Statewide Transit Goal Setting

DETAILS

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STATEWIDE TRANSIT GOAL SETTING

This digest summarizes the results of NCHRP Project 20-65/Task 34, "Statewide Transit Goal Setting." The research reported herein was performed under NCHRP 20-65 by ICF International. The report was prepared by Mr. Terence Plaskon, Senior Associate at ICF; Ms. Stephanie Trainor, Associate; and Mr. Michael Grant, Principal.

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SUMMARY

Introduction

State departments of transportation (DOTs) are gradually incorporating a performance-based approach to their transportation planning. This includes setting statewide goals for the different systems that make up the state's transportation network. However, state DOTs have limited influence over public transportation. Transit systems are often built, operated, and maintained by local or regional agencies that are separate from the state DOT. This limited influence over transit creates challenges for DOTs when setting statewide transit goals. This digest addresses the need for a better understanding of current and best practices in statewide transit goal setting by state DOTs.

Findings

The research team conducted a literature review of statewide transit goal setting practices, reviewing long-range statewide transportation plans and statewide transit plans around the country to understand current practices of transit goal setting. The research team found little literature specifically focused on statewide transit goal setting. Most literature addressed the broader issues of performance-based planning at state DOTs. Where transit was discussed, it was often in relation to transit agency-established goals and transit agency performance-based planning.

Following the literature review, the research team conducted an online survey of state DOTs on their transit goal setting. Roughly 70% of respondents have documented, statewide transit goals. Among other findings, the survey indicated the following:

- Most (65%) reported having qualitative transit goals, while 45% reported having quantitative ones. Several agencies have a combination of types.
- Less than a quarter (23%) reported having mode-specific transit goals.
- Three types of transit goals stood out as the most common. Ridership (61%), transit availability (58%), and broader multimodal goals (58%) were most frequently reported. Transit goals were least likely to address travel time and service delivery.
- DOTs are using transit goals for various purposes. Aside from helping

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guide or evaluate investment decision making, DOTs are relying on transit goals to guide local agencies and/or area stakeholders.

- DOTs are primarily developing and documenting their statewide transit goals as part of their statewide long-range transportation planning process. DOTs are also frequently documenting statewide transit goals in state transit management plans.
- DOTs are customarily tracking their transit goals (83%) and linking them to performance measures (77%). States are generally tracking their goals quarterly or annually.
- Many states without transit goals (72%) are either developing them or have considered doing so. States cited increased stakeholder interest and broader emphasis on performance measurement and improvement.
- DOTs that do not have statewide transit goals generally cited their departments' limited roles in transit management. Some mentioned that their departments were undergoing reorganization. Half of those without statewide transit goals have overarching multimodal goals.
- All those respondents who directly operate transit indicate that they track their progress via statewide goals and have linked these goals to performance measures.

Based on the literature review and survey, the research team identified a diverse group of practitioners that illustrates how states are setting statewide goals for transit. The research team interviewed representatives at each of the following states: California, Minnesota, Oregon, South Carolina, Virginia (Department of Rail and Public Transportation), and New Jersey (New Jersey DOT and New Jersey Transit). The research team found that state involvement in transit service varies greatly. Although few states directly operate transit service, most are heavily involved in administering funding. Most DOTs have an office or division of public transportation or public transit that focuses on providing transportation options for the traveling public. These public transportation divisions are often responsible for supporting transit around the state through the administration of federal and state transit funds, technical assistance, and integration of transit into statewide multimodal plans and projects. Statewide transit goals are frequently developed and documented as part of the long-range statewide transportation planning process. The research team found that several DOTs have also developed state transit plans as part of their planning processes. These plans go into more detail and generally involve closer collaboration with transit providers.

State DOTs set transit goals for various reasons. State legislation is one motivating force. Nearly half of the survey respondents indicated they are using statewide goals to fulfill legislative requirements. The transportation industry's shift toward a performance-based planning approach is another reason. DOTs are increasingly likely to set transit goals today, along with objectives and performance measures by which to monitor their progress. Limited transit funding provides additional motivation for setting statewide transit goals. Statewide goals can help target limited funds in meeting transit priorities. DOTs indicated that the process of setting statewide transit goals is just as important as the goals themselves. How a DOT sets statewide transit goals is shaped by desired outcomes, the level of coordination among parties, and the multiple stakeholders involved. All those interviewed used extensive outreach to various stakeholders, including non-traditional stakeholders and their partner transit providers, in developing their goals. DOTs use their goals based on what motivated the setting of the goals. For example, transit goals set because of the shift to performance-based planning are often likely to focus on guiding transit investments and funding allocation whereas DOTs have wider latitude in applying transit goals mandated by a state legislature. The effect of statewide transit goals is most often seen in states where the DOT has some level of control over transit funding.

Conclusions

State DOTs continue to face numerous challenges in terms of setting statewide transit goals. Foremost is overcoming a focus on highway planning and operation. DOTs are reluctant to set statewide transit goals because, for the most part, they do not directly operate transit and relationships with state transit providers often are limited. Moreover, it is as yet unclear to many DOTs the effect that statewide transit goals can have on agency investment decision making. Several DOTs noted the difficulty in setting accurate and achievable goals where there are limits in available data. Transit agencies do not always provide current data to DOTs and without such data, setting quantifiable transit goals is difficult. Limited or

uncertain funding sources also contribute to reluctance in setting statewide transit goals. Additional peer information and support, especially coming from federal partners, would encourage states and transit providers to integrate their planning and promote setting statewide transit goals.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Report

State departments of transportation (DOTs) are gradually incorporating a performance-based approach to their transportation planning. Today, state DOTs are likely to include performance-based planning elements, such as goals and objectives for the state's transportation network, in their long-range statewide transportation plans (LRSTPs). As DOTs provide direction for a state's transportation network, they set statewide goals for the network's different systems. However, this does not always extend to a state's public transportation system. State DOTs have limited influence over individual transit agencies. Transit systems are often built, operated, and maintained by local/regional agencies that are separate from the state DOT. Only a few DOTs operate transit systems, limiting state DOT influence over transit decisions. This limited influence creates challenges for DOTs when setting statewide transit goals. This digest addresses the need for a better understanding of current and best practices in statewide transit goal setting by state DOTs.

Research Approach

The findings in this report are drawn from three lines of research conducted over the summer and fall of 2010, as described below.

Literature Review of Statewide Transit Goal Setting Practices

The research team conducted a literature review of statewide transit goal setting practices. The research team researched LRSTPs and statewide transit plans around the country to understand current practices of transit goal setting. The research team reviewed existing literature about state DOT multimodal goal setting practices and performance-based planning, including *NCHRP Report 446: A Guidebook for Performance-Based Transportation Planning* (2000); *Analysis of State Long-Range Transportation Plans* by the Volpe Center for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) (2005); and the more recent NCHRP-sponsored *National Forum on Performance-Based Planning and Programming* in September 2010. The research team found little literature specifically focused on statewide transit goal setting. Most literature addressed the broader issues of performance-based planning at state DOTs. Where transit is discussed, it is often in relation to transit agency-established goals and transit agency performance-based planning.

Web Survey of Statewide Transit Goal Setting

The research team followed the literature review with an online survey of state DOTs on their transit goal setting. To achieve a higher response rate, this survey was conducted in conjunction with NCHRP Project 20-65, Task 29, "Public Transportation Performance Measures." After receiving input from the NCHRP 20-65 panel, the research team invited DOTs from all 50 states and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico to take the survey. The research team identified survey participants based on their membership in the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials' (AASHTO) Standing Committees on Public Transportation, Planning, and Performance Measurement. The research team asked each jurisdiction contacted to specify the individual(s) best suited to complete the survey. The research team contacted 238 representatives via email, approximately four to five representatives per jurisdiction. The research team received a response from 43 DOTs—a response rate of 83%. The survey used conditional logic to inquire about DOT use of statewide transit goals. The research team asked respondents a set of questions depending on whether or not their DOT had transit goals. If they had transit goals, the research team followed up about their development, use, and impact. If the DOT did not have transit goals, the research team asked whether they were considering having them in the future. Thirty states indicated they had transit goals and four indicated they were developing transit goals.

Interviews with Selected State DOTs

Based on the literature review and survey, the research team identified six DOTs that illustrate how states are setting statewide goals for transit. The research team contacted representatives of the

public transportation division (or equivalent) at each of these state DOTs for a follow-up interview about their development and use of statewide transit goals. The research team focused our interviews on their motivation for setting statewide transit goals and their process for developing such goals. The research team interviewed representatives from the following states:

- **California:** California DOT (Caltrans) has a robust set of transit goals in its LRSTP and is known for goal setting and use of performance measurement statewide, as well as for collaboration with multiple stakeholders.
- **Minnesota:** Minnesota DOT (Mn/DOT) has both strong transit goals and performance measures that are clearly linked. Its efforts are documented in statewide plans and performance reports. Interviewing Mn/DOT allowed for a greater understanding of these linkages and their importance.
- **Oregon:** Oregon DOT derives its transit goals from both its legislature and internal processes. Its goals are concrete and quantitative. The interview helped the research team to understand how these goals were set.
- **South Carolina:** South Carolina DOT (SCDOT) has a transit plan developed with the input of focus groups and surveys within each of its ten regions. SCDOT has a set of 11 goals (called "visions") for their transit system.
- **Virginia:** The *Virginia Performs* website documents state transit goals and performance measures, allowing users to find and examine plans, goals, performance reports, and budget documents. The research team focused the interview on the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT), which makes funding allocation decisions for the state's 60 public transportation providers and 55 human service transportation operators, with the majority of funding in urbanized areas.
- **New Jersey** (NJ DOT and NJ Transit): NJ Transit operates the nation's largest statewide public transit system. The interview helped clarify how groups with related responsibilities work together in a state where state representatives have a direct role in transit operations.

The research team conducted its interviews by phone in October 2010. The information from these interviews is included in the discussion of current and best practices later in this report. The literature review, web survey, and DOT interviews support the conclusions drawn in this report.

CHAPTER 2 CURRENT STATE OF THE PRACTICE

A recent analysis of LRSTPs by FHWA concludes that *today's* plans focus on highway travel because state DOTs are responsible for construction, maintenance, and operation of highways, and because of the dominance of motor vehicle travel (U.S. DOT, *Analysis of State Long-Range Transportation Plans,* 2005). State DOTs have limited responsibility when it comes to transit systems. This focus on highways often comes at the cost of public transit being similarly considered in statewide plans. The research confirmed this analysis but also finds that this practice is changing. Many states are now setting statewide transit goals.

Statewide Transit Goals

Statewide transit goals are broad statements of a desired end-state by the DOT for public transportation service in the state. Goals today take many forms, from very broad, multimodal goals to specific, often objective-like statements, particular to transit. Examples include

- "Maintain and expand the statewide public transit network."—Greater Minnesota Transit Plan (2010–2030)
- "A public transportation system in all parishes by 2020."—Five Year Strategic Plan (2011–2016), Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development
- "The public transportation system should be planned, operated, managed and financed cooperatively by public and private organizations representing statewide, regional and local interests."—1997 Oregon Public Transportation Plan

Frequently, transit is one transportation mode referenced in a broader multimodal goal that addresses the issue of mobility. In these cases, transit may only be specifically referenced in the policies or objectives supporting the goal. The research team saw this occurring more frequently in LRSTPs. Examples include

- Goal: provide mobility and transportation choices. Supporting policies include "support

public, specialized, and human services transit" and "support development of fixed-guideway transit services."—Wisconsin's Connections 2030: Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan (2009)
- Goal: "improve mobility, accessibility, reliability." Supporting strategies include, "make public transit more competitive" and "establish an information clearinghouse for aging and disabled transit and paratransit users."—New Jersey's Transportation Choices 2030 (2008 update)

The research team also noted a distinction between goals set for the state's transit system and goals that guide a state DOT public transportation division or state transit department's activities. For example, both Caltrans' Division of Mass Transit and Virginia's DRPT have agency/division missions and goals to guide state transit. These goals encompass both system performance and more internal agency actions, such as communication or research.

