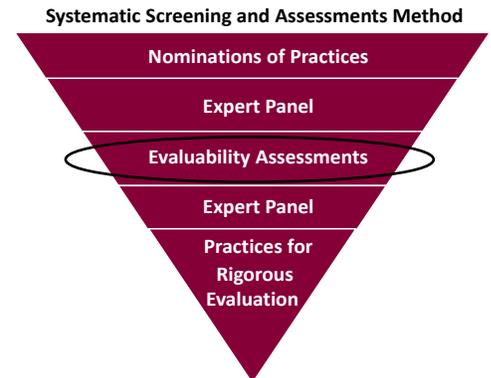


# Active Transportation Spotlight: Nashville Area Regional Transportation Plan

## Evaluability Assessment Overview

Evaluability Assessments (EAs) are a method to better understand innovative policies and initiatives being implemented in states and communities. A component of the Systematic Screening and Assessment Method (SSA), EAs provide preliminary evidence about which initiatives have the greatest potential for effectiveness and can inform subsequent evaluation activities. EAs are considered a “pre-evaluation” activity to determine whether a more rigorous evaluation is feasible or merited for a particular initiative, often saving costs and time. EAs also benefit the initiative by strengthening implementation and local evaluation.

The Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity (DNPAO) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) used EAs to identify the potential promise of several nutrition, physical activity, and obesity prevention initiatives and their readiness for rigorous evaluation. EAs consist of a site visit to assess implementation, data availability, intended outcomes, and staff capacity to better understand an initiative or policy. Upon completion of the site visit, feedback is provided to the initiative, which includes recommendations for future evaluation.



## What kinds of Evaluability Assessments were conducted?

In 2011, DNPAO used the SSA method to learn of the potential promise of five state- and local level active transportation initiatives. Active transportation initiatives encourage active transport like walking and bicycling through the promotion of a supportive infrastructure for leisure or commute activities in multiple settings.

## Active Transportation Spotlight: Nashville Area Regional Transportation Plan

One of the five initiatives selected for the DNPAO Evaluability Assessments (2011) project was the development of the 2035 Nashville Area Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) by the Nashville Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The MPO helps maintain transportation plans to guide transportation investments. The Nashville MPO consists of an executive director, several staff members, and an executive board composed of mayors within the region.

### Active Transportation Initiatives Selected (2011)

- Boston, Massachusetts Bike to Market Project
- Missouri Livable Streets Project
- **Nashville, Tennessee Regional Transportation Plan**
- Sunday Streets in San Francisco, California
- Washtenaw County, Michigan, Building Healthy Communities Initiative

The 2035 RTP contains three main policy priorities: (1) expanding mass transit; (2) improving and expanding active transportation choices; and (3) preserving and enhancing existing roadway corridors. From this long-range plan, the Nashville MPO develops a shorter-term Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) that contains projects planned for the next 4 to 5 years. All roadway projects in the 2035 RTP were ranked on a new set of scoring criteria that emphasized improvements to health and safety.

## Goals of the Nashville Area Regional Transportation Plan

The guiding principles of the 2035 Nashville Area RTP are livability, sustainability, prosperity, and diversity. The plan aims to address transportation planning through coordination with economic development, urban design, housing, land use, water and sewer systems, and food access.

## Program Accomplishments

Since the adoption of the 2035 RTP in December 2010, the Nashville MPO has demonstrated the following:

- Most 70% of the roadway projects in the adopted 2035 RTP include bicycle and/or pedestrian facilities, a significant increase from the 2% of projects incorporated in the 2030 RTP.

- The Nashville MPO is conducting a regional transportation and health study to collect data on where people travel, what mode of transportation they use, information about their health and a sub-study that collects physical activity data as part of transportation trips.
- 15% of the largest funding source for roadways (Urban Surface Transportation Program funds) was reserved to support additional active transportation education and infrastructure projects.
- The Nashville MPO's funding for active transportation exceeds the national average of less than 2% of federal transportation dollars spent on bicycle and pedestrian travel.

## Considerations for Similar Initiatives

The following considerations were developed by the Nashville stakeholders involved in the EA conducted with the Nashville MPO. When planning or implementing a similar active transportation initiative, consider the following:

- **Partnerships.** Collaborate with a wide range of partners including business organizations, nonprofit and advocacy organizations, universities, public schools, other transportation planning organizations, and health departments. In addition to a broad range of partners, consider involving partners with greater reach to underserved populations, including organizations working with homeless populations, minority groups, faith communities, and local disabled residents.
- **Engagement from Key Decision Makers.** Educate decision makers, as well as public health officials and engineers, on the benefits and opportunities associated with increased active transportation. Encourage decision makers to work on projects both locally and regionally.
- **Staff Diversity.** Engage staff members who are skilled in not only transportation planning, but also community outreach and advocacy to garner support for local and regional initiatives.

## Evaluation Considerations for Similar Initiatives

A rigorous evaluation of similar initiatives should be appropriately conceptualized and implemented. Evaluation activities for a similar program should consider the following evaluation questions and potential data sources:

- How are residents travelling differently? This can be assessed by gathering household travel information that describes where people travel, what mode of transportation was used, the purpose of their trips, and demographic data.
- What overall transportation changes are occurring in the community? Collect data related to traffic patterns, transit ridership, and miles of bicycle facilities and sidewalks.
- What environmental changes are occurring as a result of the initiative? This can be assessed from air quality data and road-related data, such as accident and congestion information.
- What changes are occurring in physical activity levels? Consider utilizing GPS technology and accelerometers to gauge levels of physical activity across transportation modes.

## Resources

- For more on the Nashville Area MPO: <http://www.nashvillempo.org/>
- For more on Evaluability Assessments: Leviton, L.C., Khan, L.K., & Dawkins, N. (Eds). (2010). The Systematic Screening and Assessment Method: Finding Innovations Worth Evaluating. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 125.

## Nashville Area MPO Contact Information

Leslie Meehan, MPA, AICP  
 Nashville Area MPO  
 Email [Meehan@nashvillempo.org](mailto:Meehan@nashvillempo.org)