

Chapter I – Introduction

A. REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING OVERVIEW

REGIONAL PLANNING HAS A PURPOSE

The 2012 Berkshire Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is both a policy document and a planning process that ensures transportation projects are consistent with overall regional development policies, provides an effective transportation system, and makes wise use of available funding. The RTP encompasses both short and long-range projects and policies. The RTP is the guiding document for all Federally funded transportation planning and implementation efforts within the Berkshires.

The RTP outlines priority transportation projects and improvements for highways, public transportation, airports (though not air travel), railroads, and bicyclist and pedestrian options. Although the majority of opportunities for enhancing systems integration, management, and operations come in the MassDOT project development process, the RTP does consider the impact of these FHWA focus areas as part of the 25 year transportation planning process.

The projects in the 2012 RTP originate from technical analysis, input from Berkshire towns and cities and other transportation stakeholders, and a review of information gathered in previous transportation studies and plans. Each recommended project represents a need identified by local stakeholders. As these projects move towards implementation, they must potentially address the RTP's overarching goals and objectives, Massachusetts statewide priorities, and Federal guidelines.

The 2012 RTP recognizes the diversity of transportation needs throughout the Berkshire region, and attempts to balance often-competing transportation needs within the fiscal and physical constraints of the region. This RTP describes the policies and actions that address walking, bicycling, driving, and freight movement in this region in a manner consistent with Federal requirements of SAFETEA-LU.

This RTP recognizes that automobiles are the primary mode of personal travel for the horizon of the plan, but also contains policies to encourage all modes of travel. The RTP also recognizes the need to increase mobility for all socioeconomic groups and those with physical impairments. Even the occasional use of transit, walking, bicycling or sharing a ride can help the Berkshires conserve energy, provide lifestyle sustainability, and achieve cleaner air and water.

Finally, the RTP recognizes that the transportation system is critical to the continued economic health and viability of the region. Many sectors of the regional economy heavily depend on the safe and efficient movement of goods and services by truck, railroad, and air, as well as delivering workers safely to employment centers. Improvements defined in this plan attempt to balance all of these diverse, and often competing, needs.

2012 Regional Transportation Plan

FEDERAL PLANNING CONTEXT

In August 2005, the transportation authorization bill SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users) became law. Although SAFETEA-LU preserves most aspects of the previous transportation bills, there were certain important changes to the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) planning process that the new law required. SAFETEA-LU mandates that metropolitan transportation plans and regional transportation plans adopted after July 1, 2007 reflect these changes. This document is in accordance with the specifications of SAFETEA-LU.

The main objective of the Federal transportation planning program is the development of a transportation system that optimizes project delivery within the Region's available financial resources. This system of projects and programs is fiscally constrained to current funding sources and those new sources that can be reasonably expected to be available during the twenty-five (25) year plan period.

While the RTP defines long-term objectives, the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a list of projects that meet regional needs within a more immediate time frame. The TIP allocates federal funds in the region, is updated annually, and includes a rolling four (4) year program of transportation improvements.

Federal regulations require an adopted RTP for federal funding of transportation capital improvements and transit operating funds. A project must be consistent with the RTP and programmed in the TIP in order to qualify for regional transportation dollars. Per SAFETEA-LU, the RTP is updated every four (4) years.

SAFETEA-LU 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 nonmotorized users;
3. Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
4. Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and for 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.

Chapter I – Introduction

CONTINUING, COOPERATIVE, and COMPREHENSIVE

Steps to Transportation Planning:

- Gather Input
- Inventory
- Identify Vision
- Forecast Future
- Assess Needs
- C o m p a r e Alternatives
- I m p l e m e n t Program and Policies
- E v a l u a t e Results

In the early 1970's the Commonwealth of Massachusetts adopted the federal government's comprehensive, cooperative, continuing (3-C) transportation planning process. The intent of the 3-C process is to decentralize transportation decision-making by insuring that "all reasonable and prudent alternatives to transportation problems are considered and analyzed adequately." Decisions must give full consideration to all impacts, emphasize physical, economic, and social consequences and include the "participation of elected officials, public and private groups and individual citizens."

The BRPC employs the 3-C process in all facets of the transportation planning program, including alternatives identification and evaluation.

