

Citizens

Guide

to Transportation Planning and
Programming in the

**Hidalgo County
Metropolitan Area**

Published by the

HCMPO

Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization
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Mission Statement

This guide is a tool that citizens can use to become better informed and to help them understand the role of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The intention of this guide is to facilitate the citizen's participation in the Transportation planning and programming activities of the MPO of the Hidalgo County Metropolitan Area.

This Guide is Designed to Provide the following information

- The History of the MPO
- Definition of a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)
- The Functions of an MPO
- The Planning Area the HCMPO covers
- The Organizational Structure of the MPO
- The key documents of an MPO
- How Federal funds are expended
- The Current Transportation System Profile
- How Transportation Ideas become projects
- Ways to Become Involved in Transportation Planning
- Regional Growth and Challenges
- MPO Committee Meeting Dates/Times
- Transportation Planning Partners Contact Information
- Glossary of definitions

Six Ways to Contact Your MPO!

Visit HCMPO Offices

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Visit HCMPO Website

www.lrgvdc.org

Call Us

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Mail Questions or Comments

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The contents of this booklet reflect the views of the authors who are responsible for the opinions, findings, and conclusions presented herein. The contents do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Transit Administration, or the Texas Department of Transportation. This document was prepared in cooperation with the Texas Department of Transportation and the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, and Federal Transit.

History of the MPO

Telecommuting: The substitution, either partially or completely, of transportation to a conventional office through the use of computer and telecommunications technologies (e.g., telephones, personal computers, modems, electronic mail). Implies either work at home or at a satellite work center that is closer to an employee's home than the conventional office.

Toll roads: A freeway facility that has a user charge often paid by electronic toll tags or by cash at toll barrier plazas.

Transit: Generally refers to passenger service provided to the general public along established routes with fixed or variable schedules at published fares. Related terms include public transit, mass transit, public transportation, urban transit, and Para transit.

Travel Demand Management: The art of modifying travel behavior through policies, programs, and actions implemented to increase the use of high-occupancy vehicles (public transit, carpooling, vanpooling), cycling, and walking; to encourage commuting outside congested time periods; and to encourage telecommuting and other techniques as alternatives to driving.

Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21): A direct successor to the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991), TEA-21 provides funding for general transportation projects through the year 2003 and establishes national transportation policy.

Vanpool: A passenger van used by seven to fifteen commuters. The group determines the route and schedule. The van may be provided or subsidized by an employer, regional rideshare agency, or a private company that leases vehicles.

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT): On highways, a measurement of the total miles traveled by all vehicles in the area for a specified time period.

The 1973 Federal Highway Act required the Governor's Office to designate a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in each urbanized area with a central city over 50,000 in population. The Census count placed McAllen as the first contiguous city in Hidalgo County to exceed a population of 50,000. As a result of meeting this population threshold, the Hidalgo County MPO Transportation Planning Committee (TPC) and the State of Texas Office of Budget and Planning entered into a transportation planning agreement on June 12, 1981. After this agreement was made, the **Texas State Department of Highways and Public Transportation** and the **Hidalgo County Metropolitan Transportation Planning Committee** created the **Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)**.

After the 1990 U.S. Census defined an urbanized population of over 200,000 for the McAllen-Pharr-Edinburg area, the title Transportation Management Area (TMA) was subsequently given to the region and allocated more resources to the Metropolitan Planning Organization. This designation allowed for the provision of staff, the establishment of formal procedures, and a set of bylaws, which were first adopted on December 7, 1992. At this time, the **MPO Transportation Planning Committee** became the **MPO Policy Committee** and it was decided that the MPO was obligated to perform the duties stated in the established bylaws, although lacking both a fiscal agent and staff for the MPO. The MPO Policy Committee then designated the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) to act as the agent to perform the fiscal, administrative, and technical functions for the MPO and staff was later hired in the fall of 1993.

Since 1993, the Hidalgo County MPO has served as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the transportation needs of the Hidalgo County Metropolitan Area. HCMPO is currently one of 8 TMA's in Texas and is the 6th largest metropolitan area in the state of Texas.

What is a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)?

Every metropolitan area with a population of 50,000 or more must have a designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

The Hidalgo County MPO is a federally funded program that addresses the mobility goals of the communities within the urbanized area of Hidalgo County. The MPO also serves as a collaborative structure of committees and organizations that creates partnerships to address this region's needs.



