

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

### 1. How can the prioritization process be improved?

MPO #1: There could be fewer projects to submit, possibly a top 3 or 300 points per county. The process has improved significantly from the beginning. The control point aspect of prioritization is much better than a ranking of the top 25 projects. I think the BOT should establish a policy for funding the top 2 or 3 projects in the TIP based on the SPOT rankings.

MPO #2: The MPO would like to commend the General Assembly for their support and acceptance of the North Carolina Department of Transportation Prioritization Process. The MPO has been working with NCDOT since its inception to prioritize and implement transportation projects. The Statewide Prioritization process (SPOT) has been a major step forward for the State in identifying, evaluating, and prioritizing transportation needs across North Carolina. This cooperative effort has resulted in more projects being delivered than ever before. The process is an ongoing and cooperative one that includes consultation and participation from the MPOs and local elected officials. This has provided a way for NCDOT and the MPOs to continue to improve the process. The SPOT process continues to evolve and the MPOs have noted marked progress in the right direction with the initial Statewide Prioritization, "SPOT 1.0" and the still ongoing "SPOT 2.0" process. Our member governments and elected officials have provided positive feedback to staff and directed the MPO staff to continue to engage in the cooperative process with our state partners. North Carolina's transportation partners, NCDOT, the MPOs, and the General Assembly have made enormous progress and we encourage all of the partners to continue to move the process forward in the same collaborative and cooperative fashion that has been successful in recent years.

MPO #3: The MPO is supportive of many of the recent reforms in the TIP development process. The MPO, like many other MPOs, has had a quantitative methodology for developing project priorities for many years and we think it is a positive step for the State to be incorporating a similar TIP development process. We support the effort to make transportation funding decisions based on quantitative needs based metrics that reflect the deficiencies of the current system and that the methodology and decision making process be transparent and openly shared with the public and stakeholders.

The MPO is especially supportive of the way that the prioritization process has been developed. There were multiple opportunities for MPO input into the process. NCDOT involved stakeholder groups that included representatives from MPOs and RPOs. The data and scoring have been shared openly with stakeholders and we were given many opportunities to review and provide feedback. The staff of NCDOT's Strategic Planning Office of Transportation (SPOT) have also been very accessible and willing to explain the process and answer questions.

While we are overall supportive, there is some room for improvement. We believe that MPOs should be primarily responsible for the prioritization process within our jurisdiction with NCDOT as a key partner. As described in this survey, by federal law, MPOs are required to have extensive public participation processes and involvement from local elected officials and staff; we are responsible for maintaining a travel demand model for our area and responsible

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

for developing a financially constrained long range plan; and we undergo a federal certification review every four years by federal agencies to ensure that we are meeting all of the requirements. MPOs are best able to determine the priorities of the local area. The prioritization process should reflect this. MPOs should have more latitude to make decisions that are best for our area and reflective of our goals.

MPO #4: Generally it works well. The call for projects not in the other plans leads to some confusion. Once the prioritized lists go to the NCDOT programming unit, they do not always find ways to match available funding to top priorities; this leads to a perception that the prioritization process was a moot exercise and frustration at the local level. More flexible funding sources would be helpful so that the programming unit can find ways to make the priorities more likely to find funds.

MPO #5: The Strategic Planning Office of Transportation (SPOT) is on the right track and the prioritization process can be improved by SPOT, the MPO's, and RPO's working together. The State of North Carolina has also politically been focused on spending large amounts of funding on mobility projects including new and the expansion/widening of highways. However, there is a strong need to shift some focus of funding statewide toward safety and upgrades to existing roadways, and non-highway related projects such as public transportation and bicycle/pedestrian projects.

MPO #6: The MPO commends NCDOT's prioritization processes for the STIP, loop projects and the Mobility Fund. The MPO commends the General Assembly as well for supporting the NCDOT's data driven prioritization process and the efforts to take politics out of transportation decision making. The TIP prioritization process can best be improved by building off of the successful implementation effort under the NCDOT's Prioritization 1.0 and more recently Prioritization 2.0. The Department has used a process of MPO and local stakeholder engagement in developing and refining the prioritization methodology. This process has worked very well in the MPO's judgment, and should be used to continue to improve the prioritization process.

MPO #7: It is helpful if NCDOT could provide guidance or actions needed to be taken by MPO's with sufficient advance notice, since there are those MPO's/RPO's who only meet quarterly or as needed.

MPO #8: Keep increasing getting public input to determine where the citizens want the limited resources spent on the different transportation modes

MPO #9: The project prioritization system developed by NCDOT's SPOT team is a great positive step because for the first time NCDOT has quantified projects' benefits and costs in a meaningful way. Because SPOT produces a scored output we can now:

- Directly compare one project with another, and
- Determine why one project is more attractive to NCDOT than another.

Nevertheless, there are some places where NCDOT could make SPOT better. The table below lists several weaknesses in the system along with recommended fixes to the perceived problem.

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

Concern	Recommended Fix
The prioritization process is not connected in any way to available money.	Give all the planning partners estimates of the funds available at the Division level for the next five years, Alternatively provide five years of funding data to each MPO, RPO and Division and let them develop their own prioritization program.
The prioritization process ranks projects statewide when money is distributed on a division, or funding region basis. (e.g., since projects in Division 1 (Edenton) do not directly compete with projects in Division 14 (Sylva) why are we prioritizing projects in Division 1 against those in Division 14?).	Present the results of the prioritization at the Division level.
The system is more complicated than necessary. The highway portion of the process alone includes ten criteria calculated based on another sixty two criteria, making it impossible to determine what criteria are important.	Find the smallest number of decision criteria that are meaningful.
The system is biased towards scoring projects on the Interstates and Primary Highways highly, (this is in addition to the funding bias towards larger projects).	Eliminate differences in scoring projects across the system tiers. (Since the money is distributed by tier there is no need to score projects on different tiers differently).
Data availability and accuracy are issues.	Fix the bad data in the system and fill in the gaps,
SPOT does not properly account for the present value of projects (i.e., SPOT considers a dollar saved in 2030 to have the same value as a dollar spent in 2015).	Apply standard, generally accepted, principles of engineering economy to the benefit and cost calculations.
SPOT assumes a uniform \$22/hour as the value of time saved across the state (this penalizes counties with high median wages while benefiting those with low minimum wages and is inconsistent with the cost estimates which are developed on a county by county basis.	Estimate median wage at the Division level and use rate to estimate benefits. Making this change would make the benefit side of the calculation more consistent with the project cost side of the equation.
SPOT assumes that all projects have a thirty year useful life (i.e., bridges have a different lifespan than signal system upgrades).	Change useful life so that it is more in line with project type, MPO/RPO basis.
It is hard to separate projects below state level.	Add a unique database sort key so that projects can be identified on a Division, County or MPO/RPO.

