

1 INTRODUCTION

Transportation is the act of moving people and/or goods from one place to another. The transportation system takes people where they want to go, and it provides the means for the delivery of the goods they need or want. There are three kinds of transportation: land, water, and air. Land transportation depends mainly on wheeled vehicles, especially automobiles, trains, and trucks, and is overwhelmingly the most common type, or mode, of transportation. In many cases, it is the only suitable or available transportation method. Automobiles, buses, and trucks are the main road vehicles. In areas well served by roads, they can provide a variety of transportation services.

Transportation planning identifies the essential links between transportation and other community goals and the transportation system is vital for the movement of people and goods to, through, from, and within the metropolitan area.

FEDERAL GUIDANCE

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1962 introduced a federal directive for urban transportation planning in the United States. The 1962 Act, joined together with the encouragement of 90% federal funding for the Interstate highway projects brought about urban transportation planning to rapidly spread throughout the United States. Over the years, the federal government has attached requirements to its financial assistance.

The implementation of the 1962 Act by the Bureau of Public Roads (PR) deciphered and created the act's requirements related to a comprehensive, cooperative, and continuing (3-Cs) transportation planning process. The process would be maintained and revised on a continuing basis. The Harlingen-San Benito Metropolitan Planning Organization was established in an agreement between the City of Harlingen and the Office of the Governor, in an effort for the 3-Cs planning process to be accomplished within the Harlingen-San Benito Metropolitan urbanized area. In this capacity, Harlingen-San Benito MPO Metropolitan Area Boundary (MAB) serves as a forum for cooperative decision making by principal elected officials of general purpose and local governments who bear the responsibility for the maintenance of the urban transportation planning process.

Congress took additional steps in drafting the 1973 Highway Act by establishing Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) in urbanized areas over 50,000 persons in population. The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) empowered MPOs and provided for flexibility in the use of funding, improved State regional cooperation, and enhanced public participation. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) legislation of 1998 expanded the role and responsibilities of metropolitan areas exceeding 200,000 persons in population with the designation of

Transportation Management Area (TMA). In 2012, congress passed The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century or MAP-21. MAP-21 creates a streamlined, performance-based, and multimodal program to address the many challenges facing the U.S. transportation system. These challenges include 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.

MAP-21 builds on and refines many of the highway, transit, bike, and pedestrian programs and policies established in 1991. This summary reviews the policies and programs administered by the Federal Highway Administration. The Department will continue to make progress on transportation options, which it has focused on in the past three years, working closely with stakeholders to ensure that local communities are able to build multimodal, sustainable projects ranging from passenger rail and transit to bicycle and pedestrian paths.

Federal Transportation Planning Process

Title 23 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 450.300,(23 CFR 450.300) states that MPOs are to carry out:

a) Sets forth the national policy that the MPO designated for each urbanized area is to carry out a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive multimodal transportation planning process, including the development of a metropolitan transportation plan and a transportation improvement program (TIP), that encourages and promotes the safe and efficient development, management, and operation of surface transportation systems to serve the mobility needs of people and freight (including accessible pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities) and foster economic growth and development, while minimizing transportation-related fuel consumption and air pollution; and

(b) Encourages continued development and improvement of metropolitan transportation planning processes guided by the planning factors set forth in 23 U.S.C. 134(h) and 49 U.S.C. 5303(h).

23 CFR Section 450.306 identifies eight planning factors to identify the “scope of the metropolitan transportation planning process.” These eight planning factors include:

(a) The metropolitan transportation planning process shall be continuous, cooperative, and comprehensive, and provide for consideration and implementation of projects, strategies, and services that will address the following factors:

(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 accessibility and mobility of people and freight;

(5) Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the 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; and

(8) Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

(b) Consideration of the planning factors in paragraph (a) of this section shall be reflected, as appropriate, in the metropolitan transportation planning process. The degree of consideration and analysis of the factors should be based on the scale and complexity of many issues, including transportation system development, land use, employment, economic development, human and natural environment, and housing and community development.

(c) The failure to consider any factor specified in paragraph (a) of this section shall not be reviewable by any court under title 23 U.S.C., 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53, subchapter II of title 5, U.S.C. Chapter 5, or title 5 U.S.C. Chapter 7 in any matter affecting a metropolitan transportation plan, TIP, a project or strategy, or the certification of a metropolitan transportation planning process.