Virginia DRPT's agency goals as contained in the agency strategic plan (2010–2012) are to

- Assist in managing the growth in congestion on Virginia's highways.
- Improve access for the general public and businesses to alternative transportation (public transportation, carpools, vanpools, human service transportation, passenger rail, freight rail) and telecommuting.
- Seek the highest possible return on investment to maximize limited funding.
- Increase communications to the general public, businesses, and community decisionmakers on alternative transportation choices and telecommuting.

Few states had a clearly articulated set of statewide transit goals. Those that did usually had them documented via their statewide transit plan. South Carolina DOT provides a good example of this. As documented in SCDOT's 2008 Transit Plan, goals include the following:

- Economic Growth
  - Recognize and promote public transit as a key component of economic development initiatives, such as linking workers to jobs, supporting tourism, and accommodating the growth of South Carolina as a retirement destination through public/private partnerships.
  - Enhance the image of public transit through a comprehensive and continuing marketing/education program that illustrates the benefits of quality transit services.
- Sound Investment Approach
  - Ensure stewardship of public transit investments through a defined oversight program.
  - Increase dedicated state public transit funding to $35 million by 2030.
  - Make public transit reasonable and affordable by encouraging more local investment and promoting coordinated land use/transportation planning at the local level.
  - Utilize an incremental approach to new public transit investments that recognizes funding constraints and the need to maintain existing services.
- Viability of Transit
  - Provide quality, affordable public transit services using safe, clean, comfortable, reliable, and well-maintained vehicles.
  - Increase statewide public transit ridership on average by 5% annually through 2030.
  - Utilize different modes of public transit, including bus, rail, vanpool/carpool, ferry, and other appropriate technologies, corresponding to the level of demand.
- Accessibility to All
  - Provide an appropriate level of public transit in all 46 South Carolina counties by 2020 that supports intermodal connectivity.
  - Develop and implement a coordinated interagency human services transportation delivery network.

Web Survey Results

Based on the survey, most DOTs are involved in statewide transit goal setting. Seventy percent (of 43 DOTs) reported having documented statewide transit goals. Most of these DOTs have more than one transit goal and 20% report having seven or more goals. Goals were frequently developed as part of the LRSTP planning process. Several DOTs also developed state transit plans (also called strategic plans or management plans) that include transit goals. The planning process used to develop transit goals had only a weak correlation with the reported use and impact of the goals, but DOTs with state transit plans reported more frequently that their transit goals or performance measures had affected

agency investments than those whose goals were in LRSTPs. Of the 13 DOTs that reported not having transit goals, most (69%) have considered or are developing transit goals. Half of these DOTs report having broader multimodal goals that cover transit, at least implicitly.

The research team's survey identified some commonalities across statewide goals. Not surprisingly, qualitative goals were more common than quantitative ones. For example, qualitative goals such as North Dakota DOT's goal to "increase the mobility of transportation disadvantaged persons in all areas and localities" (State Transit Management Plan, 2010) were reported more commonly than quantitative goals, such as Connecticut DOT's goal to "double transit ridership by 2020" (Connecticut Climate Change Action Plan, 2005). Several DOTs reported having both qualitative and quantitative transit goals. Few state DOTs reported having transit goals that were time- or mode-specific (27 and 23%, respectively), such as Connecticut DOT's goal for doubling transit ridership by 2020 or Wisconsin DOT's goal to "support development of fixed-guideway transit services" (Connections 2030 Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan, 2009).

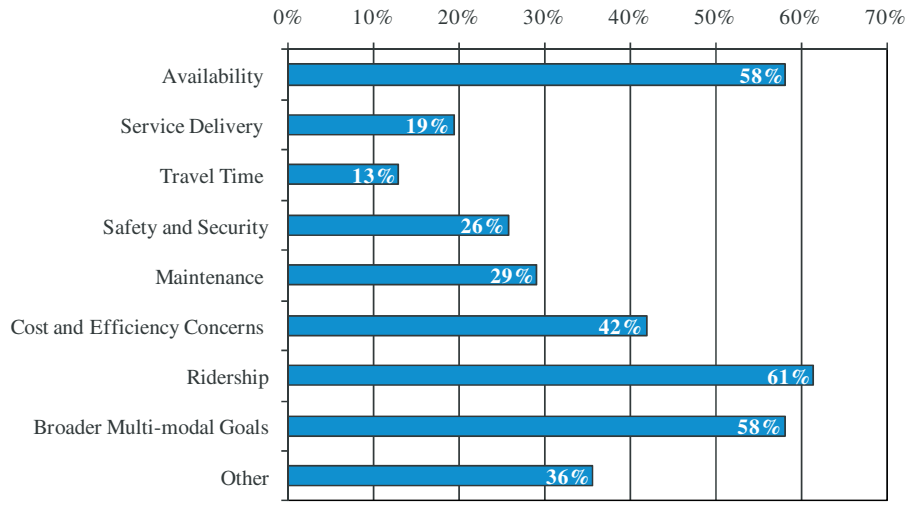
As shown in Exhibit 1, the more common statewide transit goals are focused on ridership, transit availability (e.g., frequency and accessibility of service, coverage area), and broader multimodal topics (e.g., providing transportation choices, sustainability, or land-use related). Cost and efficiency concerns are identified as goals to a lesser extent, as are maintenance and safety/security concerns. Statewide transit goals were least likely to address travel time and service delivery.

Performance-Based Planning Approach

The research team's survey indicated that the use of statewide transit goals is indicative of a greater shift to an objectives-driven, performance-based approach to transportation planning. Most state DOTs reported having set statewide transit goals under a broader initiative of performance-based planning. Over 80% of survey respondents are tracking their transit goals regularly. Over 75% of respondents are linking transit goals to performance measures. Half of state DOTs with transit goals reported use of these goals to guide or evaluate state investments in transit and to support allocation of transit funding. However, only a quarter of DOTs with transit goals said their goals had in fact affected investments.

