



Local Government Officials: Key Stakeholders in Rural Transportation Planning

December 2004

Is there a bridge in your county that needs to be replaced or repaired? Does a key highway in your region need improvements or upgrades? Are there changes to your county's land use or economic development plans that should be shared with state transportation officials? Does your community need to enhance its overall transportation system to help local businesses remain competitive in the global economy? Is there a growing demand for community transportation services for the elderly and general public? Are you looking for ways to coordinate public transportation services in your community?

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, over \$40 billion is spent each year in federal funds to maintain, expand and upgrade state and local transportation systems across the nation. Under new regulations issued by the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, local government officials outside of metropolitan planning areas now have an unprecedented opportunity to help shape and determine the transportation investments and visions for local communities and states.

Building on the legislative legacy of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), the new rural consultation rule is designed to give local officials a seat at the statewide transportation planning table. Each state is required to have a documented planning process to consult with, and seriously consider, the input of local government officials from non-metropolitan areas by February 2004. The process should help local officials have a greater impact regarding state financing of projects in their communities. Equally important, states must now involve local officials in the development of long and short-range transportation plans.

This primer is a tool for local officials to better understand the new rural transportation planning requirements. An overview of the federal statewide consultation requirements, examples of local official involvement in the transportation decision-making process, a resource list and glossary of common transportation planning terms will help de-mystify the statewide transportation planning and investment process.

Rural local official consultation...

is a formal and documented process — separate and discrete from the public involvement process — for states to involve rural local officials in the development and implementation of statewide transportation plans and project investment decisions.

Under new federal transportation regulations, a non-metropolitan local official is defined as an elected or appointed official of general purpose local government.



New Federal Highway and Transit Administration Rules on Rural Consultation

In January 2003, the Federal Highway and Federal Transit Administrations issued new rules outlining the requirements for state consultation with non-metropolitan local officials. The new rules implement the congressional intent of TEA-21, and provide specific guidance for the development and implementation of the state consultation process:

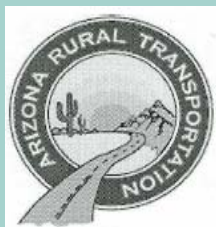
- Each state must have developed and implemented a documented process for local official input into statewide transportation plans and investment programs by February 2004.
- The consultation process must be “separate and discrete” from state processes to obtain input from the general public, giving more weight to local officials in recognition of the significant transportation responsibilities of rural local officials and governments, including ownership of roads, bridges, and transit systems.
- The rule redefines “non-metropolitan local official” to include elected and appointed officials.
- The rule requires states to confer with local officials before taking actions, consider the officials’ views and periodically inform them about actions taken.
- Within two years of implementation and at least every five years afterwards, states are required to seek feedback from local officials regarding the process. States are also directed to seek comments and input from state associations of counties, municipal officials, regional development organizations, and other non-metropolitan officials.
- States that choose not to follow recommendations provided by local officials during the comment period are required to make the reasons for their decisions public.

For a copy of the federal rules on state transportation consultation with non-metropolitan local officials, visit www.ruraltransportation.org/fhwa.pdf.

The statewide transportation planning process is the gateway for accessing federal transportation funds. Local officials now have an enhanced role in statewide planning through the rural consultation process.

ARIZONA: Regional Councils Foster Local Official Input

The Arizona Department of Transportation has fostered a meaningful dialogue and partnership with local officials by funding and supporting



ing the activities of the state’s four rural regional development organizations. As entities governed by local government officials, each regional development organization’s rural transportation staff is responsible for preparing and implementing a comprehensive transportation work program. With the active participation of both elected and appointed local officials,

each region engages in regional intermodal planning, serves as a liaison between state and local officials, and coordinates transportation grant applications at the regional level. Each region collects and analyzes transportation data for the state and local agencies, and facilitates the prioritizing of project investments in the region. In addition, local elected officials are engaged at various other points throughout the planning process, such as conducting county-wide long range planning meetings, serving as board members to the state DOT, providing input to state DOT staff, and reviewing planning studies relevant to long-range planning.

NEW HAMPSHIRE: Local Elected Officials Help Prioritize Needs



The state transportation department contracts with the state's nine regional development organizations, five of which are rural, to assist in the development of the state's ten-year transportation improvement plan. Among the key activities of the regional development organizations is to host community planning meetings, as part of the biennial update of the state's plan. Local government officials are invited to the public meetings, in addition to serving on advisory committees used by the regions to identify and prioritize regional transportation needs.

