R S G INC.
RESOURCE SYSTEMS GROUP, INC.

SUMMARY REPORT

MPO Peer Workshop

on Strategies to Improve the

Effectiveness of MPOs

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JUNE 7-8, 2007

Prepared for:
Federal Highway Administration

60 Lake Street, Unit 1E ▪ Burlington, Vermont 05401

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LIST OF ATTENDEES

- **Adam Aull,** MPO Director/GIS Manager, Danville Area Transportation Study (DATS) (Danville, IL)

- **Patricia Berry,** Principal Planner, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (Chicago, IL)

- **Robert Gordon,** Director, Hagerstown-Eastern Panhandle MPO (Hagerstown, MD)

- **Peter Hathaway,** Deputy Executive Director, Sacramento Area COG (Sacramento, CA)

- **Scott Johnstone,** Executive Director, Chittenden County MPO (Burlington, VT)

- **Lynsey Kawski,** Transportation Planner/MPO Coordinator, DeKalb-Sycamore Area Transportation Study (DeKalb, IL)

- **Michael Moriarty,** Senior Transportation Planner, Wichita Area MPO (Wichita, KS)

- **Kenneth O'Donnell,** Director, Bi-State MPO (Ft. Smith, AR)

- **Rich Perrin,** Executive Director, Genesee Transportation Council (Rochester, NY)

- **Page Scott,** Executive Director, Yakima Valley COG (Yakima, WA)

- **Matthew Stoll,** Executive Director, Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS) (Boise, ID)

- **Thomas Thomson,** Executive Director, Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission (Savannah, GA)

- **David Wessell,** Manager, Flagstaff MPO (Flagstaff, AZ)

- **David Kuehn,** Federal Highway Administration (Washington, DC)

- **Peter Plumeau,** Facilitator

1.0   BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

During 2007 and 2008, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), through its Transportation Planning Capacity Building program, conducted a series of metropolitan planning organization (MPO) peer exchange workshops in partnership with the Association of MPOs (AMPO). Each workshop focuses on a specific topic of current or emerging relevance to MPOs, each of which was identified through a national panel process. The workshops seek to engage participants from MPOs representing a diversity of urban area sizes, MPO structures and expertise/experience in the topic area.

This report summarizes the results of the workshop held in Chicago, Illinois on June 7 and 8, 2007, on addressing strategies to improve the effectiveness of MPOs. Representatives from 13 MPOs shared their experiences, success stories and challenges on this topic. The workshop was designed to maximize the exchange of information and perspectives among participants. FHWA developed this report to summarize the workshop discussions and results for the use and benefit of all MPOs and their planning partners across the country.

2.0   WORKSHOP SUMMARY

2.1   OPENING REMARKS

Peter Plumeau, the lead facilitator for the workshop, stated that the purpose of the event was to gather representatives from MPOs representing small, mid-size, and large metropolitan areas around the country to share experiences and collaborate on strategies to improve the effectiveness of MPOs. The workshop would include a presentation from a representative from the Genesee Transportation Council (GTC) regarding strategies for aligning the MPO work program, organization and management. With this presentation "setting the stage" for the remainder of the workshop, Mr. Plumeau would then move all participants into a facilitated discussion on experiences, issues and options. He noted that David Kuehn of the FHWA was present to provide additional insights from the federal perspective as well as to obtain information from the participants that can help FHWA more effectively provide assistance and support to MPOs.

2.1.1   Perspectives on MPO Effectiveness

Mr. Plumeau made a brief presentation to help provide additional context for the workshop, based mainly on the results of a 2006 Transportation Research Board (TRB) conference on *The Metropolitan Planning Organization, Present and Future.*[1] One goal of the conference was to consider current and alternative organizational structures. The purpose was to identify directions for policy development,

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[1] The full conference proceedings are available from the TRB website at http://www.trb.org/news/blurb_detail.asp?id=8340.

organizational evolution, and research on metropolitan planning and to frame a vision of the MPO in the year 2020. Among the key themes that emerged from the conference were the following:

o   The MPO must be relevant outside of federal process and view federal requirements as the base, not the limits, of its role in the region

o   The MPO should serve as a "convener" and be central in the regional network of connections and issues

o   The MPO should be appropriately proactive and entrepreneurial, which imply a need for strong MPO leadership

There remains the long-standing question of how to put the MPO's authority on par with its responsibilities and expectations. While there will be regional and local variations in how this question is resolved, the conference concluded that this issue must be addressed if MPOs are to respond to growing expectations and remain effective organizations into the future.

