

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE



HARLINGEN-SAN BENITO MPO  
Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan

### Purpose and Scope

The Harlingen-San Benito MPO Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (the “Master Plan”) identifies a region-wide network of on-street and off-street active transportation facilities that enable bicycle and pedestrian travel throughout the HSBMPO study area. The Master Plan identifies essential active transportation routes upon which on-street bicycle facilities, or off-street multi-use paths and pathways, will provide multi-modal connections between study area communities. In conjunction with this “inter-community” active transportation network, the Master Plan proposes a series of high-priority routes within individual HSBMPO study area communities where enhanced bicycle and/or pedestrian facilities are necessary to connect local residents to key community destinations. Master Plan network and facility recommendations are supplemented by a list of prioritized active transportation projects which can be incorporated into local and regional capital improvement programs.

The bicycle and pedestrian network recommended for the HSBMPO study area represents a region-wide system of “principal” on-street and off-street routes. Additional local planning efforts will be required by HSBMPO municipalities to identify a full system of secondary routes internal to each community, and extending beyond the principal system recommended in this plan. The Master Plan’s supporting facility design guidelines should be applied to the specific routes recommended in the Master Plan, and other routes subsequently identified by HSBMPO member communities as part of additional localized planning efforts.

### Federal Guidance

MPOs were first mandated to plan for multi-modal transportation systems (including accommodation for bicycle and pedestrian travel) with the passage in 1991 of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). ISTEA has in turn been superseded by the following federal transportation authorization legislation:

- **Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) (1997)**
- **Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) (2005)**
- **Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) (2012)**



On December 4, 2015, the President signed the latest federal transportation authorization bill into law. The Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act replaces MAP-21 and provides long-term certainty in the structure of federal transportation programs and funding commitments. Key distinctions between the manner in which MAP-21 and the FAST Act impact policy and funding for bicycle and pedestrian programs and infrastructure are identified in **Figure 1.1, Federal Bicycle and Pedestrian Funding Formulas (2016)<sup>1</sup>**:

**FIGURE 1.1, FEDERAL BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN FUNDING FORMULAS (2016)<sup>1</sup>**

Program Element	Federal Transportation Act (Year of Authorization)	
	MAP-21 (2012)	FAST Act (2015)
<b>Program Name (Principal Bicycle and Pedestrian Funding Source)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transportation Alternatives (TAP) was a separate program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program is a set-aside under the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP).</li> </ul>
<b>Program Funding (Principal Bicycle and Pedestrian Funding Source)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TAP was two percent of all programs.</li> <li>In 2014, TAP was funded at 819 million dollars.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding increases in 2016 and 2017 to a flat fund of 835 million dollars.</li> <li>Funded at 850 million dollars for 2018, 2019, and 2020.</li> </ul>
<b>Transparency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No reporting requirements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>States and MPOs must report number and cost of applications versus funded projects.</li> </ul>
<b>Local Control Over Spending</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fifty percent of TAP funds to state competitive program.</li> <li>Fifty percent to communities based on population.</li> <li>Large MPOs may run their own competitive process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same as MAP-21, but large MPOs can flex 50 percent of set-aside to any STBGP project.</li> </ul>
<b>Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ten percent of all Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funds could be used for non-infrastructure safety education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-infrastructure projects are ineligible for HSIP funds.</li> <li>405 Non Motorized Safety Priority: Program funds for safety and enforcement programs for states where 15 percent or more of all traffic fatalities are bicyclists or pedestrians.</li> </ul>
<b>Complete Streets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did not include safe streets language.</li> <li>On the National Highway System non-interstate (arterials, major roads, etc.) stated a state, "...may take into account all users."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Directs Secretary of Transportation to encourage states and MPOs to develop standards that provide accommodation to all users in all phases of project planning and development.</li> <li>States shall, "...consider adequate accommodation of all users."</li> </ul>
<b>Design Standards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design standards based solely on AASHTO.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design standards based on AASHTO, and NACTO Urban Streets Design Guidelines.</li> <li>Local flexibility to use design guidelines not adopted by the state.</li> </ul>

1. Adapted from League of American Bicyclists, *Bicycling in the FAST Act*, [http://bikeleague.org/sites/default/files/FAST\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://bikeleague.org/sites/default/files/FAST_fact_sheet.pdf), 2015.

While all sequential federal transportation authorizations since ISTEA have modified the formulas by which subsequent federal appropriations may fund bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, all have preserved the mandate that bicycle and pedestrian accommodation be provided. Per Title 23, United States Code, MPOs long-range plans and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP) must:

*"...provide for the development and integrated management and operation of transportation systems and facilities (including accessible pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities) that will function as an intermodal transportation system for the metropolitan planning area..." 23 USC 134 (c)(2) (2014)*

1 Adapted from League of American Bicyclists, *Bicycling in the FAST Act*, [http://bikeleague.org/sites/default/files/FAST\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://bikeleague.org/sites/default/files/FAST_fact_sheet.pdf), 2015.



