

Formal Documentation of the Iowa Department of Transportation's Cooperative Process for Non- Metropolitan Local Officials

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Introduction

The federal transportation authorization and subsequent planning guidance in [23 CFR Part 450](#) requires that each state must obtain comments concerning the effectiveness of the current process for cooperating with non-metropolitan local officials in their statewide planning process. This document summarizes Iowa's process(es) for cooperating with and considering the concerns of non-metropolitan local officials during the development of our [Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan \(SLRTP\)](#) and the [Statewide Transportation Improvement Program \(STIP\)](#). This process must be "separate and discrete" from Iowa's general public involvement process.

Regulatory citation [23 CFR §450.210\(b\)](#) for this process states:

The State shall provide for nonmetropolitan local official participation in the development of the long-range statewide transportation plan and the STIP. 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 STIP. Although the FHWA and the FTA shall not review or approve this cooperative process(es), the State shall provide copies of the process document(s) to the FHWA and the FTA for informational purposes.

At least once every five years, the State shall review and solicit comments from nonmetropolitan local officials and other interested parties for a period of not less than 60 calendar days regarding the effectiveness of the cooperative process and any proposed changes. The State shall direct a specific request for comments to the State association of counties, State municipal league, regional planning agencies, or directly to nonmetropolitan local officials.

The State, at its discretion, shall be responsible for determining whether to adopt any proposed changes. If a proposed change is not adopted, the State shall make publicly available its reasons for not accepting the proposed change, including notification to nonmetropolitan local officials or their associations.

A non-metropolitan area includes all areas of the state that are located outside one of Iowa's nine metropolitan planning areas (Ames, Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs, Davenport, Des Moines, Dubuque, Iowa City, Sioux City, and Waterloo).

Non-metropolitan local officials are the elected and appointed officials of general purpose local government in non-metropolitan areas with jurisdiction and responsibility for transportation. In Iowa, elected and appointed local officials are directly involved through the 18 regional planning affiliations (RPA).

The Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT) will cooperate and coordinate with non-metropolitan local officials in accordance with the established process (described within this document) prior to formal adoption of the SLRTP and STIP. The Iowa DOT will provide periodic updates and consider the views and concerns of the non-metropolitan local officials.

Federal requirements stipulate that the public has a 60-day period in which to review and comment on the State's method of cooperating with nonmetropolitan local officials. This comment period was initiated on October 6, 2025 and concluded on December 5, 2025. The Iowa DOT distributed a detailed description of the process throughout the state as follows:

- Press release to all Iowa DOT media contacts.
- Sent a copy of the process for review to:
 - o All 18 Iowa regional planning affiliations for review and distribution
 - o Iowa cities and counties through the Iowa DOT Local Systems Bureau online mailing list
 - o Iowa League of Cities
 - o Iowa State Association of Counties
- Discussed the process at the November 2025 MPO/RPA Quarterly Meeting

The Iowa DOT will address comments received during the comment period deadline. This document records the Iowa DOT formal process for cooperating with nonmetropolitan local officials.

Background

In 1991, President Bush signed the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) which eliminated the distinct system level/jurisdictional Federal-aid primary (FAP), Federal-aid secondary (FAS), and Federal-aid urban systems (FAUS) funding programs. Congress established a new flexible program (Surface Transportation Program (STP)) with set-asides and sub-state distribution requirements to replace FAP, FAS, and FAUS. However, Congress intentionally did not allocate separate pots of money by jurisdiction. Congress appropriated these STP funds to be administered by each state, along with the flexibility to establish their own specific in-state planning/programming procedures.

The Iowa Transportation Commission (Commission) saw a unique opportunity to foster partnerships and wanted a regional planning process that was flexible, participatory, inclusive of non-traditional partners, proactive, and would provide better information to decision makers. The Commission used the framework that was already in place – annual Regional Transit Development Plans were prepared for the Iowa DOT by 16 existing regional agencies. The Commission designated these planning regions as the initial basis for organization. Local officials representing the cities and counties were provided the opportunity to choose from three options: remain in their current planning region, join with another region, or join with other counties to form a new regional planning affiliation for transportation purposes. Counties took advantage of each option, resulting in 18 RPAs to conduct transportation planning and programming.

The Commission focused on flexibility in the execution of this regional transportation planning process. The Iowa State Association of Counties, League of Iowa Municipalities, and Iowa DOT staff presented a consensus recommendation to the Commission. The Commission formally adopted Iowa's State/Regional Transportation Planning Partnership (which directly involves elected and appointed local officials) in 1993.

With each subsequent federal transportation bill (TEA-21, SAFETEA-LU, MAP-21, FAST Act & IIJA), the Commission has approved using the same regional transportation planning and funding distribution process as had been used under ISTEA.

Federal and state planning and research funds are distributed to Iowa's 18 RPAs for planning and programming purposes. These 18 RPAs cover all non-metropolitan areas of the state.

Cooperative Process

Elected and appointed local officials: Elected and appointed local officials have continual opportunities to be consulted on statewide transportation planning through their involvement in RPAs. Each RPA is required to have a Policy Board that includes local elected officials for the counties and cities within the region. These local elected and appointed officials are responsible for approving all plans and programs. All RPAs also have Technical Committees, which are made up of professional staff, including engineers and planners, from member cities and counties.

The Meskwaki Indian Settlement: The Meskwaki Indian Settlement, like any city or county within Region 6, is invited and encouraged to attend Region Six Resource Partners meetings. They are also mailed application materials for Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) and Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funds.

Iowa DOT Districts: The Iowa DOT has seven District Transportation Planners who interact daily with various elected and appointed local officials. In addition, these planners also represent the Iowa DOT at meetings of the 18 individual RPA policy boards (which are comprised of elected and appointed local officials) and technical committees. Through the RPAs, the District Transportation Planners continually keep the elected and appointed local officials informed as to the progress in developing the SLRTP and the STIP.

Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan: The RPAs will be solicited for input during development of the SLRTP. Additionally, the draft SLRTP will be widely distributed throughout the state for comment. Each RPA Policy Board (comprised of elected and appointed local officials) will be directly contacted concerning their comments on the draft plan.

Statewide Transportation Improvement Program: Annually, the draft STIP is widely distributed throughout the state for comments. Each RPA (local officials) is directly contacted concerning their comments on the STIP.

Quarterly Meetings: The Iowa DOT holds quarterly meetings with the 18 RPAs as a group in Ames (or virtually, as needed). These meetings are held to discuss a wide array of planning issues, particularly the development of RPA long-range transportation plans and transportation improvement programs, the STIP, and the SLRTP.

Transportation Planning Work Programs: Annually, each RPA Policy Board (comprised of elected and appointed local officials) approves a transportation planning work program that outlines their proposed work for the year related to updating their long-range transportation plan, development of their TIP, implementation of their public participation plan, and other transportation planning activities.

Iowa Transportation Commission: Each year four of twelve Commission meetings are held at locations around the state to provide public input opportunities. Local elected and appointed officials regularly participate in these meetings and discuss transportation planning/programming issues.

Public Input: Various public forums have been held and will continue to be facilitated or sponsored by the Iowa DOT. Elected officials such as mayors, council members, and county supervisors are specifically invited to participate in these forums. Notice will also be provided to RPA staff.

Iowa Association of Councils of Governments (ICOG): The Iowa DOT is typically represented at the monthly ICOG meetings and is available to provide updates and answer questions. Any relevant transportation-related information from these meetings will be transmitted to RPA staff.

Iowa DOT central complex staff: Staff members are in communication with elected and appointed local officials daily to address numerous transportation planning and programming issues. Additionally, continual communications are occurring between the Iowa DOT and the RPAs regarding issues such as transportation planning guidance, document/process reviews, training needs, funding and legislative updates, modal planning efforts, Census and data issues, and RPA reviews.

Results

The Iowa DOT cooperates, where appropriate, with non-metropolitan area local officials from the regional planning affiliations, local county and municipal governments, tribes, and public on a continuing basis concerning statewide transportation planning and programming, as mandated in 23 CFR Part 450. Through this cooperative effort, the Iowa DOT is able to give non-metropolitan local officials the opportunity to participate in the development of the SLRTP and STIP.