
From Consultation to Cooperation

How States and Regional Partners Are Strengthening Rural Transportation Planning



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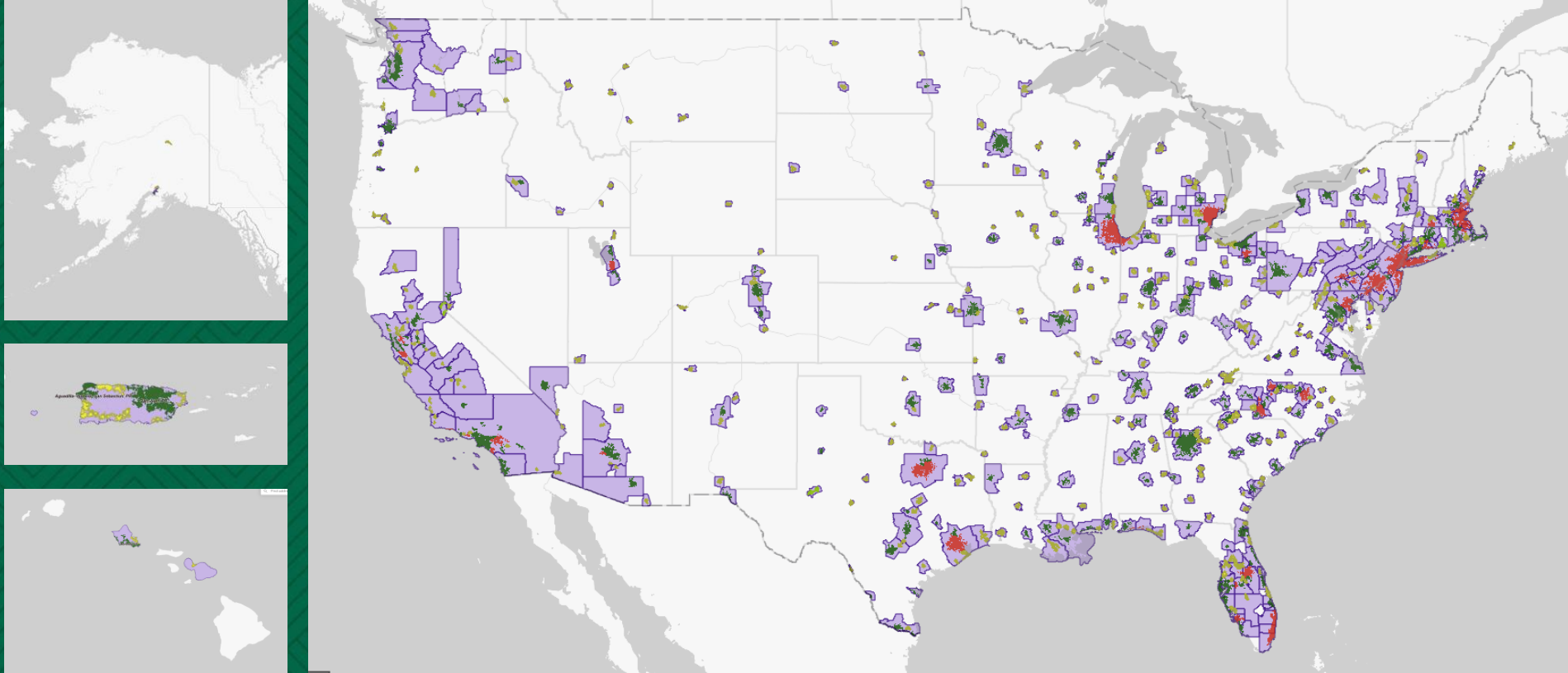


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Who plans transportation outside MPO areas?



■ = Metropolitan Planning Organizations (2020)

The Spectrum of Regional Planning Entities



Transportation Focused Regional or Rural Planning Organizations

Focus on rural transportation planning, technical assistance, long-range planning, and project prioritization.

- Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs)
- Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs)
- Transportation Planning Regions (TPRs)
- Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs)
- Regional Planning Affiliations (RPAs)



Broad Regional Planning & Development Agencies

Integrate transportation with economic development, housing, and other planning disciplines

- Councils of Government (COGs)
- Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs)
- Planning District Commissions (PDCs)
- Regional Development Organizations (RDOs)
- Planning and Development Districts (PDDs)



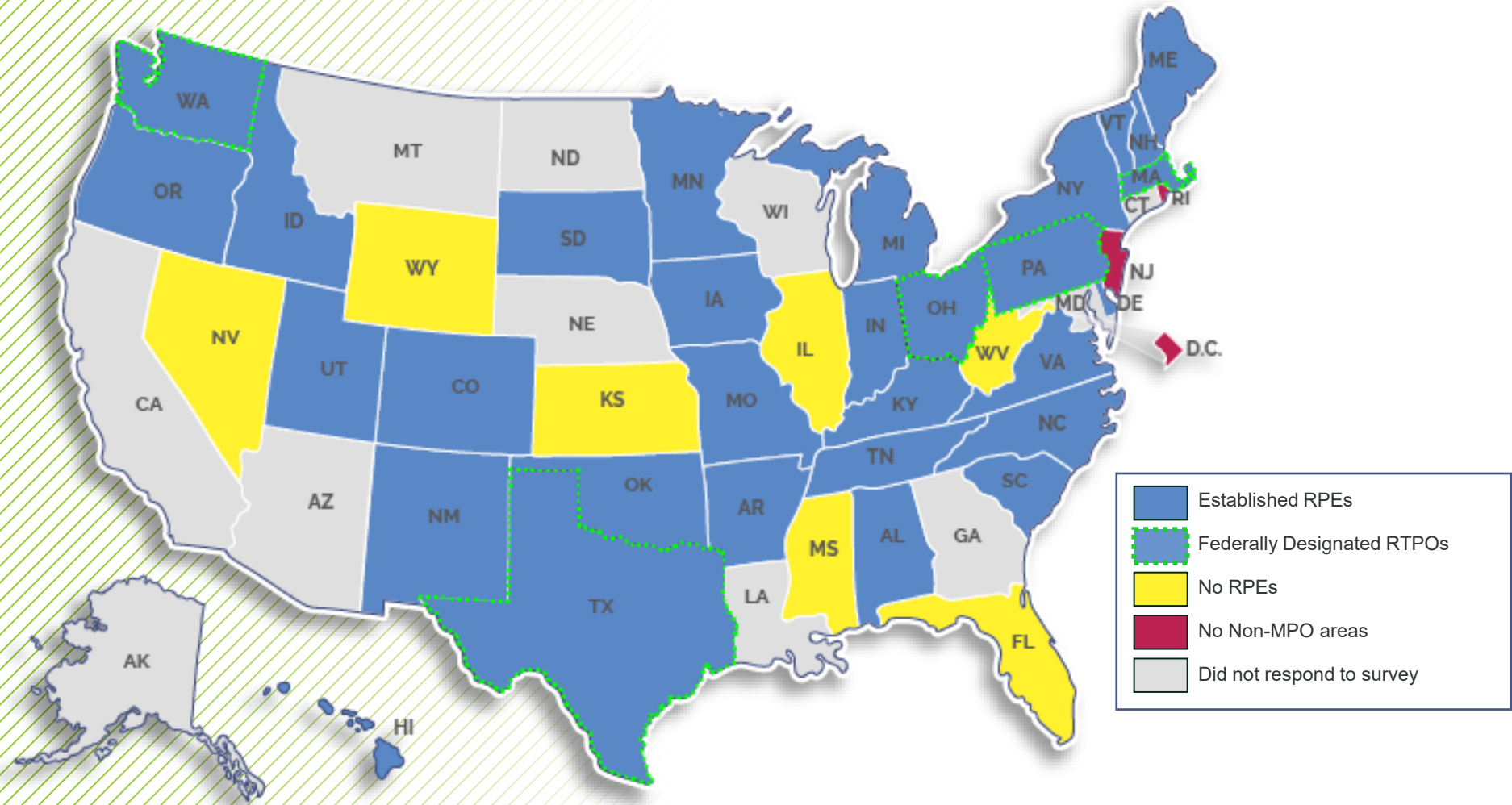
Advisory & Coordination Bodies

Provide a forum for collaboration between local governments, state DOTs, and other stakeholders.

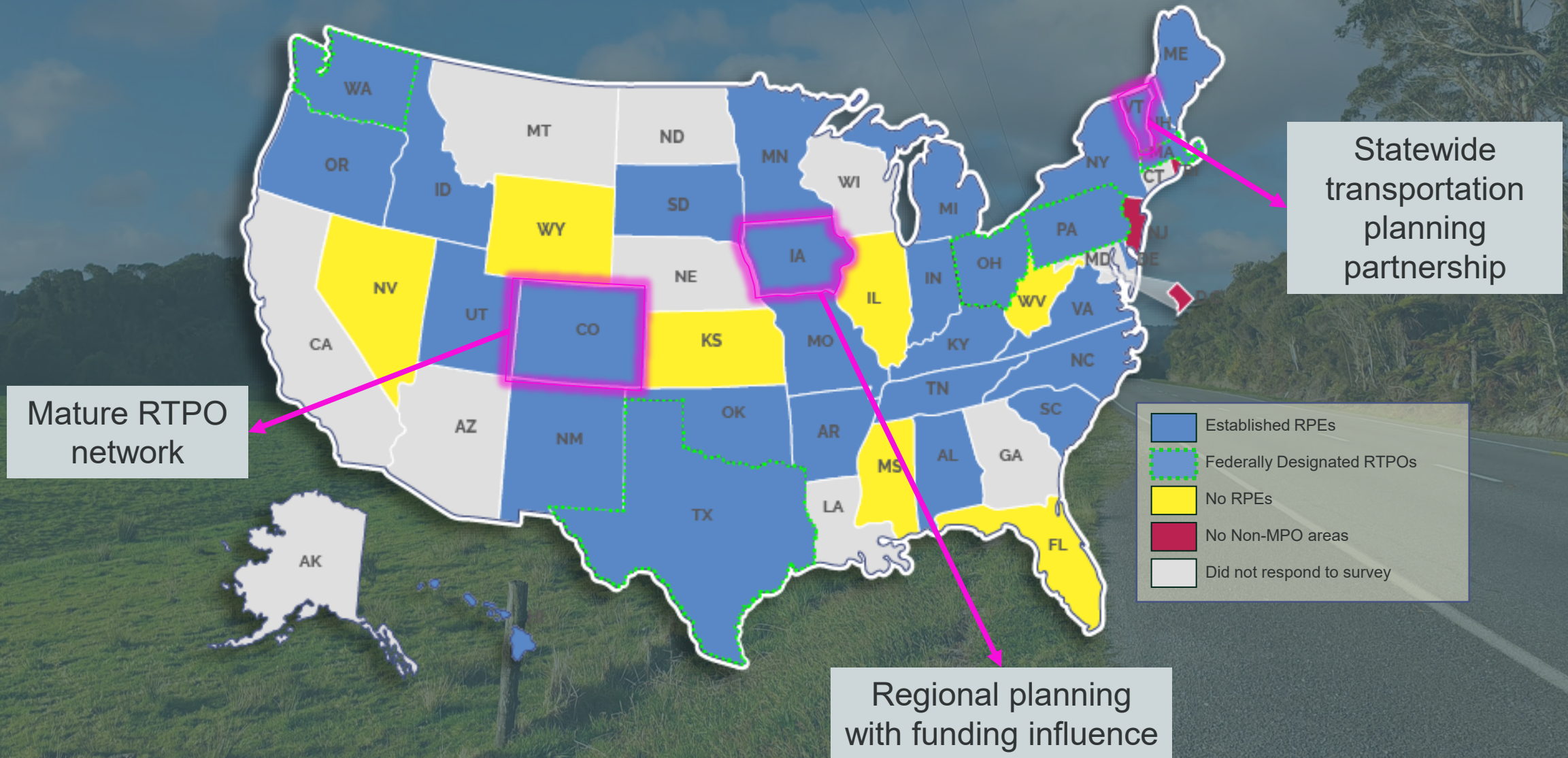
- Area Commissions on Transportation (ACTs)

These organizations are best understood by the **function** they perform, not just by the title they use.

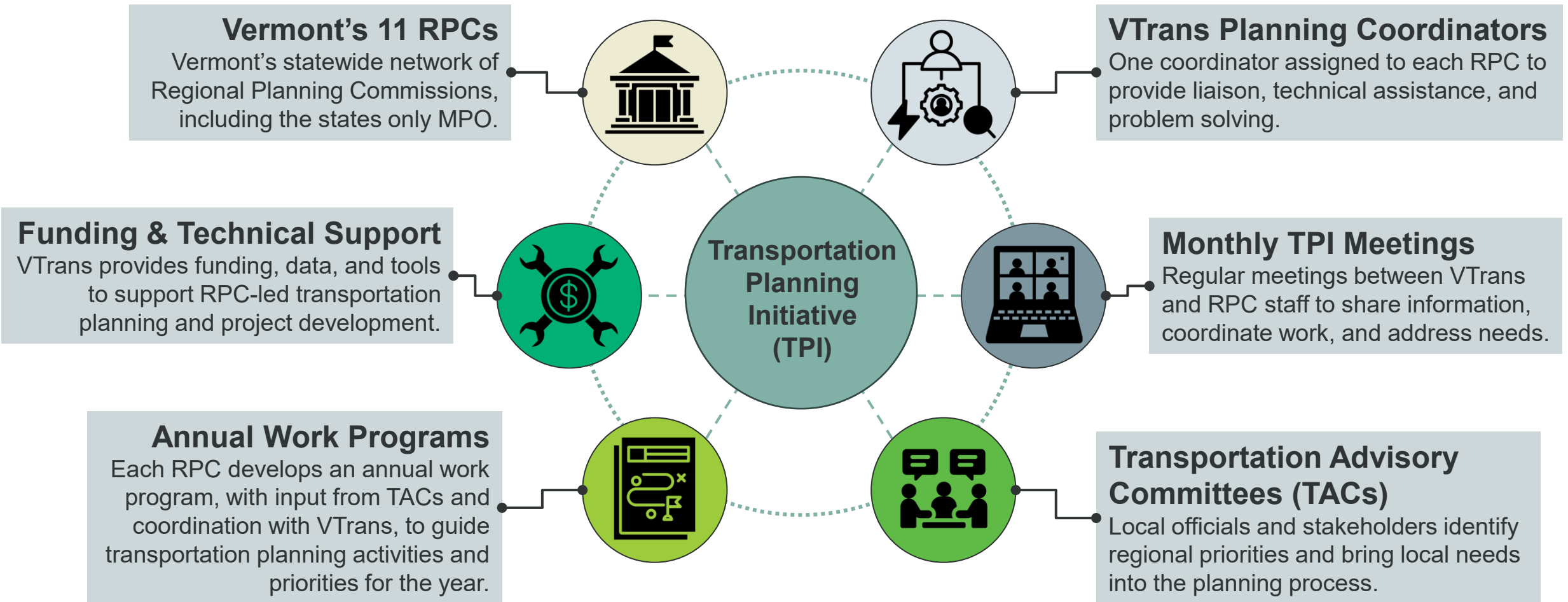
The Rural Planning Landscape Across the US



Three States, Three Different Approaches



Vermont: The Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI)

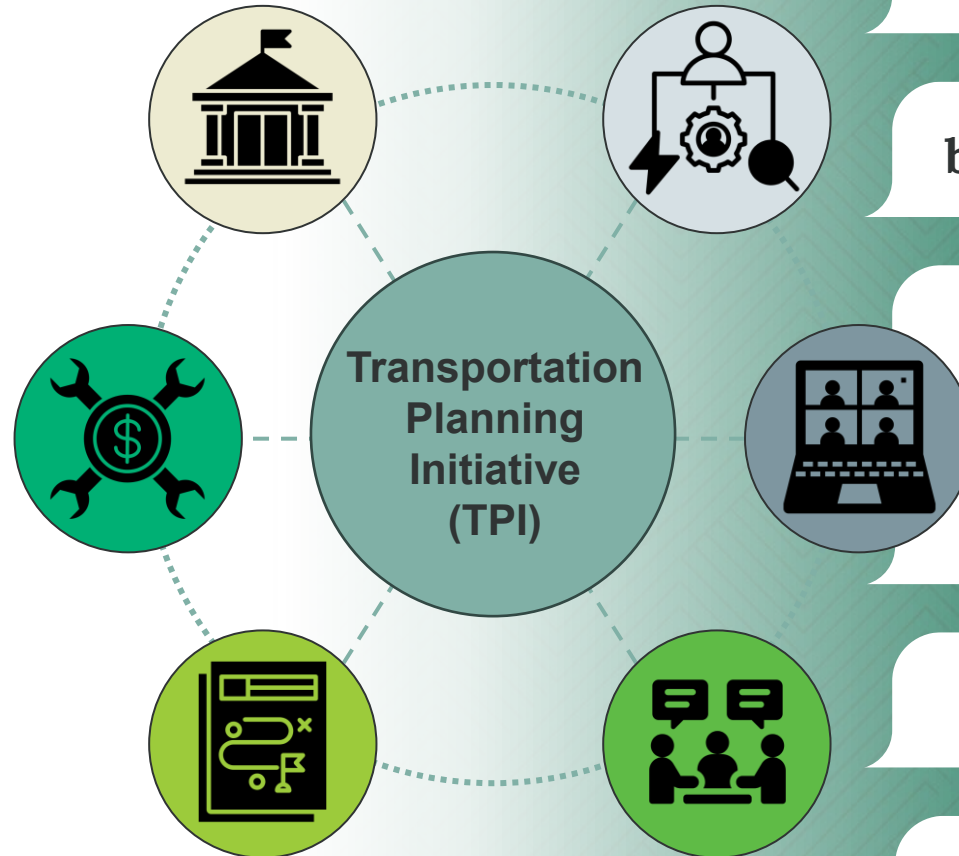


Vermont: What does TPI Deliver?



Small communities often lack transportation planning capacity.

The TPI expands local capacity through RPCs, technical assistance, and state support.



regional transportation plans

transit planning

bicycle/pedestrian planning

traffic counts

project development

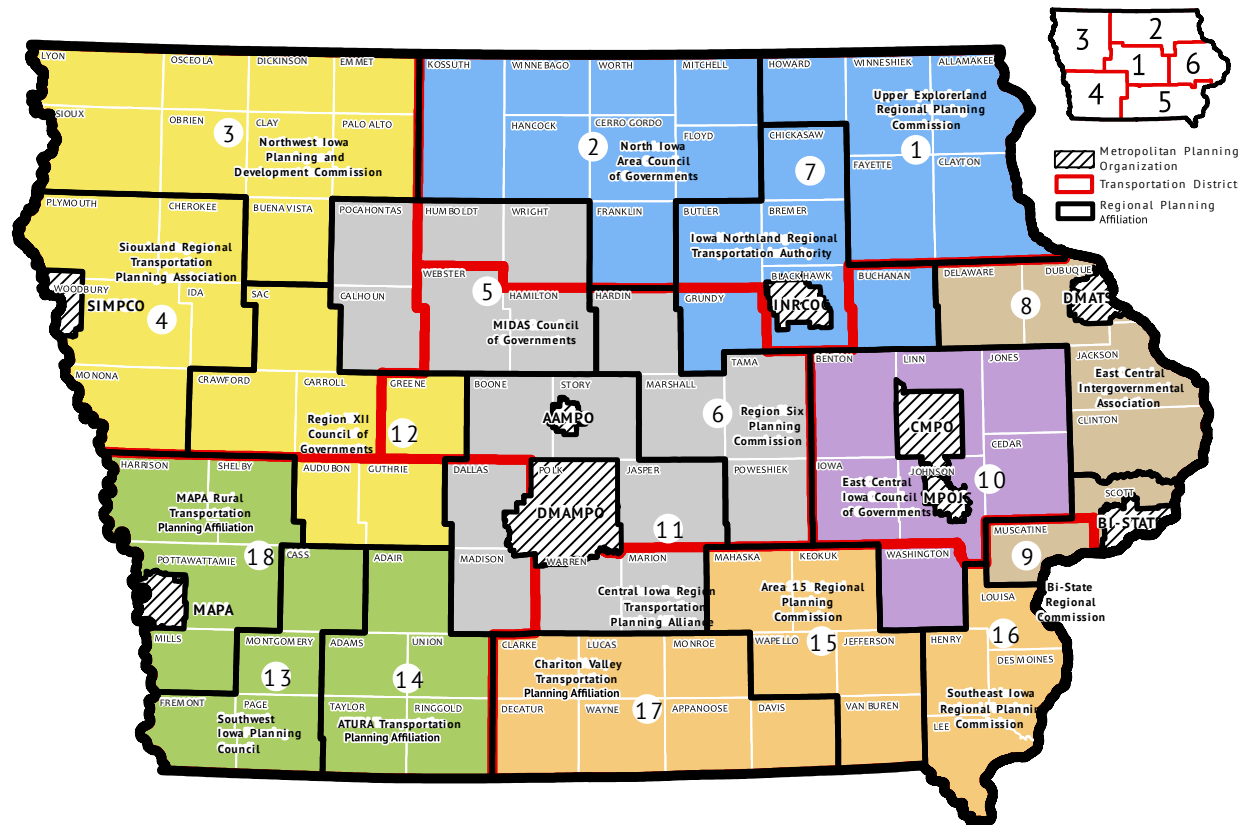
resilience planning

public engagement

Iowa: Regional Planning Affiliations

Reginal decision-making at scale

- 99 Counties
- 18 RPAs
- 9 MPOs
- Statewide Coverage



What RPAs Do



Develop Regional Plans

Create long-range transportation plans for their region



Engage the public

Conduct outreach and public involvement to identify needs and priorities



Identify Regional Priorities

Work with local officials and stakeholders to set transportation priorities



Program Federal Funds

Iowa DOT allows RPAs to directly program their allocations of STBG and TAP funds



Prioritize projects

Evaluate and recommend projects for funding based on regional priorities



Coordinate with Iowa DOT

Collaborate through quarterly meetings, reviews, surveys, and ongoing support



Maintain Planning Products

Develop TIPs, TPWPs, PPPs, PTPs, and other required planning documents.

Iowa: Supporting a Decentralized Planning System

Transportation Program
Management System (TPMS)

One statewide platform for project tracking, programming, and coordination.

Quarterly Coordination
Meetings

Align statewide priorities and share planning updates.

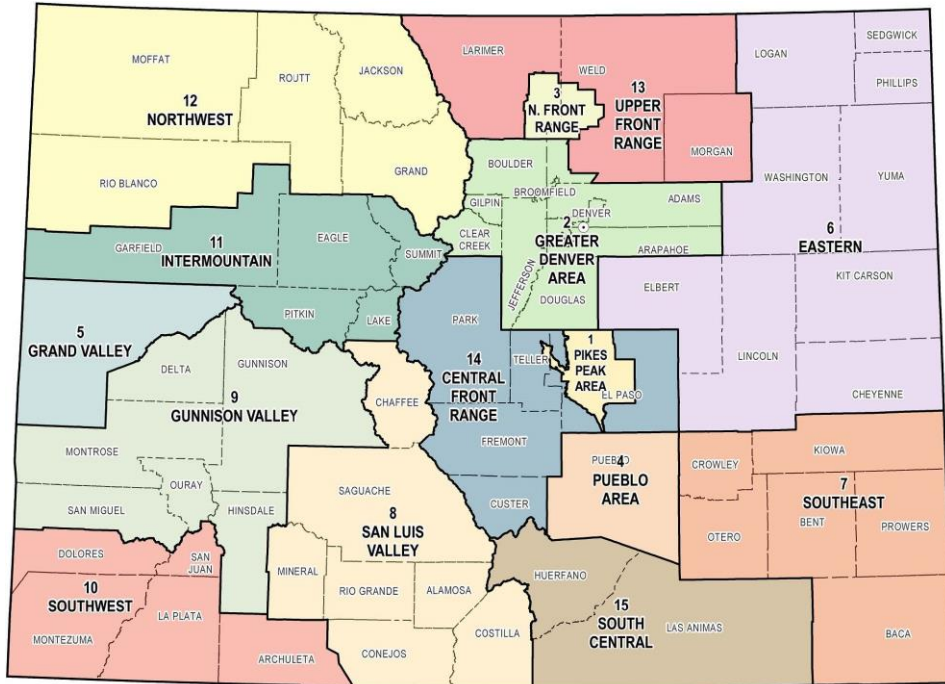
Certification Reviews

Ensure consistency, compliance, and continuous improvement

Annual Surveys

Identify emerging challenges and improve DOT support

Colorado: Transportation Planning Regions (TPRs)



15 Transportation Planning Regions (TRPs)

- 5 urban (MPOs)
- 10 rural (RPCs)

Notable Features of Colorado's Planning Framework



Statewide Transportation Advisory Committee (STAC)



Quarterly TPR Coordination Meetings



CDOT-Led RTP Development



Rural Planning Assistance (RPA) Program

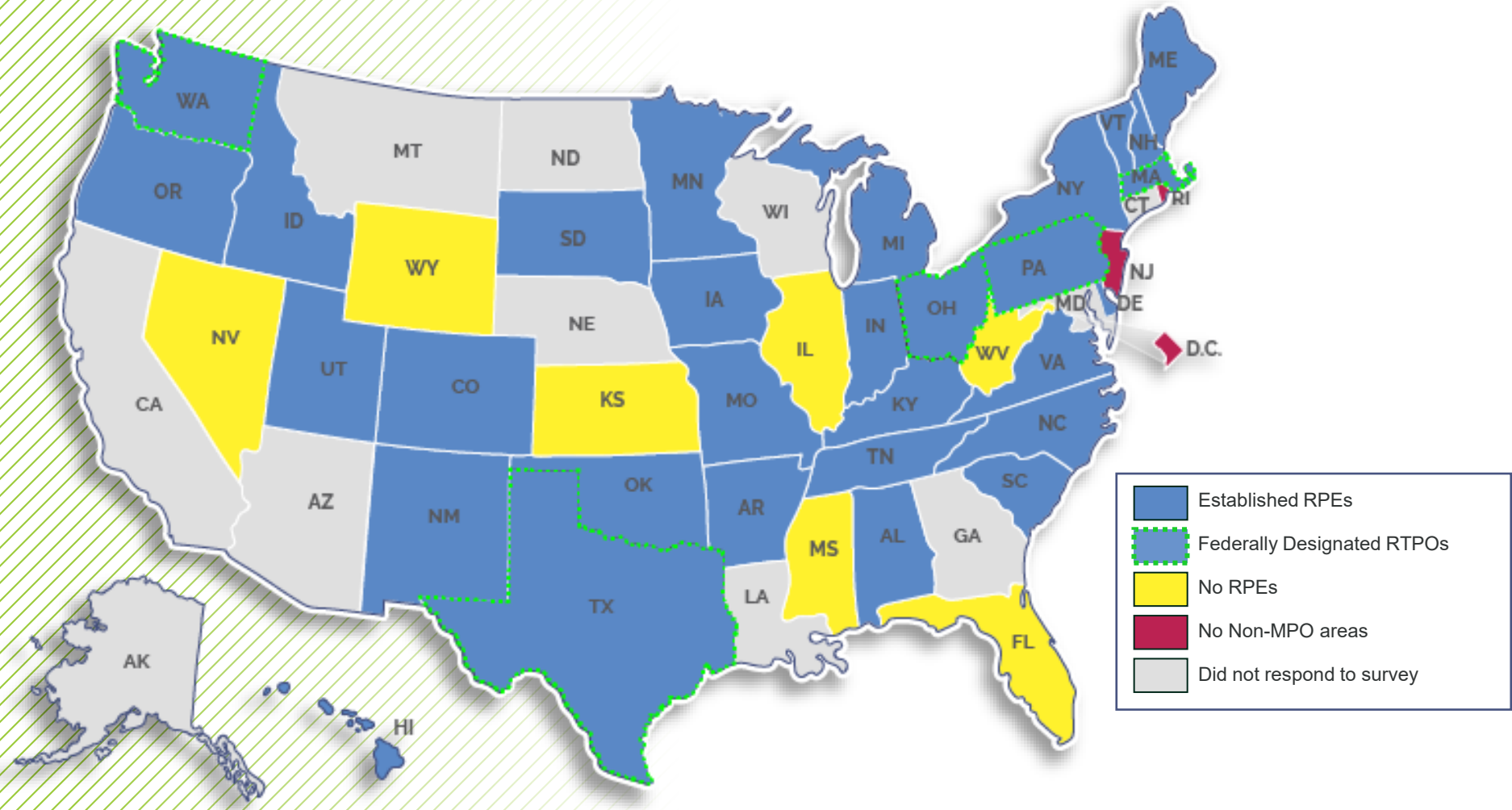


Multimodal Transportation & Mitigation Options Fund (MMOF)



Hands-On Technical Assistance

The Rural Planning Landscape Across the US



Four key practices we observed across state DOTs that support effective rural transportation planning:

Clear Roles and Responsibilities

Clearly defined responsibilities, agreements, and expectations reduce confusion and improve coordination.



Integrated Planning

Embed regional coordination across transportation, transit, land use, safety, and other planning activities rather than treating planning as a stand-alone exercise.



Strong Partnerships

Establish regular meetings, planning coordinators, dedicated liaisons, advisory committees, and other year-round communication channels.

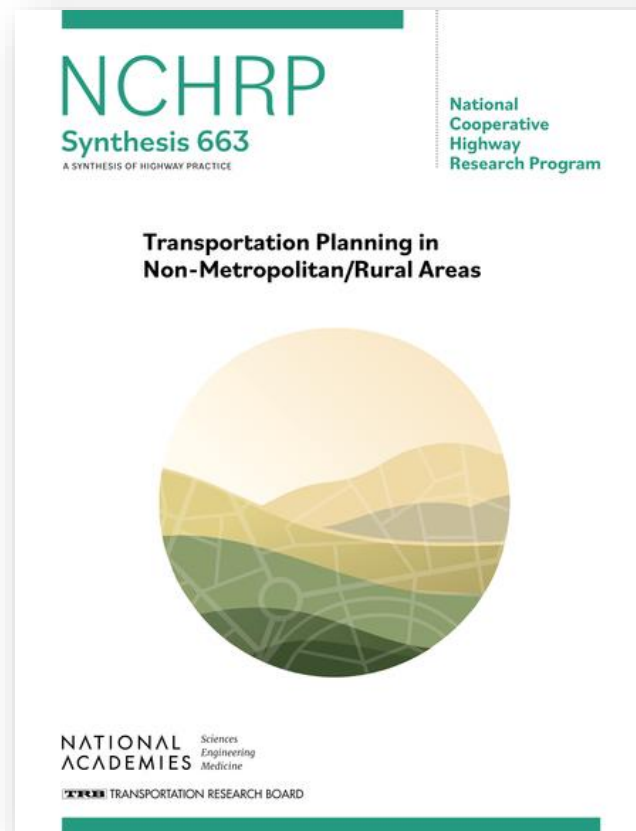


Investment in Regional Capacity

Provide funding, technical assistance, staffing support, training, and planning tools that enable rural partners to participate effectively



Read more in the
report



For questions or
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