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16. Abstract: Transportation benefits and economic stimulus were behind the creation of the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) program in 2009. New transportation funding programs exist in a landscape of other programs, and in addition extensive federal rules require that state-designated metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) lead regional transportation planning and produce near and long-range plans. This report examines the potential for the TIGER program to conflict with these mandated planning processes. To learn about the connection between MPOs, their planning documents, and TIGER applications, the primary dataset for analysis was a survey of metropolitan planning organizations. The roles that MPOs and their planning documents played in TIGER application processes were highly varied. While some MPOs were local project sponsors and others advised or provided data, a sizable share of MPOs reported no role in the regional process to select projects for TIGER applications, despite federally mandated regional coordination and planning. MPO capacity appears to differ significantly and to affect the roles that MPOs play in regional processes. While there are already additional planning requirements for larger urbanized areas, further differentiation of roles and expectations for MPOs may be appropriate. New programs, especially those with short time lines, may obscure the process for joint decision making and complicate adherence to regional planning mandates. Results on MPO roles and the relationship between plans and candidate projects suggest that MPOs are not always the decision site as language in plans would suggest, but they can be an important site for convening stakeholders.			
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**Regional Decision-Making and Competitive Funding:
Metropolitan Planning Organizations and the Transportation Investments
Generating Economic Recovery Program**

by

Kate Lowe

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Study Title: Cooperation and Competition – Regional Transportation Planning and
Competitive Federal Awards

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Executive Summary

Federal transportation investment has provided vital infrastructure for the movement of goods and people and can also be an economic stimulus tool. Both goals—transportation benefits and economic stimulus—were behind the creation of the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) program in 2009. The TIGER program—originally authorized for one year—differed from most federal transportation spending, as it is awarded through competition rather than formula and had requirements for relatively quick project implementation.

New transportation funding programs emerge in a landscape of other programs, and in addition extensive federal rules require that state-designated metropolitan planning organizations lead regional transportation planning and produce near and long-range plans. Federal rules dictate that the plans should be “fiscally constrained”, meaning that they are based on reasonable revenue expectations and a slate of projects limited to these revenues.

This report examines the potential for the TIGER program to conflict with these planning processes. Major projects that utilize federal dollars must be included in these regional plans, but TIGER funds represented a new stream not accounted for in such plans. The report provides an abbreviated introduction to federal requirements for regional planning and the TIGER program’s administration. To learn about the connection between MPOs, their planning documents, and TIGER applications, the primary dataset for analysis was a survey of metropolitan planning organizations in the United States.

The role that MPOs played in TIGER application processes was highly varied, as were the key factors in local selection of projects for TIGER applications. While some MPOs were local project sponsors and others advised or provided data, a sizable share of MPOs reported no role in the local process to select projects for TIGER applications, despite their federally mandated regional coordination and planning process. Other MPOs reported that candidate projects appeared in fiscally constrained plans or that MPO plan priorities were behind selections for TIGER project applications. The most commonly reported key factor behind candidate projects, however, was shovel readiness, although a range of other factors were reported as key factors behind local selection.

Results have potential lessons and also indicate questions for future research. MPO capacity appears to differ significantly and to affect the roles that MPOs play in regional processes. While there are already additional planning requirements for larger urbanized areas, further differentiation of roles and expectations for MPOs may be appropriate. Second, federal funding program design can complicate adherence to planning rules. Pursuit of some awards may deviate from MPO-stated project priorities which are already shaped by existing funding and federal rules. New programs, especially those with short time lines, may obscure the process for joint decision making. Results on MPO roles and the relationship between plans and candidate projects suggest that MPOs are not the key decision site as language in plans would suggest, but can be important for sponsoring projects

and convening stakeholders. Finally, capacity within and across regions may impact the administration of federal awards in ways that are insufficiently accounted for in program design.

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Introduction: The challenge of integrating funding programs and planning rules

Federal transportation investment has provided vital infrastructure for the movement of goods and people. In addition to the economic benefits realized through improved travel, government transportation spending has been an economic stimulus tool during periods of economic crisis, like the Great Depression and the Great Recession. A tight time line for stimulus spending, however, can potentially conflict with longer range planning processes, and this research considers whether one investment program aligned with federal mandates for regional, long-range planning.

Transportation benefits and economic stimulus goals were behind the creation of the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) program in 2009. The United States Department of Transportation (DOT) initially created the program to administer \$1.5 billion in discretionary funds. The TIGER program, however, was layered on top of numerous federal funding programs and rules dictating an integrated regional transportation planning process. Any new program confronts these rules but the TIGER program—with its economic stimulus aim and prioritization of relatively quick turn-around projects—had additional temporal pressure.

The TIGER program, originally authorized for one year, differs from most federal transportation spending. Unlike the supermajority of federal funds, it disburses funds according to a competitive process, rather than through formulae based on factors such as population, transit ridership, and vehicle miles traveled. Competition and the short time line for pursuing the new award could mean some stakeholders would be better positioned to compete and that the competition could disrupt the order of project priorities in longer range plans.

Not only do new programs exist in a landscape of other programs, extensive federal rules require that state-designated metropolitan planning organizations lead regional transportation planning and produce short- and long-range plans. Federal rules dictate that the plans should be “fiscally constrained”, meaning that they are based on reasonable revenue expectations and a slate of projects restricted to these revenues. The TIGER program had a potential conflict with these planning processes, as major projects that utilize federal dollars must be included in these regional plans, but TIGER funds were a new stream not accounted for in such plans. Did TIGER simply advance the queue of projects faster, make new projects possible or alternatively, disrupt priorities generated through a multi-stakeholder process? Given that many agencies could be sponsors, government agencies could independently seek funds for TIGER projects, but one would expect that MPOs would be involved with projects of regional significance. Further complicating such a program, are there inadvertent effects from merit-based competition? That projects would be outside MPOs plans is understandable given fiscal constraint but demonstrates the challenge of time sensitive and unexpected funds.

