Chapter I: Introduction

A. What is the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council?

As the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) designated by the Governor of the State of New York, the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC) was created in 1966 to carry out the continuous, comprehensive and cooperative transportation planning process for the Syracuse Metropolitan Area, which includes all of Onondaga County and small parts of Oswego and Madison Counties. The SMTC area is centered in the City of Syracuse, the transportation hub and economic center for Central New York (see Map 1).

In addition to maintaining a long-range transportation plan (a 20-year vision of future transportation projects and improvements), the SMTC conducts a number of specific transportation planning activities as part of the biennial Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), some of which include: traffic corridor studies; transportation data collection; safety improvement analyses; congestion management; and multimodal transportation planning (including bicycle and pedestrian planning). The SMTC is also responsible for the maintenance of the area’s Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), a three-year program that funds capital projects related to transit, local roadways and interstates, bridges, bicycle and pedestrian amenities, and more. It is important to note, however, that the SMTC is not an agency that can implement particular transportation improvements, but serves as a collaborative forum where transportation issues are studied, and recommendations made.

The SMTC is composed of officials representing local, State and Federal governments or agencies having interest or responsibility in comprehensive transportation planning. To facilitate and encourage maximum interaction among these groups and the local community, the SMTC has adopted a committee structure that consists of a Policy, Planning and Executive Committee. Served by the SMTC central staff, these committees serve as the hierarchy to the transportation planning activities of the SMTC.
The Policy Committee consists of the elected and appointed officials representing local, State and Federal governments and other organizations/agencies having an interest or responsibility in comprehensive transportation planning in the Syracuse Metropolitan Area. The primary responsibility of the Policy Committee is to establish policies for the overall conduct of the SMTC.

The Planning Committee, which is established by the Policy Committee, is composed of the professional/technical representatives of both the Policy Committee members and public agencies having direct or indirect responsibility for transportation planning and/or implementation. Their primary responsibility is to monitor all technical activities including the development of a draft UPWP and TIP for recommendation to the Policy Committee. They also direct and consider for recommendation to the Policy Committee all major studies and planning activities.

The Executive Committee is made up of Planning Committee members and provides oversight of the day-to-day operation of the Central Staff for financial management, personnel and other administrative requirements.

The SMTC Policy Committee members include the City of Syracuse Office of the Mayor, the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board (CNYRPDB), the Central New York Regional Transportation Authority (CNYRTA), the Empire State Development Corporation, the Metropolitan Development Association (MDA), the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC), the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), the New York State Thruway Authority (NYSTA), the Onondaga County Office of the Executive, the Onondaga County Legislature, the Onondaga County Planning Board, the Syracuse Common Council, and the Syracuse Planning Commission.

The SMTC develops three key documents that are the components to transportation planning and programming in the Syracuse Metropolitan Area: the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), the UPWP, and the TIP. Together in tandem, these three documents represent the beginning, middle and end to an effective transportation planning process.

**B. Purpose of the Long-Range Transportation Plan**

The LRTP is a blueprint to guide the Syracuse Metropolitan Area’s transportation development over a 20-year period. Updated every three years to reflect changing conditions and new planning principals, the LRTP is based on projections of growth and travel demand coupled with financial assumptions. The LRTP specifically looks at major urban transportation planning concerns such as environmental/air quality; comprehensive access to transportation; alternative transportation modes (especially bicycle and pedestrian); the impact of land development on the transportation system; highway traffic congestion; and maintenance of the existing infrastructure.
It is important to note that in all of its transportation planning activities, the SMTC is required to consider and integrate the following planning factors as outlined in the Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21):

1. Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity and efficiency;
2. Increase the safety and security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
3. Increase the accessibility and mobility options available to people and freight;
4. Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation and improve the quality of life;
5. Enhance integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight;
6. Promote efficient system management and operation; and
7. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

In January 1995, the SMTC published the 2020 LRTP. This was followed three years later with the 1998 Update, and again with a 2001 Update. All documents were prepared in compliance with CFR 450.332, which also is the basis for this document, the 2004 Update, to fulfill triennial review and update requirements. Since this document is an update, some information and data may not be balanced due to modifying/adding data to the original 1995 information. The original 1995 Long-Range Transportation Plan is the base document and this 2004 Update represents modifications to that plan.

