

VOLUME III, SECTION VII. EVALUATION OF MPO PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

As illustrated in Volume II of this Study, in meeting the long-term transportation planning needs of a region, MPOs follow different processes, which processes take on different qualities and attributes as they evolve over time. The MPOs created three decades ago were early examples of what has come to be known as “collaborative processes”. These processes are being used increasingly to promote a broader focus among groups of stakeholders to encourage collaborative problem solving on issues of mutual concern.

We will refer shortly to research which demonstrates that there is a strong connection between the qualities of collaborative processes and their relative successes in addressing root problems. This research was prompted by concerns about the qualities of processes used in transportation planning and allocation decisions. Our assessment strategy for examining MPO processes has been two fold:

- 1) First, we have identified the kinds of issues examined and the kinds of questions asked, in a variety of governmental and organizational contexts, whenever processes are examined in terms of fairness and equity issues;
- 2) Second, we have focused on specific questions concerning MPO effectiveness, as identified in the Scope of Work, referenced in the Introduction to Volume II.

PROCESS QUALITY

Issues of process quality have been examined in insurance coverage decisions,¹ public hearings,² drug testing,³ dispute resolution,⁴ performance appraisal,⁵ political

¹ Daniels, N. and Sabin, J., “Limits to Health Care: Fair procedure, democratic deliberation and the legitimacy problem for insurers,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 26(4) 1997. p. 303.

² Rettig, K., Tamand, V., Magistad, B., “Using matched pairs in modified analytic induction in examining justice principles in child support guidelines, in M. Sussman and J. Gilgun, eds.,” *The Methods and Methodologies of Qualitative Family Research*, 1996, pp. 193-222.

³ Konovsky, M. & Cropanzano, R. “Perceived fairness of employee drug testing as a predictor of employee attitudes and job performance”, *Journal Applied Psychology*, 1991, v76, pp. 698-707.

⁴ Brett, J.M., commentary on procedural justice papers, In R. Lewicki, M. Bazerman, & B. Sheppard (eds), *Research on Negotiation in Organizations*, 1986, vol. 1 pp. 81-91.

⁵ Folger, R. & Konovsky, M. “Effects of procedural and distributive justice on reactions to pay raise decisions,” *Academy of Management Journal* 1989, 32, pp. 115-130.

processes,⁶ police actions,⁷ court trials,⁸ and other contexts, including urban planning.⁹

The fairness of processes is often judged by standards or principles broadly labeled “procedural fairness”. For example, one set of principles¹⁰ identified such standards or criteria as: accuracy, the extent to which decisions are based on accurate information; bias suppression, the extent to which the decision makers are able to suppress their own self interest and consider all points of view; consistency, the extent to which the decision procedures are predictable and followed across decision situations; correctability, the extent to which the process provides opportunities for appeals, reversals of decisions, and grievances; ethicality, the extent to which procedures avoid violations of moral and ethical standards such as lying and bribery; representativeness, the extent to which the decision makers reflect the interests and values of all subgroups and populations affected by the decisions.

The equity of processes is often thought of in terms of “distributive justice”.¹¹ Of the many principles which are believed to influence perceptions of distributive justice, three are illustrative: general needs, more resources are allocated to people with greater needs; contributions, more resources are allocated to people who originally made greater contributions; equality, everyone receives the same outcome regardless of the needs or contributions.

In the perception of a process as “fair”, and the perception of outcomes as “equitably distributed”, one of the more frequently noted relationships is called “the fair process effect”. The “fair process effect” is a discovery, that the way people see the fairness of a process impacts how they view their own outcomes from that process. As a matter of fact, there is evidence that the way people view the fairness of a process also influences their acceptance of authority,¹² their support for political institutions,¹³ their acceptance of

⁶ Tyler, T.R., & De Goeij, P. “Collective restraint in social dilemmas: Procedural justice and social identification effects on support for authorities,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1995, 69, pp. 482-497.

⁷ Tyler, T.R., & Folger, R., “Distributional and procedural aspects of satisfaction with citizen-police encounters,” *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 1980, 1, pp. 281-292.

