



March 1, 2006

To: Metropolitan Policy Committee

From: Tom Schwetz and Petra Schuetz

Subject: 4.d – Integration of Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and TSPs

**Action Recommended: Review and Discuss e-MPO Work Program.  
Provide feedback to staff.**

**Issue Summary:**

Regional transportation planning is an information-intensive process. The regional transportation system cuts across several elements of general policy interest (e.g., economic development, environmental impacts, livability). As well, the process entails various levels of state and federal requirements. Combined, these two factors create a complex challenge for engagement by the public and the coordination of information at the staff level.

As the MPO region continues to grow, the volume of movement across our aging transportation infrastructure increases, and the complexity of transportation planning, policy-setting, and decision-making intensifies. Transportation planning involves a growing network of interrelationships between short- and long-term investments, agency partnerships and the public. Benefits and costs must be weighed, freight and passenger travel needs balanced, and the pressures of land use, environmental impact, and economic competitiveness considered, while meeting both state and federal requirements. When developing meaningful opportunities for public engagement, transportation planning is further challenged to provide clear, simple, and ongoing information about projects and processes.

As just one example of the public engagement challenge, there are several overlapping and interrelated long range transportation plans and short-term programming documents covering the Central Lane MPO area including the following:

Long-Range Plan	Short-Range Programming Document
Oregon Transportation Plan (OTP)	Oregon Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)
Lane County Transportation System Plan (TSP)	Lane County Capital Improvement Program (CIP)
Central Lane MPO RTP	Central Lane Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (MTIP)
Eugene-Springfield TSP (TransPlan)	Eugene and Springfield CIPs
Coburg TSP	

These plans contain the policy, projects, and other implementation strategies identified by various agencies as necessary to address future growth in the region and meet the existing set of federal and state requirements. Depending on his or her location, a resident in the region might need to be familiar with three of the plans and two or three of the programming documents to answer basic questions related to the cost, location, and timing of a project of interest.

Over the past eight months MPC has had several discussions around what has been termed the ‘integration’ of the RTP and the Eugene-Springfield TSP (TransPlan) documents. As illustrated above, this issue is actually much broader than the coordination of those two documents.

Over the last several years, many MPOs have begun embracing interactive technologies to help organize, streamline, and effectively communicate the complexities of transportation planning by developing tools that have benefits to several groups affected by the existing information challenges. This approach appears to have significant advantages over alternatives using hardcopy documents.

This memo outlines a first phase work program involving a multi-jurisdictional effort to move the Central Lane MPO’s public engagement and staff-level coordination efforts toward a more interactive electronic format. This outline identifies three primary groups affected by the regional transportation planning process; the public and policy makers, MPO staff and local jurisdiction staff. The goal is to develop a set of tools that will benefit all groups through the use of web-based technologies. The first part of this work program is meant to address the MPC’s interests regarding the integration of the regional plan documents.

### **What is e-MPO?**

Electronic or ‘e’-technologies have many definitions, but generally describe activities that take place by digital processes over a computer network, usually the Internet. These activities involve the electronic exchange of information, to receive or provide information, illustrate concepts or processes and provide more dynamic opportunities for an interactive public engagement tool. The overall effort for the Central Lane MPO is being termed ‘e-MPO’.

### **Why e-MPO?**

In recent MPC discussions relating to the integration of regional plan documents, four primary regional policy interests have emerged around how we engage the public in the region’s transportation planning process:

- 1. Reduce public confusion around regional transportation planning**
- 2. Increase the efficiency of regional transportation planning processes**
- 3. Ensure that whatever process is used does not compromise the federally-required process and deadlines**
- 4. Ensure that the process developed to address these interests results in coordination of the federal and state requirements in as efficient and understandable a manner as possible**

Communications technologies available for engaging the public are changing fast. The Internet and the personal computer have fundamentally changed our lives, affecting the way we work, learn and interact. The concept of incorporating an array of electronic engagement tools into transportation planning is a way to use new technologies to provide more convenient access to regional transportation planning information and services, to improve the quality of these services and to provide greater opportunities to participate in regional transportation processes.

e-MPO strategies can address all of these policy interests while creating even broader benefits to the public, the MPO, and staff at all levels (federal, state, regional, local) and improving coordination among local, state, and federal jurisdictions. First, the public will be provided with less complicated, more graphically oriented information on the 'front-end' as well as easier opportunities to interact with the planning process. Second, staff will develop systems that will facilitate planning coordination on the 'back-end,' improving efficiency and cost effectiveness. Finally, the jurisdictions will be able to utilize both the public and planning coordination efforts and work together to leverage other regional transportation programs and coordinate major projects more effectively.

### **Outline and Benefits of Phase One**

The interrelationships between the three groups are many. The overall goal is to provide the public and policy makers, staff and agency partners with an improved set of tools, based on interactive technologies, to use in the regional transportation planning process. Highlighted within the following e-MPO work program are suggested strategies and products. The evolving result will be a set of interactive tools to streamline the inter-relationships between *what* information the participant groups want and *how* they want it.

The e-MPO effort would be implemented through a combination of coordinated efforts among various staff teams (TPC, KeepUsMoving.info partnership, regional project coordination team) as well as involving the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) in the development of the front-end. This effort can serve as one of the primary ways in which the MPO's Public Involvement Plan (currently being developed by the CAC) is implemented.

In order to illustrate the purpose, function and benefit of the e-MPO concept, answers to several typical questions are identified below, from the perspective of one or more of the primary affected groups. Three typical questions - one from each participant group - which the MPO answers and/or coordinates on a regular basis include:

**Public:** How will this project affect me (location, cost, timing, opportunities for input)?

**MPO Staff:** Has this project met all of the federal and state requirements in order to advance to the next step in the implementation process (status in RTP, MTIP, air quality conformity, etc.)?

**Local Jurisdictions:** Long-run – do the RTP and MTIP support local priorities or are changes needed to better coordinate with local needs? Short-run - What resources are

needed at this stage of project development and will this project's construction conflict with other projects in the same area?

The e-MPO strategies have the potential to efficiently answer typical questions such as these, and address other coordination challenges. As e-MPO strategies are outlined below, answers to the sample questions will be used to illustrate specific benefits and to show how the e-MPO response to each question will provide a more streamlined, easier to access, and/or more informative and straightforward solution than current practices.

### Phase One Tasks

1. Convert the existing Regional Transportation Plan document into a more interactive electronic format:

- Hyperlinks will be strategically placed for ease of use by the end user;
- An expanded 'directional' executive summary will be developed. The summary will, in more detail, describe the relationship between the federal, state and local plans, programs and processes. This directional summary would also provide links to local and State plans, and links to more detailed information and graphic illustrations of these interrelationships;
- A series of graphics and accompanying text will describe the relationship between local plans and the MPO's process and products in a regional context;
- Links to local TSPs will be included.

#### *Benefits*

- The nature of electronic navigation, with the ability to follow different information paths by choosing useful links, will simplify and personalize explanations of the existing processes without over-simplifying the intricate relationships.
- e-MPO concepts center on the end-user's experience. Compared to hardcopy, format and content feedback is easier and quicker to change or update. Graphic illustrations have more versatility and can be integrated more fully with the electronic tools.

#### *Answering Questions*

**Public:** *How will this project affect me?* A person will be able to click on a project list and see where a project is in the planning process, its location and current cost estimate and see additional links that would take him/her to the local jurisdiction where the project is being developed.

2. Develop the Central Lane MPO website home page to provide ‘one-stop shopping’ for the multiple transportation plans and programs:

- A focal point of the updated Central Lane MPO home page will be a link to an MPO map illustrating different layers of the existing maps in the RTP. Each regionally significant or federally-funded project will be highlighted on a map with a link to a fact sheet describing each project’s current status, relevant policies, jurisdictional authority, basic facts regarding cost, scope, impact or benefit to the community, etc.;
- The home page will also describe the purpose of each of the transportation plans (OTP, RTP and local TSPs) and the interrelationships among the plan documents and processes, as well as the plan linkages to the programming documents (STIP, MTIP, CIPs);
- Information on the status of the various plans will be provided. During updates of the RTP, content on the update will be highlighted. Links to feedback mechanisms (e-mail, surveys, etc.) will be developed to better facilitate online public comment. Other update content will include an FAQ page, sign-up for e-mail updates, a schedule of involvement opportunities, and more.

*Benefits*

- People have different perspectives and knowledge bases. Policy makers, the public, special interest groups, etc. all have a different set of interests and priorities. e-MPO will give people more choice and flexibility to navigate to information related to their own interests as opposed to what may have been provided in, for example, an executive summary of the Regional Transportation Plan.
- The ability to personalize information allows the end user to tailor what information they obtain from the MPO website by navigating to answer their specific questions. This will provide better customer satisfaction and assist in reducing confusion.

