

Public Perceptions
Regarding the Draft
2011 to 2015
Strategic Plan of the
Texas Department of
Transportation:

Focus Group Results

Work performed under TxDOT RMC 0-6581-TI, Task 5



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
Key Focus Group Observations	1
Communication Elements.....	2
Prioritizing the Goals.....	3
Introduction	5
Participant Recruitment.....	5
Discussion of Goals	5
Vote Results on Six Goals.....	17
Conclusions	19
Recommendations	19
APPENDIX A: Notes for Each Focus Group.....	21
APPENDIX B: Demographics of Focus Groups	37
APPENDIX C: Discussion Guide	39
APPENDIX D: Draft 2011-2015 Strategic Plan of TxDOT	43
APPENDIX E: Slides Presented to Focus Groups	56

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A strategic transportation plan must reflect the interests and desires of several groups. It must illustrate the issues and challenges faced by the agency and the solutions that will address them. It must be aspirational and visionary, but also descriptive. One important element that must be satisfied is public acceptance. To that end, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) contracted with the Texas Transportation Institute to obtain feedback from Texans through focus groups on the draft 2011 to 2015 Strategic Plan. Most of the focus group participants had attended previous discussions about problems and improvements goals and were already familiar with TxDOT's intent to gain the public perspective on ways they can do better. Three cities were selected from the original eight targeted in the previous phase: Arlington, Brownwood, and El Paso. The locations offered geographical diversification as well as representation from both urban and rural areas.

Each of the six goals specified in the strategic plan were addressed:

Goal: *Cultivate an organizational structure and strategy designed to address the future multimodal transportation needs of all Texans.*

Goal: *Facilitate the development and exchange of comprehensive multimodal funding strategies with transportation program and project partners.*

Goal: *Maintain the existing Texas transportation system.*

Goal: *Promote congestion relief strategies.*

Goal: *Enhance system connectivity.*

Goal: *Enhance safety for all Texas transportation system users.*

The focus groups discussed the goal statements and the objectives, strategies, and performance measures designed to achieve them. Participants were asked rank these goals in order of importance; in Arlington and El Paso, the participants were asked to vote before and after the detailed discussion.

Key Focus Group Observations

Comments from the three focus groups were similar in a number of ways. There were many positive statements about the interest TxDOT was showing in public opinions, and the material was generally well received. A few improvements were suggested for each goal and the associated material. There were also several comments that broadly applied to all the goals, the process, the reporting, and the information that was being displayed for the Plan in general. A few key suggestions are listed below:

- Prioritize the goals – Identify which goals or elements of goals are most important.
- Reporting – The display and level of information was frequently noted as a way to gain (or lose) public input and trust. Statements such as those below suggest that an aggressive, continuous and far-reaching public input process should be maintained:
 - “We’re paying the taxes, we should be able to see what’s happening.”
 - “Show us the condition or performance in color, on maps and in pictures.”
 - “Show us the information on-line.”
 - “Report it more often for important items if it doesn’t cost too much.”
 - “More information means TxDOT looks like they have less to hide.”

- “Having transparency listed in the goals so much makes the reader ask ‘why?’ and suspect there is a problem.”
- Contact information – Participants wanted a point of contact (e.g., email, phone) as a way to let them express their opinions about conditions or about thresholds/standards that are being used to grade the conditions. In addition, they would like a specific local contact for projects or an expert to contact about particular programs. A “hotline” would be good summary of what was being requested.
- Describe the comparison points – Providing the readers a link to additional information about each performance measure is a key education element. Answering questions such as “What is good?”, “What is key?”, “What is safe?”, “What is a pavement condition rating?”, “What is a state congestion index?” will be important as the information is more widely disseminated.
- Use clearer wording – It would be better to remove the jargon that is used in the Plan, but if it cannot be removed or softened, it should be explained. Participants suggested that the Plan “use words that regular people can understand.” One said “it seems like a team of lawyers wrote this and, in some cases, they didn’t even talk to each other.” Links to a glossary or a method to define technical terms would be helpful.
- Evaluate current and future conditions and show the trends – Participants wanted to know the current and future conditions and how those compared to desirable conditions or targets, but they also wanted to know the trend in the measures. “Are we getting better or worse and how quickly?” was the way a number of participants stated it.
- Interest in multimodal solutions – There was a significant interest in solutions other than building roadways, and the participants seemed uncomfortable with the few mentions of a comprehensive transportation solution strategy. A few mentioned feeling like the “multimodal” term was used to make the document politically correct rather than representing a commitment.
- TxDOT has to bring the public into this plan – Follow-up public information and continued consultation will be important for the long-term success of the Plan.
- Awareness should be the “first thing” – Making Texans aware of the issues and the information that has been developed via the internet, on electronic billboards, or through any other medium was mentioned by several participants.
- Details! – More than one participant said they wanted more “meat and potatoes” with the Plan, both because they were curious about the problems and solutions and because they thought the details would reinforce the perception of expertise being applied to the problems.

Communication Elements

In various ways the participants raised the issues of “communication” and “trust” together. The linkage was most frequently made on the topic of reporting the measures, but the suggestions were made on several topics.

- Frequent reporting of elements or conditions – They want information very frequently if events or conditions change or if the cost to make it available on the internet would be relatively small. The groups had a sensitivity to the cost of generating the data but felt that if the information

changed or if the cost to produce it was very low, there was no reason to not provide it to the public. Annual updates would be appropriate where information is difficult to update, regular data collection schedules are used, or where the measure does not change very much.

- Display – Maps that allow users to look at conditions, performance, and factors on specific roads were the preferred way to report almost every measure. From a practical standpoint, some measures may not be “mapable,” but connecting various database elements such as pavement condition, crash rate, congestion levels, and improvement projects to map layers allows the public to ask their own questions. They can perform their own examination and gain a comfort level by connecting their experiences with the measures being used to guide investments.
- Use of data – There seemed to be recognition that the measures and data in the maps would not be used as “everyday reading” for most people, but the availability was important to ensuring that Texans feel their transportation funding is being well-spent. This will present some challenges (e.g., pavement maintenance efforts on roads that are not “falling apart”), but providing the information with explanations would appear to be better than any suggestion of hiding the data.
- Feedback – Any communication tool should have a response mechanism that allows and even elicits comments on the information. One of the most frequent comments on this topic was along the lines of “who do I call for more information?” A phone number, email account, web address, or other information should be provided.

Prioritizing the Goals

Safety and congestion were viewed as the two most important issues among the five “votes” taken in the three focus groups (Exhibit S-1). The discussions during the focus groups also indicated that these two topics were the greatest concerns. The maintenance and connectivity goals were the next highest rated goals. Interestingly (and perhaps indicative of the challenge faced), the funding goal was not very highly rated, although the participants recognized the funding shortfall faced by TxDOT.

Exhibit S-1. Prioritizing the Goals

Goal	Brownwood		El Paso		Arlington	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Maintain	n/a	2.5 [○]	3.5 [○]	2.9*	4.1	3.9 [○]
Funding	n/a	4.0	4.7	4.7	4.3	5.0
Congestion	n/a	1.6*	2.7*	3.4 [○]	2.4*	1.9*
Connectivity	n/a	2.6 [○]	4.0	3.9	3.4 [○]	2.8*
Safety	n/a	1.1*	2.2*	2.4*	2.6*	2.7*
Organizational Structure	n/a	3.3	3.9 [○]	3.7 [○]	3.9 [○]	4.8

*1st or 2nd highest ranked

○3rd or 4th highest ranked

Although developing a prioritized list of goals was not the point of the focus group, the level of importance indicated by the participants is an indication of the level of effort that may be needed to convince the public of the importance of the goal. The maintenance and connectivity goals, notably, were ranked as more important in the “after” period in the two locations where both votes were conducted, suggesting the information received during the meeting was helpful in swaying public opinion.

INTRODUCTION

In Part 1 of this effort, TxDOT desired to develop an understanding of the current perceptions of the public about TxDOT. The focus groups assessed the strengths and weaknesses of TxDOT. Issues and priorities that are important to the public were identified. The results of this research effort provided input to the department as the new strategic plan was developed. With the proposed plan developed, TxDOT wished to get reactions from a small number of people that participated in the earlier research effort. Out of the eight focus groups held in Part 1, three were selected for additional conversations: Arlington, Brownwood, and El Paso. These three locations offer a geographic diversification as well as representation from both urban and rural areas.

A discussion guide was developed to direct the focus group conversation pertaining to TxDOT's Draft Strategic Plan for 2011 to 2015. Since the focus groups were primarily comprised of individuals who participated in Part 1 they already had an understanding of the process that TxDOT is going through. Both the Discussion Guide and the Draft Strategic Plan are found in the Appendix.

Each participant was sent the draft plan for review prior to the focus group meeting. The six goals were discussed one at a time. The facilitator asked questions about appropriate phrases, technical terms, significance, and sought feedback on other goals that would be more useful and meaningful. Each of the objectives, strategies, and performance measures were discussed as well.

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

For these three focus group sessions, the participants from the previous phases of this project were recruited in Arlington, Brownwood, and El Paso. In Arlington, six previous participants agreed to attend the session, and six new participants were recruited via Craigslist. In Brownwood, all former participants agreed to attend, and one new person was recruited by word-of-mouth from one of the previous participants. In El Paso, six previous participants agreed to attend; additional participants were recruited from past participants of other sessions/surveys, via Craigslist, and via word of mouth from registered participants.

DISCUSSION OF GOALS

Goal: Cultivate an organizational structure and strategy designed to address the future multimodal transportation needs of all Texans.

The goal is seen as lengthy and not completely clear. To the participants, it means: planning ahead, building an organization, talking about the future, thinking through projects, bureaucracy, committee, and left hand and right hand don't know what they're doing. Some see this goal as an internal goal for TxDOT while others can see that it is intended for internal and external purposes. One person described the goal as communicating internally first, then going to the public. The wording of the goal is similar to the maintenance goal in that it sounds like nothing has been done in this area yet.

One participant told a story about contacting TxDOT about highway lighting. He spoke to a TxDOT employee who puts in the lamps for illumination. That person said that he didn't make the decisions and directed the participant to another employee who sent this participant back to the first. He went back and forth without resolution. The example points to the problem of accountability. "It's not my job" doesn't work when dealing with the public.

Re-wording this goal to something like, "Operate the department effectively and efficiently to address the travel needs of all Texans" got mixed reviews. Participants in Arlington and Brownwood liked the new wording but participants in El Paso preferred the first wording of the goal. In either case, they recommended including present and future needs and ensuring that internal and external elements are included. Some said that internal and external goals should be separated. Another person chimed in saying, "Effective should read 'accountability' because if one guy messes up, the other guy should also be held accountable. You can't be effective without accountability." Heads nodded in agreement.

Discussion about this goal got the Brownwood focus group participants talking about communication. Several indicated the need for a communication goal in the strategic plan.