⁸ Lind, E. A., Kulik, C.T., Ambrose, M., & De Vera Park, M. V., “Individual and corporate dispute resolution: Using procedural fairness as a decision heuristic,” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1993, 38, pp. 224-251.

⁹ Campbell, S. “Green cities, growing cities, just cities? Urban planning and the contradictions of sustainable development,” *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 62(3) 1996, p. 296.

¹⁰ Leventhal, G. S. “What should be done with equity theory?” In K. J. Gergen, M. S. J. Greenberg & R. H. Willis (eds), *Social Exchange: Advances in theory and research*, 1980, pp. 27 – 55.

¹¹ Deutsch, M., *Distributive justice: A social psychological perspective*, 1985 New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

¹² Lind, E. A., Kulik, C.T., Ambrose, M., & De Vera Park, M. V., “Individual and corporate dispute resolution: Using procedural fairness as a decision heuristic,” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1993, 38, pp. 224-251.

¹³ Lind, E. A., MacCoun, R. J., Ebener, P. A. Felstiner, W. L. F., Hensler, D. R., Resnik, J., & Tyler, T. R. *The perception of justice: Tort litigants’ views of trials, court-annexed arbitration, and judicial settlement conferences*. 1989 Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

agreements resulting from the process,¹⁴ and even their willingness to help the group at a cost to themselves.¹⁵

A different perspective on how people view the quality of processes comes from research on collaboration. For example, we have reported research¹⁶ on successful collaborative initiatives. And since MPOs were created for the purpose of promoting collaboration at the regional level, it seems reasonable to assess them in terms of the extent to which they compare favorably with known cases of successful collaboration. We studied 52 cases of successful collaboration. Of the many factors we found to be associated with successful collaboratives, two factors were present in all 52 cases. One factor we call “strong process leadership”, and that factor will help us interpret one of the findings of this research. The other factor we called “a credible and open process”. This factor has to do with the extent to which people see the process as genuine or authentic. The issue is whether decisions have not already been made; whether the process is being manipulated behind the scenes; whether the process is disproportionately influenced by powerful individuals; or whatever the people involved in the process directly influence the decisions made and the process is likely to have some impact on the root problem the participants are addressing.

Our consideration of process quality issues led to the development of a 17 item scale used by our research respondents to record their perceptions of the quality of the MPO processes in which they are involved. The 17 “process quality” items were reduced to a set of 15 items through factor analysis. The results of this factor analysis are presented in Volume III, Section VIII, A of this report. This analysis resulted in the following dimensions of process quality being used in measuring the perceptions of MPO participants.

1. Whether the people involved in the MPO process usually are focused on broader goals, rather than individual agendas.
2. Whether the MPO process is free of favoritism.
3. Whether the decisions are made in advance and simply confirmed by the MPO process.
4. Whether everyone has an equal opportunity to influence decisions in the MPO process.
5. Whether the MPO process gives some people more than they deserve, while short-changing others.
6. Whether the MPO process responds fairly to the needs of its members.
7. Whether the decisions made in the MPO process are based on fair criteria.
8. Whether some peoples’ “merits” are taken for granted while other people are asked to justify themselves.

¹⁴ Pruitt, D. G., Pierce, R. S., McGillicuddy, N. B., Welton, G. L., & Castrianno, L. M. “Long-term success in mediation,” *Law and Human Behavior*, 1993, 17, pp. 313-330.

¹⁵ Tyler, T.R., & De Goey, P. “Collective restraint in social dilemmas: Procedural justice and social identification effects on support for authorities,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1995, 69, pp. 482-497.

¹⁶ Chrislip, D., and Larson, C., *Collaborative Leadership: How Citizens and Civic Leaders Can Make a Difference*, Jossey-Bass, 1994.

9. Whether strings are being pulled from the outside which influence important decisions.
10. Whether the criteria for allocations are fair.
11. Whether the criteria for allocation are fairly applied.
12. Whether there is sufficient opportunity to challenge decisions.
13. Whether, in discussions about decisions or procedures, some people are discounted because of the organization they represent.
14. Whether the decisions made in the MPO process are consistent.
15. Whether the decisions are based on accurate information.

Effectiveness

The second set of evaluation criteria grew from the need to assess the extent to which MPO processes are effective. That is, do MPO processes respond effectively to specific issues involved in meeting the transportation planning needs of the region.

Two sources were considered in developing these criteria:

1. The contracting documents which govern the projects and explicate the purposes of the research and the categories of information necessary to achieve those research purposes; and
2. Ongoing communication with the Steering Committee, the official oversight committee for the project.

In operationalizing this second set of evaluation criteria, we followed two strategies: First, respondents were asked to rate and comment on issues directly related to the research objectives. These issues included:

1. The extent to which the MPO in question meets regional transportation needs.
2. The extent to which the MPO meets rapidly changing transportation needs.
3. How well the MPO and the regional transit agency work together.
4. How well the MPO and the state department of transportation work together.
5. How well the MPO process satisfies the respondents' needs in the following areas:
 - a. Additional transportation capacity
 - b. Roadway construction
 - c. Operational/safety improvements
 - d. Investment in transit and bus service
 - e. Investment in bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
6. The participants' response to the idea of having multiple MPOs operating within the metropolitan area.
7. How much impact the public has on decisions coming from the MPO.
8. The fairness of the TIP criteria.
9. The extent to which the institutional structure and decisional process in the MPO meets the long-term transportation needs of the region.
10. The respondents' comparison of the process used by the state department of transportation to allocate transportation dollars, relative to the MPO process.

Next we relied upon an indirect strategy.¹⁷ We asked the following questions reflective of this indirect strategy:

1. Think of a time when you thought to yourself: “This is a good process; it’s fair; it works.” Think about it, can you remember such a time? Tell me about it.
2. Now think of a time when you thought to yourself “This is not a good process. It’s not fair. It isn’t working.” Think about it, can you remember such a time? Tell me about it.
3. If you could change one thing that would make the MPO process in your opinion, “better”, what would you change?

Combining both indirect and direct questioning strategies allowed us to assess the effectiveness of the MPO process and institutional structure, at least from the perspectives of the participants in the process.

METHODOLOGY

Having described the two sets of criteria used for evaluating the MPO processes, we have introduced you to our basic measurement strategy. We will give you information about the adequacy of some of these measurement strategies later, when we report results. For now, let us consider simply how we used these strategies to collect the data necessary for achieving our research objectives.

Data Collection

The data collected from participants in the MPO process came to us in three forms:

1. Interviews. The primary data collection method was interviews. Interviews allow a deeper exploration of the respondent’s views of the MPO process, with the opportunity to elaborate and clarify responses. Interviews can provide a more stable basis for comparison, in the sense that they are individually arranged for the subject’s convenience and typically have a very high response rate.
2. Questionnaires. Questionnaires allow a wider range of data to be collected, more efficiently. Quantitative ratings and yes-no responses are especially easy to collect through questionnaires. Larger samples can be contacted through questionnaires. In this research, every MPO participant who was not selected to be interviewed was sent a mailed questionnaire.
3. Attitude scale. We used an attitude scale to collect respondents’ feelings about the quality of the MPO process. The attitude scale allows us to present to respondents a series of statements, all of which deal with closely related dimensions of the same attitude object, in this case the quality of the MPO process. If you add up the responses of a subject, multiple responses to basically the same attitude object, you

¹⁷ The overall purpose of the research was to find ways for improving the regional transportation process employed by MPOs. In other research we have conducted, we have found that useful information can be obtained by asking people to recall and describe specific situations they have experienced which led them to particular judgments or conclusions.

typically get a much more reliable measure of that subjects' feeling about the attitude object than you would get by asking respondents to answer single questions or rate single items. We use these cumulative scores across multiple items to make some of the more important comparisons; i.e., comparisons between different MPOs. All respondents in this research, those who were interviewed and those who responded to the mail questionnaire, completed the attitude survey.

Copies of these measurements, plus supplementary measurements referred to in other sections of this report, and measurement data (e.g. reliabilities) are presented in Volume III, Section VIII, A.

Sampling

As explained in Volume II of this study there are four MPOs involved in the primary analysis of this research: Denver, Dallas-Ft. Worth, Phoenix, and Seattle metropolitan areas.

Sampling Strategy

With assistance from the Steering Committee, the Research Team developed a framework for interviewing representative samples of individuals involved in or affected by the MPO transportation planning process. In order to sample a balanced representation of such individuals, a stratified random sampling approach was utilized. The first step was to develop categories of groups from which individuals would be selected for interviews. The second step was to determine the number to be sampled from each group. The resulting framework for the Denver area is as follows:

- 1) DRCOG Transportation Committee (TC) – 9 total
 - 6 current members (2 each from DRCOG, CDOT, and RTD)
 - 3 past members (1 each from DRCOG, CDOT, and RTD)
- 2) DRCOG Board of Directors – 7 total
 - 1 each from central city, inner suburb, outer suburb, county, small town, the city of Boulder, and the city of Longmont (these last two represent separate urbanized areas that could form their own MPO)
- 3) DRCOG Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) – 7 total
 - 1 each from central city, inner suburb, outer suburb, county, small town, the city of Boulder, and the city of Longmont (these last two represent separate urbanized areas that could form their own MPO)
- 4) DRCOG Transportation Policy Committee (TPC) – 7 total
 - 3 Board members not previously selected
 - 1 each representing: environmental, trucking, air quality, and business groups
- 5) State Transportation Commissioner from metropolitan area (Not on TC) – 1 total
- 6) RTD Board Member (Not on TC) – 1 total
- 7) DRCOG Staff – 2 total
- 8) CDOT Staff – 2 total
- 9) RTD Staff – 2 total
- 10) Regional Air Quality Council – 1 total

- 11) State Air Pollution Control Division – 1 total
- 12) State Legislature – 1 total
- 13) Governor’s Staff – 1 total
- 14) Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) – 1 total
- 15) Federal Transit Administration (FTA) – 1 total

This framework yielded a sample of 44 individuals to be interviewed. Comparable groups in the MPO cities were identified. Each of these MPOs had comparable committees similar to those of DRCOG’s, but the names were different (See Table 2 in section on TIP Distribution Analysis). Efforts were made to apply the same sampling framework to the other MPOs and the sampling process was conducted in the same randomly stratified manner.¹⁸

The following table presents the numbers sampled for both interviews and questionnaires, and the returns for each MPO.

A. Interview Questionnaires & Summary

	Denver	Dallas	Seattle	Phoenix
Personal Interviews	57 Interviews completed	22 Interviews completed	44 Interviews completed	44 Interviews completed
1st Mail Survey	Approx. 63 were mailed; 21 were returned	Approx. 235 were mailed; 79 were returned	Approx. 113 were mailed; 25 were returned	Approx. 90 were mailed; 35 were returned
2nd Mail Survey	52 were mailed; 6 were returned	174 were mailed; 20 were returned	196 were mailed; 13 were returned	91 were mailed; 15 were returned
Mail Survey Return Rate	38% return rate	42% return rate	19% return rate	55% return rate

RESULTS

The quality process dimensions. The “quality of process” survey, or the attitude survey, was collected from all respondents, those who were interviewed and those who responded to the mailed questionnaire. The survey was constructed from literature

¹⁸ Dallas-Ft.Worth was originally selected as a site for pre-testing the interview, questionnaire, and attitude survey. Dallas-Ft.Worth was retained as one of the primary MPOs, for comparison purposes, for reasons which will become evident from the results of the research.

review and expert guidance. It is a multiple item rating scale. The items ask people to express attitudes about qualities of the process that are associated with their MPOs. The original scale, to which our research subjects responded, consisted of 17 items.

The preliminary analysis was conducted on responses to the 17 “quality of process” items. This preliminary analysis was a factor analysis. A factor analysis is necessary for examining all the statistical relationships (correlations) among the items to determine if there are different groups of items, or “factors”, that are closely associated with each other. In other words we were interested in whether there are different kinds of attitudes, or different dimensions in the attitudes, that describe how people feel about their MPO’s process.

Our preliminary analysis shows that the attitude items comprise one general factor, consisting of 15 of the 17 items. In other words, people’s attitudes about the MPO process tend to be global and relatively consistent across all of the qualities we are assessing. They tend to view the process as either positive or negative, good or bad, overall. Respondents do not tend to differentiate among different qualities of the process. They tend to see the process as generally good or not so good.

This preliminary analysis led us to believe that we have a reasonably comprehensive, unidimensional, very reliable measure that will allow us to make relatively accurate comparisons. The internal reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) of the 15 item scale is high (.938). Therefore, we can describe the overall quality of the MPO processes, as perceived by our respondents.

The MPOs. If we ask, “How good is the MPO process?” how we answer that question depends, in part, on how similar versus different the MPOs are. If the MPOs are very similar, we can characterize them as a group and reach conclusions about the group as a whole. If the MPOs are very different, then the answer to most questions we ask about them will be “it depends on which MPO you are talking about.”

With the above caution in mind, let us briefly characterize the MPOs as a group. On both the process quality measure and the effectiveness ratings, a scale of one to six is used. The average ratings given the MPOs tend to fall between the high three’s and the low fives. Since all of our scales have been recoded for analysis so that positive responses receive higher numbers, these means reflect moderately positive ratings.

The same pattern of moderately positive responses continues through the open ended questions asked in the interviews. When asked "Do the elected officials in the MPO process reflect the needs of the metropolitan area as a whole, or do they focus on the organizations they represent?" Most of the respondents say that the elected officials are regionally focused, but approximately 40 % say the elected officials are more concerned with their individual needs. Fewer than half (45%) of the respondents believe that their MPO is able to meet rapidly changing transportation needs. (One may question whether MPOs, designed to promote long-term regional planning, should be expected to meet rapidly changing needs.) Most people feel that the MPO works well with the regional

transportation authority. The respondents are more evenly split on whether the MPO works well with the state department of transportation.

When asked to evaluate the MPO in terms of the extent to which it satisfies particular transportation needs of the respondents, respondents evaluated their MPOs very positively with respect to operational and safety improvements, additional transportation capacity, and investment in bicycle and pedestrian facilities. They evaluated their MPOs moderately positively in roadway construction and investment in transit and bus service.

When discussing whether MPOs' TIP Criteria are fairly established, and fairly applied, 68% of the responses were positive while only 16% were negative.

A solid majority of the responses indicated that the MPO process is a better process for allocating transportation dollars than the state Department of Transportation's process.

Respondents were asked to recall and describe specific experiences with the MPO that resulted in their thinking "This is a good process; it's fair; it works." The respondents discussed: the quality of the funding allocation decisions; fair and equitable decision making in the application of TIP criteria; cooperative efforts consistent with a regional approach to planning; an open process in which all participants are informed; the responsiveness of the MPO to individual interests; a professional, competent, approachable MPO staff.

Respondents reported that positive experiences with the MPO occurred far more frequently than negative experiences. In fact, 88% of the respondents stated that negative experiences with the MPO occurred only "several times per year" or "almost never," while positive experience were more likely to occur frequently.

In summary, the overall pattern of responses indicates a moderately positive to strongly positive assessment of the MPOs by their participants. For a more detailed description of the interview responses see Volume 2, Section IX, D.

Differences among MPOs. A very consistent pattern has emerged from the data indicating that in assessing how well the MPO process is working, a great deal depends on which MPO you are talking about. With respect to the quality of process ratings, substantial and significant differences among the MPOs are present. Dallas-Ft.Worth and Seattle receive higher ratings. Both Dallas-Ft.Worth and Seattle are significantly higher than Denver and Phoenix. Dallas-Ft.Worth and Seattle do not differ significantly from each other, nor do Denver and Phoenix.

The effectiveness ratings focused on particular aspects of the MPOs, specifically those aspects identified in our Scope of Work. Very consistent with the quality ratings, we found the following statistically significant differences in the rated effectiveness of the MPOs:

With respect to meeting our regional transportation needs, Dallas-Ft.Worth (5.11) was rated highest, significantly different from Seattle (4.37) and Denver (4.25) and Phoenix (3.96).

With respect to meeting rapidly changing transportation needs, Dallas-Ft.Worth (5.01) is rated highest, significantly different from Seattle (3.93) and Phoenix (3.73) and Denver (3.54).

With respect to how well the MPO and the regional transit agencies work together, Dallas-Ft.Worth (5.09) is rated highest and is significantly different from Phoenix (4.55) and Seattle (4.25) and Denver (4.09).

With respect to how well the MPO and the state department of transportation work together, Dallas-Ft.Worth (5.03) is rated highest, significantly higher than Seattle (4.46) and Denver (4.00) and Phoenix (3.93). Seattle is also significantly higher than Phoenix.

With respect to how well the MPO process responds to needs in “additional transportation capacity”, Dallas-Ft.Worth (4.48) is rated highest, significantly different from Phoenix (3.60) and Denver (3.29).

With respect to how well the MPO process responds to needs in “roadway construction”, Dallas-Ft.Worth (4.52) is rated highest, significantly higher than Phoenix (3.65) and Denver (3.47).

With respect to how well the MPO process responds to needs in “operational and safety improvements”, Dallas-Ft.Worth (4.65) is rated highest, significantly different from Seattle (3.92) and Denver (3.78) and Phoenix (3.73).

With respect to how well the MPO process responds to needs in “investment in transit and bus service”, Dallas-Ft.Worth (4.62) is rated highest, significantly different from Seattle (3.92), Denver (3.46) and Phoenix (3.27).

With respect to how well the MPO process responds to needs in “investment in bicycle and pedestrian facilities,” Dallas-Ft.Worth (4.40) is rated highest, significantly different from Phoenix (3.70).

With respect to the fairness of the “TIP criteria”, Dallas-Ft.Worth (6.34) is rated highest, significantly different from Seattle (5.31) and Phoenix (4.84). This particular issue, the TIP structure and decisions, was explored in greater detail through our evaluation of transportation equity issues, and was measured on a 1 – 8 scale. We mention this issue here because the results are a departure from a prevailing pattern. That is, on the ratings of fairness of the TIP criteria, Denver approximates Dallas-Ft.Worth in receiving high ratings.

With respect to the institutional structure and decisional process of the MPO meeting the long-term transportation needs of the region, Dallas-Ft.Worth (5.02) is rated highest, significantly different from Seattle (4.15) and Denver (3.83) and Phoenix (3.63). Seattle is also significantly different from Phoenix.

The pattern emerging from these results seems to us relatively clear. Dallas-Ft.Worth is substantially and significantly higher in its rated effectiveness, across a wide range of effectiveness criteria, than other MPOs.

In the responses to the open-ended interview questions, this pattern is repeated. For example, 76% of the responses in Dallas-Ft.Worth (disproportionately more than is the case with the other MPOs) are in the highest approval category for meeting participant needs in the area of additional transportation capacity. Dallas-Ft.Worth is also viewed disproportionately high by respondents in terms of meeting operational/safety improvement needs and roadway construction needs. Seattle is the only MPO that surpasses Dallas-Ft.Worth in the perceptions of participants in any area; in the particular area of meeting needs in transit and bus service.

When participants recall and describe experiences which led them to believe the MPO process was working, a good process, a fair process, Dallas-Ft.Worth participants report these experiences occurring more frequently. When respondents describe experiences which led them to believe that the process was not working, not a good process, not a fair process, both Dallas-Ft.Worth and Seattle participants report these experiences as occurring less often. When judging whether the MPO meets the long-term transportation planning needs of the region, Dallas-Ft.Worth respondents place the MPO in the highest category of meeting needs (“without qualifiers”) 77% of the time. Other MPO participants are more “mixed” in describing their respective MPOs.

When we examine the changes recommended by the participants for their own MPOs, the following themes emerge. In Phoenix, participants say that the change most needed is for the members of the MPO to set aside their individual differences and individual needs and concentrate on regional transportation planning issues. In Denver, the participants say the MPO should streamline its process, remove any unnecessary complexity, and make it easier to understand and easier to work with. In Seattle the participants say either that no change is needed, or that the MPO should expand its already successful public involvement process. In Dallas-Ft.Worth participants say the MPO should pay its staff more (the MPO staff compensation schedules are tied to the state compensation schedules) because the participants are worried that the MPO may not be able to retain its highly professional, competent staff.

While the MPOs, as a group, are seen as functioning moderately well to very well, it is clear that there are significant differences between the MPOs in terms of how well they are seen as functioning. There is room for improvement, to some degree, in each of the MPOs. Our recommendations will reflect the changes we believe most likely to lead to improvements in the manner and effectiveness of an MPOs’ regional transportation planning processes.

Within the MPOs. Our review of MPO research, presented earlier, identified the relationships between MPOs and their constituents as a traditionally troubled area. Indeed, such relational issues led directly to this research. So our next analysis had to do with whether there are differences, within the MPOs, in the demographic categories of people providing the quality and effectiveness ratings.

We did not find noteworthy patterns or specific differences to which we would attribute special meaning. For example, in Denver, in the overall evaluation of the process, we found no differences in the categories of constituencies represented. This is not to say that there are not specific individuals, or specific constituencies, who are particularly pleased or displeased with the quality and effectiveness of the MPO process. It is simply that the pleasure or displeasure seems to occur haphazardly, rather than being associated systematically with particular demographic features.

You may wish to examine the differences we found within the MPOs and reach your own conclusions about the importance (or a lack of importance) of these differences. The differences are presented in Volume III, Section VIII, C.

INTERPRETATIONS

Plausible explanations

The patterns we found might be accounted for by any number of plausible explanations. Let's examine the ones that seem to us to occur most readily.

1. Money. Dallas-Ft.Worth has strikingly positive ratings. If the North Central Texas COG receives considerably more resources than the other comparison MPOs, it might follow that its constituents would be more positive about the quality and effectiveness of its process. And to conjecture along these lines seems reasonable given the rich history of Texas and its influential citizens in national politics. So it is reasonable to presume that abundant resources might make people generally happier with an allocation process, and to ask whether NCTCOG has more resources relative to the other comparison MPOs.
2. Severity and complexity of problems. It might be reasonable to assume that the differences in perceived quality and effectiveness of processes are at least partially a function of the complexity and severity of the problems confronted by the different MPOs. The more difficult the problems confronted by the MPOs, it might be argued, the less satisfied its members should be in how effectively the MPO deals with the problems. To be sure, the problems confronted by all four of these MPOs are daunting. But to believe that the problems confronted by Dallas-Ft.Worth are less complex and severe than those of the other MPOs seems to us unwarranted. Dallas is the largest of the four comparison MPOs. It has many more members. Its boundaries cover considerably more territory. Its air quality problems constrain its planning and its allocation. And even if we went to the next set of problems we might consider

complex and severe, we might very well be considering Seattle. Therefore, it seems to us unlikely that the patterns we have seen in the results are attributable to less severe and complex problems in Dallas-Ft.Worth and Seattle.

3. The rate of growth. It is conceivable that lower quality and effectiveness ratings in Phoenix and Denver are associated with the rapid rates of growth. More rapid growth rates might be expected to create a greater sense of urgency in responding to transportation needs. Since MPO structures and processes are designed to respond more to the long term transportation planning needs of a region, the sense of urgency promoted by rapid growth rates seems antithetical to the purposes and function of MPOs.

Many plausible explanations can be offered for the patterns of findings that have emerged. These explanations continue to be offered and discussed. But some of the more reasonable explanations for these findings have been offered by the many people we talked to in the different MPOs.

CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE MPO PROCESS

Leadership

The first trend is very strong acknowledgement of important leadership qualities on the part of the MPO transportation directors in both Dallas-Ft.Worth and Seattle. This is especially true in the case of Michael Morris, of NCTCOG. Almost everyone we talked to in this MPO mentioned Morris by name, and his leadership as an important factor in this very highly evaluated MPO. Morris was acknowledged for his ability to help NCTCOG members set aside individual agendas and individual differences and concentrate on the long-term transportation planning needs of the region. His leadership was seen as instrumental in helping relieve the divisiveness and narrowness of perspective that characterized the MPO approximately 8 or 9 years ago. A strong theme that emerged early in our consideration of interview responses is the theme of leadership. In Denver and Phoenix, recent changes in leadership have the potential to bring about changes in the quality and effectiveness of the process. The most recent change, in Denver, has generated some optimism about the potential for changes in the MPO process.

As mentioned previously, MPOs are collaborative structures. They were created to promote collaborative problem solving, on issues of common concern, in an attempt to transcend narrower parochial, short-term interests. Successful collaboration requires a different set of leadership skills and capacities than those associated with traditional politics and positional authority. The right combination of leadership attitudes, skills, and capacities can be the most important determinant of whether successful collaboration, or effective regional transportation planning, occurs. Two steps should be taken to promote more effective collaborative leadership of MPOs:

1. An assessment center should be created, or an already established assessment center should be identified. The assessment center should have competence in assessing the attributes associated with successful public sector collaborative leadership in general, and MPO leadership in particular. The top slate of candidates, perhaps three, for the leadership position of an MPO should be assessed. Recommendations from the assessment center should be entered into the decision making process, and seriously considered, in choosing the final candidate.
2. A leadership development program should be created, or an existing program identified. Well-recognized and highly regarded programs already exist, such as those at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government or The University of Maryland's Burns Academy. Already established leadership development programs could be asked to collaborate in creating a program specifically tailored to the needs of leaders of collaborative structures such as MPOs. Continuing leadership development experiences, coaching, and mentoring, particularly from MPO leaders with clear records of success, should be provided, on an ongoing basis to MPO leaders.

MPO staff credibility

The Dallas-Ft.Worth MPO is seen as having a staff which is unusually competent. They are seen as having well developed technical skills. They are seen as having many planning tools and being very good at forecasting. Their advice is sought by other agencies and organizations, as well as other professional planners outside the MPO staff.

This technical competence and credibility seems to allow the MPO staff to function "above the politics" and the level of a valued resource on technical issues. Developing a large, highly competent technical staff seems to be a deliberate long-term strategic plan of the MPO's leadership.

A technically competent, highly credible staff is one of the most important attributes an MPO can have. If the staff are accurate forecasters, have useful planning models, and are sought out by state, county, and local governments for assistance on difficult technical problems, there are clear consequences. More of the physical and intellectual energy of the MPO staff goes into regional transportation planning issues. The energy of the staff is less likely to be diverted into less productive political issues. We are not suggesting that the MPO staffs are not highly competent already. We are suggesting that the MPOs would benefit from substantially increased resources devoted to developing and sustaining unusually high levels of competence among MPO staff. Therefore, a staff development program should be created, or an existing program identified. Specific reward and/or incentive systems should be implemented by the MPO to encourage both increased commitment of the MPO staff to sustain professional development and increase capacity of the MPOs to retain their most highly competent staff members.

Aggressive outreach programs

The Dallas-Ft. Worth MPO seems to be noticeably more successful in creating and sustaining a program that emphasizes public involvement, strategic partnership, and other aspects of what is described as a very open process. These outreach efforts take noteworthy forms. In the MPO's relationship with the state DOT, the MPO is asked to select the projects for a state program (urban streets). Public involvement is extended to the point where both Dallas and Ft Worth have citizen groups which have formed to both monitor and support the MPO's efforts. An open and credible process seems to have been created by the leadership and participants of NCTCOG.

Infrastructure

In Seattle, 35% of the funds allocated by the MPO are given to the counties to be distributed according to a process managed by the counties. As we have already noted several times, the long-standing concern about MPOs is the extent to which they are able to respond to the felt needs of their members. Involving subsets of members (i.e. counties as in Seattle) in creating processes for and recommending projects to the MPO is a direct response to this nagging issue. Dallas-Ft.Worth has an independent Regional Transportation Council consisting of elected officials, some of whom are citizen representatives. These elected officials are described as more "problem focused", and less political. These are some of the differences as seen in the infrastructures that might help explain the findings concerning differences among MPOs.