Designation, Staffing, and Transit Coordination: Resources for New MPOs

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Designation, History, and Urban Areas
Why Create MPOs?

- Top-down Interstate planning causes disputes between states and local government
- Cities (and counties) sought a voice in route choice
- First mandated in 1973 and made more relevant by ISTEA in 1991
- MPOs are a primary mechanism for public involvement
- MPOs are the first line of enforcement of NEPA, Title VI/Environmental Justice, and cultural resource preservation
Urban Areas and MPOs

- MPOs are based on Urban Areas (UA), which are defined by Census Bureau computers.
- As of 2010, there are 497 UAs in the United States.
- All land area in a UA, plus land area expected to be in a UA within 20 years, must fall under an MPO.
- There will be around 400 MPOs will be in operation by 2014.
- About 60% of MPOs have less than 200,000 people.
- UAs will next be updated after the 2020 Census.
What is an Urban Area?

- A UA has 50,000 people or more and a density of at least 1,000 people/sq mile
- A central core with 2,500 people is identified.
- Adjoining Census Tracts and Blocks with more than 500 people/sq mile are added until the total density falls to 1000
- Contiguous developed land with no population is included (shopping mall, airport)
- Brief jumps over water and topographical anomalies are allowed
How an MPO Draws a Boundary

- Census Urban Area Boundary

- Metropolitan Planning Area Boundary (also called FHWA Urbanized Area Boundary)

- Metropolitan Planning Organization Boundary

- Study Area Boundary

Slide credit: MPOAC Institute
Designating an MPO

- The boundary must be agreed to by:
  - The governor
  - Local governments representing at least 75% of the population
  - The largest municipality
- MPO board apportionment and voting structure is also made during designation
- The same rules apply for changing the MPO boundary
  - The governor cannot unilaterally require MPOs to merge, dissolve, or change their board composition.
  - MPOs need to reapportion and change their boundary after each Census
- Each Census is an ideal time to reevaluate board composition and organizational structure
Staffing and Organizational Structure
FHWA Staffing and Administrative Structure of MPOs

• Draws upon a survey of 130 MPOs in 2010
• Includes 10 case studies
• Useful for benchmarking organizational performance
• Highlights the wide variety of MPO structures and staffing
• Co-authored with Jeff Kramer and Karen Seggerman
• Available from:
  – www.mposurvey.com
Many Hosting Arrangements

- There is no “normal” hosting structure
- More likely to be hosted if the MPO is smaller
- Regional Council is most common host
- Combined, local governments host 40% of all MPOs
- It is possible to change hosting arrangement later!
Advantages/Disadvantages – Hosted

Advantages:
• Lower overall cost
  – Administration
  – Benefits
  – Office space
• Sharing of expertise
  – Coordinated programs
  – Employees
• Capital float

Disadvantages:
• Responsibilities blurred
  – Staff
  – Board
• MPO subject to host rules, budget and oversight
  – Managerial authority and autonomy
• Policy interference
• Unfamiliarity with MPO work
Advantages/Disadvantages – Independent

Advantages:
- Political and administrative autonomy
- Clarity in chain of command
  - Staff
  - Board
- Agency identity
- Cleaner finances

Disadvantages:
- Cash flow problems
  - Federal reimbursements
  - Matching funds
- High cost of operation
  - Administrative burdens
- Staff and administrative versatility is required
Administrative Structures

- Conventional wisdom: hosted vs. independent
- Research result: MPO structures fall along a continuum
Median Staff Size

- One employee per 47,963 people
- Median staff size for all MPOs: 6
- Some MPOs were as small as 0.5 FTE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population in Planning Area</th>
<th>Total Employees (median)</th>
<th>Maximum Total Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50,000-100,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000-200,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200,000-500,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>500,000-1,000,000</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 million or more</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All MPOs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Small MPO Fun Facts

- The average small MPO board has 9 seats
- Nonvoting members are common on all MPO boards
- Weighted voting is rare (13.5% overall), and even less common at small MPOs
- Percent of budget spent on consultants - 24%
- Around 850 people work at non-TMAs nationwide
- MPOs have 12.5% employee turnover rate
  - Up to 20% at small MPOs
- Only 49% of MPOs say federal assistance is sufficient to do their job
  - Local funds/dues
  - Matching for PL and 5303
Transit Coordination
New Urban Areas: A Guidance Brief

- Published as TRB Research Results Digest 384
- Available from: http://www.trb.org/Publications/PubsNCHRPResearchResultsDigests.aspx
- Written as a guide for new transit operators and the state DOTs that oversee them
- However, urban transit service also begins at the 50,000 threshold. Many topics are useful for new MPOs as well.
- Contains a checklist for transit operators, including a subset on how to work with the MPO
Performance Based Planning and Programming

- National Performance Measures
  - State DOT Performance Targets
    - MPO Performance Targets
      - MPO LRTP
        - MPO TIP
      - State Long Range Plan
        - State TIP
    - Select Targets from Transit Agencies
Structure of Transit in Urban Areas

• Urban Areas receive 5307 Urban Transit Formula Funding
  – Much larger than 5311 Rural Transit Formula Funding
  – Small Transit Intensive Cities Program
• Designated Recipient is the state DOT. Responsible for fiscal oversight, performance reporting, and adherence to federal regulations.
• Local transit operators in small UAs are subrecipients to DOT
  – There can be more than 1 subrecipient in a region.
  – More sophisticated agencies can become direct recipients, which allows them to deal directly with FTA
• Designated recipients and operators undergo a triennial review
• Small Urban Areas are eligible for Section 5310 Elderly and Disabled Mobility Funds
• Rural transit is still important; sometimes urban and rural service is offered by the same operator
Working with Transit Agencies

- Be involved in the creation of the transit operator
- Include transit operator representation on the MPO board and advisory committees
  - May be voting or non-voting. Be careful of double-representation
  - Voting seats required for TMAs
- Participate in transit operator activities.
  - Look for cost-sharing opportunities
- Share or pool 5303 funds for transit studies and data
- Participate in the Development of the Transit Development Plan
- Include and consult with the transit operator in adoption of the LRTP and the TIP
  - ALL federal aid transit projects must appear in the LRTP and TIP
Case Study of the Salisbury, MD/DE Urban Area

- One UA was profiled in both documents
- Became a UA in 2000
- 2010 population: 98,081
- Tri-County Council of the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland is the host agency for both:
  - Shore Transit: [www.shoretransit.org/](http://www.shoretransit.org/)
  - Salisbury-Wicomico MPO: [www.swmpo.org](http://www.swmpo.org)
Salisbury-Wicomico MPO

- Tri-County Council of the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland performs planning services for counties and cities in the region
  - Pooling of resources. No rent charged to MPO or Shore Transit

- MPO established in 2004
  - PL funds around $110,000 per year.
  - Staff of 2; shared duties with TCC and Wicomico County
  - 60% of budget to consultants
  - 9 governing board members: 3 MDOT, 5 county, 2 municipal
  - 2 nonvoting members: DelDOT, City of Delmar, DE.
  - Voting membership tied to local dues payment
Shore Transit

- Created in 2004 (after the MPO)
- Offers 301,000 rides per year
- Formed by a merger of three county-based rural operators
- Located at the Tri County Council for cost purposes
- 10 Routes with a fleet of 45 buses
- Some routes are urban, some are rural
- Links directly to the MPO for inputs to the LRTP