

# METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS

By William “Bill” E. Conerly, PE



Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) provide a mechanism to translate local transportation priorities into state and federal funds. The MPO is a federally-mandated and federally-funded transportation policy-making organization consisting of local government and governmental transportation authority representatives. In Florida, they are established under Florida Statute 339.175 and are intended to encourage and promote the safe and efficient management, operation and development of surface transportation systems that serve people and freight mobility needs. They are also meant to foster economic growth and development within urbanized areas of the State while minimizing transportation-related fuel consumption, air pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. This is accomplished through an organized planning process led by the MPO.

MPOs develop transportation plans and programs in cooperation with state and public transit operators. The plans and programs are intended to provide for the development and integrated management and operation of transportation systems and facilities that include pedestrian walkways, bicycle transportation systems, and facilities that will function as an intermodal transportation system for the metropolitan area.

The process for developing such plans and programs is designed to give consideration to all modes of transportation, and be continuing, cooperative and comprehensive, to the degree appropriate, based on the complexity of the transportation problems addressed. To ensure that the process is integrated with the statewide planning process, MPOs develop plans and programs that identify transportation facilities that should function as an integrated metropolitan transportation system, giving emphasis to facilities that serve important national, state and regional transportation functions.

Federal law requires the Governor and local governments to designate an MPO to serve each urbanized area with a population of more than 50,000. This does not, however, require that an individual MPO be designated for each such area. The Governor and local governments representing at least 75% of the population of an urbanized area can enact an interlocal agreement for an MPO to serve more than one urban area. Currently, in Florida, we have 26 MPOs. Each MPO is considered separate from the state or the governing body of a local government that is represented on the governing board. Each MPO's boundary includes the existing urbanized area it serves and the contiguous area expected to become urbanized in the next 20-year forecast period.

The five core functions of an MPO are:

1. Establish and manage a fair and impartial setting for effective regional decision-making in the metropolitan area.
2. Evaluate transportation alternatives, scaled to the size and complexity of the region, the nature of its transportation issues, and the realistically available options.
3. Develop and update a fiscally-constrained, Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for the metropolitan area addressing a planning horizon of at least twenty years that fosters:
  - mobility and access for people and goods;
  - efficient system performance and preservation; and
  - quality of life.
4. Develop a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) that is a fiscally-constrained program based on the LRTP and designed to serve the area's goals while using spending, regulating, operating, management, and financial tools.
5. Involve the general public and all significantly affected sub-groups in the four essential functions listed above.

When companies are considering new locations for job creation in major metropolitan areas, they eventually come to the question of what kind of transportation system a community has and how their employees will get to work. Whether it is maintaining and expanding our existing roadway network, or planning for the expansion of our rail systems to include both high-speed and light rail, Florida's MPOs are a critical component contributing to our quality of life.

*Bill Conerly is a Senior Project Manager in Chastain-Skillman's Tampa Office. He has over twenty years of technical experience and thirteen years as a licensed engineer. Bill's work experiences include the design, permitting and construction management of residential, commercial and institutional projects. In addition, he serves as the District Engineer for several Community Development Districts and was recently appointed to the Sarasota Manatee MPO's Citizen's Action Committee (CAC). He can be reached at (813) 621-9229 or [wconerly@chastainkillman.com](mailto:wconerly@chastainkillman.com).*