



U.S. Department  
of Transportation

**Federal Highway  
Administration**

Federal Transit  
Administration

# Program Review

## **West Memphis – Marion Area MPO Federal Planning Certification Review**

**August 2015**

FHWA - Arkansas  
Division

FTA – Region VI



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## **Executive Summary**

The United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) is required to review and evaluate the transportation planning process of urban areas with a population of over 200,000 persons every four (4) years. These reviews are called Certification Reviews and urban areas of this size are called Transportation Management Areas (TMAs).

This review was conducted by a team of representatives from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Upon completion of the review and evaluation, the results must support a joint certification by the FHWA and FTA that the transportation planning process substantially meets Federal planning requirements.

Based on this review and continuous oversight by FHWA and FTA, the transportation planning process performed by the West Memphis-Marion Area Transportation Study (WMATS) is certified as meeting the transportation planning requirements of 23 United States Code (USC) 134, 49 USC 5303-5306, and 23 Code of Federal regulation (CFR) 450.

The FHWA and the FTA find the transportation planning process of WMATS and related partners within the Arkansas portion of the Memphis Metropolitan Area to be in compliance with Federal planning requirements.



## **Background**

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are required and established for urbanized areas with a population of 50,000 or more. TMAs are defined as MPOs with a population greater than 200,000. The West Memphis Urbanized Area is designated a TMA because it is included in the Bureau of Census designated Memphis Urbanized Area. The West Memphis MPO/TMA is also known as the West Memphis – Marion Area Transportation Study (WMATS).

Pursuant to 23 USC 134(i) (5) and 49 USC 1607, FHWA and FTA must jointly certify the metropolitan transportation planning process in TMAs. No less than once every four years a TMA Certification Review is performed to assure and validate the planning process of TMAs. The last Federal certification was completed in August 2011.

### **How to Use this Report**

Significant findings, corrective actions, recommendations and strengths of the planning process are summarized in Table 1 following the Executive Summary section of this report. The user of this report should be aware of the following definitions, while interpreting the findings of this report:

**Findings** are statements of fact based on the FHWA and FTA observations made during the site visit and review of the planning documents.

**Corrective Actions** are improvements needed to correct statutory or regulatory deficiencies which, if not addressed, could lead to a “failure to certify” finding and the possible disruption of federally funded programs and projects.

**Recommendations** are not statutory or regulatory deficiencies, but actions identified by FHWA and FTA that represent best practices that are strongly endorsed.



## Purpose and Objective

**Purpose:** A Certification Review serves two purposes. It evaluates the planning process to certify the transportation planning process in the metropolitan area and it provides insight and recommendations to help strengthen major aspects of the planning process. The Certification Review is required and identifying program improvements is an important benefit .

As part of this review, the team considered products and materials related to the transportation planning process. Items for this review included the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), Congestion Management Process (CMP), and other relevant documents.

**Objective:** This Certification Review focused on specific objectives, to determine the following:

- The planning activities of the MPO and other agencies with responsibilities for regional transportation planning are conducted in accordance with FHWA and FTA regulations and policies, including the provisions of Title 23 U.S.C, MAP-21, the Clean Air Act, Title IV of the Civil Rights Act, and the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), as appropriate.
- The regional transportation planning process for the MPO area is a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive process that results in the development, implementation, and support of transportation system preservation and improvements.
- The UPWP adequately documents transportation planning activities and all other ongoing significant transportation planning activities occurring in the region.
- The regional transportation planning products, including the TIP and the MTP, reflect the identified transportation needs, priorities and funding resources of the MPO.
- The MTP is multi-modal in perspective and meets the needs of the traveling public and community.



## Scope and Methodology

The Memphis urbanized area, as defined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, includes parts of Shelby and Tipton Counties in Tennessee, DeSoto County in Mississippi, and Crittenden County in Arkansas. Two MPOs are designated to carry out the planning responsibilities for the Memphis urbanized area. WMATS covers the Arkansas portion of the Memphis urbanized area and the Memphis Urban Area MPO covers the Tennessee and Mississippi portions. This review is limited to the planning activities conducted by the WMATS to meet the requirements established in 23 CFR 450 Subpart C – Metropolitan Transportation Planning and Programming.