Local official input, in concert with the public input phase,

is also sought during the periodic review of the plan by the governor's office and by the state legislature before its final approval.

“While final planning and project investment decisions remain at the state level, local officials are now in a stronger position to influence these important transportation planning and funding decisions.”

- Jack Scriber, NADO President and Executive Director of KIPDA, Louisville, KY

“The biggest accomplishment of the RPO effort is coordinating five counties and 14 municipalities to develop a regional transportation vision. We brought everyone to the table to work towards a common goal. This has increased communication between the MPOs and the Kerr-Tarr RPO.”

*-- Danny Wright,
Commissioner,
Vance County,
North Carolina and
Kerr-Tarr RTAC Chairman*

NORTH CAROLINA: Local Elected Officials Provide Input at Advisory Committee Level

Since 2002, the North Carolina Department of Transportation has implemented a major re-engineering of its consultation process with rural local officials. State officials worked with local officials and the existing network of regional development organizations to establish 20 new Rural Transportation Planning Organizations (RPOs), which serve as counterparts to the existing Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs).

Funded by the state at \$80,000 to \$100,000 each year and with a 20 percent local match, each RPO has an advisory committee of county and municipal officials, and state DOT board members. The advisory committees establish planning goals, objectives and priorities for the region. Each group reviews and comments on the state's transportation plan and project recommendations. Each RPO also has a lead planning agency to staff and administer the organization, as well as a regional coordinating committee of local government planners and managers, transit providers and other interested stakeholders. The new process has provided local officials with a formal framework and forum to participate in the statewide and regional planning processes.



Consultation Practices

KENTUCKY: Local Officials Help to Steer Transportation Decisions

The involvement of local officials is key to the implementation of Kentucky's statewide planning process. Fifteen regional development organizations contract with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet and receive state funds to support transportation planning activities. The transportation committees include local and county officials, representatives of other interest groups, and private citizens who provide input and direction for the statewide transportation planning process. The committees are involved in the planning and selection of highway projects for inclusion in the long-range plan and six-year program, known as the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Local officials are also given a chance to offer suggestions and input on all public transportation planning issues, including public and specialized transportation services in rural areas.

"I believe this process is working and gives local officials the very best among all options of being heard and involved in a dynamic process that accents collaboration, coordination and cooperation."

-- Judge Neal Cassity
Jessamine County, Kentucky

Rural Consultation Snapshots from Around the Nation

Early in the annual planning process, local officials provide input to the **South Dakota** DOT through special meetings and participation in SDDOT's planning meetings, along with representatives of the Association of South Dakota Counties and the Municipal League. As part of the yearly budget process, local elected officials provide SDDOT with a list of transportation needs and projects for systems under their jurisdiction.

The 12 state DOT districts in **Ohio** use a variety of formal and informal ongoing consultation processes, based on what works best in each area. Most districts hold "government days" (town meetings) with local jurisdictions. There is no set agenda and local officials can address any issues they choose. District staff may also attend and participate in regular board meetings of local governments and regional planning organizations.

The **Montana** Department of Transportation staff works with local governments to manage federal programs. The consultation process for the long-range statewide transportation plan involves local elected officials in many ways, including targeted mailings of the plan, open houses and stakeholder focus groups. On-going consultation efforts include annual meetings with elected officials and tribal governments, and regular meetings with representatives of local government associations.

Oregon's DOT officials meet regularly with Area Commissions on Transportation (ACTs) and regional development organizations to discuss transportation issues. Local elected officials are encouraged to participate through ACTs and RDOs. Areas without these groups can provide input directly to the DOT. ODOT's Stakeholder Involvement Handbook states that involvement should be accessible, continuous, responsive and responsible.

PENNSYLVANIA: Local Officials Help Formulate State's Transportation Vision

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation provides the state's six regional development organizations and five rural independent counties with \$70,000 in state and federal planning funds, which require a 10 percent local match, for transportation planning.

State, regional and local decision-makers participate in the transportation planning program via technical advisory and policy committees. Their primary responsibility is to identify and prioritize transportation issues and opportunities within their regions. The groups also conduct studies and make recommendations regarding the planning and implementation of transportation projects.



How Can Local Officials Get Involved in Transportation Planning?

Become familiar with the state's rural consultation plan.

- Contact your state DOT for a copy of the rural consultation process.
- Contact your regional planning and development organization to find out how you can be involved.
- Serve on your region's rural transportation advisory committee. Or, if your region lacks a regional or local planning process for areas outside of the metropolitan planning area, take the initiative to establish a process.

Learn how states are managing the rural consultation process.

