

Linking Conservation and Transportation Planning Workshop

November 13 and 14, 2007

summary report

prepared for

**Federal Highway Administration
North Central Texas Council of Governments**

prepared by

Cambridge Systematics, Inc.

with

NatureServe

January 2, 2008

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1.0 Introduction

This report summarizes the results of the *Linking Conservation and Transportation Planning Workshop* hosted by the North Central Texas Council of Governments and sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The workshop was held in Arlington, Texas on November 13 and 14, 2007. It is intended that the documentation of this workshop will be a valuable resource to the attendees and other state and metropolitan agencies that are endeavoring to link conservation and transportation planning.

The goals of the workshop were threefold:

1. Provide an opportunity for experts in the transportation and conservation fields in Texas to meet and begin to understand each other's goals and challenges in meeting those goals;
2. Introduce information, ideas, and facilitate dialog that will assist in the integration of transportation and conservation planning in North Central Texas, and statewide; and
3. Begin a planning process and develop a strategy to support an ongoing process that engages all agencies into a participatory mode that supports the integration of conservation and transportation planning.

Workshop Format

The first day of the workshop allowed participants an opportunity to discuss what they expected as outcomes of the workshop and what they thought were the most important ways to integrate conservation and transportation planning. This was followed by an overview of approaches to biodiversity conservation planning, its benefits to transportation planning and overviews of the transportation planning process at the state and regional levels. National initiatives and research programs were summarized and a discussion of the types of standard conservation data and methods that could be utilized by transportation planners. Also, a summary was given of local initiatives and research programs that could assist in the linking of the two processes. The second day included additional discussions of tools and data sources and an integrated planning exercise of comparing actual data to draft plan proposals with a discussion of possible impacts and ways to avoid them. The workshop participants then discussed some realistic next steps to continuing the link between conservation and transportation planning in North Central Texas.

A copy of the workshop agenda and list of participants can be found in Appendices A and B respectively. Speaker presentations can be found on the NCTCOG ftp web site at <ftp://ftp.nctcog.org>. This report will also be available on the FHWA environmental web

site. References to additional information can be found in the presentations. Since more detail can be found in the presentations, this summary strictly identifies the key points derived from the discussions.

2.0 Results from Day One

■ 2.1 Key Points

Here are some of the key points made in the presentations and discussions during the first day:

- Transportation should do more than just avoid, minimize, and mitigate environmental consequences. Transportation should also enhance the environment and build environments where we would want to live or vacation.
- There are a number of reasons why we need change. The duplication of effort between planning and environmental activities wastes resources. Typically, the relationships between transportation and resource agencies are limited to project-related involvement. Coordination between planning and environmental review may lead to fewer delays and conflicts in project approvals.
- SAFETEA-LU Section 6001 Environmental Provisions – require that long-range transportation plans consider environmental factors and include a discussion of potential mitigation. They also require consultation with agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation including the comparison of transportation plans with conservation plans or maps and inventories of natural or historic resources.
- Environmental issues should be considered early in the planning process, and that consideration will prevent conflict and expense down the road. Integrated and multidisciplinary conservation planning of the environment is a continuum.
- Eco-Logical is a coalition of Federal transportation and environmental agencies that encourages flexibility in regulatory processes and lays the conceptual groundwork for integrating plans across agency boundaries. It endorses ecosystem-based planning and mitigation. It also provides case study examples of integrated conservation and transportation planning.
- Involvement of agencies (local, regional, and Federal) at multiple points in the process results in increased trust between transportation and resource agencies, consideration of a broader range of solutions, reduced project delivery delays, and better projects and environmental outcomes.

