

METROPLAN'S
TRANSPORTATION
PLANNING PROCESS AND STRUCTURE

A WHITE PAPER

Winter 2018

DRAFT



METROPLAN

SMART PLANNING MAKES SMART PLACES.

METROPLAN'S TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS AND STRUCTURE A WHITE PAPER

I. PURPOSE AND HISTORY

This White Paper is compiled for the consideration of the Metroplan management and Board prior to the beginning of the *Imagine Central Arkansas* transportation plan update for 2045. It takes a critical look at the organization and responsibilities of Metroplan and its advisory committees in carrying out its transportation planning function under federal law and regulation. The paper discusses the history of Metroplan's planning efforts and structures and how they have evolved over time.

A critique of the planning process and structure is offered based on feedback from the advisory committees, staff and Board members. The paper also analyzes a select group of other MPOs around the country in how they organize the metropolitan planning process and the MPO policy-making body. Finally, the paper provides a menu of options for potential restructuring of the Board and/or Advisory Committees as a starting place for Board discussion.

Historical Background

The **Metropolitan Area Planning Commission** (MAPC) was established in 1955 to do long-range development planning for the Little Rock metropolitan area, which at the time included only Pulaski County. The Board of Directors was composed half of appointed business leaders and half of elected representatives of its member governments—Little Rock, North Little Rock, Jacksonville and Pulaski County. For the first 15 years of its existence, the private sector members provided the Board president, usually for two one-year terms.

MAPC earned the nickname "Metroplan" from an *Arkansas Gazette* reporter named Jason Rouby who later served 22 years as the organization's Executive Director.

Metroplan conducted a series of base planning studies that resulted in the 1965 adoption of a *Comprehensive Development Plan* for the metropolitan area (then Pulaski and Saline counties) through 1990. It carried out its planning function with the help of a series of citizen-based volunteer committees. The transportation plan was one element of that comprehensive plan. In this fashion, it operated like the true regional planning commission that it was intended to be.

In 1970, MAPC formally adopted the name Metroplan and reorganized itself into a council of local governments (COG) to take advantage of the variety of federal sub-state grant programs available at the time. It incorporated as a not-for-profit Arkansas corporation. General-purpose local governments, as well as special purpose governments such as utilities and school districts, were represented. The private sector Board members were eliminated. The governing body (known as the Council) was large, with multiple members for the larger jurisdictions. For example, Little Rock was represented by its entire Board of the Directors, and North Little Rock by the Mayor and three council members. A nine member Executive Committee met monthly and provided direction to the staff.

MAPC was initially organized under the Interlocal Planning Act of 1955 as a regional planning commission with a broad and comprehensive charge. With the 1970 conversion to a council of local governments, Metroplan reincorporated under Act 176 of 1963 while specifically retaining its board charge, much broader than a single purpose MPO would have (see the Metroplan Articles of Incorporation in Appendix A with special attention to Article 3).

Metroplan made use of ad hoc advisory committees for specific projects, as had MAPC. For example, in two large comprehensive planning efforts from the 1960s and '70s, formal advisory committees were extensively used. In the 1965 *Comprehensive Development Plan 1990* covering Pulaski and Saline counties, four separate technical advisory committees were used by MAPC with 84 members among them: *Comprehensive Development Plan* (24), *Transportation Study and Technical Committee* (21), *Economic and Industrial* (20), and *Land Development Code* (19).

In a broader based community planning effort in which Metroplan participated but was not the lead, *Goals for Central Arkansas* in 1975, the 33 member Planning Committee utilized a 512 member Congress of citizen volunteers on 13 Task Forces to develop goals for the region (# of members):

- Local Government Task Force (36)
- Environment Task Force (42)
- Education Task Force (44)
- Health Task Force (44)
- Housing Task Force (42)
- Transportation Task Force (41)
- Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice Task Force (26)
- Entertainment and Recreational Development Task Force (30)
- Cultural Development Task Force (30)
- Public Safety Task Force (26)
- Economy of the Area Task Force (34)
- Social and Spiritual Development Task Force (25)
- Design of the Area Task Force (64)

The City of Little Rock used a similar organization with its *Future Little Rock* process in the 1980s. Most recently *Think Big Little Rock*, supported by the Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce, used 6 task forces comprised of volunteer citizens under 40 years of age to develop strategies for improving the central Arkansas community for young professionals.

So, the region has a long history of citizen involvement in long-range plan development because it is good planning practice to do so. In all of these examples, the committees were ad hoc and dissolved as soon as their work was completed. While committee leadership was generally hand selected from among leaders in the community and carried over into implementation roles, the committee members were largely self-selected volunteers.

