

INTRODUCTION

Metropolitan transportation planning involves a comprehensive and collaborative process that seeks to identify the vision and goals for a region and its people through early, open, and timely public participation. Because of the inter-relationships between transportation and community goals (for example, safety and health, mobility and accessibility, and land use), transportation planning requires not only consideration of transportation issues, but also consideration of those issues that can affect and can be affected by the transportation system, now and in the future.

LA CROSSE AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE (LAPC)

The La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC), which was created in 1966 to address transportation issues, became the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the La Crosse, Wisconsin / La Crescent, Minnesota urbanized area in 1974. The LAPC was designated the MPO after results of the 1970 U.S. Census determined the population of the La Crosse/La Crescent urbanized area was more than 50,000 people. As per the Federal Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1973, all urbanized areas with populations greater than 50,000 are required to have an MPO to carry out transportation planning functions.

The LAPC operates under an inter-municipal agreement among all member communities. The inter-municipal agreement is valid for three years and is renewed automatically unless terminated by one or more member communities. Non-member communities within the planning area boundary are invited to participate fully in the LAPC's planning efforts; however, they do not have a seat or a vote on the LAPC Policy Board.

ANNUAL CERTIFICATION

According to 23 CFR 450.334, "The State and the MPO shall annually certify to the FHWA [Federal Highway Administration] and the FTA [Federal Transit Administration] that the planning process is addressing the major issues facing the area and is being conducted in accordance with all applicable requirements." As per U.S. Department of Transportation regulations, the LAPC is allowed to self-certify at the time of submittal of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The LAPC, as the MPO, certifies that the metropolitan transportation planning process is addressing major issues facing the metropolitan planning area in accordance with federal law.

CHAPTER 2: METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

PLANNING AREA

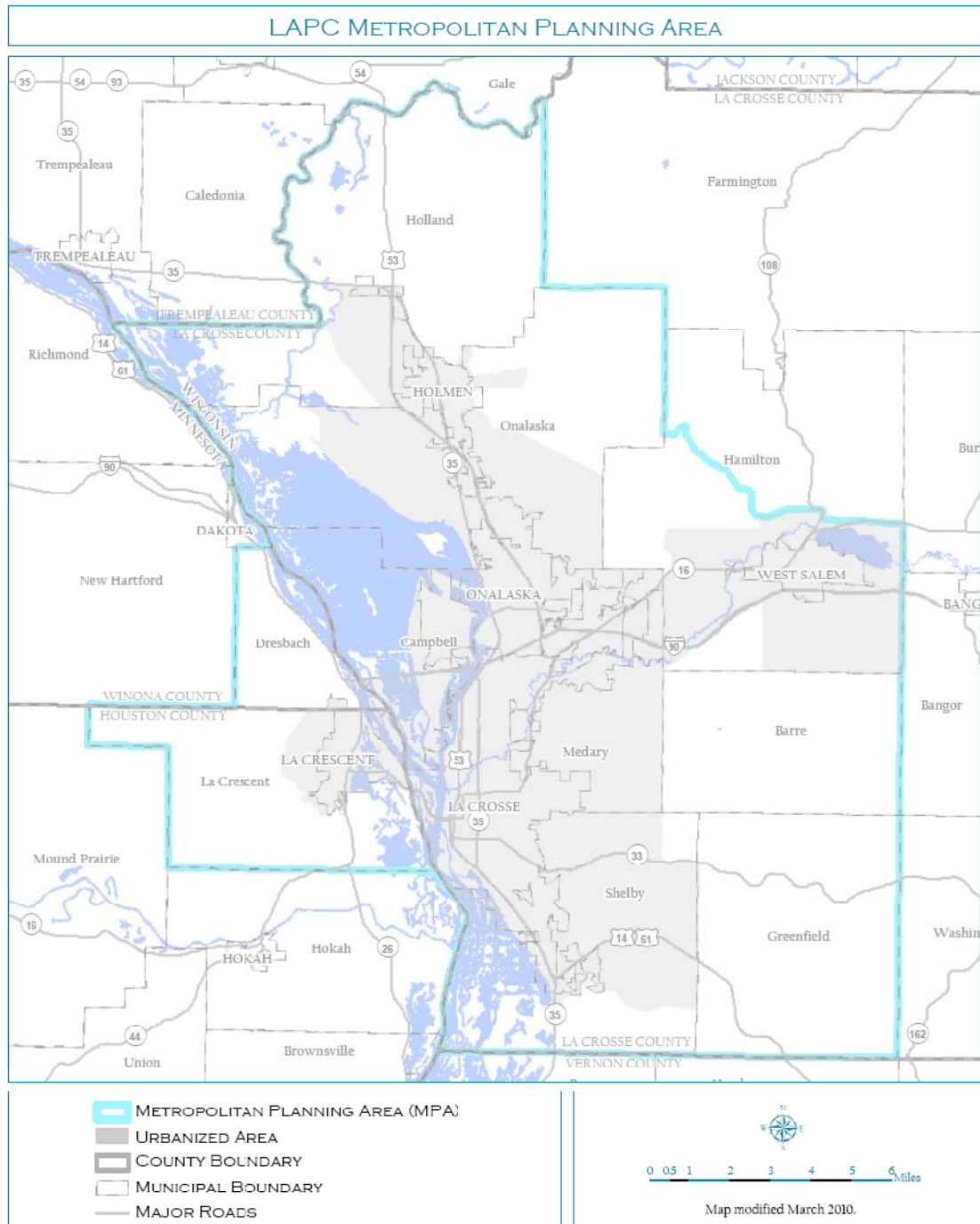
As a bi-state MPO, the LAPC planning area includes roughly the western two-thirds of La Crosse County in Wisconsin and small portions of Houston and Winona Counties in Minnesota. Over 30 sq mi or 10% of the planning area's 295 sq mi is water.

Fifteen communities fall within the planning area boundary—nine of which are members of the LAPC. Member communities include the cities of La Crosse and Onalaska in Wisconsin and La Crescent in Minnesota; the villages of West Salem and Holmen in Wisconsin; and the towns of Onalaska, Campbell, Medary, and Shelby in Wisconsin. Non-member communities include the towns of Hamilton, Holland, Barre, and Greenfield in Wisconsin and the towns of La Crescent (Houston County) and Dresbach (Winona County) in Minnesota. Houston and Winona Counties in Minnesota are encouraged to join the LAPC, but to date, only La Crosse County has become a member. La Crosse County is represented on the Policy Board by the County Board Chair. Communities and counties that have not yet opted to join the LAPC have representation on the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) where they can participate in the planning process.

Within the planning area lies the La Crosse WI-MN (U.S. Census Bureau designation) urbanized area (UA). An urbanized area is an area that contains one or more places plus the densely populated urban fringe (at least 1,000 persons per square mile) that together have a minimum population of 50,000. The U.S. Census Bureau applies other criteria related to place and density in determining the exact delineations of the urbanized area. After the Census has delineated the urbanized areas, the Wisconsin and Minnesota Departments of Transportation “adjust” the boundaries outward to follow logical planning boundaries. The LAPC then approves the “adjusted urbanized boundary” or AUB as the official urbanized area.

Map 2-1 illustrates the planning area and the urbanized area.

CHAPTER 2: METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING



Map 2-1: LANC metropolitan planning area and urbanized area.

LAPC FUNCTIONS

As the federally-mandated agency for ensuring a *continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive* (3-C) planning process, the LAPC plays a significant role in the coordination of transportation activities and the programming of transportation-related funds. The LAPC has four essential functions:

- Establish a neutral setting for regional cooperation and decision-making;
- Evaluate transportation alternatives relevant to the area;
- Develop and update a 20-year transportation plan; and
- Develop a short-range (four year) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) that is consistent with the transportation plan.

The LAPC also has a fifth function that integrates public involvement into the decision-making processes of the four essential functions. The LAPC has developed a Public Participation Plan that specifically addresses public participation activities and stakeholders.

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

The UPWP lists transportation studies and activities to be conducted by LAPC staff and/or contracted agencies over a one- to two-year period. The funding sources, the responsible entities for each study or activity, and the relative timeframe for each study or activity are identified and illustrated in a schedule of activities. Although, the UPWP may cover a two-year period of time, it is updated annually.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The LAPC's TIP is a short-range (four-year) program that allocates transportation funds among the region's priority projects. The project listing illustrates projects that are financially constrained, which means the projects can reasonably expect to be funded within the time allotted for implementation. An illustrative table is also included for prospective projects. These projects have yet to have their costs determined and/or have yet to obtain available funding. Including illustrative projects in the TIP helps to reaffirm the area's transportation priorities, and it helps to facilitate funding and implementation once funding becomes available.

CHAPTER 2: METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Although the TIP is a four-year program, it is updated every year and subsequently incorporated into the Minnesota and Wisconsin Statewide Transportation Improvement Programs (STIPs).

Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)

As stated in Title 23 of the Code of Federal Regulations Part 450 (23 CFR450C, Sec. 450.322), the transportation plan should “include both long-range and short-range program strategies/actions that lead to the development of an integrated intermodal transportation system that facilitates the efficient movement of people and goods.” The long-range component of the plan is to estimate transportation needs 20 or more years into the future. The transportation planning process must:

- Engage in a proactive and inclusive public involvement process;
- Consider eight specific planning factors that may influence and/or are influenced by transportation activities and decisions:
 - Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.
 - Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
 - Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
 - Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and freight.
 - 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.
 - Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.
 - Promote efficient system management and operation.
 - Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.
- Use major investment studies for plan development;
- Develop and implement management systems (often in cooperation with the States);
- Develop financial plans for implementing the transportation plan and the TIP; and

CHAPTER 2: METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

- Ensure that the transportation plan conforms to state transportation plans.

Like the TIP, the transportation plan must be a fiscally-constrained document and may also contain “illustrative” or “visionary” projects that illustrate the long-term goals and objectives of the region whose costs and funding sources have yet to be determined.

