Chapter 2 — Introduction and Vision

Introduction

To plan for the future of the SUATS region, we must understand a series of fundamental relationships—how the past influences the present, how land use interacts with transportation, and how collective vision becomes a real, desirable future. This financially constrained transportation plan recognizes the need to embrace our history as we build for our future. The *2030 SUATS Long-Range Transportation Plan* is the result a multi-level partnership that brought local, state, and federal policy-makers to the table with local residents, business owners, and stakeholders.

What is an LRTP and Why Update?

At its core, a long-range transportation plan (LRTP) identifies ways a region expects to invest resources to enhance its transportation system. The underlying principles and recommended actions of an LRTP reflect choices made by the public and private sectors regarding transportation investments, land use decisions, and infrastructure improvements. A typical LRTP consists of two parts—a description of the vision for the region and a detailed list of policies, operational strategies, and projects to achieve the vision. The LRTP must include a variety of actions that lead to "the development of an integrated intermodal transportation system that facilitates the efficient movement of people and goods".[1]

These tasks are accomplished within the context of policy review and public involvement to produce an intermodal transportation system that respects an area's history and heritage while providing true choice to all users. Federal regulations require the region's LRTP be updated every 5 years to reflect changing needs and priorities. This plan updates the existing Sumter Area Transportation Study Metropolitan Planning Organization (SUATS MPO) LRTP last updated January 2005.

[1] (23 CFR450C, Sec.450.322)

The federal government requires a comprehensive, cooperative, and continuing process for initiatives to be eligible for federal transportation funding. To that end, several stakeholders had a hand in this updated plan, including:

- SUATS MPO
- City and County of Sumter
- Various local, regional, state, and federal agencies, including the Santee Wateree Regional Transit Authority, the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), the Federal Transit Authority (FTA), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Figure 2.1 illustrates the SUATS study area.

Growth and Changing Transportation Trends

The Sumter area's changing needs and priorities are the result of continued growth and changing transportation trends. The South Carolina Office of Research and Statistics, Health and Demographics Division estimates Sumter County will add nearly a quarter of its 2000 population by 2030, a rate of 3 to 4% every five years. This rate is slightly lower than the state average.

But the slower pace does not account for increased personnel transferring to Shaw Air Force Base following the 2005 round of military base closures and realignments. In its most recent recommendation, the Department of Defense made a commitment to the long-term future of Shaw AFB in 2005 when it approved through the BRAC process the addition of more than 800 military and civilian employees. A potential of several thousand new residents is expected when including the employees' families.

Additional growth provides residents with new cultural, recreational, and economic opportunities but creates renewed challenges for preserving the area's high quality of life. These challenges include increased traffic congestion and pollution as well as loss of open space and evolving commuting patterns. Presently, a large percentage of Sumter County residents stay within the county for work. In fact, with 84.2% of its workers residing in the county, Sumter ranks sixth in the state behind the larger Horry, Charleston, and Greenville Counties as shown in **Table 2.1**.

Table 2.1 – Percent of Work Trips Beginning and Ending in Same County

Jurisdiction	Work Trips Beginning in Jurisdiction	Work Trips Ending in Jurisdiction	Percent
Beaufort Co.	52,634	55,790	94.3%
Horry Co.	86,744	95,732	90.6%
Charleston Co.	128,992	143,921	89.6%
Greenville Co.	161,906	185,461	87.3%
Greenwood Co.	25,587	29,747	86.0%
Sumter Co.	37,339	44,325	84.2%
State Total	1,319,645	1,822,969	72.4%

