

**Certification Review of the  
Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process  
Conducted by the  
Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission  
For the Milwaukee, Wisconsin Transportation Management Area**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

At least every three years the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) must jointly certify that the metropolitan transportation planning process carried out by Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) in Transportation Management Areas (TMA) is being carried out in accordance with applicable provisions of Federal law. The certification is not just a review of the MPO or the MPO staff, but rather covers all of the agencies (local governments, State, and transit operators) that are charged with cooperatively carrying out the process on a daily basis. The regulatory foundation for the Certification Review supports the goal of enhancing the quality of the transportation planning process.

Certification is based on routine FHWA and FTA interaction in day-to-day MPO operations, participation in planning studies and the development of required planning products, periodic meetings with staff, topical review activities, and the detailed triennial review of the overall transportation planning process. Specific review activities conducted as the basis for this determination relative to the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission included a desk review of SEWRPC planning products and processes conducted in August 2004, a field review meeting with staff from SEWRPC, WisDOT, and local transit operators September 28-29, 2004, a public comment period from September 14 – October 15, 2004, and a public hearing on the evening of September 28, 2004. Local elected officials and transit operators were also offered the opportunity to meet with the Federal review team.

The full report documents evaluation of SEWRPC planning practices relative to twelve basic elements specified in federal metropolitan transportation planning regulations. FHWA and FTA received substantial public input in response to the public comment opportunities. The comments were considered in the evaluation of the corresponding planning elements. The report

includes specific findings based on the federal requirements and cites good practices and recommendations to improve SEWRPC's metropolitan transportation planning process and activities.

Overall, FHWA and FTA find that SEWRPC is in compliance with federal metropolitan transportation planning requirements.

Public input to the certification review team was dominated by City of Milwaukee citizens and public officials who expressed dissatisfaction that the regional planning forum does not, in their view, adequately account for the interests and issues of the central city. Their input led the review team to reexamine representation in SEWRPC decision-making, regard for public input in decision-making, and accommodation of Title VI in SEWRPC programs and practices. Based on the review and comments submitted, the federal review team cannot substantiate a violation of federal requirements related to these concerns. However, the comments indicate public expectations for more meaningful involvement in decision-making and greater SEWRPC involvement in addressing the needs of minority and low-income communities.

Key findings and recommendations related to these issues include the following:

#### SEWRPC Representation

- While the makeup of the Commission itself is specified in state statute, SEWRPC has structured the makeup of the transportation policy advisory committees to provide population proportional representation, accountability to the public, and authority to direct studies and make final plan recommendations. Public comments suggesting that Commission decision-making is not representative of the region's population reflect an apparent lack of knowledge of the advisory committee structure and authority within SEWRPC.
- SEWRPC should emphasize the population-representative structure, public accountability, and decision-making authority of the transportation policy advisory committees to the public and elected officials.

- SEWRPC should further emphasize the responsibility of local officials to actively participate in the regional planning processes and to fill their advisory committee appointments with decision-makers that represent the interests, concerns, and diversity of their communities.
- In public comments, a City of Milwaukee spokesperson expressed the City's perception that SEWRPC is far removed from the issues facing Milwaukee, but suggested willingness on the part of the City to work constructively with SEWRPC toward a greater partnership. FHWA and FTA officials propose to meet with City of Milwaukee and SEWRPC officials to discuss issues and opportunities to improve that partnership within the metropolitan transportation planning process.

#### Public Involvement

- Public decision-makers must consider a wide range of conflicting issues and perspectives in deciding on a course of action they believe to be in the best interest of the public. The result is not always consistent with the majority of public comments received. Nonetheless, the public deserves to know that the decision-makers have heard their concerns.
- Commissioners and advisory committee members should attend key public hearings to receive public comments directly. While SEWRPC staff has done an excellent job of collecting and summarizing public comments and providing them to decision-makers during studies, there is a passion in the delivery of those comments that is lost in transcription.
- SEWRPC should conduct outreach to engage concerned citizens, elected officials, and interest groups who expressed comments about public involvement during the certification review in an effort to better understand their concerns and identify appropriate measures to improve public involvement in the transportation planning process. FHWA and FTA will monitor this initiative to better understand the basis for the concerns and the interest and commitment of all parties to improving the processes.

## Title VI

- It is encouraging that three minority appointments have been made to fill vacancies on the Commission since the last review such that the makeup reasonably reflects the racial demographics of the region. We note, however, that the makeup of the transportation advisory committees significantly under-represents the racial/ethnic composition of the region as a whole.
- SEWRPC should continue to recommend that local officials consider appointments of minorities and females to reflect the diversity of their communities.
- SEWRPC should continue and enhance outreach efforts to increase the representation and participation of minority and low-income populations in the transportation planning process according to the manner in which the parties prefer to be involved. SEWRPC should continue to document and evaluate outreach initiatives and the results of those efforts.
- SEWRPC should consider the public expectations expressed in comments to the certification review and expand environmental justice evaluation as appropriate to address the needs and circumstances in Southeastern Wisconsin.
- Beyond the federal requirements to involve minority and low-income communities in transportation planning and evaluate the Title VI-related impacts of their transportation planning programs, the Milwaukee community has identified an opportunity and expectation for SEWRPC to take a more proactive role in addressing a wider range of issues facing minority and low-income populations. Affordable housing, access to jobs, and community development are examples of regional issues that could benefit from SEWRPC's planning expertise.
- SEWRPC should conduct outreach to engage minority and low-income communities and service organizations, citizens, and elected officials who expressed comments on Title VI and environmental justice during the certification review to discuss community issues and appropriate regional initiatives that can be pursued to address community needs related to economic development, land use, and transportation.

