



What Is a Regional Transportation Planning Organization?

A Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) is an organization that identifies local transportation needs, conducts planning, assists local governments, and supports the statewide transportation planning process in non-metropolitan regions of a State. States are provided the opportunity to designate RTPOs as a method for formalizing the engagement of officials from areas with a population size less than 50,000 as they incorporate rural transportation needs in the statewide transportation planning process. This Fact Sheet will explain the essential elements of RTPOs and their functions.

The Development of RTPOs

1 The transportation planning discipline has progressed over the last fifty years since Congress created the requirement for a Continuing, Cooperative, and Comprehensive (3C) transportation planning process in urbanized areas.

2 In the past decade, Congress has increased the level of coordination of how States will address the transportation needs of non-metropolitan areas. In Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), States are required to **cooperate** with non-metropolitan local officials, a higher level of engagement than the previous requirement of **consultation**.

In carrying out planning...with respect to non-metropolitan areas, each State shall cooperate with affected local officials with responsibility for transportation or, if applicable, through regional transportation planning organizations.
49 U.S. Code § 5304(e)(1)

MAP-21 and Non-Metropolitan Areas

States are provided the opportunity to designate RTPOs as a method of formalizing engagement from non-metropolitan area officials as they incorporate rural transportation needs in the Statewide transportation planning process. Non-metropolitan areas constitute a significant amount of the United States' geographic area. Representation of these areas is critical in the statewide planning process to ensure that regions have an established process.



For more information go to:

- www.planning.dot.gov/focus_rural.asp
- www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/processes/rural

RTPOs will carry out the following planning tasks:



LTRTP

Preparation of a Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan (LTRTP).



TIP

Preparation of a Regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

- Coordination of local planning, land use, and economic development.

- Provision of technical assistance to local officials.

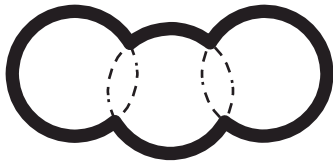
- Participation in national, multi-State, and State policy and planning development processes.

- Facilitation of a forum for public participation in regional and Statewide planning.

- Coordination of plans and programs with neighboring RTPOs and Metropolitan Planning Organizations and tribal organizations.

Designating an RTPO

Once a State chooses to designate RTPOs, those organizations must meet certain requirements. The extent to which these organizations perform transportation planning varies, depending on their history and charter. However, if each can be modified to meet the requirements shown below, then States can designate them as RTPOs.



- Be established as a multi-jurisdictional organization of non-metropolitan local officials and representatives of local transportation systems.



- Have a policy committee, with a majority of members being non-metropolitan local officials, and as appropriate, representatives from the State, private business, transportation service providers, economic development practitioners, and the public in the region.



- Have a fiscal and administrative agent to provide professional planning, management, and administrative support.

Funding for RTPOs

At States' discretion, FHWA Statewide Planning and Research (SP&R) and FTA Section 5304 program funds and/or FHWA Surface Transportation Program funding may be used to support RTPOs.

Federal funds require a match; it may be variable but in most cases 20%.

In many cases, there are already organizations conducting or assisting with regional planning. These may

be known as Regional Planning Commissions, Regional Planning and Development Commissions, Regional Planning Agencies, Councils of Governments or Regional Planning Organizations.

Benefits that can be Achieved by RTPOs

- Conducting duties that support and enhance the Statewide planning process;
- Providing a forum for public participation in non-metropolitan areas;
- Insuring the regional and local input of non-metropolitan areas;
- Fostering coordination of local planning, land use, and economic development plans with transportation plans and programs at the State, regional, and local levels;
- Cooperating on the development of the Statewide Transportation Plan, and
- Consulting on the development of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program in the non-metropolitan areas of the State.



How Do RTPOs Benefit States and Rural Regions?

The Federal transportation authorization, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), created an opportunity for States to formally designate Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) as a means of formalizing their process for including non-metropolitan areas in statewide transportation planning processes. If you are an official of a State Department of Transportation (DOT), an existing Regional Planning Commission (RPC), or a local government official or professional staff, one may ask how the benefits of formalizing RTPOs will outweigh the efforts of designation.



In California, Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs) were created by State statute in 1972. A representative of California DOT (Caltrans) says, "RTPAs play an important role in Caltrans' overall planning efforts. We realize that even at our District level, a local agency will be better informed about the region's transportation needs and priorities. We rely on the planning work of the RTPAs in developing our Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)".

RTPOs develop the same transportation planning products as Metropolitan Planning Organizations. State DOTs are accustomed to accepting Long-Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs) and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) from MPOs to sustain the Statewide planning process. When regional planning organizations become RTPOs, they will produce the same documents to be incorporated in the Statewide planning and programming process.

