



Iowa

Overview

Iowa provides a successful example of the effectiveness of planning-based transit services, performance-based funding allocation, coordination of human service and public transportation, and holding rural transit to urban transit planning and performance standards. These efforts are achieved through strong and effective relationships that the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) has with the State's 18 regional planning affiliations (RPAs), which oversee transportation planning for multi-county non-urban areas, and regional transit agencies (RTAs), which manage transit service in every county in the State. Iowa DOT provides a framework for this coordination with several layers of planning in which local and regional planning for rural transit feeds into statewide planning and Federal initiatives and goals are reflected at local levels. The DOT, RPAs, and RTAs are further supported by other State agencies and partners and the regional Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) offices.

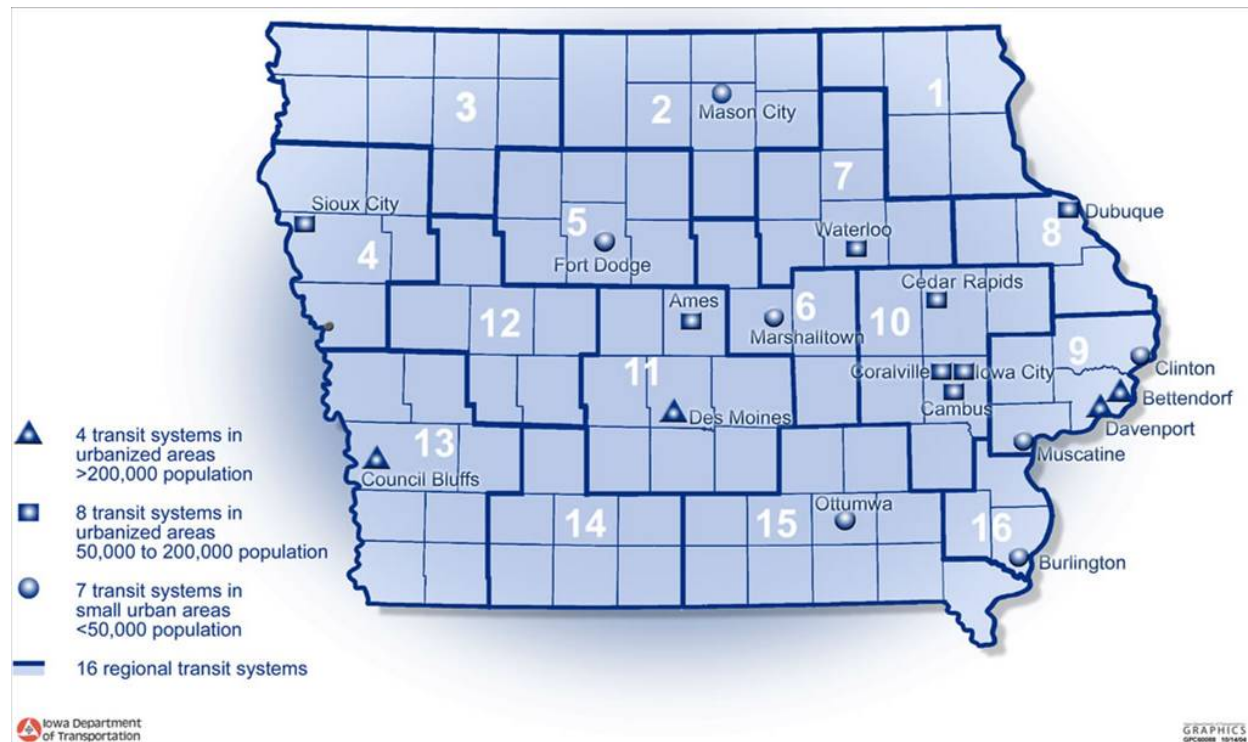
Context

Transit

Rural transit, primarily consisting of public and human services demand response service, is provided within each county by Iowa's 16 RTAs. All publicly funded passenger transportation must be coordinated through the RTAs.¹ Many RTAs have contracts to provide service to schools, Head Start programs, daycare facilities, nursing homes, and senior/assisted living centers. Due to the size of some of the service areas, which can be greater than 2,500 square miles, some RTAs operate in a different portion of the county each day of the week. For that reason, riders must plan their trips for that one day of the week when the vehicle comes to the area where they live. In addition to the RTAs, seven of Iowa's 19 urban transit systems serve communities of less than 50,000 (see Figure 1). There are also three intercity bus companies that offer regularly scheduled services that connect rural and urban communities within Iowa and beyond.

¹ [Iowa Code Chapter 324A](#).

Figure 1: Large Urban, Small Urban, and Regional Transit Systems



Source: [Iowa Office of Public Transit website](#)

Institutional Structure

There are two offices in the DOT that work on transit: the [Office of Public Transit](#) and the [Office of Systems Planning](#). Both offices are part of the Planning, Programming, and Modal Division, which is one of the DOT's [five major divisions](#).

The Office of Public Transit administers State and Federal funding to local transit systems, ensures compliance with Federal regulations, and provides planning and technical assistance to local transit agencies. While this office does not have staff dedicated exclusively to non-urban programs, staff is divided functionally to focus on areas such as contract administration, grant administration, and compliance. Compliance review by the DOT focuses on rural transit systems since large urban systems interact directly with the FTA. The compliance reviews for rural transit providers replicate the reviews for large urban transit providers. The Office of Public Transit also reviews the transit portion of planning and programming documents, including the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

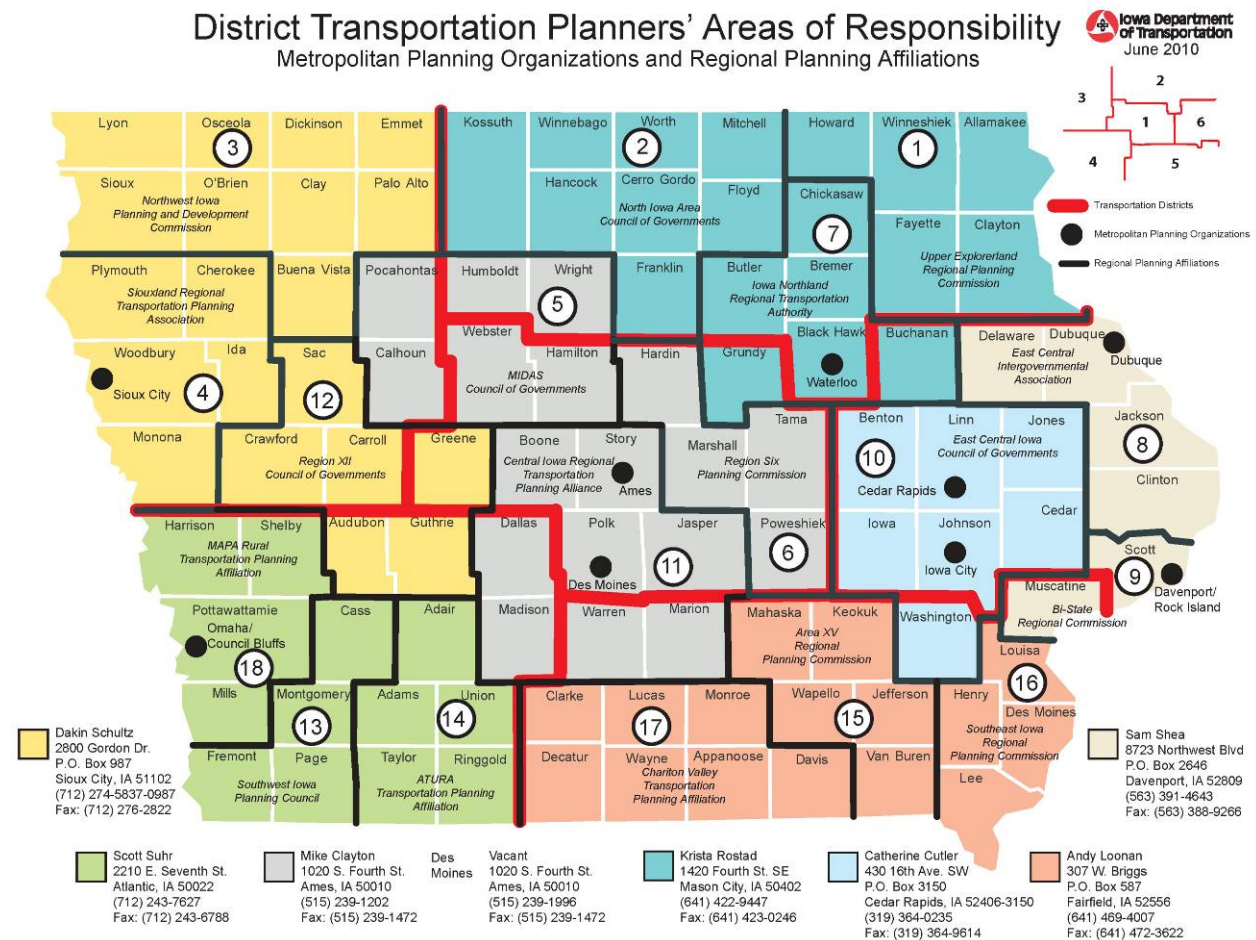
*We view ourselves as a one-stop-office for advocacy and technical assistance to the state's 35 transit systems –
Office of Public Transit official*

The Office of Systems Planning's mission is to prepare comprehensive, intermodal, and modal transportation system plans for the state. Staff is divided into three teams: Grant Programs Administration, Forecasting and Modeling, and Planning. The Planning team coordinates regional

planning for the State’s nine metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and 18 RPAs and reviews the planning documents that are required for each MPO and RPA. These documents consist of a transportation planning work program (TPWP), TIP, long-range transportation plan, coordinated transportation plan, and public participation plan. These plans direct transportation investments and the administration of statewide grant programs.

