

Frequently Asked Questions – CHATS Long Range Plan

Q: What is CHATS?

A: CHATS is a regional transportation planning partnership serving the BCD metropolitan area. CHATS stands for Charleston Area Transportation Study, a name that was chosen when the organization was founded in the 1960's. CHATS is a federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which means it has the responsibility for setting priorities for federal transportation spending in the region. In South Carolina, there are 10 MPOs, including CHATS, that work in partnership with federal agencies, the SC Department of Transportation, and local residents and jurisdictions.

Q: Why do regional transportation planning?

A: Because many of the transportation challenges facing our area are regional in nature. Roads and transit networks do not generally stop at city or county boundaries, and growth from one area often can create traffic in another. Working together, a regional partnership is the best way to take a "big picture" look at these issues, and decide what is the best way to address them.

Q: What is the Long Range Plan and why do we need to update it?

A: The Long Range Plan describes current and projected transportation conditions in the region, outlines priorities and parameters for project selection, and lists specific transportation improvement projects that need to be completed. If a project is not included in the scope of the Long Range Plan, it is not eligible for federal funding through the MPO. The plan needs to be updated regularly (federal regulations say every 3-5 years) so that it accurately reflects the changing conditions of our transportation network.

Q: What is NOT in the Long Range Plan?

A: The Long Range Plan typically does not list specific maintenance and repair projects, such as road resurfacing. These are prioritized on an ongoing basis in accordance with stated policies. The Long Range Plan also does not cover improvements to rural facilities outside of the urbanized area.

Q: How does this plan impact me?

A: The Long Range Plan sets the priorities for what transportation improvements happen in your community. If you drive, walk, bicycle, or ride in the community, you interact with our transportation network. If a specific project or improvement is important to you – including a particular road improvement, a transit route, or a bicycle/pedestrian facility – you need to have your voice heard.

Q: How are projects prioritized?

A: There are a combination of strategies used. Quantitative analysis is conducted using data on road traffic volume, accident rates, travel patterns, and other statistics about the functioning of the transportation system. Much of this information is input into a computerized transportation model, which projects future traffic volumes on area roads, and is used to analyze the relative impacts of various proposed improvements. Public input is also very important, identifying the priorities and needs in the community. There are a variety of ways to get involved in the process – make sure to let us know if you would like to be.

Q: How realistic are the priorities in the Long Range Plan?

A: The Long Range Plan is mandated to be a "fiscally constrained" plan. In other words, a project cannot be included unless a means is identified to fund it.

Q: How will projects be funded?

A: The largest source of funding for transportation improvements in South Carolina are the state and federal gas taxes. Other financing tools are available, but may require a special action from either local or state level decision makers. The annual funding program – called the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) – shows the current allocation of funding for projects in the area.