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

MPO #10: All modes of transportation should be considered by MPOs and RPOs during the STIP development process. During SPOT 2.0 MPOs and RPOs did not have the opportunity to comment on rail projects, which appears to be an emerging need in eastern North Carolina. Additionally, SPOT 2.0 deadlines imposed by NCDOT did not mesh well with the procedural requirements of our MPO. For instance in some cases, it was difficult to mobilize our TCC and TAC in a timely enough fashion (given public notification requirements) to meet submittal deadlines.

### MPO #11:

#### *General*

- a. Overall, this process has been positive and SPOT has done a great job of requesting feedback and making changes when necessary. It has created a more transparent and data driven process that allows for input from the planning partners involved.
- b. It would be helpful to have a report that tracks which projects have moved forward now that prioritization is moving into its third iteration (i.e. which projects from P1.0 are now programmed in the 10 year plan, or in the 7 year TIP?).

#### *Transit*

Process is overly focused on the short-term and on the preservation of the existing system. The transit prioritization process could be improved by recognizing:

- a. the importance of expanding major systems; and
- b. the need for long-range planning.

#### *Roadway*

- a. Project design and need should be based on future traffic volumes instead of current traffic volumes.
- b. Analysis should also consider any nearby parallel facilities which might have projects coming up that might help relieve the burden on the primary facility.
- c. We need more than two weeks review time to review project lists and prepare comments.
- d. Local input points for Sub-regional Tier projects seem to be disproportionately weighted; a reevaluation of weighting among tiers should be conducted. (The top 16 scores in the prioritization database, for highway projects statewide, are all Sub-regional Tier projects – does that suggest that Sub-regional Tier projects are the state’s highest priority highway projects?)
- e. Division and MPO weighting should be equal.
- f. The process lacks a means by which a project that crosses MPO/RPO boundaries can be assessed regionally.
- g. The process should include a means to challenge results.
- h. Adequate time should be provided to clean up the database.

MPO #13: The implementation of the SPOT process has been very positive. This process should be allowed to continue for several years to provide a more informed evaluation. The actors in the transportation planning process should be allowed and encouraged to speed up and streamline the process where possible.

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

MPO #14: Prioritization is a step in the right direction and provides a transparent tool in the transportation decision making process. I believe the Ports should play a bigger role in the prioritization process as they are an economic driver for the state and will help to attract growth and business to the state of North Carolina.

MPO #15: Over the past several years, the SPOT process and the transportation reform that the NCDOT has undertaken with the General Assembly's support has moved a long way toward providing a reliable and transparent process for establishing the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The SPOT team has been very good to work with and we continue to provide feedback and refine the process as a joint effort with the MPOs, RPOs and NCDOT collaborating in creating a better process and product. We look forward to continuing this process and building on and improving the SPOT Transportation Reform Policy to Projects efforts as we see projects continue to move forward in a timely and predictable fashion.

RPO #1: I think the SPOT office has done a great job so far. I think it's an ever evolving process that will even get better with time. It is very difficult to suggest something because every RPO/MPO is different.

RPO #2: The SPOT office is doing a good job with highway project prioritization part. Prioritizing projects for the other modes (Bike/Ped, public transit, rail and aviation) needs some work to clarify and simplify the process.

RPO #3: The Strategic Office of Prioritization (SPOT) has done an incredible job at improving the prioritization process to make it more transparent and include a lot more stakeholders than in the past. SPOT has recently done a series of exercises across the state at the division level that has let small groups allocate their equity and resurfacing dollars across different categories of needs that have been expressed by the NCDOT. An exercise such as this for the RPO would be extremely useful in adding to the transparency of the STIP process and further educate TCC and TAC members on the challenges that the state faces in funding transportation projects.

RPO #4: The work of the SPOT office has greatly improved the prioritization process. Last year the SPOT office at NCDOT held transportation investment strategy workshops across the state. These workshops included exercises where participants were asked to allocate the projected 9 billion in revenue across the various budgetary accounts for NCDOT with 54 billion worth of needs. Participants quickly learn the realities of the transportation funding challenges for our state. In this year's workshop the SPOT staff added a second exercise for the Divisions. Participants were asked to split into smaller groups based on their NCDOT Division. Spreadsheets were presented for each Division with their projected Equity Formula dollars. Group members were then asked to allocate the projected revenue across the same budgetary line items while understanding the ramifications for specific projects. TCC and TAC members have commented how informative and enlightening these workshops have been. The RPO would suggest having more of these exercises but perhaps at the RPO or MPO level rather than the Division. These exercises allow members to quickly reach realistic expectations for TIP project funding and make the system transparent.

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

RPO #5: There should be more consideration of the needs of rural areas. A greater population does not always mean a greater need.

RPO #6: Projects that are located in rural areas but cross Division and county boundaries are not considered as high in the overall process. The mobility fund was created to address these types of situations but the continued funding for such is indeed inadequate.

RPO #7: The RPO is in the same Division as large counties. This makes funding projects in our region very challenging. The RPO Director is on a committee to help guide the next prioritization process. It would be very helpful to us if we were not in the same Division with rapidly growing urban areas or if a mechanism were in place to evaluate and fund projects in rural areas separately from rapidly growing urban areas.

RPO #8:

1. Provide more turnaround time for MPOs and RPOs to get information back to SPOT, since we need input from our TCC and TAC, who only meet every other month.
2. Ensure that MPOs and RPOs remain on equal footing with regard to local prioritization point totals. We would oppose any change that would give more points to the larger MPOs.
3. Ensure that the points assigned by the NCDOT Divisions are done through some type of open process, where we can at least understand why they made the decisions they made. Right now it seems the Divisions' point allocation methods/decisions are shrouded in secrecy.

RPO #9: The NCDOT should encourage greater solicitation of small-scale projects for consideration in the STIP instead of massive corridor-level widenings, which may not be funded for decades. The NCDOT should consider SPOT project scores and rankings through their SPOT process to assign additional funds through the "Equity Formula" to Funding Regions with a disproportionate number of high-priority projects. This would not affect the distribution process for funding projects within the Funding Regions or Divisions however.