Objectives

The first objective includes the development of a communication plan that fosters transparency. One participant said that transparency needs to be external, but it is written like an internal goal. The word, transparency is used so much that it raises concern. "Is there an issue with transparency? It is obvious from this goal that the department is not very transparent," said one person.

Timely, accurate and understandable
- I like these layman terms.

“Timely, accurate and understandable - I like these layman terms,” said a participant. On time project design fits in with this goal and is very clear.

A participant stated, “Implement performance measures means getting more bang for the buck.”

Strategies

The key communication role played by the solutions being offered was clear when the discussion turned to the example list of strategies. Comments such as the following were accompanied by statements such as “Now I’m starting to really understand what is going on.”

- “Examples are needed for the lay person.”
- “Keep it simple and write these at the 4th grade level.”
- “Need to be clear and succinct.”

When speaking about collaboration with local and regional communities and stakeholders, one person shared the need to take a holistic approach. He said that TxDOT needs to convince cities and counties to reduce urban sprawl, push toward green development, high rises, etc. When asked if he thinks this is the responsibility of TxDOT, he replied, “I think their mission should include convincing those who do land planning to stop allowing sprawl.”

Confusing Jargon

- Participants don’t know what Fund 6 is.
- What does “future” mean? – Participants suggested that TxDOT should convene a group to talk about the future transportation goals and needs.
- Partnership – Who is the partner? And how involved in the decision-making are they?

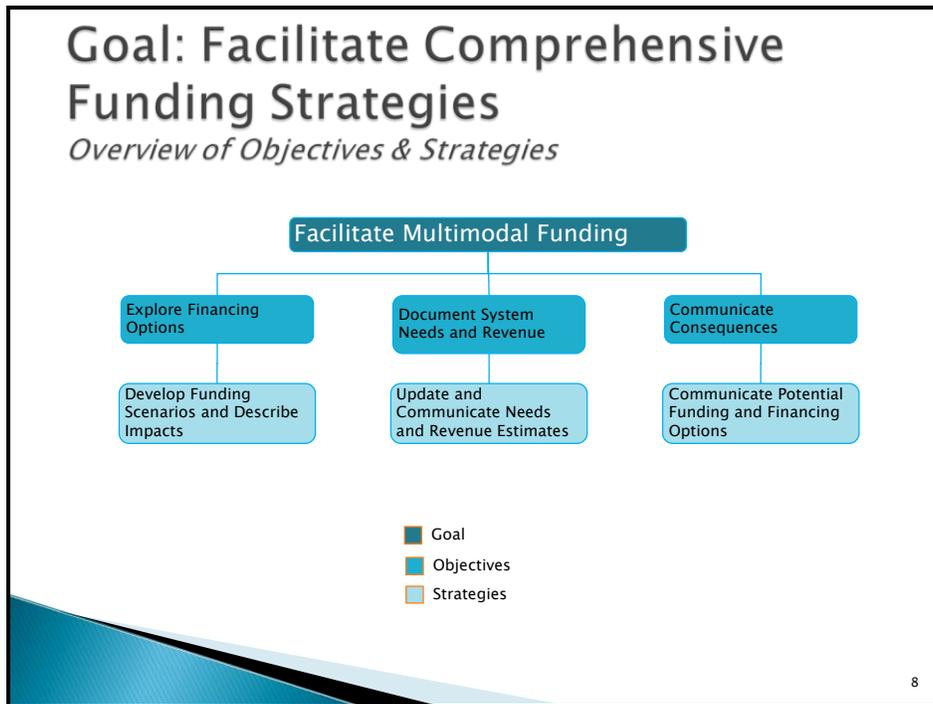
Goal: Facilitate the development and exchange of comprehensive multimodal funding strategies with transportation program and project partners.

The goal statement is confusing, too long and filled with words that many participants did not understand. The focus group researchers developed an alternate goal wording that tested better, but a simpler version than the original goal must be used. Discussions of partners, programs, Fund 6, and funding scenarios did not fare much better. Participants wanted more information on who the partners were, what was included in the program, and were confused by “scenarios and impacts.” A strategy statement like “explore funding options” elicited much better response, and participants were in favor of those actions. “Fund 6” has no meaning to the general public.

Highlight the public’s role in developing solutions.

The focus groups suggested public involvement in developing solutions and financing strategies. Greater involvement should lead to a more comprehensive set of strategies as well as more public support for the eventual plan.

A suggestion for improving the usefulness of the information developed in this goal was to also present data that compare the expected funding to the received revenue. This seemed like a logical element that TxDOT staff would want to have and, therefore, one that would not require much work to report to the public. Communicating the consequences of low or inadequate funding also appeared to be a useful element of any eventual financial strategy investigation.



Objectives

The financial objectives were seen as appropriate and useful. Identifying financial options and estimating the amount of funding and needs were viewed as important elements of the financial solution. Creating estimates of the needs and revenues was seen as a basic element of the financial analysis. Identifying the consequences of the financial decisions was also seen as a valuable exercise.

Strategies

Actions to create a variety of funding scenarios, need levels, and revenue estimates were viewed as good ideas to carry out the goal of identifying funding strategies. The analysis of options is necessary, and if proper documentation is provided and good communication methods are used, the information was seen as providing a much needed information base for discussions.

Measures

The measures were viewed as a good combination of procedural elements (e.g., number of options) and descriptions of the results of the strategies (e.g., forecast accuracy and customer satisfaction). Both types of measures were seen as useful and valuable.

Confusing Jargon

- Who are the partners? – There were many questions and some confusion expressed about the partners. Some participants assumed these were private sector toll road builders.
- What is Fund 6?
- “Development and exchange” does not add value or clarify meaning.
- “Multimodal” may be a useful term, but all projects should be included in “comprehensive” without the need for a multimodal label.

Goal: Maintain the existing Texas transportation system.

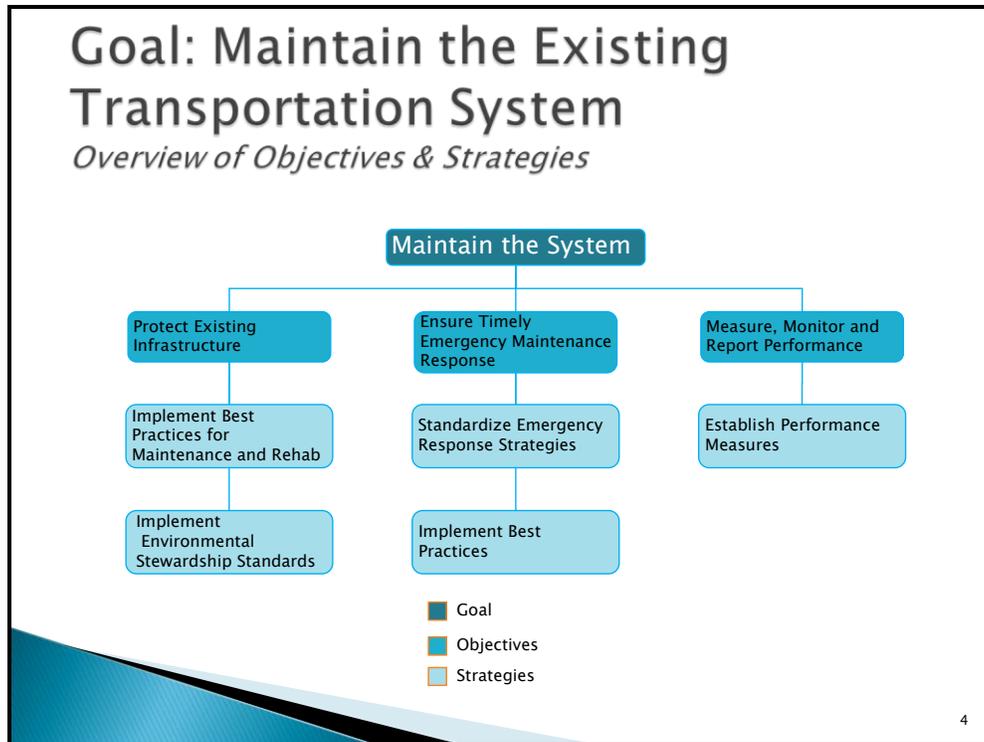
The focus groups generally understood the goal and measures used in the maintenance goal discussion. There was a preference for phrasing and focus such as “evaluate and improve the system.” This would indicate that any changes to the system were the product of study and that the goal is to improve conditions when possible. One participant said “I don’t want them to maintain the bad stuff.” “Keeping things up to date” was another way that their interests were expressed. Success would be seen when conditions are better after projects are completed.

Participants also wanted to know the current conditions and the methods used to measure and evaluate the system before they would agree that the goal and measures were reasonable. The use of terms such as “best practices,” “standards,” and “good” are either confusing or suspicious. Participants wanted to know who decides these terms, if there is any input from the public, and if the vagueness is a reflection of the fact that there are a lot of unknowns.

Maintenance is like brushing teeth: you don’t really see the benefit, but the situation is bad if you don’t do the action.

The “timely” wording is helpful in describing the goal and strategy. One participant suggested that maintenance is like brushing teeth: you don’t really see the benefit, but the situation is bad if you don’t do the action. There was also some confusion about what “system” the goal was referring to.

There seemed to be too many objectives for people to believe there would be adequate focus on the problems. Participants suggested a prioritized list of objectives might be appropriate. There also seemed to be some concern that innovations might not be pursued if “maintaining” were the goal rather than “improving” or “keeping conditions up to date.”



Objectives

The two objective topics appeared to cover the concerns of participants – regular maintenance and emergency or rapid response roadwork. The word “protect” was a concern of some participants who interpreted it as another word for “stagnant.” Performing the same functions with the same strategies would be supported, but the participants saw road maintenance in a more active role and one which seeks “improvement.”

Timely emergency response is an element of a complete program, but participants may have had a more expansive role for this topic. Roadwork, as well as crashes, vehicle breakdowns, weather emergencies, and other events were words used to describe their understanding of timely emergency response. This input indicates that additional explanation is needed.

Strategies

The phrase “best practices” sounds like the correct and appropriate term, but there is a concern about who defines the best and what effect that has on the project scale, budget, and cost effectiveness.

The other two strategies contain fuzzy words (e.g., stewardship and standardized) but generally were treated as good ideas. The connection between “standardized” and “good/best” was less clear to the participants; some effort should be made to ensure that the “standardized” procedures are as good as can be obtained.

Performance Measures

Both measures were generally viewed as good, but the desire for more specifics was clearly present in the discussions about performance measures. The focus groups expressed a general wish that the measures be understandable and have explanations for terms and ratings wherever possible.

The focus on the condition of “lane-miles” seems out of step with a concern for people. Adding a measure of “percent of person travel on roads in good condition” would align the measure with the people concern and be supported by existing data sources. Shortening the emergency closure time is also a good outcome that would be identified with the example measure.

