



U.S. Department
of Transportation

Federal Transit
Administration

TRANSIT AT THE TABLE II:

A GUIDE TO PARTICIPATION IN
METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION
DECISIONMAKING FOR TRANSIT
AGENCIES IN SMALL- AND MEDIUM-
SIZED METROPOLITAN AREAS

"It all comes back to transit in fact being at the table in a meaningful way, participating over time in all of the MPO's business, and then making the case for access to funding other than FTA monies. Just showing up and asking for funding, even for a good project, without building a foundation, is less likely to be successful."

Steven Gayle, Director, Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation Study



Federal Transit
Administration

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16. Abstract (Limit: 200 words) The purpose of the Transit at the Table II project is to answer the question, "Why should transit agencies in small- and medium-sized urban areas (population < 200,000) participate in the metropolitan planning process?" This report discusses the observations, perspectives, and recommendations of regional decisionmakers regarding transit agency participation in metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). It details how transit agencies secured strategic positions in the metropolitan planning process and the results they obtained in an effort to educate and energize transit agencies in small- and medium-sized areas taking a seat at the MPO "table." The report examines how to win policy and program support for transit services at the MPO level and provides specific examples of benefits realized by transit operators in small- and medium-sized metropolitan areas. It also discusses the benefits gained by small- and medium-sized MPOs by actively including transit in their activities. This effort builds on a previous study that focused on MPOs representing the largest urbanized areas (population >200,000). The report also identifies commonalities and differences between the "transit at the table" experiences of operators in large metropolitan areas and those in small- and medium-sized ones.					
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County Commuter - Hagerstown, MD

Chapter 1: Executive Summary

In large urban regions designated as Transportation Management Areas (TMAs), which are defined as areas with populations greater than 200,000², transit agencies are the direct recipients of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) urbanized funds (Section 5307), a major portion of transit funding. In smaller, non-TMA areas, defined as those with populations between 50,000 and 200,000, FTA formula funding is distributed to each State Governor, who then makes allocation decisions. In most States, the Governor appoints the State Department of Transportation (SDOT) to make funding decisions. The SDOT then disperses these funds based on population and population density.³ Consequently, transit agencies must work with or depend upon the SDOT to identify priority transit investment needs and to access Federal transit operating and capital funds to address these needs. In these areas, the role of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in setting priorities for system improvements tends to be deemphasized. A reduced role for the transit agencies could limit the attention paid to the access and mobility needs that transit operations can address through formulating plans and programs. However, transit operators in small- and medium-sized metropolitan areas can overcome this problem by seeking out and actively engaging their MPOs.

This report presents the case studies and personal testimonials of a cross section of transit agency, MPO, and SDOT officials. Specifically, it

² The Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) may grant TMA designation to regions with less than 200,000 people upon special request from the Governor and the MPO.

³ The Federal share is not to exceed 80 percent, except it may be 90 percent for the cost of vehicle-related equipment attributable to compliance with either the Americans with Disabilities Act or the Clean Air Act, or for projects or portions of projects related to bicycles. Where applicable, the Federal share may not exceed 50 percent of a net project cost of operating assistance.

focuses on the benefits to transit programs and to the agencies that administer them that have directly resulted from transit agencies' proactive participation in metropolitan transportation planning processes. Transit agency representatives cited numerous examples of how they were able to improve their agencies' operations and staffing by working closely with the MPO in sharing resources as well as leveraging the utility of resources from others. On a programmatic and policy level, transit agency participation in the planning process has been shown time and time again to improve the influence of the agency in setting priorities for regional transportation policies, plans, and programs. Finally, transit participation in metropolitan planning has enabled the development and delivery of a higher level of transit service and mobility to communities by leveraging new funding opportunities.

1.1 Foreword

This study was sponsored by the FTA to assess the experiences, both challenges and success stories, of public transportation agencies working within the metropolitan transportation planning processes in small- and medium-sized regions. It is a follow-up to a 2004 study, entitled *Transit at the Table: A Guide to Participation in Metropolitan Decisionmaking*, which was developed for large urbanized areas, those with populations greater than 200,000. Recognizing that transportation problems and planning issues differ in small- and medium-sized areas, this report sought to identify both the similarities and the unique aspects associated with those regions.

This report details examples of transit agencies actively participating side-by-side with the MPO in regional transportation planning activities. In many of the cases presented, transit's involvement resulted in direct benefits for the agency and, more broadly, for the profile and level of service of transit in the area as a whole. These benefits would not have been realized without proactive participation in the planning process. Additionally,

further support for increased transit service may be achieved through additional sources of funding that can be directed to transit, including the Surface Transportation Planning (STP) of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) is another source from FHWA in areas that are listed as air quality nonattainment areas. Specific examples of transit agency participation presented in this report include long-range planning, membership in committees and subcommittees, and facilitated citizen transit advocacy. In addition, the report presents several examples of cooperative funding relationships between transit operators and non-traditional partners, such as the business community.

It is also important to note that the transportation planning work activities of MPOs are set forth in Unified Planning Work Programs (UPWP) that FTA and FHWA jointly fund and they are intended to be multimodal. Communities where transit may be very limited today should not plan for business as usual 20 years from now.

1.2 Audience

The primary audience for Transit at the Table II includes transit managers, their staff and board members, MPO staff and Policy Board members, and SDOT staff and officials. This report also may be of particular interest to transit managers in areas likely to be designated as urbanized areas by the U.S. Census Bureau following Census 2010, thereby necessitating formation of an MPO. Once a region receives that designation, typically when the population reaches 50,000, the Governor(s) in that State (or States) where the area is located, in cooperation with local officials, must designate an organization to serve as the MPO for the metropolitan area. It is important that both the transit agencies operating in these newly designated MPO areas as well as members of the new MPO agency understand the importance of active transit involvement in the metropolitan planning process.

This report relays some of the opportunities and substantial benefits available to transit agencies and, most importantly, to the travelling public, that come with participation in that planning process.

In addition to transit agency and MPO staff and SDOT representatives, elected officials at all levels of government and interested citizens should find this report helpful in understanding how transit can secure the level of policy support and resource investment that is critical to addressing the mobility needs of stakeholders. It is hoped they will find inspiration in the stories presented and establish similar success stories in their specific regions.

1.3 Purpose

The effectiveness of coordination and cooperation between transit agencies and their decisionmaking and funding partners, including the MPO and SDOT, varies across the country. In some metropolitan areas, planning and programming efforts are closely integrated. On the other hand, there are other areas that demonstrate less coordination and produce transportation plans that are essentially separate, stove-piped modal plans that appear to be stapled together. The purpose of this study is to offer case study and testimonial support for transit agencies to proactively and consistently participate in metropolitan transportation planning processes. That way, transit options are fully integrated and incorporated within required plans and programs, resulting in significant gains in the number and types of mobility options available to communities. This report presents success stories to illustrate effective cooperation among transit stakeholders, including SDOT and MPO representatives. Moreover, it identifies cross-cutting factors that appear to have contributed to that success.

During the early stages of this project, the research team attended a small MPO conference in the Midwest. During lunch, a group of MPO, transit agency, and FTA staff members engaged in an

informal conversation with the research team when one transit manager asked a central question:

“Why does FTA need to sponsor this research? We get our projects accepted in the TIP [Transportation Improvement Program], and I am sure most agencies have no problem getting their specific projects allocated with the Federal funds they deserve.”

While some supported that manager’s perspective, many others did not. This report speaks to those who seek to improve their working relationship with their regional partners. Across the nation, including in small- and medium-sized urban areas, there is increased focus on the role of transit in building sustainable, livable, equitable, and environmentally friendly communities. This is a continuation of concepts reflected in congressional actions, originating with the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991 and continuing with all subsequent reauthorizations. There has been growing interest in and support for multimodalism, increased transit service, joint provision of capital and operating funds, and collaborative planning at the regional level.

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) requirement for preparation of a coordinated public transportation-human services transportation plan to receive Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC, Section 5316⁴), New Freedom (Section 5317), and elderly and disabled (Section 5310) funds is one example of improving these links. Also, while not explicitly addressed by this study, it is an excellent jumping-off point for closer coordination between small- and medium-sized metropolitan area transit operators and MPOs. Federal statutes have provided funding resources

and a mandate to include transit operators in the decisionmaking process.

The broad flexibility among Federal funding programs and the legal requirement for a multimodal transportation planning process present a picture of only the minimum-threshold requirements, not the full range of opportunities. This report documents success stories of how transit operator involvement in MPO activities has generated financial and resource-related benefits resulting in commensurate mobility gains for the communities they serve. As Ken Savage, Director of Fort Smith Transit in Arkansas, noted, “Peer programs, case studies, publications, and updates are becoming increasingly necessary to our agency to save time and create enthusiasm.”

This report, therefore, has been organized as a more robust, complete, and coherent answer to the question: “What are the benefits of transit agencies’ active participation in metropolitan transportation planning processes, and how are they achieved?” In doing so, it presents a number of effective approaches transit agencies have employed as well as observations of obstacles and benefits and recommendations for successful transit operator participation in planning for small- and medium-sized urban areas.

Importantly, this report verifies that transit operators who participate minimally in the regional planning process and who fail to participate in metropolitan transportation planning committee work and technical studies in setting a broader policy agenda may be missing important opportunities for long-term rewards. Issues discussed include interactions between the SDOT and transit agency, the level of FTA involvement, and public vs. private management of transit operations.

⁴ This report contains many references to major grant programs that FTA sponsors. Each grant program is referred to either by name and/or by a number that correlates to the section number in Title 49 of the United States Code. A description of each grant program may be found on the FTA Website, <http://www.fta.dot.gov>.

1.4 Methodology

The achievements reported in the following pages are based on discussions with transportation professionals in more than 20 small- and medium-sized metropolitan areas across the United States. Discussion participants in each region included staff and officials from transit agencies, MPOs, and SDOTs. These regions were selected based on input from FTA and the study's TWG.⁵ Selection of participants also considered innovation in service delivery methods and success in obtaining policy support and funding for transit investments. Geographic location as well as governmental structure and operating characteristics were also considered to provide a more robust and nationally diverse study sample.

A previous report, *Transit at the Table: A Guide to Participation in Metropolitan Decisionmaking*, released by Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in 2004, addressed the involvement of transit agencies in urbanized areas with populations of more than 200,000. Regional transportation planning organizational structures, funding processes, and decisionmaking issues differ between small to medium-sized regions and large regions. FTA has commissioned *Transit at the Table II* to provide insights from metropolitan areas with populations between 50,000 and 200,000.

1.5 Findings

The importance of transit's involvement in the metropolitan transportation planning process is the major theme of this report, and is supported by empirical and anecdotal evidence from various study regions. A secondary goal of this report is to provide specific responses to the transit

⁵ The TWG consisted of representatives from MPOs and transit operators in small- and medium-sized metropolitan areas, SDOTs, FTA headquarters and regional offices, and national transportation organizations. A complete list of TWG membership may be found in the front of the report. A map showing the study areas may be found in Appendix B.

involvement question quoted at the beginning of this chapter (i.e. "Why does FTA need to sponsor this research?"). The question is answered in three parts, each addressed in a separate chapter.

- Participation in the MPO process can improve transit agency operations and staffing resources - Chapter 2
- Participation in the MPO process can improve transit agency influence and create regional policy support for transit - Chapter 3
- Participation in the MPO process can leverage additional funding opportunities, thereby increasing the level of service operators are able to provide - Chapter 4

Each chapter provides examples and stories that illustrate the benefits of transit's place at the MPO table. While these stories are specific to the political and economic realities of the study regions and therefore may not be perfectly replicated elsewhere, they show exciting examples of how transit operations in certain regions have gained broad policy and programmatic support and have creatively tackled funding and resource shortfalls by leveraging MPO participation. It is hoped that these accounts will serve as an energizing force to relay the message that MPO involvement is important to transit operators and a critical ingredient to their success in securing both policy and financial resources. The categories of benefits gained by the transit agencies participating in this study are summarized in the matrix below.

Summary of Benefits

Metropolitan Area	Improved Transit Agency and Operations and Staffing Resources	Improved Transit Agency Influence	Additional Funding Leveraged for Multimodal Solutions
Fort Smith, AR		X	X
Flagstaff, AZ	X		X
Gainesville, FL		X	X
Cedar Rapids, IA	X	X	X
Coeur d'Alene, ID	X	X	
Bowling Green, KY		X	
Hagerstown, MD			X
Portland, ME			X
Saginaw, MI	X		
Duluth, MN	X	X	X
Missoula, MT	X	X	X
Grand Forks, ND	X	X	X
Binghamton, NY	X		X
Elmira, NY	X	X	
Mansfield, OH	X		X
Sioux Falls, SD	X		
Abilene, TX	X	X	
Richland, WA	X	X	X





ROUTES
1, 12

ROUTES
3, 4, 9

NO
SMOKING

ROUTES
6, 7
ROUTES
2, 1, 9, 4, 3

Mountain Line Transfer Center - Missoula, MT

Chapter 2: Participation in the MPO Process Can Improve Transit Agency Operations and Staffing Resources

Successful transit agencies juggle many responsibilities, one of which should be MPO participation. Getting involved and staying involved with the MPO can improve transit agency operations and staffing resources. Three specific benefits to the transit agency, and ultimately the communities they serve, include:

- Enhancement of the transit agency's image in the community
- Support for the transit agency's management structure
- Sharing of staff resources

This chapter describes benefits received by transit agencies working with the MPO to improve agency operations and staffing. Specific methods used by transit agencies to obtain these benefits include physical proximity, longevity/continuity of staff, changes to agency structure, and informal meetings.

An Open Agency Opens Doors!

"The MPO is an excellent forum for contact with officials who can help your agency, both with current operations and planning and future work or service expansion."
—Bill Wright, former director, Saginaw Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (SMATS) MPO, Saginaw, MI

Several transit agencies lamented that many aspects of the regional decisionmaking process are dependent on the external political environment and out of the hands of transit

agency policymakers. Yet several agencies were able to bridge what many participants believed was the inherent disconnect between transit agency and MPO collaboration by simply adapting to support improved interagency collaboration.

2.1 Enhancement of Transit Agency Image

As one transit manager noted, "We focus our efforts on transit-related issues from within and assume everything will take care of itself on the outside." He went on to say that, from his perspective, it seems as if other agencies view transit as an introverted organization that does not involve itself with outside issues.

Building a well-organized agency that is designed for external cooperation and internal efficiency is critical to regional decisionmaking for two reasons: First, an organizational design that reaches out to external partners reflects a general willingness to engage in regional issues, opening lines of communication. Second, an externally engaged organization that is inclusive and cooperative reflects competency for taking an active role in regional decisionmaking. Many of the transit agencies cited in the report meet the above criteria, and the specific examples for each agency demonstrate their effectiveness as regional transportation leaders.