- Given all of these reasons, there is a strong push for better linkages between conservation planning and transportation planning. Both transportation agencies and environmental agencies see that a broader, systems-level approach makes sense.
- There is no single definition of conservation but common concepts include viability over time of species, ecosystems, cultural features, etc. (with special consideration for irreplaceable elements or features on the landscape) for sustainable human use and enjoyment.
- Conservation is a land use and should be planned for along with other uses in an integrated and collaborative process. Collaboration can be facilitated through a common planning framework, integrated processes and products, a common data library, and standard tools.
- The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) has developed an integrated database that stores spatial and tabular information on threatened and endangered species, rare species of concern, rare natural vegetation communities, and other rare natural resources. The TPWD goals are to have the most complete, current and accurate data for the State and to share it easily and efficiently with researchers, policy-makers, planners and developers. It was noted that there are gaps in data (due in part to large private land holding) and an extremely large proportion of database needs updating. A combination of predictive range-mapping technique and field work is needed in order to have data sufficient to do good integrated planning.
- The TxDOT planning process starts with needs identification and analysis that results in metropolitan, rural, and statewide multimodal transportation plans. This leads to the development of metropolitan and rural improvement programs that are combined into a Unified State Transportation Improvement Program. Consideration of conservation occurs at the advanced planning level later in the process when NEPA studies are initiated.
- The NCTCOG, serving as the MPO, develops multimodal transportation plans and programs, selects projects, coordinates transportation services, and ensures the metropolitan areas comply with state and Federal laws and regulations regarding transportation and air quality. The long-range plan recommends planning activities, policy initiatives, transportation programs, and transportation projects for the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area.
- It is difficult to relate NEPA studies with system-level planning. Planning is cyclical and continuing where as project development is linear with beginning and end points. Planning has a different level of detail and scale. At the planning level, it is unclear where the project will be located. Issue was raised of the need to introduce environmental considerations into the planning process - before NEPA.
- The NCTCOG conducts corridor studies of significant transportation projects in the region's most congested corridors. The corridor planning process initiates NEPA

enhanced scoping studies. This combined process ensures that studies don't have to be repeated. Conservation and resource agencies get involved in the corridor studies.

- Mobility 2030 includes quality of life goals such as: provide for continued economic development; provide increased transportation accessibility; and reduce environmental and community impacts.
- The NCTCOG has initiated a combined effort between their transportation and environmental departments to link conservation and transportation planning. They want to create an atmosphere of enhanced dialogue and coordination amongst all agencies to foster greater consideration of environmental impacts during the transportation planning process. They plan to use an ecosystem approach to developing infrastructure projects.
- The NCTCOG funds transportation infrastructure, planning, land banking, and transit-oriented development (TOD) projects that support sustainable development. Mobility 2030 includes a policy recommendation for context-sensitive solutions (CSS) which is a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders in providing a transportation facility that fits its setting.
- Vision North Texas has developed and begun implementing the Greenprinting process in north Texas – integrating various datasets to guide an integrated planning process that incorporates many goals identified by the Vision North Texas team.
- NatureServe has developed a GIS-based decision support tool that can be used to guide conservation planning. VISTA can overlay maps of various elements of the landscape and help identify places to conserve, enhance, avoid, or mitigate. It explores alternative scenarios and can identify conflicts and opportunities. In the end, it helps generate optimal solutions for meeting goals.

■ 2.2 Breakout Groups

The workshop participants divided into three breakout groups to address questions about what they learned and where they want to go. This is a summary of their main conclusions:

What We Learned

- Everyone has a common interest in linking conservation and transportation planning.
- There are multiple related efforts that are attempting integrated planning that need to be better coordinated.
- We need to learn each other's language, processes, and goals in order to work together more effectively. Cross-training may be needed to accomplish this so we truly understand each others processes.

- We need to clarify the integrated planning process and ensure that we have the right involvement including skill sets and buy-in.

Recommendations Included the Following Themes

There were a number of recommendations about linking conservation and transportation planning that came from the first day presentations and breakout group discussions including the following:

1. Changing Business Practices

- Need to figure out how to institutionalize an ecosystem approach within integrated planning.
- Need to focus efforts on urgent and important issues. We also need more program staff and resources to make this happen.

2. Better Coordination of Integrated Planning

- Need an umbrella effort that coordinates all integrated planning in the State.
- Need to develop a collaborative decision-making process. “We are more than a funnel” – the conservation planners want to provide data but also be involved in the analysis and decision making. We need varied input including data and expertise.
- Listserv is needed to connect transportation planning communication.

3. Investment in Quality Data Is Needed

- Need to coordinate data aggregation. Currently there is duplication of effort in gathering and aggregating datasets for planning.
- There are lots of data improvements needed such as improved data quality. Also data in paper form needs to be digitized and all agencies need to be involved in determining data needs.
- Need a multi-agency effort to fund the completion of data gaps. Suggest that TPWD develop short-, mid-, and long-term data improvement goals and prioritize funding.
- Need to incorporate conservation data into planning decisions.
- Need to evaluate/determine what data we have and at what scale.
- Consider funding a position that would input new data at TPWD.

4. Education/Guidance

- Need to explore ecosystem services by educating everyone on how environment conservation/enhancement can improve quality of life and attract economic development in Texas.
- Cross-training between conservation and transportation planning is needed.

3.0 Results from Day Two

The second day of the conference included a summary of the first day for the executives and a description of some of the state and regional conservation efforts followed by a planning exercise and a discussion of next steps.

