

WHAT IS THE PLAN?

WHY DO WE NEED A PLAN?

The Durham/Chapel Hill/Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization is responsible for transportation planning in the urbanized areas of Durham and Orange Counties, and northern Chatham County. The MPO adopted a long-range plan, called the *2025 Long Range Transportation Plan (2025 LRTP)*, on June 11, 2004. This previous plan projected the amount and type of transportation demand through the year 2025, and developed a multi-modal project plan to service that demand. Projects included highway, bus transit, rail transit, bicycle, and pedestrian modes, and the plan presented a projection of costs and revenues to ensure that the plan was financially responsible. The plan was the result of a very thorough, deliberate process that analyzed over 70 options (i.e., combinations of highway, transit and non-motorized projects) and used an extensive public involvement process, which included a Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC).

The 2025 LRTP had to be updated because of air quality regulations. Federal transportation regulations require that MPOs in Air Quality non-attainment areas must have a conforming long-range transportation plan within one year of being designated as not in compliance. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated the Triangle Region as non-attainment for ozone pollutants on June 15, 2004. Thus, the DCHC MPO must have a conforming long-range plan by June 15, 2005. A conforming plan requires the MPO to adopt a set of transportation projects that are fiscally realistic, and subsequently the project set must go through a travel demand modeling and air quality analysis process to show compliance with air quality standards. If the MPO does not have a conforming long-range plan by June 15, 2005, the MPO will be in a conformance "lapse" – a lapse means that no additional federal grant funding can be expended in the MPO planning area.

Why develop a long-range plan? There are two principal reasons. As already highlighted, federal regulations require MPOs to develop a long-range transportation plan in order to receive federal highway, transit, and other transportation related funding. Second, a long-range plan makes sense in order to meet the many challenges inherent in constructing an effective and efficient transportation infrastructure, minimizing highway congestion, and improving air quality in our community.

Federal regulations not only require a long-range plan, the regulations stipulate the contents of the plan and the process used in its development. The plan must have:

- A multi-modal approach that includes not only highway projects, but provides for other modes such as public transportation, walking, and bicycling.
- A minimum 20-year planning horizon.
- A financial plan that balances revenues and costs to demonstrate that the plan is financially responsible and constrained.
- An appropriate air quality analysis to show that forecasted emissions will not exceed air quality budgets.
- A public involvement process that meets federal guidelines, and is sensitive especially to those groups traditionally left out of the planning process.
- A vision that meets community goals.

- An update at least every three years.

However, the impetus for developing a long-range transportation plan goes beyond federal requirements. A long-range plan is essential for building an effective and efficient transportation system. The implementation of any transportation project, such as building a new road, adding lanes to a highway, purchasing transit buses, or constructing bicycle lanes with a road widening project, usually requires several years to complete from concept to construction.

Once a community determines that a project is needed, there are many detailed steps to be completed: funding must be identified; planning must be completed to minimize environmental and social impacts; engineering designs must be developed, evaluated, and selected; the public must be involved in project decisions; right-of-way may have to be purchased; and finally, the construction must be contracted and completed. No matter which step one might consider the most important in this long process, the project always begins with the long-range plan. In fact, this basic planning concept is so important, that federal regulations require that a project must be identified in the long-range plan in order for it to proceed to step two – the encumbering of funding in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

WHAT IS IN THIS PLAN?

This document presents the planning process and products for the 2030 LRTP from start to finish. The plan begins by setting a demographic, economic, and environmental context of the MPO planning area and Triangle Region, and by highlighting the inherent transportation planning challenges in our fast growing region. Next, there is considerable discussion concerning how the 2030 LRTP was developed in terms of both the qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative methods include identifying who is responsible for developing and making decisions in the process, and showing how the MPO's Public Involvement Policy was implemented. The quantitative methods include a host of critical steps such as the socio-economic forecast, deficiency analysis, and use of the Triangle Regional Model (TRM).

The core of this document is the recommended plan that lists projects in six categories known as the plan components:

1. Highway;
2. Fixed Guideway/High Capacity Transit;
3. Transit;
4. Bicycle/Pedestrian;
5. Transportation Demand Management (TDM); and,
6. Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) and Transportation System Management (TSM).

These detailed plan components describe each project, including cost information, and can contain over two hundred projects – the Transit Component has 258 projects and Bicycle/Pedestrian Component has 243 projects.

The financial plan summarizes the total costs and revenues for the plan, and describes the method used for making the projections. This plan also identifies some non-traditional revenue sources proposed for ensuring that the plan is financially constrained, i.e., costs and revenues balance within an acceptable tolerance level. Finally, two other important factors in the development of the 2030 LRTP, FHWA Planning Factors and Environmental Justice and Screening, are presented.

It is important to note that these qualitative and quantitative methodologies used for developing the 2030 LRTP have been reviewed and approved by the appropriate state and federal agencies. Every three years the DCHC MPO completes a certification process with federal officials representing the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, and Environmental Protection Agency. This process certifies that the basic structure and planning processes of the MPO, such as the Transportation Advisory Committee By-Laws, Public Involvement Policy, Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and long-range transportation plan, meet federal requirements. In addition to this certification review, state and federal transportation officials monitor the technical details for developing the 2030 LRTP through the periodic reviews of the Interagency Council (IAC) and special reviews of the Triangle Regional Model (TRM).