



2009 SAFETEA-LU REAUTHORIZATION: STRENGTHEN RURAL LOCAL OFFICIAL ROLES IN STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING PROCESSES

The National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) supports modifying the statewide transportation planning guidelines for state consultation requirements with non-metropolitan local elected officials as part of the 2009 SAFETEA-LU federal highway and transit reauthorization process. Specially, the association and its members encourage Congress and the administration to support the establishment and funding of Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs). These entities would:

- **Provide a formal governance structure for state transportation officials to solicit, gather and coordinate the input and priorities of local elected and appointed officials**, along with other key transportation, economic development and community stakeholders, in areas outside the boundaries of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). This is particularly important since most local governments have responsibility and ownership of various transportation assets—roadways, bridges, ports, airports, transit systems and intermodal facilities—that connect with state-owned transportation infrastructure.
- **Strengthen the coordination of federal-aid eligible transportation investments** made by state transportation officials with regional and local economic development, housing, transportation, water and sewer infrastructure and workforce development investments and plans made by local officials.
- **Bolster public transparency, accountability and trust at the local level** since local elected and appointed officials would have a clearly defined and more formal role in identifying, recommending and developing long-range transportation plans and short-term program needs of rural regions of the state.

Basics of Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPO) Proposal:

1. **Strengthen the current requirement for state DOTs to partner with rural local elected and appointed government officials from “consultation” to “cooperation” as defined under federal law and rules.** In recognition of the diverse governance structures, population demographics and transportation ownership duties across the states, NADO supports affording state DOTs with the flexibility to establish RTPO models that meet state and local conditions and needs. However, the term *cooperation* has a specific meaning under federal law and it would put non-metropolitan local officials on par with their counterparts served by MPOs in small metropolitan areas between 50,000 - 200,000 population.
2. **Provide federal recognition and definition for *Regional Transportation Planning Organizations*.** While the roles, functions and membership of MPOs are clearly defined under federal law and rules, the term *RTPO* is used informally and more loosely to reference an entity that provides a forum for local input on transportation issues in non-metropolitan areas. A federal definition and recognition of RTPOs would reinforce the valuable role these entities are increasingly playing in many states.

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ORGANIZATION (RTPO) PROPOSAL**

- 3. Allow the U.S. Department of Transportation to review, comment and approve the non-metropolitan official consultation models being used by state DOTs.** As highlighted in the February 2007 statewide and metropolitan planning rulemaking by FHWA-FTA, rural local elected and appointed government officials shall be consulted and treated separately from the general public outreach process. However, U.S. DOT is prohibited from reviewing and approving state processes for rural consultation under current law. Review and approval of the process would ensure a more sincere and effective level of collaboration between state and local officials.

- 4. Target federal highway, transit and safety planning resources to enable RTPOs and rural local officials to work regionally to build the planning, project development and institutional capacity needed to maintain and sustain a multi-modal, seamless transportation network.** Currently, state DOTs are required to spend up to 2 percent (nearly \$700 million annually) of core federal highway program funds on statewide planning and research (SPR funds), while 382 MPOs collectively receive nearly \$400 million each year in federal highway and transit planning funding.

In more than 25 states, state DOTs have voluntarily established contracts with regional planning and development organizations to serve as RTPO-type entities. The state DOT typically uses a mix of SPR and state funds to provide between \$50,000 - \$200,000 annually, plus local match, for RTPOs to carry out a specific work program within their region. The NADO proposal would generally amount to only \$1 million - \$3 million for each state from SPR and other existing sources.

- 5. Each RTPO would be responsible for working with their state DOT to enhance the planning, coordination and implementation of statewide transportation plans and programs in non-metropolitan areas** of the state on a regional basis. RTPOs would be governed by a policy committee of local elected officials, along with representatives of state agencies, general public, and administrators and operators of various transportation modes and interests present in the region. In addition, each RTPO would form a technical committee to assist with specific tasks and programs, as well as select a fiscal and administrative agent, such as a regional planning and development organization, to provide professional management support.

- 6. RTPOs would establish a work plan to assist state and local officials with:**
 - Ensuring local elected and appointed officials are given a meaningful opportunity to provide input in the statewide planning process
 - Developing statewide and regional long-range, multi-modal transportation plans that are performance driven, locally accountable and publically transparent
 - Identifying and recommending regional and local policy, plan and project priorities for consideration by the state
 - Improving the coordination and sharing of local planning, land use and economic development plans with state transportation plans and investment programs
 - Providing technical assistance to local officials and other transportation stakeholders
 - Participating in national, multi-state and state policy and planning development processes to ensure regional and local input of non-metropolitan areas

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