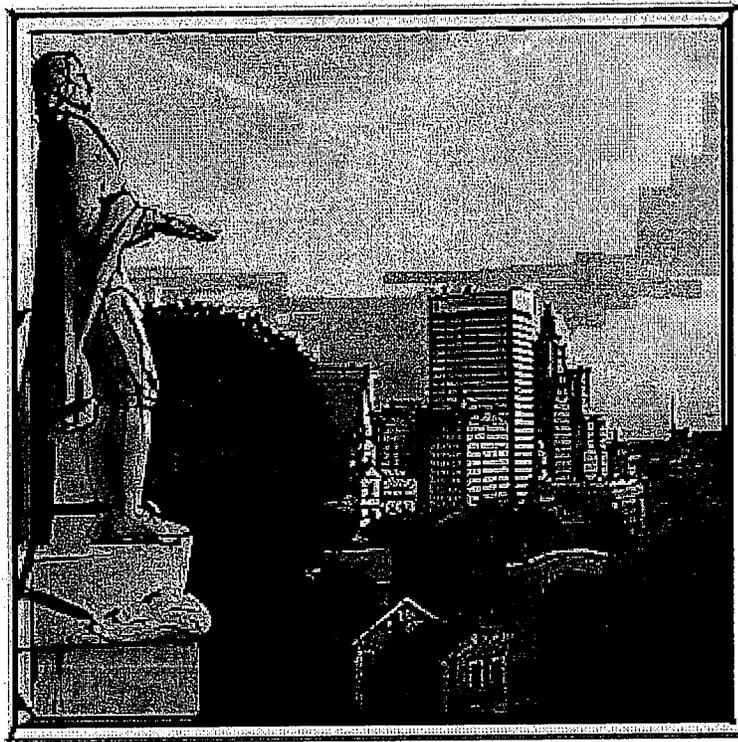




U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Highway
Administration**

**Federal Transit
Administration**



Transportation Planning Certification Review Of The
Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process For
Providence-Pawtucket Transportation Management Area

Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program (RISPP)
Final Report
February 2010

With Support from the U.S. DOT / Volpe Center

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE3

STATEWIDE PLANNING COUNCIL BACKGROUND4

CERTIFICATION ACTION.....4

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY5

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS5

REVIEW OF FINDINGS FROM 2005 FEDERAL TMA CERTIFICATION REVIEW7

PLANNING TOPICS COVERED BY THIS REVIEW.....7

 Organization8

 Boundary8

 Agreements/Contracts9

 UPWP Development11

 Transportation Planning Process12

 Metropolitan Transportation Plan Development13

 TIP Development/Approval/Amendments15

 Financial Planning19

 Air Quality and Conformity21

 Outreach/Public Participation.....24

 Self-Certification26

 Title IV and Environmental Justice26

 Congestion Management28

ADDITIONAL PRIORITY TOPICS FROM SITE VISIT.....29

 Staffing29

 Freight Planning30

 Transit Planning31

 Land Use and Transportation Planning32

APPENDICES

 Composition of Federal Team Appendix A

 List of Participants..... Appendix B

 On-Site Review Agenda Appendix C

 Public Input Summary and Matrix Appendix D

Preface

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA-LU) of 2005 set forth requirements for Statewide and metropolitan transportation planning processes, following upon the predecessor Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). The United States Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) issued planning regulations on November 14, 2007 implementing SAFETEA-LU requirements governing the transportation planning process. These requirements are presented in 23 CFR Part 450 and 49 CFR Part 613, Statewide and Metropolitan Planning Final Rule. The Metropolitan Planning Regulations are closely tied with the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 (CAAA) through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Air Quality Conformity Regulations. SAFETEA-LU essentially continues the programs and basic philosophies of ISTEA and TEA-21.

The Metropolitan Planning Regulations require that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) jointly review and evaluate the transportation planning process conducted in each urbanized area or Transportation Management Area (TMA) with a population over 200,000 no less than once every four years. This review meets the requirements of the Metropolitan Planning Regulations and, in air quality nonattainment or maintenance areas, evaluates area-wide transportation planning to ensure conformity of plans and programs to the EPA Air Quality Conformity regulations. Upon completion of planning reviews, FHWA and FTA jointly Certifies, Certifies with Corrective Action or Decertifies the Metropolitan Planning Process.

This Certification review of the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process for the Providence-Pawtucket Transportation Management Area was conducted on September 30, 2009, for the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Council (SPC), which serves as the TMA's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The review was led by FHWA – Rhode Island and FTA Region 1 staff, and involved discussions with the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program (SPP) staff, who serve as staff to the MPO, and also attended by representatives from the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT); the Rhode Island Public Transit Administration (RIPTA); the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM); representatives from the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD), the neighboring MPO; and other stakeholders.

The purpose of the on-site review meeting was to assess the technical capability of the MPO staff in meeting the requirements set forth in 23 CFR Part 450 and 49 CFR Part 613, and the ability of the MPO to involve the public who may be affected by transportation investments in the transportation decisionmaking process. In addition, the review team used these sessions to help assess the multi-modal nature of the MPO planning activities as well as their ability to respond to various DOT initiatives. The Federal review team conducted a desk review of the major components of the transportation planning process, and explored selected components of the

planning process and major DOT initiatives in depth during the on-site review. The Federal team also provides regular oversight of planning activities and reviews documents at the time of publication. Based on desk review, site visit, review of area-wide planning documents, and on-going oversight, this report identifies recommendations for consideration by the MPO for improvement and also highlights some of the positive practices of the MPO that can serve as examples to other states and planning organizations.

Statewide Planning Council Background

The Statewide Planning Council (SPC) was established as the MPO for Rhode Island in State Law Section 42-11-10, which outlines the Statewide Planning Program and the role of the SPC. The MPO is uniquely structured in Rhode Island in that the MPO boundaries cover the entire state, which has a land area of approximately 1,045 square miles and a population of approximately 1,050,788, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The MPO also includes the Rhode Island portion of the Providence urbanized area, which covers 367 square miles and had a population of 927,003 in 2000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The SPC consists of 17 voting members from State agencies, municipal planning departments, advocacy and special interest groups, and members of the public. The Statewide Planning Program (SPP) serves as the staff for the SPC. The SPP staff are State employees housed within the Rhode Island Department of Administration (RIDOA), and they are also responsible for land use planning, economic development, comprehensive planning, and coordination of GIS for the entire State of Rhode Island. This organization allows the MPO to better coordinate transportation planning with land use and municipal planning. Based on the configuration of the MPO, the structure of the planning process and the interactions between various planning agencies and disciplines was a major focus of this Certification review.

Each of the planning areas within the SPC's purview is reflected in an integrated statewide planning framework, "The State Guide Plan." The State Guide Plan is intended to be the basis for setting a coordinated path for the future of Rhode Island's State agencies and its 39 cities and towns. The State Guide Plan also serves to integrate transportation planning with land use and economic development. *Transportation 2030*, the MPO's Metropolitan Transportation Plan, is included as one of the 28 elements of the State Guide Plan. The State Guide Plan includes separate elements for Public Transit, Airports, Waterborne Transportation, and Freight Rail.

Certification Action

The FTA and the FHWA have determined that the transportation planning process conducted by the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Council (SPC), representing the Providence-Pawtucket

Transportation Management Area, meets the requirements of the Metropolitan Planning Rule, 23 CFR Part 450 Subpart C and 49 CFR Part 613. The FHWA and the FTA are therefore jointly certifying the transportation planning process.

Executive Summary

As a result of this Certification review, the FHWA and the FTA find that the Statewide Planning Council and its staff, in cooperation with RIDOT and RIPTA, are conducting a transportation planning process that produces valuable products and results using the planning tools currently available. Furthermore, SPC is demonstrating innovation in several parts of the planning process, such as integration of land use and transportation planning and the collaborative work of the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC).

Summary of Federal Actions

1. Corrective Action

- a. **Fiscal Constraint in TIP:** The MPO shall include the required categories for funding in the next Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). SPP staff should work with RIDOT, FHWA, and FTA officials to create a new format for the TIP that best meets Rhode Island's needs while conforming to the Federal regulations for funding categories.

2. Recommendations

- a. **Prior Year Expenditures:** SPC should include the prior year's expenditures in the TIP to provide an additional level of transparency to the public. The prior year's expenditures should be published as a separate supplement on an annual basis. The SPC should work with FHWA and FTA to find a mutually agreeable date to publish this supplement.
- b. **Staffing:** The State should examine whether the level of staffing in key positions within the State Planning Program is adequate to maintain continuity of the program.
- c. **Transit Plan:** SPP, RIDOT, and RIPTA should work together to more fully integrate public transit as part of regional multimodal systems planning. One potential mechanism to bring the agencies and modes together would be consolidated planning grants, which is a federal concept that allows FHWA and FTA planning funds to be combined into a single consolidated grant administered by one of the agencies.
- d. **Maintain Freight Advisory Committee:** SPC should maintain their Freight Advisory Committee as a standing committee to guide future freight planning

efforts and maintain a high level of activity and attention in this area, including in TIP development.

- e. **Congestion Management Task Force:** The Congestion Management Task Force should develop and apply performance measures that will expand the significance and utility of the Congestion Management Process. The SPP should apply these performance measures to examine alternatives and connect the CMP to long-term planning goals. Measures may include travel delay, levels of service, and Vehicle Miles Traveled.
- f. **Air Quality:** The SPP should continue to work with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) to submit Rule VIII, which outlines the process and criteria for State agencies to determine air quality conformity for transportation plans and projects, to the EPA in a timely fashion, and no later than September 2010.

3. Commendations

- a. **RIPTA Planning Initiative:** The Federal team commends RIPTA for their expanded efforts in transit planning, including the Providence Metro Transit Enhancement Study. RIPTA has comprehensively examined transit expansion and improvements across the State, and has developed a vision to guide future planning efforts. RIPTA is encouraged to expand on these efforts by working with the SPP and RIDOT to more completely integrate public transit within regional multimodal systems planning.
- b. **Land Use and Transportation:** The Federal team commends the Rhode Island State agencies and the SPC for superb coordination between transportation and land use planning. *Transportation 2030*, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, is based on scenarios analyzed in the *Land Use 2025* plan, which identifies strategies for focusing development in urban areas and preserving land in rural areas. Although Rhode Island does have a structural advantage in that the entire State is contained within a single MPO's planning boundaries, the level of coordination and collaboration between land use and transportation planning offers a valuable model for other MPOs to follow.
- c. **Planning Challenge Grants:** The Federal team commends the SPP for administering the Planning Challenge Grant program as a means to implement the *Transportation 2030* and the *Land Use 2025* plans. The program allows SPP staff to provide technical assistance strategically to communities to fund projects aligned with State priorities. The program also succeeds in fostering relationships between State and local planning. The productive working relationships between SPP staff and municipal planners, as exhibited through comprehensive planning

review and concurrency between State and local plans, are an example of a best practice that could be adopted by other MPOs.

