



2009 NATIONAL SCAN: RURAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS

NADO | NADO RESEARCH FOUNDATION | RPO AMERICA



2009 National Scan Results: Rural Transportation Planning Organizations

Since the passage of ISTEA, an increasing number of states have turned to regional planning and development organizations (including those operating as rural transportation planning organizations) to facilitate the involvement of local officials in the statewide process at a multi-county regional level, provide technical assistance to local governments, assist with public involvement in the planning process and other tasks.

In April and May 2009, the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Research Foundation conducted a national scan of multi-county regional planning and development organizations (RDOs) to determine their level of involvement in rural transportation planning, including through rural transportation planning organizations (RPOs).

Regional-level rural transportation planning is still a relatively new field, since planning and prioritization of transportation projects was the sole responsibility of state departments of transportation (DOTs) until the early 1990s.

The passage of the federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991 and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) in 1998 set the stage for enhancing the participation by rural local officials in the statewide transportation planning process.

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planning and development organizations (including those operating as rural transportation planning organizations) to facilitate the involvement of local officials in the statewide process at a multi-county regional level, provide technical assistance to local governments, assist with public involvement in the planning process and other tasks.

Unlike metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), whose responsibilities and funding have been set in federal law since the 1960s, there is no federal definition or specific funding stream for RPOs. As a result, most rural transportation planning programs are established through state DOT contracts with existing regional planning and development entities, such as economic development districts, councils of governments and regional planning commissions.

Funding sources, funding levels and responsibilities vary considerably among RPOs in various states and even RPOs within the same state. A few regions who have seen a

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State DOT Funding Support for RPO-Type Entities and Activities

State	Annual funding from state and federal sources	Match rate	Time period established
Alabama	\$25,000 – \$75,000	20%	2005 – 2006
Arizona	\$125,000 – \$150,000	10 – 20%	1970s
California ¹	\$77,000 – \$220,000		mid-1980s
Colorado	Less than \$25,000 – \$75,000	No match required	
Connecticut	\$75,000 – \$100,000	15%	1990s
Florida ²	\$25,000		2005
Georgia	\$25,000 – \$100,000	20%	early 2000s
Iowa	\$25,000 – \$100,000	20%	1995
Indiana	\$25,000 – \$50,000	10 – 20%	2001
Kentucky	\$75,000 – \$100,000	10%	mid-1990s
Maine	\$25,000 – \$50,000	No match required	mid-1990s
Maryland ³	More than \$150,000	25%	
Massachusetts	More than \$150,000	No match required	1970s and 1980s
Michigan	\$25,000 – \$125,000	No match required	1970s
Minnesota	\$25,000 – \$50,000	15%	1980s
Missouri	\$25,000 – \$75,000	20 – 25%	mid-1990s
New Hampshire	\$125,000 – more than \$150,000	10 – 20%	early 1990s
New Mexico	\$25,000 – \$75,000	15 – 20%	mid-1990s
North Carolina	\$75,000 – \$125,000	20%	2001 – 2002
Oregon ⁴	\$25,000 – \$50,000	No match required	late 1990s
Pennsylvania	\$100,000 – more than \$150,000	10%	1990s
South Carolina	\$50,000 – \$125,000	20%	late 1990s
Tennessee	\$50,000 – \$125,000	10%	2005
Texas ⁵	\$50,000 – \$75,000		
Utah	Less than \$25,000 – \$50,000		2005 – 2008
Vermont	\$125,000 – more than \$150,000	10%	early 1990s
Virginia	\$58,000	20%	early 1990s
Washington	\$50,000 – \$125,000	No match required	early 1990s
Wisconsin	\$50,000 – \$75,000	5 – 10%	1970s

Table based on self-reported scan responses, which were given in \$25,000 increments in most cases

¹ No scan responses received from organizations in California; information based on prior research

² No scan responses received; prior research found a pilot program with two RPCs assisting Florida DOT

³ One region in Maryland is known to conduct an annual transportation needs assessment

⁴ Oregon's Area Commissions on Transportation (ACTs) exist statewide, but RDOs only staff some ACTs

⁵ Texas RPOs are primarily voluntary and self-funded, but some Councils of Governments (COGs) receive support for work in related areas such as transit



More advanced RPO-type entities in places such as Arizona, California, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire and Vermont receive significant funding support through their state DOTs. Each RPO-type organization in these states typically receives more than \$125,000 each year to carry out various transportation planning activities.

need for regional-level rural transportation work have even established voluntary RPOs using only local funds.

The following information provides an update to earlier NADO Research Foundation work by offering a snapshot of RPO characteristics and activities.

Funding for Rural Planning Organizations

Responses were submitted by 172 regional development organizations in 43 states, and 74 percent of respondents (127 organizations) in 27 states report that they have a contract with their state DOT to perform some type of transportation planning services in non-metropolitan areas as an RPO or similar entity.