Confusing Jargon

- What is a lane-mile? – While not a huge problem, there was some confusion.
- What does a “good” road look and ride like? – Any road condition description should use pictures to illustrate the quality of roads with different ratings. (As noted above, it is also easier to communicate road condition meaning if readers are given a map of pavement condition for roads they normally travel.)

Goal: Promote congestion relief strategies.

Focus group participants understood the congestion goal statement and the desired outcome, but there was some confusion about whether multimodal strategies would be part of the solution. Most participants thought the multimodal aspect of congestion solutions should be highlighted in the strategies to show that road problems did not necessarily require road solutions.

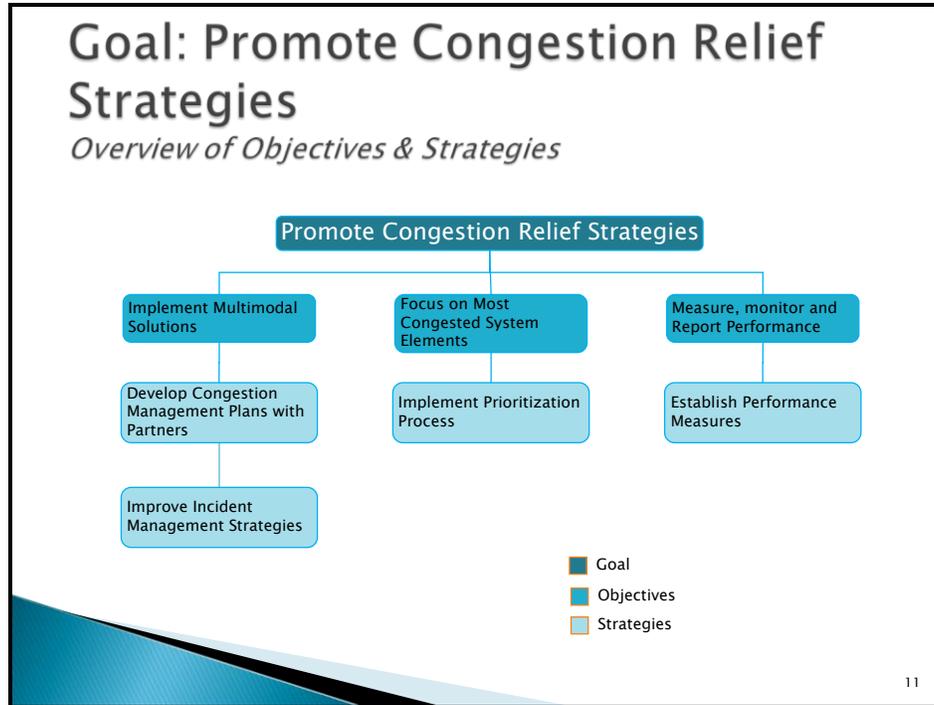
The Statewide Congestion Index measure sounds like the correct measure and the short explanation (e.g., travel time compared to free-flow) resonated with all three audiences. Focusing improvements on the worst congestion was seen as a good scheme by most (even those in Brownwood who recognized that they don’t have a significant congestion problem). There was some concern that the funding might be channeled away from regions that had low congestion levels.

An aspect of congestion that did not seem to be represented is the annual trend. A word like “compare” should be added to the way the measures will be used such that there is a focus on changes as well as on the values. Regions or corridors that have moderate congestion but which are growing rapidly require attention to maintain a good operating condition and support a desirable quality-of-life.

Focus group participants wanted the congestion goal to refer to more than simply adding lanes on roads. They were expecting multimodal (their word in many cases) solutions that included clearing wrecks, timing traffic signals, developing innovative operating strategies (such as reversible lanes), increasing transit and changing policies to encourage choices that are aligned with congestion reduction.

...want the goal to offer multimodal

As with many of the goals, the participants wanted more information about the “partners,” specifically, who they were, what their role was, whether they would choose projects and priorities, and the process for identifying and involving the partners. There was some concern that this was another way to describe another attempt at the Trans Texas Corridor.



Objectives

Focusing on the most congested sections was viewed as sensible, although there was some concern about funding being disproportionately moved to large, very congested urban areas. Channeling funding to “problems” makes sense in general forms, and building on that expectation is a worth-while element of the TxDOT plan.

Strategies

The strategies were seen as connecting well with the objectives by examining a broad range of solutions from large to small, as well as improving the process by which projects are selected. There was some frustration with the jargon used, but rewording or providing more explanation should be effective in addressing that concern.

Measures

The Statewide Congestion Index is not an inherently understandable measure, but it is easy to explain. The simple explanation (e.g., amount of extra time beyond travel time at free-flow conditions) was offered by one participant as a way to explain the measure. Focusing on the amount of funding used on the most congested road sections was also seen as a good measure.

Confusing Jargon

As with other goals, the jargon confused some group members.

- Incidents – Use terms like crashes, collisions, and vehicle breakdowns, and discuss the congestion that is caused by these events.
- Prioritization process – This means choosing which projects to do first and focusing on the most important problems.
- What is a section? – Does the list include corridors, short segments, intersections, or some other geography?
- Why only 100 most congested sections? – Explain the rationale behind focusing on the top 100 sections and describe the type of roads that are included in the list.

Goal: Enhance system connectivity.

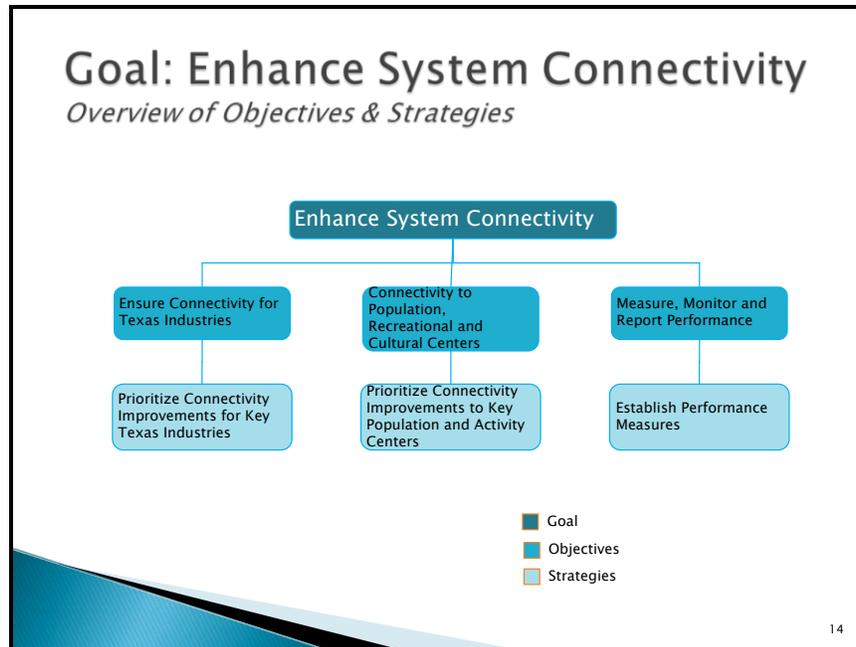
On the whole, participants do not understand what “enhance system connectivity” means. There were many blank stares, silent faces, and wild guesses when asked what the goal signifies; better wording is needed. One person thought the goal is about better communication. Another said the goal is very vague. After they learned that it means providing transportation connections between populations,

Just putting in more miles when it is not needed, that's not good.

businesses, recreational areas and cultural centers, several said that this is a good goal and that it just needs to be written clearer.

There were some disagreements with industries being able to control where roads are built and access is given. Some viewed this goal as giving better treatment to private money donors. “Rich people get what they want,” one person said. Others offered a different opinion saying that more money is being generated for TxDOT when industries make location decisions and roadway connections are made.

When deciding where to locate, “it would be easier for Texas industries and population centers to plan communities where they can already be connected,” according to one participant. Another agreed, “Schools get built in the middle of nowhere, and five years later there are roads and houses all around it.” Several agreed, saying that TxDOT should work to re-build areas instead of creating new networks. They need to know that TxDOT is putting in connections where they are needed the most.



Objectives

“These objectives are written from TxDOT’s perspective,” said one participant who went on to say that TxDOT “has got” to monitor themselves. Ensuring Texas industries can efficiently access markets and gateways is a good objective because more money is generated for TxDOT when these connections are made. One person sees the performance measure (number of projects and money received from the private sector) as a way to minimize the amount of taxes needed.

Adding lane miles to the state system must also include multimodal options. “We don’t want to just see roads to get somewhere – we want more modes,” said one. Others agreed, “bikes and bicycle lanes should be a part of connectivity.”

Strategies

Under Objective 1, the strategies seem to indicate that TxDOT can be paid off to obtain better access; there are several mostly negative comments about these strategies. As for the strategies of the second objective (Provide seamless, multimodal transportation facilities and networks to connect all statewide population, economic, recreational, and cultural centers), they were clearer but expressed a desire for a different performance measure — one that emphasizes the multimodal aspect.

Confusing Jargon

- “Industry” is not clear.
- Who and what are “key” centers? This word sends an impression of exclusivity.
- The term “lane-miles” is tough to understand. One thought a more meaningful measure would be the time required for travel.

Goal: Enhance safety for all Texas transportation system users.

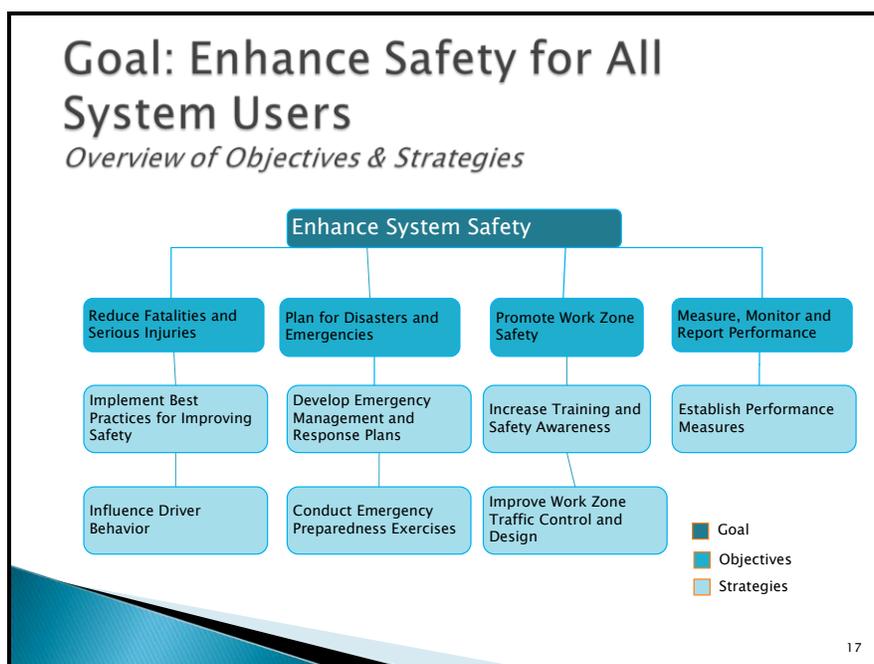
Focus group participants understand the importance of safety on the transportation system. In each of the three focus groups, this goal was ranked 1st or 2nd in importance. They recognize that safety relates to maintenance, congestion, and economic vitality. For example, when the roadway is not maintained adequately, potholes may form and increase the chances for crashes. Signs, markings and signals also need to be maintained to avoid confusion and resulting crashes.

