

Chapter 4: Foundational Ideas and the Vision

The key principle underlying the transportation plan is that it must work for the circumstances in our community. Therefore the primary goals and their contributing actions rest on assumptions based not only on our past experience, but also on the forethought and flexibility of our policy makers at multiple levels of government, of the leadership of private sector enterprises which use and help maintain our network, and the everyday work of the professional transportation staff in local government and other agencies where the evaluation of success or failure is a constant process.

This chapter establishes the plan vision for our transportation system, based on community experience and expectations for the future. This includes past experience as well as consciousness of emerging and likely changes in transportation infrastructure and operation. It also includes our most realistic assumptions about financing the transportation future we want to emerge over the next thirty years. Our transportation vision was formulated through consideration of these aspects of the transportation system and the contributions of the public, transportation stakeholders and professionals:

Our transportation system increases options for mobility and provides equitable access in support of a safe, healthy, livable, sustainable and vibrant region.

Redefining the Vision

Over the last decade the framing of a vision for the transportation system crystalized into a narrowed path forward. Current conditions put the emphasis on a few key priorities for the transportation system:

- Keep the current transportation footprint: do not add facilities unless essential;
- Maintain what we have to the greatest extent feasible;
- Search out opportunities for public-private partnerships to distribute costs;
- Pursue joint projects among the local governments to widen project benefits and distribute costs;
- Adhere to this framework absent a substantial and lasting change in local or regional economic activity that justifies new transportation infrastructure.

This vision, focused on limitations and lessened expectations, reflects a narrow historical slice of the community's experience. However, a vision grounded in a regressive time period cannot address change anticipated as a result of new technologies, new types of economic activity and new local approaches to land use, economic development and growth. Therefore the plan considers these factors in evaluating our transportation future, and also takes note of emerging technologies and their capacity to remake our understanding of transportation network functions and access.

The economic instability and public policy concerns arising in recent years emphasize a shift in local transportation project focus. In the post-recession period, the extraordinary growth that led to the building boom of the 80s and 90s has transitioned to a position of caution in public investment, and sharpened focus on compact and sustainable development. The current Bloomington and Normal comprehensive plans are steeped in this principle, and both now strongly advocate for infill redevelopment and greater development densities. This view, endorsed by the public as well as elected officials, is the impetus behind a turn to system maintenance as a critical approach to transportation, rather than our earlier practice of continued system expansion out of context with adjacent land use and traffic volume.

Although the plan estimates projects costs and available funding to demonstrate fiscal constraint, the metrics used to evaluate performance do not include transportation costs. Although cost is certainly an acute concern, both in terms of public cost for sustaining the system, and the cost for its users, anticipated cost too often stymies projects with transformational potential. Priority should be evaluated not only in terms of costs, but balanced with reasonably expected benefits of the acceptance of new ideas and methods. In that spirit, another element of the regional vision can be added to those reflected the difficult recent past. In looking ahead, the vision and goals encompasses the following additional guidance:

- Evaluate and, where beneficial, implement new developments in transportation technology and infrastructure, where such developments are considered likely to benefit the community to a greater extent than that which they replace.

The plan makes assumptions regarding the continued availability of key resources and community partnerships which to date have supported the transportation planning process and enabled the strategies and goals in earlier plans. Every participant in our planning process recognizes that current circumstances that may profoundly alter the long-standing support transportation planning and implementation have received over the last thirty years. As this plan was developed from the policy guidelines and priorities determined by the outreach process, what were once bedrock programs sustaining our transportation network are in the process of deep change or disappearance. Each of the goals in this plan is couched in the reality that practices used to design, build, maintain and pay for the components of the transportation network may not survive to the next update of this plan in 2021, let alone to its horizon year of 2045.

Anchoring the Framework

The goals, strategies and tasks, and the means to evaluate their achievement and effectiveness are grounded in the following assumptions:

- Population change in Bloomington – Normal and McLean County will continue at the more measured pace experienced in the last decade²¹, lessening the need for substantial physical expansion of the City and Town;

²¹ We will re-examine this issue after the results of the upcoming 2020 Census are made public, likely to coincide with the next update of the Long Range plan.