The 2004 Update has been prepared on the basis of an evaluation of the initial LRTP completed in 1995 and the 1998 and 2001 Updates, as well as changing circumstances of a significant nature that have occurred and affect the three documents. The 2004 Update should not be viewed as a stand-alone document but instead should be used in conjunction with the LRTP published in 1995, and the 1998 and 2001 Updates. In general, sections of the LRTP that are not substantially affected by changing circumstances are not included in this document. Some examples of the differences between the 1998 Update and the following two Updates (2001 and 2004) include:

1. The completion of several planning projects from the annual SMTC UPWP and substantial progress on other projects;
2. Inclusion of more recent demographic data resulting from Census 2000;
3. Changes made in the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) planning factors to be considered in conducting UPWP planning projects and in the SMTC TIP for selecting capital projects;
4. Progress achieved in the Action Plans in the LRTP, included in Chapter 2;
5. An extensive public outreach plan, including a public opinion survey;
6. A comprehensive review of changes in the community since the 1998 Update, including examining the impact of the proposed Destiny USA project and the Lakefront Development as well as a review of the Onondaga County Settlement Plan.

During the last decade, several changes in federal legislation have had a substantial impact on how MPOs, such as the SMTC, conduct transportation planning. These include the Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA) of 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the Intermodal Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 and the TEA-21 of 1998. Collectively, these acts address such major urban transportation planning concerns as environmental quality (especially air quality), access to transportation (especially for those with mobility difficulties), alternative transportation modes (especially bicycle and pedestrian), the transportation-land use linkage (especially the impact of land development on the transportation system), highway traffic congestion and maintenance of the existing transportation infrastructure. The legislation directs the planning focus of agencies such as the SMTC to these new areas of concern, now that the interstate highway system has been completed.

The LRTP presents a vision of the transportation system and the projects that will bring that vision to reality over time. Central to that vision is the protection of the value of investments already made in developing the transportation system while providing resources to pursue innovative solutions to mobility constraints and enhancing travel choices available. Also central to the LRTP is the need to adjust the land development patterns and transportation system investments, where practical, to conform to existing development guidelines (i.e., Onondaga County’s 2010 Development Guide, the Onondaga County Settlement Plan, and the City of Syracuse’s Comprehensive Plan, which is currently underway).

1. Public Involvement

Engaging the public early and often in the planning process is critical to the success of any transportation plan or program, and it is required by numerous state and federal laws. Such legislation underscores the need for public involvement, calling on MPOs such as the SMTC to provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agencies, private providers of transportation and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment on transportation plans and programs.

SMTC JARC Public Meeting

For many of the SMTC activities, a project-specific Public Involvement Plan (PIP) is created that sets the framework for the public participation opportunities that will be available throughout the course of the project. Please refer to Appendix A to review the PIP for the LRTP 2004 Update. Such a proactive and dynamic PIP development process
ensures the continual review of meaningful public involvement objectives and concepts, as opposed to one stagnant PIP that the SMTC must follow in all its transportation planning activities. Depending on the nature of the project, such groups as freight shippers, business developers, property owners, community leaders, social service agencies, fire and police representatives, and/or representatives of public transit, to name a few, are actively sought as participants in the project process. Input from such groups is important to the success of the project in meeting identified needs. The varying PIPs also consider the differing characteristics and impacts of different geographical areas on the focus of the study. For example, the existing conditions, the transportation issues, and the corresponding recommendations for the Seneca Turnpike Corridor Study (located on the City of Syracuse’s South Side) are quite different from that of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, a 2-year bicycle and pedestrian planning activity that will encompass all of Onondaga County. Thus, the SMTC created an individual project-specific PIP for both studies, in which differing methods allow the public to better participate in the study. The PIP also pinpoints when in the project the public involvement meetings will be held that allow for the exchange of information and input.

