

## History of Transportation Planning In Iowa

The State of Iowa has 27 regional organizations that are responsible for various types of planning functions, including but not limited to transportation. Many of these organizations are unique in their own respect. Some of the more common names for these organizations are metropolitan planning organizations (MPO), regional planning affiliations (RPA) and council of governments (COG). These organizations are associations of local governments established by federal or state law with the goals of strengthening local units of government and promoting intergovernmental cooperation. These planning agencies provide assistance to local member governments related to transportation planning, economic development, operation of transit systems, zoning, human services, housing, and environmental concerns.

Although the practice of transportation planning predates World War II, the requirements were actually set forth in the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962, which established the federal requirement for urban transportation planning due in part to the construction of the Interstate Highway System and the planning of routes through and around urban areas. This Act required, as a condition attached to federal transportation financial assistance, that transportation projects in urbanized areas of 50,000 or more in population be based on a continuing, comprehensive and cooperative planning process (3-C planning process).

By 1965, all existing urbanized areas (more than 50,000 in population) had an urban transportation planning process. Prior to 1965, qualified planning agencies were lacking in many urban areas. Therefore, the Bureau of Public Roads (predecessor to the Federal Highway Administration) required the creation of planning agencies or organizational arrangements that would be capable of carrying out the required planning process. Hence, MPOs quickly came into being because of the growing momentum of the highway program and the federal financing of the planning process.

In February 1968, Iowa Governor Harold Hughes for the first time officially recognized the concept of area wide, regionally oriented planning through the delineation of 16 regional transportation planning regions or COG. The regions were designed to address existing and future needs for:

- A common geographic base for planning, coordination and administration of state services and programs.
- Identification of common issues, goals and opportunities.
- A base for better allocation of local resources.

In addition to the 16 COGs, MPOs were formed in the state's then seven metropolitan areas with 50,000 or more population in response to the Federal-aid Highway Act of 1964. The MPOs in Iowa are the transportation policy-making/decision-making organizations, which include representatives from local government and transportation stakeholders within their metropolitan planning boundary.

The Federal-aid Act of 1973 required the creation of an MPO for all urbanized areas with a population of 50,000 or greater. These agencies were created to ensure that existing and future transportation projects and programs were based on the 3-C planning process.

In 1974, the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) is formed from the Iowa Highway Commission and inherits the Commission's six districts.

In 1977, the Iowa DOT adopts Transplan 77, a transportation plan that proposes the designation of a single administrative agency for transit in each of the 16 Governor's Planning Regions. The Iowa DOT begins contracting with the local COGs or regional planning commission within each of the Governor's Planning Regions to prepare annual regional transit development plans.

In 1982, Iowa added another MPO to the state due to the Iowa City region's population surpassing the 50,000 threshold based upon 1980 census data.

In 1984, Chapter 601J of the Code of Iowa is amended to require counties within each of the Governor's Planning Regions to designate a regional transit system to serve areas not served by urban transit systems. The Iowa DOT is allowed to approve modified boundaries-legitimizing two variations: 1) Polk County separated from Region 11; and 2) Clinton and Cedar County shifted from Region 8 to Region 9.

In 1990, Chapter 28H of the Code of Iowa is adopted codifying 16 COGs that are given the responsibility to provide planning services to the region and to inventory and prepare needs assessments of infrastructure within the region.

## **Landmark transportation legislation**

On Dec. 18, 1991, President George H. Bush signed the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). This legislation introduced new, nontraditional partners into the transportation planning and programming process. Requiring greater effort on the part of the states, cities and counties to provide for public involvement and intergovernmental cooperation. ISTEA required a statewide long-range plan to guide the development of transportation facilities that will function as an integrated and coordinated transportation system.

Statewide transportation planning included not only state-operated transportation facilities, but also a variety of transportation issues of regional or local significance. ISTEA mandated states to establish a transportation planning process to serve areas outside the MPOs and transportation management areas (TMA). This federal-mandated process provided a mechanism to access federal-aid highway and transit funding and cooperative decision-making. Within these broad requirements, each state has developed its own transportation planning process. There are basically three types of rural transportation planning:

- State-led planning approach—rural transportation planning, project prioritization and funding is led primarily by the state DOT.
- Local- or regional-led planning approach—rural transportation planning, project prioritization and funding is undertaken primarily by local and/or regional planning agencies.
- Combination or mixed planning approach—the state DOT leads planning for certain systems or categories of funding, and regional or local agencies conduct transportation planning, project prioritization, and allocate certain categories of funds.

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century further codified the transportation planning process by establishing guidelines and minimum standards that all agencies engaged in transportation planning shall follow. These minimum standards can be found in chapter 23 CFR part 450 Planning Assistance and Standards.

Federal code identifies the planning process coordination requirements and products necessary by those participating in the planning process. While an MPO's planning mission is further defined in 23 CFR part 450, the RPA process is not specifically addressed. However, it is addressed in the Iowa statewide planning requirements and dictated by the Iowa DOT.