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Regional Rural Transportation Planning:

State Models for Local Consultation, Regional Coordination, and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations

NADO
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Introduction

In 2015 - 2016, the NADO Research Foundation conducted research on regional nonmetropolitan transportation planning. This research included reviewing work programs, contractual agreements, regional plans and programs, and websites, as well as conducting interviews with regional planning and development organization (RDO) and state department of transportation (DOT) staff and other transportation professionals.

Emergence of Regional Transportation Planning

The field of regional-level rural transportation planning has existed in a very small number of states since the 1970s, around the same time that many metropolitan areas were solidifying their approach to transportation planning through metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) that were formed following the 1962 Federal-Aid Highway Act. Rural transportation planning greatly expanded after Congress passed the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991, with its emphasis on local participation, and the 1998 Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) that elevated the role of rural local officials in statewide planning. In order to meet new federal requirements, states developed new outreach methods, including supporting the work of rural, regional transportation planning organizations (often called RPOs or RTPOs). The majority of these rural transportation programs were established in existing regional planning and development organizations, which typically conduct multiple forms of planning and community and economic development work. Some rural transportation programs were also set up in county planning offices, state DOT district or regional offices, MPOs serving surrounding rural areas, other parent agencies already serving multiple local jurisdictions, or as standalone organizations. Some of the regions staff an MPO as well as an RTPO within the same regional agency.

The federal planning regulation finalized in 2003 (and again in 2007 after the 2005 Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) was passed) outlined the required process for nonmetropolitan local official consultation in statewide planning. From the federal policy perspective, RTPOs were considered a stakeholder to the planning process, but they were not defined until the 2012 law Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) established a common set of tasks and institutional structures for the voluntary organizations. This provided a pathway for federal recognition, with prescribed responsibilities and relationships. The nation's first RTPOs were designated according to the federal definition in January 2016 in Ohio.

A Federal Policy Framework for Regional Transportation Planning

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 nonmetropolitan local officials. The regulation implemented 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 develop a documented process for local official input into statewide transportation plans and investment programs, and states must seek feedback from local officials and others regarding the consultation process every five years
- The consultation process must be "separate and discrete" from state processes to obtain input from the general public, giving 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 elected and appointed officials before taking actions, consider the officials' views and periodically inform them about actions taken
- 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

Developing regional planning partnerships in nonmetropolitan areas has been one method states have used to complete their local consultation efforts. The 2012 law MAP-21, 2015 Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, and planning regulation finalized in 2016 elevate the role of local officials in statewide planning, so that states must "cooperate" rather than "consult" with local officials or, if applicable, through RTPOs. This provides an enhanced level of communication between states and local officials.

MAP-21 also defined RTPOs' structure and responsibilities in federal statute for the first time. Governors may choose to establish RTPOs, but where they exist, they must be multijurisdictional and establish a policy committee and fiscal agent. RTPOs must complete the following duties:

- Develop regional long-range multimodal transportation plans
- Develop a regional TIP for consideration by the state
- Foster the coordination of local planning, land use, and economic development plans with state, regional, and local transportation plans and programs
- Provide technical assistance to local officials
- Participate in national, multistate, and State policy and planning development processes
- Provide a forum for public participation in the statewide and regional transportation planning processes;
- Consider and share plans and programs with neighboring RTPOs, MPOs, and, where appropriate, Indian Tribal Governments
- Conduct other duties

Sources: Federal Register, January 23, 2003; Technical Corrections February 14, 2003; May 27, 2016

RTPOs Today

Over half of the states in the U.S. had established some form of rural transportation planning prior to the enactment of MAP-21, and several states have also passed their own statutes governing rural transportation planning. As a result, a patchwork of institutional models and responsibilities exist today, and RTPO-type entities are called a variety of names. Generally, RTPOs have been set up to model basic MPO structures and functions. Together with MPOs, RTPOs often offer states a consistent statewide model for conducting planning that is continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative.

RTPOs typically have a policy board made up primarily of local officials from nonmetropolitan jurisdictions, which may also be the RDO's or parent agency's own governing board, or a subset of its members and other transportation leaders. Many RTPOs also have a technical committee, comprising public works or planning staff from member local governments, representatives of transportation modes, state DOT staff, and others with an interest in transportation. In some states, the RTPOs also may form other committees, including citizen's advisory committees, safety committees, transit or coordinated transportation committees, bicycle/pedestrian committees, and more, whose make recommendations to the policy board about actions to support rural transportation goals.

In most states that have formed RTPOs or support rural transportation planning programs, the regional process is typically intended to support the federal statewide planning processes and requirements. As a result, the most common source of funding for RTPO work is FHWA Statewide Planning and Research, although FTA Planning and Rural Transit programs are also accessed, along with state sources of funding and often a local match. The RTPOs' responsibilities often include conducting their own or assisting with the state's public participation efforts, developing a regional long-range plan, and identifying regional priorities to include in a transportation improvement program (TIP) or a list of projects for the state to consider. Technical assistance is an important function in nearly every RTPO state, with the regional entities able to respond to local government questions, conduct technical analyses and local plans, assist with grant applications, develop or support the transportation chapters of local comprehensive plans, and other functions. Depending on available funding, they may complete other documents such as corridor studies, safety plans, bicycle and pedestrian maps and plans, freight plans, and other products. These efforts are of great benefit in rural areas, where local jurisdictions may have limited professional staff and little capacity to access federal funds.

The regional planning process benefits state DOTs by providing them with a direct and ongoing link to local officials and to other stakeholders. The regional planning process provides a venue to establish priority issues and strategies and to identify projects affecting regional-level, rather than parochial, outcomes that are vetted through a local and public process. Working together to develop projects can help to address local needs that may not be apparent at the state level. RTPOs are often called upon to serve on statewide committees or advisory groups, to guide the development of many different state-level plans.

As the nation's transportation needs grow, and consistent funding continues to be a concern, RTPOs' roles have evolved. Increasingly, RTPO staff and decision makers are looking to formalize the planning and project identification process. More and more RTPOs are taking steps to connect project priorities to long-range strategic planning, and developing criteria connected to state and federal laws as well as the regional vision for transportation. As states and MPOs take on new requirements for performance-based planning, including setting targets for federally defined measures, many RTPOs are identifying measures to use in their planning. Some state DOTs are also working with RTPOs to determine their roles in adopting the federally required performance management process themselves or supporting the state's performance management efforts.

This report presents a snapshot of the work occurring at the regional level in nonmetropolitan areas in 32 states. Most of these states have a formal contractual and/or consultative relationship with organizations providing regional transportation planning services, but other models are presented here, as well. Voluntary RTPOs without annual state contracts, regional support for statewide mapping efforts, consistent approaches to mobility management and coordinated human services transportation, and partnerships to address specific regional concerns or special studies are also shared in this report.

Funding Support for RTPO-type Entities and Activities

State	Total annual funding (including match)	Match rate and source	Date established
Alabama	$40,000 – $75,000	20% local	2005 – 2006
Arizona	$330,000	20% local	1970
California	$125,000 – $422,000		1972 – 1975 for most RTPAs
Colorado		No match required	1992
Connecticut	$176,250	10% state, 10% local	1990s
Florida	$25,000 (former contracts)		2005, until 2015
Georgia	$50,000 - $125,000	20% local	2000
Illinois			2008, coordinated plans only
Indiana	$29,000 – $101,000	20% local	2001 and 2005
Iowa	$40,000 – $76,000	20% local	1993
Kentucky	$65,000 – 105,000	10% state, 10% local	1994
Maine	$5,000 – $15,000, option to apply for add'l funds	20% state	1994
Massachusetts	$300,000 – $500,000	20% state	1970s
Michigan	$57,000	20% state	1975
Minnesota	$88,235	15% local	Early 1990s
Missouri	$80,882.35	20% local	1994
New Mexico	$106,250	20% local	Early 1990s
New York	No planning program, but may complete special studies		
North Carolina	$115,625 – $144,531	20% local	2002
Ohio	$88,000 - $214,000	10% state, 10% local	2013
Oklahoma	$78,000	20% local	2012
Oregon	Varies	No match required	1996
Pennsylvania	$346,000 – $390,000	10% state, 10% local	1992
South Carolina	$106,500	20% local	1997
South Dakota	No planning program, but may provide GIS support		
Tennessee	$60,000 – $100,000	10% state, 10% local	2005 – 2006
Texas	Varies; voluntary organizations		1999 – 2009
Utah	$12,000 – $50,000	20% or more local	2005 – 2008
Vermont	$150,000 – $250,000	10% state, 10% local	1993
Virginia	$72,500	20% local	1993
Washington	Varies; $2.2M total for state	No match required	1990
Wisconsin	$54,000 – $200,000	Varies; often 20% local	1976

Note: Information provided by regional or state agency staff or contained in planning documents.

Alabama

Quick Facts

Number of Rural Planning Organizations: 12

Total annual funding: $40,000 - $75,000 annually (80% federal, 20% local match)

Date established: 2005 - 2006

To meet the federal requirements for the consultation process between state transportation officials and nonmetropolitan local officials, the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) selected the West Alabama Regional Commission to conduct a two-year (FY2005 & FY2006) planning and consultation pilot project for a seven-county region that includes both rural and metropolitan areas. After the success of that pilot project, ALDOT extended the consultation process statewide and entered into agreements with the state's other 11 regional development organizations (known locally as regional councils of government and regional planning commissions) in October 2006 to formally establish Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs).

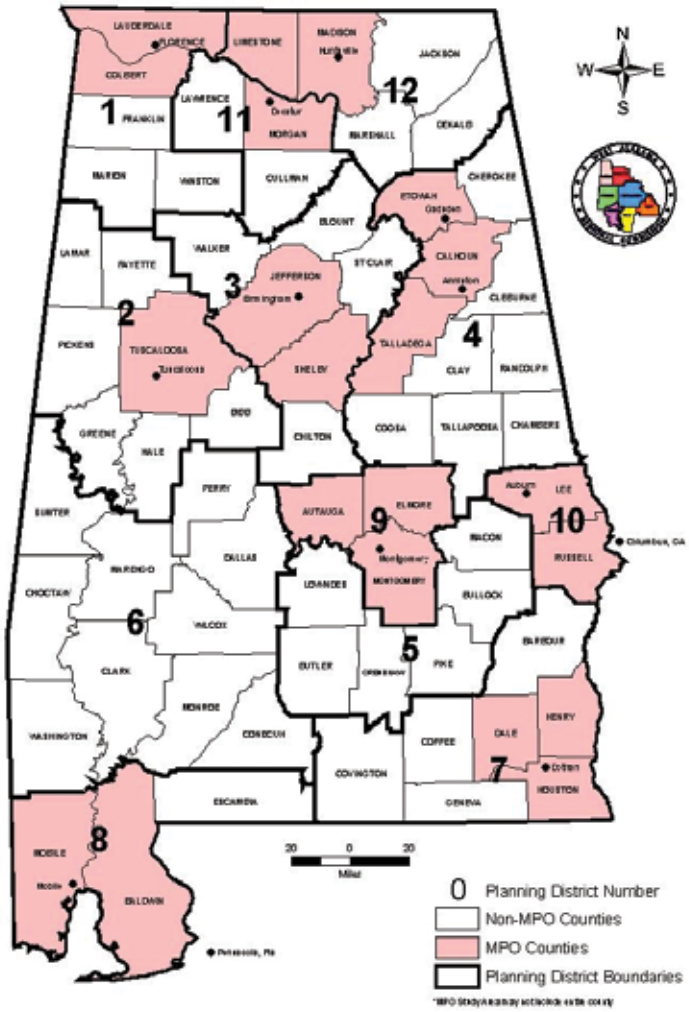
According to the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission's FY2016 Transportation Plan, "the purpose of the RPO is to enhance and improve the rural transportation planning consultation process between ALDOT and those local governments responsible for transportation planning in the rural areas."[1] In addition, the establishment of the statewide RPO process provided rural regions a "united voice in addressing safety issues, long range transportation needs, and transit needs."[2] Although this system does not allow RPOs to allocate funds for projects, it does give rural governments a means to recommend a list of their transportation needs and influence state and federal funding for transportation projects in rural areas. This occurs in some regions through voluntary development of a non-binding rural TIP.

Overview of RPO Tasks

The general structure of an RPO in Alabama consists of three primary committees: the Policy Committee, the Technical Coordinating Committee and the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee. The Policy Committee includes local officials such as county commissioners and mayors and an ALDOT division representative. The Technical Coordinating Committee includes county engineers and transportation planners and the Citizens Transportation Advisory committee typically includes four citizens from each rural county located in the service area. Some RPOs have found it advantageous to combine the Policy and Technical Coordinating Committees to allow for better meeting turnout and collaboration among committee members.[3] Some RPOs institute subcommittees within the technical coordinating and citizens advisory committees on specific transportation planning topic areas including, but not limited to, safety, public transit, and human services.

While the tasks performed by each RPO vary throughout the state, the primary function of the RPO is to provide rural local officials and local citizens with increased

Alabama Planning Districts



Courtesy West Alabama Regional Commission

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. As outlined in the RPO work program, which is fairly uniform across the state, an RPO's technical responsibilities include the administrative functions of the RPO; the coordination and management of the committee structure and meeting schedule; local transportation data collection, management, and distribution; the development of reports required by ALDOT including a regional transportation plan and a list of safety observations, and active engagement in the required public involvement process. The RPO also develops a regional long-range transportation plan that sets goals and identifies specific project priorities for each county within the region. In addition, the regions develop coordinated human services transportation plans. The RPOs are also assisting with the coordination of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) transition plan activities among local governments, state agencies, and FHWA.

[1] *SARPC (2015). Transportation Plan Fiscal Year 2016 Update, www.mobilempo.org/RuralPlanningOrganization/September23_2015/Transportation%20Plan%202016%20final%20with%20Project%20list.pdf*

[2] *SARPC (2015)*

[3] *Personal communication with Tom Piper, February 2016*

Arizona

Quick Facts

Number of Councils of Governments serving rural areas: 4

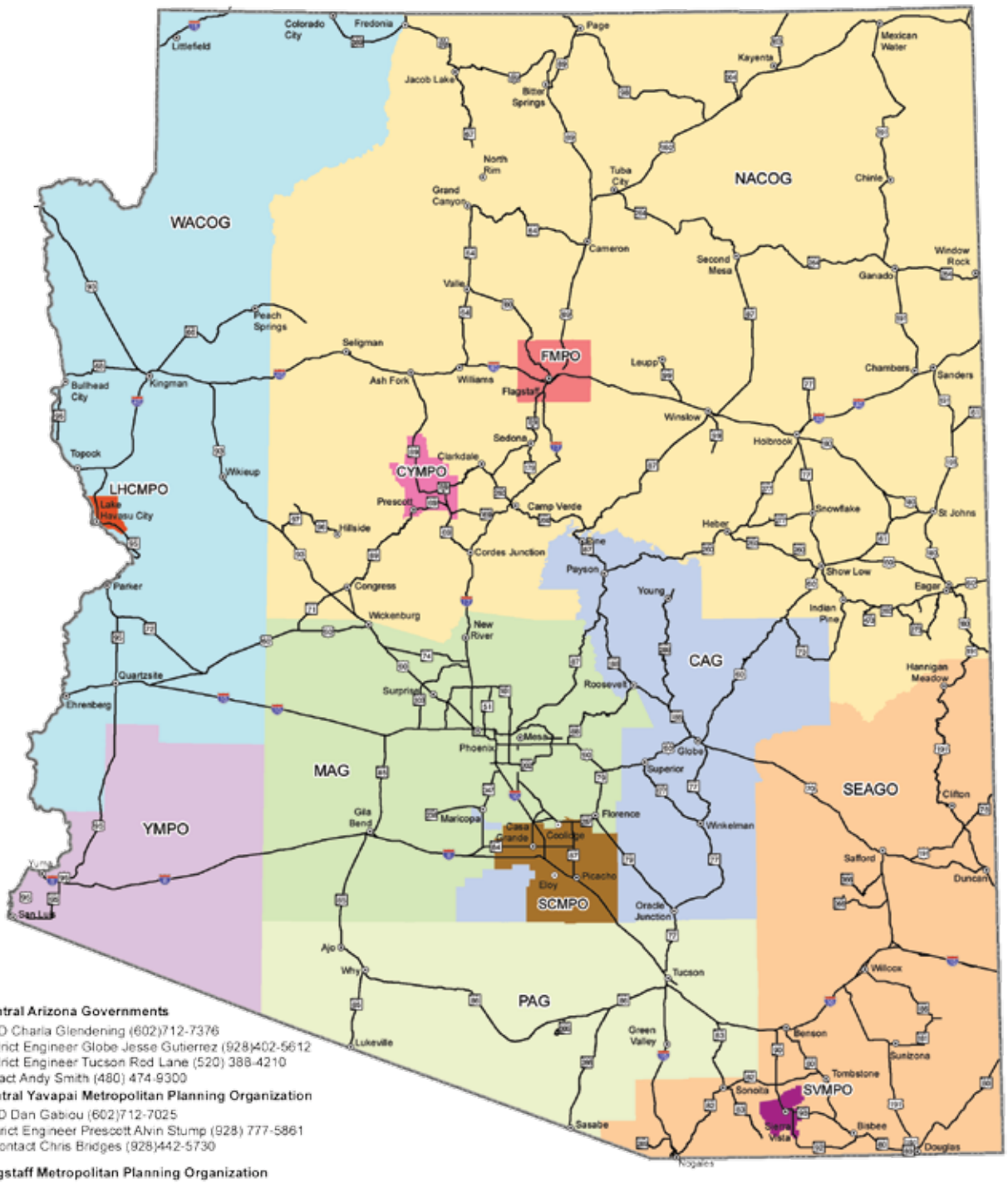
Total annual funding: $330,000 (80% federal funds from FHWA SPR, FTA Planning, and FTA Section 5310 Mobility Management, and 20% local match)

Date established: 1970

Arizona's rural transportation planning efforts are guided at the regional level by councils of governments (COGs) that serve contiguous areas without urban hubs of 50,000 or more residents. As entities governed by local elected officials, each COG employs full-time planning staff to prepare and implement a comprehensive transportation work program. COGs perform a variety of transportation services for their constituent partners, which may include local tribes. These services consist of providing technical assistance and training to support communities and service providers in applying for state and federal transportation grants, conducting data collection and projections, developing a TIP, implementing human services transportation and public transit planning and coordination, and providing a forum for public input and review.[4] Overall, the COGs serve as an intermediary between local and regional stakeholders and State and Federal transportation agencies.

The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) distributes federal transportation funds to the COGs to meet specific goals and deliverables set forth in an annual work program developed each year by ADOT's Multimodal Planning Division. In addition to the items outlined above, these additional responsibilities may include data collection and reporting, public involvement and consultation, project management, and coordination of transit through mobility management.[5] Northern Arizona Council of Governments' (NACOG) work program is illustrative of the roles and responsibilities performed by COGs in meeting regional rural transportation goals. An overarching theme of the work program is to meet the priorities of the federal surface transportation program, which include supporting economic vitality, increasing safety and security for all users, promoting accessibility and mobility, and enhancing connectivity. To achieve

Arizona COGs and MPOs



Courtesy Arizona DOT

these goals, NACOG's work program covers three core focus areas: regional roads and safety planning, transit planning, and mobility management.[6]

Regional Roads and Safety Planning

The COG is responsible for developing and implementing a public involvement plan to incorporate a variety of stakeholders into the planning process. This audience includes elected officials, residents, agency staff, transportation providers, and other partners. The COG maintains a website with useful information for stakeholders including contact and membership lists for regional transportation committees, public meeting dates and other information, and a catalogue of relevant documents and materials, including the TIP and its amendments, as well as other studies and data.[7]

The COG is also required to collect and maintain Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS) data (including traffic volume and road classification), gather accurate population estimates, identify which roads are eligible for federal funding, and meet other requirements. Annually, the region submits a TIP to ADOT programming projects for a federally mandated minimum of four years.[8] To facilitate this process, the COG coordinates a transportation technical advisory committee (TAC) comprised of local stakeholders, and also participates at ADOT meetings. Furthermore, the COG makes recommendations to the state's Five-Year Facilitates Construction Program, and provides technical support to local jurisdictions.[9]

The COG regions receive an allocation of federal Surface Transportation Block Grant funds according to a population-based formula. The COGs and MPOs partner may "borrow" from each other's allocation amounts to complete larger projects through an ADOT-approved, no-interest loan program.[10]

Transit Planning and Mobility Management

With the support of FTA Section 5311 rural transit funds that are disbursed by the state, the COG coordinates rural transit programs and supports agencies with training assistance and capacity building support.[11] Through a regional coordinating council, the COG seeks public input on improving transit service from seniors, disabled individuals, human services providers, and other interested parties. The COG is also required to develop and implement a Regional Human Services and Public Transportation Coordination Plan, and collects National Transit Database information from local partners. COG staff assist public transit agencies with grant writing support and other needs, and are obligated to stay current with the latest federal requirements impacting service providers.

FTA Section 5310 funding for transportation for older adults and disabled individuals support the COG's Coordinated Mobility Program. Responsibilities include providing technical assistance, developing a Five Year Transit Plan, and building capacity through partnerships of rural transit service providers in the region. The COG works with the state and the TAC to identify and recommend transit improvements while also collaborating with partners on federally required reporting and compliance. The COG also coordinates stakeholders to identify rider needs, improve efficiency, and ensure their safety.[12]

The rural COGs have joined 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 through dues, assessments, and conference fees to support a full-time rural transportation liaison at the state capital.

For more information, visit **www.azdot.gov/planning/transportation-planning**.

[4] *Northern Arizona Council of Governments (2015). Regional Transportation Policy and Procedure Manual, nacog.org/files/dep_menu_637.pdf*

[5] *Personal communication with Jason Kelly, July 2016*

[6] *Northern Arizona Council of Governments (2015). Annual Work Program, State Fiscal Year 2016*

[7] *Northern Arizona Council of Governments (2015). Annual Work Program, State Fiscal Year 2016*

[8] *Personal communication with Jason Kelly, July 2016*

[9] *Northern Arizona Council of Governments (2015). Annual Work Program, State Fiscal Year 2016*

[10] *Personal communication with Jason Kelly, July 2016*

[11] *Northern Arizona Council of Governments (2015). Regional Transportation Policy and Procedure Manual, nacog.org/files/dep_menu_637.pdf*

[12] *Northern Arizona Council of Governments (2015). Annual Work Program, State Fiscal Year 2016*

California

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Transportation Planning Agencies serving rural areas: 26

Total annual funding: $125,000 - $422,000 (state Rural Planning Assistance Program)

Date established: 1972 - 1975 for most RTPAs

Every county in California is served by a regional transportation planning agency (RTPA), created by state law. RTPAs are known locally as local transportation commissions, county transportation commissions, councils of government, and associations of government. Counties with urbanized areas over 50,000 people also have MPOs to guide regional transportation planning. By law, both MPOs and RTPAs are required to develop an Overall Work Program (OWP) and regional transportation plan (RTP). They also select projects identified in the TIPs.[13]

According to Garth Hopkins, formerly with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), "RTPAs play an important role in Caltrans' overall planning efforts. The state realizes that even at the District level, a local agency will be better informed about their needs and priorities."[14]

In California, there are currently 44 RTPA, 18 of which are MPOs or exist within MPO boundaries. They utilize federal and state funds to achieve regional transportation goals as outlined in their OWPs. Federal and state funding includes FHWA SPR funds, FTA Section 5304 Statewide Planning funds, FHWA PL funds (for urbanized RTPAs), Rural Planning Assistance (RPA) funds, Active Transportation Planning (ATP) funds, and Cap and Trade funds.[15] Like MPOs, the rural RTPAs have significant involvement in both the planning and project investment processes. "Caltrans relies on RTPAs for rural planning," notes Hopkins.[16]

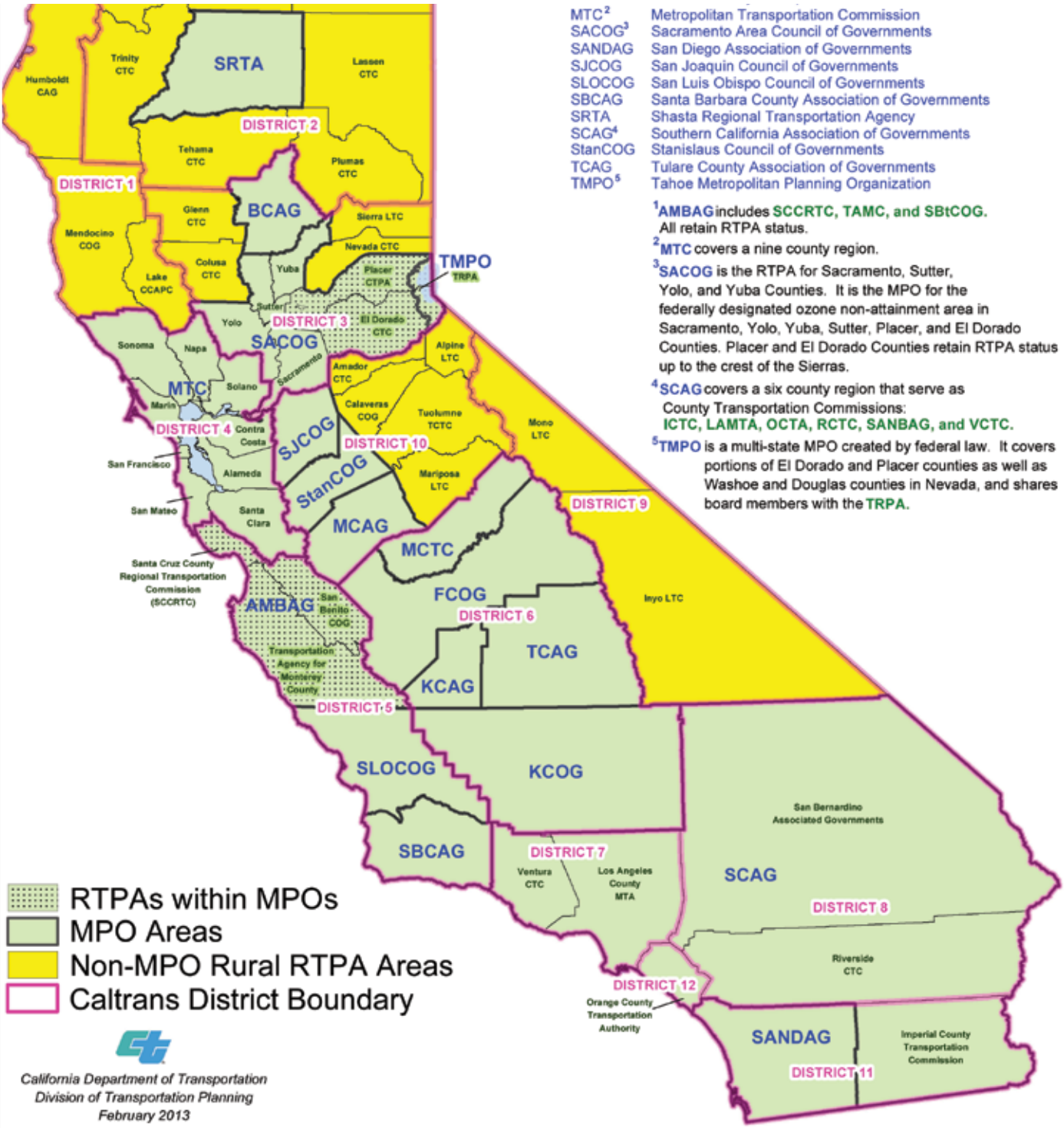
The Nevada County Transportation Commission (NCTC) is one of California's rural RTPAs. Established in 1972 by state statute, NCTC's mission is to "to plan, communicate, and coordinate with the citizens and decision-makers of Grass Valley, Nevada City, Nevada County, the Town of Truckee, and with Caltrans to identify transportation needs, propose solutions, and

assist in implementing projects to create a balanced regional transportation system, while protecting the rural qualities and historic character of Nevada County."[17] NCTC is funded through a combination of sales tax returns, state Planning, Programming, and Monitoring (PPM) funding, state Rural Planning Assistance funding, and FTA grants.[18] It has also instituted a regional mitigation fee to supplement state and federal funding.

