

Citizens Handbook for Developing the Anchorage Area Transportation System

*Basics on the
Anchorage Area
Transportation Planning,
Financing,
and Coordinating Agencies*

Published by
Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Study
AMATS

A Program of the Municipality of Anchorage
Permit Center
4700 Bragaw, 2nd Floor
Anchorage, AK 99507

www.ci.anchorage.ak.us/Services/Departments/Com/Trans/amats.html

2001

AMATS Public Participation Program

is located on the web at:

[www.ci.anchorage.ak.us/Services/
Departments/Com/Trans/amats.html](http://www.ci.anchorage.ak.us/Services/Departments/Com/Trans/amats.html)

or call 343-7991.

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Do you speak “Transportationese?”

What is AMATS—a bird? a plane?

No, really? A planning effort!

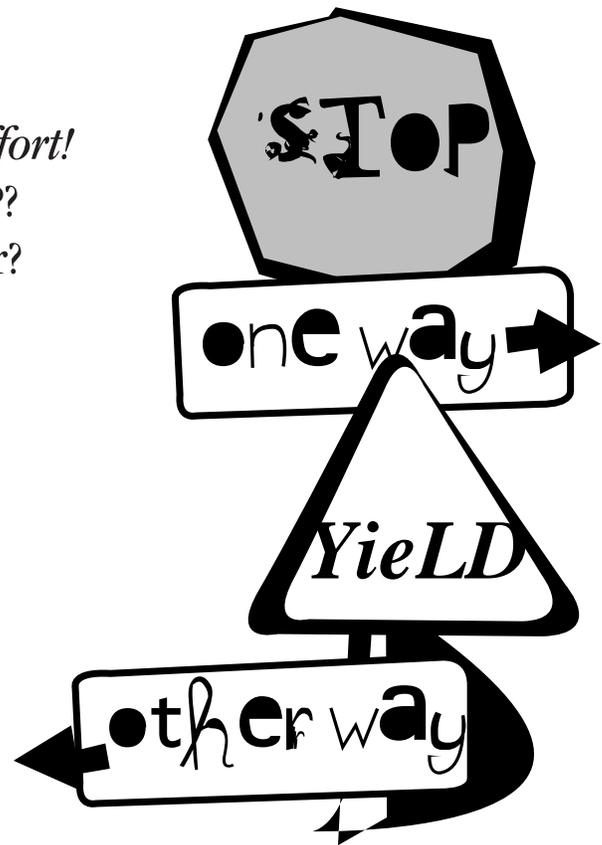
Which comes first, the LRTP or the TIP?

Are your multimodal priorities in order?

Does this bureaucratic baffle-gook sound familiar? If not, you're certainly not alone. For better or worse, the transportation arena has a language and a process all its own. Just as getting from point A to point B is often easier said than done, navigating your way through the complex web of transportation plans and funding programs can likewise be a challenge.

Is it worth the effort to become versed in the mobility business? More and more citizens are finding the answer to be “yes.” Whether motivated by a wish to contain ever-expanding rush hours, a quest to fill seemingly cavernous potholes, or a desire for innovative transportation systems, many are getting involved. They want a say in how the millions of public dollars are spent annually on the Anchorage area's network of highways, public transit, bicycle and pedestrian routes, local roads, and the airport and port.

The Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS) has designed this guide to serve as a primer on AMATS's roles and responsibilities for the Municipality's interested citizens and local policymakers, and to provide basic information on the Anchorage area's transportation network.



We've done our best to explain things in plain language. (If, however, we should lapse into “transportationese,” please use the glossary of acronyms on the following page.) Our aim is to encourage informed and productive citizen participation in AMATS activities.

No single organization has a monopoly on good ideas; they often germinate through an open exchange of information and viewpoints. Given increasing demands on limited public funds, transportation programs and projects cannot proceed without the public acceptance and support that comes through an open, inclusive process. It is in this spirit that AMATS offers this guide.

Acronyms and Definitions

ADEC

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.

AMATS

Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Study. AMATS is a federally-mandated, multi-agency team that works together to plan and fund the transportation system in the Anchorage and Chugiak-Eagle River areas when *federal funds* are being used. AMATS comprises representatives from a variety of organizations.

ARRC

Alaska Railroad Corporation.

ASD

Anchorage School District.

CAC

Citizen Advisory Committee. Every organization like AMATS in the United States is federally mandated to have a CAC. The Municipal Planning and Zoning Commission fills this requirement for AMATS.

CIP

Capital Improvement Program. A municipal document that addresses funding for transportation and public facilities in the Municipality. Most projects funded in the CIP come from local taxes.

CMAQ

Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality. This is a program that emphasizes the importance of the link between transportation and air quality. To that end, CMAQ program funding is applied to transportation projects that reduce vehicle emissions and help improve air quality. Transit and traffic flow improvement projects are included, as are projects such as ride-sharing, vehicle emissions inspection and maintenance programs, bicycle and pedestrian improvements and alternative fuels.

Comp Plan

Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Land Use Plan. A document updated every ten years, and most recently, in the Spring of 2001, the Anchorage 2020 Plan was adopted. It serves as a guide for community development, including transportation planning. This policy document identifies the issues, goals, and objectives for

land use in Anchorage, thus providing a framework for making decisions about our transportation system.

DHHS

Municipality of Anchorage Department of Health and Human Services.

DOT&PF

State of Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities.

FCC

Federation of Community Councils. A municipally funded body comprised of almost 40 community councils. The FCC is a formal participant in scoring Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) projects.

FHWA

Federal Highway Administration. A component of the U.S. Department of Transportation. FHWA authorizes expenditures from the Highway Trust Fund and sets deadlines for planning documents that AMATS is responsible for meeting.

FTA

Federal Transit Administration. A component of the U.S. Department of Transportation, established to provide leadership, technical assistance and financial resources for safe and technologically advanced public transportation.

LOS

Level of Service. A standard means of measuring traffic congestion by evaluating the capacity of a road with respect to the number of vehicles using the road in a given timeframe.

LRTP

Long Range Transportation Plan. A 20-year planning document, revised every three years, that identifies new transportation policies and facilities to meet the long-term (20-year) needs of an urban area for roads, public transportation, trail development, and general transportation. The LRTP must be consistent with the area's comprehensive long-range land use plan, urban development objectives, and overall social, economic, environmental, system performance, and energy conservation goals and objectives.

MOA

Municipality of Anchorage.

MPO

Metropolitan Planning Organization. A federal designation given to a local entity to take lead responsibility for developing transportation plans and programs using federal monies in an urbanized area with 50,000 or more people. The only MPO in Alaska is the Municipality of Anchorage.

OS&HP

Official Streets & Highways Plan. A document that depicts the hierarchy of road designations, which then creates the roadway system: freeway, highway, major arterial, minor arterial, collector, or street. These designations are determined based on projected traffic levels, which then determines the right-of-way (amount of land) needed.

Planning

A phase in transportation system development to determine the likely future transportation needs of an area.

Programming

A phase in transportation system development when the type and level of resources needed to design and build a project are determined and the scheduling of those resources occur.

PTDP or TDP

Public Transportation Development Plan. A short-term (5-year) program that outlines the intended development of the public transit system for each year during that period. It includes a detailed program of capital equipment needs, system management, and operations.

P&Z

Planning and Zoning Commission. An appointed Municipal body which, in one of its functions, serves as the official Citizens Advisory Committee to AMATS.

PC

AMATS Policy Committee. The formal decision-making body of AMATS, which approves final planning and programming documents.

POA

Port of Anchorage.

PSA

Public Service Announcement.

STIP

State Transportation Improvement Program. A document produced by the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities to allocate funds for transportation programming throughout the state.

TAC

AMATS Technical Advisory Committee. A formal body of representatives from various agencies and interests that reviews transportation planning documents and advises the AMATS Policy Committee.

TEA-21

Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century. Enacted on June 9, 1998, TEA-21 is the most recent comprehensive federal transportation enabling legislation.

TIP

Transportation Improvement Program. A document updated every two years and is required by FHWA-FTA joint regulations, in order for AMATS to receive federal funds. It is a prioritized program of transportation projects and air quality management strategies to be implemented in the near term (three years). The projects serve to implement the LRTP.

TMA

Transportation Management Area. A TMA is subject to special federal requirements regarding congestion management systems, project selection, and certification. These special requirements are for urbanized areas having a population over 200,000. AMATS is also a TMA.

UDC

Urban Design Commission. Reviews street and roadway landscape improvement projects and advises on urban design matters.

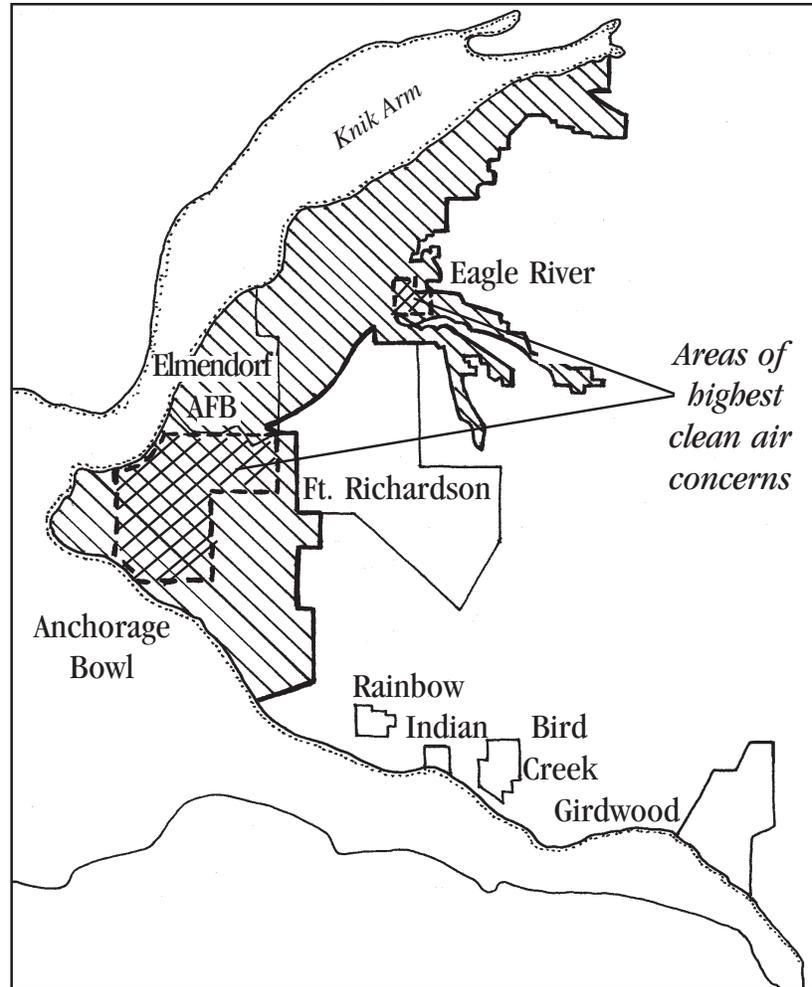
Anchorage Area Transportation Basics

AMATS Planning Area

The AMATS planning area includes the Anchorage Bowl, the Glenn Highway Corridor from Anchorage to the Eagle River area, and from the Eagle River area to Eklutna. It excludes several small communities along Turnagain Arm. Girdwood, Bird Creek, Indian, and Rainbow lie within the Municipality but outside the AMATS area.

