CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE PLANNING FRAMEWORK

To meet Kenton County’s transportation needs to 2030, recommendations are developed for all transportation modes, linked to the county’s land use plan, and financially constrained. The recommendations are shaped by the consideration given to transportation goals, planning issues, coordination with public agencies, input from planning participation, and changes in county population and employment.

THE SCOPE OF THE PLAN

Beginning with the Ohio River’s role in early settlement, transportation has been critical to Kenton County’s growth and prosperity. Major transportation projects – the Suspension Bridge and the Chesapeake and Ohio Rail Bridge in the late 1800s, the paving of Dixie Highway in the 1920s, the building of the interstate system – spurred the county’s economic growth and shaped its development. These projects have become integrated into a transportation system that is critical to the county’s economic vitality and quality of life.

As the transportation system has become more complex, its impacts have become more pervasive. In response, efforts to improve transportation involve consideration of a variety of issues. In this plan, recommendations focus on fixing problems with the existing transportation infrastructure and expanding capacity to meet future needs, but consideration is also given to transportation impacts on economic, environmental, land use, and social issues.

This is a multi-modal transportation plan for addressing Kenton County’s transportation needs through 2030. It includes…

- linkage between transportation planning to land use,
- recommendations for improving transit and initiating a bus rapid transit system,
- recommendations for improving roads (differentiated between roads eligible for federal funding and roads for which funding is primarily a county responsibility),
- recommendations for improving bicycle and pedestrian travel,
- recommendations for improving system operation (through operational improvements that include intelligent transportation system technologies), and
- a financial analysis that prioritizes recommendations based on the revenues expected to be available to cover their costs.
PLAN GOALS AND ISSUES

Goals and issues are part of the framework that has shaped this plan’s recommendations for improving transportation in Kenton County. The goals are defined below.

- **Maintain, improve, and expand the transportation system for moving people and goods.**

  The plan’s recommendations are focused on improving the transportation system to meet travel needs. Improvements are needed to maintain the existing infrastructure and enable it to operate more efficiently, and expansion is needed to accommodate future travel needs. Recommendations are made to address congestion and operational problems and to improve connectivity, both within the county (especially for additional east-west connectors) and with regional and national highway and transit systems.

- **Improve travel safety.**

  The effort to improve safety is integrated into virtually all of the plan’s recommended improvements. For roadways, recommendations address the inadequate width and poor alignment of some segments, as well as additional safety issues for county roads and intersections. Recommendations for improving system operation, including the expanded use of intelligent transportation system technologies, will enhance safety by improving emergency response, turning and merging movements, and transit security.

- **Expand alternatives to driving.**

  This plan presents recommendations for improving transit, as well as bike and pedestrian facilities, consistent with national and regional transportation policy for urban areas. Highways and automobiles will remain the backbone of the transportation system, but transit’s growing importance is tied to the ever-increasing difficulty of adding lanes to solve congestion, the need to address air quality problems, and federal policy for insuring mobility for low-income and other groups with limited access to cars. For driving alternatives to be viable in the future, initiatives must get underway now.

- **Link transportation improvements to the county’s land use.**

  As development has become more dispersed, it has spurred increases in travel, traffic, and congestion. Where roads are unsuited for growing traffic, the county is under pressure to implement improvements. Given the impacts of increased travel and the limitations on financial resources, transportation recommendations have been linked to land use by their consistency with the county land use plan and consideration of differences in the county’s diverse and changing land use.
The plan’s recommendations offer the potential to reduce future transportation problems if development trends can be altered by policy that supports more efficient transportation.

In addition to goals, this plan accounts for transportation impacts on a variety of environmental, social, and economic issues. These issues have been incorporated into transportation planning in response to federal policy. Examples of how this plan addresses some major transportation policy issues are summarized below.

**Air Quality** - Federal law links air quality and transportation planning together because air quality cannot be improved sufficiently unless emissions are reduced from transportation sources. Kenton County is part of a region where tailpipe emissions must be reduced in order to achieve the ozone standard. Progress in controlling ozone has been and will be impeded by increased driving, so that greater efforts will be needed to reduce vehicle emissions in the future. Given that air quality will drive transportation planning for years to come, this plan recommends implementing transit and land use policy initiatives now as means to reduce the growth of emissions in the future.

**Environmental Justice** - “Environmental Justice” has become an issue to be considered in developing recommendations that involve spending federal funds. As recommended projects proceed toward implementation, they are assessed for benefits and adverse impacts on areas with concentrations of “Environmental Justice” population groups. These groups include Minority and Low Income populations under federal policy, and may also include the elderly population, people with disabilities, and zero-car households for planning purposes (included in proposed OKI policy). This plan accounts for the needs of Environmental Justice population groups by its recommendations for expanding transit and by its linkage between transportation planning and land use (Chapter 2).

**Financial Constraints** - This plan presents recommendations that address transportation needs and opportunities, but the recommendations are then constrained by the financial resources expected to be available for implementation. The plan includes a financial assessment that involves estimating the revenues expected to be available for financing transportation during the planning period, estimating the costs for implementing recommendations and for operation and maintenance, and comparing the revenues and costs to identify the financial shortfall. The recommendations are prioritized to balance costs with expected revenues.

**THE PLANNING PROCESS**

Early in 2001, Kenton County requested assistance from the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI) for developing a county plan to improve transportation. One of the issues that prompted the request is development’s impact on the need for transportation improvements. In Kenton County, as well as throughout this and other metropolitan areas, low-density residential development
has generated a need for roadway improvements that cannot be fully met with existing financial resources.

In response to Kenton County’s request, OKI began developing this plan in the fall of 2001 with a commitment to link transportation planning and land use. OKI is the agency responsible for regional planning in the Cincinnati metropolitan area. Figure 1-1 shows OKI’s planning area, which includes Kenton, Boone, and Campbell Counties in Kentucky; Butler, Clermont, Hamilton, and Warren Counties in Ohio; and Dearborn County in Indiana. OKI’s long-range transportation plan addresses Kenton County, but this county-level plan is more directly focused on Kenton County’s needs and includes recommendations for county-owned roads.
At the time this plan was getting underway, OKI was finishing the update of the long-range metropolitan transportation plan, which was subsequently adopted as the *OKI 2030 Regional Transportation Plan* in September 2001. Transportation projects must be recommended in OKI’s long-range plan as a prerequisite for federal funding. Additional projects recommended in this Kenton County transportation plan will be integrated into the long-range plan when it is updated in 2004, or by amendment before that time.

In developing this Kenton County transportation plan, OKI worked in partnership with three other agencies, obtained oversight from a Task Force representing the county’s diverse local interests, and sought public participation in two rounds of public meetings.

The three agencies that coordinated most closely in this planning process, as listed below, are also involved in other aspects of transportation planning.

- The **Northern Kentucky Area Planning Commission (NKAPC)** recommends transportation improvements as part of its responsibility for developing the county’s Comprehensive Plan. As required under state statute, the county Comprehensive Plan is updated every five years and includes a Land Use Plan for guiding development. A plan update to 2021 was being completed at the same time that this county transportation plan was getting underway and was adopted in December 2001.

- The **Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC)** allocates the funds available from federal and state programs for improving transportation. The KYTC produces an Unscheduled Needs List and a Six-Year Plan as a basis for advancing and funding transportation improvements. Updated versions of these documents, which are required every two years, were completed by the state in 2002.

- The **Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky (TANK)** is responsible for the management and operation of the bus transit system serving Kenton, Boone, and Campbell Counties.

The **Kenton County Transportation Task Force** was important for overseeing the plan’s development. The Task Force was formed at the beginning of the planning process to review major milestones and preliminary recommendations. Its 58 members provided diverse perspectives and expertise. Every local government was invited to participate. Task Force members included local elected officials, representatives from public agencies and the private sector, and individual citizens.

Public participation was sought in **two rounds of public meetings**. Each round of meetings was held at three locations and preceded by public advertising and articles in local papers.
• The first round of meetings was designed to obtain input on which transportation projects were most important for improving transportation. Participants were asked to review and comment on priority transportation needs identified by the Task Force and to identify additional needs or issues that were not on the list.
• The second round of meetings was focused on obtaining review and comment on the plan’s preliminary recommendations, including an indication (survey) of which recommendations were most important.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

County population and employment characteristics affect the number and distribution of trips, which in turn affect transportation needs. Population and household census data are presented in Tables 1-1, 1-2, and 1-3 as an indication of how Kenton County is changing, followed by some demographic and employment highlights and trends. Data for areas within Kenton County is presented in Chapter 2.

Table 1-1. Population by Decade

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Table 1-2. Population Change by Decade

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<td>OKI Region</td>
<td>49,843</td>
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Table 1-3. Number of Households by Decade

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<td>Campbell</td>
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<td>28,618</td>
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<tr>
<td>N. Ky.</td>
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<td>OKI Region</td>
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<td>586,810</td>
<td>652,917</td>
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Population

- Kenton County population was 151,500 in 2000. This is an increase of 9,400 (7%) since 1990.

- Kenton County had 46% of Northern Kentucky’s total population in 2000 (8% of the OKI region population); it had 22% of Northern Kentucky’s population growth between 1990-2000.

- Compared to neighboring counties, Kenton County’s population growth in 1990-2000 (9,400) was about one third that of Boone County (28,400) and about twice that of Campbell County (4,800).


- Projections for Kenton County population are being revised by the Kentucky State Data Center, University of Louisville, but current projections are for a 2030 population of 167,873, which represents a net increase of about 16,400 persons (11%) over the next 30 years, compared to an increase of about 22,100 (15%) for the 30 years between 1970-2000.

Households

A long-term trend toward smaller household size, which has caused households to grow faster than population in all of the counties in the OKI region from 1970 to 2000, is expected to bottom out and stabilize before 2030. In the meantime, household growth is bolstering development and traffic to higher levels than what would be expected based on population growth.

- The rate of household growth in Kenton County between 1990-2000 was 13%, compared to a population growth rate of 7%.

- Kenton County had a larger share of Northern Kentucky’s household growth than its population growth during 1990-2000 (31% of the new households compared to 22% of new population).
Employment, Commuting, and Jobs

Employment patterns affect the number, length, and distribution of trips. At a regional level, work trips comprise only one fifth of total person trips, but they place the greatest demand on the transportation system because of morning and afternoon peaks.

- Kenton County employment was 76,169 in 2000 (50% of the population) as reported by the census. Assuming that Kenton County trends will be similar to the region’s, the proportion of employed persons is projected to peak in 2010 at about 55% of the population and then decline as the baby boom generation reaches retirement age and leaves the labor force.

- Among Kenton County’s employed persons in 2000 (76,169), 40% worked within Kenton County (compared to 53% of Boone County workers employed in their county of residence and 35% of Campbell County). The rest of Kenton County employed persons were nearly evenly split between commuting to Kentucky counties and commuting to counties in Ohio and Indiana.

- As a means of commuting in 2000, 81% of Kenton County employed persons drove alone, 11% carpooled, 3% used transit, and 2% walked (the remainder used another means of commuting or worked at home.)

- The mean travel time to work for Kenton County employed persons in 2000 was 22.9 minutes (up from 21.5 minutes in 1990). Census reports travel time to work as less than 15 minutes for 28% of workers and more than 30 minutes for 27% of workers. For the others, 20% of workers have trips of 15-19 minutes and 25% have trips of 20-29 minutes.

- The number jobs in Kenton County as reported by the Bureau of Economic Analysis grew from 59,6724 in 1990 to 73,489 in 2000, which is a growth of 13,765 (23%).

- Kenton County accounted for 39% of the total jobs in Northern Kentucky in 2000 (based on data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis). Of the job growth that occurred in Northern Kentucky between 1990-2000, Kenton County had 24%.