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Chapter 8: Plan Implementation and Monitoring

8.1 Introduction

The Birmingham 2035 Regional Transportation Plan provides direction and sets priorities for decision-making about transportation infrastructure investments and services within the Birmingham metropolitan transportation planning area. Embodied in the RTP is the expectation that the identified projects, programs, and activities will be implemented. Implementation of the RTP occurs at all levels of government, among transportation system and service operators, stakeholders, and system users. Stakeholders in the planning process include local governments and agencies (federal and state agencies where necessary), the business community, and citizens. Each of these has a role to play in contributing to the RTP's success and will need to provide support to the plan's projects and/or programs through all phases of their development.

While the RTP is primarily a policy document, it includes a number of strategies and specific projects and programs for moving the Birmingham metropolitan transportation planning area closer to its vision of a seamless transportation system that incorporates multiple travel modes. Implementation of the RTP will take place through a variety of mechanisms. It is very likely that some of the actions presented in the RTP will require action to be taken by the Alabama State Legislature. It certainly will also require that a better working relationship be developed between the Birmingham MPO and the Alabama Department of Transportation as well as other transportation agencies and local governments. Finally, implementation of the RTP will require that the Birmingham MPO's membership support and adhere to recommended policy changes and newly established and/or revamped processes.

Other actions to implement the RTP will require the development of guidelines and tools to assist decision-makers. Already, the Birmingham MPO has undertaken the task of developing supplemental planning documents and both analytical and technical tools to inform the planning and decision-making process. The Birmingham MPO staff has also begun the additional work and analysis to identify the appropriate entity(s) to take the lead in implementing specific actions along with the appropriate implementation mechanisms for individual actions. The big idea then is not to do more planning, but better planning: planning that is reflective of the RTP's vision and goals; planning that is responsive to the needs of the metropolitan planning area; and; planning that leads to accomplishments.

A major key in implementing the Birmingham 2035 RTP will be the efficient and cost-effective use of existing transportation funds. As discussed in Chapter 6, Financial Plans, there is a need to identify new revenues sources as well as to expand existing revenues sources in order to adequately fund proposed transportation system improvements. Indeed the Birmingham metropolitan transportation planning area is not alone in its over reliance on federal funding, but there is a need to look beyond federal dollars if the RTP is to be fully realized. As such, the RTP proposes that a new regional approach to transportation planning, project development and project implementation be considered. Some of the envisioned components of this new approach include the refined use of the **regional travel demand model, incorporation of functional and/or modal plans, and stronger consideration of the land-use impacts on the transportation system.** These strategies attempt to use technological advances in computer based planning applications, as well as good old fashioned planning methodologies.

The RTP relies less on strategies to forecast the probable future of the Birmingham metropolitan transportation planning area, and places more emphasis on laying out a roadmap to create the future described in the Vision for Regional Travel included in Chapter 3, RTP Goals and Objectives. President Abraham Lincoln stated, "The best way to predict the future is to create it." This chapter will lay out the pathway to the future.

8.1.1 The Need for Implementation

The RTP, while technically a policy plan that includes a listing of physical projects and projects, is at its heart an action plan for implementing transportation system improvements. However, in a bit of irony, the transportation system improvements identified in the RTP take so long to be implemented that at times it is hard to distinguish the project listing of current plan documents from previous long range transportation plans. Information compiled by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) indicates that major highway projects take approximately 13 years to advance from project initiation to completion.¹ Indeed, many of the projects in the Birmingham 2035 RTP have taken this long or longer to be implemented. Several projects in the RTP are legacy projects continued from previous plan documents. In a lot of cases, previously identified safety, congestion and/or mobility needs which necessitated that a project be developed have become more pronounced. This also translates into higher project costs as the identified projects costs' have increased dramatically over their original cost estimate. Table 8.1 illustrates the impact that project delays can have project costs. Take as an example a \$25 million project originally programmed to start construction in summer 2009 with completion in fall 2011. If the project's

construction were delayed by four years, the expected increase in project costs is between \$4.2 million and \$8 million over what it would have been if the project were built in the original year for which it was programmed. If the project's construction were delayed by ten years, the expected increase in costs is between \$16.2 and \$41.2 million. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the diminished need for the project, particularly