In terms of the wording of the goal, they like that TxDOT recognizes the need to improve safety. As such, they agree with the word “enhance” as a sign of striving to do more. However, “enhance” doesn’t show that TxDOT has done anything in the past to improve safety. There is missing information about how safety will be judged. For example, one participant asked, “Who is rating safety and what is considered good?” They want to know how they can tell if TxDOT is reaching their goal.

Who is rating safety and what is considered good?

Several expressed the desire to track not only serious injury crashes and fatalities but also “non-serious” collisions. Getting driver feedback on safety issues was suggested as a way to ensure safety is being addressed. Some have been involved in near crashes and would like to have a mechanism to share potential problems before serious crashes occur. They requested a hotline or a 3-1-1 system where they can report the concern.

They recognize the need for comparisons in order to understand rating systems. Including historic data as well as information from other states would be helpful. They expressed the need for more specifics.



Objectives

Reducing fatalities and serious injuries is a good objective and should go further to include all crashes and potential crashes. The performance measure example provided is the number of fatalities per 100,000,000 miles traveled. They'd like to see more than traffic deaths in the performance measure.

Objective 2 pertains to planning for, coordinating and responding to disasters and emergencies. The example performance measure is the evaluation rating of TxDOT disaster response strategies/readiness. This performance measure sounds like an in-house measure and doesn't mean anything to the participants. They suggested bringing the public into the plan. Having some perspective or rating system to understand the measurement would be helpful.

Some people asked about the importance of work zone safety. Work zone safety is seen as the responsibility of the driver and the worker. Both parties need training. One person suggested an extra defensive driving class on conducting yourself in work zones. Another asked if the driver or worker was at fault in crashes, and to focus education on the appropriate people. Also mentioned, if nobody is seen working, motorists may not slow down in the work zone. One suggested signs that say, "Slow Down. My mommy and daddy work here" for work zones in Texas. The term "best practices" was seen as subjective by a participant who completely disagreed with the strategy.

Since safety is such an important goal several liked the idea of performance reporting to let the public know about how the Department is doing. A couple of people said that reporting should be done monthly especially if doing so doesn't hit the budget too hard.

Strategies

One example strategy listed in the plan is to influence driver behavior by supporting safety outreach programs. A few of those in attendance questioned the ability of TxDOT to influence driver behavior.

Training is seen as a critical element for responding to disasters and emergencies. As such, they agreed with the strategy of conducting exercises to practice a response plan.

Measures

In terms of measuring, monitoring, and reporting performance in improving safety, they said that local information would be helpful especially using an online map. They'd like to know the scale so that they understand what is good and can compare to see if TxDOT is reaching their goal. Having the information readily available not only online but also available to the driver is desired. However, when questioned if they would seek out this type of information, most said no. The one who said she would seek information said that she tried to locate safety data using the TxDOT website after witnessing several crashes at one location.

Confusing Jargon

- Defining 100 million vehicle-miles traveled is important since most of the focus group participants are unaware of the term.
- What does “promote” work zone safety mean?

VOTE RESULTS ON SIX GOALS

A vote sheet was provided to each of the participants. They were asked to rank the goals most to least important (with 1 being the best and 6 being the worst). In Arlington and El Paso, the focus groups were asked to do the voting before and after the discussion. The results have been averaged and ranked based on the average score. As seen in Tables 1, 2, and 3, the key findings are:

- Safety was ranked most important (ranked 1st or 2nd on average in every focus group). Arlington participants ranked congestion higher than safety, while Brownwood and El Paso placed a higher importance on safety.
- Congestion Relief was 2nd most important (ranked 1st, 2nd, or 3rd on average in every focus group).
- Facilitate Development of Multimodal Funding Strategies goal placed last in every ranking (6th place).
- Organizational Structure goal was near the bottom of the list (ranking 4th or 5th on average in every focus group).
- When before/after voting occurred in Arlington and El Paso, the votes did not change significantly on average though some participants did make significant changes to their vote.

Table 1: Brownwood Focus Group Vote Results

Vote on Strategic Goal Priority - 2/08/2010										
Goal	Participant								Average	Rank
	A	B	C	D*	E	F	G	H		
Organizational Structure	4	4	4	1	6	2	1	4	3.3	5
Funding Strategies	6	5	5	1	5	3	4	3	4.0	6
Maintain the System	3	1	5	1	2	2	5	1	2.5	3
Congestion Relief Strategies	1	2	1	1	3	1	2	2	1.6	2
Enhance System Connectivity	5	3	3	1	4	1	3	1	2.6	4
Enhance Safety	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1.1	1

* Participant said, "Working together through every facet of the Department, I think they should all be equally important and time given to each."

Table 2: Arlington Focus Group Vote Results

Vote on Strategic Goal Priority - 2/22/2010											
Goal	Participant - Before/After Discussion									Average	Rank
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I		
Organizational Structure	3/6	1/6	6/6	4/4	5/6	4/4	6/6	4/4	2/1	3.9/4.8	4/5
Funding Strategies	5/5	4/4	4/4	6/5	3/5	3/5	5/5	6/6	3/6	4.3/5.0	6/6
Maintain the System	6/3	6/3	2/2	3/6	4/4	6/6	4/4	5/5	1/2	4.1/3.9	5/4
Congestion Relief Strategies	1/1	5/2	1/1	2/3	2/2	1/1	2/2	2/2	6/2	2.4/1.9	1/1
Enhance System Connectivity	2/2	2/5	5/5	5/1	/1	5/3	3/3	1/1	4/4	3.4/2.8	3/3
Enhance Safety	4/4	3/1	3/3	1/2	1/3	2/2	1/1	3/3	5/5	2.6/2.7	2/2

Participants ranked the strategic goals before and after discussion (x/y = before/after)

Table 3: El Paso Focus Group Vote Results

Vote on Strategic Goal Priority - 3/03/2010												
Goal	Participant – Before/After Discussion										Average	Rank
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J		
Organizational Structure	5/5	2/2	6/5	5/2	6/6	3/3	1/1	4/6	3/4	4/3	3.9/3.7	4/4
Funding Strategies	6/6	4/5	5/6	3/3	5/5	4/4	3/3	6/4	6/6	5/5	4.7/4.7	6/6
Maintain the System	4/3	1/1	2/1	1/1	2/2	6/6	6/4	2/2	5/3	6/6	3.5/2.9	3/2
Congestion Relief Strategies	1/2	5/6	3/3	4/5	3/3	1/1	5/5	3/5	1/2	1/2	2.7/3.4	2/3
Enhance System Connectivity	3/4	6/4	4/4	2/4	4/4	5/5	4/2	5/3	4/5	3/4	4.0/3.9	5/5
Enhance Safety	2/1	3/3	1/2	6/6	1/1	2/2	2/6	1/1	2/1	2/1	2.2/2.4	1/1

Participants ranked the strategic goals before and after discussion (x/y = before/after)

CONCLUSIONS

All six goals were supported by the focus group participants, once the meaning of the goal was clarified. The focus groups all appreciated TxDOT’s interest in the public’s reaction to the goals and suggested several aspects that could improve the final version of the plan. Interestingly, there was less variation between the responses of the three focus groups – conducted in Arlington, Brownwood, and El Paso – than one might expect.

Jargon and technical terms, while necessary for some performance measures, were clearly a barrier to more engagement, but participants indicated an interest in using the information that would be produced. It wouldn’t be mandatory late-night reading material, but they liked the idea that they would be able to find the information they wanted. They also referred to a linkage between having the data available for public viewing and increasing the trust they placed in TxDOT. Participants recognized that there was a cost to collecting data and producing information but felt that if TxDOT staff was using the data, a website could be frequently updated for the public as well.

I think I like the plan, I’m just a little confused by some of the terms.

In the technical information portion of the plan, there was a substantial interest in seeing multimodal solutions and strategies. The idea of a comprehensive set of strategies was not just limited to the large metro focus group. The groups expected to see performance measures that would allow them to compare with targets or goals, but they were also interested in trend information. Answering the “how are we doing?” question is just the first step for these readers. “Are we getting better or worse?”, “how quickly are we changing?”, and “what does the future look like?” are three other questions that TxDOT should be prepared to address.

When asked to rank the goals in priority order, participants in all three groups ranked safety and congestion as their two top priorities. Regional connectivity and maintenance were, on average, the next two priorities, and funding and organizational structure the final two. One way to understand these rankings is to characterize the first two goals as “direct service received by travelers”, the next two as “making travel easier,” and the final two as relating to how the first four goals are produced. It would be incorrect to suggest that the participants thought funding and organizational structure were not important, rather their concerns were focused on the most tangible elements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Perhaps the most important element for plan designers and those who will be tasked in following years with reporting and communication duties is that the participants were much more engaged and interested when they were able to see how the goal, objective, strategy, or performance measure related to roads they travel. Several times during the discussions a participant would refer to the need for a map or display showing the condition or performance of a local road in relation to a term such as “good condition” or “congested” or “safe.” To the extent possible, providing the public with such a local view allows them to understand the more conceptual terms used in the plan.

Providing layman’s terms or defining confusing jargon is important for connecting with the public and helping them understand the various elements of the plan. If the confusing term cannot be removed or softened, a glossary, links, or call boxes can be used to explain the meaning of the word.

The focus groups suggested that TxDOT develop a prioritized list in several cases where there were multiple items; they recognized that funding is tight and that “everything cannot be a #1 priority.” A prioritized list might also have the advantage of continuing the public discussion of transportation issues, which is something else the participants requested. They would like to see a contact person, email address, phone number, etc., for all elements of the plan and supporting information. The presence of a hotline phone number or “hot link” from a website is ubiquitous on internet sites, and TxDOT was encouraged to follow that trend.

APPENDIX A:
Notes for Each Focus Group

Dashboard Phase III
Brownwood Focus Group
February 8, 2010

Almost everyone indicated that they had read the Strategic Plan.

What did you think of TxDOT's proposed Strategic Plan? Several say it was easy to understand, clear. It seemed like it addressed important issues, I saw some points from the ideas we brought up this summer. But it was technical; not real clear on what it means for me.

From your read, can you say what TxDOT's top three goals are? Safer roads, emergency vehicles arriving quickly, finishing projects, general overview of TxDOT and what they do, finance options

What is not in the plan, but should be? Can't think of anything. "It was very organized, pretty self-explanatory."

One thing they should do before messing up roads is get community leaders together. Will it work or not? Like medians on Commerce....communication to provide rationale for the project. Coming down Bangs Hill, wants to go to Sonic, but there is a median there. Need to have U-turns to make it more convenient to go to Sonic and other businesses. What was the purpose for that median in Brownwood? I heard about an older person who forgot it was there and hit the median. It is unclear whether U-turns are allowed. Input from the community might have avoided this problem. At least we would have understood why they are doing the project.

Goal: Maintenance. What does this mean? Keep it updated. Keep it from degrading. Prefer the words, "Evaluate and Improve the existing system." One question about maintenance...I don't want them to maintain the bad stuff like the flooding problem on 3rd Street. "I like the words in the plan."

What would indicate success for this goal of maintenance? The system doesn't deteriorate. When the project is done, things are better. The way traffic flows can indicate success. Can determine by accidents. Can get from A to B safely.

I need to know the threshold for the performance measurement before I say I think it is reasonable. Like need to know a number of hours of duration that a road is closed.

How would you get someone to fix the roads? I live on a dirt road which floods and I cannot get out.

"Timely" wording is helpful.

"I like making this public."

Would you read something like this? Yes! We would read it. What format? Newspaper, web (nodding heads when mentioned online). What we need is a way to provide feedback if we agree/disagree with a rating or feature. Need an email link or phone number.

Condition rating of good or better. What does “good” mean? Examples of good or better online would be nice...especially in a map format where you can see a roadway’s rating. Truck drivers need to know this information.

I’d like to see what they are calling “good.” I might say, “That’s not good.” What might be a good road for an SUV might not be good for my Mustang.

Goal: Safety. What does this mean? Keeping everyone safe, planning ahead...like in disaster emergencies, letting you know what’s ahead of you. Watch out.

“Contingency plan for disasters”

How is life better with this goal? Safer. The vehicles would be safer...we won’t have busted shocks or need to have maintenance done. Reduced fatalities and serious injuries. This goal sounds like we haven’t done anything in the past. Let the public know it is being practiced.

“Those are good strategies.”

Work zones may not be clear by the end of the day. Night time concerns. Way too dark.

Workers and drivers need training for work zones. Extra defensive driving class on conducting yourself in work zones.

How do we judge safety? Crashes, fatalities.

Local information on safety would be helpful...map example again; an online map with colors for safety rating.

“Who is rating it?” What’s good? Need a scale and to see comparisons. Are we reaching our goal?

Are crashes in work zones the fault of the driver or the worker? Use the results to educate the appropriate person.

Need another measure to use instead of fatalities/serious crashes. Like driver feedback maybe through reporting on a hotline or texting. “A lot of people don’t know who to talk to.”

It’d be good to have a 311 system to report non-emergency issues.

Also would be good to have a specific number to call for the project itself.

Goal: Connectivity. Nobody knows what that means. Turnarounds, support big industries. Several guesses. This goal is vague. TTI researcher explained what connectivity means.

Industries that give TxDOT the most money have better roads. You get what you pay for. Better treatment for private money donors.

Lane-mile is not understood.

“Just putting in more miles when not needed...that’s not good.” Need to know that they are putting in connections where needed the most. Where are they putting them? Key to whom?

The added lane may not be needed.

Goal: Congestion relief. They understand this goal. Missouri DOT does a good job getting sand on snowy/icy roads to decrease congestion during weather problems.

This goal means putting more lanes on the highway to reduce drive time, gas, and road rage.

Implement multimodal solutions....what does this mean?

Focus on most congested roads...yes, they understand.

Who are the partners?

Improving incident management strategies...what does this mean? They don’t know. After explanation, they ask why the goal doesn’t say cleaning up quickly after crashes. Seems like big, unnecessary words.

Prioritization process – yes that makes sense (once they understood that meant choosing which projects to do first).

Statewide congestion index – yes, that makes sense.

When asked about the statewide congestion index, participants say they don’t know what it means. Where would you want to see the congestion index? On the roads I drive...want to see a map so I can look at my area. Individualize the roadway network.

Add “Compare” statewide congestion index from year to year to see trends...need action word there.

Yes, they know what 100 most congested segments means, and they know Brownwood isn’t on the list.

Goal: Facilitate Funding Strategies. “Wow!” It seems like someone pulled out a thesaurus and used the biggest words.

Second version of wording is better than original wording of the goal. “Facilitate comprehensive funding strategies with transportation program and project partners.”

Transportation program and project partners – unknown what/who these are.

Develop funding scenarios and describe impacts. Blank faces. “Explore funding options” is better.

“Cause and effect” is what impact means.

Document system needs and revenue seems to be more defined. Nodding – supports the objective, “needs more info” though.

Who are they communicating to? Consequences – says what happens. We're going to improve roads, here is what problems develop (some grimaces at the word "consequences" – they said it sounded ominous & appeared uncomfortable; they understand the concept).

Performance measure.

"What's a stakeholder?"

Does the number mean anything to you? Need to compare, says one participant.

Yes, the performance measurement supports the objective.

Fund 6 – what is that? TTI described that Fund 6 is where the taxes you pay on gas and vehicle registration goes...the main funding source for TxDOT.

Need a comparison of before to actual (planning and forecast). Described as "compare what you got to what you thought you were going to get."

What is the need?

I like "understandable information."

Why do we have to evaluate timeliness...basically just want to know what customer surveys say.

"Don't let the same people write that that wrote this."

Goal: Organizational Structure. They think it says to come up with a plan for future needs. Need to think through projects right now also. Organizational structure = Bureaucracy, committee. Left hand and right hand don't know what they're doing.

This goal talks about future, but also need a goal to evaluate current organization. Do it better now and later. Transparency – needs to be external, but the strategy is written like it is only internal.

"Communicate internally first to then come to us."

Facilitator: should there be a communication goal? Yes! But how do you communicate with 23 million Texans?

Implement performance measurement programs – means more bang for the buck.

Which one is more important at the time?

What will increase the performance? Which can be done quicker?

Who are the stakeholders? Not clear on implement performance management program.

Develop and nurture partnerships. “Nurture” is a confusing term, but partnerships are good. Corporate knowledge transfer – the top of company. Good communication top down. Mentoring, training, salaries – good.

Foster transportation through communication performance measurement – Timely, accurate and understandable – I like these layman terms.

On time – yes; timely fits in with goal.

Partnerships are good but who is the partner? Employee retention – good.

Do some of these goals make more sense than others? Yes! Do some need to be re-worked? Yes!

**Dashboard Phase III
Arlington Focus Group
February 22, 2010**

Was the Plan clear? Did you understand?

No, not clear, redundant, lawyer speak

It would be wise to have some details (meat/potatoes).

Seems like mission, objective, measures don't connect (like one person did each one).

Hard to understand, no clear explanation of what they're going to do.

What did you think of the Plan?

Not clear strategies, no examples, too broad

Needs a "how to" or responsibilities list

No real connection for real people and solve real problems

Goal: Maintain. What's it mean? Keep it up to date (a few said this) – this is what they want it to say

Keep it the same - more said this

Repair potholes

TxDOT doesn't want to improve or expand

Not clear on what "transportation system" it applies to

Status quo – sounds like we're not going into future. The goal needs a definition, needs to clearly say "We're going to keep things up to date"

Objectives

Need to be prioritized. Where are the biggest problems?

"Timely" – priority, emergency – but experience is that they take forever to fix infrastructure.

Strategies

They want more information on these.

Performance measures tell you what objectives and strategies mean

Would like to know what the definitions of thresholds are

Measure, monitor – should use this to prioritize

Where's money spent?

One participant noted this phrase was used a lot “Identify, Define, and Implement Performance Measures”

Accountability – information should be local and should be mapped; want to see what the pay off and results are. They want the plan and results to be user-friendly; use maps, color, info on “my roads”. We paid for the roads, we should be able to get the info. Also good if we want to relocate to another area.

Goal: Safety. They say this means roads, signals, signs, maintained in good working order

Addressing problem areas of high crash rates

We should always try to “enhance” safety. “Enhance” is up one level from “maintain.” (its better).

Signs especially need improvement – bigger signs

Why not include “non-serious injuries” – no sure what this means or why only “serious” crashes are included.

“Promote” work zone safety – what does that mean?

“Influence behavior” - how would you do that?

Real-time stuff is good.

Can't see their ideas in the safety plan

Not clear – what is 100 million vehicle-miles

Report more often if it's not going to hit budget too hard (maybe monthly)

Safety is important, so maybe report more often than some other issues (e.g., monthly)

Not just deaths, want injuries reported. This was interesting. They want every little thing reported.

Can't judge “Evaluation Rating” until we know what the standard evaluation is

Want comparisons – historic, other states, pictures, how rating gets done

Goal: System Connectivity. Clear-ish to some; Most say need better wording – don't understand

Enhance Multimodal System Connectivity – is what they think it should say and what they think it is.

Point A to Point B is what this is about; signs to help understand

Smoothly getting across town

Texas “industry” – worst word - don’t know what “industry” is included or not included. And what is key – didn’t like the word “key” – sends the wrong impression

Population, Recreation, Culture – this is good

Industry means - “Commerce” “Businesses” “Commercial Areas”

Must be both highways and multimodal

Strategies

It means – “Can pay off to get better access” and “Rich people can get what they want”

(is parking a part of the system?)

“Key” is too fuzzy – who is “Key”

Lane-miles – tough to understand

Lane-miles aren’t it – we really want “time to get there”

Don’t want to just see roads to get somewhere – want more modes

Bikes and bike lanes – this is also connectivity

Goal: Congestion Relief Strategies. Point A to Point B as fast as they can get there

Clear wrecks as fast as possible

“Promote” means advertise

“Promote” means make better, awareness, improve

Add more lanes, signal lights synchronized

“Multimodal” – good concept!

Focus on most congested – good

Partners? They want to know who the partners are

Incident Management – need some good training for all agencies (not just DPS)

Statewide Congestion Index – don’t know what the term is; vague, not sure

If it takes me 15 minutes without traffic and 60 minutes with traffic that’s congested

% of funding for most congested – like to see where roads are because want to drive from pt A – pt B

More info means TxDOT looks like they have less to hide

Goal: Multimodal Funding. Tie everything together for funding

2nd goal statement “Facilitate Comprehensive Funding Strategies with Transportation Program and Project Partners” is better

Thought we are talking about both transportation and funding

2nd says just funding

They don’t realize this was about funding. They just keyed in on multimodal.

Options are good

Document needs – how much revenue and what is cost

Performance Measure

Just because you look at options does not mean you get anything

Fund 6 – what is this?

Customer Satisfaction – very good

Goal: Organizational Structure. Get a group together to talk about future. What does “future” mean?

2nd is better “Operate the Department Effectively and Efficiently to address the Travel Needs of All Texans” - but need to “Address the present and future needs”

Looks like this is the same as “maintain” goal

They didn’t get the meaning – they think we need an internal AND external element

Objectives and strategies sound both internal and external

Effective Agency – should support other goals

Performance measure

“on-time design” is very clear

Customer satisfaction – hard to do

Partner relationships – easy to understand

**Dashboard Phase III
El Paso Focus Group
March 3, 2010**

Facilitator asked whether those who participated last time recognized some of the goals.

Yes, I remember maintenance and congestion was discussed last time and I see it is on TxDOT's list of goals. We did talk about buses and trains as I recall.

When asked if goals make sense, several said no. Facilitate Development and Exchange of Comprehensive Multimodal Funding Strategies with Transportation Program and Project Partners seems incredibly vague to me. Coordination goal is also vague. What does multimodal mean? Another participant answered – able to use multiple modes.

Facilitator – Based on the strategic plan, what are TxDOT's top 3 goals?

Responses:

- road and rail
- safety of intercity – growing population
- road maintenance
- connectivity
- highways (goods movement)
- want to find innovative ways of funding
- communicate openly and honestly (participant went on to say that if you communicate in short bits and pieces, the listener gets the wrong message)
- transparency came up over and over. It is unusual to see that everywhere and left me asking why?
- Provide best value – how will they do that? Is it part of the old good old boy system?
- Big impetus toward new additions.
- I think that transparency was misread. Right now they are opaque and are trying to make it open and see through. Maybe they are using the term to make change.
- Encouraging public participation

Goal: Maintain Existing Texas Transportation System. This goal says to me that TxDOT will not increase any service and instead will keep whatever service currently exists. Maintain means keep what's in place in place and don't take away. Several agree – they don't like the word maintain. There are huge stretches that desperately need repair. You got to have a benchmark. Maintenance equates with finance. Which roads get maintained first should be contingent on the volume of cars.

Need to think about improvement. Bus system has to be expanded.

They should change their thinking and do things that are more effective.

Facilitator – How does it improve your life if they are maintaining the system?

The way it is written now doesn't change or improve my life. Maintenance is not needed....drastic improvement is needed.

I look at it in the positive way in that if you don't maintain the roads, then my life will get worse. It is like brushing teeth. I do it to maintain and if I don't then my teeth will decay which will eventually make my life worse.

TxDOT has to grow with the population. Additional signs, digital signs, interstate signs like "crash up ahead" is great! I love seeing the interstate signs on the ground because I know where I am. Those are important TxDOT functions. These signs do a better job to ensure safety.

Objectives – Do you understand what all of these are? Yes, foundation for the rest. Do you know what ensure timely emergency response means? Yes.

I'll say that better utilization of existing resources should be there. Why are there so many semi-tractor trailers when we have rail systems? Need to ship on rail. For transit, infrastructure needed. Bicycle lanes, bus lanes, schedules, monorail all needed. Also need to complete the loop and the parkway needs to be done! The roads can't handle existing traffic. However, building more highways brings more traffic.

Implement Environmental Stewardship Standards means adding solar powered signs, don't mess with Texas campaign, car maintenance signs.

Facilitator – Do these objectives relate to maintenance? Yes, water damage to roadways. Icy overpasses exist - there were no signs from TxDOT to close the road. Another participant – environmental stewardship doesn't seem to link to weather. These objectives aren't defined. We are reaching at straws.

Example Performance Measure – means that the jury is still out. They don't know what performance measures to select.

Implement Best Practices does not make sense to one participant. Who decides what is best? It is too subjective. Another explains that best practices come from research.

Facilitator – We will measure whether we are protecting our infrastructure by % of lane miles on the state hwy system that is rated good or better. Do you know what good or better means? In my mind it means that surveyors calculate the pavement rating against agency established standards.

Do you want or need to know what good is? Yes, I would like to know. Need a key. Good could mean one thing to me and another to the TxDOT surveyor. Footnotes are needed to define good.

Let's have billboards, let's have a hotline to report road conditions. Agreement on the hotline idea.

Good or better should include what braking is available on a good road. Pavement condition rating should change based on weather. If a truck is going to jack knife due to weather, wouldn't that driver better negotiate speed if they knew what was ahead? The public needs to know. Drivers need to know. We want to know the pavement condition rating. Maybe a number, picture, more material should be included to explain the pavement condition rating.

Facilitator – What is a lane-mile? One person knows. Do you need to know what the term means? Yes.

As long as we know what that percentage is maybe we don't need to know what a lane-mile is.

Facilitator – so it doesn't really matter if you measure it as long as you have a percent...is that right? That is not right. They want to know what the scale is. To one it matters knowing what a lane-mile is. Sometimes when you are driving on a road with 2 lanes, one lane could be good and another bad but you can only say 100% good or 100% bad.

TxDOT isn't setting the goal very high when all they are worrying about is pavement structure. How about lighting, visibility, etc.?

Quarterly publication performance measure:

Billboards – good idea. Yes, I understand quarterly publications. Will everyone get a copy of it though? I think they should place them at bus terminals, libraries, etc.

People respond to positive reinforcement. They should encourage good behavior.

When asked if they would seek out this information, all except one participant would not seek out this publication. The one who would seek it out viewed several accidents at one location.

Goal: Safety. Means making sure there are no crashes, no potholes where people will veer off the road.

You can only have so much of an effect. What if I am not the one driving the car?

Objective of reducing serious fatalities and injuries – it is fair to say that it is appropriate.

Planning for disasters and emergencies? Training, training, training. Yes, makes sense.

For work zone safety, how important is that Really? It has to do with the wait when workers are working. If you can't see anyone working then you may not slow down.

Facilitator – does the objective address the goal? Driver behavior should be at the top of the list. It is the driver that makes the decisions. If you influence driver behavior will you achieve the objective? Yes.

Again I think best practices is incredibly subjective. Completely disagree with implementing best practices.

TxDOT needs to bring the public into the plan for emergency preparedness.

Facilitator – performance measure – reduction of fatalities and injuries by crashes per 100 million miles traveled. Do you know what that means? “From here to the moon I guess.” More than one person doesn’t know. A couple try to explain.

Are we shooting for zero fatalities? Is it important to know. Yes, it would help. Need plain language for general public. Put it online and electronic billboards. Awareness is the first thing to do. Put information on the web most helpful. Do a campaign to let the public know. To me a quarterly report is nice, but I want it on the roads while I am driving.

Need to change thinking to get desired result.

Evaluation Rating Disaster – in-house measure doesn’t sound like anything for us. Need to know where you are going to send traffic if tornado or something comes.

Disaster relief readiness – evacuation plan, what is most economic route to get around town.

Goal: Enhance System Connectivity. Means communication between TxDOT and everyone else that involves TxDOT. No one understands what this goal means.

Facilitator explained – This goal means transportation of goods and services across the state. Getting from point A to point B and communication are two different things.

This is a good objective – more money being generated for TxDOT when connecting Texas Industries.

Easier for Tx Industries and Population Centers to plan communities where they can already be connected. Schools get built in middle of nowhere. Now roads, neighborhoods are all around it.

Facilitator – Performance measure for ensuring connections for Tx Industries – TxDOT will measure the number of projects and money received. I see this as money from taxes. These objectives are written from TxDOT’s perspective. It is presumptuous to expect businesses to pay. What about our taxes?

I read that as how much money is being generated based on the movement of good and services. Need to get private money so that we can minimize the amount of taxes needed.

Several don’t know what lane-miles means. Who decides who is key?

Goal: Congestion Relief Strategies. Dallas is awful. Need to reverse lanes, get us out of congestion, have a functional transit system. You promote better flow of travel when you provide options.

Facilitator – Implement multimodal solutions – what does this mean? It means different methods for getting places.

Participants don’t know who our partners are.

Facilitator – Does improving incident management strategies mean anything? One participant says it means improving the line of communication between jurisdictions. They’d like to know what it means.

Facilitator – Implementing prioritization process – what does this mean? Need to improve communication so they can address incidents. Public needs to know what the prioritization process is.

Statewide congestion index (SCI) is the performance measurement. Do you need to know what this is? One says that this means that TxDOT will funnel more \$ away from El Paso because more populated areas will rank higher. Shouldn't base it on SCI for this reason...instead distribute geographically.

SCI better on most congested system instead of multimodal objective.

Percentage of funding allocated to the most 100 congested segments – do you know what that means? One answers, first you do your SCI and rank the first 100.

Is the SCI based on population? What is the definition of the SCI? One would like the definition. What if they are all in Dallas? What is a segment? A footnote would be appropriate.

Some uncertainty of what TxDOT maintains...facilitator explained that interstates and highways are all maintained by TxDOT.

What bothers me about this is that it is really broad. Are they talking about interstate, inside or outside of the city, why just 100 congested segments?

Goal: Facilitate Comprehensive Multimodal Funding Strategies. Blank stares from participants. What if we said something like the next slide, "Facilitate comprehensive funding strategies with transportation program and project partners?" It gets rid of multimodal. Answer is not clear. Who are the partners? Why does comprehensive have to be in there? To whose comprehension?

Facilitator – Is it safe to say that this is confusing? Yes!

Objectives and strategies – exploring financing options, etc. Do you understand? Some say yes, others no. I feel like there should be public input into where the system needs are.

Who are the stakeholders?

TxDOT needs to sit down and talk to cities, private businesses, people who are financing the roads and create more engines to finance projects.

Facilitator – Fund 6: do you know what that is? No clue.

The objective of communicating consequences will be measured by stating overall customer service. Sounds good but wants elaboration. What is understandable? To whom?

Goal: Cultivate Organizational Structure. What does this mean? Plan ahead. Build an organization. Last time I spoke to TxDOT about an issue on lighting, I talked to one guy who puts in lamps and he said no, I don't make the decisions. He went to another who pointed back at first person. This went on without resolution. Couldn't get any answers.

This is an internal goal.

Tina – How about revised goal wording? “Operate the department effectively and efficiently to address the travel needs of all Texans.” Most liked first slide. It sounds like this is the complaint department (internal). The first is more external.

Should use plain-person language. Examples needed for lay person.

Foster Transparency – info flows across TxDOT – get rid of transparent communication. Need to be clear and succinct. If they want to get to the point, keep it simple. The newspaper is written at the 4th grade level. This should be too.

Is there an issue with transparency? Transparency is opening up. It is obvious that TxDOT is not transparent since “transparent” is used so much.

Facilitator – Do you think it would be useful to break the internal and external goals down into two goals? Yes.

“Effective” should read “accountability” because if one guy messes up the other guy would also be held accountable. Can’t be effective without accountability. Another agrees.

Don’t forget about El Paso. We have congestion related to being on the border.

I’d like for this to go to the mayor and council to get input on this plan. This is not in laymen’s terms so we need their input.

TxDOT has to convince cities and counties to reduce urban sprawl. Push toward green development, high rises, etc. When asked if participant thinks this is responsibility of TxDOT he/she said, I think their mission should include convincing those who do land planning to stop allowing it.

APPENDIX B:
Demographics of Focus Groups

Demographics

A diverse group of participants attended each of the three focus group meetings. As seen in Table B-1, there was a good representation of males and females, young and old, and education levels. Long term residents as well as newcomers were in attendance.

Table B-1: Demographics of Focus Groups

Demographics of Focus Groups																			
Location	Gender		Age									Education							
	Male	Female	18-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+	Unk	Less than High School	Some High School	High School Diploma	Vocational/ Technical School	Some College	College Degree	Post Grad	Unk
Brownwood	2	6		2	2	2	1				1			4		2	1		1
El Paso	6	4		2	2			1			5					2	2	1	5
Arlington	5	4			1	1	2				5					3	1		5

APPENDIX C:
Discussion Guide

FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

TxDOT Strategic Goals Discussion

Part 1 – Sign Consent Forms (prior to beginning of focus group) – 5 minutes

Participants will be asked to read and sign a consent form that has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. Participants will also be invited to enjoy beverages and snacks.

Part 2 – Welcome and Introductions – 10 minutes

Welcome to the focus group today. Special thanks to those of you who were able to join us again. We've taken what we heard from several focus groups over the summer, and TxDOT has used that information in drafting their strategic plan and the ways to measure whether the state is going in the right direction or not. The success of the group depends quite a bit on how willing you are to share with us what you think. So, I'm asking you right up front to be open and forthcoming and not to worry about what I might think, or what others in the group might think about what you say, or even if you are giving a viewpoint that disagrees with someone else's. We're not really talking today about matters that would be considered very sensitive, but the topic is one that we would expect people to have differing opinions on, so I do want to encourage lots of dialogue. Don't worry about the tape recorder. We will keep the tape to ourselves and just use it to help us with our notes. Try to forget that it's there. Let me assure you that we will always keep everything you say anonymous.

Having said that, I want you to relax and enjoy the conversation. But I do have to ask that you talk one-at-a-time, do not have any side conversations, and speak loudly so that everyone can hear what each person has to say. I don't expect our discussion to last more than about an hour and a half. If you need to get more refreshments or use the facilities, please feel free to get up at any time.

First I'd like us to have some brief introductions. I'll start with us...

Now, let's go around the room and say your first name only (because we're keeping this anonymous) and a little bit about who you are and how long have you lived in the area.

Part 3 – Strategic Plan – 15 minutes

OK, now we're ready to get on with the topic at hand. As I mentioned, we did an earlier focus group where we asked about priorities for transportation in Texas both in the short term and in the future. Now, we want to see what you think about TxDOT's strategic plan and get your thoughts on what constitutes success for TxDOT's goals. How many of you had a chance to review the strategic plan that I sent you?

What did you think? ? Was it clear? What three things does TxDOT think are important?

Next: Do you agree with the ideas?

Third: are there important elements that you don't see?

I want to show you a short presentation that relates the goals to the objectives necessary to achieve them and the strategies that might be used to achieve the goals. ***Use parts of presentation to commission workshop.***

Basically – goals are what you want to become (what city you are going to on a road trip), you need some objectives to help you get there (towns along the trip) and performance measures tell you if you're going in the right direction and how fast.
Now let's talk more specifically about each of the goals.

Part 4 – Goals – 40 minutes

Goal A: Maintain the existing Texas transportation system (*Goals are lettered so as not to indicate priority order*)

Show slide of goal with objectives and strategies

In general, what does this goal mean to you?

Is it phrased correctly? Is there a better way to say it?

What aspects of this goal indicate success? An easy way to develop measure is to think about how to improve the situation and see if the measures show that improvement. (We need this here to get them to think about this topic before we get to measures.)

If TxDOT achieves this goal, how will your life be better?

Are these appropriate objectives to achieve the goal? Are there others that should be included?

Do the strategies support the objectives? Do the strategies mean anything to you?

Show slide of strategies and performance measures

Looking at the performance measures, do these mean anything to you?

Are they appropriate measurement indicators?

Are there others that would be more useful and meaningful to you?

Repeat questions for each of the goals.

Goal B – Enhance safety for all Texas transportation system users

Goal C – Enhance system connectivity

Goal D – Promote congestion relief strategies

Goal E – Facilitate the development and exchange of comprehensive multimodal funding strategies with transportation program and project partners. *Suggest re-wording to facilitate comprehensive funding strategies with transportation program and project partners.*

Goal F – Cultivate an organizational structure and strategy designed to address the future multimodal transportation needs of all Texans. *Suggest re-wording to “Operate the department effectively and efficiently to address the travel needs of all Texans.”*

Part 5 – Review of goals – 10 minutes

Looking back on the six goals, do some make more sense to you than others? Which ones are most understandable? What specific issues do you have with others? (*don't know what it means, not sure what it is trying to do, etc.*)

Should the goals be prioritized? *Have handout of goals and ask participants to rank.*

Part 6 – Final Remarks – 5 minutes

Again, I want to thank you for your time and participation. I want to give everyone a chance to say any final comments.

Part 7 – Have participants sign payment sheet and distribute \$ 50.00/person.

APPENDIX D:
Draft 2011-2015 Strategic Plan of TxDOT

Draft TxDOT Strategic Plan 2011-2015

*Mission, Vision, and Values Statements
Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and
Example Performance Measures*

Strategic Policy & Performance Management Office
Texas Department of Transportation

December 18, 2009

Mission Statement

Emphasizing cooperation, accountability and transparency, we will provide a safe, efficient, cost-effective, and environmentally sensitive statewide transportation system for the movement of people and goods.

Vision Statement

To be a trusted, performance-driven organization committed to collaborating with internal and external partners to deliver a modern, interconnected, and multimodal transportation system that enhances the quality of life for Texas citizens and increases the competitive position for Texas industry.

Value Statements

TxDOT will:

- Honor our commitments to the citizens of Texas with accountability and transparency;
- Provide the best value for every dollar spent;
- Earn and maintain the respect and trust of Texas citizens by listening, seeking to understand, and being responsive to our customers and stakeholders;
- Promote innovation, creativity, and collaboration;
- Promote, both with our employees and partners, high ethical conduct and a commitment to compliance with the law;
- Communicate openly and honestly;
- Protect the safety of the traveling public, our employees, and the workers who build, operate, and maintain our transportation system;
- Value diversity through inclusion, opportunity, and respect; and
- Support employee professional development.

Goal 1 - Cultivate an organizational structure and strategy designed to address the future multimodal transportation needs of all Texans.

Objective 1 – Develop a proactive internal and external communication plan that fosters transparency.

Example Performance Measure – Overall customer satisfaction with timely, accurate, and understandable information

- **Strategy 1** – Establish guidance for ensuring proactive and transparent communication with the Legislature and citizens on agency program responsibilities, multimodal project selection, and resource allocation decisions at all levels of the organization.
- **Strategy 2** – Ensure flow of information to, from, and among all TxDOT offices at all levels.

Objective 2 – Develop a comprehensive performance management program to enhance decision making, resource utilization, and product delivery.

Example Performance Measure – On-time project design

- **Strategy 1** – Develop performance measures and reporting process for key goals and objectives.
- **Strategy 2** – Create a performance driven and transparent project prioritization and selection process.
- **Strategy 3** – Develop and implement a project delivery process that encourages participation by the full range of transportation, environmental, and community stakeholders (public and private) throughout the planning, design, and implementation process, from project concept to project delivery.

Objective 3 – Develop and nurture partnerships with communities, agencies, and other transportation stakeholders.

Example Performance Measure – Overall partner satisfaction with their involvement in decision making

- **Strategy 1** – Collaborate with local and regional communities and stakeholders to plan, design, build, and maintain the state’s transportation infrastructure.

Objective 4 – Enhance workforce recruitment, retention, and leadership development efforts.

Example Performance Measure – Employee retention rate

- **Strategy 1** – Provide mentoring, formal and informal training, competitive compensation, and opportunities for professional growth to ensure that TxDOT attracts and maintains a highly skilled workforce.
- **Strategy 2** – Actively seek and value the input of employees in shaping the direction of the agency.
- **Strategy 3** – Review and update policies and procedures to ensure corporate knowledge transfer.
- **Strategy 4** – Promote workforce diversity.

Goal 2 - Facilitate the development and exchange of comprehensive multimodal funding strategies with transportation program and project partners.

Objective 1 – Explore all available multimodal financing options while not recommending any particular strategy.

Example Performance Measure – # of financing options developed with stakeholders

- **Strategy 1** – Work with stakeholders to develop likely alternative funding scenarios and describe potential mobility, safety, system condition, economic development, and environmental impacts.

Objective 2 – Assess and document transportation system needs and available revenues in periodic updates of the long-range Texas Transportation Plan.

Example Performance Measure – Percent variance between total Fund 6 revenue forecast and actual receipts

- **Strategy 1** – Provide regular updates of needs and revenue estimates and forecasts and communicate with internal and external stakeholders.

Objective 3 – Regularly communicate with the Texas public the program results from maximizing existing funding levels as well as the consequences of alternative future funding levels.

Example Performance Measure – Overall customer satisfaction with timely, accurate, and understandable information

- **Strategy 1** – Summarize and communicate information about the full set of potential funding and financing options available to Texas and best practices from other states.

Goal 3 - Maintain the existing Texas transportation system.

Objective 1 – Develop optimal asset management programs to protect existing infrastructure investments.

Example Performance Measure – Percent of lane-miles on the state highway system that have a pavement condition rating of “good” or better

- **Strategy 1** – Identify, define, and implement best practices for routine maintenance to extend the useful life of system elements.
- **Strategy 2** – Identify, define, and implement best practices for preventative maintenance to avoid and minimize the risk of future extensive rehabilitation.
- **Strategy 3** – Identify, define, and implement best practices for substandard infrastructure rehabilitation to maintain the safe and efficient use of the system.
- **Strategy 4** – Establish and implement environmental stewardship standards, based on best practices, within maintenance programs.

Objective 2 – Ensure timely and effective emergency maintenance response and damage repair.

Example Performance Measure – Average duration of road closures following emergency incidents

- **Strategy 1** – Standardize emergency maintenance response strategies, including lines of communication, response protocols, and staff responsibilities.
- **Strategy 2** – Timely communicate with the public the nature and location of damaged infrastructure and the estimated time for repair.
- **Strategy 3** – Identify and implement best practices to react more timely to damage from unforeseen events.

Objective 3 – Measure, monitor, and report performance in maintaining the existing transportation system.

Example Performance Measure – Quarterly publication of agency accountability report that identifies potential performance improvements

- **Strategy 1** – Develop quarterly performance reporting mechanism, publish results, and identify areas for improvement in system maintenance.

Goal 4 - Promote congestion relief strategies.

Objective 1 – Implement multimodal infrastructure, operational, and technological solutions to congestion needs.

Example Performance Measure – Statewide Congestion Index

- **Strategy 1** – Work with partners to develop regional congestion management plans.
- **Strategy 2** – Identify, fund, and manage operational, technology, and policy strategies to address congestion first prior to investing in new capacity.
- **Strategy 3** – Work with local and regional partners to improve incident management strategies to combat non-recurring congestion impacts.

Objective 2 – Focus congestion relief efforts on the most severely congested elements of the state transportation system.

Example Performance Measure – Percentage of mobility funding allocated to the top 100 most congested highway segments compared to total mobility funding

- **Strategy 1** – Develop and implement a process to prioritize congestion relief projects, taking into consideration regional differences as well as mobility, economic, environmental, and social costs, benefits, and impacts.
- **Strategy 2** – Fund and manage the construction and implementation of prioritized congestion relief projects and programs.

Objective 3 – Measure, monitor, and report performance in providing congestion relief.

Example Performance Measure - Quarterly publication of agency accountability report that identifies potential performance improvements

- **Strategy 1** – Develop quarterly performance reporting mechanism, publish results, and identify areas for improvement in congestion relief.

Goal 5 - Enhance system connectivity.

Objective 1 – Ensure Texas industries can efficiently access statewide, regional, national, and international markets and gateways.

Example Performance Measure – # of projects and \$ received from the private sector to support business infrastructure access improvements

- **Strategy 1** – Identify the existing and emerging industries, gateways, and facilities that contribute most to current and future economic vitality.
- **Strategy 2** – Develop a process to prioritize connectivity improvements for Texas industries and gateways.
- **Strategy 3** – Fund and manage the construction and implementation of prioritized connectivity projects and programs.

Objective 2 – Provide seamless, multimodal transportation facilities and networks to connect all statewide population, economic, recreational, and cultural centers.

Example Performance Measure – # of lane miles added to the state system near key recreational and cultural activity centers

- **Strategy 1** – Work with local and regional stakeholders to identify the population, economic, recreational, and cultural centers that contribute most to statewide and regional quality of life.
- **Strategy 2** – Develop a process to prioritize regional and statewide connectivity improvements, taking into consideration mobility, economic, environmental, and social costs, benefits, and impacts.
- **Strategy 3** – Fund and manage the construction and implementation of prioritized connectivity projects and programs.

Objective 3 – Measure, monitor, and report performance in enhancing system connectivity.

Example Performance Measure - Quarterly publication of agency accountability report that identifies potential performance improvements

- **Strategy 1** – Develop quarterly performance reporting mechanism, publish results, and identify areas for improvement in system connectivity.

Goal 5 - Enhance safety for all Texas transportation system users.

Objective 1 – Reduce fatalities and serious injuries on the Texas transportation system.

Example Performance Measure – Number of fatalities per 100,000,000 miles traveled on the Texas state highway system

- **Strategy 1** – Identify and implement system wide, corridor, and project-level best practices for improving safety and develop an approach to guide investment decisions in the Strategic Highway Safety Plan.
- **Strategy 2** – Influence driver behavior by supporting safety outreach programs proportionate to demonstrated safety problems.
- **Strategy 3** – Assess the roadway system to enhance the safety of multimodal interfaces, including interactions between vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles, rail, and other alternative modes.

Objective 2 – Partner with public and private entities to plan for, coordinate, and respond to disasters and emergencies.

Example Performance Measure – Evaluation rating of TxDOT disaster response strategies/readiness

- **Strategy 1** – Partner with public and private entities to establish lines of communication, develop emergency management and response plans for a diverse array of disasters and emergencies, and periodically evaluate the effectiveness of response strategies.
- **Strategy 2** – Provide public information on TxDOT’s emergency services, using a variety of traveler information platforms.
- **Strategy 3** – Conduct emergency preparedness exercises to practice response plan execution.

Objective 3 – Promote work zone safety to protect roadway workers and the traveling public.

Example Performance Measure – Number of fatalities and serious injuries in work zones

- **Strategy 1** – Identify and implement best practices for work zone management, including standards for the number, duration, and impact of work zones.
- **Strategy 2** – Provide workforce training, improve contractor enforcement, and increase knowledge and safety awareness of work zones.
- **Strategy 3** – Improve work zone traffic control devices and design practices.
- **Strategy 4** – Improve driver compliance with work zone traffic controls through the use of law enforcement officers trained in enforcement procedures in work zones.

Objective 4 – Measure, monitor, and report performance in improving safety.

Example Performance Measure – Quarterly publication of agency accountability report that identifies potential performance improvements

- **Strategy 1** – Develop quarterly performance reporting mechanism, publish results, and identify areas for safety improvements.

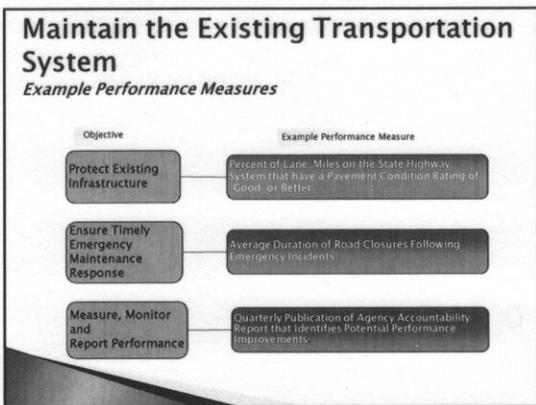
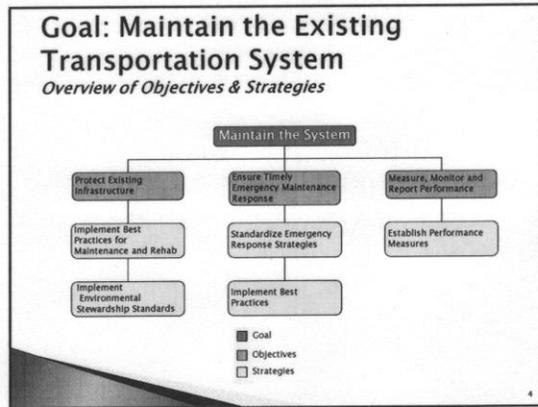
APPENDIX E:
Slides Presented to Focus Groups

TxDOT Strategic Plan

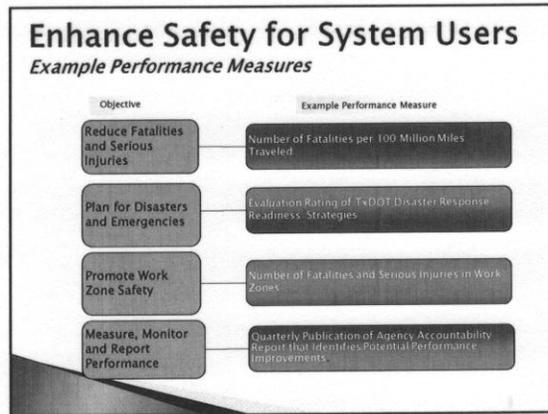
Objectives and Strategies



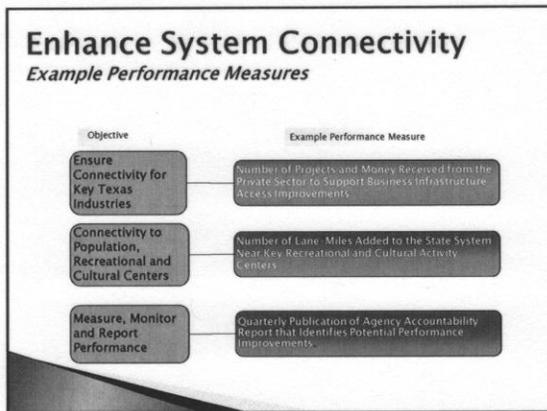
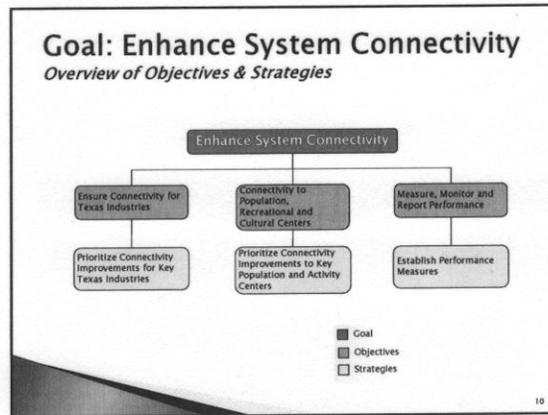
Goal: Maintain the Existing Texas Transportation System



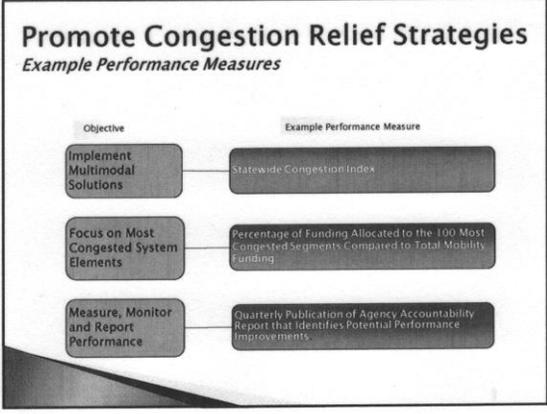
Goal: Enhance Safety for All Texas Transportation System Users



Goal: Enhance System Connectivity

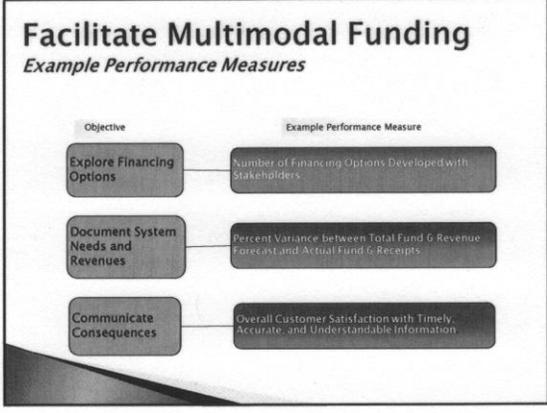
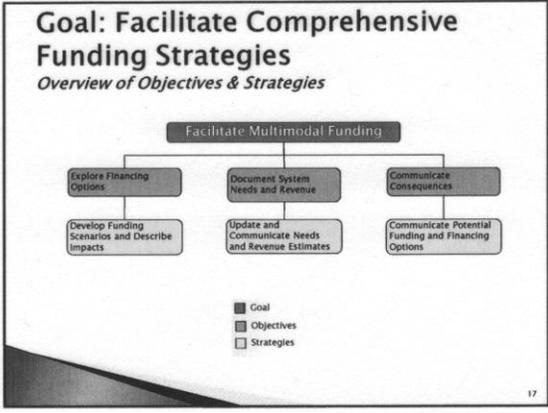


Goal: Promote Congestion Relief Strategies



Goal: Facilitate the Development and Exchange of Comprehensive Multimodal Funding Strategies with Transportation Program and Project Partners

Goal: Facilitate Comprehensive Funding Strategies with Transportation Program and Project Partners



Goal: Cultivate an Organizational Structure and Strategy Designed to Address the Future Multimodal Transportation Needs of All Texans

Goal: Operate the Department Effectively and Efficiently to Address the Travel Needs of All Texans

Goal: Effective Agency Organization
Overview of Objectives & Strategies



Organizational Effectiveness
Example Performance Measures