*Answering Questions*

**Public:** *How will this project affect me?* A person will be able to see a prominent map on the central page and see that an upcoming project will be on their commute route. The person could then click on the project and be directed to a general fact sheet and be able to identify if and when the project will have a traffic impact.

**MPO Staff:** *Has this project met all of the federal and state requirements in order to proceed?* By looking at the central map layers and associated project information sheets, staff will be able to see if there have been recent changes to the project – in cost, scope, or timing – and be able to reference a set of “check-offs” that will track fulfillment of the relevant requirements.

**Local Jurisdictions:** *Will this project's construction conflict with other projects in the same area?* By looking at the centralized map layers, local jurisdictions will be able to graphically see how well the plan is synchronized with local priorities as well as what other projects going to construction might interact with theirs.

3. Leverage existing regional programs and partnerships.

- e-MPO will link regional planning initiatives such as the Congestion Mitigation Program (CMP) and regional project coordination to the regional site.
- Programs such as the CMP will be able to use the centralized mapping technologies for communications planning around major construction projects.

*Benefits*

- By leveraging other regional programs and processes within a single framework, the tendency for duplicate efforts can be reduced or eliminated. Further, easy public access to other regional programs will enhance the MPO's public engagement efforts. The CMP is currently developing a more comprehensive program that provides communications planning for major regional transportation projects when construction will have a major effect on travel.

*Answering Questions*

**Public:** *How will this project affect me?* A person will be able to see a prominent map on the central page and see that an upcoming project will be on their commute route. The person could then click on the project and be directed to project specific information through the CMP that provides current information about possible lane closures and alternative routing.

**Local Jurisdictions:** *Will this project's construction conflict with other projects?* By looking at the centralized map layers, staff will be able to see how a proposed change to project timing (or any other aspect of a project) might affect another project, or might have significant cumulative effects (along with other projects) on travel, and thus adjustments can be made.

4. Develop Back-end database coordination. The e-MPO effort will include the development of a regional project database accessible by staff from local agencies. Currently, updates to the RTP, MTIP and local project updates are coordinated, but are in different formats and locations. Coordinating the assembly of current project information in an accurate and timely manner that serves the needs of multiple programming documents (e.g., STIP, MTIP) is a time consuming, tedious process.

Develop a data template for both the RTP and MTIP. This electronic source will be more consistent with local and state project coordination efforts;

When an amendment is made or project details change, the database will serve as a 'one stop' data repository. Local jurisdictions will be able to input their project update information into a template, saving both their time and that of MPO staff (this is now coordinated via email and several phone conversations for each project);

The database will serve as a basis 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 RTP, MTIP or TSP amendment or update requirements.

### *Benefits*

A centralized database will increase the cost effectiveness of the project coordination processes used to develop project lists for the RTP and MTIP. With e-MPO database technologies, changes to maps will be far easier if they are directly connected to a centralized database on the backside. Electronic editing and real-time ability to update messages will be provided. Colored graphics, geographic information system (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 and 'real-time' adjustments can be made to electronic networks with far more ease than multiple printing iterations.

### *Answering Questions*

**Public:** *How will this project affect me?* With a more transparent connection between database project updates and the public website, people will be able to see current project information closer to when it becomes official (through adoption) than is currently possible.

**Local Jurisdictions:** *Is any other jurisdiction's project conflicting with our project?* By looking at the centralized map layers *that are updated by the back-end database*, staff will be able to see that a recent change to another jurisdiction's project might affect their project and thus adjustments can be made.

## **Timeframe**

Many parts of first phase of e-MPO will be completed by the end of this fiscal year. The products associated with these changes are well integrated with existing staff work.

### By July 1, 2006

- First generation of regional maps
- Electronic RTP
- Directional summary of the interrelationship of the region's multiple plans
- Links to local and state plans and processes
- Links to regional programs (Congestion Mitigation Program)
- Identify database format
- Develop what information will be collected for the database
- Implement a pilot project

## **Future Phases**

Future phases of the e-MPO should be implemented within the next two years. The goal will be to continue refining, adding sophistication and usability to the e-MPO structure as it develops into a mainstay for Central Lane MPO planning and outreach.