



## 2 Regional Visioning Process

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This chapter describes the process by which the vision and goals of the planning process were established. It also describes the process by which the set of evaluation criteria – used to gauge whether recommended transportation projects support the established vision and goals – was developed and ranked.

The planning process used for the creation of the 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is prescribed by State and federal regulations, but the vision that drives the process is developed locally. This MTP visioning process, therefore, focused on gathering locally generated plans and information, as well as the knowledge and wisdom of the local community, while following the state and federal guidelines that direct the general planning process.

## Data Collection Process

In order to create a baseline from which to start the planning process, the study team gathered existing data, plans, reports, and institutional knowledge about land use patterns, economic development goals, demographic trends, environmental issues, and the study area transportation system. This information provided a picture of current conditions in the study area.

## Review of Relevant Plans and Programs

During the data collection process, relevant state, regional, and local transportation and land use planning documents were reviewed to ensure the regional transportation planning efforts were consistent with ongoing state and local activities. This included review and consultation of MPO-sponsored plans and programs like the 2035 MTP and the most recent Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which lists transportation projects in the region for which funding has been identified and allocated. Additionally, the study team reviewed the following state, regional, and local planning documents:

- LADOTD Complete Streets Work Group
- Louisiana Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan
- LADOTD 2015-2018 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)
- Louisiana Strategic Highway Safety Plan
- North Delta Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan
- North Delta Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
- City of Monroe Comprehensive Plan Update
- City of Monroe Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan
- University of Louisiana-Monroe Campus Facilities Master Plan
- University of Louisiana-Monroe Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Area Agency on Aging Plan
- City of Monroe Design Review Guidelines
- D’Arbonne National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan





## OCOG-Sponsored Plans and Programs

### *Monroe Urbanized Area MTP 2035*

The Ouachita Parish Council of Governments developed the current Metropolitan Transportation Plan, which was adopted in 2010 and covers a planning period extending from the base year of 2008 through the horizon year of 2035. This MTP was designed to meet the anticipated transportation needs of the Monroe Urbanized Area through the maintenance and enhancement of the transportation system that is funded by state and federal dollars. This document assesses socio-demographic growth trends and the condition of the multimodal transportation network and provides recommendations for improvements. It assesses current conditions, system characteristics, land use, crash data, and security related information. Public and local stakeholders were involved in the creation of the MTP through a regional visioning process.

Roadway and highway improvements and transit projects selected for inclusion in the MTP were categorized into three stages for implementation over the 25-year horizon period. Stage 1 projects (2010-2015) are estimated to cost more than \$143 million. Stage 2 projects (2016-2025) more than \$276 million, and Stage 3 projects (2026-2035) more than \$367 million, for a total program cost (in year-of-expenditure dollars) of \$787 million. Roadway and transit revenues were estimated to be \$857 million, ensuring that the plan was fiscally constrained.

### *2015-2018 Transportation Improvement Program*

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is the adopted list of public transportation, roadway, bicycle, pedestrian, and air quality projects that will receive federal transportation funds over a 4-year period. Projects include, but are not limited to, engineering and design, new construction, existing facility maintenance, capital purchases, and safety improvements in the region, which are scheduled to commence during the four-year program. The most recent TIP was adopted by the MPO Policy Committee on September 22, 2014.

## State-Sponsored Plans and Programs

### *LADOTD Complete Streets Work Group*

In 2010, LADOTD developed the Complete Streets Work Group document in coordination with representatives from 22 stakeholder agencies interested in transportation planning, engineering, and safety; bicycle and pedestrian advocacy; urban design; public health; and elderly affairs.

This report details the efforts undertaken by LADOTD in developing a statewide Complete Streets Policy, designed to result in an integrated transportation network that serves all users and modes.

The report also identifies several benefits to introducing Complete Streets practices, which include:

- Improved safety;
- Mobility and safety for children;
- Mobility for disabled Americans;
- Mobility for older Americans;
- Promoting active living;
- Supporting environmental policies aimed at reducing emissions;
- Supporting economic development; and
- Lowered household transportation costs.

Finally, the report offers legislative strategies, model ordinances, and implementation actions to ensure that regulatory guidance and project development procedures are put into place to ascertain that the needs of all transportation system users are integrated into the various transportation project development stages.

### *Louisiana Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan*

The LADOTD-sponsored Louisiana Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan was completed in 2009. The plan establishes new policies, which encourage the development of a complete and inclusive multi-modal transportation system across the State and promote the full integration of walking and bicycling into transportation projects that involve federal or state funding or approval. The primary goals of the plan are:

- Social Equity – Plan, design and fund a transportation system that enables mobility and access for all residents, whether or not the individual has access to a motor vehicle.
- Personal Safety – Increase the safety of the walking and bicycling environment and reduce injuries and fatalities by providing a high level of care and consideration for these modes.
- Economic Development – Support Louisiana’s economic development by planning and maintaining a transportation system that supports walkable and bike-able local shopping districts, offers diversified travel options to visitors, and supports increased tourism and recreational opportunities.
- Public Health – Improve the health of Louisiana residents by increasing opportunities for combining physical activity with transportation and recreation.
- Environmental Stewardship – Preserve the health of the natural environment, improve air and water quality, and reduce energy consumption by increasing the rates of walking and bicycling.

Based on the analysis of challenges, common concerns, public input, quantitative data, as well as efforts to date, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development has established four policies to realize the vision and achieve the goals of this plan:

- Pedestrian & Bicycle Accommodation Policy – Encourage increased levels of bicycling and walking to address mobility needs, reduce congestion, and improve the environment.
- Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety Policy – Provide for the safety and comfort of cyclists and pedestrians, as well as reduce related crashes and injuries.
- Pedestrian Facility Policy – Plan, fund, and design sidewalks on all new construction or reconstruction projects adjacent to existing and future developments.
- Bicycle Facility Policy – Provide bikeways and bicycle accommodations where feasible and appropriate.

It is important to note that each policy is accompanied by a list of specific actions to support implementation. Appendices also detail how bicycling and walking can be incorporated into the project development process, guidance on the effect of lane width, strategies to manage liability exposure, as well as specific case studies and resources.



*LADOTD 2015-2018 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)*

LADOTD prepared the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) document to comply with MAP-21 Statewide Planning requirements. Statewide rural transportation projects are gathered along with projects from the urbanized area TIPS to form the STIP. From the Monroe region, the current STIP, which programs funding for years 2015 to 2018, includes 7 projects including overlay, capacity, and bridge replacements with programmed costs of about \$93.8 million.

*Louisiana Strategic Highway Safety Plan*

A Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) is a statewide-coordinated safety plan that is developed to reduce fatalities along state highways and all public roads. The State of Louisiana maintains a SHSP first enacted in accordance with SAFETEA-LU requirements. The original SHSP was developed in 2006 using the 4E’s of traffic safety: engineering, enforcement, emergency response, and education. The purpose of the 2006 SHSP was to:

- Establish safety-related goals, objectives, and performance measures for high-priority emphasis areas identified in the plan;
- Address the issues at each of the jurisdictional levels;
- Identify current and future candidate safety strategies to reduce fatalities and injuries;
- Establish interagency coordination;
- Create a public outreach and education program for the SHSP; and
- Establish a process for evaluating progress towards the plan's goals and objectives, and updating the plan to reflect progress and changing needs.

