Laredo Urban Transportation Study

Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee

Notice of Public Meeting

City of Laredo City Hall
City Council Chambers
1110 Houston Street
Laredo, Texas
September 15, 2014
12:00 noon

MEETING AGENDA

I. CHAIRPERSON TO CALL MEETING TO ORDER

II. CHAIRPERSON TO CALL ROLL:

III. COMMITTEE AND DIRECTOR'S REPORTS (No action required)

III. ITEMS REQUIRING POLICY COMMITTEE ACTION

1. Approval of the minutes for the special meeting held on August 28, 2014.

2. Discussion with possible action on the proposed Project List and Project Evaluation Criteria for the 2015-2040 Laredo Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

IV. TECHNICAL COMMITTEE REPORT(S) (No action required)

- Presentation by Haley Collins, of Alliance Transportation Group, Inc, on the Transportation Management Area (TMA) Certification Project.

V. ADJOURNMENT

THIS NOTICE WAS POSTED AT THE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT OFFICES, 1110 HOUSTON STREET, LAREDO, TEXAS, AT A PLACE CONVENIENT AND READILY ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC AT ALL TIMES. SAID NOTICE WAS POSTED BY SEPTEMBER 12, 2014, BY 5:00 PM.

Persons with disabilities who plan to attend this meeting and who may need auxiliary aid or services are requested to contact Ms. Vanessa Guerra, City Planning at (956) 794-1604 at least two working days prior to the meeting so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The accessible entrance and accessible parking spaces are located at City Hall and can be accessed through the Victoria Ave. entrance.

The Laredo Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee is comprised of the following members:

CITY OF LAREDO REPRESENTATIVES:

Honorable Raul G. Salinas, Mayor and LUTS Chairperson
Honorable Roque Vela, Jr., City Councilmember, District V
Honorable Juan Narvaez, City Councilmember, District IV
Honorable Jorge A. Vera, City Councilmember, District VII

COUNTY OF WEBB REPRESENTATIVES:

Honorable Danny Valdez, Webb County Judge
Honorable John Galo, Webb County Commissioner, Pct. 3
Honorable Jaime Canales, Webb County Commissioner, Pct. 4

STATE REPRESENTATIVES:

Ms. Melisa Montemayor, District Administrator
Mr. Albert Ramirez, P.E., Transportation Planning and Development Director

***** EX-OFFICIO *****

Honorable Judith Zaffirini, State Senator, District 21
Honorable Richard Raymond, State Representative, District 42
Honorable Tracy O. King, State Representative, District 80

Nathan R. Bratton
MPO Director

Gustavo Guevara, Jr.
City Secretary

Laredo Urban Transportation Study

Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee
City of Laredo Council Chambers
1110 Houston St. -Laredo, Texas

MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 28, 2014 SPECIAL MEETING

I. CALL TO ORDER

Cm. Vela called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

II. CHAIRPERSON TO CALL ROLL

Nathan R. Bratton, MPO Director, called roll and verified that a quorum did exist.

Regular members present:

Honorable Juan Narvaez, City Councilmember, District IV
Honorable Roque Vela, Jr. City Councilmember, District V
Honorable Jorge A. Vera, City Councilmember, District VII
Melisa Montemayor, TxDOT
Albert Ramirez, TxDOT

Regular members not present:

Honorable Raul G. Salinas, Mayor and LUTS Chairperson
Honorable Jaime Canales, Webb County Commissioner, Pct. 4
Honorable John Galo, Webb County Commissioner, Pct. 3
Danny Valdez, Webb County Judge

Ex-Officio Members Not Present:

Honorable Richard Raymond, State Representative, District 42
Honorable Judith Zaffirini, State Senator, District 21
Honorable Tracy O. King, State Representative, District 80

Staff (Of Participating LUTS Agencies) Present:

City:

Nathan R. Bratton, City Planning/LUTS Staff
Vanessa Guerra, City Planning/LUTS Staff

III. COMMITTEE AND DIRECTOR'S REPORTS (No action required)

Mr. Bratton advised the Policy Board the Mock Certification will be happening sometime in December. Alliance Transportation Group will be giving a presentation pertaining to the Mock Certification at the next policy meeting.

Mr. Bratton also stated Staff was informed by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT's), Civil Rights Division that they will be performing a desk audit. Staff is gathering the necessary information for submittal by September 19th.

IV. ITEMS REQUIRING POLICY COMMITTEE ACTION

1. Approval of the minutes for the meeting held on July 21, 2014.

Cm. Vera made a motion to approve the minutes of July 21, 2014.

Second:	Cm. Narvaez
For:	5
Against:	0
Abstained:	0 Motion carried unanimously

2. Receive public testimony and initiate a 10 day public review and comment period for the the proposed amendment(s) to the MPO By-Laws.

Cm. Narvaez made a motion to open a public hearing.

Second:	Cm. Vera
For:	5
Against:	0
Abstained:	0 Motion carried unanimously

Mr. Bratton gave a brief presentation on the proposed amendments to the MPO By-Laws.

Listed below are the proposed revisions:

Section 2.1(a), shall be revised as follows:

City of Laredo:	Mayor (Chairperson) ~~[Three City Councilmembers, as appointed by the Mayor in his/her sole discreation.]~~ Two City Councilmembers, as appointed by the Mayor in his/her sole discretion.

Laredo Mass Transit Board	One Laredo Mass Transit Board member as appointed by the Board's presiding officer/Mayor in his/her sold discretion.

Section 2.1(d), (e), and (f) shall be revised as follows:

(d) Laredo Mass Transit Board's presiding Officer/Mayor shall appoint one member to represent the Laredo Mass Transit Board.

~~(d)~~ (e) The County Judge of the County of Webb shall appoint the two County Commissioners that represent the County of Webb.

~~(e)~~ (f) Appointments to the Policy Committee shall be for a period to two years. A member may be reappointed with no limitation to number of terms, except that such term will not continue in the event an officer becomes ineligible for membership on the Policy Committee.

Section 2.3(b) shall be revised as follows:

~~(b) The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) will appoint the District Advanced Transportation Planning and Development Director who shall act as Vice Chairperson of the Technical Committee and will coordinate the administration and transportation planning activities of the MPO with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and TxDOT.~~

(b) The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) will appoint two Planning Representatives, one of whom shall act as Vice-Chairperson of the Technical Committee. The TxDOT TPP Field Representatives will coordinate the administration and transportation planning activities of the MPO with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and TxDOT.

Section 2.3 (c)3 shall be revised as follows

3. State Representatives:
   TxDOT Planning Representatives (Vice-Chairperson)
   ~~TxDOT Special Projects Coordinator~~
   TxDOT Planning Representative
   TxDOT Area Engineer
   ~~TxDOT South Region Field Representative~~
   TxDOT TPP Field Representative

Mr. Bratton discussed the proposed amendments and proposed to remove the 2.3(b) completely. Language regarding the TxDOT TPP Field Representative will remain in section 2.3 (c).

Cm. Vera made a motion to close the public hearing and initiate a 10 day comment period for the proposed amendment to the MPO By-Laws including the deletion of all language in Section 2.3(b) as indicated below:

~~(b) The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) will appoint the District Advanced Transportation Planning and Development Director who shall act as Vice Chairperson of the Technical Committee and will coordinate the administration and transportation planning activities of the MPO with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and TxDOT.~~

Second: Cm. Narvaez
For: 5
Against: 0
Abstained: 0 Motion carried unanimously

3. **Authorizing the execution of Amendment #2 of the contract with CDM Smith for professional services related to the development of the 2008-2040 Travel Demand Model Update Project in order to revise the contract completion date from September 30, 2014 to January 31, 2015.**

Mr. Bratton gave a brief presentation on the execution of Amendment #2 with CDM Smith.

Cm. Vera made a motion to approve and execute Amendment #2 of the contract with CDM Smith for professional services of the 2008-2040 Travel Demand Model Update Project.

Second: Cm. Narvaez
For: 5
Against: 0
Abstained: 0 Motion carried unanimously

4. **Discussion with possible action on the proposed 2015-2040 Laredo Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) Project Evaluation Criteria.**

Mr. Bratton gave a brief presentation and discussed the proposed 2015-2040 MTP Project Evaluation Criteria.

Mr. Bratton suggested replacing and or amending the public acceptance criteria with a qualitative element to be scored by the Technical Committee. Both the quantitative and qualitative scores would then be brought to the Policy Committee for their review and acceptance. The Policy Board concurred with the amendment.

Cm. Vera made a motion to approve the proposed 2015-2040 MTP Project Evaluation Criteria as amended. Said amendment entails the criteria be revised such that 20% of the total possible project score is devoted to qualitative scoring criteria.

Second: Cm. Narvaez
For: 5
Against: 0
Abstained: 0 Motion carried unanimously

IV. TECHNICAL COMMITTEE REPORT(S) (No action required)

Mr. Bratton explained to the Policy Board that MTP must to be submitted by December of 2014. Should the December deadline not be met, funding for TxDOT projects may be interrupted.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Cm. Narvaez made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:18 p.m.

Second: Cm. Vera
For: 5
Against: 0
Abstained: 0 Motion carried unanimously

Prepared by: _____
Angie Quijano
MPO Staff

Reviewed by: _____
Vanessa Guerra,
MPO Coordinator

Reviewed by: _____
Nathan R. Bratton,
MPO Director

_____
Melisa Montemayor,
District Administrator

_____
Raul G. Salinas,
Mayor and LUTS Chairperson

LAREDO URBAN TRANSPORTATION STUDY
ACTION ITEM

DATE: 9/15/14	**SUBJECT:** A Motion(s) Discussion with possible action on the proposed Project List and Project Evaluation Criteria for the 2015-2040 Laredo Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).
INITIATED BY: Staff	**STAFF SOURCE:** Nathan Bratton, MPO Director

PREVIOUS ACTION: On August 28, 2014, the Policy Committee approved the proposed Project Evaluation Criteria as amended during the meeting. Said amendment entails the criteria be revised such that 20% of the total possible project score is devoted to qualitative scoring criteria.

BACKGROUND:

The development of the MTP is required under the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) to assure the continued allocation of federal fund to local transportation projects. When adopted the plan is recognized as the official, comprehensive, intermodal transportation plan for the metropolitan planning area. The purpose of the MTP is to identify existing and future transportation needs, develop both long-range and short-range strategies/actions that promote an integrated multimodal transportation system, and facilitate the safe and efficient movement of people and goods, while addressing current and future transportation demand. Said coordinated transportation strategies may include: roadway capacity or operational enhancements, truck, transit or rail freight related network improvements, as well as, bikeways and pedestrian facilities. The plan must address, at a minimum, a continuous twenty-year planning horizon.

During the development of the MTP, a "call for projects" is issued to encourage local stakeholders, planning partners and members of the public to submit projects they wish constructed within the next 25 years. All submitted projects, as well as any unimplemented projects remaining from the previous plan are then evaluated for the purpose of ranking, inclusion, and allocation of projected federal funds. **(See attached list of projects on attachment entitled Public Meeting 2 – Survey Questions)**

In an effort to prioritize the future transportation needs of Laredo region, the MPO has developed a series of project evaluation criteria to objectively score projects. While the criteria attempt to quantify the potential benefits and effects of each project, they are not the sole determinant in establishing regional investment priorities. Rather, these criteria are simply a tool to help discuss the merits of each project and evaluate them on an equal playing field.

REVISED project evaluation criteria are as follows *(also see attached)*:

Congestion –100 Points
- Current Congestions (50)
- Future Congestion (30)
- CMP (20)

Safety and Operations – 100 Points
- Safety (60)
- Operational Efficiency (30)
- Hazardous Materials (10)

Project Cost –50 Points
- Cost reasonableness (30)
- Alternative Financing (20)

Modal Impacts – 150 Points
Environmental Impacts – 20 Points
Public Acceptance – 80 Points
Total – 500 Points

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:	**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**
Approval as originally proposed.	**Approval**

Project Evaluation Criteria

In an effort to prioritize the future transportation needs of Laredo region, the MPO has developed a series of project evaluation criteria to objectively score projects. While the criteria attempt to quantify the potential benefits and effects of each project, they are not the sole determinant in establishing regional investment priorities. Rather, these criteria are simply a tool to help discuss the merits of each project and evaluate them on an equal playing field.

Congestion – 100 Points

Current Congestion:

Does the project specifically address a currently congested facility; or in the case ofa new alignment roadway, does it specifically address a "parallel" facility that is congested?

- Current Level of Service = E or F : 50 points
- Current Level of Service = D : 40 points
- Current Level of Service = C : 30 points
- Current Level of Service = B : 20 points
- Current Level of Service = A: 0 points

Future Congestion:

Does the project specifically address afacility that is expected to becomecongested at the end of the MTPplanning horizon (currently 2040), or inthe case of a new alignment roadway,does it specifically address a "parallel"facility that is projected to becongested?

- Future Level of Service = E or F : 30 points
- Future Level of Service = D : 20 points
- Future Level of Service = C : 10 points
- Future Level of Service = B : 5 points
- Future Level of Service = A: 0 points

Congestion Management Process:

Is this project a product of the congestion management process?

- Yes, indirectly : 20 Points
- No : 0 Points

Safety and Operations: 100 Points

Safety:

Does the project specifically address a safety issue?

- Yes, directly : 60 Points
- Yes, indirectly : 30 Points

- No : 0 Points

*Based upon type of project.
Yes, directly: Access Management, Frontage Road Conversion, Intersection Improvements, Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities (some), Center Turn Lane, Lighting, Median, Realignment, Traffic Signal, Widen Lanes
Yes, indirectly: Reconstruction/Rehabilitation/Repair/Resurface, Upgrade to Freeway
No: Added Capacity, Drainage, Landscaping, Museum, Visitor Center, New Roadway

Operational Efficiency:

Does this project include elements that specifically improve the operationalefficiency of the transportation system?

- Yes, directly : 30 Points
- Yes, indirectly : 15 Points
- No : 0 Points

*Based upon type of project.
Yes, directly: Upgrade Interchange/Intersection Improvement, Center Turn Lane, Add Turn lanes, Drainage, Frontage Road Conversion, Realignment, Signals, Traffic Flow Improvements, Median
Yes, indirectly: New Roadway, Additional Travel Lanes
No: Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities, Landscaping, Lighting, Museum, Visitor Center,Reconstruction/Rehabilitation/Repair/Resurface

Hazardous Material:

Does this project address the safe transportation of hazardous material?

- Yes : 10 Points
- No : 0 Points

Yes: Project located in a Hazmat route
No: Project not located in Hazmat route

Project Cost: 50 Points

Cost Reasonableness:

Is the project cost per future vehicle mile of travel (DVMT from "build" alternative from travel demand model) a reasonable amount?

- $75 or less per VMT : 30 points
- Between $75 and $125 per VMT : 20 points
- Between $125 and $500 per VMT: 10 points
- More than $500 per VMT: 0 points

Alternative Financing:

Does this project include non-traditional funding sources and enhanced costsharing?

- Yes : 20 Points
- No : 0 Points

*Based upon whether there is any funding for this project beyond the typical federal funds and minimum local match. Alternative financing is considered to be an indication of Community Support. Examples of alternative financing includes local match, TIRZ, Tolls, etc.

Modal Impact: 150 Points

Does this project specifically promote the use of or access to an alternative mode oftransportation?

- Transit : 25 points
- Bicycling : 25 points
- Walking : 25 points
- Air Travel : 25 points
- Rail Travel : 25 points
- Freight: 25 Points

Environmental Impacts: 20 Points

Does this project impact environment in a positive manner? (0 to 10 points)

- The TAC will evaluate and provide scores for each project based on their local knowledge

Does this project improve aesthetics of the community?(0 to 10 points)

- The TAC will evaluate and provide scores for each project

Public Acceptance:80 Points

Does the project have explicit community support? (0 to 50 points)

- The TAC will evaluate and provide scores for each project based on public outreach process

Is the project consistent with local and regional goals and objectives? (0 to 30 points)

- The TAC will evaluate and provide scores for each project

2015 – 2040 Laredo Metropolitan Transportation Plan
Public Meeting 2 – Survey Questions

LAREDO METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN 2015-2040 UPDATE
Laredo Urban Transportation Study

1. Please review the projects in the table listed below and rank the top 10 projects you would like to see constructed in the next 25 years. Your top 10 projects should be ranked from 1 to 10, 1 being most important and 10 being least important. Ranking should be indicated in the far right column label rank.

