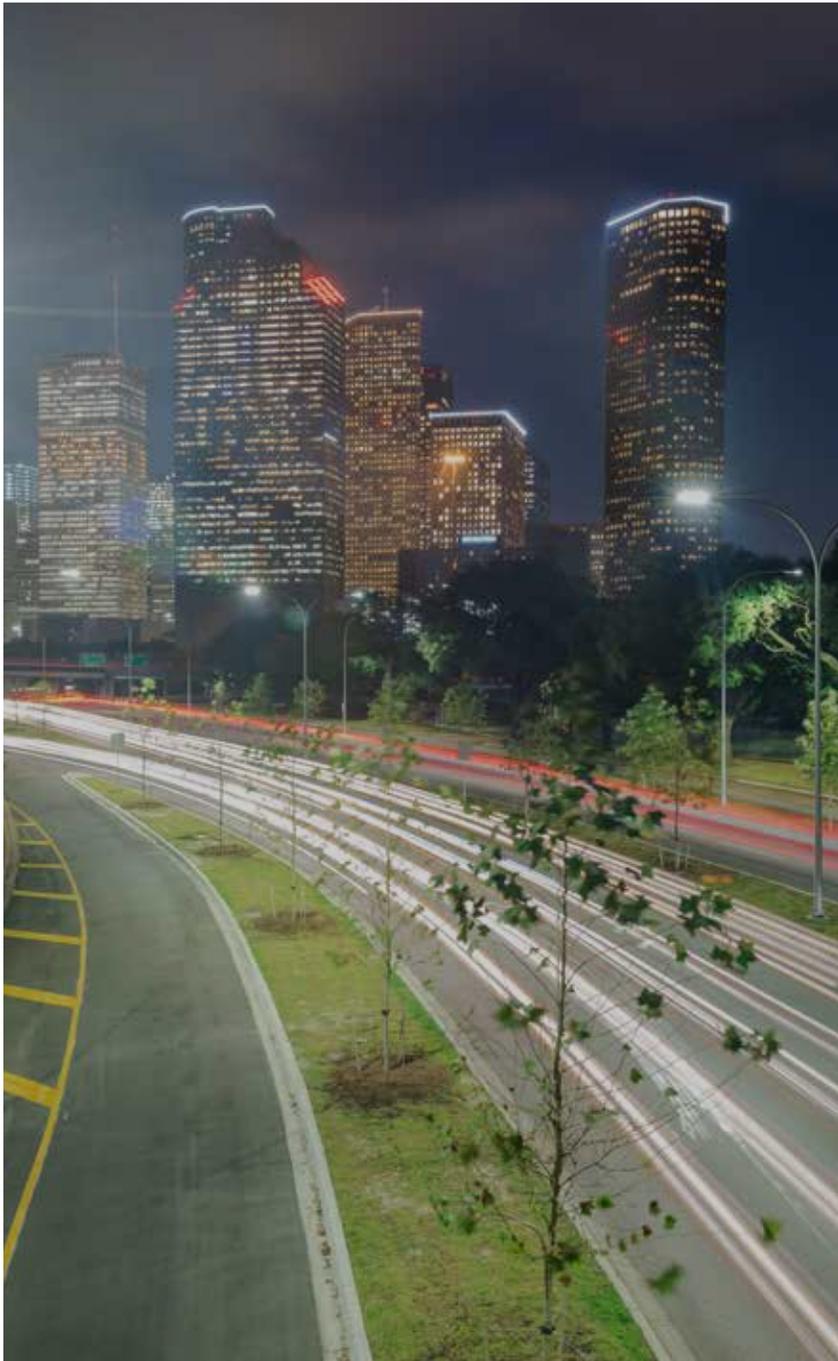




METROPOLITAN  
— *planning* —  
ORGANIZATIONS

PRIMER





# TRANSPORTATION — *planning* — IN TEXAS

Transportation planning in Texas occurs in both rural and urban areas. Congress authorized **metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs)** in the 1970s to ensure that transportation planning in urban areas is done cooperatively with input from stakeholders and the public. MPOs are responsible for ensuring that projects or programs receiving federal funds are planned collaboratively between regional transportation entities and the general public, and in support of regional goals.

