

# Guide for Rural Local Officials

## *Evaluating Your Input into the Statewide Transportation Planning Process*



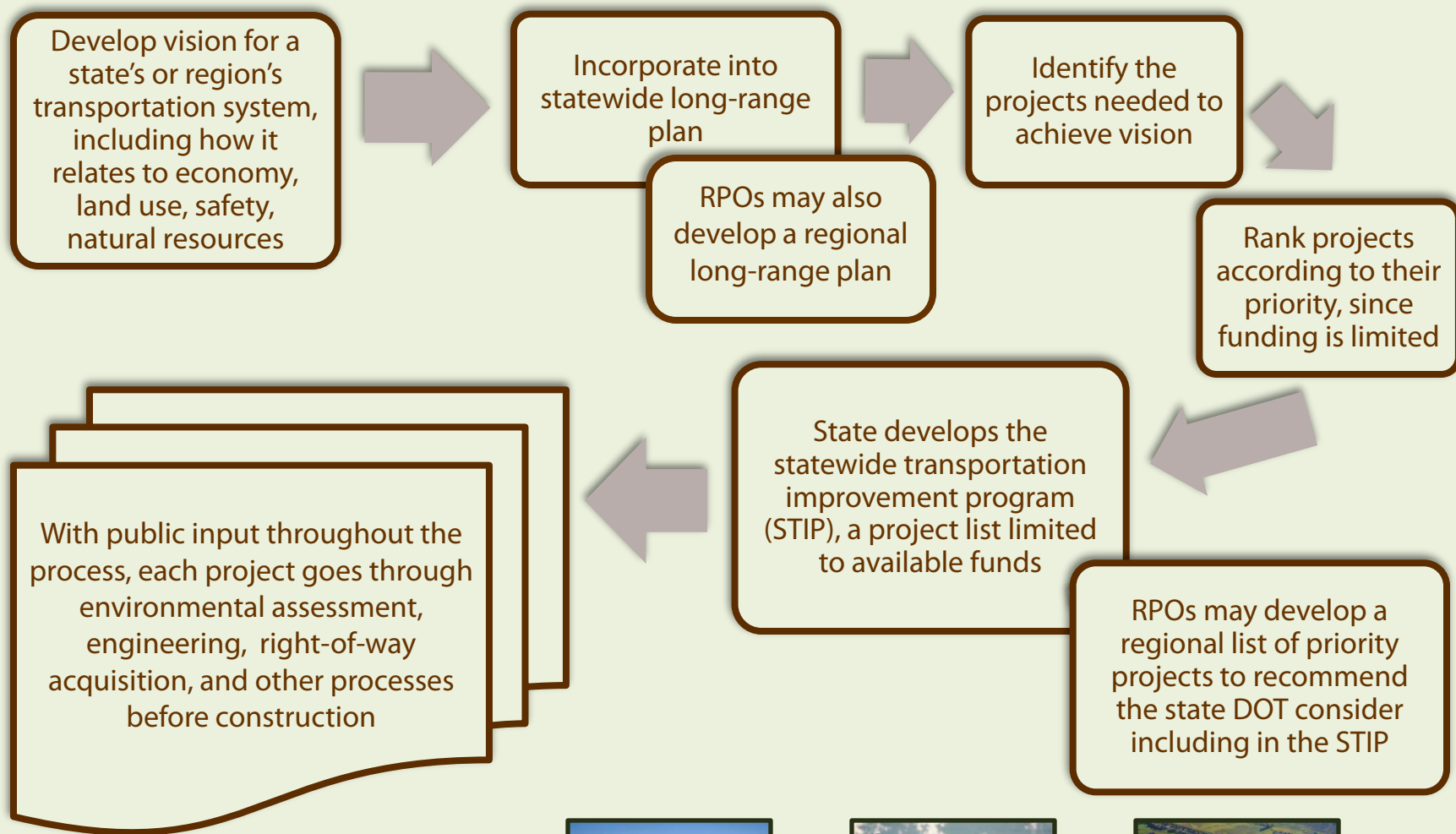
Developed by the National Association of Development  
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# Background

- Federal funding is the primary funding source for major transportation projects
- To be eligible for federal funds, projects must be included in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), a short-term list of projects developed by the state Department of Transportation (DOT)
- State DOTs also develop a statewide long-range plan (a 20 – 30 year vision for statewide transportation goals) to guide the STIP
- When state (DOTs) develop plans and priority project lists, they incorporate input from a variety of sources, including local officials



# Transportation Planning Process



# Local Official Roles

## Rural Regions

- State DOTs are the primary decision-makers but must gather input from local officials on the STIP and long-range plan
- That process must be different from the state's public involvement process
- States must periodically inform local officials about actions taken to implement the statewide plan
- In some states, local officials may participate in Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RPOs or RTPOs) to identify needs and a regional vision
- RPOs often submit plans and priority lists to the state DOT for consideration in the STIP development

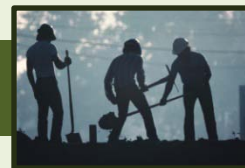
## Metropolitan Regions

- In current transportation law, a metropolitan region has a population is 50,000 or larger
- Local officials serve on the policy boards of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)
- MPOs identify projects in regional improvement programs, which are incorporated directly into the STIP so they are eligible for federal funding
- Regions with a population over 200,000 receive federal funds directly from the state DOT for their priority projects



# A Framework for Action

- The special process used by state DOTs to gather input from rural local officials in the statewide planning process is called ***consultation*** in federal regulations
- State DOTs must document the process for consulting with local officials and submit it to the Federal Highway Administration
- But the process is most effective when rural officials know what steps they can take to strengthen their partnerships with the state DOT and other local governments in their region
- Strong collaboration helps to ensure that priority issues are addressed through statewide and regional planning



# A Framework for Action

- The following series of questions will help rural local officials and RPOs to evaluate their own involvement in statewide planning
- Consideration of these issues may help to improve transportation system planning, performance and project development
- Effective transportation planning is important because infrastructure plays a role in every region's economy, environment, and the health and safety of its residents





# Section 1: Federal Rules for Local Official Consultation

**RATINGS: Excellent / Average / Needs Improvement / Do Not Know**

Does the state DOT have a clearly defined process for considering rural local officials' views?

- State officials worked with local officials, RPOs and relevant state associations to define the consultation process
- Local officials' views are considered before decisions are made and are informed of actions taken
- Local officials have made a strong commitment to attend meetings and provide meaningful input in the statewide planning process

Is the consultation process separate from the state's public involvement process?

- Because they often have responsibility for local infrastructure, local officials' views are solicited separately from the general public's input
- The state DOT has provided funding and support for a statewide network of RPOs to develop sub-state plans and priorities for consideration by the state

# Section 2: Methods for Rural Local Official Consultation

**RATINGS: Excellent / Average / Needs Improvement / Do Not Know**

Has the state DOT established a formal and continuous process for local government officials to participate in statewide planning?

- A formal, meaningful process exists for soliciting and prioritizing local officials' perspectives, such as through a statewide network of RPOs
- Sub-state regional plans and priorities are encouraged, including coordinating local and regional transportation goals with economic development, energy, land use, environmental plans
- Dialogue between state transportation officials and local officials occurs on a continuing and comprehensive basis, rather than sporadically and informally
- Local officials and RPOs consider and provide input on long-term and short-range infrastructure needs, and consider the transportation network's condition at the regional level



# Section 3: Governance Structure, Planning Process and Framework

**RATINGS: Excellent / Average / Needs Improvement / Do Not Know**

Does the state DOT's consultation process maximize the potential contributions of local officials?

- Rural local officials are aware of steps, timing and organizational roles of each stage in the transportation planning process
- Officials know the ownership structures of the region's infrastructure, funding eligibility and the regulations that guide the use and allocation of federal highway, transit and safety funding

Have local officials and RPOs been proactive at leveraging resources, coordinating various regional and local plans, and crafting a long-range vision for the region?

- Rural local officials regularly attend meetings with transportation officials and express support for their role in the statewide planning process
- Local officials have worked with state DOT to document their level of participation in and satisfaction with consultation process
- Local officials, RPOs and state associations of local officials request meetings with state and provide comprehensive recommendations for system improvements, rather than specific local projects
- Officials and RPOs work to improve coordination between metropolitan and rural areas of the state, addressing such issues as local land use, economic development, emergency management, housing and commuting patterns

# Section 4:

## Education and Training

**RATINGS: Excellent / Average / Needs Improvement / Do Not Know**

Have statewide or regional associations of local governments developed training opportunities for engaging in the transportation planning process?

- State associations of local officials or RPOs have worked with the state DOT to offer planning workshops for local officials, planners and public works officials, as well as encouraging multi-state or national training
- An attendance mechanism tracks participation in consultation process
- The statewide network of MPO and RPO planners meet regularly to exchange information and develop guidelines for regional planning documents, processes and outcomes

Has the state DOT spent the resources necessary to provide educational opportunities for local officials?

- The state transportation agency conducts meetings and training workshops with local officials, including RPO representatives, on the consultation process, state and federal transportation programs, and timing of project development
- The state DOT has developed manuals or reference material to keep local officials informed, as well as a mechanism to evaluate the training resources at improving quality of input and planning

# Section 5:

## Intergovernmental Dialogue

**RATINGS: Excellent / Average / Needs Improvement / Do Not Know**

Does the state's transportation planning dialogue occur across modes of transportation as well as across jurisdictional boundaries?

- Local officials and RPOs are prepared to serve as informed and valued participants in the statewide planning process
- Local officials, RPOs, and state associations have recommended regional transportation policies and priorities, even where the state agency has not sub-allocated resources to the local level or established RPOs
- RPOs or state associations of local officials have volunteered or been invited to serve on advisory committees to ensure rural issues are considered
- RPOs or state associations of local officials have offered to co-host forums to discuss transportation activities related to local economic development, energy, land use, environmental and safety planning efforts, as well as collaboration between metropolitan and rural regions

# Additional Resources

- *Rural Local Officials Consultation Assessment Guide*  
[www.RuralTransportation.org/uploads/assess08.pdf](http://www.RuralTransportation.org/uploads/assess08.pdf)  
NADO Research Foundation, September 2008
- *Transportation Planning in Rural America: Emerging Models for Local Consultation, Regional Coordination and Rural Planning Organizations*  
[www.RuralTransportation.org/uploads/scan2005.pdf](http://www.RuralTransportation.org/uploads/scan2005.pdf)  
NADO Research Foundation, December 2009
- *Non-Metropolitan Local Consultation Process: A Self-Assessment Tool for States*  
[www.RuralTransportation.org/uploads/aashtosats.pdf](http://www.RuralTransportation.org/uploads/aashtosats.pdf)  
American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, August 2006
- *The Transportation Planning Process: Key Issues—A Briefing Book for Transportation Decisionmakers, Officials, and Staff*  
[www.planning.dot.gov/documents/briefingbook/bbook.htm](http://www.planning.dot.gov/documents/briefingbook/bbook.htm)  
Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, September 2007
- Federal Highway Administration Planning Glossary  
[www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/glossary/index.cfm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/glossary/index.cfm)



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