

# Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

Special Informational Meeting on the  
Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) study required by SA 23-13

**Friday, November 14, 2023**

Agenda: <https://egov.ct.gov/PMC/Agenda/Download/17143>

A recording is available at: <https://egov.ct.gov/PMC/Agenda/Download/23122>

**Members present:** Carl Amento, John Filchak (Vice Chair), Sam Gold, Matt Hart, Martin Heft, Laura Hoydick, Francis Pickering, Brendan Sharkey (Chair), Ethan Van Ness

**Panelists:** FHWA – Jennifer Brady, Amy Jackson-Grove, David Williams; CT Office of the Governor – Patrick Hulin; CT DOT – Karen Kitsis; RiverCOG MPO – Anthony Salvatore; AMPO – Bill Keyrouze; CUTR – Jeff Kramer

**Members not present:** Luke Bronin, Maureen Brummett, Steve Cassano, Brian Greenleaf, Karl Kilduff, Jeff Kitching, Keith Norton, James O’Leary, Neil O’Leary, Troy Raccuia, Lon Seidman, Katie Stargardter, Ron Thomas, Mike Walsh

**OPM staff:** Christine Goupil, Bruce Wittchen

**Member vacancies:** Nominated by COST: Municipal official: Town of <10,000 population  
Nominated by COST: Municipal official: Town of 10,000 – 20,000 population

## 1. Welcome, Introductions, SA 23-13 Study Charge

Commission chair Sharkey called the meeting to order at 10:07, ACIR members introduced themselves, and Commission chair Sharkey outlined the ACIR’s charge in [SA 23-13](#).

## 2. What is an MPO?

Amy Jackson-Grove, CT Division Administrator, Federal Highway Administration

Amy Jackson-Grove introduced the [FHWA’s presentation](#) and then David Williams provided an overview of what a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is, how they are designated and funded, and federal roles. Mr. Williams also outlined the steps for redesignation and Ms. Jackson-Grove described resources available from the FHWA.

Commission vice chair Filchak asked if the FHWA does an evaluation of the number of MPOs in a state. Ms Jackson-Grove said the FHWA does not take a position and referred to the information about MPO designation on FHWA’s Slide 3. Jennifer Brady added that the FHWA conducts a federal certification review every four years for a given Transportation Management Area, in accordance with [23 CFR 450.336](#), and the resulting report can include a federal finding of inadequacies to be resolved.

## 3. [SA 23-13](#), *An Act Studying the Consolidation of Metropolitan Planning Organizations*

Patrick Hulin, Governor Lamont’s Deputy Policy Director

Patrick Hulin described the public act as asking questions and mentioned the MPO role in Colorado’s carbon budget work, asking if it could make sense for CT to have MPOs with the capacity to do that. He said CT does not have as large of a population or area as many states, but it does have major

transportation corridors. Mr. Hulin emphasized that the Governor's Office has not prejudged the outcome of the ACIR's study.

Mr. Hulin was asked about the carbon budget example: whether his office had reached out to MPOs to ask about it and whether such work is a state or federally funded effort. He mentioned the role of transportation actions on carbon budgets and noted that the State of CO had outsourced work to MPOs, and the question is whether that approach can be adapted to CT.

There was a discussion of MPOs only being able to use federal MPO funding for federally required tasks and Commission member Hart asked if the Governor's Office is asking whether larger MPOs have more capacity and Mr. Hulin answered yes. Commission vice chair Filchak mentioned work in this area by CT's [Transportation Strategy Board](#), which was disbanded around 2012.

#### **4. CT DOT's Perspective on MPOs**

Karen Kitsis, Deputy Commissioner, CT Dept. of Transportation

Karen Kitsis showed [DOT's presentation](#) and highlighted that DOT has created an intergovernmental unit. She mentioned some of the agency's key interactions with MPOs, as listed on Slide 3, describing relationships between DOT and MPO planning. Ms. Kitsis also pointed out differences between MPOs and COGs, as listed on Slide 4, and noted that there are two areas where COG and MPO boundaries are not completely aligned, as illustrated by Slide 5.

