



AMPO

Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS

What is a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)?

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) coordinate transportation planning for urban areas with populations over 50,000, ensuring that federal and state funds are effectively invested in local and regional projects. Operating under the Cooperative, Comprehensive, and Continuing (3C) process, MPOs play a critical role in determining how federal and state transportation funds are allocated, ensuring that projects reflect local priorities while addressing broader regional needs. By bringing together local governments, transit agencies, community groups, and state partners, MPOs develop long-term strategies to enhance mobility, improve safety, reduce congestion, promote environmental sustainability, and drive economic growth. Each MPO is unique, shaped by its regional context, population size, and specific challenges. This diversity requires MPOs to wear many hats—planners, problem-solvers, funders, and conveners—adapting to their communities' needs and delivering tailored solutions that work best for local priorities.

1973

Year Congress established MPOs via the Federal-Aid Highway Act

400+ MPOs

Nationwide

80%

National population living in an urban area (2020 Census)






View your state's MPO map here:

hepgis.fhwa.dot.gov/fhwagis/

MPOs: Coordinating Federal Transportation Investments

Congress created MPOs to promote cooperation among state agencies, organizations, and local cities and towns involved in regional transportation planning. The elected MPO board is responsible for deciding how to allocate a portion of federal transportation funds within the region, directing these funds toward transportation studies conducted by MPO staff and a range of construction projects.

The board is also tasked with approving all federal transportation funds used in the region, including those supporting transit, roadway, bicycle, and pedestrian projects. MPO funding is established through federal transportation legislation, with the most recent being the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)/the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). MPOs receive funding through several key federal programs that are vital to regional transportation planning and project delivery, including:

-  **Metropolitan Planning (PL/5303):** These formula funds support MPO planning activities and are allocated to all MPOs based on population and other factors. They fund transportation studies, staff, and long-range planning efforts.
-  **Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG):** Funds support road, bridge, and multimodal projects. In areas with populations over 200,000 (i.e., Transportation Management Areas or **TMA**s), a portion is directly suballocated to MPOs. For smaller MPOs, the state determines the funding allocation.
-  **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ):** This program funds projects aimed at reducing transportation-related emissions. CMAQ funds are suballocated to TMA's, while in smaller regions they are often administered by the state.
-  **Carbon Reduction Program (CRP):** funds projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation. Like other programs, CRP is suballocated to TMA's, and is often state-administered in smaller areas.
-  **Transportation Alternatives (TA) Set-Aside:** Funds projects focused on improving non-motorized transportation options, such as bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. TA funds are suballocated in TMA's, with administration varying in smaller regions.

In addition to these formula-based funds, MPOs are also eligible for various **federal discretionary grant programs**, such as USDOT's Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) and RAISE (Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity).



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TMA vs. Non-TMA MPOs

MPOs are federally designated by the Governor based on the population of urbanized areas they serve, with two primary types: Transportation Management Areas (TMAs) and non-TMAs. Each designation carries specific federal requirements and processes.



MPOs are designated for urbanized areas with a population **above 50,000**. MPOs must:

- Follow federal planning requirements such as the 3C process, Air Quality Conformity (for Nonattainment and Maintenance Areas), Intermodal and Multimodal Coordination, Cooperation and Consultation, Planning Emphasis Areas (PEAs), and Financial Planning and Fiscal Constraint.
- Produce core planning documents like the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) or Long-Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and Public Participation Plan (PPP), with *all processes subject to periodic reviews*.



TMA MPOs are specifically designated for areas with a population of **200,000 or more**. In addition to all the federal planning requirements and core products required of MPOs, these MPOs must also:

- Undergo federal certification reviews every 5 years (every 4 years for nonattainment areas).
- A portion of STBG funds are automatically suballocated to TMAs based on population size.
- In addition to all MPO requirements, TMAs must implement a Congestion Management Process (CMP).

The Anatomy of an MPO

MPOs develop core documents that shape regional transportation planning. MPOs follow the 3Cs approach, which embeds stakeholder engagement in the process. These include the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), which outlines the MPO's planning activities and budget; the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), a long-term strategy for transportation investments over 20-25 years; the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), detailing funded projects over the next four years; and the Public Participation Plan (PPP), which ensures community involvement in the decision-making process. These documents help guide transportation priorities and ensure compliance with federal requirements. The typical anatomy of an MPO may include:



Elected Board: Made up of local elected officials and key regional entities like transit authorities, this board oversees the programming of federal funds that sets the region's priorities.



MPO Staff: Oversees daily operations, develops core products, and coordinates with federal, state, and local partners.



Technical Advisory Committee (TAC): Made up of local engineers, planners, and other transportation professions this committee provides expert advice to ensure planning all guidelines and regulations.



Subcommittees/Working Groups: Focus on specific transportation issues, bringing in experts to guide key projects (e.g., freight projects).



Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC): Involves the public in transportation planning to ensure transparency and community input.

These components work together to allocate federal transportation funds, develop core products, provide technical advice, and ensure community involvement in the process.



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The Importance of MPOs

MPOs ensure that transportation planning is inclusive, data-driven, and reflective of local needs while addressing broader regional challenges. Their work ensures:

- ✓ **Local Control with Regional Reach:** MPOs ensure transportation decisions reflect local needs while delivering regional benefits, balancing priorities across rural, suburban, and urban areas to support strong communities.
- ✓ **Solving Regional Problems through Collaboration:** MPOs unite local, regional, and state leaders to address transportation challenges that cross jurisdictions, solving issues like traffic congestion and safety.
- ✓ **Responsible Use of Federal Funds:** As stewards of federal transportation dollars, MPOs ensure taxpayer money is invested wisely, delivering real results for communities.
- ✓ **Economic Development:** MPOs enhance transportation networks, driving economic growth by connecting people to jobs, schools, and essential services while supporting local industries and businesses.
- ✓ **Safety, Sustainability, and Resilience:** MPOs design transportation systems that prioritize safety for all users, prepare for emergencies, protect the environment, and ensure long-term infrastructure durability.
- ✓ **Transparency and Public Input:** MPOs maintain open, transparent planning processes that engage community members, businesses, and stakeholders to shape the transportation future of their regions.
- ✓ **Adapting to the Future:** MPOs are at the forefront of innovation, integrating technologies like Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) to ensure transportation systems are prepared for future demands.

Key Priorities for MPOs

- 📍 **Increased Planning Funds:** More funding allows MPOs to tackle urgent issues like job access, sustainability, and safer transportation. With adequate resources, MPOs can plan for a future where communities thrive, and infrastructure supports everyone.
- 📍 **Reduced Local Match Requirements:** Lowering match requirements gives communities more flexibility to improve infrastructure without straining local budgets, allowing critical projects to move forward.
- 📍 **Shifting Certain Discretionary Programs to Formula Funding:** Formula-based funding provides predictable resources, helping communities confidently plan long-term projects and ensure lasting improvements that directly benefit residents.
- 📍 **Direct Recipient Status for Certain Federal Funds:** Streamlining the funding process lets MPOs deliver projects faster, cutting through delays and getting transportation improvements to communities quickly.
- 📍 **Allowing the Carryover of Federal Funds:** Carrying over federal funds from one fiscal year to the next ensures long-term projects are completed without interruption, helping to avoid delays and see faster results on transportation infrastructure improvements.

Learn More
About AMPO's
Legislative
Priorities



ampo.org/policy/reauthorization/