Federal Transportation Planning Pre-ISTEA

Governor Dale Bumpers designated Metroplan as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Little Rock-North Little Rock metropolitan area in 1974. At the time, Metroplan was organized as a pure council of local governments. The MPO functions were conducted by the staff level Pulaski Area Transportation Study (PATS) Coordinating Committee and the Transportation Policy Board. The Policy Board was a subset of the Metroplan Board

composed of local elected officials representing jurisdictions within the transportation study area, plus a representative of the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) and the Central Arkansas Transit Authority (CATA). Along with Metroplan staff, these two groups administered the MPO functions (see Appendix B). The process was driven by the PATS Coordinating Committee, which was composed of traffic engineers, city planners and modal representatives.

The metropolitan long-range transportation plan consisted of the roadway improvement wish lists of all participating jurisdictions and the state DOT. The MPO also made decisions on how to spend approximately \$1 million per year (by 1990) of Federal Aid Urban (FAU) funding that came directly to the region, although largely sub-located to member jurisdictions by population. During this period, Metroplan also served as trustee for Central Arkansas Transit and oversaw the transit operation after taking over the bus system from the bankrupt Twin City Transit in 1972. CATA was established in 1986 and became fully separate from Metroplan in 1988.

Before the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991, the planning process was dominated by traffic engineers and was very much a highway construction agenda. Public outreach and broader urban policy issues were often an afterthought, as was the case for many MPOs.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, several issues coincided that led to a substantial reorganization of the transportation planning process and Metroplan governance.

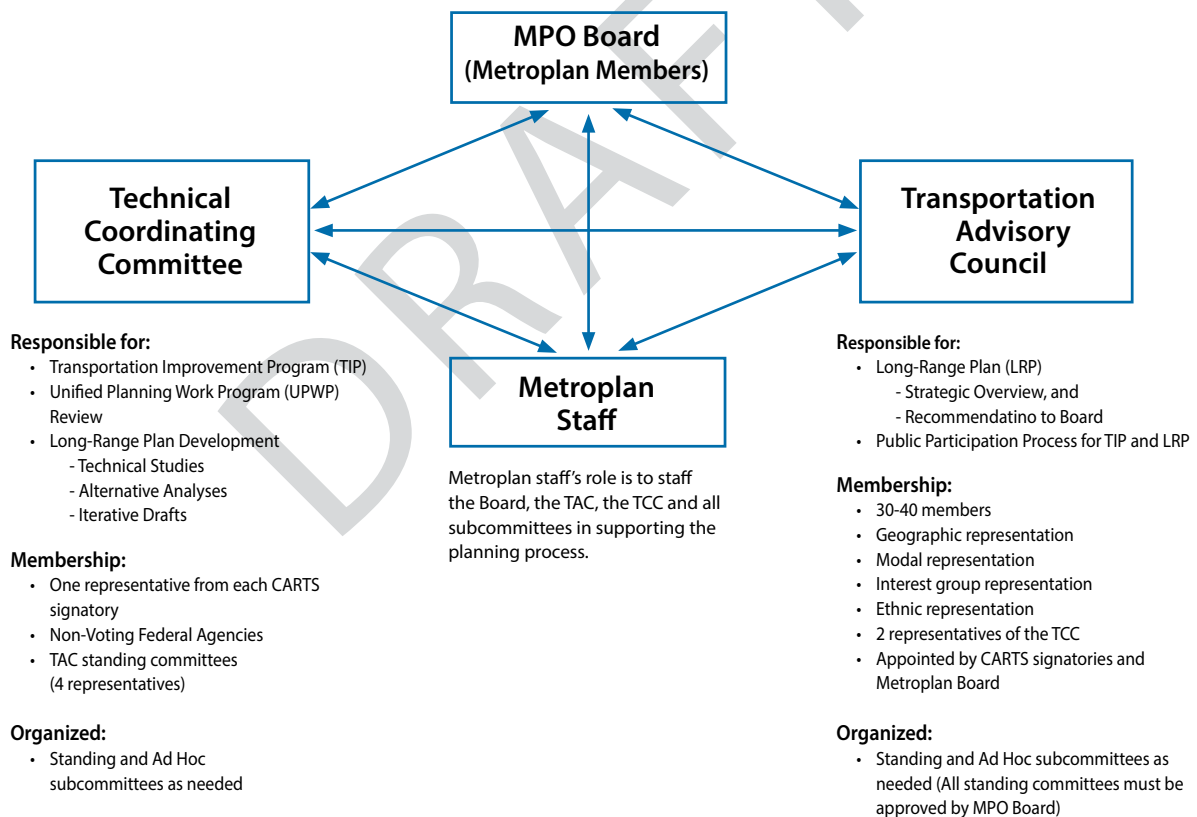
Federal Transportation Planning Post-ISTEA

In late 1991, Congress passed the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act that fundamentally changed the federal requirements for transportation planning from an interstate construction focus (the interstate highway system was officially declared complete in 1990) to a multi-modal focus tied much more closely with urban planning and environmental goals. Several key provisions impacted MPOs. First, metropolitan plans could no longer be project wish lists. Congress tried to bring some reality into the process by requiring the twenty-year plans be financially constrained. The second major change is that the old FAU program was replaced by the Surface Transportation Program (STP) and the funding allocated directly to the region increased from \$1 million annually to \$4.4 million in FY1992, and soon afterward to \$7 million (STP-A runs about \$11 million annually today). The federal set aside to fund the metropolitan transportation planning process also increased significantly.

