
2016 Transportation Management Area Certification Review

Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization

FINAL REPORT

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Preface	3
Executive Summary	5
Summary of Commendations	6
Summary of Recommendations	7
Review Areas	9
1. Overview of Recent Activities	9
2. Organizational Structure	13
3. Unified Planning Work Program	17
4. Metropolitan Planning Area Boundaries	19
5. Metropolitan Planning Agreements	20
6. Metropolitan Transportation Plan	21
7. Transportation Improvement Program	26
8. Performance Based Planning and Programming	30
9. Interested Parties, Participation, and Consultation	31
10. Transit	33
11. Congestion Management Process	35
12. Air Quality	37
13. Regional Intelligent Transportation Systems Architecture.....	38
Conclusion	40
Appendix A – 2016 TMA Certification Review Agenda	41
Appendix B – Composition of Federal Review Team	43
Appendix C – List of Participants	44
Appendix D – Comments and Questions Received	46
Appendix E – Knoxville Metropolitan Planning Area Boundaries	49
Appendix F – Knoxville Regional TPO Structure	51
Appendix G – List of Acronyms	52

Preface

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act), signed into law on December 4, 2015, and Titles 23 and 49 of the United States Code (U.S.C.) uniformly direct the statewide and metropolitan transportation planning processes across the country. The United States Department of Transportation issued the "Statewide and Metropolitan Planning Final Rule" on February 14, 2007, to establish the Federal requirements for the statewide and metropolitan transportation planning processes in Titles 23 and 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).

The regulations in 23 CFR Part 450 and 49 CFR Part 613 establish the national policy that each urbanized area, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, shall have a designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) to carry out a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process. Under the previous law, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), MPOs were responsible for considering and implementing transportation projects, strategies, and services to address eight planning factors:

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 accessibility and mobility of people and 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.

Pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 134(k)(5) and 49 U.S.C. 5303, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) must jointly review and evaluate the transportation planning process conducted in each transportation management area (TMA), an urbanized area with a population over 200,000 people, no less than once every four years.

This TMA Certification Review includes an assessment of the degree to which the MPO in each TMA meets the requirements of the metropolitan planning regulations. The TMA Certification Review is comprised of a desk review, an on-site visit, a public involvement opportunity, and a final report. Upon completion of each Certification Review, FHWA and FTA (the Federal Review Team) can take one of three Federal actions:

1. **Jointly certify** the metropolitan transportation planning process,

2. **Jointly certify** the metropolitan transportation planning process subject to certain specified corrective actions being taken, or
3. **Jointly certify** the metropolitan transportation planning process as the basis for approval of only those categories of programs or projects that FHWA and FTA jointly determine, subject to certain specified corrective actions being taken.

If FHWA and FTA do not certify the metropolitan transportation planning process, or cannot certify within a four-year period, the Secretary of Transportation may issue corrective actions, restrict funding, and withhold up to 20 percent of the funds attributable to the metropolitan planning area under Title 23 U.S.C. and Title 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53.

The Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization (TPO), initially designated in 1977, is the MPO for the Knoxville TMA. FHWA and FTA first certified the Knoxville Regional TPO in October 1995 and most recently in April 2012. This report represents the seventh Certification Review for the Knoxville Regional TPO and includes a summary of the Federal Review Team's observations, corrective actions, commendations, and recommendations:

- **Observations** are statements of fact that describe the conditions found during the data-gathering phases of the TMA Certification Review and provide the primary basis for determining corrective actions, recommendations, and commendations.
- **Corrective actions** denote items that do not meet the requirements of the applicable Federal rules and regulations. FHWA and FTA expect MPOs to address corrective actions in accordance with prescribed timelines to achieve specific outcomes.
- **Recommendations** concern the state of practice or technical improvements that would enhance existing processes and procedures. FHWA and FTA expect MPOs to give due consideration to the implementation of recommended actions.
- **Commendations** highlight noteworthy practices that demonstrate innovative, highly effective, or well-thought-out procedures for implementing the planning requirements.

The Federal Review Team did not identify any corrective actions during the 2016 TMA Certification Review. The recommendations in this report reflect national trends and best practices. Action on the recommendations will not affect the status of the 2016 TMA Certification Review; however, the suggestions would help the Knoxville Regional TPO enhance the metropolitan transportation planning process. The report also highlights commendations that can serve as examples to other States and planning organizations. The conclusion provides the final certification determination. The Appendixes deliver additional technical information.

Executive Summary

The 2016 Knoxville TMA Certification Review is comprised of a desk review, an on-site visit, a public involvement opportunity, and a final report. Since April 2012, the FHWA and FTA joint Federal Review Team (see Appendix B) has continuously reviewed the Knoxville Regional TPO's planning process and products to assess consistency with 23 CFR Part 450, 49 CFR Part 613, and other Federal rules and regulations.

The Federal Review Team's desk review included the TPO's Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), Outreach Plan, Congestion Management Process (CMP), Regional Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Architecture, and other elements of the organization's continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive multimodal transportation planning process.

