

Introduction

Both law and logic dictate that large, U.S. metropolitan areas must have well-designed, carefully maintained transportation systems that encompass travel by automobile, bus, rail, bicycle, foot and airplane.

In every metropolitan area, an interconnected web of people and organizations work to set priorities, make plans, and implement projects that affect the region's transportation infrastructure. In the Twin Cities, the transportation planning process involves an interconnected group of local transportation officials and transportation agencies, relying on plans made by the federal government, the state, counties, cities and other transportation partners. It is driven by national, state, district, metropolitan and local plans and priorities.

This brief guide describes the planning process participants that create and maintain the Twin Cities transportation system how those participants work together, the primary products and processes that define their work and the process by which a recognized need becomes a funded program or project.

Finally, this guide offers a glossary. Many of the terms used in transportation planning are long and unwieldy, and so the field's professionals often substitute acronyms and abbreviations. The glossary demystifies this alphabet soup and offers a brief reminder of

where each term belongs in the overall planning process.

Part 1: The Participants

Participants in the transportation planning process include:

- the Metropolitan Council
- the Council's Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) and its Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)
- the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MN DOT)
- the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)
- the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC)
- transit operators
- counties and municipalities
- tribal governments
- private citizens
- the U.S. Department of Transportation (US DOT)

With the exception of the Transportation Advisory Board and the Technical Advisory Committee, each of these entities has many roles and responsibilities. This guide will describe only their roles in the transportation planning process.

Metropolitan Council

Federal law requires that transportation project and program funds are available only to the state or to state-designated **metropolitan planning organizations**. These organizations, known as **MPOs**, develop transportation plans and programs based on a continuing,

comprehensive, and cooperative (“3C”) planning process carried out with state and local communities.

Created in 1967, the **Metropolitan Council** is the metropolitan planning organization for the seven-county Twin Cities area, which includes Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington Counties. (It is also Minnesota’s only Transportation Management Area, or TMA, a designation for metropolitan planning organizations in areas with more than 200,000 residents.) The council has 17 members, all appointed by the governor and confirmed by the state senate. Sixteen members each represent individual geographic districts; the chairperson serves at large.

In cooperation with local communities, the Metropolitan Council develops the Regional Development Framework of policies for shaping future growth. This framework gives direction to the four system policy plans: transportation, aviation, parks and water resources. The Council also operates the regional wastewater treatment system and the transit system.

The Metropolitan Council’s role in transportation planning is multifaceted. It includes:

- Conducting studies and preparing planning documents that guide agencies that plan for and operate highways, transit and airports; These documents and studies include the transportation policy plan (TPP), which includes plans for the metropolitan highway,

regional transit, and aviation systems; the Twin Cities regional transportation improvement program (TIP), a four-year, multi-modal program of highway, transit, bike, walking, and transportation enhancement initiatives proposed for Federal funding; and the congestion management system, a process for evaluating and developing strategies that alleviate existing and expected future traffic congestion.

- Deciding whether plans and programs conform to Clean Air Act requirements.
- Classifying roadways as part of the metropolitan highway system and/or transit service before design and operational guidelines are implemented.
- Reviewing and approving applications for federal and state funds and keeping these applications consistent with the regional development framework’s stated goals, policies, and programs.
- Reviewing local communities’ long-range plans to make sure they are consistent for regional sewer, park, transit, airport, and transportation plans.

In addition to those planning roles, the Council also:

- Operates the public transit system through Metro Transit and private contractors.
- Coordinates with suburban transit authorities.

- Administers transit project contracts and the Metro Mobility program.
- Promotes ride sharing.
- Offers local governments, regional railroads, and other public agencies, transit providers, and developers advice and technical help on transit service coordination.
- Administers state and metropolitan transit subsidies.
- Collects for and distributes from a revolving loan fund for buying highway rights of way.

Transportation Advisory Board (TAB)

Various advisory boards are part of the Metropolitan Council. The **Transportation Advisory Board (TAB)** is one of these. Federal law requires that, in order for a region to receive Federal transportation funding, elected officials must serve on a metropolitan planning organization. Minnesota's governor appoints Metropolitan Council members. TAB members, by contrast, include city and county elected officials within the seven county area. By combining the Metropolitan Council and the TAB into a single certified metropolitan planning organization, Minnesota can receive federal transportation dollars.

