

Improving the Decision-Making Process

This chapter is not about future transportation needs or funding needs. It's about improving the process KDOT uses to match transportation needs with available resources to accomplish two goals: preserve the system we have and support Kansas economic opportunities.

There is no hard and fast line between these two goals. Preservation, in the long run, creates a cost-effective and efficient system – which, in turn, supports the state's economy.

To accomplish these two goals, the transportation planning process recommended in this LRTP for the next 20 years improves upon the planning processes of the preceding two decades. Stakeholders have driven this chapter's recommendations and were crucial in forming the innovative approach they represent: one that is flexible, responsive and accountable.

Planning the Kansas transportation system will require greater public involvement than before. When KDOT's business was largely fixing highway deficiencies, it was possible to develop a project list once in a decade and check off completed items as the years passed. Less public in-

volvement and input was required, and generally occurred at the beginning of the planning cycle.

Today, flexibility and rapid response are necessary in transportation planning to match the speed of business and industry in a globalized world. More stakeholders will have to be more involved more frequently in helping KDOT select and program (schedule and budget the funding for) projects.

7.1 Pros and Cons of the Current Process

An objective, data-driven computer application called the "priority formula" drives selection of highway projects for the KDOT transportation program. Using massive amounts of data about the condition of the state's highway system, the priority formula identifies those highway sections most in need of improvement because of deficiencies in pavement smoothness or problems related to shoulders, hills, curves, traffic volume or safety concerns. The highest priority sections are assigned projects within the limits of available funds.

The formulas were used to help select projects for both the CHP and the CTP. Under the CTP, KDOT produced a 10-year schedule of projects that were announced at the beginning of the CTP. Recognizing that economic development wasn't accounted for in the formulas, a System Enhancement program was established under the CTP. Communities developed and submitted proposed projects which were then evaluated, in part, on economic development potential. Even within the System Enhancement program, projects were selected at the beginning of the CTP, and a decade's worth of projects were announced.

What is included in the Priority Formula

Currently, KDOT uses a "Priority Formula" to identify those highways in most need of improvement. The formula takes the following attributes and factors into account:

- Accident rate
- Shoulder type
- Lane width
- Current traffic volume
- Projected traffic volume
- Traffic volume/capacity
- Bridge deck condition
- Bridge structure condition
- Pavement surface condition
- Pavement structure condition
- Narrow structures
- Route classification
- Shoulder width
- Sight distance
- Truck traffic
- Bridge width

Strong funding commitments were made to pay for CTP projects. Kansans benefited from the security and commitment to projects that the approach guaranteed. The system also held KDOT accountable for the successful completion of projects. Local jurisdictions benefited, too, because they could coordinate their transportation projects with the state's projects.

However, a process to select projects once every 10 years that relies heavily on a mathematical formula has limitations, as outlined below.

Emerging opportunities are hard to plan for

By committing to a long-term, fixed list of transportation projects, the state limits its ability to address emerging opportunities. As a result, communities struggle to add important new transportation projects when they are needed.

Stakeholder dialogue is lessened

KDOT should talk frequently with stakeholders about their communities' needs for transportation infrastructure. When KDOT adopts a fixed list of projects, opportunities for meaningful dialogue among some transportation stakeholders are diminished.

Economic and other impacts are not fully considered

Because the KDOT formula evaluates road sections based on engineering deficiencies, the consideration of a project's economic impacts – and others that are less tangible – is limited. This may



mean missing out on good projects that add community or economic value.

Beyond these problems, the priority formula doesn't take into account multimodal transportation options.

7.2 Questions Raised by a New Planning Process

Transitions from one way of making decisions to another can be difficult. They raise questions such as

- How do we preserve the best features of the previous process when developing a more flexible and responsive new process?
- How do we take into account all modes as we consider transportation needs?
- How do we blend transportation modes to get the maximum value from the state's investment and the maximum benefit to users?
- How do we align transportation investments with the state's economic priorities and emerging opportunities?
- How do we create an inclusive and transparent decision-making process that has accountability as its cornerstone?
- How do we involve more stakeholders more often without bogging down the process or creating chaos?



PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATIONS

To address these questions, the following is recommended:

- **Create a more flexible and responsive programming structure**
- **Expand the use of local consultation**
- **Create a Kansas Transportation Advisory Panel (KTAP)**
- **Refocus KDOT's Economic Development Program**

More information about these recommendations can be found on the following pages 82-86.

