

FAQs

What is an MPO?

Metropolitan Planning Organizations are part of a federal process to conduct local transportation planning in urbanized areas. The federal government requires urbanized areas to establish a planning process that is comprehensive, continuing and cooperative (the three C's of transportation planning). The MPO process is required in urbanized areas over 50,000 in population in order to receive federal funding for transportation. The MPO process is a partnership between the local, state and federal governments to make decisions about transportation planning in urbanized areas and to meet planning requirements established by federal authorizing legislation for transportation funding.

What is the Mecklenburg-Union MPO?

The Mecklenburg-Union Metropolitan Planning Organization (MUMPO) is a multi-jurisdictional of local governments, NCDOT, USDOT and other providers of transportation services. MUMPO is currently comprised of the following member governments: Charlotte, Cornelius, Davidson, Huntersville, Indian Trail, Matthews, Mecklenburg County, Mint Hill, Monroe, Pineville, Stallings, Union County, Waxhaw, Weddington, Wesley Chapel and Wingate.

What are the major functions of MUMPO?

It is MUMPO's responsibility to coordinate transportation policy for local governmental jurisdictions within the Charlotte Urbanized Area, as well as develop transportation plans and programs for the urbanized area in cooperation with the State. Cooperatively, MUMPO works with the North Carolina DOT to develop transportation plans, travel models, thoroughfare plans, transit plans and bicycle and pedestrian plans. MUMPO also works with the state on issues such as funding for transportation improvements, project planning, environmental impacts and air quality. Additionally, MUMPO works with local governments to coordinate land use and transportation planning.

How are MPOs established?

MPOs are established in every urbanized area in the country with a population over 50,000. Urbanized areas are defined every ten years by the U.S. Census. In North Carolina, MPOs are determined by agreement between the Governor and the MPO. MPOs are established by a Memorandum of Understanding which is signed by all participating local governments and by the State of North Carolina.

How many MPOs are there in North Carolina?

MUMPO is one of 17 urban areas in North Carolina, which participate in the 3-C transportation planning process. Others include Asheville, Burlington, Cabarrus-Rowan, Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro, Fayetteville, Gaston, Goldsboro, Greensboro, Greenville, Hickory-Newton-Conover, High Point, Jacksonville, Raleigh, Rocky Mount, Wilmington, and Winston-Salem.

Who makes decisions for the MPO?

All decisions are made by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), with recommendations from the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC). The membership and voting structures of these committees are established through a Memorandum of Understanding between all of the participating governments.

MPO – The policy-making body made up of elected officials from each of the member governments, and the Board of Transportation.

TCC – Staff level committee that provides recommendations to the MPO regarding transportation decisions.

What is the Lead Planning Agency?

The City of Charlotte is the Lead Planning Agency for MUMPO. The MPO staff is made up of members of the City of Charlotte Planning Department and the Charlotte Department of Transportation. Responsibilities of the staff include conducting planning studies, forecasting travel demand and patterns, and preparing meeting materials for and implementing directives of the MPO and TCC. In addition, Staff provides technical expertise to all of the member MPO jurisdictions.

How can I participate and/or provide feedback to the MPO?

All MPO meetings are open to the public and there is an item on each MPO agenda that allows for public comment. Anyone may sign up to speak about relevant issues during this comment period and will be given an allotted time to do so. In addition, MUMPO has various opportunities for public involvement throughout the year, usually regarding specific projects, programs or plans. You may check the MUMPO website at www.mumpo.org by clicking the “Upcoming Public Meetings” link to find out if any public meetings are scheduled. The MUMPO website also has a “Contact Us” link which can be utilized for any questions or comments regarding MUMPO related issues.

2010 MPO ORIENTATION QUESTIONS

1. How are TCC members interacting with MPO members?

It is difficult for staff to determine how individual TCC and MPO members are interacting; however, we suggest that each community's TCC and MPO members arrange their schedules to confer at least once a month to review issues coming before the TCC. Doing so will allow the MPO representative to stay abreast of the TCC's activities and be better prepared for those topics that must eventually be addressed by the MPO.

2. How are differences between TCC and MPO members resolved?

Differences between a community's TCC and MPO representatives should be resolved using the appropriate policies of the municipality. MUMPO has no formal position on this topic.

3. How might MUMPO change after the 2010 census?

Determining MUMPO's future minimum planning area is not unlike predicting the weather—we have a reasonable amount of information, but there is much we don't know, and more important, much that is out of our control. To illustrate, the Census Bureau has revised the method by which it establishes urbanized area boundaries (UZA). (The UZA is the minimum planning area for an MPO.) In the past, water bodies were impediments to the expansion of a UZA; that is no longer the case. Also, more than just raw population will now be used; land with development potential will be considered. Finally, the Census Bureau now uses what are called "hops" and "jumps." "Hops" permit the application of UZA status to non-qualifying census block groups to connect qualifying areas that are less than ½ mile apart, and "jumps" allow for non-contiguous urban areas less than 2.5 miles apart to become part of a UZA; previously the maximum was a 1.5 mile separation.

Based upon the above, the following has been speculated:

- It is highly likely that Mooresville will become a part of MUMPO's minimum planning area. In fact, it was by only a slim margin that Mooresville did not become a part of the UZA after the 2000 Census, and much growth has taken place since then.
- Some who have closely analyzed the Census Bureau's methodology and development patterns believe there is a possibility that the planning area could extend as far north as Statesville.
- Eastern Lincoln County could become a part of the planning area if the UZA jumps across Mountain Island Lake via NC 73.
- An extension of the UZA east further into Union County could prompt extending MUMPO's planning area into the part of Union County currently in the Rocky River Rural Planning Organization's jurisdiction.
- There has been significant growth along the US 521 corridor that could result in Lancaster County being included in the UZA.

The Census could release UZA information as early as next year.

4. *If the MPO gets too big, will it become unwieldy?*

That is a distinct possibility. Merely adding Mooresville will significantly impact MUMPO's planning process. Beyond adding two or three new voting members, Iredell County is in a different NCDOT transportation division (Division 12) and is in a different equity formula funding region (Funding Region F). Moreover, staff resources would be stretched even thinner as attempts are made to provide minimal services to all member jurisdictions. If a consolidated regional MPO were to result from planning studies now underway, the current model of most jurisdictions having voting membership on the MPO would be a thing of the past.

**Iredell County could be eligible for voting representation and many assume that if Mooresville is added, the development patterns that have emerged in last 10 years make it logical that Troutman would be added, too*

5. *What's in it for my community's constituents to keep coming to the table year after year?*

The metropolitan planning process is required in urban areas that wish to use federal funds, and MUMPO is the agency officially recognized to carry out the process. Therefore it will continue to establish policy and approve plans and programs even if some communities elect to opt out of the process. Remaining at the table is the only way a community can influence policy and be an effective voice for the projects it believes are in its best interests.

6. *What is CRAFT?*

CRAFT stands for the Charlotte Regional Alliance for Transportation, and it is a voluntary association of the region's four MPOs and two RPOs and was created in 1999 to facilitate regional transportation planning in the Charlotte area. CRAFT's role is to enhance communication among jurisdictions, promote awareness of regional concerns, and to provide an educational forum in the region that addresses significant common issues.

The organizational model is that of an MPO: an Executive Committee consisting of the MPO and RPO chairs, as well as representatives from the Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC), the NC Board of Transportation and the SC Transportation Commission, and a Technical Committee consisting of staff and TCC members. The Executive Committee meets on average once per year, whereas the Technical Committee, made up of staff and TCC members, meets three to four times a year. It is at the Technical Committee level that most of the crucial information exchanges take place, ensuring that what is planned in one agency's jurisdiction is not in conflict with what is planned in another.

7. *Clarify Senate Bill 910.*

Senate Bill 910, Regional Transportation Authorities, sponsored by Senator Clodfelter, authorizes two or more units of government to enter a regional transportation funding agreement that creates an agency to exercise delegated powers, provided they are in a single EPA ozone attainment area, have no more than one MPO, include all counties in the attainment area and all cities of 5,000 or more. The agency prepares a list of transportation projects to be funded, at least 35% of which must be public transportation projects. It also authorizes counties that participate in the agreement to levy a sales tax of one-half percent and a gas tax of 5 cents per gallon.

Other than MPO/RPO consolidation, are there any other significant efforts underway?

Assuming this question is referring to other significant **regional** efforts, the development of our air quality conformity determination report is done cooperatively with our regional MPO and RPO partners. This effort is conducted through what is known as the Interagency Consultation process. Also, MUMPO works with its regional partners on specific projects, such as the Garden Parkway (with the Gaston MPO) and the I-85 widening (with the Cabarrus-Rowan MPO).

8. Discuss weighted voting and the requirements for it.

Weighted voting is a way to apportion voting authority in accordance with population. A common use of weighted voting outside government is in corporate shareholder elections, where each shareholder can vote, but their votes are counted in proportion to the number of shares they own. MUMPO's weighted voting structure is a component of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and was approved by the MPO when the MOU was adopted in 2003. It was specifically designed so that the City of Charlotte could not unilaterally determine an issue's outcome without at least two other members voting with the City. Also, it was determined that those municipalities having a corporate limits and extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) population of 20,000 or more would be given two votes.

9. How can the equity formula be addressed without losing out?

The Equity Formula will be discussed at the education forum prior to the March 24 MPO meeting.

