

**VOLUME III, SECTION X.  
SUMMARY OF RESEARCH RESULTS**

Based upon a review of contemporary literature in the field and the consideration of statistical analyses concerning individual MPO work product, process quality, and resource allocation, it has become clear that the most essential factors in the *effective* operation of Metropolitan Planning Organizations are their inclusive natures, the adequacy of allocated resources, and the cooperative natures of their respective political cultures and intergovernmental relationships. The examination of the DRCOG and Comparable MPO processes in terms of these essential factors has produced disparate results.

In analyzing those results, it has proven beneficial first to consider the general opinions of independent experts. Many of those experts have focused on subsets of these essential factors including: 1) the necessity of establishing *genuinely cooperative relationships* between MPOs, state DOTs and other stakeholders; 2) the need to aggressively promote *meaningful public participation* in both the MPO and state planning processes; 3) the importance of redesigning MPO *structures* to be *more representational*; 4) the importance of *balancing parochial* with *regional* concerns in the planning process; 5) the need to nurture leadership and communication skills in a competent staff with highly developed technical expertise; 6) the exigency of focusing state DOTs and MPOs on the *collaborative equitable allocation of funding*; and 7) the importance of *expediting* the integration of land use, air quality, and transportation planning through such means as *growth management legislation*.

Keeping these factors in mind, the facts and figures reviewed in this Study have indicated that, while DRCOG and the Comparable MPOs are functioning moderately to very well in terms of metropolitan planning processes, there are innate obstacles to the effective fulfillment of their roles as regional transportation planning agencies. The figures demonstrate, for example, that current allocation of federal and state funding to MPOs, in some instances, may actually be inequitable. While the need for equity in the distribution process has been acknowledged and made mandatory by federal legislation, the perfect measure of equity is illusive. Nonetheless, based upon the most frequently used measures relating to resource allocation and distributional equity analysis (Population, Lane Miles and Vehicle Miles Traveled), of the four States considered in this Study, it was learned that Colorado had the less-than-auspicious distinction of being the only one to receive less than its “fair share” of federal transportation funds under both *ISTEA* and *TEA-21*.

Similarly, having considered the TIP product generated by DRCOG for the years 1988 through 2004 and the actual figures relating to TIP fund distributions to counties throughout the Transportation Management Area (TMA) of Denver, there appear to be certain inequities inherent in the TIP funding allocations. Denver, Douglas, and Adams Counties received higher levels of funding than Jefferson and Boulder Counties, based on comparisons with population, vehicle miles traveled and lane miles. That observation, it

has been noted, should be tempered by considerations which are not taken into account in the equity assessment process. For example, none of the municipalities studied is a completely “closed” entity -- the populations of each jurisdiction flow through and among the other, thereby affecting the transportation needs of neighboring jurisdictions. Nearly half of all of the trips that start in Douglas County, Colorado, end in other counties, while less than twenty percent of the trips started in Boulder County end elsewhere. Additionally, some jurisdictions request and, therefore, receive lower total project funds for various reasons.

As an additional potential impediment to the MPO transportation planning process, statistics indicate that the bulk of transportation funding for regional transportation programs is controlled by the states, including the majority of categories of federal funds as well as state transportation funds. MPOs are, therefore, almost entirely dependent upon their States for the fiscal implementation of programs. This could have a chilling effect on the MPOs’ charge to develop fiscally constrained Regional Transportation Plans and the Transportation Improvement Programs. In the State of Colorado, the Colorado Department of Transportation [CDOT] makes its allocations based upon engineering regions which are not coterminous with the DRCOG boundaries. As a result, for purposes of developing its federally-mandated plans and programs, DRCOG is given a single, externally-generated list of prioritized projects (for all regions falling both totally and partially within the DRCOG area), with the requirement that it follow such list’s priorities or stand to lose some of its funding to other areas of the State. It has been discerned that the resulting State allocation to DRCOG is not reflective of its “fair share” of federal funds. A similar lack of equitable allocation has been noted in the State of Arizona. In light of a new allocation process and a steadily documented improvement in the allocation process, it appears as though MAG is approach a more appropriate “fair share” of state distributed funding than it has historically enjoyed. Conversely, in the States of Texas and Washington, analysis of the transportation resources allocated by the States demonstrates that their allocations correspond favorably, based upon percentage of population, vehicle miles traveled and lane miles. While it is difficult to assess whether the distribution of funds allocated by the States to metropolitan regions adequately addresses state or regional needs, it is clear that Denver and Phoenix, unlike Dallas and Seattle, are receiving percentages of state and federal funds significantly out of proportion to their respective percentages of population, vehicle miles and funds generated.