Project Completion Year	Inflated Current Dollar Costs	
	7.2% Annual Cost Inflation (FHWA Bid Price Index) ¹	4.0% Annual Cost Inflation (Alabama Specific Inflation Rate) ²
2010	\$ 25,000,000	\$25,000,000
2015	\$ 33,015,597	\$29,246,464
2020	\$ 66,170,894	\$43,291,911

1 - The rate of inflation in highway construction costs in this illustration is assumed to be 7.2 percent a year (representing the average rate of cost increase for highway projects from 2000 to 2006 as measured by the FHWA's Price Trends for Federal-Aid Highway Construction (or Bid Price Index [BPI])).
 2 -Project cost inflation for Alabama is provided by the Alabama Department of Transportation and is based on observed cost increases.

as the local environment adjusts in order to compensate for increased transportation demand. This has occurred in some areas of the metropolitan planning area's regional activity centers as the sluggishness of the transportation system's development necessitated more responsive solutions to congestion, mobility, and other transportation system needs. Changes to land uses, the development of locally funded public transportation services, and the construction of non-motorized transportation system components have prompted that some projects be reevaluated, revised, and or removed from the RTP because the need for the project has diminished. While this is a rare occurrence (the slowness in implementing projects actually has a tendency to exacerbate the problems associated with the need), it underscores the need for constant evaluation of the transportation system. It also shows the need to find strategies to speed up the project development and implementation process as it still takes too long to move projects from concept to reality. Figure 8.1 presents a typical project development timeline.

A lot of what needs to be done to speed up project delivery has to occur at the federal level. Truly, the environmental review process has proven to be quite onerous, and has added years to the project development process. The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission recognized the impact of the current environmental review process, and has recommended in their report to Congress that it and other project development processes be changed in order to help expedite infrastructure construction. There are also some actions that can be taken at the metropolitan level in

¹ National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Commission.

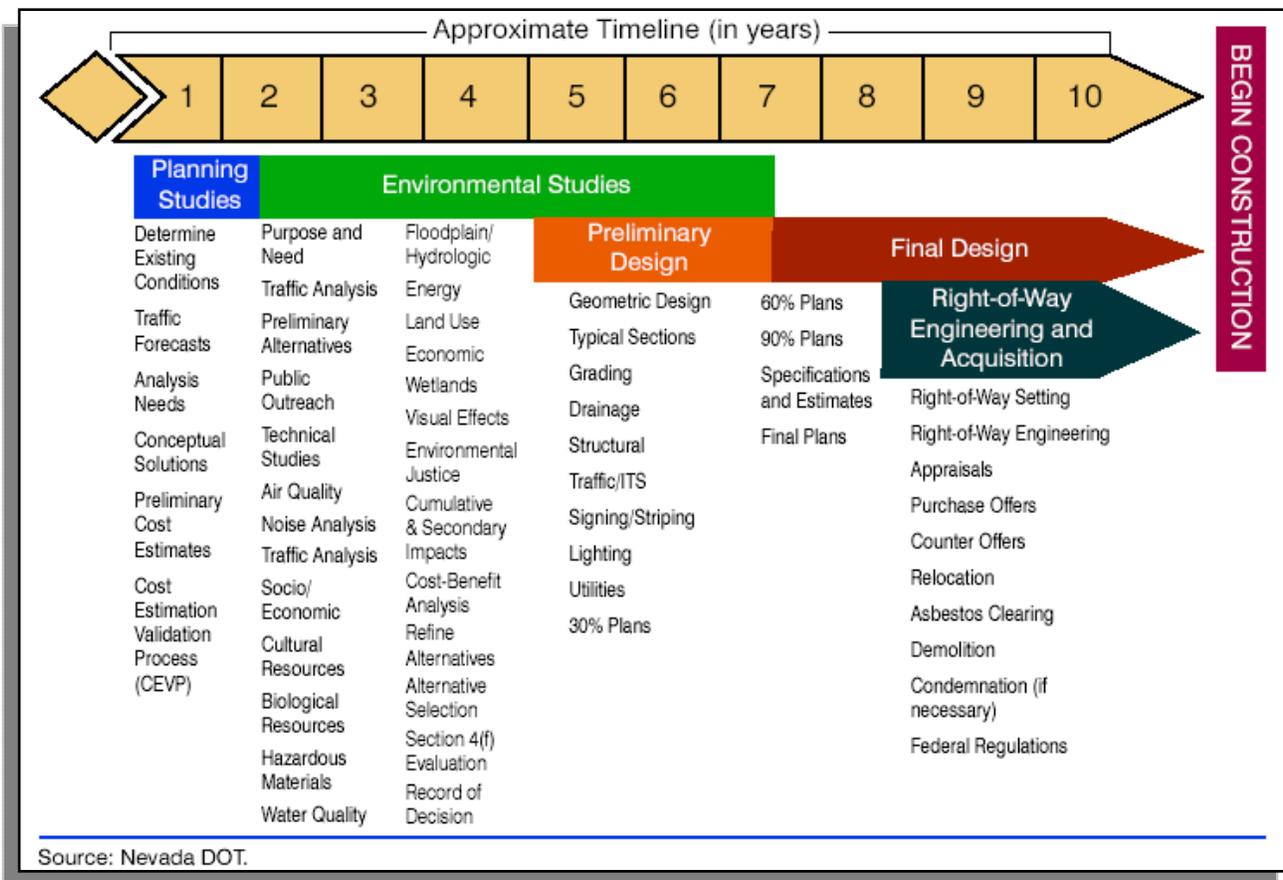


Figure 8.1 Typical Transportation Project Development Process

order to help expedite the project development process. This would include reviewing and modifying the local project development process, which is problematic, and strategies to ensure that the local match on projects is really available. While there is plenty of blame to go around, there is one thing for certain: the inability to implement projects in a timely manner is pushing the Birmingham metropolitan transportation planning area further behind in its efforts to address congestion and improve mobility.

8.1.2 Challenges to Implementation

As mentioned in the previous section, there are several challenges to the implementation of transportation projects in the RTP. Among them is the project development and environmental review processes, which themselves can cause lengthy delays that drive up project costs. Other challenges to project implementation include:

A. Project Implementation Process and Funding Policies

The metropolitan transportation planning process has, at times, proven to be a challenge to the implementation of projects. The process is set up to foster competition among projects where the best project is advanced to implementation. While competition is good, the metropolitan planning process has

inadvertently created an environment that allows project sponsors to use the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) as a placeholder. That is, projects are placed in the TIP for the specific purpose of tying up federal funding well before the project is ready to advance. For the project sponsor, this has the advantage of ensuring funding for expected cost increases as the project costs increase over time. For the MPO, however, this “gaming” of the TIP has limited the MPO’s ability to implement the RTP. Because there are no policies on reasonable progress, project sponsors do not feel a sense of urgency for advancing the project through the environmental review and preliminary engineering processes. In recent years, a number of projects have been moved outside of the TIP time period in order to help the TIP achieve fiscal constraint. However, the sense of entitlement that accompanies these projects makes it virtually impossible to remove the projects from the RTP altogether.

B. Diverging Interests

The RTP is a powerful tool that must balance local interests (this includes economic development interests) with identified regional needs. In many cases, the local interests and the identified regional need are one in the same. However, there are also cases when local interests ignore or directly conflict with regional needs and it is difficult to garner support. The Birmingham 2035 RTP has attempted to provide an argument for regionalism, pointing out that its (the RTP) concerns are for the larger transportation system, and providing the foundation for mechanisms to address local transportation issues. The RTP has put into place the necessary tools that will enable the prioritization of projects at a regional level according to how well they address goals and meet identified mobility needs. However, because the Birmingham MPO is a not an implementing agent, and because transportation planning in the Birmingham metropolitan transportation planning area is very parochial, it has proved difficult to get jurisdictions to collaborate with one another both during the planning process and financially.

C. Business Support

The recent merger of the Birmingham Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Metropolitan Development Board, and Region 2020 to form the Birmingham Business Alliance (BBA) has brought with it a real opportunity to move the Birmingham area, and in particular Jefferson County, to a new level of prosperity. It is the role of business and civic organizations to advocate for specific projects and programs, as well as to lobby for additional funding and changes to federal processes that slow implementation. It is hoped that the BBA and others will provide input to the federally mandated metropolitan planning process. In this way, the transportation system for the metropolitan planning area can move forward with the full technical, policy, political, and financial backing necessary to make it successful.

D. Multi-Modalism

Both the Alabama Department of Transportation and many local project sponsors lack policies for the successful incorporation of non-motorized transportation facilities into roadway projects as a matter of routine process. The transportation system is supposed to provide travel choices, and it is critical to develop a multi-modal approach to system planning and development. This includes, but is not limited to transit services; facilities to accommodate high-occupancy vehicle; on and off-street bicycle and accommodations; and traveler information systems.

8.1.3 Implementation Principles

Similar to the Key Principles that have provided guidance for the development of the RTP, the following Implementation Principles are meant to provide guidance to the development of the strategies that will be used to implement the RPT. These principles include:

- **Be Bold** - The scope and breadth of the RTP are transformational. In order to implement the RTP, it will be necessary to take bold steps in choosing to lead versus continuing the status quo
- **Develop Partnerships and Collaborations** - No single organization can implement the RTP on its own and the Plan cannot be legislated or regulated into reality. Successful implementation will depend on developing partnerships and collaborating across traditional agency and jurisdictional boundaries
- **Do Not Ignore the “Little Things”** - In transportation planning, there is often a tendency to focus on “big-ticket” items and mega-projects. However, the power and impact of the “little things” must not be under-estimated. Whether it is the design of a transportation facility, or the actions of an employer, the true success of the RTP will be in the collective achievement of multiple actions, large and small
- **Remain Flexible** - Every effort has been made to anticipate the needs of the future in developing the Birmingham 2035 RTP. However, it is important that the plan be flexible enough to respond to changing conditions and circumstances. The RTP is a living document, and the approach to implementation should not be so rigid as to prohibit it from changing course should the need arise
- **Value Independence and Innovation** - The RTP has established a framework to enable innovative designs of transportation facilities by means of stronger policies that will ensure the inclusion of non-motorized transportation options as a matter of routine accommodate rather than as an afterthought. The RTP also encourages local governments and other transportation project sponsors to develop and implement more projects without federal funding when possible

In addition to the Implementation Principles identified above, the status of the RTP’s role in the decision-making process needs to be elevated. Too often plan documents such as the RTP are conveniently ignored in the name of economic development. Unfortunately, plans are often looked at as limitations and/or barriers to progress, instead of as useful tools that encourage development. Adherence to the Implementation Principles will play a central role in the RTP’s success.

The RTP is a definitive roadmap to achieving the shared vision for the metropolitan planning area’s transportation system development. While the recommendations of the RTP are far-reaching, the strategies presented for the implementation of the plan are specific and deliberate. They do not leave to chance that the elements of the transportation system that are important to the metropolitan planning area will occur because of the good will of state and local transportation agencies, and local governments. In order that the RTP achieves its vision, every decision, large and small, will need to be consistent with the plan’s stated goals and objectives. In addition, the Birmingham MPO will need to be consistent in the implementation of its policies. This includes decisions related to transportation planning, transportation investments, transit operations, land use planning, and more.

8.1.4 Implementation Strategies

Chapter 6 of the RTP presented a financial plan that, while demonstrating fiscal constraint, also demonstrated the existence of a funding gap. This gap did not include the funding needs of projects contained in the RTP's Visionary Transportation Plan, none of which have federal funding assigned or local monies available. Chapter 6 also identified several potential funding sources and/or funding strategies that might be employed to generate revenues to cover the match and/or the entire cost of both needed and desired transportation infrastructure and services. There is, however, no consensus on either the funding source(s) or how generated revenues would be administered.

As part of this RTP's development process, the Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) considered a number of strategies to implement the programs and projects within the plan. This included a review of procedural steps that might help to speed up implementation, as well as strategies for obtaining additional local financing for projects, alternative implementation strategies, and changes to administrative processes and/or structure. The considerations and the Birmingham MPO's recommendations are presented in the following.

