

14. TRANSPORTATION CONFORMITY PROCESS

BACKGROUND

Transportation conformity is a requirement of the federal Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 (CAAA) to ensure that air quality in regions designated as nonattainment for one or more National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) pollutants is not negatively impacted by new transportation plans, programs, and projects. Through this analysis, regions must demonstrate that emissions related to regional transportation projects do not exceed limits established in the State Implementation Plan (SIP).

The Houston-Galveston-Brazoria (HGB) region is designated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a severe and serious nonattainment area for the 2008 and 2015 ozone NAAQS, respectively. Due to these designations, all regionally significant projects must be included in the regional emissions analysis and found to conform before federal actions related to those projects can be taken. Nonattainment areas are required to conduct a conformity determination at least every four years, but the need could arise more frequently if:

- A new Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) or Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is adopted;
- An existing RTP or TIP is updated to add, delete, significantly delay, accelerate, or change the design scope of a regionally significant project;
- A SIP motor vehicle emissions budget (MVEB) is found adequate or approved; or
- An area is designated by EPA as nonattainment for ozone, carbon monoxide, particulate matter, or nitrogen dioxide.

The forthcoming RTP 2050 and recently adopted 2027-2030 TIP meet these requirements for our region.

CURRENT SITUATION

After adoption of the 2027-2030 TIP and in anticipation of the RTP 2050, H-GAC staff have initiated transportation conformity efforts to ensure that the projects included in the RTP 2050 meet federal requirements and that regional transportation improvements result in improved regional air quality. The analysis will demonstrate that the new project list is consistent with the applicable motor vehicle emissions budgets established in the SIP.

As this process formally kicks off, staff are reaching out to relevant stakeholders, including the Technical Advisory Committee, to provide an overview of the transportation conformity process, to review recent efforts undertaken by staff and regional partners to improve and otherwise streamline the conformity process, and to provide an outlook for the months ahead as this conformity cycle progresses. Interagency consultation with TxDOT, TCEQ, FHWA, FTA, and EPA is underway. Staff will return to the Committee as draft analysis materials and public comment opportunities become available.

ACTION REQUESTED

Discussion only.