

Overview

What is the Unified Transportation Program (UTP)?

[The Texas Transportation Commission \(commission\)](#) and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) use the [UTP](#) as TxDOT's ten-year plan to guide transportation project development and construction. It is updated annually by the commission and includes:

A listing of projects with funding authorization and scheduled to be awarded construction contracts, or let, in the current Fiscal Year;

Listings of projects scheduled to be awarded construction contracts, or let, over the next **three** Fiscal Years;

Listing of projects being developed for the next **seven** Fiscal Years thereafter.

Why is the Unified Transportation Program (UTP) published?

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century ([TEA-21](#)) was signed into law by the President on June 9, 1998. It carries forward many of the federal transportation funding programs established in its predecessor, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act ([ISTEA](#)) of 1991. TEA-21 specifies the transportation systems on which certain federal funds can be used and defines the role of the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) in the planning and development of projects. TEA-21 requires each designated Metropolitan Planning Organization to develop a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the state to compile a Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) as a condition of securing federal funds for transportation projects. The projects listed in the STIP, when approved by the [Federal Highway Administration \(FHWA\)](#) and the [Federal Transit Administration \(FTA\)](#), are the only transportation projects that can utilize federal funds.

The UTP, a ten-year financial plan, and the STIP, a three-year financial plan, are used as the backbone for project development on Texas' intermodal transportation network. The UTP is the commission's mechanism to authorize project development.

What are the contents of the UTP?

The UTP contains:

- a listing of requirements for the use of transportation funds along with the commission's policies;
- a summary of [bank balance](#) highway construction program amounts;

- listings of [project specific](#) highway construction projects the commission has approved for construction or development;
- the Aviation Capital Improvement Program;
- and Public Transportation Transit Program.

What is the difference in project-specific and bank balance programs?

Bank Balance Programs- The bank balance program is a fund management tool. The commission has delegated the responsibility for selecting projects and funds management to the lowest possible levels (the TxDOT districts and divisions). TxDOT manages most highway construction programs as bank balances. Projects can be selected for development, developed and let to contract with each project's cost debited to the bank balance of funds available for that program. Most bank balance programs consist of projects requiring relatively short development times and are intended to preserve the existing highway system. The bank balance process of developing projects allows TxDOT (both the districts and divisions) the flexibility to respond to modifications requested by the MPO and others without going back to the commission for every project change or cancellation, as long as the bank balance for that program is not exceeded.

Project-Specific Programs- the projects in these programs are listed individually in the UTP. The highway construction programs managed by TxDOT as project specific are major projects to improve mobility or safety. These major projects are usually associated with longer development periods, higher constructions cost and compete statewide for funds based on need. The need is usually quantified using a cost-benefit, or other engineering analysis.

What does the Level of Authority mean?

Programming and Funding- An important factor in the project development and selection process is the amount of funds available to construct projects. In order for TxDOT's project development process to maintain its efficiency, projects must be selected years in advance of their actual funding and construction. A project must pass through many development steps including: researching proposed routes; studying environmental impacts; performing engineering surveys; holding public hearings; signing agreements with the counties or cities (if needed to fulfill state or federal requirements); acquiring right-of-way; producing construction plans; and awarding construction contracts.

The actions listed above, and countless others, must occur in sequence to bring a project from an idea, to a reality. Therefore, a project must be programmed years in advance of the actual construction, to ensure that all development steps are completed at the appropriate time.

The steps required in project development have been organized into three levels of development authority listed below. The commission uses these levels of authority to authorize district resource expenditures to complete the development actions included in