Around 80 percent of the OWP is spent on providing technical assistance to local jurisdictions and the county DOT. This includes travel demand modeling, performance measurement projects, and developing and planning coordinated human services transportation plans, development plans, and bike and pedestrian plans.[19] NCTC tracks a variety of performance and safety measurements, including congestion, vehicle miles traveled (VMT), level of service (LOS), and crash data. NCTC also conducts transit planning for two systems in the county, utilizing FTA 5305 funds and provides staff for two airport commissions in the county.

NCTC is required to develop its Regional Transportation Plan every four years. This document addresses ten-year and twenty-year projections for planning and funding streams. Using performance management measures at the request of the state, the RTP covers safety, air quality, transit, mobility, and congestions issues.[20]

California
Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs)



Courtesy Caltrans

Overall, NCTC serves an important role in connecting local, state, and federal stakeholders and partners while engaging the public in the transportation process. It does this through hosting meetings, workshops, and trainings, and posting information on its website, sharing press releases with local newspapers, and through radio broadcast updates.[21] NCTC also participates in statewide and regional coalitions, including the RTPA Group, the Rural Counties Task Force, and the North State Super Region group.[22] These relationships better connect NCTC to new opportunities and resources from state and federal partners.

For more information on regional transportation planning in California, visit **www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/orip**.

[13] California Department of Transportation, Division of Transportation Planning, Office of Regional and Interagency Planning (2013). Regional Planning Handbook, www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/orip/owp/index_files/2013_RPH_Final.pdf

[14] Personal communication with Garth Hopkins, April 2014

[15] Personal communication with Jacqueline Hodaly and Erin Thompson, July 2016

[16] Personal communication with Garth Hopkins, April 2014

[17] Nevada County Transportation Commission (nd). "About NCTC," www.nctc.ca.gov/About-NCTC/index.html

[18] Personal communication with Daniel Landon, July 2016

[19] Personal communication with Daniel Landon, July 2016

[20] Nevada County Transportation Commission (2013). Nevada County Transportation Update: March 2013, www.nctc.ca.gov/documents/Newsletters/54%20-%20March%202013.pdf

[21] Personal communication with Daniel Landon, July 2016

[22] Nevada County Transportation Commission (2013)

Colorado

Quick Facts

Number of Transportation Planning Regions serving partial or completely rural areas: 13

Total annual funding: $1,000 - $25,000 (80% FHWA SPR, 20% state match)

Date established: 1992

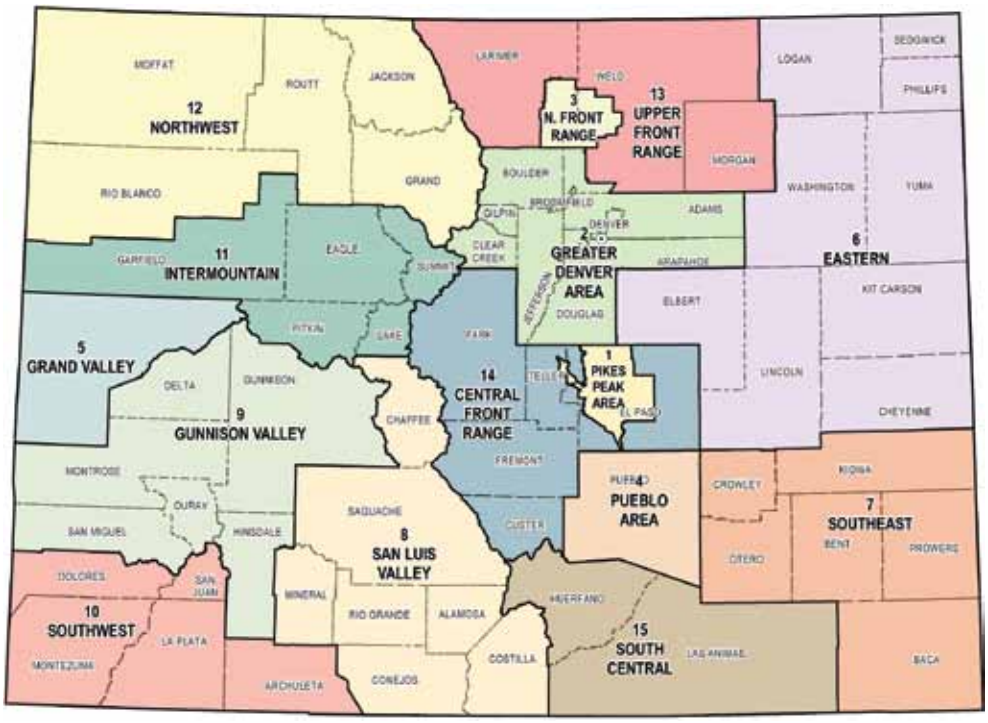
Though Colorado does not have a formal RPO structure, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) has a centralized planning process and consults with regional organizations for input. Since 1991, Colorado state law has required a cooperative planning process for all parts of the state. The state DOT created 15 transportation planning regions to help develop regional transportation plans for inclusion in the statewide plan. Colorado has ten transportation planning regions (TPRs) serving rural areas, three MPOs whose TPRs also serve some non-MPO territory, and two MPOs whose TPR service areas are completely urbanized.[23]

All regions submit priority lists to the state Transportation Commission for inclusion in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). CDOT relies on support from the regional organizations for local public involvement efforts. 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.[24]

Representatives from the TPRs and MPOs meet monthly to participate in the Statewide Transportation Advisory Committee (STAC). This provides an opportunity for regional transportation staff to advise CDOT and the Transportation Commission on multimodal transportation issues, review the regional transportation plans and their incorporation into the statewide plan, and discuss other issues related to the state's transportation network.[25]

CDOT's financial support of the TPRs includes funding to travel to the monthly STAC meetings, as well as to support meeting and administrative costs. In total, $150,000 is allocated directly to the TPRs across the state each year, and CDOT uses additional FHWA SPR funds to support the TPRs through other planning activities.[26]

Colorado Transportation Planning Regions



Courtesy Colorado DOT

CDOT works closely with the state's MPOs and TPRs in the development of transportation planning documents including the Statewide Transportation Plan, Regional Transportation Plans, and STIP. Colorado law requires transportation planning to be grounded in performance-based metrics that use "research, data, and analysis to inform decision-making, including the establishment of goals and performance objectives, distribution of resources, and project selection."[27]

The Southwest Colorado Council of Governments (SWCCOG) performs typical TPR tasks. The region has a contract with CDOT to serve in an administrative role and receive planning assistance grant funds to oversee the Southwest Regional Transportation Planning Commission (RPC). The RPC serves 17 jurisdictions that make up the Southwest Transportation Planning Region by providing transportation planning and project support. It identifies regional transportation needs by providing an update to the Twenty-Year Regional Transportation Plan every five years, as do all the other TPRs around the state. The RPC is represented at the monthly STAC meeting which brings together representatives from all the TPRs and MPOs throughout the state.[28]

The SWCCOG also oversees the Regional Transit Coordinating Council, which serves as a forum for transit stakeholders, including transit service providers, human service providers, government staff, and residents to address regional transit and mobility issues.[29]

For more information, visit **www.codot.gov/programs/planning/planning-partners/tpr-mpo**.

[23] *Personal communication with Jeff Sudmeier, July 2016*

[24] *NADO Research Foundation / Center for Transportation Advancement and Regional Development (2010). Four Corners Rural Transportation Forum: Summary of a Peer Learning Exchange, www.nado.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/4Corners10.pdf*

[25] *Colorado Department of Transportation (nd). "Transportation Planning at CDOT," www.codot.gov/programs/planning*

[26] *Personal communication with Jeff Sudmeier, July 2016*

[27] *Colorado Department of Transportation (nd)*

[28] *Southwest Colorado Council of Governments (nd). "Southwest Transportation Planning Region," www.swccog.org/projects/transportation/southwest-transportation-planning-region*

[29] *Southwest Colorado Council of Governments (nd)*

Connecticut

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Councils of Governments serving rural areas: 2

Total annual funding: $176,250 (80% federal funds from FHWA SPR and FTA Planning, 10% state match, 10% local match)

Date established rural transportation planning program: 1990s

The Connecticut DOT (CTDOT) has long partnered with the state's regional councils of governments (RCOGs) to conduct regional transportation planning activities. In 2014, Connecticut's original 15 regional planning organizations (serving both the rural and metropolitan areas of the state) underwent an analysis and consolidation process, resulting in the nine organizations serving the state today. The new law required that each of the new regions be formulated as councils of governments. Of these, seven serve as MPOs for the urbanized areas in their service area, but two are located in non-MPO areas and provide regional nonmetropolitan planning under contract to CTDOT, using state-provided funds.

The rural transportation planning activities of the two rural RCOGs include developing a unified planning work program describing the planning tasks to be completed, including each region's long-range transportation plan, planning and technical assistance to towns, and facilitating local-state dialogue regarding implementing transportation priorities. They develop and implement public participation plans to ensure broad outreach occurs throughout the planning process, in addition to completing Title VI, public participation plans, and Limited English Proficiency plans.

The two rural RCOGs review and act on the STIP in an advisory capacity. Updating functional classification of roadways based on land use and change is completed together with CTDOT, and the rural agencies assist member towns with developing transportation projects and conduct traffic counts and other assistance as requested. The RCOGs complete a coordinated public transit human services transportation plan and support transit planning to enhance connections among existing services. The RCOGs also support scenic byways work through updating corridor management plans for byways.[30]

Their planning activities are aligned with other regional plans, including the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies and Regional Plan of Conservation and Development. The RCOGs also coordinate with agencies such as workforce boards, economic partnerships, and regional transportation consortia. The long-range planning efforts for both the Northeastern Connecticut and Northwest Hills regions are multimodal and connect mobility issues with safety, livability, and economic development.[31]

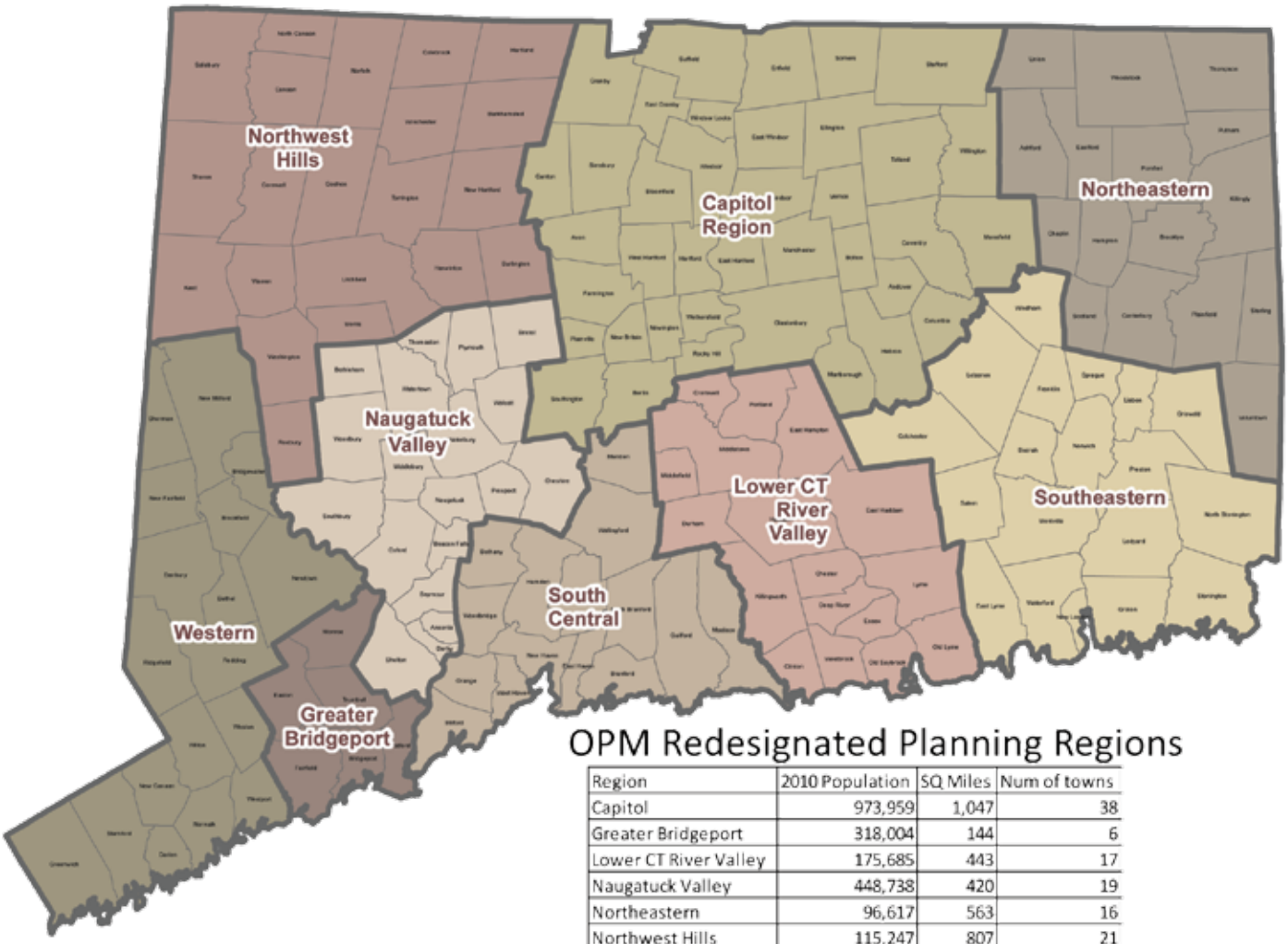
For the Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG), GIS plays a central role in its planning activities. Routing for the Northeastern Connecticut Transit District, developing trail maps, site plan design for transportation projects, build-out analysis to support land use decision-making, and integrated vehicle and pedestrian count information supplement the region's data layers available to towns and residents.[32]

The rural regions complete public involvement throughout the transportation planning process. In addition to traditional outreach activities, the RCOGs seek out under-represented populations and targeting private stakeholders and residents for each planning task.[33]

Because the regions served by the nonmetropolitan RCOGs are rural with small towns, the RCOGs play a vital role in providing professional staff support on land use, economic development, housing, and transportation issues. NECCOG maintains an engineer as an in-house staff position to assist localities with advancing their priority needs, a service which Northwest Hills Council of Governments has also considered. Services provided to local governments include analyzing transportation needs and various options, bundling road projects to reduce costs, meeting reporting requirements, construction inspection, and other forms of assistance that provide benefits to communities throughout the regions.[34]

These regional planning efforts also benefit CTDOT by assisting in various statewide planning processes. Providing project inspection and oversight services for town projects, updating functional classifications to reflect changing development conditions and land use, reviewing STIP amendments and actions, and

Connecticut Regional Councils of Governments



Courtesy Connecticut Office of Policy and Management

OPM Redesignated Planning Regions

Region	2010 Population	SQ Miles	Num of towns
Capitol	973,959	1,047	38
Greater Bridgeport	318,004	144	6
Lower CT River Valley	175,685	443	17
Naugatuck Valley	448,738	420	19
Northeastern	96,617	563	16
Northwest Hills	115,247	807	21
South Central	570,001	374	15
Southeastern	286,711	619	19
Western	589,135	550	18

conducting public participation are some of the ways in which the RCOGs also assist in statewide planning.[35]

For more information on the rural transportation planning programs, visit **neccog.org** and **northwesthillscog.org**.

[30] *Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (2015). 2016 - 2017 Unified Planning Work Program*

[31] *Northwest Hills Council of Governments (2016). Draft Regional Recommendations, http://northwesthillscog.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Draft-Recs-Regional-Transportation-Plan-June-16-2016.pdf; NECCOG (2015)*

[32] *NECCOG (2015)*

[33] *NECCOG (2015); NHCOG (2016)*

[34] *NECCOG (2015); NHCOG (2016)*

[35] *NECCOG (2015)*

Florida

Florida is covered mostly by MPOs, however 44 counties or portions of counties, out of the 67 total in the state, were not within the boundaries of an MPO prior to new urbanized area designations that occurred in 2012.[36] Of Florida's ten Regional Planning Councils (RPCs), all except two (East Central Florida RPC, and Tampa Bay RPC) have rural areas within their boundaries.[37] Two RPCs located in the Florida panhandle area, Apalachee Regional Planning Council (ARPC) and West Florida Regional Planning Council (WFRPC), signed five-year funding agreements with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District 3 in late 2005 to serve as liaisons between their local DOT district planning offices and the rural counties of their respective regions not served by an MPO. From 2005 - 2015, the RPCs coordinated meetings with county staff and local elected officials to assist in the distribution of FDOT information and updates on transportation projects. They also helped gather timely input on the state's five-year work program and other activities. This work was supported by $25,000 in funding per year from FDOT.

In those two regions, RPC staff have worked directly with county staff and rural municipalities in the region to determine the transportation needs for each county. The needs identified by rural communities were compiled in a report presented to FDOT. The report included maps of projects in the current FDOT work program as well as maps depicting requested projects. The report was then used by FDOT to evaluate and fund proposed projects in the non-urbanized areas.[38]

After 10 years of working as a liaison between rural counties and FDOT and providing rural transportation planning services, FDOT decided to reevaluate the regional contracts for opportunities to consolidate contracts and bring certain tasks back in house, and the two RPCs are no longer providing rural transportation planning assistance.[39] However, the 2060 Florida Transportation Plan (FTP) specifically recognizes the need for the statewide transportation planning process to be "reinvented to strengthen regional coordination, reduce fragmentation, eliminate duplication, and increase efficiency."[40] Discussions regarding rural consultation and regional planning tasks are continuing to occur between the RPCs and FDOT.

An MPO Model for Serving Rural Regions

In the central part of the state, following the 2010 Census, the Census Bureau designated a new urbanized area of Sebring-Avon Park, where there previously had been no formal regional transportation planning entity. This historically rural region had seen rapid growth on the order of a 45 percent population increase from 1990 to 2010. Rather than create a standalone MPO for only the urbanized area, the region determined that it would benefit from coordinating transportation planning across a multi-county region to grapple with and plan for the effects of rapid growth, according to Central Florida Regional Planning Council Executive Director Pat Steed. As a result, the Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO) was formed to include six entire counties, including the Sebring-Avon Park urbanized area and surrounding rural areas that are linked by shared economic, environmental, and cultural characteristics. Consistent with federal and Florida statutes, this new MPO was designated in 2014, with a governing board made up of representatives of the six counties and cities of Sebring and Avon Park. A technical advisory committee, citizen's advisory committee, and mobility advisory committee offer stakeholder the opportunity to provide input to the governing board on regional decision-making.

As a designated MPO, the agency completes a unified planning work program, public participation plan, long-range transportation plan, and transportation improvement program for its entire service area, consistent with federal requirements. The HRTPO is staffed by the region's existing regional planning and development organization, the Central Florida Regional Planning Council. Although not a completely rural RTPO, the mixed urbanized and rural character of the HRTPO provides a model for providing professional transportation planning services to rural areas in a large region around an urbanized hub. For more information, visit **http://heartlandregionaltpo.org**.

[36] *Florida Regional Councils Association, Executive Directors Advisory Committee (2009). Florida's Consultative Planning Process for Non-Metropolitan Areas Comments*

[37] *FRCA*

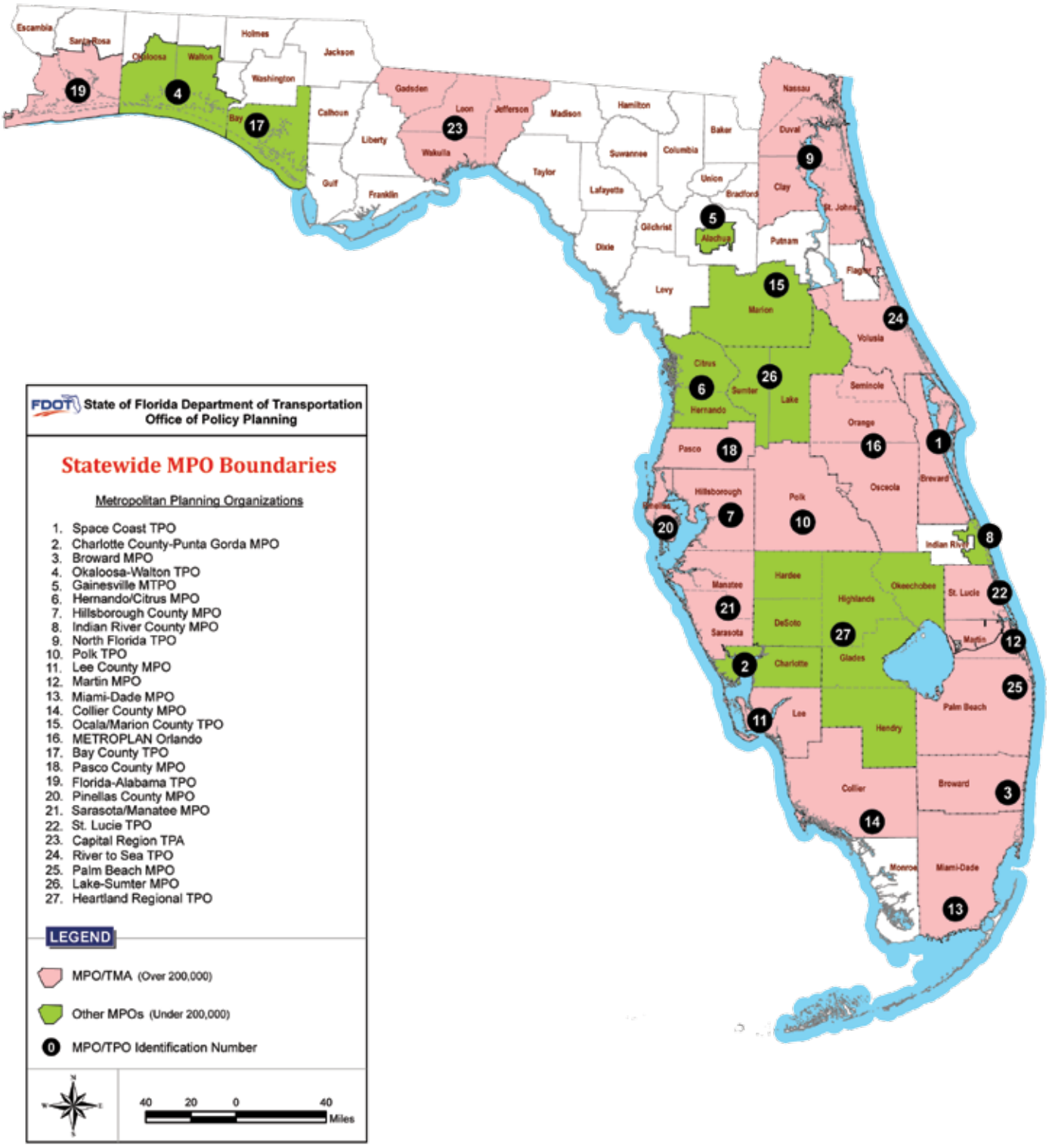
[38] *West Florida Regional Planning Council (nd). Rural Work Program, www.wfrpc.org/programs/rural-work-program*

[39] *Personal communication with Chris Rietow, February 2016*

[40] *2060 FTP*

Florida Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Designated Transportation Management Areas, and Rural Areas

(As of December 8, 2014)



Courtesy Florida DOT

Georgia

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Commissions serving rural areas: 11

Total annual funding: $50,000 - $125,000 (80% federal, 20% local match)

Date established rural transportation program: 2000

Georgia's 11 regional commissions serving rural counties have supported Georgia DOT's statewide planning efforts since 2000. Their work includes conducting public outreach to support statewide long-range plans, improvement programs, and other plans. The regional commissions assist GDOT with mapping public road center lines and bridges. They assist local governments on transportation matters, including creating a Local Area Transportation Committee for counties wishing to coordinate their transportation, land use, and economic development activities.[41] The regional commissions also perform an important coordinating role, with some serving on MPO committees for the urbanized areas that exist within their regions and others that staff an MPO.