Early in 1991, prior to the passage of ISTEA, the Pulaski County Judge called into question the underlying support for Metroplan. He argued that Pulaski County was really the regional government and offered to absorb Metroplan into the Pulaski County Planning Office. As his proposal was being considered, ISTEA passed and placed new emphasis on and provided new funding for the MPO role. In response, the Metroplan Board chose to reorganize itself around the MPO function. While it did not abandon the other potential portfolios of a regional council, it did emphasize the transportation planning role. The council of local governments form was abandoned. The special purpose jurisdictions were removed from potential membership, their needs represented by their general-purpose governments. Each general-purpose member now had a single seat on the Board of Directors and the full Board assumed management oversight of the staff. Proportional (weighted) voting, if requested by any single member, was added to the by-laws to protect the interests of the more populous jurisdictions. The methodology was modeled on that used by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG).

At the same time, Metroplan reorganized its committee structure. First, the Transportation Policy Committee was abolished and its functions transferred to the full Metroplan Board. The PATS Coordinating Committee became the Technical Coordinating Committee, but its functions were reduced to technical standards and studies and review of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). During the post-ISTEA period when Metroplan held an annual call for projects, the TCC ranked the proposed projects based on Board adopted criteria.

A new citizen based **Transportation Advisory Council (TAC)** was also created, with two primary functions: (1) to develop the draft metropolitan transportation plan for submission to the Board, and (2) to conduct broad and inclusive public outreach to provide “early and meaningful” public involvement in the plan development, as provided by the new law. In the five long-range plan updates since the passage of ISTEA in 1991, the TAC has operated as a committee of the whole for the most part, although for METRO 2020 and METRO 2025 it operated with standing sub-committees for: (1) Land Use, Urban Development and the Environment; (2) Roadways, Systems Management and Goods Movement - Freight; and (3) Transit, Non-motorized Modes and Demand Management. When it used subcommittees, the TAC relied on a Steering Committee composed of the TAC chair and vice-chair, plus the chairs of the three standing committees to coordinate its efforts.