# what are METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS?

MPOs are federally mandated and funded to address regional planning needs. Composed of local elected officials and representatives of state agencies, MPOs ensure that transportation planning in urban areas is developed cooperatively and guided by local and public input. MPOs work to balance the planning needs of local communities with the need for statewide connectivity, putting some of the planning process back in the hands of locals.

State law addressing MPOs is found primarily in the Texas Transportation Code (Sections 472 [D] and 201), which describes the roles of locals in planning processes, defines relationships with other entities, and enumerates voting rules, ethics guidelines, and other procedural details.

## Key Points about MPOs

1

**Mandated by the federal government** to ensure local and public participation in the transportation planning process.

2

**Governed locally by policy boards** whose membership is determined locally.

3

Have duties that include **developing regional long-range transportation plans.**

4

**Funded primarily by the federal government.**

## How Are MPOs Funded?

MPOs receive funding through federal, state, and local sources for their operation. Federal transportation funds are channeled through state departments of transportation to the MPOs, but state and local governmental entities may also support MPO planning activities with matching grants, employee salaries and benefits, contract oversight, information technology services, and more.



## Where Are MPOs Located?

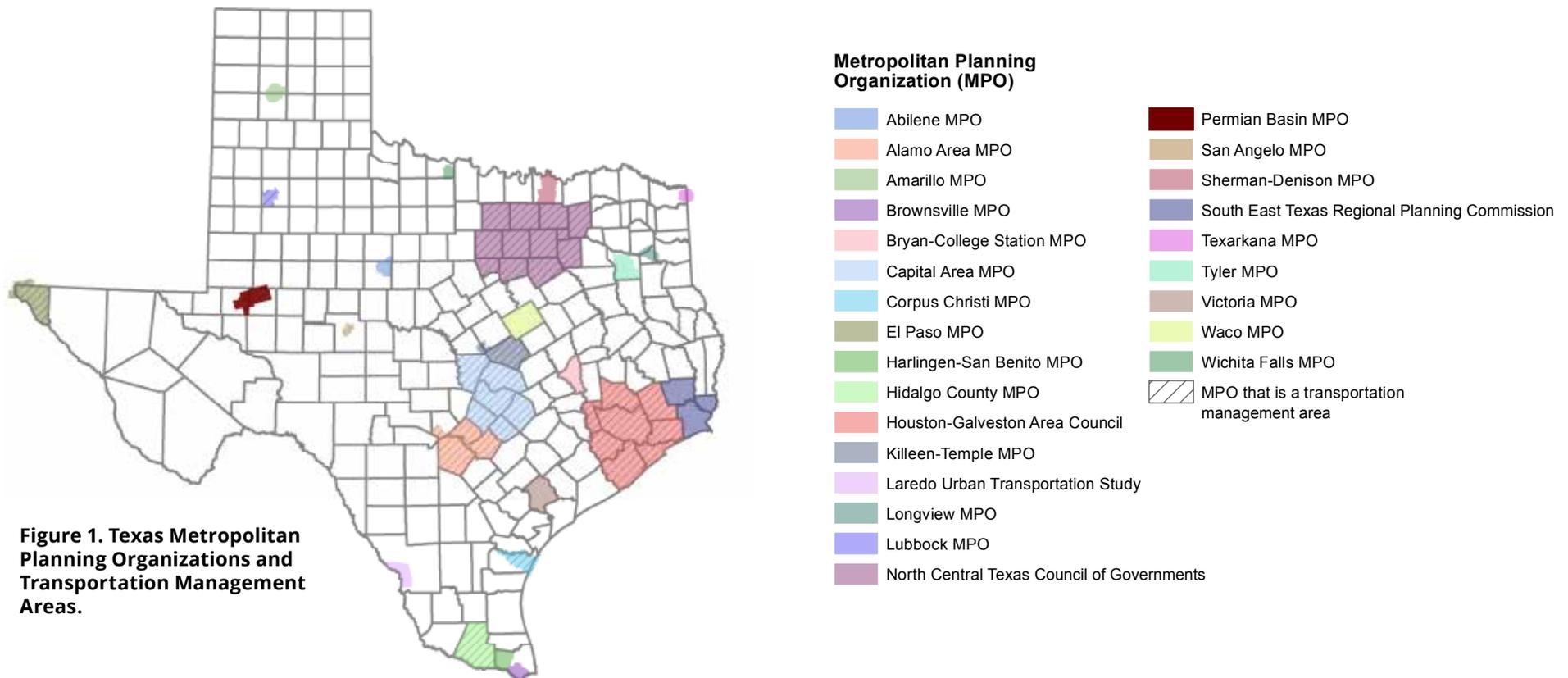
Federal law requires MPOs in urbanized areas whose populations exceed 50,000, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Agreement between the MPO and the governor sets the MPO's boundaries, which must include the existing urban area and the surrounding area that is expected to become urbanized within 20 years.