The People

AMATS serves by far the most populous area in the state, with 260,000 or almost 40% of the state's residents living there. However, fringe areas, such as the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, are experiencing faster growth than the Anchorage Bowl. During the recent Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Land Use Plan (Comp Plan) update, citizens frequently expressed the need for regional planning. It is anticipated that another 81,800 residents will live within AMATS's area of responsibility by the year 2020. An estimated 31,600 more households and 39,600 more jobs will be available.



The AMATS Planning Area.

The Network

The Anchorage area's transportation network includes highways and overpasses, many miles of local streets and roads, the public transit system, the proposed commuter rail between the Alaska Railroad Station and the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport, the airport itself, the Port of Anchorage, and extensive bicycle and pedestrian trails. These functions must all work together for Anchorage to work.

The Public Transportation System

Anchorage offers three public transportation options: People Mover buses, AnchorRIDES for senior citizens and people with disabilities who are unable to use the bus system, and the Share-a-Ride car pool and van pool program. In 1999 Anchorage's People Mover served 3.1 million riders and carried an average weekday ridership of almost 12,000. On a daily basis, AnchorRides provides more than 600 trips, about 1,200 people car pool, and 185 people commute via van pools.

The Automobile

It is estimated that 4 million miles are driven daily in the Anchorage area, with each household driving around 50 miles. Average passengers per vehicle is about 1.2, well below other cities the size of Anchorage.



The Commute

Of Anchorage residents, 72% traveled to work by single occupancy vehicles in 1990, versus 15% by carpooling and 5% by biking or walking. Even though Anchorage has one of the higher public transit riderships in the nation, it only accounts for about 2% of trips.

The Budget

During the next 20 years, some \$60 million in federal funds will be spent annually on transportation in the AMATS area. These funds will be used for improving as well as expanding public transportation, state highways, and local roads.

What is AMATS?

The Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Study, or AMATS for short, was created in 1976. It is a coordinating group, based on federal legislation requiring municipal and state transportation organizations serving population areas of over 50,000 to work together in their planning efforts if they wish to receive federal funds.

AMATS is a multiagency team that works together to plan and fund the transportation system in the Anchorage and Chugiak-Eagle River areas when *federal funds* are being used. Federal funding accounts for 90% of public monies being spent to develop our transportation system and averages about \$60 million a year in Anchorage. These federal funds are generated from gas taxes; the remaining 10% comes from state general funds.

What does AMATS do?

AMATS's primary functions are to:

- 1) **Plan** by identifying Anchorage's long-term transportation system needs for all modes of transportation.
- 2) **Fund** implementation of the planning phases for the long-term needs, which is known as the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), where resources are programmed by determining what resources are needed and at what level,

then scheduling or timing the use of those resources.

- 3) **Coordinate** with the various agencies that have a role and responsibility for transportation planning and development, including environmental concerns.

How is AMATS organized?

Policy Committee

The Policy Committee, which is the primary decision making body, is comprised of five voting members: two assembly members appointed by the entire Anchorage Assembly; the Mayor of Anchorage; the Commissioner of DOT&PF or designee (currently the Central Region Director); and the Commissioner of ADEC or designee (currently the Director of Air & Water Quality). The Policy Committee is responsible for annually approving the AMATS transportation plans and programs and providing policy direction to the AMATS process.

Technical Advisory Committee

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) advises the Policy Committee and consists of representatives from the Municipality of Anchorage Departments of Health & Human Services (DHHS), Public Transportation, Planning, Public Works, and a representative of the Citizens Air Quality Advisory Committee. State representatives from the DOT&PF and ADEC also serve on the TAC.

AMATS Staff

Primary staff for AMATS is the AMATS Coordinator and transportation planning staff, who work in conjunction with others at the Municipality in Community Planning, Traffic, Environ-

AMATS's contact phone is 343-7991
or you can visit the website
listed on the front page of this booklet.

mental Services at DHHS, Public Transportation, and Cultural & Recreational Services.

State of Alaska staff from DOT&PF and ADEC also support AMATS.

Air Quality Advisory Committee

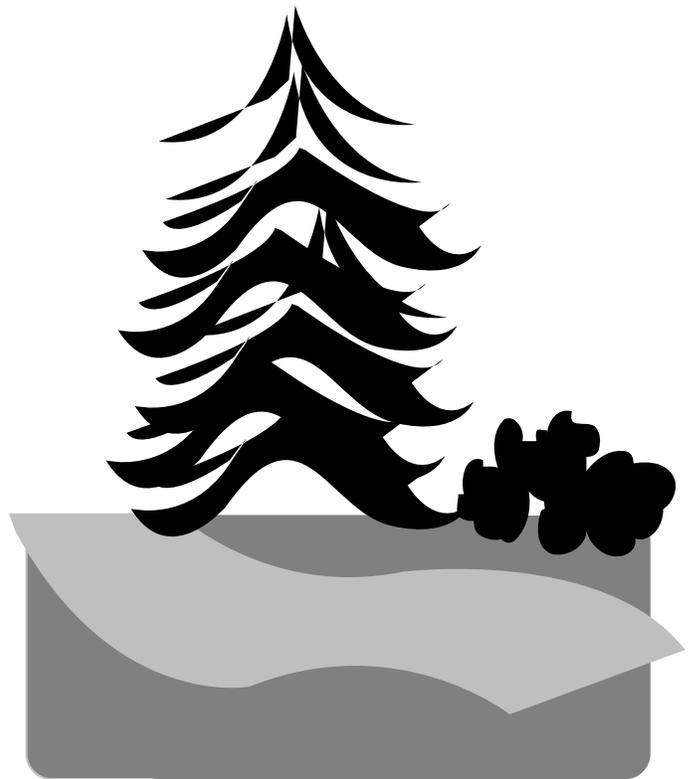
The AMATS Air Quality Advisory Committee is the citizens' forum for air quality issues. Specific functions of the committee are to assist in promoting public participation in the air quality planning process and to comment and provide recommendations on air quality planning issues. Members of this committee are appointed by the AMATS Policy Committee. DHHS is the coordinating agency for the committee and can be reached by phone at 343-6976.

Citizens Advisory Committee

The AMATS Citizens Advisory Committee is, in fact, the Municipal Planning & Zoning (P&Z) Commission. In its capacity as the AMATS Citizens Advisory Committee, the P&Z reviews transportation plans and programs. In another capacity, the P&Z reviews site selections and site plans for roadway improvement and building projects.

How does AMATS work to coordinate land use policies with transportation needs?

To clearly understand the AMATS planning process, it is useful to understand how the development of the Comp Plan, the LRTP, and the TIP work together (Figure 1). Land use decisions set the stage for transportation decisions, so it is critical that the goals and objectives of these three plans support one another. Both the Comp Plan and the LRTP



help develop a vision for 20 years into the future. Although 20 years seems like a long time, any new federally funded transportation effort in Anchorage takes an average of seven years from beginning to completion.

Comp Plan

The Comp Plan is updated every 10 years. It serves as a guide for how the Anchorage community will grow and change over time. It includes designations for transportation system development; open space; and industrial, commercial, and residential area development. It is a policy document that identifies issues, goals, and objectives of how the land in the Anchorage Bowl will be used. It also provides a framework for the community to make more detailed decisions to implement the Comp Plan.

AMATS has a number of responsibilities, but the two that garner the greatest level of public

interest are the LRTP and the TIP. Both of these plans help to implement the Comp Plan. The LRTP contains the transportation elements of the Comp Plan. The components that make up the LRTP are roads, trails, public transportation, congestion management, freight mobility, and meeting air quality standards. The LRTP is implemented in three-year phases through the TIP, which contains funding for priorities within that three-year time period. The TIP is updated every two years so, in effect, it is continually implementing the LRTP.

Long Range Transportation Plan

The LRTP is a document that guides development of the Anchorage area transportation

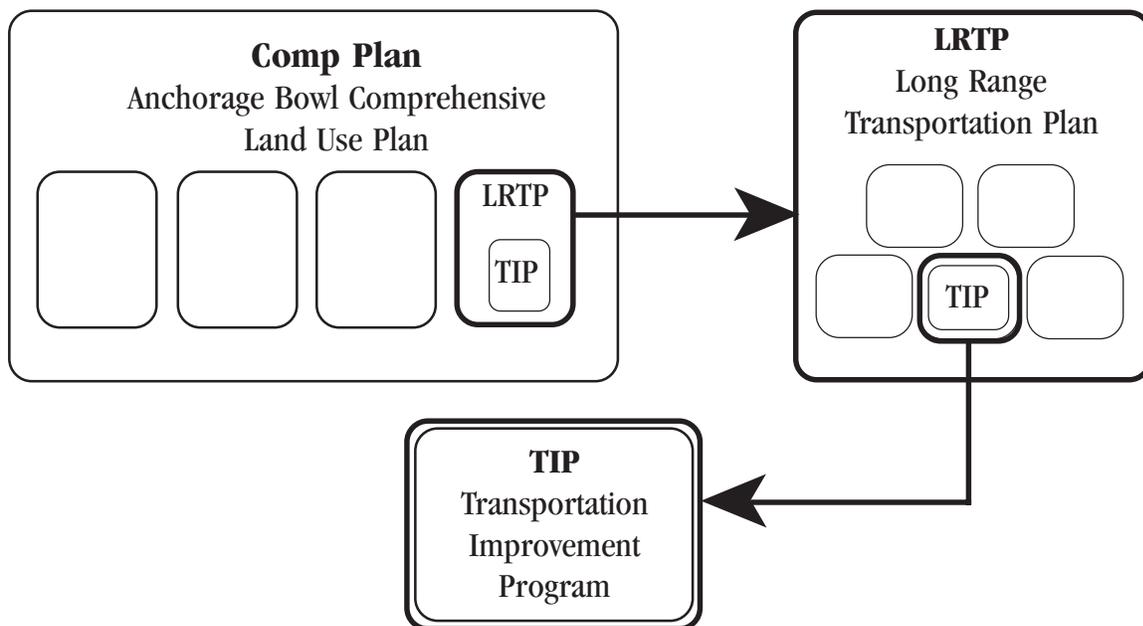
system for the next 20 years, hence its name “Long Range.” The transportation system is planned in such a way as to address and to meet the anticipated needs for 1) roads, 2) public transportation, 3) trail development, 4) freight and commerce mobility, 5) congestion management, and 6) meeting air quality standards in the Anchorage area and the Chugiak-Eagle River area. The LRTP is updated every three years. It is based on demographic and cost projections, along with the land use decisions and community goals and values as outlined in the Comp Plan.

