

Federal Transit Administration

Policy Statement on Climate Change Adaptation

May 2011

Integration of Climate Change Adaptation into FTA Planning, Operations, Policies, and Programs

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will integrate consideration of climate change impacts and adaptation to the extent practicable into the planning, operations, policies, and programs of the agency in order to ensure proper stewardship of the federal investment in public transportation systems, for the safety of the traveling public, mobility, and to maintain a state of good repair. FTA is committed to adaptation planning to address the challenges posed by climate change.

Purpose and Background

Climate-related changes are already observed in the United States and will increase in the future, according to the Federal government's Global Change Research Program. These include rising temperature and sea levels, increases in both extreme downpours and droughts, and stronger hurricanes. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions will lower the severity of these impacts over the long-term. However, even with aggressive action immediately to reduce emissions going forward, past emissions will continue to cause climate change impacts for many years. An effective response to climate change must therefore include both mitigation (reducing greenhouse gas levels) and adaptation (reducing the vulnerability of human and natural systems to climate impacts).

In fact, public transportation plays a key role in climate change mitigation by offering a low-emissions alternative to driving and by facilitating compact land use that enables reduced vehicle miles traveled. Yet public transportation must also adapt to the impacts of climate change. Subway tunnels, busways, tracks, and maintenance facilities are vulnerable to an increase in flooding from more intense rain storms, sea-level rise, and storm surge. Also, extreme heat can deform rail tracks, stress materials, reduce asset life, and jeopardize customer and worker health and safety. And, more broadly, public transportation must be positioned and prepared to serve a vital role in providing essential mobility options as communities adapt to the impacts of climate change. Public transportation also provides evacuation services during the extreme weather emergencies that become more common with climate change. Transit dependent populations are particularly vulnerable.

FTA is responsible for the stewardship of tens of billions of dollars in taxpayer investments in public transportation assets. But this is more than a fiscal responsibility: tens of millions of Americans rely on these resources and the services they provide every day. We must build upon and share our knowledge of climate change impacts on transit and the best response strategies if we are to protect these assets and the mobility they provide. In addition, through FTA grant programs, many communities are building new transit infrastructure or rehabilitating older systems. Better awareness of the future environmental stressors these assets will encounter is instrumental to sound planning and design.

Process

FTA will use the following process to coordinate adaptation planning across programs and operations within the agency.

- An interdisciplinary, inter-office adaptation working group will analyze the impact of climate change on FTA's mission and operations, then develop strategies to incorporate climate change adaptation considerations into FTA policies, programs, and operations.
- The working group will propose strategy options for consideration to senior executives through the FTA Policy Council.
- FTA will coordinate with other agencies on climate change adaptation matters of common interest through the U.S. DOT Center for Climate Change.
- FTA will also coordinate with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and other related agencies through the Council on Environmental Quality Communities Adaptation Working Group.

Programs and Resources

FTA will use the following programs and resources to support the climate change adaptation planning process: 1) Discretionary funding from FTA research programs to support adaptation research, technical assistance, and outreach; and, 2) Staff resources from headquarters and regional offices.

Public transportation agency grantees already have access to FTA's major capital programs, which fund capital investments such as asset rehabilitation and acquisition, as well as construction. Funding from FTA's major capital programs can support capital investments that increase resilience of transit assets and services to the impacts of climate change. Planning activities such as climate change vulnerability and risk assessments are also eligible under FTA's current statewide and metropolitan transportation planning programs.

Guiding Principles and Framework

FTA adopts the guiding principles and framework for adaptation planning established by the Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force. These guiding principles are:

- Adopt integrated approaches,
- Prioritize the most vulnerable,
- Use the best available science,
- Build strong partnerships,
- Apply risk management methods and tools,
- Apply ecosystem-based approaches,
- Maximize mutual benefits, and
- Continuously evaluate performance.

Authority

This policy is based on Executive Order (E.O.) 13514 – *Federal Leadership in Environmental, Energy, and Economic Performance*. The E.O. includes direction to address climate adaptation planning.

Additionally, the Secretary of Transportation has authority under 49 United States Code (U.S.C.) Section 322 – General Powers. This FTA Policy is consistent with and complementary to the department-wide Policy Statement on Climate Change Adaptation of the Secretary of Transportation. This Policy is effective immediately and will remain in effect until it is amended, superseded, or revoked. This Policy does not alter or affect any existing duty or authority of individual components or offices. FTA will review and update this policy as necessary.