
Transportation Conformity Determination Report
1997 Ozone NAAQS

Transportation Conformity Determination
Blair County, PA

2021-2045 Long Range
Transportation Plan

February 10, 2021

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Executive Summary

As part of its transportation planning process, the Blair Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) completed the transportation conformity process for the 2021-2045 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). This report documents that the LRTP meets the federal transportation conformity requirements in 40 CFR Part 93.

Clean Air Act (CAA) section 176(c) (42 U.S.C. 7506(c)) requires that federally funded or approved highway and transit activities are consistent with (“conform to”) the purpose of the State Implementation Plan (SIP). Conformity to the purpose of the SIP means that transportation activities will not cause or contribute to new air quality violations, worsen existing violations, or delay timely attainment of the relevant NAAQS or any interim milestones. EPA’s transportation conformity rules establish the criteria and procedures for determining whether metropolitan transportation plans, transportation improvement programs (TIPs), and federally supported highway and transit projects conform to the SIP.

On February 16, 2018, the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in *South Coast Air Quality Mgmt. District v. EPA* (“*South Coast II*,” 882 F.3d 1138) held that transportation conformity determinations must be made in areas that were either nonattainment or maintenance for the 1997 ozone national ambient air quality standard (NAAQS) and attainment for the 2008 ozone NAAQS when the 1997 ozone NAAQS was revoked. These conformity determinations are required in these areas after February 16, 2019. The *Altoona, PA* area (encompassing Blair County) was maintenance at the time of the 1997 ozone NAAQS revocation on April 6, 2015 and was also designated attainment for the 2008 ozone NAAQS on May 21, 2012. Therefore, per the *South Coast II* decision, this conformity determination is being made for the 1997 ozone NAAQS.

This conformity determination was completed consistent with CAA requirements, existing associated regulations at 40 CFR Parts 51.390 and 93, and the *South Coast II* decision, according to EPA’s *Transportation Conformity Guidance for the South Coast II Court Decision* issued on November 29, 2018.

1.0 Background

1.1 Transportation Conformity Process

The concept of transportation conformity was introduced in the CAA of 1977, which included a provision to ensure that transportation investments conform to a State Implementation Plan (SIP) for meeting the Federal air quality standards. Conformity requirements were made substantially more rigorous in the CAA Amendments of 1990. The transportation conformity regulations that detail implementation of the CAA requirements were first issued in November 1993, and have been amended several times. The regulations establish the criteria and procedures for transportation agencies to demonstrate that air pollutant emissions from metropolitan transportation plans, transportation improvement programs and projects are consistent with (“conform to”) the State’s air quality goals in the SIP. This document has been prepared for State and local officials who are involved in decision making on transportation investments.

Transportation conformity is required under CAA Section 176(c) to ensure that Federally-supported transportation activities are consistent with (“conform to”) the purpose of a State’s SIP. Transportation conformity establishes the framework for improving air quality to protect public health and the environment. Conformity to the purpose of the SIP means Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funding and approvals are given to highway and transit activities that will not cause new air quality violations, worsen existing air quality violations, or delay timely attainment of the relevant air quality standard, or any interim milestone.

1.2 National Ambient Air Quality Standards

The CAA requires the EPA to set NAAQS for pollutants considered harmful to public health and the environment. A nonattainment area is any area that does not meet the primary or secondary NAAQS. Once a nonattainment area meets the standards and additional redesignation requirements in the CAA [Section 107(d)(3)(E)], EPA will designate the area as a maintenance area.

Blair County is currently designated as a maintenance area under the 1997 8-hour ozone NAAQS. The County is in attainment of the 2008 and 2015 8-hour ozone, 2006 24-hour PM_{2.5} and 2012 annual PM_{2.5} NAAQS. Transportation conformity requires nonattainment and maintenance areas to demonstrate that all future transportation projects will not prevent an area from reaching its air quality attainment goals.

1997 8-hour Ozone NAAQS

The EPA published the 1997 8-hour ozone NAAQS on July 18, 1997 (62 FR 38856), with an effective date of September 16, 1997. An area was in nonattainment of the 1997 8-hour ozone NAAQS if the 3-year average of the individual fourth highest air quality monitor readings, averaged over 8 hours throughout the day, exceeded the NAAQS of 0.08 parts per million (ppm). On May 21, 2013, the EPA published a rule revoking the 1997 8-hour ozone NAAQS, for the purposes of transportation conformity, effective one year after the effective date of the 2008 8-hour ozone NAAQS area designations (77 FR 30160).

On February 16, 2018 the D.C. Circuit reached a decision in *South Coast Air Quality Management District v. EPA*, Case No. 15-1115. In that decision, the court vacated major portions of the final rule that established procedures for transitioning from the 1997 ozone NAAQS to the stricter 2008 ozone NAAQS. By court decision, Blair County was designated as an “orphan” maintenance area since the area was maintenance for the 1997 ozone NAAQS at the time of its revocation (80 FR 12264, March 6, 2015) and was designated attainment for the 2008 NAAQS in EPA’s original designations for this NAAQS (77 FR 30160, May 21, 2012).

2008 and 2015 8-hour Ozone NAAQS

The EPA published the 2008 8-hour ozone NAAQS on March 27, 2008 (73 FR 16436), with an effective date of May 27, 2008. EPA revised the ozone NAAQS by strengthening the standard to 0.075 ppm. Thus, an area is in nonattainment of the 2008 8-hour ozone NAAQS if the 3-year average of the individual fourth highest air quality monitor readings, averaged over 8 hours throughout the day, exceeds the NAAQS of 0.075 ppm. Blair County was designated as an attainment area under the 2008 8-hour ozone NAAQS, effective July 20, 2012 (77 FR 30088).

In October 2015, based on its review of the air quality criteria for ozone and related photochemical oxidants, the EPA revised the primary and secondary NAAQS for ozone to provide requisite protection of public health and welfare, respectively (80 FR 65292). The EPA revised the levels of both standards to 0.070 ppm, and retained their indicators, forms (fourth-highest daily maximum, averaged across three consecutive years) and averaging times (eight hours). Under the Clean Air Act, the EPA administrator is required to make all attainment designations within two years after a final rule revising the NAAQS is published. Blair County is in attainment of the 2015 8-hour ozone NAAQS.

2.0 BLAIR/ALTOONA MPO LRTP

The Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) serves as the official transportation plan for a metropolitan area. The LRTP documents the current and future transportation demand and identifies long-term improvements and projects to meet those needs. The plan guides decision-making about transportation improvements in Blair County. Federal regulations require that the LRTP:

- Consider all modes of transportation
- Cover at least a twenty year period
- Consider federal planning factors
- Be fiscally constrained
- Provide for public participation
- Be updated at least every five years

The planning factors specified in federal regulations provide the framework for developing an LRTP. In addition, PennDOT provides guidance to help MPOs prepare LRTPs, and local policies and plans also play a role in the development of an LRTP that illustrates how transportation investments will address current and future needs.

The February 16, 2018 South Coast vs. EPA Court decision did not vacate EPA’s revocation of the 1997 ozone standard and the decision does not change the area’s attainment status. Therefore, while such areas might be required to meet conformity requirements as part of anti-backsliding controls, such areas are not considered nonattainment or maintenance areas under the Transportation Planning Rule (23 CFR 450.104). Such areas continue to complete 5-year plan update cycles as described in 23 CFR 450.324(c). The 5-year metropolitan transportation plan update cycle continues to apply from the date of the most recent MPO metropolitan transportation plan adoption (not the most recent FHWA/FTA conformity determination). While these areas have a 5-year plan cycle for transportation planning purposes, as a result of the court decision they must still meet the 4-year frequency requirements for conformity determinations on long range plans and TIPs as required by 40 CFR 93.104.

Appendix A provides a listing of the regional significant projects that are funded in the LRTP within Blair County. These projects draw from the region’s TIP and PennDOT’s Twelve-Year Program (TYP). Regionally significant projects include transportation projects (other than exempt projects as defined under 40 CFR 93.126-127) that are on a facility which serves regional transportation needs.

3.0 Transportation Conformity Process

Per the court’s decision in *South Coast II*, beginning February 16, 2019, a transportation conformity determination for the 1997 ozone NAAQS will be needed in 1997 ozone NAAQS nonattainment and maintenance areas identified by EPA¹ for certain transportation activities, including updated or amended TIPs and LRTPs. Once US DOT makes its 1997 ozone NAAQS conformity determination, conformity will be required no less frequently than every four years. This conformity determination report will address transportation conformity for the Altoona MPO 2045 LRTP.

¹ The areas identified can be found in EPA’s “Transportation Conformity Guidance for the South Coast II Court Decision, EPA-420-B-18-050, available on the web at: www.epa.gov/state-and-local-transportation/policy-and-technical-guidance-state-and-local-transportation .

4.0 Transportation Conformity Requirements

4.1 Overview

On November 29, 2018, EPA issued **Transportation Conformity Guidance for the South Coast II Court Decision**² (EPA-420-B-18-050, November 2018) that addresses how transportation conformity determinations can be made in areas that were nonattainment or maintenance for the 1997 ozone NAAQS when the 1997 ozone NAAQS was revoked, but were designated attainment for the 2008 ozone NAAQS in EPA's original designations for this NAAQS (May 21, 2012).

The transportation conformity regulation at 40 CFR 93.109 sets forth the criteria and procedures for determining conformity. The conformity criteria for TIPs and LRTPs include: latest planning assumptions (93.110), latest emissions model (93.111), consultation (93.112), transportation control measures (93.113(b) and (c), and emissions budget and/or interim emissions (93.118 and/or 93.119).

For the 1997 ozone NAAQS areas, transportation conformity for TIPs and LRTPs for the 1997 ozone NAAQS can be demonstrated without a regional emissions analysis, per 40 CFR 93.109(c). This provision states that the regional emissions analysis requirement applies one year after the effective date of EPA's nonattainment designation for a NAAQS and until the effective date of revocation of such NAAQS for an area. The 1997 ozone NAAQS revocation was effective on April 6, 2015, and the *South Coast II* court upheld the revocation. As no regional emission analysis is required for this conformity determination, there is no requirement to use the latest emissions model, or budget or interim emissions tests.

Therefore, transportation conformity for the 1997 ozone NAAQS can be demonstrated by showing the remaining requirements in Table 1 in 40 CFR 93.109 have been met. These requirements, which are laid out in Section 2.4 of EPA's guidance and addressed below, include:

- Latest planning assumptions (93.110)
- Consultation (93.112)
- Transportation Control Measures (93.113)
- Fiscal constraint (93.108)

4.2 Latest Planning Assumptions

The use of latest planning assumptions in 40 CFR 93.110 of the conformity rule generally applies to a regional emissions analysis. In the 1997 ozone NAAQS areas, the use of latest planning assumptions requirement applies to assumptions about transportation control measures (TCMs) in an approved SIP. However, the Altoona, PA SIP maintenance plan does not include any TCMs.

² Available from <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2018-11/documents/420b18050.pdf>

4.3 Consultation Requirements

The consultation requirements in 40 CFR 93.112 were addressed both for interagency consultation and public consultation.

As required by the federal transportation conformity rule, the conformity process includes a significant level of cooperative interaction among federal, state, and local agencies. For this air quality conformity analysis, interagency consultation was conducted as required by the Pennsylvania Conformity SIP. This included conference call(s) or meeting(s) of the Pennsylvania Transportation-Air Quality Work Group (including the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), DEP, EPA, FHWA, FTA and representatives from larger MPOs within the state).

Meeting and conference calls were conducted on July 15, 2020 and October 22, 2020 to review all planning assumptions and to discuss the template and content for transportation conformity analyses in 1997 ozone orphan areas.

The LRTP and associated conformity determination has undergone the public participation requirements as well as the comment and response requirements according to the procedures established in compliance with 23 CFR part 450, Altoona MPO's Public Participation Plan, and Pennsylvania's Conformity SIP. The draft document was made available for a 30-day public review and comment period, which included a public meeting.

4.4 Fiscal Constraint

The planning regulations, Sections 450.324(f)(11) and 450.326(j), require the transportation plan to be financially constrained while the existing transportation system is being adequately operated and maintained. Only projects for which construction and operating funds are reasonably expected to be available are included. The Altoona MPO, in conjunction with PennDOT, FHWA and FTA, has developed an estimate of the cost to maintain and operate existing roads, bridges and transit systems in the region and have compared the cost with the estimated revenues and maintenance needs of the new roads over the same period. The Altoona MPO LRTP has been determined to be financially constrained.

5.0 Conclusion

The conformity determination process completed for the Blair/Altoona MPO LRTP demonstrates that these planning documents meet the Clean Air Act and Transportation Conformity rule requirements for the 1997 ozone NAAQS.

Appendix A

Regionally Significant Project List

Blair County

| Project Name | Description | Municipality |
|---|---|------------------------------------|
| FY 2021-2024 Highway-Bridge TIP/FY 2021-2045 Long Range Plan | | |
| 6th Ave/7th Ave Intersection Improvement (MPMS 94439) | The scope of this project will increase capacity along PA 764 (6th Ave) through the installation of a northbound left turn lane at PA 764 (6th Ave) and SR 4013 (7th St). Adaptive signals and existing signal timings will be investigated along the PA 764 corridor to ensure efficient movement of vehicles. A signal warrant analysis will be conducted at 6th and 11th Street to control vehicles and pedestrians associated with the adjacent Altoona Area School District. Overhead and pedestrian signings will be evaluated and replaced to reduce driver confusion and increase traffic flow. | City of Altoona |
| US 22 and North Juniata Street Improvement (MPMS 98785) | Intersection improvement, at-grade railroad crossing replacement, and bridge rehabilitation on US 22 from just west of the Jackson Street intersection to just east of the Front Street intersection in Hollidaysburg. | Hollidaysburg Borough |
| SR 1009 from SR 1021 to PA 36 (MPMS 108201) | Resurfacing, signal upgrades, and intersection improvements on Frankstown Road (SR 1009) from Amelia Avenue (SR 1021) to PA 36 in the City of Altoona and Logan Township. Traffic signals will be interconnected. | City of Altoona and Logan Township |

Blair Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

2021 Air Quality Conformity Resolution

Conformity of the 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the 2021-2045 Long Range Transportation Plan in accordance with the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990.

WHEREAS, the Congress of the United States Enacted the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, which were signed into law and became effective November 15, 1990, hereafter referred to as the CAAA; and

WHEREAS, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), under authority of the CAAA, has defined the geographic boundaries for areas that have been found to be nonattainment with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for ozone, carbon monoxide and particulate matter; and

WHEREAS, the EPA issued the Final Rule on Transportation Conformity on November 24, 1993 for transportation plans, programs and projects, and amended the Final Conformity Rule various times between 1996 and present; and

WHEREAS, effective July 15, 2004, Blair County was designated by EPA as a nonattainment area under the 1997 eight-hour ozone NAAQS; and

WHEREAS, on August 1, 2007, Blair County was re-designated under the 1997 eight-hour ozone NAAQS as an attainment (maintenance) area by EPA with motor vehicle emissions budgets (MVEBs) established in the State Implementation Plan (SIP) revision maintenance plan; and

WHEREAS, on April 6, 2015, EPA revoked the 1997 eight-hour ozone NAAQS for all purposes and established anti-backsliding requirements for areas that remain designated nonattainment for the revoked NAAQS; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Eighth Circuit issued a decision in *South Coast Air Quality Management District v. EPA* on February 16, 2018, addressing air quality requirements for former 1997 ozone maintenance areas that are in attainment of all subsequent ozone NAAQS, for which Blair County satisfies the criteria; and

WHEREAS, the EPA issued the Transportation Conformity Guidance for the South Coast II Court Decision on November 29, 2018 to address how transportation conformity determinations can be made for the 1997 ozone NAAQS; and

WHEREAS, transportation plans and programs are required to conform to the purpose of the State Implementation Plan and Sections 174 and 176 (c and d) of the CAAA [42 U.S.C. 7504, 7506 (c and d)]; and

WHEREAS, the Blair MPO, the Metropolitan Planning Organization for Blair County Pennsylvania, is responsible for the development of transportation plans and programs in accordance with Section 134 of Title 23, which requires coordination and public participation with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation; and

WHEREAS, the Final Conformity Rule (and subsequent amendments) requires the Blair MPO to determine that its transportation plans and programs conform with CAAA requirements by meeting the Final Rule on Transportation Conformity; and

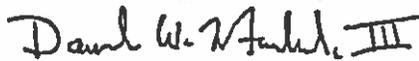
(Continued)

WHEREAS, an air quality conformity determination has been prepared for the Blair Long Range Transportation Plan 2021-2045 and the 2021-2024 TIP for the 1997 ozone NAAQS; and

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Blair MPO has found the Blair 2021-2045 Long Range Transportation Plan and 2021-2024 TIP contribute to the achievement and maintenance of the 1997 eight-hour NAAQS for ozone; and the Blair MPO has found the 2021-2045 Long Range Transportation Plan and 2021-2024 TIP are consistent with the final conformity rule issued on November 24, 1993 and subsequent amendments; and that this conformity determination demonstrates that the requirements of 40 CFR Part 93 regarding conformity to the State Implementation Plan are met.

I hereby certify that this Resolution was adopted by the Blair MPO on February 10, 2021.

ATTEST:



David W. McFarland, III, AICP
Blair MPO Secretary

BY: 

Thomas A. Prestash, P.E.
Blair MPO Chair