Transportation Improvement Program

The TIP is a three-year plan that serves to

Figure 1. Relationship of Major Planning Efforts

The Comp Plan provides a blueprint for land uses for a 20-year timeframe. The LRTP and TIP help implement the Comp Plan by aligning transportation system planning with the desired land use patterns.



implement the LRTP. The term *program* means determining the type and level of resources needed to advance the LRTP, and it is also where the scheduling or the timing of those resources is determined. The TIP is updated every two years. Because the TIP implements the LRTP and the LRTP is based on the Comp Plan, the TIP is also a primary tool to implement the Comp Plan (see Figure 1).

Developing the transportation system is done in three phases (Figure 2). The first is long-term planning (LRTP). The second is programming (TIP) or determining the level and type of resources needed, and the third is project design and construction. AMATS is responsible for planning and programming, but is not responsible for project design and construction. Either DOT&PF or the Municipal Office of Planning, Development, and Public Works has management responsibility during preconstruction, design, and construction of the project, not AMATS.

Other Important and Related Transportation Efforts

State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)

The STIP is similar to the AMATS TIP, except it lists priorities for the entire state. The TIP is incorporated into the STIP using the amendment process. DOT&PF is responsible for the STIP. For more information, call DOT&PF at 269-0520.

Official Streets & Highways Plan

The OS&HP identifies and classifies roadways in the Municipality according to the functions they serve and the minimum right-of-way requirements for those functions. Classifica-

tions are collector, minor/major arterials, expressways, and freeways. The OS&HP is used primarily during land subdivision and development to ensure that an adequate amount of right-of-way is reserved for planned roads. The Municipal Planning Department is responsible for the OS&HP; call 343-7991.

Capital Improvement Program

The CIP is a six-year program for municipal facilities that includes maintenance (e.g., pot holes), roadways, transit, and trails as well as improvements to municipal structures, parks, and other public facilities. It is funded from a variety of sources such as local bonds, state grants, and others. The federally funded portion of the CIP is developed from the AMATS TIP. The Municipal Office of Management and Budget oversees the development of the CIP. The phone number is 343-4282.

Unified Planning Work Program

The UPWP is a federally required document outlining the annual activities, or tasks, for AMATS to undertake in support of federally funded transportation projects. The Municipality of Anchorage and DOT&PF are the two

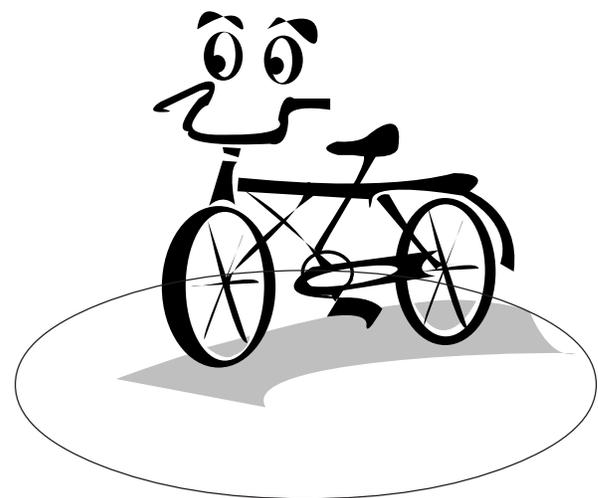
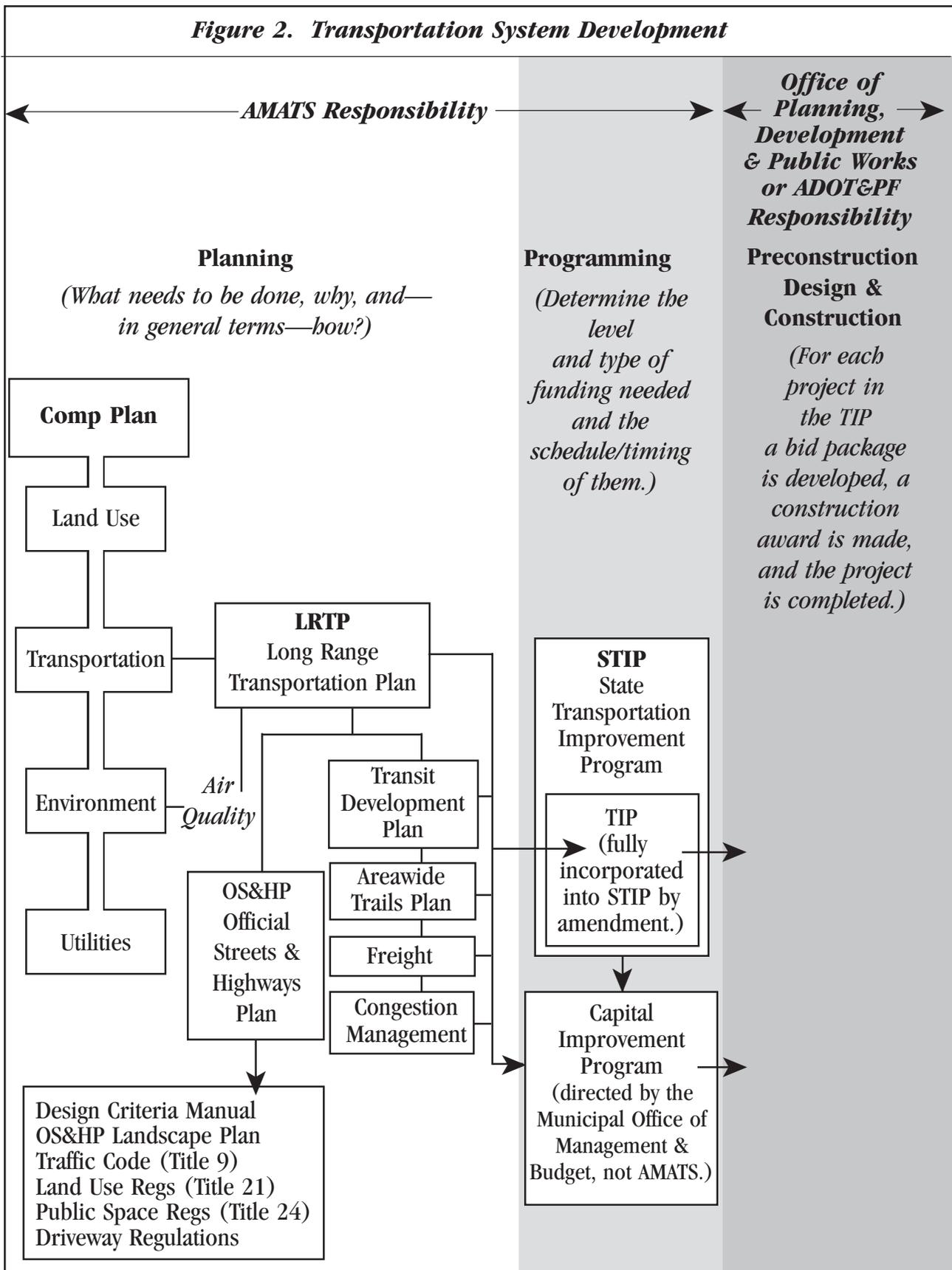


Figure 2. Transportation System Development



agencies that agree on the UPWP, and it is approved by the AMATS Policy Committee; call 343-7991.

**Americans with Disabilities Act
Paratransit Plan, 1995 Update**

This plan describes how Anchorage is meeting the transportation needs of persons with disabilities. The Municipal Public Transportation Department and AMATS are responsible for meeting these needs. For information, call 343-8409.

**Citizens' Transportation Reference Guide
(1996)**

This document provides general information to answer common questions from the public regarding transportation and air quality. It is available through AMATS; call 343-7991.

Public Transportation Development Plan

This five-year operational and implementation document carries out the decisions in the LRTP for the public transportation system. The Municipal Public Transportation Department is responsible for this plan; call 343-8409.