As requested by their member local governments, the regional commissions complete single-county or multi-county multimodal transportation plans, as well as transit development plans to address county-level transit demand and goals. This work is supported through FTA Section 5304 funding of about $30,000 per region. Mobility management activities in many of the regions build partnerships among transportation providers and other organizations to identify opportunities to coordinate existing service. Some regional commissions also provide transit service.[42]

Bicycle and pedestrian planning and assistance with the Transportation Alternatives program also enhance the local governments' ability to plan for non-motorized transportation. Many of the regions are involved in Safe Routes to School assistance to communities, and they assist with scenic byways efforts.[43]

Following the passage of the Transportation Improvement Act of 2010, each of the state's regional commissions also formed regional transportation roundtables, with the purpose of developing potential project lists for a regional sales tax that would have been used to fund transportation projects within the region. Voters had the opportunity to consider adopting the tax in a ballot initiative contained on the primary election ballots in 2012, and the tax was approved in three fairly rural regions, out of the state's total of 12 regional commissions. The Georgia legislature passed the Transportation Funding Act of 2015, which changed the sales tax initiative. In the 2010 law, the special purpose sales tax was implemented only at the regional level and with a 10-year sunset period, but in the 2015 statute, counties can opt for residents to vote on a referendum for their own five-year, single-county sales tax for transportation.[44] Regions that adopted the sales tax in 2012 have seen benefits from having a new regional revenue source, since their localities have been able to purchase new equipment, maintain roads, and use sales tax revenue as local match for transit and other federally funded projects.[45]

Georgia Regional Commissions

Courtesy Georgia Association of Regional Commissions

For more information on Georgia's regional commissions, visit **garc.ga.gov**.

[41] *Three Rivers Regional Commission (nd). Transportation Projects, http://www.threeriversrc.org/transportation-projects.php*

[42] *Three Rivers Regional Commission*

[43] *Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (nd). Transportation Planning, http://www.negrc.org/resource-1.php?page_ID=1294242559*

[44] *Andria Simmons (2015). "New transportation bill won't put you in the fast lane," Atlanta Journal-Constitution, April 6, 2015, http://www.ajc.com/news/news/state-regional-govt-politics/new-transportation-bill-wont-put-you-in-the-fast-l/nkmjp/*

[45] *Georgia DOT (2016). Local communities get customized transportation boost from TIA discretionary funds, http://www.ga-tia.com/Content/pdf/06.15.16%20-%20TIA%20Discretionary%20Funds.pdf*

Illinois

Quick Facts

Number of Human Services Transportation Planning Regions: 11

Date established: 2008

To comply with new requirements for regional-level coordinated human services transportation planning included in the 2005 surface transportation law Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), the Illinois DOT (IDOT) opted to contract with a variety of existing organizations to complete coordinated transportation plans for 11 regions. Illinois does not conduct rural, regional multimodal transportation planning through regional transportation planning organizations, and the state is only partially served by multi-county regional planning and development organizations. Since 2008, some of the existing regional planning and development organizations have supported coordinated transportation for one or more of IDOT's human services transportation planning regions, and in other places, single-county regional planning commissions that staff smaller MPOs took on a larger planning footprint to assist surrounding rural regions with developing their regional plan. The state's MPOs also develop plans for their urbanized areas.[46]

Regional Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan Activities

The initial rural coordinated plans were completed in 2008 and are updated on a three-year cycle. Each region has a policy and technical committee comprising public transportation and human services transportation providers, local officials, higher education representatives, transit advocates, individuals with disabilities, Area Agency on Aging representatives and other human service agencies, and other stakeholders.[47]

The regional human service transportation plan coordinators across the state perform mobility management tasks, including assessing transit needs, inventorying available infrastructure and service to meet those needs, and identification of service gaps and duplications. The coordinators also develop trainings

and toolkits delivered to human service professionals on transportation.[48]

As a local transportation champion and policy leader, the coordinators also develop the coordinated plan and staff the regional committee as a forum for communication and to identify opportunities to increase transportation efficiencies. Coordinators also conduct program reviews of grantees of FTA Elderly and Disabled Transportation (Section 5310) funds. They also collect, review, and prioritize transportation projects.[49]

The work of the regional human services transportation committees has been effective at improving and increasing the transportation service available in rural areas. The Western Illinois Regional Council (WIRC) staffs two human services transportation plan regions covering a total of 16 counties. WIRC Executive Director Suzan Nash describes the impact, "As a result of the region's work over the years and the collaboration resulting from the coordinated plans and human services transportation committees, only one of the counties we serve—with a population of just slightly over 7,000—does not currently have some sort of public transportation."[50]

Other Regional Transportation Planning Studies

Because the state's regional councils are engaged in broader regional planning and economic development activities, stakeholders and staff have an interest in the supporting role that transportation plays to the regional economy and quality of life. Periodically, IDOT awards grants for special planning studies to regional councils. Airport impact studies, highway corridor impact studies (including lessons learned from bypass construction), bicycle plans, freight studies, and other special planning projects are among the assistance that IDOT has provided to connect transportation planning to community and economic development outcomes. These special studies help communities, counties, and regions to identify key strategies and projects to meet their mobility goals, which assists them in deciding whether to apply for state or federal funds and to prioritize their local investments and match commitments.[51]

For more information on regional planning in Illinois, visit **www.ilarconline.org**.

[46] *Planning for Better Communities: Illinois Association of Regional Councils*

[47] *Personal communication with Terri Finn, May 2016*

[48] *Illinois Human Service Transportation Plan Coordinator Essential Roles & Duties, 2016*

[49] *Personal communication with Terri Finn, May 2016*

[50] *Personal communication with Suzan Nash, August 2015*

[51] *Personal communication with Suzan Nash, August 2015*

Indiana

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Planning Organizations: 11

Total annual funding: $29,000 - $101,000 (80% federal, 20% local match)

Date established: 2001 and 2005

The Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) launched the Small Urban and Rural Transportation Planning Program in 2001 with five regional development organizations and four MPOs. Starting in 2005, the program was expanded to 11 regional and small urban planning partners, which includes three regions that include both RPOs and MPOs and three MPOs.

The planning activities of the groups are aimed at supporting the state's headquarters and district office staff.[52] The program is reviewed and modified each year and each organization is evaluated and renewed based on its performance.

The annual activities include conducting traffic counts in each RPO's rural counties and communities; level of service analysis; planning support to local governments such as plans, corridor or area studies, intersection studies, Hazard Elimination Studies, or bike/pedestrian plans; data collection for FHWA's Highway Performance Monitoring System; railroad crossing data; support to INDOT's district offices including rural consultation, assistance with a district's public open house, or coordination with local officials.[53] This level of engagement is designed to give local officials input into the STIP process.[54]

Certain RPO tasks that assist the state in meeting its own federal requirements are reimbursed at 100 percent, while other activities that provide significant benefit to local governments have a 20 percent match. Frank Baukert, transportation planner-rural program manager for the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT), notes several benefits of the RPO program. He says, "RPOs allow INDOT to meet its rural planning and consultation goals without the creation of a new organization. The extension of the transportation planning process to rural areas allows communities

to make smarter investments in their transportation infrastructure."

[52] *Personal communication with Jill Saegesser, January 2016*

[53] *2015 Activity Guide for Rural Transportation Planning Program, Indiana DOT*

[54] *Personal communication with Frank Baukert, May 2016*

Iowa

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Planning Affiliations: 18

Total annual funding: $40,000 - $76,000 (80% federal funds from FHWA SPR and FTA 5311 and 5305e, 20% local match); RPAs can choose to program additional STBG funds to support their planning activities

Date established: 1993

When 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. A new level of collaboration began in 1993 when local leaders were given the opportunity to participate in statewide multimodal transportation planning by forming a regional planning affiliation (RPA), which could follow existing transit planning region boundaries or form new regions. Most of the newly formed RPAs followed the existing regional transit planning boundaries, and most were staffed by existing regional councils of governments.

The RPAs are patterned after MPOs' organizational structure, with a policy board of local elected officials and a technical committee that includes local city and county engineers and other professionals. FHWA, FTA and Iowa DOT staff participate in the technical committee as non-voting members to serve as an informational resource to the region, rather than as decision makers for the region, and demonstrate the agencies' commitment to cultivating local engagement in the planning process. The participation of local elected officials in the RPAs is a direct way of conducting nonmetropolitan local consultation.[55]

Local officials and stakeholders can participate in other RPA committees that may be formed in their region; these could include Transportation Alternatives Program or bicycle/pedestrian committees, transit advisory groups, or multi-disciplinary safety teams, among the most common RPA committees.[56]

The RPA boundaries do not align exactly with Iowa DOT district boundaries, so the DOT districts work with multiple RPAs, and some RPAs may work with multiple DOT districts. The RPAs, MPOs, and DOT central office and district planning staff meet quarterly, ensuring a regular means of communication about policy updates, new tools and resources available, and noteworthy practices and expectations for meeting deliverables. Iowa DOT conducts a planning review with the RPAs, similar to a federal certification review for MPOs, to ensure that they are meeting expectations.

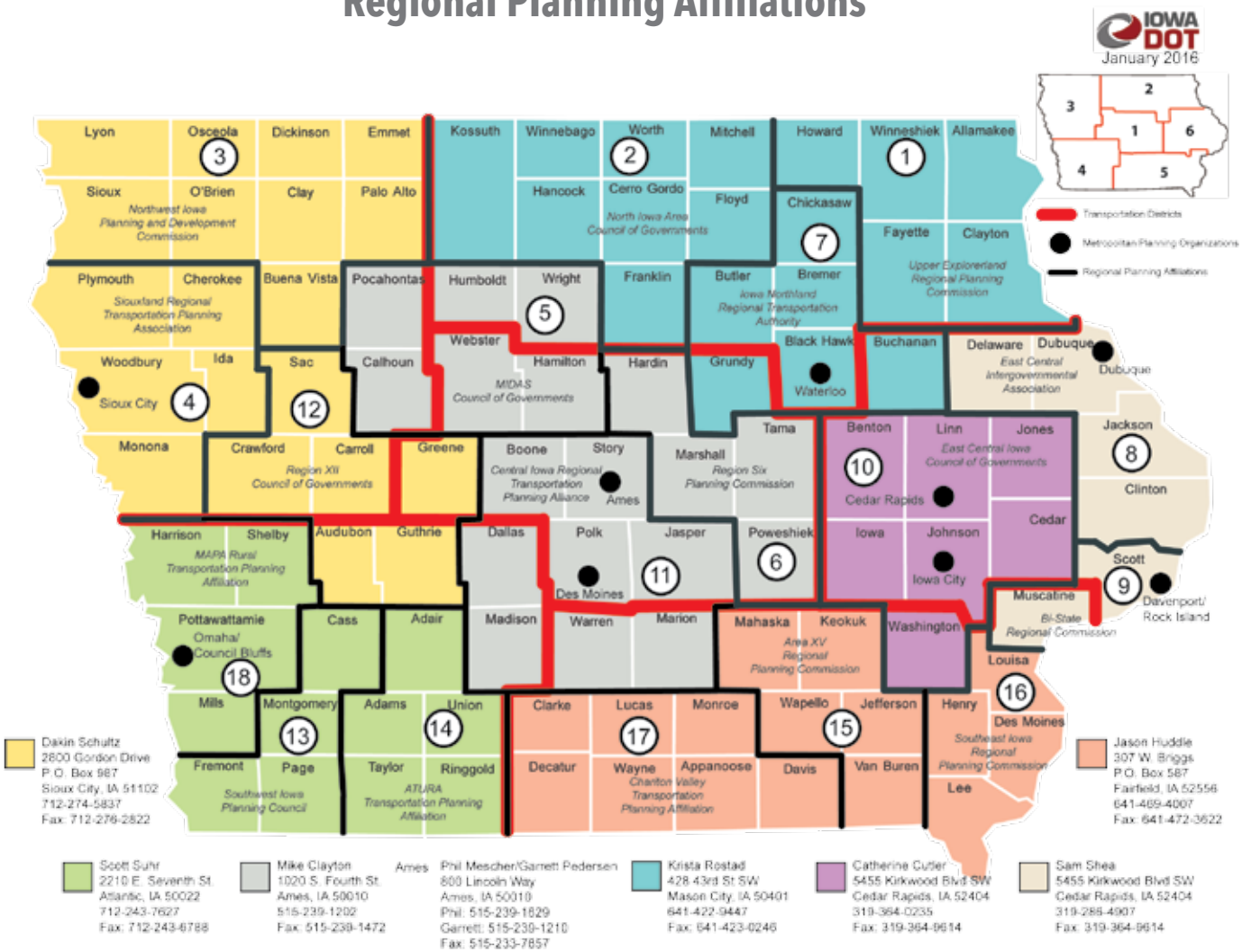
Courtesy Region XII Council of Governments

The number of staff who work at least part of their time completing transportation planning tasks varies across regional agencies across the state. A minimum of two staff and average of four individuals work for organizations serving only rural counties, with an average of six staff members at agencies that staff both an RPA and MPO.[57]

Major Planning Activities

The RPAs complete an annual work program, describing the tasks to be completed in the contract year. A rural long-range transportation plan is updated every five years to outline future demands on the transportation system and financial resources for a 20-year planning horizon. In addition, the RPAs develop a regional TIP to list the locally identified priority projects for a multi-year period of time, although the document is updated annually to ensure that current priority projects are

Iowa DOT Districts, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and Regional Planning Affiliations



Courtesy Iowa DOT

included. Each RPA receives an allocation of Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) and Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) funds to program according to the priorities and strategies in their region's plan. The level of STBG funds each RPA programs ranges from $1.1 million to $5.1 million in fiscal year 2017, and is calculated based on population for areas above 5,000 and based on both population and farm-to-market factors in areas with a population of less than 5,000.[58] The policy boards of RPAs may opt to increase funding of planning activities from their regional STBG allocation, which allows some regions to complete additional planning activities. RPAs also have the ability to use an allocation of STBG funds that Iowa calls TAP-Flex, which they can program for TAP- or STBG-eligible projects. In addition, the RPAs identify and program rural transit funds in their TIP.[59]

The RPAs complete a coordinated human services transportation plan, called the Passenger Transportation Plan in Iowa. The plans are updated every five years, and include a detailed inventory of services, vehicles, and needs. RPAs are also required to hold at least two Transportation Advisory Group meetings every year, which are groups that include representatives of public transit, passenger transportation providers, human service agencies, and local governments.

To complete these planning initiatives, the RPAs develop a public participation plan and implement public outreach activities. In addition, some RPAs take on additional responsibilities in particular program areas, such as grant applications, trail planning, corridor studies, traffic counts, Safe Routes to School, parking

studies, freight planning, regional transit planning, and other programs.[60]

Across the state, multi-disciplinary safety teams are emerging, comprising planners, engineers, law enforcement, emergency response, incident response, Iowa DOT central office and district staff, and Iowa State University Institute for Transportation staff. Depending on local safety issues and priorities, the safety teams conduct road safety audits, workshops, construction zone management, corridor evaluations, and safety media campaigns. Currently, 10 safety teams exist, including some staffed by RPAs and MPOs, and others focused on cities or counties. There is no additional allocation of funding provided for the RPAs that staff a safety team, but their efforts are integrated into and funded through the RPAs' general transportation planning and programming.[61]

For more information on Iowa's regional transportation planning process, visit **www.iowadot.gov/systems_planning/mpo_rpa_planning.html**. For more information about the RPAs and the regional organizations in which they are housed, visit **www.iarcog.com**.

[55] *Iowa DOT (2016). Formal Documentation of the Iowa Department of Transportation's Process for Non-Metropolitan Local Officials Consultation, www.iowadot.gov/systems_planning/pr_guide/Public%20Participation%20Process/Local-consultation-process.pdf*

[56] *Iowa DOT (2014). State of the Practice – 2014: Metropolitan and Regional Transportation Planning in Iowa, www.iowadot.gov/systems_planning/pr_guide/Planning%20Agency%20Information/State%20of%20the%20Practice/State_of_the_Practice-2014.pdf*

[57] *Iowa DOT (2014)*

[58] *Personal communication with Andrea White, June 2016*

[59] *Personal communication with Andrea White, June 2016; personal communication with Zach James, July 2016*

[60] *Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission (2016). Final Draft FY2017 Region 16 Transportation Planning Work Program*

[61] *Nicole Waldheim, Susan Herbel, and Carrie Kissel (2014). Integrating Safety in the Rural Transportation Planning Process, safety.fhwa.dot.gov/local_rural/training/fhwasa14102/appa.cfm; personal communication with Gena McCullough, December 2014; personal communication with Andrea White, June 2016*

Kentucky

Quick Facts

Number of Area Development Districts: 15

Total annual funding: $65,000 – $105,000 (80% federal, 10% state, 10% local match)

Date established rural transportation planning program: 1994

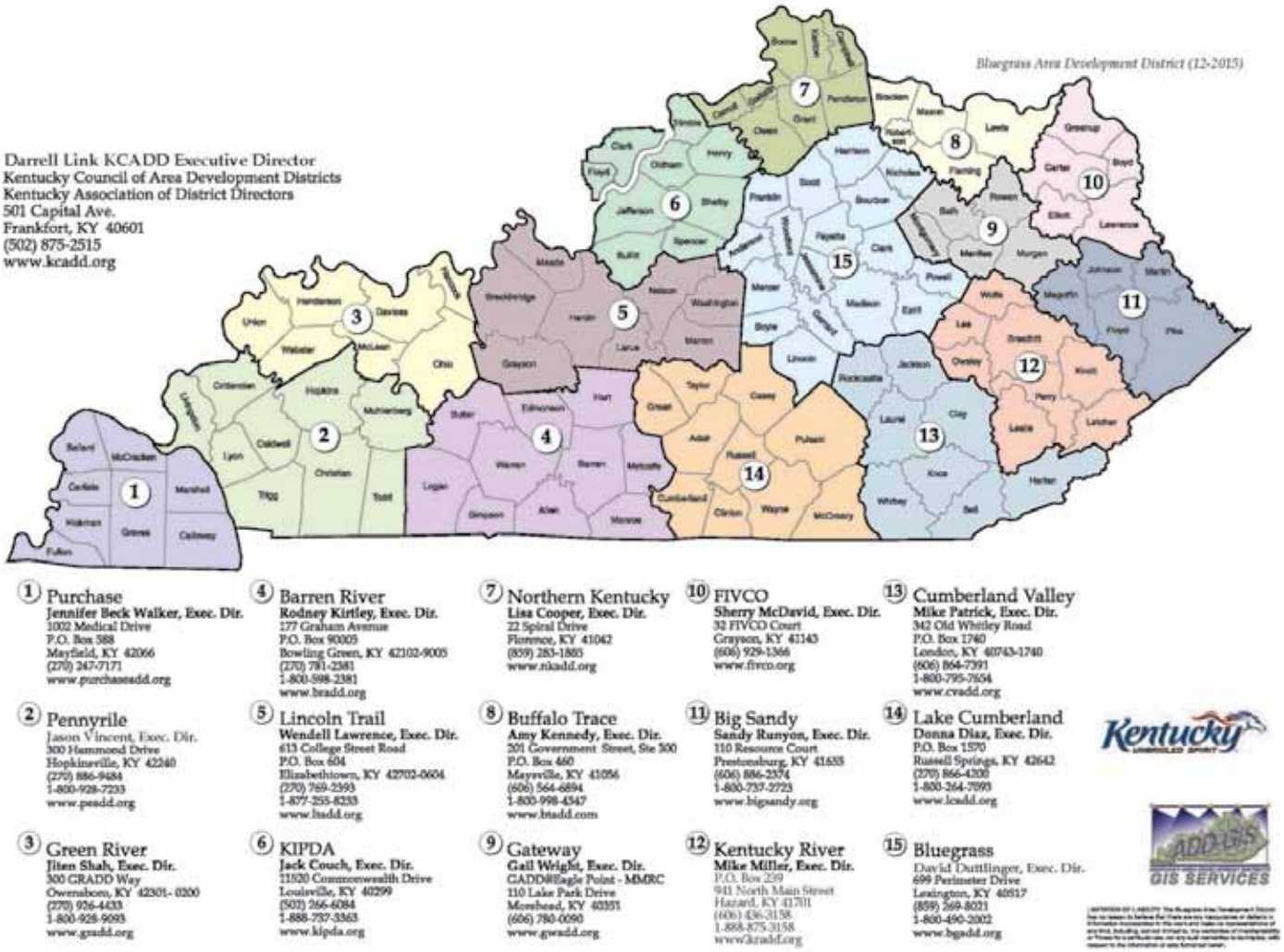
To accommodate the state's diversity in geography, economy, and transportation network, the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) uses its 12 highway districts, 15 Area Development Districts (ADDs, the state's regional development organizations), and 9 MPOs to facilitate local input and priorities into statewide planning. Following the passage of the 1991 surface transportation law ISTEA, KYTC began to contract with the ADDs to form a regional transportation committee for each region (outside of MPO boundaries).

Conducting Rural Consultation and Developing Regional Priorities

The committee membership includes local and county officials, helping the state to meet federal requirements for consultation with local officials. In addition to coordinating with local governments through the regular transportation committee meetings, the ADD planners, along with staff from the KYTC Highway District Office, meet with each mayor and county judge executive at least once a year to discuss transportation concerns.[62] Other members on the committee vary by region, but can include representatives of freight interests, local public works, law enforcement, emergency medical services, school transportation, human service delivery, bicycle and pedestrian groups, or local industrial and economic development entities. Staff from the KYTC's Highway District Offices participate in the committee, but in an advisory capacity and not as members.

The ADDs' regional transportation committees identify transportation needs across the region. As part of that identification process, relevant information is collected for each transportation need through the use of Project Information Forms (PIFs) that serve as an initial scoping study. Every two years, the regional transportation committees, with local input and coordination with the KYTC Highway District offices, prioritize all the projects

Kentucky's Development Districts



Courtesy Kentucky Council of ADDs

on the Unscheduled Needs List. The ultimate desire of prioritization is that those high priority projects are included in the biennial state's highway plan which is the transportation element of the state budget.

The ADDs develop a Public Involvement Plan, with an emphasis on expanding the component addressing minority and underserved populations within the region. Coordinating with other entities is an important role for the ADDs to play. Each ADD is expected to coordinate not only with neighboring rural and metropolitan planning regions and KYTC Highway District Offices, but also with modal transportation owners or operators, along with health services, emergency management, and agencies serving the underserved populations. Maintaining a close working relationship with local governments and stakeholders makes the ADDs an asset to KYTC. Jeff Moore, transportation planner in the KYTC District 3 Planning Section, says of the value the ADDs bring to transportation planning: "They are our eyes and ears, and without them, we would be operating blind."[63]

Regional Transportation Asset Review

The ADDs also collect other information that shapes the state highway plan. They develop a Regional Transportation Asset Review, which references regional goals and objectives and include several components. This includes maintaining an inventory of multimodal facilities within their region, including airports, railways, intermodal facilities, river ports, transit systems, greenway networks 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

Courtesy FIVCO Area Development District

use plans, the approval dates and the appropriate contact information. In the past five years, the KYTC also contracted with the regions to create a new GIS database of all of the public roadways in the state. As part of the Regional Transportation Asset Review, the ADDs complete a Major Freight Users Inventory for their region to assist the state with considering freight facilities in its planning. The inventory also has helped the cabinet to identify corridors for possible inclusion in the highway system known as the Kentucky Freight Focus Network by gathering information about facilities over 100,000 square feet in size or that had over 100 employees. This opportunity to engage with private sector entities has helped some of the ADDs to see more businesses involved in their regional transportation planning process.

Other aspects of the Regional Transportation Asset Review include inventories of rail yards and truck parking facilities, reviews of intermodal connectors, and bicycle and pedestrian asset data collection. The ADDs assist with asset management by reviewing the state's Adequacy Reviews of segments on the state's highway system, which helps to identify segments that may be included in the Unscheduled Needs List for future prioritization. The components of the Regional Transportation Asset Review are updated on a four-year schedule.

The ADD planners assist the KYTC with completing transportation plans and small area studies, and with addressing air quality issues in rural counties that are not in attainment with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Local assistance to communities within the region is an important role, as in other states. One significant area of assistance is for the ADDs to serve in a "quality control" role, assisting local governments and the KYTC with verifying data contained in communities' Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) transition plan to document pedestrian ramps on state-maintained roadways.[64]

For more information on Kentucky's ADDs, visit **http://www.kcadd.org**.

