



## MPO/RPA White Paper

The [MPO/RPA Technical Report](#) (November 2006) 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 the MI Transportation Plan (MITP). The MPO/RPA Technical Report also highlighted potential issues that were not addressed in MPO/RPA plans that may complement MITP in subsequent planning at the regional and metropolitan levels. This white paper provides an update to that report. Current information on individual MPOs may be found on the [Michigan Transportation Planning Association](#) Web site. Current information for individual RPAs can be found on the [Michigan Association of Regions](#) Web site.

### Metropolitan Planning Organizations

The U.S. Census Bureau designates a new list of Urbanized Areas (UZAs) every 10 years, following the conclusion of each decennial census. A UZA is a census-designated urban area with 50,000 residents or more. Federal law<sup>1</sup> requires that every UZA be represented by an MPO (23 USC 134(b) and 49 USC 5303(c)). MPOs 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), bringing additional responsibilities.

Based on the 2000 Census<sup>2</sup>, there are currently five TMAs in Michigan: Detroit, Grand Rapids, Flint, Lansing, and Ann Arbor. 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 notice on [Qualifying Urban Areas for 2010 Census](#). It is anticipated that the new MPO and TMAs will be announced in July 2012, however this may be delayed based on reauthorization (see footnote). A list containing all of Michigan's MPOs, based on the 2000 Census, is provided in Table 1. In addition to the 12 MPOs within Michigan, urbanized areas in South Bend, Indiana and Toledo, Ohio, include parts of Michigan at the state line.

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<sup>1</sup> As of June 12, 2012, the following note of information is on the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) [Census Urbanized Areas and MPO/TMA Designation](#) webpage: “\*Please note that USDOT is currently operating under an extension of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) which expired on September 30, 2009. While Congress works on a new reauthorization act, many of the provisions where UZAs come into play are under discussion and subject to change. As a result, it is difficult to say with certainty how the future transportation program will unfold. However, we recognize the need to continue providing guidance and direction to our State and MPO partners. FHWA will update this website and the FAQ when new legislation is enacted.”

<sup>2</sup> Published in the Federal Register/Vol. 67, No. 193/ Friday, October 4, 2002/ Notices  
<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2002-10-04/pdf/02-25277.pdf>



**Table 1: Metropolitan Planning Organizations**

Central City	MPO Name	Area (Sq. Miles)	2010 Census Population	Designation Year
Battle Creek	<a href="#">Battle Creek Area Transportation Study</a>	169	91,083	1974
Bay City	<a href="#">Bay County Area Transportation Study</a>	201	87,959	1974
Detroit Ann Arbor Port Huron	<a href="#">Southeast Michigan Council of Governments Washtenaw Area Transportation Study St. Clair County Transportation Study</a>	4,608	4,703,593	1974
Flint	<a href="#">Genesee Co. Metropolitan Planning Commission</a>	648	425,788	1963
Grand Rapids	<a href="#">Grand Valley Metro Council</a>	1,010	692,019	1990
Holland	<a href="#">Macatawa Area Coordinating Council</a>	212	119,125	1991
Jackson	<a href="#">Jackson Area Comprehensive Transportation Study</a>	723	160,253	1968
Kalamazoo	<a href="#">Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study</a>	579	250,331	1979
Lansing	<a href="#">Tri-County Regional Planning Commission</a>	1,712	464,036	1973
Muskegon	<a href="#">West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission</a>	657	225,014	1973
SW Michigan Commission Benton Harbor Niles	<a href="#">Southwest Michigan Planning Commission Twin Cities Area Transportation Study Niles/Buchanan/Cass Area Transportation Study</a>	338	127,004	1974
Saginaw	<a href="#">Saginaw Metropolitan Area Transportation Study</a>	259	150,334	1965

Sources: U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration website: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/midiv/midivmpo.htm> as of April 24, 2012, and <http://www.planning.dot.gov/mpo.asp> as of June 13, 2012.



## 2010 Census

The 2010 Census identified the Midland area as a new urbanized area (population of 59,014).<sup>3</sup> Transportation agencies are still operating under an extension of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2005 - Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). New re-authorization may change the planning provisions and MPO designations. Currently, Midland meets the MPO threshold. Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) staff members are meeting with Midland area leaders to investigate the area becoming an MPO. According to the current federal regulations, this process must be completed and approved by the Governor by March 2013 in order for the Midland area to be recognized as an MPO. Similarly, Kalamazoo has reached the TMA threshold (population 209,703) and is currently exploring becoming designated as the newest TMA in Michigan.<sup>4</sup>

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 Bay City Area Transportation Study (87,959 people) to the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (4.7 million people) based on current MPO boundaries.<sup>5</sup>

Michigan is the only state to lose population between 2000 and 2010. Despite a 0.6 percent drop in statewide population between the 2000 and 2010 decennial censuses, and an even larger 0.12 percent decline in population in Michigan's 12 MPOs, the percentage of Michigan's population that lives in an MPO area has actually increased from 76.03 percent in our 2006 report to 76.41 percent today (Table 2).

