



#### ISSUE

**The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC)** supports the existence and continued operations of Councils of Government (COGs), Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) – large, small, urban and rural – in transportation planning and programming to promote regional solutions to national transportation needs that support economic growth, environmental sustainability, and enhanced mobility.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

**STRONG FEDERAL ROLE** – **The Federal government must continue to play a strong and focused role in shaping the future of our nation’s surface transportation policy.** The federal government should lead in furthering America’s competitive advantage by developing projects of regional and national significance which enhance the flow of commerce, reduce congestion, improve the environment, and create and maintain jobs. The federal government should also support a strong intergovernmental partnership to set national transportation goals and priorities.

**STRONG LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIAL ROLE** – Our nation is best served when the needs and considerations of local communities are maximized across all government policy. **The absolute inclusion and leadership of local elected officials, building on their understanding of local needs, opportunities, and obligations, as well as their “on-the-ground” perspective, should be the forefront of transportation policy.**

**REGIONAL COUNCIL ROLE** – Regional planning is essential to moving people, goods and services across our surface transportation network. Since the late 1960s, MPOs have directed the construction and maintenance of transportation infrastructure in urban areas with 50,000 or greater population. MPOs, COGs and RPOs perform comprehensive planning with substantial public input and have a strong interest in maintaining a safe and efficient multi-modal transportation system to support national, regional and local initiatives.

**REGIONAL AUTHORITY & RESOURCES** – The success of regional planning and cooperation is contingent upon proper authority for local elected officials and adequate resources to build capacity and address the following key issues: integration of urban, suburban and rural interests; efficient goods movement; transportation safety planning; environmental mitigation; governance that is accountable to its citizenry; and, the future financing of our transportation system. NARC advocates examining collapsing current funding streams into a mechanism that fully funds and establishes regions and their local governments as primary recipients of current and future federal resources. In areas where regional planning organizations do not currently exist, a mechanism for their establishment should be created to meet the needs of contiguous local jurisdictions. **Policies must prioritize the economic and cultural linkages between regions – regardless of size – and support transportation planning to maximize the authority, funding and future of regions.**

**COOPERATION** – The cooperation between and integration of rural, suburban and urban localities on a regional level will bolster the American economy. All policies must prioritize the linkages between regions and support transportation planning to maximize the authority and funding for regions. **All regional planning organizations should receive the necessary authority to be responsible for all federally directed funding, decision making, and performance standards that create a intermodal and multi-modal system.** Federal policies should promote integrated, layered levels of decision making that include federal, state and local governments.

**SAFETY & SECURITY** – **Safety and security are paramount in establishing and maintaining an efficient multi-modal transportation network with COGs, MPOs and RPOs serving as primary leaders in transportation safety planning activities.** Policy and program changes are necessary to reduce the inconsistencies surrounding COG/MPO/RPO participation in safety and security planning. Better prioritization and incorporation of regional transportation planning interests into the federal program is required, including those that address critical infrastructure and disaster planning.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**PERFORMANCE MEASURES** – The federal surface transportation program has received substantial criticism over the past several years regarding the seeming inability to track progress in meeting federal level goals based on the expenditure of funds. The policy-setting and implementation functions of an MPO create a system that is transparent and accountable for the local governments they represent. Many MPOs have already begun establishing sets of performance measures tied to their planning process in an effort to better account for local, State and federal money expended in their regions. **Performance measures on the MPO level should be a flexible set of metrics, tied to the regional planning process and designed to incorporate locally defined policies, and be reflective of the priorities established by the MPO.**

**FINANCING** – Innovative transportation financing mechanisms, which empower COGs, MPOs and RPOs, must be explored to meet regional and national needs. **NARC advocates for an increase in the federal gas tax, while concurrently developing revenue sources that are predictable, diversified and diffuse.** Local governments, COGs, MPOs and RPOs should be able to exercise and be direct recipients of finance mechanisms that bolster capabilities to execute regionally approved transportation plans. These mechanisms include, but are not limited to:

- An increase in the federal gasoline tax;
- Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) and other user-based fees;
- Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) that do not undermine public authority in managing infrastructure;
- Regional Infrastructure Improvement Zones (RIIZs); and,
- New revenue sources like those generated from a possible cap-and-trade program or another approach used to control pollution by providing economic incentives for achieving reductions in the emissions of pollutants.

**FREIGHT** – Goods movement is the backbone of America’s commerce and requires a high degree of coordination, connectivity and easy access between multiple modes of transportation – highways, ports, railroads and airlines. COGs and MPOs are well positioned to coordinate the freight interests within the regional context of transportation, economic development and environmental planning. **NARC advocates establishing transportation policies that address efficient and cost effective freight movement, and improve regional, state and local economies. NARC recommends implementing a consistent, dedicated and firewalled freight funding source in our national surface transportation program to meet current and future freight needs.**

**SIMPLICITY** – As we enter an era of planning overwhelmed with funding and sustainability challenges, we must create and foster an environment that realizes the benefits of all transportation mode options – transit, rail, and aviation – as a solution to many of the problems plaguing urban, suburban and rural areas. Balanced funding and opportunities between all modes should be established. **NARC urges the adoption of a “Transportation Account” that collapses all surface transportation related funding into one funding stream – directed to the States, regions and localities – to develop the best and most flexible transportation solutions. NARC advocates for the removal of redundant and duplicative programs within the U.S. Department of Transportation and other transportation related programs across all federal agencies.** In doing so, States and localities can benefit from flexibility, authority and funding, while maintaining responsibility and accountability for their projects and programs.

**LIVABLE COMMUNITIES** – National emphasis must be placed on the integration of strategic regional transportation, economic, environmental, land use and housing planning objectives, breaking down federal funding and regulatory silos, and streamlining processes to encourage cross-cutting, regional efforts. **Federal transportation programs should look to promote livability by focusing on the economic and social well-being of all Americans through a safe, reliable, intermodal and accessible transportation network** that enhances choices for transportation users; provides easy access to employment; and, promotes positive effects on the surrounding community. As local governments act as the primary points of contact for these efforts, COGs, MPOs and RPOs are prepared to uniquely integrate solutions for the varying transportation users.

**DATA, TECHNOLOGY & RESEARCH** – Transportation planning and decision-making rely on the most up-to-date data available to create models that forecast future transportation and land use needs. Policy and program changes are needed at all levels of government to improve data collection and promulgation, and the technologies available to aid in regional planning for emerging transportation, land use and environmental issues. **The federal government should continue to be a leader and play an active role in data collection, innovation and research, particularly as it relates to the needs of local governments and their regional planning organizations.**