

## History

The Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti Urban Area Transportation Study Committee (now known as **Washtenaw Area Transportation Study**) was formally established in 1965 in response to the requirements of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1962. This Act stipulated that after July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1965, federally-aided highway projects in urbanized areas of more than 50,000 population must be based on a coordinated, continuing, comprehensive planning process, carried on cooperatively by the states and local communities. In 1965, the units of government in the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti Urbanized Area signed Memorandums of Understanding with the Michigan Department of State Highways and Transportation (now MDOT) to give formal status to this required process in order that this urbanized area would be eligible for federal highway funds.

In 1974, the Agency reorganized under Public Act 200 of 1957 of the Acts of Michigan. This reorganization was accomplished through passage of a Resolution to Establish an Intermunicipality Committee under P.A. 200 of 1957. Each unit of government that has voting membership on the Committee passed the resolution giving the Committee legal status. Voting membership on the Committee at that time included the following:

Cities – Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and Saline  
Townships – Ann Arbor, Lodi, Pittsfield, Scio, Superior and Ypsilanti  
Washtenaw County board of Commissioners  
Washtenaw County Road Commission  
Washtenaw County Metropolitan Planning Commission  
Ann Arbor Transportation Authority

Ex-officio (non-voting) members included Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, South-eastern Michigan Transportation Authority (now SMART), the Federal Highway Administration, and the Michigan Department of State Highways and Transportation.

In 1991, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) designated the Agency as a Transportation Management Area (TMA) and expanded its area of responsibility for study to the entire county. For FY 2001-2002 voting members included:

Cities – Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and Saline  
Townships – Ann Arbor, Pittsfield, Scio, Superior and Ypsilanti  
Village – Dexter  
Washtenaw County board of Commissioners  
Washtenaw County Road Commission  
Washtenaw County Metropolitan Planning Commission  
Ann Arbor Transportation Authority  
Michigan Department of Transportation Bureau of Planning

For FY 2001-2002, ex-officio members included Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), Michigan Department of Transportation University Region Office, Michigan Department of Transportation Brighton Transportation Service Center (TSC) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

Since 2002, the following communities and universities have joined the organization:

Cities - Chelsea

Townships – Bridgewater, Dexter, Freedom, Northfield, and Manchester

Universities – Eastern Michigan, University of Michigan

### Agency Responsibilities

Major responsibilities of the Agency are defined in several documents. Public Act 200 of Michigan (1957) provides the legal basis for the Agency as an independent entity. The By-laws and Rules of Procedure state the major roles of the Agency and outline the responsibilities of the standing sub-committees. The Federal Highway Act of 1962 and all subsequent federal transportation and air quality legislation further define the Agency's role in transportation activities. There are also numerous regulations promulgated by the Federal Department of Transportation that define the responsibilities of the Agency regarding transportation planning and programming.

Under the various laws and regulations cited above, the responsibilities of the Agency can be divided into four principal areas of activity:

**PLANNING** – The Agency is responsible for the development and maintenance of a long-range (20 year), multi-modal transportation plan for all of Washtenaw County (the Intermodal Surface Transportation Act – ISTEA expanded the study area from the original three city, six township study area). The current long-range plan, covering streets, transit and non-motorized needs, was adopted in March 2000 by the Agency and in June 2000 by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. The Agency also initiates detailed planning studies to solve specific transportation related problems. For example, in 1976 the Agency initiated the Huron Valley Corridor Study to determine the best means for accommodating travel desires between Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti from Plymouth road to Ellsworth road. More recently, the Agency provided assistance in FY 2002 to the City of Ypsilanti with the Cross Street Study.

**PROGAMMING** – Every other year, in accordance with federal regulations, the Agency develops a three-year Transportation Improvements Program (TIP) for Washtenaw County. The Tip contains a list of street, transit, bikeway, pedestrian, rail and airport projects and programs contemplated for implementation during the program period. The TIP is coordinated with the Agency's Long Range Plan, through which projects and programs are identified with the purpose of maximizing the use and efficiency of the existing transportation system. The Agency and its members also carry out programming activities related to the development of a TIP including full and administrative amendments that are made at least quarterly. Agency staff also provides assistance to the local members with the programming of projects and assistance with grant funding opportunities.

**Projects** – the Agency is the designated recipient of Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds (previously know as Federal Aid to the Urbanized systems (FAUS)) funds for Washtenaw County. In 1975, the Policy Committee decided that these funds would be allocated to projects in the following manner:

|                 |   |     |
|-----------------|---|-----|
| Roads & Bridges | - | 84% |
| Transit         | - | 12% |
| Bikeways        | - | 4%  |

In 2006, the WATS Policy Committee adopted a new policy that established STP Urban funding targets as follows:

|                 |   |     |
|-----------------|---|-----|
| Roads & Bridges | - | 80% |
| Transit         | - | 10% |
| Non-motorized   | - | 10% |

Periodically, Washtenaw County implementing agencies are asked to submit priority projects from the approved Long Range Plan for review and Policy Committee consideration. After evaluation and recommendation from the subcommittees (a description of the subcommittees is included in the Organization section), the Policy Committee allocates funds to projects in each mode.

For Transportation projects financed with funds other than STP Urban (STPU), the Agency performs an evaluation and a prioritization to the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. These reviews consist of an evaluation of the proposed projects based on consistency with the adopted Long-range Plan, Agency goals and policies, and the social, economic and environmental effects of the proposed projects. As part of the Agency’s responsibilities, the Agency reviews and gives local support to all transportation projects in Washtenaw County that require the use of federal funds.

**LOCAL ASSISTANCE** – The Agency gives assistance to its local unit members on transportation-related projects, programs and issues. This assistance includes help with securing project funds, grant application support, supporting local views on proposed projects, expediting projects through the implementation process, and providing information on transportation-related issues. As an example, the Agency assisted the City of Saline in obtaining recognition as a small urban place increasing the availability of funds for City projects. The Agency also regularly reviews and supports grant applications for local member units of government.