

section 1: introduction

The Waco Metropolitan Planning Organization (Waco MPO) has prepared this plan in compliance with the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. The preparation of this plan has been funded in part through grants by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT).

The contents of this report reflect the views and opinions of the authors who are responsible for the facts and accuracy of the data presented herein. The contents do not necessarily reflect the official view or policies of the FHWA, the FTA, or TxDOT.

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1.1 – what is the metropolitan planning organization?

The US Census Bureau has identified over 400 regions throughout the United States that they consider to be urbanized. Urban Areas, by definition, contain a population greater than 50,000. Federal law mandates the creation of a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for each census defined urbanized area, with the purpose of providing local government input into transportation decisions involving federal highway or transit funds.

To achieve this, the City of Waco has been designated by the Governor of Texas as the MPO responsible for transportation planning in the Waco Urbanized Area. The City of Waco Planning Staff organizes, researches, and coordinates activities between TxDOT, Waco Transit and the Waco MPO Policy Board.

Although federal law mandates the creation of an MPO for each census defined urbanized area, federal law also requires that the MPO plan for a larger area that at a minimum reflects the region anticipated to be urbanized within the next 25 years. The MPO may also plan for areas beyond this region which are anticipated to significantly influence transportation activities within the forecasted urbanized area. This area is referred to as the Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) or the Waco Metropolitan Area, and is determined by an agreement between the MPO Policy Board and the Governor of Texas. The MPA for Waco is coextensive with McLennan County. Please refer to Map 1.1 for the Waco MPA and census defined urbanized area.

1.1.1 – waco MPO governance

The Waco MPO is governed by a 20 member Policy Board representing McLennan County, the municipalities within McLennan County, and the various modal interests within the Waco Metropolitan Area. The MPO Policy Board establishes regional transportation policy, identifies regional project priorities, and adopts all plans and programs produced by the MPO. A list of Policy Board members may be found in Appendix A.

The MPO Policy Board receives advice and recommendations regarding project-level considerations from the MPO Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The TAC is composed of professional planners, engineers and staff from various modal interests, member governments, and transportation stakeholders. The primary roles of the TAC are to 1.) Review reports and analysis performed by the MPO staff and/or private sector consultants working for the MPO and 2.) To provide recommendations regarding the priorities of proposed transportation investments. A list of TAC members may be found within Appendix A.

The Waco MPO is administered by professional staff that perform necessary technical analysis and evaluations, produce federally required plans and programs, and provide project recommendations to address regional transportation needs. The following is the list of MPO staff for fiscal year 2019-2020:

Christopher Evilia, AICP, MPO Director
Chelsea Phlegar, AICP, Senior Planner
Annette Shepherd, Senior Planner
Diane Cano, Staff Assistant

1.2 – the transportation planning process

Transportation priorities are identified and follow a path to implementation that begins with input from citizens, stakeholder interests and elected leadership for member cities and counties. From there, the process is partly prescribed by federal law, partly prescribed by Texas state law, and partly by MPO policy.

identification of universe of projects and need

Connections 2045: The Waco Metropolitan Transportation Plan, also known as the MTP, is the 25-year plan that outlines the mobility needs for the Waco Metropolitan Area. The MTP serves as the blueprint from which future mobility projects are developed and reflect the policies and priorities of the Waco MPO Policy Board. The MTP is required by federal law to include all projects which intend to utilize federal highway or transit dollars during the 25-year planning period as well as all other regionally significant transportation projects, regardless of their source of funding. The MTP, however, must also be constrained against a realistic estimate of available resources. Only those projects that can be realistically funded during the 25-year planning period may be included in the MTP.