Who Should Drive the Bus? Contractor Support for the Transit Agency Management Structure

Transit agencies in small- and medium-sized regions have historically found it difficult to attract and retain transit professionals for several reasons, including:

- Limited opportunities for professional development and
- The perceived lack of transit-related "excitement" in small- and medium-sized

regions. As one MPO director lamented, “We can get the young kid right out of grad school for a year or two, but they leave as soon as they get experience and an opportunity to do rail planning.”

Consequently, many transit agencies and MPOs in small- and medium-sized regions are staffed by individuals who lack formal training in transit planning. To address this gap, many of the transit agency participants hired a private transit management company to make the day-to-day operational decisions. The majority of participants gave positive feedback regarding the management company’s operations in their region. Several noted that having professional transit management staff was very helpful in dealing with technical operational issues, thereby allowing transit policymakers to focus more on regional decisions. Two specific benefits associated with a management agency include:

- Extensive experience in transit management issues
- Ancillary resources (transit-related software, technical problem solving, etc.)

For example, the Duluth (MN) Transit Authority (DTA) has been managed by a private firm since its formation in 1970. DTA’s Board of Directors sets fare and service policies and the management company oversees operations. If the DTA transit director requires additional expertise, the entire transit management company is available for consultation. Similarly, the Chemung County Transit System (CCTS), serving the Elmira, NY region, is also operated by a management company. Officials in Elmira applauded the efforts of the management company, noting that CCTS general managers who are assigned by the transit management company often come from outside the region, a practice that provides a level of

insulation between the operations of the transit system and local politics.

There are, however, weaknesses associated with transit management companies, such as:

- High turnover, with transit managers rotating out after several years
- Lack of familiarity with local priorities or standard operating procedures

A transit agency that has strong ties with the MPO has a particular advantage in mitigating the weaknesses associated with transit management. For example, Transportation Planning Director Robert Allen of the Abilene, TX MPO noted that they use several methods to keep a stable working environment between the transit agency and the MPO, even during the changes in transit agency management during his 20 years there. (See box below, “Abilene, TX—Mentoring and Community Involvement.”)

Abilene, TX—Mentoring and Community Involvement

The Abilene transit agency, CityLink, contracts with a transit management company. However, Abilene Metropolitan Planning Organization’s Transportation Planning Director Robert Allen noted that the MPO uses several methods to ensure a smooth transition between transit managers. He has been at the MPO for more than 20 years and serves as a mentor to new transit agency managers assigned to the region. He does not look at high turnover as an impediment to interagency cooperation. He takes it upon himself to introduce new transit managers to the local way of doing things and “show them the ropes.” While the productivity lost during the rehiring and training of new transit agency managers can create problems, the mentoring



Robert Allen, Transportation Planning Director, Abilene MPO

process he has developed works to get regional partners on the same page quickly.

Allen also noted the establishment of a community group to help the transit agency maintain policy direction despite changes in management staff.

The management company nominates a general manager to oversee the CityLink transit system, and the Abilene City Council must then approve the nomination. In 2005, the City Council felt that the current general manager was not representing citizen concerns.

To foster community involvement and buy-in regarding transit priorities, community leaders were selected from a number of governmental, nonprofit, and business interests to form an ad hoc advisory committee. Citizens are appointed to the committee by the Abilene Public Works Department (where CityLink is housed) and are responsible for identifying needs and developing recommendations for transit agency priorities. The purpose of the advisory committee is to provide local representation to the transit management company's operational decisions and retain institutional memory through various management changes.

Involvement with MPO activities and close personal working relationships between transit directors and MPO directors can also serve the MPO. For example, Sylvester Payne, the Saginaw Transit Authority Regional Service (STARS) general manager in Saginaw, MI helps new MPO directors familiarize themselves with regional politics, as he has been both the MPO director and the transit agency director (currently). In addition,

in the Cedar Rapids, IA region, both the transit and MPO directors have worked in their positions for many years and have a tradition of working together to achieve a common vision.

In Missoula, MT, a private transit management firm ran daily operations of the Mountain Line transit system for decades. However, over time, it became apparent that the management company's philosophy did not match local area concerns. (See the example "Missoula, MT –Management Agency Switch" below.) Mountain Line's Board of Directors was also concerned that the agency was not actively involved in the State and local planning processes. Staff morale was suffering and the community was not engaged in the transit decisionmaking process. So, in 1996, Mountain Line became a municipally run organization. This allowed Mountain Line and Missoula MPO staff to select a general manager who understood local politics and could get the business community involved in the transit planning process. As a result, staff morale improved as employees realized that they were providing a service responsive to local concerns and based on local objectives. Ridership has increased since the change and there has been a decrease in employee turnover.

Missoula, MT—Management Agency Switch

From the agency's inception, the operational decisions of Mountain Line transit service were managed by a private consulting firm, while the Missoula Urban Transportation District made policy decisions. Management of daily operations was done in a professional and acceptable manner; however, systemic issues associated with outside management began causing concerns within the community. For example, general managers did not stay in Missoula for more than a few years, using it as a "stepping stone" to other management opportunities. Thus, every 4 to 5 years, a new

general manager was hired and introduced to the community and agency representatives, making it difficult to retain institutional memory and build a long-term working relationship with MPO employees, board members, and the community. Specifically, no new ideas were being generated, and there was no effort made by the management agency team to bring other partners, such as the business community, into the decisionmaking process. The philosophy of the management company did not match local desires.

As Steve Earle, the general manager for Mountain Line, noted, the prevailing attitude of the business community at the time reflected a feeling of “why should we become involved with this guy and work at building a relationship when we know he will be moving on in a few years?” In addition, morale issues within the transit agency were surfacing because general managers brought in from outside the area did not seem to understand local priorities and social trends. With these concerns in mind, the transit board felt it was time to switch from a private management agency to a locally managed operation, and did so in 1996. For approximately \$100,000 a year, the transit agency covers the salary and benefits associated with a general manager and additional legal and professional assistance, creating a break-even financial outcome.

Until 1996 the transit board consisted of three elected members. Once the decision was made to provide a full-time general manager, legislative action altered the composition of the board to seven members appointed by the city and the county. The board then simply voted not to renew the management contract and put an advertisement in the local paper for the general manager position.

“The hardest thing to do was make the change a positive thing in the eyes of the media,” Earle noted. “At the time of the change, staff was already demoralized, so they saw the change as an opportunity for an improved working environment.” Once the change was made, not only did staff become reenergized, but the community became energized as well. The transit agency became much more involved with local goings-on and became much more ingrained in the community consciousness.

“Getting more involved in local public and private affairs was the best move we made,” says Earle, “Being active in the Downtown Association, the Chamber of Commerce, university groups, and in the planning process was a very important move in the future of Mountain Line.”

Agency morale has risen and Mountain Line now relies on innovative, locally relevant programs that engage the business community and strengthen the role of transit. The agency’s greatest measure of success is a significant increase in ridership and a decrease in employee turnover. Happy operators bring happy customers!



Missoula, MT, Transit Center
Image courtesy of Steve Earle, Mountain Line CEO

2.2 Sharing of Staff Resources

Once the management structure has been established, there are several ways to integrate either the management company or municipal staff into the MPO structure. The more transit agencies and MPOs integrate their technical

and/or decisionmaking staff, the more they will increase their eligibility for additional monetary and staff resources. A good relationship with the MPO allows for possible sharing of technical staff. Advantages of such an arrangement include:

- The transit agency obtains technical support
- The MPO learns more about how transit works

There are several methods to obtaining the benefits listed above, including:

- MPO staff perform bilateral duties as transit planning staff
- City/county staff perform bilateral duties as transit planning staff
- A third party funds transit planning/operations

MPO Staff Perform Bilateral Duties as Transit Planning Staff

In Mansfield, OH, the private bus operator went bankrupt in the early 1970s and, since then, a new staff organizational structure has been developed. The board of Richland County Transit (RCT), which is appointed by the county commissioners, is in charge of policy-level decisions. Through a specific item in the UPWP, which is a budget document of upcoming planning work activities required annually of MPOs, funding support is provided for the staff from the Richland County Regional Planning Commission. This funding makes it possible for this staff to give planning and technical advice to the RCT board. A private transit company provides a three-person management team for day-to-day operations. The RCT board pays for the transit management contracts and some of the work that the MPO staff completes; however, much of the work that the MPO staff performs, provided as part of the normal MPO planning work program, has reduced RCT operational outlays. Participating annually in the development of the UPWP represents one

of the most effective ways that transit operators can participate in MPO activities to obtain staff planning assistance and/or financial resources to support the effort. In addition to the arrangement in Richland County, where the MPO staff also work directly as the transit planning staff, transit participation in UPWP preparation can also place transit planning on the MPO's radar and prompt the MPO and other planning participants to undertake a transit study and include transit in other studies.



Richland County Transit Vehicle (Mansfield, OH)
Image courtesy of Richland County Transit

City/County Staffs Perform Bilateral Duties as Transit Planning Staff

In Cedar Rapids, IA, the City Planning Department completes both the MPO and transit planning staff functions. The advantage of such a structure, as Bill Hoekstra, Director of Five Seasons Transportation and Parking Transit, noted, is that “the right hand always knows what the left hand is doing.” In Abilene, TX, CityLink transit is housed within the City Department of Public Works. Since the City Planning Department is also attached to the Department of Public Works, they often share staff resources and the Planning Department does the majority of the transit planning work. In the Elmira, NY region, Chemung County serves as the transit operator but contracts with a private transit management company for day-to-day operations. In Binghamton, NY, the Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation Study (BMTS, the MPO), and the Broome County Transit (BC Transit) are county departments, so they share resources. For example, the BMTS expert in geographic information

systems (GIS) also serves as the BC Transit GIS expert. In Fort Smith, AR, the transit agency (Fort Smith Transit) operates as a department of the city government.

A Third Party Funds Transit Planning/ Operations

The Coeur d’Alene, ID, Native American Tribe [Schitsu’umsh] (see “MPO Involvement in Coeur d’Alene, ID, Breathes Life into Transit Service with the Help of a Third Party”) was spending \$450,000 a year operating a bus service directly from the urbanized area to their casino. The MPO approached the Tribe, noting that since it was already spending transit operating money it might be a good idea to contract with the MPO to supplement the transit service. This would enhance accessibility to those areas isolated from medical, job, and educational services. The Tribe agreed and subsequently a third-party contract agreement was signed that used the \$400,000 a year in Tribal funds as the local match for a FTA Section 5307 grant. Kootenai County is the designated recipient of the funds and, in turn, it provides the money to the Panhandle Action Council (PAC) that administers the transit service contract. The Kootenai MPO (KMPO) Board directs the planning and implementation and receives monthly reports, reviews ridership, and examines service issues.

The Flagstaff, AZ, region set up a transportation authority known as the Northern Arizona Intergovernmental Public Transportation Authority (NAIPTA) that serves as a regional transit coordination organization. With the ability to pool monetary resources between several transit agencies, NAIPTA is able to fund the salary of a full-time transit planner. The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) believes that the presence of a full-time, dedicated transit professional, made possible through the NAIPTA organizational structure, has contributed greatly to the success of transit in Flagstaff.

To further ensure transit’s participation in regional planning and policy development, the NAIPTA planning manager sits on the Flagstaff MPO’s Technical Advisory Committee. The two agencies also recently partnered for a transit plan synthesis funded through the MPO’s UPWP and will partner again for a study of a downtown transfer center location, if the previous plan determines there is the need for a center. The MPO works directly with NAIPTA to secure funding commitments for this work in the UPWP.



New Bus for City of Flagstaff, AZ
Image courtesy of NAIPTA

MPO Involvement in Coeur d’Alene, ID, Breathes Life into Transit Service With the Help of a Third Party

According to Kootenai Metropolitan Planning Organization (KMPO) Executive Director Glenn Miles, the only fixed-route transit service in the region would not exist without the local match contribution from the Coeur d’Alene Tribe. Miles noted that expanded CityLink service has met an urgent mobility need and markedly improved intergovernmental relations with the Tribe and MPO member jurisdictions.

However, KMPO participation in Coeur d’Alene transit activities did not stop with the expansion of CityLink. Kootenai Area Transportation System (KATS) continued to provide door-to-door demand-response service. KATS and CityLink transit were driving on the same roads and providing

service on identical routes. The MPO board, when reviewing contract renewals, requested KATS and CityLink work together to eliminate redundant service. The county directed them to begin transferring passengers between systems when appropriate.

Most small- and medium-sized urban regions do not have potential transit partners with fiscal resources comparable to the Coeur d'Alene Tribe that can be used to assist in the establishment of a fixed-route transit system. However, it is useful to acknowledge that by working with local resources, including those that are not traditionally thought of as transit-supportive, an expansion of services or reduction of overlapping services and amenities can be accomplished through participation in the MPO. It is those activities of the MPO that foster interaction between agencies and identification of potential resources or overlapping expenses that make this possible.

Faced with low residential density, dispersed transit destinations, and an inability to acquire operating funds for local units of government, the Kootenai MPO used innovative collaboration to secure the local match required for fixed-route operations funding.

A common situation

A fixed-route service for the urban area was difficult to initiate and was not operating when KMPO was initially designated in 2002. A demand response service, the KATS, was operating in the area to provide transit service to those unable to own or operate a private automobile. However, the newly formed MPO was interested in providing fixed-route transit that would attract new riders. The time constraints placed on technical staff exacerbated monetary concerns. Through their UPWP, the KMPO Board contracts with the Spokane Regional Transportation Council

(SRTC) for staff support. SRTC staff spends approximately 75 percent of their work week providing support for the Spokane, WAMPO and approximately 25 percent of their time with the KMPO. Therefore, they did not feel they had enough time to administer an MPO-sponsored transit division.

An uncommon regional partner

The Coeur d'Alene Native American Tribe (Schitsu'umsh) opened a casino outside the urban area and began operating a bus service (CityLink) connecting the urbanized area with the casino in the early 1990s. Providing this fixed-route service resulted in an annual operating budget of approximately \$400,000 a year, funded by casino revenues.

A simple solution: The MPO as a dealmaker

Although KMPO staff did not feel that they had the resources necessary to administer a fixed-route service, they did recognize an opportunity to obtain the required local match operating funds. They worked with the Tribe, Kootenai County, and PAC to develop a third-party, fixed-route transit system. Essentially, the Tribe provides the local matching operating funds and Kootenai County serves as the recipient of the Federal transit funds, which are passed on to PAC to administer the contracts. The KMPO Board gets monthly reports, reviews ridership, and examines service issues. Furthermore, the Board directs the planning and implementation of transit operations and service changes. The board also establishes policy and direction.

2.3 Cooperation Makes It Happen: Methods of Enhancing Agency Involvement

"In order to provide and advance regional cooperation and improve the transportation planning process, regions

need to get past turf issues that serve to circumvent the process.”—Roger Foster, General Manager, Cities Area Transit (CAT), Grand Forks, ND

Influential factors noted by transit agencies to achieve benefits mentioned previously include:

- Physical proximity of MPO and transit agency offices
- Longevity/continuity of staff
- Informal meetings

One of the most effective ways at getting past “turf issues” noted by several regions involves sharing ideas. One way this has been accomplished is through management staff exchange. For example, before becoming the General Manager and Chief Executive Officer (GM/CEO) of STARS Transit in Saginaw, MI, Sylvester Payne was the Saginaw Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (SMATS) Director. He credited his ability to accomplish a good working relationship between the transit agency and MPO with the fact that he knows many of the SMATS staff on both a personal and professional level from his time as director. Likewise, the transit planner for Sioux Falls Transit in Sioux Falls, SD, previously worked for the Southeastern Council of Governments (the MPO), and is credited with helping to foster an interagency relationship.

Switching between MPO and transit agency executives is not the only way to take advantage of interpersonal relationships. Sharing the staff resources and technical knowledge can be enhanced by improving both formal and informal relationships between each agency’s staff as well. Various agencies have noted the most frequently cited methods in fostering this cross-pollination of ideas and resources and they are described below.

Physical Proximity

During various discussions with MPO and transit agency staff — long drives across town to attend a formal meeting, a scheduled phone call that digresses into conversations lasting much longer than needed, and a misinterpreted email — were a number of reasons noted as barriers to creating an open region.

One measure used by several regions to bridge the “isolation” gap and allow for more ongoing communication involves the collocation of agency offices. Regions found that an increase in informal contacts among decisionmakers and staff members of separate agencies allowed for more comfortable interpersonal relationships. Transit agency staff noted that they felt as if they were members of the MPO organization and were included in more of the discussions, both informal and formal, taking place.

For example, in Elmira, NY, the Elmira-Chemung Transportation Council (the MPO) office building also houses the Chamber of Commerce. The close proximity of agency representatives through the sharing of office space leads to many informal contacts between staff members, resulting in discussions on how transit can serve business interests and how the mode can be marketed to enhance the desirability of the area. In fact, the Economic Development Department of the Chamber of Commerce funded an access study for a specific parcel of land, resulting in a better site design and orientation to the local transit system.

Longevity and Continuity of Staff

“Institutional knowledge gained from the longevity of staff at either the MPO or transit agency is a major advantage”—Sylvester Payne, GM/CEO of STARS Transit in Saginaw, MI

Transit professional staff are difficult to attract and retain in small- and medium-sized urban

Image courtesy of STARS



**Sylvester Payne, GM/CEO of
STARS Transit, Saginaw, MI**

areas. Thus, the longevity and continuity of staff can be a measure of organizational success in a region. Transit agencies that were involved with the regional process through MPO activities were also found to have staff that were either shared between

agencies or worked together closely. For example, the Southeastern Council of Governments (the MPO) and Sioux Falls Transit in Sioux Falls, SD, share a GIS expert. In many regions, agencies noted that county and/or MPO staff did the technical analysis associated with the planning of transit issues.

Informal Meetings

“Our method of successful MPO interaction and cooperation is simple but effective. It all has to do with building personal relationships. You have to go over there and know these people—as people not just as bureaucrats. I know Mark’s [Kushner] job there and I know his staff and their specializations. We know them as people, professionals, and friends. This is why we are doing so well. It is easier to have a cup of coffee, sit down, and work it out. In developing relationships, things get done.”—Ed Frost, Transit Manager, Ben Franklin Transit, Richland, WA

The informal meetings associated with the colocation of offices in the same geographic area, while beneficial, are also sporadic. Consequently, several regions found it beneficial to establish regular, informal get-togethers, which often take place at casual venues, such as a local restaurant. These meetings can be between various agencies in a particular region, such as transit agency and

MPO general managers, or can be between similar agencies in different geographic regions, such as transit agency general managers from two different MPOs meeting to discuss common problems and solutions.

This cross-pollination of ideas conducted in the atmosphere of an informal meeting can lead to opportunities for increased MPO involvement. The MPO director and transit director in Fort Smith, AR meet at least once a month over lunch or dinner to discuss everything from their personal lives to regional planning problems. The 13 MPOs in New York have a State association that, while not formally incorporated, acts as a forum for the exchange of experiences and information among the MPO directors at their bimonthly meetings. The New York Public Transit Association serves the same purpose for transit operators, large and small. The two associations have begun to explore how they can work together at the statewide level. As Steven Gayle, BMTS director, said, “You gotta get out of town ... go forth and learn!”

The Abilene MPO has regional planning meetings where the MPO, CityLink, and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) get together several times a year to discuss regional transportation issues, such as integration of rural providers and location of public service land uses (e.g. hospitals).



SERVICE

Chapter 3: Participation in the MPO Process Can Improve Transit Agency Influence and Create Regional Policy Support for Transit

“The transit operator can always be more involved with the process. They must keep the conversation going outside of meetings...and while this might be hard and time-consuming and engender the attitude that the transit agency can’t afford such an effort, in reality they can’t afford not to.”—Ron Epstein, Director, Transit Bureau, Office of Finance, Policy and Strategy Division, New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT)

Increasing transit agency influence in the metropolitan transportation planning process can prove beneficial for small- and medium-sized areas. Approaches that were found to increase transit agency influence included:

- Establishing formal involvement with the MPO board, committees, and task forces
- Building relationships with SDOT representatives
- Cultivating relationships with the public and stakeholder groups

Benefits include building a level of trust with the community and developing interpersonal relationships with key decision makers in the region. Once these relationships have been established, collaboration with the MPO can lead to improved community mobility by expanding the pool of resources available to transit operators, as discussed in the “Cedar Rapids, IA - Involved in Community Issues” sidebar. The two activities most noted by highly influential transit agencies were:

- Involvement in regional decisionmaking. Many regions noted that involvement of the transit agency in regional decisions increased the

perception by the community of the transit agency as a proactive organization. “The involvement with the MPO committees has really enabled us to become known by the community at large as a can-do organization. If progress is at a standstill, the general feeling is to involve transit...they know how to get things done,” noted one Midwestern transit agency general manager.

- Collaboration. Many regions noted that as their transit agencies became involved with other transportation modes and the overall decisionmaking process, the transit agency representatives built a foundation for informal relationships and the strengthening of agency cooperation.

Cedar Rapids, IA—Involved in Community Issues

Bill Hoekstra, Director of Five Seasons Transportation and Parking (FSTP), the regional transit provider in Cedar Rapids, has created a culture of cooperation both with agency partners in the region and transit partners statewide. The relationships he has built because of this involvement have created additional policy advocacy and resource opportunities with the metropolitan planning organization (MPO).

For example, Hoekstra is on numerous state and local committees and is involved with issues other than strictly transit-related efforts. He serves willingly and describes his involvement as, “It’s all about community for me.” Hoekstra’s community involvement informs his work as a transit leader. He is on the Iowa Clean Air Committee and has helped obtain more than \$3 million from Federal appropriations and competitive grants to fund planning and much-needed implementation projects. Another committee

he is involved with worked on providing a baseball park for the Cedar Rapids Kernels, the Class A affiliate of the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim. Hoekstra volunteered to be on the committee and assisted in writing the proposal and lobbying the State successfully for a \$4 million economic development grant to have the stadium built. Bus service is now in the vicinity of the ballpark.

Hoekstra has also been involved with larger projects that benefit the Cedar Rapids region. For example, Cedar Rapids and Iowa City (home of the University of Iowa) are roughly 25 miles apart. Local officials have long envisioned using existing rail lines to connect their two regions. The lack of a formal study was holding back implementation of the project. Hoekstra commissioned a locally funded study that included input from the MPO, Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT), and FTA. The study included an alternatives analysis identifying commuter rail as the locally preferred alternative. Funding for that study was made available through the regional Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).

A member of the Linn County Regional Planning Commission (LCRPC), the Cedar Rapids MPO, notes that Hoekstra's involvement with the various committees in town has created very positive feelings for FSTP and that LCRPC will support Hoekstra and his agency in any way it can.



Formerly known as Five Seasons Transportation and Parking

3.1 Get in the Game – The Importance of MPO Involvement

“Because the RTPO (Regional Transportation Planning Organization) forces us to get together, it helps us to understand each other’s businesses better. This fosters a spirit of informed teamwork, instead of competition.”

—Dick Fondahn, Transit Manager, Valley Transit, Walla Walla, WA



Image courtesy of Walla Walla Valley Transit

Dick Fondahn, Transit Manager, Valley Transit, Walla Walla, WA

Formal involvement with the MPO varied and included several different levels:

- A voting seat on the MPO Policy Board
- Technical advisory/committee participation
- “Transit champion” representatives
- Involvement in the regional long-range vision plan

A Voting Seat on the MPO Policy Board

Full transit agency (voting) representation on the MPO Policy Board is not a Federally mandated prerequisite for MPO establishment in small- and medium-sized areas. However, transit agency participation as a voting member is advantageous. “Serving on the Policy Board allows us to have direct conversations with our member jurisdictions,” noted Ed Frost, Transit Manager of Ben Franklin Transit (BFT) in Richland, WA. “They are the ones directly responsible for building streets, sidewalks, and the placement of curbs and planter strips, so we [transit] encourage them to find better ways to safely connect our service to the sidewalk.” By taking an active role as a voting member on the Policy Board, BFT was able to greatly and directly improve the ability of the region to identify

and plan for the region's future transit needs, as discussed in the "Richland, WA—Transit Assisted in Selecting a Regional Modeling Partner" sidebar that follows.

Richland, WA—Transit Assisted in Selecting a Regional Modeling Partner

The Ben Franklin Transit (BFT) routinely prepared transit inputs for the Benton-Franklin Council of Governments (BFCOG), the designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO), regional travel demand forecasting model. The BFCOG modeling software was outdated and thus the model did not represent transit activity very well. Therefore, BFCOG decided to examine options for upgrading the model structure and software. It issued a request for proposals and asked members of the MPO Policy Board (including BFT) to serve on a selection committee. The committee interviewed a number of software vendors and, at the insistence of BFT, the ability to model transit trips was a key selection factor.

After selection, BFCOG offered training on how to use the new model. Three BFT staff members participated in a five-day training program. Other member jurisdictions and BFCOG staff participated as well. "Because BFCOG was buying the program, we (BFT) were able to buy a license and use the program at a greatly reduced fee," noted Ed Frost, BFT's Transit Manager. "We routinely use the program within our agency today. We also share our data with BFCOG for regional modeling. The easy integration of the program and the model's modal split characteristics and transit forecasting functions resulted in a benefit to BFT, as modeling time and effort was greatly reduced. This enabled more efficient time and cost allocation of staff resources to transit modeling." As with most

MPOs, the development and operation of the BFCOG travel demand forecasting model is supported through the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), which is approved by the MPO and jointly funded by FTA and FHWA. The extensive input BFT provided to development of the UPWP resulted in significant improvements in the region's ability to forecast future transit needs and to address how those needs could be addressed.

Technical Advisory/Committee Participation

Air quality conformity, bicycle and pedestrian issues, long-range planning, and land use integration are specific MPO activities that often have their own subcommittees. Participation in these types of subcommittees presents the chance for the transit agency to advise the MPO Policy Board on specific transit issues and introduce transit as an important transportation option in future plans and programs, particularly if the transit agency does not have voting membership on the MPO Policy Board. In fact, providing input at the subcommittee level – in advance of the MPO Policy Board meeting – may be the most effective approach to participation.

These subcommittees are often composed of several decisionmakers and technical staff from the various transportation agencies in the region. Jesus Gomez, transit director for the Gainesville, FL, Regional Transit System (RTS), understood that participation in subcommittee activities increased policymaker and technical staff exposure to transit-specific concerns. Consequently, he used general fund money to support staff participation in all MPO-sponsored committees. (See "Gainesville, FL – Staffing MPO Committee Meetings" sidebar.) Gomez said, "When I first came here, we [RTS] had to prove our benefit to the region, but now we are seen as assets in both assisting regional decisions and providing transportation services. I attribute this to being more involved in the regional

planning process and letting them know what transit is all about.”

Roger Foster of CAT in Grand Forks, ND, noted that he does not have a voting membership on the Policy Board. But he does participate in critical MPO activities through involvement with specific committees. “This involvement built relationships between us [CAT] and other agencies and allowed for personal and professional interaction between decisionmakers,” he said. “These relationships proved to be invaluable for future funding opportunities.” For example, participation with MPO activities was credited with helping CAT advance the region’s transit program, providing improved service with Section 5309 funding. Grand Forks and Fargo (another one of North Dakota’s three MPOs) bundled project requests together when lobbying the State congressional delegation. Funds from this lobbying effort were used for the construction of a new regional transit center in Grand Forks.

Gainesville, FL—Staffing MPO Committee Meetings

The City of Gainesville Regional Transit System (RTS) has been a voting member of the MPO Policy Board since its inception. However, according to RTS transit director Jesus Gomez, the majority of policy-level decisions are made by the MPO with recommendations of several committees, such as the design team committee, Citizens Advisory Board, Bicycle and Pedestrian Board, and Technical Advisory Committee. Gomez felt that transit’s participation in the MPO planning process was not as involved as it could or should have been. As there were not enough staff members available to cover all of the required meetings, Gomez funded the hiring of two additional planners through his operating budget. In addition to working on the typical planning issues associated with

agency operations, each of the three planners are assigned to the numerous MPO committees, including those that are not usually staffed

with transit interests, such as the Roadway Signing Committee. Gomez believes that this level of transit agency involvement in MPO decisions has created relationships that benefit future transit programs in the area.



Image courtesy of RTS

Jesus Gomez, Director, Gainesville (FL) Regional Transit System

“Transit Champion” Representatives

Transit operators in several regions commented that they did not have formal membership on the MPO board but surrogate members did represent them.

- Bill Hoekstra of Five Seasons Transportation and Parking (FSTP) in Cedar Rapids noted that transit service operates as a department of city government. A city council representative is on the MPO Policy Board and is someone whom Hoekstra views as the “champion” of transit issues.
- CCTS in Elmira, NY does not have a designated seat on the MPO Policy Board, but Chemung County does make the policy decisions for the transit agency and is on the MPO board.

Involvement in the Regional Long-range Vision Planning

“A common vision is needed for successful regional transit participation. Regions must move beyond a strictly funding discussion. Set a vision, then find a way to meet it through involvement with MPO activities. Collaboration always accomplishes more than working alone.”—Ron Epstein, NYSDOT

Engaging the MPO in a long-range vision for regional transit services can create a supportive atmosphere between the transit agency and the MPO. In fact, there is a regulatory mandate⁶ for transit operator participation in the development of the MPO's regional Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRP) and this is where the regional transit vision should be written down. There should be agreement between the MPO and the transit operator as to transit's roles and responsibilities in the plan development. For example, transit should participate in the development of the financial plan that accompanies the LRP. The LRP provides the foundation for regional strategies and projects to support transit as part of a balanced transportation network that promotes mobility and accessibility across the metropolitan area.

