

Regional Cooperation and Transportation Planning in Alaska

A Regional Models of Cooperation Peer Exchange Summary Report

Location: Virtual Workshop

Date: March 9 – 10, 2016

Host Agency: FHWA Alaska Division Office and Alaska State Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

Peer Agencies: Center for Community
Nashua Regional Planning Commission
New Mexico Department of Transportation

Federal Agencies: Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
National Park Service, Alaska Regional Office



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| 14. ABSTRACT This report summarizes the proceedings of a Regional Models of Cooperation Virtual Peer Exchange Workshop held on March 9 – 10, 2016 for the State of Alaska. Participants discussed the benefits and challenges of cooperation across jurisdictions and with diverse stakeholders in a large state with a dispersed population. The Regional Models of Cooperation program of the Federal Highway Administration, part of the Every Day Counts 3 initiative, sponsored this event. | | | | | |
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Foreword

This report summarizes the presentations, key themes, and recommendations identified at a Regional Models of Cooperation peer exchange on March 9 – 10, 2016, held remotely through a web platform. With support from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Office of Planning, the FHWA Alaska Division Office hosted peers from the Center for Community in Sitka, Alaska; New Mexico Department of Transportation, the Nashua Regional Planning Commission in New Hampshire, and National Park Service Alaska Regional Office. The purpose of the peer exchange was to share best practices in cooperating across transportation agencies across the state of Alaska and to determine how models of regional cooperation can inform this process. Regional Models of Cooperation is a program of the FHWA Every Day Counts 3 (EDC-3) initiative, co-led by the FHWA Office of Planning and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Office of Planning.

Introduction

Regional Models of Cooperation

Regional Models of Cooperation is a program of the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Everyday Counts Initiative. Through this initiative, FHWA and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) work with State Departments of Transportation (DOTs), Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and other stakeholders to identify innovative technologies and processes that are deserving of accelerated deployment nationwide. Regional Models of Cooperation was selected for accelerated deployment in the third round of Everyday Counts (EDC-3), for calendar years 2015-2016.

Regional Models of Cooperation describes enhanced processes for effective cooperation and communication between State DOTs, MPOs, transit agencies, and other transportation planning partners working across jurisdictions or traditional disciplines. When implemented, these techniques can improve collaboration, policy implementation, technology use, and performance management. Regional Models of Cooperation reaches beyond traditional borders and brings together entities from multiple jurisdictions and disciplines to support common goals in transportation planning, such as congestion management, safety, freight, livability, economic development, and project delivery and efficiency.

Successful implementation of Regional Models of Cooperation in transportation planning can improve decision-making, save time and money through the sharing of resources or data, and help agencies achieve more by working together. Examples of regional cooperation include jointly developing transportation plans and programs, cross-jurisdictional corridor studies, and project planning across MPO and State boundaries. It also includes collaboration between State DOT(s), MPOs, and operators of public transportation on activities such as collecting, storing, and analyzing transportation data.

One way that FHWA and FTA are supporting States and MPOs to help them implement Regional Models of Cooperation is through peer exchange workshops. These workshops bring representatives from multiple jurisdictions within a region together with peers from other regions to share experiences and best practices that can help move specific, locally-driven priorities forward. The Regional Models of Cooperation implementation effort also hosts webinars and documents cooperation case studies and techniques to promote notable practices in a variety of topic areas.

For more information, please visit the [FHWA Regional Models of Cooperation website](#) and the [EDC-3 initiative summary page](#).

Organization of this Report

This workshop summary report is organized in four sections:

1. **Workshop Overview:** An overview of the peer exchange goals, format, and a summary of the key themes and strategies that emerged.
2. **Workshop Summary:** A summary of presentations and discussion sessions.
3. **Key Themes and Strategies:** A synthesis and discussion of the key themes identified during the workshop.
4. **Conclusion:** A summary of lessons learned and next steps.

The Key Themes and Strategies section synthesizes and discusses three focus areas that the workshop participants identified as priorities for successful regional and statewide cooperation:

1. Enhancing communication among transportation stakeholders
2. Determining regional boundaries and establishing regional forums
3. Creating joint planning products

Workshop Overview

Peer Exchange Description

This virtual peer exchange supported multijurisdictional and multi-agency planning in Alaska, facilitating cooperation among numerous stakeholders including, state, local, regional, and tribal governments, Federal agencies, and other stakeholders. The purpose of the workshop was to assist Alaska in establishing a framework to guide future transportation planning collaboration efforts. The discussion focused on discussing issues related to cooperation and collaboration at the local and regional levels and with tribal communities, as Alaska contains a large number of tribes. Participants from Alaska's MPOs and the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (Alaska DOT & PF) discussed how to work across jurisdictional boundaries to enhance cooperation and share resources in transportation planning.

The FHWA Office of Planning, the FHWA Alaska Division Office, FHWA Western Federal Lands Highway Division Office (WFLHD), and the Alaska DOT & PF worked together to identify peers with experience successfully cooperating across jurisdictional boundaries in transportation planning. FHWA invited the following peers to attend the workshop to share their stories and advice regarding statewide and regional cooperation in transportation planning with the Alaska participants:

- **Connie Sipe**, Executive Director, Center for Community in Sitka, Alaska
- **Jessica Griffin**, Government to Government Unit Supervisor and **Ron Shutiva**, Tribal Liaison, New Mexico Department of Transportation (New Mexico DOT)
- **Jen Czsyz**, Assistant Director, Nashua Regional Planning Commission (Nashua RPC)
- **Paul Schrooten**, Transportation Program Manager, National Park Service Alaska Regional Office (NPS AKR)

The goals of this peer exchange and workshop were to:

1. Share experiences of collaborative transportation planning efforts in Alaska and other regions.
2. Identify expected benefits of multi-jurisdictional cooperation for transportation planning in Alaska.
3. Find opportunities to strengthen existing cooperation and introduce new areas for expanded cooperation.
4. Establish a framework for cooperation going forward, including establishing meeting guidelines, frequency, forum, and means to formalize the process.