This report next provides an abbreviated introduction to regional planning and the TIGER program’s administration. It then discusses the methodology for exploring these tensions. This report focuses primarily but not exclusively on TIGER I (2009), given the unique conditions for its status as new money tied to a short timeframe.

Federal rules and regional planning

Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are the entities responsible for regional transportation planning. Multi-jurisdictional transportation planning has been a federal requirement for more than fifty years; continuing, comprehensive, cooperative metropolitan planning was a requirement in the 1962 Highway Bill (Zoller & Capizzano, 1997). In the early 1970s, legislation required that states designate metropolitan planning organization as the agencies responsible for these activities (Solof, 1998). MPOs are required for each urbanized area with greater than 50,000 residents, with additional rules in place for MPOs serving areas with population in excess of 200,000.

Metropolitan planning organizations play multiple roles. According to the Federal Highway and Transit Administrations (2007), MPOs have several core functions including: convening stakeholders, involving the public, and creating long- and short-range plans (FHWA & FTA, 2007, 4). Both the long-range plan—which covers at least 20 years—and the shorter, range Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) document that covers at least 4 years, must be fiscally constrained. This means that estimated project costs must align with reasonable estimates of future funds. Furthermore, major projects must be in these plans to be eligible for federal transportation dollars. In regions where there are or have been air quality problems, projects must be in these documents even if not federally funded. In general, projects in TIPs should be fairly developed relative to projects listed only in the long-term plan, given the shorter time horizon for TIP project implementation. Many MPOs, in addition to their fiscally constrained plans, identify projects in addendums; MPOs sometimes list these as needed or priority or “illustrative” projects that do not have funding sources identified and would be implemented with increased funding availability.

Several studies have examined the challenges that MPOs face in conducting regional planning. MPOs lead coordination and cooperation in a fragmented environment with complex institutional dynamics. Indeed, FHWA and FTA note in their guide to transportation planning that “Transportation planning must be cooperative because no single agency has responsibility for the entire transportation system” (2007, p. 6). Even though legislation in the 1990s marked increased authority for MPOs, they still have very limited direct control over most transportation funds (Sciara & Wachs, 2007) and highly varied capacities (US GAO, 2009). Due to limited funding control coupled with the fiscal constraint requirement, MPOs face a “fiscal paradox” in that for a regional plan with a balanced budget MPOs must accommodate how funds controlled by other agencies will be spent (Lowe, 2014). Yet, some have cited the fiscal constraint as increasing the legitimacy of MPO planning (Goldman & Deakin, 2000; Sciara, 2012). Furthermore, because major projects must appear in MPO plans to be eligible for federal funds, in some cases MPOs have used that requirement as leverage with local stakeholders (Sciara, 2012).

Economic stimulus and competitive funding

The benefits of transportation infrastructure investment range from increased economic activity and mobility to enhanced quality of life. Public expenditure on transportation is thought to bring direct and indirect benefits, with associated transportation benefits also triggering induced and additional economic activity (Taylor, 2004). Thus, infrastructure investment has been used to stimulate the economy during economic lows for the direct expenditure effects and in turn long term economic benefits as well.

After the onset of the Great Recession, U.S. policymakers sought ways to encourage and speed economic recovery. In 2009, Congress passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) or “stimulus”. The bill included \$48 billion for transportation, mostly to be allocated along pre-existing formulae. Of this, however, \$1.5 billion was allocated for a competitive, discretionary fund.

In response to the legislation, the United States Department of Transportation (DOT) created the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) program. While most federal funds are administered through mode-specific agencies (e.g., the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Transit Administration, the Federal Aviation Administration), this program is administered centrally through US DOT and is multi-modal. In addition to established federal transportation goals, the program prioritized economic recovery. This first round of awards prioritized “quick start” projects that could be completed within three years. Legislation also required a mix of urban and rural projects. While initially authorized for one year as part of the stimulus, the US DOT has continued to administer discretionary awards with the TIGER name.

DOT adopted a competitive process and required that applicants submit a project cost benefit analysis. In 2009, the Department of Transportation evaluated approximately 1,450 TIGER applications. The formal evaluation process and specific, defined criteria likely helped winnow down the projects to a smaller pool of finalist projects (166). Project costs and benefits were important criteria and the program was also legislatively directed to prioritize quick start or shovel ready projects. In the Notice of Funding Availability (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, 2009), DOT noted that a project’s inclusion in regional, local or state plans was one among six factors that could indicate a project was ready for a quick start. The notice explains in a footnote that significant metropolitan-based projects must be in long-range plans for federal funding and that TIGER funds would be held until a project became part of a plan. In other words, the notice allows for projects that *were not yet* in appropriate MPO documents but stipulates that the projects must be in updated plans.

A senior team of officials evaluated that smaller pool to make final funding recommendations/decisions. At this final stage, it is unclear how influential the adopted criteria and formal evaluation was, as there was not statistically significant variation among ratings for funded and unfunded projects within the finalist pool (Homan, Adams, & Marach, 2014). Likewise, the GAO (2011) reported decisions on which finalist projects to fund were not well justified or

documented in TIGER I. (A map showing metropolitan statistical areas where TIGER I funds were awarded is included in Appendix 1.) Furthermore, GAO (2014) findings on a subsequent round of TIGER awards also raise questions about the role of evaluation criteria and limited reliance on technical ratings. Officials explained some poorly rated projects in this later TIGER round were advanced “because senior officials had specific knowledge of the capabilities of individual applicants to deliver projects and the strengths and weakness of individual applications that technical evaluation teams may not have been aware of when assigning their ratings” (GAO, 2014, p. 6).

As the GAO report’s comments reflect, capacity—not just need or merit—has a role in the distribution of federal funds across policy areas. The time and expertise required for technical cost benefits analysis was seen by some potential TIGER applicants as a barrier to pursuing and receiving funds (Eno, 2013). In another competitive transportation program, the New Starts program for mass transit expansion, benefits evaluation did not have a statistically significant relationships with award of federal funds for mass transit expansion but local financial capacity did (Lowe, 2013). Prior research beyond the transportation sector shows a relationship between receipt of federal funding and local government capacity (Collins & Gerber, 2006; Hall 2008) or capacity among non-profit organizations (Lowry & Potoski, 2004; Manna and Ryan 2011). Thus, this research considered how the competitive design may have also shaped how a new, time-sensitive program interfaced with mandates for regional, long-range planning.

Approach and methodology

This research used multiple data sources to explore the process for and metropolitan planning's relationship to federal transportation dollars. Three analyses were conducted: a survey of all MPOs, document review related to transit projects funded in TIGER I, and a statistical analysis with equity coding based on TIGER I profiles. Findings from the last component were done in collaboration with other researchers and are reported elsewhere (Lowe, Reckhow & Gainsborough, 2013).

Survey questions were developed to learn the perspectives of MPO staff regarding the TIGER application process. The questions combined open- and close-ended answers and are listed in Appendix 2. Questions on TIGER were included in a longer survey focused on the role of MPOs in promoting "Complete Streets" (streets that better incorporate all modes especially those other than automobiles). The survey was administered in June 2014. From each of the 385 MPOs in the US, a staff member was invited to participate. Almost all MPO staff contacts were from a recently created database developed by an outside researcher from online directories. Many staff contacts were explicitly listed as lead for transportation planning, while at smaller MPOs an Executive Director may have been contacted. Invitations to participate were first sent via postal mail to inform participants of forthcoming survey, then an email invitation with an active survey link was sent, and finally a reminder postcard with an extended survey deadline was sent to those who had not yet responded. Because not all survey takers completed the survey, only those that substantially completed TIGER-related questions were used in this analysis (n=128) for an effective response rate of 33 percent.

Document review focused on whether projects funded by the first round of TIGER awards (2009) were already integrated in regional transportation planning. Document review was of plans in place prior to 2009, when the TIGER program was created. In 2009, 51 TIGER awards were made, and this study focused on TIGER-funded transit projects (n=8) to make document review feasible and comparable. Document review was conducted in 2012 and 2013. Given the comparability and fiscal constraint tied to MPO plans, these plans were a central point for review. Document review was limited to plans available online and also included searches at related agencies for relevant transportation plans. Given the dispersed sources of data, it is possible that some unique documents overlooked. Because the review considered plans that existed before TIGER I awards were made, later plans would subsequently have been adjusted to include these projects. These findings are discussed within the context of survey responses on the relationship between TIGER I applicant projects and MPO documents; the projects and plans examined are listed in Appendix 4.

Findings

Characteristics of participating MPOs

Invitations were sent to all 385 MPOs, and the response rate for this analysis is 33 percent. Some respondents, however, as data below reflects, did not answer every questions. Participants represented a diverse mix of MPO staff size, national sub-region, and the size of population served. There was representation from locations across the country, as Table 1 displays.

Table 1: Participation by sub-national region (n=123)

Midwest--East North Central (Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin)	18
Midwest--West North Central (Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota)	12
Northeast--Middle Atlantic (New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania)	11
Northeast--New England (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont)	6
South--East South Central (Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee)	13
South-- Atlantic (Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia)	23
South--West South Central (Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, District of Columbia)	21
West--Mountain (Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, New Mexico, Montana, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming)	9
West--Pacific (Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington)	10

Approximately half of the participants worked for MPOs serving urbanized areas of less than 200,000 residents, while the smallest number of respondents were from the largest metro areas (greater than 1 million).

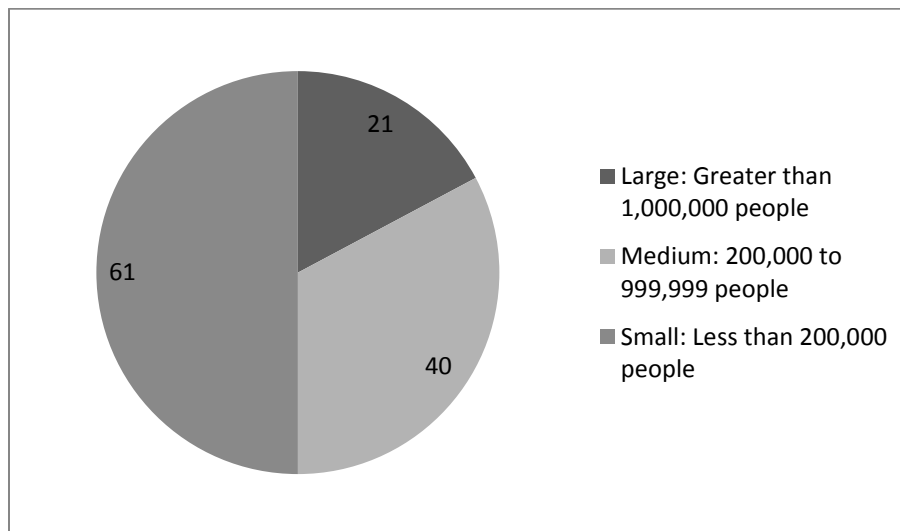


Figure 1: Urbanized area population for participating MPO (n=122)

Finally, while mean staff size was 14 (n=108), there was notable variation. The standard deviation from the mean was 35.6, and the median staff size was 4. Among the respondents serving areas of more than 1 million, staff size averaged 62.2, for medium metros 7.6, and for small metros 3.4.

MPO involvement in TIGER applications

MPO respondents reported that their agencies played a variety of roles in both the first and later rounds of TIGER funds seeking. The survey design allowed respondents to select multiple roles that the MPO played. A substantial plurality reported no involvement in TIGER applications in each time period, as seen in Table 2. In addition, 11 reported simply observing the TIGER process. In the first round of TIGER funding (2009), the most commonly reported involvement was that applications used MPO data, followed by formally advising project sponsors, and being a sponsor or co-sponsor. In the text box for “Other” involvement, some respondents reported writing letters of support or that a MPO board endorsed a project. In the second round, MPO co/sponsorship, formal and informal advising, as well as providing data, were all reported a substantial number of times. Still, a large share reported no involvement in TIGER applications.

Table 2: MPO roles in TIGER applications

	2009 (count)	2010-current (count)
Sponsor/Co-sponsor	26	29
Formally advised	29	30
Informally advised	18	23
Application used MPO data	34	26
Observed process	11	11
Other	4	4
Not involved	47	42
Total responses	169	165

Due to the substantial range of roles, especially the large share reporting no involvement, analysis by urbanized area size was conducted. The TIGER I responses showed substantial variance in roles by urbanized area size. As Table 3 reflects, MPOs serving medium and small urbanized areas more frequently reported not being involved.

Table 3: MPO roles in TIGER applications by urbanized area size

		Involvement by size (selected roles 2009)		
	Count	Sponsor/co-sponsor	MPO data used	Not involved
Large	21	38%	48%	10%
Medium	40	23%	18%	43%
Small	61	15%	26%	46%

To check the varied role vis-à-vis MPO capacity, variability in staff size was explored as a proxy in t tests for three roles (sponsorship, data provision, and not involved). The difference in capacity was statistically significant between MPOs who reported “not involved” and those MPOs which did not select that response. There was also a statistically significant difference in mean staff size (albeit at a lower confidence level) between those reporting or not reporting MPO data was used in TIGER I applications. The difference in mean staff size was not statistically significant for a sponsorship role. Results of t tests (conducted in MS Excel) for variance in means are reported in Appendix 3.

Table 4: Mean staff size for MPOs adopting selected roles in TIGER 1

	Mean staff size	
	Role applies	Not applicable
Sponsor/co-sponsor	17.6	10.0
Application used MPO data*	18.2	7.8
Not involved**	5.0	19.8

*Indicates statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence interval

**Indicates statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence interval

Selecting projects to submit for TIGER funds

Survey responses reflect a variety of top factors were behind the local selection of projects for applying for TIGER funds. Respondents were asked to identify up to three top factors, but on average selected fewer than two factors. Shovel readiness was the most commonly identified factor (n=40), but priority in MPO plans was close behind (n=39). As shown in Figure 2 below, a mix of other responses were common, such as elected officials, federal evaluation criteria, and business advocacy. Business advocacy may have been underreported, as four of the respondents indicating “other” advocacy efforts wrote in stakeholders who could be classified as business-related interests (economic development support, home builders association and downtown redevelopment). Results below reflect their responses and have not been recoded as business advocacy.

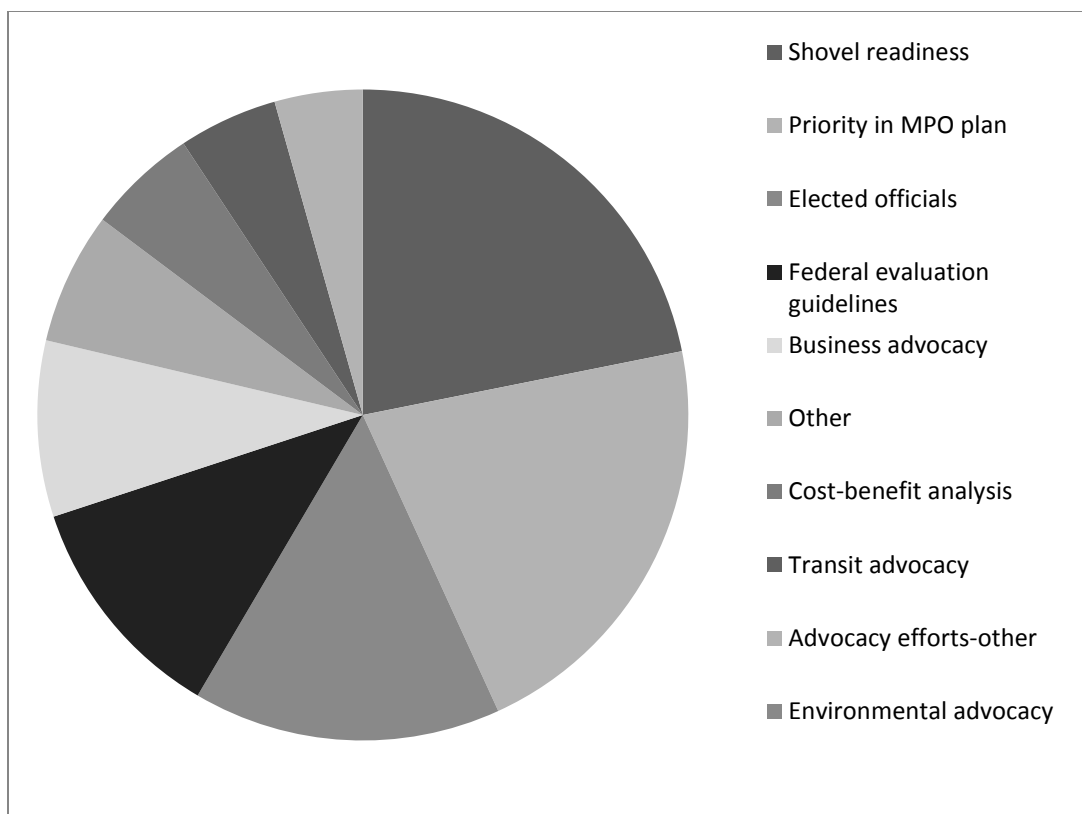


Figure 2: Top factors behind local project selection for TIGER I applications (2009)

Despite some changes in program rules from the first round of TIGER, respondents reported similar rationale for local selection of projects in subsequent TIGER funding rounds. In both time periods, shovel readiness was the most commonly reported rationale. In both time periods, the second and third most commonly reported factors were “Priority in MPO plan” and “Elected Officials”, although their relative positions changed. Figure 3 shows the number of times each factor was selected for both time periods (TIGER I-2009 and subsequent rounds).