#### **5. MPO Perspective**

Anthony Salvatore, Chair, Lower Connecticut River Valley MPO

Anthony Salvatore described RiverCOG's experience with merging two MPOs and said their experience shows how to do so: local leaders must be engaged and do it from the bottom up. He referred to the ACIR's assignment in SA 23-13 and said the federal requirement provides the answer to Assignment #1: the minimum population of an MPO is 50,000. He said his MPO has the lowest population of a CT MPO and is 175,000, the median MPO population nationwide.

Mr. Salvatore said congress created MPOs as a check on the power of states, but they work with the state through partnerships. He mentioned CT's [Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program \(LOTICIP\)](#) and described an example of the MPO working with DOT on such a project. He returned to SA 23-13 and pointed out that, as described by an earlier presenter, the state does not have unilateral authority to determine #2 because municipalities control that.

Mr. Salvatore said the process envisioned in #3 would be expensive and, regarding #4, he recommended not fixing something that isn't broken. Regarding #5, he said an MPO merger would not bring more federal funding and he added that this is a challenging time to consider new MPO staffing as mentioned in #6. Regarding the assignment of #7, Mr. Salvatore said the focus of the study should be on CT, where the MPO process is working well, rather than looking at other states. He concluded by saying the merger of two MPOs during the formation of RiverCOG was a credit to those involved.

#### **6. MPOS of Other States**

Bill Keyrouze, Executive Director, Assoc. Of Metropolitan Planning Organizations

Bill Keyrouze showed [his presentation](#) and described the national Assoc. Of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO). He stepped through each of the seven assignments, highlighting the minimum size of NRZs is based on the federal requirement and noting the US Census Bureau role in identifying urbanized areas (UZAs). He also outlined the federally-mandated process for MPO consolidation and described an example in TX. Mr. Keyrouze's 6<sup>th</sup> slide referenced the potential benefits addressed in SA 23-13's Assignment #3 while the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> slides highlight potential obstacles to be considered in

Assignment #4. He described the variety of issues potentially raised by such a change and added that now is not the best time for that because of the magnitude of discretionary funding currently available.

With the 9<sup>th</sup> slide, Mr. Keyrouze spoke of MPO restructuring options seen in other states, emphasizing that mergers are uncommon. He also described opportunities for MPO collaboration and cooperation, as listed on the 10<sup>th</sup> slide, and referring to the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> slides, described CT as having high performing MPOs. He added that CT MPOs have a good relationship with the state DOT; that is not always the case across the country. The state's outlook looks good for Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding, as listed on the 13<sup>th</sup> slide. Mr. Keyrouze concluded with a listing of MPO Resources on the 14<sup>th</sup> Slide and he highlighted the [METROPLAN White Paper](#) listed there.

## 7. MPO Studies Around the US

Jeff Kramer, Program Director, Center for Urban Transportation Research

Jeff Kramer showed [his presentation](#) and described his experience with MPO related research and mentioned a saying that “if you know one MPO, you know one MPO.” His 3<sup>rd</sup> slide illustrates the MPO hosting continuum, from an MPO being fully independent on the left side of the continuum and being part of an all-in-one agency on the right. CT is on the right. The 4<sup>th</sup> slide provides data on MPO hosting based on a national survey having a 75% response rate. Local governments (municipal + county) lead, nationwide, and he noted that MPOs sometimes switch from one type of host to another.

Mr. Kramer's 5<sup>th</sup> slide describes the variation in the size of MPO boards nationwide and he pointed out that the mode is 12. He added that one challenge in consolidating MPOs is determining who will remain on the board of the consolidated MPO. The 6<sup>th</sup> slide shows the composition of MPO boards nationwide and the 7<sup>th</sup> describes various approaches in establishing member voting rights. Referring to his 8<sup>th</sup> slide, Mr. Kramer described his findings regarding MPO staffing and he noted that federal law recognizes the MPO and board, not the staff.

Mr. Kramer's 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> slides illustrate the relationship between urbanized areas and MPO planning areas, using the State of FL as an example. He said FL has polycentric urbanized areas and distinguished that from the Atlanta region, where the urbanized area has expanded without contacting another urbanized area. He said the urbanized areas of SE FL have merged but the region's three MPOs remain separate, doing corridor planning through a cooperation pact. He noted a similar arrangement in the Tampa area.