Some MPOs are also transportation management areas (TMAs). These are urbanized areas with populations of at least 200,000. Texas has 25 MPOs and 11 TMAs by population (Figure 1).

The areas MPOs serve heavily influence the MPOs' structure, focus, and character. Specific factors such as population, transportation needs and goals, and local participation impact the operations of the MPOs.

## How Are MPOs Governed?

Some MPOs are stand-alone agencies, while some are found within other agencies such as cities, counties, or councils of governments. The governance of the MPO resides internally within its policy board, which is free to adopt policy, bylaws, and organizational procedures. Federal law requires policy boards of MPOs that are also TMAs to consist of local elected officials, state department of transportation officials, and officials of transportation providers, such as transit authorities, toll authorities, or rail districts. MPOs typically also form advisory boards and committees to assist them in their decision-making process.



**Figure 1. Texas Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Transportation Management Areas.**

# WHAT DOES *an* MPO DO?

MPOs develop long-range transportation plans and program funds for projects and operations. They must involve both local transportation providers and the general public in the planning process. The plans serve as the roadmap for future projects and programs.

MPOs also conduct short-range planning and identify projects and funding sources. TMAs must also generate strategies for congestion mitigation.

## *Long-Range Planning*

MPOs develop a long-range plan called the metropolitan transportation plan (MTP) for the area that spans at minimum a 20-year planning horizon. The MTP guides the region's multimodal transportation system, including roadways, freight, transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and rail. A new MTP is developed every five years, except in air quality nonattainment areas, where it is developed every four years. The MTP must also identify funding sources for proposed projects.

## *Short-Range Planning*

MPOs also create a short-term planning document called the transportation improvement program (TIP). The TIP is a list of approved projects that receive federal funds, require some sort of federal approval, or are regionally significant. The TIP, usually prepared every two years, covers a four-year period and is consistent with the current MTP. The TIP must be fiscally constrained, meaning it must identify funding that can be

## *Project and Funding Source Identification*

MPOs create a unified planning work program (UPWP), a document describing the proposed activities, their estimated costs, and funding sources (federal, state, local, or other) for that fiscal year.

## *Congestion Mitigation*

TMAs must also identify the actions and strategies for reducing congestion in a congestion management process (CMP). The CMP must be cooperatively developed in the region and include strategies that result in the more efficient and effective use of the transportation system. When an area is designated as a TMA, it must also go through a federal certification review every four years.

## Planning Documents and Definitions

**Metropolitan transportation plan (MTP):** A long-range plan with a 20-year planning horizon.

**Transportation improvement program (TIP):** A short-range, four-year list of regional projects.

**Unified planning work program (UPWP):** The annual financial program for projects in the TIP.

**Transportation management area (TMA):** MPOs with population greater than 200,000.

**Congestion management process (CMP):** A plan for congestion reduction in TMAs.

**Statewide transportation improvement program (STIP):** The combined planning document for all TIPs in Texas.

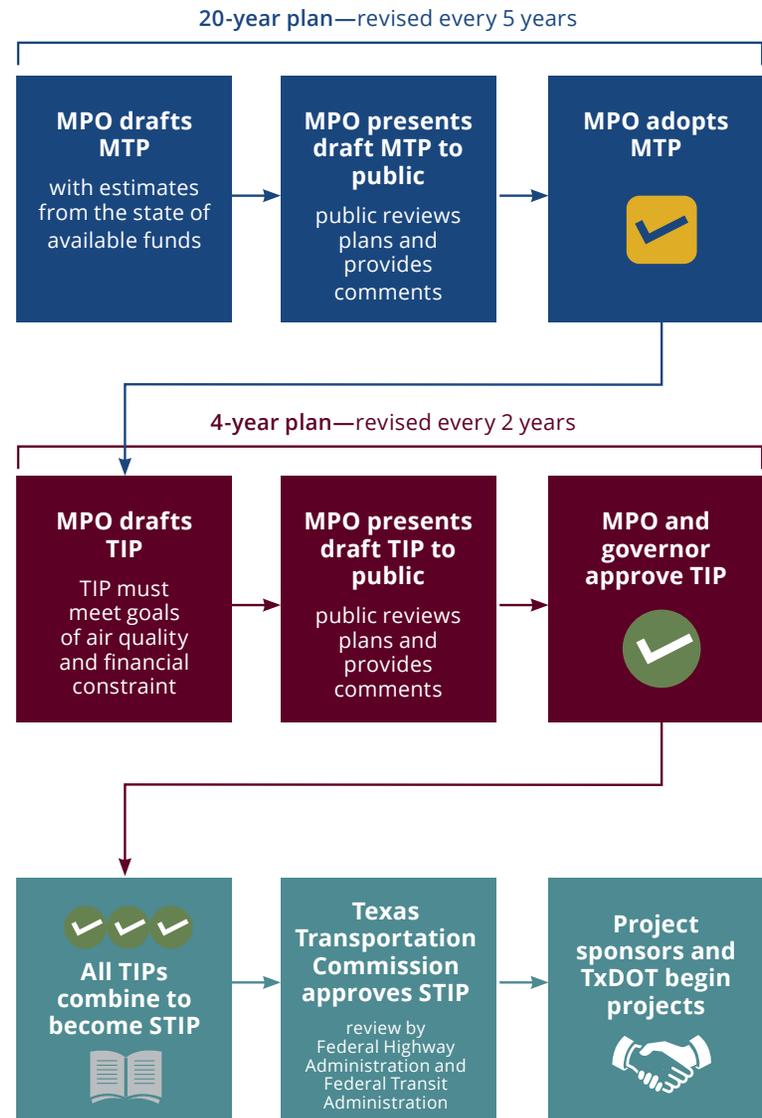
# HOW DOES THE MPO PLANNING *process* WORK?

Working with its partners and the public, an MPO develops the long-range plan (MTP) in an iterative process of drafting, reviewing, and commenting that results in plan adoption by the MPO's policy board. The process is the same for the short-range plan (TIP), which must meet air quality goals and financial constraints.

Once all of the approved TIPs from metropolitan areas throughout the state are complete, they are compiled with rural TIPs and other state transportation programs into one document, the statewide transportation improvement program (STIP). This statewide program is approved by the Texas Transportation Commission and reviewed by federal highway and transit administrations.

After the STIP is approved, local project sponsors and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) can work together to implement each project. Figure 2 illustrates this process.

Figure 2. MPO Planning Process.



# WHAT ARE MPO



## *planning values?*

### What Types of Projects Can an MPO Include in Its Plan?

Federal law requires MPO planning efforts to consider a set of values designed to support a high quality of life for a region's citizens, a clean environment, a healthy economy, and a high-functioning transportation system. MPO planning activities—such as projects in a plan, programs administered by the MPO, and other strategies—must align with this value set.

## MPO Planning Values



## MPO Project and Program Examples

The projects and programs below are examples of how MPOs in Texas embody the planning values. They reflect the priorities and goals of their regions.