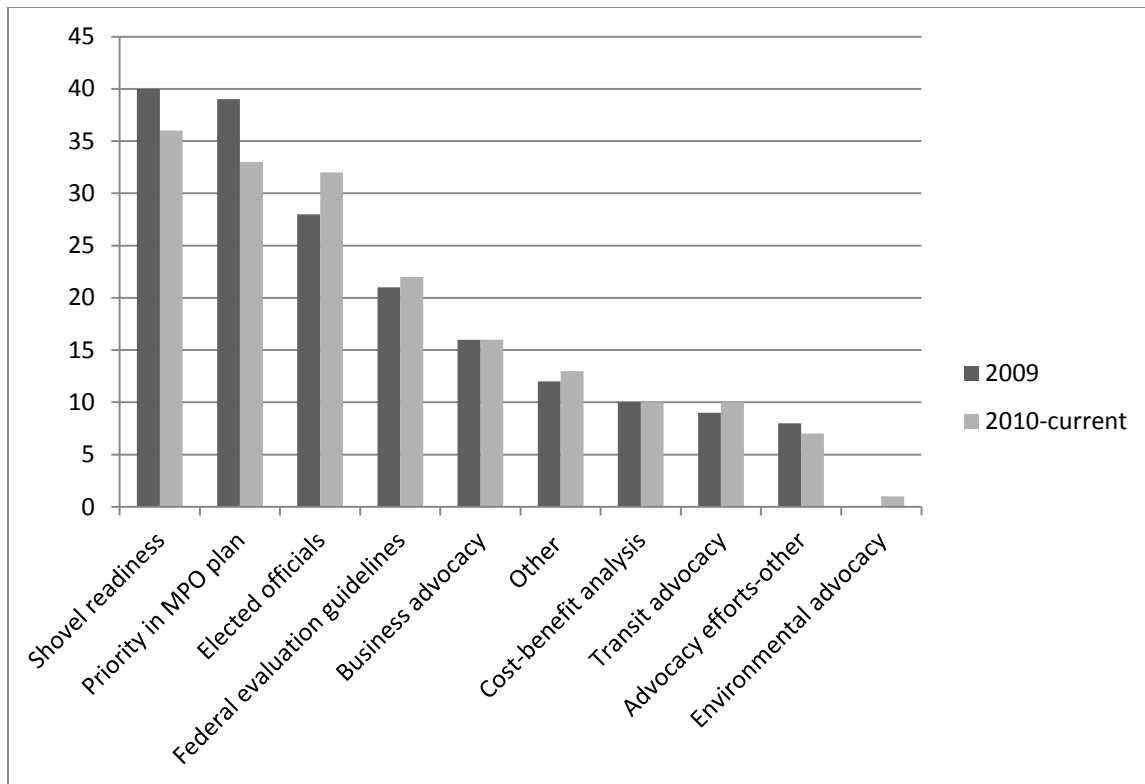


Figure 3: Frequency of reported top factors for local project selection in TIGER I and subsequent rounds

Sub-national screening out of “other” projects

Many potential candidate projects for federal funding never made it to the application stage during TIGER I. Approximately 21 percent of MPO respondents (n=24) reported that during the TIGER I round, there had been other projects locally considered for TIGER applications but that regional stakeholders had not pursued. Not surprisingly, respondents from larger urbanized areas (population of 1 million or more), more frequently reported (38%) additional projects had been considered but not pursued. A quarter of respondents in medium-sized areas reported additional projects that were not pursued, and in the smallest category, only 12 percent reported additional projects had been considered but not actually pursued. Interestingly, where there were other projects that were not pursued, MPOs much less frequently reported their role as “not involved” than the respondent base as a whole (approximately 13 percent versus 37 percent). This could be a factor of urbanized area size or tied to varied involvement by MPOs in regional convening when multiple projects were under consideration.

Seventeen respondents provided explanation of how projects were winnowed down among potential candidate projects. Three of the 17 reported concerns with applying itself—either a lack of staff capacity or the demands of the application. Other reasons for not pursuing an application included that a project was not shovel ready, did not have local matching funding, or did not align with explicit or expected evaluation criteria. In some regions, stakeholders agreed to limit the

number of projects pursued. Several mentioned something like a “regional consensus” to have a single, priority application for the region. Another noted that “[o]ther rail and highway projects considered [sic], but [region] went with top 3”. Of course, this does not reveal why a particular project became the project around which the regional stakeholders agreed to focus.¹

Relationships between TIGER projects and MPO planning documents

Survey

Most respondents reported that projects in TIGER applications had appeared in at least one MPO document. The survey specifically asked whether projects appeared in the federally required and fiscally constrained MPO short-range (TIP) and long-range plans (see above section “Federal rules and regional planning”). Most frequently, respondents reported that projects were those which appeared in illustrative project lists that were associated with long-range plans but *were not* part of fiscally constrained plans.² On the other hand, many TIGER projects were part of long-range plans and/or appeared in the near term, financially constrained 5-year TIP.

Table 5: TIGER applicant projects and MPO documents

TIGER applicant projects appeared in the following (n=112)	
Fiscally constrained short-range plan (TIP)	21
Fiscally constrained long-range plan	33
Long-range plan unfunded projects/illustrative projects	35
Other	5
None of the above	18

Five respondents indicated that the TIGER project appeared in “other” MPO documents. Three provided specifics: “Added to TIP after approval”; “TIP Illustrative list of unfunded projects”; and “MPO highway corridor study.”

Eighteen respondents reported that TIGER applicant projects were not in TIPs, fiscally constrained plans, long-range unfunded project lists, or other MPO documents. However, three of those respondents also reported that shovel readiness *and priority in MPO plan* were top factors in pursuing particular projects for TIGER awards. At first glance, these responses appear inconsistent—that

¹ On the other hand, sometimes there was less regional cooperation. One respondent reported in the comments field when explaining the MPO role vis-à-vis TIGER that “It was discussed at a Regional level, and members decided to 'go it alone' and not do a regional coordinated process”.

² As discussed earlier, federal rules require that MPOs produce 20-year metropolitan transportation plans that have a balanced budget of estimated revenues and project costs. In addition, some MPOs may release associated documents that list priority projects beyond expected revenues, often called illustrative projects.

priority in a plan could co-occur with a project not appearing in any MPO documents. However, it is unknown whether responses were selected in error or multiple projects were submitted in TIGER applications and corresponded with different responses. In these cases, a respondent may have indicated one project was selected for its priority in a MPO plan but another did not appear in any MPO documents. Similarly, 10 respondents indicated that projects were both in the *fiscally-constrained* long-range plan *and* a list of *unfunded*, illustrative projects associated with the fiscally constrained plan. This again could be due to respondent error or that across the region local agencies submitted multiple TIGER I applications. Regardless, projects that did not appear in MPO plans, like the responses more generally, showed a mix of key rationale behind local selection for TIGER application. Shovel readiness was the most commonly cited factor. These projects did more frequently co-occur with “other” as a key factor for local project selection, but not all respondents specified the factor in the associated text box, making a pattern difficult to discern.

Document review

Document review, which focused on TIGER I transit projects (n=8), also showed varied relationships between TIGER I awards and MPO documents. Among the eight transit projects which DOT selected for funding, only one project was identified as appearing in a TIP plan prior to TIGER I awards. Four were included in MPO long-range, fiscally constrained plans (see Appendix 4).

Discussion

Survey results reflect variability in transportation decision making processes and in the role of MPOs. The key factors behind local selection of TIGER projects were mixed, but shovel readiness continues to be dominant in the local selection of projects for TIGER applications. Given the stimulus goal of TIGER I, this is a logical criterion. Yet, the time-sensitive nature of TIGER I and continued emphasis on shovel readiness may mean timeliness, not long-term benefits, drive some decisions—both local screening and national awards.

The majority of respondents did not indicate that prioritization in the regional plan was a top factor for local selection of projects for TIGER funds seeking. Still, prioritization in a MPO plan was the second most common rationale for selecting a project for a TIGER application. In fact, some TIGER I applicant projects were highly prioritized in MPO documents and already had funds programmed for them, as evidenced by their inclusion in a TIP (short-range, fiscally constrained plan). A new funding source for these projects may have advanced the local funding queue more quickly, but some projects jumped in as they were not required to have *already* been in MPO plans.

Many TIGER project applications were for projects that did not appear in fiscally constrained 20-year plans; almost as many were part of these plans. It is understandable that some projects outside of fiscally constrained documents were funded, since long- and short-range plans are supposed to be fiscally constrained and TIGER funds did not exist when plans in place in 2009 were developed. Yet there also seems to be some tension with rules that require MPO planning and priority setting for major projects. Projects already in short-term plans could have been accelerated, and one would expect that projects in TIPs should have been most shovel ready (followed by those in fiscally constrained long-range plans). A small but still notable number of respondents reported that TIGER I applications were for projects that did not appear in MPOs documents, not even in documents that listed illustrative priority projects beyond the fiscally constrained project list. This raises questions about the extent of regional coordination across transportation agencies and the role of official regional planning processes.

The design and language of regional planning processes suggest that the highest priority projects are those that will be funded and programmed in MPO documents, leading to questions about why and how projects not in these documents would be federally funded. Yet, this simple interpretation overlooks the reality of how transportation dollars have restrictions on use (dependent on source) and are controlled by multiple agencies. Fiscally constrained plans reflect identified sources of funding, which typically have restrictions on purpose and are not typically centrally controlled by MPOs. Thus, pursuit of TIGER funds outside of the fiscally constrained project list could reflect the flexibility possible through TIGER funding—unlike most pots of money, almost many agencies could seek these funds and use them for multiple modes. This raises questions for further research—what role does and should a project's position in MPO planning and documents play in funding awards made by USDOT? How does control of and restrictions on funding shape the landscape for regional processes?

Findings further indicate an important role for capacity in TIGER applications and federal awards. As noted above, there was a statistically significant difference in the average staff size of MPOs that were or were not involved in local selection of TIGER applicant projects. Lower capacity MPOs were more likely to be uninvolved in TIGER applications. Certainly, larger capacity MPOs are more likely in large urbanized areas where federal rules call for additional planning oversight. Other types of capacity—specifically the influence held by elected officials, businesses or civic groups—may play a role in local selection of projects for which to pursue findings. Business advocacy and elected officials, for instance, were fairly frequently reported as a top factor behind local selection of projects. Findings at the national level, based on related research, show that metropolitan areas with more organized civic capacity had an increased likelihood of receiving TIGER I awards and that equity advocacy capacity might have been critical for equity-oriented TIGER I awards (Lowe, Reckhow & Gainsborough, 2013).

While findings suggest significant variability in regional processes and a potentially important role for capacity, this study had several limitations. First, respondents could not separate how different projects had different rationale or relationships to MPO plans due to the survey design. This, or respondent error, contributed to some response combinations that were difficult to interpret. Second, the factors discussed as rationale behind local TIGER selection are interrelated. In addition, while the response rate was reasonable for an online survey, the majority of MPOs did not have a participating staff member.

Conclusion

Federal funding programs, such as TIGER, can have multiple goals. In the case of TIGER I, stimulating the economy through shovel-ready projects and generating transportation benefits were complementary goals for federal spending. The TIGER program differs from most federal transportation spending, as it is distributed through competition while most federal transportation funds are distributed through formulae based on factors like population.