Public Participation Plan

As required by Title 23 Code of Federal Regulations Part 450 (23 CFR 450.316), the metropolitan transportation planning process must “include a proactive public participation process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans and transportation improvement programs (TIPs).” A vital aspect of this process is what has been termed “environmental justice.” A full discussion of environmental justice and the public participation process can be read in the *La Crosse & La Crescent Metropolitan Area Public Participation Plan*.

COORDINATION AND CONSISTENCY WITH STATES

As per 23 CFR 450.312, MPOs are required to consult with the State(s) to assure the preparation of integrated plans and TIPs. As a bi-state MPO, the LAPC must coordinate with Wisconsin and Minnesota.

During the planning process for the MTP, LAPC staff endeavored to be consistent with state plans and to include state stakeholders in the process and review of the MTP. The process included coordination and consultation with environmental, historic, tribal, and local agencies to ensure consistency with environmental plans.

Plans referenced during the MTP update process include:

- *Wisconsin Highway Safety Performance Plan 2010*
- *Minnesota Strategic Highway Safety Plan*
- *Connections 2030, 2008*
- *Wisconsin State Airport System Plan 2020*
- *Wisconsin Bicycle Transportation Plan 2020*
- *Wisconsin Pedestrian Policy Plan 2020*

CHAPTER 2: METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

- *Minnesota Statewide Transportation Policy Plan 2009-2028*
- *Statewide 20-year Highway Investment Plan 2009-2028*
- *Mn/DOT District 6 20-year Highway Investment Plan 2009-2028*
- *Minnesota Statewide Freight Plan*
- *Mn/DOT Bicycle Modal Plan*
- *Mn/DOT Pedestrian Plan*
- *La Crosse County Land and Water Resource Management Plan 2007-2011*
- *Wisconsin's Strategy for Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need, 2005*
- *Wisconsin Land Legacy Report, 2006*
- *Wisconsin Karner Blue Butterfly Habitat Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*
- *Coulee State Forest Master Plan, 1978*
- *La Crosse River State Recreation Area Trail Master Plan, 1982*
- *The 2005-2010 Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2006*
- *Minnesota's 2003-2008 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2002*
- *Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare: An Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife*
- *Upper Mississippi River Comprehensive Conservation Plan, 2006*
- *Karner Blue Butterfly Recovery Plan, 2003*
- *La Crosse County Outdoor Recreation Plan*
- *La Crosse County Land & Water Resource Management Plan 2007-2011, 2007*
- *Hixon Forest Comprehensive Plan, 2005*
- *Management Plan for Historic Bridges, 2006*
- *An Intensive Architectural and Historical Survey Report of La Crosse County, 2004*
- *Wisconsin Historic Preservation Plan 2006-2015, 2005*
- *Local comprehensive plans*

Statewide Transportation Improvement Programs

While the state transportation plans provide the framework for planning goals and activities, the Statewide Transportation Improvement Programs (STIPs) provide the conduit for state and federal funding and programming of projects. The STIPs and

CHAPTER 2: METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

the MPO TIP must be consistent. All state- and federally-funded projects programmed in the STIPs for the planning area must be included in the MPO's TIP. Conversely, projects receiving state and/or federal funds programmed in the MPO TIP must be included in their respective STIPs. The process for determining TIP/STIP inclusion differs between the two states.

Wisconsin

Wisconsin uses a process for investing federal highway funds by allowing the MPOs to select their projects. The LAPC prioritizes its projects, and then sends them to Madison for inclusion in the STIP. All WisDOT state-funded projects within the planning area must be included in the LAPC's TIP for informational purposes.

Minnesota

Minnesota uses a process for investing federal highway funds through regional Area Transportation Partnerships (ATP). This process was designed to provide a geographic basis for integrating transportation priorities within the regions of the state. As a partner in Minnesota's District 6 ATP (headquartered in Rochester), the LAPC submits its prioritized projects to the District, which are subsequently integrated into the process for developing its Area Transportation Improvement Program (ATIP). The prioritized ATIP is then submitted to the state for consideration and inclusion in the STIP. All Mn/DOT state-funded projects within the planning area must be included for informational purposes in the LAPC's final TIP and all updates regarding FTA Urbanized Area Formula Program-funded projects included in the LAPC's TIP must be submitted to the District. This process ensures that the TIP is consistent with the STIP.

PUBLIC PROCESS FOR THE 2035 MTP

As a minor¹ update to the 2030 MTP, the public process for the 2035 MTP included a review and reaffirmation of the goals and objectives outlined in the 2030 MTP and recently completed *2035 Coulee Regional Bicycle Plan* instead of a comprehensive visioning and goal-setting process (planned for the 2015 update). The members of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), Transit Coordinating Council, and Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) as well as interested parties on our public contact lists were invited to review and comment on the goals for inclusion in the 2035 MTP.

¹ We consider this plan a minor update because the unavailability of 2010 census data at the traffic analysis zone geography precluded our ability to engage in an up-to-date modeling and alternatives development process. Our committees re-affirmed the action plan adopted on 2005.