

Appendix E
H-GAC's Regional Planning Process



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H-GAC is in the process of developing a consistent planning framework for linking the seven planning factors required by the Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) and the criteria that are used to evaluate specific projects for the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The framework is not finished, but substantial progress has been made. There are three steps involved in the framework:

1. The Seven Planning Factors
2. Planning Goals and Objectives
3. Performance Measures

Seven Planning Factors

TEA-21 formulated seven planning factors that had to be addressed as part of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). These seven factors replaced the 16 metropolitan and 23 statewide planning factors that were part of the prior transportation legislation (ISTEA). The seven factors are:

1. Support the economic vitality of the United States, the States and metropolitan areas, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
2. Increase the safety and security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
3. Increase the accessibility and mobility options available to people and freight;
4. Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, and improve quality of life;
5. Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight;
6. Promote efficient system management and operation; and
7. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

H-GAC's Planning Goals and Objectives

Starting with these planning factors and comments received from the general public, H-GAC has initiated a process to translate these factors into specific planning goals and objectives. At the current moment, the Transportation Policy Council (TPC) has approved an overall mission for the MPO, which is to:

Enhance mobility by providing an efficient, affordable, safe, and environmentally responsible transportation system for both people and goods.

Eight goals and specific objectives for each goal have been defined and are being integrated into the MTP (both the 2022 Update and the MTP 2025). The eight goals are:

Goal 1: Increase the number of travel choices for people & freight movement.

- ?? Evaluate transit options, including urban rail, in all travel corridors where major transportation improvements are being considered.
- ?? Provide transit options, where feasible, to those that cannot or choose not to drive a car.
- ?? Improve the ongoing public education programs on alternatives to driving alone.
- ?? Develop a variety of transportation solutions that meets the unique needs of each community in the region.
- ?? Develop a system of connected bicycle and pedestrian facilities within each community and throughout the region.
- ?? Evaluate adding new bicycle and pedestrian facilities in all new roadway construction or major maintenance projects.

Goal 2: Adequately maintain current roads & transit services.

- ?? Give priority to maintaining, operating, and managing existing roadways and transit services over expanding these facilities and services.

Goal 3: Promote coordinated land use & transportation development.

- ?? Transportation projects should support regional and local land-use policies and plans.
- ?? Transportation projects should promote community and neighborhood cohesion.

- ?? "Smart growth" and compact land-use development should be encouraged with appropriate transportation investments.

Goal 4: Improve access to and connections within the transportation system.

- ?? Provide convenient transfers between connecting methods of travel necessary to complete a trip.
- ?? Design future HOV facilities to provide easy access onto and off the facilities.
- ?? Improve local streets necessary for shorter distance trips.

Goal 5: Encourage the efficient movement of people and goods.

- ?? Consider the needs of freight movement in all aspects of transportation development.
- ?? Encourage the active involvement of freight shippers in transportation development.
- ?? Improve street and sidewalk access to transit services and encourage land uses that promote transit ridership.
- ?? Use new, proven technologies to increase the efficiency of our transportation system.

Goal 6: Establish an environmentally responsible system.

- ?? Minimize the negative impacts of transportation projects on the physical and social environment of communities.
- ?? Include in transportation project budgets sufficient funding to mitigate a project's environmental impacts to an acceptable level.
- ?? Give priority to programs that reduce vehicle emissions.
- ?? Provide incentives to encourage the use of alternatives to driving a car alone.

Goal 7: Create a cost effective and affordable transportation system.

- ?? Foster governmental cooperation to avoid duplication and minimize costs.
- ?? Encourage the joint development and operation of transportation facilities to reduce costs and maximize benefits.
- ?? Consider life cycle costs and cost/benefit analyses in transportation project selection.

Goal 8: Make the top priority the safe and secure movement of people and commodities.

- ?? Identify and improve roads for evacuation during emergencies and natural disasters and support emergency management programs.
- ?? Identify and maintain roads and railroads for the transfer of hazardous materials.
- ?? Design and operate transportation facilities and services to be safe and secure for the public.
- ?? Provide grade separations on major rail corridors, where feasible.
- ?? Identify unsafe locations and eliminate safety hazards.
- ?? Ensure safety and security on public transit.

In developing these goals and objectives, the public was involved during the entire process. Public involvement consists of a three-phase process of public outreach meetings in the early, intermediate, and final stages of plan development. The process reflects the education, outreach, and participation goals outlined in the H-GAC Transportation Public Involvement Plan by using a variety of mechanisms to involve the public including the distribution of newsletters, articles, and advertisements involving diverse media.

Future Directions

With the metropolitan area growing so rapidly, it is becoming imperative that we think about future land use arrangements and how they would influence future transportation demand and patterns. We are modeling the effects of a number of land use scenarios on future travel demand and will eventually make some recommendations to the TPC about adopting certain outcomes as being more efficient and equitable for the future transportation system. If adopted by our TPC, these outcomes would become add to or modify the existing goals and objectives.

Performance Measures

The final step has been to translate the goals and objectives into specific performance measures. These are quantifiable indices that allow us to both evaluate submitted projects as well as monitor the effectiveness of finished projects to see whether they actually accomplished their purposes. We are in the process of compiling the measures and illustrating them with specific examples. Once they are finished, they will be submitted to the TPC for approval. From that point on, they will be used explicitly as evaluation criteria for newly submitted projects.

Currently, we have defined seven categories of performance measures and 13 specific measures:

Traffic

1. Congestion Burden Index
2. Travel Rate Index

Transportation Choice

3. Transit Choice Ratio
4. Bicycle Choice Ratio
5. Pedestrian Choice Ratio

Safety

6. Safety Improvement Index for Hazard Elimination Program (HEP) projects
7. Safety index for non-HEP projects

Environmental

8. Accessibility Index

Financial/Funding

9. Local Participation
10. B/C Ratio

Economic Development

11. Major Employment Centers Supported

Goods Movement

12. Truck Burden Index
13. Truck Congestion Index

We will refine these measures and may add a few more. As mentioned, once they are approved by the TPC, they become formal criteria in the project selection process.