

South Western Region Congestion Management Process

Progress Report: July 2008 – June 2009

August 2009

I. Background

The metropolitan planning region covered by the South Western Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (SWRMPO) was designated as a Transportation Management Area (TMA) as a result of population growth measured by the 2000 Census. Consequently, the SWRMPO is required to develop and implement a congestion management process (CMP) as part of its Long Range Transportation Plan.

The SWRMPO, through the South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA), anticipated the future need to comply with federal CMP (formally CMS¹) requirements. In 1999, SWRPA sought funding for a corridor-level congestion mitigation study through the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT). In early 2001, CTDOT entered into an agreement with SWRPA that provided federal CMAQ and state funds to conduct such a study. The study, called the Congestion Mitigation Systems “Vision 2020” Plan, commenced in May 2001 and was completed in February 2003. Study products include technical memoranda summarizing existing conditions and predicted future travel demand, preliminary analysis of possible “visions” for mitigating traffic congestion over time, and detailed market research reports that identify the types of options supported by commuters and freight shippers. A final report outlining a twenty-year plan for implementation of transportation improvements and the likely benefits of implementing such a plan also was prepared.

The *Vision 2020* planning process provided the foundation for the South Western Region Congestion Management System Technical Memorandum, which was released in January 2004. The purpose of this Technical Memorandum was to outline the steps taken by the SWRMPO to prepare for its designation as a Transportation Management Area (TMA) and to establish a plan of future actions to satisfy the associated Congestion Management System requirements.

This report is the sixth update to that Technical Memorandum.

II. Applicability and Purpose

Area of Application: This report focuses on the eight municipalities of the South Western Region. The Region’s connections with the transportation networks and economies of adjacent regions also are considered to the extent they impact travel demand and behavior in the Region.

Purpose: This report was developed to satisfy the requirements of CTDOT and Federal Highway Administration and follows the recommended format.

III. Report: Status and Achievements

Using the South Western Region Congestion Management System Technical Memorandum (hereinafter “Technical Memorandum”) as a guide, SWRPA commenced implementation of its CMP in early 2004 as required by federal transportation planning program regulations. This section provides an update on activities undertaken and/or planned by SWRPA.

¹ SWRPA has retitled its Congestion Management System (CMS) to comply with the naming conventions passed in August 2005 as part of Pub. L. 109-59, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: a Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). SWRPA’s CMS is now referred to as the Congestion Management Process or CMP.

Determine CMP network in the Region. The CMP network includes the following roadways and transportation systems:

- Limited access expressways, such as I-95 and CT-15 (Merritt Parkway);
- Arterial highways, including US 1 and US 7;
- Railroads (passenger and freight);
- Bus transit including local, regional and commuter connections services; and
- Navigable waterways including Long Island Sound, Norwalk and Stamford Harbors.

Define congestion. The FHWA defines congestion as:

The level at which transportation system performance is no longer acceptable due to traffic interference. The level of acceptable system performance may vary by type of transportation facility, geographic location and/or time of day. Growth in traffic has out paced the ability of State and local governments to be able to implement capacity solutions to eliminate congestion.

Using this definition as a guide, SWRPA has determined that:

- The Region experiences significant recurring and non-recurring congestion on a daily basis;
- Many of the Region's transportation facilities experience recurring congestion during both peak and off-peak hours;
- Peak traffic periods continue to spread as housing and employment centers move farther apart and travelers divert to alternate times;
- Congestion needs to be considered from both a technical and a policy perspective; and
- System performance should be monitored in order to identify policy and operational changes as well as capital investments that are likely to mitigate congestion and improve system efficiency.

SWRPA will continue to refine this definition through development of performance measures that identify the thresholds at which system performance becomes unacceptable to system users. Measures and/or thresholds used to more precisely define congestion may include:

- Volume-to-Capacity (V/C) ratios of 0.9 or greater²;
- Travel time and speed data collected using a probe vehicle equipped with a GPS device;
- Average speeds that are at least 15% below posted speed limits;
- Time of day parameters, such as variations in V/C, vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and average speed during peak and off-peak hours;
- VMT in excess of a highway's design capacity;
- Transit load factors during peak and off-peak periods; and
- Patterns of delay: recurring vs. incident-specific.

SWRPA also will use such data to identify choke points resulting in time-of-day or spot congestion and examine incident patterns to identify locations that may benefit from operational improvements.

Identify congested links. SWRPA will use data collected by CTDOT to assess levels of congestion. SWRPA may also work with the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council's (NYMTC) Best

² These V/C ratios were recommended in SWRPA's Congestion Mitigation Systems *Vision 2020 Plan*. The CMS report prepared by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council identifies roadways with V/C of 0.8-1.0 as "congested" and roadways with a V/C of greater than 1.0 as "severely congested."

Practices Model data to evaluate the relationship between congestion in the South Western Region and congestion in the New York metropolitan area.

Develop strategies. The *Vision 2020* and Long Range Transportation Plans identify multimodal strategies to improve mobility, accessibility and connectivity. Such projects are incorporated into the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) as funding becomes available.

Implement strategies. SWRPA commenced implementation of its CMP in early 2004. This section provides an update of activities planned and undertaken by SWRPA during the period July 2007 through June 2008. Activities include efforts to improve passenger and freight transport services, to enhance coordination between SWRPA and its partners in adjacent planning regions, and to better link land use and transportation planning within the South Western Region. Descriptions of selected efforts are below:

Activity	Level of SWRPA Involvement	Time Frame	Outcome
Formation of a CMP committee	Lead agency	Current activity	SWRPA staff has developed the structure for a regional CMP committee and identified members.
Data Collection	Lead agency	On-going	Collect, organize and analyze data critical to the development and monitoring of a CMP. Data collection activities are conducted in partnership with CTDOT. During this reporting period, SWRPA worked with CTDOT's 2008 Congestion Screening and Monitoring Report data.
Travel Time Data Collection	Lead agency	On-going	Collect, and analyze travel time data using a probe vehicle equipped with a GPS device. SWRPA has developed its own travel time data to support and expand on the CMP data provide by its partners. Travel time data collection has become an ongoing and integral part of SWRPA's overall CMP. Summary data is made available to the public. The FY 2008-09 travel time monitoring was expanded to include US 7 as well as CT 15 and I-95 and the study area was expanded beyond the Greater Bridgeport and South Western Regions to include the Houatonic Valley Region. In FY 2009-10, SWRPA will expand the travel time monitoring program to include US 1.
ITS Systems Plan	Lead agency	Current activity	The Regional ITS Strategic Plan, including recommendations to enhance the operations and efficiency of the regional transportation system, was completed in FY 2008-09. The final report presents cost and benefit data for a series of ITS strategies. The plan supports stakeholder efforts to secure funding for important ITS projects.
SWR Incident Management Task Force	Lead agency	On-going	Continued coordination and improved management of highway incidents. Regional model and strategies have been used to shape development of statewide strategy and implementation plan.

Bridgeport-Stamford Urbanized Area Planning and Coordination	Co-lead agency	On-going	Build consensus regarding major transportation projects in the Bridgeport-Stamford Urbanized Area.
I-95 Operational Improvements: Project Design	Participant	On-going	Design phase for operational improvements identified through the CMS 2020 and I-95 Corridor Study.
Bridgeport-Stamford Urbanized Area: STP Coordination	Participant	On-going	Participate in and provide leadership to support planning, development and coordination of STP-funded projects within the Bridgeport-Stamford Urbanized Area.
Bridgeport-Stamford Urbanized Area: FTA Enhancement Coordination	Lead coordinator	On-going	Coordinate and facilitate the development of urbanized area FTA Enhancement projects. On an annual basis, approximately \$200,000 is available and programmed for eligible activities.
CMAQ Program Coordination	Lead coordinator	On-going	Coordinate development of CMAQ project proposals to access the \$2 million that is available within Connecticut on an annual basis.
Darien/Route 1 Downtown Circulation Study and Plan	Lead agency	Current activity	Develop a plan to improve traffic operations and safety on US 1 in Darien including pedestrian safety, access management, maintaining traffic flow, minimizing congestion, and associated land use issues. Project mobilization is underway. Request for qualifications for consultant services was issued during FY 2008-09.
South Norwalk Intermodal Center Plan	Participant	Current activity	Neighborhood plan is complete and was incorporated into local Master Plan. The intermodal center component of the project was completed during FY 2008-09.
Transportation Technical Services Program (TTS)	Lead agency	Current activity	Program helps member municipalities access professional services such as traffic engineering to implement local projects that improve mobility, accessibility and connectivity. Three projects will begin during FY 2009-10.
TTS: Route 136 Project	Lead agency	Planned activity	Design of operational and sightline improvements on Route 136 in Westport under the auspices of the TTAP.
TTS: Route 57	Lead agency	Planned activity	Identification of necessary traffic improvements at Route 57 and School Road in Weston under the auspices of the TTAP.
TTS: Route 1 at I-95/Exit 5	Lead agency	Planned activity	Assess existing conditions and develop a plan of recommended improvements for the intersection of U.S. Route 1 (East Putnam Avenue) at I-95 Exit 5/Neil Avenue in Greenwich under the auspices of the TTAP.
Congestion Pricing	Participant	On-going	SWRPA staff worked with OPM and TSB on the Statewide Congestion Pricing study. SWRPA participated on the technical advisory group and promoted study findings among regional stakeholders.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Study – Route 1 from Greenwich to Norwalk	Lead Agency	Current activity	Study operational feasibility of bus rapid transit (BRT) on US 1 between Greenwich and Norwalk. BRT was a recommended strategy in the CMS 2020 study. Final report recommends enhanced bus service between Stamford and Norwalk. The study was completed in FY 2008-09.
Route 1 Greenwich-Stamford Operational Needs Plan	Lead Agency	Planned activity	Develop a plan to improve traffic operations and safety on US 1 between Greenwich and Stamford including pedestrian safety, access management, maintaining traffic flow, minimizing congestion, and associated land use issues. Request for qualifications for consultant services was issued during FY 2008-09.
Route 7 Corridor Needs Assessment: Wilton - Danbury	Lead Agency	Planned activity	Develop a plan to improve traffic operations and safety on US 7 between Wilton and Danbury. Plan will cover access management, congestion, transit opportunities, and land use. Request for qualifications for consultant services was issued during FY 2008-09.
South Western Region Railroad Station Parking Study	Lead Agency	On-going	Examine rail station parking including current capacity, utilization, and fees. Recommend improvements to better manage demand. Final results were published during FY 2008-09.
South Western Region Freight Overview	Lead Agency	Current activity	Identify key elements of the region’s freight transportation system and describe the movement of goods through the region. Data being analyzed includes commodity flow data, highway data including ADT, truck ADT, weight station violations, and maritime statistics. Final report was published in FY 2008-09.
East of Hudson Rail Operations Task Force	Participant in bimonthly dialogue	On-going	Develop recommendations/build support for infrastructure improvements to enhance cross-Hudson freight mobility.

In addition to those activities listed in the chart above, SWRPA also has actively advocated for the development of an urbanized area-wide CMP. SWRPA will continue these efforts and hopes to fully involve CTDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in these efforts.

SWRPA has consulted with a number of metropolitan planning organizations to identify best practices in CMP development and data collection. Staff consulted with the Capitol Regional Council of Governments to identify their CMP practices. Staff also collected information regarding network monitoring and performance measures from five metropolitan planning organizations outside of Connecticut as part of the regional ITS strategic plan. Although not exclusively solicited to support CMP activities, this information will be useful for future policy decisions regarding network monitoring, establishment of performance benchmarks, and project assessment with respect to the CMP.

Staff continues to explore best practices and professional development, as appropriate. In FY2008-09, staff participated in an FHWA/FTA *Advancing CMP and Management & Operations in Transportation Planning* workshop in Philadelphia and a statewide CMP workshop organized by FHWA – Connecticut

Division. Staff regularly participates in USDOT webinars regarding transportation system management and operations, ITS, and freight.

Monitor the network. SWRPA will continue to work with CTDOT to develop a monitoring network and to access transportation data. The statewide Congestion Monitoring System Data and Report, prepared annually by CTDOT, is an invaluable resource. SWRPA will refine and expand its travel time monitoring program to cover all major highways in the Region. The travel time monitoring program may be expanded to transit services, as appropriate. Additionally, SWRPA will continue to seek the following data and periodic updates of such data:

- Transit ridership data – by mode, operator, route, time of day;
- Transportation Demand Management program data including
 - Number and location of participating companies,
 - Enrollment of commuters, by company and company location,
 - Vanpool and shuttle utilization statistics,
 - Actual participation rates of enrolled commuters, and
 - Marketing data – outreach v. yield;
- Vehicle registration data, by class;
- Drivers' license data, by class;
- Number and distribution of households without vehicles;
- Rail and commuter parking lot utilization; and
- Bike rack (transit stations and vehicles) utilization statistics.

In FY 2009, SWRPA expanded its travel time monitoring program to cover an additional highway and a larger study area. In addition to I-95 and CT 15, US 7 was added to the monitoring program. The study area was enlarged to encompass portions of the Housatonic Valley Region as well as the Greater Bridgeport and South Western Regions. This was done with the recognition that the recurring congestion problems on the Region's principal highways extends well beyond the South Western Region's boundaries. In FY2010, SWRPA plans to expand the monitoring program to US 1 and to work more closely with CTDOT and large Regional Planning Organizations to improve the CMP statewide.