What does the MPO do?

HCMPO is responsible for the regional planning process for all modes of transportation. The MPO provides technical assistance to the local governments of Hidalgo County in planning, coordinating, and implementing transportation decisions for this area.

The HCMPO administers all federal funds for urban transportation improvements in Hidalgo County, including: road and highway expansion, maintaining the existing infrastructure through pavement management systems, safety transportation planning (including the creation of designated freight routes and bicycle/pedestrian paths), emergency response planning, rail studies and transit planning.

National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS): Issued by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA). Determines the amount of total emissions that can be produced in a geographical location by transportation facilities.

Nonattainment area: An area that does not achieve one or more federal national ambient air quality standards.

Off-System Roads: Those roads maintained by local governmental entities (such as local cities or the county). Certain **Off-system roads** qualify to receive federal funding, such as Metropolitan Mobility Funds.

On-System Roads: Those roads maintained by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). Federal classification as on-system is important in order to receive federal funding.

Park-and-Ride Lot: A parking area where people can park their cars and then ride transit or meet carpools and vanpools.

Public Participation: The active and meaningful involvement of the public in the development of transportation plans and improvement programs. The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 and subsequent regulations require that state departments of transportation and MPOs proactively seek the involvement of all interests parties, including those traditionally underserved by the current transportation system.

Reverse Commute: A reverse commute project related to the development of transportation services designed to transport residents of urban areas, urbanized areas, and areas other than urbanized areas to suburban employment opportunities.

Reversible Facility: An HOV facility on which the direction of traffic flow can be changed to match the peak direction of travel during peak traffic periods.

Right of Way (ROW): An area that usually holds the public utilities (both overhead and underground) and transportation facilities.

Sustainable Development: Development practices that must be responsive to regional trends in economic expansion, population growth, development, quality of life, public health, and the environment in order to provide

mobility, improve the region's air quality status, and avoid a risk of sanctions on federal transportation funds.

Grade: The slope (ratio of change in elevation to change in distance) of a roadway typically given in percent. For example, a 3 percent grade three feet of elevation change over a 100-foot distance.

High Occupancy Vehicle Lane (HOV): Lanes on streets or highways reserved for vehicles that transport multiple passengers.

Intermodal: Interconnectivity between various types (modes) of transportation.

Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991

(ISTEA): Landmark federal legislation signed into law in 1991. ISTEA made changes in the way transportation decisions are made by emphasizing diversity and balance of modes as well as the preservation of existing systems and construction of facilities. ISTEA expired in 1997, but much of the program is carried forward by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).

Land Use: The purpose for which land or the structure on the land is being used.

Local Street: A street intended solely for access to adjacent properties.

Light Rail: An urban railway system characterized by its ability to operate single cars or short trains in streets or exclusive right-of-way and capable of discharging passengers at track or car floor level (e.g., DART light rail trains).

