

2026 Non-metropolitan Local Officials Consultation Plan



Michigan Department
of Transportation

Bureau of Transportation Planning

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Introduction

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) strives to serve and connect people, communities and the economy through transportation. The foundation of successfully and efficiently achieving this mission requires putting all Michiganders, regardless of where they live, at the forefront of planning activities. To ensure that all communities can equally and equitably participate in MDOT's planning processes, MDOT has produced this Non-metropolitan Local Officials Consultation Plan as an update to the 2021 Michigan Department of Transportation Process for Involving Local Officials in Rural Transportation Planning.

Informed and collaborative relationships with local officials and decision-makers across Michigan are critical to ensure a smooth and efficient planning process, known as the Continuing, Comprehensive and Cooperative (3C) Planning Process. The 3C Planning Process is the basis for MDOT's work across the state. This plan also satisfies the requirement identified in **23 CFR Part 450.210 (b)**:

The State shall have a documented process(es) for cooperating with nonmetropolitan local officials representing units of general purpose local government and/or local officials with responsibility for transportation that is separate and discrete from the public involvement process and provides an opportunity for their participation in the development of the long-range statewide transportation plan and the [State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)].

This plan update will identify how MDOT has created two broad avenues, Programmatic and Geographic, to consult with non-metropolitan local officials. This plan begins by introducing the STIP and State Long-Range Transportation Plan (SLRTP) and discusses how MDOT relies on the 3C planning process to ensure that these documents are effective, strong and collaborative. A discussion of Michigan's non-metropolitan regions and the communities these methods support follows. This plan concludes with an examination of the Programmatic and Geographic different methods mentioned earlier.

This plan will also discuss MDOT's outreach approach to the federally recognized, sovereign Native American tribal governments.



MDOT's STIP, State Long-Range Transportation Plan, Five-Year Program, and the 3C Planning Process

As described in 49 U.S.C. 5304(g), MDOT develops Michigan's STIP, which identifies programs and projects to which state and local transportation agencies have committed federal-aid funding. The STIP is not a single report; it is comprised of 16 separate documents: 15 individual metropolitan planning organization (MPO) transportation improvement programs (TIPs) and one statewide non-MPO STIP document. The process documented in this plan will focus on the non-MPO STIP. It is a formal, ongoing process that works with local jurisdictions and the public as outlined in the STIP [Public Participation Plan](#). It lists all federally funded road, bridge, transit and alternative transportation projects that will be awarded over a four-year period. As a living, fiscally constrained document, the Non-MPO STIP is updated six to 10 times per year through the federal amendment process to reflect the most up to date information for every project it includes. Proposed amendments to projects are posted on the [STIP website](#) for a minimum of two weeks to give local officials and members of the public the opportunity to provide comments on projects. The STIP website also features the [Michigan Transportation Planning Portal](#) (MTPP), a specialized online map where all local officials and members of the public can learn more about STIP projects and comment on them. In addition to these public comment periods and the MTPP, local officials have additional and specific opportunities to participate in project selection through MDOT's Small Urban and Rural Task Force programs, which are described later in this document.

[Michigan Mobility 2045](#) (MM2045) is the current SLRTP, a 25-year policy plan used to guide the development of Michigan's transportation system. It assesses both existing and future networks to guide projects, programs, processes and initiatives that will help Michigan and MDOT reach their long-term objectives. The long-range plan is updated every five years, and the goals, objectives and programs discussed in the SLRTP set the foundation for the fiscally constrained STIP. The Public and Stakeholder Participation Report outlines the opportunities that were presented to local officials during the development of the MM2045 plan. MDOT has started the process of updating MM2045, and the MM2050 Public Participation and Partner Engagement Plan outlines the strategy for local official participation in the current update effort. Both documents are available on the MM2045 website.

MDOT also develops a [Five-Year Transportation Program](#) (5YTP). This program outlines planned investments across all modes early in the planning process to support program delivery, encourage local coordination and provide opportunities for public engagement. Produced annually, each year's 5YTP call for projects gives local officials an opportunity to identify and comment on projects. The projects identified in the 5YTP are included within the STIP. Like the STIP, it utilizes the MTPP as an accessible, centralized website to host public comments.