The certification review consisted of three major activities: desk audit review, an on-site review, and a public meeting. Each of these components was performed in making this certification determination.

Desk audit - A review of files and supporting documentation was conducted prior to the on-site review by planning staff in the FHWA Arkansas Division Office.

On-site review - Detailed discussion on transportation planning issues were held with members of WMATS Policy Committee and technical staff and Memphis MPO technical staff, and the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) staff. The review concentrated on ten focus areas. The areas were:

- MPO Organization Structure and Area Boundaries
- Agreements, Roles, and Responsibilities
- Metropolitan Planning Process
- Transit
- Congestion Management Plan and ITS
- Air Quality
- UPWP
- Metropolitan Transportation Plan
- Transportation Improvement Program and List of Obligated Projects
- Public Participation, Title VI, and Environmental Justice

Policy Board members and other local elected officials were invited to meet with the review team separately, during the morning of August 11, or any other time convenient to them. No Policy Board members requested a meeting.

Public Meeting – A public meeting was held in the evening of August 11 to gather comments and input on the planning process used in the West Memphis area.



## **Team Members**

The review was conducted by the following:

Ms. Ronisha Hodge, FTA – Region VI  
Ms. Valera Daniel, FHWA – Arkansas Division  
Mr. David Blakeney, FHWA – Arkansas Division

The following attended the On-Site Meeting:

Mr. Eddie Brawley, WMATS  
Mr. Bobby Williams, WMATS  
Mr. Sajid Hossain, Memphis MPO  
Mr. Antonio Johnson, AHTD  
Mr. Paul Luker, City of West Memphis  
Mr. Phillip Sorrell, City of West Memphis  
Mr. Paul Simms, AHTD  
Ms. Pragati Srivastava, Memphis MPO  
Mr. David Blakeney, FHWA-Arkansas Division

The following participated via teleconference call:

Ms. Virginia Porta, AHTD  
Mr. Bill Ryan, AHTD  
Ms. Ronisha Hodge, FTA – Region VI  
Ms. Valera Daniel, FHWA – Arkansas Division



## Observations and Findings

### MPO Organization Structure and Area Boundaries

#### Observations:

WMATS is composed of its Policy Committee (PC), Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC), and Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC).

The Policy Committee is the governing body that is designated to carry out the metropolitan planning process. The TCC is appointed by the PC and provides technical expertise and advice to guide the decisions made by the PC, as well as providing technical assistance and facts to the CAC, citizens, public agencies and private sector concerns. The CAC is a voluntary group that provides advice on citizen concerns including community issues, goals and values.

The administrative and transportation planning responsibilities of WMATS are performed by Brawley Engineering under contract with the City of West Memphis. Brawley Engineering employee, Mr. Eddie Brawley, is the appointed Study Director. Brawley Engineering works under jurisdiction of the West Memphis Public Works Department in cooperation with its Office of Planning and Development.

Two MPOs are responsible for carrying out the transportation planning process for the Memphis, TN-MS-AR Urbanized Area. The Memphis MPO is the designated MPO responsible for the planning process in the Tennessee and Mississippi portion of the urbanized area. WMATS is the designated MPO responsible for the Arkansas portion of the urbanized area. WMATS coordinates and cooperates with the Memphis MPO in its transportation planning for its programs, plans, and projects.

#### Findings:

- WMATS has active Committees. The TCC and CAC provide assistance and expertise to WMATS and the PC that is used and benefits its decision making role.
- Membership of the TCC provides modal diversity.
- The Memphis MPO has good representation from its partnering public agencies and stakeholder public agencies.
- The boundary area of WMATS encompasses the urbanized area as determined by the United States Census 2010. Annually WMATS assesses its boundary/jurisdictional area in accordance with federal regulations. The boundary of WMATS is compliant with federal regulations and procedures.



### Agreements, Roles, and Responsibilities

Agreements are required between MPOs, States, and public transportation operators. These agreements cooperatively identify transportation planning roles and responsibilities.