As a final, objective, measure of the process fairness/equity, quality, and perceived success rates relating to DRCOG and the Comparable MPOs, a basic measurement strategy was designed and data was collected in the form of interviews, questionnaires, and attitude scales. (A stratified random sampling approach was used to assure a balanced representation of individuals.) The conclusions drawn from these statistics and response include: the importance of collaborative leadership qualities on the part of MPO transportation directors; the need for staff competence and credibility; the importance of creating and sustaining public involvement programs, strategic partnerships and other aspects of open processes; and the need to integrate subsets of members or stakeholders in the prioritization and creation of projects.

In concluding, this “Research Results” Volume of the Study has presented data provided by Metropolitan Planning Organizations in the Miami-Ft Lauderdale, Palm Beach and Tampa-St. Petersburg, Clearwater metropolitan regions in Florida, and the Charlotte-Gastonia metropolitan regions in North Carolina (the Alternative MPOs). This data has included statistical and factual analyses relative to individual and multiple MPO structures within those regions, with particular focus upon their respective mechanisms for regional coordination. Additionally, survey responses concerning the multiple vs. single model MPO debate were solicited, compiled, and analyzed to ascertain the perceived effectiveness of the two models.

This in-depth examination has demonstrated that, whatever the structure, the majority of MPO respondents show a strong preference for their respective status quos: the Alternative MPOs prefer the multiple MPO model, while the Comparable MPOs, in general, prefer the single MPO model. The perceived *effectiveness* of the Alternative MPO model is however, even within the ranks of its proponents, contingent upon the vigor of schemes used to coordinate the multiples in dealing with air quality, transit, Major Investment Studies, and other critical regional issues. Not surprisingly, the areas which are dependent upon informal or ad hoc coordination schemes are not considered as effective as the others in which cooperation occurs on a more formal or functional basis, or in situations where an oversight MPO is operational. In point of fact, the tighter and more formal the coordination mechanisms, the more strongly the respondents felt that multiple MPOs were effective, both for their region and their locality.

This absolute need for cooperation and policy coordination is the common ground between the advocates of both single and multiple MPOs. From that common ground, however, branch the numerous arguments in support of each model. Those arguments include: economies of scale – weighing the considerable political and economic influence as well as cost-effectiveness and centralized planning afforded by the single MPO; political and economic equity – viewing the single MPO as an ungainly monstrosity, so large and cumbersome as to negate local involvement; regionalism vs. localism—focused on big-city domination compromising the different growth and planning interests of the smaller localities; and the basic “dynamics of change” arguments—“if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

Even considering the compelling “small is beautiful” arguments propounded by multiple MPO affiliates, the steadfast theme, and the common parochial vs. regional thread which has wound its way throughout this Study, is that **many issues are of “such magnitude and scope that the boundaries of any single MPO are transcended ...regional problems demand comprehensive regional solutions.”** In recognition of this core concern, the multiple MPO must deal with regional collaboration at some institutional level. The options would be: 1) to amalgamate multiple MPOs into one; 2) to require state Departments of Transportation to arrange annual assemblies of MPOs; 3) to institute statewide MPO alliances and advisory councils; 4) to execute complex memoranda of understanding to ensure inter-MPO collaboration; 5) to institute MPO coordination along functional lines; 6) to institute regional councils or alliances such as

the Tampa Bay Chairmen's Coordinating Committee, or 7) to form a "supra-MPO" for addressing regional concerns.

In the Alternative MPO environment, as demonstrated herein, there is a movement afoot to forge alliances and coalitions by which to comprehensively address regional issues, while, at the same time, attempting to retain local individuality. In other words, while probing for a comfortable mix of regionalism, the multiple MPO scenario is part of an evolving regional process, the ultimate resolution of which may be the amalgamation of multiple MPOs into a single one. Query, then, assuming statutory permissibility and requisite local agreement, whether the time is ripe for Denver to alter its established organizational structure to join in this still unfolding climate in its search for a greater measure of local autonomy. Based upon the research reproduced in this Volume and the findings of the Research Team as set forth in Volume I above, the answer is "No". Single MPO respondents indicated strong disdain for multiple MPOs, citing increased administrative concerns, fractionalization among jurisdictions, and ultimately harmful effects on regional transportation. Even though multiple MPOs in a single MPO region should not be encouraged, federal MPO redesignation requirements should be changed by removing the approval authority for central cities. Affording any particular unit of local government a veto over such an important issue as redesignation is not conducive to promoting fair, equitable and collaborative processes in MPOs.