

MPO

2005 Briefing Booklet

Certification Review

**2005 Certification Review
Briefing Booklet**

for the

Regional Planning Commission

*(the New Orleans Metropolitan Planning Organization for the
parishes of Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St.
Tammany, St. Charles and St. John the Baptist)*

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IMPLEMENTING ISTEA AND THE METROPOLITAN PLANNING REGULATIONS

When the Intermodal Surface Transportation and Efficiency Act (ISTEA) was enacted in 1991, we were among the first MPOs to fully grasp our changing role under the new legislation. We made a conscious decision to embrace the new paradigm and actively shape a new leadership role for our organization. We made a concerted effort to improve communication and coordination and cooperation with Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) program and planning staff, and we are grateful that they responded in kind, to help us form a new more productive relationship.

We worked very hard to inform and educate our policy makers, other local elected officials, transportation stakeholders, various community partners, and the public at large about the principles of ISTEA and to help them understand our collective role in the metropolitan planning process. In conjunction with this effort, in order to better carry out the spirit of ISTEA intermodalism, we expanded our Transportation Policy Committee (TPC) to include a broader range of geographic and modal representation. This policy of inclusion has resulted in the current board composition of nearly 40 members including (in addition to the statutory RPC membership) local transit providers, ports, airports, freight rail and motor carriers, and local parishes that are not statutory members of the full RPC, but are geographically located within the planning study area.

In addition, the RPC actively sought to engage community partners in an open and fluid dialogue on the transportation planning process. This improved relationship with neighborhood and business associations, environmental groups, social equity and faith based organizations and the public at large has resulted in an improved understanding of the needs and goals of our community.

The RPC also took an aggressive stance on reengineering of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) to better support the ISTEA planning factors. In many areas around the country the MPO chose to start from scratch and completely reinvent their plans. The approach of invalidating their own previous work put them in adversarial relationship with many of their stakeholders and created clashes that were the antithesis of the ISTEA intent to form collaborative partnerships. The core of the RPC strategy for reengineering the MTP was to acknowledge that our previous plan contained much good work, but needed to be reviewed and revised in light of fiscal constraint, new community goals, and the new emphasis on optimizing and maintaining the existing system. Through this approach, we were able to eliminate duplica-

tive solutions, remove projects from the MTP that no longer met the communities needs, and give higher priority to projects with intermodal and multi-modal elements, or those that met planning goals such as maintenance of the existing system or reduction in drive alone trip making.

A significant part of developing the input for this prioritization process was an expanded community outreach program and improved technical planning through such efforts as congestion management systems planning and other evaluative processes derived from the planning factors that provide benchmarks and criteria for selecting and ranking projects.

Combined with strong follow through with local jurisdictions and the DOTD to promote timely project implementation and protect the integrity of plan milestones, this measured approach earned us credibility with our stakeholders, and, with their cooperation, allowed us to build a valid, meaningful, fiscally constrained MTP that reflected the changing policies of ISTEA and better supported the emerging sustainable community goals being expressed by our policy makers and the citizens they represent.

The success of our communication, coordination, and policy efforts prompted one Federal Transit Administration (FTA) official to describe us as “the most improved MPO in the country.”

CURRENT UNIFIED TRANSPORTATION WORK PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Our efforts to build a collaborative stakeholder driven process to carry out the spirit of ISTEA and the requirements of the metropolitan planning regulations have continued in our ongoing activities under the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21) and continuous improvement of our comprehensive, coordinated planning process remains a focus of our efforts under our Unified Transportation Work Program (UWP).

Integration of Land Use and Transportation Planning

The development of the MTP for the region is the responsibility of the MPO, but local parish and municipal codes generally govern land use decisions. In order to set an agenda for better integrating land use and transportation planning, the RPC has framed its MTP in the context of being one element in a regional comprehensive plan driven by community goals and values.



Our central role has led to more uniform use of data. The region is now consistently working off of the same set of population projections and growth scenarios. Planning is now scaled to more realistic expectations and there is

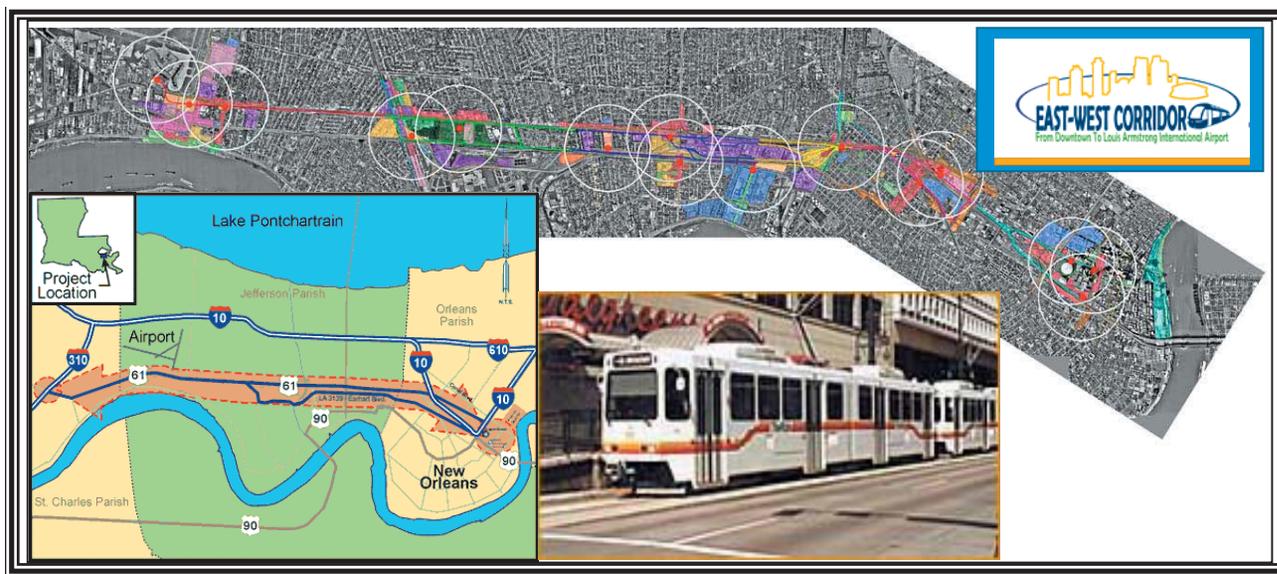
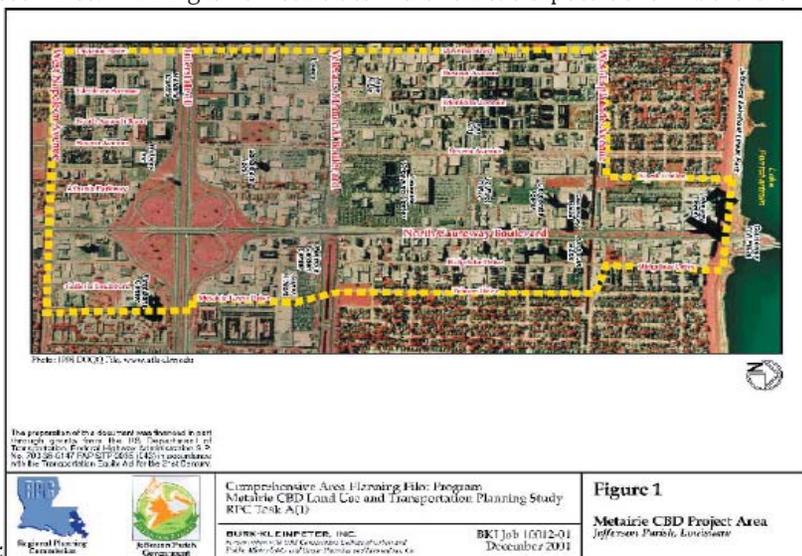
an improved understanding of the impacts of decisions in one parish on the future of the others in the region.

