



STRENGTHEN RURAL LOCAL OFFICIAL ROLES IN STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING PROCESSES

ISSUE:

On November 9, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (EPW) considered and unanimously approved “Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century” (S. 1813), their long term SAFETEA-LU reauthorization legislation. The two-year, \$109 billion measure aims to maintain existing transportation funding levels adjusted for inflation.

In the original draft Senate bill, local elected officials (particularly in rural areas) would have had a seat at the table during the state transportation planning process, the gateway for accessing federal surface transportation funding. The bill elevated the relationship of non-metropolitan local officials with their state DOTs from “consultation” to “cooperation” and in some places “coordination.” However, during the November 9 markup, a group of “en bloc” amendments were modified and agreed to by the Committee, including an amendment by Sen. Michael Crapo (R-ID) that negatively resets the rural local official role to “consultation,” rather than the terms of “cooperation” and “coordination” proposed in the committee’s original bill. The amendment by Sen. Crapo reverses key parts of the committee’s original intentions to ensure a stronger state-local partnership in rural areas.

The Senate reauthorization bill would also negatively impact areas currently covered by Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) with populations between 50,000 – 200,000. The EPW bill sets the new MPO population threshold at 200,000 with a three step process for existing small MPOs to be allowed to continue. This includes approval by local officials in the area, Governor, and U.S. Department of Transportation. This policy change threatens approximately 200 out of the nation’s 382 MPOs, more than 50 percent of all MPOs. In addition, 8 states potentially will not have a MPO. If an area served by an MPO today loses its status as part of the recertification process under the proposed new criteria, they would lose the “cooperation” status with their state DOT and be incorporated into the “consultation” category.

ACTION NEEDED FOR RTPOs:

- **Please contact your Senators and urge them** to elevate the level of rural local official’s relationship with their state DOTs from “consultation” to “cooperation” in the statewide transportation planning process during floor consideration of the Senate’s surface transportation authorization (S. 1813).
- **If your Representative serves on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee**, urge them to include in their final reauthorization bill, legislation by Reps. Walz and Hanna (H.R. 1565) to elevate the level of rural local official’s relationship with their state DOTs to “cooperation” in the statewide transportation planning process.

ACTION NEEDED FOR MPOs:

- If you are a MPO serving a population under 200,000 and are concerned with the potential impact of the Senate’s proposed threshold change, contact your Senators and Representatives and communicate the negative effects of this change.

For more information, contact NADO Associate Legislative Director Jennifer Walsh at 202.624.8467 or jwalsh@nado.org.

Four Cs of Federal Transportation Planning Dialogue

Under federal transportation planning rules, the statewide and metropolitan transportation planning processes are guided by four levels of intergovernmental collaboration and outreach. Each of the following definitions holds a specific meaning that state DOTs must follow with their local government partners.

- **Consideration** means that one or more parties takes into account the opinions, actions, and relevant information from other parties in making decisions or determining a course of action.
- **Consultation** means that one or more parties confer with other identified parties in accordance with an established process and, prior to taking action(s), consider the views of the other parties and periodically inform them about action(s) taken.
- **Cooperation** means that the parties involved in carrying out the transportation planning and programming processes work together to achieve a common goal or objective.
- **Coordination** means the cooperative development of plans, programs, and schedules among agencies and entities with legal standing and adjustment of such plans, programs, and schedules to achieve general consistency, as appropriate.

BACKGROUND and LEGISLATION:

The National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) supports modifying the statewide transportation planning guidelines for state DOT consultation requirements with non-metropolitan local elected officials as part of the SAFETEA-LU federal highway and transit reauthorization process. The statewide planning process is the gateway for accessing federal surface transportation funding, making it vital that local officials be involved. Specifically, the association and its members encourage Congress and the administration to support the establishment and funding of Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) as outlined in H.R. 1565 by Reps. Walz and Hanna and S. 625 by Sens. Klobuchar and Alexander. This legislation would:

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

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

1. Strengthen the current requirement for state DOTs to partner with rural local elected and appointed government officials from “consultation” to “cooperation” as defined under federal law and rules.
2. Provide federal recognition and definition for *Regional Transportation Planning Organizations*.
3. Allow the U.S. Department of Transportation to review, comment and approve the non-metropolitan official consultation models being used by state DOTs.
4. Target federal highway, transit and safety planning resources to enable RTPOs and rural local officials to work regionally to build the planning, project development and institutional capacity needed to maintain and sustain a multi-modal, seamless transportation network.
5. Give each RTPO a formal structure and the responsibility for working with their state DOT to enhance the planning, implementation and results of statewide transportation plans and programs in non-metropolitan areas of the state on a regional basis.
6. Establish an RTPO work plan to assist state and local officials with:
 - Ensuring local elected and appointed officials are given a meaningful opportunity to provide input in the statewide planning process—***the gateway for accessing federal surface transportation aid***
 - Developing statewide and regional long-range, multi-modal transportation plans that are performance-driven, locally accountable and publicly transparent
 - Identifying and recommending regional and local policy, plan and project priorities for consideration by the state DOT and other appropriate state policy makers
 - Improving the integration and sharing of local planning, land use and economic development plans with state transportation plans and investment programs
 - Providing technical assistance to local officials and other transportation stakeholders

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