Office of Systems Planning staff provides oversight and guidance in conjunction with eight DOT district transportation planners, one of whom is a member of the Office of Systems Planning. The other seven district transportation planners each represent a region that is based on the DOT districts but is modified to match RTA and RPA borders such that there are seven rather than six areas (see Figure 2). Although the district transportation planners are part of Iowa DOT’s Highway Division and report to the district engineers, they meet with staff from the Planning, Programming, and Modal Division monthly to discuss local and regional transit issues. Each district planner attends MPO and RPA technical committee meetings and reviews their TIPs, TPWPs, and plans before they are submitted to the DOT. While the focus of their work has been on the TIP and TPWP, the Planning, Programming, and Modal Division is trying to re-emphasize their involvement in multi-modal support. Iowa DOT has also been discussing whether the district planners should be part of the Office of Systems Planning due to the nature of their work.

Figure 2: Transportation Districts and MPO and RPA Boundaries



Source: [Iowa Office of Systems Planning website](http://www.iosp.iowa.gov)

Regional transportation planning became the focal point in Iowa when the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) became law in 1991. As a starting point for forming a new State/regional transportation planning partnership, the [Iowa Transportation Commission](#)² designated 16 regional transit planning regions as the initial basis for organization. These entities are now known as RPAs, but some are also referred to as councils of government (COGs). Currently, there are 18 RPAs/COGs covering the State from border to border (see Figure 2). Twelve of the RPAs have concurrent boundaries with the RTAs; the remaining eight RPAs overlap with the boundaries of six RTAs. Seven of the RPAs contain MPOs, which maintain their separate functions, though some RPAs and MPOs are housed in the same building and are more formally coordinated than others. The DOT provides additional background on RPAs and MPOs in its MPO and RPA [Profiles Document](#).

Each RPA has a technical advisory committee and a policy board for guiding the planning and programming process for the region. The technical committee is made up of professional staff such as engineers and planners from member towns and counties. The policy board includes local elected officials from throughout the region. These officials are responsible for approving all plans and projects developed by the technical committee. The policy board also approves the long-range transportation plan and projects included in the annual elements of the TIP. In combination with RPA staff, technical committees conduct research, develop technical tools and analysis for the region, and advise the RPA policy board on technical and administrative issues related to regional transportation planning.

Some RTAs have hired mobility managers to perform outreach, enhance ridership, and coordinate with human services organizations. Previously, the Iowa DOT had provided funding for such positions; but now RTAs can apply for funding annually through FTA's Section 5317 (New Freedom) Program.

Funding

The Iowa DOT administers Federal and State transit grants to provide funds for the State's urban public transit systems and RTAs. Fiscal year 2009 funding amounts for Federal funding are shown in Table 1; state funding amounts are shown in Table 2. Additional information on the transit funding programs can be found in the Iowa DOT's [Guide to Transportation Funding Programs](#).

² In 1974, the Iowa State Legislature created the Iowa Transportation Commission, consisting of seven members appointed by the governor and subject to Senate confirmation. No more than four persons can represent the same political party. Serving four-year terms, members are responsible for periodically reviewing programs of the DOT and making all major investment policy decisions.

Table 1: Federal Transit Funding in Fiscal Year 2009 (in millions)

Funding Program	Authorized
Section 5311 (Formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas)	\$10.1
Rural	\$8.1
Intercity bus	\$1.5
RTAP	\$0.2
Planning	\$0.3
Section 5310 (Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities)	\$1.4
Sections 5303/4 (Metropolitan Planning)	\$0.4
Sections 5303/4 (Statewide Planning)	\$0.1
Section 5307 (Urbanized Area Formula)	\$26.6
Section 5309 (Bus and Bus Facilities)	\$10.0
Section 5316 (Job Access and Reverse Commute)	\$1.8
Section 5317 (New Freedom)	\$1.0
Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program	\$4.1
Surface Transportation Program (includes funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA))	\$3.1
Federal Total	\$68.7

Table 2: State Transit Funding in Fiscal Year 2009 (in millions)

Funding Program	Authorized
PTIG (capital only)	\$1.3
State Transit Assistance Funding	\$10.6
State Total	\$11.9

For State funding, a portion (one-twentieth of the first four cents) of the fees for new registration collected on the sales of motor vehicles and accessory equipment provides revenue for the State's transit funding assistance. The amount available varies, but it is currently approximately \$10 million per year. The DOT allocates State transit funding assistance based on a performance-based formula that includes ridership, revenue miles, an economy factor for both – cost per revenue mile and per rider, and local support. Iowa DOT also allocates “vertical infrastructure” money from the [Public Transit Infrastructure Grant \(PTIG\) program](#), totaling about \$2 million a year.³ These funds are awarded through a competitive grant program, and the State share is up to 80 percent.

