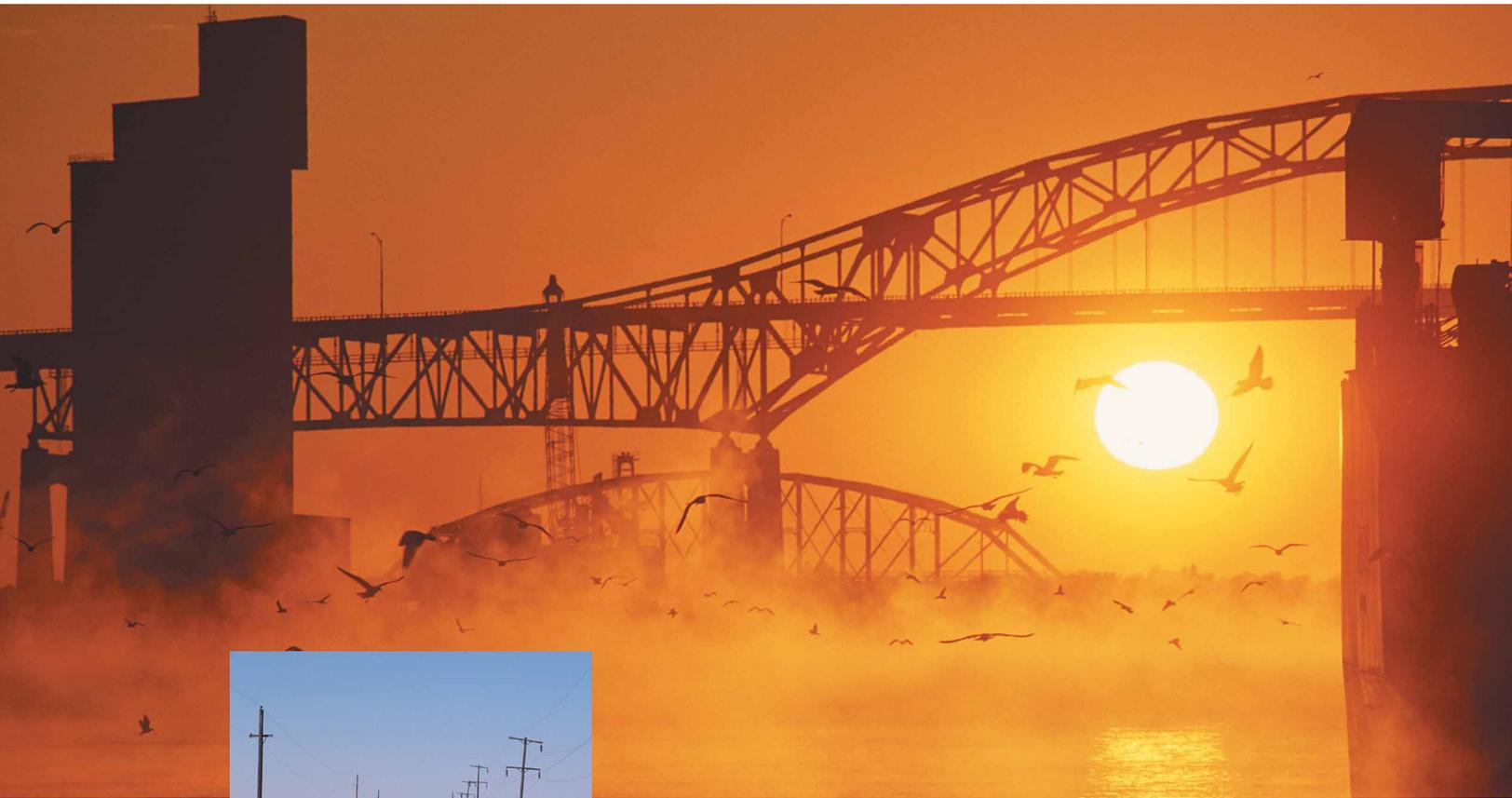




TRANSPORTATION PLANNING IN RURAL AMERICA:

Emerging Models for Local Consultation, Regional Coordination & Rural Planning Organizations



About the NADO Research Foundation

Founded in 1988, the **NADO Research Foundation** is the non-profit research affiliate of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO).

The NADO Research Foundation identifies, studies and promotes regional solutions and approaches to improving local prosperity and services through the nationwide network of regional development organizations.

The Research Foundation shares best practices and offers professional development training, analyzes the impact of federal policies and programs on regional development organizations, and examines the latest developments and trends in small metropolitan and rural America. Most importantly, the Research Foundation is helping bridge the communications gap among practitioners, researchers and policy makers.

The Research Foundation's current portfolio of educational programs and research projects covers issues such as community and economic development, rural transportation planning, homeland security and emergency preparedness, brownfields redevelopment, environmental stewardship and small business development finance. Visit Nado.org to learn more about the NADO Research Foundation.

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A Scan of Rural Transportation Consultation & Planning

In late 2005, the NADO Research Foundation conducted a nationwide scan of the rural transportation planning and consultation practices of the nation's 320 regional development organizations that primarily serve small metropolitan and rural regions. The project consisted of an online questionnaire for rural transportation planners and executive directors of regional development organizations, along with a comprehensive review of annual reports, Web sites, work programs and contractual agreements with state transportation agencies.

Transportation Planning in Rural America: Emerging Models for Local Consultation, Regional Coordination and Rural Planning Organizations builds on the Research Foundation's nearly ten years of studies into the emerging and evolving partnerships between state transportation agencies and regional development organizations with respect to facilitating and enhancing the involvement of rural local government officials in statewide planning, a process best described as the "gateway" for accessing federal surface transportation funds.

Unlike statewide and metropolitan planning, the field of rural transportation planning is still in its infancy. Federal transportation laws have mandated and funded comprehensive transportation planning for urban areas, including through the formation and work of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), since the early 1960s. However, the planning and prioritization of federal-aid eligible transportation investments in rural areas have been under the sole purview of state transportation officials until the early 1990s when the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) set the stage for greater local participation.

Under the 1998 Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), federal policy makers aimed to elevate the importance of rural official participation in statewide and regional planning and programming activities. Even though non-metropolitan areas still lack a dedicated federal funding set aside and a federally-mandated organizational structure and work program like MPOs, the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration issued implementation rules for TEA-21 in January 2003 that are giving a new voice to rural local officials and regional development organizations.



This report offers some preliminary insights into the impact, trends and partnerships being forged as a result of the new rural planning and consultation rules. The report examines why regional development organizations have emerged as a valued and trusted partner for state transportation officials as they strive to implement the new federal guidelines. More importantly, the report sheds new light on the growing network of Rural Planning Organizations being created and staffed by regional development organizations with the support of state and local officials, along with case studies that showcase the activities and results of these regional planning entities.



Setting the Stage:

Evolution of Rural Transportation Planning

The field of rural transportation planning and consultation continues to evolve and mature since the passage of the 1998 Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) and the accompanying federal rules issued in January 2003 for state consultation with non-metropolitan local officials.

For nearly four decades, the nation's metropolitan regions and their local elected officials have been empowered under various federal laws to draft and pursue strategies for improving the efficiency, coordination and expansion of their transportation systems and services.

These activities are governed, coordinated and staffed by Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). Most importantly, the responsibilities and funding resources for MPOs are specifically outlined and mandated under federal surface transportation law. This process has its origins dating back to the early 1960s, with significant upgrades enacted under the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and continued through the 2005 SAFETEA-LU law.

In non-metropolitan areas under 50,000 population, the development of plans, programs and project priorities for federal-aid eligible transportation investments have historically been dominated by state transportation officials, with little to no formal involvement of local government officials.

Starting with the 1991 ISTEA legislation and even more so under the 1998 TEA-21 law, federal policy makers worked to provide a more reasonable balance between the traditional roles and functions of state transportation agencies and the benefits of incorporating the views and needs of rural local officials in the state planning process.

While leaders of the congressional transportation committees understood the value of enhancing the roles of rural local officials, they also wanted to avoid a federal directive requiring states to use a single approach or technique for rural consultation. The resulting compromise was a general call for states to "enhance" their consultation outreach with rural local officials, including through the facilitation of regional development organizations.

As outlined in the National Academy of Public Administration's pioneering report in May 2000, *Rural Transportation Consultation Processes*, state transportation officials have historically used nine major methods to consult with rural local officials. These techniques range from basic practices such as state consultation tours, state hearings and the convening of state policy-

Regional Development Organizations

Are Known by Many Different Names, Depending on the State:

- Area Development Districts
- Associations of Government
- Councils of Government
- Economic Development Districts
- Local Development Districts
- Planning and Development Districts
- Planning Development Commissions
- Regional Councils of Local Government
- Regional Planning Commissions

making and advisory boards. Typically, local government officials, along with the general public, are invited to attend these various events and meetings.

The more advanced practices involve the sub-allocation of transportation funds and responsibilities, partnering with MPOs to consider the needs of areas outside the metropolitan planning boundaries and establishing specific processes for the interactive exchange of views with individual and groups of local officials.

Over the past 15 years, states have increasingly turned to the existing network of regional development organizations to facilitate and coordinate the input of rural officials, in addition to performing a variety of rural planning tasks.

The work programs of regional development organizations may be as basic as helping market and coordinate the various state outreach efforts aimed at local officials, the public and targeted stakeholder groups.

Tasks may also involve providing professional technical assistance to state and local officials on transportation enhancement projects, special transportation studies and the collection and analysis of transportation data using geographic information system (GIS) tools.

A growing number of states are tapping into the planning expertise, grant management skills and local

“The consultation process must be ‘separate and discrete’ from state processes to obtain input from the general public, giving more weight to local government officials in recognition of their significant transportation responsibilities, including ownership of roads, bridges and transit systems.”

official networks of regional development organizations to help form and staff a more formal and locally-driven consultation model referred to as Rural Planning Organizations or RPOs.

While the definition and meaning of a Metropolitan Planning Organization is clearly outlined in federal transportation rules and law, the NADO Research Foundation has found that the term Rural Planning Organization is used more liberally to reference an entity that provides a forum for local input on transportation issues impacting communities of 50,000 or less.

In 1998, the NADO Research Foundation identified 17 state highway agencies with formal contracts or funding agreements with regional development organizations for RPO-type assistance. By December 2005, the number had grown to a minimum of 25 states, with several others in various stages of discussions about forming new partnerships or pilots.

In isolated cases, such as in Texas, local officials and regional development organizations have formed RPOs without the financial or staff support of the state. When this occurs it typically involves regions with urban encroachment of rural communities or in regions where local officials feel left out of the state planning process.

In almost all cases, according to the Research Foundation’s scan, RPOs are either a program of an existing regional development organization or created

FHWA-FTA Rules:

State Consultation with Rural Officials

In January 2003, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) issued a new rule to guide the consultation process between state transportation officials and non-metropolitan local officials. The new rule implements the congressional intent of the 1998 TEA-21 law to enhance the participation of rural local elected and appointed officials in the statewide transportation planning and decision-making processes. Highlights of the rule include:

- Each state must have developed and implemented a documented process for local official input into statewide transportation plans and investment programs by February 2004.
- By February 2006 and at least every five years afterwards, states must seek feedback from local officials regarding the consultation process. States are also directed to seek comments and input from state associations of counties, municipal officials, regional development organizations and other non-metropolitan officials.
- The consultation process must be “separate and discrete” from state processes to obtain input from the general public, giving more weight to local government officials in recognition of their significant transportation responsibilities, including ownership of roads, bridges and transit systems.
- The rule modified the definition of “consultation” to require states to confer with local officials before taking actions, consider the officials’ views and periodically inform them about actions taken. In addition, the rule clarifies that the definition of “non-metropolitan local official” includes elected and appointed officials.
- States that choose not to follow recommendations provided by local officials during the comment period are required to make the reasons for their decisions public.