An important component of long-range vision development involves winning support from the general public. For example, Dennis Jensen, GM/CEO of the Duluth Transit Authority (DTA), noted that "obtaining public input and seeking broad consensus through the MPO's public participation process enables the MPO to accomplish the goals that it identified. The MPO identified these goals through a process of technical analysis, community and stakeholder buy-in, and expansion of service by being flexible, willing to compromise, and above all being an agency that works with constituents, not against them. Obtaining MPO support of the LRP helps create a common regional vision and can identify future funding set-asides for transit capital needs, as shown in the "Duluth, MN – Regional Planning Participation Process" example in the sidebar.

⁶ See 23 CFR 450.310(b), 450.312(a) and (d), and 450.316(a)(14). Regulations available online at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/legregs/directives/fapg/Cfr450c.htm>

Duluth, MN—Regional Planning Participation Process

Working with the Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council (MIC), the area metropolitan planning organization (MPO), the Duluth Transit Authority (DTA) developed a "vision plan" detailing future transit operations for the region. This vision was predicated on the desire to grow the system and increase ridership through the penetration of new and underserved markets as well as to continue growth in current ones. The specific plan recommendations developed a framework for the concentration of transit capital investments in major transit centers. To support this vision, several steps were taken:

- The first step involved the initiation of a downtown transit study. At the time of the study, there were two transit centers in close proximity to one another in the central business district (CBD). The location of each transit center and increasing ridership created vehicular and pedestrian congestion on the local streets. The congestion posed a pedestrian safety hazard. The vision plan called for improving conditions in the CBD through pedestrian improvements and route restructuring and recommended a location for a unified downtown transit center. To support site selection for a new transit center and analyze CBD operations, the MIC funded \$15,000 of a \$55,000 origin/destination survey (the remainder was Federal funds), including vehicle boarding and alighting locations. The MIC programmed this study in the UPWP, which FTA and FHWA jointly funded, based on DTA's active involvement in the work program preparation. Analysis of the geocoded results indicated that a restructuring of the routes, the dispersal of some of the CBD stops, and an off-street transfer center would be beneficial for transit operations.

- The second step involved public participation. The business community did not support the idea of an off-street transfer center and feared a decrease in storefront foot traffic (i.e., potential customers). So the MIC and DTA devised a plan for funding transit “super centers” that would keep stop locations on the sidewalk but provide off-street amenities for riders, such as real-time bus information, benches, and heating. This compromise allowed the business community to retain a segment of their customer base and DTA riders received amenities that made their transfer more comfortable. Construction began in fall 2007 with a \$350,000 street and sidewalk improvement budget and \$250,000 shelter budget. DTA funded 20 percent of these costs while FTA is funding the remaining 80 percent.
- The third step involved expanding transit service options to an underserved market through transit center investment. Approximately 9,000 students attend the University of Minnesota-Duluth (UMD) campus, which is located within the DTA service area. To serve the student population better, DTA colocated a transit center with the UMD student center. The new transit center also includes a daycare center to support welfare-to-work initiatives. The \$22 million project (the 20 percent local match was funded from Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality [CMAQ] funds) was completed in August 2004 and is currently generating approximately 48,000 unlinked trips per month, a sixfold increase from the approximately 7,000 unlinked trips prior to the transit center completion.

In addition to working within a long-range plan concept, transit agencies should seek



Kirby Plaza, Duluth, MN
Image courtesy of Duluth Transit Authority

coordination between short-range service provisions and regional policies. For example, land use and growth management policies can be made even stronger if the transit provider participates in the program. Linking the transit provision policies with the land use policies is a mutually beneficial act and will result in additional agency cooperation and funding sources. See the “Missoula, MT – Land Use and Transit Service Coordination” sidebar below.

Missoula, MT—Land Use and Transit Service Coordination

In the Missoula region, new developments are being planned outside of the existing transit service area. However, the developers are currently considering providing matching funds (approximately \$40,000 a year that will be paid annually until the area becomes a formal part of the service district) for Federal Section 5307 or 5311 funds so that



A Missoula, MT, Transit Stop
Image courtesy of Steve Earle, Mountain Line CEO

transit service can be extended there. The total cost for service to the area is projected to be \$80,000 a year. According to Steve Earle, General Manager of Mountain Line, “The developers are willing to consider this [funding] because they are aware of the impact on the existing infrastructure that new growth will have, and we have been able to illustrate that public transit is an important part of that infrastructure.”

3.2 Building Relationships with SDOT Representatives

“The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) is very involved. They serve on the MPO board with the transit agency, which has really helped transit obtain more flex[ible] funding since we all talk about regional needs at the MPO meetings. So that everybody is on the same page and understands the needs and priorities of the region.”—John Austin, PAC, Coeur d’Alene, ID

The Federal funding process in small- and medium-sized urban regions creates a bridge linking SDOTs and transit agencies through funding programs. The SDOT is the recipient of most Federal funds. Thus, interaction with the SDOT becomes very important for transit and the MPO is often a point of meeting and coordinating with the SDOT on mobility issues and transit service needs. Wide variations exist among States regarding participation in transit programs, from funding to operations oversight. Transit operators should identify opportunities for forging collaborative relationships with their SDOTs. In general, there were three categories of activities within the study regions that enhanced the transit/SDOT relationship:

- SDOT involvement on MPO committees that have active transit participation
- SDOT collaboration with MPOs and transit
- MPO “first mover” program development opportunities engaging SDOTs

SDOT Involvement on MPO committees with Transit Participation

Many regions noted that SDOT representatives were on both the MPO Policy Boards and many of the committees. Several regions also noted that the SDOT presence benefited transit agencies. As one transit general manager remarked, “I always thought of the SDOT rep [representative] as an anti-transit advocate, but once I got to know her on a personal level, I found out that was just my perception.” He went on to note that the personal relationship was enhanced from interaction on MPO committees. “Working together and forming a personal relationship has allowed us to get to know each other better,” he said. “I don’t have a problem now picking up the phone and asking them [the SDOT] for help.”

SDOT Collaboration with MPOs and Transit

Some SDOTs take a proactive role in funding allocation decisions. For example, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) formed Area Transportation Partnerships (ATPs) as a means of getting local involvement in transportation funding decisions after the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991. (See “Minnesota Area Transportation Partnerships” below.)

Minnesota Area Transportation Partnerships

After the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) divided the state into eight Area Transportation Partnerships (ATPs). Each ATP may organize based on local needs. Membership often includes representatives from Mn/DOT, other State agencies, regional organizations, counties, cities, tribal governments, and transportation (modal) operators. ATPs prioritize Federal expenditures in an Area Transportation Improvement Program (ATIP), a recommended 4-year program of transportation projects for their region. The ATIP is then submitted to Mn/DOT, which gives final approval to each regional program and incorporates it into the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The Northeast Minnesota ATP (NE MN ATP), which includes the Duluth region, is the largest ATP in the state in terms of membership with more than 50 members.

The NE MN ATP provides “a full partnership in the planning, identification, prioritization, expenditure, and effectiveness measurement on the use of Federal transportation funds in Northeast Minnesota.” The Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council (MIC), the area metropolitan planning organization

(MPO), has both Policy Board and staff representation in the ATP, while Mn/DOT provides the majority of ATP staff, who work closely with the steering committee (also known as the technical committee). The NE MN ATP allocates approximately \$42 million per year of Federal formula funds, including an average of \$1.6 million a year to the Duluth Transit Authority for the acquisition of buses. The dedicated transit funds are attributed to transit agency involvement with ATP practices and the relationships formed with the SDOT representatives.

While not all SDOTs are as proactive as Mn/DOT, all agencies in this study noted that a relationship with the SDOT is important. Collaborating with SDOT representatives can be very beneficial, even if no formal relationship exists. Steve Alexander, from the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD), noted that “a peer exchange in April of 2004 inspired me, the MPO, and a few other members of the SDOT to become actively involved in a local voluntary [transit] coordination effort before it became a requirement.” The open communication provided a catalyst for a transit coordination plan that received statewide recognition.

MPO “First Mover” Program Development Opportunities Engaging the SDOT

Taking advantage of a new funding source or initiating a new service option is not always easy. However, by taking calculated risks in identifying potential new transit markets, transit agencies in small- and medium-sized regions have the ability to realize large gains to their overall systems. In small- and medium-sized regions, a transit service improvement or new amenity can make a big difference in the attraction of choice riders (i.e. those riders who would otherwise not use transit). Adding choice riders will result in a large percentage increase in overall ridership, and



Duluth, MN, Bus Stop Enhancement Plan
Image courtesy of Duluth Transit Authority

develop an important level of trust with SDOT representatives. This goodwill with the SDOT can lead to further opportunities for expanding transit programs to meet needs, as is discussed in the “Cedar Rapids – Take Advantage of Opportunities” sidebar below.

Cedar Rapids—Take Advantage of Opportunities

In the mid-1990s, an industrial park in Cedar Rapids was expanding, and more employees were being asked to work during the late evening and early morning hours. Many of these employees depended on transit service to travel to and from work, but there was no existing service during the late evening and early morning. In addition, many of the workers lived near each other. So the neighborhood association where



Bill Hoekstra, Director, Five Seasons Transportation and Parking, Cedar Rapids, IA

the workers lived requested assistance from the metropolitan planning organization (MPO), the Linn County Regional Planning Commission (LCRPC). LCRPC worked with the transit agency, Five Seasons Transportation and Parking (FSTP), to secure

the use of a transit vehicle that could be operated by one of the workers to help shuttle employees from the neighborhood to the industrial complex. The original idea was to have a van pool type of operation where a resident would drive the transit bus. This single bus has evolved to the provision of eight vehicles by FSTP, resulting in over 50,000 unlinked trips in 2006. This allows

FSTP to claim they are the only 24-hour transit service provider in Iowa. An Iowa Department of Transportation representative commented that “we are very impressed with Cedar Rapids’ willingness to take on innovative projects.”

Similarly, the University of Florida in Gainesville wanted to reduce automobile usage and parking requirements on campus. The Gainesville MPO decided that increasing transit operations to the university was the most advantageous way to proceed. Students, however, were not supportive of the original plan, so the MPO brought in the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to assist. In September 1997, FDOT funded a \$246,000 demonstration project providing transit services that linked the City of Gainesville with the campus. The students liked the service so much they demanded expanded hours. Students now charge themselves a transit fee (added to their other university fees) of \$5.24 per credit hour. Students comprise 75 percent of the RTS ridership. The RTS now has the fourth highest transit ridership in Florida, despite Gainesville being only the ninth largest metropolitan area in the State. Revenues from student ridership are approximately 50 percent of the total operating budget.

Using new technology can also provide good publicity and lead to funding opportunities. For example, Fort Smith Transit in Fort Smith, AR was able to fund a coordination plan for the United We Ride Program because of its relationship with the MPO. The SDOT was so impressed that it is funding the second phase of the program, as discussed in the “Fort Smith, AR – First Movers” sidebar below.

Fort Smith, AR—First Movers

The Fort Smith region wanted to get a jumpstart on the United We Ride Program. Instead of

waiting for future opportunities, the Fort Smith region sought its own opportunities.

Ken O'Donnell, the Bi-State Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) director, described it as follows: "The inspiration for the River Valley Transportation Providers came to Ken Savage (the Director of Fort Smith Transit) on his way home after he attended a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)/Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Transportation Capacity Building Program 'Peer Exchange' that the Bi-State MPO hosted in April 2004. We had 11 MPOs, and representatives from FTA, FHWA, Oklahoma Department of Transportation (Oklahoma DOT), Arkansas [State] Highway and Transportation Department, the Volpe [National Transportation Systems] Center (part of FHWA), Fort Smith Transit, and Razorback Transit from Fayetteville [Arkansas]. [Dr.] Mike [Michael] Meyer from Georgia Tech was our facilitator. Ken decided that the Fort Smith region needed to coordinate agencies of like interests and organize a group of transit providers in the region that had not, as of 2004, ever sat around the same table to discuss commonalities. He worked with me to identify membership and outline goals of the River Valley Transportation Providers, and the rest is history. The driving force



Ken Savage, Director, Fort Smith (AR) Transit

behind the success of this effort rested with Ken Savage and his strong desire to make it work."

Since Fort Smith Transit had worked so closely with the MPO in the process, the MPO pro-

grammed in the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) approximately \$6,500 in fiscal year 2005; \$6,000 in fiscal year 2006; and \$11,000 in fiscal year 2007 for the planning and pre-implementation stage of the River Valley Transportation Providers Coordination Plan. In addition, the collaboration between the MPO and Fort Smith Transit drew the attention of the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD), which then used Fort Smith as the demonstration for other MPOs in implementing the United We Ride Program and funded the second phase of the coordination plan.

Cultivate Relationships with Stakeholder and Citizen Advocacy Groups

Transit involvement with the MPO can lead to formal interaction with stakeholder and advocacy groups that are transit supportive, but might not be organized specifically for transit advocacy. However, if effectively engaged, these groups can provide invaluable efforts at both the MPO and SDOT levels.

The Elmira-Chemung Transportation Council (ECTC) in Elmira, NY serves as the MPO for Chemung County, which includes the City of Elmira. The Chemung County Transit System (CCTS) provides transit to the MPO service area as well as adjacent Steuben, Schuyler, and Tompkins counties. Realizing that transportation issues do not stop at the Chemung County border, ECTC has developed a tri-county commission that looks at regional transit issues. There is also a Pedestrian and Bicycle (Ped-Bike) Committee comprised mostly of citizens that reports to the tri-county commission. The Ped-Bike Committee makes recommendations for Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) projects and is often given project-specific Transportation Enhancement (TE) funding. The committee

works with both CCTS and ECTC and has been working on a pedestrian trail in Elmira and improved connections to transit stops.

CityLink, the transit provider in Abilene, TX, has several layers of public involvement. All of these methods combine to provide positive public relations, increased access to funding opportunities, and increased ridership. The “Abilene Region – Public Relations” sidebar below discusses CityLink’s experience.

Abilene Region—Public Relations

Abilene’s CityLink transit maintains a multifaceted, comprehensive public relations presence. Knowing that community support ultimately leads to funding decisions, the involvement of community representatives in the CityLink operational process is a key strategy and includes the following initiatives:

- Metropolitan planning organization (MPO) committee participation
- Stakeholder involvement
- Citizen involvement

MPO committee participation

The Technical Committee is the only standing subcommittee of the Abilene MPO Board, and the CityLink General Manager is a member of this committee. In addition, City of Abilene transit oversight officials are voting members of the MPO Transportation Policy Board. The transit agency has created specific advisory committees in which MPO staff members often participate. For example, an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Advisory Board was created in April 1992 as a means to engage formal public input for persons with disabilities.