The Transportation Advisory Board consists of 33 members: ten elected city officials ; one member from the board of each county in the metropolitan area; the commissioner

of transportation; the commissioner of the Pollution Control Agency; one member of the Metropolitan Airports Commission; one person appointed by the Metropolitan Council to represent non-motorized transportation; one member representing the freight transportation industry; two members representing public transit; one member from each Metropolitan Council district (for a total of eight); and one Metropolitan Council member.

The Transportation Advisory Board works closely with the Metropolitan Council, reviewing, commenting on, and coordinating transportation planning and programming. It is a key responsibility of the Council's TAB to solicit and evaluate project applications for funding from four federal programs. Projects are solicited, reviewed, scored and ranked through the regional solicitation criteria and process every two years.

[See more information on the TAB's responsibilities.](#)

The TAB operates with three standing committees: executive, policy, and programming.

[See more information on the TAB committee structure.](#)

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to the TAB

The **Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)** also works closely with the TAB and the Metropolitan Council. Composed of 29 professional staff from city and county governments and the agencies involved in

transportation in the seven county region, the TAC provides the technical expertise the Transportation Advisory Board needs.

[See more information about TAC membership.](#)

[See more information about TAC subcommittees and their responsibilities.](#)

Minnesota Department of Transportation (MN DOT)

The **Minnesota Department of Transportation (MN DOT)** is the state's principal agency for developing and implementing state transportation plans and programs. Its strategic plan has three parts: safeguard what exists, improve transportation system operations, and improve MN DOT's performance. MN DOT develops and maintains state and interstate highways, handles statewide transportation planning, and develops and allocates funding to various projects.

In turn, statewide transportation plans guide MN DOT District plans. MN DOT's district plan for the seven-county metropolitan area addresses performance needs and matches plans made by the metropolitan planning organization, placing a priority on the preservation, safety, and management of the existing system over other capital improvements that increase system capacity.

The agency also plays an integral part in the Twin Cities metropolitan planning process, serves as the liaison between the metropolitan planning organization and the U.S. Department

of Transportation, and participates in the Air Quality Conformity Process.

[See more about MN DOT's 14 goals.](#)
[See more about MN DOT's internal structure.](#)

[See more about MN DOT's transportation planning responsibilities.](#)

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)

The **Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)** and its 950 employees in eight offices help Minnesotans protect, conserve, and improve the state's environment. The agency proposes a variety of plans and measurements to monitor pollution and keep it within Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) limits. It also guides the Metropolitan Planning Authority in fulfilling environmental requirements and advises about how projects and their status will affect Minnesota's compliance with environmental regulators

[See more about the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.](#)

Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC)

The **Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC)** is a special-purpose agency with broad powers to acquire, develop, and operate airports within a district that approximates the seven-county metropolitan area. It owns and operates seven metropolitan, public-use airports, and can raise money to finance airport development and operations. MAC answers directly to the state

legislature, but its long-range plans must be consistent with Metropolitan Council plans and policies. Moreover, specific airport development projects of \$5 million or more at the Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport and \$1 million at other airports must have Metropolitan Council approval.

[See more about the Metropolitan Airports Commission.](#)

Transit Providers

The Metropolitan Council operates the largest transit system in the state— Metro Transit. In addition to the largest bus system, Metro Transit operates two rail lines. Hiawatha Light Rail and Northstar Commuter rail. The Metropolitan Council also administers Metro Mobility, a transportation service for those unable to use regular fixed-route buses due to a disability or health condition, coordinates a rideshare/carpool program and sponsors Van Go!, a vanpool program.

Suburban Transit Providers operate in about a dozen cities within the Council's transit taxing district and also operate their own regular-route bus services. These Public Transit operators give their input to the transportation planning process through the Metropolitan Council's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), as well as through the Transit Providers Advisory Committee. They are also involved with the Metropolitan Council through contracts for bus storage facilities, bus shelters, University of Minnesota services, and regular-route transit services. Transit operators participate

in developing the Transportation Improvement program (TIP).

[See more about Transit Providers.](#)

Counties and municipalities

Metropolitan-area **counties and municipalities** participate in the transportation planning at two levels. At the policy level, elected county and municipal officers serve on the Transportation Advisory Board. At the technical level, the Technical Advisory Committee includes professional staff from area governments.

[See more about county and municipality transportation planning responsibilities.](#)

Private citizens

Twin Cities residents are encouraged to participate in the transportation planning process. Advisory committees, boards, and commissions associated with the Metropolitan Council's planning responsibilities have an open appointment policy, and meetings are open to anyone. Informational meetings, workshops, and public hearings are open to the public; and all policy documents are posted on the Council's website.

U.S. Department of Transportation (US DOT)

The **U.S. Department of Transportation (US DOT)** includes the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), which maintains a local office and actively participates in regional planning, the Federal Transit

Administration (FTA), and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

Both the Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Highway Administration establish the regulations that govern the development of an urban areas' transportation plans and programs. Together, these two organizations have final approval over the Metropolitan Council's Transportation Policy Plan, MN DOT's State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), and the Unified Planning Work Program. The two administrations also certify the metropolitan transportation planning process.

The Federal Aviation Administration develops the National Plan for an Integrated Airport System, approves and funds planning and development projects, operates and maintains the national air traffic control system, certifies aircraft and pilots, and establishes and enforces flight operation rules. Metropolitan Airport Commission policies must be in keeping with both Metropolitan Council plans and those of the FAA.

Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB)

The vision of CTIB is a network of interconnected transitways that allows users to move efficiently and safely, while mitigating congestion, enhancing economic development and improving environmental stability for the region. CTIB was formed by the Minnesota Legislature in 2008. Since then, five counties – Anoka, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey and Washington –

have utilized a quarter-cent sales tax and a \$20 motor vehicle sales tax to invest in and advance transit projects by awarding annual capital and operating grants. The Board works in collaboration with the Metropolitan Council and Carver and Scott counties.

[See more about CTIB](#)

Other agencies

County regional rail authorities, the Minnesota Department of National Resources, the State Historic Preservation Office, and tribal governments also participate in the metropolitan transportation planning process. Published in 2007, the Participation Plan guides those affected by planning decisions, and outlines activities that can encourage agency and public participation.

Part 2: Transportation Planning Documents

The agencies discussed above work together to create policy planning documents.

Major transportation planning documents include:

- the Regional Development Guide
 - Transportation Policy Plan/Aviation Plan Chapters
- the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)
- the State Transportation Plan

Figure 1 shows which agencies and organizations create each individual

plan or program, and describes their respective roles in the creative process.

A variety of other documents serve as supportive material for the major transportation planning documents. These supportive documents include:

- the Congestion Management System Plan
- the Air Quality Conformity Determination
- the Right of Way Acquisition Loan Fund (RALF) Guidelines

As with the major planning documents, various agencies and individuals work to create these supportive documents. **Figure 2** shows which entities are involved in producing each supportive document, describing their roles in the process.

The coming pages describe the function of each primary and secondary document and shows the process that each goes through on its way to completion.

Regional Development Framework/Transportation Policy Plan

The **Regional Development Framework** sets out the regional forecast data and development plan assumptions. It also provides the regional physical and policy framework, which forms the basis for the type, location, investment priorities, and general implementation and review procedures for metropolitan transportation systems.

Prepared and regularly updated by the Metropolitan Council with participation from every agency in the metropolitan planning process, the **Transportation Policy Plan (TPP)** describes the region's approach to metropolitan transportation investments between now and the year 2030. The TPP is one chapter of the metropolitan Council's Development Guide. The TPP also addresses SAFETEA-LU and CAAA concerns, major studies conducted since the last update, the number of additional vehicle trips on the area's highways, and the funds available to maintain or replace highways and other transit infrastructure. The plan must balance planned investments against reasonably expected resources; it must also produce cleaner air or meet the emission budget.

Figure 3 shows how the TPP develops from initiation to adoption.

[Learn more about the Regional Development Framework](#)
[Learn more about the Transportation Policy Plan.](#)

Aviation Plan

The Metropolitan Council, working with airport users, owners, affected communities, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation, writes the aviation element of the Transportation Policy Plan. It charts aviation planning through the year 2030, establishing goals, policies, review criteria, guidelines, coordination, and implementation procedures, as well as an airports system plan.

Figure 4 shows how the aviation plan develops from initiation to adoption.

[Learn more about the Aviation Plan.](#)

Unified Planning Work Program

The **Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)** is an annual description and documentation of proposed transportation and transportation-related planning activities in the metropolitan area. The UPWP also serves as the Metropolitan Council's application for US DOT transportation planning funds.

The UPWP describes metropolitan-area transportation planning activities being undertaken by four agencies: the Metropolitan Council, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and the Metropolitan Airports Commission. This document is prepared only in odd-numbered years, with minimal updates done in even-numbered years. It is prepared by the Metropolitan Council in cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and the Metropolitan Airports Commission.

Figure 5 outlines the UPWP's development from initiation to adoption.

[Learn more about the Unified Planning Work Program.](#)

State Transportation Plan

The Minnesota Department of Transportation writes the Strategic Plan, which guides the creation of the **Statewide Transportation Plan**. It in turn provides the policy framework for implementing the Strategic Plan. The Statewide Transportation Plan also provides direction to MN DOT's districts, divisions, and modal offices, as well as to other transportation partners as they prepare long-range plans, identify investment priorities, and ultimately identify and fund specific transportation projects.

Figure 6 outlines the State Transportation Plan's development from initiation to adoption.

[Learn more about the State Transportation Plan.](#)

Metropolitan District Transportation System Plan

The Minnesota Department of Transportation's Metro District created the 2008-2030 **Transportation System Plan (TSP)** as a guide to future investments in the state trunk highway system with the Metro District's eight-county metropolitan area. The document reflects Federal, state, and regional policies as well as priorities and projected funding availability as it identifies the long-term system and corridor improvements necessary to achieve and maintain established performance targets. The TSP also reflects the goals and policies of the Metropolitan Council's Development Framework and its Transportation Policy Plan.

Figure 7 outlines the Metropolitan District Transportation System Plan's development from initiation to adoption.

[Learn more about the Metropolitan District Transportation System Plan.](#)

Part 3: The Programming Process: How Projects and Programs Become Reality

Minnesota regularly gets Federal aid money to spend on transportation needs. Like other states, Minnesota may also receive congressionally designated high-priority or earmarked project funding. The Minnesota Department of Transportation reserves Federal highway funds for use in four categories:

- Administration, including state highway planning and research, metropolitan planning, safety funds for education and enforcement, and engineering and contingencies for construction projects.
- The Statewide Bridge Preservation Fund, which provides financial help in replacing bridges that are structurally deficient. (Functional obsolescence alone does not qualify a bridge for this funding.)
- The Statewide Corridor Fund, which helps complete major transportation projects that have statewide significance and have been difficult for a district or area-wide transportation partnership (District/ATP) to fund on its own. This fund gets the Federal dollars that remain after District/ATPs and the Statewide Bridge Preservation Fund receives their funding. Distributions from this fund will begin in 2010.
- The Central Adjustment Fund reserved for statewide projects or

used to balance the program across the state.

Together with specifically earmarked congressional funds, the money in these categories funds Minnesota's transportation projects.

Project Solicitation

The Metropolitan Council, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, other metropolitan planning organization members, and Minnesota's local and regional governments are all project proposal sources.

The project selection process favors initiatives that meet both local needs and regional, statewide, or national goals. Projects must fill demonstrated needs and give priority to safety, management, and the preservation of existing transportation assets.

Proposed projects must have a concept, support from planning or non-planning forums, and project funding from the metropolitan planning organization or a specific act of Congress. MN DOT typically solicits and selects projects for Federal funding, paying particular attention to actions of the Minnesota State Legislature.

A project must also go through a project development phase, which addresses engineering challenges, environmental impact, public involvement, land acquisition, and investment level (for large, complex projects). Vigorous, continuous support can mean that a project

moves toward completion more quickly than it otherwise might.

Figure 8 shows how an issue, need, or want becomes a finished project.

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Four year's worth of approved projects comprise the **Transportation Improvement Plan**, or TIP, which must include all federally funded transportation projects with in the seven-county area. A TIP must include only projects for which construction and operating funds will likely be available during the TIP period. A TIP must also include all projects or project phases that will be developed with Federal funds; contain only projects consistent with the overall transportation plan; include all regionally significant transportation projects requiring Federal or non-Federal funds; and provide enough project description and scope to allow air quality analysis.

A TIP must also:

- Identify the criteria and process for prioritizing transportation plan elements for TIP inclusion.
- List major projects from earlier TIPs and identify any significant delays in implementing planned major projects.
- Describe progress made in implementing transit control measures (TCM).
- Include a list of all projects from earlier TIPs that conformed to

air quality requirements and now form part of the basis for other analyses.

Figure 9 shows a TIP's development from initiation to adoption. Public meetings and hearings are an integral part of the process.

[Learn how a TIP is developed.](#)
[Learn more about the current TIP.](#)

State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)

TIP projects are incorporated into the **State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)**, a four-year schedule of planned highway and transit projects that the Minnesota Department of Transportation prepares. STIPs should be reviewed and approved by appropriate Federal agencies before the end of the Federal fiscal year on September 30.

Figure 10 shows an ideal STIP schedule. Both TIPs and STIPs are sometimes modified to reflect project or priority changes, and both undergo annual review to articulate what progress has been made toward achieving their stated goals.

[Learn more about the current STIP.](#)

Part 4: Processes and Documents that support both planning and programming

A group of processes and, formal documents supports the major transportation planning documents. These supportive elements include:

- the Congestion Management System Plan
- the Air Quality Conformity Determination
 - Transit Master Plan
 - Principal Arterial Plan
- the Functional Highway Classification Process
 - the Controlled Access Approval Process
 - the Right of Way Acquisition Loan Fund (RALF)

Congestion Management System Plan

Written by the Metropolitan Council, the Transportation Advisory Council, and MN DOT, the **Congestion Management System** is incorporated in the Transportation Policy Plan.

Under Federal law, metropolitan planning organizations in areas with populations over 200,000 must develop and adopt a congestion management system, which sets out a system for evaluating and developing strategies for addressing existing and projected traffic congestion. Those strategies may include intelligent transportation systems, incident management, high-occupancy vehicle lanes, ride sharing, travel demand management, transportation system management, transit operations, transit pricing, road pricing, access management, site design, parking management, flextime, and telecommuting.

Figure 11 outlines the Congestion Management System Plan’s development from initiation to adoption.

[Learn more about the Congestion Management System Plan.](#)

Air Quality Conformity Determination

The Federal Clean Air Act Amendments passed in 1990 stipulate that transportation plans, programs, and projects in non-attainment and maintenance areas must undergo an air quality conformity analysis. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency designates the seven county metropolitan area and a portion of Wright County adjacent to the metro area, —as a maintenance area for carbon monoxide emissions, so transportation plans, projects, and programs are subject to that air quality analysis.

An interagency committee involving metropolitan planning authorities, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the Environmental Protection Authority, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, plus (sometimes) local transportation agencies, work together to ensure that Minnesota’s transportation plans conform to air quality standards. The Metropolitan Council, however, also makes its own assessment, using technical data, assumptions based on such things as transportation modeling and emissions analysis, and transportation control measures to prove whether or not its transportation plans will conform to air quality standards.

Conformity determinations are subject to public review and comment before agencies take any formal

action. Members of the public have access to information, emissions data, analyses, models and modeling assumptions used to determine conformity.

Figure 12 shows the relationship between conformity determination and transportation planning documents.

[Learn more about Air Quality Conformity Determination.](#)

Functional Highway Classification Process

Roadways are classified according to their primary function—mobility for through trips or access to adjacent lands.

A Federal requirement, the **Functional Highway Classification Process** takes place under the authority of the TAB and its associated committees. The TAB works within federally suggested limits on principal arterial, minor arterial, and collector road mileage; it also takes local city and county functional classification systems into account.

In classifying highway functions, the Council decides what function a roadway should perform before determining its width, speed limits, intersection controls, or other design features. The results help classify roads into one of four categories: principal arterials (which include interstate freeways), minor arterials, collector streets, and local streets, all of which are the publicly provided elements of Minnesota’s land transportation system.

This process helps determine which roads will be part of the metropolitan highway system. Functional classification determines if federal highway funds can be spent on the highway or road and helps establish priorities for Federal funding allocated through the Metropolitan Council and the TAB.

Figure 13 describes the process for making changes to functional roadway classifications.

[Learn more about the Functional Highway Classification Process.](#)

Controlled Access Approval

Minnesota state law requires the Metropolitan Council to approve any controlled access highway or transit fixed-guideway in the metropolitan area before construction or right-of-way acquisition begins. Requests for approval come from the construction agency—typically the Minnesota Department of Transportation—and the Metropolitan Council and Metro Transit have 60 days to review the request.

[Learn more about Controlled Access Approval.](#)

Right-of-Way Acquisition Loan Fund Program (RALF)

State law allows the Metropolitan Council to levy a regional property tax (up to 5/100 of a mill) for advance acquisition of metropolitan highway rights of way threatened by imminent development. The funds are used by the Council to make loans to counties,

cities and towns, which in turn buy property within the officially mapped right of way of state trunk highways or metropolitan highways. The loans are repaid before highway construction takes place.

Figure 14 shows the loan and purchase process.

[Learn more about the Right-of-Way Acquisition Loan Fund Program.](#)

Part 5: Glossary

Add current TPP glossary here.