

**AMES AREA METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION (AAMPO)  
TRANSPORTATION POLICY COMMITTEE ACTION FORM**

**SUBJECT: AAMPO SELF-CERTIFICATION**

**BACKGROUND:**

Pursuant to federal regulations, each Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) must self-certify that the transportation planning process is addressing the major issues in the metropolitan planning area and is being conducted in accordance with all applicable requirements. In the 2011 AAMPO process review by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), a joint report was issued finding that the transportation planning activities of AAMPO are being carried out in accordance with federal regulations, policies, and procedures.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

1. Certify that the AAMPO transportation planning process is being conducted in accordance with all applicable requirements.
2. Reject the certification.

**ADMINISTRATOR'S RECOMMENDATION:**

Both the FTA and FHWA previously determined that the AAMPO is carrying out its transportation planning activities in accordance with federal requirements. However, each MPO must also certify that transportation planning activities are being conducted in accordance with these requirements.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the Administrator that the AAMPO Policy Committee adopt Alternative No. 1, thereby certifying that the AAMPO transportation planning process is being conducted in accordance with all applicable requirements.

**AMES**

**METROPOLITAN AREA**

**MPO TRANSPORTATION PLANNING  
REVIEW REPORT**

**REVIEW CONDUCTED BY:**

**FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION  
AND  
FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION**

**JUNE 29, 2011**

## **I. PURPOSE OF MPO TRANSPORTATION PLANNING REVIEW**

Pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 134 and 49 U.S.C. 1607, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) have responsibilities for ensuring that the metropolitan transportation planning processes are conducted in a manner consistent with the above legislation. As a condition for receipt of Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) transportation funds, federal legislation requires that each metropolitan area have a transportation planning process that results in plans and programs consistent with the development of the metropolitan area. These plans and programs must support the transportation improvements and subsequent project development activities in the area. The FHWA metropolitan planning (PL) and FTA urbanized area formula planning (Section 5303) funds are made available annually to the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) which is responsible, together with the State DOT and Transit Operator, for carrying out the above planning activities.

The MPO planning 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. Transportation Planning Work Program approval, Metropolitan and Statewide Transportation Improvement Program findings, 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 overall MPO planning review.

The Ames Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO) is the officially designated MPO for the Ames metropolitan area. The focus of this planning review of AAMPO was to:

- A. Determine if AAMPO's metropolitan transportation planning activities are being carried out in accordance with the governing metropolitan planning regulations, policies, and procedures;
- B. Determine if AAMPO's metropolitan transportation planning process is a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive process that results in the support and development of transportation improvements for the Ames metropolitan area; and,
- C. Determine if AAMPO's 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.
- D. Highlight good metropolitan transportation planning practices, which can be shared with other MPOs and State DOTs.

While the MPO Transportation Planning Review report itself may not fully document all intermediate and ongoing information and checkpoints, the findings of the MPO review, in fact, are based upon the cumulative information gathered in yearlong contacts and conclusions based on a number of activities, culminating in the findings of the review effort. The review process is individually tailored to focus on topics of significance in each metropolitan planning area. Federal reviewers prepare 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.

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

FHWA and FTA conducted a joint on-site review of AAMPO's transportation planning process on June 29, 2011 at the MPO offices located in the City of Ames City Hall. The review focused on documenting the MPO's efforts and accomplishments as well as highlighting both commendations for quality planning items and recommendations for improvement of certain areas of their planning process. Prior to the 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 AAMPO in advance of the review and AAMPO returned responses to the Review Team prior to the review. Copies of the guidelines and responses are attached as Attachment B.

## **III. REVIEW PARTICIPANTS**

Representatives from FTA and FHWA, AAMPO, the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT), and the Ames Transit Agency (CyRide) attended the review. The following is a list of the individuals who participated:

John Joiner, AAMPO  
Rudy Koester, AAMPO  
Damion Pregitzer, AAMPO  
Sheri Kyras, CyRide  
Shari Atwood, CyRide  
Tracy Troutner, FHWA Iowa Division  
Mark Bechtel, FTA Region VII  
Craig O'Riley, Iowa DOT  
Anne Turcotte, Iowa DOT  
Garrett Pederson, Iowa DOT  
Phil Mescher, Iowa DOT  
Kristin Haar, Iowa DOT  
Mike Tiedens, Iowa DOT

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

As recorded by the US 2010 Census, the population for the Ames metropolitan area is just under 60,000. Population growth has been occurring at approximately one half percent per year. Iowa State University (ISU), with nearly 30,000 students, is located on the west side of the Ames MPO planning area and the university has a major influence on transportation and development patterns. The City of Ames is experiencing growth in the northwest quadrant and in the north central part of Ames. During the period of 2007 to present, the MPO has experienced more redevelopment than new growth.

The City of Ames has invested in transportation improvements and other infrastructure in these areas, which is facilitating growth. To date, most of the growth in the southwest area has been apartments and condominiums adjacent to CyRide routes, with little retail or single-family development. "Campustown," the commercial area just south of the ISU campus is still moving forward though not as quickly as anticipated. This development, along with other commercial and residential development, is moving slower than expected or is on hold due to the economic downturn that has occurred since the 2007 Planning Review. It was noted during the review that no major employers closed operations during the economic downturn. 3-M and Barilla did not have significant reductions; Sauer-Danfoss had significant layoffs, but now are back to staffing levels prior to recession. HIPRA, a large animal vet and vaccine company will be locating in Ames.

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

Under a State of Iowa 28E Agreement between Boone and Story counties, the City of Ames, and CyRide; the Ames Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO) was officially designated as the Ames MPO on March 17, 2003. The City of Ames provides staffing for the MPO's regular work activities. Currently, one City staff person works full-time for the MPO. Two other City staff persons and one CyRide staff person work part-time for the MPO. AAMPO also contracts for some planning work to be performed by consulting firms. For example the current Long Range Transportation Plan was prepared by a consultant. The Policy Board for the MPO directs the work activities of the MPO. The Policy Board is composed of ten voting members; seven from the Ames City Council including the Mayor, one from Story County, one from Boone County, and one from CyRide. The MPO's Technical Committee includes members from the City of Ames, including the City Engineer, Traffic Engineer, and Planning Director, the Director of CyRide, a representative from Iowa State University, and representatives from Boone and Story counties and the Ames Airport. Both the Policy and Technical committees meet on an as needed basis, but typically only a few times a year. As the MPO, AAMPO enters into annual agreements with the Iowa DOT governing the utilization of federal planning funds for activities included in its Transportation Planning Work Program. AAMPO also has an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with CyRide that covers the cooperative transit planning responsibilities of each agency.

During the review, there was discussion on the possible adjustments to board make-ups. One point of discussion was that Iowa State University is not a member of the Policy Board, yet has ownership of streets which are on the Federal Functional Classification System (which adds to the Federal funding for the MPO). Another observation of the policy board is that the City of Ames has too large a presence on the Board, and that Boone County infrequently attends meetings.

It was discussed that the MPO become more known for being an agency separate from the city. There were discussions of having stand alone MPO meetings versus the current practice of being held just prior to the City of Ames City Council meeting. It was also suggested that the MPO staff answer the phone as being the MPO and not the City of Ames. In addition, the MPO needs to look at other opportunities to promote the MPO.

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

Currently, most highway/street initiatives in the Ames metropolitan area are not for major projects involving new highway construction, but mostly consist of road improvements, intersection improvements, system enhancements, and pavement rehabilitation projects. It was noted that arterial street connections need to be improved and are the focus of the LRTP. The extension of Grand Avenue from Lincoln Way south to South 16<sup>th</sup> Street is a major project for the Ames metropolitan area and will help south to north traffic flow. Only three arterials travel from east to west across the Ames metropolitan area, so improving this directional flow of traffic is needed as well.

Each year approximately \$5.5 million from the City of Ames general fund, \$0.5 million from the City's sales tax proceeds, and approximately \$1 million from the FHWA Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds highway/street improvements. For the next few years, AAMPO's TIP will continue to mostly include projects for overlay/rehab projects, and the MPO will be using the pavement management system for scheduling rehabilitation work activity. The Ames metropolitan area has an extensive network of trails, and each year the City continues to spend approximately \$150,000 to \$300,000 on trail projects. In addition, Ames has a program to provide sidewalks where there are gaps in the system. Approximately \$50,000 is programmed annually for the sidewalk program.

The transit operator, CyRide, is the public transit system for Ames. CyRide continues to be a leader of Iowa transit systems in providing transit service to its community. Except for the single-family residential growth areas in the north and industrial areas in the east, CyRide provides transit service seven days a week for 75% of the City of Ames. CyRide's "Dial a Ride" provides "door to door" service, including paratransit service, for eligible individuals. This service continues to provide approximately 15,000 rides annually.

CyRide began operating in 1976 as a City of Ames department. Through a 28E Agreement between Iowa State University, the City of Ames and the Government of the Student Body

at Iowa State, CyRide became the Ames Transit Agency in 1981. CyRide currently operates 73 revenue vehicles, 11 support vehicles and is in the process of purchasing 2 articulated busses for the Orange and Red routes. At the 2007 Planning Review, CyRide staff stated that CyRide's greatest need is to replace buses that are beyond their "useful life." Due to extensive purchases of buses since the 2007 review, CyRide's average fleet age has been reduced from 13 to 8 years. It was stated at the review, that of the new vehicles, the hybrid buses are not showing fuel savings. However, CyRide is working with the hybrid vehicle manufacturer to improve their efficiency. Operational improvements either planned or underway include "Next Bus" technology for GPS/cell phone use for bus arrivals, and scheduling software to be purchased to replace the existing system of using spreadsheets.

The 2010 ridership was at 5,450,000 rides and represents the highest annual ridership CyRide has ever experienced. The numbers for 2010 were the third year in a row for progressively higher ridership. The 2010 ridership is approximately 27% higher than the 2005 ridership of 4,292,000 reported at the 2007 Planning Review; however, ridership growth is slowing. There has been a 1-2% increase this past year, which is down from the 7-8% increases the previous two years. This slowing growth rate is most likely the result of the saturation of the transit market in the Ames.

CyRide's ridership continues to be very dependent upon ISU students accessing the transit system. Each semester, student fees at ISU include a transit pass and, in return, students have no fare for riding CyRide buses. CyRide stated that this no fare policy for student riders has allowed for a historically large ridership.

CyRide is in need of more storage and maintenance space for its fleet, and is currently proceeding with an expansion project of their current administrative/storage/maintenance facility. The Request for Proposals to expand the Cy-Ride facility for more vehicle storage would also include raising the ceiling height in the existing facility to accommodate the hybrid buses.

Phase One of the intermodal facility to be located west and adjacent to Campus Town is under construction and is scheduled to be opened in June of 2012. The intermodal facility will provide service for Jefferson and Burlington Trailways intercity bus services, Executive Express providing service to Des Moines International Airport, and HIRTA providing rural service outside of Ames. Executive Express will have office and store its vehicles at the intermodal facility. In addition, taxi service, bicycle lockers, public restrooms, 20 van pool spaces (free), and 388 parking spaces will be provided. A bike path connecting to the ISU campus and to the residential area southwest will travel through the intermodal facility site. Phase 2 of the intermodal facility will include Cy-Ride services and additional parking spaces.

CyRide also desires to have advanced technology including Automated Vehicle Locator (AVL) and Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) technology installed on all its buses.

Security cameras have been installed on buses that are used for the Midnight Express late night weekend service to monitor and record any unruly behavior by riders.

CyRide does not provide service provided by FTA Access to Jobs funding; however, CyRide continues to provide transit service for low-income workers accessing jobs at the hotel/service sector at the northwest corner of I-35 and US 30. CyRide and AAMPO have developed an approved Passenger Transportation Development Plan (PTDP), which will be the framework for any future application made by CyRide for Access to Jobs or FTA New Freedoms funding.

CyRide plans to conduct an FTA funded Alternatives Analysis (AA) study which will examine bus rapid transit on one of its route corridors. This AA study will build on the Transit Feasibility Study completed in 2006 which looked at transit use on several major corridors or study areas within the Ames community. There is also a pending study for Des Moines to Ames transit service for which the Des Moines MPO and Des Moines transit system are taking the lead.

## **VII. PLANNING REVIEW FINDINGS**

The findings from the Metropolitan Planning Review process include both recommendations for improvement as well as commendations for quality activities of the Ames metropolitan area's transportation planning process. The findings include the following:

**Policy Board and Technical Advisory Committee Composition** – It is recommended that Iowa State University have a voting seat on the Policy Board. This seat could be comprised of ISU campus planning or the CRP Department. It is also recommended that INTRANS staff, or an engineer from Iowa State University, be considered for the Technical Committee.

The MPO should consider diversifying representation and weighting of the Policy Board. Currently, eight out of 10 Policy Board members are city staff. There is very little distinction between the MPO Policy Board and the City Council. A national survey of single-city MPOs shows that most of these MPOs have a more diverse Policy Board representation than just the single city. Attachment A notes the findings of the national survey.

**MPO Meeting and Location Times** – It is recommended that AAMPO consider meeting times and locations that are separate from the City Council meetings which are currently preceded by AAMPO meetings. The MPO currently has little autonomy from the City Council.



**Formal Interagency Agreements** – While it is noted that AAMPO’s informal planning arrangements with its planning partners, principally the Iowa DOT and CyRide, work well; it is recommended that AAMPO establish formal agreements with its planning partners regarding planning work and responsibilities.

**MPO Branding** – In order to promote AAMPO and have it more recognizable by the Ames public, it is recommended that “branding” for the MPO including answering phone as the MPO, having MPO decal signing, and utilizing aampo.org for the MPO’s primary website.

**Transit Ridership Trends** – CyRide and AAMPO continue to be strongly commended for conducting the planning for ridership growth that exceeded 5 million annual rides three years in a row. Five million annual rides was the goal of CyRide and AAMPO in the 2007 Planning Review. In addition, CyRide is commended for reducing the average age of its transit vehicles from 13 years to 8 years since the 2007 Planning Review.

**“Environmental Scorecard”** – AAMPO is commended for including an environmental scorecard for projects in the LRTP.

**Intermodal Facility TIGER and TIGGER Application** – CyRide and its planning partners are commended for submitting high quality FTA TIGER and TIGGER program funding applications that received funding awards from FTA HQ. Both of these programs were very competitive on a national basis with less than 10% of applications receiving awards.

**Participation in Des Moines Bicycle/Pedestrian Roundtable** – AAMPO is commended for participating with Des Moines’ Bicycle/Pedestrian Roundtable which allows for regional perspectives on these two modes of transportation.

**Long Range Transportation Plan Update** – AAMPO is commended for the quality and content of the current LRTP. Now that AAMPO has its’ own planning staff, it is recommended that the MPO prepare the next LRTP in-house as per the intention for the use of PL funds. If assistance is still necessary, it is recommended that consultants be utilized for a specific component of the planning, such as leading public involvement efforts.

**Tracking Performance Measures** – It is recommended that the MPO begin to track and measure performance annually to create a base and determine if progress is being achieved. Goals, objectives and performance measures in the LRTP should be utilized for this. Performance measurement tracking should be a component of the annual work program. It is also recommended that the next LRTP update include a time element and target for performance measures.

**Public Transit Plan** – AAMPO and CyRide are commended for having its PTP being a best practice for public involvement/planning.

**Self Certification** – AAMPO is commended for explaining self certifications on the public City of Ames television channel.

**Multi Modal Modeling** – AAMPO and the Iowa DOT are encouraged to continue its work in developing a multi modal model. If successful, AAMPO and the Iowa DOT would be leaders in FTA Region 7 in such modeling efforts.

## **VIII. CONCLUSION**

AAMPO has a transportation planning process that provides for the support and development of transportation improvements for the Ames metropolitan area. Transportation planning activities in the Ames metropolitan area are being carried out in accordance with governing Federal regulations, policies, and procedures, and the MPO's transportation planning process provides adequate representation and input from all levels of local government and individual interest groups on the transportation needs of the metropolitan area.