Callout: The Michigan Transportation Planning Portal

The Michigan Transportation Portal (MTPP) is an online web mapping tool. It is a centralized site to solicit comments on MDOT's and local agencies' transportation projects. It hosts specific maps for the STIP and 5YTP, as well as the Rebuilding Michigan Program. The MTPP includes links for the public to download data included on the map. Each project point on the map includes information on the project, such as the project name, type of project and project year. There is a feedback button that allows users to comment on STIP projects at any time. Comments are routed to MDOT and the appropriate local agency based on the agency responsible for the individual project. This functionality is also available for the 5YTP while the comment period is open, with comments routed to the appropriate area within MDOT.

The 3C planning process is a planning process that is continuous, comprehensive and cooperative. It was first defined in the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962. A planning process is considered continuous when there are always opportunities to add, subtract or amend projects to a work program. It is comprehensive when the project considers the many different planning factors identified by the state and federal governments. It is cooperative when all planning partners, including all appropriate jurisdictions, organizations and the public, have a chance to consider the project.

More than half a century after the 1962 Act, the 3C planning process is still considered the bedrock of sound federal-aid planning. MDOT strives to maintain a continual process that thoughtfully and collaboratively develops and facilitates transportation projects that help achieve the department's mission of serving and connecting people, communities and the economy through transportation.

In metropolitan areas, MPOs are responsible for bringing together local officials representing units of local government and local officials with responsibility for transportation, the public, different agencies and MDOT to develop projects. In areas outside of the MPOs, MDOT has developed other programs and avenues to work with local officials to ensure an efficient and effective 3C planning process.



Non-metropolitan Areas in Michigan

Map 1: Non-metropolitan Areas in Michigan



As described in 23 CFR Part 450.210(b), this plan focuses on MDOT's programs that work with local elected and transportation officials who represent jurisdictions outside of areas served by an MPO. MPOs represent census urban areas with at least 50,000 people living in them; in these areas, MDOT engages in the 3C planning process through collaboration with MPOs. Michigan has 15 MPOs across the state. Non-MPO areas, the focus of this plan, are all other areas within the state (as shown in Map 1).

These non-MPO areas in Michigan are home to 3,615,656 people across 1,221 local jurisdictions, according to the 2020 census. This overall population is an increase of 41,752 people from the 2010 census, when the population was 3,573,904, an increase of just more than 1 percent. Table 1 displays the population estimates for non-MPO areas, as well as the change between the 2010 and 2020 census. It displays population by the MDOT programs used to facilitate STIP project selection for non-MPO areas: the Rural Task Force and Small Urban programs.

Table 1: Population and change in non-MPO areas, by MDOT program, 2010-2020, totals rounded to the nearest thousand (Source: 2020 U.S. census).

	Rural Task Force Jurisdictions Outside MPO Boundaries	Small Urban Jurisdictions Outside MPO Boundaries	Total Non-MPO Jurisdictions
2010	1,916,000	1,798,000	3,714,000
2020	1,829,000	1,779,000	3,616,000
Total Change	-87,000	-19,000	-98,000
Percent Change	-4.5%	-1.1%	-2.6%

Local Official Consultation Methods

This plan update has identified two broad avenues, Programmatic and Geographic, through which MDOT works with local officials to facilitate participation in Michigan’s STIP and the SLRTP. These different avenues are:

- Programmatic Methods: Includes both internal programs (such as the Rural Task Force, Small Urban Program, and Local Agency Program’s Local Bridge and Safety Programs) and regional planning agencies (RPAs), and external organizations with whom MDOT partners.
- Geographic methods: Focused on different forms of contact through MDOT’s comprehensive region system.

Programmatic Methods

Internal MDOT Programs

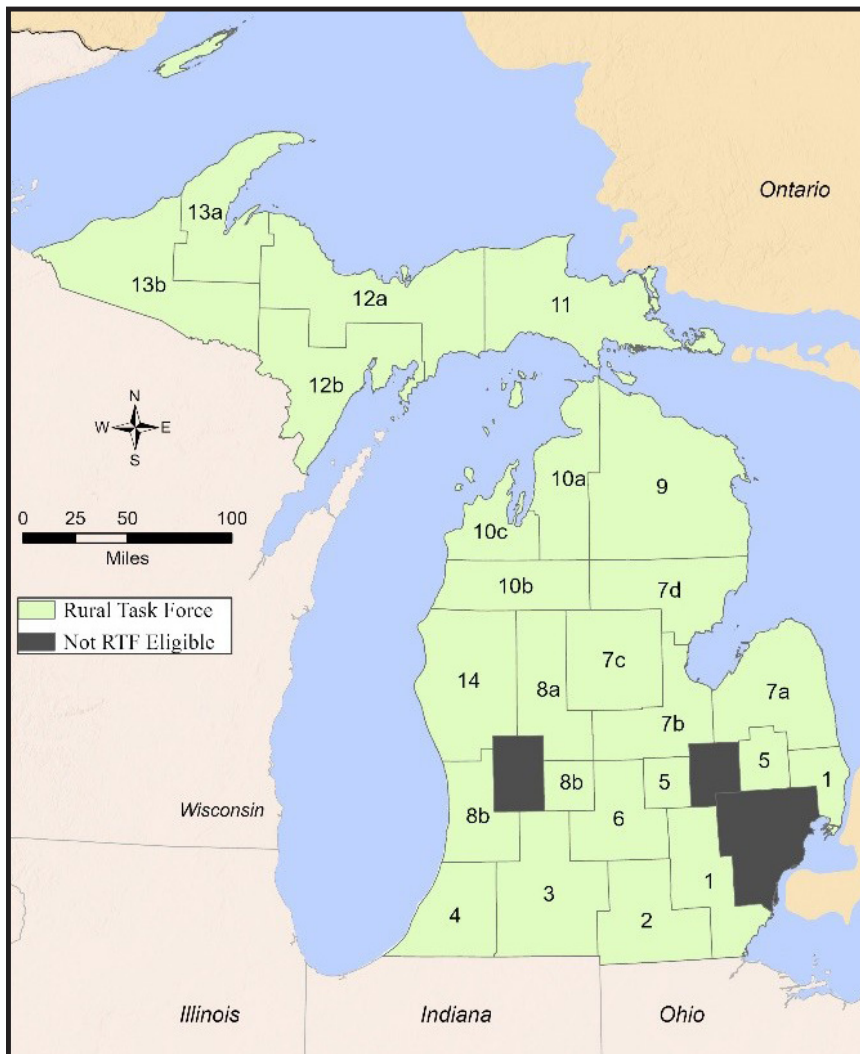
MDOT has created several programs to ensure non-metropolitan jurisdictions are continually able to plan transportation projects. These programs are focused on either jurisdiction size (Rural Task Force and Small Urban) or character (Local Bridge and Safety).

Rural Task Force

The **Rural Task Force** (RTF) program was established by the state Legislature in 1987 and provides federal funding for transportation projects and programs in counties with a population of 400,000 or fewer people (78 of Michigan’s 83 counties). There are 22 RTFs covering all of Michigan. The RTF process was developed to ensure that all transportation modes were represented in the rural planning process and that the highest transportation needs and best solutions for each RTF are determined by the people closest to the local transportation system. Policy for the RTF program is set by the RTF Program Advisory Board that consists of representatives from the County Road Association of Michigan (CRA), the Michigan Municipal League (MML), Michigan Association of Transportation Systems, Michigan Public Transit Association, and MDOT.

Local officials serve as RTF committee members; local officials who are not members are considered stakeholders and are notified of all RTF meetings. RTFs are responsible for selecting projects for the STIP that utilize federal rural funding sources within their boundary, which includes non-MPO areas.

Map 2: RTFs across Michigan



There are two levels of committees within the RTF program: local and regional. The local, county-level meetings mark the beginning of the cooperative project selection process during STIP development. The local county committee consists of three or more members:

- A representative of the county road commission.
- A representative from cities or villages with a population of less than 5,000.
- A representative of rural transit providers within the county.