10. What proposals are being considered for changes to the Equity Formula?

The NC General Assembly's Joint Legislative Transportation Oversight Committee is about to begin a process to review the Equity Formula, therefore no formal proposals have been put forth. During earlier discussions on this topic, some of the recommended changes centered on realigning the funding regions to more closely reflect local economic relationships and commuting patterns (e.g., there is a great deal of commuting between Gaston and Mecklenburg counties but they are in different funding regions) and to allow for population to be a more significant factor. It is important to note that the Equity Formula statute already contains a provision for population to be weighted more heavily. The text of that provision reads as follows:

When ninety percent (90%) of the mileage of the Intrastate System projects listed in G.S. 136-179 is completed, the Secretary of Transportation shall, on or before October 1 of each year, calculate the estimated amount of funds subject to this section that will be available for the next seven program years beginning that October 1. The Secretary shall then calculate a tentative percentage share for each distribution region by multiplying the total estimated amount by a factor that is based:

- (1) Sixty-six percent (66%) on the estimated population of the distribution region compared to the total estimated population of the State; and*
- (2) Thirty-four percent (34%) on the fraction one-seventh, which provides an equal share based on the number of distribution regions.*

11. What determines the topics that are addressed by the TCC?

There are essentially two reasons a topic come before the TCC.

- **Federal requirements**

The metropolitan planning process regulations require that MPOs prepare specific plans and programs, such as the long-range transportation plan, Transportation Improvement Program, Unified Planning Work Program, etc.

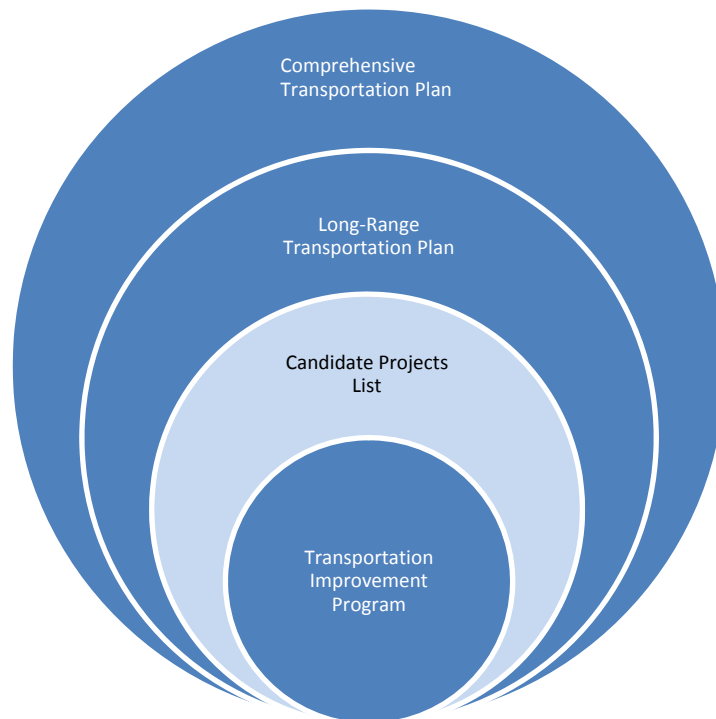
In addition, other federal laws or regulations require MPO action. For example, the Clean Air Act requires MPOs to make air quality conformity determinations on its TIP and LRTP. Therefore these topics, along with the various activities that go into preparing the associated plans and programs, must be addressed by the TCC.

- **State requirements:**

MUMPO is most affected by the state requirement to develop and maintain a comprehensive transportation plan (CTP), formerly known as the Thoroughfare Plan. Many past actions related to the CTP/Thoroughfare Plan have related to amending the document.

State policy now includes MPOs in its project environmental review process known as the Merger Process, which involves coordinating the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process with the permitting process associated with the Clean Water Act. The MPO approved a policy that requires staff to bring major milestones in the Merger Process to the TCC for review and comment (and in some cases to the MPO).

12. Describe the relationship between: the Candidate Project List – MTIP – STIP – CTP – LRTP



The Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) is the universe of projects. Projects to be funded in future Long-Range Transportation Plans (LRTP) will come from the CTP. Projects funded in the Transportation Improvement Program must come from an MPO-approved, air quality-conforming

LRTP, but first must be placed in the Candidate Projects List (CPL) by the MPO. The CPL represents MUMPO's top candidates for TIP funding.

A thorough description of the relationship between documents requires more than a diagram. This topic should be considered for further discussion at an education forum prior to an upcoming MPO meeting.

13. Why install the funding for a project allocated at the beginning of a project instead of spread over 5 years (i.e. cash flow vs. long term)?

For most projects requiring construction lasting two or more years, the construction funds are allocated over the time period that construction is expected to occur. Funds for pre-construction activities (environmental studies, right-of-way purchases, etc.) are of course allocated in the years preceding construction.

14. How does a town, city or county get a project in the TIP?

What does a town, city or county need to do to help get a project in the TIP?

The diagram found under question #12 provides the basic steps required to take a project from a mere concept to funding in the TIP; however, the process is much more complex than can be illustrated in a diagram or even described in text. The best way to respond would be as part of an education forum prior to the start of a future MPO meeting and to use a specific project as a case study. The complexity of the process is such that more than one hour may be needed.