Source: Federal Register, January 23, 2003; Technical Corrections February 14, 2003.



as a separate non-profit entity that is governed by a separate policy board but housed and staffed by the regional planning agency.

While MPOs, especially those serving urban areas above 200,000 population, have more autonomy and control of their planning and project selection processes, the work of RPOs is generally more advisory in nature and subject to state oversight and control.

Like MPOs, most RPOs operate policy and technical committees. They develop lists of project priorities, sometimes fiscally constrained and other times a full wish list, within their region for consideration by state decision makers. They conduct various data collection and analysis activities including the use of GIS. A limited but increasing number of RPOs are tasked with developing more detailed long-range plans and visions for their regions.

Most notably, RPOs serve as a link between state DOTs, local officials and citizens in ensuring there is formal and continuous input from rural leaders into the statewide transportation planning and decision-making process.

RPOs are working to integrate the needs of the various transportation modes into the planning process, with an increasing awareness of the needs of public transportation providers. As emphasized in the 2005 SAFETEA-LU law, RPOs will also be tasked with reaching out to freight, business and natural resource organizations to better incorporate their input into regional and rural plans.

If the past 15 years is any evidence, the work of RPOs and regional development organizations will continue to mature and progress with time.

Benefits of Involving Local Stakeholders in Rural Transportation Planning

- Increased trust in government. This benefit is greatest when the consultation process is viewed as fair, open, inclusive, timely and legitimate.
- Better plans and programs. Consultation frequently identifies new needs and better ideas for meeting needs, especially from ideas outside the transportation field itself. Such ideas may be key to helping transportation programs contribute most effectively to economic development, land use, livability and other goals of state and local governments.
- Stronger support for implementing plans and programs. Often, developing plans and programs is the easy part. Getting them implemented is harder. Local official involvement in the planning and programming process frequently helps to improve the implementation record.
- Improved performance of transportation systems and better outcomes for people. Feedback from local officials can help keep track of the performance of the transportation system in addition to its contributions to improving the outcomes for people in terms of accessibility, social justice, livability, safety and economic vitality and opportunity in rural America — the kinds of outcome goals set forth in the U.S. Department of Transportation's own strategic plan.

Source: Rural Transportation Consultation Processes, National Academy of Public Administration (May 2000)



Rural Consultation and Planning Practices:

Insights, Views and Practices from the Field

The NADO Research Foundation conducted a national scan of 320 regional development organizations in late 2005 to determine their involvement in facilitating the involvement of rural local officials in the statewide transportation planning process. The scan examined the various partnerships and contractual agreements between state transportation agencies and these regional planning entities to promote and foster regional approaches to transportation planning and development in rural areas. The following results are based on responses from 126 organizations to an online questionnaire, phone interviews and a comprehensive review of the Web sites, annual reports and work programs of regional development organizations.

State Partnerships with Regions for Rural Transportation Planning and Consultation Services

By the end of 2005, the number of state transportation agencies with contractual agreements or partnerships with the nation's regional development organizations had grown to at least 25 states.

In addition, several states are conducting or exploring options for pilot programs or targeted services for rural regions. This is up from 17 states in August 1998 and 23 states in December 2003. Of the respondents, nearly 20 percent also administer and staff a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for their urban areas.

Among the more notable developments in the past two years is the creation of 12 new Rural Transportation Planning Organizations in Tennessee under a new partnership agreement between the Tennessee Department of Transportation and the state's nine regional development organizations.

In Alabama, the state funded and launched a two-year RPO pilot in the western portion of the state. The West Alabama Regional Commission, which also serves as the MPO for the Tuscaloosa metropolitan area, administered and staffed this successful effort. As a result of the pilot, the state is now planning to bring the RPO concept statewide in the fall of 2006.

In Missouri, the state worked with the MPOs, rural regions and other key stakeholders to launch an enhanced planning framework that is focused on increasing the participation and input of local officials and the public. While the state already had a strong track record in rural consultation, state officials decided to increase their financial support of the rural planning regions.

The state of North Carolina chartered 20 new RPOs across the state, mostly in partnership with the existing network of regional development organizations. With funding between \$80,000 and \$100,000 each, the RPOs are functioning in a similar role as the MPOs.

The regions in Kentucky continue to play a central role in the state's planning and project selection process. Known as Area Development Districts, the regions updated and digitized all of the centerlines of public roadways under a contract with the state. The state now funds a full-time staff position for each ADD to implement regional highway safety programs.

While Florida is covered mostly by MPOs, there are several rural regions in the central and western portions of the state. Two regional planning commissions in the northwest corner recently signed agreements to serve as liaisons between the state and the rural areas of the region not served by an MPO.

Under the five-year contract, the regions will conduct meetings with county staff and elected officials to assist in the distribution of information and to gather input on the state's five year work program and other activities.

Overall, the working relationship and partnerships in states that use regional development organizations for rural planning and consultation assistance are positive and continue to mature. According to respondents from these states, 68 percent rated the state's consultation process as very good or good and the remaining 32 percent rated it as somewhat good.

In states with very limited or no partnerships between state transportation officials and the regions the respondents either had little knowledge of the state's consultation process or held a lower opinion of the techniques being used to engage rural local officials.

In isolated cases, regional development organizations in portions of a state, such as Texas, have formed and funded their own rural transportation planning programs or organizations. While they are operating without financial support from the state, they are establishing better communications with regional and district staff of the state transportation departments.

“State transportation agencies provide a range of funding to regional development organizations for rural consultation and planning services, from a low of \$10,000 to a high of more than \$240,000 annually. The most common increments are between \$50,000 - \$75,000, followed by \$25,000 - \$50,000 and \$100,000 or more on an annual basis.”

State Funding Support for Regions

State transportation agencies provide a range of funding to regional development organizations for rural consultation and planning services, from a low of \$10,000 to a high of more than \$240,000 annually. The most common increments are between \$50,000 - \$75,000, followed by \$25,000 - \$50,000 and \$100,000 or more on an annual basis.

According to scan respondents, the state DOT typically uses either federal statewide planning and research (SPR) funds, state transportation funds or a mix of federal and state funds to support the partnerships.

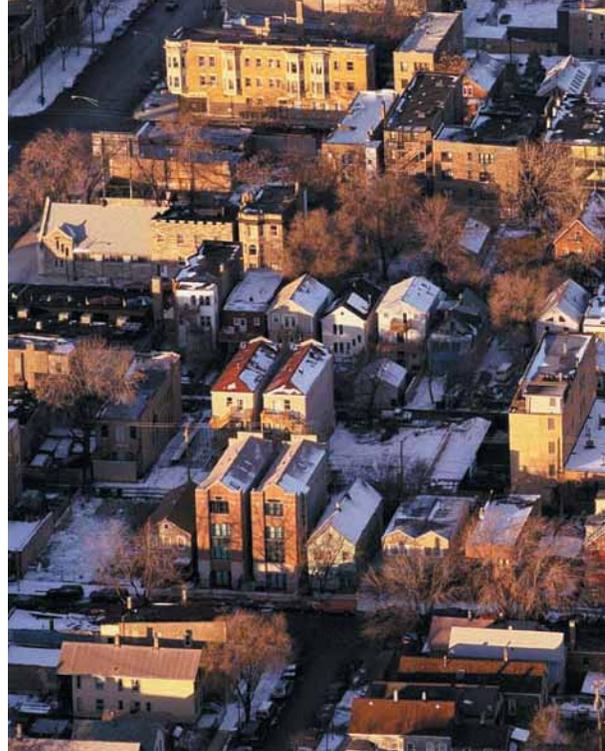
In addition, most states require a local match, mostly a cash contribution from counties and municipalities or a mix of cash and in-kind contributions. The most common rate was a 20 percent local match, with a 10 percent match a distant second. Nearly 15 percent indicated that the state does not require a local match.

By comparison, according to the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, the nation’s 385 Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) receive a 1.25 percent funding takedown from the core highway programs and another allocation from the transit account. Federal planning funding for MPOs is nearly \$300 million each year. Budgets for individual MPOs range from a high of nearly \$9 million annually for the largest MPO to a low of nearly \$100,000 for the smallest MPOs.

Governance and Leadership Committees

Regional development organizations with rural transportation programs typically operate with the assistance and leadership of a policy and technical advisory committees.

Policy committees generally consist of county and municipal elected officials as the primary members, along with state transportation officials. More than one-third of respondents indicated that public citizens



and transit officials also serve on the policy committee. In select states and cases, some regions expanded their committee membership to include state legislators and representatives of other modal interests such as freight, trucking, aviation and ports.

The primary role of the policy committee is to review and adopt recommendations for state consideration, including applications for transportation enhancement projects and regional priorities for federal-aid highway projects.

Technical advisory committees are focused more on the nuts and bolts of the planning process. They generally consist of local public works staff, state transportation officials and transit providers, along with the region’s planning staff.

Nearly one-fourth of respondents reported that public citizens, civic interest groups and bike/pedestrian representatives also serve on the technical panels. In selected cases, the committees have representatives from the trucking industry, regional and local airport authorities, the Army Corps of Engineers, regional and local water authorities and local government land use planners.

Further illustrating the evolution RPOs, a small but growing number also have a safety committee and a committee for transportation enhancement projects, compared to previous research.

“Regional development organizations perform a variety of functions across the country. The most common work elements include facilitating and assisting with the public involvement process for state transportation agencies, along with fostering the input of rural local officials into statewide and regional planning processes.”

Functions and Work Programs

Regional development organizations perform a variety of functions across the country. The most common work elements include facilitating and assisting with the public involvement process for state transportation agencies, along with fostering the input of rural local officials into statewide and regional planning processes.

The vast majority of regions also provide professional technical assistance to local governments, especially with transportation enhancement applications and projects, corridor studies and GIS data collection and analysis.

The more advanced regions with RPO-type work programs develop regional priorities for consideration and adoption into the statewide transportation improvement program (STIP) and nearly 50 percent of respondents reported they are now assisting with crafting statewide and regional long-range plans for rural parts of the state.

Between one-third and 50 percent of respondents also reported that they are involved in issues such as land use planning coordinated with transportation, traffic count studies, transit planning, pedestrian and bicycle safety, corridor studies and intermodal planning.

In a few cases, scan participants noted that they are involved with travel demand forecasting and air quality monitoring, although these groups are more advanced and likely to also serve as an MPO. Several groups also highlighted their involvement in the deployment and planning of Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) services, scenic byway planning, parking studies and industrial site access road development.

Modal Coverage of Planning Efforts

RPOs are charged with assuring local transportation stakeholders - elected and appointed officials, residents, civic groups and others - are consulted throughout the planning process.

As they gather information about local needs, it is filtered up to the state level where rural concerns and needs are considered throughout the statewide planning process. But how information is gathered at the local level is often determined by the state governance model and culture.

As expected, the most common focus of rural planning efforts concerns the upkeep and improvements of highways and bridges. Nearly 70 percent of regions also reported incorporating rural public transportation services, greenway and bicycle / pedestrian projects into their planning efforts and more than 50 percent address aviation, intermodal facilities and railway issues.

A select few also reported that they include barge and river transportation, private transit providers, military base access and freight needs into their planning program.

Impact of Federal Rural Consultation Rules and Other State Methods

The impact of the January 2003 federal transportation rules for state consultation with rural local officials is having a positive effect, according to scan participants. More than one-third reported that the new federal rules have improved the state's consultation process while another one-third indicated that their existing process was solid so the rules did not change the state-rural official relationship.

Nearly 25 percent felt the new FHWA-FTA rules have not been implemented fully in their state. None of the respondents reported that the new rules harmed the state consultation process.

In addition to using regional development organizations as the facilitators of rural input, scan participants indicated that a common technique used by states is to invite rural public officials to various hearings, forums and committee meetings. Nearly half reported that state officials have direct formal communications with rural local governments in addition to informal dialogue and information exchanges. Only a few respondents indicated that their state sub-allocates funds to rural governments.



Pressing Transportation Needs of Rural Regions

The most pressing transportation need in rural America, according to 80 percent of scan participants, is the upgrading and maintenance of existing highway and bridge systems. More than 50 percent placed a major priority on developing transportation corridors for economic development and nearly one-third mentioned the need to establish or enhance public transportation services in their rural regions.

In targeted areas, participants reported concerns about preserving or attracting regular air service to regional and rural airports, preserving access to the national railway network for businesses and the importance of strengthening intermodal connectors for both freight and passengers.

Some scan participants placed the highest priority on coordinating with public land management agencies, complying with new federal air quality rules and managing land use changes. There was also mention of maintaining funding equity for rural areas in the statewide investment process.

In response to an inquiry about the rural activities related to Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) deployment, most participants reported that they were not yet involved. Several groups indicated they are starting to use ITS technology, especially for regional transit coordination and traffic information near tourist attractions. They also noted that ITS is often used by the states in the rural fringes near metropolitan areas and on the Interstates.

Benefits of Using Existing Regional Planning Entities To Facilitate Rural Transportation Consultation

By working with regional development organizations, according to findings of the NADO Research Foundation scan, state transportation officials can better coordinate the participation of local elected officials and the public in the rural transportation planning and project investment process.

These regional entities are ideal partners for state transportation agencies because they are:

- Recognized and established under state law or executive order.
- Experienced with economic development, land use and environmental planning.
- Owned and governed by local government officials and have strong links to community leaders.
- Service providers and coordinators for a variety of federal economic development, community development and human service programs.
- Experienced with fostering regional collaborations and dialogue among local government officials within a region and state.
- Known by local government and community leaders as credible and professional organizations.
- Accountable organizations with strong fiscal and grant management experience.

Regional Development Organizations Conducting Rural Transportation Planning

State	Annual Funding from Federal & State Sources	Number of Regions Involved in Rural Planning	Comments/Notes
Alabama	\$60,000	1	Two-year pilot; expanding statewide in fall 2006
Arizona	\$80,000 - \$125,000	4	Each region also receives an extra \$15,000 for rural transit planning
California	\$77,000 - \$220,000	26	Formula funding from state DOT
Colorado	\$6,000 - \$15,000	10	10 RPOs plus 5 MPOs serve small metropolitan and major urban areas
Connecticut	\$60,000	4	Regions conduct transit planning
Florida	\$25,000	2	New program for most rural portions of state
Georgia	\$50,000 - \$90,000	15	Public outreach, GIS and technical assistance
Indiana	\$40,000	6	Implementing new funding formula
Iowa	\$20,000 baseline	18	Statewide STP funding available-\$1.6 million
Kentucky	\$80,00 - \$105,000	15	Includes separate funds for safety activities
Maine	\$55,000	10	Consultation process revised in 2005
Massachusetts	\$160,000	3	
Michigan	\$40,000	14	Mostly public outreach and roadway inventory
Minnesota	\$50,000 ⁹		Regions provide assistance to area partnerships
Missouri	\$44,000 - \$55,000	17	RPO process since 1990s; Revised 2005
New Hampshire	\$130,000	6	Operating based on MPO model
New Mexico	\$65,000	7	2005 was first year with all COGs involved
North Carolina	\$80,000 - \$100,000	20	Formula funding from state DOT
Oregon	\$50,000	6	Six of 11 regional transportation commissions staffed by regional councils
Pennsylvania	\$90,000 - \$140,000	6	State also funds 5 individual counties
South Carolina	\$75,000	10	Incorporating regional transit planning
South Dakota	\$77,000	4	GIS road data collection project only
Tennessee	\$60,000	12	Plus \$1,500 per county in region
Texas	\$0	At least 4	Regions self-finance programs
Utah	\$40,000	2	Two regional councils administer two county RPOs as pilots with state
Vermont	\$150,000 - \$240,000	11	Full service rural transportation planners
Virginia	\$48,000 baseline	12	Regions eligible to apply for additional competitive planning funds
Washington	\$30,000 baseline	16	States provide bet. \$55,000 - \$77,000 more based on formula and work scope
Wisconsin	\$50,000 - \$75,000	9	Limited to technical assistance for locals

NOTE: Information is based on phone interviews, responses to an online questionnaire and a comprehensive scan of the work programs, contracts, annual reports and Web sites of regional development organizations and state transportation departments. As noted in the comment section, some of the regions provide very limited or specific services rather than serving as a full-service rural transportation planning organization. Unlike the federal definition of a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPOs), there is no official federal definition for a Rural Planning Organization.



SNAPSHOTS:

Regional Development Organizations Providing Rural Transportation Planning Services

Following are brief snapshots of the organizational structures, work programs and partnership models being used by state transportation agencies and regional development organizations (RDOs) across the nation. These case studies only represent a small sample of the emerging and innovative efforts of RDOs to foster information exchanges, improve the efficiency and effectiveness of rural transportation services and involve rural local officials in statewide and regional planning initiatives.

ALABAMA

The West Alabama Regional Commission was selected in late 2004 by the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) to conduct a two-year planning and consultation pilot project for a seven-county region that includes both rural and metropolitan areas. ALDOT is now planning to take the Rural Planning Organization (RPO) process statewide with the state's other 11 regional development organizations (known locally as regional councils of government) by late 2006.

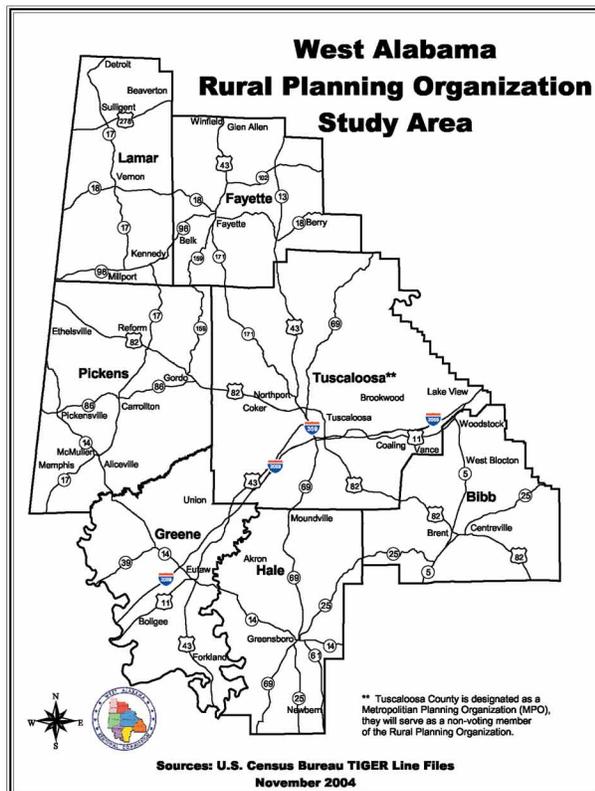
"We are enthusiastic about this pilot project. We see the RPO as a link between the local communities and the Alabama Department of Transportation to promote better communications and to improve the dissemination of information regarding the transportation planning process,"
*Robert Lake, Executive Director
West Alabama Regional Commission*



The West Alabama Regional Commission, which also serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Tuscaloosa urban area, was responsible for establishing and staffing the West Alabama RPO. The RPO consists of three primary committees: Policy Committee, Technical Coordinating Committee and the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee. The state provided \$120,000 for the two-year effort and required a 20 percent local match.

The primary function of the RPO is to provide rural local officials and local citizens with increased dialogue and input with state policy officials and staff, in addition to offering a formal framework to develop, prioritize and pursue transportation and safety improvements within the region.

One of the main products of the RPO planning effort is the development of an integrated transportation investment plan that addresses the multi-modal needs of the region. The group identifies and shares ideas for low-cost safety improvements with state district engineers, county engineers and other relevant partners. The RPO also develops a regional long-range transportation plan that sets goals and identifies specific project priorities for each county within the region.



“The Arizona rural consultation process has been successful because it gets local officials involved, but we are also focused on making sure that the state receives quality input from local officials and the regions. In the end, the planning and prioritization exercises of our rural officials must be reflected in the statewide process if we want to maintain a high level of rural involvement.”

*Chris Fetzer, Transportation Director
Northern Arizona COG*

ARIZONA

The Arizona Department of Transportation has fostered a meaningful dialogue and partnership with local officials by funding and supporting the activities of the state’s four regional development organizations serving rural portions of the state. As entities governed by local elected officials, each regional development organization (known locally as regional councils of government) has a full-time rural transportation staff to prepare and implement a comprehensive transportation work program. Each region receives between \$80,000 and \$125,000 each year, along with a 20 percent local match, to carry out the elements of the work program.

With the active participation of both elected and appointed local officials, each COG engages in intermodal planning, serves as a liaison between state and local officials, and coordinates the development and implementation of a five year construction program for federal-aid eligible projects.



Each region collects and analyzes transportation data for state and local agencies, reviews Section 5311 rural transit applications for consistency with the regional plan, and coordinates the application and prioritization process for transportation enhancement projects and the Section 5310 rural transit program for the elderly and disabled. More recently, the regions have also begun assisting

with the development of the state’s long-range transportation plan.

The rural COGs have joined together with the four small MPOs in the state to host an annual professional development conference for elected officials, members of the technical committees and other rural transportation stakeholders.

The annual event, along with periodic training workshops, helps enhance the technical understanding of local officials, provides a forum for peer networking and information sharing, and allows the rural regions of the state to speak with a more unified voice. In addition, the rural coalition raises enough funds annually through dues assessments and conference fees to support a full-time rural transportation liaison at the state capital.

CALIFORNIA

The state of California uses a network of Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs) that are similar in structure and responsibility to MPOs. The 44 RTPAs (of which 18 are also MPOs) are typically staffed and housed within a council of government, cover a single county and are charged with preparing regional transportation plans and improvement programs.

