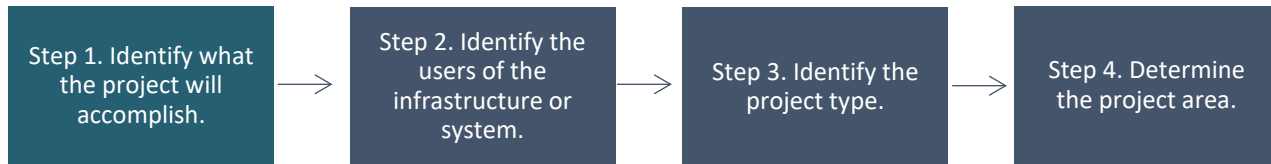# Justice40 Quick Guide 1: Determining a project area.

This quick guide is intended to provide four simple steps for determining an appropriate project area, which is helpful in- using tools like US Department of Transportation's (DOT's) Transportation Community (TC) Explorer, the project selection process, the evaluation of transportation alternatives, supporting grant application narratives, and informing public involvement activities. As you work through the steps of this quick guide it may be helpful to sketch your answers to the questions on a digital or paper map. Pay attention to the overlapping areas.

| Step 1. Identify what the project will accomplish. | → | Step 2. Identify the users of the infrastructure or system. | → | Step 3. Identify the project type. | → | Step 4. Determine the project area. |

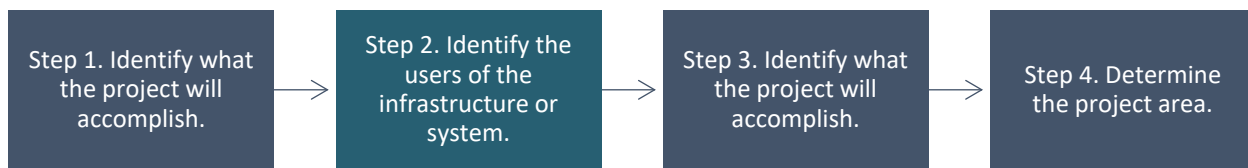## Step 1: Identify what the project is trying to accomplish.

Why is this step important? A clear understanding of what a project is trying to accomplish will help determine how large your project area is. It will also help with developing a narrative describing how the project will address the needs of a community.

What to consider? When determining what your project is trying to accomplish it is helpful to look at the current state of transportation in your region and think about whether the current system is meeting your community's needs. Ask yourself-

- Is there a "problem" in my community that a transportation project can help solve?
- Is the current transportation system helping my community meet its goals?

Common examples of transportation project needs and goals-

- **Needs:**
  - Community members are unable to get where they need to go to meet the needs of their daily lives regularly, reliably, affordably, and safely.
  - Infrastructure conditions and/or changes in environmental conditions have left my community's current transportation infrastructure either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete.
- **Goals:**
  - My community would like to strengthen our local economy and industries while improving the region's livability and resiliency.
  - My community would like to improve the safety and security of the regional transportation system for all users.
  - My community would like to protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements, planned growth and economic development patterns.

Step 1. Identify what the project will accomplish.	→	Step 2. Identify the users of the infrastructure or system.	→	Step 3. Identify what the project will accomplish.	→	Step 4. Determine the project area.

Step 2: Identify the users of the infrastructure or system.

Why is this step important? Thinking about the users of the project, including how they access it, will help determine the full geographic range of the project impacts, which again helps to determine how large a project area is.

How do I determine who the users are?

- **Ask people**: Engage with the public to identify intended users and to understand what groups should be engaged during project planning and development. DOT's Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement In Transportation Decision-Making provides tips on how to identify impacted users and groups and how to ensure they can participate in and shape the project development process.
- **Review publicly available data**: Data sources that identify different infrastructure types within your community such as transit routes, bus stops, and bike lanes, can help in understanding what types of users are within a geographical area (i.e., pedestrians, vehicles, transit riders). The DOT Navigator has a useful section on Data and Mapping Tools.
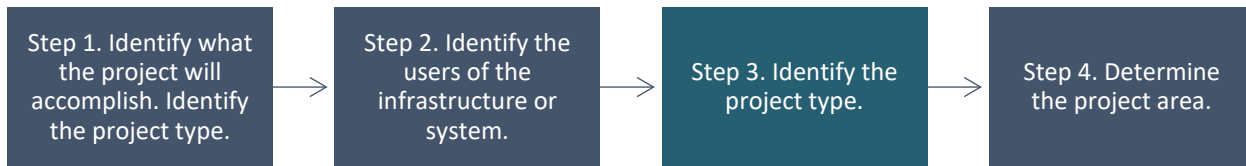
What to consider?

- Who will use your project each day? How will users access it and for how long will they travel on it?
  - Consider both individuals and the facilitation of the movement of goods and services.
- Whether users might change the mode of transportation they use if the new project is built.
  - Consider whether this mode shift makes the project area larger or smaller?
- If the infrastructure can no longer be used, how large a geographic area will be impacted?
  - Consider how far a user would need to travel if detoured.
- Does the project create heightened/decreased usage of the area that did not exist before?
  - Consider how the increased traffic (pedestrian, vehicles, trains boats, etc.) will affect adjacent areas and consider whether the impacted areas should be included in your project area?
- Will the infrastructure displace residents or businesses or lead to any other changes in the physical layout of the community?
  - Consider these displacements and physical changes as part of the project area.
- Will the infrastructure impact other types of transportation or community infrastructure that users rely upon like utilities, drainage, etc.?
  - Consider the location of the infrastructure, the impacts and any mitigation associated with them.

- What physical infrastructure, if any, will the project be creating?
  - Consider if the new infrastructure will increase or decrease access and usage of an area, introduce different modal options, or increase green space. Consider whether your project area should include these changes in access.
- Are users walking, biking, driving, or taking transit? Walking, biking, driving and transit all have different impact areas. Figure 1 provides aggregate data from Federal Highway's National Household Travel Survey on the length of daily non-commercial trips. This data may be helpful in determining how far users typically travel to access a project type, which helps define the project area.

Figure 1: National Travel Household Survey - Average Person Trip Length (miles, travel day), 2022

Trip Mode	Average trip length in miles
Car/ Van/ SUV	12
Pickup truck	15
Motorcycle	13
Public or commuter bus	7
School bus	6
Street car/ trolley/ subway/ elevated rail	7
Commuter rail	27
Taxicab/ limo service/ ride-sharing service	7
Paratransit/ Dial a ride	9
Bicycle (including bikeshare, ebike, etc.)	2
E-scooter	1
Walked	1

Step 1. Identify what the project will accomplish. Identify the project type.	Step 2. Identify the users of the infrastructure or system.	Step 3. Identify the project type.	Step 4. Determine the project area.

Step 3: Identify the project type.

Why is this step important? Understanding the project type is important to help understand the likely boundaries of your project area.

What are typical transportation project types? Transportation project types tend to fall into the following categories: **systemwide**, **fixed location**, or **corridor**.

Systemwide projects affect the whole system they are part of or create. Typically, a systemwide project is a combination of elements that are interconnected and can have a very large impact area. When drawing a project area for a systemwide project think about the operating area of a transit system or the area that is directly impacted by a set of interconnected projects that function together. Some examples are:

- Buying more buses for a bus fleet could improve an entire transit system. The project area could be the boundaries of the transit system's operations.
- A port facility technology upgrade project that improves the movement of goods both at the port and on the roads and rail lines in the area surrounding the port. If improvement at the port is removing truck traffic off local roads to improve safety and air quality, the project area would include the local roads surrounding the port.

Fixed location projects are located at a specific location and do not move. Their impact areas can vary greatly in size depending on 1) what the project is trying to accomplish 2) who the users are 3) how close the nearest transportation alternative is, if for some reason a transportation asset can no longer be used. Some examples are:

- Updating pedestrian crossing infrastructure at a single intersection will have immediate impacts to safety at that intersection. If you are putting forward an application with ten separate intersection improvements that don't interact, your application would have ten different project areas, one for each intersection.
- Building a new passenger rail station to alleviate congestion on area highways will benefit passengers that use the station, potentially transit system routes that service the station, potentially the highways that are experiencing less congestion, and potentially the immediate road and/or sidewalk network surrounding the station that is seeing an increased use due to users accessing the station.

- A bridge improvement project may address safety and access concerns in a localized area but if that bridge is the only crossing in the region losing access to it may have impacts on travelers in a wide geographic area.
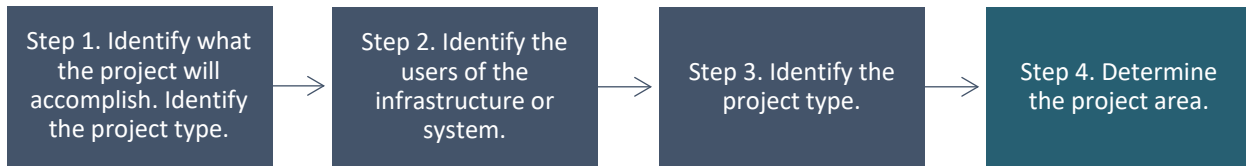
Corridor projects are generally linear areas used by one or more modes of transportation connecting two or more destinations. Their impact areas typically span a larger area than a single fixed location and could simply include the corridor or may include neighborhoods along the corridor or communities on the corridor that aren't in the immediate vicinity of the project. Some examples are:

- Rehabilitating or reconstructing a segment of a local freeway or interstate highway. Think about whether the project work only impacts the immediate users of the road (linear corridor), or will it impact the local roads and neighborhoods adjacent to the roadway by increasing or decreasing traffic?
- Installation of rail double tracking. Think about whether the project is having impacts simply where the double tracking is installed (linear corridor) or will it have broader impacts like eliminating train idling at a layover, will businesses or neighborhoods grow as a result of increased train speeds or train frequency, do nearby rail crossings need improvements due to faster train speeds? Your project area might capture these broader impacts.
- Construction of a multi-use path. Consider whether your project area should include just the path or will the path impact nearby neighborhoods or downtown districts that are now connected thanks to the path?

What to consider?

- Where is my project and where are all its elements located? Do the elements interact with each other to create a system? *If yes- this may be a **systemwide** project.*
- Does my project operate through an area? *If yes- this may be a **systemwide** project.*
- Is my project located at a single point or is my project a series of improvements at single points that don't interact? *If yes, this may be **a fixed location** project.*
- Does my project cover a linear area connecting multiple destinations? *If yes, this may be a **corridor project**.*

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Step 4: Determine the project area.

Why is this step important? Determining the project area can help a community assess the geographical range of the potential positive and negative impacts of proposed projects.

How do I determine the project area? A project area can simply be the project's immediate footprint but often it includes broader areas that will directly receive the benefits or negative impacts of a project.

Putting it together- Consider what the project is trying to accomplish (Step 1), who will use the project, how they will access it, AND who might be affected by it (Step 2), what the project type is (Step 3) and if there are any additional considerations. If you sketched your responses to each of the steps, where do you see overlap?

Illustrative Example:

In this example, a transit system is proposing to purchase new buses to allow for a new route and expanded service on existing routes.

Figure 2: Illustrative Map of Project Area

- Step 1 – The region has identified a need for increased transit service along current routes and to expand service to a nearby community. The yellow buffer captures the regional need.
- Step 2 – According to census data and the TC Explorer there is low car ownership in the area so users will likely be walking to the service. Given that the average walking trip is one mile (National Household Travel Survey) the green line captures a narrow buffer along the existing and proposed transit route.
- Step 3 – Given that new buses will allow for increased service across the whole transit system this is a **systemwide project** supporting the previously drawn yellow and green buffers.
- Step 4 – Putting it together there is clear overlap between the responses to the steps 1-3. Taking other considerations into account, the project sponsor can reasonably identify the boundaries of the project area between the green and yellow buffers.