

Chapter 1

Regional Transportation Planning in California

1-A. Background

Formal regional transportation planning began in the United States with the passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1962. This federal landmark legislation required the formation of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and the development of a "3 C" (continuous, coordinated and comprehensive) planning process as a condition for receiving federal funds in the Urban Areas. As part of the plans, air quality and environmental considerations were to be addressed. While some states had just one or two MPOs, California had ten in 1962, including the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the largest MPO in the country in terms of land area.

Of the 43 California RTPAs currently in the state, 16 are Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) that are federally recognized and funded. These MPOs have the responsibility for transportation planning and programming in urbanized areas with a population in excess of 50,000. MPOs receive federal Metropolitan Planning funds from the FHWA (PL) and Federal Transit Administration (Section 5303). There are 28 non-urban RTPAs that conduct their planning activities primarily with Rural Planning Assistance state funds. Federal Code statues Title 23, Sections 134 authorize the designation of MPOs, transportation planning and air quality coordination, and relationships with Native American Tribal Governments.

Early experience showed that a successful transportation planning process required a multidisciplinary approach, involving a wide range of disciplines, decision-makers and interest groups. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was established with the passage of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) (1970) to assure that environmental issues would be addressed in all areas of planning. Within this same era, the Federal Clean Air Act was passed to assure that air quality issues would be addressed. Concurrently, in 1970 the California Legislature passed, and Governor Reagan signed into legislation the California Environment Quality Act (CEQA). These state and federal laws required that the transportation plans addressed environmental and air quality issues and include specific documentation as part of the transportation planning process.

Regional transportation planning in California began with the passage of AB 69, (Government Code Chapter 1253, statutes of 1972). This state landmark legislation required the establishment of regional agencies to include all areas of California and to prepare Regional Transportation Plans as a condition for receiving State transportation funds. In the RTPs, agencies were to develop transportation goals, address transportation issues and needs of the community, identify system options and alternatives, and finally develop actions and financing necessary for recommended projects. The legislation required the agencies to prepare RTPs for use in the State policy development and allocation of resources for transportation infrastructure and operations. The State legislation established an annual funding commitment to support this regional transportation planning process.

As a consequence of the state and federal legislation, transportation planning became a condition for receiving state and federal funding for projects. In addition, all transportation plans required more interagency consultation and analysis relating to air quality and environmental issues.

1-B. The Regional Transportation Planning Process

The RTP is a long-term (20-year) document. It involves the active participation of all levels of government (federal, state, regional, local), as well as Tribal Governments, private organizations and individuals working together in a collaborative process to develop an effective plan. The challenge is to identify current and future regional transportation issues, develop access, mobility, social, environmental, and land use goals, identify and evaluate feasible alternatives. Subsequently, develop plans and strategies for implementing these goals.

The Regional Transportation Planning process has a multitude of functions, including some of the following examples identified in the 1999 RTP Guidelines:

- Establish regional transportation goals and objectives
- Identify and develop transportation improvements that meet the region's mobility, accessibility, livability, and sustainability needs
- Evaluate transportation performance and identify future needs
- Contribute to the economic health of the region
- Preserve and enhance the environmental quality of the region
- Identify transportation safety and operational issues

- Identify interregional transportation issues for partnership resolution with The Department and others
- Integrate the regional transportation systems to form a seamless statewide system
- Promote equity for all system users
- Promote community vitality
- Meet state and federal requirements as a basis for project development
- Encourage use of best practices.

1-C. The Purpose of the Regional Transportation Plan

The Regional Transportation Plan has three major functions:

1. To serve as a foundation for programming of projects by the California Transportation Commission. The RTP accomplishes this requirement by providing a regional needs assessment to support the funding of transportation projects.
2. To meet State and Federal requirements for other planning and funding activities. A well-developed RTP provides critical information that addresses regional issues, such as transportation and future land use, the location, housing allocation as well as air quality and the preservation of environmentally sensitive areas.
3. To serve as a decision-making document for local, state and federal purposes. The RTP serves as a nexus that identifies integrates and balances a multiple of competing goals and objectives within the region.

1-D. RTP Development Costs

The cost associated with preparing RTPs is a major reoccurring expense for MPOs and RTPAs. These costs vary from approximately \$150,000 for a smaller rural RTPA, to over \$1 million dollars at the larger MPOs in the state. Both the federal and state government provide financial assistance to help offset these RTP development costs. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) provide approximately 40 million dollars per year to the 16 MPOs in California to conduct metropolitan transportation planning activities, such as the RTPs. These federal metropolitan planning dollars are called FHWA PL and FTA 5303 funds. The funds are allocated annually to each MPO primarily on a population basis. The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) is the largest recipient of these funds (approximately \$22 million) while the Tahoe Metropolitan Planning Organization (TMPO) receives approximately \$48,000.

Federal money is not available to the RTPAs for transportation planning purposes. The State of California does provide \$4 million in Rural Planning Assistance (RPA) funds annually to the RTPAs to help with the costs associated with their transportation planning activities. Like federal planning funds, the RPA funds are allocated on a population basis. Monterey County was the largest recipient of RPA funds in fiscal year 2002/03 (\$262,800) and Alpine and Sierra the smallest with \$62,800.

1-E. Programming and Funding of Transportation Projects

As mentioned above, two of the major functions of the RTP is to support the programming of projects and serve as a decision making document. As part of this process, the MPOs and RTPAs develop a Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) based on the projects identified and prioritized in the RTP. The regional transportation planning agency programs specific projects in the RTIP and requests state and federal funding for project implementation. The RTIP identifies the funding source, anticipated schedule of funding, and major components of project implementation. While the RTIP provides a schedule of projects over a five-year period, it is updated and submitted for approval to the CTC on a two-year cycle. As projects are implemented, other programmed projects become available for funding over the following five-year period.

Senate Bill (SB) 45, 1998 changed the decision-making responsibilities that existed between the Department and the RTPAs. SB 45 gave MPOs/RTPAs a greater role in project development, based on a major change in the funding allocation. The legislation required seventy-five percent of available state and federal transportation funds are designated for regional improvements, which RTPAs and MPOs identify in the RTIP. Twenty-five percent of available State and Federal transportation funds are designated for interregional improvements, which the Department identifies in the Interregional Transportation Improvement Program (ITIP) (Streets and Highways Code Section 164). The Department prepares the ITIP, and the MPOs and RTPAs prepare the RTIPs. There is a strong relationship between the RTP, the RTIP and the ITIP and projects in the ITIP and the RTIP must be consistent with the RTP.

1-F. Defining Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Regional Transportation Planning Agencies

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs) are either single or multi-county agencies. They are responsible for the preparation of RTPs and allocation of funds through the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) process. There are 43 designated MPOs/RTPAs in California. (A map of the MPOs/RTPAs is located on page 11) California's Government Code § 65080 authorizes the designation of RTPAs and identifies requirements related to development of the RTPs, as well as the relationship of the RTPs to the RTIPs.

Code of Federal Regulations, Title 23, Section 134 created MPOs and stated how they are required to produce transportation plans in conformance with State and Federal requirements. Federal transportation agencies provide the major funding support for planning and programming of projects.

Under state legislation, (Government Code § 65080 et seq.) Regional Transportation Planning Agencies are created, funded and required to produce transportation plans in conformance with State and Federal requirements. State funding allocations provide the major support for planning activities.

At the time of adoption of the RTP Guidelines in December 1999, there were a total of 43 regional transportation-planning agencies in California; 16 were MPOs and 28 were RTPAs. Two of these MPOs (Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments and the Tahoe Metropolitan Planning Organization) are not a recognized RTPA for state funding purposes. The latest U.S. census data indicates that Madera and Kings counties will become MPOs in fiscal year 2003/04 due to population growth in their counties.

Aside from funding sources, there are some major differences in the characteristics of MPOs and RTPAs. MPOs have planning responsibility for urban areas with generally more complex, comprehensive transportation systems. RTPAs have planning responsibilities for the smaller, rural areas characterized by lower population density.

The overall transportation issue facing MPOs and RTPAs is the need to improve mobility for travelers and goods movement. The vast majority of the regions in California are

facing rapid population growth, which places increased demand on the transportation system. Vehicle miles traveled (VMT) is increasing at an even faster rate than population growth, resulting in substantial stress on the transportation system in the cities and suburbs, and even some fast growing rural areas. Many rural as well as all urban areas face the dual challenge of improving mobility for travelers, while meeting air quality goals. An additional challenge to rural RTPAs includes the lack of adequate funding due to lower population densities and longer travel distances.

Another major issue, especially in the rural areas, is that maintenance of the transportation system has not been considered part of the transportation planning process. Planning is considered "future oriented". With the decreasing percentage of funds available for the transportation system and more concern with air quality as a constraint on new projects, there is now a greater focus on looking at maintenance as an integral part of transportation planning. With the aging transportation system in all areas of California, maintenance priorities and the cost of maintenance are both becoming an integral part of the planning process.

CALIFORNIA

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS (MPO's) and Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPA's)



- AMBAG¹ Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments
- BCAG Butte County Association of Governments
- COFCG Council of Fresno County of Governments
- KCOG Kern Council of Governments
- MCAG Merced County Association of Governments
- MTC² Metropolitan Transportation Commission
- SACOG³ Sacramento Area Council of Governments
- SANDAG San Diego Association of Governments
- SJCOG San Joaquin Council of Governments
- SLOCOG San Luis Obispo Council of Governments
- SBCAG Santa Barbara County Association of Governments
- SHASTA Shasta County Regional Transportation Planning Agency
- SCAG⁴ Southern California Association of Governments
- StanCOG Stanislaus Council of Governments
- TCAG Tulare County Association of Governments
- TMPO Tahoe Metropolitan Planning Organization

¹ AMBAG includes SCRTC, TAMC, and SBTCOG. All remain RTPA status.

² MTC covers a nine county region

³ SACOG is the RTPA for Sacramento, Sutter, Yuba, and Yolo Counties. It is the MPO for the federally designated ozone non-attainment area in Sacramento, Yolo, Yuba, Sutter, Placer, and El Dorado Counties. Placer and El Dorado Counties retain RTPA status up to the crest of the Sierras.

⁴ SCAG covers a six county region. Five of which are County Transportation Commissions. LACMTA, OCTA, RCTC, SBCTC, and VCTC.

RTPAs within MPOs
 MPO Areas
 Non-MPO Rural RTPA Areas

¹MOU, Kings CAG and Madera LTC have an agreement with COFCG to model their plan and program for conformity. San Benito has a similar arrangement with AMBAG.

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Chapter 2

The RTP Evaluation Report (Purpose and Use)

2-A. Purpose of the Regional Transportation Plan Evaluation Report

The Department has developed this Regional Transportation Plan Evaluation Report at the request of the California Transportation Commission (CTC). The report provides an evaluation of the Regional Transportation Plans (RTPs) adopted in 2001 and 2002 by the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and the Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs). Department staff also reviewed the regional transportation planning process with the intent of developing recommendations for improving the regional transportation planning guidelines. As part of the evaluation Department staff looked at trends identified in the plans to determine how the State and Federal agencies and decision-makers may provide additional services and support to the regions in the future.

The Evaluation Report assesses how well the RTPs, statewide, address the legislative requirements summarized in the Guidelines, in order to increase their effectiveness as a tool for decision-makers. The evaluation does not identify deficiencies with specific RTPs or Regional Transportation Planning Agencies. However, Department staff does identify good planning practices that exemplify the intent of the guidelines.

2-B. Use of the RTP Evaluation Report

Department staff has developed this evaluation report with the intent of making the regional transportation planning process more efficient, more effective and more flexible to local needs. The methodology was to review all adopted RTPs using the Guidelines; examine how well the regional transportation planners followed the guidelines and how well the plans met the intent of state and federal legislation.