A. Streamlining the Environmental Review Processes

Project development and implementation in the Birmingham metropolitan transportation planning area is required to deal with complex environmental review process. In 2008, the Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission suggested that the project development and implementation project could be cut in half if the existing regulations that govern the environmental review process were changed and/or modified. Changes to these regulations will likely be slow in coming, and will not have an impact in the immediate future. However, the U.S. Department of Transportation and its agencies have devised a number of strategies to help streamline the environmental review process. One U.S. Department of Transportation Agency, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), has developed a streamlined method for conducting Alternatives Analysis, the required planning step for obtaining New Starts transit funding. This streamlined approach is applicable to more than transit projects, and is believed to be an effective way to link the corridor planning process to the environmental process. The FTA's approach includes:

- Pursuing early and frequent coordination between the project sponsors and cognizant federal agencies in order to determine the appropriate level of environmental documentation and foster ongoing communications;
- Linking the planning process with the environmental review process using strategies such as early scoping in order to combine redundant steps
- Defining the project's purpose and need early in the combined planning and environmental review processes by clearly "Making the Case" for the project. This would include a statement of the projects ability to address the purpose/expected problem, its benefits and the tradeoffs

The Birmingham MPO has completed one FTA Alternatives Analysis, and is in the process of completing three others. All have used this streamlined process. The completed project, from start to finish, took less than four years finish and has resulted in detailed plans and an approved environmental document. This same project was submitted to the U.S. Secretary of Transportation for funding consideration under the Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) discretionary grant program, a program of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), being one of a handful of projects nationwide that had completed the environmental review process.

B. Revising Project Development Process

In addition to taking steps to incorporate federal recommendations for streamlining the environmental review process, strategies are needed to revise the local project development process. In 2004, the Alabama Division of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) produced a report that looked specifically at the causes of the Birmingham metropolitan transportation planning area's low obligation rate and noticeably slow project implementation. The report pointed out that there were inefficiencies in both the Alabama Department of Transportation's project development and environmental review process, and on the part of the project sponsors. The report suggested that the project development process might be improved through a number of steps to include a review of the State's process, and better educating project sponsors and their planning and engineering consultants on the process.

In 2009 the Birmingham MPO, as part of the Birmingham 2035 RTP development, revisited the FHWA report in order to determine what, if anything, the MPO might do to help facilitate the report's recommendations. The MPO also reviewed its own processes in order to determine its culpability in the sluggishness of the project development process and to see if there were any incentives and/or disincentives that it could provide to encourage faster project implementation. All of this was done in response to recent rescissions that threatened to wipe out a large sum of the attributable Surface Transportation Program funds as well as criticism by the Alabama Department of Transportation about the amount of unobligated funds.

The result of this review provided the impetus for the Birmingham MPO to develop new policies specifically related to project development. Chapter 3, RTP Goals and Objectives, presents a number of policies related to project development to include a policy on reasonable progress and a policy on the application of the Congestion Management Process to generate new roadway capacity projects. Chapter 3 also speaks to the development of the Transportation Improvement Program, the short-term implementation plan for the RTP.

Finally, the Birmingham MPO reviewed its role in the project development process. Traditionally, the MPO programs, funds, and monitors the RTP to see which of the projects contained within it was implemented and how it is performing. However, the introduction of ARRA funding and the urgency of using these funds provided an ideal test for the MPO to evaluate how it might insert itself into the project development process. The ARRA funding process also helped the MPO to better understand and determine what its proper role in the project development process. Lessons learned indicate that the Birmingham MPO was most effective in the role of facilitator. The MPO facilitated the development of agreements between the local project sponsors and the Alabama Department of Transportation, as well as improved communications between the two and federal agencies. The MPO also facilitated the development of technical information, either directly or through its external resources. This included analysis of air quality impacts and noise.