Source: Missouri Census Data Center

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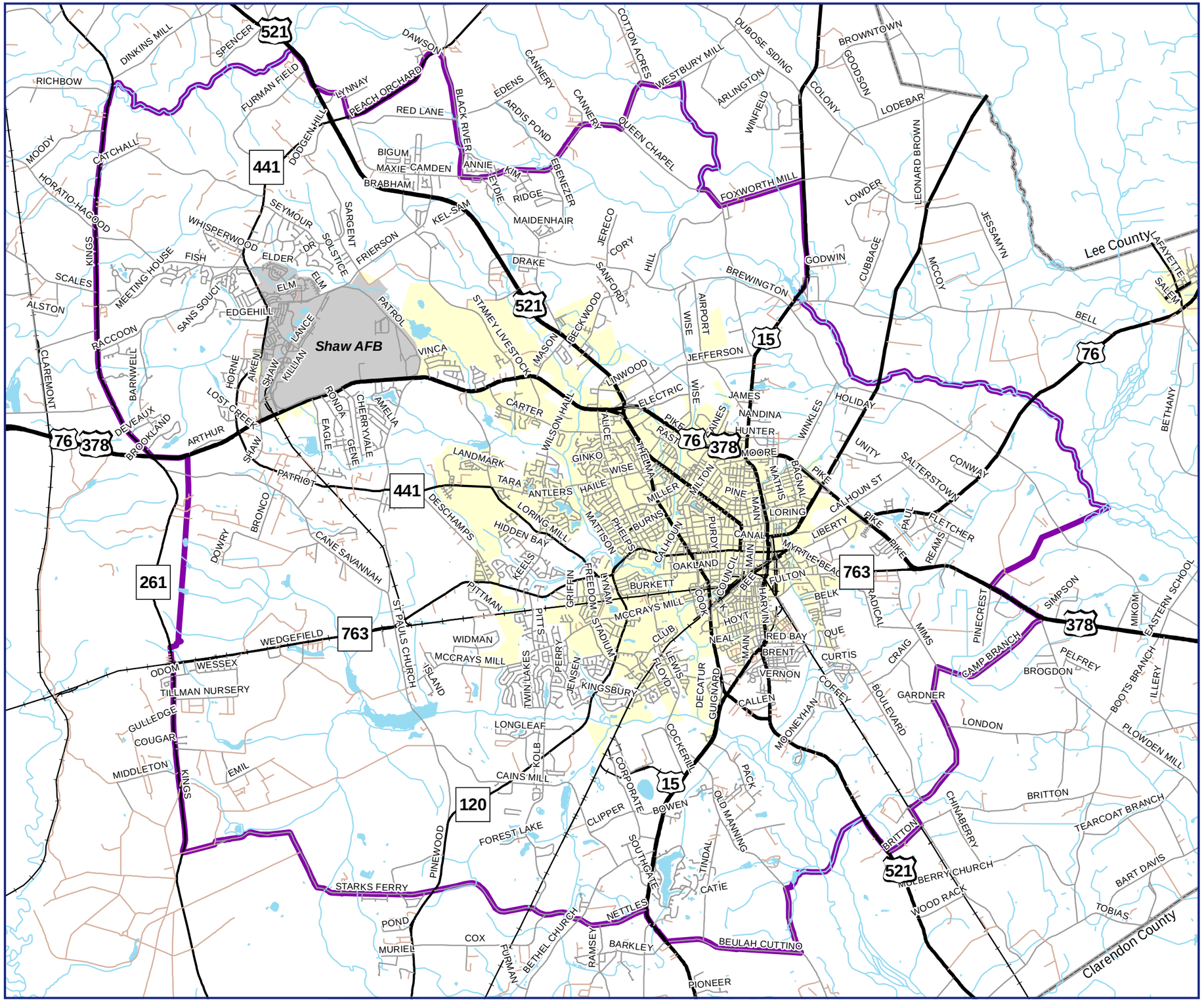
Figure 2.1

Study Area



Legend

- SUATS Study Area Boundary
- County Boundary
- City Limits
- Shaw Air Force Base
- Bodies of Water
- US Highway
- SC Highway
- Street
- Dirt Road
- Railroad

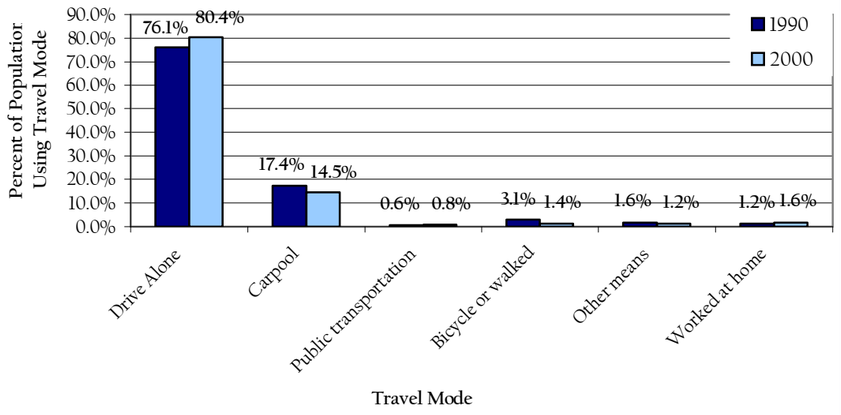
September 2007

0 0.75 1.5 Miles

Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc.

A more centralized employment base places more pressure on local officials to establish a transportation system that balances the economic needs of the region. In Sumter's case, the central employment base does little to discourage local residents from using personal transportation to get to work. As shown in **Figure 2.2**, the share of commuters choosing to drive alone to work increased from 76.1% to 80.4% between 1990 and 2000. Public transportation users increased by only 0.2% and those biking or walking to work decreased from 3.1% to 1.4%.

Figure 2.2 Mode of Travel to Work



The increased reliance on driving alone to work burdens the transportation system. The average travel time to work for Sumter County workers remains below South Carolina and national averages, but the percent change from 1990 to 2000 outpaces both averages. Travel times increased by 24.7% (from 17.2 minutes to 21.5 minutes) for Sumter County but only 14.1% and 18.8% for the nation and state, respectively. Meanwhile, one out of nine households in Sumter does not have access to a vehicle.

Even with the difficulties placed on some households, the frequency and length of trips continue to increase throughout the Sumter area. A multimodal transportation system providing true choice to all users can reduce the burden. The SUATS LRTP accounts for growth in population and traffic as well as shifting travel patterns. The plan balances the region's quality of life with the need to effectively and efficiently move goods and people to a variety of local, regional, and national locations.

To ensure the plan becomes a working document, projects identified as highest priority will move into the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), a multi-year, intermodal program of prioritized transportation initiatives. The TIP is updated annually for a three-year period, and projects not listed in the TIP are ineligible for FHWA and FTA funds.

Public Outreach

Transportation planning is a cooperative process led by the region's MPO and involving key stakeholders and the general public. The public involvement process offers a diversity of opinions from residents, business community, civic groups, and environmental groups. In particular, the plan must represent the viewpoints of traditionally underserved groups such as the minority, low income, and Hispanic communities. At the start of the update, the project team developed a public involvement plan that was proactive, continuous, and collaborative. Public outreach occurred through a variety of small- and large-group meetings and through an assortment of media.

Transportation Plan Advisory Group

The Transportation Plan Advisory Group (TPAG) was appointed as a representative group of the citizen base of Sumter to ensure the final plan incorporated several viewpoints and concerns. Beginning with a kick-off meeting June 7, 2006, the TPAG met regularly to fulfill its mission of examining the existing deficiencies and potential solutions for bicycling, walking, driving, transit, and freight, as well as the relationship between transportation and land use to help shape the plan. The group's duties included serving as a sounding board for project team ideas, participating in visioning and mapping exercises, providing feedback to the project team, and spearheading the promotion of other public involvement efforts.

SUATS
Long-Range Transportation Plan

At its first meeting, the TPAG discussed general issues and specific concerns to be addressed throughout the planning process. These issues included current influences on commuting patterns and freight movement, maintaining the small town, family-oriented feel of the area, promoting economic development through transportation infrastructure decision, and identifying and improving specific problem corridors. The group also mentioned the need for improving connectivity and options for non-automotive transportation.

Concurrent with their first meeting, the TPAG convened for a Sales Tax Work Session to discuss and identify potential projects to be included in the November 2006 Sales Tax Referendum. The session included an overview discussion of the projected revenue and impacts if approved as well as a timeline and general guidance for the selection of projects worthy of funding.

Public Workshops

Citizens understand the strengths and weaknesses of the region's transportation system and are affected by transportation decision on a very personal level. To tap into the special knowledge of the citizens of Sumter, the project team assisted by the TPAG led a series of two public workshops.

The first public workshop took place August 10, 2006 at Swan Lake/Iris Gardens Visitor Center. The evening began with an overview presentation during which the project team described the planning process and introduced background data. Following the presentation the citizens, business owners, and local officials in attendance gathered in small groups around maps to discuss the opportunities and needs of the Sumter region. The comments spanned all the elements of the long-range transportation plan. Specific comments from the small groups included:

Roadway Element

- Dangerous/congested intersections include US 76/378 and US 15; US 76/378 and US 521; US 521 and US 15
- Congestion on SC 441 at Shaw AFB gates
- Protect the mobility of the US 76/378 corridor all the way to Columbia

Bicycle and Pedestrian

- Need improved maintenance to plants and trees that infringe on sidewalks
- Need better school connectivity
- Need connections to recreation and shopping areas
- Need improved road maintenance/street sweeping
- Need more shoulders or other on-road bicycle facilities
- Need to make connections between existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Need traffic calming and bicycle/pedestrian safety provisions at key intersections

Freight and Aviation

- Need better way to accommodate truck traffic between US 378 east of town and US 521 to the south
- Cane Savannah/St. Pauls Church - truck route being used on two lane road not designed/designated for such use – need to pave shoulders/fix ditches and design to accommodate WB-50

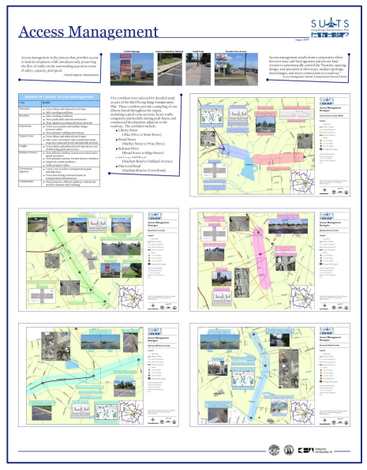
Transit

- Need improved public information (marketing materials, etc.)
- Need increased funding (dedicated local funding source)
- Need to increase route frequency, expand routes to new/existing employment centers, and extend hours to Shaw AFB
- Need improved image of transit
- Need to enhance stops and add sidewalks

The comments received during the first workshop informed the development of recommended facilities and policies. Prior to submitting a draft plan, the project team again assembled with the public to discuss progress and recommendations. The second workshop occurred August 29, 2007 at the Sumter City Center.

The second round of public workshops included two 2-hour session during which the public joined the project team, advisory committee, and local officials to review the process and results of the planning process. The sessions began with a presentation that highlighted comments from the various public outreach vehicles, discussed goals and guiding principles, explained key recommendations, and revealed financial and implementation strategies.

Following the presentation, participants joined project team leaders in an open house format to discuss specific recommendations in a more intimate setting. The project team set up four stations to present information and receive feedback on the recommendations. These stations included: Roadways, Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities, Transit and Freight Strategies, and Land Use Scenario Planning. Many comments validated the multi-modal recommendations and acknowledged the need to develop alternative funding sources for roadway, bicycle/pedestrian, and transit projects. Discussion also centered on improving the functionality of US 76/378 Bypass, increasing the use of bike lanes, and embracing walkability.



By the time the draft plan was completed, the SUATS community had devised a shared vision for their area and multiple ways to fulfill it. The study findings were communicated by the project team at the second public workshops, when the community provided feedback on the findings and recommendations.

Stakeholder Interviews

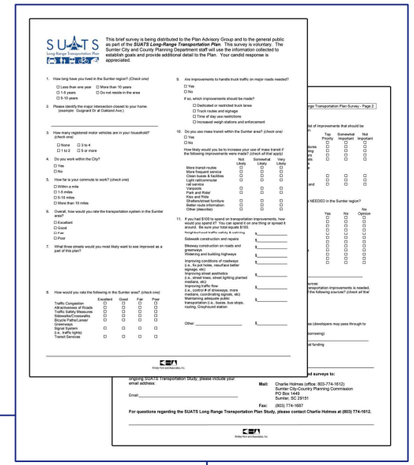
Information garnered through stakeholder interviews supplemented the information provided by the TPAG and the results of the public workshops. Early in the public outreach process, the project team identified several key stakeholders, including regional business leaders, industry representatives, transit operators, and elected officials. The project team met with representatives the same day as Public Workshop #1 to gain a better perspective of local needs and desires.