- Bloomington and Normal, in implementing the policies outlined in their respective comprehensive plans, will permit new development or re-development only in areas already within their corporate boundaries and already connected to municipal services in whole or in part. In the municipal comprehensive plans, these areas are defined as infill or Tier I growth areas, which are expected to accommodate anticipated growth to 2035.
- Municipal infrastructure decisions and implementation, including those relating to transportation, will support local and regional goals for sustainability and resiliency, and incorporate new technologies as they are proven appropriate to community needs.
- New transportation technologies will be evaluated first with respect to their capacity to improve the safety and security of network users and workers.
- New technologies will also be carefully evaluated regarding their capacity to lessen the volume of greenhouse gases and other pollutants released into the community, to improve the health and quality of life of all.
- Local and State government will develop cooperative strategies to fund needed projects, including direct financial participation by private sector establishments, with all participants agreeing to put forward economically and technically feasible proposals consistent with broad community needs.
- Although Federal-level transportation funding will change in focus or quantity, in some instances in response to changing transportation technology, broad regional and State priorities will continue to influence national transportation policy through Congressional action.

As the implementation and evaluation of this plan begins, the assumptions discussed here will also be revisited and evaluated. As with the land use plan reviewed in Chapter 2 and the population and growth estimates discussed in Chapter 3, revisions to the framework of assumptions will be assessed for their impact, and resulting changes in impacts will be addressed through an amendment to this metropolitan transportation plan.

Aspirational Assumptions

- Employing more compact forms of development at somewhat greater densities will permit wider use of transit-oriented development to improve access between residences and workplaces, schools and shops, and neighborhoods to one another and the wider community and region.
- Local government and associated agencies will create and follow a process to seek new and stable types of fund sourcing, including private sources, to supplant or replace traditional funding which has been reduced or eliminated.

From that foundation, regional transportation priorities have been developed and defined based on public input and consideration of potential constraints imposed by fiscal and sustainability

issues. This chapter also catalogues the goals, strategies, performance measures and targets for accomplishing the conditions in the vision, grouped into the following five subject areas.

- **System Preservation** – refers to the strong public preference that the transportation system be maintained and kept at approximately its current extent. Investment in transportation should focus on maintaining the existing system in good repair, and on maximizing the utility of the system for all users. This element of the vision is strongly supported by the Bloomington and Normal comprehensive plans.
- **Mobility, Access and Choice** – considers how the transportation system can improve options for any person to travel at will and for any purpose throughout the community, and beyond. Although the terms *mobility* and *access* are often used in reference to transportation options for people with challenges or disabilities, older people, people living in poverty and others with difficulty in fulfilling their need for transportation, they also express what is needed by all users of the transportation system.
- **Health and Safety** – Safety is a common topic in transportation, and is always a key concern in managing the system. This issue is central in transitioning to Complete Streets, and embracing the elimination of traffic fatalities through a commitment to the Vision Zero process and outcome. Coordinating the interrelationships between transportation and public health is an emerging discipline requiring continuing discussion among planners, transportation managers and health care experts in multiple specialties. The intent is the use of various transportation modes to offer pathways to better health for the public, including the promotion of people-powered transportation modes such as walking and bicycling.
- **Sustainable Transportation** – The interaction of the transportation system and the patterns of land use in the community are considered in this topic. As noted above, the municipal comprehensive plans testify to the determination of the communities to pursue sustainable growth strategies. A key concern is keeping incorporated areas compact and economically as well as environmentally sustainable. Environmental sustainability issues arising from the transportation system include air quality, stormwater management and land consumption.
- **Freight** – as of November 2017 MCRPC is awaiting the final report on the freight study conducted over the past year. Some of the preliminary findings are used in this plan as first steps towards management of freight in the area. Upon completion and review of the freight report, and the freight section of Chapter 5 will be amended to reflect the full understanding of freight conditions, conflicts and operations.