Like MPOs, the RTPAs have significant involvement and control of local elected and appointed officials in both the planning and project investment processes. The state provides between \$77,000 and \$220,000 each year in federal and state planning funds to the RTPAs based on a funding formula and the overall work program of each RTPA.

Each RTPA is tasked with implementing an annual work program, developing a regional transportation plan and selecting projects for implementation. The plans are focused on developing a coordinated and balanced regional multimodal transportation system, including a significant emphasis on incorporating public transportation services into the process.

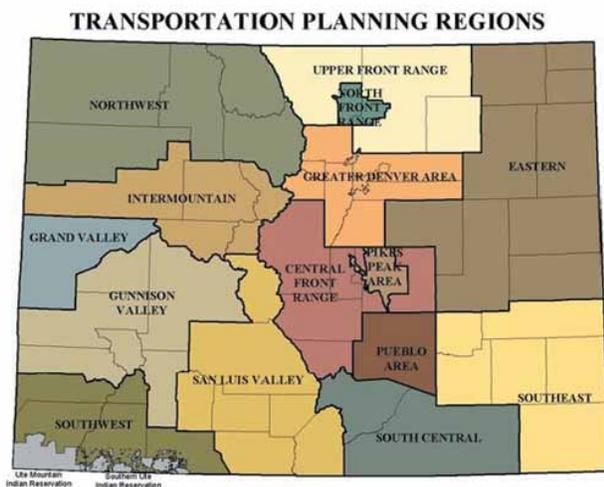
For more specifics on the regional planning process, download the California Department of Transportation’s Regional Planning Guidebook at www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/orip/2003_Regional_Planning_Handbook.pdf.

COLORADO

Since 1991, Colorado state law has required a cooperative planning process for all parts of the state. The state DOT created 15 transportation planning regions to help develop regional transportation plans for inclusion in the statewide plan. They focus heavily on involving the public, local leaders and other civic interests in the planning process and crafting of a long-range vision for each region and the state.

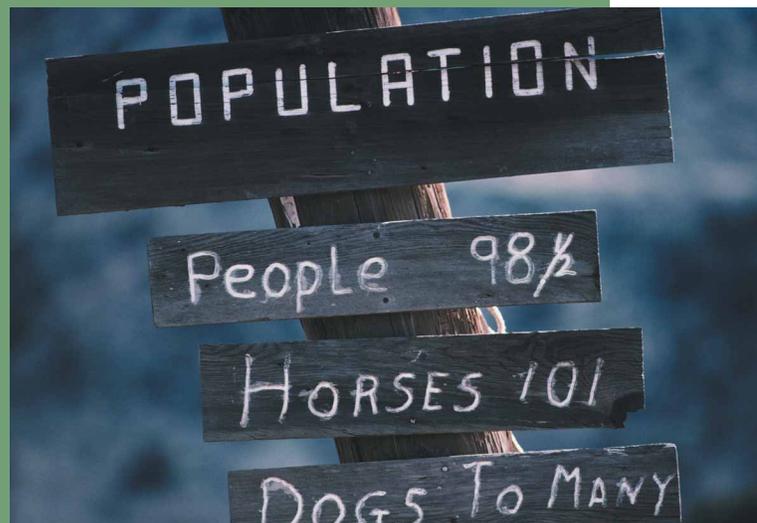
Of the 15 regions, five are urban and served by Metropolitan Planning Organizations. The remaining ten regions are rural and are typically assisted by a regional development organization (referred to as regional planning commissions in Colorado).

In establishing the rural planning process, each regional commission was given the opportunity to use a consultant or in-house planning staff to implement the required work program.



According to Irene Merrifield of the Colorado Department of Transportation, “The state’s rural transportation planning process is very much a grassroots effort. Our goal is to ensure that everyone has equal input in the planning process.”

In addition, a representative of each region serves on a statewide transportation advisory committee. The committee meets monthly and is attended by the RPCs, MPOs, state officials and federal highway representatives. Its purpose is to bring together local



For many years, two of Colorado’s communities, Mancos (pop. 1200) and Bayfield (pop. 1800) experienced an increase in accidents and fatalities due to the lack of traffic signals. This resulted in the reconstruction and addition of traffic signals to two intersections in both of these communities. The state funded these projects at about \$5-6 million. The town’s interest in treating the bypass as a local street conflicted with the state’s need to have these highways serve their intended function as principal arterials. The region’s RPO helped set priorities for how the money would be spent for these improvement projects and assisted with engineering analyses. Numerous focus groups and public meetings were held. The final outcome was the installation of additional traffic signals and the addition of pedestrian crossings, improved access to the main highway, enhancement grants for bike trails and significant safety improvements for vehicles and pedestrian crossings at these intersections.

officials and other key transportation stakeholders to discuss transportation issues and identify priorities for each region.

As outlined in the state DOT’s *Regional Transportation Planning Guidebook*, “The vision for transportation and the resulting transportation projects from each of the Transportation Planning Regions form the basis for Colorado’s statewide transportation plan. Only projects contained in or consistent with the regional transportation plans are eligible for inclusion in the statewide plan. Consequently, only these projects are eligible for state and federal funding through the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) process.”

CONNECTICUT

Four rural planning agencies, along with the eleven MPOs, play an active role in the state's planning and programming process. Each rural agency has an annual planning budget of \$60,000, including \$50,000 in federal funds, \$5,000 in state money and \$5,000 in local matching funds. The state also provides each region with an extra \$20,000 to plan and implement rural transit services for the elderly and disabled.

The regional planning agencies are responsible for conducting rural planning activities. They assist municipalities with planning and administrative services and provide a forum for information exchanges with state officials and neighboring communities. They provide input into the statewide plan and investment programs. In addition, they monitor, analyze and report on regional transportation data, assist with the public involvement process and perform corridor studies.

For more information about regional planning agencies in Connecticut, visit www.opm.state.ct.us/igp/rpos/rpo.htm.

FLORIDA

Florida is covered mostly by MPOs, however there are several rural regions in the central and northwest portions of the state. Two regional planning commissions in the northwest corner signed funding agreements in late 2005 to serve as liaisons between one of the state district planning offices and the rural counties of the region not served by an MPO. Under the five-year contract, the regional commissions will coordinate meetings with county staff and local elected officials to assist in the distribution of information and help gather timely input on the state's five year work program and other activities. The process is viewed as an enhancement to the overall statewide rural consultation process.

For more information, visit the Apalachee Regional Planning Council Web site at www.thearpc.com.



GEORGIA

The 16 regional development organizations (known locally as regional development centers) in Georgia have forged new partnerships with the state DOT that are aimed at improving the statewide and rural transportation systems. The state provides between \$50,000 and \$91,000 with a 20 percent local match.

While the state still directs the rural consultation program, the regional commissions have been assisting with public outreach campaigns since the early 2000s. They also provide assistance and information to local officials about the state's scenic byway program, conduct bicycle and pedestrian planning and help promote the state's transportation enhancement program.

More notably, each regional organization has implemented a program to use advanced satellite technology (GPS) to map road centerlines within one meter. As an end result, the state DOT and the public now have access to a powerful GIS database that includes detailed and accurate information about each road and transportation facility.

The regional organizations have proven to be valuable resources for the state DOT on historic preservation, natural resource and land use issues. In addition to assisting the state in evaluating the potential impact of transportation projects on historic sites, the regional organizations are helping state transportation officials reach out to individuals with an interest in historic preservation during environmental reviews.

Several regions also collect and forward data to the state on local development approvals, amendments to local development codes and comprehensive plans, and land that may be available for environmental mitigation.

For more information on the members of the Georgia Association of Regional Development Centers, visit www.gardc.net.

INDIANA

The Indiana Department of Transportation launched the Small Urban and Rural Transportation Planning Program in 2001 with five regional development organizations (known locally as regional planning commissions) and four MPOs. Starting in 2005, the program was expanded to 11 regional and small urban planning partners, including seven RPOs, two RPOs that also serve as MPOs and two MPOs.

The planning activities of the groups are aimed at supporting the state's headquarters and district office staff with public outreach, technical assistance to local officials and the collection of transportation-related data. The program is reviewed and modified each year and each organization is evaluated and renewed based on its performance.

Typically, the state provides each planning partner with \$40,000 and requires a 20 percent local match. In FY2006, the state is restructuring the program to make it more accountable and focused on a traffic count program and implementation of the state's Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS).

According to Lisa Gehlhausen, Executive Director of the Indiana 15 Regional Planning Commission, "The project has been instrumental in improving our use of GIS technology. It has taken awhile to build the staff capacity and organizational support to accomplish what we have thus far, but it has helped us and in turn it has helped our local communities."

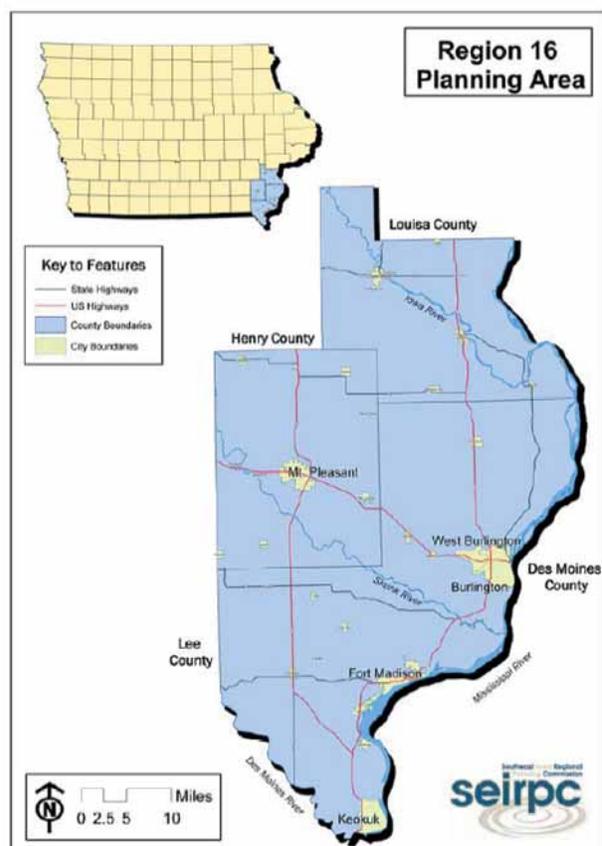
The Indiana 15 RPC has expanded its transportation program to create maps that outline improvements to streets in various communities. In addition, the group is engaged in discussions with the state and county highway engineers about collecting more accurate data on traffic volumes at rail crossings. The issue of railway crossings is an issue of growing concern in the region.

For more information, visit the Indiana Association of Regional Council at www.iarconline.org.

IOWA

When the Intermodal Surface Transportation Equity Act (ISTEA) became law in 1991, regional transportation became a focal point. In response, the Iowa Transportation Commission designated regional transit-planning regions where local officials were given ownership over the new process from the beginning. This was achieved by giving local leaders the opportunity to indicate their preference to remain in their current transit planning region, join another, or form a new partnership with other counties as a regional planning affiliation (RPA).

Currently there are 18 RPAs, most are associated with a regional development organization (known locally as councils of government), which allocate about \$20,000 in state funding with a 20 percent local match. It is important to note that the policy boards of each RPA may opt to increase its funding of planning activities from its regional surface transportation program allocation.