Local support is the locally determined income/match for any given project, which can include tax revenues, fares, donations, and contracts with social service agencies. Local support provides over half of the operating budgets for RTAs with the remainder split between State and Federal support. Local cities can assess a tax levy to directly provide transit services or to purchase services from the regional system.

³ According to [Iowa legislation](#), vertical infrastructure was defined in 1998 as land acquisition and construction, major renovation and major repair of buildings, all appurtenant structures, utilities, site development, and recreational trails.

With regard to Federal funding, the State also uses performance measures – riders and revenue miles – when allocating Section 5310 and Section 5311 funds. RPAs and MPOs have flexed \$26 million in Federal highway funding for transit projects since 1995 with RPAs flexing funds on a more consistent basis than MPOs. The State also allocates a portion of its Federal surface transportation program (STP) and State planning and research (SPR) funds to RPAs to develop TIPs that in turn use that funding to supplement planning activities or transit activities.

Iowa currently meets all Federal standards for air quality so it receives the minimum apportionment for the [Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality \(CMAQ\)](#) Improvement Program funding or \$4.7 million a year. This funding is considered flexible in that it can be used for projects eligible for either CMAQ or STP, and it does not need to meet CMAQ priority provisions; however, FTA and FHWA encourage targeting funds to projects that reduce particulate matter.⁴ One RTA reported using CMAQ funding in the past and is proposing to use it again for employment/medical care transit trips between Davenport and Iowa City. The Iowa Transportation Commission recently directed Iowa DOT to start a new program to allocate CMAQ funding based on an application process for projects that will maintain the State's attainment status by, for example, reducing emissions and vehicle miles traveled. Since its inception, this new program has funded several transit projects.

Participation of Rural Transit in Statewide Planning Process

Iowa DOT

In general, the Office of Public Transit coordinates with RTAs, and the Office of Systems Planning coordinates with RPAs. The two DOT offices also work closely with each other. Iowa DOT has direct relationships with RTAs primarily through contract administration and procurement activities since all State and Federal funds go through the Office of Public Transit to RTAs. Iowa DOT contracts with RTAs every year. RTAs submit quarterly reports and data annually to the DOT; these data are used in their performance-based allocation formulas. Iowa developed its RPA planning process to mirror the MPO planning process. However, while MPOs work more often on transit issues with Federal agencies such as the FTA than with the State, RPAs work more directly with Iowa DOT. DOT Office of Systems Planning staff subsequently spends more time working with RPAs than with MPOs.

“All regions are similar because [the state] has some type of guidance in place.” – RPA official

The district transportation planners try to attend all RPA technical and policy meetings to help

One RPA official remarked that “Iowa DOT does a fantastic job in how it sets things up with planning. Without the commitment of the Office of Systems Planning and the Office of Public Transit to transit, Iowa would be a lot further behind than where it is now.”

coordinate planning and programming efforts. The DOT Office of Public Transit has developed a [Transit Manager's Handbook](#), which outlines the roles and responsibilities of the DOT, RPAs, and RTAs, for reference and orientation for new staff at transit agencies.

⁴ The Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program under the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Act – a Legacy for Users. [Final Program Guidance](#). October 2008.

Regional Transit Agencies

In general, RTAs report that they are directly involved with RPAs and MPOs, which in turn work through Iowa DOT, and that they have frequent interactions with the Office of Public Transit as well. They report only working with the Office of Systems Planning on CMAQ applications.

According to the RTAs, transit agencies in the state generally have a good relationship with the DOT. There is open communication, and the DOT brings procedural and regulatory information and funding opportunities to the attention of the RTAs. DOT staff is accessible to questions and attend statewide public transit meetings. Where RTA staff is limited, the DOT works with the RTA and local elected officials on service design planning. One RTA remarked that if it holds an open house or ribbon cutting event, DOT staff tries to attend and provides a DOT presence. Another RTA recounted that while it was trying to raise funds for a construction project, a DOT staff came to a local board meeting to discuss the issue with board members who were hesitant to proceed.

The interaction between RTAs and RPAs varies depending on their organizational relationship. Nine of the RPAs contain the RTA within the same organization (seven are part of the RPA organizationally and two are under contract management). In addition, even for those RTAs and RPAs that operate independently, in many instances the same people are on the boards of both agencies in any given area. RTAs report that they have easy access to staff at their respective RPAs. One RTA official sits on the regional technical committee and commented that the group is “tight knit.” Some RPAs provide their RTAs with services that the RTA does not have; for example, one RPA provides its RTA with assistance in developing its website and geographic information system (GIS) services at no cost. An RTA official said that they talk with their RPA regional planner every day since they are co-located in the same building. Some RPAs work closely with their RTA on transit planning and transit TIP requests. One RTA official, however, remarked that some of the State’s smaller rural areas do not have a relationship with their RPA, and that can be problematic.

“In some instances when the RPA and RTA are co-located, coordination organically takes place; one RPA official said “down the ball, transportation planning folks are talking to transit folks.”

Some RTAs and RPAs partner with neighboring transit agencies to provide service outside of their region. This coordination allows for cost efficiencies since one service can provide transportation for the entire ride as opposed to needing to physically transfer the passengers between the different agencies’ vehicles. Other agencies have not pursued this level of coordination, in some cases due to good intercity bus service connections.

RTAs remarked that everyone is in touch with one another, and they are unaware of transit agencies that are not getting assistance. In their opinion, if any transit agency feels as if it is on its own, it is by choice; there is no lack of resources available to transit agencies in the State.

One RTA official mentioned that all the rural operators know each other and get along well. Twenty years ago, rural operators in western Iowa formed an informal organization called the Western Alliance of Rural Transit Systems (WARTS). While WARTS started “as a way to play golf on Saturday afternoons,” it has also worked on procurements, created a consortium on insurance that is now disbanded, and formed a Drug and Alcohol Consortium, which currently has 60 members and which coordinates oversight of outside contractors to perform drug and alcohol testing.

Regional Planning Affiliations

RPAs who participated in the study report that they work closely with Iowa DOT. In addition to providing general guidance, the Office of Systems Planning meets quarterly with many RPAs. The Office of Public Transit periodically provides updates on new regulations, policy, or initiatives to the RPAs. RPAs coordinate with both offices on the development of their coordinated transportation plan and the TIP. The DOT evaluates each RPA's coordinated plan annually to see if the RPA needs to do a full update or just an executive summary update.

Several RPAs mentioned that the DOT district transportation planner comes to all technical and policy board meetings, participates in studies, and serves as a liaison to the district office and Office of Systems Planning. One RPA official said that its district transportation planner, whose background is not in transit, fields the first line of questions; if he does not know the answer, he finds someone who does. The RTAs reported that they interact with the district planner infrequently.

RPAs reported that the DOT frequently forms working/standing committees that draw from the transit industry and community to inform key issues. For example, one RPA official represents RPAs and rural transit in the state on a committee that allocates CMAQ funding. This official has also participated in meetings about the State's long-range transportation plan; RPAs also participate on a passenger rail advisory committee, which the DOT created in 2009.

In general, RPAs expressed the belief that there are ample opportunities to participate in various statewide initiatives. Some recent initiatives include the [Iowa Traffic Safety Alliance](#), bike/pedestrian promotion, the statewide long-range transportation plan, and studies of several primary highway corridors that are Iowa DOT facilities. One RPA remarked that when working on an initiative, the State has been effective at convening advisory groups of MPOs and RPAs and in allowing for regional review and feedback.

State Transit Association

The [Iowa Public Transit Association](#) (IPTA) provides advocacy and professional development opportunities for Iowa transit systems. IPTA is in the process of developing a three- to five-year vision regarding which decisions, changes, and methods of support will best benefit the industry as a whole. During this timeframe, IPTA envisions placing more emphasis on working with Iowa DOT to improve the process of allocating funds and having more involvement in DOT decisions that affect public transit. All 35 transit agencies belong to IPTA. IPTA holds four open meetings a year: a summer annual meeting, a fall legislative meeting, a winter meeting, and a March trip to Washington, DC. The Iowa DOT plays a key role in IPTA and attends every meeting. According to participants in the discussions, IPTA is a good forum to discuss pertinent legislation and information that affects transit in the state.

Iowa Transportation Coordination Council

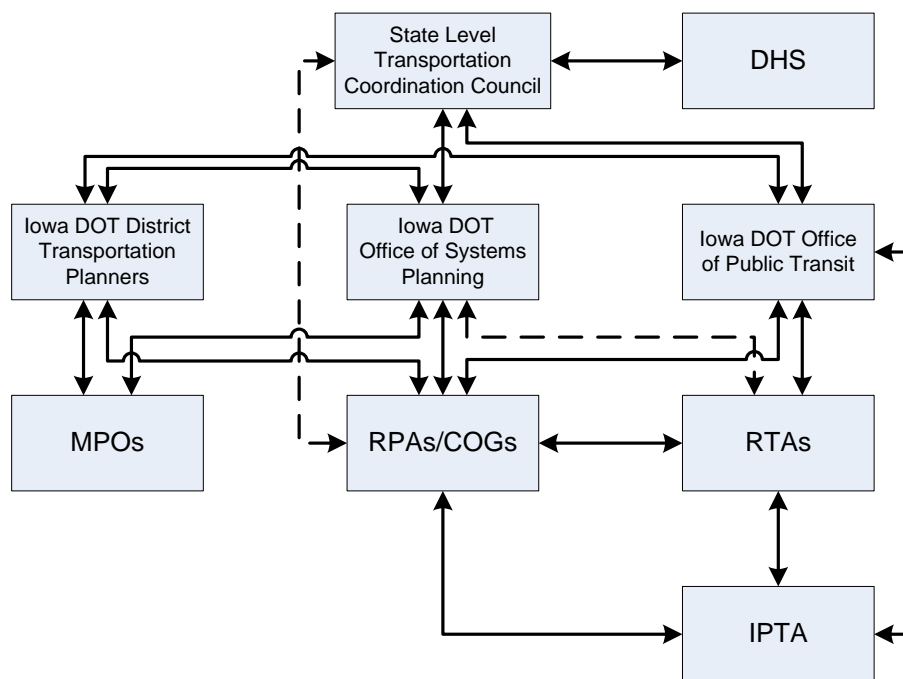
Iowa DOT chairs and staffs the [Iowa Transportation Coordination Council](#) (ITCC), which is an interagency transportation coordination council that includes representatives from a number of state agencies, including the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS), Iowa Department of Public Health, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Department on Aging, Iowa Workforce Development, and Governor's Developmental Disabilities Council. The mission of the ITCC is to discuss and review transportation coordination issues, including institutional and/or regulatory barriers, so as to provide the

highest level of public transportation with the most effective use of public investment. ITCC has existed since 1992, but it has expanded its focus on coordinating passenger transportation to human service and other transportation providers in part as a result of Iowa's Mobility Action Plan (MAP) initiative (see text box below). ITCC has produced three state action plans, the most recent of which was drafted in 2010 and is in the process of being completed. Each action plan lays out ITCC's effort to coordinate public and human service transportation and the status of the attainment of its goals. The most recent plan's draft outline includes sections on volunteer transportation, evaluation of the Medicaid brokerage, mobility management, and a strategy to "Engage, Educate, Energize." ITCC is intended to empower and provide leadership through the RPAs since coordination occurs at the local and regional levels. ITCC promotes the staffing of mobility managers at the RTAs within each RPA.

Flowchart

The flowchart below (Figure 3) illustrates the relationships and connections between the various agencies within Iowa involved in planning for rural transit, as discussed above. While solid lines represent a direct connection, dashed lines represent an indirect connection.

Figure 3: Connections between Agencies Involved in Rural Transit Planning



Major Planning and Project Initiatives

Iowa has a very strong policy for transit to be a planning-based program, which dates back to the 1970s. The State only approves projects that are included in the state transportation improvement program (STIP), which is comprised of TIPs from both RPAs and MPOs. The TIPs are based on locally developed coordinated public transit – human services transportation plans, known as Passenger Transportation Plans (PTP), formerly Passenger Transportation Development Plans. Rural transit agencies do not generate projects without going through the RPA and establishing support from the communities in which they operate. The primary planning focus for transit agencies is at the RPA and

MPO levels and around public and human service transportation coordination, which began formally in 2006 with Iowa’s MAP initiative (see text box below).

This strong focus on planning has resulted in comprehensive and updated regional plans, a statewide Medicaid brokerage, and other local service initiatives. At the State level, the 1999 State [Transit System Plan](#) is considered out of date; but the DOT is currently working on an [update to the state transportation plan](#) called “Planning Ahead 2040,” which will include a revised State transit plan that will incorporate the [Iowa Passenger Transportation Funding Study](#), which was completed for the legislature in 2009.

Mobility Action Plan Initiative

Iowa’s Mobility Action Plan (MAP) initiative has brought public transit and human service agencies together and resulted in improved capacity of agencies to identify gaps, needs, priorities, and funding streams. The MAP initiative was funded by the FTA’s United We Ride grant program, a Federal interagency initiative to improve transportation services for older adults, people with disabilities, and those with low incomes that began in 2004. For the initiative, the Iowa Transportation Coordinating Council partnered with the Office of Systems Planning to hold regional meetings followed by a statewide coordination conference in 2006. These events provided an opportunity to discuss experiences, identify barriers and solutions to those barriers, and review best practices. The 2006 meetings marked the beginning of Iowa’s passenger transportation planning initiative.

RTAs reported that the MAP effort has helped to put names to faces and bring human service and transit agencies together. MAP has also been helpful in identifying issues, opportunities for improvement, and the need for coordination in moving forward. One of the outcomes of the 2006 meetings was to encourage development of transit advisory groups (TAGs), which are small working group within each region, to better involve human service providers in transportation planning processes and to work on coordinated plans. There are now TAGs throughout the State; some bridge multiple RPAs (there are 13 TAGs for the 18 RPAs) and each MPO also has a TAG. TAGs provide an ongoing capacity for regions to continue to build upon the MAP initiative.

Regional plans

Each RPA follows a transportation planning process aimed at the adoption of a regional transportation plan. This plan includes both long- and short-term strategies and actions that lead to the development of an integrated, intermodal transportation system. Similar to MPO long-range transportation plans, the regional plan includes:

- An inventory of the region’s transportation facilities and services;
- Use and condition of these facilities and services;
- A 20-year forecast of the facility and service needs; and
- An estimate of the long-term and short-term funding needs and an establishment of goals, strategies, and priorities for accomplishing those needs.

The RPAs update their plans every five years, including a status update on the implementation of the previous plan. The DOT Office of Systems Planning coordinates a review of these documents, inviting other offices to participate as appropriate.

As mentioned previously, RPAs are also required to publish a locally developed Coordinated public transit - human service transportation plan, the PTP. The purpose of the PTP is to incorporate the Federal requirements for coordinated planning, as well as address needs-based project justification for all transit programs. The PTP covers a five year period and is updated annually. Projects identified in the PTP are included in the TIP. TIPs from the RPAs and the MPOs comprise the STIP. While this planning process works particularly well for the nine transit agencies that have the same borders as the RPAs, the process is more complicated for RPAs that have two or more regional transit agencies in their borders. An example of both a regional transportation plan and PTP can be found [here](#).

Medicaid transportation study

In 2008 and 2009, Iowa DHS received Federal funding to conduct a needs study of Medicaid transportation and partnered with Iowa DOT, which contracted with the University of Iowa to perform the study, [Iowa Medicaid Non-Emergency Medical Transportation System Review and Options for Improvements](#). The study resulted in a broad recommendation that the State establish one mandatory statewide brokerage. A request for proposals (RFP) was issued in February 2010, and an evaluation team led by DHS and including DOT staff reviewed submitted proposals in spring 2010 and selected TMS Management Group, Inc.⁵ The new statewide brokerage began operating October 1, 2010. With the brokerage now in place, customers will call the broker, which, after confirming the eligibility of the individual and requested ride, will assign the ride to a service provider. The broker also verifies that the ride was provided and arranges funding reimbursements. The text box below highlights some of the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the system as expressed by participants in this study.

Iowa's Medicaid Brokerage: Advantages and Disadvantages

The DHS and DOT are working together to ensure that the brokerage does not create duplicate transportation systems. The RFP issued for the brokerage includes a requirement that the brokerage be coordinated with regional public transit and that public transit systems have the right of first refusal. Nearly all existing RTAs are Medicaid providers. With the brokerage, the DHS and DOT expect that there will be a significant increase in Medicaid services since Medicaid transportation in the past has been a fragmented and underutilized program with little to no marketing. However, the DHS and DOT are concerned about how much expansion of service is possible given the State's financial situation. At the local level, there are also concerns. One RPA expressed concern about it being difficult to commit to providing service since there are many potential barriers – regulatory and otherwise – to providing service for any given case. Overall, the RTAs reported taking a “wait and see” approach to the brokerage; they acknowledge that they have trouble meeting demand, especially for trips that might take 60-120 miles. Some RTAs are concerned that anyone with a van might sign up to provide service and not realize the significant responsibilities.

⁵ Documentation of the process can be found here:
http://www.ime.state.ia.us/Reports_Publications/RFP/RFP10011.html

Other reports

Other publications that are relevant to planning for rural transit include *Coordination of Transit and School Buses in Iowa*, *Transportation Policy Strategies for Iowa to Advance the Quality of Life, and Health Care and Public Transit*. The [Coordination of Transit and School Buses in Iowa](#) report was completed in December 2003 in response to a legislative request. This report documents coordination initiatives, resulting efficiencies and cost savings, and barriers. The [Transportation Policy Strategies](#) report was developed by the University of Iowa in 2004 in response to a request from the Iowa Transportation Commission as a follow-up to a similar report focused on roadway investments. The report drew upon several focus groups and provided an assessment of and recommendations for economic development, safety, modal choice, and financing. The report concluded that there is a need to increase alternative transportation options, especially in rural areas. The brief [Health Care and Public Transit](#) report, which was updated in January 2010, was created by the Iowa Department of Public Health's Bureau of Health Care Access and the Iowa DOT Office of Public Transit in an effort to promote collaboration to improve health care access for all citizens through the use of public transit.

Local initiatives

Several rural transit agencies have initiated programs to improve use and services in their areas; two such examples are provided in the text boxes below.

River Bend Transit's Ambassador Program

The Ambassador Program is a collaboration between Bettendorf Transit, Davenport CitiBus, River Bend Transit (see Figure 3), health and human service agencies, and volunteers. The goal of the program is to educate a base of volunteer ambassadors who will help local seniors understand and use public transit. Working directly with transit managers, ambassadors learn how transit systems operate in their community and conduct outreach to educate others.

Figure 3: River Bend Transit vehicle




Source: River Bend Transit

Western Iowa Transit System's JobJet Vanpool

JobJet, which started in 2009, is a vanpool run by Western Iowa Transit in rural west central Iowa. According to the JobJet [website](#), five to 15 commuters ride together to and from work in a fully equipped passenger van. JobJet members live in close proximity to one another, work in the same general area, and have similar work hours. JobJet members meet in a central location or set a route and time schedule, pay one monthly fare, and travel to and from work together. JobJet presents ridesharing as an economical, reliable, and dependable alternative to driving alone to work and an alternative that helps to reduce traffic, helps keep the air clean through reduction in emissions, and lessens the demand for gasoline.

Figure 4: Screenshot of Jobjet website



jobjet

Home What is jobjet Contact jobjet Sign-up Rates Region XII Council of Governments

A vanpool/rideshare program for West-Central Iowa that can save you **\$10,000 a year*** and help the environment.

Saving More Than Money...

You could save thousands of dollars a year by ridesharing. A one way commute of 30 miles costs a single worker nearly \$10,000 a year in expenses.*

- **Save money** by reducing commuting expenses for gasoline, maintenance, and insurance.
- **Reduce wear and tear** on vehicles.
- **Enjoy free time** to read, chat or sleep during the ride.
- **Improve air quality** and help the environment by reducing emissions.

Source: [Jobjet website](#)

Observations and Challenges

Changes in relationships

According to Iowa DOT, transit agencies in the State used to be split along urban and rural lines; however, this division is no longer prevalent, and relationships between the state, the RPAs, the MPOs,

and transit agencies are effective and generally harmonious. The change is a result of improved communication and transparency.

The State and the regions partner closely on planning initiatives and project development. Participants said that the partnership between the State and the regions has been beneficial for Iowa; a new appreciation of the infrastructure dilemmas facing each level of government is apparent, and the coordination of efforts has been key to the development of the planning and programming process in Iowa.

Several RPAs and RTAs are concerned with the impacts of State budget cuts, which resulted in early retirement for some experienced DOT staff in 2010. According to one RTA official, the Office of Public Transit lost 60 years of institutional knowledge. This RTA official remarked that the loss was not just of professional resources, but of friends and relationships as well.

Training

According to the RPAs participating in this study, training is well utilized statewide. For example, there is a training fellowship program available through Iowa DOT to MPO, RPA, and transit agency staff for transit-related training events. According to these RPAs, it is critical that their planning staff is knowledgeable about transit. RTAs also remarked that Iowa DOT helps fund statewide training sessions and that there are more training opportunities available than transit agencies take advantage of. In some instances, Iowa DOT will travel to individual agencies and will provide training, updates on procedures, and orientation for new transit management or new RTA employees.

RPAs receive training from IPTA and through RPA quarterly meetings. One RPA mentioned attending a useful two-day FHWA/FTA/Iowa DOT conference on transportation and land use. This RPA also mentioned that there is now more of an effort to bring training closer to this area of the country. Another RPA mentioned attending a helpful FTA-sponsored conference in Kansas City with its RTA to learn about the transit side of Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU).

Federal interaction

The participating RTAs mentioned that livability, climate change, clean air, and sustainability are primarily the responsibility of the MPO and the DOT and that their involvement is indirect through the MPO. One RTA official said that these topics play a very minor role in their areas as they are extremely rural. This official said that a lot of initiatives that come of Washington do not directly affect them. Iowa DOT is currently working through a group with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) to increase understanding and applications of the concepts of livability and sustainability.

Regarding Federal programs, RPAs remarked that there is good dialogue with Iowa DOT on federal transportation legislation. Iowa's concern is that the bill will have more of an urban focus and Iowa will lose funding. With regard to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), MPOs and RPAs selected many projects and were proactive by holding public hearings before the bill was signed. As a result, Iowa was the second state to obligate funds, primarily due to there already being a system in place to quickly distribute funds locally. Several RPAs and RTAs used ARRA funding to purchase buses.

Conclusions

- In general, strong, effective, and personal relationships exist between Iowa DOT and the State's RPAs and RTAs. These relationships are supported by other State agencies such as IPTA and by the regional FTA and FHWA offices.
- Iowa DOT emphasizes that transit projects be planning based; all transit projects must be part of the TIP, required for both RPAs and MPOs, and that feeds into the STIP.
- Iowa DOT holds the State's 18 RPAs to the same standards as the State's MPOs in terms of planning processes and documents, including regional transportation plans, RTPs, and TIPs. The DOT-RPA partnership allows rural areas to achieve similar planning and program results as regions with MPOs. This standard also carries through to rural transit providers, which must follow many of the same guidelines as the State's urban transit providers.
- There has been increased coordination between transit agencies and human service providers over the past several years; a brokerage for allocating Medicaid transportation is now in place, and DHS and the Department of Public Health has worked with DOT to identify opportunities for using rural public transit to ensure access to health services.
- The DOT allocates State transit funding assistance on a performance-based formula, and the State uses performance measures when allocating Federal funds as well. As a result, funding is linked to Federal and State goals of cost effectiveness and service provision.