



Gainesville - Hall
Metropolitan Planning Organization

GHMPO

Flowery Branch - Gainesville - Hall County - Oakwood

Project Evaluation Criteria

Adopted November 14, 2006 by GHMPO Policy Committee

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Introduction

This document describes the process for evaluating and prioritizing projects for inclusion in the GHMPO Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The GHMPO designed this process to assist with developing the LRTP and TIP in a fiscally-constrained environment.

The following guiding principles framed the GHMPO's design of the project evaluation process:

- The evaluation of projects should be linked to the adopted goals of the LRTP as well as required SAFETEA-LU planning factors.
- Each project should be evaluated based on its contribution to attaining the GHMPO's LRTP goals.
- The criteria used to evaluate projects should include a mix of quantitative criteria (objective) and expertise-based criteria (objective and subjective).
- The input of the GHMPO Committee members, which are representative of the region's stakeholders, should be appropriately integrated into the development of the prioritization criteria and process.

The LRTP goals articulated by the GHMPO encompass three broad areas:

1. Provide an integrated multimodal and intermodal transportation system that includes more options to provide the desired level of accessibility and mobility of people and goods.
2. Develop a transportation system that is safe, efficient, conserves energy, and promotes the attainment of air quality standards, and take steps to ensure the maintenance of that system.
3. Integrate transportation planning with land use decisions and other comprehensive planning tools to support economic development goals and enhance the area's quality of life.

With these items as a foundation, the GHMPO designed the process to facilitate an evaluation of projects in a manner that is credible and understandable, and

that can be conducted within the framework of available GHMPO resources and capabilities.

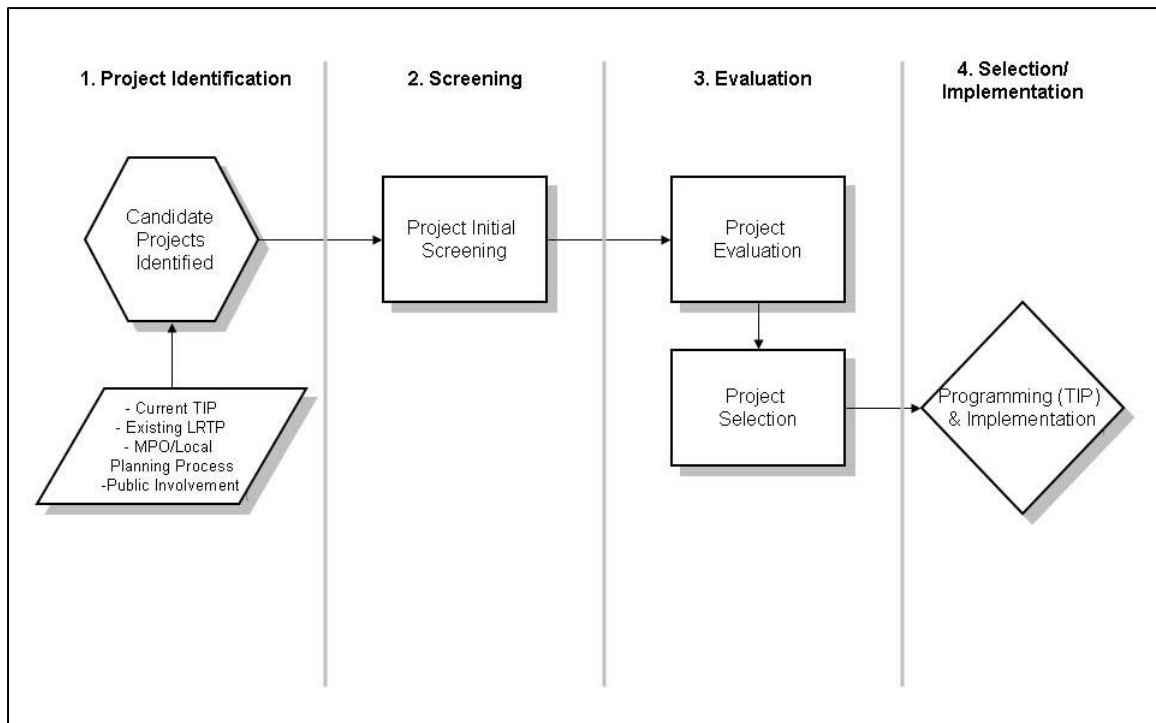
The Project Evaluation Process

As shown in **Exhibit 1** below, the project evaluation process consists of four steps:

1. Project Identification;
2. Project Screening;
3. Project Evaluation; and
4. Project Selection/Implementation.

Each step is dependent on inputs from the prior step; the process therefore works in a logical, “building-block” manner.

Exhibit 1: Overview of GHMPO Project Evaluation Process



Step 1: Project Identification

The first step in the process is to identify the pool of projects that are candidates for evaluation and prioritization. For each LRTP and TIP Update cycle, projects may be identified based on information and input from a variety of sources. These may include:

- Committed projects already in the current Transportation Improvement Program (TIP);
- Projects identified and prioritized in the existing LRTP;
- Projects identified through the ongoing MPO planning process and local and state government transportation studies; and/or
- Projects identified through an ongoing public involvement process.

Step 2: Initial Project Screening

The pool of candidate projects for prioritization identified in Step 1 now needs to be screened to determine each project's basic feasibility. Key considerations include local support and potential fatal flaws posing significant obstacles to project implementation. The screening of each project should ask the following questions:

- Is the project included or justified in an adopted/approved local plan or program?
- Is the project sponsored by a GHMPO member organization, with a demonstration of financial commitment to the project?
- Have any known or documented constructability, implementation or community support problems affecting the project been considered?

The GHMPO will use the answers to these questions to determine whether to move a project forward into the prioritization process (Step 3). It is important to recognize that a "no" answer to any of the screening questions does not necessarily mean a project cannot move into the evaluation process. The GHMPO will need to consider the circumstances and context associated with a project that does not pass this screening and may decide, based on these considerations, that the project is still eligible for advancement.

A project that does not meet the initial screening criteria may be identified for informational purposes in an LRTP appendix of “conceptual projects” outside of fiscal constraint. The GHMPO may also decide to not further consider such a project and drop it from the project list.

For projects that the GHMPO has previously endorsed in the existing LRTP and/or TIP, the GHMPO Committees will need to decide whether these projects should be re-evaluated in light of the current planning environment. To make this determination, the GHMPO Committees should consider issues such as the level of activity (such as ROW acquisition), if any, that has already occurred or is programmed to occur for a given project or what priority has another agency (such as GDOT or a jurisdiction) determined for a given project.

Step 3: Project Evaluation

The general approach for evaluating projects identified for the LRTP involves assessing each candidate project against a set of goal-based criteria and using those results in determining project importance. The GHMPO developed the criteria based on the established LRTP goals and objectives and input from the GHMPO Committee. For each criterion, a project is evaluated based on its impact or how effectively it addresses that criterion.

3.1. Evaluation Criteria and Definitions

The following describes each of the criteria under the three LRTP goal areas.

GOAL A: Transportation/Travel Improvement & Efficiency

1. **Supports SAFETEA-LU Planning Factors** – Assesses the extent to which the project supports the eight required federal planning factors under SAFETEA-LU.
2. **Results In Improved Travel Safety** - Assesses the extent to which the project addresses identified travel safety problems in the GHMPO region. Such problems may include, but not be limited to, high accident locations, areas with high levels of pedestrian-vehicle interfacing, roadway segments with higher than average accident rates, etc.

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3. **Provides Long-Term Mitigation For Congested Facilities** – Assesses the extent to which the project helps reduce congestion on regional facilities. The evaluation of a project under this criterion should consider whether it provides a long-term congestion mitigation solution or a short-term congestion relief action that will likely require further action within the next few years.
 4. **Expands Multimodal Options For People And/Or Goods** – Assesses the extent to which a project provides either non-single occupant vehicle (non-SOV) transportation options or access to non-SOV transportation options for people and/or goods movement. Such projects may include public transit services, intermodal facilities (people or freight), park and ride lots, bikepaths/multi-use paths, airport access facilities, etc.
 5. **Improves Efficiency Of Transportation System Through Non-Capacity Means** – Assesses the extent to which a project improves the ability of people and goods to travel within, to and/or from the GHMPO region through means other than adding highway capacity. Such projects may include traffic signal timing/optimization technologies and initiatives, intelligent transportation systems (ITS) installations for traffic monitoring and reports, transit information systems, intersection operations improvements, etc.
 6. **Improves Connectivity With Areas Outside The Region** – Assesses the extent to which a project helps improve travel options, efficiency and effectiveness that connect the GHMPO region with areas outside the region. Such projects may be passenger and/or freight-specific, may be any mode, and may include facility capacity expansion, entirely new facilities, or some combination of these.

GOAL B: Community and Environmental Impact

1. **Contributes to Environmental Justice (EJ) Goals** – Assesses the extent to which a project supports an equitable distribution of transportation investment across the GHMPO region.
2. **Supports Achievement Of Air Quality Conformity** – Assesses the extent to which the project contributes to the goals and objectives of the Georgia State Implementation Plan (SIP) for achieving compliance with National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS).

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3. **Supports Preservation Of Environment** – Assesses the extent to which the project would have direct development or construction impacts on the environment, including wetlands, historical resources, endangered species and GHMPO region’s identified natural and open spaces.

GOAL C: Economic and Regional Development

1. **Supports Achievement Of Regional Land Use Goals/Plans** – Assesses how well the project complies with or clearly supports the achievement of regional, county and local land use goals and plans.
2. **Supports Regional Economic Development** – Assesses the extent to which the project supports or enhances the addition of economic activity and/or jobs in the GHMPO region. This will allow for fast tracking new or existing projects for economic development purposes.
3. **Helps Preserve/Reinvest In Targeted Communities/Subareas** – Assesses the extent to which the project provides transportation investment directly within, or for facilities that support, specially-targeted communities or subareas within the GHMPO region. Such communities and areas may include those designated as economically distressed, historically or architecturally significant, and/or of special regional interest (per a formal governmental process).

Exhibit 2: Evaluation Table for GHMPO Projects

L RTP Goals & Supporting Evaluation Criteria
GOAL A: Transportation/Travel Improvement & Efficiency
1. Supports SAFETEA-LU planning factors
2. Results in improved travel safety
3. Provides long-term mitigation for congested facilities
4. Expands multimodal options for people and/or goods
5. Improves efficiency of transportation system through non-capacity means
6. Improves connectivity with areas outside the region
GOAL B: Community and Environmental Impact
1. Contributes to Environmental Justice goals
2. Supports achievement of AQ conformity
3. Supports preservation of natural and open space
GOAL C: Economic & Regional Development
1. Supports achievement of regional land use goals/plans
2. Supports regional economic development
3. Helps preserve/reinvest in targeted communities/subareas

Step 4: Project Selection/Implementation

The final step in the project prioritization and development process is project selection. The term “selection” relates to actual project implementation (rather than “prioritization”) and therefore relates directly to the programming of funds in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Project selection is therefore an element of the TIP and financing programming process. It is an important follow-on to the LRTP project prioritization process, however, in that the TIP is the means by which the LRTP is implemented.

Project selection criteria may include:

- Funding availability and commitment (state/regional/local);
- Political support;
- Public support; and/or
- Existence of supportive planning, environmental and engineering studies.