

**DES MOINES**  
**METROPOLITAN AREA**

**Transportation Planning  
Certification Review Report**

**Certification Review by:**

**Federal Highway Administration  
and  
Federal Transit Administration**

**March 22-24, 2005**

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## **I. PURPOSE OF CERTIFICATION REVIEW**

Pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 134(i)(5) and 49 U.S.C. 1607, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) must jointly certify the metropolitan transportation planning processes in Transportation Management Areas (TMA) at least every three years. (A TMA is an urbanized area, as defined by the U. S. Census, with a population of over 200,000. There are 155 TMAs in the U. S., based on the 2000 Census.) The certification review process is only one of several methods used to assess the quality of a local metropolitan planning process, compliance with applicable statutes and regulations, and the level and type of technical assistance needed to enhance the effectiveness of the planning process. Unified Planning Work Program approval, Metropolitan and Statewide Transportation Improvement Program findings, air quality conformity determinations (in non-attainment and maintenance areas), as well as a range of other formal and less formal contacts provide both FHWA and FTA an opportunity to comment on the planning process. The results of these other processes are considered in the certification review process.

This review covered the Des Moines, Iowa metropolitan area. The Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (DMAMPO) is the officially designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

The focus of this review was to:

- 1.) Determine if the metropolitan transportation planning activities are being carried out in accordance with the governing metropolitan planning regulations, policies, and procedures;
- 2.) Determine if the metropolitan transportation planning process is a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive process that results in the support and development of transportation improvements for the Des Moines metropolitan area; and,
- 3.) Determine if the metropolitan transportation planning process provides adequate representation and input from all levels of local government and individual interest groups in addressing the transportation needs of the metropolitan area.

While the Planning Certification Review report itself may not fully document those many intermediate and ongoing checkpoints, the “finding” of the certification review, in fact, is based upon the cumulative findings of the entire review effort.

The review process is individually tailored to focus on topics of significance in each metropolitan planning area. Federal reviewers prepare certification reports to document the results of the review process. The reports and final actions are the joint responsibility of the appropriate FHWA and FTA field offices and content will vary to reflect the planning process reviewed.

In order to encourage public understanding and input, FHWA/FTA will continue to improve the clarity of the certification review reports.

## **II. REVIEW FORMAT AND GUIDELINES**

The on-site review was conducted at the offices of the Des Moines Area MPO from March 22 – 24, 2005. During the prior desk review, the Federal review team developed an updated set of review guidelines in the form of questions based on the review of documents, files and the team’s working knowledge. These updated guidelines were provided to the MPO in advance of the review. (Copies of the guidelines are attached.) The MPO staff provided final responses to the guideline questions prior to the review. Although not required, this information was of great assistance to the review team during the on-site portion of the review.

As part of the review, a public meeting was held at the Botanical Center in Des Moines at 6:30 p.m. on March 22, 2005. The review team opened the meeting by discussing the Certification Review process. The meeting was well attended, with seventy-four people present, not counting the Federal team or MPO staff. There was extensive testimony from the public concerning the transportation planning process in the Des Moines metropolitan area, as the Federal team received numerous verbal and written comments. A summary of the verbal comments is provided in Appendix A. Written comments are provided in Appendix B.

## **III. REVIEW PARTICIPANTS**

In addition to FTA and FHWA staff, representatives from the MPO, the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT), and the Des Moines Metropolitan Transit Agency (MTA) participated in the review. The following is a list of the individuals who participated during the on-site phase of the review. MTA’s Shari Atwood and Sheri Kyras participated in the review process prior to and after the three-day on-site review period.

### **FHWA**

John Cater  
Holly Liles  
Joe Jurasic  
Janice Thompson

### **Iowa DOT**

Amanda Martin  
Lorne Wazny  
Peter Hallock  
Phil Mescher

### **FTA**

Mark Bechtel

### **MPO**

Tom Kane  
Kristin Nanke  
Adam Noelting  
Nokil Park  
Jessica Hekter  
Loretta Kuhlman