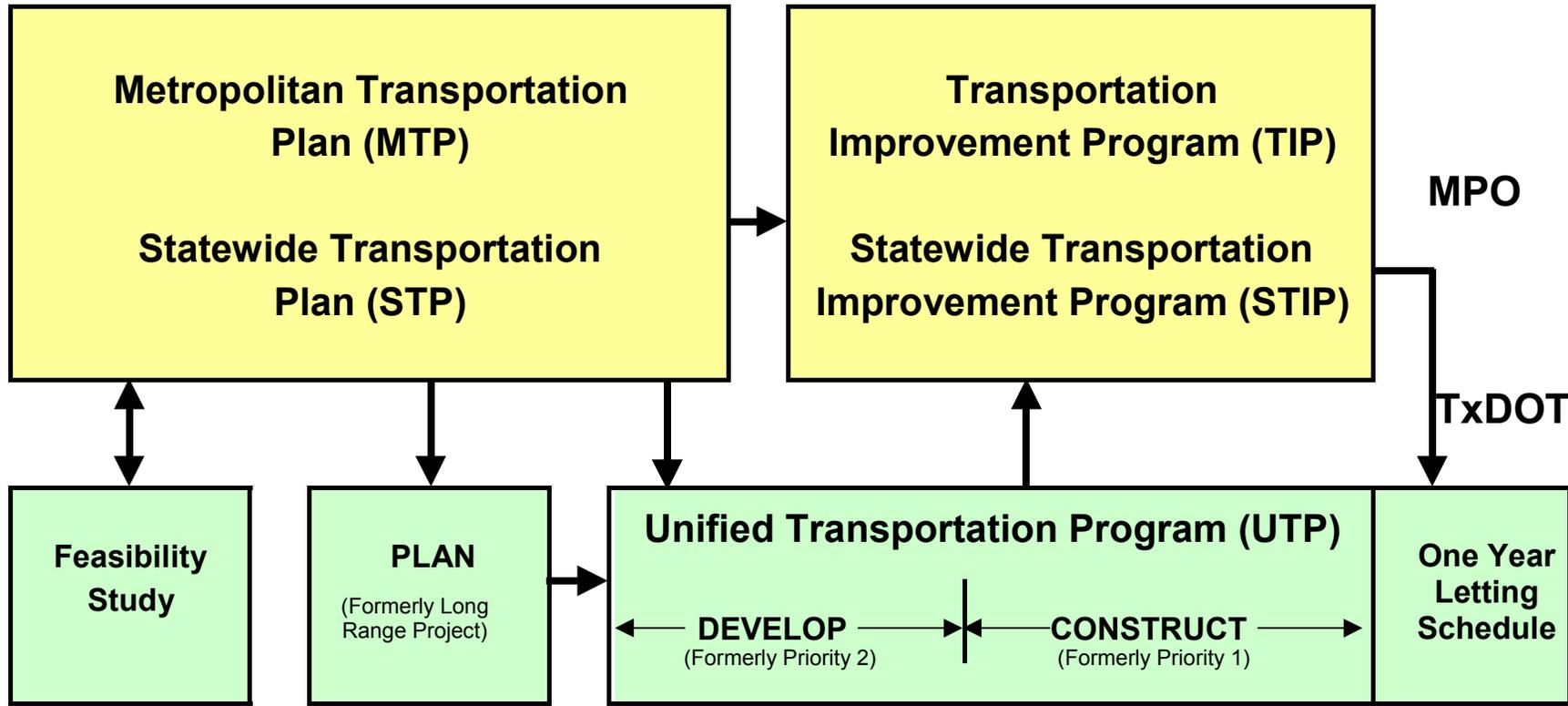
each level. A chart depicting the levels of authority, including approximate times allowed for each level, is located below in this overview.

PLAN (formerly Long Range Project)- Projects with this level of authority are in the initial stages of development. This development authority is reserved for mobility or other high capital cost projects where the route studies, environmental impact studies, and right of way determination can take a substantial amount of time. PLAN status authorizes the TxDOT districts to complete the necessary right of way determination including drafting the right of way map, studying routes, performing environmental impact studies, and holding public hearings. Projects with PLAN status are not listed in the UTP because their construction is anticipated beyond the ten years contained in the UTP.

DEVELOP (formerly Priority 2)- This level of authority authorizes the TxDOT districts to prepare the construction plans and acquire the necessary right of way. Districts should substantially complete project construction plans (geometric, structural, hydraulic and pavement design) and required right-of-way acquisition prior to moving to CONSTRUCT authority. The amount of projects in DEVELOP is constrained to **seven** years of anticipated future funding.

CONSTRUCT (formerly Priority 1)- This status authorizes the TxDOT district to complete the construction plans, perform the utility adjustments, and award a construction contract for the project in the scheduled Fiscal Year.

THE PROJECT DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING PROCESS



10 YEARS or Greater	7 YEARS	3 YEARS	1 YEAR
Long Range Planning	Programming		Funding Contract Awarded