

Project Summary Report 8195

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Local Transportation and Land Use Coordination: *Tools and Gaps*

http://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/planning/smart_trans.shtml

Introduction

The effective coordination of transportation and land use planning decisions is vital to Montana’s long-term economic growth and fiscal well being. Toward this end, this research project entailed a best practices study of land use and transportation planning across the United States, with a particular focus on issues and strategies relevant to Montana. The main resulting research product, the [Montana Transportation and Land Use Resources for Growing Communities](#), is drawn from the information developed through the study as well as surveys and discussions with land use planners and transportation professionals across the State.

This online resource illustrates successful tool application in communities throughout Montana and similar states through a series of examples and cross-cutting case studies. Tools and tool implementation strategies can be accessed by category or a “How do I?” list of typical questions and situations often faced by local planners as they seek to coordinate land

use and transportation planning. This online resource also provides an overview of transportation planning in this state and links to key transportation planning resources in Montana and around the nation.

Development of this online resource centered around four research objectives to facilitate coordinated transportation and land use planning in growing Montana communities throughout different phases of implementation:

- Development and extension of local street networks;
- Local transportation system financing;
- Assessment of development impacts on local and state roads; and
- Directions for multimodal and transit development.

What we did

The research plan included five work tasks, as illustrated in Figure 1. The research effort began with a

literature review of national planning practices combined with a more focused review of the formal regulatory context and informal procedures that influence transportation and land use practices in Montana. This combined review uncovered hundreds of examples of planning practice that had potential application in Montana. The material was assembled into themes that related to the four research objectives, and then subjected to a rigorous analysis that produced a short list of potential tools for this web-based resource.

After review with the research panel, this shortlist of potential content was organized into a sequence of web mock-ups that allowed comparison of alternatives for structuring the online resource and accessing the content. After multiple rounds of mockup review, a conceptual structure was selected and the content was reorganized and expanded to populate the resource web site.

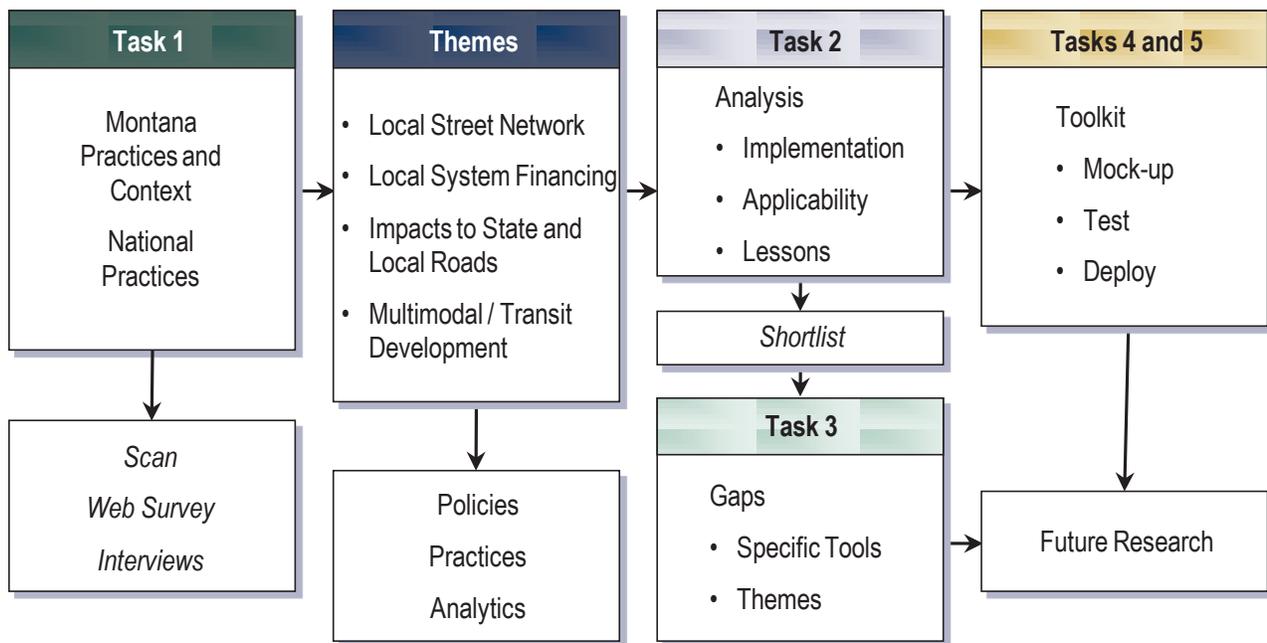


Figure 1. Research Plan

While the online resource was under development, a gap analysis was undertaken to identify promising but underdeveloped planning approaches for further research and/or development in subsequent efforts.

