



Nashville Area MPO 2035 Regional Transportation Plan

Impacts of Transportation Policy on Prevention and Health

The Problem

One-third of Americans do not drive or own cars, and 12 percent of all U.S. trips are made by walking or bicycling, yet these modes account for 14 percent of traffic fatalities and only 1.6 percent of federal transportation funding. Of the trips taken in U.S. metros, 50 percent are three miles or less; nearly 30 percent are one mile or less. And despite the fact that 55 percent of Americans want to bike more, drive less and walk more than they do now, 65 percent of trips under one mile are still taken by automobile due to inadequate facilities for active transportation. With Tennessee ranked fourth in the nation for obesity rates, the Nashville Area MPO is pursuing infrastructure policies that reflect a desire for healthier options to get around communities - including safer, more convenient means to walk or bicycle for routine trips.

About the MPO

The Nashville Area MPO is the federally designated transportation planning organization for the greater Nashville region. The region is home to approximately 1.3 million people and the MPO membership consists of twenty-two city and county governments, in addition to regional transit authorities and the Tennessee Department of Transportation. The MPO is responsible for programming Federal transportation dollars from a variety of funding sources for regional transportation projects that help to increase the efficient movement of people and goods throughout the region and accommodate future growth in population and employment.

Transportation Policy for Health

In December of 2010, the MPO adopted the [2035 Regional Transportation Plan](#) which marks a significant shift in increasing the support for active transportation projects. Sixty of the one hundred points on which transportation projects are scored are now based on positive outcomes for air quality, provision of active transportation facilities, injury reduction for all modes, improvement to personal health and equity of transportation facilities in underserved areas. Five hundred transportation projects were submitted for the plan and were scored using the new criteria. MPO staff saw a significant shift in the type of transportation projects submitted for the estimated \$6 billion dollars, with 75% of the submitted projects including an active transportation element such as a bikeway, sidewalk or greenway. The final Regional Transportation Plan includes 70% of the adopted roadway projects that have active transportation infrastructure, up significantly from the estimated 2% of projects in the 2030 plan.

Funding

In addition, the MPO Executive Board endorsed a funding strategy which reserves 15% of Federal Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds, the largest Federal funding source for roadways in the MPO region, exclusively for active transportation infrastructure and education. The 15% funding set-aside is separate from the funding for projects which were ranked on the scoring criteria. The national average of Federal transportation dollars spent on bicycle and

pedestrian infrastructure is 1%, so the 15% reserved amount demonstrates a significant commitment to active transportation. The 15% may be used for infrastructure projects such as crosswalks, greenways and sidewalks, or education and promotional activities such as Safe Routes to School Programs, maps of bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and education and training of law enforcement and the public on bicycle and pedestrian laws.

In addition, the MPO reserved 10% of STP funds to be flexed to federal transit funds received by the MPO from the Federal Transit Administration. Combined with the funding for the criteria-ranked projects and the 15% Active Transportation funds, the MPO is spending at least 30% or more of federal funding on active transportation infrastructure and education.

Food Access

Finally, the MPO evaluated all of the submitted transportation projects based on proximity to grocery stores, farmers markets and emergency food sources. Although this evaluation was not part of the official scoring criteria, it was part of the staff evaluation report for each project, which played a role in the determination of which projects received funding.

Outcomes

The outcomes of the initiative are adopted regional transportation policies and dedicated funding for active transportation facilities that will impact a large number of people over the next several decades. The results will be increased infrastructure and education for active transportation such as transit, bikeways, sidewalks and greenways. The MPO has taken steps to prioritize these facilities so that underserved areas are addressed first. Over time, the positive impacts of the policies may include improved air quality, increased opportunities for physical activity, decreased traffic crashes for all modes, and increased active transportation facilities for populations with higher rates of health disparities.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

One of the most important lessons learned by staff in the development of the 2035 Regional Transportation Plan was how to frame the issues. Staff began the conversation by inviting stakeholders and community members to create a vision for a vibrant and thriving community. From the vision, a series of goals and objectives were created for how transportation could support the vision. By starting with a vision and not specific projects, and by engaging community members throughout the process, the MPO was able to develop policies based on what these residents and stakeholders envisioned for their communities. The MPO also developed priorities first, and determined which funding source best fit the priorities, rather than starting with the estimated dollars for a funding source and determining which projects should receive the funding. This approach allowed the MPO to ensure that top priorities were funded first, and allowed the MPO to think creatively about how to make funding sources fit the needs of the region.

One of challenges faced by the MPO was a lack of data on populations with health disparities and high rates of chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes and heart disease at a sub-regional level. In order to address this data gap, the MPO will be collecting health data as part of a regional travel survey effort described below.

Next Steps

The MPO is interested in further evaluating the outcomes of the transportation policy, including determining a final dollar amount of projects providing active transportation facilities, and an analysis of how well the active transportation projects address chronic diseases, underserved

populations and address equity. Examples of analysis include determining how many projects are within the environmental justice and underserved areas with estimated populations having high rates health disparities, chronic diseases, high rates of bicycle and pedestrian crashes and low rates of vehicle ownership. Additionally, the MPO would like to conduct additional analysis on how many of the projects fall within food desert areas and how transportation facilities can help provide access to healthy food sources, in addition to access to schools, medical care, housing and jobs.

Gathering Data and Benchmarking Progress

The MPO Regional Transportation Plan incorporated modeling of existing data from a variety of sources to predict future population and employment growth, the increase in congested roadways, the decrease in air quality, as well as economic impacts of congestion, traffic crashes and transit systems. The MPO is conducting a Regional Household Travel Survey in 2012 that surveys approximately 6,000 households on travel behavior and health and includes a subset of 600 participants who will wear GPS units and accelerometers to collect data on the relationship between transportation, physical activity and overall health. This data will be used in the next update of the MPO Regional Transportation Plan.

Sharing the Story

The MPO policies recently underwent an evaluability assessment by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity (DNPAO). The review is a pre-evaluation of the MPO's policies around physical activity, with the intent of collecting an evidence base of policy-based initiatives for the purpose of wide-spread replication. The report from the review is available from MPO staff.

The MPO staff believes that the 2035 Regional Transportation Plan policies represent a paradigm shift in transportation policy and take important steps to link transportation with health and equity outcomes.

Contact: Leslie Meehan, AICP – Director of Healthy Communities, meehan@nashvillempo.org