Transportation and Housing Alliance Toolkit

What is THA

The Transportation and Housing Alliance was established by the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, with funding from the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD),
as a way to help meet the housing and transportation needs of people with disabilities. THA is established as a standing committee of the Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions, with the goal of providing information, resources, technical assistance and education on accessibility and the interconnection between housing and transportation.
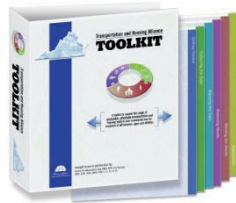
The THA Toolkit provides guidance on

Process:
- Conducting Meetings
- Data Collection and Analysis
- Mapping

Assessing Existing Conditions for:
- Transportation
- Housing
- Economic Development/ Employment

Planning in Virginia

The Comprehensive Plan is a guiding document that addresses multiple aspects of the community, providing a "comprehensive" vision for the future. This is typically a 20-year plan for the community, which addresses housing, transportation, land use, economic development and other topics. The State code requires every jurisdiction (Town, City and County) to adopt a Comprehensive Plan that will be reviewed every five years.

Updating your Comprehensive Plan with the THA Toolkit

The THA Toolkit is a resource for updating or drafting a new Comprehensive Plan for a Town, City or County. The Toolkit provides several resources that can help you collect and present data on housing, employment and transportation.

Getting to Know the THA Toolkit

THA developed the Toolkit to help provide a better understanding of transportation and housing needs of people with disabilities and others who may otherwise be excluded from the planning process. It is a catalog of tools with instructions and tips on how to collect and analyze information on your community. The Toolkit was expanded in 2007, when THA added a section to the Toolkit that focuses on providing guidance for analyzing employment and economic market conditions.

With references on housing, employment and transportation, the Toolkit is a useful resource for many projects, including work on Comprehensive Plans. The Toolkit can assist in developing the typical elements of a Comprehensive Plan, while helping to consider all citizens, including those with special needs. With these tools and instructions, the Toolkit can help localities complete plans that provide a clear, accurate and comprehensive analysis of the community and its needs.

The General Assembly adopted legislation that required localities to consider the housing needs of people with disabilities in their Comprehensive Plan. This legislation is effective July 1, 2008

Typical Tasks and Elements Applied to Comprehensive Plans

Conducting work on a Comprehensive Plan can be a challenging process, both in terms of finding accurate information on existing conditions, and incorporating that data into the plan's various sections or chapters. While the focus of the THA Toolkit is assessing the needs of people with disabilities, it can assist with any basic plan update.   The following are some common challenges to this process, typical sections of plans and ways the THA Toolkit can be a useful resource.
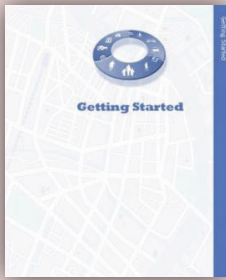
Finding accurate information, with limited time and resources – The THA Toolkit will direct you to various websites and resources where you can find basic or more detailed data on your community. The Toolkit provides step-by-step instructions on how to extract this information and how to present it in an easily understood format. This includes guidance on mapping with GIS and working with the public.

Transportation – The Toolkit provides questions and tools for assessing your community's transportation system. The Toolkit can help focus on a specific area, such as a neighborhood, or evaluate the entire jurisdiction or region.

Housing – Using the references and instructions in the Toolkit, you can find detailed information on housing and demographics. This will assist in determining existing conditions and the proximity of housing to community amenities and employment centers.
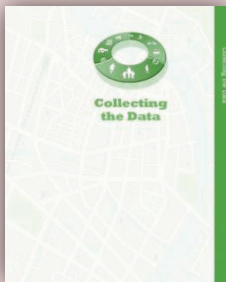
Economic Development/Employment – The Toolkit offers multiple resources for gathering information on the area's employment and market conditions. These resources will help identify employment centers, job creation and economic trends.

While many plans may view these topics separately, these aspects of the community are connected and influence each other. The Toolkit can help link these areas of the community, providing a clear and comprehensive vision for the community.