The designation of RTPOs can assist strengthening rural and urban project proposals. For instance, instead of the State Department of Transportation (DOT) not understanding the significance of a bridge project that was proposed by the county highway superintendent, the State response to an RTPO with an established process may

Benefits of RTPOs to Rural Regions

1

Instill a systematic transportation planning process.

2

Involve local officials in Policy Committee decisionmaking.

3

Provide a means to establish transportation goals, objectives, and regionally unique priorities.

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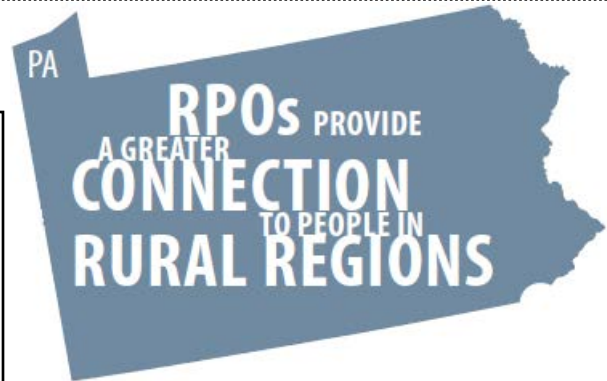
Improve the ability of prioritized projects to compete for funding.

5

Facilitate conversation and public involvement between local communities and the State DOT.



In Pennsylvania, there is a longstanding practice of Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs) covering the geography not covered by MPOs. A Pennsylvania DOT (PennDOT) representative states, "The RPOs provide a greater connection to people in rural regions and allow us to maintain a focus on needs-based planning with connections to municipal and county comprehensive plans."



Benefits of RTPOs to State DOTs

Facilitates quality conversation between agencies and with members of local communities across regions, which increases transparency and aids in coordinating transit planning.

Provides uniformity for planning and project inputs from rural and metropolitan regions of the State and promoting fairness in regional representation.

Creates a basis for fully integrating rural transportation needs into the State Transportation Plan and STIP, including a means for selecting regional priorities.

Provides an established source of information on rural economic development needs and opportunities, resource development, and transportation system resiliency, as they regions are often critical areas for valuable agriculture, mining, and natural resource production.

Can streamline outreach to local governments by bringing them together in a regional forum.

1

2

3

4

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Work Program Development & Content

Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) that are designated by States as permitted by 23 United States Code (USC) 135(m) must meet specific requirements. To coordinate transportation planning activities, a Work Program provides a framework for organizing the annual workload of staff and partner agencies and for documenting how available planning funds will be spent. Many existing regional planning

organizations (RPOs) are supported by their State Department of Transportation (DOT) with FHWA State Planning & Research (SP&R) and FTA's Section 5304 funds. In those instances, the projects will be included on the SP&R program. Provided below are examples where rural regional planning organizations demonstrate the work they are accomplishing.

Nevada County Transportation Commission

The Nevada County Transportation Commission (NCTC) was established as a result of the California Transportation Development Act of 1971. County transportation planning commissions and agencies are funded by the Local Transportation Fund and other sources. The State law requires that all designated agencies adopt an Overall Work Program (OWP) annually. This is an excellent example of both framework and content.

Annual Planning Budget \$1.1 Million



Revenue Sources

- State Transportation Improvement Program Planning Funds (Federal)
- Federal Transit Administration (FTA) §5304 (Federal)
- Local Transportation Fund from ¼ Cent Statewide Sales Tax (State)
- Rural Planning Assistance Formula & Grants (State)

Key Work Tasks

- Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan Update
- Western Nevada County Transit Development Plan Update
- Rural Counties Task Force Performance Measures Data
- Transportation Improvement Program Development
- Coordination of Regional Planning

- Coordinate local land use planning with regional planning
- Analyze regional impacts of proposed development
- Promote cooperation between regional planning agencies
- Support Regional transportation services

Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Council

The Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Council (TRORC) informs local governments of a set number of activities that can be accomplished within the budget. Requests are prioritized based on each project's ability to mesh with existing programs and available funding. TRORC's annual transportation planning program is developed with the help of Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTRANS) staff and submitted to VTRANS in a well-established process.

Key Work Tasks

Local government assistance including: traffic counts/pedestrian counts, culvert inventories, public involvement facilitation for local/state projects, High Risk Rural Roads safety programs, road surface management evaluation studies, pavement evaluations, and road conditioning scoring.



Assistance to VTRANS including highway inventory for suitability of traffic and geometry for an on-road bicycle facilities planning.

North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning & Development Commission

Pennsylvania has a longstanding practice of coordinating transportation planning among the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), the MPOs, and RPOs throughout the State. There is a Statewide UPWP Work Group that develops Planning Emphasis Areas. Each RPO identifies locally meaningful areas from the overall list. The North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission (NCRPDC) Executive Committee solicits ideas for assistance to local partners during UPWP development. They adopt a two-year work program that is matched to the two-year FHWA and FTA SP&R work program. After PennDOT and FHWA Division staff review the draft, the NCRPDC Executive Committee approves the program.



Annual Planning
Budget \$301,000

Revenue Sources

FHWA SP&R (Federal)
Local Technical Assistance Program (Federal)
FTA Planning Funds (Federal)
Local Matching Funds (Regional)

Key Work Tasks

Coordinated Public Transit-Human Service Transportation Plan
Regional Action Strategy: Linking Land Use, Transportation, and Economic Development
Identification of the region's core highway network, following PennDOT's process, which is then used for:

- Safety corridor analysis** of the core system, using State data for fatalities/serious injuries and public input to identify 25 projects.
- Traffic congestion analysis** for DuBois and Sandy Township.
- Freight analysis and needs assessment** as part of the PennDOT Regional Operations Plan.
- Economic analysis** of the Route 219 corridor.
- Inland intermodal port/terminal study** in relation to ARC Network Appalachia.
- Greenway planning** as part of Community Development planning.



Boonslick Regional Planning Commission

Representing three counties northwest of St. Louis, Missouri, the Boonslick Regional Planning Council works to provide basic transportation planning services to its local governments. Economic plans are funded via Economic Development Administration (EDA) planning funds, and local planning funds. The Missouri Department of Transportation (MODOT) funds the safety studies using local dues.

Key Work Tasks

Economic Development-
Related Freight Planning



Mapping
Assistance



Traffic Studies & Counts
At the Local Level



Safety Plans



Coordinated Public
Transit-Human Services



Hazard Mitigation

The Hazard Mitigation Plan is part of the regional comprehensive plan to identify infrastructure at risk.



Economic Development Plans

The RPC economic development plans include economic resiliency by assessing which corridors would be impacted and to what effect. The RPC reaches out to businesses to survey potential risks and impacts with regard to their businesses.



Transportation Improvement Program Development

State Transportation Improvement Programs (STIPs) must cover a four-year period and include all projects funded by programs of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA), as well as other regionally significant projects. The STIP must be fiscally constrained to agreed upon estimates of reasonably available revenue.

For affected nonmetropolitan local officials, the State must consult to determine projects that may be of regional significance.

This Fact Sheet illustrates examples of existing regional planning agencies that develop RTIPs and how projects from these plans have been incorporated into their STIPs.

A Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) is required to develop a regional TIP (RTIP) for consideration by the State. The State must cooperate with RTPOs.

Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission

The Southeast Iowa RPC (SEIRPC) prepares a four-year RTIP that is updated annually. SEIRPC is responsible for a portion of fund sources while the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) retains programming responsibility for other major funding sources.

Iowa DOT goes beyond requirements and accepts the RTIP for direct incorporation in the STIP, given fiscal constraint conditions are met.

Regional agencies, like the SEIRPC, are given an allocation of FHWA Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds based on which regional projects are selected in a manner reflecting fiscal constraint. Regional agencies also receive an allocation of FHWA Transportation Alternative Program (TA) funds for which a competitive award process is conducted. SEIRPC invites its member counties and cities to submit applications for STP funds. Projects selected are often related to pavement preservation.

THE SEIRPC RANKS CANDIDATE PROJECTS ON A POINT SYSTEM FOR SIX CRITERIA:



Iowa and Pennsylvania share similar perspectives on the benefits of developing RTIPs. These State DOTs recognize that a rural regional planning agency is in the best position to understand local and regional transportation needs. Having these agencies in place and giving them the resources and responsibility to develop a TIP saves the resources that the DOT would otherwise have to dedicate to outreach to non-metropolitan officials and to program development.

These States acknowledge that *the regionally developed TIP is the preferred product.*

North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning & Development Commission

Pennsylvania is unique in how it determines allocations of Federal funds. The State has a Pennsylvania Planning Partners organization, which is comprised of members from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), all MPOs and RPOs in the State, the State Transportation Commission, FHWA, and FTA, to program Federal funding. The North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning & Development Commission (NCPRPDC) prepares an RTIP that includes Federal, State, and local funding sources. Similarly, NCPRPDC has a Financial Guidance Working Group that develops allocation methodologies. NCPRPDC's Financial Guidance Working Group develops program guidelines and best practices.

