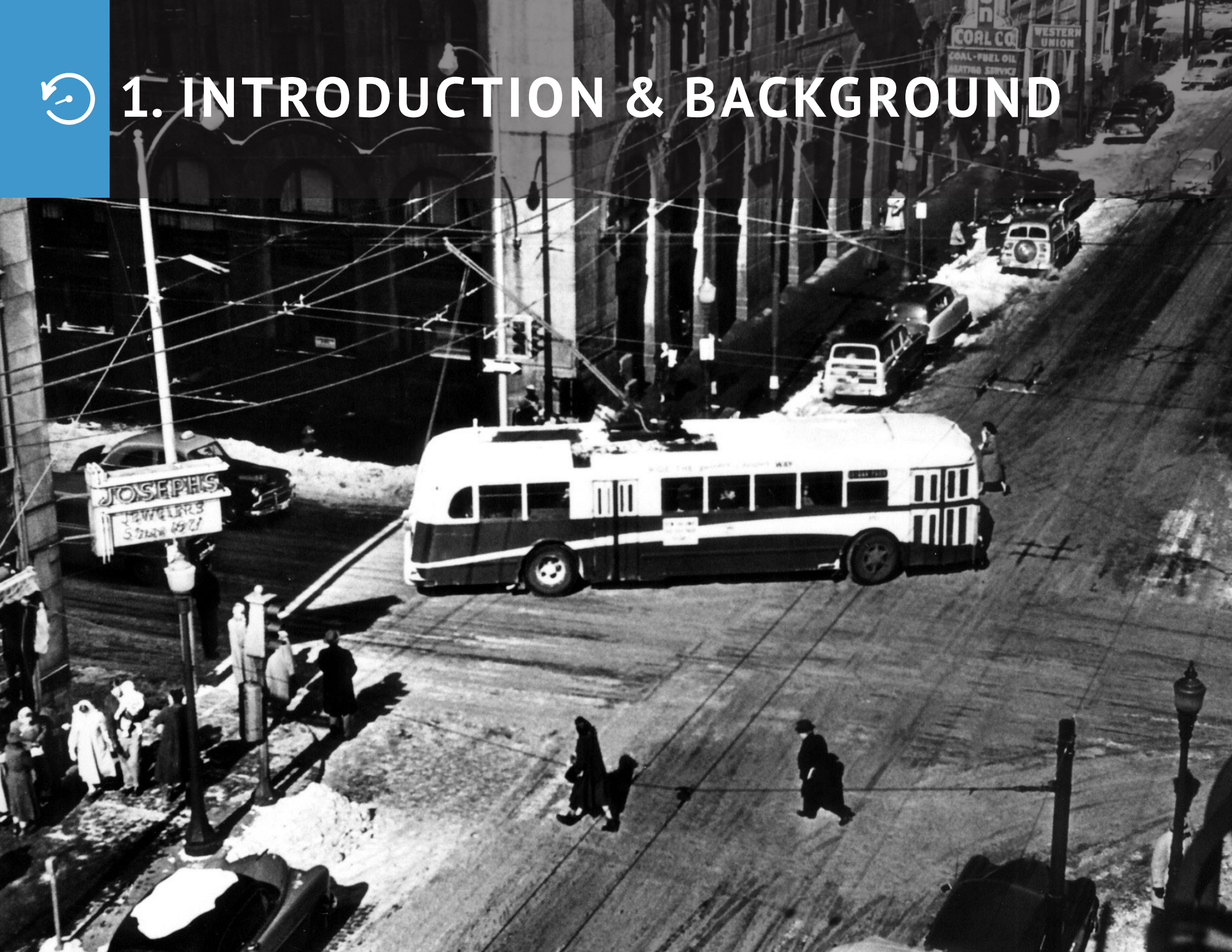




# 1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND





# 1.1. What's the Plan?

Iowans use our robust public transit system to get them where they need to go. Whether shuttling commuters to and from work to reduce congestion, getting people to their medical appointments on time, or transporting folks to shopping or entertainment venues, public transit strives to easily connect everyone in the most practical, efficient, and safe means possible. To make our system even stronger, the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT), working with our transit agency partners and interested stakeholders, is developing this Public Transit Long Range Plan (Plan) to efficiently utilize limited resources to support an effective statewide public transit system.

## Why are we updating the Plan?

Planning is collaborative process, and plans are in a continuous cycle of being developed, implemented, assessed, and revised. While the process itself is cyclical, one of its major milestones and culminating products is the publication of a long-range plan. This Plan is a product that documents the understanding of trends leading up to the current situation, identifies needs and gaps that exist now or may in the future, and presents courses of action to address those needs through efficient allocation of resources.

Long-range transportation plans, such as the Iowa Public Transit Long Range Plan and its umbrella multi-modal plan, Iowa in Motion 2045<sup>1</sup>, are generally updated every five years in order to stay current with the contemporary operating environment, emerging trends, legislation, funding, and technological developments. As situations develop and factors change, the Plan also needs to adapt. Results from previous planning efforts and newly collected data help us evaluate, anticipate, and respond to changing needs. In this Plan, we are projecting these changing needs out to the planning horizon years of 2030 and 2050. This enables us to set long-term goals far into the future, while also working to implement short-term objectives.