Emerging economic opportunities require speed and agility to address

Transportation-related economic opportunities are not new in Kansas. What is different, however, is the speed and scale of emerging opportunities today. New ethanol plants, growth at Fort Riley, the Gardner intermodal freight facility, new gaming opportunities and development around the Kansas Speedway are examples of projects with big economic potential that depend on transportation improvements and which have emerged outside the scope of the CTP. The state must improve its position to handle these kinds of opportunities.



The Kansas Speedway opened in Wyandotte County in 2001.



Artists rendering of Kansas City Logistic Park near the Gardner intermodal facility, which is expected to handle 2500 trucks per day by the year 2030.



Ethanol plants are being built across the state.



7.3 Create a More Flexible and Responsive Programming Structure for Transportation Programming

A program structure with two categories of multimodal projects is proposed. The chart in Figure 7.1 reflects this programming model.

MULTIPLE PROJECTS, TIME HORIZONS AND LEVELS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

On the left side of the proposed programming model are *core projects* representing the core mission, and core programs, of the transportation system. These projects preserve current elements of the transportation infrastructure, modernize them or add to their capacity. They also improve safety. These projects are central to KDOT's mission; they are the type that KDOT has traditionally been known for. The agency has powerful tools and analytical databases to support this work.

These projects usually can be selected on the basis of engineering criteria. The larger preservation and modernization projects can be scheduled several years in advance. They are fundamental to a functioning system, so their funding should be reliable and inflation-resistant. Their early scheduling helps local jurisdictions coordinate their projects with state projects.

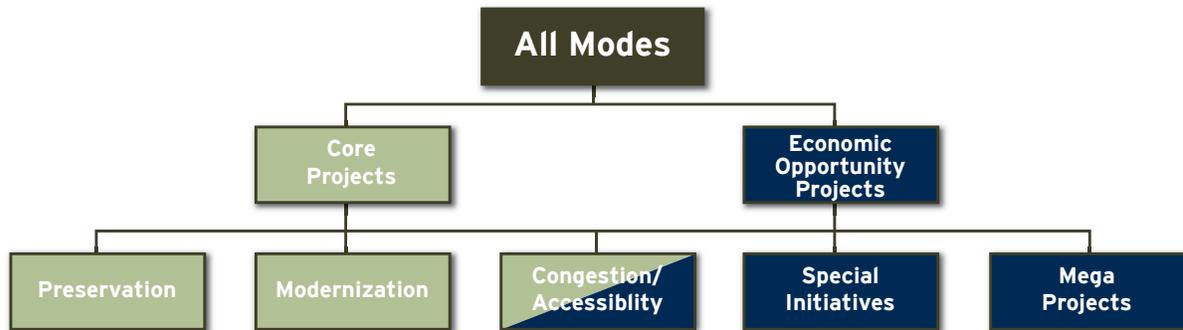
They tend to generate little public discussion because their solution lies, to a great extent, in engineering. These project types are discussed at length in Chapters 2 and 4 and are defined briefly in the “Core Projects” sidebar.

On the right side of the proposed programming model are *economic-opportunity projects* – special initiatives and mega projects that take both engineering criteria and the economic well-being of the state into account. This includes retaining businesses and industries already here and creating opportunities for businesses or industries that might choose to locate here if the state could partner with them on transportation. They may require innovative partnering, funding or engineering techniques.

Such opportunities tend to be time-sensitive and may require quick turnaround. They may even be launched before all the key details of a project are settled. These large-scale projects typically require more public discussion because they are complex, costly and have far-reaching impacts.

Three categories of these projects are defined in the “Economic-opportunity Projects” sidebar. It should be noted that the types of projects listed under the “Congestion/Accessibility” box share some of the features of both core projects and economic-opportunity projects.

Figure 7.1 - Proposed KDOT New Programming Model



Core Projects

1. **Preservation.** Activities such as pavement resurfacing and reconstruction, bridge repairs, short line rail repair loans and grants and runway resurfacing protect the state’s investments in transportation infrastructure.
2. **Modernization.** Activities such as adding or widening highway shoulders and improving airport navigation equipment help the transportation infrastructure meet modern standards to improve travelers’ safety and mobility.
3. **Congestion and accessibility.** Activities such as adding turn lanes, deploying intelligent transportation systems technology or supporting new bus service offer congestion relief and improved accessibility for all modes. These activities support both core programs and economic opportunities.

Economic-Opportunity Projects

1. **Congestion/Accessibility.** Projects in this category may address unforeseen congestion and accessibility needs, such as those created by a new manufacturing plant. The solutions to these problems could be similar to the solutions used in core program projects.
2. **Special Initiatives.** These projects respond to emerging needs of statewide significance, such as the demands placed on the transportation system by the Kansas Speedway or growth at Fort Riley. Some special initiatives projects might focus on a single mode while others might include multimodal elements.
3. **Mega Projects.** These are massive, infrastructure improvements of statewide significance, such as the K-7 corridor which spans 37 miles in four rapidly-developing counties. Because these projects could easily absorb most or all of KDOT’s annual construction funds, they would likely require a package of federal, state and local funds or some form of innovative financing.

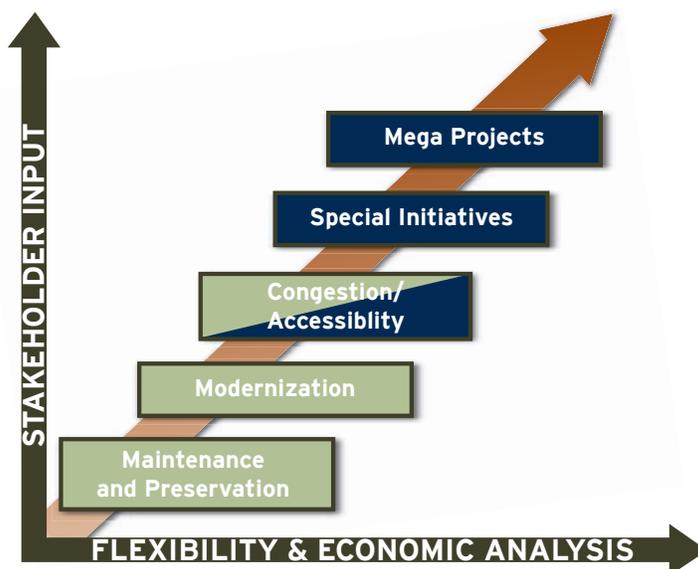


A NEW PROGRAM STRUCTURE: FREQUENT AND FLEXIBLE DECISION-MAKING

The different motivations for the two kinds of projects – preserving the transportation system and supporting the economy – combined with the different levels of public interest and necessary economic analysis mean that KDOT and its partners need to make project decisions more frequently than once every 10 years.

Different projects require different input and flexibility levels as shown in Figure 7.2. As noted above, core projects generally can be selected early, programmed in advance and require less public involvement. The priority formulas will remain important in their selection because these projects target improvement is on the basis of existing physical conditions.

Figure 7.2 - Different Projects Require Different Input and Flexibility Levels



With projects in support of economic opportunity, on the other hand, the priority formulas provide important data, but aren't sufficient for decision-making. These projects will require a wide-ranging discussion about local, regional and statewide tradeoffs. That is the basis for the next two recommendations, which concern input and accountability.

7.4 Expand the Use of Local Consult

Because of the success of a series of 84 local consultation meetings conducted in 2006, KDOT should expand their use to engage in regular, informal dialogue with local stakeholders about transportation needs as shown in Figure 7.3. These meetings, which would emphasize stakeholder collaboration, should be a forum for

work on transportation issues by such partners as the metropolitan planning organizations, Kansas Department of Commerce, local elected and public works officials, regional planning commissions where available, chambers of commerce, transit providers, airport authorities, shippers and other industries that rely on the transportation system. The hope is that over time, such meetings would result in stakeholders' taking a more regional, multimodal transportation perspective.

The meetings should be held at sites across the state, with stakeholders choosing to attend the local and regional meeting(s) where they are likely to discuss economic or transportation issues that are most relevant to them. These meetings would be a powerful way for KDOT to gather grassroots input on project needs and priorities that can subsequently inform to regional discussions and spark new program development.

7.5 Create a Kansas Transportation Advisory Panel

A flexible program structure increases the need for mechanisms that assure KDOT is accountable. In addition to local consultation, a Kansas Transportation Advisory Panel (KTAP) should be created as shown in Figure 7.3. Its members should be appointed by the Secretary in consultation with stakeholders. It should include a mix of local, regional and statewide transportation

stakeholders representing the state’s geographic regions, transportation modes and economic impact perspectives. Members would be briefed on KDOT progress in meeting agency goals and would provide ongoing counsel to the Secretary regarding:

Guidance on emerging issues

KTAP members should serve as an additional set of “eyes and ears” on emerging statewide issues likely to impact the transportation system.

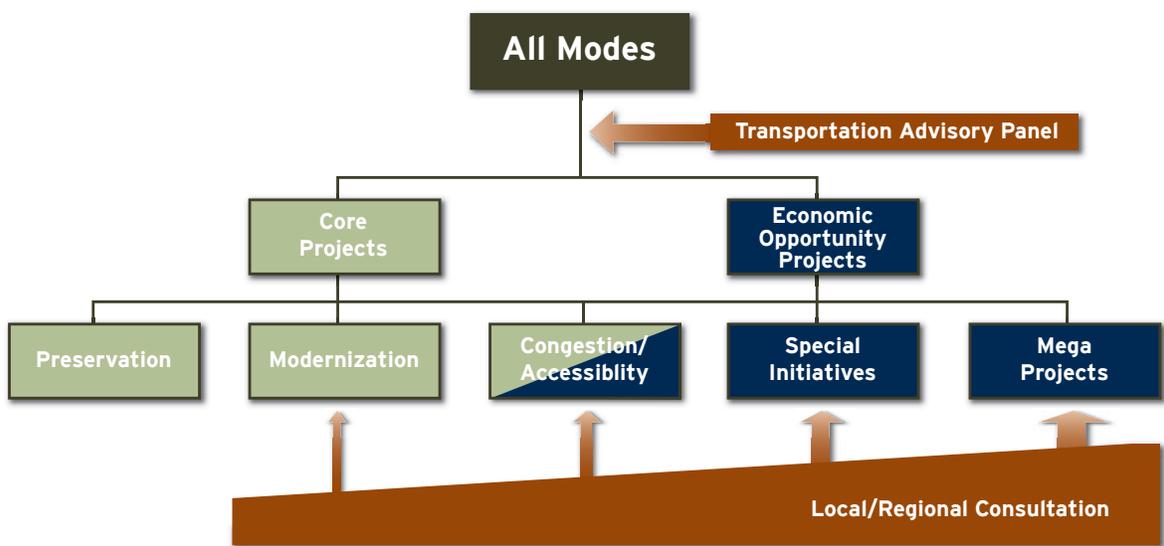
Advice on project selection

KTAP members should provide advice on the selection of a broad range of transportation projects.

Response to local input

KTAP members should review and comment on information generated through local consultation meetings.

Figure 7.3 - Integrating Stakeholder Input and Increasing Accountability





7.6 Refocus KDOT's Existing Economic Development Program

Transportation-sensitive economic opportunities don't always require costly solutions. In addition to aligning the state's major transportation investments with economic opportunities of statewide significance, it is important to also provide transportation improvements for locally or regionally important opportunities.

So, in addition to the mega projects and special initiatives funded as economic opportunities, the five topical working groups recommended KDOT overhaul its existing economic development set-aside program. The purpose would be to redirect the program toward economic development with the explicit goal of helping companies that offer the prospect of high-quality employment to decide to remain in Kansas or locate here. Today, the program funds important transportation improvements on the local road system but a rigorous selection process based on economic impact criteria isn't currently used.

Projects within this program are typically small and rural, and the LRTP working groups recommended that focus not change. However, they recommend that the program be expanded to all transportation modes.

Typical projects might include intersection improvements at a business park or improvements to a short-line railroad spur. Features of the new program would include:

- Emphasizing non-speculative, immediate opportunities;
- Focusing on well-paid, permanent jobs;
- Utilizing economy-based project selection criteria;
- Accelerating decision-making on project awards; and
- Integrating and coordinating with other economic development initiatives.

During the CTP years, about \$5 million a year was allocated to these projects. A cost-benefit analysis of the program, once refocused, would give direction about whether that level of funding is sufficient.

In any case, funding decisions on the multi-modal project applications should be accelerated. KDOT has programmed these projects two to three years in advance. In the new program, decisions would be made annually or more frequently.