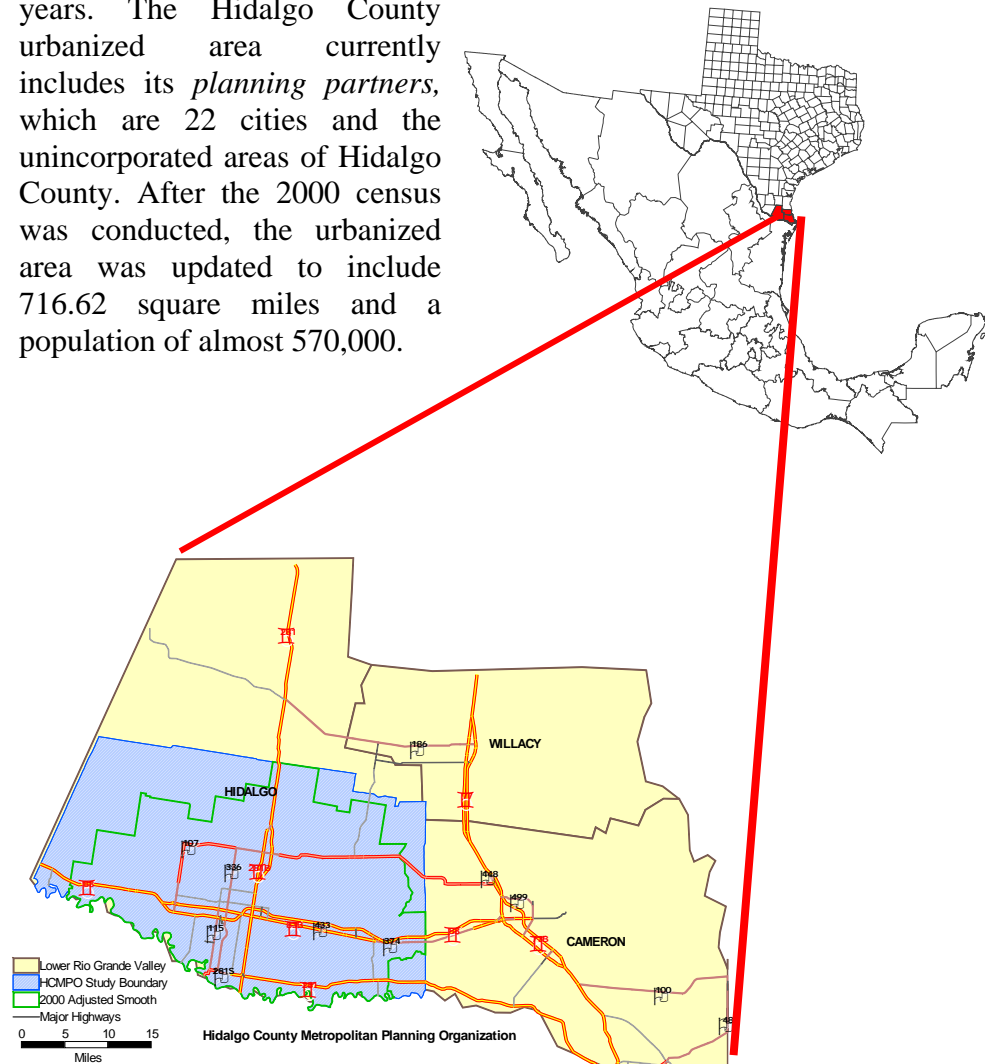
Mobility: The ability to move or be moved from place to place.

Mode: A particular form of travel, such as automobile, transit, bicycle, and walking.

Metropolitan Planning Organization: A federally required planning body designed by the governor and local elected officials as responsible, together with the State, for transportation planning in an urbanized area with a population of over 50,000.

Federal funds for conducting the transportation planning process are limited to the Hidalgo County Metropolitan Area, which covers 992.76 square miles and includes the existing urbanized area and the contiguous area expected to be urbanized within the next 20 years. The Hidalgo County urbanized area currently includes its *planning partners*, which are 22 cities and the unincorporated areas of Hidalgo County. After the 2000 census was conducted, the urbanized area was updated to include 716.62 square miles and a population of almost 570,000.

The Metropolitan Planning Area HCMPO covers



MPO Structure

The MPO works with:

HCMPO works with Hidalgo County, cities within the county, transit providers and the Texas Department of Transportation to plan for the future transportation needs of this metropolitan area. Some of the other agencies the MPO works with are:

- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
- Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC)

as well as the private sector, aviation interests, and the region's citizens to plan coordinated transportation systems designed to move goods and people affordably, efficiently, and safely.

The MPO Staff facilitates the act of reaching a consensus on transportation issues between entities and agencies. In order to incorporate the will of the citizens of the region, the MPO has the duty of providing pertinent information to local agencies and entities with the right tools for making effective decisions. The MPO provides TAC and Policy Committee members with technical information, prepares documents required by federal regulations (such as the Metropolitan Transportation Plan), and promotes and facilitates interaction between agencies and entities. Most importantly, the MPO administers all information regarding urban transportation planning

Commuter Rail: Commuter rail is a mode of public transportation that is based on passenger trains operating on railroad tracks and providing regional service.

Congestion: Interference of vehicles with one another as they travel, reducing speed and increasing travel time.

Constraints: Limitations of a product, or by regulation, which results in a revised approach or process to resolve.

Corridor: A broad geographical area of land that follows a general directional flow or connects major sources of trips.

Environmental Justice: Principles applied to transportation planning efforts that ensure full and fair participation of all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process.

Expressway: A divided roadway for through traffic with full or partial access control and including grade separation at all or most intersections. Also a wide road built for fast moving traffic traveling long distances, with a limited number of points at which drivers can enter and leave it.

Facility: The means by which a transportation mode is provided. For example, a sidewalk is a facility, so is an HOV lane.

Freeway: A divided arterial highway designed for the unimpeded flow of large volumes. Access to a freeway is rigorously controlled and intersection grade separations. An expressway with fully controlled access.

Frontage Road: A roadway generally paralleling an expressway, freeway, parkway, or through street designed to intercept, collect and distribute traffic desiring to cross, enter, or leave such features. The frontage road may be within the same traffic way as the main roadway or in a separate traffic way.

Glossary /
Definitions

Air Quality Conformity: In general, the agreement of transportation plans and programs with commitments designed to attain federal and state air quality standards; transportation plans collectively must not worsen air quality.

Alternative Fuels: Any motor fuel other than ordinary gasoline, especially those that result in lower levels of air pollutants (i.e., natural gas, propane, electricity, and liquefied natural gas).

Arterial: A major thoroughfare that is vital for moving people and goods; feeds into the interstate and freeway systems.

Bikeway: A facility designed to accommodate bicycle travel for recreational or commuting purposes. Bikeways are not necessarily separated facilities; they may be designed and operated to be shared with other travel modes.

Bottleneck: The point of minimum capacity along a roadway segment.

Capacity: The maximum resource that can be assigned (allocated) to or be serviced by a facility. For example, the capacity of a school is the number of students that can be enrolled there.

Congestion Management System/Congestion Mitigation

Strategies: Congestion management policies and projects. Targets resources for operational management and travel demand reduction strategies such as vanpooling, carpooling, and use of public transit.

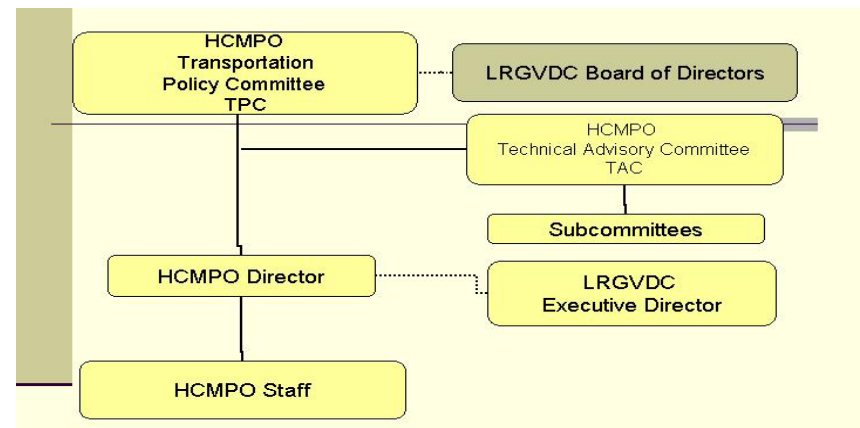
Collector: An urban street which provides access within neighborhoods, commercial and industrial districts, and which channels traffic from local streets to minor and major arterials. Collectors are typically low volume and low speed streets; however, they sometimes serve local bus routes.

directly to the public by informing and educating the general public on issues related to the MPO transportation planning process.

The Hidalgo County MPO contains **subcommittees**, which deal with specialized issues and make recommendations regarding these issues to the Technical Advisory Committee. The subcommittees perform various tasks, as deemed necessary, and the subcommittee exists until the project it was created for is completed.

The **Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)** was created for the purpose of making planning recommendations to the Policy Committee regarding MPO-generated documents, project selection criteria, special transportation planning studies and other issues for immediate action. The TAC Committee’s membership consists of local officials and planners from the cities and the county within the MPO boundary.

The **Transportation Policy Committee (TPC)** was created for the purpose of serving as spokespersons for the citizens of the county as well as each respective city in the metropolitan area. The TPC is comprised of elected officials from each city of the MPO, as well as Hidalgo County representatives. The TPC is responsible for creating policies regarding transportation planning issues. TPC meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at 5:30 p.m. The meetings are held at the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Conference Center at 600 West US 83 Expressway, in Pharr, Texas.



What documents are necessary in an MPO?

- **The Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).** The MTP is a comprehensive, multimodal “blueprint” for transportation systems and services aimed at meeting the mobility needs of the Hidalgo County Metropolitan Area through the next 25 years. Plans, projects, programs, and policies are proposed as transportation recommendations that reflect solutions to improve the over all quality of life for residents in the Hidalgo County area.
 - **The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).** The TIP is required to list all transportation projects in the MPO region using federal funds. This includes highway and transit projects and other necessary enhancements such as bicycle and pedestrian projects. The MPO planning partners propose eligible projects and the MPO staff and TAC then evaluate the proposed projects and rank them in accordance with a detailed process.
- The comments received during public meetings are made as part of the process. The ranking of the projects is consistent with funding constraints and public comments are presented to the Transportation Policy Committee for final selection of projects for a TIP.
- **The Congestion Management System (CMS).** The CMS serves to outline effective management of facilities and systems to provide the maximum amount of benefit from available resources. The CMS program includes those travel demand management components such as vanpooling and rideshare programs.
 - **The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)** The UPWP lists all the studies to be undertaken during the coming year. These studies may involve any aspect of transportation including

Transportation Policy Committee (TPC)

meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at 5:30 p.m.

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 1:30 p.m.

All committee meetings are conducted at:

LRGVDC Transportation Center
510 S. Pleasantview Dr.
Weslaco, TX 78596

Committee Meetings

Dates/Times



For a complete listing of the TPC and TAC members, please visit our website at www.lrgvdc.org.

Transportation Partners

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)

600 W. U.S. 83
Pharr, TX 78577

Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council

311 N. 15th St.
McAllen, TX 78501

Federal Highway Administration

300 E. 8th St., Rm 286
Austin, TX 78701

Federal Transit Administration

819 Taylor St., Ste 8A36
Fort Worth, TX 78572

McAllen Express

1501 W. Bus. 83, Suite 100
McAllen, TX 78501

For a listing of our planning partners, please visit our website at www.lrgvdc.org and select “HCMPO links”.

Regional Growth and Transportation Challenges

The Hidalgo County region will be home to over one million by the year 2025. Transportation planning must reflect solutions that will provide substantial benefits to all people and communities within the region. With the adoption of the long-range transportation plan for the region, *Transportation Improvement Program*, and regional transportation planning issues can be fully addressed.

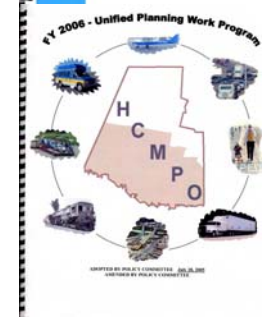
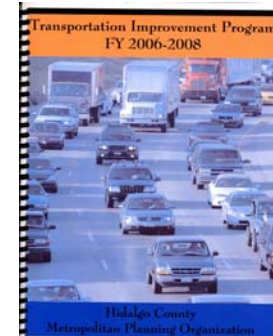
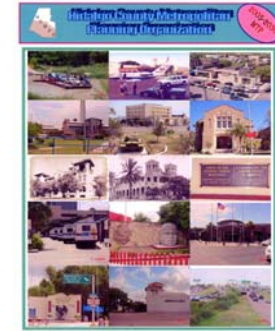
Transportation Improvement Program is required to list all transportation projects in the MPO region using federal funds. The MPO entities propose eligible projects and the MPO staff and TAC then evaluate the proposed projects and rank them in accordance with a process. The ranking procedure allows the regional highway and transit projects, identified in the plan, to proceed to construction.

Public involvement in the development of these plans is crucial to the success of the transportation system. Public input provides transportation planners with the information they require to address the needs and concerns of individuals and communities within the region. On the surface, transportation and air quality planning may seem too technical and complex, and therefore inaccessible to the general public. However, public participation is highly encouraged as the Metropolitan Planning Organization strives to meet the transportation needs of a growing region.



highways, transit and the needs of the disadvantaged. A study may be proposed by a participating entity of the MPO. Some studies are proposed in response to federal or state requirements while others are included responding to local needs. The list of proposed studies is reviewed by the Transportation Advisory Committee. A selection is made of those studies to include in the coming year's UPWP based on the MPO priorities, the need to satisfy state and federal requirements, and funding constraints.