PennDOT has a cooperative process for TIP development that is all-inclusive with regional agency input to methodologies and requirements. Therefore, the entire RTIP is incorporated into the STIP. NCPRPDC's website enhances transparency by making it easy for the public to locate TIP projects and find detailed project information.

DEVELOPING A REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PLAN (RTIP)





A Statewide Approach to Transportation Planning that Works

Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), the Federal surface transportation bill passed in 2012, creates an institutional framework for establishing Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) to perform transportation planning tasks in non-metropolitan areas. Many States already have regional planning partnerships

established in their non-metropolitan areas. These organizations vary in how they address organizational structure and planning responsibilities. This Fact Sheet illustrates successful practices observed in existing non-metropolitan planning organizations based on five areas of approach.



1. ENHANCE CONNECTIONS

MAP-21 establishes that an RTPO shall establish, at a minimum: A) a policy committee, the majority of which shall consist of nonmetropolitan local officials, or their designees; and B) a fiscal and administrative agent, such as an existing regional planning and development organization, to provide professional planning, management, and administrative support. RTPOs duties also include participating in national, multistate, and State policy and planning development processes to ensure the regional and local input of nonmetropolitan areas. More importantly RTPOs provide a forum for public participation in the statewide and regional transportation planning process.

Boonslick Regional Planning Commission (RPC)

- The Missouri-based RPC attends local government meetings to make RPC staff available and hear issues directly from local entities.
- The RPC has a Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) with representatives from several sectors from each of its three counties.
- The TAC has an executive board and voting membership comprised of local officials and holds four meetings per year to discuss transportation priorities.

The Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) refers to its institutional framework for working with local governments and regional entities such as metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and non-metropolitan Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) as the “Planning Partnership.” Supporting positive relationships among these partners has been a goal since the mid-1990s, and the emphasis on connections has been beneficial to ensure local buy-in.

2. EXPAND PARTICIPATION

All States must have a formal, documented process for cooperating with local officials in statewide planning. RTPOs can formalize a process for identifying transportation problems and potential strategies to address those problems, as well as mechanisms for achieving consensus on priorities to advance to the State Department of Transportation (DOT). Using the RTPO to broadcast other information, solicit input outside of the planning process, or communicate more generally with local officials and stakeholders supports the position of the RTPO as an integral member of the planning process.

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)

- Caltrans requires that its non-metropolitan regional agencies provide formal Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) to implement the vision and goals from the regional long-range plan.

Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans)

- A fiscally constrained TIP is not required for regional agencies, but the agency provides local priorities and feedback to VTrans.
- VTrans uses regional input as 20% of the weight in the Statewide project ranking process.

PROMOTE TRANSPARENCY

RTPOs provide a venue through which State DOTs can communicate with stakeholders. This outreach may include distributing information about RTPO products and plans, scheduling time in RTPO meeting agendas to discuss stakeholder issues, encouraging RTPO members and stakeholders to attend DOT public meetings, and other strategies.

North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning & Development Commission (NCRPDC)

- NCRPDC's TIP is included in the State TIP, as the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) allocates funding by region.
- The agency has a regional Transportation Planning Committee, which includes FHWA and PennDOT as active partners to enhance awareness of State and local priorities.

MoDOT

- MoDOT shares data with its RPCs to help project prioritization.
- Each MoDOT District serves more than one RPC, so projects are selected considering priorities from all RPCs in the District.
- Stakeholders are able to present large-scale projects to RPCs, MPOs, and MoDOT representatives to justify the need for State funding.

ENSURE STATEWIDE CONSISTENCY

Taking steps to achieve consistency in the work of RTPOs can help each State DOT know what to expect and to make best use out of RTPO deliverables and input. Some States have developed manuals for their non-metropolitan planning partners to use in conducting planning activities and administering agency operations. Communicating expectations, scheduling regular meetings, and forming work groups to support planning practices can help guide all agencies in the State to produce deliverables and execute processes with the same quality and content.

Iowa DOT

- Iowa DOT holds quarterly meetings to include representatives from all regional planning agencies in discussions on Statewide planning resources, requirements, and emerging issues.
- One meeting each year is held concurrently with staff training.



PennDOT

- PennDOT holds regular meetings with rural and metropolitan agencies.
- PennDOT formed working groups on specific topics involving representatives from rural to large metropolitan regions.
- Working groups develop guidance for all planning regions to follow.

ACCOMMODATE VARIABILITY

Although certain planning roles and products may be required for all RTPOs, States can create space for regional variation. Each region may have special transportation interests that should be included in committee institutions in addition to more universal roles, such as local officials. Different regions may have different planning priorities that would benefit from specialized analysis, so allowing for special planning studies such as corridor safety studies, bicycle and pedestrian studies, freight movement studies, etc. can help RTPOs identify projects to submit to their DOT.