- A narrowed focus on the areas of greatest need;
- Inclusion of recent science-based research used to quantify the effectiveness of the engineering and behavioral safety countermeasures that are put into place;
- Increased stakeholder representation in the creation of the SHSP; and
- A new focus on countermeasure evaluation.

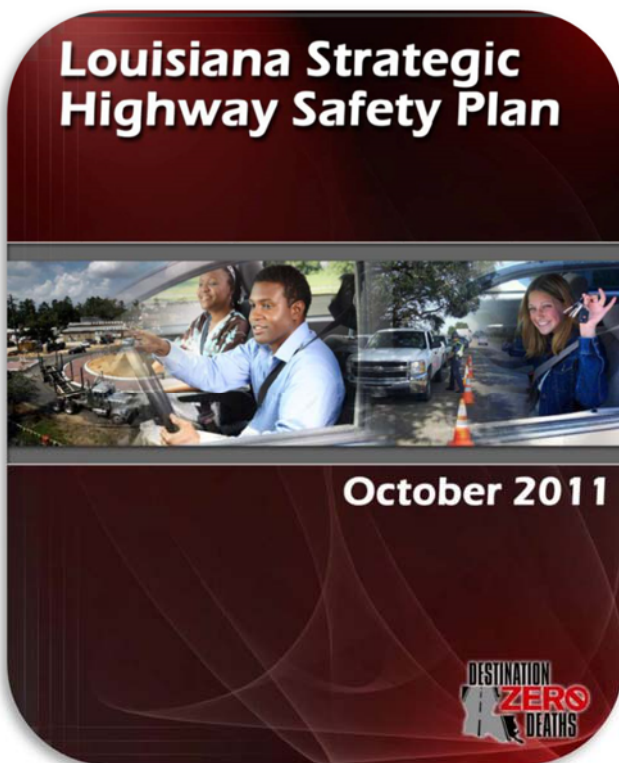
The vision of the SHSP is to bring the number of fatalities on Louisiana roadways to zero by using the 4E's approach. The goal of the current SHSP is to reduce the number of highway fatalities by fifty percent by the year 2030. This same benchmark is used as the goal for each of the emphasis areas listed below. SHSP performance measures, tracked by LADOTD with the OnTrack program, include countermeasures that are underway, completed, or awaiting implementation.

During the development of the current SHSP, four emphasis areas were identified for implementation of countermeasures based on data availability, improvement potential, and access to resources. The four emphasis areas are:

- Alcohol related driving;
- Occupant protection;
- Infrastructure and operations; and
- Crashes involving young drivers.

Strategies for reducing the fatal and injury crashes for each of these emphasis areas include:

- More efficient DWI/DUI arrest reports;
- Outreach and education;
- Marketing;
- Law Enforcement Liaisons at the Louisiana State Police Troop Commands;
- Checkpoints for alcohol and seat belts;
- "Buckle Up" signs;
- Newer, systematic improvements to infrastructure;
- A Roadway Departure Action Plan;



Source: LADOTD

The SHSP was updated in 2011 and includes all elements of the 2006 plan, with the addition of:

- Enhanced collaboration between agencies for updates and improvements to the plan;
- Alignment of safety goals with those of the state's other safety plans;

- Increased coordination with MPOs to include safety planning in the TIP; and
- An Underage Alcohol Purchase Prevention Program.

Figure 2-1 shows the planning process involved in the update of the SHSP. Figure 2-2 shows the structure

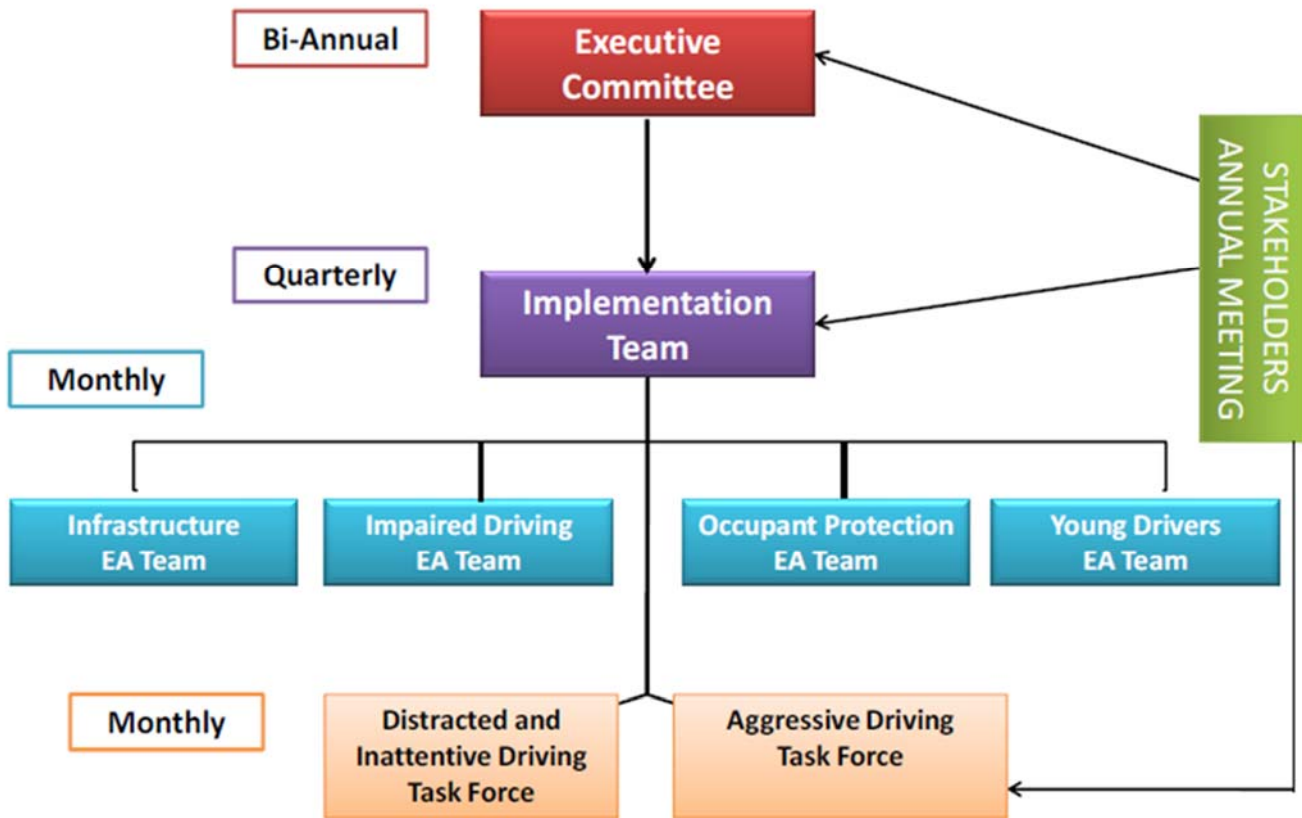
that is used in the implementation of the SHSP by the various agencies that are involved in the plan.

**Figure 2-1: Planning Process to Update the Louisiana SHSP**

Timeframe	Activity
July-November 2009	Conduct Data Analysis
Nov-09	Select SHSP Emphasis Areas
Nov-09	Draft update of the 2006 Louisiana SHSP Circulate for review by DOTD, LHSC, and LSP
Dec-09	Incorporate comments from DOTD, LHSC, and LSP and create revised Draft
16-Dec-09	Host Stakeholders Meeting to introduce the outline of the draft plan, gain feedback on emphasis areas, identify potential leadership, review research, and begin discussion of strategies and countermeasures
30-Dec-09	Develop revised Draft 2010 Louisiana SHSP Review Draft SHSP by stakeholder group
Mar-10	Host Transportation Safety Summit to introduce the SHSP, and build Regional Safety Coalitions which will develop safety action plans to align with the goals, emphasis areas, objectives, and strategies of the statewide SHSP Review Summit participant comments
Apr-10	Develop revised 2010 Louisiana SHSP
Jun-10	Convene Implementation Team to review revised SHSP, introduce management structure and roles and responsibilities
Jul-10	Begin monthly meetings of the Emphasis Area Teams and Task Forces to expand upon action plans and track implementation via OnTrack
Ongoing	Continue quarterly Implementation Team meetings, bi-annual Executive Committee meetings and annual Stakeholder meetings to further implementation and track progress

Source: Louisiana Strategic Highway Safety Plan

**Figure 2-2: Louisiana SHSP Project Management Team**



Source: Louisiana Strategic Highway Safety Program

### Locally-Sponsored Plans and Programs

#### North Delta Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan

In 2009, the North Delta Regional Human Services Transportation Council developed the North Delta Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan, which investigates deficiencies in the current state of the public transportation system in Monroe, and explores needs of riders, especially the elderly and disabled. The plan was developed by representatives of public, private, and nonprofit transportation and human services providers and members of the public. It includes the following key elements:

- An assessment of transportation needs for the disabled, older adults, and persons with limited incomes;
- An inventory of available services that identifies areas of redundant service and gaps in fixed route and demand response transportation

services and identifies current providers (public, private, and nonprofit);

- Strategies and/or activities to address the identified gaps in transit service and achieve efficiencies in service delivery;
- Identification of coordination actions to eliminate or reduce duplication in services and strategies for more efficient utilization of resources;
- A discussion of priorities to be met by the plan and a process for establishing future priorities; and
- A process for continued coordination planning.

Included in the plan were several recommendations to the State on methods that would increase the implementation of a successful coordinated human services transportation plan for the North Delta Region. Those recommendations include the following:

- Fully enacting, funding and supporting the recommendations of the United We Ride reports;



- Using the goals and objectives established in the plan for selection of section 5310, 5311, 5316 and 5317 transportation providers; and
- Coordinating and supporting the development of an insurance pool for small providers in the state in order to reduce insurance costs.

The plan also introduced a series of goals and accompanying objectives for creating an effective Human Services Transportation Coordination Process, which include:

Goals	Objectives
To increase capacity to serve unmet needs	Improve our ability to determine need for transportation services. Improve ability to obtain funding for coordination projects.
To ensure that the coordination process is comprehensive and sustainable	Develop communication between providers
To create a more cost-effective service delivery system	Determine methodologies for reducing costs.
To make services more easily understood and accessible by riders	Improve public awareness of transit options.
Improve the quality of service provided	Increase public participation in evaluating service

*North Delta Comprehensive Development Strategy*

In 2015, the North Delta Regional Planning and Development District updated the 2010 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which presents an economic profile of the area by describing major economic clusters, examining the area's workforce, identifying vocational and educational opportunities, and determining strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It also offers goals, objectives, and an implementation plan for the area. The goals outlined in the CEDS include the following:

- Stimulate the creation of private sector jobs through the attraction of industry and the retention/expansion of existing businesses, especially those in economically stressed areas;

- Help distressed communities build their capacity to stimulate or at least maintain growth;
- Provide new knowledge by analyzing information and seek out non-federal resources for solutions at the local level; and
- Enable distressed communities to practice and implement sustainable development.

*City of Monroe Comprehensive Plan Update*

In 2013, the City of Monroe updated its Comprehensive Plan, which serves as a guide to all planning efforts undertaken within the City. The plan provides a summary of demographic and economic data and projections through the year 2017, as well as information about current and future land use, including a future land use map, shown in Figure 2-3.

The Comprehensive Plan focuses on three goals:

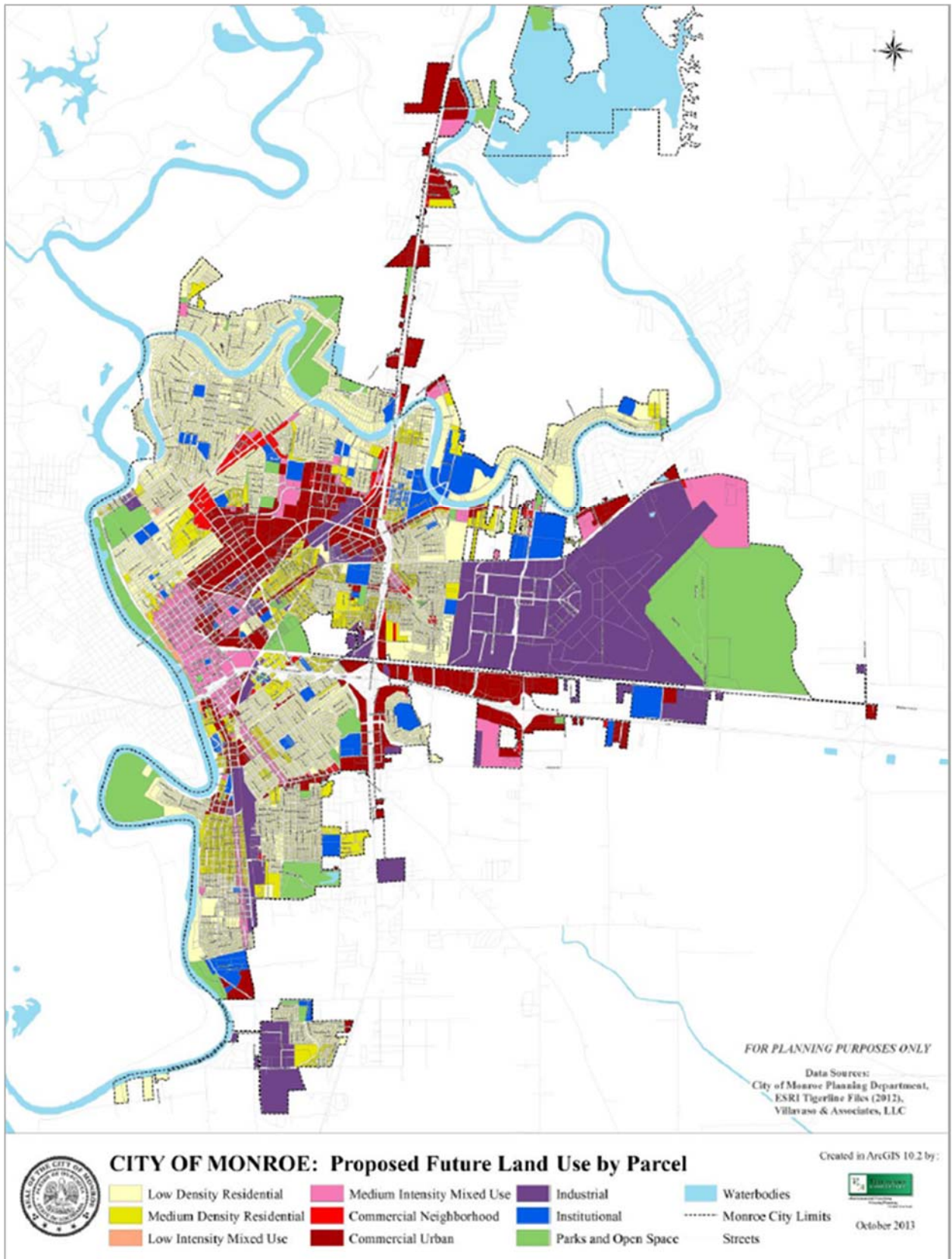
- Resiliency – Meet the needs of citizens without undermining the natural resources and environmental quality; use adopted plans, ordinances, policies, and strategies to guide development and redevelopment.
- Economic Development – Support downtown development; coordinate economic development by expanding partnerships with local, regional, and state entities; and create opportunities to promote the City.
- Housing – Ensure that a wide range of housing options are available for all residents including senior citizens and special needs populations.

The Comprehensive Plan specifically refers to its city-wide Transit/Transportation Policy, which calls for a multi-modal transportation system, and recommends the use of a Complete Streets framework that considers the accessibility needs of all transportation system users.

The plan encourages the reuse of existing structures in Downtown Monroe, the creation of mixed-use developments to foster close proximity of housing, services, and essential needs, and identifies key geographic areas for economic development. The plan provides an Implementation Matrix and associated strategies by which to implement all outlined policies.



**Figure 2-3: City of Monroe Future Land Use Map**



*City of Monroe Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan*

The Multi-Hazard Mitigation plan (HMP) was updated in 2010 by the Monroe Hazard Mitigation Steering Committee in conjunction with the City of Monroe Planning and Urban Development Department. It identifies all types of natural and technological hazards that may potentially occur in the Monroe Urbanized Area, and suggests strategies to mitigate such disasters. The 2010 HMP update built upon the original plan developed in 2004.

The plan profiles the most common area hazards, which include natural hazards (e.g. extreme weather), technological hazards (e.g. levee/dam failures). Some of the concerns addressed in this plan for the Monroe transportation system include the following:

- The maintenance of a transit bus system that can provide citywide transportation for the public and be made available during times of disaster;
- The transportation of hazardous materials on both road and rail networks as potential hazards; and
- Evacuation procedures in the event of a disaster.

The goals that follow were established in the plan along with corresponding objectives:

- Projecting life and property
- Ensuring emergency services
- Increasing public preparedness
- Establishing and strengthening partnerships for implementation
- Preserving or restoring natural resources, and
- Promoting a resilient economy.

Twenty-five projects were included in the priority list for hazard mitigation. Transportation related projects included a transportation evacuation study and an airport canal erosion project.

*University of Louisiana-Monroe Campus Facilities Master Plan*

In 2013, the University of Louisiana-Monroe and a team of consultants completed a campus master plan to guide future campus land use and development. The plan process included a review of previous university planning efforts, designation and

discussion from a Steering and Executive committee, examination of existing conditions, data analysis, and a series of workshops involving representative from each school and department on campus. The efforts resulted in a summary of needs for the plan, which included:

- Strengthening the campus identity,
- Consolidating and refining the collegial environment,
- Embracing the natural landscape and urban context,
- Evaluating the quality of campus facilities; and
- Supporting a sustainable future for university operations.

A set of recommendations was included in the plan, which included the following activities:

- Using landscape, open space, and natural features to define the campus,
- Prioritizing facility upgrades,
- Clarifying circulation, parking and service access,
- Strategically reallocating building uses,
- Tactically demolishing obsolete facilities,
- Anticipating growth,
- Considering infrastructure enhancements, and
- Adhering to a consistent set of design standards.

Nine areas were identified, each with several projects to address plan recommendations. Roadway alignment and paving projects, and bike and pedestrian facility construction were among building construction, landscaping, and signage as proposed projects. Projects were divided into three phases and each included low and high costs ranges. The low estimated project costs for all phase was \$33,804,200, and the high estimated projects costs for all phases was \$44,887,100. An additional \$94,200,000 in funding was identified as budgeted elsewhere at the university.

*University of Louisiana-Monroe Hazard Mitigation Plan*

In 2013, the University of Louisiana Monroe developed the Monroe Hazard Mitigation Plan, which is similar to the City of Monroe's Hazard Mitigation

Plan, but focuses exclusively for the University of Louisiana Monroe campus itself. The Plan provides an overview of the campus, outlines all possible natural hazards; and provides a risk assessment matrix outlining procedures to follow in the event of each hazard.

*Area Agency on Aging Plan*

In 2010, the North Delta Area Agency on Aging developed the Area Agency on Aging Plan. The plan is a requirement under section 305a(2)(A) of the Older Americans Act, and addresses deficiencies with providing services to older adults. Transportation barriers for older adults with regard to accessing medical appointments, shopping, and social activities is an important component of the plan. Several objectives were included in the plan to address the transportation needs. These objectives include the following:

- Revising the Transportation Risk Management Plan that will result in increased units of services an assistance rendered by June 2011.
- Locating a target population on computerized mapping of seniors who have been identified in need of service, and
- Conducting interviews with participants for a report of their pending unmet/met needs.

*City of Monroe Design Review Guidelines*

In 2011, the Heritage Preservation Commission with the City of Monroe developed the Monroe Design Review Guidelines, which sets the guidelines for historic commercial and residential properties in the city. The purpose of the plan is to equip property owners with all the design guides and regulations that must be considered when improvements are made to structures in historic districts. An inventory of architectural styles for both residential and historic buildings, as well as guidelines for new commercial construction comprises the document.

Additional goals, include serving as a resource for assisting property owners with enhancing their properties' appearances and values, and promoting preservation over the alteration of historic buildings.

*D'Arbonne National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan*

The U.S. Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Services completed the Comprehensive Plans for the D'Arbonne and Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuges to guide the management actions and directions for the refuges in accordance with The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. This act requires that all refuges be managed according to a comprehensive plan. The D'Arbonne National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1975 and is located in both Ouachita and Union parishes, while the Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1997 and is located entirely within Ouachita Parish.



*Source: Keith Yahl (via Flickr)*

The comprehensive plans established goal areas with accompanying objectives and strategies for each refuge, including: fish and wildlife population management, habitat management, resource protection, visitor services, and refuge administration (D'Arbonne only). To achieve the goals described in the plans, 35 projects were proposed for D'Arbonne and 15 projects were proposed for Black Bayou Lake. The initial startup costs for D'Arbonne National Wildlife Refuge were over \$11 million with recurring costs of \$477,500 per year, while the initial costs for Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge were \$3.2 million with recurring costs of more than \$776,000 per year.



## Other Data Sources

Because the Monroe Urbanized Area's transportation system both affects and is effected by other characteristics of the region, the 2040 MTP considers data gathered from a variety of sources. Some of the other types of data gathered to support the plan include:

- Population (U.S. Census Bureau)
- Employment (InfoUSA)
- Economic Development
- Freight
- Safety (Louisiana Highway Safety Commission)
- Environmental (wetlands, historic and cultural resources, parks, wildlife refuges, etc.)

The majority of this data was used to support the regional needs assessment described in Chapter 3. Data about the environmental impacts of projects discussed in the plan are described in Chapter 5.

## Transportation System

In addition to the other data collection efforts described above, the study team created a baseline picture of all infrastructure facilities for the various modes of transportation. This was accomplished by compiling available data on highways and other roadways, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, transit, freight, rail, and airports. This information was utilized during the various needs analyses described in Chapter 3.

## Public Visioning Process

MAP-21 identifies public participation as a critical element of the metropolitan planning process. The more input provided by citizens, the better decision-makers can understand and realize community goals. The Ouachita Council of Governments (OCOG), acting as the Monroe Urbanized Area's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), developed the update with public involvement at the core.

<sup>1</sup> (Ouachita Council of Governments, 2013)

## Outreach Methods

To better understand the community's goals and objectives for the Monroe Urbanized Area, a variety of outreach methods were used to maximize input from regional stakeholders. These outreach efforts included print media, interviews, and open comment periods, as well as public workshops and stakeholder consultation. By engaging the entire spectrum of regional stakeholders, from the general public to transit operators, advocacy groups, and the business community, the MTP was developed in accordance with OCOG's public participation goal to "provide opportunities for citizens to contribute ideas and voice opinions, early and often" during the preparation of plans and programs.<sup>1</sup>



## Visioning Workshop Overview

Two visioning workshops were held on January 27 and January 29, 2015 at the West Ouachita Senior Center and the Monroe Civic Center, respectively. The public was notified of these meetings through public notices and email blasts.

At the beginning of each workshop, participants were welcomed by members of the study team, and elected officials in attendance were acknowledged. The workshop was moderated by J.D. Allen of Alliance Transportation Group.

Participants were informed that the MTP update process was based largely on a public participation program designed to articulate a vision for future growth through open dialogue, collaboration, and the

use of scenario-based planning tools. Throughout each workshop, the public was provided with opportunities to inform the MPO of the transportation needs and challenges that should be addressed in the Monroe Urbanized Area, and to give input regarding the importance of the criteria used to evaluate future transportation projects.

Participants were told they would be asked to do the following three things:

- Help the MPO understand the critical transportation issues expected to be faced in the future;
- Help the MPO to evaluate the importance of a new list of criteria used to prioritize various scenarios and transportation projects;

- Share with the MPO personal visions of what the future transportation system in the Monroe Urbanized Area should look like in order to adequately serve the needs of the people.

### Exercise 1: Stakeholders Present

In the first exercise, participants were directed to the list of stakeholder groups shown in their participant workbooks, and were asked to identify which groups they represented. This was done to gauge stakeholder representation during the visioning activities and to identify any stakeholder groups that were underrepresented so targeted outreach could be performed for subsequent public engagement activities. Table 2-1 shows the results of Exercise 1.

**Table 2-1: Stakeholder Representation at Visioning Workshops**

Stakeholder Groups Present During Workshops	
Private Auto/SUV/Pickup User	Representative of an Agency that is responsible for Transportation Safety
Bicycle User	Representative of a Law Enforcement Agency
Pedestrian Facility (Sidewalks, Hike & Bike Trails, etc.) User	Representative of an Agency that is responsible for Land Use Management
Public Transit User of the Monroe Transit	Representative of an Agency that is responsible for Natural Resources
Transit for the Elderly and Disabled User	Representative of an Agency that is responsible for Historic Preservation
Airport User	Transit Operator
Responsible for Transportation of Children	Private Transportation Provider (e.g. Taxis, Buses, etc.)
Business Owner	City or Parish Elected Official
Member of Community Group (such as Neighborhood Association, Civic Club, etc.)	Planning Organization Member
Member of Environmental Protection Organization	Member of a Population that is Traditionally Underserved by the Transportation System
Member of Historic or Cultural Preservation Organization	Resident of Ouachita Parish
Representative of an Agency that provides Traffic Control	Representative of an Agency that is responsible for Transportation Safety
Representative of an Agency that supports Ride-Sharing	Representative of a Law Enforcement Agency
Representative of an Agency that regulates Public Parking	

The workshop was attended by 24 stakeholders, 19 of which identified themselves as Ouachita Parish residents. There were also 19 private auto users who attended the meeting, in addition to 18 self-identified as airport users and 13 as bike and pedestrian facility users.

Notably absent were Native American tribal officials, freight handlers, environmental protection representatives, and public transit riders. Additional efforts were made to reach out to the missing constituents through the consultation process, which is outlined later in this chapter.

### Exercise 2: Current State of the Transportation System

For the second workshop exercise, participants were first instructed to consider the following question:

*Thinking about changes to the region and the nation (environmental changes, gas prices, aging baby boomers, economic changes, land use changes, etc.), are there any users of the transportation system that will be poorly served if there are no improvements to the system?*

Facilitators led a group discussion, and both the results of the discussion and individual responses were recorded. Stakeholders were instructed to write any additional issues they might have that were not discussed at the table on their participant response sheet.

Responses received during the group discussions and individual responses from both workshops have been paraphrased and grouped into the following categories:

- Congestion
- Public Transportation
- Bicycle and Pedestrian
- Ouachita River

#### Congestion

Congestion and roadway capacity were the biggest areas of concern for residents, particularly in school zones, along I-20 eastbound from the Calhoun area to Well Road, and along US 165, where alternative routes may be needed. Participants listed traffic light timing adjustments and increased capacity as possible solutions to this congestion, but that an increase in multi-modal transportation options is vital, as the current transportation system is not likely to meet the area's future transportation needs.

Individually, some participants stated that highways and newly constructed schools have caused an increase in congestion, which can also decrease safety when drivers are aggressive. Additionally, participants indicated that bridges can become choke points between Monroe and West Monroe, especially if one or more of the crossings are blocked due to a crash incident.

Finally, some participants expressed concern that congestion slows public transportation, and suggested that dedicated and/or separated bus lanes should be considered along congested corridors.

#### Public Transportation

Participants indicated that the current public transportation system is important to the area and that a shortage of alternative transportation options exists – especially for seniors, some of whom need paratransit services to make trips. Further concerns were raised that some areas do not receive adequate transit service, and the hours of operation should be extended to accommodate more riders. Participants also acknowledged that there is limited access to educational institutions via public transit.

#### Bicycle and Pedestrian

Participants discussed the lack of bike and pedestrian friendly streets, including poor sidewalk conditions in older neighborhoods and a lack of adequate lighting in many areas. Many elderly residents live in these older neighborhoods, and the poor sidewalk condition increases the difficulty of walking around the neighborhood or reaching nearby bus stops.

