



# 1 Introduction

# I Introduction and Planning Process

## Introduction

This document is the update of the Monroe Urbanized Area Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) for the years 2015 to 2040. It was adopted on November 23, 2015 by the Policy Committee of the Monroe Urbanized Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The MPO planning functions are housed at the Ouachita Council of Governments (OCOG), which is part of the North Delta Regional Planning & Development District (North Delta) – the regional planning commission for the eleven-parish region in northeast Louisiana. This document constitutes the latest update to the region’s long-range transportation plan, and fulfills the federal planning requirements necessary to receive transportation funds from the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), which was signed into law on July 6, 2012 to provide guaranteed federal funding for highways, highway safety, public transportation, and non-motorized transportation modes.

The Monroe Urbanized Area is located wholly within Ouachita Parish and includes the cities of Monroe and West Monroe, the town of Richwood, and the unincorporated areas of Bawcomville, Claiborne, and Swartz (see Figure 1-1). While the official MPO boundary includes the urbanized area and the adjacent land anticipated to be urbanized within the 25-year planning horizon, the 2040 MTP study area considers the entirety of Ouachita Parish, including the town of Sterlington and unincorporated community of Calhoun.

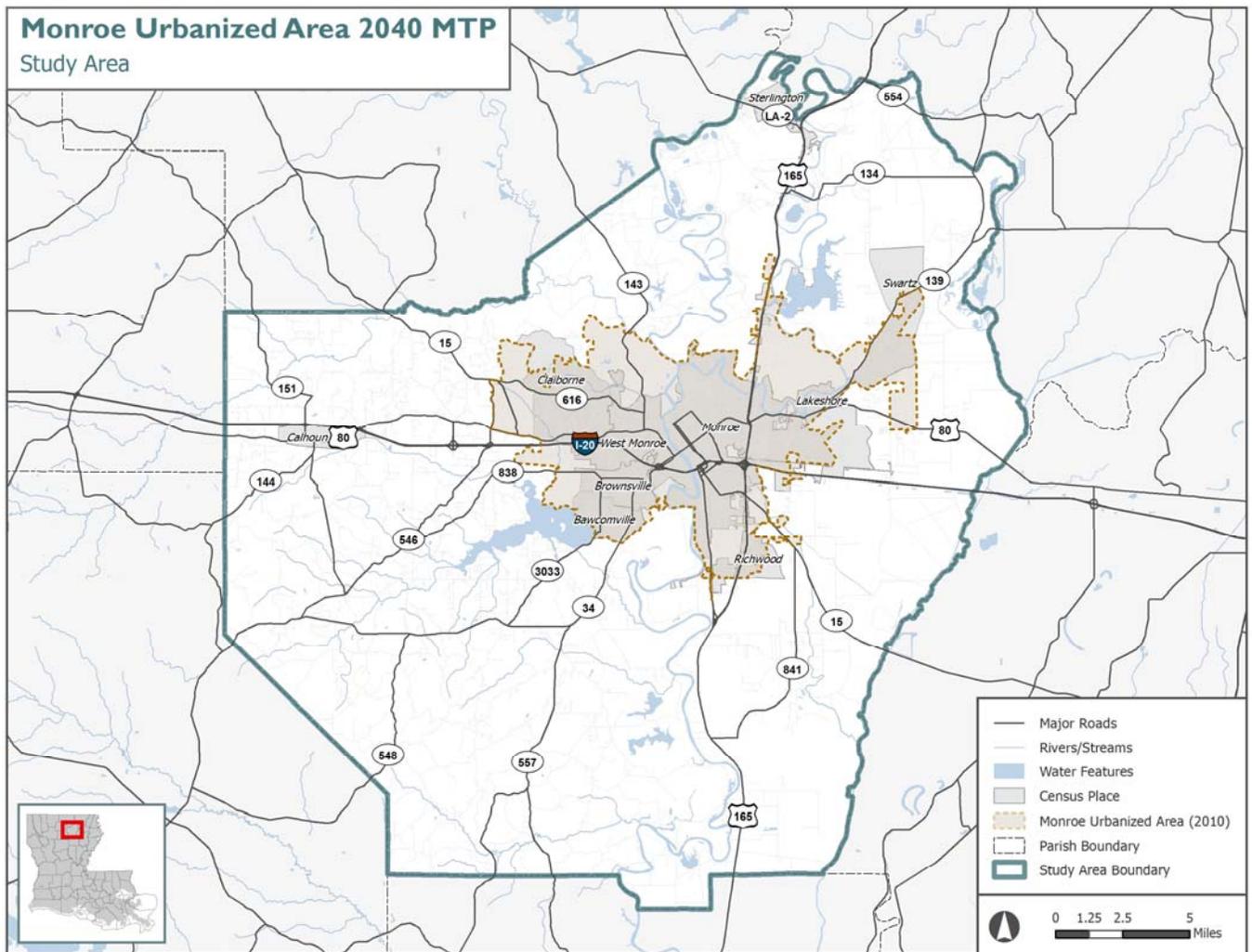
Following the 1970 US Census, the Census Bureau determined that the densely populated area in and around the Cities of Monroe and West Monroe met the Bureau’s definition of an urbanized area because it had a population exceeding 50,000 people with a population density of over 1,000 people per square mile in a contiguous geographical area. Since that time, the Monroe Urbanized Area has continued to grow, and now has an estimated 2010 population of 153,720.