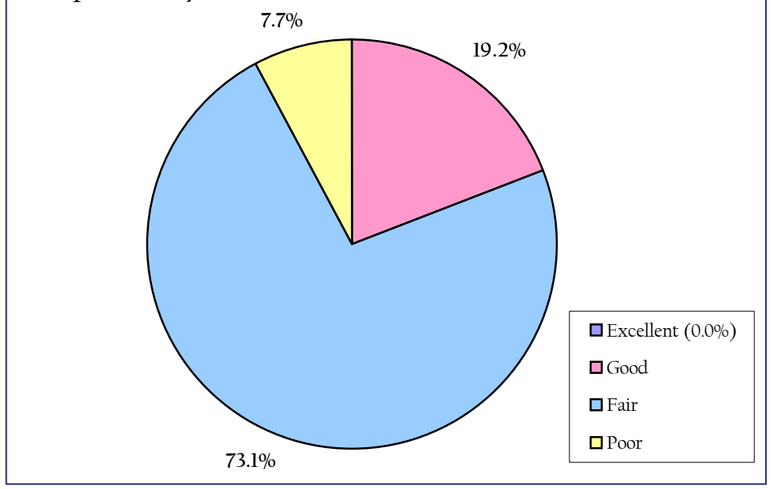
Public Survey

A public survey distributed to TPAG members and the general public provided the project team information on a variety of topics. To ensure diversity in responses, the survey was distributed at the first public workshop and early committee meetings. For individuals unable to attend meetings, the survey was distributed at the public workshop, circulated at group meetings, and made available at city offices. The 18-question survey asked a variety of questions on all aspects of the transportation network.

In general, the surveys reaffirmed the information gathered through other public outreach channels. The survey reiterated the features that make Sumter an attractive place to live, work, and relax. Responses to the survey indicated that the small town feel with big city amenities, the people, and the local/climate are all reasons to cherish Sumter. On the other hand, traffic and crime were identified as dislikes in the region.

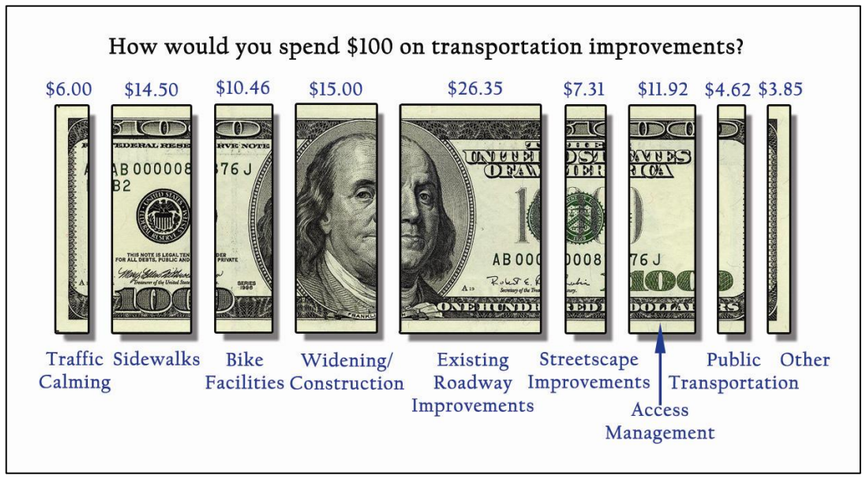
An important questions from survey asked participants to rate the transportation system. The response, as shown in the pie chart, indicates room for improvements. No survey rated the transportation "excellent" and more than 92% rated the transportation system as "fair" or "poor". Many options exist to act upon this room for improvement.





SUATS
Long-Range Transportation Plan

Another question asked participants to divide $100 among a series of transportation improvements. They could choose to spend all the money on one category or distribute it among several. As shown in the diagram below, most money was allocated to existing roadway improvements. However, the combined value placed on pedestrian and bicycle facilities is nearly a quarter of all funds. More information from the surveys is presented in the appropriate element.



Previous Planning Efforts

To enhance the public involvement efforts specific to the *SUATS Long-Range Transportation Plan*, the project team considered the involvement from other recent planning activities. The Sumter Community Vision, Downtown Revitalization initiative, Sumter Demographics and Psychographics Study, Retiree Recruiting, and transit plans provided valuable insight into the public's vision for Sumter.

