



Regional Planning Affiliations in Iowa

History and Structure of Regional Transportation Planning

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IOWA | DOT

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Overview

Councils of Governments

Original geographic structure

History of Regional Planning

Creation and implementation of RPAs

RPA Structure

RPA board and staffing organization

RPA Expectations & Requirements

Work performed and oversight



Councils of Governments

The genesis of regional planning in Iowa

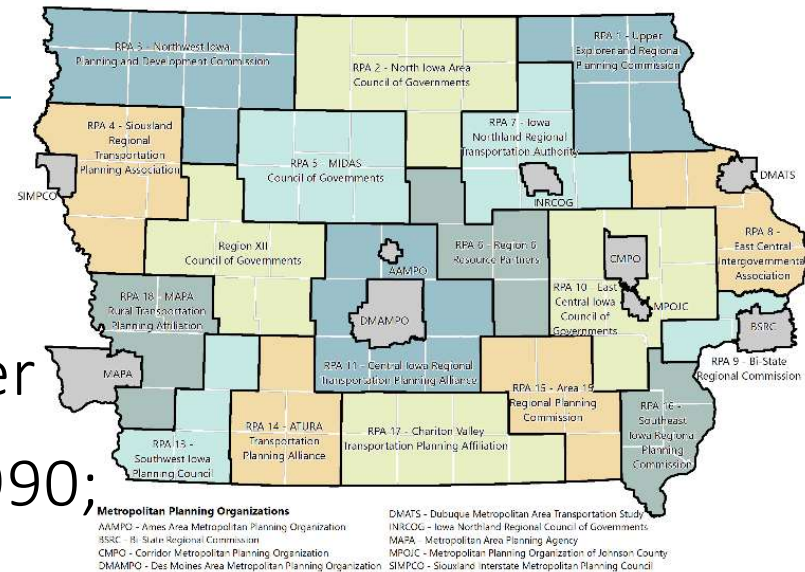


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Iowa Councils of Governments

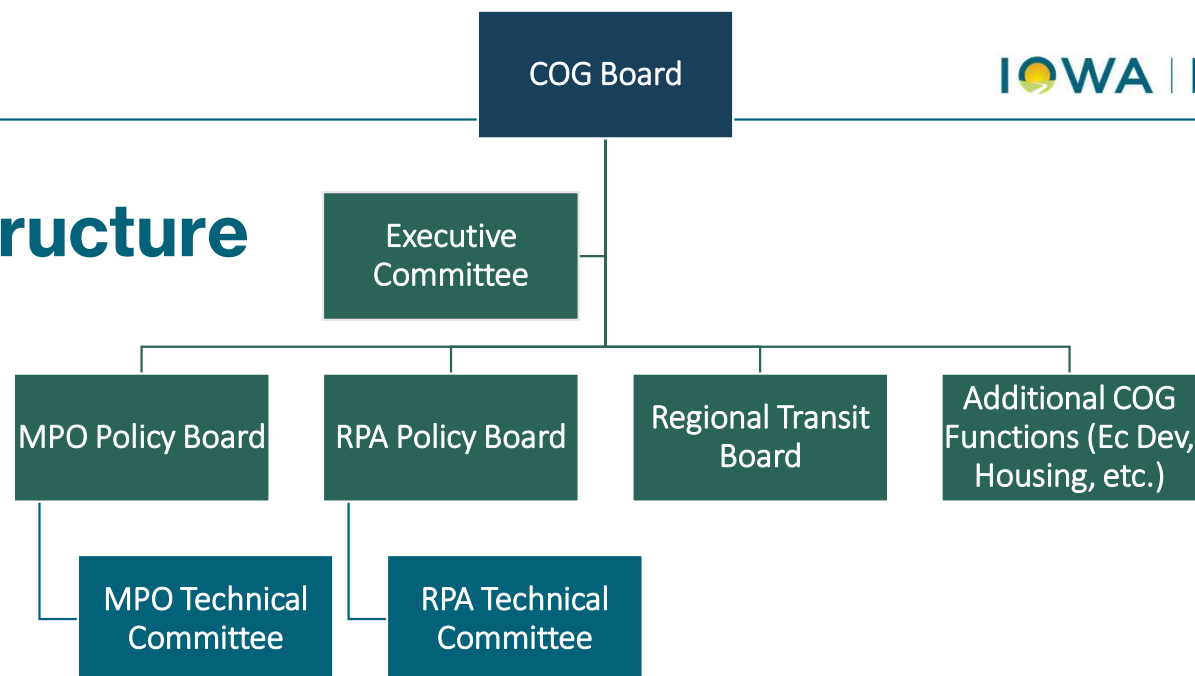
- Established 1968 by Executive Order
- Codified by General Assembly in 1990;
 - Iowa Code chapter 28H
- Each COG provides services that are tailored to the unique needs of its region and communities
- COG staff members can/often serve as an extension of city/county staff for planning



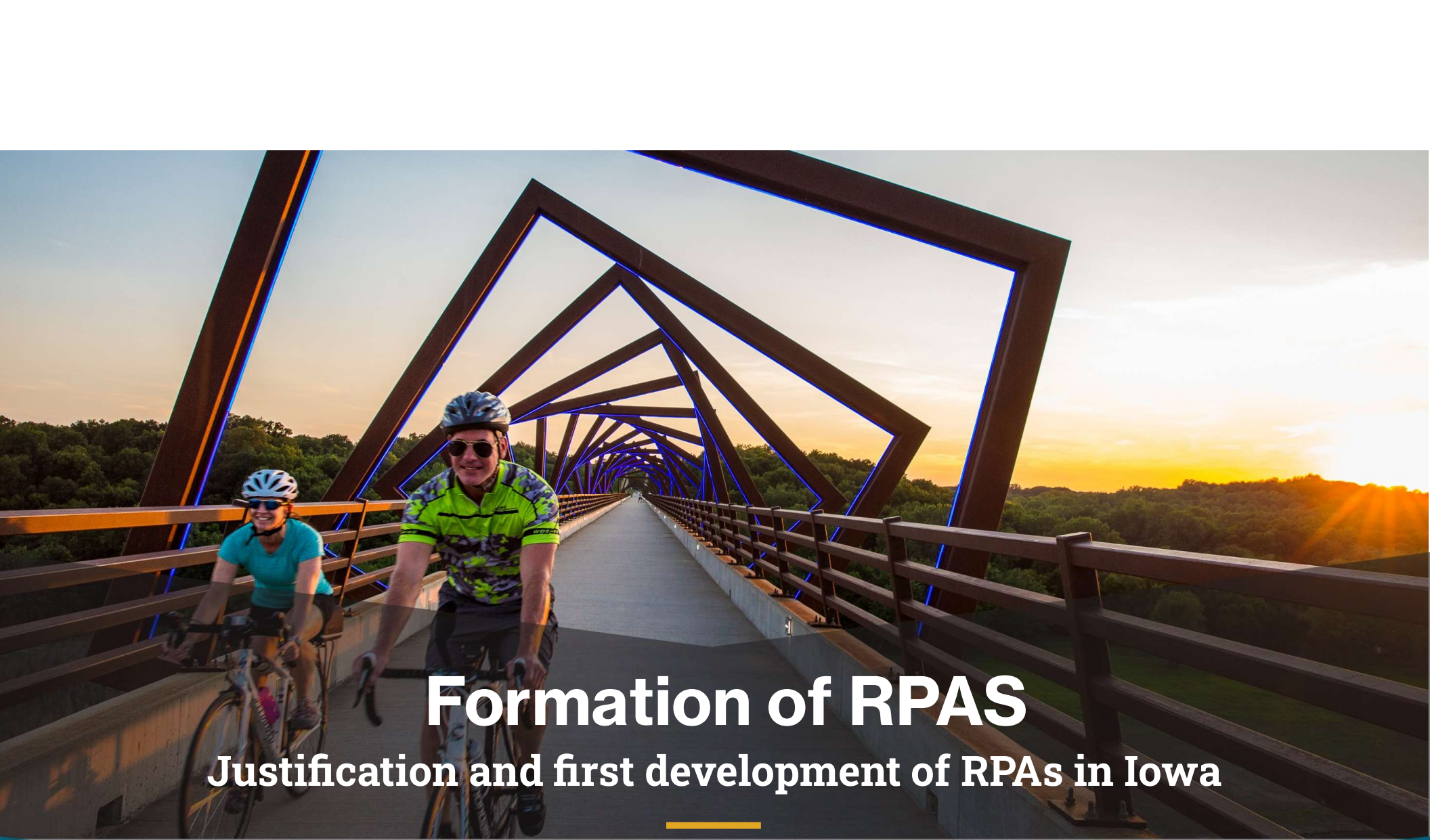
Typical COG Activities and Planning Areas

- Administration
- Community development
- Comprehensive planning
- Economic development
- Environmental
- Grant Writing
- GIS and mapping
- Hazard mitigation
- Housing
- Land Use
- Recreation
- Transit
- **Transportation** (RPA and/or MPO)
- Watershed
- Workforce development
- Workplace safety

Example COG Structure



- COG structures vary depending on regional responsibilities and planning activities
 - Agencies can have separate boards for functions with differing geographies
- Boards are typically elected or appointed officials
- COG staff helps provide support to these boards
- On average, the portion of the COG's overall budget that is attributed to RPA planning is 12%

A photograph of two cyclists riding a modern bridge at sunset. The bridge features a unique design with large, dark, triangular steel trusses that create a series of nested triangles along the length of the bridge. The sun is low on the horizon to the right, casting a warm orange glow over the scene. The cyclists are in the foreground, riding towards the camera. The man in the foreground is wearing a bright green and black cycling jersey, a blue helmet, and sunglasses. The woman behind him is wearing a light blue cycling jersey and a white helmet. The bridge has a concrete deck and metal railings. The background shows a line of trees under the sunset sky.

Formation of RPAS

Justification and first development of RPAs in Iowa

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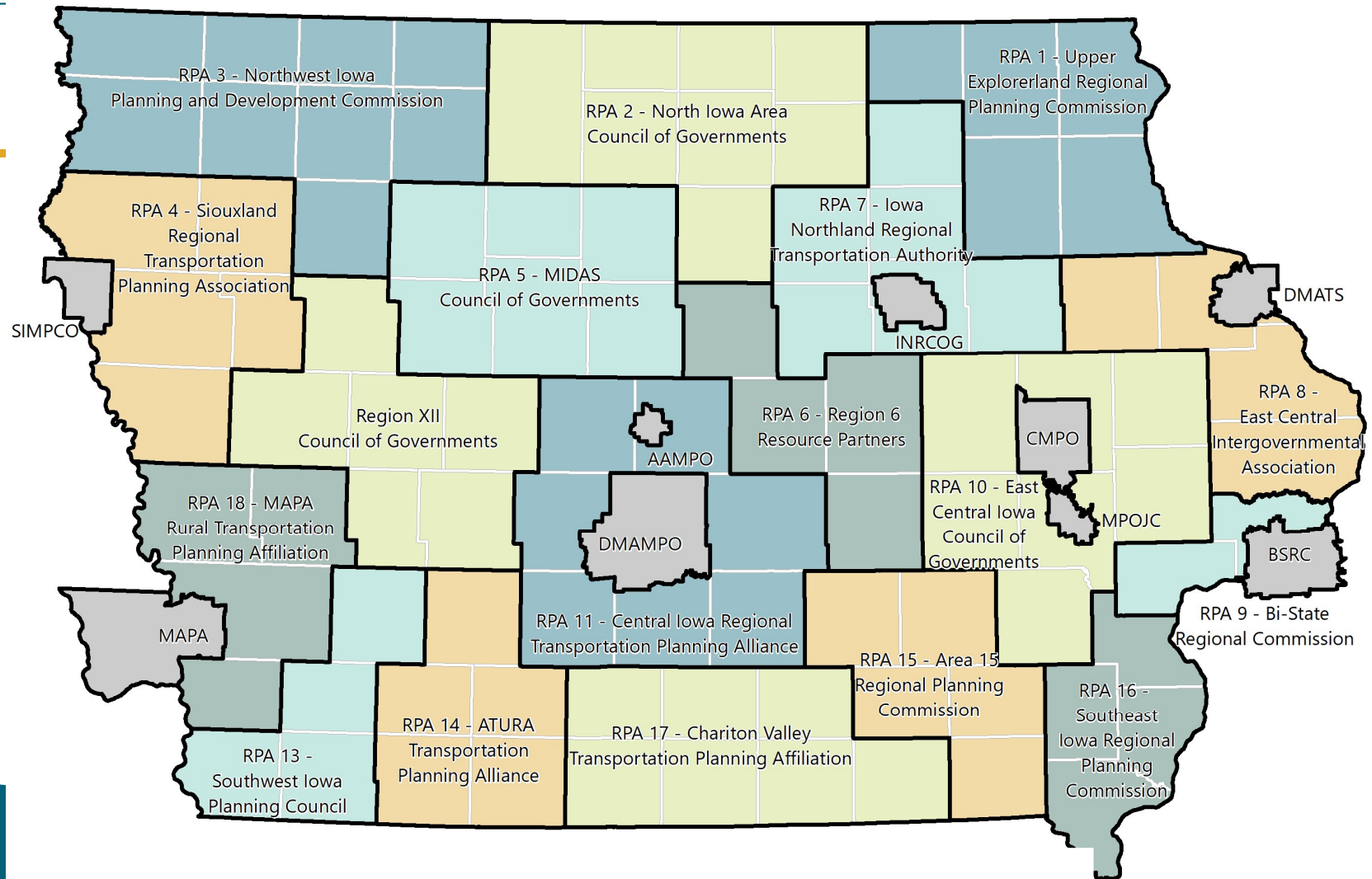
RPA Formation

- 1991: Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA)
 - Eliminated specific allocations to local/state systems, replacing them with STP (Surface Transportation Program) allocations to the state.
 - Required additional planning partners and additional public involvement, including cities under 5,000, rural transit operators, non-motorized, rail, freight.
- Rather than programming all STP funds at the state level, the Iowa Transportation Commission decided to make the majority of funding available to local planning organizations to facilitate this process and to prioritize for regional needs.

RPA Formation

- RPAs created following passage of ISTEA
 - Staff engaged with the Transportation Commission with the implementation of ISTEA
 - Transportation Commission started with 16 transit regions as basis, gave locals opportunity to change affiliation
 - Resulted in 18 RPAs
 - Most align with COG boundaries – only seven counties are in different COGs and RPAs
 - 17/18 of RPAs are staffed by COGs

Resulting 18 RPAs



RPA Formation

- The goal of the Commission was to create a framework for decision making on the use of STP funds that establishes regional needs and funding priorities and develops an investment plan which represents the aggregate interests of Iowa
 - Planning process for metropolitan areas over 50,000 in population had been required since 1962; had been successful in Iowa (MPOs)
 - RPA structure and responsibilities were modeled off MPOs

RPA Formation

- RPAs are responsible for transportation planning and programming at the regional level
 - Like in urban areas, the planning process is a condition of receiving federal funds through the Iowa DOT
- Iowa has remained committed to regional transportation planning through subsequent federal bills
 - After each bill, the distribution of funding to MPOs/RPAs for programming as part of their planning processes has been reaffirmed by the Commission



Iowa RPAs

Statistics, Structure and Function



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Average RPA Statistics

- 4-8 counties, with population of 96,000 total
- Supported by 1 to 2 FTE staff through the COG/overhead agency
- RPAs are allocated between \$50,000 and \$90,000 in federal planning funds.
- Additional STBG Flex Funding: 13/18 agencies transferred an average of \$58,000 from their Regional STBG allocation to supplement planning activities.
- Average agency total transportation planning budget of \$162,000 (\$130,000 federal; \$32,000 local)
- Typical annual expenditures are for major planning categories

RPA Funding Sources for Planning

- Federal sources provided through Iowa DOT
 - FTA funding for nonmetropolitan transportation planning
 - FHWA funding from State Planning & Research (SPR) funds
- Optional federal source if allocated by RPA
 - FHWA funding through Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) program
 - A majority of RPAs normally utilize some STBG funding for planning
- Local funding – used to provide 20% match to federal funds

Expectations & Requirements for RPAs

- Annual agreement between the planning agency and Iowa DOT includes requirements for the RPA and its committees.
 - Department may, at its discretion, withhold payment if the agency does not meet the requirements.
 - Planning and programming requirements not completed by the agency may constitute a breach of agreement and jeopardize regional programming authority.

Expectations & Requirements for RPAs

- RPAs are required to conduct comprehensive, continuing, cooperative transportation planning process, including annual development or review/confirmation of:
 - **Transportation Planning Work Program**
(annual budget for planning activities)
 - **Public Participation Plan**
(plan for providing public with opportunities to provide input)
 - **Passenger Transportation Plan**
(documentation of passenger transportation needs, coordination, and projects)
 - **Long Range Transportation Plan**
(future 20+ year vision for multi-modal transportation in the region)
 - **Transportation Improvement Program**
(four-year list of transportation projects programmed for federal aid in the region)

Regional Soliciting of Projects and Programming (STBG/TAP)

- RPAs receive the STBG and TAP allocation for their region
 - Targets based upon county amount, county size and population
- RPAs conduct project selection and programming of Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) and Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding
 - Half of agencies have a scoring method of determining regional priorities
 - Half of agencies suballocate funding evenly among counties
- RPAs then create a four-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
 - Includes STBG and TAP administered by the RPA
 - Also includes all federal funding allocated to the region which was not administered by the RPA

Additional Planning Studies

- RPAs conduct special planning studies and/or provide technical assistance to transportation providers or local governments as may be determined beneficial
 - RPA Policy Board and Technical Committee should provide direction to RPA staff in this area
 - Example additional planning activities – individual city or county transportation plans, trail/bicycle plans, parking studies, data collection, freight studies, research, grant applications

Personnel Responsibilities

- **RPA Policy Board** (elected/appointed officials) provides direction and guidance to staff and has decision-making authority
 - Minimum expectations established in planning agreement between Iowa DOT and agency
 - RPA bylaws may spell out additional requirements
- **RPA Technical Advisory Committee** (engineers/planners/subject matter experts) advises Policy Board
- **RPA staff** are employed by the umbrella COG/agency, and staff members carry out activities to meet planning requirements and additional activities at direction of Policy Board

Department Oversight

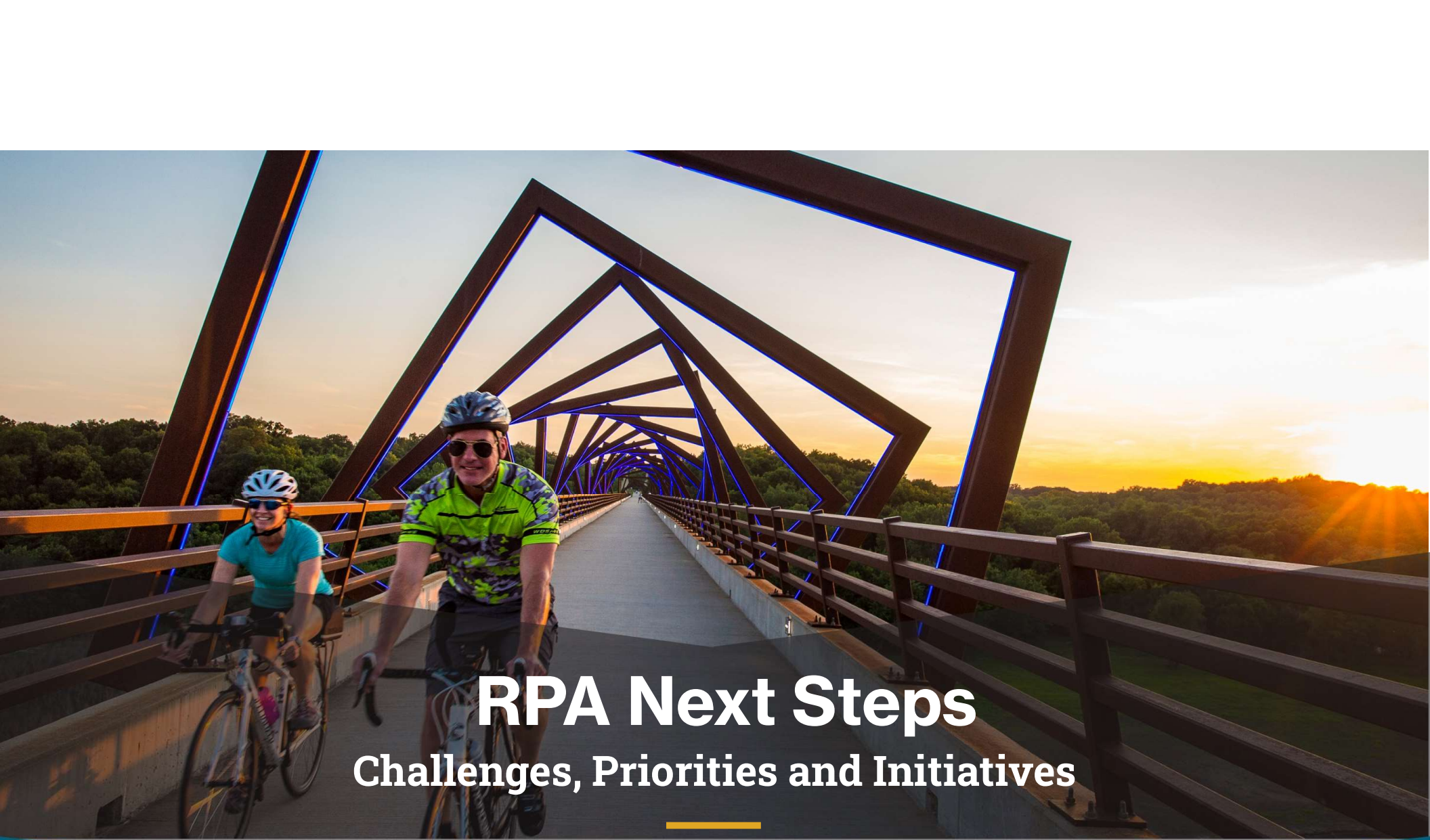
- **Systems Planning & Program Management Bureau**
 - Provides guidance and oversight for core work products (TPWP & TIP annually)
 - Guides agencies on long range work products (LRTP, PTP, PPP – every five years)
 - Reviews and approves reimbursement requests and progress reporting
- **District Planner Oversight**
 - Attends meetings, approves progress reports and reimbursement requests
- **Six-year performance reviews**
 - Iowa DOT staff travel to agency and lead discussion based upon RPA questionnaire and desk audit
 - Iowa DOT conducts three-year mid-term check-in with agencies

RPA Benefits

- Benefits of regional planning
 - Regional perspective and priorities
 - Grass-roots planning, rather than top-down
 - Flexible/responsive public input techniques
 - Rural funding distribution
 - More equitable statewide funding distribution
 - Locally elected officials make regional transportation decisions
- Iowa RPA process is often referenced nationally as a best practice

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RPA Next Steps

Challenges, Priorities and Initiatives

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Changing demographics in Iowa

- Internally: Hiring challenges are causing inconsistent work outputs
 - Rural Iowa population decline also means a diminished labor pool (both for Planners and general employees)
 - Constantly exploring new avenues for hiring, pooling of staff resources, and innovative funding sources to hire and retain staff/workload.
- Externally: 10% of Iowa's counties are growing in population
 - Adjusting forecasted funding, infrastructure demands, and maintenance demands of existing infrastructure
 - Most programming is used for system preservation where all possible

Long Range Planning Documents

- Long Range Transportation Plan Project Lists (6-20 years)
 - Current LRTPs require 5 years of projects. Enhanced to 20
 - Becoming a Legislative, competitive grant-inducing, promotional document.
- Undergoing new strategies for participation in meetings.
 - Public Transportation committees do not have dedicated funding sources, which can lead to meeting participation declines if entities do not see the benefit

Adapting to Authorization Bills

- IIAA
 - Emphasis on discretionary/competitive grants
 - Encouraged agencies to elevate projects identified in long range planning efforts
 - Many agencies wrote grants for local jurisdictions, especially SS4A
- Future Authorization Bill
 - Provide feedback to FHWA/FTA/State on priorities for the next bill
 - Continued commitment to maintaining/enhancing RPAs in Iowa

Questions?



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