

8.0 Seven Planning Factors

In 1991, Congress enacted the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, or ISTEA. This legislation dramatically changed the manner in which appropriations for transportation improvements were handled in that it clearly recognized the importance of modes of travel other than the automobile. This milestone legislation was reinforced in 1998 with the passage of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). This successor to ISTEA made it clear that transportation planning must take into account other modes. Unfortunately, at this time there is no new legislation passed by Congress to extend or build upon TEA-21.

8.1 Economic Vitality

The Gaston MPO has worked extensively over the years with NCDOT and other state and federal agencies on transportation projects that enhance the economic prosperity of the County.

A significant development is the formation of a regional transportation alliance involving the four MPOs in the Charlotte Region. The new organization, CRAFT (Charlotte Regional Alliance for Transportation), is committed to ensuring that the economic growth and vitality of the entire area will be complemented by a transportation system developed in a regional manner. The alliance marks a coordinated effort to guide the Charlotte region in broader planning to serve the rapidly merging urban areas. The four MPOs in the Charlotte region Cabarrus-Rowan, Gaston, Rock Hill-Fort Mill and Mecklenburg-Union have signed a Memorandum of Agreement for working cooperatively on regional transportation issues and have begun meeting on an adopted schedule.

Also important is the completion of 1-485, and widening of 1-77 and 1-85. These freeways will continue to provide important interstate access to other parts of the country and benefit the Charlotte region's economy with improved transportation for goods and tourism. The implementation of an efficient transportation system including mass transit options will preserve the area's reputation as a desirable place to locate businesses.

8.2 Safety and Security

GUAMPO takes a number of measures to increase the safety and security of the transportation system for all users. NCDOT produces an annual inventory of high accident locations to identify where there may be a need for safety improvements. Projects are then developed to improve the conditions. NCDOT also has a safety program to address these needs.

The Gaston MPO will begin to look at other projects including the camera enforcement programs aimed at reducing heavy traffic congestion during peak hour. As the City of Gastonia is in the final stage of completing a city-wide signalization upgrade to fiber optic cable, camera enforcement programs will be possible in 2006. Further efforts supported by the Gaston MPO to ensure safety and security include: the construction of median guardrails on freeways, the replacement of deficient bridges and other roadway structures, the construction of sidewalks on all non-freeway road projects, the addition of bike lanes on roadways, and programs to improve safety at school crossings.

8.3 Accessibility and Mobility Options

Increasing the accessibility and mobility options available to people and for freight is one of the most important objectives of GUAMPO. This is achieved by: integrating land use and transportation planning, providing the necessary resources to enhance the existing transportation system, expanding the existing transit system and implementing fixed route mass transit options.

Land use and transportation policies are being instituted that support transit ridership, walking and bicycling, and reducing the dependency on the automobile. More compact development patterns at activity centers and along transit corridors will make the transit system more economically self-sustaining. In neighborhoods, transit-oriented development that emphasizes a mix of uses and easy pedestrian access to shopping and services could reduce the need to drive.

8.4 Environmental Protection, Energy Conservation Promotion, and Quality of Life Improvements

The Gaston MPO is committed to protecting and enhancing the environment, promoting energy conservation, and improving the quality of life for citizens living, working or visiting the area. The member governments within the urban area look to protect its important resources by enacting environmentally sensitive land use policies, transportation choices, and promoting air quality education programs. Land use decisions are being made to direct growth to reduce travel demand, which in turn leads to energy conservation and reduced pollutants.

8.5 System Integration and Connectivity

GUAMPO has begun to develop and support programs and projects that enhance the development, integration, and connectivity of a multi-modal transportation system. The current proposed Gaston East-West Connector (toll facility) and the expansion of the Charlotte Douglas International Airport provides a critical link for movement of goods between rail, highway, and air.

Ambitious transit plans in Charlotte-Mecklenburg will provide many opportunities for the region's population to enjoy a more mobile system to access the entire Region. Park-and-ride lots will provide auto commuters an opportunity to access the current bus system and will be available for the planned rapid transit system. Bike racks on buses allow people the flexibility to access bus stops by bike, improving the efficiency of the system. Gaston MPO policy to add sidewalks to non-freeway roadways enables citizens to leave their vehicle at home for short trips.

8.6 Efficient System Management and Operations

Congestion Management System

In 2005-2006 the Gaston MPO Technical Coordination Committee will begin preparation analysis of a Congestion Management System in Cooperation with the North Carolina Department of Transportation. The system will identify improvements to reduce traffic congestion at intersections throughout the urban area.

A. Traffic Monitoring System

North Carolina Department of Transportation completes bi-annual traffic counts for the entire Gaston Urban Area.

B. Safety Management System

The MPO works with NCDOT's Traffic Engineering Branch in implementing safety improvements on the State highway system.

8.7 Preservation of the Existing System

GUAMPO has worked with NCDOT for many years in establishing and maintaining a transportation planning program that incorporates a standard set of planning principles. These planning principles require the development of a safe and efficient transportation system by: maximizing utilization of the existing facilities, increasing operational efficiency and altering travel demands when appropriate, and minimizing adverse impacts to the natural, social and economic environments. The MPO is also committed to providing the necessary resources for maintaining and preserving the existing and future transportation system.