

Transportation Planning in Tribal Communities

Draft Memorandum 2: Methodology

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Introduction

This memorandum summarizes the proposed methodology for collecting and analyzing data and information in support of the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) *Transportation Planning in Tribal Communities* study. The study's goals are to:

1. Align planning tools to specific Tribal planning needs;
2. Ensure long-range transportation plans are implementable by Tribal staff; and
3. Link planning phase to project design, construction, and maintenance.

This memorandum describes:

- The research questions to be addressed;
- The information and data needed;
- The stakeholder entities and individuals from whom to gather the information and data;
- The proposed methods to collect the information and data;
- Anticipated research results;
- Assumptions that will inform the methodology; and
- The general timeframe for the Data Collection and Analysis task (Task C).

The Volpe Center used information documented in *Memorandum 1: Background and Literature Review* to inform this methodology.

Research Questions

The literature review for this study (see *Memorandum 1: Background and Literature Review*) identified research questions for the Volpe Center to explore in the subsequent phases of this study. These include:

Tribal Transportation Planning

- What value does transportation planning provide to Tribes?
- What do Tribes need to conduct effective, meaningful, and impactful transportation planning?
- Do Tribal communities use the methods and practices described in Federal documents and modules to assist them in their transportation planning processes?
- How are the six common best practice areas identified in the 2009 FHWA Tribal Transportation Best Practices Guidebook (leadership, problem identification, resource allocation, creative problem solving, collaboration and partnerships, and effective communications) applicable in current Tribal transportation planning contexts? Are there any recent examples of government-to-government coordination or relationships that demonstrate how these best practices are put into practice?
- Who do Tribes involve in their transportation planning processes? At what point in the process are these individuals involved and what is their involvement?
- Who are the decision makers within a Tribe's transportation planning processes? What information is used to help inform those decisions?
- What considerations impact a Tribe's transportation planning decision making (e.g., economic development, safety, access to jobs, maintaining infrastructure)?
- How do changes in Tribal leadership influence transportation planning priorities and decision making?

- How do Tribes' internal staffing capacity affect the transportation planning process?

Data Collection and Use

- What types and sources of data do Tribes use to support their transportation planning processes?
- What challenges do Tribes face in collecting and using data in the transportation planning process? How do Tribes address those challenges or gaps in information?
- What informal strategies do Tribal planners use when data is limited or not available?
- What alternative data and analysis methods assist Tribes when formal methods are not available?

Long-Range Transportation Plans

- What are the common processes that Tribes use to develop long-range transportation plans (LRTPs), including partnerships with other agencies and tools that facilitate the planning process?
- How do Tribes incorporate their LRTP priorities into other planning documents, such as comprehensive plans, master plans, land use plans, safety plans, and statewide or regional plans? How do Tribes incorporate recommendations from other planning documents into their LRTPs?
- What are the post-LRTP decision points (e.g., project selection, programming) that an LRTP should inform?

Tribal Transportation Improvement Program

- What methods or tools do Tribes use to prioritize projects?
- What challenges do Tribes experience with the Tribal Transportation Improvement Program (TTIP) process? What are the solutions or tools to address those challenges throughout the development of the TTIP?
- How do the Tribes utilize their TTIPs?

Legal Frameworks

- How do Tribal governments or planners navigate the legal and regulatory requirements for Tribal transportation planning?
- How do Tribes consider Tribal sovereignty when making transportation planning and funding decisions?

Financial Planning

- How do Tribes conduct financial planning including budgeting, cost estimating, and allocating resources?
- What sources of funding do Tribes use for conducting planning activities?
- What grant funding sources do Tribes seek to fund projects?
- What resources do Tribes need to better manage received funds?

Tools and Resources

- What tools and support systems do Tribes currently use to support the transportation planning process? How are they useful/helpful?
- What tools or resources would be helpful in the Tribal transportation planning process?

Planning Connections

- How do Tribes link the Tribal transportation planning process to project delivery (including preliminary engineering, environmental review, right-of-way, utilities, and construction) and infrastructure maintenance and operations?