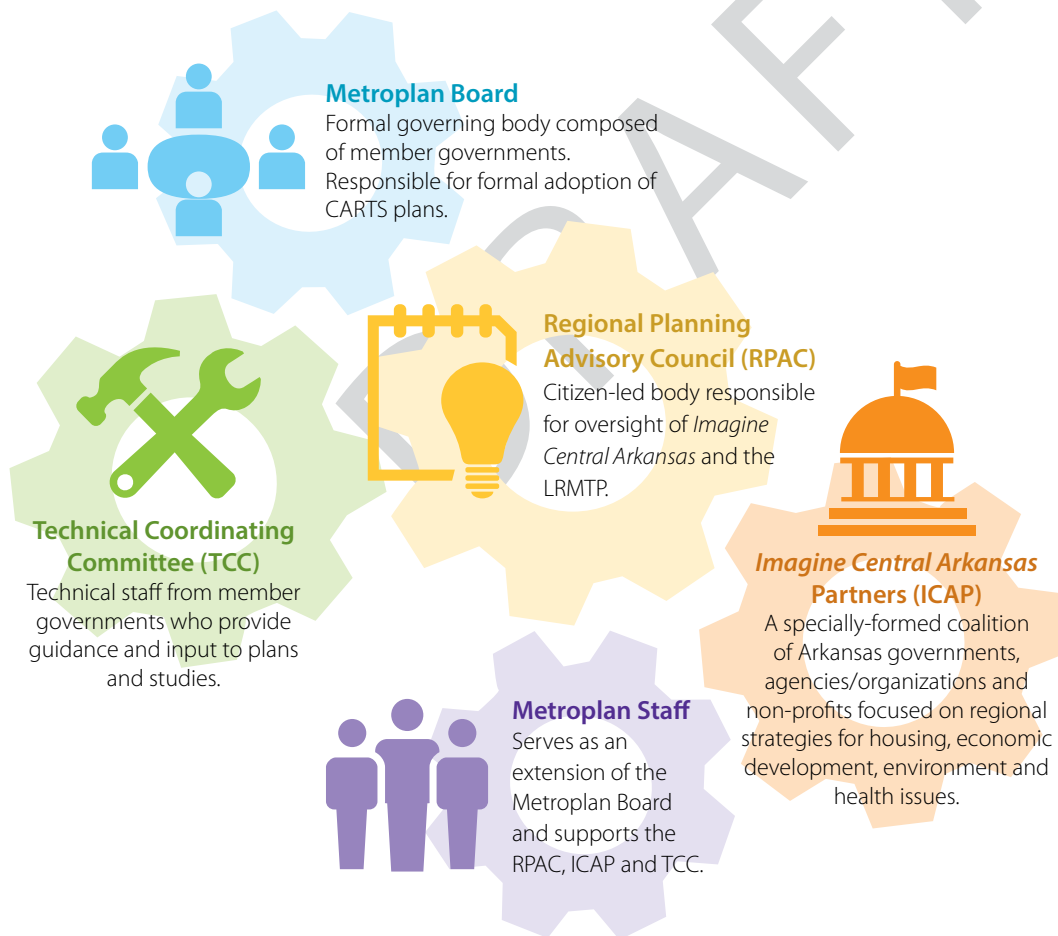


At the 2011 Metroplan Board Retreat, the Board set a broader agenda for plan development, incorporating the Green Agenda developed by its Green Task Force. The Green Agenda made recommendations in four broad areas: Movement, Power, Nature, and Knowledge (Appendix E).

In September 2011, the Board changed the TAC's name to the Regional Planning Advisory Council (RPAC) to better reflect the broader charge given to it by the Board. At that same time, the Board began reappointing members to the RPAC in preparation for the 2014 LRMTTP plan update.

In the decades after the passage of ISTEA, each subsequent federal transportation bill and rule making increased emphasis on tying transportation investments to land use and to environmental goals. That emphasis culminated in 2009, when the U.S. Departments of Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and the Environmental Protection Agency signed a partnership agreement pledging to support comprehensive planning and sustainable development. One direct result of that partnership was the Sustainable Communities grant program administered by HUD.

In 2010, Metroplan sought a planning grant from the Sustainable Communities program. While we didn't receive one that year we were encouraged to apply the next year. We did and were successful in that effort titled *Imagine Central Arkansas*. The Imagine process using the Sustainable Communities grant, started after the 2040 plan update was already underway. As a result, the *Imagine Central Arkansas* Partners group was created to handle the non-transportation elements of the plan per the requirements of the HUD grant. This group was comprised primarily of professional staff of partnering organizations. Joint meetings of the RPAC and ICA Partners were often held to discuss common issues, and there was significant cross-pollination between the groups. As the Board had directed, the *Imagine Central Arkansas* process brought Metroplan back to its roots in comprehensive planning.



After the *Imagine Central Arkansas* plan was adopted by the Board on December 17, 2014, the RPAC and ICA Partners met to discuss how to merge the two committees for on-going plan implementation as envisioned by the Sustainable Communities grant. Ultimately, the ICA Partners committee was dissolved and some key members of that group were appointed to the RPAC using the normal appointment process. Others remained active in plan implementation through partner organizations and still continue to engage Metroplan.

II. CURRENT PLANNING STRUCTURE AND ROLES

The **transportation policy board**, as required by federal law, is the Metroplan Board of Directors with Rock Region METRO (formerly CATA) and the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ArDOT, formerly AHTD), serving as special members voting on transportation issues. As the MPO Board, it has ultimate responsibility for carrying out the federal planning requirements per law and regulation. The Board hires staff, appoints committees, and adopts policies necessary to carry out those duties. It is also responsible for adopting the documents required in the federal process: the long-range metropolitan transportation plan (LRMTP), the transportation improvement program (TIP), the annual Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), the Public Participation Plan (PPP), and the Title VI Program and LEP Plan.

The Metroplan Board has adopted a set of policy documents that are mutually reinforcing and reflect the philosophy of the organization in general and in regard to the federally required transportation planning process specifically:

- Metroplan Articles of Incorporation
- Metroplan Board By-laws
- Metroplan Budget
- Metroplan Personnel Policies
- Central Arkansas Transportation Study Agreement of Understanding
- Regional Planning Advisory Council By-laws
- Technical Coordinating Committee By-laws
- Long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan (financially constrained)
- Transportation Improvement Program
- Unified Planning Work Program
- Public Participation Plan
- Title VI Program/LEP Plan
- CARTS Roadway Design Standards
- TIP/STIP Amendment Procedures
- *Imagine Central Arkansas* (comprehensive vision plan)

The RPAC is given two primary duties by the Metroplan Board of Directors: (1) to develop the long-range transportation plan for consideration by the Board, and (2) oversight of the public involvement process in the plan development and adoption. The intent of the council is to be citizen-based and jurisdictions have been encouraged not to appoint their technical staff to the group, although some do. (See Appendix G for RPAC by-laws)

The membership on the RPAC is limited to a maximum of fifty (50). Thirty members are nominated by member jurisdictions based on population, see chart below. Public transit has a member nominated by Rock Region METRO, and ArDOT has a member. The Board Executive Committee can nominate up to 18 members to ensure geographic, modal, special interest and ethnic balance. The Board confirms all nominees. There are no fixed terms for RPAC members, a handful of who have served since the development

The purpose of the **RPAC** is to ensure geographic, modal, ethnic, and interest group (business, construction, environmental, transit dependent populations, etc.) representation in the development of the long-range transportation and development plan for central Arkansas.

of METRO 2020 in the early 1990s. Generally, however, the time demands of serving on the RPAC during a plan update result in a natural attrition of many of the members during each five-year cycle.

The **Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC)** is composed of technical staff of member jurisdictions plus transit, ArDOT, and modal representatives and other appropriate parties. (For example, the professional planner for the Little Rock Air Force Base is a member.) The TCC by-laws and membership roster are included in Appendix H.

The primary duty of the TCC is to recommend action to the Board dealing with all products of the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and the CARTS Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TCC also reviews and comments on RPAC recommendations concerning technical issues and on technical studies from the UPWP.

The TCC and RPAC (formerly TAC) are intended to function in a highly interactive manner and regularly communicate with each other. Initially, each committee was represented on the other committee to facilitate this interaction. However, this interaction has decreased with each successive plan, and cross-representation is currently limited to Rock Region METRO and the Arkansas Department of Transportation.

In the early years after ISTEA passed, Metroplan conducted an annual call for projects to distribute its suballocated federal funding, and the TCC scored those submittals and recommended funding to the Board. The Board changed that process in 2001 to focus on more strategic investments. With most of the standards developed, the TCC's role became much less active. However, some competitive project evaluation is returning with the TAP program, and the new federal performance standards will involve the TCC more substantively.

RPAC APPOINTMENTS	
Jurisdiction	Appointments
Conway	3
Faulkner County	2
Cabot	1
Lonoke County	2
Jacksonville	1
Little Rock	7
Maumelle	1
North Little Rock	3
Sherwood	1
Pulaski County	4
Benton	1
Bryant	1
Saline County	3
ArDOT	1
Rock Region METRO	1
At-large	18
Total	50

In the first decade and a half after the committees were reorganized in the early 1990s, the TCC was highly engaged in reviewing and establishing roadway design standards, defining and recommending the Regional Arterial Network, evaluating and recommending rail grade separations, and setting regional congestion management standards.

What Do Federal Regulations Require?

Transportation Policy Board

Federal regulations are detailed requirements for what the metropolitan planning process is and how it is conducted. There are also requirements for the make-up of the MPO policy board, for the involvement of other modes of transportation and for public involvement in the process. Beyond that, however, federal statute leaves it up to each MPO on how to organize its proscribed work, leaving that internal structure (including advisory committees) up to the organization's by-laws and any applicable state law.

Regarding the MPO policy board, requirements differ if the MPO is a TMA (Transportation Management Area over 200,000 in urbanized area population) or a non-TMA and whether the MPO is newly created or was in existence prior to 1991. Other regulations cover multi-state MPOs and MPOs created under and governed by state law. Metroplan is a TMA grandfathered under the regulations. It is neither multi-state nor covered under state law establishing MPOs.

An agency other than Metroplan could serve as the MPO for the Little Rock/North Little Rock/Conway MSA if a redesignation occurred. For a redesignation to occur, the Governor, the largest city in the MSA (i.e. Little Rock) and jurisdictions representing at least 75% of the MSA population must agree to it. In that case, the redesignated MPO would have to meet the structural requirements of a new MPO. (See Appendix C, 23 USC 134 Metropolitan Planning) **The regulations do allow substantial leeway for the MPO to organize itself internally without triggering redesignation.**

Metroplan is currently organized along the lines required for a TMA created after 1991, as defined in the regulations as follows:

23 CFR §450.310(d) TMA structure

(d) TMA structure:

- (1) Not later than October 1, 2014, each metropolitan planning organization that serves a designated TMA shall consist of:
 - (i) Local elected officials;
 - (ii) Officials of public agencies that administer or operate major modes of transportation in the metropolitan area, including representation by providers of public transportation; and
 - (iii) Appropriate State officials.
- (2) An MPO may be restructured to meet the requirements of this paragraph (d) without undertaking a redesignation.
- (3) *Representation.* (i) Designation or selection of officials or representatives under paragraph (d)(1) of this section shall be determined by the MPO according to the bylaws or enabling statute of the organization.

In paragraph (ii) above, those public agencies include Rock Region METRO, the Bill and Hillary Clinton National Airport and the Little Rock Port Authority. The transit agency has a seat on the Board; and the Airport and Port, as agencies of the City of Little Rock, are represented on the Board as well, but do not have a separate seat at the table. The other major modes of freight transport—the Union Pacific Railroad and the trucking industry—are represented on the RPAC.