The RPC has used its role as a resource for data, maps and technical expertise to forge partnerships with the parishes relative to comprehensive planning and to shape a role for ourselves in assisting the parishes to better integrate their land use and transportation efforts. The first pilot project of this type was our involvement in the land use and transportation elements of the Metairie CBD redevelopment project. Working with Jefferson Parish, the Jefferson Economic Development Corporation (JEDCO), the University of New Orleans, and the residents, business owners and employees in the study area, the study attempted to coordinate a vision for transportation, land use and economic development in a deteriorating mixed-use area. The concept was to use this project as a prototype for conducting joint land use and transportation planning in sub areas throughout the region.

The project led to an agreement among our member parishes to use the American Planning Association (APA) Land Base Classification System (LBCS) as the standard for our land use and transportation data sets both at the parish and the regional levels. The Metairie CBD project led to development of a planning model that is currently being used as the basis for the

parish wide Jefferson Parish Comprehensive Plan and has allowed the RPC to play a major role in the land use and transportation elements of comprehensive plan development not only in Jefferson Parish, but also in New Orleans and St. Tammany Parish. We have also been able to use this same strategy to help Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes to take the first steps toward coordinated land use and transportation planning efforts.

These efforts led to St. Tammany Parish being selected as a pilot site to test the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Smart Growth Index Model and to the Metairie CBD project being sited as an example of best practices in the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidebook for the use of





remote sensing in transportation planning researched by New Mexico State University in 2002.

At the project level, we are also pursuing coordination of transportation and land use. The RPC has contracted with Bechtel Corporation to undertake a detailed analysis of existing land use and future development potential around proposed station locations along the various alignments for the Airport to CBD light rail alternatives being considered in the East West Corridor environmental impact statement (EIS). This detailed land use study will provide information to feed not only into the EIS, but also into the annual New Starts Report required by FTA.

One of the other tools that is being used to pursue these coordinated land use / transportation planning efforts is a citizen participation / community outreach model that was developed under our Transportation and Community and Systems Preservation (TCSP) activities. This TCSP community outreach tool is a combined presentation, survey and interactive workshop that focuses peoples' attention on the relationship between land use and transportation and helps to examine the combination of auto, transit, bicycle and pedestrian improvements that best fit the context of their community and help support their quality of life.

This community-based planning model became the basis for the land use and transportation elements of the Jefferson Parish Comprehensive Plan and was used in 23 neighborhood workshops. This approach was also employed by RPC as part of a master plan study by Xavier University in examining potential environmental justice issues in land use and transportation between Xavier and the adjacent Gert Town neighborhood.

Another effort under the TCSP program has been the development of a set of community health indicators or sustainability indicators that provides insight into how well our community is doing in moving toward a vision of building a sustainable regional community. This effort, titled Top 10 by 2010, brought together organizations and civic leaders from throughout the region. The over four hundred people who participated in the process represented a wide variety of neighborhood and business associations, environmental and social interest groups and others representing all segments of our regional community. They worked together to articulate a vision for our future and to develop a set of benchmarks to measure how well we are progressing towards achieving it.

RPC remains an active member of the Top 10 by 2010 Steering Committee and is assisting Greater New Orleans, Inc. (the project sponsor) is updating

and improving the measurability or quantification of the regional sustainability index.



Transit

The RPC has consistently pursued a proactive approach to supporting, improving and expanding transit mobility and accessibility in the New Orleans metropolitan area. Our leadership in transit program development has existed as long as we have. We served as the host venue for formation of the Regional Transit Authority in the 1970s. We regularly provide the first cut technical analysis of projects put forth by the community such as the Canal Streetcar project and the Airport to CBD Light Rail project. We were among the first MPOs in the nation to flex highway funds to transit, and during a period of major bus replacement efforts by local transit

providers, we programmed a routine bi-annual line item in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and MTP flexing urban area STP funds to the bus replacement program. And today, we serve as the primary platform for innovative and creative collaboration among our local parishes for the development of a truly regional transit system. An example is the establishment of inter-parish transfer sites for the MITS and LIFT elderly and disabled paratransit services.

