



A Brief History of Metropolitan Planning Organizations



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COMPASS

General Members

Ada County
Ada County Highway District
City of Boise
Canyon County
Canyon Highway District #4
City of Caldwell
City of Eagle
City of Garden City
City of Kuna
City of Meridian
City of Middleton
City of Nampa
City of Parma
City of Star
Golden Gate Highway District #3
Nampa Highway District #1
Notus-Parma Highway District #2

Special Members

Boise State University
Capital City Development Corporation
Idaho Department of Environmental Quality
Idaho Transportation Department
Independent School District of Boise City
Joint School District #2
Valley Regional Transit

Ex Officio

Central District Health
Office of the Governor
Greater Boise Auditorium District



By the late 1990s, APA considered the feasibility and desirability of extending its planning boundaries to include Canyon County. The organization changed its name to the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS) in 1999 to assist with transportation planning in Canyon County, and amended the Joint Powers Agreement to authorize the agency to work with any public agency in Southwest Idaho – not just Ada – for the purpose of regional planning. In March 2000, COMPASS included dues-paying, voting members from the various Canyon County governmental entities. Canyon County became a metropolitan area as a result of the 2000 Census, and Nampa became the central city. In March 2003, COMPASS was designated as the MPO for the Nampa Urbanized Area.

With the Census 2000, the Boise Urbanized Area became a Transportation Management Area (TMA) because the population exceeded 200,000. This designation added the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) as a voting member of the Board and required the MPO to develop a Congestion Management System (CMS). It also increased the stature of the MPO regarding ongoing collaboration with ITD.



Bibliography

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Introduction

The U.S. government recognizes over 300 metropolitan areas. These areas are identified as "a core area containing a nucleus, together with adjacent communities having a high degree of economic and social integration with that core." This includes the notion that the vitality of regions depends on the large-scale circulation of goods and people over region-wide transportation networks, while acknowledging that fragmented political authority in most metropolitan areas makes it difficult to address regional transportation needs.

For the past 30 years, the federal government has sought to address this failing by requiring states to establish Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), composed of local elected officials and state agency representatives to review and approve transportation investments in the metropolitan area.

1890—1929

Improvements to the nation's transportation system made growth possible in the early years of the country. The early 19th century saw the development of canals, railroads, and marine ports. Later 19th century innovations in transportation – including horse-drawn railways, electric streetcars, and automobiles – provided circulation systems needed for further growth

In the early 20th century, reformers known as the Progressives, wanted to impose order on the rapid and often chaotic growth of metropolitan areas; reformers laid the groundwork for eventual federal programs to support comprehensive regional planning, and sought to bring rational organization to growing, dispersed, piecemeal populations. This was generally a top-down approach (in which elite committees drew up plans based on "scientific" evaluations of data). Progressive reformers sought change in the following areas:

- Civil servants
- Sanitation
- Building codes
- Zoning ordinances

1930 — 1945

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, cities abandoned visions of promoting orderly urban regions as they struggled with social and economic conditions. But the regional planning experiences of the 1920s exerted a continuing influence, and research created a strong case for new institutions such as regional planning commissions to supplement fragmented political structures. The federal government carried the torch of regional planning as it intervened to revive the economy in the 1930s. New Deal programs were administered regionally, and encouraged cooperation among local officials. Planning, however, was to be in accordance with national standards as a condition for receipt of federal infrastructure aid.

This requirement set the pattern for future intergovernmental relations, where the federal government used aid as a lever for promoting achievement of national goals and for persuading state and local governments to invest in infrastructure and social needs.

Post WWII

Following the patriotic fervor of World War II, planning for a new post-war America became a national preoccupation. A decade of pent-up demand for housing and consumer goods led to an unprecedented peacetime economic boom. Three-fifths of all new housing in the late 1940s was built in “the suburbs.” The explosive growth of suburbs increased the severity and complexity of regional-scale problems. As a result, the federal government expanded requirements for regional planning, which prompted formation of a variety of new intergovernmental bodies – such as Councils of Government (COG). These new bodies took a democratic and tentative approach to planning. They often lacked implementation authority and were limited to addressing issues on which consensus could be reached among local governments, notably in transportation and other infrastructure.