Each RPA has established a transportation planning process aimed at the adoption of a regional transportation plan and the implementation of an annual work program. The plans must include both long-term and short-term strategies and actions that lead to the development of an integrated, intermodal transportation system.

The board of the Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission has placed a high priority on regional transportation planning within its rural region. The four-county region receives about \$2.08 million in federal surface transportation program (STP) funds from the state, with \$196,000 reserved for enhancement projects. The board now sets aside five percent, or \$104,000, of the STP funds for planning activities.

Mike Norris, Transportation Director for the Southeast Iowa RPC said of the process, "In a rural setting, maximizing resources and coordinated decision making are the most important factors in rural transportation planning and they can only be accomplished through regional dialogue."

A technical advisory committee made up of professional staff, including engineers and planners from member towns and counties, works with the policy board constituted of local elected officials, to guide grant spending as well as the planning and programming process for the region.

Norris added, "Our regional organization is made up of local governments who all want to succeed. It is our job as staff to work with the board and the members to think regionally so that projects that are developed will benefit the region as a whole, not just one community."

The benefits of the new process in Southeast Iowa, according to Norris, is that it encourages regional projects, allows top priority projects to be developed first and funding is spent in a timely manner. In addition, it provides a forum for regional cooperation and coordination.

For more information, visit the Iowa Association of Regional Councils at www.aircog.com or visit the Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission at www.seirpc.com.

KENTUCKY



The involvement of local officials is central to the implementation of Kentucky's statewide planning process. Fifteen regional development organizations (known locally as area development districts) receive between \$80,000 and \$105,000 annually from the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet to perform transportation and safety planning services.

Each region operates through a rural transportation committee consisting of local and county officials, representatives of various interest groups and private citizens. In addition, the planning efforts are required to cover all modes of transportation, including public and specialized transportation services in rural areas.

The rural work program focuses mainly on the analysis, identification and evaluation of needs in each region, and the subsequent evaluation and ranking of projects for possible inclusion in the state's six-year highway plan. The rural planning groups also coordinate public input, coordinate transportation planning activities with other plans and provide technical assistance to local government officials.

Among the more uncommon RPO-type activities, the ADDs are tasked with maintaining an inventory of multimodal facilities within their region, including airports, railways, intermodal facilities, riverports, transit systems, greenway projects and highways.



They maintain listings of all facilities which generate significant peak or continuous traffic and congestion in each region. They provide an inventory to the state on local land use plans, the approval dates and the

“The transportation needs of the state far exceed our ability to fund them. Thus, a broad based regional support is necessary in order to highlight the need for the project. The projects that are supported on a regional basis generally will have more impact in relation to the cost. Counties and municipalities that band together to support a project will likely have more success in moving those projects forward than those who fight among themselves for funding.”

*Daryl Greer, Director, Division of Planning
Kentucky Transportation Cabinet*



appropriate contact information. In the past five years, the state DOT also contracted with the regions to create a new GIS database of all of the public roadways in the state.

Since 2001, the state has partnered with the 15 ADDs to implement a rural highway safety program. The program is focused on the four “E’s”: engineering, enforcement, emergency response and education.

The state provides enough funding for each ADD to support a full-time highway safety liaison whose role is to promote actions aimed at reducing fatalities, injuries and economic losses due to traffic accidents, especially on two-lane rural roads.

The ADDs work through safety committees composed of state and local law enforcement, transportation agencies, private sector business leaders, school officials and local safety advocates. They collect data from emergency response personnel about crash scenes and environmental conditions. They host and sponsor a variety of highway safety programs at schools, fairs and other community events, including mock crash simulations. These are just a few examples of the broad array of safety activities conducted by the ADDs.

MAINE

Maine’s commitment to meaningful inclusion of rural communities into the transportation planning process is noteworthy. In 2005, the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) recognized that the system for gathering input from local officials and the public was not sufficient, so the state turned to the six existing regional development organizations for help.

The regional planning agencies were selected because of their connections to local governments and their planning backgrounds in land use planning and economic development. This is particularly relevant in Maine because of a state law requiring every municipality to maintain a comprehensive plan that is consistent with state transportation goals and law and another law based on a statewide referendum that requires early public involvement in the statewide transportation planning process.

An example of the new state-regional partnerships is the revised work program of the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments (AVCOG). The COG will develop a regional six-year plan that includes a fiscally constrained list of projects that are more comprehensive than just highway and bridge reconstruction projects. The process involves the hands-on participation of elected and appointed municipal officials, representatives of regional environmental, business and alternative transportation entities and other interested parties.

The COG is tasked with identifying and prioritizing potential multi-modal projects in previously targeted corridors and they will help the state DOT update the standard format for communities to use in the development of their comprehensive plans. In addition, the COG will provide technical assistance to local communities and governments, provide access management





training and sponsor regional forums for state officials to meet with municipal officials and regional transportation stakeholders.

Organizations such as AVCOG receive about \$55,000 each year to perform the needs assessment and other tasks related to land use and transportation planning at the local and regional level.

Robert Thompson, Executive Director at AVCOG stated that, “It’s an open table. Our transportation committee was formed to discuss ideas and encourage the exchange of information. Anyone is welcome. Projects and ideas that come from the committee are often folded into our regional work program and participants are encouraged to discuss more opportunities with our legislators.”

Interestingly, Maine’s regional approach to transportation planning is increasingly viewed in the context of economic development. Thompson describes it as a “strategic investment tool that communities in the region and the state are using to leverage for a stronger economy.”

MICHIGAN

The 14 regional development organizations (known locally as regional councils of government) in Michigan have partnered with the state Department of Transportation (MDOT) for regional transportation planning for over 30 years.

They have worked in partnership with MDOT to assist in fulfilling federal planning requirements and the state’s Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS). Starting in 2002, the regions were asked to partner in the state’s Transportation Asset Management Program.

The asset management program is a joint effort of the state DOT, county road commissions, municipalities and the regional councils. The 14 regions are provided approximately \$1 million each year to conduct an inventory of all public roadways in the state, including 39,000 miles of federal-aid eligible highways. This amount is in addition to the \$500,000 funding allocation for the regional transportation planning activities for the rural areas of the state.

Since the inventory data is used in the distribution of state and local project dollars, the inventories are performed by a joint inspection team that must include a state DOT, road commission and regional council representative. The involvement of municipalities is optional.

The teams travel in state vans with laptops equipped with Roadsoft software and GPS technology. The crews rate the conditions of each roadway based on a Paser rating between 1 and 10. The process helps state and local officials make funding decisions based on the needs and conditions of the transportation system, rather than politics. It is also an innovative partnership model between state, regional and local agencies.

As explained by Sean Dey, Executive Director of the West Michigan Shoreline RDC, “Transportation is a regional issue. Whether it is metropolitan or rural, we need a regional approach.”

To learn more about the Michigan Association of Regional Councils, visit www.miregions.org.

MINNESOTA

Before 1969, there was little input by local officials in the transportation process in Minnesota. With the Regional Development Act and an Executive Order by the Governor things changed. The Act and Executive Order facilitate intergovernmental cooperation and ensure coordination of federal, state and local comprehensive planning and development programs.

The state further enhanced and decentralized its planning and decision-making process after the enactment of the 1991 ISTEA legislation. The state launched the Area Transportation Partnership (ATP) program to help broaden input into the project selection process.

The state's 11 regional development organizations (known locally as regional development commissions) are key partners and technical assistance providers to the ATPs around the state. The regional commissions receive \$50,000 each year from the state DOT, along with a 15 percent local match, to help state and local officials implement ATP work programs.

The membership of each Area Transportation Partnership typically includes state DOT officials, county and municipal leaders, state natural resource and economic development officials, Tribal communities, transportation modal interests and private citizens.

Each of the regional partnerships has its own process and work program. Most solicit projects for federal funding, evaluate projects and seek to integrate the priorities and needs of the membership. The groups also conduct public outreach, forward a list of regional priorities to the state and review and comment on the state's improvement and project program.

Annette Bair, Physical Development Director at the Southwest RDC explains, "It is important for us to have local elected officials involved in the transportation committees because they are the decision makers, and we are confident that their recommendations are sound."



Bair added, "The focus on a regional approach gives a new perspective to local officials who begin to think about what is best for the region, not just their community. Having a consistent plan with elected officials in the driver seat is good for the region."

The Arrowhead Regional Development Commission, which also serves as the MPO coordinator for the Duluth urban area, has expanded its regional transportation program to include an In-kind Transportation Planning Grant Program. This program provides transportation planning to small communities in Minnesota that lack resources for planning.

The Arrowhead RDC uses a state transportation-planning grant to support the in-kind planning services that its regional transportation advisory committee awards to small communities based on a competitive process. The planning time can be used to develop transportation enhancements, parking studies, regional infrastructure plans and other related services.

Visit the Minnesota Regional Development Organizations Web site at www.mrdo.org or the Arrowhead RDC Web site at www.arcd.org for more details.

“Missourians depend on MoDOT and their local officials to work together to make the best use of limited transportation funds. Local officials have a unique understanding of the needs and desires of their communities at a grassroots level,”

*Kent Van Landuyt, Federal Liaison
MoDOT*

MISSOURI

The Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) has outlined a framework that will bring about improvements in the state’s transportation planning and decision-making process. Working with the state’s MPOs, regional planning commissions (RPCs), public officials, special interest groups and citizens, MoDOT is able to determine and refine a statewide transportation vision in the long-range transportation plan which includes policies and goals and a fiscally constrained strategy to achieve the highest-priority components of the plan.

One of the main goals of the new planning framework is to ensure that the general public and local officials actively participate in the process. MoDOT has been able to achieve this with its MPO and RPO planning partners. “Through the planning framework process, there has been a greater influence by the local officials and the general public in the transportation decision-making process. This process has provided MoDOT with the local input needed to make responsible transportation decisions,” said Bill Stone, Technical Support Engineer, MoDOT.

MoDOT works closely with the regional commissions to develop regional transportation plans that include long-term goals, needs identification and public outreach. These plans must be approved by the regional commission’s board of directors, which are comprised of local officials. The regional plans are then forwarded to the state for consideration in the development of the state’s transportation plan.

“Missourians depend on MoDOT and their local officials to work together to make the best use of limited transportation funds. Local officials have a unique understanding of the needs and desires of their communities at a grassroots level,” said Kent Van Landuyt, Federal Liaison, MoDOT.

Local officials’ involvement is MoDOT’s primary focus of the improved planning process. Officials who are elected by the general public are members of the MPOs and RPCs boards. The framework identifies opportunities throughout the planning process for involvement of local officials. The general public participates at every stage of the planning process including electing the local officials who represent them on RPC and MPO boards of directors and by having direct contact with MoDOT, MPOs, RPCs or local officials.

Missouri’s main project focus in the state’s transportation planning process is highway and road improvements. Each rural regional planning commission receives between \$44,000 - \$54,000 in federal statewide planning and research funds with a 20 percent local match. The state also encourages the rural transportation planners to attend professional development courses, participate in peer learning groups and national trade associations.

Learn more about the members of the Missouri Association of Regional Councils at macog.mo-acte.org/.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

The rural transportation consultation process in New Hampshire is written into state law and is driven by extraordinary opportunities for local officials, as well as the public, to guide transportation planning for their region.