#### **IV. DESCRIPTION OF METROPOLITAN PLANNING AREA**

The Des Moines metropolitan planning area is the largest population and employment center in the state. The central city of the metropolitan area is the City of Des Moines, the capital city of Iowa. The metropolitan planning area includes much of Polk and parts of Dallas, Warren and Madison counties and includes the cities of Altoona, Ankeny, Bondurant, Carlisle, Clive, Des Moines, Grimes, Johnston, Norwalk, Pleasant Hill, Polk City, Urbandale, Waukee, West Des Moines, and Windsor Heights. According to the 2000 US Census, the metropolitan area had a population of approximately 400,000. Between 2000 and 2005, the MPO estimates the growth of the Des Moines metropolitan area accounted for at least one half of Iowa's total population and employment growth. These growth trends, moderate by national standards, are projected to continue for the Des Moines metropolitan area through the year 2030, with an annual growth rate of 1 to 2 percent expected. Central city population is expected to remain stable. The 2000 US Census also showed significant growth of the Hispanic population. According to Census counts, the Hispanic population currently is 4.5% of the Des Moines metropolitan population and is the largest minority population. Similar to national trends, this minority population is projected to grow at a rate in excess of Des Moines' overall regional population growth rate.

Population growth in the north, east, and south sectors of the Des Moines area has not been as rapid as growth in the western suburbs. However, due to higher land costs, fewer "starter" and mid-level homes are being constructed in the western suburbs and instead are being constructed elsewhere. Ankeny, in the northeast sector, had the most housing starts last year and has had 1,000 starts per year since 2000. Altoona, also in the northeast sector, has had 700 housing starts over the past five years. The MPO anticipates increasing development in the Iowa 5 / US 65 corridor in the near future. It should be noted that the anticipated growth in the Des Moines metropolitan area has generated a major issue for the MPO and several member governments regarding whether new interchanges are necessary on the Interstate system. A major access management agreement with local governments has been implemented, focusing on development occurring in the US 6 corridor west of Interstate 35/80.

The deployment of Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) activities including cameras monitoring traffic congestion and the "highway helper" program will help to accommodate movement of the increased traffic generated by future development. Later this year, MTA plans to begin a transit-related ITS project in the University Avenue corridor. Through an electronic signal transmission, MTA bus drivers will be able to extend the green phase of traffic signals in order to proceed through intersections on University Avenue between 9<sup>th</sup> Street and 63<sup>rd</sup> Street. Being able to extend the green phase will allow bus drivers to more easily stay on their time schedule by "getting through" the end of a signal phase where they would otherwise be stopped.

The Des Moines metropolitan area continues to be the employment center for much of central Iowa and workers continue to commute into the Des Moines metropolitan area from a wide geographic area. The two predominant employment centers in the Des

Moines area with approximately 70 percent of all jobs in the metropolitan area are central Des Moines and the western suburbs of West Des Moines, Clive, and Urbandale. The MPO projects that these two employment centers will continue to be the predominant employment centers in the region, however some dispersion of employment is anticipated within the US 65/Iowa 5 corridor, the I-35 and I-80 corridors, and other metropolitan locations as well. The anticipated employment growth in central Des Moines without a parallel increase in residential growth (which is not anticipated) will cause an increase in commuter traffic into the central city, with resultant transportation impacts.

Since the 2002 Certification Review, MTA has been focusing upon their core route (regular, express, and commuter) system as opposed to special services. Consequently, transit ridership on MTA's core route service has increased by 0.6% from 3,633,515 passengers in 2002 to 3,656,158 passengers in 2005. Over the past year this focus on core routes has resulted in these routes having a ridership increase of 2.1%.

During the past three years MTA has provided new services in response to changing transportation needs in the growing metropolitan area. MTA now operates vanpools within Polk County and MTA has also reconfigured its express/regular route services in the suburbs by introducing a new type of service for its passengers entitled "On-Call." Customers can schedule their bus trip directly with the "On-Call" bus driver for curb-to-curb service within a zone by calling the bus operator's cell phone. "On-Call" services began in Urbandale in March 2002 and most recently in West Des Moines in October 2004. The public has welcomed this new type of bus service with over a 90% approval rating. Since the 2002 Certification Review, MTA has received approximately \$550,000 in FTA Sections 5307 and 5309 federal funds for safety and security projects which included an underground fuel storage leak detection system, construction of a farebox/coin room, and the purchase of surveillance cameras for paratransit buses.

