

Chapter 1: Introduction

Transit at the Table III: A Guide to Effective Participation in Statewide Decisionmaking for Transit Agencies in Non-Urbanized Areas examines successful approaches to considering rural transit in statewide transportation planning. It uses eight State case studies to identify processes, experiences, and results of transit agency participation in statewide transportation planning, focusing on non-urbanized or rural areas. The report consists of the following sections:

- Synthesis;
- Observations and Challenges;
- The Role of Transit in Rural Livability;
- A Self-Assessment Checklist for Transit Operators;
- Resources and References; and
- Non-SDOT Study Participants.

In addition, separate and detailed case studies of each of the eight States are available online at on the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Transportation Planning Capacity Building website (<http://www.planning.dot.gov/>).

This study was conducted for the FTA Office of Planning and the Environment by the U.S. Department of Transportation's John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center.

1.1 Purpose and Audience

Transit at the Table III examines the full range of activities conducted as part of statewide transportation planning processes, from use of vision plans; setting goals, policies, and priorities; establishing performance measures; involving stakeholders and the public; selecting investments; and implementing projects. The research study recognizes that statewide planning, and participating agencies and partners, varies in each State and that variation has implications for how rural transit considerations are reflected in these processes. This study evaluates how and when these considerations are incorporated within statewide transportation planning, whether through policies, programs, technical processes, or collaboration and partnerships.

This study's major contribution will be to provide examples of effective approaches that will assist peer rural transit and regional planning agencies to work more effectively with State Departments of Transportation (SDOTs) to ensure that transit is considered in statewide planning and decisionmaking. Statewide planning guides important transportation resource allocation decisions that play a major role in the life of residents of rural areas -- from meeting basic mobility and accessibility needs to supporting economic development and provision of health and human services. This report includes a detailed section examining the role transit, supported by statewide transportation planning, can play in improving the livability of rural communities. This topic reflects top priorities of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation and FTA and is related to the DOT-HUD-EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities.

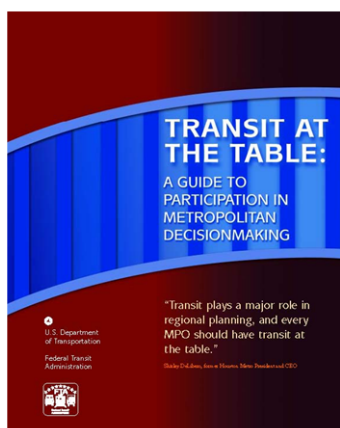
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This report will provide a resource for organizations directly or indirectly involved in planning for and providing rural transit –SDOTs, regional or rural planning organizations (to be referred to as RPOs), rural transit providers and their partners, including businesses, universities, Tribes, Federal land management units, health care providers, and others. This study is intended to improve the effectiveness of transit participation in statewide transportation planning, the multimodal content of statewide transportation plans and programs, and ultimately, the delivery of transit services.

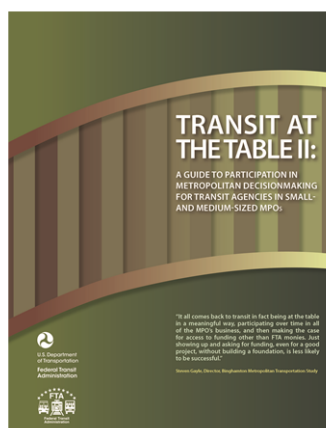
1.2 Transit at the Table Series

This report is the third in the *Transit at the Table* series on successful consideration of transit in the transportation planning process. The first study, completed in 2004, focused on participation by transit agencies in Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in large urbanized areas, defined as those areas with populations greater than 200,000. The second study, completed in 2010, provided insights into participation by transit agencies in MPOs in small urbanized areas, defined as those areas with populations between 50,000 and 200,000. The covers of the first two studies are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Covers of Transit at the Table I and II



Large urbanized areas
(population greater than 200,000)