RPO #10: The SPOT process has been a useful tool for our local prioritization process. It centralizes a lot of the data points, providing additional data that is used for our local prioritization process. As a rural organization in the western part of the state, we still experience some equity issues with the new process. It is more expensive to build projects in the western part of the state, so it is common for projects in our area to have difficulty competing in the cost-benefit segment of the prioritization process.

RPO #11: The development of the SPOT prioritization procedure has been very helpful in improving the prioritization process. Changes made by the SPOT staff for Prioritization Version 2.0 were thoughtfully made and our input was considered. I expect SPOT will do the same in conjunction with the RPOs and MPOs for updating the process for version 3.0.

RPO #12: The biggest issue in the RPO area is lack of funding for transportation. Members of the RPO and the public are well aware of the lack of funding for projects. And as we go over

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

this process every two years, people see a similar list due to projects not being funded. Over time, this generates a lack of interest by the public.

RPO #13: I believe the new SPOT system from NCDOT is a great improvement over the past methods of prioritization. However, I still believe that ultimately it's the MPOs and RPOs who know the needs best and therefore should have the greatest say in the prioritization process.

RPO #14: The primary issue with the prioritization process for the RPO has been that some of our counties do not have an adopted Comprehensive Transportation Plan in place yet. When there is a CTP in place, the county commissioners can submit projects from the plan. The projects in a CTP have been vetted through the planning process (via committee meetings, public input sessions, public hearings, etc). In a county without a CTP, the elected board submits projects for prioritization that have not been through a public process and may not reflect the true needs of the community's transportation system. As we complete CTPs in the region, this will not be an issue.

RPO #15: The prioritization process as currently developed under the SPOT office is a relatively good process. The initial purpose of its development was to allow for a more transparent view into the prioritization of TIP projects and allow for quantitative values to back up the decisions equated from the SPOT model. The most pressing problem with the prioritization process as it stands is that of time. The SPOT office must take in projects from around the State, gather data and return it to the local jurisdictions for those jurisdictions to begin their prioritization process. The problem is that not all data that will be used by the SPOT office for their prioritization process is delivered to the local jurisdictions in time for their prioritization processes. Expanding the time frame for project submittal or grow the SPOT office for gathering data quicker would greatly improve this process and allow for a better local prioritization process.

RPO #16: The prioritization process continues to evolve at both the RPO/MPO and statewide levels, and NCDOT has provided opportunities for the RPO leadership to shape the process. So long as the RPO continues to have a seat at the table as the process changes, we are comfortable with the process.

RPO #17: It is helpful when NCDOT provides guidance or action needed to be taken by RPO's with advance notice, since many MPO's and RPO's only meet quarterly or as needed.

RPO #18: It is helpful when NCDOT provides guidance or action needed to be taken by RPO's with advance notice, since many MPO's and RPO's only meet quarterly or as needed.

RPO #19: In the past, the State's prioritization process has improved tremendously. NCDOT staff have been able to give a much better listing of projects that will get funded. The biggest local complaint RPO staff hears deals with a project being on the TIP for years and never being built.

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

2. Do you believe there is duplication, too much red tape, or any other hindrances that you believe can be solved that will improve transportation planning at the State, division, or local level?

MPO #1: We believe that more decentralization is a good thing. There are still too many NCDOT units in Raleigh that are not responsive/educated in local affairs. Specifically, we believe the Transportation Planning Branch coordinators should be located within the Division offices.

MPO #2: Division and District NCDOT staffs are very cooperative and helpful. However, the Transportation Planning and Public Transportation Branches are exceptionally difficult to work with at times. For instance, grant/program administration seems to reflect individual preference more than federal and state legislation in some cases. Further, these agencies often struggle with retaining adequately trained staff, resulting in considerable delays in project delivery and grant administration due to inexperience.

Rigidity within the Transportation Planning Branch is very difficult to manage at times. It seems as though both branches tend to lose focus on the fact that they exist to support others who deliver valuable services, not to stand in our way.

Transit grants are difficult to administer because of slow moving processes associated with modifying the State Transportation Improvement Program. At best, it takes two months to make simple modifications that other states are able to make in a matter of days or hours. Quite often, NCDOT efforts are duplicative of MPO activities and lack local public involvement at key stages in the project development process. Consolidation of NCDOT feasibility studies into the MPO planning efforts should be explored to eliminate redundancy and ensure that projects moving forward have buy-in from local stakeholders.

MPO #3: North Carolina's transportation partners are delivering more projects on time or ahead of schedule than ever before. Continued support from all of the State's transportation partners of the process will ensure this trend continues and the ball is advanced down the field. Statewide Prioritization was an important step in the right direction. The transportation partners should continue to view this as an evolving process. Increased resources, both financial and technical will help to continue to meet the transportation planning needs in North Carolina.

MPO #4: Decentralization of the NCDOT's Transportation Planning Branch and placing these planners in the Division offices would help with traffic modeling and traffic forecasting. However, I believe NCDOT has improved coordination with local governments over the past several years.

MPO #5: The MPOs, NCDOT and our federal partners have developed good working relationships over the many years that MPOs have been functioning. The process of developing our LRTPs and TIPs to meet Air Quality Conformity Determinations has brought a new level of cooperation and teamwork.

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

### MPO #6:

- a. The Planning (PL) fund reimbursement process is cumbersome.
- b. MPOs should be notified as soon as a project is initiated.
- c. We believe that emissions budgets should not be defined on a county by county basis; larger regions, such as metropolitan planning area boundaries, MSAs, etc, should be considered.
- d. There is a lack of NCDOT planning and design staff at a local level. Decentralization would result in better products.
- e. There is a lack of coordination between the various branches, units, etc. of NCDOT.

MPO #7: NCDOT needs to get into the sidewalk business and not foist it off on municipalities, at least on major arterials maintained by NCDOT. Especially with the new annexation laws, we will start to see more built-up areas outside municipal boundaries.

MPO #8: NCDOT's Strategic Planning Office of Transportation (SPOT) has begun a process that will greatly assist with prioritization of projects statewide to be programmed in the 2014-2020 STIP. However, although there is division staff, much of the coordination still requires constant communication with NCDOT central offices in Raleigh, NC. In general, NCDOT has historically been a department composed 95% of engineers whose technical details and analysis of projects have increased the cost of projects and made the statewide transportation improvement goals hard to achieve. MPO's and RPO's are a very integral part of the overall statewide transportation process, without which the process would not successfully coordinate and communicate the needs of local jurisdictions to the state level. At the division level, again the majority of staff are exclusively highway and/or traffic engineers that provide more focus on vehicular mobility and less focus on other important modes of transportation, such as mass transit, rail, and bicyclists and pedestrians, which have a more positive long term economic and environmental impact.

