



Michigan’s Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Regional Planning Agencies White Paper

The [*Metropolitan Planning Organization and Regional Planning Agencies Technical Report*](#) synthesized the planning priorities of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) and Regional Planning Agencies (RPA) in Michigan and discussed how they support and complement the overall vision and goals of MI Transportation Plan. The [MPO/RPA White Paper](#) (2012) provided an update to the original technical report, which discussed changes between 2006 and 2012. This white paper provides an update to that report. Current information for individual MPOs may be found on the [Michigan Transportation Planning Association](#) website and current information for individual RPAs on the [Michigan Association of Regions](#) web page.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations

The U.S. Census Bureau designates a new list of Urbanized Areas (UZA) every 10 years, following the conclusion of each decennial census. An UZA is a census-designated urban area with 50,000 residents or more. Federal law requires that every UZA must be represented by an MPO (23 USC 134(b) and 49 USC 5303(c)). MPO’s are the designated local decision-making body that is responsible for carrying out the metropolitan transportation planning process. Furthermore, UZAs with populations exceeding 200,000 are designated as Transportation Management Areas (TMAs) and are required to fulfill additional responsibilities.

Based on the 2010 Census, there are six TMA’s in Michigan: Ann Arbor, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Flint, Kalamazoo, and Lansing. The U.S. Census Bureau released the new list of urbanized areas based on the 2010 Census results on March 27, 2012, in the Federal Register. A list of all of Michigan’s MPOs, based on the 2010 Census is provided in Table 1.

In addition to the 13 MPO’s within Michigan, South Bend, Indiana, and Toledo, Ohio, urbanized areas include parts of Michigan at the state line. See Map 1 below.

Map 1: Michigan MPOs and Metropolitan Statistical Areas

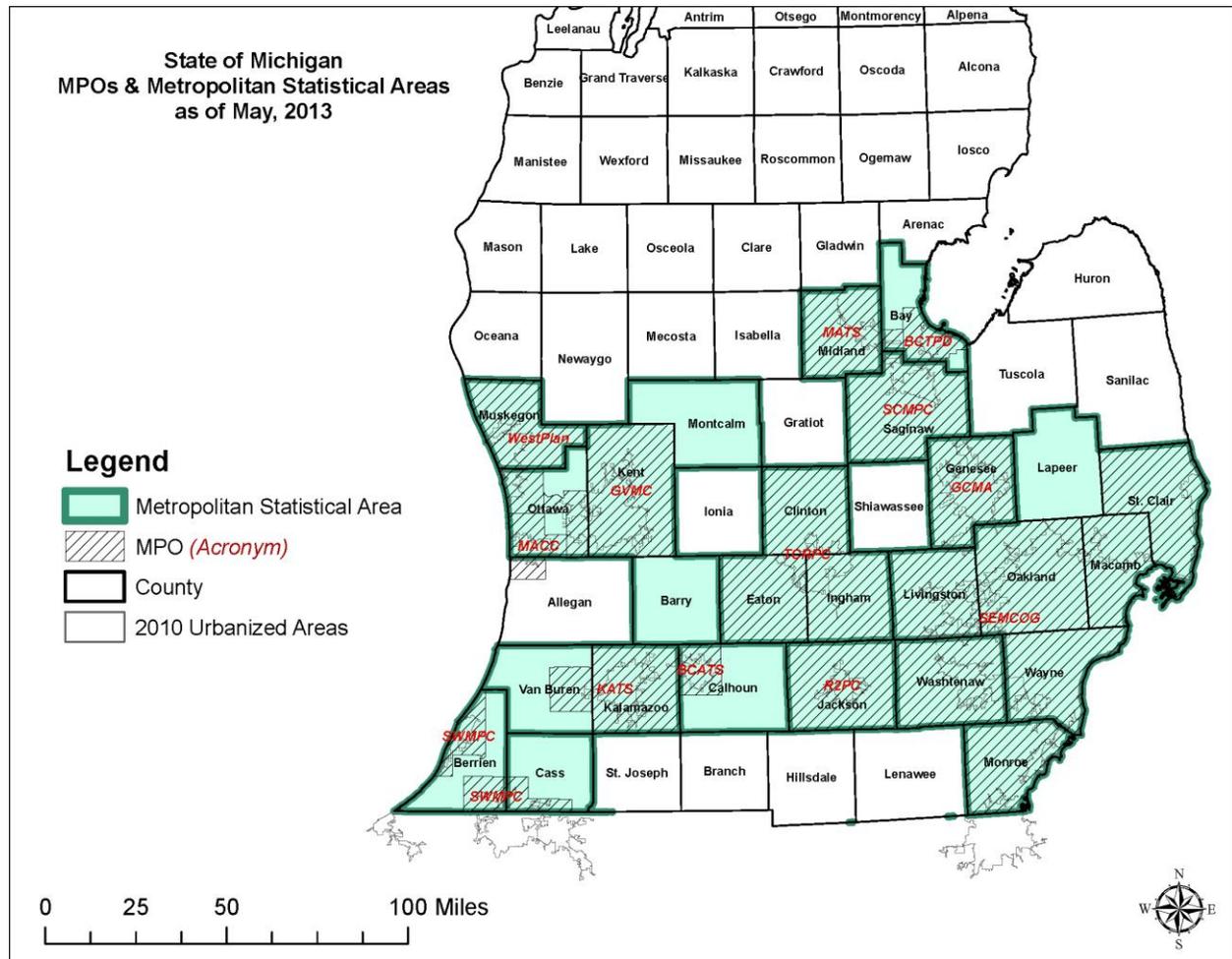


Table 1: Metropolitan Planning Organizations

Central City	MPO Name	Area (Square Miles)	2010 Census Population	Designation Year
Battle Creek	Battle Creek Area Transportation Study	169	93,998	1974
Bay City	Bay County Area Transportation Study	201	85,050	1974
Detroit Ann Arbor Port Huron	Southeast Michigan Council of Governments Washtenaw Area Transportation Study St. Clair County Transportation Study	4,608	4,703,593	1974
Flint	Genesee Co. Metropolitan Planning Commission	648	425,788	1963
Grand Rapids	Grand Valley Metro Council	1,010	694,632	1990
Holland	Macatawa Area Coordinating Council	212	119,125	1991
Jackson	Jackson Area Comprehensive Transportation Study	723	160,253	1968
Kalamazoo	Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study	721	277,100	1979
Lansing	Tri-County Regional Planning Commission	1,712	464,036	1973
Midland	Midland Area Transportation Study	323	90,645	2013
Muskegon	West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission	657	225,014	1973
SW Michigan Commission Benton Harbor Niles	Southwest Michigan Planning Commission Twin Cities Area Transportation Study Niles/Buchanan/Cass Area Transportation Study	338	127,004	1974
Saginaw	Saginaw Metropolitan Area Transportation Study	259	149,863	1965

Sources: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/midiv/midivmpo.htm> as of November 19, 2015; MDOT, Bureau of Transportation Planning.

2010 Census and 2014 Census Estimates

The 2010 Census identified the Midland area as a new urbanized area with a population exceeding the 50,000 threshold. The Midland Area Transportation Study (MATS) was designated as Michigan’s 13th MPO on January 8, 2013 by Governor Rick Snyder. Similarly, Kalamazoo has reached the TMA threshold (population 200,000+) and has been designated as the newest TMA in Michigan.

Each MPO is centered on one of Michigan’s major cities and encompasses (at least) the census-designated urbanized area. As seen in Table 1, the MPO study areas range in size from the Midland Area Transportation Study (81,886 people) to the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (4.7 million people), based on current MPO boundaries.

Following the decline in overall population between 2000 and 2010, Michigan has experienced a very moderate increase in overall population. Between 2010 and 2014, the statewide population grew by 0.27 percent. The total population residing in Michigan’s 13 MPOs has continued to rise. In addition, the percentage of Michigan’s population that lives in an MPO area has modestly increased. (Table 2).