## **V. ORGANIZATION OF THE MPO**

The Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization was designated by the Governor as the responsible entity for carrying out the region's urban transportation planning process. The MPO also enters into annual agreements with the Iowa DOT governing the utilization of federal planning funds for activities included in the Unified Planning Work Program. The MPO has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the MTA that covers the cooperative transit planning responsibilities of each agency. The basic structure of DMAMPO is unchanged since the previous 2002 Certification Review. The MPO is composed of 18 member governments, including 15 cities and Polk, Warren, and Dallas counties. The MPO Policy Committee has 33 voting members with one representative permitted for each member government having a threshold population of 1,500. Member governments are permitted one representative for each 25,000 population or fraction thereof over the first 10,000 population. Application of this formula results in the City of Des Moines having 9 of the 33 votes of the MPO Policy Committee to represent its roughly one half share of the metropolitan population. There is

also one nonvoting member each from the Iowa DOT, Des Moines International Airport, MTA, FHWA, and FTA.

The MPO Executive Committee provides general direction for the MPO Executive Director and staff. It is composed of five MPO Policy Committee members selected by vote of the MPO Policy Committee. The MPO is currently considering a policy change to require that an Executive Committee member be an elected official, not an administrator or citizen. At least one member must be from the City of Des Moines, with the remaining members selected to insure diverse geographic representation. Currently, the jurisdictions represented on the MPO Executive Committee are Polk County and the cities of Altoona, Des Moines, Johnston, and West Des Moines. State Representative Geri Huser of Altoona serves as the chair of both the Executive Committee and the Policy Committee.

The MPO's Transportation Technical Committee (TTC) is responsible for providing the MPO Executive Committee with recommended actions based on technical analysis and merit. It is composed of 29 voting members, which represent all MPO member governments, the Des Moines International Airport, and the MTA. The Iowa DOT, FHWA, and FTA are nonvoting members of the TTC.

A quorum for all MPO committees is attendance by one half plus one of the total committee membership. If members miss three consecutive meetings, a letter is sent from the MPO to the Mayor of the absentee's jurisdiction advising that the Mayor may wish to replace the absentee member with a new member to the committee. There is excellent participation in the major MPO committees by the member governments, and having a quorum is almost never an issue. Annually, the MPO staff gives a workshop for new MPO committee members on how to be an effective participant in the MPO process.

The MPO has an eight person staff that includes the Executive Director, the Executive Assistant, five planners, and a part-time administrative assistant. In addition, the MPO often has one to two planning interns. There are currently two vacancies, which the MPO wants to fill with specialists rather than general planners. For the first time the MPO is advertising nationally by placing the job announcements on national websites. The MPO staff also serves Central Iowa Regional Transportation Planning Affiliation, the Regional Planning Affiliation (RPA) that covers an eight (8) county area in central Iowa surrounding the metropolitan area.

## **VI. MAJOR REGIONAL ISSUES AND PRIORITY PLANNING ACTIVITIES**

### **A. Long Range Transportation Plan Update Process**

During the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) update process just completed in December 2004, the MPO process relied heavily on input from local governments at many steps throughout the process. This resulted in major delays to the update process especially for allocating growth within the metropolitan area, and for population and employment projections within communities. The delays led

to a situation where the roadway portion of the plan was completed in just a few weeks, and without the anticipated level of analysis. In hindsight, the MPO staff recognizes some of the flaws in the process for the recently completed LRTP update. There was general agreement that the MPO LRTP needs to include a broad regional view as well as serve as a reflection of local priorities. The MPO's stated goal is for the LRTP update process to be a dynamic, ongoing process, not just a course of action undertaken once every five years. The MPO will use 2005 as the base year for the next update. Updated population and employment figures for the metropolitan area, including the large employment increase in the southwest part of the metropolitan area, will be included in the 2005 base year data. It is expected that the next update will look at the future of the region from a more regional perspective and with less of a local government point of view.

## **B. Transit**

The Des Moines Metropolitan Transit Agency (MTA) was originally instituted by an interagency agreement between five cities. In order to provide transit service to more of the jurisdictions in the expanding Des Moines metropolitan area, and to develop a more stable funding base, the MPO and MTA are exploring the possibility of changing MTA to a regional transit authority that would have jurisdiction in Polk County and eastern Dallas County. If additional transit service is implemented on a regional basis, MTA could provide transit service for up to seventeen (17) cities. It is projected that there would be a combination of FTA Sections 5307 and 5311 funding to support a regional transit agency.

