

AIR QUALITY CONFORMITY

The Baton Rouge area is currently designated by EPA as an ozone non-attainment area. Such a designation triggers the need for air quality conformity analysis on the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

Due to a change in the ozone standard from 1-hour to 8-hour, the MPO and DOTD are required to re-submit an air quality conformity analysis as required by federal regulations. This process started in early September 2004 and involved members of DEQ, EPA and FHWA in addition to the MPO and DOTD. The process concluded that the Baton Rouge non-attainment area is unable to demonstrate 8-hour ozone conformity for the model year of 2005.

As a consequence, the Baton Rouge area went into a state of a “conformity lapse” as of June 15, 2005 (when the new 8-hour standard went into effect). The conformity lapse triggers suspension of all road projects that increase traffic capacity. On-going capacity projects can continue in a current phase of work but cannot proceed to the next phase. Non-capacity projects can proceed during the conformity lapse. These projects are classified as follows:

- A) Transportation Control Measures (TCMs) in an approved SIP
- B) Projects identified in 40 CFR §93.126, for example, signal synchronization, safety, overlay, rehabilitation, bridge repair/replacement, railway crossing, striping or CMAQ
- C) Non-regionally significant non-federal projects
- D) Projects with funding commitments for construction, PS&E approvals, and
- E) Full Funding Grant Agreements (FFGA), FTA.

Due to the suspension of capacity projects, the “interim” MTP and TIP are required to be prepared. In addition, the above noted non-capacity projects can proceed only if the “interim” MTP and TIP are adopted and in place by June 15, 2005. The “interim” MTP and TIP have been prepared and were adopted at the Transportation Policy Committee (TPC) meeting on May 17, 2005.

The air quality conformity analysis process continues. The Baton Rouge area is expected to meet the new 8-hour federal ozone standard for vehicle ozone-related emissions budget by early 2006 for the next scheduled attainment year of

2007. Once air quality conformity is achieved, the “normal” MTP and TIP will be reinstated, allowing the capacity-type projects to proceed. Since the suspension of capacity-type projects is expected to be in effect only for a period of about six months, the impact of the suspension on the construction schedule of these projects will be insignificant.

In addition, in order to minimize the effect of lapse, the following current projects with FHWA authorization have been accelerated:

- A) Airline Highway - widen 4-6 lanes - between Cedarcrest Avenue and Florida Boulevard
- B) Perkins Road - C & G, utility relocation - between Bluebonnet Boulevard and Siegen Lane
- C) Joor Road (LA 946) - C & G, utility relocation - between Jones Bayou and Hooper Road, and
- D) Central Thruway - C & G, embankment, construction - between Florida Boulevard and Frenchtown Road.