(d) The metropolitan transportation planning process shall be carried out in coordination with the statewide transportation planning process required by 23 U.S.C. 135 and 49 U.S.C. 5304.

(e) In carrying out the metropolitan transportation planning process, MPOs, States, and public transportation operators may apply asset management principles and techniques in establishing planning goals, defining TIP priorities, and assessing transportation investment decisions, including transportation system safety, operations, preservation, and maintenance, as well as strategies and policies to support homeland security and to safeguard the personal security of all motorized and non-motorized users.

(f) The metropolitan transportation planning process shall (to the maximum extent practicable) be consistent with the development of applicable regional intelligent transportation systems (ITS) architectures, as defined in 23 CFR part 940.

(g) Preparation of the coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan, as required by 49 U.S.C. 5310, 5316, and 5317, should be coordinated and consistent with the metropolitan transportation planning process.

(h) The metropolitan transportation planning process should be consistent with the Strategic Highway Safety Plan, as specified in 23 U.S.C. 148, and other transit safety and security planning and review processes, plans, and programs, as appropriate.

(i) The FHWA and the FTA shall designate as a transportation management area (TMA) each urbanized area with a population of over 200,000 individuals, as defined by the Bureau of the Census. The FHWA and the FTA shall also designate any additional urbanized area as a TMA on the request of the Governor and the MPO designated for that area.

(j) In an urbanized area not designated as a TMA that is an air quality attainment area, the MPO(s) may propose and submit to the FHWA and the FTA for approval a procedure for developing an abbreviated metropolitan transportation plan and TIP. In developing proposed simplified planning procedures, consideration shall be given to whether the abbreviated metropolitan transportation plan and TIP will achieve the purposes of 23 U.S.C. 134, 49 U.S.C. 5303, and these regulations, taking into account the complexity of the transportation problems in the area. The simplified procedures shall be developed by the MPO in cooperation with the State(s) and public transportation operator(s).

HARLINGEN-SAN BENITO METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

The Harlingen-San Benito MPO, established in 1988, serves as the formal transportation planning body for the Harlingen metropolitan area and is located in the heart of the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas and along the Texas/Tamaulipas border with Mexico; the Harlingen-San Benito Metropolitan Planning Organization is the MPO for Northeastern Cameron County and its member municipalities consist of the City of Harlingen, City of San Benito, City of La Feria, Town of Primera, Town of Combes, Town of Los Indios, City of Palm Valley, City of Rio Hondo, City of Santa Rosa and the unincorporated parts of Cameron County within Precinct 3 and 4.

The Harlingen-San Benito Metropolitan Planning Organization provides a regional forum to ensure that local, State, and Federal agencies and the public coordinate transportation planning issues, and prepare transportation plans and programs. The Harlingen-San Benito MPO develops both long range and short-range multimodal transportation plans, selects and approves projects for federal funding based on regional priorities, and develops ways to reduce traffic congestion.

The Harlingen-San Benito MPO is responsible for these transportation planning activities within a geographic area identified as the Metropolitan Area Boundary (MAB), which was last approved by the Transportation Policy Committee in April 2012.

Organizational Structure

The Harlingen-San Benito MPO consists of two (2) components that oversee the planning and distribution of federal transportation dollars within a defined area. The two (2) components are the following:

Transportation Policy Committee (TPC) -This is the decision-making committee of the MPO that consists of elected officials that represent all of the participating government entities and agencies in the MPO study area. The following entities/municipalities are represented by their respective elected officials: City of Harlingen, City of San Benito, City of La Feria, City of Primera, City of Comes, City of Los Indios, City of Palm Valley, City of Rio Hondo, City of Santa Rosa and Cameron County within Precinct 3 and 4, and Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT).

The Transportation Policy Committee (TPC) is responsible for giving the MPO overall transportation policy guidance in the transportation and programming process. Policy actions are made by the TPC in reference to current transportation issues and policy actions are made in reference to transportation documents/plans. The Transportation Policy Committee has the following responsibilities:

1. Provide direction to support the regional transportation planning process.
2. Certify the coordination, comprehensiveness, and continuity of the regional transportation planning process.
3. Develop the Unified Planning Work Program, the Transportation Improvement Program, and the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (Long Range Transportation Plan) in accordance with federal regulations and statutes.
4. Review the limits of the MPO Study Area and make appropriate revisions.
5. Authorize transit planning technical assistance to transit operating agencies at their request.
6. Identify the kinds of consultant projects eligible for federal transportation funding.