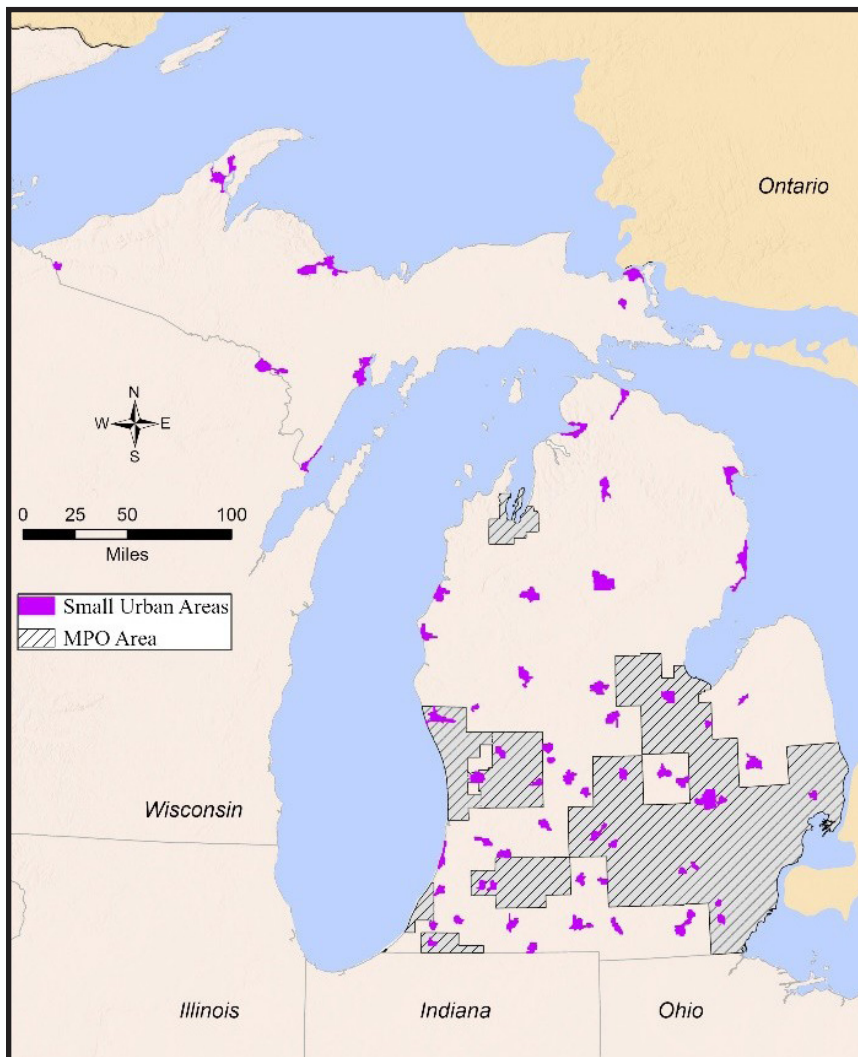
The local committees should balance the number of committee members between the three member agencies.

The regional RTF committee makes the final decisions on project selection and includes representatives of each county that comprises individual RTFs and includes:

- One representative from each county road commission within the RTF.
- One representative for all the rural transit providers in each county.
- One representative from incorporated cities and villages with a population of less than 5,000 people for each county.

RTFs are MDOT's local, rural vehicle for fulfilling the 3C planning process. MDOT has an RTF program manager who works closely with each RTF to ensure the 3C planning process runs smoothly. The RTF program works closely with RPAs to facilitate RTF committee meetings, monitor fiscal constraint and distribute information to non-MPO areas, such as funding calls or training opportunities. The RTF program operates a listserv to communicate with non-metropolitan officials electronically, which includes sending out monthly RTF program project status reports. The RTF program holds virtual monthly meetings and additional virtual and in-person trainings to ensure non-metropolitan officials and transportation decision-makers are aware of transportation planning processes and opportunities, as well as having an opportunity to communicate with MDOT program managers.

Map 3: Small Urban areas in Michigan



Small Urban

The **Small Urban Program** was developed to serve communities with population size between 5,000 and 50,000. There are currently 65 small urban areas in Michigan, which is determined by 2020 U.S. census urban area designation. To facilitate the 3C planning process with these communities, the Small Urban Program relies on RPAs to facilitate meetings and communication. Local officials serve as Small Urban committee members; local officials who are not members are considered stakeholders and are notified of small urban committee meetings. The small urban committees consist of:

- A representative from each city or village within the small urban area.
- A representative from a local transit agency.
- A representative from the county road commission.

MDOT's Small Urban Program manager works in concert with the RPAs and small urban committees to ensure that non-metropolitan officials can participate

in MDOT's planning process. The Small Urban Program maintains regular contact with RPAs and small urban committees through monthly reports and updates sent out via the program's listserv, including instructions to the RPA to share the news with their local officials contact lists.