### **El Paso Multimodal Plan**

Strategies will use alternative modes such as transit, bicycling, and walking to establish solutions to congestion, support economic development, and promote health in the region.

<http://www.elpasompo.org/multimodal/>

### **Corpus Christi MPO Hazardous Materials Truck Study**

The MPO in partnership with the City of Corpus Christi and the Nueces County Local Emergency Planning Committee conducted a hazardous materials truck transportation commodity flow study using data collected between April 2016 and September 2016.

[http://www.corpuschristi-mpo.org/04\\_studies/04\\_studies\\_ea/cchmtts\\_eaq\\_092016.pdf](http://www.corpuschristi-mpo.org/04_studies/04_studies_ea/cchmtts_eaq_092016.pdf)

### **Houston-Galveston Area Council Ports Area Mobility Study**

The study will establish a stronger future for the region's freight economy by recommending improvements that will better connect the four deep-water ports with emerging population and employment centers.

<http://www.h-gac.com/taq/freight-planning/ports-area-mobility-study/background.aspx>

### **Waco Thoroughfare Plan**

The Waco Thoroughfare Plan preserves highway corridors for development up to 50 years into future. The plan is intended to assist in the identification of projects for future MTPs.

<http://www.waco-texas.com/cms-mpo/page.aspx?id=209>

### **Tyler City Center Shuttle and Downtown Tyler Park and Ride**

The shuttle service was implemented during the construction of the Fair Plaza Parking Garage and reconstruction of the People's Petroleum Building, the Smith County Jail, and the City Council Chambers at City Hall. Over a thousand people used the shuttle during the five months when all of these projects were under construction. Service was discontinued after the completion of the Fair Plaza Parking Garage, which currently supplies the needs of downtown patrons.

### **Harlingen-San Benito MPO Traffic Light Synchronization Study**

The study will collect traffic data and provide traffic light synchronization plans for 66 traffic signals along the most congested corridors based on the spring 2011 Congestion Management Process Study. The plan will improve operational efficiency.

<http://hsbmmpo.org/files/69121737.pdf>

### **North Central Council of Governments Try Parking It**

Try Parking It is a ride-match and trip-logging website in North Central Texas that helps commuters locate car-pool and vanpool matches, and transit, biking, and walking buddy matches. Users also earn points to use for rewards.

<https://www.tryparkingit.com/Public/Home.aspx>

### **Capital Area Active Transportation Plan**

The 2045 Active Transportation Plan will develop a blueprint for a safe and easy-to-use active transportation network of trails, sidewalks, bike lanes, and streets for the six-county Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization region.

<http://www.campotexas.org/plans-programs/bicycle-pedestrian/2045-active-transportation-plan/>

### **Southeast Texas Air-Monitoring Network**

The South East Texas Regional Planning Commission maintains an air-monitoring network made up of numerous air-monitoring stations located throughout the region. With real-time data from those sites, the agency maintains a comprehensive database on the air quality of the region.

[http://www.setrpc.org/ter/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=3](http://www.setrpc.org/ter/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=3)



# ADDITIONAL MPO *responsibilities*



## Air Quality

MPOs located in areas that are designated as *nonattainment* for air quality must ensure that their transportation plans are consistent with the state's air quality plan, the state implementation plan. Four Texas regions are currently designated as nonattainment: Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston-Galveston, Beaumont-Port Arthur, and El Paso.

## Public Involvement



Federal law requires MPOs to produce a public participation plan that provides for meaningful involvement with citizens in the region. The law requires that at a minimum MPO public involvement methodologies must include:

- Public meetings.
- Visualization of plans.
- Plans available for comment electronically.

## Performance Targets

MPOs must establish and track targets for surface and public transportation that address the performance measures required by federal law. Those measures include assessments of bridge and pavement condition, roadway performance, roadway safety, congestion, and air quality.

## Glossary

**Congestion management process (CMP):** A systematic process for managing congestion and enhancing mobility through strategies that promote the efficient and effective use of existing and new transportation infrastructure.