[62] *Regional Transportation Planning Program, Annual Work Plan FY2016*

[63] *Personal communication with Jeff Moore, March 2016*

[64] *Regional Transportation Planning Program, Annual Work Plan FY2016*

Maine

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Planning Organizations serving nonmetropolitan areas: 9

Total annual funding: base level of $5,000 - $15,000 (80% federal funds, 20% state match), with an option to apply for funds for additional tasks

Date established rural transportation planning program: 1994

In Maine, the state's regional planning organizations (RPOs) have had a contractual relationship with the Maine Department of Transportation (DOT) to support statewide planning for over 20 years, but the nature of the regional support has changed over time according to the state's needs. In the mid-2000s, MaineDOT charged its partners with developing regional plans and identifying priority corridors that had significance for the local and state economy.[65] Other tasks included coordination, transportation project involvement, state and local assistance, and other approved tasks.

Beginning in 2016, the regional process has refocused on a handful of core tasks related to serving as a liaison between local communities and the state and providing technical assistance. In their liaison role, the RPOs educate communities about MaineDOT processes and transportation issues, opportunities to participate in public meetings or respond to funding opportunities, inform about upcoming projects in the state's work plan. RPOs provide input to MaineDOT about statewide planning studies, including long-range plans, modal plans such as transit, freight, ports, or aviation, or other studies. The rural regions also participate in the state's online public engagement portal known as MySidewalk and engage in regular discussions with the MaineDOT Regional Planner.[66]

The core RPO responsibilities are completed with a base level of funding, which is 25 percent of the funding the RPOs had received previously. The remaining balance of the RPO funds, over $300,000, is still used for rural planning but not earmarked for specific regions. Instead, the funds are pooled, and RPOs can apply to complete additional tasks, studies, or plans. The application process begins when an RPO completes a task fund request application describing the purpose

and need for the proposed effort, with a focus on solutions to issues, projects that would be competitive for funding and quick delivery, and improvements to safety, economic development, congestion, or mobility.[67] The applications go through an approval process including both MaineDOT Regional Planners and Bureau of Planning staff. If approved, the RPO and MaineDOT both develop cost estimates, and the task moves forward if the estimates are close or is negotiated further if the estimates are more than 10 percent different.[68]

These additional tasks can be proposed by RPOs or by MaineDOT. Although some limited support for local technical assistance is provided through the core tasks, projects eligible for additional funds might include special studies performed by an RPO for individual localities, corridor management plans, transportation sections of local comprehensive plans, or other area plans.[69] One example of a study being completed in 2016 in southern Maine includes conducting field review and road safety audits of high crash locations throughout the rural region. This effort uses a systemic approach to recommend solutions to safety issues in locations based on both risk and crash history. Although the project emphasizes low-cost solutions that can be deployed quickly, larger projects may also be identified for consideration in future MaineDOT work plans.[70]

[65] *David Cole (2011). Connecting the D•O•T•S, A Guide for Connecting with Your Department of Transportation*

[66] *MaineDOT (2016). Cooperative Agreement Assignment Letter for RPOs*

[67] *MaineDOT (2016). Regional Planning Work Plan Task Proposal*

[68] *MaineDOT (2015). Regional Planning Grants*

[69] *MaineDOT (2015). Regional Planning Grants*

[70] *Personal communication with Tom Reinauer, July 2016*

Massachusetts

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Planning Agencies serving rural areas: 3

Total annual funding: around $300,000 - $500,000 (80% federal funds, 20% state match)

Date established rural transportation planning program: 1970s

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) provides liaisons and state matching funds to all of the state's 13 regional planning agencies (RPAs) to implement transportation planning. Three of the RPAs serve geographic areas that do not contain an urbanized area with a population of 50,000. However, MassDOT refers to all of the RPAs as MPOs for transportation purposes. The RPAs all complete the same federally required tasks, including developing a unified planning work program, public participation and Title VI and environmental justice plans, long-range planning, and a fiscally constrained transportation improvement program. In addition, the regions plan for regional greenhouse gas emissions reductions in compliance with a state initiative known as GreenDOT.[71]

Data collection and analysis is an important function provided by the RPAs. This includes conducting traffic counts on major roads within the region and providing the information to MassDOT. In addition, the RPAs collect information on other modes of transportation, including ferry and airport trips, bicycle or pedestrian counts, and information on the presence of alternative transportation facilities and condition as appropriate to the region.[72]

Performance measurement is an increasing area of focus for the region. The RPAs have begun to score projects in their regional TIPs according to greenhouse gas emissions reductions and support for mode shifts away from automobile use. However, the RPAs have been able to set up their own criteria to review and score projects in both the TIPs and long-range plans. The Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC) recently revised its criteria to include specific performance targets.[73] The Franklin Regional Council of Governments is also partnering with neighboring regional agencies, including the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

(an adjacent MPO), to create an online data portal to communicate progress a greater regional vision.[74] Pavement management systems assist localities in tracking pavement condition, including recently improved roads, which complements an emphasis on maintaining existing infrastructure.[75] Where applicable, the RPAs also engage in air quality planning.[76]

In addition to completing federally mandated planning deliverables, the RPAs have the flexibility to also conduct planning work that relates to priority issues within their individual regions. For MVC, reviewing significant development proposals known as Developments of Regional Impact (DRI) is one of the region's priorities because of its significance for maintaining the character of the island. Although regional planning and development organizations in other states also conduct DRI reviews, for Martha's Vineyard, part of this work is conducted through the transportation planning work program, emphasizing the connection between land use and transportation. MVC assists with developing transportation impact analyses and reviews proposed developments for consistency with island policies and plans including regional transportation plans. This work includes reviewing development site plans for transportation aspects and potential mitigation. MVC encourages consideration of alternative modes at the site level in addition to regional planning activities; as an example, a commercial building of more than 3,000 square feet is subject to DRI review. Connections from the building to the street for transit use, bicycle parking, and other

improvements are regularly suggested. This is consistent with the organization's mission, since it was created by the Massachusetts legislature in 1974 to create a system of regional planning to protect the natural, historical, ecological, scientific, and cultural qualities of Martha's Vineyard.[77]

For the Nantucket Planning and Economic Development Commission, a regional focus is on managing automobile use is a priority, and planning activities emphasize various modes of transportation and providing parking options, assessing downtown parking and major corridors for accessibility, and improving conditions for bicycle and pedestrian mobility and safety.[78] For the Franklin Regional COG, bicycle and pedestrian access is also a priority, as is regional rail and transit service, and scenic byway corridor planning.[79] All of these localized RPA efforts tie into priorities of other locally developed and adopted plans, including land use, economic development, and local transportation plans and studies.

For more information on regional transportation planning in Massachusetts, visit **www.massdot.state.ma.us/planning/Main/PlanningProcess/RegionalPlanning.aspx**.

[71] Nantucket Planning and Economic Development Commission (2015). Unified Planning Work Program for Transportation Planning Activities, FFY 2016, www.nantucket-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/10085

[72] NPEDC (2015); Franklin Regional COG (2016). Draft Franklin Region Unified Planning Work Program for Transportation Planning Activities; Martha's Vineyard Commission (2014). Unified Planning Work Program for Transportation Planning Activities in County of Dukes County, Massachusetts, FFY 2015

[73] Personal communication with Priscilla LeClerc, July 2016

[74] FRCOG

[75] NPEDC, FRCOG, and MVC

[76] FRCOG

[77] Personal communication with Priscilla LeClerc, July 2016

[78] NPEDC

[79] FRCOG

Michigan

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Planning Agencies serving rural areas: 13

Total annual funding per RPA: $57,000, which includes $19,000 to assist with local consultation (80% federal funds, 20% state match), and $38,000 of Michigan Trunkline Funds for other tasks

Date established rural transportation planning program: 1975

Although Michigan's regional planning agencies (RPAs) have assisted Michigan DOT (MDOT) with statewide planning tasks since 1975, their roles and responsibilities have evolved in more recent 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, and other planning tasks have been added since then.

Asset Management

The asset management program is a joint effort of the state DOT, county road commissions, municipalities and the RPAs. The 13 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 RPA 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 Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating (PASER) rating between 1 and 10. From that information, county-level maps and data tables are generated to aid analysis. 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.

Supporting Local Consultation in Statewide Planning
In 1987, the Michigan legislature passed two laws, Act 231 and Act 233, which created the state's Transportation Economic Development Funds and also called for the establishment of regional Rural Task Forces (RTFs). Starting in 2012, began to contract with the state's RPAs to complete additional tasks related to the participation of local officials and the general public in statewide planning in nonmetropolitan areas, including through the RTFs.[80] With assistance from the RPAs, counties conduct local project selection meetings to reach consensus on what projects will be submitted to the rural task force from their county.

Then, the regional-level Rural Task Forces identify and discuss projects to submit to MDOT to be considered for inclusion in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for roadway and transit projects eligible for Surface Transportation Block Grant funds and Michigan's Transportation Economic Development Funds. The RTF membership includes local officials from nonmetropolitan county road commissions and municipalities, as well as modal representatives such as local transit agencies, and MDOT. Of the state's 83 counties, 78 are served by 22 RTFs, and supported by the RPAs. The RTF project priority lists must be fiscally constrained according to the annual allocation targets provided by MDOT, which occurs according to a statewide formula, although regions can agree to borrow funds from one another to complete larger projects. At RTF meetings, MDOT also reports back to the region's stakeholders on any updates on projects occurring within the region.[81] Other RPA tasks include assisting with access management training for local communities, participating in air quality planning for rural non-attainment counties, supporting the state's Heritage Route program for routes and communities within the region, collect information for non-motorized transportation planning and produce maps, and conduct rural safety planning.[82]

Connecting Transportation to Prosperity

In 2013, Michigan began the Regional Prosperity Initiative (RPI), an effort led by Governor Rick Snyder to incentivize higher levels of collaboration among RPAs, MPOs, and service delivery agencies and the development of a five-year Regional Prosperity Plan. Through a grant program, RPAs and MPOs can apply for funding to develop the plan and, at potentially higher levels of funding, also coordinate on shared services and decision-making.[83]

Some regions have already adopted their Regional Prosperity Plans. Framework for Our Future: A Regional Prosperity Plan for Northwest Michigan was completed in 2014 and contains several sections with in-depth analysis on a variety of planning topics. Throughout the document, the plan focuses on developing and maintaining regional talent, community and quality of life, and business-friendly policies. For the transportation section of the larger prosperity plan is a comprehensive plan in itself, analyzing the region's existing network, challenges, and goal areas for transportation supporting prosperity. The plan chapter also analyzes local governments' plans for their impacts on transportation and opportunities to plan for

different modes of transportation. With an eye toward plan implementation, the region developed a local implementation checklist for communities to use in their planning and zoning to address transportation and outlined specific actions tied to the plan's transportation strategies.[84]

The RPAs and MPOs are also working to address transit mobility within the Regional Prosperity Initiative regions. West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission, West Michigan Regional Planning Commission, and other partners within the RPI region developed a survey to document individual mobility needs and ability to use existing transit services, which was distributed through transit partners across the region. Regional analysis was provided to MDOT in supportive of a statewide mobility effort.[85]

In most of the state, the RPI boundaries do not match exactly with individual RPA boundaries, so most RPAs working on Regional Prosperity Plans are collaborating with other RPAs, MPOs, and other partners. The Rural Task Forces for transportation planning also operate under different boundaries, and RPAs may support more than one RTF within their region.

For more information on Michigan's Rural Task Force program, visit **www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,1607,7-151-9621_17216_54903---,00.html**. For information on Michigan's RPAs, visit **www.miregions.com**. To learn about the Regional Prosperity Initiative, go to **www.michigan.gov/dtmb/0,5552,7-150-66155---,00.html**.

[80] *West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (2014). West Michigan Regional Transportation Planning Program*

[81] *MDOT (2013). Statewide Guidelines and Operating Procedures: Rural Funding and Planning Coordination with Regional Planning Agencies, www.michigan.gov/documents/mdot/Statewide_Guidelines_and_Operating_Procedures_Final_-_8.121013_442956_7.pdf*

[82] *WMSRDC*

[83] *Michigan Department of Technology, Management, and Budget (2013). Regional Prosperity Initiative, http://www.michigan.gov/dtmb/0,5552,7-150-66155---,00.html*

[84] *Networks Northwest (2014). Framework for Our Future: A Regional Prosperity Plan for Northwest Michigan*

[85] *WMSRDC (2015). "WMSRDC Participating in Governor Snyder's Regional Transit Mobility Initiative," http://wmsrdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Aprilmay-2015.pdf*

Minnesota

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Development Organizations: 10

Total annual funding: $88,235 (85% Minnesota trunk highway funds, 15% local match)

Date established: early 1990s

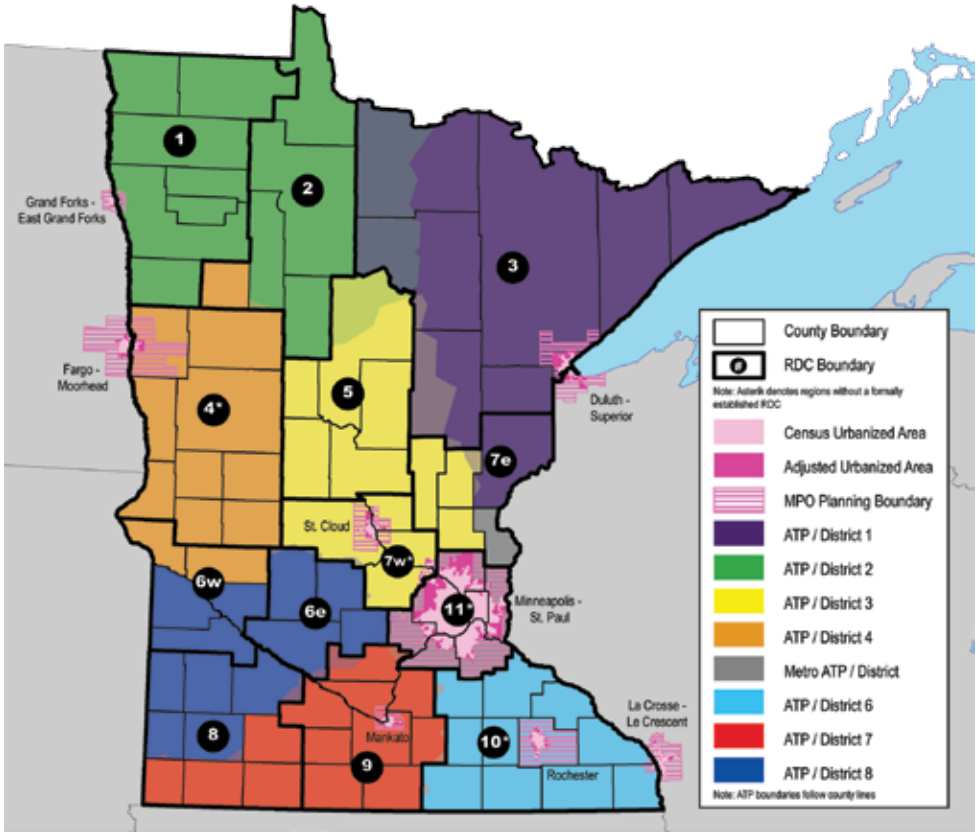
The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) established its Area Transportation Partnership (ATP) program to broaden input into the project selection process and to comply with new consultation requirements in ISTEA. The state's 10 regional development organizations (RDOs) are key partners and technical assistance providers to the ATPs around the state. MnDOT has provided planning grants to the RDOs since the 1970s, although the ATPs were established in the early 1990s to enhance the state's consultation process.

Regional Decisionmaking

Each ATP's geography is based on MnDOT district boundaries, and ATP membership typically includes state DOT officials, county and municipal leaders, small MPOs where they exist, state natural resource and economic development officials, Tribal communities, transportation modal interests and private citizens. Each regional partnership has its own process and work program. Most solicit projects for certain federal funding programs, 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.[86]

The RDOs have a seat on the ATP serving their region and also provide regional planning support to MnDOT. These planning support tasks may include coordinating and supporting ATP meetings and hosting a public open house where the draft Area Transportation Improvement Program (ATIP) is presented. RDO staff assist with preparing the ATIP, including soliciting and selecting projects, conducting public outreach, and other activities). They also assist the MnDOT districts with the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

Minnesota Area Transportation Partnerships and Regional Development Organizations



Courtesy Minnesota DOT

for the ATP, conducting program outreach to eligible applicants, reviewing letters of interest, assisting with project applications, and participating in the project selection process.[87]

The ATP is the decision-making body for selecting local priorities and recommending them to MnDOT. However, the RDOs also convene a transportation advisory committee (TAC) to better connect with professionals within the region, the public, and to align programs within the RDO. The TACs generally meet quarterly.[88]

Regional and Statewide Planning Activities
Through their regular annual contract, the RDOs also conduct regional planning tasks and support statewide planning activities. The regional planning efforts include completing technical assistance such as traffic counts or speed studies, participating in and implementing the state's Toward Zero Deaths initiative, reviewing and assisting with project scoping, providing transit planning assistance, and other activities related to community and economic development and health.[89]

MnDOT routinely solicits feedback from the RDOs on its statewide planning efforts, typically providing one or more seats for RDO planners on the advisory committees for statewide planning processes related to various topics and modes. The RDO staff also played a valuable role in assisting MnDOT with completing urban area boundary reviews with local governments following the 2010 Census, as well as working to achieve consensus between local governments and MnDOT in the subsequent functional class review.[90]

For more information on Minnesota's RDOs, visit **www.mnado.org**.

[86] *Northwest Regional Development Commission, "Transportation," nwrdc.org/home/transportation*

[87] *RDO Transportation Planning Grant Agreement Work Plan, FY2015*

[88] *Personal communication with Katie Caskey, 2015*

[89] *Personal communication with Minnesota Transportation Planners, 2015 – 2016*

[90] *Personal communication with Ronda Allis, April 2016*

Missouri

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Planning Commissions serving rural areas: 18

Total annual funding: $80,882.35
(80% federal funds, 20% local match)

Date established rural transportation program: 1994

Missouri uses a planning process that emphasizes ongoing engagement across state, regional and local levels of government. Missouri's Planning Framework was developed out of recognition that there were more transportation needs than available funds, a lack of consistency in planning and project delivery across the state, a piecemeal approach to improvements, unclear roles for planning partners, and problems with credibility in transportation due to a lack of local and public support.

In response to new requirements for local consultation in the 1991 surface transportation law ISTEA, MoDOT decided to contract with Missouri's regional planning commissions (RPCs) to conduct planning and outreach activities for nonmetropolitan regions. Since 1994, the RPCs have functioned similarly to the state's MPOs to complete rural transportation planning activities. Their primary functions are to staff a Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) that identifies and prioritizes community and regional transportation needs, coordinate transportation needs with local development plans, develop a regional transportation plan to be adopted by the RPC policy board, and educate and inform the public on transportation planning activities. Each RPC has a regional transportation plan that contains data about the region and its long-range vision and goals. Although there is no time horizon assigned to the plan, RPC staff do work with their localities to update the plan annually.[91]

Prioritizing Local Needs

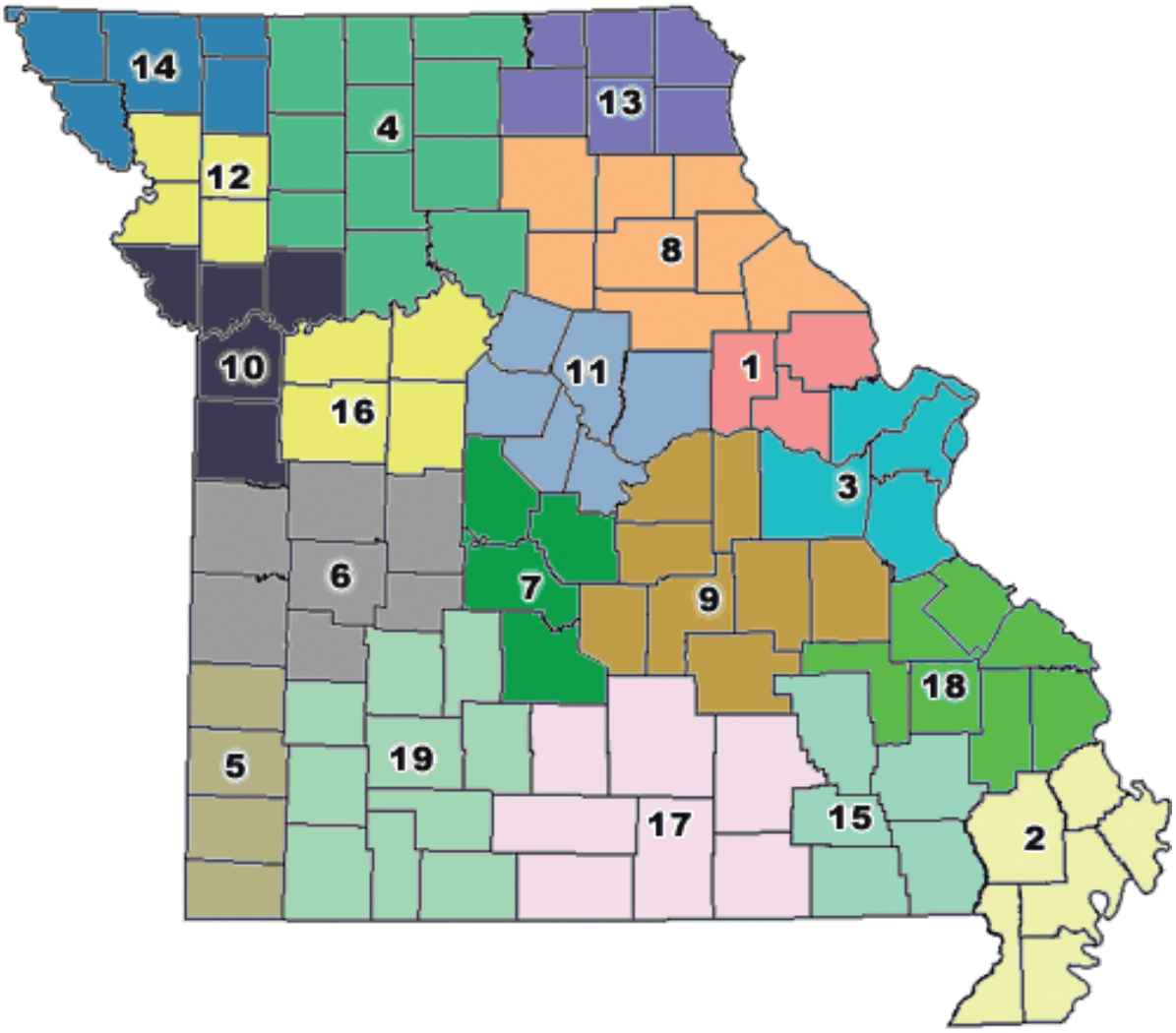
TAC and RPC board members are often local officials and business leaders who, after discussion about transportation needs at the regional level, become champions for those priorities in their communities. The makeup of each TAC is determined by the RPC. For example, in 2012, the Boonslick RPC restructured its TAC to have a broader, more multimodal scope and more overlap with the region's economic development concerns.[92]

The TACs meet quarterly, with each meeting focused on a step in the planning process. Each RPC follows generally the same format and completes uniform tasks, but the exact process followed by the TAC is customized for each region and changes somewhat from year to year depending on available funding and other issues occurring in the state. For Boonslick RPC, in the first meeting, the TAC receives a basic introduction to the planning process, followed by outreach in individual communities. In the second meeting, the needs identified through the outreach process are presented to the TAC. Before the third meeting, Boonslick RPC staff work with MoDOT to compile information on each project, including location, safety data, average annual daily traffic, and other metrics that the TAC members might want to consider. This information is discussed during the third meeting, and then TAC members individually conduct their own prioritization of needs, ranking each project as a low, medium, or high priority, and submit their rankings to Boonslick RPC staff. There is no required set of formal criteria for TAC members to use, but the information compiled prior to the third TAC meeting sets the context for prioritizing, and safety tends to be a focus area for the Boonslick RPC TAC. The individual rankings are then compiled, and the final quarterly meeting of each year consists of analyzing the priority list and whether it fits with the region's goals.[93]

This annual list of project priorities essentially functions as the region's transportation improvement program (TIP), which is then submitted to MoDOT for consideration. Each MoDOT District includes the entire boundaries of MoDOT staff compare the RPCs' priorities with needs determined by condition information, pavement models, and other assessments. The two systems of identifying needs generally match up, with the data-driven process often leading to many of the same priorities that are identified through the RPCs.[94] The RPC staff also participate in MoDOT's "Core Team" to review projects and define project scope, often bringing a socioeconomic perspective to complement MoDOT staff engineering expertise.[95]

When needed, MoDOT District Offices can bring the RPCs that they work with together to discuss major district-level projects, although it does not necessarily happen annually. Projects of statewide significance have

Missouri Regional Planning Commissions



Courtesy Missouri Association of Councils of Government

rarely been proposed in recent years, as funds have declined. However, localities with a major project that exceeds funds programmed at the MoDOT District level can present their projects at Missouri's annual planning partners meeting, where all the planning partners jointly score projects as low, medium, or high priorities.

Other Planning Activities

The RPCs assist MoDOT with implementing some statewide activities within their regions. These include participating in regional roundtables for the Blueprint for Safer Roadways initiative and working with local governments to identify and assist with applying for transportation alternatives program funds for local projects. RPC staff complete sidewalk inventories of local jurisdictions, conduct road safety audits, corridor studies, traffic counts, the transportation portion of local comprehensive plans, and other planning activities through their work program.[96] Public education is a core component of the RPCs' work programs. The RPCs assist with MoDOT's public engagement activities in support of statewide long-range planning and programming, as well as conducting their own outreach to communities in the process of completing other regional plans like the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and local comprehensive plans.[97]

Some RPCs are involved in their region's coordinated human services transportation council, including staffing a mobility management position to work with existing transportation providers to coordinate services, conduct outreach to communities on mobility needs, and assess how to best provide service through existing means.[98]

Although not necessarily a part of their transportation work, the RPCs are engaged in resilience activities through their regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy updates and through disaster recovery efforts in places affected by flooding, tornadoes, economic shocks, and other disaster events. These resilience efforts relate to transportation, though, such as business continuity planning efforts that include working with businesses to identify major transportation corridors that could be affected by a disaster and how that would affect business.[99]

The RPCs' work programs include support for professional development, including attending courses, national and state conferences, webinars, and other training activities. In 2011, MoDOT and the RPCs completed a guidance manual to ensure consistency in conducting activities and administering the rural transportation programs, and a self-evaluation spreadsheet tool helps the RPCs to track their performance at meeting expectations for participating in statewide planning and conducting planning activities.