On December 7-9, 2015, the Federal Review Team organized an on-site visit with the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), Knoxville Area Transit (KAT), and the Knoxville Regional TPO's staff, Technical Committee, and Executive Board. The on-site visit focused on the TPO's metropolitan transportation planning process and major federal initiatives (see Appendices A and C).

On December 7, 2015, the Federal Review Team held a public meeting to invite public comments and feedback on the Knoxville Regional TPO's metropolitan transportation planning process (see Appendix D). The Knoxville Regional TPO advertised the public meeting in accordance to the procedures established in the TPO's Outreach Plan, including public notices in regional newspapers and on the TPO's website – <http://www.knoxtrans.org/>. On December 8, 2015, the Federal Review Team held a listening session for the TPO's Technical Committee and Executive Board.

The Federal Review Team collected 16 comments regarding the TPO's metropolitan transportation planning process. In summary, stakeholders have high praise for the TPO's community outreach efforts, multimodal transportation focus, support for healthy and livable communities, and provision of technical support to its member jurisdictions and community.

The Federal Review Team's previous TMA Certification Review in April 2012 did not identify any corrective actions; however, the 2012 Review identified seven recommendations. The Knoxville Regional TPO has adequately addressed all seven recommendations since April 2012. Overall, the Knoxville Regional TPO has demonstrated a strong commitment to meeting the letter and intent of all applicable Federal rules and regulations.

In conclusion, the Knoxville Regional TPO substantially meets the requirements of 23 CFR 450 and 49 CFR 613. FHWA and FTA jointly certify the TPO's metropolitan transportation planning process. The Federal Review Team did not find any corrective actions and identified 8 commendations and 11 recommendations.

Summary of Commendations

1. Overview of Recent Activities

- Embracing the Partnership for Sustainable Communities' livability principles and seeking ways to improve access to affordable housing, increased transportation options, and lower transportation costs while protecting the environment.
- Supporting Plan East Tennessee (PlanET) products such as the PlanET Playbook, Livability Report Card, and PlanET Index.
- Promoting active transportation through bicycle and pedestrian data collection, community events such as "Open Streets," regional greenway planning, and the TPO's Smart Trips program.

2. Organizational Structure

- Demonstrating the principals of FHWA's Regional Models of Cooperation initiative through continuous coordination with the neighboring Lakeway Area Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization (MTPO), East Tennessee North Rural Planning Organization (RPO), and the East Tennessee South RPO to support priorities outside of the TPO's planning area.

10. Transit

- Increased focus in identifying and supporting Environmental Justice communities through the TPO's Title VI Plan and PlanET's Equity Report Card, which is recognized by the USDOT as a national best practice.
- Supporting the Knoxville CAC's Volunteer Assisted Transportation (VAT) program to connect Knox County seniors and people with disabilities with volunteer drivers for rides to medical facilities, grocery stores, recreational activities, and other essential services.

11. Congestion Management Process

- Documenting how capacity-adding projects will integrate other congestion management solutions to preserve capacity in the future.
- Integrating travel time reliability and performance management into business processes, specifically through coordination with TDOT and the University of Tennessee in the Strategic Highway Research Program (SHRP2) Reliability Data and Analysis Tools project.

Summary of Recommendations

2. Organizational Structure

- Evaluate the potential need and benefits of reestablishing the TPO's Planning for Operations Committee for activities such as the update to the 2040 Mobility Plan, Regional ITS Architecture and Deployment Plan, and CMP.

3. Unified Planning Work Program

- Explore resources to help TPO members maintain transition plans consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

5. Metropolitan Planning Agreements

- Eliminate potential confusion in maintaining outdated Prospectus by revising the document to be current and comprehensive or terminating the document. If the TPO chooses to terminate the Prospectus, the TPO Bylaws that currently reside in the Prospectus, must connect to a standalone document.

6. Metropolitan Transportation Plan

- Continue examining ways to integrate PlanET outputs such as the PlanET index, PlanET Playbook, and Greenway studies into the region's planning and project selection processes.
- Ensure the 2040 Mobility Plan update aligns with TDOT's Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) and the Extreme Weather Vulnerability Assessment.
- Reexamine existing local sponsor project application for Mobility Plan 2040 and TIP projects for consistency with current regional priorities, preferred growth scenarios, and consistency with MAP-21 and FAST Act requirements.
- Continue to research the use of FHWA's Infrastructure Voluntary Evaluation Sustainability Tool (INVEST) in the development of the 2040 Mobility Plan update.

7. Transportation Improvement Program

- Consider developing a web-based TIP to support the TPO's efforts to map projects and track obligations, amendments, and administrative adjustments.

8. Performance Based Planning and Programming

- Continue to engage FHWA, TDOT, and transit providers on MAP-21 and FAST Act requirements, especially the transportation performance management elements on performance measures and performance targets.

12. Air Quality

- Target the planning and programming of transportation projects that minimize and mitigate fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) emissions.

13. Regional Intelligent Transportation Systems Architecture

- Ensure the upcoming 2040 Mobility Plan update clarifies how the TPO will use the Regional ITS Architecture and Deployment Plan in its project selection processes.