Table 2: Metropolitan Planning Organizations Study Area Population

Metropolitan Planning Organization Study Area	2010-2014 Population Percent Change
Battle Creek Area Transportation Study	-0.63%
Bay City Area Transportation Study	-1.77%
Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission (Flint)	-3.03%
Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (Grand Rapids)	+4.53%
Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study	+2.96%
Macatawa Area Coordinating Council (Holland)	+3.85%
Midland Area Transportation Study	+0.32%
Region 2 Planning Commission (Jackson)	-0.32%
Saginaw Metropolitan Area Transportation Study	-2.58%
Southeast Michigan Council of Governments	+0.22%
Southwestern Michigan Commission MPO (Benton Harbor/St. Joseph and Niles)	+0.002%
Tri-county Regional Planning Commission (Lansing)	+1.38%
West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (Muskegon)	+1.26%
Total MPOs	+0.57%

Source: MDOT Statewide and Urban Travel Analysis Section

Factors Affecting Regional Planning Efforts in Michigan

Since 2013, there has been a significant shift in the field of transportation planning. A greater focus is being placed on regional cooperation and program development in both urban and rural areas. The topics discussed below outline several influences that have facilitated this shift in planning practices in the state, which will keep Michigan moving forward.

New Federal and State Legislation

1. Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century

Since the last update of this report in 2012, there have been significant changes at both the federal and state level concerning transportation planning and coordination. In July 2012, Congress passed a two-year transportation funding bill entitled Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21). The bill was signed into law July 31, 2012 by President Obama. This federal legislation provided modest increases to transportation funding nationwide, consolidated transportation funding programs, expanded the National Highway System to include additional principal arterials in metropolitan areas, and required the adoption of performance measures in five major categories. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) has been working diligently with its partners and stakeholders to implement the MAP-21 requirements.

2. Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act

The FAST Act, Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (P.L. 114-94), was signed into law on December 4, 2015, and authorizes funding for highway, transit, and rail programs through fiscal year 2020.

The bill follows closely on the heels of MAP-21, which made a number of transformative changes to the federal program, many of which have not been fully implemented. This includes transitioning highway and transit programs to become performance-oriented and placing new emphasis on studying, planning for, and facilitating the movement of freight.

It is important to note that with few exceptions, provisions in the FAST Act do not repeal or replace the changes made by MAP-21. Rather, the FAST Act affirms and improves many of the reforms made by MAP-21. The FAST Act continues the focus on freight by creating two new programs aimed at better directing resources to projects that will enhance the efficient movement of freight along the surface transportation system. It also directs resources to assist and equip states, MPOs, and transit agencies in their efforts to adjust to the framework for a national system of performance management.

As the changes in both MAP-21 and the FAST Act continue to be implemented over the months and years ahead, their benefits may begin to be realized. These changes may shape the future direction of this plan. Without full knowledge of how changes will be implemented and what the associated impacts will be, MDOT is unable to include those in this plan update.

3. Implementation of MAP-21 Performance Measures

The five major areas of the MAP-21 performance provisions include: Planning, Highway Safety, Highway Conditions, Congestion/System Performance, and Transit Performance. There are eleven rules governing the implementation of these measures. The Metropolitan and Statewide Planning Rule affects all 13 MPOs and 14 RPAs in the state. Its purpose is to establish a performance-based planning process at the metropolitan and state level; and to define coordination in the selection of targets, linking planning and programming to performance targets. Although MAP-21 officially expired September 30, 2014, it is assumed that many of the provisions required in the Act will be implemented, including performance measures.

MDOT has been working with its partners (including the MPOs and RPAs) and stakeholders to prepare for the new requirements of moving to a performance-based planning process and selecting statewide and regional targets. MDOT hosted a peer exchange in April 2015 to discuss ideas and hear how other states are preparing for the final rule. The peer exchange provided an opportunity to hear about case-studies and exchange ideas to facilitate the development of statewide action plans.

The final rules related to the remaining focus areas have yet to be issued, and have varying schedules of implementation once they are finalized. However, states have approximately 12-18 months to implement the provisions of the final rules after they are published in the federal register.

4. Regional Prosperity Initiative

Governor Rick Snyder introduced the concept of Regional Prosperity Initiative (RPI) Areas in August 2013, and asked each state department to align its work area boundaries to match the RPI boundaries. The Snyder Administration believes that having one set of regional boundaries for all key services in the state will eliminate overlap and confusion to Michigan's citizens, reduce and streamline bureaucratic requirements, and attract more business and industry to the state. MDOT recently changed its region office and service boundaries to match the RPI boundaries.