Format and Agenda

The two-day virtual peer exchange consisted of peer presentations followed by question and answer periods and full group facilitated discussions, as described below:

- **Overview Presentations:** Presentations from the Alaska DOT&PF and FHWA Office of Planning provided an overview of the themes of the workshop, as well as an opportunity to generate a list of priority topics for further discussion.
- **Peer Presentations:** Presentations from New Mexico DOT, WFLHD, NPS AKR, Nashua Regional Planning Commission, and Center for Community discussed their experiences collaborating across agencies and with communities on planning initiatives.
- **Facilitated Discussion:** Following each peer presentation and at the end of each day, the attendees participated in a facilitated discussion about how the peer examples could relate to the Alaska context and the agencies in Alaska could develop a plan to improve coordination.

The list of event participants can be found in Appendix B and the workshop agenda can be found in Appendix C.

Workshop Summary

Summary of Presentations

The following sections provide brief summaries of the presentations from the opening remarks and four peer presentations. Please note that the Key Themes and Strategies section provides additional detail about some of the examples in presentations.

Opening Remarks

During the introduction, speakers from Alaska DOT & PF and FHWA provided context for the role of regional models of cooperation in transportation planning and the current state of the practice and transportation planning goals in Alaska.

Jody McCullough, Planning Oversight & Stewardship Team, FHWA Office of Planning, provided a brief overview of the Regional Models of Cooperation program. Transportation planning encompasses a number of topics that do not stop at jurisdictional boundaries, such as transit planning, freight coordination, and air quality issues. Coordinating activities across jurisdictions can lead to increased efficiencies in the planning and programming processes, as well as more comprehensive solutions to widespread transportation issues. The Regional Models of Cooperation initiative published a number of case studies that illustrate notable examples in regional cooperation on a variety of issues. McCullough highlighted two cases that could be relevant examples for Alaska. In New Hampshire, [the Granite State Future case study](#) describes how the state conducted its largest public outreach effort, which included visioning sessions and other efforts, to create a statewide plan among the state's nine regions. In Utah, which is similar to Alaska in that it is a large State with only a few MPOs, the state's four MPOs, DOT, and Transit Authority collaborate to produce unified transportation plans and develop a unified list of projects. McCullough also discussed two examples of cases FHWA had developed regarding State and tribal planning coordination. In South Dakota, the tribal governments meet with South Dakota DOT, FHWA, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs annually and on an ad-hoc basis to coordinate transportation projects and divide responsibilities. In North Central New Mexico, representatives from local Indian pueblos developed a regional transit district and conduct regular meetings. These examples illustrate different ways in which regions and communities can cooperate on transportation planning initiatives.

Eric Taylor, Statewide Long Range Transportation Planner, Alaska DOT & PF, discussed the current state of practice and goals for transportation planning cooperation in Alaska. Alaska DOT & PF currently conducts regional outreach through a number of mechanisms. Development of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) involves multiple meetings with each regional office and the DOT is working on producing an electronic version of the STIP that will provide additional opportunities for collaboration and input. For the Transportation Asset Management (TAM) process, the DOT includes MPOs on the planning and program team. However, the DOT is currently more focused on the Result Based Alignment process, which also includes an engagement process. The DOT is also conducting an update of the 2008 Long Range Transportation Plan, which involves several subcommittees and stakeholder groups that include regional representatives. Finally, the DOT conducts two outreach initiatives at the local level. The Non-Metropolitan Local Official Consultation Process is updated every five years and the Community & Public Transportation Advisory Board is a group of commissioner and governor appointees that are tasked with identifying recommendations to improve transportation services at the local level.

Day One Peer Presentations

On the first day of the workshop, peers from the New Mexico DOT and the Federal Lands Management Agencies in Alaska discussed their experiences working with tribal governments and conducting a collaborative planning process, respectively.

Jessica Griffin, Government to Government Unit Supervisor and Ron Shutiva, Tribal Liaison, New Mexico DOT, discussed how New Mexico DOT cooperates with tribal governments and small communities on their planning initiatives.

The New Mexico DOT adopted a planning procedures manual in 2013 that outlines all the federal and state planning requirements for MPOs and Rural Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) and provides a work plan. The DOT developed the manual in consultation with the MPOs and RTPOs. New Mexico's RTPOs cover all the land outside of MPO boundaries and incorporate tribal participation in their planning initiatives. The RTPOs developed a Tribal/Local Public Agency Handbook which describes a seven step project development process, including a Project Feasibility Form process that includes input from DOT, RTPO, and local agency staff.

Like Alaska, New Mexico has a number of Native American tribes ranging in size. New Mexico DOT has developed a robust method of cooperation with the tribal governments in order to ensure effective communications about transportation planning issues and projects. In 2009, the State passed the State Tribal Collaboration Act, which created a tribal liaison in every State department, mandates Cultural Competency Training for all employees to improve understanding about how to collaborate with tribal communities, and requires agencies to submit an annual report. The Act also initiated an Annual State Tribal Leaders Summit with the governor and quarterly State Agency Tribal Liaison meetings, which provide a more informal opportunity for tribal leaders and public sector staff to network and communicate.

As Tribal Liaison, Shutiva hosts DOT District meetings with tribal communities, coordinates other Departmental meetings with tribes, attends Tribal Planners Roundtable meetings, and acts as the general "go to" person for the tribes at the DOT. He plans on hosting a Tribal Safety Summit, establishing a Tribal Safety Committee, and creating Tribal Transportation Safety Plans. Shutiva explained some of the challenges the DOT and Tribes must overcome to successfully collaborate, which included navigating turnover in tribal administration, working within tribal council schedules, and understanding the internal tribal approval process, among others. However, he highlighted the Laguna Pueblo Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) project as a best practice example of cooperation, where the DOT worked with the Laguna Pueblo on bicycle and pedestrian facilities funded through a TIGER grant. They concluded by stressing the importance of the Tribal Liaison in facilitating cooperation and that creating standard procedures and guidelines provide helpful structure to the coordination process.

Paul Schrooten, Transportation Program Manager, NPS AKR and Roxanne Bash, Transportation Specialist, FHWA WFLHD, discussed how the Federal Land Management Agencies in Alaska and Alaska DOT & PF collaborated to produce a joint long range plan in 2012.

The Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Alaska DOT & PF worked together to align their planning processes, develop strategies to address similar needs, share limited resources, and facilitate future joint funding opportunities, as well as fulfil Federal statutory requirements. The multi-agency helps reduce duplication of efforts and create a more coordinated approach to transportation planning. Another major benefit of the process was the opportunity to establish and build strong relationships across agencies so that each partner was able to understand and represent the needs of another partner when discussing transportation issues and initiatives. However, the group also faced some challenges during the process, including resolving the differences in agency missions; agreeing on scope, schedule, and cost; identifying project 'champions' or leaders; maintaining positivity and a high morale through a long planning process;

and sharing resources and responsibilities equally. The group overcame these challenges by developing 'drop-down' plans that reflected each agency's needs and agreeing on how to distribute roles and responsibilities early in the process. They recommended that others looking to follow a similar process establish personal relationships, focus on mutually beneficial outcomes and set differences aside, and emphasize the process rather than the project or product.

Day Two Peer Presentations

On the second day of the workshop, peers from the Nashua RPC in New Hampshire and the Center for Community in Sitka, Alaska discussed their experiences conducting statewide planning initiatives and collaborating with tribal governments and public agencies on public transportation, respectively.

Jen Czysz, Assistant Director, Nashua RPC, discussed the process the nine regional planning commissions in New Hampshire cooperated on to produce a statewide 'snapshot' of their shared issues and goals as well as nine parallel regional plans.

The regional planning commissions had struggled to fund required updates to each of their regional plans, so they decided to come together and apply for a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Sustainability Grant to fund a joint planning process. Upon receiving the grant, the agencies collaborated for three months to reach consensus about scope and cost. The group conducted the largest outreach effort in the state, engaging 12,000 residents in discussion about their goals and visions for their communities. The group worked with local non-profits and universities to ensure they would reach a broad audience that accurately reflected the variety of views across the state. The RPCs hosted a workshop where they learned best practices for conducting outreach. Such a workshop would not be as feasible to fund individually, but by coming together the RPCs were all able to benefit from the training.

The RPCs established an executive, an advisory, and multiple technical committees to address different aspects of the joint planning process. They found that in-person meetings worked better for collaboration than virtual meetings. They generated a common vision for land use and transportation by assessing the goals of local master plans and used the vision to develop livability principles and a common framework for the individual regional plans. The staff used a cloud-based file storage site to coordinate internally between meetings and share drafts of documents, as each region analyzed data for and developed one chapter of the statewide snapshot.

Major benefits of the efforts included making available statewide data and analysis, developing common transportation performance metrics, and reducing duplication of planning efforts. Czysz emphasized the importance of communication, clarity, and flexibility during a statewide collaborative process.

Connie Sipe, Executive Director, Center for Community, discussed the collaborative approach to providing public transportation in Sitka, Alaska.

In Sitka, the local tribal government partnered with the State and local governments to address the need for a transit system to serve the needs of the elderly and car-less households. The task force received a grant to start a public transit service and contacted Center for Community, a non-profit community organization, to administer the grant. Center for Community contracted with the Sitka Tribe to operate two fixed routes, since the tribe already ran a seasonal tour bus operation, and contracted a local senior service to provide paratransit service.

After launching the services in 2002, the operators and Center for Community began to realize how they could collaborate to meet ongoing needs. For example, the Sitka Tribe offered to use extra tribal funds to buy an additional bus and used a tribal Older Americans Act grant to help fund expanded weekend service of the paratransit. Similarly, the senior services organization allowed Center for Community to use unallocated funding sources to fund the transit project as a whole, enabling the service to make its local

matching requirements for FTA funding. In 2014, after years of collaborative efforts such as these and successful service, the Center for Community and Sitka Tribe successfully secured annual funding from the local government's budget, illustrating how the City recognizes the importance of public transit to the community.

Summary of Discussion

The virtual workshop provided a number of opportunities for full group discussion interspersed between the presentations in order to continually review and update ideas regarding how to move forward in Alaska. The following sections summarize the group discussions from different points in the workshop.

Opening Discussion

Following the opening remarks, the participants discussed what topics within transportation planning were priorities for the workshop discussion and regional cooperation more generally. First, the participants reviewed the list of key themes and topics mentioned during the Alaska DOT & PF presentation. Next, the participants developed a list of potential discussion topics related to regional models of cooperation. Both lists are below.