Since the early 1990’s the state’s nine regional development organizations (known locally as regional planning commissions), six of which are rural, have contracted with the state to perform valuable technical assistance and help develop the state’s 10-year transportation improvement plan. In order to carry out the required work program, each rural region is given \$130,000 with a ten percent local match requirement.

Among the key activities of the regional development organizations is to host community planning meetings as part of the biennial update of the state’s plan. Local government officials are invited to the public meetings, in addition to serving on advisory committees used by the regions to identify and prioritize regional transportation needs.

Local official input, in concert with the public input phase, is also sought during the periodic review of the plan by the governor's office and by the state legislature before its final approval.

Regions such as the North Country Council have also expanded their local planning services in recent years to include traffic data collection, physical road inventory, GIS mapping and community-level transportation planning. Each of the rural regions receives up to \$130,000 to implement their rural work program.

Visit the New Hampshire Association of Regional Planning Commission's Web site at www.nharpc.org for more information.

NEW MEXICO

The rural transportation planning process in New Mexico faces some unique challenges. Having an international border and several Tribal governments in the state adds to the complexity of the process. However, this situation has only confirmed the need for a regional approach to rural transportation in New Mexico.

2005 is the first year that all of the state's seven regional development organizations (known locally as regional councils of government) are providing the administrative and staffing support for the state's Rural Planning Organizations. The state generally provides around \$65,000 each year for the regions to operate and carry out the work programs of the RPOs. The state has used the RPO process since the early 1990s to conduct outreach to local officials.

Like many COGs and RPOs, the Northwest New Mexico COG receives state funding of around \$65,000 with a local match requirement of about 17 percent. Typical of COGs in the state, Northwest New Mexico COG staffs a regional technical committee composed of public works, planning and transportation professionals from each of the member governments, with ex officio staffing involvement by NMDOT and other state and federal agencies.



The New Mexico Department of Transportation and the Mid-Region Council of Governments have partnered to bring commuter rail service to the state. Service between the rural communities of Belen and Bernalillo and through Albuquerque will begin in Spring 2006.

The Rail Runner will operate on existing railroad tracks currently owned by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway. The express commuter trains will extend service through even more rural communities and into Santa Fe by 2008. The rail service is intended to help improve mobility, address clean air issues and spur new economic development opportunities. It will also improve regional access to schools, jobs, medical services, shopping and other community services.



During its monthly meetings, the technical committee is involved in a plethora of activities, including vetting and making recommendations on transit, scenic byway and other special projects for state funding. Staff provides technical assistance to members on project development and the committee helps prioritize projects and needs into a regional transportation improvement plan.

All policy level actions are then taken to the RPO Policy Committee, which is also referred to as the "COG-plus" board. The "COG-plus" board derives its name from the fact that it is made up of the COG's Board of Directors plus representatives from each of four Tribal governments in their region.



Local officials and communities are kept engaged in the statewide and regional processes through their involvement in the COG board as well as RPO process. Jeff Kiely, Deputy Director of the Northwest New Mexico COG stated, “The regional approach allows for the efficient use of existing regional planning staff. We are now better serving the planning needs of multiple communities across our region and the state, and the COG/RPO process creates a stronger voice for rural and small-town communities.”

Visit www.epcog.org/index.htm to learn more about the members of the New Mexico Association of Regional Councils.

NEW YORK

The nine regional development organizations in the state (known locally as regional planning and development boards) have no formal contracts or partnerships with the state to foster the participation of rural local officials in the statewide planning process. However, regional development organizations along the state’s southern tier have provided valuable leadership in pursuing the designation and upgrading of key rural highway corridors to Interstate status.

The regions in New York have a long history in the areas of regional aviation planning and technical assistance to local airports. Both the Federal Aviation Administration and New York State DOT have provided ongoing financial support for these efforts.

Activities have included economic impact studies, business plans, land use analysis, operations and revenue analysis, GIS mapping, strategic plan development, development needs studies and opportunities. The aviation staff of each region also participates in state and regional aviation conferences to share experiences and gather information on new trends, federal development financing and other areas relevant to local airports across the state.

In addition, the Southern Tier West Regional Planning and Development Board has played a vital leadership role in preventing the abandonment of a 145-mile rail stretch connecting six counties in New York and Pennsylvania. The group spearheaded the revitalization of this essential freight line by piecing together \$24.9 million in new investments. The retention of the regional rail line has helped to create 805 new jobs in this rural region in addition to generating an additional \$4 million investment by three private shipping firms. Most notably, the group has increased the mileage and usage from 75 carloads on 40 miles of track to 54,000 carloads annually on 145 miles of railways.

As the state works with its rural and urban planning partners to develop a more seamless intermodal system, they have identified six key issues. These include documenting the clear roles and duties of each planning partner, delivering targeted training programs and educating new local officials. It also involves addressing boundary issues, developing a more clear and consistent communications protocol for participants and improving the coordination and sharing of GIS data.

To learn more, visit the North Carolina Association of Rural Planning Organizations at www.kerrtarco.org/rpo/NCARPO.php or the North Carolina DOT at www.ncdot.org/doh/preconstruct/tpb/planning.

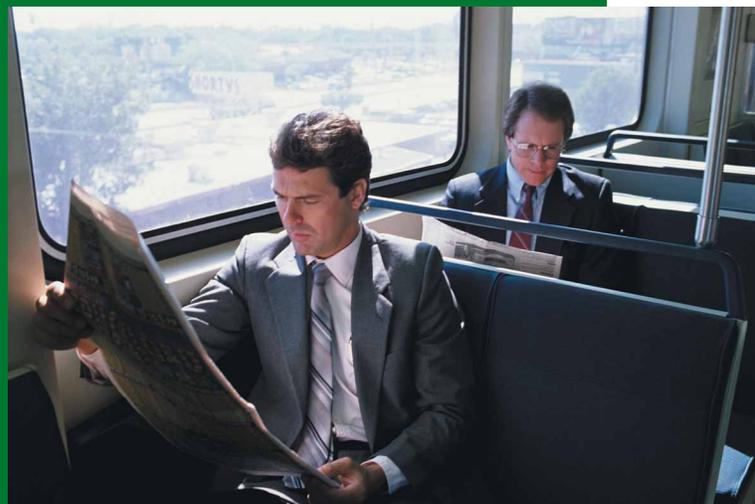
OREGON

Recognizing a need to better incorporate all of the stakeholders in transportation issues, the Oregon Transportation Commission established a process in the late 1990's to bring together state and local partners in transportation planning, programming and development.

Regional advisory committees, known as Area Commissions on Transportation (ACTs), were created for local officials and other key stakeholders to provide input on long range transportation issues, recommendations on priorities for capital investments and advice to the state on regional and local issues.

Each ACT is expected to address the diverse aspects of transportation such as surface, marine, air and transportation safety with their focus on the state's transportation improvement plan. The 11 commissions are staffed by a variety of models, including by the state DOT only, in partnership between the state and established regional development organizations (known locally as councils of governments and/or economic development districts) or by a coalition of several state, regional and local organizations.

Regardless of the staff model, the commissions are focused on soliciting participation and representation from city and county governments, tribal councils, port and transit authorities, as well as private industry. The ACTs play a key advisory role in the development of



Making Public Transportation Efficient

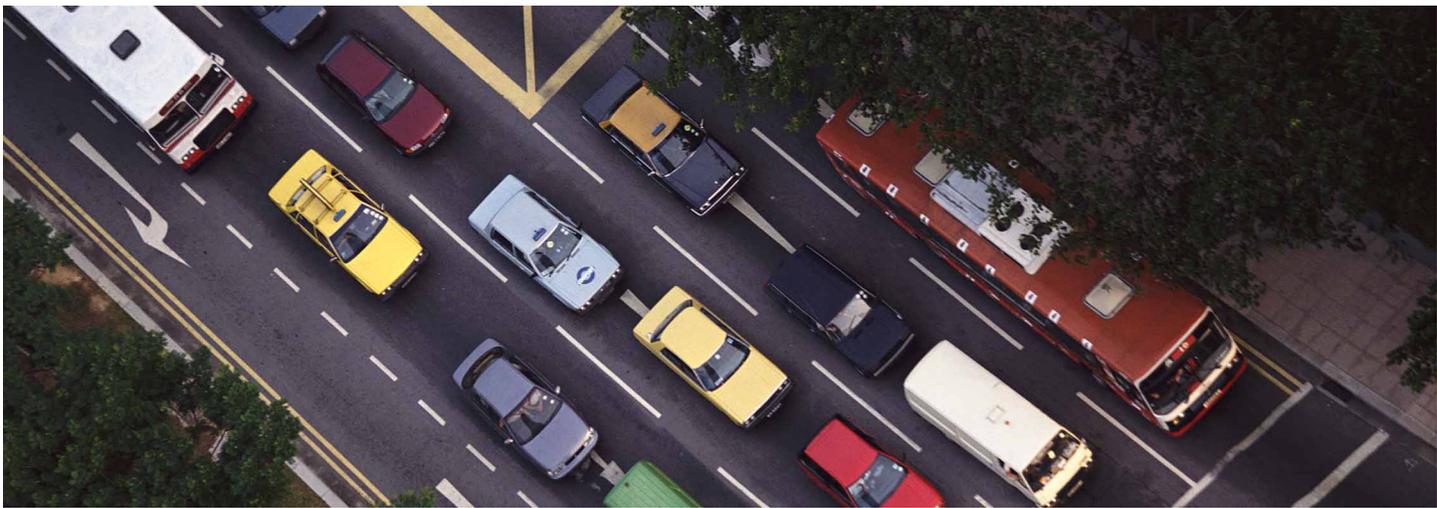
The Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC) recently launched a much-anticipated and greatly needed medical ride program, dubbed Cascades East Ride Center. The Ride Center provides no-cost transportation to medical appointments for Medicaid clients with no other transportation.

The COIC worked with the Oregon Department of Human Services, which reimburses COIC per ride, and other community partners to secure transportation providers and to set up the program.

Rides are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Due to the benefit for citizens and the cost-savings the program is providing to the state, the service is rapidly expanding to additional counties in the region. The program currently costs \$1 million annually to operate, but its success is fueling growth and improved services.

the state's project investment and project prioritization programs, as well as the pursuit of a seamless and multi-modal transportation system.

Because the Oregon Cascades West COG was already engaged in metropolitan transportation planning, incorporating the ACT under its umbrella made sense. Bill Wagner, Executive Director of the Oregon Cascades West COG reports, "There simply isn't enough money to do everything. Our ACT provides the forum to look at regional and local issues and projects, and come to a consensus regarding the priority of state funded projects to be placed in the State Transportation Improvement Program."



To get the diverse range of local officials involved, COG's such as the Cascades West COG host ACTs with representatives from all local governments who are interested in participating. As Wagner put it, "The state transportation commission has given us the opportunity to establish rural regional transportation planning structures. These structures can be as fully functioning as our urban MPO agencies. The effectiveness of these structures is dependent to a great degree on the willingness and interest of local leaders to fully take advantage of the opportunity."

Cascades West has also made a concerted effort to involve state legislators, representatives from neighboring regions, chairs of regional social service agencies and representatives of special interest groups such as housing, economic development and law enforcement agencies.

For more information about Oregon's Area Commissions on Transportation, visit the state DOT Web site at www.oregon.gov/ODOT/COMM/act_main.shtml.

PENNSYLVANIA

Since 1992, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation has used a forward-thinking and robust program to reach the regions of the state that are not served by Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). The state partners with and funds the state's six regional development organizations (known locally as local development districts), along with five rural independent counties, to conduct rural transportation planning activities.

The state DOT awards each region between \$90,000 and \$140,000 in state and federal planning funds, which is matched 10 percent with local funds. Most

notably, the state provides the regional Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) with the same status as MPOs.

State, regional and local decision-makers participate in the transportation planning programs of the six regions via technical advisory and policy committees. Each RPO is responsible for identifying and prioritizing transportation issues and opportunities within their regions.

They conduct transportation studies and make recommendations regarding the planning and implementation of transportation projects. In addition, the RPO's provide geographic information system (GIS) services to state and local agencies and provide technical assistance to transit, emergency responders and other transportation stakeholders.

The rural program provides a forum where state, regional and local officials identify issues and opportunities, conduct studies and make informed recommendations regarding the programming and implementation of transportation investments. Short and long-range plans are produced in each region, and the six regional organizations and the department jointly develop, negotiate and approve the rural portions of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

According to both state and local officials, the process has helped build professional capacity at the local level, bring attention to the long-range planning needs of rural areas and generate plans more closely aligned to community interests. It has also raised awareness of local economic development activities and improved the coordination between statewide plans and regional initiatives.



With funding support from the state and other sources, each region is engaged in a wide range of special projects and studies. SEDA-COG, for example, has conducted a comprehensive multi-modal freight transfer center feasibility study for the Williamsport area. They have examined the intermodal opportunities within its region and studied areas needing improvements or upgrades at major interchanges.

SEDA-COG also formed a Joint Rail Authority in 1983 to bring about public ownership of rail lines that Conrail abandoned. This preservation effort was essential to rail-dependent industries within the region, which employed more than 3,000 workers in coal, lumber, steel and grain businesses.

The SEDA-COG rail authority first purchased 82 miles of Conrail lines serving 22 industries in 1984. Funding was leveraged from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, Federal Railroad Administration, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Centre County Commission, Columbia County Industrial Development Authority and various rail dependent industries.

By 2005, the railroads served 85 industries with over 29,000 carloads annually. There have been environmental benefits as well as improved rail service to regional industries, increased property values, new business growth and enhanced opportunities for commercial development. By maintaining the rail service, the group has also lowered the maintenance costs for local and state highways and bridges within the region.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Following the passage of the 1991 ISTEA law, the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) started partnering with the state's 10 regional development organizations (known locally as councils of government) to identify and prioritize highway needs statewide.

The process focuses on generating input from public officials and the general public, and the evaluation of projects on the basis of travel needs and economic development opportunities.

The SCDOT Planning Office provides each COG with a list of potential highway construction needs that have been identified based on travel, congestion and accidents for its region. The COGs use these lists to generate feedback from local officials, economic development groups and legislators. Additional construction projects may be identified through this consultation.

Each COG maintains a committee that reviews the project list and data. Project priorities are then recommended to the COG board, which consists of local government officials, state legislators and citizen representatives.

Once adopted by the board, the list is then recommended to the SCDOT Transportation Commission. Project lists from all ten COGs are ultimately used to develop a draft STIP which is presented to the SCDOT Transportation Commission. Once the Commission gives its approval of the STIP, it is given to the COGs for the public review period. Following this exercise, the Commission adopts the STIP and awaits approval by FHWA and FTA.

Moving People Around the Region

With an assist from the Lower Savannah Council of Governments and the Lowcountry Regional Transportation Authority, the Allendale County Scooter was launched in 2004. The Scooter was a direct response to an urgent need for public transportation services throughout the county. For a minimal fee of \$1.50 per 10 miles, almost 75 regular riders use the system daily for work, medical care and general business. Local agencies and businesses purchase Scooter tickets for their patients and customers, and over 6,613 passenger trips have been made since August 2004.

Rather than purchase new vehicles, the program coordinated with the Disability and Special Needs Board, the County Office on Aging and the Low Country Health Center to use existing vehicles. The program is funded by the South Carolina Department of Transportation, the James Clyburn Transportation Center at the South Carolina State University, Sisters of Charity and Allendale Alive.

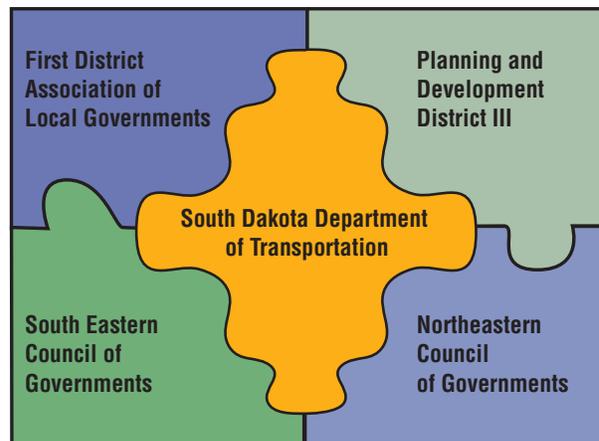
Several of the COGs incorporate freight transportation into their planning efforts. The Lowcountry COG is planning to conduct an analysis of existing rail and truck volumes and movements within its region. The group is also appraising the impact of existing and proposed ports and international airports upon freight and economic development in the Lowcountry region and surrounding regions.

Under a pilot program, five of the ten South Carolina COGs have also been conducting rural and regional public transportation planning. This includes the identification and central coordination of public transportation providers within the region. The state is expected to include public transportation elements into all ten planning contracts in 2006.

SOUTH DAKOTA

The regional development organizations (known locally as councils of government) in South Dakota are not directly engaged in the state's rural consultation efforts with local governments. However, four of the regional groups are under contract with the state DOT to perform road data inventories.

This includes collecting road centerline locations, point locations representing a variety of rural and urban points of cultural significance and database information for the 66 counties of South Dakota. These entities also perform map and database edits to the global positioning system (GPS) data, which must be approved by the state.



TENNESSEE

The Tennessee Department of Transportation, in partnership with the state's nine regional development organizations, formed 12 new Rural Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) in late 2005 to complement the 11 existing Metropolitan Planning Organizations.

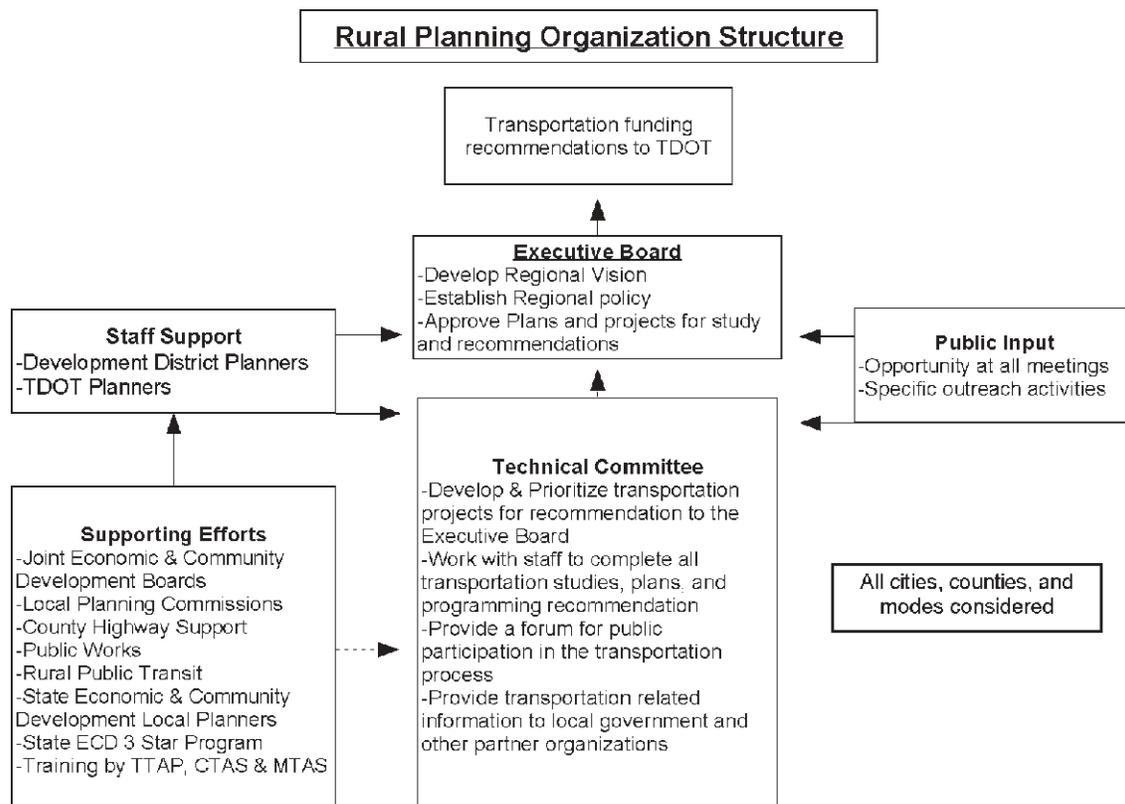
Prompted by the January 2003 federal rules on rural consultation, the state established these entities to serve as a formal mechanism to gather local official input for statewide and regional plans. The state structured the RPOs based on the MPO model.

Before deciding to use the RPO model, the state DOT worked with organizations like the Tennessee County Services Association, Municipal League, Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development and the Tennessee Development District Association over an 18-month timeframe to establish regional working groups. These groups discussed ways to improve local and regional transportation infrastructure in rural parts of the state.



Today, the regional working groups have been replaced with 12 RTPOs that are tasked with facilitating the input and involvement of local elected and appointed officials in the state's planning and decision-making processes. The regional development organizations in Tennessee (known as development districts), in conjunction with the state DOT, largely organized and formed the RTPOs. For the first year, the state is providing a base level of \$60,000 for each RTPO plus an additional \$1,500 per county in the region. Several of the regional planning groups are staffing two RTPOs within their regions.

According to state documents, "The RTPOs will consider multi-modal transportation needs as well as



short term funding priorities and will make recommendations to TDOT.” Each RTPO must adopt organizational bylaws, operate an executive board and technical committees, and provide proactive input to the state DOT on transportation investments based on land use and strategic planning efforts.

While the Tennessee Department of Transportation is still ultimately responsible for statewide transportation planning, the RTPO process is intended to serve as the primary tool to increase local input and to pursue a more comprehensive approach to multi-modal planning in the state.

The executive committee of each RTO consists of county and municipal representatives, along with the state legislators who serve on the board of the regional development organization. The leadership committees also include non-voting representatives from county, state and federal highway agencies, rural public transit officials, state economic development officials and an appointee of neighboring RTPOs.

The technical committees are appointed by the boards of each regional development organization and they consist of representatives from public transit, aviation, trucking, rail, water ports and bike and pedestrian entities within the region. In addition, state and local officials from transportation and economic development agencies, representatives from neighboring MPOs and RPOs and FHWA division staff serve as non-voting members of the committees.

To view sample materials from the Tennessee Rural Transportation Planning Organizations, visit the South Central Tennessee Development District Web site at www.sctdd.org/RTPO/index.htm.

TEXAS

In Texas, several regional development organizations (known locally as councils of government) in the state have voluntarily formed and operate Rural Planning Organizations to help address the rural transportation needs of their multi-county regions.

The RPOs in Texas are not currently operating under any set guidelines or responsibility and they do not receive any planning funds from the state. They are self-financed and governed by local officials. However, the RPOs are providing a valuable forum for enhanced communications between state transportation officials and rural local government officials.

The Capital Area Rural Transportation Planning Organization (CARTPO), operated by the Capital Area COG, is focused on bridging the communications and planning gap with the urban and rural counties within its region. The membership of the RPO consists of representatives from both urban and rural counties.

CARTPO is not intended to duplicate the work of the MPO serving the three urban counties within its region, according to the organization’s Web site. “Rather, it recognizes the strong interconnectivity between urban and rural areas within the region and the importance of incorporating urban plans into a region-wide focus on transportation.”



The Capital Area RPO operates three separate committees. The Planning and Project Development Committee focuses on long-range planning, regional cooperation, project development and organizational structure. This committee has been helpful to the state in reaching consensus on the transportation investment priorities of local officials from the rural portion of the region.

The Legislation and Policy Initiative Committee works to build regional support for legislation and policies that will increase mobility, traffic safety and funding for transportation improvements. The RPO also has an Alternative Transportation Committee that is responsible for supporting the development of and planning for transportation modes that serve as alternatives to single-occupancy vehicles.

Visit the Capital Area RTPO at www.capcog.org/Committees/CARTPO for more details.

UTAH

In Utah, the state is working with two regional development organizations (known locally as associations of government) to test the RPO model in two rural counties, Tooele and Wasatch.

Under the pilot program, for example, the state provides \$40,000 each year for the Mountainland Association of Governments (AOG) to act as the lead agency in coordinating the work program of the Wasatch County Rural Planning Organization.

The primary activities include coordinating the local and regional transportation needs and solutions between the municipalities, county, transit agencies, state and others in this growing region. The state does not currently have plans to bring the RPO process statewide, however there are tentative plans to add a third single county RPO pilot in 2006.

The Wasatch County RPO provides a clear description of the group's mission. "Rural transportation planning is the process of examining travel and transportation issues and needs in non-metropolitan areas. It includes a demographic analysis of the community, as well as an examination of travel patterns and trends."

"The planning process includes an analysis of alternatives to meet projected future demands, and for providing a safe and efficient transportation system that meets mobility goals while avoiding adverse impacts to the environment. In metropolitan areas over 50,000 population the responsibility for transportation planning lies with designated Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO); in small communities and rural areas there is no federally designated body to provide transportation planning."

Visit the Mountainland AOG's Web site at www.mountainland.org for more information on the Utah RPO pilot program.

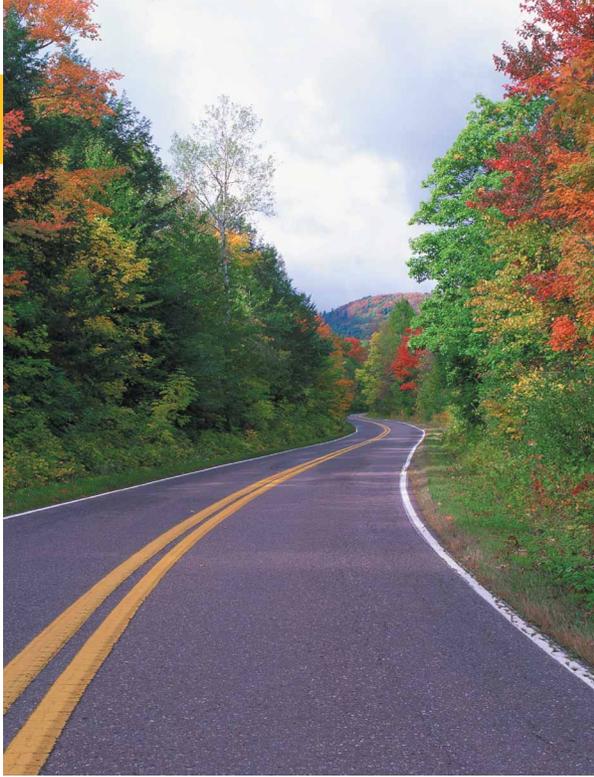
VERMONT

In 1992, the Vermont Agency on Transportation launched a new rural planning initiative that was specifically designed to move the state transportation planning process to the local and regional levels. This involved creating expanded opportunities for citizen input as well as a forum for local officials to affect state planning and investment decisions.

The state transportation agency partnered and contracted with the state's 11 regional planning commissions (RPC) to implement the new program, since these regional groups already had years of economic development planning experience and established credibility with local officials and the public.

The RPC process was also set up to help the agency comply with both the 1991 ISTEA law and a state law (Act 250) enacted in the late 1980s that requires state agencies to conduct extensive public outreach on infrastructure projects with land use implications.

As part of the annual work program, the RPCs operate transportation advisory committees composed of community officials, public transportation providers, interest groups and individual citizens. They prepare long-range transportation plans that identify the goals and objectives for all forms of transportation for up to a 20-year horizon. They identify and prioritize projects for implementation as part of the STIP, plus they conduct studies on specific transportation problems and issues as needed.



VIRGINIA

Virginia has implemented a Rural Transportation Planning Program (RTPP) to address the needs of non-metropolitan areas of the state. The program is implemented in partnership with the 12 of the state's 20 regional development organizations (known locally as planning development commissions) that serve rural portions of the state.

Under the two-part program, the regional commissions typically receive a baseline of \$48,000 each year to serve as liaisons with local governments, assist with the development of the statewide multi-modal plan and the state highway plan and develop bicycle and pedestrian plans.

The regional commissions conduct studies, prepare transportation enhancement grant applications, conduct GIS services, develop rural transit plans and prepare the transportation elements of regional comprehensive plans. The regions are also eligible to apply for additional rural planning and implementation funds through a competitive grant process.

The Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission, which also serves as an MPO, is enhancing its rural work program in the current year to include a preliminary analysis of transportation safety issues.

As part of its safety conscious planning initiative, the regional commission is forming a new committee of various community representatives to act as a community leader and clearinghouse for transportation safety information and best practices. The committee will include local law enforcement agencies, municipal traffic engineers and planners and representatives from the various modes.

Visit the Virginia Association of Planning Development Commissions Web site at www.vapdc.org for more information.

As part of the planning process, the RPCs work together on projects that cross jurisdictional boundaries, such as ski country, regional rail and snowmobile issues. They are helping the state work with local communities to develop multi-modal projects and solutions, with the goal of establishing more intermodal connections in the future.

More importantly, the RPCs are facilitating improved dialogues and communications between the state and local communities, which in the end may be one of their most valuable contributions.

The Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission offers a typical example for the state. The group provides leadership and staff support for public transportation and town planning, and works with state, local and private sector officials on regional and state initiatives.

They conduct asset management functions such as culvert and small bridge inventories, traffic counts, GIS and GPS mapping services and capital budgeting assistance. The group places a major emphasis on fostering public involvement and civic engagement in transportation design and planning. Most importantly, they help towns, nonprofit groups and governmental agencies implement projects and studies, from rail to trail feasibility studies to park and ride reviews to safety and traffic calming projects.

For more information on members of the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies, visit www.vapda.org.

WASHINGTON

In 1990, the Washington state legislature passed the Growth Management Act (ESHB 2929) authorizing the Regional Transportation Planning Program. This program allowed for the creation of regional transportation planning organizations (RTPO) in both urban and rural regions of the state.

While the federally-mandated MPOs serve as the RTPOs for metropolitan areas, the state also supports and helps fund regional planning entities for rural regions. Several of the RTPOs are staffed and administered by regional development organizations (known locally as councils of government), including those who also serve as MPOs. The remaining RTPOs are stand-alone entities, staffed by the county or managed with assistance from the state DOT.

The RTPOs are voluntary organizations composed of local governments whose purpose is to coordinate transportation planning on a regional basis, and to develop a regional transportation plan, according to the state's RTPO Transportation Planning Guidebook (June 1998). The state provides annual financial support to help the regional groups implement their work programs.

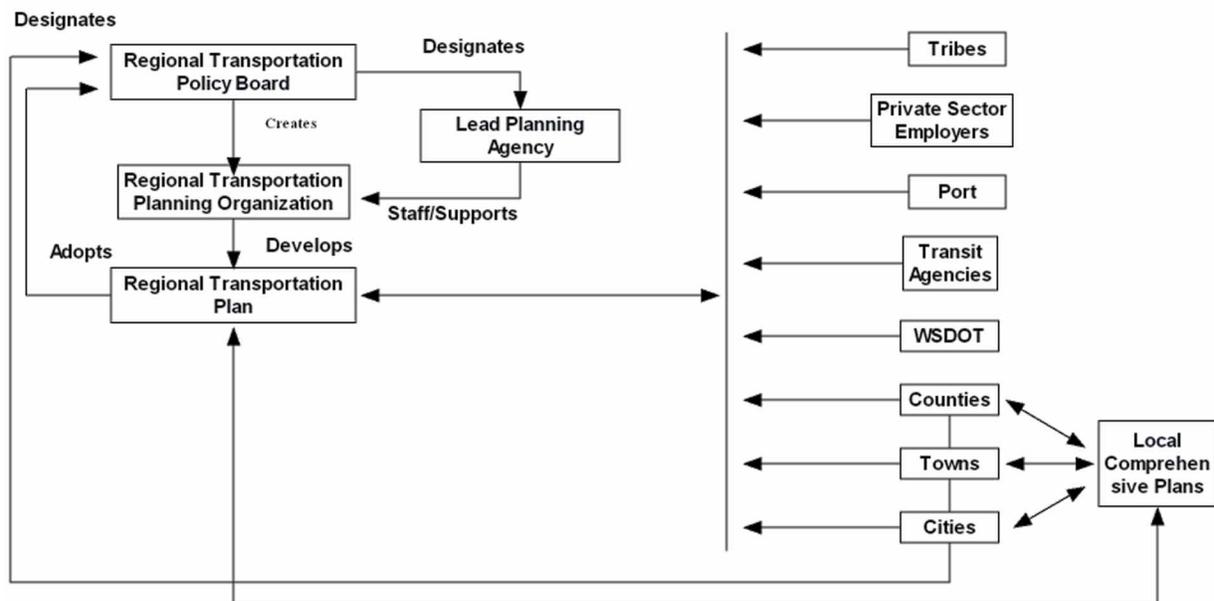


The primary functions of RTPOs are to develop regional plans and policies for transportation, growth management, environmental quality and other topics determined by the RTPO. They provide data and analysis to support local and regional decision making.

They also work to build community consensus on regional issues through information and citizen involvement. The RTPOs pursue intergovernmental consensus on regional plans, policies and issues, and advocate local implementation. In addition, the RTPOs provide planning and technical services on a contractual basis.

For more information, visit the Washington Department of Transportation Web site at www.wsdot.wa.gov/ppsc/planning/rtpomap.htm.

State of Washington Rural Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) Organizational Structure



For more information, visit RURALTRANSPORTATION.org



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