

Regional Transportation Plan Audit

Background

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is a comprehensive, performance-based, multi-modal and coordinated regional plan through fiscal year 2028. The RTP covers all major modes of transportation from a regional perspective, including freeways/highways, streets and public transit (including facilities and services such as a regional bus network and light rail). The RTP identifies specific projects and revenue allocations by transportation mode. The RTP is prepared, updated and adopted by the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG), which is the regional planning agency for the Maricopa County area.

In 2004, voters passed Proposition 400, a half-cent sales tax for transportation in Maricopa County. The tax continues for 20 years, through calendar year 2025 to implement projects and programs in the RTP. The sales tax is used to construct new freeways; widen existing freeways and highways; and improve the arterial street system, regional bus services, and other special transportation services, and high capacity transit services such as light rail, bus rapid transit, and express buses. All projects funded from the half-cent sales tax are specified in the RTP and provides over half of RTP revenues.

The Audit

A provision included in Proposition 400 requires a performance audit of the RTP and projects scheduled for funding during the next five years beginning in 2010, and every fifth year thereafter.

The Arizona Auditor General's Office has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) from independent auditors, with proposals being accepted until July 14. A contract to perform the audit is anticipated to be awarded in late July. The audit is statutorily required to be completed by October 17, 2011.

The purpose of the audit is to assess the efficiency, effectiveness, and performance of the MAG RTP for Maricopa County and to:

- Examine projects previously funded and their impact on relieving congestion and improving mobility (2006-2010)
- Examine projects scheduled for funding during the next five years (2011-2015)
- Review specific areas identified by the Arizona Auditor General through interviews with and input from various interested parties
- Address statutorily mandated questions
- Recommend ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the RTP

Light Rail

There are several specific issues related to transit that are required to be addressed in the audit. The 20-mile light rail starter line was constructed and began service using Prop 400 funding. The auditor will review several factors related to the light rail system:

- Service levels – determine whether light rail service achieved projected service levels and the reasons for any differences
- Capital costs – evaluate whether capital costs have been on target with projections, higher than projected, or lower than projected and the reasons for any differences
- Operation and Maintenance Costs – identify whether operation and maintenance costs have been on target with original projections, higher or lower than projected, and the reasons for any differences
- Transit Ridership – review and comment on how transit ridership was originally projected and determine whether ridership has been on target with projections, higher or lower than projected and the reasons for any difference, and whether or how light rail ridership may have impacted bus ridership
- Farebox Revenues – determine whether farebox revenues have met established goals and what percent of costs farebox revenues cover

The audit is also required to make recommendations on whether further implementation of a transportation system is warranted, and to examine the process for changes to the RTP and whether any changes are in the transportation system's best interest and to ensure that the public has an opportunity to provide input into the process.

Opportunities for Input

Friends of Transit responded to an invitation to provide feedback to the Auditor General's Office prior to the release of the RFP and sent the Auditor a letter on September 18, 2009 stressing the need for opportunities for public input during the audit.

The RFP outlines a scope of work that includes several public hearings:

- Briefing to the MAG Transportation Policy Committee (once per month)
- Presentations to Legislative committees (as requested, likely after final report issued)

Friends of Transit attended the pre-proposal conference for the RFP on June 8 and reiterated the importance of public input. The Auditor General's Office specified during the pre-proposal conference that the firm awarded the audit contract will have discretion on soliciting further public input. Friends of Transit has offered assistance in announcing any public meetings, and will continue to stress the importance of public input through all appropriate avenues.

Timeline for the Audit

RFP

RFP released	May 26, 2010
Pre-proposal conference	June 8, 2010
RFP deadline	July 14, 2010
Estimated contract award and notice to proceed	July 28, 2010

Reports

Written status reports due to Auditor General	every two weeks
Briefings provided to audited entities	monthly
Deadline for initial preliminary draft	July 15, 2011
Deadline for revised draft	August 17, 2011
Deadline for draft exit conference	September 7, 2011
Deadline for final report for agency response	September 23, 2011
Agency final response due	October 7, 2011
Deadline for final report to Auditor General	October 13, 2011
Issue report	October 17, 2011
Presentation to Legislative Committees	TBD
6-month follow up	April 2012
18-month follow up, if necessary	April 2013