

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) must jointly review and evaluate the transportation planning process for each Transportation Management Area (TMA) no less than once every four years to determine that the metropolitan transportation planning process meets the planning requirements of title 23 U.S.C. 134 (Metropolitan Planning) and 49 U.S.C. 5303 (Federal Transit Act).

The following report summarizes an on-site MPO certification review conducted by the FHWA and FTA in May 6-8, 2009. The following certification review report encompasses many of the statutory provisions of title 23 U.S.C. 134 (Metropolitan Planning) and 135 (Statewide Planning), Clean Air Act requirements (CAA), as well as other federal laws and regulations including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, ADA, and the SAFETEA-LU Highway Act of 2005 (amending title 23 U.S.C.134) statutory requirements. This certification report will serve to support the FTA and FHWA joint STIP planning “finding” required at least once every four years as cited within 23 CFR 450.218 under the joint FTA and FHWA metropolitan and statewide transportation planning regulations.

The Corpus Christi MPO documents that were reviewed prior to the FHWA and FTA on-site certification review (as part of a desk audit review completed in April 2009) include the: 1) FY 2008-11 Corpus Christi Transportation Improvement Program (TIP); 2) FY 2007-2030 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP); 3) FY 2008/9 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP); and the 4) the updated MPO Public Participation Plan (PPP). The findings of the FHWA/FTA desk audit review in conjunction with the on-site MPO certification review (and based upon public comments obtained during the May 7, 2009 public listening session) were used to complete the following report and to better define major planning emphasis areas, issues and challenges facing the Corpus Christi metropolitan planning area.

During the previous MPO certification review completed by FTA and FHWA in FY 2005 four years prior for the Corpus Christi TMA, there were no major corrective action findings identified upon review of the “3-C” metropolitan planning process. However, based upon the review of MPO-prepared documentation submitted to FHWA and FTA by the Corpus Christi MPO in FY 2005 several recommendations were issued by the FHWA/FTA Review Team in their August 2005 certification report. These joint recommendations have been reviewed for follow-up purposes as part of this FY 2009 MPO certification review. The Corpus Christi MPO provided the FHWA-FTA Review Team with a documented response to the list of recommendations as part of the FY 2009 MPO certification review process.

Based upon the recently completed FY 2009 MPO certification review and desk audit, the FHWA-FTA Review Team found that the Corpus Christi MPO has improved its planning capacity tremendously over the past several years in terms of its efforts related to raising public awareness, improving the visibility, accessibility, credibility of the MPO, and has greatly enhanced cooperative interagency working relationships as part of its “3-C” metropolitan planning process.

The FHWA-FTA Certification Review Team found that at its current level of performance, future MPO work program activities should also result in fully satisfactory planning products consistent with 23 CFR 450 and title 23 U.S.C. Section 134. The following FTA and FHWA recommendations and list of acknowledge strengths have been made based upon completion of the FY 2009 on-site MPO certification review<sup>1</sup> of May 6-8, 2009 and the results of the desk audit completed in April 2009.

In addition, the basis of these FTA and FHWA recommended improvements and acknowledged strengths were drawn from the face-to-face interviews with elected local officials, and the general public via comments provided as part of the public listening session conducted on May 7, 2009. In addition, the FHWA-FTA Review Team also made these recommendations based upon electronically submitted public input forms transmitted during the 30-day public comment period.