The Transportation Planning Committee shall consider the recommendation of the Technical Advisory Committee on any plan or project to be discussed.

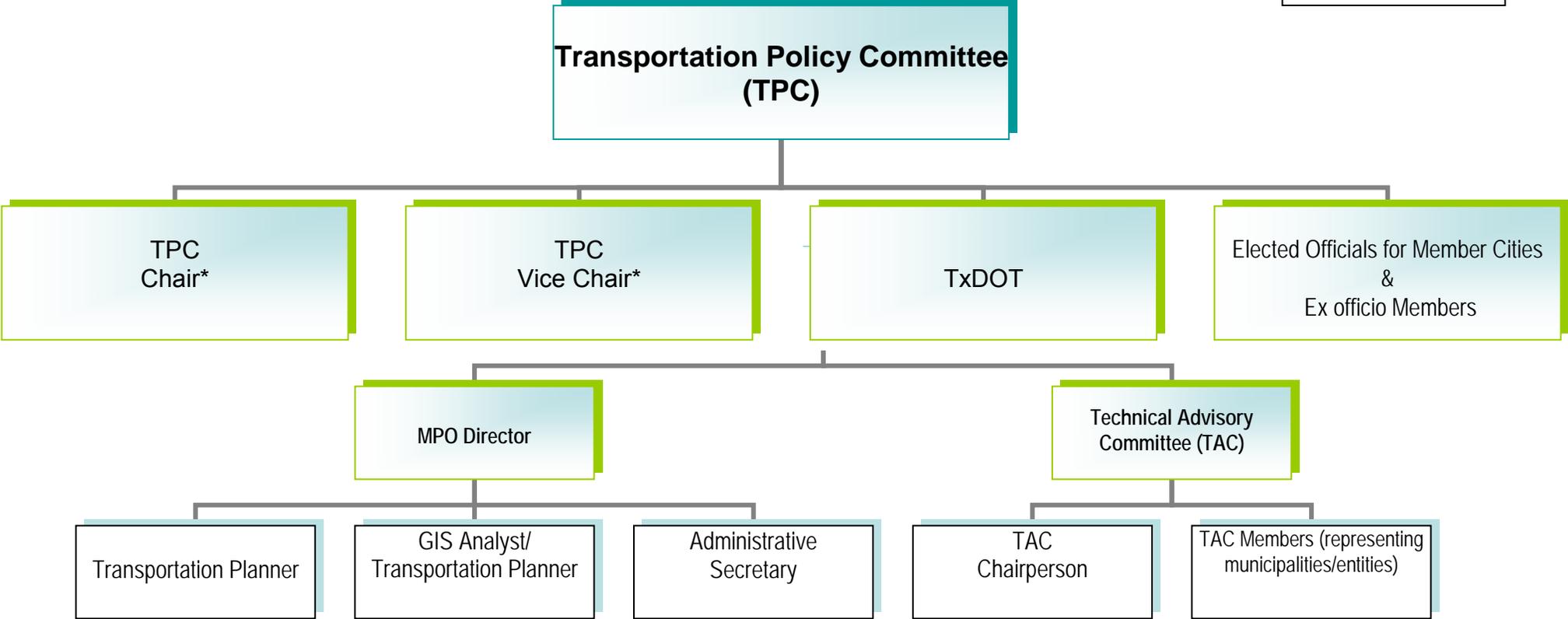
Technical Advisory Committee & MPO Staff shall be a group of local municipal and county government representatives appointed by the Transportation Policy Committee to investigate, research, and report all issues charged to them for the Transportation Policy Committee's consideration in developing regional transportation planning process. The Technical Advisory Committee has the following responsibilities:

1. Assist the Transportation Policy Committee with technical tasks associated with developing the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and recommend its adoption by the Transportation Policy Committee;
2. Review transportation related studies within the Harlingen-San Benito Metropolitan Planning Area and make recommendations to the Transportation Policy Committee and other agencies.
3. Provide technical support in the preparation of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and recommend its adoption by the Transportation Policy Committee.
4. Review the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and other high priority projects and recommend its adoption by the Transportation Policy Committee.
5. Advise the Transportation Policy Committee on technical matters and, if specifically authorized by the Transportation Policy Committee, on the policy matter with accompanying recommendations and supporting rationale.