ID	Road/Facility	Location	Project Description	Cost (millions)	Rank
1	Loop 20	At IH 35	Construct overpass and approach roadways	$42	
2	Loop 20	At International Blvd	Construct overpass and approach roadways	$25	
3	Loop 20	At IH 35	Construct a ramp from IH 35 South to Loop 20 East and a ramp Loop 20 West to IH 35 South	$45	
4	Loop 20	East of Havana Rd to US 59	Upgrade to Interstate Standards, including overpasses at Shiloh Dr, Del Mar Blvd, University Blvd, Jacaman Rd, and Airport	$392	
5	Loop 20	US 59 to Mangana-Hein Rd	Upgrade to 4-lane freeway	-	
6	Loop 20 (Cuatro Vientos)	To US 83 near the City of Rio Bravo	Extend existing 2-lane roadway	-	
7	US 59	Laredo city limit to Duval county line	Upgrade to IH 69 design standards	-	
8	Green Ranch Pkwy	FM 1472 to IH 35	Construct new roadway with 2 lanes	-	
9	Laredo Outer Loop	IH 35 to US 83	Construct new roadway with 4 lanes	$271	
10	Alexander Hike and Bike Trail	Zacate Dam to Del Mar Blvd	Construct hike and bike trail	$1	
11	FM 1472 (Mines Rd)	SH 255 to Killam Industrial Blvd	Widen from 4 lanes to 6 lanes	-	
X-01	US 83	SH 359 to Prop. Outer Loop	Widen from 4 lanes to 7 lanes	$65	
X-02	Loop 20 (Cuatro Vientos)	At Southgate Blvd	Construct overpass and ramps	$42	
X-03	Loop 20 (Cuatro Vientos)	SH 359 to Prop. Outer Loop	Widen 4 lanes to 6 lanes	$48	
X-04	Loop 20	World Trade Bridge to IH 35	Add 1 lane in each direction	$9	
X-05	Interstate 35	Shiloh Dr to Loop 20	Widen 4 lanes to 6 lanes	$49	
X-06	Interstate 35	At Loop 20	Construct ramp from Loop 20 Westbound to IH 35 Northbound	$32	
X-08	Interstate 35	At Loop 20	Construct ramp from IH 35 Northbound to Loop 20 Eastbound	$32	
X-09	Interstate 35	At Loop 20	Construct ramp from Loop 20 Eastbound to IH 35 Southbound	$32	
X-11	US 83	At San Rio Blvd	Construct overpass and ramps	$10	
X-12	Loop 20 (Cuatro Vientos)	At Cielito Lindo/Sierra Vista	Construct overpass and ramps	$51	
X-13	Loop 20	McPherson Blvd to Bucky Houdmann Blvd	Construct 4-lane freeway main lanes	$22	
X-15	US 59	2.0 miles east of Loop 20 to Prop. Outer Loop	Widen 2 lanes to 7 lanes	$73	
X-16	Loop 20 (Cuatro Vientos)	At future minor arterial (1 mile north of Mangana Hein Rd)	Construct overpass and ramps	$51	
X-22	Prop. Outer Loop Spur	Loop 20 to Prop. Outer Loop	Construct new roadway with 2 lanes	$103	
X-24	Clark Blvd (Spur 400)	Loop 20 to Prop. Outer Loop	Construct new roadway with 5 lanes	$126	
X-25	US 83	At Proposed Outer Loop	Construct ramps- Northbound US 83 to Eastbound Outer Loop and Westbound Outer Loop to Southbound US 83	$64	
X-26	Market St	At KCS Railroad	Construct overpass	$10	
X-27	Corpus Christi St	At KCS Railroad	Construct overpass	$10	
X-28	IH 35 SB Frontage Rd (Santa Ursula)	At KCS Railroad	Construct overpass	$10	
X-29	San Bernardo (Bus. Interstate 35)	At KCS Railroad	Construct overpass	$10	
X-30	IH 35 NB Frontage Rd (Santa Ursula)	At KCS Railroad	Construct overpass	$10	
X-31	Chicago St	At UP Railroad	Construct overpass	$10	
X-32	Scott St	At UP Railroad	Construct overpass	$10	
X-33	Sanchez St	At UP Railroad	Construct overpass	$10	
X-34	Seymour Ave	At KCS Railroad	Construct overpass	$10	

2015 – 2040 Laredo Metropolitan Transportation Plan
Public Meeting 2 – Survey Questions

LAREDO METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN 2015-2040 UPDATE
Laredo Urban Transportation Study

ID	Road/Facility	Location	Project Description	Cost (millions)	Rank
R-05	US 83 (Chihuahua)	IH 35 to SH 359	Widen from 2 lanes to 3 lanes	$24	
R-06	US 83 (Guadalupe)	IH 35 to SH 359	Widen from 2 lanes to 3 lanes	$24	
E-01	Along Manadas Creek	Rio Grande River NW of water treatment plant to United H.S.	Construct hike and bike trail	$19	
R-07	Loop 20	IH 35 to McPherson Rd	Construct 4-lane freeway main lanes	$43	
B-02	US 59	At Zacate Creek	Replace bridge	$13	
B-03	Convent Ave	At Rio Grande River	Rehabilitate bridge	$6	
B-04	Sanchez St	At Zacate Creek	Replace bridge	$1	
B-05	Mangana-Hein Rd	At Becerra Creek	Replace bridge	$1	
B-06	Wormser Rd	At Dolores Creek	Replace bridge	$1	
B-07	Las Tiendas Rd	At Tejones Creek to Isabel Creeks and Palito Blanco Arroyo	Replace bridge	$2	
B-08	-	At Juárez-Lincoln Bridge	Construct new bus facility	$40	
0018-05-904	IH 35	0.5 mi N of Uniroyal Dr to 0.5 mi north of US 83	Widen from 4 lanes to 6 lanes	$23	
0018-06-155	Shiloh Dr	At Railroad	Construct overpass	$35	

2. Please suggest other projects you would like to see in the next 25 years and rank them?

3. Do you have any additional comments regarding transportation in Laredo region?

4. Please provide you suggestion on how to make this meeting better?

Thank you for attending tonight's open house and workshop. In order to ensure that future events make the most out of your time commitment, please rate the items listed below using the scale provided

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
The open house location was easily accessible	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt like my time was valued and utilized well	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The information presented was well prepared and informative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

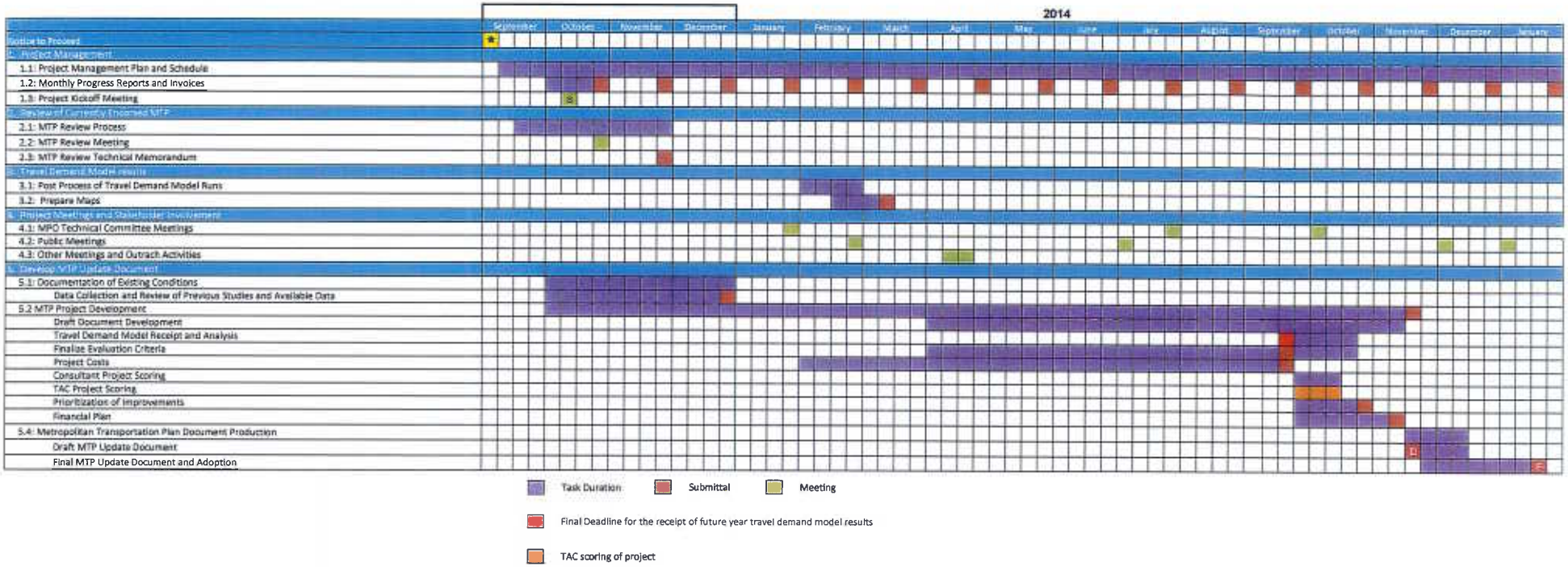
July, 2014


Proposed Outer Loop Alternative Route
Porposed Outer Loop Alternative Route
Webb County
Rio Grande
Lake Casa Blanca
Submitted Projects
Submitted Projects
Laredo City Limits
Rio Bravo City Limits
MPO Planning Area
0 1.25 2.5 5 Mi


Webb County
B-07
0018-05-904
X-04
X-06
X-09
X-08
X-05
IH 35 & Loop 20 Intersection
R-07
X-13
X-22
0018-06-155
E-01
X-28
X-27
X-30
X-29
X-31
B-02
B-04
X-33
X-32
R-05
X-24
R-06
B-03
B-08
X-34
X-15
Downtown
X-26
X-02
X-03
X-01
X-12
B-06
X-16
X-25
B-05
X-11
0
4.5 Mi
Legend
Other Projects
Laredo City Limits
Rio Bravo City Limits
MPO Planning Area

Laredo 2040 MTP Update

Project Schedule



Presentation by Haley Collins of Alliance Transportation Group, Inc. on the Transportation Management Area (TMA) Certification Project

FHWA/ FTA JOINT CERTIFICATION REVIEW

LAREDO URBAN TRANSPORTATION STUDY

FHWA/ FTA QUESTIONNAIRE

September 2014

Prepared by:
Alliance Transportation Group | 11500 Metric Blvd, Bldg M1, Ste 150 | Austin, Texas 78758 | 512.821.2081
T.B.P.E. Firm Registration No. 812

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/ QUESTIONNAIRE

STUDY AREA ORGANIZATION

1. **WHO ARE THE MEMBER AGENCIES OF THE MPO POLICY COMMITTEE? WHO ARE THE MEMBER AGENCIES OF THE MPO TECHNICAL COMMITTEE? ARE ANY IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES OR TRANSPORTATION MODES NOT MEMBERS OF THE MPO? DISCUSS ANY ANTICIPATED IMPACTS RESULTING FROM CENSUS 2010.**

Member agencies of the MPO Policy Committee include the City of Laredo, Webb County, and the State of Texas. The composition of the Policy Committee is detailed below.

POLICY COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

- City of Laredo Representatives
  - Mayor of Laredo (Chairperson)
  - City Councilman
  - City Councilman
- Laredo Mass Transit Board
  - Laredo Mass Transit Board Member
- Webb County Representatives
  - County Judge (Vice Chairperson)
  - Webb County Commissioner
  - Webb County Commissioner
- State of Texas Representatives
  - TxDOT District Administrator
  - TxDOT Transportation Planning and Design Director
- Ex-Officio
  - State of Texas Senator(s)
  - State of Texas Representative(s)

Member agencies of the MPO Technical Committee include representatives of the City of Laredo, Webb County, the State of Texas, and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), as well as private sector freight representatives, representatives of both school districts that serve the Laredo and Rio Bravo areas, and higher education representatives. The composition of the MPO Technical Committee is detailed below.

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

- City of Laredo Representatives
  - El Metro General Manager
  - Laredo International Airport Director
  - City of Laredo Bridge Director
  - City of Laredo Traffic Safety Director
  - City of Laredo Engineering Director
  - City of Laredo Planning Director (Chairperson)
- Webb County and Regional Representatives
  - Webb County Planning Director
  - Webb County Rural Transit Director
  - Webb County Engineering Director
  - South Texas Economic Development Representative
- State of Texas Representatives
  - Planning Representative, TxDOT (Vice-Chairperson)
  - Planning Representative, TxDOT
  - Laredo Area Engineer, TxDOT
  - TPP Field Representative, TxDOT
- Federal Representatives
  - Federal Highway Administration Planning Representative
- Private Sector Representatives
  - Kansas City Railroad Representative
  - Union Pacific Railroad Representative
  - Transportation Provider Representative
- School System Representatives
  - Laredo Independent School District Representative
  - United Independent School District Representative
  - Texas A&M International University Representative
  - Laredo Community College Representative

The Laredo MPO includes members of all implementing agencies representing the City of Laredo and Webb County, and transportation modes, including a representative from El Metro, as well as El Aguila, the rural public transportation provider for Webb County. The MPO is considering the appropriateness of adding a representative of the Regional Mobility Authority (RMA), which was recently approved by the Texas Transportation Commission on February 27, 2014, to its Technical Committee.

The 2010 decennial Census did not result in the identification of any new urbanized areas within the existing MPA boundary, and therefore did not trigger a need to update the membership of the Policy or Technical Committees to include additional jurisdictions.

For more information regarding the Policy and Technical Committee, see **Chapter 1: Study Area Organization**.

2. DISCUSS THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE MPO STAFF. TO WHAT DEGREE IS THE MPO PROCESS SUPPORTED BY STAFF ACTIVITIES? TO WHAT DEGREE IS THE MPO PROCESS SUPPORTED BY CONSULTANT ACTIVITIES?

The LUTS staff is comprised of an MPO director, the MPO coordinator, two part-time staff, a GIS analyst (position currently vacant), and one part-time clerk. The MPO coordinator is the only full-time staff person at the MPO.

MPO staff utilizes the help of consultants at key points in the planning process, where their expertise is instrumental either in facilitating highly technical tasks or in providing additional resources. Although the MPO is constrained in their ability to perform all planning activities in-house, the MPO maintains its role as the steward of the planning process by exercising tight control over policy decisions and programmatic processes.

The FY 2014 UPWP calls for the preparation of a Limited English Proficiency Plan, a Congestion Management Plan, the 2015-2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) Update, a Railroad Quiet Zone Study Update, a Transit Plan Update, a Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, and the Mines Road Corridor Study, as well as a website redesign and a TMA Certification Project, all to be completed by private consultants.

In-house activities include administrative and management duties, updating demographics, including population, land use, housing, employment and roadway databases and maps, developing and/or revising as necessary the UPWP, the TIP, Bylaws, and the Public Participation Plan (PPP), as well as participating in the development of the aforementioned plans and studies by private consultants.

For more information regarding the organizational structure of the LUTS staff, see **Chapter 1: Study Area Organization**.

Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) Boundary

3. Describe the current status and development of the MPA and UAB. When was the MPA/UAB last adjusted? Discuss any anticipated impacts resulting from Census 2010.

   The existing MPA boundary was approved by the Governor in 2004. Although the 2010 Census redefined the UAB for the City of Laredo, the existing MPA boundary encompasses the additional area, and therefore does not require any further adjustments based on the revised UAB. However, the MPO is currently in the process of reviewing the MPA boundary, in cooperation with TxDOT and El Metro, to evaluate whether or not it encompasses all areas expected to be urbanized over the next 20 years. Based on demographic forecasts from the most recent update to the Travel Demand Model (TDM), as well as ongoing and detailed conversations with TxDOT, the Technical and Policy Committees, and MPO staff, it is expected that the existing MPA boundary will remain valid for the planning horizon.

   For more information regarding the metropolitan planning area (MPA) boundary, see **Chapter 2: Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) Boundary.**

Agreements, Contracts, and Coordination

4. What cooperative agreements or memoranda of understanding identifying planning responsibilities have been established among the MPO, TxDOT, public transit providers or other agencies involved in the planning process? When was the planning contract signed? To what extent do existing agreements conform to regulatory requirements and how accurately do they represent the planning process as actually practiced? Please attach supporting documentation.

   The MPO currently operates under two separate agreements, a Memorandum of Understanding with El Metro, the public transit provider for the City of Laredo, and an agreement with TxDOT. The agreement with El Metro was signed on January 31, 2012. The agreement between the MPO and TxDOT was signed on November 13, 2012.

   The agreements conform to the following regulatory requirements (§ 450.314):

   - 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.
   - Include specific provisions for cooperatively developing and sharing information related to the development of financial plans that support the metropolitan transportation plan and the metropolitan TIP and development of the annual listing of obligated projects

Both agreements include specific roles and responsibilities for each party and were developed through a cooperative process. The agreements are written and signed by both parties, copies of which are kept on-hand in the MPO office. The MOU between El Metro and LUTS requires both parties to work in consultation in developing the financial plan for the MTP and the TIP. The MOU between El Metro and LUTS also requires El Metro to provide the MPO with the annual list of transit obligated projects. The agreement between the MPO and TxDOT requires both parties to share information and information sources concerning transportation planning issues to assist in the development of required planning documents.

In 2007 the MPO, in cooperation with TxDOT and El Metro, reviewed and updated its agreements to bring them into full compliance with SAFETEA-LU. At the time, agreements closely reflected the planning process as it was carried out in practice. However, as the planning process has started to evolve in response to TMA status, as well as new requirements under MAP-21, changes to respective roles and responsibilities have outpaced existing agreements. Accordingly, the MPO has initiated discussions with TxDOT and El Metro regarding the need to update agreements to better reflect the changing roles and responsibilities of each party under TMA designation, and to meet new requirements introduced by MAP-21. For more information regarding the MPO's agreements with TxDOT and El Metro, see **Chapter 3: Agreements, Contracts, and Coordination**. A copy of the agreements is included as **Attachment D** and **Attachment F**.

5. WHAT PROCESSES ARE SPECIFIED FOR COORDINATION ON PROJECT PRIORITIZATION AND SELECTION FOR THE TIP? DOES THE MPO HAVE A PROCESS/AGREEMENT FOR MOVING OR SELECTING PROJECTS FOR ADVANCEMENT FROM ANY OF THE 4-YEARS OF THE TIP?

Existing agreements do not include specific processes for coordinating on project prioritization and selection for the TIP. However, agreements with the MPO's planning partners describe a comprehensive, cooperative, and continuous planning process that includes participation by El Metro and TxDOT on the Technical and Policy Committees. It is through meetings of the Technical and Policy Committees that the technical merits and community value of proposed projects are evaluated, and projects are selected and prioritized in an open and transparent environment.

The highly qualitative process for selecting and prioritizing projects for the TIP relies on feedback from public meetings conducted as part of the metropolitan planning process, the vision and guiding principles developed cooperatively with the public and transportation stakeholders as part of the MTP, and the eight federal planning factors to guide transportation decision making. Generally, top priority is given to projects that address system preservation, safety, congestion relief, environmental protection, economic development, and aesthetics. Consideration is also given to whether or not projects already have funding secured, have had their environmental study completed and approved, or for which all or most of the right-of-way has been acquired.

Projects generally move through the 4-years of the TIP in a sequential manner. If a project is delayed, the project is assigned to a later year in the TIP based on when the MPO and its planning partners anticipate the let date.

For more information regarding the processes for selecting projects for inclusion in the TIP see **Chapter 7: Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).** A copy of the MPO's FY 2013-2016 TIP is included as **Attachment Q**.

6. WHAT OPPORTUNITIES ARE PROVIDED FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT AT KEY DECISION POINTS IN THE PLANNING, PROGRAMMING, AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PHASES OF TRANSPORTATION DECISION-MAKING? HOW IS THE PROCESS MANAGED AND UPDATED TO MEET THE CHANGING NEEDS OF COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC AND AGENCIES AND THEIR EXPECTATIONS FOR ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT? WHEN DID THE MPO ADOPT THEIR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN AND WHEN WAS IT LAST UPDATED? HOW DOES THE CONSULTATION PROCESS DEMONSTRATE EXPLICIT CONSIDERATION AND RESPONSIVENESS TO INPUT RECEIVED? WHAT KIND OF FEEDBACK DID THE PUBLIC AND AGENCIES RECEIVE ON THE PROPOSALS AND QUESTIONS THEY PUT FORWARD?

Guided by its public participation plan (PPP), adopted by the Policy Committee in 2007, the MPO provides the public, its planning partners, and interested parties with ample opportunities to participate in the transportation planning process. Public and stakeholder participation in the transportation planning process is early and continuous. Ongoing engagement tools currently employed by the MPO include maintaining the MPO website, updating and sending periodic updates to the MPO's contact list, and providing opportunities for comment at Policy and Technical Committee meetings. Additionally, the MPO conducts stand-alone public meetings as needed, to solicit feedback regarding key issues, major projects, and to assist in the development of the MTP.

In the development of the MTP, the MPO conducts public workshops, thematic roundtable discussions, and interagency meeting in order to obtain input at the following key decision points:

- Visioning and goal setting;
- Issue identification;
- Project development;
- Project prioritization; and
- Social, economic, and environmental assessment.

Public and agency involvement in the 2010-2035 MTP update, as well as the activities completed to date for the 2015-2040 MTP update are detailed in **Chapter 5: Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).**

In an effort to meet the changing needs of communicating with the public and agencies, and their expectations for active involvement, the MPO is required by its PPP to update the public participation plan as needed and re-approve it every five years. In accordance with this policy, the PPP was last updated on June 14, 2012. The purpose of this action is to ensure the plan effectively allows for a full and open public participation process. Additionally, the MPO actively seeks out new public outreach methods and engagement tools to maximize the effectiveness of its public involvement process. New strategies for public participation are discussed in greater detail in **Chapter 8: Public Participation.**

The MPO understands the importance of a public participation process that not only provides adequate opportunities for input, but also demonstrates explicit consideration and responsiveness to input received. When significant written and oral comments are received by the MPO during MTP or TIP development, the MPO summarizes, analyzes, and provides a description of how comments were addressed in the applicable document. **Table 1** below shows documentation of comments received and the actions taken for the FY 2012 UPWP. The table was included in all communications with MPO staff and the Technical and Policy Committees regarding the FY 2012 UPWP.

Table 1: FY 2012 UPWP Comments

	Public Comment	Action Taken
1	Page 1, I. Introduction: you may want to only reference the most current federal legislation.	Language referencing all previous legislation was removed and replaced with language identifying the current legislation.
2	Page 1. Change SAFETEA-LU to read MAP-21	Language changed.
3	Page 2, Section C: Organization, what are the job titles for support staff?	Support staff job titles were identified.
4	Page 4, Task 2.0, Sect. C: Is the Demographic data collection in-house or will the MPO retain consultants for this effort	Previous data collection efforts were done in house. Data collection efforts in relation to global control totals will continue to be done in house. Data collection for the 2013 Travel Demand Model Efforts identified in Subtask 2.2 will be done via a consultant. Action Taken: Language in Subtask 2.1 and 2.2 were revised to identify tasks to be completed by consultant and staff.
5	Page 5, Task 2.1: Is the demographic collection effort described in Subtask 2.1 different from what the consultant will collect for the TDM effort as described in Subtask 2.2? If so, what is the difference?	The demographic collection efforts described in 2.1 differ from those described in 2.2 in that Staff will oversee and coordinate (subtask 2.1), the actual data collection and analytical /GIS products (subtask 2.2) to be produced for the Travel Demand Update. Action Taken: Subtask 2.1 and 2.2 were reworded to identify Staff's oversight role and clarify the consultant's role in the Travel Demand Model update effort.
6	Page 6, bottom of page: need to move the title C. Previous Work to next page.	Title C. Previous Work was moved to the next page.
7	Page 7, Task 5.0- Special Studies: Section C. Previous Work: need to re-write sentence to remove the letter (n). What are the specific transportation management systems for FY 13? Need to address what are the specific studies as a result of the TMA designation in the objective section.	Spelling of the word "in" in Section C. Previous Work was corrected. Language relating to legislation calling out transportation management systems was removed from Introductory Section as recommended by Region. Language identifying the Congestion Management Plan as a specific study to be conducted as a result of TMA designation was added to objective section.

Additionally, the MPO incorporates the results of public participation processes directly into its project selection criteria for the MTP to ensure transportation improvements reflect the values and needs of the community. For example, improving travel times, reducing congestion, increasing safety, and promoting economic development were all identified as top priorities by the public and other stakeholders during the 2010-2035 MTP update. Accordingly, nearly 40 percent of the total points that can be awarded to projects based on the project selection criteria were related to reducing congestion levels. Projects that improved safety and promoted economic development were also awarded additional points in the project selection criteria.

For more information regarding the MPO's PPP and other public involvement processes, see **Chapter 8: Public Participation**. A copy of the MPO's PPP is included as **Attachment S.**

UPWP DEVELOPMENT

7. HOW ARE UPWP ACTIVITIES DEVELOPED, SELECTED AND PRIORITIZED?

Planning activities required to comply with federal regulations, such as the development of the MTP and the Congestion Management Process (CMP) along with the development of tools to support these efforts, are given top priority for inclusion in the UPWP. Once all federal requirements have been addressed, any ongoing or incomplete projects are incorporated into the UPWP. The remainder of the activities originates from needs identified by previously conducted studies, as well as from discussions with Technical Committee members.

The MPO is proactive in reaching out to its planning partners to identify planning studies, especially transit studies that should be incorporated into the UPWP. The MPO works diligently to always include a transit element in its UPWP. Since 2009, the MPO has completed a Transit Development Plan, a Bus Rapid Transit Plan, and a Para-Transit Plan Update. For 2015, the MPO has programmed funding for an update to the Transit Development Plan.

Upon completion of the draft UPWP, members of the Technical Committee are provided opportunities to comment on the work program prior to approval by the Policy Committee. Additionally, the public is provided a 20-day review and comment period prior to adoption by the Policy Committee. Written comments received during this time are presented to the Policy Committee for consideration prior to final action on the plan.

8. IN THE CURRENT UPWP, HOW ARE ALL AVAILABLE FEDERAL FISCAL PLANNING RESOURCES BUDGETED? FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS, HAVE ALL THE FISCAL RESOURCES BEEN SPENT? IS THERE A RUNNING BALANCE OF FEDERAL PLANNING FUNDS? IF SO, WHAT IS THE AVERAGE BALANCE? WHAT ONGOING ISSUES ARE THERE CONCERNING OVER- OR UNDER-BUDGETING OF FEDERAL PLANNING FUNDS?

The FY 2014 UPWP budgets all available Federal fiscal planning resources, totaling $995,000. Approximately $565,553 of the total budget represents estimated carryover from the previous fiscal year. For the past two years, there has been an average running balance of $501,016.50. The MPO is committed to reducing the carry-over amount. Despite the significant carry-over, the MPO has only had funds revert back to the Federal government on one occasion. In 2007, approximately $30,000 in federal funding reverted back to the federal government. Moreover, the MPO has never had to suspend work due to a lack of funding.

9. BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE PROCESS IN PLACE FOR AMENDMENTS TO THE UPWP. WHAT AFFECT HAS TXDOT'S IMPLEMENTATION OF REGIONAL OFFICES HAD ON THE AMENDMENT PROCESS?

Revisions to the UPWP are classified as either substantive or non-substantive. Substantive revisions to the UPWP, defined as any changes to a plan or program that consist of the addition, deletion or substitution of projects, changes to a project's scope or reprogramming of projects outside of the plan or program's scope, do not require a public review and comment period, but must be approved by the Policy Committee. A 72-hour advance notice is published in the local newspaper in English and Spanish, emailed to the MPO contact list, and posted at the Laredo City Hall, the Laredo TxDOT District Office, the El Metro Operations facility, and the MPO's website prior to final action by the Policy Committee. Revisions are set out in full, so that any portion to be deleted is indicated by strike-out type, and any proposed new language is indicated by underscoring or the use of italics. Non-substantive revisions must also be approved by the Policy Committee; however, there are no advance notice requirements. Generally, amendments to the UPWP are infrequent, and reflect unforeseen needs that arise as the planning process is carried out. Since 2011, there have been very few amendments to the UPWP.

Amendments to the UPWP are coordinated with TxDOT through participation of the TxDOT Transportation Planning and Program Division (TPP) Field Representative on the Technical Committee. The implementation of TxDOT's regional offices has not had a significant impact on the amendment process, nor does the MPO foresee any impacts as TxDOT transitions away from the regional offices.

10. BRIEFLY DESCRIBE SOME OF THE SIGNIFICANT CORRIDOR STUDIES IN THE LAREDO METROPOLITAN AREA.

As part of its work program, the MPO has recently completed the following corridor studies, described in greater detail below:

- San Bernardo Renovation and Restoration Project in FY 2008;
- McPherson Corridor Capacity and Mobility Analysis Project in FY 2010; and
- Del Mar Corridor Study in FY 2011.

San Bernardo Renovation and Restoration Project in FY 2008 – The San Bernardo Renovation and Restoration Project presents a vision for transforming the San Bernardo corridor, a major corridor paralleling I-35 and providing essential access to downtown Laredo, from an aging and fractured corridor to a cohesive, amenity-filled corridor that enriches the surrounding community. In completing the project, the MPO worked closely with a consultant team to inventory existing conditions, and develop a vision for the corridor based on workshops with members of the community. Four scenarios were evaluated for their ability to provide adequate traffic operations, while incorporating the design elements envisioned by the community. Block level, segment level, and corridor level construction cost estimates were developed, as was a project phasing plan that outlined the cost of the project by phase and logical construction segmentation. Direct project benefits were calculated using a land use inventory, average industry performance, the Webb County Tax Assessment District's assessed values, and the area's current sales taxes, motel taxes and property taxes. A copy of the San Bernardo Renovation and Restoration Project is located in **Attachment J.**

McPherson Corridor Capacity and Mobility Analysis Project in FY 2010 – The objective of the McPherson Corridor Capacity and Mobility Analysis Project was to evaluate existing and projected traffic conditions on McPherson Road between Loop 20 and US Highway 59 (Saunders Street) to develop recommendations for mobility improvements, including, but not be limited to traffic signal system synchronization, access management, alternative parallel traffic routes, and one-way side street pairing. The project evaluated current traffic operations, roadway function, trip projections, crash analysis, and needs along the McPherson Road study corridor, and outlined capital improvements, cost-benefit ratios, and an implementation plan with short and long-range strategies, cost estimates and phasing for infrastructure improvements to improve mobility and reduce congestion along the corridor. A copy of the McPherson Corridor Capacity and Mobility Analysis Project is located in **Attachment K.**

Del Mar Corridor Study in FY 2011 – The purpose of the Del Mar Corridor study was to evaluate Del Mar Boulevard and identify mobility improvements. The study included collection of sufficient information to measure, evaluate, and identify a range of tools to improve mobility and safety. These tools were designed to reduce travel delay, reduce crash rates, improve pedestrian and transit mobility, enhance land use, enhance the aesthetic character of the corridor, and promote economic vitality along the corridor. Existing year data was collected for turning movements at signalized intersections, and 24-hour volumes on Del Mar at multiple locations. The MPO worked closely with the consultant to examine current (2010) and future (2020 and 2025) traffic conditions. Proposed improvements focused on thru capacity improvements, channelized (raised) medians, turn lanes or auxiliary lanes, driveway consolidation/access management, signal modifications, bicycle, pedestrian and transit improvements, alternate access roadways, and alternative intersections. Short, medium and long term recommendations were developed to meet corridor measures of effectiveness, including level of service and intersection delay, as well as address identified stakeholder concerns. A copy of the Del Mar Corridor Study is located in **Attachment L.**

11. ARE THE CORRIDOR STUDIES CONDUCTED IN A MANNER SO THAT PLANNING DECISIONS AND ANALYSES MAY BE CARRIED THROUGH TO THE PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESSES? IF SO, PROVIDE EXAMPLES AND DISCUSS BENEFITS AND COSTS OF SUCH ACTIVITIES.

Although the previous corridor studies described above were completed under SAFETEA-LU and did not strictly follow the current planning and environmental linkages (PEL) process, the MPO is working to incorporate PEL guidelines into the planning process. The FY 2014 allocates funding for the MPO's first corridor study under MAP-21. The Mines Road Corridor Study will be conducted in a manner so that planning decisions and analyses may be carried through to the project development and environmental review process in accordance with 23 CFR § 212(b) and 450.318(b) and describe in Appendix A to 23 CFR 450, including:

- Coordination with local, state, tribal, and federal agencies;
- Public review of the PEL Study , including opportunities for public/ agency involvement;
- Documentation of relevant decisions in a format that is identifiable and available for review during the NEPA scoping process so that it can be appended or referenced in the NEPA document; and
- Adherence to and completion of the Planning/Environmental Linkages Questionnaire.

For more information regarding planning and environmental linkages (PEL), see **Chapter 12: Planning and Environmental Linkages.**

12. IS THERE A PROCESS IN PLACE TO EVALUATE PAST PERFORMANCE (EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE USE OF FUNDS) OF UPWP PROJECTS/WORK ELEMENTS? IF SO, PLEASE PROVIDE DOCUMENTATION OF THIS PROCESS AND ITS RESULTS.

In accordance with its agreement with TxDOT, the MPO prepares and submits to TxDOT an Annual Performance and Expenditure Report (APER). The FY 2013 APER outlines all funding sources, the amount budgeted, the amount expended, the remaining balance, and the percent expended.

Additionally, the UPWP is evaluated through a qualitative process based on feedback from the Technical Committee, the number of amendments to the UPWP over time, the ability of the MPO to complete work on-time and on- or under-budget, and the implementation of recommendations from completed studies. Results are as follows:

- Amendments to the UPWP have been minimal; only four amendments were made to the UPWP since 2011.
- The MPO has a strong track record of efficiently budgeting planning funds and completing projects in a timely fashion; the MPO has never been required to suspend work on a study due to budgetary issues.
- Feedback from stakeholders indicates that the studies being performed by the MPO are helpful and provide useful information on which to base transportation decisions.

For more information regarding the MPO's UPWP, see **Chapter 4: Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)**. A copy of the FY 2014 UPWP is included as **Attachment I**.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS

13. DISCUSS ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT ARE ANTICIPATED DURING THE PLANNING HORIZON.

Prior to TMA designation, TxDOT had a significant role in directing the transportation planning process, with input from the MPO. Under TMA designation, the MPO is now expected to assume a greater leadership role in guiding the transportation planning process, in cooperation with its planning partners. However, as a relatively small MPO with limited staff resources, the MPO faces a number of challenges in asserting itself in the planning process. The MPO is considering a number of measures to increase its presence and help to facilitate this transition to a greater leadership role, including:

- Updating agreements with El Metro and TxDOT;
- Developing a standard presentation and/ or introductory package for all new Technical and Policy Committee members to explain the MPO planning process and the roles and responsibilities of MPO staff, committee members, and other planning partners in the transportation planning process; and/or
- Publishing a semi-regular newsletter to inform committee members, as well as the MPO's contact list, of MPO activities, study findings, and future plans, as well as provide some educational material pertaining to federal regulations and/ or best practices (i.e. innovative funding strategies, the role of performance measures, etc.).

Resource constraints also pose challenges for documenting MPO processes and maintaining the data necessary to implement a performance-based planning process on par with those of larger MPOs with greater resources for additional data collection and analysis. The MPO will need to strategically utilize existing data sources, and work closely with TxDOT and other planning partners to obtain the data necessary to meet requirements under MAP-21. The constrained ability of the MPO to perform extensive data collection and analysis in support of a performance-based planning process, given existing resources, may impact funding resources available to the MPO in the future.

14. HOW DOES THE MPO EVALUATE THE OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF ITS PLANNING PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES?

The MPO currently evaluates its planning process through an ongoing dialogue with the public and its planning partners, utilizing formative measures to better understand how well the planning process meets the needs of the public and addresses the critical needs of the area. Examples include examining who is participating in the planning process, how successfully the MPO communicates with its planning partners and the public, and how effective new efforts are in increasing and broadening participation by the public and agencies. Additionally, the MPO examines its technical processes to evaluate whether or not the planning process is identifying the same deficiencies and needs being identified by the public and the MPO's planning partners. As the MPO transitions to a performance-based planning process under MAP-21, the MPO will supplement these formative measures with quantitative assessments of the impacts of transportation investments, utilizing such tools as travel demand modeling and the Congestion Management Plan (CMP).

15. HOW DOES THE MPO DEFINE "ADMINISTRATIVE MODIFICATION"? HOW DOES IT DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN "ADMINISTRATIVE MODIFICATION" AND "AMENDMENT" (FOR THE TIP AND MTP)? DOES THE MPO HAVE WRITTEN/DOCUMENTED PROCEDURES FOR DETERMINING AND PROCESSING ADMINISTRATIVE AND NON-ADMINISTRATIVE REVISIONS OF THE TIP AND MTP? PLEASE ATTACH SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION.

The MPO's adopted PPP includes definitions and procedures for "substantive revisions" and "non-substantive revisions" to the MPO's planning and programming documents. The MPO refers to amendments as "substantive revisions" and administrative modifications as "non-substantive revisions." Substantive revisions to the TIP and MTP, defined as changes that consist of the addition, deletion, or substitution of projects, changes to a project's scope or reprogramming of projects outside of the plan's scope, require a public review and comment period of not less than 10-days prior to final action by the Policy Committee. MPO staff may request action by the Policy Committee for non-substantive revisions to the TIP. Non-substantive revisions would include correcting typographical errors, correcting calculations that did not affect fiscal constraint, changes in project labeling (e.g. CSJ numbers etc.), or changes or clarifying additions to descriptive or explanatory language. These types of changes do not require a public review and comment period. All changes to the plan are required to be set out in full, with portions intended for deletion represented by strike-out type and any new language indicated by underscoring or the use of italics.

Aside from the aforementioned guidelines, the MPO does not have written/ documented procedures for determining and processing administrative (non-substantive) and non-administrative (substantive) revisions to the MTP/TIP. Generally, MPO staff determines whether proposed changes qualify as substantive or non-substantive, in consultation with the Policy Committee, which is required to approve all revisions. However, the MPO recently incorporated language into its proposed FY 2015-2018 TIP that requires the written approval of both the MPO Planning Director and the TxDOT District Administrator for all non-substantive changes.

16. WHAT PERFORMANCE MEASURES HAS THE MPO ESTABLISHED TO MONITOR THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM IN THE REGION? WHAT ARE THE EXISTING AND FUTURE DATA NEEDS FOR THESE PERFORMANCE MEASURES?

As part of the development of the Congestion Management Plan (CMP), the MPO has identified a toolbox of performance measures that can be used to monitor the transportation system in the region. These include:

- Average travel speed;
- Average travel time;
- Average travel rate;
- Total delay;
- Volume to capacity ratios;
- Level of service;
- Crash rates; and
- Congestion Indices.

As the CMP is intended to be a continuing process, the Policy Committee will periodically revisit its selected performance measures in order to make any adjustments as needed to respond to evolving technologies or network conditions.

To date, the FHWA has published two Notices of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) that address national performance management measures as they relate to the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), specifically, serious injuries and fatalities per VMT, and the number of serious injuries and fatalities. The MPO anticipates the release of three additional NPRMs that will propose additional performance measures for a) carrying out the National Highway Performance Program (NHPP) and assessing pavement conditions for the Interstate and NHS (National Highway System) (excluding Interstate), NHS bridge conditions, and performance of the Interstate and NHS (excluding Interstate); b) carrying out the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program and assessing traffic congestion and on-road mobile source emissions; and c) assessing freight movement on the Interstate system. Once final rules have been published and targets adopted by the State and transit operator, the MPO will finalize its performance targets and present those targets to the Technical Committee for discussion. The performance measures and targets will then be fully incorporate as part of the MTP update process.

Data collection for the adopted performance measures will be lead by the MPO, working in conjunction with its planning partners to maximize existing resources. Existing data needs include traffic counts and crash data collected by TxDOT, as well as data available from the South Texas Regional Advanced Transportation System (STRATIS) administered by TxDOT, and data collected through the ITS Regional Architecture and the City of Laredo ITS Master Plan development processes. However, to supplement these existing data resources, the MPO will conduct periodic twenty-four hour tube counts at other facilities, in coordination with local agencies. Additionally, blue tooth-based travel time measurement may be available to the MPO in the future for measuring travel times and speeds.

17. DOES THE MPO, IN COORDINATION WITH THE STATE AND TRANSIT OPERATORS, ANNUALLY PUBLISH A LIST OF PROJECTS (INCLUDING INVESTMENTS IN PEDESTRIAN WALKWAYS AND BICYCLE TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES) FOR WHICH FEDERAL FUNDS WERE OBLIGATED IN THE PRECEDING PROGRAM YEAR? WHEN, WHERE, AND IN WHAT FORMAT IS THIS INFORMATION PUBLISHED? PLEASE PROVIDE A COPY OF THE MOST RECENT EDITION OF THIS DOCUMENT.

The MPO publishes an Annual List of Obligated Projects for which federal funds are obligated in the preceding program year as a standalone document no later than 90 calendar days following the end of the program year. The list is provided to TxDOT and published on the MPO's website. The end of the program year falls on September 31st or the date of approval of the new UPWP from the appropriate oversight agency, whichever occurs later.

The Annual List of Obligated Projects is grouped according to project type, including:

- Transit projects;
- Highway projects;
- Grouped projects;
- Local projects; and
- Bicycle and pedestrian projects.

For each project, sufficient descriptive material is included to identify the project or the phase, the agencies responsible for carrying out the project or phase, the amount of Federal funds requested in the TIP, the Federal funding that was obligated during the preceding year, and identification of the Federal funding remaining and available for subsequent years.

The FY 2013 Annual Listing of Obligated Projects and the approval letter from FHWA are included as **Attachment X**.

18. HOW HAS THE MPO ENGAGED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF STATEWIDE PLANS (E.G., STIP, UTP, ETC)?

The MPO works closely with Lori Morel in the TxDOT Planning and Programming Division to ensure the TIP is compatible with the State's short-term transportation improvement program. The MPO coordinates with the State frequently through email, or through TxDOT representatives serving on the MPO's Technical Committee.

19. DISCUSS THE CONTENT OF THE MPO SELF-CERTIFICATION. HOW DO YOU TRACK THESE REQUIREMENTS AND YOUR AGENCY'S ABILITY TO MEET THEM?

In developing and completing the Laredo MPO self-certification the MPO staff reviews available FHWA and FTA resources such as the TMA Planning Certification Review Primer and other current published guidance materials including, to the extent feasible, the review of the Metropolitan Planning regulations and the other relevant statutes and regulations. MPO staff also reviews best practice materials from peers and transportation associations such as AMPO, ASHTO, etc., and works closely with TxDOT and FHWA to identify any gaps in the transportation planning process. For non-planning related requirements (e.g. EEOC, procurement rules, etc.) the MPO also relies on established policies adopted and maintained by its fiscal agent the City of Laredo.

Given the new and emerging rules under MAP-21 and the fact that the Laredo MPO is developing and will be self-certifying its first MTP as a TMA later this year, the MPO has obtained the assistance of a consultant to help review the requirements and evaluate the MPO compliance status, and make recommendations for addressing any perceived gaps.

Using the outcome of these various staff reviews and support resources, the MPO will evaluate the MTP planning process, make a presentation to the Policy Committee on compliance findings including best practice recommendations for fostering continuous improvement, and receive authorization for the Policy Committee chairman to execute the self-certification documents to accompany the 2040 MTP.

MTP DEVELOPMENT

20. WHAT LONG- AND SHORT-RANGE STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS DOES THE MTP IDENTIFY LEADING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM? DISCUSS THE MTP'S STRATEGIES, INVESTMENTS, PROCEDURES, AND OTHER MEASURES TO ENSURE THE PRESERVATION OF THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM.

    The MTP identifies multiple long- and short-range strategies leading to the development of a multimodal transportation system. These include operational and management strategies, capital investment strategies, and transportation and transit enhancement activities. Strategies for preserving the system are a major consideration of the MPO in developing its MTP and TIP. The 2010-2035 MTP update encourages the preservation of the existing transportation system by including strategies for roadway maintenance and pavement management, bridge maintenance and rehabilitation, travel demand management, transportation system management and operational efficiency, access management, and land use and urban design considerations. The MTP programs 16 functionally obsolete bridges for replacement over the life of the plan.

    Additionally, the MPO has completed several corridor studies that focus on maximizing the operational efficiency of the existing transportation system to improve mobility and safety.

21. HOW IS PROJECTED DEMAND DETERMINED IN THE MTP? WHAT ARE THE ROLES AND METHODS OF DEMOGRAPHICS, LAND USE, AND TRAVEL DEMAND FORECASTING? WERE DIFFERENT POPULATION AND/OR EMPLOYMENT GROWTH RATE SCENARIOS CONSIDERED IN ADDITION TO THE FORECAST DOCUMENTED IN THE MTP? DISCUSS HOW REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/LAND USE INFLUENCED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MTP.

    The process of predicting future needs is a collaborative process with TxDOT, following TxDOT guidelines, that involves projecting population, employment, and land use data to the horizon year for input into the travel demand model. The travel demand model, in turn, uses this information to estimate future demand on the existing plus committed transportation system if no new improvements are implemented over the planning horizon. The results of the travel demand model help to identify those roadways that will be impacted the most by projected growth patterns and which may require transportation investments to reduce congestion and increase safety.

    The TxDOT process includes consideration of several population projections prepared by the Texas State Data Center based on various migration scenarios, as well as local land use plans and economic development plans in allocating population and employment forecasts to the traffic analysis zones (TAZs). The estimates of future land use were based on final and preliminary plats submitted to the city, as well as a suitability analysis that assigned an "attraction" factor to each TAZ based on physical characteristics as well as local land use plans and regional and local economic development plans. Estimates of population and employment were distributed throughout the region for each forecast year accordingly, in order to evaluate their impact on the existing transportation system.

Although the MPO staff discusses scenario based planning with the Policy Committee and Technical Committee, and has introduced the concept of alternative land use scenarios and the interaction of land use and transportation into the planning dialogue, the Laredo metropolitan area's basic growth pattern tends to already be highly efficient and compact, and is constrained by lack of water resources and utilities in portions of the metropolitan planning area.

22. WHAT IS THE STRATEGY TO IMPLEMENT PROVISIONS OF THE MTP? HAVE IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES BEEN ESTABLISHED?

Projects from the MTP are implemented through the short-term transportation improvement program (TIP). The process for selecting projects from the MTP for inclusion in the TIP is a highly qualitative process based on detailed and on-going conversations with the Technical and Policy Committees. Projects that already have funding secured, had their environmental study completed and approved, or for which all or most of the right-of-way has been acquired are considered to be TIP priorities. Additionally, priority is assigned to projects that address system preservation, safety, congestion relief, environmental protection, economic development and aesthetics.

For more information regarding MTP development, see **Chapter 5: Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).**

FINANCIAL PLANNING

23. HOW ARE COST ESTIMATES DEVELOPED FOR THE MTP? HOW ARE REVENUE ESTIMATES DERIVED? DO THESE REVENUE AND COST ESTIMATES INCLUDE OPERATING AND MAINTENANCE COSTS FOR EXISTING, PLUS PLANNED FACILITIES? HOW ARE CONTINGENCY AMOUNTS DEVELOPED AND INCORPORATED INTO THE ESTIMATE? WERE INFLATION RATE FACTORS USED IN DEVELOPING THE MTP? IF SO, WHAT INFLATION RATE FACTORS WERE USED?

Generally-speaking, cost estimates are developed in cooperation with TxDOT and the MPO's planning partners by first estimating an opinion of probable cost, accounting for total project costs, and inflating costs to year-of-expenditure dollars. For roadway and bicycle/pedestrian projects, the MPO works with TxDOT to develop opinions of probable cost based on TxDOT's estimation of average costs by project type for the region. Cost figures for transit projects are reported by El Metro. Total project cost estimates are then developed by applying percentages for preliminary engineering, construction engineering, indirect costs, contingencies, and right-of- way acquisition for roadway projects, and percentages for professional fees and contingencies for transit projects. A 5% contingency is included for each project regardless of construction costs. Highway and transit total program costs are then inflated to year-of-expenditure (YOE) dollars. A 4% compounded rate to account for the effect of inflation is applied to all base year project costs to estimate future year-of-expenditure costs.

Revenue projections are also developed in close cooperation with TxDOT and El Metro, and reflect both existing revenues and historical trends, including all public and private resources reasonably expected to be available over the planning horizon. The State's Unified Transportation Program (UTP) has been the main source of financial information for the TIP and MTP over the last several years. The MPO projects future revenue according to historical trends of TxDOT expenditures in Webb County, including revenue for preliminary engineering, construction engineering, indirect costs, contingencies, and right-of-way acquisition for roadway projects. Additionally, the likelihood of the availability of certain non-recurring sources of revenue, such as funding available through the Coordinated Border Infrastructure (CBI) Program and special programmatic funding (a previous example would be the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)), is evaluated, and projections are adjusted accordingly.

Revenue growth for both highway and transit funds were forecasted using the policy assumptions developed and adopted by TxDOT, the MPO, and the transit provider in consultation with FHWA such that revenue growth was anticipated to occur at the same inflation rate at which costs were anticipated to grow. To calculate the revenue growth, the annual estimate in constant base year dollars was inflated by the same inflation rate used for cost estimates and compounded annually for the life of the plan. For the 2015-2040 MTP update, based on guidance from TxDOT, the MPO utilized the Texas Transportation Institute's (TTI) Transportation Revenue Estimator and Needs Determination System (TRENDS) model to forecast revenues. The model is designed to assist transportation planners, policy makers, and the public in forecasting revenues and expenses for TxDOT for the period from 2012 through 2040 based on a number of assumptions regarding statewide transportation needs, population growth rates, fuel efficiency, inflation rates, taxes, fees, and other elements. The model is updated on a monthly basis, based on the latest cash forecasts and letting schedules from TxDOT.

24. HOW IS FINANCIAL INFORMATION IN THE FINANCIAL PLAN COORDINATED WITH ALL OF THE AFFECTED AGENCIES (MPOS, TXDOT, TRANSIT OPERATORS, AND LOCAL JURISDICTIONS)? HOW IS LOCAL REVENUE DETERMINED OR SECURED FOR LOCAL MATCHES OR LOCAL PROJECT SPONSORSHIP?

The MPO works closely with TxDOT, El Metro, and local sponsors in developing the financial plan in the MTP and the TIP. Before designation as a TMA, highway projects were primarily funded through state categorical funding with most matches coming from TxDOT sources. This process was a function of consultation and negotiation between LUTS and the TxDOT Laredo District regarding what portion of statewide funds may be available. Documentation of the match commitment is based on incorporation of non-federal matching funds into the approved STIP and UTP. This process is likely to continue for projects in which TxDOT is the sponsor, but the MPO intends to work with TxDOT to develop more formal financial planning steps when the memorandum of understanding is updated to address MAP-21 requirements.

For locally sponsored roadway, bicycle and pedestrian projects, which are anticipated to be more common under the TMA designation, the MPO works with TxDOT and the local sponsor to develop cost estimates and identify the required local matching share. The local sponsor and TxDOT enter into a Advance Funding Agreement, which The AFA defines the scope of work, labor and material resources, and cash funding responsibilities to be contributed by each party that are necessary to accomplish a transportation project.. The local sponsor is also expected to demonstrate the commitment through a resolution, or other official action by its policy board (e.g. City Council, County Commission, etc.) to acknowledge the commitment.

For transit projects, El Metro prepares cost and revenue estimates for all transit projects included in the MTP and TIP. These estimates include the required level of non-federal match and a forecast of the available local funds for this purpose. As a subsidiary of the City of Laredo, the commitment to matching funds is made through resolution of the City Council.

25. WHAT PROCEDURES ARE FOLLOWED TO ENSURE THE TIP FINANCIAL PLANS WITHIN THE STATE ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE STIP?

The MPO works closely with Lori Morel in the TxDOT Planning and Programming Division and District Planning Staff to ensure the TIP is compatible with the State's short-term transportation improvement program. The MPO coordinates frequently through email, or through TxDOT representatives serving on the MPO's Technical Committee.

For more information regarding financial planning, see **Chapter 6: Financial Planning**.

TIP DEVELOPMENT AND PROJECT SELECTION

26. ARE SPECIFIC CRITERIA USED TO DETERMINE WHICH PROJECTS WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE TIP? IF SO, WHAT PROCESS WAS USED IN DEVELOPING THESE CRITERIA? HOW ARE PROJECTS PRIORITIZED? ARE ANY STP OR SECTION 5307 FUNDS SUB-ALLOCATED AMONG JURISDICTIONS OR MODES? IF SO, HOW MUCH FUNDING IS SUB-ALLOCATED AND THROUGH WHAT PROCESS?

The process for selecting projects from the MTP for inclusion in the TIP is a highly qualitative process based on detailed and on-going conversations with the Technical and Policy Committee. Consideration is given to feedback from public meetings conducted as part of the metropolitan planning process, the vision and guiding principles developed cooperatively with the public and transportation stakeholders as part of the MTP, and the eight federal planning factors. Generally, top priority is given to projects that address system preservation, safety, congestion relief, environmental protection, economic development, and aesthetics. Funding distributions within the TIP is based on need identified through the needs assessment performed as part of the MTP update and based on the vision and guiding principles established as part of the long range transportation planning process. The process attempts to equitably address the needs of geographic subareas, but there is no formula sub-allocation.

27. DISCUSS LAREDO MPO'S STRATEGY FOR MEETING THE REVENUE AND COST ESTIMATE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE TIP (YOE AND TPC).

The MPO works closely with TxDOT, El Metro, and local jurisdictions to develop cost and revenue estimates for the TIP. Generally, the MPO, in cooperation with TxDOT and El Metro, takes the following steps in meeting the revenue and cost estimate requirements for reporting Year-of-Expenditure (YOE) dollars and Total Project Costs (TPC) in the TIP, which are discussed in further detail below.

- Step 1. Estimate Total Project Costs in base year dollars;
- Step 2. Estimate Year of Expenditure dollars;
- Step 3. Account for non-recurring special program and discretionary revenue; and
- Step 4. Consultation with TxDOT on the availability of formula funds.

Step 1. Estimate Project Costs

Total Project Costs for roadway and bicycle/pedestrian projects are developed in collaboration with the project sponsor starting with published TxDOT estimates of typical construction costs for the MPO study area by project type and facility cross section. Using these construction cost estimates as a starting point, Total Project Cost is obtained by applying percentages for Preliminary Engineering (4.9%), Construction Engineering (5%), Indirect Costs (5.68%) and Contingencies (7.0%) to the base construction cost estimates. If the project calls for acquisition of right-of-way, these costs are estimated based on available market valuation data for similar parcels. These total project costs are then inflated to Year of Expenditure Dollars.

Step 2. Estimate Year of Expenditure Dollars

TxDOT has adopted and the MPO uses an inflation rate of 4% compounded annually to forecast Year of Expenditure dollars. To calculate the revenue growth at this rate, the total project cost for each project calculated in base year dollars is inflated by 4% compounded annually to the anticipated year of project implementation using the following formula.

$$YOE\$ = ACY\$ *(1+0.04)^n$$

Where:
YOE$ = year of expenditure dollars
ACY$ = Annualized constant year dollars
n= number of years from base year

Step 3. Account for Non-Recurring Special Program and Discretionary Revenue

In addition to recurring program funds, LUTS has received special non-recurring competitive grants and other one-time program funds due to its role as a border gateway to the US. These items relate primarily to border security and safety issues and are actual revenues received from sources not included in the recurring revenue forecasts.

Step 4. Consultation with Project Sponsors and Funding Agencies on the Availability of Funds

Although funding availability over the 25-year horizon of the MTP can be a conceptual forecast based on extensions of historical trends and likely future evolution of funding programs, funding availability for the short-term program of the TIP requires identification and commitment of specific funds dedicated to project implementation. Therefore, estimating the funds available for a given TIP year is a function of consultation and negotiation between the MPO and the TxDOT Laredo District regarding what portion of categorical formula funds may be available for any program year.

While, short-term funding projections are worked out in collaboration with TxDOT Laredo District within the framework of funding availability of the overall state program, the MPO coordinates with local sponsors to allocate funds to locally sponsored projects and to secure commitments of local funds for the non-federal matching share of project costs.

Based on guidance from TxDOT, revenue growth is forecast using the Texas Transportation Institute's (TTI's) Transportation Revenue Estimator and Needs Determination System (TRENDS) model for years for which actual funding allocation levels have not yet been established. The model is designed to assist transportation planners, policy makers, and the public in forecasting revenues and expenses for TxDOT for the period 2012 through 2040 based on a number of variables related to assumptions regarding statewide transportation needs, population growth rates, fuel efficiency, inflation rates, taxes, fees, and other elements. The model is updated on a monthly basis, based on the latest cash forecasts and letting schedules from TxDOT.

28. HOW DOES THE MPO ENSURE THAT THE TIP INCLUDES ALL PROPOSED FEDERALLY AND NON-FEDERALLY FUNDED REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS, INCLUDING INTERMODAL FACILITIES?

The vast majority of transportation projects in the region are funded through federal dollars. To date, there has not been a regionally significant project built using non-federal monies that required incorporation into the TIP. In identifying regionally significant projects being constructed using non-federal funds, the MPO works closely with the members of its Technical Committee, and the City of Laredo and Webb County Planning Departments to stay up-to-date on all planning and construction activities in the metropolitan planning area. Additionally, the MPO attends all City Council and Planning and Zoning Meetings for the City of Laredo, and serves on the Platting Sub Committee of the Planning and Zoning Commission. Establishment of the Regional Mobility Authority (RMA), which was approved by the Texas Transportation Commission on February 27, 2014, will likely be a key source of regionally significant projects funded through alternative funding sources, particularly bonds. The MPO is committed to establishing a strong working relationship with the RMA, a representative of which is being considered for inclusion on the MPO's Technical Committee.

In terms of private sector transportation facilities such as distribution centers or intermodal facilities, because the MPO 3 step TDM cannot directly model intermodal transfers, intermodal facilities are treated as land uses with higher than normal propensity to generate freight trips. These locations are incorporated into the TDM as special generators.

For more information regarding financial planning, see **Chapter 6: Financial Planning**. For more information regarding TIP development see **Chapter 7: Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

29. WHAT IS CONSIDERED EFFECTIVE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION? WHAT REVIEW AND EVALUATION PROCESSES DO YOU USE FOR THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS? WHAT IS ITS CYCLE OR PERIOD OF REVIEW? WHO INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY, INCLUDING THE PUBLIC, IS INVOLVED WITH THIS REVIEW AND EVALUATION?

There are several important components to an effective public participation process. Involvement of interested parties should be continuous throughout the planning process, and provide opportunities for input at key decision-making points. It should also be encouraged early in the process, to ensure the MPO has a firm understanding of community priorities prior to making any decisions. Ensuring public participation processes take into account the diversity of needs and values in the community means public outreach must be proactive, with special attention given to traditionally underserved populations in transportation decision-making. Public participation opportunities must also be accessible, so that all who wish to participate are able to do so. It is imperative that information be presented in an easy to understand format using a variety of techniques designed to meet the diverse needs of the general public. Effectively communicating complex ideas so that the public can fully grasp the complicated nature of transportation investment decisions allows the public to formulate informed opinions that take into account the trade-offs of various solutions. Finally, and most importantly, an effective public participation process demonstrates explicit consideration of public input in the decision-making process.

Currently, the MPO does not have a documented process for evaluating the effectiveness of its public participation strategy. Assessing the overall effectiveness of the program is intended to be an ongoing process conducted by the MPO. The MPO is required by its PPP to update the plan as needed and re-approve it every five years. In accordance with this policy, the PPP was last updated on June 14, 2012. The purpose of this action is to ensure the plan effectively allows for a full and open public participation process. With the adoption of a performance-based planning process, the MPO is considering the appropriateness of various Measures of Effectiveness (MOE) in bringing a more quantitative process to evaluating the MPO's success in reaching out to all citizens, especially low-income and minority populations, and effectively engaging with the public in the development of plans and projects.

The MPO has already taken steps to strengthen the evaluation process for their public participation strategies. At the first public meeting for the 2015-2040 MTP update, the MPO distributed a questionnaires to participants. The survey asked participants questions regarding their travel behaviors, preferences, and needs. Additionally, participants were asked to denote their place of residence on a map, which will assist the MPO in evaluating its outreach efforts to various communities. Moving forward, the MPO plans to continue to incorporate questionnaires into its public participation activities, and is considering expanding the survey to include questions regarding the socioeconomic characteristics of participants, and the perceived effectiveness of the MPO's public outreach and engagement methods.

30. HOW DOES THE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS DEMONSTRATE EXPLICIT CONSIDERATION AND RESPONSIVENESS TO PUBLIC AND INTERESTED PARTIES' INPUT RECEIVED DURING THE PLANNING AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS? WHAT KIND OF FEEDBACK DO THE PUBLIC/INTERESTED PARTIES RECEIVE ON THE PROPOSALS AND QUESTIONS THEY PUT FORWARD? SPECIFICALLY, IN WHAT INSTANCES HAVE COMMENTS RAISED THROUGH PUBLIC PARTICIPATION RESULTED IN CHANGES TO POLICY, PLANS, PROGRAMS OR PROJECTS?

The MPO understands the importance of a public participation process that not only provides adequate opportunities for input, but also demonstrates explicit consideration and responsiveness to input received. When significant written and oral comments are received by the MPO during MTP or TIP development, the MPO summarizes, analyzes, and provides a description of how comments were addressed in the applicable document. **Table 1** on page 8 shows the comments received and actions taken to address each comment in the preparation of the FY 2012 UPWP. The table was included in all document review correspondence between the MPO staff, and its Technical and Policy Committees.

Additionally, the MPO incorporates the results of public participation processes directly into its project selection criteria for the MTP to ensure transportation improvements reflect the values and needs of the community. For example, improving travel times, reducing congestion, increasing safety, and promoting economic development were all identified as top priorities by the public and other stakeholders during the 2010-2035 MTP update. Accordingly, nearly 40 percent of the total points that can be awarded to projects based on the project selection criteria were related to reducing congestion levels. Projects that improved safety and promoted economic development were also awarded additional points in the project selection criteria.

Comments raised by the public in previous years have directly resulted in changes to MPO policies, plans, programs and projects. The most recent example occurred during the first public meeting for the 2015-2040 MTP update. A number of comments regarding excessive congestion on Mines Road were noted by the MPO. Subsequently, the Outer Loop Alignment Study, programmed in the FY 2014 UPWP was replaced by a Mines Corridor Study to address public concern. Additionally, the McPherson Road Capacity and Mobility Study, the Del Mar Corridor Study, and the Laredo Railroad Quiet Zone Study were the direct result of informal complaints from the public.

31. WHAT VISUALIZATION TECHNIQUES HAVE BEEN USED TO AID THE PUBLIC IN UNDERSTANDING THE MTP, TIP, AND SUPPORTING STUDIES? ARE THERE OTHER TECHNIQUES BEING CONSIDERED TO IMPLEMENT OR ENHANCE THE PLANNING PROCESS?

To aid the public in understanding the MTP, TIP and supporting studies, visualization techniques, including charts, graphs, computer renderings, and maps have been utilized in the past by the MPO. However, tools such as computer modeled images, interactive GIS systems, GIS based scenario planning tools, photo manipulation, and computer simulation have increased the sophistication and ease with which complex ideas are communicated and proposals are visualized. The MPO is committed to increasing its knowledge and use of available and emerging visualization techniques. The current UPWP includes funding for the procurement of professional services to aide in the enhancement of the MPO's website to increase the public's access to various MPO documents and maps.

For more information regarding public participation, including examples of visualization techniques, see **Chapter 8: Public Participation**. A copy of the MPO's PPP is included as **Attachment S.**

TITLE VI/LEP

32. WHAT TITLE VI PROTECTED POPULATIONS ARE FOUND IN THE METROPOLITAN AREA? WHERE ARE THEY LOCATED? PLEASE DISCUSS IN DETAIL HOW DISPARATE IMPACT OR UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS ARE DETERMINED.

Title VI legislation states that "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 be subject to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." The purpose of the law is to ensure that public funds, to which all taxpayers of all races [colors, and national origins] contribute, not be spent in any fashion which encourages, entrenches, subsidizes or results in racial [color or national origin] discrimination.

According to 2012 Census estimates, 95.4% of the population of Webb County, the majority of which is located within the metropolitan planning area, identifies as "Hispanic or Latino." Only 3.6% of the population identifies as "white alone, not Hispanic or Latino." Less than 1% of the population of Webb County identifies as "Black or African American alone," "American Indian and Alaska Native alone," or "Asian alone."

Because the vast majority of the population within the urban area is of Hispanic origin, mapping efforts focus primarily on other populations traditionally underserved by the transportation system. GIS analysis for the 2010-2035 MTP update revealed that the largest concentrations of low-income, elderly, and disabled populations are located in the central city. Colonias on the other hand, which are rural communities oftentimes lacking in some of the most basic living necessities, such as potable water and sewer systems, electricity, paved roads, and sanitary housing, are primarily situated in rural areas outside of the City of Laredo.

The MPO has not developed specific criteria for measuring impacts of projects on low income communities, but in general uses the following concepts to consider negative impacts and unanticipated consequences.

- It is assumed that the mobility, access and safety benefits of most projects accrue most strongly to those areas in close proximity to the project and therefore if the project objectives are consistent with the travel market needs of adjacent communities the project is viewed as have a positive impact.
- It is assumed that the physical impacts of project construction and footprint also have the greatest negative impacts on adjacent communities and that large infrastructure projects whose objectives are not consistent with community needs represent potential negative impacts. Examples include the construction of a new railway line that may create safety and noise pollution concerns, the construction of a new roadway that divides an existing community or creates barriers to other resources and/or activities, or improvements that may increase freight traffic or the movement of hazardous materials through low-income areas.

The key consideration in determining unintended consequences is how the project objectives match the community's transportation needs. The MPO is committed to working with project sponsors to mitigate negative impacts on Title VI/ Environmental Justice communities.

The MPO also considers the distribution of improvements across modes to ensure non-motorized modes of transportation are given appropriate consideration in the planning process. These more qualitative processes may be supplemented in future years with additional quantitative methods for evaluating existing conditions and predicting future needs like comparing travel times or analyzing the percentage of Title VI/EJ persons within walking distance of an El Metro bus stop.

33. HOW ARE PERSONS TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED BY TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS, SUCH AS LOW-INCOME, MINORITY OR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY PERSONS, ACTIVELY SOUGHT OUT FOR INVOLVEMENT IN THE PLANNING PROCESS?

The MPO actively seeks to increase participation in the transportation planning process by Title VI and environmental justice communities. Public announcements and outreach materials are published in both English and Spanish. Additionally, the MPO advertises public involvement opportunities on El Metro buses, as well as at bus stations, and holds all public meetings in transit accessible locations. As part of its Public Participation Plan (PPP), the MPO utilizes existing community and neighborhood organizations to reach out to Title VI and environmental justice communities.

34. DOES LAREDO MPO HAVE AN AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT TRANSITION PLAN? DOES LAREDO MPO HAVE A LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY INVOLVEMENT PLAN?

The ADA requires any public agency with more than 50 employees to make a transition plan setting forth the steps necessary to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. With fewer than 50 employees, the MPO is not required to have an Americans with Disabilities Act Transition Plan at this time.

The MPO is currently in the process of developing its first Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan to ensure all citizens are able to fully participate in the transportation planning process. The plan is expected to be complete before the end of FY 2015, either by a consultant or in-house. The MPO has reviewed final guidance on LEP from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The MPO, possibly with the assistance of a consultant, will undertake a four factor analysis that balances the following four factors:

- Number or proportion of LEP persons served or encountered in the eligible service population ("served or encountered" includes those persons who would be served or encountered by the recipient if the persons received adequate education and outreach and the recipient provided sufficient language services);
- Frequency with which LEP persons come into contact with the program;
- Nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the program; and
- Resources available and costs to the recipient.

For more information regarding how the MPO identifies and engages with Title VI/ LEP populations, see **Chapter 9: Title VI and Environmental Justice.**

CONGESTION MANAGEMENT PROCESS (CMP)

35. DISCUSS LAREDO MPO'S CONGESTION MANAGEMENT PROCESS (CMP) AND HOW IT HAS BEEN FULLY INTEGRATED INTO THE OVERALL METROPOLITAN PLANNING PROCESS. HAS THE CMP BEEN EFFECTIVE? HOW IS THIS PROCESS AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS DOCUMENTED? WHAT MONITORING SYSTEMS ARE BEING USED TO PROVIDE A FRAMEWORK FOR ADDITIONAL EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATION? ARE PERFORMANCE MEASURES PERIODICALLY REVIEWED FOR USEFULNESS AND APPLICABILITY, AND IF SO, HOW OFTEN DOES THIS REVIEW TAKE PLACE? DOES THE CMP FOLLOW THE 8-STEP APPROACH? IF NOT, WHY NOT, AND ARE THERE ANY STEPS BEING TAKEN TO ALIGN THE CMP WITH THE RECOMMENDED 8-STEP APPROACH?

The CMP adopted by the MPO on January 21, 2014, follows the recommended 8-step approach that includes the:

- Development of objectives;
- Defining a network;
- Developing performance measures;
- Collecting data/ Monitoring system performance;
- Analyzing congestion problems and needs;
- Identifying and assessing strategies;
- Programming and implementing strategies; and
- Monitoring strategy effectiveness.

The CMP for the Laredo region is in the early stages of implementation. At present, the MPO is in the process of redefining its network to respond to issues identified in the data analysis phase. Namely, the MPO recognized the difficulty of data collection and analysis, given existing resources, on the initial network, and is in the process of developing a tiered system that will aid in the allocation of limited data collection and analysis resources to the most critical roadways, while continuing to monitor congestion on other roadways using the travel demand model.

The goals and objectives of the CMP serve as the primary linkage between the CMP and the MTP. Both the vision statement and the guiding principles from the 2010-2035 MTP are incorporated directly into the CMP. Developed in close cooperation with the Technical and Policy Committees, and the public, the vision statement and guiding principles shape how congestion is addressed from a policy perspective. Additionally, the MPO recently drafted project selection criteria for use in scoring projects for inclusion in the 2015-2040 MTP update. The draft project selection criteria awards up to 100 points to projects that specifically address a currently congested facility or a facility that is expected to become congested over the MTP planning horizon. Specifically, 20 points are awarded to projects that are a product of the CMP. Overall, congestion elements comprise 55 percent of the total score that can be awarded to potential MTP projects. Data obtained in the implementation of the CMP will be an integral tool for informing transportation decisions.

Since the CMP has not yet been fully implemented, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of CMP strategies in addressing congestion in the Laredo region. The MPO has identified several monitoring systems that will assist in the evaluation of the effectiveness of the CMP. Monitoring systems available to the MPO for additional effectiveness evaluation include:

- Crash data;
- South Texas Regional Advanced Transportation Information Systems (STRATIS) data; and
- Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) data.

To date, the MPO has collected the following data for all segments on the draft CMP network:

- Average travel time;
- Average travel speed; and
- Total delay.

Additionally, the MPO is currently working with TxDOT to obtain average daily traffic (ADT) volumes on the network segments, which TxDOT compiles and processes annually. A toolbox of performance measures has been identified for measuring system-level performance and strategy effectiveness. While no specific timeline for evaluating performance measures has been specified, the CMP includes language encouraging the Policy Committee to periodically revisit its selected performance measures in order to make any adjustments as needed to respond to evolving technologies or network conditions.

36. DOES THE CMP CONSIDER ALL MODES OF TRANSPORTATION (SOV, SHARED RIDE, TRANSIT, INTERMODAL CONNECTIONS, NON-MOTORIZED MEANS SUCH AS BICYCLING AND WALKING, ETC.) IN DEVELOPING CONGESTION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES? DESCRIBE THE PROCESS FOR ADDRESSING PROPOSALS FOR ADDING SOV CAPACITY. HOW HAVE OTHER TRAVEL DEMAND REDUCTION AND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES BEEN ANALYZED? WHEN SOV CAPACITY IS WARRANTED, HOW DOES THE CMP DEMONSTRATE THE ANALYSIS OF TRAVEL DEMAND REDUCTION AND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES?

The CMP includes strategies for all modes of transportation. Examples include:

- Transportation demand management (TDM) strategies that encourage alternative modes of transportation, including bicycling, walking, and transit;
- Public transportation strategies for improving existing transit operations, increasing access, and expanding transit service; and
- Traffic operation improvements, such as the construction of new High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes, the optimization of the timing of traffic signals, and access management that focus on single-occupancy vehicles.

Given the expense and possible adverse environmental impacts of new single-occupant vehicle capacity, management and operations strategies will be given due consideration before additional capacity is considered. The consideration of management and operations strategies will be well-documented in corridor-level studies conducted as part of the planning process prior to the selection of a preferred strategy for minimizing congestion.

37. HOW WAS THE CONGESTION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM DEVELOPED AS PART OF THE METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS? WHAT ARE THE LINKAGES BETWEEN THE CMP AND THE MTP AND TIP? EXPLAIN HOW THE CMP LEADS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS CONTAINED IN THE PLAN AND TIP. HOW ARE THESE ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED IN THE UPWP?

The goals and objectives of the CMP serve as the primary linkage between the CMP and the MTP. Both the vision statement and the guiding principles from the 2010-2035 MTP are incorporated directly into the CMP. Additionally, the MPO recently drafted project selection criteria for use in scoring projects for inclusion in the 2015-2040 MTP update. The draft project selection criteria awards up to 100 points to projects that specifically address a currently congested facility or a facility that is expected to become congested over the MTP planning horizon. Specifically, 20 points are awarded to projects that are a product of the CMP. Overall, congestion elements comprise 55 percent of the total score that can be awarded to potential MTP projects.

Data obtained in the implementation of the CMP will be an integral tool for informing transportation decisions, particularly in programming corridor-level plans and studies into the UPWP for the purposes of identifying strategies for implementation and/ or assessing the impacts of various strategies on congestion through before and after studies. Data collection, project monitoring, and evaluation efforts by the MPO will be programmed in the UPWP and funded through MPO planning funds.

38. WHAT EFFORTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO IDENTIFY AND INCLUDE CMP STAKEHOLDERS, SUCH AS OTHER TRANSPORTATION AGENCIES, AND SYSTEM OPERATORS IN THE REGION WHO STAND TO GAIN FROM ADDRESSING CONGESTION PROBLEMS? DESCRIBE THE INTERACTION THAT HAS TAKEN PLACE WITH LOCAL TRANSIT, FREIGHT AND TRAFFIC CONTROL OPERATORS, AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS IN THE CMP. EXPLAIN HOW STAKEHOLDERS COORDINATE DATA IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES IN THE CMP. HOW ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND ANALYSIS OF POTENTIAL CONGESTION MITIGATION STRATEGIES? ARE LOCAL OPERATING AGENCIES (SUCH AS THE RMA) COORDINATING AND IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES THROUGH THEIR OWN PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING PROCESSES THAT SUPPORT THE OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES OF THE CMP?

Collaboration and coordination among a wide range of stakeholders is an important foundation for an effective CMP. These partners can work together to develop regional objectives, define performance measures, share and analyze data, and identify and evaluate potential strategies. The MPO has worked closely with its Technical Committee throughout the development of the CMP. The Technical Committee is comprised of 24 agency representatives including: TxDOT, the City of Laredo's Transit, Airport, Bridge, Engineering, and Traffic Departments, Webb County's Planning, Engineering, and Rural Transit Agencies, the South Texas Economic Development Council, the Federal Highway Administration, local school districts, and private sector representatives including Kansas City Southern Railroad, Union Pacific Railroad, and local area freight transportation providers.

In early 2013, the MPO conducted a workshop with the Technical Committee to raise awareness about the CMP, as a new requirement of the metropolitan planning area since being designated a TMA, and its role in the transportation planning process. Subsequently, three meetings were held with the Technical Committee in March, May, and October of 2013 to identify the draft CMP network. Technical Committee members were invited to comment on the draft CMP plan prior to approval by the Policy Committee.

Data collection for the adopted performance measures will be led by the MPO working in conjunction with its planning partners. The MPO will work closely with TxDOT to obtain and analyze average daily traffic (ADT) volumes, crash data, and data from the South Texas Regional Advanced Transportation Information System. Similarly, the MPO will work with the City of Laredo to obtain and analyze data collected through the ITS Regional Architecture and City of Laredo ITS Master Plan development process. The MPO provides a forum for consideration of this technical information as well as potential strategies to address congestion.

Stakeholders, as well as members of the public, will play a vital role in helping to identify potential mitigation strategies. Through their involvement on the Technical Committee, stakeholders will work with the MPO to analyze the potential or realized impacts of congestion mitigation strategies by assisting in the programming and review of various corridor studies. Because the MPO is in the early stages of implementing its CMP, which was adopted in January 2014, local operating agencies have not started implementing strategies through their own planning and programming processes at this time. However, the MPO is considering the appropriateness of developing a technical documentation and/or a guidebook for use by partnering agencies to encourage the implementation of CMP strategies.

For more information regarding the CMP, see **Chapter 10: Congestion Management Process.**

Travel Demand Forecasting

39. Who is responsible for travel forecasting in the region? Does the MPO staff directly provide travel forecasting or oversee consultant staff providing travel forecasting services? If so, how does MPO evaluate the technical work of consultants? Does the MPO include a technical committee to review planning assumptions and forecasting methods?

    The MPO utilizes the help of TxDOT and consultants to develop and apply the travel demand model. Although the MPO works with consultants to guide the process and provide quality control, the MPO does not have in-house staff with TDM experience. The MPO staff uses the technical capability of the Technical Committee, city and county traffic engineers, TxDOT engineers and other Technical Committee resources to review and evaluate input assumptions and to evaluate and interpret the traffic forecasts and TDM output.

40. What formal training has the MPO technical staff received in travel demand forecasting? Does staff require training in specific technical areas?

    As time permits, MPO staff participates in workshops and other professional development opportunities provided by TxDOT and TTI. In March 2012, the MPO coordinator attended the TDM Demographics Workshop in Pharr, Texas. However, additional training opportunities and resources would be beneficial.

41. Describe the key assumptions used in developing forecasts and the process for creating baseline conditions for the model. Discuss issues or items that contributed to the delay of the model validation. What actions are being conducted or considered to reduce potential delays to future model validation efforts (i.e., lessons learned)? When will work on the next model validation begin and has a schedule for completion of the model validation been developed?

    The Laredo MPO and TxDOT TPP staff have been collaborating on an update of the Laredo TDM including a minor revision to the study area coverage to address urban area boundary changes, an update to the demographic forecasts and transportation system networks, as well as the recalibration and revalidation of the TDM to a new 2010 base year based on available 2010 US Census data and other sources. The updated TDM will have a forecast horizon year of 2040.

    TPP is in the latter stages of completing the update, and the TDM is expected to be available in the Fall of 2014. Development of the TDM was delayed, in part, due to issues associated with updating the demographic inputs in-house. After receiving comments from TxDOT and TTI on the work performed in-house, the MPO opted to acquire the assistance of a consultant in finalizing the demographic inputs. Despite the delay in model development, the MPO hopes to finalize the model in time to be used in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) development process to perform transportation system deficiencies analyses, test alternative land use and transportation scenarios and to provide quantitative measures and statistics for mobility related performance measures as one element of the project identification, selection and prioritization process.

As a result of the delays in model development, the MPO will either be acquiring the help of consultants in the development of future updates to its TDM, or MPO staff will require additional training in TDM development in order to perform the activities in-house.

For more information regarding travel demand model forecasting, see **Chapter 11: Travel Demand Forecasting.**

PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL LINKAGES

42. DOES THE MTP ADDRESS POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL MITIGATION ACTIVITIES AND POTENTIAL AREAS IN WHICH TO CARRY OUT THESE ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING ACTIVITIES THAT MAY HAVE THE GREATEST POTENTIAL TO RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THE ENVIRONMENTAL FUNCTIONS AFFECTED BY THE PLAN? WHAT PLANS, MAPS, INVENTORIES OR DATA SYSTEMS FROM OTHER AGENCIES HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED RELATIVE TO THE MTP? HOW DOES THE MPO MAKE USE OF GIS-ST OR NEPASSIST IN DEVELOPING THE MTP?

The MTP addresses potential environmental mitigation activities and potential areas in which to carry out these activities. The environmental mitigation strategies and activities are intended to be regional in scope, and do not necessarily address potential project-level impacts. Environmental features of particular concern in the Laredo region that may be impacted by transportation programs include wetlands, prime farmland soils, and cultural resources.

Once a final list of projects had been prioritized, the MPO utilizes existing environmental resources, including NEPAssist and information from TxDOT's Environmental Affairs Division to conduct a high-level analysis of the region's environmental and cultural resources. The analysis utilizes ArcGIS to compare proposed improvements to the locations of detention ponds, lakes, 100-year flood plains, historic landmarks, hospitals, schools, cemeteries, the historic district, and parks and recreational facilities.

Furthermore, draft copies of the MTP are sent to the Texas Council on Environmental Quality, the Texas Historical Commission, and the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board for review and comment prior to adoption.

For more information regarding planning and environmental linkages, see **Chapter 12: Planning and Environmental Linkages.**

43. HAS THERE BEEN ANY COORDINATION WITH OTHER FEDERAL, STATE OR LOCAL RESOURCE AGENCIES OR NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MTP OR TIP? WHAT IS THE PLAN FOR COORDINATING WITH RESOURCE AGENCIES OR TRIBES IN THE FUTURE? IS THIS INCLUDED IN THE PPP? ARE YOU SEEKING PUBLIC INPUT SPECIFICALLY ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND DESIRED MITIGATION? HOW IS THIS INFORMATION BEING CARRIED FORWARD INTO PROJECT DEVELOPMENT?

During the 2010-2035 MTP update, the MPO consulted early and continuously throughout plan development with Federal, State, and local resource agencies to ensure the MTP supported statewide, regional, and local goals related to environmental protection and resource management. Activities included roundtable discussions, interagency meetings, and an opportunity to comment on the draft MTP prior to adoption. Roundtable discussions included members of both public and private sector agencies and organizations that play a key role in future development of the region, and were focused

on ways to optimize and coordinate transportation and land development, promote economic development, and address the growing concern of environmental stewardship and historic preservation. It is through this forum that the MPO seeks public input on environmental issues. Mitigation strategies included in the MTP are intended to be regional in scope, and may not necessarily address potential project-level impacts. As the location and magnitude of the proposed projects are determined, appropriate project level mitigation measures are developed in cooperation with the project sponsor. The MPO does not specifically seek out public input on desired mitigation strategies.

The MPO does not include specific procedures for coordination with resource agencies in its PPP. However, the MPO plans to continue its coordination efforts with other Federal, State, and local resource agencies in the development of future plans. There are no Native American Tribes within the Laredo metropolitan planning area.

LAND USE AND LIVABILITY

44. HOW IS LAREDO MPO INVOLVED IN DISCUSSIONS CONCERNING REGIONAL LAND USE PLANNING? HOW DOES LAREDO MPO ENVISION ITS FUTURE ROLE IN REGIONAL PLANNING EFFORTS?

The MPO is a key facilitator in coordinating regional transportation and land use planning through open and continuous dialogue with the City of Laredo Planning Department, the Webb County Planning Department, and the South Texas Development Council. All three departments have representatives designated to the MPO's Technical Committee. These community members' knowledge of regional land use planning efforts is shared with the MPO as part of this ongoing forum. In addition to these organizations participating on the MPO Technical Committee, the MPO also works to maintain a strong presence with these and other organizations related to land use planning and economic development throughout the region. For example, the MPO Director attends all City Council and Planning and Zoning meetings. Additionally, the MPO Coordinator serves on the Platting sub-committee of the Planning and Zoning Commission, and acts as an alternate on the South Texas Development Council committee. The MPO fosters open lines of communication with these groups by including them on the MPO contact list, and encouraging them to keep the MPO informed of developments within their agencies and additional opportunities for involvement.

Since being designated a TMA, the MPO envisions a greater role for itself in coordinating regional planning efforts, particularly in linking the transportation and land use planning processes. The MPO views the Congestion Management Process (CMP) as a vital tool for bringing together stakeholders throughout the region with an interest in reducing congestion. Transportation demand management (TDM) strategies that focus on land use controls or zoning that encourage mixed use development, growth management restrictions, policies that support transit-oriented designs, and incentives for high-density development, are all included in the toolbox of potential strategies to address congestion management. In implementing the CMP, the MPO will work closely with its planning partners to identify the causes of congestion and determine whether or not land use strategies may be effective in reducing congestion.

45. HOW ARE ISSUES RELATED TO SMART GROWTH, CONTEXT-SENSITIVE SOLUTIONS, GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE, COMPLETE STREETS, TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT, AND SO FORTH, CONSIDERED, ADVANCED, OR SUPPORTED THROUGH THE MPO, TXDOT, TRANSIT OPERATOR(S), LOCAL JURISDICTIONS, OR OTHER ORGANIZATIONS IN YOUR PLANNING REGION?

The 2010-2035 MTP update discusses the concepts of complete streets and context sensitive solutions as examples of best practices in integrating land use and urban design considerations with the transportation system. The San Bernardo Avenue Renovation and Restoration project is an example of the MPO pursuing a complete streets concept in the context of a larger economic revitalization strategy. While these concepts have grown in popularity among planning professionals and in other related industries, they have not yet gained the same traction among community members and local officials in the Laredo region. Part of the reason may be the fact that sprawl has not been as significant a problem in the Laredo region as in others due to inherent geographical and political constraints. However, the MPO maintains these concepts in its toolkit of strategies available to address issues as they are identified. The MPO also works to raise consciousness among the public and local officials regarding issues related to environmental preservation and climate change, through the metropolitan transportation planning process.

46. HOW DOES THE MTP DEMONSTRATE COMPARISON OF THE CONSISTENCY OF PROPOSED TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS WITH STATE AND LOCAL PLANNED GROWTH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT? TO WHAT EXTENT ARE NON-MOTORIZED MODES OF TRAVEL ANALYZED AND ADDRESSED IN THE MTP AND THROUGHOUT THE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS?

Planned growth and economic development concepts for the Laredo area are clearly articulated only at the local level. Major planned growth and economic development initiatives, as well as general growth and economic trends, are incorporated into the MTP forecasts, and the MPO and its consultants incorporate the integration of transportation strategies and land use/economic development projects into the visioning process. The MTP projects are also prioritized in part through a qualitative review of how the proposed transportation investments support economic development and land use plans.

The MTP incorporates non-motorized modes by examining the location of existing facilities, analyzing safety data related to crashes involving bicycles and pedestrians, and by incorporating best practices for bicycle and pedestrian planning. As stated in the previous response, subsequent corridor studies to advance MTP projects incorporate complete streets concepts and engage local residential and business stakeholders to help them understand the opportunities for supporting economic revitalization and improving the quality of place through access to other modes of transportation.

The FY 2014 UPWP programs funding for the development of the region's first bicycle and pedestrian plan, to be completed by a consultant. The plan will provide guidance for the development and implementation of an interconnected network of designated on-street bicycle facilities as well as off roadway trails and sidewalks.

47. OVERALL, WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND CONCERN ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY/"GOING GREEN" IN YOUR REGION AND AMONG LOCAL MEMBER JURISDICTIONS OR THE GENERAL PUBLIC? DOES IT AFFECT THE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS? DOES THE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS CONSIDER AFFORDABLE HOUSING PLANS OR INVOLVE AGENCIES/ORGANIZATIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR IDENTIFYING OR ADDRESSING HOUSING NEEDS AND OPTIONS? HAVE JURISDICTIONS WITHIN THE TMA ADOPTED CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION OR GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSION REDUCTION GOALS OR PLANS? WHAT, IF ANY, ACTION IS THE MPO TAKING TO ADDRESS GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS AS PART OF THE PLANNING PROCESS?

Despite general community indifference to sustainable development concepts or "going green," the MPO maintains these concepts in its toolkit of strategies available to address issues as they are identified. The MPO also works to raise consciousness among the public and local officials regarding issues related to environmental preservation and climate change, through the metropolitan transportation planning process. The MPO works diligently to identify environmental and cultural resources using tools such as NEPAssist, and communicate their location relative to proposed improvements utilizing visualization techniques that are meaningful to the public and local officials.

The MPO considers both greenhouse gases (GHG) and climate change as part of its ongoing long-range transportation planning process. The 2010-2035 MTP update discusses the link between greenhouse emissions and road use, and incorporates the FHWA's four primary strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, including:

- Improving system and operational efficiencies;
- Reducing growth of vehicle miles traveled (VMT);
- Transitioning to lower greenhouse gas emissions fuels; and
- Improving vehicle technologies.

El Metro is currently in the process of transitioning its local buses to cleaner burning natural gas from traditional diesel fuel. Additionally, the MPO worked closely with El Metro to identify funding sources for building a new fueling facility away from residential areas.

For more information regarding land use and livability, see **Chapter 13: Land Use and Livability**.

TRANSIT

48. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE TRANSIT OPERATOR AND HOW IS IT INVOLVED IN THE MPO'S OVERALL PLANNING AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS? WHAT IMPROVEMENTS COULD BE MADE TO THIS PROCESS AND WHAT BARRIERS EXIST TOWARDS IMPLEMENTING THESE IMPROVEMENTS? HOW IS THE TRANSIT AUTHORITY'S PLANNING PROCESS COORDINATED WITH THE MPO'S PLANNING PROCESS, INCLUDING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE UPWP?

El Metro and El Aguila play an integral role in the metropolitan transportation planning process. A representative from both transit providers serves on the Technical Committee for the MPO. To comply with MAP-21 requirements, a representative of the Laredo Mass Transit Board was recently added to the Policy Committee, and will have equal decision making authority. Through these roles, El Metro and El Aguila have the opportunity to review and comment on all major planning documents, such as the UPWP, MTP, TIP, PPP, and CMP, as well as other plans and studies being conducted by the MPO. El Metro was directly involved in the development of the CMP, specifically in identifying transit operational improvements, such as the location of bus pull outs, to help reduce traffic in the Laredo region. El Metro works directly with the MPO to develop the financial plan for the MTP and the TIP. Additionally, both El Metro and El Aguila share ridership and fare box data with the MPO, which the MPO then uses to identify plans/ studies to include in the UPWP and as part of the existing conditions assessment in the MTP.

While transit acts as an equal partner in the transportation planning process at the technical level, by assisting in the development of the TIP, financial plan, and the Annual List of Obligated Projects, and regularly attending Technical Committee meetings, the MPO believes some improvement in coordinating with transit at the Policy Committee level may be necessary. In particular, a capacity building program for the transit representative on the Policy Committee may help to ensure the representative from the Laredo Mass Transit Board, which is comprised entirely of city councilpersons, understands their role in specially representing the needs of El Metro and can effectively advocate for transit at the policy level.

49. HOW OFTEN IS THE COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT-HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN UPDATED AND WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR SAME? PLEASE DESCRIBE HOW THIS EFFORT IS BEING COORDINATED WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND NON-PROFIT TRANSPORTATION AND HUMAN SERVICES PROVIDERS, AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC INCLUDING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, OLDER ADULTS, AND INDIVIDUALS WITH LOW INCOMES WHO CAN PROVIDE INSIGHTS INTO LOCAL TRANSPORTATION NEEDS. DESCRIBE HOW THE COORDINATED PLAN PROCESS RESULTS IN A PROGRAM OF PROJECTS AND ITS INTEGRATION INTO THE METROPOLITAN PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING PROCESSES.

The first Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan, prepared by the South Texas Development Council (STDC), in cooperation with the MPO, was adopted in 2006 and updated on July 11, 2008. FTA guidance recommends coordinating updates to the plan with the cycle of the MTP (four years in air quality nonattainment and maintenance areas and every five years in air quality attainment areas). Coordinating the update cycle with the metropolitan and statewide planning process helps to ensure that selected projects are included in the TIP and STIP, and receive funds in a timely manner. Due to a lack of funding, STDC has not been able to update the plan since 2008. However, an update is scheduled for 2015. The MPO will work with STDC to coordinate future updates with the MTP cycle.

The 2008 Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan meets federal requirements for a "locally developed, coordinated human services transportation plan...developed through a process that includes representatives of public, private, and non-profit transportation and human service providers and participation by members of the public." The MPO participated in several meetings facilitated by the STDC to solicit input from stakeholders. The resulting plan identifies the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes, provides strategies for meeting these needs, and prioritizes transportation services for funding and implementation.

50. PLEASE DISCUSS WEBB COUNTY TRANSIT USE LEVELS OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS? WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE BEING CONDUCTED AS PART OF THE PLANNING PROCESS TO ASSIST IN AN INCREASE IN TRANSIT USE IN THE REGION?

Transit ridership in the Laredo region is high, despite the fact that ridership decreased from peak levels during the economic downturn as did all other travel in the area. In an effort to increase ridership, the MPO has worked closely with El Metro and El Aguila to implement supportive policies and a proactive transit development plan. The MPO is committed to ensuring the area's public transit operators have the information and resources they need to understand existing needs and increase transit use in the region by expanding services and improving the quality of existing services. The MPO is proactive in reaching out to El Metro and El Aguila to find out the types of studies that can be programmed in the UPWP to support transit. Since 2009, the MPO has completed the following transit-related studies:

- Update to the Transit Development Plan (2015);
- Para-Transit Plan Update (2013);
- Bus Rapid Transit Plan (2011); and
- Transit Development Plan (2009).
- For more information regarding transit, see Chapter 14: Transit.

SAFETY

51. HOW IS SAFETY ADDRESSED AS AN EXPLICIT GOAL IN YOUR PLANNING PROCESS AND MTP? HOW DOES LAREDO MPO IDENTIFY AND ANALYZE SAFETY ISSUES ON THE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM? DESCRIBE THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING SAFETY GOALS, OBJECTIVES, PERFORMANCE MEASURES, AND STRATEGIES FOR THE MPA?

In support of the eight federal planning factors, the seven national performance goals, and statewide goals, the MPO takes seriously its responsibility to improve safety for all transportation modes and users in the transportation planning process. It is the guiding vision of the MPO to develop a transportation system that offers safe, efficient, affordable travel choices for people and goods, while supporting economic development and long-term quality of life. The MPO works closely with key planning and safety professionals in developing the MTP and TIP. From ongoing discussions with the Technical Committee to roundtable deliberations on safety and security conducted as part of the long-range planning process, the MPO coordinates with public and private community service agencies focused on the health and safety of local residents to identify safety concerns and improve the safety of the regional transportation system.

The MTP includes a safety element that summarizes the goals contained in the Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP), as well as other safety-related plans and activities in the Laredo region. Project selection criteria used by the MPO to prioritize transportation improvements in the long-range transportation planning process awards additional points to projects determined by the MPO and its planning partners to improve safety. Many of the proposed improvements are the result of corridor studies, programmed by the MPO in the UPWP, that include a safety component. As the MPO moves forward with the implementation of the CMP, crash data maintained by TxDOT will become an increasingly important tool for identifying sources of nonrecurring congestion, and assessing the effectiveness of various strategies in helping the MPO to "provide a safe transportation system through the promotion of policies and projects that reduce the number and severity of vehicle crashes," as stated in the CMP.

Currently, the TIP project selection process is more qualitative in nature, based on ongoing discussions with the MPO's Technical and Policy Committees. However, major elements considered in selecting projects for inclusion in the TIP include:

- System preservation;
- **Safety;**
- Congestion relief;
- Environmental protection;
- Economic development; and
- Aesthetics.

As the MPO continues to transition to a performance-based planning process, it plans to consider the appropriateness of incorporating specific project selection criteria, including a safety component, for moving projects from the MTP to the TIP.

Additionally, MPO staff is keeping a close eye on all federal rulemakings and guidance on performance measures to identify measures that will align with federal and state standards once adopted. On Tuesday, March 11, 2014, FHWA published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) in the Federal Register, Vol. 79, No. 47. The NPRM proposes to establish four performance measures for State DOTs to use to carry out the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), including:

- Serious injuries per Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT);
- Fatalities per VMT;
- Number of serious injuries; and
- Number of fatalities.

Once TxDOT has established their safety targets for the aforementioned performance measures, the MPO will work closely with TxDOT to determine appropriate safety targets for the MPA in support of the statewide effort, and develop strategies to reduce or eliminate safety hazards.

52. HOW DOES LAREDO MPO USE INFORMATION ON IDENTIFIED SAFETY ISSUES ON THE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM TO GUIDE OR PRIORITIZE TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENTS IN THE MTP AND TIP? WHAT SPECIFIC SAFETY STUDIES OR ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN CONDUCTED IN THE REGION? HOW ARE SAFETY PERFORMANCE MEASURES INCORPORATED IN THE PLANNING PROCESS?

Project selection criteria used by the MPO to prioritize transportation improvements in the long-range transportation planning process awards additional points to projects determined by the MPO and its planning partners to improve safety. Many of the proposed improvements are the result of corridor studies, programmed by the MPO in the UPWP, that include a safety component. The McPherson Road Mobility and Capacity Study, Del Mar Corridor Study, and the San Bernardo Renovation and Restoration Project all included a safety component, including an analysis of crash data along the corridor, and recommendations for improving safety.

As the MPO moves forward with the implementation of the CMP, crash data maintained by TxDOT will become an increasingly important tool for identifying sources of nonrecurring congestion, and assessing the effectiveness of various strategies in helping the MPO to "provide a safe transportation system through the promotion of policies and projects that reduce the number and severity of vehicle crashes," as stated in the CMP.

The MPO does not presently incorporate safety performance measures in the planning process. However, as mentioned in previous questions, MPO staff is keeping a close eye on all federal rulemakings and guidance on performance measures to identify targets that will align with federal and state standards once adopted. On Tuesday, March 11, 2014, FHWA published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) in the Federal Register, Vol. 79, No. 47. The NPRM proposes to establish four performance measures for State DOTs to use to carry out the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), including:

- Serious injuries per Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT);
- Fatalities per VMT;
- Number of serious injuries; and
- Number of fatalities.

Once TxDOT has established their safety targets for the aforementioned performance measures, the MPO will work closely with TxDOT to determine appropriate safety targets for the MPA in support of the statewide effort, and develop strategies to reduce or eliminate safety hazards.

53. DISCUSS ANY RELEVANT COORDINATION BETWEEN THE MPO AND TXDOT IN REGARDS TO THE STRATEGIC HIGHWAY SAFETY PLAN (SHSP)? WHAT OTHER STAKEHOLDERS ARE INVOLVED IN THE SHSP? DESCRIBE ANY REGIONALIZED IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SHSP THAT IS OCCURRING. DOES THE MPO COORDINATE ANY EFFORTS CONCERNING LOCAL AGENCY APPLICATIONS TO THE HIGHWAY SAFETY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (HSIP)? WHAT IS THE MECHANISM FOR INCLUDING HSIP FUNDED PROJECTS, WHICH ARE WITHIN THE MPA, IN THE TIP?

Coordination between the MPO and TxDOT in regards to the Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) occurs through the participation of TxDOT on the MPO's Technical Committee. The MPO is not aware of any regionalized implementation of the SHSP that is occurring. However, the MPO recently assisted the City of Laredo in applying for funding through the HSIP by writing a letter of support. Federal funding was granted, and the MPO has initiated conversations with the City regarding the need to incorporate the project into the TIP.

For additional information, please see the responses to questions 51 and 52. For more information on safety planning, see **Chapter 15: Safety**.

SECURITY

54. WHAT IS THE APPROPRIATE ROLE FOR THE MPO IN REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE SECURITY PLANNING? IS THE MPO ENGAGED IN EMERGENCY RELIEF AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS PLANNING? ARE SECURITY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES DEFINED IN THE MTP, THE TIP, THE UPWP, OR THE CMP?

The MPO defines security as the freedom from intentional harm, including those inflicted by people, as well as harm from natural phenomena, such as extreme weather events. In particular, security goes beyond safety and includes the planning to prevent, manage, or respond to threats to the region and the transportation system. These threats could include any number of events, such as natural disasters, terrorist threats, and smuggling of people or drugs, all of which endanger the lives of people and important transportation infrastructure that is vital to the region.

Increasing the security of the transportation system for motorized and nonmotorized users is one of the eight planning factors established under SAFETEA-LU and carried over by MAP-21. Given the location of the metropolitan planning area on the US-Mexico border, planning for a secure, regional transportation network is a priority in the region. In particular, the MPO coordinates with various agencies at the federal, state, and local level to enhance the security of the regional transportation network. This includes the following agencies:

- US Customs and Border Protection;
- Office of Border Patrol;
- Office of Field Operations;
- Other Homeland Security Programs;
- TxDOT;
- South Texas Development Council;

- Webb County;
- City of Laredo;
- El Metro; and
- Laredo Bridge System.

The MTP includes a discussion of emergency relief and disaster preparedness plans and strategies, and policies that support homeland security and safeguard the personal security of all motorized and non-motorized users. Additionally, the MTP outlines the roles and responsibilities of various federal, state, and local agencies involved in planning for the security of the region. In the MPA, TxDOT maintains designated hazardous materials routes and works with the Texas Department of Public Safety to develop contra-flow plans for major hurricane evacuation routes. Specifically, U.S. Highways 59 and 83 are designated as evacuation routes for coastal communities such as Brownsville and Corpus Christi, and the Laredo region serves as an evacuation point for such communities. MPO staff also worked with various agencies tasked with safety and security plan development and participated in the development of the plans described in the following paragraphs.

The South Texas Development Council's (STDC) Department of Homeland Security acts as coordinator and steward for the Governor's Homeland Security Strategy in the South Texas region. The STDC Department of Homeland Security works with state government in assisting local jurisdictions with emergency management efforts and administering emergency management funds from the state to local governments. The main resource for emergency management is the state homeland security grant. The STDC Department of Homeland Security has played a vital role in the development of the STDC Homeland Security Interoperability Plan and the Regional Action Mitigation Plan.

Webb County has an emergency management plan, and the City of Laredo has two important plans in place to respond to emergency situations. They are the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan and the Emergency Management Plan. Additionally, the City of Laredo, in cooperation with Webb County, operates an Emergency Operations Center (EOC), which functions as a hub and gathering point for agencies during the event of an emergency. El Metro has a specific security plan in place for the Facilities Department, including the security of the Transit Center and the operations and maintenance buildings. Annex S of the City of Laredo's Emergency Management Plan is focused on providing for the transportation of people, supplies, and materials during the event of an emergency. In particular, it identifies the Transportation Officer as El Metro's General Manager, who will be responsible for coordinating transportation operations in the event of an emergency.

55. DO THE REGIONAL PLANNING ENTITIES HAVE THEIR OWN CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS PLAN (COOP)? IF SO, WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPAL COMPONENTS OF THE PLAN?

Currently, no regional planning entities have a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP).

For more information on security planning, see **Chapter 16: Security**.

FREIGHT

56. HOW HAS THE MPO IDENTIFIED THE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING LINK BETWEEN FREIGHT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE AREA? HOW HAVE THESE PLANNING FACTORS BEEN DOCUMENTED WITHIN THE MPO PLANNING PRODUCTS?

The Laredo regional economy relies significantly on the freight transportation system due to its special geographic location and socioeconomic and development characteristics. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which has resulted in increased trade with Mexico, has created a strong demand for trucking, warehousing, and support service industries in the region. The port of Laredo serves as a major national gateway connecting the U.S. with Mexico, making freight movement an extremely important local issue. Over time, increasing freight movement will require more infrastructure improvements and better connectivity between the national transportation system corridors and trade partners in order to increase synergies that reduce logistics costs of goods and services in final consumption markets. By being able to provide quick, affordable, and efficient goods movement, the Laredo region is expected to attract more freight dependent industries and benefit from trade related strategies.

The MPO tracks and analyzes historic and emerging trends in freight cross border and domestic flows using a variety of available data resources (see answer to question 58) and ties these activities back to economic development opportunities by coordinating with the freight community (as described in the answer to question 57).

57. HOW IS THE FREIGHT COMMUNITY ENGAGED IN THE PLANNING PROCESS, PARTICULARLY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MTP AND TIP? DOES THE TAC INCLUDE INPUT FROM FREIGHT REPRESENTATIVES?

The freight community is engaged in the Laredo area planning process in multiple ways. In the development of the MTP, the MPO's adopted Public Participation Plan (PPP) requires the MPO to provide opportunities for input from a variety of groups, including freight shippers, and providers of freight transportation services. Therefore, the MPO engaged with key stakeholders early in the 2010-2035 MTP update by hosting a series of thematic roundtable discussions, one of which was on Freight and Goods Movement. This was a forum for regional carriers, shippers, and members of the international trade industry focused on issues related to the transportation system's capacity, accessibility, and reliability, both now and in the future. In the development of the TIP, the MPO engages the freight community through their participation on the Technical Committee, which includes representatives from Kansas City Railroad and Union Pacific Railroad.

58. DOES THE MPO COLLECT AND ANALYZE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL GOODS MOVEMENT FLOW DATA? HOW DOES THE MPO CONSIDER AND EVALUATE LAND USE AND FREIGHT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THEIR MPA?

The MPO collects regional and international goods movement data from several sources including: the Texas Center for Border and Economic and Enterprise Development, Texas A&M International University, the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, the Laredo International Airport, and the Freight Analysis Framework 2 database. The MPO analyzes data related to the value of trade, including historical freight flows, the top freight commodities in the Laredo region, percentages of total goods value by mode, the frequency of border crossings by truck and rail over time, and trends in air cargo.

The MPO gauges future demand utilizing freight projections from the Freight Analysis Framework 2 database.

Industrial facilities in the Laredo region are the nerve centers for freight traffic in the Laredo region. These facilities serve as the origins and destinations of the majority of commercial traffic. Through zoning and other regulations, the city of Laredo has steered the development of these facilities away from residential areas and have tried to isolate their impacts to a handful of clusters around the region. No doubt, the location of future facilities will impact freight movement throughout the region. Strategic investments in the transportation infrastructure near and around these industrial facilities are being considered in the MTP development process to help support this critical piece to the local and national economy.

59. HAS THE MPO IDENTIFIED KEY GOODS MOVEMENT FACILITIES IN THE REGION AND SOUGHT TO IDENTIFY THE TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE, INVESTMENT, AND POLICY NEEDS OF THE GOODS MOVEMENT COMMUNITY?

The MPO has identified the following key goods movement facilities in the region:

- Congressional High Priority Corridors;
- Highway designated truck routes;
- Union Pacific and Kansas City Southern Railroads;
- International Border Bridges;
- Mexican Multimodal Corridor;
- Foreign Trade Zones;
- Air Freight Facilities; and
- Industrial Facilities.

A number of freight movement issues face the Laredo region, including capacity constraints, border crossing wait times, air pollution, and security. Capacity issues are the most critical challenge to the international gateways. As such, the MPO has worked diligently to include the goods movement community in the transportation planning process, in order to better understand their needs and ensure transportation investment decisions take into account the important role of freight in the Laredo region. The MPO designated two members of the freight community on its Technical Committee, a representative from Kansas City Railroad and Union Pacific Railroad. Additionally, the MPO has specifically sought out the participation of the goods movement community in the development of the MTP by hosting a series of thematic roundtable discussions, one of which focused on goods and freight movement.

For more information on freight planning, see **Chapter 17: Freight.**

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PLANNING

60. DISCUSS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LAREDO MPO BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PLAN. HOW IS THE PLAN BEING IMPLEMENTED? HOW WERE BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN USER GROUPS INVOLVED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN? WHAT STRATEGIES OR POLICIES ARE IN PLACE TO PROMOTE IMPROVED BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN ACCESS AND MOBILITY IN ROADWAY, TRANSIT AND OTHER MODAL PROJECTS PLANNED AND PROGRAMMED THROUGH LAREDO MPO?

    The MPO has programmed funds in its FY 2015 UPWP for the development of the region's first Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. The purpose of the plan is to develop a framework for creating an environment conducive to walking or cycling as a mode choice, and for providing recreational opportunities for walking and cycling in order to encourage a healthy lifestyle. The plan will lead to the implementation of an interconnected network of designated on-street bicycle facilities as well as off-roadway trails and sidewalks.

    Presently, the Laredo region has only a few bicycle-only facilities. However, the region possesses many qualities that contribute to its ability to attract bicyclists and pedestrians, including a favorable climate, a flat landscape, and good connectivity through its local street network in the central city of Laredo. To further encourage and promote bicycling and walking as practical and reasonable options, the MPO will continue to pursue projects included in the 2040 MTP that will provide bicycle and pedestrian enhancements. In particular, a major focus has centered on the development of hike and bike trails providing regional connectivity along existing water features, including Chacon Creek and Manadas Creek. These environmental features provide a safe and beautiful corridor and represent exciting new transportation facilities for the residents of Laredo.

For more information on bicycle and pedestrian planning, see **Chapter 18: Bicycle and Pedestrian.**