

Chapter 8 Congestion Management Process



A congested corridor under construction - Robert Willett, newsobserver.com

Introduction

The CR MPO is designated by the Federal Highway Administration as a Transportation Management Area (TMA). Under this designation, the CR MPO must maintain a Congestion Management Process (CMP) that will address the area's congested corridors. The CMP plays a key role in identifying strategies and projects that will assist in reducing congestion and improving air quality in the region.

Objective

The objective of the CR MPO CMP is to measure and manage congestion of the current and future transportation system through data collection, travel demand modeling, and highway capacity analysis.

Goals

The following goals are outlined in the MTP and the Prospectus and should be applicable to efforts to reduce congestion and implement the CMP.

Highway System Goal

Develop an efficient street and highway network for the Cabarrus-Rowan Urban Area

Congestion Management Goal

Develop a local thoroughfare system that minimizes traffic congestion and maximizes system preservation

Bicycle and Pedestrian Goal

Promote development of an integrated bicycle and pedestrian network

Environmental Goal

Develop a transportation system, which preserves and enhances the natural and built environments

Title VI and Environmental Justice Goal

Promote a transportation system that does not disproportionately impact minority and low-income populations.

Public Transportation Goal

Support efforts to improve mobility for Urban Area residents

Freight Goal

Develop a transportation system that encourages safe and secure movement of freight goods within and outside the Urban Area.

Process

The following steps should be followed in order to achieve the objective and meet the goals of the CRMPO CMP:

1. Define congestion for the existing transportation network;
2. Evaluation and monitoring of the operational performance of the transportation network;
3. Identification of congested corridors;
4. Evaluation and identification of appropriate strategies to alleviate congestion;
5. Implementation of appropriate congestion management or mobility enhancement strategies;
6. Evaluation of the effectiveness of implemented strategies.

Defining Congestion

Fortunately, the CR MPO has minimal congestion at best outside of the urban core in Cabarrus County. Congestion does increase on the periphery towards the Charlotte Metro area, but is primarily a function of peak hour work trips into and out of Mecklenburg County.

Nonetheless, it is important to define and understand what is meant by congestion and impeded travel. The Transportation Research

Board has defined congestion as “travel time or delay in excess of that normally incurred under light or free-flow travel conditions.” There are two types of congestion:

1. recurring congestion that tends to be concentrated into short time periods that are predictable in pattern of time, location, and durations such as “rush hour” and is caused from excessive traffic volumes resulting in reduced speed and flow rate within the system; and
2. non-recurring congestion caused by unforeseen incidents (road accidents, spills, and stalls) which affect driver behavior and can be less predictable.

The CMP will produce data related to both of these types of congestion. The Metrolina Regional Travel Demand Model produces volume to capacity ratios for peak hour travel i.e. “rush hour” in the AM and PM. NCDOT captures incidents and accidents through law enforcement reports of crashes. (It is estimated that 60 percent of traffic delay is caused by incidents in a typical urban area).

The CMP is “*a systematic process that provides information on transportation system performance and alternative strategies to alleviate congestion and enhance the mobility of persons and goods to levels that meet state and local needs.*” The operative word in this phrase is systematic and a CMP must serve as a consistent ongoing evaluation of congestion and mobility to be completely effective.

Another important concept is the value or tolerance for some congestion within the urban area. Not all congestion is bad, particularly as it relates to influence on the shift in mode choice or transit attractiveness. Hence, the acceptable system performance may vary by transportation mode, time of day, or facility type. The CMP establishes criteria or parameters for locally acceptable standards of mobility in terms of travel time or delay.

These parameters set the framework for

monitoring/tracking the progress of congestion from a system or corridor level, which is followed by strategies and actions to meet those standards.

Evaluation of Network Performance

One of the best tools at the MPO's disposal to evaluate the street network's performance is the Metrolina Regional Travel Demand Model. This Model includes a host of congestion measures for both the base year and future year(s).

The primary performance measure for congestion is the level of traffic volume versus the total capacity of the facility i.e. volume-to-capacity or v/c ratio. The v/c ratio provides an indication of whether the road or street is experiencing free flow travel or excess capacity or whether the road or street is deficient or congested with excess travel or vehicles. A v/c ratio of 1 or greater indicates that the travel demand volume exceeds the available capacity of the roadway and forced flow conditions will inevitably result. The Highway Capacity Manual defines congestion in terms of level of service (LOS) ranging from A to F. The v/c ratios in the Regional Travel Model would roughly equate to the following LOS levels:

Table 8-1 - Capacity and Level of Service

Level of Service	Volume to Capacity Ratio
LOSA	0 to 0.35
LOS B	0.35 to 0.5
LOS C	0.5 to 0.75
LOS D	0.75 to 1.0
LOS E	1.0 to 1.25
LOS F	> 1.25

Table 8-2 lists the congested corridors as recommended by MPO jurisdictions with several performance measures

Strategies

The CRMPO has identified the following strategies for managing congestion along corridors in the transportation network. As the initial study only evaluated a relatively small sample of the thoroughfares in the network, only a few strategies

were identified. As the CMP grows over time to become an integral process for the MTP and subsequent project planning, these strategies can grow into a more aggressive program with historical quantitative data to track their progress. One overall goal of the CMP will be to identify and measure strategies on corridors that consistently score at a LOS F (which is rare particularly in the northern half of the MPO area) and hopefully improve to a better level of service in the future.

Access Management

Manage access along major corridors with well-spaced driveways and connectivity between adjacent developments, and intersections designed to improve capacity and channel turning movements.

Intelligent Transportation Systems

Use of dynamic message signs to relay travel and roadway conditions to motorists on the interstate. Use of incident management to clear intersections and major roadways of congestion caused by accidents.

Roadway System Operational Improvements

Improve traffic signal coordination and intersection design to improve capacity and channel turning movements.

Public Transit Operational and Capital Improvements

Additional bus routes and parking space management to promote increased transit ridership.

Mass Transit Operational and Capital Improvements

Improve functional operation of regional express transit to the Charlotte urban core through evaluation of Concord Express and connectivity to the end of the Blue Line Extension with feeder bus service. Evaluate connection between Salisbury Transit and Concord/Kannapolis Area Transit Bus Center.

Highway Capacity

Addition of lanes, interchanges, or connecting facilities to the existing street network.

Non-motorized Transportation Improvements

Addition of bike lanes, sidewalks, and greenways to supplement the street network.

Special Event Congestion

Developing innovative measures to address congestion due to recurring large scale special events (i.e. Lowe's Motor Speedway Races).

Implementation

Current CMP Strategies In Place

1. Concord Express Service
2. Rowan Express Service
3. Incident Management Assistance Program (IMAP) – I-85
4. Dynamic Message Signs – I-85
5. NCDOT's Traveler Information Management System
6. CATS vanpool
7. Salisbury Transit System
8. Concord/Kannapolis Area Transit System
9. NCDOT and City of Salisbury Traffic Cameras www.salisburync.gov/trafficcams
10. Traffic signal coordination – City of Concord and City of Salisbury
11. Train station in Salisbury and Kannapolis for High Speed Rail
12. Saturday and Sunday service for CKTS

The implementation schedule will be spread across the horizon years of the Long Range Transportation Plan.

Short-term (0-8 years):

- TIP and MTP Project Selection consistency
- Optimization of traffic signal system
- Coordination of Concord/Kannapolis Transit (CKTS) with Concord Express schedule
- Opening of the permanent bus transfer facility in Concord/Kannapolis that will be accessible by rail
- TIP Project Development – bus, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities

- Public/private partnerships in the urbanized area
- Review parking standards for potential transit destinations
- Intersection improvements to Poplar Tent and US 29 - CMAQ
- Intersection improvements to US 601 and NC 3 - CMAQ
- Salisbury Traffic Signal System Upgrade – CMAQ
- Express bus connections to regional rail system

Mid-term (9-18 years):

- Expansion of Concord/Kannapolis and Salisbury transit service to reach underserved areas
- Implementation of Regional ITS Program developed by NCDOT including surveillance cameras, changeable message signs, etc.
- Local government carpool and bus incentive program

Long-term (19-28 years):

- Regional light rail connection to CATS Blue Line Extension
- High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes on I-85
- Ramp Metering beyond Mecklenburg County

Table 8-2 - Congested Corridors and Recommended Performance Measures

Corridor Segment	Alternative Strategies	2045 Recommended Strategy	Implement Schedule
Branchview Dr. from Corban Ave N. to City Limits at I-85	Improved traffic signal coordination; intersection improvements; access management	Additional physical capacity; intersection improvements	Future Need identified in MPO Street Appendix
Brookwood Ave. NE from Church St. N to Branchview Dr.	Improved traffic signal coordination; intersection improvements; access management	Improved traffic signal coordination	Corridor Study completed by City of Concord
Cabarrus Ave. W from US Hwy 601 to US Hwy 29	Improved traffic signal coordination; intersection improvements; access management	Additional physical capacity; intersection improvements	Future Need identified in MPO Street Appendix
Cannon Blvd. From Concord City Limits to Rowan Co. Line	Improved traffic signal coordination; intersection improvements; access management; transit service	Improved traffic signal coordination	Future Need identified in MPO Street Appendix
Cochran Rd. from Roberta Rd. to Pitts School Rd.	Improved traffic signal coordination; intersection improvements; improvements to Pitt School Rd and Westside Bypass	Improved traffic signal coordination; improvements to Pitts School Rd and Westside Bypass	Future Need identified in MPO Street Appendix
Country Club Dr. NE from US Hwy 29 to Branchview Dr.	Improved traffic signal coordination; intersection improvements; access management	Improved traffic signal coordination; intersection improvements	Future Need identified in MPO Street Appendix
Dale Earnhardt Blvd. From Main St. to Cannon Blvd.	Improved traffic signal coordination; intersection improvements; access management	Improved traffic signal coordination; access management	Coordination to be studied and improved
NC Hwy 73 from Trinity Church Rd West to the City Limits	Improved traffic signal coordination; intersection improvements; access management	Additional physical capacity; intersection improvements	Access Management Study completed by NCDOT
I-85 from Concord Mills Blvd. To Rowan Co. Line	Special event transit service; access management at interchange ramps; express bus service; IMAP; ITS, ramp metering, managed lanes, flyover at exit 49	Additional physical capacity; access management at interchange ramps; IMAP; ITS	Funded TIP project
So. Main St. from Dale Earnhardt Blvd South to City Limits	Improved traffic signal coordination; intersection improvements; access management; transit service	Additional physical capacity; intersection improvements; access management; transit service	Future Need identified in MPO Street Appendix
US Hwy 601 from Miami Church Road to NC Hwy 49	Improved traffic signal coordination; intersection improvements; access management	Additional physical capacity; intersection improvements	Future Need identified in MPO Street Appendix

Evaluation and Time Frame

The evaluation of these strategies originated with the development of the 2035 LRTP. As most of these strategies are long term in nature, it will require most of the life of the 2045 MTP to complete them. Timing and financing are the primary obstacles to implementation. The state

and federal governments do not provide the necessary funding to appropriately address congestion on a comprehensive basis, nor have the local jurisdictions been able to adequately address concurrency of infrastructure with changes in land use. MPO and technical staff typically address congested hot spots in a piece

meal fashion as more high profile projects such as the interstate widening garners most of the attention. As funds become available either through discretionary grants, private sector participation, or the development review process, the schedule for implementing particular strategies may be truncated or hastened. With the growing funding “gap” in the fiscally constrained part of this MTP, it will be very difficult to program surface transportation program (STP) funds to address these needs. In fact, the immediate future (10 plus years) for any federal or state funds allocated to the Cabarrus-Rowan MPO will be tied to the completion of I-85, so it may take several iterations of the MTP before these projects become fiscally implementable projects.

Monitoring and Update

The CMP will require an ongoing program of data collection to identify and monitor system problems, identify system deficiencies, analyze alternative solutions, and measure the effectiveness of

congestion management strategies and actions. This program can serve to inform the project selection process by the MPO for the MTP and Metropolitan TIP. Projects with high congestion measures should intuitively rise to the top. I-85 is already the top priority of the MPO and serves as the critical link to the rest of the Metrolina Region.

The MPO will continue to evaluate congestion criteria and their effectiveness in conveying congestion levels and overall delay. MPO staff compiles information on intersections and travel delay. (As to be expected, several of the intersections overlap with the list of congested corridors.) To further analyze the congested corridors, the MPO will need to conduct more extensive performance measures such as travel time studies. The network will also be re-examined through subsequent accident data and Regional Model updates.



CK Rider Transit Service Bus