

STEP 5

ALTERNATIVES

In order to develop a list of potential alternatives, you first must start with an open slate; no boundaries, no limits, and no restrictions. This section of the transportation plan can become highly technical and may warrant professional traffic engineering assistance.

The transportation plan is guided by the local community's goals for development as expressed in the comprehensive plan or land-use plan. It is also important to consider the current conditions of travel and the transportation system as well as community attitudes toward various transportation services and facilities.

Lastly, political, financial, and institutional factors will also have important influence on the alternatives that are recommended for inclusion in the transportation plan. Alternatives should be analyzed against a set of criteria that is based on all of these factors.

DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVES

Before you can understand how potential alternatives will affect the transportation system, you have to understand the existing system. Assessing the performance of the existing roadway system under current and future conditions, as discussed in Steps 3 and 4, will identify the baseline condition.

The first alternative to consider is to do nothing except routine maintenance; this is a "no build" or "do nothing" alternative. The "do nothing" alternative demonstrates what and why improvements are needed and can be useful to justify funding. In the longer-term, pursuing a "do-nothing" alternative can have extensive opportunity costs for maintaining a transportation system that does not maximize its contribution to the community.

The next step is to evaluate any previously planned improvements to determine if they will meet the future needs of the community. If not, these planned improvements should be reconsidered.

If a "do nothing" alternative and previously planned improvements are not sufficient to meet the needs of the community, other alternatives need to be developed and considered. Several packages of alternative improvement options that provide additional travel capacity, options, and safety should be considered. These alternatives may include a variety of modes, new facilities, different policies, or merely different levels of improvement.

The following steps should be used to develop and evaluate alternatives:

- Determine a set of evaluation criteria and that has the approval of the Steering Committee. These factors should cover economic, social, environmental, mobility, and safety considerations.

- Develop a list of potential improvements, policies, and strategies that advance the community's goals and objectives as determined in Step 1, and satisfy the existing and forecast future transportation needs as determined in Steps 3 and 4.
 - Physical improvements to consider:
 - Capital projects that improve capacity, condition, drainage, etc.
 - Spot improvements at individual intersections or locations
 - Policies to consider:
 - Maintenance program enhancements
 - Access management principles
 - Traffic calming measures
 - Development regulation enhancements
 - Land use and zoning requirements
 - Alternative mode options to consider:
 - Sidewalk systems and crosswalks
 - Multi-use trails
 - Transit opportunities
- Conduct analyses of proposed alternatives based on the criteria identified earlier to determine which alternatives, policies, and strategies would be most effective in meeting the transportation needs. Some of the alternatives may require more thorough assessment or technical evaluation.
- Assess the feasibility of the alternatives. Are they achievable financially? What impacts might the alternative have on adjacent properties? Are there other alternatives that may be more efficient or acceptable to the community for a similar cost?
- Recommend preferred alternatives for consideration by the Steering Committee, community officials, and the general public.

Municipal boards and committees will consider the recommended preferred alternatives from the Steering Committee and make the decision of whether or not to adopt the transportation plan based on these recommendations. Including members of these boards and committees that are not already on the Steering Committee in the evaluation of alternatives can go a long way in ensuring that the transportation planning process is successful.