

Regional transportation plans are long-term transportation plans for metropolitan areas. Regional transportation plans have enormous influence on a region's future, because local and regional transportation projects are ineligible for most federal or state funding unless they have been included in the regional transportation plan. Every metropolitan area with more than 50,000 people has a regional transportation plan, developed by agencies called metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). Also known as long range transportation plans or metropolitan transportation plans, regional transportation plans generally contain a vision for the region's transportation future, goals, objectives, a description of all transportation facilities that comprise the regional transportation network, performance measures, a list of planned projects, and a financial plan for funding the projects. Because plans are updated or newly developed every four or five years, there are regular opportunities for advocates and stakeholders to influence regional transportation plans to encourage goals, objectives, and projects that support walking, bicycling, transit, and health.

Why Regional Transportation Plans Matter

- Regional transportation plans direct the investment of billions of dollars of federal and state transportation funding. MPOs' short term funding prioritization can only include projects that are consistent with (and generally included within) the regional transportation plan.
- Traditionally, regional transportation plans have focused the vast majority of investments on new and expanded highways and other car-centric projects, with some money dedicated to public transit, and almost none dedicated to active transportation.
- By modifying the goals, performance measures, and project lists contained in regional transportation plans, investments can be dedicated to significant and transformative walking, bicycling, and transit projects, enabling communities to reap health, injury prevention, mobility, economic, and equity benefits:
 - Investments supporting walking and bicycling protect everyone, reducing injuries and deaths from vehicle crashes for people in cars and particularly for people walking and biking.^{1,2,3}
 - Prioritizing transportation investments based upon health equity impacts can reduce the disproportionate injuries and deaths in low-income communities by addressing inequities in access to sidewalks, safe crossings, street lights, and other features.^{4,5,6}
 - Active transportation investments more than pay for themselves in health care and fuel savings, generating substantial savings within a 10 year period.^{7,8}

What are MPOs?

Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are regional transportation planning agencies for urban areas. MPOs have the duty of coordinating among local jurisdictions to ensure coordinated and collaborative regional decision making, and are the entity responsible for developing regional transportation plans. Under federal law, states must establish MPOs for any urbanized area with a population of over 50,000 people. There are more than 400 MPOs across the United States, and more than 70 percent of people in the United States live within the jurisdiction of an MPO. An MPO plays an essential role in planning for its region's future and in making determinations regarding investments of transportation funds to achieve those plans.

What Makes a Good Regional Transportation Plan?

Regional transportation plans can support walking, bicycling, and healthy communities by:

- Establishing community health and health equity as part of the vision, key goals, and objectives for the regional transportation plan. Multimodalism, equity, environmental protection, and safety are related key goals for plans.
- Developing performance measures and models that assess health, health equity, and active transportation, so that health impacts can be understood and health goals achieved.
- Ensuring that walking and bicycling networks, safety and mode shift needs, projects, and programs are part of the regional transportation plan.
- Developing transportation project lists that advance health and health equity, rather than harming them. When regional transportation plans invest heavily in freeway widening, new highways, and other car-centric projects, they increase air pollution, climate emissions, sedentary behavior, injuries and fatalities, and limited mobility for low-income communities. When they consider health and health equity in the design and prioritization of major projects and include significant numbers of transformative active transportation projects, they support healthy and connected communities.



Additional resources

- To learn more about metropolitan planning organizations and health, see the Safe Routes Partnership's detailed reports: [Metropolitan Planning Organizations & Health 101: The Nuts and Bolts of Regional Transportation Agencies](#) and [Metropolitan Planning Organizations & Health 201: Best Practices & Promising Opportunities for Health](#).
- For a quick overview of regional transportation plans, see [Why Metropolitan Planning Organizations Matter for Health](#).

References

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