A transit long-range planning effort, "Transit 2030 Vision," is currently underway. It is being conducted by the "Transit 2030 Committee," which is led by the Greater Des Moines Partnership. In addition, MTA staff is currently developing a "2030 Strategic Plan for Transit" which will incorporate the "Transit 2030 Vision" document and subsequently be submitted for inclusion into the MPO's adopted Year 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan. At the public meeting on March 22, 2005, comments were received that the long-range transit planning process should be conducted under the MPO's overall LRTP update process. The MPO needs to ensure that long-range transit planning is included in the next LRTP update and that all public and private transit agencies in the Des Moines metropolitan area be given the opportunity to participate in the long-range transit planning process. If necessary, in order to ensure that long-range transit planning is included in the LRTP update process, MTA and the MPO may need to refer to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that clarifies the cooperative transit planning responsibilities between the two agencies.

Since the 2002 Certification Review, MTA received FTA New Starts funding to conduct a Bus Rapid Transit alternative analysis study. FTA alternative analysis study requirements include extensive modeling for transit ridership. The MPO and Iowa DOT modelers have made major advances in modeling using TransCAD and MITSIM over the past three years. The MPO strongly believes that with assistance from Iowa DOT modelers, it is ready to provide "cutting edge" modeling assistance



to MTA for their upcoming Bus Rapid Transit study, which will meet all FTA New Starts modeling requirements.

### **C. Public Participation and Environmental Justice**

As evidenced by the large attendance at the public hearing for the Certification Review, there has been an increase in public scrutiny of the transportation planning process in the Des Moines metropolitan area. Since the previous Certification Review, public interest groups have become much more active and recently were very involved in reviewing and responding to the LRTP update. The MPO and its member governments should continue to be proactive in facilitating public participation and strive to be responsive to public comment on the transportation planning process.

In conjunction with the I-235 project, the Iowa DOT has made a major effort to work with each of the effected neighborhoods adjacent to the project. For example, the Iowa DOT has printed flyers in Spanish and is considering also publishing flyers in Bosnian for neighborhoods including these two population groups. Another noteworthy example was a neighborhood of Vietnamese/Laotian immigrants who came to the United States in the 1970's. The residents are mostly elderly widows who prefer not to drive, and the Iowa DOT made a concerted effort to work with the residents and address their concerns during the project.

In response to customer needs, MTA has established a Spanish-speaking information line and has Spanish-speaking bus drivers available to assist MTA riders. The MPO has not used languages other than English in its publications and other communications, but has identified translation services, which are made available at public hearings/meetings if requested.

### **D. Roundtables**

Since 2002, the MPO has initiated Freight, Transit, and Bicycle-Pedestrian Roundtables. Each of the roundtables meets on a regular basis and representatives from public and private transportation agencies and interested citizens are invited to participate in the roundtable that corresponds to their transportation mode interest. The Bicycle-Pedestrian Roundtable has been the most successful, as it has had good attendance from bicycle, pedestrian, and trail advocates and the roundtable has been successful in identifying bicycle/pedestrian needs and identifying trail planning and development projects.

Since its inception, the Freight Roundtable has served to focus attention of freight issues impacting central Iowa. This roundtable initially began as a forum for MPO representatives to educate themselves about freight issues. It has since grown to include participation from freight users and providers. Recently, Iowa Motor Truck Association, the Greater Des Moines Partnership, Firestone Agricultural Tire, and Iowa DOT Director's staff and Rail Division staff have joined in the roundtable discussions. Currently, the Freight Roundtable is very interested in bringing more attention to the existing Foreign Trade Zone (established in the early 1970s), to

being active in the North American Inland Port Network (NAIPN), and to listening to the business and the economic development communities on transportation system improvements needed to improve this metropolitan area's economic competitiveness.

There have been concerns regarding the recent lack of participation by private transit operators in the Transit Roundtable. Nevertheless, the Transit Roundtable, the original MPO roundtable, has provided a regional forum for exploring transit issues both within and beyond MTA's service area. Overall, there has been strong community support for the roundtables, particularly the Bicycle-Pedestrian Roundtable. The MPO recognizes that the roundtables are a relatively new forum for transportation planning and the MPO has expectations for their continued involvement into being an effective forum for modal transportation planning in the Des Moines metropolitan area.