Review of recent Census data indicates that the residential population within the Monroe and West Monroe city limits has been stable with some growth happening in the unincorporated areas around the urbanized area. This pattern of population change is anticipated to continue into the future. Since 2000, residential and employment growth has been distributed towards the northern and western portions of Ouachita Parish. Major regional employment centers include the downtown areas of both Monroe and West Monroe, the area near the University of Louisiana at Monroe, and the US 165 North corridor, where CenturyLink’s corporate headquarters and the future IBM facility are located.



Source: Louisiana Travel (via Flickr)

**Figure I-1: Study Area**



### Purpose of the Plan

The MTP provides a framework for analyzing the current and future regional travel demand and creating a blueprint for addressing the future transportation needs within the Monroe Urbanized Area. With a focus on the creation of a safe, accessible, equitable, and multi-modal transportation network, the MTP recommendations will help address congestion, support economic development, and enhance the quality of life for those living in and travelling to the Monroe region. As an update to the 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan, this plan will guide transportation decision-making through the year 2040.

The MTP is a long-range planning document, and is reviewed and updated every five years. Each

iteration provides a chance to reassess conditions and ensure that the plan remains consistent with the desires and needs of the region as it changes over time.

Development of the MTP requires the collaboration of regional stakeholders, including local, state and federal agencies and governing bodies, public and private transportation providers, the business community, and includes extensive public input. All these stakeholders must work together so that the community's visions and goals coalesce into defined principles that will guide transportation policy and investment decisions within the Monroe Urbanized Area. The resulting recommendations and proposed improvements will impact all aspects of transportation.

## Vision and Goals

The vision and goals developed for the MTP are the result of a collaborative effort between the Policy Committee, Technical Committee, and the public. The following statement reflects a collective vision that defines important transportation issues for the Monroe Urbanized Area.

### *Vision:*

The quality of life in the Monroe Urbanized Area is supported by a transportation system that supports the local economy and provides residents safe, convenient, and affordable transportation choices to desired destinations.

### MTP Goals

The following goals were developed to support the 2040 MTP.

- Use the existing transportation system efficiently and maintain it to maximize public investment and ensure safety for all users.
- Expand non-driving transportation options such as public transportation, bicycling, and walking.
- Develop a transportation system consistent with local social, land use, economic, energy, and environmental plans.

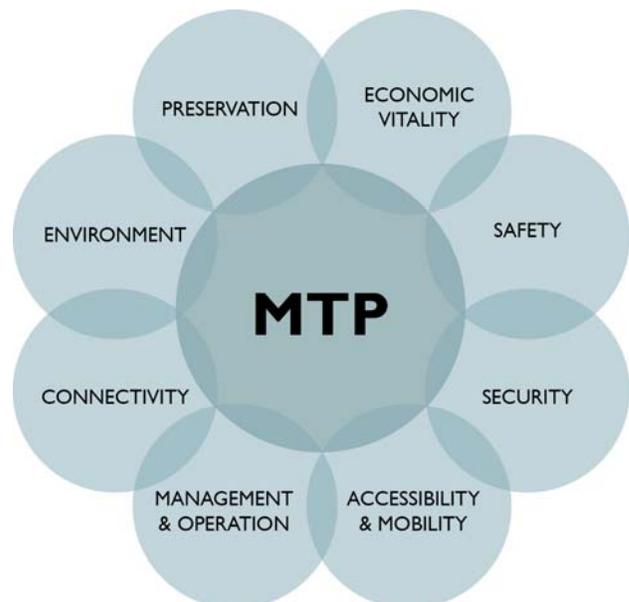
## Legislative Authority for the MTP

With passage of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1962, Congress made urban transportation planning a condition for receipt of Federal funds for highway projects in urban areas with a population of 50,000 or more. That legislation encouraged a continuing comprehensive transportation planning process carried out cooperatively by states and local communities. The Federal Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1973 required the formation of an MPO for any urbanized area with a population of 50,000. Thus, MPOs were designated by the governor in each state to carry out this legislative requirement. Following that initial Federal legislation, Congress has passed a series of surface

transportation bills that have continued to fund transportation projects, the most recent being the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21). The Monroe Urbanized Area 2040 MTP was developed in compliance with this legislation.

### MAP-21

MAP-21 was signed into law in July 2012, became effective on October 1, 2012, and currently serves as the regulatory and funding framework for transportation planning in metropolitan areas. MAP-21 authorizes funds for highway, transit, bicycle, pedestrian, and transportation-related safety programs. It succeeded a series of transportation legislative acts that have drastically changed the process of planning for transportation systems. These legislative acts include the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) enacted in 1991, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) enacted in 1998, and the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) enacted in 2005. All these legislative acts have been a direct result of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 (CAAA), which broadened the goals of transportation system planning to include reducing vehicle miles traveled, expanding travel mode options, improving air quality, and integrating land use considerations into the planning process.



Many of the highway, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian policies established by preceding transportation laws, and continued under SAFETEA-LU, were expanded and refined in MAP 21. The eight planning factors that guided the creation of this MTP were specifically continued from the previous legislation. These factors emphasize that the transportation planning process for metropolitan areas must provide for the consideration of projects and strategies that:

1. Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
2. Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
3. Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
4. Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and for freight;
5. Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns;
6. Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight;
7. Promote efficient system management and operation; and
8. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

In addition to the eight planning factors, MAP-21 requires MPOs to develop transportation plans and improvement programs through a performance-based planning process. In doing so, the planning process must address seven national performance goals:

1. Reduce traffic fatalities and serious injuries;
2. Maintain highways in a state of good repair;
3. Reduce traffic congestion;
4. Improve the efficiency of the transportation system;
5. Improve the national freight network;
6. Protect and enhance the environment; and
7. Reduce project delivery delays.

States and urbanized areas will use these performance measures to assist in evaluating alternative transportation improvements and prioritizing projects that will support national performance goals.

## Ouachita Council of Governments (OCOG)

Following the 1970 decennial Census, the Census Bureau determined that the area in and around the Cities of Monroe and West Monroe exceeded a population of 50,000, and as such, required the designation of an MPO to oversee regional transportation planning for the area. OCOG became the designated MPO for the Monroe Urbanized Area, which includes the cities of Monroe and West Monroe, the town of Richwood, and other unincorporated areas of Ouachita Parish, including Bawcomville. OCOG is part of the North Delta Regional Planning and Development District (North Delta) – the regional planning commission for the eleven-parish region in northeast Louisiana. Federal regulations require that the metropolitan planning area include not only the urbanized area, but also the portion of the region that is anticipated to be urbanized within the next 25 years.

OCOG consists of MPO staff, a Technical Advisory Committee, and a Policy Committee.



## Policy Committee

It is the Policy Committee's responsibility to review and make decisions regarding the transportation planning efforts in the Monroe Urbanized Area. Membership of the Policy Committee is governed by agreement between the affected local governments and the Governor of Louisiana, and is reviewed periodically to ensure adequate representation of all parties. Membership consists of 6 voting members and 4 non-voting members, as detailed below.

### Voting Members

- Mayor Jamie Mayo (Monroe);
- Mayor Dave Norris (West Monroe);
- Dr. Ray Armstrong, (Monroe);
- Sonny Bennett (West Monroe);
- Walt Caldwell (Ouachita Parish Police Jury); and
- Scotty Robinson (Ouachita Parish Police Jury).

### Non-voting Members

- Marshall Hill (LADOTD);
- Mary Stringfellow (FHWA);
- Mayor Vern Breland (Sterlington); and
- Mayor Alvin Jackson (Richwood).

## Technical Committee and MPO Staff

The Technical Advisory Committee serves in a consultative role to the Policy Committee and is responsible for professional and technical review of work programs, policy recommendations, and transportation planning activities. Membership consists of local and state technical and professional personnel knowledgeable in the transportation field. Membership consists of 6 voting members and 6 non-voting members, as follows:

### Voting Members

- Kim Golden (Monroe);
- Arthur Holland (Monroe);
- Robbie George (West Monroe);
- Bruce Fleming (West Monroe);
- Kevin Crosby (Ouachita Parish Police Jury); and
- John Tom Murray (Ouachita Parish Police Jury).

## Non-voting Members

- Dan Broussard (LADOTD);
- Donna Lavigne (LADOTD);
- Marshall Hill (LADOTD);
- Marc Keenan (Monroe Transit);
- Mayor Vern Breland (Sterlington); and
- Mayor Alvin Jackson (Richwood).

## The MTP Planning Process

The planning process used for the creation of the MTP is prescribed by State and federal regulations, but the vision that drives the process is developed locally. In order to create the MTP for the Monroe Urbanized Area, the following planning process was used by the study team, which was comprised of OCOG staff, the Technical Advisory Committee, and LADOTD, and was supported by professional planning consultants. The planning process was conducted under the authority of OCOG.

### Visioning Process

The purpose of the MTP is to identify the transportation needs of the community over the next 25 years, establish priorities for funding those improvements, and chart a course for meeting the community's identified transportation needs. Establishing a community vision for the future of the transportation system and related goals to assist in the prioritization of transportation improvements is key to ensuring the plan reflects community values. Input from key stakeholders and members of the public was solicited early and continuously throughout the development of the plan.

The process for updating the Monroe Urbanized Area MTP was initiated by a series of meetings with the public, professional planners and engineers from the MPO and its member agencies, as well as State and local agencies, and other community stakeholders. The purpose of these meetings was to gather data and input on community needs and values, in order to establish a framework for MTP development. Using this information, the MPO drafted a recommended vision, set of goals, and a list of evaluation criteria to assist in prioritizing transportation improvements for inclusion in the MTP.

## Needs Assessment

In order to develop feasible and beneficial transportation solutions, it is imperative to assess the current state of the transportation system, as well as community growth trends. For the update to the Monroe Urbanized Area MTP, the needs assessment included an inventory of the existing transportation system; a review of local plans; a demographic analysis to determine existing transportation demand based on current population levels; and projections of future population and employment and the associated future travel demand.

## Needs Plan

The next step in the planning process was to identify potential strategies to consider for addressing regional transportation needs.

### No-Build Strategies for Meeting Needs

Building new facilities will not address all identified transportation needs. Not only is building new roadways expensive and funding limited, but some identified needs are best addressed by strategies that reduce demand and improve the operational efficiency of the existing transportation system. Therefore, the MTP planning process included consideration of the preservation of the existing system through preventative and rehabilitative maintenance; the inclusion of access management strategies; and the incorporation of Travel Demand Management (TDM) and Transportation System Management and Operations (TSMO) strategies. These strategies are often referred to as "no-build" strategies because they do not require the construction of new roadways or the widening of existing roadways.

### Project Identification and Selection Process

Once the no-build strategies were considered, potential projects to expand or build new facilities were examined. The results of technical reviews, available planning studies, highway and corridor studies, consultation with local traffic engineers, planners, and other stakeholders, a call for transportation projects, as well as the results of the travel demand model analysis were all combined to develop a list of candidate projects for further analysis.

Proposed projects were then coded into the travel demand model and tested to determine what impact they might have on addressing identified congestion and transportation system needs. Non-highway projects were also analyzed to determine what impact they would have on addressing deficiencies, using a combination of existing data, forecasts, and professional judgment. The results of the travel demand modeling effort are described in Chapter 3.

Traffic volume, volume-to-capacity, and travel delay information provided by the travel demand model were used in conjunction with the weighted qualitative measures developed through the public visioning process to create project scoring criteria.

The study team presented the list of proposed projects to the Technical Advisory Committee members, along with the weighted criteria. The Policy Committee had the opportunity to observe the project scoring, and either accept or reject the final list of prioritized projects developed by the TAC.



Source: Wikimedia Commons

## System Level Analysis

System level analyses examined how the candidate projects impact community issues that are of system- and region-wide concern. The study team incorporated this planning approach into the development of the MTP, which allowed for prioritization of transportation investments based on broader community issues in accordance with the community's vision.

## Environmental Mitigation Analysis

An environmental mitigation analysis was conducted with the list of proposed projects to look for any potentially negative impacts on environmental, cultural, or historical resources. This was a high-level, conceptual analysis conducted with the intent to avoid any obvious environmental constraints that would prevent the project from being implemented. The analysis also assessed potential impacts associated of the proposed projects on low-income and minority populations (environmental justice).

## Coordination with Local Plans and Programs

Ensuring that proposed improvements are consistent with local programs, plans, and their goals and objectives, as well as supporting local values and preserving existing community resources is of vital importance to the MTP development. A review of local programs and plans was therefore conducted to ensure consistency between the metropolitan transportation planning effort and local community initiatives.



## Human Services Transportation Coordination Analysis

Human services transportation coordination aims to improve transportation services offered by various public, non-profit, or private providers to persons with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with lower incomes. An analysis was conducted to determine whether the MTP would adequately support the goals and objectives of the regional human services transportation coordination plan. Although the coordination plan covers a much broader geographic area than the MTP, it was designed to improve the quality and quantity of services available to disadvantaged populations within the Monroe Urbanized Area.

## Financial Analysis and Constraint

Fiscal feasibility is a significant priority in determining the final list of improvements. Not only does MAP-21 mandate that the MTP be fiscally constrained and only include projects that can reasonably be expected to have adequate funding, but certain projects also require that local communities provide matching local funds in order to receive federal funds. The process for establishing both estimated costs and revenues is critical for the creation of a viable MTP.

## Revenue Projection

A revenue projection was developed that identified the anticipated revenue stream for local, State and Federal funds. This revenue stream was factored to account for inflation at the anticipated year-of-receipt.

## Project Costs

Cost is defined as the total project cost, which includes: planning elements (e.g. environmental studies and functional studies); engineering costs (e.g. preliminary engineering and design); preconstruction activities (e.g. line and grade studies, right-of-way acquisition and corridor preservation); construction activities; and contingencies. Project costs were calculated based on historical expenditures for similar improvements. The resulting cost estimates also included an inflation factor to account for the anticipated year-of-expenditure.

## Fiscal Constraint Analysis

A fiscal constraint analysis was performed that compared the anticipated year-of-expenditure costs to the anticipated year-of-receipt revenues to determine if sufficient and timely financial resources were likely to exist to fund the proposed program of projects.

## Selection of a Proposed Package of Projects

Based on the cost and revenue projections, the package of fiscally constrained projects, anticipated to best accomplish community-defined goals and objectives, was selected by the study team and then submitted to the Policy Committee for approval.

## Adoption Process

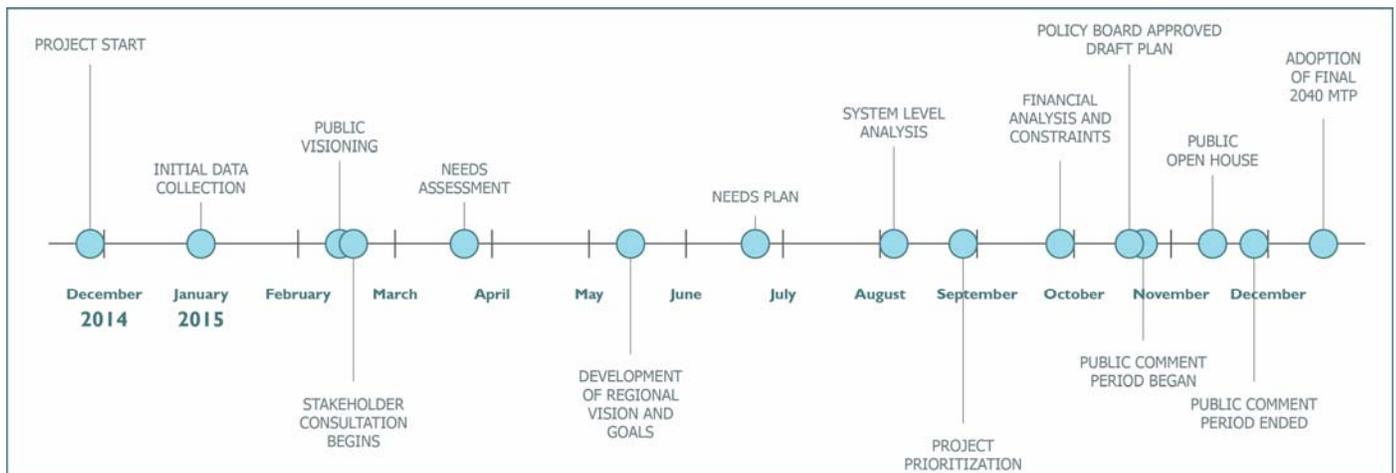
The preliminary transportation recommendations and associated list of proposed projects resulting from the project selection and fiscal constraint analysis, along with the results of the technical analysis and public input, were included in the draft 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan.

### Public Review of the Draft 2040 MTP

On October 27, 2015, the draft plan was presented to the public and their feedback was solicited throughout the 14-day public review period.

### Adoption of the Final 2040 MTP

The final MTP was presented to the Policy Committee for adoption on November 23, 2015. The approved MTP has an effective date of November 30, 2015 and was shared with LADOTD, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Federal Transit Administration.



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