The Bridge to Cleaner Air

Transportation Conformity

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State and local agencies throughout the country are looking for strategies to relieve traffic congestion, improve air quality, and provide communities with a safe and efficient transportation system.

Transportation conformity, a Clean Air Act requirement, helps communities ensure that federal funds go to transportation activities that are consistent with their air quality goals.The conformity process is administered jointly by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT).

Conformity applies to transportation plans, transportation improvement programs, and highway and transit projects funded or approved by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). It is required in areas that do not meet, or previously have not met, air quality standards for ozone, carbon monoxide, particulate matter, or nitrogen dioxide. Conformity provides an opportunity to address air quality and transportation goals for the new 8-hour ozone and fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) air quality standards.

A conformity determination estimates emissions that will result from an area's transportation system, and demonstrates that those emissions are within the limits outlined in the state's air quality implementation plan. Conformity determinations also ensure that transportation and air quality agencies are consulting with one another, and that transportation control measures in an approved state air quality implementation plan are being implemented in a timely fashion.

What Are the Benefits of Transportation Conformity?

As a bridge between the air quality and transportation planning processes, transportation conformity is a critical element of the Clean Air Act.
It encourages cooperation among various governmental entities and can lead to implementation of new and innovative transportation projects and air pollution control measures as well as improvements in planning data and modeling. Projects and control measures are selected because they can reduce pollution from the existing fleet or prevent pollution from being created in the first place.

Improved Coordination Between Transportation and Air Quality Agencies

Effective consultation on transportation conformity brings together professionals and officials from the transportation and air quality sectors—two highly specialized and traditionally distinct fields.

New and Innovative Transportation Projects and Air Pollution Control Measures

Some U.S. cities have implemented new and innovative projects and air pollution control measures as a result of the need to demonstrate conformity. Smart growth, transit-friendly transportation projects, commuter programs, the purchase and use of alternative-fuel buses for public transit systems, diesel retrofit programs, and anti-idling reduction projects are examples of how some areas have met their conformity challenges.

Improved Tools and Analyses

Conformity helps move the state of modeling and data collection to a higher level. More and higher quality demographic, economic, land use, travel, and air quality data are collected, and models are improved to create better air pollution projections for conformity. These improvements have resulted in better air quality and transportation decisions, and have been beneficial where these same tools are used for other local planning purposes.

How Are Communities Using Transportation Conformity?

Several cities have added new projects and measures to meet their air quality and transportation goals for the 1-hour ozone air quality standard. EPA encourages communities to consider these and other innovative projects and measures when developing conformity determinations and state air quality implementation plans for the new 8-hour ozone and $PM_{2.5}$ standards.

- **Beaumont/Port Arthur, Texas,** provided truck stop electrification to reduce vehicle idling.
- **Houston, Texas,** implemented a heavy-duty diesel retrofit and replacement program.
- **Houston and Dallas, Texas; and the District of Columbia,** implemented programs to reduce single occupancy driving by commuters.
- **Atlanta, Georgia,** used the conformity process to assist agencies in addressing significant growth in vehicle miles traveled. To reconcile air quality and transportation needs, state and local officials reevaluated transportation planning goals and added new transit and land use initiatives. In addition, the governor created a regional planning authority to integrate transportation and air quality concerns.
- **Charlotte, North Carolina,** addressed increased vehicle miles traveled and resulting emissions increases with the creation of a long-term transit and land use plan. Voters passed a $50 million local tax referendum to fund the new plan.

What Agencies Are Involved in the Conformity Process?

A formal interagency consultation process involving metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), state and local transportation and air quality agencies, EPA, FHWA, and FTA is required in developing transportation plans, programs, and projects; preparing state air quality implementation plans; and making conformity determinations. This interagency consultation process ensures that all relevant parties can participate in the process. Public participation is also provided for prior to conformity determinations.

What Agencies Make Conformity Determinations?

MPOs make initial conformity determinations in metropolitan areas. State departments of transportation do not make determinations, but they can assist in analyzing emissions from outside metropolitan planning organization boundaries. FHWA and FTA make final conformity determinations.

How Often Are Conformity Determinations Required?

Conformity determinations must be made whenever transportation plans or programs are updated or amended, or when non-exempt highway and transit projects receive FHWA or FTA funding or approval. In addition, plan and program conformity determinations are completed on a periodic basis and when new emissions budgets become available.

What Role Does EPA Play in Conformity?

EPA, in consultation with FHWA and FTA, is involved with many aspects related to transportation conformity, including:

- Writing federal conformity regulations
- Issuing national guidance
- Developing emissions modeling tools
- Providing conformity training to state and local agencies
- Providing technical and policy assistance
- Determining if state air quality implementation plan motor vehicle emissions budgets are adequate for conformity purposes

Where Can I Find More Information on Transportation Conformity?

Additional information regarding transportation conformity regulations, emissions budget adequacy, training, regional contacts, and guidance documents is available on EPA's transportation conformity Web site at <www.epa.gov/otaq/transp/traqconf.htm>.

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EPA420-F-06-001

January 2006
www.epa.gov/otaq