Ultimately, the 2012 RTP provides financially constrained 25-year priorities for road, transit, freight, bicycle and pedestrian improvements, consistent with the federal requirements of SAFETEA-LU.

Public participation was an integral component of developing the 2012 RTP.

2012 Regional Transportation Plan

2012 RTP PROCESS

The 2012 RTP is the latest in a series of transportation plans BRPC has produced to comply with Federal planning requirements. The BRPC collaborated with MassDOT, local government partners as well as citizens and community groups to produce the 2012 RTP over the past year.

The RTP follows the basic comprehensive planning process as applied to transportation:

- **Input**– The basis for planning is that there is a vision for the future that is different than where we are today. Planners are not charged with creating this vision, rather, the community and stakeholders at large should provide input so that planners can synthesize how that future landscape would appear. Public involvement is important throughout the RTP process, but it falls distinctly within the critical path to beginning a successful plan.
- **Existing Transportation System**– Transportation systems vary in scale and scope, so it is important for BRPC to collect and analyze data that yields results for effective policy making. Information is specifically collected on highways, accidents, freight and goods movement, public transportation, passenger rail, airports, bicycling and pedestrians, and intelligent transportation systems.
- **Goals and Objectives**– BRPC defined RTP goals and objectives after collecting public and stakeholder input and examining our existing transportation system. These overarching goals, consistent with the guiding principles of The Regional Plan for the Berkshires, define project and policy development through the implementation component of the RTP.
- **Forecasts**– In order to understand what kinds of improvements will benefit the transportation system and its users the most, the BRPC works with MassDOT to estimate regional population and economic conditions twenty years into the future (to 2035) so that projects and policies will have longevity through the planning cycle.
- **Needs Assessment**– After we have all of the pieces– input, inventory, regional goals and objectives, and forecasts– the BRPC can show where the transportation system now falls short and predict where it will not meet expectations in 20 years.
- **Alternatives Analysis**– The amount of money available to meet the regional goals for transportation is finite. BRPC takes the deficiencies identified within the needs assessment and uses a screening approach to identify projects that meet regional priorities as guided by the MPO.
- **Conclusions and Implementation**– The preferred alternative projects and implementation policies must demonstrate that they are fiscally constrained, exhibit air quality conformity, and generally comply with other Federal regulations for transportation. After the final draft is complete, there is a 30 day comment period where the BRPC will distribute the document and accept feedback prior to MPO adoption.

Chapter I – Introduction

The planning process included opportunities for public input by citizens, local officials, organizations and businesses, and state and federal agencies.

SAFETEA-LU requires that MPO's develop a public participation plan in consultation with interested parties that provides reasonable opportunities for all parties to comment. The federal legislation requires that public meetings be: conducted at convenient and accessible locations at convenient times; employ visualization techniques to describe plans; and make public information available in an electronically accessible format, such as on the Internet.

Appendix A provides a full description of the 2012 RTP public involvement process.

B. RELATED PLANS AND PROCESSES

THE COMMONWEALTH'S PLANNING CONTEXT

In 2009, Massachusetts completed YouMove Massachusetts with the following ten themes:

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts should...

- Improve transportation system reliability.
- Focus more attention on maintaining our transportation system.
- Design the transportation system better.
- Encourage shared use of the infrastructure.
- Increase capacity by expanding existing facilities and services.
- Create a more user-friendly transportation system.
- Broaden the transportation system to serve more people.
- Provide adequate transportation funding and collect revenue equitably.
- Minimize environmental impacts.
- Improve access to our transportation system.

2012 Regional Transportation Plan

RELEVANT STATE AND FEDERAL PLANNING EFFORTS

The following are guides to regional transportation planning in the Berkshires, and the objectives contained in each were reviewed during the preparation of this RTP:

GreenDOT

GreenDOT is a comprehensive environmental initiative that will make MassDOT a leader in “greening” the state transportation system. MassDOT should promote sustainable economic development, protect the natural environment, and enhance the quality of life for all of the Commonwealth’s residents and visitors through the full range of its activities, from strategic planning to construction and system operations. GreenDOT includes three principal goals: reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; promote healthy transportation options; and support smart growth. Additional information can be found at: http://www.eot.state.ma.us/default.asp?pgid=content/releases/pr060210_GreenDOT&sid=release.

Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA) Chapter 298 of the Acts of 2008.

The GWSA calls for a 10 to 25 percent reduction of 1990 GHG emissions levels by 2020, and a further reduction to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) sets economy-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction goals and strategies for Massachusetts. The Act can be found at: <http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/senate/185/st00/st00534.htm>.

The Massachusetts Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2020

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs released the Massachusetts Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2020 in December of 2010. The Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA, or the Act) of 2008 requires the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs to establish a statewide limit on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of 10% – 25% below 1990 levels for 2020 — on the way toward an 80 % reduction in emissions by 2050.

The Healthy Transportation Compact (HTC)

The HTC is a requirement of the 2009 transportation reform legislation. This inter-agency initiative is designed to facilitate transportation decisions that balance the needs of all transportation users, expand mobility, improve public health, support a cleaner environment and create stronger communities. More information can be found at: <http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/main/HealthyTransportationCompact.aspx>.

Complete Streets

The MassDOT Project Development and Design Guide promotes a Complete Streets design philosophy. Complete Streets calls for project designers to provide accommodations for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users within the same right-of-way.

Chapter I – Introduction

Bay State Greenway

The Bay State Greenway (BSG) is MassDOT's proposed seven-corridor, 740-mile network of bicycle routes that comprise both off-road and on-road bicycle facilities. The BSG connects urbanized areas with the greatest density of trips to maximize the potential for distance travel, facilitate increased bicycling, and link to existing shared-use paths. www.massbikeplan.org

The Transportation Enhancements Program (TE) is a Federal program that increases travel choice and improves the cultural and environmental character of the transportation system. There are twelve (12) eligible categories including, but not limited to: bicycle and pedestrian facilities, streetscape improvements, historic transportation facilities, cultural facilities, and environmental improvements for the transportation system.

REGIONAL PLANNING CONTEXT

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) coordinates the Federal transportation planning and funding for the region with two other agencies: Berkshire Regional Transit Authority (BRTA), and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

BRPC is the official area-wide planning agency for the Berkshires and is composed of representatives from each of Berkshire County's 32 local governments. Representatives from the three BRPC, MassDOT and BRTA, along with representatives from the cities of Pittsfield and North Adams and four sub-regional town representatives, comprise the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The ten-member MPO is responsible for oversight and approval of the RTP, TIP, annual Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) as well as other transportation policies and plans for the region.

The 2012 RTP is consistent with the broad policies of BRPC's Regional Plan for the Berkshires, the region's comprehensive long-range plan which contains policies, approaches, and specific work element recommendations for the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, its communities, state government, and the private sector. The four guiding principles of the Regional Plan are:

- Spatial efficiency in land use development and management;
- Preservation of sensitive environments and open space;
- Economic development and fiscal responsibility; and
- Social equality and quality of life

An efficient transportation system is important to the quality of life in a region. However, transportation is a means to an end, and not an end unto itself. The purpose of planning for transportation is to help the Berkshires achieve their greater regional goals as presented in the Regional Plan.

The RTP is one component of a technical planning process that includes ongoing studies and analyses to assess regional transportation needs. The following lists the various regional transportation documents consulted during the 2012 update of the RTP.

2012 Regional Transportation Plan

Table I- 1 Additional Regional Resource Plans, Documents, and Studies:

Document Name	Description	Date
Unified Planning Work Program	A statement of transportation planning tasks to be completed for the year, and a budget for each task. Based on the priorities established in the RTP.	Annually
Transportation Improvement Program	A prioritized, multi-year capital budget of transportation projects. Required yearly for obligating federal transportation funding and must reflect fiscally constrained RTP.	Annually
The Coordinated Plan	Identifies transportation needs of individuals with disabilities and the elderly, as well as promotes use of public transit, especially for assisted income and low income individuals.	Annually
The Lee Area Traffic Study	BRPC initiated the Lee Area Traffic Study to evaluate a wide range of potential transportation improvements, and develop recommendations for those improvements that best address local and regional mobility needs. The study area included the towns of Lee, Lenox, Becket, Stockbridge and West Stockbridge. The study corridor was defined as Route 20 from the Lee/Lenox town line to the Prime Outlets retail site in Lee.	2010
Analysis of BRTA Fixed Route System	Identified opportunities to improve and expand BRTA's fixed route system. Preliminary recommendations began implementation in 2010.	2009
The Route 7/20 Corridor Access Management Study	Access management refers to a range of actions that assist with the preservation of road capacity and the maintenance of safe and efficient traffic operations. It is most commonly implemented through a combination of capital improvements, design standards, and land use control measures. In practice, it requires finding a balance between through movement of traffic, access to land, and preservation of community character	2010
The Berkshire Bicycling and Walking Plan	Many residents of the Berkshires are interested in walking and bicycling, both for transportation and recreation. This plan presents information on a range of existing conditions, analyzes the data, and proposes a prioritized list of areas for communities to further evaluate for possible improvements.	2009
Berkshire Blueprint	The Berkshire Blueprint established a contemporary framework and direction for marketing the Berkshire lifestyle and economic development assets to companies, entrepreneurs and visitors.	2007
South Street Alternatives Study	Analyzes potential improvements and provides a regional consensus on a preferred course of action to improve north-south mobility in the Route 7/20 corridor between Housatonic Street in Pittsfield south to the City line, and the developing area to its west.	2006
Downtown Pittsfield Circulation Study	Provides recommendations for improving north-south travel throughout the Downtown Pittsfield area and enhancing the safety and mobility of vehicular and pedestrian traffic.	2006
Great Barrington Parking Study and Downtown Circulation Studies	Provides a quantitative analysis documenting the nature and extent of existing parking problems in the core area of the downtown and some further analysis of issues to be considered in determining appropriate courses of action by the Town.	2005
Goods Movement Study (Phase 1)	Identifies methods to improve freight movement efficiency while reducing impacts on communities and the environment. This report documents Phase 1 of the study, which primarily focuses on analyzing the existing situation and identifying issues and opportunities for improvement.	2005

Chapter I – Introduction

C. 2012 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Regional Plan for the Berkshires (2001) is a document that provides guidance and information for communities as they work toward implementing their local vision through comprehensive planning. The Goals and Objectives of the RTP are compatible with the guidance provided in The Regional Plan for the Berkshires. In Berkshire County, planning decisions often require finding the appropriate balance between development and preservation of the environment and quality of life. The region needs to keep moving forward economically to retain and attract businesses that provide quality jobs, but must also protect the natural resources that distinguish it as a desirable destination and a special region with a high quality of life.

The Goals and Objectives in the 2012 RTP are applied in two areas. The first is to guide the selection of projects and planning efforts for the period of time until the next RTP. The second is to incorporate their principles, to the extent feasible, into the design and implementation of projects that the RTP recommends. The Goals and Objectives presented in this update of the RTP represent a refinement to those that were set forth in the past RTPs.

2012 RTP Goals and Objectives are:

Goal I – Protect Sensitive Environments and Open Space

Protecting Sensitive Environments and open space is conserving the environment and mitigating the harmful impacts from our transportation system. Issues such as pollution, energy and ecosystem continuity correlate to protecting the natural environment and preserving open space.

Objectives:

- Reduce air pollution.
- Improve the quality of water resources.
- Protect sensitive natural features.
- Optimize the transportation system's use of resources.
- Adapt in order to mitigate global warming and climate change.

Goal II – Preserve and Enhance Community Livability

The US Department of Transportation defines six principals of Livability. Briefly, they are; Provide choices for travel modes, expand choices available for energy efficient housing, improve economic competitiveness of neighborhoods, use federal funds to revitalize existing communities, remove barriers to collaboration between federal programs, and enhance the unique characteristics of all communities. The objectives shown are areas of emphasis for implementation of livability principals in the Berkshires.

2012 Regional Transportation Plan

Objectives:

- Enhance aesthetic, cultural, and historic qualities of communities.
- Minimize impacts of truck traffic and cut-through traffic
- Mitigate delays to travelers and freight by coordinating infrastructure improvements.