#### **E. MPO Planning Boundary**

Following the receipt of new population data from the 2000 Census, the MPO's metropolitan area planning boundary was adopted in December 2002. In Iowa, this process can be controversial, since adding territory to the MPO area reduces territory and funding from the surrounding RPA. After much discussion, the boundary revisions approved by the MPO were extremely conservative, especially considering the rate of growth in the metropolitan area. While this lessened the impact on CIRTPA and Polk, Dallas, and Warren counties, it created the potential for metropolitan projects and impacts to occur outside the metropolitan planning area boundary. This occurred almost immediately, as Polk County began developing a concept for a Northeast Beltway project that extends beyond the metropolitan planning boundary. Another project that surfaced, partially outside the metropolitan planning boundary, is the Western Bypass project. This project was also added to the 2030 LRTP. Regardless of the specific location of these projects in relation to the boundary, the impacts of these projects and others extend beyond the current MPO planning boundary.

#### **F. Access to Jobs and United We Ride**

The MPO continues to be involved in welfare-to-work activities in the Des Moines metropolitan area since the passage of federal welfare reform legislation. The agency developed a regional Job Access and Reverse Commute Plan, which was completed by working with MTA, Polk County and transportation service providers. This plan is annually updated by the MPO. FTA Access to Jobs funding has been received since Fiscal Year 1999, which has allowed MTA to offer extended service in the evenings and weekends and also provide several route expansions.

The MPO will be working with MTA in the forthcoming United We Ride planning activity, which will facilitate Federal, State, and local agencies working together to ensure coordination of transportation services in the Des Moines metropolitan area. MTA has already been actively involved in preliminary planning activities for this

initiative. MTA's Paratransit/RideShare Director was invited to Washington D.C. to be on a task force which put together a coordinated United We Ride plan for the Des Moines metropolitan area and also worked on developing a standardized eligibility process for demand response services using American Disability Act (ADA) guidelines. All Des Moines area transit providers participating in the United We Ride program will use this standardized eligibility process, anticipated to be available by the end of 2005. The result of this new process will ensure residents able to use fixed-route services are using this type of transportation, and demand response service will be provided to individuals requiring door-to-door transportation service.

## **VII. DISPOSITION OF ACTION ITEMS FROM THE 2002 CERTIFICATION REVIEW**

- 1. Environmental Justice / Title VI – The MPO needs to do more demographic study to understand where low income and minority populations are concentrated and then do further analysis to understand how they are impacted by transportation projects and services, both positively and negatively. The existing GIS tools that the MPO has should be helpful in this regard. The Iowa DOT and the MTA also need to be more involved in environmental justice/Title VI issues. They are encouraged to work cooperatively with the MPO to better understand how their activities affect low income and minority groups.*

The MPO mapped Census 2000 demographic data including minority population and household income. MTA transit routes were plotted on these maps, which showed that the majority of MTA routes travel through and serve and benefit higher minority populated census tracts. Using these maps the MPO needs to analyze how low income and minority populations are impacted by transportation projects. Future activities under this item are covered under Item 9 in the Recommendations section.

- 2. Pedestrian Issues – The DOT, MPO, and MTA are all encouraged to give greater attention to pedestrian issues. A critical “intermodal” component of nearly every trip is a pedestrian component. The development of a sidewalk map/inventory by the MPO is a good idea to get an understanding of the transportation facilities serving pedestrian trips, and will likely highlight gaps in that network. Further efforts in this area are encouraged.*

The MPO has done much work in planning and facilitating the development of a comprehensive regional trails network. They have also been involved in both the downtown skywalk system as well as efforts to ensure that sidewalks provide an appropriate system for walking trips. In that regard, the MPO developed a sidewalk inventory that covers the entire metropolitan area. They used that inventory to check for gaps in the sidewalk network. The MPO then overlaid transit routes on the sidewalk network to check for gaps in access to

bus stops and the transit system. These actions provide useful information for decision-makers for improving the connectivity of the pedestrian component of the transportation network. This item is considered resolved.

3. ***10% TDM for I-235 Corridor*** – *The Federal team was very impressed with the challenge taken on by the metropolitan area to implement TDM-10 for the I-235 corridor. (The goal of TDM-10 is to reduce vehicle traffic on I-235 by 10%.) The DOT, MTA, and MPO are encouraged to heighten their efforts to make TDM-10 a reality. A critical part of this effort will be to assess all transportation decisions made for the downtown area to ensure that they are consistent and supportive of this goal. Additionally, it is critical that they continue to work to inform local decision-makers - both public and private – of the effects of their activities and investments on this important regional goal.*

The MPO financially sponsors the Transportation Management Association (TMA), which has performed a very good public service in providing information to the public on bus service and ridesharing during the I-235 reconstruction project. With the I-235 project nearing completion and with the ongoing service provided by TMA, this Action Item has been addressed. However, we encourage TMA to continue its services in order to assist in reducing congestion within the I-235 corridor.

4. ***Potential Major Transit / Passenger Rail Investment*** – *There has been considerable local interest in investing in a new rail transit service, with commuter rail, light rail, and intercity passenger rail all receiving interest. The MPO needs to provide leadership in studying the potential and feasibility of establishing these modes of transportation in the Des Moines metropolitan area. The MTA and DOT also need to continue to work with local officials in determining the potential for new passenger rail service in Des Moines and central Iowa.*

After the 2002 Certification Review, MTA received a federal earmark to conduct an FTA New Starts study for Bus Rapid Transit service in the Des Moines metropolitan area. The MPO plans to provide support to MTA in this study, particularly with transit modeling, which MTA anticipates occurring in 2006. The MPO is also actively involved in the preservation of rail corridors. Due to ongoing local interest in rail and Bus Rapid Transit services, future activities are included in Item 2 in the Recommendations Section, as the MPO needs to provide continued leadership in studying the potential and feasibility of these transportation modes.

5. ***Travel Demand Model*** - *The effort to improve the travel demand model should continue. We particularly encourage the MPO and transportation project sponsors to work together to refine the model so that improved outputs will be useful and enhance developing decisions associated with Corridor Studies and specific transportation studies such as FTA New Starts projects.*

With close cooperation and support of the Iowa DOT modelers, the MPO has refined and improved its travel demand model. The MPO is also ready to provide modeling assistance to the upcoming FTA New Starts Bus Rapid Transit study. In addition, the MPO has begun using the MITSIM model for corridor studies, i.e. the I-235 route diversion analysis, and plans to utilize this modeling software for future corridor studies. Due to improved travel demand modeling and planned support for future modal modeling, this Action Item is considered resolved.

## **VIII. OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS FROM THE 2005 CERTIFICATION REVIEW**

The findings from the Certification Review process include both recommendations for improvement as well as a listing of commendations of the strengths of the Des Moines metropolitan transportation planning process.

### **A. CORRECTIVE ACTIONS**

No corrective actions were identified as a result of this review.

### **B. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. MTA is developing a “2030 Strategic Plan for Transit” which when completed, will be submitted for inclusion into the Year 2030 Long-Range Transportation Plan adopted by the MPO on December 16, 2004. Long-range transit planning for the next LRTP update needs to be completed under the comprehensive planning process performed by the MPO. In addition, long-range transit planning needs to include the participation of all public and private transit agencies in the Des Moines metropolitan area.
2. We recommend that the MPO continue to improve and build upon the metropolitan transportation planning coordination between the MPO, MTA, other transit agencies, and the Iowa DOT. We look for MTA and the Iowa DOT to take proactive steps to improve planning coordination as well. Project level coordination for studies such as the Bus Rapid Transit study is one opportunity for improving coordination between these three major transportation planning agencies.
3. The Year 2030 Long-Range Transportation Plan appears to be a collection of local transportation desires rather than a document offering a regional focus for the Des Moines metropolitan area’s future transportation system. The Plan needs to provide a regional vision, rather than just serve as a compilation of local priorities. Future updates need to take a longer-term, broader regional view with a regional vision and regional priorities, rather than just reflecting short-term goals of local governments.