Participants indicated that a more robust network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities would be welcomed, and would provide residents more opportunities to



exercise, increase transportation options, offer students safe walking routes to nearby schools, and improve the overall quality of life in Ouachita Parish.

#### *Ouachita River*

Some participants suggested that consideration of the Ouachita River as a commercial and recreational asset would prove crucial to the area. An evaluation of the waterway and its infrastructure should be undertaken and a plan for maintaining or further enhancing port and levee infrastructure should be adopted.

### Exercise 3: Ranking and Scoring Criteria

The number of needed improvements is likely to exceed the funding available for implementation. Therefore, it is important that OCOG has a mechanism in place to use evaluation criteria to prioritize the most worthwhile projects which yield the greatest benefits for the region. Exercise 3 asked participants to rank potential evaluation criteria based on their personal preferences. Participants completed this activity both in groups and individually. This exercise illustrates the transportation values of visioning participants, and the results of the exercise helped the MPO place differing weights on evaluation criteria for project prioritization.

#### *Evaluation Criteria Descriptions*

To provide a starting point for discussion, workshop participants were given a list of criteria that reflects years of public feedback, and which incorporates the metropolitan planning factors prescribed in MAP-21. The criteria descriptions are listed below.

Improves Safety – Protects against unintentional harm (e.g. traffic collisions)

Improves Security – Protects against intentional harm (e.g. security threats, crime)

Protects the Environment – Reduces air and noise pollution, protects critical habitats, avoids developing in flood-prone area, protects historical and cultural resources, etc.

Reduces Congestion – Minimizes the time spent in traffic congestion

Promotes Efficiency – Maximizes the potential of the existing transportation system (e.g. improved signal timing, limiting the number of driveways on certain roads, preserving the existing system through overlays, etc.)

Supports Land Use Goals – Coordinates plans for the transportation system with plans for land development

Increases Street Connections – Improves circulation within the community and to external destinations by connecting roads to provide multiple options for reaching destinations

Conserves Energy – Reduces the use of natural resources

Improves Access – Balances access to land uses with the efficient flow of traffic

Supports Economic Development Goals – Improves or builds transportation infrastructure that increases access to markets, attracts employers, makes businesses more accessible, etc.

Connects Modes of Travel – Improves the ease with which people can use multiple modes of travel to reach destinations (e.g. ride a bike, then use a bus)

Increases Multi-Modal Options – Provides travelers with more options for reaching their destinations, such as biking, walking, riding the bus, or driving a car

Improves Quality of Life – Plans the transportation system so it has a positive impact on the community's quality of life (e.g. safe routes to schools, opportunities for recreation, etc.)

Preserves Right-of-Way – Plans ahead for the future expansion of the transportation system and purchases land before development occurs to reduce future costs

#### *Criteria Scoring*

Following an explanation of these criteria by the moderator, each table facilitator answered any remaining questions before the participants scored the transportation criteria as a group. At each table, each participant received 24 dots to place on a chart listing potential areas of focus. Participants were able

to allocate their dots to each focus area as they saw appropriate. Their choices indicated what criteria they felt were the most important emphasis areas for the community.

Collectively, promoting efficiency, reducing congestion, and improving safety and quality of life were the top areas on which participants indicated future efforts should be focused. Participants were least concerned about environmental protection, security improvement, and supporting existing land use goals.

Following the group exercise, participants were asked to individually score each criterion based on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = Unimportant and 5 = Extremely Important). When scored individually, improved safety and reduced congestion were identified as the areas where the majority of focus should be placed. However, support for economic development, improved access, and improved quality of life also scored highly. The focus areas ranked as the least important by individuals include protection



of the environment, conservation of energy, improved security, and connecting modes of travel.

### Exercises 4 & 5: Growth Trends and Envisioning the Future Transportation System

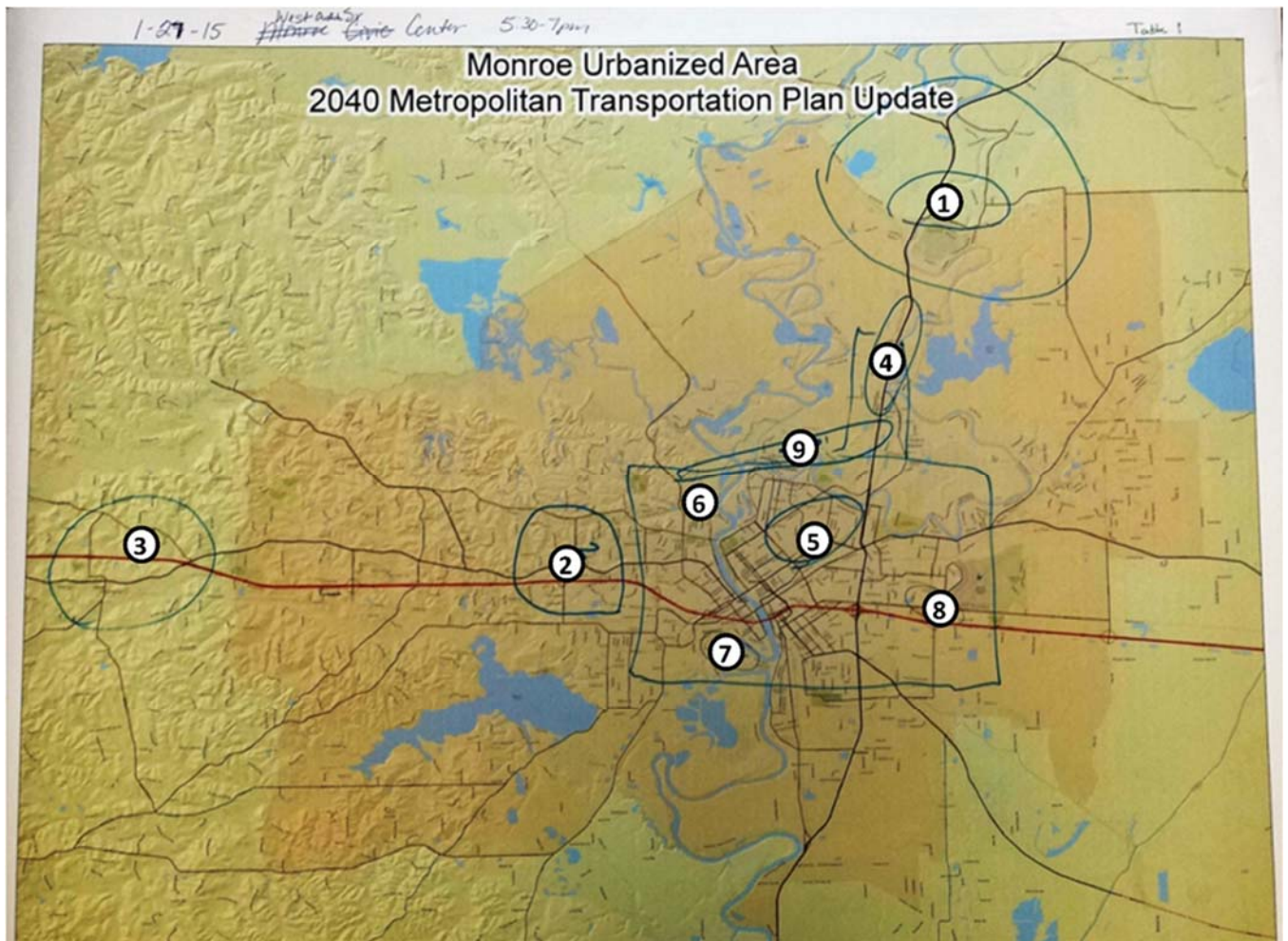
The final exercises during the public visioning meetings were combined into one facilitator-led group discussion at each table following a presentation on regional growth trends including population, employment, and traffic flow changes, as well as bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Participants were encouraged to voice their opinions regarding future growth in the region, and maps of the planning area were provided at each table for participants to mark areas on the map where future population growth is anticipated and where possible transportation improvements are needed. Participants were also encouraged to record anything of particular importance to them on their participant response sheets, which were collected and reviewed by the project team.

Participants identified additional roadway improvements that were not illustrated at specific locations on the maps. Participants expressed a desire for enhanced public transportation to educational institutions and workforce development opportunities, renovation of existing bridges across the Ouachita River, improvement to overall interstate capacity, and improvement of safety along roadways in the Monroe Urbanized Area.

#### Example Map Exercise

The map in Figure 2-4 and the text on the following page provide an example of Exercises 4 & 5. The full results of the visioning workshops are found in Appendix A.

**Figure 2-4: Example Map Exercise**



1. Northeast Ouachita growth driven by schools, lakes, work, and availability of land. This includes the whole area (not just Sterlington).
2. Claiborne School District area likely to grow.
3. The Calhoun area also likely to grow.
4. The US Hwy 165N corridor is currently experiencing growth, which is expected to continue.
5. The Tower Drive area continues to be a focal point for economic development.
6. Alternative transportation systems will need to be employed in the central region of the Parish.
7. There should be a new roadway southwest of downtown West Monroe to support growth and expansion at Greater Ouachita Port.

8. Money should be invested on a connection between Airport Road and Kansas Lane.
9. Future efforts should explore the creation of a North Loop with a 4th bridge across the Ouachita River.

### Workshop Evaluation

At the workshop's conclusion, participants were given an opportunity to provide feedback regarding their personal satisfaction with the meeting by completing a short survey. Surveys were conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of workshops, and to gather information for use in developing future public participation activities. The majority of respondents provided favorable responses to each statement indicating a positive experience with the workshop. The complete list of survey results is shown in Table 2-2.



**Table 2-2: Public Visioning Workshop Evaluation**

	Strongly Agree (5)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Meeting Room was easy for me to get to	85%	10%	0%	5%	0%
Meeting Room was comfortable	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
Available parking was adequate	95%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Time of the meeting was convenient for me	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
Day of the week of the meeting was convenient for me	95%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Purpose of the meeting was made clear to me	90%	10%	0%	0%	0%
Information presented at the meeting was useful to me	80%	20%	0%	0%	0%
Information was presented in a clear and understandable manner	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
I felt my contributions were respected	95%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Facilitator at my table did a good job	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Materials used in the meeting were clear and understandable	80%	15%	5%	0%	0%
Meeting met my expectations	79%	21%	0%	0%	0%

## Stakeholder Consultation Process

In addition to the public visioning workshop, stakeholder consultation interviews were conducted by OCOG. Transit providers, bike and pedestrian advocates, and private transportation providers were invited, as well as businesses involved in freight logistics and goods movement. In addition, chambers of commerce, real estate, and housing development representatives were also contacted. The stakeholder consultation interviews were conducted in January and February, 2015. The various agencies and groups consulted during this process are listed as follows:

- Monroe Transit
- Chamber of Commerce - Monroe
- Ouachita Council on Aging
- West Monroe Council on Aging
- City of Monroe Planning Department
- LADOTD
- City of West Monroe
- City of Monroe Traffic Engineering Department
- Monroe Advocates for Safe Streets
- Louisiana State Police

## Current State of the Transportation System

The following section summarizes stakeholder comments regarding the current state of the transportation system in the Monroe Urbanized Area, grouped into the following major categories:

- Roadways
- Congestion
- Safety
- Mobility
- Public Transportation
- Bicycle and Pedestrian
- Freight

### Roadways

Several roadways were identified by stakeholders as being in need of widening or reconstruction to accommodate current and future traffic conditions, specifically:

- US Hwy 80, through both Monroe and West Monroe, capacity widening from Well Road to LA 546 in Cheniere, LA
- US Hwy 165 needs to be widened in both directions. There are currently two projects in various stages of completion on US 165 but additional capacity is needed from Richwood to north of Monroe
- I-20 widening through the length of the parish
- Downing Pines overpass needs to be widened from a two lane roadway to four lanes

However, with limited funding and aging infrastructure, preserving and maintaining current roadway capacity is the top priority of both the City of Monroe and LADOTD. Funding for the maintenance of existing roadways was identified by several stakeholders as an issue.

### Congestion

Roadway congestion was cited as a major transportation concern, and particular attention should be focused on the following roadways:

- US Hwy 165 was described as being over capacity at all times due to growth in Sterlington, the CenturyLink expansion, and school traffic. Similarly, the US Hwy 165 Business Connector has congestion issues.
- A fourth bridge across the Ouachita River to the north of Monroe and West Monroe is in stage 1 of development. Completion would improve access between Monroe and West Monroe. When one or more of the bridges is inaccessible, traffic becomes choked.
- I-20 is constantly congested and is not designed to accommodate current commuter traffic. Problem areas along I-20 include Garrett Road, where an overpass is needed; the Thomas Road, and US Hwy 165 interchanges, where improvements and increased capacity are needed; and the Well Road exit, which frequently backs up on to the interstate during increased traffic flows.
- 18th street (state route) is starting to have congestion and needs improvements, especially where a new Walmart neighborhood store is being located.
- Millhaven Rd. (state route) runs parallel to KCS – new community college road – and needs to be expanded.
- Long queues near Ouachita High School make crossing US Hwy 80 difficult.
- Additionally, stakeholders mentioned the need to better coordinate school siting with transportation planning in order to reduce school-related congestion on adjacent roadways.

### Safety and Security

Safety on Ouachita Parish's roadways is among the top concerns of area residents. To increase safety on Ouachita Parish roadways, improvements at intersections with high crash volumes will take precedence, particularly at locations with a high number of bike or pedestrian crashes. Nine of the ten high crash areas identified in Ouachita parish are located at intersections. Additionally, a number of roadway segments were specifically mentioned as safety deficient, including:

- On US Hwy 80 near Ouachita High School, it is difficult to get to the other side of the roadway.
- Area residents have trouble getting in and out of their neighborhoods off of Thomas Road.
- Arkansas Road is awaiting DOTD safety money to build roundabouts at difficult intersections.
- A high number of crashes involving a pedestrian along Desiard Street.

Additionally, a high number of fatalities occur in rural areas, when people who are not wearing their seatbelts are ejected from their vehicles, so law enforcement has focused on educational programs and seatbelt enforcement in these areas.

Crash incidents in Ouachita Parish occur most frequently on Mondays and Fridays, and closely correlate with peak traffic periods from 7 AM - 9 AM and 3 PM - 6 PM, suggesting congestion is a major safety issue on area roadways.

Roundabouts, public outreach/ education, and additional funding were identified as potential solutions to identified safety and security issues.

The lack of lighting at transit stops and along these major roadways was also cited as a security concern. To address this, Monroe Transit has hired a security team, and has previously installed cameras on buses and at bus stops. Furthermore, new lighting is scheduled to be installed in transit parking lots.

### Mobility

Several stakeholders mentioned roadway connections over the Ouachita River between Monroe and West Monroe as a problem, as traffic tends to bottleneck at these bridges, especially if any existing bridge is non accessible. Adding a fourth bridge to the north of Monroe/West Monroe is in stage one of development, having been discussed for years.

Stakeholders are working to increase the amount of bike and pedestrian facilities and create connections and continuity between them throughout the area in order to create a multi-modal transportation system.

### Public Transportation

Monroe Transit is concerned about their aging transit fleet, where about half of their rolling stock is past its useful life, as defined by the Federal Transit

Administration (FTA). Funding for new buses is not adequate, and Monroe Transit only has enough money for one new bus. Four additional paratransit buses will be added to the fleet, but will only replace three paratransit buses which will be phased out. This aging bus fleet struggles to keep cool in the heat of summer, making riding uncomfortable and undesirable to riders.

Service to West Monroe is desired, but has faced opposition. Monroe Transit is focused on making their service more efficient and safer, because expansion of transit service is prohibitive given budget constraints.



The Monroe Council on Aging (COA) expressed concern over their limited ability to provide on-demand and scheduled paratransit service to riders in rural areas. The Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) also provides vans for doctor visits and dialysis appointments, but they do not have the appropriate equipment to accommodate certain wheelchair bound riders. Monroe Transit offers an on-demand bus service. However, users must



provide a letter from the doctor in order to access the services, and it often takes upwards of one month to get approved.

In order to improve paratransit service, the COA hopes to expand coordination efforts with Monroe Transit, DHH, and other providers, and develop tools to match riders with paratransit services. COA presently contracts with the Monroe Housing Authority to provide transit services, but would like to find a way to contract with area nursing homes as well. Increased funding was identified as an important tool for improving their services.

### Bicycle and Pedestrian

The Monroe Advocates for Safe Streets (MASS) and other stakeholders have worked with local governments to rapidly increase bike and pedestrian infrastructure throughout Ouachita Parish since the last MTP update. The Monroe urbanized area now has a total of six bike routes, and is working to increase the number of shared roads with signage and bike racks throughout the area. Of the six bike routes, some serve primarily recreational purposes, while others provide access to specific destinations. MASS is focused on providing additional destination routes to encourage bicycling as an alternative to travel by motor vehicle. Additional projects are in various stages of planning and development, such as the Kansas Lane-Garrett Road Regional Multi-modal Connector, with the objective being to link local bike facilities with state bike routes.

Stakeholders discussed missed opportunities in the past to incorporate bicycle and pedestrian facilities during new roadway construction or when improvements have been made to existing facilities, and stressed the need to include alternative means of transportation into new roadway projects.

Stakeholders suggested street sweeping to clear facilities of debris would help improve riding conditions, and that the area lacked connectivity and access to educational institutions. The Rails to Trails Program was mentioned as an opportunity for increasing bicycle and pedestrian options. Connectivity between modes was discussed as an important consideration. Stakeholders noted that MTS has bike racks on all but one bus, but

emphasized the need to expand connectivity between modes.

### Freight

Congestion of both rail and truck freight moving into and out of Greater Ouachita Port is a concern with area stakeholders. Roadways into and out of the container-only port need improvements if they are to handle increased freight traffic – particularly the 5<sup>th</sup> Street exit from I-20. Similarly, the Kansas City Southern (KCS) rail line connecting to the port needs to be upgraded. The port and locks on the river are also only open 20 hours a day. Stakeholders suggested making the waterway accessible at all times would open the port to more shippers.

### Future Growth

Stakeholders identified several areas where development or redevelopment is anticipated within the study area. Commercial development is expected to occur along I-20 in the eastern section of Ouachita Parish up to and including the Garrett Road area. East of Garrett Road, new development is anticipated to be primarily industrial or warehousing.

The area east of the Ouachita River and south of I-20 between Lee Avenue and Grand Street may experience gentrification and infill development in the future, but needs a facelift and improved infrastructure in order to change public perception about the area. Improvement to water quality and infrastructure expansion of the riverfront may also drive commercial and residential infill growth. Sterlington, north of Monroe, is also growing, which, along with growth at CenturyLink, will increase congestion on US Hwy 165, which is already over capacity.

## Establishment of Vision and Goals

Using the detailed goals and objectives developed during the 2035 MTP update process as a base, the study team drew from all the input processes listed above to develop the following vision, goals, and objectives for the MTP planning process.

## Vision Statement

“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.”

## Goals of the MTP Process

The goals established for the 2035 MTP were reviewed against the information gathered in the Visioning Meetings held in January 2015 and still captured the public's wishes. The goals were presented to the Policy Committee in March, 2015. Members of the committee were asked if these goals still captured the community's vision, and members agreed that they were still valid. Those goals are now the official goals of the Monroe Urbanized Area 2040 MTP Update, and are as follows:

- 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.

## Creating Measures of Effectiveness

Establishing the vision and goals for the MTP planning process is meaningless unless a method is put in place to evaluate whether the chosen transportation improvements meet the community's goals.

## Project Scoring Criteria

A final criteria ranking was chosen for the evaluation of the transportation system, which complies not only with federal and state mandates, but also includes local values based on public outreach and stakeholder consultation. Table 2-3 shows this final ranking of the criteria, which combined group and individual scores. The column on the right displays the ranking assigned to each criteria during the previous (2035) MTP for comparison.

**Table 2-3: Final Criteria Ranking**

Criteria	Final Rank	2035 MTP Rank
Improve Safety	1 (Tied)	3
Reduce Congestion	1 (Tied)	2
Promote Efficiency	3	9
Improve Quality of Life	4	1
Support Economic Goals	5	4
Increase Connections	6	6
Improve Access	7 (Tied)	5
Connect Modes of Travel	7 (Tied)	10
Preserve Right-of-Ways	9	13
Conserve Energy	10 (Tied)	7
Increase Multi-modal Options	10 (Tied)	12
Protect Environment	12 (Tied)	8
Support Land Use Goals	12 (Tied)	11
Improve Security	14	14

While the community has not seen a change in vision significant enough to warrant creation of new goals for the MTP, the results of the visioning exercise shows some of the community's priorities about evaluation criteria have shifted. Notably, there is a stronger emphasis on maximizing the potential of the existing transportation system, as seen in the jump from 9th place to 3rd place for the “Promote Efficiency” criterion.

Based on these criteria, the study team created a set of weighted performance measures that were used to assess how well the community's vision and goals are being met by the proposed transportation improvements included in the 2040 MTP.