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October 25, 2019

Mr. Wolfgang Junge,
AMATS Policy Committee Chairman
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Central Region
P.O. Box 196900
Anchorage, AK 99519

Dear Mr. Junge:

This letter notifies you that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) jointly certify, subject to the resolution of two corrective actions, that the planning process for the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS) Transportation Management Area (TMA) substantially meets the requirements of 23 CFR 450, Section 336(b). This certification is based on the findings from the Federal Certification Review conducted on June 11-12, 2019.

The overall conclusion of the Federal Certification Review is that the planning process for AMATS complies with the spirit and intent of Federal metropolitan transportation planning laws and regulations under 23 U.S.C. § 134 and 49 U.S.C. § 5303. The planning process at AMATS reflects a significant professional commitment to deliver quality transportation planning.

We would like to thank Craig Lyon and his staff for their time and assistance in planning and coordination for the review process. Enclosed is a report that documents the results of this review which includes two corrective actions and two identified recommendations. This report has been transmitted concurrently to AMATS.

If you have any questions regarding the Certification Review process, the Certification action, and/or the enclosed report, please direct them to either John Lohrey, FHWA Alaska Division at (907) 586-7428 or Ned Conroy, FTA Region 10 at (206) 220-4318.

Sincerely,



Sandra A. Garcia-Aline
Division Administrator
Federal Highway Administration

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Linda M. Gehrke
Regional Administrator
Federal Transit Administration

Electronically cc:

Craig Lyon, AMATS Coordinator
Ben White, Director Program Development



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Highway
Administration**

FHWA Alaska
Division

FHWA
Headquarters
Planning

FTA Region 10

Metropolitan Transportation Planning Certification Review

Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS) Certification Review

October 2019



Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Requirements and Objectives

Since the enactment of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) are required to jointly review, evaluate, and certify the transportation planning process in all Transportation Management Areas (TMAs), which are defined as urbanized areas over 200,000 in population, to determine if the process meets the Federal planning requirements set forth in 23 U.S.C. § 134, 49 U.S.C. § 5303, and 23 CFR Part 450 no less than once every four years. Certification of the planning process is a pre-requisite to the approval of Federal funding for transportation projects in such areas. The TMA certification review is also an opportunity to assist on new programs and to enhance the ability of the metropolitan transportation planning process to provide decision-makers with the knowledge they need to make well-informed capital and operating investment decisions.

Process

The TMA certification review was conducted by a team of representatives from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA), hereafter referred to as the Review Team. It consisted of a desk review of the Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) documented practices, procedures, guidelines and activities, followed by a field review that includes meetings with the MPO management, partners and staff, and finally the issuance of a report that includes findings and recommendations of the Review Team. The review results are presented in a joint statement of certification by the FHWA and FTA included in this report.

On June 11 and 12, 2019, the Review Team conducted an on-site visit with the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS), the MPO for the Anchorage Urbanized Area in Alaska, and the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) staff. A risk-based review approach identified the following priority subject areas:

1. Follow-up on recommendations from the August 2015 review which resulted in no corrective actions; however, the August 2015 review report included some recommendations for improvement.
2. Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) – Emphasis on the transit element, financial constraint, and the air quality conformity.
3. Performance-Based Planning – Coordination with DOT&PF on Transportation Performance Management (TPM) and Asset Management, and the status of the Congestion Management Process.
4. Civil Rights – Language in AMATS' Title VI Plan and written complaint procedures.
5. Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) changes – Review of processes and procedures for implementing Administrative Modifications and Amendments to determine if the proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) changes would have an impact on the TIP.

Conclusion

The TMA Certification Review of AMATS identified the following corrective actions:

1. The MTP must be updated by November 2020 and must fully meet the requirements of 23 CFR 450.324. This includes using the latest available estimates and assumptions for population, land use, travel, employment, congestion, and economic activity and incorporating the requirements for transportation performance management. AMATS, in coordination with planning partners, should develop an MTP update schedule and process that ensures the next MTP and subsequent updates meets federal requirements within the federally required MTP update cycle
2. The TIP must provide documentation that describes the planning and programming processes used to develop and adopt the TIP as described in 23 CFR 450.326, including how performance-based planning targets are addressed, a description of public, local agency, involvement and the disposition of any public comments received, tribal consultation, and a financial plan that meets 23 CFR 450.326(j), including the metropolitan area's ability to operate and maintain the existing and proposed transportation system.

The Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Highway Administration jointly certify, subject to the resolution of the two corrective actions outlined in this report, that the planning process for the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions substantially meets the requirement of 23 CFR 450, Section 336(b).

DESCRIPTION AND OVERVIEW OF MPO

AMATS was first designated as a metropolitan planning organization in 1976. The governor of the state of Alaska, per the Intergovernmental Agreement signed in December 2002 by the DOT&PF and the Municipality of Anchorage, and in accordance with the federal regulation coded in 23 CFR 450, designated AMATS. The Operating Agreement was last amended by the AMATS Policy Committee in 2016.

The Municipality of Anchorage fulfills its dual roles as the recognized MPO and air quality planning agency for the Anchorage non-attainment area through AMATS. The participant groups in the AMATS planning and decision-making process are: AMATS Policy Committee; AMATS Technical Advisory Committee; Citizens Advisory Committee; AMATS Freight Advisory Committee; Municipal Assembly; and AMATS staff.

The Anchorage Urbanized Area is made up of the densely populated areas of the Municipality of Anchorage. The Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) encompasses the Anchorage Urbanized Area and the rapidly developing areas of Eagle River/Chugiak/Birchwood/Eklutna and the residential area south of Rabbit Creek Road.

- Policy Committee Chair: Wolfgang Junge
- Member Jurisdictions and Number Represented: The MPO Policy Committee includes three members from the Municipality of Anchorage (Mayor and two Assembly members) and two members from the state (Department of Environmental Conservation Air Quality Manager and DOT&PF Regional Director.)
- Population Served: Approximately 300,000
- Major Transit Operators: The public transit system includes People Mover (fixed route), AnchorRIDES (paratransit), and Share-A-Ride (vanpool). Alaska Railroad Corporation also provides rail transportation services in the Anchorage metropolitan area.

DISPOSITION OF PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

The Federal Review Team made no findings during the 2015 TMA Certification Review that required a corrective action; however, the review did result in several recommendations. The recommendations from 2015 review and AMATS' resolutions are summarized below:

1. The roles and responsibilities of the various technical, policy and citizen committees should be clarified and documented in concert with the current update of the Operating Agreement.

AMATS resolution: The Operating Agreement was updated to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various technical, policy, and citizen committees.

2. AMATS should consider developing an agreement with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough to define and clarify modeling protocols and procedures, including applicable model uses and updates, data collection and sharing, validation techniques and socio-economic forecasting procedures. Discussions regarding the potential creation of a regional transit authority should continue to be investigated as transportation demand increases between the AMATS area and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

AMATS resolution: Coordination with the Mat-Su Borough planning staff has improved. Quarterly regional planning meetings are held.

3. The 2015 TMA Certification Review made the following recommendations related to the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP):

- Include estimated expenditures to conduct the documented work activities as part of the UPWP work element descriptions as well as in the summary financial table.

AMATS resolution: The UPWP has been updated to include funding by task.

- Provide an early draft of the UPWP to FHWA and FTA for review and comment.

AMATS resolution: Early drafts of the UPWP are now being provided to FHWA and FTA for review and comment prior to submitting for approval.

- Consider including a prospectus at beginning of document. This section would describe the near-term priority work tasks and issues facing AMATS in overview terms to inform partners and stakeholders.

AMATS resolution: A narrative now outlines the key activities to be undertaken.

4. AMATS should continue to refine its performance measures to key measures, clearly identify how measures are used to identify strategies/projects and evaluate progress toward targets established as part of a broad-based performance management planning process.

AMATS resolution: AMATS has adopted DOT&PF's performance measures for the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Act. In addition, the AMATS Congestion Management Process and the Status of the System Report include additional measures.