**Metropolitan planning organization (MPO):** Federally mandated planning organization for areas with populations of at least 50,000. This organization is responsible for preparing the MTP and the TIP.

**Metropolitan transportation plan (MTP):** The primary long-range plan mapping transportation needs for the next 20 years.

**Nonattainment:** An area considered to have air quality worse than the National Ambient Air Quality Standards as defined in the Clean Air Act Amendment of 1970.

**Policy board:** The governing body of elected officials and others that approves all actions of the MPO. This generally includes one representative from each local entity and, for TMAs, from the local transit authority.

**Public participation plan (PPP):** A document that provides for meaningful involvement with local citizens in the planning process. The public is guaranteed the opportunity to comment on the transportation plans at public meetings and that the plans will be visualized and made available for comment electronically.

**Statewide implementation plan (SIP):** The state's comprehensive plan that describes how the state will meet federal air quality standards. The plan is prepared by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and adopted by TCEQ commissioners.

**Statewide transportation improvement program (STIP):** The collection of all approved TIPs and projects throughout the state from MPOs in the urban areas and rural planning organizations in the rural parts of the state.

**Technical advisory committee (TAC):** A group of practitioners (city planners, engineers, etc.) that review projects for the TIP and MTP and make recommendations to the policy board.

**Transportation improvement program (TIP):** The primary short-range plan that lists all the projects that could be reasonably and financially accomplished in the next four years.

**Transportation management area (TMA):** An MPO with a population greater than 200,000. MPOs that are also designated as TMAs have additional planning responsibilities.

**Unified planning work program (UPWP):** A plan developed each year to describe the proposed work activities, requirements, and funding sources for that fiscal year.

## Resources

### Legislation

23 Code of Federal Regulations 420, Subpart A—Administration of FHWA Planning and Research Funds, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2011-title23-vol1/xml/CFR-2011-title23-vol1-part420-subpartA.xml>

23 United States Code 134: Metropolitan Transportation Planning, <http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title23-section134&num=0&edition=prelim>

23 United States Code 150: National Goals and Performance Management Measures, <http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title23-section150&num=0&edition=prelim>

Texas Transportation Code 472, Subchapter D: Metropolitan Planning Organizations, <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/TN/htm/TN.472.htm#472>

Texas Transportation Code 201: General Provisions and Administration, <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/TN/htm/TN.201.htm>

### Organizations

#### Texas Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (TEMPO)

c/o Waco Metropolitan Planning Organization  
P.O. Box 2570  
Waco, TX 76702-2570  
Phone: (254) 750-5666  
<https://www.texasmpos.org/>

#### Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO)

444 North Capitol Street NW, Suite 345  
Washington, DC 20001  
Phone: (202) 624-3680  
<http://www.ampo.org/>

## Resources

### ***Additional Information***

Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, Metropolitan Transportation Planning: Executive Seminar, <https://www.planning.dot.gov/Documents/MetroPlanning/metroTrans.htm>

Solof, Mark, *History of Metropolitan Planning Organizations*, North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, Inc., January 1998, <http://www.njtpa.org/getmedia/b95661af-dfd4-4e3d-bb87-39e617619c7b/MPOhistory1998.pdf.aspx>

Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, *The Transportation Planning Process Briefing Book: Key Issues for Transportation Decisionmakers, Officials, and Staff*, 2015, [http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/publications/briefing\\_book/fhwahep15048.pdf](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/publications/briefing_book/fhwahep15048.pdf)

Bond, Alexander, Jeff Kramer, and Karen Seggerman, *Staffing and Administrative Capacity of Metropolitan Planning Organizations*, Federal Highway Administration, May 2010, [https://www.planning.dot.gov/documents/Staffing\\_Administrative\\_Capacity\\_MPOs.pdf](https://www.planning.dot.gov/documents/Staffing_Administrative_Capacity_MPOs.pdf)

**Note:** *The Texas A&M Transportation Institute is currently producing an in-depth report on MPOs.*

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