The time line for the first round of TIGER funding meant that sub-national stakeholders had to quickly identify projects of regional or national significance. Presumably, such critical projects would have already been identified by the federally required metropolitan planning organizations that serve urbanized areas. The design of the federal program allowed for more flexibility in funding use but also required shovel readiness, which may not have aligned with the required long- and short-range planning processes MPOs are required to lead.

To better understand the relationship between federal funding programs and planning rules, this research examined the role of MPOs and their planning documents in TIGER funds seeking. While emphasizing the first round, the associated survey questions also included information on subsequent TIGER rounds.

The role that MPOs played for TIGER candidate projects was highly varied. While some were local project sponsors and others advised or provided data, a sizable share of MPOs reported no role in the selection or pursuit of projects that were presumably of regional significance. MPO capacity and urbanized area size showed some relationship with how active a role an MPO played in regional/local TIGER project selection. Some MPOs reported that candidate projects appeared in fiscally constrained plans—even as TIGER funds would not have been available at the time of plan making—or that MPO plan priorities were behind project selection. Some projects had never been identified in MPO plans, seeming to conflict with the design and language of regional planning processes.

The most commonly reported key factor behind local TIGER project selection was shovel readiness. This raises questions about whether the readiest rather than most beneficial projects were funded. However, a range of other factors were reported, showing a variety of rationale behind local TIGER project selection. One factor behind some projects being de-prioritized for TIGER funds was a regional goal of unifying around one or a few projects, rather than many applications going forward from the same region.

Results are not definitive but have potential lessons and indicate questions for future research. MPO capacity appears to differ significantly and correlate with the roles that MPOs play. While there are already different rules dependent on Transportation Management Area status (urbanized areas over 200,000 in population), further differentiation of MPO roles and expectations may be appropriate. Second, federal funding programs can complicate adherence to planning rules. Pursuit of some awards may deviate from MPO-stated project priorities which are already shaped by existing funding and agency fragmentation, as well as federal rules. New programs, especially those with short time

lines, may obscure the process for joint decision making and trigger tension between timely action and democratic processes, similar to what Nelson, Ehrenfeucht, and Laska (2007) describe in Post-Katrina New Orleans. Results on MPO roles and the relationship between plans and candidate projects suggests that MPO planning processes are not always the key decision sites as language in planning documents seems to present them. MPOs can be important for convening stakeholders or even directly sponsoring projects. Regardless, capacity within and across regions may impact the administration of federal awards in ways that are insufficiently accounted for in their design.

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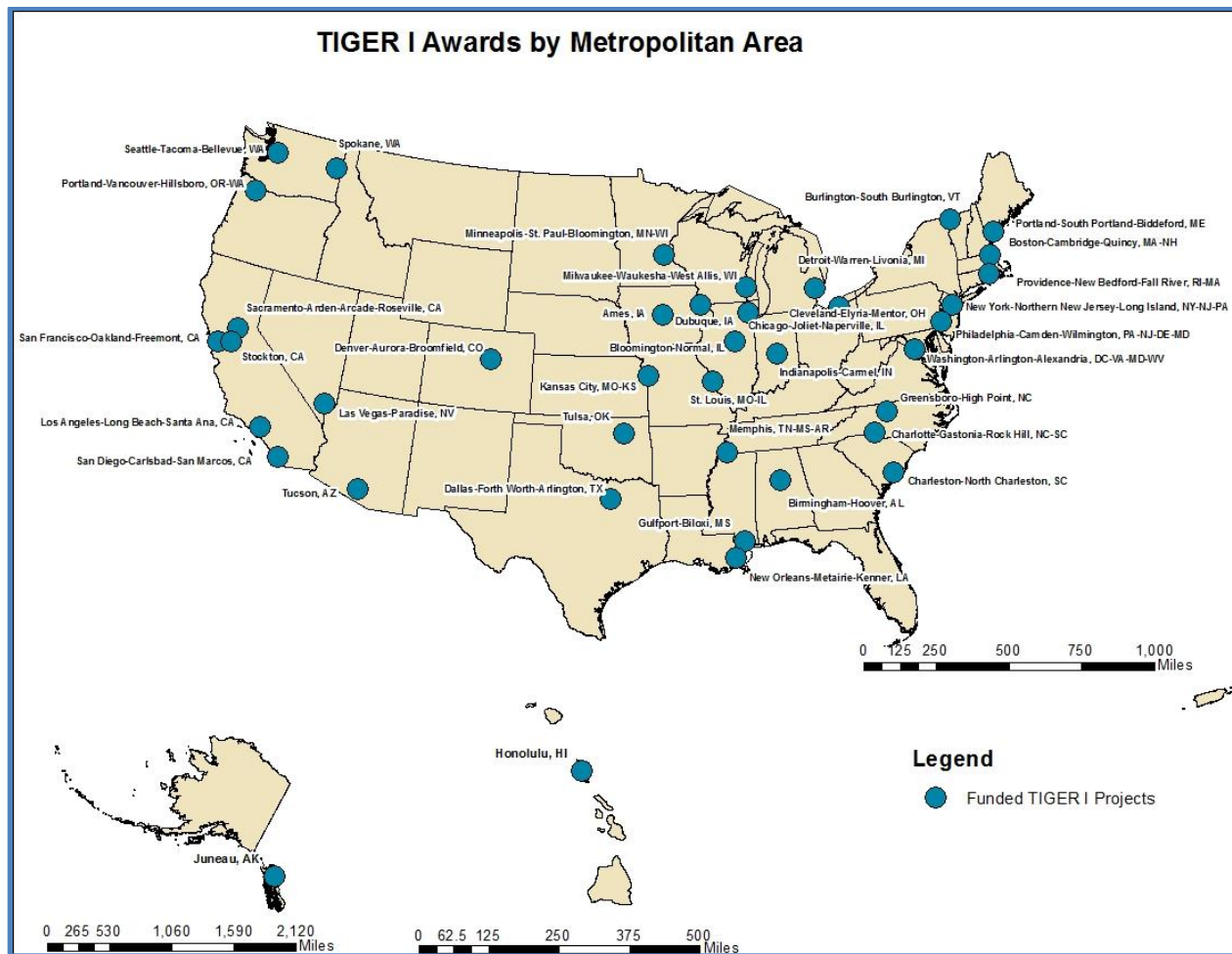
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Appendix 1: TIGER I (2009) Projects



Map created by Azeen Khanmalek.

Appendix 2: Survey questions

[TIGER survey questions were administered as part of a larger MPO-targeted survey.]

TIGER Grants Round 1 - 2009.

Questions in this section focus exclusively on the first round of TIGER grants in 2009. For these questions please only consider your organization's experience from the first TIGER program.

1. In 2009, how was your MPO involved in efforts to apply for one or more grants from the new TIGER program? If there were more than one application, please specify the number of projects.
 - i. Sponsor/co-sponsor Number ____
 - ii. Formally advised Number ____
 - iii. Informally advised Number ____
 - iv. Application used MPO data Number ____
 - v. Observed process Number ____
 - vi. Other Number ____
 - vii. Not involved Number ____

2. Please indicate which of the following were sponsors or co-sponsors for TIGER applications.

(select all that apply):

- MPO
- Transit agency
- State DOT
- Municipal
- County
- Economic development organization
- Other (please specify) _____

3. Did your region submit a ***freight transportation*** TIGER I proposal? Yes/no

If so, what stakeholders were key supporters for that project? (Organization(s) and / or individuals)

4. In your metropolitan region, were there other proposals for TIGER I funds that were explored but not submitted to DOT for funding? (yes/no)

If yes, please describe the project(s) and why, in your opinion, the proposal did not go forward.

5. What were the three most important factors in determining which projects were locally selected to seek for TIGER I funding? (select up to three)

- Shovel-readiness

- Priority in MPO plan
- Business advocacy
- Environmental advocacy
- Transit advocacy
- Other advocacy, please specify_____ -
- Cost-benefit analysis
- Federal evaluation guidelines
- Elected officials
- Other (please specify)
- Other (please specify)

6. Were projects TIGER I applications (funded or unfunded) in your MPO's following documents?
(select all that apply)

- TIP
- Fiscally constrained long range plan
- Long range plan unfunded projects list
- None of the above

TIGER Grants Round 2 and beyond (2010-current)

7. Since the first TIGER round, how has your agency been involved in efforts to apply for one or more grants from the TIGER program? If there were more than one application, please specify the number of projects.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------|
| i. Sponsor/co-sponsor | Number_____ |
| ii. Formally advised | Number_____ |
| iii. Informally advised | Number_____ |
| iv. Application used MPO data | Number_____ |
| v. Observed process | Number_____ |
| vi. Other | Number_____ |
| vii. Not involved | Number_____ |

8. What have been the three most important factors in determining which projects are locally selected for seeking subsequent TIGER funding rounds? (select up to three)

- Shovel-readiness
- Priority in MPO plan
- Business advocacy
- Environmental advocacy
- Transit advocacy
- Other advocacy, please specify_____ -
- Cost-benefit analysis
- Federal evaluation guidelines
- Elected officials
- Other (please specify)

Appendix 3: T-test results (Two-sample assuming unequal variances in MS Excel)

Sponsorship (not significantly different means; .05 alpha)

	<i>sponsor</i>	<i>not</i>
[Staff size] Mean	17.625	9.982558
Variance	1079.444	372.8968
Observations	20	86
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	22	
t Stat	1.000846	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.163892	
t Critical one-tail	1.717144	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.327783	
t Critical two-tail	2.073873	

Involvement (Statistically significant, results show .05 alpha)

	<i>not involved</i>	<i>[not not] involved</i>
[Staff size] Mean	4.95122	19.78462
Variance	17.54756	2021.164
Observations	41	65
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	66	
t Stat	-2.64197	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.005141	
t Critical one-tail	1.668271	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.010282	
t Critical two-tail	1.996564	

Application used MPO data (critical values reflect .1 alpha; statistically significant)

	<i>Used data</i>	<i>Data not used</i>
Mean	18.18519	7.759494
Variance	1063.753	173.7747
Observations	27	79
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	29	
t Stat	1.616475	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.05841	
t Critical one-tail	1.311434	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.11682	
t Critical two-tail	1.699127	

Appendix 4: Document review: Transit projects funded in TIGER I

City	Project	Funding	Total Estimated Cost	Planned Before TIGER ?	Prioritized Before TIGER? ³	In TIP	In RTP?	Illustrative projects	Other Document
Washington D.C.	Infrastructure Improvement for BRT	\$58,838,000	\$83,008,000	No	No	No	No	-	-
Detroit	M-1/Woodward Avenue Light Rail	\$25,000,000	\$143,000,000	Yes	No	NA	Yes	-	“Improving Transit in Southeastern Michigan”
Dallas	Downtown Dallas Streetcar	\$23,000,000	\$58,000,000	Yes	No	NA ⁴	No	-	Dart 2030 Transit Plan; 2007 Streetcar Study
Denver	U.S. 36 BRT	\$10,000,000 + future direct loans	\$260,000,000	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	-	EIS
Tucson	Tucson Streetcar	\$63,000,000	\$150,100,000	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	-	“City of Tucson Major Transit Investment Study”
Las Vegas	Sahara Avenue BRT	\$34,400,000	\$45,156,000	No	No	-	-	-	-
New Orleans	Loyola-UPT Streetcar	\$45,000,000	\$45,000,000	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	-
Fitchburg, MA	MBTA Commuter Rail Extension	\$55,500,000	\$72,200,000	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (2030)	-	-

³ Planned indicates project appeared in any planning document, not necessarily with any funding attached. “Prioritized” indicates a project appeared in a financially constrained RTP or TIP or alternatively has a recently published EIS (2011 or before).

⁴ Not available online.

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