

# 1 INTRODUCTION



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## WHAT IS THE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION?

A metropolitan planning organization is a transportation policy-making organization made up of representatives from local government and transportation authorities. The Federal Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1973 required any urbanized area with a population greater than 50,000 persons to have a designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The Policy Committee (PC) of the Texarkana Urban Transportation Study (TUTS) is designated by the governors of Arkansas and Texas as the MPO for the Texarkana Urbanized Area and is known as the Texarkana MPO. The fourteen (14) members of the PC represent cities, counties, and transportation agencies, from both Arkansas and Texas, serving the Texarkana, USA region. The PC is supported by a twenty-three (23) member Technical Committee (TC) and the MPO staff. The PC relies on its TC and the MPO staff for analysis and recommendations regarding transportation policy options. The Texarkana MPO study area is comprised of nearly 200 square miles in northeast Texas and southwest Arkansas. Jurisdictions involved in the MPO include the cities of Texarkana, Arkansas; Nash, Texas; Wake Village, Texas; and Texarkana, Texas; as well as Miller County, Arkansas and Bowie County, Texas. A boundary map, **Map 1.1**, of the Metropolitan Study Area is shown on the next page.



## WHAT DOES THE MPO DO?

The MPO has five (5) core functions and produces three (3) key documents through the transportation planning process. The five (5) core functions include the following activities:

- Establish and manage a fair and impartial setting for effective regional decision-making.
- Evaluate available transportation alternatives given the size, complexity and nature of the region's transportation system.
- Develop and update a long-range transportation plan for the metropolitan area that addresses mobility and access for people and goods, efficient system performance and preservation, and quality of life.
- Develop a program based on the long-range transportation plan and designed to serve the area's goals.
- Involve the general public in the four (4) core functions listed above.



The three (3) key documents produced by the MPO are:

- The **Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)**: The UPWP is the activities and budget document for the MPO staff and lists the transportation studies and tasks to be performed. This document covers a one (1) to two (2) – year time frame.
- The **Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) or Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)**: The MTP is the strategic planning document that identifies future investments to be made in the region's transportation system. The plan is required to have a continuous twenty (20)-year planning horizon and be updated every five (5) years.
- The **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**: The TIP is a four (4)-year funding program implementing the transportation projects and strategies identified in the MTP. The TIP is updated on a two (2) to three (3) year cycle as determined by each state transportation agency.

In addition to these three (3) key documents, the MPO is also required to develop and publish a Public Participation Plan (3P) and the Annual Listing of Obligated Projects (ALOP). The purpose of the 3P is to ensure that public participation is an integral part of the transportation planning process and that decisions are made with the benefit and consideration of public perspectives. The Annual Listing of Obligated Projects is published each year in December listing the projects for which federal funds were used in that fiscal year.

## CHALLENGES TO THE TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM

The historic objective of public servants in the field of transportation was to provide and manage mobility as a means of increased freedom and economic opportunity. By and large, they have done that and done it so well that the public and our elected officials expect the transportation system to always be available and function at an acceptable level. Fulfilling these expectations requires a dedicated funding source and funding levels adequate to meet the demand for service. The number of vehicles using the system continues to grow, demand for alternative modes is increasing, and the maintenance needs of the system expand as the existing facilities age and new ones are built but funding levels have not kept pace.

The transportation sector faces several challenges, namely:

1. Regulatory requirements continue to expand (land-use, environment, etc.)
2. A declining and uncertain revenue source
3. Opposition to increased motor fuels taxes or alternative revenue sources
4. Decaying infrastructure
5. Increasing demand for new infrastructure and access to alternative modes

Starting with the Intermodal Surface Transportation Act of 1991 (ISTEA), the regulatory requirements for transportation planning have been expanded to include everything from mobility to the environment and land-use to social equality. The objectives have become so broad (i.e., land-use, global warming, economic development, etc.) that it is no longer possible

to assimilate and apply all the information effectively. More stringent requirements are also being placed on achieving single-focused objectives (i.e., reduced emissions, equal access to all modes, avoidance of negative impacts, reduced congestion, etc.). Conflicts between these objectives and the regulatory requirements associated with them are more frequent and increase the time it takes to complete projects as well as their cost. So, while reducing motor vehicle emissions by reducing the amount of miles driven or improving fuel efficiency may be a worthwhile objective, it also undercuts funding for the transportation system generated from motor fuels taxes. Elected officials, taking their cue from their constituents, are not eager to increase the motor fuels tax or supplement/replace it with a usage based tax or other revenue source. There have even been several steps taken at both the state and federal levels to prevent an increase in the motor fuels tax and/or eliminate the private sector as a funding option. The result is that the existing revenue stream continues to decline, the existing infrastructure continues to decay and the demand for new infrastructure continues to increase. This is a problem that affects everyone regardless of where we live or our economic situation. The number one objective moving forward should be to create a funding mechanism as close as possible to the time and place that transportation services are used and in such a way to maximize liberty, freedom of choice, economic opportunity, and quality of life.

## **WHY WE NEED A METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), signed on August 10, 2005 and its predecessors, the 1998 Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21) and the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991, require each MPO to develop a MTP in order to be eligible to receive transportation program funding. Federal legislation requires the MPO to develop a Metropolitan Transportation Plan that encourages and promotes the safe and efficient management, operation, and development of surface transportation systems that will serve the mobility needs of the people and freight and foster economic growth and development within and through out the urbanized areas, while minimizing transportation-related fuel consumption and air pollution.

The *Texarkana Urban Transportation Study (TUTS) 2035 PLAN* is the Texarkana region's MTP. The *TUTS 2035 PLAN* is a strategic planning document designed to identify and address the transportation needs of the region through the year 2035. The primary use for the *TUTS 2035 PLAN* is as a regional long-range plan for federally funded transportation projects. The MTP serves as the framework for project development and guides public entities in selecting projects for implementation. It is a multimodal plan that describes needed improvements for all modes of transportation. It also considers a number of transportation issues, including connectivity, land use, and systems management. As such, the MTP forms the basis for transportation planning activities within the region and determines the nature of the future transportation system.

The purpose of the MTP is to formulate a vision, define goals, identify needs, and recommend strategies for improving the regional transportation system. The transportation needs addressed in the MTP include traditional topics such as

improving mobility, preserving the existing infrastructure, and enhancing safety as well as related strategic needs including supporting freight movement and improving the overall quality of life.

The MTP is the result of a cooperative effort that begins with a shared vision. Its development progresses with the analysis of needs and investigation of potential solutions. This evaluation leads to public adoption of specific projects and affordable strategies that best meet the region's mobility, economic development and environmental goals. The MTP is the result of inter-agency consultation between federal, state and local governments and transportation agencies as well as users of the transportation system. The transportation investments recommended in the MTP have been prioritized in order to balance estimated transportation costs with anticipated funding.

## PLANNING PROCESS

The United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) relies on the MPO to ensure that existing and future expenditures for transportation projects and programs are based on a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive (3-C) planning process. The 3-C process is the foundation for regional transportation planning and includes input and direction from participating cities, counties, community agencies, elected officials and the public. The Texarkana MPO is the agency responsible for coordinating the transportation planning activities for the Texarkana region. The MPO staff and Technical Committee provide technical analyses and planning for the region. All regional plans, projects and programs, however, must be approved by the MPO Policy Committee (PC).



The MTP is both a product and a driving force of the planning process. It incorporates the plans and programs developed by many agencies and local governments into one comprehensive plan. The projects identified in the MTP are eligible for federal funding through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Adoption of the MTP sets the stage for the short-term strategy and phasing for implementing the full plan.

SAFETEA-LU legislation requires that metropolitan planning organizations consider eight (8) specific issues or "factors" when developing transportation plans and programs. The eight (8) factors are as follows:

Factor #1: Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.

Factor #2: Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.

Factor #3: Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.

Factor #4: Increase the accessibility and mobility options available to people and for freight.

Factor #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.

Factor #6: Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.

Factor #7: Promote efficient system management and operation.

Factor #8: Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

The Texarkana MPO *Public Participation Plan* guided the public involvement procedures in the development of the MTP. The public process for updating the MTP included a request for project suggestions from the general public and member agencies, a series of focus group meetings, three (3) public meetings and corresponding comment periods.



There were six (6) focus groups that met with the MPO staff between May 6, and May 16, 2008. The six (6) groups represented educational institutions, freight transportation users and providers, public transportation providers, economic development interests, the minority community, and emergency responders. The MPO staff conducted listening sessions with each of these groups to find out how they used the transportation system. The participants shared with the MPO staff their thoughts about what improvements could be made to the system that would benefit or assist in their various areas of operation and how those improvements might benefit the community as a whole.

During January and February, 2009, the MPO issued a call for projects from the general public and its member agencies. No comments or suggestions from the public were received during this public comment period. Five (5) agencies involved in transportation, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD), the City of Texarkana, Arkansas, the City of Texarkana, Texas, and the Texarkana Urban Transit District (TUTD) submitted project lists. There were over 200 projects originally submitted for consideration.

The MPO staff met with members of the Technical Committee on June 17, 2009 for a project prioritization workshop. During the workshop, the MPO staff presented information from the public participation process. The committee members included representatives from each agency that submitted projects for consideration. The members reviewed the proposed projects and evaluated them based on comments from the public and transportation planning data. On July 28 and 29, 2009, the Technical Committee members met again to further prioritize projects based on anticipated revenue estimates and the coordination of projects across the region. The final list of projects were prioritized into four (4) categories: the first four (4) years of the MTP (2010 – 2013) which corresponds with the TIP time frame, the second six (6) years of the MTP (2014 – 2019), the last sixteen (16) years of the MTP (2020 – 2035), and projects for which there was no funding that could be reasonably anticipated but were considered important to fulfilling the vision for the transportation system. See Chapter 9: Financial Plan for a discussion on the sources of revenue and how the anticipated revenue estimates were derived.

One component of the *TUTS 2035 PLAN* was developed through a separate public involvement process. The Alliance Transportation Group, Inc., under contract to the Texarkana MPO, with the assistance of citizens from the Texarkana region, produced the Texarkana Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (2009). An executive summary of the bicycle and pedestrian plan is presented in Chapter 6: Bicycles and Pedestrians.

## **CONSULTATION WITH FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL RESOURCE AGENCIES**

The Texarkana MPO shall establish a timetable and a documented process to consult with the federal, state and local agencies listed below as part of the process to develop the metropolitan transportation plan. As part of the consultation process, these agencies will be invited to participate in discussions to formulate policies, programs, or strategies relevant to potential environmental mitigation activities and potential areas to carry out these activities as a result of the development of projects listed in the MTP.

Agencies to be consulted may include, but are not limited to, those federal, state and local agencies responsible for:

- Land Use Management
- Natural Resources
- Environmental Protection
- Conservation
- Wildlife
- Historic Preservation
- Planned Growth
- Economic Development
- Airport Operations
- Freight Movements
- Federal Land Management Agencies

## INCLUSION OF INDIAN TRIBES IN THE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS

To address the requirements of Section 106 of The National Highway Preservation Act that requires consultation with Indian Tribes during the planning process, the MPO sent an invitation to twenty-two (22) tribes on March 18, 2002. **Table 1.1** shows the tribes that were contacted and the subsequent status of the individual tribes' involvement.

On May 16, 2006, certified letters with return receipts were sent out to all persons on the public notification list. At the time the letters were sent, only two (2) tribes remained on the list: United Keetoowah Band and Caddo Nation of Oklahoma. The United Keetoowah Band requested that they be removed from the Notification List while the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma requested that they be kept on list.

## THE VISION

A "vision" is a statement of the preferred future or anticipated outcome for a group. The vision defines the ultimate goal that a group is trying to accomplish. It serves as a guide for the actions taken by the group collectively. The vision for the *TUTS 2035 PLAN* is:

***Improve the Texarkana region's quality of life by creating a multimodal transportation system that supports economic development and increases the safety and efficiency of the transportation system for both people and goods, while being environmentally responsible.***

## GOALS

The goals of the *TUTS 2035 PLAN* are:

- To develop a transportation plan that addresses the needs of all users and modes of travel
- To promote the efficient use of the existing transportation system
- To identify improvements to the transportation system that will support economic growth in the region
- To identify and preserve transportation corridors for future growth
- To identify the resources needed to implement identified improvements

**TABLE 1.1**

**INCLUSION OF INDIAN TRIBES IN PLANNING PROCESS**

<b>Name of Tribe</b>	<b>Response to 03/18/2002 Contact</b>	<b>Subsequent Contact</b>	<b>Response to 05/16/2006 Notification Update</b>	<b>On Notification List</b>
Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Caddo Tribe of Oklahoma	Yes - 03/29/2002	Not Applicable	Yes – 05/30/2006	Yes
Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma	No - 03/22/2002	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Citizen Band Potawatomi	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Comanche Tribe of Oklahoma	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Delaware Trust Board	Yes - 03/22/2002	Requested removal 03/24/2005	Not Applicable	No
Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Jena Bank of Choctaw Indians	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Kialgee Tribal Town	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Kickapoo of Kansas	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Kickapoo of Oklahoma	No - 03/22/2002	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Mescalero Apache Tribe	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians of Michigan	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Prairie Bank Potawatomi Council	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Quapaw Tribal Business Committee	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
Thlopthlocco Tribal Town	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No
United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee	No Response	Not Applicable	No – 05/31/2006	No
Wichita and Affiliated Tribes	No Response	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	No

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