**Project Preconstruction, Design and
Construction Plans**

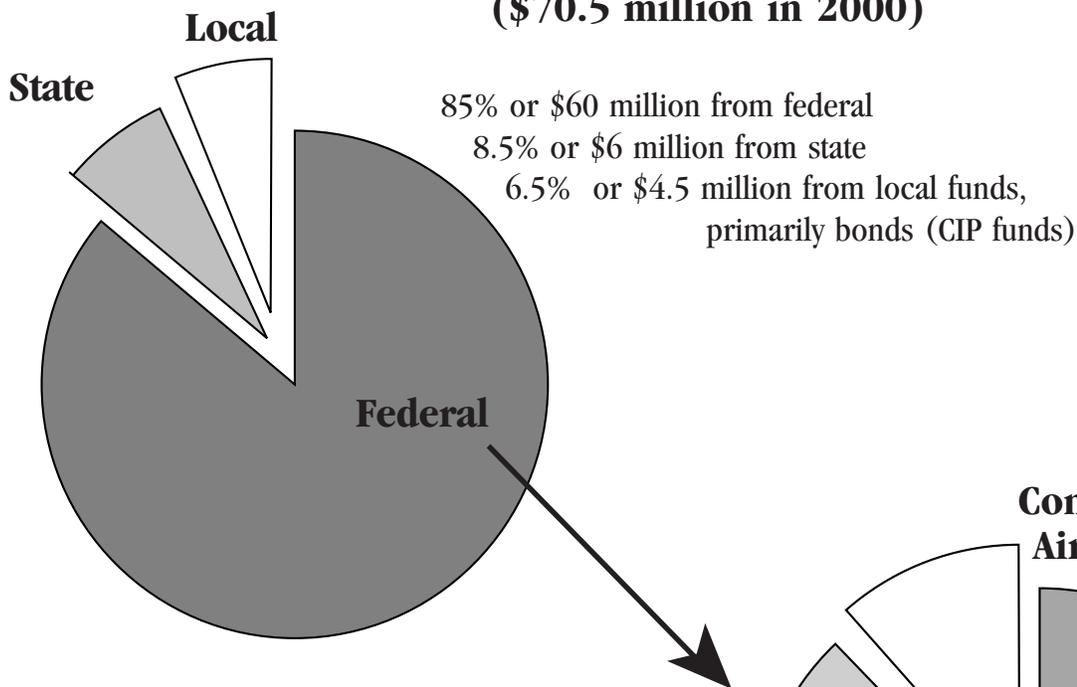
These plans are developed on a project-specific basis, with "project" meaning a certain road, intersection, trail, bus stop, etc. AMATS does not have oversight for this aspect of Anchorage's transportation system development; call the Office of Planning, Development, and Public Works at 343-8160.

Transportation Funds and AMATS Budget

Where do the funds come from? How are they spent?

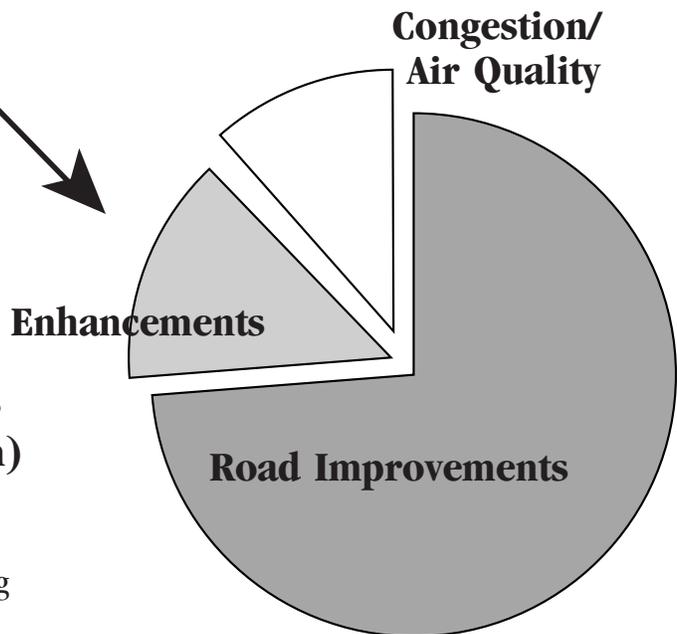
The vast majority of transportation funds to AMATS come from the federal government – the Federal Highway Administration. Average funding sources and expenditures are depicted here.

**Average Sources of Transportation Funds
(\$70.5 million in 2000)**



**AMATS Budget
Average Federal Expenditures
for 2001–2003 (\$60 Million)**

- 73–75% Road Improvements
- 10–12% Decreasing Congestion and Improving Air Quality Management
- 15% Transportation Enhancements (Sidewalks, Trails, Landscaping)



A Brief Look at Planning and Budgeting

AMATS has primary responsibility for two planning efforts: the Long Range Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program.

Long Range Transportation Plan

The LRTP is based on land uses described in the Anchorage Bowl Comp Plan and the Chugiak-Eagle River Comp Plan. The LRTP is developed to address and meet the anticipated needs for:

- 1) Roads (major roads and highways, but not neighborhood streets).
- 2) Trails (primarily for recreation, bicycles, and commuters).
- 3) Public Transportation (People Mover, AnchorRIDES, Share-A-Ride, Commuter Rail).
- 4) Freight Mobility (commercial trucks).
- 5) Air Quality (to meet federal air quality standards).
- 6) Congestion Management (to determine the level of acceptability).

The LRTP is actually composed of the above six components or subplans; it is a joint state and municipal document that is updated every three years and revised as necessary. The latest update to the current plan identifies the long-range planning goals and addresses the general transportation needs of Anchorage through 2023. (See *Figure 5. LRTP Decision-Making and Public Participation Steps* on page 23.)

Because of the complexity of the LRTP's six components, when the LRTP is updated, only two or three of these components are updated at the same time. We use the term "LRTP" even when only one or several of the components are the topic of discussion.

What are the basic elements evaluated to develop an LRTP?

- Where a trip starts (i.e., at home).
- Where a trip ends (i.e., work, shopping, or school).
- Which mode of transportation is taken (i.e., bus, car, walk, or bicycle).
- Which route is taken.

In Anchorage, most of the 4 million miles driven each day originate outside of the downtown area. Drivers from far-flung points of origin converge on workplaces throughout the city, but primarily in downtown and midtown. This process is reversed as people travel from work to home.

Other important considerations in transportation planning for the Anchorage Bowl are:

- Determining the current and preferred mode of transport.
- Determining the routing to and from points of origin and destination.
- Managing congestion, including how long it takes to get to and from points of origin and destination.
- Balancing the transportation needs of the entire community while trying to preserve the integrity of existing and planned neighborhoods.
- Supporting a trail system.

- Supporting a public transportation system.
- Supporting effective movement of freight.

Budgeting Through the Transportation Improvement Program

The second major responsibility of AMATS is the TIP, a prioritized list of transportation projects for the Anchorage Bowl. This three-year plan is used to implement the LRTP and is where AMATS assigns funds to each priority. The AMATS Policy Committee determined that 73 to 75 cents of every federal transportation dollar will be spent on road improvements, 10 to 12 cents on improving congestion and air quality management, and 15 cents on transpor-

tation enhancements such as sidewalks, trails, and landscaping. Priorities in the TIP include efforts such as roadway rehabilitation, roadway expansion, roadway safety, air quality improvement, trails, and public transportation improvements. Priorities in the TIP must be consistent with the LRTP and include new and previously funded efforts advancing into a new phase.

Projects are nominated for the TIP by members of the public, agency representatives, and elected officials. Updates to the TIP usually begin in February and are completed and approved by the following February. The process for updating the TIP is displayed later in this document in Figure 6.

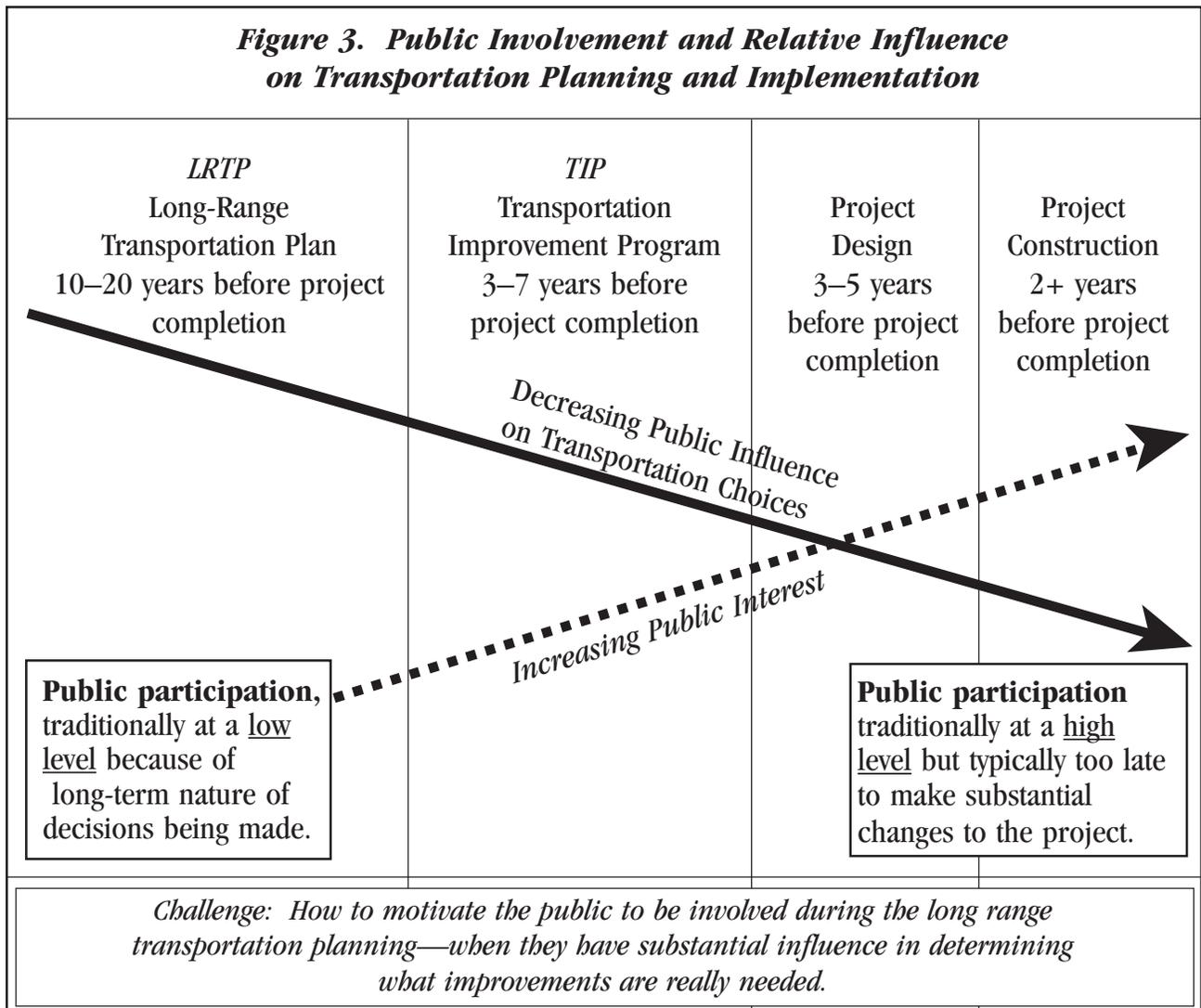
Plugging into the Process: Public Participation in Transportation

The Public's Influential Role— Early Participation is Key

The primary reason that early public participation is necessary for transportation planning to be effective is the extremely lengthy time it takes to develop transportation projects that are funded with federal dollars. Often these projects take 7 to 15 years, and some even 20

years. This timeframe includes planning, engineering, and, finally, construction (Figure 3).