2.1.2   Summary of Pre-Workshop Assignment

Prior to the workshop, each participant was asked to respond to a set of questions to help both provide insights on each MPO's situation and provide participants with an additional resource document for reference during and after the workshop. Each participant was asked to provide responses to questions on the following topics: Articulating the MPO mission; Aligning the MPO mission with the Work Program; Experiences with organizational development; Addressing resource constraints for strategic planning; and The impact of the MPO administrative structure.

The following is a summary of the pre-workshop assignment responses:

▪   Articulating the MPO Mission: Several MPOs conducted formal processes for strategic planning and/or mission development at the policy-maker level. The majority of the MPOs at the workshop had staff-led informal approaches to articulating the mission, and some MPOs were still working towards educating the Board and the public about the role of the MPO.

▪   Aligning the UPWP and MPO Mission: Only a few of the MPOs had tried to formally align the Work Program with their articulated MPO mission. While some have tried to keep this relationship between the documents simple, the majority of MPOs have tried to achieve a de facto mission-related work program, primarily through the staff's internal process for developing the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).

▪   Experiences with Organizational Development: There were many approaches to organizational development. Some MPOs conducted extensive organizational development efforts to facilitate cultural change and a continued focus on priorities within the agency. Others used ad hoc efforts to strengthen the MPO's effectiveness, such as funding a shared GIS position with a host agency. Still others used a "continuous improvement" approach by addressing progress on

priorities at weekly staff meetings, or by creating a Board-level Strategic Management Committee, for example.

Resource constraints related to undertaking organizational development (or "reengineering") were an issue for almost all of the MPOs. Some commented that organizational development is often considered a "luxury," or secondary, to transportation planning work. Some MPOs have managed to find creative ways to enhance their operations, such as forming a statewide MPO association to provide peer support and a forum for information exchange.

- Impact of MPO Structure: There were several different opinions expressed on the impact of the MPO administrative structure on effectiveness. For most of the MPOs whose designation created them as stand-alone entities, participants considered such independence to be a facilitator of effectiveness. Representatives of MPOs whose designation placed them within a "host" agency, however, had a range of opinions on this topic. Some felt that the structure allowed them to obtain administrative services that were otherwise difficult to afford. Others felt that the structure created ever-present potential for political or mission conflict with the host agency. Some participants also believed that non-host jurisdictions might have issues with host jurisdictions regarding "fair shares" of MPO services.

2.2   RICHARD PERRIN, GTC, "BEYOND THE UPWP: DEVELOPING AN EFFECITIVE MPO WORK PLAN FOR THE GENESEE-FINGER LAKES REGION"

Richard Perrin, Executive Director of the Genesee Transportation Council (GTC), gave a presentation entitled, "Beyond the Unified Planning Work Program: Developing an Effective MPO Work Plan for the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region."[2]

Mr. Perrin began by defining the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) as a document that brings all elements of the planning process together. Using major tasks as a framework, the UPWP defines desired project outputs, schedules and costs for achieving these outputs, and technical activities that will support project goals. Financial resources are identified and public input is considered to define and implement the UPWP planning tasks.

GTC has a second document called the MPO Work Plan that defines the internal operating strategies for implementing the UPWP. It achieves this by identifying the MPO's customers, defining roles and expectations, and directing organizational activities. From there, the MPO Work Plan assigns staff resources and considers MPO input, ultimately resulting in operating strategies for the MPO.

While these two documents are different, they are both critical to a successfully operating MPO. The task becomes figuring out how to align the two. Mr. Perrin said the UPWP represents the "what" and the Work Plan represents the "how," with the alignment of the two documents representing maximal MPO effectiveness.

[2] Appendix 2 includes a copy of Mr. Perrin's presentation slides.

Mr. Perrin shared a graphic entitled "Pyramid of MPO Effectiveness" (Figure 1**Error! Reference source not found.**), which illustrates that an MPO's relevance correlates with its ability to address key regional needs and issues. For example, those MPOs who aspire only to meet basic federal requirements could be considered minimally relevant, while those that pursue activities that influence travel dynamics could be considered highly relevant and effective. He noted that most MPOs probably fall somewhere within the middle ranges of the pyramid, meaning they do somewhat more than the basic federal requirements but are not necessarily able to influence regional travel dynamics.

Mr. Perrin discussed challenges and key issues associated with an effective MPO Work Plan. In particular, he noted that it is difficult to fully identify and understand the MPO's "customers," since there are so many ways in which different elements of the region's population and stakeholders can be served by the MPO, thus making it very difficult to generalize. In addition, Mr. Perrin noted that the GTC has found that about 20% of its constituency (e.g., municipalities and officials) drives at least 80% of their workload (he called this another way of thinking about the "80/20 Rule" or "Pareto Principle").

With regard to the task of defining roles and expectations, Mr. Perrin noted that a challenge to an effective MPO process is the multiple parties involved in MPO functions, including the Policy Board, the Planning Committee and MPO staff. The Work Plan addresses this complexity by clearly delineating the roles of each of these parties. The GTC considers all participants to be part of the "3-C" process. At the same time, however, it is important for each to understand their role in that process: the role of the Policy Board is to act; the Planning Committee's role is to review and consider; and the staff role is to gather, report, and present (not to advocate in the case of GTC). With well-understood boundaries and performance expectations, all can to focus their energies and reduce duplication of efforts. The result is the MPO has a framework for operating efficiently.

Figure 1: Pyramid of MPO Effectiveness
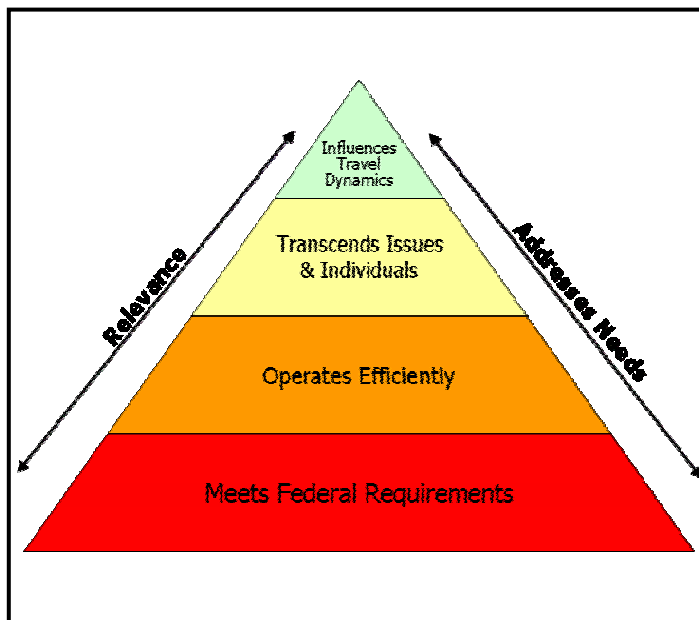
The Work Plan helps direct organizational activities by determining staff duties, ensuring those duties are connected with the UPWP's goals, objectives and principal themes, and facilitating structured information sharing among staff. It is important to note that when defining roles and directing organizational activities, the Work Plan should be comprehensive; it is not just for senior management and not just for training.

Among the Work Plan's key roles is to prioritize staff efforts across UPWP tasks based on customer needs. It also helps create a standard for the form and quality of deliverables in the UPWP. For example, all UPWP projects require an executive summary to be developed along with the final product. Similarly, data collection activities require use of a format that can be accessed and used by MPO staff and member agencies.

The MPO Work Plan also derives from input from both primary customers and MPO staff. This allows the highly informed staff to articulate what is required, technically and financially, to undertake a task. Similarly, the MPO can have key stakeholders air their differences and obtain buy-in before projects are initiated.

Mr. Perrin concluded his presentation by noting that the Work Plan approach allows the MPO to balance its structure with the need for flexibility. The focus is on performance in Key Result Areas from the Work Plan. This focus requires use of guidelines and checklists, performance measures and targets, and unfettered and continuous communication among staff. Taken together, these ingredients move the MPO toward a more fully aligned Work Plan and UPWP, which facilitates having an effective organization.

2.3   WORKSHOP THEMES AND ISSUES

Participants engaged in a facilitated discussion of the issues raised in the workshop introduction and the presentation. Several key themes emerged from this discussion, as described below.

2.3.1   Leadership & Vision

Participants agreed that an MPO must have strong leadership in order to function effectively. However, realizing the benefits of strong leadership can be impeded by the public, regional and/or institutional environment in which the MPO must function. In other words, a strong leader's influence may be countered by other factors in the MPO's operating environment. Participants also agreed that if the MPO were not properly organized to draw upon the strengths of their leadership, it would not live up to its full potential to influence travel dynamics in the region. Although many MPOs have strong leadership from the Policy Board, the Director or both, this is not always enough to propel the organization forward.

2.3.2   MPO Policy Board

Participants agreed that the MPO Policy Board plays a key role in the effectiveness of the organization. Participants believed that that board member turnover and "attention span" can both significantly affect an MPO's ability to operate effectively. Ongoing turnover of Board members tends to dilute the Board's institutional memory, which in turn can undermine members' appreciation of the MPO's role and responsibilities and make it more difficult to be effective as an organization. In some regions, being appointed to the MPO Board is considered akin to "drawing the short straw" compared to other municipal appointment options, therefore resulting in lower quality board membership. Others found that the Board's lack of understanding about the purpose and role of the MPO limited its ability to create a clearly defined identity and mission for the MPO beyond the basic federal requirements. The Board's desire to be involved in the "technical details" of the MPO's work, rather than focusing on policy and strategic issues, can be a manifestation of this lack of understanding of roles.

Related to the discussion of the Policy Board was the role of the MPO executive director. Participants discussed whether the role of the executive director was that of a leader or risk-taker, or whether it was to simply administer the organization. Participants agreed that both were important, but that the executive director should create a space for the staff to feel "safe" in doing innovative things as well as feel comfortable to take risks regarding addressing resource constraints. The executive director can also play an important role in supporting an MPO "champion" on the Board who is willing to lead the MPO into new or different areas of work.

2.3.3   The MPO Mission

Several participants said that they had difficultly articulating their MPO's mission in a succinct and compelling manner to the Policy Board and others. For MPOs that had not developed an accepted set of organizational goals and objectives, different parties in their planning environment tended to have differing opinions of the MPO's precise mission. Furthermore, without a clear and well-understood mission, gauging "success" through performance measures or measures of effectiveness is becomes difficult and highly subjective.

Some participants noted that working with related regional and local agencies and institutions to coordinate roles and missions could facilitate the process of educating the public and stakeholders about the MPO and its role. In addition, these participants believed that it was essential to the success of the MPO to have policy-makers engaged in developing and articulating the mission. Ultimately, the articulation of the MPO's mission needs to be simple and compelling enough to transcend individuals and issues.

2.3.4   The Public

The "public" can refer to many entities – the business community, the local residents. Participants generally believed that some or all of these constituencies – and in some cases the MPO Board --

need to acquire a better understanding of the purpose and role of the MPO in their community. Participants also felt that outreach needs to be tailored to each stakeholder group's particular situation and perspective. In addition, the group believed that public support is critical to the voice of the MPO, particularly as it pertains to working with elected officials and making progress on difficult issues. The MPO can build credibility with policy-makers when the public understands and is engaged in the MPO process.

Some participants believed that there were obstacles to gaining the support of the public, such as the myriad elements of the "MPO process," which can be frustrating to the nonprofessional. Similarly, the business community does not always perceive the MPO as helpful or related to their industry. The public at large often has difficulty understanding the role and requirements of the different agencies. All of these become challenges that the MPO must address in order to gain public support.

2.3.5 Resources

Participants agreed that an MPO rarely has enough resources (funding or people) to meet all requirements and expectations. Regarding the specific topic of taking actions to improve MPO effectiveness, most agreed that resource availability and competition for resources among various MPO tasks has at least as much of an impact as does leadership on the ability to do strategic planning or organizational development.

In the opinion of participants, several key areas go largely unaddressed due to resource constraints, including:

- Clearly defining the Policy Board's role and responsibilities

- Articulating the importance of the LRTP as the foundation of implementation and fiscal planning, including explicitly linking the LRTP to the tasks and budgets of the UPWP

- Educating the Board to enhance appreciation for the MPO's role (and reducing turnover)

Some participants believed that the more educated and engaged the Policy Board becomes, the easier it will be to allocate resources for strategic planning and organizational development activities because the Board will recognize that it has a real stake in the effectiveness of the MPO.

2.3.6 Institutional Relationships

Participants concurred that the quality of the relationships between the MPO and other public agencies and stakeholder organizations can have a significant impact on the MPO's work and effectiveness. Several participants cited their own experiences and said that to create good working relationships, the MPO needed to be proactive and identify the interests and priorities held in common with other organizations. This would provide a focal point for collaboration and relationship building over time. The MPO's willingness to "take the first step" and seek out these collaborative opportunities is an important ingredient of effectiveness.

Participants discussed some of the unique relationship issues faced by multi-state MPOs. One of the biggest challenges is dealing with the separate, and sometimes competing, pulls and priorities of two or more states. While no clear resolution was suggested, several participants expressed their belief that the federal government needs to develop options for multi-state MPOs to help address scenarios where one project involves two states that cannot come to agreement on key project aspects. It was also suggested that convening a multi-state MPO peer exchange at the Board level to gather and disseminate strategies and information would be very helpful.[3]

2.3.7 Strategic Planning and Organizational Development

Participants agreed that at least three factors play a key role in successful strategic planning and organizational development:

- Create policies and procedures that transcend individuals and years

- Strive for cooperation and collaboration among the Board and staff

- Balance the allocation of resources between policy and technical planning

The group felt strongly that a strategic plan must be a dynamic document that is frequently referenced and updated. In addition, participants generally believed that a strategic plan for an MPO must be prospective and consider the opportunities afforded by looking at the federal requirements as the bare minimum of what should be done, and allow for organizational flexibility to respond to emerging and forecasted changes in the planning environment.

Participants from MPOs hosted by other agencies believed that that strategic planning and organizational development can frequently get lost in a sea of undefined inter-organization arrangements. It is therefore critical to have a clearly articulated agreement between the MPO and the hosting agency to facilitate a more effective organization.

Some participants believed that the greatest obstacle to successful strategic planning was implementation of the strategies themselves. Without a means to facilitate strategy implementation, the strategic planning exercise is essentially irrelevant. Participants therefore believed that the strategic plan must be reflected in the MPO's day to day work be ensuring work tasks are linked directly to achieving strategic plan objectives and goals. It is important to bring the staff and Board into this process by regularly reviewing and reporting on progress toward those goals.

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[3] In recent years, several studies and papers have been developed that examine multi-state MPO issues and challenges, including NCHRP 8-36, Task 44, "Multi-State MPOs: Approaches, Cases, and Institutional Arrangements," (http://www.trb.org/trbnet/ProjectDisplay.asp?ProjectID=1258).

APPENDICES:

1. **WORKSHOP AGENDA**

2. **PRESENTATIONS**

**MPO PEER WORKSHOP ON STRATEGIES
TO IMPROVE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MPOS**
Hosted by Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)
Chicago, Illinois
June 7-8, 2007

AGENDA

Thursday, June 7

5:00 pm	Meet in W Hotel Lobby & Proceed as a Group to Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) in Sears Tower

5:15 – 8:00 pm   Social Period & Dinner with Opening Discussions:

- Purpose & Goals of Peer Exchange (Peter Plumeau, Facilitator)
- "Strategies for Aligning the MPO Work Program, Organization and Management" (Rich Perrin, Genesee Transportation Council)
- Facilitated Roundtable Discussion – Each participant discusses his/her MPO's current activities and issues
- Preview of Day 2 Agenda and Logistics

Friday, June 8

7:45 – 8:15 am   Continental Breakfast/Registration (CMAP)

8:15 – 9:45 am   Facilitated Group Discussion on Strategic Planning & Organizational Development for MPOs

- Selected MPO officials will discuss their experiences with the entire group
- Facilitated Q & A

9:45 – 10:00 am   Break

10:00 am – 12:00 pm	Breakout Groups – Topics Set #1:* • Defining the MPO's mission – policy-maker & staff roles • Organizational development/reengineering needs • Developing a mission-aligned MPO work program
12:00 – 1:00 pm	Lunch • Open discussion with facilitator assistance – reflect on morning's proceedings
1:00 – 2:45 pm	Breakout Groups - Topics Set #2:* • Strategic planning techniques and tools for the MPO environment • Overcoming resource constraints to enable organizational development/strategic planning • Administrative structure impact on organizational development options (e.g., hosted vs. stand-alone MPO, etc.)
2:45 – 3:00 pm	Break
3:00 – 4:00 pm	Synthesis and Wrap-up • Facilitated group discussion on workshop themes and issues • Sketching out of outline for workshop report to ensure most important topics are captured
4:00 pm	Adjourn

***Note*: Specific breakout topics are subject to revision based on participant interests and needs discussed during initial part of Workshop.**

Beyond the Unified Planning Work Program
Developing an Effective
MPO Work Plan for the
Genesee-Finger Lakes Region

Richard Perrin, AICP
Executive Director

GENESEE TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL

Unified Planning Work Program

- Identifies Tasks

- Defines Outputs & Schedules

- Directs Technical Activities

- Assigns Financial Resources

- Includes Public Input

- Implements Planning Strategies

MPO Work Plan

- Identifies Customers

- Defines Roles & Expectations

- Directs Organizational Activities

- Assigns Staff Resources

- Includes MPO Input

- Implements Operating Strategies

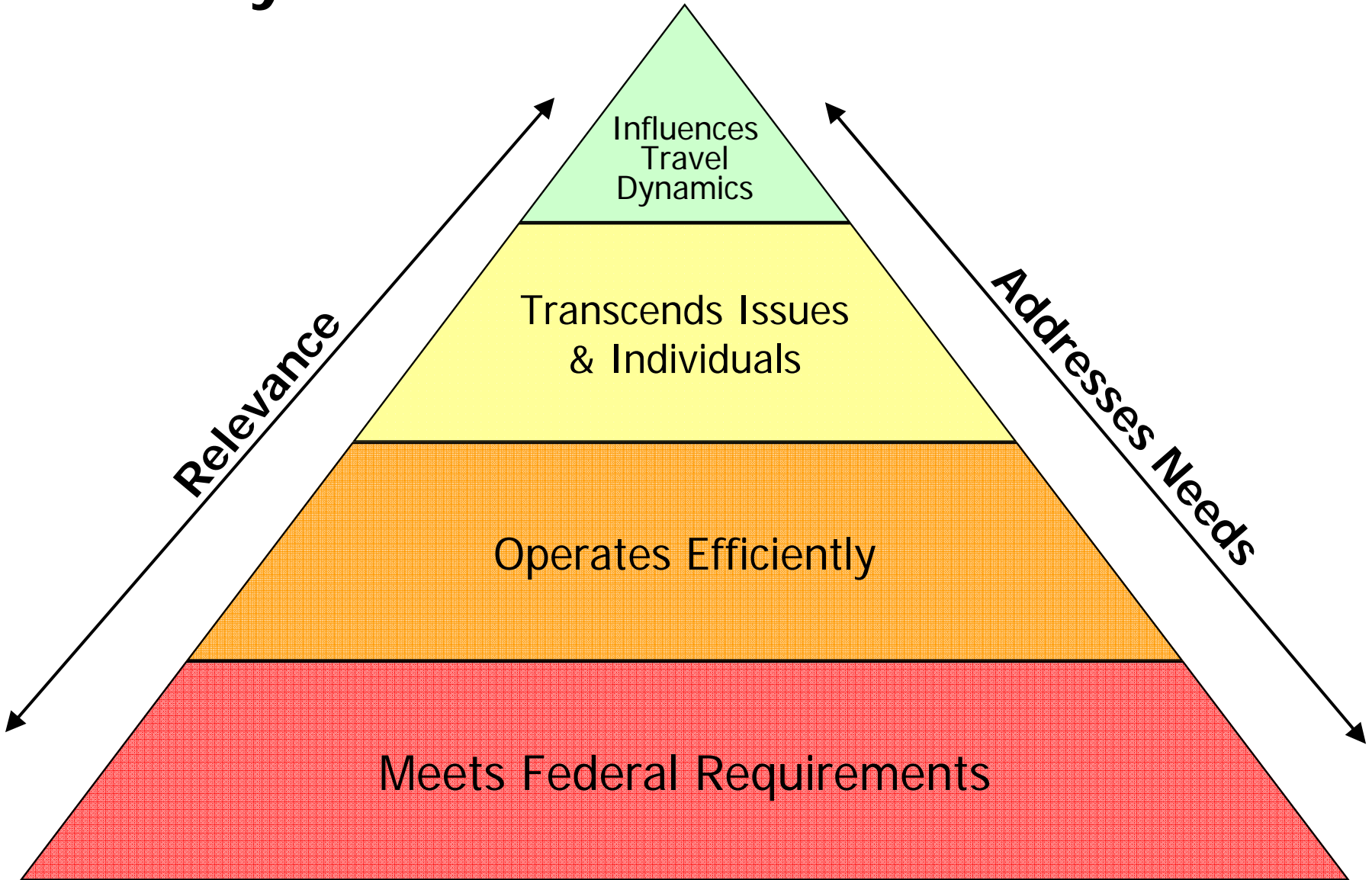# Aligning the UPWP & Work Plan

The UPWP represents the "What"
The Work Plan represents the "How"

**Aligned
Work Plan
&
UPWP**
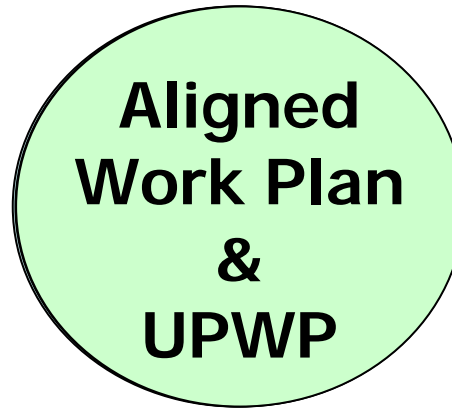
**Ultimate Goal is to Maximize
Effectiveness of the Transportation
Planning and Investment
Decision Making Process via the MPO**

Pyramid of MPO Effectiveness

Relevance

Addresses Needs

Influences Travel Dynamics

Transcends Issues & Individuals

Operates Efficiently

Meets Federal Requirements

GENESEE TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL

Identifies Customers

Key Issues

- Cannot be broadly defined

- MPO is many things to many people

- Assists in prioritization of effort

Results

- Primary – Member agencies and the public
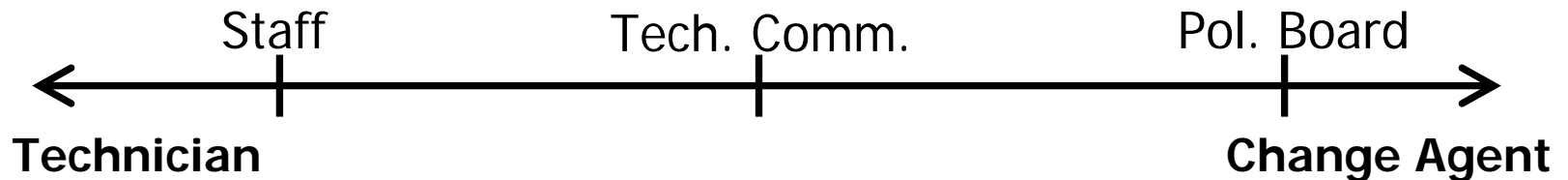
- Direct – Non-MPO members

Defines Roles & Expectations

Key Issues

- ## Various roles
  (Policy Board, Technical Committee, and staff)

- ## Need clear delineation to define boundaries

- ## Establishes framework for efficiency

Results

- ## Adopted TIP Procedures Manual

-

Technician   Staff   Tech. Comm.   Pol. Board   **Change Agent**

Directs Organizational Activities

Key Issues

- Primary determinant of staff duties

- Connected with goals, objectives, principal themes

- Structured information sharing among staff

Results

- Operating Model (Program management and technical assistance)

- UPWP Call for Projects

- Weekly Project Status Report (PSR) review

Assigns Staff Resources

Key Issues

- Prioritization of staff efforts by activity based on customer needs

- Professional development and training needs

- Creates standard for form and quality of deliverables

Results

- SWOT analysis for planning and administration

- Uniform presentation of information and materials

GENESEE TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL

Includes MPO Input

Key Issues

- Involve primary customers in development

- Air differences and get buy-in at technical level

- Staff who do it know what is needed

Results

- Technical development committees for all required products and new programs

- Staff input in developing budget for their tasks

Implements Operating Strategies

Key Issues

- Balance structure with flexibility

- Performance driven for Key Result Areas

- The journey is important <u>not</u> the destination

Results

- Guidelines and checklists
  (Use of UPWP funds, RFP/RFQ and contract management templates, etc.)

- Performance measures and targets

- Targeted staff meetings on work plan direction

MPO Effectiveness

Influences Travel Dynamics

Transcends Issues & Individuals

Aligned Work Plan & UPWP

Operates Efficiently

Meets Federal Requirements

Relevance

Addresses Needs

GENESEE TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL