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## MEMORANDUM

**To:** CMAP Transportation Committee

**From:** CMAP Staff

**Date:** April 19, 2024

**Subject:** Regional Transportation Plan update

**Action Requested:** Information

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CMAP has initiated the development of the next Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) for northeastern Illinois. The RTP serves as a long-range transportation plan for the region, outlining transportation goals, objectives, strategies and investment priorities that guide transportation decision-making and funding allocation within the region. In accordance with federal rules, the RTP must identify how the metropolitan area will manage and operate a multimodal surface transportation system - including transit, highway, bicycle, pedestrian, and accessible transportation - to achieve regional goals.

### **Building on the success of ON TO 2050**

The development of the RTP will build on the goals, objectives, and strategies provided in the region's current comprehensive plan, ON TO 2050. The mobility chapter includes three broad goals for the region's transportation system:

- A modern multimodal system that adapts to changing travel demand
- A system that works better for everyone
- Making transformative investments

To achieve these goals, the mobility chapter includes recommendations and numerous strategies to achieve them. Recommendations include:

- Harness technology to improve travel and anticipate future impacts
- Make transit more competitive
- Maintain the region's status as North America's freight hub
- Leverage the transportation network to promote inclusive growth
- Improve travel safety
- Improve resilience of the transportation network to weather events and climate change
- Fully fund the region's transportation system
- Enhance the region's approach to transportation programming

CMAQ staff will use these goals, recommendations and strategies as a starting point to facilitate a regional dialogue on the development of the next RTP.

### **Federal requirements**

The development of the RTP is governed by federal transportation regulations which require metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), such as CMAQ, to develop and update the RTP in coordination with state and local transportation agencies, as well as stakeholders and the public. The RTP is required to cover a planning horizon of 20 years or more and must be updated every four years. To achieve this, the next RTP will maintain a 2050 horizon year and be adopted by October 2026.

The development of the RTP must be grounded in performance-based planning principles. CMAQ is required to establish performance measures and targets related to various aspects of transportation performance, such as safety, congestion, air quality, and asset management. These measures and targets should align with goals and objectives established through the planning process and serve as benchmarks for evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of transportation investments and informing the decision-making processes.

CMAQ is required to coordinate closely with state and local transportation agencies, as well as with other transportation partners in the development of the RTP. This coordination ensures alignment with state and local transportation plans, policies, and priorities, and facilitates the integration of transportation planning efforts across jurisdictional boundaries. Federal regulations also emphasize the importance of public involvement in the transportation planning process. CMAQ is required to engage stakeholders, including the public, local governments, transit agencies, environmental organizations, and other regional partners, throughout the development of the RTP. This helps ensure that the final plan is transparent, inclusive, and responsive to community needs and priorities.

### **The regional transportation planning process**

Development of the RTP is a multi-year effort that requires comprehensive research, analysis, policy development, stakeholder coordination, and targeted public outreach. The process to develop the regional transportation plan can be summarized by three questions:

- What is the future transportation system we want?
- What are the challenges and opportunities to get there?
- How will we achieve the future transportation system we want?

## What is the future transportation system we want?



### *What is the future transportation system we want?*

In the initial phases of developing the RTP, the focus is on establishing clear goals and objectives that will guide the planning process. These goals and objectives are derived from input from stakeholders, including the public, local governments, transportation agencies, and other regional partners. The goals set the overarching long-term vision for the transportation system within the metropolitan area, while the objectives provide specific, measurable outcomes that contribute to achieving those goals. For example, goals may include enhancing mobility, improving safety, improving air quality and fostering economic development, while objectives could entail improving travel time reliability, increasing transit ridership, and enhancing pedestrian and cyclist safety.

Federal regulations mandate that CMAP adopt a performance-based approach to transportation planning. This requires the establishment of performance measures and targets to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of transportation investments and programs. Performance measures encompass a wide range of metrics related to established goals and objectives. Targets are specific with quantifiable goals set for each performance measure, reflecting desired outcomes and progress towards achieving broader transportation goals. For instance, performance measures related to safety may include the number of fatalities and serious injuries, while targets may aim to reduce these numbers by a certain percentage over the twenty-five-year planning horizon.

Setting performance measures and targets ensure that the RTP development process is grounded in data-driven decision-making and accountability. By establishing clear benchmarks for measuring progress and outcomes, CMAP can prioritize investments and allocate resources more effectively to address the most pressing transportation challenges within the region. Moreover, performance-based planning enables CMAP to communicate the impact of transportation investments to decision-makers, stakeholders and the public, fostering transparency and trust in the regional planning process.

### *What are the challenges and opportunities to get there?*

Simultaneous to the goals and objective setting phases of work, CMAP staff will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the current state of transportation infrastructure, services, and travel patterns within the metropolitan area. This existing conditions and future needs phase of work involves analyzing existing roadway networks, public transit systems, bike and pedestrian facilities, freight corridors, and other transportation assets to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Additionally, CMAP staff will gather data on travel behavior, including commuting patterns, trip lengths, mode choices, and congestion levels, to better understand how people and goods move within the region. By examining existing conditions, CMAP can identify transportation challenges and opportunities that need to be addressed in the development of the RTP.

Work is currently underway to develop a regional socioeconomic forecast to project future population, employment, and land use trends within the metropolitan area. This forecasting process relies on demographic data, economic indicators, and land use models to estimate future growth and development patterns. By anticipating changes in population distribution, employment centers, and land use densities, CMAP can predict shifts in travel demand and spatial mobility patterns over the planning horizon. This forward-looking analysis is essential for identifying future transportation needs and guiding infrastructure investments that can accommodate projected growth while promoting equity, resilience, and fiscal and environmental sustainability.

In addition to the socioeconomic forecast, travel demand modeling plays a critical role in the existing conditions and future needs phase by simulating future transportation demand based on various assumptions. These models incorporate data on population growth, land use changes, economic activity, transportation networks, and travel behavior to forecast future traffic volumes, congestion levels, and modal shares. By analyzing the results of travel demand modeling, CMAP can identify potential congestion hotspots, assess the need for mobility improvements, evaluate the effectiveness of alternative transportation strategies, and prioritize investments that align with regional goals and objectives. Overall, the existing conditions and future needs phase provides the empirical foundation for informed decision-making in the development of the RTP.

### *How will we achieve the future transportation system we want?*

This phase of the RTP development process is a critical stage where CMAP and its partners formulate strategies to address identified transportation challenges and capitalize on opportunities within northeastern Illinois. This phase involves synthesizing data, analysis, and stakeholder input gathered in previous phases to develop a comprehensive set of transportation strategies that align with the overarching goals and objectives of the RTP. These strategies encompass a wide range of interventions aimed at achieving regional goals.

Integral to the strategy development phase is the formulation of a financial plan that forecasts reasonably anticipated revenues and expenditure allocations to support the implementation of transportation projects and programs identified in the plan. The financial plan involves collaboration with funding partners, including federal, state, and local governments, as well as

consideration of innovative financing mechanisms and public-private partnerships. By aligning anticipated revenues with proposed expenditures, the financial plan ensures fiscal constraint and provides assurance that the RTP is financially feasible and sustainable over the planning horizon. Additionally, the financial plan helps identify any funding gaps that need to be addressed and explores strategies to leverage available resources to achieve desired transportation outcomes.

Furthermore, the strategy development phase encompasses the evaluation and prioritization of regionally significant projects. Regionally significant projects (RSPs) are capital investments in the region's expressways, transit system, and arterials with impacts and benefits that are large enough to warrant additional discussion through the regional planning process. The federal government requires regional planning agencies to demonstrate fiscal constraint by showing that sufficient resources will be available to construct projects recommended in the plan, based on their alignment with regional goals, technical feasibility, cost-effectiveness, project readiness and potential benefits. CMAP plays a crucial role in vetting projects and ensuring that limited transportation funding is directed towards projects that provide the greatest regional benefit and address the most pressing transportation needs within the region.

The process begins by revisiting the existing RSP policies and procedures, including the definition and thresholds for RSPs. The RSP definition and thresholds establish what types of projects warrant regional analysis and consideration through the regional transportation planning process. Once the RSP definition and thresholds are established, candidate RSPs are solicited through a call for projects. Following the call for projects, CMAP staff analyzes potential impacts on the regional transportation system and surrounding communities and evaluates projects for alignment with regional goals and objectives. The information gathered is then synthesized to develop an initial prioritized list of regionally significant projects, taking into account available revenues identified in the financial plan to ensure fiscal constraint. Subsequently, CMAP staff will engage with the CMAP Transportation Committee to develop a recommended prioritized list of RSPs that are presented to the CMAP Board and MPO Policy Committee for consideration and final approval as part of the adoption of the regional transportation plan. This process also involves collaboration with stakeholders, including transportation agencies, local governments, advocacy groups, and the public, to ensure transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in decision-making. By selecting projects that offer the highest return on investment and align with the regional goals, the region can maximize the impact of transportation investments and advance the overall objectives of the plan.

The strategy development phase culminates in the development of an implementation plan which serves as a roadmap for translating the long-range goals and strategic priorities outlined in the plan into tangible actions and projects that will be implemented over a specified timeframe. The implementation plan serves as a mechanism for coordinating various policy and planning initiatives to ensure the realization of the plan's objectives. This collaborative approach involves federal, state, and local transportation agencies, transit operators, regional planning organizations, local governments, and other entities working together to advance transportation priorities and achieve regional goals and objectives.

**Next steps**

The next steps in the development of the RTP involve initiating key phases of the planning process. CMAP has commenced background research for the goals and objectives phase. Simultaneously, staff has begun the existing conditions and future needs phase, conducting a comprehensive analysis of the current state of transportation infrastructure, services, and travel patterns within the metropolitan area. This phase also involves forecasting future population, employment, and land use trends to anticipate future transportation needs and challenges.

Furthermore, CMAP is actively engaged in working with regional partners to evaluate and potentially update regionally significant project (RSP) policies and procedures. This collaborative effort is assessing the need to update policies and procedures related to the evaluation of potential impacts of transportation investments and prioritization of projects for funding. Additionally, we are forecasting transportation revenues to inform the financial planning process, ensuring that anticipated funding sources align with the costs of proposed transportation projects and programs. Moreover, efforts are underway to procure a team of consultants who will provide technical expertise and support in the development of the RTP.

Finally, CMAP is coordinating with state and federal partners to align planning efforts, while also developing a comprehensive public outreach strategy to engage stakeholders and solicit input from the community throughout the planning process. These concerted efforts underscore CMAP's commitment to developing a robust and inclusive RTP that addresses the region's evolving transportation needs and aspirations.

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