

INTRODUCTION

Transportation systems are a major determinant of the social and economic vitality of a community. They facilitate access to employment, labor, goods, services, and recreation. Because businesses, homes, and other origins and destinations have physical locations, it is the relationship between transportation and land use that is the foundation of transportation planning.

Two aspects of the transportation-land use relationship that are central to transportation planning are:

1. The relationship is reciprocal; land use patterns affect travel decisions and travel decisions affect land use patterns
2. The locations of residents, businesses, and institutions change in response to changing values, norms, and preferences – independently of land use and transportation

Regional state department of transportation offices, councils of governments, metropolitan planning organizations, and transit operators are typically involved in transportation planning in both rural and urban areas.

However, a number of additional local agencies may also be engaged in transportation planning in an urban area. Most cities and urban counties have road, highway, planning, and/or traffic departments with staff dedicated to transportation planning. Needless to say, there is an abundance of agencies involved in developing transportation plans in urban areas.

This “How-To” Guide recognizes that rural communities in the Genesee-Finger Lakes region may have limited staff resources available for, or experience in, preparing transportation plans compared to their urban counterparts. Accordingly, this guide presents an easy-to-use six-step process for developing plans to meet a community’s transportation-related goals and objectives. The six steps are:

- Step 1 – Process Initiation***
- Step 2 – Public Involvement Program***
- Step 3 – Existing Conditions***
- Step 4 – Future Conditions***
- Step 5 – Alternatives***
- Step 6 – Prioritization and Implementation***

STEP I

PROCESS INITIATION

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

At the beginning of the planning process, it is important to clearly establish the goals and objectives of the transportation plan. This will determine how the planning program should be designed and who should be involved. While it is appropriate to be conservative in defining the scope of the plan in order to contain costs, it is also important to insure that all potential needs are reasonably considered.

Regardless of the resources available, a transportation plan should never presuppose an outcome. The goal of the plan in its most wide-ranging form should be to initiate and conduct an objective study to identify current and future issues and opportunities affecting the transportation system and alternatives to address issues and maximize opportunities, with an emphasis on cost-effectiveness.

The goals and objectives of a transportation plan should be consistent with the goals and objectives of the community's comprehensive (or master) plan. Most comprehensive plans contain some basic goals and objectives related to the transportation system. The development of a transportation plan allows for an in-depth analysis of the impacts of a community's transportation system on its quality of life and economic vitality.

Questions to consider when developing the goals and objectives of a transportation plan include:

- What is the community trying to accomplish with respect to transportation (e.g., safer and more efficient movement of people and goods)?
- What level of detail is the plan going to address (e.g., only key roadways or every street in the community)?
- What modes (e.g., roads, transit, pedestrian, etc.) of transportation are present? How much emphasis should be placed on each?

The answers to these questions can be based on available information from local, regional, and state data sources such as traffic volumes or pavement condition scores as well as input from the general public. Recognize that a community's goals are not always easy to determine and may not be completely determined before the transportation planning process begins.

As stated earlier, all or part of the answers to these questions may be dictated by the funding and resources available to undertake the transportation plan.

Transportation plans can be funded through local resources or through funds available from regional, state, or federal agencies and departments.

Another consideration in developing the goals and objectives of the plan is balancing the need to identify alternatives to improve the transportation system based on current and future issues and opportunities with the probable financial resources available to implement them. Transportation plans both identify the improvements necessary to optimize the performance of the transportation system and serve as a rational justification for pursuing the funds to implement them.

The justification for funding is an important consideration because implementing the improvements identified in a transportation plan usually requires financial assistance from state and federal sources. The competition for these funds is often, if not always, highly competitive. Step 6 of this guidebook outlines general funding options available for completing transportation system improvements.

COORDINATION

The stakeholders whose participation and involvement will be required in developing the plan should be identified at the beginning of the process. These stakeholders should be involved early and continuously throughout the planning process.

Certain components of the plan may be able to be completed with internal community resources such as town or village boards and staff. However, the completion of other portions of the plan will usually require additional assistance from other transportation agencies.

Contact the county planning and highway departments, NYS Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), and Genesee Transportation Council (GTC) to determine what technical resources they may have to assist in the development of the plan. Appendix A provides contact information for the departments and agencies listed above.

Coordinating with these agencies is important because it provides opportunities to obtain information and data that may already be available (e.g., traffic counts, demographic data, speed data, road conditions, accident history) as well as to identify transportation system improvements that may be planned in or near the community (e.g., a resurfacing project for one of the key roadways in the community that is scheduled to begin during the next construction season).

Depending on the resources available, it may be advantageous to retain a planning consultant to either lead or assist in the development of the transportation plan.