C. Administrative Structures

- **Regional Transportation Commission** - The Birmingham MPO has significantly evolved over the past decade. The MPO has taken a more direct role in developing, implementing and maintaining programs, beginning with the ClasTran paratransit services, and including the CommuteSmart Rideshare and Alabama Partners for Clean Air programs. While most of these are operational and/or administrative in nature, the Birmingham MPO recently took the next step in its evolution with the submittal of a TIGER grant that identified the MPO and its hosting agency, the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB), as the responsible parties for the In-town Transit Partnership project's capital development. The RPCGB provides the financial and administrative support necessary to administer the metropolitan planning process through the

Birmingham MPO. Much of the conversation to follow will present the Birmingham MPO and the RPCGB as a single entity.

Much like the evolutionary changes that occur in nature, the growth of the RPCGB to include the operational and administrative programs identified above happened because of necessity. Gaps and/or shortcomings in service delivery demanded that some government or entity take on the responsibility of implementing those programs and projects that were of regional concern. The RPCGB is one of a small handful of agencies that can operate across jurisdictional boundaries, and is the only regional entity in the metropolitan planning area when it comes to transportation planning and operations. The recent addition of the Heart of Alabama Rural Planning Organization to the suite of programs hosted and/or administered by the RPCGB has squarely placed the agency in a position to serve as a regional transportation planning and implementing agency across both urban and rural areas.

It has been suggested that the next step in the evolution of the RPCGB is for the agency to become a true regional transportation commission. Ideally, the RPCGB would continue with its current roles of administering the metropolitan planning process, providing community and land planning services, grant preparation services, and other advisory services as needed. However, it is also envisioned that specific authorities will be granted to the RPCGB, namely the authority to continue cooperation of programs such as the regional rideshare program, the administration of human service transportation program and to become involved in express bus and other types of commuter transportation.

- **Capital Improvement Cooperative Districts** - An administrative tool that has been used very successfully in the Birmingham metropolitan transportation planning area is the Capital Improvement Cooperative District (CICD). Mostly used for economic development, a CICD enables multiple entities, typically local governments, to come together and form a district within which they can cooperatively develop infrastructure. Within the district, additional taxes and/or fees may be levied in order provide financing for the infrastructure. A single set of administrative plans and regulations such as land use plans, zoning and subdivision regulations govern the development of the district. Revenues generated within the district are shared by the forming entities.

The CICD administrative structure is a particularly attractive option for the development of transportation infrastructure, particularly those facilities and/or services that cross jurisdictional boundaries. The CICD has a built-in revenue source, and can effectuate the connections between land use and transportation that the RTP espouses to, particularly the development of activity centers and mobility hubs. It is also an option for financing transportation services in that collected taxes may be applied to the operational costs of services provided within the district. This administrative approach to developing infrastructure has been used successfully in the metropolitan planning area to develop roadway infrastructure, utilities, and park land specific to retail and residential developments sharing borders with the Cities of Leeds and Moody, and St. Clair County. Lessons learned from this experience are being used to guide the development of a CICD specific to the implementation of a proposed trail corridor in Jefferson County.

The CICD administrative approach is certainly not applicable to the development of all transportation infrastructure and services in the metropolitan planning area. However, it has potential to be successfully applied to the development of specific types of transportation infrastructure. This might include regional trail facilities as described above, true transit oriented mobility hubs as described in Chapter 5, Transportation Investment Strategy, or strategies to control access and land development along new roadways and interchanges.

D. Transportation Finance

Chapter 6, Financial Plan, presented some options for funding transportation system improvements. While the financing strategies identified in that chapter are certainly options that need to be explored, they are not the only sources of funding which might be available. For many years, the approach to financing transportation system improvements has focused on identifying a single revenue source for a single transportation mode, public transit. Efforts have specifically focused on getting the State of Alabama to provide funding to public transit either through amending the Alabama Constitution to remove the restrictions on the use of gas taxes, or by mandating that the state provide funding from the general funds to public transportation. During the last few legislative sessions, the Alabama Legislature has concentrated on increasing the overall pot of funding available to all modes of transportation, with the lions share of this funding proposed to be given to the Alabama Department of Transportation for road construction and maintenance. The funding for roadways would be supplemental to revenues gained from the gas tax. It also would not be adequate to fully fund the operational needs of Alabama's many public transportation systems, let alone the needs of the Birmingham metropolitan transportation planning area's public transit services. With that being said, a better approach to financing transportation infrastructure and service operations needs would be to identify and employ multiple funding sources across multiple geographies. This is in line with information gathered from both scientific and informal surveys commissioned and/or administered by the RPCGB. In the surveys, respondents indicated that they favored a combination of both regional and local funding solutions.

