

Action Plans for Routes of Regional Significance: A Tool for Growth Management

William R. Loudon and Joseph A. Story
DKS Associates

Abstract

Transportation sales tax measures in Contra Costa County have included an innovative Growth Management Program (GMP) that encourages local jurisdictions to participate in a cooperative, multi-jurisdictional planning process, and among other things, establish flexible, multimodal transportation service standards for “Routes of Regional Significance.” As part of cooperative planning process envisioned under recent sales tax measures, “Action Plans for Routes of Regional Significance” are to be developed by subarea Regional Transportation Planning Committees (RTPC) with input from the local jurisdictions. The Action Plans are designed to give local jurisdictions an opportunity to cooperatively establish goals, objectives, and actions to mitigate the cumulative impacts of growth. The third round of Actions Plans has recently been completed for the five regional planning areas within the county. The process has resulted in the initiation of numerous multi-modal projects and programs to address the impacts of growth within the planning areas and multi-jurisdictional development fee programs to provide supplemental funding for the projects and programs generated by the Action Plans. More importantly, the adopted Action Plans establish a framework for the analysis of future General Plan Amendments to determine, through a cooperative planning process, whether proposed land use changes support the Action Plan objectives.

The Action Plan Concept

In 1988, Contra Costa County voters approved Measure C, a one-half percent local sales tax that generated \$1 billion (2008 dollars) in funding for transportation projects and programs over 20 years. Measure C also created the Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA), with a board of 11 elected officials and 3 ex-officio members to guide the expenditure of the sales tax proceeds in accordance with the voter-approved expenditure plan. Recently, Measure J was passed by the voters, extending the sales tax for 25 years through 2034, and generating an additional \$2 billion (2008 dollars).

Both Measure C and J include an innovative Growth Management Program (GMP) that encourages local jurisdictions to participate in a cooperative, multi-jurisdictional planning process, and among other things, establish flexible traffic service standards for Regional Routes. The CCTA allocates 18 percent of the sales tax revenue it receives to local jurisdictions that are found to be in compliance with the Growth Management Program. Under Measure J, an additional 5 percent of total sales-tax revenues are available to local jurisdictions for Transportation for Livable Communities (TLC) projects, subject also to GMP compliance.

As part of the cooperative planning process envisioned under Measure C/J, adopted “Action Plans for Routes of Regional Significance” are required by the five Regional Transportation Planning Committees (RTPCs) with input from the local jurisdictions who are represented on the

RTPCs. Four of the five RTPCs are totally within Contra Costa County. A fifth RTPC, known as the Tri-Valley RTPC, represents a subarea that spans both Contra Costa and Alameda Counties with roughly half of the area in both; the Tri-Valley Action Plan process involves collaborative planning and decision-making between both local jurisdictions and counties.

The overall objective of the Action Plans is to give local jurisdictions an opportunity to cooperatively set goals, objectives, and actions to mitigate the cumulative impacts of growth on the regional transportation system. Local jurisdictions must participate in the development of the Action Plans, and also be willing to implement the actions, programs, projects, and measures identified within the Plans to be found in compliance with the CCTA's GMP and be eligible for some project funding.

Elements of an Action Plan include the following:

1. Statements of Vision, Goals and Policies
2. Routes of Regional Significance
3. Multimodal Transportation Service Objectives
4. Actions
5. Subregional Transportation Mitigation Program
6. Development Review Procedures

A description of each is provided in the remaining section so this paper.

Statements of Vision, Goals and Policies

The statements of vision, goals and policies for each Action Plan served as a blueprint to guide all other decision making related to the Action plan. The development of statements generally began with a review of the General Plans of the communities in the RTPC and a preliminary assessment of forecasted growth in the subarea. Statements were then generated to consistent with the statements of the local communities but that would help the RTPC address issues related to growth. Sample statements included the following from the Tri-Valley Action Plan:

1. Integrate transportation planning with planning for air quality, community character and other environmental factors.
2. Support corridor management programs to make the most efficient, effective and safe use of existing facilities and services.
3. Consider both the need for vehicular mobility and congestion reduction, and such livability concepts as walkability, bicycle access and community character.
4. Maintain and actively pursue expanded transit, ridesharing and non-motorized mode options and trip reduction programs to increase accessibility, to increase the transit share of travel and to increase average vehicle occupancy.
5. Encourage through-trips and interregional travel to stay on interregional routes and discourage diversion of these trips to intraregional routes as a mechanism for ensuring intraregional mobility.

Two of the RTPC adopted formally policy statements related “gateway capacity.” These policies stated that the existing capacity of Routes of Regional Significance that connected the subarea to other subareas would be maintained to limit growth of traffic into the subarea in the future. These two RTPCs represented subareas with major facilities that served through traffic from outlying high-growth residential areas and major employment centers.

Routes of Regional Significance

Routes of Regional Significance are roadways considered to be important from a regional perspective, providing regional mobility and connecting multiple jurisdictions, and are specified in each Action Plan. For each roadway, the RTPCs must establish quantifiable performance measures in the Action Plan. The Implementation Guide developed by the Contra Costa Transportation Authority for the development of Action Plans provides the following criteria for identifying Routes of Regional Significance¹:

1. Connects two or more subareas;
2. Crosses county boundaries;
3. Carries a significant amount of through traffic; or
4. Provides access to a regional highway or transit facility (e.g. A BART station or freeway interchange).

Roadways that meet one or more of these criteria may be designated as Regional Routes. The five RTPCs took very different views of what should be considered a Route of Regional Significance, largely based on the perceived need for growth control mechanisms between local jurisdictions. The Actions Plans for the five RTPCs had as few as three Routes of Regional Significance and as many as thirty-one. All freeways were considered Routes of Regional Significance as were all other state highways, but the designation of other principal arterials varied from area to area.

Multimodal Transportation Service Objectives

The specified term of quantifiable performance measures in the Action Plan are known as Multimodal Transportation Service Objectives (MTSOs). The MTSOs represent quantifiable performance measures that are to be maintained or met within a specific timeframe. They provide a mechanism for the jurisdictions within the RTPC to define the quality of service that is desired on their Routes of Regional Significance. Examples of MTSO from the five Action Plans are the following:

Peak Hour Travel Speed - This measure sets a minimum average peak hour speed for the AM and PM peak hours.

Delay Index - This measure compares the time required to travel between two points during the peak hour to the time required during non-congested, off-peak hours.

Duration of Congestion - This measure is expressed in terms of hours of congestion per day.

Intersection Levels of Service - This is a measure of the amount of delay that results from volume on a particular facility.

Maximum Wait times for Drivers on Side Street – This measure was adopted by one jurisdiction to make sure that there was a balance between local traffic and the traffic on the routes of Regional Significance.

Maximum Load Factor for Peak Period BART Service – This measure is the ratio of peak period passengers on rapid transit system serving the corridor to the seat capacity of the service.

MTSOs can also represent targets for system performance such as transit ridership, mode shares, or average vehicle occupancy. The MTSOs are to be monitored through a special data collection program every two years. In addition, the Action Plan process included a projected performance of the MTSOs in twenty-year forecasts as part of the Action Plan updates. The twenty-year forecast was developed using the adopted projected, cumulative land use forecast for each jurisdiction in the process.

Actions

Actions are the specific actions, measures, or programs that the RTPC and its jurisdictions agree to in order to achieve the MTSOs. The responsibility of carrying out the actions may be at the local jurisdiction level or at the RTPC level. Actions may involve implementing specific projects at the local level, or they may call for the RTPC to support region-wide projects that have a local impact. The jurisdictions within Contra Costa County are required to carry out these actions in order to be found in compliance with the Measure C/J GMP.

The actions adopted by the five RTPC included very specific capacity improvements to address existing or future bottlenecks, but also included programs that support traffic management or trip reduction through ridesharing or transit use. Some of the programmatic actions in the Lamorinda Action plan included the following:

1. Support and seek additional funding for expanding transit service, including service between Lamorinda BART stations and adjacent communities.
2. Support and seek funding for augmentation and expansion of school bus service in Lamorinda
3. Support expansion of BART seat capacity through the corridor and parking capacity east of Lamorinda
4. Develop a Lamorinda Transit Plan to identify future community transit needs and to address the changing needs of the senior population
5. Encourage expanded Travel Demand Management (TDM) programs to increase the use of alternative modes of transportation and increase overall vehicle occupancy.
6. Support programs and projects that encourage students to take alternative modes of transportation to school to reduce demand on the roadway and increase vehicle occupancy rates

