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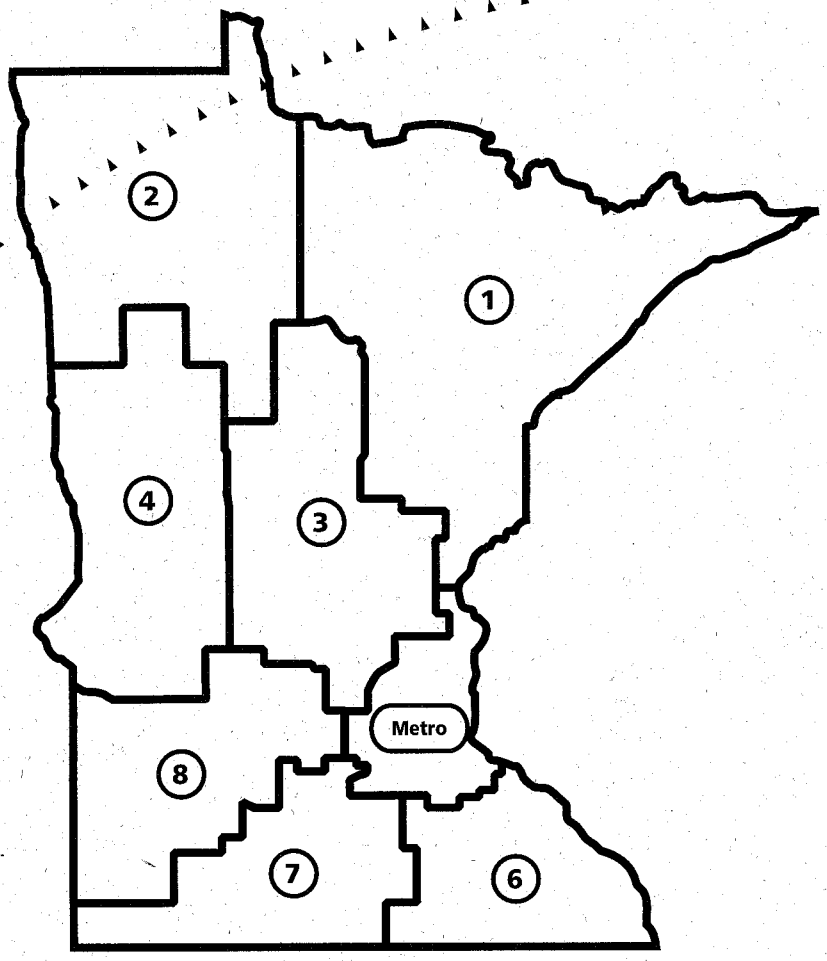

Minnesota's District/Area Transportation Partnership Process

Volume II: Case Studies and Other Perspectives

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
CENTER FOR TRANSPORTATION STUDIES

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The University of Minnesota's Center for Transportation Studies conducted a study on Minnesota's district/area transportation process (ATP). Building upon existing planning processes, the ATPs involve a broad range of transportation professionals, elected officials, special interest groups, and the public in developing the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

Volume II of this study includes eight case studies that report the data heard from the members of the eight ATPs. It also contains other perspectives from the point of view of the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (Mn/DOT's) Central Office, non-ATP members and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) directors. The case study information is organized around these key features: project selection and ranking process, ATP membership make-up, boundary issues, financial data, goals, relationships with regional entities and local units of government, the role of elected officials, and the public involvement process.

Through eight case studies, one for each district/ATP, and a cross-case analysis, the study documents information gathered from ATP members and representatives from Mn/DOT on the key features of the ATP process. A summary of the perceived strengths and challenges for the three themes of partnership, prioritization, and planning shows that several of the strengths and challenges appear more than once across the three themes.

As the ATPs and Mn/DOT explore the possibility of future changes, the cross-cutting issues in the ATP process are: the composition of ATP membership; the nature of public involvement; decentralized decision making; enhancement projects; ranking regional significance; intermodalism; urban and rural tension; fiscal constraint; and the role of planning in the ATP process.

Volume I of the report includes the cross-comparison of ATP processes and practices, findings from the common characteristics of the research data, and issues and challenges identified by ATP members in the interviews.

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Final Report

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7.1 THE EVOLUTION OF THE NORTHEAST ATP

Research data from interviews with members of the Northeast ATP (NE ATP) indicate that the decentralization of transportation investment authority to the ATPs has resulted in a number of changes in the decision-making process. Some of these changes include:

1. New relationships have formed on a regional level. People who formerly may not have thought of themselves as transportation stakeholders now see themselves as invited into a regional transportation investment process.

2. Involvement in the ATP process allows for members to become aware of a broader range of transportation concerns and to find ways to rank projects based upon criteria that are directly tied to the cultural and geographic composition of that region.

3. Members claim that their efforts to determine what is best for their part of the state and for the state as a whole has given them a sense of "the bigger picture."

4. Formalization of the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission's transportation planning functions.

Additional changes noted by members include:

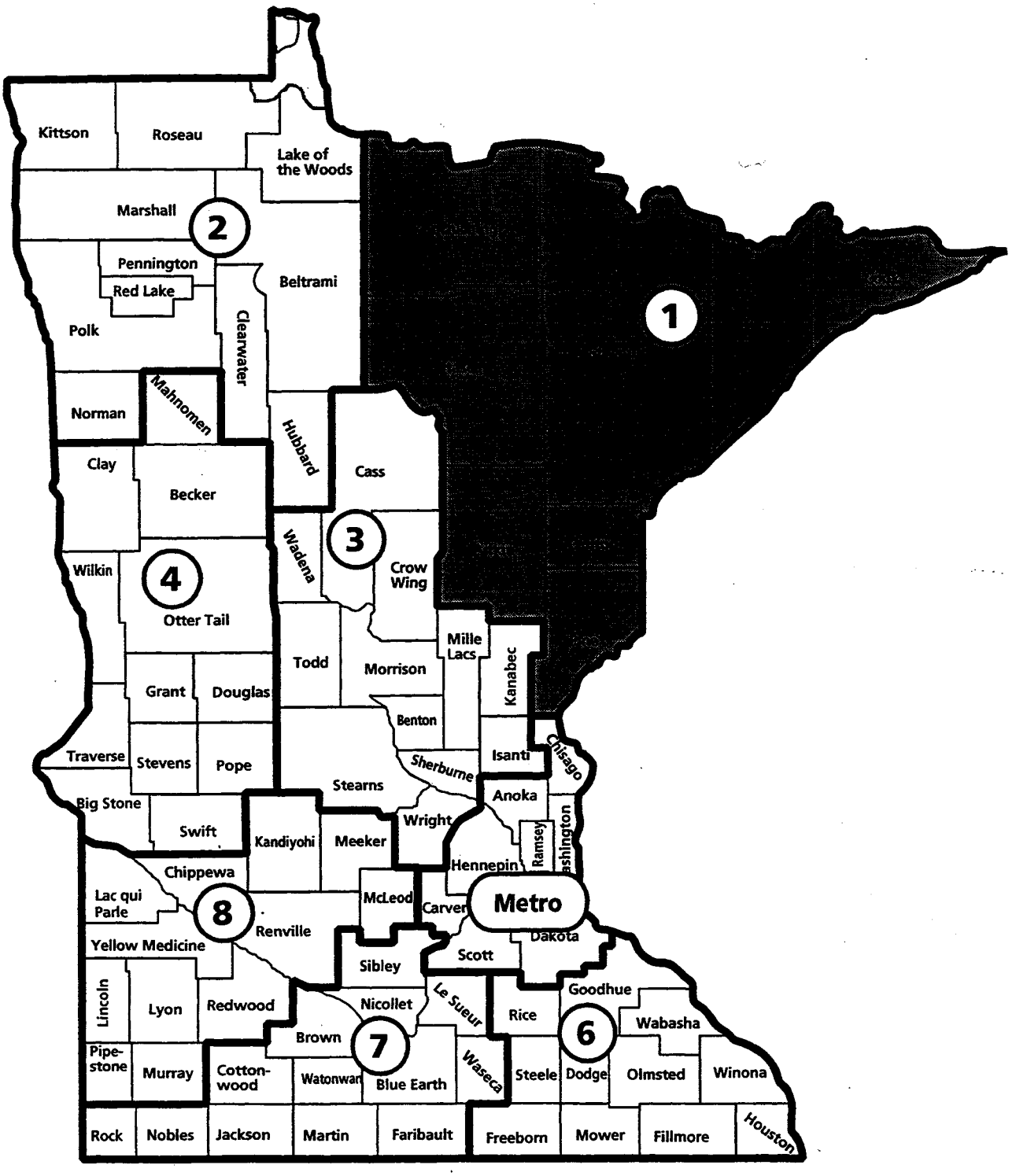
1. The new process is shorter. One member commented, "We would nominate in March and it would be fourteen months before we would have a program developed; now we get it in sixteen weeks."

2. The tribal representative to the ATP finds that the ATP is a new forum for voicing tribal concerns. Furthermore, the NE ATP is an opportunity for tribal representatives to indicate that the transportation needs of their communities coincide with the broader needs of the region.

3. Members have observed that representatives from the counties used to see only the importance of county roads; now they are recognizing the role of the state system and other modes like transit.

4. The pattern of investments using federal funds has changed. The next three-year transportation improvement program (TIP) shows increased attention to preserving and

District 1
Area Transportation Partnership



Courtesy: Minnesota Department of Transportation

improving highway miles while adding an additional 37 buses as a part of an effort to improve the transit fleet.

5. Today, the NE ATP is able to rely upon a regional transportation plan being created by the ARDC that contains information on various transportation activities (such as pedestrian and bike trails, and scenic by-ways) in the region, an inventory of the existing transportation system, and a vision for an improved regional system.

7.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGION

7.2.1 Geographic

The NE ATP is located in the northeastern corner of Minnesota. The region, known as the Arrowhead, is dominated by lakes and woods, the Mesabi Iron Range, and the shore of Lake Superior.

The Northeast Minnesota ATP encompasses one-fifth of the state and includes the following counties: Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, Pine, and St. Louis. The NE ATP borders upon Mn/DOT Districts 2, 3, and Metro Division (border of Pine and Chisago Counties), Canada, and Wisconsin.

7.2.2 Economic

The City of Duluth is the economic hub of the region. The Seaway Port Authority of Duluth manages a major port for bulk commodities, including taconite, coal, and grain. Hibbing, Mountain Iron/Virginia, Eveleth/Gilbert, Cloquet, Grand Rapids, and International Falls are regional centers. Mining, tourism, services, retail trade, government, manufacturing, and forest products are the primary economic activities. Employment grew from 133,540 in 1983 to 157,697 in 1992.

7.2.3 Demographic

The 1980 population for this ATP region was 363,215. In 1990, the population was 332,606, and is projected to be 299,640 in 2020, a 10% decline.[1] Pine County, the county closest to the Twin Cities, is the only county in the ATP projected to grow in population.

7.2.4 Highway and Transit Information

The daily vehicle miles traveled for the NE ATP represents 9% of the state's total. Travel to work took an average of 17 minutes, which is the state average. Seventy-two percent of the people made their commute drive alone, which is slightly below the state average. The region has an extensive rural transit system that has experienced a steady increase in ridership. However, the Duluth Transit system ridership fell 33% from 5,230,245 rides in 1984 to 3,499,523 rides in 1994.[2]

7.3 NORTHEAST ATP PROCESSES AND PRACTICES[3]

7.3.1 Introductory Comments

Many ATP members interviewed noted that attention to broad representation and process are important to the NE ATP process. Because of the close working relationship between the regional entities such as the ARDC, tribal governments, and the Metropolitan Interstate Council (MIC), ATP members reported that they trust the process. There was overall agreement that the NE ATP is indeed a "partnership." Figure 7-1 illustrates the interchange between regional entities and the calendar they work by.

7.3.2 Membership Characteristics

Full ATP: Before the NE ATP was formed, the District Engineer approached the ARDC and asked the group for recommendations on representatives to serve in the to-be-created ATP committee. Mn/DOT District 1 would provide two members, the District Engineer would be an ex-officio member, and the remainder of the members on the ATP would be recommended by the ARDC.

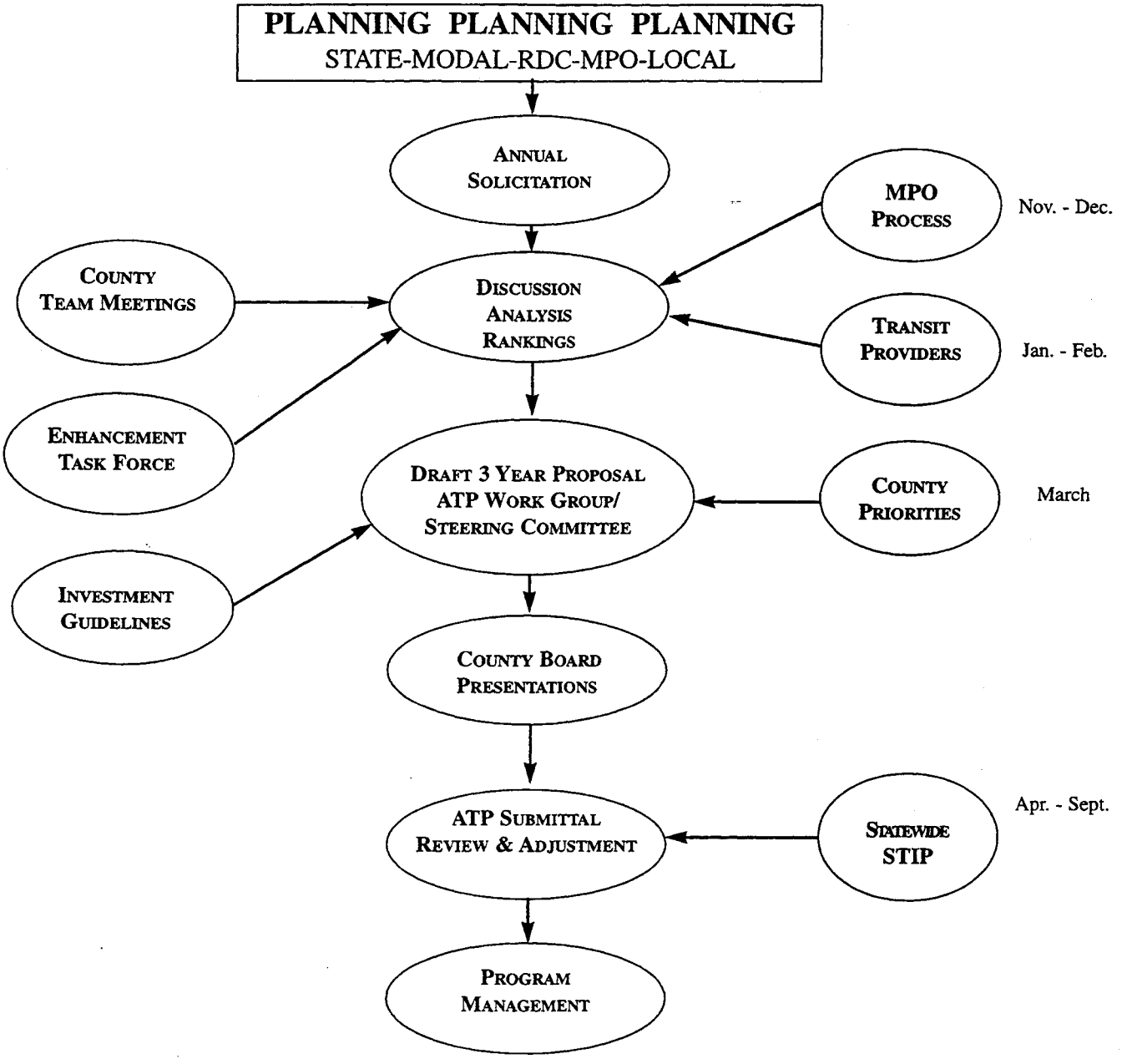
The NE ATP has 52 representatives, with the District Engineer serving as an ex-officio member. The following reflects the 1997-1999 membership of the full NE ATP. An organization's number of representatives, if more than one, is indicated in parentheses.

Mn/DOT (2)	Duluth-Superior MIC (2)
Aitkin County (3)	Large Urban Transit
Carlton County (3)	Rural Transit
Cook County (3)	Small Urban Transit
Itasca County (3)	Bike/Trail Representative
Koochiching County (3)	Rail Representative
Lake County (3)	Airport Representative
Pine County (3)	Ports Representative
St. Louis County (3)	Tribal Governments
Chisholm	US Forest Service
Cloquet	Regional Rail Authority Representative
Duluth	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Grand Rapids	Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (2)
Hermantown	Environmental Representative
Hibbing	Bureau of Indian Affairs
International Falls	Minnesota State Patrol
Virginia	Mn/DOT (ex-officio)

Steering Committee Membership: Membership is determined and derived from the ATP. Its role is to recommend steering committee membership, STIP policy, process and schedule, a priority list of projects to the full ATP, draft changes to the STIP, and to monitor program

FIGURE 7-1

District/ATP 1 Prioritization Process



status throughout the year. This committee also serves as a reauthorization committee for major changes in project scope and/or cost. Membership includes:

County Representatives (8)
Cities over 5,000 Representatives (2)
Duluth-Superior MIC (1)
Mn/DOT (1)
Modal Representative (1)
Transit Representative (1)

The steering committee meets four or five times a year, while the full committee meets twice.

The NE ATP has expanded slightly from its original form first suggested by the ARDC's Transportation Advisory Committee and the MIC. There is membership rotation for counties, townships, and city representatives. There is no fixed term length for the chair. The NE ATP is currently chaired by a county engineer.

ATP Work Group: The work group is made up of two ARDC staff members and three Mn/DOT staff members. The work group's membership is determined by and derived from Mn/DOT and the ARDC staff. The work group makes recommendations on process, projects, and STIP changes to the steering committee. It also monitors program status throughout the year. The Transportation District Engineer and the District State Aid Engineer can authorize minor changes in project scope and/or cost.

Task Force on Enhancements: The task force is made up of eight members: an ATP elected official, an ATP bike, trails, and pedestrian representative, an ATP steering committee member, a Mn/DOT Office of Environmental Services representative, a Mn/DOT District 1 representative, a Minnesota Historical Society representative, an ATP environmental representative, and one Minnesota DNR representative. An ARDC representative facilitates the enhancement subcommittee process.

7.3.3 Relationships with Regional Entities

The NE ATP is a regional entity and has been from its inception. The ATP functions as a coordinating body for all the regional transportation interests. There is regional representation on the steering committee and the full ATP.

The tribal communities of the Arrowhead region are one of the regional entities represented in the NE ATP process. Before the ATP process, the ARDC's Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (the precursor to the NE ATP) had a position for tribal interests.

The NE ATP tribal representative explained that he did not see himself as competing for ATP money because reservation roads are funded through a separate process. Funds go directly to tribes or are funneled through the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The six bands that comprise the

Minnesota Chippewa Tribe have an informal agreement to pool money and rotate project resources on a multi-year schedule.

7.3.4 Goals for the Area Transportation Improvement Program

For its prioritization process, the NE ATP uses investment guidelines to direct its funding priorities. These priorities are:

1. non-roadway/enhancements
2. transit projects
3. bridges
4. safety
5. preservation
6. reconstruction/expansion.

Rather than use subtargets, the NE ATP has developed investment goals that have a historical basis in the pre-ISTEA funding categories.

The transportation investment goals of the NE ATP are to:

- Improve the overall mobility and quality of life of area residents.
- Preserve and restore the interstate highway system.
- Improve major regional corridors.
- Reduce and prevent congestion in urban areas.
- Support major industries within the area.
- Maintain road safety and driving surfaces.
- Create and maintain a year-round 10 ton network.
- Provide for reconditioning and updating of low volume roads.
- Assist communities in updating in-town portions of trunk highways.
- Support the provision of transit services.
- Ensure the efficient use of public funds for transportation projects.

7.3.5 Description of the Project Solicitation Process

Applications are mailed to all cities, counties, townships, transit providers, and to all other interested groups. Submitted projects are forwarded into the county team meeting process that starts after the first of the year. The county teams rank the projects and incorporate what is best for the region. Projects are then forwarded to the ATP work group.

7.3.6 Ranking Techniques

Investment goals help to guide the prioritization process. Projects are considered in the previously discussed order of investment guidelines. This order is: non-roadway enhancements, transit projects, bridges, safety, preservation, and reconstruction/expansion

projects. Information generated from management systems for pavement, bridges, and transit is used in the ranking process. However, as one member commented, when "meshing county projects with Mn/DOT projects, a lot of judgment comes into play." The NE ATP does not use subtargets; instead, it incorporates certain percentage goals that grew out of a concern for dividing funds equitably.

7.3.7 Project Mix Between Modes

Because of the make-up of the NE ATP, the wide range of modal representation assures a voice in the decision-making process for all mode representatives. This ATP, because of its geographic location, has strong reasons to pay attention to ports, railroad, highway, and enhancement interests.

7.3.8 Boundaries

Because the highway system in the NE ATP is a regional system, there is little problem matching with bordering districts. Also, because of the long-standing relationship between Duluth and Superior, Wisconsin, this ATP builds on the experience of cooperation between the ARDC and the Duluth-Superior MIC. Aitkin, Itasca, and Koochiching counties are split between two Mn/DOT districts.

7.3.9 Public Involvement

The NE ATP has the largest number of members on its ATP. Efforts are continually made to make sure that the ATP has the broadest range of representation possible. The public has access to the ATP process through the people who are members of the ATP.

The county team meetings are well attended. Local people show up to voice their needs, and because the project prioritization occurs at the county level, attendance is high. Because of the interest in the enhancement process, people show up to speak to these less traditional projects as well. One additional illustration of public involvement is the presence of an active bicycle organization in each county of the ATP.

7.3.10 Elected Officials and the ATP Process

Because the ATP has 15 elected officials representing both their respective local units of government and the RDC's interests, there is an expectation that those members will be particularly well informed on local and regional issues.

7.4 PARTNERSHIP, PRIORITIZATION, PLANNING: COMMON QUALITIES IN THE NE ATP PROCESS

7.4.1 Partnership

Perceived Strengths

The District Engineer for this region commented that the history and culture of northeast Minnesota has clearly shaped how this ATP works. Regional cooperation has been a long standing tradition. It is a "way of life;" a condition for survival. He stated that the history of economic boom and bust patterns has caused the people to be both fiercely independent and cooperative: "The independence is a sense of separateness from the rest of the state; the interdependence is a looking to one another in this region for strength during hard times." It was only natural, when the call to form the ATPs occurred, that the District Engineer should look to the ARDC for guidance in establishing the partnership.[4]

Members state that the NE ATP's large membership forms a broad partnership providing important access to the transportation project selection process. In the past, members saw themselves as a part of planning projects; members now see themselves as also having access to the process of spending federal dollars. Representatives ranging from different modal interests to the Department of Public Safety have access to the spending discussions.

People from the NE ATP and from Mn/DOT's Central Office have commented that the ATP has made the greatest effort to implement the original idea of ATP partnership. Members credit this achievement to the NE ATP having the most members, and to Mn/DOT and ARDC leaders attending meetings with each county board. This ATP is also praised for relying on the "process" strengths of the ARDC. Members have said that they are familiar with the transportation planning process of the ARDC and that they trust it.

Perceived Challenges

Tribal partners: Generally, there is agreement that the NE ATP is a partnership. However, the experience of the ATP's tribal representative suggests that challenges exist regarding the size of the ATP, individual members serving as advocates versus general representatives, and the historical absence of tribal representatives in the transportation infrastructure investment process.

First, some members say that one of the NE ATP's biggest challenges is that it has too many members. They are concerned that the membership be limited to no more than the 52 members currently representing various entities. The argument is that the ideal of broad based membership becomes too diluted if each entity argues successfully for unique representation.

But, tribal communities from northeast Minnesota have expressed a desire to have more ATP tribal representatives. That desire stems from "a historical distrust of how the state-county road funding system" works. The tribal communities feel that the ATP process is a step in the right

direction because it involves tribal interests. This could be further improved by having representation from all three bands in the region. The process currently cannot recognize the unique needs of each tribal community.

Another challenge lies in the perception that each ATP member will advocate for a parochial interest. The tribal representative for the NE ATP stated that there is a need for tribal representation on the ATP because state and county roads pass through reservations. However, he stated that he prefers to serve as a strong ATP advocate for low volume roads throughout the region, rather than someone solely advocating for public roads that pass through tribal lands.

The tribes have a concern that state and county governments should keep tribal portions of the system in as good a condition as they would "a road serving a non-reservation population." The tribal representative stated that, "Like all low volume roads, traffic volumes are low on reservation roads, so those roads have a tough time competing for ATP funds." Low volume roads do not meet the regional significance standard nor the trunk highway standards "even though the roads may be very significant locally."

Third, the tribal representative observed that although there is a historical pattern of tribal transportation interests being left out of the investment discussion, the ATP process presents a unique opportunity for the tribes to educate the public about their transportation needs. The tribal representative suggested that the ATP is a forum that was not there before. He explained that there is a long-standing distrust of the state and county road funding system. There has almost been "a defeatist attitude; the state and counties had always ignored the tribal needs and they would continue to do so." He noted there has been a lack of understanding of tribal needs, with the tribes not having the resources to hire tribal engineers and planners. Now, the reservations are better understanding the advantage of working with the state and counties in the ATP process.

Building trust:

When I walked in the first thing I had to do was whack the program in half.

--District Engineer

Mn/DOT was talking about decentralizing before ISTEA; now the opportunity is there not only for maintenance and preservation funds, but for the entire program. There is local accountability now and decentralized decision making. Pre-ISTEA we were over programmed because we made assumptions about increased revenues that didn't materialize.

--ATP Member

Building trust was difficult in the beginning. There was an expectation that there would be far more money available than there was. At the same time as the NE ATP was being put together, there was a need to cut funds. One bridge project, half of which was in Wisconsin, took a large percentage of the federal aid funds for the whole first year. ATP members were

being asked to have trust in the agency at the same time as they were being asked to help cut the program in half.

The recovery process has taken four years. The process was restoring local projects to the ATIP. Many members agree that the change from Central Office control of decisions to the ATP process "has built greater trust in decisions." The District Engineer noted, "We couldn't get any dialogue going" because in the past there was too much reliance on technical analysis.

Participation by the 52 ATP "partners" has made for a means of meeting the Northstar Workshop goals of "good communication" and "broad public involvement for building trust and consensus, and transportation plans consistent with regional and state goals."

7.4.2 Prioritization

Perceived Strengths: An Opportunity for New District Responsibilities

We are . . . shift[ing] from the parochialism of federal aid urban and federal aid secondary funds to being "deal-doers." Bring your stuff to the table, whatever you need, and maybe we can do the financing.

-- District Engineer

In the Arrowhead region, there is a tradition of finding ways to get things done with regional cooperation and flexibility. There are a number of regional entities that work together to finance public projects, such as the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board, the ARDC, MIC, and Arrowhead Transit. Some NE ATP members still have a concern that the Central Office will impose uniformity in the way all the ATPs do business. Because the area treasures its consensus building and dialogue, it is important to many members that the successes of developing a program in 16 weeks be continued.

Additionally, there is a philosophy of not bringing private interests to the table. The District Engineer noted, "I believe this is a government process geared to distribute public funds. It's our job as government to listen to business in the planning perspective. People are elected to make decisions about the use of public funds."

Finally, a strength of the process is the interaction of the various "cultures" of the ATP: tourism, mining, timber, government, and small business. ATP members believe that each of these cultures compete for resources, but that the NE ATP process allows for a dialogue that produces an equitable distribution of public funds.

We submit two lists, a prioritized federal formula list and a prioritized state list. The locals like this. From a regional perspective, it's easier to understand that the federal money is competing across modal and jurisdictional boundaries.

--ATP Member

Additional strengths of the prioritization process include:

The counties used to "see" only county roads; now they are broadening their interests by seeing the state system and other modes like transit. The ATP prioritization process allows for all members to consider not only the projects of their local interest, but to view the projects in a regional context.

Funding for local projects has nearly doubled statewide. Study data suggest that prior to ISTEA, federal money was spent to complete the interstate system and Federal Aid Urban/Federal Aid Secondary systems. When the ATP process was created there was a concern that under the new system counties and cities would not reclaim as much money as under the old. The three-year track record shows that local funding has increased.

An emphasis on the highway network is recognized as well. Projects have gone from short, intense projects to longer projects on existing corridors. Additionally, the next three-year transportation improvement program shows increased attention to preserving and improving more highway miles.

Perceived Challenges: Standardization and Enhancements

There is a concern in the NE ATP that the Central Office may impose a statewide standardized set of criteria. ATPs would then lose their autonomy to develop a system of selecting projects most appropriate to the geographic and demographic features of their area. Because the NE ATP has taken its own approach to ranking, members would not be interested in standardized criteria.

Under a seamless transportation system, the theory is that all dollars should be on the table -- county-state aid, trunk highway, federal aid, aeronautics, intelligent transportation system dollars. On a practical level, that will not work yet. I think it will take some time for us to emerge to that level of sophistication.

-- District Engineer

One of the major issues facing NE ATP members is how to justify spending money on enhancement projects when the basic road system is underfunded. Some members claim that no enhancement projects should be considered unless a maintenance fund is in place at the time of application. Another member believed the focus should be on generating better proposals, not more of them. Other ATP members see the maintenance issue and the expanded applications issues as a way of screening projects. Having maintenance funds in place prior to application, after all, is not a condition placed on county or city road or bridge proposals.

Another of the challenges raised by the NE ATP members is whether ISTEA funds should be used to pay for the construction or upkeep of snowmobile trails. The NE ATP is struggling with distinguishing between transportation-related usage and recreational usage. For those who see snowmobiles as a legitimate form of transportation, enhancement funds are a much needed source of revenue. Pedestrian and bicyclist ATP representatives strongly differ, and would

prefer to define an eligibility criteria that would exclude snowmobiles. One representative suggests that "projects which encourage the use of snowmobiles are in direct contradiction to enhancement criteria, the spirit of ISTEA, and greatly interfere with the proper and successful use of these moneys in serving intended users."[5]

Because the promotion of the tourism industry is seen as a part of the economic development of the Arrowhead region, and because attracting snowmobilers is an essential part of that economic strategy, the ATP is faced with the struggle to define how best to use ISTEA funds, how to be flexible, and how to define a criteria that satisfies the expectations of the large membership of the NE ATP.