The review identified issues and opportunities for improvement in several other planning elements:

## Planning Agreements

- The 2000 census elevated the Round Lake Beach-McHenry, Grayslake, IL-WI urbanized area to TMA status. While less than ten percent of the urbanized area population lies within Southwestern Kenosha County, Wisconsin, TMA designation triggered dedicated funding and planning requirements that SEWRPC must address.
- SEWRPC and CATS need to execute a formal agreement outlining the split of transportation planning responsibilities and mechanisms for coordination of the bi-state Round Lake Beach TMA. Wisconsin FHWA and FTA representatives will coordinate with counterparts in Illinois to facilitate this activity.

## Monitoring Implementation of the Plan

- SEWRPC monitors implementation of the plan in terms of the fundamental underlying forecasts and new infrastructure and services. However, implementation of goals related to safety, mobility, operations, freight, system preservation, environment, etc. is not routinely monitored. Transportation improvement programs, which are intended to implement the goals of the plan, tend to be primarily driven by infrastructure condition needs. Safety, capacity, freight, and other needs are typically addressed in conjunction with physical infrastructure improvement projects. However, the timing of improvements based on infrastructure life cycles does not necessarily assure that safety, capacity, freight, and other needs are addressed on a priority basis. Opportunity exists to better monitor the accountability of the implementing agencies to implementation of all goal areas in the plan.
- SEWRPC should collaborate with WisDOT, FHWA, and FTA to identify fundamental performance measures corresponding to the goals and objectives of the transportation system and based on available data sources as a basis to monitor plan implementation as a consideration during the periodic update of the plan.

### Congestion Management System

- Effective implementation of any management system requires monitoring and periodic evaluation to determine the extent of implementation and effectiveness of the strategies in addressing congestion.
- SEWRPC should monitor, evaluate, and report on the implementation and effectiveness of implemented CMS strategies as part of a periodic system-wide transportation plan implementation status report.
- In conjunction with the current transportation plan update, SEWRPC should re-evaluate the adopted CMS strategies and update the CMS to include strategies appropriate to address traffic congestion and incorporate other changes necessary to make the CMS consistent with current practice.

The review team also cited SEWRPC for good practices related to several planning elements.

### Cooperation among the MPO, State, and Transit Providers

- Evidence, as supported by WisDOT and Milwaukee County Transit System officials participating in the review, indicates cooperation among SEWRPC, WisDOT, and transit officials is excellent in carrying out their joint responsibilities for metropolitan transportation planning.

### Linking Planning and Project Development

- Collaboration among SEWRPC, FHWA, and WisDOT led to development of a SEWRPC initiative to more closely link the transportation planning and environmental analysis completed in regional transportation planning with the engineering and environmental analysis completed in project level preliminary engineering under the National and Wisconsin Environmental Policy Acts. The initiative will directly involve Federal and State environmental resource agencies in the regional transportation planning process.
- This pilot initiative among SEWRPC, WisDOT, FHWA, FTA, and environmental resource agencies shows great promise to improve trust and coordination leading to improved accountability for environmental concerns in the transportation planning

process and greater acceptance of the planning process as a solid foundation for project level environmental analysis.

#### Air Quality

Within the Wisconsin transportation community, SEWRPC has been a leader in air quality planning. Staff is active in SIP development and discussion of air quality issues through participation on the Wisconsin Clean Air Act Task Force and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) Conformity Work Group, and maintain familiarity with the very complex and dynamic air quality and conformity rules.

#### Conclusion

The FHWA and FTA strongly considered the comments provided by citizens and public officials. We find that the broad context of federal public involvement and Title VI requirements provides opportunity to examine the public expectations expressed in comments and consider appropriate changes to improve SEWRPC metropolitan transportation planning. Certification recommendations recognize SEWRPC's past willingness to consider critique of their processes and improve their practices to address valid concerns. Responsibility for these improvements falls on SEWRPC, the local governments, WisDOT, and the transit operators as well as the concerned citizens, interest groups, and public officials who seek changes. FHWA and FTA expect to be closely involved in monitoring implementation of these recommendations to better understand the basis for the concerns and the interest and commitment of all parties to constructively improving the processes.

Based on the reviews conducted and ongoing oversight by FHWA and FTA, the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission's transportation planning process is certified as meeting the transportation planning requirements of 23 CFR § 450.334.

The review team recognizes the SEWRPC staff for exceptional professionalism, cooperation and courtesy extended during the review activities. The team appreciates SEWRPC's respect for and accommodation of FHWA and FTA staff in performance of our transportation planning program oversight responsibilities.