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Chapter 4: Performance Based Planning Process

The complete transportation infrastructure of the Lynchburg metropolitan area includes an extensive network of roads, bridges, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, trails, rail lines, and airports. At any given time, there may be numerous improvements that could be made to this network. These improvements may be as simple as routine repair and maintenance, or as complex as the enlargement or enhancement of a road corridor in order to improve safety or traffic operations.

While all of these projects may provide benefits, limited funding restricts the region to advancing only a small number of them at any given time. As a result, decision makers must carefully consider the question of how they may best utilize the available funding to make the most effective investments for the region. Many questions must be addressed during this process, such as: What are the metropolitan area's transportation goals? Who defines these goals? What types of improvements are most effective? Who can provide input regarding the final project selection?

One of the primary goals of the Central Virginia Long Range Transportation Plan 2040 Update is to create a project evaluation process that is transparent, standardized, and objective. Furthermore, the MPO intends for this evaluation tool to reflect the goals and priorities of the region's residents and to have broad support from local leaders.

This approach is consistent with a national trend in transportation planning called Performance Based Planning and Programming (PBPP). This refers to the application of performance management principles within the planning and programming processes of transportation agencies to achieve desired performance outcomes for their multimodal transportation system.

Why use Performance Based Planning and Programming?

Transportation planning efforts can benefit greatly from utilizing a PBPP approach. First, this approach increases the transparency of both the project evaluation framework and the project evaluation results, each of which allows members of the public to better understand and trust the planning process and decisions made by the plan. Secondly, a PBPP approach increases the effectiveness of planning decisions by ensuring that they are being made with the latest information regarding transportation conditions in the study area.

Public credibility in transportation planning has commonly suffered from the perception that project decisions are perceived to be based more upon political motives than operational needs. This perception may partly be a result of planning efforts in which the selection of one project over another is made by a group of technical experts who do not clearly explain all of their project evaluation criteria to the public. A PBPP process, on the other hand, allows a region to clearly define the parameters and factors considered in the project evaluation process, as well as to share all of the evaluation results used in the decision making process. This increased transparency can enhance public trust and support of the planning process.

Additionally, the process ensures that planning decisions are made in light of the latest available data and projections. Due to the fact that metropolitan regions are constantly changing

and adapting, the importance or value of any one particular project may fluctuate with time. A PBPP process allows the region to reevaluate these conditions based on a consistent set of criteria during every plan update and thus make any adjustments that are necessary. This better ensures that transportation funding will be effective and meaningful, and can help a region avoid devoting time and resources to projects that are outdated in design or location.

PBPP in Federal and State Transportation Legislation

Yet another reason for the MPO to adopt a PBPP approach is to align with federal and state requirements. MAP-21, Virginia House Bill 2, and VTrans (the statewide transportation plan for Virginia) all require the establishment of a performance- and outcome-based program in the coming years. It has been the intention in this LRTP update to be proactive in developing a methodology for project prioritization in order to be invested in performance-based planning by the time federal and state mandates are enforced. A well-vetted methodology for project prioritization can help position our region for more funding in the years to come.

The Virginia Department of Transportation has been pioneering performance-based planning, and developed a prioritization process for programming several years ago. The VDOT Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment began adopting PBPP principles during the creation of the VTrans 2025 Statewide Transportation Plan, and refined the process during the VTrans 2035 Update.

As mentioned earlier, under MAP21, MPOs are federally mandated to have a clear project evaluation framework to be ready for implementation of target-based funding in 2016. In addition, by July 2016, the Commonwealth Transportation Board must begin allocating transportation funding according to the provisions of House Bill 2.

The timing of these major pieces of legislation is significant to CVLRTP 2040. While a Draft HB2 process was released in the spring of 2015, approval of a final process won't be finalized until the summer/fall of 2015, after the completion of the LRTP. For Central Virginia, this created the opportunity to comment on the process through Regional Workshops held during the spring of 2015, and to help shape the weighting of the Prioritization Factors for the region's VDOT Construction District. In the longer term, the projects prioritized under this LRTP may, at the discretion of the MPO Policy Board, be advanced to nomination for HB2 project prioritization before the October 1, 2015 deadline for project nominations.

Despite their obvious linkages and similarity of purpose, it is important to distinguish key differences between the LRTP's project prioritization process and the state's HB2 prioritization process. The table below highlights some of these key differences:

Issue	HB2 Project Prioritization	CVLRTP Project Prioritization
Purpose	To help the CTB allocate project funding under the annual SYIP process	To help the MPO policy board identify key project priorities in its long range plan
Planning Horizon	Short term – generally 6 year funding plan	Long term – 25 year planning horizon
Relevant Funding	Certain types of funding subject to HB2 (e.g. does not include most safety, maintenance and revenue sharing funding programs)	All funding available to the region for transportation, including funding ineligible for HB2
Relationship to Priorities	Relates to statewide priorities	Relates to regional priorities
Update Cycle	Cycle conducted annually	Updated every 5 years

As shown in the table above, the LRTP's project rating approach ultimately has a different purpose than the HB2 project rating process. One is for a long range plan for all types of transportation funding (the LRTP), and the other is for short range funding decisions for specifically eligible funding categories (HB2). In addition, each process relates to different priorities, one relating to statewide priorities and one to regional priorities. For these reasons, the LRTP rating process should not necessarily mirror the HB2 rating process, although they are clearly related.

It should also be noted that in both cases (CVLRTP and HB2), the project rating and prioritization systems are only ways to assist policy boards in their decision making processes – they do not replace the decision making process. It could be said that both the LRTP planning process and the HB2 process are data guided rather than data driven processes and neither prioritization system precludes the decision makers from using their own judgments concerning the best interest of the public at large in making their decisions on transportation investments.

PBPP in Regional Planning

Due to the reasons mentioned above, the majority of Virginia's MPOs are incorporating performance-based planning and programming into their long range transportation planning processes. According to a survey done by the state Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment, twelve of the fourteen MPOs in Virginia are now conducting some form of performance-based planning. The leaders in this charge have been the Northern Virginia, Hampton Roads, and Fredericksburg area MPOs.

Central Virginia's performance-based project evaluation framework is not the first among Virginia MPOs, and it has benefited from the experience of other MPOs through the research that was conducted by the consultant team and the technical committee prior to establishing the region's framework.

Process Objectives

The performance-based project evaluation tool developed for the CVLRTP 2040 Update, which is explained in detail in the next chapter, was developed with several process objectives in mind. These objectives guided and shaped the development of the project evaluation system and ensured that it would meet broader regional and MPO goals as stated in the LRTP. These included:

1. **Create a transparent and objective project evaluation process that can effectively respond to the changing needs of the metro region**

The project evaluation tool created during this update should provide a transparent evaluation process whose evaluation factors are clearly defined and which relies upon objective measurements of the latest current and projected transportation and planning data.

2. **Create a project evaluation tool that effectively reflects the transportation goals and objectives that are supported by members of the public and local leaders.**

The project evaluation tool created during this update include factors that have been identified as important to residents and leaders in the region and should have continuity with the adopted Goals from the prior LRTP update. Additionally, the relative importance or weighting of these factors should likewise be based on public and stakeholder input.

3. **Create a project evaluation tool that is generally consistent with the structure performance factors that are defined by Virginia's House Bill 2.**

The project evaluation tool created during this update should generally reflect the evaluation categories and performance management factors that are defined during the ongoing development of Virginia's House Bill 2, with some variation allowed in order to most effectively respond to the needs and goals that are unique to the Central Virginia MPO.

4. **Create a project evaluation tool that is guided by economic development initiatives led by the region and the state, and acknowledges the importance of effective interregional transportation infrastructure for supporting the economic prosperity of the region.**

The project evaluation tool created during this update should prioritize evaluation factors that support economic development initiatives in the region. Projects should receive a higher evaluation rating if they have been identified in a formal economic development plan. Additionally, the project evaluation tool should include evaluation factors that support improvements to major corridors that provide interregional connections that are vital for trade and economic development.