Information and Data Needs

The Volpe Center will gather data and information related to the research questions, including but not limited to the following:

- Tools that support Tribal transportation planning, including Geographic Information Systems (GIS);
- Inputs that Tribes use to conduct Tribal transportation planning, such as safety data, land ownership data, roadway inventory conditions and classifications, and related plans (e.g., economic development, resilience);
- The processes that Tribes undertake to conduct Tribal transportation planning, including information exchange between technical planning staff and Tribal leadership;
- Current coordination efforts with partners in the Tribal transportation planning process;
- Resource (e.g., staff, funding, tools) capacity for planning
- The use of consultants to conduct or contribute to the Tribal transportation planning process;
- Tribal Transportation Program (TTP) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) data and information;
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Tribal transportation planning requirements, processes, and procedures;
- Broader Tribal community context (e.g., geography, population, public health, economy, road inventory, cultural enhancements, design specifications);
- Examples of how State DOTs and MPOs incorporate Tribal projects into Statewide Transportation Improvement Programs (STIPs) and TIPs;
- Funding and financing resources for Tribal transportation planning and projects, including TTP funds and the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP); and
- Decision-making practices related to project implementation (decisions in the LRTP and those that are informed by the LRTP).

Stakeholder Entities and Individuals

The Volpe Center has identified the types of stakeholder entities to whom to reach out to gather the data and information necessary for this research. The entities include Tribes, agencies that partner with Tribes on transportation, Federal agencies that are involved with or support Tribal transportation, and other entities, including the academic and consultant communities. Table 1 lists the entities, the possible contacts at each entity, and the high-level topics to address with each.

Table 1: Data and Information Collection Entities, Contacts, and Topics

Entities	Possible Contacts	Existing Tools	Existing Resources	Planning Process	Project Delivery	Long-Term Vision	Challenges/Barriers	Coordination/Collaboration	Spatial Comparison	Road Inventory	Monitoring and Evaluation
Tribes	Tribal Transportation Planning Staff	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Tribal Leadership, Elders, and Youth	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	
	Tribal Non-Transportation Staff					X	X	X		X	X
	Tribal Transportation Program Coordinating Committee	X	X				X	X			
Planning Partners	State Department of Transportation (DOT) Liaisons	X	X				X	X			
	State DOT Planners	X	X	X	X		X	X			
	Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Planners	X	X	X	X		X	X			
	County/Local Government Transportation Staff	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X
Federal Partners	FHWA Office of Tribal Transportation Tribal Coordinators	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	FHWA Federal-Aid Planners	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	FTA Planners	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	BIA Regional Road Engineers	X	X		X		X	X		X	X
	BIA Regional Planners	X	X	X	X		X	X			
	Federal Land Management Agency Transportation Planning Staff	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X
Other	Transportation Research Board (TRB) Native American Transportation Issues Committee	X	X								
	Academic Community	X	X								X
	Consultant Community	X	X								X

The Volpe Center, with input from the study’s Project Management Team (PMT) and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), will identify individuals from Tribes, planning partners, Federal partners, the TRB Native American Transportation Issues Committee, and the academic and consultant communities to include in the study’s data collection activities. The Volpe Center will aim to collect data and information from a diverse set of sources to ensure that the information and data collected and analyzed represents

the experiences of a wide variety of Tribes. The Volpe Center may also contact regional tribal organizations to validate perspectives and fill in gaps, as needed.

Proposed Collection Methods

The Volpe Center will conduct the following activities to collect the data and needed to achieve the study's goals:

1. Align planning tools to specific Tribal planning needs;
2. Ensure long-range transportation plans are implementable by Tribal staff; and
3. Link planning phase to project design, construction, and maintenance.

This research includes six data and information collection methods:

- Discussions;
- Workshops;
- Site Visits;
- Process Mapping;
- Conferences; and
- Webinars.

Each proposed data collection method is described further below.

Discussions

The Volpe Center will hold discussions with stakeholders from a single entity or organization to address the study's research questions and achieve the study's goals, particularly around Tribal planning needs and understanding Tribes' planning processes. Discussions will focus on a single entity or organization's experiences, and will provide a private format to share information with the researchers. Discussions may lead to the review of documents, additional and more in-depth discussions, or process mapping activities. The discussions will be with one or more stakeholders at a time. The discussions will be held over the phone or via Microsoft (MS) Teams. Each discussion will last no more than one hour.

Workshops

The Volpe Center will hold workshops with small groups of stakeholders from more than one entity or organization to discuss broader processes, issues, or challenges associated with Tribal planning. Workshops will drill down into specific topics to gather information from the stakeholders. The workshops will be held via MS Teams and will last 1-1.5 hours. The Volpe Center may also participate in existing workshops coordinated by Tribes that are external to the project but relevant to Tribal transportation planning, such as workshops to discuss safety plans. Participation in such workshops may provide key anecdotal data from Tribes and community members that may not be captured in data reports.

Site Visits

The Volpe Center will conduct site visits to several Tribes to conduct deep dives into a Tribe's planning process (as such, some process mapping activities will be conducted as site visits). The Tribes selected for site visits will be determined by the information gathered in the discussions. Tribes that will be selected for site visits will have planning processes and tools that warrant a deeper exploration and may

be featured in case studies. The number of site visits will be limited by available time and funding for travel as well as constraining circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Process Mapping

The Volpe Center will conduct process mapping activities to get a detailed understanding of how Tribes conduct their transportation planning processes. The Tribes to be included in process mapping activities will be identified through discussions, workshops, and suggestions from the PMT and the TAC. Tribes selected for process mapping will have transportation planning processes that have elements that may be effectively applied to other Tribes and may inform the recommendations in the research's final report. Process mapping activities may take place as site visits or discussions.

Conferences

The Volpe Center will attend virtual or in-person conferences that are relevant to Tribal transportation planning. At the conferences, the Volpe Center will attend relevant sessions to gather information on Tribal transportation planning, and/or present on the study and solicit feedback. One possible conference to attend is the annual National Transportation in Indian Country Conference. In addition, the Volpe Center and/or PMT members may attend the TRB Native American Transportation Issues Committee meeting in January to present and/or solicit input on the project.

Webinars

The Volpe Center will hold webinars to inform stakeholders about the study and its findings. The webinars will be held via MS Teams. The webinars will occur early in the study process, mid-way through the study process, and after the final report is complete.

Anticipated Research Results

The results of these research activities are listed below according to the goals of the study which they address:

1. Align planning tools to the specific Tribal planning need
 - a. Information about the processes that Tribes use to conduct transportation planning including what is working well and what is not working well
 - b. An understanding of how Tribal transportation planning differs among Tribes with different characteristics (e.g., population, geographic size, location)
 - c. Information about Tribes' use of planning tools to inform Tribal transportation decision making
 - d. The availability of other tools that Tribes can implement or adapt to improve Tribal transportation planning
 - e. Clear identification of what are the post-LRTP decision points (e.g., project selection, programming) are and how they inform LRTPs.
2. Ensure long-range transportation plans are implementable by Tribal staff
 - a. How FHWA and BIA can support Tribes in implementing effective Tribal transportation planning processes, tools, and resources
 - b. Challenges that Tribes have faced in conducting meaningful planning processes, and how they overcome them
 - c. Information about how Tribal governance influences transportation planning

- d. An understanding of how the Tribal transportation department/designated individual or group is factored in the Tribe's leadership structure (e.g., membership on leadership/executive committees or standing spot on Tribal Council updates)
 - e. Successes and challenges in partnering or coordinating with other agencies in Tribal transportation planning
 - f. Information about the quantifiable benefits of planning on transportation decision making
3. Link planning phase to project design, construction, and maintenance
 - a. Information about how Tribal transportation planning influences or impacts project development, implementation, and maintenance
 - b. The monitoring and evaluation methods that Tribes use to measure Tribal transportation planning success
 - c. Information about how Tribal transportation planning informs land use, economic development, public health, cultural heritage, resiliency, and other planning connections

Assumptions

The Volpe Center makes the following assumptions related to the study methodology.

Limitations on Number of Discussions

The Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) is a law that governs how the Federal government collects information from the public. This research is subject to the PRA, and the Volpe Center is considering seeking PRA approval for a limited survey of Tribal governments. However, the number of stakeholders who participate in discussions or workshops will be limited.

Travel Restrictions

Due to restrictions on travel related to the Covid-19 pandemic, there will be limited opportunities for the Volpe Center to conduct site visits or attend in-person meetings. If travel is to occur, it will be held when travel restrictions allow for it and when it is safe for both the Volpe Center and the other participants to travel or be traveled to. Virtual meetings will be held instead if necessary.

Recent Changes to Planning Processes

Tribes may have recently modified or delayed their planning processes or their use of tools and resources due to impacts from recent events, including the Covid-19 pandemic and wildfires. The Volpe Center will seek to understand how the planning processes and use of tools/resources have changed based on these impacts, and what additional tools/resources might help Tribes in times of transition.

Federally Documented Transportation Planning Process as a Starting Point

FHWA developed a flow chart graphic to illustrate the transportation planning process (see Figure 1). This process generally applies to State Departments of Transportation and Metropolitan Planning Organizations. The Volpe Center will use this process as a starting point in discussions with Tribal leaders and staff to discuss their transportation planning processes, though it is expected that they may differ from this process.

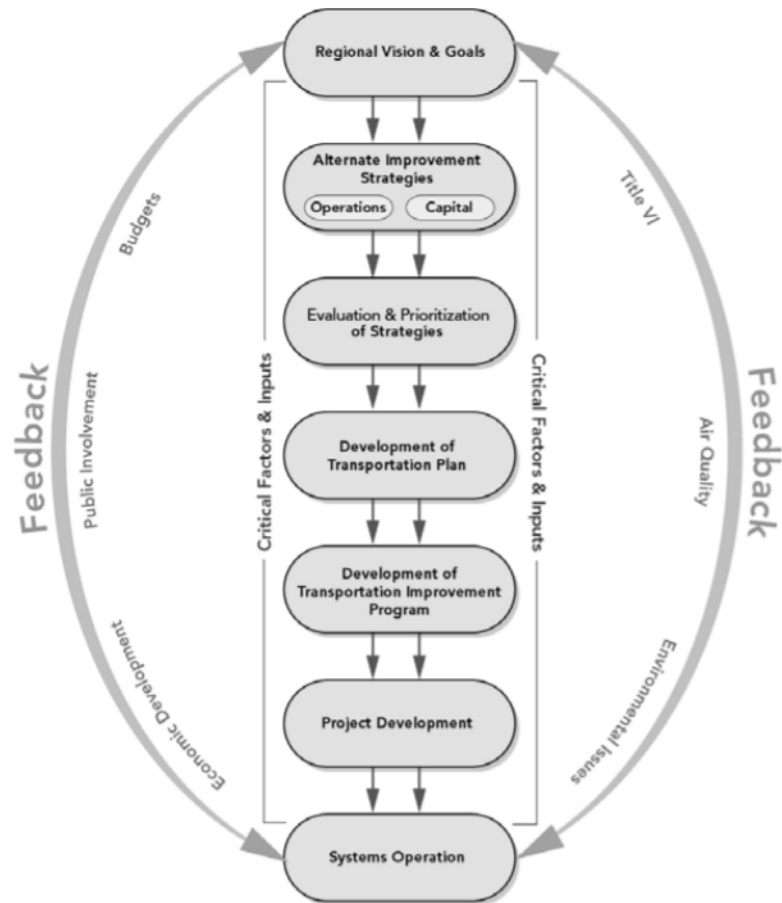


Figure 1: Basic Steps in Transportation Planning Process. (Source: FHWA Introduction to Planning Tribal Transportation Module)

Timeframe

The research study's Data Collection and Analysis task includes three subtasks. The subtasks are listed below with their respective proposed timeframes and the collection methods to be conducted within each subtask.

- Data Collection: February 2021 to June 2022
 - Discussions
 - Workshops
 - Process Mapping
 - Conferences
- Analysis of Planning Tools: April 2022 to August 2022
 - Discussions
 - Workshops
 - Site Visits
 - Process Mapping
 - Conferences
- Findings: July 2022 to November 2022

- Discussions
- Workshops
- Conferences
- Peer Exchanges
- Webinars

The project team anticipates engaging the Technical Advisory Committee every 5-6 months throughout the data collection and analysis and the tasks to follow. It is anticipated that the TAC will meet during the following months:

- June 2021
- November 2021
- February 2022
- June/July 2022
- November/December 2022

Next Steps

Following the completion of the Data Collection and Analysis task, the Volpe Center will implement the remaining study tasks:

- Report Development, where the Volpe Center will summarize the research activities and findings into a final report; and
- Implementation, where the Volpe Center will disseminate the study's findings and tools to Tribal, Federal, and other partners.

The Volpe Center will develop plans for these activities after the Data Collection and Analysis task is complete, at the direction of PMT and the TAC.