The report identifies major benefits that have developed as a consequence of the systematic, on-going regional transportation planning process as identified in the plans. While progress has been made, shortcomings and deficiencies in the regional transportation planning process do exist. Based on Department staff review of the

benefits and need for change, there are a number of recommendations for CTC consideration. These recommendations have been reviewed by representatives from the MPOs and RTPAs and their assessment is included as part of this report.

One of the primary lessons that staff from the Department, MPOs and RTPAs have learned from this process is that whatever the changes ultimately adopted, it is of paramount importance for there be sufficient lead time for the CTC to adequately communicate the changes to all regional agencies. Following up on these changes, the process must assure planners and local decision makers have a clear understanding of the requirements and how these changes benefit the region's transportation planning process.

2-C: 1994 RTP Evaluation Report

The last RTP Evaluation Report was prepared by the Department in 1994. The single largest impact on the RTP process since the preparation of this last evaluation report in 1994 was the passage of SB 45 in 1997. The 1994 RTP Evaluation Report made several recommendations that were considered during the preparation of the next RTP Guidelines adopted by the California Transportation Commission (CTC) in 1999. The three recommendations that were not included in the 1999 RTP Guidelines were: #2 - *Require both unconstrained and constrained action elements*; #3 *Establish a multi-agency task force to develop a standard mechanism for estimating twenty-year need* and #5 *Reduce the required frequency of RTP updates for rural RTPAs from two years to every five years.*

The seven recommendations contained in the 1994 RTP Evaluation Report are as follows:

1. Standardize RTP reporting requirements for the financial data.
2. Require both unconstrained and constrained action elements.
3. Establish a multi-agency task force to develop a standard mechanism for estimating twenty-year need.
4. Require discussion of interregional impacts to the transportation system in RTPs.
5. Reduce the required frequency of RTP updates for rural RTPAs from two years to every five years.
6. Integrate interregional goods movement strategies into the RTPs.
7. Coordinate deployment of advance transportation technologies with the State and between regions.

Chapter 3

The 1999 California Transportation Commission Regional Transportation Planning Guidelines

3-A. Purpose of the Guidelines

The CTC first adopted the Regional Transportation Plan Guidelines in May 1978 and since then there have been eight subsequent updates of this guidance document. The latest was adopted by the CTC and published in December 1999. This evaluation report addresses the RTPs prepared and adopted using the December 1999 Guidelines.

The CTC is responsible for issuing these RTP Guidelines (Government Code § 14522) to assist the regional agencies in development of their transportation plans, and to assure that all participants, staff and decision makers are aware of the legal requirements for receiving state and/or federal funding. The Guidelines summarize planning legislation and specify required elements, which are to serve as a framework for the RTP.

The purpose of the RTP Guidelines is to:

- Promote an integrated, statewide, multi-modal, regional transportation planning process.
- Set forth a uniform transportation-planning framework throughout California.
- Promote a transportation planning process that facilitates decision-making.
- Promote a continuous, comprehensive, and cooperative transportation planning process that facilitates the rapid and efficient development and implementation of projects while maintaining California's commitment to public health and environmental quality.
- Promote a planning process that considers the views of all stakeholders in the decision-making process.

The Guidelines are intended to provide each RTPA with federal and state planning requirements relating to development of the RTP. Government Code § 65080 requires each plan to have three components: *Policy Element*, *Action Element* and a *Financial Element*.

The plan should include an executive summary, as well as a needs assessment, which addresses concerns such as congestion or differential access and mobility for various segments of the population. In addition, an effective RTP includes an assessment of future transportation demand, based on economic forecasts, as well as population and employment projections. The RTP Guidelines assume that regional planners have a basic understanding of the development of the RTP, as well as analytical data and tools, such as model inventories, land use analysis, as well as employment and population projections.

RTPs that require federal support for projects are required to meet specific federal planning requirements. The RTP Guidelines identify these requirements and include consideration of seven planning factors, a public involvement process, plan contents, air quality conformity criteria procedures, criteria and procedures for the consultation process, and so forth. This information will be addressed later in the report.

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