

9. Critical Factors in the Planning Process

Our transportation investments influence more than just our ability to get from one place to another. How and where we develop roads, transit lines and other transportation services impact other things we value, including the natural environment and the health and well-being of our neighborhoods, and those who live in them. Federal law recognizes these important considerations by requiring that Long Range Transportation Plans specifically address eight planning factors:

1. Support economic vitality of the metropolitan areas, 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.

Each of these factors is addressed throughout this report. This section highlights the following critical factors:

- **Air quality:** demonstrating that transportation plans will further clean air goals and meet air pollutant standards;
- **Environmental Justice:** showing how transportation plans relate to communities that have been historically underserved or disproportionately impacted by transportation investments; and
- **Safety and Security:** addressing how the transportation plans and the organizations that implement them promote safer and more secure travel choices.

9.1 Transportation - Air Quality Conformity

Transportation-air quality conformity ("conformity") is a way to ensure that Federal funding and approval goes to transportation activities that are consistent with air quality goals. Conformity applies to long range transportation plans—such as this one, to transportation improvement programs (TIPs), and to projects funded or approved by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) or the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in areas that do not meet or previously have not met air quality standards for ozone, carbon monoxide, particulate matter, or nitrogen dioxide. These areas are known as "non-attainment areas" or "maintenance areas," respectively.



A biodiesel school bus

A conformity determination demonstrates that the total emissions projected for a plan or program are within the emissions limits ("budgets") established by the State Implementation Plan (SIP) for air quality, and that transportation control measures (TCMs) – specific projects or programs enumerated in the SIP that are designed to improve air quality – are implemented in a timely fashion. All of the area within the Triangle covered by the two MPOs, except for Harnett County, is currently designated as a "maintenance area" for the 8-hour ozone standard; the effective date of this designation was December 26, 2007. In addition, Durham and Wake Counties are maintenance areas for carbon monoxide.

Determining Conformity

Regional emissions are estimated based on highway and transit usage according to transportation plans and TIPs. The projected emissions for the plan and TIP must not exceed the emissions limits (or "budgets") established by the SIP. Where TCMs are included, responsible MPOs and the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) are required to demonstrate that TCMs are implemented in a timely fashion. In North Carolina there are currently no TCMs included in SIPs.

The Decision Process

A formal interagency consultation process involving the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), FHWA, FTA and state and local transportation and air quality agencies is required in developing SIPs, TIPs, and transportation plans, and in making conformity determinations. Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) policy boards make initial conformity determinations in metropolitan areas, while the NCDOT does so in areas outside of MPOs, in consultation with affected Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs).

Four organizations are responsible for making the conformity determinations in four distinct parts of the Triangle Ozone Maintenance Area:

- a. the Capital Area MPO within the CAMPO metropolitan area boundary – all of Wake County, and parts of Franklin, Granville, and Johnston counties.
- b. the DCHC MPO within its metropolitan area boundary – all of Durham County and parts of Orange and Chatham counties.
- c. the Burlington-Graham MPO within its portion of the metropolitan area boundary in western Orange County.
- d. the NCDOT in a rural area that is comprised of those portions of Chatham, Orange, Person, Franklin, Granville and Johnston Counties that remain outside of any MPO metropolitan area boundary.

Each of these responsible organizations must make a conformity determination for its respective area in order for all of the areas to be designated in conformity.

The final conformity determination is made at the Federal level by FHWA/FTA. These determinations must be made at least every four years, or when transportation plans or TIPs are amended or updated, or within one year of the effective date of a non-attainment designation. Conformity determinations must also be made within two years after the approval of a State Implementation Plan (SIP) containing motor vehicle emission budgets or determination of adequacy of those budgets.

Appendix 6 includes the *Conformity Analysis and Determination Report* for the CAMPO and DCHC MPO 2035 Long Range Transportation Plans, along with the 2009-15 TIP.