The research plan included several activities to begin the process of integrating these resources into Montana’s local transportation and land use planning practices:

- Several rounds of stakeholder interviews and outreach were conducted to identify needs and potential content, and to review the draft web site.
- A Transportation and Land Use Summit was held in conjunction with the Montana Association of Planners (MAP) 2009 conference to formally introduce the draft web site and gather feedback and suggestions for final development.
- Web-based seminars, or [webinars](#), were held to demonstrate the final web site to Montana’s transportation and land use planning community.
- A two-page [informational brochure](#) describing the online resource was developed for potential distribution by MDT and panel members

during normal coordination activities with local jurisdictions and transportation professionals throughout Montana.

What we found

This research project resulted in the creation of a web-based resource of policies, practices, analytic methods, data sources, software and other ideas – collectively known as tools – to assist Montana’s expanding cities and surrounding areas in better coordinating transportation and land use planning and decision-making. This resource is oriented to local transportation and land use planners, and features “off-the-shelf” tools now in use in the state and nationally that are practical for application in Montana and nationally.

The online resource is organized by four major tool categories (coordination and consensus building; policy and planning, financing; and technical analysis) and includes 33 unique tool implementation strategies. It illustrates successful tool application in communities throughout Montana and similar states through a series of examples

and cross-cutting case studies. The home page is illustrated in Figure 2.

The online resource is not a prescription for local transportation and land use planning. Rather, it is, itself, the product of ongoing transportation and land use planning and coordination activities in local communities throughout Montana and other states. Through explanations, examples, and links to other resources, this web site illustrates how other local communities have approached transportation and land use issues faced by small, growing cities and communities.

The research project also identified promising but underdeveloped planning approaches for potential research and/or development. These “gaps” in practice and available information were found to be particularly acute for small, rapidly growing communities. The research team identified 23 specific gaps at the tool subcategory and tool implementation levels. The team classified six of these 23 gaps as high-priority:

- Paying for transportation in smaller, rapidly growing communities;
- Transferable processes and data for community-level transportation analysis in smaller communities;
- Multijurisdictional approaches and incentives for smaller communities;
- Multimodal transportation system needs and opportunities in smaller communities;
- Staff-level training resources to improve community and interagency communication; and
- Effective growth policies and success stories.

These six high-priority gaps were developed as draft research problem/topic statements.

What the researchers recommend

This online resource is a living research product, and its value will grow through implementation and continuing updates. Outreach and training activities conducted to date must be viewed as initial deployment efforts. This resource should be maintained, inquiries answered, and its content regularly refreshed.

The experience of the research team is that the shelf-life of such web-based tools can be quite short. The planning profession and the regulatory and political environment in which planners operate constantly change. The type of information needed by planners also changes. For this resource to be successful as a credible, source of information in the long-term, it should be kept up-to-date and expanded over time to reflect changing issues and emerging practices.

Toward this end, the research process has resulted in the following specific recommendations:

- Implementation activities for the next two years should be led by the MDT Rail, Transit, and Planning Division, with Division leadership



Figure 2. Online Resources Home page

- appointing a motivated staff person to serve as the “face” of this resource to establish partnerships, communicate with users, and identify opportunities to update the information or develop new material.
- Implementation should be founded on solid marketing and direct communication with user groups. All MDT staff that coordinate with Montana’s local planners should be familiar with this resource and prepared to discuss it during their coordination activities with local communities.
- During the two-year initial implementation period, MDT should demonstrate commitment to web site users. In part, we suggest promptly responding to all inquiries and input on the online resource.

- Quarterly updates should be undertaken during the first year, with updates decreasing to semi-annually thereafter. More comprehensive overhauls should be considered every two years.
- All updates should be announced on the resources home page and by e-mail to Montana’s planning community.
- More basic issues such as broken links, inaccurate content, grammar errors, and similar items should be corrected on a semi-monthly basis.
- Long-term hosting options should continue to be explored during the initial two-year implementation period.
- MDT should seek research funding to address the six primary gaps.

For More Details . . .

The research is documented in Report FHWA/MT-10-002/8195, *Local Transportation and Land Use Coordination: Tools and Gaps*

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Implementation activities related to the website resources will include: (1) routine, general maintenance of the site's functionality; (2) quick response to questions and comments by users; (3) promotion of the resource to user groups; and (4) periodic and regular enhancements through additions, updates, and replacements of substantive content. In the near term, these efforts will be managed internally by the MDT Rail, Transit, and Planning Division. The six identified research gaps will be considered for funding at the departmental level and, as appropriate, communicated to peers who might help refine these ideas and support them as research efforts at the regional or national levels.

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