



# Issue Brief

## What are MPOs?

Federal Law (Section 134, 23 U.S.C.) requires that areas with populations of 50,000 or more establish a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Funded by the Highway Trust Fund, MPOs represent local, regional, and national interests in the transportation planning process. Congress vests MPOs with the authority to plan for regional and national transportation needs and to set funding priorities for highway, transit, safety, and security projects receiving Federal aid. Of the existing MPOs, about half are administered, housed or staffed by a Regional Council, with the remaining operated within a state, county or city planning office, or by a stand-alone nonprofit entity.

## Why are MPOs important?

Nationwide, 385 MPOs represent metropolitan populations ranging from 50,000 to 19 million. These urban areas act as the economic engines for the country:

- Metropolitan regions account for 84% of the nation's population, 90% of the GDP, and produce 85% of the exports.
- Over the next 20 years, 94% of the America's economic growth will occur in metropolitan areas.
- Of the world's 100 largest economies, 37 are metros areas in the U.S.
- Per capita GDP production is over \$3,000 higher in urban areas than it is nationally.
- In 47 states, metro areas alone generate the majority of economic output. This is true even in classically rural states like Idaho and the Dakotas. (Sources: Brookings Institute, Metropolitan Policy Project; Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Conference of Mayors)
- Congestion costs the United States over \$115 billion annually. Because of their central role in metropolitan transportation planning, MPOs do not deal just with the consequences of congestion; they create solutions. With increased funding, MPOs can implement the projects necessary to reduce this burden on our economy. (Source: Texas Transportation Institute, 2010 Annual Urban Mobility Report)
- The movement of freight – internationally, into and out of the country at major entry ports and airports, and internally through major intermodal hubs –

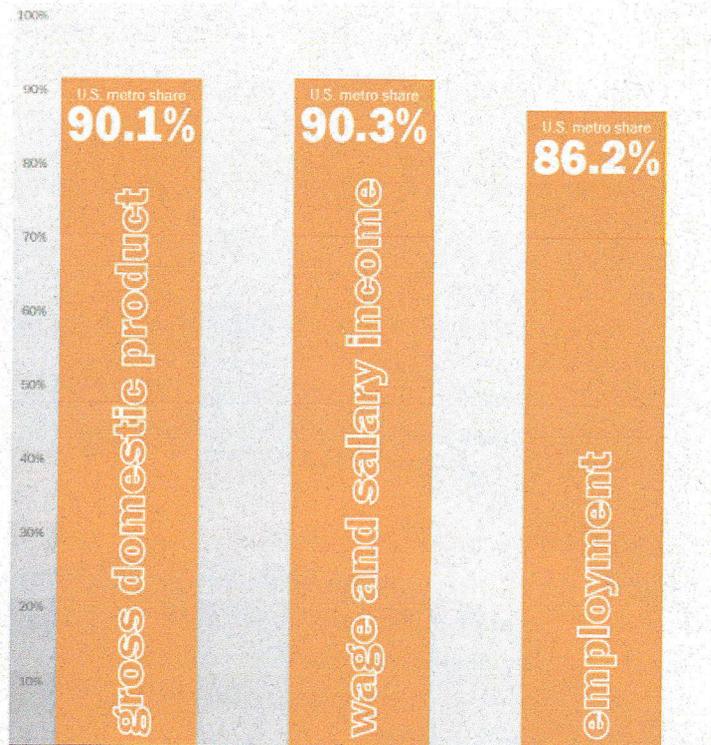


Figure 1: (Source: U.S. Conference of Mayors, Metro Economies Report, Jan. 2010)

contributes significantly to national and regional economies. Limited road capacity not only hinders economic activity, but also wreaks havoc on passenger travel in those corridors. Much of this activity takes place in metropolitan areas. Without proper planning, the movement of goods and people can grind to a halt.

**How are MPOs Governed?**

Democratically elected officials accountable to local and regional constituencies govern MPOs. Thus, MPOs truly respond to the region’s unique demands and visions. MPOs conduct the planning process in conjunction with state, tribal, and federal government entities and a broad array of public and private stakeholders. Given the importance of transportation infrastructure to economic growth, security, and sustainability, MPOs are an inextricable part of the U.S. economy.

**What do MPOs do?**

The MPOs primary role is to provide a balanced forum for effective regional transportation decisions during the transportation planning process. The MPO ensures that the process considers all possible strategies to meet the transportation needs of the metropolitan area. This planning takes into account the broad spectrum of community input, both from local communities and state transportation agencies, as well as meaningful public involvement. MPOs produce 20-year long-range transportation plans (LRTP) for the metropolitan area and 5-year Transportation Improvement Plans (TIP) that allocate federal transportation funds for multi-modal transportation projects.

Collectively, MPO transportation planning serves the national interest by linking regions and states. Specifically, Federal Law requires MPOs to address the following 8 factors during their planning process:

1. Support economic vitality of metro area, enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency
2. Increase safety for users
3. Increase security for users
4. Increase accessibility and mobility for people and freight
5. Protect and enhance environment and quality of life
6. Enhance connectivity across modes for people and freight
7. Promote efficient system management and operation
8. Emphasize preservation of existing system

MPOs are uniquely positioned to participate in and contribute to achieving the goals of cooperative regional planning. We routinely work with representatives and officials responsible for other planning activities including land use, economic development, environmental protection, other modes of transportation, and freight movement. Many of our members go beyond the planning requirements of federal law and work with state and local housing agencies, education officials, and other affected entities.

Alabama	80.0%
Arizona	95.1%
California	98.7%
Colorado	88.5%
Connecticut	96.0%
Delaware	87.2%
Florida	96.8%
Georgia	89.6%
Hawaii	75.3%
Illinois	92.6%
Indiana	84.7%
Louisiana	84.2%
Massachusetts	99.6%
Maryland	95.6%
Michigan	87.9%
Minnesota	83.2%
Missouri	84.2%
North Carolina	83.0%
New Jersey	100.0%
Nevada	91.9%
New York	96.7%
Ohio	87.2%
Oregon	85.7%
Pennsylvania	89.5%
Rhode Island	100.0%
South Carolina	82.5%
Tennessee	84.4%
Texas	93.2%
Utah	90.3%
Virginia	93.5%
Washington	93.9%
Wisconsin	80.2%

Figure 2: Metros Account for over 75% of GDP in 32 states. (Source: U.S. Conference of Mayors, Metro Economies Report, Jan. 2010)