The setting of statewide goals and use of performance measures are key components of a performance-based planning approach. Nearly all survey respondents considered their statewide transit goal setting to be a part of this approach and all DOTs the research team interviewed said they were

Exhibit 1 Topics addressed by transit goals, by percentage of responding DOTs with goals addressing each topic*



*Totals do not sum to 100 because respondents could select multiple responses

Exhibit 2 Performance-Based Planning

A performance-based approach to transportation planning includes the following steps:

1. **Develop goals and objectives for the transportation system, generally through extensive outreach to stakeholders and the public.** Goals are broad statements that describe a desired end state while objectives are the specific and measurable means for achieving the goals; together they define the agency's priorities and provide the foundation for the rest of the process.
2. **Select performance measures that can be used to track progress toward the goals.** Performance measures should be identified with stakeholder support, particularly those who will be providing data or will be monitored. Performance measures may need to be adjusted to reflect what information is available or can reasonably be collected and available analytical tools.
3. **Set performance targets for each performance measure.** Quantifiable targets allow an agency to track progress toward goals more specifically.
4. **Select strategies and allocate resources to achieve performance targets.** How agencies approach attainment of performance targets, goals, and objectives will depend on the type of planning process involved.
5. **Implement strategies.** In the case of state DOTs, this may be done by the agency itself or by another agency with funding and/or support from the DOT.
6. **Monitor, report, and evaluate performance.** There should be feedback loops in place that allow the evaluation of projects or agencies based on their performance and achievement of objectives.

aware of recent FHWA and FTA encouragement for an objectives-driven, performance-based approach to transportation planning. Exhibit 2 provides additional information describing elements making up this approach.

State DOT Connection to Transit

State involvement in transit service varies greatly. In a few states, the DOT or other state agency directly operates service. In most states, administered funding is the strongest connection between the state and local transit agencies. However, state DOTs often take an active interest in rural transit and interregional transit. These are areas over which they are more likely to have jurisdiction or some level of control (often through funding).

Operators

At least seven states directly own or operate some part of their state's transit system. New Jersey, for example, is the major public operator in the state. New Mexico operates a portion of the state transit system (i.e., interregional bus and rail service). In most states, transit service is the responsibility of a regional or local government (such as a city or county) or a special district or authority.

Funding

Transit funding comes from various federal, state, and local government (e.g., sales tax and farebox) sources. For urban areas, most transit funds are sent directly from FTA to the transit operator. For rural areas, state DOTs administer transit funds. This responsibility by the state can contribute to DOT interest in setting statewide transit goals, particularly where the DOT exercises discretion over funding distribution. Exhibit 3 describes the primary FTA funding programs.

Over the past two decades, FTA has been transferring administrative responsibility for many of its programs to the states. In each of the recent major transportation bills—ISTEA, TEA-21, and SAFETEA-LU—higher levels of funding have gone to transit, with states administering these funds. For instance, under SAFETEA-LU, states continue to administer the current formula programs under Sections 5311 (Non-urbanized), 5307 (Small Urban), and 5310 (Elderly and Disabled). In addition, programs under Sections 5316 (JARC) and 5317 (New Freedom Program) are now state administered. Among the states the research team interviewed, several mentioned the Formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas (Section 5311), which provides funding to states to support rural transit systems.

Exhibit 3 FTA Transit Funding Programs

Federal funding is often the primary source of transit funding for many states and operators. The major federal programs are as follows:

- **Section 5303, 5304, 5305 Metropolitan & Statewide Planning.** These programs provide funds to state DOTs (who may pass them along to MPOs) for cooperative, continuous, and comprehensive planning.
- **Section 5307 Urbanized Area Formula Program.** This is available to urbanized areas and governors (or their agencies) for transportation planning, capital expenses, and operating assistance (for areas with populations less than 200,000).
- **Section 5309 Transit Capital Investment Program.** This provides funds to public bodies and transit agencies for capital projects. Its three components are
  – New Fixed Guideway (New Starts and Small Starts): start or expand fixed guideway systems.
  – Fixed Guideway Modernization: capital projects related to existing fixed guideway systems.
  – Bus and Bus Facilities: used to purchase new and replacement buses and for investments in facilities.
- **Section 5310 Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities.** This provides funds to states in order to help non-profits assisting the elderly and those with disabilities in areas where existing services are not sufficient.
- **Section 5311 Formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas.** This provides funding to state DOTs to assist rural areas with populations less than 50,000 in providing public transportation services.
- **Section 5316 Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (JARC).** This provides funds to states and public bodies (who may pass funds along to non-profit organizations and transit operators) for assisting low-income individuals in their commutes.
- **Section 5317 New Freedom.** This provides funds to states and other public bodies for new public transportation services and alternatives to assist individuals with disabilities in meeting their transportation needs beyond requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Source: http://www.fta.dot.gov/funding/grants_financing_263.html

Several DOTs had recently or were in the process of altering their distribution methods for these funds, often to a more performance-based approach. States generally control much less funding for urban areas, because transit systems in larger urbanized areas usually have the authority to receive FTA funding directly (FTA, 2010). As a condition of receipt of federal funds, transit providers must report data to the National Transit Database. For Section 5311 recipients, the state DOT often handles the reporting, using data provided by the transit providers.

State funds can be an important source of matching funds for transit providers, particularly if they do not have other dedicated local funding sources. Depending on how the funding is sourced and distributed, the state DOT may control some of these funds, though often with certain legislative restrictions. For example, Caltrans is restricted in its use of state transportation funding to roads and interregional transportation and distributes urban and rural funds directly to regional transportation planning agencies (metropolitan and rural).