1. Iowa in Motion 2045: <https://iowadot.gov/iowainmotion>

The analysis and forecasts in the early portion of the Plan represent a systematic process of looking at variables that influence public transit demand in Iowa. During this process, we can identify gaps or redundancies in service and work to adjust to changing needs. These strategies are more broadly characterized as “rightsizing” to better align the statewide public transit system. Some of these key concepts were utilized as part of the vision statement to describe the intended outcome of this Plan’s implementation: “A public transit system that supports the physical, social, and economic wellbeing of Iowans, provides enhanced mobility and travel choices, and accommodates the unique needs of dependent and choice riders through rightsized solutions.”

## Where does this process start?

The last comprehensive statewide public transit plan was the Iowa in Motion Transit Plan, adopted in 1999. Since that plan, the Iowa DOT has conducted more specific planning efforts including the Iowa Statewide Passenger Transportation Funding Study<sup>2</sup> in 2009, the Iowa Park and Ride System Plan<sup>3</sup> in 2014, and the Iowa DOT Transit Asset Management Group Plan<sup>4</sup> in 2018.

While these plans and studies each have their specific focus, this Plan looks at the public transit system more comprehensively. This will enable Iowa’s public transit partners to take a refreshed look at public transit from today’s perspective. This Plan will seek to coordinate planning, programming, and technical assistance statewide to support public transit operations at the local level. The goal with the newly updated Plan is to provide specific strategies and improvements that can be implemented and revisited over time.

1 Iowa in Motion 2045: <https://iowadot.gov/iowainmotion>

2 Iowa Statewide Passenger Transportation Funding Study: [https://iowadot.gov/transit/regulations/Exec\\_Summary\\_Final\\_12-15-09.pdf](https://iowadot.gov/transit/regulations/Exec_Summary_Final_12-15-09.pdf)

3 Iowa Park and Ride System Plan: <https://iowadot.gov/iowainmotion/files/StatewideParkandRideSystemPlanFINAL.pdf>

4 Iowa DOT Transit Asset Management Group Plan: <https://iowadot.gov/transit/publications/TransitAssetManagementGroupPlan.pdf>



### What is in the Plan?

Plan content includes the following.



**Trends:** An analysis of demographic, economic, and ridership data and what these trends mean for Iowa's public transit system.



**Needs:** Deficiencies, gaps, and shortfalls identified through condition assessments and stakeholder input related to transit service, facilities, vehicles, personnel, and technology.



**Vision:** Broad, overarching areas within which strategies have been defined to implement the Plan, including partnering, service, facility/fleet/personnel, and funding.



**Strategies:** Actions and initiatives that will be utilized by the department and our partners to implement the vision.



**Costs and revenue:** An analysis of anticipated capital and operating costs as well as anticipated revenue through the planning horizon.



**Implementation:** A discussion related to addressing any funding shortfalls, programming future investments, and continuous performance monitoring.

### What is Public Transit?

#### What we do/ Our mission

The mission of the Iowa DOT's Public Transit Bureau is to advocate and deliver services that support and promote a safe and comprehensive public transit system in Iowa to enhance access to opportunities and quality of life.

The Iowa DOT administers federal and state public transit grants and provides technical assistance to Iowa's 19 urban public transit systems and 16 regional public transit systems. Nearly 25 million rides were provided by Iowa's public transit systems in fiscal year (FY) 2018. Every county in Iowa is served by a regional system to ensure Iowans have transportation to work, medical facilities, meal sites, and leisure activities.

Urban systems provide scheduled route services in larger Iowa communities. Most regional systems offer demand-responsive service and provide contract service. Public transit systems work with human service agencies to provide coordinated transportation in their area. All public transit systems receive state and federal funding and are open to the general public.

Iowa's public transit systems rely on state and federal transit assistance to help make rides available and affordable for Iowans. State transit assistance (STA) is funded by fees for new registration collected on sales of motor vehicles and accessory equipment. Federal assistance programs also provide funding for operational expenses, facilities, and buses.

Local support such as tax revenue, fares, and donations provide a larger share of agencies' operating budgets. Cities can assess a property tax levy to directly provide public transit services or to purchase services from the regional system. Federal funding is also available for intercity bus operations to help Iowans connect to the national transportation network.



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## Public Transit Challenges Iowa Faces

Before we can begin planning for the future needs of the public transit system, we must first understand the challenges that public transit currently faces.

### Declining ridership

Trends both within Iowa as well as across the U.S. show public transit ridership decreasing for multiple years in a row. There is a combination of factors that may be contributing toward these decreases.

**Rural areas.** These areas are declining in population compared to urban areas, which impacts public transit service in areas that have few, if any, alternative means of transportation. Many rural areas also exhibit an aging population with greater medical needs. Non-emergency medical transportation is still a need for rural residents despite the sometimes great distances from area hospitals or medical providers.

**Low population density.** Areas that have high rates of personally owned vehicles and low population density have historically seen low transit ridership due to the difficulty of maintaining regular routes over dispersed locations. Irregular transit service and limited transportation options make it more difficult for employees to get to work and complicate employer efforts to reach potential pools of workers that live further away.

**Availability of other forms of transportation.** Other transportation and micro-mobility options are operating alongside existing public transit services. In some cases, this results in riders who may otherwise utilize public transit choosing to travel via another mode. Additionally, Transportation Network Companies (TNCs), such as Uber and Lyft, utilize a business model of on-demand service that operates within regions that have typically utilized fixed routes, resulting in further ridership impacts while continuing to add to high traffic volumes within dense urban areas.

### Overextended transit system

Trying to do more with less has diminishing returns over time. As transit agencies continue to stretch their assets, the effectiveness of those resources decreases and leads to increasing break downs and extensive maintenance.

**Vehicles beyond useful life.** As the bus fleet gets older, it becomes more expensive to maintain. Replacing aging rolling stock will keep vehicles performing while minimizing costly repairs and servicing. Without sufficient revenue, an effective asset management plan can only carry an organization so far before the assets themselves become unsustainable to maintain.

**Shortage of qualified drivers.** Another aspect of the system that is overextended is its staff and bus drivers. Not having enough drivers prevents a transit agency from expanding its routes and hours of service. One of the contributing reasons for this includes competition with other sectors of employment, like the trucking industry, that is able and willing to pay higher wages than public transit agencies. The difficulty and expense of obtaining a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) only adds to the challenge. In response, some organizations utilize their administrative staff and maintenance personnel to serve as drivers when there are shortages. This results in either more deferred maintenance of vehicles or reducing service in other areas to make up for critical staff vacancies.

**Rapidly changing technology.** Emerging technologies, ranging from ongoing research into autonomous vehicles to ride hailing apps on a personal device and more, are having an impact on how the public interfaces with transportation. The agility of an organization to adapt to emerging technological change can be made especially challenging when trying to anticipate human behavior and tendencies which could fluctuate rapidly and with little warning.

### Stigma of public transit

In some cases, it is not the lack of availability or infrequency of service that influences the decline of ridership; rather it is commonly held perceptions that prevent potential riders from choosing to even try public transit in the first place.

**Transportation option of last resort.** One of the advantages of public transit is that, generally, it is a transportation mode that is more cost-effective compared to owning and operating a personal vehicle. Not only that, but public transit does not require a driver's license or permit in order to travel. As a result, some low-income riders who utilize public transit do so because owning and operating a car is too cost prohibitive. Some riders may lose or never acquire a license to drive due to medical reasons or legal action. This shapes the perception that public transit is a mode of transportation that is the last option to be utilized, used primarily by people who are not able to travel by some other mode.

**Undesirable experiences.** When one imagines public transit, some of the more negative imagery that may come to mind is an environment that is crowded, chaotic, and uncomfortably hot. Given the close proximity of other public transit riders, there may also be a sense of insecurity or loss of freedom, as opposed to driving a personal vehicle in which a person exerts his/her independence with a greater sense of security.





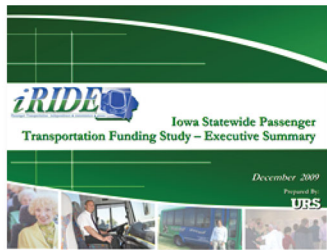
## 1.2. Previous Iowa Passenger and Transit Planning Efforts

Throughout the last 20 years, the Iowa DOT has built upon the last comprehensive system plan by focusing on specific facets of public transit. The Iowa Public Transit Long Range Plan represents the most recent iteration of this continuous process.



### Iowa in Motion Transit System Plan (1999)

The 1999 Iowa in Motion Transit System Plan was completed two years after the 1997 Iowa in Motion long-range plan was approved by the Iowa Transportation Commission. The 1999 Transit System Plan outlined a comprehensive strategy for implementation of the Commission's transportation policy to "Encourage and assist in the development, preservation, maintenance, improvement, and efficient use of all transportation systems – transit systems and services." The Public Transit Bureau of the Iowa DOT is responsible for administering that policy through coordination with other department bureaus, programming of federal and state funds, and providing technical support.



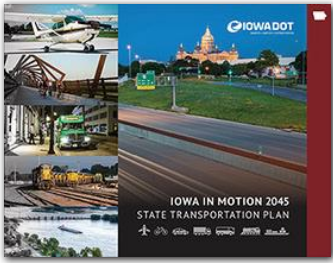
### Iowa Statewide Passenger Transportation Funding Study (2009)

In 2009, legislation directed the Iowa DOT, in cooperation with the Office of Energy Independence and the Department of Natural Resources, to review the current revenues available for support of public transit and the sufficiency of those revenues to meet future needs. The review included the identification of public transit improvements needed to meet state energy independence goals and an assessment of how the state's support of public transit is positioned to meet the mobility needs of Iowa's growing senior population. The Iowa Statewide Passenger Transportation Funding Study was produced in response to this need and submitted to the governor and the general assembly for consideration.



### Iowa Park and Ride System Plan (2014)

The Iowa Park and Ride System Plan was designed by the Iowa DOT to plan, evaluate, and develop a formal statewide system of park and ride facilities. These facilities were established to serve the purpose of providing a place to park a vehicle when carpooling, vanpooling, or taking public transit. The need for a more formalized park and ride system was initially identified through input from residents who contacted the Iowa DOT seeking information related to the location of existing park and ride facilities. The need for a formal park and ride system plan was the outcome of periodic planning-level reviews of the existing system by the Iowa DOT's Systems Planning and Public Transit Bureaus.



### Iowa in Motion 2045 State Transportation Plan (2017)

The Iowa in Motion 2045 Plan, adopted by the Iowa Transportation Commission in 2017, is the most recent long-range plan developed by the Iowa DOT. This plan is updated every five years in order to stay current with trends, forecasts, and factors that influence decision-making, such as system needs, technological changes, and state priorities. The Plan provides direction for each transportation mode, including public transit, and supports a continued emphasis on stewardship.

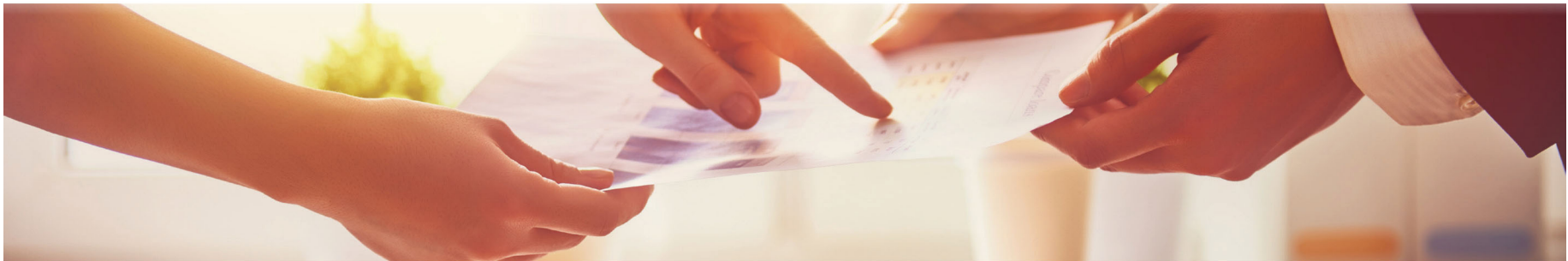


### Iowa Transit Asset Management Group Plan (2018)

The Iowa DOT Public Transit Bureau, through the Transit Asset Management Group Plan, provides funding priorities and technical assistance, as well as many other services and program oversight functions, to aid in assessment of the current condition of capital assets for group participants. This is done by determining the condition and performance of assets, identifying unacceptable risks, and providing guidance and technical assistance to stakeholders, allowing them to balance and prioritize reasonably anticipated funds toward improving asset condition and achieving a sufficient level of performance.

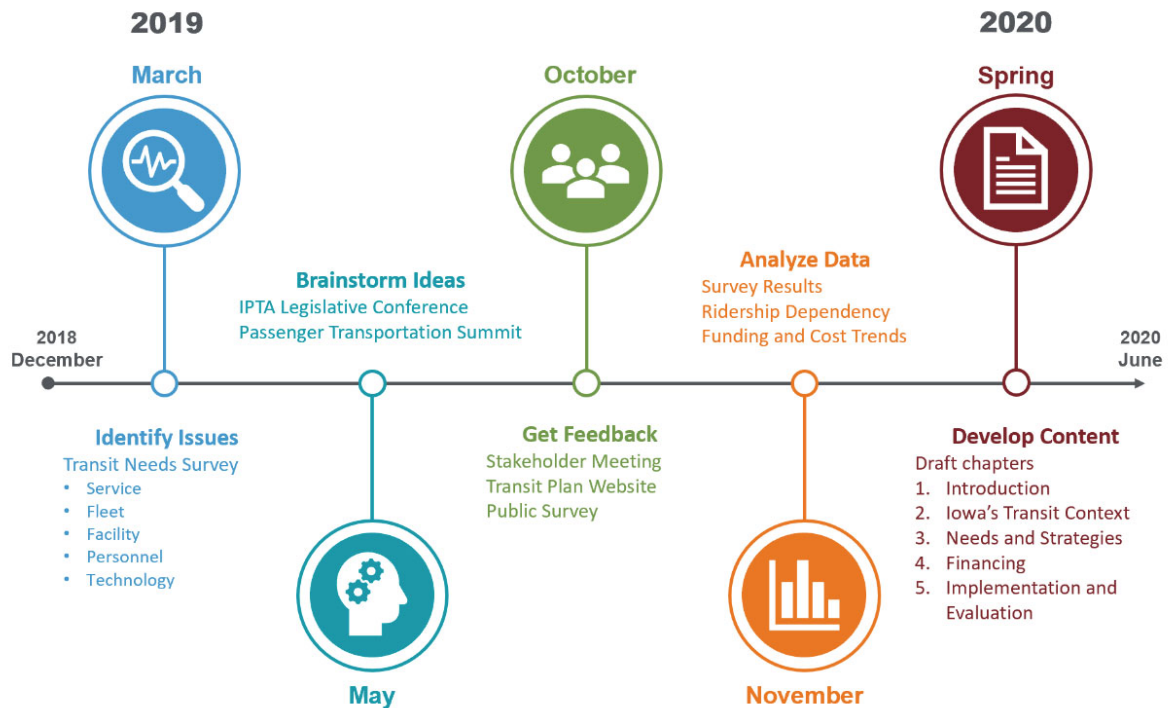
## 1.3. How this Plan was developed

This Plan was developed over an 18-month time period, as shown in the graphic on page 11, and involved many steps to gather input and data, refine feedback and analyses, and develop Plan content. Development of a long-range plan does not occur in a vacuum. Nor does it occur without gathering sufficient information regarding the needs of the public transit system and validating that proposed solutions align with available resources and meet the expectations of public transit stakeholders. In order to facilitate a comprehensive planning process, multiple stakeholder groups, participants, and sources of feedback were utilized to help generate the Plan.



## Interagency and external stakeholder consultation

While Iowa DOT staff can shed light on related issues as they pertain to department operations, the only way to truly include a diverse set of viewpoints is to invite participation from representatives across the state, including transit agencies, non-profit organizations, and other state government offices.



### Transit agencies

The Iowa DOT distributes state and federal public transit assistance to public transit systems that have been duly designated as a single administrative agency (public transit system).

There are 35 such public transit systems in Iowa which are classified by size with populations 50,000 and greater designated as large urban systems, those in urban areas of less than 50,000 population designated as small urban systems, and rural areas outside the urban systems designated as regional systems.

Given that they directly interface with public transit riders and manage their own operations, transit agencies were among the first organizations to contribute input for the Plan. The earliest effort was through the Iowa Transit Needs Survey which sought to identify major issues, needs, and gaps in Iowa's public transit system.

Distributed through Survey Monkey's web interface, the survey was opened February 1, 2019, and closed March 29, 2019, in order to allow the agencies ample time to respond. Many of the questions in the survey required forecasting a variety of needs to the short-term timeframe of 2030 and long-term timeframe of 2050. All 35 public transit agencies provided responses.



The survey itself was divided into six sections, with the first section focused on questions that affected the agency in general terms (i.e., marketing and outreach, strategic planning, etc.). Sections two through six each highlighted the “needs categories” of transit service, vehicles, facilities, personnel, and technology.

The survey helped identify gaps in the transit system, which enabled the planning process to move forward with generating strategies that could address those needs through the Plan’s implementation.

In addition to the Transit Needs Survey, the transit agencies were also involved through select representation from the large urban, small urban, and regional public transit systems in the External Stakeholder Group. This group provided feedback and direction on the overall Plan development. The transit agencies as a whole were also informed of Plan progress through regular meetings with the Public Transit Advisory Council (PTAC), which is made up of public transit agency representatives and meets quarterly, presentations at Iowa Public Transit Association (IPTA) conferences, and through the ridership dependency analysis (described later in this Plan).

The screenshot shows the 'Iowa Transit Needs Survey' form. The 'Agency Information' section is highlighted. It includes a green header, a title 'Agency Information', and two paragraphs of introductory text. Below the text are two required questions: '\* 1. Agency name' with a dropdown menu and '\* 2. What is a good contact email address to reach your agency?' with a text input field. At the bottom, there are five categories of needs: 'Service Needs', 'Fleet Needs', 'Facility Needs', 'Personnel Needs', and 'Technology Needs'. Each category has an 'EDIT' button next to it.

## External Stakeholder Group

Given the broad range of public transit ridership purposes, demographics, and challenges, the planning process needed to incorporate as many perspectives as possible in order to ensure the Plan adequately addresses all needs. As such, it was decided that an External Stakeholder Group would be formed with representation from a diverse range of backgrounds, fields, and viewpoints.

Membership included:

- Cedar Rapids Transit
- Marshalltown Municipal Transit
- Southwest Iowa Transit Agency (SWITA)
- AARP
- American Cancer Society (ACS)
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
- Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH)
- Iowa State University (ISU) – Extension and Outreach
- Iowa’s University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD)

The External Stakeholder Group was utilized to review products, themes, and strategies prior to them being broadly disseminated. Transit agency representation was also important to this group’s productivity, with SWITA representing regional public transit systems, Marshalltown Municipal Transit representing small urban systems, and Cedar Rapids Transit representing large urban systems. Having broad representation also led to committee members communicating information regarding this Plan to their respective stakeholders, allowing for greater visibility of the planning effort and inviting additional feedback. This helped to reach specific demographics, such as older riders and riders experiencing disabilities represented by UCEDD from the University of Iowa and the AARP, ethnic and minority groups represented by ISU’s Extension and Outreach, military veteran medical transportation needs represented by the VA, cancer patient volunteer transportation needs represented by ACS, and non-emergency medical transportation needs represented by IDPH.



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## Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Regional Planning Affiliations (RPAs)

Iowa has nine Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and 18 Regional Planning Affiliations (RPAs). MPOs conduct transportation planning activities in urbanized areas with more than 50,000 population. These include the metropolitan areas of Ames, Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs, Davenport, Des Moines, Dubuque, Iowa City, Sioux City, and Waterloo. RPAs conduct transportation planning for the non-metropolitan areas of the state and cover all 99 counties.

The planning activities conducted by these agencies are funded through Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) sources, as well as local financial support. MPOs and RPAs complete several transportation planning activities on regular cycles, including updating their Passenger Transportation Plans (PTPs) at least every five years. The PTP process promotes coordinated passenger transportation planning programs and provides needs-based justification for passenger transportation projects. The goals are:

- Improve transportation services to Iowans.
- Increase passenger transportation coordination.
- Create awareness of unmet needs.
- Develop new working partnerships.
- Assist decision-makers, advocates, and consumers in understanding the range of transportation options available.
- Develop justification for future passenger transportation investments.
- Save dollars and eliminate overlapping of services.

The PTP process is an Iowa creation, providing needs-based justification for passenger transportation projects as well as incorporating federal requirements for coordinated planning. To support this need for coordination, MPOs and RPAs utilize Transportation Advisory Groups (TAGs) that are locally established and include representation from public transit systems, human service agencies, private transportation providers, non-profit organizations, and other entities. TAGs meet at least two times annually to discuss transportation related matters within the context of their areas. Additionally, the TAG is involved in the drafting of the PTP to ensure that a broad array of viewpoints is considered.

An important piece of the development of strategies, described in further detail later in this Plan, was a review of the MPO and RPA PTPs in order to determine gaps and overlaps in needs. This was particularly true when identifying the need for interagency and interregional transportation options.

### Iowa Public Transit Association (IPTA)

In its words, “The mission of the Iowa Public Transit Association is to unify, advocate, and advance the interests of Iowa transit systems to influence and gain support from government agencies, legislators, and other entities.” IPTA serves as the trade organization of Iowa’s 35 public transit agencies, advocating for public transit interests and hosting multiple conferences each year to highlight public transit trends and offer discussion of public transit challenges. As it was developed, this Plan was presented to the IPTA membership at their regularly scheduled meetings.

### Iowa Transportation Coordination Council (ITCC)

The Iowa Transportation Coordination Council (ITCC) was created in 1992 with original members including the Iowa DOT, the Iowa Department of Human Services, and the Iowa Department of Elder Affairs. In 2001, the ITCC membership was expanded. A United We Ride Action Plan for Iowa was created by ITCC in 2005.

Chaired by the Iowa DOT's Public Transit Bureau, the ITCC meets every other month to discuss such issues as mobility management, accessibility of transportation, STA Special Project Proposal applications pertaining to coordination, and the encouragement of state and local agencies' involvement in the passenger transportation planning process. Having grown considerably from the three original member state departments, the ITCC now includes membership from state departments, statewide organizations, and federal groups. This Plan was presented to the ITCC representatives at their regularly scheduled meetings throughout its development.

### Public Transit Advisory Council (PTAC)

The Public Transit Advisory Council (PTAC) members represent Iowa public transit agencies to provide guidance and recommendations to the Iowa DOT Public Transit Bureau regarding public transit funding and policy issues. Council membership includes public transit professionals from regional, small urban, and large urban (both under and over 200,000 population) public transit systems. PTAC members are appointed by the Iowa DOT's Public Transit Bureau Director and serve a term of three years and a total of no more than four terms. This Plan was presented to the PTAC representatives at their regularly scheduled meetings throughout its development.







## Internal stakeholders

Representatives from several bureaus within the Iowa DOT were invited to participate in the development of the Plan. The participants were invited due to their relationship to public transit and passenger transportation, such as the Aviation and Rail Transportation Bureaus. Other bureaus were involved due to their experience with special projects and corridor-level studies that consider aspects of public transit.

Staff representation included members from:

- Public Transit
- Systems Planning
- Aviation
- Rail Transportation
- Location & Environment
- Driver & Identification Services
- District Planners

The involvement of internal staff is important as it helps the planning effort integrate with other parallel efforts across all modes of transportation. This level of cooperation and multi-tiered planning allows the department to take a more holistic approach to understanding transportation problems while optimizing our limited resources in order to address numerous related needs. This supports the Iowa DOT's overall mission of supporting safe, efficient, and accessible mobility options for everyone who travels in Iowa.

## Public input

Published in 2017, the State Public Participation Process for Transportation Planning<sup>5</sup>, provides guidance for providing Iowans the opportunity to help identify transportation issues, needs, and priorities; plan how to meet those needs and priorities; and select transportation projects that turn the plans into reality. Examples of how the Public Participation Process was utilized in this Plan include the following.

### Passenger Transportation Summit

The 2019 Iowa Passenger Transportation Summit was held at the Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) Ankeny campus on May 23, 2019, and featured speakers from the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority (DART), American Cancer Society (ACS), Jefferson Lines, and North Dakota State University. Attendance was not restricted, allowing the members of the general public to attend and participate alongside federal, state, and local government officials, public transit agency staff, and human service organizations.

The 2019 summit was also one of the first opportunities to share the results of the Transit Needs Survey conducted by the Iowa DOT with feedback from all 35 public transit agencies. The survey results covered need areas that included transit service, vehicles, facilities, personnel, and technology. After sharing the results of these needs, a public participation “brainstorming” exercise was conducted by asking attendees to write ideas, solutions, strategies, or action items on sticky notes. Several large sheets of paper with each of the need areas were hung on the wall, allowing attendees to place their sticky notes under any of the topics.

<sup>5</sup> State Public Participation Process for Transportation Planning: [https://iowadot.gov/program\\_management/StatePublicParticipationProcess.pdf](https://iowadot.gov/program_management/StatePublicParticipationProcess.pdf)

During the summit, the results of the exercise were aggregated in a spreadsheet then presented to the audience at the end of the conference. The results included nearly 60 individual pieces of feedback and highlighted trends in the types of strategies being proposed by the participants. After the conclusion of the summit, feedback was discussed and refined, helping to inform the initial creation of the strategies that can be found in this Plan. More information on the strategies can be found in “Chapter 3 – Needs and Strategies”.

### Public surveys

An online public survey was released for public input on October 18, 2019 and concluded November 1, 2019. While the survey was considered officially closed after that date, the survey itself was kept “live” for three additional weeks in order to allow opened surveys to be submitted. Mailed survey responses were also included in the results.

The intent of the survey was to provide the public an opportunity to weigh-in on the refined strategies that utilized input from the Passenger Transportation Summit and external stakeholders. Responses were determined by a “Five-star” rating scale, with one star indicating the strategy was “Very Unimportant” and five stars indicating the strategy was “Very Important”.

In addition to providing input on the strategies, survey respondents also provided useful demographic information, which helped



### Iowa Public Transit Survey

#### Service Strategies

The second part of our survey is to find out what you value in the public transit system. We are going to ask you a series of questions related to different strategies and actions that could potentially be taken in order to improve transit service.

Some terms you will see in some of the strategies:

- **Large urban** means the 12 transit systems located in areas greater than or equal to 50,000 in population.
- **Small urban** means the 7 transit systems located in small urban areas between 20,000 and 49,999 in population.
- **Regional** means the 16 transit systems that cover the remainder of the state.

Full listings and maps of Iowa’s public transit systems can be found at: <https://iowadot.gov/transit/iowa-transit-services/transit-agency-maps-and-listings>.

- **Fixed route** public transit services are provided by the 19 urban transit agencies. No advance reservations are necessary. Service is available to the general public, including persons with disabilities.
- **Demand response** public transit services are provided by the 16 regional transit agencies. Ride reservations are made in advance, normally 24 hours. With demand response service, the bus picks the passenger up at their location and takes them to their desired destination. Service is available to the general public, including persons with disabilities.
- **Paratransit** is an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary service provided by the 19 urban transit agencies in, at a minimum, 3/4-mile around a fixed route. Ride reservations are arranged by the rider at least one day prior to a desired trip. The bus picks the passenger up at their location, taking them to the desired destination. Fares for this origin-destination service may be no more than double the regular fixed route fare.

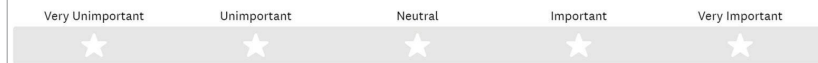


Our public transportation system is spread out across all of Iowa and offers a variety of types of transit service. This includes metropolitan areas that have fixed route service with bus stops, regional on-demand service that is scheduled, and para-transit that supports transportation to accommodate users with disabilities. The service-related questions that we will ask you will tell us what you think are the most important solutions we should focus on to improve service for our communities.

14. Examine the effects of offering free state-wide bus service.



15. Expand bus service hours for people who work nights and weekends.



16. Prioritize funding applications for communities that provide or improve transit service or access.



determine which strategies resonated with various socio-demographic groups. Along with that, respondents were asked questions to gauge their usage of different transportation modes, such as how often public transit is utilized, or how far one is willing to commute to work. The result was a total of 583 responses from across Iowa that reflected a nearly equal distribution of public transit riders and non-riders, thus providing useful feedback that was not skewed toward any particular type of traveler.

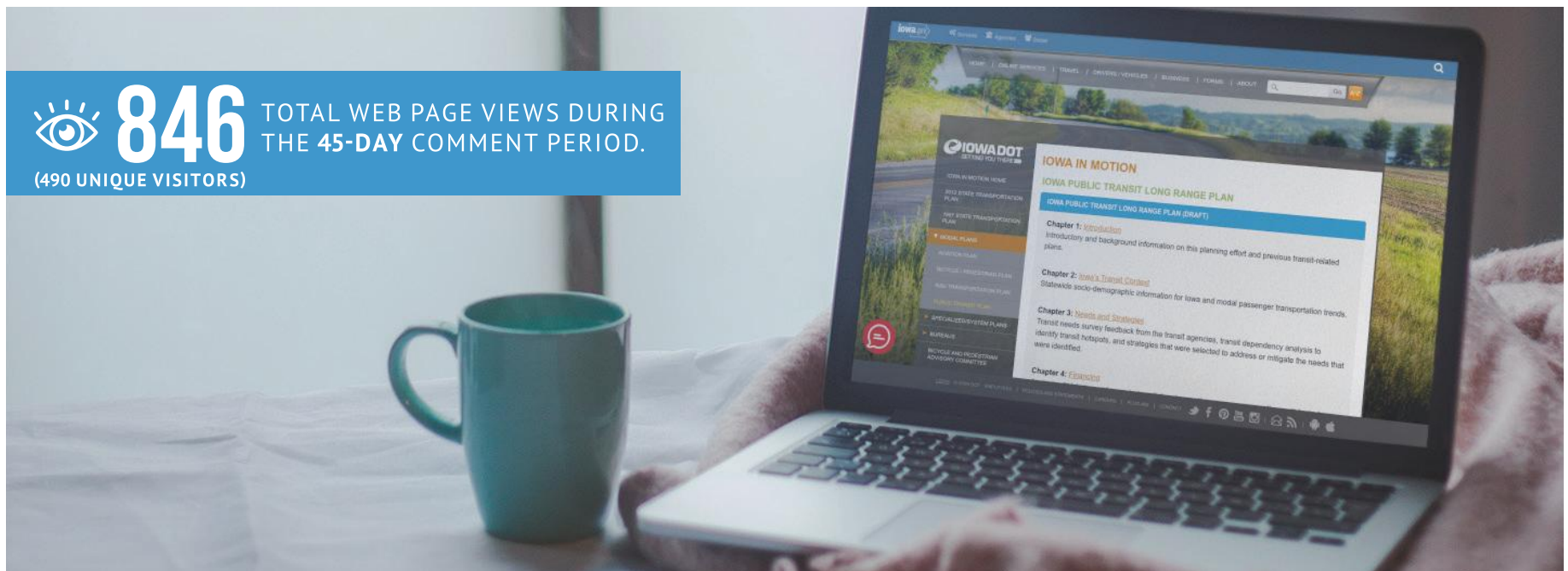
## Website and media

Iowa DOT's Strategic Communications Bureau assisted with the dissemination of information regarding the planning effort through creation of a dedicated website for the Plan, press releases, posts on the Iowa DOT's Transportation Matters blog, and posts via the department's social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter.

## Public comment period

A 45-day public comment period was held for the Plan from May 18 to July 1, 2020. During this time, the draft Plan was posted online along with contact information and a comment form.

The Plan web page received 846 total web page views during this 45-day period, which consisted of 490 unique individual users. Approximate user locations were generalized through Google Analytics showing a distribution of users across metro and rural regions of the state. Additionally, a handful of individual comments were submitted through the online comment form. Included with these comments were two response letters from entities representing multiple organizations, reflecting a variety of different viewpoints. All responses and comments were compiled and considered while revising the final draft of the Plan.



Transit Plan Website: <https://iowadot.gov/iowainmotion/Modal-Plans/Public-Transit-Plan>



## 1.4. How this Plan is used

### What will the outcome be?

This Plan will assist the department and local public transit agencies in making informed decisions for the state. The strategies within the Plan serve as the starting points for what will become the implementation phase of the planning process. As with other Iowa DOT long-range plans, the public transit plan will be revisited after a five-year implementation period as the results of the performance monitoring can be analyzed and new guidance, input, and feedback can be gathered. This leads to a renewed effort to update the Plan as the process continues its cycle.

**Public Transit Plan:** The Plan serves as a kind of blueprint of strategies to successfully address identified needs and rightsize the public transit system for the future. The analysis that contributes to the development of the Plan helps determine what actions need to be taken and a rough sense of when and in what order those actions need to occur. This ensures that the right resources are allocated to the right action at the right time.

**Implementation:** While the Plan outlines the priority of events and milestones that need to be reached, implementation determines “how” exactly those strategies and actions will be executed. In some ways, this is similar to an architect who develops the initial plan and passes it on to the builder, who then figures out exactly how to construct it.

**Performance monitoring:** Progress of Plan implementation is tracked and compared to the general state of the public transit system. This allows us to determine if changes in public transit performance and any of the factors noted in the initial needs assessment have been impacted by the strategies. The evaluation of the system’s performance is continuous, with minor adjustments occurring as the implementation of the Plan continues. The correlation of public



*Transit planning and programming cycle*

transit impacts with actions enables the department to measure the effectiveness of the Plan’s strategies and action items. This quality control effort helps the department ensure that it is making the best investments at the most ideal times.

**Guidance and input:** Feedback is an important aspect of the planning process as it enables the department to execute the Plan as effectively as possible. Feedback and input lets the Iowa DOT know what elements of the Plan are working and what elements may need to be adjusted. Using this feedback, public transit professionals can be agile and responsive to a rapidly changing environment, especially as situations change and technological advancements challenge conventional ideas regarding how public transit can be utilized.

## Transit funding and programming process

Public transit planning is a process to determine the current and future needs for public transportation and to choose the best match between those needs and the available resources. The needs can be multifaceted, involving unserved or underserved populations, diverse geographic areas, or lack of appropriate equipment. The resources can include finances, equipment, workforce, and infrastructure.

The planning for public transit must be integrated and coordinated with many other types of planning to be effective. By law, public transit planning is part of an intermodal transportation planning process covering primarily highways and transit, but also including other transportation modes. The best planning processes also integrate public transit planning with human services planning, as well as planning for other community services. This can be accomplished by involving existing committees, such as the ITCC, in the vetting of proposed special projects and awarding these projects with funding from STA special projects funds. ITCC is also uniquely positioned as an organization established through State of Iowa statutes that mandate the coordination of transportation services.

The Plan can also be used as a resource by transit agencies, many of whom do not conduct formal strategic planning efforts. The Plan can either serve as a template for developing plans specific to a transit agency's needs, or it could simply provide an initial set of goals, tools, and resources in order to make better informed investments within their organization. For example, the transit dependency analysis, described later in this Plan, was conducted statewide in order to focus attention on specific areas where there are populations that may be more dependent on public transit for their transportation needs. This assessment generates "hotspots" of potential public transit needs at the U.S. Census block group level. A tool such as this can be used as a catalyst for transit agencies to expand services to these areas or to utilize a variety of outreach or marketing efforts targeting particular transit-dependent populations.

Lastly, the Iowa Public Transit Long Range Plan is a mode-specific plan that nests within the State Transportation Plan, which is an authoritative document that is approved by the Iowa Transportation Commission and guides transportation infrastructure investments that are programmed in the Five-Year Iowa Transportation Improvement Program.

