

TWIN CITIES AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY



LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN 2009-2035

A Comprehensive, Coordinated, and Continuing Urban Area Transportation Planning Process

Prepared by:

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Southwest Michigan Commission (SWMPC) is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Twin Cities Area Transportation Study (TwinCATS). The MPO is responsible for convening the communities within the study area and engaging them in a comprehensive transportation planning process. The jurisdictions involved within the defined study area boundaries collaborate to set regional priorities for all modes of movement in the transportation network and determine their formula for producing the local, non-federal match required for federal assistance in planning and transportation-related activities. The SWMPC board reviews and confirms the decisions of the TwinCATS Policy Committee. Together, the SWMPC, through the expertise present in the TwinCATS Policy and Technical Advisory Committees (TAC) produce the following: an annual Unified Work Program (which describes the planning work to be accomplished during the year), a four-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP, which prioritizes all transportation improvement projects in the four-year period), and a Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP, which covers a twenty-five year period and is revised every four years).

The plan contained herein is an update of the previous Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) adopted by the SWMPC. It is revised every four years and constitutes a twenty-five year look at the issues and needs of the Twin Cities Area. This LRTP reflects an expansion of the area in which the travel demand model has been constructed and run. This expanded area is an indication of the expanded influence of the areas abutting the TwinCATS study area boundary to the south on the transportation network within the study area.

In June of 2004, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) declared Berrien County as a base non-attainment area for 8-hour Ozone standards. This required air quality conformity determinations for all capacity expansion and “regionally significant” transportation projects. It also required modeling for conformity with each significant change to the Transportation Improvement Program or the Long Range Transportation Plan. The committees were obligated to assure that their plans and projects were not detrimental to air quality standards. However, on May 16, 2007, the EPA approved a request from the State of Michigan to re-designate Berrien County, among others, to attainment of the 8-hour ozone National Ambient Air Quality Standards

(NAAQS). While the re-designation changes the area's non-attainment status, the designation is now "attainment-maintenance," and air quality conformity procedures must continue to be followed.

Public Participation

Each program administered by the SWMPC must implement a process for ensuring public involvement in its activities. This process may vary from program to program. All go well beyond federal and state requirements, while meeting the goals and objectives of the Commission. In transportation, participation involves the inclusion of a number of partners in touch with under-represented populations. The process also incorporates daily contacts made with local municipalities and citizens regarding roads, services, and non-motorized activities.

The SWMPC must monitor and evaluate the efforts and effectiveness of the plans and processes to generate interest in and give input to the entire planning process. This ongoing review and evaluation of the effectiveness of the public participation for TwinCATS programs is important to the mission of the entire organization.

The TwinCATS public participation strategy follows the 2006 *Public Participation Plan*, approved by the SWMPC. Accordingly, the transportation planning process must seek to obtain public input on the list of goals and objectives, on the list of proposed priority projects, and on the LRTP draft document as a whole. The participation plan promotes the development of a breadth of public outreach strategies to tap into the embedded knowledge of the widest possible cross-section of the TwinCATS study area. In addition to the steps set out in the plan, each municipal member of TwinCATS engages with local citizens on an almost daily basis. Whether there is an established complaints/comments procedure, or a less formal way of hearing what the public has to say, this is a valuable source of opinion for TwinCATS public participation.

Attending the meetings is the best way to become part of the planning process. The TwinCATS transportation planning process is designed to be open to the public. Each month, on the third Monday, the TAC and Policy Committee meet at 9:30 and 10:30 a.m. respectively, to discuss projects and other items related to transportation in the region. Both committees meet at the Southwest Michigan Regional Airport in Benton Harbor, and the meetings are always open to the public.

Agenda packets and announcements for regularly scheduled TwinCATS meetings are distributed to all members approximately seven calendar days before the meeting.

Meeting information is also posted on the SWMPC website at

<http://www.swmpc.org/twincats.asp> or by contacting the SWMPC at:

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
185 East Main Street, Suite 701
Benton Harbor, Michigan 49022
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In the event that a member of the public is unable to attend meetings, the transportation staff at the SWMPC is available to discuss transportation issues by e-mail, letter, telephone, or in person.

Transportation Goals

There are six broad goals that have driven the work of this plan.

- Goal one is to support the economic vitality of southwest Michigan.
- Goal two is to promote safety conscious planning and system security in southwest Michigan.
- Goal three is to ensure the equitability and accessibility of the transportation system.
- Goal four is to preserve the regional transportation system.
- Goal five is to promote livable communities and environmental responsibility in southwest Michigan.
- Goal six is to efficiently and effectively move people, goods, and services within southwest Michigan.

It is by design that the TwinCATS goals align with the eight planning factors specified in the governing federal transportation legislation (SAFETEA-LU). Therefore, by implementing projects, strategies, and services that are consistent with the goals, TwinCATS municipalities and agencies are, by default, addressing the planning factors specific to the existing federal transportation legislation.

TwinCATS Development Issues

The issues facing the jurisdictions within TwinCATS have changed in their complexities over the years. Some are a result of continuing efforts for economic development, improvements in our roads, and connections to other parts of our region and beyond. Others have resulted from outside influences such as changes in air quality emission standards. Each of those changes point to an increasing need for efficient, predictable, and reliable transportation. Some of the area developments likely to have significant impacts are as follows:

- The Hollywood Corridor – There is much current development and much available land along Hollywood Road in both St. Joseph and Royalton Townships. In the findings of a recent corridor study, continuing growth of Lakeland Medical Center required road and drainage improvements and included a new bridge over I-94.
- Harbor Shores – A significantly large residential and commercial development involving three local units of government. Surface transportation circulation concerns exist as well as public transit service concerns to and from the development.
- Commercial development in Benton Charter Township – There is a need for non-motorized facilities and an access management plan.
- The continuing residential, commercial, and light industrial developments in Royalton, Lincoln, St. Joseph, and Lake Townships. Especially the proposed new Meijer store on St. Joseph Ave in Lincoln Township.
- The proposed US-31 connection to I-94, east of Business Loop I-94.
- The continuing expansion of the Southwestern Michigan Regional Airport and its surrounding industrial areas.
- The continuing growth of the Lake Michigan College/Western Michigan University complex along Napier Avenue is a potential issue. Traffic on Napier is a concern, especially at the I-94 interchange. This concern will be alleviated upon the completion of US-31 at I-94.
- The locally-driven interests in providing pedestrian and bicycle routes and connections among the various jurisdictions in and around the TwinCATS area remain a focus in the area.
- The growing national and regional concern for alternative forms of transportation to the single passenger car for commuting to and from work.

- The desire to preserve the existing rural character and the viability of agriculture. These issues are dependent on property owners' decisions and the local implementation of state land use policy. The outcomes of local decisions in this area bear directly on the road network. As employment opportunities spread far from the historic centers of the cities, a less dense population will put a strain on the existing outlying infrastructure. Limited resources present challenges to the extension and maintenance of newly expanded roads and infrastructure.
- Strategic actions in securing the local, state, and federal funds necessary to the St. Joseph River Harbor's development, both commercially and for recreational use. New recreation and/or maintenance committees may be necessary.
- Securing commitments and support for the proposed ferry service from St. Joseph/Benton Harbor to Chicago
- Local government decisions regarding the delivery of services may impact the local road system (Niles Road Bridge over I-94).
- More fully utilizing opportunities to use rail for passenger and freight. Maintaining Lakeshore rail line as well as developing high speed rail that serves Niles.