**AMPO Survey: MPOs Need More Freight Resources**

The results of a March 2003 AMPO survey clearly show that although MPOs are adequately dealing with freight issues in their jurisdictions, across the board they are in need of data, funding and staff expertise in order to do truly effective freight planning. TEA-21 reauthorization must provide MPOs with the resources necessary to increase program capacity and ensure the safe and efficient movement of goods in and through metropolitan areas.

The AMPO survey was distributed to all 340 MPOs and received 136 responses (40%) from MPOs across the country, including organizations that employ one person to one with over one hundred and thirty employees. Included in the survey were questions about each MPO’s staff, structure, budget, and planning as they concern freight.

The survey results clearly show that although freight is considered in most MPOs’ planning process (80% include freight in their LRP), because of inadequate resources freight planning falls short when it comes to implementation (only 37% of MPOs include freight in their TIP, and only 16% have a priority list of freight projects). The most commonly needed resource – a need described by one MPO as “dire” - is data, cited by 80% of the respondents. Says Frank Baron of the Miami-Dade MPO, “Data is very difficult to come by. Surveys are considered either too intrusive - from either the ‘interference with business’ aspect or the ‘big brother government wants more information from us’ perspective - or delving into possible proprietary information.”

After data, MPOs need professional development and funding, each listed by 60% of respondents, and 34% of MPOs require more staff to deal with freight. These needs are illustrated by only 22% of surveyed MPOs having at least one staff person dedicated to freight and 60% of the responding MPOs spending under 5% of total staff time on freight, and half of the MPOs reporting freight projects as less than 2% of their overall program (in terms of both dollars and number of projects), while nationally freight accounts for 44% of all traffic1.

Also problematic for MPOs is the lack of freight stakeholder involvement in the planning process. Although 65% coordinate with ports, private rail companies, or trucking companies on freight projects, only 18% have an institutionalized freight advisory committee, and freight interests have voting representation on only 18% of surveyed MPO policy boards. According to John Hummer of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, although they make efforts to involve freight stakeholders, “[T]he freight community is not well coordinated and organized in presenting its needs to the MPO.”

For MPOs to enhance their freight activities, the reauthorization of TEA-21 must provide them with substantially increased resources. To that end, AMPO advocates 1) increasing the FHWA PL and FTA 5303 planning takedowns to 2% of the overall programs, 2) allocating a certain portion of Surface Transportation (STP) funds and Congestion Management and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds directly to MPOs, 3) developing an “infostructure” to collect travel data (including freight), 4) expanding the eligibility of freight project funding, 5) providing incentives to attract private funding, and 6) refining TEA-21’s National Corridors and Coordinated Border Infrastructure Programs.

1 Freight ton-miles as percentage of summed passenger-miles and freight ton-miles (all modes).
Source: <http://www.bts.gov/publications/national_transportation_statistics> tables 1-34 & 1-44