In addition to streamlining services, the second purpose of the RPI is to encourage better regional cooperation and collaboration to attract investment and align services statewide by placing a focus on adult education, workforce development, economic development, transportation, and higher education organizations.

An RPI grant program has been established for Regional Planning Agencies to apply for funding to develop economic development plans and initiate collaborative studies that will address the goals of their respective regions and meet the expectations of the RPI concept.¹

¹Separate white papers explaining the RPI concept and progress to date as well as the Michigan Local Rural Transportation Program can be found on the [MI Transportation Plan Website](#)

Strengthening Transportation Planning Efforts in Non-Metropolitan Areas through the Local Rural Transportation Program

A greater emphasis has been placed on strengthening the relationships with MDOT's transportation partners in non-metropolitan areas. The Local Rural Transportation Program funds projects in 78 of Michigan's 83 counties through 22 rural task forces (RTFs) statewide. The RTFs include voting members from the county road commissions, cities and villages with populations of less than 5,000, MDOT, and rural transit providers. The total statewide program allocates about \$42 million in federal funds and \$7 million in state funds on an annual basis to these RTFs to fund transportation projects in their respective areas.

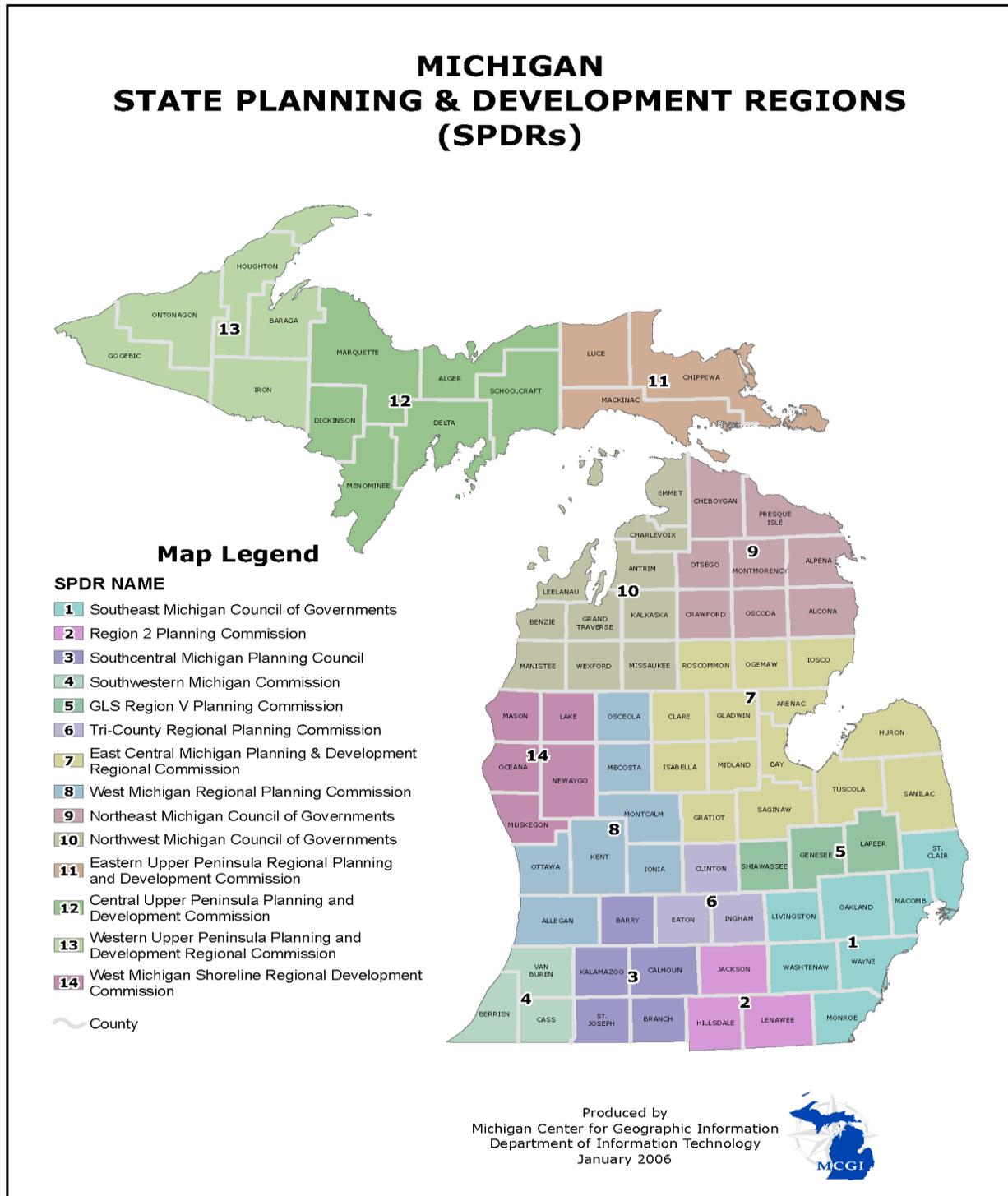
For the past three years, MDOT has been working diligently with representatives from the RTFs and other stakeholders, including the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Michigan Association of Regions, to address concerns and issues as it relates to the transportation planning process and funding in non-metropolitan areas. A coalition known as the Rural Task Force Oversight Board was formed to provide statewide guidance and policy concerning the local rural transportation program and to enhance the transportation planning process that currently exists. The RTF Oversight Board has nine voting members - three MDOT representatives, and two representatives each from the County Road Association of Michigan, the Michigan Municipal League, and the two Michigan Transit Associations. The board held its first meeting Dec. 22, 2014.