## 8. Q & A

Directing the question to Amy Jackson-Grove of the FHWA, Commission member Hart asked which entities are able to initiate MPO consolidation. Ms. Jackson-Grove said the federal regulations do not say, but noted that the decision must be approved by a minimum of 75% of the MPO's voters, including the MPO's urban center. Commission member Hart also asked Karen Kitsis of the CT DOT if there is any improvement or efficiency that DOT would like to see from the state's MPOs. Ms. Kitsis said DOT is interested in how the MPOs themselves might grow and what can be done at the MPO level. She said relations have been good.

Commission member Hart followed up by asking Bill Keyrouze and Jeff Kramer about larger MPOs being more remote and if any establish districts focusing on subregions. Mr. Keyrouze said he is unaware of quantitative research showing effects of MPO size. He noted that the MPO encompassing the Pittsburgh region includes more than 500 municipalities and added that an MPO being in a COG can access additional federal funding.

Jeff Kramer said he is unaware of an MPO organizing itself by districts but said some maintain a satellite office. In the FL panhandle, one regional planning commission encompassing three MPOs has

a satellite office. He also mentioned a TN MPO formerly hosted by a county that moved to a regional planning commission. One size does not fit all. He added that FL MPOs are shifting away from counties and said there can be a perception that staff of a county or other host can be biased. The organization of MPOs should be driven by the local culture. Commission member Gold asked Karen Kitsis of the CT DOT if it intends for MPOs to conduct air quality conformity testing rather than the DOT. Ms. Kitsis answered no and added that, with the GHG emissions reduction requirements having recently passed, DOT is beginning to look at how to address those requirements. Some MPOs in other states do air quality conformity work.

Commission vice chair Filchak said this has been very informative. He pointed out that his COG is not an MPO but there have been conversations about joining the Worcester, MA-area MPO. He asked about bi-state MPOs and about rural planning organizations joining a MPO. Ms. Kitsis described her prior experience in the northern Virginia region, where an MPO crosses the state boundary. She worked for a transit authority that crossed two MPOs, noting the common needs and interests of the MPOs.

Commission vice chair Filchak said New Jersey seems to have three MPOs but more planning regions and asked how that happened and how does it work. Mr. Kramer described the history of the three MPOs and noted that, when MPOs are forming, a key consideration is which entity has the capacity to take on that role and, once a decision has been made, it is difficult to change. He added that multi-state MPOs are common and described some of the arrangements they use and noted the coordination challenges.

Commission member Gold commented on the different hosting arrangements and highlighted the multidisciplinary nature of CT's COGs, describing his COG's recent work in obtaining federal housing funding. Commission member Pickering asked about Florida's transportation councils and how MPOs work together. Mr. Kramer said FL's MPOs have to coordinate with each other, a situation not unique to FL, and described various alliances that have resulted. He pointed out that state DOTs also have different organizational structures and added that there is not a 1:1 relationship between the boundaries of FL's MPOs and the FL DOT's regional districts. They find the needed scale without merging MPOs.

Mr. Keyrouze mentioned the mutual interests of MPOs and regional planning organizations and described various approaches, such as developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for transit service. He pointed out that large MPOs sometimes provide small MPOs with services regarding federal air quality requirements.

Mr. Kramer added that much comes down to funding. Merging MPOs will not deliver more federal MPO funding and success at obtaining discretionary federal funding depends on having local matching funding required to receive a federal grant. He said MPOs can work together on regional projects and mentioned work in Pinellas County, FL regarding transportation and land use plans.

## **9. Next Steps**

Commission chair Sharkey said that, based on what the ACIR has learned about the federal MPO requirements, cannot make recommendations regarding assignments 1 and 2 of the study. Regarding Assignments 3, 4, 5, & 6, Commission chair Sharkey said the ACIR should not assume consolidation, noting that the current configuration reflects organic processes. As for the 7<sup>th</sup> assignment, experiences of other states might not translate here. He does not know if another informational or special meeting will be needed.

Commission member Gold recommended scheduling a special meeting following the ACIR's 12/1 regular meeting for a vote on the report that will be prepared and Commission member Hart recommended learning more about service sharing among MPOs.

## **10. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 12:04.

*Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM*