

## **DRAFT REGIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

Transportation policies and objectives must be reviewed and updated periodically to include legislative mandates and other factors that affect investment and management decisions related to the maintenance, operation and planning of transportation services and infrastructure.

Legislation at the Federal level has been incorporated into the goals and objectives of the Plan. The Plan addresses the requirements outlined in the following federal legislative documents:

- (1) The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990;
- (2) The 1990 Clean Air Act and Amendments;
- (3) The National Highway System Designation Act of 1995;
- (4) The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU); and
- (5) Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the President's Order on Environmental Justice.

The Americans with Disabilities Act mandated accessibility for all transportation facilities. The Clean Air Act Amendments established deadlines for attaining national ambient air quality standards. The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) contained new guidance for transportation planning. The National Highway System Designation Act of 1995 eliminated ISTEA requirements for management systems, making them optional for individual states.

The primary transportation goal of the Plan is to develop a balanced, multi-modal, cost-effective, transportation system connecting points inside and outside the Northern Middlesex Region. The Plan also strives to:

- (1) provide safe, secure and convenient transportation service to all area residents, especially the transit dependent groups such as the elderly, low income, and disabled;
- (2) maximize energy conservation, improve air quality and minimize traffic congestion;
- (3) encourage development patterns consistent with local and regional land use policies, and
- (4) increase the number of travel choices for people and freight.

In order to achieve these goals the objectives of the Plan are detailed as follows:

### **A. Improve, Maintain, and Preserve the Existing Transportation System and Infrastructure**

The major focus of the Regional Transportation Plan is on maximizing the efficiency of existing facilities, rather than constructing new ones. Therefore,

maintenance is one of the most cost-effective strategies of the Plan. A relatively small investment is needed to keep the system in good condition, compared to what would be required to completely rebuild it. Deferred maintenance may save money in the short run, but will be far more costly over the long term when compared with regular preventive maintenance. Regular maintenance provides better service, increases safety, provides longer equipment/facility life, and results in fewer breakdowns.

**B. Increase Integration and Connectivity Between Various Transportation Modes**

Connectivity between modes is crucial to the effectiveness of the transportation network. Allowing for safe and convenient transfers between modes improves the overall efficiency of transportation by better distributing travelers between modes, thereby minimizing congestion of a particular mode. Information relative to the effectiveness of public transportation, ridesharing, bicycling and walking, should be provided to the traveling public.

**C. Reduce Congestion on Existing Facilities**

In the past, the transportation system was viewed as something that could be passively managed (i.e. through signs, pretimed signals, etc.) and still yield reasonable performance. However, capacity under this operating philosophy has been reached or exceeded in many locations. Much of the region's core highway and arterial system is subject to substantial delays on a recurring basis. A new operating paradigm must be established if the existing system is to handle increased demand.

Congestion results in increased travel time, increased air pollution, and frustration on the part of the traveling public. Existing facilities can be enhanced by operational improvements and better intermodal connections. Other options, such as reducing travel demand through employer -based ridesharing and telecommuting, can also play a role in relieving congestion. Expanding existing facilities is often the most direct way to alleviate congestion, although it is not always the most cost effective. Improved methods of providing information about congestion trouble spots to commuters may make travelers aware of alternative routes and modes.

SAFETEA-LU requires that metropolitan transportation plans include operational and management strategies to "improve the performance of the existing transportation facilities to relieve vehicular congestion, and maximize the safety and mobility of people and goods." This requirement for the inclusion of operational and management strategies must be in place prior to MPO adoption of the plan.

**D. Provide Equal Accessibility to People with Disabilities**

Transit and paratransit services and systems must be accessible to persons with physical or other disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

**E. Provide Equitable Services to All Residents**

The transportation system must provide equitable service to all residents thereby ensuring the continued economic and social vitality of the region. Transportation decision making should be made through an open and accessible public participatory process which includes a broad representation of interested individuals and groups, including minority and low income populations.

**F. Provide Safe and Secure Transportation Facilities**

The physical safety of travelers can be ensured through careful design and policing of transportation facilities. Transportation facilities should be located and designed to minimize safety hazards.

Traffic accidents result in economic loss from damaged vehicles and goods, personal pain and suffering due to injury, and occasionally the catastrophic loss of life. Facility improvements that benefit safety must be highly valued. The Plan strives to reduce and minimize the risk of accidents occurring on the roadway network, and encourages the integrated consideration of roadway, vehicle and driver elements in design of future improvements.

In the post September 11, 2001 era, the Plan also recognizes the need to assess security issues for transportation facilities. SAFETEA-LU calls for the security of the transportation system to be a stand-alone planning factor, signaling an increase in importance from prior legislation.

**G. Encourage Development in Areas Most Suitable as is Consistent with Regional and Local Land Use Policies**

Transportation and land use policies have a symbiotic relationship – each is dependent upon the other. Transportation facilities should be constructed to service areas with existing demand, and land should be developed most intensively where there are adequate transportation facilities. Transportation planning decisions should incorporate sound local and regional land use planning objectives.

Compact, mixed-use development brings jobs, housing, and shopping closer together. The trips are shorter, which encourages walking and bicycling. Cities such as Lowell already have compact mixed-use development. This land pattern should be supported by transportation service adequate to support the City's efforts to regain and maintain its economic vitality.

**H. Promote Transportation Improvements that Enhance and Foster the Economic Vitality of the Region, and that are supportive of the Region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)**

The transportation system should support economic development by assuring efficient, safe, and reliable movement of employees and commerce throughout the region. The plan should strive to reduce the time and cost of commuting, goods movement, and other travel needs. Transportation can support economic development by improving transit and highway access in developing areas, increasing transportation services in economically disadvantaged areas, and by locating transportation services in areas where new development is desired.

SAFETEA-LU promotes consistency “between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns.” This new requirement must be in place prior to the MPO adoption of the plan.

**I. The Regional Transportation System Must be Planned, Designed, Constructed, Operated and Maintained to Preserve and Promote Environmental Quality**

Transportation impacts the environment by producing air pollution, creating runoff that affects soils and drinking water, consuming land, and by generating noise and visual impacts. Air quality can be improved by encouraging the use of modes that reduce the amount of emissions per passenger per mile. Ridesharing, transit, bicycling and walking are beneficial in this regard, compared to using the single occupant automobile. Alternative fuels and new engine technologies also offer hope for the future.

Design and construction of facilities should assure that materials used in operations and maintenance, such as road salt, will not have negative impacts on drinking water. In planning new facilities, sensitivity to design issues can also minimize adverse impacts on communities through appropriate treatments such as landscaping and noise barriers.

In accordance with SAFETEA-LU requirements, the Transportation Plan incorporates a discussion of potential environmental mitigation activities, which has been developed in consultation with Federal and State regulatory agencies.

**J. Minimize the Use of Energy Resources**

The most efficient modes of transportation save energy by using fewer vehicles to carry a given number of people. As vehicle occupancy rates increase, the amount of energy used per passenger mile decreases. The use of the most energy efficient modes such as transit, ridesharing, bicycling and walking should be encouraged and promoted wherever practical.