Success in public engagement is measured not only in plan adoption but also in rapid implementation of projects identified as high-priority. The vision and objectives of the *SUATS Long-Range Transportation Plan* provide the foundation for project identification.

Vision

The vision for the SUATS Long-Range Transportation Plan was developed based on the input received from the TPAG and the public. The vision statement is as follows:

> Sumter area citizens envision a growing community that attracts "new economy" as well as residents that desire higher quality lifestyles linked to a safe, efficient, and environmentally compatible transportation system that provides convenient choices for accessing destinations throughout the Sumter Urban Area.

Goals and Objectives

After the vision for the plan was established, the next step was to develop a set of goals and objectives that would serve as a guide for shaping the remainder of the plan. The goals and objectives that follow balance the vision with the results of the public involvement process. These goals and objectives guided the development of the SUATS Long-Range Transportation Plan.

- **Create a system of interconnected streets** – improve mobility and distribute traffic efficiently and appropriately by purpose and function
- **Develop a plan that maximizes benefits to the transportation system while minimizing costs involved** – improve existing roads and corridors and implement creative strategies to better manage congestion
- **Provide a safe transportation system for all users** – develop safety projects to reduce crashes at high-collision intersections and provide better facilities for pedestrian and bicyclists
- **Encourage streetscape and "built-in" traffic calming in roadway designs** – develop street design standards that cater to more than the vehicle by providing provisions for bicyclists and walkers and incorporate pedestrian-friendly elements such as street trees and pedestrian level lighting
- **Develop a plan compatible with land use** – corridor-based planning that balances the transportation facilities and improvements with the function and the land uses that the corridor is trying to serve

- **Recognize the effect growth patterns have on the transportation system and vice versa** – develop strategies to effectively encourage connectivity while discouraging inefficient sprawl development
- **Promote a pedestrian-friendly environment** – fill in gaps and improve interconnection in the sidewalk system
- **Support more bike lanes and trails** – provide better connections to parks and community activity centers
- **Improve freight mobility and downtown access** – to and from US 378 and US 521, including gateway features
- **Provide viable transportation alternatives to decrease dependence on the automobile, in turn decreasing the demand on the existing transportation system** – provide a more comprehensive transit system that encourages more riders through attractive and convenient amenities
- **Minimize environmental impacts of the transportation system** – utilize planning tools to preserve areas along streambeds and restore and maintain air quality status for the SUATS area

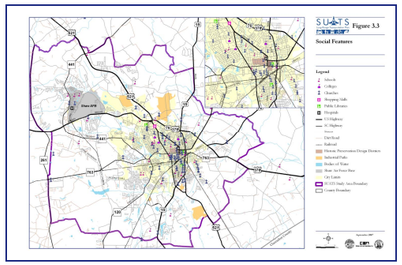
Elements of a Transportation Plan

Guiding the development, approval, and implementation of the *SUATS Long-Range Transportation Plan* are eight broad areas outlined by the federal government in recent legislation. These planning factors are addressed throughout this plan and are specifically discussed in subsequent sections. Local officials must consider how projects and transportation initiatives address the following areas:

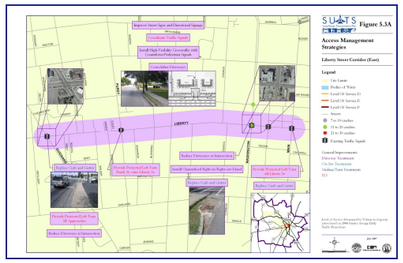
- Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency
- Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users
- Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized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

This plan serves as a tool and guide for decision-makers in the implementation of the region's transportation system. The plan represents the collective vision of a safe, multimodal, and interconnected transportation system that supports continued economic development without comprising the natural, historic, and social resources vital to the region's sustainability. Elements of the plan include:

Social and Environmental Screening



Roadway Element



Bicycle and Pedestrian Element

Transit Element

Freight and Aviation Element

Scenario Planning

The *Long-Range Transportation Plan* concludes with two critical chapters. The **Financial Plan** investigates potential funding sources and revenues and identifies probable costs for the recommendations in order to produce a fiscally-constrained. The **Implementation Plan** provides a roadmap for design and construction of proposed projects.