The public has its greatest influence about what transportation improvements are going to occur years before construction – usually when the initial question of construction, “Should we have a road (or trail, or bridge, etc.) here, or not?” needs to be answered.



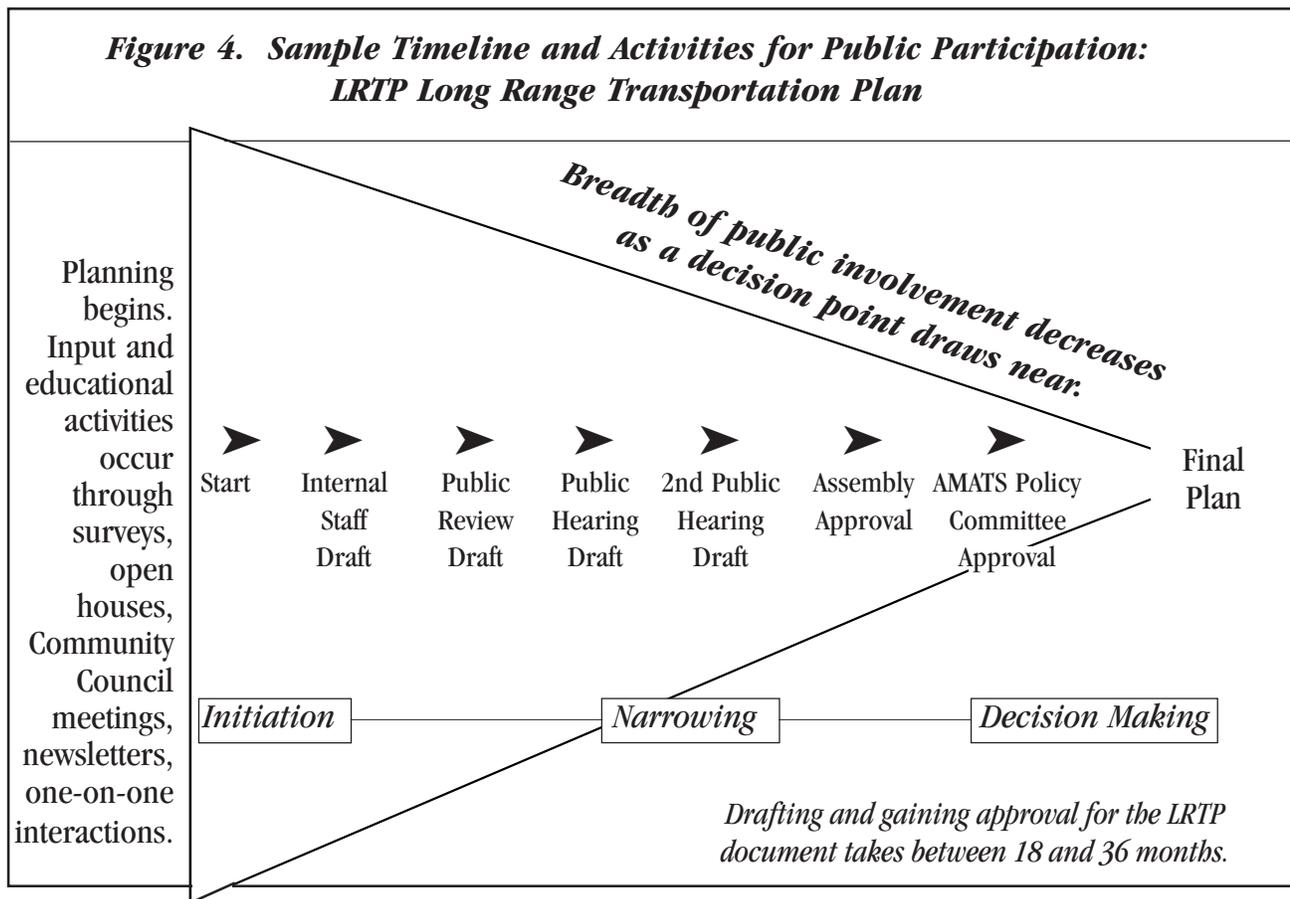
What happens if the public waits until a project is somewhere in the middle of being developed before it gets involved? It is usually too late to say, “No, we don’t want this project to become reality.” By that time, there has been a review of alternatives and other options to address issues and to meet service needs. There has also been a great deal of resources expended and various contracts are in place that need to be honored.

Public participation moves through three phases in the AMATS planning process (Figure 4).

- An *initiation phase* during creation of the draft plan, whether it is the LRTP or TIP.
- A *narrowing phase* during the recommendation and comment steps for a draft document.

- A *decision-making phase* during the public hearings steps, which occur when the formal advisory and decision-making committees are reviewing a planning document.

Another important reason for the public to be involved early has to do with the AMATS decision-making structure. During the entire planning process, alternatives are considered, choices are made, and plans are readied for final approval. When the planning options are narrowed through a technical and public review and a timely decision is reached, the transportation planning process is considered effective. The definition of *timely* is based on set federal deadlines for planning documents. If these deadlines are met, it is timely; if they are not met, federal transportation funds are in



jeopardy of being withheld from the State and Municipality.

The AMATS organizational structure, however, is intended to support timely decision making and implementation to address transportation needs. In order to ensure decisions are made in a timely manner, there must be effective

public participation early in the process during the initiation and narrowing phases rather than in the decision-making phase when the plan (LRTP or TIP) goes to the Planning and Zoning Commission, the Technical Advisory Committee, the Assembly, and finally the Policy Committee for their approvals.

Guiding Principles for AMATS Public Participation

The following guiding principles were created by Anchorage-area residents who helped develop the AMATS public participation program. These principles express how the public wants AMATS to work with them in developing transportation plans.

- An early and continuing public role and a commitment to be inclusive.
 - A strong public presence in defining transportation vision and goals.
 - Participation of the underserved.
 - More efficient public participation techniques used.
 - Enhanced customer service with explicit responses and feedback between agencies and the public.
 - Fiscal constraints that make public participation time-efficient and cost-efficient.
 - Meaningful dialogue among all of the stakeholders.
- Review of the effectiveness of the public participation process, including a critical look at how much is enough.
 - Revision of the public participation process as necessary.
 - A clear and well-understood public participation process.



Public Participation and Planning

The LRTP provides a blueprint for developing the Anchorage area transportation system and is required by the FHWA. It is to be updated every three years. The FHWA considers a transportation system to be roads (including freeways, highways, and streets), the public transportation system, trails, and freight mobility, as well as managing congestion and attaining air quality standards.

There are multiple decision-making and public participation steps to develop the LRTP for roads, trails, Chugiak-Eagle River area, and public transportation (Figure 5). Developing the LRTP creates a good deal of public interest. The timeframe to develop these plans is between 18 and 36 months, but the number of meetings, informational activities, and information exchanges are substantially higher for roads than for the other components.

Public Participation for Roads, Trails, Chugiak-Eagle River Area, and Public Transportation

Roads

Because the vast majority of Anchorage residents drive cars and use the road system, a great deal of effort is expended to build awareness and generate diverse participation about how to meet Anchorage's needs in the future. Many public participation awareness-building, input, and education activities are conducted during the planning cycle (Figure 5).

Areawide Trails

In cooperation with other local and state agencies, the Transportation Division coordinates the development of the Areawide Trails Plan. The last update of this plan was conducted over a three-year timeframe and required participation of the general public, the community councils, and other organizations. Committees made up of representatives from these various groups developed, reviewed, and revised the draft planning documents.

Chugiak-Eagle River Area

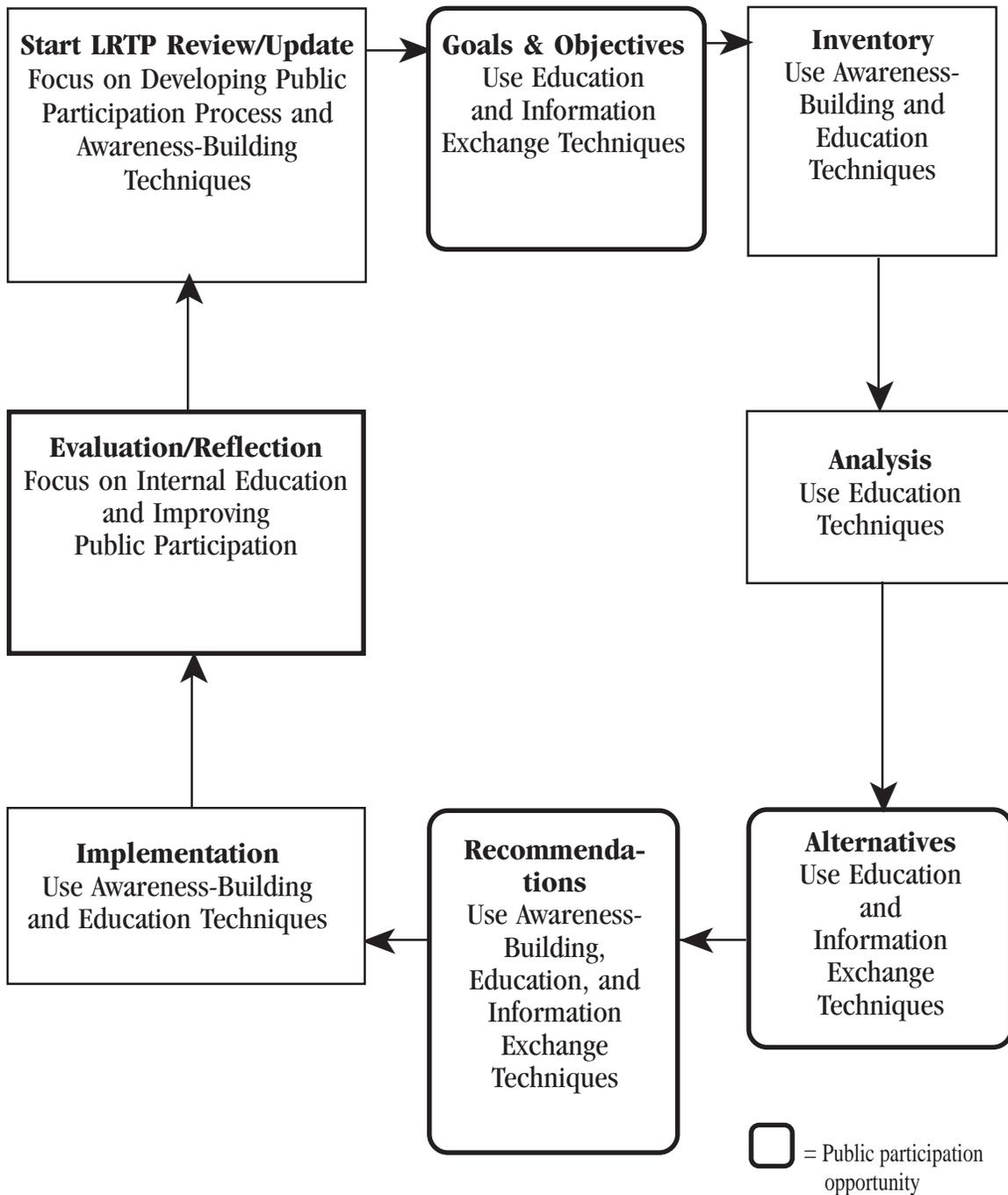
All six components—roads, public transportation, trails, congestion management, air quality, and freight mobility—are addressed together for the Chugiak-Eagle River area. This differs from the LRTP for the immediate Anchorage area, where only a couple components at a time can be addressed. The population and transportation system in the Chugiak-Eagle River area is not as extensive, making it possible for all components to be addressed at the same time.

Public Transportation

The public transportation system in Anchorage consists of the People Mover bus system, AnchorRIDES for those who are physically unable to use the bus system, and the Share-a-Ride car pool and van pool program. In order to help meet the needs for which the public transportation system is designed, a Public Transit Advisory Board is a major component of public participation efforts. Board members

Figure 5. LRTP Decision-Making and Public Participation Steps

Timeline for Public Participation in the Long Range Transportation Plan
for Roads, Trails, Chugiak-Eagle River Area, and Public Transportation
• 18 to 36 Months •



are appointed by the mayor and approved by the assembly for three-year terms.

In addition to the Advisory Board, the Public Transportation Department holds an annual public meeting as a *shakeup* or review to revise routes and schedules and to determine where improvement funds should be spent, such as on a new bus stop. Details about these funds and their uses can be found in the Public Transportation Development Plan, which describes how decisions in the LRTP for the public transportation system will be carried out.

The Public Transportation and People Mover website is www.peoplemover.org. There are also a number of brochures available describing the public transportation system's services. The annual Bus Rodeo, a public event where bus drivers compete with each other, is held in early spring. Often an open house is held later in the summer.

Another form of participation the public transportation staff uses, which enables them to understand the type and level of service needed from the public transportation system, is continuous communication with organizations representing various users. Some of these organizations are Foster Grandparents, Day Break, and Access Alaska.

Public Participation For Air Quality, Congestion Management, and Freight Mobility

The public participation efforts for air quality, congestion management, and freight mobility differ from the 18-to-36-month public processes used for roads, trails, and public trans-

portation. The following describes the public participation activities for each of these three components. For information on any of these, call AMATS at 343-7991.

Air Quality

The public participation strategy used to determine how to attain air quality standards is through the AMATS Citizens Air Quality Advisory Committee. This committee is a result of federal requirements related to the expenditure of fuel tax money on projects meant to reduce air pollution caused by the use of internal combustion engines in transportation. Members are appointed by the AMATS Policy Committee. It comprises individuals from public, private, and nonprofit organizations with an interest and responsibility in air quality improvements.

The AMATS staff for the Air Quality Committee is located at the Municipality's Department of Health & Human Services. The common thread that binds the committee together is the desire to attain and maintain a level of air quality that is safe to breathe. There is a variety of ways to reach that end.

The Advisory Committee's first step has been to try to determine the scope and nature of existing air quality problems related to engine exhaust. This is a task that municipal air quality personnel do as part of their jobs. The federal law that funds remedies for air quality problems was drafted as a "one size fits all" prescription, and many of the remedies are not really suitable or needed in Anchorage. Luckily, there is a great deal of flexibility on how the funds are spent.

A few places in the nation, including Anchorage, are broadening the use of these funds to ad-

dress more innovative air quality projects. To help identify and prioritize these types of projects, the AMATS Citizens Air Quality Advisory Committee is assisting in the review of project ranking criteria for the use of federal funds.

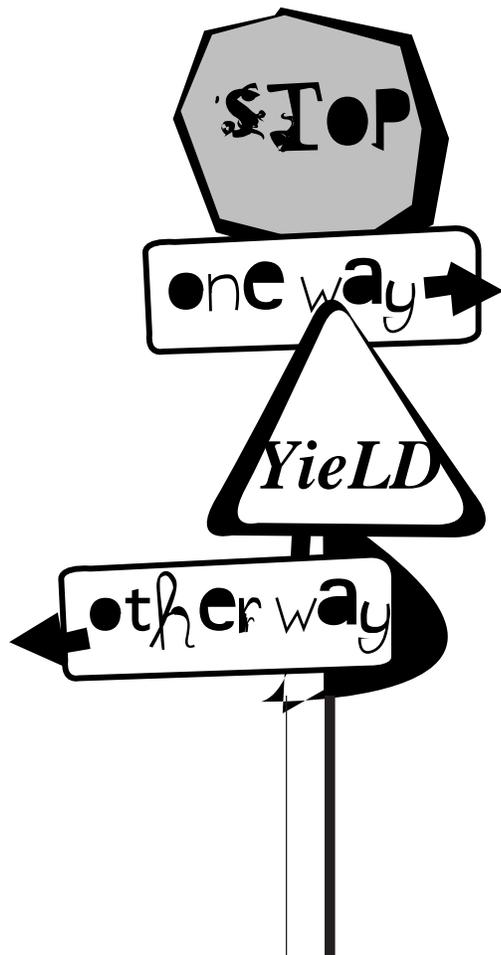
Congestion Management

The Congestion Management Program looks at short-and long-term strategies for managing congestion. Strategies are selected through a public process including workshop meetings and a telephone survey of Anchorage residents to find out what strategies would be acceptable. There is no one silver bullet to address congestion. Congestion management requires different strategies for different parts of town because of heavy traffic times and causes of

congestion. AMATS has a toolbox of techniques and strategies that it employs to address congestion issues. The Congestion Management Program is also a federal requirement. There are several sources of funding to address the congestion problems, including several federal sources, as well as local bonding. Here, too, the federal sources of funds are fairly flexible and AMATS is beginning to use new, or innovative, congestion management techniques.

Freight Mobility

During the inventory phase of the Freight Mobility Study, public participation is less formal and focuses on freight shippers and carriers. A survey of truck drivers is conducted for information, and interagency contact provides a broad overview of existing issues and problems. As this study moves into the next steps—analysis and alternatives—a broader, more formal public participation process is employed.



Public Participation in Funding

The TIP provides both agencies and the community with a document that describes what efforts are being publicly funded and at what stage they are in development. In this way, the TIP acts as a tracking document. AMATS is required to develop, implement, and update the TIP every two years.

The TIP is the implementation stage of the LRTP; it represents the efforts expended to determine the level and type of resources needed to design and construct the transportation system. This includes roads (including freeways, highways, and streets), the public

transportation system, trails, and freight mobility, as well as managing congestion and attaining air quality standards.

Like the LRTP, there are also multiple decision-making and public participation steps for the TIP (Figure 6). The project nominations step is probably the public's most influential opportunity, as virtually anyone in the Anchorage area can propose a project. Nominations are scheduled at intervals. To find out when the next TIP nomination opportunity is scheduled, call 343-7991.



Finding Additional Information

AMATS

Your first source of information is the AMATS staff.

AMATS Staff

Staff Contact

Municipality of Anchorage
Traffic Department
Transportation Planning Division
Permit Center, 4700 Bragaw, 2nd Floor

Mailing Address

P.O. Box 196650
Anchorage, AK 99519-6650

Contact by Phone

(907) 343-7991 • Fax (907) 343-7998

Visit the AMATS Website: www.ci.anchorage.ak.us/Services/Departments/Com/Trans/amats.html

AMATS Committee Meetings

Formal decisions affecting AMATS policies and planning efforts are made in committee.

Meeting dates, times, and locations are subject to change; they should be confirmed by calling 343-7991, or checking the website:

www.ci.anchorage.ak.us/Services/Departments/Com/Trans/amtsmsch.pdf

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

Monthly meetings on the fourth Thursday, usually 3:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M.

The Policy Committee (PC)

Monthly meetings on the second Wednesday, most often 1:00 P.M. to 2:30 P.M. Meetings are usually held in the Mayor's Conference Room at City Hall, which is located downtown at 6th Avenue and G Street.

Other meetings may be scheduled as requested by various entities.

On-street meter parking is available as well as some spaces in the Municipal lot on the 7th Street entrance. All bus routes travel to downtown Anchorage.

AMATS Public Participation Program

is located on the web at:
www.ci.anchorage.ak.us/Services/Departments/Com/Trans/amats.html
or call 343-7991.

Community

The following groups have been active and involved in AMATS planning and program development.

Using Your Community Councils

To find your local community council contact for transportation issues, call the Federation of Community Councils (FCC) at 277-1977, or email councils@alaska.net. Girdwood, Turnagain Arm, and Portage Valley Community Councils are not part of the AMATS planning area, but citizens in those areas can get transportation contact information from the FCC.