In addition, the ***Harlingen-San Benito MPO staff*** shall provide continuous technical support to the transportation planning program and is tasked with establishing an impartial setting for effective decision making, providing technical information to the Transportation Policy Committee and other co/sub committees, developing documents required by the federal government, and involving the public in the decision-making process. (See *Figure 1.1, HSBMPO Organization Structure Chart*)

Harlingen-San Benito Metropolitan Planning Organization Structure Chart

Figure 1.1



*TPC Chair and Vice-Chair alternate every two (2) years between the Mayor of Harlingen and the Mayor of San Benito.

The Three Primary MPO Documents

The role of the Metropolitan Planning Organization is to ensure that the federally funded transportation improvements create an efficient intermodal transportation system for the area as well as for the intermodal transportation system and the United States. This is accomplished through transportation planning for the area, data collection, studies, the **Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)**, the **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**, and the **Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)**. The Transportation Policy Committee, through public involvement and the project selection process, works to ensure project coordination. This coordination results in the efficient use of funds through timely right-of-way acquisition, utility placements, and construction costs. Through planning and working with the public, the MPO is aware of transportation needs and can develop solutions in a timely fashion. The project selection process ensures that projects are developed in an efficient, needs-based manner.

A. The Metropolitan Transportation Plan

Federal law, Federal Highway Administration, and Federal Transit Administration regulations require states, MPOs, and transit operators that receive federal capital or operating assistance to continuously, cooperatively, and comprehensively plan for urban transportation needs. Federal transportation legislation known as the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 mandated that the MTP be updated every five years. The current federal transportation legislation continues this requirement of updating the Plan on a five-year schedule. The Harlingen-San Benito MPO last adopted the Metropolitan Transportation Plan in December 2009.

Federally funded transportation improvements within the Metropolitan Area Boundary (MAB) must be in the adopted MTP in order to receive federal funding. The MTP is the long range, 25 year document that describes the transportation goals and facilities necessary to accommodate existing and future transportation needs of the area. Federal funding is restricted to roads that are functionally classified by the MPO and Texas Department of Transportation as collector or above. Roadways are classified based on the volume of traffic and the purpose of the roadway. A transportation improvement is everything from building a new road or adding capacity (lanes) to rehabilitation of an existing road, funding transit systems and providing improved pedestrian or bicycle facilities.

The MTP must identify all transportation facilities, include a financial plan that demonstrates how the plan can be implemented, and assess capital investment and other measures necessary to preserve the existing transportation network and meet future demand. The MPO only provides for the planning of projects; the actual construction is conducted by the TxDOT in coordination with the local entities such as Cameron County and MPO cities.

In addition to the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, all MPOs are responsible also for the following two (2) documents:

B. The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) - This document is the 2-year construction program for the MPO. It lists what projects will be constructed in the MPO urbanized area and in what fiscal year they will be let. (Let means when the contract

will be awarded.) The TIP is updated every two fiscal years (FY 2011, 2013, 2015, etc.) and Quarterly revisions are also allowed.

C. The Unified Planning Work Program, or UPWP - The Unified Planning Work Program is the MPO's annual program of projects and budget. It outlines the administrative and transportation planning activities the MPO will undertake in the current fiscal year. The document is divided into work tasks. Each task allocates how much planning money will be spent by the MPO on each activity during the fiscal year. The MPO operates on the fiscal year October 1 to September 30.

2015-2040 METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN

The Harlingen-San Benito MPO Metropolitan Transportation Plan 2015-2040 serves as the guide for the transportation system decision making process for the Harlingen-San Benito Area.

23 CFR 450 requires that the *Metropolitan Transportation Plan* (MTP) must cover no less than a 20 year planning horizon, shall include both short and long range strategies/actions, and must be updated, at a minimum, every five (5) years.

2015-2040 MTP Plan Organization

The Harlingen-San Benito MPO 2015-2040 MTP has nine (9) chapters, which identifies the MPO's area and short and long range needs and plans. The following list the nine (9) chapters in this document:

1-Introduction

The Introduction explains Federal transportation planning guidelines and provides background information on the Harlingen-San Benito MPO's responsibilities, representatives, and committees. In addition, the chapter provides an overview of the plan, including its purpose, requirements, and methodology to adopt, implement, amend, or revise the 2015-2040 MTP.

2-Existing Conditions

The Existing Conditions chapter inventories the existing elements of the multimodal transportation system, and presents the socioeconomic composition of the Harlingen-San Benito MPO.

3-Existing Transportation System

The Existing Conditions chapter inventories the existing transportation system, which includes all modes of transportation that are currently present in the Harlingen-San Benito MPO.

4-Goals and Objectives

The Goals and Objectives chapter identifies goals, objectives, and policies for the transportation system.

5-Transportation System Improvements

The Transportation System Improvements chapter identifies the transportation

system's planned capital improvements, strategies, plans, and programs agreed to by the Harlingen-San Benito MPO.

6-Financial Plan

The Financial Plan presents the Harlingen-San Benito MPO's estimated future funding revenues and identifies future improvement cost estimates, in order to ensure the region has the fiscal capacity to implement the planned improvements.

7-Environmental Review

The Environmental Review takes into consideration the natural and human environment, assists in streamlining the federal project review process, and identifies potential mitigation strategies.

8-Public Participation Plan and Public Comments for the 2015-2040 MTP

Chapter 8 details the Public Participation Plan requirements Harlingen-San Benito MPO public involvement process and efforts for communicating with the general public and other interested parties during the 2015-2040 MTP update.

9-Conclusion

The Conclusion chapter provides a summary of the 2015-2040 MTP's preceding chapters. The conclusion discusses overall findings from developing the 2015-2040 MTP; identifies steps for the Harlingen-San Benito MPO to implement, monitor, and update the 2015-2040 MTP; and identifies potential challenges and potential opportunities for the Harlingen-San Benito MPO in the future.

Plan Adoption

Adoption of the Harlingen-San Benito MPO Metropolitan Transportation Plan 2015-2040 is subject to the MPOs Transportation Policy Committee review and approval. The review process consist of 30-day public comment period that offer opportunities for review and comment. At the conclusion of the public review period, Harlingen-San Benito MPO staff reviews and summarizes all submitted comments and presents the findings to the Transportation Policy Committee (TPC) for consideration into the final 2015-2040 MTP. Once approved, the Harlingen-San Benito MPO submits the final 2015-2040 MTP document, with a copy of the formal resolution, to Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transportation Association (FTA) for review and to ensure compliance with federal regulations.

Implementation

The role of the Metropolitan Planning Organization is to ensure that the federally funded transportation improvements create an efficient intermodal transportation system for the area as well as for the intermodal transportation system of Texas and the United States.

Implementation of the 2015-2040 MTP occurs through a series of short and long range strategies, plans and programs. The Harlingen-San Benito MPO *Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)* identifies fiscal year work activities and anticipated work products. Also, the Harlingen-San Benito MPO's *Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)*

identifies all transportation projects programmed with federal funds for the upcoming four federal fiscal years.

Amendments and Administrative Revisions

The Harlingen-San Benito MPO considers the following criteria when amending and/or revising the 2015-2040 MTP:

Amendments

The Harlingen-San Benito MPO considers proposed changes that meet any of the following criteria as amendments to the 2015-2040 MTP:

- Changes in socioeconomic projections;
- Addition of a project to the plan in any year increment;
- Major changes in a project's scope, limits or construction cost greater than 50%.

If the Harlingen-San Benito MPO considers a change to the plan to be an amendment, the Harlingen-San Benito MPO must approve the requested change and must follow the public participation process identified in the Harlingen-San Benito MPO's Public Participation Plan (PPP).

If the HSMBPO approves the amendment, the MPO will notify TxDOT, FHWA, and FTA. Generally, plan amendments take a minimum of 60 days to process.

Administrative Revisions

The Harlingen-San Benito MPO considers proposed changes that meet any of the following criteria as administrative revisions to the 2015-2040 MTP:

- Changes to any of the modal elements;
- Editorial revisions of text and/or graphics
- Minor changes in a project's scope where the recalculated construction costs are minimal (less than 50%).

If the Harlingen San Benito MPO considers a change to be an administrative revision, the MPO will process the revision administratively, and the MPO staff will need to ensure the following:

- Process the revision by notifying TxDOT, FHWA, and FTA in writing; and
- Notify the HSBMPO Transportation Policy Committee (TPC) members of all administrative amendments at the monthly committee meeting.

Generally, administrative amendments take a minimum of 30 days to process.