



Issue Brief

AMPO Recommendations for Performance Planning -- Input for the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee

AMPO supports performance-based transportation planning and recommends that the following principles be incorporated in surface transportation authorization legislation:

Establish National Performance Goals: As a first step, it is appropriate for Congress to establish a core set of national transportation performance goals. This core set of goals should be (a) discrete and focused (not a laundry list); (b) reflective of truly national priorities; and (c) based on tangible results that resonate with the public and businesses (not abstractions or esoteric). Possible national performance goals are Safety, International/Interstate Commerce, Mobility/Congestion Reduction, Infrastructure Preservation, and Environment/Energy Security.

Take a Phased, Iterative Approach: After national performance goals are established, it is appropriate to take a phased, iterative approach in identifying performance measures and implementing performance-based planning. Start with basic, straightforward measures on which there is wide agreement and for which reliable data are available. Over time, move forward with additional measures. It is not a simple matter to establish performance goals, agree upon performance measures, collect reliable data consistently over years, and tie performance measures to transportation policies and investments – and to pull this off in a coordinated way across three levels of government – Federal, state, and metropolitan/local. There are many areas for legitimate differences to surface, many complexities, significant data hurdles, potential unintended consequences, and significant demands on financial and staff resources.

Seek Common Ground in Performance Measures: It is important to start with a few solid, widely supported performance measures, rather than to attempt an all-encompassing set of performance measures on which there is disagreement and uncertain data. Therefore, based on the core set of national goals, USDOT should facilitate discussions among states, MPOs, and local governments to identify an initial set of performance measures on which there is widespread agreement, on which all levels of government would track performance and seek to make policy and investment decisions in these performance areas. In areas where there is initially lack of agreement on performance measures (whether for conceptual reasons or for lack of reliable data), variation should be allowed for a period of several years, during which different states, MPOs, and local governments could experiment with and make a case for additional performance measures. After several years of experimentation, USDOT should facilitate another round of discussions to seek agreement on additional performance measures.

Focus on Outcomes Relevant to the Public: First and foremost, transportation performance measures must be relevant and clearly understandable to the public and businesses, so that they will see a tie between investment and policy decisions and performance improvements that matter to them. Further, different performance measures will be relevant in different states, regions, and local governments –

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different performance measures will make sense in Orlando, Detroit, Seattle, Wichita, Tuscaloosa, Anchorage and the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont.

Support Improved State and Metropolitan/Local Performance Planning: In addition to national performance goals and measures, it is appropriate for the Federal government to support improved state, MPO, and local government performance based planning, in which flexibility is allowed for these governmental entities to establish additional or different performance goals and measures and to tie policy and funding decisions to improved performance. There is wide variation in the priorities, circumstances, economic /fiscal conditions, and other conditions of different states, metropolitan areas, and local governments; therefore, substantial flexibility is needed for performance based planning at these levels of government.

Support Intergovernmental Coordination: Congress should support substantial coordination among all levels of government in establishing goals, delineating performance measures, collecting and sharing data, all in ways that allow variation among governmental levels yet produce coherent and consistent data for the public and decision makers. Legislative provisions need to allow time and flexibility for this coordination to be effective.

Provide Incentives and Support – not Penalties and Rigid Mandates: The Federal government can advance performance-based planning through peer exchanges, domestic scans, documentation of case studies, workshops, improved data collection programs, funding for pilot programs in performance planning, etc.

Aim for Continuous Improvement – not Adherence to Rigid Standards: Performance planning will be most successful if it focuses on continuous improvement in each area, if it avoids invidious comparisons and if it respects the wide variations among states and metropolitan areas.

Consolidate, Simplify, and Streamline Programs: It is difficult if not impossible to carry out performance based planning under the current plethora of Federal program categories and requirements. If Congress does not simplify Federal programs and requirements, it makes it difficult for states, MPOs, and local governments to make performance-based decisions.

Improve Data and Data Availability: Performance planning requires solid data in a wide variety of goal areas. Yet transportation data is lacking or deficient in many of these goals areas, especially for freight data, environmental impacts, and travel behavior. It will be costly and take time to build the data bases needed for effective performance planning, and require considerable Federal support over many years.

Increase Program and Project Evaluation: Federal support for program and project evaluations is needed to ascertain whether investments and policy decisions achieve the intended results. It is not enough just to produce system-wide performance data – evaluation is needed to understand whether and how certain policies and investments influenced performance results.

Avoid Tying Federal Funding to Performance Measures or Planning Certifications: Europeans, who have more experience with performance planning than the U.S., recommend not tying funding to performance measures, because of unintended consequences and incentives for tilting data. For those reasons, and because of the wide variability in metropolitan areas, performance measures should also not be introduced into the planning certification process.

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