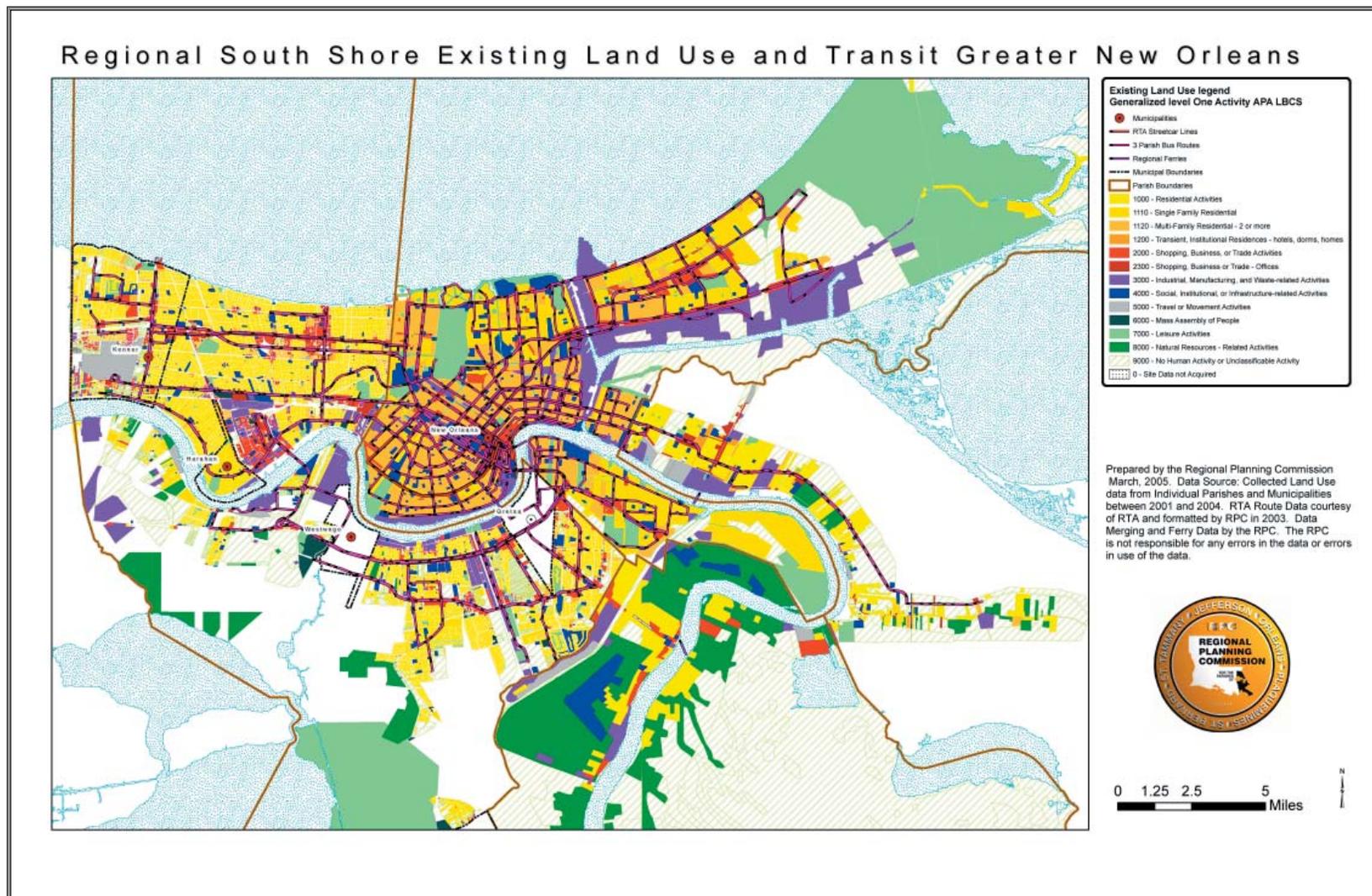
Recent activities in which the RPC has acted as broker in fostering regional cooperation include the Inter-parish Transit Mobility Study that has resulted in the implementation of a one-day ride pass that allows riders to purchase, on the bus, a ticket that allows them to ride all day on either the Jefferson or RTA systems (or both) for one fare. Another outcome of this study was the implementation of new bus routes and transfer points between the parishes to provide improved mobility particularly on the westbank.

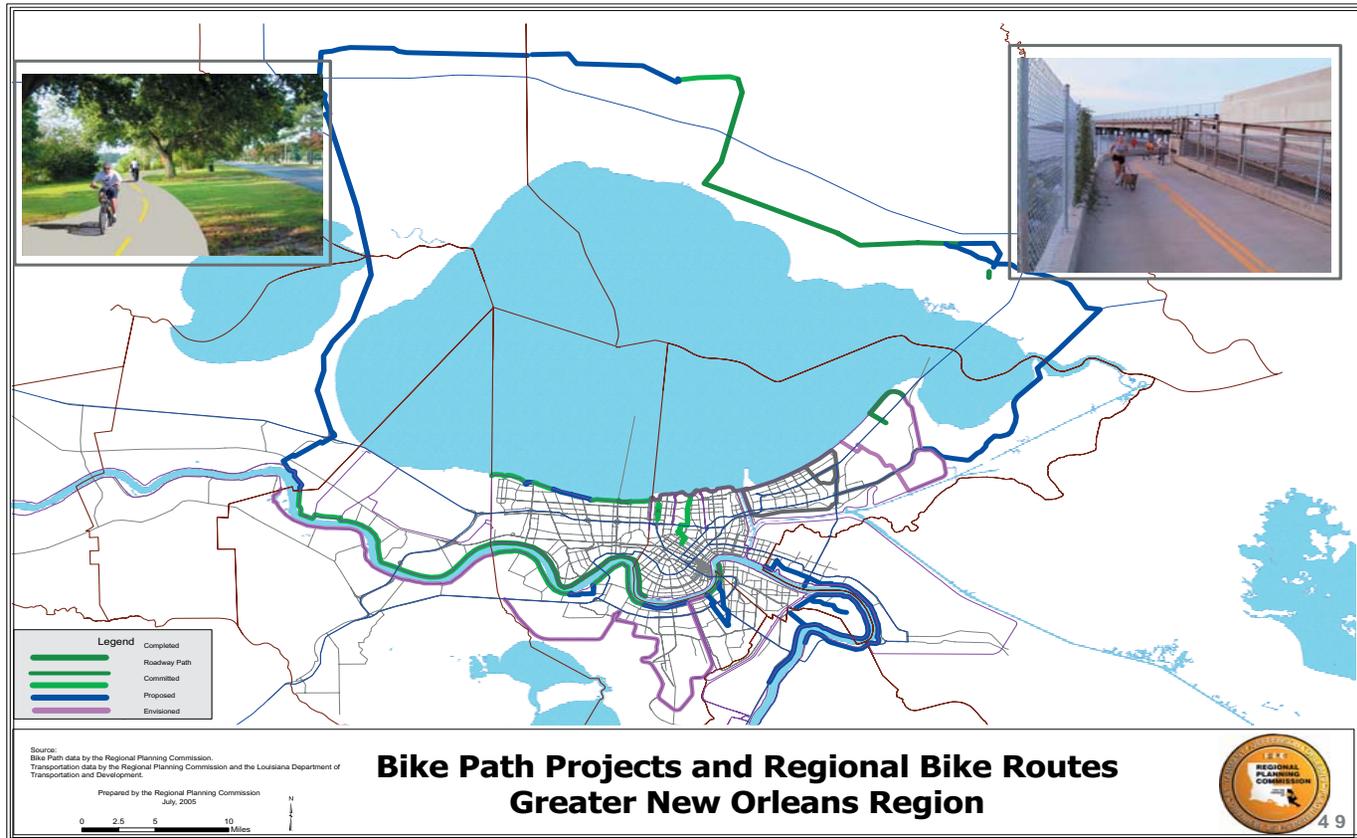
Our role in regional collaboration not only functions at project level, but is fully integrated into the planning process as we develop the TIP and MTP. Funds are targeted strategically to meet needs. An example is the agreement among local transit operators to allow the St. Bernard system to program all



remaining operating funds available to the region in order to allow them some time to develop viable local funding. This measure essentially rescued the St. Bernard transit system from being shut down. Other planning efforts include the Plaquemines Parish mobility plan that has led to an agreement under which Jefferson Parish will provide an extension of its service to Belle

Chasse to provide Plaquemines residents with transit access to the regional system. RPC is presently serving as the lead agency on the Regional Transit System Integration Plan. This study is examining the benefits and potential cost savings associated with consolidating the Jefferson and RTA transit systems (a long held





regionalism goal) into a single operating system. The study is also undertaking a major re-evaluation of the entire regional transit network with the goal of improving connectivity across parish lines, reducing costs through route and facilities consolidation, and linking transit dependent communities with existing and emerging job centers.

Working with local transit providers, the Welfare to Work consortium and the local and regional Workforce Partnerships, the RPC has also developed a Job Access Transportation Plan that seeks to improve transit connectivity between job seekers and employment and training opportunities. Among efforts implemented under the plan are new bus routes (and funding for the required buses) to improve transit access to areas such as the Peters Road area that have been identified in the regional economic cluster analysis as having job growth potential, and van based job and training focused paratransit service to provide flexible mobility to job seekers. Another example is

the programming of FTA funds to the Crescent City Connection Division of the Louisiana Department of Transportation for refurbishment of the docking facilities of the Canal Street ferryboat terminal.

In addition to the bus component that serves as the foundation of our regional transit system, we are also working with our member parishes, our local transit providers and the DOTD on two New Start rail projects that are in various stages of development. These include: The Desire Streetcar, which is nearing the completion of environmental work, and the Airport to CBD Light Rail project, which is in the early stages of environmental analysis as one part of a multi-modal strategy. RPC, in partnership with RTA and the New Orleans City Planning Commission, is also working on a community-based initiative examining the feasibility for a one-mile upriver extension of the Mississippi Riverfront Streetcar.



In conjunction with these transit activities, the RPC has also been highly active in bicycle and pedestrian planning. Our bicycle and pedestrian planning activities work in conjunction with our transit planning to provide improved access to the transit system, and also independently to offer the public viable non-motorized transportation options.

The current focus in this regard is an update of the Regional Master Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. The original plan completed in 1994 focused on the most logical physical connections between likely bicycle destinations. This plan led to the implementation of some notably successful projects such as Tammany Trace in St. Tammany Parish and the New Orleans to Jefferson Mississippi River Bike Path and has raised community acceptance of and interest in non-motorized travel. However, the RPC wanted to undertake a more meaningful effort that:

- Classified bike routes by type, purpose, and skill level.
- Identified pedestrian friendly and pedestrian deficient sub-areas for more detailed study.
- Established a community outreach process that better evaluated the needs of riders particularly the low income populations that use their bicycle as a primary means of transportation.
- Developed improved institutional relationships among stakeholders, particularly those with responsibilities for operating, maintaining or policing bike routes.
- Identified legal barriers to use of existing streets as commuter bicycle routes and proposed mechanisms for change.
- Identified physical barriers in establishment of bicycle commuting from origin to destination.
- Provided a mechanism for improved education on bicycle and pedestrian safety for riders, walkers and auto drivers.
- Integrated bicycle and pedestrian activities with other modes to promote a seamless transportation system in which pedestrians had better access to the transit system and bicyclists could use assets such as the Jefferson Bike on Bus Program to plan multi-modal trips.
- Focused attention on bicycle and pedestrian safety issues as part of the region's new Safety Conscious Planning initiative.

RPC, in collaboration with Tulane University's Environmental Research Center, recently completed a national pilot program for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) for educating and training university students, faculty and staff on bicycle safety and use both on campus and in the surrounding community.

The understanding of non-motorized transportation networks is steadily growing nationally while its importance at the state and local levels has been marginalized. The MPO recognizes the need to illuminate the critical issues with our state and local counterparts through the New Orleans Master Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan initiative and at the same time to inform the bicycle and pedestrian communities of ways to better communicate their needs with those empowered to make changes. Thus, the planning process continues to identify problems and strategically respond to build a manual that assists both groups in determining the physical, legal and operational needs of a non-motorized system for the New Orleans region. This effort goes far beyond the 1994 plan as it is adaptive and not prescriptive.

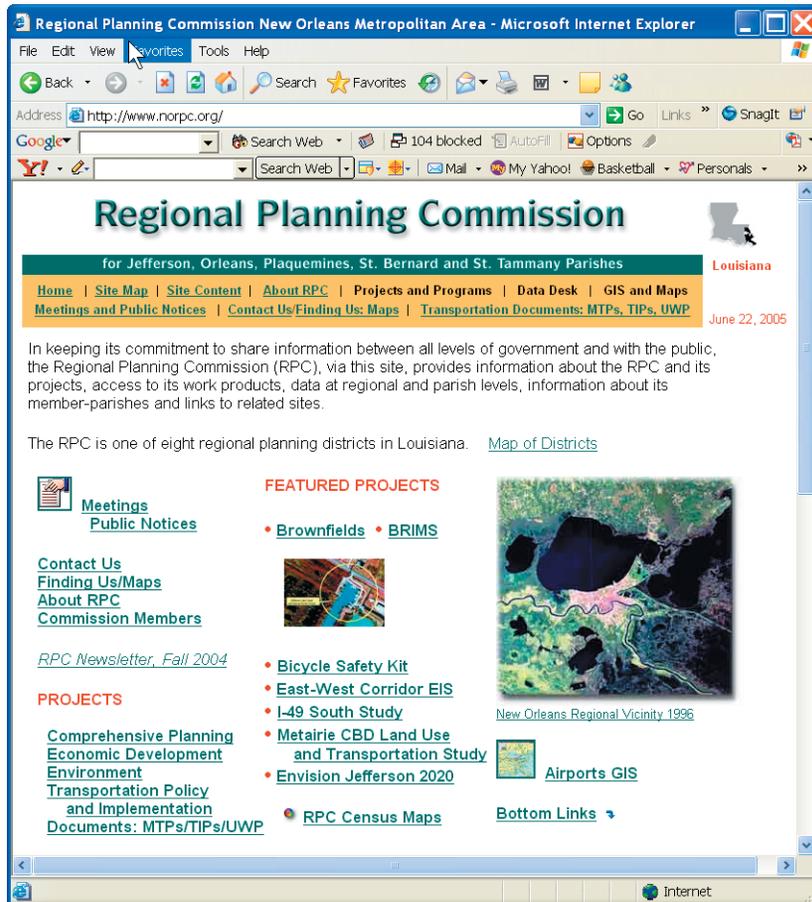
Public Involvement / Community Outreach (Partnering for Excellence)

In order to be able to design a more context sensitive transportation system that addresses the communities quality of life, economic prosperity, social equity and environmental protection goals, the RPC has made an ongoing, informative public involvement effort one of the cornerstones of its planning process. We have learned through this process, that engaging the public early in the planning process, before major project decisions have been made leads to better project design and ultimately to greater community acceptance and easier implementation. Throughout this document, you will see in each area activity whether it be environmental justice, freight planning or any other planning effort, community outreach and stakeholder involvement are always among the early steps in each of our initiatives.

In order to maintain this common thread of community outreach and meaningful two-way communication, the RPC has developed some tools and techniques to improve the effectiveness of the outreach effort. The RPC is committed to a highly proactive community outreach and public involvement effort. Although calling meetings is often necessary, we tend to avoid calling our own meetings and attempted rather to take our message to community meetings and forums that are already taking place. In this way, people can find out about plans and projects as well as communicate their needs



without additional burdens to their plans. If we are not able to avoid holding a separate meeting, we try to do so in a venue familiar to the target population and in or near their community. These familiar and accessible surroundings promote attendance and participation.



Meetings are seldom enough, however. To supplement meetings, we use the print media, newsletters, and direct mail to reach those individuals who could not attend meetings or to provide feedback on meeting outcomes to those that did. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, we make great use of the electronic media and communications.

The RPC has put significant effort into creating a user friendly, informative web site that provides information about our planning activities, proposed plans and projects, available data and other products, reports and upcoming events. The web site also allows individuals to provide feedback to the RPC in much the same way meeting participants do during workshops or presentations.

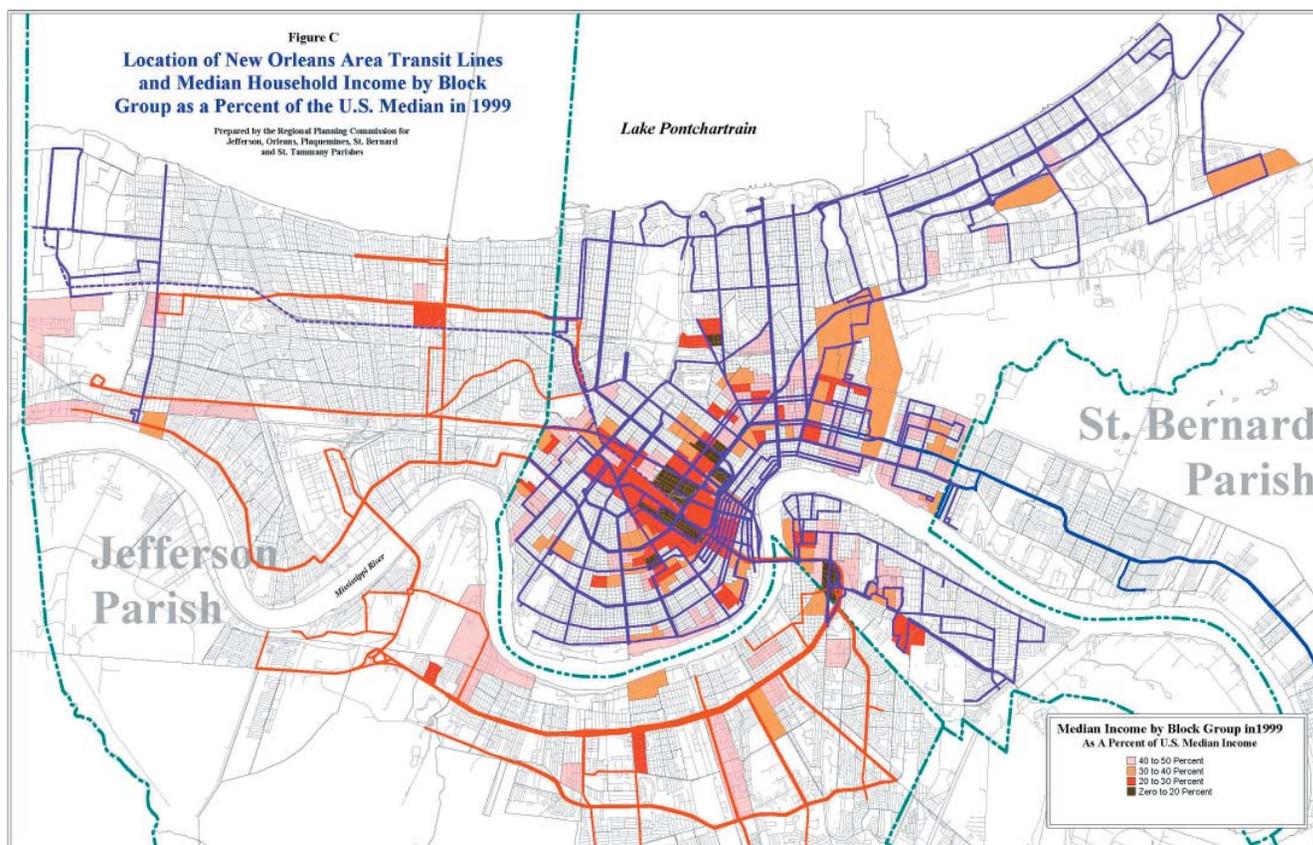
We also make extensive use of cable television to inform the public. Many of our major public meetings are videotaped and then rebroadcast on cable access channels in either targeted areas or throughout the region. This process allows a much wider dissemination of information than could be achieved by meetings alone.

Our proactive approach to community outreach has allowed us to partner successfully with a broad range of groups from business groups such as Greater New Orleans, Inc., Chamber of Commerce, and the Elmwood Business Association, to environmental groups such as the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation and the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana and a broad range in between. The best relationships are built when, as was the case in the TCSP supported Top 10 by 2010 initiative, the effort is directed to building a community dialogue that helps to establish a shared vocabulary, to identify shared values, and to construct a shared vision. Once this type of dialogue is established, it becomes much easier to address specific objectives and the plans and projects to bring them about. RPC's updated 2005 Public Involvement Plan was distributed to over two hundred organizations and individuals throughout the metropolitan area.

Title VI Compliance / Environmental Justice

The RPC has endeavored to incorporate Title VI compliance and Environmental Justice considerations into the mainstream culture of our planning process. The first step in this process was to identify areas that warranted special attention because of the population of low income or minority residents. In the New Orleans metropolitan area, poverty is so closely correlated with race that income serves as a reasonable surrogate for both. For the sake of brevity, the discussion in this document will focus on income / poverty as the benchmark for analysis.

Using the RPC's GIS capabilities to spatially analyze census data, Louisiana Department of Labor data (DOL), and Louisiana Department of Economic Development data, RPC staff developed a series of products to help depict the distribution of low income and minority populations. Products were produced that allowed us to identify and analyze areas with high concentra-



tions of households below the poverty line, areas with high concentrations of households with no available autos, and areas that had been identified as enterprise communities.

Once the Title VI and Environmental Justice populations were identified, several products were produced to analyze the relationship between these populations and the transportation system to determine if current transportation plans met the transportation accessibility and mobility needs of the target populations. Among other products developed, RPC staff produced transit accessibility maps allowing for a route-by-route analysis of the relationship between the target low income and minority populations and the current transit system.

During our Job Access planning activities, mobility analysis was also conducted using DOL data on Welfare to Work clients, job seekers, and employment opportunities to determine how well the current transportation system met the work travel needs of low income and minority job seekers. This analysis of work trip origins and destinations led to a combination of transit capital investments and modifications to transit operations specifically designed to reduce obstacles to employment for the target population.

The RPC has also conducted an analysis of funding expenditures by mode to determine if there is an equitable balance of expenditure for modes most likely to benefit low income and minority populations. Although the correlation is not perfect, the assumption was made that transit improvements



provide a higher benefit to the target population, and highway improvement provides a higher benefit to other populations. On this basis we compared annual expenditure of funds across these two modes. The results of the analysis show that the current TIP programming for the period FY 2001 to FY 2003 for highway and transit are roughly equivalent with an average annual projected expenditure for highway projects at just slightly over \$100 million and projected expenditures for transit projects at just over \$104 million.

The following is a list of projects that have been added, deleted or modified to address environmental justice issues raised in the community outreach process:

Projects added

Inter-parish transit consolidation study
Algiers Loop / Jefferson Transfer facility connector
Plaquemines / Jefferson connector service
Peters Road bus line
New Orleans jobs vans
One day ride pass
Support for ferry service (Canal Street pedestrian ferry)
New Orleans East sidewalks and bus shelters
St. Bernard/NO East connector bus service

Projects modified

Canal Streetcar line
Desire Streetcar line
Earhart Expressway extension
Florida Bridge / Expressway
Carrollton Curve Project
Harvey Boulevard extension
Slidell Bike Path Plan

Projects omitted

Causeway Bridge Third Span

Projects proposed

Interparish Transit Terminals

The most important part of our Environmental Justice and Title VI activities, however, has to do with our community outreach program. In the planning process, particularly when we are beginning environmental work on a project or corridor, the RPC undertakes a proactive community outreach effort designed to allow the affected communities early input into the planning process. The goal is to open a dialogue with them on the issues the proposed transportation project raises for their community. RPC staff then takes this input from the community and evaluates the likely impacts the transportation plan or project will have on neighborhood, parish, and regional quality of life and how it will affect community goals. An effort is then made to continue the community dialogue to find mutual, context sensitive solutions to the issues raised. This process works best when the community dialogue is initiated in the early stages of the planning process before any specific project proposals have been put forth. In this way the RPC is beginning to plan with the community instead of for the community.

Continuing efforts related to Title VI and Environmental Justice issues include:

- Collaboration with the Orleans Parish Work Force Investment Board and the Regional Workforce Partnership to conduct a community audit of the region that will provide updated information on the residential location of low income and minority job seekers in relationship to the location of employment opportunities and training facilities
- Participation with the City of New Orleans and Jefferson Parish on a US Department of Commerce funded grant to develop a multi-parish entitlement community and the transportation services to support it
- Participation in the regional Welfare to Work Consortium to continue development of strategies for inclusion in the region's job access transportation plan
- Continuing to work with local transit providers on ADA issues such as paratransit coordination and improved transit access for the mobility impaired
- Continuing to work with the Committee for a Better New Orleans and the Metropolitan Area Committee on community-based Neighborhood Planning Councils program.

Although much work is yet to be done in maintaining and broadening this community dialogue, our current efforts are having a significant impact on the content and character of the MTP.



collection and analysis, and methods for prioritizing freight projects in the planning process.

One of the first steps in the process was to work with partnering organizations to better understand our transportation system. In addition to expanding its transportation policy committee to include representatives of the various modes including port, airport, rail and motor carrier, the RPC also held strategic workshops to analyze the issues and set goals and priorities.

Examples of such efforts include the Southeast Louisiana Rail Committee and the RPC freight intermodal committee. We have also continued to work with the Transportation Committee of the World Trade Center and the New Orleans Regional Chamber Intermodal Transportation Council.

In addition to these outreach efforts, we undertook several technical planning efforts. RPC staff worked closely with the U.S. Maritime Administration to develop and design the FIELD program for educating MPO policy makers



and technical staff on intermodal freight issues. We then hosted the first FIELD site visit using the New Orleans port and intermodal facilities as a living classroom.

We have also conducted several surveys of motor carriers and other freight stakeholders to get information on origin / destination patterns as well as to identify problem locations and priority issues. Through this effort, we were able to share findings with the DOTD and parish traffic engineers, further refine planning efforts, and to implement several short-range TSM projects that helped to relieve problems that were causing a significant deterioration in the efficiency of the transportation system. Current planning initiatives address improving interstate signing for urban intermodal terminals, establishing grade separation at major conflict points between freight rail and highways, and the integration of variable message signs for particularly dangerous rail/highway crossings. It also includes redesign of intersection geometry to better accommodate truck-turning radii at impacted intersections. St. Claude at Poland Avenue supporting the Port of St. Bernard and Dakin Street at Jefferson Highway supporting a cluster of industrial and commercial businesses are two significant intersections on existing truck routes receiving attention.

The process also allowed us to reprioritize some major capital projects in the MTP to better reflect their importance to the local economy and the efficiency of the local transportation network. Examples of such projects are the Airport Road reconstruction, Almonaster Bridge replacement, and the Earhart Expressway ramp connectors to Dakin Street and LaBarre Business Park.

In order to be effective in the long term, however, it is necessary to examine both freight problems and solutions at the systems level. One of our most important current undertakings is an innovative strategic planning effort with national implications. The New Orleans Rail Gateway Analysis features cutting edge modeling and data analysis, and creative stakeholder collaboration that has been cited as a best practice model by FRA. Our freight planning efforts revealed that despite the extreme rail delays occurring in our region, there was actually capacity available within the system. The problem was really one of coordination and communication among the various independent rail providers. To address these issues, the New Orleans Rail Gateway Analysis attempts to tap the underutilized capacity in the system by implementing a high tech rail communications and coordination center that will eliminate proprietary conflicts and allow the rail gateway to be treated as a single system instead of six individual private properties.

The RPC has been active in seeking a long-term solution to increasing truck moves between the Port of New Orleans uptown facilities and local intermodal terminals. Over 95% of all containers are moved by truck into and out of the port, and total volumes will increase dramatically over the next decade. The New Orleans Public Belt Railroad and the Port of New Orleans contacted RPC to facilitate dialogue on funding and logistics to decrease truck moves (drayage) and increase the capability for rail to shuttle cargo to various terminals. RPC also provided transportation modeling assistance identifying a series of short-term TSM measures for immediate implementation to alleviate congestion in the Tchoupitoulas corridor. Through RPC's ongoing relationship with both agencies, we have become a valued partner in garnering important operational and capital improvements that support the highest use and best integration of New Orleans freight terminals and modal networks.

In addition, the RPC is conducting a comprehensive evaluation of traffic growth and impacts to the burgeoning commercial and residential neighborhood outside the Port of New Orleans. While the most important freight corridor for the Port, the community is also experiencing significant development along the corridor with Phase IV of the Convention Center recently funded and a new 700 unit condominium recently constructed. Each provides critical economic development growth for the region, and RPC is working with the Port of New Orleans and the City of New Orleans to adequately and safely accommodate all traffic.

We are also working with the DOTD to help with development of the statewide transportation model. Because most intermodal activity takes place in urban areas, this statewide model and the commodity flow information associated with it will be invaluable in aiding planners to better understand, analyze and plan for changes in motor freight activity at both the state and metropolitan levels. Combined with studies such as the rail gateway analysis and other RPC rail studies such as the Plaquemines Parish Rail Capacity Evaluation, these types of tools will allow us to consider the role of our multi-modal freight transport system in supporting future economic growth initiatives such as development of the Millennium Port. The goal is to tie transportation, land use and economic development decisions together in order to create job growth in the state and region.

ITS and Congestion Management

In 1998, the RPC conducted a workshop with the Chamber of Commerce's Intermodal Transportation Council to determine what transportation issues



the business community regarded as important in promoting the economic vitality of the region. This group of highly knowledgeable transportation stakeholders indicated that the most important initiatives that the RPC could undertake to help the economy of the region was to address problems of recurring (everyday capacity related) and non-recurring (accident and incident related) congestion on the interstate and major arterial system. The reason these issues were so important was because in today's marketplace with the demands of intermodal container activity and commercial strategies such as just in time delivery and in-transit warehousing, delays to commercial vehicles sitting in traffic represented one of the single greatest drains on the regional economy. It is for this reason that the RPC has placed such a high value on the two strategies with the greatest potential for dealing with these issues: Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) and Congestion Management System (CMS) Planning.

The RPC developed the first ITS Deployment Plan for the Metropolitan Region in 1996. In the original plan as well as subsequent updates, the plan focuses primarily on non-capacity related issues on the freeway and primary arterial systems. The ITS plan addresses not only the issues raised by the Chamber, but also fog and safety issues, construction delays and traveler information, improved operation for peak hour traffic in the CBD, increased capacity for hurricane evacuation, incident management, and improved institutional connectivity and coordination among the various entities responsible for traffic operations. The original plan has also been expanded to be more intermodal and multi-modal in its scope with ITS components being developed for transit, motor carrier and freight rail operations.

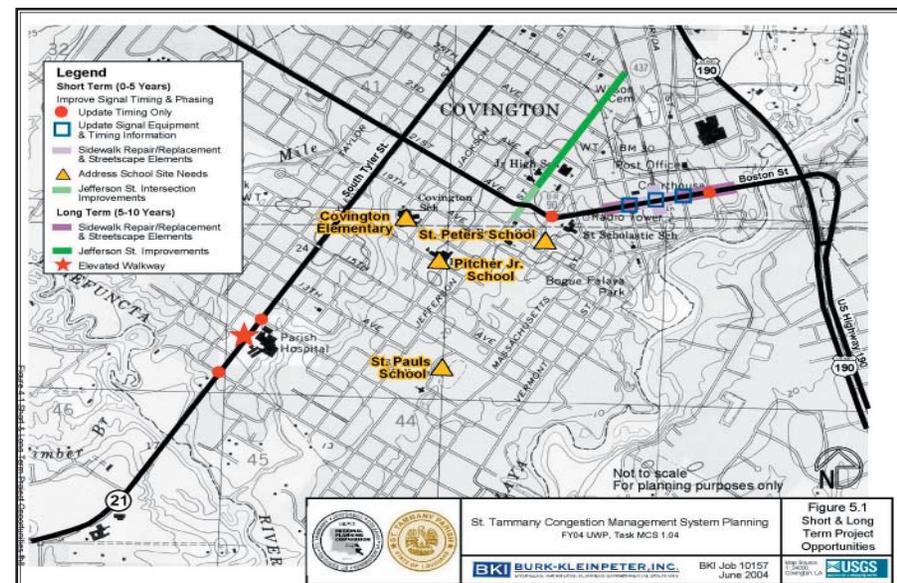
Among the various ITS projects implemented or in development include:

- City of New Orleans traffic signal computerized interconnect to provide peak hour capacity and operational continuity for 400 signalized intersections beginning with the CBD.
- A joint LaDOTD and RPC computerized, multi-modal traffic and transit management center to better coordinate and optimize the operation of the two modes, including:
 - Variable message signs in construction zones, in fog areas, on critical bridge links and at other sites in the region.
 - A regional motorist assistance patrol along the interstate system, originally focused on construction areas, but intended to be permanent.

- Regional Configuration Management Board consisting of emergency response, public safety and operations personnel to discuss institutional strategies and best practices related to highway incidents.
- Development of an ITS freeway management and incident response system jointly supported by the RPC and the DOTD.
- Negotiations for a joint use agreement with private media outlets for access to traffic video cameras.

The RPC Congestion Management System (CMS) plan, which first took its current form in 1998, focuses primarily on capacity related congestion and the resulting delay on the freeway and major arterial systems. This plan is one of the primary sources for MTP and TIP project selection and prioritization. The CMS plan uses a combination of travel delay, traffic volume, and percentage of trucks to classify the level of congestion on each of the nearly six thousand links on the freeway and major arterial system.

This data is used to rank the seriousness of the problem and prioritize sections of roadway for attention in the planning process. Using the CMS data and other information, technical analysis of the identified problem locations is undertaken to establish the most cost effective solution to the problem.





The RPC is also continuing to carry out special initiatives related to our primary UWP activities. These include:

- Continuing the Federal Coordinating Council to provide opportunities to leverage resources on multi disciplinary projects and provide improved communication to streamline the planning process.
- Support development of the Greater New Orleans Clean Cities Coalition to promote the addition of alternative fuel vehicles to local fleets and the implementation of fueling stations providing alternative fuel.
- Working with the Highway Safety Commission and DOTD, coordinate a regional safety program to better coordinate the application of resources to safety planning and education programs.
- Work with State Farm Insurance Company and local jurisdictions on targeted intersection safety projects.
- Work with Office of Emergency Preparedness on hurricane evacuation and transportation security issues.

Solutions are developed using a multi-modal approach that might include intersection improvements, transit improvements, alternate cargo modes such as rail, and finally capacity increases to the roadway itself.

The resulting projects are then ranked within the CMS process as to their importance to operating and maintaining the continuity of the transportation system. This priority ranking is then used to evaluate the CMS process and is the principle mechanism by which new capacity projects such as bottleneck elimination or lane additions are included in the TIP.

The RPC conducted a very careful and high-tech data collection and analysis process to develop the data for the CMS system. This data collection process included the use of geographic positioning system (GPS) computer equipment that used satellite-referencing systems to develop initial horizontal control and accurately scale the roadway network. The GPS units were also used to conduct travel delay studies that estimated type and magnitude of delay throughout the system at various times of the day.

There are several reasons why such initial accuracy was necessary. The initial accuracy of the fixed data (road location, distances etc.) allowed us to integrate the CMS network with our other GIS components including local parish and municipal GIS street base data, digital aerial photography, DOTD functional class and control section GIS, and the RPC transportation demand model. The ability to combine the aggregate data sets and analytical resources represented by this array of assets has created a dynamic and powerful tool for interpreting and understanding the transportation system and how it operates under varying scenarios.

A more important reason for the initial accuracy of the data collection, however, is the fact that the CMS planning process includes an element for post implementation evaluation. In order to accomplish this evaluation, a comparison must be made of pre and post project conditions and a measurement taken to determine what, if any, impacts the plan implementation had on the operation of the transportation system. In some cases such an evaluation is easy because the improvement is so dramatic that it can be easily identified. One such example was the change in toll collection procedure on the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway that halved PM peak congestion delay on the Causeway approach and provided noticeable improvement to traffic delay within the Causeway Interchange to I-10. Other improvements are not so obvious which means that accurate and consistent data collection using





compatible methodology and criteria are critical to evaluating the benefits of CMS plan implementation.

Continuing activity in the CMS arena includes development of the capability to evaluate the traffic related site impacts of major land use decisions and how they might effect the operation of the CMS network. This tool is being used by the RPC and its member parishes to better understand the interaction between land use and transportation and propose operational solutions to better integrate land use and transportation decisions related to new or expanded activity centers

SMART GROWTH INITIATIVE

The most recent Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) dated October, 2004 contains a section on Smart Growth. The RPC, as a regional policy making body, is uniquely positioned to advance Smart Growth (anti-sprawl) education as well as policies and practices designed to enhance quality of life across the region.

Under TEA-21, RPC has been called upon by its member parishes as well as business and community organizations to provide technical resources, assistance and leadership in economic development and environmental planning for local communities and the region.

The objective is to provide decision-makers with the information they need to make informed decisions based on the principles of Smart Growth. The systems planning process has been expanded in order that land use and transportation decisions are evaluated in the contest of other community and regional goals, i.e., economic development, environmental and quality of life impacts. This decision-making paradigm has long been lacking in our state's planning culture, but it is now being nurtured by the RPC as part of our new regional commitment to comprehensive plan development and Smart Growth programs.

THE METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN

With the passage of ISTEA in 1992, the metropolitan transportation planning process has become much more dynamic. Instead of a static long-range plan, today's Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is updated under law by the MPO every three years. The opportunity for interested citizens, business and environmental groups to review and comment on the MTP is afforded through a formal listening process. Copies of the proposed plan are placed in

libraries and local governmental (planning board) offices for the purpose of public review and comment at least thirty days in advance of MTP adoption by the region's Transportation Policy Committee or MPO. A public listening session is also held approximately two weeks prior to TPC action to answer questions and receive comments on the proposed MTP and its proposed projects. Significant comments or concerns, if any, are brought to the attention of the TPC for their consideration prior to MTP adoption.

The MTP identifies transportation needs or deficiencies in the transportation network. These deficiencies have been defined as a result of technical analysis (feasibility studies) conducted by LaDOTD, the MPO, or local government. Other deficiencies in the transportation system have been identified as a result of on-going transportation modeling (long-range 20 year time horizon) and short-term Congestion Management System (CMS) and Traffic Safety planning initiatives of the MPO.

RPC has been pro-active in seeking community input to integrate land use and transportation systems planning in the region. Because this dialogue occurs typically at the neighborhood level, RPC responds to emerging community needs by incorporating sub-area transportation studies into the MTP to remedy problems such as lack of sidewalks, street lighting, intersection improvements, or transit stops.

The RPC adheres to the formal, six-step process adopted by LaDOTD for the advancement of projects. Based on a study finding of overall project feasibility (step #1), an environmental determination (step #2) must then be made on the project. If successful, an economic review (step #3) of the proposed improvement must then be made to identify the necessary and likely resources to fund the project. Assuming adequate funding availability, the project may proceed with preliminary engineering and utilities work (step #4); final design (step #5) and into construction (step #6).

Once the basic feasibility analysis has been completed, projects are placed in the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) for tracking and advancement through the completion (steps #2 through #6 above).

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is the region's construction programming document. It is updated on at least a bi-annual basis. The TIP identifies all federal-aid projects (both highway and mass transit) that are being advanced toward construction. Projects are typically listed by project number with a brief description of the type of work expected to be undertaken (i.e., environmental, preliminary engineering, right-of-way, utilities relocation, ad construction) during the up-coming federal fiscal year. The TIP by



law covers a three year period. The TIP for the New Orleans urbanized area also includes a section on new or anticipated projects (years four through six) to inform the public about future federally-sponsored work activities in the region.

Projects listed in the TIP were selected by the MPO in consultation with LaDOTD. Such projects have gone through the metropolitan transportation planning and feasibility study process. Projects are drawn from the MTP or CMS Plan evaluation process. Placement of a project in the TIP makes it eligible for federal-aid funding, but it does not guarantee a federal commitment. Projects are advanced incrementally through the program with each step requiring federal and state concurrence prior to funding.

Similar to the MTP, the TIP document is circulated to local parishes and city governmental entities in the region and placed in public libraries for public review at least thirty days prior to final approval by the Transportation Policy Committee.

Review comments and questions may be directed to the attention of the RPC Executive Director or Principal Planner via email (rpc@norpc.org) or by telephone (504) 568-6611.

CONCLUSION

The RPC has worked diligently to not only meet the requirements of ISTEAA and TEA 21, but to develop a planning process and a regional vision that emphasized the planning factors as major elements in the decision making process and supported the goals and objectives of these two pieces of landmark legislation throughout the development of our region's transportation system.

On the basis of the strength of our planning program, the RPC has received national recognition through a number of mechanisms.

- We were one of 15 areas nationwide selected to receive ITS early deployment planning funds
- We were one of 40 out of 400 areas to receive round one TCSP funding (when it was still a competitive program)
- We were invited to help design the Maritime Administration's FIELD program for educating MPOs on freight planning issues
- We were asked to host one of five regional dialogue sessions conducted across the nation on highway operations issues and

several of our policy makers and staff were invited to participate in a national summit on freight and highway operations issues

- We were invited to design and host an all day professional development workshop on the use of scenario based planning in a regional context for the 2001 National APA Conference.
- Our staff members are often invited by organizations such as AMPO, ICAP, RSTC and URISA to speak at national conferences and seminars
- We were invited by EPA to participate as one of the pilot sites for testing of the Smart Growth Index Model.
- And many of our planning and GIS products such as our regional transit accessibility maps and our Metairie CBD land use classification GIS have been included as best practice examples in national publications.

Through our UWP activities, combined with special initiatives such as those cited above, the RPC continues to work with its community partners to maintain a comprehensive, coordinated and continuing transportation process that will result in a MTP that can be integrated into a vision for a sustainable regional community. We look forward to a more complete discussion of our planning program during the certification review process.

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