



# SPR Research Program Stage 2 Problem Statement FY 2010-11

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## I. PROBLEM NUMBER

PEA-10-06

## II. PROBLEM TITLE

A multi-state comparison of regional transportation planning and decision making: an analysis of applicability to Oregon

## III. RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

**Overview.** Issues such as metropolitan travelsheds and rural travel corridors make regional transportation planning challenging. Planning and decision-making is further complicated when considering the relationship of transportation to land use and economic development. Many states have adapted methods and institutional arrangements for considering and dealing with these issues. In Oregon, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Area Commissions on Transportation (ACTs) address some of these issues, but are often limited by their geographic area. In other states, alternate arrangements and mechanisms exist that could potentially be effective at addressing remaining issues in Oregon, though little information is currently available on their effectiveness.

**Background.** In metropolitan areas throughout the U.S., rapid growth in travel demand is outstripping investment in transportation infrastructure. In Oregon, regional transportation and land use planning has helped limit this growth, but it continues to be one of the most significant challenges for both metropolitan travelsheds and rural travel corridors. Governor Kulongoski's Transportation Vision Committee identified these growth trends as one of the most significant challenges facing Oregon in terms of both the funding and the state's goals for reducing greenhouse gases.

Regional transportation planning and decision making has been recognized as a significant issue throughout the U.S., and while transportation and land use coordination is a common topic, there has been limited attention paid to institutional arrangements. In 2002 and 2003, the US Department of Transportation conducted domestic scans of state approaches in Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Florida, North Carolina, and Tennessee. These scans highlighted a number of specific mechanisms for integrating transportation and land use, such as collaborative processes, public-private partnerships, and the physical design of places. Furthermore, several states have conducted studies focusing on transportation and land use coordination, including North Carolina (*Rodriguez et al. 2003*), Virginia (*Miller et al. 2004*) and Florida (*Hendricks and Seggerman 2005*). However, this research focuses on topics such as travel demand tools, forecasting mechanisms, and legislative options for regional coordination. The North Carolina study also highlighted the need for NCDOT to identify institutional mechanisms that allow state and regional transportation planners "to reach out to local land use planners to increase collaboration among parties and improve planning outcomes" (*Rodriguez et al. 2003, 40*).

**Oregon.** Although Oregon's Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Area Commissions on Transportation (ACTs) address some of these issues, they have little authority to address regional travelsheds. Furthermore, many regional transportation and land use issues cross these boundaries. The recently completed report for ODOT on Oregon's ACTs highlighted some the limitations of the current structure and the complications of addressing these issues without addressing the regional planning and decision making arrangements of ODOT, MPOs and ACTs (Brody and Margerum 2008). Regional transportation planning and decision making are identified as critically important in Oregon because travel sheds and travel corridors: (1) contain some of the most significant transportation problems, (2) are the areas creating some of the most significant new demands for limited transportation dollars, (3) are critical to the economic development of metropolitan and rural areas, and (4) include areas where increasing transportation options has the highest likelihood of success.

As part of the Oregon ACT study, the research team conducted a brief review of regional structures for transportation improvement in three states (Washington, Iowa, and California) based on phone interviews. These reviews generated significant interest among ODOT staff and the Oregon Transportation Commission in terms of highlighting options for Oregon. However, this brief review did not evaluate the structures for transportation planning and decision making in these states, and it did not examine other innovative regional approaches in places such as Utah, Colorado, and North Carolina. As the Governor's Committee noted, there is a need to "initiate a study of national 'best practices' for improving the delivery of metropolitan transportation services through enhanced regional decision making" (*Transportation Vision Committee 2008, 7*).

#### **IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The goal of this research is to identify and evaluate the potential regional institutional arrangements and mechanisms for addressing transportation and its relationship to land use and economic development through a cross-state comparative analysis. The specific research objectives for this project are to:

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the research literature to identify key findings from previous research, identify potential case studies, and collect data on other state approaches;
- Evaluate institutional arrangements and mechanisms for coordinating regional transportation planning and decision making in 3-5 other states or regions
- Assess the applicability and transferability of these lessons to Oregon.

#### **V. WORK TASKS, COST ESTIMATE AND DURATION**

Work Tasks:

- A. Review current research literature to: synthesize findings, summarize findings from other states and identify potential state or regional case studies.
- B. Refine evaluation framework developed for Oregon study of ACTs
- C. For 3-5 case studies, describe approaches to regional transportation and land use planning and evaluate its effectiveness through on-site interviews, an on-line evaluation survey of appropriate participants, and a research forum to discuss issues, practices and outcomes with transportation officials from ODOT and the case study states.
- D. Summarize findings from the state comparative study and the workshop in a report to the Oregon Department of Transportation.

**Time required:** 18 months. Tasks A and B: July 2009-December 2009; Task C: January-June 2010; Tasks D: June-August 2010; Task E: August-December 2010

**Cost Estimate:** A total of \$192,500 (including ODOT expenses). The researchers plan to submit a proposal to the Oregon Transportation Research and Education Consortium (OTREC). If jointly funded, the cost to ODOT would be \$100,000.

#### **VI. IMPLEMENTATION**

This research will provide information for the Oregon Transportation Commission, Oregon Department Transportation, the Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and the Area Commissions on Transportation. There will also be findings related to broader initiatives on transportation, land use and climate change that are currently under development by the Governor's office, state legislature and Oregon Transportation Commission. The project will provide valuable findings for transportation decision makers in Oregon and the other states and regions participating in the study. These findings will identify some of the structures, mechanisms and tools that have been used in various locations. Importantly, because the issues, practices and outcomes will be discussed jointly in a research forum with transportation and other officials in Oregon and other case study sites, participants will have the opportunity to discuss the implications and lessons in more detail, learn from other approaches, and create opportunities for future exchange.

## **VII. POTENTIAL BENEFITS**

Like many states, Oregon is facing increasing transportation costs in conjunction with increased congestion. The findings from this study will help transportation and land use officials at the state, regional and local level develop institutional arrangements and mechanisms to better coordinate regional transportation planning and decision making. This can help reduce future demand and better allocate scarce transportation investment, and ensure adequate transportation investment to support economic development. Furthermore, by improving regional coordination, planners can seek to reduce greenhouse gases by better integrating transportation and land use planning. As noted in the study of Oregon ACTs and the Governor's Transportation Vision Committee, if a more comprehensive review of regional transportation approaches is not undertaken, Oregon will face a situation of piecemeal and reactive investment while transportation infrastructure needs continue to increase.

## **VIII. SUBMITTED BY**

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