



A Statewide Approach to Transportation Planning that Works

Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), the Federal surface transportation bill passed in 2012, creates an institutional framework for establishing Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) to perform transportation planning tasks in non-metropolitan areas. Many States already have regional planning partnerships

established in their non-metropolitan areas. These organizations vary in how they address organizational structure and planning responsibilities. This Fact Sheet illustrates successful practices observed in existing non-metropolitan planning organizations based on five areas of approach.



1. ENHANCE CONNECTIONS

MAP-21 establishes that an RTPO shall establish, at a minimum: A) a policy committee, the majority of which shall consist of nonmetropolitan local officials, or their designees; and B) a fiscal and administrative agent, such as an existing regional planning and development organization, to provide professional planning, management, and administrative support. RTPOs duties also include participating in national, multistate, and State policy and planning development processes to ensure the regional and local input of nonmetropolitan areas. More importantly RTPOs provide a forum for public participation in the statewide and regional transportation planning process.

Boonslick Regional Planning Commission (RPC)

- The Missouri-based RPC attends local government meetings to make RPC staff available and hear issues directly from local entities.
- The RPC has a Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) with representatives from several sectors from each of its three counties.
- The TAC has an executive board and voting membership comprised of local officials and holds four meetings per year to discuss transportation priorities.

The Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) refers to its institutional framework for working with local governments and regional entities such as metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and non-metropolitan Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) as the "Planning Partnership." Supporting positive relationships among these partners has been a goal since the mid-1990s, and the emphasis on connections has been beneficial to ensure local buy-in.

2. EXPAND PARTICIPATION

All States must have a formal, documented process for cooperating with local officials in statewide planning. RTPOs can formalize a process for identifying transportation problems and potential strategies to address those problems, as well as mechanisms for achieving consensus on priorities to advance to the State Department of Transportation (DOT). Using the RTPO to broadcast other information, solicit input outside of the planning process, or communicate more generally with local officials and stakeholders supports the position of the RTPO as an integral member of the planning process.

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)

- Caltrans requires that its non-metropolitan regional agencies provide formal Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) to implement the vision and goals from the regional long-range plan.

Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans)

- A fiscally constrained TIP is not required for regional agencies, but the agency provides local priorities and feedback to VTrans.
- VTrans uses regional input as 20% of the weight in the Statewide project ranking process.

PROMOTE TRANSPARENCY

RTPOs provide a venue through which State DOTs can communicate with stakeholders. This outreach may include distributing information about RTPO products and plans, scheduling time in RTPO meeting agendas to discuss stakeholder issues, encouraging RTPO members and stakeholders to attend DOT public meetings, and other strategies.

North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning & Development Commission (NCRPDC)

- NCRPDC's TIP is included in the State TIP, as the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) allocates funding by region.
- The agency has a regional Transportation Planning Committee, which includes FHWA and PennDOT as active partners to enhance awareness of State and local priorities.

MoDOT

- MoDOT shares data with its RPCs to help project prioritization.
- Each MoDOT District serves more than one RPC, so projects are selected considering priorities from all RPCs in the District.
- Stakeholders are able to present large-scale projects to RPCs, MPOs, and MoDOT representatives to justify the need for State funding.

ENSURE STATEWIDE CONSISTENCY

Taking steps to achieve consistency in the work of RTPOs can help each State DOT know what to expect and to make best use out of RTPO deliverables and input. Some States have developed manuals for their non-metropolitan planning partners to use in conducting planning activities and administering agency operations. Communicating expectations, scheduling regular meetings, and forming work groups to support planning practices can help guide all agencies in the State to produce deliverables and execute processes with the same quality and content.

Iowa DOT

- Iowa DOT holds quarterly meetings to include representatives from all regional planning agencies in discussions on Statewide planning resources, requirements, and emerging issues.
- One meeting each year is held concurrently with staff training.



PennDOT

- PennDOT holds regular meetings with rural and metropolitan agencies.
- PennDOT formed working groups on specific topics involving representatives from rural to large metropolitan regions.
- Working groups develop guidance for all planning regions to follow.

ACCOMMODATE VARIABILITY

Although certain planning roles and products may be required for all RTPOs, States can create space for regional variation. Each region may have special transportation interests that should be included in committee institutions in addition to more universal roles, such as local officials. Different regions may have different planning priorities that would benefit from specialized analysis, so allowing for special planning studies such as corridor safety studies, bicycle and pedestrian studies, freight movement studies, etc. can help RTPOs identify projects to submit to their DOT.

Iowa DOT

- Many non-metropolitan regional planning affiliations are housed in organizations that complete other planning processes.
- Iowa DOT allows regional partners to combine plans where applicable. Neighboring regions have coupled regional economic development plans with long-range transportation plans.

Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC)

- TRORC piloted the first regional safety forum with VTrans to address stakeholder concerns.
- The safety forum established relationships between regional safety stakeholders, addressed resource sharing, and identified highway safety issues.

