

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Having an efficient, safe and sustainable transportation system is vital to the future of the Central Midlands region. Transportation affects our economy, the natural environment, and our overall quality of life. Our ability to work, shop and recreate is impacted to some degree by how well the transportation system works. A long range transportation plan is needed to service the needs of our region for today as well as into the future.

Transportation planning is diverse and takes many forms. Streets, highways, transit, bike and walking paths, and aviation all provide means for moving people and goods into and throughout the region. Roadway design standards, intelligent transportation systems, and levels of adequate service all help to facilitate that movement.

Issues of population growth, safety, security, environmental justice as well as active citizen participation must be addressed and incorporated throughout the planning process. Coordination and collaboration among government entities and agencies must be pursued in order to achieve a unified plan of action to address transportation issues on a regional basis. The ability to pursue and provide adequate funding for the transportation system and its maintenance is also paramount to the planning process.

The Midlands Tomorrow: 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan is the regional transportation plan for the Columbia metropolitan area. It has undergone a collaborative effort by multiple transportation stakeholders across the region in an effort to comply with federal transportation planning guidelines. This multimodal long range plan builds upon the momentum of previous plans in order to provide a more comprehensive outlook for transportation in the near and long-term future.

1.1 Purpose and Scope

The Central Midlands Council of Governments (CMCOG) is designated by the Governor of South Carolina as the official Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the urbanized area around Columbia, which is referred to as the Columbia Area Transportation Study (COATS). As the COATS MPO, CMCOG is responsible for developing, maintaining and administering the region's long range transportation plan (LRTP).

The LRTP is a vision plan that looks 30 years into the future to anticipate transportation needs for the region. The plan is predicated on demographic and economic assumptions and forecasts. It identifies various desired elements of travel and investigates how these transportation modes interrelate. To ensure financial feasibility, the LRTP summarizes implementation costs and presents practicable funding scenarios. The LRTP also summarizes the resulting impacts of these investments on the social and natural environment.

The LRTP serves as a guide for the investment of local, state and federal resources and will become a component of the South Carolina Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Finally, the LRTP meets the requirements of federal law authorizing the adoption of a long-range transportation plan for the metropolitan planning area. This is an important requirement for the expenditure of federal transportation resources.

The LRTP covers the 1100 square-mile COATS planning area, which comprises most of Richland and Lexington Counties, small portions of Kershaw and Calhoun Counties, and twelve municipalities. Key attractions and area landmarks include the State Capitol and the University of South Carolina; Fort Jackson; the Congaree National Park, and Lake Murray. According to 2005 census data, the current population of the COATS area is in excess of 500,000 and is expected to grow to 845,644 by year 2035. This 46% increase in residents in the area reinforces the need for reliable, convenient and safe transportation opportunities in the future.

1.2 Planning Process

The foundation and framework for the 2035 LRTP planning process is based primarily on the 2005 federal transportation legislation, titled the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). This legislation defines the roles and responsibilities of MPOs and federal and state transportation agencies and presents a set of eight planning factors that MPOs must consider as part of the LRTP development process.

The eight planning factors of SAFETEA-LU are:

1. Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;

2. Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
3. Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
4. Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and for freight;
5. Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns;
6. Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight;
7. Promote efficient system management and operation, and;
8. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

As the MPO, CMCOG maintains lead responsibility for overseeing area transportation planning. All transportation plans and programs are based in, and coordinated with, local and state governments on a continuous, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process. Representatives of each member community's principally-elected officials are appointed to the CMCOG Board, which serves as a forum for cooperative decision-making on issues of regional significance, including transportation. The Board meets regularly to establish transportation policies and evaluate transportation needs for the region. Only officials who represent the member governments located in the MPO study area are eligible to vote on MPO activities.

The development of the LRTP began as early as 2005 with public outreach activities as part of a set of subregional transportation-land use studies. Many of the public-involvement strategies were used not only in these studies but also in the development of this LRTP to obtain broad-based input from across the region from interested citizens and targeted populations at key decision points in the plan development process. More information about the public participation activities can be found in Chapter 2, Public Participation, of this document.

Prior to adoption of the final LRTP by the CMCOG Board in December 2008, two transportation advisory committees monitored and reviewed the products at each critical planning stage.

1.3 Committee Oversight

The transportation planning process is overseen by the Transportation Subcommittee and the Technical Committee. Both committees meet monthly and are comprised of representatives from federal, state, and local governments and agencies as well as state and local authorities. The Technical Committee, an advisory group to the Transportation Subcommittee, provides technical expertise related to development of urban transportation plans and programs.

The Transportation Subcommittee is an ongoing forum for policy development and adoption related to urban transportation planning, programming, and operation. Upon Subcommittee approval, transportation plans and programs are forwarded to the CMCOG Board for endorsement.

1.4 Vision, Goals, Objectives and Strategies

The LRTP's vision, goals and objectives provide the basis for identifying options, evaluating alternatives and making decisions on future transportation investments. They are intended to address the spirit of the eight general planning factors of SAFETEA-LU as well as provide guidance and coordination between and among CMCOG and the local jurisdictions it represents. The LRTP vision and the goals set forth by this plan, in no particular order, are noted below. At the conclusion of every chapter, a list of objectives and recommended strategies will be provided as a means for achieving these goals.

Vision for the 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan

The paramount purpose of our transportation system is to enhance and sustain the quality of life and economic vitality of the region. This will be accomplished through collaboration, sound development, maintenance, and management of a transportation system that meets the accessibility and mobility needs of people and goods in the region through safe, secure, environmentally prudent, and financially sound means.

Goals for the 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan

- **Consultation** – consult with transportation partners and entities that provide guidance and input into the transportation

planning process, identify critical transportation issues, and determine the principles for implementation.

- **Mobility** – promote efficient movement of people and goods across all modes of transportation.
- **Accessibility** – increase connectivity and provide better ways for people to reach important destinations easily.
- **Safety** – minimize accidents and fatalities on our roadways for all motorized and non-motorized users.
- **Security** – support homeland security and safeguard the personal security of all motorized and non-motorized users.
- **Economic Vitality** – provide an efficient, interconnected transportation system to advance and support the economic well-being of the region.
- **Environment** – protect and enhance the environment, support social justice, promote energy conservation, promote consistency between transportation improvements and local planned growth patterns.
- **Finance** – ensure by minimizing cost, wisely applying existing resources while seeking innovative funding sources, and expanding opportunities for preserving existing transportation system.