### **Acknowledged Strengths (FY 09)**

1. Elected officials and agency representatives continue to offer very positive and supportive comments on the impacts of the MPO with its improved image and interagency communication efforts. The FHWA and FTA were very impressed with the collaborative working relationships shown within the Corpus Christi Metropolitan Planning Area. The MPO is viewed as a focal point for regional planning and has done a good job of engaging its partners and communicating with its elected officials as part of its “3-C” metropolitan planning efforts.
2. The MPO is commended for its Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) efforts associated with the implementation of GIS-ST and NEPAAssist screening tools as part of its next long-range MTP update. The use of GIS-ST and NEPAAssist screening tools are recommended for use by the FHWA and FTA in order to better visualize environmental mitigation as part of corridor and systems level alternative analysis. The FHWA and FTA have noted that the MPO has recently hired a full-time GIS analyst and he will soon be trained by the U.S. EPA and TxDOT to produce environmental mitigation maps and visualization products via GIS-ST and NEPAAssist for use in the next MTP update.
3. The MPO is commended for its new and improved internet homepage, it was found to be up-to-date and easy to navigate for purposes of sharing planning data, products, and information with other agencies and the general public. The FHWA and FTA Review Team successfully used the MPO website for purposes of announcing the public listening session, and included a FHWA/FTA electronic public input form, as part of this MPO certification review.

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<sup>1</sup> A list of Federal, State, and local participants is shown within the Appendix Section of this report.

4. The MPO is commended for hiring a technical consultant for purposes of reviewing and improving its regional travel demand model. As this consultant-led effort progresses, and with new TxDOT origin-destination travel survey data incorporated, the MPO should be able to produce better estimates of interim and future traffic forecasts at the link level. The FHWA and FTA recommend that the new calibrated and validated regional traffic demand forecast model be utilized for the next long-range MTP update and future corridor/scenario studies. The MPO is encouraged to work closely with TxDOT Traffic Analysis Section to ensure quality control and assurance regarding all regional traffic model inputs and outputs.
5. The FHWA and FTA acknowledge that the MPO has been very proactively involved in TEMPO executive level and working groups and has sponsored regional freight conferences and has attended monthly web-based training provided by the FHWA Office of Freight Management and Operations (HOFM). We commend the MPO for taking a very proactive approach to collaborative efforts related to the UTP development, STIP Working Group, UPWP Working Group, and other TEMPO-sponsored activities over the past four years within the State of Texas.
6. The MPO is commended for its support of training associated with scenario planning and Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) and Context Sensitive Design (CSD). The FHWA and FTA are pleased to see that the Corpus Christi MPO has taken a leadership role in sponsoring recent NHI training and FHWA Resource Center workshops in these planning areas.
7. The MPO is commended for its work related to the MTP Validation Process in conjunction with the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) and TxDOT TPP (Systems Planning). This work should be shared with all small and intermediate sized MPOs that are currently updating their long-range transportation plans under SAFETEA-LU.
8. The MPO is commended for its work to prioritize and select safety and congestion-related transportation projects based on actual traffic accident data and measured congestion travel times for purposes of MTP and TIP development purposes.
9. The MPO is commended for its efforts to implement specific projects and elements associated with the 2004 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan in cooperation with the City of Corpus Christi.

### **Recommendations (FY 09)**

1. The Corpus Christi MPO will need to develop as part of its long-range MTP update a financial plan that includes estimates of costs and revenues association with its systems-level operations and maintenance (O&M) activities over the period of the 25-year long-range transportation plan. These estimated costs of O&M shall contain estimates at the systems-level for costs and revenue sources that are reasonably expected to be available

in order to adequately operate and maintain Federal-aid highways (as defined by 23 U.S.C. 101(a)(5)) and public transportation (as defined by title 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53) per 23 CFR 450.322(f)(10(i)).

2. The Corpus Christi MPO needs to identify improved performance measures for purposes of measuring its effectiveness of Title VI/Environmental Justice outreach efforts as part of its public participation plan (PPP). The current PPP (adopted in 2006) does not include significant performance measures to adequately ensure that Federal-aid programs and projects are not disproportionately affecting minorities and low-income users of public transportation. The FHWA and FTA will provide best practices related to this subject as part of NCHRP, AASHTO and TRB studies on this subject for possible consideration for use by the MPO.
3. The Corpus Christi MPO should identify financial shortfalls within its next long-range metropolitan transportation plan (MTP) update. Innovative finance techniques (including pass-thru funds, managed lanes, TIFIA and SIB loans, bonding opportunities, and public-private partnerships) will need to be reviewed and evaluated for possible consideration in order to fund financial shortfalls over the 25-year period of the MTP. The discussion of alternative financing mechanisms should be documented as part of the next MTP update and its associated long-range financial plan. The FHWA and FTA recommend that the long-range financial plan update could include the future revenue forecasts associated with the next Unified Transportation Program (UTP) to ensure fiscal constraint and consistency with State revenue projections.
4. The Corpus Christi MPO should identify the security and safety issues related to the possible structural issues associated with the aging Harbor Bridge structure. The FHWA and FTA acknowledges comments received during this review that this bridge may have nearly reached its useful design life, is functionally obsolete, and is beginning to show signs of exterior deterioration due to heavier than expected growth of truck and passenger traffic volumes. The Corpus Christi MPO could look into the benefits and costs of alternative modes of transportation in the event of the closure of this aging infrastructure or other possible alternative modes of transportation in case of an event that may warrant the closure of the Harbor Bridge in order to safely and efficiently move people and goods across the port's waterway.
5. The Corpus Christi MPO should begin to review possible expansion of its Metropolitan Planning Area boundary in response to the Year 2010 U.S. Census Data release expected to occur in 2012. This study and evaluation should consider the possible expansion of the 25-year Metropolitan Planning Area boundary and be illustratively shown in the next major update of the MTP due in late CY 09. The MPO Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) could provide their recommendations to the Transportation Policy Committee on this issue over the next several months. The evaluation should document the benefits and costs of MPA boundary expansion in a manner that is easily communicated to the public and elected officials.

6. The Corpus Christi MPO should look into the possibility of expanding staff and technical resources to address future freight and goods movement needs within the metropolitan planning area. The FHWA and FTA are concerned that future planning challenges associated with the proposed expansion of the Port of Corpus Christi in conjunction with the La Quinta intermodal facility will need to be addressed in the near future. Without adequate MPO technical staff or resources to fully evaluate and address growing intermodal truck, waterborne freight, and rail needs over the next 20 years, the region may not be ready to successfully plan and execute transportation infrastructure improvements resulting from the Panama Canal expansion and the larger post-Panamex cargo ships expected to arrive into the Port of Corpus Christi.
7. Public participation seems to be difficult to achieve for metropolitan planning efforts within the Corpus Christi region, and seems more heavily focused upon project-level NEPA decision-making efforts. The Corpus Christi MPO needs to continue to engage the general public as part of its improved internet website efforts, and as part of its efforts to partner with local elected officials, public schools, transit users, university, neighborhood and community leaders, as well as those organizations that have already been involved in long-standing transportation and economic development activities within the metropolitan planning area.
8. The Corpus Christi MPO needs to address applicable phases of regionally significant transportation projects proposed within the four-year period of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and as part of twenty-year Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), and Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Under 23 CFR 450.324(e)(3), each relevant phase (e.g., ROW, PE, NEPA, Design, or CONSTR) and estimated year-of-expenditure (YOE) cost of a proposed regionally significant transportation improvement shall be included within each of the applicable fiscal years of the four-year TIP/STIP in order to demonstrate fiscal constraint by year for each proposed category of Federal funds and/or sources of non-Federal funds.

The following report more fully documents the completion of the FHWA/FTA on-site review and preliminary desk audit process, as well as the input received from interviews conducted with elected officials and input received from the general public. The following report documents the joint FHWA and FTA finding that the Corpus Christi MPO has successfully addressed the major SAFETEA-LU transportation planning requirements as part of their “3-C” metropolitan transportation planning process. The FHWA and FTA has found that the MPO is in substantial compliance with title 23 U.S.C. 134 and 49 U.S.C. 5303 and 23 CFR 450 metropolitan planning regulations.