3. Public Involvement Process - DRAFT

Accomplishments over the Past Five Years

The San Antonio-Bexar County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) continues to have a strong public participation program by taking advantage of new technologies and opportunities. Enhancements include an expanded Walkable Community Program with workshops, safety classes, bike rodeos and bicycle helmet distribution; in-house development of Spanish language videos explaining who and what the MPO is, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and Transportation Improvement Program processes, air quality and its potential impact on the region, and the Walkable Community Program. The MPO has also developed and printed Spanish language brochures, has its quarterly newsletter translated to Spanish and several of the articles printed in "*La Prensa",* the local Spanish language newspaper for an even wider distribution of information. The MPO also created a Facebook page and enhanced its website. All committee (Transportation Policy Board, Technical Advisory Committee, Bicycle Mobility Advisory Committee and Pedestrian Mobility Advisory Committee) meeting materials are posted on the website one week prior to the meetings. The MPO adopted an updated Public Participation Plan, participates several times a month with other organizations' activities such as health fairs, Earth Day, Solar Fest and other events. The MPO also conducts outreach to school age children through the annual GIS Day event.

Background

The MPO's mission is to provide a continuous, comprehensive and coordinated ("3-C") regional transportation planning process for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods consistent with the community's overall economic, social and environmental goals.

The MPO believes in the proactive involvement of citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, private providers of transportation, and other interested parties in the development and updates of the MTP. Effective public involvement is integrated throughout the entire process. A proactive approach to an effective public involvement process requires several elements:

- Early, continuous, and meaningful public involvement;
- Reasonable public access to technical planning information;
- Collaborative input on transportation alternatives, evaluation criteria and mitigation needs;
- Transportation planning meetings that are open to the public; and
- Access to the planning and decision-making process prior to closure.

Mobility 2035 Kickoff Press Conference

The first step in the public involvement outreach efforts for updating the MTP was a press conference to announce the beginning of the planning process for Mobility 2035. The press conference was conducted on September 5, 2007 at the historic Sunset Depot train station. All of the MPO's major transportation partners were represented. It was attended by the local media resulting in a number of print, radio and television stories, getting the outreach effort off to a good start.

In addition to inviting the public to the first four Mobility 2035 Visioning Meetings, additional Mobility 2035 information was available on a traditional website at www.mtp2035.org as well as on a MySpace page at www.myspace.com/mtp2035. The MySpace page was an effort to reach a younger segment of the population.

Phase I: Visioning Workshops

More than 200 citizens participated in four identical Transportation Visioning Workshops held at various locations across the MPO's study area. The meetings took place at St Philip's College, Judson High School, South San High School and the Leon Valley Community Center between September 18 and September 27, 2007.

(Include map showing meeting locations and dots for attendees addresses)

The workshops began with an Open House, which included information about the MPO, the long range transportation plan, and the plan update process. The current long range plan, "Mobility 2030" was also available for additional information. A brief overview of the MPO followed the Open House.

Participants were placed into small groups to identify and discuss their values regarding transportation. They were first asked to map where they live, work, attend school, shop and participate in recreational activities, then to visualize the major trip each makes on a typical day. Next they were asked how they are making that trip: alone, with others, how many stops are made along the way, what mode of transportation is used and how the transportation system works for them.

Next, the facilitator presented the transportation system as it is today and how it could change over the next 20 to 30 years if no other transportation projects were implemented other that the projects that were currently funded. Participants were asked to discuss in their groups how the changes predicted for the future would impact their use of the transportation system.

Then the facilitator presented three possible future growth scenarios that were developed: Current Trends, Transit Oriented Development, and Infill Development. Additional information on scenario development can be found in Chapter 2 Scenario Planning and the Technical Appendix. After the growth scenario presentation, the small

groups focused on developing evaluation criteria that should be used in making future transportation decisions.

Each group developed a list of evaluation criteria. The criteria are based on what the citizens' communicated as their values, issues, goals and objectives for the region. Citizens prioritized their evaluation criteria and displayed their preferences through a dot exercise. The exercise provided citizens with an opportunity to vote by placing dot stickers on a large display next to the criteria they deemed most important in planning for future growth in the region.

Results from the meetings indicated the following criteria were most important:

- Promote access to and use of transit
- Protect the environment
- Reduce likelihood of toll roads
- Improve connectivity
- Reduce sprawl and protect green space
- Reduce traffic congestion
- Increase transportation safety
- Reduce project costs and improve funding
- Promote walkable communities
- Increase multi-modal choices
- Promote open and responsive policy process
- Improve transportation to and from schools
- Improve regional economic development
- Improve transportation for seniors

Mobility 2035 Visioning Workshops Outcomes

Public Transportation

During the visioning workshops there was strong, consistent support for improved and expanded public transportation services. Taken as a whole, there was great interest in a comprehensive regional public transportation system that promotes premium rapid transit service on radial routes into the city center; downtown circulator routes to provide mobility and reduce congestion; better use of park and ride lots; and increased hours of services, safety and aesthetics to make the public transit service a more convenient alternative to auto travel.

Toll Roads

The dominant message regarding toll roads from the visioning workshops was to reduce the number of toll roads proposed in the plan. The strategies proposed by workshop participants for taking toll roads out of the project mix included adding fewer highway

projects in general; restricting highway projects to those that are tax funded; using more transit options, and eliminating the use of comprehensive development agreements (CDAs) as a funding mechanism.

Environment

Many participants in the workshops expressed concerns about designing the transportation system in a way that protects the environment. Items mentioned most often were air quality, water quality, aquifer protection, and preservation of green space. To help soften transportation impacts on the environment, assessment of the environmental impacts of the plan will be included in the review of potential projects. Among these assessments is an air quality analysis of the proposed plan, and the plan will be coordinated with agencies that address environmental protection, tribal land management, wildlife management, land management, and historic preservation.

Land Use

Participants in the Visioning Process expressed a desire to see coordination between the region's land use and transportation planning processes so that changes and improvements in the transportations system support the community's land use goals. There was a desire expressed for the plan to support the goal of containing urban sprawl and preserving green space.

Congestion Relief

Most participants expressed a desire for congestion relief that would improve the travel conditions of existing roadways and decrease travel time throughout the road system, but especially on the interstates and major arterials within the system. In addressing congestion relief, participants wanted the plan to consider both the design of the infrastructure itself as well as the operational systems used to control the flow of traffic on that infrastructure.

Alternative Transportation Options

Walking, biking, pedestrian access to transit, and park-and-ride/park-and-walk facilities were among the items mentioned when participants suggested the plan be evaluated based on its friendliness to non-automobile choices. Making these options a part of a connected multi-modal system that could be used to get to and from any area of the region at all times of the day was an important consideration of these participants.

Children, Seniors and the Mobility Impaired

During the workshops many participants expressed a desire for the plan to include accommodations for those citizens who cannot drive to their desired destinations due to

age or disability. The participants expressed a desire to see school children, seniors and the mobility impaired served with safe alternative transportation options that meet their special needs. Participants felt that children need safe routes to schools and playgrounds that would allow them to use active transportation, such as walking or biking, to get to these destinations. And participants felt that the accessible transit options should be expanded for seniors and the mobility impaired as the aging baby boomers increase the demand for these transportation services.

Transportation Safety and Security

Participants indicated that safety of both the road system and the transit system are important goals for improving the regional transportation system. Reducing accidents, improving emergency response time, improving maintenance of roads and bridges, and reducing crime on transit lines were specifically identified by participants as areas that would benefit from targeted improvement.

Roadway and Transit Connectivity

Participants suggested that it was important to design an overall transportation network that connects the system of roads, rail, bus, parking, bike lanes/paths, airports, taxis and sidewalks together such that people can use a multi-modal approach to addressing their transportation needs. Participants also expressed a desire for improved connectivity between residential neighborhoods and amenities – such as schools, playgrounds, recreation areas, places of worship and shopping - by means of roads, transit lines, bike lanes, and sidewalks.

Policy Process

Participants expressed a need for an open and responsive policy process that included public discussion of both transportation options and funding strategies. Participants expressed a desire that the plan have both an inclusive public participation process and a strong public awareness campaign. In addition, the participants wanted to see the values and criteria developed in that public involvement process used throughout the decision-making process to evaluate and implement the plan. Overall, participants wanted to see an open planning process integrating land use and transportation, and a planning process that supports community values through strict enforcement of established rules, regulations and community goals and objectives.

Economic Development

Participants expressed a desire to see the transportation system of the region support expanded economic development opportunities for residents of the region. The participants suggested that the plan should be coordinated with the economic development plans of the region and should focus on supporting infill development in areas in need of

economic boost, e.g. South San Antonio. Participants also felt that the transit system hours should be expanded to allow those persons without access to a reliable automobile to use public transit to access jobs at non-traditional hours.

Quality of Life

Participants felt that for the health of the citizens, the health of the environment and the encouragement of better quality of life for the community – the promotion of "walkable communities" throughout the region should be made an important goal of the transportation system. Participants felt that mixed use land use planning, and pedestrian friendly commercial development policies should be included in the plan.

Phase II: Regional Transportation Attitude Survey II

A successful MTP is critical to achieving the vision for the transportation future of our region. Accordingly, the MPO proactively requested the involvement of a broad cross-section of citizens, affected public agencies, private transportation providers, traditionally underserved groups and all other interested parties in the process of updating this transportation plan.

Building a good plan requires a statistically valid benchmark or starting point regarding attitudes and perceptions concerning the region's current transportation system. Accordingly, a second Regional Transportation Attitude Survey (RTAS II) was conducted. The purpose of both this new survey and the MPO's original 1998 RTAS was to gather statistically valid data on the public's opinions, attitudes, beliefs and values about existing transportation issues, changes in travel behavior, lifestyles, and perceptions about future multimodal transportation systems.

In 1998, 80% of Bexar County residents felt that traffic congestion levels had not yet reached a point requiring expansion of alternative modes of transportation. Eight in ten drivers drove alone while 87% of the drivers felt their commutes were either very or somewhat reasonable. While traffic safety, protecting water and air quality, and energy conservation were mentioned as worthy transportation planning goals, there was little evidence of motivation to change basic travel behaviors.

By 2008, however, travel perceptions have changed significantly: traffic congestion has grown, average travel times have increased by 20% and the price of gasoline has risen sharply. Additionally, public awareness of San Antonio's ozone problem is much higher than in 1998.

In Spring 2008, 1,628 residents, 305 employers and 334 transit users were surveyed throughout the study area. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish by mail and phone for the residents and employers while the transit users were interviewed personally.

With over a 30% response rate for both residents and employers, the survey results are statistically valid at the 95% confidence level for each category's regional population.

Major findings included:

- 73% of residents and employers felt traffic congestion had increased greatly over the previous five years. Employers, residents and transit users all felt that relieving traffic congestion should be the top long range planning emphasis for the future.

- 71% of employers, 68% of residents and 55% of transit users felt that roadway improvement funding should be much or somewhat greater over the next five years.

- 71% of employers, 66% of residents and 62% of transit users felt public transit funding should be much or somewhat greater over the next five years.

Other planning issues important to one or more groups include preserving the Edwards Aquifer, improving air quality, separating truck and car traffic, improving bicycle and pedestrian facilities, improving traffic and railroad crossing safety, preserving future road corridors and implementing mass transit improvements including light rail and commuter rail.

Phase III: Growth Scenario Workshops

Phase III of the public outreach process consisted of a second set of public meetings to show the public how their visioning inputs were used in three possible regional growth scenarios. About 200 people attended four identical "Mobility 2035" public meetings held from February 17 to March 4, 2009 at Judson High School, South San High School, Leon Valley Community Center, St. Philip's College and the VIA Metro Center.

Figure 3.2 Growth Scenario Workshop: Breakout Groups

The 25-year forecast presented at these workshops estimated that San Antonio and Bexar County's population would increase by 600,000 growing to a total of 2.2 million people. This means about 1.6 million travelers would be driving 60 million miles per day on our road network greatly adding to current traffic congestion levels.

While recognizing that major governmental policy changes outside the MPO's authority will be needed to successfully manage regional growth, citizens needed to understand how growth affects our transportation system.

Since how and where we grow determines future transportation needs, our second series of Mobility 2035 public input meetings presented three potential growth scenarios for participants to consider:

- **Current Growth Trends** – the majority of new growth continues outside of Loop 1604.

- **Transit Oriented Development** – beyond year 2015, several high-capacity transit corridors are defined throughout the region and the majority of new, higher density growth is attracted to station locations in these corridors.

- **Infill Development** – by year 2020, new policies and incentives result in all new growth occurring inside Loop 1604.

Figure 3.3 Growth Scenario Workshop: Scenario Analysis

A transportation demand model run using 2035 demographics (population, employment and land use types) on the 2015 road network resulted in the following potential impacts of different growth scenarios on our transportation system.

Table 3.1 Summary Statistics of the Three Proposed Development Scenarios

2035 Characteristics	Current Trends Development Scenario	Transit Oriented Development Scenario	Infill Development Scenario
People living inside IH 410	728,000	931,000	828,000
People living between IH 410 and Loop 1604	877,000	937,000	1,022,000
People living outside Loop 1604	617,000	354,000	372,000
Total Population	2,220,000	2,220,000	2,220,000
Hours of Delay	2,100,000	721,300	707,500
Productivity Loss	$24,000,000	$8,700,000	$8,600,000
Lane Mile Equivalents needed to eliminate congestion	1,800	1,600	1,400
Construction Cost	$4,600,000,000	$4,100,000,000	$3,600,000,000

Most participants strongly agreed the Infill and Transit Oriented Development scenarios would be better from a transportation systems perspective than the Current Trends Development scenario.

The results of these meetings were provided to the MPO's Transportation Policy Board at their meeting on March 23, 2009 and they directed MPO staff to proceed with a combination of both the Transit Oriented and Infill Development scenarios.

Phase IV: Public Meetings for Draft Mobility 2035

To be conducted in October 2009.

Conclusions

Participants throughout the planning process expressed a desire for more coordination between land use, economic development and transportation planning agencies. The Mobility 2035 plan reflects these desires as uses them as guiding principles for future transportation project development. The specific measures and planning priorities used throughout the process were directly based upon the community's input expressed in the visioning workshops and through other outlets in the planning process. The feedback received from the public was used to determine the evaluation criteria for the plan and selecting the preferred growth scenario for the region, a combination of Infill and Transit Oriented Development (see chapter 2).