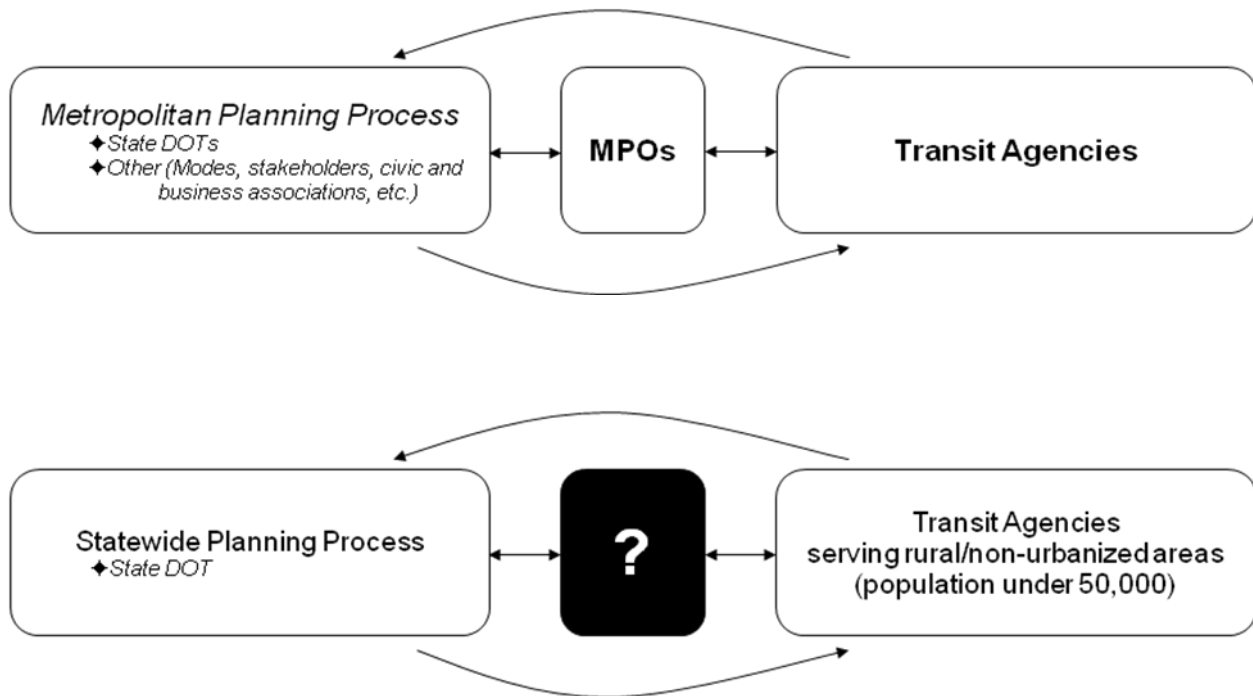


Small and medium-sized urbanized areas
(population between 50,000 and 200,000)

Recognizing that transportation needs and planning issues differ between urban, rural, or non-urbanized areas, this report identifies both the similarities and the unique aspects associated with these areas. In *Transit at the Table I and II*, the main participants in the planning processes of interest, and their roles and responsibilities, are clearly identifiable. Both of the earlier studies focused on close collaboration between MPOs and transit agencies, with support from the SDOT and other entities. Although some relevant aspects of the planning roles played by SDOTs and rural transit agencies are defined by Federal regulations and programs, the interaction between the two and the participation of other entities varies greatly among the States studied. Figure 2 summarizes the contrast between the clear roles of planning agencies studied in *Transit at the Table I and II* and the less clear and more broadly ranging roles identified in *Transit at the Table III*.

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Figure 2. Comparison of Transit at the Table I and II Participants and Transit at the Table III Participants



1.3 Methodology

This report is based on structured discussions with staff and officials from eight SDOTs, over 20 RPOs, and over 20 rural transit providers, either local government or non-profits, as well as from several other State agencies, and transit associations. A Technical Working Group (TWG) assisted the study team in identifying key topics of interest and in selecting case study States. The TWG included representatives from the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), Association of American State Highway and Transportation Officers (AASHTO), Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), National Association of Development Organizations (NADO), National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), and the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Statewide Multimodal Transportation and Public Transportation Planning and Development Committees. In addition to the TWG, the study team conducted discussions with key stakeholders at the NARC 43rd Annual Conference and Exhibition on June 2, 2009, in Denver, CO, and at the National Rural Transportation Peer Learning Conference in October 2009 and October 2010. These discussions helped inform the study by providing and then confirming common themes and issues.

