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## NATIONAL SUMMIT ON TRANSPORTATION OPERATIONS

The National Summit on Transportation Operations was held on October 16-18, 2001 in Maryland. The Summit was the culmination of more than a year of work and discussion, referred to as the National Dialogue on Operations, and was initiated by FHWA and led by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE). The purpose of the Dialogue and the Summit is to focus attention on the need for efficient management and operations (M&O) of existing transportation infrastructure and improve transportation safety, reliability, and security.

The Operations Vision, as defined by the National Steering Committee for the Dialogue, is that M&O of transportation facilities must become the central focus of federal, state and local transportation agencies, rather than capacity expansion. This new M&O focus is believed to be necessary because capacity expansion is increasingly constrained by financial and political considerations.

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"Several MPO representatives participated in the National Dialogue with FHWA. From left to right are Michael Morris, NCTCOG; Sandy Greyson, Dallas Councilmember; Jim Gosnell, SCAG; John Mason, Mayor, City of Fairfax; Mary Peters, FHWA Administrator; Don Shanis, DVRPC; Tom Swanson, Pima AOG; Alex Taft, AMPO Executive Director; Karen Parsons, NORPC; Sarath Joshua, MAG]

## THE MPO ROLE IN MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS

*AMPO was invited, with several other associations, to develop a white paper on management & operations (M&O) and present the paper at the National Summit in October. Over the past year, AMPO surveyed members, held a series of focus groups, and organized regional sessions to consider the appropriate role of MPOs in M&O. This effort led to a draft paper that was presented to membership at the AMPO Annual Conference in September. The Board approved a final version of the paper on Sept. 22, 2001. Below is a synopsis of the paper.*

Metropolitan areas account for 75 percent of the nation's population and 83 percent of its economic output. They are the hubs of the national transportation system. Yet as our regional transportation systems are becoming increasingly important, they are becoming increasingly congested. If the nation is to continue to prosper economically, its metropolitan transportation systems must exhibit greater efficiency. One way to achieve this is through enhanced planning for M&O. MPOs have had increasing involvement with planning for operations in recent years, and place a high priority on furthering involvement with M&O issues. An almost infinite number of roles for MPOs are possible.

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# THE MPO ROLE IN MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS

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To provide a framework for discussion, AMPO members identified five generic roles, recognizing that these represent five points on a continuum of roles. The five roles, in order of increasing MPO responsibility, are:

Traditional MPO Role - MPOs would "Promote efficient system management and operation" as called for in TEA-21 by incorporating this planning factor in traditional activities. There would be no requirement for MPOs to move into M&O planning, beyond consideration of specific M&O projects that are part of traditional plans and programs. No budget or grant eligibility issues would arise. MPOs would create no new products.

MPO as Convener of Meetings to Facilitate Metropolitan-level M&O Planning - MPOs would become the conveners of metropolitan level discussions of operational planning by holding regular meetings to discuss operational issues, plans and projects. By doing so, they would encourage the key agencies involved in operations to come together. But MPOs would take no responsibility to ensure that an integrated, effective metropolitan M&O plan was developed. That would be up to the initiative of participants at the meetings.

MPO as Champion of Metropolitan-level Operations Plans and Projects - This is similar to the previous role, with one important difference: MPOs would work actively to get agencies to collaborate in developing operations plans and programs. MPOs would not develop operations plans themselves, but use their involvement of local elected officials and relationship with the public to persuade agencies to work together to create programs that improve system performance.

MPO as Developer of Metropolitan-level Operations Plans - MPOs would take explicit responsibility for developing metropolitan level operations plans as part of their long range transportation plans. MPOs would develop and implement system performance measures and identify performance problems, gaps and opportunities in their transportation improvement programs. They would



assign responsibilities and resources to agencies to address identified problems and opportunities. MPOs would support and mediate other agencies' regional efforts to manage and operate the system. This would add up to a fundamental reorientation of the way MPOs operate.

MPOs as Operators of Region-wide Programs to Improve System

Operation - Operating an on-going program to improve system operation is a distinct and separate step from creating a plan for such a program. This activity is typically outside the mandate of MPOs, and is not eligible for funding from grant sources generally available to MPOs. It requires a set of operational skills that are typically not available in MPOs, and delivers a product that is outside the range of many, but not all, MPOs.

*Proposed Role for MPOs in Planning for Operations*

All MPOs are already involved, to different degrees, in operational issues. Their challenge now is to work with stakeholders to develop the capacity to create, and the means to implement, metropolitan-wide operations plans. The role to be played by MPOs in reaching these goals will vary from region to region, as well as over time.

The current goal of all MPOs should be to develop the capacity to play an effective role as convener of meetings on metropolitan-level operations planning.

The longer-term goal should be that best practices of MPOs already engaged in M&O planning, and in operations, be implemented across the nation in all MPOs where these practices can be helpful in increasing the performance of metropolitan transportation systems.

It is recommended that TEA-21 re-authorization legislation establish an ideal role for all MPOs to play the role of developer of metropolitan-level operations plans and projects. This role could only be fulfilled by all MPOs, large and small, if adequate planning funds were available to undertake the role.

# WASHINGTON, DC MPO ADDRESSEES M&O IMPROVEMENTS FOR EMERGENCIES

The National Capital Transportation Planning Board (TPB), the MPO for Washington, DC, is taking quick action to develop emergency management plans for the region's transportation system in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Following the attack



on the Pentagon and reports (that turned out to be false) of bombs near Federal buildings in the District, all government

offices and most private businesses closed early, sending thousands of workers onto the region's roads and transit systems all at once. In most cases, the evacuations were fairly orderly, as agencies implemented special events traffic patterns and other measures. But regional leaders have noted that coordination among jurisdictions and agencies was generally ad hoc, and in some cases inadequate.



TPB's existing Management, Operations, and ITS Policy Task Force quickly developed a number of observations based on the experience of September 11. For example, a fail-safe communications system does not exist in the region – phone circuits were overloaded, leaving some agencies unable to communicate with each other. In addition, conflicting or erroneous information was disseminated to the public, including the false rumor the Metrorail system had closed down. And the opening of HOV lanes for all traffic reduced access of some emergency vehicles. Doctors at Washington, D.C. hospitals were ready to take victims from the Pentagon, but congested roads and the fact that traffic signals had been set to move outbound motorists prevented victims from being treated at District hospitals.

At its October MPO meeting, TBP received a briefing on transportation response capabilities in emergency situations, and directed TPB Chair John Mason



Mayor John Mason, City of Fairfax, VA and TPB Chair (right) and Dan Tangherlini, DC Transportation Director, address regional transportation priorities in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

to work expeditiously with all affected agencies to identify all necessary improvements to these capabilities. The TPB held a special work session on October 30, where organizations that own, operate, and police the regional transportation system were convened. As a result of this meeting, TPB identified actions needed immediately, within six months, and within two years.

Immediate steps include identifying who is involved in decision-making and what improvements are needed in communications and coordination, and agreeing on a lead for developing a "play book." Over the longer term, agencies should develop plans, procedures, and protocols and conduct exercises. TPB also identified the need to upgrade existing traffic management centers, develop new ones, and create interconnected, fail-safe backup systems between them.

To emphasize the importance of these needs, TPB adopted a resolution at the November MPO meeting that declares the identified actions are regional transportation priorities and urges reliable sources of funding be identified by federal, state, and local governments at the earliest possible time. The resolution also directs Chairman Mason to convey to the region's congressional delegation that timely implementation will require federal funding assistance.

Chairman Mason emphasized the importance of these measures at a November 28<sup>th</sup> TRB "Report to the Region" held for federal and state legislators and other regional leaders. "As a region, we have identified 'must-do' transportation priorities and now we must move quickly to implement solutions," he said. "We simply cannot afford to wait."

# LINKING TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND OPERATIONS IN DALLAS-FORT WORTH

The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG), the MPO for the Dallas-Fort Worth region, has planned, developed and implemented a \$30 million M&O program, using CMAQ and STP funds. The program focuses on short-range actions to address air quality, congestion and safety issues.

At AMPO's September 2001 Annual Conference, Michael Morris, Transportation Director of the NCTCOG, presented operations activities underway at the MPO. He spoke of these activities in terms of the transportation programs, policies, and projects underway in the region and their relationship to enhanced M&O, and provided examples of each.



NCTCOG programs involving operations include freeway bottleneck removal, mobility assistance patrols, speed limit reduction, thoroughfare audits, public education, and sustainable development. Policies include speeding construction using better management and incentives for early completion, training police and fire to respond to incidents, a uniform towing ordinance to eliminate bottlenecks, development of a memorandum of understanding among partners, project streamlining, and expanded criteria for selecting projects. Specific projects include traffic management centers, real-time information in truck cabs, movable barrier and control-flow lanes, red light running enforcement, and smart parking garages.

Implementation of each of these programs, policies, and projects adds up to an enhanced transportation system. Performance measures are taken to determine improvements. These include a state of the region report that documents transportation indicators and trends, safety reports, air quality measurements, and low level aerial photography.

The driving force behind these activities boils down to a customer focus. Traditional planning methods alone are not sufficient. Another meaning for MPO, Mr. Morris emphasized, is Management Planning and Operations. NCTCOG is re-orienting itself to focus on people, not transportation facilities, when planning the transportation system.

## NATIONAL SUMMIT ON TRANSPORTATION OPERATIONS

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AMPO was an active participant in the National Summit, along with more than 200 other participants from government, academia, and the private sector, including FHWA Administrator Mary Peters and FHWA Operations program manager Christine Johnson. The participants identified non-legislative and legislative actions that could be taken to define and advance the national transportation operations agenda. AMPO developed a paper titled "The MPO Role in Management & Operations" for presentation at the Summit. (See excerpt in this newsletter). ♦

# COMMUNICATION IS KEY IN MICHIGAN ROADWAY RECONSTRUCTION

Management & operations doesn't always have a technology focus. This is confirmed by the experience of a reconstruction project on US-131, the major north-south freeway in western Michigan that links Chicago with Grand Rapids and the tourist areas along Lake Michigan.

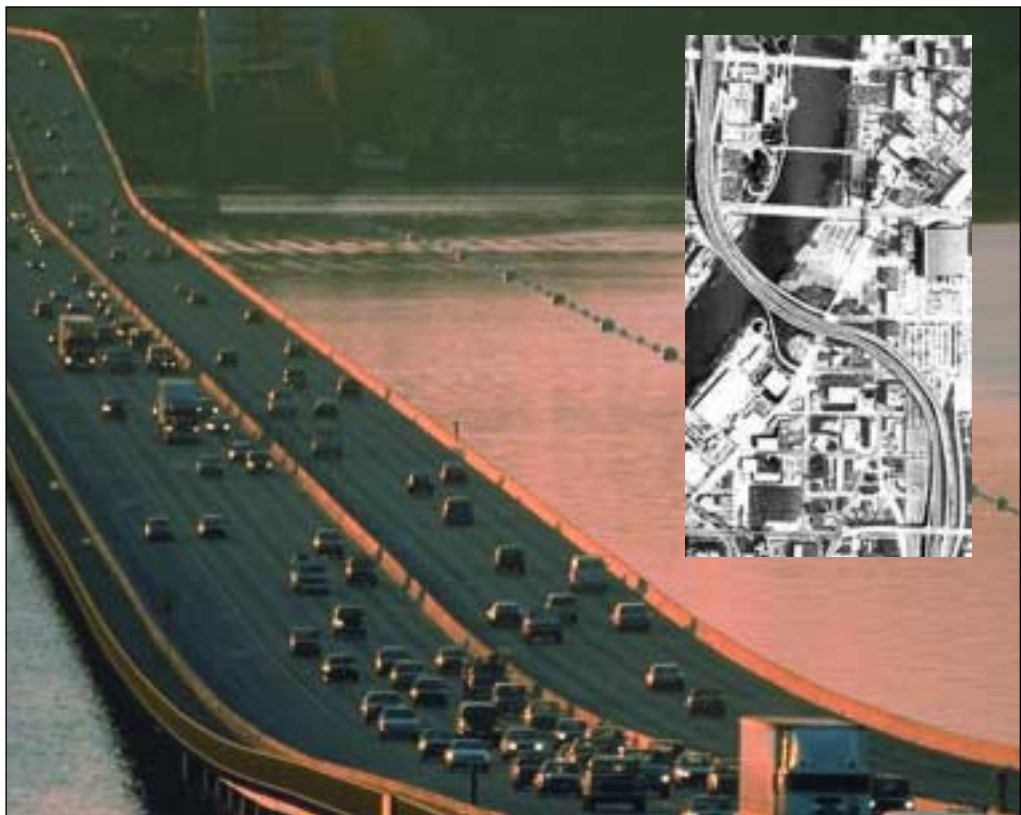
The Grand Rapids metropolitan area is home to over 1 million people. US-131 carries approximately 120,000 vehicles per day through Grand Rapids and over the Grand River. A 1.2 mile segment of US-131 through the city of Grand Rapids, including a river bridge, was scheduled for replacement. This work had the potential of affecting not only commuter and commercial traffic - with major economic impacts on Grand Rapids and western Michigan - but also the state's tourist industry.

The Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, the MPO for the area, worked with Michigan DOT, FHWA, the city of Grand Rapids, the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Grand Rapids Area Transportation Authority to address the concerns raised by the project.

Through intense planning and coordination, the project was planned, designed and constructed in less than two years.

Customer orientation was key in providing the best reconstruction solution for the community, and the team's efforts turned a potential crisis into a major opportunity. The project's message was to "get in and get out as quickly as possible." A Motorist Information Plan was developed to provide project information to visitors, motorists, area residents, and business owners, and included a web site that received more than 20,000 visitors each month. It was extremely important to direct motorists to alternate routes while US-131 was closed, but not discourage them from visiting downtown area businesses and entertainment venues. Therefore, the stakeholders adopted the motto "Road Closed, City Open."

How did it go? The project has been deemed a tremendous success overall, both from a communications and engineering standpoint. Before the US-131 closure, news reports painted a grim picture of how the city would function with its major artery closed. However, after just one month into the project, reports turned positive and provided updates about how well the community was coping and how fast the project was proceeding. At the same time, many area businesses and residents were sending positive feedback to the



department via email, and writing letters to the editor of the major daily newspaper in town.

As a testament to the project's success, the lead spokesman for the project, Ari B. Adler, was named Communicator of the Year by the West Michigan Association of Public Relations Professionals. In addition, the project manager, Suzette Peplinski, was named Young Engineer of the Year by the West Michigan Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers. AASHTO highlighted this project as a success story on their website.

The most important lesson learned on US-131 was the value of communication with all parties, including local residents, elected officials, designers, and contractors.

**AMPO is a nonprofit, membership organization established in 1994 to serve the needs and interests of metropolitan planning organizations nationwide.**

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## OF NOTE

**FHWA Recognizes Outstanding Traveler Information Websites** - FHWA announced the first winners of its new national awards for traveler information websites. They are: the Houston TranStar; Coordinated Highways Action Response Team (CHART) in Hanover, MD; and the Virginia VDOT. Visit [www.fhwa.dot.gov/pressroom/infosites.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/pressroom/infosites.htm) for more info and links to the websites.

**511 Implementation Guidelines** - The 511 Deployment Coalition has released "Implementation Guidelines for Launching 511 Services" to provide recommendations to those planning or implementing 511 traveler information services. See [www.its.dot.gov/511/511\\_Guidelines.htm](http://www.its.dot.gov/511/511_Guidelines.htm)

**ITS and Security** - ITS America submitted a white paper to U.S. DOT that describes a future vision for integrated, nationwide deployment of already existing transportation technologies that would improve the security, safety, and reliability of our nation's transportation infrastructure, services, and customers. See [www.itsa.org](http://www.itsa.org)

**New ITS Fact Sheets** - FHWA published three new "ITS Sheets" as part of a collection of existing brochures. The publications are executive summaries of various aspects of ITS and are primarily targeted to elected officials. See [www.nawgits.com/fhwa/its\\_shts.html](http://www.nawgits.com/fhwa/its_shts.html)

**ITE Online Training** - The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) has initiated the "ITE Online Learning Gateway" to make professional development training available 24/7 to transportation professionals. Courses are approximately four hours long and can be completed in one sitting or in a series of sessions. Visit [www.ite.org/OLgateway.htm](http://www.ite.org/OLgateway.htm)

**Accommodating Older Drivers** - U.S. DOT issued guidelines and recommendations to accommodate older drivers and pedestrians, with information that links older road-user characteristics to design, operational and traffic-engineering recommendations. See [www.tfhr.gov/safety/pedbike/pubs/O1-051.pdf](http://www.tfhr.gov/safety/pedbike/pubs/O1-051.pdf) ♦

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