Members are appointed by the Mayor of Abilene with the consent of the Abilene City Council and serve as an advisory board to the Council on ADA issues. According to

Robert Allen, the Abilene MPO director, “The Abilene Metropolitan Area is not a Transportation Management Area and receives no direct allocations of funds that can be used for non-planning operations or purchases. However, interaction with members of the ADA Committee has improved the awareness and sensitivity of MPO staff to accessibility issues in all forms of transportation.” Citizens concerned with ADA issues feel as if transit is an active lobbyist for them on regional issues.

Stakeholder involvement

The business community has a vested interest in developing and maintaining a livable, sustainable region and can therefore be an important ally for transit. However, they are not always brought into the transportation, or transit, planning process. CityLink is attempting to establish a committee to assist in securing transit route sponsors. Various businesses could then sponsor a specific route of their choosing and, in turn, receive advertising rights on the route vehicles. The Abilene business community would not only take an active role in transit operations and have a direct tie to CityLink’s success, but would also assist in operational funding.

Public involvement

CityLink contributes transportation stories in the local paper to increase the comfort level of senior citizens who use or are considering transit. Through the sharing of travel experiences, CityLink hopes that seniors will become more comfortable with the idea of transit and become more frequent (or new) riders. Abilene also conducts more traditional promotions to attract transit ridership. James Condry, the traffic and transportation administrator for the City of Abilene, noted, “A promotional campaign, in which persons can ride the transit system for free, has evolved over the years. It began in the mid-1980s as a promotion with the local shopping mall in which the Friday after Thanksgiving

was a '[fare] Free Day.' In celebration of the transit system's 25th anniversary in 1989, this was expanded to a fare-free month. In 1990, the fare-free day was replaced with a 'Food for Fare' promotion. This was part of a campaign to help the local food bank that was begun by one of the local television stations. This event, which is held for several weeks in late November and early December, allows individuals to ride the transit system in exchange for nonperishable food (any fares collected during the campaign are also given to the Food Bank)."

In Missoula, MT, a group of paratransit users created a formal role with the MPO board of Directors and advocates on behalf of the transit agency to the MPO. Mountain Line Transit knows that its paratransit riders are considered in MPO decisions due to this interaction, which strengthens mobility enhancements in MPO projects. (See the "Missoula Region—Citizen Involvement" sidebar below.)

Missoula Region—Citizen Involvement

In 1989, a group of paratransit users formed the "Special Transportation Advisory Group," comprised of approximately 12 members, through an interlocal agreement between Missoula County and the MPO Board of Directors. This agreement authorizes the committee to advise the board on paratransit service and development, and commits the county to consider this service in their budgeting process annually.

This group acts as an advisory committee to the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) in the allocation of Federal Section 5310 funds. Through a strong lobbying effort of the Missoula County Commissioners and with the support of the transit agency, the committee was able to obtain additional paratransit funds in order to expand service. Regional paratransit

service is now offered on Sundays. The cost of the new service was approximately \$18,000 a year (funded with a 50/50 split between the county and the State).



Image courtesy of Steve Earle, Mountain Line CEO

**Steve Earle, General Manager,
Mountain Line Transit,
Missoula, MT**





Hagerstown, MD

Chapter 4: Participation in the MPO Process Can Leverage Additional Funding Opportunities for Multimodal Solutions

Transit funding for many small- and medium-sized regions is often just enough to keep existing service levels operational. Several metropolitan areas were involved in MPO activities. This allowed them to identify and promote transit service needs and then pursue the necessary financial support. MPO involvement can:

- Identify transit service needs and resource opportunities
- Identify potential funding partners

4.1 MPO Involvement Identifies Transit Service Needs and Resource Opportunities

Involvement with MPO activities can help identify transit service needs and potential funding opportunities. In the discussion that follows, funding opportunities were identified under three programs:

- Discretionary funding
- Identification of Federal flexible funding programs
- Establishment of a dedicated funding source

Discretionary Funding

Regions noted that the majority of formula-based Federal grants were used for fleet replacement programs. For example, the NAIPTA in Flagstaff received \$100,000 in Federal funds in a recent year to purchase updated transit vehicles. However, expanded service and capital improvements (such as shelters) and real-time travel information could

not be implemented. It was suggested that involvement with MPO activities allows transit policy directors to align transit needs with MPO priorities, creating a more collaborative atmosphere and a common goal for both agencies. Under this scenario, it is more likely that the MPO will work to identify funding opportunities for the transit agency.

For example, the DTA (MN) needed to reduce transit vehicle congestion in the vicinity of a major transfer location in the central business district (CBD). The Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council (MIC), the area MPO, recognized that congested conditions in the CBD affected the entire region. Consequently, it funded and analyzed a transit origin/destination ridership survey to identify solutions. The resulting analysis found that a restructuring of routes, the removal of several stops, and the consideration of an off-street transfer location would be advantageous. The business community did not want the transit center to be located off-street as they felt they would lose many of their walk-in customers. The MPO provided the approximately \$850,000 FTA-required match for construction of enhancements to an on-street transfer station. (See a complete discussion on page 21, titled “Duluth, MN – Regional Planning Participation Process.”)

Identification of Federal Flexible Funding Programs

How do regions create a layered funding portfolio like Missoula? As stated in the example on page 28, it starts with MPO and SDOT involvement. Transit agencies that do not explore funding options outside of their formula-based Federal transit programs are missing an important opportunity. There were several regions that noted flexible funding opportunities as the first step in organizing a complete funding portfolio. The opportunities involved several programs, including:

Mountain Line Transfer Center, Missoula, MT
Images courtesy of Steve Earle, Mountain Line, CEO



- Project-specific Surface Transportation Planning (STP) funding
- STP set-asides
- Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funding

Project-specific STP Funding

The STP flexible funding program allows local areas to choose which projects certain Federal surface transportation funds will be spent on; their decisions are based on local planning needs and priorities. For example, Federal highway funds can be transferred for use on transit capital projects. In small- and medium-sized regions, the MPO, in cooperation with FTA, FHWA, and the SDOT, makes the decision to transfer funds across program areas. However, a formal transfer, or flex, may not be needed. This is because the SDOT may directly spend these funds on transit facilities and services without the need for a transfer. In many MPOs, this decision to access STP funds is based on a competitive process, where all transportation projects are rated according to the MPO needs-based selection criteria. The highest rated projects addressing the most prominent needs are funded and the remaining ones must wait for future STP allocations. By being involved with MPO processes, transit agencies can promote the unmet transit service needs of the region, become aware of STP funding opportunities, and lobby for STP funding to support needed projects.



Mountain Line Transfer Center, Missoula, MT

For example, the Gainesville, FL RTS was involved in MPO activities when STP funds first became available (see “Gainesville – First Mover Funding” sidebar) in the early 1990s. By being involved with MPO practices, they were able to easily obtain STP funding for several years because they clearly articulated their service and spending needs and identified the STP program as a funding opportunity.

Gainesville—First Mover Funding

When Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) funds first became available for “flex” funding after the passage of ISTEA in 1991, Regional Transit System (RTS) took advantage. According to Jesus Gomez, the Transit Director of RTS, “In the first 5 years of the Surface Transportation Planning (STP) program, RTS was one



RTS (Gainesville, FL) Transit Vehicle
Image courtesy of RTS

of the few agencies requesting to use the funds. At the time, our biggest need was for bus replacement for both our paratransit and fixed-route service. Consequently, RTS obtained funding for capital projects such as bus replacement. RTS was able to obtain more than 20 buses over a five-year period.” Other agencies finally caught on to RTS’s use of STP funds due to Gomez’s continued success at obtaining funding and the process is now much more competitive.

Transit agencies, by being involved with the MPO structure, can participate in “first-mover” activities and also become involved in the funding decision process, as is noted in the “Binghamton – Flexing Funds” example in the sidebar.

Binghamton—Flexing Funds

The Binghamton, NY region recently was in the process of constructing a \$12 million transit terminal to serve the hub and spokes of Broome County Transit (BC Transit), which had 12 routes converging in downtown Binghamton. The refurbished transit center was identified as a priority for improving pedestrian safety and providing a weather-sheltered location for transit transfers. The off-street accommodations are provided through the renovation and expansion of an historic 1930 bus depot. The new transit center was planned to accommodate the local

bus routes, plus have 14 bus bays dedicated for intercity carriers (operated by Greyhound and Coach USA).

To pay for this capital investment, the Binghamton



Steven Gayle, Director, Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation Study

Image courtesy of Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation Study

Metropolitan Transportation Study (BMTS), the area metropolitan planning organization (MPO), flexed \$5 million from Surface Transportation Planning (STP) monies and obtained the rest of the approximately \$12 million from congressional earmarks and county funds. Steven Gayle, Director of BMTS, noted, “This is the third time we have flexed STP funds to transit since Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). The other two times were for bus purchases. The \$5 million is significant in relation to the overall size of the STP program of our Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which is typically \$10-\$15 million annually. This has been done as part of the TIP development process and it relies on a series of things happening: transit needs being identified in the MPO long-range plan (LRP); the specific project becoming a priority of the MPO Policy Committee as our region does not have a specific STP set-aside for transit projects; and the cooperation of New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT).”

Gayle went on to observe that, “It all comes back to transit in fact being at the table in a meaningful way, participating over time in all of the MPO’s business and then making the case for access to funding other than FTA monies. Just showing up and asking for funding, even for a good project, without building a foundation, is less likely to be successful.”

STP Set-asides

Some regions have gone a step beyond flexing STP funds for a specific project. With MPO and SDOT cooperation and in recognition of continuing transit service needs and urgency of an ongoing resource commitment, they have set up dedicated transit STP funds. For example, Cedar Rapids designates 1 percent of STP monies specifically for transit projects. Duluth designates 5 percent of STP funds to transit in the Northeast Minnesota Area Transportation Partnership (NE MN ATP) (approximately \$1.6 million a year),

which the region has used to fund a number of projects, including construction of a unified DTA headquarters that houses maintenance, operations, and administrative functions. The Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation Committee (PACTS), the MPO in Portland, ME, created a 7 percent set-aside for transit from STP money. Part of this set-aside was used to fund an Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) project consolidating information from all the regional transit operators and making it easily accessible to users. This program is described in the sidebar below, titled “Portland – STP Funding.”

Portland—STP Funding

The Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation Committee (PACTS), the Portland, ME, metropolitan planning organization (MPO), has funded transit capital projects with Surface Transportation Planning (STP) funds for the past 10 years. Initially, funds were allocated for the purchase of buses, signs, or bus shelters. In 2004, however, PACTS established a standing Transit Committee to advise the region on ways to improve the transit system. One of the recommendations that this committee made was a firm policy commitment to allocate monies to transit through specific shares of STP funds. This policy is revisited every 2 years to ensure that transit receives its fair share of dollars in the region.



John Duncan, Director, Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation Committee

This money is used for vehicle purchases, capital construction projects, ferry docks (some of Portland’s transit system is waterborne), and Intelligent

Transportation Systems (ITS) projects. There are eight public-sector transit providers in the Portland region, and they are all encouraged to submit projects for the STP set-aside that concur with “Destination Tomorrow,” the regional long-range plan (LRP).

A specific example of the region using the STP set-aside for transit improvement projects includes the revitalization of the Downtown Transportation Center (DTC). Various plans have made recommendations for improvements to the DTC since the Portland Transportation Plan was published in 1993. A new passenger waiting area was officially opened in June 2007 using a combination of FTA, Maine Department of Transportation (Maine DOT), PACTS, and Greater Portland Transit District (METRO) funds.

The new DTC features an enclosed waiting area with seating for 44 passengers, an enclosed dispatch office, restrooms, a Transportation Information Display System (TIDS) screen, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access for persons with disabilities. Currently, the DTC serves a “pulse” operation (meaning all routes arrive at the transit center at the same approximate time to make transfers time efficient) with six of the eight METRO routes. In addition, other providers stop at nearby Monument Square, including the South Portland Bus Service, Shuttle Bus, the ZOOM Turnpike Express, and the Regional Transportation Program (RTP).

CMAQ funding

“CMAQ funds have been crucial to providing additional amenities. We used CMAQ funds to purchase and install bike racks on buses that have proven to be a fairly popular addition to our fleet.”— Ron Chicka, Director, Duluth-Superior MIC, Duluth, MN

Regions that have been designated as nonattainment for ozone levels are eligible for Federal CMAQ funds if the projects will contribute to regional air quality conformity by increasing transit ridership, reducing single-occupant vehicles, or through other means. CMAQ money can be used for a variety of projects. For example, Missoula used \$400,000 of CMAQ funds to install farebox technology, which reads a magnetic strip on the transit pass. The farebox tracks how many city employees, University of Montana students, and county employees are riding Mountain Line buses. Now Mountain Line knows how many people ride the service a year, stratified by rider type (e.g. university student, downtown employee). They can then make estimates for future growth and policy changes based on these historic counts. In addition, each transit partner (e.g. the University or Downtown Business Association) can reimburse Mountain Line for the specific number of rides provided.

Involvement with MPO activities can also provide an opportunity to target transit projects as transportation control measures for improving regional air quality, thereby making them eligible for CMAQ funding. Through working with an MPO committee on air quality conformity, the Eastern Panhandle Transit Authority in Martinsburg, WV, was able to get a park-and-ride lot paid for with CMAQ funds, as described in the “Hagerstown—Committee Representation” sidebar below.

Hagerstown—Committee Representation

The Hagerstown region includes Hagerstown, MD and Martinsburg, WV as well as the surrounding areas (including a small portion of Franklin County, PA). This region is in air quality nonattainment status. Lynn Walker, Director of the Eastern Panhandle Transit Authority (EPTA) in Martinsburg, sits on the air quality board of the Hagerstown/

Eastern Panhandle MPO (HEPMPO). The HEPMPO air quality board finds ways to reduce transportation-related emissions in the region. Walker was also trying to find a way to pay for the development of a park-and-ride lot in the eastern section of her service area. She noticed that idling truckers were using a large dirt area just off Interstate 81, the region’s major north-south highway, to take naps, spend the night, or just stop for a quick road break. She continued to bring up this issue at the air quality board meetings until the board finally decided to pave the dirt lot and provide truck hook-ups so that the lot could be used as a park-and-ride facility during the day and an impromptu truck stop at night. By curtailing idling time, emissions were reduced and the air quality in the region improved, which met the air quality board’s goal. And, by establishing a new park-and-ride, EPTA’s goal was also met.

In the Missoula region, a citizens’ advisory group involved with the MPO requested funding so that they could more actively participate in promoting alternative transportation. Mountain Line worked with the MPO and the public to identify CMAQ funding to create “Missoula In Motion” (MIM). Eventually, they were able to hire a three-person staff and pay for other operating needs totaling approximately \$250,000 a year. MIM was designed to help local businesses, institutions, and individuals reduce traffic and improve air quality. MIM is an advocate for carpooling, biking, walking, transit, vanpooling, telecommuting, and a compressed work week. With transit agency and MPO support and a funding source, MIM has become a notable success and is one of the contributing factors to increased transit ridership. MIM also has voting membership on the MPO Policy Board.

Establishment of a Dedicated Funding Source

Several regions noted that they have been able to obtain dedicated funding with the support of the MPO.

The two transit agencies serving the Richland, WA, region are permitted to create a Public Transit Benefit Area (PTBA) with the enabling authority coming from the State. The State has given PTBA the authority to levy local service taxes exclusively for transit operation and services. The taxes represent 70 percent of revenue for Valley Transit (with a \$3.1 million operating budget) and 90 percent for BFT. The two transit agencies then pay annual MPO dues of \$17,000 and \$20,000, respectively. This exceeds the local match requirement for the \$50,000 in Section 5309 FTA funds that the MPO receives for transit planning activities. The MPO then uses the Federal money to directly support transit projects. A win-win situation is created: the MPO receives the total amount available in Federal funding and the transit agencies receive matching services from the MPO for the money they bring to the table.

Mountain Line in Missoula, MT had a transit-specific tax district created in 1978 with support from the MPO. The resulting property tax revenue provides approximately \$1.8 million annually. Mountain Line uses the revenue as matching funds for Federal transit operating expenses. Ultimately, both of these funding sources are the direct result of the regional transit operator making the case to the MPO that there are unfunded transportation needs. This led both agencies to make a successful argument to the SDOT to provide additional monies.

4.2 MPO Involvement Identifies Funding Partners to Assist in Addressing Unmet Needs

In addition to providing a venue for articulating unmet service needs, the MPO can also foster

relationships between transit agencies and organizations that can potentially help fund transit projects. These funding resource options outside of the MPO include:

- Nontraditional partners (such as the National Park Service [NPS] or parking commissions)
- Business groups
- Elected and agency officials
- Regionally important players

Nontraditional Partners

There are numerous funding partners that can be identified through working with the MPO. For example, the Old Frisco Station in Fort Smith, AR was a functional transit station for decades. For a short while, the transit station was converted into a restaurant. However, after it closed, NPS took over the building in 2003. The building is currently in disrepair and not in use; however, its location is excellent from a transit perspective. It is close to the terminals of both the Fort Smith trolley and a tourist excursion train and is near an existing regional multi-use trail. Because Fort Smith is a major destination for transit riders just across the Arkansas River in Oklahoma, some of the existing transit service overlaps. The Bi-State MPO and regional transit operators envision the Old Frisco Station as a future location for the transfer of Oklahoma and Fort Smith transit riders. The overlapping service could be eliminated and the vehicles redeployed to serve other transit routes for their respective operators. The Bi-State MPO and Fort Smith transit are working with NPS to develop a transit station that will provide functionally for the regional operators and complete an historic preservation project for the park service. The City of Fort Smith has now received grants for this project.

Frisco Station, Fort Smith, AR – Several Decades Ago



Frisco Station, Fort Smith, AR – 2007



Missoula also has a history of involving nontraditional transit supporters. In 1996, the Missoula Redevelopment Agency and the Missoula Parking Commission provided the required local match of approximately \$60,000 for purchase of a downtown circulator bus. In addition to the initial capital outlay of approximately \$300,000 for the vehicles, the service required an additional \$80,000 a year for operating costs. The MPO funded these costs using CMAQ funds for the first 3 years of operation. The circulator bus is currently only operated during special events, such as the County Fair.

During the summer of 2006, the Chevrolet dealership in Missoula was in need of some positive

publicity due to soaring gas prices. Therefore, the dealership sponsored “Free Transit Fridays,” where they paid for all transit trips every Friday during July and August. In exchange, Mountain Line allowed the dealership to advertise for the fare-free days.

Cedar Rapids used a nontraditional partner, and some innovative problem-solving, to enhance service and increase ridership through MPO involvement, as described in the “Cedar Rapids – Take Advantage of Opportunities” sidebar in Chapter 3.

Business Groups

Business group involvement is usually directly linked to wider community support; sometimes, buy-in from the business community can serve as either a proxy for or a catalyst to broader public recognition and support of a regional transportation initiative. In some small- and medium-sized regions, business interests shape the MPO agenda. In fact, research for this report found that in several small- and medium-sized areas, the business community is often represented on MPO Policy Boards. Therefore, in order to build a stronger working relationship with the MPO, transit operators must recognize that they have a vested interest in the business community.

Yet, convincing the regional business community to support transit can be difficult. Transit agencies cited a perceived abundance of free parking, lack of noticeable traffic congestion, and the location of many retail outlets outside of the CBD as reasons for lack of business support. In addition, transit agency representatives noted that in some areas CBD business owners voiced concerns about loitering. As one transit agency representative noted, “Shoppers don’t like seeing groups hang out in front of stores...even if they are waiting for the bus.”

However, several transit agencies relayed success stories of business community inclusion. In 2001, the Missoula Downtown Association and Parking Commission became concerned that the lack of parking in the CBD was disrupting business. In addition, they did not want and could not afford to make room for more parking by removing businesses. To address their concerns, they teamed with the transit agency to fund bus passes. See the “Missoula Downtown Association” example that follows for further discussion.

Missoula Downtown Association

In 2001, the Missoula Downtown Association and Parking Commission became concerned that the lack of parking in the central business district (CBD) was disrupting business. In addition, they did not want and could not afford to make room for more parking by removing businesses to create more parking spaces. So they teamed with the transit agency to fund bus passes for all 8,000 downtown employees at a cost of approximately \$22,000 a year. Missoula In Motion conducted a huge marketing campaign and handed out annual passes to all 8,000 employees. Transit now issues photo ID annual passes with magnetic strips on them. Mountain Line also honors all city and county employee identification badges. Now, with the support of the business community, almost all of the CBD workers have subsidized transit service.

Elected and Agency Officials

Involvement with elected and agency officials is always advantageous when identifying unmet service and funding needs. Several SDOTs and MPOs noted that statewide lobbyists often bundle transportation project requests together. All of the MPOs in the State then make a single line item request to Congress for the next Federal transportation bill. The SDOT receives the Federal

dollars as a lump sum and then allocates the appropriate funds to each region. Consequently, it is beneficial for transit agencies to be involved with the MPO, as the example “Grand Forks – Political Avenues to Obtain Funding” below illustrates.

Grand Forks—Political Avenues to Obtain Funding

Transit agencies throughout North Dakota (such as Fargo and Grand Forks) work together to provide their State representatives with realistic budgets for future transit capital costs. The State lobbyist then combines these specific requests into one lump sum that can be included as a line item in the Federal budget. Once the Federal budget is passed, each agency receives the funds that were requested. The Grand Forks region used funds from the previous line item budget to construct a downtown transit center.

In Gainesville, the county and city commissioners, along with transit and MPO technical support, lobbied and obtained a \$480,000 earmark (dedicated funding for a specific project) from the Florida legislature to conduct a Rapid Bus Transit (RBT) feasibility study. The project will connect East and West Gainesville with the hope of making East Gainesville more attractive to development.

Regionally Important Players

“It’s a great partnership...the university raises the revenue and transit provides quality bus service.”
—Marlie Sanderson, Director of Transportation Planning, Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization (MTPO), Gainesville, FL

Many of Gainesville’s well-funded regional attractions have a working relationship with the MPO. For

example, it was found that in many university towns, a school official is on the MPO Policy Board. Interaction with the MPO can then get the transit agency, MPO, and university on the same page. Since universities often have funds available for capital improvements, this cooperative relationship can become very advantageous for the transit agency. See the “Gainesville – Taking Advantage of Nontraditional Partners” sidebar.



Marlie Sanderson, Director of Transportation Planning, Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization (MTPO), Gainesville, FL

Notably, universities are not the only regionally important player. Other organizations or groups can also provide funding. Please see Chapter 2 for a discussion on the Coeur d’Alene Native American Tribe and its contribution to the

regional transit agency. These are just two specific examples of the innovative involvement of regional partners.

Gainesville—Taking Advantage of Nontraditional Partners

The 1995 University of Florida (UF) Master Plan included a goal of reducing parking on the campus and increasing transit ridership. The University had two goals: to reduce the University’s environmental footprint and to reduce the operating budget. As Marlie Sanderson, Director of Transportation Planning for the Gainesville Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization (MTPO), the area metropolitan planning organization (MPO), noted: “In the mid-1990s, there was a lot of interest from the university in partnering with public agencies to reduce the need for parking structures on the UF campus.” Therefore, the university



University of Florida students boarding an RTS vehicle
Image courtesy of Regional Transit System

contracted with the Regional Transit System (RTS) to provide transit service on campus that would reduce the need for additional parking structures.

Initial reaction from the auto-dominated student body was negative. However, the University, MTPO, and RTS were all committed to proving transit could serve the student body just as well as, or better than, the private automobile (see the previous discussion of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)-funded demonstration project and its successful outcome on page 25). However, after the success of the demonstration project, the high student ridership raised some concerns in the community. As Jesus Gomez, director of RTS, said, “The community was concerned that the service was becoming nothing more than a UF shuttle. To improve community goodwill, the university funded system-wide transit service on Sundays, and the transit agency conducted an advertising campaign with the help of the MPO to relay to the community the source of the Sunday service funds [UF]. Since this public information campaign began, community concerns have drastically [been] reduced.” The transit agency was able to provide Sunday service and the university received positive publicity.

Technology applications in transportation are becoming ever-important in advancing transportation decisionmaking. By working with the regional players, the Portland, ME region was able to obtain funding for an Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) project to disseminate transit service information to residents and visitors alike. See the “Portland – ITS” sidebar below.

Portland—ITS

The Portland, ME region has a number of transit providers that include two intercity van and two intercity ferry companies, three major tour and charter bus companies, and 20-30 cruise ship dockings per year as well as local bus operations. In an effort to improve traveler information and make modal transfers more seamless, the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG), in concert with the development of the Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Architecture and assistance from the Peninsula Transit Committee comprised of stakeholders from public and private transportation providers, used Surface Transportation Planning (STP) and ITS funds to design and develop a website (Transportme.org) that displays the arrivals and departures of all bus, rail, airline, and ferry services in the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) region. The Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) provided \$90,000 in ITS funds for the purchase, system integration, and procurement of the first 10 screens. STP has funded subsequent installations through the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation Committee (the MPO), with participating partners providing matching funds. Allocations include \$52,000 in 2006–2007 and \$36,000 in 2008–2009 for additional units. The website was developed in 1999 and the first Transportation Information Display System (TIDS) screens were installed in 2001.

Currently, 17 screens have been installed in transit stations, transportation terminals, and six hotels so that riders/visitors without Web access can still obtain the needed information.





Martinsburg, WV

Chapter 5: My Region Will Likely Become an MPO Following the 2010 Census: How Can I Begin Preparing Now?

In 2003, following the results of the 2000 Census and subsequent designation of the Bowling Green urbanized area (which had surpassed the population threshold of 50,000), the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KTC), the SDOT, with the chief executives of the local jurisdictions of the region, jointly designated the Bowling Green/Warren County MPO. The operators of the regional GO BG transit system, Community Action of Southern Kentucky (CASOKY), noted during their discussion with the study team that having the MPO in place required some adjustments, as they were used to working exclusively with the FTA and KTC. To paraphrase CASOKY, 4 years after the MPO designation, the two agencies were only then beginning to understand each other's missions, activities, and processes and beginning to partner effectively. Clearly, there are advantages to doing some advance planning for transit operators and other transportation planning professionals in those small areas that may become part of an MPO following the next census.

GO BG Transit Vehicle with Big Red, Mascot of Western Kentucky University (a Major Regional Destination in Bowling Green)
Image courtesy of GO BG Transit and Western Kentucky University



There are many areas throughout the country that may be designated as a new MPO or become part of an existing MPO following the 2010 Census. Perhaps the best resources for helping these areas navigate the MPO process are transit operators and transportation planners in those regions where MPOs were designated following the 2000 Census. These people can serve as an effective resource for regions preparing for their potential upcoming designation, as they have been through the process and the changes in how transit planning occurs in the aftermath. A list of these MPOs and their corresponding regional transit operators, as well as their websites, appears in Table 5.1.

All of the strategies and techniques discussed in the cases cited in this study can be followed from day one after the MPO is in place. Even better, many of the initiatives can be started before the MPO is established by working with the transit agencies. Here are some questions for transit operators in these emerging MPO regions to consider as a preamble to considering some of the approaches shown in this report:

- Who will staff the new MPO?
- How will transit be included in the new MPO structure, either at the staff, board or other committee level?
- Do senior staff at my agency and potential MPO senior staff have an existing relationship?
- If so, how can it be strengthened now in advance of the MPO formation?
- If not, how can I foster a relationship?
- How can the relationship between my agency and the MPO be formalized (i.e., through the memorandum of understanding?) as part of the MPO designation process?
- Where can I go for more information on how an MPO works?