#### Observations:

Agreements have been executed between WMATS and its transportation planning partners. These agreements assure a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process is followed as required by Federal regulations. In 2011, AHTD, the MPO Policy Committee and the City of West Memphis (as the transit provider) executed a Memorandum of Agreement to define roles and responsibilities of the partners with regard to transportation planning process. In 2005, the West Memphis MPO and the Memphis MPO executed a Memorandum of Agreement to establish the coordination process between the MPOs. Also in 2005, the West Memphis MPO and the Memphis MPO executed a Memorandum of Understanding to define the process for demonstrating transportation conformity for the non-attainment or maintenance areas within the Memphis urbanized area.

#### Findings:

- With its use of agreements, the roles and responsibilities for WMATS and its partnering agencies are indicated.
- WMATS and the adjacent MPO in Memphis, Tennessee, have cooperatively developed procedures that enable them to each develop their required transportation planning products in support of regional transportation planning objectives.

### Metropolitan Planning Process

#### Observations:

The procedures and processes used by WMATS in its transportation planning process are well documented in its agreements. These agreements were reviewed and are cited in this review. Based on these reviews, discussions and interviews with WMATS staff, City of West Memphis staff, and Committee members and participation of FHWA Arkansas Division staff in WMATS Committee meetings and its planning process, the agreements reflect the transportation planning process of WMATS.



#### Findings:

- The WMATS planning process is a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive process that engages and involves partners.

#### Transit

##### Observations:

The City of West Memphis contracts with the Memphis Area Transit Authority (MATA) for transit operation of bus routes. MATA services three routes for West Memphis. Two of the routes are local routes in West Memphis and one is a commuter route between West Memphis and Memphis. All three routes operate Monday through Friday.

Current schedules indicate the local routes beginning service at 6:27 a.m. and 6:36 a.m. and ending service at 5:26 p.m. and 5:36 p.m. The commuter route operates during a.m. and p.m. peak periods with its first departure from West Memphis at 6:14 a.m. and from Memphis at 6:45 a.m. The West Memphis to Memphis service has two runs in the a.m. and one run in the p.m. The Memphis service has one run from Memphis in the a.m. and two runs from Memphis during the p.m.

The City of West Memphis provides the matching funds for the Federal Transit Administration funds used for the bus service.

The City of West Memphis' Transit Division participates in WMATS transportation planning process in the role as transit operator.

#### Findings:

- The City of West Memphis has contracted with the Memphis Area Transit Authority (MATA) for MATA to provide transit services to the West Memphis area.

#### Congestion Management Process and ITS

##### Observations:

As required by Federal regulation WMATS addresses Congestion Management. The MPO has developed a Congestion Management Process (CMP) for use in its transportation planning and decision making. Using its CMP, WMATS identifies projects to address Recurring Congestion and Non-recurring Congestion.



With its proximity to Memphis and being part of the Memphis urbanized area WMATS and the Memphis MPO cooperate and share a vision for a regional Congestion Management Plan. In cooperation with AHTD and Tennessee DOT there are message boards on the Interstate System in Arkansas that offer travel information generated from the Traffic Control Traffic Center in Memphis.

Findings:

- WMATS has developed a CMP that contains performance criteria for use in its transportation planning and decision making process.
- WMATS has coordinated with partners and stakeholders for its CMP and has developed a systematic approach that provides for effective management and operation for the transportation system through operational management strategies.

Air Quality

Observations:

Crittenden County, Arkansas and Shelby County, Tennessee were recognized as a nonattainment area in September 2004. As such WMATS and Memphis MPO executed a Memorandum of Understanding in March 2005. The MPO's agreed to perform their conformity determinations independently.

Conformity determinations for WMATS are made using an interagency consultation process. Agencies included in this process are: WMATS, the City of West Memphis, the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ), FHWA, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

In April 2004, the Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) designated the Memphis TMA as an 8-hour ozone non-attainment area effective June 2004. Crittenden County in Arkansas was included in this designation along with Shelby County in Tennessee. Because of this designation, Crittenden County (which includes the West Memphis MPO) is subject to transportation conformity requirements. Based on data from 2006 to 2008, EPA reclassified the area to maintenance. However, because of increased standard violations after 2009, EPA reclassified the Crittenden County as Nonattainment – Marginal.

Findings:

- The transportation conformity process within the WMATS area is well defined and appears to be a cooperative process.



