



## **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 DOT consultation requirements with non-metropolitan local elected officials as part of the SAFETEA-LU federal highway and transit reauthorization process. The statewide planning process is the gateway for accessing federal surface transportation funding, making it vital that local officials be involved.**

Specifically, the association and its members encourage Congress and the administration to support the establishment and funding of Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) as outlined in H.R. 1565 by Reps. Walz and Hanna and S. 625 by Sens. Klobuchar and Alexander. This legislation 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.
- **Improve the integration 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 shaping and addressing long-range transportation plans and short-term program needs of rural regions within the state.

**The primary objectives of the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) proposal include:**

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 that will 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 currently 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 will reinforce the valuable role these entities are increasingly playing in many states.

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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 has been prohibited from reviewing and approving state processes for rural consultation since the 1998 TEA-21 law. Review and approval of the process will ensure a more sincere and effective level of collaboration between state and local officials. It would also allow the U.S. DOT to properly implement the original rules issued in 2003 as a result of a compromise negotiated among the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), National Association of Counties (NACo) and NADO.
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 more than \$400 million each year in federal highway and transit planning funding for metro areas.

In more than 25 states, state DOTs have voluntarily established contracts with regional planning and development organizations and other similar groups 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 a local match) for each RTPO to carry out a specific work program within their region. The NADO proposal generally amounts to only \$1 million – \$3 million for each state from existing SPR and other state and local sources.

5. **Give each RTPO a formal structure and the responsibility for working with their state DOT to enhance the planning, implementation and results 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 and ensure public transparency and accountability.
6. **Establish an RTPO 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—*the gateway for accessing federal surface transportation aid*
  - Developing statewide and regional long-range, multi-modal transportation plans that are performance-driven, locally accountable and publicly transparent
  - Identifying and recommending regional and local policy, plan and project priorities for consideration by the state DOT and other appropriate state policy makers
  - Improving the integration 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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## **BACKGROUND**

In the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress (2009-2010), Reps. Tim Walz (D-MN) and John Duncan (R-TN) and a group of 26 co-sponsors introduced legislation (H.R. 2782) to establish and give federal recognition to Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) for areas outside the boundaries of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). Companion legislation (S. 3743) was introduced in the Senate by Sens. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN).

In the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress (2011-2012), Sens. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN) introduced the RTPO bill (S. 625) on March 17, 2011 to incorporate regional transportation planning organizations into statewide transportation planning. In the House, Reps. Tim Walz (D-MN) and Richard Hanna (R-NY), Vice-Chair of the House Transportation and Infrastructure, Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, introduced companion legislation (H.R. 1565) on April 14.

The goal is to incorporate language from the RTPO companion bills into the multi-year SAFETEA-LU reauthorization for federal surface transportation programs being developed by the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (highway title) and the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs (transit title). *See attached list of committee rosters.*

Specifically, the RTPO bills would:

- Elevate the participation of rural local officials from “consultation” to “cooperation” in the statewide transportation planning process; these words have very specific meaning under the SAFETEA-LU law
- Establish a federal definition and basic work program for RTPOs
- Require state DOTs to designate and fund RTPOs to help address the transportation needs of non-metropolitan areas outside the boundaries of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)
- Allow U.S. DOT to review and comment on state DOT processes for consultation with rural local officials

On September 16, 2011, President Obama signed P.L. 112-30, the “Surface and Air Transportation Programs Extension Act of 2011.” The legislation extends federal highway programs until March 31, 2012. This latest extensions will give authorizers additional time needed to continue to work through differences on the long-term authorization for federal surface transportation programs.

## **ACTION NEEDED**

- **Urge your House members to co-sponsor the Walz-Hanna bill (H.R. 1565) to establish and recognize Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs).** This is especially important for NADO members with Representatives serving on the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. To co-sponsor the Walz-Hanna RTPO bill, House members or their staff should contact Brian Kessler in Rep. Walz’s office at 202.225.2472 or Andrew Brady in Rep. Hanna’s office at 202.225-3665.
- **Urge your Senators to co-sponsor the Klobuchar-Alexander RTPO legislation (S. 625) in the Senate.** This is especially important for NADO members with Senators serving on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works and the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee. To co-sponsor, Senators or their staff should contact Travis Talvitie in Sen. Klobuchar’s office at 202.224.3244 or Curtis Swager in Sen. Alexander’s office at 202.224.4944. A roster of the transportation oversight committees is attached.

**For more information, contact NADO Associate Legislative Director Jennifer Walsh at 202.624.8467 or [jwalsh@nado.org](mailto:jwalsh@nado.org).**

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**U.S. Senate**  
**Committee on Environment and Public Works**  
*(Oversight of Highway Title of SAFETEA-LU)*

**Majority:**

**Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Chairman**

Max Baucus (D-MT)\*  
Thomas R. Carper (D-DE)\*  
Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ)\*  
Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD)\*  
Bernard Sanders (I-VT)\*  
Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI)\*  
Tom Udall (D-NM)\*  
Jeff Merkley (D-OR)  
Kirsten E. Gillibrand (D-NY)

**Minority:**

**James M. Inhofe (R-OK), Ranking Member**

David Vitter (R-LA)\*  
John Barrasso (R-WY)\*  
Jeff Sessions (R-AL)\*  
Mike Crapo (R-ID)\*  
Lamar Alexander (R-TN)  
Mike Johanns (R-NE)\*  
John Boozman (R-AR)\*

*\*Member of the Senate EPW Subcommittee on  
Transportation and Infrastructure*

**U.S. Senate**  
**Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs**  
*(Oversight of Transit Title of SAFETEA-LU)*

**Majority:**

**Tim Johnson (D-SD), Chairman**

Jack Reed (D-RI)\*  
Charles E. Schumer (D-NY)\*  
Robert Menendez (D-NJ)\*  
Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI)\*  
Sherrod Brown (D-OH)\*  
Jon Tester (D-MT)\*  
Herb Kohl (D-WI)\*  
Mark R. Warner (D-VA)  
Jeff Merkley (D-OR)\*  
Michael F. Bennet (D-CO)\*  
Kay Hagan (D-NC)

**Minority:**

**Richard C. Shelby (R-AL), Ranking Member**

Mike Crapo (R-ID)\*  
Bob Corker (R-TN)\*  
Jim DeMint (R-SC)\*  
David Vitter (R-LA)  
Mike Johanns (R-NE)  
Patrick J. Toomey (R-PA)\*  
Mark Kirk (R-IL)\*  
Jerry Moran (R-KS)\*  
Roger F. Wicker (R-MS)\*

*\*Member of the Senate Banking Subcommittee on Housing,  
Transportation and Community Development*

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**U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
(Oversight of Highway and Transit Titles of SAFETEA-LU)**

**Majority:**

***John L. Mica (R-FL), Chairman\****

Don Young (R-AK)\*  
Thomas E. Petri (R-WI)\*  
Howard Coble (R-NC)\*  
John J. Duncan, Jr. (R-TN)\*  
Frank A. LoBiondo (R-NJ)\*  
Gary G. Miller (R-CA)\*  
Timothy V. Johnson (R-IL)\*  
Sam Graves (R-MO)\*  
Bill Shuster (R-PA)\*  
Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV)\*  
Jean Schmidt (R-OH)\*  
Candice S. Miller (R-MI)\*  
Duncan Hunter (R-CA)  
Tom Reed (R-NY)  
Andy Harris (R-MD)\*  
Rick Crawford (R-AR)\*  
Jaime Herrera Beutler (R-WA)\*  
Frank Guinta (R-NH)\*  
Randy Hultgren (R-IL)  
Lou Barletta (R-PA)\*  
Chip Cravaack (R-MN)  
Blake Farenthold (R-TX)\*  
Larry Bucshon (R-IN)\*  
Billy Long (R-MO)\*  
Bob Gibbs (R-OH)\*  
Patrick Meehan (R-PA)  
Richard Hanna (R-NY)\*  
Stephen Fincher (R-TN)  
Jeff Landry (R-LA)  
Steve Southerland (R-FL)\*  
Jeff Denham (R-CA)  
James Lankford (R-OK)

**Minority:**

***Nick J. Rahall, II (D-WV), Ranking\****

Peter A. DeFazio (D-OR)\*  
Jerry F. Costello (D-IL)  
Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)  
Jerrold Nadler (D-NY)\*  
Corrine Brown (D-FL)  
Bob Filner (D-CA)\*  
Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)\*  
Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD)\*  
Leonard L. Boswell (D-IA)\*  
Tim Holden (D-PA)\*  
Rick Larsen (D-WA)  
Michael Capuano (D-MA)\*  
Tim Bishop (D-NY)  
Michael H. Michaud (D-ME)\*  
Russ Carnahan (D-MO)  
Grace F. Napolitano (D-CA)\*  
Daniel Lipinski (D-IL)  
Mazie Hirono (D-HI)\*  
Jason Altmire (D-PA)\*  
Tim Walz (D-MN)\*  
Heath Shuler (D-NC)\*  
Steve Cohen (D-TN)\*  
Laura Richardson (D-CA)\*  
Albio Sires (D-NJ)\*  
Donna F. Edwards (D-MD)\*

*\*Member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure  
Subcommittee on Highways and Transit*