■ 3.1 Key Points

Here are key points from the second day:

- TPWD discussed the Texas Wildlife Action Plan which is an important document for Texas nongame and is focused on habitat and species. The plan includes a discussion of conservation issues related to transportation such as air quality, water quality, sprawl, etc., along with mitigation measures. Need to integrate data into TPWD database to make data usable for integrated planning.
- EPA Region 6 discussed their tools for planning and conservation. The Texas Environmental Resource Stewards (TERS) was formed by various Federal and state agencies to collaborate on common ecosystem management and regulatory streamlining issues. TERS developed a product, Texas Ecological Assessment Protocol (TEAP) which analyzes existing broad-scale electronic data to identify important ecological areas in Texas that should be avoided or protected. This tool can be used to produce data and information that ultimately leads to enhanced decision-making. It was identified that TERS efforts need to be reinvigorated and include more stakeholders including transportation planners.
- Vision North Texas (VNT) was presented. VNT is a collaborative effort of stakeholders to create a shared vision for the region's future and develop action steps needed to achieve that vision by 2050. VNT development principles include efficient growth, environmental stewardship, resource efficiency, and transportation efficiency. More details on VNT can be found at www.visionnorthtexas.org.
- An exercise was conducted using a map from TPWD showing the occurrence of rare species and conservation areas with the draft 2030 transportation proposals superimposed. This was for illustration purposes only but it demonstrated how conservation and transportation data can be linked and discussed at the planning level. Vision North Texas, NCTCOG, The Nature Conservancy, and TPWD were all asked to provide comments on the map.
- The Nature Conservancy laid out a vision of conservation goals and ways we might achieve these goals - the idea of using native species for roadside planting to create

corridors for at-risk species (primarily plants) in combination with identifying conservation areas where low-density development is needed to preserve integrity of at-risk habitats. NCTCOG expressed concern about using roadsides as corridors – further discussion may be needed.

- A comparison of transportation and conservation goals was presented, and it was discovered that a commonality exists between goals except that many conservation goals did not distinguish between short- and long-term goals like transportation plans.

■ 3.2 Breakout Groups

The attendees broke out into three groups and listed the next steps that need to be taken in the North Central Texas region to further the link between conservation and transportation planning that has already begun. The steps chosen are summarized into three groups below:

1. Organizational Steps

- Identify appropriate structure (committee or agency) to lead and continue this integrated planning effort in the future.
- Establish a leader and coordinator for linking conservation and transportation planning and institutionalize the effort.
- Identify and engage additional agencies that have not been involved in these dialogs so far, including local and county representatives.
- Identify champion(s) of integrated planning at the various state, regional, and MPO planning agencies.
- Add a MPO representative to the TERS.
- Establish follow-up monthly or quarterly meetings to continue the momentum established at this workshop. These meetings should include both policy and technical representatives. May need technical team to provide input into overarching integrated planning team.
- Hold an annual summit or forum of all the involved agencies.
- Agencies should be involved earlier in the planning process rather than just at the project permit stage.

2. Data Steps

- Identifying data needs and gaps including the need for timely data and the sharing of data among interested agencies. Interest in predictive range-mapping in combination with field work to assist in filling data gaps.
- The level or scale of the data should be matched with the level of the decision-making – plan, corridor, or project levels.

- Work with universities to get their help in gathering data including conducting wildlife or other surveys.
- Consider pooling resources to purchase and organize key data.
- Consider establishing a committee to identify and address data needs for all of the partners. Establish priorities within the list of data needs.
- Consider using NEPA documents to help decide on data priorities.

3. Process Steps

- Inventory current planning efforts across the region and state. Include in the inventory goals and objectives from the various plans and programs.
- Review organizational strategic plans on an ongoing basis.
- Integrate regional efforts involving the “three-legged stool” – land use, conservation, and transportation.
- Map out relationships between each initiative and decide on the appropriate place to begin involvement.
- Develop strategies on how to identify and involve the right people at the right levels. In addition to the appropriate transportation and conservation groups the public should be included. Also, leverage existing forums and processes to get the word out. Environmental documents could be used to help identify key people.
- Identify other issues that need to be included in these actions such as environmental justice.
- Integrate various regional conservation and transportation plans such as Mobility 2030, Vision North Texas, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and TPWD plans, etc.
- Develop an understanding of other groups, including what they do and want to accomplish, and then integrate them into the process.
- Identify related processes that can be moved from the project phase to the planning phase.
- Develop cooperative exercises, plans, etc. (always be on patrol for new efforts).
- Educate and inform the higher levels within the organizations as well as locally elected and appointed officials.
- Consider cross-training among organizations so staff learns about other disciplines.
- Establish a listserv.

4.0 Items for Follow-up

The items below are actions that in the short term would help keep the integrated planning effort moving forward. These items are based on the above summary. As a first step, each item below needs a lead identified to help implement the action.

1. Process Steps

- Identify appropriate structure (committee or agency) to lead and continue this integrated planning effort in the future (“umbrella effort”).
- It was identified that TERS effort needs to be reinvigorated and include more stakeholders including transportation planners.
- Identify and engage additional agencies that have not been involved in these dialogs so far including local and county representatives.
- Establish follow-up monthly or quarterly meetings to continue the momentum established at this workshop. These meetings should include both policy and technical representatives. May need technical team to provide input into overarching integrated planning team. Hold an annual summit or forum of all the involved agencies.
- Inventory current planning efforts across the region and state, and relationships between each initiative. Include in the inventory goals and objectives from the various plans and programs.
- Meet with agencies to identify how the transportation planning processes mapped out by NCTCOG and TxDOT at the workshop might be modified to interject conservation considerations.
- Educate and inform the higher levels within the organizations as well as locally elected and appointed officials.
- Listserv should be developed to connect transportation planning communication.
- Identify cross training needs/opportunities.

2. Data Steps

- Consider establishing a coordinating committee to identify and address data needs for all of the partners.
- Identify and prioritize data needs and gaps including the need for timely data and the sharing of data among interested agencies.
- Consider using NEPA documents to help decide on data priorities.

- Determine who will lead coordination of data aggregation. Currently there is duplication of effort in aggregating datasets for planning.
- Integrate data from TWAP into TPWD database to make data usable for integrated planning.
- TPWD will develop a proposal (short term and long term needs) to fill data gaps to prioritize funding from multiple agencies. Also, they will consider funding a position at TPWD to input data and respond to transportation related requests.
- Interest in predictive range mapping in combination with field work to assist in filling data gaps.
- Collaborate with universities to get their help in gathering data including conducting wildlife or other surveys.
- Consider pooling resources to purchase and organize key data.

3. Conservation Planning Steps

- Consider and discuss the idea raised by TPWD, TNC, and Vision North about conservation planning approaches that utilize roadsides as corridors.
- Consider integrating planning activities and objectives of TPWD, TNC, and Vision North to create a single conservation plan that meets the objectives of each organization.

Appendix A – Workshop Agenda

Linking Conservation and Transportation Planning Workshop
November 13 & 14, 2007
North Central Texas Council of Governments
AGENDA

DAY 1		
8:30 - 9:00 am	Registration	Transportation Council Room
9:00 - 9:30 am	Welcome and National & Local Perspective <i>Question:</i> Why are we having this workshop, what past efforts are we building on, and what do we hope to achieve?	Mike Culp, FHWA Michael Morris, NCTCOG
9:30 - 9:45 am	Overview of Workshop <i>Question:</i> How will this workshop facilitate expected outcomes?	Sandy Wesch-Schulze (Facilitator)
9:45 - 10:30 am	Introductions (1 minute per participant) 1) What are your expected outcomes from workshop? 2) What is most important for us to do to better integrate conservation and transportation planning?	Sandy Wesch-Schulze (Facilitator)
10:30 - 10:45 am	Break	Transportation Council Room
10:45 - 11:15 am	Approaches to Biodiversity Conservation Planning <i>Question:</i> What is conservation planning and how can it benefit transportation planning? What is the next step towards a true integration of conservation planning into the transportation planning process?	Patrick Crist, NatureServe
11:15 - 12:15 pm	Overview of NCTCOG & State Transportation Planning Process <i>Question:</i> What is the current transportation planning process, where are the challenges/obstacles and opportunities in integrating conservation goals?	Dan Lamers, NCTCOG Barbara Maley, FHWA
12:15 - 1:15 pm	Lunch	Transportation Council Room
1:15 - 2:00 pm	National Initiatives <i>Question:</i> What outcomes from regional and national initiatives/research programs can we build on that could assist in the integration of conservation and transportation planning?	Mike Culp, FHWA Kimberly Majerus, FHWA Resource Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAFETEA-LU Transportation Act & You • Eco-Logical Multi-Agency and Federal Highway Administration Initiative • Case Studies • Q&A
2:00 - 3:10 pm	Introduction to Data & Technology Resources <i>Question:</i> What are the types of standard conservation data and methods that are currently being used and ones that could be utilized by the transportation planners?	Bob Gottfried, Texas Parks & Wildlife Shara Howie, NatureServe Kimberly Majerus, FHWA James Sharp, Trust for Public Land <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of Data Resources Available Texas Wildlife Diversity Database, NatureServe, Other Data • Summary of Technology Available Greenprinting, NatureServe Vista
3:10 - 3:20 pm	Break	Transportation Council Room

