

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An integrated transportation plan is of paramount importance to urban, regional, and national economic health, given the myriad benefits of efficient transportation. It is estimated that traffic congestion costs national economies several billion dollars per year through lost worker productivity, and the effects of delays in just-in-time goods delivery. Recently, Toronto and Vancouver – two of Canada’s major city-regions – have taken steps towards addressing such issues by producing regional transportation plans, or RTPs. While an RTP may take different forms depending on its preparing agency’s functions, at its core an RTP is a long-term strategy document that guides the regional transportation network’s development.

Metrolinx, the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA)’s regional transportation planning agency, released its RTP, *The Big Move*, in November 2008. *The Big Move* consists of a number of transportation projects suggested by the province, coupled with the goals, strategies and policies to ensure those projects’ implementation. In July 2008, the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD)’s regional transportation planning agency, TransLink, released its most recent RTP, *Transport 2040*. As TransLink is responsible for operating the GVRD’s public transit network, its RTP also includes a second document, the 10-Year Transportation and Financial Plan (TFP). The TFP is responsible for describing GVRD transit expansion and operations, and how those will be funded.

While RTPs are important vision documents for their city-regions, few methods exist for evaluating their policies, projects, or impacts. This is quite surprising, given the vast amounts of funding that RTPs require, and given the RTP's power as a tool for influencing a city-region's land use patterns. This report's purpose is to develop such a tool for RTP evaluation based upon pre-existing methods of plan evaluation (see Methods, below), and seeks to accomplish the following five objectives:

1. To determine the elements of what constitutes "good" regional transportation planning,
2. To determine the extent to which the Metrolinx and TransLink RTPs reflect these elements,
3. To compare and contrast the Metrolinx and TransLink RTPs based upon these elements,
4. To demonstrate the effectiveness of mixed quantitative/qualitative evaluation methods for RTPs, and
5. To provide an evaluation process and recommendations for future RTPs to follow.

Methods

This report employs Baer's General Plan Evaluation Criteria, a method of plan evaluation that provides a base set of criteria for determining plan quality, and that encourages the addition or deletion of criteria as needed to suit the plan being evaluated. Criteria were added, rejected, or modified based upon their perceived usefulness for RTP evaluation (see Table 2, below). Each criterion was then assigned a ranking out of one or two, based upon how well the RTP reflected that criterion; these were tabulated at the end of the evaluation to provide an overall quantitative rank out of 100. The two RTPs were then evaluated against the resultant criteria and ranked to

determine the extent to which the criteria were represented. These results were then compared to determine (in conjunction with a background context review) elements of “good” regional transportation planning (see Table 1, below).

Results

Table 1 – Comparative Analysis Results

<i>Section</i>	<i>Metrolinx</i>		<i>TransLink</i>	
	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Weighted</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Weighted</i>
Adequacy of Context	10/13	11.5/15	11/13	13/15
“Rational Model” Considerations	17/24	10.5/15	15/24	9.5/15
Procedural Validity	13/16	12/15	14/16	13/15
Adequacy of Scope	10/14	11/15	12/14	13/15
Guidance for Implementation	9/10	13.5/15	4/10	6/15
Approach, Data and Methodology	4/7	5/9	3/7	4/9
Quality of Communication	7/8	7/8	6/8	6/8
Plan Format	6/8	6/8	6/8	6/8
<i>Total Rank</i>	<i>76/100</i>	<i>76.5/100</i>	<i>71/100</i>	<i>70.5/100</i>

The results of the analysis demonstrate that both *The Big Move* and the TransLink RTP are satisfactory or good plans. Both exhibited characteristics that can be considered “good” regional transportation planning elements. Common characteristics included:

- A detailed examination of background challenges (both on the regional and global levels),
- Robust consultation processes to ensure that many different points of view are being considered, and
- Extensive focus placed upon the land use/transportation connection, which is important given transportation’s role as a key driver of land use patterns.

While the two plans were ranked equally when the section on implementation was not taken into account, *The Big Move* ranked higher overall when this section was considered, due to its far greater provision of implementation guidance.

Table 2 – Elements of a “Good” RTP

Detailed examination of the challenges that the RTP is designed to address
Clear identification of implementation problems
Explicit identification of goals and objectives, with clear connection to proposals/recommendations
Clear relation to other government bodies, agencies, and plans
Frequent updates
Robust consultation process
Examination of both fiscal and network efficiency
Extensive focus placed upon the land use/ transportation connection
Strong implementation provisions
Clear communication

Based upon the elements of “good” RTPs displayed in Table 2, five recommendations for future RTPs to follow were generated:

Recommendation 1 – Place extensive focus upon the land use/transportation connection.

Recommendation 2 – Frequent updates (preferably every five years or less) help ensure that the plan is responsive to change.

Recommendation 3 – Strong implementation guidance is necessary to help keep the plan “on track”.

Recommendation 4 – A robust consultation process helps ensure that the plan addresses the concerns of a broad segment of the population.

Recommendation 5 – Be bold, yet reasonable.

Table 3 – RTP Evaluation Criteria

Adequacy of Context (*Explain the context and the setting: the what and the why of the document. They are not self-evident to the public.*)

1. Is the political/legal context of the RTP explained?
2. Is the administrative authority for preparation indicated?
3. Is the role of the preparing agency adequately presented?
4. Is background information presented?
5. Is it clear who the RTP is for?
6. Is the RTP's purpose explained?
7. Is the RTP's scope reported early on, to alert the reader about what to expect?
8. Is an overview/summary provided?
9. Is the source of funding for the RTP shown?

"Rational Model" Considerations (*Show basic planning considerations based on underlying theory and its criteria. Even beyond the list here, there many theories and types of plans. The plan authors must be clear themselves about what they are doing, to transmit clarity to the reader.*)

1. Are the RTP's formulators clear about the criteria they will use to assess its progress?
2. Have these criteria been made explicit in the RTP?
3. Are problems specifically identified, or merely implied?
4. Are goals and objectives explicitly identified?
5. Is the tone of the RTP commensurate with the planning approach recommended?
6. If the RTP is intended to be comprehensive, does it relate substantively to a larger whole?
7. Does the RTP consider the next highest level of government or context?
8. Does the RTP consider the next lower level of government or context?
9. Is there planning for coordination with other plans and agencies?
10. Is the capacity or adequacy of existing transportation infrastructure identified?
11. Are transportation alternatives listed, or at least considered?
12. Are the alternatives identified as "variations on a theme", or as radically different?

13. How often is the RTP scheduled to be updated? Is there a requirement for it to be updated more/less often?

Procedural Validity (*Explain the who and the how of the plan-making; inform the reader about what went on in making the plan and what is going on by publishing it.*)

1. Who was involved in the RTP formulation?
2. How were they chosen?
3. How were they involved?
4. How many noticed public meetings were held?
5. Were these held in different parts of the region?
6. How were interested parties notified of their ability to be involved in the RTP process?
7. Was an advisory group used?
8. How were technical matters transformed into recommended policy? (e.g. through "ordinary knowledge", experience, "scientific" training, design training)
9. How were the RTP's transportation needs determined?
10. Were preliminary drafts circulated for public comment?
11. Were any changes made to the RTP (or the process) as a direct result of public input?

Adequacy of Scope (*Show how the plan is connected to the outside world.*)

1. Have a variety of possible or pertinent issues been considered?
2. To what extent have issues of efficiency been considered?
3. To what extent have issues of equity been considered?
4. Has the distribution of costs and benefits among different groups and interests been considered?
5. Have financial/fiscal implications been considered?
6. Is the RTP financially constrained or unconstrained? Was a constrained plan required?

Adequacy of Scope (continued)

7. Have legal/political implications been considered?
8. Does the RTP relate to the province's transportation plan? If so, how?
9. Is maintenance and operation of the existing system given consideration, in addition to the addition of new capacity?
10. How does the RTP deal with the land use/transportation connection?

Guidance for Implementation (Most plans are intended to do something. Consider the instruments [ordinances, regulations, budgets, schedules, etc.] and the agencies and persons responsible for making the plan work. Should they be included? [A vision plan would not have an implementation aspect; rather, it would have a section dealing with the "next steps".])

1. Are implementation provisions included in the RTP?
2. Are there priorities for implementation?
3. Is cost of implementation vs. non-implementation considered?
4. Is there a time span for RTP implementation?
5. Is there a program or proposal for an impact analysis?
6. Is the agency or person responsible for implementation identified?
7. Can the responsible agency realistically be expected to implement the RTP?

Approach, Data, and Methodology (Make clear the technical bases, if any, of the plan; where the data may come from and how they are used, so that others may check the plan's thinking by use of the same sources.)

1. Is the RTP based on a wide spectrum of data where feasible?
2. Is the plan sufficiently flexible to permit new data and findings to be fed in?
3. Are the data sources cited?

4. Are the methodology sources cited?
5. Is there a multi-modal scoring criteria used for projects?
6. Were there changes made to land use or demographic projections based on the congestion implications from the travel forecasting process?
7. Are ranges of values used for controversial assumptions?

Quality of Communication (Clear communication above all else is necessary for a fair hearing from others.)

1. Are the ideas convincingly presented, given the nature of the audience?
2. Are the rationales behind the decisions effectively presented?
3. Are the proposals/recommendations/conclusions consistent with the objectives?
4. Is the tone of the document consistent with the message conveyed? (e.g. not presented in the past tense as an accomplished fact when the plan is for study and review?)

Plan Format (Other forms of communication are found in the plan format itself, as well as evidence on who takes professional responsibility for the plan's formulation, when it was adopted, and other seemingly incidental concerns that nevertheless communicate professional competence.)

1. Are the size and format conducive to the use intended?
2. Is the date of publication shown?
3. Are the authors shown, to indicate professional responsibility?
4. Is there a table of contents?
5. Are pages numbered?
6. Are graphics used to best advantage?
7. Is the RTP attractively laid out?