- **Key Themes and Potential Discussion Topics**
 - Topics related to different stakeholders
 - Challenge of working with local decision-makers to come to an understanding about how to optimize local resources within a region
 - Determining and improving the role of tourism industry
 - Currently represented in freight and other committees
 - How to improve communications between tourism industry and smaller communities?
 - Need for and organization of communication/regular meetings to facilitate coordination with tribes
 - Importance of participation/coordination with military community
 - Department of National Resources trails access military land
 - Projects in Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) potential on military land, require an agreement regarding using their transportation network
 - Turnover with commanders makes it difficult to establish relationships and longstanding agreements/collaboration
 - Lack of highway advisory board
 - Topics related to planning initiatives
 - Better integration of marine transportation into long-range strategic planning
 - Integration of marine transportation and freight planning
 - Delays in planning efforts (Long Range Transportation Plan, State Rail Plan) due to changes in State level administration
 - Border/international coordination with Canada (*not considered priority*)
 - Safety planning in tribal communities
 - Topics related to logistics on coordination
 - Budget constraints and travel restrictions will continue – leads to greater need for collaboration and sharing solutions

The group then discussed the possibility of using the workshop to develop ideas for creating an ongoing regional forum that would reach beyond the current MPO boundaries to include representatives from municipalities outside these borders. The group discussed the need to address the following topics regarding a regional forum:

- **Priority:** Ensuring representation from all of the entities within a region, which may include municipalities that fall outside of MPO Boundaries
- **Need:** Determine how to define Alaska's regions
- **Tools to use:** Formal agreements that specify the roles and responsibilities of the participants

Participants elaborated on these points during the remainder of the workshop. Their discussion resulted in a synthesized list of action items for developing a regional forum. This discussion and list of actions items is summarized in the "Review of Key Themes and Next Steps" section.

Summary of Discussions

The workshop featured several facilitated discussions, which focused on the importance of safety, techniques for coordinating with Alaska's Tribes, and techniques for including local government in state and regional planning processes. Over the course of the two days, the groups raised a number of opportunities for collaboration, as well as important challenges they face and potential solutions to these challenges.

Safety Planning

First, the group discussed the importance of safety as a key issue for tribal communities in Alaska. The group listed the following resources regarding safety:

- National Center for Rural Road Safety, which provides examples of work from other States
- Tribal Safety Plans, which involve collaboration with the Tribal Transportation Program; and
- The statewide Tribal Transportation Program Safety Conference and Presentations.

The group discussed the importance of determining how to translate the ideas put forth in presentations and plans into actions and how to collect the data needed for these planning initiatives.

Cooperation with Tribes

After New Mexico DOT's presentation about collaboration with tribal governments, the participants discussed how the lessons and techniques presented could apply to the Alaska context. Alaska has 229 tribes, ranging in size from just a few people or families to thousands of individuals. Remote locations present logistical challenges for communication and coordination, as many of the tribes are located in areas which lack access to the surface transportation network and instead rely on snowmobiles, marine, and air transportation. Looking forward, the group discussed incorporating the following techniques:

- **Hosting regular meetings among transportation agencies and tribal governments:**
 - Model after the Anchorage example where the MPO hosts staff level meetings with open agendas to discuss the tribes' concerns
 - Communicate with local non-profits and other local contacts to help coordinate meeting logistics and attendance
 - Consult with tribes about what the community wants/needs
- **Enhancing communication with dispersed tribes and chapters:**
 - Follow up with local staff and contacts
 - Work together on timelines for funding applications since the Federal program timelines do not match other programmatic and community timelines
 - Determine whether there are there potential incentives to help Alaska Federation of Tribes to "come to the table" or provide representation in planning and safety projects
 - Help tribes strengthen their position with Federal funds/grants – so they can have their own position and more power in regional discussions

Cooperation Techniques

The group also discussed techniques for improving communications and cooperation among State, local, and regional agencies. After the presentation discussing the Federal Land Management Agencies' long range planning process, the group identified the following ways in which agencies could cooperate on planning initiatives:

- **Opportunities for cooperation:**
 - Conduct a Statewide survey to identify transportation gaps
 - Develop a regional approach to gathering data on safety and other transportation issues
 - Host quarterly regional meetings that include tribal and municipal representatives
 - Combine support from high level officials and drive of the regional level to improve qualities of plans through collaboration
 - Develop a common online system for sharing data and collaboration on documents
 - Build on tribal participation in statewide transit planning conference

- **Challenges:**
 - State DOT staff lack familiarity with municipal transportation issues
 - *Potential solution: include municipal representatives in outreach conversations, attend regional planners meetings*
 - *Potential solution: Provide DOT support to municipalities with limited planning resources*
 - Coordinating projects and initiatives across the large geographic size of boroughs¹
 - *Potential solution: Include a map in group meetings to illustrate geographic context and overlap of transportation*
 - State DOT lack of communication with unincorporated areas outside of boroughs when conducting outreach to borough representatives
 - Planning fatigue during long statewide processes
 - *Potential solution: Rotating leadership roles and responsibilities*
 - Inclusion of small communities that do not have planning capacity in planning processes
 - *Potential solution: Better-resourced agencies can develop easy-to-use data collection frameworks and common formats to minimize burden on small communities*
 - *Potential solution: Tribes can give negotiating authority to a non-profit to reduce burden of work*
 - Lack of consistent internet access across the state, which would be necessary to develop a common online system for sharing data and collaborating
 - *Potential solution: Work with local non-profits and develop a Statewide working group to address this issue*
 - Local and tribal skepticism about regional planning and Federally funded processes
 - *Potential solution: Demonstrate that communities' voices are heard through outreach and inclusion of their ideas in documents*
 - Small tribes' lack of capacity and ability to complete the requirements for receiving and maintaining federal grants for transit
 - *Potential solution: Small communities in the same geographic area work together to build capacity, with the help of Alaska DOT & PF*

¹ In Alaska, boroughs are similar to the county level of government in other states.

Next Steps

The participants spent the time during the final facilitated discussion outlining the details of their next steps.

They returned to the idea of **establishing a regional forum** where representatives from different types of transportation agencies in the same region would be able to discuss issues and identify further opportunities to coordinate and collaborate. The full notes and details of this discussion can be found in Appendix D. The participants used these notes during a follow up call they held in the weeks following the workshop.

The group first identified who would participate in a **working group that would refine the details of how such forums would work** through phone conferences and eventually an in-person meeting. They identified participants in the peer exchange workshop who were able to commit to joining such a working group at that time, as well as stakeholders who they would like to reach out to about participation. They also discussed potential conferences and events where they could host a parallel in-person meeting, including Municipal League meetings and transit conferences.

Next, the group outlined the potential **priorities of the working group**:

1. The group decided to prioritize determining how to divide Alaska into regional units or sub-groups that could form regional transportation forums or groups. Participants expressed a desire for regions to accurately represent the interests of municipalities and boroughs outside of MPO boundaries, tribes, and other groups that are currently in regular communication.
2. Participants also decided a sub-group focused on integrating marine transportation and freight planning could be a priority.

Finally, participants discussed a number of useful resources for the working group, including:

- The FHWA [Accelerated Innovation Deployment \(AID\) Demonstration program](#), which provides grants to states to accelerate the implementation of innovative practices in highway transportation
- [State Transportation Innovative Councils](#), which offer technical assistance and funding to support the costs of putting innovative practices into action
- The [Alaska Online with Libraries \(Owl\) Video Conferencing service](#), a video conferencing system available in all of Alaska's public libraries and a potential resource for virtual meetings.

Summary of Key Themes and Strategies

This section synthesizes ideas and discussion from the workshop participants and summarizes the group's takeaways on how regional cooperation in transportation planning could be improved in Alaska.

During the course of the workshop several key themes and strategies emerged to improve cooperation, which are summarized here and discussed below:

- 1.) Enhancing communication among transportation stakeholders:** The workshop presenters and participants discussed the importance of involving a variety of stakeholders, including local communities and tribes, in transportation planning initiatives. They identified a number of tools and methods that agencies could employ to improve communication.
- 2.) Establishing regional forums:** Participants discussed at length how regional forums could ensure that stakeholders beyond the boundaries of Alaska's MPOs could have a greater voice in transportation planning decisions.
- 3.) Creating joint planning products:** Developing a multi-agency or statewide planning product requires extensive communication and cooperation among partners and can identify mutual needs, issues, and goals, as well as opening potential cost-sharing and funding opportunities.

Enhancing Communication among Transportation Stakeholders

Much of the discussion focused on methods for enhancing communication among transportation agencies and with local and tribal governments, as a means to gathering input for State and Regional transportation plans and strengthening relationships with users of the transportation network. The presentations and discussions identified the following key issues to address in order to improve communication:

- Establishing regular meetings and a point person/liasion for regions and tribes at the State level,
- Balancing virtual and in-person communications, and
- Working with local non-profits and communities to learn about their needs and logistical considerations.

All presenters stressed the importance of communication to cooperative planning. This can take the form of formal or informal meetings.

Jessica Griffin and Ron Shutiva of the New Mexico DOT cited the vital role of the State DOT tribal liaison in improving the regularity of contact and meetings with tribal communities. As the "go-to" person for tribes regarding transportation issues, the tribal liaison attends annual summits with tribal leaders and the governor and, more importantly, the informal quarterly meetings. During these informal meetings, tribes have the opportunity to network and discuss issues in a more conversational setting.

The NPS AKR, WFKLHD, and Nashua RPC also stressed the importance of meetings during their plan development processes as a means to stay updated on each other's progress and have an opportunity to come to consensus on scope and goals.

However, all the presenters also recognized that building strong relationships across agencies and with communities through meetings and discussion takes time and patience. They emphasized the importance of finding appropriate times when everyone can meet conveniently. Some presenters and participants recommended meetings during already established meetings, summits, or conferences, so that participants would not need to travel more frequently and to keep up attendance rates.

Virtual communication through phone conferences, emails, and web resources is another important tool agencies and communities use to improve communication. The participants from Alaska discussed the

difficulty of meeting in-person, as the State is large, certain areas are inaccessible by surface transportation networks, and funding for travel to meetings is increasingly limited. The peer exchange itself was host virtually for some of these reasons. However, the presenters and participants discussed a number of useful options for virtual communication. Nashua RPC and the other RPCs in New Hampshire set up a cloud-based file sharing site to share updates among the group and drafts of documents. Such a file sharing site helps to reduce version control issues and the number of emails going between agencies regarding drafts of documents. All the presenters noted the importance of phone and email communication as well, as means to address or resolve issues between regular meetings.

Developing relationships with local governments and non-profits is another way to enhance communication with and understanding of local and tribal communities. The Center for Community presentation illustrated how developing relationships between non-profits, tribal governments, and local and State agencies can result in long-standing and important collaborative projects, such as the public transit system in Sitka. Furthermore, they discussed how non-profits can provide assistance to tribes and communities seeking to complete Federal or State grant applications for transportation projects. Non-profits working in local communities have an understanding of the needs and norms of local communities, whether they be tribes or other communities. Developing relationships with these types of non-profits and organizations can enable transportation agencies to better understand and serve different types of communities.

Establishing Regional Forums

The presentations and discussions identified regional forums as an important tool for increasing regional cooperation.

A regional forum that includes representatives from multiple across a region or the state provides a space for stakeholders to discuss issues, develop potential collaborative projects, and build relationships among agencies. The group discussed key aspects of establishing such a forum, including:

- Determining the appropriate geographies and agencies for regional issues,
- Developing formal agreements to work together, and
- Addressing funding constraints which may limit participation.

The workshop participants discussed how current MPO boundaries do not always include a number of municipalities and unincorporated areas that are important concerns for regional planning. Furthermore, tribal perspectives of regions can differ from how the state is currently divided geographically. For these reasons, the participants found that developing forums that reach beyond MPO boundaries and include other regional transportation stakeholders, including boroughs, local governments, and tribes, would help improve regional coordination on transportation projects. However, determining how to draw the boundaries of such regional forums and who to include is an important step in getting started and requires buy-in from the stakeholders involved. Workshop participants decided to prioritize this as a topic for future work on regional cooperation.

Developing formal agreements and addressing budget constraints are two other important aspects to establishing regional forums. Formal agreements ensure that the roles and responsibilities of each agency or organization involved are agreed upon and clearly stated. Furthermore, they provide the opportunity for the partners or members of a forum to determine how they will share costs and address budget constraints. Ms. Czysz described that in New Hampshire the RPCs each contributed a membership fee to provide funding for group activities and agencies with more resources helped support those with less, to ensure equal participation by all partners.

Creating Joint Planning Products

The peer agencies attending the workshop presented examples of joint planning products, developed cooperatively by two or more planning jurisdictions. Developing joint planning products, such as [Granite](#)

[State Future](#) in New Hampshire and the [Alaska Federal Lands Long-Range Transportation Plan](#) allows transportation agencies to work together to assess conditions and needs and determine goals. This process improves coordination on initiatives and projects across agencies and can help agencies identify cooperation opportunities. The presentations and discussion identified a number of challenges and benefits to pursuing a joint planning product.

Agencies collaborating on a joint planning product often face logistical and content-related challenges. Logistically, Nashua RPC and the Alaska Federal Lands Management Agencies (FLMAs) discussed how organizing and creating the document requires a high-level of communication and dedication of resources. For example, the New Hampshire RPCs had monthly in-person meetings at the beginning of the process to determine the scope and goals. Then, the RPCs divided tasks for drafting the document, but jointly reviewed each piece for consistency. The organizations experienced 'planning fatigue' by the end from the extensive and time-consuming three-year process. The RPCs overcame some of these challenges by sharing roles and responsibilities, but recognized that the process is logistically taxing.

Both Nashua RPC and the Alaska FLMAs discussed the difficulties overcoming differences in views regarding the scope and goals of the plan. The New Hampshire RPCs were able to develop joint livability principles in part by acknowledging the difference between regions, rather than require agreement on all issues. Similarly, the Alaska FLMAs accepted differences of opinion among the agencies. To help deal with these differences, the Alaska Federal Lands Long-Range Transportation Plan includes an umbrella plan that discusses shared issues and goals, as well as "drop down" plans for each agency, which highlight individual needs and goals.

Despite the challenges, the presenters identified a number benefits from creating joint planning products. The agencies involved in each process were able to build strong relationships at the staff level which are supporting ongoing cooperation. Furthermore, the agencies are better equipped to work together on joint projects. The peers also discussed how working together on a joint planning product provides all the agencies involved with access to data and information regarding transportation issues throughout their greater regions or across their State, which helps them make better plans and decisions.

Conclusion

Improved regional cooperation among transportation agencies and stakeholders can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of transportation investment decisions, introduce opportunities for collaboration on projects, and increase the understanding of needs and issues among organizations and communities. Because the State is large and sparsely populated, with many remote and unincorporated areas lacking access to surface transportation, cross-jurisdictional cooperation is perhaps uniquely challenging in Alaska. However, for these same reasons, finding effective means of ongoing communication and coordination is key to ensuring the needs of the diverse and varied communities of Alaska are met.

The Regional Models of Cooperation Alaska virtual peer exchange workshop provided Alaska DOT & PF, the State's MPOs, and local transportation stakeholders with the opportunity to learn about notable practices in regional and tribal collaboration elsewhere in the U.S., and to discuss how they can move forward to improve cooperation in Alaska. The participants determined that establishing regional forums that better represent the State's expanding populated areas would provide transportation stakeholders with a space to communicate about their issues and collaborate on projects. Furthermore, the participants discussed key methods for improving cooperation with tribal communities in particular, including increasing the number of formal and informal meetings and communication between the State DOT Tribal Liaison and tribal representatives, attending conferences and meetings dedicated to tribal transportation issues, and aiding tribes with Federal and State level grant applications or reporting requirements.

Acknowledgements

The Regional Models of Cooperation program extends a special thank you to the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities for hosting the event. Thanks also go to the Center for Community, the New Mexico Department of Transportation, Nashua Regional Planning Commission, and the National Park Service Alaska Regional Office for attending the workshop and sharing their experiences with cooperation in transportation planning with their peers in Alaska. The program also wishes to thank the workshop participants for their valuable contributions and active engagement in discussions about regional cooperation in transportation planning in Alaska.