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AGENDA

DAY 1 CONTINUED

3:20 - 4:00 pm	Significant Regional Transportation Initiatives <i>Question:</i> What outcomes from local transportation initiatives and research programs can we build on that could assist in the integration of conservation and transportation planning?	Tamara Hollowell, NCTCOG Lyndsay Krodell, NCTCOG <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Central Texas Ecological Framework • NCTCOG Sustainable Development Program, Alternative Futures, Context Sensitive Solutions
4:00 - 5:00 pm	Wrap-up and Review of Day 1 <i>Question:</i> What did we learn, where should we go from here in order to develop realistic, high priority next steps?	Sandy Wesch-Schulze (Facilitator)
5:00 pm	Adjourn	Sandy Wesch-Schulze (Facilitator)
5:15 pm	Participant Dinner	Humperdinks, 700 Six Flags Dr. Arlington, Texas 76011

DAY 2

8:30 - 9:00 am	Registration and Networking	Transportation Council Room
9:00 - 10:00 am	Day 1 Refresher & Day 2 Introduction <i>Question:</i> What did we learn, where should we go from here in order to facilitate integration of conservation planning into the transportation planning process?	Sandy Wesch-Schulze (Facilitator) Mike Culp, FHWA Dan Lamers, NCTCOG
10:00 - 11:00 am	Significant State and Regional Conservation Initiatives <i>Question:</i> What outcomes from local initiatives and research programs can we build on that could assist in the integration of conservation and transportation planning?	Steve Bender, Texas Parks & Wildlife Sharon Osowski, EPA Region VI Jack Tidwell, NCTCOG Karen Walz, Vision North Texas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision North Texas, See Healthy Ecosystems • Texas Ecological Assessment Protocol • Texas Wildlife Action Plan • Discussion, Q&A
11:00 - 12:00 pm	Discussion & Begin Integrated Planning Exercise <i>Question:</i> Based on what you have heard so far what questions have come up and do you have any ideas on ways that you could do planning differently?	Sandy Wesch-Schulze (Facilitator) Mike Culp, FHWA Dan Lamers, NCTCOG
12:00 - 1:00 pm	Lunch	Transportation Council Room
1:00 - 2:00 pm	Continue Integrated Planning Exercise	Patrick Crist, NatureServe
2:00 - 2:15 pm	Break	Transportation Council Room
2:15 - 3:15 pm	Develop Next Steps <i>Question:</i> What are some concrete, realistic and measurable next steps and who participate in carrying out these tasks? Where do we go from here and what do we want to accomplish (highest priorities)?	Sandy Wesch-Schulze (Facilitator)
3:15 - 4:00 pm	Feedback	Sandy Wesch-Schulze (Facilitator)
4:00 pm	Adjourn	

Appendix B - List of Attendees

Name	Agency
Atta-Fynn, Autumn	NCTCOG
Bender, Steve	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD)
Carman, Elliott	USACE
Crist, Patrick	NatureServe
Culp, Michael	FHWA
Davis, John	TPWD
Debner, John	TxDOT
Dixon, Vicki	USACE
Duman, JoAnn	USACE
Edwards, Chad	NCTCOG
Eidson, Jim	The Nature Conservancy
Endres, Stephen	TxDOT
Gilmore, Cathy	EPA
Gottfried, Bob	TPWD
Hale, Carol	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Hall, Robert	TxDOT
Hatcher, Preseley	USACE
Hedrick, John	DCTA
Hollowell, Tamara	NCTCOG
Howie, Shara	NatureServe
Ibewuike, Victor	DART
Krodel, Lyndsay	NCTCOG
Lamers, Dan	NCTCOG
Leonard, Kenneth	Cambridge Systematics, Inc.
Majerus, Kimberly	FHWA
Maley, Barbara	FHWA
McCulley, Judith	U.S. EPA
Morris, Michael	NCTCOG

Name	Agency
Osowski, Sharon	U.S. EPA
Promise, John	NCTCOG
Puder, Sid	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Reeves, George	TxDOT
Rooni, James	Texas Forest Service
Sen Sandip	FWTA
Sawey, Jamye	TxDOT
Sharp, James	Trust for Public Land
Theiss, Sue	TxDOT
Tidwell, Jack	NCTCOG
Tyree, Jimmy	TxDOT
Walker, Tony L.	TCEQ
Walz, Karen	Vision North Texas
Wesch-Schulze, Sandy	Carter-Burgess
Wicker, Jule	TPWD
