MPO STAFFING AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

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Poll Questions 1 – 3

What is an MPO?

- A regional transportation planning agency
- Plans and prioritizes transportation improvements
- Funded by a 1.25% takedown from highway programs
- Required in all areas with more than 50,000 people
- Must exist to receive Federal money
- May be independent or hosted by another agency
### Research Problem
- MPO role is complex and responsibility is broad
- MPO role and work load have expanded over time
- MPO staffing and organizational capacity is critical to meeting responsibilities and expectations
- Few materials comparing strategies are available
- MPO resources are relatively limited
- To date, national research on MPO organizational structure and staffing is limited

### Project Scope
- Basic discovery of MPO practices:
  - Organizational structure
  - Staffing levels, specialties, salary and turnover
  - Governance
- Available at www.mposurvey.com
- Funded through the FHWA Surface Transportation and Environment Research Program (STEP)
Methodology and Data Collection

- Online survey (www.mposurvey.com)
  - Survey in field for 3 months (March-May 2009)
  - 61-72 questions, depending on MPO characteristics
  - Recruited through association newsletters, state associations, direct solicitation
  - 133 MPOs responded (35.5% response rate)
  - Statistically valid sample with margin of error +/- 6.83

- Ten Case Studies
  - Document review
  - Interviews

Map of Survey Participants
Poll Question 4

Types of Hosting

- There is a wide variety of MPO organizational structures
- More likely to be hosted if the MPO is a non-TMA
- Regional Council is most common host
- Combined, local governments host 40% of all MPOs
Advantages/Disadvantages – Hosted

**Advantages:**
- Lower overall cost
  - Administration
  - Benefits
  - Office space
- Sharing of expertise
  - Coordinated programs
  - Employees
- Capital float

**Disadvantages:**
- Responsibilities blurred
  - Staff
  - Board
- MPO subject to host rules, budget and oversight
  - Managerial authority and autonomy
- Policy interference
- Unfamiliarity with MPO work

Advantages/Disadvantages – Independent

**Advantages:**
- Political and administrative autonomy
- Clarity in chain of command
  - Staff
  - Board
- Agency identity
- Cleaner finances

**Disadvantages:**
- Cash flow problems
  - Federal reimbursements
- High cost of operations
  - Administrative burdens
- Staff and administrative versatility is required
Administrative Structures

- Conventional wisdom: hosted vs. independent
- Research result: MPO structures fall along a continuum

Structure Types - Independent

- **Freestanding Independent (~10%)**
  - Handles all fiscal and administrative duties entirely in-house
  - Adopts its own administrative rules
  - Independent board and director
  - Examples: METROPLAN (AR), Lake-Sumter (FL) MPO

- **Leaning Independent (~20%)**
  - Independent board and director
  - Relies on contracts or gratis services from a local government
  - Has severable contracts to provide goods and services
  - Often mimics personnel policies, contracting rules, and salary bands of local government
  - Examples: Bryan/College Station (TX) MPO, Corvallis (OR) MPO
### Structure Types - Hosted

**Component MPO (~30%)**
- Exists as a component of a larger host
- MPO director reports to a supervisor
- Participates in host agency benefits programs
- Follows host agency administrative rules
- Indirect rate is charged
- Example: Indianapolis MPO

**Dual Purpose MPO (~25%)**
- Usually found at small local governments
- Local government leverages federal money to create planning capacity
- Staff performs MPO planning and local transportation planning
- Covered by host agency administrative and salary rules
- No indirect rate is charged
- Examples: Missoula MPO, Salisbury-Wicomico (MD) MPO

### Structure Types - Hosted and Others

**All-in-One (~10%)**
- Usually hosted by a large metro regional council
- Difficult to differentiate MPO staff from other staff
- MPO area covers most of regional council area
- MPO known by same name as host agency
- Example: Mid-America (KS/MO) Regional Council

**Examples of “The Others” (~5%)**
- Transit agencies:
  - Metro Council
  - Genesee Transportation Council
  - Regional Transportation Commission of Southern NV
- Transportation Authority:
  - South Jersey TPO
- Universities:
  - North Jersey TPA
- State DOTs:
  - New York MTC
Board Size, Composition and Voting

Poll Questions 5 – 7
Board Size – Voting Seats

- Wide range of MPO Board sizes
  - 5 to 73 voting members

Max: 73
Median: 14
Min: 5

- Bottom quartile has 8 or fewer
- Top quartile has 19 or more
Board Size – Voting Seats

- Wide range of MPO Board sizes
  - 5 to 73 voting members
- Bottom quartile has 8 or fewer
- Top quartile has 19 or more
- High outliers upwardly influence the mean of 16
- Most common response was 9

Voting Board Seats

- Max: 73
- Min: 5
- Third Q: 19
- Mean: 16
- Median: 14
- Mode: 9
- First Q: 8

Board Composition – Percent of All Seats

- Municipal Elected
- County Commissioners
- Not Reserved
- State DOT
- Countywide Elected
- Public Transit Agency
- Private Sector
- All Other Types
Board Composition – Voting Rights

- One member-one vote is the prevailing voting structure
  - Allocation of seats by population can give more seats to larger local governments
- Weighted voting
  - 13.5% of MPOs in the sample
  - Many MPOs with weighted voting have never used it
- “Rotating” voting seats
  - 27% of MPOs in the sample have a “rotating” voting seat
- Other voting systems: Consensus Voting, Golden Vote

Board Composition – Non-Voting

- Board representation for those without a voting seat
- 63% (84 of 133) have non-voting board members
- Mean of 5 seats at MPOs providing non-voting seats
- Examples include:
  - Small local govs within MPO boundary
  - Neighboring local govs/MPOs
  - Federal agencies
  - Chairs of MPO committees
  - Private sector
  - State legislators
  - Business groups
  - RTPOs
  - Modal authorities
  - School boards
  - State agencies
The MPO Workforce

Poll Questions 8 – 9
- Ranged from 121 to less than one employee
- A dozen high outliers skew the mean higher. Median is more instructive.

Median MPO: 5 full-time and 1 part-time employees (6 total)
- Three-quarters of MPOs have less than 11 total staff
- A quarter of MPOs have 3 or fewer total staff

### Median Staff Size by Population Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population in Planning Area</th>
<th>Total Employees (median)</th>
<th>Maximum Total Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50,000-100,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000-200,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200,000-500,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500,000-1,000,000</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 million or more</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All MPOs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Employment, etc.

- Part time employees are found at 73% of MPOs
- One employee per 47,963 people
- Approximately 4,200 MPO employees nationwide

Specialties on Staff

- MPOs were asked if any staff member spent more than half of his/her time in a specialized area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty</th>
<th>Percent of MPOs with this Specialty</th>
<th>Median Staff Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GIS</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Demand Modeling</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle and Pedestrian</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Involvement</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Only selected results are shown*
Employee Turnover

- MPO universe experiences 12.5% turnover/year
  - Twenty or more employees: 4.1%
  - Less than three: 20.1%
- 40% left transportation sector
- Just over a quarter went to consulting firms

Other Topics in the Survey

- Salary Scales
- Employee Benefits
- Organization Funding
- State Governance
- MPO Directors
- Aging Workforce
- Intergovernmental Efforts
- Indirect Rate
- Employee Tenure
- Consultants
Contact Us

Download the full report at
www.mposurvey.com

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