The SMTC has taken several steps to strengthen the public involvement process. In addition to holding public meetings, the SMTC continues to recruit the necessary technical personnel and community representatives to serve on a project-specific Study Advisory Committees (SAC). The SAC, consisting of representatives from affected organizations, local and state governments and agencies, and selected community representatives, meets regularly with the SMTC to assist in managing projects and provide needed input and direction.

In addition to the SAC, a list of interested “stakeholders” (a broader group of interested individuals with significant relations and interest in a particular planning study or activity) is maintained by the SMTC. The stakeholders are sent pertinent study information, kept apprised of significant study developments, notified of all public meetings, and encouraged to provide feedback and comment regarding the particular planning study or activity. Separate meetings are also considered for the stakeholders group at various points during some projects, so that the SMTC may report on the progress of a study effort, and solicit input. The SMTC feels meeting with the stakeholders group on a one-on-one basis is an important strategy in gaining support and input from non-traditional partners.
On an overall basis, the staff’s Communications Specialist works with the technical staff on a regular basis to expand opportunities for public input on each of the projects conducted under the annual UPWP.

Since the 2001 Update, the SMTC has continued to improve and expand upon its already impressive public involvement efforts. The following items are some of the noteworthy acts and methods the SMTC has implemented to inform and invite the public to participate:

1. **SMTC Web Site** [www.smtcempo.org]: In September 2001, the MPO launched a “new and improved” SMTC web site, which now contains general information on the SMTC, and detailed, “headline” information on its studies, products, public participation opportunities, and other pertinent news and developments. The site is also referred to as a “one-stop shopping” site for various SMTC-produced reports and study documentation. The new and improved web site has received a significant number of hits, has been extremely useful and cost-effective in its posting of final reports, and is becoming a site that the public relies on for meeting notices, and UPWP project updates. Most importantly, it has become another source for the public to participate in the transportation planning process.

   The public involvement aspects pertaining to the web site have also been strengthened. The SMTC has taken advantage of the Internet and its web site by creating a sub web site specific to individual UPWP projects. For example, a sub web site for the SMTC’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan has been created [www.smtcempo.org/bike-ped], as has a web site for the LRTP 2004 Update [http://www.smtcempo.org/LRTP2004]. The SMTC will continue to use its web site for project-specific sub web sites in the future, publicizing project news, updates, and opportunities for public participation.

2. The use of **press releases** to announce various meetings, project updates, and available reports has been upgraded in its distribution. The SMTC is now e-mailing its press releases to local media and agencies/individuals/citizens of interest.

3. **SMTC newsletter, DIRECTIONS**: The SMTC continues to promote its activities through its quarterly newsletter, which has grown in its total distribution count from approximately 1,500 in 1999 to about 2,000 in 2002. The SMTC has also begun to promote its online version of DIRECTIONS, and is now distributing the newsletter via e-mail to hundreds of recipients.

4. **Final Reports**: The SMTC has attempted to make better use of technology in making transportation planning reports, memorandums, and documents available for public review and possession. Central staff has implemented procedures that allow for final reports to be accessed via CD-ROM, e-mail (PDF file), or accessed on the SMTC web site. The SMTC continues to make
its reports available at its offices, and at local libraries throughout Onondaga County.

5. Continued and improved distribution of various project-specific fact sheets and meeting announcement flyers. The SMTC has received considerable feedback and inquiries following the distribution of such material. SAC members are assisting in the distribution of these flyers in an attempt to get the “grass-roots” community involved.

6. Project specific newsletters have been developed to provide focused information and project updates on particular UPWP projects.

7. SMTC brochure: A Citizen’s Guide to Transportation Planning was produced in the Fall 2001. It has been well received in its attempt to explain the role and purpose of the SMTC. In fact, it has been recognized by the public in its effective explanation of the MPO process (e.g. the progression and relationship of the LRTP, UPWP, and the TIP).