Local Agency Bridge and Safety Programs

MDOT's Local Agency Program works with local jurisdictions in a variety of ways to help manage federal and state aid programs. Although most of their work comes during project development, the program has two subprograms (Local Agency Bridge and Local Agency Safety) that work with local officials to plan future transportation projects.

The Local Agency Bridge program was created by the state Legislature. The program manager works closely with external MDOT partners to notify local jurisdictions of funding opportunities. A regional council, comprised of members from CRA and MML, oversees administration and scoring for projects. It relies on an advisory board also comprised of local officials to set policy and provide oversight. The program manager uses a listserv and email to communicate with local officials on this annual program.

The Local Agency Safety program also utilizes CRA and MML to distribute information about this annual program. The program manager sends information to both partners, who then work with local officials and decision-makers.

Active Transportation Projects

MDOT staff work with local and regional partners to create Regional Active Transportation plans. Each MDOT region has a plan, which is updated on a rolling basis. During plan development, MDOT staff will work with local and regional partners, including non-metropolitan local officials representing units of general-purpose local government and/or local officials with responsibility for transportation, to identify projects to integrate into MDOT's transportation plans.

External Program Partners

Non-metropolitan area characteristics vary across the state. For instance, the Upper Peninsula differs in many ways from non-metropolitan areas in the south-central Lower Peninsula. Therefore, the method to engage planning partners in the 3C process may differ, as well. However, the following are several programs and organizations that MDOT region staff use in many situations to regularly inform and work with non-metropolitan local officials across the state.

Regional Planning Agencies

RPAs are multi-county organizations that were created via state legislation to aid in regional planning and economic development. They are a form of local government voluntarily created by their members, which are largely representative of local governments in the region; membership also includes road authorities, nonprofit organizations and representatives of the business community in many regions. The [*Michigan Association of Regions*](#) (MAR) provides a centralized policy board comprised of locally elected and appointed officials. In addition to MAR's policy board, an executive director's committee supports local officials to understand, develop and collaborate on regional policy issues, programs, education and research, among other activities.

Although the RPA has a much larger range of work outside of transportation, MDOT maintains a yearly contract with the RPAs to assist with facilitation of the RTF and Small Urban programs, providing technical assistance to MDOT and local governments, compilation of federally required data, and ensuring the 3C process is followed. RPAs play a key role in the non-metropolitan local officials consultation process by maintaining an up-to-date database of local contacts, to which they distribute information that includes opportunities for comment on the STIP, MDOT's 5YTP and the SLRTP. MDOT staff attend monthly MAR meetings to share relevant information, get feedback and maintain a high level of coordination with the RPAs.

Michigan Municipal League

A statewide association of local governments, the [*Michigan Municipal League*](#) (MML) represents hundreds of local jurisdictions across the state. Their representatives often receive direct MDOT communication, and they participate in transportation decision-making programs, such as sitting on MDOT's Rural Task Force Policy Advisory Board or appointing members to assist in Local Agency Project selection.

County Road Association of Michigan

The [*County Road Association of Michigan*](#) (CRA) is an organization of county road agencies that focuses on working with local jurisdictions and MDOT to achieve a high-quality transportation system. Similar to the MML, CRA both distributes and coordinates project information for members, while also appointing board members for different MDOT programs.

Utilizing these organizations as channels for working with local officials and transportation decision-makers does more than just integrate local perspective and knowledge into MDOT's transportation planning. These organizations act as both formal and informal foundations of relationship building that helps direct new and seasoned officials and decision-makers toward MDOT's transportation planning programs. As local officials and decision-makers change, these organizations maintain lines of communications and act as platforms to ensure that non-metropolitan officials always have two-way communication with MDOT to plan transportation projects.

Geographic Outreach Methods

MDOT divides the state into seven regions in order to deliver better, context-sensitive support to the array of people and infrastructure across the state. Region and Transportation Service Center (TSC) contact information can be found on the [MDOT Regions](#) website. Within each MDOT region, several TSCs offer local expertise for the public and local officials to engage with regarding planning issues. Each MDOT region office has a regional planner and planning team, while each TSC has managers and engineers who work closely with the region office on projects and planning processes.

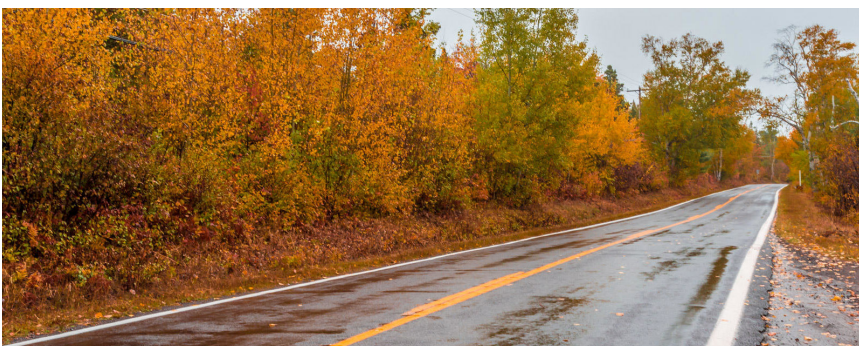
Recognizing the different needs across Michigan, MDOT region staff identify their preferred, locally influenced methods to integrate local officials into planning and project development processes.

Map 4: MDOT Regions



MDOT region planners attend RTF committee meetings to give updates on MDOT projects and receive feedback from the local officials who attend those meetings. Additionally, projects that are currently in development give MDOT region staff an opportunity to maintain open lines of communication with local officials, which may result in presentations to officials and decision-makers. TSCs often maintain current databases of local officials. Combined with contact lists maintained by RPAs, MDOT has access to a thorough directory of local officials across Michigan. MDOT region office staff also work through other official groups, such as active transportation or corridor committees, which hold regularly scheduled meetings and give MDOT staff other contact points to discuss planning processes and future and current projects. Region planners may also attend regularly scheduled events (such as township meetings) or one-off events (such as project groundbreakings) to interact with local officials.

Some regions also hold their own annual meetings to consult and coordinate with local officials. This has occurred both in person and virtually; some regions include a packet of information for local officials that discusses MDOT planning, projects and information on transportation planning processes.



Callout: Region Spotlight

Each MDOT region is different, and Michigan's non-metropolitan areas differ across the state. MDOT's Superior Region, which does not contain any metropolitan areas, has identified several unique ways to work with their non-local officials and ensure they have effective ways to participate in project selection and comment on federally funded transportation projects. The region holds an annual meeting every spring for local elected officials and tribal governments. Superior Region staff coordinate with the three RPAs in the UP to help organize this meeting and send out meeting notifications to elected officials and tribal governments. At the meeting, a packet of information on upcoming projects is distributed to attendees, which is also available at the region's TSCs.

The region utilizes MDOT's programs and transportation groups to develop relationships with local officials, as well. They attend all RTF meetings and utilize public participation opportunities to meet with local officials to educate them on MDOT projects and programs. The Superior Region staff also regularly attends meetings with other groups throughout the year, where they can answer questions on current or future projects, as well as provide a name and contact information to ensure that future questions can be answered. These relationships help support local officials throughout their tenure, as well as develop local knowledge about how MDOT's STIP and SLRTP processes operate.

Map 5: Governmental centers of federally recognized tribal nations



Tribal Participation

In addition to developing Programmatic and Geographic Avenues to consult non-metropolitan local official consultation, MDOT has also developed separate consultation strategies to communicate with federally recognized tribal nations.

The state of Michigan is home to 12 federally recognized Native American tribes, which have special status under federal law. This includes tribal sovereignty and the ability to exercise jurisdiction in their territory. Tribal governments develop their own long-range transportation plans, as well as annual tribal TIPs, which are included in MDOT's STIP and posted on the STIP website.

In addition to including the tribal TIPs in the STIP, MDOT staff work alongside tribal officials in other ways. The Michigan Governor's Office facilitates a monthly tribal leadership call that MDOT staff participate in. MDOT staff work frequently with tribal officials on MDOT projects that

require Section 106 reviews. Regional staff also often invite tribal leaders to any regional meetings that they hold. MDOT is currently building tribal nations a portal to see projects that are in the pipeline, and where they can share confidential comments with MDOT.

Summary

Ensuring an effective 3C planning process is fundamental to MDOT's goals. MDOT strives to meaningfully work with all local officials across Michigan on the collaboration, development and implementation of transportation infrastructure. Through MDOT's many programs and relationships with external organizations, MDOT ensures that local officials in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas have the opportunity to participate in the STIP and SLRTP processes.

Notes

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