Goal III – Enhance Regional Economic Development

A goal of the RTP is to support the vision created by the Berkshire County To create a diverse and robust economy that creates sustainable prosperity for all its residents. While capitalizing on the region’s heritage, intellectual vigor, cultural assets and natural resources we will encourage innovation, collaboration and entrepreneurial spirit. The RTP supports economic vitality through facilitating the reliable of people and goods movement.

Objectives:

- Provide an investment program for infrastructure improvements.
- Serve critical regional economic development needs.
- Facilitate goods movement.
- Minimize the costs associated with traffic congestion and delays.

Goal IV: Promote Efficient Land Use Development and Transportation System Management

Planning for interrelationship of land use and transportation can create opportunities to enhance both the quality of the built environment and the infrastructure that serves it. Well designed land development projects should account for transportation system demands, and provide an environment that encourages more efficient use of both automobiles and alternate travel modes. Improving the feasibility of alternative modes and reducing our dependence on automobile travel are important components of a long range transportation vision.

Objectives:

- Improve the efficiency of traffic operations and manage travel demand.
- Enact development policies that increase overall mobility & improve efficiency.
- Foster development in existing core communities.
- Integrate alternative travel mode facilities into roadway improvements.

Chapter I – Introduction

Goal V: Maintain and Improve the Mobility and Accessibility of the Transportation System

The most basic function served by the Regional Transportation System is to provide mobility for people, goods, and services. The primary focus of the transportation planning process is to address regional mobility needs. The goal of system accessibility is to provide full and equitable travel opportunities for all travel modes, serving all geographic and demographic components of the Region.

Objectives:

- Maintain the Region's existing transportation system. Increase mobility and access options for all people and places.
- Provide sufficient transportation capacity for all modes and goods.
- Facilitate system connections to improve efficiency and access.
- Coordinate public transportation with other transportation providers.

Goal VI: Improve Transportation Safety and Security

Design for system and facility safety should integrate with all phases of the transportation facility life cycle, from construction through maintenance. Reducing conflict points and increasing awareness improves safety for all. Security for the transportation network is essential. Transportation system management techniques can be a vital component of emergency preparedness and disaster response.

Objectives:

- Minimize collisions with wildlife.
- Implement Massachusetts Strategic Highway Safety Plan processes.
- Maintain the connectivity of critical highway corridors.
- Plan for movements during emergencies.

2012 Regional Transportation Plan

FEDERAL PLANNING FACTORS

In 2005, President Bush signed the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA–LU) into law. SAFETEA–LU, the transportation authorization that guides this RTP, expanded the Federal planning factors MPOs must consider to include projects and strategies during planning that:

Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.

Objectives in all of the goals at least indirectly support economic vitality in the Berkshires. The strong influence of natural resources, recreation, and tourism on the economic stability in the region makes protecting the natural environment important when considering this planning factor.

Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.

Objectives within Goal VI include maintaining the transportation system in the safest possible manner for people and freight. Any project or policy resulting from the Berkshire’s MPO planning process is compliant with the MassDOT ‘Complete Streets’ policy to the greatest possible extent.

Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.

Goal VI prioritizes critical highway corridors for movement into and out of population centers during emergencies. Sustaining redundant access to critical facilities and routes is an important part of natural hazard mitigation.

Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and for freight;

Accessibility and mobility correlate to both the condition of the transportation system and linking transportation planning with land use. This RTP maintains the existing road network, expands transit service options, and promotes community mobility.

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.

Several objectives focus directly on minimizing impacts from the transportation system on the natural environment and indirectly reducing energy consumption to promote sustainability and lessen the effects of climate change and global warming.

Chapter I – Introduction

Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.

Although this RTP does not directly expand significant roadway capacity, several objectives improve the existing transportation network's condition and efficiency.

Promote efficient system management and operation.

This RTP acknowledges that there are opportunities to manage system maintenance and operations efficiency without adding capacity to the network. Transit options, including paratransit, are included in the plan. Incremental safety improvements and congestion mitigation measures are components of each federally funded project in the Berkshires.

Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

The broadest theme of the 2012 RTP is providing the greatest efficiency and performance possible out of the Berkshires' existing transportation system. A reliable, consistent transportation network is essential to the quality of life in the Berkshires.

The 2012 RTP is consistent with this Federal requirement, and reflects all of the planning factors in the Goals and Objectives outlined in this chapter.