Federation of Community Councils

(907) 277-1977 • Email: councils@alaska.net • www.alaska.net/~councils/

Community Councils, AMATS Planning Area

Abbott Loop	Airport Heights	Basher
Bayshore/Klatt	Bear Valley	Birchwood
Campbell Park	Chugiak	Downtown
Eagle River	Eagle River Valley	Fairview
Glen Alps	Government Hill	Hillside
East	Huffman/O'Malley	Mid-Hillside
Mountain View	Northeast	North Star
Old Seward/Oceanview	Rabbit Creek	Rogers Park
Russian Jack	Sand Lake	Scenic Foothills
South Addition	South Fork	Spenard
Taku/Campbell	Tudor Area	Turnagain
Turnagain Arm	University Area	

Other Organizations

The following organizations may be useful in providing additional information on transportation issues and planning in the Anchorage area.

Access Alaska

(907) 248-4777

Anchorage Citizens Coalition

(907) 274-2624

Anchorage Trails and Greenways Coalition

(907) 269-8704

Alaska Trucking Association

(907) 276-1149

Headquarters in Anchorage

Anchorage Chamber of Commerce

Transportation Committee

(907) 272-2401

Municipality of Anchorage

AMATS works with other Municipal offices.

Planning Department

(907) 343-4303 • Email: cpd@ci.anchorage.ak.us
www.ci.anchorage.ak.us/Services/Departments/Com/index.html

Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Land Use Plan

www.ci.anchorage.ak.us/Services/Departments/Com/2020/

Planning & Zoning Commission

(907) 343-4215 • Meets first Monday each month, 6:30 P.M.

Urban Design Commission

(907) 343-4224 • Meets second Thursday each month, 5:30 P.M.

Public Transportation Department

www.peoplemover.org

People Mover Bus Service • (907) 343-6543

Share-a-Ride Car and Vanpooling • (907) 562-7665

AnchorRIDES Transit for People with Disabilities • (907) 562-8444

Traffic Department

(907) 343-8406 • www.muni.org/Services/Department/Public/traffic.html

Project Management & Engineering Department

(907) 343-8109 • www.muni.org/projectmgmt/index.cfm

Department of Health & Human Services

(907) 343-4065 • www.ci.anchorage.ak.us/healthesd/index.cfm

Cultural & Recreational Services Department

(907) 343-4365 • www.muni.org/culture/index.cfm

Anchorage Municipal Libraries

Z.J. Loussac Library

3600 Denali Street, Anchorage, AK 99503 • (907) 343-2975
www.ci.anchorage.ak.us/Services/Departments/Culture/Library/index.html

The Alaska Collection holds state and municipal documents. It contains AMATS planning documents such as the latest LRTP and TIP and the Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Land Use Plan. It also holds select federal documents.

Chugiak-Eagle River Library

12400 Old Glen Highway, Eagle River, AK 99577 • (907) 694-2500
www.ci.anchorage.ak.us/Services/Departments/Culture/Library/index.html

The Chugiak-Eagle River Library has the Chugiak-Eagle River Comprehensive Plan, the Chugiak-Eagle River Long Range Transportation Plan, and other transportation planning documents for the area.

Additional Library Services

Alaska Resources Library and Information Services (ARLIS)

3150 C Street, Suite 100, Anchorage, AK 99503 • (907) 272-7547
www.arlis.org/

ARLIS provides universal access to natural and cultural resources information. It has a large collection of state and federal documents and access to CD-Rom and online databases on Alaskan resource issues such as land use management. The Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Land Use Plan is available at ARLIS.

State of Alaska

AMATS and the State of Alaska also coordinate planning activities.

Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF)

Central Region Anchorage

www.dot.state.ak.us • Email: Planning_Comments@dot.state.ak.us

Planning (907) 269-0520

Preliminary Design & Environmental Section (907) 269-0542

Highway Construction Section (907) 269-0450

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC)

Air & Water Quality Division, Air Nonpoint and Mobile Sources Section

(907) 269-7577

www.state.ak.us/local/akpages/ENV.CONSERV/dawq/dec_dawq/htm

Alaska Railroad Corporation

(907) 265-2300 (Headquartered in Anchorage) • www.akrr.com/

Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport

Planning (907) 266-2544 • Environmental (907) 266-2129

Community Relations (907) 266-2107 • www.anchorageairport.com

Federal

AMATS receives 90% of its funding from federal sources

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Alaska Division

(907) 586-7418 (Juneau, Alaska) • www.fhwa.dot.gov/akdiv/index.htm

Federal Transit Administration Region 10 (includes Alaska) (Headquartered in Seattle, WA)

(206) 220-7954 • www.fta.dot.gov/

Publications

Creighton, James L., Ph.D. 1992. *Involving Citizens in Community Decision Making: A Guidebook*. The Program for Community Problem Solving, Washington, D.C. (202)783-2961.

FHWA. *Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making*. Downloadable publication: www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/cover.htm

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Traffic Signals

“How does a signal operate? Is a specific signal operating correctly?”

There are many different types of traffic signals. Some are fixed-time and each movement gets a preset amount of time. Some use detectors buried in the pavement and time is allocated based on the amount of vehicles sensed by these detectors. At other intersections, some movements have detectors and other movements do not. At some intersections, where possible, the pedestrian movement is automatically recalled each cycle. At others pedestrians must push a button to bring up the walk signal. The proper operation of signals can be checked remotely by computer, or in the field by traffic signal personnel. Those with specific questions about signal operations should contact the Traffic Department at 343-8406.

“Why do I have to stop? Why are signals so poorly synchronized?”

When there is high traffic flow between intersections, signals are coordinated, or synchronized with each other, to reduce stops and delay for the major traffic movements. Coordinating signals require that all signals be programmed with a common cycle length, which is the amount of time it takes a signal to sequence through all traffic movements one time. The quality of progression through a set of traffic signals depends on the spacing between signals, the speed of traffic, the cycle

length, and the amount of traffic. Signals along main arterials are generally coordinated with each other during the day, when there are heavy traffic flows. It is often not possible to progress traffic in both directions because of poor spacing between traffic signals. Sometimes it is necessary to choose one direction to progress. When two-way progression is not possible, the Municipality often uses computerized traffic modeling to find coordinated timing plans that decrease the total delay and stops for all users of the system. Traffic turning onto or off of a side street is generally not progressed, and turning vehicles can usually expect to stop at the next signal. Specific questions about signal progression should be referred to the Traffic Department at 343-8406.

“Why do I have to wait so long after I stop at a specific signal?”

At most traffic signals several different timing plans are used throughout the day to account for varying levels of traffic demand. The length of the wait depends on the signal cycle length and amount of traffic. In general, a longer cycle length increases the amount of vehicles that can be moved through an intersection (capacity). Increasing cycle lengths also increases driver delay. Cycle lengths range from 60 seconds to 160 seconds in the Municipality, depending on the size of the intersections and the amount of traffic. Cycle lengths must be longer at larger intersections

to serve the greater number of separate traffic movements during the timing sequence, to accommodate much longer pedestrian crossing times, and to accommodate higher volumes of traffic. Requests for timing changes at individual intersections should be referred to the Traffic Department. Information needed for a signal employee to investigate a requested timing change is what day of the week and at what time of day a problem occurs. Call the Traffic Department at 343-8406.

“Why isn’t there enough green time to get the traffic through the signal for a specific movement?”

The amount of green time programmed for each movement at a signal varies by time of day. Sometimes there is more traffic at a signal than the signal can handle, and the signal is over its capacity. In these situations, the Traffic Department attempts to time the signals to equalize delays for conflicting movements. At other times green time can be moved from one movement to a conflicting movement, realizing that improving one movement hurts another. Increasing green for one movement requires decreasing the amount of green for another movement.

Requests for timing changes at individual intersections should be referred to the Traffic Department. Here, too, information needed for a signal employee to investigate a requested change is what day of the week and at what time of day a problem occurs. Call the Traffic Department at 343-8406.

“How do I get a new signal installed?”

Installing a new traffic signal first requires determining if a signal is needed. If a signal is

needed, then a method of funding and constructing the signal must be found. Evaluating the need for a traffic signal requires careful analysis of the accident history, the intersection geometry, and amount of traffic. The number of traffic accidents almost always increases when a signal is installed, as interruption of free flow results in an increased number of rear-end type accidents. Certain types of accidents that tend to be more severe can often be reduced by installing a signal. The analyst must weigh the different types of accidents and compare them to federal guidelines. There are certain federal requirements that must be met before a signal can be installed.

If a signal is needed, the next challenge is to find a method of constructing and funding the signal. On municipal roadways, signals can be included in road improvement projects, and constructed if bonds are approved by the voters. However, most of the major roads are owned by the State of Alaska, and Municipal funds can not be spent on these roadways. If a signal is needed on a state-owned roadway, other methods of funding must be sought, such as requesting inclusion in the state safety improvement program.

A new signal usually costs more than \$250,000 dollars to construct, and then additional dollars will be needed for annual maintenance. With limited funding, desired new signals must be compared with intersections with the worst accident problems, which receive priority. Requests for new traffic signals can be referred to the Traffic Department at 343-8306.

“How do I find how much traffic there is at a specific location, or how many accidents there have been?”

The Traffic Department counts traffic at all major intersections in the Municipality once every three years. Traffic at smaller intersections will be counted as needed, due to special projects or investigations. These counts are stored in a database that is maintained by the Traffic Department. All intersection related accidents for which police respond or accident reports are filled out, are also tracked and summarized in a computer database. This allows the Municipality to identify safety problems that arise at specific intersections. Requests for traffic volume or accident data should be submitted to the Traffic Department at 343-8406.

“How do I find how a signal was operating at a specific time and date, and if it was operating correctly?”

The Traffic Department cannot say exactly how a signal was operating on a specific date and time due to field variables such as traffic demand. However, we can determine how a signal was programmed to operate, and if there were any malfunctions such as a burned out light bulb or power outage on a specific date.

Records of all programming changes and all maintenance responses are maintained at the Traffic Department. Requests for historical records concerning traffic operations should be referred to the Traffic Department at 343-8406. Sifting through the records takes a significant amount of research, and it is not a good idea to make a request a week before the

court date. A thorough records search can take up to three weeks.

“How does a pedestrian signal work?”

Where possible, pedestrian signals are programmed to automatically be served each signal cycle, so that pedestrians do not have to push the pedestrian button. This is often not possible due to site-specific constraints, and it is a good idea to push the button if there is one available.

Once a pedestrian indication starts, there can be some confusion as to the meaning of the signal indications. The first indication is a white walking man. This symbol means the pedestrian can start walking in the direction of the signal. This is followed by a flashing orange hand symbol. The flashing hand does not mean that the pedestrian should stop crossing the street. When this symbol is shown, any pedestrians who have started to cross should continue crossing, but pedestrians that have not yet started to cross should not begin crossing.