Participation of Interested Parties and Public Participation

The pertinent federal rule for the participation of interested parties and for public participation is stated below (see Appendix D, 23 CFR 450.316):

23 CFR §450.316 Interested parties, participation, and consultation.

(a) **The MPO shall develop and use a documented participation plan** that defines a process for providing individuals, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, public ports, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation (including intercity bus operators, employer-based commuting programs, such as carpool program, vanpool program, transit benefit program, parking cash-out program, shuttle program, or telework program), representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties **with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the metropolitan transportation planning process.** [Emphasis added]

Additional federal guidance on Public Participation expands on the rule as follows and can be found on the FHWA website under the Office of Planning, Environment and Real Estate:

Public participation is an integral part of the transportation process, which helps to ensure that decisions are made in consideration of and to benefit public needs and preferences.

Early and continuous public involvement brings diverse viewpoints and values into the decision-making process...Successful public participation is a continuous process, consisting of a series of activities and actions to both inform the public and stakeholders and to obtain input from them which influence decisions that affect their lives...

Providing a balanced approach with representation of all stakeholders and including measures to seek out and consider the needs of all stakeholders, especially those that are traditionally underserved by past and current transportation programs, facilities, or services.

Federal regulations require MPOs to adopt a PPP that addresses early and continuous public engagement.

Certification Review Comments

Since the passage of ISTEA, Metroplan has chosen to honor these requirements by bringing the key interest groups together into the Transportation Advisory Council (TAC), later the RPAC, and giving them a meaningful role in crafting the plan itself. In addition, Metroplan has aggressively used innovative public involvement techniques as reflected in the Public Participation Plan that the Board has adopted. Since 1998, FHWA/FTA Certification Review reports have commended Metroplan for its public participation process and committee structure, as well as other innovative parts of the planning program:

1995 Reorganization of the MPO was triggered in part by the need to obtain meaningful public input directly to the Policy Board. The operation of the TAC satisfies this need.

1998 The area has established an excellent committee structure for addressing future transportation challenges. The MPO is commended for...consideration of land-use impacts of proposed transportation projects, [and] involvement of the public in the decision-making process...

2001 The MPO is commended for the development of a Regional Arterial Network, which will allow the area to strategically focus efforts...

2004 Metroplan provides the public with good access to information and ample opportunity to participate in the decision making process.

2012 The use of the "Green Agenda" during MTP development is commendable...[as is] Metroplan's requirement that projects be consistent with planned growth and development and with regional multi-modal design standards in order to qualify for MPO funding. Metroplan's use of HUD Regional Planning Grant for Sustainable Communities research and other sustainable transportation, livable communities, and context sensitive street design strategies in development of the plan is laudable.

DRAFT

III. CRITIQUE OF PLANNING PROCESS AND STRUCTURE

This critique is based on SWOT analyses conducted with members of the Regional Planning Advisory Council, the Technical Coordinating Committee and the Metroplan staff. In addition, a majority of Board members have been interviewed to identify issues that they would like to see addressed or improved upon in the future. All of those comments have been consolidated and grouped into four areas: the Planning Program, Advisory Committees, the Board and Staff. The SWOT analyses were combined into a separate SWOT Analysis Report and contain a rich amount of detail not included in this summary, and is recommended reading for those so inclined.

Planning Program

The planning program has a long history of winning national and state awards for excellence, although everyone involved recognizes that there is always an opportunity to improve the process. In particular, the visioning process and the public engagement efforts are exceptional, as often mentioned in the federal certification reviews.

The organization has been a leader in Arkansas on multi-modal transportation planning, especially for bicycle and pedestrian networks. Metroplan's publications, especially the semi-annual ***Metrotrends***, enjoy an excellent reputation.

The organization's first planning efforts in the 1950s and 60s were comprehensive in nature. As federal funding became siloed in the Great Society programs and with the federal transportation bills, planning efforts also became siloed. At the Board's direction in 2012, Metroplan returned to comprehensive planning with *Imagine Central Arkansas*—a more holistic plan for the development of the region.

The organization's focus is on the integrated economic region that is central Arkansas. Metroplan has used its role as convener around regional issues to broker/support several **collaborative** efforts—Ozone Action Days, the Arkansas River Trail Task Force and the Mid-Arkansas Water Alliance most notably.

On the other hand, while the *Imagine Central Arkansas* plan is a comprehensive plan that touches on several areas of development in addition to transportation, not enough staff time is made available to make any meaningful difference in those areas (land use, housing, sustainability). And while ICA provides a broad vision for the region, the cities need those goals broken down into small, intermediate steps with a roadmap of how to reach the vision. For smaller jurisdictions especially, increased technical assistance would be useful.