Transportation Planning in Ada and Canyon Counties



In July 1958, a steering committee organized the Boise Transportation Planning Organization (BTPO) to review transportation planning activities in the Boise Metropolitan Area. Elected officials and appointed representatives of city, county and transportation agencies served on the steering committee. They collected data to assess future transportation needs. In 1964, the group became the Boise Metropolitan Transportation Study (BMTS) and offered the general public a transportation plan for the Boise region.

In the early 1970s, the Governor designated BMTS, in cooperation with the newly formed Ada Council of Governments (ACOG), as the MPO for the Boise Urbanized Area. In March 1977, the policy committee of BMTS approved the consolidation of the organization under the Ada Planning Association (APA, previously ACOG). In April, 1977, Governor Evans designated APA as the MPO for the Boise Metropolitan Area, and by September 1, 1977, APA entered into contracts and agreements for urban transportation planning in accordance with the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964.

1980s

In the 1980s, the Reagan Administration wanted to turn-back federal responsibilities to state and local governments. As a result, 38 of 39 federal programs that underwrote regional planning were terminated, deregulated, or received major budget cuts. The one major regional planning requirement left on the books concerned MPOs. While they were still required to plan and approve transportation projects, new regulations left it up to each state to define their specific roles. For many MPOs capital planning was limited to confirming work in a fragmented region, rather than providing area-wide leadership.

1990— Present

The enactment of the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) ushered in something of a renaissance for MPOs. After a decade or more of being consigned to a minimal role in transportation planning, ISTEA gave MPOs more money, expanded their authority to select projects, and provided a mandate for planning initiatives in their regions. State transportation officials, for the first time, were required to consult with local representatives on MPO Boards. These changes stemmed from new political alignments and the need to address difficult transportation problems arising from suburban boom development in the 1980s. Many recognized that the problems could be addressed only through a stronger federal commitment to regional planning.

ISTEA emphasized transportation planning and guided the operations, management and investment in a surface transportation system. ISTEA strengthened the role of local officials, required public involvement, and encouraged integrated, modally mixed strategies. ISTEA increased funds available to metropolitan areas. MPOs, however, had to “fiscally constrain” their long-range plans and short-ranges TIPs. This meant that the plan and TIP could no longer contain “wish lists” of projects; rather MPOs had to create realistic, multi-year agendas of projects matched with available funds.

TEA-21 – 1998 reauthorization strengthened ISTEA.

1950s — 1960s

In the 1950s and 1960s, America built highways on a grand scale. With billions of dollars from federal gasoline taxes, 2000 miles or more of highways were built each year. The effort commanded wide public support and was backed by a powerful coalition of politicians, business leaders and interest groups.

The **1956 Federal Highway Act** authorized construction of the multibillion dollar, 41,000-mile interstate highway system, which constituted the largest construction program in the nation’s history (equivalent to 60 Panama Canals). The choice of routes was left to state highway departments, so many local officials found new cause to embrace cooperation through planning agencies – to avoid having routes imposed on them and to gain bargaining clout. The concept of “planning” was narrow and technical, and focused mostly on route alignments. The Act did not require routes to conform to metropolitan plans already in place or to give consideration to land use issues, and it all but neglected damage that could be done to urban transit systems, which were already in decline due to the automobile.

The **Highway Act of 1962** made federal highway aid to areas with populations over 50,000 contingent on the “establishment of a continuing and comprehensive transportation planning process carried out by states and local communities.” This is the basis for metropolitan transportation planning used to the present day.