- **Regional Funding** - The need for a regional funding source is important as there are many projects of regional significance that languish for lack of adequate funding. Regional funding options would look to collect revenues for transportation infrastructure across jurisdictional boundaries and apply this funding to projects of regional significance. One advantage of regional funding is financial freedom. That is, monies would be available to use as leverage for federal funding or they might be used to fully fund projects. As described earlier in this chapter, projects funded with federal monies do not get implemented very quickly, and the provision of a regional funding source would enable decision-makers to better assess whether or not the pursuit of the project is worth the additional time, effort, and expense of securing federal funding.

Another advantage of regional funding is that it is collected equally across the metropolitan planning area and helps to minimize the parochialism that has guided the development of the transportation system. Because monies are collected uniformly, the entire region has a stake in those projects that are truly regional in nature. This will encourage improved accountability for the development of the project and demand that facilities address regional values and goals.

Yet another advantage of having a regional revenue source is that it minimizes the amount of funding that needs to be collected. It is envisioned that regional revenues will be applied mostly to regional projects. Funding might be made available to local projects via infrastructure loans and through competitive grant programs. None-the-less, most of the projects in the RTP are local in nature and would need to obtain local funding in order to advance.

- **Local Funding** - In addition to securing regional funding, county and local governments need to be empowered to collect and administer a locally collected revenue source. Chapter 6, Financial Plan, highlighted some potential revenue sources that might be employed to provide additional funding for transportation infrastructure and services. Like the regional funding options described previously, local funding sources would afford counties and cities alike a measure of financial independence. As it stands now, most local governments fund transportation infrastructure improvements out of their general funds meaning that transportation projects have to compete with other needs. Local funding would enable communities to decide whether or not they should attempt

to leverage federal or state monies, or fund transportation projects on their own. This is particularly useful when it comes to local economic development, as it provides the government another tool for incenting and/or recruiting residential and commercial development interests that do not have regional significance.

8.2 RTP Monitoring

Performance monitoring completes the link between the investment strategy and plan goals, objectives, and policies. Through evaluation over time, the region evaluates if investments are achieving desired outcomes.

The implementation of the Birmingham 2035 RTP depends upon the development of a monitoring system that provides notice if current practices are achieving, and conversely are not having the desired results. Performance monitoring is useful for refining programming criteria and decision-making processes to ensure the region's investment strategy is supporting regional policy. Plan monitoring and assessment for the RTP addresses all elements of the transportation system, monitoring changes in growth and development as well as transportation systems and finance.

Contained within the Birmingham Regional Congestion Management Process (CMP) is a Performance Monitoring Program (PMP). The PMP is designed to monitor and analyze various indicators to provide data to measure how well the transportation system is functioning. The data collected through the PMP provides a basis for identifying the need for short and long term system improvements. Through this ongoing monitoring program the metropolitan planning area will be better able to assess existing conditions and the impact of improvements to ensure that the region's investment decisions are effective and consistent with regional policies. Chapter 3, Goals and Objectives, provides a full discussion on the regional performance monitoring program.

8.2.1 Monitoring RTP Policies

The Birmingham MPO and its host agency, the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB), monitor and assess regional development patterns, as well as other growth indicators as they relate to capital investments, in order to measure progress toward preserving and making the most efficient use of transportation facilities. A method to be used to achieve this outcome is through the RPCGB's continued assistance to local communities in developing comprehensive plans, corridor plans, and both administrative and regulatory documents. Plans developed by the RPCGB for local communities, ideally, will include transportation recommendations that are consistent with the recommendations of the RTP. Likewise, plans developed without the assistance of the RPCGB should contain transportation system recommendations that are consistent with the RTP's policies.

A significant amount of data regarding a wide range of transportation indicators is already collected regularly by the Birmingham MPO and the RPCGB, as well as other entities. The RPCGB, in particular, collects information about demographic, economic, and transportation trends in both the metropolitan planning and six-county RPCGB region. The challenge of the Performance Monitoring Program is to effectively gather, correlate, and interpret the diverse data available into conclusions regarding the status of the transportation system. The collected data forms the foundation for analyses, policies and actions to inform growth management. The data also informs the efficient use of limited transportation funding. Monitoring reports highlight demographic and transportation trends, as well as monitor growth patterns to understand progress toward the implementation of adopted RTP policies.

The feedback from the PMP informs regional policy-makers on the effectiveness of current policies, the likelihood of achieving regional goals. They also provide guidance for refining policies and actions for future RTP updates. Conclusions about the data can be used to define effective and practical plans of action for the maintenance and improvement of the transportation system. It is also vital that the process be carried out in a way that is understood and supported by the local governments, planning and transportation agencies, and the general public. The Birmingham MPO will monitor progress toward more integrated land use and transportation decisions, including better linking the regional Transportation

Improvement Program programming process to land planning considerations identified in both the RTP and locally developed and adopted comprehensive plans.

8.2.2 Monitoring RTP Project Implementation

As described previously, the Birmingham Regional Congestion Management Process (CMP) is a Performance Monitoring Program tool that helps to identify congested transportation corridors, as well as potential solutions within these corridors. The CMP monitors system performance to assist in the evaluation of corridor investments. Performance monitoring also helps to refine future programming decisions and is a key factor in the successful implementation of the RTP.

In addition to the CMP, there are several significant activities that also assist in system monitoring. These include:

- **Regional Operations** - The biggest challenge in improving the effectiveness of operational and management strategies are institutional structures and decision-making processes. The Birmingham MPO will look for opportunities to encourage changes to institutional roles in transportation system management and operations, and expand its existing role in planning and programming investments.
- **Integration of the Congestion Management Process** - Emphasis was placed on management and operations strategies in the development of the Birmingham 2035 RTP. Through the Birmingham Regional Congestion Management Process, identified operations and management strategies will be given priority consideration based on their ability to address congestion and other mobility problems/challenges -- before implementing capacity-adding solutions.
- **Regional Safety Data Monitoring** – The Birmingham MPO will coordinate with the state and local agencies engaged in transportation safety, including cities, counties, law enforcement, public health officials, and others in an active effort to compile and monitor regional safety data. The Birmingham MPO will also work with regional safety groups to review the region’s safety progress and to make recommendations to regional policy-makers on future directions.

8.2.3 Financial Monitoring

The Birmingham 2035 RTP Transportation Investment Strategy depends on a stable funding environment at the state, regional, and local levels. Regional funding challenges would be lessened if mechanisms were provided that are flexible enough to allow investment in the full array of regional transportation priorities.

The metropolitan planning area’s financial capacity to implement the RTP is based on the adequacy of funding. Federal law requires the RTP to make reasonable financing assumptions, accounting for existing or new revenue sources which can be expected to be available over the life of the plan. Revenue forecasts build off of current funding bases, and other economic variables, to estimate changes in revenues.

Revenue forecasts consider (a) the dedicated or historical distribution of revenues to funding programs, and (b) the percent of generated revenues returned to the region. The Birmingham MPO will monitor and revise economic and financial forecasts, as necessary, to be consistent with the tracking of financial performance over time.

It is recommended that subsequent RTPs establish a finance committee in order to study the conditions, needs, issues, and problems of both the Birmingham metropolitan transportation planning area and the Heart of Alabama Rural Planning Organization service area in order to recommend local actions as well as recommend potential legislative agendas to include the institutional structuring recommendations included in this plan document.

The implementation of new revenue sources will require that action be taken within a number of decision-making bodies including those in the State of Alabama Legislature, within the region, and finally through voter referendums. Clear roles and responsibilities must be spelled out in the administration of any new revenue sources. This will provide greater performance accountability and decision-making transparency, both of which are important elements of any future process.