Prior to development of the MTP, MPO staff solicits project ideas and identification of regional transportation needs using a variety of methods. Those methods include public information meetings and comment periods, meetings with regional stakeholders such as TxDOT or Waco Transit, MPO Policy Board and Technical Committee discussions as well as various corridor and modal studies. In addition to these efforts, MPO staff also utilizes analysis performed for the adoption of various FAST Act required transportation performance targets to identify projects that may be effective in helping the Waco region achieve those targets. See section 8 for details regarding the public processes used by the MPO to solicit project and need concepts.

identification of transportation plan priorities

Once a list of conceptual projects has been developed, MPO staff then evaluates each project based upon a 22 element project selection criteria identified in Appendix B. That criteria scores projects based upon how well or how poorly they help the region achieve the MTP guiding principles identified in Section 2. Based on the process identified in Section 7, projects are then

recommended for inclusion into the MTP contingent upon public input and MPO Policy Board approval. Projects not identified within the adopted MTP cannot proceed further within the process.

identification of 10-year plan

Within the MTP, the highest project priorities are identified as a 'Short-Term Priority' which are the MPOs recommendation to be implemented within the first 10 years of the MTP. For this MTP, that represents the year 2030. These projects represent the 10-year plan required for MPOs under SB 252 and are then forwarded to the Texas Department of Transportation for inclusion within their Unified Transportation Program (UTP). The UTP represents how TxDOT intends to use their resources for project development for the next 11 years with the goal of ensuring projects within the document have adequate funds for implementation within the identified year. Projects identified within the UTP are then authorized for project development activities such as engineering design, environmental review, right of way acquisition and utility relocation.

Other MTP short-term priorities that are not TxDOT eligible projects are forwarded to the appropriate cities, counties or modal agencies for consideration within the appropriate Capital Improvement Programs (CIP).

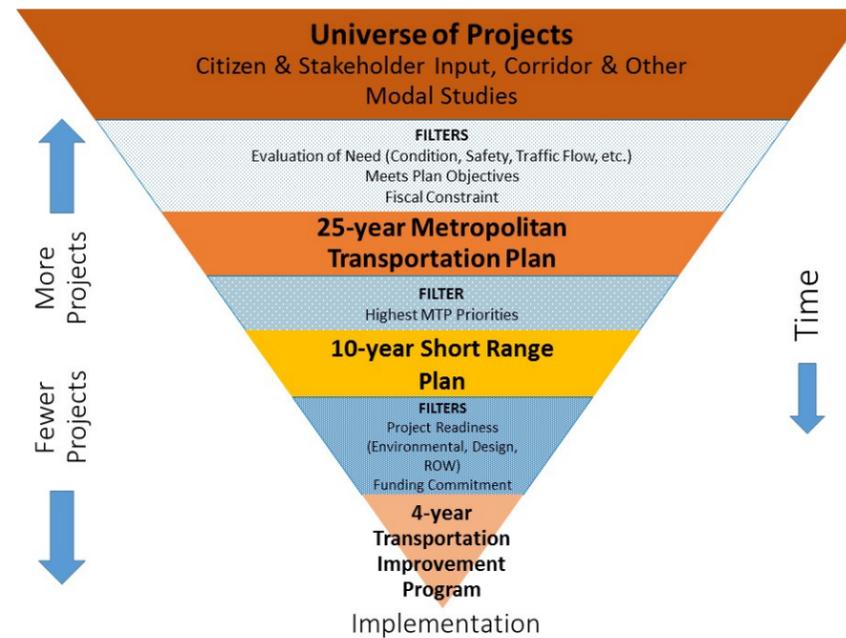
transportation improvement program (TIP) development

Once a project has been identified within the TxDOT Unified Transportation Program (UTP) or an appropriate Capital Improvement Program (CIP), the project is eligible for inclusion within the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP represents a formal commitment to implement a particular phase of work for a project. The TIP covers a 4-year timeframe with the current TIP representing fiscal years 2019 through 2022. The most important requirements for TIP inclusion are: 1.) Project readiness must have made sufficient progress for a particular phase of work to be realistically implemented within the next 4 years and 2). A formal commitment of funding has been made for the entire phase of work by the appropriate agency.

Once the TIP has been adopted by the MPO, TxDOT then adopts a statewide TIP which incorporates all projects within the various MPO TIPs across Texas. Once the statewide TIP is approved by USDOT,

projects may then proceed to implementation. See chart 1.1 for an overview of the transportation planning process.

chart 1.1 – generalized transportation planning process



1.3 – federal legislation

1.3.1 – review of legislation since 1962

The Waco MPO is the result of a long history of transportation planning legislation. In 1962, Congress passed the Federal Highway Act (FHWA) which focused on the needs for transportation planning in urbanized areas. The Act specifically states:

The Secretary [of Transportation] shall not approve...any projects in any urban area of more than 50,000 population unless he finds that such projects are based on a CONTINUING, COMPREHENSIVE transportation planning process carried on COOPERATIVELY by the States and Local Communities.

The FHWA of 1962 became the catalyst for many later federal actions. When Congress passed the Federal Highway Act of 1970 they added:

...no highway project may be constructed in any urban area of 50,000 population or more unless the responsible public officials of such urban area in which the project is located have been consulted and their views considered.

In compliance with this Act, the Cities of Waco, Bellmead, Beverly Hills, Hewitt, Lacy-Lakeview, Northcrest, Robinson, Woodway, McLennan County and the Texas Highway Department (now known as TxDOT) formed the Waco MPO in 1974.

In 1975, Congress implemented the FHWA/Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA) Joint Regulation. This directed Governors to designate Metropolitan Planning Organizations that develop:

- Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)
- Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)
- Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991, known as ISTEA (in effect FY 1991-1997), included measures that have affected transportation planning in a more significant manner than any previous legislation. ISTEA included for the first time an emphasis on public involvement, multi-modal considerations, and better highway design. Although not as significant in the Waco area as in larger MPOs, the inclusion of the Clean Air Act provisions in ISTEA highlighted the growing importance of issues beyond fast and convenient transportation.

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, known as TEA-21, was the reauthorization of ISTEA (in effect FY 1998-2003). TEA-21 further emphasized the importance of planning in the development of transportation projects and strengthened several core requirements within the transportation planning process. The Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) legislation (in effect FY 2005 – 2009) replaced TEA-21. SAFETEA-LU emphasized safety, equity,

innovative finance, congestion relief, mobility and productivity, efficiency, environmental stewardship, and environmental streamlining. Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) replaced SAFETEA-LU legislation (FY 2013- 2014). MAP-21 provided the statutory language for a streamlined, performance-based, and multimodal program to address the national transportation priorities identified by Congress. These priorities included improving safety; maintaining infrastructure condition; reducing traffic congestion; improving efficiency of the system and freight movement; protecting the environment; and reducing delays in project delivery.

All of these federal actions had a profound effect on the history, formation, and role of the Waco MPO. However, the most recent federal legislation that affects the organization and function of the Waco MPO is the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act or FAST Act, which was signed into law on December 4, 2015. FAST replaces the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) and provides the authorization and funds for Federal transportation programs through September 30, 2020. FAST identifies several new requirements for the transportation planning process that are required to be incorporated or addressed into the Metropolitan Transportation Plan on or prior to fiscal year 2018. These requirements are described in Section 1.3.2, Fast Act Overview.

1.3.2 – FAST act overview

The current Federal transportation legislation is the FAST Act. FAST refocuses the Federal-aid highway program on seven national transportation goals (23 US Code § 150). The intent is to increase accountability and transparency of the program and to improve project decision-making through performance-based planning and programming. The seven national transportation goals are as follows:

1. Safety: To achieve a significant reduction in traffic fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads.
2. Infrastructure condition: To maintain the highway infrastructure asset system in a state of good repair.
3. Congestion reduction: To achieve a significant reduction in congestion on the National Highway System.

4. System reliability: To improve the efficiency of the surface transportation system.
5. Freight movement and economic vitality: To improve the national freight network, strengthen the ability of rural communities to access national and international trade markets, and support regional economic development.
6. Environmental sustainability: To enhance the performance of the transportation system while protecting and enhancing the natural environment.
7. Reduced project delivery delays: To reduce project costs, promote jobs and the economy, and expedite the movement of people and goods by accelerating project completion through eliminating delays in the project development and delivery process, including reducing regulatory burdens and improving agencies’ work practices.

The FAST Act introduced two new planning factors (marked with *) that must be considered as part of the metropolitan planning process, for a total of ten planning factors (23 US Code § 134). The ten planning factors are listed below.

1. Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.
2. Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
3. Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
4. Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and freight.
5. Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, and improve quality of life and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns.
6. Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for

people and freight.

7. Promote efficient system management and operation.
8. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.
9. Improve the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate stormwater impacts of surface transportation.*
10. Enhance travel and tourism.*

Additionally, FAST identifies several new requirements for the transportation planning process that are required to be incorporated or addressed into the Metropolitan Transportation Plan on or prior to fiscal year 2018. These requirements include the following:

- Consideration of the following Facilities / Services
 - Ports
 - Intercity Bus Services
 - Employer Based Commuting Programs
- Reduce Vulnerability of System to Natural Disasters
- Incorporate Performance Targets and Analysis into Project Decision Making
 - Safety
 - State of Good Repair
 - Transit Asset Condition
 - Travel Time Reliability
 - Transit Safety

New to MAP-21, but further emphasized within the FAST Act is an emphasis on addressing deficiencies on the National Highway System (NHS) and less of an emphasis for all other highway facilities. The NHS system is composed of all Interstate, Other Freeway, and Principal Arterial classified facilities, regardless of ownership.

regional performance targets

Transportation Performance Management (TPM) is federally required through the FAST Act. It is a strategic approach that uses goals, measures, and data to make better informed decisions about how to invest transportation funding resulting in a better performing national transportation system with greater public benefit. Emphasis is placed on efficient delivery of goods, and safe reliable journeys to work, school, shopping, and community activities. Funding is intended to be targeted toward projects aimed at achieving national performance goals for improving the safety, reliability and condition of roadway facilities that are a part of the NHS and regional transit systems.

Future long range transportation plans and short range implementation programs (MTPs and TIPs) developed by the Waco MPO are required to demonstrate a performance based decision process that ties back to performance targets. The Waco MPO is required to establish performance standards for the Waco Metropolitan Area and to meet subsequent reporting requirements. Performance measures focus on transportation system safety (PM1), condition of pavement and bridges (PM2), system reliability and freight movement (PM3), and transit safety and asset condition (PTASP, TAM).

federal planning emphasis areas

In addition to those priorities identified by the Congress, the US Department of Transportation (USDOT) identifies several additional priorities with which federally funded planning processes are to address. The following were priorities identified by USDOT during fiscal year 2016 which remain as priorities in 2019:

- MAP-21 Implementation and transitioning to performance based planning and programming.
- Promote cooperation and coordination across MPO boundaries and across state boundaries where appropriate to ensure a regional approach to transportation planning.
- Address ladders of opportunity and identify gaps in access to essential services, such as housing, employment, health care, education, etc., and further identify solutions to address those gaps.

The intent of the MTP is to address these priorities, where appropriate.

1.3.3 – clean air act and MPO attainment status

The Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 require all metropolitan areas to meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) established by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for numerous criteria air pollutants, including ozone, nitrous oxides, and particulate matter. Metropolitan areas that meet these standards are considered to be in attainment and are not required to establish control measures to improve air quality.

As of 2019, the Waco Metropolitan Area is considered to be in attainment for all criteria air pollutants under the EPA's NAAQS. Periodically, the Waco air quality monitoring site records 8-hour ozone concentrations that approach the NAAQS standard of 0.070 parts per million (ppm). As of 2019, the current three-year average for 8-hour ozone is 64 parts per billion (ppb). Section 3.4.4, air quality, provides a more detailed analysis of air quality for the region and identifies the estimated transportation sector contributions to regional ozone levels. Since the Waco Region is considered attainment for all air pollutants, project-level air quality analysis is not currently being performed for the Waco Region. Nevertheless, recommendations that may help to reduce regional ozone levels generally receive higher scores within the adopted project selection criteria (Appendix B) and are identified within Section 7, Recommendations.