Table 1: MPOs and Transit Operators in Areas Designated Following the Year 2000 Census

City	State	MPO Name	Staff Agency	Website	Transit Operator	Website
Fairbanks	AK	Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (FMATS)	Fairbanks/North Star Borough	http://co.fairbanks.ak.us/Transportation	MACS	http://co.fairbanks.ak.us/transportation
Hot Springs	AR	Hot Springs Area MPO	City of Hot Springs	http://www.ci.hot-springs.ar.us/business-transportation-planning.html	Intracity Transit	http://www.cityhs.net/dept-transit.html
Jonesboro	AR	Jonesboro Area Transportation Study (JATS)	City of Jonesboro - Dept. of Community Development	http://www.jonesboro.org/mpo/mpo.htm	Jonesboro Economical Transit (JETS)	http://www.ridejets.com/index.html
Prescott Valley	AZ	Central Yavapai MPO (CYMPO)	MPO	http://www.cympo.com	Regional transit study recently completed	http://www.cympo.com/transit%20Study.htm
Hanford	CA	Kings County Association of Governments (KCAG)	MPO	http://www.countyofkings.com/kcag	Kings Area Rural Transit (KART)	http://www.kartaits.com
Madera	CA	Madera County Transportation Commission	MPO	http://www.maderactc.org	Multiple regional operators	http://www.maderactc.org/pubtrans.html
Old Saybrook	CT	Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency (CERPA)	MPO	http://www.cerpa.org/transportation.php	Estuary Transit District	http://www.estuarytransit.org/index.html
Leesburg	FL	Lake-Sumter MPO	MPO	http://www.lakesumtermpo.com	Sumter County Transit Lake Xpress	http://sumtercountyfl.gov/cs/transit/bus.htm http://www.ridelakeexpress.com
Dalton	GA	Dalton-Whitfield County MPO	North Georgia Regional Development Center	http://www.ngrdc.org/mpohome.html	Whitfield County Transit	
Gainesville	GA	Gainesville-Hall MPO (GHMPO)	Hall County - Planning Dept.	http://www.ghmpo.org	Hall Area Transit (HAT)	http://www.hallcounty.org/transport/redrabbit.asp
Hinesville	GA	Hinesville Area MPO (HAMPO)	Liberty Consolidated Planning Commission	http://www.cityofhinesville.org/Departments/LCPC/default.html	Transit implementation study ongoing; led by MPO	
Valdosta	GA	Valdosta-Lowndes MPO	South Georgia Regional Development Center	http://www.sgrdc.com/Programs/CommDev/commdev.htm	Transit implementation study ongoing; led by MPO	
Ames	IA	Ames Area MPO (AAMPO)	City of Ames - Public Works Dept.	http://www.hws.com/aampo/index.html	CyRide	http://www.cyride.com
Danville	IL	Danville Area Transportation Study (DATS)	MPO	http://www.cityofdanville.org/COD/Maps/DATS%20home.htm	Danville Mass Transit (DMT)	http://www.cityofdanville.org/cod/dmt/dmt_home.htm
Columbus	IN	Columbus Area MPO (CAMPO)	MPO	http://campo.in.gov/index.php	ColumBUS	http://www.columbus.in.gov/transit-columbus.html
Bowling Green	KY	Bowling Green-Warren County MPO	Barren River Area Development District	http://www.bradd.org/MPO/index.asp	GO BG Transit	http://www.casoky.org/transportation.shtml
Elizabethtown	KY	Radcliff-Elizabethtown MPO	Lincoln Trail Area Development District	http://www.ltadd.org/mpo.shtml	Transit Authority of Central Kentucky (TACK) New transit study completed by MPO	http://www.ltadd.org/pdf/publictransportationstudy.pdf
Salisbury	MD	Salisbury-Wicomico MPO	Wicomico County Planning and Zoning Dept.	http://www.wicomicocounty.org	Shore Transit	http://www.shorettransit.org
Jefferson City	MO	Capital Area MPO (CAMPO)	City of Jefferson - Dept. of Community Development	http://www.jeffcitymo.org/cd/campo/campo.html	JEFFTRAN	http://www.jeffcitymo.org/cd/transit/transit.html
Farmington	NM	Farmington MPO	MPO	http://www.farmingtonmpo.org	Red Apple Transit	http://www.farmtn.org/city_services/red_apple_transit/index.html
Carson City	NV	Carson City MPO	Carson City - Engineering Dept.	http://www.carson-city.nv.us/index.aspx?page=608	Jump Around Carson (JAC)	http://www.carson-city.nv.us/index.aspx?page=1436
Kingston	NY	Ulster County Transportation Council (UCTC)	Ulster County Planning Board	http://www.co.ulster.ny.us/planning/tran.html	Ulster County Area Transit (UCAT)	http://www.co.ulster.ny.us/ucat
Sandusky	OH	Policy Committee of the Erie Regional Planning Commission	MPO	http://www.cerie-county-ohio.net/planning/mpo.htm	Sandusky Transit System	http://www.ci.sandusky.oh.us/community-dev/sis-vehicles.htm

Bend	OR	Bend MPO	City of Bend	http://www.ci.bend.or.us/depts/community_development/bend_metropolitan/index.html http://www.corvallisarcampo.org	Bend Area Transit	http://www.bendareatransit.com
Corvallis	OR	Corvallis Area MPO (CAMPO)	Oregon Cascades West COG	http://www.ci.bend.or.us/depts/community_development/bend_metropolitan/index.html http://www.corvallisarcampo.org	Corvallis Transit System (CTS)	http://www.ci.corvallis.or.us/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=467&Itemid=410
Lebanon	PA	Lebanon County MPO (LEBCO MPO)	Lebanon County - Planning Dept.	http://dsf.pacounties.org/lebanon/cwp/view.asp?a=3&q=477676	County of Lebanon Transit Authority (COLT)	http://www.colibus.org
Cleveland	TN	Cleveland Area MPO	City of Cleveland- Community Development Dept.	http://www.cityofclevelandtn.com/mpo/mpo.html	Transit needs assessment recently completed by MPO	http://www.cityofclevelandtn.com/mpo/chapter%205%20final%20draft.pdf
Morristown	TN	Lakeway MPO	City of Morristown- Planning Dept.	http://www.lamtpo.org	Eastern Tennessee Human Resources Agency	http://www.ethrapublictransit.org
Midland	TX	Midland-Odessa Transportation Organization (MOTOR)	MPO	http://www.motormpo.com	Midland-Odessa Urban Transit District (EZ Rider)	http://www.ez-rider.org
St. George	UT	Dixie MPO (DMPO)	Five County Association of Governments	http://www.fcaog.state.ut.us/dep/mpo	SunTran	http://www.sgcity.org/suntran
Christiansburg	VA	Blacksburg-Christiansburg-Montgomery Area MPO	Montgomery County	http://www.montva.com/departments/mpo	Blacksburg Transit (BT)	http://www.btransit.org
Staunton	VA	Harrisonburg-Rockingham MPO (HRMPO)	Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission	http://www.hrvamp.org	Harrisonburg Public Transportation	http://www.harrisonburgva.gov/index.php?id=168
Winchester	VA	Winchester-Frederick County MPO	Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission	http://www.winfredmpo.org	Winchester Transit	http://www.winchesterva.gov/transit
Asotin	WA	Lewis-Clark Valley MPO (LCVMPO, WA/ID)	MPO	http://lewisclearmpo.org	Valley Transit/Asotin County Transit	http://users.lewiston.com/valleytransit
Wenatchee	WA	Wenatchee Valley Transportation Council (WVTC)	MPO	http://www.wvrtc.org	Link Transit	http://www.linktransit.com
Menasha	WI	Fond du Lac Area MPO	East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission	http://www.eastcentralrpc.org/fonddulacmpo	Fond du Lac Transit; Valley Transit	http://www.ci.fond-du-lac.wi.us/transit http://www.appleton.org/departments/transit
Morgantown	WV	Morgantown-Monongalia County Transportation Planning Organization (MMCTPO)	Morgantown-Monongalia County	http://www.planttogether.org	Mountain Line Transit	http://www.busrider.org

There are countless resources available to transit operators to begin seeking answers to these important questions. The Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO) has a section of its website devoted to new MPOs, and this information may be found at the following URL:

<http://www.ampo.org/content/index.php?pid=38>

The Transportation Planning Capacity Building (TPCB) program website, maintained jointly by FTA and FHWA, provides a great deal of useful information for both new and existing MPOs:

<http://www.planning.dot.gov>

Another excellent source of information is your FTA regional office. Finally, perhaps the best resource is the agencies cited in this study. Their experiences are recounted here because they represent success in integrating transit into the metropolitan planning process in areas very similar to yours, and they are willing to share more details with you, their peers.



63072

9 LEXINGTON CR.

Regional Transit System



Gainesville, FL

APPENDIX A

Self-Assessment Checklist for Transit Operators on Their Participation in Metropolitan Transportation Planning

Key findings from the study, *Transit at the Table II: A Guide to Participation in Metropolitan Decisionmaking for Transit Agencies in Small- and Medium-Sized MPOs*, were used in preparing the following questions for transit operators in small- and medium-sized areas to use in assessing their profile and participation in metropolitan planning. The indicators are generic and not exhaustive; therefore, these questions should be regarded as only the starting point for subsequent discussions targeted to local issues.

While answering these questions may illuminate issues and opportunities, perhaps the greatest value of this work is in the resulting discussion among planning partners. The checklist may be applied effectively in facilitated group settings, as a useful catalyst to discussion, and with less attention to scores. The checklist may also be used by transit operators and other state and local officials as a starting point for discussions about the structure of a future MPO in those areas that will likely have one designated following the 2010 Census. “Yes” responses generally suggest more positive outcomes or experiences.

Transit Operator Participation in Metropolitan Transportation Planning

1. Representation on the MPO Board and Committees

YES NO

- Do you know the name and location of your MPO? _____
- Do you have an existing relationship with any MPO staff or board members? _____
- Is there a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between your agency and the MPO? _____
- If you have an MOU, is it up to date and reflective of policy, responsibility, and / or funding changes? _____
- If you have an MOU, does it identify explicit roles for transit operators in various facets of the MPO process? _____
- Are you a voting member of the MPO Board (or have Board representation)? _____
- Are you represented on, and active in, MPO policy and / or technical committees, subcommittees, or task forces? _____

2. Involvement with Planning and Special Studies

- Are you involved in developing the MPO’s long-range transportation plan? _____
- Do you monitor progress and products of the metropolitan transportation planning process? _____
- Does the long-range transportation plan accurately reflect public transportation and is it integrated with other travel modes? _____
- Is the MPO’s long-range transportation plan coordinated and consistent with local land use plans? _____

YES NO

- Are transit-supportive development policies and strategies included in the MPO's long-range transportation plan? _____
- Is transit properly reflected in the transportation system management, maintenance, and operations sections of the MPO long-range plan? _____
- Does the MPO plan include plans / policies that highlight the benefits of transit? _____
- Does the MPO plan consider economic development, job access, air quality, social services, human services transportation, health and safety, and / or historic preservation? _____
- Do you propose transit-related work tasks for inclusion in the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)? If so, are they accepted and funded? _____
- Are you involved in educating the public or promoting regional comprehensive plans and politics? _____
- Are you involved in educating the public about transit's role in regional transportation, planning, and development? _____
- Do you understand the role of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) in the metropolitan planning process? _____
- Does the UPWP respond to transit needs? _____

3. Involvement in Funding and Implementation

- Are you involved in identifying, prioritizing, and scheduling projects for the TIP? _____
- Do you feel that the TIP prioritization process is objective, fact-based, and that it treats transit fairly in achieving modal balance? _____
- Do you feel that you receive a fair share of the region's project funding? _____
- Is the MPO's status reporting of your TIP projects timely and reliable? _____
- Are you involved in cooperatively forecasting revenues for the long range plan and TIP? _____
- Are your revenues considered and incorporated in these estimates? _____
- Are you able to assume future revenue enhancement plans and proposals? _____
- Do you know about flexible Federal funding programs that you may be able to access through the MPO or to spend directly on transit without flexing (e.g. STP, TE, CMAQ, etc.)? _____
- Have you requested flex-funds for transit projects in the TIP? _____
- Have you secured flex-funding sponsorship of any of your projects? If not, why not? _____

APPENDIX B

Study Methodology and Characteristics of Selected Areas

The purpose of this study is to document and share successful transit operator stories and practical examples related to being active players in decisionmaking at the regional level. Examples of methods and outcomes obtained by transit agencies have been documented and categorized in an effort to generate excitement and invigorate transit agency decisionmakers to become more involved with the planning process and fund allocation decisions made in small- and medium-sized urban areas (populations between 50,000 and 200,000).

Federal Transportation Planning Requirements

Federal planning requirements under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and subsequent reauthorizations are applied to transit operators in metropolitan areas, depending on the size of the region. Regions with populations greater than 200,000 are considered transportation management areas (TMAs), although selected regions throughout the county are under 200,000 in population but have obtained TMA designation through approval by the Governor of the State and the FTA and FHWA. The Federal program requires that the transit agency in TMAs established subsequent to 1992 be on the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Policy Board, forcing the transit agency to become involved in the regional resource allocation process and the MPO to expect transit agency input. Conversely, Federal planning requirements do not require transit agency representation on policy boards of MPOs in pre-1992 TMAs, nor in small and medium-sized regions.

Study Areas

To assist the FTA and consultant team in the course of the study, a Technical Working Group (TWG) was established. This group consisted of 20 people from across the country, representing SDOTs, FTA, FHWA, transit agencies and MPOs. The TWG helped identify what regions should be studied and what questions should be included in the discussions, and reviewed deliverables.

The TWG and study team identified 20 regions as primary study areas based on perception of the TWG members and/or FTA staff of innovative transit agency involvement methods or interesting success stories. Ten secondary regions were also identified by the TWG as it was recognized that some of the primary study areas might not be willing/able to participate in the discussions.

Three meetings were held in each region, involving the transit agency, MPO, and SDOT in each. A separate introductory letter and set of discussion questions were developed for each agency type (transit, MPO and SDOT). All agencies were contacted to introduce the project and ascertain their willingness to participate in the study. Contacts included the transit agency general manager, the MPO director or a senior planner, and the SDOT representative in the region (often identified during meetings with the two other agencies).

Geographic diversity was a consideration in selecting regions, however a greater emphasis was placed on identifying those agencies that would offer comprehensive experience and insights, along with impressive stories to share. The regions selected for participation in the study are shown on Figure B-1 below, with their MPOs and transit operators listed in Table B-1.

Figure B-1: Study Areas



Table B-1: Study Area MPOs and Transit Operators

Region	MPO	Website	Transit Agency	Website
Fort Smith, AR	Bi-State MPO	http://www.wapdd.org/bistate_index.html	Fort Smith Transit	http://www.fortsmithar.gov/default.aspx?tabid=80
Flagstaff, AZ	Flagstaff MPO	http://www.flagstaffaz.gov/index.asp?nid=995	NAIPTA	http://www.naipta.az.gov
Gainesville, FL	Gainesville MPO	http://ncfrpc.org/mtpo	RTS	http://www.go-rts.com
Cedar Rapids, IA	Corridor MPO (formerly LCRPC)	http://www.cedar-rapids.org/rpc	Five Seasons Transportation and Parking	http://www.cedar-rapids.org/transit
Coeur d'Alene, ID	Kootenai MPO	http://www.kmpo.net	Citylink	http://www.idahocitylink.com
Bowling Green, KY	Bowling Green/Warren County MPO	http://www.bradd.org/mpo/index.asp	GO BG Transit	http://www.casoky.org/transportation.shtml
Hagerstown, MD	HEPMPO	http://www.hepmpo.net	Washington County Transit Pan/Tran	http://www.washco-md.net/public_works/commuter/trans.html http://www.pantran.com
Portland, ME	PACTS	http://www.pactsplan.org	GPTD	http://www.gpmetrobus.com
Saginaw, MI	SMATS	http://www.saginawcounty.com/scplanning/smats.htm	STARS	http://www.saginaw-stars.com
Duluth, MN	Duluth-Superior MIC	http://www.dsmic.org	DTA	http://www.duluthtransit.com
Missoula, MT	Missoula MPO	http://www.co.missoula.mt.us/transportation/faq.htm	Mountain Line	http://www.mountainline.com
Grand Forks, ND	Grand Forks/East Grand Forks MPO	http://www.theforksmpo.org	CAT	http://www.grandforksgov.com/bus/index.html
Binghamton, NY	BMTS	http://www.bmtsonline.com/bmts	BC Transit	http://www.gobroomecounty.com/transit
Elmira, NY	ECTC	http://www.elmirampo.org	CCTS	http://www.chemungcountytransit.com
Mansfield, OH	RCRPC	http://www.rcrpc.org	RCT	http://www.rcrpc.org/rct
Sioux Falls, SD	Southeast COG	http://www.sdcommunitynetwork.com/mpo_transportation/mpo.htm	Sioux Falls Transit	http://www.siouxfalls.org/transit.aspx
Abilene, TX	Abilene MPO	http://www.abilenempo.org	Citylink	http://www.abilenetx.com/citylink
Richland, WA	Tri-MATS/BFCOG	http://www.bfcog.us/transportation.html	BFT Valley Transit	http://www.bft.org http://www.valleytransit.com

While the transit agency, MPO, and SDOT agreed to participate in the interview process in most of the selected regions, it should be noted that certain agencies in some regions did not wish to participate.

Interpretation and Use of Results

Because of the small number of cases and the way they were selected, the results of this study should not be interpreted as having statistical validity. The results are insightful and have practical value, but they are based on too few cases to generalize in a statistical sense; therefore, no summary statistics based on the results are presented in the report.

Each small- and medium-sized metropolitan area is unique and has its own culture and planning environment based on its historical political, socioeconomic, and legal climate. Even though there is no single best way to improve metropolitan planning, strengthen interagency relationships, or tap additional funding sources in these regions, all of the study areas have provided concrete examples of how to meet these goals, and re-emphasized the need to do so to advance the continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative (3-Cs) planning process. The insights gained in this study provide sound tools and advice to build upon, and have a place in the larger planning toolbox for professional planners, engineers, transit operators, and policy officials in small- and medium-sized metropolitan areas. Each seat at the table and each regional player has the same mission: maximize the utility of the MPO process by taking advantage of the opportunities it provides to strengthen transportation planning, and through that, improving mobility and accessibility in their areas. The guidance in this study may best be regarded as effective strategic planning for any small- or medium-sized transit operator within the context of Federal funding program structure and regulatory requirements.

Discussion Guides

To develop a body of structured insights about coordination between transit operators, MPOs, and SDOTs in small- and medium-sized regions, discussion guides were designed for use in contacting each agency. The guides were adapted from the first Transit at the Table study, which focused on TMAs. The discussion guides were emailed to participants prior to conducting a telephone meeting. Most discussions lasted at least 1 hour. In some cases, follow-up calls or emails were made to clarify points or add more information. The discussion guide for each agency is included on the following pages.

Transit at the Table II
Discussion Guide for Meetings with
Transit Agency

During our discussion, a variety of subjects will be broached in an attempt to obtain observations and perspectives on how your transit agency works within the planning process on technical and programmatic activities and how those efforts may ultimately affect resource allocation decisions. We are also interested in your recommendations for strengthening multimodal cooperation and partnerships with metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) within your service area. The explicit goal of these discussions is to obtain “best practices” that can both educate and energize transit agencies in small metropolitan areas to take a more active role in resource allocation decisions.

This guide provides a general structure of discussions in an effort to identify specific insights into the transit operators’ participation in metropolitan planning. General subject matter to be covered in the discussion is outlined below.

1. Identification of the transit agency, including background information such as:
 - Person interviewed, including roles and responsibilities
 - Basic characteristics of the transit agency
 - Fleet characteristics, peak vehicle requirement, revenue hours operated, service area, staff
 - Operating budget (farebox recovery percentage, percentage of Federal vs. state, and local funding)
2. Organizational structure of the transit agency:
 - MPO and State Department of Transportation (SDOT) representation on the transit agency board
 - Transit service is agency operated or contracted to a third party
3. Experiences with involvement in the following MPO practices:
 - Policy board
 - Election process (policy board compositions and selection process)
 - Technical committee
 - Membership in other MPO committees
 - Transit-oriented alternatives analysis or Major Investment Studies (MIS)
 - Highway-led or MPO-led corridor study
 - Participation in MPO committees in which the transit agency is not a member

- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the MPO defining transit agency roles and relationships
 - MPO long-range transportation/land use planning
 - Development and use of transportation models and forecasting process
 - TIP development
 - Reporting on status of projects in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
 - Project selection process
 - Incorporating transit agency plans into MPO plans
 - Cooperative revenue forecasting for fiscal constraint
 - Negotiating highway/transit fund flexing
 - Developing the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)
 - MPO certification process
 - Specific projects where MPO has supported transit agency
 - Is the transit agency represented on the MPO board
 - Other
4. Perception of transit agency roles in the resource allocation decisions of the MPO:
- For studies (UPWP)
 - For projects (plan and TIP)
5. Role that the MPO plays in transit and/or transit land use planning, if any
6. Best practices (self-nominated)
7. Additional opportunities (wish the transit agency could be involved, but is not now involved)
8. Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)'s and FTA/FHWA's Transportation Planning Capacity Building Program impact on small area regional planning
9. Barriers encountered when participating in the MPO process (benefits gained by participating in the MPO process)
10. Importance of the MPO process to the transit agency (When was the MPO established? Was transit involved from beginning?)
11. Importance of other partners in the MPO process:
- State Department of Transportation (SDOT)
 - Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- Public Service Commission (or other regulatory body)
- Individual local governments
- Chamber of Commerce or other business organizations
- Civic or citizens groups
- Mass media
- National associations
- Other (specify)

12. Anything of significance that was missed

13. Additional contacts that should be made

Transit at the Table II
Discussion Guide for Meetings with
State Department of Transportation (SDOT)

During our discussion, a variety of subjects will be broached in an attempt to obtain observations and perspectives on how the transit provider(s) in your metropolitan area work within the planning process on technical and programmatic activities and how those efforts may ultimately affect resource allocation decisions. We are also interested in your recommendations for strengthening multimodal cooperation and partnerships between transit agencies and the metropolitan planning process. The explicit goal of these discussions is to obtain “best practices” that can both educate and energize transit agencies in small metropolitan areas to take a more active role in resource allocation decisions.

This guide provides a general structure of discussions in an effort to identify specific insights into the transit operators’ participation in metropolitan planning. General subject matter to be covered in the discussion is outlined below.

1. Identification of the State Department of Transportation (SDOT), including some background information such as:
 - Person interviewed, including roles and responsibilities
 - Basic characteristics of the agency:
 - State and SDOT district population, number of metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in state and SDOT district, staff size for SDOT and regional/multimodal/transit planning division(s)
 - Extent of flexible funding being used
 - State support given for MPOs in small areas (modeling, planning, staffing support)
2. Perception of transit agency roles in metropolitan planning regional resource allocation decisions
3. Barriers to participation by transit agencies in metropolitan planning regional allocation decisions
4. Steps taken to support and encourage transit’s participation in the regional planning process
5. Additional opportunities (The transit agency could be more involved in areas where it is currently not involved.)
6. Criteria used by SDOT to distribute Section 5307 funds and activities the transit agency can do/does to affect the apportionment decisions

7. In relation to transit properties' participation in regional resource allocation, please share your observations on FTA/FHWA's Transportation Planning Capacity Building Program and Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)'s impact on small area regional planning
8. Are transit funds used in the metropolitan planning decisionmaking and funding programs
9. Importance of other partners in the metropolitan planning process:
 - Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
 - Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
 - Public Service Commission (or other regulatory body)
 - Individual local governments
 - Chamber of Commerce or other business organizations
 - Civic or citizens groups
 - Mass media
 - National associations
 - Other (specify)
10. Anything of significance that was missed

Transit at the Table II
Discussion Guide for Meetings with
Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)

During our discussion, a variety of subjects will be broached in an attempt to obtain observations and perspectives on how the transit provider(s) in your metropolitan area work within the planning process on technical and programmatic activities and how those efforts may ultimately affect resource allocation decisions. We are also interested in your recommendations for strengthening multimodal cooperation and partnerships with transit agencies. The explicit goal of these discussions is to obtain “best practices” that can both educate and energize transit agencies in small metropolitan areas to take a more active role in the activities of the metropolitan planning processes and how these efforts may impact resource allocation decisions.

This guide provides a general structure of discussions in an effort to identify specific insights into the transit operators’ participation in metropolitan planning. General subject matter to be covered in the discussion is outlined below.

1. Identification of the MPO, including some background information, such as:
 - Person interviewed, including roles and responsibilities
 - Basic characteristics of the agency and metropolitan area
 - Service area, staff, population of the metropolitan area
 - Mode share for peak work trips to downtown (or some other indicator of the market penetration of transit)
 - Extent to which FTA/FHWA funds are spent on other modes (could be a formal “flex,” or could tap the broad modal eligibilities of selected programs (e.g., Surface Transportation Planning [STP], Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality [CMAQ], and Section 5307) in spending FHWA funds directly on transit or vice versa
 - Highlights of the most recent metropolitan or statewide planning “finding” related to transit issues
2. Perception of the transit agency roles in ongoing activities of the MPO, including:
 - Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) development
 - Preparation of the long-range plan
 - Preparation of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
 - Administration and conduct of regional or corridor studies
 - Travel forecasting
 - Other (specify)

3. Perception of transit agency roles in the resource allocation decisions of the MPO:
 - For studies (UPWP)
 - For projects (plan and TIP)
4. Role that the MPO plays in transit and/or transit land use planning, if any
5. Barriers, or factors, affecting participation by transit agencies in metropolitan planning activities and resource allocation decisions
6. Steps taken to support and encourage transit's participation in the metropolitan planning process
7. Additional opportunities (The transit agency could be more involved in areas where it is currently not involved.)
8. Methods the state uses to allocate the Section 5307 monies and the role the MPO plays in the process (formula based, based on a statewide plan, etc.)
9. Importance of other partners in the MPO process:
 - State DOT(s)
 - FTA
 - FHWA
 - Public Service Commission (or other regulatory body)
 - Individual local governments
 - Chamber of Commerce or other business organizations
 - Civic or citizens groups
 - Mass media
 - National associations
 - Other (specify)
10. Anything of significance that was missed

APPENDIX C

Summary of Findings from a Companion Review

In 2006, the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO) contacted the staff of metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in five small- to medium- sized metropolitan regions. In partnership with FTA, AMPO engaged MPO staff in discussions focused on MPO-transit agency issues such as working relationships, modal balance in plans and programs, and staff participation in planning studies.

These discussions were held with MPO officials in the following metropolitan areas: Charlottesville, Virginia; Olympia, Washington; Corpus Christi, Texas; Madison, Wisconsin; and Greensboro, North Carolina. The resulting observations disclosed a range of experience among transit agencies and MPOs in the post-Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) era, with transit operators involved in the MPO process for many key decisions. Working relationships between MPOs and transit agencies were noted as very cooperative. The MPOs characterized their relationships with transit agencies as good to excellent, and pointed to a number of supportive conditions:

- Good communication
- A history of collaboration and problem-solving
- Strong formal and/or informal connections between the agencies' staffs
- Active participation of transit agency representatives on MPO boards and committees
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the agencies
- Mutual recognition of the connection between land use and transportation
- Coordinated funding efforts

Some of the MPOs report that they set policy at the regional level, while others do not. Generally, the MPOs take responsibility for strategic long-range planning, and their transit agency partners take responsibility for detailed short-range planning.

Transit projects in these regions may or may not have received special consideration in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The MPOs took a variety of approaches to transit project selection including: equal consideration for transit and non-transit projects, preference for transit projects, consideration of transit as an "alternate" mode, or consideration of projects on a case by case basis. All MPOs reported that transit agency staffs contribute to studies conducted by the MPO. In those regions where the MPO's modeling does not currently take transit into account, the MPO reported that it was developing a means to represent transit. Some of these transit agencies receive Metropolitan Planning (PL) funds through the Unified Transportation Planning Work Program (UPWP) and/or flex funds, and some do not. Transit is at the table for development of the MPO's UPWP, and the MPOs incorporate transit agency documents into their plans as appropriate.

This AMPO review reveals that transit agencies may not always have a seat at the table alongside elected officials on MPO boards where critical transportation policy and funding allocation decisions are made. In some instances, transit agencies do not have parity with their counterpart highway agencies in their access to decisionmakers and to the planning process.

Also observed were many good models of productive relationships between MPOs and transit operators on both the working and policy level. Those transit operators were generally experiencing better outcomes from the MPO process as measured by funding allocation and project selection.

As part of this project, AMPO convened participants from seven other MPOs and their counterparts at transit agencies. With FTA, the group discussed working relationships and determined that at least three key characteristics are present in cases where transit agencies and MPOs work together effectively – technical credibility, established forums that include transit, and personal relationships. The MPOs and transit agencies reported improved outcomes in regions where the following characteristics are present: the public understands agency roles and accepts outcomes; transportation agencies speak with one voice and convey a consistent message; the public is more engaged in the process; redundancy and resource use are minimized; local government buy-in is improved; and there is improved ability of the region to prioritize projects.

Technical Credibility for Reliable Planning for Transit Services -

Effective planning and subsequent implementation of transit service is important to the long-term viability of those services. Although the initial challenge to establish a viable level of system operations may be daunting, credibility is gained with experience, and support for transit is sustained when actual experiences meet the expectations and pre-operation forecasts developed by the sponsoring agencies.

Reliable technical studies depend on models that take into account transit modes as well as highway. MPOs and transit agencies that work together on models can produce credible forecasts that others can buy into. The range and depth of MPO consideration of transit in future plans and programs is closely related to the technical ability of MPOs to prepare forecasts of future transit ridership under alternative policy scenarios.

Established Forums that Include Transit at the Table -

Institutional framework is very important; MPO board structure and transit board structure can determine how effectively transit participates in the MPO's processes. The manner in which agencies are able to institutionalize these forums also makes a difference. Some MPOs facilitate project selection processes that address transit, while other MPOs establish MOUs with their transit agencies and/or ensure transit representation on the MPO board, technical committees and environmental studies. Some participants emphasized that buy-in is most helpful when it happens at the staff level.

The Intangibles of Personal Relationships

The existence and quality of lines of communication between MPO and transit agency boards are key to effective multimodal planning. Strong personal relationships between members of the two boards are also important and enhance these lines of communication.

Individual personalities of key board members can make a big difference in the relationship between transit agencies and MPOs, and in the development of a multimodal plan. Effective leadership styles and communication skills can be cultivated through board training and facilitation. Public education is important too, and can enhance citizens' skills and abilities to lead the leaders on important transportation issues.

Details on these case studies and discussions can be found at:

<http://www.ampo.org/content/index.php?pid=99>.

For more information: Detailed descriptions of the individual case study discussions, as well as the findings, may be obtained directly from AMPO:

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