The impacts of the 2010 Census will likely mean a reduction in federal dollars for Michigan. Many federal programs, including transportation, use census data to distribute funds. This assumes that the current federal surface transportation law is not significantly changed during any future federal reauthorization. There is no definite date when a new surface transportation reauthorization may be enacted. However, when passed, the existing funding formulas and programs under SAFETEA-LU may change significantly.

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<sup>3</sup> Federal Register, Vol. 77, No. 59 / Tuesday, March 27, 2012 / Notices <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-03-27/pdf/2012-6903.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Schedule of Activities may be found at: [http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/census\\_issues/urbanized\\_areas\\_and\\_mpo\\_tma/schedule/](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/census_issues/urbanized_areas_and_mpo_tma/schedule/)

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Planning, Environment, Realty (HEP) HEPGIS website at: <http://152.122.41.86/hepgismaps11/ViewMap.aspx?map=MPOBoundaries|MPO 2010 Population#>



**Table 2: Metropolitan Planning Organizations Study Area Population**

<i>Metropolitan Planning Organization Study Area</i>	<i>2000 population</i>	<i>2010 Population</i>	<i>% Change</i>
Battle Creek Area Transportation Study	91,498	93,998	+ 2.23%
Bay City Area Transportation Study	87,322	88,346	+1.17%
Genesee County Metropolitan Planning Commission	436,141	425,790	-2.37%
Grand Valley Metropolitan Council	650,183	692,040	+6.44%
Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study	238,603	250,331	+4.92%
Macatawa Area Coordinating Council	112,467	119,125	+5.92%
Region 2 Planning Commission	158,422	160,248	+1.15%
Saginaw Metropolitan Area Transportation Study	159,102	200,169	+25.81%
Southeast Michigan Council of Governments	4,833,493	4,704,743	-2.66%
Southwestern Michigan Commission MPO	121,280	122,866	+0.94%
Tri-county Regional Planning Commission	447,728	464,036	+3.64%
Western Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission	220,196	225,014	+2.19%

Source: U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration  
Transportation Planning Capacity Building Web site:  
<http://www.planning.dot.gov/overview.asp>,  
As of June 13, 2012

### **Factors Affecting Regional Planning Efforts in Michigan**

As noted in our 2006 Technical Report, there are at least two factors that have an impact on regional planning efforts and agencies in Michigan: Home Rule and County Road Commissions. Since the publication of the 2006 Report, events in Michigan have lead to several proposals that may impact these factors. These are:

1. Home Rule in Michigan

The 2006 Report stated: “Home rule is closely guarded by local jurisdictions, as it grants them autonomy and control over local issues. On the other hand, the policy environment fostered by home rule greatly complicates voluntary efforts at the intergovernmental cooperation and regional planning level. Such issues as transportation funding, fire protection, land use, solid waste management and consolidation, and intergovernmental contracting are persistent concerns for many local officials. Problems in these areas frequently have to do with local control, either among local jurisdictions, or between locals and the state. The line between state and local authority is sometimes vague, and spheres of influence are often overlapping, ambiguous, and contested.”



The Governor of Michigan has initiated a number of budget (revenue-sharing) incentives and has proposed several legislative changes to allow for and encourage greater cooperation and sharing of services among local units of government.

## 2. County Road Commissions

The 2006 Report stated: “In many locations, particularly the rural areas, the county road commission’s process for identifying needs and allocating available funds to them is distinct from the regional planning process and is not linked to regionally-based transportation planning efforts”.

Wayne County abolished its road commission several years ago. In 2010, Macomb County eliminated its road commission under legislation connected to the county executive form of county government. Earlier this year, under new legislation designed to reduce the overall number of government agencies in Michigan, Ingham County has eliminated its road commission. Several other counties are considering making these changes.

### **Recent Improvements to Statewide Planning Efforts**

As a result of significant staffing changes and re-organization efforts at MDOT, the Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) throughout Michigan have been asked to assist MDOT in the transportation planning process for non-metropolitan areas beginning in FY 2012. The RPAs have been asked to work with counties to organize and coordinate rural task force meetings. These annual meetings are held statewide to develop and select local projects for transportation dollars and to assist MDOT in the public involvement and consultation process for non-metropolitan areas for the state trunkline program.

