According to Federal transportation law, every urbanized area of 50,000 or greater must have a designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) that represents the State and local governments in the area. The Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) is the MPO for the Capital District region. As such, the CDTC serves as the forum for making decisions about roadway and transit plans, programs, and improvements in the area. Some decisions have an immediate impact, others have to do with plans 10-25 years into the future. Cornerstones of CDTC’s responsibilities are the development of a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), a regional transportation plan (RTP), approval of federally-funded highway and transit projects through a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and determining conformity of its plans and programs with the State Implementation Plan for Air Quality.

In accordance with Federal requirements, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) must specifically review and evaluate CDTC’s planning process every four years, and to certify that CDTC is (or is not) meeting federal rules and regulations. The intent of the statutory and regulatory requirements of federal law is to assure that an urbanized area, like the Capital District, is developing a transportation system that serves the mobility interests of people and freight through a multifaceted metropolitan planning process. The federal certification process evaluates an MPO’s overall planning approach, identifies strengths and weaknesses, and makes recommendations for improvement. In addition, the federal reviewers try to identify good or innovative practices to share with other States and metropolitan planning organizations.

The 2012 certification review process officially began in February with an internal desk audit of CDTC products, and concluded with an on-site interview with CDTC staff and other CDTC members on March 27-28, 2012. Members participating included NYSDOT, CDTA, the New York State Thruway Authority (NYSTA), Town of Clifton Park, and the Village of Altamont (via a telephone interview). The FHWA and FTA fully certified CDTC as meeting the federal transportation planning requirements, and found that CDTC’s process to be exemplary, noting the cooperative nature of the process and citing eleven noteworthy activities and practices, and the strong technical capabilities of the staff and member agencies. The list of noteworthy practices (on page ii of the draft report) continues to grow with the addition of CDTC efforts toward bike/ped law enforcement training and clean communities planning. The review (on page 7 of the draft report) cited CDTC’s Prospectus as one of the most unique in the Nation, laying out a clear philosophical framework for conducting transportation planning within the region.
The FHWA/FTA report noted that several corrective actions (on page 4 of the draft report) that were identified in the previous 2008 certification review related to TIP financial planning, completion of CDTC’s Prospectus, MPO planning and air quality agreements, and security planning actions have been successfully addressed. The 2012 report did not identify any corrective actions, but makes several recommendations related to TIP project selection for smaller communities, CDTC’s website and mailing lists, and outreach to neighboring rural counties to help with emergency planning.

The Draft 2012 Certification Report can be found at the first news bullet on CDTC’s website at www.cdtcmpo.org.