7.4.3 Planning

Perceived Strengths: A Tradition of Planning

The first year was more of a statewide process like the North Star workshop. Here in the northeast, we already had active committees with the regional development commission. So our first ATP meeting was a meeting with the ARDC Transportation Advisory Committee.

--ATP Member

Members report that the transportation planning responsibilities of the ARDC were "already a serious effort" before the creation of the ATP process. Today, the NE ATP is able to rely upon a regional transportation plan being created by the ARDC that contains information on various transportation activities (such as pedestrian and bike trails, scenic by-ways, etc.) in the region, an inventory of the existing transportation system, and a vision for an improved regional system. The document is "flexible and is designed to involve and educate the public, and to provide tools to local governments to accomplish future improvements." The plan integrates previous state, regional, and local plans in the context of socio-economic trends and projections.[6] Members state that the close working relationship between the ARDC and the ATP allow for an integration of transportation planning efforts into the STIP that many ATP members feel strengthens the quality of the ATP's investment decisions.

Cooperation with the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission made the start of the ATP process go more smoothly. Unlike southeast Minnesota which had no regional development commissions in place, the NE ATP had a developed relationship in transportation planning. Some in the Central Office had suggested that only three people needed to be in the room to have an ATP -- a regional development commission representative, a metropolitan planning representative and the District Engineer. It was the Northeast ATP which showed the way. We drove it out into a public process more than the others. The other districts started their ATPs with a small professional staff.

--District Engineer

The ARDC's Transportation Advisory Committee's (TAC) planning process was in place before the NE ATP began. The TAC process gave the NE ATP a running start. Moreover, transportation stakeholders in the Arrowhead region had a tradition of working together on

regional transportation goals. They had institutional knowledge about federal, state, interstate, and local transportation issues and processes.

The NE ATP has tackled a wide range of its transportation challenges by establishing 19 task forces related to such concerns as community and highway corridor improvements, scenic by-ways, and bike and pedestrian pathways. Working closely with transportation planners from the ARDC, Mn/DOT District 1 personnel and representatives from the NE ATP recently formed a maintenance coordination and sharing project task force that is looking at a number of different roadway maintenance sites that could be shared between the state, the counties, and the cities in order to achieve cost savings.

Members report that the ATP has a goal of bringing the planning process closer to the transportation stakeholders of that area. Because of its broad-based membership and close ties to the ARDC planning process, members feel that the NE ATP has achieved its desired outcome of closely linking investments to planning.

Perceived Challenges: Changes in ISTEA, Fiscal Constraint, and Membership

I hope that Congress doesn't change this process; we are just getting used to it. Our ATP is doing well, and our members like it. Members like decentralized decision making.

--ATP Member

Members state that part of the challenge for the NE ATP is anticipating what the future of the process will be. The NE ATP, with its broad membership, has sent a signal that it intends to tackle the tough problems of the future. Some members have a concern that the uncertainty that goes with re-authorization of ISTEA suggests that Congress may undo the requirements that led to the creation of the ATPs. In general, the members of the NE ATP approve of this newly decentralized process and hope that Congress does not undo the process. In fact, many members expressed the desire to not only continue the ATP process, but to build upon the ISTEA principles of efficiency, flexibility, and intermodalism. Some members feel that a thoroughly prepared regional transportation plan now underway will put the NE ATP in a unique position to meet the challenges of future transportation investment decisions.

Because of the requirement that the STIP be fiscally constrained, the leadership of the NE ATP has expressed a concern that the constraint represses the need to "dream" about future proposals that might better serve the long-range needs of the region. There is a concern that some larger projects are not being brought forward for discussion because their potential cost is so great that there would not be any money for other projects. Still, for some members, there is a desire to carry forward the larger policy implications of ISTEA so that investments are truly "jurisdictionally blind."

NE ATP members feel that membership make-up of the ATP should be adjusted to fit changing needs. For example, the addition of a State Patrol member to the ATP was a recognition that in the future, federal safety funds may be made available in the form of block grants. Having a representative from the safety community not only adds the symbolic

dimension of a "voice for safety" to the existing dialogue, that representative will be poised to be familiar with the ATP process if and when these newly anticipated federal safety funds arrive.

CHAPTER 8
CASE STUDY ON THE DISTRICT 2 ATP (NORTHWEST ATP)

8.1 THE EVOLUTION OF THE NORTHWEST ATP

The evolution of the Northwest ATP (NW ATP) includes:

1. While suballocation still occurs, the NW ATP has moved towards choosing some projects without considering geographical equity. This process may eventually lead to a greater emphasis on regional significance as a basis of project prioritization. The use of dollars for regionally significant projects is a significant change from prior practice in the ATP district.

2. There is now modal, local government, and tribal representation in the transportation investment process.

3. Members feel that the use of subgroups to make project selections has allowed each group, such as county engineers, to coordinate project choices.

4. Counties, cities, and Mn/DOT engage in goal setting for each of their systems. This is seen by many ATP members as a strength. Members report the role of the RDCs and MPO has also increased in importance as they have contributed to defining what the ATP should seek to accomplish.

5. Where repairing and upgrading roads would formerly not have been questioned, members feel the ATP process has encouraged the consideration of what investment strategies are best.

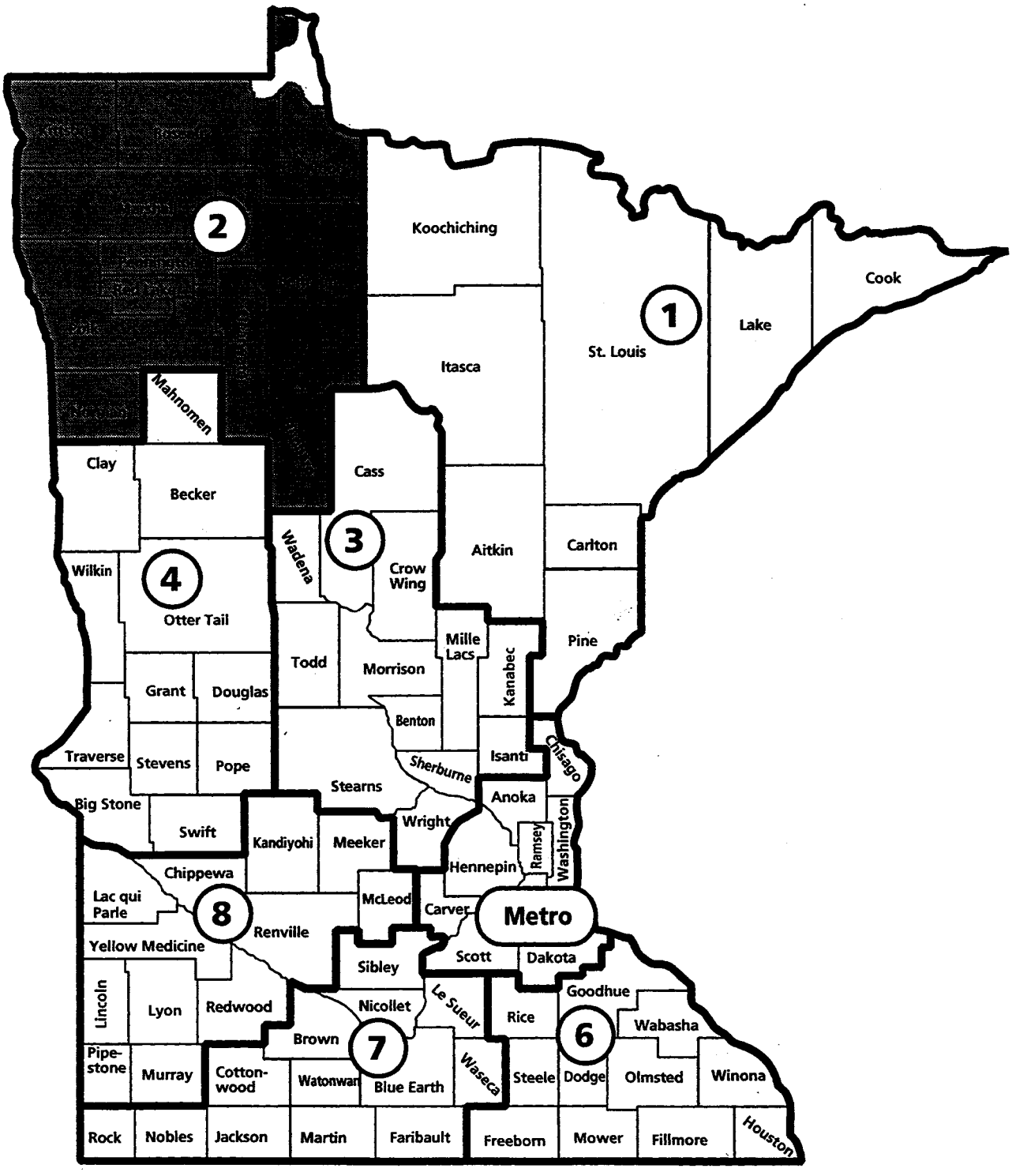
8.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGION

8.2.1 Geographic

District 2 ATP is located in the northwest corner of the state, bordering North Dakota, Canada, and Mn/DOT districts 1, 3, and 4. It contains the following eleven counties: Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard, Kittson, Lake of the Woods, Marshall, Norman, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake, and Roseau.

The NW ATP has two regional development commissions, the Northwest RDC and the Headwaters RDC. Additionally, there is an MPO representing Grand Forks, North Dakota-East Grand Forks, Minnesota.

District 2
Area Transportation Partnership



Courtesy: Minnesota Department of Transportation

8.2.2 Economic

Employment in the Northwest ATP increased 25.4% in the ten year period from 1983 to 1992. The largest sectors of employment include services, government, and retail trade. Most of the region's jobs are centered in three counties: Beltrami, Polk, and Roseau. While all counties except Red Lake experienced employment growth from 1983 to 1992, growth ranged from an increase of 2.5% in Kittson County to 79.2% in Roseau County. Median household income for the district is $21,785, with a range from $17,752 in Clearwater County to $25,910 in Roseau County.[7]

8.2.3 Demographic

The 1990 population for the ATP region was 151,798, a decrease from the 1980 census count of 154,830. Its largest cities include Bemidji (pop. 11,245), East Grand Forks (8,658), Crookston (8,119), and Thief River Falls (8,010).[8]

8.2.4 Highway and Transit Information

Daily vehicle miles traveled (DVMT) in the NW ATP region has remained at four percent of the state's total from 1980 to 1994. During that period, the DVMT increased by 26% in the ATP, from 3.5 million to 4.3 million. In 1990, 65% of commuters in the ATP area drove to work alone, a percentage below the state average of 74%. The ATP has nine transit systems in ten counties.

8.3 NW ATP PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

8.3.1 Introductory Comments

The NW ATP's ranking policies and procedures are still undergoing significant adjustment. Currently, many local transportation providers are satisfied with the preservation of dedicated dollars to their individual areas. Whether directed to counties, transit, or enhancements, subtargeted amounts continue to dictate ATP spending patterns.

Concurrently, some ATP members have pressed for further consideration of regional significance valuations and relying on established criteria for project selection. The ATP is clearly grappling with the tenets of regionalism, local funding guarantees, and decentralization.

The data shows that the continued emphasis on jurisdictional equity above other values may be hindering regional cooperation and planning. However, the NW ATP has moved towards choosing some projects regardless of jurisdictional equity, a process that could eventually lead to an increased emphasis on valuing a project's regional importance.

The NW ATP meets four to six times per year to develop the ATIP. Most of the work, however, is done outside of the ATP meetings by the various subgroups.

8.3.2 Membership Characteristics

There aren't any policies [for membership rotation]. We haven't yet gotten to that detail.

--ATP Member

The NW ATP has nine members, making it one of the smallest of the ATPs. Four of the representatives come from regional development commissions, two from the Northwest RDC and two from Headwaters RDC. One RDC member shares a dual role as representative of the Chippewa National Forest and the RDC.

Each of the following groups has one representative on the ATP: the Grand Forks/East Grand Forks Metropolitan Planning Organization, cities over 5,000, counties, Mn/DOT District 2, and the Red Lake Tribe. Additionally, four non-voting staff members from the RDC, MPO, and a transit agency provide planning services to the ATP.

The chair of the ATP is a non-voting Mn/DOT employee. He was selected to the position by the group. No formal policies exist as to the rotation of members or the selection of the chair.

The District Engineer was the process coordinator for the transition to the ATP and decided the composition of the ATP. He emphasized that ATP development was a region-wide process, not just a Mn/DOT process. After brainstorming all the possible groups to involve, from government to trails to transit, he submitted a proposal and worked with the MPO and RDCs to get there. Together, they decided each RDC would get three representatives of their choosing. The District Engineer and the group recognized this led to an overload of county people appointed by the RDCs. Because the MPO had only gotten one member and felt overpowered, changes were made to decrease the RDC representatives to two members per RDC.

8.3.3 Relationships with Regional Entities

Because equity is important, everyone gets a piece of influence.

--ATP Staff Member

Because the NW ATP actively uses suballocations for the various funding categories, coordination is largely done at the subcommittee level. For instance, two RDC planners are heavily involved in the transit, enhancement, and trunk highway subcommittees. Overall, a majority of the ATP members are representatives of local or regional planning groups.

The ATP has always included a representative of the Red Lake Tribe. Formerly, the member was an elected tribal member; an engineer from the tribe has since taken over as representative.

8.3.4 Goals for the Area Transportation Improvement Program

Those who benefited from federal funds in the past should not be left in the cold.

--ATP Member

Interviews suggest that equity in the distribution of funds continues to guide the NW ATP process. Eighty-five percent of the ATP dollars are dedicated to subtargeted areas, with 15% reserved for inter-jurisdictional projects that compete district-wide.

ATP members observed that the move to ranking projects on criteria is a gradual one. They see the development of trust as ongoing. Also they see a uniform system of ten-ton roads as an additional motivation for lowering the amount of sub-allocated dollars. Despite the emphasis on suballocations, one ATP member believed the ATP's goals "probably line up with regional and state goals."

8.3.5 Description of the Project Solicitation Process

Equity is the only overriding consideration [for project selection].

--ATP Staff Member

There is no formal solicitation process for roads and highways. The various groups responsible for projects are fully informed of the workings of the ATP process. In keeping with the emphasis on subtargets and local decision making, each representative confers with its subgroup to determine project rankings and priorities. For example, the county engineer representative works with the other ten county engineers to arrive at a priority list of county projects. A similar process occurs with Mn/DOT and cities of population over 5,000.

8.3.6 Ranking Techniques

Members report that Mn/DOT's Central Office philosophy suggests moving toward increased ranking based upon establishing priorities. The NW ATP limited such priority ranking to 15% of the target dollars of the district for the "anywhere pot." The criteria for the limited district-wide project selection include:

- The extent to which a specific road improvement project directly and meaningfully improves or maintains economic development opportunities in northwest Minnesota (40%).

- The extent to which the proposed road project solves existing or future safety problems (40%).

- The extent to which the proposed road project improves road system continuity (20%).

The ATP directs transit providers to prioritize their needs. The ATP has generally funded transit at close to 100% of requests. An enhancement solicitation letter is distributed by mail to

over 100 groups and to the RDCs. Applications are received from environmental groups and governments. Projects with completed applications are forwarded to the enhancement subcommittee for a technical score and ranking based on eligibility criteria and District 2 ATP policy.

The District Engineer reported that the use of geographical subtargets in the region was important to create buy-in among the transportation partners. Different sub-groups evaluate projects and forward a ranked list to the ATP. Members stated that the ATP accepts the priorities because it does not assume it has technical knowledge of each individual system. Separate subcommittees for project rankings include Mn/DOT, counties, and cities with a population greater that 5,000.

8.3.7 Project Mix Between Modes

Our goal is not to do the best projects, but to do the best projects considering equity, enhancements, and transit.

-- ATP Staff Member

ATP members believe that the project mix in the ATP reflects the historical distribution of funds in the district, with the addition of bridges, cities greater than 5,000, transit, and rail safety projects. Because of the subtargets, the modes are not pitted against one another. The mix reflects the priorities of the ATP members, that "there [not be] big winners or losers."

ATP members believe the ATP priorities match the Mn/DOT goals and objectives for dollars spent on preservation, management and operations, replacement, and expansion.

8.3.8 Boundaries

Subgroups take boundary issues into account when they match projects within and between groups.

--ATP Member

The boundaries of the NW ATP are largely coterminous with the Mn/DOT district, save for three counties. The similarity has meant there are few problems related to boundaries. Members feel that the use of subgroups to make project selections has allowed each group, such as county engineers, to coordinate project choices.

The ATP shares a border with North Dakota to the west. Members indicate that cooperation has been part of the ATP process in planning for bridge maintenance, as well as bus replacement. The Grand Forks-East Grand Forks MPO, in particular, has articulated the concerns of the City of Grand Forks regarding mutual and equitable transit funding.

Between the NW ATP and ATPs 1 and 3, informational meetings have identified connecting state trunk highways slated for future construction.

8.3.9 Public Involvement

People know what is going on in northwest Minnesota because they live in small communities.
--ATP Member

Interviews suggest that public involvement other than through the ATP representatives is limited. Citizen involvement in the ATP largely occurs at the sub-ATP level where constituents take part in planning with their city, county, and regional representatives. Because of these city, county, MPO, and RDC meetings, additional public presentations of the ATIP are seen as "redundant."

8.3.10 Elected Officials and the ATP Process

The elected officials leave it to the engineers unless there is a specific project.
--ATP Staff Member

There are very few elected officials involved in the ATP process. One county commissioner is involved in the process. The data suggest that elected officials indirectly influence decisions on the ATP. Elected officials make up the governing board of the RDCs. The RDC hires the staff members who provide input and support to the ATP. State legislators have generally not been involved in the ATP process. One member reported that one legislator wrote a letter supporting a particular enhancement project and attended two or three meetings.

8.4 PARTNERSHIP, PRIORITIZATION, PLANNING: COMMON QUALITIES IN THE NE ATP PROCESS

8.4.1 Partnership

Perceived Strengths

The NW ATP members indicate that they have been engaged in a lengthy effort to build trust and relationships among the transportation stakeholders. The current method of resource distribution, suballocations, has emerged from discussion among local entities, not from pronouncements issued by the Mn/DOT district office. The ATP members emphasize that changes are occurring and better transportation decisions are being made. People also said they feel that the history of the region cautions against wholesale changes made too quickly.

Perceived Challenges

Northwest ATP members are not in agreement over the idea of transportation partnership. While some ATP members see room for significant improvement, the counties and cities are content with the current distribution of resources that is tied to pre-ISTEA funding formulas.

One representative illustrated the dilemma in commenting that partnership is fine, but "there can be no partnership if one group gets all the money."

The District Engineer reported disappointment with the public involvement in the ATP process. He has considered moving toward a larger ATP, such as the NE ATP currently uses. With the use of subcommittees to develop local priorities, however, members say that there is less of a reason to involve the public at the ATP level.

Public involvement in the ATP originally was extended to an industry representative of a major local employer. The representative eventually ceased attending ATP meetings and was not replaced. An ATP member from another district commented on why certain representatives no longer show up for meetings: "If you aren't going to get any money, why come?" Another ATP member said, "Do you think a county engineer or county commissioner would be re-appointed to an ATP if they hadn't brought a project home after being a member for three years?"

Additionally, comments from the interviews suggest the role of the Mn/DOT Central Office in the partnership is not clear. ATP members expressed the sense that the ATP was actively engaged in collaborative efforts, while the Central Office's focus remained disproportionately on issuing directives. Members also expressed that the reliance on suballocating funds continues because there is a perception that Mn/DOT will be taking money away from local projects if the suballocation targets are removed.

The delivery and development of enhancements, like in most ATPs, is a challenge reported by members for the NW ATP. The traditional letting process for roads and bridges is not necessarily compatible for "piecemeal projects such as bike trail development or historic building preservation." The NW ATP recognizes that revising the letting process is necessary for ensuring that non-traditional proposers can successfully deliver projects.

Finally, members felt that attempts at building partnerships among non-traditional transportation interests have been hindered by turnover among some representatives. The Red Lake Tribe, for instance, has had four representatives since the process began. Members reported that orientating new members to the ATP history, goals, and process remains a challenge.

8.4.2 Prioritization

Perceived Strengths

ATP members report that the decentralization of transportation decision making to subgroups of local providers is one of the strengths of the ATP process. Members feel that adhering to the use of subtargets ensures geographical equity. Priorities established by those providers closest to the transportation mode and to local constituents are considered by members to be a strength of the process. Adhering to subtargets also guarantees that transit and enhancement requests are considered and funded.

The NW ATP has initiated moves toward ranking based on interjurisdictional priorities. The creation of the so-called "anywhere pot" is a significant change from prior practice. In only a few years, one member noted, the ATP has significantly progressed to even be considering projects on a basis other than geographical equity.

In sum, decentralized decision making is cited as successfully allowing the ATP members to make programming decisions based on their perceptions of the most important local needs. Counties have even raised their local match dollar amounts in an effort to further spread federal funds to more projects. Compared to the process developed over the previous decades, an ATP member noted the decisions from this five year-old process are already better. Nevertheless, the ATP process has been operational for a very short time. As each ATP confronts the process of making structural change, each will have different time frame to work through such change.

The District Engineer reported a shift in the role of the Central Office as a strength. Formerly, the Central Office decided on district projects using an established technical criteria. The District was aware of the types of projects that the Central Office would accept. With the advent of the ATP system, the Central Office just monitors to make sure the ATP is making decisions according to broadly established state-wide goals and directions. The new role of the Central Office, as counselors and coaches, is supported by the District Engineer.

Members state that highway 75 is an example of the new possibilities the ATP provides. While the District members felt the highway was a safety problem, the Central Office felt the cost was too much for the District. Although it was the district's top priority, it was not funded. The ATP process changed this. While the highway was extremely expensive, the ATP felt it was regionally important and worth the investment.

Perceived Challenges

For enhancements, some ATP members noted concerns with the readiness of some groups to follow through on the documentation necessary to meet federal guidelines. Nonetheless, members report the enhancement process has improved and the ATP has not had difficulty with the delivery of enhancement projects.

Mn/DOT applies pavement management systems to its project ranking process for state trunk highways. The extension of management systems to cities and counties has been resisted because local jurisdictions have indicated they are wary of a loss of dollars. Also, the increased use of pavement quality standards is seen by ATP members as nonsensical because many jurisdictions are simply trying "to keep roads open."

Members report that the ATP's priority remains geographic equity, with an extremely limited view of making regional transportation investments. The emphasis on fairness is applauded by local jurisdictions, but seen as restrictive by more regionally-minded members. The data suggest that the district has regionally significant roads that are not necessarily recognized as such in the current fund distribution process. Some members feel this failure to prioritize

regionally reflects a lack of consensus about just what the federal ATP funds should be used for. Despite the flexibility the ATP process champions, ATP members observe that the NW ATP has retained a very traditional project selection process.

The future challenge seen by ATP members is for the ATP to continue to build upon the "anywhere pot" idea of dedicating funds to the projects meeting the criteria of economic development, safety, and system connectivity. At the same time, members believe that local transportation units need to be ensured they can compete with Mn/DOT for project selection.

Because the ATP has traditionally subtargeted, the process for ranking based on established criteria will need to continue in development, according to some ATP members. The NW ATP reports they are currently experiencing growing pains trying to determine how a township bridge should be compared to a trunk highway bridge. To ensure "buy-in" and trust among ATP members, a process that accounts for different road systems needs to be further refined.

8.4.3 Planning

Perceived Strengths

The ATP process has spurred counties, cities, and Mn/DOT to engage in goal setting for each of their systems. This was seen by many ATP members as a strength. Members report the role of the RDCs and the MPO has also increased in importance as each has contributed to defining what the ATP should seek to accomplish.

The district is currently engaged in an extensive freight movement study evaluating the upgrade of roads and its effect on railroad shippers. The impetus for the study, according to one ATP member, was the ATP process itself. Where repairing and upgrading roads would formerly not have been questioned, members feel the ATP process has encouraged the consideration of what investment strategies are best.

Perceived Challenges

The District Engineer acknowledges the need to develop a master transportation plan for the region. His vision is to one day have a transportation resource center to work with local entities, Mn/DOT, and industry. While some ATP members believe the ATP should be doing some planning itself, they also cite that the limits of the ATP, both fiscal and personnel, likely preclude this from happening.

The ATP's challenge for planning is to convince local groups that regional planning is an integral and worthwhile part of transportation investment decision making. In some ATP members' views, programming projects based on a regional plan is challenged by the use of subtargets that are seen as the only way to ensure that Mn/DOT will not dominate the process. Whether it is the development of goals for enhancements or deciding whether or not a uniform ten-ton road system is desirable, developing a plan for the future funding decisions is a challenge cited by most ATP members.

CHAPTER 9
CASE STUDY ON THE DISTRICT 3 ATP (CENTRAL MINNESOTA ATP)

9.1 THE EVOLUTION OF THE CENTRAL MINNESOTA ATP

1. Along with feelings of ownership and accountability in projects selected, Central Minnesota ATP members stated that transportation investment decisions are better now and attribute the improvement to a partnership that is cohesive and inclusive.

2. The role of the Central Office has become much more decentralized. ATP members report that the ATP is able to manage the ATIP without needing the approval of the Central Office for things like a change in funding requests.

3. An ATP member stated "Now the ATPs have target amounts of funding to provide a starting point for ATIP development."

4. Instead of the Central Office, regional entities do program solicitation and prioritization.

9.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGION

9.2.1 Geographic

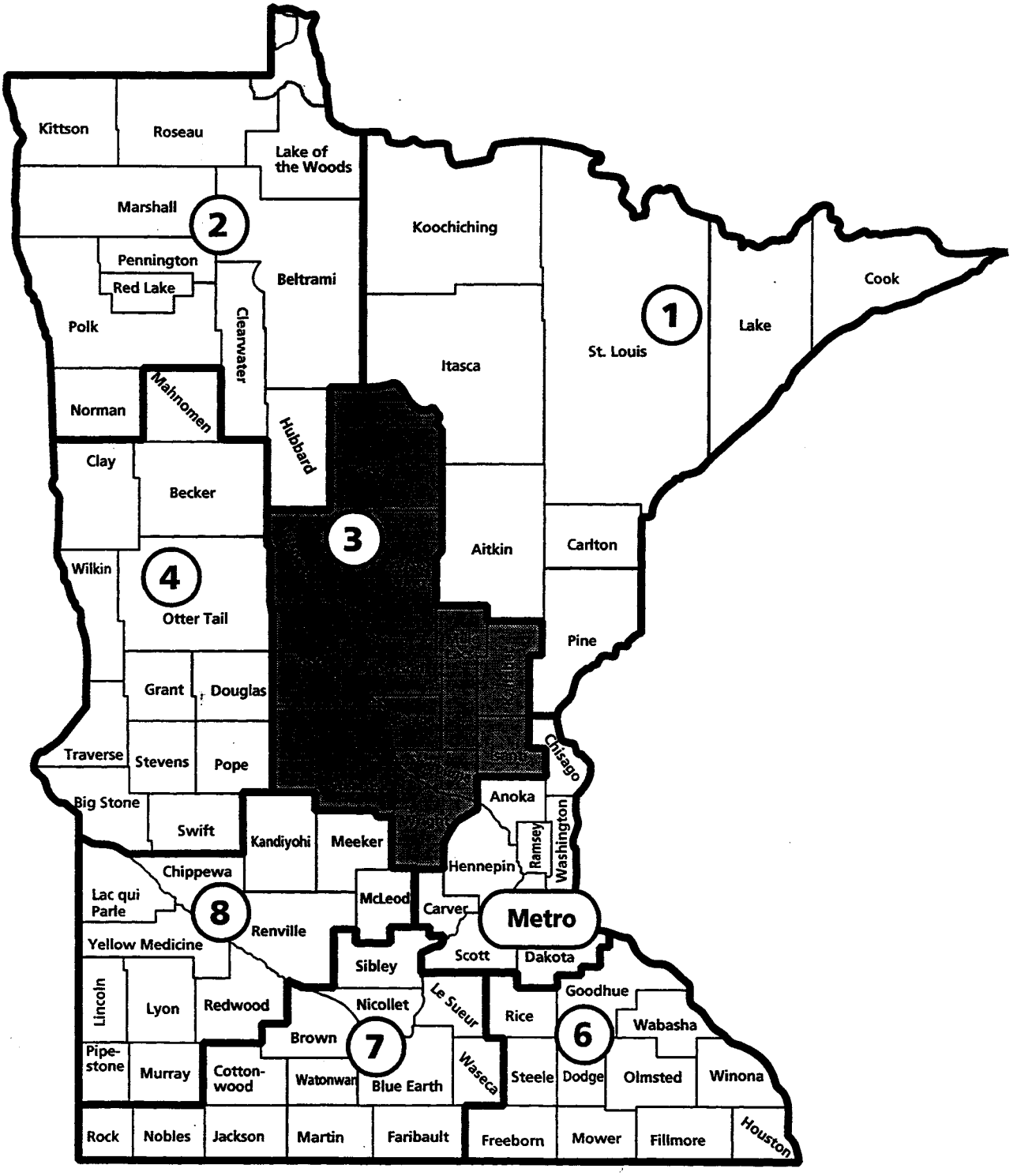
The Central Minnesota ATP is located in the central portion of Minnesota that includes the growing St. Cloud and Brainerd areas. The Central Minnesota ATP has the following counties: Benton, Cass, Crow Wing, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Sherburne, Stearns, Todd, Wadena, and Wright. While the entire ATP area has experienced a continued increases in vehicle miles traveled, the increase has been most significant in the southern counties bordering the Twin Cities area.

The St. Cloud APO is the only metropolitan planning organization in the area. There are two active RDCs that provide input into the ATP process. There is also one inactive RDC in the area. For the region with an inactive RDC, Mn/DOT is responsible for heading up two ad hoc transportation planning groups consisting of an advisory committee and a policy committee. The Mn/DOT district headquarters is located in Baxter and another full service office is located in St. Cloud.

9.2.2 Economic

The March 1995 unemployment rate was 4.7%, higher than the state average of 3.3%. The area of most growth is in the service sector, with a 10 year gain of 24,000 jobs. The services

District 3
Area Transportation Partnership



Courtesy: Minnesota Department of Transportation

sector employs the largest proportion of people in the area, nearly 25% of all jobs. The finance, insurance, and real estate sector grew by 76.3% between 1983 and 1992, representing nearly 8,000 jobs.

9.2.3 Demographic

Outside of the metro area, the Central Minnesota ATP has both the largest population and the fastest rate of growth in the state.[9] The ATP had 10.3% of the state population in 1990, and a growth rate of 10.3% between 1980 and 1990. The counties with the highest levels of growth in this ATP are Sherburne, Wright, and Benton counties, which include the St. Cloud metro area and the I-94 corridor between St. Cloud and the Twin Cities.

9.2.4 Highway and Transit Information

Daily vehicle miles traveled in the ATP region in 1994 represented 12% of the state's total, up from 11% in 1980. The totals increased by 62%, up from 8.5 billion miles in 1980, to 13.8 billion miles in 1994. In 1990, 72% of commuters in this area drove to work alone, which is close to the state average of 74%. There are 11 transit systems that cover nine counties.

9.3 CENTRAL MINNESOTA ATP PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

9.3.1 Introductory Comments

ATP members report that the ATP has developed an integrated system of project solicitation, ranking, and funding. The ATP is responsible for combining the prioritized project lists from four regional groups, one of which is an ad hoc transportation planning group that replaced the dissolved 7W RDC.

The 1995-1997 STIP submittal from the District represented over 2,000 person-hours of effort by the ATP members. These hours included tasks of defining the process, receiving education on program and modal needs, reviewing the investment goals, developing and testing ranking criteria, identifying and soliciting projects, prioritizing projects, and developing the ATIP. [10]

9.3.2 Membership Characteristics

This ATP has 23 members: eighteen have the power to vote, while the other five serve as non-voting members. Four of the non-voting members are RDC or Mn/DOT Planners, the fifth is from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The District Engineer from the Central Minnesota ATP is not a member of the ATP. The District Engineer was originally responsible for setting up the membership, and he selected the agencies who were originally represented. The individual members are selected by the respective agency. The three RDCs and the St. Cloud APO each select two members for the ATP. Of those two, the ATP has a policy that at least one of the representatives must be an elected official. The ATP has formal policies, including a required

biannual review of its membership, where functional groups represented on the ATP can appoint new or re-appoint existing members.

ATP Membership: (an organization's number of representatives, if more than one, is indicated in parentheses):

Mn/DOT (2) (ADE Planning and Design, and District State Aid Engineer)
RDCs (2 from each of 3 RDCs)
St. Cloud APO (2)
Native American Tribal representatives (2)
County engineers (2)
City engineers (2)
Rural transit representative (1)
Urban transit representative (1)

There are no formal term limits for the ATP. In the four years the ATP has been in operation, there has been a 50% turnover in membership of individual members. The groups that have representation at the ATP level have not changed. The full ATP meets three to four times a year and the committees meet a few times a year.

The District Engineer originally developed a list of individuals and organizations who were required to be on the ATP and a list of individuals and organizations who he felt would contribute to the partnership setting. His original list of the group was only the first iteration and subject to change in the future.

In the Central Minnesota ATP, the District Engineer is not a member, nor does he regularly attend meetings. The District Engineer does not feel his membership on the ATP would be appropriate. He adds that the role of the District Engineer is to provide oversight to "make sure people are being treated fairly without having a vested interest in the ATP. I tried to interpret the intent of ISTEA--to give responsibilities to local groups."

9.3.3 Relationships with Regional Entities

This ATP receives input from three RDCs and an APO that represents the St. Cloud metropolitan area. Each of the four groups has two full voting members. The ATP programs for three of the five counties in region 7E. Of the two remaining counties, one (Aitkin county) joined with the NE ATP. and the other (Chisago) joined the Metro ATP.

Tribal communities hold two voting positions on the ATP, as well as positions on the RDCs, where the priority lists are developed before being presented to the ATP.

9.3.4 Goals for the Area Transportation Improvement Program

ATP members report that they are encouraged to remain aware of the state goals and objectives during the solicitation process. One ATP member stated, "If the project is going to

get a high ranking at the ATP level, it is important to match the state investment priorities." Each year the ATP receives a report detailing how the ATIP submittal fell into the state goals and objectives of preservation, management and operations, replacement, and expansion.

9.3.5 Description of the Project Solicitation Process

This ATP relies on the RDCs and the APO to conduct the project solicitation process. There is a standard letter that is used for the solicitations in all four regional groups. The application comes in a full form and a shorter form. The latter is a letter used to encourage project referrals. All four groups send applications to the same set of agencies, with press releases to provide for public participation. The contact person for project solicitation is the RDC or APO planner in that area. The Mn/DOT District 3 planner is the contact person for the former Region 7W.

9.3.6 Ranking Techniques

Candidate projects are identified by project proposers based on three factors: current and forecasted system performance, current valid transportation plans, and public input.

Projects representing different modes pass through different ranking systems as part of the process of project approval. The process for road and bridge project selection is based on a point system that makes urban and rural projects compatible for ranking. The solicitation and application processes go directly through the RDCs or the APO. After project applications are received by the RDCs or the APO, those groups apply a technical ranking system to the road and bridge projects. There is a standard set of computer software provided to the RDCs and the APO by the ATP that is used to rank the road and bridge projects.

Transit projects are ranked using the Public Transportation Management System (PTMS) provided by the Office of Transit at the Central Office. A transit subcommittee from the ATP ranks the transit operating and capital projects funded through the Surface Transportation Program (STP). After a ranked list of transit projects has been created by the subcommittee, the list is delivered to the RDC or APO for integration into their final prioritized list.

Rail projects are ranked by the Office of Freight, Railroads and Waterways (OFRW) of the Central Office and sent to the ATP. In turn, OFRW's rank ordered lists are forwarded to the RDCs or APO where they consider the projects for inclusion in their integrated list of regional transportation priorities.

Similar to the process used for transit, enhancement project rankings are developed by a subcommittee of the ATP and then sent to the RDCs or APO. Safety projects are ranked on criteria in the Hazard Elimination Safety (HES) application.

Each of the four regional entities has a certain number of "regional significance" points that can be assigned to qualifying technically scored transportation projects. Regional significance is a way for the region to promote projects that are important for the development of the area.

There are a number of criteria (including proximity to schools, hospitals, industry, etc.) that can result in a project being awarded more points. Regions have complete discretion on how many points to award projects, but each region only has a certain amount of points available to them.

After the RDCs and the APO have created their prioritized list of projects for their specific region, the lists are sent to the ATIP committee for integration. The ATIP committee is comprised of seven people: two from Mn/DOT, one from each of the three RDCs, one from the St. Cloud APO, and one from transit. This group is responsible for integrating the lists of the four regional groups while respecting the project priorities. If there is an outstanding question in the way a particular project was handled, the ATIP group can bring that concern to the ATP to be handled. In addition, members report that targets, some overprogramming, adherence to investment goals, and geographic as well as agency distribution are used to develop the ATIP.

9.3.7 Project Mix Between Modes

Instead of trying to manipulate criteria to arrive at a one-size-fits-all process of integrating different transportation modes, we said -- let's simply recognize the relative importance of each project within its respective mode, and ensure that projects of different modes with similar regional significance receive similar attention in developing the region's list of transportation priorities. This ensures that all modes are considered fairly and the subsequent priorities are based on need.

--ATP Member

Members state that Mn/DOT and local project lists are currently not integrated in developing the prioritized lists at the regional level. However, the ATP reports it is working on a method to accomplish this integration in the future. A method has been developed to integrate locally-sponsored transportation projects of different modes that evaluates projects according to their relative importance within their respective mode. After projects have been evaluated in this manner, each RDC and the APO create their prioritized list of projects by mode according to their level of importance: urgent, important, or desired. When the ATIP subcommittee of the ATP meets to create the integrated list of projects, they review the individual regional lists of transportation priorities and merge them while "making sure to respect priorities established by the regions."

9.3.8 Boundaries

The Central Minnesota ATP does not include Chisago or Aitkin Counties. However, there are strong overlapping interests. Aitkin County is split between two Mn/DOT Districts, 1 and 3. Aitkin chose to join the NW ATP, but District 3 federal and state funds must be set aside for NW ATP Aitkin County and state projects. Chisago County is a member of the Metro ATP; however, Chisago County is a member of the regional development commission for many of the Central Minnesota ATP counties.

9.3.9 Public Involvement

The ATP made a recommendation at its last meeting to encourage regions to hold a public meeting prior to soliciting candidate projects. In the future this ATP may require these public meetings for improved public input and for educating the public about the process.

--ATP Member

The ATP meetings are open to the public. ATP members stated that it is rare that a person from the general public will attend. This ATP encourages public participation to occur at the RDC or APO level, through the Mn/DOT district office, or through the local city or county engineer. ATP members reported that the comments made in this manner are considered in the prioritization process. The RDCs are encouraged to hold a public meeting before the solicitation process begins each year. The St. Cloud APO has a policy that requires public involvement on big projects.

9.3.10 Elected Officials and the ATP Process

Elected officials may be members of the ATP if the RDC or APO appoint them. The ATP recently established a policy stating that at least one of the two representatives from the RDCs and the APO must be an elected official. ATP members stated that other elected officials, who are not formal members on the ATP, get involved in the ATP at the regional level or on a project-by-project basis.

9.4 PARTNERSHIP, PRIORITIZATION, PLANNING: COMMON QUALITIES IN THE CENTRAL MINNESOTA ATP PROCESS

9.4.1 Partnership

Perceived Strength: Pride and Cooperation

Members of the ATP are proud of the development of their partnership over the past four years. One ATP member characterizes the ATP as "a cohesive, inclusive group." Members also report feeling an ownership of accomplishment and a "spirit of cooperation." There is diversity in the groups coming to the table at this ATP. Although members disagree on some points, the ATP is a forum to explore that disagreement in a respectful way.

The District Engineer believes "decisions are better now," using the ATP process, than they were five years ago. He believes decisions have improved because there is cooperation between the ATP partners.

Perceived Challenges

In the beginning, the groups were set up to be technical and outcome oriented; the members would have professional and historical knowledge of the system. In order to get better representation we might take a step back and increase the involvement of others such as bicyclists, private citizens, and historical folks. There was concern at the beginning that they weren't at the table.

--District Engineer

Having limited confidence that non-traditional groups are routinely being exposed to the ATP, the District Engineer sees a need for more representation from different groups in the subcommittees.

Most of the challenges we've conquered. For the future, I think it will remain important to make sure that we maintain equity in the system

--ATP Member

The equity issue is persistent at the ATP level. There has been lively discussion about the trade-off of approving funding increases for projects already in the STIP and the expectations for future project approvals. The dilemma is: Should projects be determined on a purely regional basis and be blind to county, city, or Mn/DOT sponsorship, or should some consciousness be built into the system in terms of an "equitable" distribution of project opportunities among groups? There is a general perception that a member of the ATP might not truly "represent the region" or may be subject to the "danger of buying votes." But the District Engineer believes that the ATP can develop ways to avoid that problem.

Another challenge the District Engineer emphasized is that there should be a split in authority between state and local politicians. He said, "With their responsibility to allocate funds across the state, state legislators should not be members of an individual ATP because their membership might lead to a conflict of interest. A more appropriate way to include elected representatives is to have local elected officials on the ATP to help select projects."

9.4.2 Prioritization

Perceived Strengths

The targets constrain us and force us to have significant conversations at the ATP level. Prior to the ATP there was a lack of responsibility [because of the Central Office's role]. We are now better managers of the money and projects. This is good for taxpayers.

--District Engineer

ATP members state that the ATP process has strengthened the way projects are prioritized in two main ways. First, the ATP is able to make "funding changes rather than having the Central Office micromanage" each step of the process. Second, the Central Minnesota ATP is working on an "innovative project prioritization" system.

In the past, when funding came from the Central Office, there was less flexibility to deal with overruns, underruns, and overprogramming. Now, the ATPs have target levels of funding to provide a starting point for ATIP development. This has given more responsibility and accountability to the ATP.

Perceived Challenge: Developing Adequate Tools

The ATP was set up to do an important job without the proper tools. There is a big mix of projects and we are forced to try to compare apples with oranges with pears.

--ATP Member

A major challenge noted by one ATP member was the need for more tools to make project decisions. The member suggested there is a need for securing better data, updated transportation plans with multimodal considerations, and improved results from the ISTEA management systems.

Another challenge for this ATP is the subtarget system. The ATP continues to subtarget, a cause of regret for some members, while a relief for others. The ATP uses a system of guidelines for enhancement and transit funding. It also targets a breakdown of funds to Mn/DOT and local groups: Mn/DOT gets 75% of the federal dollars, the remaining 25% goes to counties and cities. This targeting method is used to start the ATIP development process. Actual funding varies with each ATIP depending on project priorities.

An ATP member stated that local road and bridge technical ranking criteria did not always score safety projects well compared to other road and bridge projects, because they have low cost-effectiveness. In these instances, this ATP member suggested that the projects that qualify as safety programs could compete favorably using Hazard Elimination Safety ranking criteria.

9.4.3 Planning

Perceived Strength: Use of the RDCs and APO for Regional Input

The ATP defers to the RDCs and the APO to select and prioritize projects. Each of those regional entities selects the projects they find most important for the region. The ATP has the responsibility for integrating the project lists submitted by the APO and RDCs. Research data indicate that this puts an emphasis on regional decision making by giving the RDCs and the APO a responsibility to not only develop transportation plans, but to program transportation investments.

Perceived Challenge: Integrating Planning

One of the challenges faced by the ATP is the integration of the goals of the regional entities into the ATP. One member stated that the regions are only beginning to understand their roles and the importance of them. ATP members also stated that they saw the need for the ATP to

spend more time on discussing goals and integrating them. Currently, the region is working on a long-range transportation plan that looks at intra-regional issues.

We haven't got a long-range transportation plan off the ground yet and we're hoping that projects from that plan flow into the programming, like ISTEA requires. We have been able to get the programming of our projects done without planning, so why should we plan? So, I mean, we're going to have to really sell the need to plan.

--ATP Member

ATP members are not clear on whether the ATP process is a planning or programming process, although most people said it includes elements of both.

When asked whether the ATP process is programming or planning, one of the ATP members responded: "I know that the correct answer is supposed to be planning. I think it's both, and I'm going to put the emphasis on programming because there is money involved. You can plan forever; however, if the money isn't there, you can't build." Another member said "The planning occurs more at the local and regional levels. In the future, I see a shift to more of a combination between planning and programming as we progress with the process."

Regions have discretion to add as many of the available points given to them to qualifying projects, so no consistent ranking system for regional significance exists. Because the planning is disjointed, there may be a "choppy" sense of regionalism. Another perspective is that since the process is decentralized the plan may have greater strength because of more local input.

CHAPTER 10
CASE STUDY ON DISTRICT 4 ATP

10.1 THE EVOLUTION OF THE DISTRICT 4 ATP

1. ATP members report that the ATP is involving interests that were previously not considered in the transportation investment decision process.

2. There is more communication among regional entities, like RDCs and MPOs, according to ATP members.

3. ATP members state there has been a slow decentralization of the modal offices' priority lists.

4. The ATP process has members thinking about "regionalism"; members report they now are seeing the significance of the lack of RDCs to the ATP process.

10.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGION

10.2.1 Geographic

ATP 4 is located in the west central region of the state. The largest cities in the area are Moorhead (of the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area), Fergus Falls, Detroit Lakes, Alexandria, and Morris. This ATP includes Becker, Big Stone, Clay, Douglas, Grant, Mahnomen, Otter Tail, Pope, Stevens, Swift, Traverse, and Wilkin counties. Big Stone and Swift counties are covered by RDC 6W, and Mahnomen County is in RDC 2. The remaining counties are not in an RDC. The District office is located in Detroit Lakes and the sub-district office is located in Morris.

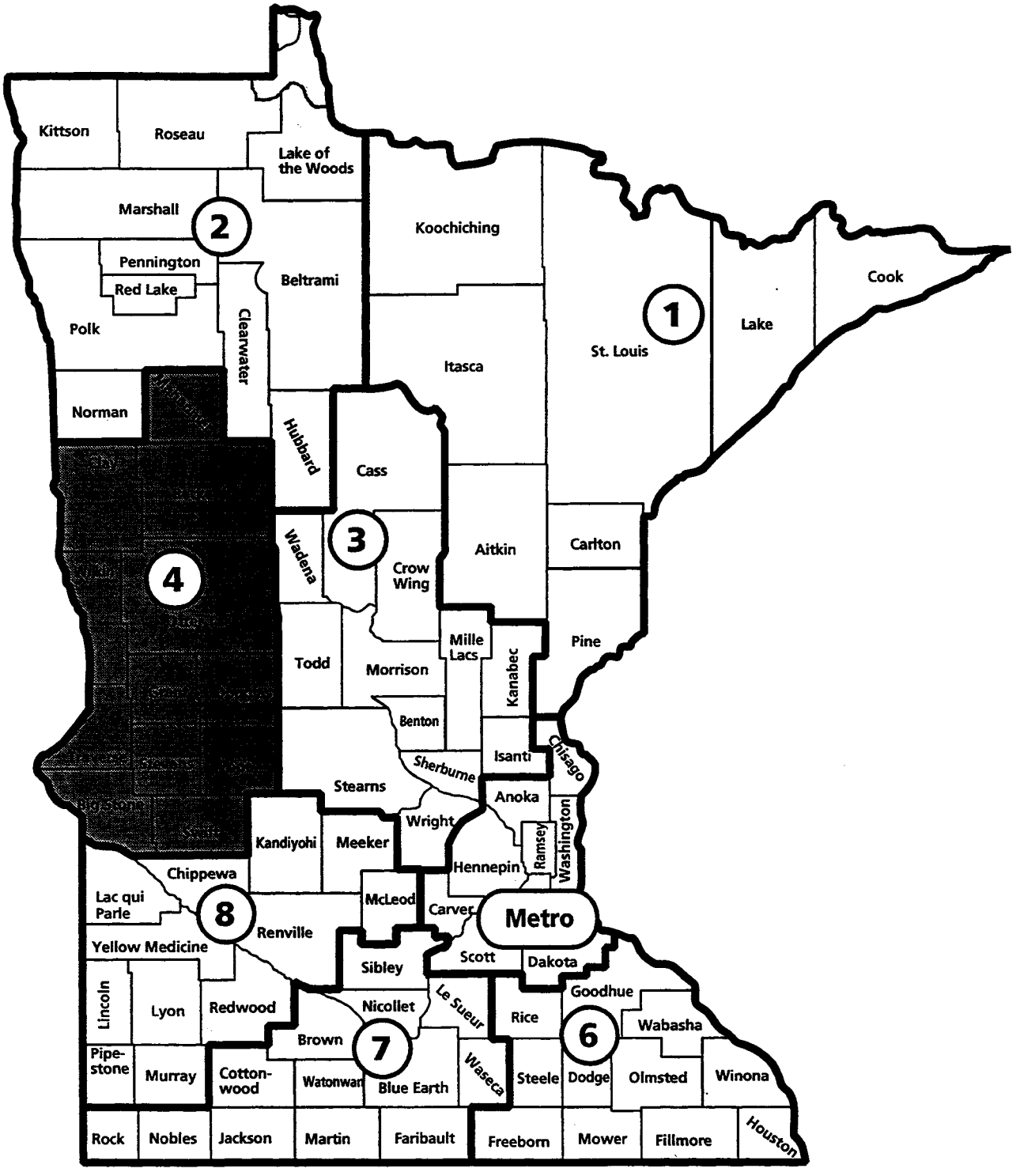
10.2.2 Economic

The March 1995 unemployment rate for the counties represented by this ATP was 4.3%. The state unemployment rate was 3.3% at this time. Total employment between 1983 and 1992 grew over 20%. Much of this growth was due to increases in retail (4,000 new jobs) and services (almost 7,000 new jobs) in the District.

10.2.3 Demographic

Between 1980 and 1990, the ATP lost 4.1% of its population while the state grew by 7.3%. The ATP counties contain 5% of the state's population. The largest city of the region is

District 4
Area Transportation Partnership



Courtesy: Minnesota Department of Transportation

Moorhead with 32,295 residents in 1990. Clay and Douglas counties are the only two within the twelve that experienced population growth between 1980 and 1990.

10.2.4 Highway and Transit Information

Of the total state daily vehicle miles of travel (DVMT) in 1994, 6% of the miles occurred within the boundaries of this ATP, down from 7% in 1980. DVMT between the two periods did increase in the region, but the state total increased more relative to the ATP total.

The Fargo/Moorhead area is served by a metro transit system. Ten of the twelve counties have transit systems in operation.

10.3 DISTRICT 4 ATP PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

10.3.1 Introductory Comments

ISTEA changed the process by stripping categories away and giving districts the flexibility to move projects between categories. The ATP used to look at the investments in a different way; there is far more sharing and interaction in the ATP process now than there was four years ago. The greatest change that has arisen with the ATP process is the move away from the central programming process which was criteria driven.

--District Engineer

Members say that this ATP conducts its business in a three month period each year, during four to six meetings. The primary function of the meetings is to allocate resources and develop the ATIP. ATP members report that there is currently little emphasis on planning, though Mn/DOT began to set up a planning group last fall to function in place of the dissolved RDC. In June of 1996, the counties in the dissolved RDC voted unanimously to form the transportation planning group.

10.3.2 Membership Characteristics

The ATP is composed of thirteen voting and one non-voting member. Decisions are typically reached by consensus rather than by a formal vote. The two active RDCs each have one voting representative (one selected a planner to vote, the other sends a planner as a technical staff member and has the County Commissioner as their chosen voting member). ATP members said that representatives of this District met internally several times to try to determine the critical interests that needed to be brought to the table. The emphasis was not on the individuals who would represent the interests, but on who the proper interests would be.

The District Engineer commented that ATP 4 has a "good relationship with cities and counties which they want to perpetuate and strengthen." He also felt that there is also a strong interest in transit in this area. Representatives from the district decided which interests would be at the

table: county engineers, city engineers, elected officials, the MPO, and rural and urban transit were all chosen to have membership at the ATP. After the interests were chosen, the District Engineer relied on those interests to choose the ATP representatives. He noted, "Our role was to structure the ATP but to not actually pick the members of it."

Membership categories:

County Commissioners (2) (one is voting representative for RDC 6W)
County Engineers (2)
RDC Representatives (2) (both are planners: one is a voting member for RDC 2, the other is a City Engineer (Fergus Falls)
Fargo/Moorhead COG Representative (MPO Executive Director)
Indian Community Representative (from White Earth Reservation Business Committee)
Mn/DOT Assistant District Engineer
Mn/DOT ISTEA Coordinator
Mn/DOT State Aid Engineer
Non-voting, technical staff member from RDC 6W)
Rural Transit Representative
Urban Transit Representative

Shifts in membership over the last few years have been minor. The ATP added a tribal representative, recently replaced a rural transit person, and the 6W RDC brought on an elected official.

The District Engineer does not participate as a member of the ATP. At the beginning he was directly and heavily involved in the process, but has now moved to an "arm's length" position. The ATP makes decisions that are basically independent from the District Engineer, whose involvement decreases each cycle. He stays informed of the process so that "irrevocable decisions" are not made without his knowledge. Ultimately, the District Engineer is responsible for the management and outcome of the ATP process.

10.3.3 Relationships with Regional Entities

The twelve county ATP receives input from two RDCs, representing only three counties in the area. The other nine counties are not represented by a formal RDC, because their RDC was dissolved. Two of the counties are in the Upper Minnesota Valley RDC (6W) and one is in the Headwaters RDC (2). Mn/DOT has developed a planner position for the district, which was put into place during the last year. A planning body for the nine counties not represented by an RDC is under development, and should be in place for next year's process.

The Fargo-Moorhead MPO sends their Director as its representative to the ATP. The MPO conducts metropolitan transportation planning, which is "the only comprehensive transportation planning currently underway within the ATP area." The MPO prepares a formal TIP for consideration by the ATP in funding decisions.

The White Earth Reservation is represented by a member on the ATP, but projects are not requested through the ATP process. There is a specific system of federal funding for reservation roads administered through the BIA. The tribal government sends their list of projects to the ATP, and the ATP includes those projects in the list it develops.

10.3.4 Goals for the Area Transportation Improvement Program

According to the District Engineer, this ATP "does not have well stated investment goals." However, the ATP is in the process of forming a joint-powers transportation planning organization for the nine counties not covered by an RDC that could establish such goals. The ATP conducts a check between the investments in the area and the investment goals formulated by the state. ATP members reported that they usually come very close to the percentages that have been developed by the state. Refer to Volume I, Appendix B, "Federal Dollars Only" tables.

10.3.5 Description of the Project Solicitation Process

ATP members report that the ATP is basically operating on a subtarget system, though they say they have been told by the District Engineer "to wean themselves away from that process." When the ATP was originally developed, ATP members stated that county and city engineers were told that they would not receive less than they did under the previous process. Subtargets were determined based on general ISTEA formula ratios and historical levels of funding for counties, cities over 5,000, and for the Mn/DOT District. Each group knows "approximately how much money they will get." They meet within their groups (county engineers, city engineers, district representatives) to make their prioritized lists of projects to be delivered to the ATP. The lists are combined, with projects that are above the target amount of funding for that group placed at the bottom of the list, and sent to the Central Office.

10.3.6 Ranking techniques

I would say that we are living in a jurisdiction bound system and we are beginning to take jurisdictional filters out of the system.

--District Engineer

We avoid jurisdictional rivalry by not ranking all projects together.

--ATP Member

Each group that has project submittals is responsible for ranking their own projects. The ATP respects the ordering that is submitted for the ATIP. A prioritized list is compiled by a Mn/DOT staff member and presented to the ATP. The ATP "rarely makes any decisions" though they are asked for comments on the prioritization of the project list. The major considerations for project selection are if the project "meets the criteria." As one ATP member stated, "I'm afraid that one of the criteria is something for everyone rather than what is the best investment for the federal dollar."

ATP members report that to achieve the regional significance directive arising out of the Northstar Conference, ATP 4 has attempted to set aside a portion of the federal dollars into an "anywhere pot," a source of funding for the most regionally significant projects. Project selection for these funds uses the following criteria to establish the regional significance ranking: Economic Development (40%), Safety (40%), and Access (20%). ATP members report that the first year the "anywhere pot" was used, the money went to fund projects proposed by the city of Moorhead and Mn/DOT. In the most recent cycle, "anywhere pot" money was not set aside.

10.3.7 Project Mix Between Modes

ATP members stated that road and bridge projects dominate the ATP process. Rail projects that are sent to the ATP directly from the Central Office in St. Paul tend to be lower on the list of priorities. The ATP's emphasis on subtargets generally ensures that the different modal representatives get the projects they request. There is a growing concern in the ATP regarding the increasing number of transit projects. Reasons for the increased need include growing service and access needs of the aging population and an increasing number of transit systems, each requiring new vehicles and vehicle replacement.

10.3.8 Boundaries

According to ATP members, there is communication between ATP 4 and neighboring ATPs as they plan to do highway projects. The members also stated that there is an effort to coordinate project timing that typically occurs for major Mn/DOT projects.

10.3.9 Public Involvement

ATP members reported that there is no formal public involvement in terms of public meetings or press releases at the ATP level. At this time the "public involvement is through meetings of the county engineers, the RDCs, city engineers, and the MPO." The counties have public participation one time per year at the County Board Meetings. The Fargo/Moorhead MPO has an extensive citizen input process that it uses for its Metro TIP. ATP members stated that the ATP members conduct public involvement on a local level prior to project list consolidation at the county level.

10.3.10 Elected Officials and the ATP Process

The membership of the ATP includes two county commissioners. ATP members said that the role of the county commissioner is to report the interests of the other county commissions, but explicit discussions at the ATP level are rare.

10.4 PARTNERSHIP, PRIORITIZATION, PLANNING: COMMON QUALITIES IN THE DISTRICT 4 ATP PROCESS

10.4.1 Partnership

Perceived Strengths: Involvement of Different Groups

There is a working sense of the importance of interstates and geography. There is a commitment to the overall region growing. We leave our jurisdictional allegiances at the door for the most part. There is funding of joint projects, coordination between city and county projects.

--ATP Member

ATP members cited the involvement of groups of people previously left out of the transportation investment process as one of the successes of the ATP and a sign of the growing partnership between groups. Members also felt that the introduction of the ATP process increased communication between RDCs and the District, the MPO and the district, transit and the district, and between counties and the District. One member summarized one strength of the ATP 4, stating:

> The greatest success of this ATP is in having different entities there and getting them involved in the process. Though there is still a great need for improvement, this is a huge step from where they were before the ATPs were organized.

The data indicate that an additional strength of the process is that the ATP itself has a voice in which projects each of the groups (cities, counties, Mn/DOT) set forth in their program. Members believe this is a strength because within the ATP process, MPOs, cities, counties, transit, and Mn/DOT have an opportunity for voice in each others' lists. Though the opportunity exists, it is rare for a group to exercise their voice. Members report that there is no spoken conflict at the ATP level, though a member reports that if there was something members adamantly opposed, they would have the opportunity to speak.

ATP members stated that since there is such a variety of players in the transit mode, the ATP put together a subcommittee to help the rural transit representative prioritize the submitted projects. The various involved groups include a five county group, single counties, and cities. Ten of the twelve counties have transit systems in operation.

Perceived Challenges: Not Enough Voices

I think the way we structured the ATP was to try to compensate for the dissolved RDC. I don't know how well we've done that because we still follow along with the key traditional players.

--District Engineer

We are fairly remiss in our public involvement process. I don't think we are doing what we should. When we started talking about the planning body, some of the ATP members got nervous. The nervousness has more to do with the reincarnation of a RDC than public involvement on the prioritization process. Opening up the process to a larger constituency makes them uncomfortable.

--District Engineer

A challenge perceived by ATP members regarding the ATP process is the lack of voice from some distinct groups. The dissolved RDC has resulted in a barrier to regional planning and ATP members feel that this has presented a fundamental challenge to the region. The ATP reaches consensus without significant discussion about the subgroups' selection priorities.

According to some ATP members, the use of subtargets also presents a challenge to the ATP partnership because there is a discussion lacking on what is really important to the region's goals. The data from the interviews indicate that a working sense of regionalism is lacking because of the dissolved RDCs.

Another challenge noted by ATP members is the lack of public involvement in the ATP process. The public involvement is more indirect than direct. The data show that this presents a challenge in the partnership notion and the idea of decentralizing the process in order to include citizen participation. The ATP chair reported that the ATP relies on the meetings of county engineers, the RDCs, the MPO, and the city engineers to account for public input. One RDC representative noted that they are "never asked for public involvement on any issue."

Beyond being notified about the actions of the ATP, state legislators are not involved in the ATP process. There is a fear, especially by the engineers, about politicizing the process. The role of public involvement is a contested issue between ATP members. One member noted:

> We are very susceptible to challenge due to our limited elected officials' involvement. The ATP has very little public involvement relative to ISTEA rules, with the exception of the MPO's planning and programming process. Our ATP's technical basis for its project decisions is also rather limited. There is a risk in involving legislators and more local elected leaders, since it could politicize the process, but this risk seems worthwhile in the long run to assure local awareness and support. Such involvement has worked well at the MPO level.

Finally, an additional challenge to the partnership theme is the issue of transportation investment decisions for reservations and tribal representative input into the process. The District Engineer characterized the involvement in the following manner:

> I think one of the reasons we have not been successful at the ATP with tribal representatives is there is a cultural problem. We don't know what they are doing and they don't know what we are doing. The White Earth tribe has a member on the ATP. Even though there is a chair for them, they don't show up to take part. They manage

money through the BIA process. We wouldn't invite them if we weren't genuine in our interest in their inclusion.

10.4.2 Prioritization

Perceived Strengths: Trust in the Current System

ISTEA changed the process by stripping categories away and giving districts the flexibility to move projects between categories. The ATP used to look at the investments in a different way. There is far more sharing and interaction in the ATP process now than there was five years ago. The greatest change that has arisen with the ATP process is the move away from the central programming process which was criteria driven.

--District Engineer

This ATP's process relies heavily on the work done by its subcommittees. The ATP did not spend significant time discussing project lists, and that the time commitment of members is not as high here as in other ATPs. There is apparent trust in the lists submitted by other groups by members in this ATP.

Perceived Challenges: Subtargets, Money Available, and Modal Offices

ATP members report that Mn/DOT has been trying to move the ATP away from a suballocation scheme, but each group does its own ranking for project submittals. There has been a yearly effort to put more money into an "anywhere pot," a source of money for the most regionally significant projects. One member noted, "that has been a difficult process because some interests are protective over what they would have gotten [under the old system]." Interviews with ATP members suggest that the ATP has responded to the protective groups by earmarking the money into categories designated by ISTEA, "mostly because of the fear that any regional entity could get projects and local governments would end up shortchanged."

The District Engineer comments that the ATP exists in a jurisdiction-bound system, and they are just now beginning to take "jurisdictional filters" out of the system. He also believes that removing the "jurisdictional filters" has been marginally successful, but that it will take more time for further success. The District Engineer's goal in this whole process has been to make the process jurisdictionally blind. He thinks the ATP is two or three years away from reaching that goal.

Another challenge is suggested by an ATP member who commented that the ATP struggles with defining regional significance because of the suballocation process. The member describes the struggle as follows:

> I see it as a real dilemma for the representatives of the cities and the counties because in the past they had a budget that they knew they were going to get and they relied upon it. Now we are asking them to be jurisdictionally blind. So if you vote with your

brain, you are probably going to select an interstate or expressway project that needs some improvement. Whereas if you are going to vote with your heart, you are likely going to pick your next favorite county project, which has little regional significance. If the representative consistently votes with his brain, he is no longer going to be a representative. I see that as a real dilemma.

A challenge seen by the District Engineer is the extent of the money on the table for the ATPs to program with. He expressed a desire for the ATP members to play a larger role in the discussion of Mn/DOT funded state projects. There currently is limited discussion about how Mn/DOT projects fit into the regional TIP at the ATP level.

The District Engineer added that he would like to see all of the money on the table, the state, federal, trunk highway, and local money, so the ATP "could not avoid thinking about regional transportation priorities." The ATP is not at the point where the money is all "on the table" and up for discussion. The District Engineer comments: "I don't know how far down the road that is. Clearly, that is to me the intent, the spirit of that bill and we are at this point still jurisdictionally bound and the end of that isn't in sight and I wish it were."

The other challenge mentioned by ATP members is the slow decentralization of the modal office's priority lists. The Office of Freight, Rail, and Waterways develops a project list and gives the list to the district, but the timing and priorities of the list do not always match the priorities of the district. The role of the modal office's is changing and, as the District Engineer stated, "We are now working much more closely with them to make sure their lists fit in terms of timing and funding."

ATP members spoke of the difficulties the ATP had in making sure that enhancement projects were delivered by their sponsor. The ranking process for enhancement projects is developing and member feel it is stronger now than it was at the beginning of the process. Enhancement projects were reported to have more competition now. A three year solicitation process for enhancement projects was initiated this year.

10.4.3 Planning

Perceived Strengths: Developing a Transportation Planning Group

The ATP has a multi-interest basis, but the planning process is where all special interests should be represented. It would synthesize the interests. The choices would then be left to the ATP. Merging would cause the ATP to be a place of posturing and special interest maneuvering.

--District Engineer

The plan to develop a transportation planning body is underway and members hope that will play a significant role in the ATP by helping create a more in-depth discussion on regional goals. The District Engineer sees the ATP and the transportation planning group as distinct groups that should be separated.

Perceived Challenges

There is paranoia that we not recreate a RDC here. It has been very political and very sensitive. What has happened is that the ATP is afraid about a loss of power and influence if the regional transportation planning group does get together.

--District Engineer

One of the major challenges stated by ATP members is the lack of a regional long-term transportation plan. Some ATP members feel that the lack of a regional planning group in the majority of the ATP's counties presents a barrier for planning activities in the ATP. Data from the interviews show that there is no resource for planning efforts that the ATP can utilize as they select and prioritize projects. One ATP member stated that, "We have no regional goals."

According to ATP members, the dissolved RDCs intensify this challenge. The District Engineer noted, "I think that the goals for our ATIP are not well stated. The reason for that is that we have been working on the forming of a regional transportation planning body and essentially what we have been doing in the meantime is using the old system." Members report that the ATP has ranking criteria such as selecting projects that promote economic development that could be developed as goals. In addition, data from the interviews indicate that the lack of RDCs for nine counties is the major reason why the goals for this ATP are not well defined or agreed upon.

Another challenge identified by ATP members is that the MPO does planning, but the ATP does not. An ATP member commented that, "Cities and counties can bring projects to the table, without having gone through a rigorous planning process, with roughly equal chances of survival as a MPO project which has survived scrutiny and tests. Planning should drive the process."

Federal requirements for an MPO ensure that these organizations have citizen participation and produce long-range plans. This is in a contrast to the ATP that has little planning and little public involvement. This puts the ATP and the MPO at different levels and creates a somewhat awkward position for both. One member says that "if the ATP decisions are based more on planning, the MPO would dominate with an unfair advantage over cities and counties" because the MPO has much more detailed plans than cities or counties."

The District Engineer envisions a future for all ATPs where they will have a role in investment decisions concerning ports, telecommunications, and other transportation modes. Currently in District 4, the absence of an active RDC creates a barrier to true regional planning. He adds that practically, an expanded role of the ATP "would not work today because of representation and money constraints." To fulfill the future vision, the District Engineer feels that the ATP needs a solid planning process to move away from programming only highway work.

CHAPTER 11
CASE STUDY ON THE DISTRICT 6 ATP (SOUTHEAST ATP)

11.1 THE EVOLUTION OF THE SOUTHEAST ATP

1. ATP members state that transportation providers have been encouraged to work together in new ways in which the "power is now shared."

2. MPOs have become a more central entity in planning and programming.

3. ATP members feel the ATP is applying funds where they are most needed, such as in the off-system bridges that were formerly not eligible for federal funding.

4. Local government and transit system interests have increased their involvement in the transportation investment process because the funding allocation scheme has changed.

5. The District Engineer, as well as many ATP members, argue the ATP process has encouraged the district to get into the planning business. The District Engineer notes, "With local units of government now doing some planning, people are looking at the big picture. If proper planning is done, the STIP becomes a construction plan. As the cycle occurs each year, the program is getting better and better."

11.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGION

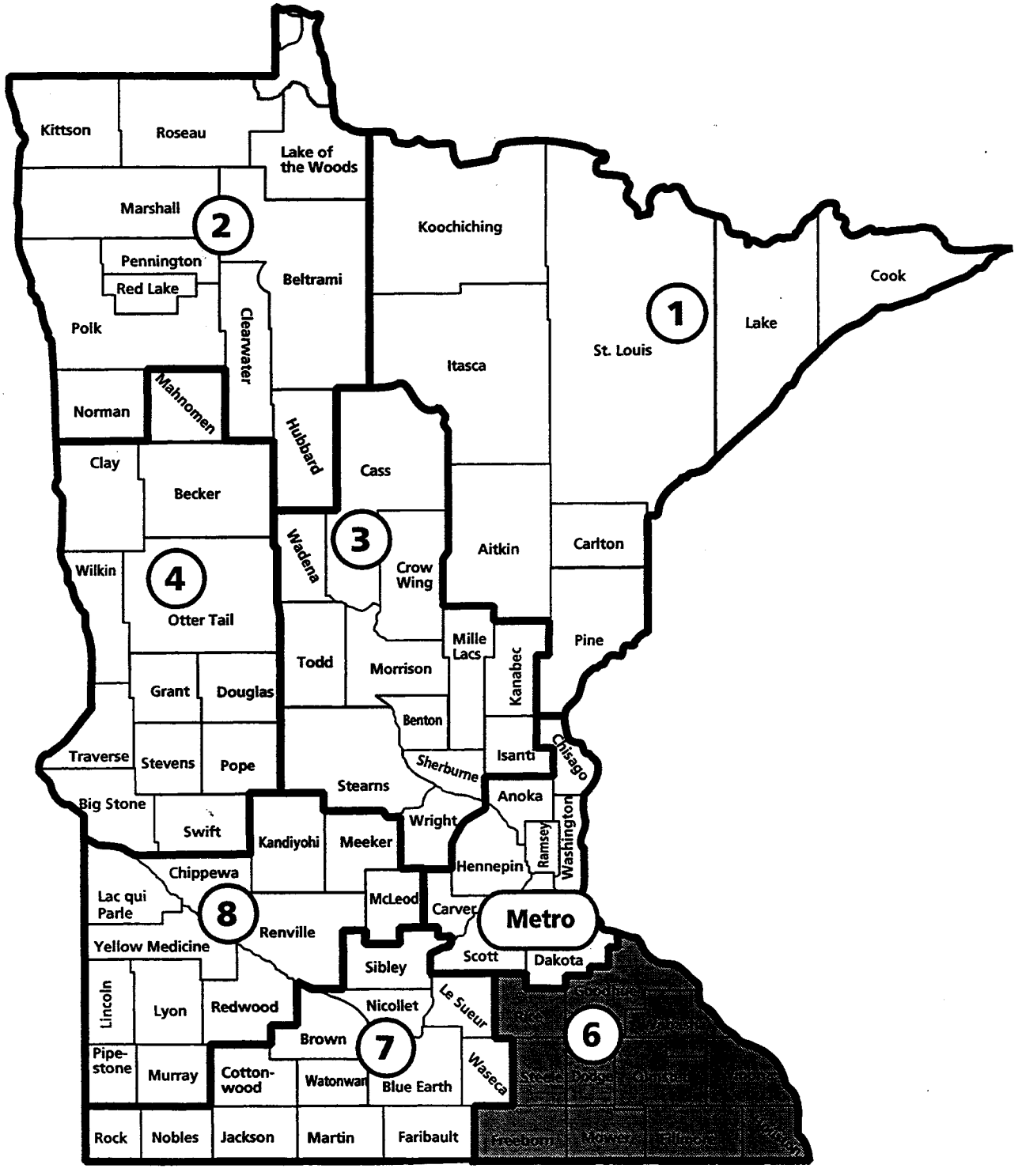
11.2.1 Geographic

The Southeast ATP (SE ATP) is located in the southeast corner of the state. It is composed of Dodge, Freeborn, Goodhue, Houston, Mower, Olmsted, Rice, Steele, Wabasha, and Winona counties. The city of Rochester is the regional center of the ATP, with Olmsted County the population center. The ATP does not have a RDC, but does have two MPOs, the Rochester Council of Governments (ROCOG) and the La Crosse Area Planning Commission.

11.2.2 Economic

Employment in the SE ATP continues to shift towards services and trade. The leading employment providers in the eleven county area include services, retail trade, manufacturing, and government. A high proportion of the jobs are located in four counties: Olmsted, Winona, Rice, and Goodhue. While all counties experienced employment growth from 1983 to 1992, growth ranged from an increase of 3.1% in Mower County to 31.5% in Goodhue County.[11]

District 6
Area Transportation Partnership



Courtesy: Minnesota Department of Transportation

11.2.3 Demographic

The district/ATP population in 1990 was 420,094, with a projection of 449,560 by 2020.[12] The largest cities within the district/ATP boundaries include Rochester (70,745), Winona (25,399), and Austin (21,907).

11.2.4 Highway and Transit Information

Daily vehicle miles traveled in the SE ATP has remained at 10% of the state's total from 1980 to 1994. During that period, DVMT increased by 48% in the ATP, from 7.9 million to 11.8 million. In 1990, 70% of commuters in the ATP area drove to work alone, slightly below the state average of 74%. The District 6 ATP has eleven transit systems that operate in ten counties. The district has 1,435 miles of highway, including 206 miles of interstate, and over 4000 bridges.[13]

11.3 SOUTHEAST ATP PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

11.3.1 Introductory Comments

ATP members indicate that the SE ATP has successfully recognized local needs while incorporating the regional decision-making philosophy emphasized in the ISTEA legislation. The data from the interviews suggest that while there are still center-periphery issues of equity, the ATP's dedication of funds to off-system bridges and its emphasis on criteria for ranking projects show a commitment to innovative ways of transportation programming.

ATP meetings are held monthly from the fall through late spring, with additional meetings when the ATIP is being constructed. Decision by consensus is the preferred mode of operation, though the actual ranking of projects is done anonymously by using the "Option Finder" system, a computerized software program.

11.3.2 Membership Characteristics

The chair [of the ATP] acts more as a facilitator; any member of the committee may bring any item to debate at any time.

--Former ATP Member

The District Engineer established the guidelines for representation. The size, make-up, and representation were agreed to by the local units of government, MPOs, and the transit providers. Members reported that this was accepted initially, but there were concerns that Olmsted County and Rochester would dominate the process because of a large transit system and the MPO. This concern has been addressed by limiting the Rochester/Olmsted area to two representatives to the ATP at any time.

The SE ATP has eleven members. They are distributed as follows, with number of representatives indicated by parentheses:

Mn/DOT (3) (appointed by the District Engineer)
Cities with populations of greater than 5,000 (2) (rotating)
Counties (2) (rotate by county)
Transit providers (2) (one for rural transit, one for the Rochester transit system)
Each of two MPOs (1)

There are no RDC representatives because there are no active RDCs in the area.

The size and structure of the group has remained constant since the ATP process began. All members of the ATP vote, though consensus is the primary method of decision making. The ATP's chair is a Mn/DOT employee who was originally appointed to the position by the District Engineer.

The District Engineer was a member of the ATP at the beginning of the process, but never as chair. He does not think he should sit on the ATP today. Because the District Engineer is an "extension of the Commissioner in the district," he believes it is improper that he vote in the ATP process.

11.3.3 Relationships with Regional Entities

The ATP reinforces coordination. We learned that RDC 10 was not needed.

--ATP Member

The Rochester Council of Governments is the primary non-Mn/DOT actor for planning and development. It brings proposals for projects to the ATP, working off its own TIP, just as any other entity would. Because of the technical expertise of the ROCOG staff, its contributions to the ATP process have been as a partner working with the ATP to develop a workable project ranking system.

The input of the district/ATP's other RDC, the La Crosse Area Planning Commission has not been as fruitful. ATP members reported that this MPO's efforts were focused in Wisconsin, with little attendance or contribution to the workings of the SE ATP.

11.3.4 Goals for the Area Transportation Improvement Program

There is a conscious effort to hit [state] goals. The ATP is aware of them.

--ATP Member

The SE ATP makes a significant effort to adhere to the Mn/DOT guidelines on the distribution of moneys according to project type (preservation, management and operations, replacement, and expansion). During the selection process, the chair informs ATP members of the spending

areas that require additional funding. The ATP has taken projects ranked lower than others and moved them up in the rankings in order to satisfy these goals.

ISTEA has given the ATP the opportunity to flexibly apply funds where its members see the greatest need. On a district-wide level, the ATP has made a specific commitment to meet the needs of off-system bridges that ordinarily are not eligible for federal money. Accordingly, off-system bridges receive a dedicated subtarget of 5%, amounting to approximately $800,000 per STIP year. Safety and rail safety projects are funded with a goal of $400,000 per year (1.7% of target). For enhancements, the ATP has a goal of $800,000 to $1,000,000 (4.3% of target funds).

ATP members report their project goals and resulting project choices are in sync with the goals of the Central Office. However, it was noted that preservation and safety categories may be underreported because when a bridge is rebuilt, it is categorized only as a "replacement" project, not as preservation or safety.

11.3.5 Description of the Project Solicitation Process

We send letters to communities, counties, and other organizations such as trail committees and user groups.

-- Former ATP Member

The SE ATP uses different solicitation processes for different transportation modes. These modes and their processes include:

Regular highway and bridge funding: Cities, counties, and MPOs are invited to submit application based on a standard solicitation application.

Transit: The two city providers and each of the rural providers are informed of the opportunity to apply for ISTEA dollars. The Mn/DOT Office of Transit receives the applications and prioritizes them, sending the results back to the ATP. The ATP is currently considering the development of its own transit prioritization process.

Enhancements: Solicitations are made every two years in a separate application process. Solicitation packets are sent to a variety of interested groups, including governmental units, trail committees, and recreation groups. All interested parties are invited to Rochester for an overview of the application and documentation process.

Railroad safety projects: Local governmental units receive a solicitation letter from the Mn/DOT Office of Railroads. All applications are returned to the Office of Railroads where they are ranked and prioritized. The railroads themselves are also invited to submit applications for safety projects. The ranked projects are then considered by the ATP for funding decisions.

11.3.6 Ranking Techniques

Highway and road projects: The ATP has a system of ranking that mandates certain minimum requirements for projects to be considered. These requirements include:

- Existing average daily traffic (varies for urban & rural roadways).
- Functional class (collector, major collector, or minor arterial).
- Permanent road improvement.
- Federal aid request of $200,000.
- Project is in existing local program.
- Project is consistent with Mn/DOT Capital Improvement Plan.
- Assured coordination within all jurisdictions/modes.
- Assured local match (i.e., funding availability).

Projects that meet the requirements are visually examined by the ATP in a two-day field walk every April. The entire ATP travels together to inspect each proposed project.

Following the field walk, the ATP members participate in an anonymous ranking process using the "Option Finder" computer software system. Each member assigns point totals to a proposed project based on deliverability, life-cycle cost, extent of need, functional class, commuter access, and road condition.

The road condition scoring is based on the visual inspection by the ATP members. The ATP does not have access to pavement management system rankings for city or county roads. One ATP member commented that management systems are not widely used in the district because people who work with the roads already are aware of the road conditions.

While the ATP does not have subtargets for highways and roads, it does consider that rural roads are less likely to meet the full-range of criteria necessary for a high ranking. Members recognize this when voting anonymously on the projects.

Off-system Bridges: With over 4,000 bridges within the district boundaries, the SE ATP has recognized the need to actively dedicate funds to bridge repair and replacement. It currently subtargets 5% of ISTEA funds for this purpose.

The ATP uses the PONTIS bridge management system to identify projects for bridge construction and reconstruction. The system is aided by a thorough data base of each bridge's condition.

Bridge requests must first meet minimum requirements in each of the same categories as highways and roads. The minimum federal dollar request is $80,000 for new or rehabilitation projects. Based on the results of the bridge management system, as well as how the other criteria are met, the ATP ranks the bridges using the "Option Finder" computer software program.

Enhancements: There is a current minimum federal request of $50,000 in construction costs for enhancement projects. The ATP has considered doubling this to $100,000 to reflect the complexity and cost of meeting federal requirements. Additionally, all enhancements must meet the following criteria to advance in the ATP process:

- Must be a permanent improvement.
- Coordination within all jurisdictions/modes.
- Assured local match (20% of construction & design costs).

Railroad Safety Projects: Ranked and prioritized by the Mn/DOT Office of Railroad Safety. The ATP requires a benefit/cost ratio of greater than one.

Transit: The Mn/DOT Office of Transit makes the selections and remits to the ATP a list of ranked proposals. The ATP has a $15,000 minimum federal aid request for transit.

For a comparison, see Chapter 13 which provides a description of the SW ATP revised technical ranking and regional significance system.

11.3.7 Project Mix Between Modes

We follow the ISTEA guidelines, but are flexible in the long run.

--ATP Member

The SE ATP is described by ATP members as flexible in its funding choices, yet aware of ISTEA and Mn/DOT guidelines for the use of federal dollars. The ATP reviews funds for roads, bridges, transit, enhancements, safety, and rail safety.

Because transit is a small part of the total target amount, the ATP has funded transit at 100% of the requests made since the ATP's inception. However, the ATP expects future increases in the requests of transit providers that will affect the full-funding of transit projects.

The SE ATP has ports at Red Wing and Winona. The ATP has provided special consideration to improving the weight-capabilities of the roads connecting to the ports.

11.3.8 Boundaries

We have an awareness of coordination, rather than a vigorous procedure.

--ATP Member

The Mn/DOT district and the ATP district share the same boundaries, so there is no internal border coordination problem. Likewise, since the SE ATP does not have a RDC, members report that there is no conflict over planning jurisdictions. While the ATP has two MPOs, members stated that the La Crosse-La Crescent MPO covers only a small portion of the ATP are, they are not as active in the ATP process.

The ATP has engaged in cooperation with other entities. Minnesota and Wisconsin have mutual bridge inspection for border bridges. Any reconstruction costs are split in half between the states. This requires a bridge project to be part of both states' STIPs. The ATP has also worked on joint corridor studies with District 7 ATP (Mankato) to develop Highway 14, as well as a separate study with Iowa.

11.3.9 Public Involvement

We don't think we need a separate public involvement program for the ATP process. The meaningful participation goes on before the ATP process.

--ATP Member

There is a strong consensus among SE ATP members that public involvement should occur at the lower levels of planning, not at the ATP level. Whether at city and county meetings, ROCOG forums, or Mn/DOT planning hearings, citizen involvement is most useful at these planning stages. All MPO projects already go through a public hearing process. At the ATP level, public involvement often consists of no more than a request that a particular project be completed.

Accordingly, no press releases or public invitations to participate are part of the ATP process. Because the ATP members themselves represent the public, members are accountable to the agency, and the citizens that support them.

11.3.10 Elected Officials and the ATP Process

Elected officials are represented by their representatives on the ATP.

--ATP Member

There are no elected officials on the ATP. ATP members uniformly believe that elected officials are represented on the ATP by the members themselves. For instance, the executive director of ROCOG carries the interests of local officials to the ATP when he attends meetings. Direct involvement of elected officials in picking projects is seen as inappropriate.

The proper role for elected officials, according to members, is to become involved in long-range planning for transportation. One member explained that state legislators do not have a place on the ATP because they should be concerned with public policy, not project selection at the ATP level.

11.4 PARTNERSHIP, PRIORITIZATION, PLANNING: COMMON QUALITIES IN THE SE ATP PROCESS

11.4.1 Partnership

Perceived Strengths

Folks who work with Mn/DOT have been partners for years. . . . The ATP process did not create a partnership, though it may have added some other dimensions.

--ATP Member

We are a collection of partners. The partnership is being asked to do things it has never been asked to do before like sharing opinions and biases. In this sense, its quite a good partnership.

--ATP Member

Members report that transportation partnerships were formed before the creation of the ATPs. However, ATP members add that the SE ATP has encouraged the development of even stronger bonds between local transportation providers and the Mn/DOT district office in southeast Minnesota.

The MPOs are now a "key partner in planning" for transportation needs; formerly, they drew up their programs separately. ATP members report that where decisions were formerly made unilaterally, power is now shared. The data show that the ATP has embraced the idea of "partnership" in one way by rejecting the use of geographical subtargets for project selection. The only suballocation for the district is the dedication of federal moneys to off-system bridges, a recognition of the system-wide need for such repair.

The formal partnership has taken on new challenges, such as considering the place of transit in the larger transportation network. For instance, bringing transit providers into the decision-making group has exposed local officials to transit's role in their communities. With transit representatives taking a part in the process, members indicated that everyone realizes funding with scarce resources leads to tough decision. The ATP has thus far given strong support to transit initiatives, as evidenced by 100% funding of transit requests.

The local process has "changed with ISTEA because local governments no longer receive federal dollars directly for transportation." ATP members feel that the ATP is the vehicle for involving the local entities in the decision making. Members also believe that with transit representatives present on the ATP, everyone is beginning to understand transit's role in the region.

Finally, the ATP members are confident that the place for public involvement is at the local unit of government level or ROCOG. The ATP members uniformly believe that they, as employees or appointed representatives beholden to elected officials, are representing the

public interest. Whether a county transportation meeting or a Mn/DOT corridor study, public involvement is most qualitatively effective at these planning levels.

Perceived Challenges

The data from the interviews suggest that the addition of enhancement projects to the STIP remains a challenge to the SE ATP and to the idea of partnership. Because an organization proposing an enhancement project is required to secure a governmental sponsor, Mn/DOT, cities, and counties have become partners with non-traditional groups proposing projects. ATP members report that these relationships have been uneasy in some cases, as sponsors are faced with new demands on resources with no accompanying increase in allocations. Also, members said that the enhancement projects that are funded have been susceptible to delay and cancellation because of the unfamiliarity of non-traditional groups with federal and state regulations. ATP members feel a review and simplification of the enhancement application process is needed.

The SE ATP has responded to these difficulties with a re-emphasis on instructing proposers on how the process works. Their efforts include holding pre-proposal and post selection enhancement workshops for those groups proposing projects, and providing them with examples of project plans and memoranda. As often mentioned, the process has improved year-by-year.

The lack of voice from a regional entity has been cited as a challenge to the ATP by some members. Specifically, members interested in planning note an attitude of aversion to RDCs. Members suggested this makes discussion on goals and priorities more difficult.

Another challenge in voice concerns the Prairie Island Band of Dakota, which has not participated in the ATP process despite invitations to submit project proposals. Represented by Goodhue County, the tribe itself is too small, according to some ATP members, to warrant a member on the ATP.

In regard to other intermodal accommodations, one member noted that it is difficult to bring interested parties to the ATP decision-making process if they do not have anything to directly gain from attending. Elected officials are not involved in the process but are represented by ATP members themselves. Another observed challenge is the different levels of public involvement for the MPO and the ATP.

11.4.2 Prioritization

Perceived Strengths

I first had reservations. But after a few times through, I felt more comfortable that projects chosen were the right projects. [The process] gives you confidence that all these projects are worthy.

--Assistant District Engineer

According to ATP members, the flexibility of ISTEA allows the SE ATP to meet one of its most pressing needs, the reconstruction and replacement of off-system bridges. The decision to subtarget a funding amount to bridges has spurred the adoption of the PONTIS bridge management system, a system that divides resources based on set criteria.

ATP members report that the ATP has also developed a fairly advanced method of project selection for roads and highways. The SE ATP prioritizes on established criteria and selects projects using the "Option Finder" software system. ATP members feel they are recognizing the competing needs of urban and rural areas by adjusting the weighted factors so as not to unfairly bias rural transportation projects. As one ATP member stated, "the ATP provides a level playing field for folks" to compete in project selection.

ATP members spoke of the attempt to move towards embracing an intermodal view of transportation. One member noted that the ATP is "continually working with our intermodal offices, railroads, ports, trucking, and transit." The focus on an intermodal perspective is illustrated in the ATP's funding choices that include bus shelters and buses, railroad safety projects, and developing all-season, non-restricted access to ports located in the ATP. However, a reported challenge to this is that "among engineers there is a traditional reluctance" to fund transit at such levels.

Perceived Challenges

ATP members stated that the ATP continues to struggle with the most appropriate way to measure a road's condition, use, and importance. The ATP is currently investigating how the use of benefit/cost analysis might affect the transportation choices of the ATP. However, the very consideration of benefit/cost analysis is viewed with concern by members representing less populated counties of the ATP. Members report that the "Rochester/Olmsted County versus rural counties" issue remains a challenge in trust building and project delivery.

While the ATP process is ideally meant to steer funding to the most regionally significant projects, some members expressed concern with the inability of the process to recognize those best projects. The unreliability of federal funds, it is suggested, convinces some county engineers to avoid the ATP process and instead fund with a guaranteed source of dollars. Other members disagreed, however, characterizing projects submitted to the ATP as those that are best able to compete against other projects.

Not all ATP members are convinced of the usefulness of management systems. One noted, "It's a myth that management systems have a lot to do with what we do. People who work with roads know their condition. People who work with bridges know the condition of those bridges; they send the projects to the ATP." Most members predict a more efficient and refined ATP process because of increased use of pavement, transit, and bridge management systems. Members report that each year the process has improved, and they anticipate this will continue.

Some ATP members suggest another possibility is to let the ATPs make all the district transportation decisions. While this is not currently feasible politically, members note this would add state and local funding to the ATP moneys and allow for the ultimate in decentralization and priority ranking.

The ATP is attempting to refine its enhancement solicitation process to communicate to potential applicants the complexity and commitment necessary to carry an enhancement project through to completion. This ATP has had numerous instances in which approved enhancement projects have had difficulty being delivered. The ATP reports that more than half of enhancement projects are delayed at some point.

An additional area of concern is the requirement that a governmental unit be the sponsor of any enhancement projects. One ATP member reported that there is an effort to move away from locally sponsored enhancement projects toward projects that have more district-wide importance, such as state-entrance projects along the Minnesota-Iowa border.

11.4.3 Planning

Perceived Strengths

The ATP process has worked because planning has been decentralized--not everything is done by Mn/DOT.

--ATP Member

While the SE ATP does not have an RDC, ATP members report that the emphasis on regional decision making has spurred improvements in the planning processes of the two MPOs, as well as the development of a Mn/DOT district planning arm. Members believe the result has been gradually improved coordination among the counties, cities, Mn/DOT, and other partners. Compared to pre-ISTEA, the district transportation entities are engaged in significantly more planning. The role of the ATP, most members would agree, is to continue to encourage planning.

Most members characterize the ATP process as one of programming or "fund distribution." It is largely rejected as a planning process itself.

Perceived Challenges

While ATP members report that the ATP has encouraged various groups to contribute to planning efforts, there is no "regional plan" that encompasses the entire area. In fact, the idea of just what a regional plan should consist of is unclear to some ATP members. Currently, each entity is contributing its own plan. A possible challenge suggested by the data is for the ATP to combine the plans into a regional vision of what transportation and development choices the district/ATP should be making. Of note, there is some disagreement as to whether the ATP even has the resources to participate in such a planning process. One ATP member

stated, "The ATP is about ranking and scheduling, not reconsidering goals of the community or land use. The ATP should encourage planning, not do it."

Some ATP members mentioned that they feel input and discussion is missing from a regional entity and that an RDC would help facilitate a discussion on regional significance. One ATP member, when asked if the ATP incorporated regional plans into the project selection process, responded, "That is a strange question. The plans should be arising from the projects. Counties have comprehensive plans. I don't know what a 'regional plan' is. Is our district even a region? It depends on who is defining 'region.' The concept of a regional plan is very poorly defined."

CHAPTER 12
CASE STUDY ON DISTRICT 7 ATP

12.1 THE EVOLUTION OF THE DISTRICT 7 ATP

1. Members report that the process of transit prioritization is no longer restricted to Mn/DOT. Before the list of prioritized projects from the Office of Transit is sent to the ATP, the ATP has already been introduced to the transit projects by either the urban or rural transit representatives.

2. There has been some change in the project selection process in the rail mode; for example, county engineers can now bring in rail projects through the ATP.

3. Members report that the new system allows more flexibility, reliability, and accountability.

4. Groups that did not traditionally work together prior to ISTEA now work together through the ATP.

5. The STIP process is a three-year process. However, in order to accommodate longer range planning efforts, the ATP developed a four year plan. Creating a fourth year of projects in the list was requested by local representatives, and works to aid project development.

12.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGION

12.2.1 Geographic

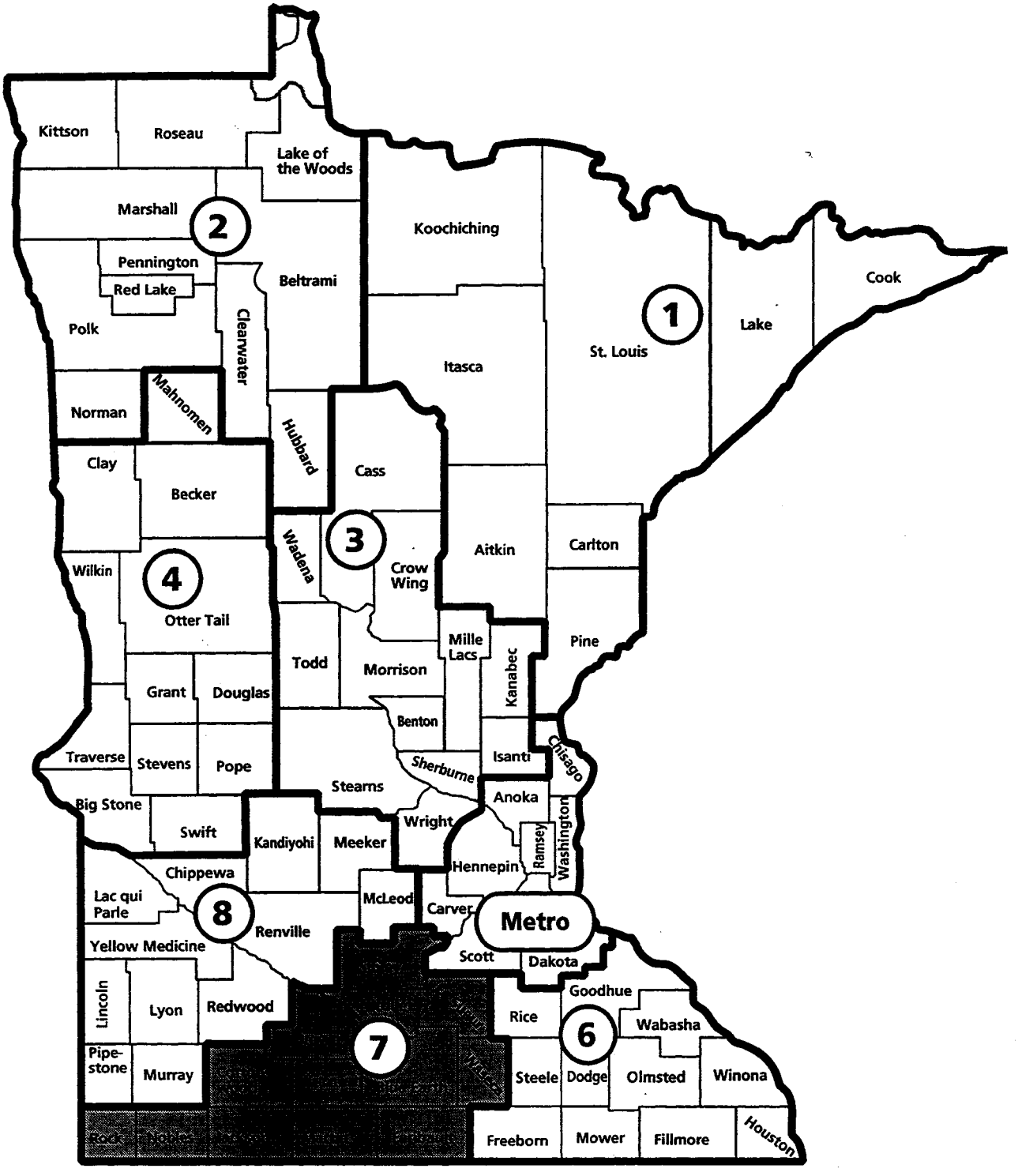
ATP 7 is located in the south central area of the state. Mankato is the population center of the region. There are two RDCs in the region, covering all thirteen counties of the ATP. The Mn/DOT District Office is located in Mankato.

ATP 7 includes Blue Earth, Brown, Cottonwood, Faribault, Jackson, Le Sueur, Martin, Nicollet, Nobles, Rock, Sibley, Waseca, and Watonwan counties. RDC 8 covers Cottonwood, Jackson, Nobles, and Rock counties on the western region of the ATP, while RDC 9 covers the remaining nine counties.

12.2.2 Economic

The labor force forecast for the year 2020 predicts a 0.8% loss in employment, an expected loss of 1,000 jobs.[14] Total district employment between 1983 and 1992 increased by 13.7%, an increase of almost 17,000 jobs. The largest increase in jobs was in the service sector, followed by manufacturing.

District 7
Area Transportation Partnership



Courtesy: Minnesota Department of Transportation

12.2.3 Demographic

The thirteen county population in 1990 was 270,596, down from 283,067 in 1980. Approximately 6% of the state's population lives within the boundary of ATP 7. Mankato, the ATP's largest city, has a population of 31,477 people, an increase of nearly 3,000 people from the 1980 census count.

12.2.4 Highway and Transit Information

Even with an increase in daily vehicle miles traveled (DVMT) of 22% in the 13 county area, DVMT dropped from 8% of the state's total in 1980 to 6% in 1994. There are five countywide transit systems and four city systems in ATP 7.

12.3 DISTRICT 7 ATP PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

12.3.1 Introductory Comments

ATP 7 develops a four year area transportation improvement program (ATIP) instead of the typical three year ATIP. Creating a fourth year of projects in the list was requested by local representatives and works to aid project development. Once a project has been approved by the ATP for inclusion in the ATIP, it will not be removed.

This ATP meets about once a month throughout the year. Rather than relying on strict parliamentary procedure, this group worked by consensus. The ATP has used video-conference to bring in participants from remote locations or to join member groups sitting in different locations.

12.3.2 Membership Characteristics

The ATP has thirteen members, composed as follows:

City council member
City engineer
County commissioner
County engineers (2) (rotate on a two year term)
Region 9 RDC representative (an RDC staff person)
Southwest RDC Representative (presently a county commissioner)
Rural transit
Urban transit
Mn/DOT representatives (4) (District Engineer, Assistant District Engineer, District Transportation Planner, State Aid Engineer)
Regions 8 and 9 RDCs are involved through the counties (including soil and water conservation district representatives, engineers, commissioners, and mayors) at the RDC level.

Annually, the ATP asks the group that sends each representative to reconfirm its selection. At that time, each group has the option of rotating or changing its representative. The county engineers have made the decision to rotate their representatives on two year staggered terms.

Regarding membership, one person involved in the structuring of the ATP emphasized the need to allow the process to develop before major changes are implemented. The member stated:

> If the ATP needs tinkering, it should be adjusted, but there should be four to five years allowed to see how it goes first. [It is also important to] make sure there is succession of members; there should be a six year maximum term for service. For institutional memory, the ATP should make sure there is a mix of people who have been there a while, along with new people.

There have been a few changes in membership since the beginning of the process. The ATP has added another county engineer. A meeting with state legislators was set up towards the beginning of the ATP implementation. An ATP member stated that some legislators felt that representation on the ATP was heavy with engineers. After some discussion between the District Engineer and the other ATP members, elected representatives from the Association of Counties and the Minnesota League of Cities were added to the ATP membership.

The District Engineer noted that he is responsible for ensuring the ATP is fairly representing its constituents. He views his job as that of an educator, working to see that legislators, elected officials, ATP members, and the public understand how the process works.

12.3.3 Relationships with Regional Entities

The two RDCs in the ATP's district each have a voting member. In addition to having a place at the table, the RDCs apply regional significance factors to the ranking process and are a technical assistance resource for project applicants.

12.3.4 Goals for the Area Transportation Improvement Program

The ATP has a series of subtargets set up for cities, counties, enhancements, and Mn/DOT. The subtargets are based on historical patterns of funding, especially for the cities and counties. For transit, the target amount may be adjusted according to need.

12.3.5 Description of the Project Solicitation Process

The ATP solicits projects for a four year period. Applications are mailed to partners in the process (transit providers, cities, and counties). There is a separate mailing for enhancement projects from an expanded list of partners. Inspired by the enhancement project workshops implemented in neighboring ATP 8, ATP 7 expanded the idea to conduct workshops for the enhancement, transit, and safety project application processes.

ATP members stated that the workshops are useful in informing potential applicants about the process that must be followed to achieve a successful project. The purpose of the workshop program is to explain what the ATP is, talk about the prioritization process, give examples of successful past projects, and answer any questions of participants.

12.3.6 Ranking Techniques

There are seven categories for ranking projects: trunk highways, county roads and bridges, city roads and bridges, off-system bridges, transit, safety, and enhancements. A subcommittee is assigned to each of the seven categories. After meeting in subcommittee, the prioritized list for each category is brought back to the ATP.

Most subcommittee ranking is technical in nature. Management systems used in the process include state-ranking number (rating of condition between 1 and 1,500) for off-system bridges, Public Transportation Management System (a function of mileage, age, and condition of transit vehicles) for transit, and a pavement management system for Mn/DOT projects.

Members report that the regional significance points are allocated by the RDCs so that the ATP can rank projects according to regional need. A project may have a relative importance to the region equal to or greater than its local importance. The ATP asks each of the regions to look at projects in their geographic area and to select the projects that best serve the region, not just the local area where the project is located.

12.3.7 Project Mix Between Modes

There are seven modal categories set up for funding allocation: trunk highways, county roads and bridges, city roads and bridges, off system bridges, transit, safety, and enhancements. The mix between these seven categories is achieved using subtargets of the federal funds.

12.3.8 Boundaries

ATP members report that they make an effort to coordinate major projects with neighboring ATPs. Historically, Mn/DOT has coordinated projects at the district level. The district boundaries and the ATP boundaries are identical, allowing for internal coordination.

All of RDC 9 is within this ATP, but only one half of RDC 8 is located within the district/ATP boundaries. The RDC 8 representatives reported that they end up doing much of the same work twice, once for each ATP they belong to. Alternately, an ATP member stated: "I see [the dual membership of RDC 8 between two ATPs] as an advantage for us because we get the benefit of learning how another ATP operates."

12.3.9 Public Involvement

ATP members report that press releases alert interested parties to contact their local representatives about the project solicitation process and invite attendance at a meeting to review and comment on projects in the STIP. The ATP also gives each city and chamber of commerce the opportunity to have an ATP member attend their meeting and discuss ATP activities. According to one ATP member, the primary forums for public participation are the RDCs.

12.3.10 Elected Officials and the ATP Process

There are three elected officials serving on the ATP. One represents the southwestern RDC, another represents all elected officials of area counties, and the third represents all cities of over 5,000 in population. Members note that each elected official has a responsibility to represent a larger group than the organization that selected him or her.

12.4 PARTNERSHIP, PRIORITIZATION, PLANNING: COMMON QUALITIES IN THE DISTRICT 7 ATP PROCESS

12.4.1 Partnership

Perceived Strengths

Combining definitions, ATP members define "partnership" as people working together to make good transportation investment decisions for the region. The size and composition of this ATP encourages just such a partnership. The ATP rarely takes votes, but instead discusses issues until consensus is reached. While subcommittees do a large portion of the work, the priorities they develop are generally followed.

One non-ATP member explained a perception about the new partnership:

> It used to be that if you had a cozy relationship, you could get your projects through and somebody else could not. And they had a system set up that they liked and they did not want to see change. . . . Opening up to the public means that you are going to get more diverse ideas. That is one thing I like about this [process]. More people will disagree, but it is better to have that disagreement prior to construction than afterwards.

An additional partnership strength is the ATP's workshop program, meant to promote non-traditional participation in the process. Members noted they have accepted the responsibility of helping people not familiar with the system learn the application techniques necessary for project acceptance. The workshop is one example of bringing newcomers into the process. One member noted, "Guests are invited and do participate in discussion. We want guests there."

Perceived Challenges

When the Central Office rolls up the ATIPs from around the state, they will try to apply the same STIP criteria to the projects at the bottom of the list that were used to establish the ATIP, and they will favor projects that are preservation oriented. We felt this was unfair because then putting preservation projects on the bottom is advantageous.

--ATP Member

There has been some disagreement by the ATP about how the project lists are handled by the Central Office. The process has been characterized by one ATP member as "a game that has the Central Office and the ATP as opposing players." One perception is that the Central Office favors preservation oriented projects and is more likely to cut an expansion project that falls close to the target cutoff amount for the ATP.

An additional challenge to partnership is the discomfort among other district engineers about including elected officials on the ATP. The ATP 7 District Engineer believes that some district engineers fear that elected officials may unduly influence project selections. While this ATP has elected officials who are ATP members, the ATP has emphasized that the vote should not be political. The ATP emphasizes that transportation projects should be selected on the basis of need.

12.4.2 Prioritization

Perceived Strengths

I like the process, I think we've come a long way. The decentralization process has done a lot. I would like to see it go further. We should spend the money in the most efficient way.

--District Engineer

The data from ATP members suggest that they feel one of the strengths of their prioritization process is that it is predictable and equitable between groups. Since the ATP operates using subtargets based on historical allocations, members generally feel no worse off than they were under the old system. In this case, the specific criteria used for ranking do not much matter.

The ATP does recognize that targets based on historical allocations may be problematic. There is a question about how to handle the future needs of the transit system, and what the ideal role of subtargets will be in the future. When asked, "Where will the ATP process be in five years?," one ATP member replied, "I think the ATP will be here. Hopefully we will be a bit less historically-based than we are now. The subtargets are evidence of our tie to the old way of doing things. We are working toward growing beyond the subtarget system."

An additional strength of the prioritization process is that different groups forward their five year plans to the ATP, allowing the ATP to scrutinize projects before they are part of a formal funding request. Thus, the risk of bringing projects to the ATP is reduced by introducing them to the ATP before the programming stage. The District Engineer believes that trust in the

system is building, but also said that the trust level could change if the funding targets drop. The District Engineer believes that project proposers feel they are being treated fairly, and he credits funding targets that have stabilized as producing increased trust in the ATP process.

ATP members feel that the Central Office has moved away from project selection and towards developing strategic direction. This role serves the ATP by giving it guidance about how resource allocation.

Perceived Challenges

ATP members report that one challenge is to resolve the "game playing" issue with the Central Office. This ties directly to the partnership issue, but is centered on how the prioritization lists are created. One ATP member commented:

> [A]s we build (the) TIP, its kind-of like watching an NBA game; it is only the final two minutes which make a difference. It is the last couple of projects on the list that are important because they are the ones at risk. If you look at it, transit does pretty well in the top half of list, but safety and enhancements usually are toward the bottom. And maybe it is a backlash, those are prescribed by ISTEA so those are the ones we will put at risk.
>
> We will protect our local projects by putting them higher on the list. But because we have to do the enhancement and safety, those are the ones we will put on the bottom because no one will dare cut those. I may be oversimplifying it, but if you take a look at the list, you will see that safety and enhancements fall at the bottom.

Another challenge is the continued use of subtargets, which are seen by ATP members as a way to stabilize the process. Talk about discontinuing the subtarget system made some members nervous. With the subtargets, some ATP members believe that the group has some assurance that Mn/DOT will not come into the process and take money away. If ranking is done in a strictly technical way, interviewees felt that the numbers will often place Mn/DOT projects at a higher priority than non-Mn/DOT projects.

In addition to the concerns members have about Mn/DOT projects taking priority over non-Mn/DOT projects, they also have questions about how to compare different modal projects. ATP members feel that the ATP does not have the tools at this time to compare unlike modes, with one interviewee commenting that "it is comparing apples and oranges."

A final perceived strength regarding prioritization is the cost of transit funding and its relative inefficiency in the rural areas of the district. One member commented that, "Customers will call the van rather than wait for the public bus to go get groceries, so it costs $65 to go get a box of Wheaties." Additionally, while present set asides are sufficient to meet transit requests, projects needs for the future are unlikely to be met give the current funding projections.

12.4.3 Planning

Perceived Strengths

Members note that the existence of the ATP has encouraged planning among transportation stakeholders. The ATP has requested the five year plan of each city and county. The submission of local plans provides for the dispersal of information between different groups, contributing to a regional mindset in transportation decision making.

Perceived Challenges

Selecting projects by "regional significance" is encouraged, but often resisted across the state. One non-ATP member explained the resistance, noting, "In some respects, including regional significance scores in the ranking system is dangerous because Mankato is so big, [so] all regionally significant projects would be in Mankato. Similarly, all highway money would go to the metro area if regional significance were the only measure."

CHAPTER 13
CASE STUDY ON THE DISTRICT 8 ATP (SOUTHWEST ATP)

13.1 THE EVOLUTION OF THE SOUTHWEST ATP

1. The data from this ATP suggest that the ATP's creation has given ATP members the authority and accountability to make decisions.

2. ATP members report that the Southwest ATP (SW ATP) has become more customer focused and proactive in reaching out to the public.

3. Members state that an awareness of planning has created a realization that regional planning is needed for the SW ATP. It appears that more local communities are thinking about and preparing for the future.

4. The RDCs have played a more active role in transportation planning.

5. The District Engineer feels the ATP can manage its system better because it knows how much money it will receive in the future.

6. The ATP can incorporate community concerns into the investment process now because of regional significance ranking techniques.

13.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGION

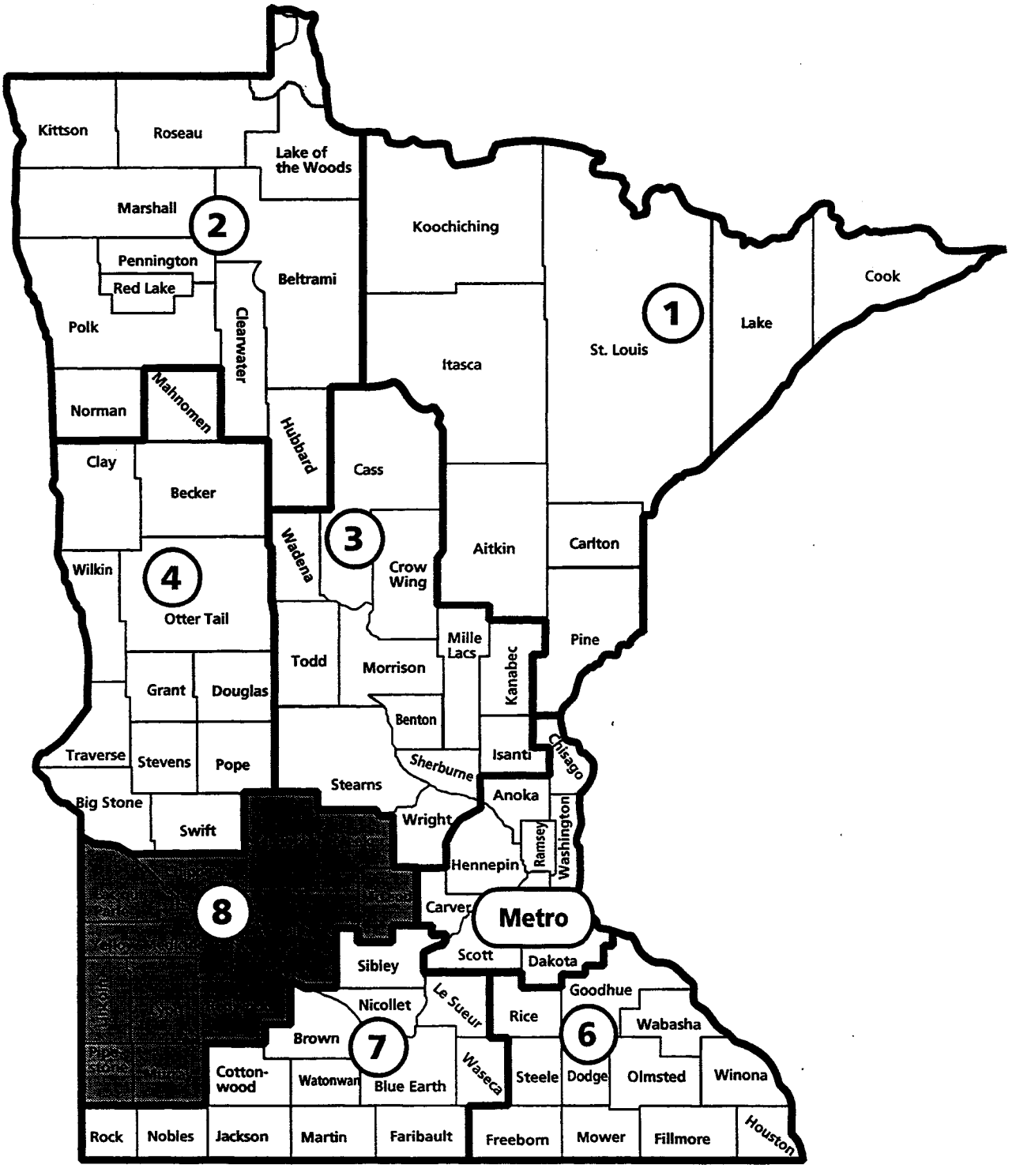
13.2.1 Geographic

The SW ATP is located in the southwestern corner of the state. This district incorporates 12 counties: Chippewa, Kandiyohi, Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, Lyon, McLeod, Meeker, Murray, Pipestone, Redwood, Renville, and Yellow Medicine. The regional centers are Willmar and Marshall. This ATP is bordered by South Dakota and ATPs 3, 4, 7, and Metro.

13.2.2 Economic

The dominant industry in the region is agriculture. However, the manufacturing and service industry has been growing since 1983. The area gained 10,722 jobs in manufacturing and service between 1983 and 1992. The total gain in employment for these years was 15.57%, while the state increase was 27.8%.

District 8
Area Transportation Partnership



Courtesy: Minnesota Department of Transportation

13.2.3 Demographic

The three counties projected to increase in population by 2020 are Kandiyohi, the largest county in the area, McLeod, which is the closest to the Twin Cities, and Meeker. The other nine counties are expected to decline in population. The population for the district/ATP was 222,553 in 1960 and 212,553 in 1990. The population is forecasted to be 204,130 in 2020. This district represented 4.9% of Minnesota's population in 1990.

13.2.4 Highway and Transit Information

The daily vehicle miles of travel (DVMT) in 1980 was 77,908,000, which increased 52% by 1994 to 118,729,556. The heavy commercial daily vehicle miles of travel (HCDVMT) more than doubled for this district/ATP between 1980 and 1984. The DVMT and HCDVMT each represent 5% of the state total.

Transit ridership was 313,847 rides provided in 1994. All twelve counties in this ATP have transit systems; nine counties are fully served by transit systems, while three have municipal systems.

13.3 SOUTHWEST ATP PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

13.3.1 Introductory Comments

When I attended a District 8 ATP meeting where they talked about their workshop for enhancement applications, I learned of a way we could improve District 7's enhancement process.

--Southwest ATP Member

The SW ATP, with one of the smallest memberships of all the ATPs, has been cited by ATP members across Minnesota as a source of innovative processes. (See 13.5 for an overview of the Southwest ATP candidate ranking process.) For example, the SW ATP has given workshops and training on regional significance ratings. Additionally, the ATP conducts workshops for parties interested in applying for federal money to fund an enhancement project. The ATP has also offered training on using cost benefit analysis to prioritize projects.

Study data show that while all ATPs under go adjustments to their process, the SW ATP demonstrates evidence of constant innovation and redefinition of it processes.

13.3.2 Membership Characteristics

We started as a small ATP with nine members. We thought we could always get bigger.

--District Engineer

The process has worked very well, the small group of members has been a real plus. It is hard to get things done when the group gets larger.

--ATP Member

The SW ATP has a detailed membership policy statement in its handbook, "Policies, Procedures and Guidance Manual" (April 1996). Currently, the ATP has nine members, with the District Engineer as the chair. ATP membership is discussed on an annual basis, when each member group is asked to identify an ATP member and alternative.

ATP membership includes four Mn/DOT representatives, three RDC representatives, two city or county representatives, and up to nine alternative or technical advisors. Currently, the representatives include:

Mid-Minnesota RDC	Mn/DOT District Engineer
Southwest Minnesota RDC	Mn/DOT District Planner
Upper Minnesota Valley RDC	Mn/DOT Assistant District Engineer
County or city engineers (2)	Mn/DOT District State Aid Engineer

The Chair and Vice-Chair are selected annually by the membership. Terms of office are addressed on an annual basis with a maximum term limit of three consecutive years. Terms are staggered so that approximately one-third of the membership turns over each year.

The SW ATP has set up a technical assistant team to aid in the ATP. The team includes the Mn/DOT District Planner, the District State-Aid Engineer, the District Materials Engineer, the ATP Coordinator, and the RDC transportation planners. The purpose of the team is to provide technical ranking and evaluation of the submitted projects. The technical team is in charge of five work teams: Mn/DOT Roads and Bridges, Local Road and Bridge, Transit, Safety, and Enhancements. Individual team responsibilities are defined in the Policies, Procedures and Guidance Manual. The Team currently has eight members, six of whom are not part of the general ATP membership.[15]

13.3.3 Relationships with Regional Entities

Mn/DOT District 8 had a close relationship with the RDCs prior to the creation of the ATP. They worked together before ISTEA to develop an integrated road system to efficiently connect agriculture production areas to markets. This type of relationship has helped the ATP to develop quickly and operate more smoothly.

Three different RDCs are part of the ATP: the Mid-Minnesota RDC (6E), the Southwest Minnesota RDC (8), and the Upper Minnesota Valley RDC (6W). All of RDC 6E is included in SW ATP, while only parts of 6W and 8 are included.

13.3.4 Goals for the Area Transportation Improvement Program

We are in a preservation mode. The maintenance operations [need] to have money set aside for preservation activities, so we're not doing much expansion. Basically in our minds, we know what we can and can't do.

--District Engineer

ATP members report that the ATP makes an effort to meet the Mn/DOT goals and objectives of preservation, management and operations, replacement, and expansion. One ATP member considers replacement to be the same as preservation. Many ATP members stated that the goal of completing the district's transportation network is difficult because expansion is almost impossible due to the low level of funding and high need for preservation of the area's roads.

13.3.5 Description of the Project Solicitation Process

The planning unit of District 8 is responsible for solicitation of candidate projects in on-system road and bridges, off-system bridges, transit, safety, rail, and enhancements. RDCs are encouraged to notify the county engineer, city engineer, or Mn/DOT district planning unit regarding additional projects. RDCs may provide technical assistance to project proposers.

County highway engineers are responsible for soliciting road and bridge projects on the county and township system, including off-system bridges. Cities with populations greater than 5,000 can submit projects for roads or bridges through their city engineer.[16]

A summary of the project solicitation process would include:

- Direct mailings are sent to cities over 5,000, counties, townships, tribal governments, the Mn/DOT District Office, and the Offices of Transit and Freight, Railroads, and Waterways.

- There is an annual solicitation process for enhancements, direct mailings are sent to all local units of government and government agencies. Annual workshops are held for interested parties.

- Information is also disseminated through the news media, RDCs, and public meetings.

- There is an on-going sharing of information with the public through mailings and meetings.

13.3.6 Ranking Techniques

The SW ATP has a sophisticated ranking process that considers factors other than a technical rank. The District State Aid Engineer, with the assistance of others, created this method of quantifying regional significance. The process was reviewed and approved by the District 8

county engineer group and was first used on local projects for the 1995-1997 STIP. It was also used for the 1998 STIP to rank most of the road and bridge projects.

Despite success in developing a ranking system, the ATP's Technical Committee plans to look at other ways of refining the ranking process. The committee believes that investments to expand the transportation system should be prioritized with cost benefit considerations. They also believe social impacts and community values should be addressed and weighed against economic analysis.

The RDC planners each use their RDC's Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) to rank the regional significance of all projects proposed within their RDC. Each project is ranked in five categories by individual TAC members or by the TAC as a group, and eventually the individual scores are combined and averaged to get a final regional significance score. The following is the regional significance ranking criteria for on-system projects and off-system bridge projects:[17]

Regional Significance Factors for On-System Projects

1. Economic Factors, including agriculture, manufacturing and wholesale business, and retail/tourism factors.

2. Growth Factors

3. Health, Social and Environmental Factors

4. Access Factors

5. Other considerations, including deliverability, cost effectiveness, public/private and public/public partnerships, and anticipated problems and forecasts.