- Visit www.ruraltransportation.org for examples and models.
- Visit www.ruraltransportation.org to join the new interactive email listserv for rural transportation stakeholders.

Share your ideas with the RPO, RDO and state.

- Identify transportation needs in your area and provide input to the state on regional and local issues and priorities.
- Attend public transportation meetings and share your ideas and concerns.
- Engage local citizens and get them to attend planning meetings.
- Work with your peers to prepare a unified transportation needs plan. Advocate area transportation issues to neighboring regions, area legislators and other interested parties.

"We've seen a lot of great accomplishments come out of our state's regional transportation planning process."

**-- Jim Johnson, Supervisor,
Hardin County, Iowa**

"We are enthusiastic about the new rural consultation process in our region. We hope the local officials and citizens see this as an opportunity to provide thoughtful input to the state. We see the RPO as a link between these entities to promote better communication and the dissemination of information regarding the transportation planning process."

**-- Robert Lake, Executive Director,
West Alabama Regional Commission
Northport, Alabama**



"Consultations with local officials are crucial to making transportation delivery systems work well in the states."

-- National Academy of Public Administration's Rural Transportation Consultation Processes (May 2000)

"Local officials are closest to the individual users of the system and are the first to hear what and where the needs are the greatest. The opportunity for local officials to have input in the transportation planning process of the state ensures that these concerns are heard and weighed in relation to all identified needs."

**-- Daniel Fedderly, District 8 Supervisor,
Dunn County, Wisconsin**

"The Missouri Department of Transportation's new planning framework will allow local elected officials to be engaged throughout the process, beginning with needs identification and culminating in the prioritizing and programming of projects."

**-- Steve Etcher, Executive Director,
Boonslick Regional Planning Commission
Warrenton, Missouri**

Glossary of Common Rural Transportation Terms

Consultation - One party confers with another identified party in accordance with an established process and, prior to taking action(s), considers that party's views and periodically informs that party about action(s) taken.

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) - An organization of primarily local elected officials that provides a forum for local decision-making on transportation issues impacting metropolitan areas with a population above 50,000. Each MPO has a policy board that is generally comprised of chief elected officials who represent different parts of the region served by the MPO. This board is often advised by a technical committee that consists of planning and engineering staff from jurisdictions within each region.

Regional Development Organization (RDO) - Also known as area development districts, councils of governments, economic development districts, local development districts, planning and development districts and regional planning commissions - regional development organizations provide valuable administrative, professional and technical assistance to over 2,000 counties and 15,000 small cities and towns. They also administer and deliver numerous federal programs on a regional basis and depending on local needs. Programs include aging, community and economic development, housing, business development finance, transportation and emergency management. RDOs typically administer and/or serve as the RPO.

Rural Planning Organization (RPO) - An organization of primarily rural local elected officials that provides a forum for local input on transportation issues impacting non-metropolitan communities with a population below 50,000. RPOs serve as a link between state DOTs, local elected officials and citizens in ensuring their involvement in the transportation planning and decision-making process. In the 23 states with RPOs, these entities are typically managed and coordinated by regional development organizations.

Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) - The STIP is a staged, multi-year, statewide, intermodal program of transportation projects, funded or requiring action by the Federal Highway Administration or Federal Transit Administration. The STIP must be consistent with the statewide long range transportation plan and its planning processes including policy plans. The STIP must cover a period of no less than three years.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) - The TIP is a three-year priority list of transportation projects to be implemented within a metropolitan area of the state. In addition to federally funded transportation projects, the TIP includes a listing of all other transportation projects that use state and/or local funding sources.

Resources

American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO): www.aashto.org

AASHTO TEA-21 Reauthorization: <http://transportation1.org/aashtonew/>

Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations: www.ampo.org

American Public Transportation Association: www.apta.com

Community Transportation Association of America: www.ctaa.org

Federal Highway Administration's Office of Planning: www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/index.htm

Federal Transit Administration's Office of Planning & Environment:
www.fta.dot.gov/about/offices/hq/4956_4950_ENG_HTML.htm

National Association of Counties: www.naco.org

National Association of County Engineers: www.countyengineers.org

National Association of Development Organizations: www.nado.org

National League of Cities: www.nlc.org

National Association of Regional Councils: www.narc.org

Transportation Research Board: www.trb.org

U.S. Department of Transportation: www.dot.gov

U.S. DOT Surface Transportation Reauthorization: www.fhwa.dot.gov/reauthorization/

For more details regarding rural transportation issues, visit
WWW.RURALTRANSPORTATION.ORG

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