



STATEMENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS (AMPO)

**THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT HEARING “ADDRESSING THE ROADWAY SAFETY CRISIS: BUILDING SAFER
ROADS FOR ALL” JUNE 8, 2022**

Chair Norton, Ranking Member Davis, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the hearing record regarding the role of MPOs in implementing safety programs and other roadway safety strategies. AMPO supports the goal for zero roadway fatalities - zero is the only acceptable number.

AMPO supports the continued investment in making improvements to enhance roadway safety particularly within metropolitan planning areas that our members serve. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provides opportunities for MPOs to plan and, hopefully, implement additional safety measures. There is considerable interest from MPOs in the new Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) program with many MPOs intending to develop or update metropolitan area plans. We believe those initiatives will have lasting impacts on safety within our urban areas.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s (NHTSA) 2020 Overview of Motor Vehicle Crashes (Published March 22) fatalities in urban areas increased 8.5% from 2019 to 2020 despite lower Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) in 2020. Since 2011 both pedestrian (+61%) and pedalcyclist (+54%) fatalities have increased in urban areas, areas of concern for many MPOs. These increases are not acceptable and the MPO community is committed to using limited capital resources to implement the safety projects and programs included in MPO plans and TIPs. We will also continue to partner, when

we can, with States to construct the necessary safety measures to reduce these fatalities and improve the quality of life in all urban areas.

USDOT's National Roadway Safety Strategy (NRSS) outlines the major actions it wants to take over the next few years, to make a significant difference in safety. The heart of the Strategy is the Safe System Approach which focuses on five key objectives: safer people, safer roads, safer vehicles, safer speeds, and post-crash care. While MPOs do not have the authority to make changes in all of these key areas we hope that under the NRSS and the Safe System Approach the MPO community can meaningfully participate in the discussions. According to NHTSA the three major behavioral factors linked to roadway fatalities are speeding, alcohol-impaired driving, and seat belt non-use. One area that is of major concern to smaller MPOs are rural roads. Most of the nation's vehicular fatalities occur on these facilities. Speed is a key factor along with the aging population. Mitigating these risk factors are often simple dynamic messaging signs, geometric improvements, or obstruction removal of rocks, trees, etc. Many MPOs are undertaking a local roads safety plan to help address these issues. Like State and localities, MPOs also face challenges to combat distracted driving. The MPO community welcomes the opportunity to work with our respective Local and State DOTs and the Federal government to combat these issues.

Through the MPO planning process we strive to locate, identify, and address safety issues within the transportation network, rather than waiting for crashes to occur and reacting afterwards. Throughout the MPO planning process our members engage with the public and conduct outreach activities to solicit input from the entire community so that investments can benefit all users of the system.

How MPOs are making roadways safer.

In **Springfield, Missouri** the city developed the SGF Yields program that aims to initiate a cultural change in Springfield toward a more pedestrian friendly community by education and awareness. The program

educates elementary students about how to be a safety superhero and provides awareness through Mr. Walker statues placed near heavily used crosswalks to remind drivers to be attentive to pedestrians. The program yielded an increase in percentage of drivers yielding at sidewalks from 35% to 52%. The number of pedestrian crashes within the city limits decreased from 72 in 2017 to 60 in 2021. The pilot was funded with local dollars. Additional funding would assist in expanding the program across the region. Initiatives that have worked.

In **Morgantown, WV** the city put up locally funded Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon's (RRFB) at selected intersections (on state owned but city-maintained streets) and employed a proactive bicycle safety public information campaign. These investments have improved non-motorized transportation safety considerably and the safety program was recognized by the League of American Bicyclists as a bronze level Bicycle Friendly City.

The **Richmond Regional Transportation Safety Plan** is based on the vision of Toward Zero Deaths which has been adopted by the Commonwealth of Virginia. The 2017-2021 Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) prioritizes a safe system approach based on successful Vision Zero efforts in Europe.

Implementation of the SHSP involves the 5Es of highway safety: Engineering, Education, Enforcement, Emergency Response and Medical Services, and Everyone. While the SHSP outlines an overarching statewide approach the Richmond Regional Transportation Safety Plan addresses the issues specific to the region and local jurisdictions. The plan outlines the primary factors preventing people from arriving safely at their destinations along with locations where safety improvements could make a difference. Regional safety trends, crash characteristics, crash locations, and next steps are outlined in the plan.

East-West Gateway Council of Governments (EWG) in St. Louis, Missouri has partnered with Missouri and Illinois Departments of Transportation to provide visiting safety education programs in high schools covering topics such as impaired and distracted driving, post-accident trauma, and how to prevent

crashes. EWG has also been working recently with the Missouri Department of Transportation on targeted social media ads and public service announcements in that same vein.

In **St. Lucie County, Florida, the St. Lucie Transportation Planning Organization (St. Lucie TPO)** supports the efforts of its member local governments to improve roadway safety comprehensively such as by evaluating the visibility of crosswalk markings for pedestrian safety, identifying incomplete streets and implementing bicycle lane pilot projects to encourage the addition of bicycle facilities, and assisting the management of speed and the setting of target speed limits with analyses and studies. This wide-ranging support reinforces the FHWA safe system approach to achieving the vision of zero fatalities and serious injuries within the communities of the St. Lucie TPO.

IIJA PROVISIONS

Under Section 11206 MPOs are required to use 2.5% of their planning funds for activities to increase safe and accessible options for multiple travel modes for people of all ages and abilities. The new requirement defines activities to include Complete-street standards and policies, plans that create networks of active transportation facilities, increase public transportation ridership, and several other similar activities. In most cases MPOs exceed this level of funding and we encourage USDOT to be open and flexible in its approval process for meeting this requirement.

The opportunity to make increased safety investments under the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) has been greatly enhanced under the changes in the IIJA. Not only has the funding significantly increased but Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) formula funds can be credited toward the non-Federal share of a TAP safety project. However, States would need to agree to use HSIP funding in this manner.

For decades MPOs have had the authority to program their suballocated Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP) funds for safety improvements. We thank Congress for its continued support of

the STBGP, not only with additional resources but also the expansion of eligible projects. MPO's block grant funds have been used for many safety-related projects such as intersection improvements, sidewalks, traffic signals, improved guardrails, rumble strips and improved lighting.

SS4A - The IIJA establishes the new Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) discretionary grant program, which supports local initiatives to prevent death and serious injury on roads and streets, commonly referred to as "Vision Zero" or "Toward Zero Deaths" initiatives. As we noted, making progress towards and ultimately achieving zero deaths on roadways is a goal of AMPO's members, but it will take strong coordination between the States, MPOs, and local government. AMPO anticipates there will be a robust number of applications from MPOs in partnership with other eligible entities.

The SS4A program creates new Safety Action Plan (SAP) planning requirements that some MPOs are concerned may not leverage existing safety planning (such as Regional Safety Plans), nor is it clear how they relate to Transportation Performance Measures (TPM). The need to retool existing plans created in compliance with pre-existing federal statute into SAPs may add delay to project implementation. We understand that under the SS4A NOFO there is an opportunity to self-certify if the applicant has a plan substantially similar to an SAP, and we encourage USDOT to be flexible in its evaluation and approval of existing safety related planning documents.

Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program: In addition to bicycle and pedestrian safety issues, MPOs also struggle with methods to highlight and improve safety conflicts between our roadways and major rail corridors. This funding opportunity not only encourages improvement of specific infrastructure and safety devices, but also to support other means to improve safety if related to the mobility of people and goods at highway-rail grade crossings, including technological solutions. However, the railroads analyze at-grade crossings on a project-by-project basis. Most MPOs do not engage in project development level analyses. It is unclear how most MPOs planning level analysis will fit into the

railroads' longstanding project development level process. AMPO is encouraged by the multimodal approach that FRA and USDOT has taken to recognize the significant safety concerns in these areas and provide multiple opportunities to address them through parallel programs.

Challenges and Observations.

MPOs are actively engaged with the public in their planning areas. More public involvement (and funding for major advertising campaigns) is needed to address negative driving behaviors and educate the public on the impacts of them. SS4A grants could be helpful, and we hope funds may be utilized for this type of public engagement.

To better analyze crash information, AMPO would recommend that there be consistency in crash reporting by law enforcement agencies. In addition, there is a need for Federally provided or funded Predictive Crash Analysis Software to be made available for MPOs to utilize. This would also promote a consistent method to better identify which intersections and road segments have the highest crash risk and can suggest appropriate countermeasures at each location. This data would be a great asset to all MPOs with limited staff.

The lack of waivers for the FHWA Buy America compliance requirements for equipment made with steel or iron - *100% of steel or iron should be made in America* - has negatively impacted efforts related to purchasing some safety-related equipment. For instance, some MPOs have run into issues with items as small as screws in cameras not meeting the requirement. Some local law enforcement agencies have indicated an interest in using drones for crash reconstruction but are unable to purchase drones currently available on the market with federal dollars due to the restrictions associated with the country of origin of the drone manufacturers.

In some States many of the safety issues that need to be addressed are on state owned and maintained roads. Allowing a local entity to improve a State-owned road with a grant (SS4A) will require coordination and ultimate approval from the State. This may include the need for matching funds.

AMPO has identified inconsistencies within states across the country as to how safety programs and projects are implemented. The lack of consistency and coordination has led to project delay or in some cases has prevented the project from moving forward entirely. AMPO believes that USDOT can help encourage consistency and coordination at all levels of government in order to achieve the safety outcomes we all would like to see.

AMPO and all our members are committed to supporting the safety goals that were established by Congress and now being implemented by the USDOT. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this statement for the hearing record. AMPO is happy to answer any questions that you may have.