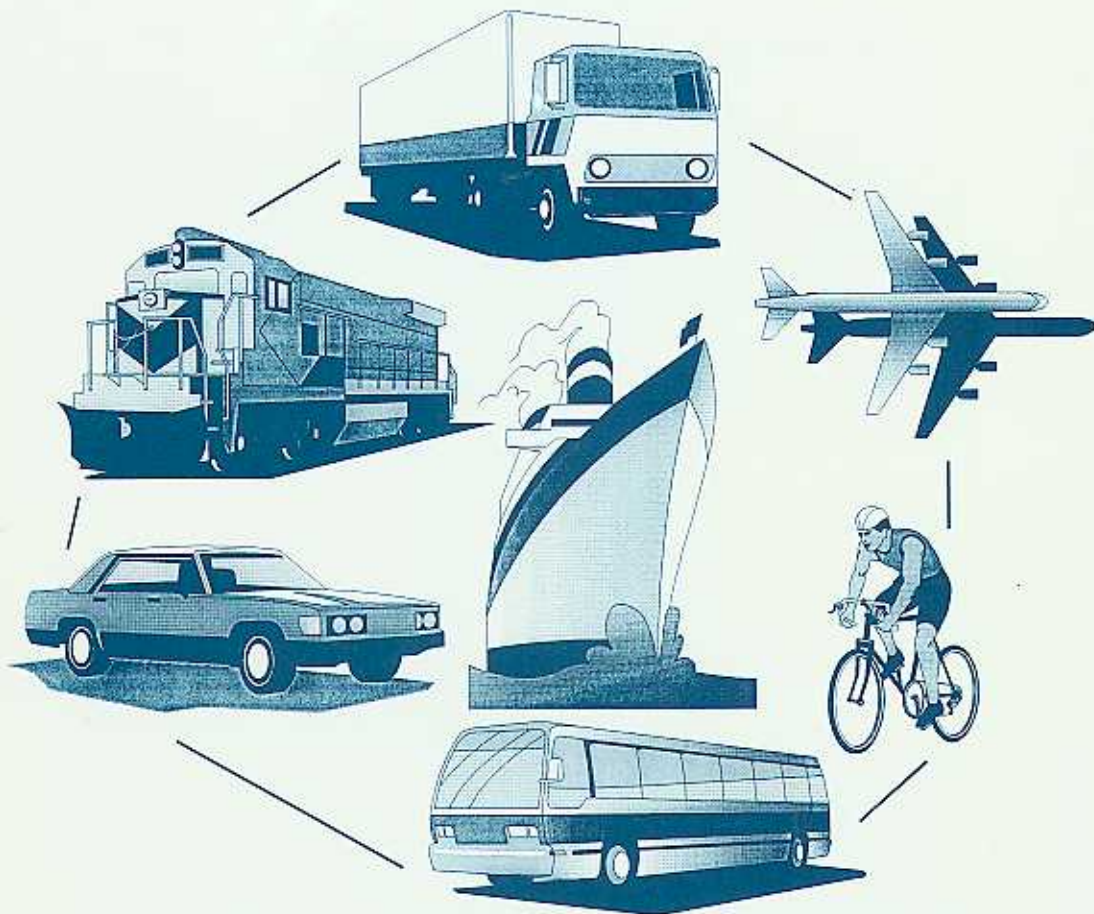


MPO CAPACITY

***Improving the Capacity
of Metropolitan Planning Organizations
to Help Implement
National Transportation Policies***



**U.S. Advisory Commission
on Intergovernmental Relations**

**A Commission Report
May 1995**

A-130

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May 1995

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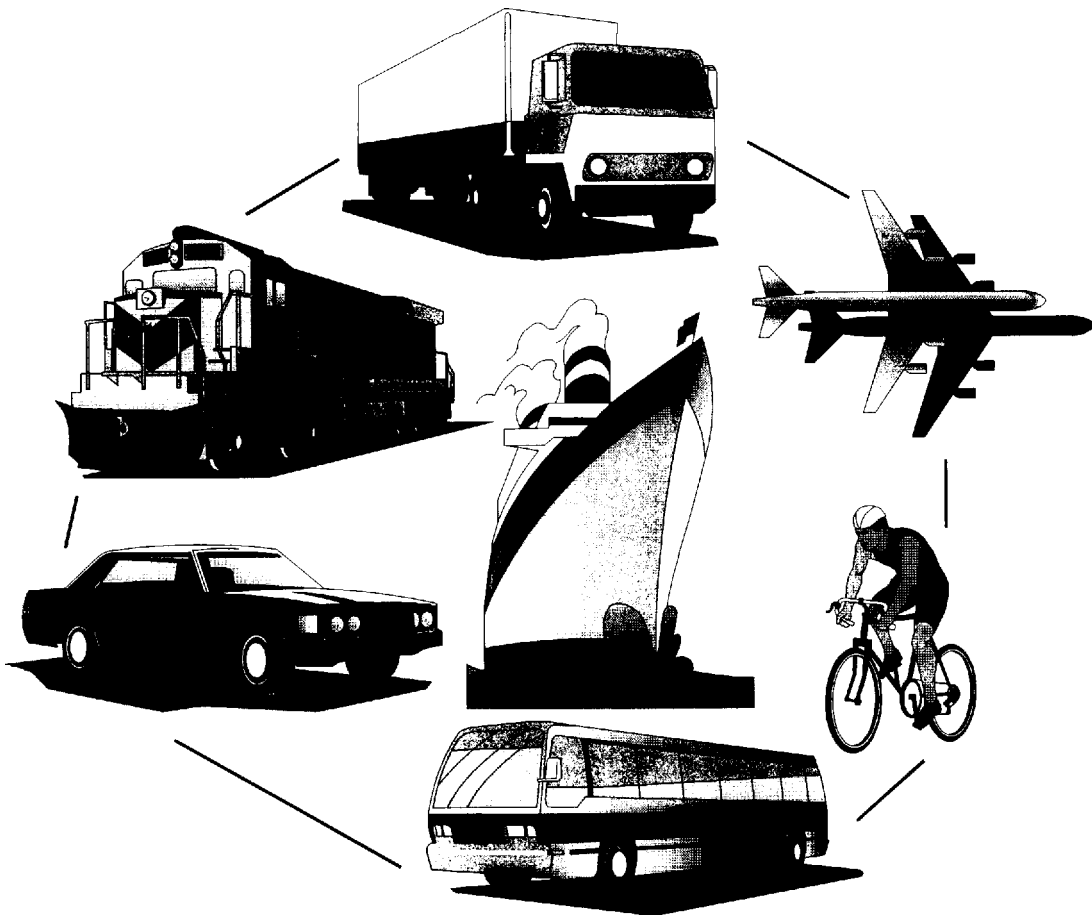
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) created important new roles for the nation's **339** officially recognized metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). MPOs are responsible for the transportation planning required to keep their regions eligible for federal highway, transit, and surface transportation funds. This new-found importance, however, came at a time when many MPOs had fewer capacities than needed to perform their planning functions, and when it was difficult for them to expand.

In **1993**, the Federal Highway Administration asked ACIR to study MPOs to show how current practices can be brought into closer alignment with ISTEA expectations.

The study addresses the question of MPO capacity. It begins with the hypothesis that many, if not all, of the MPOs need help in fulfilling the expectations of ISTEA, and outlines their initial experiences in seeking to comply with the law.

ACIR also reports new field work on 18 MPOs serving 12 metropolitan areas of differing sizes and circumstances.

ISTEA brought *three new, far-reaching philosophies* to the administration of federal surface transportation programs:

1. **Decentralization of decisionmaking** to the state and local governments, and particularly to the MPOs in the larger metropolitan areas of 200,000 population or more;
2. **Stronger environmental connections**, especially to the Clean Air Act; and
3. **Elevation of nontraditional goals and stakeholders to new prominence** in the planning and decisionmaking processes.

ISTEA *greatly expanded the responsibilities* of MPOs in three fundamental respects:

1. **The MPO organization** must be more inclusive and linked more strongly with other organizations and the public.

2. **The MPO planning process** must be considerably broader in scope, fully intermodal, more advanced technologically, more outcome oriented, and more open to interaction with decisionmakers and affected parties.

3. **A new implementation role is established for MPOs** that are designated as Transportation Management Areas. These MPOs (about **137** of them, mostly with populations over 200,000) will determine how to spend about 20 percent of ISTEA funds, making them more responsible for planning results (outcomes). They must be federally certified every three years.

For each of these topics, the interviewers asked:

1. What had changed because of ISTEA?
2. What difficulties were being encountered in complying with ISTEA?
3. What kinds of assistance would be most helpful in improving the response to ISTEA?

Based on its field work, ACIR found that:

- Metropolitan planning organizations are not all alike, and they should not be expected to perform alike.
- Most MPOs are not governments and do not exercise clear lines of authority.
- ISTEA has placed new pressures on MPOs to (1) review and/or change their structures; (2) produce more comprehensive, more thoroughly developed, and more realistic plans; (3) speed up their planning processes; and (4) take on a stronger political decisionmaking role.
- Many MPOs have responded positively to the new ISTEA requirements, but believe (1) the ISTEA goals will be difficult to

achieve in the short run and (2) the expectations are too complex and burdensome.

- Many MPOs have responded positively to the new ISTEA requirements, but believe (1) the ISTEA goals will be difficult to achieve in the short run and (2) the expectations are too complex and burdensome.
- MPOs recognize that they need help with: intergovernmental coordination; data and quantitative analysis; planning strategies and methods; the funding process; public involvement; financially constraining their plans and transportation improvement programs (TIPs); implementation techniques; and prioritizing projects in the TIPs.
- More capacity-building assistance appears to be available than is being delivered effectively to many of the MPOs.
- MPOs now get, or expect to get, the help they need largely from the federal and state governments.
- The U.S. DOT field presence is not as supportive as MPOs would like it to be.
- Significant gaps exist in the knowledge needed to implement ISTEA effectively, efficiently, and equitably.

Considering all these findings together, ACIR concludes that efforts to improve the capacity of MPOs to perform their ISTEA tasks should be built around three interrelated principles:

- *Educate more than regulate.*

- *Create a common understanding* among all the partners about what ISTEA requires in a practical working sense.

- *Create a closer, more trusting working relationship* among all the partners in the *MPO* process.

To implement this conclusion, ACIR makes the following recommendations.

- The U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) should establish a more comprehensive capacity-building program for metropolitan planning organizations.
- U.S. DOT should consider reorganizing its training, research, and field units to enable it to deliver a more unified, coherent, effective, and efficient capacity-building program.
- U.S. DOT should couple its MPO capacity-building program with a program to reduce regulatory burdens on the MPOs and their partners in the cooperative transportation planning process.
- U.S. DOT should support a mediation, conciliation, and peer-review service.
- The state DOTs should be active partners with the federal government in helping to strengthen the capacity of *MPOs*.
- MPOs—in cooperation with all their partners—should do everything they can to strengthen their own capacities to respond to the goals of ISTEA.

PREFACE

Enactment of the *Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991* (ISTEA) ushered in expectations for improved metropolitan transportation planning and decisionmaking. As with many new federal programs, the expectations appeared to be outrunning the results of current practice.

ACIR has addressed the topic of metropolitan planning many times over the past 35 years. In the 1960s, the Commission emphasized issues stemming from suburbanization, metropolitan development, and urban problems. To help the local governments in metropolitan areas deal with these challenges, ACIR recommended federal assistance for comprehensive planning, coordination of federal aid, advance federal approval of interstate compacts, and intergovernmental reviews and comments for federal decisions coordinated through metropolitan clearinghouses.

In the 1970s, ACIR's work contributed to widespread establishment and operation of regional organizations, increased use of interstate compacts, and use of areawide transportation planning and

decisionmaking mechanisms in conjunction with the creation of state departments of transportation.

ACIR reexamined metropolitan transportation planning, institutions, and services in the mid-1980s for the U.S. Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA).

In 1993, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) asked ACIR to study metropolitan transportation planning organizations (MPOs) to show how current practices can be brought into closer alignment with ISTEA expectations. ACIR's experience positioned the Commission well to revisit some of its longstanding policy interests while assisting the U.S. Department of Transportation with one of its most significant intergovernmental responsibilities.

The findings of ACIR's field work and the Commission's recommendations point toward a strengthening of the intergovernmental partnership for delivering improved transportation services in the nation's metropolitan areas.

William F. Winter
Chairman

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William E. Davis III
Executive Director

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FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

March 24,1995

FINDINGS

1. Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are not all alike, and they should not be expected to perform alike.

- Some are large; some are small.
- Some have significant technical and political independence from the state Department of Transportation (SDOT); some are largely dependent on the SDOT.
- Some are old and well established; some are new and still finding their way.
- Some cross state lines; some do not.
- Some are in areas with multiple MPOs; some serve the whole area.
- Some have serious air quality and congestion problems; some do not.
- Some are in growing areas; some are in stable or declining areas.

All of these differences significantly affect:

- (1) The difficulty of the MPOs' tasks;
- (2) The ability of MPOs to meet the expectations placed on them by ISTEA; and
- (3) The variety of forms of assistance needed by the MPOs.

2. Most MPOs are not governments and do not exercise clear lines of authority.

- MPOs are complex intergovernmental processes that often consist of several separate power centers that are loosely related to each other. Often, there are intergovernmental policy differences within the MPO that make it difficult for the organization to act with a single voice. With strong local governments and one or more strong SDOTs interacting, the process is difficult to manage. In most transportation activities, the SDOT has been, and often still is the predominant actor. Although the *Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991* (ISTEA) envisions a more equal position for MPOs in the transportation partnership, it may be a long time coming in some cases. Supportive partners—including a supportive SDOT—are essential to the success of the MPO.

3. ISTEA has placed new pressures on MPOs to (1) review and/or change their structures; (2) produce more comprehensive, more thoroughly developed, and more realistic plans; (3) speed up their planning processes; and (4) take on a stronger political decisionmaking role.

- It is not simple to achieve these goals. ISTEA expanded the transportation partnership in several ways: intergovernmentally, modally, geographically, and with customers and affected parties. The MPO planning process is relied on to bring the parties together to resolve their differences and create harmony around a new set of broader goals. However, the partners in the new process are not yet comfortable with each other or with the expanded ISTEA goals. In addition, many of the partners find that the changes are stressful, and the amount of help is inadequate.

4. Many MPOs have responded positively to the new ISTEA requirements, but believe (1) the ISTEA goals will be difficult to achieve in the short run and (2) the expectations are too complex and burdensome.

- There is too much to do all at once and too little flexibility perceived in the requirements. All the MPOs must meet approximately the same deadlines regardless of current staffing, starting points, or political situations. Most MPOs

have changed their programs to give greater attention to public involvement, air quality issues, intergovernmental coordination, relationships with the SDOT, intermodal planning, and long-range planning.

- MPOs also have run into difficulties with regulatory and workload burdens, very high expectations, uncoordinated analytical procedures and deadlines, and problematic relationships with the SDOT. There is perceived duplication among the requirements for long-range planning, the six management systems, major investment studies, NEPA environmental analysis, air quality conformity analysis, and state planning requirements. Such duplication is a source of excessive paperwork. There also is a perception that some of the required work is done just to satisfy federal and state requirements rather than to improve planning for the metropolitan area.

5. MPOs recognize that they need help.

Although some MPOs need more help than others, the overall spectrum of needs is quite broad. It includes, in priority order, help with:

- Intergovernmental coordination;
- Data and quantitative analysis;
- Planning strategies and methods;
- The funding process;
- Public involvement;
- Financially constraining their plans and transportation improvement programs (TIPs);
- Implementation techniques; and
- Prioritizing projects in the TIPs.

6. More capacity-building assistance appears to be available than is being delivered effectively to many of the MPOs.

- The U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT), sometimes in cooperation with others, has devoted considerable resources to providing technical assistance and research support to the SDOTs and MPOs to help them address the new needs created by ISTEA. These efforts include meetings and conferences, contract research, university research, technology sharing, training, and other opportunities. However, many MPOs, especially the smaller ones, cannot afford the time or the expense to take advantage of these opportunities.

7. MPOs now get, or expect to get, the help they need largely from the federal and state governments.

- The next most frequently mentioned source of help was other MPOs, but that help was mostly anticipated in the future. Six other sources of help were mentioned less frequently.

8. The U.S. DOT field presence is not as supportive as MPOs would like it to be.

- The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) field presence is much less evident than that of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Some FHWA and FTA procedures still differ enough to cause confusion in the MPOs, especially when making use of flexible funds. Differences with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) also cause confusion.
- Questions to DOT field staffs often do not provide much help, and sometimes bring conflicting interpretations.
- MPO staffs feel the need for stronger federal support when dealing with their policy boards and SDOTs, and when attempting to educate the general public and the local elected officials about the concepts and requirements in ISTEA—which is a key part of building public support for the changes called for.

- Several MPOs desired a closer, more supportive working relationship with federal field personnel representing all the transportation modes. In particular, they felt it would be helpful for the federal participants in the technical committee and policy board meetings to be more active, buying in and committing to solutions, and assisting in developing the understandings that the other participants were trying to develop. The passivity of the federal personnel leaves a vacuum, an uncertainty, an unsettling feeling that what is being developed may not be acceptable to the federal government, and a long wait after the MPO acts to learn whether there will be a federal (or state) decision to countermand the MPO. It was felt that active federal participation and support could help legitimize the status of the newer partners and shorten the decisionmaking process.

9. Significant gaps exist in the knowledge needed to implement ISTEA effectively, efficiently, and equitably.

- This suggests the need for a strong research program designed specifically to back up the efforts to improve the capacity of MPOs to respond appropriately to ISTEA. Assistance to the MPOs, if it is to be credible, needs to be scientifically correct, adequately peer-reviewed, practical to use in a variety of different settings, and authoritative. Any uncertainty in the state-of-the-art should be acknowledged in the ISTEA regulations, and leeway should be provided for experimentation.
- The research challenges include the need for new models, new data, effective transportation control measures, a better understanding of concepts such as environmental and social equity, and hard thinking about some of the newer management systems and their relationships to the rest of the planning process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering all these findings together, the Commission concludes that efforts to improve the capacity of MPOs to perform their ISTEA tasks should be built around three interrelated principles:

- Educate more than regulate.
- Create a common understanding among all the partners about what ISTEA requires in a practical working sense.
- Create a closer, more trusting working relationship among all the partners in the MPO process.

To implement this conclusion, the Commission makes the following recommendations.

1. A Comprehensive MPO Capacity-Building Program

The U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) should establish a more comprehensive capacity-building program for metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) that (a) addresses the needs of all participants in the MPO process, (b) makes affordable and effective assistance available to all MPOs, (c) covers a broad array of topics, and (d) provides a broad array of services.