For more information on Missouri's RPCs, visit **www.macogonline.org**.

[91] *Personal communication with Jason Ray, December 2015*

[92] *Personal communication with Krishna Kunapareddy, May 2014*

[93] *Personal communication with Krishna Kunapareddy, May 2014*

[94] *Personal communication with Tom Batenhorst, May 2014*

[95] *Southwest Missouri Council of Governments (2015), Transportation Planning Work Program FY2016*

[96] *SWMCOG (2015)*

[97] *Personal communication with Krishna Kunapareddy and Angie Hoecker, May 2014*

[98] *Personal communication with Krishna Kunapareddy, May 2014*

[99] *Personal communication with Krishna Kunapareddy, May 2014; Jason Ray, June 2015*

New Mexico

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Transportation Planning Organizations: 7

Total annual funding: $106,250 (80% federal, 20% local match)

Date established: Early 1990s

New Mexico has used a regional transportation planning organization (RTPO) system since the early 1990s to conduct outreach to local officials in regions not covered by an MPO. The year 2005 marked the first time that all of the state's regional development organizations (known locally as councils of government) provided the administrative and staff support for the state-designated RTPOs. Known as rural planning organizations (RPOs) until 2012's federal MAP-21 legislation led to a name-change, these entities serve a variety of functions in planning, promoting, and implementing rural transportation projects throughout the state.

Boilerplate bylaws define the structure of the RTPOs and address membership, staff functions, meeting schedules, and other issues. The bylaws also establish a committee system for these organizations. RTPOs have a policy committee of decision-making representatives such as local officials, New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) staff, economic developers, business owners, and members of the public. A technical committee of professional staff including engineers, planners, and road managers serves in an advisory role and delivers technical support and recommendations for transportation planning.[100] Some RTPOs have combined these committees into one entity.

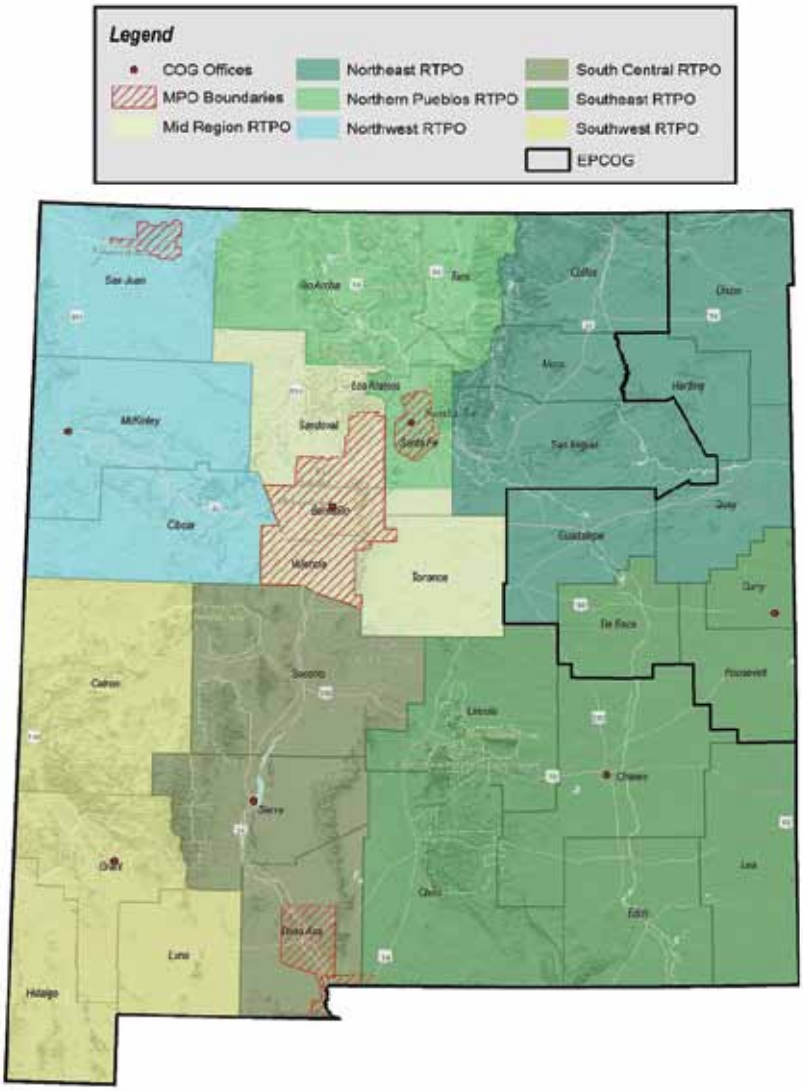
The South Eastern New Mexico Economic Development District/Council of Government staffs the Southeast Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SERTPO). The regional work program that guides SERTPO sets out to develop, improve and strengthen the southeastern multimodal regional transportation network.[101] Key functions outlined in the work program include long-range planning, identifying projects through Rural Transportation Improvement Program Recommendations (RTIPR), implementing a public participation plan, and providing technical support.

Major Planning Tasks

RTPO long-range planning activities "assess transportation needs and identify projects that could potentially be implemented using federal, state, and local funds that are reasonably expected to be available over a 20-year (or longer) period."[102] Working in conjunction with NMDOT, RTPOs assess population data, economic development trends, travel demand data, and other information to update the Regional Transportation Plan as it relates to the Statewide Long-Range Multi-Modal Transportation Plan (SLRP).[103] With the New Mexico Transportation Plan complete, the RTPO is working to implement activities outlined in the RTP.[104] RTPOs long-range planning is also integrated into other planning efforts, including the STIP, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), and Capital Improvement Plans.

Each year, RTPOs develop a plan and prioritized list of potential projects which they send to the state for incorporation into the STIP. This list is called the Rural Transportation Improvement Program Recommendations (RTIPR). These projects are recommended by RTPO members and often include safety, planning, and roadway projects. Ranking criteria are set by each RTPO.[105]

New Mexico RTPOs



Courtesy New Mexico Association of Regional Councils

An important role of the RTPOs is to create a public forum for conversation and collaboration about regional transportation initiatives. Every RTPO establishes a Public Participation Plan (PPP) that ensures a process for public engagement and outreach through hosting workshops and meetings and sharing information and resources to interested parties across all modes of transportation.[106]

The RTPOs also provide additional forms of technical assistance, including organizing professional development and training opportunities for members, delivering data to assist in project planning and development, and sharing funding information and legislative updates. SNMEDD/SERTPO have also recently been involved with functional reclassifications of rural roads and their uses in oil and gas regions. This has involved reclassifying local roads to higher classifications such as minor and major collectors.[107] Finally, the RTPO serves as a liaison between its local members and state and federal partners to foster channels of communication and collaboration.[108]

The rural transportation planning process in New Mexico faces some unique complexities, including having an international border and several Tribal governments. The Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments has carried out extensive collaboration efforts with Tribal nations to ensure consistency and compatibility among the different organizations' plans and project priorities. NWRTPO staff has worked to get all parties together to coordinate functional classification issues within the FHWA highway classification system and the Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian Reservation Roads Program.[109]

For more information, visit **www.rtponm.org**.

[100] New Mexico Department of Transportation, Transportation Planning and Safety Division (2013). Planning Procedures Manual, dot.state.nm.us/content/dam/nmdot/planning/Planning_Procedures_Manual.pdf

[101] South Eastern New Mexico Economic Development District/Council of Governments (2012). Southeast Regional Transportation Planning Organization Regional Work Program, 2013 - 2015

[102] New Mexico Department of Transportation (2013)

[103] South Eastern New Mexico Economic Development District/Council of Governments (2012). Southeast Regional Transportation Planning Organization Regional Work Program, 2013 - 2015

[104] Personal communication with Mary Ann Burr, July 2016

[105] New Mexico Department of Transportation (2013)

[106] New Mexico Department of Transportation (2013)

[107] Personal communication with Mary Ann Burr, July 2016

[108] South Eastern New Mexico Economic Development District/Council of Governments (2012). Southeast Regional Transportation Planning Organization Regional Work Program, 2013 - 2015

[109] NADO Research Foundation (2010). Four Corners Rural Transportation Forum: Summary of a Peer Learning Exchange, www.nado.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/4Corners10.pdf

New York

The nine regional development organizations in the state (known locally as regional planning and development boards or regional planning councils) have no formal contracts or partnerships with the state to foster the participation of rural local officials in the statewide planning process. However, some regional development organizations have been active in transportation studies, projects, and service in multiple modes of transportation. For example, regional planning and development boards in the state's Southern Tier have provided valuable leadership in pursuing the designation and upgrading of key rural highway corridors to Interstate status.

One region in particular, the Southern Tier West Regional Planning and Development Board (STW), 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 and creating the Southern Tier Extension Railroad Authority as a local public authority. The retention of the regional rail line helped to create 805 new jobs in this rural region in addition to generating an additional $4 million investment by three private shipping firms. Notably, the group has significantly increased the mileage of track and usage of the railway. STW has also developed the region's first-ever regional transportation strategy, which was adopted in 2009, with funding from the state. The multimodal strategy documents needs related to the region's community and economic development goals and the high priority projects—related to all modes of transportation—that would serve these goals.[110] Although many of the priorities identified in the regional strategy are specific infrastructure projects, one process-oriented effort that has been underway following the completion of the regional transportation strategy is the development of a standardized road scoring process and criteria for local roads. This effort is intended to help identify high priority corridors, which often include a combination of state, county, and local highways.[111]

New York has invested in mobility management programs across the state, which are often administered at the county level. Regional-scale transportation needs identified in the Southern Tier West Regional

Transportation Strategy revealed has led to a shared mobility management website for the three counties and Seneca Nation of Indians, which are all served by STW. The regional website links to the locally developed coordinated plans and existing service in each jurisdiction.[112]

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 some of 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 members also participate in state and regional aviation conferences and meetings to share experiences and gather information on new trends, federal development financing and other areas relevant to local airports across the state. The Southern Tier East Regional Planning and Development Board, for example, convenes a quarterly meeting of the staff of airports within the region to address aviation-related issues, and in particular, how air service contributes to vibrant communities and resilient local economies.[113]

The Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council (G/FLRPC) has also been active in addressing transportation issues affecting the regional economy and residents. In 2016, the council published the special study Transportation and Food Systems in the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region, completed with funding allocated through the Genesee Transportation Council, which is the Rochester area's MPO. This study used interviews with stakeholders involved in all facets of the food industry, from production and processing to product sales and waste management. New York State is a major producer of agricultural products, much of it originating within the G/FLRPC region.[114] The RPC has long been active in supporting transportation initiatives through its assistance to local governments on local land use and water resources planning, including in the development of local comprehensive plans and other resources. Prior special studies addressed village main streets, model ordinances and other resources for planning for transportation and climate change, a historic transportation gateway inventory, regional rights of way, and more.[115]

[110] STW (2009), www.southerntierwest.org/pdfs/transportation/stwtransstrategy.pdf

[111] Personal communication with Richard Zink, March 2014

[112] STW, "Regional Transit," www.southerntierwest.org/CTC%20Coalition/default.html#

[113] Personal communication with Erik Miller, September 2014

[114] G/FLRPC (2016), Transportation and Food Systems in the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region, www.gflrpc.org/uploads/5/0/4/0/50406319/final_report.pdf

[115] G/FLRPC, "Publications and Completed Projects," www.gflrpc.org/publications.html

North Carolina

Quick Facts

Number of Rural Planning Organizations: 18

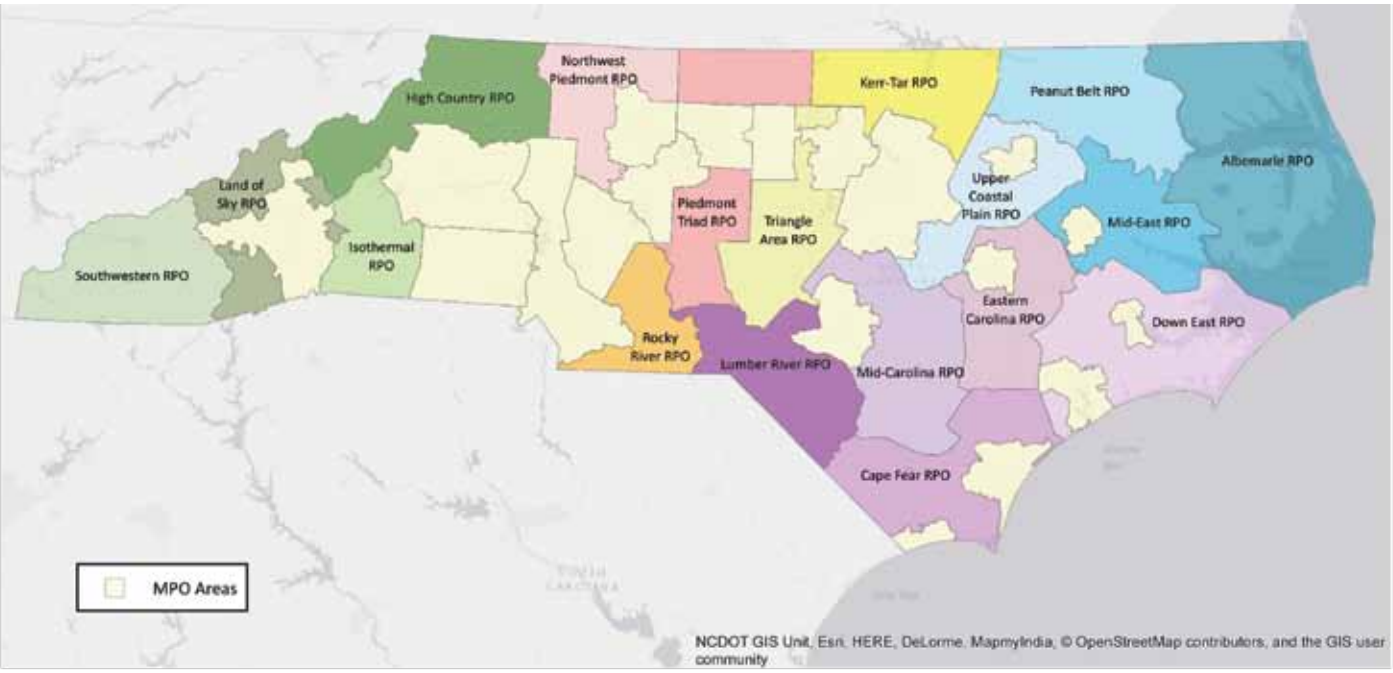
Total annual funding: $115,625 – $144,531 (80% federal funds, 20% local match)

Date established: 2002

Since 2002, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) has implemented a major re-engineering of its consultation process with rural local officials. The change was mandated under a new state law passed in July 2000 that required the establishment of rural planning organizations (RPOs) to work cooperatively with the state to plan rural transportation systems and to advise the department on rural transportation policy (Senate Bill 1195, covered under Article 17 General Statue 136-210 through 213). State officials worked with local officials and the existing network of regional development organizations (known locally as regional councils of government) and with counties to create an initial 20 RPOs to serve all areas outside of the existing 17 MPO boundaries. These new planning organizations were designated by the governor, similar to the MPO designation process.[116] Under the state law, RPOs are required to serve contiguous areas of 3 - 15 counties or must have a combined minimum population of 50,000. MPOs cannot be a member of RPOs. Each rural county must be a member of an RPO, although membership is optional for municipalities.[117] The RPOs have a lead planning agency that is a council of governments, county, city, or other agency that staffs and administers the rural transportation planning work program.[118]

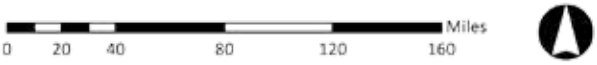
The RPOs have been a useful tool for providing planning services to rural areas that have rapidly become urbanized. In some cases, new urbanized area designations have caused RPO service areas to be added to the metropolitan planning area of existing MPOs. As a result, two RPOs have been disbanded following the 2010 Census and their territory completely served by existing MPOs, and others' boundaries were adjusted as metropolitan areas grew.[119] Even

Rural Planning Organizations in North Carolina



Courtesy Matthew Day, North Carolina Association of RPOs

NCARPO
North Carolina Association of Rural Planning Organizations



Map Date: 6/30/2016

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 StatePlane North Carolina FIPS 3200 Feet

with changing boundaries, the RPOs still collectively serve a significant portion of the state, with over 3 million residents served by RPOs.[120]

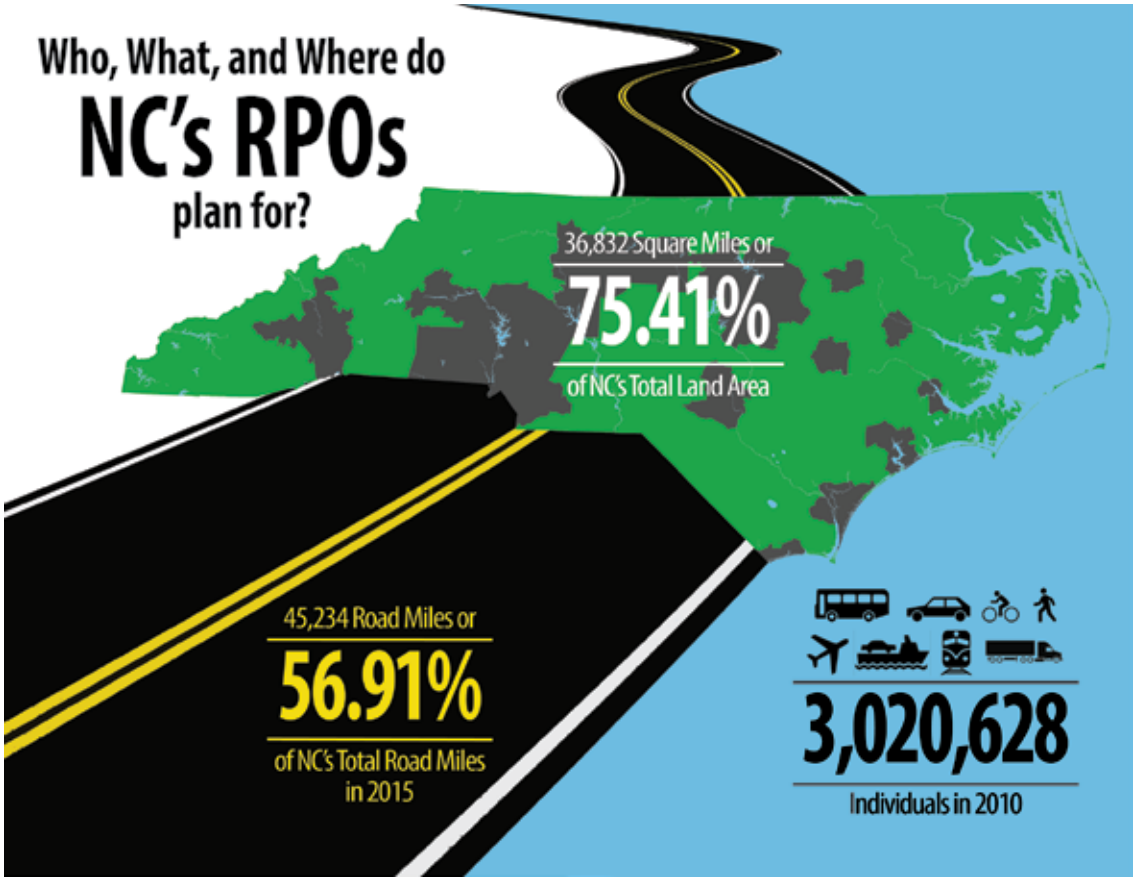


Image courtesy Lauren Tuttle, Eastern Carolina COG

The state's RPOs have formed a state association specific to their work, the North Carolina Association of RPOs (NCARPO). The state association meets quarterly with NCDOT staff and liaises with the state's MPO association. The NCARPO members serve on several different working groups and committees that advance planning practice across the state by keeping other RPO staff up to date on emerging issues at the quarterly meetings and sharing work samples and methodologies with the other regions.

Major Planning Activities

The RPOs usually have two major committees that provide significant input and guidance into the work of the RPOs. The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) that serves as the policy entity, which includes elected officials, members of the local governments, the area's representative on the Board of Transportation and others to guide the planning process. The Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) membership comprises individuals knowledgeable about transportation issues, including staff of member governments, NCDOT, transit providers, and others. The TCC oversees the planning work and documents produced by the RPO and makes technical recommendations to the TAC.[121]

Each RPO produces several planning deliverables: a planning work program, public involvement plan, five-year planning calendar to connect short-term goals to long-term priorities of each RPO, Comprehensive Transportation Plan list of study needs, TIP project prioritization, and review and comment on local issues relating to the draft STIP.[122]

The RPOs provide several core planning services:

- Coordinate, assist and develop local and regional plans, including Comprehensive Transportation Plans that may be requested by a local jurisdiction and completed or updated through the rural planning work program
- Provide a forum for public participation in the transportation planning and implementation process
- Develop and prioritize projects the organization believes should be included in the state transportation improvement program, which factor into the state's strategic prioritization process and decisions regarding the STIP
- Provide transportation related information to local governments[123]

The process has provided local officials with an enhanced framework to participate in the statewide and regional planning processes. It has also provided a forum for state and local officials to discuss and address issues requiring regional solutions.

For more information on the North Carolina Association of RPOs, visit **www.ncarpo.org**, and details about the regional planning process are provided by the North Carolina DOT's Transportation Planning Branch at **connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/Pages/MPO-RPO.aspx**.

[116] *Personal communication with John Marshall, June 2015*

[117] *NCDOT Transportation Planning Branch and NCARPO (2015). RPO Manual 2015, connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/TPB%20Documents/RPO_Manual_2015.pdf*

[118] *NCDOT (nd). Rural Planning Organizations, connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/TPB%20Documents/Rural%20Planning%20Organizations%20(RPO).pdf*

[119] *Personal communication with John Marshall, February 2016; Centralina COG (nd). "Gaston Urban Area MPO Expands to Encompass Lincoln and Cleveland Counties"*

[120] *NCARPO (nd). "Rural Regional Transportation Planning Organizations," www.ncarpo.org/about-us.html*

[121] *NCDOT (nd)*

[122] *NCDOT TPB (2015)*

[123] *NCDOT TPB (2015)*

Ohio

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Transportation Planning Organizations: 5

Total annual funding: $88,000 - $214,000 (80% federal, 10% state, 10% local match)

Date established: 2013

After soliciting rural transportation planning proposals from existing multicounty regional development organizations (RDOs), the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) awarded two-year pilot project contracts to five organizations to form regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) in 2013. These RTPOs do not cover the entire non-urbanized area of the state, but they have brought regional transportation planning services to many previously unserved areas. Before the RTPOs existed, MPOs served 32 of the state's 88 counties and 45 percent of its roadways. With the RTPOs adding regional transportation planning services in more places, planning organizations now serve 65 counties and 75 percent of the roadways.[124] The RTPOs range in size from 2 counties to 11, based on the size of the existing RDO boundaries and whether some counties fall within MPO boundaries. Additional multi-county regions of the state are investigating forming RTPOs outside of metropolitan regions that have engaged in regional planning.[125]

In January 2016, these five organizations received Governor John Kasich's formal designation as RTPOs, according to U.S. Code, Title 23, Section 135 (m), the federal statute authorizing states to form RTPOs that was included in the 2012 surface transportation authorization MAP-21.

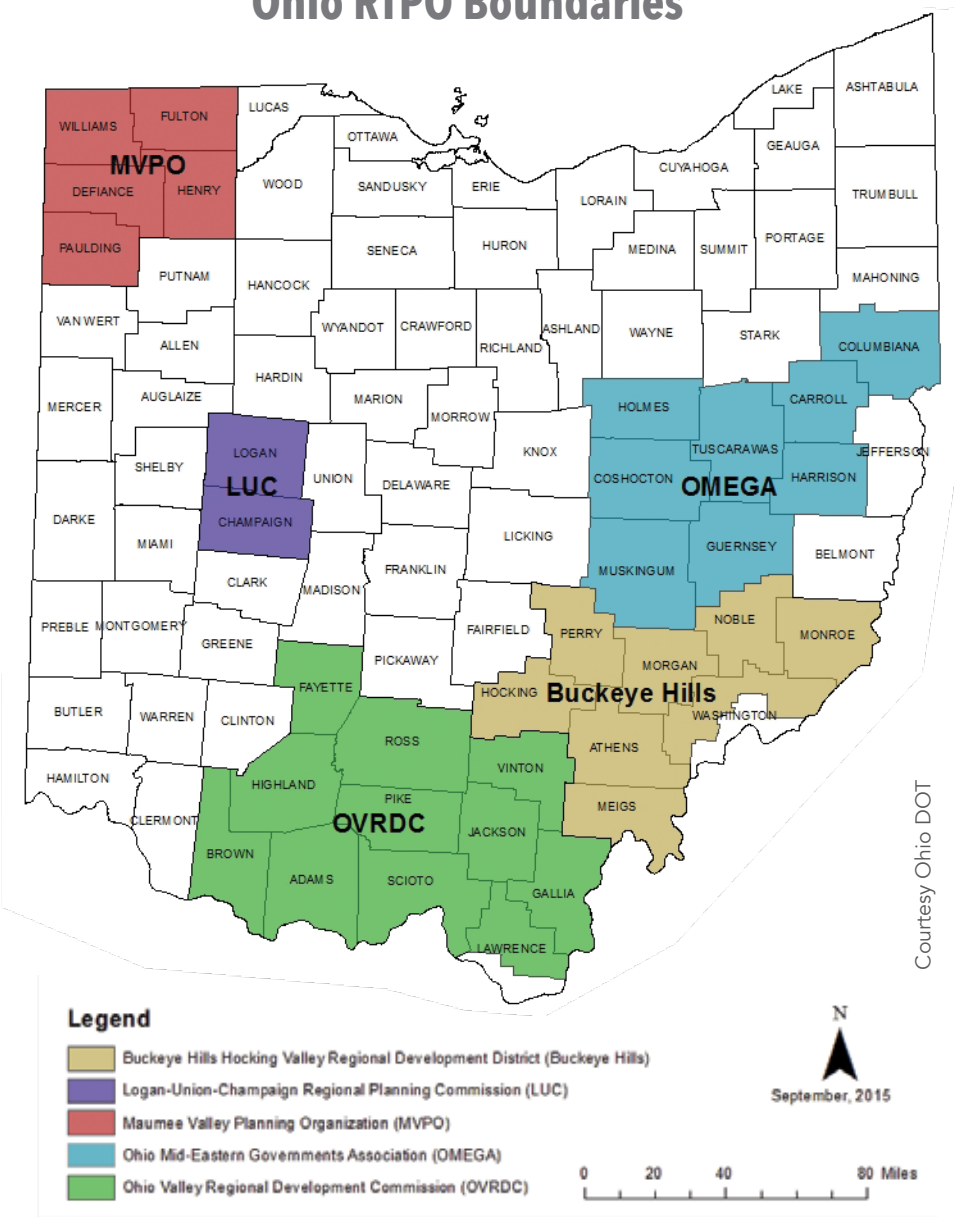
RTPO Responsibilities

As they created their bylaws and institutional structures, Ohio's RTPOs used their existing RDO governing boards as their RTPO policy committees, with participation from area local government officials and others. They also set about establishing transportation technical advisory committees and other committees, including a citizen advisory committee or environmental justice committee at most of the RTPOs.

Each of the regions completed their first public outreach, local official consultation process, and regional transportation plans in their initial two-year phase of work, ending in 2015. ODOT Statewide Planning Manager Dave Moore says, "Using the RTPOs is a direct method of engaging nonmetropolitan area local governments more readily in our statewide planning program. Prior to establishing the RTPOs, the ODOT Districts took the lead in rural consultation and effected the process themselves. Now we have RTPOs with a staff of at least one or two people to work on transportation in the region and represent local governments in the planning process."

Maumee Valley Planning Organization Transportation Planner Ellen Smith agrees, "In a way, we've become like an arm of ODOT. We can hear the region's needs within the RTPO, and we may understand them in a different way than they would at the state level. We can take those issues back to ODOT and give them a more local perspective. The RTPO has brought a new level of regional coordination to our counties, but we've been able to help each of them individually, too."

Ohio RTPO Boundaries



Courtesy Ohio DOT

To assist with their planning and analysis, ODOT gave the RTPOs access to a great deal of data about the transportation system, including the state's GIS Crash Analysis Tool (GCAT) that houses crash information about all public roads.[126] Another technical tool developed by ODOT in 2016 is a safety program target spreadsheet with safety data by region for each RTPO and MPO in the state. In addition to historical data and five-year rolling averages, the tool uses a linear projection for future years, as well as using projections based on the historical reduction rate of the five-year rolling average and the state's goal of a 2 percent reduction rate to present potential scenarios and numeric targets. This tool was developed to help the MPOs to determine a regional target for performance-based planning; although the RTPOs are not required to set performance targets, ODOT has made the data and target spreadsheet tool available for their use too.[127]

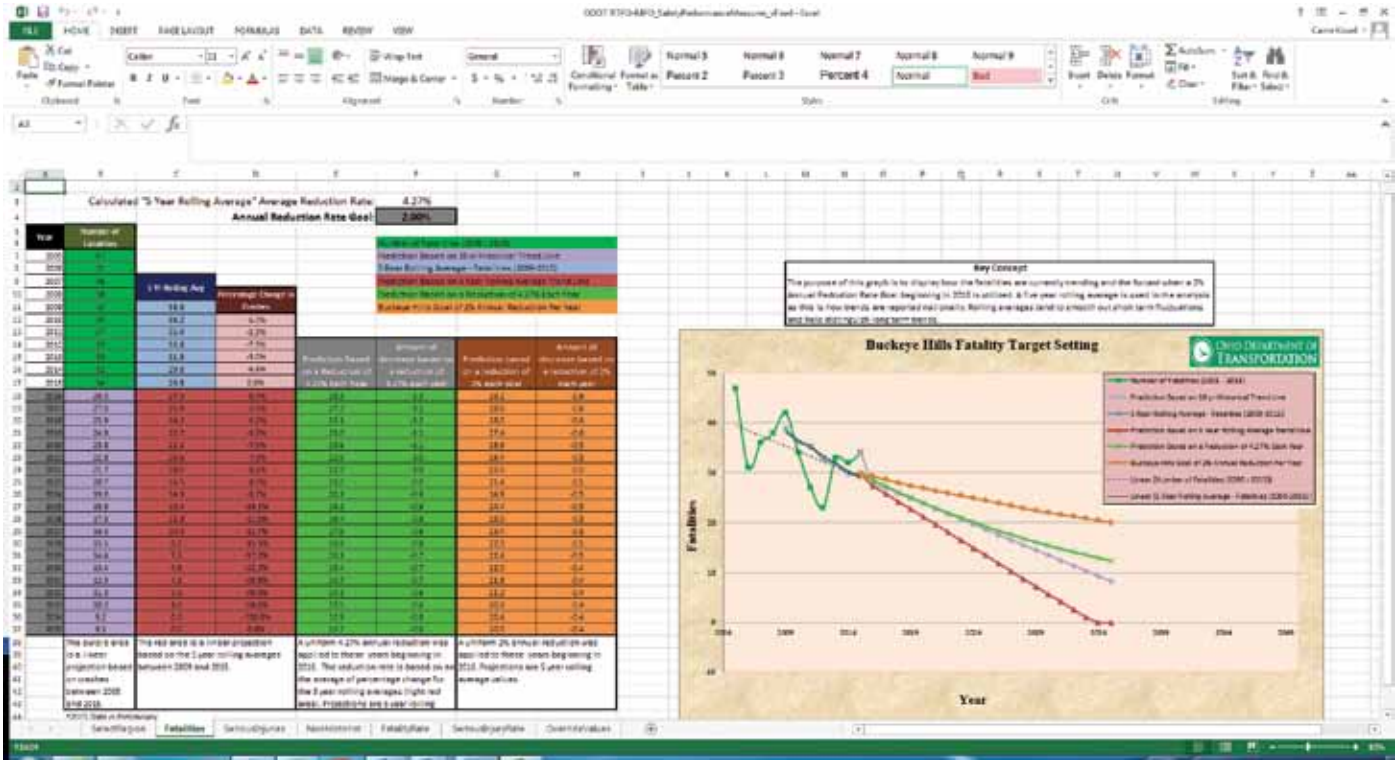
The RTPOs also are continuing to conduct technical assistance to local governments, including completing traffic counts or special planning studies such as corridor studies, safety studies, bicycle route information, truck origin/destination studies, asset management database development and analysis. Smith says of the Maumee Valley RTPO, "The counties in our region have many of the same experiences and similar needs, such as general road and bridge maintenance, but they also have some unique needs. We've been able to help communities further investigate those issues."

New two-year contracts added more responsibilities in 2015. The RTPOs are identifying local needs to complete their first transportation improvement programs (TIPs), a major new deliverable in this second phase. This will be an important step, as the RTPOs formalize their planning and help communities to identify specific projects that ultimately may be funded in the statewide planning process. Over time, TIP development will help the regions to implement goals and specific projects in the long-range plans they finalized in 2015.[128]

Courtesy Buckeye Hills-Hocking Valley RDD

Delivering projects is a key outcome for the RTPOs. Moore says, "It's important to have the RTPOs assist their member local governments with securing funding to address the very real transportation needs within rural Ohio." Some of the smaller local governments may not be aware of all of the funding opportunities available that might fit their project needs.

Delivering projects assists with buy-in into the transportation planning process. "There needs to be some funding to keep everybody coming back to the table. Many communities have projects that need just a small amount of extra funding to be completed," Smith says. To move projects forward, the RTPOs assist the local governments with completing grant applications for federal funding programs such as the Highway Safety Improvement Program, which is popular because funds can be used on all public roads and because small projects can be completed. State funding, including



Courtesy Ohio DOT

the Ohio Public Works Program and other programs for maintenance and economic development, meets other types of project needs.

In addition to its investments in the RTPOs' planning and delivery processes, ODOT has invested in their professional growth by including the development of technical expertise as an element in the RTPOs' scopes of work. "In order to be an effective transportation advocate for their member local governments, the RTPOs needed to understand transportation. Heretofore, the agencies we've contracted with have worked on community and economic development programs for many years, but what they didn't have was transportation planning experience. Professional development and training are critical components of providing a full-service transportation program for their regions," says Moore.

ODOT has also provided financial support to some of the state's MPOs to serve as mentors to the new RTPOs since 2013 and applied to FHWA for funding support to hold a peer exchange with an RTPO in a neighboring state. This mentor network has resulted in close relationships between the rural transportation planning professionals and metropolitan planning staff, who have offered guidance on a range of organizational issues and technical analyses and assisted with developing the RTPOs' first regional plans.[129]

The mentor relationships have been fruitful for the MPO staff as well as for the RTPOs. Two largely metropolitan regions, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission and Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission staff multi-county MPOs but also serve rural counties outside the MPO boundaries. For both, assisting with the development of rural planning programs and plans as mentors led commission staff to reach out to rural counties adjacent to the MPO to discuss local interest in developing new RTPOs, creating their own regional rural plans to lay out strategies, and assisting localities with applying for funds for projects. One of the emerging RTPOs may be established by mid-2016, while the other region continues to discuss the details of forming a new entity.[130]

The RTPOs also participate in meetings of the Ohio Association of Regional Councils Transportation Committee, a group of MPO and RTPO professionals, ODOT, and FHWA division staff who meet every other month. This forum allows for shared networking, professional development, and coordination on issues of shared concern among metropolitan and rural regions and at multiple levels of government.[131]

To complete their responsibilities, the RTPOs are provided a base allocation of funding of $55,000 per year, plus additional funds distributed by a formula based on their population and geographic size. Their ODOT contracts are funded 80 percent by FHWA SPR funds, 10 percent by state funds, and each RTPO provides the final 10 percent in local match.

For more information on Ohio's RTPOs, visit **www.dot.state.oh.us**.

[124] *Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission (2015). 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan, www.ovrdc.org/rtpo*

[125] *Personal communication with Andrew Shepler, March 2016, Thea Walsh and William Murdock, April 2016, and Brian Martin, April 2016*

[126] *Waldheim, Nicole, Susan Herbel, and Carrie Kissel (2014). Integrating Safety in the Rural Transportation Planning Process, safety.fhwa.dot.gov/local_rural/training/fhwasa14102*

[127] *Personal communication with Dave Moore, March 2016*

[128] *Personal communication with Bret Allphin, October 2015*

[129] *Personal communication with Dave Moore, March 2016; Bret Allphin, October 2015; and Ed Davis, December 2014*

[130] *Personal communication with Thea Walsh and William Murdock, April 2016, and Brian Martin, April 2016*

[131] *Personal communication with Dave Moore, March 2016*

Oklahoma

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Transportation Planning Organizations: 3

Funding range: $78,000
(80% federal; 20% local match)

Date established: 2012

Following the designation of 11 sub-state planning districts in 1970, local governments throughout Oklahoma established Councils of Governments to work on regional planning issues.[132] In 1992, the Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils (OARC) was created to provide a statewide platform to address regional issues.[133] In 2012, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) initiated a contract through OARC to establish regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) within the state. With the funding provided, three pilot RTPOs were created.

The RTPOs were tasked with reviewing and providing comments on the statewide transportation plan and STIP, developing regional consensus on priority projects from multiple modes of transportation, developing rural long-range transportation plans, conducting public participation, and providing transportation-related information to the local government members of the RTPOs. The RTPOs responsibilities and priorities include data collection, developing long-range transportation plans (LRTPs), short range studies, and conducting public participation guided by a public participation plan.[134] The RTPO structure, established through bylaws, includes a policy board, technical committee, and steering committee.

The three pilots have completed their first LRTPs and are now working on county transportation plans and other initiatives. "The success of the RTPOs working on the LRTPs has opened up new opportunities for them," notes Jana Harris, Director of Community & Economic Development at the Southwest Oklahoma Development Administration (SWODA), which staffs the Southwest Oklahoma Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SORTPO), one of the original pilot regions.[135] These new projects include reviewing and scoring Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) projects, as well as conducting freight analysis by tracking trucking, tonnage, and hauling data.[136]

The RTPOs "serv[e] as the point of contact, facilitator, and convener" for public meetings and engagement with a variety of transportation stakeholders.[137] The RTPOs' public participation plans are designed to "encourag[e] citizens and organizations to take an active participation in their community-related transportation issues," including those stakeholders who are traditionally underserved during the planning process.[138]

The RTPOs are funded through FHWA SPR funds. OARC continues to serve in an administrative role, connecting the state and the three pilot RTPOs. For those areas not served by an RTPO, OARC also plays a coordinating role to support collaboration between the COGs and ODOT on statewide and regional transportation plans.[139] Currently, two additional COGs are in the process of forming RTPOs. They are in the administrative stage, establishing bylaws and forming policy boards.[140]

[132] *Southwest Oklahoma Regional Transportation Planning Organization (2016). Custer County, Oklahoma 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan, sortpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2035-LRTP-Long-Range-Transportation-Plan-Final.pdf*

[133] *Oklahoma Department of Transportation (nd). "Metropolitan Planning," www.okladot.state.ok.us/metro-planning/index.htm*

[134] *Southwest Oklahoma Regional Transportation Planning Organization (2015). Regional Transportation Planning Work Program, FFY2016*

[135] *Personal communication with Jana Harris, June 2016*

[136] *Personal communication with Jana Harris, June 2016*

[137] *Southwest Oklahoma Regional Transportation Planning Organization (2016)*

[138] *Central Oklahoma Rural Transportation Planning Organization (nd). "Public Participation Plan,"*

[140] *Personal communication with Jana Harris, June 2016*

Oregon

Quick Facts

Number of Area Commissions on Transportation: 12

Total annual funding: Varies; formula based on population, vehicle miles traveled, ton miles traveled, and vehicle registrations

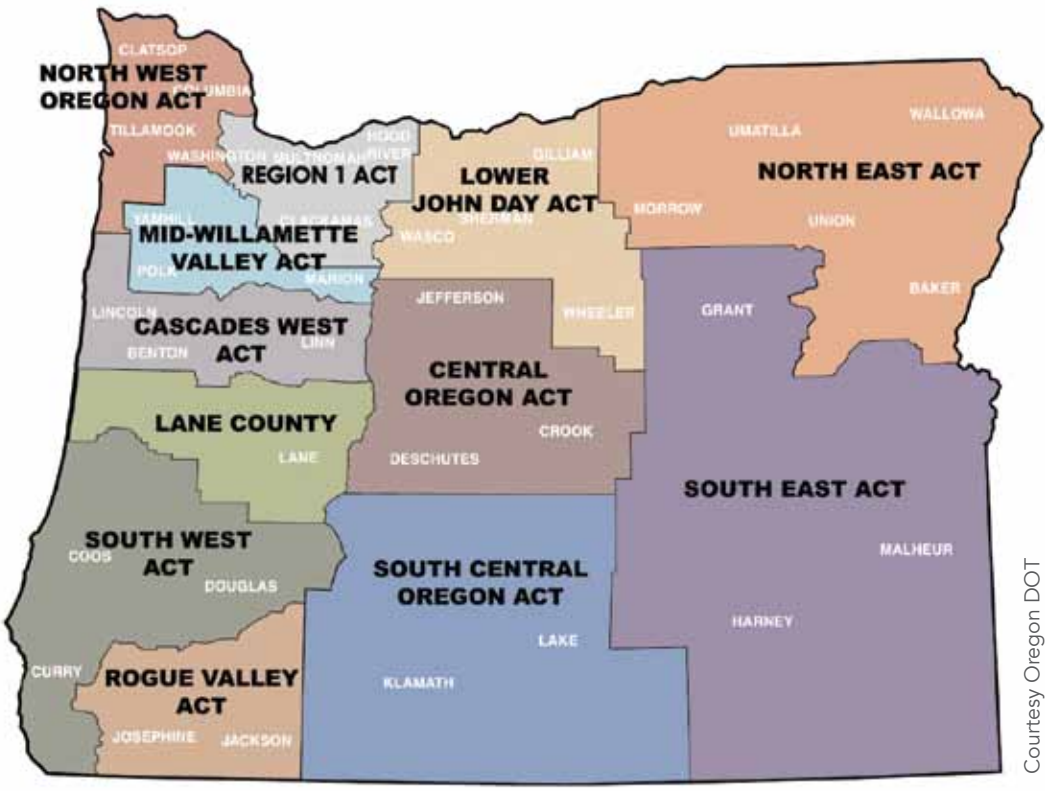
Date established: 1996

The Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) oversees state transportation policy and authorized the creation of Area Commissions on Transportation (ACTs) in 1996. ACTs are voluntary regional advisory entities that serve a variety of roles in bringing together state and local partners in transportation, planning, and development. ACTs address highway, transit, and transportation safety issues. They play a critical role in serving as a "forum for the discussion and coordination of current and future transportation issues and to make recommendations to the OTC."[141] 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 and the general public to foster better collaboration with the OTC and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT).

The 12 commissions are staffed by a variety of models, including by the ODOT 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. The ACTs play a key advisory role in the development of the state's project investment and project prioritization programs, as well as the pursuit of a seamless and multimodal transportation system. Through a public involvement process, ACTs assist the state in its creation of the STIP. This process identifies, prioritizes, and recommends infrastructure and capital improvement projects for inclusion in the STIP.[142] "The ACTs serve as boots on the ground," notes Jerri Bohard, ODOT's Transportation Development Division Administrator. "We need local government buy-in for the projects we do, particularly those that make changes to the system. We are transparent about the projects we select."[143]

To develop a comprehensive and inclusive transportation network, ACTs are encouraged to "consider all modes and aspects of the Transportation System in formulating recommendations, taking into account the provision of elements and connections between air, marine, rail, highway, trucking, transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities."[144] Though the OTC has final say over decisions and planning, the ACTs recommendations and suggestions are influential. The OTC meets face-to-face in the regions with the ACTs to stay up-to-date on regional transportation needs, challenges, and opportunities.

Oregon Area Commissions on Transportation



Courtesy Oregon DOT

Funding for enhancement projects is allocated to five established regions throughout the state on a formula that computes population, vehicle miles traveled, ton miles traveled, and vehicle registrations. The ACTs then collaborate to identify how best to utilize funding to implement projects of value to the region.[145]

For more information on Oregon's ACTs, visit **www.oregon.gov/ODOT/COMM/Pages/act_main.aspx**.

[141] *Oregon Transportation Commission (2003). Policy on Formation and Operation of Area Commissions on Transportation (ACTs), www.oregon.gov/ODOT/COMM/docs/acts/actpolicy0603.pdf*

[142] *Oregon Department of Transportation. (nd) "Area Commissions on Transportation," www.oregon.gov/ODOT/COMM/Pages/act_main.aspx*

[143] *Personal communication with Jerri Bohard, June 2016*

[144] *Oregon Transportation Commission (2003)*

[145] *Personal communication with Jerri Bohard, June 2016*

Pennsylvania

Quick Facts

Number of Rural Planning Organizations: 4

Total annual funding: $346,000 - $390,000 (80% federal funds, 10% state match, 10% local match)

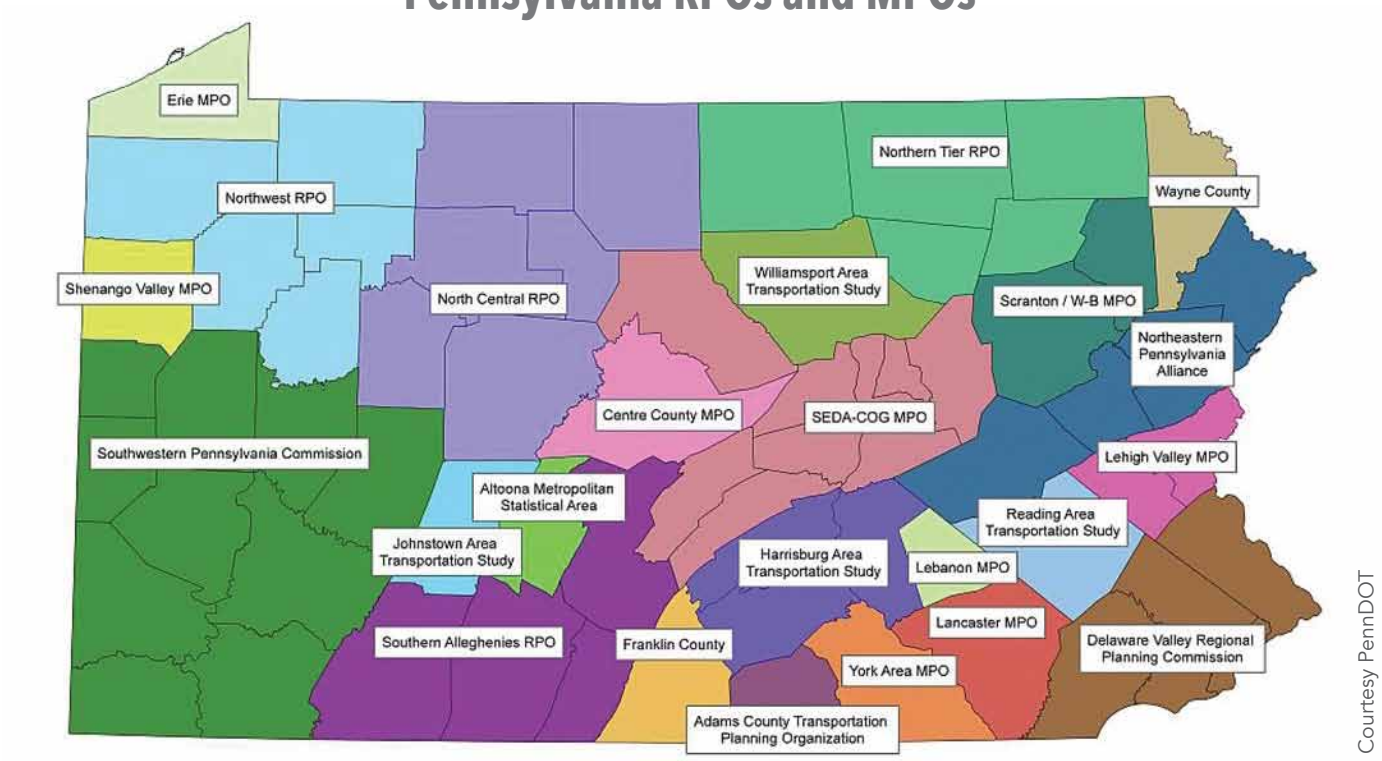
Date established rural transportation planning program: 1992

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 MPOs. The state partners with and funds four of the state's regional development organizations (known locally as local development districts) to conduct rural transportation planning activities through rural planning organizations (RPOs). New areas in Pennsylvania were designated as urbanized after Census 2010, but before that, PennDOT also supported additional multicounty and single-county RPOs that became MPOs serving the state's new urbanized areas.[146] Membership in the RPOs is voluntary, but almost all of the nonmetropolitan areas of the state participate. Ninety-four percent of municipalities in Pennsylvania are served by either an RPO or an MPO.[147] RPO members include county officials, representatives of the major modes of transportation, PennDOT, and other transportation stakeholders.[148]

Major Planning Activities

Notably, the state provides its RPOs with the same status as MPOs. State, regional and local decision-makers participate in the transportation planning programs of the four RPO regions via technical advisory and policy committees. Each RPO is responsible for identifying and prioritizing transportation issues and opportunities within their regions through a strategic long-range planning process and shorter-range TIP that is incorporated into the STIP. Each RPO receives an allocation of funding to program, based on a formula, and the plans are based on the funding assumptions developed jointly with PennDOT.[149] Every project included in the long-range plan or TIP goes through a screening process that links planning to environmental considerations according to the National Environmental Protection Act.[150]

Pennsylvania RPOs and MPOs



Courtesy PennDOT

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

The RPOs also receive some Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) funding from PennDOT to market and coordinate LTAP trainings for local governments within the RPOs' service area and to identify training needs. This partnership with the RPOs helps Pennsylvania's LTAP program to target trainings to specific regional audiences.[151]

Work Groups

In addition to regular meetings that all MPO and RPO planning partners attend, PennDOT has formed work groups to focus on particular topics. Each work group has a membership that includes representatives of rural, small metro, and large metro regions, as well as the state (including transportation modal offices as appropriate) and FHWA division staff. The work group's role is to develop guidance for all planning regions in the state to follow. One work group produces financial guidance, which guides the funding assumptions made within each region's planning process. Another shapes the development of the regions' planning work programs by identifying the range of tasks, and expectations for those types of tasks, that regions can complete with their allocated planning budget. The guidance is cooperatively developed by the regional, state, and federal representatives, and all regions refer to the guidance developed by the work groups when putting together their own local planning and process deliverables.[152]

According to both state and local officials, the RPO planning 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 engages in a wide range of special projects and studies that address locally identified issues either through their regular work program or with special supplemental planning funds. The institutionalized structures for considering local input, using it to program projects and shape plans, and ensuring regular communication between state and regional actors through the regional transportation

committees and the statewide work groups has supported the success of the RPO effort since it was established.

[146] *Personal communication with Jim Saylor, Alan Baranski, 2014*

[147] *PennDOT (2014). SPR Work Program, www.dot.state.pa.us/public/Bureaus/Cpdm/Fiscal/2014-16%20Work%20Program.pdf*

[148] *Penndot (2014). Twelve-Year Work Program*

[149] *Personal communication with Amy Kessler, December 2015*

[150] *Northwest Commission (2016). Northwest RPO 2016 - 2018 UPWP; Southern Alleghenies PDC (2016)*

[151] *PennDOT (2014). SPR Work Program, www.dot.state.pa.us/public/Bureaus/Cpdm/Fiscal/2014-16%20Work%20Program.pdf*

[152] *Personal communication with Amy Kessler, December 2015*

South Carolina

Quick Facts

Number of Councils of Governments: 10

Total annual funding: $106,500 (80% federal funds from FHWA SPR and FTA Planning, 20% local match)

Date established rural transportation planning program: 1997

In 1997, the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) began to contact with the state's existing network of regional councils of governments (COGs) to conduct rural planning activities to plan for rural road improvements. The COGs serve as a liaison between local governments, SCDOT, and federal agencies to coordinate transportation planning and priorities. Jennifer Tinsley, Planning, Community, Tourism, and Economic Development Administrator for Lower Savannah COG, explains the central liaison role the COGs play, "When local officials have concerns or questions about a transportation issue, they are likely to come to the COGs to find the information. They know us, and they work with us on a regular basis on all kinds of issues."[153]

The regional planning model benefits SCDOT as well. "The structure we have certainly assists SCDOT with having an ongoing and cooperative rural planning

South Carolina Councils of Governments

Courtesy South Carolina DOT

process. The COGs give us a direct link to the rural local elected officials," says SCDOT Director of Planning Mark Pleasant.

To support SCDOT's efforts to develop a statewide long-range plan and STIP, the COGs develop their own 20-year rural long-range plans and five-year regional TIP, which is fiscally constrained by year. The regional TIP is approved by the SCDOT Commission and included in the STIP. Each rural region is assigned a hypothetical allocation of federal Surface Transportation Block Grant and National Highway Performance Program funds to support their region's transportation priorities.[154] The allocation is based on population, and the rural regions program between $2 million and $7 million per year.[155]

Like states and MPOs across the United States, South Carolina's rural COGs are also increasingly evolving their planning processes toward performance-based planning. A state law passed in 2007 known as Act 114 established specific criteria to be used in prioritizing projects that are submitted to the SCDOT Commission. Those criteria include financial viability, public safety, potential for economic development, traffic volume and congestion, truck traffic, the pavement quality index, environmental impact, alternative transportation solutions, and consistency with local land use plans.[156] This prioritization framework shapes both the long-range plans and regional TIPs developed by the COGs. Going forward, long-range plans will be performance-based, in addition to complying with Act 114, and will demonstrate progress toward established targets.[157] As the South Carolina DOT and the state's MPO partners prepare to implement new federal requirements for performance management, additional roles will likely be defined for the rural COGs too.[158] This will enable COGs to assist with meeting state goals and track progress toward meeting their regions' critical outcomes.[159]

The COGs also conduct public involvement and local consultation through the formation of a rural transportation committee, similar to the technical advisory committee found in MPOs and in other states. The COGs' board of directors, made up of local officials and their designees and other leaders, typically serve in the role of a policy committee, adopting the regional plans and priorities. This arrangement allows for more local input in identifying and developing projects of high priority to the region.[160] The COGs also conduct public participation activities, often with the help of local officials who recommend other important community leaders and citizens, time and place for public hearings or comment opportunities, and other tips that support the public involvement process.[161] The state's evaluation of the rural planning program showed that a large majority of the responding rural local officials found that SCDOT's partnership with the COGs to be effective and satisfactory.[162]

The COGs have worked together with SCDOT to develop regional travel demand models to aid in the analysis of priority issues and projects. The COGs are responsible for data collection activities that maintain the model, including adding to a GIS traffic count database, socio-economic data, coordination with neighboring MPOs and other agencies on data.[163] The traffic models assist the COGs and SCDOT with analyzing roads in need of improvement, together with

information gathered through site visits to proposed project locations when necessary to gather more detailed data. This information, together with estimated costs and time to complete, is compiled into a list for consideration by the COG boards for adoption as the regional TIP.[164]

The Transportation Alternatives Program provides an important source of funds for local governments to access to meet mobility needs. The COGs play a role through their work program by working with applicants to develop project applications and define project scope as needed, and soliciting applications and evaluating them as appropriate to assist in the process.[165]

To increase consistency and ensure effectiveness of the planning process, SCDOT conducts an audit of the COGs' planning process every five years. This allows for the identification of both best practices and areas of improvement.[166]

For more information on South Carolina's COGs, visit the South Carolina Association of Regional Councils at **sccogs.org**. For additional detail about SCDOT's planning process, visit **www.scdot.org/inside/planning_faq.aspx**.

[153] *Personal communication with Jennifer Tinsley, March 2016*

[154] *Personal communication with Rick Green, December 2015*

[155] *Personal communication with Mark Pleasant, July 2016*

[156] *SCDOT (nd). "Act 114—Project Priority Lists," www.dot.state.sc.us/inside/act114.aspx*

[157] *SCDOT (2016). Contract between South Carolina Department of Transportation and Council of Governments*

[158] *Personal communication with Mark Pleasant, July 2016*

[159] *Appalachian COG (2015). Rural Planning Work Program, 2016 - 2017*

[160] *Appalachian COG (2015)*

[161] *Upper Savannah COG (2015). Rural Planning Work Program*

[162] *SCDOT (2016). Summary of 2016 Survey Results: Evaluating the Effectiveness of SCDOT'S Consultation with Non-Metropolitan Officials in the Transportation Planning Process*

[163] *Appalachian COG (2015)*

[164] *Upper Savannah COG (2015)*

[165] *Appalachian COG (2015)*

[166] *SCDOT (2016). Contract between South Carolina Department of Transportation and Council of Governments*

South Dakota

South Dakota's regional development organizations (known locally as councils of government (COGs) or planning and development districts (PDDs)) do not have a formal transportation planning role and do not function under contract to the state to perform planning-related tasks. However, four of these 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 global positioning system (GPS) data, which must be approved by the state.

While not tasked with a formal planning role that similar regional entities have in some other states, South Dakota's regional development organizations do serve in an informal intermediary capacity to promote communication between state and local agencies and to help local governments propose alternative maintenance agreements for stretches of roadway. Individual regional organizations have been active in rural transportation issues in other ways. For example, Planning and Development District III (District III), located in Yankton, has provided administrative support and completed financial records for the Mitchell to Rapid City Regional Rail Authority, a quasi-governmental entity that is spurring new private investment in the region. Additionally, District III staff and local government members meet with state DOT staff to review the STIP. District III staff also communicate regularly with the state DOT to discuss local and regional projects.[167]

For the past three years, the planning districts have also engaged with the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and other partners on the County Site Analysis Program which uses GIS to analyze potential development sites using criteria including transportation networks and other infrastructure considerations. PDDs are also partners in the state's Certified Ready Sites Program which uses GIS and other tools to research and document the status of properties under consideration for development, including analyzing transportation infrastructure and needs.[168]

[167] *Personal communication with Greg Henderson, Planning and Development District III, 2011*

[168] *Personal communication with Greg Henderson, Planning and Development District III, May 2016*

Tennessee

Quick Facts

Number of Rural Planning Organizations: 12

Total annual funding: $60,000 - $100,000 (80% federal funds, 10% state match, 10% local match)

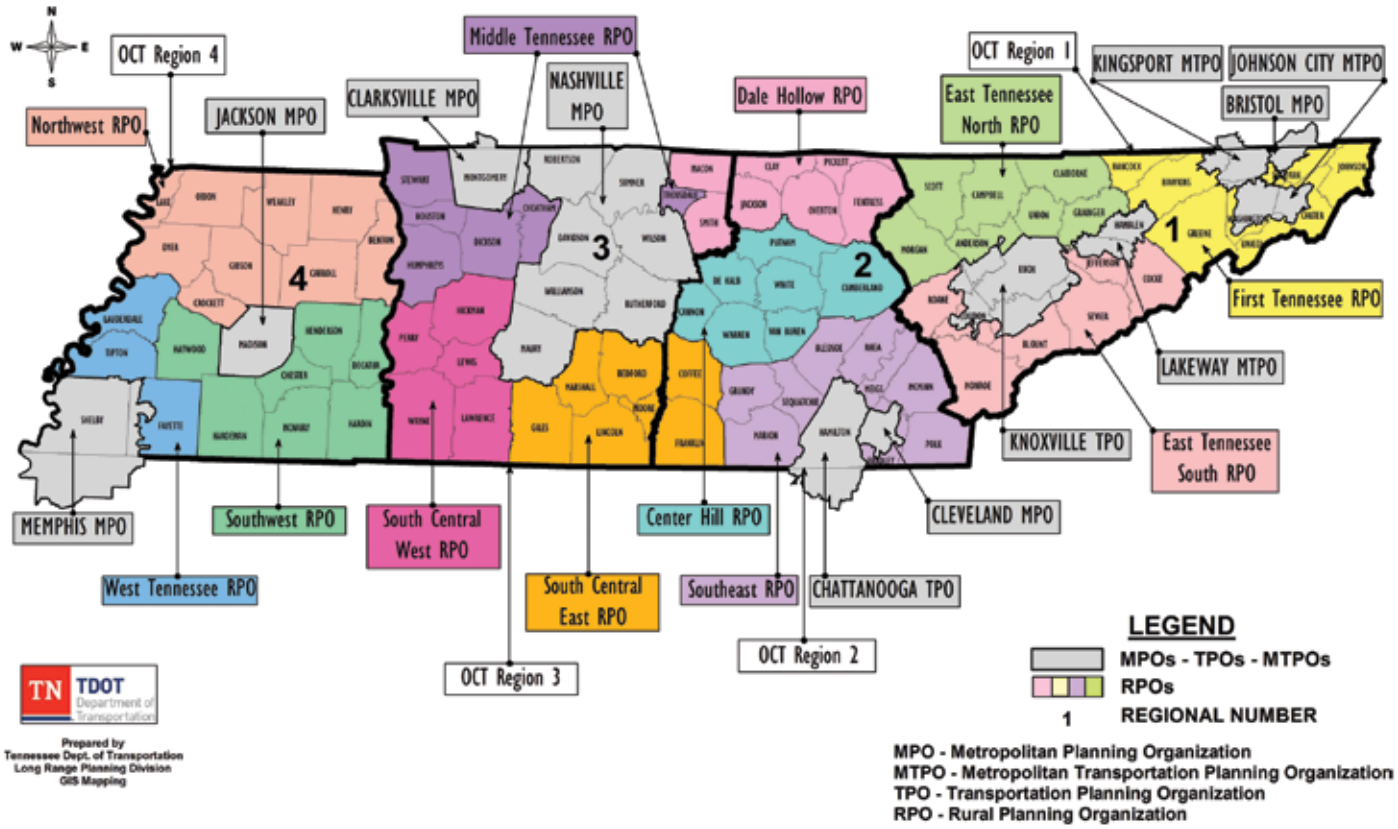
Date established rural transportation planning program: 2005 - 2006

Prior to establishing a statewide network of RPOs, Tennessee DOT (TDOT) formed regional working groups to improve transparent and responsive decision making. These working groups were intended to bring information to citizens and local leaders and get their feedback on project priorities. This feedback proved to be a valuable effort for a state with far more identified transportation needs than available funding, and a policy not to take on debt such as bonding. When TDOT initially reached out to local stakeholders for input, the agency displayed maps showing the transportation projects that had been identified in the statewide plan to determine whether those were still priorities. Many local jurisdictions reported that they were planning trip-generating facilities such as new schools, municipal golf courses and subdivisions on other corridors, rather than the corridors already slated for improvement. This offered an opportunity to discuss and revise project priorities and to generate an interest in ongoing interagency coordination on those issues.[169]

Through this effort to enhance feedback, TDOT heard from local officials and the public in the state's nonmetropolitan regions that they would like to continue the dialogue that had begun through the working groups. This led to the creation of the RPOs as a platform for sustaining communications and bringing local information into statewide planning through annual contracts with TDOT.

The RPOs have a two-tier organizational structure: an executive board comprises mainly local elected officials and includes a state senator and state representative; and a technical committee includes modal representatives such as short line rail, public transportation agencies, community airports, and inland waterway stakeholders, as well as county highway superintendents, city and county public works directors,

Tennessee MPO, TPO, and RPO Planning Areas



Courtesy Tennessee DOT

local planners, and other local government staff. The involvement of economic development actors has been key to coordinating transportation improvements with other projects, as has the ex officio participation of neighboring MPOs and RPOs, including regional planning and development organizations located in neighboring states.

The exact duties of the RPOs vary according to local needs, and the contract amounts are determined by a formula based on population.[170] Generally, the RPOs maintain databases of members, stakeholders, and interested parties to use in their public outreach regarding meetings or hearings, general announcements, information requests and surveys, and input on transportation issues. The RPOs summarize the input received through their outreach efforts to share with TDOT on a regular basis. TDOT and the RPOs may coordinate on special studies on particular issues or proposed projects, with TDOT staff often completing technical analysis and RPO staff coordinating input and identifying key stakeholders and site visits.[171]

The RPOs' roles and relationship with TDOT have continued to evolve over time. In 2013, TDOT created an Office of Community Transportation with community planning staff and resources in each of TDOT's District offices to improve delivery of planning services, especially outside of MPOs. "Working with TDOT staff in the regional offices has made a difference in planning and projects. Since then, we've had more opportunity to work with TDOT on developing projects, and analyzing safety and other impacts through our RPO," says Chris Craig, assistant executive director of the First Tennessee Development District. One example of this heightened collaboration has been in the road safety audits performed on roads within RPO service areas.[172]

Another opportunity for collaboration came about through the update of Tennessee's 25-Year Long-Range Transportation Policy Plan, initiated in 2013 and adopted as final in 2016.[173] The last statewide long-range plan update received feedback from just 100 people, but the new long-range plan had over 20,000 community inputs through an extensive outreach effort that included the state's RPOs. This outreach took place through multiple methods, including interactive presentations TDOT called "book-a-planner" presentations that gathered feedback from participants on their greatest transportation needs and

priorities for policies, projects, and funding.[174] Using the statewide network of RPOs was one way for TDOT to get the word out about the presentations and other methods for gathering input, including other in-person and online engagement strategies. The RPOs booked presentations for their own committees to participate in, as well as for local governments, local planning commissions, or other stakeholder groups that work with the RPO.[175]

For more information on the state's RPO program, visit **www.tn.gov/tdot/article/longrange-regionalruralplanningoffices**.

[169] NADO Research Foundation (2011). National Symposium for RPOs and MPOs, https://www.nado.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/2010symposium.pdf

[170] Personal communication with Stacy Morrison, July 2016

[171] TDOT (2013). Scope of Services

[172] Personal communication with Chris Craig, January 2016

[173] Personal communication with Angie Midgett, March 2016

[174] Stacy Morrison and Jonathan Russell (2016). TDOT 25-Year Long-Range Transportation Policy Plan, presented to the 2016 National Regional Transportation Conference, June 14, 2016

[175] Personal communication with Chris Craig, March 2016

Texas

Quick Facts

Number of RPOs: 13

Total annual funding: Varies; though there is no dedicated funding, RPOs have received planning assistance/technical assistance from TxDOT

Date established: Varies; 1999; most around 2008 - 2009

In Texas, regional planning organizations (RPOs) provide rural transportation planning support to places located outside of designated metropolitan planning areas that are served by an MPO. The role of these voluntary organizations is defined by the state in Title 43 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 16, which went into effect January 1, 2011. Regional development organizations (known locally as councils of government or COGs) have formed and operate RPOs to help address the rural transportation needs of their multi-county regions by "providing a forum for informed transportation decision making at the local level."[176]

RPOs are governed by local elected officials and work cooperatively with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to develop the Rural Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP), which is then incorporated into the STIP and the Unified Transportation Program (UTP), the state's 10-year plan.[177] TxDOT has contracted with entities across the state to conduct coordinated human services transportation planning according to the regional COG boundaries. Some of the COGs do engage in that work under contract with TxDOT, but other agencies such as transit agencies, MPOs, or counties also support transit planning work.

In general RPOs create a valuable forum for enhanced communication between state transportation officials and rural local government officials. RPOs can also be instrumental in informing the public about the transportation planning process. For example, the Alamo Regional Rural Planning Organization (ARRPO) and the TxDOT San Antonio District recently conducted community workshops in nine different rural counties. TxDOT provided the planning and technical support for ARRPO to conduct outreach to rural stakeholders

on regional priorities, public concerns, and hear from county officials and others about their needs and challenges.[178]

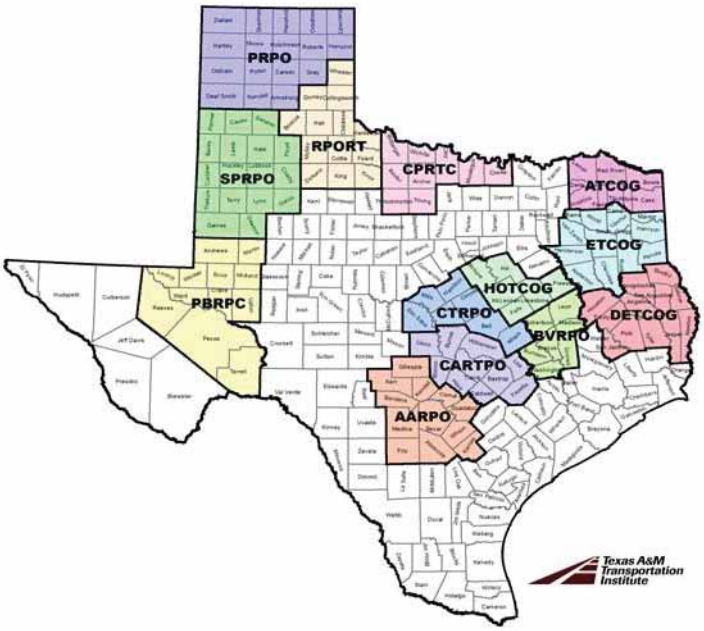
Although there is no permanent or dedicated state programmed funding for RPOs in Texas, RPOs may receive planning support from TxDOT in various forms.[179] With the support of a grant from TxDOT, the Brazos Valley Regional Planning Organization (BVRPO), affiliated with the Brazos Valley Council of Governments, conducts a Coordinated Public Transportation Planning to improve senior and disability transportation. As part of this process, a five-year plan update is required to address transportation inventory, identify gaps, and explore new opportunities. The grant meets the cost of a full-time planner, an intern, and additional resources. One of the positive outcomes to emerge from this effort is the development of the Brazos Valley Transportation Partnership. With additional support from the Area Agency on Aging, the partnership provides bus transportation for seniors and disabled residents and covers associated maintenance.

BVRPO creates the space for communication between local officials and state and federal agencies through a variety of forums, including a technical committee that meets quarterly and a bi-monthly transportation workgroup, as well as through other events and meetings. Topics such as economic development, safety, high-speed rail, freight needs, and highway safety improvements are often discussed. Additionally, the highway prioritization system allows local officials to communicate their challenges and opportunities and provide other feedback about projects and needs to TxDOT representatives.[180]

The South Plains Association of Governments (SPAG), located in Lubbock, and the Capital Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG), located in Austin, have also been supported by TxDOT in rural transportation planning efforts. SPAG has established the South Plains Rural Planning Organization (SPRPO) which delivers rural transportation planning with the support of $10,000 in funding from TxDOT. SPRPO's service area covers 17 counties which aligns with the TxDOT District. SPRPO acts as an advocate for this region on transportation issues and provides county officials with information and assistance, acts as a liaison between the TxDOT District and county judges and engineers, and coordinates meetings to facilitate collaboration between local and state representatives to plan for improved transportation infrastructure and avoid a duplication of services. SPRPO's efforts have led to better communication between state officials and local representatives. For example, sharing information has led to quick decision-marking about strategically identifying areas to locate Dynamic Interactive Message Boards to warn motorists of locations of high accident rates or inclement weather conditions. For many states, addressing winter weather impacts on the roads is a significant investment of resources. SPRPO has also been able to save TxDOT resources by making its own brine and converting two herbicide machines to spray brine to counteract ice on roadways in the region.[181]

The Capital Area Rural Transportation Planning Organization (CARTPO) is housed within the Capital Area Council of Governments. CARTPO, organized as the first COG RPO in Texas in 1999, continues to provide a venue for officials of both non-MPO and MPO counties to discuss transportation issues and identify regional priorities. CARTPO is careful not to duplicate the Capital Area MPO (CAMPO), and recently the two

Texas Rural Planning Organizations



AARPO Alamo Regional Rural Planning Organization
ATCOG Ark-Tex Council of Governments
BVRPO Brazos Valley Regional Planning Organization
CARTPO Capital Area Regional Transportation Planning Organization
CTRPO Central Texas Rural Planning Organization
CPRTC Cross Plains Rural Transportation Council
DETCOG Deep East Texas Council of Governments
HOTCOG Heart of Texas Council of Governments Rural Planning Organization
PRPO Panhandle Rural Planning Organization
PBRPC Permian Basin Regional Planning Commission
RPORT Rolling Plains Organization for Rural Transportation
SPRPO South Plains Rural Planning Organization

Courtesy Texas A&M Transportation Institute

organizations have begun coordinating on key road systems they are labeling "strategic corridors" so that CARTPO and CAMPO can advocate for regionally significant projects that span their territories. CARTPO was created to serve CAPCOG's ten-county region when CAMPO only covered one full county and slivers of two adjoining ones. Now CAMPO covers six counties, but the region-wide participation in CARTPO hasn't changed.[182]

From 2012 - 2015, TxDOT funded CARTPO's operations, including a Transportation & Economic Development Plan for three rural counties. CAPCOG, also the region's Economic Development District, believed much of the economic development activities in rural areas impact the transportation infrastructure as well, whether it's roads supporting industrial development areas or streetscapes for a downtown redevelopment effort. TxDOT agreed, and between 2012 and 2015 CAPCOG completed three different countywide transportation and economic development plans, generating new enthusiasm and ideas for planning in those counties.[183]

CARTPO is now working on a scope that can be broadly defined as collaboration services, with the intent to build capacity among staff throughout the region and catalyze project development in counties outside the MPO boundaries. CARTPO serves to connect elected officials, county and city staff, and TxDOT staff in a way that maximizes access to resources and information for county and city staff, advances knowledge sharing and the adoption of best practices throughout the region, and streamlines the flow of projects through the TxDOT development process. This approach links the MPO's activities with transportation planning in more rural parts of CARTPO's region, resulting in strategic and cohesive transportation planning across the 10-county Capital Area.[184]

[176] *Overman, John (2012). Rural Planning Organizations: Their Role in Transportation Planning and Project Development in Texas, www.nado.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/RPO-Participant-Guide-Handout-11-2011.pdf*

[177] *Overman, John*

[178] *Personal communication with Bill Mosely, February 2016*

[179] *Personal communication with John Overman, July 2016*

[180] *Personal communication with Michael Parks, December 2015*

[181] *South Plains Rural Planning Organization, 2015 NADO Innovation Award materials*

[182] *Personal communication with Betty Voights and Chris Schreck, July 2016*

[183] *Personal communication with Betty Voights and Chris Schreck, July 2016*

[184] *Personal communication with Betty Voights and Chris Schreck, July 2016*

Utah

Quick Facts

Number of Rural Planning Organizations: 4

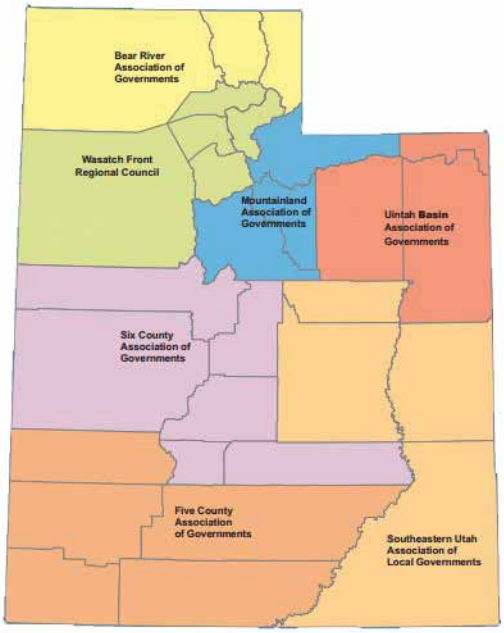
Total annual funding: $10,000 - $20,000 (including local match); regions receive $45,000 for mobility management activities

Date established: 2004 - 2008

In general, the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) conducts the state's transportation planning process in rural areas under 50,000 people that are not served by an MPO. Rural transportation needs and opportunities are incorporated into the statewide long-range transportation plan, a project plan which is updated every four years.[185] Rapid growth in certain parts of rural Utah have led to the state working with regional development organizations (known locally as associations of governments or AOGs) to assist in addressing rural transportation issues. AOGs staff rural planning organizations (RPOs) to provide transportation planning support and assistance to certain rural areas that are near urbanized areas and/or are growing quickly.

Of the state's seven AOGs, UDOT established Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) with four of them to outline roles, responsibilities, and funding support for five RPOs, serving one or part of one county each. One of the original RPOs disbanded after the adjacent metropolitan area expanded, and a second RTPO's geographic service area was reduced as another metropolitan area grew into the previously rural county. The RPOs' tasks vary depending on each region's area and context.[186] The RPOs' general activities include coordinating the local and regional transportation needs among the municipalities, county, transit agencies, state, and others in the growing regions. They serve a variety of functions to coordinate rural transportation planning between UDOT and local governments, as most generally "facilitate access management agreements to protect future right-of-way needs; facilitate data collection for traffic volumes, capital improvements, and land use changes; develop and maintain an RTP; and assist with development of annual STIP."[187] However, RPOs do not program funds or engage in construction projects. UDOT also relies on RPOs to involve local

Utah Associations of Governments



Courtesy Utah's Associations of Governments

officials in the state transportation planning process. Some AOGs house both an MPO and an RPO and benefit from joint collaboration within the AOG structure. These organizations can leverage the MPO staff relationships for RPO planning, technical assistance, and advocacy. In addition UDOT, most of the RPOs, and all the MPOs are on the same schedule for plan updates, which allows state legislators to compare all the proposed projects and financial assumptions simultaneously.[188]

The Mountainland Association of Governments (MAG) serves as both an MPO (for the urbanized Utah County) and RPO (for the rural Wasatch County). It has entered into a memorandum of understanding with UDOT to establish and maintain the Wasatch County Rural Planning Organization. The MOU states the main responsibilities for MAG in carrying out its duties to support the RPO as it serves local communities with transportation planning. Technical support includes data sharing with local governments, gathering 2040 population and employment data to inform a travel demand model, and participating in other regional transportation studies.[189] The Statewide Travel Demand Model developed by UDOT in particular has helped staff to better advocate for project prioritization at the state level. Additionally, the RPO recommends Transportation Alternative Program projects for the region. The Wasatch RPO is funded at $10,000 from

UDOT Region 3 in addition to $10,000 from the local governments split per-capita for a $20,000 annual program hosted by the Mountainland AOG.[190] Like its counterparts, the Wasatch County RPO serves as an intermediary between the state and local stakeholders. This includes creating an opportunity for UDOT to consult and coordinate with local elected officials, holding RPO meetings, and participating in an annual UDOT local visit. "The local governments find the Wasatch RPO an excellent and efficient venue to work with and model traffic with UDOT for future needs and to solve immediate safety issues. It helps with communication between both technical and policy level staff," notes Shawn Seager, MAG's MPO Director.[191]

In summary, Wasatch County RPO's MOU notes the value that Utah's RPOs have in addressing the transportation needs of their regions: "Interagency coordination between local and state governments facilitated by the RPO is smoothing the transition process between transportation planning and project development processes while ensuring that community transportation needs are recognized."[192]

In addition to the planning tasks provided by the RPOs, five of the state's AOGs also provide mobility management services, through FTA grants from UDOT. The AOGs develop a coordinated human services transportation plan and may staff a coordinating council of other agencies and stakeholders to guide the development of the plan and coordination activities.[193]

[185] Utah Department of Transportation (nd). "Metropolitan and Statewide Transportation Planning," www.udot.utah.gov/main/f?p=100:pg:0:::1:T,V:272

[186] Personal communication with Jeff Harris, July 2016

[187] Utah Department of Transportation (2015). 2015 – 2040 Long-Range Transportation Plan: Transportation in Utah's Rural Areas, www.udot.utah.gov/main/uconowner.gf?n=23540107153558604

[188] NADO Research Foundation (2010). Four Corners Rural Transportation Forum: Summary of a Peer Learning Exchange, www.nado.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/4Corners10.pdf

[189] Wasatch County Rural Planning Organization (2013). Memorandum of Understanding between the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) and Mountainland Association of Governments (MAG), FY 2014

[190] Personal communication with Shawn Seager, June 2016

[191] Personal communication with Shawn Seager, June 2016

[192] Wasatch County Rural Planning Organization (2013). Memorandum of Understanding between the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) and Mountainland Association of Governments (MAG), FY 2014

[193] UDOT (nd). Regional & Mobility Management Contacts; personal communication with Brian Carver, July 2016

Vermont

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Planning Commissions serving rural areas: 10

Total annual funding: $150,000 - $250,000 (80% federal funds, 10% state match, 10% local match)

Date established rural transportation planning program: 1992

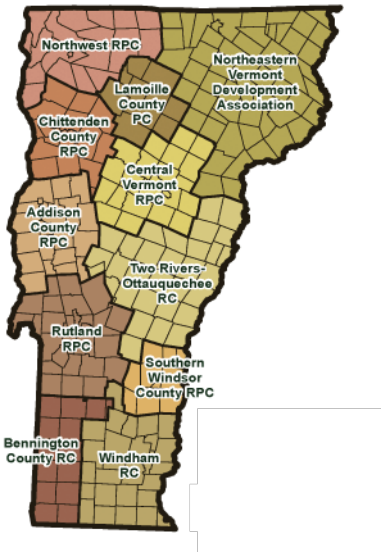
In 1992, the Vermont Agency on Transportation (VTrans) launched the new Transportation Planning Initiative that was specifically designed to move the state transportation planning process to the local and regional levels in the rural portions of the state. This involved creating expanded opportunities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

VTrans partnered and contracted with the state's 11 regional planning commissions (RPCs) to implement the new program consistently across the state, since these regional groups already had years of regional planning experience and established credibility with local officials and the public. Of the 11 total RPCs in Vermont, 10 serve rural areas, and one serves as the state's only MPO.[194]

The RPC process was also set up to help the agency comply with both the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act and state laws (Act 250 and Act 200) enacted in the 1970s and 1980s that require state agencies to conduct extensive public outreach on infrastructure projects with land use implications. In 2007, the state legislature also passed a bill codifying the RPCs' role of performing rural transportation planning work in order to ensure that local consultation requirements were met.[195] The RPCs' transportation work is funded through an allocation of FHWA statewide planning and research funds, disbursed according to a formula based on population, number of towns served, and highway mileage.[196] Special studies relating to transit planning are sometimes funded through FTA planning grants, with match provided by local transit agencies or other sources.[197]

As part of the annual work program, the RPCs operate transportation advisory committees composed of

Vermont's Regional Planning Commissions



Courtesy Vermont Association of Planning & Development Agencies

community officials, public transportation providers, interest groups and individual citizens. The RPC staff also attend local meetings, such as selectboard, planning commission, conservation commission, or other business and civic group meetings to gather input and provide information about transportation issues. 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.[198]

Assistance to localities on transportation issues is an important part of the Transportation Planning Initiative, with 37 percent of the state's regional planning budget spent on local technical assistance such as scoping studies and bridge, culvert, sidewalk, and sign inventories.[199] The RPCs conduct traffic counts at the request of either VTrans or local towns, as well as conducting bicycle and pedestrian counts, and highway sufficiency rating data, occupancy counts at park and ride facilities, and other data collection and analysis to support planning.[200] The RPCs also support transit planning, safety efforts, scenic byways, rail trail councils and other groups, and other efforts that meet local needs.[201]

As part of the planning process, the RPCs work together on projects that cross jurisdictional boundaries, such as

Courtesy Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission

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.The RPCs facilitate improved dialogue between the state and local communities, which may be one of their most valuable contributions as they work to ensure that top-down decisionmaking has valuable local input and that localities receive technical assistance to benefit their own transportation decisions and investments.[202]

Following the significant damage that occurred to state and local infrastructure when Tropical Storm Irene hit Vermont in 2011, VTrans engaged the RPCs to assess needed local road repairs, while the state agency focused on state-owned roads. The responsibilities the RPCs took on in the immediate aftermath of the storm went beyond their typical transportation activities at the time. However, the state agencies and RPCs have taken steps to formalize the regional roles following a disaster and continue to participate in training to implement the state's after action report.[203] Project development work relating to both recovery and resilience have become routine responsibilities, as the RPCs work with towns to analyze roads at risk of flooding and options for improving them. Bank stabilization along roadways, road relocation, road lowering, and roadway erosion analysis are some of the ways transportation resilience is built into the RPCs' work in transportation planning, community development, and environmental planning.[204]

For more information on Vermont's RPCs, visit **www.vapda.org**.

[194] *Vermont Association of Planning & Development Agencies (2015). VAPDA Annual Report*

[195] *Personal communication with Peter Gregory, 2012*

[196] *RPC Allocation Calculator*

[197] *Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission (2015). Transportation Planning Initiative FY 2016 Work Program and Budget*

[198] *TRORC*

[199] *VAPDA*

[200] *TRORC*

[201] *TRORC; Northwest RPC (nd). "Transportation Planning," www.nrpcvt.com/TransportationPlanning.html*

[202] *TRORC*

[203] *TRORC*

[204] *Personal communication with Rita Seto, Dan Currier, February 2016*

Virginia

Quick Facts

Number of Planning District Commissions serving rural areas: 20

Total annual funding: $72,500 (80% federal funds, 20% local match)

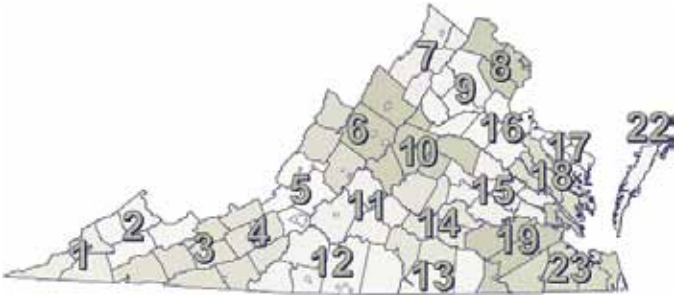
Date established rural transportation planning program: 1993

Virginia has implemented a Rural Transportation Planning Program (RTPP) to address the needs of nonmetropolitan areas of the state. The program is implemented in partnership with the state's 20 regional development organizations (known locally as planning district commissions, PDCs, or regional commissions) that serve rural portions of the state, including some regions that serve urbanized areas or staff MPOs as well as serving rural counties.[205]

The PDCs serve as liaisons with local governments, assist with the development of the statewide multi-model plan and the state highway plan. The PDCs develop a public involvement plan and a rural regional long-range plan, as well as working with local governments to identify projects to submit to VDOT for consideration in the six-year improvement program and the statewide multimodal plan update.[206]

In 2014, a new law known in the state as HB2 directed the Commonwealth Transportation Board to develop a scoring process to use for project selection for two funding programs, the Construction District Grant Program (which distributes funds by formula to the VDOT Districts) and the High-Priority Projects Program (a statewide competitive program). The PDCs are able to submit project applications through the process, called Smart Scale, along with MPOs, transit agencies, and localities that maintain their own infrastructure—most road miles in Virginia are maintained by the state.[207] This new grant application process is part of a statewide move to find increasing ways to improve transparency and communication about decisionmaking and to advance a culture of performance management. The culture of performance is also reflected in the state's first rural long-range plans completed in 2011, which identify particular deficiencies and opportunities for improvement based on standard criteria, and in the long-range plan updates that PDCs are beginning.[208]

Virginia Planning District Commissions



Courtesy Virginia Association of PDCs

Through their rural transportation work program, the regional agencies also complete a variety of tasks to meet local transportation needs, mobility concerns, and planning priorities. Depending on the regional context and needs, the PDCs may conduct special studies, prepare transportation alternatives and other grant applications, provide GIS services and products, develop rural transit plans and staff rural transit committees, prepare the transportation elements of local or regional comprehensive plans, conduct bicycle and pedestrian planning and trail counting, or complete other tasks that support transportation planning.[209]

For more information, visit the Virginia Association of Planning Development Commissions website at **www.vapdc.org**.

[205] *Darrel Johnson (2013). VDOT: Developing Long-Range Transportation Plans*

[206] *New River Valley RC (2016). FY17 Transportation Planning Work Program. Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission (2015). FY 2016 Rural Transportation Planning Work Program. Thomas Jefferson PDC (2016). FY 2017 Rural Transportation Planning Work Program*

[207] *VDOT (nd). Smart Scale: Funding the Right Transportation Projects in Virginia, http://vasmartscale.org*

[208] *Personal communication with Elijah Sharp, June 2016*

[209] *New River Valley RC, Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission, Thomas Jefferson PDC*

Washington

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Transportation Planning Organizations: 14

Total annual funding: $2.2 million of state funds invested statewide in RTPO planning

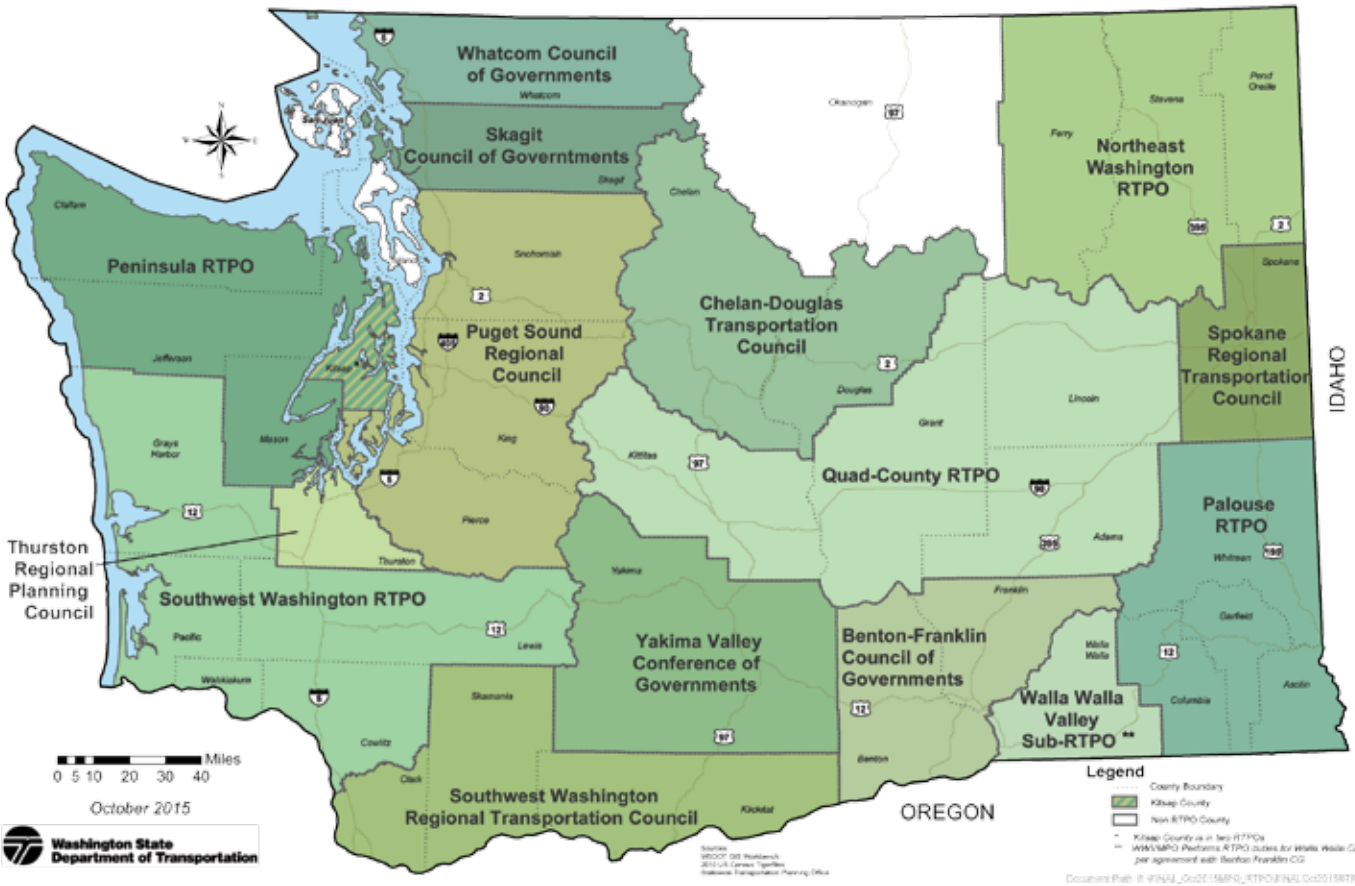
Date established: 1990

In 1990, the Washington state legislature passed the Growth Management Act, which in part authorized the state's Regional Transportation Planning Program. This program created Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) in both urban and rural regions of the state. RTPOs develop a regional transportation plan and coordinate wider regional transportation planning.[210] They maintain a Regional Transportation Improvement Program, updated every six years, and also ensure that county planning efforts meet the goals of the regional transportation plan. RTPOs are voluntary organizations covering 37 of the state's 39 counties, and whose members may include local governments, counties, tribes, transportation service providers, ports, and other key transportation stakeholders.[211]

The state provides annual financial support to help the regional groups implement their work programs, totaling $2.2 million per year.[212] Organizational staffing and administration for rural RTPOs varies and may be a regional economic development organization, county public works department, or the regional Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) office.

RTPOs serve many other roles in promoting coordinated regional transportation planning. They provide data and analysis to support local and regional decision making and also deliver planning and technical services on a contractual basis. They assist in implementing the Growth Management Act, address environmental quality

Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organizations



Courtesy Washington State DOT

issues, and pursue other initiatives determined by the RTPO. Finally, RTPOs serve as "consensus-builders," working to develop community consensus on regional issues through information and citizen involvement and pursue intergovernmental consensus on regional plans, policies and issues, and advocate for local implementation.

RTPOs are a Washington state designation, while MPOs are defined and established by federal law. RTPOs in Washington can be single or multi-county entities, and some agencies serve a dual function of housing both an RTPO and an MPO if the population meets the requirements for doing so. WSDOT views the MPO and RTPO requirements and responsibilities as "complementary" to each other.[213] In urbanized areas, existing MPOs receive federal funding and also serve as the lead agencies for RTPOs for their resident counties. WSDOT also supports and funds multi-county RTPOs.

For example, the Benton-Franklin Council of Governments (BFCG) is both an RTPO and an MPO, which serves as the MPO for the Tri-Cities area in southeastern Washington State and the RTPO for locations within Benton & Franklin counties (Walla Walla County is a sub-RTPO). BFCG's transportation initiatives are guided by a Unified Work Program, which is informed by the Tri-Cities Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (Tri-MATS).[214] Elsewhere in Washington, some MPOs have chosen for their designated MPO boundary to be coterminous with the RTPO boundary, while other RTPOs with separate MPO boundaries within their borders have the option of administering and planning for the programs together. The complementary programs avoid duplication.[215]

For more information, visit **www.wsdot.wa.gov/planning/regional**.

[210] Washington State Department of Transportation (1998). RTPO Transportation Planning Guidebook, www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/E5A25A1A-61E0-44E8-B000-AA546E5C3BE3/0/RTPOGuidebook.pdf

[211] Washington State Department of Transportation (nd). "Regional Transportation Planning," www.wsdot.wa.gov/planning/Regional

[212] Personal communication with Matt Kunic, July 2016

[213] Washington State Department of Transportation (nd)

[214] Benton-Franklin Council of Governments. "Transportation Planning," bfcog.us/transportation

[215] Personal communication with Matt Kunic, July 2016

Wisconsin

Quick Facts

Number of Regional Planning Commissions: 9

Total annual funding: $54,000 - $200,000 (typically 80% federal funds, 20% local match, or match divided between state and local funds), depending on population

Date established transportation program: 1976

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) works with the state's nine regional development organizations (known locally as regional planning commissions or RPCs) and 14 MPOs to establish a coordinated approach to local, regional, and statewide transportation planning. The RPCs serve all but five counties in the state and were formed by executive order of the governor as early as 1959.[216] Counties' participation in the RPCs is voluntary.[217] They began to perform transportation responsibilities under contract to WisDOT in about 1976.[218] For the nonmetropolitan areas, the work is generally overseen by the RPCs' governing commission membership, including local officials from cities, counties, and Tribal nations.

The RPCs' work supports statewide planning efforts in a variety of ways, varying according to the needs and context of the region. This can include by providing support on rail planning issues, including providing staff and administrative support for rail transit committees within their regions, and assisting WisDOT with long-range planning efforts related to rail activities. In addition, to facilitate local road and highway planning and programming, the RPCs provide planning assistance on regional issues and participate in discussions and assist with coordinating federal transportation performance measures and targets. The RPCs work on other transportation modes and special projects as well, with work activities on harbor, airport, transit, and non-motorized transportation planning, as well as support for Safe Routes to School or scenic byways as appropriate within the region.[219] For some regions, a focus on alternative modes such as downtown design and streetscape, bicycle and pedestrian mobility, recreational trails, workforce transportation, and resolving on-road ATV issues form the core of the work program activities.[120]

The RPCs assist communities with participating in state and federal programs, and provide planning and development assistance to local governments. This might include assistance with the transportation elements of comprehensive community plans, zoning and subdivision ordinances, grant writing, geographic information system map production, economic development planning and socio-economic data collection and dissemination. They also review grant applications for federal funds to ensure consistency with regional and local plans, as well as development priorities.[121]

For more information on Wisconsin's RPCs, visit **www.awrpc.org**.

[216] *Wisconsin DOT (nd). "Regional Planning Commissions," http://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/doing-bus/local-gov/plning-orgs/rpc.aspx; personal communication with Sheldon Johnson, June 2016*

[217] *Personal communication with Diane Paoni, June 2016*

[218] *Personal communication with Sheldon Johnson, December 2015*

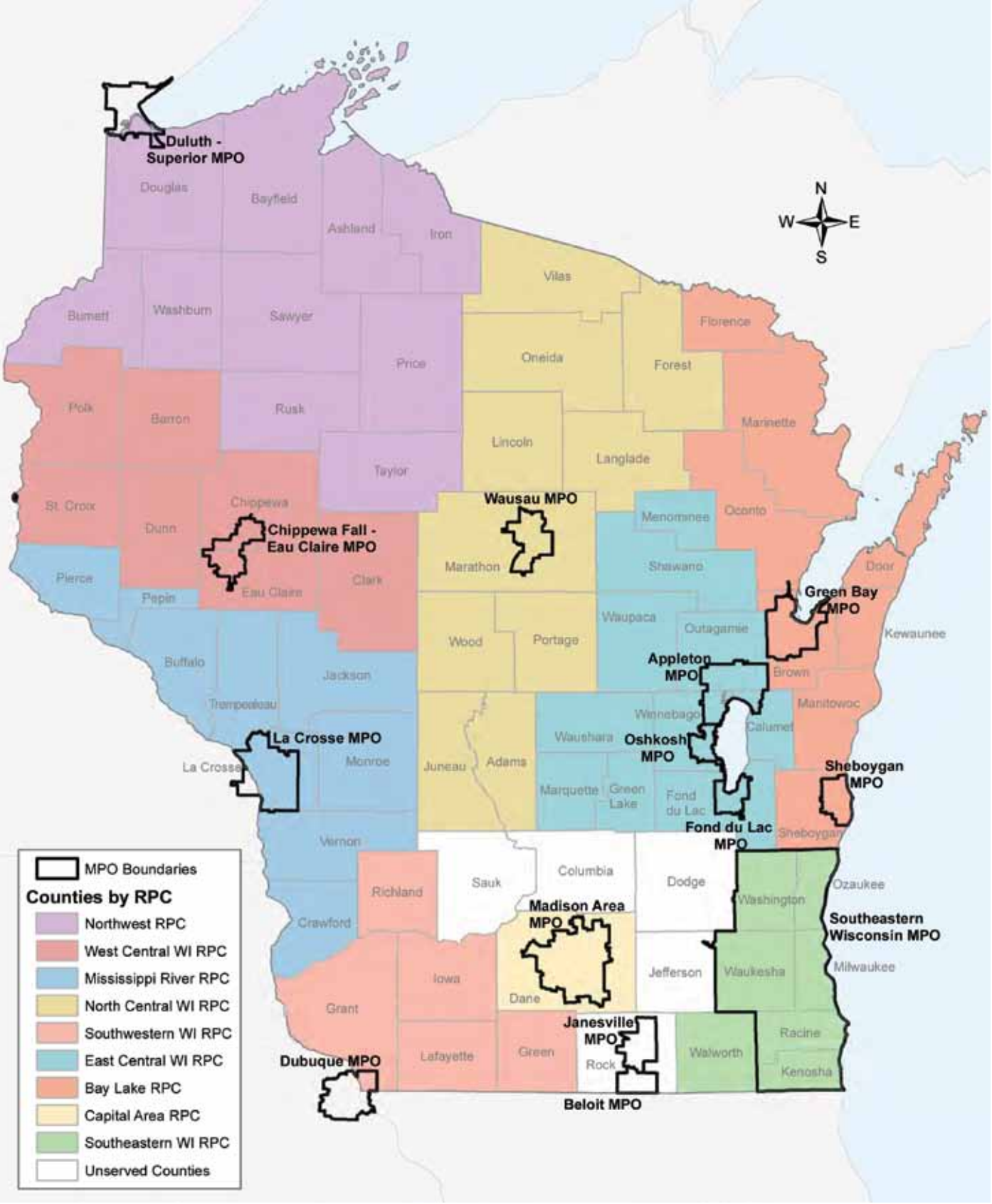
[219] *Northwest Regional Planning Commission (2015). 2016 Rural Transportation Work Program; Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (nd), "Current Projects"*

[220] *Personal communication with Troy Maggied, June 2016*

[221] *WisDOT*

Courtesy Wisconsin DOT

Wisconsin RPCs and MPOs



Courtesy Wisconsin DOT

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