

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The recently enacted Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) requires Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to develop and adopt a financially feasible Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) every four years. According to 23 CFR 450.312 (a)(b), “The MPO in cooperation with the State and with operators of publicly owned transit services shall be responsible for carrying out the metropolitan transportation planning process. The MPO shall approve the metropolitan transportation plan and its periodic updates.” The MPO is responsible for conducting a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process that results in plans and programs that consider all transportation modes and that support the metropolitan and communities’ goals. The MPO must plan for the movement of both people and goods within the Region by all modes of travel, including highways, rail, public transportation, bicycles, and foot. It also plans for the connections linking these modes.

The Regional Transportation Plan attempts to forecast an area’s mobility needs to a point in the future based on projected travel demands. These must have at least a twenty-year planning horizon. Regional transportation plans are comprised of two major components: a needs component that identifies what projects are “needed” to meet the travel demands identified over the study period, and a financially feasible component that identifies what projects an area can afford based on its projected financial resources.

1.1 Objective, Vision, and Mission

Population growth and the associated travel demand continue to place pressure on the transportation system in the Old Colony Region. The Regional Transportation Plan represents the MPO’s effort to craft a document and a process that will meet the challenges of preserving and expanding a truly intermodal transportation system. Following the directives of the law, it includes goals and policies, analyses and recommendations necessary to build and maintain an efficient, effective and affordable regional transportation system. It is the intention of the MPO to build on the current system, working to make it comprehensive and fully integrated. The goal is a balanced range of well-connected transportation options that will use the best of each travel mode: automobile, transit, rail, bicycle, pedestrian, boat, air and truck. The plan will identify the region’s transportation project needs for the next twenty years.

The primary objective of this Regional Transportation Plan is to establish the framework and guidelines for decision-makers to use when selecting among projects, programs, and facilities with different and sometimes conflicting objectives. The Regional Transportation Plan recommends studies and specific short-term and long-term project priorities that are needed to maintain the existing transportation infrastructure and produce a more balanced, safe and affordable regional transportation system.

The Vision Statement for the Regional Transportation Plan is, “A system of communities, neighborhoods, and commercial districts with unique character, desirable quality of life, and a safe, mobile, and accessible transportation system for existing and future residents, visitors, and businesses.” The Regional Transportation Plan addresses a twenty year planning horizon and includes both short and long range strategies/actions that lead to the development of an integrated intermodal transportation system that

facilitates the efficient movement of people and goods. Additionally, the Regional Transportation Plan examines both current and forecasted transportation and land use conditions and trends and provides an overall framework for developing the future transportation system. Furthermore, the Regional Transportation Plan draws upon the Statewide Transportation Plan and the MassHighway Project Development and Design Guide Book. Given that framework, the mission of the Regional Transportation Plan is to provide a safe and efficient transportation system that promotes multimodalism (roads, transit, sidewalks, bicycles, etc.), supports projected growth, and addresses social, economic, and environmental impacts through effective planning/policy and local/regional coordination.

The principal way in which Regional Transportation Plan recommendations will be translated into action is through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP is a multimodal list of projects for which federal surface transportation funds will be used. The TIP covers a four-year period and is updated every year. It must be based on a reasonable estimate of funds that will be made available to the region.