The board was formed to establish a cooperative forum to resolve issues and provide direction and expectations of the planning process in non-metropolitan areas. The board recently released a call for projects for fiscal years 2017-2020 for the development of the next State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). In addition, the board has finalized statewide guidelines and has reached a major milestone in addressing funding concerns from the local agencies.

MDOT is working with the state's regional planning agencies to identify, prioritize, and address gaps in regional transit mobility, in particular seniors. In June 2014, Governor Snyder released a special message to the legislature on the topic of aging, titled "Making Michigan a Great Place to Live Well and Age Well." In that message, the Governor asked MDOT to partner with MPOs and RPAs to work on the issue of regional transit mobility with a specific focus on senior citizens. MDOT provided small grants to each RPA and issued a guidance memo asking each MPO and RPA to work with MDOT and transit providers to identify gaps and then craft possible approaches to close the most pressing gaps. Regional transit mobility is being defined as "the ability to use local transit services to make a trip that involves moving from one county to the neighboring county and/or from one transit system to the neighboring system."

MDOT has also been contracting with the RPAs since 2012 to assist in transportation planning efforts for the non-metropolitan areas. Both the RPAs and RTFs share the same boundaries. The RPAs coordinate and document local and regional RTF meetings and submit all required documentation to MDOT. In the coming years, MDOT hopes to build on the progress made through the RTF Oversight Board to continue developing a seamless process for the non-metropolitan transportation planning program in the state.

Map 2: State Regional Planning Agencies



Developing Electronic Transportation Planning Tools and Processes

In an effort to assist MDOT and MPOs with expedited processes to approve and fund transportation projects, the Electronic State Transportation Improvement Program (ESTIP) has been established. Development of this tool began in 2013 with the goal of enabling MPO staff to submit approved transportation projects directly to the MDOT project database through a web-based system. This tool is now a live application through the Michigan Single Sign-On System. Both MDOT and MPO staff are being trained to utilize this application to submit projects electronically. Phase 1 of this effort will allow MPO staff to submit federally funded local road projects. In the coming years, MDOT hopes to expand this system through a phased-in approach to include state trunkline and multi-modal projects. MPOs will use the ESTIP to submit their local road projects for fiscal years 2017-2020 as part of development of the STIP during fiscal year 2016. All transportation projects using federal funds are required to be either in the STIP or the MPO TIP.

In addition, a larger statewide database upgrade known as JobNet will allow all transportation providers both at the state and local level to submit projects to MDOT electronically beginning in fiscal year 2018.

Both of these tools will change the way transportation projects are currently reviewed and processed by reducing the time required to enter approved projects into the MDOT database. These tools will also allow both MDOT and the MPOs to monitor their programs and receive data in real time.

These tools serve as building blocks to a more fully automated system that will allow for not only the electronic submittal of transportation projects to MDOT, but eventually to provide a mechanism for electronic approval of these projects by the department's federal partners and reduce the amount of time it currently takes (2-4 weeks).

Comparison of MI Transportation Plan Goals and MPO Long-Range Transportation Plan Goals

As part of the development of this report, MDOT staff conducted a review of existing MPO Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) goals and compared them to MI Transportation Plan goals:

1. **System Improvement:** Modernize and enhance the transportation system to improve mobility and accessibility.
2. **Efficient and Effective Operations:** Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the transportation system and transportation services, and expand MDOT's coordination and collaboration with partners.
3. **Safety and Security:** Continue to improve transportation safety and ensure the security of the transportation system.
4. **Stewardship:** Preserve transportation system investments, protect the environment, and utilize public resources in a responsible manner.

Since 2012, several MPOs have updated their LRTPs to 2040. Current plans for all thirteen MPOs are consistent with the MI Transportation Plan goals and MAP-21 and FAST requirements.² Long Range Transportation Plans for MPOs include projects and are required to be fiscally constrained based on forecasted revenue for the timeframe of the plan. The State Long Range Transportation Plan does not include specific projects, but serves as the transportation vision and policy document for the state of Michigan.

More cooperation and consistency is developing statewide around certain goals and objectives including: public involvement, as more opportunities to reach a larger audience have grown through social media; the development of performance measures; and more integration of multi-modal facilities as a result of Complete Streets policies to address connectivity and accessibility.

Air Quality Conformity

Transportation conformity is the link between air quality planning and transportation planning. Michigan's MPOs play a critical role in transportation conformity. Transportation conformity is a way to ensure that federal funding and approval are given to those transportation activities that are consistent with Michigan's air quality goal of meeting the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS), as stated in the State Implementation Plan (SIP). The Clean Air Act requires that transportation plans, programs, and projects in air quality nonattainment or maintenance areas that are funded or approved by the FHWA or the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) must be in conformity with the SIP.

Areas become nonattainment if classified as exceeding a NAAQS by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) based on local air monitoring data. Transportation has four NAAQS pollutants; ozone, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, and particulate matter (divided into less than 10 micrometers in diameter and less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter). A maintenance area is an area that was designated exceeding a NAAQS (nonattainment), but is currently meeting and maintaining the standard. MPOs in nonattainment or maintenance areas must demonstrate through the conformity process that implementation of a LRTP, TIP, or project will not cause new, or increase the frequency or severity, or delay attainment of the standard.

Michigan currently has two maintenance areas, both in SEMCOG. The whole seven county area is a maintenance area for annual and 24-hour particulate matter 2.5. Also portions of Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties form the maintenance area for carbon monoxide.

The EPA recently enacted new standards for air quality conformity. MDOT is working with our resource agencies and stakeholders to ensure that Michigan is in compliance with the new standards. The new ozone standard was listed in the Federal Register on October 26, 2015. The final rule is effective on December 28, 2015.

² The first Long Range Transportation Plan for the Midland Area Transportation Study is currently under development and will be completed in 2017.



As part of the conformity process Michigan’s MPOs facilitate interagency consultation work groups, which include MDOT, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, EPA, FHWA, and FTA, to enable collaborative discussions of regional and statewide air quality issues. For more information regarding air pollutants, refer to the [Environmental White Paper](#) of this plan.

Conclusions

Michigan’s long-standing regional and metropolitan-level transportation planning efforts are strong and continue to evolve. New federal and state legislation places a very strong emphasis on regional cooperation and program development in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. New automated tools are being developed to expedite transportation planning processes and facilitate timely approval of transportation projects. MDOT continues to monitor transportation funding and other proposed legislation to ensure that the state remains in compliance with federal and state rules and provides a 21st century integrated transportation system that will continue to move Michigan forward and support the state’s economic recovery for future generations.