Getting Started:

The *Toolkit* offers several tools that can help with conducting work on a Comprehensive Plan. A good place to begin with the Toolkit is under its first tab, **"Getting Started."** This section provides further background on these resources. Becoming familiar with this basic overview can be helpful in understanding the layout of the *Toolkit* and how it works. The following provides an overview of how the Toolkit can help with the process and independent chapters of the Comprehensive Plan, including guidance on how to best make use of the *Toolkit*'s resources.
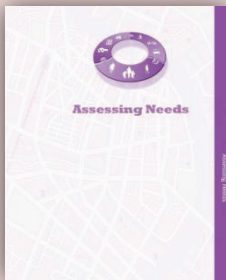
Process – Outreach:

Data Collection

One of the first steps in developing a Comprehensive Plan is collecting general data on the community. This information identifies existing conditions and trends, acting as a cornerstone for the rest of the process. The *Toolkit* has several references that are helpful for this step. Most of these resources are found under the Toolkit's **"Collecting the Data"** tab. The *"Introduction"* section to this tab lists 'Resources for Data on the Web.' This is a list of websites that maintain general information on demographics, transportation and other information. With these resources, your locality will be prepared to begin with public outreach.

Public Involvement

The Comprehensive Plan is a public document that represents the vision of a community's citizens. This makes public outreach one of the first and most important steps to any comprehensive planning work. The public should have a sense of ownership of the plan as early in the process as possible.

The THA *Toolkit* offers ideas and guidance on ways to obtain this input. Under the **"Meeting the Needs"** tab, it discusses how to facilitate community-based charretes. The *Toolkit* also provides tips on building partnerships and offers a 'Best Practices' section for looking at land use and transportation. The *Audit Form* section, under the **"Collecting the Data"** tab, has a set of several questions that may be useful for getting started with the public. These are basic questions that can be presented directly to citizens or function as ideas for potential surveys. There is a sample audit form in this section that can help build a better understanding of a focused area, on a block or neighborhood scale. It may also act as an example to guide and develop a format for separate surveys. Under the **"Assessing Needs"** tab, there are additional questions that may be helpful, once again either to grasp the public's needs or to serve as questions in a survey.
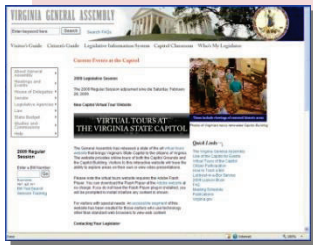
Mapping

Maps can be a critical tool for analyzing information and reaching out to the public. People typically relate and understand graphics more than text and can better grasp complex concepts and trends with these illustrations. Maps also allow people to easily identify important community resources, destinations, areas needing improvement and other important locations.

The *Toolkit* has extensive instruction and tips on mapping, using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Special software is needed to compose these maps. If your locality lacks this computer program, then the area's Planning District Commission will be a good resource for helping with this task. If your Comprehensive Plan identifies special study areas or areas of interest, then the *"Collecting and Digitizing Data"* section will describe how to depict a study area in a GIS map and how to crop the mapping layers so they are only within that designated area. The State Code requires that certain localities identify Urban Development Areas (UDAs). This section of the Toolkit may be helpful for defining the boundaries of these areas. Further guidance on GIS is below, providing direction for the separate chapters found in a Comprehensive Plan.

Chapters of the Plan – Collecting and Presenting Information:

A Comprehensive Plan covers multiple aspects of the community, which are typically divided into sections or chapters. This wide array of topics is what makes these plans "comprehensive." Some of the most common chapters include transportation, housing and economic development. While the Toolkit was developed to address the needs of people with disabilities, it can assist with any work on these plans. Below is additional guidance on how the Toolkit can help with these three common chapters.
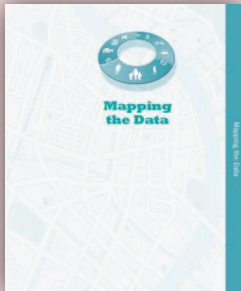
Transportation

The State Code requires that all jurisdictions adopt a Transportation Plan or Chapter, which is typically part of the Comprehensive Plan. The details of these requirements are located on the General Assembly's website, at http://legis.state.va.us/. Aside from these requirements, the transportation system is a critical part of any community. It serves as the link between one's home and employment opportunities, services, amenities, friends and other essentials of daily life. While the transportation section of the Toolkit is helpful for defining the needs in any type of community, it is best tailored for urban areas. Many of these tools deal with transit stops, sidewalks and other facilities that are typically found in cities, towns or densely developed areas. If you are developing a transportation chapter for a rural area, make sure to consider this focus. For rural areas, the Toolkit is most helpful with mapping existing transportation services or roads.

Collecting Transportation Information

Information on transit and other services will require separate research, but the *Toolkit* does offer directions on conducting fieldwork, which is found in the *"THA Checklist"* section of the **"Assessing Needs"** Tab. If a Comprehensive Plan includes focus or smaller study areas, then these questions will help identify the location and quality of facilities such as bus stops, sidewalks and other transportation related items. Questions in the Audit forms, found under *"Audit Forms"* section of the **"Collecting the Data"** Tab, may be a good start for determining how people with special get around.

GIS mapping

In the Toolkit, the most direct tool for addressing transportation is through mapping. With GIS mapping, the Comprehensive Plan can show where there are transit services and depict their proximity and access to households and those with special needs. This is an effective way of identifying gaps in transportation services.

The **"Mapping the Data"** tab provides ideas and guidance on several different kinds of maps. Focus on the third section, *"Geocoding Places"* and also *"Geocoding Employment Center"*. This will show how to map important places, such as medical, educational, recreational, civic, and employment centers, along with other community amenities. Also focus on the seventh section, *"Proportion of Persons served by Transit."* After collecting information on your transit services, this will instruct you on how to map this information. By overlapping the transportation information with housing, employment and other important places, there will be a clear understanding of existing gaps in your transportation network or challenges in accessibility.

The Economic Development/Employment section below discusses additional tools that may assist with transportation planning.

Housing

The cost and location of housing is critical, particularly for people with special needs. Once again, the State Code has requirements for meeting this topic in the Comprehensive Plan, along with addressing the needs of people with disabilities. Many people with physical and financial limitations have to make difficult choices on where to live, since accessible or affordable housing is often not located near needed services, such as public transit or employment centers. This, along with the inherent importance of having a home, makes housing a significant part of any Comprehensive Plan. The *Toolkit* is a valuable resource that provides multiple strategies and tools for assessing this topic.

U.S. Census Bureau
Under the *Toolkit*'s second tab, **"Collecting the Data,"** it directs you on how to retrieve data from the U.S. Census Bureau's website, which keeps an assortment of data. The first section, *"Collecting US Census Data,"* will be the basic resource for getting information on your community and directs you on how to extract a variety of data, including on those with disabilities. The "Introduction" section lists other resources, such as the Weldon Cooper website. This site provides detailed information of housing, demographics and other topics.

GIS mapping
The third tab, **"Mapping the Data,"** offers detailed instructions on how to display this data with GIS mapping. Maps can clearly depict where people with disabilities live and can illustrate other valuable information dealing with education, supplemental income and age. Additional maps can show the vicinity of housing to parks and other services. Focus on section two, *"Mapping Census Data,"* section five, *"Mapping Residential Growth,"* and section six, *"Disaggregating Block Group Data to Block Data."* There is further guidance on importing this information in the *"Collecting US Census Data"* section, under the **"Collecting the Data"** tab. These thematic maps are great tools for creating a clear understanding of the current population and for identifying areas that may have special housing needs.

Economic Development/Employment
The location and availability of employment plays an important role in anyone's decision on where and how to live. Employment and market conditions also play a major role in a community's prosperity. Businesses and job opportunities create tax revenue for local coffers, financing public infrastructure and services. As such, economic development is another typical and important chapter in Comprehensive Plans. With a new section on market conditions and employment, the *Toolkit* offers detailed and comprehensive resources to assess an area's job market. All of the employment references are under the second tab, **"Collecting the Data,"** in the last section, labeled *"Economic Market Conditions."*

HotReports
The *Toolkit* gives detailed instruction on using the HotReports website, which can provide a general overview of a community's market conditions. It identifies types of employment in the area and provides demographic information on education, income, and age. HotReports is easy to use and gives a clear understanding of market conditions by using charts, maps and tables. It also identifies other community assets and offers information on how people commute to work, which is useful for transportation considerations. This information serves as a general overview of employment, which can be useful in a Comprehensive Plan. Information on HotReports can be found on Page 3 of the **"Collecting the Data"**/*"Economic Market Conditions"* section.

OnTheMap
OnTheMap, found on Page 17 of the **"Collecting the Data"**/*"Economic Market Conditions"* section, is another resource which provides maps on employment centers and concentrations of housing. The maps can be useful in showing proximity of housing to jobs. The U.S. Census maintains OnTheMap, providing information on a community's labor statistics. This tool is most useful for transportation planning, helping identify designations and origins for commuting. While OnTheMap offers mapping, a locality can find further options under the **"Mapping the Data"** tab. Section four, *"Geocoding Employment Centers"*, discusses how to depict employment opportunities on your maps using GIS. With the GIS maps, a locality can overlay the employment centers with other maps, such as 'Disabilities by Block Group.'

Workforce Indicators
The Toolkit also offers references to Workforce Indicators, which provide further detail on an area's employment opportunities, such as turnover rates, new hires, etc. This information is included under the **"Collecting the Data"** /*"Economic Market Conditions"* section. This can contribute to a general overview of employment in you locality.