

## Rural Task Force White Paper

### Michigan's Local Rural Transportation Program

The *Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991* (ISTEA) required, for the first time, the establishment of a statewide transportation planning process. It also required that federally-funded transportation projects be planned and approved through that process. Subsequent legislation, including *Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act of 2012* (MAP-21) and *Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act of 2015* continue the requirement for a statewide transportation planning process, and places even greater emphasis on the involvement of rural local officials in the planning process, including involvement in the selection of projects.

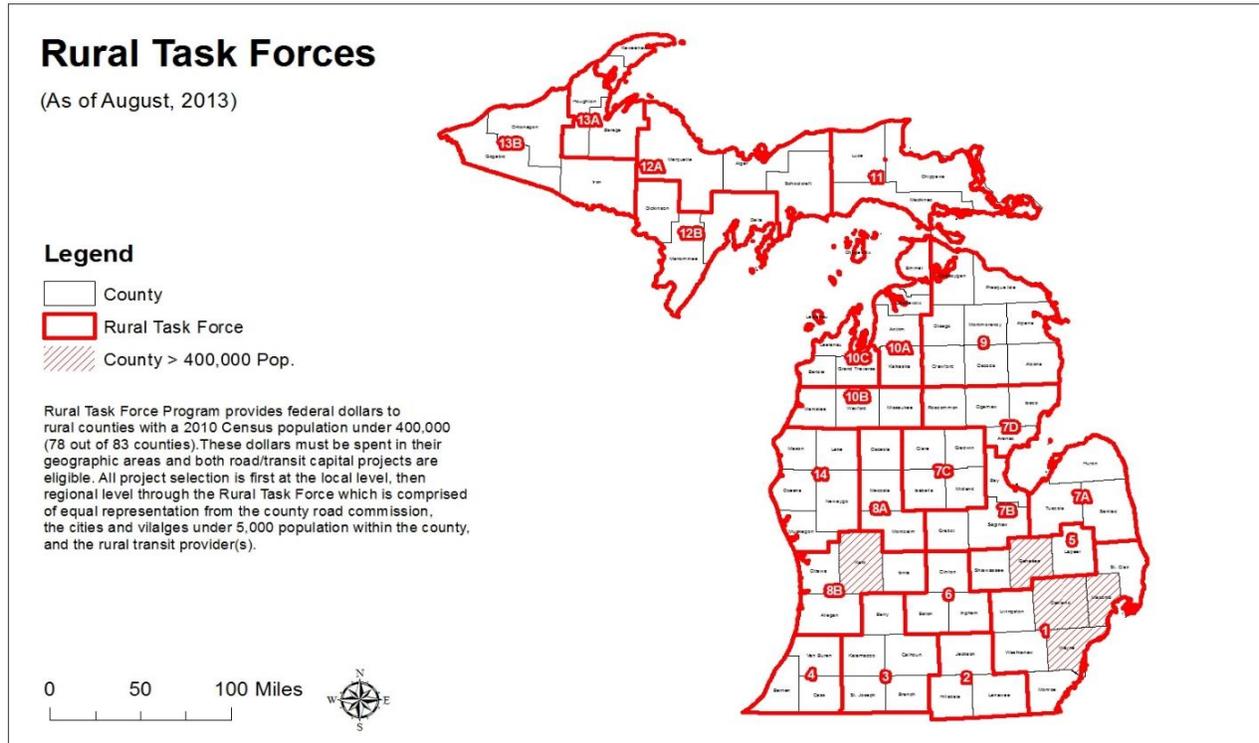
The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) rely on the statewide transportation planning process as the main mechanism for cooperative decision-making. However, they rely on each state to develop its own process for transportation planning and for making transportation decisions in non-metropolitan (rural) areas. In Michigan, the Local Rural Transportation Program (LRTP) is the mechanism to ensure that the statewide transportation planning process is being carried out in rural areas, and that MDOT's transportation planning and project decisions reflect the needs of Michigan's rural areas and contribute to regional economic growth and quality of life.

### Brief Background of the Local Rural Task Force Program

The Local Rural Transportation Program was originally established under Michigan Public Act 231 of 1987 to fund rural transportation projects and programs in counties with a population of 400,000 or less (78 out of 83 counties). There are currently 22 regional Rural Task Forces (RTFs) that cover the entire geographic area of Michigan, as shown in Map 1 below. Each regional RTF is composed of one representative from each county road commission within the region, an equal number of representatives from incorporated cities and villages with a population of 5,000 or less within the regional area, and one representative for each rural transit provider. The total statewide RTF program allocates about \$42 million in federal funds and \$7 million in state funds on an annual basis to these regional RTFs to fund transportation projects in their respective areas.

The RTF program recognizes that rural officials are the decision makers closest to rural transportation problems. Therefore, their involvement is critical for a cooperative and coordinated solution of rural transportation issues and problems.