4. Since the 2002 Certification Review there has been an increase in the public's interest in the Des Moines metropolitan area's transportation planning process. In part, this is due to a perception by members of the public that local governments are developing transportation projects without adequate input from the public. It is critical that local governments do not circumvent the established planning and project development processes when projects are being developed, especially if they hope to use federal transportation funding for those projects. We urge the local governments to work through the established processes for planning and developing projects and to re-double their efforts to have processes that are open and inclusive to insure that all viewpoints are heard as part of the project development process. Failure to do so will likely result in lengthy and contentious project development processes that may end with projects being either ineligible for federal funding or cancelled.
5. The financial constraint analysis offered by the Year 2030 Long-Range Transportation Plan is not well supported. In particular, there is no apparent basis for the cost figures provided for future minor construction and preservation projects, and it is unclear whether maintenance costs are included in those calculations as well. Additional clarification of these figures is needed to support the financial constraint determination of the LRTP.
6. The MPO has done a commendable job with a broad range of initiatives including access management, freight, congestion management, and sidewalks. The next step is to bring the products of those initiatives into the project selection process so that the results of those initiatives are reflected in the projects and funding decisions made by the MPO.
7. During the past few years the MPO and its member governments have been involved with discussions and proposals for projects that are outside the MPO's transportation planning boundary. As the metropolitan area continues to grow and develop, there will likely be more issues that impact the metropolitan area that occur in the area outside the MPO's planning boundary. The MPO needs to reassess where the planning boundary should be set and expand the boundary so that it covers all areas directly impacted by transportation in the metropolitan area.
8. During the past couple years; there has been a tremendous growth in employment and housing in the area west of I-35 and south of I-80. The MPO's travel demand model needs to accurately reflect where employment and housing are located, so that future decisions are based on the most accurate information possible.
9. In many ways, the MPO is very proactive and does an exemplary job in providing information to the public and providing notification of its actions

and activities. One area where the MPO needs to expand its efforts, however, is in the Environment Justice/Title VI area. In particular, the MPO and MTA need to develop a more formal process to identify the transportation needs of low income and minority populations and assess whether those needs are being met through the transportation planning process. Additionally, the MPO needs to establish a process for periodically assessing the effectiveness of their public involvement process and then updating it as part of that process. Further, the MPO needs to explicitly work to include media and social service agencies targeting low income and minority groups, including non-English speaking media if necessary, as part of their overall public involvement process.

### **C. COMMENDATIONS**

1. We commend the MPO's support for trail planning and development. The trails vision for the region and the implementation of that vision is a model for other areas.
2. We commend the MPO for recognizing MTA's bus replacement needs as part of the overall transportation needs of the community and annually transferring approximately \$400,000 to \$500,000 of FHWA-Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds to MTA for their use in purchasing new buses for its fleet.
3. The MPO is commended for creating and then facilitating the modal roundtables. The transit, freight, and bicycle/pedestrian roundtables have improved planning coordination of those public and private transportation agencies affiliated with each of these modes. We look forward to the continued evolution of these modal roundtables serving the Des Moines metropolitan area.
4. We are pleased that there continues to be a strong public interest in transportation planning in the Des Moines metropolitan area. We commend the MPO in being very proactive in facilitating public participation and encourage it to continue to be very responsive to public comment on the transportation planning process.
5. We commend the prompt addition by the MPO and MTA of the "United We Ride" work activity in the MPO's Fiscal Year 2006 Unified Planning Work Program.
6. The MPO and Iowa DOT are commended for their strong commitment to ITS in the Des Moines metropolitan area which includes the "Highway Helper" Program, cameras that monitor traffic flow on the interstates, and variable message signs on interstates advising motorists of approaching

travel delays and detours. These improvements should result in safer roadways and reduced congestion on the regional highway network.

7. The MPO has developed a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) process that is a rational, systematic method for distributing FHWA STP and Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds. The process also includes a monitoring process to ensure that project sponsors are advancing their projects in a timely manner. Further, the MPO worked with Iowa DOT to discover roughly \$1 million in unaccounted STP funds that the Funding Subcommittee chose to use for trail projects in the metropolitan area. Overall, the MPOs management of the TIP process and programming STP and TE funds is exemplary.
8. The MPO's commitment to improved modeling techniques is commendable. The MPO has migrated to TransCad as the metropolitan travel model. The MPO has MITSIM available as a microsimulation model that should be an extremely useful tool for analysis in the future.
9. The MPO plays a major role in many national and international planning efforts. The influence of the Des Moines MPO, and its Executive Director, in such efforts is greater than expected from the relative size of the Des Moines metropolitan area. The MPO and the Executive Director are commended for their leadership in the greater transportation planning community and in efforts to improve the regional economy through improved coordination of international freight.

## **IX. CERTIFICATION ACTION**

In accordance with 23 CFR 450.334, the FHWA and FTA hereby jointly certify the Transportation planning process in the Des Moines metropolitan area for the period October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2008.



## **ATTACHMENTS**

**Appendix A: Verbal Comments From the Public Meeting**

**Appendix B: Written Comments Received on Des Moines Planning Certification**

**Appendix C: Certification Review Guidelines (Questions)**