State DOT Public Transportation Divisions

Most state DOTs have an office or division of public transportation or public transit that focuses on providing transportation options for the traveling public. These public transportation divisions are often responsible for supporting transit around the state through the administration of federal and state transit funds, technical assistance, and integration of transit into statewide multimodal plans and projects. The research team saw at least one case (South Carolina) where there was a public transit section within the DOT's planning division, in addition to the DOT's Office of Public Transit. In that case, the planning division's transit section takes the lead on developing the goals for the transit plan. Where there is a public transit department separate from the DOT, the creation of a multimodal transportation plan is often a point of collaboration between the transit

department and other departments in the state. For example, Virginia DRPT is responsible for state planning for rail, public transit, and commuter services (e.g., carpools, telework, and other alternative modes). Virginia DRPT collaborates with Virginia DOT to set the state's transit goals in the LRSTP. The statewide plan addresses higher level policy issues for all transportation modes.

Human Service Transportation Coordination

SAFETEA-LU created a requirement that projects funded under the Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310), JARC (Section 5316), and New Freedom (Section 5317) programs be coordinated through a public transit-human services transportation plan. This plan must be developed at the local level with input from transportation and human services providers, non-profits, and other private and public organizations, as well as the public. These plans are meant to assess the needs of the transportation-disadvantaged and avoid duplication of services (FTA, 2005). To help fulfill this requirement, several states have created statewide coordinating bodies to provide services at a wider scale. These groups provide a forum for state DOTs to coordinate with transit providers, better informing planning efforts. For example, Mn/DOT cited its State Coordinating Council for Transportation Access as an impetus behind the state's extensive outreach to transit providers during the development of their statewide transit plan. Twenty-five states have created state coordinating councils (Farber, 2010).

Planning Processes

Transit goals are frequently developed and documented as part of the LRSTP process. The LRSTP establishes a state's strategic vision and direction for its transportation investments for at least a 20-year period. These plans may vary in content from state to state—from broad policy-oriented documents to a specific list of projects combined to create an overall transportation plan for the state (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010). Where transit goals are not developed as part of the LRSTP, they are frequently part of a shorter term strategic plan or an agency performance plan.

The research team found that several DOTs have also developed state transit plans as part of their planning processes. These plans go into more detail and generally involve closer collaboration with transit providers. The transit goals in these plans generally support the broader multimodal system goals in the LRSTP. By developing a separate transit plan, these states can describe in greater depth the needs of their state transit systems and often propose goals that are more detailed.

Transit plans are varied. In Minnesota, the state transit plan applies only to the non-metropolitan planning organization portions of the state. This corresponds to those areas for which Mn/DOT administers transit funding. Utah DOT takes a different approach with its Unified Transportation Plan, combining the regional transportation plans for the state's four metropolitan areas with a state plan for the non-metropolitan areas (Utah Department of Transportation, 2007). Of the DOTs the research team interviewed, only one (New Jersey) did not have a separate transit plan completed or in progress, but, in that case, the LRSTP includes extensive reference to transit in its goals and the major transit provider in the state, NJ Transit, was an equal partner in the plan's development.

Unlike in metropolitan areas, states have no federal requirement to update their LRSTPs on a particular schedule (though state transportation improvement plans must be updated every 4 or 5 years). Federal planning regulations require states to continually evaluate, revise, and periodically update the LRSTP; however, regulations do not prescribe a schedule or time frame for these updates (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010). In some states, an update schedule is mandated by statute or executive order, but in the literature review, the research team found various dates for the LRSTPs the research team consulted. Several of the states the research team spoke with were updating their LRSTP or transit plan; some were also developing transit plans for the first time (e.g., California's Statewide Transit Strategic Plan) or doing additional transit planning (e.g., Minnesota with its new Transit Investment Plan).

Transit plans appeared to be updated sporadically, relying more on whether a connection exists to the LRSTP. For example, Oregon DOT has several plans focusing on different modes that it updates periodically. Its transit plan is one of the oldest now, done back in 1997. Oregon DOT reported that its transit plan was well received when developed. It is scheduled for an update in the 2011–2013 biennium. Mn/DOT created its first transit plan in 2001 and updated it in 2009 as part of the LRSTP update.

CHAPTER 3 BEST PRACTICES IN STATEWIDE TRANSIT GOAL SETTING

Motivation for Transit Goal Setting

Although state DOTs generally do not have oversight of local transit systems, they do have increasing responsibility for the passenger transportation system. Policymakers are funneling more money to transit today than ever before as concerns about the environment, traffic congestion, and livability issues take precedence. At the same time, transit ridership is increasing and is likely to become an even more popular choice in the future as demographic trends and economic realities drive consumers to consider options other than driving. In response to these shifts, there is a growing expectation that state DOTs include transit in their transportation planning.

Involvement by the State Legislature

While nearly half (43%) of the survey respondents indicated that they are using statewide goals to fulfill legislative requirements, only three states indicated that their state legislature was involved in setting goals. In the research team's interviews, the DOTs in Oregon, California and Minnesota said their state legislatures were motivating forces behind the DOT's shift to a multimodal planning approach. For example, the Minnesota legislature created transit planning requirements for Mn/DOT.

Shift to Performance-Based Planning

The general shift in the transportation industry toward a performance-based planning approach provides additional motivation for state DOTs to set statewide transit goals. For example, Oregon DOT created its first transit plan in 1997 and is now preparing to update the plan in the next couple of years. Oregon DOT said a gradual shift to more performance-based transportation planning and a focus on issues of sustainability and livability provided motivation for the DOT's current round of goal setting. Similarly, in Minnesota, the original state statute that provided state funding for transit set a goal of providing transit in every county. As the state approached that goal (there is currently service in 75 out of the 80 counties), Mn/DOT thought it needed a new goal to work toward that captured the quality of service provided. Mn/DOT set a new goal of meeting rural transit needs as measured by service hours, not just the presence of transit service (as it was previously measured). The Minnesota Legislature codified the service hour goals and created a requirement that Mn/DOT develop a Transit Investment Plan to show how the state would meet 80% of transit need in the state by 2015 and 90% of need by 2025.

In Virginia, setting statewide transit goals and developing state transit plans came as part of the statewide shift to performance-based planning. Recently, Virginia has promoted taking a strict, business-like approach to government that emphasizes performance-based objectives. Every state department is required to create a strategic plan with performance measures. Virginia DRPT established short-term objectives and performance measures as part of its strategic plan, as well as broader multimodal goals in *VTrans 2035,* the LRSTP for the state. Virginia DRPT is developing a transit plan that will set long-term statewide transit goals.

Limited Transit Funding

Limited funding provides motivation for setting statewide transit goals. For example, South Carolina DOT set transit goals because it had limited transit dollars to allocate. SCDOT established goals to ensure limited funds were targeted, well-utilized, and effective to meet future demand. SCDOT ended up setting statewide transit priorities and a vision for South Carolina's transit systems. In Virginia, the LRSTP made transit funding an investment priority to ensure a state of good repair. This goal was the basis for a shift in the state's transit funding distribution formulas, providing a higher funding match for public transportation maintenance and repair projects.

Responsibility for Interregional Travel

Transit is often seen as more of a regional or local concern, but as South Carolina DOT noted, there is a statewide interest in the provision of transit because transit needs extend beyond the service areas of individual transit providers. Within a region, a local government may be responsible for transit service between providers, but when travel needs extend over regional boundaries, a state agency may be better positioned to step in and help with coordination activities. In California, a state statute restricts Caltrans' use of state transportation funding to roads and interregional transportation. Planning for interregional travel has traditionally focused on the roads

that Caltrans controls. However, a new state requirement (SB391)—that the next LRSTP meet state climate change goals—coupled with the rise of blueprint planning at the regional level that places a heavy emphasis on transit strategies has prompted a shift in statewide planning to focus on multimodal interregional travel in the current LRSTP. This change also created a need for data about interregional transit trips, giving added impetus for coordination with local transit providers.

Approaches to Statewide Transit Goal Setting

The research team's interviews revealed that the process of setting statewide transit goals is just as important as the goals themselves. How a DOT sets statewide transit goals is shaped by desired outcomes, the level of coordination between parties, and the multiple stakeholders involved. Although state DOTs have taken numerous approaches to setting goals, one overarching theme the research team saw is a high level of collaboration. No DOTs developed their statewide transit goals in isolation. The vast majority had extensive outreach to various stakeholders.

Outreach and Collaboration

There is extensive outreach surrounding goal setting approaches. Many state DOTs convened some form of an advisory committee that included transit providers and sometimes regional planning organizations. For example, Virginia DRPT recognized that the urbanized area around the Washington, DC, metropolitan area has a very different set of needs than the rest of the state. It created two working groups of stakeholders (e.g., operators and local and regional governments), one for northern Virginia and one for the rest of the state, to ensure that the state plan would meet the needs of all groups. In several states, regional planning organizations were often tapped to help guide local outreach surrounding the plans, such as for local stakeholder meetings or public workshops. South Carolina DOT incorporated extensive outreach to local stakeholders in its planning process. In developing the state's Multimodal Transportation Plan, SCDOT held two meetings in each of the state's 10 planning areas: one meeting with public officials and another with the public. In addition, it conducted public surveys and made follow-up calls in order to solicit feedback. After gathering initial input from the public and transit operators, SCDOT developed a system vision and transit goals. It then took this information back to the public and stakeholders to gather public comment. SCDOT compiled a matrix of all comments received and its responses to those comments, which was made available with the revised document. Exhibit 4 provides further detail on SCDOT outreach to non-traditional stakeholders.

Similarly, some state DOTs conduct outreach with other state agencies to ensure that transportation goals and investments are coordinated. For example, Mn/DOT builds on the state's coordination surrounding human service transportation outreach. In Oregon, the state's planning laws require all state and local plans—including the LRSTP—to be consistent with the state's 19 Statewide Planning Goals.

Exhibit 4 Outreach to Non-Traditional Stakeholders

To guide the development of its Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan, South Carolina DOT created a stakeholder group to guide the plan's development. The stakeholder group included a broad range of representatives from communities and groups around the state, including from the Catawba Indian Tribe (the state's only recognized tribe) and the Gullah Geechee Sea Island community, an African-American community with a distinct language.

Cooperation with Transit Providers

Transit providers are important participants in the goal setting process, because they will be the parties directly responsible for helping to meet those goals. This is most evident in New Jersey, where NJ Transit is the state's major public transit operator. NJ Transit acts as co-lead with NJ DOT in developing the LRSTP. In California, Caltrans is using the transit planning process as an opportunity to build better relationships with the state's many transit providers. Caltrans is developing a transit plan that can be used by transit providers, based on their ideas and needs. Though the plan is still in the works, Caltrans has reviewed numerous transit agency plans to identify commonalities in goals and objectives across providers. Caltrans' planning will add to these individual agency plans and sees the limited fund-

ing available as motivation for transit agencies to meet and collaborate.

Partnerships with Other Planning Activities

States are required to consult with MPOs and non-MPO officials during their LRSTP planning process. The research team saw examples where this collaboration extends to statewide transit goal setting. Most notably this occurs in New Jersey, where the entire state lies within one of three MPOs and NJ DOT has a history of coordinating with metropolitan planning activities. In South Carolina, 10 state-defined planning regions (councils of government) cover the entire state. SCDOT developed its Multimodal Transportation Plan and its Transit Plan in partnership with these planning regions and their transit providers. For the Statewide Transit Plan, each region developed a regional transit plan with identified needs and transit choices. SCDOT then built on the individual regional plans. The DOT took this bottom-up approach so as to ensure that the goals matched the differing local needs across the state and would meet the common goals of the different regions (South Carolina Department of Transportation, 2010). Going forward, the regional plans are to be updated in concert with the LRSTP update. Oregon DOT's Public Transit Division lacks the staffing that their MPOs and urban transit agencies have, so Transit Division staff look to those agencies to help provide transit data and expertise when developing the state transportation plans. In particular, the DOT has drawn on the planning expertise of both Tri-Met and Lane Transit, the major urban transit providers in the state.

