



February 2, 2006

To: Metropolitan Policy Committee

From: Tom Schwetz and Petra Schuetz

Subject: Item 4.e – Report on Integration of Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Transportation System Plan(s) (TSP(s))

Action Recommended: Review information and provide direction to staff.

Issue Summary:

At its April 14, 2005 meeting, MPC unanimously passed the following motion:

"Amend the Unified Planning Work Program to include a work plan item to pursue a single work plan item that results in a single document that revises both the Regional Transportation Plan and the Transportation System Plan."

Staff has provided various updates to MPC on this work item's progress, most recently at MPC's October 20, 2005 meeting.

The effort to pursue a single plan document ties into four broader policy interests:

1. Reducing public confusion around regional transportation planning
2. Increasing the efficiency of regional transportation planning processes
3. Ensuring that whatever process is used does not compromise the federally-required process and deadlines
4. Ensuring that the process used results in coordination of the federal and state requirements in as efficient and understandable a manner as possible

To satisfy these policy interests, the range of options for MPC includes:

1. A full integration of the two processes and documents,
2. A streamlining of the two processes for closer and more efficient coordination
3. Two completely separate processes

Option 1 is not feasible given the different schedule requirements for state and federal plans, and the limited resources available for updating local TSPs. Option 3 would not be viable under the proposed TPR amendments or under federal requirements, which call for coordination and consistency between the federally-required RTP and local plans. The objective of not compromising the federally-required process and deadlines needs to be factored into the level of coordination that will be possible. Based on this assessment, staff has developed a proposal for the implementation of Option 2. This proposal is summarized below.

Staff Proposal

Over the past several months staff has analyzed the three options above; evaluating legal, process, and cost opportunities and constraints. As described above, staff recommends Option 2 - to streamline the processes for closer and more efficient coordination. Staff conducted research on national trends in the use of techniques for providing broad public access to the complex regional transportation planning process. MPO's across the country are embracing the concept of enhancing the overall MPO process, including the development of a hardcopy plan document, with a web-based, interactive public engagement tool. The overall effort has been termed 'e-MPO'.

At the March 2006 MPC meeting staff will present a work program describing the phasing of a multi-jurisdictional effort to move the RTP's public engagement efforts toward a more interactive electronic format. This will be a coordinated, multi-jurisdictional effort, implemented in phases. In the first phase, the following elements are suggested:

1. Transform the existing RTP document into an electronic format where hyperlinks are strategically placed for explanatory benefit to the end user, an expanded executive summary is developed, and a series of graphics describe the relationship between local plans and the MPO's process and products in a regional context. The '3-dimensional' ability that electronic navigation allows, will simplify explanation of the existing processes without over-simplifying the intricate relationships.
 - i. A page would be developed that would provide 'one-stop shopping' for the multiple transportation plans which exist in the region. This page would describe the purpose of each plan and the interrelationships among the plan documents and processes. Links would then be provided to each of the plan documents themselves.
2. Develop a series of static map layers illustrating the existing maps in the RTP. This could then evolve to the point where interactive illustration helps the end user navigate transportation planning from 'idea to construction.' In the beginning, each regionally significant or federally-funded project shall be highlighted on a map with a link to a fact sheet describing each project's relevance to policies, jurisdictional authority, basic facts regarding cost, scope, and impact or benefit to the community, etc.

3. **Back-side database coordination.** Streamlining the transportation planning process is a challenge. The RTP e-MPO proposal will include the development of a project database, starting with a data field template including specific information for each project identified in the RTP, using the information in the existing RTP project lists as a starting point. When an amendment is made or project details change, the database could serve as a 'one stop' data repository that has the ability to simultaneously update the e-MPO public information pages, send notice to regional partners, solicit project details from engineering staff and trigger a notice for MTIP or respective TSP update requirements.

In future phases, full interactive mapping, regional database coordination for MTIP tracking, and services related to communications plan implementation for specific projects could be developed.

This approach addresses the four policy interests in a variety of beneficial ways.

1. Reducing public confusion around regional transportation planning

- e-MPO, by nature is 'customer centric'. The MPO can transform both policy interests with current public interest to organize principles for their online programs.
- 'Public confusion' is subjective. Policy makers, the public, public, special interest groups, all have a different set of interests and priorities. e-MPO will give individuals the tools to navigate the answers to their own questions as opposed to what may have been prescribed in an executive summary of RTP/TSP relationships.
- An e-MPO program will offer broad availability of services. There are several ways in which graphic illustration and interactive information exchange can be integrated. Further, links to partner services and processes will be more accessible and intuitive for the end user.
- Planning documents have been traditionally set within a two-dimensional or 'horizontal' framework. The MPO is looking for ways to build the cross-agency integration that will create seamless interactions for their customers with electronic links to a variety of resources within minutes.
- Personalization is emerging. The idea of tailoring what government provides to the individual user comes about as an evolution of the intentions-based approach where a basic form of segmenting information has been used. Let individuals pursue questions that have meaning to them.

2. Increasing the efficiency of regional transportation planning processes

- Interest in the horizontal integration of plans has been apparent for some time; what is new are decided efforts to integrate vertically—across federal, state/regional, and local levels of government. Governments that attempt this

level of integration face greater technical complexity as well as new challenges in organizing the governance and funding of these new initiatives, but the opportunity cost of not integrating technological tools will slow proactive public engagement in the long run.

- e-MPO will be cost effective. The cost of developing multi-layered explanations in hardcopy form could take years of trial and reprint and consume resources. With e-MPO technologies, refinements to explanations, changes to maps and linkages will be far easier with electronic editing and real-time ability to update messages. Color enhancements, GIS, hyperlinks, and interactive components will be more engaging and easier to understand. Further, what is produced electronically can easily be printed, emailed or added to a database.

3. Ensuring that whatever process is used does not compromise the federally-required process and deadlines

- The federal RTP process and local TSP documents will function more efficiently without being tied to one another. e-MPO can integrate the similarities by providing hyperlinks to issues, answers to questions, and links to external information, without disrupting the time-sensitive federal or local requirements, timelines and processes.

4. Ensuring that the process used results in coordination of the federal and state requirements in as efficient and understandable a manner as possible

- e-MPO has the potential to evaluate the content of the RTP and TSP information items by soliciting feedback and tracking electronic activity levels to get a sense of what is important to the public. Real-time adjustments can be made to electronic networks with far more ease than multiple printing iterations.