The proposed UPWP is then submitted for approval of the Transportation Policy Committee. The draft is then reviewed by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The MPO staff incorporates the comments of the state and federal agencies and presents the final document to the Transportation Policy Committee for approval.



Funding for Highway, Transit and Other Projects

Nearly all major transportation projects in the MPO region involve some federal funding. ISTEA has placed the MPO in a major partnership position with the transportation providers to determine how the federal funds should be allocated to the many competing projects in the area. These federal funds are provided to the region under several program categories. In the highway arena, funds are identified as Interstate, National Highway System (NHS), Surface Transportation Program (STP), Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation, and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ). Transit funds are provided through various sections of transit programs for operating and capital expenses for urban and rural needs.

There is a considerable flexibility provided to the MPO in regards to highway and transit projects.

Although some funds are specifically restricted for one particular type of project, federal funding guidelines allow the MPO significant latitude in shaping the programs to meet local priorities. In addition to the federal programs, the State of Texas provides the required matching funds for federal highway projects. Many projects are funded completely by the state of Texas.

Many transportation projects on city and county roads are financed through local funds. The Capital Improvement Projects (CIPs) of the cities and county provide local transportation project information.



How can I Become Involved in Transportation Planning?

- Learn who is involved in your community
- Establish contacts with your representative TPC Member
- Visit HCMPO's website regularly for up-to-date Transportation Planning activities: www.lrgvdc.org
- Join HCMPO's mailing list for notification of Public Meetings and other events
- Complete online Public Meeting comment forms www.lrgvdc.org
- Attend committee meetings
- Participate in HCMPO's "Listening Sessions"
- Participate in Public Meetings
- Request materials from the HCMPO
- Complete HCMPO's Citizen Surveys
- Visit HCMPO's Transportation Library to borrow books, videos, CDROMs, and other materials to learn more about the planning process
- Contact the HCMPO office with questions or comments at (956) 618-0803
- Establish contacts with transportation providers
- Share suggestions for improving MPO Public Involvement activities

Citizen Participation

Citizen participation and input is essential in the planning process. HCMPO's Public Involvement procedures are designed to educate the public on transportation planning, to seek out and provide opportunity for interested parties to comment on transportation ideas and proposals, and to actively contribute to the policy and decision making process. Citizens participate in the planning process through the MPO's Public Involvement Process, and through their elected officials that make up the sub-committees, Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), and the MPO Policy Board.

HCMPO works to give citizens an opportunity to become more involved in the transportation planning process by keeping the public informed about what the MPO and its planning partners are doing for their areas. Citizen participation is encouraged

through the use of the HCMPO website, informational literature the MPO produces on a regular basis, outreach meetings conducted within communities, and the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC).

We believe that better plans will result if more citizens participate in shaping the transportation planning initiatives for Hidalgo County. For more information about the Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization, or how to become more involved with the MPO, visit our website at www.lrgvdc.org or call the MPO offices at (956) 618-0803.



Current Transportation System Profile

The United States Department of Transportation (USDOT)



relies on the MPO to ensure that highway and transit projects that use federal funds are products of a credible planning process and meet local priorities. USDOT will not approve federal funding for urban highway and transit projects unless they are on the MPO's program. Thus, the MPO's role is to develop and maintain the necessary transportation plan for the area to assure that federal funds support these locally developed plans. The region's current transportation network is an integrated system of transportation modes designed to enhance the region's quality of life by providing mobility choice, economic vitality, and efficient movement. More of us are riding buses, walking, and carpooling than ever before. As transportation options increase and our region's citizens become more aware of the benefits of

alternative mobility, our transportation system becomes more efficient, affordable, and effective.



The region also has an expanding system of pathways, bike lanes, sidewalks, and bike routes to accommodate those individuals who choose this mode of travel. To meet the transportation needs of the region, the MPO supports several programs.

As a way to address congestion concerns, a travel demand management program attempts to reduce the demand for drive-alone travel on roadways by offering alternatives such as vanpooling, ridesharing, telecommuting, walking, bicycling, and transit use.



How a Transportation Idea Becomes a Transportation Project

The Road to Success

**Start
Here!**