## UPWP

### Observations:

WMATS prepares its UPWP annually in coordination and cooperation with AHTD, Memphis MPO, FHWA, and FTA. The time period for the UPWP is July 1 through June 30. The UPWP identifies transportation planning activities performed by WMATS and includes planning priorities.

The work proposed in the UPWP is identified in detail and includes which partner will perform the work, the schedule for completing the work, results, and funding. The activities of the UPWP are related to the goals and priorities contained in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). Most activities of the UPWP are recurring and routine and are performed on a continuing or cyclical basis. If necessary activities are added or modified to meet changing needs.

### Findings:

- WMATS coordinates with partners and stakeholders for preparation of its UPWP.
- The UPWP includes discussion of planning priorities and it identifies the work proposed by activity and task that indicates who will perform the work items.
- WMATS prepares its UPWP that contains performance criteria for use in its transportation planning and decision making process.

## Metropolitan Transportation Plan

### Observations:

The current WMATS MTP was adopted in 2013. The MTP horizon year is 2033 and it was determined to satisfy requirements.

The next Long Range Plan will be adopted during 2017.

### Findings:

- The MTP describes the region's vision for transportation and identifies goals for the WMATS area. The goals were developed by local officials and public participation was engaged. WMATS consulted with Resource Agencies during the development process.
- The MTP is financially constrained. Federal funding levels are projected by AHTD based on historic funding levels with a 2 percent inflation rate used for revenues and a 6 percent inflation rate for construction expenses.



- The MTP prioritizes projects using WMATS congestion management process, public participation, technical analysis.

### Transportation Improvement Program and List of Obligated Projects

#### Observations:

The WMATS 2013 – 2016 TIP identifies projects in regards to these years of its MTP. This TIP provides the funding summary for this time period and its fiscal constraint is achieved similar to the MTP. Funding levels are projected by AHTD based on authorization levels considering reasonable appropriation levels. The TIP is available at <http://www.wmats.org/FY16/ALOP%202015b.pdf>.

The annual list of projects identifies Federal-aid projects obligated in the preceding year. WMATS' current list of projects includes Federal-aid projects obligated during Federal FY 2015 (October 1, 2014-September 30, 2015). The list is available at <http://www.wmats.org/FY16/ALOP%202015b.pdf>.

### Public Participation, Title VI, and Environmental Justice

#### Observations:

WMATS adopted its Public Participation Plan (PPP) in February 2010. The plan outlines the framework to ensure public participation in the planning process. The PPP was developed in consultation with public and private entities and groups, and individuals affected by or involved with, transportation in the region. To improve public involvement, a Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) was established in 1974 and has been reconstructed several times over the years. This committee is responsible for providing citizen input directly to the Policy Committee. CAC meetings are scheduled the week prior to the Policy Committee meetings.

WMATS utilizes different methods to meet the public participation requirements. All of WMATS meetings are open to the public and advertised in the local newspaper and on their web site, <http://www.wmats.org/>. The site posts all planning documents, meeting schedules and relevant announcements to encourage involvement and request public participation. WMATS allows the public adequate time for review and comments on key decisions. The MPO advertises the development and adoption of all policy documents, plans, and programs to the public. The initial development and drafts of such documents and public comments are also discussed at CAC meetings. To encourage participation, all public meeting are conducted at convenient and accessible locations at convenient times. Meeting locations are also accessible for individuals with disabilities. To educate and enhance communications, the MPO employs visualization techniques to describe plans. With the creation of their PPP, WMATS was able to reassess the effectiveness of their preceding public involvement procedures.



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A Title VI report was published in October 2010. The report detailed actions WMATS pursued to ensure no person was to be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity. Minorities in the area participate in the transportation planning process either by providing comments at public meetings or through their participation on the MPO's CAC.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the overall findings, the FHWA and FTA jointly certify that the transportation planning process of the West Memphis/Marion TMA substantially meets the Federal planning requirements in 23 CFR 450 Subpart C subject to the TPO satisfactorily addressing the Corrective Actions stated in this report. This certification will remain in effect until December 2019.

The MPO staff is commended for their commitment in working together to ensure that the products of the transportation planning process are serving the members of the urbanized area. The Federal review team remains available to assist the staff in this endeavor.



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