MDOT staff will continue to be actively involved in the rural planning and rural consultation process by overseeing the activities of the RPAs in this new role. MDOT staff will continue to manage the statewide rural program and ensure a fair and cooperative planning process is applied. Statewide guidelines have been developed in cooperation with MDOT’s planning partners and will be released in the summer of 2012.

### **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 MITP 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 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.

Table 3 provides summaries of this review on an MPO by MPO basis to the goals of the MITP. Based on this review, it is apparent that there is general consistency between the goals of MPOs and those of the state, as articulated in adopted local LRTPs. In only a few cases did an MPO's LRTP goals not articulate a state goal. For example, based on this review, neither the Jackson nor Saginaw MPO LRTPs expressly identified stewardship (as defined by MDOT) as a goal.

**Table 3: Overview of Michigan MPO LRTP Update Cycles and Consistency with MDOT**

<i>MPO</i>	<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Next Update</i>	<i>Consistent With</i>	
			<i>MI Transportation Plan Goals</i>	<i>Planning Factors</i>
SEMCOG	2005/2030	2014	yes	yes
Ann Arbor	2005/2030	2014	yes	yes
Port Huron	2005/2030	2014	yes	yes
Flint	2005/2030	2013	yes	yes
Saginaw	2002/2027	2012	yes	yes
Bay City	2002/2027	2012	yes	yes
Lansing	2005/2030	2014	yes	yes
Jackson	2000/2025	2013	yes	yes
Battle Creek	2000/2025	2015	yes	yes
Kalamazoo	2000/2025	2015	yes	yes
Grand Rapids	2004/2030	2015	yes	yes
Muskegon	2005/2030	2015	yes	yes
Holland	2004/2030	2015	yes	yes
Benton Harbor	2005/2030	2013	yes	yes
Niles	2005/2030	2013	yes	yes

Source: Michigan Department of Transportation, 2011

A few MPOs also identified regional goals as priorities that are currently not priorities for MDOT or the State. For example, the Lansing MPO highlighted parking/parking management, community impact mitigation, and airport development as key regional goals.

### **Air Quality Conformity**

Michigan's MPOs and RPAs also 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 goals, as embodied in the federally-required State Implementation Plan (SIP).

Federal law requires that transportation plans, programs, and projects in air quality non-attainment or maintenance areas (that are funded or approved by the FHWA or FTA) be in conformity with that state’s SIP through the process promulgated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The conformity requirement applies to MPOs, LRTPs, and Transportation Improvement Plan (TIPs), as well as the Statewide TIP.

In the 2006 Technical Report, several of Michigan’s MPOs and RPAs were identified as “Non-Attainment Areas.” Today, the entire State of Michigan has been classified as attainment/unclassifiable under the 2008 National Ambient Air Quality Standards for Ozone. Table 4 displays Michigan’s air quality areas and the corresponding MPOs/RPAs affected as of 2012.

**Table 4: Maintenance Areas in Michigan**

Maintenance Area for PM 2.5 and CO	MPO/RPA Affected
Livingston, Macomb, Oakland, St. Clair, Washtenaw, Wayne and Lenawee Counties	Southeast Michigan Council of Governments Washtenaw Area Transportation Study St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission

Source: Michigan Department of Transportation

Michigan’s MPOs and RPAs play a major role in convening and facilitating the work of Interagency Work Groups, which include MDOT and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality to discuss regional and statewide air quality issues, develop conformity options and strategies, and recommend projects for Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program funding.

### Conclusions

There is a great deal of regional and metropolitan-level transportation planning occurring throughout Michigan today. However, there remains a strong home rule tradition that presents a challenge to the execution of regional plans in a truly regional (inter-jurisdictional) manner. MDOT could assume a strong role in efforts, such as corridor and transit planning, that facilitate inter-jurisdictional efforts to address transportation needs and work closely with regional bodies that undertake these efforts.

In addition, MPOs, RPAs, and MDOT will work together to facilitate more engagement of the general public and other stakeholders in the metropolitan and statewide transportation planning processes.

Since 2006, MDOT has employed social media and cell phone technology and made various improvements to its Web site to involve more Michigan citizens in the



transportation planning process. Such engagement will lead to more consistency between priorities and needs identified through the MPO and statewide transportation planning processes and funding decisions made by the state, counties, cities, villages and transit providers.

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