Because Arkansas does not have statewide legislation mandating coordinated regional development plans like Georgia, Tennessee, Florida, Washington, Oregon or California, the adopted regional plan does not have the authority to influence local development plans that directly impact the efficiency of transportation systems.

An obstacle in the current transportation planning program is the differing federal planning requirements for states versus MPOs. Under federal law, metropolitan areas are required to develop a twenty year project specific financially constrained plan; states, on the other hand, have the option of doing that or developing a "policy plan" that is not project specific. The Arkansas Department of Transportation chooses the unconstrained policy plan approach. The practical impact of this approach is that projects selected in subsequent TIPs may have little connection to the plan and appear "out of the blue" to most member jurisdictions.

Federal regulations require that the metropolitan plan be developed cooperatively with the state DOT and transit providers. Cooperation has been identified as a weakness in the current transportation planning program. In its

2016 Certification Review, FHWA and FTA recommended that “AHTD should consider taking a more active role in the development of Metroplan’s MTP (Metropolitan Transportation Plan)” and that “Metroplan should consider taking a more active role in the development of the AHTD Long-Range Intermodal Transportation Plan [LRITP].” To increase the meaningfulness of the metropolitan plan, the MTP and LRITP must be aligned through more effective agency coordination and the MTP must be acknowledged as regional policy of all transportation providers.

The certification review also recommended that the CARTS Memorandum of Agreement be updated and that the “partners work together to identify strategies and work processes that will improve the level of cooperation.” Redrafting the CARTS Agreement should be used as an opportunity to come to a meaningful understanding with ArDOT/the Highway Commission on a long-term investment strategy for the metropolitan area that can be incorporated into both the state and metropolitan plans, define a more collaborative planning process, and enhance the interaction between policy boards.

Transportation investments in metropolitan areas are more expensive than in other parts of the state, and state and local revenues for transportation improvements are notoriously in short supply. In Arkansas, local governments exercise exclusive control over land use decisions. Their pro-active engagement in the planning process is critical in controlling future demand on the system.

Advisory Committees – RPAC and TCC

The **Regional Planning Advisory Council** is the broadly diverse forum designed to bring all groups at interest to the same table to develop a regional vision for future development, including developing recommendations to the MPO for the federally required metropolitan transportation plan. The Metroplan Board appoints all RPAC members. Thirty are by Board members’ nominations (apportioned roughly by population) and up to 18 come from staff recommendations to the Executive Committee in order to ensure that the RPAC, on balance, is representative of the region in terms of geography, ethnicity, and interest groups. The final two members are ex officio representatives of ArDOT and Rock Region METRO (see Appendix G). RPAC members who attend regularly are very committed and have devoted hundreds of hours to understanding the region, seeking public input and understanding the federal transportation planning requirements.

Long-serving TCC and RPAC members provide continuity during Board turnover.

However, although the RPAC has 50 members on paper, seldom more than 25 participate on a regular basis. Some appointees do not realize the significant time commitment that active participation requires, particularly in the 12-18 months leading up to plan adoption. Some appointees choose to participate sparingly (notably trucking interests, railroads and some chambers of commerce) because they prefer negotiating directly with the Highway Commission.

For those members who do actively participate, there is no formal mechanism for reporting back to the member jurisdictions that may have appointed them in the first place. Often the appointing elected officials turn over and, since the RPAC members don’t have a fixed term, they have continued to serve as long as willing. Both the Board and RPAC felt that lack of communication with the Board undermines the effectiveness of the RPAC and its usefulness to the Board as a resource.

The RPAC is most comfortable with its role as a conduit for stakeholders and the general public, and as articulating the vision for central Arkansas. The Council is less comfortable with developing a financially constrained, project-specific plan.

The **Technical Coordinating Committee** is felt by staff and the TCC itself to be an under-utilized resource with an unclear role in the planning process. That wasn't always the case as explained in the introduction.

The TCC is composed of professional staff from the member jurisdictions, usually public works engineers, occasionally planning staff. The TCC also has representatives from ArDOT, Rock Region METRO, the Clinton National Airport, the Little Rock Port Authority, the Union Pacific Railroad and the Little Rock Air Force Base. Over the past several years the TCC has met on call when there is business to transact, but the committee members expressed a desire for a regularly scheduled meeting time.

The Committee has a significant amount of technical expertise and knows their communities from the ground up, which makes them uniquely positioned to explain and advocate for local priorities, and also to understand and act from a regional perspective.

An expanded role for the TCC could include land use considerations, and resolving project design issues during the project development and design phases.

The Committee is concerned about their currently diminished role and feels like they are given few technical issues to consider. They understand that they could be an important technical resource for the Board and the staff of Metroplan. The TCC wants to be more involved in plan updates. The Committee can also be used more to improve coordination with ArDOT, work on land use and technical issues, and be more involved in project design.

Additionally, not all jurisdictions are represented, especially small communities that may not employ technical staff. Ideally, representatives of counties communicate with their smaller communities and take their concerns to the TCC, but there is no formal mechanism to ensure that flow of communication. Committee members suggested that the TCC might be deficient in representing some of those smaller communities.

Metroplan Board

The Metroplan Board fully represents all parts of the region since all member governments have a seat on the Board. Weighted voting (based on relative populations) is provided for, but to date has never been requested, as the Board has always placed value on trying to develop a consensus. Transit and the state DOT sit on the Board as special voting members on transportation issues. As a general rule, the Board allows staff to do its technical analysis without political interference. Over the past several decades, many Board members have been national leaders in the National Association of Regional Councils, the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, the National Association of County Executives, the National League of Cities and the ICLEI USA—Local Governments for Sustainability, as well as leaders in the Arkansas Municipal League, and have brought a broad and visionary perspective to Metroplan's efforts.

However, there are some built-in challenges of a regional governing Board doing 20-50 year planning composed of local elected officials with two- or four-year terms. Board members' "day jobs" require a local, sometimes parochial, and shorter-term focus that can be in conflict with the longer term, regional goals. Even though the CARTS Agreement pledges its signatories to adjust their local plans to be consistent with the regional plan that is cooperatively developed, that does not always happen in practice. The fact that it doesn't happen consistently limits the ability of the regional planning effort to be as effective as it could be.

The high learning curve and the constant turnover of Board members makes it difficult to sustain previous consensus and adopted regional policy over time. The issues dealt with by the Board can be complex and are often

shrouded in jargon. Extra effort should be made for Board training not only on the federal grant requirements, but also on non-profit Board responsibilities, including a firm understanding of the finances of the organization. Particular attention should be paid to adequate orientation for new Board members.

Everyone does not understand the policy framework of Metroplan that guides how decisions are made and who gets projects funded. Those policies were developed over two decades and need to be codified and made part of Board training and orientation.

The Board practice of rotating the presidency annually is seen as not giving the president enough time to get into his/her role, to set an agenda and carry it out. While the Board gets to see the regional perspective through Metroplan, members of their governing boards and communities do not. To that end, more involvement by members of city councils, quorum courts and planning commissions in Metroplan's planning efforts might be helpful. In addition, more direct Metroplan technical assistance, especially for smaller jurisdictions, would be welcome.

Partly because of a breakdown in communication/interaction between their appointees on the RPAC and the Board over the 30 Crossing project, the Board is not seen by some as "owning" their adopted plan. It is also perceived by some that the Board does not fully understand the potential for exercising regional authority by acting together. From the Board's standpoint, while they recognize the authority given them under federal law, they feel that there is not enough recognition of the practical realities of political decisions required of elected officials.

The Board and both advisory committees cited the need for routine and regular communication. The TCC and RPAC cited the need for active participation on the part of the Board.

- Establish a mechanism for formal communication with advisory committees.
- Provide specific direction and feedback to advisory committees.
- Provide Board regular reports from its advisory committees.

Metroplan Staff

The staff is highly skilled and works well as a team. There is a high level of technical skill in transportation modeling, GIS mapping and analysis and data collection and analysis. Although small in number, Metroplan's staff is highly efficient in the volume and quality of the work they perform. Most of the planning staff are members of the American Association of Certified Planners (AICP) and subject to the AICP Code of Ethics—a high standard of professional ethics and conduct. Metroplan has long been committed to continual development, education and training of its staff, which builds staff capacity and enhances staff retention. The non-bureaucratic organization structure of Metroplan facilitates staff initiative and creativity. The organization has a strong service culture, always willing to help members, elected officials, businesses and citizens find answers to questions.

The Metroplan staff is mostly Caucasian; all live in Pulaski County and predominately exhibit a bias toward urban places. More ethnic diversity is desirable in the staff, although with a small staff and low turnover that is hard to achieve quickly. A good portion of the study area is suburban/exurban blending into rural. It is important to recognize any internal biases and to not subconsciously edit out suburban/exurban concerns.

The Metroplan staff is also aging and the need for transition planning continues beyond the recent retirement of the long serving Executive Director and Deputy Director. The organization is carrying three empty positions and is understaffed. Although a conscious effort has been made to cross-train staff, there is little back up for several key positions. The loss of a single key staffer could seriously impact program delivery.

Because of the small staff size and non-hierarchical organization, there is not a traditional career ladder for younger workers. Management should create ladders of responsibility to challenge and reward employees for growth in their jobs. There is a desire from several members for more technical assistance for their planning and community development efforts. Such additional assistance will require additional staff resources, the cost of which may or may not be covered by federal transportation funds. Metroplan currently flexes Surface Transportation Block Grant Program funds for transportation-related planning (federal PL funds being inadequate to pay the full cost of the required planning program).

DRAFT