

Dear T&I/EPW Committee,

The transportation authorization bill is a top priority for the United States. We are struggling to balance pressing infrastructure needs while strengthening our nation's economy. These two critical issues overlap in many ways.

We write as a member metropolitan planning organization ("MPO") of the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations ("AMPO") regarding serious concerns of the future of smaller MPOs. AMPO represents MPOs across the United States, of which there are 385 ranging in designated population size of 50,000 to several million.

As Congress debates the reauthorization of surface transportation legislation, we would like to remind you that it has been AMPO's policy recommendation to **retain all existing MPOs under 200,000 in population** regardless of any new MPO threshold designation changes that may be included in legislation. While we agree that certain changes in law may be needed to improve the planning process, all existing small MPOs must remain in operation to continue their critical roles in decision-making.

- **Local elected officials are the MPO.** Removing the decision-making authorities from the local level will take away the voice of the local government, its citizens, and people in the regions. Citizens elect their local public officials to reflect the unique nature of their region.
- **Citizens and voters need to be heard and participate in transportation decisions that impact their daily lives.** Removing the MPOs' connection to public participation will lead to decisions made without actual citizen involvement. It will only increase the distance between the average citizen and the policy-maker.
- Should Congress elect to change the population threshold without including grandfather provisions, **States will lose MPOs.** In fact, with the possible elimination of MPOs in areas with populations lower than 200,000, 8 states potentially *will not have a MPO*. In all, the 200,000 threshold would eliminate approximately 220 of the 385 MPOs. Some current MPOs have existed since 1962. Decades of an open table for the operators, public agencies, states officials, local electeds and citizens will disappear.

As required under U.S. Code Title 23, Chapter 1, Section 134, MPOs are policy boards comprised of local elected officials, representatives of public agencies that administer or operate transportation modes and state officials. The boards are responsible for carrying out federally required transportation planning activities that include, but are not limited to, development of long-term multimodal transportation plans, coordinated selection of transportation improvements in a fiscally constrained manner, public outreach, and coordination with states and numerous public and citizen interests.

With current economic realities, these transportation decisions and investments are critical to economic growth, our citizens, and the nation's financial engines, which are tied to metropolitan regions of *all sizes*. Given the importance of transportation

infrastructure to economic growth, security, and sustainability, MPOs are an inextricable part of the U.S. economy.

AMPO has provided Congress with legislative language that would grandfather existing MPOs from designation changes. If you would like to receive a copy of this draft legislative provision please feel free to contact DeLania Hardy, Executive Director, Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations at 202-296-7051, or dhardy@ampo.org. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

DeLania Hardy

Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations