

OVERVIEW

Bringing a transportation project from concept to concrete requires more than just funding and construction crews. Long before ground is broken and construction begins on a project, planners at the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) have collaborated extensively with their counterparts at metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) statewide. Together, they identify, plan and develop hundreds or thousands of projects that will be constructed.

The process for their collaboration is guided by federal statutes (see Fig. 1), and involves multiple planning documents. Some of those planning documents forecast needs in the next 20-plus years. Gradually, projects in those documents are refined and adopted into other planning documents with shorter horizons.

Work on each of these planning documents cannot occur in a vacuum. TxDOT routinely works with the public and its regional partners, including local governments. Together, they develop the vision for a funded, four-year capital improvement program that guides transportation spending and construction.

FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY

30-year Visions

The process begins as TxDOT establishes its Strategic Plan, which sets goals and visions for the department. From there, TxDOT develops a host of mode-specific plans for freight, airports and water ports, as well as the federally mandated Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The LRTP sets out a minimum 30-year construction vision for the state, and TxDOT must collaborate with MPOs on its development.

On the local/regional side of the transportation planning effort, MPOs also develop a 30-year planning document known as the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). The MTP is a federally required document (USC Title 23, Sections 134-35), and it plans for all transportation infrastructure in the existing and expected urbanized areas. It is updated regularly by MPOs. In areas not covered by an MPO, TxDOT develops Rural Transportation Plans (RTPs). In addition, parts of the state must demonstrate air quality conformity under EPA and FHWA oversight. All planning documents must demonstrate conformity.

10-year Planning Horizon

Together, the projects and visions outlined by TxDOT and metropolitan regions come together in the Unified Transportation Plan (UTP). The UTP is a 10-year, mid-range planning document that guides the state's transportation project development. It authorizes projects for construction, development and planning activities. Those projects

SOURCE: Texas Department of Transportation.

include highways, public transportation, aviation, state and coastal waterways, and rail. It is adopted annually by the Texas Transportation Commission, usually in August.

TxDOT's 2015 UTP states: "Despite its importance to TxDOT as a planning and programming tool, the UTP is neither a budget nor a guarantee that projects will or can be built. However, the UTP is a critical tool for the department in guiding transportation project development within the long-term planning context. In addition, the UTP serves as a communication tool for stakeholders and the public in understanding the department's project development commitments."

Four-year Action Plan

Federal statute requires the state to develop a four-year, Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The program serves as TxDOT's four-year capital improvement program, and it must be compliant with current

federal transportation funding legislation. In addition, federal statute requires the STIP to be developed in consultation with all MPOs and with elected officials in areas outside of designated MPOs.

On the local/regional side of the planning effort, every MPO is required to work with the state to develop its Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). Federal regulations, along with regional policies and practices, establish the process by which transportation projects are selected, modified, and implemented.

The TIP serves as a region's short-term programming document that lists four years of funded (committed from local, state, and federal sources) transportation projects. The TIP features projects that maintain regional and statewide transportation systems. The projects come from recommendations in the long-range statewide transportation plan and an MPO's long-range metropolitan transportation plan.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TIP AND STIP DOCUMENTS:

- MPO TIPs are stand-alone documents, developed at the local level, that include projects within the MPO boundaries.
- The STIP includes all MPO TIPs, plus rural listings of projects for the entire state and is approved first by the Texas Transportation Commission, and then by both the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).
- The STIP is subject to a statewide public involvement effort that culminates in a public hearing in Austin, Texas, and a subsequent comment period before Commission adoption by minute order.
- Federal dollars cannot be expended on a project unless that project is in the STIP listed individually or by reference. With few exceptions, projects must generally be included in both the TIP and STIP in order to move forward.

FIGURE 1: Federal regulations require the state to develop a statewide transportation improvement program (STIP) and a long-range statewide transportation plan (LRTP) for all areas of the state. Those programs shall be developed in cooperation with designated metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). In addition, federal regulations state that MPOs "...in cooperation with the State and public transportation operators, shall develop long-range transportation plans

and transportation improvement programs through a performance-driven, outcome-based approach to planning for metropolitan areas of the State." And, "in cooperation with the State and any affected public transportation operator, the metropolitan planning organization designated for a metropolitan area shall develop a TIP for the metropolitan planning area." (USC Title 23, Sec. 134-135; USC Title 49 Sec. 5303-5304).

PROJECT PLANNING PROCESS



TxDOT graphic

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the TIP? The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is both a funding and a planning document. It is developed by a federally recognized metropolitan planning organization. Federal regulations, along with regional policies and practices, establish the process by which transportation projects are selected, modified, and implemented. The TIP serves as a short-term planning document that lists approximately four years of funded transportation projects designed to carry out the recommendations of the long-range metropolitan transportation plan (MTP).

What is the difference between the TIP and STIP? The major difference between these two documents is that the TIP details transportation funding decisions in an MPO region, while the STIP covers the entire State of Texas. The TIP is a stand-alone document at the metropolitan level, but it fits within the STIP at the state level. Although there are some exceptions, projects must generally be included in the TIP and STIP in order to move forward into the construction and implementation stages.

The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) includes the TIP documents for the 24 Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in Texas, plus all the rural transportation projects that are not included in metropolitan TIP documents. Projects must be consistent with the state and metropolitan long-range plans, and in non-attainment areas such as the Dallas-Fort Worth area, projects must conform to an air quality State Implementation Plan.

The STIP can only include projects for which full funding is reasonably anticipated to be available in order to complete the project.

How are projects selected for the TIP? For TxDOT-selected projects, local governments and transportation agencies may submit projects directly for consideration by TxDOT. A set of projects is then selected either through a competitive call for projects or more strategically, at the discretion of the MPO, or in collaboration with the TTC or individual TxDOT District Offices. For MPO-selected projects, on the other hand, local governments must submit project proposals during a RTC funding initiative. Funding initiatives are the method through which the RTC allocates federal transportation dollars to local governments and transportation agencies for specific programs and projects.

What is the UTP? The UTP is a 10-year, mid-range planning document that guides the state's transportation project development. It authorizes projects for construction, development and planning activities. Those projects include highways, public transportation, aviation, state and coastal waterways, and rail. It is adopted annually by the Texas Transportation Commission prior to Aug. 31.

What is the MTP? What is the LRTP? How do they work together? The project development and planning process begins as TxDOT establishes its Strategic Plan, which sets goals and visions for the department. From there, TxDOT develops a host of mode-specific plans for freight, airports and water ports, as well as the federally mandated Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The LRTP sets out a minimum 20-year road construction vision on the state highway system, and federal regulations require that TxDOT collaborate with MPOs on its development.

On the local/regional side of the transportation planning effort, MPOs also develop a 20-year planning document known as the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). The MTP is a federally required document, and it plans for all transportation infrastructure in the existing and expected urbanized areas for a 20-year period. It is updated regularly by MPOs. In areas not covered by an MPO, TxDOT develops Rural Transportation Plans (RTPs) that are updated regularly.

How often can one of these plans be updated? The UTP is updated annually and adopted by the Texas Transportation Commission in August. The TIP/STIP is updated every two years. Both the UTP and STIP have quarterly revisions. MTPs and LRTPs are updated regularly.

Sources: TxDOT, North Central Texas Council of Governments

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ROADWAY PROGRAM SELECTION RESPONSIBILITY

1	Preventive Maintenance and Rehabilitation	TxDOT
2M	Metropolitan Corridor Projects	TxDOT/MPO
2U	Urban Corridor Projects	TxDOT/MPO
3	Non-Traditionally Funded Transportation Projects	TxDOT/MPO
4	Statewide Connectivity Corridor Projects	TxDOT
5	Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality Improvement Program	MPO
6	Structures Replacement and Rehabilitation	TxDOT
7	Surface Transportation Program-Metropolitan Mobility/Rehabilitation Program	MPO
8	Safety	TxDOT
9	Transportation Enhancements/THP	TxDOT
10	Supplemental Transportation Projects	TxDOT
11	District Discretionary	TxDOT
12	Strategic Priority	TxDOT
LC	Local Contribution	Local Gov't./NTTA

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