

Land Use and Planning Resources Report

Summary of Key Findings and Potential Implications

Land Use Advisory Committee Meeting September 20, 2012

As the Met Council develops Thrive MSP 2040, Jon Commers, the Chair of the Land Use Advisory Committee (LUAC) asked what can be learned from the *Land Use and Planning Resources Report* completed in January 2011. LUAC contributed to three progress reports and the final report to the Minnesota Legislature. It did so by sharing ideas and information, asking questions, and giving the invaluable perspective of locally elected officials.

The *Land Use and Planning Resources Report* (LUPR report) has potential implications for developing Thrive MSP. Council Members are highly interested in leveraging the connection between land use and transportation. In addition, work on LUPR reports shows how LUAC can be used to provide advice and assistance to the Council and gain stakeholder input.

This summary provides key findings of the final report and discusses potential implications for Thrive MSP 2040 and the Met Council. Potential implications are intended to further discussion, and they focus on land use-transportation topics and the role of LUAC. Findings and potential implications were recently updated to show additional comments shared with a staff policy development team supporting Thrive MSP.

Summary of LUPR Report

The 2009 Minnesota Legislature directed the Metropolitan Council to:

- (a) Assess how land-use and transportation policies and strategies in the seven-county metropolitan area can: reduce air pollution; mitigate traffic congestion; and reduce costs for operating, maintaining or improving infrastructure.
- (b) Emphasize approaches that reduce or manage travel demand through land use and access to transportation options.
- (c) Identify and adapt information and resources applicable to Minnesota, taking into account travel and demographic trends specific to the Twin Cities metropolitan area; and collaborate with local units of government and other stakeholders interested in developing and refining resources.

The completed report:

- **Identifies Council-adopted policies and strategies** that support transportation and land-use decisions made by local governments in the metro area.
- **Compiles an array of planning and implementation tools** that can help enable local governments to use land use and transportation, working together, to achieve legislative goals.
- **Analyzes the 2030 comprehensive plans** to show what communities in the region are doing to implement and integrate land-use and transportation strategies.

- **Includes an air quality assessment tool**, a voluntary tool that local governments can use to estimate how different land-use strategies for a proposed project or subarea affect travel behavior and air pollutant emissions.
- **Describes outreach and collaboration efforts** that helped shape its content.
- **Highlights outcomes** of local and regional land-use and transportation strategies, **summarizes lessons learned**, and **features information on transportation infrastructure costs and results**.

Link to final report: <http://www.metrocouncil.org/planning/LUPR/LUPRjan2011.pdf>

Link to find all LUPR reports: <http://www.metrocouncil.org/planning/LUPR/LUPRminutes.htm>

Council-adopted policies and strategies

Land use and transportation policies and strategies were adopted in the Metropolitan Council's *Regional Development Framework* (Framework 2004) and the *2030 Transportation Policy Plan* (TPP 2010).

Regional strategies that apply to all communities were organized into four main topics. These are listed below as findings, and include primary goals of the Council and the means of achieving them.

Findings

- *Protect the natural environment and minimize negative impacts.* A primary goal is to reclaim, conserve, protect and enhance the region's vital natural resources, including air quality. Means of achieving this goal include reducing transportation emissions of pollutants, expanding the regional parks system, and taking additional measures to protect natural resources.
- *Manage congestion and improve performance of the transportation system.* A primary goal is to plan and invest in multimodal transportation choices to slow the growth of congestion and serve the region's economic needs. Strategies focus on making the transportation system more efficient, modifying travel behavior while providing multimodal alternatives, and planning highway investments within financial constraints.
- *Expand and enhance transportation choices.* Primary goals are to plan and invest in multi-modal transportation choices and double transit ridership by 2030. Strategies to achieve these ends include planning a multimodal transportation system, supporting other transportation modes, and coordinating transportation investments.
- *Improve connections and access.* One goal is to work with local communities to accommodate growth in a flexible, connected and efficient manner. Another goal is to encourage expanded choices in housing location and types, and improved access to jobs and opportunities. Council strategies aim to maximize accessibility, support travel by alternative modes, coordinate transportation and land use, and invest resources to use land efficiently.

Potential implications for discussion

- Which of these existing goals, policies and strategies should be retained?
- Identifying policies and strategies is a tradeoff between naming a lot of adopted policies (more is better because some policies are unfamiliar and policies differ by geographic planning area) and being concise (less is better).

- Organizing policies and strategies was challenging because of interrelationships and different levels of implementation (Council role and community role). But how policies and strategies are presented conveys a good deal about the Council’s approach toward implementation.
- How can the Council better integrate transportation and land-use strategies and policies?
- What could be done to better connect policies and strategies to regional investments? Linking policies and strategies to total amounts of regional investments was beyond the scope of the report. But working toward that end would provide valuable information.

Resources and Tools

Strategies and implementation tools were collected from a range of sources to illustrate what regional and local governments can do to affect travel behavior, reduce air pollution and mitigate congestion.

Findings

- Research showed that many strategies in use across the nation have already been adopted and implemented in this region. Examples include “specific area plans” in complex or large development projects, urban parks and landscaping, travel demand management, parking management and Complete Streets initiatives that connect local streets, paths and trails.
- Integrating land use with a multimodal transportation system is key to addressing congestion and improving regional mobility.
- Access to activity centers along transportation corridors is a leading influence on choice of travel mode. Street design and connectivity of local transportation networks is second in importance. Research concludes that density alone is not as effective as density combined with other strategies, such as connections to major centers, a high-quality local transportation network, a mix of land uses, and transit.
- Changes in the built environment generally contribute modest changes in travel behavior, but combined strategies have more significant effects. Changing land uses is a long-term strategy, as impacts of land-use changes build and accumulate over time.
- One size does not fit all. Some strategies or tools apply to many areas, while others are more relevant to types of locations, such as transportation corridors or high-density developments.

Potential implications for discussion

- Policies should reinforce one another to be most effective.
- How will strategies apply to different areas? A strategy of intensifying development along transportation corridors will not fit all areas or even all corridors.
- Does the Council want to consider policies to reduce VMT? [In the first LUPR report, all references to VMT were removed because of sensitivity to language used in earlier bills.]
- Density was a hot-button issue in discussions among LUAC members while working on LUPR reports. Will density continue to be as prominent an issue in developing Thrive MSP?
- Another sensitive topic was reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Will Thrive MSP adopt policies to address this issue?

Results from 2030 Comprehensive Plans

To emphasize land-use and transportation connections, analysis of planned land uses in 2030 comprehensive plans concentrated on land uses that are primary starting or ending points for travel and land uses near 2030 highway corridors and 2030 transitway corridors.

Findings

- Local governments are implementing the Council’s adopted land-use and transportation policies and strategies.
- Development in 2030 comprehensive plans intensifies along highways to increase access and improve connections between land-use and transportation networks. Highway corridors act as magnets for mixed-use development and higher-density housing.
- Development in 2030 comprehensive plans also intensifies along transitway corridors to utilize and support expanded transit service. Transitway corridors are catalysts for mixed-use development and higher-density housing.
- Given the amount of housing in the region and the longevity of housing structures, existing patterns of development can influence travel patterns for generations.
- Commercial, industrial and institutional land uses can offer significant opportunities for redevelopment and reuse to change land use and travel patterns in the future. These land uses concentrate in areas served by major transportation infrastructure.
- Jobs concentrate in eight major job and activity centers. Locations where highway and transitway corridors coincide offer significant opportunities for intensifying job concentrations and affecting travel behavior.

Potential implications for discussion

- In addition to the new Livable Communities TOD fund, what other efforts are needed to intensify planned development along highway and transitway corridors?
- Employment locations in 2030 comprehensive plans should be analyzed further. What additional analysis would support new goals to stimulate economic development and job creation?
- Given existing development, can Thrive MSP help bring about noticeable changes (rather than marginal changes) in development patterns to achieve policies? A number of LUAC members consistently questioned what good policies are when their results are marginal at best.

Air Quality Assessment Tool

The Council developed a tool for estimating air pollutants generated by travel in the region. The air quality assessment tool provides a way for communities to assess how different land-use strategies for a proposed project or subarea affect travel behavior and air pollutant emissions. This tool was not required by the LUPR legislation, but it was developed at the request of Chair Peter Bell as a voluntary tool.

The tool compares travel-related emissions for “before” and “after” development scenarios. It includes six land-use changes in the first version of the tool as an Excel spreadsheet. Strategies include:

concentration of population or households; land-use mix; balance of jobs to housing; intersection or street density; percentage of 4-way intersections; and distance to nearest transit stop.

Findings

- Changing land uses lowered travel-related air pollutants for the region as a whole for two hypothetical examples of development proposals. Changing land uses, however, did not directly benefit local areas with improved air quality because development generated more traffic, leading to somewhat higher air emissions.
- Individual strategies produce modest changes in preliminary testing. The tool gives approximate rather than precise answers and does not identify a single solution that can significantly reduce air pollution. The tool is not recommended for use by rural areas.
- Use of the tool was intended to be voluntary, not a mandate imposed by the Council.

Potential implications for discussion

- Staff developed an air quality assessment tool for this report and considered additional efforts to make it more user-friendly and accessible. Is there interest in developing this tool further or finding alternative ways to show the impact of potential development on travel-related air pollutants? Does the Council want to promote use of this air quality assessment tool (or something similar) by including/referencing it in the Thrive MSP?
- The air quality tool was developed as a VOLUNTARY tool for local governments and not a mandate. Will the Council opt for mostly voluntary tools in Thrive MSP? A mix of carrots and sticks? How will partnerships and collaborations change implementation of policies?

Collaboration and Outreach

Council staff met with land-use and transportation advisory committees for the Council and encouraged participation by all stakeholders, including representatives of environmental or other advocacy groups. LUAC members gave guidance and advice on the direction of this report, development of the air quality assessment tool, and useful resources.

Findings

- LUAC members played a significant role. Their questions, comments and other input influenced study elements and responded to local concerns. Many comments summarized in the LUPR report are relevant to the formation of policy in Thrive MSP.
- The air quality assessment tool was the subject of considerable, sometimes heated, discussion during LUAC meetings. LUAC was an effective forum for discussing differing viewpoints on this subject, as well as density and other influences on travel behavior.
- LUAC reacted positively to information shared on tools that communities are using to implement 2030 comprehensive plans, and committee members gave examples to explain how communities are implementing plans.

Potential implications for discussion

- While working on LUPR reports, both attendance and participation at LUAC meetings was quite high. Members expressed satisfaction in seeing how their hard work made a difference. Are LUAC and other Council advisory groups going to have an opportunity to contribute similarly in development of Thrive MSP? [The answer is yes.]
- LUAC meetings functioned as working sessions to test results, improve ways of communicating outcomes, and gain other stakeholder feedback. In addition to the peer cities project, should specific projects be added to LUAC's work plan to support Thrive MSP?
- At the staff level, preparing for advisory committees gave structure to the work flow on LUPR reports and fostered collaboration. Is the experience of the LUPR team relevant for future inter-department collaboration on Thrive MSP? [The answer is yes.]

Assessment of Outcomes and Lessons Learned

The last section of the LUPR report highlighted outcomes of local and regional land-use and transportation strategies and summarized lessons learned. It drew from the preceding sections and also featured information on transportation infrastructure costs and results.

Findings

- Strategies are interrelated and reinforce one another, so the impacts of strategies are not fully reflected by separate topics.
- Integrated strategies, such as coordinated land-use planning and transportation investments, achieve multiple goals and make strategies more effective.

Potential implications for discussion

- This part of the LUPR report was more of a summary than a thorough assessment of how land-use and transportation policies and strategies achieve certain outcomes. Should Thrive MSP be developed using more information from assessment of land-use and transportation policies and strategies?
- How can benchmarks or performance measures be used to improve accountability and to effectively tell the story of what the Council does?
- How should outcomes of interrelated strategies and policies in Thrive MSP be communicated?