- **Audience.** Although there is substantial research and assistance for MPOs, it is conceived primarily as assistance to the MPO staffs, and much of it is not getting through even to that limited audience. The audience should be greatly broadened, and the delivery of assistance should be more systematic and intentional. The present, largely passive federal approach should be turned in a more active direction designed to reach all MPOs and all of the partners in the MPO process—not just the staffs.

The targeted partners should include the local elected officials, citizen participants, the general public, transportation providers, and the federal and state field staffs who work with the MPOs. All of these participants should be getting the same messages about ISTEA—though perhaps in different forms according to the needs of their differing roles in the process. To the extent that they all receive consistent messages, the process is likely to be more constructive.

- **Delivery.** A wider array of techniques should be used to deliver assistance to MPOs (and all their federal, state, and local partners, and the public) in a more cost-effective manner. Techniques that should be emphasized include video tapes (with companion workbooks and correspondence course options), satellite hookups, electronic bulletin boards, TV spots, traveling road shows, interactive video conferencing, and an upgraded Technology Transfer (T²) Program. A concerted effort should be made to put the MPOs in touch with all the latest helps, and with new opportunities as they develop. The new national Association of MPOs (AMPO) and state associations of MPOs should be used as a means of keeping the capacity-building program relevant and focused on the most needed activities.

The objective should be to reach all of the audiences with consistent, multimodal messages about what ISTEA expects and how to deliver results—at a cost they can afford and with a degree of convenience that is too good to pass up.

- **Topics.** Initially, highest priority topics for help include (in rank order):
 - Intergovernmental coordination;
 - Data and quantitative analysis;
 - Planning strategies and methods;
 - The funding process (including facilitation of intermodal flexible funding);
 - Public involvement;
 - Financially constrained plans and transportation improvement programs (TIPs);
 - Implementation techniques; and
 - Prioritizing projects in the multimodal TIPs.

In addition, there should be an authoritative, but easy to understand, explanation of ISTEA that puts all the concepts together and motivates effective participation by all parties. Assistance also is needed in developing the intergovernmental agreements that form the basis of MPO processes. The messages about these topics should be developed by U.S. DOT through intergovernmental consultations and peer review.

- **Services.** The MPO capacity-building program should meet identified needs for training, applied research, information sharing, site-specific technical assistance, and dispute resolution. There was a strong desire by half of the MPOs surveyed for a “best practices” clearinghouse — which implies that there should be some evaluation of practices before they are promoted for use by other MPOs. This evaluation should include peer-review.

The research backup for this capacity-building program should strive to provide a reliable basis for improving the MPO process. To help ensure this essential reliability, the research should seek to be scientifically sound, adequately peer-reviewed, practical, authoritative, and timely.

2. Supportive U.S. DOT Reorganizations

U.S. DOT should consider reorganizing its training, research, and field units to enable it to deliver a more unified, coherent, effective, and efficient capacity-building program

For example, the separate National Highway Institute (NHI) and National Transit Institute (NTI) resources could be combined to establish a stronger intermodal training institute with a major TV studio devoted to producing a broad array of instructional programs that could be beamed by satellite to all MPOs, SDOTs, federal field offices, transportation providers, elected officials, and affected publics across the nation. By this means, the same story would be getting out to everyone, so they could align with it and hold each other accountable for the intended results. A major aspect of this enhanced program should be to help educate the general public and elected officials about ISTEA—to help build the public support needed to make ISTEA a success.

Unifying the field presence of DOT would help to overcome the current unevenness among the modes in the field. Only FHWA personnel are uniformly available in the field. Other modes are too sparsely staffed to participate regularly in MPO activities. This skews the federal presence away from the intermodal intent of ISTEA.

Even the regional office locations of the various modes differ, creating difficulties in coordinating the current federal field structure.

A consolidated U.S. DOT field structure should be thoroughly trained as a truly intermodal group, capable of providing constructive capacity-building help and reliable and helpful participation in MPO activities.

3 Regulatory Relief for MPOs

U.S. DOT should couple its MPO capacity-building program with a program to reduce regulatory burdens on the MPOs and their partners in the cooperative transportation planning process.

U.S. DOT should step up its efforts to move in the direction of educating its partners in ISTEA rather than regulating them. The multiple regulations issued under ISTEA, with their deadlines and long checklists of tasks, introduce rigidities and stress into the operations of the partners without clearing up the ambiguities inherent in the legislation. Clear, peer-reviewed examples of how ISTEA requirements can be met by each type of MPO without excessive effort and paperwork should be provided. These examples should be available to help guide MPOs, such as large nonattainment, large attainment, small nonattainment, small attainment, interstate, and multiple-MPO situations.

This enhanced reliance on educating the partners should be designed to provide flexibility to perform **ISTEA** functions creatively in each MPO setting, and to empower the MPOs to do a better job in developing their own solutions to problems. Federal requirements should be coupled with motivation and capacity to perform creatively. Barriers to effective performance — such as inadequately coordinated federal regulations and inconsistent practices among federal agencies in such activities as processing applications for transferring funds from one mode to another — should be bridged in consultation with the affected parties. Federal, state, and local decisionmaking should be focused in the cooperative MPO process, so that the MPO decision usually will be consistent with the views of all the parties, and subsequent reviews will be unnecessary or expedited, and unlikely to produce surprises.

To supplement its regulations, U.S. DOT should move cautiously and cooperatively toward greater use of consensus performance goals and measures of accomplishment. ISTEA goals should be operationalized in cooperation with the SDOTs, MPOs, and other transportation stakeholders, and data series should be reviewed and strengthened—by intergovernmental consensus—to provide periodic checks on results that could be assessed objectively at national, state, and metropolitan levels.

Annual “report cards” on the status of national, state, and metropolitan area transportation systems should be used to communicate objectively with the public and demonstrate the accountability of transportation agencies in response to publicly announced performance goals. Competition for “good grades” would be a healthy incentive to improve results.

Some of the ISTEA goals that should be operationalized into measures of success—through an intergovernmental consensus process—might include improving air quality, lessening congestion, enhancing environmental and social equity, developing fair and equitable intergovernmental relationships and voting arrangements, and raising the level of customer satisfaction. The ISTEA goals should be maintained, but rigid requirements should be loosened (by legislation in some cases) to allow reasonable progress rather than arbitrarily timed compliance that may be out of step with reality.

Where progress is not being made, a search for the stumbling blocks, by all partners, would indicate where attention is needed.

SDOTs also should not regulate the MPO process unnecessarily. Means should be found to meet federal, state, and local planning requirements with the least possible duplication of effort.

4. An ISTEA Mediation, Conciliation, and Peer-Review Service

U.S. DOT should support a mediation, conciliation, and peer-review service.

ISTEA raises, but does not resolve, many difficult issues that are likely to lead to disputes. Among them are:

- MPO boundaries, membership, grandfathering, and redesignations;
- Air quality conformity;
- Funding estimates for constraining plans and TIPs;
- Allocations of scarce funds in prioritized TIPs;

- Coordination among multiple MPOs in the same area; and
- Coordination between the SDOTs and MPOs.

These issues cannot be solved by writing regulations. Solutions provided by ISTEA relies on a series of mutual vetoes, which can be avoided only through cooperation among the various parties. ISTEA, however, does not provide clear mechanisms to facilitate the needed cooperation. It is just assumed that the parties will find a way to make it happen.

The federal government's position outside a particular region or state gives it the opportunity—and perhaps even charges it with the responsibility—to be an active peacemaker. The *Alternative Dispute Resolution Act of 1990* promotes the use of this technique by federal agencies and provides assistance through the Administrative Conference of the United States.

When disputes such as those listed above seem to be blocking progress toward ISTEA goals, an outside, objective mediator—agreed to by the parties—should bring the parties together in a constructive way to resolve their differences, rather than letting issues fester until a federal decision about who wins and who loses becomes the only alternative. Although the federal government may need to continue to “carry a big stick” in order to get some of the parties to the bargaining table, use of the stick should be minimized.

The requirement for certification of the larger MPOs offers an opportunity to try an alternative to direct federal regulation. In cases where there are no major differences of views that might benefit from a more formal dispute resolution process, U.S. DOT should try promoting peer-reviewed self-evaluations in lieu of federal certification. A number of regional councils do self-evaluations that involve politicians as well as staff and other constituencies. The peer review should come from a site-visit team composed of federal, state, and local officials, and private experts from outside the region and state(s).

The emphasis in this process should be on taking stock and finding ways to improve. This would be approached through a partnership between the MPO and the peer-review team. It should prove to be a significant learning experience for all of them. Approached as a “management by objectives” process, the evaluation/review would establish goals for incremental improvement. By this means, each MPO would be put on a path toward continuous improvement. (A similar approach also could be used with SDOTs.)

5. SDOT Roles in MPO Capacity-Building

The state DOTs should be active partners with the federal government in helping to strengthen the capacity of MPOs.

The original MPOs—in the 1950s, before they were required—were established by state highway departments to help them understand the complex metropolitan area transportation systems. Some SDOTs still are the predominant influences in the activities of the MPOs. Nevertheless, ISTEA contemplates MPOs as independent, local-government driven actors within an interdependent, intergovernmental transportation partnership. Thus, the MPOs should be standing on their own, with appropriate assistance from federal and state sources.

State participation in the MPO process is essential in many ways, because (1) the state and metropolitan plans and TIPs are integral to one another, (2) the state management systems are integral to the MPO plans and programs, and (3) the MPO plans and programs are integral to the SDOT plans and programs. The more constructive and facilitative the state participation, the easier it is for the MPO to do its job. SDOTs should supply predictable funding and timely financial capacity estimates to the MPOs.

Other capacity-enhancing activities the SDOTs should pursue on behalf of the MPOs include:

- Encouraging the state association of MPOs;
- Sponsoring an annual SDOT/MPO planning conference;
- Using the Technology Transfer (T²) program to provide training to the MPO participants;
- Sponsoring such mechanisms as a statewide interactive TV training network; and
- Using joint SDOT/MPO task forces to resolve specific issues.

6. MPO Responsibility for Capacity-Building

MPOs—in cooperation with all their partners—should do everything they can to strengthen their own capacities to respond to the goals of ISTEA.

- It is easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of meeting **ISTEA** requirements and forget the purposes of the program. MPOs need to:
 - Take time out to think about what they are doing;
 - Train their staffs, elected officials, and other stakeholders to understand the new concepts and methods of **ISTEA** planning;
 - Go through some self-evaluation exercises; and
 - Develop a program of improvement.
- These are not frills; they are essential activities that need to be programmed into the MPO work program.
- MPOs—and their partners—also should exchange their experts to enhance their experience and infuse new ideas into the organizations. In addition, MPOs and their partners should supply persons to serve on the peer-review teams for other MPOs.

CHAPTER 1

ASSISTING METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS TO IMPLEMENT ISTEA

The *Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991* (ISTEA) created important new roles for the nation's 339 officially recognized metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), which are responsible for the transportation planning required to keep their regions eligible for federal highway, transit, and surface transportation funds. This new-found importance, however, came at a time when many MPOs had fewer capacities than needed to perform their planning functions, and when it was difficult for them to expand.

During the 1980s, federal assistance and requirements for metropolitan planning declined in most programs other than transportation, leaving MPOs more isolated from other types of planning and depriving them of supplementary sources of planning money—including former big players such as HUD and EPA. In addition, the federal budget deficit in the 1990s has kept ISTEA from being fully funded.

This study addresses the question of MPO capacity. It begins with the hypothesis that many, if not all, of the MPOs need help in fulfilling the expectations of ISTEA, and outlines their initial experiences in seeking to comply with the law.

This study reports new field work on 18 MPOs serving 12 metropolitan areas of differing sizes and circumstances. Every effort was made to pick the most fully representative MPOs, within the limits of the study's resources. The process of choosing these cases is described in Chapter 2.

This limited-case field work approach was chosen because of the large number of

questionnaires already sent to MPOs by other researchers, growing MPO resistance to further surveys, and the need for a more in-depth understanding of MPO needs. This study seeks to build on existing research.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the types of assistance that MPOs could use to best advantage in building the capacities they need to more fully implement ISTEA. The report will be used as a resource for the Transportation Research Board's (TRB) special Conference on MPO capacity needs, May 21-24, 1995. The conference is to develop and recommend a multiyear research and technical assistance program for MPO capacity-building that could be supported by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

This chapter provides a framework for the study. It begins with a brief examination of the new expectations created by ISTEA, and then summarizes the findings of recent conferences, surveys, and studies that have addressed MPO capacity issues. A brief review of capacity-building assistance is also included.

Review of these materials informed the development of the questions asked in the site visits reported in Chapter 3.

New Expectations for MPOs Under ISTEA

ISTEA brings three new, far-reaching philosophies to the administration of federal surface transportation programs:

1. Decentralization of decisionmaking to the state and local governments, and particularly to the MPOs in the larger metropolitan areas of 200,000 population or more;
2. Stronger environmental connections, especially to the *Clean Air Act*; and
3. Elevation of nontraditional goals and stakeholders to new prominence in the planning and decisionmaking processes. *BOX 1*

In addition, ISTEA provides for intermodal flexibility in the use of most grant funds

and emphasizes efficient use of the whole intermodal system.

These new philosophies imply that MPOs will be transformed from weak advisory bodies into strong decisionmaking partners working closely and on a more equal footing with the state departments of transportation (SDOTs), the governors, air quality and land use regulators, and other major stakeholders.

To fulfill these expectations, many MPOs may need to consider revising their boundaries and organizational structures, upgrading their planning processes, working more closely and productively with the other partners in the ISTEA process, and strengthening their ability to make credible political decisions that set priorities, allocate scarce funds, and take responsibility for results. *BOX 2*

Box 1

ZSTEA'S IMPACT ON MPOs

Seeds of Change

- **Decentralization** of decisions will give many MPOs a larger area to plan for, more miles of roads to make decisions about, more flexibility to consider alternatives to the automobile, a lead role in allocating certain federal transportation funds, a longer time horizon to consider, and a responsibility to consider many transportation-related public policies.
- **Environmental** considerations will be much more of a driving force in the work of MPOs. Compliance with national air quality standards will become paramount for areas that do not meet them. Other federal environmental standards that will need increased attention from MPOs are protection of wetlands, cleanup of urban stormwater runoff, and transportation of hazardous wastes.
- **Nontraditional goals and stakeholders** include (a) international competitiveness; (b) energy conservation; (c) economic development and jobs; (d) equality of access, opportunity, and mobility for underserved and disadvantaged populations; (e) historic preservation; (f) neighborhood preservation; and (g) renewed vitality of central cities.

Reinvented MPOs will:

- **Expand** their boundaries and memberships.
- **Rebuild and expand** their planning programs.
- **Strengthen their public involvement** programs.
- **Financially constrain** their planning and programming.
- **Build an effective political decisionmaking** capacity.
- **Equitably represent central cities.**
- **Link with others** to form effective intergovernmental partnerships.
- **Retool the staff.**

Source: Bruce D. McDowell, "Reinventing Planning under ISTEA: MPOs and State DOTs, ISTEA's Impact," *TRNews*, November/December 1994.

MPO Capacity

Many MPOs will need to enhance:

- Institutional structures and relationships;
- Technical planning processes; and
- Political decisionmaking and implementation clout.

These three concepts provided a basis for the field research reported in Chapter 3. Each type of capacity is equally important in fulfilling the promise of ISTEA. Neglecting any one of them leaves the MPO process without the tools it needs.

Ambiguities

Even while ISTEA was being debated in the Congress, the revolutionary nature of many provisions was recognized and hedged with ambiguities. For example:

- The clear intent that MPOs expand their boundaries and bring many new stakeholders into their decisionmaking processes **is** coupled with the "grandfathering" of all existing MPOs. Many MPOs are not anxious to reopen tough

INTERGOVERNMENTAL CHALLENGES IN *ISTEA***Key Reforms in the Act**

- Increases authorized spending by 28 percent.
- Doubles the authorization for transit and makes many highway funds eligible for transfer to transit. Makes the non-federal match **20** percent for most programs to remove any financial disincentive for transferring funds.
- Replaces four separate federal highway systems with one, and creates a new intermodal surface transportation block grant.
- Authorizes a \$1 billion annual grant to help pay for congestion management and air quality improvement.
- Requires transportation plans and programs to conform to air quality plans.
- Uses the fiscal capacity of recipients as a consideration in non-federal match for certain fixed guideway transit capital investment grants.
- Channels metropolitan planning funds for transit through states for the first time.
- Requires statewide transportation planning for the first time.
- Requires new style of more detailed and more effective “performance” planning by the SDOTs and MPOs.

- Increases supporting research, statistical, educational, and training services to SDOTs and MPOs.
- Creates new National Surface Transportation R&D Plan, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, National Highway Institute, Office of Intermodalism, and National Transit Cooperative Research Program.

New Capacities Needed by MPOs

Technical Capacity. Rebuild planning capacities lost in the 1980s, and add new performance planning and benefit-cost techniques.

Political Capacity. Add additional key political players to the MPO governing board, and transform the MPO’s technical documents into political documents that allocate implementation funds and take responsibility for reducing congestion and air pollution, repairing bridges and pavements, and improving safety.

Geographic Capacity. Push the boundaries of the MPO out beyond the presently urbanized area to encompass the 20-year growth area and the air quality region. Add local governments in the new areas to the governing body. Link together all the MPOs that serve the new area if there is more than one.

Source: Bruce D. McDowell, “Reinventing Surface Transportation: New Intergovernmental Challenges,” *Intergovernmental Perspective*, Winter 1992, pp. 6-8, 18.

organizational issues on which they could lose more than they might hope to gain.

- The intent that MPOs play a much stronger role in determining the use of federal transportation funds in their area is coupled with a gubernatorial veto over the metropolitan transportation improvement program (MTIP) and the lack of any direct funding to the MPOs. The federal funds all go through the SDOTs, strengthening the belief that little had occurred to displace their preeminent position.
 - Much of the act is written as though there is a single MPO for each region, and a single SDOT for each MPO, but this ideal frequently does not occur. Multiple MPOs and SDOTs operating in the same metropolitan area have little guidance on how to work together

effectively. Federal responsibility to ensure this coordination is viewed as a last-resort backstop provision to be used very sparingly.

Dialogues

Within a month after *ISTEA* was enacted, the 1992 Annual Meeting of the Transportation Research Board convened in Washington, DC, and the debate between the skeptics and the idealists was joined. Those who believed that little had changed came into direct contact with those who believed that *ISTEA* had changed everything. It was still too early to conclude much, other than that there was an urgent need to develop a continuing dialogue to bridge the wide gap between these two camps.

In March 1992, the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP)—a new coalition of environmentalists, design and planning profes-

sionals, and state and local governments established to help develop the first post-Interstate transportation act—convened a special conference on ISTEA in Washington, DC. When the dust settled from the lobbying on ISTEA, STPP emerged as the most influential agent of change. This conference was designed to bring together the traditional and nontraditional players named in **ISTEA** and begin to articulate more precisely the intended changes.

STPP, which had been formed as a temporary body to pass the legislation, began to see that it was needed for a longer period of time if the changes it had advocated in the legislative process were to be put into practice. **BOX3**

Box 3

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION POLICY PROJECT
PUSHED ISTEA GOALS**

STPP is a coalition of more than 100 public interest groups that helped write **ISTEA**. Soon after the act passed, STPP held a session to begin a dialogue with transportation and other public officials on the implementation of broad goals: connecting transportation to energy conservation, environmental protection, and community viability.

Issues Raised

- 1) What are the barriers to and incentives for flexible use of funds for non-highway projects?
- 2) What are the implications of the new planning requirements?
- 3) What are the new project selection and programming processes, the roles of state and local officials, and the status of previous set-asides?
- 4) What is the meaning of the financial feasibility requirement?
- 5) What kind of contribution can transportation enhancements make to economic and environmental goals? Who is involved?
- 6) What are the new forms needed for public participation?
- 7) What changes are needed in design standards and how do they apply to federal standards?

STPP wanted to ensure that transportation plans and methods addressed all modes and community livability goals, beyond the former focus on highways and mobility.

Source: Planning Committee correspondence for STPP conference, **ISTEA: New Partners for Surface Transportation** in the 1990s, March 30-31, 1992, Washington, D.C.

By May 1992, the U.S. Department of Transportation was actively promoting the dialogues needed to accomplish the changes called for in ISTEA. The Charlotte, North Carolina, conference on “Moving Urban America,” raised more questions than it answered, but it also established an agenda for change that included realistic steps toward improving quality of life, expanding public involvement, nurturing new partnerships that transcend divisions between existing power centers, integrating the six new management systems and linking them firmly to traditional planning and programming processes, improving the sequence of required steps and products in the planning process, and putting the federal government into a more supportive role. **BOX4**

Three weeks later, TRB held another conference on the new transportation data needs created by **ISTEA**. The amount, types, quality, and timeliness of transportation data were found to need much improvement. **BOX5**

In July 1992, TRB convened a conference at the request of U.S. DOT to examine the specifics of the planning, programming, financing, and institutional changes needed, and to develop recommendations for research that could help accelerate progress toward **ISTEA** goals. Highlights of the research needs identified are listed in **BOX 6**. They concentrated heavily on quantitative analysis needs (data collection, forecasting, modeling, and program evaluation), but they also included:

- Institutional needs (consensus-building techniques for decisionmakers, public involvement, coordination of multiple MPOs, and documentation of institutional changes made in response to **ISTEA**);
- Financial planning needs (data, forecasting, and revenue options), needs for doing something about the transportation/land use link; and
- Needs for sharing information about best practices (including case studies).

Another national conference, convened by TRB in December 1992, identified barriers

THE QUESTIONS DEBATED

ISTEA called for significant changes in how U.S. DOT and its partners did business, therefore, the department sponsored a series of conferences to bring the parties together. The first meeting, "Moving Urban America," was held in May 1992 in Charlotte, North Carolina, and raised many fundamental questions and offered tentative findings.

Questions

- Can transportation engineers recognize the viewpoints of citizens and elected officials?
- Can transportation professionals include environmental and social concerns in their work and can environmental advocates recognize mobility and economic development objectives?
- Can MPOs move beyond technical analysis and wish lists to fiscal programming and construction phasing?
- Will system preservation projects and small community-based projects such as bike paths and public safety compete with large, politically glamorous projects?
- Do MPOs have the political will to rank projects? How do they show elected officials the effect of the *Clean Air Act Amendments* (CAAA) on their decisions?
- Can states cooperate with locally elected officials and share the credit and blame for decisions?

- On what rational basis do we make multimodal decisions?
- How do we utilize the land use powers of locally elected officials to achieve growth management?

Findings

The promise of ISTEA was thought to depend on:

1. Broad commitment to achievable results;
2. Expanded public participation;
3. Making the transportation and land use connection;
4. A simplified version of the combined air quality and transportation planning process;
5. Stronger partnerships between state and local officials;
6. Resolution of the mutual veto powers in CAAA and ISTEA;
7. Integrating the six management systems with each other and into the plans and programs of the state DOTs and MPOs;
8. Coordinating the sequence of products required by ISTEA from state DOTs and MPOs;
9. Better air quality conformity guidance for TIP development;
10. Federal encouragement of experimentation and exchange of ideas; and
11. Adequate resources for developing better planning models, performing needed research, and enhancing state DOT and

Source: Transportation Research Board, *Moving Urban America*, Proceedings of a Conference, May 1992, Special Report No. 237.

TRANSPORTATION DATA NEEDS - IMPLICATIONS FOR MPOs AND SDOTs

This national conference, in May 1992, raised the challenges of using data for complex planning and management systems required by ISTEA. Conference recommendations were new training, shared SDOT and MPO work programs, and regular conferences to be developed jointly with MPOs.

New Systems

The old planning process used single sets of relatively simple and static demand, supply, and system performance measures. The new measures under ISTEA need to be more detailed, dynamic, and interactive to support analysis of

- Multiple issues and options;
- Short- and long-range time scales;
- Multiple impacts and results;
 - Feedback on results and changed conditions;
- Viewpoints of multiple participants;
- Financial constraints and investment trade-offs.

Institutional Challenges

New systems must address:

- A changing institutional context;
- The data needs of decisionmakers, not just professionals;
- The diversity of the new participants in decisions;
- The most effective way of communicating data;

- Need for integrated SDOT and MPO work programs.

Data Collection and Management Challenges

State and local officials will need to be helped with:

- Quality control;
- Effective use of limited resources;
- Effective sampling and statistical analysis methods; and
- Staffing.

Data Analysis Challenges

SDOTs and MPOs will have difficulty collecting all the data required by law. Efficient systems and training are needed for:

- Transportation planning models for decisionmaking;
- Data demands of diverse "customers";
- Staffing;
- Information sharing among MPOs and states.

Selected Research Recommendations

- Enhance predictive ability of transportation and air quality models;
- Determine performance measures and develop a national approach;
- Develop cost-effective methods for analyzing present mobility;
- Define new methods for intermodal planning, land use impacts, and transportation control measure impacts.

Source: Transportation Research Board, *Transportation Data Needs: Programs for a New Era*; Proceedings, April 1993, Circular No. 407.

Box 6
MULTIMODAL PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING IN THE REAL WORLD

In the third U.S. DOT conference in July 1992 in Seattle, the transportation planning community wrestled specifically with how to undertake multimodal and intermodal planning and programming. This large conference consisted of workshops, papers, and keynote addresses. It concluded:

The new challenges of ISTEA and CAAA are:

- Expanding the scope of planning (that includes many externalities and all elements of metropolitan planning), and undertaking performance-based planning (that includes the six new management systems) will require new planning and decisionmaking capacity at the regional and state levels.
- Institutionalizing new partnerships with groups not previously formally involved (such as shippers and transit groups).
- Avoiding gridlock in the new intergovernmental deci-

sionmaking process—using new criteria to guide decisionmaking and new performance monitoring systems designed to help resolve policy and goal conflicts by analyzing options and trade-offs.

- Developing rigorous and responsive financial planning techniques for MPOs and SDOTs that will bring key participants into the process earlier and put planners and decisionmakers under scrutiny and provide flexible and competitive financing.

Research is needed to:

- Develop and circulate case studies on successful practices; and emphasize cases on citizen participation, state and MPO planning, and coordination among multiple MPOs and SDOTs in the same region.
- Monitor institutional changes and organizational arrangements.

Source: Transportation Research Board, *Transportation Planning, Programming, and Finance*, Proceedings of a Conference, April 1993, Circular No. 406.

likely to hinder development of intermodal transportation planning, recommended specific research topics to aid intermodal planning, and suggested steps that could be taken to enhance the prospects of intermodal planning. *BOX 7* summarizes the conference. The steering committee for the conference has become an active, ongoing Intermodal Task Force within the TRB committee structure.

In Fall 1993, at the direction of Secretary Federico Peña, U.S. DOT held meetings in all ten federal regions to listen to its “customers” about how ISTEA was working. The ten major national issues uncovered are listed in *BOX 8*. They emphasize the need for greater simplicity and flexibility, full funding of the act, preservation of existing facilities, increased priority for freight movement, and expanded training and support. A detailed 15-point action plan was adopted to carry these objectives forward.

Other conferences have been held on specific topics such as livable communities, the six required management systems, the transportation/land use link, travel management improvement, and research needs for multi-

modal and intermodal planning. Additional conferences on ISTEA topics are planned, including the Fifth Annual Conference in April 1995 on the application of transportation planning methods (*see Appendix B*).

A new dimension was added to this dialogue in July 1994 when the first annual meeting of the national Association of MPOs (AMPO) was convened. This conference, titled “The Power of Partnerships,” focused on the role of MPOs in convening all the players in transportation planning and policy-making. They were challenged by Deputy Secretary of Transportation Mortimer Downey to look on their ability to orchestrate a collaborative planning process and to mediate among competing interests, while providing the technical basis for sound decisions, as the key to their success. *BOX 9*

Surveys

AASHTO/NARC/APTA Surveys. In the first year of implementation for ISTEA, the American Association of State Highway and

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ISTEA AND INTERMODAL PLANNING ISSUES

This national conference, in December 1992, identified barriers likely to hinder development of intermodal transportation planning, recommended specific research topics to aid intermodal planning, and suggested steps that could be taken to enhance the prospects of intermodal planning.

Barriers

1. Institutional separation and biases of transportation modes.
2. Proprietary nature of much vital private transportation company information.
3. Inconsistent and meaningful definition of system performance.
4. Inadequate private sector participation.
5. Insufficient resources to solve problems.
6. Inadequate analytical tools.
7. No clear process for accomplishing intermodal planning.
8. Inadequate consideration of vehicle specifications as they affect the intermodal system.
9. Insufficient understanding of all transportation modes and their relationships.

Selected Research Recommendations

1. Document ongoing efforts by MPOs, states, and the private sector to conduct intermodal planning and cross-modal analysis.
2. Document progress of the states in developing multimodal plans and intermodal management systems.
3. Quantify the costs and benefits of modal alternatives, life-cycle costs, long-term subsidy requirements, and external costs in present value terms.
4. Develop multimodal and intermodal performance measures and standards that can be used for planning and monitoring the performance of the intermodal system.

5. Develop tools to identify and measure the impacts of intermodal operational improvements on the transportation system.
6. Update research in consensus-building techniques and conflict resolution.
7. Examine various approaches to developing an intermodal management system and effective implementation strategy.
8. Examine the impact of land use planning in an intermodal context.
9. Document regulatory and institutional issues that affect the creation and ongoing operation of intermodal planning.

Selected Steps to Enhance Prospects of Intermodal Planning

1. Develop and widely distribute educational materials that explain the intermodal policy and substantive provisions of ISTEA.
2. Prepare technical guidance materials that recognize the different institutional structures and decisionmaking environments that exist throughout the U.S., while still providing a consistent message.
3. Establish planning links between airport systems/plans and ISTEA state/regional plans when reauthorizing aviation legislation.
4. Convene interest groups of intermodal and multimodal players to develop a broad-based advocacy agenda for building on the multimodal and intermodal aspects of ISTEA.
5. Study improvements to freight corridors needed to facilitate global competitiveness.
6. Develop case studies and demonstrations of good intermodal planning practice.

Source: Transportation Research Board, *ISTEA and Intermodal Planning: Concept, Practice, Vision*, December 1992, Special Report No. 240.

Transportation Officials (AASHTO), the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), and the American Public Transit Association (APTA) teamed up, with U.S. DOT support, to survey the SDOTs and MPOs. This extensive survey was repeated the following year to measure any changes. Almost all of the SDOTs responded both years (90%), while

60% of the MPOs responded the first year and 50% the second year.

Picking the MPO characteristics out of these surveys, it can be seen that most of those organizations are performing the most essential functions—unified work program, long-range plan, TIP, environmental reviews, and exchange of technical support with the SDOT.

Box 8
REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE REPORT
AND ACTION PLAN

DOT held meetings in the Fall of 1993 with local and state officials in the 10 federal regions in order to advise the federal government on how the ISTEA process is working.

Major National Issues

U.S. DOT was urged to:

- Support full funding of ISTEA;
- Oversee the flexible planning and funding processes to ensure they work as intended;
- Reduce the complexity and prescriptiveness of ISTEA regulations;
- Encourage more flexibility and cooperation from EPA in helping communities meet air quality goals;
- Use transportation planning to maximize system efficiency and support economic development;
- Expand ISTEA outreach and training;
- Increase the priority for freight projects;
- Give rural areas a fair shake in the distribution of funds; and
- Emphasize preservation of the existing transportation system infrastructure.

Source: U.S. DOT, *ISTEA, Regional Roundtable Report and Action Plan: A Progress Report from Our Customers*, March 1994.

Box 9
THE ASSOCIATION OF METROPOLITAN
PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS (AMPO)

MPOs organized to work together at their first annual conference, "The Power of Partnerships," held in July 1994. "There is a power in *MPOs* that many of us don't recognize, and it's the power of partnerships . . . of convening all the players," said the chairman.

A major concern was how MPOs will be evaluated for recertification by USDOT. The proposed system is one of ongoing review and improvement based on best practices for:

- 1) Integration of the 15 planning factors;
- 2) Public involvement;
- 3) Major investment studies;
- 4) Congestion management and treatment of air quality analysis;
- 5) Integration of air quality into planning throughout the process; and
- 6) Financially constraining plans and programs.

Source: Conference on "The Power of Partnerships," San Francisco, July 21-23, 1994. Notes from NARC.

At least 40% of the MPOs participated in a wide range of other ISTEA activities. The least frequently practiced activities (fewer than 40 percent) are **growth** management, access management, energy planning, collection of air quality data, recreation planning, and zoning.
BOX 10

There has been a healthy increase in the number of MPOs undertaking several ISTEA

Box 10
MPO PROGRAM ACTIVITIES
(in descending order of commonality)

Most Common (80% to 100%)	% 1992	% 1993	% Change
Unified work program	91	97	+6
TIP conforms to CAAA	84	95	+11*
Long-range planning	85	94	+9
MTIPs included in STIP		89	
Technical support from SDOT	84	89	+5
Technical support to SDOT	75	85	+10*
Environmental review	68	85	+17*
Quite common (65% to 79%)			
Funds programmed for non-road uses	46	79	+33*
Adequate local matching funds	67	75	+8
MPO involved in updating SIP	61	71	+10*
Transit planning	74	70	-4
Joint effort on NHS	72	68	-4
Economic development	68	68	
MPO travel model	62	67	+5
Land use decisions	70	65	-5
Less common (30% to 64%)			
MPO programming of CMAQ funds	50	59	+9
Non-motorized modes	63	57	-6
Ride-share	54	50	-4
Air quality planning	52	46	-6
Corridor preservation	32	44	+12*
Joint effort to classify roads	36	33	-3
Growth management	21	30	+9
Access management	32	44	+12*
Rare (0 to 29%)			
Energy planning	28	23	-5
MPO collects air quality data	21		
Recreation planning	23	20	-3
Zoning at regional level	6	6	

*Major positive change

Source: American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, with National Association of Regional Councils and American Public Transit Association, *Survey and Summaries of Metropolitan Planning Organizations and State Departments of Transportation*, Washington, DC, November 1992 and 1993.

activities, including air quality conformance and involvement in preparing the SIP; providing technical support to the SDOT; preparing environmental reviews; and using flexible funding, corridor preservation, and access management. Thus, ISTEA appears to be having the intended effect, at least in certain respects.

Some other summary findings are shown in **BOX 11**. Most noticeable, perhaps, is the greater concern with the MPO/SDOT relationship in 1992 compared with 1993. In 1993, the MPOs seemed more concerned with internal problems.

NARC's Data Base. NARC has established a database on MPOs as part of its sponsorship of AMPO. **BOX 12** shows some preliminary changes since ISTEA was enacted.

The greatest changes have occurred in the technical committees of the large non-attainment area MPOs and the governing boards of the small non-attainment MPOs (43 and 45 percent, respectively). There has been less change in the other types of MPOs and in the citizen advisory committees, and in voting procedures. *All types of MPOs have increased their* staffs,

FHWA/ACIR Voting Power Survey. FHWA had data on voting structures and the availability of weighted voting options for **86** MPO governing bodies (out of **137** surveyed). ACIR's analysis showed that central cities were underrepresented on 79 percent of the governing boards and that only **18** boards had a weighted voting option. (Seth Benjamin, John Kincaid, and Bruce McDowell, "MPOs and Weighted Voting," *Intergovernmental Perspective*, Spring 1994, pp. 31-35.)

Box 11

MPO RELATIONSHIPS WITH SDOTS AND OTHERS

Findings (1992 Survey)

Challenges perceived in *MPO* relationships with SDOTs:

- Coordination
- Reporting requirements
- Equitable distribution of funding
- Developing management systems and TIPs
- Mandated uses of STP funds
- Integrating land use, clean air, and transportation planning

Other challenges perceived by MPOs:

- Partnerships with interest groups and local governments
- Need for public involvement workshops

57% of MPOs said they were sole data collectors, while **84%** of SDOTs said they were sole data collectors.

While 50% of MPOs in non-attainment areas believed their plans conform with CAAA, few claimed conformity with local land use codes.

90% of MPOs perceived positive relationships with transit operators.

Source: American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, with National Association of Regional Councils and American Public Transit Association, *Survey and Summaries of Metropolitan Planning Organizations and State Departments of Transportation*, Washington, DC, November **1992** and 1993.

Findings (1993 Survey)

Challenges perceived by MPOs:

- Public participation
- Environmental sensitivity
- Use of ISTEA management systems
- Staffing and skills needed to be more comprehensive
- Data and information
- Making the link to local land use decisionmakers for regional strategies

MPO policy committee representation expanded to include transit owners and operators.

State and local road functions dominated project selection.

Consideration of transportation in the development of land use plans had increased.

Box 12

MPO BASELINE SURVEY

A 1994 survey of changes in MPO structure and function shows institutional changes based on an **86%** response rate.

Type of Changes Made since ISTEA	Large MPOs (Rank/%)		Small MPOs (Rank/%)		All MPOs	
	Attainment	Non-attainment	Attainment	Non-attainment	Average Rank	Percent
Changed technical committee	1/30%	1/43%	1/28%	2/31%	1	34%
Changed governing board structure	2/27%	2/31%	2/20%	1/45%	2	29%
Changed or formed citizen advisory committee	3/16%	3/25%	3/18%	3/13%	3	19%
Changed voting procedures	4/5%	4/15%	4/10%	4/10%	4	11%
Added Staff (FTE):						
1990	2.08	8.34	1.29	0.56	3.91	
1993	4.19	11.15	2.03	1.67	5.53	

Source: NARC, *MPO Baseline Survey*, December 1994. Initial tables produced by Robert Gage, University of Colorado.

Research Studies

The U.S. Department of Transportation has commissioned several research studies of the roles of MPOs in implementing ISTEA. The first two were based largely on literature searches, and three were based on original field research.

Institute of Public Administration. In the first study (December 1992), the institute laid out the technical, consultative, and political capacity challenges to MPOs, and recommended several research and technical assistance tasks for the department. These recommendations reinforced the findings of the conferences held that year. **BOX 13**

Harvard. The second study (1993) concentrated on regional governance. Significant mismatches were found between the integrated planning required by ISTEA and CAAA and the widely dispersed governmental structures and powers in metropolitan America. Thoroughly participatory MPOs, with solid federal encouragement, were recommended to bridge the gap. **BOX 14**

Subsequent field research in the Metropolitan Washington (DC) area, however, suggests difficulties with such an approach. Relying principally on stakeholder participation could mean that each participant will seek to use the MPO as a tool to further its own interests rather than to promote the common good.

Volpe National Transportation Systems Center, U.S. DOT. In its report on field work in the nine largest MPOs (January 1993), the center confirmed that there are substantial gaps between current practice and the expectations of ISTEA and CAAA. The issues stressed were MPO political power, long-range planning, better MTIPs, and improved public participation. **BOX 15**

The National Association of Regional Councils/Program for Community Problem Solving. The association developed a new public participation manual, drawing on best practices in 28 MPOs. Almost every MPO has cited the need for help with this process. **BOX 16**

Another U.S. DOT-sponsored study of public involvement in transportation planning

Box 13

**WHAT ISTE A ASKS OF MPOs:
AN EARLY ASSESSMENT**

The Institute of Public Administration identified three substantial ISTE A challenges to MPOs, based on field research.

1. Technical analysis and planning capacity;
2. Public involvement and coordination capacity;
3. Political capacity.

Issues Needing Research, Experimentation, and Evaluation:

- Alternative approaches to U.S. DOT certification of MPOs and project approval;
- Steps to link transportation and air quality programs;
- Methods to link land use and transportation decision-making and financing;
- Means of implementing intermodalism;
- Adjustments for new intergovernmental roles;

- Better representation of central cities, urban transit agencies, and neighborhoods;
- Effective mechanisms for public participation and building consensus on project priorities; and
- The effect of funding on MPO capacity.

Recommendations

- U.S. DOT support research and consultation to develop new regulations, guidance, and technical assistance to encourage MPO innovation and the sharing of expertise. This should include ongoing surveys of MPOs.
- Study the effectiveness of transportation control measures, growth management efforts, regional planning, and local land use controls.
- Develop criteria for comparing modes and assessing trade-offs.
- Study role of governors, cities, neighborhoods and transit agencies, and the integration of MPO technical committees, policy boards, and separate councils of governments.

Source: Institute of Public Administration, *ISTEA: Promise to Performance*. Prepared for FHWA, U.S. DOT. New York, December 1992.

Box 14

ISTEA AND CAAA CHALLENGES TO REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

Expectations

ISTEA and CAAA expect surface transportation programs to make a major contribution to achieving clean air standards. These laws demand a set of integrated and technically complex plans prepared under tight deadlines that link air quality and surface transportation.

Structure and Authority Mismatch

There is a mismatch between the geographic scale of the problem and the structure and authority of the public institutions that must implement ISTE A and CAAA. The United States lacks an effective regional structure of politics and governance. Authority over policy spheres is divided in metropolitan areas.

The complexity of air quality and transportation issues compounds the complexity of managing both nongovernmental participation and the participation of geographically overlapping government jurisdictions.

Public agencies may not have the resources, skills, or time to develop necessary organizational capacity and then integrate

their separate roles. Agreement on espoused policy does not ensure that it will be carried out.

Goals Mismatch

Some regard air quality as a policy lever to control sprawl, reduce automobile use, and promote a particular vision for "quality of life." Others promote mobility or access.

Divergent goal perspectives may make consensus on policies and projects difficult, despite the federal threat of sanctions for non-compliance. The threat is untested.

The Challenge

U.S. DOT's challenge is to persuade state and local governments to work together to implement ISTE A and CAAA.

MPOs must elicit and manage participation from various government institutions, interest groups, and the public. Through diverse participation, policy options are to be devised and tough decisions made.

Source: Arnold M. Howitt and Alan Altshuler, "Regional Governance, Challenges of CAAA and ISTE A," *TR News*, No. 167, July-August, 1993.

Box 15

**PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF MPO COMPLIANCE WITH
ISTEA AND CAAA**

A late 1993 review of the metropolitan planning processes in nine of the largest MPOs identified four significant gaps between current practice and the expectations of ISTEA and CAAA.

1. MPOs, historically removed from major political decisionmaking, must now become the key intergovernmental consensus builders.
2. Long-range plans for one or two modes must now become multi-modal and intermodal, must focus on alternatives, and must be judged against system performance.
3. The short-range transportation improvement program (TIP), which has been just a collection of lightly justified local projects, must now become fiscally constrained, thoroughly justified, and linked strategically to a long-range plan.
4. What has been limited public participation must now become an earlier, more substantive, and broader process.

Source: William M. Lyons, "The FTA-FHWA MPO Reviews-Planning Practice Under ISTEA and CAAA," 73rd TRB Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, January 1994.

and project development is due to be completed in 1995. (Howard/Stein-Hudson and Parsons Brinkerhoff, *Innovative Techniques for Public Involvement in Transportation Planning and Project Development*, forthcoming.)

MIT. Some of the most well-known MPOs were surveyed by telephone regarding the 15 required planning factors. *BOX 17*

The conclusion was that ISTEA has raised expectations for the scope and quality of planning beyond what can be accomplished now, especially for the smaller MPOs. Consequently, some of the planning factors can be considered only qualitatively, but progress is being made in improving quantitative methods. The institutional, organizational, and political issues are the most challenging. *BOX 18*

National Academy for Public Administration. In a forthcoming report, NAPA documents the results of a two-phase project involving: (1) extensive field research and analysis of factors driving change in state DOTs and (2) recommendations for the most effective response strategies for the departments. The research findings are summarized in *BOX 19*.

Box 16

**COLLABORATIVE DECISIONMAKING STATUS AND
SUGGESTIONS**

Metropolitan planning regulations require early and continuing public involvement opportunities throughout the transportation planning and programming process. A manual on collaborative decisionmaking has been developed based on best practices in MPOs of different population sizes, air quality designations, and locations.

Collaborative decisionmaking for transportation planning is defined as a "consensus-based approach in which MPOs work in partnership with citizens, special interest groups, other agencies and elected officials to develop transportation plans and programs with maximum community support."

In areas with populations greater than 200,000, ISTEA transfers the lead role in decisionmaking from the state to the MPOs. For areas under 200,000, ISTEA requires a joint decisionmaking arrangement between the MPO and state DOT.

Success requires:

1. Engaging the general public and interests (such as freight) that have not had a meaningful role before;
2. Buttressing the new authority of MPOs to assert metropolitan priorities for the use of federal and state transportation funds;
3. Developing a regional perspective that will allow the local politicians governing the MPO to support projects of regional benefit; and
4. Allocating adequate MPO resources to the public participation process.

Public participation strategies that can assist MPOs include:

- Strengthened citizen advisory committees;
- Qualified consultants or staff who can run an innovative public participation program;
- Kick-off conferences at the beginning of a new planning cycle; and
- Special outreach to civic and business groups.

Source: National Association of Regional Councils in association with Program for Community Problem Solving, *Working Together on Transportation Planning: A Guide to Collaborative Decision Making*, January 1994. Report #FTA-DC-26-6013-94-1.

Available Assistance

U.S. DOT has a long record of providing technical assistance and research support to the state departments and MPOs, which it depends on to implement its programs. These programs have been refocused rapidly to address the needs of ISTEA. For example:

Meetings and Conferences. Perhaps the largest U.S. DOT program is the Transportation Research Board. Through a network of

THE 15 PLANNING FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE METROPOLITAN PLAN

1. Preserve and enhance *existing transportation systems*
2. Conserve *energy*
3. Relieve and prevent *congestion*
4. Integrate transportation policies with *land use* and development policies (demand management, growth management, APFO)
5. Fund "*enhancements*"
6. Include *all transportation projects* (not just federally funded ones)
7. Make major connections (*connectivities*) with:
 - international borders
 - ports and airports
 - freight routes to modes
 - intermodal facilities
 - recreational, historic, and military destinations
8. Ensure *connectivity* of metro and non-metro roads
9. Meet the needs identified through *management systems* prepared by SDOTs and MPOs
10. Preserve *right-of-way* for future projects
11. Provide for the efficient movement of *freight*
12. Use *life cycle costing* analysis of proposed investments {and prepare major multimodal investment analysis: other modes treated like transit "alternatives analysis" to facilitate comparative analysis across modes)
13. Transportation *impact analyses*: social, economic, and environmental (include linkages between housing, jobs, and transportation)
14. Enhance *transit services*
15. Enhance *transit security*

MPO EXPERIENCES IN ADDRESSING THE 15 PLANNING FACTORS

4s a result of ISTEA, the planning process has been mewed and reinvigorated by MPOs. According to this survey, some of the required 15 factors are still being addressed qualitatively, while quantitative methods are under development.

Planning Issues

Expectations have been raised beyond what can be accomplished.

- Local officials must deal with conflicts between urban and suburban priorities.
- Staff is not adequate to deal with Major Investment Studies.
- Extensive project planning requirements limit long-range planning activities.
- Integration of management systems is difficult.
- Schedules required by ISTEA and CAAA are unrealistic.
- Smaller MPOs need different guidelines than larger MPOs.
- Some view the process as a way to address social, not transportation, objectives.

- Flexible funding is not always available. The pie needs to be cut more ways but is not bigger.

Air Quality Issues

- More political cooperation is needed.
- Coordination is needed among federal, state, and other agencies dealing with air quality planning.
- Technical models are needed to evaluate conformity.
- Technical models are needed for Major Investment Studies.

Larger and non-attainment MPOs

- In non-attainment areas, MPOs are spending substantial funds to update comprehensive planning tools from the 1960s and 1970s.
- The technical problems can be addressed if adequate financial resources are made available.
- The institutional, organizational, and political issues are most challenging.

Smaller and attainment MPOs

- Limited staff resources constrain MPOs' efforts to pursue the more comprehensive ISTEA approach.

Box 19

**STATE DEPARTMENTS OF TRANSPORTATION:
STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE**

Summary of Findings

1. Each SDOT is at a unique point in its evolution. Each has a different blend of “cultures” that creates strengths as well as some obstacles to change.
2. Almost without exception, Chief Administrative Officers of the SDOTs, other SDOT employees, and stakeholders see significant changes affecting transportation, with important implications for SDOTs’ missions, roles, responsibilities, and relationships.
3. Many SDOTs are applying improvement strategies and techniques for achieving organizational effectiveness.
4. While SDOTs are responding in many ways to factors driving change, little evidence exists that fundamental change has penetrated very deeply in most SDOTs.
5. The greatest obstacle to SDOTs in responding effectively to change is also their greatest strength—their people.
6. Changes in organizational culture and methods of operating will take time, effort, and strong leadership.
7. Broad and dramatic organizational change processes generally do not arise without a direct and immediate stimulus, despite the magnitude of changes facing SDOTs.
8. Most SDOTs do not have a comprehensive or systematic process for gathering information and insights from stakeholders, employees, and the general public on goals, policies, or programs.
9. The best means for stakeholders to contribute to the ability of SDOTs to respond to change is to work in partnership with them, according to most interviews.

Source: Thomas Larson, et al., “State Departments of Transportation: Strategies for Change.” Draft prepared for National Cooperative Highway Research Program, forthcoming from Transportation Research Board. (Used by permission.)

committees, TRB involves the whole transportation community in developing research and technical assistance needs statements and encouraging the exchange of ideas. The annual meeting, mid-year committee meetings, and special conferences contribute greatly to this effort. Significant papers are published through the *Records*, *TRNews*, *Circulars*, and conference proceedings.

Many ideas for TRB research come from the committees and special conferences. An example is the conference on strategic mobility

research convened at Irvine, California, November 1-3, 1993, to respond to new ISTEA and CAAA requirements (*see Appendix B*).

Contract Research. U.S. DOT also contracts directly for research and uses its own think tank—the Volpe Transportation Systems Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts—to get quick results on high-priority topics.

One such program is the Travel Model Improvement Program. This program was initiated cooperatively by the departments of Transportation and Energy, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Its purposes are to enable travel forecasting to respond to:

- New policy issues like growth management and environmental enhancements;
- Changes in travel behavior associated with a variety of transportation control measures; and
- The needs of decisionmakers who must anticipate the effects of transportation improvements on congestion, air quality, energy conservation, and land development. (Edward Weiner, “Upgrading Travel Demand Forecasting Capabilities,” presentation to the Fourth National Conference on Transportation Planning Methods Applications, Daytona, FL, 1993.)

The recommendations of a conference on the Travel Model Improvement Program are listed in *BOX 20*.

University Research. U.S. DOT supports transportation research at 13 University Transportation Research Centers. Each of these centers represents a consortium of universities in a particular region. These centers are listed in *Appendix B*.

Technology Sharing. U.S. DOT makes its research available through a technology sharing program that distributes reports and other guidance free on request. For example, the department issued a memorandum in May 1994 explaining the status of technical assistance in financial planning. Another example is

Box 20

TRAVEL MODEL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Conference Recommendations:

- 1) The sensitivity of land use and travel models to emerging transportation policies should be improved.
- 2) Research is needed to identify household and individual activity characteristics that influence trip chaining.
- 3) Trip generation models should be sensitive to the type and level of transportation services.
- 4) Research is needed on choice of trip destination and travel mode for non-work and non-home based trips.
- 5) Information is needed on changes in travel behavior over time to accurately predict future travel.
- 6) Models need to be developed for forecasting movements of freight, goods, and services.
- 7) Research is needed to improve understanding of the potential for congestion relief from non-motorized and non-transportation modes.
- 8) Research is needed to improve land use forecasting procedures and to effectively integrate those with travel forecasting procedures.
- 9) Better understanding is needed of the influences of vehicle characteristics and operating conditions on motor vehicle emissions.
- 10) Considerable need exists for training all levels of practitioners in various type and sizes of transportation planning organizations.
- 11) Improved communication and timely dissemination of information among transportation planning practitioners is needed for sharing problems, solutions, and advancements.

Source: Ed Weiner, speech based on "Travel Model Improvement Program Conference Proceedings."

the U.S. DOT notebook on public participation techniques, *Innovations in Public Involvement for Transportation Planning* (January 1994). DOT also offers compilations such as its technical assistance catalogue, *Intermodal Technical Assistance Activities for Transportation Planners* (1993). (See Appendix B.)

Training. U.S. DOT supports at least three training programs for state and regional transportation personnel. The National Highway Institute and the National Transit Institute offer standard courses at a central location. The

Local Transportation Assistance Program offers a variety of more locally accessible training opportunities.

Other Opportunities. Professional associations—such as the American Planning Association, the American Society of Civil Engineers, and the Institute of Traffic Engineers—offer national conferences, publications, and local chapter activities. In addition, constituent organizations—such as the National Association of Regional Councils and the national Association of MPOs—provide additional opportunities.

Also of note are the continuing activities of the Surface Transportation Policy Project. In addition to a regular newsletter and STPP sponsorship of the Livable Communities conferences, the Partner States Program is helping to organize the MPOs and citizen groups in eight states for creative interchanges of views with the SDOTs. *BOX 21*

STPP also speaks for many non-traditional stakeholders that are included in the ISTEA process. It monitors implementation of the act, participates in numerous conferences and meetings, and offers testimony or comments to the Congress and the Administration. *BOX 22*

Questions for Field Research

ISTEA greatly expanded the responsibilities of MPOs in three fundamental respects:

1. **The MPO organization** must be more inclusive and linked more strongly with other organizations and the public.
2. **The MPO planning process** must be considerably broader in scope, fully intermodal, more advanced technologically, more outcome oriented, and more open to interaction with decisionmakers and affected parties.
3. **A new implementation role is established for MPOs** that are designated as Transportation Management Areas (TMAs). These MPOs (about 137 of them, mostly with populations over 200,000) will determine how to spend

Box 21
STPP PARTNER-STATES PROGRAM

Georgia focuses primarily on public involvement in both the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program and the long-range Statewide Transportation Plan.

Maryland focuses on advice to the Maryland DOT on a variety of topics.

Minnesota focuses on advice to MN DOT and support for the Minnesota Transportation Alliance.

Missouri focuses technical assistance to the Missouri Highway and Transportation Department on the long-range plan, transportation system management, and public involvement. This work includes expansion of the Missouri Transportation Alliance.

Pennsylvania focuses on active STPP participation on advisory committees and program teams, and on support for three statewide citizen-based outreach and education organizations.

Texas focuses on the statewide transportation enhancements and congestion mitigation programs, a program for MPOs, and the formation of a statewide transportation coalition called the Trans Texas Alliance.

Virginia focuses on the formation of the Virginia Surface Transportation Coalition and advice to Virginia DOT.

Washington focuses on advice to WASH DOT in establishing its public participation program, and work with the state's two major transportation coalitions.

Source: Hank Dittmar and Christopher Bender, "Transportation Partnerships: The Surface Transportation Policy Project's Partner State Program," *TRNews*, November/December 1994.

Box 22
STPP MONITORS ISTEA

At the end of the second year of ISTEA implementation, the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) issued a status report, judging the effort from its viewpoint. Here is what it found:

ISTEA calls for profound changes in the state DOTs and the MPOs. We should not expect this change to occur overnight.

ISTEA shifted decisionmaking from the professionals in the state DOTs to a shared responsibility between the SDOTs and the MPOs. The MPOs were charged with opening up the process to include all modes, all levels of government, elected officials, and the public.

But, there are concerns now that: neither the central cities nor the suburbs have done well; both the ports and the transit operators have been disadvantaged; the MPOs have not acted quickly enough to include the state's projects; and the states have not cooperated with the MPOs.

Confusion has increased because more complex planning is called for, but expectations are not clear and the federal regulations were not issued until October 1993.

The clearest winners have been those willing to make alliances with new stakeholders who participate actively in the planning process.

Too much of the ISTEA money is being committed before ISTEA planning is done. The flexibility to use funding for alternatives to the auto is not being used much. The lack of flexibility in using state matching funds contributes to this result. In addition, MPOs requesting more flexible funds find that inquiries to FHWA bring responses only through the SDOTs. This puts transit, bike, pedestrian, clean air, and environmental interests at a disadvantage.

ISTEA is working. It provides the mechanism for integrating transportation into livable communities. It asks the right question, "How can we integrate transportation investment with a set of community values, including clean air and access to housing and jobs?"

Source: Surface Transportation Policy Project, *ISTEA Year Three: A Special Report on the Implementation of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991*. Washington, DC, January 1994.

about 20 percent of ISTEA funds, making them more responsible for planning results (outcomes). TMAs must be federally certified every three years.

As noted earlier, the specifics of the expanded MPO responsibilities have been left somewhat ambiguous by both ISTEA and the implementing regulations. However, three years into the implementation of ISTEA, the nature of MPO responsibilities is beginning to clarify.

BOX23 lists the topics of inquiry pursued in the field research reported in Chapter 3. These topics are organized under the three headings listed above. For each of these topics, the interviewers asked:

- What had changed because of ISTEA?
- What difficulties were being encountered in complying with ISTEA?
- What kinds of assistance would be most helpful in improving the response to ISTEA? **BOX24** lists suggested questions for the interviewers in greater detail.

The sampling process is described in Chapter 2. The relationship of the 18 sample MPOs to the universe of **339** organizations is described. Obviously, different MPOs have different capabilities in relation to ISTEA and CAAA. Thus, it was important to pick a representative sample to avoid an unrealistic profile of MPO needs for assistance.

Box 23

BASIC TYPES OF CAPACITY AND LINKAGES TO BE CONSIDERED

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>I. Organizational Capacity Expanded/Inclusive (Appropriate Organizational Arrangements, Legislation, Structures, and Relationships)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Boundaries B. Decisionmaking board and committees (equitable representation and voting arrangements on technical and policy bodies—or acceptable alternative) C. Designations (MPO, TMA, other federal, other state) D. Involvement of all affected parties—"open" and "equitable" planning processes E. Cooperative coordination agreements (with other MPOs, other regional organizations, transportation providers for all modes, state agencies, local governments) F. MPO/DOT/governor relationships G. Memberships in state and national associations of MPOs, regional councils, etc. H. Participation in TRB, national and regional conferences, STPP activities, etc. <p>II. Planning Capacity (Appropriate Plans and Processes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Considering the required 15 factors of the plan (<i>Box 17</i>) B. Preparing congestion management systems (CMS) and plan to meet air quality standards (if applicable)—TMAs and small non-attainment areas C. Use of up-to-date planning methods/technologies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Data 2. Models 3. Interactive planning processes 4. Involvement processes D. Adequate personnel (number, quality, experience, training) and/or consultants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> E. Adequate funding of the planning process F. Use of outcome-oriented performance measures (including "social equity") G. Financial planning (for the "constrained TIP") <p>III. Implementation Capacity (Appropriate Action, Results, and Outcomes—Ability to "Make a Difference" in Transportation Investment and Management Decisions)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Effective and "equitable" MPO decisionmaking (authority and outcomes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Constrained TIP 2. Air quality elements 3. Intermodal flexibility B. Approval of MTIP by governor C. Incorporation of MTIP into state TIP (STIP) D. Approval of STIP by FHWA/FTA E. Cross-acceptance with local land use and development decisionmakers (and growth management) F. Cross-acceptance with regional and state air quality regulators G. Cross-acceptance with wetlands and water quality regulators H. Identification of barriers to flexible planning, decision-making, funding, and implementation (and program to remove barriers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pipeline full of traditional projects 2. Matching not flexible 3. Planning not multimodal and flexible 4. Expanded boundaries and scope of work harder to handle 5. Litigation I. Certification by U.S. DOT |
|---|--|

Box 24

APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT EACH ISSUE

(Interview Guide)

1. What approaches and innovations are your MPO taking to comply with ISTEA and related provisions of CAAA and ADA?
 - How helpful are these approaches?
 - Do you wish **you** could use different (or additional) approaches? Which ones and why? What is stopping you?
 2. Do you have the **tools** you need to comply with ISTEA?
 - Which ones are missing? Where can you get them?
 3. What barriers do you have to overcome?
 - How can you overcome them? (If you can)
 4. What assistance does your MPO need? (Please be **as** specific **as** possible.)
 - Better/clearer federal regulations
 - TRB conferences and publications (including NCHRP and TCRP research)
- Consultant Services
 - More adequate funding for the MPO
 - University training (including University Transportation Centers)
 - U.S. DOT Technology Sharing Program
 - U.S. DOT research programs
 - Statewide transportation coalition
 - Interstate transportation coalitions
 - Information exchange on “best practices”/clearinghouse mechanisms
 - Associations of MPOs
 - Better federal transportation data
 - STPP Partner-States Program
 - Other (please specify)

CHAPTER 2

MPOs ARE NOT ALL ALIKE

The metropolitan planning responsibilities required by ISTEA are carried out by **339** metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs).¹ This number changes as a result of the decennial population census and as the political process adjusts to new conditions. Furthermore, MPOs differ greatly in size, responsibilities, and capabilities. Thus, studies of MPOs must recognize and represent the diversity of this complex universe.

This chapter examines briefly the universe of MPOs and explains how the sample cases were chosen for the field work reported in Chapter 3.

The Universe of MPOs

MPOs were first required in **1962** for all “urbanized areas” (UZAs). UZAs are defined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census as contiguous areas of urban settlement with a population of at least 50,000 and a density of at least 1,000 persons per square mile. Some MPO-like organizations had existed since the **1950s** to prepare special metropolitan transportation studies under the auspices of state highway agencies in major areas such as Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia. They provided the models followed by MPOs across the country.

Number, Size, and Shape of MPOs

UZAs do not necessarily follow political boundaries. The Census Bureau reviews and adjusts the boundaries after each decennial census, creating new UZAs when urban settlements grow above the 50,000 population threshold and decommissioning others. Thus, the number, size, and shape of MPOs is subject to the dynamics of population growth and decline. By this process, the number of MPOs has grown from 218 in **1972** to **339** today.²

About **70** MPOs were added following the **1980** Census, and about 12 new MPOs resulted from the creation of **33** new UZAs following the **1990** Census.

As growth occurs, UZAs sometimes overrun the boundaries of MPOs or become so large that state and local officials choose more than one MPO to serve the area. Presently, 14 contiguous urbanized areas within a single state have two or more MPOs. Conversely, **36** MPOs serve multiple UZAs.

Of the **396** UZAs, 54 cross state lines; **44** are served by a single MPO and the others by more than one MPO. Examples include Chicago, Memphis, New York, and Portland (Oregon/Washington). Of the 270 metropolitan areas designated by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, **37** cross state lines.

The discrepancy between the number of interstate metropolitan areas and the interstate UZAs occurs because some UZAs are not part of a metropolitan area, some UZAs cross state lines when the corresponding metropolitan area does not, and some interstate UZAs are in two metropolitan areas. The number of interstate MPOs does not match either the interstate UZAs or interstate metropolitan areas because MPOs may cover multiple, partial, or whole areas.

This tangled web of boundaries took on new dimensions with enactment of ISTEA, which requires that MPO boundaries encompass the area of expected urbanization over the next 20 years and the air quality region if it is in non-attainment. In addition, it is appropriate under federal law for an MPO to encompass the entire metropolitan area if the local governments and the governor agree. However, it is not required that these areas be covered by a single MPO. Thus, simplification of boundaries and the use of fewer MPOs is authorized, but not required.

If more than one MPO serves a single area, ISTEA requires coordination between them. The same requirement applies to two or more state departments of transportation (SDOTs) in an interstate metropolitan area.

Legal Authority

Originally, all MPOs were treated alike under federal laws and regulations. In the mid-1980s, when funding for metropolitan planning was being stretched thin, preference for funding was given to the MPOs with populations of 200,000 or more. ISTEA added air quality attainment and non-attainment as another legal distinction, without regard to population size. Thus, there now are four types of MPOs with different powers. These distinctions are shown in *Table 1*.

Although most discussions about MPO authority and powers focus on federal legislation and regulations, state law and interstate compacts can and do specify additional characteristics of the MPO organizations. For example, some MPOs allocate non-federal transportation funds under the provisions of state law (California), and some MPOs may have limited growth management and land use planning roles or relationships under state law (Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington). In a few cases, these state-granted powers are more far-reaching than the federal authority. ISTEA recognizes the validity of state law in specifying some organizational provisions for MPOs. These state-generated distinctions reflect differences in political philosophies and political cultures that are distributed variously across the country.

Practical Considerations

MPOs generally have four basic components:

- (1) A policymaking board that involves elected officials from the local governments in the metropolitan area and others;
- (2) A technical committee that brings together staff representatives of the federal, state, and local transportation and transportation-related agencies that have a role in ISTEA planning;
- (3) An MPO staffing arrangement; and
- (4) A public involvement mechanism.

A typical configuration of these components is portrayed in *Figure 1*, but no two MPO processes are exactly alike.

Federal law and regulations allow great latitude in locating MPO staff. Although many of the older MPOs were established under the wing of a state highway department, most now have a local government-based organizational structure. In the 1970s, about 75 percent of MPOs were staffed by metropolitan regional councils, which are intergovernmental advisory planning bodies usually governed by local elected officials appointed on the basis of one government, one vote (see *Table 2*). The councils generally have independent staffs and deal with other program areas in addition to transportation.

Many new small MPOs have been created, however, and some older MPOs have separated from their regional councils. Now, only about 44 percent of all MPOs are staffed by regional councils. The others are staffed by individual cities, counties, or city-county planning commissions, or they are independent entities having only MPO responsibilities. Very few are staffed by the SDOT.

The strength of MPOs has been the provision of areawide analysis for highway and transit system planning. Most organizations have not been noted for studies of freight or intermodal facilities, their political decisionmaking capacity, or their control of transportation implementation funds.

The roles of MPOs also are determined by:

- Their relationship to the SDOT;
- The number of local governments in the region;
- The presence of an international border;
- The age and maturity of the MPO;
- The population growth rate (1980-1990) and economic climate; and
- The number and types of transportation modes in the region.

These factors are recognized in the ACIR sample, although not always by perfect indicators. For example, the proxy for relationship to the SDOT is the percentage of highway mileage in the state controlled by the state (see *Table 3*). The reasoning is that a state that owns more of the highways is likely to be more dominant.

Classes of MPOs	Population		Ozone or CO Nonattainment Area	Powers				Planning Required		
	200,000+	200,000-		Block Grant by Formula	Projects Constrained by CAA	Projects Selected by MPO	Priority for Planning Funds	Congestion & Air Quality Project Funds	Full	Abbreviated
1. Standard Large MPO	148			148		148	148		148	
2. Large MPO Nonattainment area	58		58	58	58	58	58	58	58	
3. Small MPO Nonattainment area		98	98		98	98	98	98	98	
4. Standard Small MPO		40								40
TOTALS	206	138	156	206	156	304	304	156	304	40

Note: Table 1 is about two years old, so the numbers are slightly out of date. For example, it shows about five more MPOs than the most current MPO directory from FHWA, and perhaps 10-20 more non-attainment areas than there are now. Official updates of these figures are not available.

Source: Federal Highway Administration.

Regional Council or Commission	81	37.2	205	82.3 ⁶	152	58.9	179	54.6	161	48
City, County, or Joint	38	17.4			44	17.1	83	25.3	96	28
City									(38)	(11)
County									(34)	(10)
Independent	7	3.2	30	12.1	54	20.9	52	15.8	74	22
State	92	42.2	14	5.6	8	3.1	14	4.3	8	2
TOTAL	218	100	249	100	258	100	328	100	339	100

¹ ACIR, *Toward More Balanced Transportation* (Washington, DC, 1975), pp. 82-83.

² U.S. Department of Transportation, *Urban System Study* (Washington, DC, December 1976), p. 45.

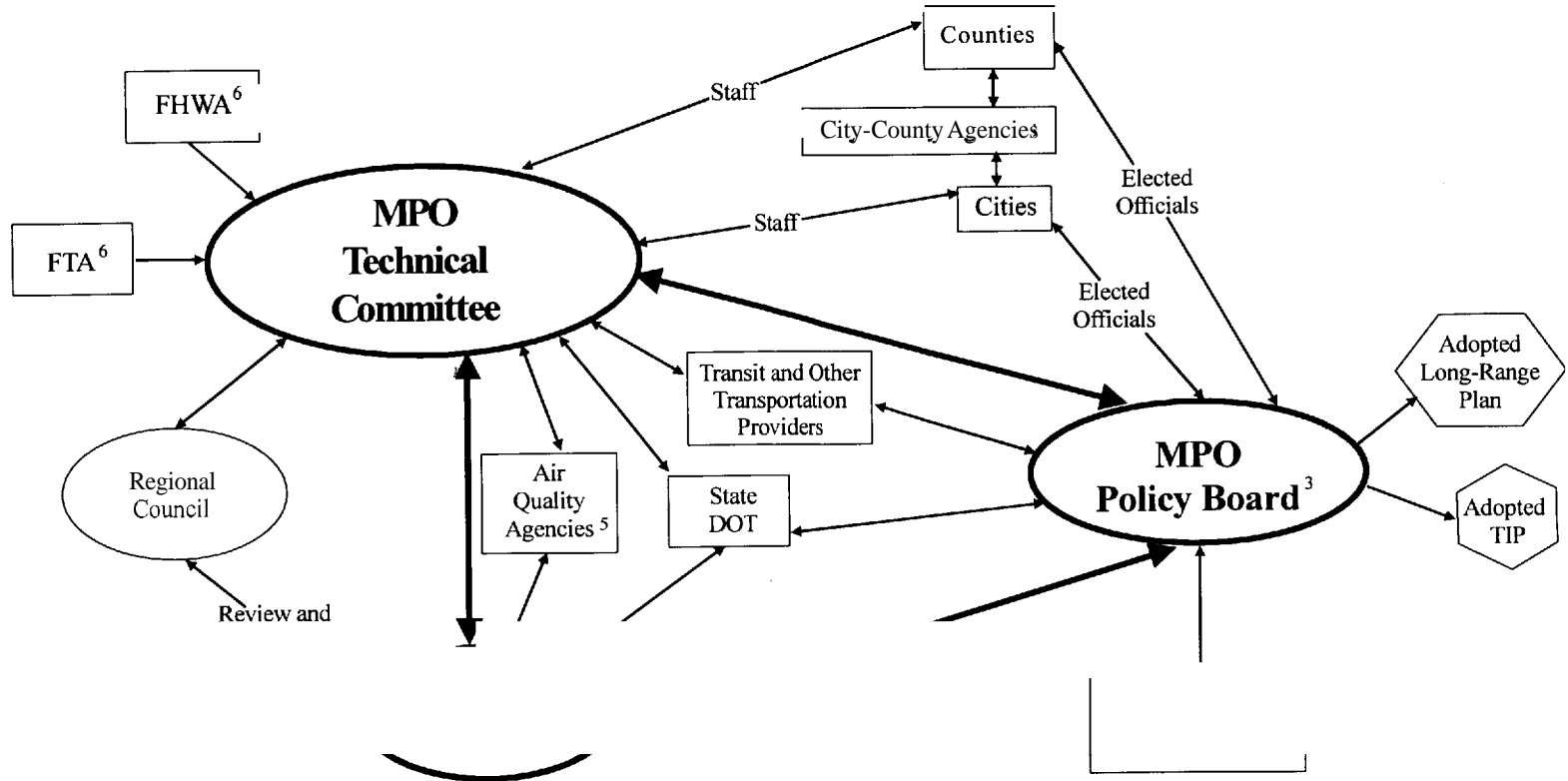
³ U.S. Department of Transportation, *Metropolitan Planning Organizations and State Transportation Agencies: Directory* (Washington, DC, June 1980).

⁴ MPO Mailing List, supplied by U.S. Department of Transportation, September 26, 1983.

⁵ Unpublished ACIR research, 1993.

⁶ Regional Councils accounted for about 75% of all MPOs at their peak in the mid 1970s. See ACIR, *Toward More Balanced Transportation*.

Figure 1
TYPICAL PARTICIPANTS IN THE MPO PROCESS¹



Notes:

- 1 No two MPO processes are alike.
- 2 Can be separate organization; a unit located in a city, county, or state government; or a regional council.
- 3 An intergovernmental decisionmaking body established by a formal agreement.
- 4 Where it exists.
- 5 Where appropriate.
- 6 The federal agencies may have other linkages to the MPO process.

Table 3
STATE ADMINISTRATION OF NON-FEDERAL HIGHWAYS

State"	State-Controlled Mileage	Total Mileage	Less Federal	Net State-Local	Ratio of State-Controlled Mileage to Net State-Local
West Virginia	31,858	34,919	650	34,269	92.96%
Delaware	4,887	5,524	3	5,521	88.52%
Virginia	56,441	68,429	2,026	66,403	85.00%
North Carolina	77,774	95,582	2,026	93,556	83.13%
South Carolina	41,638	64,129	602	63,527	65.54%
Alaska	5,849	13,634	2,588	11,046	52.95%
Kentucky	27,584	71,765	491	71,274	38.70%
Pennsylvania	44,421	116,788	992	115,796	38.36%
Maine	8,545	22,481	170	22,311	38.30%
Louisiana	16,647	58,629	626	58,003	28.70%
New Hampshire	4,027	14,913	136	14,777	27.25%
Missouri	32,357	121,424	563	120,861	26.77%
Texas	76,843	293,317	953	292,364	26.28%
Washington	18,880	79,413	7,204	72,209	26.15%
Hawaii	1,027	4,106	105	4,001	25.67%
Arkansas	16,208	77,162	1,628	75,534	21.46%
Oregon	11,273	95,237	41,870	53,367	21.12%
New Mexico	11,636	61,195	4,450	56,745	20.51%
Vermont	2,835	14,145	80	14,065	20.16%
Connecticut	3,972	20,280	4	20,276	19.59%
Wyoming	6,661	39,022	4,116	34,906	19.08%
Maryland	5,423	29,172	435	28,737	18.87%
Rhode Island	1,136	6,120		6,120	18.56%
Ohio	20,527	113,823	32	113,791	18.04%
Utah	5,799	43,270	9,729	33,541	17.29%
Tennessee	14,516	85,144	572	84,572	17.16%
Nevada	5,298	45,657	13,832	31,825	16.65%
Georgia	17,838	110,790	1,097	109,693	16.26%
Arizona	6,130	55,969	14,461	41,508	14.77%
New York	16,404	111,686		111,686	14.69%
Mississippi	10,468	72,795	779	72,016	14.54%
Idaho	5,122	58,588	23,121	35,467	14.44%
Colorado	9,244	78,043	7,123	70,920	13.03%
Illinois	17,369	136,402	172	136,230	12.75%
California	18,450	168,378	18,524	149,854	12.31%
Indiana	11,294	92,054		92,054	12.27%
Oklahoma	13,049	112,432	88	112,344	11.62%
Wisconsin	12,445	110,371	962	109,409	11.37%
North Dakota	7,399	66,648	831	65,817	11.24%
Nebraska	10,256	92,686	137	92,549	11.08%
Montana	6,200	70,357	14,248	56,109	11.05%
Florida	11,870	110,640	106	110,534	10.74%
Alabama	3,563	34,323	941	33,382	10.67%
Minnesota	7,904	129,622	1,627	127,995	10.43%
Massachusetts	3,563	34,323	117	34,206	10.42%
South Dakota	7,904	83,299	1,969	81,330	9.72%
New Jersey	3,247	34,286	41	34,245	9.48%
Iowa	10,105	112,586	121	112,465	8.99%
Michigan	9,632	117,520		117,520	8.20%
Kansas	10,672	133,655		133,655	7.98%
U.S. Average	800,237	3,901,715	182,412	3,719,303	21.52%

*States are listed in descending order of ratio of state-controlled mileage to net state-local mileage

Source: FHWA, Highway Statistics, 1992.

The Sample of MPOs

The 12 metropolitan areas and 18 MPOs in the **ACIR** sample and their characteristics are listed in *Table 4* (pages 40-41). The location of the **12** areas in relation to state lines and the standard federal regions is shown in *Figure 2*.

The sample represents:

- 4 consolidated metropolitan areas, 7 regular metropolitan areas, and 1 urbanized area in a non-metropolitan area;
- 9 of the 10 standard federal regions;
- 4 areas with multiple *MPOs*;
- 9 TMAs and 3 non-TMAs;
- Populations ranging from 62,000 to many millions;
- Population changes ranging from a slight loss to fairly rapid growth;
- State highway ownership ranging from 85 percent to about 8 percent;
- 3 MPOs created after the 1980 Census, and 1 after the 1990 Census;
- 2 state-staffed MPOs, 3 independent, 8 regional council, and 5 local government;
- 1 MPO on an international border, 2 interstate MPOs, 3 interstate areas with multiple MPOs, and a single-state area with multiple MPOs;
- 4 metropolitan areas with rail transit;

- State economic climates ranging from grades of B to D;
- Air quality areas that are attainment, non-attainment, and maintenance;
- About equal numbers of eastern, western, sunbelt, and frostbelt areas;
- MPOs with weighted voting as well as underrepresentation and overrepresentation of the central city; and
- MPOs having from 3 to 138 general local governments within the planning area boundary.

In short, this sample reflects the measurable characteristics of the *MPO* universe as completely **as** possible with such a small number of cases. Nevertheless, the findings in Chapter 3 should not be considered to be a scientifically validated representation of the whole universe of MPOs. There were not enough cases in the sample, and there was no attempt to weight the cases proportionately to the composition of the universe.

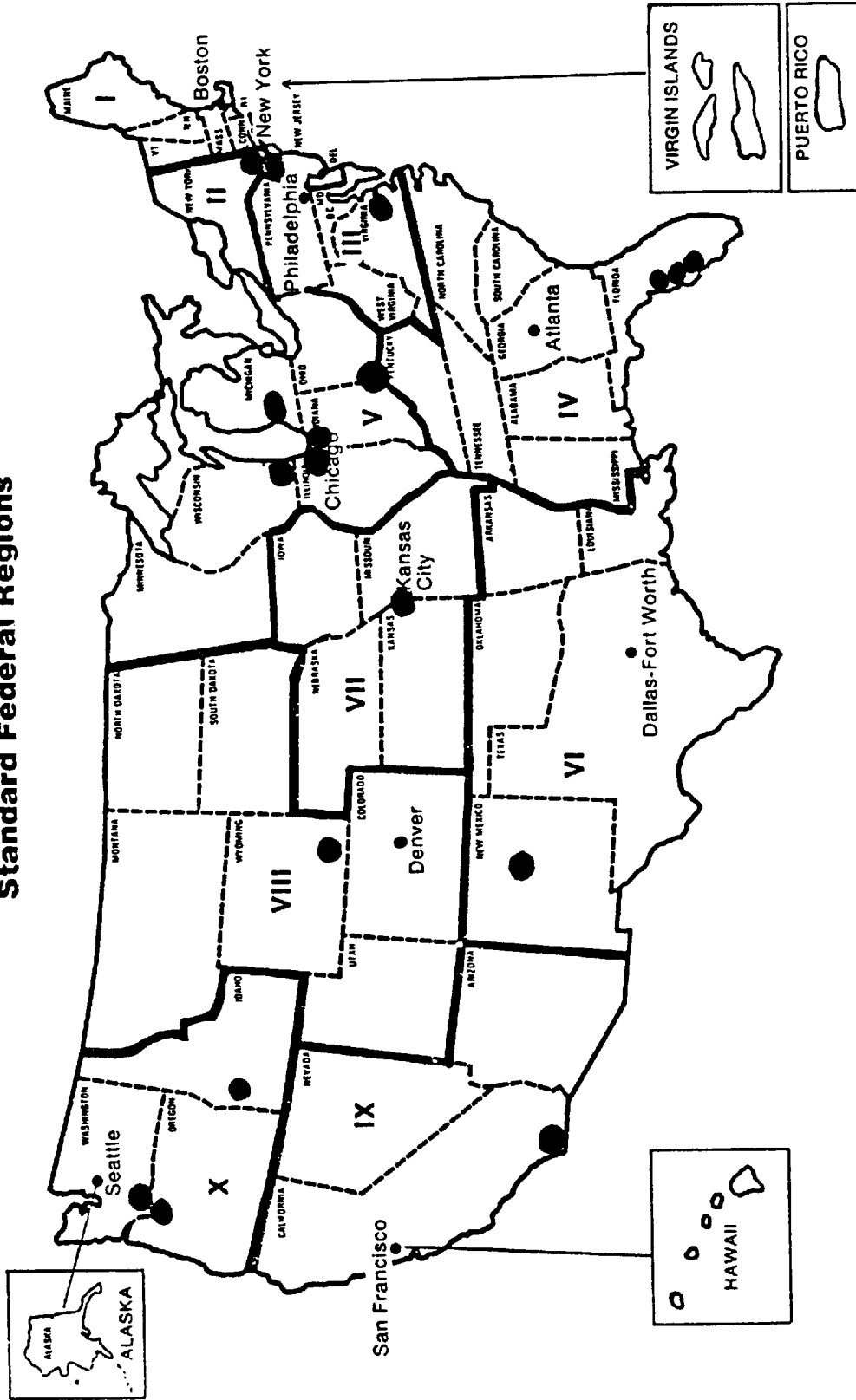
Notes

¹ U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, *Directory of Metropolitan Planning Organizations* (Washington, DC, 1993).

² Bruce D. McDowell, "The Metropolitan Planning Organization Role in the 1980s," *Journal of Advanced Transportation* 18 (1984): 125-133; McDowell and Sheldon M. Edner, "Reinventing Metropolitan and State Institutions for Surface Transportation Planning," in National Research Council, TRB, *Transportation Research Circular 406, Transportation Planning, Programming, and Finance* (Washington, DC, April 1993), pp. 64-74.

Figure 2

Standard Federal Regions



SOURCE: U.S. General Services Administration, 1976/77 United States Government Manual, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976, p. 818.

Table 4
CASE STUDY LIST—MPOs AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

Study Areas Name-State ¹	Type Metro Area	Federal Region	TMA Status	East (E) or West (W) of Miss. River	Frostbelt (F) or Sunbelt (S)	Pop in MPO (000)	Pop Change 1980-90 ²
<i>New York, NY/NJ</i> New York Metropolitan Transportation Council North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority	CMSA	2	X	E	F	11,100 5,800	Slow Rapid
<i>Norfolk, VA (P)</i> Hampton Roads Planning District Commission	MSA	3	X	E	S	1,320	Rapid
<i>Tampa, FL</i> Hillsborough Co. Metropolitan Planning Org. Pasco Co. Metropolitan Planning Organization Pinellas Co. Metropolitan Planning Organization	MSA	4	X	E	S	834 281 852	Rapid Rapid Rapid
<i>Cincinnati, OH-KY-IN</i> OKI Regional Council of Governments	CMSA	4/5	X	E	F	1,430	Slow
<i>Chicago, IL-IN-WI</i> Chicago Area Transportation Study Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission	CMSA	5	X	E	F	7,500 700 1,900	Slow Decline Slow
<i>Holland, MI</i> Macatawa Area Coordinating Council	MSA	5		E	F	62	Rapid
<i>Santa Fe, NM</i> Santa Fe Metropolitan Planning Organization	MSA	6	X	W	S	63	Rapid
<i>Kansas City, KS-MO (P)</i> Mid-America Regional Council	MSA	7	X	W	F	1,275	Rapid
<i>Cheyenne, WY</i> Cheyenne Metropolitan Planning Organization	UZA	8		W	F	62	Slow
<i>San Diego, CA</i> San Diego Association of Governments	MSA	9	X	W	S	2,348	Rapid
<i>Boise, ID</i> ADA Planning Association	MSA	10		W	F	168	Rapid
<i>Portland/Vancouver, OR-WA</i> Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council Metropolitan Service District	CMSA	10	X	W	F	238 1,277	Rapid Rapid

¹ (P) denotes those states that have participated in the assistance program offered by the Surface Transportation Policy Project.

² Growth was rapid if the change in population between 1980 and 1990 was greater than 1.1, slow if less than 1.1, declining if less than 1.0.

Table 4 (continued)

State DOT Control of Highway Mileage ³	Date Created	MPO Staffing ⁴	Metro Area is Interstate (I) or Single state (S)	Metro Area Has Rail (R) Transit	Statewide Economic Climate {Grade} ⁵	Air Quality ⁶	Central City Voting Index ⁷	Number General Govts.
							0.16	138
Low	pre-1980	State	I	R	NY - C	N		
Low	pre-1980	I	I	R	NJ - B	N		
								11
High	pre-1980	RC	S		B	N		
							1.88-1.29	15
Low	pre-1980	Local	S		C	N		
Low	1980	Local	S		N			
Low	pre-1980	Local	S		A			
							NA	77
Low	pre-1980	RC	I		OH - C KY - D	N		
							.10 - .11	128
Low	pre-1980	State	I	R	IL - B	N		
Low	pre-1980	RC	I	R	IN - D	N		
Low	pre-1980	RC	I		WI - B	N		
								7
Low	1990	I	S		C	N		
								3
Low	1980	Local	S		C	A		
							NA (W)	46
Medium	pre-1980	RC	I		KS - B MO - C	M		
								3
Low	1980	Local	S		C	A		
							(W)	19
Low	pre-1980	RC	S ⁸	R	C	N		
								4
Low	pre-1980	RC	S		B	N		
							NA-0.50	12
Medium	pre-1980	I	I	R	B	N		
Low	pre-1980	RC	I	R	B	N		

³ State control of highway miles: 0-25% is low, 25-50% is medium, and 51-100% is high.

⁴ I = Independent; RC = Regional Council, Local = City or County or both; S = State

⁵ Adapted from *The 1994 Development Report Card for the States*, Eighth Edition (Washington, DC, Corporation for Enterprise Development, 1994).

⁶ Air quality was nonattainment even if the area was in nonattainment for only one pollutant. N = Nonattainment, A = Attainment, M = Maintenance.

⁷ Index of Central City Voting Power on MPOs, where an index of 1.00 means a voting strength proportionate to the central city's population ratio to the metropolitan area population. 'W' indicates weighted voting.

⁸ San Diego is a single-state MPO, but is unusual in that it shares a border with Mexico.

CHAPTER 3

THE CAPACITY-BUILDING NEEDS OF MPOs: OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FIELD

This chapter summarizes Observations from the field research in **18** metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) providing federally required transportation planning in the 12 representative metropolitan areas selected for this study. The research consisted of approximately **240** interviews (including a wide range of individuals who were involved in or familiar with each MPO), and examination of key MPO documents. A promise of anonymity was given to encourage frank responses.

Three principal lines of questioning were pursued:

1. What **changes** have been made in the MPO process to comply with the new requirements of the *Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991* (ISTEA)?
2. What **difficulties** have been encountered in trying to comply with ISTEA?
3. What **types of help** does the MPO need to respond to the ISTEA innovations more effectively?

The research findings are reported in this chapter. The answers are the perceptions of the interview respondents, not necessarily fact.

The methodology for the field work is described in *Appendix A*.

Changes in MPO Programs

Respondents credited ISTEA with bringing positive change to every MPO (*see Table 1*).

Following are representative observations and comments collected about each of the changes.

Public Involvement

Many respondents believed that ISTEA had opened the process and increased the outreach activities of the MPO. In some cases, public

Table 1
POSITIVE CHANGES BROUGHT BY ISTEA

Changes	M O s	
	No.	%
Increased Public Involvement	14	78%
Air Quality Work	10	56
Better Intergovernmental Coordination	10	56
Better SDOT/MPO Relationships	8	44
New/Increased Attention to Intermodal Issues	7	39
New/Increased Attention to Long-Range Planning	6	33

involvement has become an MPO activity only since ISTEA was enacted. In other cases, minority groups, businesses, and other stakeholders who had not been involved are participating now. A greater awareness of diverse viewpoints is developing. Some parts of the planning process are being delayed to offer fuller opportunities for public participation, and personnel have been added to pursue this work. New techniques are being used in some cases. The *MPO* staff is perceived to be willing to listen. There is a growing feeling that public involvement may make a difference.

Air Quality

For affected areas, the perception is that air quality requirements have become a very high political and technical priority. They consume much of the planning budget and program, but “end the hesitancy” to work together regionally on this issue. Some MPOs are seeking memoranda of agreement with communities outside their boundaries, but within the air quality non-attainment region. Specific levels of non-attainment receive great attention. Even a reclassification to “attainment” status is a concern because of the need to

continue vigorous air quality planning while losing federal funding for it.

Intergovernmental Coordination

ISTEA has brought new commitment by many local public officials to work together regionally and with the SDOT, and with state air quality officials. This commitment is stretching across state lines and helping to bridge the central city vs. suburb chasm in some instances. Public officials are attending MPO meetings more frequently and taking the process more seriously. “Corridor planning councils” have been created by neighboring communities to integrate land use and transportation policies. Project selection processes also are bringing local governments together. Still, some contentious issues remain unresolved—such as city annexation of county territory.

MPO/SDOT Relations

The mutual dependencies between the MPO and SDOT have brought them into much closer contact. In some cases, they are supporting each other’s programs. (It should be noted, however, that a smaller number of *MPOs* reported difficulties in this relationship. See a later section of this chapter.)

Intermodal Planning

In many areas, ISTEA has given alternatives to the automobile a big boost—not just transit, but also pedestrian, bike, park and ride, shuttle, railroad, trail, and other modes, as well as connecting facilities. Air quality considerations are an important part of this. The Chamber of Commerce has gotten involved in the issue of commuter alternatives. ISTEA has provided a convenient vehicle for expressing these emerging community priorities.

Long-Range Planning

ISTEA’s long-range planning requirement has directed more energy into consideration of the region’s future economy and quality of life. Excessive focus on highway building and the short-term TIP has been moderated.

Conclusion

ISTEA appears to be having much of its intended effect in some respects, while other objec-

tives do not appear to be receiving as much attention as might have been expected.

Difficulties Encountered by MPOs

In responding to ISTEA provisions, every MPO in the sample (except the one created after ISTEA was enacted) has encountered one or more new difficulties serious enough for them to mention in the interviews (see *Table 2*).

Following are summaries of representative comments about these difficulties.

Regulatory and Workload Burdens

In some ways, ISTEA was seen by a number of interviewees as a step backward. The simpler MPO process, which had been working fairly smoothly, now is felt to be more **complex and less** clear, and it takes longer to plan and get projects approved. Some MPOs believe they must start their planning processes again under ISTEA, and staff has not expanded commensurate with the new workload.

New requirements for environmental analysis, enhancements, and major (corridor) investment analysis were reported to have slowed or halted many projects that had been ready to go. The perception is that there is more paperwork and less flexibility. It is hard to keep up with the new regulations.

In addition, it was felt that the public involvement process takes a lot more time and effort. Some smaller *MPOs* are bogged down in meeting

Table 2
DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY MPOs
BECAUSE OF ISTEA

Difficulties	MPOs	
	No.	%
Increased Regulatory Burden and Workload	17	94%
Unachievable Expectations	8	44
Uncoordinated Deadlines	4	22
Disrupted Relationships within MPO	3	16
Strained Relationship with State DOT	2	11

detailed requirements more suitable for larger organizations, leaving less time to consider broader strategic choices about matters such as how to meet travel demands.

Federal responses to questions too frequently were felt to be no more helpful than reading the regulations, and sometimes they produced conflicting interpretations. There is confusion about the requirements for fiscally constraining the plans and TIPs. It is not clear what is and what is not fundable. FTA and FHWA regulations, schedules, and interpretations differ. This is especially bothersome when FHWA funds are transferred into transit programs where they are spent under different rules. FTA personnel are viewed as being too far away, too inaccessible, and too ill-equipped to be helpful. FAA does not recognize the linkages between airport planning and surface transportation. Differences with EPA also were reported to be bothersome.

Unachievable Expectations

The heightened expectations brought by **ISTEA** are contagious, *but* the perception *is that* funding and staffing have not increased appreciably and the expectations cannot be met. There is anxiety that the local elected officials in the MPOs will become frustrated and disillusioned by the gap between promise and performance.

Uncoordinated Deadlines

Deadlines for MPO planning (1) are too close, (2) are ahead of deadlines for the state planning they must be based on, (3) do not allow for local political transitions over which the MPO has no control, and (4) do not provide enough time to prepare well all the new types of products and processes required. To make matters worse, the federal regulations were issued too late. MPO products are being forced to be approved before they are ready.

Disrupted Relationships within the MPO

Delicate balances of cooperation in some MPOs have been upset by **ISTEA**. Transit interests have been encouraged in some areas to be too aggressive too quickly, while the additional funding promised by **ISTEA** remains unavailable. Some

small communities in large MPOs feel they have little effective input to the MPO process.

Strained Relationships with the State DOT

Some SDOTs were reported to be reluctant to provide financial information to the MPO or to open the funding allocation process. In such cases, the MPO must set its priorities in a vacuum and then wait for the SDOT to determine which funding category will pay for them. Some SDOTs also were reported to be too slow in reviewing MPO proposals and draft products. Some SDOTs remain predominantly highway oriented. Many MPOs do not sense a feeling of equal partnership with their SDOT.

Types of Help Requested by MPOs

Interviews with a broad range of persons identified **58** separate types of requested help. These are listed in *Table 3*, which also shows the *number of MPOs mentioning* them. The list is in rank order. On average, each MPO asked for almost 15 types of assistance.

For ease of analysis, the 58 types of help were grouped into the following five major categories or techniques and also into eight general topics (listed later):

1. Research and information
2. Regulatory relief
3. Training
4. Greater resources
5. Technical assistance (on-site)

Of the **18** MPOs visited, **13** requested help in all five categories. The other five MPOs wanted help in four of the five categories. Three MPOs did not mention on-site technical assistance, and two did not mention greater resources.

The types of help requested are cross-tabulated in *Table 4* by the eight topics on which help is needed and the five “categories” of techniques by which assistance would be provided. The largest number of types of help were requested in the research and information and training categories. The topics drawing on the largest number of types of help are planning strategies and methods, and

Table 3
TYPES OF HELP REQUESTED BY MPOs: RANK ORDER

Rank and Type of Help	Number of MPOs Requesting
1. Clearer, more timely federal regulations.	13
2. ISTEA education for citizens and elected officials.	11
3. Increased funds for projects (the expectations problem)	11
4. Flexibility to synchronize ISTEA and local deadlines	10
5. Training for public participation.	9
6. Better coordination among federal agencies.	9
7. Facilitation of flexible funding	9
8. Research and information about management systems	9
9. "Best Practices" information mechanism (clearinghouse)	9
10. More training opportunities for staff.	8
11. Training in modeling.	8
12. More flexible federal regulations in general	8
13. Quicker federal feedback on MPO plans and products.	7
14. Research to provide better models	7
15. Training in management systems	7
16. Understanding and justifying the constrained TIP requirement	6
17. Training in transportation impact analysis for the metropolitan plan.	6
18. Technical assistance in intergovernmental coordination.	6
19. Data from outside sources.	5
20. Better coordination between federal and state agencies	5
21. Better state guidance for MPO	5
22. Understanding and justifying use of management systems	5
23. Training in the use of analytic tools such as GIS and forecasting	5
24. Increased MPO staff	4
25. Training in corridor investment analysis.	4
26. Technical assistance in achieving interstate coordination	4
27. Research in fiscally constraining TIP	4
28. Research in enhancements (related to NEPA requirements)	4
29. Research in public participation	4
30. Research in legal liabilities	4
31. Training in making the transportation/land use link	3
32. Training in conflict resolution.	3
33. Research in making the transportation/land use link	3
34. Research in air quality compliance strategy	3
35. Increased funds for planning.	3
36. Increased CMAQ funding.	3
37. Research in transportation impact analysis.	3
38. Research in right-of-way preservation	3
39. Research in corridor investment analysis	3
40. Research in analytic tools such as GIS and forecasting	2
41. Training in fiscally constraining TIP	2
42. Training in data collection techniques	2
43. Training in ranking and prioritizing TIP projects	2
44. Training in right-of-way preservation.	2
45. Training in preparing abbreviated plans	2
46. Technical assistance with public participation	2
47. Technical assistance with fiscally constraining TIP	2
48. Technical assistance with freight planning	2
49. Research in ranking and prioritizing TIP projects	2
50. Research in comparing highway and non-highway alternatives.	2
51. Research in pavement technologies	2
52. Training in legal liabilities	1
53. Training in comparing highway and non-highway alternatives	1
54. Technical assistance with long-range planning	1
55. Technical assistance with comparing highway and non-highway alternatives.	1
56. Technical assistance with enhancements	1
57. Technical assistance in right-of-way preservation	1
58. Research in intermodal planning.	1
Total number of requests.	265

Table 4
HELP REQUESTED BY MPOS

Topics Addressed	Types of Help ⁴ and Categories of Help Requested ⁵					Totals		
	Research and Information	Regulatory Relief	Training	Greater Resources	Technical Assistance	Types of Help	Categories	# of MPO Requests
Intergovernmental Coordination/ Communication		5 (45)	1 (3)		3 (17)	9	3	(65)
Data and Analysis ⁷	5 (20) ⁷		5 (25)			10	2	(45)
Planning Strategies and Methods ²	5 (21)	1 (4)	3 (12)		3 (4)	12	4	(41)
Funding Process		1 (9)		4 (21)		5	2	(30)
Public Involvement	1 (4)		2 (20)		1 (2)	4	3	(26)
Financial Constraint	1 (4)	1 (6)	1 (2)		1 (2)	4	4	(14)
Implementation Techniques ³	3 (9)	2 (3)	1 (1)			6	3	(13)
Prioritizing Projects	2 (4)		2 (3)		1 (1)	5	3	(8)
Total Types of Help	17	8	16	4	10	55 ⁶		
Total MPO Requests	(62)	(64)	(66)	(21)	(27)			(242)

¹ Includes modeling, transportation impact analysis, data collection, analytic tools, and corridor investment analysis.

² Includes transportation/land use linkage, air quality strategies, abbreviated planning, freight planning, long-range planning, enhancements, management systems, and intermodal planning.

³ Includes right-of-way preservation, legal liabilities, and pavement technology.

⁴ "Types of Help" are the 58 numbered items in Table 3.

⁵ "Categories of Help" are the 5 subheadings of columns in this section of the table.

⁶ Does not total to 58 (as in Table 3) because three types of help requested were too general to be allocated to the "Topics" addressed in this table.

⁷ Numbers in parentheses represent the number of separate MPO requests for help of all types on this topic in this category.

data and quantitative analysis. When all the requests are added together, the topics fall in the following rank order:

1. Intergovernmental coordination;
2. Data and quantitative analysis;
3. Planning strategies and methods;
4. The funding process;
5. Public involvement;
6. The requirement to financially constrain the TIPs and long-range plans;
7. Implementation techniques; and
8. Prioritizing projects in the TIP

Table 5 shows how the specific requests for help were clustered into these eight “topics.” Three of the 58 requests were too general to be assigned to one of these clusters.

Following are the summary comments from the MPOs concerning the help they need on the eight major substantive topics listed above.

Intergovernmental Coordination

The types of assistance requested to improve intergovernmental coordination fell into three categories—regulatory relief, technical assistance, and to a much lesser extent, training.

In the **regulatory relief** category, the requests included (1) sufficient guidance on expectations and enforcement; (2) timely regulations in plain English; (3) indexing new regulations to the ones they modify; (4) realistic flexibility to allow adjustment to varying conditions (especially air quality compliance); (5) closer coordination between FHWA, FTA, and EPA so that SDOTs and MPOs are not saddled with the extra burdens of coordinating the federal agencies; (6) development of common funding procedures for FHWA and FTA to ease the transfer of flexible funds; and (7) greater flexibility for MPOs to make their own decisions when there is no need for federal interference.

As an aside, *BOX 25* shows one of the reasons why many MPOs feel burdened by the federal regulations—ISTEA and CAAA have created a steady stream of new regulations (proposed, final, and interim). The timeline shown represents only the major steps in the development of FHWA and

<i>Box 25</i> TIMING OF MAJOR LAWS AND REGULATIONS	
November 15, 1990	Clean Air Act Amendments enacted
December 18, 1991	ISTEA signed into law
April 6, 1992	Metropolitan Planning Interim Guidance issued
May 28, 1992	Statewide Planning Interim Guidance issued
June 3, 1992	Management Systems Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking published
January 3, 1993	U.S. EPA Conformity Rule Notice of Proposed Rulemaking published
March 2, 1993	Metropolitan Planning Notice of Proposed Rulemaking published
March 2, 1993	Statewide Planning Notice of Proposed Rulemaking published
March 2, 1993	Management Systems Notice of Proposed Rulemaking published
October 28, 1993	Combined Statewide and Metropolitan Planning Final Rule Published
November 30, 1993	U.S. EPA Conformity Final Rule published
December 1, 1993	Management Systems Interim Final Rule published
October 1, 1994	Compliance with Metropolitan Planning Final Rule by Non-Attainment MPOs Required to Have Transportation Control Measures (TCMs).
December 18, 1994	Compliance with Metropolitan Planning Final Rule by all other MPOs.

FTA guidance on the implementation of the planning requirements and related activities of the management systems and conformity requirements.

In addition, the FHWA Electronic Bulletin Board has provided ongoing publication of answers to individual questions. Further, some significant guidance has been issued, e.g., Planning Certification Procedures, April 28, 1994; Major Investment Studies, August 19, 1994; and Public Involvement, December 29, 1994.

Given the “great expectations” surrounding the changes associated with ISTEA, the fact that it took almost two years after the passage of ISTEA for key regulations to be issued caused some observers to despair and others to applaud. Those who despaired lamented the tardiness of federal

Table 5
CROSSWALK BETWEEN 58 TYPES OF HELP AND 8 TOPICS

**Intergovernmental Coordination
 Communication**

Clearer, more *timely* federal regulations.
 Flexibility to synchronize ISTEA and local deadlines.
 Technical assistance in achieving interstate coordination.
 Better coordination among federal agencies.
 Technical assistance in intergovernmental coordination.
 Better coordination between federal and state agencies.
 Training in conflict resolution.
 More flexible federal regulations in general.
 Quicker federal feedback on MPO plans and products.

Planning Strategies and Methods

Training in making transportation/land use link.
 Research in making transportation/land use link.
 Research in air quality compliance strategies.
 Training in management systems.
 Understanding and justifying use of management systems.
 Research and information about management systems.
 Training in preparing abbreviated plans.
 Technical assistance with freight planning.
 Technical assistance with long-range planning.
 Research in enhancements (related to NEPA requirements).
 Technical assistance with enhancements.
 Research in intermodal planning.

Financial Constraint

Understanding and justifying the constrained TIP requirement.
 Research in fiscally constraining TIP.
 Training in fiscally constraining TIP.
 Technical assistance with fiscally constraining TIP.

Prioritizing Projects

Training in ranking and prioritizing TIP projects.
 Research in ranking and prioritizing TIP projects.

Research in comparing highway and non-highway alternatives.
 Training in comparing highway and non-highway alternatives.
 Technical assistance with comparing highway and non-highway alternatives.

Data and Quantitative Analysis

Research to provide better models
 Training in transportation impact analysis.
 Research in transportation impact analysis.
 Data from outside sources.
 Training in data collection techniques.
 Training in use of analytic tools such as GIS and forecasting.
 Research in analytic tools such as GIS and forecasting.
 Training in corridor investment analysis.
 Research in corridor investment analysis.
 Training in modeling.

Funding Process

Facilitation of flexible funding.
 Increased funds for projects (the expectations problem).
 Increased MPO staff.
 Increased funds for planning.
 Increased CMAQ funds.

Implementation Techniques

Research in pavement technologies.
 Research in legal liabilities.
 Training in legal liabilities.
 Research in right-of-way preservation.
 Training in right-of-way preservation.
 Technical assistance in right-of-way preservation.

Public Involvement

Training for public participation.
 Research in public participation.
 Technical assistance with public participation.
 ISTEA education for citizens and elected officials.
 The following three types of help were too general to be assigned to the categories above:
 "Best Practices" information mechanism (clearinghouse).
 More training opportunities for staff.
 Better state guidance for MPOs.

guidance. Those who were happy felt empowered by the freedom inherent in the lack of constraining federal rules.

It also should be noted that the elections of 1992 significantly slowed the development of rules and caused some change in substance.

In the **technical assistance** category, the requested federal help included (1) special hands-on encouragement to get adjoining states in interstate metropolitan areas to work together (including an interagency federal team to work with the state and metropolitan agencies to ensure coordination, with sensitivity to the unique obstacles faced, and extra time for coordination), and (2) help in reconciling state and metropolitan project priorities.

Another form of technical assistance requested is to create better feedback mechanisms for MPO plans and other products. Continuous feedback would help avoid unexpected conflicts among stakeholders at a late stage in the process when it is difficult to resolve them within the time and budget remaining. Suggestions were made that performance criteria and measures should be developed to guide these reviews, and “excellence teams” should be used to critique and peer-review MPO products and processes. Such teams could be especially helpful in providing assistance when a new process is gearing up, or when the MPO needs to get over a “rough patch.” A more proactive role by the federal agencies also was suggested.

Training was requested in the politics and mechanisms of joint intergovernmental efforts (including negotiating intergovernmental agreements and resolving conflicts). ISTEA has intensified the need to consider issues of boundaries, governing board and committee memberships, transit vs. highway priorities, air quality conformance vs. pressures for community and economic development, and competition among communities for transportation projects. The requested training could take the form of assessing interests and options, and finding a “best fit” solution that is defensible and reasonable.

Data and Quantitative Analysis

Better models and better training were requested clearly by most MPOs. The comments

suggested that sound and acceptable models should be sensitive to the effects of varying strategies and scenarios. Current models do not include ferry, pedestrian, bicycle, and other modes, nor do they deal with transportation control measures or energy conservation issues. Special attention needs to be **given to linking air quality models to travel forecasting models, and training MPO staffs to use them.**

Simple manuals are badly needed to explain the models and their outputs to citizens and public officials. Training in the use of models needs to be geared to MPO staffs of varying sizes, resources, and levels of expertise.

Analytical tools like geographic information systems (GIS) also were requested, along with better training. In addition, research was requested to improve the tools for transportation impact analysis—including project impact analysis, corridor impact analysis, major investment analysis, energy, air quality, metropolitan development, life style changes, and economic effects.

Another perceived need was for assistance in collecting increasingly complex sets of data for the new analyses required by ISTEA.

Planning Strategies and Methods

The transportation-land use link remains elusive in the view of many who were interviewed. They requested both research and training to help make this link. The training should extend to land use regulators in local governments.

Research also was suggested to help define the six new management systems and intermodal planning. Congestion management systems, which are the responsibility of the larger MPOs, were singled out for special attention. It was suggested that this research consider how these systems relate to long-range plans and TIPs, and how they can be applied to the smaller MPOs.

The 1994 NARC survey of MPOs found that about 51 percent of MPOs are preparing congestion management systems, 43 percent intermodal, 40 percent transit maintenance, 23 percent safety, 18 percent bridge maintenance, and 29 percent pavement maintenance.

Freight planning also was singled out for greater attention. It is highly intermodal, but not much practiced by MPOs.

The **enhancements** program and requirements also were suggested for further study. Intended to improve the “livability” of transportation projects, the process of considering potentials to use enhancements has had the effect of slowing and cancelling some projects. Clarification of regulations, training, and technical assistance may be necessary to expedite this element of the planning process.

Abbreviated planning needs to be defined so the smaller MPOs can begin using this technique. Shortcuts and the ability to prioritize ISTEA tasks over a multiyear period were requested. Once developed, these techniques should be made freely available, along with training.

The Funding Process

Many who were interviewed believed that ISTEA needs to be better funded if the flexibility it promises is to be realized. They also suggested that the different funding sources in ISTEA be made easier to understand and to tap, that difficulties in using ISTEA funds flexibly be corrected, and that SDOTs help MPOs have a clear understanding of the funds that will be available to them.

Public Involvement

Research was suggested to pull together and share practical **citizen participation techniques**, especially those that have been successful in high population areas. Techniques for interacting with the business community and other parts of the private sector also need special attention. Education and training efforts were suggested to spread the best practices. **MPOs** perceived a need for the services of trained citizen participation experts.

The **communications aspects** of citizen participation also were perceived to need attention. MPOs want to know how to use the media to build public support. In addition, it was suggested that all MPO reports and other products meant for public consumption should be “translated” into plain English, easily understood graphics and special editions for persons with disabilities. Special attention should be given to translating TIPs and the outputs

of transportation models so the average citizen can understand them.

Positive outreach efforts also were suggested, along with a requirement that MPOs demonstrate that public input will be used to make a difference in the planning process.

A third aspect of citizen participation that was mentioned is the need to **train involved citizens and elected officials**. Many of them have not been given a good understanding of ISTEA, CAAA, and other essential facts they need to be involved in the MPO process. It was suggested that some training opportunities for MPO staff be opened to qualified and interested citizens and elected officials, and that training opportunities be repeated frequently, because of the rapid turnover in some of these audiences.

Federal public information programs also were requested to raise the general level of public understanding of these issues. This type of information could help put ISTEA and CAAA expectations into realistic perspective so they do not outrun the prospects for accomplishment.

Financially Constraining the Plans and TIPs.

Clearer regulations and guidance were requested to clarify fiscal constraints on MPO plans and TIPs, including examples and expanded opportunities to discuss what is expected of the MPOs and how it can be accomplished.

Implementation Techniques

Although **right-of-way preservation** is one of the 15 factors that must be considered by the MPOs, it is commonly perceived to be in violation of the environmental laws. Training is needed to differentiate this planning element from the concept of land acquisition.

In addition, training sessions were requested to spell out the **legal implications** of MPO responsibilities. In particular, there is a concern about MPO board liability if the costs of TIP projects are underestimated. Liabilities for board actions in non-attainment areas also are of concern.

Finally, continued research on superior **pavement** materials and pavement monitoring devices was requested.

Prioritizing Projects in the TIPs

Research is needed on TIP ranking processes that can be adapted to several types of MPOs and SDOTs, and that show how the MTIPs and STIPs can be integrated. There is also need for simple publications that highlight effective processes used by small MPOs.

Type of MPO Affects Help Requested

Examining the types of MPOs that emphasized needs for different types of help yields the following generalizations.

1. The eight MPOs most concerned with the substance of planning (research and information, training, and technical assistance) were the largest, oldest ones in the Frostbelt.
2. The seven MPOs most concerned with the need for regulatory relief were mostly middle-sized, well established ones in both the Sunbelt and the Frostbelt.
3. The two MPOs most concerned with the need for added resources were small.
4. The MPO established since ISTEA was enacted saw the need for help about equally across all the categories.
5. MPO work programs are heavily oriented toward air quality issues in some non-attainment areas.

6. Interstate MPOs have special needs for coordination with SDOTs.

Sources of Help for MPOs

The sources of help that MPOs use now and those they believe they should be able to count on more in the future are listed in *Table 6*. The federal government was mentioned most often in both categories, followed by the state and other MPOs. The other six sources identified were mentioned infrequently (this “sources” question was not probed deeply in some of the interviews).

The comments on this question are summarized below.

Federal

Federal agencies should organize a team to work with the MPO to ensure coordination and sensitivity to the unique obstacles faced, and to help explain ISTEA’s practical effects and available options more effectively.

FAA personnel need to be incorporated more effectively into the intermodal team. The FAA seems to ignore the linkages of airport planning to ground transportation.

Federal representatives should participate more fully in MPO meetings. Their assistance needs to be more creative and helpful than simply quoting the federal regulations.

The FTA was viewed as being too far away, too inaccessible, and too ill-equipped to be helpful. A well trained and available FTA staff could help to provide modal balance to the MPO process and to strengthen the whole team. ISTEA has brought FHWA and FTA closer together.

When different federal agencies take different positions, it causes uncertainties. More common FHWA and FTA procedures for funding requests were thought to be needed.

Timely advice from federal officials could save time and money. When they work only through the state, communication was perceived to be slower and more complicated.

State and federal agencies often do not see eye to eye on environmental matters, leaving the

Table 6
SOURCES OF HELP FOR MPOS

Sources	Number Using Help	Number Wanting Help	Total
Federal	7	8	15
State	4	6	10
Other MPOs	1	3	4
TRB	2	1	3
Universities	2	0	2
Consultants	2	0	2
Professional Societies	2	0	2
National Associations	1	0	1
State Associations	1	0	1
TOTALS	22	18	40

MPO caught in the middle. The tendency of the environmental review process to say “no” to most local initiatives is very frustrating to the MPOs. EPA, FHWA, and FTA policies need to be better coordinated.

The MPO perceives a decline in the number of practical federal research studies and informational documents that address the planning process. New studies were requested of ISTEA implementation topics, including examples of best practices and success stories.

The recent FHWA modeling classes were well received, but regional and state sites for these classes were seen as being important to cut costs. The federal Local Technical Assistance Program, run by the state, was said to be helpful in localizing training opportunities. U.S. DOT’s technology sharing program also was perceived to be helpful. It was suggested that FHWA’s T² Centers and FTA’s RTAP program could play a bigger role in providing ISTEA-related training, especially in management systems, GIS, new technologies, and simple monitoring tools.

Also suggested were stronger federal policies and assistance with coordination in interstate areas, a conference or workshop directed specifically to interstate MPOs, and techniques that could be compared and discussed with federal and state staffs.

More federal field staff were thought to be needed, and some should be assigned to the MPOs. MPOs wanted federal agencies to work closely with them so there will be no surprises at the end of the process.

Information and education were seen as appropriate roles for federal assistance in building public understanding of the implications of ISTEA goals. There is foreboding that the goals of ISTEA and the *Clean Air Act* are in conflict and unattainable. More workshops and discussions were requested. Federal agencies need to be clear about how the rules will be enforced, and they must agree with each other.

Traveling road shows were suggested by MPO policymakers. These shows should be short, with brief presentations by federal experts and opportunity for questions and discussion.

Federal backing for improved travel data collection was seen as vital. Federal agencies also need to provide guidance on “abbreviated planning.”

State

Comments suggested that SDOTs need to be able to explain ISTEA effects and options, and should be less reluctant to give financial information or open up the funding process. Greater openness in data and funding allocations was seen as essential to the MPO’s TIP preparation.

Videos and “Q and A” publications were suggested to help local officials understand the realistic possibilities for funding. Frank discussions of funding alternatives are needed. Local officials want a layman’s guide to project eligibility.

In one case, the SDOT was seen as needing to be more responsive in reviewing MPO proposals and draft products. Development of an annual calendar would be beneficial. The role of the SDOT in transit planning and modeling needs to be addressed.

In another case, the SDOT houses a staff person at the MPO two or three days a week, and relations were perceived to be good.

Another MPO staff viewed the SDOT as being helpful, especially in sponsoring quarterly meetings of all the state’s MPOs to learn from each other.

National pooled-funds studies by the states were suggested as a means of developing best practices.

Other MPOs

Suggestions for MPOs helping other MPOs included: sharing models, training sessions, increased communication among MPOs across the country, and sharing examples of processes—especially how to prioritize funding—through conferences and publications. In a particular state, it would be helpful to rotate new MPO staff among the agencies working with the organization.

Many MPOs wanted contact with others of the same size.

Other Sources of Help

The university transportation consortium offers training programs and undertakes research projects; it should do more. The MPO has a good relationship with the university.

Visiting teams should be organized to aid the MPO on specific problems. The resource persons available for this type of help also should be organized into a network of resource persons to be called on individually for help. Published rosters of resource persons would be helpful.

Professional facilitators and peer-review “excellence teams” could be used to come in for a period of time to give hands-on assistance to the MPO in gearing up a process or getting it over a rough patch.

Videos should be available to cover various obstacles as well as to help put all the pieces of ISTEA together. A series of technical papers also could be helpful in getting information to practitioners.

A clearinghouse offering best practices and case studies is needed—including good plans, management systems, and modeling practices. An accessible and user friendly information center would be invaluable. Assistance should be geared

to MPOs of varying sizes and resources. The federal government may be the proper location for this clearinghouse. TRB is another possibility.

Considerable time is spent with consultants on preparing scopes of work and monitoring their work.

In addition to looking to the SDOT for help, the MPO looks to commercial consultants (one of the most helpful sources), the quarterly meetings of the state association of MPOs, the Transportation Research Board, and the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC). The city and county planning staffs, who work with the *MPO*, tend to look to the American Planning Association, the Planning Advisory Service, and the Urban Land Institute. The transit staff tended to look to the regional transit association first, and then to federal training grants and the National Transit Institute. Citizens involved with the MPO get their public involvement experience from political campaigns, the League of Women Voters, environmental groups, and other special interest groups.

TRB conferences, such as the one for small area planning, were perceived as extremely helpful, but only limited staff can attend these national events.

APPENDICES

- A - Field Work Methodology*
- B - Conferences and Research*

APPENDIX A
FIELD WORK METHODOLOGY

Purpose and Product of Research

The Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) initiated this study at the request of the Federal Highway Administration to analyze the support needs of metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), improving their capacities to undertake expanded responsibilities under the *Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991* (ISTEA). The Federal Transit Administration subsequently cosponsored the project.

The ACIR report was planned to facilitate a May 1995 Transportation Research Board (TRB) conference on the technical assistance needs of MPOs. The conference is expected to provide a basis for U.S.DOT support for a research and technical assistance program for MPOs.

Because a number of surveys of MPOs had been carried out by the National Association of Regional Councils and other organizations since the passage of ISTEA, ACIR did not conduct another survey. Instead, ACIR:

1. Made maximum use of previous surveys, conference proceedings, and studies;
2. Interviewed individuals knowledgeable about the MPOs in a representative sample of 12 metropolitan areas; and
3. Prepared a report that
 - Identified means by which different types of MPOs are meeting, and can meet, their responsibilities under ISTEA;
 - Identified the perceived needs of different types of MPOs to improve their capacities;
 - Identified the assistance that different types of MPOs perceived they need;
 - Recommended technical assistance steps; and
 - Recommended additional research.

The Sample of MPO Cases

ACIR is aware that the differences among MPOs affect both requirements and how well they are able to comply. The most significant differences in the requirements are tied to MPO status in attaining air quality standards and their designation as “transportation management areas” (TMAs).

Differences in ability to comply with requirements may be tied, in part, to the governmental complexity in the metropolitan area, relationships with state government, the severity of transportation and air quality problems, and the structure, funding, and staffing of the MPO. The factors ACIR considered in choosing the 12 metropolitan areas for the case studies are listed in *Table A-1*.

The 18 MPOs serving the 12 areas (*see Chapter 2, Table 4*) are reasonably representative of the MPO universe, although they are not a statistically

<i>Table A-1</i>	
CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING MPO CASES	
The 12 Cases should include at least:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. one new “1990” MPO 2. one new “1980 MPO 3. one interstate MPO 4. one “redesignated” MPO 5. MPOs in a multiple MPO area: single-state 6. MPOs in a multiple MPO area: multi-state 7. one non-attainment MPO: severe 8. one non-attainment MPO: moderate 9. one non-attainment MPO: marginal 10. one previously non-attainment MPO (AQ “maintenance area”) 11. one MPO that has significant non-transportation programs and responsibilities (a strong multi-purpose regional council) 12. one very large MPO (with rail transit) 	
The total group should represent MPOs with diversity of	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. population size b. geographic location c. economic climate d. growth/no-growth proclivities e. local government complexity f. staffing organization g. degrees of state dominance h. voting representation status of central city

representative sample. To develop a good understanding of each case, ACIR collected documents, interviewed a representative set of key players in each of the 18 MPO processes, and carefully documented the responses.

The interviews were conducted with over 240 participants in the MPO process. Approximately 30 percent were MPO staff, and another 36 percent were local government officials (elected and non-elected, including public transit agencies). State officials accounted for 11 percent, and federal officials made up 8 percent of the sample. The remaining 15 percent of respondents represented citizen, business, freight, and other interests.

Peer Review

The research design was reviewed by a representative group of experts and MPO process participants before the field research began (Thinkers' Session). The draft report was critiqued by a similar group before it was finalized and adopted by the Commission (Critics' Session). The persons participating in these sessions are listed in the "Acknowledgments" section.

Questions to be Investigated

There were three principal lines of questioning:

1. What changes have been made in the MPO process to comply with the new requirements of the *Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991*?
2. What difficulties have been encountered in trying to comply with ISTEA?
3. What types of help does the MPO need to respond to the ISTEA innovations more effectively?

The questions covered a variety of capacity issues, which are listed in *BOX 23* (page 31). Three equally important types of MPO capacity are addressed in this table: Institutional Capacity (organizational structures and relationships), Planning Capacity (analytical and planning processes and planning products), and Implementation Capacity (political action and results).

The 15 specific factors of metropolitan transportation planning suggested by ISTEA, are listed in *BOX 17*, (page 27). For each issue in *BOX 23*, ACIR asked the questions in *BOX 24*, (page 32). Interviewers were not looking for "right" or "wrong" answers to these questions, but sought to identify perceptions in each region about the types of assistance that would be most useful to the MPOs. The persons interviewed were promised anonymity so they could answer freely and frankly even those questions that might touch on controversial issues in the current MPO process.

Interview Preparation

The interviewers were given the notebook prepared by ACIR for the project Thinkers' Session, as well as a few other documents. In addition, ACIR collected from each of the MPOs background materials (such as their unified planning work program and their long-range plan).

The interviewers studied these materials for the area to be visited to get a preliminary understanding sufficient to open the interviewing efficiently and knowledgeably. The interviewers were instructed to prepare a preliminary diagram of the MPO process, based on the materials supplied by the MPO, as a conversation starter concerning the institutional capacity issues.

Interviewing

The interviewers tried to visit with all key players in the MPO process, such as:

1. MPO staff (executive director and/or planning director, plus others);
2. MPO board (chairperson and /or others; making sure to include center city and suburban elected officials);
3. State DOT representative who generally attends the MPO meetings (and others);
4. FHWA representative who generally attends the MPO meetings;
5. FTA representative who generally attends the *MPO* meetings;

6. Transportation providers (transit, port, airport, private carriers, etc.);
7. Local land use and development officials;
8. Citizens and interest groups (environmental, disabilities, historic preservation, etc.);
9. Air quality officials (if non-attainment).

Most of these people were interviewed as individuals (for their convenience). Group meetings were scheduled when possible if there were several persons in any of the above categories and if the group setting would not be likely to inhibit frank responses.

When key persons could not be worked into the average two-day field visit schedule for each MPO, they were contacted by phone at a later time. Phone-backs to interviewees were used to clarify any uncertainties when preparing the case-study reports.

Interviews started with a brief description of the request by FHWA and FTA for ACIR to objectively help identify the types of assistance that different MPOs perceive to be of greatest help to them in meeting their ISTEA responsibilities. Interviewers stressed that ACIR's intent was not to evaluate the MPO, but to listen to the experiences expressed and the needs perceived by those being interviewed. Interviewees were shown the diagram of their MPO process and asked for confirmations and corrections to stimulate discussion of processes and institutional linkages.

Persons interviewed were not forced through every issue if not in a position to respond. Care was taken to avoid leading responses.

Preparation of the Case-Study Reports

The individual case-study reports (which ACIR is not publishing to preserve the anonymity of the respondents) accomplished two objectives: (1) to identify the kinds of assistance that would be

genuinely helpful to the MPO, and (2) to put those suggestions in the context of the MPO's situation so it is clear what kind of MPO would benefit from that assistance.

The following outline was the basic structure used to draft the case studies:

- I. ***Overview of the MPO Structure and Process.*** The basic set-up. What has changed, and what is changing because of ISTEA?
- II. ***Priorities for What Needs to be Done.*** How the federal and local priorities differ. Taking first things first, in the context of expansive ISTEA requirements and limited existing capabilities. Largely based on the perceptions of the interviewees, but with clearly identified conclusions by the interviewer.
- III. ***Assistance Needed.*** The types of assistance being sought, and the sources of assistance being drawn upon. Suggestions for additional help needed, even if sources of that help are not identified.

Analysis of Results

The 18 case-study reports provided unstructured answers to those broad questions. The ACIR staff classified the answers and tabulated the number of MPOs yielding similar answers. Typical comments were preserved without attribution, to describe the flavor of the responses received.

The sample of MPOs and interviewees was too small to allow precise statistical analysis of differences among the types of MPOs and the types of respondents. Thus, the results of this study are more qualitative and suggestive than quantitative and scientifically proven.

A thorough evaluation of the applicable federal regulations and the true facts of each MPO's situation were beyond the scope of this report.

Appendix B

CONFERENCES AND RESEARCH

OTHER ISTEА-RELATED CONFERENCES

- March 30-31, 1992, Washington, DC—ISTEA: New Partners for Surface Transportation in the 1990s, STPP.
- November 12, 1992—University of Minnesota, Center for Transportation Studies Symposium.
- December 4-5, 1992 through 1993—Transportation Planning for Livable Communities, 11 regional conferences, STPP and other sponsors.
- September 9-10, 1993—Metropolitan America in Transition: Implications for Land Use and Transportation Planning, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and DOT, Arlington, VA.
- October 31-November 3, 1993—TRB Workshop on Multimodal Transportation Planning Research Needs, Irvine, CA.
- November 7-10, 1993—Integrating Transportation Management Systems into Transportation Planning and Operations, VECTOR at Vanderbilt U. and DOT, AASHTO, NARC, and State of Tennessee/ Issues related to the rule on state management systems, coordination among SDOTs, MPOs and private sector.
- January 8, 1994—Managing for Change: Strategies for the ISTEА Era, STPP.
- March 16-17, 1994—National Training Summit, U.S. DOT.
- March 20-23, 1994—The Environment, Changing Our Transportation Priorities, Institute of Transportation Engineers.
- June, 1994—Livable Communities, Business Transportation Council.
- December 7-9, 1994—two concurrent conferences sponsored by TRB in New Orleans: (1) National Conference on the Intermodal Terminal of the Future and (2) National Conference on Intermodalism: Making the Case, Making It Happen.

NEW RESEARCH TOPICS

For the April 1995 conference on data and planning methods planned for Seattle, Washington, the Transportation Research Board invited papers on the following topics:

- Transportation management systems
- Land use/transportation interaction
- Administration and finance
- Geographic information systems
- Intelligent vehicle highway systems
- Statewide planning
- Public involvement processes
- Data collection
- Major investment analysis
- Travel demand analysis and modeling
- Land use and socioeconomic forecasting
- Multimodal and intermodal planning
- Transportation impact analysis
- Conformity and air quality planning

ISTEA RESEARCH RECOMMENDED BY A TRB CONFERENCE

The following studies were suggested at the TRB Conference at Irvine, California, November 1-3, 1993 which addressed CAAA and ISTEА compliance needs. (*See Multimodal Transportation: Development of a Performance-based Planning Process.*) They are under way.

- *Synthesis of Intermodal Statewide Transportation Planning.* Report due February 1995. (Activities funded in five states and a New England consortium.)
- Parsons Brinckerhoff, *Involving Citizens in Post-ISTEA MPO Transportation Planning.* (Report due mid-1995.)

- Howard/Stein-Hudson, *Innovative Techniques for Public Involvement in Transportation Planning and Project Development*. (Technique descriptions, case studies, application essays, and revised training material.)
- HWA contract for development of a course: *Statewide Transportation Planning Process*.
- *Integration of Land Use Planning with Multimodal Transportation Planning*.
- *Develop Improved Data and Data Collection Efforts*.
- *Develop and Maintain Partnerships for Multimodal Planning*.

**U.S. DEPARTMENT
OF TRANSPORTATION
UNIVERSITY TRANSPORTATION
CENTERS PROGRAM**

10 Regional Centers

1. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
(and 7 other universities)
2. City University of New York
(and 11 other universities)
- 3, *Pennsylvania State University*
(and 4 other universities)
4. North Carolina State University
(and 10 other universities)
5. University of Michigan
(and 5 other universities)
6. Texas A&M University
(and 2 other universities)
7. Iowa State University
(and 1 other university)
8. North Dakota State University
(and 3 other universities)
9. University of California/Berkeley
(and 3 other universities)
10. University of Washington
(and 3 other universities)

3 National Centers

1. National Center for Transportation and Industrial Productivity, New Jersey Institute of Technology
2. National Center for Transportation Management, Research & Development, Morgan State University
3. Mack-Blackwell National Rural Transportation Study Center, University of Arkansas

**University Transportation Centers
Clearinghouse**

Pennsylvania State University

Source: U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of University Programs, *University Transportation Centers Program: 1995*.

**INTERMODAL TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES
FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNERS**

CONTENTS

Types of Assistance Offered
Air Quality Analysis
Citizen/Industry Participation
Congestion Management
Economic Analysis
Environmental and Social Impact Analysis
Geographic Information Systems
Intermodal Facilities Planning
Intermodal Freight Transportation
Intermodal Systems — Planning and Management
Metropolitan and Statewide Planning Activities
Resource Centers
Transportation Statistics
Travel Demand Forecasting
Travel Demand Management

Source: U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of Intermodalism, *Intermodal Technical Assistance Activities for Transportation Planners*. Washington, DC, August 1993.

RECENT ACIR PUBLICATIONS

Tax and Expenditure Limits on Local Governments (M-194, 1995)	\$15.00
Federal Mandate Relief for State, Local, and Tribal Governments (A-129, 1995)	\$15.00
Federally Induced Costs Affecting State and Local Governments (M-193, 1994)	\$20.00
Local Government Responsibilities in Health Care (M-192, 1994)	\$10.00
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