MPO #9: No, there does not appear to be duplication. MPOs and RPOs work together, and provide the NCDOT an invaluable link to local government officials, priorities, and technical expertise that the Department has benefitted greatly from.

MPO #10: NCDOT's Strategic Prioritization efforts are a wonderful step forward due to the cooperative nature of the process which included consultations with MPO's and local officials. Furthermore, the process provides a systemic evaluation of project needs throughout the state.

MPO #11: Thank you for asking, but I don't have a specific change to request. I would welcome more involvement of the state legislators with our MPO. You have a standing invitation to visit anytime. The most important issue is the need for additional revenue for transportation funding.

MPO #12: Planning and funding projects across Division Boundaries is sometimes difficult because priorities are not always the same but MPOs and RPOs can cover multiple planning boundaries. Sometimes environmental review takes excessive time to complete. CMAQ is very difficult to plan out for the life cycle of the STIP.

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

MPO #13: Because of the large financial contribution of the federal government transportation planning is driven by need to comply with their [federal] regulations. Because of that we see little opportunity to eliminate requirements. We do see the opportunity to improve some products so that they build upon one another or are more easily understood by citizens.

MPO #14: Progress has been made in making transportation planning more efficient and effective in North Carolina. Transportation planning has become more technically sound based on quantitative data and evaluation tools. The models used to develop transportation plans and projects have become much more sophisticated. Much of this improvement and innovation has been led or initiated by MPOs. One potential way to improve transportation planning is to align all processes with the geography of urban areas. North Carolina, like much of the country, has become an urban state. The urban areas are driving the growth, economy, and innovation in the state. Several processes, such as prioritization, treat urban and rural areas the same, and may not end up with results that reflect the needs of urban areas. As described in the survey, the urban areas, through their MPOs, have to meet stringent federal requirements for transportation planning and public involvement. The NCDOT Divisions are not aligned with population centers and urban areas. For example, the MPO is in three different counties and three different NCDOT Divisions. Transportation planning could be made more efficient if State processes and plans, NCDOT Divisions and funding regions, and Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations were better aligned based on the actual geography of urban and rural areas.

RPO #1: I think when it comes to some environmental issues there is because it burdens the coastal regions like ours and makes it a longer process for construction and work to get done.

RPO #2: One of the greatest challenges facing NCDOT is adequately explaining the merits of projects and dealing with negative misinformation. NCDOT should expand on their use of graphic technology, which there currently is only a small department. Visualization technology will expedite public buy-in to several NCDOT projects.

Continuing education of local elected officials and citizens on the overall transportation planning process and prioritization processes will reduce the perception that there is an excessive amount of red tape. There must be a greater emphasis on land use planning in conjunction with transportation planning. The two planning process cannot exist independently. There must be synergy between land use planning and transportation planning. Admittedly this is difficult in the rural areas where there is little to no land use planning, nor the desire for it.

RPO #3: First, I believe continuing to educate local elected officials and citizens on the overall transportation planning process and prioritization processes will reduce the perception that there is an excessive amount of red tape. Second, I believe greater utilization of technology such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can expedite several transportation processes. Many of the federal permitting processes can be expedited with greater use of GIS and less time in the field. Our greatest challenge in scheduling new

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

projects is with permits and the merger process. Using GIS will eliminate months and sometime years off the project timeline. Third, one of the greatest challenges facing NCDOT is adequately explaining the merits of projects and dealing with negative misinformation. I would encourage NCDOT to expand on their use of visual graphics technology. The saying “A picture is worth a thousand words” was never more true than it is for transportation planning. Greater utilization of GIS technology, fly-through videos, YouTube, and other visualization technology will expedite public buy-in to several NCDOT projects. Fourth, there must be a greater emphasis on land use planning in conjunction with transportation planning. The two planning process cannot exist independently. There must be synergy between land use planning and transportation planning.

RPO #4: The recent simplification and streamlining of the RPO’s planning work program requirements by DOT will reduce the amount of reporting that is required by the RPO to DOT every quarter. The process heretofore had become burdensome and overly complex.

I believe DOT does a very good job at the division level of cooperating with the RPO and including us in issues where there is a need for meaningful local government involvement. Both Division staffs are active participants in the committee meetings.

RPO #5: The NCDOT should focus on how to reduce paperwork and bureaucracy when spending Federal dollars on small-scale projects, particularly CMAQ and Enhancement funds, which are becoming increasingly difficult to spend. The NCDOT should consider consolidating the Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation with the Transportation Planning Branch (TPB) to bring their specific skills to the larger TPB, which does not have such specialized bicycle and pedestrian planning skills. The NCDOT should review existing funding, transit, and planning boundaries to make them more closely align with metropolitan boundaries.

RPO #6: I believe that transportation planning could be improved by taking measures to de-centralize some of the NCDOT planning efforts. The Public Transportation Division houses a transit planner in the Western region, providing us with opportunities for greater levels of coordination. I would enjoy the presence of planning staff in the western part of the region. In considering the Bicycle and Pedestrian division, NCDOT should also consider placing bicycle and pedestrian staff in various areas of the state. These practices are exercised in Tennessee and other states, and prove to be effective.

RPO #7: The folks at NCDOT could probably answer this best, but there seems to be a great deal of duplication and red tape in the time frame of when we hand a project over to NCDOT and when that project actually receives the final Environmental Impact Statement. It usually takes a minimum of seven years with the current process.

RPO #8: There is too much restriction on what types of projects funds can be spent on. Funding for projects should be directed to where an area needs to make improvements, not where the state or federal guidelines require the money to be spent.