Regional Planning Acts:

Planning Acts in 1940 and 1954 authorized federal aid to cities, which included support new regional planning efforts. Section 701 of the 1954 Act gave federal grants to COGs and metro planning agencies to promote cooperation in analyzing and addressing regional problems.

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR), 1959, explored new government structures and policies to address suburban growth problems and improve coordination of increasing number of federal programs.

The following legislation helped realize many of the ACIR recommendations for replacing ad hoc regional commissions with stronger metropolitan bodies:

1961 — Housing Act
1964 — Urban Mass Transportation Act
1965 — Housing and Urban Development Act
1966—Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act
1966 — Federal-Aid Highway Act; 1969 amendment required citizen participation in transportation planning
1969—National Environmental Policy Act, required Environmental Impact Statements.

The 1962 Act recognized that growing areas needed dynamic regional plans that were subject to revision based on continuing data collection and feedback. By the end of the 1960s, the case for improved regional planning moved forward, thus expanding the role and authority of regional planning agencies. Legislation was a significant step towards comprehensive regional planning.

Metropolitan planning is needed to “teach us to think on a scale as large as the problem itself and act to prepare for the future as well

1970s

The 1970s brought a wave of environmental legislation and a backlash against urban highway projects, which re-thought the long-held gospel that national progress was tied to the automobile. With rising inflation, government at all levels tightened transportation budgets, and the federal government implemented wage and price controls. Also, the post Viet Nam era saw more aggressive community organizations aided by laws granting the public greater input into the transportation decision-making process and by a growing number of “advocacy planners” who lent expertise to fights against highway routes through minority and poor neighborhoods. Opposition in urban neighborhoods, concerns about the environment, and funding shortfalls slowed highway projects by scaling back and even blocking them.

To help cope with the complex transportation policy environment of the 1970s, Congress required each urbanized area to establish Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) composed of local officials. Congress hoped MPOs would help build regional agreement on transportation investments that would better balance highway, mass transit and other needs and lead to more cost-effective solutions to transportation problems. Many urban areas began to recognize that they could not easily build their way out of congestion.

The new focus became multi-modal. Mass transit was encouraged, as were projects that could squeeze greater capacity from the existing transportation network without encouraging auto use, incur huge costs or inflict major environmental damage. In 1972-73, urban and environmental interests blocked passage of the highway bill until 1973 when Congress authorized the use of highway money for mass transit.

The interest in seeking a more balanced and multimodal transportation system focused new attention on COGs and regional planning commissions composed of local officials. Although these regional agencies provided good technical advice, they often only met minimum federal requirements rather than facilitating good planning. Thus, federal officials pushed to strengthen regional planning and encouraged agencies to develop consensus on the most cost-effective approaches for solving transportation problems. This included balancing roads, mass transit, or other needs while addressing environmental, economic, and community concerns.

Highway Act 1973 dedicated a small portion of each state’s funding from the Highway Trust Fund for new Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) to be established or designated in each urbanized area over 50,000. Thus, Congress gave federal officials the legal mandate and financing to transform the hodgepodge of regional bodies across the country into effective, multi-modal planning agencies. Many saw the new MPOs as a means to counter the domineering influence of state transportation departments in pushing highway projects.

The final rules governing MPOs were issued in 1975, noting that MPOs had to include “principal elected officials.” The most significant responsibility involved compiling and approving the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), a short-range component to the long-range plans developed in most urban regions. Also, for the first time both highway and transit projects had to be included in a single planning document, and state and local agencies were required to gain approval of MPOs to obtain federal transportation funds. Projects that better managed traffic were to be given highest consideration.

At the end of the 1970s, despite localized successes in finding innovative approaches to transportation problems, many people found that transportation planning had become too complex and cumbersome to address pressing needs in urban regions. A succession of laws and regulations had added layer upon layer of planning requirements intended to address concerns about the environment, neighborhoods, local economies, elderly and disabled, energy conservation, transit, among others. For many, acrimony, gridlock, and stagflation became the hallmarks of planning in the 1970s.