

0-6852: Framework for Implementing Performance Planning for Rural Planning Organizations

Background

Performance-based transportation planning has existed for many years and is being put in practice more as a result of recent federal rules. Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) and the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act place an increased emphasis on performance-based management of the multimodal transportation system, and require the use of performance-based methods in state, metropolitan, and non-metropolitan transportation planning and programming. MAP-21 emphasized planning areas including safety, infrastructure condition, congestion reduction, system reliability, freight movement, and economic vitality. Performance-based transportation planning is becoming the cornerstone for transportation decision making throughout the country in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan (rural) areas. This research effort provided the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) with a framework, performance measures, tools, and guidance to conduct performance-based transportation planning and programming in non-metropolitan areas of the state and to support rural planning organizations (RPOs).

What the Researchers Did

The research team:

- Summarized the experience and current state of the practice for using performance measures to assess and monitor rural transportation systems and to provide input to long-range planning and project selection

and programming for state departments of transportation and rural transportation planning organizations.

- Developed a six-step organizational and technical framework for conducting rural performance-based planning.
- Prepared a rural performance measure tool that enables TxDOT districts, RPOs, individual counties, and TxDOT to support the rural performance-based transportation system assessment, monitoring, planning, and programming at the individual county, RPO, TxDOT district, and statewide levels.
- Prepared a rural performance planning guidebook.
- Conducted rural transportation planning workshops in nine rural Texas counties.
- Piloted a rural planning process in cooperation with TxDOT's San Antonio District and the Alamo Regional Rural Planning Organization.

Research Performed by:

Texas A&M Transportation Institute

Research Supervisor:

John Overman, TTI

Researchers:

Kristi Miller, TTI

Patricia Ellis, TTI

Matthew Miller, TTI

Mike Pratt, TTI

Nasir Gharaibeh, TTI

Sushant Sharma, TTI

Curtis Morgan, TTI

Gretchen Stoeltje, TTI

Todd Carlson, TTI

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What They Found

The six-step framework developed for this research effort establishes an organizational structure and process that directs users through the important considerations and tasks needed to develop and implement a particular program based on recent federal and state legislation and the current structure of rural transportation planning within Texas. The steps are as follows:

- Step 1: Identify Rural Area Needs, Strategies, Goals, and Objectives.
- Step 2: Prepare Monitoring Plan and Performance Measures.
- Step 3: Assess the Rural Multimodal Transportation System.
- Step 4: Prioritize Projects and Funding Scenarios.
- Step 5: Prepare Regional Transportation Plan to Communicate Recommended Project and Investment Strategies.
- Step 6: Implement Projects and Monitor System Performance.

The framework is intended to be an iterative process, and each step is a fundamental element of performance-based planning. More than one step can be conducted simultaneously with another, or the sequence of steps may vary.

Performance measures must cover a broad range of goals and objectives that support planning goals and emphasis areas from applicable plans and legislation. Establishing a common set of performance measures allows for the evaluation

and comparison of different projects and transportation corridors for both current and future conditions, and translates data and statistics into a form that the public and decision makers can easily understand.

The guidebook directs the reader through the framework for conducting a rural transportation system assessment, monitoring progress, and improving project planning and programming based on individual goals, objectives, selected performance measures, and weights.

What This Means

Rural counties in Texas (counties located outside metropolitan planning organization boundaries) have a wide range of transportation issues and needs to be addressed through short- and long-term planning. This research effort developed a framework, performance measures, tool, and guidance to conduct performance-based transportation planning and programming in non-metropolitan areas of the state and to support rural transportation planning organizations. The results of this research and its research products will be of immediate benefit to TxDOT and its partners in the transportation development process for rural areas outside metropolitan planning boundaries. The project deliverables provide a foundation for the education and outreach needed to implement performance-based planning in non-metropolitan regions of the state.

For More Information

Project Manager:

Sonya Badgley, TxDOT, (512) 416-4657

Research Supervisor:

John Overman, TTI, (817) 462-0516

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Research and Technology Implementation Office

Texas Department of Transportation

125 E. 11th Street

Austin, TX 78701-2483

www.txdot.gov

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