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

RPO #9: There is too much centralized oversight and reporting required by the Transportation Planning Branch for RPOs. We operate with limited budgets and many of us are very far from Raleigh for truly effective working partnerships to exist between TPB and the RPOs however, we are working to strengthen our partnerships with District offices which are more conveniently located and able to help us with problems that are more relevant to rural areas and small cities in rural areas. More time and resources should be spent by RPOs engaging local communities and leaders in rural areas; more time should be spent identifying alternative funding mechanisms for transportation and helping local communities with limited or no professional staff to address transportation and mobility. In most cases, when compared to MPO's, RPOs including Isothermal provide a degree of comprehensive professional service to small communities and counties with limited or no staff on a range of factors contributing to transportation from economic development to environmental, watershed, and land use planning. Unfortunately, recently, the direction has been to spend more time doing administrative work for TPB and not planning and outreach for rural areas. The RPO serves over 150,000 people in 3 counties and 13 towns and cities with the equivalent of one staff person. 18 RPO's in North Carolina serve over 4,000,000. We have been very successful when we are given maximum flexibility and decision-making capability. This does not mean there should not be oversight and accounting but one hopes the state will appreciate how much the RPOs have been able to do with limited resources. The RPO has built an excellent relationship with our local governments but accessing state resources, for example, funding for small transportation improvement projects that could extend the life and improve the function of existing facilities is too difficult.

RPO #10: 18 RPO's in North Carolina serve over 4,000,000. We have been very successful when we are given maximum flexibility and decision-making capability. This does not mean there should not be oversight and accounting but one hopes the state will appreciate how much the RPOs have been able to do with limited resources. In the recent past, there has been too much centralized oversight and reporting required by the Transportation Planning Branch for some RPOs although efforts are being made to streamline the process so more work can be produced and less time spent on administration. We are working to strengthen our partnerships with District offices which are more conveniently located and able to help us with problems that are more relevant to rural areas and small cities in rural areas. More time and resources should be spent by RPOs engaging local communities and leaders in rural areas; more time should be spent identifying alternative funding mechanisms for transportation and helping local communities with limited or no professional staff to address transportation and mobility. In most cases, when compared to MPO's, provide comprehensive professional services to small communities and counties with limited or no staff on a range of factors contributing to transportation from economic development to environmental, watershed, and land use planning. The RPO has built an excellent relationship with our local governments but accessing state resources, for example, funding for small transportation improvement projects that could extend the life and improve the function of existing facilities is too difficult...

RPO #11: From the RPO perspective, there has been a sometimes overwhelming amount of administrative work and time spent reporting work done each quarter. The RPO has done a good job in the past year working with the Transportation Planning Branch of NCDOT to

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

create an easier, more streamlined approach to submitting deliverables that appears will cut down on administrative man hours.

### RPO #12:

- As RPOs complete their county transportation plans. The need to redo a rural county transportation plan is not needed as frequently as an urban county transportation plan. What is needed is doing small corridor studies or small area improvements. Doing small corridor studies or small area improvements is something that is really hard for RPOs to accomplish. These are tasks that might cost 25 - 75 thousand to complete. But RPOs don't have the funding to contract out this work. And NCDOT doesn't have a good efficient mechanism to help provide this funding in a quick and efficient manner. The amount of time it takes for NCDOT to work on these types of projects is frustrating to our local counties/towns.
- While we appreciate a strong, positive relationship with the NCDOT Planning Branch staff, NCDOT planning staff spends a great deal of time traveling to and from our area to perform planning duties. One solution to this is to co-locate planning staff members at NCDOT divisions. This would allow planners to focus on areas where they work and live, and build familiarity and trust with local officials. This may also free up time and effort to focus on plans at different scales – both smaller (corridor studies) and larger (regional). There are some pros and cons to this idea. Pro – puts NCDOT planners in the area that they work and live. So familiarity with issues would be much greater. Things such as doing small corridor plans should be easier to do and accomplish. Con – Lack of mobility upward for the planner at division office. Could cause a never ending rotation of planners coming and going at the local level.
- NCDOT divisions no longer adequately represent the travel patterns and multi-modal demands of the state. In the RPO, we coordinate planning efforts with two different highway divisions. While our relationships with the Divisions are strong, it does create duplication of effort on both sides.

RPO #13: From the RPO perspective, there has been a sometimes overwhelming amount of administrative work and time spent reporting work done each quarter. The RPO has done a good job in the past year working with the Transportation Planning Branch of NCDOT to create an easier, more streamlined approach to submitting deliverables that appears will cut down on administrative man hours.

RPO #14: NCDOT divisions no longer adequately reflect the travel patterns and multi-modal demands of the state. In the RPO, we coordinate planning efforts with three different highway divisions. While our relationships with the Divisions are strong, it does create duplication of effort on both sides.

While we appreciate a strong, positive relationship with the NCDOT Planning Branch staff, NCDOT planning staff spends a great deal of time traveling to and from our area to perform planning duties. One solution to this is to co-locate planning staff members at NCDOT divisions. This would allow planners to focus on areas where they work and live, and build familiarity and trust with local officials. This may also free up time and effort to focus on plans at different scales – both smaller (corridor studies, small area plans) and larger (regional).

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

RPO #15: Yes, but I am not sure how to fix it. There are times when the left hand of NCDOT does not know what the right hand is doing. It is the function of such a large organization not always communicating with each other and with jurisdictions.

RPO #16: The main complaint that I hear from local elected officials within the RPO is that taking the politics out of transportation funding has been done in words only, but that the reality remains that decisions are made far above the local level. The extensive process by which we collect, prioritize, and submit projects to the NCDOT still allows for projects to score high even without the support of the RPO.

RPO #17: In general, the RPO TAC has expressed a desire to reduce the administrative burden placed on the RPOs. This could be achieved by streamlining the PWP and invoicing processes, reducing required paperwork, and other similar measures. Some administrative improvements are already being implemented by NCDOT TPB at the present time, but we are always looking for ways to reduce our administrative work to allow us to focus on technical work. Additionally, the TAC has expressed interest in reducing the red tape and funding/administrative barriers associated with the use of CMAQ funds on technical work.

RPO #18: The North Carolina Association of RPOs and the NCDOT Transportation Planning Branch have recently begun doing a fantastic job of working together. With the RPOs being a relatively new (10 years) organization without many other examples to work from across the country it is only natural that there would be a time period of trial and error. The two above mentioned groups have recently developed a work plan more dedicated to the RPO functionality and made reporting more detailed while also making it easy to work though. While in the past there have certainly been times of frustration and I am sure more to come in the future, I do believe the two groups are headed in the right direction, and with open channels of communication present the groups will continue to work well together in to the future.

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

3. Do you have recommendations, including statutory, budgetary, or administrative changes, for this Committee to consider that will assist MPOs or RPOs ?

MPO #1: Continued support from the General Assembly will be one of the most productive mechanisms to ensuring that improvements continue to evolve the transportation process in North Carolina. In the past General Assembly representatives and senators have been active in their constituent MPOs through attendance at TAC meetings and we encourage this in the future. Additionally, any new federal, state or local opportunities to increase transportation revenues in North Carolina should be explored and pursued. Numerous state and national studies including the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission Report

([http://www.transportationfortomorrow.com/final\\_report/report\\_html.htm](http://www.transportationfortomorrow.com/final_report/report_html.htm)) have illustrated the need for substantially higher levels of aggregate investment in our transportation infrastructure to maintain a state of good repair and ensure strong economic growth can continue within North Carolina and the United States. User pay systems such as tolling in the short term and transitioning to mileage based user fees, congestion pricing, variable pricing or other pay as you go funding structures will become more appropriate in the future. Continued support of public private partnerships (PPP) will also be important components of transportation financing in the future. In general, increasing the size of the transportation funding pie is needed and will only become more important in the future.

MPO #2: There is a tenuous balance between local effectiveness and ability to recruit specialized skills with much of planning and development headquartered in Raleigh. Moving some of those specialties out to the Division might be beneficial instead of having all the specialty units in Raleigh.

It has also been my personal experience that Professional Engineering credentials are overvalued by the HR folks at NCDOT. The result in a monochromatic culture at NCDOT, with an overwhelming number of employees all coming from a single program and a single university (engineering at NC State). No offense toward NC State or the engineering school, but it makes for a very insular culture that does not always welcome innovation because so many staffers have the same training and approaches to problem solving. NCDOT may also be overpaying for the engineering credentials when that work can now be done by less-skilled staff through computers and software that didn't exist (at the levels of sophistication available today) when the last pay studies were done.

MPO #3: The United States Congress is currently debating a new transportation bill on the floor of both the House and Senate. It is important for the State to recognize the importance of MPO's and RPO's with regards to transportation planning and funding, and to support the current regulations regarding MPO's. The new transportation bills being discussed aim to eliminate MPO's with less than 200,000 people according to the Census 2010 Urbanized Area boundary discussions. This will eliminate several MPO's across the state, and will have negative impacts on the coordination, communication and overall transportation planning throughout the state.

MPO #4: The NCDOT acknowledges transportation needs of over \$60B with revenues of only approximately \$10B. The lack of transportation funding restricts economic development

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

and growth. Additional transportation funding would provide improved transportation infrastructure that would help to improve mobility and safety and also provide the opportunities for the state to attract growth and economic development.

MPO #5: More federal, state and local funds will be needed to meet the growing transportation needs of the urbanized areas. Consideration should be given to revamping North Carolina's Equity Formula for transportation funding.

Adoption of the Complete Street Policies and Guidelines to provide additional support for moving forward to implementing a multimodal transportation network for our communities. We appreciate Representative Dale Folwell (Forsyth, District 74) for taking the time to attend our TCC meeting on September 16, 2010 and look forward to welcoming members of the General Assembly to our TAC and TCC meetings in the future.

MPO #6:

- a. Funding needs to be increased for all modes of travel; inadequate funding limits North Carolina's economic competitiveness.
- b. There should be greater emphasis on how a project is operated and maintained after it is constructed, in fact, these two issues should be addressed in project planning.
- c. The General Assembly should not attempt to dictate project design.
- d. Earmarks not providing new funds for a project should be forbidden.
- e. MPOs should be notified as soon as a project is initiated.
- f. Division boundaries should be realigned to reflect economic regions.
- g. The Equity Formula is an outdated method of distributing funds; at a minimum, the intrastate system component of the formula needs to be removed.
- h. The State constitution should be amended to allow traffic fines to be used to pay for red light camera systems or, a rider should be placed on insurance policies to support the system.
- i. There are conflicts between the design-build process and the traditional build process; design-build lessens the ability to achieve complete streets with local consultation.

MPO #7: Funding to support the planning efforts of the RPO is an ongoing issue. As costs go up, the PTRPO has struggled to maintain equipment and staff expertise. There's also a funding disparity between the geographic and population demands in MPOs and RPOs. In the case of the RPO, we provide services to nearly 350,000 citizens – representing the third largest transportation planning agency in the state. Yet, we receive a very small amount of funding to support our planning efforts.

Small and medium size cities have particular transportation planning needs that do not fit in current NCDOT models or grant programs. Examples of these would be small area plans or corridor studies.

The legislative mandate for RPOs limits the efforts of these organizations to planning. This mandate does not provide flexibility to address the transportation needs of our member governments. Rural small towns and cities in the PTRPO have demonstrated needs for projects that would improve mobility and safety, but cannot compete for TIP funding. If a

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

modest amount of project funding were allocated to each RPO, a number of high value projects could be completed to address these currently unmet needs.

MPO #8: Increased transportation funding is needed at all levels. The gas tax's value will continue to diminish as vehicle fuel efficiency continues to increase. North Carolina will need to add additional means of funding transportation over the next decade.

Also, reviewing the 61.95% of State Highway Trust Fund revenues dedicated to completing the Intrastate System might be productive. It appears that dedicating something less than 61.95% to the intrastate system could preserve the ability to implement key Intrastate System improvements while freeing existing revenues to address more critical current priorities and needs.

MPO #9: Funding for transportation planning activities need to be increased since the regulatory burden imposed upon MPO staff has notably increased, especially in the past 10 years. To meet State and Federal requirements requires more funding so that MPO's can increase staff levels to meet additional regulations.

MPO #10: Should have stronger language requiring comprehensive land use planning. Should be clear coordination between transportation planning and land use planning. Disconnect between STIP cycle and grants especially in public transit. Hard to fit transit projects into STIP because transit changes yearly and STIP is difficult to mesh with a federal schedule. Funding cycle disconnect between different modes of transportation. Hard to coordinate local planning efforts. STIP cycle should be more predictable. STIP cycle has changed many times over the past decade.

MPO #11: As with other states, I believe MPOs should be empowered to make decisions about priorities and the more project level funding that can be directly allocated to MPOs, the better. CMAQ and STP-DA funds are a good start towards giving locals the ability to collectively prioritize their needs and apply funding to meet those needs. Also, RPOs should not be an extension of NCDOT staff, but should be a contracted service that enables the best professionals to lead the rural parts of NC into the future. Again, moving some of those planning and development specialties to the Division might be beneficial instead of having all the specialty units in Raleigh. I also believe that Professional Engineering credentials are overvalued by the HR folks at NCDOT, particularly as it relates to non-engineering tasks such as management and policy. The result is a monochromatic culture at NCDOT, with an overwhelming number of employees all coming from a single program at a single university (civil engineering - NC State). This makes for a very insular culture that does not always welcome innovation because so many staffers have the same training and approach problems in the same manner. NCDOT may also be overpaying for the engineering credentials when that work can now be done by less-skilled staff through computers and software that didn't exist (at the levels of sophistication available today) previously.

MPO #12: The MPO Board is concerned with the availability of funds for all types of transportation. Many of our MPO Board (TAC) Members have served on the board for long tenures; one has also served on the Board of Transportation, and are keenly aware of the

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

mismatch between available funds and current needs. In addition the long term viability of the motor fuels tax as a funding source is questionable. The MPO Board (TAC) has also expressed the desire for local funding sources that could be locally directed to meet transportation needs without incurring the long lead times associated with the federal transportation process.

MPO #13: Having NCDOT planning staff located in the Division or District Offices would improve their ability to coordinate with local stakeholders and to have a better grasp of transportation issues affecting the region. Currently, NCDOT planners are centralized in Raleigh isolating them from the communities that they are expected to plan for, insulating them from local issues and limiting communication.

MPO #14: We believe it would be most helpful for the General Assembly to consider the great transportation needs in North Carolina, particularly in the urban areas, and develop new or additional ways to increase transportation funding. The gas tax is a critical funding source, but new revenue sources also need to be considered, especially as cars become more fuel efficient. User pay systems, mileage based taxes, congestion pricing, and other sources need to be considered to maintain the long-term viability and safety of our transportation network. We urge you to consider the needs of all modes of transportation. Highways are important, but transit, bicycling, and pedestrian facilities are also very much needed. North Carolina is behind many other states in the provision of basic bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. These facilities are critically important for safety, quality of life, and encouragement of more active and healthy lifestyles. As our state urbanizes, transit becomes increasingly important and a more practical alternative to congested highways.

We would appreciate support from the General Assembly on NCDOT's transition to a more publicly accountable and professional organization. Decisions on which projects should receive funding should be based on quantitative defensible data that reflects the State's true needs and local priorities. While there is room for improvement, the prioritization process is a step forward. We urge you to encourage NCDOT to continue improving this process. We strongly encourage General Assembly members to increase their familiarity with local planning organizations, the way we operate, and the way we make decisions. We are happy to answer this survey and welcome you to ask any further questions and attend any of our meetings.

RPO #1: ...we need more autonomy and decision-making power to truly help our partners in rural counties and communities including access to funding. We are stretched to the limit of what we can effectively do. Understandably difficult, allotting more funding to RPOs: for staff and/or project funding will afford us the ability to provide better service for residents of rural unincorporated areas and small municipalities. We don't need more plans sitting on shelves, we need practical plans that can help to improve our existing infrastructure with more cost-effective improvements; fully and creatively utilize existing infrastructure to expand economic opportunities. Overall, recognizing that the needs for new facilities are much greater in the state's big urban areas, help us do more with less by planning smarter and maximizing our existing infrastructure. Currently, we plan for new or expanded facilities but in many cases, we can "fix" what we have and save money. In this sense and others, the needs of RPO

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

areas are very different from MPOs; expanding MPOs into RPO areas should not be encouraged since small communities do not have the staff or experience required to be truly effective MPO members and as indicated earlier, the RPOs provide a more comprehensive level of planning service to these communities and counties. To this end, it would be very useful and greatly appreciated by rural leaders if, through the RPO, we could access funding directly for small, relatively inexpensive, transportation improvement projects (perhaps via a rural STP-DA?) or if we had the staff and funding to complete studies to examine the ways we extend the life and expand the function of existing facilities.

RPOs must become a viable alternative to MPOs – working in partnership with them – but recognizing that rural and urban area needs and resources are frequently dramatically different and better served by entities that mirror their needs and experiences more realistically.

Finally, as a resident of the region myself, I am very grateful for opportunity to serve my fellow citizens; represent and provide them the opportunity to participate in the transportation planning process.

RPO #2: I enjoy working with the RPO program. It formalizes the federal requirement that states consult with rural communities in the transportation planning process. The state's award winning RPO program serves as a national model and should be preserved through dedicated state and federal funding in future years.

I would recommend changing the state enabling language in regards to RPO structure to read 3 counties or 50,000 in population, instead of reading 3 counties and 50,000 in population. The 2010 Census is going to change some RPOs and MPOs and that is appropriate, but the enabling legislation does not make it flexible enough for more populated rural counties. Localities should have the opportunity to communicate their wishes to the state in regards to preserving their local RPO.

The development of the SPOT prioritization procedure has been very helpful in improving the prioritization process. Changes made by the SPOT staff for Prioritization Version 2.0 were thoughtfully made and our input was considered. I expect SPOT will do the same in conjunction with the RPOs and MPOs for updating the process for version 3.0.

RPO #3: When the 2010 Census Data is used to realign boundaries, some RPOs may still have the required 50,000 in population but may no longer have a total of three complete counties. It may be advisable to change the legislation to designate an RPO have "3 counties OR 50,000 population" in order to accommodate more populated rural counties that would not fit well in an MPO.

RPO #4: I think it would be great to see equality across the state. Our region has a very low population but also has a lot of roads that need to be improved in the future to help us compete economically with the rest of the state and the region. I do not think changing the equity formula will benefit the rural areas of NC. By giving all the funding to urban areas, it will

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

basically put the rural areas far behind the gap that already exists between the rural and urban areas.

I also think we need to work on finishing up the Strategic Highway Corridors in our region. These are major corridors that exist in the state that need to be upgraded.

I would also like to see a change to the legislation on Ferry Tolls. Our ferry tolls are part of the highway system but are the only ones going to be tolled to make up budget issues with the state budget. It will affect not only us but the whole state because there will be less state tax revenue from sales or income in our region.

RPO #5: The pending expansion of the MPOs due to the results of the 2010 census may cause at least one RPO to fall below the minimum threshold for RPOs as outlined in the general statutes (3 counties and 50,000 population). The Committee might want to consider recommending an amendment to the general statutes to allow RPO's to exist with only 2 counties and 50,000 populations.

RPO #6: Empowering the TCC and TAC with full control over the Comprehensive Transportation Plans (CTP) for the RPO region would be a very effective and positive start. This would include the authority to initiate new plans, develop the plans, and update the plans without having to rely on the NCDOT Transportation Planning Branch. In short, the RPO would like to enjoy the same level of authority over the CTPs that the MPOs currently have over their Long-Range Transportation Plans (LRTP).

RPO #7: The RPO would recommend empowering the TCC and TAC with full control over the Comprehensive Transportation Plans (CTP) for the RPO region. This would include the authority to initiate new plans, develop the plans, and update the plans without having to rely on the NCDOT Transportation Planning Branch. In short, the RPO would like to enjoy the same level of authority over the CTPs that the MPOs currently have over their Long-Range Transportation Plans (LRTP). The RPO would also encourage NCDOT to revise CTPs so that they are fiscally constrained plans like the LRTPs. Currently CTPs are not fiscally constrained and they result in a long list of expensive highway recommendations that ultimately lead to unrealistic expectations for local officials.

RPO #8: No.

RPO #9: We need more autonomy and decision-making power to truly help our partners in rural counties and communities including access to funding. We are stretched to the limit of what we can effectively do. In a perfect world, allotting more funding to RPOs: for staff and/or project funding will afford us the ability to provide better service for residents of rural unincorporated areas and small municipalities. It would very useful and greatly appreciated by rural leaders if, through the RPO, we could access funding directly for small, relatively inexpensive, transportation improvement projects (perhaps via a rural STP-DA?) or if we had the staff and funding to complete studies to examine the ways we extend the life and expand the function of existing facilities. Currently, we plan for new or expanded facilities but in many cases, we can "fix" what we have and save money. In this sense and others, the needs of

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

RPO areas are very different from MPOs; expanding MPOs into RPO areas should not be encouraged since small communities do not have the staff or experience required to be truly effective MPO members and as indicated earlier, the RPOs provide a more comprehensive level of planning service to these communities and counties. RPOs must become a viable alternative to MPOs – working in partnership with them – but recognizing that rural and urban area needs and resources are frequently dramatically different and better served by entities that mirror their needs and experiences more realistically.

RPO #10: The state should continue to index motor fuel taxes to retain “buying power” for the NCDOT, but continue to explore future revenue sources as fuel economy standards reduce revenues from motor fuel consumption. The state should create a Statewide Infrastructure Bank (SIB) to give an incentive to counties and municipalities who choose to raise and spend money improving the NCDOT network. The SIB would be used to augment local funds to build projects. The NCDOT should also “hold harmless” any community who chooses to raise revenues to pay for projects by not shifting funding elsewhere.

RPO #11: I believe the RPOs could be more effective if they had a pot of money to actually assign to projects much like the MPOs have. It doesn't have to be much, but I think it could come in really useful in helping the small towns who have needs, but often get overlooked.

RPO #12: Change the enabling language to read 3 counties or 50,000 in population, instead of and. Census is going to change some RPO's and MPO's and that is appropriate but the enabling legislation does not make it flexible enough for more populated rural counties.

RPO #13:

- Funding: As salaries and cost to work (gas, rent, etc.) go up, our budgets have either remained constant or gone down (refer to question 5 for funding amounts). If it is impossible to have some sort of small rate increases on a yearly basis, then have some sort of funding to help upgrade equipment every 5 years. As you can imagine, as costs go up, something has to give. And usually, it's the ability to upgrade IT/GIS equipment. So an equipment grant to help upgrade infrastructure every 5 years would be useful.
- Grant to apply for funding with corridor planning or small area projects.
- The legislative mandate for RPOs does not provide flexibility to address the transportation needs of our member governments. Rural small towns and cities in the RPO have demonstrated needs for projects that would improve mobility and safety, but cannot compete for TIP funding. If a modest amount of project funding were allocated to each RPO, a number of high value projects could be completed to address these currently unmet needs.

RPO #14: Change the enabling language to read 3 counties or 50,000 in population, instead of and. Census is going to change some RPO's and MPO's and that is appropriate but the enabling legislation does not make it flexible enough for more populated rural counties.

RPO #15: Change the enabling language to read 3 counties or 50,000 in population, instead of and. Census is going to change some RPOs and MPOs and that is appropriate but the enabling legislation does not make it flexible enough for more populated rural counties.

## North Carolina MPO and RPO Survey

RPO #61: No, I feel that the RPO program is accomplishing what it has been tasked with doing.

RPO #17: We are concerned about the eroding of state funds provided to RPOs in recent years. Our funding has been flat several years, and was subject to a 7% cut prior to that. TARPO's state funding today is significantly lower than the funding it received between FY2005-2009, and only slightly more than was received in FY2004, TARPO's first year of operation (not including the special GIS/equipment grants provided in FY 2004 for startup purposes). While we certainly appreciate the current economic situation, we would request at least minor funding increases to offset inflation, and ideally a return to our FY 2007-09 funding level (prior to the 7% funding cut).

Additionally, we support the current MPO and RPO structure and would oppose any effort to require the realignment, merger, or consolidation of RPOs, unless such a change is being requested by the MPOs or RPOs themselves.

RPO #18: Rural Planning Organizations are an extremely important part of transportation in North Carolina. They allow rural areas to have a voice in an area where the urban areas have the loudest trumpeters. The RPOs responsibilities have room to expand and should gain importance in the way all projects are prioritized in their regions. RPOs should also be bigger partners with their local division and districts, working together to prioritize projects according to the local perspective and communicated to the public through the partnership as well. A heavy burden is placed on the divisions and districts to make certain all that will be affected by a project are notified, this is simply one area where the RPOs could and should be able to assist. Along with more responsibility obviously comes the necessity of additional operation funds. In a time period where funding is scarce all funds should be carefully utilized. A greater partnership between the local NCDOT offices and the RPOs would allow the local DOT offices to concentrate more on what they do best, building and paving. And, while more funds directed to the RPOs may seem out of place these funds could allow the RPOs to hire additional staff that could assist with things like public outreach or even data collection for feasibility studies. Again, RPOs play a very important role in rural transportation and have the potential to play an even greater role. Limiting their role, limits the effectiveness of the rural voice in transportation, boosting their role adds to both a greater level of efficiency and effectiveness in transportation on all levels.

### **Fiscal Staff redacted the names of RPO/MPOs and associated identifying information.**

#### Abbreviations:

BOT: Board of Transportation

CMAQ: Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality

CTP: Comprehensive Transportation Plan

GIS: Geographic Information Systems

LRTP: Long Range Transportation Plans

SPOT: DOT's Strategic Planning Office of Transportation

TAC: Transportation Advisory Committee

TCC: Technical Coordinating Committee

TIP: Transportation Improvement Plan

TRP: Transportation Planning Branch