- d. Financial Planning:** The Federal team commends the Blue Ribbon Panel that examined funding for transportation. The effort recognized the critical funding situation in Rhode Island and worked proactively to identify new funding sources. The Federal team encourages Rhode Island to make greater use of the conclusions of the Panel in future transportation planning. The FHWA will work with the SPP to explore the possibility of a peer exchange on the strategic use of financial planning in the transportation planning process.
- e. Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC):** The Federal team commends the effectiveness of the Transportation Advisory Committee and its climate of cooperation. Although the TAC includes a wide range of interests and individuals, TAC members and members of the public express satisfaction with the process and at the level of respect and collaboration that occurs in the TAC.

Review of Findings and Recommendations from 2005 Federal TMA Certification Review

At the site visit, SPP staff outlined SPC's response and action to the 2005 Certification recommendations and required action. The Federal team reviewed the status of all Federal findings from the 2005 review and concluded that SPC had made satisfactory progress on all items. The twelve recommendations and one required action of the 2005 Certification have been sufficiently addressed, with the exception of the submittal of Rule VIII to EPA. A recommendation regarding Rule VIII is included in the Air Quality section. Considerations related to the other eleven recommendations are incorporated into the sections below.

Planning Requirements Covered by this Review

The Metropolitan Planning Regulations set forth in 23 CFR Part 450 and 49 CFR Part 613, Statewide and Metropolitan Planning Final Rule contain specific requirements for recipients of federal funds that conduct Statewide or Metropolitan Planning. This section of the report addresses each of these requirements as they apply to the transportation planning activities of the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Council in the Providence-Pawtucket Transportation Management Area. The assessment covers examination of the requirements through both the desk review and the on-site visit.

Organization, Boundaries, Agreements/Contracts

Organization

Regulatory Basis

Federal legislation (23 USC 134(b); 49 USC 5303)) requires the designation of a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for each urbanized area with a population of more than 50,000 population. The policy board of the MPO shall consist of (a) local elected officials, (b) officials of local agencies that administer or operate major modes of transportation within the area, and (c) appropriate State officials.

This designation remains in effect until the MPO is re-designated. The addition of jurisdictional or political bodies into the MPO or members to the policy board generally does not constitute a re-designation of the MPO.

The organizational requirements for Metropolitan Planning Organizations are spelled out in Federal Regulation CFR 23 Section 450.310. To the extent possible there will be one Metropolitan Planning Organization for each urbanized area in the State, designated by the Governor through enabling State legislation. The MPO should have a defined organizational structure.

Observations:

The Statewide Planning Program meets the requirements for organization and designation of 23CFR 450.310. The organizational structure further enables the MPO to consider planning opportunities outside the traditional transportation realm.

Boundaries

Regulatory Basis:

Federal legislation (23 USC 134(c); 49 USC 53039(d)) requires boundaries of a metropolitan planning area to be determined by agreement between the MPO and the Governor.

Each metropolitan planning area shall encompass at least the existing urbanized area and the contiguous area expected to become urbanized within a 20-year forecast period and may encompass the entire metropolitan statistical area or consolidated metropolitan statistical area, as defined by the Bureau of the Census. CFR 23 Section 450.312 defines the boundary requirements for Metropolitan Planning Organizations.

Observations:

The Rhode Island Urbanized Area as identified by the 2000 Census includes the entire State of Rhode Island. The urban boundaries encompass all of the Census Urbanized Area [except those

parts in Massachusetts] plus the Metropolitan Planning Area Boundary, which includes the area that the MPO anticipates to become urbanized in the next 20 years. Finally, the MPO boundary includes the entire nonattainment and maintenance areas in and around the Census Urbanized Area, which is the entire State.

The Federal team reviewed a prepared statement by the SPP staff as part of the desk review, which states:

“The entire State is the metropolitan planning area. This matches the MPO’s statutory jurisdiction, and is appropriate given that both RIDOT and RIPTA have statewide operating areas and that the entire State is designated as an ozone nonattainment zone under the Clean Air Act. The MPO does not have any statutory authority over the Massachusetts portions of the Providence metropolitan urbanized areas.”

The boundary of the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program is a contiguous geographic area with a finite boundary. It incorporates the existing urban area, areas expected to become urbanized, and all nonattainment and maintenance areas in Rhode Island.

Agreements/Contracts

Regulatory Basis:

Federal legislation (23 USC 13) requires the MPO to work in cooperation with the State and public transportation agencies in carrying out a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive (3C) metropolitan planning process. These agencies determine their respective and mutual roles and responsibilities and procedures governing their cooperative efforts. Federal regulation requires that these relationships be specified in agreements between the MPO and the State and between the MPO and the public transit operators:

“The MPO, the State(s), and the public transportation operator(s) shall cooperatively determine their mutual responsibilities in carrying out the metropolitan transportation planning process. These responsibilities shall be clearly identified in written agreements among the MPO, the State(s), and the public transportation operator(s) serving the MPA.” *23 CFR 450.314(a)*

If more than one MPO has been designated to serve an urbanized area, there shall be a written agreement among the MPOs, the State(s), and the public transportation operator(s) describing how the metropolitan transportation planning processes will be coordinated to assure the development of consistent metropolitan transportation plans and TIPs across the MPA boundaries...” *23 CFR 450.314(d)*

The regulations also require an agreement between the MPO and any other agency responsible for air quality planning under the Clean Air Act. A single agreement should be executed among the MPO, State, transit operators, and designated air quality regulations “to the extent possible.” *23 CFR 450.314 (c)*.

Observations:

The SPP has several Memorandums of Understanding, which help guide the transportation planning process.

1. “Memorandum of Understanding between Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program and the Southeast Regional Planning and Economic Development District” was adopted in February 2009. The purpose of the MOU is to “cooperate and provide for the coordination of planning activities for all modes of transportation between southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island.”
2. “Memorandum of Understanding between Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program and the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission” was adopted in March 2009. The purpose of the MOU is to “cooperate and provide for the coordination of planning activities for all modes of transportation between central Massachusetts and northern Rhode Island.”
3. “Memorandum of Understanding between the Rhode Island State Planning Council and the Rhode Island Department of Transportation and the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority” was adopted in 2003. The purpose of this MOU is “to establish procedures for changing the Transportation Improvement Program after adoption by the State Planning Council and approval by the Governor and after approval by the federal government.”
4. “Unified Planning Work Program Cooperative Agreement” was adopted in 2009 between the Rhode Island Department of Transportation and the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program for the purpose of carrying out all transportation and related planning activities described in the FY 2010 Unified Planning Work Program for transportation planning.
5. “Air Quality/Transportation Model Consultant Support Cooperative Agreement” was adopted in 2009 between the Rhode Island Department of Transportation and the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program for the purpose of funding transportation air quality consultant services.
6. “Agreement between the Rhode Island Department of Administration Division of Planning and Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. for the purpose of providing consulting services in connection with Air Quality/Rhode Island Statewide Travel Demand Model” was signed in 2008.

The SPP has adopted the necessary MOUs and agreements to promote a cooperative planning process among the RIDOT, RIPTA, the designated air quality agency, and other relevant agencies in the Rhode Island Urbanized Area.

UPWP Development

Regulatory Basis:

23 *CFR* 450.308 identifies the requirements for Unified Planning Work Programs (UPWPs) to be prepared in Transportation Management Areas. *CFR* 420.109 governs how FHWA planning funds are distributed to the MPOs. 49 *USC* 5303 (h) allocates FTA assistance to metropolitan planning organizations. MPOs are required to develop the UPWP in cooperation with the State and public transit agencies [450.308 (c)].

Elements to be included in the UPWP are:

- Discussion of the planning priorities facing the metropolitan planning area
- Description of all metropolitan transportation planning and transportation-related air quality planning activities anticipated within the next 1- or 2-year period, regardless of funding source or agencies conducting activities, indicating:
 - Who will perform the work;
 - Schedule for completion of the work; and
 - Intended products.
- Include all activities funded under title 23 and the Federal Transit Act [450.308(b)]

Observations:

The SPP has prepared the UPWP annually through FY 2010. SPP staff prepare the preliminary draft of the UPWP, anticipated to be funded by federal transportation agencies. RIDOT and RIPTA staff provide assistance relative to the work tasks of their respective agencies. The UPWP accounts for activities of both the Statewide Planning and Strategic Planning units of the Division of Planning, including work tasks related to land use, economic development, consistency review, and planning information and resource initiatives. Because SPP staff also carry out specific activities beyond the normal MPO planning activities, the UPWP also includes funds from the Economic Development Administration and Energy Facility Siting Board. Adjustments can be made based on changes in state appropriations, Federal grants, and other matters.

The UPWP includes a list of all transportation-related activities and issues that will involve the SPC over the following fiscal year. The UPWP lists the tasks necessary to carry out the objectives of *Transportation 2030* and elements of the transportation planning process. For each project or activity, the SPC identifies funding sources, products that will be produced, anticipated work schedule, and sponsoring agencies and participants.

As a key implementation mechanism of the metropolitan transportation plan (MTP), the UPWP includes several innovative programs including freight planning webinars and Planning Challenge Grants. The SPP hosted 12 Talking Freight webinars and a July 2008 webinar on Freight Planning in Rhode Island. The Planning Challenge Grant program, which is detailed in

the Land Use and Transportation section of this report, is an effective means of directing technical support to communities while furthering objectives of the MTP.

The SPC develops a comprehensive UPWP, meeting the requirements of *23 CFR 450.308*, in cooperation with RIDOT and RIPTA. The Federal team encourages the SPC to continue incorporating innovative implementation programs into their UPWP.

Transportation Planning Process

Regulatory Basis:

The Transportation Planning Process, relative to planning factors and other elements of the planning process, is described in the 23 CFR Part 450 and 49 CFR Part 613, Statewide and Metropolitan Planning Final Rule § 450.306.

The eight planning factors are:

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.

SAFETEA-LU also requires a public participation process and plan as a component of the planning process as defined in section § 450.316 (a). This regulation requires that the MPO consult all interested parties including citizens, public agencies, freight shippers, representatives of transportation use groups and other stakeholders. The MPO must create a public participation plan in consultation with all interested parties. The plan should include adequate public notice for all participation activities; visualization techniques to describe the transportation plan and TIP activities; provisions for holding public meetings in convenient, accessible locations; and provide ample opportunity for public comment.

Observations:

The SPP provided detailed documentation that describes how it considers the eight SAFETEA-LU planning factors in the State's transportation planning activities, studies, and policies. The statement, *Integrating SAFETEA-LU Planning Factors into the Transportation Planning*

Process, describes how the planning factors are reflected in *Transportation 2030* objectives, TIP evaluation criteria and funding categories, and other Statewide planning elements and activities.

The SPP, functioning as the MPO staff, works closely with RIDOT and RIPTA staff to fulfill transportation planning requirements for the MPO. Also, since the SPP encompasses land use planning, comprehensive planning, economic development, and GIS, transportation planning involves close institutional linkages with these disciplines. The SPP works closely with RIDOT, RIPTA, and other State agencies to carry out all parts of the transportation planning process, including the MTP, the TIP, the UPWP, and the Congestion Management Process.

The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) is a standing committee of the SPC that reviews and provides input on transportation documents such as the MTP and the TIP, both of which fall under the purview of the SPC. The TAC consists of 25 members representing local and state government, interest groups, and the public; they play a key role in encouraging public involvement in the transportation planning process. Both RIDOT and RIPTA have representatives on the TAC. During a public hearing held during the Federal team's site visit, TAC members and members of the public praised the respect and the cooperation exhibited by the TAC.

The SPP is appropriately considering the SAFETEA-LU planning factor requirements in their planning process. The SPC transportation planning process demonstrates close coordination with transportation agencies, state and local governments, and the public. The TAC serves a central role in reviewing transportation planning documents to provide guidance to the SPC; feedback from SPP staff, TAC members, and members of the public indicates that the TAC runs a fair and balanced review process.

Commendation:

The Federal team commends the effectiveness of the Transportation Advisory Committee and its climate of cooperation. Although the TAC includes a wide range of interests and individuals, TAC members and members of the public express satisfaction with the process and the level of respect and collaboration that occurs in the TAC.

Metropolitan Transportation Plan Development

Regulatory Basis:

The requirements for development of a Metropolitan Transportation Plan are spelled out in § 450.322 of 23 CFR Part 450 and 49 CFR Part 613, Statewide and Metropolitan Planning Final Rule.

“The metropolitan transportation planning process shall include the development of a transportation plan addressing no less than a twenty-year planning horizon as of the effective date. The plan shall include both long-range and short-range strategies/actions that lead to the development of an integrated intermodal transportation system that facilitates the efficient movement of people and goods.” 23 CFR 450.322 The metropolitan transportation plan is to be updated every four years in nonattainment and maintenance areas to ensure its consistency with changes in land use, demographic, and transportation characteristics.

The regulation also identifies a number of required elements that must be addressed in the Transportation Plan, including:

- Demand analysis [23 CFR 450.322 (f) (1)];
- Congestion management strategies [23 CFR 450.322 (f)(4)];
- Pedestrian walkway and bicycle facilities [23 CFR 450.322 (f) (2)];
- System preservation [23 CFR 450.322 (f) (5)];
- Design concept and scope descriptions of all existing and proposed transportation facilities, in sufficient detail to permit conformity determinations in nonattainment and maintenance areas [23 CFR 450.322 (f) (6)];
- A multimodal evaluation of the transportation, socioeconomic, environmental, and financial impact of the overall plan [23 CFR 450.322 (f) (7)];
- Transportation enhancements [23 CFR 450.322 (f) (9)];
- “A financial plan that demonstrates how the adopted transportation plan can be implemented.” [23 CFR 450.322 (f) (10)]
- Public official and citizen involvement (in accordance with the requirements of 23 CFR 450.316), including participation during the early stages of plan development, availability of document for public review, and at least one formal public meeting in nonattainment TMAs [23 CFR 450.322 (j)];
- Conformity determination in nonattainment and maintenance areas 23 CFR 450.322(l)]

Observations:

The current metropolitan transportation plan, entitled *Transportation 2030*, was adopted in 2008. The 2008 plan is an update of the 2004 Plan; it is compliant with SAFETEA-LU and incorporates recommendations from the 2005 MPO Federal Certification Review.

Transportation 2030 also incorporates new studies, including land use and housing plans completed by SPP staff, into statewide transportation goals. Specifically, the Plan uses three growth scenarios based on scenarios used in the Statewide land use plan, *Land Use 2025*.

Transportation 2030 is fiscally constrained based on estimated State and Federal revenue, which the SPC recognizes as insufficient to meet Rhode Island’s transportation needs (based on an inventory of existing transportation system and a needs assessment in the MTP). In order to

address the insufficiency, *Transportation 2030* includes a systems-level analysis with four scenarios of investment levels that could finance transportation infrastructure.

The plan is multi-modal and results from diligent collaboration with local, State, and regional stakeholders to incorporate the most comprehensive project and program assessment. Additional characteristics of the plan are:

- Responds to the eight SAFETEA-LU planning factors from the SAFETEA-LU regulations;
- Provides strategic direction for the TIP;
- Includes analyses of environmental resources, environmental justice benefits and burdens, and air quality conformity (jointly administered with the FY 2009-2012 TIP);
- Incorporates 2006 Freight Needs Assessment;
- Discusses all modes of transportation, including fixed route public transportation, vehicular, rail, ferry, air, freight, pedestrian and bicycle; and
- Integrates the congestion management process (CMP).

The next update of the MTP is scheduled for 2011, if not before.

The SPP MTP meets the requirements of *23 CFR, Section 450.322* and is the result of extensive interagency involvement and a robust planning process. The SPP has successfully integrated other statewide planning elements and objectives into the MTP and employed innovative strategies to address the funding situation. The SPP has also shown notable efforts in the areas of congestion management, freight planning, and multi-modal integration.

TIP Development and Project Selection

Regulatory Basis:

The MPO is required, under *23CFR 450.324*, to develop a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) in cooperation with the State DOT and public transit operators. Specific requirements and conditions, as specified in the regulations, include:

“The MPO, in cooperation with the State(s) and any affected public transportation operator(s), shall develop a TIP for the metropolitan planning area. The TIP shall cover a period of no less than four years, be updated at least every four years, and be approved by the MPO and the Governor... The TIP must be compatible with the STIP development and approval process.”

[*23CFR 450.324(a)*]

- Conformity determination by FHWA and FTA in nonattainment and maintenance areas.
[*23CFR 450.324(a)*]

- Reasonable opportunity for public comment in accordance with *23CFR 450.316(a)* and, in nonattainment TMAs, an opportunity for at least one formal public meeting during the TIP development process. [*23CFR 450.324(b)*]
- The TIP shall include a financial plan identifying projects that can be implemented using public or private sources. The State and the transit operator must provide MPOs with estimates of Federal and State funds available for the transportation system serving the metropolitan area. [*23CFR 450.324 (h)*]
- The TIP shall include: all transportation projects, including bicycle and pedestrian facilities, proposed for funding under title 23, U.S.C., including Federal Lands Highway projects, but excluding safety projects funded under *23 U.S.C 402*, emergency relief projects, and planning and research activities not funded with National Highway System, Surface Transportation Program or Minimum Allocation funds; all regionally significant transportation projects for which FHWA or FTA approval is required and, for informational purposes, all regionally significant projects to be funded from non-Federal sources; only projects that are consistent with the Transportation Plan. [*23CFR 450.324(c)*]
- Information shall be provided as follows for each project included in the TIP: sufficient descriptive material to identify the project or phase; estimated total cost; the amount of Federal funds proposed to be obligated during each program year; proposed source of Federal and non-Federal funds; identification of funding recipient/project sponsor; in nonattainment and maintenance areas, identification of TCMs and sufficiently detailed description to permit conformity determination. [*23CFR 450.324(e)*]
- Projects that the State and MPO do not consider to be of appropriate scale for individual identification in a given program year may be grouped by function, geographical area, and work type. [*23CFR 450.324(f)*]. In nonattainment and maintenance areas, classifications must be consistent with the exempt project classifications contained in the U.S. EPA conformity requirements. [*40 CFR part 51*]
- As a management tool for monitoring progress in implementing the Transportation Plan, the TIP shall identify the criteria and process for prioritizing the implementation of Transportation Plan elements through the TIP; list major projects implemented from the previous TIP and identify significant delays in implementation. [*23CFR 450.324(l)(1) and (2)*]
- In nonattainment and maintenance areas, the TIP shall describe progress in implementing required TCMs [*23CFR 450.324(l)(3)*];

Several other regulations govern different aspects of TIP development and implementation:

- *23CFR 450.326* addresses modification of the TIP, stating that the TIP can be modified at any time, subject to the following conditions:
 - In nonattainment or maintenance areas, adding or deleting projects that affect emission levels requires a new conformity determination

- Public involvement opportunities are provided consistent with requirements for complete information, timely notice, full public access to key decisions, and other relevant provisions.

23CFR 450.326 also governs the relationship between TIP and STIP:

- A Governor- and MPO- approved TIP shall be included without modification in the STIP
- In nonattainment and maintenance areas, a conformity finding by FHWA and FTA must be made before incorporation in the STIP.
- In TMAs, all Title 23 and Federal Transit Act funded projects not included in the first year of the TIP as an “agreed to” list of projects (except projects on the NHS and projects funded under the bridge, interstate maintenance, and Federal Lands Highways programs) shall be selected from the approved metropolitan TIP by the MPO, in consultation with the State and Transit operator. *[23CFR 450.330 (a)]*
- If the State or transit operator(s) wish to proceed with a project in the second or third year of the TIP, MPO project selection procedures must be followed unless expedited project selection procedures formally exist. *[23CFR 450.330(a)]*
- In nonattainment and maintenance areas, priority will be given to the timely implementation of TCMs included in the applicable SIP. *[23CFR 450.330 (e)] TEA-21 [23USC134(h)(7)(B)]* requires the publication of an annual listing of projects for which Federal funds have been obligated in the preceding year. This list shall be consistent with the categories identified in the TIP.

CFR 23 Section 450, Subpart C – Metropolitan Transportation Planning and Program spells out a comprehensive planning process for MPOs to follow. Generally, the development and selection of projects for funding shall be completed through a comprehensive planning process with local input. Projects should be identified in the Transportation Plan and listed in the Transportation Improvement Program, and be developed through various planning methods.

Observations:

In the State of Rhode Island the MPO TIP and the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) are the same document. The current STIP for the State of Rhode Island, which covers FY 2009 – FY 2012, was developed in coordination with the DOT and was approved by both the MPO and the Governor. The TIP covers a four-year period and includes a complete listing of projects that are programmed for funding during that period. The SPP also publishes an annual listing of projects for which Federal funds have been obligated in the preceding year. It is financially constrained and includes only projects for which funds are available. The air quality conformity determination is consistent with 40 CFR 51 or 93 and projects are described in sufficient detail for analysis. The conformity determination is included in the TIP.

The 2009 – 2012 TIP had no available funding to accommodate new projects, so no general project solicitation process occurred during the time since the 2005 TMA Certification Review. Additionally, the current TIP provides only limited information on project selection criteria,

given that such criteria were not applied in this TIP. The only exception was in the CMAQ Program, for which project review procedures and criteria were included in the appendix of the current TIP.

The State Planning Council adopted criteria for TIP project selection that rates projects on a scale of -5 to 5 in the following areas: mobility benefits, cost-effectiveness, economic development, environmental impact, degree of support to State and local goals and plans, and safety/security/technology. Highway project proposals are reviewed by the TAC using the SPC criteria. Bicycle/Pedestrian and Rail subcommittees review projects specific to those modes, also using the SPC criteria.

However, many projects that are included in the TIP are not reviewed against the SPC criteria. These include proposals for the CMAQ program, which is reviewed by the Transportation/Air Quality subcommittee of the TAC and uses its own evaluation criteria. Enhancement projects are reviewed by the Transportation Enhancements Advisory Committee, which uses the specific enhancement criteria outlined that are generally included as appendices to the TIP (there was no solicitation for enhancement projects for the 2009-2012 TIP due to a lack of funding). The TIP projects included in the Bridge Improvement Program and the Pavement Management Program are also ranked and reviewed separately by RIDOT using the Bridge Management System and the Pavement Management System, respectively.

RIDOT has the first recommendation of allocations for each funding category within the TIP. Projects are then assigned to categories based on their readiness to be implemented.

Finally, RIPTA has the responsibility to select and manage TIP projects that fall into several categories of FTA funding (including Large Urban Cities, New Freedom Program, Job Access and Reverse Commute, Nonurbanized Area Formula Program, and Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities). RIPTA's project scoring criteria and policies for grant selection and management for these funding categories are detailed in the State Management Plan.

While the SPC has adopted transparent criteria for rating TIP project proposals, many projects in the TIP are not reviewed according to these criteria. However, even given the complexity of the various reviewing agencies and procedures, the most recent TIP for which project solicitation occurred (the 2006-2007 TIP) includes a transparent explanation of project selection procedures and criteria. The MPO should continue to make the selection process clear and accessible to the public through inclusion of criteria and explanations in the TIP and UPWP.

FHWA, FTA, and the SPC have determined that the FY 2009 – FY 2012 TIP is in conformity with applicable Federal air quality regulations. The TIP is developed through a comprehensive and cooperative process and meets the requirements of relevant metropolitan transportation planning regulations.

Corrective Action:

Regulation 23CFR, 450.216 i (3) requires that the TIP provide information on the categories of Federal funds and non-Federal funds. The SPC TIP shows overall funding categories that do not clearly designate specific categories of Federal and non-Federal funds. Without a clear designation of categories, the TIP is less transparent and understandable to the public.

The MPO shall include the required categories for funding in the next TIP. SPP staff should work with RIDOT, FHWA, and FTA officials to create a new format for the TIP that best meets Rhode Island and the Providence area's needs while conforming to the Federal regulations in terms of including required funding categories in the next TIP.

Recommendation:

The TIP currently does not include the prior year's transportation expenditures, which is required by Federal regulation.

The Federal team recommends that the SPP include the prior year's expenditures in the TIP to provide an additional level of transparency to the public. The prior year's expenditures should be published as a separate supplement on an annual basis. The SPC should work with FHWA and FTA to find a mutually agreeable date to publish this supplement.

Financial Planning

Regulatory Basis:

There are two sections of CFR 23 that define financial requirements of MPOs: Section 450.322(e)(10) and Section 450.324(h).

The provisions related to the Transportation Plan include the following requirements:

- Contain system level estimates of costs and revenue sources that will be expected to operate Federal-aid highways and public transportation
- The MPO and the State should cooperatively estimate funding sources required to support metropolitan transportation plan implementation
- Include recommendations on other financing strategies
- For nonattainment and maintenance areas, the financial plan shall address the specific financial strategies required to ensure implementation of TCMs in the applicable SIP.

The provisions related to the TIP include the following requirements:

- Includes a financial plan demonstrating which projects can be implemented with current revenue sources and which projects require proposed revenue sources

- Takes into account the costs of adequately maintaining and operating the existing transportation system
- Developed by the MPO in cooperation with the State and transit operator
- Developed with estimates of available federal and state funds provided by the state and transit operator
- Includes only projects for which construction and operating funds can reasonably be expected to be available
- Includes strategies for ensuring the availability of new funding sources
- For the financial analysis, considers all projects funded with Federal, state, local private resources.
- In nonattainment/maintenance areas, only includes projects for which funds are available and committed in the first two years.

Observations:

RIDOT and FHWA have jointly developed and agreed to procedures for attaining and documenting financial constraint. The 2009-2012 STIP is fiscally constrained and includes only projects for which funds are available. RIDOT and RIPTA provide project cost estimates for projects they propose, and RIDOT develops or verifies costs for locally proposed projects. *Transportation 2030*, the MTP, dedicates Part 3 to Transportation Financing; this Part includes current funding sources, amounts, and allocations as well as alternatives to address state funding shortfalls. Part 3 also contains a fiscal constraint analysis that shows how constrained federal funding is allocated among major STIP programs and projects. The costs of projects listed in the STIP do not exceed the total Federal funds authorized for each of the four years included.

A significant challenge for the SPP is the severe State budget shortfall that has limited the State's ability to meet transportation needs over the past several years. Recognizing the mismatch between Rhode Island's transportation needs and available funding, the Governor established the Blue Ribbon Panel to investigate aging infrastructure against available funding, explore the extent of current and future federal funding, and assess options for future funding at the state level. The Panel, which met frequently over a ten-month period, was composed of 12 representatives of public, private, and non-profit organizations and businesses, and it was staffed by RIDOT, SPP, and the University of Rhode Island. The Panel's final report, published in December 2008, found that funding levels were based on available revenues rather than need, that the State relied too heavily on federal funds, and that program costs were increasing even as revenues were declining. The Panel also noted weaknesses of the current funding scheme and explored potential new sources of revenue, including increases in gas taxes and registration fees and a Vehicle Miles Traveled tax. The Panel report emphasized the critical state of Rhode Island's transportation infrastructure and the urgent need to act.

RIDOT and the SPP concurrently pursued their own strategies to address financial planning as the Blue Ribbon Panel's work was underway. RIDOT helped the SPP develop four scenarios for use in *Transportation 2030* that apply different levels of transportation investment in a system-wide analysis. The scenarios ("sink," "tread water," "swim," and "win the race") reflect estimates of funding levels and include potential transportation system improvements. The analysis also considers additional revenue sources and how much would be needed for each scenario. The scenarios were presented to the Blue Ribbon Panel and helped inform their findings.

The SPP demonstrates financial constraint in both the MTP and the TIP. The innovative visioning and planning work completed by the SPP are impressive, but the implementation of this work cannot be realized with the extreme funding limitations. The SPP has demonstrated considerable initiative in addressing the need to find new funding sources for transportation in Rhode Island.

Commendation:

The Federal team commends the Blue Ribbon Panel that examined funding for transportation. The effort recognized the critical funding situation in Rhode Island and worked proactively to identify new funding sources. The Federal team encourages Rhode Island to make greater use of the conclusions of the Panel in future transportation planning. The FHWA will work with the SPP to explore the possibility of a peer exchange on the strategic use of financial planning in the transportation planning process.

Air Quality and Conformity

Regulatory Basis:

Section 176 (c)(1) of the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendment (CAAA) states:

"No metropolitan planning organization designated under *Section 134 of title 23, United States Code*, shall give its approval to any project, program, or plan which does not conform to an implementation plan approved or promulgated under section 110." The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 subsequently included provisions responsive to the mandates of the CAAA. Implementing regulations have maintained this strong connection. Provisions governing air quality-related transportation planning are incorporated in a number of Metropolitan Planning Regulations, rather than being the primary focus of one or several regulations. For MPOs that are declared to be air quality nonattainment or maintenance areas, there are many special requirements in addition to the basic requirements for a metropolitan planning process. These include formal agreements to address air quality planning requirements, requirements for setting metropolitan planning area boundaries, interagency coordination, Transportation Plan content and updates, requirements for a Congestion Management System

(CMS), public meeting requirements, and conformity findings on Transportation Plans and TIPs. Sections of the Metropolitan Planning Regulations governing air quality are summarized below:

- An agreement is required between the MPO and the designated agency responsible for air quality planning describing their respective roles and responsibilities (Also see *Agreements and Contracts* topic area) [23 CFR 450.314 (c)]
- The MPO is required to coordinate development of the Transportation Plan with the SIP development process, including the development of transportation control measures (see *Metropolitan Transportation Plan* topic area). [23 CFR 450.312 (c)] The MPO shall not approve any Transportation Plan or program that does not conform with the SIP [23 CFR 450.312 (d)]
- In TMAs designated as nonattainment areas, Federal funds may not be programmed for any project that will result in a significant increase in carrying capacity for single occupant vehicles, unless the project results from a CMS meeting the requirements of 23 CFR part 500, subpart E. [23 CFR 450.320 (b)].
- The Transportation Plan shall identify single-occupancy vehicle projects that result from a CMS meeting Federal requirements. [23 CFR 450.322 (b) (4)] and include design concept and scope descriptions of all existing and future transportation facilities to permit conformity determinations [23 CFR 450.322 (b)(6)]. The FHWA, FTA, and MPO must make a conformity determination on any new or revised Transportation Plan in nonattainment and maintenance areas (see *Metropolitan Transportation Plan* topic area). [23 CFR 450.322(d)]
- In nonattainment and maintenance areas, the FHWA, FTA and MPO must make a conformity determination on any new or amended TIPs [23 CFR 450.324 (b)] and [23 CFR 450.330 (b)].
- In nonattainment TMAs, there must be an opportunity for at least one formal public meeting during the TIP development process [23 CFR 450.324 (c)]
- In nonattainment and maintenance areas, the TIP shall give priority to eligible TCMs identified in the approved SIP and shall provide for their timely implementation. [23 CFR 450.324(d) and 450.330 (b)]
- In nonattainment and maintenance areas, the TIP shall include all regionally significant transportation projects proposed to be funded with Federal and non-Federal funds [23 CFR 450.324 (f)(4) and (5)] and identify projects identified as TCMs in the SIP [23 CFR 450.324 (g)(6)]. Projects shall be specified in sufficient detail to permit air quality analysis in accordance with U.S. EPA conformity requirements. [23 CFR 450.324 (h)]
- For the purpose of including Federal Transit Act section 5309 (former section 3) funded projects in a TIP, in nonattainment and maintenance areas, the TIP shall describe the progress in implementing required TCMs [23 CFR 450.324 (m) (3)] and include a list of all projects found to conform in a previous TIP and are now part of the base case used in air quality conformity analysis [23 CFR 450.324 (m) (4)].

- In nonattainment or maintenance areas, if the TIP is amended by adding or deleting projects that affect transportation-related.

In TMA that are nonattainment or maintenance areas, the FHWA and FTA will review and evaluate the transportation planning process to assure that the process is adequate to ensure conformity of plans and programs in accordance with procedures contained in *40 CFR part 51. [23 CFR 450.334 (c)]*. Air Quality requirements are spelled out in CFR 23 Section 450.322(d) and Section 450.324(b). “In nonattainment and maintenance areas for transportation related pollutants the MPO must make a conformity determination on any new/revised transportation plan or Transportation Improvement Program, in accordance with the CAA and the EPA conformity regulations.”

Observations:

The entire State is a moderate nonattainment area for ozone, and the City of Providence is a maintenance area for carbon monoxide. The SPP and RIDOT jointly fund a consultant to prepare emissions analyses for conformity determinations on TIPs and metropolitan transportation plans in the State. SPP established an Air Quality Working Group in conjunction with the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) that also includes representatives from RIDOT and RIPTA. Rule VIII outlines the process and criteria for transportation and environmental state agencies to determine air quality conformity for transportation plans and projects. In 2005, the Federal team recommended that the SPC submit Rule VIII to the EPA. SPC plans to formally submit the rule to EPA by September 2010.

The Rhode Island Statewide Travel Demand Model (RISM), updated with planning assumptions and demographic projections, was used to obtain traffic data for the air quality analysis. The model was developed to estimate future travel demand on the regional transportation network and also has been used to test transportation and land use alternatives, such as in *Land Use 2025*. RISM is a daily model that runs in TransCAD 5.0 using input from the roadway networks, traffic analysis zones (TAZ) data, census data, and employment data; the model covers all of Rhode Island and over 300 TAZs in Massachusetts and Connecticut. RISM outputs travel data to use in the Mobile 6.2 Air Quality Model.

Although Mobile 6.2 was used in the most recent TIP, Rhode Island is transitioning to the MOVES model. MOVES, which is being adopted by EPA, is a trip-based model that allows for more flexibility and accuracy of emissions measurement. The model focuses mostly on ozone and carbon monoxide, but the Air Quality Working Group is also monitoring future projections of greenhouse gases, which will become a policy consideration in the future.

The SPP in cooperation with RIDOT uses an acceptable practice to demonstrate air quality conformity in both the TIP and the metropolitan transportation plan. The SPP also demonstrate

efforts to stay current with air quality modeling technologies and incorporate new measurements into policies. The SPC is actively working with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and EPA to refine and officially submit Rule VIII.

Recommendation:

The Federal team recommends that the SPP continue to work with DEM to submit Rule VIII to the EPA in a timely fashion, and no later than September 2010.

Outreach/Public Participation

Regulatory Basis:

The requirements for public involvement are set forth primarily in *23 CFR 450.316*, which addresses elements of the public involvement requirements. Public involvement also is addressed specifically in connection with the Transportation Plan in *450.322 (i)* and the TIP in *450.324(b)*.

Requirements related to the planning process generally are summarized in *450.316*, as follows:

- A proactive process
- Complete information
- Development of a participation plan in coordination with all interested parties
- Timely public notice of public involvement activities and information about transportation issues and processes
- Full public access to key decisions and time for public review and comment
- Early and continuing public involvement in developing the TIP
- A minimum public comment period of 45 days before adoption or revision of the public involvement process
- Minimum 30-day review period for Transportation Plan, TIP and major amendments in nonattainment areas classified as serious and above
- Explicit consideration and response to public input
- Consideration of the needs of people traditionally underserved by transportation systems, including low-income and minority households; consistency with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, including actions necessary to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
- Periodic review of public involvement effectiveness
- Coordination of metropolitan and statewide public involvement processes
- MPO should consult with other agencies and officials responsible for planning activities such as federal agencies, Tribal governments, transit operators, etc.

The requirements pertaining to the Transportation Plan (*450.322(i)*) are further elaborated as follows:

- Opportunity for public official and citizen involvement in the development of the Transportation Plan, in accordance with 450.316(a).

TIP related requirements [450.324 (b)] include:

- MPOs must provide reasonable opportunity for public comment in accordance with the requirements of 450.316(a) and, in nonattainment TMAs, an opportunity for at least one formal public meeting during the TIP development process and provision for public review and comment. The passage of ISTEA in 1991 marked the beginning on an increased emphasis on the role of the public in making transportation decisions that effect their locality.

Public involvement in the transportation planning process is a major feature of ISTEA and TEA-21. The Metropolitan Planning Regulations state that, “The metropolitan transportation planning process shall include a proactive public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans and TIPs.” To this end, MPOs must develop and adopt a formal public involvement process for planning and program development.

Observations:

Rule IX of the State Planning Council’s Rules of Procedure specifies the public involvement procedures for participation in the transportation planning process. Rule IX incorporates appropriate mechanisms to solicit input from stakeholders and specifies participants who should be involved in the transportation planning process. The SPC also published its *Public Participation Guide* in 2007 with the purpose of documenting its public participation activities to enable constituents to participate more effectively in the transportation planning process. The *Guide* includes supporting legislation, outreach and education tools, and details on opportunities for public participation. A summary brochure for the *Guide* is published in English and Spanish.

The SPC requires that public hearings be held prior to the adoption, amendment, or repeal of State goals and policies, elements of the State Guide Plan (including *Transportation 2030*), and Council Rules of Procedure. Monthly TAC meetings are open to the public and include public comment periods at the beginning and end of the meeting. Public input solicited by the Federal team about the transportation planning process was overwhelmingly positive, with many commenters praising the fair, balanced, and transparent process for project selection and transportation planning. In particular, commenters complimented the TAC for their high level of respect and collaboration among the diverse interest groups represented on the committee. While most comments were complimentary, a few members of the public expressed dissatisfaction at the level of participation permitted during TAC meetings and identified additional opportunities to expand involvement or outreach to underserved citizen groups, such as bus riders.

The SPC conducts public participation and outreach activities sufficient to notify the public of transportation planning activities and to provide opportunities for the public to influence transportation policies, priorities, and projects. In particular, the publication of the public participation summary brochure for the guide in English and Spanish is a noteworthy public outreach effort. The SPC's public participation program meets the requirements of pertinent Federal transportation planning regulations.

Self-Certification

According to *23 CFR 450.334* Certification review by FTA and FHWA is required in TMAs, concurrent with the TIP submission, the State and MPO shall certify at least every four years that the metropolitan transportation planning process is being carried out in accordance with the following requirements:

- Section 134 of title 23, U.S.C.,
- the Metropolitan Planning Regulations,
- Sections 174 and 174 (c) and (d) of the Clean Air Act,
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act,
- Section 1101 (b) of ISTEA (as incorporated in TEA-21) *49CFR part 26* regarding the involvement of DBE in FHWA & FTA funded planning projects, and
- The provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA).

Observations:

The SPP combines self-certification with the development and adoption of the Unified Planning Work Program. The annual adoption of the UPWP includes the elements of self-certification outlined above. The FY 2010 UPWP approved in 2009 includes a self-certification by the MPO.

The SPP meets the self-certification requirements of *23 CFR 450.334*.

Title VI and Environmental Justice

Regulatory Basis:

It has been the U.S. Department of Transportation's (US DOT) longstanding policy to actively ensure non-discrimination under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI states the "no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under a program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." Title VI bars intentional discrimination as well as disparate impact discrimination (e.g., a neutral policy or practice that has the effect of a disparate impact on protected groups). *23 CFR 450.334(a)(3)* requires the FHWA and FTA to certify that the "planning process . . . is being conducted in accordance with all applicable requirements of . .

.Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Title VI assurance executed by each State under 23 U.S.C 324 and 29 U.S.C. 794.”

Executive Order 12898, issued in 1994, further amplifies Title VI by providing that “each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations.” In compliance with *Executive Order 12898*, the U.S. DOT Order on Environmental Justice was issued in 1997.

Observations:

Rule IX of the State Planning Council’s Rules of Procedure contains general information on public involvement but does not specify how public outreach will be conducted for minority or low-income populations. The SPC has thus taken additional steps to address environmental justice (EJ). The State has adopted three core principles to guide these efforts: outreach to involve target populations in the planning process, prevention of disproportionate burdens on minority and low-income communities, and equitable distribution of benefits from transportation projects.

In recent years, the MPO has made additional efforts to solicit public input from nontraditional sources. This has included an Open House at the Blackstone Valley Visitor Center, a Bus Users Forum, and lectures and planning exercises directed at urban student populations in conjunction with the University of Rhode Island. The SPC also has included a representative from the Governor’s Commission on Disabilities on the TAC; created a notification list for social advocacy groups; and assisted in RIPTA efforts to develop a Public Transportation-Human Services Plan. Finally, the SPC and its subcommittees all offer accommodation for individuals with disabilities at their public meetings and maintain accessible websites.

Transportation 2030 uses a Location Quotient to quantify burdens using a ratio of the percentage of EJ populations in the study area to the percentage of EJ populations in the reference area being studied. The MPO conducted a case study of populations residing within 250 feet of interstate highways and found disproportionate burden to EJ populations. The SPC is working to address these burdens through awarding more points to CMAQ project proposals near interstates and encouraging RIDEM to prioritize urban areas for their school bus retrofits program. The SPP also conducted a study for the MTP that found that EJ populations had greater access to transit than the general population; the SPP assumes that increased transit access results in greater access to jobs and services.

The SPC undertakes conscientious efforts to adhere to environmental justice principles, ensuring that the benefits and burdens of transportation programs and projects are fairly distributed among communities in Rhode Island.

Congestion Management Process

Regulatory Basis

Under SAFTEA-LU regulations *23 CFR 450.320* a metropolitan-wide congestion management process is required for new and existing multimodal transportation facilities in the TMA to ensure safe and efficient use of the system. Performance measures and strategies for congestion management should be reflected in the TIP and metropolitan transportation plan. The congestion management process should include *23 CFR 450.320 (c)*:

- Methods to monitor and evaluate the performance of the multimodal transportation system, identify the causes of recurring and non-recurring congestion.
- Performance measures that are tailored to the locality
- Data collection system coordinated with other data collection efforts
- Identification of an implementation strategy and funding sources
- Congestion management strategies could include:
 - Demand management measures
 - Traffic operational improvements
 - ITS technologies
 - Additional system capacities

Observations:

In response to the SAFETEA-LU requirement, the CMP was designed by the Congestion Management Task Force (CMTF) for inclusion in *Transportation 2030*. The Process is intended to identify, analyze, and evaluate the causes of congestion and evaluate the effect of improvement strategies. The CMP was developed through the use of RIDOT's Traffic Management Center (TMC) data, a Statewide modeling tool to show future congestion conditions, and input from RIPTA about congested bus routes and Park n' Ride lots.

The CMTF is a standing group charged with implementation of the CMP. They meet quarterly to monitor the management of congestion and make recommendations to transportation agencies; these recommendations are implemented through the TMC, through RIPTA, or through TIP projects or land use regulations over the long-term. While still in its early stages, the CMTF continues to identify additional congested roadways not highlighted in the CMP and prioritize solutions between corridors. The CMTF is also looking to move towards a performance-based measurement system as their data collection matures and improves. *Transportation 2030* establishes performance measures for incident clearance time, mode split targets, delay reductions, and increases in transit use, among others. The CMP is also designed to incorporate feedback into future design, policies, and operations.

Additionally as part of the CMP, an Incident Management Task Force meets quarterly to plan for non-recurring congestion. They utilize advanced ITS to operationalize plans to clear accidents quickly and safely.

The CMTF and the CMP provide a structured and comprehensive means of evaluating causes of congestion and planning for access management. Rhode Island has not yet formally adopted mechanisms to measure and monitor progress, which would aid in continued planning efforts.

Recommendation:

The Federal team recommends that the CMTF develop and apply performance measures that will expand the significance and utility of the Congestion Management Process. The SPP should apply these performance measures to examine alternatives and connect the CMP to long-term planning goals. Measures may include travel delay, levels of service, and vehicle miles traveled caps.

Additional Priority Topics from Site Visit

In meeting the requirements of the Metropolitan Planning Regulations set forth in 23 CFR Part 450 and 49 CFR Part 613, Statewide and Metropolitan Planning Final Rule, MPOs have the flexibility to focus their particular planning expertise on the needs that they define for their planning region through their planning process. The priority topics highlighted at the on-site review and described in this section represent innovative programs and challenges that uniquely impact the SPC.

Staffing

Observations:

As part of the Rhode Island Department of Administration (RIDOA), the Statewide Planning Program staff are State employees responsible for all statewide planning functions, including transportation planning. The SPP has experienced significant turnover since 2005, including at the highest levels of the organization, with many vacancies related to retirement. While some of the vacancies have been filled through new hires and promotions, the total sustained staffing level has been reduced by 32% from 2005 levels due to extraordinary State budget shortfalls. SPP staff expects to operate at these reduced staffing levels into the foreseeable future and faces the possibilities of additional vacancies as State leadership seeks to further cut State spending.

SPP staff is responsible for developing and executing innovative transportation planning programs that often exceed basic federal requirements. In addition to fulfilling MPO planning functions, staff also builds relationships with municipal governments through comprehensive planning reviews and Planning Challenge Grants. In several programmatic areas, such as freight

planning and transportation modeling, the SPP is limited in its capacity to advance program goals due to staffing shortages.

Recommendation:

Over the past several years, the level of staffing for the Statewide Planning Program has been reduced due to retirements and budget cuts. However, the high caliber of transportation planning can only be sustained with strong staffing support.

The Federal team recommends that the State examine whether the level of staffing in key positions within the State Planning Program is adequate to maintain continuity of the program.

Freight Planning

Observations:

The SPP has focused on enhancing its freight planning activities since the 2005 review. The SPP published a Freight Planning Needs Assessment in 2006, which examined all freight activities in Rhode Island and the northeast corridor, grouped by major modes, as well as intermodal connections, safety, security, and congestion. The assessment covered SPP efforts and those of RIDOT, Coastal Resources Management Council, and the University of Rhode Island (URI) Transportation Center. The assessment identified planning needs in terms of incorporating freight into the MTP, establishing freight points of contact in the SPP and RIDOT, improving outreach to the freight community, and providing new opportunities for training and data modeling. Findings of the assessment were incorporated into *Transportation 2030* and the 2009-2012 TIP. The official integration of the Freight Planning Needs Assessment into the MTP and the repeal of the Freight Rail Plan element of the State Guide Plan are included in the UPWP 2010. The integration will also include an electronically updateable Technical Paper that details the current status and condition of the state's rail operations and rail system.

A Freight Advisory Committee was assembled to complete the assessment and coordinate its integration with the MTP, which is still ongoing. The Advisory Committee includes representatives from the SPP, RIDOT, Rhode Island Association of Rail Passengers, Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, and the Providence and Worcester Railroad.

In addition to the assessment, the SPP has been an active participant in FHWA's Talking Freight webinars, including offering the webinars to interested parties and presenting at webinars. The SPP works with URI to encourage Planning Challenge Grant applications for freight projects, such as an inventory of ports and harbors in Rhode Island. The inventory includes water-dependent land uses and will inform future planning for short-sea shipping as an alternative to freight transport on I-95.

Recommendation:

The Freight Advisory Committee was convened for the purpose of assessing and updating state freight planning goals, policies and strategies in 2009. Their guidance successfully raised the profile of freight in Rhode Island.

The Federal team recommends that the SPP maintain their Freight Advisory Committee as a standing committee to guide future freight planning efforts and maintain a high level of activity and attention in this area, including in TIP development.

Transit Planning***Observations:***

Public transit management in Rhode Island is split by mode; Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) has jurisdiction over bus transit and selected Park n' Ride facilities and RIDOT has jurisdiction over rail transit as well as Park n' Ride facilities on highway property. While both agencies recognize the long-term need for RIPTA to evolve into a multi-modal transit agency, RIPTA's current structure does not facilitate managing the large construction processes necessary for rail transit. Both agencies closely coordinate with the SPP for transportation planning functions, including completing the MTP, the TIP, and the UPWP; both agencies also have representatives who serve on the Transportation Advisory Committee.

RIPTA has recently made new strides in long-range planning and is in the process of establishing a strategic planning committee with representation from RIPTA, RIDOT, and the SPP. The Committee created a vision for transit in Rhode Island with goals for intermodal operations, interagency coordination, and new funding. The first major planning study to emerge from RIPTA is the Providence Metropolitan Transit Enhancement Study, which includes ten areas of focus to improve transit in Providence. RIPTA's other planning projects include the Aquidneck Island Planning Study and the South County study for transit options around the University of Rhode Island. RIPTA also operates demand response service ("The Ride Program") and coordinates with elderly affairs, mental health, and social service agencies. Finally, RIPTA has studied capacity and potential expansion of Park n' Ride lots across the state.

The RIDOT Rail Transit Program primarily consists of commuter rail transit. RIDOT has managed the Pilgrim Partnership with the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) since 1988, which runs 14 daily round-trips from Boston to Providence. The MBTA receives Rhode Island's federal transit capital funds in exchange for rail service. One of RIDOT's largest rail transit projects is the South County Commuter Rail, an extension of commuter rail service from Providence to Wickford Junction with a stop at the Warwick Intermodal Station at T. F. Green Airport. The Warwick Intermodal Station is anticipated to be completed in September 2010, due

in part to the allocation of ARRA money for highway projects which freed up highway money to be allocated to the Warwick facility. RIDOT is also working on other rail transit planning projects, including an FTA New Starts application in Pawtucket and Federal Railroad Administration grant applications for Kingston and Providence.

Planning for rail freight, passenger rail, and automobile-based passenger transit occur separately through different agencies and with different funding sources. This method of transit planning has the potential to lead to long-term challenges from fragmentation as passenger rail becomes more prominent in the region. RIPTA's new long-term planning process is a good start towards more integrated transit planning.

Recommendation:

The SPP, RIDOT, and RIPTA should work together to more fully integrate public transit as part of regional multimodal systems planning. The agencies should also collaborate on a regional basis to create partnerships outside Rhode Island for long-term transit planning projects, such as high-speed rail. One potential mechanism to bring the agencies and modes together would be consolidated planning grants, which is a federal concept that allows FHWA and FTA planning funds to be combined into a single consolidated grant administered by one of the agencies.

Commendation:

The Federal team commends RIPTA for their expanded efforts in transit planning, including the Providence Metro Transit Enhancement Study. RIPTA has comprehensively examined transit expansion and improvements across the State, and has developed a vision to guide future planning efforts. This visioning forms a solid foundation upon which to build future comprehensive transit planning. RIPTA is encouraged to expand on these efforts by working with the SPP and RIDOT to more completely integrate public transit within regional multimodal systems planning.

Land Use and Transportation Planning

Observations:

As outlined previously, the State Guide Plan (SGP) is a coordinated plan that integrates land use, transportation, economic development, and energy planning. *Transportation 2030* and *Land Use 2025* are both included as elements of the SGP. The State of Rhode Island requires that all municipalities have municipal comprehensive plans that are consistent with the elements of the SGP, and municipal zoning and regulations must be consistent with adopted comprehensive plans. The Comprehensive Planning Section of the Statewide Planning Program reviews municipal comprehensive plans for conformance with the SGP; only plans that are found in conformance receive State approval. Cities and towns have twelve months after the adoption of new SGP policies to change their comprehensive plans to be consistent with that policy. Due to

cooperative relationships between SPP staff and local planning directors, SPP staff is able to influence local plan conformance through conversations with planning directors.

Municipal comprehensive plans that are approved by the State become binding for State agencies. This system incorporates checks and balances into local and State-level planning and enforces that local regulations and developments are consistent with Statewide transportation and land use planning.

The SPP is working to provide municipal comprehensive plan review during the draft stage of the planning process. Earlier review of comprehensive plans can better facilitate consistency with Statewide goals and policies. The SPP is in the process of obtaining statutory authorization for draft comprehensive plan review.

SPP staff also work closely with cities and towns to build local capacity for transportation and land use planning. As many small towns have limited staff resources devoted to planning, the SPP assists in providing GIS land use cover and funding programs such as the Grow Smart Rhode Island Land Use Training Collaborative to deliver direct technical assistance to local planners.

Land Use 2025, which was adopted in 2006, was the State's first major land use plan since the early 1990s. Assessments completed in preparation of the land use plan found disproportionate development of land relative to population growth with problematic economic and environmental repercussions. A major objective of *Land Use 2025* is to focus growth within urban service areas, including prioritization of TIP developments in these service areas, while preserving rural areas through the containment of sprawl. *Land Use 2025* includes several implementation tools, including form-based codes, transfer of development rights, and Planning Challenge Grants. Planning Challenge Grants provide financial assistance to communities and organizations engaged in planning activities that further the goals of *Land Use 2025* and *Transportation 2030*. Challenge Grants are also flexible in that they can be applied to local comprehensive planning, regional planning studies, or Statewide training courses.

Transportation 2030, the MTP, is another key element of the implementation of *Land Use 2025*. The land use plan evaluated three scenarios of future growth and how growth would affect the transportation network and vehicle miles traveled (VMT). The scenario study found that compact growth led to the highest transit use and the lowest VMT, and this scenario was then applied as the goal for *Transportation 2030*. The MTP then takes the land use scenario planning a step further to consider how transportation funding must be utilized to realize the compact growth scenario.

The Statewide Planning Program has made significant efforts and accomplishments in coordination between land use and transportation planning.

Commendations:

The Federal team commends the Rhode Island State agencies and the SPC for superb coordination between transportation and land use planning. *Transportation 2030*, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, is based on scenarios analyzed in the *Land Use 2025* plan, which identifies strategies for focusing development in urban areas and preserving land in rural areas. Although Rhode Island does have a structural advantage in that the entire State is contained within a single MPO's planning boundaries, the level of coordination and collaboration between land use and transportation planning offers a valuable model for other MPOs to follow.

The Federal team commends the SPP for administering the Planning Challenge Grant program as a means to implement the *Transportation 2030* and the *Land Use 2025* plans. The program allows SPP staff to provide technical assistance strategically to communities to fund projects aligned with State priorities. The program also succeeds in fostering relationships between State and local planning. The productive working relationships between SPP staff and municipal planners, as exhibited through comprehensive planning review and concurrency between State and local plans, are an example of a best practice that could be adopted by other MPOs.

Appendix A

Composition of Federal Team

The individuals listed below were responsible for reviewing all pre-meeting materials, conducting the on-site review, and writing the draft and final Certification report.

Barbara Breslin
Federal Highway Administration
Rhode Island Division
380 Westminster St., Suite 547
Providence, RI 02903
Barbara.breslin@dot.gov

William Gordon
Federal Transit Administration
Region 1
55 Broadway, 9th Floor
Cambridge, MA 02142
William.gordon@dot.gov

William M. Lyons
Volpe National Transportation Systems Center
Research and Innovative Technology Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
55 Broadway, 4th Floor
Cambridge, MA 02142
William.lyons@dot.gov

Haley Peckett
Volpe National Transportation Systems Center
Research and Innovative Technology Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
55 Broadway, 4th Floor
Cambridge, MA 02142
haley.peckett@dot.gov

Joanne Weinstock
Federal Transit Administration
Region 1
55 Broadway, 9th Floor
Cambridge, MA 02142
Joanne.weinstock@dot.gov

Appendix B

List of Participants and On-Site Review Agenda

The following individuals attended the on-site review held on September 30, 2009 at the Rhode Island Department of Administration offices, in Providence, Rhode Island.

Federal Representatives

Barbara Breslin, Program Development and Team Leader, FHWA-RI
William Gordon, Regional Community Planner, FTA-Region 1
Joanne Telegen Weinstock, Program Manager, FTA-Region 1
William Lyons, U.S. DOT/Volpe Center
Haley Peckett, U.S. DOT/Volpe Center

Statewide Planning Program, Division of Administration

Jared Rhodes, Chief of Statewide Planning Program
Karen Scott, Principal Planner
Kevin Nelson, Supervising Planner
Shane White, Supervising GIS Specialist
Nancy Hess, Supervising Land Use Planner
Walter Slocomb, Principal Planner
Michael Moan, Principal Planner
Ronnie Sirota, Senior Planner and Safe Routes to School Coordinator
Kevin Flynn, Associate Director of Planning
Robert Griffith, Chief of Strategic Planning and Economic Development

Rhode Island Department of Transportation

Robert Shawver, Associate Chief Engineer
Joseph Schall, Traffic Management
Joe Bucci, Traffic Management
Diane Badorek, Chief Civil Engineer
Stephen Devine, Intermodal Planning

Rhode Island Public Transit Authority

Mark Therrien, Assistant General Manager
Harriet Holbrook, Planner

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

Frank Stevenson, Office of Air Resources
Ronald Marcaccio, Office of Air Resources

Massachusetts MPOs

Jim Hadfield, Director of Highway Planning, Southeast Regional Planning and Economic Development District
Paul Mission, Transportation GIS Specialist, Southeast Regional Planning and Economic Development District

Mary Ellen Blunt, Transportation Program Manager, Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Agency

Other Participants

Sheila Brush, Executive Director, Grow Smart Rhode Island

Tina Dolen, Executive Director, Aquidneck Island Planning Commission

Thomas Wholley, Director, VHB

Barry Schiller, TAC member

Appendix C

Certification Review of the Rhode Island Portion of the Providence-Pawtucket TMA

Date: September 30, 2009

Place: Statewide Planning Program
RI Department of Administration
One Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02903
Conference Room

Agenda

8:30 am Introduction (FTA/FHWA)

8:45 Overview of the Rhode Island State Planning Council Transportation Planning Process –
J. Rhodes

- Structure of RISPP
- State Guide Plan – Overview
- Planning Process – Overview

9:00 Progress since 2005 Certification Review – J. Rhodes

9:30 MPO Representation, Coordination, and Consultation – J. Rhodes

- Tribal Participation
 - Appointment of Jim Soctomah to TAC
- Bi-State Coordination
 - Execution of MOU with CMRPC and SRPEDD
 - BVP Involvement
 - Coordination with MBTA for commuter rail
- Other Coordination and Consultation
 - Intergovernmental Review
 - URI Transportation Center Executive Board
 - Building Homes Rhode Island Program
 - State Community Development Block Grant Program

- RI Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
- Coordination Opportunities
 - Freight Representative on TAC

- 10:30 BREAK

- 10:45 Freight Planning – Past, Present, Future - V. Flood
 - Freight Planning Needs Assessment (2006)
 - Integration of freight planning into Transportation 2030
 - Representative of the Advisory Committee?
 - Hosted 12 Talking Freight webinars, presented in one

- 11:10 Congestion Management Process – Past, Present, Future
 - Congestion Management Task Force
 - Presentation by Task Force Member?
 - Access Management Task Force
 - Presentation by Task Force Member?

- 11:35 Air Quality Planning/Conformity – Past, Present, Future
 - Drafted scope of service to eventually contract with VHB, Inc. for air quality consultant support on tasks including TIP air quality conformity analysis, evaluation of CMAQ project proposals and previous year CMAQ programs and assistance with enhancement of the Travel Demand Model – V. Flood
 - Travel Demand Model – V. Flood
 - Transition from MOBILE 6 to MOVES – Whooley, VHB
 - RIDEM compliance with the Clean Air Act – R. Marcaccio

- 12:00 pm LUNCH (on your own)

- 1:00 Transit Planning – Past, Present, Future
 - RIPTA – M. Therrien
 - Metro Area Transit Study
 - Job Access and Reverse Commute planning and New Freedoms FTA funded programs
 - Assisted in production of Coordinated Plan for Public Transit – Human Services Transportation in RI
 - RIDOT – S. Devine
 - South County Commuter Rail
 - FTA grant – Pawtucket Commuter Rail Station
 - Warwick Intermodal Center
 - Coordination with MBTA
 - Federal Railway Administration – ARRA Grants
 - Kingston Station Bypass

- Providence Parking Garage
- Statewide Planning Program – V. Flood
 - Enhanced travel demand model by adding transit component that allows for a true mode choice/mode split and incorporation into the transit planning process
 - Woonsocket Commuter Rail Study
 - Cooperated on production of Statewide Special Needs and Out of District Student Transportation Plan.
 - Integration of waterborne passenger transportation into Trans 2030
- Future Transit Planning – K. Flynn
 - Responsibility for implementation – RIPTA/RIDOT

1:45 Land Use and Transportation Planning – K. Flynn

- Land Use 2025
 - Need for and development of document
 - Primary concepts incorporated into the plan
 - Scenario analysis, evaluation and selection
 - Relationship to local comprehensive planning
- Transportation 2030
 - Framework of document
 - Integration of Land Use 2025 scenario analysis
 - Links between Land Use 2025 and Transportation 2030
 - Conceptual funding scenarios – Sink, Tread Water, Swim, Win the Race
- Transportation Improvement Program (2009-2012)
 - Implementation of Transportation 2030
 - Primary theme – Fix it First

2:30 BREAK

3:00 Financial Planning - B. Shawver

- Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation Finance
- Funding Issues for Future Implementation

3:30 Technical Assistance and Outreach

- Planning Challenge Grants
- Corridor Studies
- Route 1 Plan
- Aquidneck Island Transportation Corridor Study
- Safe Routes to School
- RI Emergency Management Agency – Emergency Support Function 1 and use of Transportation 2030 for update
- GIS template for local comprehensive plans
- Development of LIDAR-based elevation data set of coastal New England
- SAFETEA-LU Reauthorization

5:00 Transportation Advisory Committee Meeting – Public Hearing on FHWA/FTA
Certification Review

NOTE: The times shown on this agenda are guides only. Adjustments will be made as necessary to accommodate discussion of the issues.

Appendix D

Public Input Summary and Matrix

October 14, 2009

This section summarizes the comments of attendees at the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) public hearing for the Providence-Pawtucket MPO Certification Review held September 30, 2009. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) representatives chaired the public hearing, and Volpe National Transportation Systems Center staff facilitated the hearing. Participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

- How effective is public involvement in transportation planning?
- What methods are working and what are not?
- How does involvement help the region reach consensus on difficult issues?
- How can public views successfully be communicated to decision-makers?
- What are some situations where public involvement has and has not had an impact on the planning process?
- How might the Statewide Planning Program improve public involvement?

Out of 27 attendees at the Public Input Meeting, 16 made oral comments. This document also summarizes the two written comments received by FHWA and FTA staff over the ten-day comment period following the meeting. The two written comments included an email and a letter. The comments were classified into the following eleven categories (see Public Input Matrix at the end of the Summary) and summarized below:

- The TAC is effective
- Strong cooperation between diverse interests
- Need for regional planning beyond State borders
- TAC meetings should be held outside of Providence
- Public input has improved through TAC
- Need to improve public participation
- Need to utilize new sources of data and participation
- Good integration of land use and transportation planning
- Earmarks impede planning process
- The role of TAC in airport planning
- Other comments

The TAC is Effective

Several commenters noted that the TAC structure and organization are effective for making decisions on transportation projects. One commenter said that “the debate and the discussion

[are] very appropriate to try to come to consensus.” Another commenter is “impressed by how public policy materializes,” and calls the TAC “the perfect forum for public policy.” One commenter said that the honesty of SPP staff helped the TAC achieve better decisions.

One commenter attributes the effectiveness of the TAC, in part, to the continuity of its membership and their willingness to come to agreement. The commenter had the opinion that the group succeeds in doing the right projects given fiscal constraint. Another commenter noted that the TAC was an appropriate and effective forum for Rhode Island to bring people together, given the State’s small size. A commenter expressed appreciation for the TAC process, knowing that when a project was sent to the TAC, it would get a fair hearing and a balanced decision that considered the resources available.

Several TAC members commented that they enjoyed serving on the TAC because of the “camaraderie” and a belief in what the group accomplishes.

Strong Cooperation Between Diverse Interests

Many commenters complimented the ability of the TAC to incorporate multiple and diverse interests as representatives in a collaborative planning process. One commenter noted the role of the State Planning Program, DOT, and RIPTA staff in meeting with interest groups and environmental groups, which facilitated the respect between diverse views in the transportation planning process. Several commenters contrasted interest groups with one another, such as bicycle advocates and trucking associations, but complimented the fact that they come together effectively in the TAC. A commenter noted that depth accompanied the breadth of interests represented on TAC, with departmental directors and other experts coming to speak on a variety of topics.

A commenter addressed the general climate of openness at TAC meetings, which has led to greater accommodation between conflicting interest groups. Another commenter credits the cooperation to a strong culture of respect within the TAC, observing that, “Over the years, we have come to appreciate and honor commitments that are sitting at the table [and] treat everyone and their opinions with respect.”

Need for Regional Planning Beyond State Borders

Several commenters described a need for the Rhode Island MPO to adopt more of a regional perspective on various aspects of transportation planning. Some expressed concern that although Amtrak decisions on major rail projects have a big impact on Rhode Islanders, Rhode Islanders had little input into projects that occurred out of state boundaries. Conversely, major projects that take place in Rhode Island, like the relocation of I-195, did not benefit from the input of out-of-state users. One commenter suggested a formalized communication forum between Amtrak and the public for greater transparency with regional-level decisions. Another commenter noted that airport planning lacks a regional focus, noting an inherent challenge of the regional nature of

airport impacts and expressing the importance of Rhode Island having a voice in regional decisionmaking agencies.

One commenter who was involved with the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission spoke to the benefits of inter-municipal regional planning in terms of TIP project prioritization. This commenter praised regional planning councils and their improved ability to cooperate with other agencies.

TAC Meetings Should be Held Outside of Providence

Commenters requested that more public participation meetings be held outside of Providence to expand public input opportunity. One commenter said that the “majority” of meetings are currently in Providence, and the TAC should travel more.

Public Input has Improved through TAC

Several commenters noted marked improvement in the TAC in incorporating public participation in recent years. One commenter who had been involved with the TAC for over 15 years noted a significant push from the TAC in that time to increase public input for transportation projects. A commenter who was introduced to the TAC through a local planning process was impressed by the TAC’s push for greater public involvement. Another commenter said, “The fact that there are seven members of the public represented on the TAC and SPC speaks for itself.”

One commenter praised the increased public comment periods at the beginning and end of TAC meetings as well as increased environmental representation on the TAC, crediting the Federal review team for their role in bringing about these changes. Another commenter said that the diversity in TAC members allows them to reach out to groups that might not otherwise be included in the transportation planning process. The commenter said, “It’s not perfect, but we are a small State so we have a better opportunity to bring people together.” Another commenter discussed alternative forums for public comment, such as the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission public meeting, which can then be incorporated into the MPO planning process via TAC members.

Need to Improve Public Participation

While many commenters described public input as improved, others commented that certain segments of the public were not being reached for public participation. One commenter spoke about outreach to people without vehicles, noting that “bus passengers aren’t really organized like other modal groups; they could get pushed around.” The commenter also noted the need to bring more public participants before the legislature to address the transportation budget crisis. On the topic of incorporating public comments into decisionmaking, a commenter recommended that the TAC be given one month to review comments after a public hearing before making a recommendation on the long-range transportation plan or the TIP to the SPC.

One commenter noted that the TAC had evolved from a very welcoming group in which “anyone who cared about votes could attend and participate fully in discussions” to one in which people could listen only and not participate. The commenter acknowledged that some progress had been made in the past year with public comment at the beginning and end of the meeting, but the commenter requested that participants be able to participate and ask questions during the meeting.

Need to Utilize New Sources of Data and Participation

Several commenters requested that the TAC and the SPC use new sources of information and solicit different types of public input. One commented on existing yearly surveys of Rhode Island AAA members that could be better utilized to make transportation decisions. A commenter involved with the Safe Routes to School program described how that program successfully draws new participants, including parents, teachers, law enforcement, and local governments, into the transportation planning process. The SRTS program requires cooperation from each of these groups from planning through implementation. Another commenter agreed that this program was successful in raising participation from new groups of people.

Good Integration of Land Use and Transportation Planning

Several commenters complimented the Division of Planning’s structure in that staff covered the MPO’s transportation planning as well as the state’s land use planning. One commenter said, “Land use, transportation, economic development: they are nothing unless you put all the pieces together,” which the SPP does well.

Earmarks Impede Planning Process

Several commenters expressed frustration with the way that earmarks disrupt the planning process. “Earmarks are not the way professional planners would like to see things happen,” noted one commenter. The commenter suggested that greater public involvement might address some of the problem. Another commenter said that earmarks “discredit the process” since “work is shoved aside for a political reason.” The commenter expressed frustration on behalf of the TAC for time and effort wasted on projects that are scrapped in favor of earmarked projects.

The Role of TAC in Airport Planning

One commenter expressed frustration at the TAC’s lack of formal participation in airport planning, particularly regarding how airports affect ground transportation. The commenter also said that Rhode Island is the only state where the airport sponsor does airport planning, rather than having a state agency do that planning. Another commenter noted that stronger formalized coordination between state agencies and airport planning was not necessary, but that the Rhode Island Airport Corporation would strive to reach out to the TAC and the SPP as appropriate.

One commenter said that if RIAC served on the TAC, it would be “self-serving” given its incentive to push its own interests. The commenter also endorsed having a state-sponsored

agency involved in airport planning at the regional level so that “there at least exists the possibility that other transportation venues might be considered.”

Other Comments

One commenter complimented the communication of transportation funding scenarios in *Transportation 2030*, which generated attention from the Governor’s office and led to the establishment of the Blue Ribbon Panel.

Another commenter requested that RIPTA improve how it lists projects, using more specific categories, to better communicate with the public what types of projects or specific projects are being proposed or discussed.

Public Input Matrix

Commenter	Written or Oral	Organization; Community	TAC is effective	Cooperation between diverse interests	Broadening regional planning beyond State borders	Holding TAC meetings outside of Providence	Public Input has improved through TAC	Need to improve public participation	Need to utilize new sources of participation/data	Good integration of land use and transportation planning	Earnmarks impede planning process	Role of TAC in airport planning	Other
Broad, Alan	Oral	RI Public Works Association; TAC	X	X		X							
Cohen, Marilyn	Oral	RI Chapter of American Planning Association; TAC	X	X						X			
DeIgarria, Grant	Oral	Ecology Action for Rhode Island					X						
Flaherty, John	Oral	Grow Smart RI	X		X					X			X
Frazier, Peter	Both	Rhode Island Airport Corporation										X	X
Harrington, Lynn	Written	Cranston										X	X
Langseth, Rich	Oral	Greenwich Bay Watershed Group			X							X	
Murray, Bob	Oral	RI AAA; TAC	X	X					X				
Quigley, Bob	Oral	Aquidneck Island Planning Council; TAC	X		X								
Reynolds, Paul	Oral	South Kingstown; TAC	X				X						
Schiller, Barry	Oral	Sierra Club; TAC		X				X			X		X
Sherman, Jane	Oral	TAC											X
Sirota, Ronnie	Oral	Senior Planner of SPP		X					X				X
Stocket, Fran	Oral	TAC (Chairwoman)		X									
Stuart, Everett	Oral	RI Association of Railroad Passengers; TAC	X		X								
Wood, Michael	Oral	RI League of Cities and Towns	X	X			X				X		