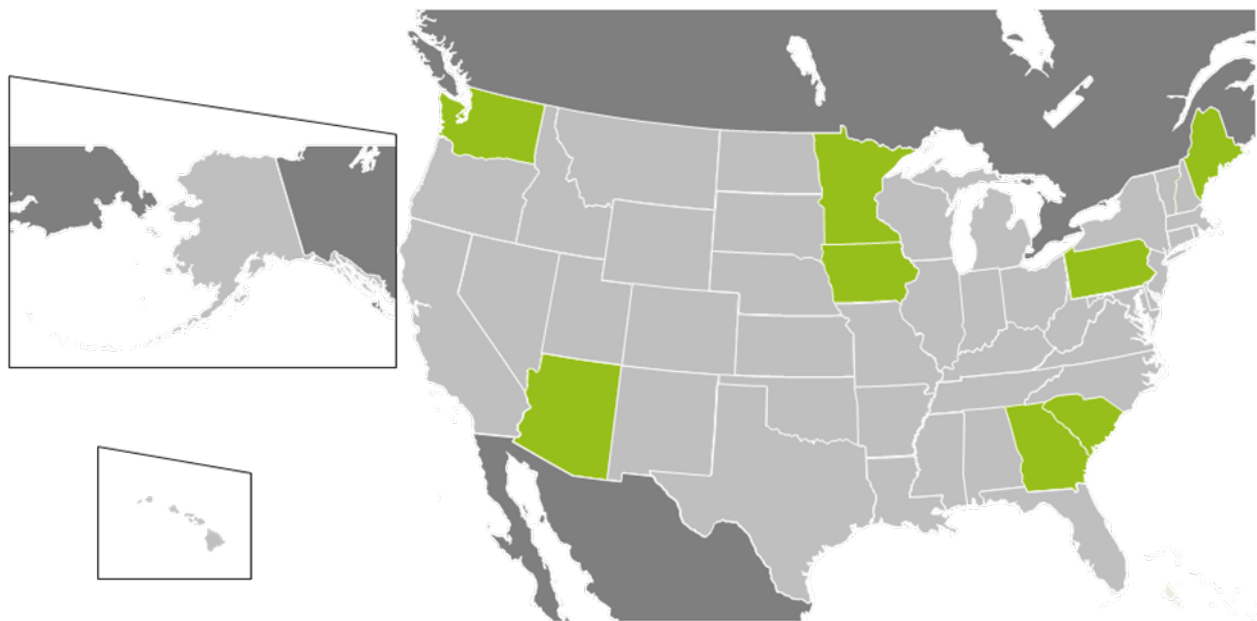
The study team selected eight States based on input from FTA and the TWG, with consideration of geographic location, prevalence of rural transit, presence of public lands units and Tribes, and perception of successful planning processes. The study recognizes that there are other States that would also serve as good case studies; FTA hopes to continue to research and highlight these examples in the future. Within each State, the team held three structured discussions with State, regional, and local participants that were chosen based on similar criteria, with input from the SDOT.

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The eight States highlighted in the study are listed below and shown in Figure 3:

- Arizona
- Georgia
- Iowa
- Maine
- Minnesota
- Pennsylvania
- South Carolina
- Washington

Figure 3. Map of Case Study States for Transit at the Table III



1.4 Structure

As noted above, this report consists of sections on: synthesis; observations and challenges; the role of transit in rural livability; a self-assessment checklist for transit operators; and resources and references. In addition, eight separate State case studies are available online at the FTA/FHWA Transportation Planning Capacity Building website.

The first section identifies five attributes of planning identified by the study team as important to successful integration of rural transit in statewide planning: goals, planning products and processes, institutional relationships, funding, and service. The team placed each planning attribute along a continuum to describe an evolution from basic to more complete or thorough approaches. The study team used this continuum as a framework to describe and assess approaches to statewide planning and rural transit in each of the States studied. The team also used the framework to highlight examples of how different States effectively consider rural transit in statewide planning.

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The observations and challenges section highlights those findings that were not captured in the continuum because of their cross-cutting nature and important and timely relevance to the national context. These include success in the context of limited and constrained resources; changing perceptions of rural transit; performance measures; and Tribal transit.

The role of transit in rural livability section presents observations and insights into how statewide transportation planning can strengthen the role transit plays in creating livable rural communities. It draws both from the framework presented in the findings section as well as the Livability Principles of the DOT-HUD-EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities and other resources, and is based on the *Transit at the Table III* case studies and synthesis.

The self-assessment checklist for transit operators presents a series of questions that SDOTs, RPOs, rural transit providers and others can use to assess rural transit participation in statewide planning. The checklist is intended to facilitate discussion among planning partners on how to improve their collaboration and delivery of transportation services.

The eight case studies identify the service characteristics, institutional structure, and funding of rural transit in the assessment of how rural transit is incorporated within statewide planning, including interactions between entities, major planning and project initiatives, and observations and challenges.