7. Promote alternative work opportunities including employer pre-tax benefit programs, compressed work-week schedules, flex schedules and tele-work
8. Support the development of regional bicycle facilities
9. Seek funding to provide bicycle parking infrastructure at employment sites and activity centers throughout Lamorinda
10. Pursue financial incentives to implement sound growth control strategies and support strengthening of growth management policies

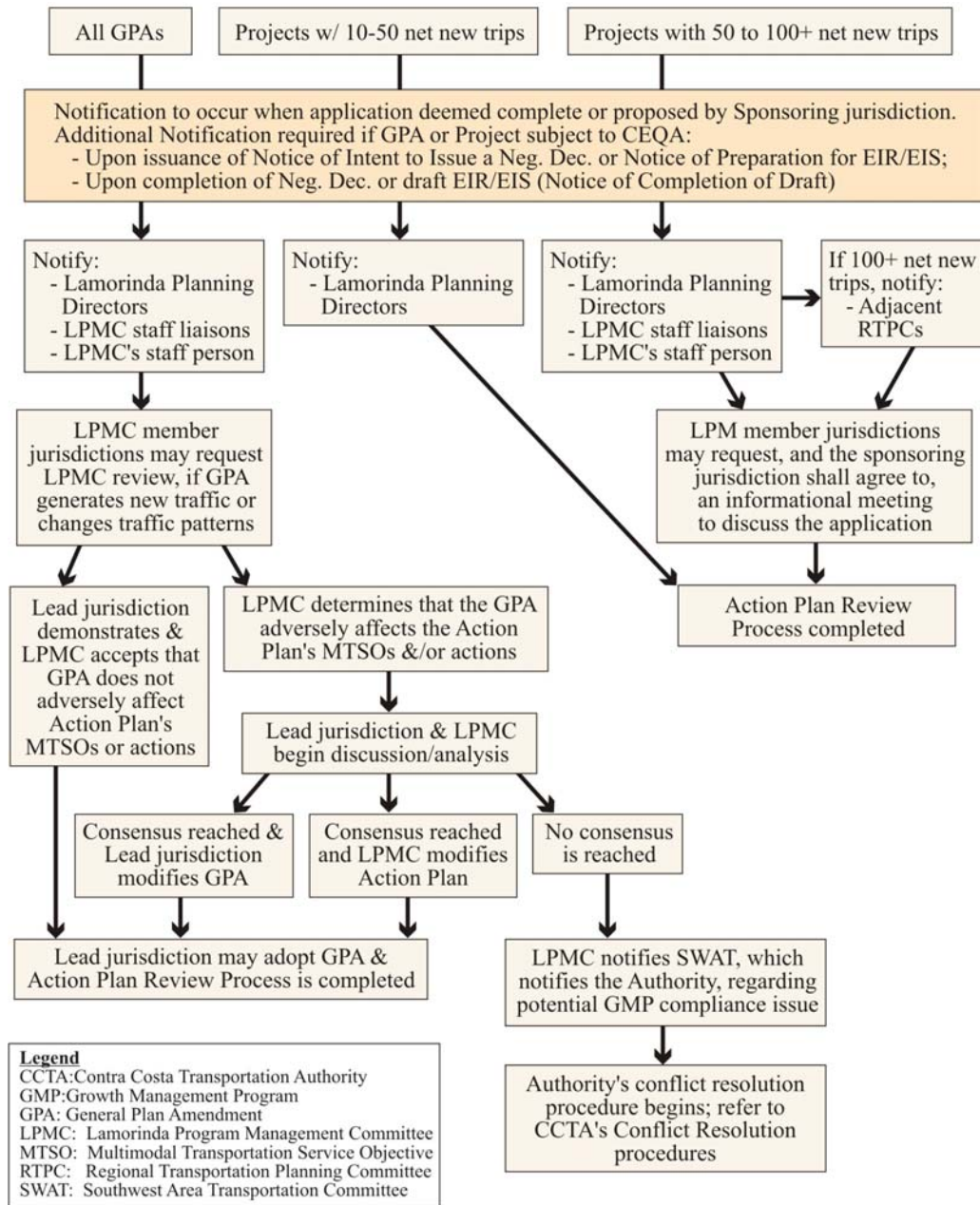
Subregional Transportation Impact Fee

The Subregional Transportation Mitigation Program is the areawide transportation fee program adopted by the RTPC to generate revenues to fund transportation improvements that are necessary to mitigate the impact of new growth. Four of the five subareas have adopted fee programs that require collection of a fee on any significant new development within the jurisdiction; the fifth has a study process that determines whether improvements and development fees are appropriate.

Development Applications Review and General Plan Amendments

Development Review Procedures are agreements about how General Plan amendments or major development projects proposed by local jurisdictions will be reviewed by the jurisdictions and RTPC to determine whether the development proposal adversely affects the ability to meet the adopted MTSO. The Development Review Procedures represent the major element of the Action Plans that gives them the potential for growth management. Each of the RTPCs was required to reach an agreement among its member jurisdictions about how proposed new developments in one jurisdiction would be reviewed by the other jurisdictions. Once review guidelines were established by an RTPC, those guidelines could also be used by the RTPC or any one of the jurisdictions within the subarea to review a development proposal by another jurisdiction outside of the subarea but within Contra Costa County. Most of the RTPCs adopted review procedures that jurisdiction with the development proposal demonstrate that the development would not result in the violation of an MTSO or worsen any that were already being exceeded. An example of one review process is illustrated in the attached diagram for the Lamorinda RTPC – the Lamorinda Program Management Committee (LPMC).

Figure 1 Development Review Process for the Lamorinda Action Plan



Current as of November 6, 2009

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

The third round of Actions Plans has recently been completed for the five regional planning areas within the county. The process has resulted in the initiation of numerous multi-modal projects and programs to address the impacts of growth within the planning areas and multi-jurisdictional development fee programs to provide supplemental funding for the projects and programs generated by the Action Plans. More importantly, the adopted Action Plans establish a

framework for the analysis of future General Plan Amendments to determine, through a cooperative planning process, whether proposed land use changes support the Action Plan objectives.

In the three rounds of Action Plans and roughly fifteen years of experience with the program a number of valuable lessons have been learned.

1. Clear statements of vision, goals and policies help to guide decision making about the other program elements. The objectives of individual member jurisdictions in an RTPC are often at odds, and unify statements of vision, goals and policies help the participating jurisdictions find appropriate compromises.
2. MTSOs must be quantifiable, measurable and capable of being forecast in a consistent way. To be effective, the MTSOs must be used to evaluate the potential impacts of development proposals and these evaluations will be done by a variety of analyst on behalf of developers and the local jurisdictions.
3. The desire for high levels of service often conflict with limited willingness to pay for transportation programs and infrastructure. In many cases the target values for MTSOs were adjusted downward by the RTPCs when the costs of meeting higher levels were realized. The Action Plans have helped the RTPC find an appropriate balance of cost and level of service.
4. Once successful implementation mechanisms (such as regional fee programs) are in place, the Action Plan process may not appear to be needed, but it remains an important way to confirm continued participation of local jurisdictions when approaching regional transportation planning challenges and visions.

Author Information

William R. Loudon is a Principal with DKS Associates and is the firm's National Transportation Planning Manager. He has over 30 years of consulting experience and significant depth of experience in regional and corridor planning. Bill has managed numerous projects that involved assisting local, regional and state agencies in the evaluation of transportation investment options in congested urban areas as well as rural areas. He managed the Lamorinda and Tri-Valley Action Plans for the Contra Costa Transportation Authority. He has also helped to develop regional transportation plans for the Seattle, San Francisco, Phoenix, Atlanta and Austin metropolitan areas and led the development of the rural corridor plans in Eastern Idaho. Bill has a bachelor's Degree in Civil Engineering from Southern Methodist University, a Master's Degree in City Planning from Harvard University and a PhD in Transportation Systems Analysis from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Address: 1000 Broadway, Suite 450 Oakland, CA 94607-4039

Phone: (510) 267-6623

E-mail: wrl@dksassociates.com

Joseph A. Story, AICP, is a Principal with DKS Associates in Oakland. He was the project manager for the updates to the Central County and East County Action Plans. He has 26 years of experience in transportation planning including travel demand forecasting, corridor studies,

transit planning and long-range transportation planning. He has a Master of City and Regional Planning from the Ohio State University.

Address: 1000 Broadway, Suite 450 Oakland, CA 94607-4039

Phone: (510) 267-6635

E-mail: jas@dksassociates.com

ⁱ Contra Costa Transportation Authority, Implementation Guide, December 1990, p. IG-10.