The length of the flashing indicator can be quite long. It is calculated based on the length of the crosswalk and the nationally recognized average walking speed of pedestrians. An orange flashing hand changes to a solid orange hand symbol; pedestrians should not be in the crosswalk when this symbol is shown. Questions about pedestrian signals can be referred to the Traffic Department at 343-8406.

Air Quality and Environmental Concerns

“How does Anchorage’s air quality compare with other communities in the Lower 48? Are we better or worse off?”

On the vast majority of days, Anchorage enjoys good air quality. Our levels of smog or ground level ozone pollution are well below federal standards and very low compared to many areas in the Lower 48. Our cool summer climate helps us avoid the hot summer weather smog alerts that many communities experience. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that 92 million people in the United States live in areas where health standards for ground-level ozone pollution are exceeded.

While Anchorage enjoys some of the lowest smog levels in the country, winter carbon monoxide (CO) concentrations in Anchorage can approach and occasionally exceed federal standards. Although CO concentrations have dropped by 60% in the past twenty years, Anchorage is one of a handful of U.S. cities (including Fairbanks, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and Phoenix) where continued long-term compliance with the standard remains an issue. Our subarctic winter climate makes achieving compliance more difficult. Strong temperature inversions trap pollution near the ground and “cold starts” increase CO emissions from motor vehicles.

“I can sometimes see a brown haze along the mountains. What is it?”

No specific studies have been performed to determine what is in Anchorage’s brown haze. Multimillion dollar studies in other communi-

ties like Denver have shown that much of their haze is comprised of very small particles called PM-2.5. Sources of these small particles could be exhaust emissions from gasoline or diesel-fueled cars and trucks, aircraft, and/or wood burning. This haze could also be caused in part by road dust particles. Road dust particles tend to be larger in size, however, and do not scatter light as efficiently as smaller particles. For this reason, most of the haze is presumed to be caused by the smaller PM-2.5 particles. CO is an invisible gas and does not contribute to the haze.

“Why don’t we require diesel vehicles to get an I/M test? They look like they emit more pollution than other vehicles.”

It is true that diesel vehicles generally emit more visible air pollution than gasoline vehicles. However, most of what is emitted from diesel vehicles is in the form of particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide, not CO. CO emissions from diesel vehicles are 5 to 10 times lower, on average, than a comparable gasoline vehicle. Also, the relatively large amounts of particulate pollution emitted by diesel vehicles would harm conventional I/M testing equipment.

“The TV news reports the air quality index. What do they mean when they say that air quality is good, moderate, or unhealthy?”

The Municipal Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) monitors air pollution levels every weekday and reports them to the media using EPA’s air quality index. The EPA devised a uniform, reporting format to be

used throughout the country to report pollution levels. The air quality index is a reporting tool that converts air pollutant concentrations to a simple numerical scale from 0 to 500. An index of 100 corresponds to a level of pollution equal to the federal air quality standard. Under the index, air quality is described as follows:

Air Pollutant	Air Quality Concentrations
0-50	good
51-100	moderate
101-150	unhealthy for sensitive groups
151-200	unhealthy
201-300	very unhealthful
301-500	hazardous

When the air quality index rises above 100, the DHHS will issue an air quality health advisory containing recommendations for sensitive individuals that could be affected.

“Where, how, and who measures air pollution in Anchorage? What are the air pollution levels in my neighborhood?”

The DHHS is responsible for monitoring air pollution in Anchorage. They currently operate eight monitoring stations in the municipality. Over the years, monitoring has been conducted at over 50 locations. The DHHS prepares an annual report summarizing pollution levels and trends. This report is available at the Loussac Library; it is also available on the Internet at <http://www.indicators.ak.org/>.

Projects, Funding, and Schedules

“How did this project get funded anyway?”

Making decisions about and funding a transportation project is generally a very lengthy, public process. The initial needs for transportation services are identified in the Comp Plan, in a very general manner; then the LRTP provides a greater level of detail. Funding may actually come from one of two sources, or a combination of those sources. A project may be funded through the detailed plan—the TIP—which specifies how funds from the FHWA will be spent to develop the transportation system, or a project may be funded through bonds issued by the Municipality.

“Where is the money coming from?”

Gasoline tax receipts go into the Highway Trust Fund, which are appropriated by Congress, through the FHWA each year in the annual budget cycle. Alaska receives a very favorable return (\$6 for every \$1 it pays in gasoline tax). Ninety percent of the funding for road projects in Alaska comes from FHWA; the other 10% is state matching funds, which is appropriated by the Legislature from general funds. If the state did not appropriate matching funds, the FHWA, by law, would not be able to provide the other 90%. Thus, the vast majority of road, trail, and transportation projects are not funded with property or sales taxes.

“How come this project isn’t done yet?”

Developing projects with FHWA funding can take a long time. For example, if there was money to start a reconstruction project tomorrow, dirt would not start being moved for five to seven years. Because we accept FHWA funds for transportation system development, we are then obligated to proceed with project development under FHWA rules and regulations, which require a rigorous environmental and project design process that takes considerable time, e.g. the five-to-seven-year timeframe.

“How come you always bid the projects at the end of the year?”

Bunching up projects for a specific bid cycle is not intentional. Bringing a project to the point where the FHWA will give us authorization to advertise the project is like weaving fabric. There are many strands to keep track of. Some of these strands, like utilities and right-of-way (ROW) acquisitions, become critical to track at the close of a project design and often these schedules are not driven by the DOT&PF.

Utility work agreements must be signed and all ROW certified before FHWA will give us authorization to advertise. Consequently, if utility agreements fall behind due to conflicting work needs at the utility or if ROW acquisition gets bogged down in a condemnation issue, the project slows down and may be delayed. Also, the FHWA will not allow DOT&PF to obligate all of the funding available in a federal fiscal year at once. FHWA sets quarterly goals for obligation of funding for all phases of project development. If a project is ready to bid in the first quarter of the year, but the obligation limit has already been reached, then the project must wait for the next quarter to receive authority to advertise.

“How can I get my pet project into the plan?”

Become involved early in the project nomination process, which is a primary step in the TIP planning process. Nominate your project emphasizing the appropriate ranking criteria. Get your community council and neighboring community councils to support your project. Elected officials support is also useful. Check to see if your project is already part of an existing plan.

“Why is the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS) so difficult to understand?”

The name of this organization really confuses people, because it isn’t a “study.” It is a process. So right off, people have a problem with AMATS. Also, AMATS is a virtual organization overlaid on top of a single governmental unit, the Municipality of Anchorage. Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are mandated by the federal government for communities with populations over 50,000, which accept federal funds for their transportation system. MPOs are most often made up of multiple governmental organizations and in a sense are both more complex and more simple to understand. The federal government has many rules that directs how MPOs conduct business. People are also confused by AMATS because developing the plans and programs within the rules takes so much time. Most people do not have the patience or time to devote to trying to unravel the fabric that is AMATS. *Anchorage on the Move* has been a start to help the general public understand AMATS.

“How come it takes so long to get a project started and completed?”

If a nominated project is accepted into the AMATS TIP it does not mean that it is funded immediately. The TIP program is financially constrained, so not all nominated needs identified are allotted funding. The process is such that every two years the nominations are re-scored. A project that in one year is close to the funding line, could get booted lower on the list if a new nomination scores substantially higher in terms of need. So it can take awhile to get a project above the funding line. Once above the funding line, the project development process takes over as outlined above. Here too, since federal dollars are being used, project development must be conducted within the rules set out in the federal process.

Environmental assessments (EA) usually take 24 months and can take longer if there is substantial environmental or social concern. The initial design process takes 18 to 24 months. The design phase cannot be started until you have a signed EA, and the right-of-way (ROW) process cannot be started until there is sufficient design completed for the project and the utility process cannot begin until there is substantially more design. It is a “Mother May I” situation with FHWA at each phase of project development. Until FHWA is satisfied that the previous step has been conducted according to federal rules, it will not authorize funds for the next step.

“LRTP - what’s that?” “I don’t have to buy in on that.” “Why do priorities change in the TIP?”

Most governmental units and all federal and state agencies have some kind of planning process, which are required by law. Usually there is a near/mid/and long range planning process. For an MPO the long range process is the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The LRTP is not based on someone’s wish list, but rather it is an analysis of what it will take to efficiently and safely move people and goods around town, 20 years from now. It is based on existing conditions of the road network, land use, population, employment centers, etc. Then a 20-year projection is made about what the community needs from its transportation system.

To call into question such a planning process that is guided by federal rules and regulations is to call into question “Why plan at all?” Transportation planning documents are meant to be dynamic and are reviewed and reevaluated to ensure that they are responsive to the changing needs of a community. The MPO must reevaluate its LRTP every three years. Subsequently, the plans for what a community needs from its transportation system get more scrutiny than most planning processes that sit on shelves for 5, 10, 15, and even 20 years, before they are updated.

“Why has Bragaw Road not been constructed south of Tudor Road?”

There is an insufficient level of agreement about the need for this proposed project. The reasons for the disagreement are unclear.

Public Transit

“Why don’t you have later bus service?”

The need for more bus service (later, on weekends, and more frequent service) is recognized and priorities have been described in the 2000-2004 Public Transportation Development Plan. As operating funds are added to the Public Transportation Department, services can be added.

“Why are buses always running around empty?”

Anchorage’s Public Transportation system carries an average of 30 passengers per vehicle per hour. Generally, buses are most full at the mid-point of the route, with people getting on and off all along the route. The farthest from downtown and midtown you see a bus, chances are it is less full than if you

saw that bus closer to downtown. Anchorage actually has one of the higher riderships in the country for its public transportation system.

“Why do you use the large buses when smaller buses would cost less?”

As much as 80% of the cost to operate a vehicle is labor costs, which is the same regardless of bus size. Daily, we have standing room only on some of our busiest routes—so there is a definite need for the 40-foot buses. By maintaining a standardized fleet, buses can be used areawide and inventory and maintenance costs are lower because we can take advantage of economies of scale when ordering parts. It also requires less continuous training for the maintenance staff, because they only have to be knowledgeable about a couple types of vehicles, rather than many types.