

SECTION 2: Setting the Stage

Federal highway and transit statutes require, as a condition for spending federal highway or transit funds in urbanized areas, the designation of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), which are responsible for planning, programming and coordinating transportation investments. Here in the Triangle region there are two MPOs: the Capital Area MPO, which serves the eastern side of the Triangle, and the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO (DCHC MPO), which serves the western part of the region. A map of the region's transportation planning area and the MPOs' jurisdictions is provided on page 15.

MPOs are required to develop Long Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs) and regularly update them to maintain a time horizon of 25 years into the future. LRTPs identify the needs of a transportation system to meet user expectations for movement of people and of goods, and must address current and future needs for all transportation modes. LRTPs also address other factors connected to the transportation system including safety, economic development and air pollution standards. The LRTP establishes a vision and policy structure and sets forth strategies for directing investments, including identifying the financial resources needed to build and sustain the system.

The Capital Area and DCHC MPOs are currently in the process of updating their LRTPs to a 2035 planning horizon year. The 2035 LRTPs for both MPOs are expected to be adopted by the MPOs in late 2008 with federal approval of the plans anticipated in summer 2009.

Our two MPOs have moved toward greater planning coordination in recent years, recognizing and reflecting the complex economic, freight and commuter interaction between the eastern and western portions of our region. In order to address one aspect of these regional interactions, the MPOs will coordinate

This section describes why and how the STAC was convened along with an overview of how the recommendations of the STAC fit into the bigger picture of transportation planning in the Triangle region.

the major transit investment part of their LRTPs during this plan update cycle. The two MPOs decided to work together for several reasons. Both the DCHC MPO and the Capital Area MPO included the earlier Triangle Transit Authority Regional Rail project (sometimes referred to as "Phase I") between Durham and Raleigh in their 2030 LRTPs. When this project failed to receive federal funding, the two MPOs resolved to work cooperatively to develop a new transit plan to serve the region's needs. Furthermore, several major transit investments will connect the eastern and western parts of the Triangle and thus will require agreement between the two MPOs. In addition, the tremendous effort required to fund, build and operate a major transit project was considered to be more likely to be successful if both MPOs worked together. Therefore, they agreed to pursue the joint development of a Regional Transit Vision Plan to serve as the foundation for making comprehensive, cooperative and well-coordinated decisions on future major transit investments.

In November, 2006, the policy boards for the MPOs (known as Transportation Advisory Committees or TACs) met jointly and agreed to convene a citizen advisory group to take a fresh look at regional transit. The group, called the Special Transit Advisory Commission (STAC), was charged with delivering a set of recommended major transit investments and initial investment priorities. These recommendations are to be taken into

SECTION 2: Setting the Stage

consideration by the two MPOs when developing their 2035 LRTPs (see Appendix A for the Charge to the STAC).

The membership of the STAC was established by the TAC of each MPO. The TACs solicited nominations from their various constituencies, including towns, universities and other inter-governmental and regional agencies. Nominees were asked to describe their interest in the STAC and any relevant experience they would bring to the effort. In the subsequent months, the two MPOs appointed 29 members and nine ex-officio members to the STAC (see Appendix B for a list of STAC members). Some had experience as municipal officials, some represented corporate and business interests, others were involved with environmental or community groups. Many had experience with transportation issues in the Triangle. Across this broad range of backgrounds, all members of the STAC recognized the relationship between our region's transportation system and our economic prosperity and overall quality of life. They committed to investigate and debate the issues around transit and develop a set of recommendations for regional transit investments that would serve our regional future.

Recognizing that there would be extensive work required to prepare for and organize STAC meetings, the two MPOs, the North Carolina Department of Transportation, and Triangle Transit contracted with the Institute for Transportation Research and Education (ITRE) at North Carolina State University to provide staff support for the STAC. To guide the work of the STAC and provide technical information and analysis, a staff working group was established with representation from both MPOs, Triangle J Council of Governments, Triangle Transit, local governments, the Regional Transportation Alliance, North Carolina Department of Transportation and ITRE (see Appendix B for list of staff working

group members; see page 14 for a diagram of STAC process).

Parallel to the work of the STAC, a collaborative effort between local governments, the MPOs and other organizations across the region such as the Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority, was initiated to provide the technical basis for recommendations on transit investments. This Regional Transit Infrastructure Blueprint Technical Analysis Project analyzed future transit corridors and the potential transit infrastructure investments within those corridors. The Technical Analysis Project was designed to provide consistent, documented information related to land use and transit investments for preparation of the forthcoming 2035 LRTPs and consisted of three main parts:

- **A land use analysis** that described the land use-transit relationship, examined different ways of looking at land use, reviewed land use-related strategies undertaken in other regions, and developed measures for land use intensity tied to transit service provision
- **A travel analysis** that described the nature of travel in different parts of the region and by different groups of travelers, examined travel patterns in major corridors, and compared corridors across a range of travel-related measures
- **A cost analysis** that looked at the building blocks of major transit investments and developed tools and data to estimate transit investment costs.

The Technical Analysis Project cannot provide an actual “blueprint” of specific projects to be built and does not constitute an engineering study. It also does not provide an automatic method to select the “best” projects for the region, but rather offered technical inputs for the STAC to consider along with other qualitative factors to shape

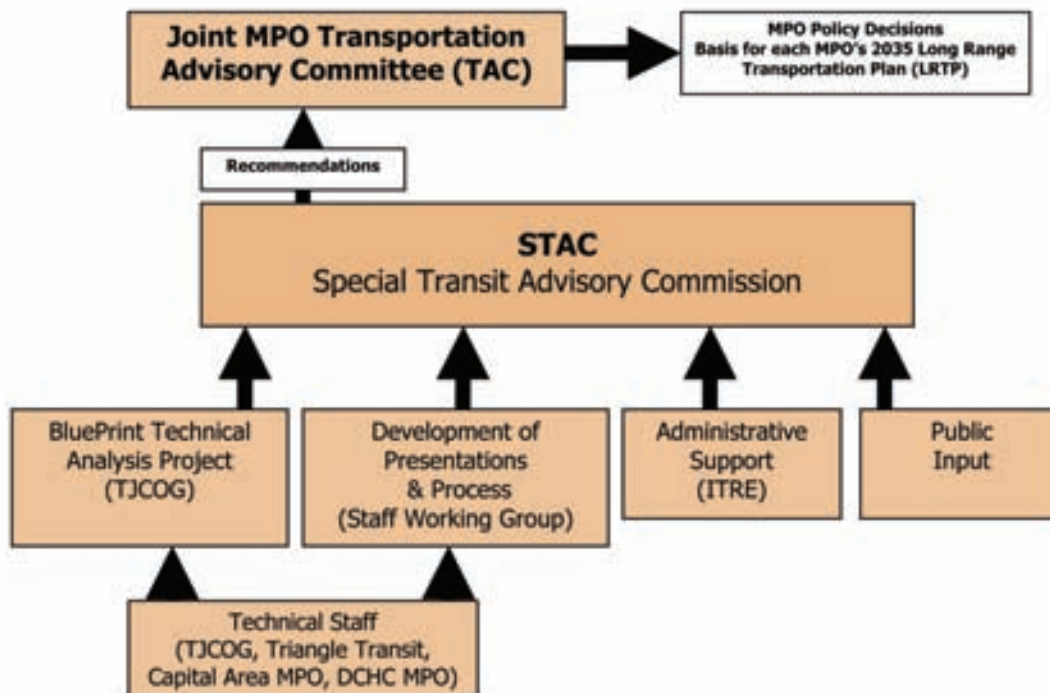
SECTION 2: Setting the Stage

their recommendations. (See Appendix C for additional information on the Technical Analysis Project.)

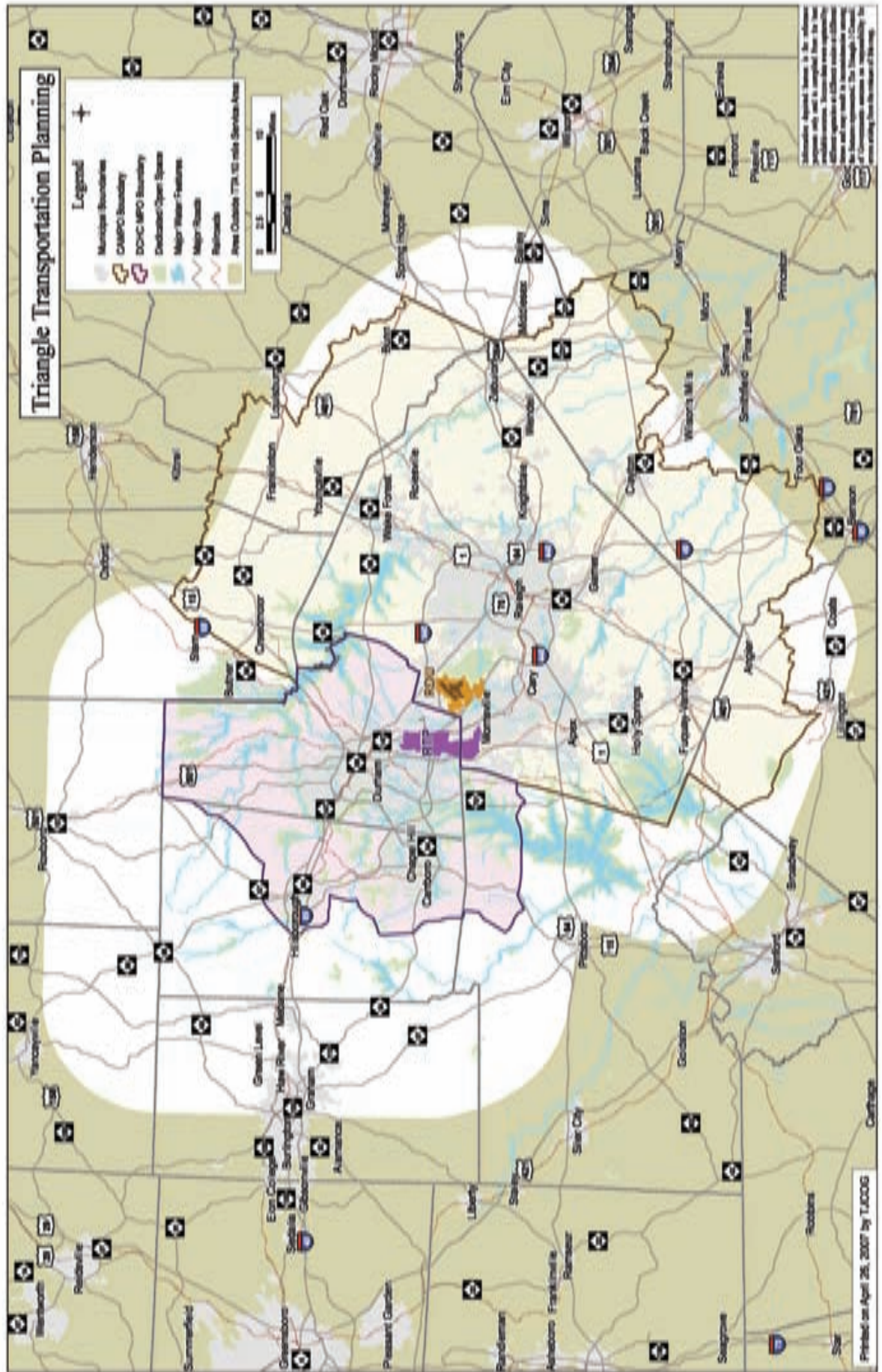
One of the most compelling stories the technical analysis revealed was the story of growth in the Triangle. The numbers show our recent, tremendous growth, both in population and in geographic extent as we've expanded our communities to absorb that greater population. The numbers also forecast continued, dramatic change ahead for the Triangle region. Because growth has outpaced investment to meet many of the mobility needs of our current population, it is expected that future growth will translate into even greater demand on our transportation system, compounding the demands of tomorrow on top of the needs of today. The region has the opportunity to address those current and future

mobility needs, and tackle them in a strategic way so that we do not find ourselves faced with crisis conditions that may force extremely unpleasant choices. Or worse, no choices at all. Yet the window of opportunity is narrow. Because large-scale infrastructure projects require careful planning and rigorous approval processes, the time to begin is now. The two MPOs in the region are set to develop their LRTPs that will shape the Triangle's transportation system for the next 25 years. They are looking for workable solutions to the region's collective transportation future. Local governments are looking for new ways to resolve our communities' mobility problems. The residents of the region, our co-workers, families, friends and neighbors are looking for relief from dependence on personal vehicles, and for viable options for their individual transportation futures.

Schematic of the STAC process and relationship to the regional transportation planning processes.



The Triangle Region Transportation Planning Area



SECTION 2: Setting the Stage

The members of the STAC also have a sense of urgency about our region's mobility issues. They recognize that failing to act now will lead to worsening traffic conditions, increasing costs of commuting and dangerous declines in air quality. In short, the Triangle faces the prospect of unacceptable declines in our quality of life that will threaten the desirability of our region to businesses, residents and visitors and reduce our overall competitiveness. Although many of

these forces already have considerable momentum, members of the STAC believe there is an opportunity to begin to turn the tide, and that substantial investments in improving our transit system will play an important role in doing so. With their recommendations, the STAC is urging the Triangle's citizens, leaders and transportation agencies to seize the opportunity before us now.

Sponsors of the STAC Effort

Capital Area MPO: The MPO serving the eastern part of the Triangle region including Wake, parts of Granville, Franklin, Harnett and Johnston.

Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO: The MPO serving the western part of the Triangle region, including Durham County and parts of Orange and Chatham counties.

Triangle Transit (formerly Triangle Transit Authority or TTA): The Triangle's regional transit service provider; currently operates local and express bus service and vanpools.

RTA: Regional Transportation Alliance: Regional business leadership group focused on mobility issues affecting the Triangle; supported by 22 chambers of commerce and over 100 companies.

NCDOT: North Carolina Department of Transportation, Public Transit Division: The division involved in planning transit systems and services across the State. NCDOT does not operate buses, trains or vans directly, but rather helps local and regional transit providers plan and operate more effectively.

TJCOG: Triangle J Council of Governments: A voluntary organization of municipal and county governments covering Chatham, Durham, Johnston, Lee, Moore, Orange and Wake Counties. Works on regional issues including development and infrastructure, water resources management, sustainable energy and environment, air quality, and aging services. Provides support to member communities including technical assistance, planning, mapping, web page design and maintenance and administrative services.

ITRE: Institute for Transportation Research and Education: An inter-institutional research center administered by NC State University in Raleigh. ITRE conducts research, transportation workforce training programs and technical assistance projects on a wide variety of transportation issues.

