

Long Range Transportation Plan Task Force
March 7, 2011 Meeting Recap

Welcome & Introductions

PC – Andy Ruff, Richard Martin
TAC - Lew May, Jane Fleig, Adrian Reid, Kurt Babcock
CAC - Ted Miller, Jack Baker, Sarah Ryterband
Staff - Josh Desmond, Scott Robinson, Raymond Hess

Peer Community Research

Josh Desmond continued to share his findings of the Johnson County Council of Governments. The Johnson County Council of Governments (JCCOG) is the MPO for Iowa City, Iowa, and its designated urbanized area. The Iowa City urbanized area is quite similar to the Bloomington Urbanized Area in size and composition, which makes it an excellent peer MPO for Long Range Transportation Plan LRTP research purposes. MPO Staff conducted an interview with Kent Long (Assistant Transportation Planner) and Darian Nagle-Gamm (Transportation Modeler) to learn more about the JCCOG Long Range Transportation Plan and Travel Demand Model (TDM). The following is a summary of that discussion.

Overview

The JCCOG last updated their LRTP in May 2007. Like BMCMPPO, they are in the early stages of updating that plan, and anticipate that it will be complete and adopted by May 2012. This new LRTP will have a planning horizon of 2040, easily exceeding the 20 year horizon required by Federal law. Also like BMCMPPO, JCCOG has traditionally done their LRTP work in-house, with the bulk of the content being developed by staff. Modeling expertise has been obtained through a consultant contract with the Iowa Department of transportation (IDOT). JCCOG has recently added an in-house modeler so that they can update and manage the model in between major plan updates.

In updating their plan, JCCOG has to deal with many issues similar to those facing BMCMPPO. While JCCOG already has two interstate highways within its MPO area, one of those highways (I-80) was recently widened from 4 travel lanes to six travel lanes. This project received significant community opposition, much like the I-69 opposition present in Bloomington. JCCOG also has similar interest in bicycle and pedestrian issues, and has an adopted Complete Streets Policy that is referenced in their current LRTP. They plan to carry this forward with further enhancements for their new LRTP. According to JCCOG staff, the Iowa City area now has over 40 miles of trails.

While Peak Oil is a major topic of discussion in Bloomington, the issue has not risen to such a high level in Iowa City. It has come up from time to time, but there is not a significant community push to craft policies that address Peak Oil. One interesting fact of note in this area is that Johnson County is currently 2nd in the nation in wind power production. Transit is an important issue in Iowa City, much like in Bloomington. Iowa City was part of a \$273 million set-aside through ARRA for a passenger rail line between Iowa City and Chicago. The new Republican Governor has not made a decision on whether the state will reject this funding. According to JCCOG staff, over 20,000 people commute in to Iowa City every day to work at the University of Iowa Hospital System.

Plan Development Process

Unlike BMCMPPO, JCCOG is looking at their current LRTP effort as an update to the 2007 Plan. It will follow the same organization and format, but with updated content to reflect new modeling results, new project lists, and revised financial forecasts. Staff conducted a “round table” discussion with their committee members at the beginning of the process to gauge their concerns and interests with the existing plan. The “public” phase of the JCCOG process began last summer with a dozen presentations to the town councils and plan commissions of the communities that are part of the MPO, explaining what the LRTP is (and isn’t) and how it affects them.

JCCOG is currently in the data collection and preliminary drafting phase of their process. This includes updating their travel demand model model, the drafting some early LRTP chapters, and conducting some basic (non-scientific) surveys about bicycling, rail, and transit. In the spring JCCOG will begin working with their Technical Advisory Committee and Policy Board to review the draft Plan that staff has developed. Staff will then produce a final draft LRTP that will be used for a limited public input process. This will be the only real public interaction in the development process. Since JCCOG has taken the approach that this is an update rather than a full scale replacement, they are comfortable with a reduced public input phase.

Travel Demand Model (TDM)

The TDM utilized by JCCOG is a traditional 3-step model, similar to the TDM used by BMCMPPO. Like BMCMPPO, JCCOG has not modeled their transit network as part of the TDM. In order to represent an accurate mode split, JCCOG uses what they call a “Student Reduction”. Due to the presence of the University of Iowa, there are certain areas of Iowa City that have significant student populations. The Student Reduction assumes that these areas will have much higher rates of walking, biking and transit use as opposed to personal vehicles. As a result, the TDM factors in a higher mode split percentage for any TAZ that is tagged with the Student Reduction. This will result in traffic being modeled in a way that better reflects the travel patterns of UI students.

The JCCOG model accounts for land use with the typical three categories that most TDMs incorporate: Dwelling, Non-Retail Employment, and Retail. Each TAZ is tagged with one of these land use types, and the traffic for that TAZ is generated accordingly. Like BMCMPPO, JCCOG plans to recalibrate their model using data from the 2010 Census in order to ensure the most up-to-date data is applied. Population forecasts for future years will be made in cooperation with each individual community that is covered by their plan. They will also use a “control” total developed by staff to measure against. JCCOG staff wants to have a contingency to use in case some communities are overly optimistic in their growth projections.

JCCOG is not modeling freight movement in their TDM. The “industries” in their region are largely white collar and do not have significant freight or shipping needs, in contrast with traditional manufacturing-type industries. They are using the National Household Travel Survey, rather than a locally developed travel survey, to develop mode splits and traffic projections. JCCOG is trying to emphasize during the plan development process that the model

is one tool that they use to evaluate projects and scenarios, but it should not be the only factor in making key decisions.

Project Selection

The existing JCCOG LRTP includes four different future project lists, representing four different scenarios. This was done in order to provide options for future decision makers, as it is difficult to predict the economic or political landscape too far into the future. This would preserve flexibility for the MPO communities to adjust as required. Unfortunately, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) did not believe this was an appropriate way to address future projects in the LRTP. In their latest Certification Review, FHWA noted that this practice should not continue in any future LRTP for JCCOG. As a result, their new LRTP will adopt a single list of future projects.

JCCOG will break their project list into three phases for funding purposes: 2012-2021, 2022-2030, 2031-2040. In order to ensure that future project costs reflect inflation, JCCOG will use a 4% annual inflation factor for project costs. This is the same inflation factor that the BMCMPPO TIP requires. JCCOG will begin with a wide range of project options, and put them through a basic screening process to narrow the range to projects that are eligible for Federal funding. The projects will be reviewed for basic criteria such as location on a Federal Aid Highway, location within the MPO planning boundary, and other basic eligibility criteria. Once the eligible projects list is created, JCCOG plans to utilize an objective points-based system to further analyze and select projects for the final list.

Lessons to be Learned

There are several lessons to be learned from JCCOG and its Long Range Transportation plan. The Student Reduction is a creative way to get a more realistic mode split in the Travel Demand Model without having to do a vastly complex and expensive model. Even with an improved model, JCCOG has adopted the philosophy the Model is not the only decision making tool for the LRTP. Project selection should also consider whether a proposed project meets the Plan's vision, goals and policies.

JCCOG has also learned a lesson regarding the format of its existing LRTP. Federal authorities clearly prefer a single adopted list of future projects to a plan that provides multiple potential outcomes. This is more predictable for future users of the Plan. As part of the project selection process, an objective scoring system could be created. This would create more transparency in the selection process and keep decision-makers focused on selecting projects that best meet the needs of the MPO.

From a plan development perspective, the JCCOG process is significantly less interactive than the BMCMPPO process is anticipated to be. This is likely because they consider their project to be an interim update while BMCMPPO is taking a more global update approach. One method of involving the public that JCCOG used is to do presentations to local legislative bodies to ensure that they were aware of the Plan update and had an opportunity to provide their input.

Ted Miller said he is interested in the Campus Stadium Park and Ride, the number of parking spaces on campus and how it affects travel behavior.

Jack Baker would like to know about the relationship with DOT. Specifically he would like to know attitudes towards funding active transportation and the impact of renewable energy.

Richard Martin suggested that we find communities which have rigorous scoring systems which dominate the model in project selection (e.g. Gainesville FL, Ft. Collins CO).

Sarah Ryterband asked about how the bike/ped network affects the system and whether any of the plans have resulted in a significant shift in vehicle miles travelled per capita.

Mr. Martin would like to better understand what is required of the MPO when it comes to modeling.