Iowa DOT

- Many non-metropolitan regional planning affiliations are housed in organizations that complete other planning processes.
- Iowa DOT allows regional partners to combine plans where applicable. Neighboring regions have coupled regional economic development plans with long-range transportation plans.

Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC)

- TRORC piloted the first regional safety forum with VTrans to address stakeholder concerns.
- The safety forum established relationships between regional safety stakeholders, addressed resource sharing, and identified highway safety issues.





Public Participation in Transportation Planning

Public involvement remains a hallmark of the transportation planning process. It has always been important for planners to understand the perspective of their constituents, listen to the voices of elected officials, advocates, and stakeholders as they devise transportation plans and programs. Doing so is a challenge in the rural regions of our country. State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) often find it difficult to get input from rural residents, especially if they rely on traditional public involvement techniques.

RTPOs provide DOTs with a unique opportunity for more effective public participation and collaboration, since they are closer to their rural constituency. Some RPOs also provide public involvement services for their local agency members. This Fact Sheet illustrates effective public participation planning at three regional agencies.



Boonslick Missouri Regional Planning Commission



Public outreach in the Boonslick Regional Planning Commission (RPC) occurs during the creation of the comprehensive plans, economic development plans, as well as the strategic plan. The RPC specifically provides assistance by:

1. REACHING OUT TO LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS
2. ATTENDING COMMUNITY MEETINGS, AND
3. IDENTIFYING NEEDS GAPS.

**COMMUNITY
NEEDS/INPUT**



Individual outreach is conducted with local community members. The RPC has 26 cities in three counties. The RPC acts as a liaison between local communities and the Missouri DOT (MoDOT) by staying in tune with the transportation issues in individual communities. To create this bridge, it is often the RPC attending public meetings of the local communities rather than the other way around. The RPC staff members make themselves available through attendance at these types of events, which plays a big role in communicating what individuals and businesses need and directly translates to recommendations of projects for consideration.

North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning & Development Commission

OFFICIAL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

Similar to an MPO, the North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission (NCRPDC) has an official Public Participation Plan, which includes a Limited English Proficiency Plan. Public input opportunities are offered via five to six meetings per year and periodic survey efforts.

“ENGAGE NORTH CENTRAL PA” ONLINE

COUNTY-LEVEL FOCUS

There are 167 municipalities within NCRPDC’s service area and most have small or non-existent staff and limited computer availability. Therefore, NCRPDC focuses its efforts on the county level, meeting with county planning offices on project status/schedule.

NCRPDC has an online portal entitled, *Engage North Central PA*, as part of the public involvement activities by identifying needs and hypothetically programming dollars to get a sense of fiscal constraint. Engage North Central PA has been running for over a year.

REGIONAL INPUT FOR STIP

When the Pennsylvania DOT develops its Statewide Transportation Plan and Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), they utilize the services of the RPO in publicizing public meetings in the region, and with other means to gather input.

Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission

Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) plays a critical role in coordinating the associated activities, people, and stakeholders in public hearings and input forums for the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans). VTrans provides an opportunity for RPCs throughout the State to be involved in development of the Strategic Highway Safety Plan. They facilitate public outreach and data collection efforts and have organized sub-State gatherings on this topic.

The TRORC is also involved in STIP hearings by facilitating local discussions on regional modal plans. VTrans works with the public to facilitate these conversations through the Council’s Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). VTrans representatives attend TAC meetings, which provides then an awareness of regional issues.

The TRORC helps to facilitate State programs, like the *Go Vermont* commuter challenge, at the regional level by collaborating with employers and conducting employer outreach to internally develop the program by encouraging employees. The ability of RPCs to reach out to their regions is critical to these efforts. There is only one staff person at VTrans who works on the program, making this a great example of how VTrans’ capacity is extended by their relationship with RPCs.

In the near-term all of Vermont’s RPCs will be required to have a formal public participation plan that complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and guides the organization beyond federal requirements and applies to all programs.

TRORC CONDUCTS PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT VIA:



Traditional Public Meetings/Hearings



Focus Group Sessions



Community Surveys



Information Distribution and Interaction at Community Events

AN EXTENSION OF VTRANS STAFF

TRORC considers itself to be an extension of VTrans staff that provides a quality relationship with the local areas. The existence of TRORC and the other RPCs saves VTrans both money and staff resources through its ability to get things done quickly and well at the local level which benefits both State-level agencies and constituents.