Similarly, the Code of Federal Regulations maintains that MPO Metropolitan Transportation Plans (MTP), and TIPs must meet the following:

*“Existing and proposed transportation facilities (including major roadways, transit, multimodal and intermodal facilities, pedestrian walkways and bicycle facilities, and intermodal connectors) that should function as an integrated metropolitan transportation system...” 23 CFR 1.450.322 (f)(2) (2015)*

*“The TIP shall include capital and non-capital surface transportation projects (or phases of projects) within the boundaries of the metropolitan planning area proposed for funding under 23 U.S.C. and 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53 (including transportation enhancements; Federal Lands Highway program projects; safety projects included in the State’s Strategic Highway Safety Plan; trails projects; pedestrian walkways; and bicycle facilities)...” 23 CFR 1.450.324 (c) (2015)*

## State, Regional, and Local Planning Initiatives

This document represents the HSBMPO’s first bicycle and pedestrian plan since the adoption of the Harlingen-San Benito Pedestrian and Bicycle Mobility Study in 2000. Since that time there have been many changes in federal and state policies and funding mechanisms relating to bicycle and pedestrian modes of travel. Likewise, local development conditions and community travel patterns continue to evolve. Although the HSBMPO’s Metropolitan Transportation Plans (MTP) include bicycle and pedestrian elements that establish general policy recommendations, MTPs have not included the type of network maps, project lists, and work program that are incorporated into this plan.

Master Plan recommendations were informed by previous HSBMPO bicycle and pedestrian planning initiatives, and current HSBMPO policy documents. Other recent bicycle and pedestrian planning initiatives that were reviewed during the preparation of the Master Plan include:

### *Regional Planning Initiatives.*

The planning initiatives of regional entities abutting or overlapping the HSBMPO study area were evaluated to ensure consistency of inter-regional bicycle and pedestrian routes and facility design, where possible.

- **Brownsville MPO (Various Plans).** Several bicycle and/or pedestrian mobility plans and studies have been conducted by the Brownsville MPO. Documents were reviewed to determine the MPO’s most recent bicycle and pedestrian network and facility design recommendations.
- **Hidalgo County MPO Bicycle Plan (2012).** The Hidalgo County MPO Bicycle Plan recommends the addition of 82 miles of on-street and off-street bicycle facilities to the existing 32 mile system. Recommended bicycle facility improvements include: striped bicycle lanes, paved shoulders, and shared-use paths. The plan identifies only two (2) thoroughfares (U.S. Highway 83 Business, SH 107) extending into the HSBMPO study area which include shoulders suitable to accommodate bicycle travel. There are no current plans to add bicycle facility enhancements to either thoroughfare where they intersect Cameron County.
- **Hidalgo County MPO Pedestrian Plan (2013).** The Hidalgo County MPO Pedestrian Plan identifies a system of high priority on-street pedestrian improvement projects within MPO study area. The Pedestrian Plan does not recommend any on-street or off-street projects that would provide connectivity to HSBMPO study area communities.
- **LRGV Active Transportation and Active Tourism Plan (the “Active Plan”) (2016).** The Active Plan proposes a series of region-wide on-street bicycle routes and multi-use paths connecting Cameron County cities with area destinations and attractions. The Plan’s recommended bicycle and pedestrian network includes routes that would be attractive to both visitors and local residents. Many HSBMPO communities participated in this planning activity. Where possible, Master Plan bicycle and pedestrian routes correspond with Active Plan network recommendations.



### Local Planning Initiatives.

The plans of local communities within and adjacent to the HSBMPO study area were also reviewed as part of the planning process to ensure the consistency of regional recommendations with local initiatives, where feasible. Local comprehensive plans, bicycle and pedestrian plans, major thoroughfare plans, trails plans, parks and recreation plans, and more were among those reviewed. Of these numerous documents, the following five (5) plans provided significant insight into local bicycle and pedestrian network and facility priorities:

- **Brownsville Hike and Bike Master Plan (2013).**
- **Harlingen Comprehensive Plan (2016).**
- **Harlingen Trails Master Plan (2010).**
- **La Feria Comprehensive Plan (2007).**
- **San Benito Comprehensive Plan (Ongoing).**

## Public and Stakeholder Engagement

Public and stakeholder engagement activities conducted throughout the six (6) month planning period influenced the development of Master Plan objectives, recommendations, actions/initiatives, and projects. Engagement activities included the following:

### Public Engagement

- **Public Open Houses (Needs).** Two (2) introductory public open houses were held to assess community needs and preferences. The open house were held on consecutive nights in La Feria and Harlingen. Attendees participated in exercises to identify principal bicycling and walking destinations and barriers; and, to express their preferences regarding different types of bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- **Public Input Survey.** An on-line public survey was distributed and advertised by the HSBMPO asking study-area residents about their bicycling and walking habits and preferences. There were a total of 273 survey completed, this number includes a group of paper surveys that were completed at the Viva Streets Harlingen event.
- **Viva Streets Harlingen.** A public information booth was staffed at Viva Streets Harlingen – the City’s first festival catering to healthy activities in a street closed to motor vehicles and serving as a temporary ‘paved park.’ The Viva Streets Harlingen booth provided an additional opportunity to solicit public feedback utilizing the on-line survey, and previous open house materials.
- **Public Open House (Recommendations).** A public open house was held to solicit feedback on proposed bicycle and shared use networks and improvements throughout the study area. Participants provided comments on proposed routes, recommended facilities, and prioritized projects.

Public input opportunities were provided in English and Spanish - including access to bilingual staff at all events.



### Stakeholder Engagement

- **Visioning Meetings.** A series of six (6) visioning meetings with key stakeholders were held at the beginning of the planning process to understand the mobility needs of individual study area communities, and existing barriers to developing a comprehensive network of active transportation facilities. The meetings were held over a two (2) day period at different study area locations. Follow-up conversations with many of the participating stakeholders aided in the development of subsequent Master Plan recommendations.
- **Bicycle-Pedestrian Advisory Task Force.** The HSBMPO assembled an advisory task force of key community stakeholders. The task force represented governmental bodies responsible for providing mobility and recreational services in the study area, and private entities engaged in activities that support health and wellness and active transportation. The task force met five (5) times during the planning process and provided guidance on area mobility needs, and network and facility recommendations.

### Master Plan Adoption

The final Master Plan document was reviewed and adopted by the HSBMPO Transportation Policy Committee (TPC) at a publicly-advertised meeting, which occurred September 14, 2016.

## Plan Goal and Objectives

The goal of the Harlingen-San Benito MPO Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan is to develop a network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities that increase the use of non-motorized transportation options throughout the study area while providing access to recreational opportunities that promote healthy lifestyles. This goal will be achieved by implementing the following four (4) objectives:

### BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN MASTER PLAN OBJECTIVES

<p><b>1</b> CONSTRUCT A NETWORK OF ON-STREET BICYCLE FACILITIES THAT WILL CONNECT USERS TO KEY DESTINATIONS THROUGHOUT THE STUDY AREA.</p>	<p><b>2</b> CONSTRUCT A NETWORK OF SHARED-USE PATHS THAT PROVIDE SAFE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WALKING AND BICYCLING WITHIN AND BETWEEN STUDY AREA COMMUNITIES.</p>	<p><b>3</b> IDENTIFY ENHANCEMENTS THAT CAN BE MADE TO PEDESTRIAN NETWORKS WITHIN STUDY AREA COMMUNITIES.</p>	<p><b>4</b> DEVELOP PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES WHICH PROMOTE BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY.</p>
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Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of the Master Plan provide recommendations for the creation of a study-area wide active transportation network and supporting initiatives, designed to achieve the bicycling and walking goals and objectives of HSBMPO communities. The three (3) chapters are organized to address the five (5) categories identified by the League of American Bicyclists (LAB) as essential to making a place great for bicycling:

**FIGURE 1.2, THE 5 E'S: BICYCLE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES<sup>1</sup>**

Element	Description
<b>Engineering</b>	Creating safe and convenient places to ride and park.
<b>Education</b>	Giving people of all ages and abilities the skills and confidence to ride.
<b>Encouragement</b>	Creating a strong bike culture that welcomes and celebrates bicycling.
<b>Enforcement</b>	Ensuring safe roads for all users.
<b>Evaluation and Planning</b>	Planning for bicycling as a safe and viable transportation option.

1. League of American Bicyclists, *The Essential Elements of a Bicycle-Friendly Community*, <http://bikeleague.org/content/5-es>.

**It is important to note, that although the program categories referenced in Figure 1.2 refer to the creation of 'bicycling' friendly communities, they represent the same essential elements that are necessary to make a place great for walking.** The Harlingen-San Benito MPO Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan utilizes the measures in **Figure 1.2** to formulate network, facility, and program recommendations for both bicycling and walking throughout the study area.