8. Media Relationships: Continued and heightened relationship with the local media has led to increased media exposure over the past three years for the SMTC and many of its transportation planning activities. The SMTC has been working with all mediums, television, radio, and print, to promote the activities and public participation opportunities to the public. In addition, the SMTC has established a good working relationship with students from Syracuse University who conduct interviews for their public communications class, and the Syracuse University newspaper. This is helping to spread the SMTC news on to the college setting/environment.

9. Advertisements: When necessary, the SMTC has arranged for advertisements in free newspapers to expand its outreach to all populations. The SMTC has also posted various legal notices and announcements in the print media.

10. Representation on the FOCUS (Forging Our Communities United Strengths), a community-wide visioning program. This volunteer activity has allowed the SMTC to discuss its role in the community and promote the activities and studies of the SMTC in tandem with the community’s goals and visions.
11. **Integration and coordination with the City of Syracuse’s Tomorrow’s Neighborhoods Today (TNT),** a citywide community development forum. The SMTC has partnered with this group in the distribution of information, and holding of public meetings in an attempt to reach more citizens in all sections of the City of Syracuse.

12. **Orientation Packet:** Part of the SMTC’s public involvement activities has been to educate our Planning and Policy Committee members, in addition to the general public who request information about the SMTC. Thus, the SMTC created and established an orientation packet for new committee members.

13. **Onondaga Indian Nation:** The SMTC continues its outreach to the Onondaga Indian Nation in all of its mailings (e.g., press releases, newsletters, flyers, and public meeting announcements).

14. **Assisting other MPOs:** The SMTC has expanded its outreach to assist in promoting MPOs throughout New York State. In 2002, the SMTC assisted with the design and layout of the New York State Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (NYSAMPO) brochure. The SMTC’s Communications Specialist designed the graphical layout, and coordinated printing efforts for a brochure that aims to promote the role and purpose of MPOs, and the significance of transportation planning in New York State.

15. **Comment Cards/Surveys:** The SMTC has implemented various questionnaires, surveys, and comment cards in an effort to obtain additional public participation and opinion.

The SMTC recognizes that the active involvement of the entire community, in addition to the SMTC Policy and Planning Committee members, is paramount to good transportation planning. Public comments are valued because they can shape the direction of a particular transportation study or planning activity, and may help to identify new transportation projects that are important to citizens of the area.

**C. Transportation Planning Context**

The SMTC develops three key documents that are the ingredients to transportation planning and programming in the Syracuse Metropolitan Area: the LRTP, the UPWP, and the TIP. Together in tandem, these three documents represent the beginning, middle and end to an effective transportation planning process. Descriptions of each of the three key documents are included throughout this chapter. The following illustration (Table 1-1) depicts the interrelationship between the three documents.

The LRTP represents the starting point in which the transportation goals and objectives for the future are set forth in a document adopted by the SMTC Policy Committee. Each year, the Policy Committee adopts the UPWP, which incorporates all the transportation
planning and directly supporting comprehensive planning activities for the coming year. The activities are generally major transportation studies that identify short-and long-range needs and reflect the efforts to be undertaken that will lead toward the attainment of the LRTP goals and objectives over a number of years. Finally, the SMTC adopts the TIP, the SMTC instrument for programming capital improvement projects to complete the planning and implementation process.

Table 1-1

The Planning and Programming Process

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<th>Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)</th>
<th>Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)</th>
<th>Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)</th>
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D. Process and Funding

1. Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Process

The SMTC is responsible for the maintenance of the area’s TIP, a three-year program that funds capital projects related to transit, local roadways and interstates, bicycle and pedestrian amenities, and more. Four pieces of federal legislation significantly affect the TIP and the planning and programming of transportation projects. These include the TEA-21, ISTEA, ADA, and CAAA.

The TIP for the SMTC area is comprised of a staged three-year program of transportation capital projects together with a three-year estimate of transit capital and maintenance requirements. While the TIP is usually approved biennially, the document may be amended as needed. ISTEA and TEA-21 as well as the Metropolitan Planning Regulations mandate that a TIP adhere to the following requirements:

1. Identify transportation improvement projects recommended for advancement during the program year. The projects required are those located within the study area and receiving any FHWA or Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds.
2. Identify the criteria and process for prioritization for inclusion of projects in the TIP and any changes from past TIPs.

3. Group improvements of similar urgency and anticipated staging into appropriate staging periods.

4. Include realistic estimates of total costs and revenue for the program period.

5. Include a discussion of how improvements recommended from the Long-Range Transportation Plans Transportation Systems Management Plan were merged into the program.

6. List major projects from previous TIPs that were implemented and identify any major delays in planned implementation.

7. Describe progress in implementing any required Transportation Control Measures (TCM) as identified in the State Implementation Plan (SIP) for Air Quality.

8. Include an air quality conformity analysis of the TIP to the SIP with a list of all projects found to conform in previous TIPs that should be considered as a base case for conformity analysis.

The TIP should also include regional highway and transit projects that are being implemented by the State, City, County and CNYRTA for which no Federal funding is requested.

2. UPWP Process

The UPWP identifies the transportation planning activities that are to be undertaken in the SMTC study area in support of the goals, objectives and actions established in the 2020 LRTP, which was adopted in January 1995. The SMTC Central Staff, working with the Planning Committee and the NYSDOT, annually initiates the process of developing the UPWP and prepares a final draft for the consideration of both the Planning and Policy Committees. The intent in developing a comprehensive UPWP is to ensure that a coordinated transportation planning process occurs in the region, which will make positive contributions towards the achievement of the established 2020 goals regarding mobility, facilities, safety, the environment, economy and land use.

The SMTC’s Operations Plan outlines a framework for the UPWP, which the Central Staff is expected to accomplish, and provides guidance with respect to a financial plan to support the UPWP. The UPWP is intended to be consistent with the Operations Plan, as well as the metropolitan planning requirements for the TEA-21 and its implementing regulation (23 CFR Park 450, Subpart C and 49 CFR Part 613, Subpart A). Compliance with these regulations frames much of this program. Further, the UPWP strives to address NYSDOT planning emphasis areas that are intended to implement the State’s policies for urban area transportation planning. This is to ensure that projects conceived by the SMTC fulfill the Federal and State policies, and local issues progress in a timely manner.

The status of the current UPWP is reviewed monthly by the SMTC’s Executive Committee to ensure that it is being carried out in a manner consistent with the MPO’s
goals. While it is the mission of the Central Staff and the Executive Committee to complete work efforts within a program year, task elements may be designed to span multiple fiscal years and therefore are carried into subsequent UPWP’s to enable project closure. Each year an estimate of transportation planning funds available for new programs is made. Policy direction and scope of the UPWP are developed with member agency participation based on their needs, consistent with the LRTP.

The staff, working with member agencies, establishes a list of candidate projects for inclusion in the next year’s UPWP. Estimates of amounts and sources of funding to accomplish the planning program are developed. The Planning Committee then prioritizes the continuing program and the new projects. A draft UPWP is developed for Planning Committee review and recommendation of acceptance to the Policy Committee. The Policy Committee has the final responsibility to approve the UPWP.

3. Long-Term Funding

Although the planning funds for the MPO over the past few years have remained consistent, there was an approximate decrease of $100,000 for the 2003-2004 UPWP. The projections for federal funding available for transportation planning projects are unlikely to increase during the next few years. Similar to planning fund trends, capital projects trends show a plateau or slight decrease over time. This limits the money available for further capital improvements. According to SMTC policy, funding should be prioritized for use in maintaining the current infrastructure with minimal focus on expansion. An examination of the recent transportation expenditures shows the majority of funding going towards maintenance of existing infrastructure.

At the time of the authorship of this document, a temporary 5-month extension to the existing legislation has been enacted. The future of federal transportation funding beyond this extension is unknown and beyond the ability of the SMTC to foresee. Hence, until further information is made available, the SMTC is operating under the auspices of the previous funding mechanisms for the prioritizing of both planning and capital projects. Additionally, the New York State budget is operating at a considerable deficit, adding additional unknowns to the long-term future funding of both transportation planning and capital projects.