

## TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

### Clackamas County TSP

White Paper #5.2b - DRAFT

National Transportation Policy

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## Introduction

This paper provides an overview of national transportation policy with respect to how it might affect alternatives planning development activities during the County's Transportation System Plan (TSP) update process. The paper identifies key initiatives, trends over short-, mid- and long-term timeframes, and concludes with recommendations for the County to consider in creating its vision and goals for the TSP.

## Initiatives

At the national level, transportation policy is in a state of flux as the next transportation authorization bill is being debated. The upcoming presidential and congressional elections in 2012 could further alter the policy direction. Federal policy is developed through a complex network of agencies and organizations, and includes hundreds of initiatives that provide guidance to local communities, States and other Federal offices. This section presents the current key issues in national transportation policy, drawing on material from Federal offices of transportation, as well as policy briefs prepared by national research, advocacy and other "think-tank" organizations.

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## ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

There is general scientific consensus that the earth is experiencing a long-term warming trend and that human-induced increases in atmospheric greenhouse gases (GHG) are the predominant cause. In the United States, transportation is the largest source of GHG emissions, after electricity generation. Within the transportation sector, cars and trucks account for a majority of emissions. Opportunities to reduce GHG emissions from transportation include switching to alternative fuels, using more fuel efficient vehicles, and reducing the total number of miles driven. Transportation planning activities, which influence how transportation systems are built and operated, can contribute to these strategies. In addition to contributing to climate change, transportation infrastructure is vulnerable to predicted changes in sea levels and increases in severe weather and extreme high temperatures. Long-term transportation planning will need to respond to these potential threats.

## GOODS MOVEMENT

In the past century foreign trade has increased from just over 10 percent of the national gross domestic product to nearly 30 percent, a trend that is likely to accelerate in the years ahead.<sup>1</sup> Growth industries in the U.S. have shifted away from manufacturing to global services and trade. Federal policy is focused on facilitating safe, efficient and environmentally friendly movement of goods to and from international trade centers. The U.S. freight system faces significant capacity constraints at key gateways that will require effective policy solutions coordinated with both public and private parties. Long-term policy changes are likely to include facilitation of public private partnerships, improvements in freight infrastructure and coordination with regional passenger rail planning.

## LIVABILITY

Livability represents the quality and location of transportation facilities and their relationship to job access, affordable housing, quality schools, active transportation and safe streets. This is a cross-cutting policy initiative that reaches beyond transportation to housing and environmental issues, blending many of the initiatives in this section such as safety, context sensitive solutions and public health. Livability can also include improvements in public transit access, safety and non-motorized travel for rural communities. Backed by national cooperation between the U.S. Departments of Transportation (DOT), Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), livability is likely to continue as a key theme in transportation policy and funding.

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<sup>1</sup> America 2050 (2010) "America 2050 Prospectus". Accessed online 2011 at <http://www.america2050.org>.

Recent competitive grants through the partnership's sustainable communities<sup>2</sup> program demonstrated how a competitive, performance-based national program can be used to support local, regional, and national transportation goals.

#### PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION

The USDOT is working to assess and improve the use of performance measurement systems to encourage accountability, efficiency, and enhanced operations. Performance measures and related performance management systems are being increasingly used to monitor performance of transportation networks relative to a variety of key goals, evaluating projects to see what has been successful, and using these observed outcomes to plan for future improvements. Federal funding programs have begun to explore the use of performance measures in project and program development. National organizations have called for more robust performance measurement to prioritize key investments<sup>3</sup>. The FTA is also developing new performance measures to reflect interest in national environmental, social and economic goals. Performance categories will need to meet the unique demands of different travel modes, and could include measures such as reliable on-time performance, congestion mitigation, safety and environmental benefits, improved transportation choices, accessibility and mobility options for communities with limited options, and reduced energy use. Examples of project or program-level measures include distance from major destinations such as schools and employment centers or transit facilities, ability to provide a missing link within the bicycle and pedestrian network, and other measures that provide insight into whether a project or program enhances accessibility to major destinations and transportation facilities.

#### TRAFFIC CONGESTION

Federal policy continues to focus efforts on reducing traffic congestion on the nation's highways. Operational improvements include real-time traveler information, incident management, transportation demand management and road pricing. Moving vehicles, people and freight throughout the network is being furthered by the development and integration of performance measurement to reflect national priorities (see performance measurement paragraph above), data

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov/>

<sup>3</sup> National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission (2008), "Transportation for Tomorrow". Accessed online September 3, 2011 at [http://transportationfortomorrow.com/final\\_report/index.htm](http://transportationfortomorrow.com/final_report/index.htm)

sharing and creating effective multimodal connections. National studies have explored policy and technical tools available to apply use-based highway pricing to relieve highway chokepoints and improve trade flows, commutes, reduce emissions and encourage use of public transportation.<sup>4</sup>

## CONTEXT SENSITIVE SOLUTIONS

The objective of Context Sensitive Solutions is to improve environmental quality as a result of transportation decision making by incorporating context sensitive solutions principles. These principals include incorporating shared stakeholder visions, demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of contexts of decision making, fostering a collaborative process that achieves consensus, and shaping effective transportation solutions that preserve or improve community and natural environments.

## PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE PLANNING

The USDOT continues policies for non-motorized travelers that emphasize pedestrians and cyclists in federally funded projects, enhance the safety of cyclists and pedestrians, and encourage investments that go beyond minimum requirements to provide facilities for cyclists and pedestrians of all ages and abilities. The department also supports policy that extends FTA funding to pedestrian and bicycle improvements around a transit stops.

## SAFETY

National efforts to integrate safety into the transportation planning process continue at many levels. The USDOT works with states and regions to achieve short- and long-term goals of improved safety for motorists, transit riders, cyclists and pedestrians. Safety is expected to remain a key issue, bolstered by new partnerships in the public and private sectors, developments in data collection and analysis, and increased attention on integrating multimodal transportation networks that promote safe and efficient travel for all users. In the safety arena, the new Highway Safety Manual plays a key role in providing policy makers, planners, and engineers with tools to truly assess the safety tradeoffs between different approaches and strategies.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

## MEGAREGIONS AND MULTISTATE PROJECTS

Developing and coordinating multi-state projects is an emerging national issue. Current research has touched on funding, planning, decision making and efficient management for projects crossing jurisdictions. Expediting the project delivery process could have enormous cost savings in both short- and long-term timeframes. Organizations such as America 2050 have stressed the importance of megaregions, which are metropolitan areas where the boundaries between cities, suburbs and towns have blurred together to create an expansive metropolitan network of economic, social and infrastructure links, which brings with it special considerations for regional planning. America 2050 suggested a “Cascadia” megaregion encompassing cities and communities near Vancouver, B.C., Seattle, Portland, Salem and Eugene, Oregon. Whether and how the region grows is to be seen, but the concept illustrates the infrastructure and travel links between these areas and the importance of aligning funding and policy for regionally supportive investments.<sup>5</sup>

## Trends

The initiatives above summarize key parts of today’s national transportation policy. These initiatives are likely to change somewhat over the timeframe of the Clackamas County TSP. While there is no crystal ball available, general assumptions about trends are collected below in short-, mid- and long-term timeframes.

### SHORT TERM: 1-2 YEARS

The delay in passing the next transportation authorization bill will leave policies and programs largely unchanged. The development of national performance measures and standards for comparing investment choices have been discussed for inclusion in the legislation, and are likely to be included in the next transportation authorization bill. Understanding and applying these mode-neutral performance measures could be increasingly important for local communities.

### MID TERM: 5-10 YEARS

After passing the transportation authorization bill, major initiative areas are unlikely to change, but economic recovery following the recession is expected to continue with a particular focus on linking transportation investments to performance measures related to jobs, productivity, trade and cost effectiveness. Policies important to improving the efficiency of existing systems such as safety, ITS

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<sup>5</sup> America 2050 (2010) “America 2050 Prospectus”. Accessed online 2011 at <http://www.america2050.org>.

and goods movement will continue to play an important role. Environmental issues and relationship to land use development may be secondary to economic recovery, but will develop as the recovery takes place over the long-term.

#### LONG TERM: 10-20 YEARS

While the priorities in the mid-term period – jobs, output, productivity, goods movement and safety – will continue to play a key role in Federal transportation policy, other issues will also begin to emerge. New policy areas aside, the continued focus on vehicle emissions and other environmental issues, livability, and planning for megaregions may develop even more robust policy initiatives that guide the nation’s adjustment to shifts in industry and trade, climate change and travel congestion.

## Recommendations

With respect to national transportation policy, Clackamas County can both provide input regarding the process and prepare for these key policy initiatives and developments.

- Inform the debate over national priorities to emphasize local transportation goals and objectives. Continue to be actively involved with local, regional and State-level planning in Oregon to communicate local goals and needs, and leverage inter-agency cooperation to attract and prepare for future investment.
- Enhance and expand a performance-based planning process that corresponds to local and regional goals, identifies projects that meet these goals, and communicates project benefits at the national level.
- Explore the use of performance measures in project and program development. One approach is partnering with Metro to assess transportation performance through a variety of evaluation tools. Examples include dynamic transportation analysis models to measure travel time reliability, applying multimodal level of service measures, economic impact analysis, quantitative exposure-based safety analysis and accessibility performance measures. Performance measures that address the topic of accessibility may include travel times to schools, employment centers and transit facilities, and connections in the pedestrian and bicycle network.
- Plan for transportation investments that improve environmental quality from current trends. Clackamas County and other communities in Oregon are leaders in planning that steers the benefits of transportation and land use investments to environmental, social

and economic goals. These measures should clearly communicate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and link with travel demand management, linking transportation and land use, comprehensive travel pricing policies, clean transit vehicles and non-motorized travel.

- Continue to pursue the early established goals of linking land use, transportation, public health, and safety into the assessment of transportation projects, programs, policies, studies, pilot projects, and implementation tools.