**Map 1: Rural Task Forces in Michigan**



Source: Michigan Department of Transportation, Statewide Planning Section

### **Strengthening Transportation Planning Efforts in Rural Areas through the RTF Oversight Board and the Regional Planning Agencies**

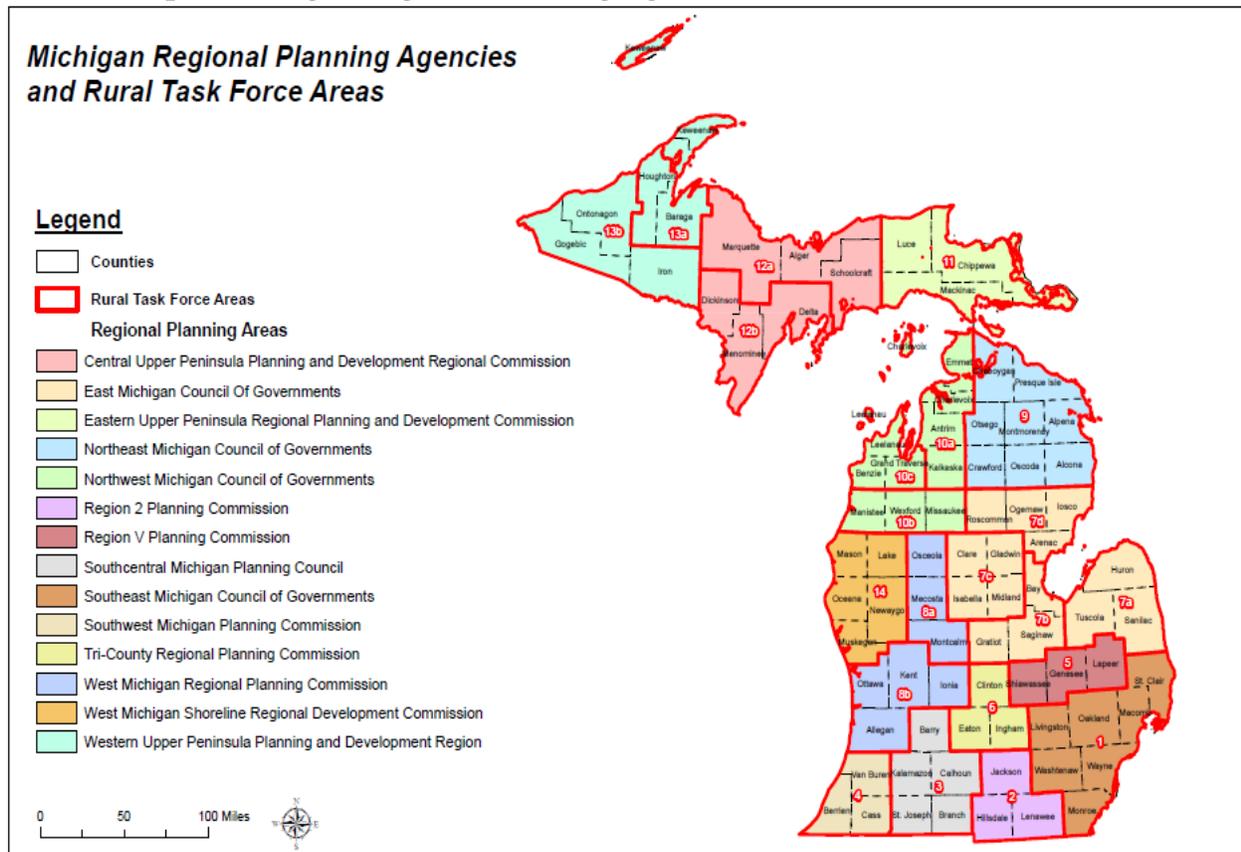
Since 2012, an even greater emphasis has been placed on strengthening the relationships with our transportation partners in rural areas. For the past three years, MDOT has been working diligently with representatives from each regional RTF and other stakeholders including the Federal Highway Administration and the Michigan Association of Regions to address concerns and issues related to the transportation planning process and funding in rural areas. A coalition known as the RTF 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 – 3 MDOT representatives, and 2 representatives each from the County Road Association of Michigan, the Michigan Municipal League, and the 2 Michigan Transit Associations. The board held its first meeting on 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 rural areas. Information on milestones may be found on the MDOT [Rural Task Force](#) webpage.

The board recently released a call for projects for fiscal years 2017-2020 for the development of the next State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

MDOT has also been contracting with the Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) since 2012 to assist in transportation planning efforts for the rural areas. Both the RPA and regional RTFs share the same boundaries (see Map 2 below). 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 to develop a seamless process for the non-metropolitan transportation planning process in our state. In addition, the board has finalized statewide guidelines and has reached a major milestone in addressing funding concerns from the local agencies.

**Map 2: Michigan Regional Planning Agencies and Rural Task Force Areas**



Source: Michigan Department of Transportation, Statewide Planning Section