

Colorado's Transportation Planning Process

Transportation planning activities in Colorado are not just a response to federal requirements. The 1991 State legislation, which created CDOT, also established an integrated transportation planning process at both the state and local/regional levels.

The legislation took some new directions by including stronger public participation in the planning process (e.g., cities, interest groups, and the general public) and by including other modes (e.g., transit, aviation, bikes, rail). The legislation called for local areas to develop regional, multi-modal transportation plans that would then be integrated into a statewide transportation plan. The legislation required the creation of up to 15 Transportation Planning Regions (TPRs), five of which are the existing MPOs.

The legislation authorized the establishment of formal Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs), which are responsible for developing and adopting 20-year Regional Transportation Plans (RTPs). The first 20-year RTPs were completed in 1993. They will be updated every six years. The first updating process began July 1998 and will conclude in 2000. RPCs may develop the plan themselves, but most of them are using the assistance of consultants.

The RTP must: address all modes of transportation; cover a 20 year period; identify 20-year transportation improvement needs; contain a preferred system plan that is financially constrained; be environmentally sensitive; and, be based on an adequate public involvement process.

The legislation created a Statewide Transportation Advisory Committee (STAC). The STAC is made up of one representative and one alternate from each of the TPRs, with the state's two tribal governments serving as ex-officio members. The STAC is charged with recommending steps to ensure some degree of consistency among the regional plans, and recommending methods by which to consolidate and prioritize the 15 local RTPs into the 20-year statewide transportation plan.

Also playing an important role in the new planning process is the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), a 6-year planning document required by ISTEA; all projects selected for federal transportation assistance must be listed in the STIP. Projects prioritized in MPO TIPs are automatically included in the STIP. All MPO TIPs must be approved by the Governor, while the STIP must be approved by the Colorado Transportation Commission.

It is important for transit operators to directly participate in this planning process in order to ensure that their needs and critical issues are made known to local officials. If transit operators want their projects to be considered for flexible federal funding, or for state funding if current laws are ever changed, they will have to be deeply involved in this planning process. In addition, agencies that wish to receive FTA funding through the CDOT Transit Unit are required to have their projects approved locally and included within the RTP in order to be eligible for funding.

For complete information, goto <http://www.dot.state.co.us/StateWidePlanning/PlansStudies/>.