

### PURPOSE AND NEED

#### BACKGROUND

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), as the official agencies required to plan and perform short- and long-range transportation activities for urbanized areas with populations of 50,000 or more, were federally mandated by the 1962 Federal Aid Highway Act. Each MPO is required to develop a transportation plan with at least a 20-year planning horizon that includes “both long-range and short-range strategies/actions that lead to the development of an integrated intermodal transportation system that facilitates the efficient movement of people and goods.”

As transportation and community needs have changed, executive orders and federal acts have been drafted and adopted to address those needs. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Clean Air Act Amendment (CAAA) of 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the Intermodal Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21), for instance, have had profound influence on how transportation planning is conducted. Because the planning area for the La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC) is an attainment area (an area that meets Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) air quality standards for particulates, carbon monoxide, ozone, and other pollutants), the transportation plan must be updated every five years (every four years for other areas).

#### WHAT’S NEW

Three new components are included in the *2035 La Crosse and La Crescent Metropolitan Area Transportation Plan* (or 2010 MTP update): environmental mitigation, sustainability, and performance measures. Environmental mitigation and performance measures are discussed in their own chapters (chapters 5 and 9, respectively) while sustainability is addressed in Chapter 7: Recommendations & Next Steps.

#### Environmental Mitigation

The 2005 transportation bill, Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), required MPOs to streamline the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process by incorporating environmental mitigation into the transportation plan. In 2007, LAPC staff, through a rigorous consultation process, completed a supplement to the *2030 La Crosse and La Crescent*

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*Metropolitan Area Transportation Plan* (or 2005 MTP update). The supplement, which is incorporated into this MTP as chapter 5, includes a comprehensive inventory of natural, cultural, and agricultural resources in the metropolitan planning area (MPA) and potential mitigation activities.

### **Planning for Sustainability**

#### *Federal Efforts*

In 2009, the EPA, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) formed an interagency partnership to “help communities develop and support neighborhoods that provide transportation choices and affordable housing while increasing economic competitiveness and directing resources toward places with existing infrastructure.” To help communities meet this goal for sustainability, several new grant opportunities were made available in 2010:

- Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant program (HUD);
- Sustainable Community Challenge Grants (HUD); and,
- Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Planning Grants (DOT).

Prior to any federal efforts in the sustainability arena, the City of La Crosse and La Crosse County endeavored to become “eco-municipalities” —communities that aspire to develop an ecologically, economically, and socially healthy community for the long term using The Natural Step framework for sustainability as a guide.

#### *Local Efforts*

In June of 2007, the City of La Crosse and La Crosse County adopted resolutions that acknowledged the importance of an environment that can support and sustain the community. The resolutions, which endorsed principles of sustainability consistent with The Natural Step model and guidelines developed by the American Planning Association (APA), adopted support of eco-municipality designation and a commitment to developing a Strategic Plan for Sustainability. In 2009, the County and City adopted the *City of La Crosse & La Crosse County Strategic Plan for Sustainability*. This plan was developed through a year-and-a-half-long process that included stakeholders from the County, the City, the LAPC, and others. (See [www.sustainablelacrosse.com](http://www.sustainablelacrosse.com) for the plan and additional information.)

La Crosse County continues working on sustainability through a seemingly unrelated avenue provided by American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding to combat obesity. The La Crosse County Department of Health and Human

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Services (HHS) received a federal grant to improve the overall health of residents of La Crosse County by addressing nutrition and activity. The nutrition component ties into sustainability by 1) promoting local sources of fresh fruits and vegetables and 2) reducing healthcare costs. The activity component promotes sustainability by supporting transportation infrastructure that encourages walking and biking instead of road-building. As part of the Leadership Team on the Healthy Living Collaboration (HLC), LAPC staff is responsible for assisting HHS staff implement the goals and objectives of the HLC Community Action Plan (CAP), which includes goals to implement the *2035 Coulee Regional Bicycle Plan* and to create a Complete Streets policy that ensures all roadways are designed and operated with all transportation modes in mind for the County and its municipalities.

### Performance Measures

The 2005 MTP update provided a plethora of potential performance measures to consider for permanent incorporation into the planning process. After review of the potential measures internally and by a committee of MPO, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and Department of Transportation (DOT) officials, LAPC staff developed the measures discussed in chapter 9. Some measures recommended by the review group (i.e. pavement rating) have been dropped in this update of the MTP because the data have not been made available to MPO staff.

## PLAN ORGANIZATION

This document is organized into the following nine chapters:

**Chapter 1: Introduction** discusses the purpose of and need for a transportation plan, what is new in the 2010 update of the MTP, and the overall organization of the document.

**Chapter 2: Metropolitan Transportation Planning** discusses the metropolitan transportation planning process, the public participation process, the history and functions of the LAPC, and the geographic extent of the planning area.

**Chapter 3: State of the Region** provides an overview and analysis of common demographic characteristics, including population, households, employment, and building construction characteristics.

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**Chapter 4: Transportation Networks** provides an updated inventory of existing and planned transportation networks, including bicycle and shared-use, pedestrian, transit, roadway, freight, and passenger.

**Chapter 5: Environmental Review** provides a comprehensive inventory of natural, cultural, and agricultural resources in the MPA and potential mitigation activities. This chapter also illustrates major build projects programmed in the 2010-2013 transportation improvement program (TIP) in relation to resources and in relation to minority and low-income populations.

**Chapter 6: Transportation/Land Use Connection** discusses how projections of future population, employment and land use are used with the area traffic forecasting model to forecast 2035 roadway demand. Roadway segments with current or future congestion are identified and actions are recommended to address the congestion.

**Chapter 7: Recommendations & Next Steps** discusses recommended actions as related to the goals of the MTP and identifies the next steps for implementation of the plan.

**Chapter 8: Financial Plan** compares reasonably expected state, federal and local transportation funding with the anticipated expenses needed to maintain the expansion, operations and maintenance of our area roadways and transit systems. The Financial Plan helps the area prioritize future projects and expenditures in order to maintain a safe and efficient transportation network.

**Chapter 9: Performance Measures & Evaluation** identifies specific performance measures used to evaluate the success of the transportation plan in meeting its goals and objectives.

Two appendices defining common acronyms and the methodology for assessing social impacts (environmental justice) are provided to help clarify some of the language and discussion found in the MTP.