5. The 2015 TMA Certification Review made the following recommendations related to the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). AMATS must be able to demonstrate the proposed Knik Arm Crossing (KAC) project can be accomplished by DOT&PF within financial constraint of the MTP, based on documentation in a project-level financial plan approved by FHWA. The MTP update scheduled for completion in December 2017 should include documentation for the full cost (design, construction, operation, maintenance) of the KAC to the extent that it is available.

AMATS resolution: The 2015 recommendation to include the Knik Arm Crossing in the MTP fiscal constraint analysis is now moot, as the previous governor Bill Walker put the project on hold.

6. AMATS has a good spreadsheet tool to analyze and demonstrate financial constraint, but it is not easily understood by the public. To ensure that the financial information is clearly understood by policy-makers and the public, a summary table(s) should be developed for the MTP that provides key financial data, including sources and uses of all funds by various timeframes.

AMATS resolution: The Interim 2035 MTP Chapter 6 includes narrative and several tables that provide sources and uses of funds in a more understandable manner.

7. Two areas of the Congestion Management Process (CMP) that need direct attention include: identification of an implementation schedule and responsibilities, and establishment of a process for periodic assessment of identified strategies.

AMATS resolution: AMATS is developing a Transportation Systems Management and Operations strategic implementation plan for the CMP and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) combined implementation that will identify specific projects, implementation schedules, and responsibilities for implementation.

8. Project information in the TIP should clearly state the type of funding being used. For example, the CMAQ table includes projects that are funded with other than CMAQ funds, which may be confusing.

AMATS resolution: The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) includes clarifying language to show CMAQ funding.

9. AMATS has the option to include the self-certification statement as part of the TIP development process, which is on a four-year cycle. Full documentation that supports the self-certification should be referenced.

AMATS resolution: Resolution is pending. See corrective action identified during the 2019 TMA Certification Review, under Transportation Improvement Program section.

10. AMATS should consider the formation of a Citizen's Advisory Committee with a membership that represents a broad cross-section of the AMATS area.

AMATS resolution: AMATS formed a Citizens Advisory Committee with a membership that represents a cross-section of the AMATS area.

11. A schedule should be developed for reviewing the Title VI Non-discrimination Plan on a regular basis and should include an outline of the process for working with the DOT&PF's Civil Rights Office.

AMATS resolution: An annual meeting with the DOT&PF Civil Rights Office includes a task to evaluate the Title VI Non-Discrimination Plan for needed updates and a task to identify training needs.

12. AMATS should continue the efforts to further link the CMP to the updated ITS architecture.

AMATS resolution: Resolution is pending. AMATS is developing a Transportation Systems Management and Operations strategic implementation plan for the CMP and ITS combined implementation that will identify specific projects, implementation schedules, and responsibilities for implementation.

RESULTS OF THE 2019 CERTIFICATION REVIEW

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS (23 CFR 450.300 and 23 CFR 450.306)

Regulatory Basis

Federal regulations 23 CFR 450.306 and 450.318 define the scope of the metropolitan transportation planning process and the relationship of corridor and other subarea planning studies to the metropolitan planning process and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. In addition, 23 CFR 345.316 (c)(d) and (e) address the need for participation by Federal lands management agencies and tribal governments in the development of key products in the planning process. Key provisions of 23 CFR 450.306 are related to required planning factors, coordination, and consistency with related planning processes, asset management, and possible differences in requirements for Transportation Management Agencies (TMAs) and non-TMAs.

Findings

Roles of AMATS and DOT&PF to carry out a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive (3-C) performance-based transportation planning process are not adequately coordinated. AMATS plans and programs the Surface Transportation Block Grant funding they receive as a metropolitan area over 200,000 population. This funding is referred to as the “AMATS allocation.” Per 23 CFR 450.300, National Highway Performance Program and other funding for the facilities owned and managed by the DOT&PF within the AMATS planning boundary must be defined by consensus among MPO partners.

AMATS is responsible for transportation planning and programming for the regional multi-modal transportation system for the entire MPO planning area. This includes carrying out a 3-C process in coordination with DOT&PF and others in the development of the long-range and short-range transportation plans and the prioritization and programming of all regionally-significant, and/or federally-funded projects into the TIP.

As the recipient of FHWA funding, DOT&PF is responsible for administering stewardship over the entire Federal-Aid program including funding allocated to AMATS. DOT&PF must ensure compliance of the AMATS planning and programming processes based on 23 U.S.C. § 134 and § 135 and work cooperatively with AMATS as a member of the MPO.

Corrective Actions

None

Recommendations

AMATS and DOT&PF should work together to better support a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive, performance-based multimodal transportation planning and decision-making process described under 23 CFR 450.306. This includes developing a regional approach to

planning and programming for the entire Metropolitan Planning Area and the multi-modal transportation system, and includes developing a consensus process on how federal-aid transportation projects are determined and funded within the AMATS planning area.

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN (23 CFR 450.324)

Regulatory Basis

Federal regulations require the development of a MTP as a key product of the metropolitan planning process. The metropolitan transportation planning process shall include the development of a transportation plan addressing no less than a 20-year planning horizon. The transportation plan shall include both long-range and short-range strategies/actions that lead to the development of an integrated multimodal transportation system to facilitate the safe and efficient movement of people and goods in addressing current and future transportation demand. [23 CFR 450.322]. The MTP is to be updated every four years in non-attainment and maintenance areas and every five years in attainment areas to ensure its consistency with changes in land-use, demographic, and transportation characteristics.

Findings

The MTP in effect at the time of the June 2019 review is the Interim 2035 MTP, adopted by the MPO Policy Board in November 2015 and was intended to be a short-term plan to allow for the completion of the 2040 MTP. The Interim 2035 MTP extended the expiring 2030 plan without significant modification to allow staff enough time to fully meet the requirements outlined in 23 CFR 450.300. AMATS staff indicated that they will not be able to meet the November 2019 deadline for the update of the Interim 2035 Plan. AMATS staff indicated that they expect to have the 2040 plan updated by November 2020 and they understand that AMATS will enter a one-year air quality conformity grace period on November 19, 2019. If the 2040 MTP is not completed by November 2020, then a conformity lapse will take effect and the MPO will experience funding limitations and other restrictions that will impact regional planning and programming.

23 CFR 450.324(e) requires that the plan be based on the latest available estimates and assumptions for population, land use, travel, employment, congestion, and economic activity. The Interim 2035 MTP does not adequately describe how other plans and processes (CMP, freight mobility, and non-motorized plans) are integrated into the planning and programming processes.

Corrective Actions

AMATS' 2040 MTP must be completed by November 2020 and fully meet the requirements of 23 CFR 450.324. This includes using the latest available estimates and assumptions for population, land use, travel, employment, congestion, and economic activity and incorporating the requirements for transportation performance management. AMATS, in coordination with planning partners, should develop an MTP update schedule and process that ensures the next

MTP and subsequent updates meets federal requirements within the federally required MTP update cycle.

Recommendations

None

TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (23 CFR 450.326 and 328)

Regulatory Basis

The MPO is required, under 23 CFR 450.326, to develop a TIP in cooperation with the state and public transit operators. The TIP must cover a period of at least four years and must be approved by the MPO and the governor. If the TIP is updated more frequently, the cycle must be compatible with the STIP development and approval process [23 CFR 450.326(a)]. The following information must be provided for each project included in the TIP: sufficient descriptive material to identify the project or phase; estimated total cost; amount of Federal fund proposed to be obligated during each program year; proposed source of Federal and non-Federal funds; identification of funding recipient/project sponsor; in non-attainment and maintenance areas, identification of Transportation Control Measures (TCMs) and sufficiently detailed description for conformity determination [23 CFR 450.326(g)]. TIP amendments are required to add a new project, delete a project, or for major scope changes.

Findings

The AMATS TIP (adopted on December 20, 2018) does not include adequate explanation of how projects programmed in the TIP were derived from the MPO's regional long-range and short-range planning and programming processes. TIP amendment and modification procedures were not documented at the time of the on-site review. After the June 2019 on-site meeting, AMATS' operating agreement has been modified to document the process for making changes to the TIP in compliance with federal regulations for amendments and administrative modifications.

Corrective Actions

The TIP must provide documentation that describes the planning and programming processes used to develop and adopt the TIP as described in 23 CFR 450.326, including how performance-based planning targets are addressed, a description of public, local agency, involvement and the disposition of any public comments received, tribal consultation, and a financial plan that meets 23 CFR 450.326(j) including the MPO's ability to operate and maintain the existing and proposed transportation system.

Recommendations

None

AIR QUALITY (23 CFR 450.314, 320, 322, 324, 326, and 334)

Regulatory Basis

Section 176(c)(1) of the Clean Air Act (CAA) Amendments of 1990 states: “*No metropolitan planning organization designated under section 134 of title 23, United States Code, shall give its approval to any project, program, or plan which does not conform to an implementation plan approved or promulgated under section 110.*” Provisions governing air-quality-related transportation planning are incorporated in a number of metropolitan planning regulations, including: 23 CFR 450.314, 23 CFR 450.322, 23 CFR 450.320, 23 CFR 450.324, 23 CFR 450.326, and 23 CFR 450.334.

Findings

Anchorage Urbanized Area is a limited maintenance area for carbon monoxide and the Eagle River area is a limited maintenance area for PM10. The air quality conformity analysis in the 2019 – 2023 TIP for the Eagle River PM10 non-attainment area showed a 5-year average concentration of 98.6, and the maximum for the maintenance area is 98. The conformity procedures round decimal values to the lower whole number, so the PM-10 concentration equaled the maximum allowed. The Eagle River PM10 problem is the greatest in the spring when winds and vehicle traffic create dust from winter road sand that remains on the roadways.

Corrective Actions

None

Recommendations

AMATS should closely monitor the air quality in Eagle River. To avoid exceeding the allowable 5-year concentration of PM10 particulate matter, maintenance forces or contractors should perform mitigation measures such as street sweeping and application of dust palliative in the spring when the dust problem is the worst.

CIVIL RIGHTS (23 CFR 450.336)

Regulatory Basis

The metropolitan planning process is required to be carried out in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and 23 CFR 450.336(a)(3). Title VI states that no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. The Title VI assurance executed by the state adds sex and physical handicap to characteristics protected against discrimination.

Findings

AMATS has an annual meeting with the DOT&PF's Civil Rights Office. One of the topics discussed at the annual meeting is the AMATS' Title VI Non-Discrimination Implementation Plan to determine if any updates are needed. A direct mailing list with over 700 names is maintained to ensure that populations affected by projects and programs are being reached. AMATS staff attend Title VI training offered by the DOT& PF's Civil Rights Office.

Corrective Actions

None

Recommendations

None

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (23 CFR 450.322, 324, 316)

Regulatory Basis

The requirements for public involvement are set forth primarily in 23 CFR 450.316(a)(1)(2)(3) and (b) which addresses elements of the metropolitan planning process (see also *Transportation Planning Process* topic area). Public involvement also is addressed specifically in connection with the MTP in 23 CFR 450.322(g)(1)(2), (i), and (j) and with the TIP in 450.324(b); participation and consultation requirements, which pertain to the MTP and the TIP, also are included in 450.322 (f)(7), (g)(1)(2), (i), and (j) and in 23 CFR 450.324(b). Requirements related to the planning process generally are summarized in 23 CFR 450.316(a)(1)(2)(3) and (b).

Findings

The AMATS Public Participation Plan has specific goals and objectives to reach out to diverse groups. AMATS is developing a list of contacts and events to reach traditionally underserved populations, including low income and non-English speaking populations. AMATS has a citizen's advisory committee that includes representation of a broad cross -section of the planning area. An extensive contact and email list is maintained for distribution of planning information to stakeholders. The AMATS public participation process is a best practice.

Corrective Actions

None

Recommendations

None

CONCLUSION

The Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Highway Administration jointly certify, subject to the resolution of the two corrective actions outlined in this report, that the planning process for the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions substantially meets the requirement of 23 CFR 450, Section 336(b).