

Metropolitan Planning Organizations: Definitions, History, and other Context

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Regional Systems Planning vs Metropolitan Planning Organization

Not just transportation: As presented earlier, Metropolitan Council also responsible for Community Development and Environmental Services.

Transportation responsibilities include

- Transit operations,
- Transitway development and
- Regional Transportation Planning - MPO included here

First part of the presentation will focus on MPO role



MPO Parameters

Outlined in Federal Law (23 U.S. Code §134, 23 CFR §450.310)

- Shall be designated for urbanized areas over 50,000
- Policy board established to develop:
 - Long range transportation plans
 - Transportation Improvement Plans (TIP's)
- If established "new," must include:
 - Local elected officials
 - Officials of public agencies that administer or operate major modes of transportation
 - State officials
- Previously established MPO's, such as the Metropolitan Council, may operate as originally established

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2011-title23/html/USCODE-2011-title23-chap1-sec134.htm>



Designation of MPO

Designated in Federal Law (23 U.S. Code §134, 23 CFR §450.310)

- Requires agreement between
 - Governor
 - Local governments representing at least 75% of urbanized area population
 - Must include largest city
- Redesignation required when proposed changes would
 - Substantially change proportional representation
 - Substantially change responsibilities, decision making authority or procedures
 - 23 CFR §450.310 - Only applies to urbanized areas of greater than 200,000 population

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2011-title23/html/USCODE-2011-title23-chap1-sec134.htm>

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-23/chapter-I/subchapter-E/part-450#450.310>



Role of MPO's in Metropolitan Areas

Transportation Planning

- 20 year Long Range Transportation plan (23 CFR §450.324)
 - Reviewed every 4 years
- 4 year Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) (23 CFR §450.326)
 - Updated every 4 years
 - TIP shall include capital and non-capital surface transportation projects (or phases of projects) within the boundaries of the metropolitan planning area (23 CFR §450.326(e))

Regional vs. Local Decision Making

- Federal funding from projects identified in TIP
- TIP process defines input from local governments



How this applies to Metropolitan Council (Overview)

- Metropolitan Council designated as MPO in 1973, and continues under that authority, as allowed by law
- Specific implementation in MN stat 473.146 ("Policy Plans for Metropolitan Agencies")
- Non-transit elements of transportation plans must be developed in consultation with the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) (MN stat 473.146 subd 3)
 - TAB membership outlined in MN stat 473.146 subd 4
- TAB role unclear for transit planning
 - No explicit requirement
 - Transit projects included in TIP, which is reviewed by TAB and approved by Council



Alternative MPO "models"

- As noted above, an MPO exists as designated. Many regional governments have MPO role, but form of government varies:
 - Councils of Governments, consisting of local elected officials and appointees (e.g. DRCOG in Denver)
 - Appointed Planning Commissions (e.g. Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission)
 - Elected Regional (Portland Metro)
 - Full list of MPO's available at <https://www.planning.dot.gov/mpo/default.aspx>
- Note, however, that redesignation has specific requirements



MPO History

More than 50 years old, oriented to transportation since the systems are not confined nor operate in a vacuum. Highway Act of 1962 introduced MPOs as a vehicle to provide cooperative, comprehensive and continuing multimodal planning for urban areas.

- The Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, established Urban Mass Transportation Administration, now the FTA.
- Creation fits the mold of regionalization/centralization of planning and other urban development trends.
- Range of assumed duties/focus/size of orgs. Larger MPOs often take on required planning for landuse, system preservation, expansion, new modes, etc. Smaller MPOs often focus just on basic delivery of plans/logistics as required.



Changing Context

- Not static entities, nor regions.
- Changes in structures, trip-making, technology, landuse, transportation goals, climate are changing the work of MPOs/regional governments.
- Regional vs. Local decision-making/funding.
- Concerns about funding for all transportation.



Unique elements of Metropolitan Council

- Dual role as planner and operator for transit is very rare combination. Operating is a whole different process.
- Transit operations has a different setup than others without a “working” advisory board between operations and Council.
 - TAB is not designated to deal with transit planning or operations.
- Issue between regional decisions-making body and transit provider.
 - Other entities have separate boards—MVTA, SW Transit.
 - Council is both coordinator, collaborator, and competitor.



Comparisons?

- Las Vegas – operates transit
- Portland – operates the zoo (different scale)
- Houston – open question about representation
- Also worth connecting specifically with comparable transit agencies to learn about governance models and connection to MPO/regional government.
 - Philadelphia
 - Denver



Final points to ponder

Transit planning and operation.

- Does structure for both planning and operation need greater definition?

Overall, how to structurally best mediate between planning at high level and building/running system that work for the region?

- With large-scale goals around climate change, safety, equity and access how to coordinate/incentivize/enforce decisions and systems.

