

VOLUME II, SECTION VI. H.
NORTH CENTRAL TEXAS COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (NCTCOG)
OVERVIEW AND STRUCTURE¹

The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) serves as the MPO for North Central Texas. NCTCOG is a voluntary association of over 225 entities (approximate division: 16 counties, 157 cities, 25 independent school districts, and 24 special districts) formed under Texas law.² The COG deals with the problems and planning needs that cross the boundaries of individual local governments or that require regional attention. NCTCOG is also the overall umbrella under which the regional transportation planning process functions. The Texas Governor, in 1974, designated the NCTCOG as the MPO for transportation planning with the proviso that the Regional Transportation Council be the decision-making group for regional transportation policy.

The NCTCOG region covers approximately 12,800 square miles in a sixteen county metropolitan region centered around Dallas and Fort Worth. The region has a population of 4.6 million. Nine of the fifteen counties in the region are “urbanized” and account for 96 percent of the region’s jobs. The four urban counties of Collin, Dallas, Denton and Tarrant are considered core counties since they account for 87 percent of the region’s residents and 91 percent of the region’s jobs.

NCTCOG’s Transportation Management Area (TMA) encompasses all of Collin, Dallas, Denton, Rockwall and Tarrant Counties and portions of the contiguous counties of Ellis, Johnson, Kaufman, and Parker.³

Intergovernmental Cooperation⁴

The *Bylaws and Operating Procedures, Regional Transportation Council⁵* (Bylaws) summarize the roles of the various entities. Counties and cities have the local responsibility for anticipating and meeting the transportation needs for adequately moving people and goods within their jurisdictions. The TxDOT is charged with the responsibility for planning, designing, constructing, and maintaining the State Highway System. Duly authorized transportation authorities are responsible for planning, developing, and operating public transportation services in their respective service areas.

¹ Information in this section was compiled from various NCTCOG information documents, including the *1998-99 Unified Planning Work Program for Regional Transportation Planning* and from the *Enhanced Planning Review of the Transportation Planning Process in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Area, July 1996*.

² See NCTCOG’s map showing the distinction between: 1. NCTCOG boundaries, 2. Metropolitan area, and 3. Ozone Nonattainment Area.

³ NCTCOG’s Transportation Management Area (TMA) encompasses the areas designated as nonattainment for ozone under the Clean Air Act. This MA covers the existing urbanized area and the contiguous area expected to be urbanized within the 20-year forecast period. Federal planning monies for carrying out the transportation planning process are limited to this area.

⁴ See also the information on the MOU with TxDOT mentioned in the section on “Texas State Requirements for MPOs.”

⁵ December 1998

Under federal law, the MPO, through the NCTCOG, has a role in project selection and transportation project programming.

The Bylaws provide for a Regional Transportation Council (RTC) of primarily elected officials as spokesmen for the counties and cities in the North Central Texas Region. The RTC evaluates transportation alternatives and then determines the “most desirable transportation system” for the region. The RTC is the forum for cooperative decision making by local governments and representatives of entities responsible for highway and mass transit improvements. The RTC maintains a particularly close working relationship with TxDOT.⁶

Organization and Decision-Making

The **General Assembly** of NCTCOG consists of the 220+ members that each have one voting representative. The General Assembly annually elects an 11-member Executive Board (9 local elected officials and 2 regional citizens).

The **Executive Board** establishes overall policy for comprehensive planning coordination in the region, including policy for the MPO and NCTCOG staff, as well as policy for the administration of funds granted to the MPO.⁷ The Executive Board endorsed transportation planning documents or policies first approved by the Regional Transportation Council.

NCTCOG created the **Regional Transportation Council (RTC)** to address regional transportation planning policy and activities, to provide guidance for multimodal transportation planning and to assure coordination among transportation modes, local government entities, and planning activities.

The RTC is composed of thirty-seven policy leaders and is the single policy group for regional transportation decisions.⁸ Thirty-two members are elected city and county officials;⁹ the other five are appointed and include two TxDOT District Engineers; two transportation authority representatives, and the representative of the North Texas Tollway Authority. The chairman of the RTC is elected from the membership for a term of two years. The individual local governing bodies select their representatives to the RTC. RTC members may also serve on various subcommittees formed on an as-needed basis to respond to specific issues that come before the Council.

⁶ For example, TxDOT’s Regional Planning Office supplies data such as traffic counts and auto occupancy surveys, while the Dallas and Fort Worth Districts review and comment on planning documents and conduct feasibility and design studies on projects in the TIP.

⁷ Neither of the transit operators (DART; FWTA) is represented on the MPO’s Executive Board, however both are represented on the RTC.

⁸ See chart entitled “Regional Transportation Council Subcommittees,” July 1, 1999.

⁹ Optional representatives of local governments, up to one-third of the public agency’s representation, may be non-elected private sector officials who are residents of the appointing entity.

The RTC and Executive Board work cooperatively to support regional transportation planning. The *Bylaws and Operating Procedures, Regional Transportation Council*, December 1998, Section 3.J. defines the functions of the RTC as follows:

- Provide direction to the regional transportation planning (RTP) process.
- Certify the coordination, comprehensiveness, and continuity of the RTP process.
- Develop the UPWP, RTP, TIP and related requirements.
- Review the TIP and RTP for assurance of fiscal reasonableness.
- Select and nominate projects for funding.
- Prioritize corridors identified for improvements.
- Review the limits of the Metropolitan Area and make revisions considered appropriate.
- Authorize transit planning technical assistance.
- Encourage federal and state agencies to follow RTC developed plans and procedures.
- Identify the kinds of consultant projects eligible for federal transportation funding.
- Communication of needs/policies/actions between the RTC and represented entities.
- Optimize public involvement.

The RTC directs and approves the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the Congestion Management System (CMS), and the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). The RTC also satisfies and implements federal and state laws and regulation pertaining to the regional transportation planning process.

Committees

NCTCOG has some 35 committees, including policy development, technical advisory, and study committees, with more than 800 members collectively. Their recommendations are considered for adoption by NCTCOG's Executive Board and, ultimately, for implementation by local governments.

The regional transportation planning process is supported by four technical committees. The members of these committees include lead engineers and planners from local jurisdictions and regional and local transportation providers, and representatives from the trucking, rail, and air industries. The technical committee members provide the RTC with information about the concerns and priorities of the individual local entities the members represent. They also provide specialized technical expertise and serve as a medium of communication and coordination between the regional planning process and individual local agencies. The committees are:

- Surface Transportation Technical Committee (STTC) reviews, comments on, and prepares recommendations regarding surface transportation planning and development. The STTC is appointed by the cities, counties, and agencies

represented on the RTC and approved by the Executive Board of NCTCOG to review the roadway planning process and the transit planning process to the RTC.¹⁰

- Travel Demand Management Committee/Congestion Management System Committee (TDMC) provides technical support and coordination for the implementation of the travel demand actions contained in the state implementation plan (SIP) for air quality.
- Air Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (ATTAC) that provides expertise and guidance in the development and maintenance of the Regional Airport and Heliport System Plans (general aviation and air cargo activity). The members are appointed by the NCTCOG Executive Board.
- Intermodal Freight/Transportation Task Force focuses on increasing private sector involvement in the MPO planning process, on forming a better understanding of goods movement issues, and on public/private partnerships in transportation plan implementation.¹¹ Membership is proposed from representatives of the trucking, rail and airfreight industries, state and federal transportation agencies, locally elected officials, as well as various highway user groups and goods movement organizations.

Staff

The Transportation Department of NCTCOG provides technical planning services in support of development, project selection, and implementation of transportation projects in the RTP and TIP. To assist the RTC in its role in transportation planning, NCTCOG staff provides administrative and clerical support to the RTC. The Department also provides regional planning, major investment studies, travel forecasting, air quality analysis, transit and traffic operations planning, airport planning, and technical assistance to local governments.

The Director of Transportation for NCTCOG is responsible within the MPO for coordinating all work efforts funded under the UPWP in order to meet all certification requirements and maintain federal funding eligibility for local projects.

¹⁰ See the *Bylaws and Operating Procedures Regional Transportation Council*, December 1998, for committee membership details.

¹¹ The FY 1998-99 UPWP provides continued funding support for the further development and implementation of the Intermodal Freight/Transportation Task Force.

NORTH CENTRAL TEXAS COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (NCTCOG) HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

In Texas, the Regional Planning Act of 1965¹² authorized the creation of regional councils. NCTCOG was established in 1966 to assist local governments in planning for common needs, cooperating for mutual benefit, and coordinating for sound regional development. At that time there were 110 member governments and 10 counties in NCTCOG. Transportation planning for the Dallas-Fort Worth area began at NCTCOG in December, 1969. John Roark assumed the newly created role of Transportation Department director.

In 1971, the state legislature designated the regional councils as the appropriate areawide planning organizations to provide review and comment on application for federal assistance. It also gave regional councils the authority to review any state grants having an areawide impact.

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1973 (1973 Act) established MPOs. The State Department of Highways and Public Transportation (SDHPT), now known as the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT), under the guidance of the 1973 Act, initiated the statewide structuring of key policy committees of elected officials.

In 1974 NCTCOG was designated by the Governor as the MPO for the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Since that time NCTCOG has served as the MPO for regional transportation planning in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan area.

In 1980, the role of Transportation Department director shifted from John Roark to Gordon Shunk. In 1983, the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) and the Fort Worth Transportation Authority (“The T” or FTWA) were created.

With the signing of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 (CAAA) into law, the Dallas-Fort Worth region was designated as a moderate nonattainment area for exceeding federal emission standards for the pollutant ozone. In 1990, Michael Morris assumed the role of Transportation Department director. The same year, the MPO finalized a regional transportation plan (RTP), known as *Mobility 2010: The Regional Transportation Plan for North Central Texas*, which presented a system of transportation improvements needed to maintain mobility in the Dallas-Fort Worth area over twenty years.¹³ In response to ISTEA, the MPO prepared an update, known as the *Mobility 2010 Plan Update*, which was adopted by the RTC and endorsed by the Executive Board of NCTCOG in October 1993.

NCTCOG’s current regional transportation plan, *Mobility 2020: The Metropolitan Transportation Plan* was developed in 1996. The plan is updated every three years.

¹² Texas Code, Chapter 391, Local Government Code, as amended and codified.

¹³ *Mobility 2010: The Regional Transportation Plan for North Central Texas*, represented the third comprehensive effort since 1974.

NORTH CENTRAL TEXAS COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (NCTCOG) WORK PRODUCT

Regional Transportation Planning

The MPO prepares, and updates periodically, a regional transportation plan (RTP) in response to the federal requirement for a financially constrained RTP which serves as a guide for the expenditure of federal, state, and local transportation funds. The RTP includes consideration and treatment of congestion management concerns as well as financial considerations.¹⁴

NCTCOG's plan, *Mobility 2020: The Metropolitan Transportation Plan* ("Mobility 2020"), identifies transportation facilities that will make the most effective use of the existing system to relieve congestion and indicates appropriate enhancements to meet the mobility need of the region. Current federal transportation legislation requires review of transportation plans every three years.¹⁵ *Mobility 2020* provides policy leaders and transportation planners with estimates of traffic congestion expected in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Area through the year 2020.

The forecasts have confirmed the planners' expectations – if Dallas-Fort Worth continues to grow at current rates, maintaining current levels of mobility will require greater levels of funding, more innovation in the management and operation of the transportation systems, and greater diversity in the transportation modes of the region. The *Mobility 2020* Plan recommends the implementation of \$32.5 billion in Metropolitan Transportation System improvements across the region. Ongoing planning efforts are now focused on revenue strategies to implement the Plan and refinement of Plan recommendations through more detailed corridor feasibility and major investment studies.

Regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The MPO considers the TIP to be an implementation document for the transportation plan. The annually-prepared TIP for the area lists all roadway and public transportation projects proposed for implementation in the near future. While the *Mobility 2020* Plan identifies needs, the TIP represents the process by which projects are selected for funding. For TIP development, the MPO scores and ranks projects for certain funding based on MPO adopted criteria. TxDOT rates projects for other funding sources (e.g. NHS, IM, bridge) with input from the MPO.

The TIP for the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area is prepared by the MPO staff in cooperation with the TxDOT, DART, and the FWTA. NCTCOG's Executive Board, the RTC, STTC, TDMC, and the Air Quality Advisory Committee also participate in the development, review, endorsement, or approval of the TIP. The MPO staff continually

¹⁴ The inclusion of the region's Congestion Management Plan within the RTP is unique.

¹⁵ Work began on the update of Mobility 2020 during FY 1998-99.

monitor funded TIP projects for scope, finances and conformity status; and they maintain a dialogue with local governments to track implementation status.¹⁶

Unified Planning Work Program (UTWP)

The MPO prepares the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) annually in cooperation with TxDOT, Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), Fort Worth Transportation Authority (FWTA), and counties and local governments in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area. Each year, specific planning needs for the region are identified through requests solicited from representatives of these agencies and local governments. These needs are combined with those at the regional level, identified by the MPO, and then allocated to available planning resources.

The UPWP includes a list of planning projects, a budget, and the funding source for each project. The MPO may not request payment for work performed unless that work is included in the prevailing UPWP.¹⁷ The UPWP is presented as a work program to the transportation technical committees for review prior to submission to a public meeting for comments. Final approval is granted by the RTC and the Executive Board.

The document covers six program areas, which are identified by TxDOT for all MPOs in the state:

- Administration and Management
- Transportation Data Development and Maintenance
- short-range Planning and Programming (TIP, Air Quality, TDM)
- Metropolitan Transportation Plan
- Special Studies

Most of the functional and financial responsibilities of the participating agencies and the planning activities to be undertaken by them are defined in the UPWP. The mix of tasks includes both transit and highways and also addresses ISTEA and CAAA regulatory planning requirements.

Congestion Management System (CMS)

As a Transportation Management Area (TMA) and an ozone non-attainment area, the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan region is required to develop a Congestion Management System (CMS). The MPO takes the lead role in developing the CMS and has incorporated the CMS into the transportation plan as an essential ingredient for maximizing the efficiency of the existing transportation plan. The Congestion Management Plan evaluates and recommends transportation systems management (TSM), transportation demand management (TDM), and non-single occupant vehicle (SOV) strategies.

¹⁶ Modifications to the TIP are processed throughout the year. With each modification, a financial analysis is performed to ensure that the TIP was constrained to available financial resources as required by ISTEA.

¹⁷ The provision precluding payment for work that is not included in the UPWP is contained in the *Urban Transportation Planning Contract* between the State and the MPO.

Other Publications

In addition to the products discussed above, NCTCOG's Transportation Department, in conjunction with the Public Affairs Department, takes an active role in developing publications designed to educate the public on transportation issues and encourage their active involvement. Such publications include, but are not limited to:

- Regional Mobility Initiatives (an ongoing educational brochure series)
 - Advanced Transportation Management, March 1996
 - Air Quality, July 1996
 - Traffic Congestion, October 1996
 - Multimodal Solutions in the North Central Corridor, July 1997
 - Toll Roads, February 1998
 - Major Investment Studies, August 1998
 - High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lanes, December 1998
 - Travel Demand Forecasting Procedures, June 1999

- Educational Pamphlets
- Technical Report Series Reports
- NCTCOG Transportation Data Book
- Your Region newsletter
- NCTCOG Annual Report
- Public Meeting Notices
- Notices of focus groups, workshops, or open houses

Information is also available via electronic media. The home page access is: <http://www.nctcog.dst.tx.us/>.