



TECHSUMMARY

SIO No. 30000606 / LTRC Project No. 12-4SS

Development of Minimum State Requirements for Local Growth Management Policies – Phase 1

INTRODUCTION

Growth in and around many urban areas in Louisiana is not consistently managed or planned. This can negatively impact state and local governments' ability to meet current and future demand for transportation infrastructure, particularly with respect to related policies and programs adopted by the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development. This research entails the development of minimum requirements for local growth management policies for use in Louisiana in order to alleviate some of the stress placed on state and local governments by uncontrolled development and to provide a mechanism for coordinating infrastructure investment with development to encourage safe, efficient, and sustainable communities.

OBJECTIVE

The goal of this research was to identify policies, programs, and strategies aimed at supporting the alignment of land and transportation assets and planning in order to more efficiently manage growth that could be effectively implemented in urban, suburban, and rural communities in Louisiana, at all levels of government.

The ultimate objective of this research was to develop a blueprint for growth management and a guide to model policies at the state, MPO, parish, and municipal levels in Louisiana. This is a tool that the state can use to develop and encourage policy implementation and to facilitate better coordination across jurisdictions and agencies to integrate transportation investments with land use decisions. This is also a tool that local governments can use directly to find solutions to the specific issues they face in their communities.

SCOPE

The first phase of this research was limited to defining minimum requirements with respect to transportation with a focus on understanding how it relates to the state's complete streets policy.

The scope of work included a review of the literature; identifying current state-of-practice in Louisiana, including a legal analysis and a socioeconomic and demographic analysis of the trends at the parish level, a statewide poll, stakeholder interviews, an inventory of growth management policies for rural and urban areas; modeling effectiveness of potential policies based on transportation and return-on-investment outcomes; creating draft Growth Management Guidelines for Louisiana; and working with stakeholders to establish consensus and determine the potential ability for implementation of such policies. Each of these work products were considered in the development of a guide to model growth management policy, which accompanies the final research report.

METHODOLOGY

This study involved a mixed methods approach that includes both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. The literature review addressed several key research questions related to this effort, including:

- What is the current state of the practice in statewide growth management policy?
- What states have implemented growth management programs to date, and in particular, what role can state DOTs play in growth management policy?

LTRC Report 545

Read online summary or final report:
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- What tools have those programs employed, and what can we learn from other states' experiences?

The legal analysis involved identifying which parishes in Louisiana have growth management policies in place and what policies are currently active, if any, and what legal frameworks exist at the state and local levels in Louisiana for growth management, generally. U.S. Census data from 2000 and 2010, American Community Survey 5-year estimates for 2006-2010, and the Louisiana Parish Population Projections Series through 2030 were evaluated in order to identify demographic trends and transportation characteristics around the state.

From October to November 2013, the Merritt C. Becker Jr. Transportation Institute at the University of New Orleans conducted a public poll about transportation across Louisiana, as well as a poll targeted to stakeholders including planners, engineers, and other professionals with an interest in and knowledge of transportation issues. The second poll was directed principally to local and regional government agencies, though representatives of non-profit organizations, the private sector, and state agencies were permitted to participate as well.

A series of initial stakeholder focus groups were conducted during the spring and fall of 2013 on the topic of growth management and transportation in Louisiana. The focus groups were intended to identify current transportation and development concerns, priorities, and policy efforts in each region of the state, in order to identify contextually appropriate tools and policies that could help the state encourage local and regional agencies to more effectively guide growth to protect and enhance the effectiveness of the state's transportation networks. A second series of stakeholder meetings were conducted during the spring of 2014. These meetings were designed as workshops to allow participants to provide feedback on the findings of this research to date, and to develop consensus about which of the draft growth management guidelines are the state's top priorities. In addition, these workshops sought to identify the key stakeholders who should or must be involved in the development of priority policies, as well as the resources and actions needed to implement such policies, and the relative level of overall difficulty in achieving policy implementation.

Finally, the team developed a model of the potential impacts of implementing a growth management policy approach. This exercise builds on recent studies that have demonstrated a statistically significant correlation between built environment and transportation variables with vehicle miles travelled (VMT), the crash rate, injury rate and fatality rate at the metropolitan level. In addition, a return-on-investment analysis was prepared demonstrating some of the potential benefits of fully implementing access management features into arterial roadways in the two largest metro areas in Louisiana, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans.

CONCLUSIONS

This research revealed that most states have had decades of experience in working towards managing development with transportation infrastructure. Louisiana is relatively "late to the game" but can benefit of 30+ years of experiences in other states. State-level leadership, however, will be necessary for local government to seriously engage in growth management planning and implementation. Legal analysis conducted for all parishes in Louisiana revealed that

23 of 64 have combinations of policies in place that would support growth management goals. Most of these parishes are located in the urbanized portions of the state, including the I-20 corridor near Shreveport, leaving significant opportunity for planning and policy adoption in support of growth management elsewhere. Demographic analysis revealed that, in the coming decades, households across the state are becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, consisting of smaller families and more single-person households with a growth in older adults, further reinforcing the need for more efficient, accessible development patterns and transportation choices.

The major finding of this project is that it will be impossible for Louisiana to "build our way out of traffic congestion." The return-on-investment analysis found that while there are important benefits to converting arterial streets to include access management features to reduce traffic delay, the costs associated with such an investment does not yield significant cost savings as a result. This is not to say there are not other benefits, such as improved safety; however, the researchers were not able to obtain the necessary data to assess the safety benefits of access management.

While access management is not a panacea for addressing growth management, the growth management policy modeling exercise found significant benefits for creating policy to use fuel prices, population density, and transit usage as an effective way to manage VMTs and transportation safety, measured by crash rates, injury rates, and fatal crash rates. The study found that manageable increases in fuel prices, population density, and transit usage can help offset VMT growth associated with population growth, thus keeping total VMTs flat between 2010-2030 and help improve transportation safety.

The study also found public support for increasing transit and other multi-modal services, including willingness to pay new taxes to fund such infrastructure. This is not surprising considering many other states have passed new dedicated taxes in recent years to fund transit infrastructure that connect people to jobs and services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Stakeholders reported that high priority needs for advancing growth management policy in Louisiana include: the need to review and eliminate non-essential bureaucratic processes; initiate transportation funding reform; reduce developer/community resistance to regulatory change; prioritize technical assistance and growth management in fast-growing communities; and develop a planning/implementation grant program to encourage development of comprehensive plans and zoning codes, empower local agencies to build community support for innovative policies and projects, incentivize and facilitate adoption of DOTD policies by local and regional government agencies, develop and publicize new-policy demonstration projects, and focus on MPOs as leaders for local policy dissemination and consistency with DOTD objectives.

An overview description, findings, and actions for implementation of these high priorities, along with the medium and low priority recommendations can be found in the "Louisiana Guide to Transportation and Growth Management Policies" developed in the course of this study. These guidelines constitute the "blueprint" or set of policies that state, regional, and local policymakers and planners should use to begin to move a growth management agenda forward in the state of Louisiana.