Strategic Planning

In Virginia, the current transit goals were developed as part of the strategic planning process and then reviewed and affirmed by the LRSTP. This process meets the state requirement that every state agency prepare a budget and a strategic plan. The goals in that plan must be aligned with broader statewide goals and relate both to public transit within the state and the operation of the department (e.g., increasing communication about transportation choices and telecommuting). Virginia DRPT is completing a statewide transit plan that will identify more long-range transit goals. Virginia DRPT has also developed an asset management inventory system for transit providers to use, in order to allow both providers and DRPT to better forecast asset needs. This also supports the department and state goals around statewide "state of good repair." A similar initiative is a new requirement that transit providers develop 6-year transit development plans (TDPs). To ensure that transit agencies that receive funds from DRPT are doing multi-year planning and to help DRPT develop its own programs and budgets, DRPT now requires each of its transit grant recipients to prepare a TDP. TDPs will include individual system goals that match statewide transit goals, as well as any related local goals. In order to ensure that the TDPs are comparable and can be easily consolidated at the state level, Virginia DRPT produced a model TDP for transit providers to follow when developing their plans. In addition, DRPT recognized that not all providers have the capacity in-house to prepare these plans, and so it made its staff and consultants available to assist with TDP preparation where needed.

New Jersey DOT has developed a 10-year Capital Investment Strategy that addresses asset management and performance measures in support of its LRSTP. Given the nature of New Jersey's transit service (i.e., having one major provider), the Capital Investment Strategy does not focus heavily on transit. NJ Transit does not have a comparable mid-term plan like this currently, although it has made some effort in this area before. A similar approach with a more direct transit focus comes out of Minnesota, where Mn/DOT is developing a Transit Investment Plan. This plan will identify the funding needs to meet set percentages of transit demand in the non-metropolitan areas of the state in 2015 and 2025, as mandated by the state legislature.

Legislative Leadership and Executive Oversight

In some instances, the state legislature has set goals for state transit, though this does not preclude the state DOT from setting additional goals. In Minnesota, the legislature set a goal of having transit service in all counties in the original statute providing state transit funding. The DOT later supplemented this goal with a service hour goal, which the legislature has since incorporated into its mandated state transit goals. The legislature also directed Mn/DOT to develop a Transit Investment Plan to meet

certain thresholds of transit need within given timeframes.

Among the states that the research team interviewed, several highlighted the presence of a state Transportation Commission charged with setting statewide transportation policy and overseeing the state DOT. The research team found several instances where these advisory bodies take an active role in guiding DOT policy. For example, Virginia's Commonwealth Transportation Board adopted a Transit Sustainability and Investment Policy in 2008 that provides guidance to Virginia DRPT regarding (1) the allocation of transit funding and (2) setting policy goals for the funding to achieve, namely that the funding be used to

- Increase transit ridership per capita by at least 3% annually
- Maintain existing transit assets as the first funding priority
- Support improved land use, protect the environment, and maximize the use of available funding.

In Oregon, both the Oregon Transportation Commission and the state legislature are actively involved in statewide planning. The legislature has several planning requirements that affect transit, including (1) the general requirement that all plans be consistent with the Statewide Planning Goals, (2) required biennial reporting as part of the budget process, and (3) recent bills that have led to a new focus on a multimodal and balanced transportation system. The Transportation Commission oversees many of these mandates. It is supplemented with area commissions made up of local officials, planners, and public works employees. These deal largely with the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and have more recently begun considering multimodal solutions to issues in their areas.

Using and Achieving Transit Goals

What state DOTs do with their statewide transit goals once set is often closely related to their impetus for setting them. Transit goals established from a shift to performance-based planning are often likely to be ultimately directed toward guiding transit investments and funding allocation. Where goal setting was mandated by the legislature, the actual use may be more at the discretion of the DOT.

Shaping System Investments

Sixty percent of the survey respondents who have statewide transit goals use their goals in some way to guide transit expenditures. The effect is most evident in states where the state DOT has some level of transit funding control. Some examples of how goals are affecting transit investments are as follows:

- South Carolina DOT set several transit goals, including one to "increase statewide public transit ridership on average by 5% annually through 2030" (South Carolina Statewide Transit Plan, 2008). SCDOT indicated that this and its other goals are used to help determine how transit funding needs to be distributed throughout the state. SCDOT modified its Section 5311 funding formula to include ridership, in response to new data available through its operating statistics monitoring report.
- Oregon DOT's new Flexible Funds Program was created in response to the Oregon legislature's direction to invest in non-highway modes, including transit. The program supports sustainable non-highway projects that improve modal connectivity, sustainability, livability, and the transportation system's operation. Investment in the state's transit system will help Oregon DOT meet its statewide transit goals relating to modal split, ridership, and service availability (Oregon Department of Transportation, 2010).
- Virginia DRPT updates its annual program application to reflect department priorities. DRPT then puts a draft of the application out to the grantees and holds workshops about it (prior to the actual application period) to ensure that there is collaboration and agreement around those priorities. DRPT has found that this leads to better applications.

Another way that statewide transit goals shape transportation system investments is by using the goals to inform short-term plans that are more directly tied to project implementation. New Jersey DOT saw its LRSTP goals setting the stage for shorter term plans like the Capital Investment Strategy, individual program areas for the State Transportation Improvement Program, and the 1-year annual capital program approved by the legislature. New Jersey's Capital Investment Strategy is notable for being a mid-term plan, between the 4-year STIP and 20-year LRSTP.

Influencing Goal Realization

Given the limited role most state DOTs have in providing transit service, DOTs often have little influence in affecting the realization of statewide transit goals. Caltrans expects that the outcome of their goal setting process will be a set of goals that individual operators can choose from to use for their individual transit systems and less a set of statewide goals that will inform state transit policy. Caltrans plays more a customer service role with regard to transit than that of a regulator or funding distributor, because of the state's heavy focus on having local control. Caltrans focuses its transit planning on interregional trips and on making a planning document as useful as possible to transit providers and regional planning agencies. As in other states, statewide transit goals in California are expected to help guide the allocation of what limited funds the state DOT does control.

Public Accountability

Often as part of a larger focus on performance-based planning, many DOTs consider their goals to be part of being accountable to the public. By setting goals, linking them to performance measures, and then reporting on those measures regularly, the intention is to demonstrate what the DOT, and the state and transit operators more broadly, are doing to advance public transit. The accountability generally comes in the form of public information, and less frequently in the form of repercussions for under-performing systems. Public reporting can also validate state support for transit. In the case of Minnesota, the original statewide goal of transit service in every county provided an easy measure that could be used to rally legislative support for additional transit funding. In Oregon, the state's very specific quantifiable targets associated with their transit goals (e.g., "increase per capita transit hours in MPO areas from 0.96 to 1.7 hours per capita by 2010") have helped to create an expectation that people could call attention to when looking to increase transit service (Oregon Department of Transportation, 1997).

CHAPTER 4 CONTINUED CHALLENGES

State DOTs continue to face challenges in terms of setting statewide transit goals. The discussion below addresses some of these challenges.

Overcoming a Focus on Highways

A recurring theme the research revealed was that state DOTs are reluctant to set statewide transit goals because they do not directly operate transit. Instead, their focus is on highways—planning, building, operating, and maintaining them. This is their area of expertise and often they feel ill-equipped to set transit goals. From more than one survey respondent and interviewee, the research team heard that, because most funding went to highways, so did their planning focus. Moreover, because they had limited involvement with transit providers, they had little comfort in setting statewide goals for providers. To meet this challenge, state DOTs have taken different approaches. One survey respondent indicated their state DOT recently mandated the creation of a transit division, separate from the department's broader planning work, solely to consider transit issues and engage providers. This example is similar to what the research team heard in Virginia, where the state created a separate Department of Rail and Public Transportation in 1992. Both Virginia DRPT and Virginia DOT are overseen by the State Secretary of Transportation and the Commonwealth Transportation Board. The two departments work jointly to develop the LRSTP.

Of those DOTs currently developing transit goals, some of the reasons the research team heard included an increasing interest in transit—on the part of stakeholders or the legislature. This interest is mostly a result of increases in transit service and funding. In California, the increasing emphasis on transit statewide comes in part from the state's efforts to address climate change and greenhouse gas emissions. The result has been that Caltrans, traditionally seen as very highway-centric, is now trying to build stronger relationships with transit providers. In developing its new transit plan, Caltrans is trying to make it a document with both state and local ownership, so it is taking a participatory, consensus-building approach that reaches out to as many transit agencies as possible.

Linking Transit Goals to Funding Decisions

The research indicates it is as yet unclear to many the effect that statewide transit goals have on agency investment decision-making. When the research team's survey asked how transit goals are used, many respondents indicated that they were guiding or supporting state transit investments or funding deci-

sions. However, when asked later in the survey whether transit goals had affected agency investments, fewer respondents said they had. Where transit goals (and other performance-based elements, such as performance measures) have affected investments, they have helped to target assistance toward lagging systems (e.g., in Wisconsin and Minnesota) or identify aging vehicles that may need replacement (e.g., in Oregon and Maine). In states where the investment impact of transit goals has been less evident, respondents indicated goals were used more for public accountability or for advocating on behalf of transit system expansion. For example, Missouri DOT said it used the performance measures linked to their transit goals to provide evidence of transit ridership and availability when requesting additional state transit funding.

Data Availability

Several state DOTs noted the difficulty in setting accurate and achievable goals where there were limits in available data. Transit agencies do not always provide data to state DOTs and, without current and verifiable data, DOTs are limited in setting quantifiable transit goals. Many states have taken steps to address this challenge. For example, Mn/DOT has developed a robust data reporting program. Washington State DOT requires transit agencies around the state to provide updated figures in accordance with their TDPs on an annual basis. This is rolled into one state report provided to the legislature. As data sharing improves, this challenge will become more surmountable.

Funding and Staffing

Funding was a common issue raised by the interviewees. This was particularly evident in states with more limited or uncertain funding sources. SCDOT said it had to be realistic in what it could expect of their transit providers in meeting statewide goals, considering limited funding and staffing demands. As performance-based planning becomes more ingrained at state DOTs, available resources might be better allocated in the future; however, currently funding and staffing concerns are still a challenge.

Sources of Information

Throughout the research, the research team heard over and again that state DOTs were in need of additional information and support in setting and using statewide transit goals. Most DOTs turn to the same sources of information (e.g., guidance and documentation from FHWA, FTA, NCHRP, and TCRP reports). Several DOTs suggested that more information about what other states are doing would be beneficial. DOTs generally look to other states they consider their peers in confronting challenges. For example, Mn/DOT said it often looks to Ohio DOT because the two states share many common characteristics. SCDOT informed the research team they looked to DOTs like Iowa and North Carolina for their experiences.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

The number of DOTs setting statewide transit goals is growing. Many DOTs indicated they were updating their transit goals or developing a transit plan to develop more extensive or specific goals. Plans in progress identified by the research team include the following:

- Virginia DRPT and Caltrans are preparing transit plans.
- Oregon DOT and Florida DOT are preparing to update their transit plans.
- Nebraska Department of Roads is updating the LRSTP and will include transit goals.

The research team saw many of the same challenges across states, frequently related to funding and data issues. Similarly, DOTs encounter common challenges in exerting their authority to set statewide transit goals and engendering support for monitoring and evaluation of these goals. In meeting these challenges, DOTs noted opportunities to support improved statewide transit goal setting.

Transit planning is not fully integrated into statewide performance-based planning efforts when compared with other parts of the transportation system. As transit becomes an increasingly attractive option for meeting statewide transportation goals, including those of livability and quality of life, transit planning needs to become better integrated into today's statewide performance-based planning efforts. In particular, transit goals need to be effectively linked to performance measures and to the programming and project prioritization process. Performance measurement in many DOTs is more advanced than goal setting, although many DOTs are still looking for measures that capture meaningful

information about the transit system, particularly for rural transit providers. Finally, DOTs expressed a strong desire for support in setting statewide transit goals—the link between the state and local transit providers should be made more explicit.

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