPO located in an air quality nonattainment area to prepare or update the LRTP on a four-year schedule (23 CFR §450.324(a)). Because transportation systems and facilities are generally not operated by MPOs, the LRTP must be developed cooperatively and include representatives from relevant transportation agencies. These include state and local transportation departments, transit agencies, and airport authorities, among others.

### ALIGNING LRTPS AND STATE TRANSPORTATION PLANS

Federal law requires states to develop long-range statewide transportation plans (LRSTPs) to address the integrated management and operations of intermodal transportation systems (49 USC §5304(f)). LRSTPs are also developed through a performance-based process that is continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive and guided by 10 planning factors. LRSTPs have a 20-year planning horizon, though they do not have a required update schedule. They are developed in cooperation with MPOs and in coordination with local officials or officially designated RTPs in nonmetropolitan areas. Meanwhile, federal law requires MPOs to incorporate the goals, objectives, performance measures, and targets of LRSTPs into their LRTPs, either directly or by reference (23 USC §135(h)(2)(D) and 49 USC §5304(h)(2)(D)).

### CONNECTING LRTPS WITH OTHER REGIONAL GOALS

LRTPs have traditionally focused on their defined scope of the management and operation transportation systems; however, MPOs are increasingly linking regional transportation goals and investments to other regional goals and priorities, including those related to economic development, hazard mitigation and climate change, housing availability and affordability, and broader issues of livability. While MPOs are required to vertically integrate LRTPs with statewide transportation plans and programs, they can also work to horizontally integrate transportation plans with other regional plans, as well as with plans from neighboring regions.

### IMPLEMENTING LRTPS

The primary tool for coordinating LRTP implementation is the regional TIP, a scheduled list of planned transportation project investments in the UZA over a period of at least four years. MPOs must develop the TIP in collaboration with state and public transit agencies and secure formal approval of the governor. The projects contained in the TIP must be consistent with and reflect the investment priorities established in the LRTP. As with an LRTP, the TIP must be fiscally constrained.

### CONCLUSION

The LRTP guides transportation decision making and investment through the establishment of short-term and long-term strategies. They are developed through a performance-based planning process that requires cooperation between multiple stakeholders, including MPOs, public transit agencies, and local and state transportation agencies, among others. Although LRTPs have traditionally been focused on the maintenance and operation of the transportation system, MPOs are increasingly connecting transportation goals and investments to other regional goals.

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### FURTHER READING

#### 1. Published by the American Planning Association

Piro, Rocky, Robert Leiter, and Sharon Rooney. 2017. *Emerging Trends in Regional Planning*. PAS Report No. 586. Chicago: American Planning Association. Available at [planning.org/publications/report/9118764](http://planning.org/publications/report/9118764).

#### 2. Other Resources

Grant, Michael, et al. 2014. *Model Long Range Transportation Plans: A Guide for Incorporating Performance-Based Planning*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration. Available at <http://bit.ly/2DWOYDQ>.

Transportation Planning Capacity Building Program. 2017. *The Transportation Planning Process Briefing Book: Key Issues for Decisionmakers, Officials, and Staff*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Transportation. Available at <http://bit.ly/2Gee6Yt>.

U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration. 2017. "Metropolitan, Statewide & Non-Metropolitan Planning." Available at <http://bit.ly/2l86RC5>.