Regional Significance Factors for Off-System Bridge Projects

1. Economic Factors

2. Health, Social and Environmental Factors

3. Access Factors

4. Functional Classification and ADT Factors

5. Other Considerations, such as the priority the county assigned to the project.

The SW ATP has also used innovative ways to do the technical ranking of roadways and bridges. The State Aid Engineer reported that the change in technical ranking was a sophisticated way of ranking created partially to get "buy-in" from the city and county

engineers when the district moved away from FAS and FAU suballocations. The use of functional classifications and regional routes is a way to use federal funds more effectively.

13.3.7 Project mix between modes

Before the ATP process formally emphasized intermodalism, the RDCs attempted to integrate the road system with the rail system. Today, ATP members report that they have expanded this effort to consider the integration of highway, bridge, transit, rail safety, and qualified enhancement projects.

13.3.8 Boundaries

The involvement of three RDCs in the ATP has caused the ATP some minor difficulties. Overall, members report that all parties cooperate and there are very few problems. The RDC planners report, however, that it is frustrating for them when they are split between two or more ATPs. One ATP member commented, "It is difficult at times, but I'm not sure that there is a boundary that will work well for all parties."

13.3.9 Public Involvement

Data from the interviews suggest that the SW ATP has been very active in reaching out to the public. In March of 1995, the ATP conducted a market research study to determine the perception of the public about the allocation of transportation dollars and the most effective ways to inform the public about opportunities for involvement. From this study the ATP drafted a communications plan with the goal of increasing public participation in the ATP. The communication plan states:

> The ATP partners with the RDCs. The RDCs consist of policy bodies that include elected officials and technical committees involving transportation professionals and special interests. The RDCs operate in a public forum and represent constituencies with the cities and counties. The general public has ready access to the individuals on the policy and technical committee and to the activities and an information display.
>
> In addition, public input is [achieved] through the use of public meetings, forums and focus groups held throughout the year by the ATP partners and Mn/DOT. Other methods used to encourage public involvement include the use of newsletters, informational mailings, press releases and an information displays.[18]

The ATP also has presentations and displays at annual township and RDC meetings, in addition to publishing meeting notices. The public meetings are held for review of the ATIP and include a comment period. Regular ATP meetings are open to the public. The SW ATP has a specified person publicly designated as the "ATP Coordinator."

13.3.10 Elected Officials and the ATP Process

We need more elected officials involved. If a good planning process is in place, then the planners and engineers can spend their time planning and the decision makers can make the decisions.

--ATP Member

The voting members of the ATP representing the RDCs must be elected officials. Some state legislators have attended meetings and provided input directly to the agencies county, RDC, or Mn/DOT. There is a feeling by some ATP members that the way to increase public involvement in the process is to involve more local elected officials because they represent constituencies and speak on their behalf.

13.4 PARTNERSHIP, PRIORITIZATION, PLANNING: COMMON QUALITIES IN THE SW ATP PROCESS

13.4.1 Partnership

Perceived Strengths

SW ATP members feel that the ATP is a partnership not only between Mn/DOT and the modal offices, but also between Mn/DOT and local planning agencies. This partnership has been strengthened by the ATP's resistance to sub-targeting and emphasis on developing a priority system that's "best for the customer." Interviewed ATP members were optimistic that the developed partnership was strong and would continue to broaden.

ATP members are pleased that the leadership style of the chair reinforces the strength of the partnership. The District Engineer speaks of his leadership style, noting:

> As chairperson, I like to think of myself as the person that tries to get the group to reach consensus. We talk about our membership annually. We don't vote on things, we do it by consensus. I can't recall a time when we've ever voted on an issue. The advantage is, from a personal standpoint, I'd like to think I'm a consensus builder. The disadvantage, in my mind, would be that I might be perceived as biased towards Mn/DOT. We have a proposal now that we rotate membership more often, probably even the chair."

Perceived Challenges

We do a lot of public relations; all ATP meetings are publicized and open to the public. Typically we don't get a lot of attendance, but we provide them with an opportunity to become involved.

--ATP Member

The District Engineer expressed a strong concern about the silent group of "common drivers" and transit users who do not get involved. Members report, though, that the ATP is always open to more public involvement, especially from elected officials and local citizens. One member noted, "People have opinions about transportation projects in their area; however, it is hard to involve the public unless they are sitting on one of the committees."

13.4.2 Prioritization

To explain how things have changed since the creation of ATPs in one word, I would have to say "decentralization." The process gives us the authority to make decisions on priorities in our district, which we did somewhat before, but not a lot. Before ISTEA, we developed our programs by categories, now we prioritize all categories together.

--District Engineer

Perceived Strengths

ATP members report that prior to ISTEA, the ATP did not know which projects it would have funded from year to year. Now that the ATP knows the amount of dollars it will receive, planning becomes much more realizable and worthwhile. The District Engineer noted, "Now we know when we can do a certain project. We know how much we'll be getting for an overlay three years from now. Prior to ISTEA, it was year by year. So, today we can manage our system much better."

In addition, members state that prior to ISTEA, it was difficult for the transportation investment process to incorporate community concerns. The old system was focused primarily on technical factors. One of the greatest strengths cited by ATP members was the ranking system that incorporated regional significance factors such as social, economic, and health considerations. If a project ranks low on a technical score but has regional significance, the overall score will be higher. The ranking system is designed to recognize that there are some small, local projects that would not get funding if there were not some equalization factors built into the ranking system.

Perceived Challenges

We have difficulty comparing buses to bridges to roads to enhancements. One of the greatest challenges faced by the ATP is moving away from past practices of sub-allocation.

--ATP Member

ATP members note that the move away from traditional ranking practices continues to present major challenges to ATP members, especially those who are appointed or elected and must justify these changes to their constituencies. However, the ATP's new ranking system begins to address the issue of ranking one mode against another. Members report that weighing social, economic, and functional considerations is a major departure from past technical evaluative practices. The ATP has noted some of the shortcomings it sees in its ranking system

and has drafted several options to address them. The ATP group believes that investments in expansion of the transportation system should be prioritized with cost benefit considerations. It also believes social impacts and community values should be addressed and weighed against economic analysis.

13.4.3 Planning

Perceived Strengths

All interviewees stated that the ATP has strengthened the planning process in the district. The incorporation of the previously-established planning processes of the RDCs contributed to the quick and efficient development of the SW ATP. The RDCs have also been very active in assisting the ATP to create regional significance ranking techniques, enhancement workshops, and market research processes.

Members report that the creation of the ATP has also given regional planning a boost by creating the realization that planning is important to the district/ATP. The data suggest that even though the ATP is struggling between a programming and planning role, it has been productive in its struggle and has helped to create a sense of regionalism with innovative ideas such as regional significance ratings. The data also indicate that the partners involved, like the counties, have had their internal transportation planning processes boosted. It appears that more local organizations are thinking about and preparing for the future.

Perceived Challenges

If ATPs are going to be successful, they need to struggle between planning projects and programming.

--RDC Transportation Planner

While ATP members interviewed noted that the creation of the ATPs strengthened regional planning, a challenge for the ATP is to clarify whether the process is planning, programming, or a combination of both. Some members believe that public involvement should be at the planning end of the process; others said the ATP's role is only at the programming end. Most ATP members feel these challenges will get addressed over time and recognize the early part of this process is necessarily a transition period.

13.5 SOUTHWEST/DISTRICT 8 ATP CANDIDATE RANKING PROCESS

This case study includes the SW ATP Candidate Ranking Process as a demonstration of district/ATP 8's efforts to incorporate community-based values into a technical ranking process. The ranking process is made understandable so that all ATP members, engineers, planners, and elected officials can use it.

The SW ATP is responsible for prioritizing and integrating candidate projects into the ATIP. The technical assistance team provides an integrated list of projects for the ATP's consideration. Alternatives for integrating projects into the draft ATIP include:

1. Suballocation or subtargeting: The ATP does not encourage suballocating to local jurisdictions and believes that individual projects should compete on their merit. However, the ATP does believe some degree of regional fairness needs to be addressed.

2. Point System: This prioritized list will be developed using a blend of "Technical Ranking," "Regional Significance Ranking" and "Other Considerations." Each of these rankings will be on a scale of 1-5.

3. Other Methods: The technical committee will look at other methods, procedures, and factors as they arise to improve upon the developed candidate project prioritization point system process. As an example, the ATP believes that expansion investments in the region's transportation system should be prioritized in part by a cost benefit analysis. Social impacts and community values should be addressed and possibly temper the economic analysis.

In summary, the way candidate projects are scored through the use of a prioritization point system processes will be subject to an on-going evaluation. This evaluation can lead to periodic changes in the current candidate ranking process. The goal of this process is to make ISTEA funding decisions that are fair as possible to all eligible participants.

13.5.1 Technical Ranking Process

Mn/DOT will provide information concerning technical ranking of their candidate projects and will provide a priority list of road and bridge projects to the ATP.

County and city engineers will provide information concerning technical ranking of their candidate projects and will provide a priority list of road and bridge projects to the ATP.

The ATP Enhancements Work Team will provide the ATP with a priority list of projects to be integrated into the ATIP.

Hazard Elimination Safety (HES) and Railroad-Highway Grade Crossing Safety Improvement Program projects must go through a statewide certification process. Eligible projects will be forwarded to the ATP for integration into the ATIP.

Mn/DOT Office of Transit will develop a list of recommendations for Transit Capital (preferably a five year plan). Eligible projects will be forwarded to the ATP for integration into the ATIP.

13.5.2 Regional Significance Rating

RDC planners, working through their transportation advisory committees (TAC) and approval of the RDC Board of Directors/Full Commissions, will assign a regional significance rating to all candidate projects. Each project is then ranked in the following five categories by individual TAC members or by the TAC as a group, and eventually the individual scores are combined and averaged to get a final regional significance ranking.

Regional Significance Factors for On-system candidate projects:

1. Economic Factors may be divided into three sub-categories:
   a. Agriculture related: implement dealers, elevators, sugar beet dump sites and routes, etc.;
   b. Manufacturing and wholesale business factors: Businesses that are major employers in the area or have high average annual sales;
   c. Retail/tourism: State Parks, large service industries, mining sites.

2. Growth Factors* consider whether the proposed project will assist or hinder the growth of a community or business.

3. Health, Social and Environmental Factors consider how the project will affect the availability of health care facilities, development achievement centers, senior meal sites, landfills, etc.

4. Access Factors look at if the proposed project aids in providing access to interstates, intermodal facilities, water crossings etc.

5. Other Considerations will be identified by the Technical Assistance Team and may include the following factors:

   a. Deliverability (Can project be ready in time frame identified?)
   b. Project Scope (Is project beyond scope of addressing problem?)
   c. Cost Effectiveness (Demonstrated based on Benefit/Cost Ratio).
   d. Commitment Considerations.
   e. Prior funding commitments (i.e. project is in the current STIP; commitments should be honored because of the paperwork involved in processing federally-funded projects).

f. Project required by state or federal law.
g. Politics (extent of local support for the project).
h. Public/Private and Public/Public Partnerships.
i. Access Considerations.
j. Other river/waterway crossings nearby.
k. Miles added to route if bridge or road were dosed or reduced to minimum maintenance route.
l. Parallel route of equal or greater use within "X" number of miles.
m. Rail service availability.
n. Anticipated problems and forecasts.
o. Capacity issues related to traffic volumes (based on existing volume to capacity and 20 year projections).
p. Capacity issues related to strength.
q. Safety issues (based on planned changes in the area).
r. Coordination considerations.
s. Tied to another project in same year, time frame, vicinity.
t. Part of staged plan; parts have already been completed.
u. System continuity (plans in adjacent cities, counties, districts, states, etc.).
v. Equity considerations.
w. Modal, geographic, agency, etc.
x. Previous ISTEA funding.
y. Consideration/Evaluation of Transportation Investment Goals and Objectives.
z. Overmatch (ATP has taken the position that there will be no special priority for local match in excess of the 20%).
aa. Management Systems (will they influence decision-making?).
bb. Five year plans from counties should be requested/required.
cc. Availability of other funding sources.

* The Growth Factor is only used by the Mid-Minnesota RDC to rank expansion projects due to the large areas of growth affecting that region. The Southwest and Upper Minnesota Valley RDC's incorporate the growth factor into the "Economic Factor" category, as does the Mid-Minnesota RDC with non-expansion projects.

Regional Significance for Off-system Bridge candidates (BROS):

6. Economic Factors. Identification of what land use activities are there (i.e. gravel pits, pasture, file access). The economic factor also deals with how often access must be relied upon.
   a. 1 point = field access, pasture, or low volume access.
   b. +1 point for additional activities (i.e. feedlot, gravel haul, etc.) up to 5 points.

7. Health, Social, Environmental Factors. Fire, ambulance to households, number of households/people affected (use judgment), create wetland, divert water, reduce flooding, project design: bridge to culvert.
   a. 1 point = low impact.

b. +1 points per additional positive impacts if project were completed up to 5 points.

8. Access Factors.
   a. Net detour of 2 miles gets 1 point.
   b. As net detour increases, increase by 1 point for every 2 miles- max. 5 pts.
   c. If next access is of same rather than higher - begin at 2.

9. Functional Classification and ADT Factors.
   a. low volume (25 vehicles per day or less) = 1 point.
   b. 26-50 vehicle per day = 2 points or if minor 3 points.
   c. 51-100 vehicle per day = 3 points or if minor 4 points.
   d. 100+ vehicle per day = 4 points or if minor 5 points.

10. Other Considerations. Since each county has a list of off-systems bridges identified in priority order, county priority is being used for other considerations.
   a. County priority #1=5 points.
   b. County priority #2=4 points.
   c. County priority #3=3 points.
   d. County priority #4=2 points.
   e. County priority #5=1 points.

CHAPTER 14
CASE STUDY ON THE METRO DIVISION 8-COUNTY ATP

14.1 THE EVOLUTION OF THE METRO DIVISION 8-COUNTY ATP

1. The Metropolitan Council, in concert with the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) relationship, is certified as the official Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the district.

2. Chisago County is part of the Metro Division 8-County ATP established by Mn/DOT.

3. The relationship between the Met Council and Mn/DOT has changed as a result of the ISTEA legislation that gave large MPOs a lead role in transportation decision making.

4. The formation of the Metro Division 8-County ATP has had no real effect on how the Met Council and TAB work. ATP members have stated that there was no new institution created here, only a series of old processes brought together in a new "clearinghouse."

14.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGION

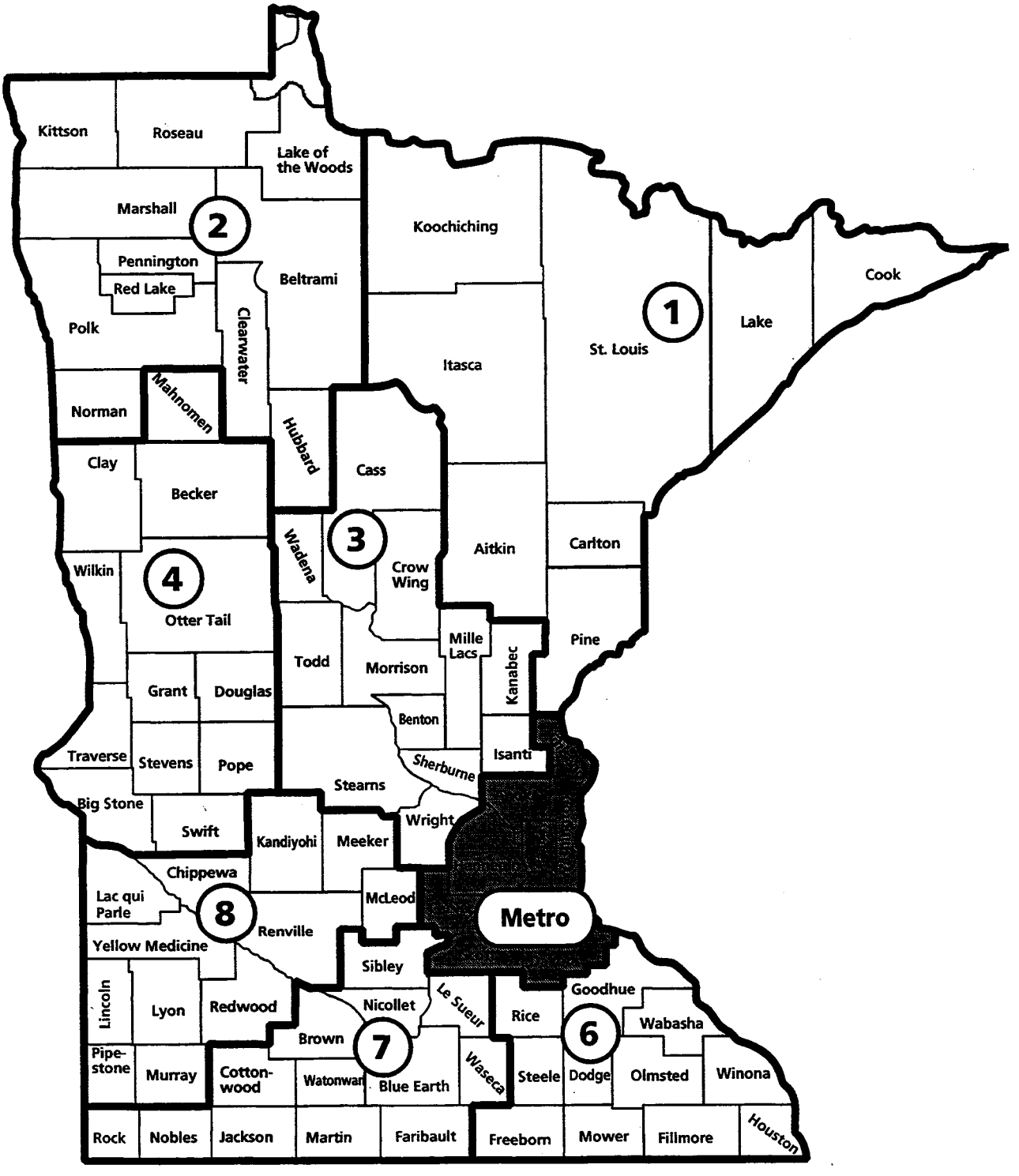
14.2.1 Geographic

The Metro ATP includes the seven counties under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Council, and Chisago County, which borders the north metro area. The seven metropolitan counties are Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington. The ATP includes Minneapolis and Saint Paul, the most populated cities in Minnesota. The other ATPs that border the Metro ATP are districts/ATPs 3, 6, 7, and 8. Additionally, Wisconsin borders the ATP on the east side.

14.2.2 Economic

The Metro ATP has the largest population and the most economic activity in Minnesota. The metropolitan area is the major center for finance, retail, manufacturing, trucking, rail, professional sports, and media outlets for the state. The area is also a multi-state regional center, drawing people, freight, and airline traffic from Wisconsin, Iowa, and the Dakotas. The largest employers for the area are service providers, retail trade, finance, and manufacturing.

Metro Division
8 County
Area Transportation Partnership



Courtesy: Minnesota Department of Transportation

14.2.3 Demographic

Hennepin and Ramsey counties have approximately 64% of the eight county population. In 1990, the Metro ATP represented 53% of Minnesota's total population. The population for the seven county area is expected to increase by 650,000 people, or 27.3%, by the year 2020.[19] This projected increase is more than twice the population of Dakota County. All counties are forecasted to grow in terms of population, with Hennepin and Dakota counties gaining the most.

14.2.4 Highway and Transit Information

The Metro ATP accounts for 49% of the daily vehicle miles of travel (DVMT) in the state of Minnesota. In 1994, the DVMT in the ATP was 58,085,273. The Eight County ATP includes 665.2 miles of train trackage (Chisago has 15.2 miles). The major transit provider in the Twin Cities area is the Metropolitan Council Transit Operations. In 1995, it had ridership of 61.1 million passenger rides. The Chisago County Heartland Express, a local transit provider, had a ridership of 8,535 passengers in 1991.

14.3 METRO DIVISION 8-COUNTY ATP PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

There is much more decentralization. It works better. It isn't as directive. People feel a part of the process.

--Metro Division Engineer

Within the ATP, you have got more transportation people now thinking about how we affect communities. Eureka!

--TAB Member

14.3.1 Introductory Comments

The transportation functions of the Metropolitan Council reduce the relevance of the Metro ATP because the Council is the MPO for the seven county metropolitan area. The Met Council consists of seventeen members appointed by the governor. The Council was created in 1967 to establish a policy framework for the development of the seven county region. Accordingly, the Council prepares system plans for surface transportation, air transportation, parks, and waste control. In addition, it ensures local community plans are consistent with regional system plans, operates the public transit system, and oversees the regional sewage collection system.

ISTEA impacted the role of MPOs in areas of populations of 200,000 or more by requiring the them to do a number of things, including:

- Prepare a fiscally constrained twenty year multi-modal transportation plan that is consistent with the National Clean Air Act
- Develop a congestion mitigation plan
- Prepare a fiscally constrained multi-year, multi-modal Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) consistent with the Clean Air Act

The Met Council, in combination with its TAB and TAC, is the MPO for the seven county metropolitan area. If the Metro Division 8-County ATP did not contain an eighth non-Met Council county - Chisago - the Metro ATP would be the Met Council/TAB. Because of Mn/DOT administrative choice, the Metro ATP was overlaid on the metropolitan process and Chisago County was added. Mn/DOT has consistently rejected the Met Council's position that since Chisago County is not bound by the Met Council planning framework, it should be a part of a different ATP.

14.3.2 Membership Characteristics

The Metro ATP has 13 members who represent the East Central RDC, Met Council, TAB, TAC, and Mn/DOT Metro Division. The current membership includes:

- Met Council staff member
- TAB (3) (citizen member, elected official, staff)
- TAC committee member
- East Central RDC (5) (citizen member, elected official, RDC director, planner, technical committee member)
- Mn/DOT Metro Division (3) (State Aid Engineer, Assistant. Division Engineer, Planner)

The ATP chair stated that the membership was negotiated and was established to balance representation of the TAB and the East Central RDC. The Met Council planner and his/her counterpart from the East Central RDC are members of the ATP. The same is true for elected officials, the technical committee, and citizen members.

Capital Improvements Committee: Due to the large volume of capital improvements required in the metro area, Mn/DOT has a Capital Improvements Committee (CIC) set up to identify Mn/DOT projects for the ATP. The committee identifies major National Highway System projects, trunk highway projects for federal funding, and all state funded projects proposed by Mn/DOT for the Metro ATP.

The CIC is a Metro Division committee composed of four TAC members, the TAB staff, one East Central RDC member, and Mn/DOT Metro Division participants.

Transportation Advisory Board (TAB): The TAB process is the largest part of the Metro ATP process. The TAB, through it's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), solicits and prioritizes projects. Its 33 voting members include:

7 County Commissioners (one per county)
10 mayors and city council members
8 citizen members representing geographic regions of the metro area
3 agency representatives (one from Mn/DOT, MPCA, MAC, and a non-voting member from the Met Council)
4 modal representatives (freight, 2 transit, bike/pedestrian)

The TAB's responsibilities are to hold public hearings on the TIP, adopt the TIP, adopt and implement regional processes for solicitation, evaluation, prioritization and selection of transportation projects funded with federal ISTEA funds, and to monitor approved projects.

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC): This committee provides technical assistance to the TAB. The TAC consists of 27 members, including: twelve from cities (two each from Minneapolis and Saint Paul), eight from suburban municipalities, and one from each of the seven counties. The TAC also has five standing committees that make recommendations and provide more in-depth support to the TAC. Figure 14-1 illustrates the relationship between the Twin Cities MPO, the CIC, and the East Central RDC.

14.3.3 Relationships with Regional Entities

Really all this ATP does is merge those priorities developed by the Met Council TAB with priorities developed by Chisago County.

--ATP Member

The relationship among regional entities is seen as somewhat convoluted by ATP members. The seven county region has its separate MPO process, the East Central RDC (Chisago County) has a separate process, and Mn/DOT Metro Division has a Capital Improvements Committee with its own process and objectives. Each entity does its own soliciting and ranking.

These processes and results are merged together by the during development of the ATIP. Members report that the entities have not integrated their processes, and developing a relationship among the groups is thus complicated. Members also note there is not a single goal that binds the three entities, leading to transportation choice that are not coordinated and often unrelated.

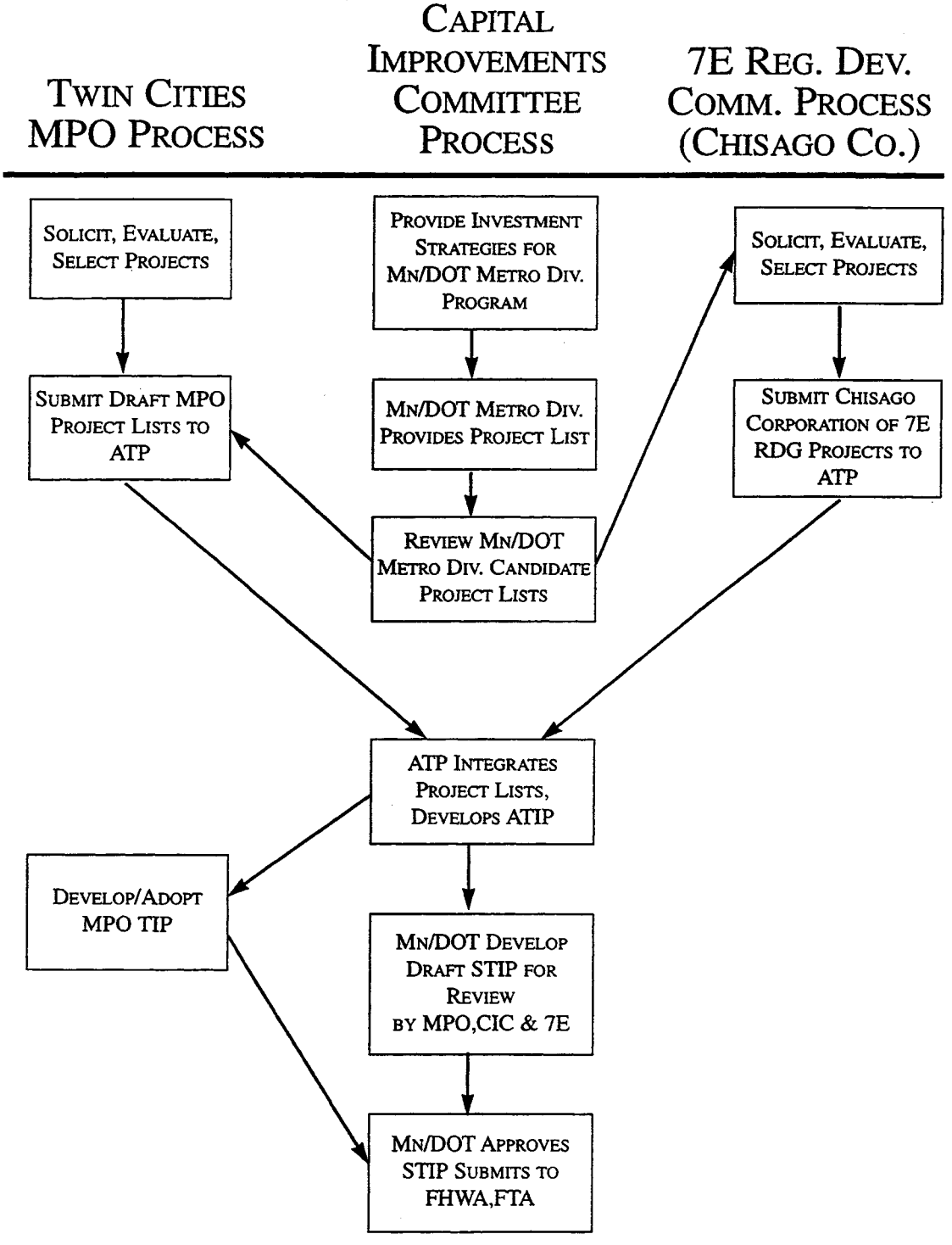
14.3.4 Goals for the Area Transportation Improvement Program

Metro ATP members state that they make an effort to meet Mn/DOT goals and objectives for transportation investments. Financial targets are used to meet the percentage goals of investments recommended by the state. Preservation is acknowledged as the ATP's top priority, after which management/operations and system expansion follow.

Within the TAC, the Mn/DOT goals are kept in mind, but not strictly adhered to. As in other ATPs, TAC member reported that the funding categories tend to overlap, obscuring the real

FIGURE 14-1

Eight County Metro Area Transportation Partnership Process



impact of projects that both preserve and expand the system. While individual yearly goals may not be met, over time the percentage goals are largely met.

14.3.5 Description of the Project Solicitation Process

The TAB solicitation process has been in place since 1974, first for federal aid urban highway funding, and since 1991, for ISTEA designated funds. The TAB is responsible for solicitation in the seven county area, and does so by sending requests for projects to all entities eligible for receiving federal transportation funds.

For Chisago County, the East Central RDC uses the same type of solicitation process as the Central Minnesota ATP. This involves sending applications to counties, townships, cities, Mn/DOT, the DNR, and historical societies.

14.3.6 Ranking Techniques

The TAC does the ranking for the metropolitan seven county area. It has specific criteria for each transportation project category and applies the criteria to develop a numerical score for each proposed project. Additional points are awarded if the project is multi-modal. The following factors are some of the considerations of each evaluating organization:

East Central RDC Transportation Advisory Committee Criteria: The technical rating is based on a 200 point scale. Factors used include:

- Correction of deficiencies
- Traffic counts
- Cost effectiveness

TAB Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Criteria: The criteria are different for each type of transportation project. There are eleven categories: five roadway, two bikeway, transit, pedestrian, CMAQ, and enhancements. The ranking is based on a 1200 point scale. The criteria go through an evolving process to reflect the regional planning goals. Factors used include:

- Consistency with regional plan
- Consistency with regional development philosophy
- Cost effectiveness
- Technical factors

14.3.7 Project Mix Between Modes

The intermodal vision of ISTEA is being addressed in the metropolitan area. The characteristics of the area - major truck freight flow, high rail activity, transit, barge movement, and an international airport - all encourage such broader thinking. A Metro ATP member commented on one part of the intermodal mix, railroad safety projects. He noted:

We do fund a number of rail crossing safety projects through the regional process. They are recommended and selected by the Mn/DOT Rail Office and concurred in by the region for two reasons. One, the region doesn't have sufficient staff resources to research rail projects and two, there is trust of the Mn/DOT Rail Office identifying most needed railway crossing safety improvements. The region may not fund as many as the rail office wants but the rail office does not necessarily expect all candidate projects to be funded each year.

Some commuter and transit funding decisions made through the TAB process include the funding of park and ride lots, transit hubs, and bus replacements. Additionally, pedestrian walkways, pathways, highway overpasses, and bikeway projects, all have gone through the process of being nominated by an agency, scored, ranked, and then considered for funding in the competitive regional process.

14.3.8 Boundaries

Chisago County happens to be within Mn/DOT's Metro district geography, and that causes us some problems, because it doesn't fit. The ATP doesn't fit the MPO or TAB, or XYZ. That's a problem.

--TAB Member

The majority of ATP members interviewed believe the inclusion of Chisago County in the Metro ATP complicates the reaching of consensus in transportation goals and project selection. Because the TAB of the Met Council already operated in a manner similar to an ATP, and the MPO for the region is the Met Council, the addition of Chisago County to the ATP but not to the MPO left the Metro ATP with the task of having to subjectively incorporate Chisago County projects into the metropolitan ATIP. While the MPO's planning process must adhere to federal programming and planning requirements, Chisago County has far fewer planning requirements.

Chisago County representatives admit to being faced with a difficult choice in whether to become part of a Metro ATP or the Central Minnesota ATP. Faced with challenges to the county from either choice, the county chose to align itself with the metropolitan area.

14.3.9 Public Involvement

If people do not have prior experience with the ATP process, it is a deterrent to get involved and they may not be effective once they get there.

--ATP Member

Public involvement is dealt with slightly differently in Chisago County than in the seven county metropolitan area. In both cases, all solicited projects are drawn from local plans, that have been developed with full opportunity for public participation. The TAB, in accordance with federal law, has meetings that are open to the public. The TAB holds two public information meetings on the regional TIP, a formal public hearing, a public open house, and

has a 45 day public comment period. In addition, the Met Council itself has a public participation process and communications plan for area-wide planning.

Chisago County and the East Central RDC are not required to hold public hearings, except for transit capital purchases. The East Central RDC, though, has made efforts to provide the opportunity for public participation for individuals and agencies. The RDC has held meetings to help identify transportation needs that may be included in the ATIP.

14.3.10 Elected Officials and The ATP Process

Federal law requires the TAB to have elected officials as members. More than half of the TAB members (17 of 33) are elected officials. The East Central RDC and the TAB each have one elected official on the ATP.

14.4 PARTNERSHIP, PRIORITIZATION AND PLANNING: COMMON QUALITIES IN THE METRO 8-COUNTY ATP PROCESS

14.4.1 Partnership

Perceived Strengths

While the awkwardness of the Metro ATP partnership makes strengths somewhat difficult to recognize, members suggest two strengths that have emerged from ISTEA's implementation and the creation of the Metro ATP. First, the relationship between the Mn/DOT Metro Division and the Met Council has been improved. One ATP member from the Met Council noted, "I think all-in-all, our relationship with Mn/DOT is really quite strong. It's a fair relationship and a dynamic one. I think ISTEA was intended to give the regions more power in the process of setting priorities, and we have. ISTEA has put us into a decision making role."

Second, there is an evolving relationship between the seven county metropolitan area and Chisago County. Some Metro ATP members suggest the ATP attempts to find a balance that fairly recognizes the planning processes of the Met Council while not ignoring Chisago County. Other observers would take issue that "balance" should not be a goal between a single county and a seven county MPO. Regardless, the different issues that face a growing metro area and a growing rural area have been illuminated in the Metro ATP process. Additionally, the Metro Division Engineer and the TAB Chair believe that Chisago County's inclusion could facilitate new mechanisms for dealing with all growth areas outside the MPO.

Perceived Challenges

It seems to me that our root challenge is the melding of the TAB and the Met Council process with that one odd county that we have.

--Metro Division Engineer

The inclusion of Chisago County with the seven county metro area to form a Metro ATP is perceived by the majority of interviewees as a problem. The problem revolves both around the extensive planning and programming processes only the TAB follows, as well as funding issues. Encompassing both of these difficulties are the different transportation needs of the entities that make up the Metro ATP. Parts of the metro area have a high population concentration, serious traffic congestion problems, and the need to increase capacity, as well as preserve an aging system.[20] Conversely, Chisago County is not subject to the same land use controls as the Met Council counties, and does not share many of the goals of the metropolitan counties.

Both Chisago County representatives and those who disagree with them allude to a "horse and rabbit stew" analogy. For Chisago County, as the rabbit, the stew tastes just like horse. For some metro advocates, it is unwise and bad policy for the horse (seven county metro area) to be in balance with the rabbit (Chisago County).

Another challenge to a unified vision of partnership is the differing views on public participation between the metro area and Chisago County. One Metro ATP member from Chisago County suggests that public participation is not always beneficial to the transportation decision-making process. He said, "We don't like public participation the way folks in the cities like it." In contrast, a TAB member argued that "the process does not have enough citizen participation. We have not achieved what ISTEA/Federal government is looking for."

There is a similar challenge in the role of elected officials in the transportation programming process. A TAB interviewee stressed that it is "essential to have state and federal legislators involved" because that is the only way to receive the funding necessary to improve and support the process." A Metro ATP member cautioned that elected officials should not be involved because of the potential for politicization of the process.

14.4.2 Prioritization

Perceived Strengths

Because [the TIP] is fiscally constrained, the decisions about setting priorities are much more important. Those projects sometimes floated from year-to-year and never got implemented. Today, if a project is in the TIP, the community has a pretty good idea that it's going to be implemented within the stated time frame; they can count on it. That's a heck of a difference in a very positive way.

--ATP Member

Metro ATP members have been challenged to think about regional significance and its role in making transportation decisions. The following are some factors ATP members consider in project selection:

- Regional significance can mean transportation projects within, into, out of, and through the region.

- Because of the umbrella-like nature of the Met Council and its role as an MPO, regional significance in the metro area tends to focus on the metro highway system, while Chisago County tends to focus on trunk highway projects with quantifiable impact on the county.

- Regionally significant projects are often characterized by high usage, multi-modal characteristics, and importance to the transport of goods.

Perceived Challenges

The biggest challenge of this ATP is to overcome biases over the shares of dollars and to get over the hurdle of saying Chisago County doesn't belong in the metro area.

--Metro ATP Member

There is no question that there's a feeling on the part of the people in the seven counties that they are sharing their money with one more county, Chisago County, which doesn't ascribe to the rules and procedures and the policies of this urban area.

--Metro Division Engineer

As noted repeatedly, the primary challenge for the Metro ATP is to decide which projects should get funded in Chisago County, despite the county not being subject to the same planning requirements as the Met Council. With the different ranking process of the TAB, the East Central RDC, and Mn/DOT's Capital Improvement Committee, prioritization is difficult because of disparate goals. For instance, a TAB member noted that the overriding policy for projects selected by the metropolitan seven county area is growth management, while members of the East Central RDC focus on preserving roadways to allow for commuting to the Twin Cities.

Project ranking for Chisago County is done by the East Central RDC, which uses criteria relevant to a rural transportation system. The ranking system differs from the seven county region in that the TAB and TAC system is necessarily urban oriented. Some Metro ATP members acknowledge the resulting difficulty when comparing projects. A further challenge to deciding projects to fund is the lack of competition Chisago County projects face during the composition of the project list. The East Central RDC simply prepares a project list for Chisago County that is forwarded to the ATP.

One final prioritization challenge that relates to the metro area is the issue of whether funds should continue to be used to expand the transportation system by building highways, or whether an

increased emphasis on transit and alternative transportation modes is a better investment. One TAB member stated, "I sometimes think we could use more congestion in order to change people's behavior. Maybe we should put our money into enhancements, transit, and . . . smoothing traffic flow."

14.4.3 Planning

Perceived Strengths

To me, what the ATP truly is, what ISTEA is, is planning together. And, if you do that, usually the answers come out pretty well.

-- Metro Division Engineer

Metro ATP members point to an emphasis on regional planning as one meaningful result of the ISTEA legislation. ISTEA greatly altered the planning and TIP requirements for large MPOs, thus giving additional credence to the already established Met Council planning component. Moreover, Mn/DOT's Metro Division has become more closely involved with the Met Council in planning for metropolitan area transportation needs. The merging of two metro Mn/DOT districts into the Metro Division has also contributed to the effort towards cooperative planning measures.

A strength of the somewhat awkward process which the Metro ATP has instituted is the lesson the process provides for dealing with continued metropolitan growth outside the seven county metropolitan area. The difficulty of assimilating two different planning processes to determine project selection is a caveat for future attempts to incorporate other fast-growing counties into the Met Council's funding process. As one participant in the process noted, "there should be some overall planning scheme going on, rather than the road building scheme. That's what needs to happen in the metro area. Hopefully, as we learn from our funny little relationship with Chisago County, we can figure our future relationships."

Perceived Challenges

We seem to be so bottom line. It's like business today. You have got to make a profit this year, not thinking five or ten years down the road. I think we're doing the same thing. We're not thinking about what the future is going to look like. I don't think we're getting that long-range vision that used to take place.

--Metro Division Engineer

I think there is a strong need for state planning to help facilitate regional boundary coordination, and more importantly, to set a state development framework that functional single purpose agencies like Mn/DOT can fit their state transportation planning and programming within.

--Metro ATP Member

The disparate planning processes of the groups involved in the Metro ATP illustrate the difficulty of an expanding region-wide funding scheme. While the Met Council has prepared a twenty-year plan and updated it since 1974, Chisago County has not been required to do such long-range planning. Some Metro ATP members and TAB personnel believe that the Chisago County issue is a precursor to futures dilemmas on the expanse of the metropolitan region.

CHAPTER 15
SUMMARY OF THE PERSPECTIVES OF MN/DOT'S CENTRAL OFFICE

15.1 BACKGROUND

People within Mn/DOT's Central Office report that the formation of the Area Transportation Partnerships (ATP) was a natural extension of an ongoing effort to decentralize the project selection process. This section summarizes the perspectives of individuals from within Mn/DOT's Central Office and selected modal offices. As these individuals reported their perspectives, the study found that their statements reinforced the common themes of partnership, prioritization, and planning found in the case studies of the ATPs.

Leadership from Mn/DOT's Central Office convened the Northstar Conference in 1992, where a dialogue was directed at ISTEA's requirement of early and continuous public involvement in transportation decisions.[21] Based on discussions about what public involvement would mean in Minnesota, the Central Office, together with the districts and the Metro Division of Mn/DOT, developed a plan to implement ATPs. Representatives from the Central Office state that the ATPs serve the requirement of public involvement by increasing the number of stakeholders who are invited to "the table" during the development of transportation investment priorities. Each ATP is responsible for developing an Area Transportation Improvement Program (ATIP) that, together with the other ATPs' ATIPs, form the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

15.2 SUMMARY OF CENTRAL OFFICE ROLES BEFORE AND AFTER THE ATP PROCESS

15.2.1 Before the ATP Process

- Central Office toured districts to look at road and bridge conditions to confirm project needs and system candidates.
- Districts identified projects, while the Central Office prioritized projects through the Office of Highway Programs based upon a quantitative ranking system.
- District engineers submitted projects to the Central Office and the Central Office, together with the districts, made the decisions about which projects to pursue.
- Ranking criteria were established by the Central Office and all projects in the state were ranked in St. Paul. Criteria were reviewed by the RDCs and weighted by importance.
- Districts would nominate resurfacing, reconditioning, major construction, and reconstruction projects for ranking by the Office of Highway Programs.
- Together with the Office of Highway Programs, modal offices developed lists for projects in their mode without substantial input from the districts.

- Budget was managed by the Central Office and districts created a list of all desired projects with the Office of Highway Programs providing cost/investment guidelines. Overprogramming occurred for future years in anticipation of increased funding and as a way to accommodate optimistic project schedules.

15.2.2 After the ATP Process

- By breaking down definitional barriers for the types of projects eligible for federal funding, ISTEA introduced new partners to the transportation investment process, including transit, environmental, bicycle, and pedestrian groups.
- Prior to ISTEA, a new transportation interest, or partner, had no specific guidelines or path to follow when proposing a project, but after ISTEA, new participants in the process could turn to the Central Office's modal or state aid groups, to the district, or to an active RDC or MPO with their project proposal.
- The introduction of ATPs served to create a distinct process for all partners to follow in their efforts to fund and complete a project.
- The Central Office sets statewide goals and objectives for the program.
- ATPs solicit and prioritize projects.
- The Central Office now acts as a guide and a strategic partner.
- The Central Office provides "service" to the ATPs, modal expertise and investment management skills.
- ATPs have fiscal constraint for the project lists; moderate overprogramming occurs.

15.3 A SYNTHESIS OF ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CENTRAL OFFICE

15.3.1 Background on Perspective

The Central Office provides strategic management and direction for agency activity. Though not involved in the day-to-day operation of the ATPs, the Central Office played a central role in the development of the ATP process. The North Star Conference in 1992 was Mn/DOT's "conversation" with a wide range of transportation stakeholders who might be influenced by the legislation. There was concern that the invitation list was not broad enough to bring in people who would be more impacted under ISTEA than under previous legislation; for example, people concerned about economic development and access. Nevertheless, that conference "charted the course" for the future way of "doing business." Mn/DOT has long been engaged in a decentralization process. However, there was general agreement that "without ISTEA, Mn/DOT would not be where it is today. Now, if ISTEA goes away, Mn/DOT would never go back to the old ways."

Before ATPs were formed, leadership in the Central Office saw that the ATPs had a model already in place in Minnesota. The Met Council's Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) was among the "most knowledgeable ATPs in the country." ISTEA was an invitation to bring in

planners and policy makers, especially representatives of local governments and regional planning organizations with broader perspectives, into the process of ranking projects.

The section of the report is based on interviews with members of the Central Office leadership, including: Mn/DOT's Commissioner; Deputy Commissioner/Chief Engineer, Bureau of Engineering and Operations; Division Engineer, Division of State Aid for Local Transportation; Assistant Commissioner, Operations, Bureau of Engineering and Operations; Assistant Division Director, Operations; Associate Director for the Office of Intergovernmental Policy (Former Director of the Office of Highway Programs); and, ISTEA Coordinator, Office of Investment Management.

The modal offices are a part of Mn/DOT's Central Office in St. Paul. The modal offices aid the ATPs in the selection of appropriate transportation projects. Each modal office has a unique relationship with the Central Office and with the districts. The data from the modal offices' interviews reveal the different ways relationships have formed and changed due to the ATP process. (For more information on the perspectives of the selected modal offices, see Volume I, Appendix F).

The individuals interviewed for the Central Office affirmed the three common qualities of partnership, prioritization, and planning that were identified by the study. However, the Central Office perspectives differ at times with the data gathered from the ATP members.

15.3.2 Partnership

The common quality of partnership within the agency pre-dates the creation of the ATPs. Prior to ISTEA, Mn/DOT had started a process of decentralizing its decision-making processes, especially by including regional planning organizations into the investment process. There may be some disagreement with these generalized statements, but the following is a summary of the key strengths and challenges identified in the interviews with individuals from the Central Office.

Perceived Strengths

Before Mn/DOT recommended the creation of the ATPs, the Met Council's TAB was already in place. It served as a guide to the formation of the ATPs.

Because they are suited to understanding the trade-offs necessary in transportation programming, local elected officials help to create buy-in for fiscal constraint. Their membership leads to better stewardship of available dollars, which in turn results in better investment decisions.

There has been an increase in credibility in Mn/DOT's investment decisions. "The public is not interested, nor necessarily knowledgeable, about whether a road is a state, county, or city road. They just want a transportation system that works." The involvement of elected officials

in the ATP process is "so critical because they deal with tradeoffs every day of their lives," and are suited to understanding the circumstances surrounding transportation programming.

Implementation of the ATP process has created an opportunity for increased interaction and information exchange between the modal offices, the districts, and ATP members. For example, the ATP process has made additional sources of money available for transit purposes. The increased visibility has resulted in a more systematic replacement of capital equipment.

Perceived Challenges

Because there is never enough funding for transportation needs, achieving credibility with local groups concerned about changes in funding distribution was and continues to be a source of challenge for the Central Office. Some people inside and outside the agency fear that bringing in transit advocates, bikeway people, environmental people, and people with non-highway perspectives dilutes the distribution of already limited dollars.

The expectation that an increase in grassroots support for transportation funding would arise from the implementation of the ATP process has not been realized. The ATP process did not create more support among the partners for an increase in the transportation funding.

Planners and engineers have differing approaches to transportation issues. As partners, their differing perspectives are more evident in the ATP process.

15.3.3 Prioritization

The number of challenges in the programming process far exceeds the perceived strengths. The strengths are generally attributed to the decentralization of the programming process. However, because fiscal constraint is such an enormous controlling factor in the distribution of scarce resources, the challenges are directly connected to fiscal constraint, or to the other common qualities of partnership or planning.

Perceived Strengths

Central Office leadership had a concern that because of Mn/DOT's extensive knowledge and authority, the agency would dominate the process. However, in the first year, "$43 million of projects that we anticipated would be approved by the ATPs were not." Those moneys were directed to projects "off the trunk highway system." As a result, the trust level increased because Mn/DOT was "really putting all [its] cards on the table face up."

The centrally controlled technical ranking system of the past worked well, but Mn/DOT's decentralization efforts have improved that ranking process by shifting budgeting responsibility to the district engineers, to the districts, and to the ATP members.

In the past, project supporters would lobby legislators, the governor, or the Central Office to get their projects approved. "Now that those groups have to pay for the project out of their budget, there is a greater consideration if the project is really necessary."

Perceived Challenges

Funding sources: One of the early concerns that received a great deal of internal discussion within the agency was what funding sources would be available to the ATPs to program. Some Central Office interviews suggest that if ATP members had all federal, state, and local funds before them during the programming process, their project selection process would be more informed and more balanced. At the outset, except for funds needed for the preservation of the system, the agency supported having all federal, state, and local funds "on the table." This approach paralleled Mn/DOT's ongoing effort to decentralize decision making. In the end, after more than a year of deliberation with the district engineers and members of the Commissioner's staff, and consideration of information from ATP members about what funds should be available, the Commissioner was persuaded that it was best to have the ATP members focus on the federally funded projects in the STIP.

Additional funding source challenges include:

- Metropolitan and rural needs differ. Some areas of the state are more concerned about preservation, others are more concerned about expansion.

- ATPs may be "arguing about money instead of arguing about what is important to do."

- The "targeting" of funds to districts inspires ongoing debate and is a source of contention between representatives of population growth areas and areas of population decline. The Central Office struggles with determining target funding levels that are equitable.

- Mega-projects are a problem for the ATPs because the costs are sometimes prohibitive for the program, even though the project itself might be a good idea.

Timing challenges: Fiscal constraint beyond three years may limit the ability to make creative and innovative plans. Giving an expanded group of stakeholders enough time to make transportation investment decisions and to meet the schedule demands of the federal government was a struggle, particularly in the first few years of the process.

The timing of the enhancement process is frustrating for many because projects tend to backlog in short periods of time and there is a struggle to push as many projects through quickly to get those projects authorized. Enhancements have been a source of tension throughout the ISTEA's span. The focus for enhancement projects has changed over time at both the state guidance and ATP levels. There has been an increase in the number of bike trail projects successfully competing for enhancement funding and a decrease in the number of projects that are not generally accepted as having a strong transportation focus.

The timing of the enhancement process is also frustrating for many because projects tend to backlog in short periods of time and there is a struggle to push as many projects through quickly to get those projects authorized. Additionally, the coordination for calculating all environmental costs in time for inclusion into a fiscally constrained program is difficult and a continued source of tension

Regional concerns: There was an expectation that ATP members would not hold on to the "old" pre-ISTEA ways of allocation. Within Mn/DOT there was hope that the ATP members would discover the need to move toward seeing the larger good of the whole state. Instead, some ATPs are still struggling with gaining a "regional perspective." The current process of "keeping score" of money spent in some ATP's geographic areas goes against such "beyond-the-borders thinking."

15.3.4 Planning

Although the ATP process is not a planning process, data from interviews with people in the Central Office suggest that planning is intricately linked with the other two common qualities, partnership and prioritization. One member of the Central Office suggested that the "ATPs were designed as a short term strategy to create a bridge from programming to planning. The ATP process is a short term, stop-gap solution to a long-term problem. The problem is lack of funding." Before the ATP process, the Central Office made a technical ranking of projects that the districts submitted. The ranking system they used was weighted towards functional classes.

Perceived Strengths

The involvement of regional planning organizations has greatly improved the quality of transportation decisions. There is more accountability when there is a plan in place. The presence of a plan suggests the need to identify costs.

Perceived Challenges

When member of the Central Office stated, "When you don't do planning, you've got all sorts of authority [for spending money] but no accountability." There are statewide goals for transportation contained in Governor Carlson's *Minnesota Milestones* and the *Economic Blueprint for Minnesota.*[22] The statewide transportation goals and objectives must be consistent with these other constraints. "Complete centralized planning doesn't work because all that a centralized office can do is study, they can't implement the plan. Someone else must perform the implementation and if they do not believe in the plan, the plan will fail."

Some ATPs are still struggling with gaining a "regional perspective." The existing political barriers prevent ATPs from working together to gain a sense of the needs of the whole state. The statewide transportation goals and objectives are not consistent with constraints identified elsewhere in state government.

Planners and engineers have differing approaches to transportation issues. There are people in the process who disregard the need and usefulness of planners, but in order to be efficient, there is a need to plan. Planners serving in the RDCs do not necessarily have the transportation expertise needed to fill the needs of the programming process. RDC members are better suited to serve as generalists who see the region as a whole.

CHAPTER 16
THE PERSPECTIVE OF FEDERAL AGENCIES

Interviews were conducted with individuals serving in the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The goals of the interviews were to explore the relationship between each agency and the ATP process and to garner the agency impression of the ATP process. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of the U.S. Forest Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Additional information contained in this chapter was gathered from Minnesota's State Transportation Improvement Program. Just as in the "Perspective of Mn/DOT's Central Office," the common qualities of partnership, prioritization, and planning emerge as key themes in the comments from individuals at the federal level.

16.1 FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

Information about the FHWA perspective was gathered from interviews with personnel from the FHWA's Minnesota Division Office. Interviews were conducted with the Planning and Research Program Manager and a representative from the Office of Engineering and Operations.

The Planning and Research Manager provided the bulk of information regarding the FHWA and ATP relationship. FHWA's role is to support and encourage full partnership and broad participation of the stakeholders. Regarding the ATP process, the FHWA was "very happy with the statewide process in terms of its response to ISTEA, in terms of involving the public, in terms of partnerships with non-traditional partners, and in terms of the state allowing project selection and priorities to be set at the local level."

16.1.1 Perceived Strengths

The Program Manager notes a number of strengths in Minnesota's ATP process, including:

1. Decentralized project selection. This is in contrast to some neighboring states where project selection "is done centrally and . . . in many cases, very politically. It is not done in a representative fashion. Minnesota's ATP process is encouraging bordering states to take notice of how more inclusive and representative project selection can be successful. Minnesota's effort to bring decision making to the local level is exemplary."

2. The Program manager stated that the process has developed significantly since the ATPs were started. "ATP members are beginning to think beyond 'my mode' and 'my county.'

They are now looking at their ATP area. Ideally, that momentum will continue and they will look at things regionally and ultimately see themselves as a part of statewide goals and priorities. They will look at how their ATP process fits into these plans."

3. Regarding the evolution of this from previous Mn/DOT initiatives, she adds, "I want to underscore that this type of process, what ultimately became the ATP process, was under development before ISTEA was passed. Bringing decisions to the local level did not happen solely because of ISTEA. Minnesota was already moving in that direction."

16.1.2 Perceived Challenges

Expectations about the role and training of district planners

The Program Manager sees the connection between planning and the ATP process as an important and most immediate challenge before Mn/DOT and the ATPs. She comments:

> In many ways the challenges can be summed up in "linkages" and "balance." The ATP brought out linkages that were not previously evident, especially linkages between modes. More importantly, however, as the linkage between planning and programming emerged, planning was seen as a more critical element. It involves more than putting together a list of projects.

She sees the need for linkage to long-range plans, highway plans, freight plans, transit plans, land-use plans, bicycle and pedestrian plans, and economic plans. She also sees new linkages in terms of roles and relationships between ATPs and RDC, Mn/DOT district, Mn/DOT Central Office, city, county, township, and bi-state plans. She believes that the ATPs have struggled with finding a way to balance needs in competing modes, between rural and urban, and between jurisdictions and roles. The struggle will continue as the process matures. She noted:

> At this point one of the greatest challenges is how the planning should occur in rural areas, who should do it, what is the role of the ATP in planning, what is the role of Mn/DOT districts and the RDCs, and how should this fit into a statewide goal? There is clearly a need for this planning to occur, the projects being selected and prioritized should come from a planning process. Subtargets are not a substitute for planning and ideally all funds and all categories would be part of the ATP programming process. Many challenges remain.

Information to the ATPs

The Program manager believes that the ATP members should have access to as much information as possible. She suggests that:

> Knowledge and context are important elements to decisions. Now that the ATPs are making the transportation decisions in their areas, they must have access to as much

information as possible. Here, FHWA can provide support to Mn/DOT and the ATPs with as much information as possible to make those decisions. For example, in the area of transportation enhancements, more guidance and information early on could have made implementing this program much easier. We in FHWA must be there with any information or guidance that may be needed to support this process, and it must be available to the ATPs when they need it.

In summary, the Program Manager noted that, "One of the things ISTEA was intended to do was bring to about public participation. It had little to do with holding more meetings. It had everything to do with opening the process to new partners and broadening access to information."

16.2 FEDERAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

The ATP process from FTA Region 5 Chicago Perspective

The Program Development Officer for Region 5 spoke about his expectations for Minnesota's ATP process. He is especially concerned about transportation project evaluation and selection process in light of delegated authority given to the ATPs. Specifically, he believes that the ATPs should look at transit and all transportation projects in terms of a long-range regional transportation and land development that recognizes the social, environmental, and economic impacts of transportation on the regional community. This requires an explicit evaluation of the state/regional tax structure on land development and transportation. It is also desirable to seek to increase transit effectiveness and efficiency by promoting coordination of transportation operations between transit agencies and social agencies. An evaluation of these issues requires the education and involvement of the general public.

The Program Development Officer recommends that objective criteria be used for determining the ranking of road, transit, and bicycle projects. He said that this has been done in Madison, Wisconsin. He commented that he has heard positive comments about the good working relationship between cities and rural counties in Minnesota, such as the Duluth area, and is optimistic that the ATP process can best address regional needs.

Regarding federal transit interests, he mentioned the following specific project evaluation issues:

- ATPs could encourage coordination between transit agencies and the transportation arm of social services agencies such as welfare programs, health care services, Headstart, and other educational programs or schools. Even small agreements on driver training, vehicle washing, and shared procurements can lead to coordination of schedules, clients and revenue.
- FTA requires comprehensive, regional long-range transportation plans that serve as a framework for project selection. Discussions with businesses to understand their needs is as

important as discussions with those environmental and welfare/social concerns. Desires for jobs and economic development should be balanced with consideration of tax and land development implications, as well as transit and road needs.

- Public involvement is necessary during the entire planning and programming process to ensure consideration of all regional issues, as well as to develop public support for the end result.

He noted that while ISTEA encourages flexibility in funding between highway and transit, a set of objective criteria helps to determine priorities.

16.3 BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

The concerns of tribal governments are represented in the STIP in two ways. First, federal-aid highway allocation funding for Indian Reservation Roads and Bridges is attached to Minnesota's STIP by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) based upon an administrative formula. Presently, the NE ATP has a BIA official as a standing member of its ATP. While BIA-ATP involvement has not been extensive in that ATP, the BIA's Acting Agency Road Engineer notes that he is more informed of local transportation decisions and better able to coordinate his agency's decisions with those of the districts.

Additionally, tribal governments have representatives on three ATPs. These tribal community representatives/ATP members coordinate transportation activities of the tribes as a part of the STIP. Also, tribal representation is invited throughout the Statewide Transportation Plan development.

16.4 U.S. FOREST SERVICE

The U.S. Forest Service is involved in two ways in Minnesota's STIP process. Like the BIA, the federal-aid funds for the Forest Highways portion of the Public Lands Highways program are allocated by formula to the state. These funds may only be used for public highway project within or near National Forest lands. The projects are selected for funding by a group comprised of county, Mn/DOT, FHWA, and USDA Forest Service officials. The process is governed by federal regulation and an agreement between Mn/DOT, FHWA, and the Forest Service. The approved Forest Highway program is then incorporated into the STIP.

Secondly, the NE ATP has a Forest Service representative from the Superior National Forest as a member of that partnership. The representative noted he is "extremely enthusiastic about the ATP process and the opportunity to see the big picture of the region's transportation network." He believes that the process allows him to see other interests, to understand what counties are doing, and to participate in a process of integration of interests. He noted the benefit of the ATP as, "Before the ATP process, things were more parochial. The ATP

process provides excellent opportunities for networking and developing partnerships. I have a better understanding of state and local interests. I more clearly see the role the Forest Service can play in all this, too."

The ATP process gives the Forest Service a picture of the area's total transportation network. The representative cited a recent example:

> A contractor made an error in grading a road adjoining TH 61. The Forest Service, instead of making him redo it, looked up the STIP and realized the state was going to redo that intersection in two years. We had the contractor do some other work instead of ripping up and rebuilding something that was going to be reconstructed anyway.

As an engineer long-involved in setting priorities for transportation projects, the Forest Service representative believes allocating funds is largely a scheduling exercise. He commented:

> Validation of the projects must occur prior to the allocation process. There are two important criterion . . . that must be applied in the allocation process. One is deliverability, and the other is equity. Deliverability is more of a feasibility criterion, but equity is much more abstract and any group charged with selecting projects should have some way of dealing with equity issues. An extreme example would be if there were only enough funds to do one project a year, then each party would have it accept some method or rotating the projects. Each party wants to keep working towards their goals, and if they perceive they're losing ground the coalition will be broken.

In sum, this Forest Service representative and ATP member felt that the relationship is a positive one. He noted that "it doesn't work perfectly due to the large size of the NE ATP. The size does reflect, however, the complexity of transportation interests in northeast Minnesota. Yet, by using committees and support work by the Arrowhead RDC staff, the work of the ATP is thorough and results in better transportation decision making for the area."

16.5 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Region 5 engineer who reviews Minnesota's STIP noted that while he "has just started his responsibilities of oversight related to Minnesota role in transportation planning," he did have thoughts on the following parts of the process:

Project evaluation

People with environmental concerns "need to become involved early in the planning process rather than late when they are seen as disruptive. Public participation doesn't work when people come in late."

Breadth of issues

EPA is now concerned with issues broader than air quality, especially sustainability and land use issues. While these were seen as local issues in the past, they now are part of EPA consideration.

Functional relationship

EPA does not impose requirements, the state DOTs do that. The EPA does not require that states build certain projects, rather, they "leave it up to the locals to develop a STIP that won't adversely effect air quality. EPA is not going to dictate projects." The EPA representative added that smaller MPOs may have a more difficult time meeting standards because they do not have the staff to meet all requirements, especially for modeling.

Agency cooperation

EPA's view from Chicago is that "now there is more interaction between agencies." When performing Congestion Mitigation Air Quality processes, there is a memorandum of understanding between the FHWA, FTA, and EPA that sets the guidelines and process review for programming. EPA reviews the TIP for each non-attainment area as a sub-set of the STIP.

The EPA engineer commented on other federal agency cooperation, noting, "We had an intermodal planning group that has now become the Interagency Planning Council made up of Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Federal Aviation, EPA, and DOT. We are trying to get Army Corps and Department of Agriculture also involved. People representing the Americans Disabilities Act are not yet involved."

CHAPTER 17
THE PERSPECTIVE OF NON-ATP MEMBERS ON THE ATP PROCESS

Five individuals from across the state who have not served as ATP members were interviewed. Each of these individuals has had significant interactions with the ATP process or were a part of Mn/DOT's policy formation process that led to the ATP process. Individuals interviewed included a county commissioner who was involved in the creation of the ATP in his region of the state; a former Mn/DOT district engineer and a former Mn/DOT assistant commissioner, both members of the agency before the ATPs were formed; a mayor of an MPO city who is also a leader of a statewide organization of rural communities; and the executive director of the Association of Minnesota Townships.

The reader is urged to review these remarks keeping in mind the common qualities of partnership, prioritization, and planning. These five individuals have a unique vantage point on the ATP process; they are neither agency nor ATP members. There is a distinct frankness in their voice, and again, an affirmation of the issues identified by the ATP members in the eight case studies.

17.1 COUNTY COMMISSIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

This commissioner has never been a member of an ATP, but was invited by Mn/DOT and the RDC of his region to be a part of the dialogue that formed the District 7 ATP. He stated that, at the outset, the ATP process was not well received by everyone. He noted, "Our county engineer really thought the ATP was the worst idea ever. That engineer thought that 'if you had a cozy relationship, you could get your projects through and somebody else couldn't.' "

The county commissioner said he differed with the engineer's opinion that the ATP process would become a process for exchanging political favors; he greatly appreciated the fact that the ATP process would "expose light" to others who had been shut out of transportation decisions in the past. He believes that, "Opening the process up to the public means that you are going to get more diverse ideas. Having more people involved means that more people will disagree; but it is better to have that disagreement prior to construction than afterwards."

The commissioner believes that the introduction of the ATP process changed the county's planning process. From his perspective as a professionally trained engineer, he saw that the project selection process was previously dominated by the "technical thinking of engineers; the ATP process broadened the thinking to include other considerations such as aesthetics." He thought that including people other than engineers has meant that engineers benefit by "encountering less criticism" than before. The result, he believes, is increased trust. He noted:

> Representation from regional development commission members on the ATP, people who have had a history of working together on soil and water conservation issues, on trash, community services and transportation, meant that they would bring a history of trust to the process.

He believes that this experience of cooperation set the stage for generating a "regional" perspective for the District 7 ATP process.

The commissioner acknowledged that there is "danger" in establishing "regional significance" as a criteria. He noted that, "Because Mankato is the regional center, Mankato could have all regional significance projects. The changing urban and rural landscapes creates particular problems in developing ranking techniques." He noted that some rural highways have very little traffic, but are essential for the movement of commodities in that area. Also, he discussed the difficulty of assessing the efficiency of rural transit systems.

The county commissioner believes that the existence of the ATPs is an incentive for "better planning" and a broader vision. He added that prior to an ATP process being evaluated, there needs to be at least six years of operation before a judgment is made. He also suggested that district engineers would gain a "fresh perspective" by serving as "visiting members" on ATPs in regions other than their own.

17.2 FORMER DISTRICT ENGINEER'S VISION FOR THE ATPs

Working with the transportation leadership of Itasca County, this former district engineer now serves as the transportation representative for the North Itasca Joint Powers Board, which includes three townships and two small cities. The board is recognized in Minnesota statutes and has legal standing to do planning. The organization has "been successful" by recently getting TH 38 federally designated as a Scenic By-Way.

As a district engineer for the northwest region of the state, he said that he had established a process that preceded the ATP process, but accomplished some of the same purposes. He noted:

> The district philosophy was to work with our clients. First, by learning their business -- the needs of loggers, farmers, housewives, truckers, school districts. Second, we needed to teach them our business -- show them what [Mn/DOT's] process was, how it is that a project comes about.[23]

When he was the district engineer, he experienced resistance from his fellow engineers who preferred to keep "such information" from people "who wouldn't understand." He recently testified at a state legislative hearing regarding the STIP process and funding criteria, noting "funds are based on population, vehicle miles, lane miles and where income is generated. Rural areas do not compete well based on these factors"[24]

His group's strategy is to meet early enough in the process with the Mn/DOT district/ATP staff so they can:

> [M]ake a case for the state trunk highways and enhancement needs of the area on issues like wider shoulders, snowmobile trails, and interpretative centers. [The] board puts together a project priority list that feeds into the ATP process. We have worked with people in our area to develop a corridor management plan. The NE ATP has supported our efforts. At first they were not sure what we were, but as time goes on, they do understand and we are getting projects regularly because we have our ducks in order.

He believes that:

> The future for ATPs is in linking planning to projects. There should be more of the public at those [ATP] meetings, I don't see farmers and loggers there. The ARDC has no plan for ten-ton roads in this area. So when targets are set, those targets are not linked to reasons for doing the projects. The ATPs don't know what it is that is going to help us have a good life. For this region, when timber and tourism are healthy, then we will have the good life. We need that access from the big woods that will be harvested. We need to look at how our roads can be the main street for wood. We need a divided highway to connect to the metropolitan centers.

This former district engineer added that the ATP process "is still dominated too much by technical people. They are getting better, but engineers don't see the economic connection between projects and people's lives." He sees the ATPs as advocating for the formation of groups like the North Itasca Joint Powers Board. These local entities "could do the planning for and provide information to the ATPs" regarding what is most appropriate for the region's needs. They would "know more about what they need and how to have those needs met."

17.3 FORMER MN/DOT ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

The Past

According to a former assistant commissioner, the 1978 Mn/DOT/PLAN[25] was the first transportation plan established that had a process for citizen involvement in Minnesota's transportation investments and for each region to do planning. Like the ATPs, these regional entities had a ranking process. Similar to the ATPs' efforts to establish "regional significance" as a ranking criteria, the Mn/DOT/PLAN made sure that regions had input into developing ranking criteria that had a regional focus. He added that there were "considerations and constraints" in the ranking criteria so that other factors could be brought into the ranking that could accommodate considerations arising from a statewide perspective.

The former assistant commissioner stated that "before 1978, politics played a bigger role." He believes that the ATP is a maturation of the old process created in 1978. From an "outside in" perspective, he comments that:

> [T]here is still a lack of understanding that the Mn/DOT commissioner does have to make tough choices that take into consideration factors not evident at the local or regional level. Because each ATP represents only one part of the state, they lack a statewide perspective. The commissioner provides that statewide perspective.

Like many others interviewed, the former assistant commissioner had expectations about how the ATP process might broaden support for transportation funding: "My big disappointment is that this process has not generated more interest in helping Mn/DOT generate additional project funding. There's a link that is missing between elected officials and transportation funding needs."

The Future

The former assistant commissioner believes that transportation investments in the future have to be made in the context of planning as a land use activity. He suggested that lessons from the past should guide the state to the future. Specifically, he notes:

> [I]n 1976, we got all the state agencies together with the Met Council and we invited them to give us their plans. We thought our job would then be made easy; we would be able to see what their needs were and overlay a transportation plan to serve those needs. They said we don't have those kind of plans to give you.

He feels that the need for land use planning has not diminished, but increased. He suggests that the ATPs will not know where to make investments if they do not know what future development is expected. He notes, "Until you do a comprehensive land use plan, you don't know how you should spend transportation dollars. You need to know what the numbers are that generate transportation use. The funding comes later. Prioritization is easy after that."

The former assistant commissioner acknowledged that "the reason we don't have strong land use regulations is the reluctance of elected officials to tell individuals what they can and cannot do." He said that the problem for the ATPs is that the projects submitted for their consideration need to be developed in a larger context of future needs based on land use changes and expected future growth. By default, the ATPs are making some of their decisions by responding to current, not future conditions.

17.4 MAYOR'S STATEWIDE AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

In 1992, this mayor of a northwest Minnesota city and other leaders of the Minnesota Rural Initiatives Coalition prepared an "ISTEA Policy Statement" that would serve as an alternative to Mn/DOT's proposed ATP process. The "Policy Statement" recommended fixed categories of funding and set forth goals of:

- Providing local decision-making mechanisms that bind the distribution of funds.
- Installing predictable mechanisms and funding that permit comfortable short and long range planning.
- Developing fair criteria for allocation funds, including but not limited to: community needs; tourism; social needs such as elderly and housing; population densities; projected growth; and miles of existing roads.[26]

He feels that Mn/DOT largely ignored the Coalition's recommendations for an alternative to the ATP process: "We had a number of legislative leaders who picked-up on some of our ideas and they did some work to try to advance them, but pretty much to no avail." The mayor also feels that ISTEA created a "large urban bias" at the expense of smaller urban areas and rural areas. He believes that Mn/DOT set up a process that "centralized" its power even more. The mayor commented:

> The process kind of did the opposite of what was being done on the federal level. We think from our perspective that Mn/DOT strengthened their hand. Instead of having entitlements as we'd grown accustomed to for years and years, even though it wasn't a lot of money, at least we could count on it. It was centralized on a regional and a state basis.

His earlier skepticism has been lessened by the experience of working with the ATP process. He noted, "Right now in this community, for example, we've been treated very well through the regional ATP process. But it could have gone the other way." He stated that Mn/DOT asked for input at the North Star Conference in 1992, but "in the final analysis, Mn/DOT really called the shots and it was done the way they wanted to do it." He goes on to add about the ATP process:

> [It] has been driven too much by Mn/DOT bureaucrats and technical staff, and I personally don't think that locally-elected officials have been involved enough with transportation policy as it affects their region. That's particularly true in a region like ours where we don't have an RDC. Our whole region has suffered because of a lack of regional focus.

He sees that the current ATP process makes it difficult for local officials to plan for regional needs. He thinks that because there was a sub-allocation system in the past, local non-MPO

communities knew they were getting some money, so they planned for it. As an MPO, they are required to plan, but their plans meet up in the ATP process with others who do not plan. He is concerned that because his MPO has been able to plan, in the ATP process they have "been treated so well, it could be held against us for years and years to come."

He added that smaller MPOs "should be eligible to have an entitlement status, and I know that position is shared by a number of city and county associations." He is confident that his MPO staff can prepare transportation plans as well as the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities.

17.5 TOWNSHIP OFFICERS ASSOCIATION PERSPECTIVE

The executive director of the Minnesota Association of Townships is concerned about the lack of representation by townships in the ATP process. He notes:

> We were very interested in the ATPs when they were formed, but we were disappointed that the decentralization process of the ATPs did not allow for full representation by rural Minnesota, especially by township officials and elected officials from small cities. The representation is mostly from county and city engineers, folks who generally talk to themselves. The ATPs do not have broad representation. I think there is only one township official who is an ATP member.

He believes that township officers could serve as "a liaison" to local communities. This is needed, he argues, because "the RDCs, who are represented in the ATPs, are dominated by the county commissioners and larger city officials." He added, "If you have all of the players at the table, there will be less likelihood of consternation among the troops. If you come to similar conclusions, it's hard to be enemies with your friends."

He stated that the association has had discussions with a legislator about the lack of representation on the ATPs. He added that at a time when there is "such a move today to have people participate in public decisions, there is lack of township participation in the ATP process."

17.6 SUMMARY OF ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF NON-ATP MEMBERS

- Establishing a ranking criteria that includes "regional significance" may create a dilemma. Regional centers may be the beneficiaries at the expense of the less populated areas. Rural areas do not compete well in the current ranking criteria.

- The project selection process is dominated by "technical" people; not enough information is shared with people whose lives are directly impacted by investment decisions. ATP

membership should include representation from those more closely connected to the local perspective.

- There is a lack of a statewide perspective; each ATP represents only one region of the state. There is no statewide ATP.

- Without a comprehensive land use plan, transportation investment decisions are made in a vacuum.

- Smaller MPOs are disadvantaged in the current funding process. They do the planning but do not receive entitlement funds.

CHAPTER 18
THE MPO PERSPECTIVE

Long before the creation of the ATPs, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) were required by federal law to develop transportation plans and transportation improvement programs (TIPs) as a precondition to the receipt of federal funds for transportation projects. There are seven MPOs whose boundaries are all or partly in Minnesota; four of the seven are bi-state. Each MPO director is a member of an ATP or has a staff member who serves as an ATP member. For the Metro 8-County ATP, TAB members and TAB staff are represented.

Since ISTEA, Minnesota-connected MPOs provide staff assistance to the ATP process and propose projects that come through the MPO planning process. People from within Mn/DOT who were involved with the ATP process since its inception suggest that the MPO process of project selection, especially the Met Council's Transportation Advisory Board, was a model for creating the ATP process.

The story of MPO involvement in the ATP process is partially contained in case studies of the six district/ATPs that have MPOs within their boundaries. District/ATP 6 has two MPOs, the La Crosse Area Planning Commission and the Rochester-Olmstead Council of Governments. The story of the interaction between the Metro 8-County ATP and the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities is briefly described here, and primarily contained in the case study of the Metro 8-County ATP.

In the case studies of each ATP, information was gathered about the MPO/ATP connection. However, only one MPO director was interviewed as a part of the individual ATP data collection process. After preparing those case studies, it became apparent that the study needed a more complete picture of the role MPOs play in Minnesota's transportation project selection process. A separate session was held with the MPO directors to get a better sense of "the MPO's interpretation as to how the ATP process is working."[27] Most of the information in this chapter was obtained in a focus group discussion between the six Greater Minnesota MPO directors and one former director. The information regarding the Met Council's perspective was taken from earlier interviews with Met Council TAB members and staff, and from information provide separately by the Met Council's MPO director.

Just as each ATP is unique in its culture and regional characteristics, each MPO is unique. The following is a summary of the key issues identified by the directors. Their statements reaffirm issues and challenges found in the common qualities of partnership, prioritization, and planning.

18.1 ST. CLOUD AREA PLANNING ORGANIZATION

The St. Cloud Area Planning Organization director feels that the St. Cloud MPO "has done well competing for projects within its ATP." However, he has a concern that, over time, the other ATP partners will get more sophisticated with their preparation of projects and therefore will be more competitive. He predicted that in the near future there will be more of a tendency toward sub-area targeting because the other partners in the ATP are likely to want more of a guaranteed funding level.

Also, he feels that the non-MPO ATP members do not have an appreciation for how much work an MPO puts into the required transportation planning process from which projects evolve. He commented, "All other ATP partners do little if any transportation planning, and yet have an equal access to ATP funding of projects. MPOs do even more transportation planning than Mn/DOT." MPOs also have "fiscal constraints" within the planning process that limit the type of projects they can submit to the ATPs. Even though ISTEA was supposed to bring about funding flexibility, he says, "there is not a dollar of transit money on the ATP table to flex."

18.2 GRAND FORKS-EAST GRAND FORKS METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

The Grand Forks-East Grand Forks Metropolitan Planning Organization director stated that the MPO's relationship with the NW ATP "got off to a rocky start." He said that the ATP was formed without consulting with the MPO, so "there was a reluctance to be a part of the ATP in the beginning." However, to receive a "fair-share" of the funding, the ATP process requires the MPOs to participate in the ATP process.

The Grand Forks-East Grand Forks MPO director said that the "original intent of ISTEA was never realized from an MPO's perspective." He notes:

> We were forced into this process by Mn/DOT. The MPOs had a planning process in place for years with public participation. The RDCs have some level of planning that contributes to the ATP process, but the overall planning and public participation in the ATP process is not developed at the level of the MPO's long range planning process. Because targeting still exists in the Northwest ATP, ATP members are more worried about getting their own projects. Long-range planning falls by the wayside.

Also, he stated, "Coordinating the TIP process between Minnesota and North Dakota is a challenge. Date and times for publication are not the same. The public participation process is difficult to coordinate." MPO transportation planning process results in projects that have been more thoroughly developed and consequently are more deliverable than are projects that come from other partners.

18.3 ROCHESTER-OLMSTEAD COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

The Rochester-Olmstead Council of Governments director also feels that MPOs compete well because "they have better planning and a well-prepared list of projects to bring to the table. The Rochester area benefits from the bulk of the ATP projects. He stated that the MPO has "allowed us to be ahead in readiness to do things, to identify and document needs, to convince the other members that we have greater needs." The director observed that "Mn/DOT's role was to move the state away from a political process more to a rational investment process. This ATP process allows MPOs to do very well." The director added that the District 6 ATP process has successfully developed a ranking process that looks at selecting projects based upon a criteria of "what is the best investment for that region."

18.4 LA CROSSE AREA PLANNING COMMISSION

The director of the La Crosse Area Planning Commission stated that he "sends representatives to District 6 ATP, but there is little that we gain. Ninety-five percent of the population is on the Wisconsin side." He noted that the Rochester-Olmstead MPO dominates the District 6 ATP process, and only one La Crosse-La Crescent area project is contained in the current STIP. From his Wisconsin-based perspective, he had a concern about the legitimacy of Minnesota's ATP process:

> There is a question about whether the ATP is really sanctioned by FHWA. Depending upon who you talk to, there is a different interpretation about what is recognized federal policy. For example, Wisconsin has gotten permission from FHWA in Chicago to say that the ten percent setaside for enhancements are not required. The setaside is required in federal law, but states do not have to budget for enhancements. Because of legislative action, Wisconsin has greatly reduced its funding of enhancements.

The director feels that "very little has changed with the passage of ISTEA with regard to the role and responsibility of the MPO in designating projects."[28] The MPO is given a list of projects that the state wants included and the MPO adds them to the TIP.

18.5 DULUTH-SUPERIOR METROPOLITAN INTERSTATE COMMITTEE

The Arrowhead Regional Development Commission and the Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Committee have had a long-standing working relationship with Mn/DOT District 1. Nonetheless, the MPO Director noted some concerns:

> We have some of the same concerns on the bi-state issues as the other bi-state MPOs. Even though the dates for project submittal differs, Wisconsin has let Minnesota's process take the lead. Wisconsin has kept the allocation method in place so we know

> how much money we have to deal with. We prioritize the projects accordingly. On the Minnesota side, it's a 'crap-shoot.' We don't have a regional plan in place, even though planning has been done, there is nothing that identifies priorities. From an MPO perspective, we have fared well, but I wouldn't say we have been funding priorities. We have been forwarding projects that we think have the best chances of receiving funding rather than addressing our highest needs.

He added that to truly coordinate projects and needs for the entire region, "We would like to see all the funding laid on the table to see what type of options there are - state, counties, and local funding."

The former MPO director for the Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Committee added that "although we have a good relationship with the District Engineer, that could change in the future if he should leave." He also said, "Every ATP runs differently. In Duluth we have been successful in getting local projects funded; for example, we have had a complete replacement of transit vehicles."

In a follow-up memo,[29] the present director suggested an additional point regarding MPOs and the requirements of ISTEA:

> Since the passage of ISTEA, transportation planning and programming have undertaken a dramatic change. In the past, decisions concerning the planning and programming were largely made by Mn/DOT. Now, local authorities, especially MPOs, wield more of the power to make resource allocation decisions. For small MPOs (under 200,000), ISTEA requires the state to collaborate with the MPO in the decision-making process.
>
> In making these resource decisions, MPOs need to follow a planning process prescribed by ISTEA. This process has resulted in better planning and in a better link between planning and programming, but it has come at an additional cost. The increase in ISTEA planning funds has not kept pace with additional demands and responsibilities. There are two examples: Additional public participation process was required, and financially constrained plans and programs mean you can't plan or program for what is anticipated. In the past, you could plan for what your needs are. There was an increase in funding for planning, but the increase did not match the scale of increased requirements.

18.6 FARGO-MOORHEAD METROPOLITAN INTERSTATE COMMITTEE

The Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Interstate Committee director sees the metropolitan area as representing a transportation network that functions as a system. He believes it should be accepted and "empowered" as a system. In his view:

> The ATP's partners do not see themselves as being a part of this metropolitan system. The ATP is primarily oriented toward a regional allocation of funds within Minnesota to maintain the existing rural and state transportation system. Occasionally, for example, on interstate highways or enhancement projects, there have been examples of interstate collaborative efforts. The ATPs are not planning institutions, rather, they rely upon the planning done by regional organizations when and where they exist, and none exist in western Minnesota. The MPOs have a long tradition of transportation planning, of thinking systematically, and have demonstrated the ability to maintain and develop a complex intermodal system.

He felt that the ATP process tends to connect the rest of Minnesota to the Twin Cities because that is the long-held and predominant philosophy with Mn/DOT. He believes that until very recently, Mn/DOT officials tended to view their transportation responsibilities as a "closed system" that ended or faded at or near state boundaries. This attitude originated from their perspective that was oriented toward internal, instead of external movements. He offered an example from his experience as an RDC Director in southwest Minnesota:

> Sioux Falls, South Dakota serves as the market area and travel-shed for a large part of Southwest Minnesota, but this kind of travel need was not readily viewed as a priority for Mn/DOT. The coordination between Mn/DOT and SD/DOT was weak. The expectation was that people want to get to the Twin Cities. However, for many persons in bi-state MPOs and the people from the rural region surrounding these MPOs, they see St. Paul as the center of their government; but that's not where they work, move their commodities, do business, go to college, seek health care, or find entertainment opportunities. In fact, their travel patterns are often toward bi-state MPO areas. The ATPs have little knowledge to embrace the transportation needs of other states, or the 'fringe areas located between the states.' Thus, projects that fall into these jurisdictionally 'gray areas,' whether in bi-state MPOs, small bi-state cities, or rural bi-state areas, are not fully understood.

He believes bi-state MPOs are trying to develop a transportation system that serves their metropolitan area and provides key linkages for the flow of goods and people in and out of the metropolitan areas. Such cities are islands of growth and are the "economic engines" that drive the entire region. He noted that instead of always implementing their priorities (new construction or major reconstruction projects that address capacity or growth needs), we "pitch" and to obtain projects the ATP feels are priorities, such as rehabilitation or preservation projects. An expensive, new or urban arterial reconstruction project is nearly impossible to get through the ATP process. This is because the ATP's goals are predominately oriented toward maintenance of interstates or state highways.

The Fargo-Moorhead director suggested that MPOs should be allowed to have a direct setaside of ATP funds to distribute in their metropolitan area and possibly the surrounding rural fringe that is linked to the metropolitan areas. He added that the majority of the ATP target still should be cooperatively allocated for regional projects. Such a situation exists in the Metro 8-County ATP and its process has worked well. He stated that "the local officials in his MPO do

not feel the current allocation process is fully satisfactory because non-MPO interests tend to dominate the decisions affecting bi-state MPOs." He feels that MPOs are better positioned to "set transportation priorities and determine linkages."

Overall, he noted that the ATP process has worked better than originally expected from a bi-state MPO perspective. However, he feels that since the ATPs and ISTEA are evolving, "empowerment of the MPOs would be an appropriate next step in Mn/DOT's decentralization process."

18.7 METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

The Metropolitan Council's representative noted that the MPO serving the Twin Cities is unique because it covers almost the entire ATP. Federal regulations give additional planning and programming responsibilities to the larger MPO's with a population over 200,000. Because of this, the Metropolitan Council has a specific ISTEA suballocation and the right to set its own investment priorities. The area has had a long standing cooperative process, for twenty years, to determine the investment of STP money (previously FAU), but only within the MPO boundaries.

The ATP for the metro area is nearly coterminous with the MPO boundaries. The Metro 8-County ATP includes only one county, Chisago, that is not part of the MPO area. The seven counties comprising the MPO have the vast majority of the population, road mileage, and geographic area of the ATP. The MPO portion of the region has a regional comprehensive planning process and all of the local units of government are mandated by state law to prepare local comprehensive plans consistent with regional plans. Chisago County is not required to prepare a plan, nor is it required to coordinate with the Metropolitan Council's regional plans. For these reasons, according to the MPO director, the relationship between the MPO and Chisago County has been one of the major issues in implementing the ATP. This is discussed in detail in the case study.

18.8 GENERAL DISCUSSION OF ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

In a general discussion, the MPO directors identified these additional issues:

- While there is a need for an MPO guarantee, there is a danger of losing a sense of the region if there is a continued move toward an earmarking or sub-allocation system between local and state investments.

- There is a lack of criteria for making investments. One director asked, "Where can we best grow the state? Do we put the money into roads in areas where there has been a pattern of declining populations for twenty, thirty years, or in the areas like the mid-size cities where

there is growth?" Directors acknowledged that "this is a very dangerous discussion that has never happened at the ATP level."

- Because MPO plans are fiscally constrained, there is no way to advance all the projects identified by their travel demand models. There is no way for the system to accommodate growth scenarios. ATPs, because of constraints, do not fund corridor studies or right-of-way acquisition, both of which are essential in rapidly growing MPO areas.

- There is no way a mega-project will ever be funded because "it would take all of an ATP's locally earmarked money for several years."

- The larger MPOs like the Met Council get an ISTEA sub-allocation that is theirs to invest. If the smaller MPOs had a similar pot of money to work with, they could strengthen their planning process by setting their own investment priorities.

- The ATP partners, with the exception of MPOs, do not have to show consistency between land-use plans and their project selection process. Non-MPO jurisdictions should be required to do comprehensive planning, access management, and corridor preservation.

- Jurisdictions required to participate in the MPO planning process pay thousands of local dollars to fulfill the federal transportation planning requirements. For example, "local dollars to support the St. Cloud MPO transportation planning process totaled more than $121,000 in 1996. This local investment has been ever-increasing on an annual basis since 1970." Non-MPO jurisdictions do not put any local money into the transportation planning process, yet the ATP process places all partners on an equal basis.

VOLUME II ENDNOTES

[1] US Census Bureau -- 1980 and 1990 population; Minnesota Planning, MN population 2020 forecast.
[2] 1994 Minnesota Transit Report.
[3] The processes and practices are different in each ATP; however, since this study focused particular attention on the NE ATP processes and practices, this case study contains more detailed information.
[4] Fieldnotes from phone conversation with District Engineer, March, 1996.
[5] February 1, 1996 memo to District 1 Engineer, ARDC Transportation Director and ATP Chair from ARDC bicycle and pedestrian representative.
[6] ARDC "Principles of the Regional Transportation Plan," Draft May 1, 1995.
[7] Minnesota Planning, MN households 1990; Regional Economic Information Services
[8] US Census Bureau.
[9] Census information (1980 and 1990), provided by the Minnesota Planning Office.
[10] Raisanen, Donald L. Office memo sent to Al Schenkelburg, Office of Investment Management. May 24, 1994. Subject: District 3 - Area Transportation Partnership FY 1995-97 Regional Transportation Improvement Program Submittal. The RTIP was recently named ATIP.
[11] Regional Economic Information Services.
[12] US Census Bureau information contained in documents furnished by Mn/DOT.
[13] 1994 Minnesota Transit Report.
[14] Minnesota Planning forecast.
[15] Southwest Area Transportation Partnership Policies, Procedures and Guidance Manual Draft April 1996, Part III.
[16] Ibid., Appendix D.
[17] Southwest Area Transportation Partnership Policies, Procedures and Guidance Manual Draft, April 1996, Appendix E.
[18] Ibid., Appendix C.
[19] U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 Population; and Minnesota Planning-Mn population 2020 forecast.
[20] Draft Prospectus for the Transportation Planning Process Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, April 1996, Prepared by the Metropolitan Council.
[21] Mn/DOT 1996-1998 STIP. Page II-8.
[22] Documents are available through the Minnesota Department of Administration, St. Paul, MN
[23] This philosophy was articulated in Transportation Research Board Paper Number 910072. The paper is entitled, "Minnesota Department of Transportation in the Marketplace." Presented while serving as a Mn/DOT District Engineer, the paper states: "The Northwest District of Minnesota Department of Transportation recognized the need to change nearly 16 years ago. Initially, a new vision was created that identified the 'real bosses' as being transportation clients (timber producers, tourists, sugar beet farmers, etc.) and not the internal

'regulatory' approach to clients was replaced with 'finding a way to say yes' to our clients." Bob Wolfe and Mark Anderson, January, 1991.

[24] Edge of the Wilderness Community Right to be Rural Legislative Hearing, September 16, 1996.

[25] Mn/DOT/PLAN: A Transportation Plan for the State of Minnesota. Minnesota Department of Transportation document, 1978.

[26] Testimony before the Minnesota Senate's Transportation Committee, "Rural Initiative Coalition's Position Statement Regarding Distribution of Federal Transportation Funds," presented by Brian Shorten, Executive Director, Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments, February 10, 1993.

[27] Meeting Agenda, Minnesota MPO Directors, October 23, 1996.

[28] Letter from Lawrence Kirsch, Director of Planning, La Crosse Area Planning Committee, to Gary DeCramer, November 4, 1996.

[29] When MPO directors were invited to review and comment on the first draft of this section of the report, Len Simich, Metropolitan Interstate Committee, provided a memo to Gary DeCramer entitled "Comments on ATP process," November 1, 1996. A follow-up phone call on November 4 to Gary Tonkin, the former MPO director, provided additional clarification.