Appendices

A. Key Contacts

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B. Event Participants

| First Name | Last Name | Agency |
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| Amit | Armstrong | FHWA Western Federal Lands Highway Division |
| Roxanne | Bash | FHWA Western Federal Lands Highway Division |
| Fred | Bowers | FHWA Office of Planning |
| Teresa | Brewer | Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation System |
| Margaret | Carpenter | Alaska DOT&PF – Northern Region |
| Ned | Conroy | Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Region 10 |
| Jennifer | Czysz | Nashua Regional Planning Commission (New Hampshire) |
| Donna | Gardino | Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System |
| Alicia | Giamichael | Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System |
| Jessica | Griffin | New Mexico Department of Transportation |
| Dave | Harris | FHWA Office of Planning |
| Marie | Heidemann | Alaska DOT&PF – Southern Coast |
| Tonya | Holland | FTA Office of Planning |
| Aaron | Jongenelen | Alaska DOT&PF – Northern Region |
| Lorrie | Lau | FHWA Office of Planning |
| John | Lohrey | FHWA Alaska Division Office |
| Bill | Lyons | U.S. DOT Volpe Center |
| Alexandra | Markiewicz | U.S. DOT Volpe Center |
| Kevin | McCoy | U.S. DOT Volpe Center |
| Jody | McCullough | FHWA Office of Planning |
| Kristine | McGuill | FTA Region 10 |
| Marcheta | Moulton | Alaska DOT&PF – Headquarters |
| Ken | Petty | FHWA |
| Shelley | Potter | Alaska DOT&PF – Headquarters |
| Lisa | Randall | FHWA Resource Center |
| Paul | Schrooten | National Park Service – Alaska Region |
| Paulette | Schuerch | Advisor to the Governor – Tribal Relations |
| Ron | Shutiva | New Mexico Department of Transportation |
| Connie | Sipe | Center for Community (Sitka) |
| Jessica | Smith | Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Alaska |
| Julie | Staveland | Alaska DOT&PF |
| Spencer | Stevens | FHWA Office of Planning |
| Eric | Taylor | Alaska DOT&PF – Headquarters |
| Scott | Thomas | Alaska DOT&PF – Central Region |
| Robert | Venables | Marine Transportation Advisory Board |
| Mike | Weller | Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Alaska |

C. Workshop Agenda

Alaska Regional Models of Cooperation – Virtual Peer Exchange Workshop Wednesday, March 9 – Thursday, March 10, 2016

Host and Organizers

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) will host this peer exchange. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Office of Planning, with the support of the FHWA Alaska Division Office, and the FHWA Resource Center is supporting and facilitating the workshop.

Purpose and Goals

The Regional Models of Cooperation (RMOC) initiative of FHWA's Every Day Counts (EDC) program promotes innovative, collaborative processes that bring together many entities working on common goals across jurisdictional boundaries. Consistent with Alaska DOT&PF's decision to implement RMOC, this virtual peer exchange will support multijurisdictional and multi-agency planning in Alaska, facilitating cooperation among numerous stakeholders including, state, local and tribal governments, Federal agencies, MPOs, and other stakeholders across Alaska. The purpose of the workshop is to assist Alaska in establishing a framework to guide future transportation planning collaboration efforts.

The goals of this peer exchange and workshop are to:

1. Share experiences of collaborative transportation planning efforts in Alaska and other regions.
2. Identify expected benefits of multi-jurisdictional cooperation for transportation planning in Alaska.
3. Find opportunities to strengthen existing cooperation and introduce new areas for expanded cooperation.
4. Establish a framework for cooperation going forward, including establishing meeting guidelines, frequency, forum, and means to formalize the process.

Format

The peer exchange workshop will consist of two three-hour virtual sessions conducted via webinar. During each session, peer presenters will share information and relevant transportation planning cooperation experiences. FHWA will facilitate questions and discussion of how the examples may apply to Alaska. FHWA and Alaska DOT&PF will guide the group through discussions of how transportation planning cooperation in Alaska may be advanced and how future cooperation activities may best proceed.

Agenda

Day 1: March 9, 2016

Please note: All times are in Alaska Standard Time

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 8:00 am | Welcome (DOT & PF, FHWA TBD) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introductions of call participants• Review goals for workshop• Review logistics for call |
| 8:20 am 8:30 am | Introduction to Regional Models of Cooperation (FHWA – Ken) Transportation Planning Cooperation in Alaska: Current State of the Practice and Goals (Alaska DOT&PF) |
| 8:45 am | Q & A / Discussion |
| 9:00 am | Peer Presentation: Transportation Planning Cooperation with Tribal Governments and Small Communities in New Mexico (New Mexico DOT) |

- 9:25 am Q & A / Discussion**
- 9:40 am Presentation: Transportation Planning Cooperation among Federal Land Management Agencies in Alaska (Paul Schrooten, Randy Goodwin, Marcheta Moulton, and Roxanne Bash, and others)**
- 10:05 am Q & A / Discussion**
- 10:20 am Facilitated Discussion to Brainstorm Alaska Regional Framework for Cooperation (to be continued on Day 2)**
- Revisit themes from overview presentation
 - Are there lessons from New Mexico and Federal Agencies in Alaska that can be applied to Alaska DOT&PF and stakeholders?
- 10:50am Wrap Up and Review of Key Themes**
- 11:00 am Adjourn**
- Day 2: March 10, 2016**
- 8:00 am Welcome and Introductions (DOT & PF, FHWA TBD)**
- Introductions
 - Review logistics for call
 - Review key themes from Day 1
 - Review goals for Day 2
- 8:30 am Peer Presentation: The Granite State Future Project (Nashua RPC)**
- 8:55 am Q & A / Discussion**
- 9:10 am Peer Presentation: Public Transportation Cooperation in Sitka, Alaska (Center for Community)**
- 9:35 am Q & A / Discussion**
- 9:50am Discussion of Alaska Regional Framework for Cooperation (continued from Day 1)**
- Refinement of draft ideas from Day 1
 - Are there lessons from New Hampshire and Sitka that can be applied in Alaska?
 - Opportunities and challenges for expanded cooperation in Alaska
 - Priorities for cooperation moving forward
- 10:50am Wrap Up and Next Steps**
- 11:00 am Adjourn**

D. Key Themes and Next Steps

After the workshop concluded, FHWA developed the following synthesis of the key themes and next steps discussion that occurred at the conclusion of the workshop. The participants used these notes during a follow up call they held in the weeks following the workshop.

Review of Key Themes

- **Topics that may benefit from enhanced cooperation**
 - Integration of marine transportation into long-range strategic planning
 - Integration of marine transportation and freight planning
 - Engagement with tribal communities
 - Engagement with tourism industry and private sector providers of transportation
 - Safety planning
 - Communicating the benefits of regional cooperation to local elected officials and decision-makers
 - Establishing regional cooperative relationships among municipalities and tribes
 - Ports – connection to broader transportation network – deep water ports
 - Definition of “collaboration”

- **Key Stakeholders**
 - Boroughs and municipalities
 - FLMAs
 - Marine transportation providers
 - Military
 - MPOs
 - Non-profits
 - Private sector
 - Tribal governments
 - Universities

- **Techniques for Cooperation**
 - Enhancing communication among DOT, local communities, and Tribes
 - Challenges:
 - Incentivizing Tribes to establish communication and/or form a regional group to communicate with other agencies
 - Difficulties coordinating across dispersed communities in such a large State
 - Establishing a regular communication method takes a long time
 - Tools:
 - Regular meetings
 - Using online tools for virtual collaboration (possibility of using virtual communications on a regular basis)
 - Hosting less frequent in person meetings
 - Current set of annual meetings (tribal, municipal league, other conferences) could be a place to build in exchanging ideas among regional transportation organizations
 - Surveys
 - Tribal and community liaisons from DOT
 - Establishing an official regional forum that reaches beyond municipal/MPO boundaries
 - Challenges:
 - Ensuring representation from all of the entities within a region

- Determining how to define a region
 - Budget constraints
 - Difficulties coordinating across dispersed communities in such a large State
 - Tools:
 - Formal agreements among members
- Joint planning products
 - Challenges:
 - Logistical issues and agreeing on scope and cost
 - Identifying challenges
 - Sharing resources and responsibilities among communities and agencies with differing access to resources
 - Opportunities:
 - Leveraging funding sources together
 - Building relationships between agencies
 - Identifying outcomes that benefit everyone

Next Steps Discussion

- **Develop a working group to continue communication and cooperation effort**
 - Potential members of working group
 - Marcheta Moulton, Alaska DOT & PF
 - John Lohrey, FHWA Alaska Division Office
 - Paulette Schuerch, Advisor to the Governor
 - Paul Schrooten or another representative from FLMAs
 - Representative from each of the DOT regions
 - Northern Region – Margaret Carpenter
 - Kathie Wasserman (or someone else from a Municipal League community) as potential Municipal League representative
 - Representative from each MPO
 - DOT Tribal Liaison
 - University Transportation Centers
 - University of Alaska Fairbanks
 - Tribal Technical Assistance Program (Bryan Bluehorse)
 - Tribal representative
 - Potential in-person meeting times
 - Potential for a meeting to coincide with another current meeting
 - Transit conference
 - Tribal transportation, March 22 – 24, 2016
 - Municipal League meetings
 - Potential regional conferences
 - Other types of events (mining conferences, etc.)
 - Potential attendees
 - Federal Land Management Agencies, Federal Highways
 - Members of working group
- **Possible focus topics for the working group**
 - Focus 1: Determine how Alaska could divide into regional units/subgroups of the State that would eventually meet and coordinate more regularly
 - How to formally define these across such a large State?
 - Incorporating existing tribal regions
 - Including boroughs and municipalities that are not within MPO boundaries, such as the Matanuska – Susitna Borough in the Anchorage area, as discussed on Day 1 of the workshop

- Building off of groups that are in current communications
 - How to align differing focus topics?
 - Focus 2 (or sub-working group): Integration of marine transportation and freight planning
 - Stakeholders: Marine Transportation Advisory Board (MTAB), South Coast, DOT staff, others identified by MTAB, Alaska Marine Highway System Planner
- **Next Steps**
 - Marcheta will send out a doodle poll to the potential members listed above to set up a conference call
 - Determine potential for an in-person meeting
- **Resources**
 - [Accelerated Innovation Deployment](#) (AID) Demonstration Funds: Grant provides funding for eligible entities to accelerate the implementation and adoption of innovation in highway transportation. FHWA encourages the use of AID Demonstration to promote the deployment of the EDC innovations, which provide ways of improving the work of highway planning, design, construction and operation.
 - To apply, coordinate with John Lohrey, FHWA Alaska Division Office
 - [State Transportation Innovation Councils](#) (STIC): Offers technical assistance and funds (up to \$100,000 per STIC per year) to support the costs of standardizing innovative practices in a state transportation agency or other public sector STIC stakeholder.
 - To apply, coordinate with John Lohrey, FHWA Alaska Division Office
 - [Owl Video Conferencing](#): All public libraries in Alaska offer free video conferencing through the Owl system. Using this system for meetings provides a potentially cost effective alternative to in-person meetings. While conference calls are another alternative, video conferencing allows for face-to-face communications.

E. Resources

Regional Models of Cooperation Initiative

[Regional Models of Cooperation](#)

[Every Day Counts](#)

FHWA Resources

[Accelerated Innovation Deployment](#)

[State Transportation Innovation Councils](#)

F. Acronyms

| | |
|----------|--|
| AID | Accelerated Innovation Deployment |
| AKR | Alaska Regional Office of the National Park Service |
| DOT | Department of Transportation |
| DOT & PF | Department of Transportation and Public Facilities |
| EDC-3 | Every Day Counts |
| FHWA | Federal Highway Administration |
| FTA | Federal Transit Administration |
| MPO | Metropolitan Planning Organization |
| MTAB | Marine Transportation Advisory Board |
| NEPA | National Environmental Policy Act |
| NPS | National Park Service |
| ODOT | Ohio Department of Transportation |
| RPC | Regional Planning Commission |
| RTPO | Rural Transportation Planning Organization |
| STIC | State Transportation Innovation Councils |
| STIP | State Transportation Improvement Program |
| TAM | Transportation Asset Management |
| TIGER | Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery |
| WFLHD | Western Federal Lands Highway Division of FHWA |