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

The process for their collaboration is guided by federal statutes (see Fig. 1), and involves multiple planning documents. Some of those planning documents focus on the need in the next 20-plus years. Gradually, projects in those documents are refined and adopted into other planning documents and/or projects.

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, 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. Additionally, TxDOT develops Rural Transportation Plans (RTPs) that are updated regularly.

The STIP includes all MPO TIPs, plus rural listings of projects for the entire state and is approved first by the Texas Transportation Commissioner, 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.

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 Commissioner, 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 and a long-range state 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.”

ROADWAY PROGRAM SELECTION RESPONSIBILITY
1 Preventive Maintenance and Rehabilitation
2M Metropolitan Corridor Projects
2U Urban Corridor Projects
3 Non-Traditionally Funded Transportation Projects
4 Statewide Connectivity Corridor Projects
5 Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality Improvement Program
6 Structures Replacement and Rehabilitation
7 Surface Transportation Program-Metropolitan Mobility/Rehabilitation Program
8 Safety
9 Transportation Enhancements/TIP
10 Supplemental Transportation Projects
11 District Discretionary
12 Strategic Priority
13 Local Contribution

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 in 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 August 1.

What is the LRTP? 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 for the state highway system, and federal regulations require that TxDOT coordinate 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. Additionally, 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 LRTP 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