In addition, eight percent of respondents (14 organizations) from seven states report that they voluntarily fund and staff a rural transportation planning program without a contract with the state DOT.

Twenty-three percent of respondents (40 organizations) administer or staff a federally designated MPO in-house, and of those with MPOs, 80 percent (32 respondents) house both an MPO and an RPO.

Funding for the RPOs with state DOT contracts varies significantly among states, and even among RPOs within the same state due to the nature of the funding formulas used and the availability of special project or competitive grant funding.

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Most RPOs receive funding through state DOT contracts at amounts between \$25,000 and

\$100,000, with 28 percent of responding regions receiving \$50,001 – \$75,000, 22 percent receiving \$75,001 – \$100,000, and another 21 percent receiving \$25,001 – \$50,000. *(See table on page 2 for a matrix of funding amounts for each state where respondents reported receiving state funding.)*

Federal SAFETEA-LU funding is significant for sustaining RPO programs. State Planning and Research funds (SPR), which are derived from a two percent takedown from SAFETEA-LU's core highway and transit programs, were reported as the major source of funding for 31 percent of respondents.

Another 30 percent indicated their funding was largely a mix of state and federal funds, which may include SPR funds as well as support for rural and other transit programs funded through the Federal Transit Administration.

State transportation funds comprise the major source of RPO funding for 27 percent of respondents. The funding

levels reported in the scan do not include funds provided to MPOs for planning, only for rural planning programs.

Where states administer rural and metropolitan planning process jointly, only the rural portion of funding was reported.

Most states require RPOs to provide some level of matching funds. The most common match rate is a 20 percent match, at 48 percent of scan responses, followed by a 10 percent match, with 21 percent of respondents. No match is required for 15 percent of the responding RPOs.

Where a match is required, the most common source of funds is local cash, at 75 percent. A mix of local cash and in-kind support provides the match for another 13 percent, while 5 percent use only in-kind for their match. Other sources of match funding include regional development organization general funds through local dues, other state funds and a local tax levy.

Serving Local Governments and Residents

The organizations responding to the scan indicated that RPO boundaries typically align with regional planning commission or economic development district boundaries (excluding

portions of region covered by MPO), although some exceptions do exist.

Most RPOs serve a fairly small number of counties, with 75 percent of respondents serving six or fewer counties, although the number of counties does not necessarily indicate the geographic size served.

The number of municipalities ranges more broadly, with a minimum response of one and maximum of 337 units of local government. Examined together, 63 percent of respondents serve fewer than 30 municipalities.

The population size of regions served by RPOs also varies. The most frequent response is a population served of 100,001 – 200,000, at 35 percent of respondents. Another quarter of responding RPOs serve regions of 200,001 – 350,000, and 23 percent have regional population of 50,001 – 100,000.

RPO Structure and Activities

Often similar in structure to MPOs, most RPOs have policy and technical committees, which sometimes exist as a joint policy and technical committee.

Of the 127 organizations with a state DOT contract to

POLICY COMMITTEE MAKEUP

Most Common

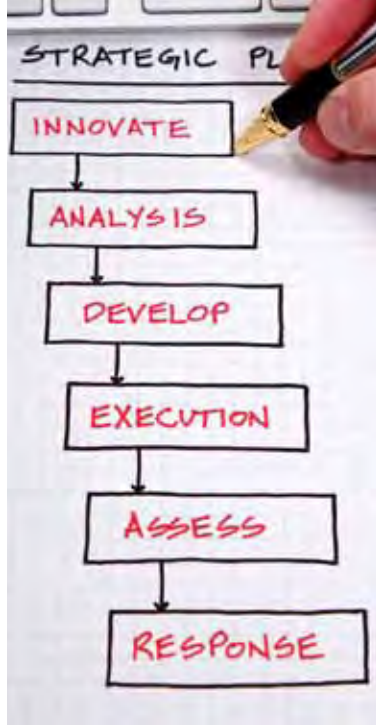
- County Elected Officials
- Municipal Elected Officials
- State DOT Representatives
- City/County Managers
- Business Sector Representatives
- Local Economic Development Organizations
- Public / Citizen Representatives
- Transit Providers

Noteworthy

- Aviation Facility Officials
- College/University Officials
- Human Service Providers
- MPO Representatives
- Railroad Representatives
- Port Authority Officials
- Public Works Officials and County Engineers
- School District Officials
- Tourism Officials
- Trucking Companies

OTHER NOTEWORTHY RPO COMMITTEES

- Bike/Pedestrian Committee
- Citizen Advisory Committee
- Freight Stakeholders Committee
- Public or Human Services Transportation Committee
- Transportation, GIS and Land Use Committee
- Joint Transportation Committee for Urban and Rural
- Regional Air Quality Task Force
- Safety Committee



Policy committees are most frequently made up of state DOT representatives, municipal elected officials and county commissioners, while technical committees are often made up of state DOT representatives, city/county managers, public works representatives and transit officials, with county and municipal elected officials appearing less regularly.

perform rural transportation planning activities, 70 percent have a policy committee, and 61 percent have a technical committee. Public transportation or transit committees are the next most common, at 18 percent.

Policy committees are most frequently made up of state DOT representatives, municipal elected officials and county commissioners, while technical committees are often made up of state DOT representatives, city/county managers, public works representatives and transit officials, with county and municipal elected officials appearing less regularly.

Responding RPOs conduct a wide variety of planning services through their state DOT contracts. The most often reported tasks include providing technical assistance to local governments (93 percent), assisting with public involvement (91 percent), and facilitating participation of local officials in the statewide planning process (90 percent).

Assisting with applications for Transportation Enhancement grants (84 percent), and developing regional priorities for the statewide transportation improvement program (or STIP, 76 percent) were not far behind.

Likewise, many RPOs address an array of transportation modes. The most common included in respondents' transportation planning activities are highways (93 percent), bicycle and pedestrian (91 percent), transit (88 percent) and bridges (69 percent).

Transportation Initiatives

Scan respondents also provided brief overviews of their innovative transportation-related initiatives. These responses covered a broad range of transportation modes, planning issues and administrative initiatives.

Several regions are analyzing transportation together with related planning topics such as land use, housing, and economic development. For example:

- **Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission (VA)** is performing a gateway study to link transportation and land use in areas directly adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway
- **East Michigan Council of Governments** recently launched its Regional Transportation, Land Use and GIS Committee, to provide

a platform for regional cooperation, data sharing and problem solving and to minimize duplication of work

- **Down East Rural Transportation Planning Organization** (housed at the **Eastern Carolina Council of Governments (NC)**) has developed a new corridor management initiative to link transportation with land use
- **Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission** has initiated Joint Land Use Study (JLUS), Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan (HSCTP) and Hazard Mitigation planning processes
- **Northern Arizona COG** is working to strengthen links between regional transportation planning and the transportation component of the region's comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDs)
- **Northwest Michigan Council of Governments** is currently engaged in a six-county land use and transportation study called the Grand Vision, the result of reallocating federal funds that were originally intended for a bypass

- **North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission** is working to link Land Use, Transportation and Economic Development in an initiative known as LUTED, as well as Linking Planning and NEPA through needs-based long-range planning
- **Catawba Regional Council of Governments (SC)** has conducted a corridor study for U.S. 521 and a regional visioning effort, as well as its Sustainable Growth Cabinet establishing the Regional Corridors Working Group

Rural, regional transit and rideshare were also significant, including such projects as:

- **North Country Council (NH)** is developing a North Country RideShare Program, writing a Regional Transportation Plan, writing a Regional Coordinated Transit Plan, and assisting with the development of Regional Coordinating Councils
- **Santee-Lynches Regional Council of Governments (SC)** has developed a Rural Rideshare Program where employers are encouraged to partner with the local transit agency in providing alternative transportation

options, such as carpooling, vanpooling, bicycling and transit, via a Web-based system

- **Lower Savannah Council of Governments (SC)** is developing a Travel Management and Coordination Center for common dispatching
- **Bear River Association of Governments (UT)** is engaging in mobility management planning for human service transit coordination

Other new initiatives reported by responding RPOs include bicycle and pedestrian projects, including Safe Routes to Schools programs as well as recreational trail work; safety initiatives; cultural and environmental preservation and context sensitive solutions; sharing staff among MPOs and RPOs housed in the same agency to promote metropolitan and rural transportation planning collaboration; and outreach to neighboring states with limited local official consultation.

For more details, contact NADO Transportation Program Manager Carrie Kissel at 202.624.8829 or ckissel@nado.org, or visit RuralTransportation.org.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

RuralTransportation.org

NADO and RPO America's clearinghouse for information on rural transportation planning, including descriptions of states' RPO models, a comprehensive document library, calendar of events and other resources

Transportation Planning in Rural America: Emerging Models for Local Consultation, Regional Coordination and Rural Planning Organizations (2005)

NADO Research Foundation
www.RuralTransportation.org/uploads/scan2005.pdf

Rural Local Officials Consultation Assessment Guide: Evaluating Your Knowledge and Input into the Statewide Transportation Planning Process (2008)

NADO Research Foundation
www.RuralTransportation.org/uploads/assess08.pdf

FHWA Rural Transportation Planning Web Resources

Federal Highway Administration
www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/rural/ and
www.planning.dot.gov

FTA Statewide Transportation Planning Web Resources

Federal Transit Administration
www.fta.dot.gov/planning_environment.html



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PROMOTING REGIONAL STRATEGIES, SOLUTIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS
THAT STRENGTHEN LOCAL ECONOMIES, COMPETITIVENESS AND QUALITY OF PLACE
THROUGH THE NATION'S REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS