



**Urban
Transportation
Center**

**THE URBAN TRANSPORTATION CENTER
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT
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Regional Rural Transportation Planning and the Role of the Rural Planning Organizations

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Prepared By

The Urban Transportation Center at UIC
P.S. Sriraj, PhD; Paul Metaxatos, PhD, Pietro Buffoni, PhD Candidate, &
Brian Larson, MUPP Candidate

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this research is to identify Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) in the State of Illinois and current practices in rural transportation planning. The research will inform IDOT on the functioning of these organizations, their sources of funding and identify gaps and redundancies in the state.

The objective of this research is twofold:

First, it investigated current practices in Illinois, with an in-depth analysis of roles, activities, funding, and coordination mechanisms between RPOs and IDOT within the state. It focused on methods used to facilitate RPO inclusion in the planning process, especially for areas without representation, and methods to foster the rural programs development process.

Second, the research explored existing coordination methods and rural planning organization practices in other states, to propose recommendations from case studies where rural planning process has been consistently incorporated into transportation planning at the DOT level. For this second aspect the study included a survey with rural planning managers from state DOTs.

To reach these goals, we agreed with IDOT to:

- Conduct a review of Rural Planning Organizations in Illinois (including Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs), Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs), and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) that carry out rural transportation planning activities).
- Compile a list and create maps of existing organizations to identify gaps and redundancies.
- Compile a literature review exploring if and how coordination at different governance levels can be beneficial to planning processes.
- Conduct two surveys:
 1. With Illinois RPOs: to identify funding sources, typical structure, and their current relationship and coordination with state planning activities.
 2. With DOTs nationwide: to explore the role of RPOs in other states and the relationship with local DOT.
- Conduct a descriptive analysis of the survey results.
- Create a framework to evaluate the effectiveness of coordination between RPOs and DOTs for rural transportation planning.
- Provide recommendations about the main needs and current issues for RPO – DOT coordination.

Overview of RPOs and legislation

The research builds upon the 2016 report by the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO), where an RPO's role and coordination with state DOTs is investigated nationally, highlighting different models and frameworks of inclusion in state planning. RPOs are generally defined as a voluntary association of local governments that plan rural transportation systems and advise each state's DOT on rural transportation policy (Overman et al., 2010). The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Act (P.L. 112-141) introduces for the first time a definition of an RTPO as "an organization that identifies local transportation needs, conducts planning, assists local governments, and supports the statewide transportation planning process in nonmetropolitan regions of a State (with less than 50,000 population)".

Currently, federal legislation recognizes RTPOs and directs states to coordinate with existing local bodies in charge of rural planning. In this context, we use the term RPO to include RTPOs, RPCs, and MPOs that carry out rural transportation planning activities. Given the voluntary nature of such organizations, there is high variability of roles and structures in the nation. The main tasks these organizations carry out include the collaboration in the statewide transportation planning process, identification of local transportation needs, enhancing public participation in non-metropolitan areas, fostering participation of local representatives, and providing recommendations regarding the Long-Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs) and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) (NADO, 2016). Main sources of funding are the FHWA Statewide Planning and Research (SP&R), the FTA Section 5304 and Section 5311 programs, and the FHWA Surface Transportation Program.

Survey Takeaways

Table 1: Number of Recipients of the web survey instruments. Number of Responsive and Non-Responsive

	Number of Recipients	Number of Respondents	Number of Non-Respondents	Response rate
Illinois RPO Survey	31	22	9	71%
State DOT Survey	47	29	18	59%

Illinois survey non-respondents appear to serve areas that, on average, are more rural, lower populated, less dense, and with greater rural highway mileage whereas responding agencies appear to serve smaller geographic areas that are more urban.

State DOTs that responded to the national survey represented slightly more rural states, with higher rural population shares, higher institutional fragmentation (more counties as well as more rural counties), and larger rural areas.

Takeaways from Both Survey Groups

Both Illinois RPOs and state DOTs defined RPOs in a similar way, believing them to be locally-focused organizations responsible for the identification of local needs that assist local bodies of government and organizations that foster public participation and provide a forum for representation of non-metropolitan areas. Most state DOTs also considered RPOs to be multijurisdictional organizations promoting collaboration between local and state governments.

Takeaways from Illinois Survey

The greatest gap in rural transportation planning occurs in Central Illinois, particularly Menard, Logan, Mason, and DeWitt counties. All four counties lack a centralized planning agency that covers any part of the county. This results in an emphasis on HSTP support to ensure planning services are provided to these more remote counties.

Most RPOs have insufficient staff and technical expertise to facilitate coordination. This leads to problems accessing both state and federal funding. One respondent summarized this need, stating they would like coordination from IDOT staff “with the local agencies to walk them through the application process and how to navigate the federal funding process.”

IDOT’s interactions with RPOs are limited. This may lead to the above difficulty accessing IDOT funding sources. One respondent suggested improving communications by starting with “[quarterly] meetings between the RPOs and [IDOT] district offices facilitated by the state/central office” (Urban Transportation Center Survey, 2022).

Direct outreach offering rural planning funding application assistance provides an opportunity to stretch limited rural planning budgets and educate more RPOs about this successful funding program. It may also help smaller organizations identify projects previously thought ineligible.

Despite funding being a major concern by most RPOs, the IDOT Fall Conference focused on statewide practices and technical training, not funding options and how to acquire funding. However, attendees also preferred practices and training available through the Fall Conference, so whether the Conference requires modification is uncertain.

Takeaways from State DOTs Survey

Most DOT representatives believe rural planning is well integrated in DOT activities, focusing on direct funding support, regular communication, and discussion of local needs. Most DOTs also had monthly or more frequent interactions with RPOs. However, DOTs also infrequently communicated with their peer DOTs in other states.

DOT personnel perceive the most important factor hindering coordination is a lack of time and/or staff. Most state DOTs indicated that part of their activity is to support RPOs securing funding for rural transportation projects or to help secure federal funding, with most providing a dedicated rural transportation funding stream. Rural transportation planning therefore appears to be heavily reliant on state funding programs, which need to be well-designed and properly directed to the existing actors.

This need for state funding appears to be the greatest challenge, where a lack of funding sources is the most critical need for state RPOs, followed closely by a lack of personnel or expertise for rural transportation planning needs.

1. DEFINITION OF RURAL PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS

The definition of Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) poses several challenges stemming from the fact that there is no specific and agreed upon definition in the legislation to delimitate the institutional boundaries of such organizations. In the following sections we will review some of the main themes that would help clarify the concept of RPOs. We will discuss: the debate on the concept of *rural* and its numerous definitions; the development of these entities through the history of legislation on transportation planning; the characteristics of RPOs nowadays, and the different names and forms they can have; the role RPOs typically carry out and the main sources of funding they receive.

1.1. Defining rural

One crucial aspect in the definition of rural planning, and to identify organizations operating in this domain, is the delimitation of rural areas. In the US, several actors define rural in different ways. The US Department of Health and Human Services provides a comparative scheme to help clarify this distinction between urban and rural areas¹. This information page has the objective of providing guidance and assist stakeholders, grantees, researchers, and policymakers to deal with topics of interest concerning rural population and rural areas.

At the federal level, there are two main recognized definitions of rural, but many other alternatives are available when looking at different institutions. First, the US Census Bureau definition classifies two types of urban areas: Urbanized Areas (UA), consisting of geographical areas of 50,000 people or more; and Urban Clusters (UC), which include areas between 2,500 and 50,000 people. Rural areas instead are not directly defined but they are identified by the exclusion of UA and UC. According to the US Census Bureau, any area and population that is not included in Urbanized Areas and Urban Clusters, is considered rural². Consequently, this definition does not follow institutional boundaries of cities or counties and can sometimes lead to difficulty determining rural areas. As of 2010, almost 60 million people (or 19.3% of the population) was considered rural, living in an area classified

¹ Source: Defining Rural Population, Guidance portal of the Department of Health and Human Services: <https://www.hhs.gov/guidance/document/defining-rural-population>. Accessed on Sep 09th 2022.

² Urban and Rural, US Census Bureau website: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural.html>

as rural, which is 95% of all US land area³. In the context of Illinois, most organizations in the rural planning domain consider as defining criteria for their area of operation the US Census Urbanized Areas definition (more details can be found in the UTC survey results section in Chapter 0).

Second, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) defines rural areas using the following county designations: (a) Metropolitan: counties containing a core urban area of at least 50,000 people; (b) Micropolitan: counties with an urban core of at least 10,000 people; or (c) Neither metropolitan or micropolitan: any county that is excluded from the previous two categories.⁴ Moreover, all counties that are not part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) are considered rural. Counties that are classified as micropolitan (b), and counties that are not classified as either micropolitan or metropolitan (c), are considered non-Metropolitan or rural. Under this definition, in 2010, the non-metropolitan counties contained 46.2 million people (15% of the total US population), over a land area of 72% of the total area.⁴ Both the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. OMB definitions have limitations. The U.S. Census Bureau standard tends to sometimes include an overcount of the rural population as it often classifies suburban areas as rural. On the contrary, the U.S. OMB standard can sometimes represent an undercount of rural population when it includes rural areas within metropolitan counties.³

In an attempt to overcome these limitations the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP) proposed a definition that uses a mix of the previous two definitions when classifying a geographic region.³ Specifically, it includes in the definition of rural all non-metropolitan counties, and it determines additional rural population based on the method of Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) codes. In this approach, census tracts are assigned a code to determine the rural nature of the population living in it. This enables identification of rural census tracts within Metropolitan counties (through codes 4 to 10). Moreover, particularly large census tracts, with low rural population density (more than 400 sq mi, with less than 35 people), are also classified as rural. The FORHP definition identifies rural area covering 84% of land area in the USA, which include approximately 57 million people (18% of the population) in 2010.³

³ HRSA website, Defining Rural Population. <https://www.hrsa.gov/rural-health/about-us/what-is-rural>. Accessed on October 1st 2022.

⁴ More detail on the OMB dedicated page: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/metro-micro.html>
Delineation of Metro and non-Metro areas: <https://www.census.gov/geographies/reference-files/time-series/demo/metro-micro/delineation-files.html>

1.2. RPO legislation summary

The emergence of rural transportation planning throughout the years and the implementation of several regulations on transportation planning has little by little clarified the definition, role, and characteristics of a Rural Planning Organization. However, significant inconsistencies remain across states, which have individually developed a network of rural planning services to different extents of coordination and through different organizations. Today, at a national level, federal legislation recognizes RPOs and directs states to coordinate with existing RPOs and local officials for statewide transportation planning. This recognition has emerged in several federal transportation bills, which are multi-year funding bills used to regulate surface transportation programs in the United States. This includes relevant indicators on the definition, formation process, requirements, funding sources, and role of RPOs. To date, the establishment of RPOs is still not required, but voluntary. Table 2 summarizes the major developments in the emergence of rural transportation planning organizations in the federal legislation.

The 1962 Federal-Aid Highway Act officially instituted Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) as forums for cooperative transportation decision-making for the metropolitan planning area (Black, 1963). This federal legislation created the requirement for urban transportation planning, applicable to urban areas of more than 50,000 in population. The MPOs were conceived as the organizations through which local officials in urbanized areas must act to carry out metropolitan planning. However, the only reference to non-urbanized areas was the generic direction of cooperation that states were to implement with local and regional officials. Direct references to the organization and coordination with rural transportation planning organizations emerged in the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991. Local governments were encouraged to foster consultation with local planning organizations to include rural transportation needs in their planning efforts. At that time there were no specific requirements for the form and frequency of such consultations⁵. More recently, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) reinforced the role of rural local officials in statewide planning and introduced federal requirements concerning the support to existing regional planning organizations by the states. Moreover, TEA-21 encouraged and improved public involvement in the planning

⁵ Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), 1991. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/house-bill/2950>

processes.⁶ As a consequence, rural transportation programs were set up around the nation, with the involvement of state DOTs and local MPOs serving rural areas as well (NADO, 2016). In 2003, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) finalized a rule to guide a consultation process between state transportation officials and nonmetropolitan local officials.⁷ This rule formally required a consultation process with local elected officials with jurisdiction over transportation, in order to identify transportation needs of non-metropolitan areas. The 2005 Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) significantly expanded these consultation requirements and introduced the recommendation for the formal institution of rural planning organizations as stakeholders to the statewide planning process⁸.

Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) were first formally defined in federal legislation by the MAP-21 act.⁹ They were defined as organizations that identify local transportation needs, conduct planning, assist local governments, and support the statewide transportation planning process in nonmetropolitan regions of a state. This legislation defined the role, tasks, and institutional structures of these organizations. Previously, rural planning organizations did not have any required standard or harmonized role across states. They typically conducted consultations with local officials and aided the DOT with statewide planning in nonmetropolitan areas. With MAP-21, RTPOs are to be designated by the state DOT, and each RTPO has to establish a policy committee composed by a majority of local officials; establish a committee, or be associated with an organization that would manage administrative and fiscal responsibilities; contribute to the development of regional long-range transportation plans with regards to rural areas; assist requests for creation of short-range transportation improvement programs for rural areas; and promote and assist local governments with public participation initiatives and coordination with other local transportation organizations.

⁶ Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), 1998. <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/tea21/index.htm>

⁷ FHWA and FTA rule to guide consultation process between state transportation officials and nonmetropolitan local officials, 2003. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2003-01-23/html/03-1319.htm>

⁸ Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), 2005. <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu/>

⁹ Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), 2012. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/112th-congress/house-bill/4348/text>

In 2015 the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act¹⁰ the role of local organizations in statewide planning was elevated, reinforcing the requirements for states to cooperate (rather than consult, as stated in previous legislation) with local officials or with the established RTPO. Moreover, this act introduced the requirement for performance-based evaluation of rural transportation planning practices.

Table 2: The emergence of rural transportation planning in the federal legislation

Year	Act	Definition	Role	Funding allocation programs	Consultation with local officials		Creation of RPOs		Performance-based approach	
					Rec. ¹¹	Req. ¹¹	Rec.	Req.	Rec.	Req.
1991	ISTEA	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x
1998	TEA-21	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x
2003	FHWA and FTA rule	x	x	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x
2005	SAFETEA-LU	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x
2012	MAP-21	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	x
2015	FAST	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓

1.3. Different forms of Rural Planning Organizations

The federal legislation described above (Table 2) has led to the coexistence of several layers of organizations operating in the domain of rural transportation planning. Table 3 summarizes the characteristics of the existing types of organizations that are operating in the rural transportation planning domain, identified by the research team in different states, and specifically in Illinois.

¹⁰ Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, 2015. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/22/text>

¹¹ Rec.: Recommended, Req.: Required

Table 3: Definition of the different organization types operating in the rural transportation planning domain

Organization	Acronym	Definition	Reference
Regional Transportation Planning Organization	RTPO	A Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) is an organization that identifies local transportation needs, conducts planning, assists local governments, and supports the statewide transportation planning process in nonmetropolitan regions of a State (<50,000).	2012, MAP-21
Rural Planning Organization	RPO	RPOs are generally defined as a voluntary association of local governments that plans rural transportation systems and advises each state’s DOT on rural transportation policy.	2010, Overman et al.
Metropolitan Planning Organization	MPO	A Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is an agency created by federal law to carry out the metropolitan transportation planning process. MPOs are required to represent localities in all urbanized areas (UZAs) with populations over 50,000, as determined by the U.S. Census. MPOs must plan for regional transportation planning expenditures and are responsible for the continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process for their urbanized area.	1962, Federal-Aid Highway Act
Human Service Transportation Plan	HSTP	Development of a Human Services Transportation Plan was first required with the intent of identifying transportation needs and solutions and thereby improving transportation services for people with disabilities, seniors, youth, individuals with lower incomes and those in rural locations who cannot provide transportation for themselves.	2005, SAFETEA-LU
Regional Planning Commissions	RPC	Multi-service entity with state- and locally-defined boundaries that delivers a variety of federal, state, and local programs while carrying out its function of provider of planning services, technical assistance, and consulting services to its member local governments. <i>Also referred to as: Regional Planning Councils, Regional Commissions, Planning Districts, or Council of Governments.</i>	NARC website ¹²
Regional Planning Councils (Illinois)	RPC	Regional councils are voluntary multi-service entities formed under Illinois law by counties and municipalities to serve local government planning needs. The primary function of a regional council is to study the needs and conditions of a region and to develop strategies which enhance the region's communities.	ILARC ¹³
Illinois Association of Regional Councils (Illinois)	ILARC	The Illinois Association of Regional Councils (ILARC) serves as the recognized organization in Illinois representing regional planning agencies at the state and national levels. It is a not-for-profit organization that promotes and defends the interests and activities of regional councils of government (COGs).	ILARC ¹³

¹² NARC Website, What is a Regional Council, COG, or MPO? <https://narc.org/about/what-is-a-cog-or-mpo/>

¹³ ILARC Website, <https://ilarconline.org/>

Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs). As described above, RTPOs are defined in MAP-21 as state-recognized organizations that identify local transportation needs, conduct planning, assist local governments, and support the statewide transportation planning process in nonmetropolitan regions of a state (areas with less than 50,000 people)⁹. Under this definition states have guidance over RTPOs. The recognition of these organizations by the state government is necessary to their establishment.

Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs). An RPO is defined as a “voluntary association of local governments that plans rural transportation systems and advises each state’s DOT on rural transportation policy” (Overman et al., 2010). This is a general definition that tends to include a variety of different types of organizations, matching the regulatory uncertainty of rural planning. The emphasis is on their voluntary nature, since there is no federal legislation requiring states to create RPOs. The role of these organizations is broad and can vary significantly state by state.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). An MPO is an agency regulated by federal law to guarantee the participation of local elected officials in planning and implementing federal funds for metropolitan areas (urbanized areas, with populations over 50,000, as determined by the U.S. Census¹⁴). Since the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962, formation of MPOs is federally mandated. They are required to plan for regional transportation planning and are responsible for the continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process for their urbanized areas. Federal highway and transit projects are to be planned and implemented with the participation of MPOs. Since the 1990s, the role of these organizations has grown, as they are responsible for programming and approving expenditures of federal funds for the Long-Range Transportation Program (LRTP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Additional funding resources have been directed to MPOs through several transportation bills, including the ISTEA, TEA-21, SAFETEA-LU, MAP-21, and FAST acts.¹⁵

Human Service Transportation Plans (HSTPs). HSTPs are organizations created to comply with federal legislation (2005, SAFETEA-LU) that requires the coordination of projects selected for funding under the Enhanced Mobility

¹⁴ FTA, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). <https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/transportation-planning/metropolitan-planning-organization-mpo>. Accessed on September, 30th, 2022.

¹⁵ National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) website: <https://narc.org/about/what-is-a-cog-or-mpo/>. Accessed on October 3rd, 2022.

for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310) Program¹⁶. Their purpose is to collect and coordinate the participation of local seniors, individuals with disabilities, public representatives, and private and nonprofit transportation and human services providers in identifying local transportation needs and designing strategies to include and prioritize such needs into transportation services planning and implementation.

Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs). Regional Planning Commissions also go by different terms in different states, such as Regional Planning Councils, Regional Commissions, Planning Districts, or Council of Governments (in Illinois, they are called Regional Planning Councils). These terms are generally interchangeable, and they refer to “a multi-service entity with state- and locally-defined boundaries that delivers a variety of federal, state, and local programs while carrying out its function as a planning organization, technical assistance provider, and ‘visionary’ to its member local governments”.¹⁵ These organizations are accountable to local units of government. Their work includes building consensus, creating partnerships, and providing services and fiscal management support. The specific roles of these organizations can vary broadly in different states, but the main functions they carry out include programs on comprehensive planning and transportation planning, economic development, workforce development, environmental planning, and ADA services. Research from the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) indicates that 35,000 of the 39,000 local government organizations, such as counties, cities, townships, towns, villages, boroughs, are served by some form of RPC.¹⁵

Rural Planning Organizations in this study (from now on referred to as RPOs) identify any organization that carries out rural transportation planning activities and collaborate, directly or indirectly, with the state Department of Transportation to define rural transportation policy. Within this categorization, we include both voluntary as well as state-constituted organizations. This definition therefore applies to multiple types of organizations, such as RTPOs, MPOs, or RPCs, that share these functions. This meshes with the purpose of this research, in order to investigate any organizations active in the rural transportation planning domain, focusing on their coordination with the central DOT.

¹⁶ FTA, Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plans. <https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/coordinated-public-transit-human-services-transportation-plans>. Accessed on September 30th, 2022.

1.4. Role of RPOs

The guidelines provided by the described legislation, as well as research conducted by the NADO Research Foundation (NADO, 2016), and by staff of the Federal Highway Commission Technical Oversight Working Group¹⁷, help outline the responsibilities and capabilities of RPOs and their role in rural transportation planning.¹⁸ They can be grouped in the following aspects:

- Support to the statewide planning process.

RPOs conduct duties to enhance statewide transportation planning, and to provide uniformity with insights for planning in rural regions of the state. They cooperate on the development of the Statewide Transportation Plan and can be consulted to support the definition of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program with regards to rural areas of the state. Some RPOs (specifically, those constituted as RTPOs) also produce Long-Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs) and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) of their own, similarly to MPOs. Moreover they can be part of the planning process for the Surface Transportation Program (STP) and Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), two federal funding programs that may require the contribution of RPOs to provide support for rural areas. While it can be a significant challenge for state DOTs to coordinate with many small jurisdictions, RPOs can be considered as their *boots on the ground* to provide services and coordination to member agencies, state, and local officials.

- Local focus, identification of local needs, and promotion of participation.

Ensuring the local input for nonmetropolitan planning into statewide transportation planning involves the identification of the local needs. This is especially done by promoting participation at the local level. In fact, one of the main tasks of RPOs is providing a forum for public participation, involving local officials, as well as citizens, and transportation organizations, to collaborate at the identification of needs for the rural region, and to identify regional issues and priorities with the engagement of diverse stakeholders, in addition to local governments. The local focus of RPOs is also in fostering the coordination between different actors of

¹⁷ US FHWA Website, Technical report on Integrating Safety in the Rural Transportation Planning Process. https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/local_rural/training/fhwasa14102/. Accessed on September 27th.

¹⁸ FHWA and FTA Regional Transportation Planning Organization Fact Sheet Series. https://www.planning.dot.gov/documents/RTPO_factsheet_master.pdf. Accessed on October 3rd, 2022. For more information go to: www.planning.dot.gov/focus_rural.asp and www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/processes/rural

local planning, community, and economic development, with transportation plans and operators at the state, regional, and local levels. This can be facilitated by the engagement of RPOs in frequent conversations with decision-makers, local stakeholders, and local officials through policy committee meetings about the issues and opportunities that emerge from the community.

- Technical assistance to local entities.

RPOs usually have experience in supporting long-range planning processes as well as other regional and local planning efforts. For this reason, their staff is involved in many different aspects of transportation network planning, such as local land use planning, economic and workforce development. This expertise allows to provide useful insights to local entities for their planning efforts. Moreover, RPO staff are usually planners and geographic information system (GIS) professionals. As a result, these organizations typically have access to data, as well as to technical capabilities, mapping skills, and technology. Their collaboration with local government entities can therefore prove crucial in assisting them on some technical aspects of the planning process.

1.5. Funding overview

RPOs can access funding from different sources. As explored in the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) report in 2016, many existing RPOs around the nation are supported in their operations by the respective state Department of Transportation (DOT), through the establishment of dedicated streams of funding for rural planning efforts (NADO, 2016). FHWA Statewide Planning and Research (SP&R) and FHWA Surface Transportation Program funding can be used to support RPOs. Moreover, RPO can access FTA Section 5304 program funds (Metropolitan & Statewide Planning and Nonmetropolitan Transportation Planning)¹⁹ and FTA Section 5311 funding (Formula Grants for Rural Areas)²⁰. These sources of federal funds typically require a local match, which is often in the amount of 20% of the available funding (though in some cases the requirements can be higher, typically for operating assistance projects, where the local match share is set at 50%).²¹

¹⁹ Legislation reference: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2008-title49/pdf/USCODE-2008-title49-subtitleIII-chap53-sec5304.pdf>. Accessed on September, 30th, 2022.

²⁰ FTA website, Formula Grants for Rural Areas – 5311. <https://www.transit.dot.gov/rural-formula-grants-5311>

²¹ For additional details, visit the Regional Transportation Planning Organization Fact Sheet Series. https://www.planning.dot.gov/documents/RTPO_factsheet_master.pdf. Accessed on September, 30th, 2022.

2. RPO CONTEXT IN ILLINOIS

2.1. The need: understanding the context, improve coordination efficiency

Transportation planning coordination in Illinois is covered by a variety of organizations within the state, depending on the location's urban-rural composition. As shown in Table 4, these organizations take one of three roles: Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Regional Planning Councils (RPCs), and Human Services Transportation Plan committees (HSTPs). In some instances, one organization may serve as all three roles for a particular region.

The 1962 State Highway Act requires Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) for all urbanized areas of more than 50,000 people. MPOs therefore take on this role in the more urbanized areas. MPOs then delegate the execution of these plans to the local county or municipal departments of transportation and transit agencies. Guidance on this division of responsibility is governed by the MPO Cooperative Operations Manual.²²

²² <http://idot.illinois.gov/Assets/uploads/files/Transportation-System/Manuals-Guides-&-Handbooks/Highways/Metropolitan%20Planning%20Organization%20Cooperative%20Operations%20Manual.pdf>

Table 4: Transportation Planning Organizations Within Illinois and the Roles they Serve

Organization	Region	MPO	RPC	HSTP
Bi-State Regional Commission	Quad Cities	✓	✓	✓
Blackhawk Hills Regional Council	Galena		✓	
Champaign County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC)	Champaign-Urbana	✓	✓	✓
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)	Chicago	✓	✓	
Coles County Regional Planning and Development Commission	Coles County		✓	
Danville Area Transportation Study (DATS)	Danville	✓		
Decatur Urban Area Transportation Study (DUATS)	Decatur	✓		
Dekalb/Sycamore Area Transportation Study (DSATS)	DeKalb/Sycamore	✓		
East Central Intergovernmental Association (ECIA)	Dubuque	✓		
East-West Gateway Council of Governments	St. Louis	✓		
Greater Egypt Regional Planning Development Commission (GERPDC)	Carbondale/Marion	✓	✓	
Greater Wabash Regional Planning Commission	Crawford, Edwards, Lawrence, Richland, Wabash, Wayne, and White counties		✓	
Kankakee Area Transportation Study (KATS)	Kankakee	✓		
McLean County Regional Planning Commission	Bloomington/Normal	✓		✓
Morgan County Regional Planning Commission	Morgan County		✓	
North Central Illinois Council of Governments	Bureau, Grundy, LaSalle, Marshall, Putnam, and Stark counties		✓	✓
Region One Planning Commission (R1PC)	Rockford	✓		
South Central Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission	Effingham		✓	✓
Southeast Metropolitan Planning Organization (SEMPO)	Cape Girardeau	✓		
Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission	Harrisburg		✓	
Southern Five Regional Planning District and Development Commission	Ullin/Cairo		✓	
Southwestern Illinois Metropolitan and Regional Planning Commission	St. Louis		✓	
Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission (SSCRPC)	Springfield	✓	✓	

State Line Area Transportation Study (SLATS)	Beloit	✓		
Tri-County Regional Planning Commission (TCRPC)	Peoria	✓	✓	✓
Two Rivers Regional Council of Public Officials	Quincy		✓	
West Central Development Council	Carlinville		✓	
Western Illinois Regional Council	Macomb		✓	✓

As rural composition rises, the entity responsible for coordination shifts first to Regional Planning Councils (RPCs), which can be one and the same as an MPO, then to county departments of transportation. Regional Planning Councils serve as the primary entity for most of the state. The 2005 SAFETEA-LU act required regional-level coordination for human services transportation planning. In many instances, IDOT contracted with existing MPOs and Human Service Transportation Plan providers (HSTPs) to enact coordinated policies and plans. This prompted MPOs to expand their regional planning footprint to include nearby rural areas.

The Illinois Association of Regional Planning Councils (ILARC) serves as the organizing entity, both statewide and nationally, for the next provider of planning, Regional Planning Councils (RPCs).²³ RPCs provide their service areas with planning, zoning, and data analytic technical assistance.

Towards the far end of rural composition, the only entity engaging in coordination are Human Service Transportation Plan committees (HSTPs) such as SHOWBUS in Central Illinois. However, while IDOT has delegated transit coordination to HSTPs, HSTPs are not seen by IDOT as a formal transportation planning entity. Instead, the Rural Transit Assistance Center (RTAC) operates pursuant to an inter-agency agreement with IDOT.²⁴ RTAC was established in 1990 to provide training, technical assistance, and deliver public transportation to rural areas. Additionally, the Federal Transit Administration’s Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) promotes the safe and effective delivery of public transportation services in rural areas and facilitation of more efficient use of public transportation resources.²⁵ RTAP organizes most of this delivery and usage coordination through RTAC. IDOT principally coordinates with local rural and small urban areas through four programs. First, the State Highway Program, which is a six-year program detailing the investment of transportation dollars in state and

²³ <https://ilarconline.org/about/mission>

²⁴ <https://www.iira.org/rtac/>

²⁵ <https://www.nationalrtap.org/About/History-and-Mission>

local highway systems consistent with the State Long Range Transportation Plan, where IDOT district offices develop and coordinate projects with local agencies and elected officials.²⁶ Second, the Local Roads Program, which is a local government-driven street and highway program utilizing federal and state highway funds coordinated through IDOT. Third, the Public Transportation Program, where IDOT reviews local transit providers' operating budgets and capital needs to determine opportunities for state assistance. Finally, the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), offering an opportunity for local officials and providers to provide input and involvement in IDOT decisions. To determine the effectiveness of this process, federal regulations require IDOT to review and solicit comments from local officials every five years.²⁷

Even with this patchwork of entities, however, there are still a few counties in Illinois which do not have a responsible dedicated transportation planning entity, as discussed below, impacting coordination efficiency between the state and localities.

2.2. Gaps and overlaps

Illinois has multiple regions that have both significant gaps in transportation planning coordination, as well as overlaps between responsible agencies. Furthermore, some MPOs are limited to a particular metropolitan region's boundaries, whereas others have full planning authority over their local county.

As seen in *Figure 1a*, RPCs generally oversee the transportation planning activities for most of the state. This ensures at least partial technical support for these services. Region 1 Planning Council (R1PC) is the only regional planning organization, serving Winnebago and Boone counties, which is not a member of ILARC.

The greatest gap in transportation planning occurs in Central Illinois, particularly Menard, Logan, Mason, and DeWitt counties (Figure 2). All four counties lack a centralized planning agency that covers any part of the county. This results in an emphasis on HSTP support to ensure planning services are provided to these counties. HSTPs, as seen in Figure 1b, are divided into regions that cover the entire state except for the Chicagoland area.

2.2.1. Visuals

²⁶ Illinois Department of Transportation, Department Policy OPP-01.

²⁷ Illinois Department of Transportation, Department Policy CL2016-02

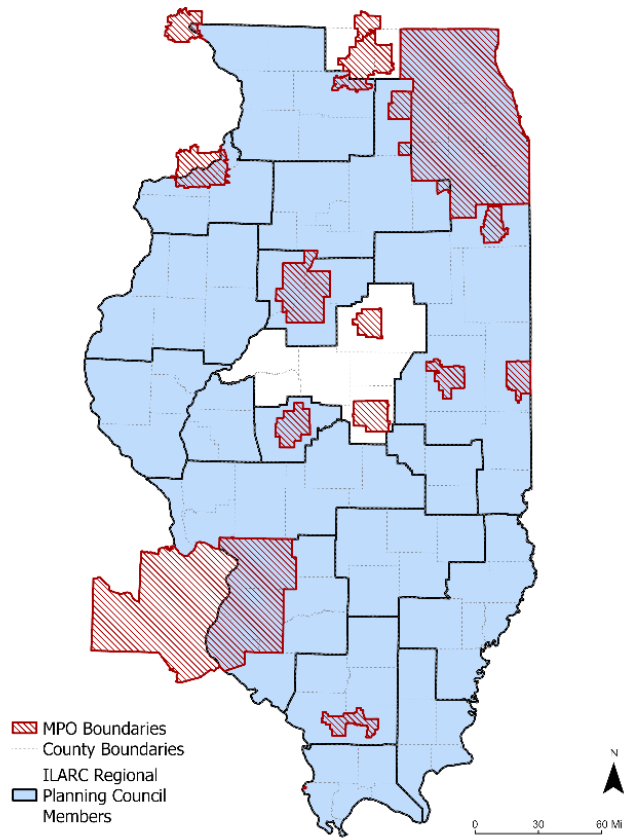


Figure 1a: Map of Illinois ILARC RPC Members and MPO Boundaries

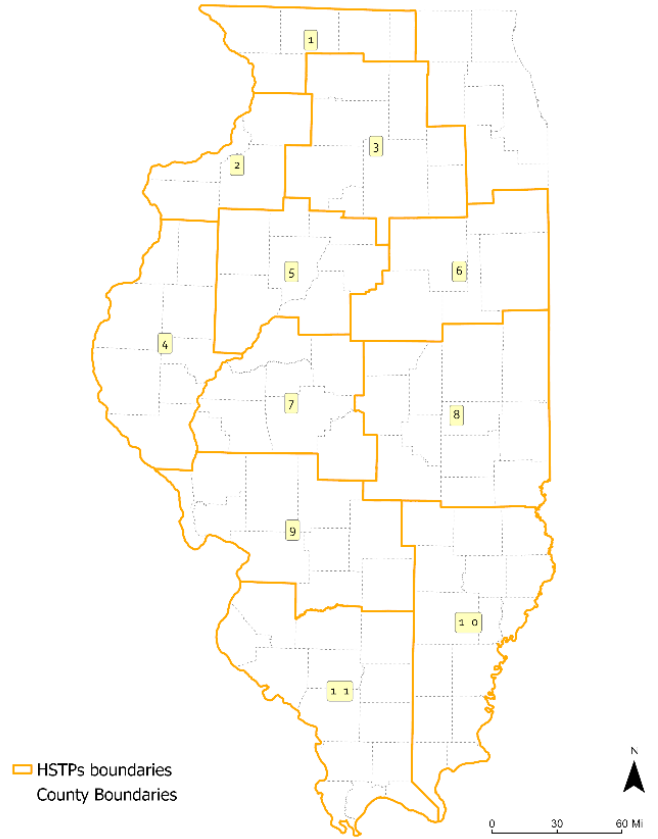


Figure 1b: Map of HSTP Boundaries

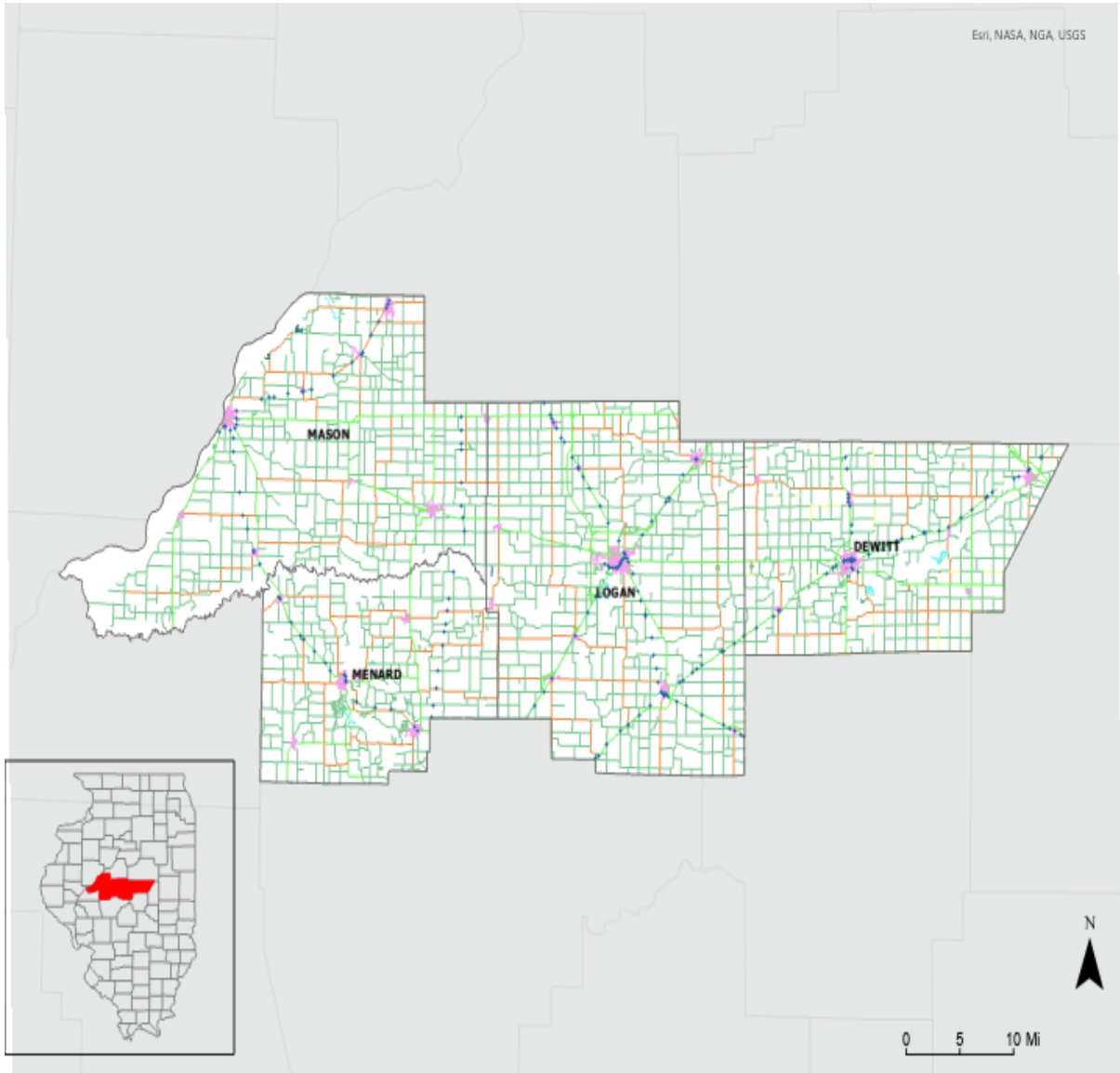


Figure 2: Illinois Counties Lacking a Centralized Rural Planning Body and Their Transportation Jurisdictions (Lines are Roads, Dots are Railroad Crossings)

3. SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

3.1. Development of the Survey Instruments

3.1.1. Description of the Survey Instruments

Both survey instruments are structured into the following sections: Introduction, Definition of Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs), Coordination Between RPOs and the DOT, Funding and Financing of Rural Transportation Planning, and Challenges and Needs. We present below a brief discussion of these sections. The survey instruments are attached in Appendix C. The objective of the surveys is to capture the perception of different organizations on several issues concerning rural transportation planning. We conducted separate surveys of individual RPOs in the State of Illinois, and of state Department of Transportations around the nation. This will identify and illustrate common challenges, opportunities, and best practices to inform IDOT about Illinois' experience from the point of view of local RPOs, while offering a nationwide analysis of benchmarks to develop coordination strategies with local RPOs.

Sections of the surveys

Introduction

This section explains the objective of each survey and seeks to obtain informed consent from the participants. Moreover, it collects general information on the respondent's organization and their role within it.

Definition of Rural Planning Organization

The first main section asks respondents to identify how they define RPOs to explore the RPO's role, the activities the RPO is responsible for, and the RPO's typical structure. The lack of precise legislation on these organizations' functions allows multiple interpretations and practices for rural transportation planning.

Participants were asked to select from a list of definitions those that best fit their vision of an RPO. The definitions highlight different aspects of these organizations, with the aim of capturing the most relevant constitutive elements of RPOs: the local focus, through identification of local needs and assistance to local actors; the multijurisdictional nature and the coordination role between different levels of government; the representativeness and promotion of public participation; and the population-based criteria to define their areas of action, using a normative approach to define RPOs.

Coordination Between RPOs and the DOT

In this section we explore the existence of formal and informal networks of RPOs around the nation. Moreover, we investigate the frequency and topics of interaction between DOTs and RPOs, as well as their usual means of

communication. Finally, we explore the perception of the respondents about the role of coordination in fostering transportation planning, and the factors impacting coordination between agencies.

Funding and Financing of Rural Transportation Planning

In this section we seek information on the budgeted and spent amounts in rural transportation planning activities at the DOT and local levels. Questions in this section explore the funding sources of RPOs and request participants to provide detailed examples of specific state funding programs.

Challenges and Needs

The last section of each survey instrument seeks information on the main challenges of RPOs and the critical needs to improve rural transportation planning.

The following tables outline the different sections in the two surveys and include the most relevant questions for each of them. Questions highlighted in green are unique to each survey.

Table 5: Structure and main questions of the Illinois RPO survey

Section	Question
Introduction	Which organization are you representing?
	What is your role/position in your organization?
	What is the staffing level of your organization?
Definition of Rural Planning Organization and their structure	Selection of definitions of RPO
	Which of the following planning activities does your organization cover in rural areas?
	Which of the following structures does your organization include? [Advisory, policy, technical, planning committees]
Coordination between RPOs and IDOT	Are you aware of any RPO networks?
	How often do you interact about rural transportation planning issues with other organizations?
	What are the topics of such interactions?
	What are the means of communication of such interactions?
	How often do you interact with IDOT about rural transportation planning issues?
	What are the topics of such interactions with IDOT?
	What are the means of communication of such interactions with IDOT?
	Has the 2015 FAST Act affected the way in which you interact with IDOT?
	Have you attended a recent IDOT Fall Planning conference? Why did you attend? Why not? Were you satisfied with the insights provided during the conference?
	Level of agreement about statements on the coordination between the DOT and RPOs
Level of agreement about coordination factors	
Funding and financing of rural transportation planning	What was the annual budget of your organization for FY2019?
	What was the amount spent on rural transportation planning in FY2019?
	What sources of funding are available to the RPOs for rural transportation planning in your state? With percentages.
	What was the main rural transportation project implemented in FY2019? Details on topic, budget, and funding source
IDOT Rural Planning Funds program	What is your perception of the change of approach for the IDOT Rural Planning Funds Program allocation process?
	Did you apply for IDOT Rural Planning Funds in FY2019? Amount requested, success of application, funding of the project.
	Why did you not apply for the funds?
	Will you apply again next year if the program is continued?
Challenges and needs	What are the main challenges regarding rural transportation planning projects?
	What would be the most critical needs for RPOs regarding rural planning?

Table 6: Structure and main questions of the State DOT survey

Section	Question
Introduction	Which state DOT are you representing?
	What is your role/position in the DOT?
	Is there a rural transportation planning division? What is its name? What are its goals?
Definition of Rural Planning Organization	What are the criteria used to define urban and rural areas in your state?
	Selection of definitions of RPO
	Which organizations are responsible for rural transportation planning?
	How many RPOs in the state?
	Which of the following activities does your organization cover, about rural areas planning?
Coordination between RPOs and the DOT	Are you aware of any RPO networks?
	How often do you interact about rural transportation planning issues with other organizations?
	What are the topics of such interactions?
	What are the means of communication of such interactions?
	Do you feel that rural transportation planning is well integrated in your agency? Why?
	What is the role of the DOT in coordinating RPOs in the state?
	Has the 2015 FAST Act affected the interaction with RPO?
	Level of agreement about statements on the coordination between the DOT and RPOs
Level of agreement about coordination factors	
Funding and financing of rural transportation planning	What was the amount spent on rural transportation planning in FY2019?
	Indicate the level of human resource commitment for rural transportation planning
	What sources of funding are available to the RPOs for rural transportation planning in your state? With percentages.
	State assistance to RPOs to secure funding
	State provision of local match
	State provision of dedicated stream of funding.
	Description of the specific program.
Challenges and needs	What are the main challenges regarding rural transportation planning projects?
	What would be the most critical needs for RPOs regarding rural transportation planning?

3.1.2. Survey Implementation

Both survey instruments were designed and conducted through the Qualtrics platform (the UIC online web survey provider). We emailed identified contacts for each survey and requested their participation in the web survey. We anticipated that participants would be able to complete the survey within 30 minutes. As discussed above, the beginning of the survey included a description of the study and of the rationale behind the survey. Participants were also provided with an informed consent form before accessing the survey instrument and given the option to opt out.

The identification of survey participants was realized through an outreach process that included a first contact via email using the identified contacts' professional email addresses. A total of three successive reminders via email were sent out to all contacts from which no response was received. For the DOT survey, the first outreach was done the last week of September 2021, while for the RPO survey it was done the first week of October 2021. A final reminder was attempted, by phone if that contact information was available. The contact list, tracking of reminders and responses, were stored in spreadsheet form in a secure UIC file server. The recipients' selection criteria for the two surveys are detailed below.

3.1.3. Contacts selection criteria

Illinois RPO survey

For the Illinois RPO survey, the following organizations were selected to participate in the survey:

- All member organizations of the Illinois Association of Regional Councils (ILARC)²⁸;
- All applicants and recipients of the IDOT Rural Funds Program four editions, since 2011;
- Other rural planning organizations identified through a web search.

Recipients' contacts were retrieved from the ILARC website, or from a web search. For most of the organizations the Executive Director was contacted. Other relevant contact positions included in the contact list were Regional Planning Director or Liaison and Planning Program Manager. In total, the UTC team reached out to 52 people from 31 organizations and received responses from 22 organizations (71% response rate). The complete list of respondents is illustrated in

²⁸ The full list can be found on the ILARC website: <https://ilarconline.org/member-councils/member-councils>

Table 7.

The following illustrates the recipients of the web surveys, as well as non-County respondents unless we RPO relationship listed above. included Mason, McLean, and County was represented on through the Regional Commission, limited service county.

RPOs
Bi-State Regional Commission
Blackhawk Hills Regional Council
Boone - Region One Planning Commission
Boone County
Boone County, Highway Department
Champaign County Regional Planning Commission
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) CMAP, Kane County CMAP, Kane/Kendall Council of Mayors CMAP, McHenry County CMAP, Will County
Coles County Regional Planning and Development Commission
DeKalb Sycamore Area Transportation Study
Greater Egypt Regional Planning and Development Commission
Greater Wabash Regional Planning Commission
Kankakee County Regional Planning Commission
Logan County
Macomb Park District
McLean County Regional Planning Commission
Morgan County Regional Planning Commission
North Central Illinois Council of Governments
SHOW BUS Public Transportation
South Central Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission
Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission
Southern Five Regional Planning District and Development Commission
Southwestern Illinois Metropolitan and Regional Planning Commission
Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission
Tri-County Regional Planning Commission
RPOs
Two Rivers Regional Council of Public Officials
Bi-State Regional Commission
West Central Development Council
Blackhawk Hills Regional Council
Western Illinois Regional Council
Boone - Region One Planning Commission
Boone County
Boone County, Highway Department
Champaign County Regional Planning Commission
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) CMAP, Kane County CMAP, Kane/Kendall Council of Mayors CMAP, McHenry County CMAP, Will County
Coles County Regional Planning and Development Commission

map (Figure 3) distribution of the web surveys, respondents and respondents. not contacted identified an per the criteria These counties Menard, DeWitt, Macon. McLean indirectly the survey McLean County Planning which has a area with the

Table 7:
Illinois RPO

DeKalb Sycamore Area Transportation Study
Greater Egypt Regional Planning and Development Commission
Greater Wabash Regional Planning Commission
Kankakee County Regional Planning Commission
Logan County
Macomb Park District
McLean County Regional Planning Commission
Morgan County Regional Planning Commission
North Central Illinois Council of Governments
SHOW BUS Public Transportation
South Central Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission
Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission
Southern Five Regional Planning District and Development Commission
Southwestern Illinois Metropolitan and Regional Planning Commission
Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission
Tri-County Regional Planning Commission
Two Rivers Regional Council of Public Officials
West Central Development Council
Western Illinois Regional Council

Recipients of the
survey

total, the UTC team reached out to 112 people from 47 organizations²⁹, including all iterations and reminders, and received responses from 29 state DOTs (59% response rate). The following map (Figure 4) illustrates the distribution of recipients of the web surveys, as well as respondents and non-respondents.

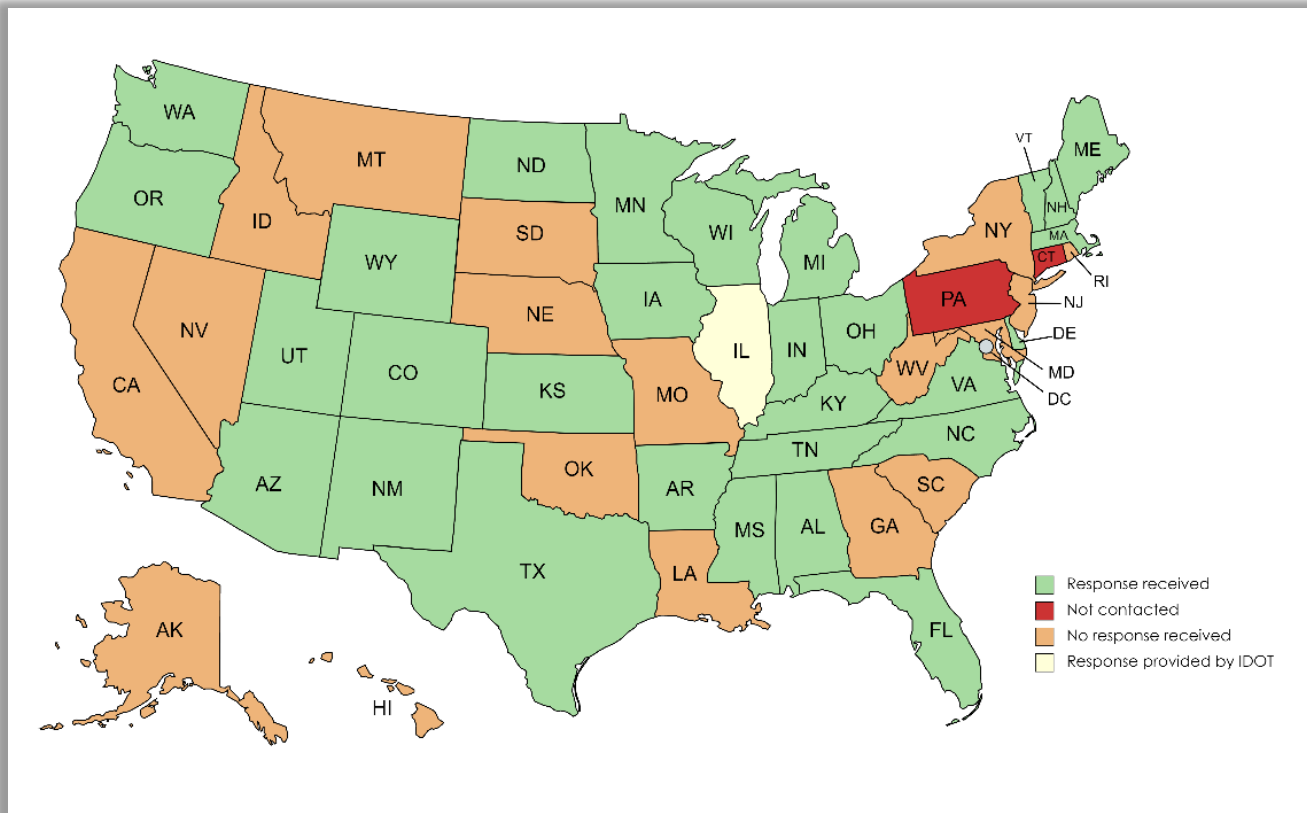


Figure 4: Distribution of responses to the state DOT web survey

3.1.4. Collection of responses, data cleaning, and analysis

The responses were exported as a comma-separated values (.csv) file from the Qualtrics platform (the UIC online web survey provider) and the data were re-coded for analysis. The data was qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed to identify relevant patterns in the responses. First, a descriptive analysis of the survey responses and of the characteristics of the respondents was performed. Moreover, data visualizations were created through

²⁹ This includes all states, excluding Illinois, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania.

the Qualtrics Reports tool and used to illustrate the aggregated survey results that are presented in the following paragraphs. In the case of multiple responses from two representatives belonging to the same organization, these were compared and integrated to fill gaps in the responses. This was the case for the state DOTs of Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, and Utah.

One-pager information sheets methodology

The survey results were incorporated into informative one-pager sheets, one for each of the survey respondents. These documents include general information on the respondent as well as the data elaboration from the survey responses. The one-page write-ups were divided into five sections: Summary, Description, Defining Rural Planning, Coordination, and People and Financial Resources as discussed below.

The *Summary* section includes ratings that allow readers to rapidly identify differences between the surveyed organizations. These ratings include for Illinois RPOs: IDOT Coordination, Peer Coordination, and Willingness to Coordinate; while for DOTs: Coordination with RPOs, and Willingness to Coordinate. These scores utilize a combination of scores based on the survey participants answers on how frequent the organization holds meetings with its counterparts, what topics are covered during those meetings, and how the organization communicates with its counterparts. This is based upon the responses from the surveyed organizations.

The remaining sections are within the written portion of the one-page write-up.

The *Description* section lists the surveyed organization's respective national or statewide Department of Transportation Region, whether the state has a mostly urban or rural population, whether the state is geographically urban or rural, and the rural population density. It also lists how many RPOs are in a state, and the average rural representation per RPO. Description values were acquired through Census 2010 data, including rural and urban population and state and urban defined areas GIS data.

The *Defining Rural Planning* section lists the surveyed organization's perspective on what rural planning organizations cover in their respective community. Potential responses included that RPOs perform a local-focused role, emphasize multi-jurisdictional representation and/or coordination, represent rural entities and/or the public, and serve areas less than 50,000 people or more than 50,000 people outside of Metropolitan Planning Organization boundaries. Defining Rural Planning is based upon the responses from the surveyed organizations about what rural planning entails, utilizing select language depending on which answers were chosen from a multiple selection list question.

The *Coordination* section lists what activities the surveyed organization covers, awareness of other RPO networks, the interaction between the surveyed organization and other planning organizations, and what would improve coordination activities. Coordination is based upon the responses from the surveyed organizations.

The People and Financial Resources section lists barriers to implementing rural planning, including organizational coordination, staffing, and funding. It also recognizes how surveyed organizations believe these barriers can be overcome and what barriers have the most impact. People and Financial Resources is based upon the responses from the surveyed organizations.

The Key Data section is based upon publicly available demographic and infrastructure data. In addition, for the Illinois RPO surveys, information about whether the RPO is a member of the Illinois Association of Regional Councils is also considered. The source of the data is the 2010 U.S. Census, (data on rural and urban population, and data on state and urban defined areas geographic data), as well as the ILARC website. Urban and rural areas were defined using U.S. Census-defined GIS data of urban areas in the U.S. Rural areas were all non-urban areas as defined by the GIS data.

3.2. Analysis of survey results

As shown in Table 8, the state DOT survey was sent to 47 states and had a response rate of 59% with 29 state DOTs responding. The Illinois RPO survey had a 71% response rate with 22 out of 31 agencies participating (Table 8).

Table 8: Number of Recipients of the web survey instruments. Number of Responsive and Non-Responsive

	Number of Recipients	Number of Respondents	Number of Non-Respondents	Response rate
Illinois RPO Survey	31	22	9	71%
State DOT Survey	47	29	18	59%

3.2.1. Illinois RPO survey

Table 9: Responsive and Non-Responsive Group Statistics. Illinois RPO survey

Attribute ⁱ	Responsive ⁱⁱ	Non-Responsive ⁱⁱⁱ
Total Rural Population (Census 2010)	1,232,730	387,961
Average Rural Population (Census 2010)	72,514	22,821
Average Rural Pop Pct (Census 2010)	33%	52%
Average Rural Population Density (rural pop/rural Sq mi)	39	24
Total Population (Census 2010)	5,127,206	839,580
Average Population (Census 2010)	301,600	167,916
Total Urban Population (Census 2010)	3,894,476	451,619
Average Urban Population (Census 2010)	229,087	90,324
Average Urban Pop Pct	67%	48%
Total Area (Sq mi)	41,233	16,389
Average Area (Sq mi)	2,425	3,278
Total Rural Area (Sq mi)	37,591	15,882
Average Rural Area (Sq mi)	2,211	3,176
Average Rural Area Pct	89%	97%
Total Rural Mileage (miles)	74,111	30,984
Average Rural Mileage (miles)	4,359	6,197
Average Rural Mileage/Rural Sq mi	1.98	1.94
Average Rural Pop/Rural Mileage	19.8	12.3

i) *Total* refers to the total of all survey responses, and *Average* refers to the average of all survey responses.

ii) Excluding Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) region from calculations

iii) Excluding CMAP region from calculations

As seen in Table 9, responding agencies appear to serve areas that have a lower average rural population percentage, a greater rural population density, a higher average total population, a higher average urban population, a lower average total area, lower average rural area, lower percentage of rural area, less rural highway mileage, and more rural residents per rural highway mileage. On the contrary, non-responding agencies appear to serve areas that, on average, are more rural, lower populated, less dense, and with greater rural highway mileage. Overall, responding agencies appear to serve smaller geographic areas that are more urban than the non-respondents. As discussed further below, staffing is often a barrier to increased collaboration and rural planning. Non-respondents, as less populous but with more rural highway mileage, may have even more of a staffing shortage that prevented completion of the survey.

Profile of survey respondent / targeted positions, collected responses profiles

Positions targeted by the survey included committee chairs, executive directors, directors, senior planners, transportation planners, and planning liaisons for the relevant agencies. These positions were determined to be the most likely to know details regarding rural planning operations and the organization's relationship with IDOT.

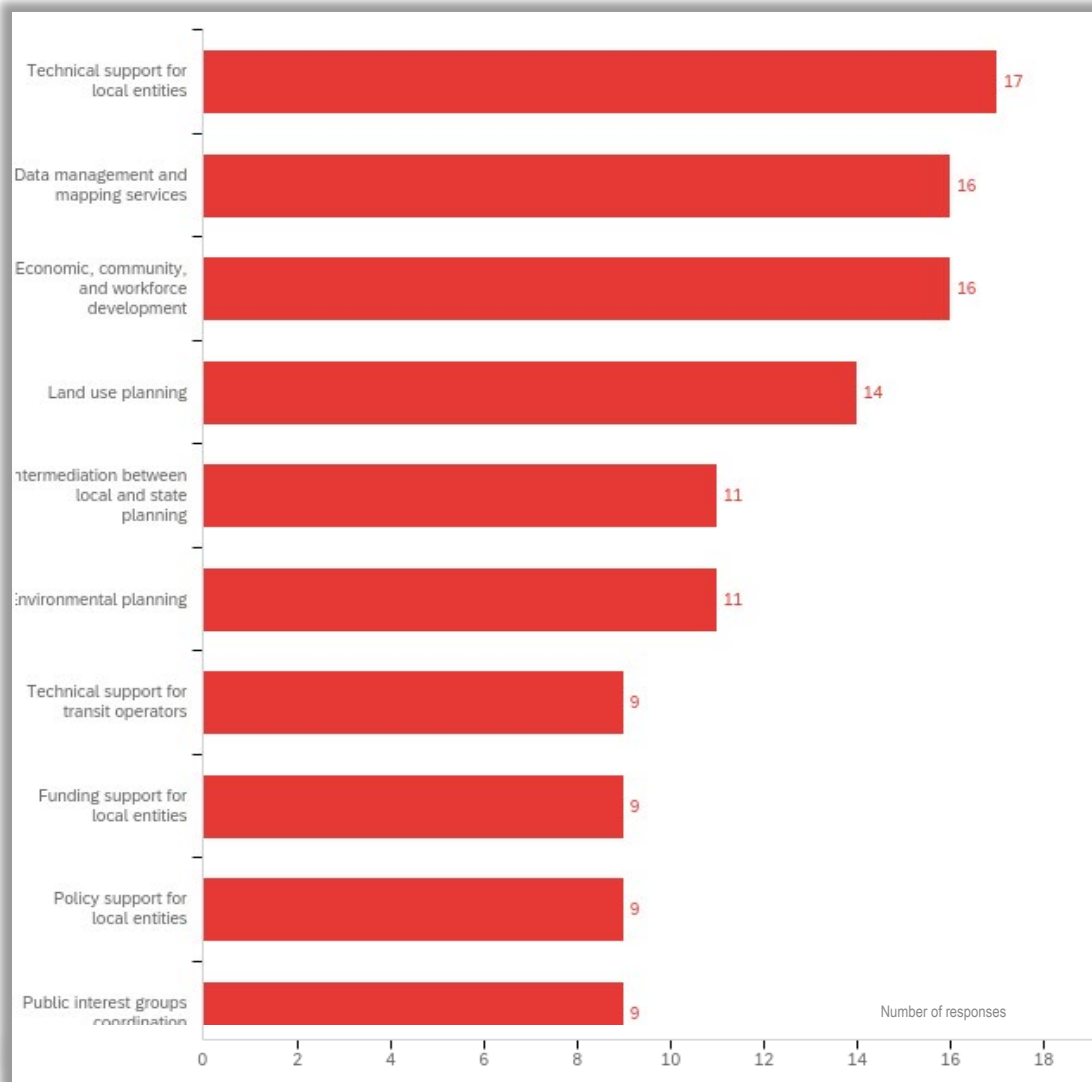
Definition of Rural Planning Organizations

Participating agencies defined Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) as:

- a) Locally focused organizations responsible for the identification of local needs that assist local bodies of government.
- b) Organizations that foster public participation and provide a forum for representation of non-metropolitan areas.

Only one-quarter (25%) of RPOs in Illinois believe an RPO is responsible for transportation planning in highly populated areas outside of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) boundaries. The responses also indicate that RPOs are not considered the sole organization responsible for rural planning, but share this role with local officials, MPOs, and Rural Planning Councils (RPCs). Human Service Transportation Programs (HSTPs) and RPCs are considered less central to planning. State officials are predominately relied upon for funding assistance.

Moreover, the responses indicate that the most important RPO activities are technical support for local entities, closely followed by data management and mapping services, economic, community, and workforce development, and land use planning. For most RPOs, activities such as social and community services, Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) review, and education are not seen as central (Figure 5).



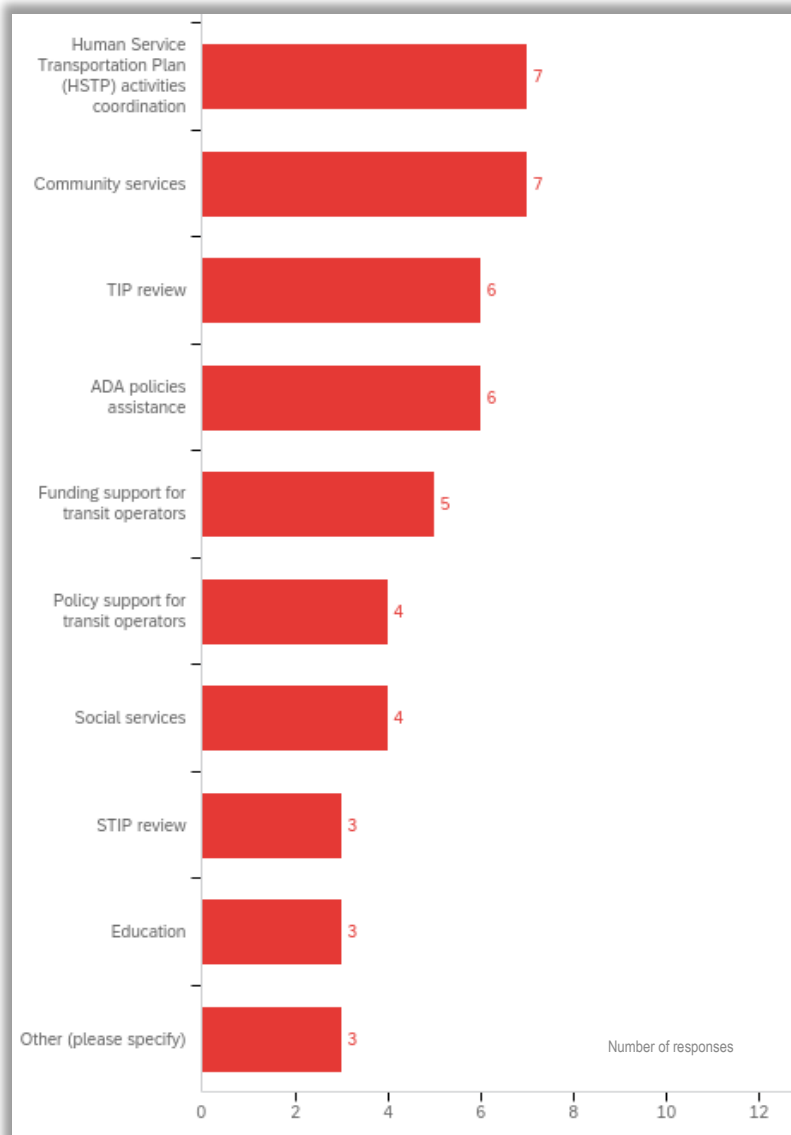


Figure 5: Which of the following activities does your organization cover with regards to rural areas planning?

3.2.2. Coordination between RPOs and IDOT

Perception of Coordination

Most RPOs see coordination improvement suffering the most from a lack of staff and/or time (85% somewhat or strongly agree). A majority also strongly or somewhat agree that the complexity of reporting or other

administrative requirements (55%), federal laws, regulations, and guidance (55%), and state laws, regulations, and guidance (50%) also impact coordination.

RPOs see increased coordination benefitting most by improving their quality work product (85%), their ability to serve more people (80%), and increased cost-effectiveness (75%). 80% also believe that technology will increase their coordination.

Fewer organizations agree that they are incentivized to coordinate, at a lower rate than the other coordination survey statements (60% somewhat or strongly agree).

IDOT and the RPOs

Our survey found that RPO communications with the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) were infrequent with 67% of respondents reporting talking with IDOT once per quarter or less, and 29% of respondents once a year or less. While phone and in-person events are the most common methods of communication, at similar rates to email in other high-communication groups, IDOT communications with RPOs were predominately only over email (100%), with fewer phone contacts or in-person events (67%).

While the 2015 Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act increased the frequency of communications between some respondents and IDOT (14%), most (73%) indicated that interactions had not changed.

Respondents generally sought all forms of support from IDOT to assist their rural transportation planning (Figure 6). The strongest demands were for increased funding support (31%) and technical support (23%). Increased policy support (13%) and coordination (13%) were not as highly desired.

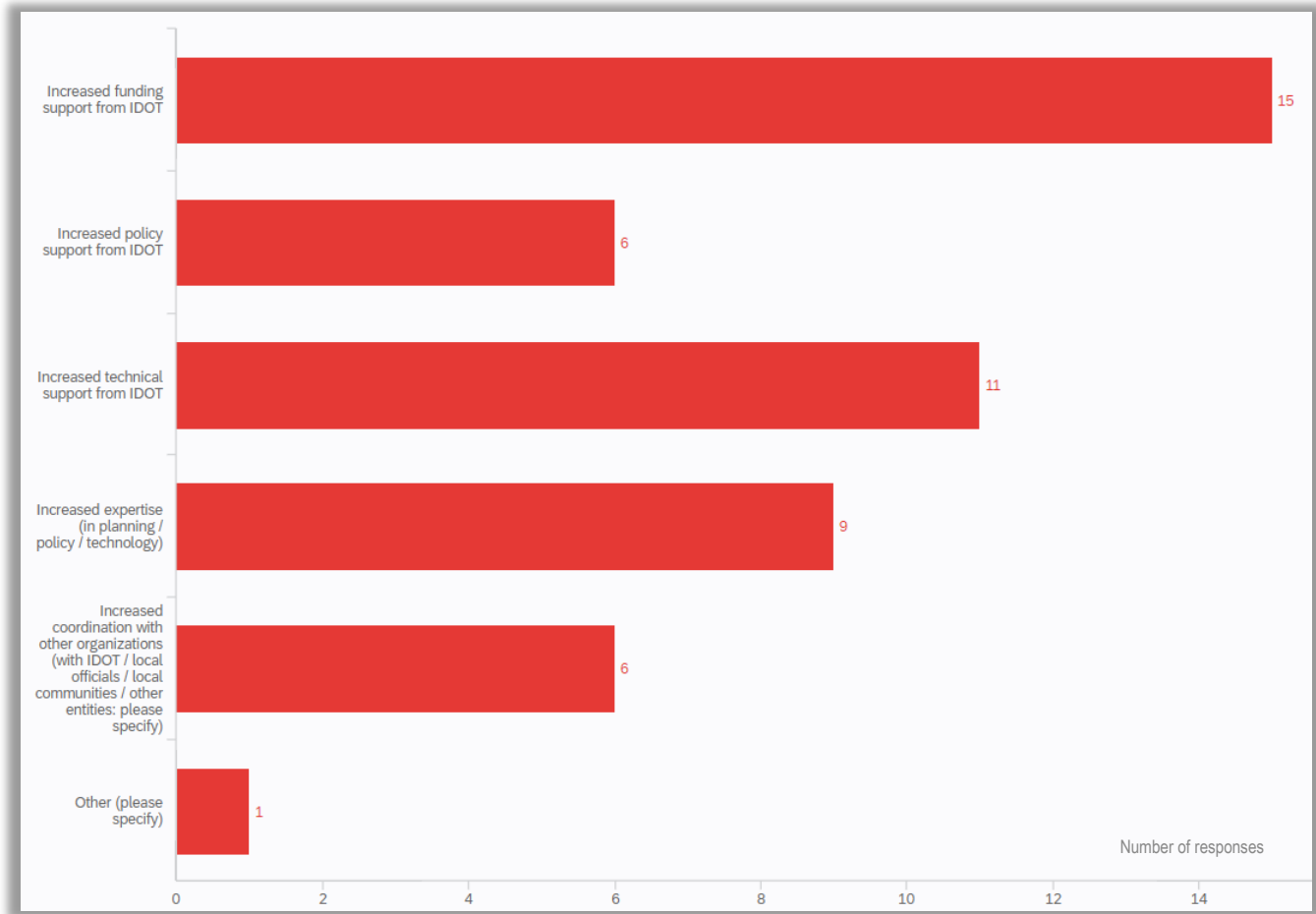


Figure 6: What would be the most critical needs regarding rural transportation funding?

The IDOT Fall Planning Conference saw high attendance among respondents with 71% reporting attendance. Most attended to learn about statewide practices (67%) and for workshops or technical training (62%). Fewer attended to learn about funding options (48%) or the funding application process (43%). Reasons for not attending the Fall Planning Conference were primarily lack of time and/or staff (40%) and lack of knowledge about the conference (30%).

Staffing, funding, and financing of RPOs

Of the respondents, half (50%) had a staff of 10 or less, 25% had a staff of 11 to 25, with the remaining 25% evenly split between 26 to 50 staff and greater than 50 staff. The largest proportion (7 out of 22, or 33%) of respondents operate with a budget of less than \$500,000 (Figure 7). 8 out of 22 respondents' have a budget

between \$500,000 and \$2,000,000. The remaining 6 respondents have a budget above \$2,000,000. Unsurprisingly, the smaller the respondent's staffing level, the smaller the budget, with no respondent having over 11 staff members also having a budget less than \$500,000 (Figure 7).

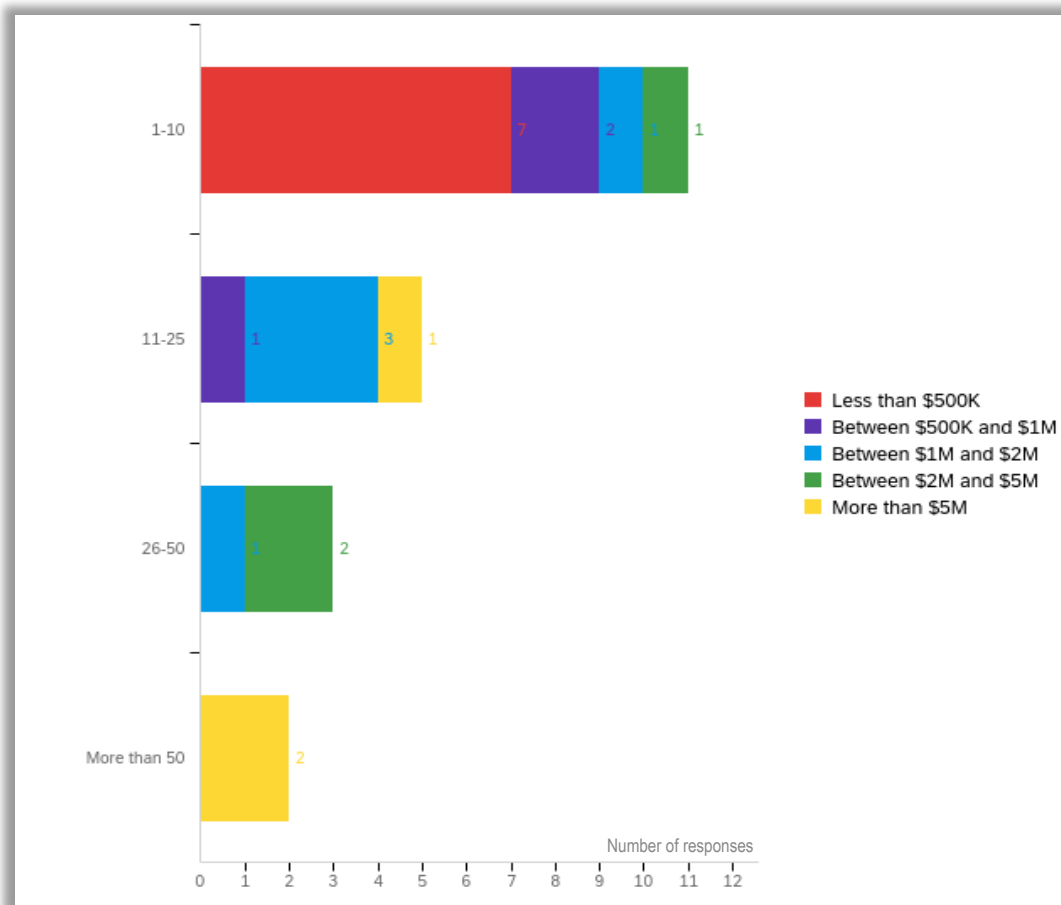


Figure 7: What is the staffing level of your organization and your annual budget for FY2019?

Respondents used a variety of funding sources, including funds from the federal 5304, 5311, FHWA SP&R, and FHWA STP programs, state funding, and local funding, with most utilizing state funding (29%) and FHWA SP&R (25%).

Despite a wide use of state funding programs, 70% of respondents did not apply for IDOT rural planning funds. Nearly half (43%) indicated that the reason they did not apply for these funds was because they lacked knowledge about the program. A large percentage (36%) also indicated that they had no transportation project that would

have qualified. This is despite all respondents who had applied for the program reporting they had been approved. Although IDOT changed its Rural Planning Funds allocation approach, most respondents were either unaware of the program (25%) or not aware of the change (20%).

Challenges and needs

The largest challenges facing rural transportation projects are a lack of funding sources and securing a local match as indicated by 25% of the respondents on both issues. Similarly, a lack of capacity in terms of personnel or expertise (20%), and a lack of funding information (16%), are also major challenges. As seen in Figure 8 and Figure 9 below, these challenges are especially felt by organizations with only 1-10 staff members, with the largest organizations principally reporting feeling challenged by a lack of funding sources, a lack of funding information, securing a local match, and a lack of capacity.

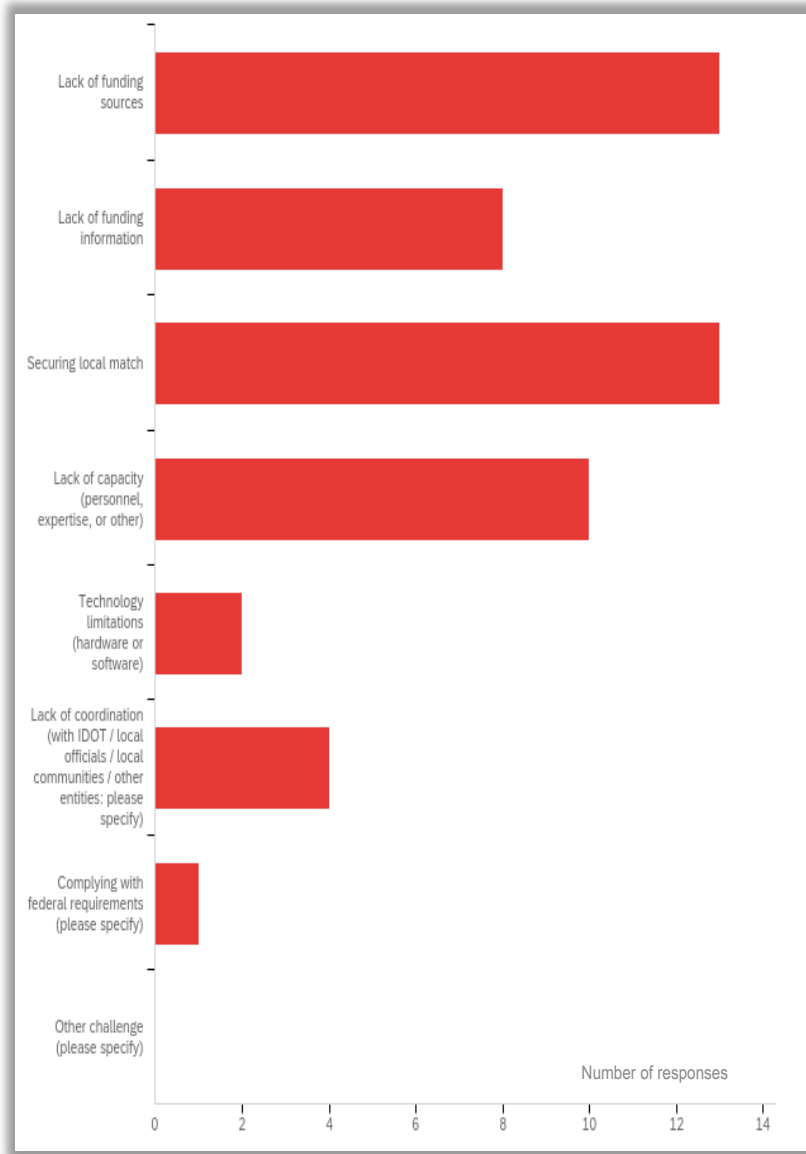


Figure 8: What are the main challenges regarding rural transportation planning projects?

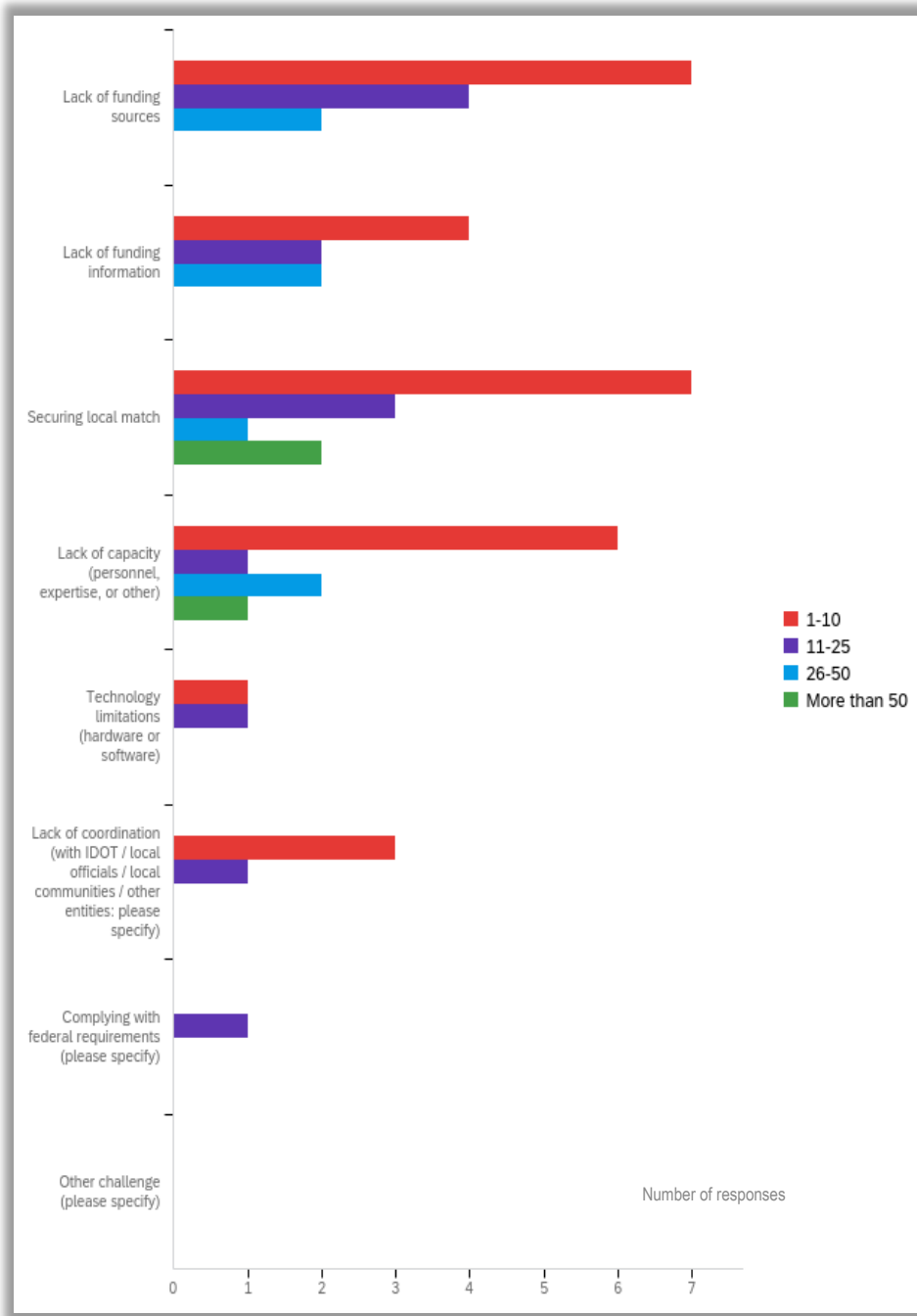


Figure 9: What are the main challenges for rural transportation planning projects? (by size of organization)

Main findings from the survey of Illinois RPOs

Most RPOs operate with a small budget. Most RPOs are also unaware of IDOT’s funding options. However, IDOT may also need to re-tool its funding eligibility process to expand access to organizations. As shown in Figure 10, smaller organizations were more likely to indicate that the lack of a qualifying project was the major reason they did not apply for Rural Planning Funds.

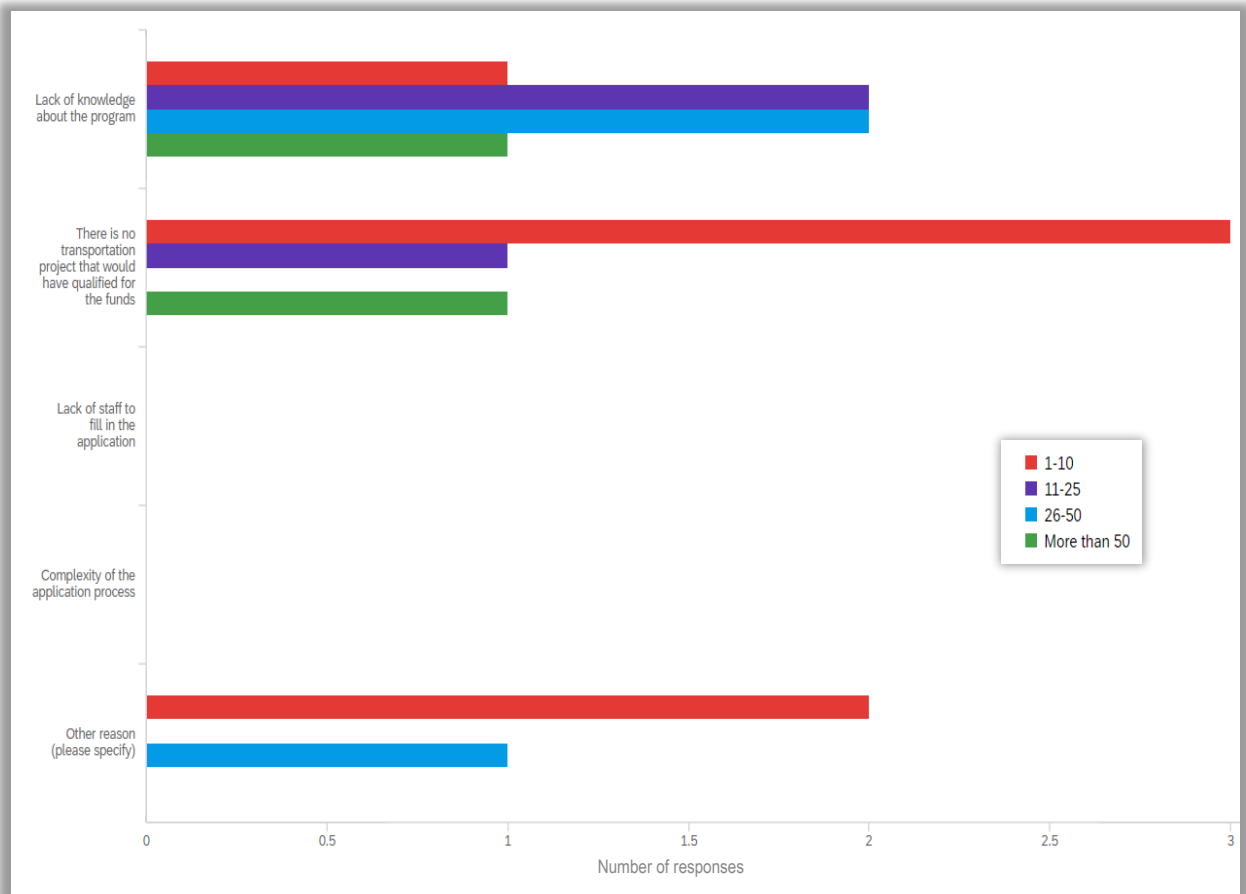


Figure 10: Why did you not apply for the IDOT Rural Planning Funds (by Size of Organization)

Most RPOs have insufficient staff and technical expertise to facilitate coordination. This leads to problems accessing both state and federal funding. One respondent summarized this need, stating they would like IDOT staff to coordinate “with the local agencies to walk them through the application process and how to navigate the federal funding process.”

IDOT's interactions with RPOs are limited. This may lead to the above difficulty accessing IDOT funding sources. One respondent suggested improving communications by starting with "[quarterly] meetings between the RPOs and [IDOT] district offices facilitated by the state/central office."

Direct outreach offering rural planning funding application assistance provides an opportunity to stretch limited rural planning budgets and educate more RPOs about this successful funding program. It may also help smaller organizations identify projects previously thought ineligible.

Despite funding being a major concern by most RPOs, attendance at the IDOT Fall Conference focused on statewide practices and technical training, not funding options and how to acquire funding. However, attendees also preferred practices and training, so whether this requires modification is uncertain.

3.2.3.DOT survey

Table 10 indicates descriptive statistics for states which either responded or not responded to the survey. There are no major differences between the two groups. In general, responsive state DOTs represented slightly more rural states, with higher rural population shares (28.1% for respondents, versus 23.8% for non-respondents), higher institutional fragmentation (more counties as well as more rural counties), and larger rural areas.

Table 10: Responsive and Non-Responsive Group Statistics. State DOT survey

Attribute ⁱ	Responsive	Non-Responsive
Rural Population (Census 2010)	1,255,855	1,090,825
Urban Population (Census 2010)	4,581,921	5,559,391
Total Urban and Rural Population (Census 2010)	5,837,776	6,650,216
Pct Rural Population (Census 2010)	28.1%	23.8%
Pct Urban Population (Census 2010)	71.9%	76.2%
Counties (Census 2010)	68	55
Rural Counties (>50% rural pop - Census 2010)	41	33
Rural Counties Pct	55.7%	47.4%
Rural Pop per County	22,538	22,174
Rural Pop per Rural County	58,733	49,646
Rural Fragmentation (Rural Counties Pct / Rural Pop Pct)	2.21	2.16
Rural Fragmentation Normalized	0.36	0.36
Area (Sq mi) (Census 2010)	87,917	57,959
Rural Area (Sq mi) (Census 2010)	80,357	54,446
Pct Rural Area (Census 2010)	89.7%	84.6%
Rural Pop Density (rural pop/Sq mi)	26.69	31.53
Rural Density (rural pop/rural Sq mi)	32.51	44.39
Urban Highway Mileage (FHWA)	24,925	24,466
Rural Highway Mileage (FHWA)	63,314	51,729
Rural Highway Pct	72.0%	62.9%

i) *Total* refers to the total of all survey responses, and *Average* refers to the average of all survey responses.

Definition of Rural Planning Organization

The state DOT survey respondents defined Rural Planning Organizations in a similar way as the Illinois RPOs. More specifically, state DOTs responded that:

- a) RPOs are local-focused organizations, responsible for the identifications of local needs.
- b) RPOs are organizations that foster public participation and representativeness of rural areas.
- c) A large share of DOTs (27 out of 29) considered RPOs to be multijurisdictional organizations promoting collaborations between local and state governments.

In contrast with the common role of a regional planning commission (RPC) in Illinois, few of the participants attribute to RPOs the role of organizing and implementing transportation planning in highly

populated areas surrounding territories administered by Metropolitan Planning Organizations (5 out of 29).

The survey results also show that RPOs are not considered the sole type of organizations responsible for rural transportation planning, but they share this role with local municipalities and county governments (Figure 11). However, fewer respondents consider RPCs (15 out of 29) and MPOs (13 out of 29) central in the rural transportation planning process. As previously mentioned, in Illinois MPOs and RPCs are predominately relied upon to carry out rural transportation planning activities, and it is therefore interesting to observe how this is not the most common practice around the nation. This shows that the role of regional scale organizations, such as MPOs and RPCs, may vary significantly when it comes to rural transportation planning. Therefore, the importance of MPOs and RPCs in providing rural transportation planning can be considered a distinctive characteristic to assess different approaches to such practices among the DOTs.

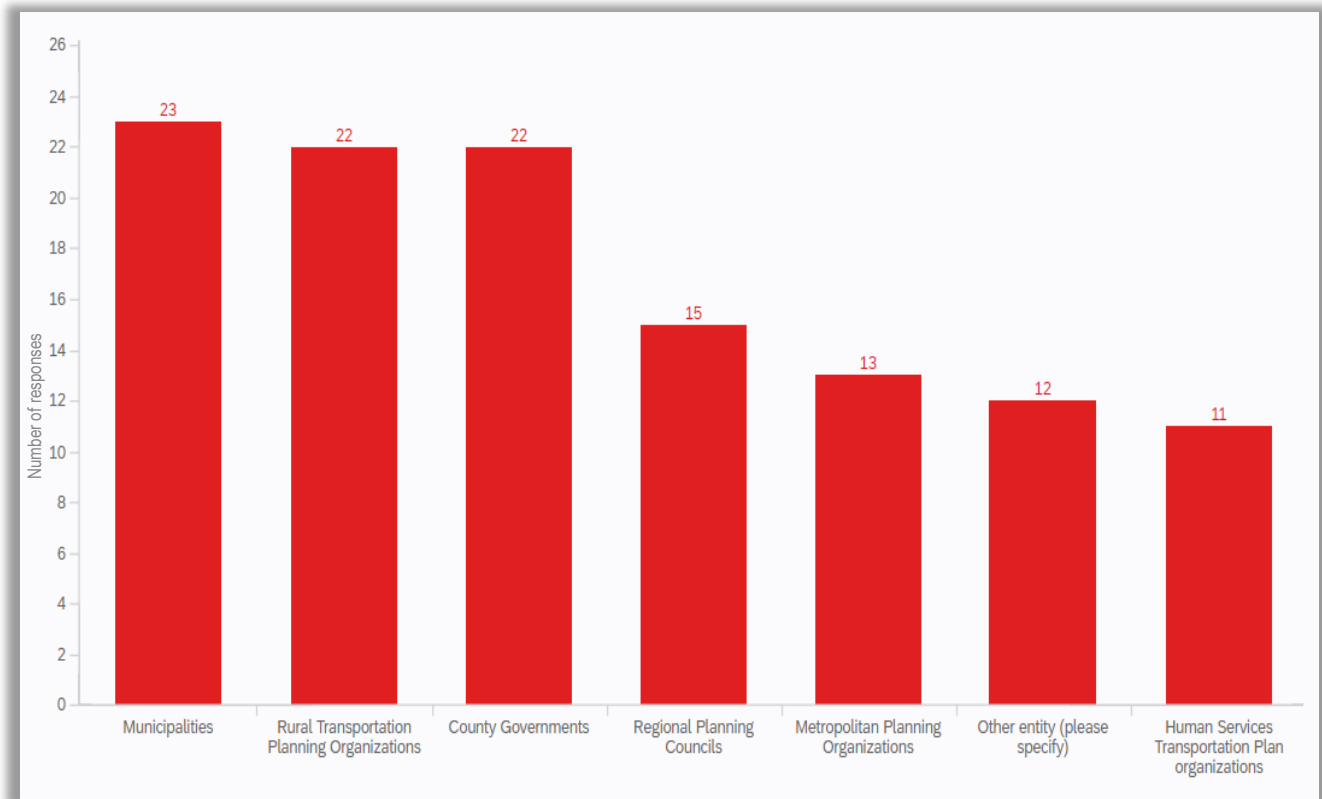
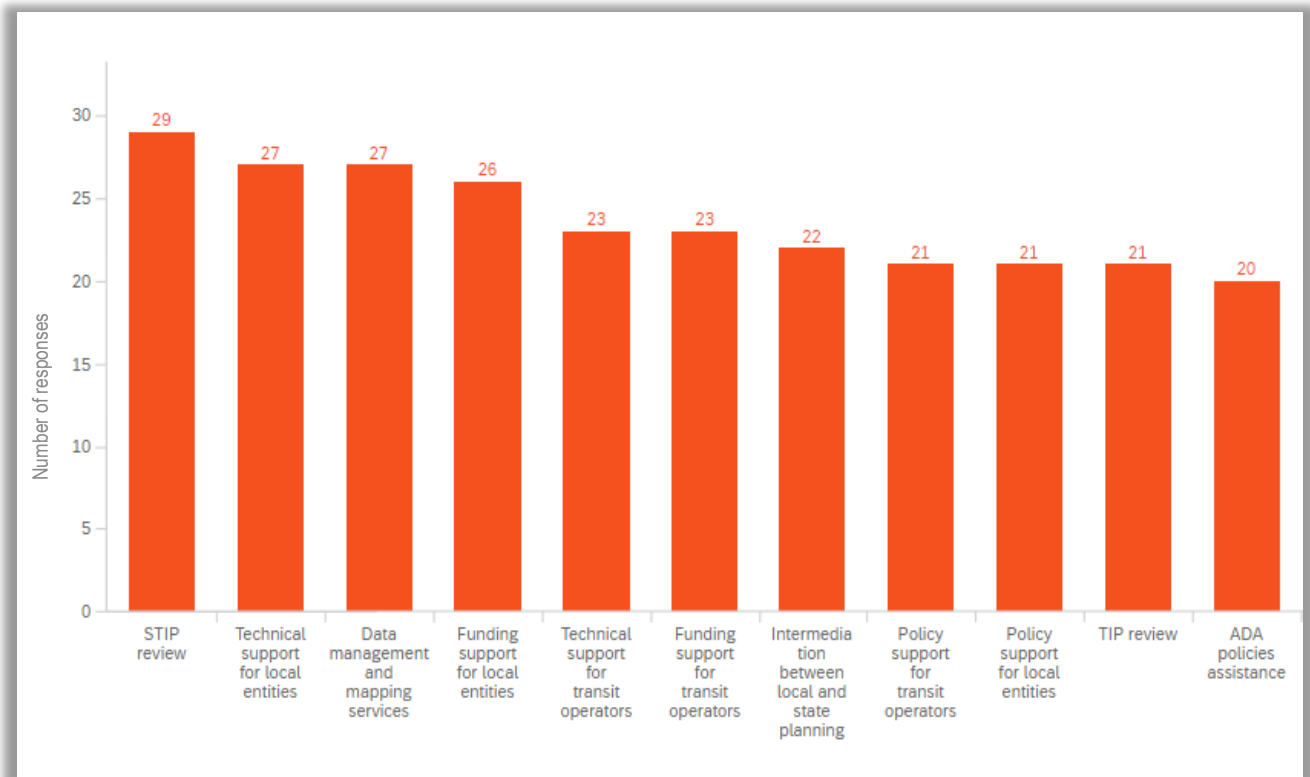


Figure 11: Which of the following organizations are responsible for rural transportation planning?

In terms of activities carried out by RPOs (Figure 12), responses show that the review of Statewide Transportation Improvement Programs (STIP) is considered the main activity of RPOs, closely followed by technical and funding support for local entities, and data management and mapping services. On the other hand, economic and community development activities, as well as community services, social services, and education are generally not considered to be part of an RPO's responsibilities. These results seem to align with the definitions of RPOs provided by the respondents.



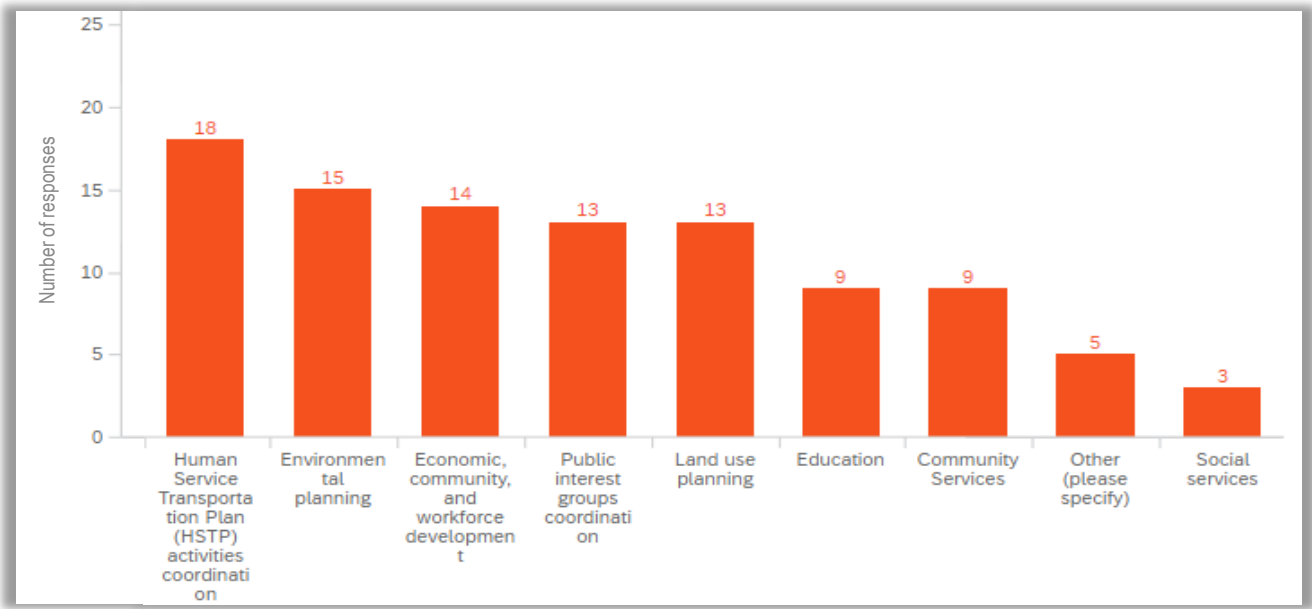


Figure 12: For which of the following activities are RPO responsible?

Coordination between RPOs and the DOT

The role of the DOT

The role of the DOT in coordinating and promoting rural planning was explored in the survey. It is worth noting that the survey was submitted to DOT representatives, and the results are therefore explanatory of the view DOTs have of their own role with regards to rural transportation planning. First, our survey found that most of the DOT representatives who participated in the study (88%) felt that rural planning was well integrated in the DOT activities. When asked what are the activities that allow the work of the DOT to contribute to rural planning, the most common responses include the provision of direct funding support for regional transportation planning activities, as well as regular communication and discussion of local needs to ensure state public participation requirements.

Second, respondents were asked to detail the role of the DOT in coordinating rural planning activities. From their responses, illustrated in Figure 13, it can be shown that DOTs around the nation perceive their role generally as facilitators of rural planning by providing funding and policy assistance to RPOs. They also emphasize their responsibility in ensuring that federal and state legislation, policies, and priorities are met. Therefore, while DOTs consider themselves as regulators and promoters of RPO activities, their role in promoting the formal establishment and coordination of such organizations is less widely held. In fact, only 15 state DOTs out of 29 have selected establishing new RPOs as a main role in the coordination of rural transportation planning. This dichotomy between supporting existing RPO systems and

developing new RPO systems may merit additional analysis of respondent regional and demographic differences.

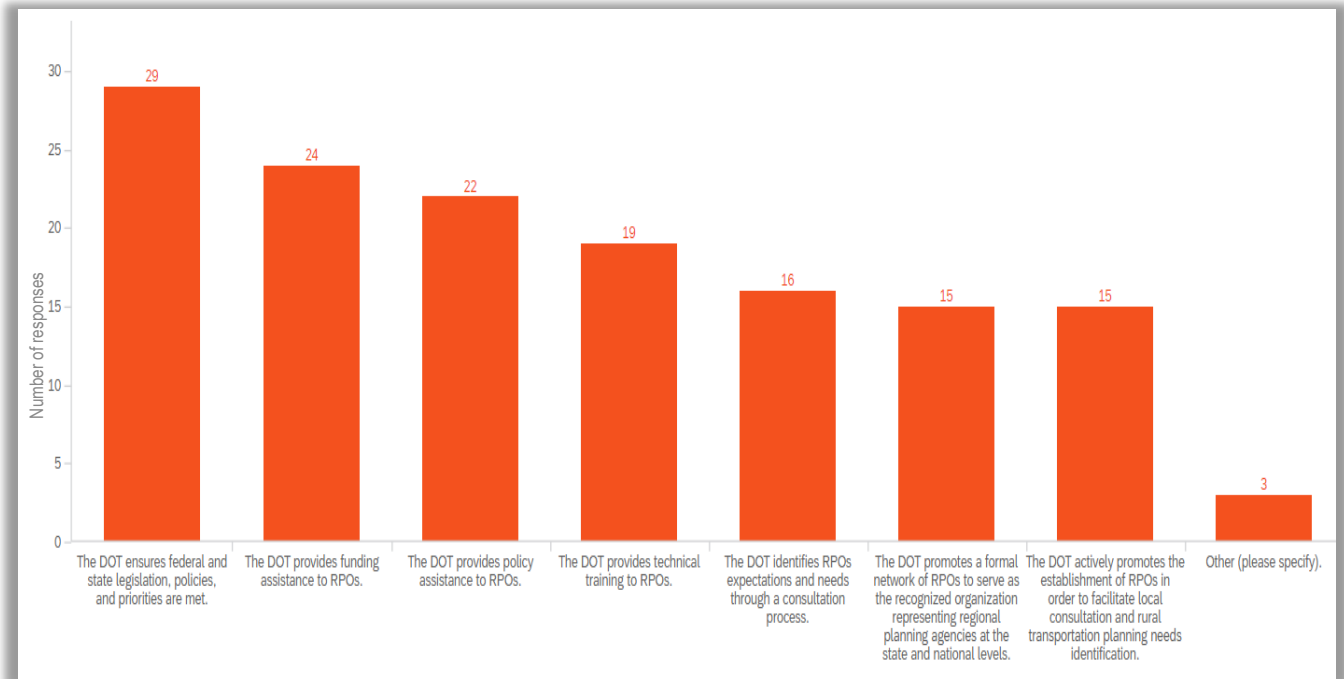


Figure 13: What is the role of the DOT in coordinating Rural Planning Organizations in the state?

DOT- RPO interaction

To explore the mechanisms and practices of coordination between RPOs and the DOT in the states which were involved in the survey, a series of questions about the frequency, topics, and means of interactions between these organizations were asked. Looking at the aggregated responses of all participants, some trends can be highlighted, demonstrating some common characteristics in the type and frequency of interchanges between RPOs and the DOT.

Figure 14 shows the distribution of the responses to the question “How often do you interact with the following organizations?”. It shows that the DOTs perceived Metropolitan Planning Organizations as the closest connection to the DOT, with most respondents indicating high frequency of interaction, even more than with other states’ officials. With regards to RPOs, two groups of respondents can be defined, a group of states that indicated at least monthly interactions with RPOs (more than two thirds, 69%), and another group of states that only occasionally have contacts with these

organizations. Finally, this question also highlighted the lack of interaction about rural transportation planning practices among states' DOTs, as only 10 states' DOT officials (out of the 29 respondents) reported having at least monthly conversations with their peers in other states.

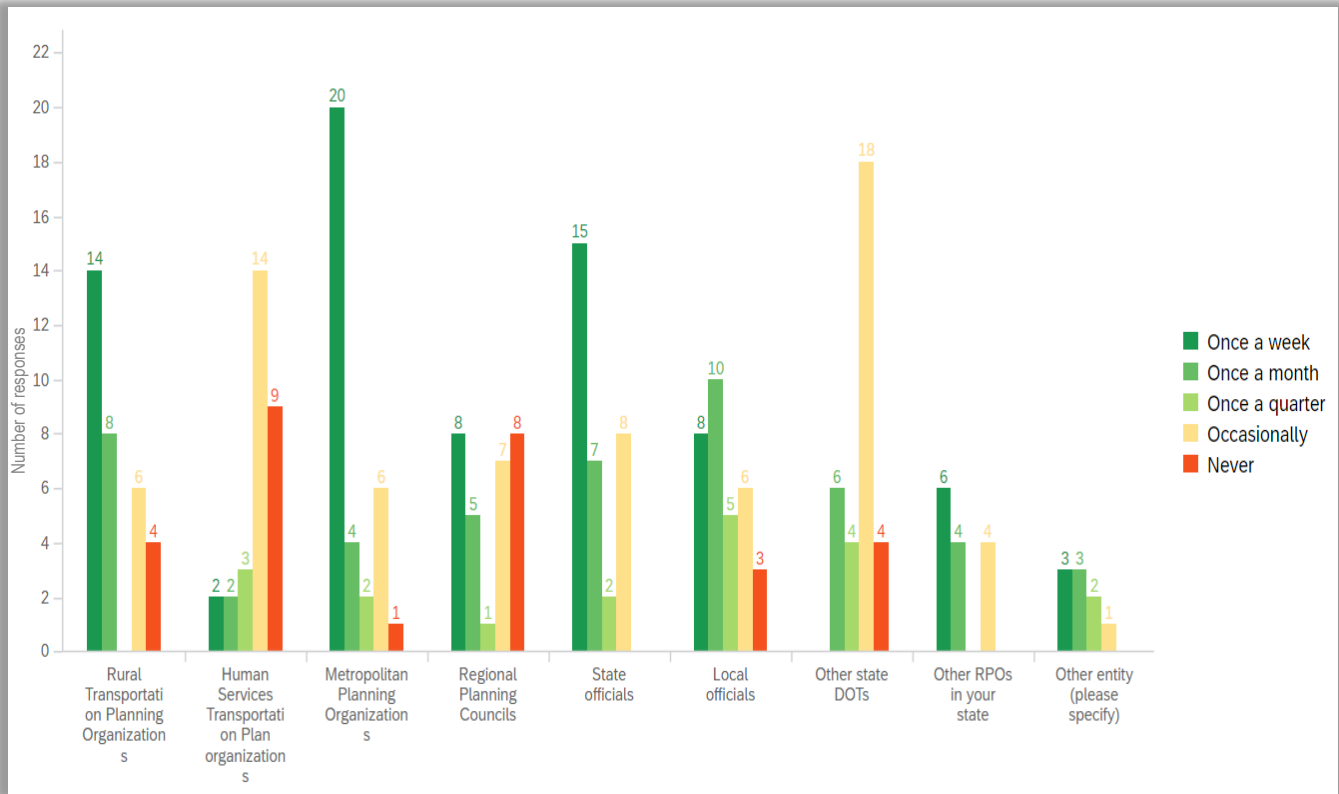


Figure 14: How often do you interact with the following organizations?

Perception of coordination

In this section of the survey, two questions explored the perception of coordination both in terms of the current status of coordination in transportation planning activities, as well as with regards to the main factors impacting the efficiency of such coordination between the state DOT and local RPOs. These two questions asked the respondent to indicate their level of agreement with different statements about coordination in transportation planning. The first question tries to explore the attitude toward coordination in transportation planning from the perspective of DOT employees. The second question investigates relevant factors hindering coordination, such as lack of time, resources, or legislation limitations. Figure 15 and Figure 16 show the results of these two questions, displaying the percentage of

responses for each agreement level for each statement. In both Figures, the percentage of different level of agreements with the statements are color-coded as shown in the legend. A few considerations can be outlined by observing the results. First, coordination in transportation planning is overwhelmingly perceived to serve more people, improve the quality of the transportation services offered in the state, and improve cost effectiveness. All these benefits derived from coordination are agreed upon by at least 85% of the respondents. However, while most DOT representatives shared this view, there are significant minorities that do not recognize coordination as a means to achieve these objectives. Particularly, around 13% of respondents did not agree with the statement that coordination would improve cost effectiveness of transportation planning services.

These insights might suggest that, depending on the context, coordination is not considered an optimal result to achieve and that actors who would be key to improve coordination might not be even convinced about the benefits that would come from coordination among transportation planning organizations. This alternate consideration of the benefits of coordination, may have caused the last statement concerning the existence of incentives to coordination, to be the least agreed with. This highlights the lack of incentive to coordinate among different organizations (Figure 15).



Figure 15: To what extent do you agree with the following statements on coordination in transportation planning?

In the second question on coordination, the results show that the DOT personnel perceive the most important factors hindering coordination are (in order of importance): lack of time or staff (more than 88% of agreement), administrative requirements (more than 51% of agreement), lack of knowledge of stakeholders in the state (more than 42% of agreement), federal or state laws and regulations (both over 27% of agreement).

While it is unsurprising that lack of time and resources represents the main hinderance to transportation planning coordination, it is worth noting how due to the above-mentioned complexity of the rural transportation planning context, lack of knowledge of existing actors in the field represents a significant limitation to transportation planning coordination. Uncertainty of these actors, as well as their activities,

role, and financing practices are an issue shared by multiple DOTs and appear to be important to address when tackling the challenge of rural transportation planning.

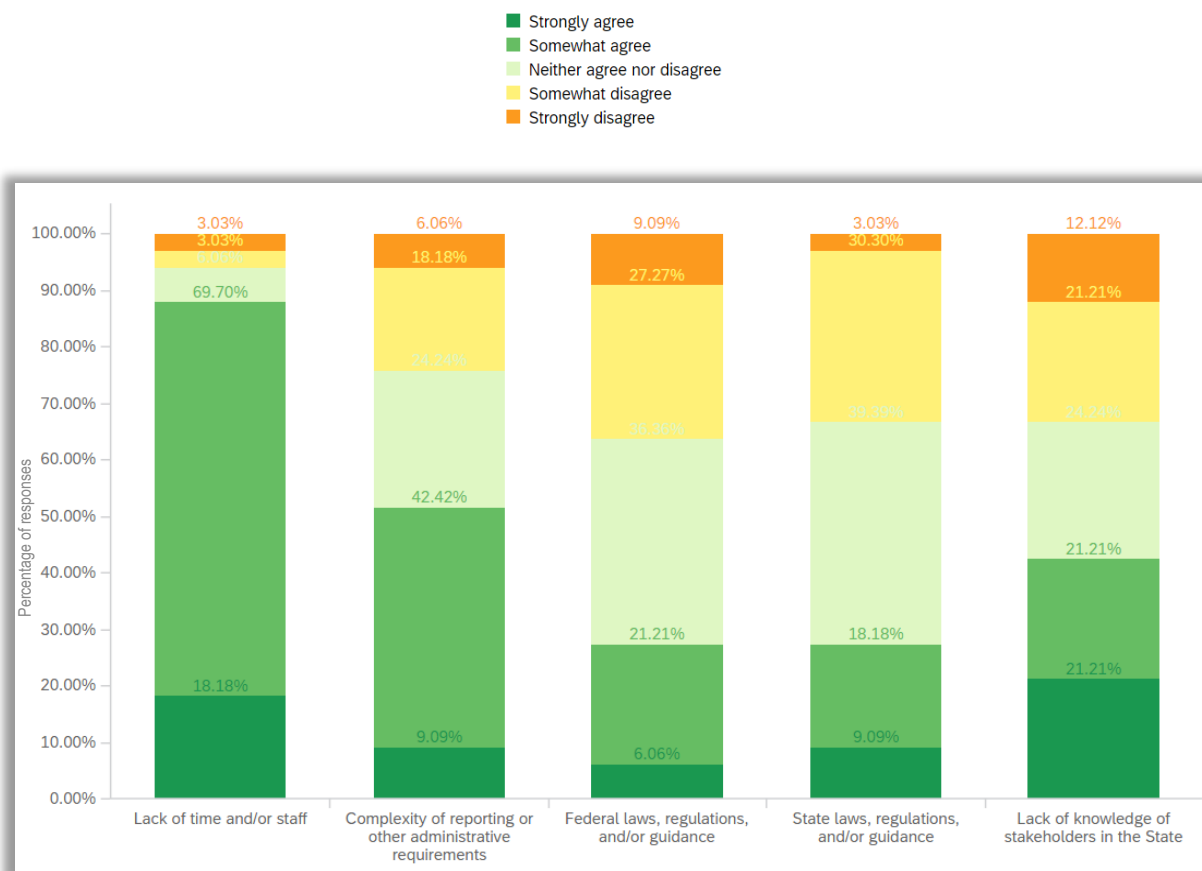


Figure 16: What are the main factors impacting coordination between your agencies and RPOs?

Funding and financing of rural transportation planning

In this section, our survey collected information about state DOT budgets, and the share dedicated to rural transportation planning. Only 16 DOTs provided their rural transportation planning state budget, and for these states the average 2019 budget was just over \$1.5 million, or \$205,000 per RPO (for those states which indicated the number of RPOs active in their territory).

Most state DOTs indicated that part of their activity is to support RPOs securing funding for rural transportation projects (76%), while a smaller share provide a local match to help secure federal funding in RPO-promoted rural transportation projects (58%). The summary of responses displayed in Figure 17 shows how FHWA Statewide Planning and Research (SP&R) funding and dedicated state funding programs

are the two main sources of funding for RPOs to implement rural transportation projects (both selected by over 29% of respondents), followed by FTA funding streams, specifically Section 5304 and 5311 (respectively around 15% and 14%), and FHWA Surface Transportation Program funding (9.7%).

Rural transportation planning therefore appears to be heavily reliant on state funding programs, which need to be well-designed and properly directed to the existing actors. The result of this research emphasizes the importance of a clear understanding of the rural transportation planning practices in the state in order to design efficient funding programs on which the quality and effectiveness of rural transportation planning might rely.

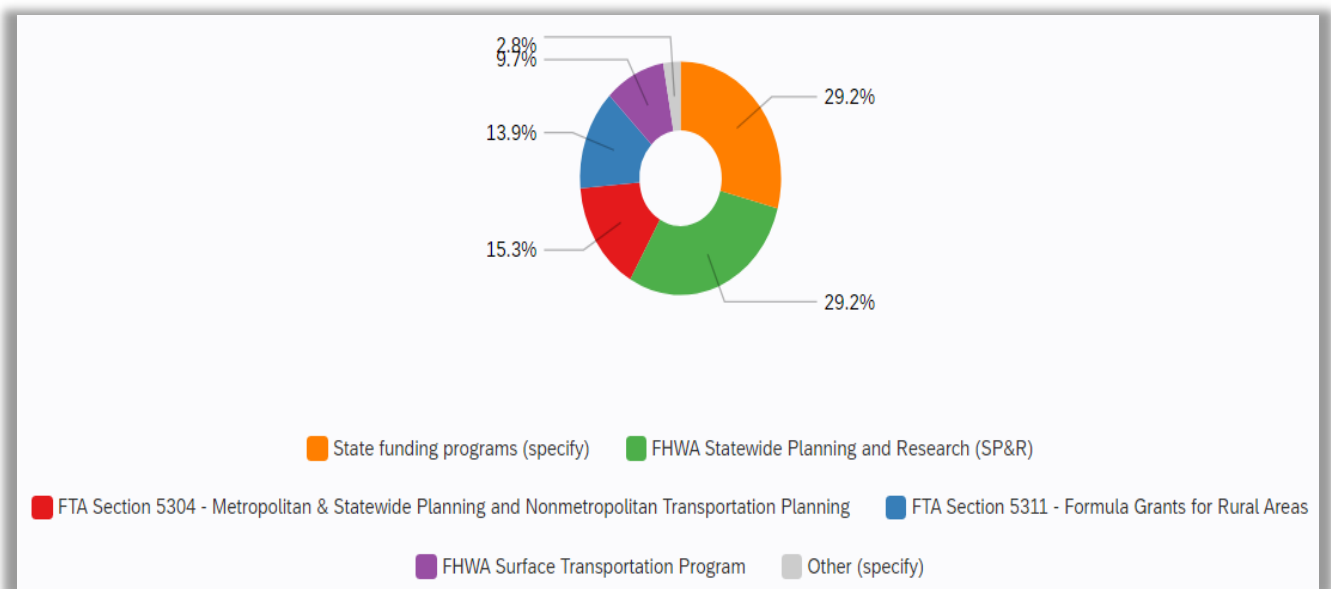


Figure 17: What are the main sources of funding for rural transportation planning in your state?

State dedicated stream of funding

In the next section of the survey, respondents were asked to describe any dedicated stream of funding that they are currently directing toward rural transportation planning. Most of the participants (72%) indicated that their DOT is indeed providing a dedicated funding stream. Moreover, 16 of the 23 DOTs that specified specific state funding streams provided their 2019 funding amounts, with an average of approximately \$1,130,000, or just over \$130,000 per RPO.

Challenges and needs

The last section of the survey tries to identify challenges and needs to improve rural transportation planning, from the perspective of state DOTs. Figure 18 summarizes the main challenges concerning rural

transportation planning projects. Most respondents identify funding challenges as the most relevant ones, in particular lack of funding sources, and difficulty in securing local match (respectively 24 and 20 respondents out of 29 indicated these as main challenges). The second category of challenges identified are staffing limitation, both in terms of lack of personnel (19 respondents out of 29) and lack of expertise (16 respondents out of 29). It is interesting to notice that lack of coordination is not considered a significant challenge by most state DOTs (only 6 out of 29 participants).

Figure 19 shows the most critical needs for state RPOs. In line with the challenges identified, state DOTs employees identify an increase in funding support as the most critical need for RPOs (22 respondents out of 29), followed by increased expertise and availability of personnel (20 respondents out of 29). Again, the responses show how improved coordination does not seem to be considered a solution to rural transportation planning in most cases (6 respondents out of 29).

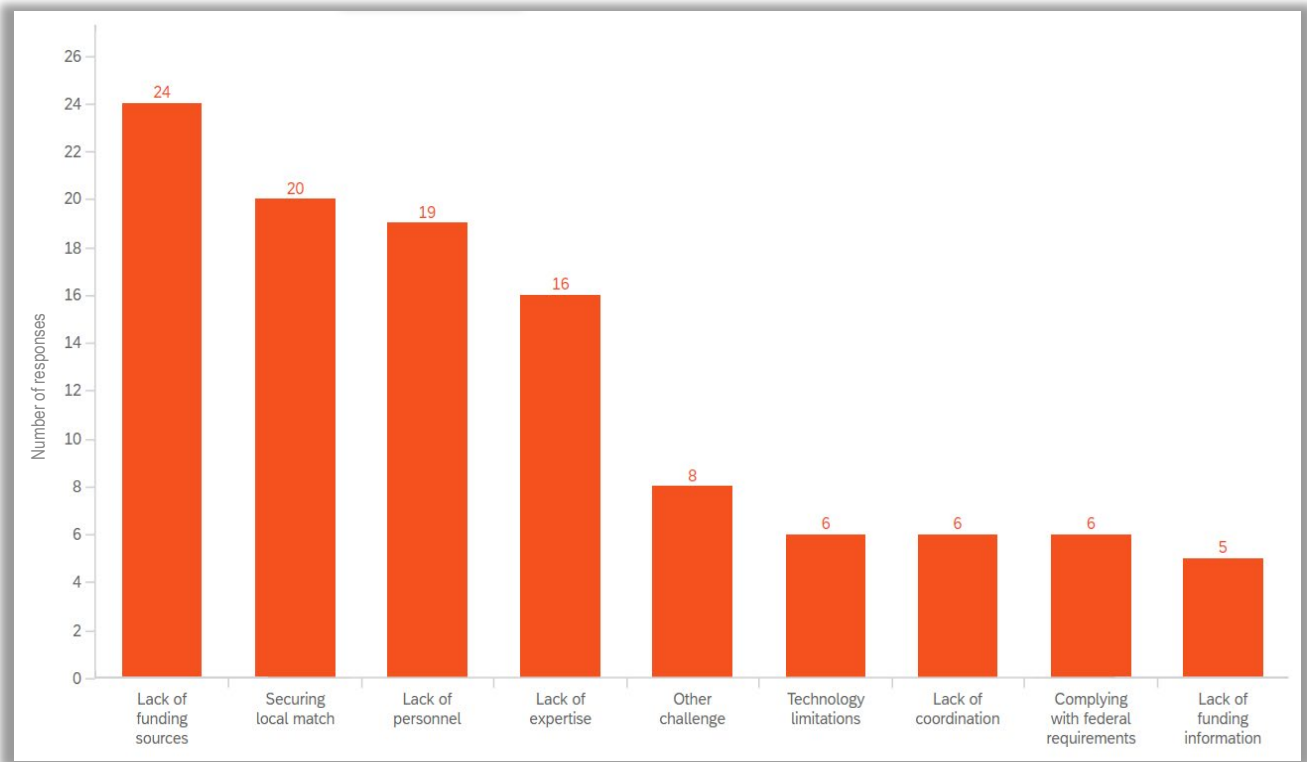


Figure 18: What are the main challenges regarding rural transportation planning projects?

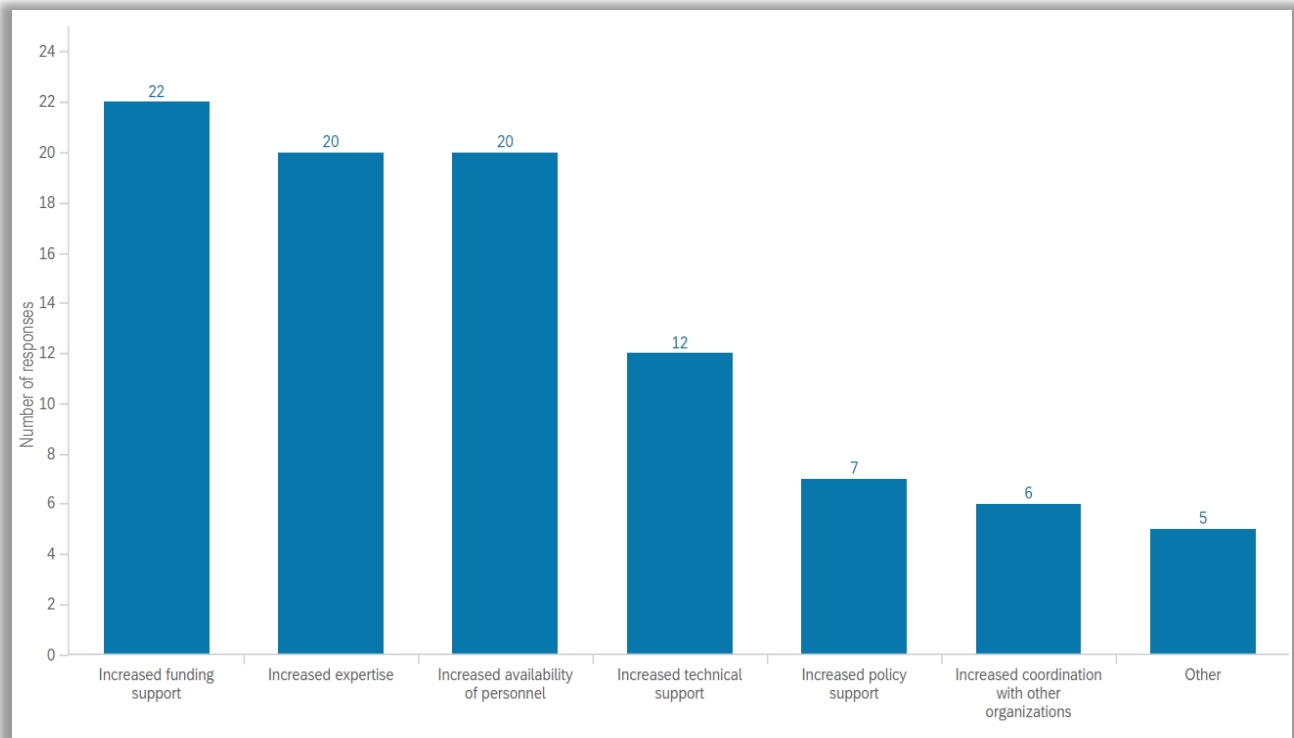


Figure 19: What are the most critical needs for RPOs in your state?

In order to determine the states whose rural characteristics are most similar to Illinois we are developing an analytical model that will utilize a cluster analysis approach that will group states with those they are most alike. This model will compare key characteristics to provide a list of both regional and national comparison points. Potentially, this could facilitate the identification and interaction between IDOT and peer states to promote rural transportation planning needs. The model is still being finalized, pending additional input from IDOT on important characteristics they would like to highlight. It is conceivable, as different covariates are considered in the model, the resulting groups of peer states would change significantly. Therefore, a thorough assessment of the soundness of this methodology is still required to validate its results.

4. COORDINATION EFFICIENCY FRAMEWORK

4.1. Indicators assessing efficiency of coordination for rural transportation planning

The DOT and RPO surveys identified several indicators useful to assessing efficiency of coordination for rural transportation planning. Generally, indicators included the following broad categories. First, communication, whether the frequency of communication between DOTs/RPOs and other government actors, or with whom DOTs or RPOs predominately communicated most. Second, that DOTs or RPOs primarily identified coordination with serving more people, improving quality of transportation services, and improving cost effectiveness, although there was a large segment of respondents who disputed the latter. Third, the kinds of activities DOTs and RPOs provided to local entities. Respondents clearly identified that social and community services, TIP and STIP review, and education are not as strongly identified with coordination as other activities. Fourth, respondents identified the incentives to coordination, with Illinois RPOs indicating the existence of more incentives to coordinate, whereas statewide DOTs indicated fewer incentives. And finally, what hindrances to coordination existed. Both DOTs and RPOs clearly indicated that lack of time and/or staff was the greatest barrier to coordination, followed by administrative requirements, and federal or state laws or regulations.

Illinois RPO-specific indicators included who RPOs believe is responsible for transportation planning in areas outside MPO boundaries, and whether there is an overlap of transportation planning services between responsible parties. RPOs also indicated that their IDOT communications are infrequent, with most reporting once per quarter or fewer communications with IDOT. Additionally, most of these communications were email-based instead of phone or in-person events. Many also stated that the FAST Act has not significantly changed their interactions with IDOT.

State DOT-specific indicators included that most had a dedicated state funding program for rural transportation planning. State DOTs also indicated that in addition to general hindrances to coordination, a lack of knowledge of state stakeholders prevented better coordination.

Finally, the NADO report data can be used as an indicator for a coordination index's efficiency. STIP and TIP production to sustain a statewide transportation plan are considered a key RTPO role per NADO (2016). However, both statewide DOTs and Illinois RPOs did not identify these as key roles. Therefore, there is some discrepancy between the NADO survey and the UTC survey respondents as to key role and coordination efficiency.

4.2. Role of IDOT in rural transportation planning – regulation / coordination / funding

RPOs primarily seek assistance with funding support and technical support. Many respondents indicated that inability to attend the IDOT Fall Planning Conference and obtain relevant education was due to a lack of time and/or staff, or lack of knowledge about the Conference. IDOT can address both issues and improve overall coordination by providing technical assistance to RPOs. Providing direct technical assistance will increase IDOT and RPO communication rates, increase coordination, and ensure the direct application and dissemination of best planning practices to RPOs who lack the time and/or staff to attend the Fall Conference.

4.3. Comparative perspective and state by state fact sheet

Three scores were developed for each Illinois agency, IDOT Coordination, Peer Coordination, and Willingness to Coordinate, and three scores were developed for each state DOT, Perception of Coordination, Coordination with RPOs, and Willingness to Coordinate. These scores were based upon survey respondents' answers. Scores among agencies were weighted, with certain responses such as higher frequency of communication or in-person instead of virtual interactions worth more than other responses. Additionally, the more outside organizations a respondent reported interacting with, the higher their score. Valuation weights were based on two categorizations. First, where the question was multiple choice, scores were a fraction of the number of potential responses for that question. More valuable responses were then worth double the base fraction amount to provide sufficient value differential. Second, where respondents had to choose a single response, the least important option was worth zero points, with more important options following an exponential growth pattern up to a value of one point. The goal of these valuations was to ensure that each question could be worth at most a single point on the valuation score prior to normalization.³⁰

These valuation weights were chosen to emphasize the importance of collaborative practices. It would also identify where gaps existed in collaborative practices. These results would provide IDOT with information on which agencies or states had potential best practices to emulate, as well as which agencies

³⁰ Normalization involves taking the scores for each organization for a particular variable, identifying the minimum and maximum potential values for that response, scaling that range to a 0-5, and plotting organization scores along the resulting range.

needed additional outreach by IDOT. Pre-indexed valuations, which are the gross total scores for potential answers based on their importance and potential number of responses for a survey question, are listed below:

Table 11: Pre-Indexed Weighting of Survey Responses

Category	Importance	Value
RPO Network (Per Network)		0.25
Frequency - More Often, Once a Week, Once a Month	High	1
Frequency - Once a Quarter, Once a Year	Medium	0.5
Frequency - Less often, Never	None	0
Means of communication - Phone, In person meeting		0.286
Means of communication - Email, Event, Sector specific committee		0.143
Importance of Coordination Statements - Strongly agree, Somewhat agree	High	1
Importance of Coordination Statements - Neither agree nor disagree	Medium	0.5
Importance of Coordination Statements - Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree	None	0
Rural Committee (Per Committee)		0.25
Other RPO Networks - Formal (Adjustment)		2
Other RPO Networks - Informal (Adjustment)		0.667
Frequency of Interaction with MPO	High	1
Frequency of Interaction with State Official	High	1
Frequency of Interaction with Local Official	High	1
Frequency of Interaction with RTPO, RPC, or Other RPOs in State	Medium	0.5
Frequency of Interaction with HSTP	Low	0.25
Frequency of Interaction with Other State DOT	Low	0.25

Weighted responses for each category were then normalized using a 0-5 scale. Base response weights were calculated using a fraction of the number of potential answers a respondent could give. From there, if a particular response was deemed more important (for example, “Medium” versus “Low”), it would be worth double the base response weight and so on until the importance level arrived at 1. This factorial increase in valuation was based on the desire to clearly identify more important responses. More important responses were determined using the values of high frequency communication, engagement with organizations more influential on rural planning needs such as MPOs, State Officials, and Local Officials, direct live communications, whether over the phone or in-person, and agreement towards coordination value assessment questions. Level of importance was determined through an internal survey of experts who identified the key aspects that lead to increased coordination. After summing the survey

respondents' answers for a category, they were normalized in relation to the potential range of scores and assigned a 0-5 score accordingly.

IDOT Coordination scores were based upon survey respondents' frequency of communication with IDOT, the method used to communicate with IDOT, whether the FAST Act had improved interaction with IDOT, attendance of the IDOT Fall Conference, and degree to which the agency felt incentivized to coordinate.

Results from survey respondents indicate few agencies feel that coordination is promoted by IDOT, as seen in Table 12, below. Only 6 survey respondents scored a 3 or above on the index values.

Table 12: Top Illinois Agencies IDOT Coordination Scores

Illinois RPO	IDOT Coordination Score
Tri-County Regional Planning Commission	5.0
Tri-County Regional Planning Commission	5.0
McLean County Regional Planning Commission	4.0
Boone County Highway Department	3.1
Champaign County Regional Planning Commission	3.1
DeKalb County	3.0
Kankakee Area Transportation Study	3.0

State DOT Perception of Coordination scores were based upon survey respondents' frequency of interaction, means of communication, and perception of whether the FAST Act had improved interactions with RPOs.

Survey respondents indicate an even percentage feel that they have adequate coordination with RPOs to those that feel they have little coordination with RPOs. However, there were few state DOTs that felt they had excellent coordination with RPOs.

Table 13: Top State DOT Perception of Coordination Scores

State DOT	Perception of Coordination
Vermont	5.0
Wisconsin	4.5
Tennessee	4.3
Washington	4.1
Texas	3.8

Peer Coordination scores were based upon survey respondents' use of ongoing transportation planning committees, knowledge of rural planning organizations within the state, use of formal or informal organizations, and the frequency of interaction and method used to interact with RTPOs, HTSPs, MPOs, RPCs, state officials, local officials, other Illinois RPOs, other states' DOTs, and other organizations.

Survey respondents indicated greater coordination among their peers than with IDOT. While only 6 agencies reported a 3 or higher in IDOT Coordination, 12 reported a 3 or higher in Peer Coordination.

Table 14: Top Agency Peer Coordination Scores

Illinois RPO	Peer Coordination Score
Bi-State Regional Commission	5.0
Champaign County Regional Planning Commission	4.6
Tri-County Regional Planning Commission	4.4
Greater Egypt Regional Planning and Development Commission	4.2
Blackhawk Hills Regional Council	4.1

State DOT Coordination with RPO scores were based upon whether the DOT had a structure for rural planning, if they assisted RPOs to obtain funding, whether they felt they incentivized RPOs to coordinate at the state level, whether funds were made available specifically for rural planning, knowledge of rural planning organizations within the state, use of formal or informal organizations, and the frequency of interaction and method used to interact with RTPOs, HTSPs, MPOs, RPCs, state officials, local officials, other states' DOTs, and other organizations.

Table 15: Top State DOT Coordination with RPO Scores

State DOT	Coordination with RPOs
Vermont	5.0
Wisconsin	4.9
Tennessee	4.5
Washington	3.8
Texas	3.7

From the results in Table 15, state DOT survey respondents indicate an even percentage feel they have adequate coordination with RPOs to those that feel they have little coordination with RPOs. However, there were few state DOTs that felt they had excellent coordination with RPOs. This result appears to match state DOTs' perception of their coordination, indicating that the DOTs correctly visualize their actual abilities.

Table 16: Top Agency Willingness to Coordinate Scores

Illinois RPO	Normalized Willingness to Coordinate Score
Bi-State Regional Commission	5.0
Champaign County Regional Planning Commission	5.0
Tri-County Regional Planning Commission	5.0
Greater Egypt Regional Planning and Development Commission	5.0
DeKalb County	5.0
Kankakee Area Transportation Study	5.0
Coles County Regional Planning and Development Commission	5.0
SHOW BUS Public Transportation ³¹	5.0
North Central Illinois Council of Governments	5.0
Region 1 Planning Council	5.0
Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission	5.0

In direct comparison to perception of IDOT and RPO coordination policies, survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated a willingness to coordinate, with 11 survey respondents scoring a perfect value

³¹ Pass through for Grantees McLean County, Kankakee County and Logan County

(5) on the Willingness to Coordinate index as shown in Table 16: Top Agency Willingness to Coordinate Scores above. These scores were based on respondents' perception of whether coordination would allow them to serve more people, improve the quality of their work, improve cost effectiveness, and whether technology would improve coordination. With most respondents indicating a high Willingness to Coordinate, Illinois RPOs show a mindset and strong desire for coordination, as well as a positive attitude that coordination can improve the RPO's work product.

This mismatch between the Willingness to Coordinate score and the IDOT Coordination and Peer Coordination may indicate that current IDOT and RPO policies may not fully meet local desires. The Willingness to Coordinate value may also influence the Peer Coordination value, as 4 of the survey respondents scoring a perfect Willingness to Coordinate score also appear in the top Peer Coordination score survey respondents.

Similar to the Illinois RPOs, state DOT survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated a willingness to coordinate, with 21 survey respondents scoring a perfect value (5) on the Willingness to Coordinate index. Similarly, this mismatch between the Willingness to Coordinate score and the Coordination Perception and Coordination with RPO scores may indicate that state DOT policies may not fully meet DOT desire for additional coordination.

Complete tables with resulting scores of both Illinois RPOs and Illinois DOT are included in Appendix B.

5. IDENTIFICATION OF BEST PRACTICES AMONG STATE DOTs

This section provides an outline of the methods adopted to cluster states DOT who participated in the survey. The objective is to define potential groups of states can be compared to Illinois, based on different rationales. An in-depth comparative analysis of forms of coordination and approaches to rural transportation planning will offer insights on best practices around the nation. While the previous chapter focused on the review of results from all organizations who participated in the survey, in this chapter the focus will be on grouping states that would present similar characteristics, and/or similar needs to those of Illinois. The objective would be to illustrate relevant case studies for IDOT to better address rural transportation needs and coordination challenges with RPOs in the state.

5.1. Identification of peer states

5.1.1. Geographical clustering

The first type of grouping is based on a geographical clustering criterion. A group of peer states with Illinois according to this criterion includes states that are in geographical proximity to Illinois, as well as belonging to the same regional institutions. More specifically, this grouping will consider the geographic Regions and Division defined by the US Census Bureau, and the membership to the Mid America Association of State Transportation Officials.

Census Regions and Divisions are groupings of States that subdivide the United States.³² In the US there are in total 4 Regions, and each of the four census Regions is divided into two or more census Divisions, for a total of 9 Divisions (these are shown in Figure 20). The state of Illinois is included in Region 2, Midwest³³, and in Division 3, East North Central. Within the same Division there are the states of Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Moreover, Region 2 also includes Division 4, West North Central, which includes Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Missouri.

The Mid America Association of State Transportation Officials (MAASTO) is one of the four divisions of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). AASHTO is a nonprofit and

³² For an overview of geographic levels defined by the US Census Bureau, visit: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/economic-census/guidance-geographies/levels.html>

³³ Prior to June 1984, the Midwest Region was designated as the North Central Region.

nonpartisan association that represents transportation departments in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. It represents all transportation modes with the primary goal of supporting the development of an integrated national transportation system. A key responsibility of this organization is to educate decision-makers about the crucial role of the transportation system in securing good quality of life and sound economy for the regions. Moreover, it serves as a liaison between state departments of transportation (DOTs) and the Federal government. Specifically, “the goal of MAASTO is to foster the development, operation, and maintenance of an integrated and balanced transportation system that adequately serves the transportation needs of the member states.”³⁴ MAASTO consists of 10 states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin (Figure 21).

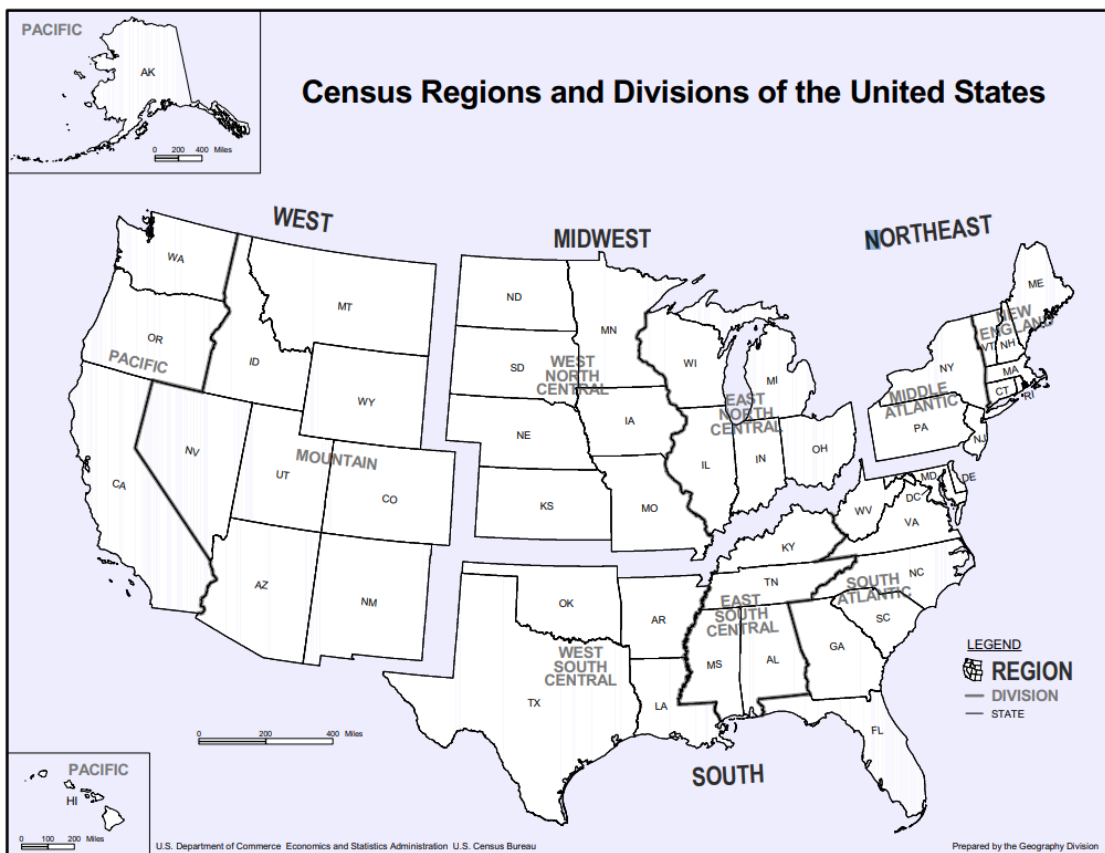


Figure 20: Map of the Census Regions and Divisions of the United States. Source: US Census Bureau

³⁴ For more information, visit: <http://maasto.net/>



Figure 21: Map of the 10 MAASTO member states. Source: MAASTO website: <http://maasto.net/>

The following table summarizes the participation of states to the described geographical clustering (Table 17). Noticeably, Kentucky is the only MAASTO member state that does not belong to the Midwest Census Region.

Table 17: Summary of states belonging to geographical institutional clusters with Illinois

State	MAASTO	Region 2 Midwest	Division 3 East North Central
<i>Illinois</i>	x	x	x
<i>Indiana</i>	x	x	x
<i>Ohio</i>	x	x	x
<i>Michigan</i>	x	x	x
<i>Wisconsin</i>	x	x	x
<i>Iowa</i>	x	x	
<i>Kansas</i>	x	x	
<i>Kentucky</i>	x		
<i>Minnesota</i>	x	x	
<i>Missouri</i>	x	x	

5.1.2. Classification of states by rural characteristics

The second criteria used to identify similar states to Illinois in terms of rural planning needs is based on the classification of states by rural characteristics. This analysis assumes that states with similar

geographic and demographic characteristics in their rural areas would face similar challenges in the organization, implementation, and coordination of rural planning activities. A wide range of variables on rural characteristics of states were included. The data includes information on rural population, rural area, rural roads, rural institutional fragmentation, and rural density. A qualitative approach was adopted to group states based on the rural characteristics in different typologies. This classification made use of radar charts visualizations³⁵, which allowed the comparison of the type and level of rural needs of states. This visualization method generates shapes based on each state data points. Once they were created, radar charts were qualitatively compared with that of Illinois to identify common patterns. Among the variables explored, six were included in these visualizations, namely rural population, rural area extension, number of rural counties, miles of rural roads, and the percentage of each of these variables over the total population, area, counties, and roads respectively. The purpose of this choice of variables was based on a criterion of clarity of the visualizations, as well as simplicity of measures to define rural characteristics. The resulting classification represents a tentative categorization based on qualitative evaluation of rural characteristics. It is intended as a basis for further discussion on the potential of classifying criteria to identify similar states to Illinois in terms of rural characteristics. Its methodology can be expanded and refined to update and produced more quantitatively solid results. The following table summarizes the resulting groups of states from this analysis and their characteristics (Table 18). Only states whose representatives participated in the survey are included in this classification.

³⁵ Multidimensional data visualization technique with potential to effectively convey meaning in their multivariate data through graphical presentation. For a description of the visualization and its characteristics, see Saary (2008).

Table 18: Qualitative classification of states based on rural characteristics. Only includes survey respondents.

	Rural type	States included
Type 1	Rural states with population concentrated in urban areas	Arizona, Colorado, Illinois , Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, Ohio, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin
Type 2	Mid-sized mostly rural states	Alabama, Arkansas, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, North Dakota, Tennessee.
Type 3	Small rural states	Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont
Type 4	Small urban states	Delaware, Massachusetts
Outliers	Unique rural characteristics as compared to the other states	Michigan, Florida, Texas

The first group of states identified can be referred to as *rural states with population concentrated in urban areas*. The profile of these states is shown in Figure 22. For all visualizations, the grey background shape in the radar chart represents the rural characteristics of the state of Illinois, taken as reference. This group comprise of states with similar rural characteristics to those of Illinois. They are states with moderately small land areas classified as rural, but which represent a large percentage of the total state area. Moreover, they have a low share of the population living in rural areas, with moderate institutional rural fragmentation (percentage of counties classified as rural). In these states, a large amount of population lives in urban areas (low percentage of rural population), and a large amount of road miles, land area, and counties are classified as urban.

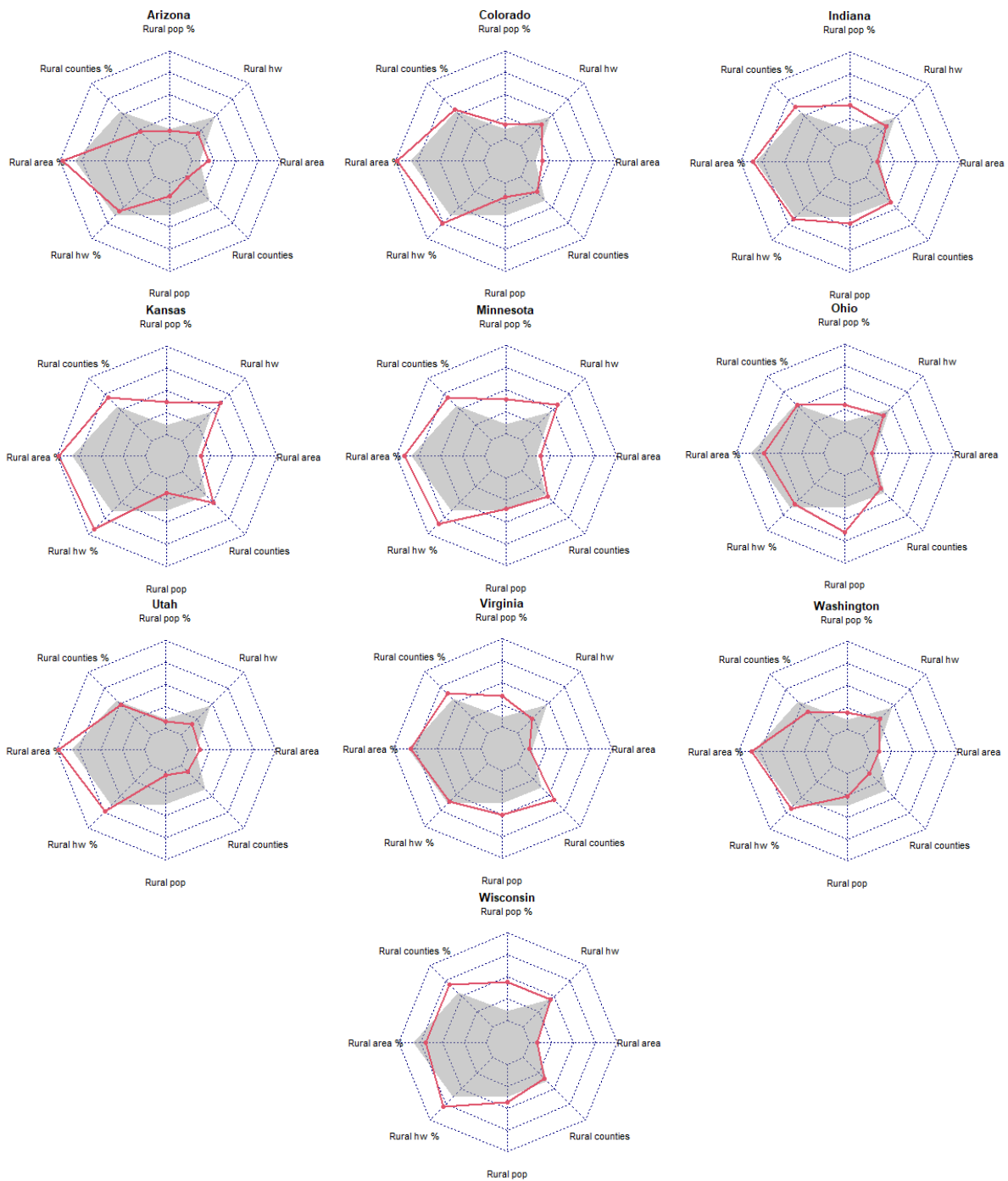


Figure 22: Type 1 states, rural states with mostly urban population. The grey area represents the state of Illinois.

The second group of states are *rural states with mostly rural population* (Figure 23). These states can be defined as mostly rural, with most of the population living in areas classified as rural. Moreover, a large share of the land area and of the road infrastructure is rural, and most of their counties are also classified as rural. These states typically present a small amount of rural highway, land area, and rural counties (the only exception being Kentucky, which has numerous rural counties), mostly due to their moderate size.

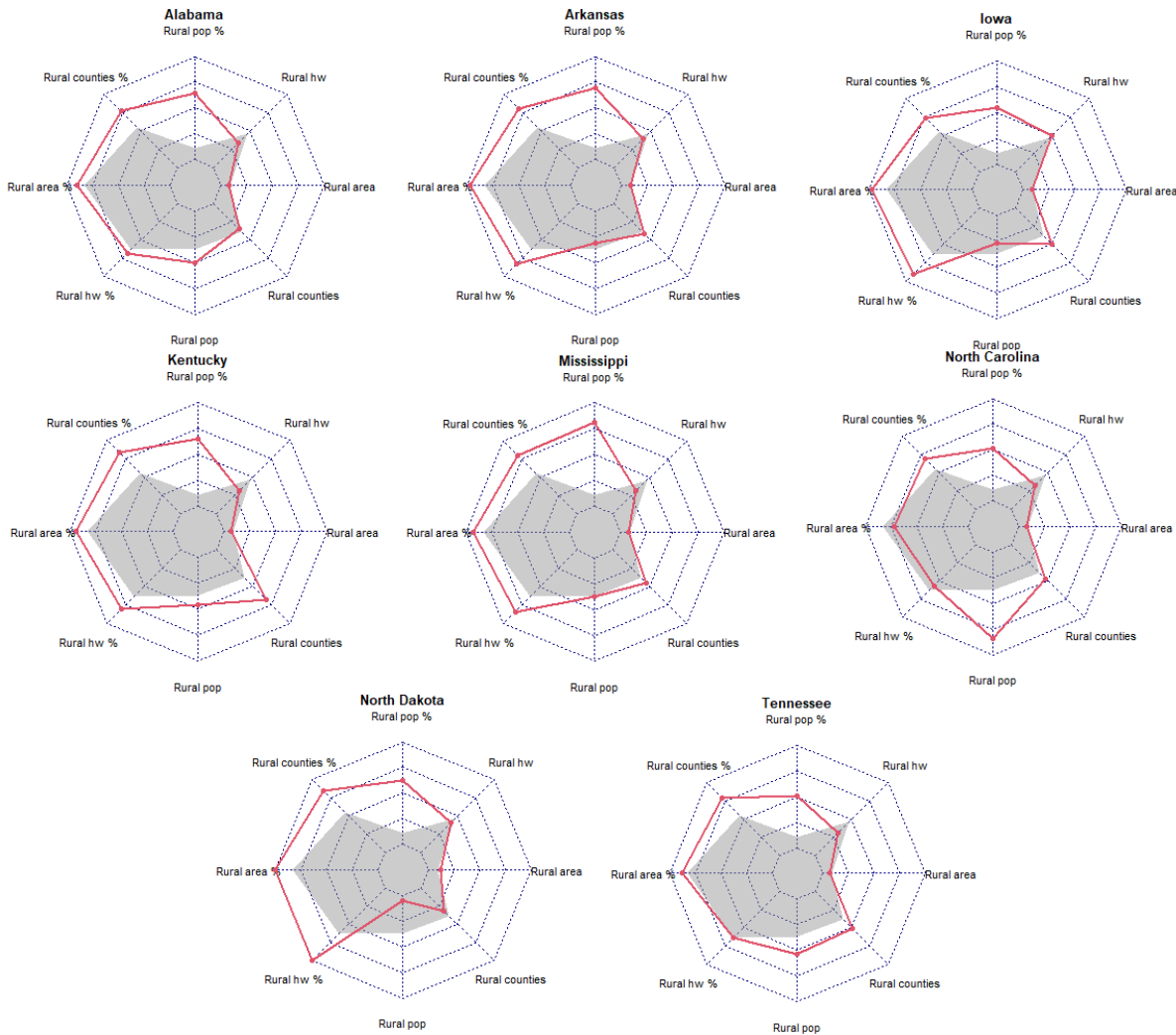


Figure 23: Type 2 states, mid-sized mostly rural states. The grey area represents the state of Illinois.

Type 3 states are *small rural states* comparatively to Illinois (Figure 24). They present extremely limited rural areas, roads, population, and counties. However, they amount to high percentages of the state total land area, roads, population, and counties. This indicates these states are mostly rural but too small to be compared to Illinois in terms of planning needs. This group includes Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

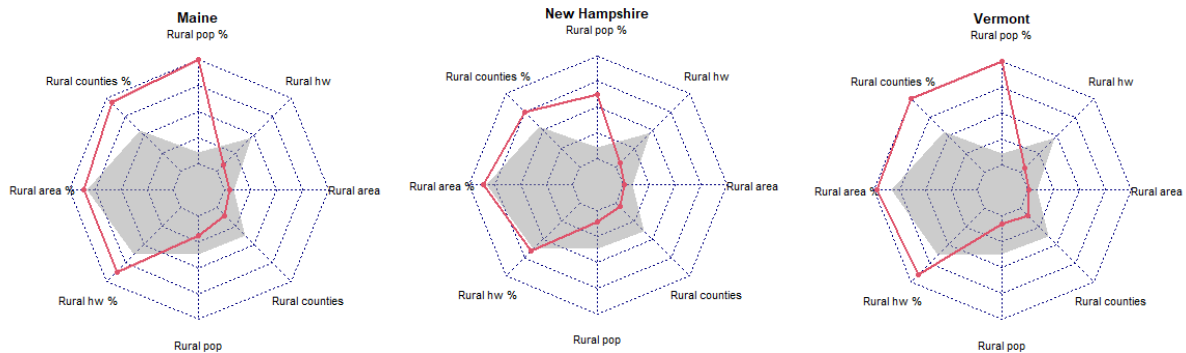


Figure 24: Type 3 states, small rural states. The grey area represents the state of Illinois.

Type 4 states are *small urban states* comparatively to Illinois (Figure 25). These are small states with little or no rural areas, rural roads, rural population, or rural counties. Among the surveyed states, Delaware and Massachusetts are classified in this group.

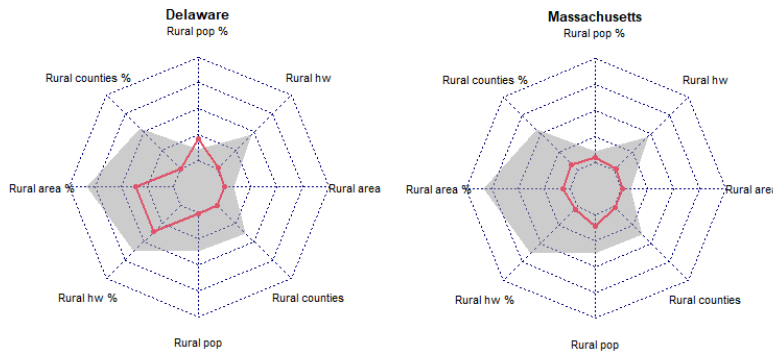


Figure 25: Type 4 states, small urban states. The grey area represents the state of Illinois.

According to this classification of rural characteristics of states, a few states appeared to be outliers (Figure 26). Michigan presents a low rural population share over the total population, which is however living in counties mostly classified as rural (high rural counties percentage), occupying a small portion of the state

(little rural area and low percentage of land classified as rural). Florida has a moderate share of land classified as rural, with most of the population living in urban areas, where most of the road infrastructure is. Finally, in Texas most of the population live in urban areas (low rural population percentage), but it still presents a very large rural population. Moreover, most of the land area of the state is classified as rural, divided into a very high number of counties classified as rural, and an incomparable amount of rural road infrastructure (in terms of miles) with other states.

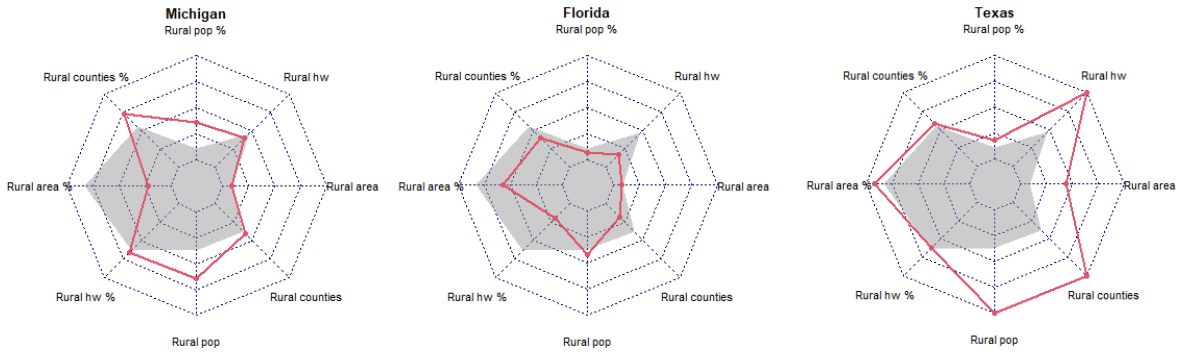


Figure 26: Outliers states. The grey area represents the state of Illinois.

5.2. Best practices and models of coordination

This section compares practices of rural transportation planning among Illinois peer states. An overview of the approaches adopted in the rural transportation planning domain is outlined to identify common practices. The coordination efficiency framework is used to identify models of coordination and best practices around the nation. Survey responses from Illinois peer states are analyzed in more detail. The peer states group is identified according to the criteria outlined above.

First, considering the institutional criterion (section 5.1), the 10 MAASTO member states could represent a comprehensive set of peer states for Illinois. Through our survey we collected information responses from 9 of the 10 MAASTO member states, as described in Table 19. Representatives from each state, except for Missouri, participated in the survey. Second, using the rural characteristics clustering criterion, half of the states included in the same *rural type* as Illinois are also MAASTO members, namely Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Non-MAASTO members similar in rural type to Illinois include Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Virginia, and Washington. The resulting group of peer states is listed in Table 19.

Table 19: Survey participation of MAASTO member states and UTC Identified peer states based on rural characteristics.

State	Survey participation	Cluster
Indiana	Yes	Both MAASTO Member and Rural Characteristics Peer
Kansas	No ³⁶	
Minnesota	Yes	
Ohio	Yes	
Wisconsin	Yes	
Iowa	Yes	MAASTO Member State
Kentucky	Yes	
Michigan	Yes	
Missouri	No	
Arizona	Yes	Rural Characteristics Peer State
Colorado	Yes	
Utah	Yes	
Virginia	Yes	
Washington	Yes	

³⁶ Though a Kansas' DOT representative participated in the survey, most of the responses were left blank. Therefore, the Kansas case will not be taken into consideration in this analysis.

5.2.1. RPO definition and the role of the DOT

The definition of RPO is linked to the identification of rural areas in each state. This definition therefore varies across states. In fact, six of the twelve states considered in the analysis use MPO boundaries to define rural areas, four use US Census Urbanized Areas boundaries, one uses the FHWA defined rural area boundaries, and one uses a city population threshold of 5,000. Moreover, several states have additional requirements. For instance, Ohio DOT also takes into consideration the urban-rural boundaries defined by the transportation management association (TMA)³⁷; Michigan DOT considers MPO boundaries, US Census Urbanized Area boundaries, or Census urban clusters, depending on the context and activities to implement; and Kentucky DOT does not consider any part of the seven-county metropolitan area of the Twin Cities, regardless of MPO boundaries, to be rural. The specificity of the context is therefore crucial in establishing a framework for coordination of rural transportation planning services, and it is important to consider these specificities to fully understand other states' case studies.

According to our survey, all these DOTs consider their state's RPOs to play a crucial role in the identification of local transportation needs and assisting local governments, particularly through consultation in developing the STIP for the non-metropolitan areas of the state. This contrasts with the position of RPOs in Illinois whose survey responses do not identify STIP review as one of their main responsibilities. Moreover, except for the Minnesota DOT, every state in this peer group considers an RPO's defining element to be a forum for public participation in non-metropolitan areas. Other widely shared defining characteristics for RPOs include their role in fostering cooperation and coordination at a local level among planning, land use, and economic development stakeholders, as well as the ability to accomplish multijurisdictional planning, and provide local representation in planning activities.

Our survey indicates that state DOTs (with the exception of Arizona) consider their role to mostly consist in providing funding assistance and policy assistance to RPOs. This shows a divergence from most of the twelve states considered as peer states to Illinois. Illinois' peer states indicated that their DOT's role is to actively promote the establishment of RPOs and facilitate local consultation and identification of rural transportation planning needs. This divergence from the overall survey results is substantial, where less

³⁷ In Ohio, Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) are non-profit, member-controlled organizations that provide transportation services in a particular area. For more information: <https://www.vtpi.org/tdm/tdm44.htm>

than half of the total participants have indicated these as a DOT responsibility. However, only seven of the twelve peer state DOTs have a formal consultation process set up to identify RPO needs.

5.2.2. Coordination practices

In terms of coordination practices at the DOT level, most of the survey participants consider rural transportation planning to be well integrated within the DOT activities. Specific approaches to coordination, and best practices, emerge from the state DOTs survey. A Minnesota DOT representative indicated that funding support provided by the DOT to existing RPO enables the RPO to have “open communication, maintain relationships and implement workplans that help steer regional transportation planning activities and initiatives”³⁸. Moreover, the established cooperation and interactions with regional offices and RPCs carried out by WisDOT in Wisconsin has allowed the RPO to “build strong relationships with county and municipal local officials and staff”³⁸, promoting local participation in planning and project development in rural areas. The state of Michigan instituted a dedicated advisory board, which includes representatives from RPOs, local communities, and local transit agencies, which establishes “contracts with regional planning agencies to help with the rural task force program and ensure stakeholders are informed and participating in the process”³⁸. Finally, the state of Kentucky proposes an annual work program to RPOs, rural communities, and rural partners, with monthly updated deliverables.

The only exception is the state of Indiana, where according to the representative who participated in the survey, rural planning practices are not well coordinated because “outside of [the] Small Urban & Rural Transportation Planning Assistance program, RPO consultation is considered [...] unnecessary and inefficient.” In particular, the lack of project-specific long-range plans “reduces the incentive for local communities to use their Regional Planning Organization”³⁸.

Table 20 details the existence of formal or informal RPO networks in the peer states considered in this analysis. According to the survey respondents, eight of the twelve states DOT indicate the existence of a formal network of RPOs, and only three of these eight are also aware of informal networks. Only two, namely Arizona and Colorado, do not have any coordination network.

³⁸ Extract from the responses to the UTC survey with state DOTs.

All MAASTO members (except for Ohio, whose representative did not fill out this section of the survey) have a formal network of RPOs, as is the case of Illinois, where the Illinois Association of Regional Councils (ILARC) serves as a formally recognized organization representing regional planning agencies at the state and national levels³⁹. Moreover, Wisconsin and Michigan also provide an informal network for rural stakeholders: WisDOT coordinates with local municipalities on all transportation planning and projects in their jurisdiction, involving RPOs in communications; MDOT coordinates monthly meetings and email communications with all Rural Task Force Program participants. Finally, Washington state offers an interesting example, where the survey respondent indicated that the six independent RTPOs have formed an informal group that meets three times a year to focus on issues of mutual concern.

Table 20: RPO networks detail. Source: UTC survey responses.

State	RPO Networks Formal or Informal	MAASTO Member	Rural Peer of Illinois
Wisconsin	Both	X	X
Michigan	Both	X	
Indiana	Formal	X	X
Minnesota	Formal	X	X
Iowa	Formal	X	
Kentucky	Formal	X	
Utah	Formal		X
Virginia	Formal		X
Washington	Informal		X
Ohio	NA	X	X
Arizona	None		X
Colorado	None		X

The elaboration of the coordination framework (section 4) can help IDOT reflect on best practices in states that are particularly efficient in communicating and interacting with rural planning stakeholders. The resulting coordination scores (described in section 4.1) for the group of twelve states that we are

³⁹ ILARC website: <https://ilarconline.org/about/mission>. Accessed on November 3rd, 2022.

considering are illustrated in Table 21. The results confirm what emerged from the discussion of coordination practices, and the example of states like Wisconsin and Washington seems worth exploring to improve coordination practices in Illinois.

Table 21: Coordination indicators scores of peer states group.

State	Perception of Coordination	Coordination with RPOs	Willingness to Coordinate	MAASTO Member	Rural Peer of Illinois
Wisconsin	4.5	4.9	5.0	X	X
Washington	4.1	3.8	5.0		X
Utah	3.7	3.1	5.0		X
Michigan	3.6	3.0	5.0	X	
Minnesota	3.2	2.9	5.0	X	X
Kentucky	3.2	1.6	5.0	X	
Virginia	3.2	3.2	5.0		X
Ohio	2.1	2.0	5.0	X	X
Indiana	1.1	0.7	4.4	X	X
Colorado	0.9	0.5	5.0		X
Iowa	0.8	0.5	4.4	X	
Arizona	0.5	0.3	3.8		X

5.2.3.Funding

The two main sources of funding of RPO among the group of peer states are FHWA Statewide Planning and Research (SP&R) funds, and state funding programs. Ten of the twelve states are directing SP&R funds to rural planning activities, with only Minnesota and Washington entirely relying on state programs. In some cases, like the state of Indiana, state programs are entirely funded through SP&R funds⁴⁰. The only states which do not have dedicated streams of funding for RPOs through state programs are Iowa and Colorado. Instead, these two states, together with Arizona and Utah, are the only ones drawing resources from the FTA Section 5304 (Metropolitan & Statewide Planning and Nonmetropolitan Transportation

⁴⁰ Source: Description of the Indiana DOT (INDOT) Small Urban and Rural Transportation Planning Assistance fund in the UTC survey.

Planning), the FTA Section 5311 (Formula Grants for Rural Area), and the FHWA Surface Transportation Program funds. According to the survey responses, all state DOTs assist RPOs to secure funding for rural transportation projects, except for the state of Arizona.

State programs play an important role in funding rural transportation planning projects. Table 22 offers details from selected state funding programs run by peer states. The largest state program recorded in the survey is the one implemented by Washington state, which dedicated almost \$2.5 million to seventeen regional transportation planning organizations in 2019. Respondents also described the allocation formula criteria for state funds. Most of the state DOTs examined distribute funding either equally among beneficiaries (Minnesota and Virginia) or based on population or counties included in the RPO area (Michigan and Washington). Indiana differs, as it allocates funding based on a request for proposals from the participant RPOs. This process seems similar to that of the \$500,000 Rural Planning Funds Program implemented by IDOT every two years to assist RPOs in the state.

Table 22: Detail of selected state funding programs for RPOs. Source: UTC survey responses.

State	Name of the program	Amount allocated (FY2019)	Number of beneficiaries (FY2019)	Allocation formula criteria
Indiana	Small Urban and Rural Transportation Planning Assistance	\$361,700	13	Based on a request for proposals from RPOs
Minnesota	Regional Development Commissions (RDC) Planning Grant	\$75,000 ⁴¹	9	Divided among all the officially designated RDCs
Michigan	Michigan Transportation Fund (MTF)	\$488,800	13	Allocated based on the number of counties served by the RPO
Virginia	Rural Transportation Planning Assistance Funds	\$1,160,000 ⁴²	20	Equally divided among all the Planning District Commissions (PDCs)

⁴¹ Bi-annual grant process.

⁴² A 20% match is provided by the Planning District Commissions (PDC), for total funding \$72,500 each.

State	Name of the program	Amount allocated (FY2019)	Number of beneficiaries (FY2019)	Allocation formula criteria
Washington	Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPO) Program	\$2,450,000 ⁴³	17	Based on the percentage of served population, and the number of counties included in the RTPO

5.2.4. Challenges and needs

Unsurprisingly, the main challenges and needs identified by state DOTs concern the struggle to access funding and securing local match for the financial support of RPOs. In fact, most of the respondents among peer states (eleven out of twelve) indicated the lack of dedicated funding resources as the main challenge at the DOT level, and of these eleven states, nine also mention the struggle of securing a local match for rural transportation planning projects. Moreover, ten out of twelve suggested that the most critical need for Rural Planning Organizations would be increased funding support from the DOT.

Another significant need of RPOs concern human and technical resources. According to the state DOTs, most of these organizations would significantly benefit from having additional personnel, or additional technical expertise and support. This issue is less pronounced at the DOT level, as only half of the respondents among the peer states (six out of twelve) indicated a lack of personnel dedicated to rural planning practices, and fewer still highlight a lack of expertise (only four). In particular, the Indiana DOT suggested that a better understanding of the planning process by local organizations and a clearer vision of its benefits and how RPOs can contribute, would be crucial for rural transportation planning.

Three states also mention the challenge of complying with federal requirements. In fact, some refer to the National Environmental Policy Act Review Process (NEPA), which is necessary to secure national funding, or the State Historic Preservation process, as it can be onerous for smaller rural projects and local organizations. However, the survey responses also offer potential insights to deal with federal requirements. In particular, the respondent from Iowa indicated that when the RPOs presented them with

⁴³ Biennial funding authorization.

the issue of federal requirements, the state engaged in a process of “swapping federal funding for state funding dollar by dollar, eliminating some of the federal requirements for projects that can now be funded with state or local dollars”.⁴⁴

It is interesting to highlight that only two respondents mentioned coordination as a significant challenge for RPOs. The Arizona DOT respondent mentioned how the different priorities carried by different stakeholders can be a hindrance to the rural planning process when not coordinated at a higher level. The representative from Virginia underlined the struggle of local agencies in rural areas to compete with large urban areas for funding, especially when little or no coordination mechanisms are in place.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Extract from the responses to the UTC survey with state DOTs.

5.3. Recommendations to IDOT

Based on the rural transportation planning practices and models of coordination described so far, it is possible to outline some recommendation points that could help IDOT address the challenges of coordinating RPOs in the state of Illinois, better understand their needs, and find solutions to improve rural planning activities.

- Set up a consultation process to identify the needs of RPOs. According to our coordination framework, most of the peer states who have a formal process of consultation with RPOs are ranking high in coordination efficiency. This type of process would allow IDOT to identify needs and criticalities, as well as promote the involvement of RPOs that might have limited capacity or little knowledge of the DOT activities. Funding resources seem to be limited for everyone, and every DOT and RPO around the nation struggles to access a sufficient amount of money. In this regard, IDOT could ensure every local organization has full knowledge of the available funding streams and is capable of accessing these resources. Effectively coordinating and communicating with RPOs and other local stakeholders is necessary for a fair distribution of the limited funding available.
- Promote a forum of coordination among RPOs (e.g., similarly to what is established in the state of Washington) to facilitate the interaction of these organizations, the sharing of information on funding opportunities and common challenges or needs.
- Promote the establishment of RPOs, or other complementing organizations, in areas where there are gaps in representation (e.g. as shown in Figure 1a, the greatest gap seems to occur in Central Illinois, particularly Menard, Logan, Mason, and DeWitt counties). The lack of centralized planning agencies that covers some part of the counties could create hinderances to coordinated rural transportation planning. An emphasis on HSTP support to ensure planning services, or the coordination with other existing local organizations could facilitate local consultation and rural transportation planning needs identification in these areas.
- Ensure the development of a project-specific long-range plan that actively engages RPOs and encourages the consultation of local stakeholders with their respective RPO. This could be achieved through a multijurisdictional advisory board, as in the case of Michigan, or through the implementation of an annual work program with recurrent deliverables, as in the state of

Kentucky³⁸. As emerged from the UTC survey results, this could be crucial in the integration of rural planning practices into DOT activities.

- Explore / discuss with Michigan representative about their Local Rural Task Force Program.⁴⁵ The Michigan Rural Task Force Program Advisory Board develops “guidelines and operating procedures to provide a resource to rural local elected/appointed officials, county engineers, transit providers, stakeholders, and other decision-makers”. This could help ensure the development of rural transportation projects and programs, guaranteeing funding support and planning coordination.

⁴⁵ For more information on the project: <https://www.michigan.gov/mdot/-/media/Project/Websites/MDOT/Programs/Grant-Programs/Rural-Task-Force-Program/RTF-Guidelines.pdf?rev=eec3a104fca040a4bc7ac730a663119a&hash=4ED2F16A83953C355F43DAD08F14E204>

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7. APPENDIX

7.1. Appendix A: One-Pagers examples

The One-Pager examples in this appendix are included for illustrative purposes. A single one-pager for every RPO and state DOT that was included in the survey will be produced.

MORGAN COUNTY RPC



Description

Located in Illinois DOT Region 4, District 6, Morgan County RPC is a single-county regional planning agency. Morgan County RPC has an equally urban and rural population, with 25,345 rural residents making up 46.5% of its population. The region is mostly rural, with 1,175 square miles of rural area, or 97.2% of the total area. Morgan County's rural population density is lower than average for Illinois.

Defining Rural Planning

Morgan County views RPOs as performing a local-focused role, emphasizing multi-jurisdictional coordination and representation of rural entities for areas of less than 50,000 people.

Coordination

Morgan County helps with local entity support, whether technical, funding, or policy focused. It also provides data management and ADA policy services, as well as general planning services.

As part of its rural planning structure, Morgan County has a regular technical advisory committee.

Morgan County is aware of the Illinois Association of Regional Councils and IDOT Fall Planning Conference.

Interaction with RTPOs and HSTPs is on an annual basis, while local officials interact monthly, and interact with MPOs, RPCs, and state officials on a quarterly basis. No interaction with other Illinois RPOs or other state DOTs occurs.

Interactions with involved organizations involve planning, policy, funding, and data management services. These interactions utilize most possible methods, however RTPO interactions are only through in person meetings.

Interactions with IDOT are very infrequent

Key RPO Data

Rural Population (2010)	25,345
Percent of Total Population	46.4%
Rural Land Area (sq mi) (2010)	1,176
Percent of Total Land Area	97.23%
Rural Highway Mileage (2020)	2,055
Type of Organization	Single-County Commission
ILARC Member	Yes
Rural Planning Budget (2019)	\$22,000

– less than once a year. These interactions involve planning, funding, and data management, and appear to occur only during the IDOT Fall Planning Conference. Attendance at this conference was useful to Morgan County to understand funding sources and the application process, increase technical training, and explore statewide practices.

People and Financial Resources

Morgan County feels that a lack of time and/or staff, federal and state laws, and complexity of reporting or administrative needs impacts its ability to coordinate transportation planning services. It does not feel that lack of knowledge of state stakeholders prevent this coordination.

Morgan County has an annual budget of \$22,000, all from FHWA SP&R.

Morgan County sees a lack of funding sources and information, and lack of staff capacity are the greatest challenges to rural transportation planning projects. Increasing technical support from IDOT would meet their most critical needs.

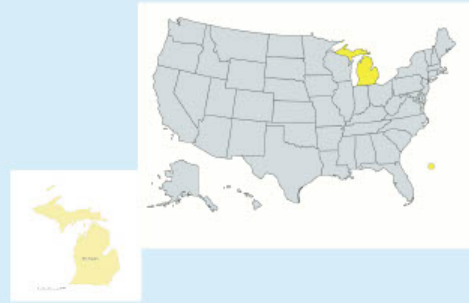
MICHIGAN

3/5

Coordination with RPOs

5/5

Willingness to Coordinate



Introduction

Located in United States DOT Region 5, Michigan has a mostly urban population, with only 2,513,683 rural residents, 25.4% of the total state population. However, the state is almost evenly geo-geographically urban and rural, with 54,672 square miles of rural area. Michigan's rural population is quite densely settled, at 45.9 per square mile of rural area. With 14 RPOs, Michigan has a lower level of representation than other states, with 179,548 rural residents per RPO.

Defining Rural Planning

Michigan has no dedicated rural transportation planning division or department within its DOT. In the state, several organizations are responsible for rural planning, namely, Regional Planning Areas, RTPOs, MPOs, county governments, and municipalities. Michigan determines its rural areas through federal Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) criteria of <50,000 population, Transportation Management Area (TMA) criteria of <200,000 population, and counties <400,000 population. Michigan DOT views RPOs as performing a local-focused role similar to MPOs, emphasizing multijurisdictional coordination and representation of rural entities and the public.

Coordination

MDOT helps with technical, funding, and policy support for transit operators and local entities, data management and mapping services, TIP and STIP review, ADA policy assistance, and coordination between public interest groups, local, and state planning efforts. There are both formal and informal RPO networks, including a listserv. Interaction between MDOT and other planning organizations is frequent, occurring once a week with RTPOs, MPOs, State officials, and local officials. Interaction with HSTPs, RPCs, and other state DOTs is minimal to nonexistent. MDOT feels that coordination would generally improve the quality, scope, and cost of service, and is incentivized to do so.

People and Financial Resources

MDOT does not feel that there are material impacts on its ability to coordinate transportation planning services. MDOT has an annual budget of \$815,800 dedicated to rural planning activities, including a state program to support RPOs that distributed \$488,800 in 2019. MDOT has 2 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) employees with 6 employees handling

rural planning functions. Michigan provides a state local match for rural transportation projects, and considers helping RPOs securing rural transportation funding a key responsibility.

Key State Data	
Rural characteristics	
Rural population	2,513,683 (25.4%)
Rural area	54,672 sq mi (56.5%)
Rural highways	84,003 mi (68.8%)
Representation	
Number of counties	83 counties
Number of rural counties	56 rural counties
Rural planning division	No
N of RPOs	14
N of MPOs	18
N of FTE	2
Funding	
Funding amount for rural planning	\$815,800
State program for RPO (Yes/no, amount)	Yes, \$488,800
Tot amount / RPO	\$58,271
State program amount / RPO	\$34,914



7.2. Appendix B: Coordination scores

7.2.1. Appendix B1: Illinois RPOs Coordination scores

Agency	IDOT Coordination	Peer Coordination	Willingness to Coordinate
Bi-State Regional Commission	2.6	5.0	5.0
Blackhawk Hills Regional Council	2.1	4.1	4.4
Blackhawk Hills Regional Council	0.0	2.7	0.0
Boone County	0.0	2.3	0.0
Boone County Highway Department, IL	3.1	4.0	0.0
Champaign County Regional Planning Commission	3.1	4.6	5.0
Coles County Regional Planning and Development Commission	1.7	2.9	5.0
DeKalb County	3.0	4.0	5.0
Greater Egypt Regional Planning and Development Commission	2.8	4.2	5.0
Greater Wabash RPC	1.9	3.9	3.1
Kane County Division of Transportation	1.0	2.2	3.8
Kane Kendall Council of Mayors	2.7	3.8	4.4
Kankakee Area Transportation Study	3.0	3.6	5.0
Logan County RPC	0.6	0.2	1.9
McLean County Regional Planning Commission	4.0	3.7	4.4
Morgan County Regional Planning Commission	1.0	2.6	4.4
North Central Illinois Council of Governments	1.7	1.6	5.0
Region 1 Planning Council	2.7	1.6	5.0
SHOW BUS Public Transportation, pass through for Grantees McLean County, Kankakee County and Logan County	2.5	2.6	5.0
Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning & Development Commission	0.7	1.7	3.8
Southern Five Regional Planning District & Development Commission	1.3	2.1	4.4
Southwestern Illinois Metropolitan and Regional Planning Commission	2.2	3.8	4.4
Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission	1.9	1.5	5.0
Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission	0.0	0.0	0.0
Tri-County Regional Planning Commission	5.0	4.4	5.0
Two Rivers Regional Council of Public Officials	0.4	1.4	4.4

7.2.2. Appendix B2: State DOTs Coordination scores

Agency	Coordination with RPOs	Willingness to Coordinate
Alabama	0.7	5.0
Arizona	0.3	3.8
Arkansas	0.0	1.9
Colorado	0.5	5.0
Delaware	1.8	5.0
Florida	2.4	5.0
Indiana	0.7	4.4
Iowa	0.5	4.4
Kansas	0.6	0.0
Kentucky	1.6	5.0
Maine	2.4	5.0
Massachusetts	2.8	5.0
Michigan	3.0	5.0
Minnesota	2.9	5.0
Mississippi	2.0	5.0
New Hampshire	2.4	5.0
New Mexico	3.0	4.4
North Carolina	1.9	5.0
North Dakota	1.7	0.0
Ohio	2.0	5.0
Oregon	2.5	3.1
Tennessee	4.5	5.0
Texas	3.7	5.0
Utah	3.1	5.0
Vermont	5.0	5.0
Virginia	3.2	5.0
Washington	3.8	5.0
Wisconsin	4.9	5.0
Wyoming	1.7	5.0

7.3. Appendix C: Full surveys

7.3.1. Appendix C1. Illinois RPO Surveys

Start of Block: Informed Consent

Departments of Transportation and Regional Rural Transportation Planning.

You are being asked to participate in the research conducted by UTC Director Dr. P. S. Sriraj, or by students of staff under the supervision of Dr. Sriraj.

Informed Consent

You understand that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that you can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. **The research team will exclude your name from any reports and will maintain your privacy** whether you choose to participate in the study or not. You understand that your name and email address has been obtained for recruitment purposes and that they will be destroyed after the data collection phase. You understand that your answers to this survey will be recorded for the purposes of research and that they will eventually be destroyed after the aggregation process.

You understand that your participation in this research will not pose any physical risks to you personally and that you can skip any questions you are not comfortable answering. You understand that you will not directly benefit from participating in the research, but that the research may be of benefit to the efficiency of the transportation planning process in the state of Illinois.

Agreement to Participate in Research

I understand that in accepting this consent form, I am agreeing to participate in the research and give Dr. Sriraj, and his associates, permission to present this work in written and oral form, without further permission from me.

If you have any questions about this study, feel free to ask them now or anytime throughout the study by contacting:

Dr. P.S. Sriraj, Director of the Urban Transportation Center
Urban Transportation Center
University of Illinois at Chicago

Phone: (312) 413-7568

E-mail: sriraj@uic.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may write or call OPRS at the following address:

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)

1737, W. Polk Street, M/C 672

203 Administrative Office Building

Chicago, Illinois – 60612. Phone: (312) 996 1711 or toll free: 866-789-6215

Email: uicirb@uic.edu

Do you agree to participate in the study?

- I agree to participate in the study and take the questionnaire
- I do not agree and I do not want to participate in the study

Display This Question:

If Do you agree to participate in the study? = I do not agree and I do not want to participate in the study

We thank you for your time.

Could you share with us the contact information of someone within your organization who might be more appropriate to respond to the survey?

- Name _____
- Position _____
- Email address _____

Skip To: End of Survey If Condition: Name Is Not Equal to

. Skip To: End of Survey.

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: Introduction

You have been identified as an applicant for the Rural Planning Funds program from IDOT. IDOT is interested in understanding how they can better coordinate rural planning activities with your organization. We understand that you may also be an MPO or an RPC or other type of a parent organization.

We appreciate your time in responding to this survey to help us better understand the issues that you face with your rural transportation planning responsibilities.

Which organization are you representing

What is your role/position in your organization

What is the staffing level of your organization?

- 1-10
- 11-25
- 26-50
- More than 50

End of Block: Introduction

Start of Block: Definition of Rural Planning Organization

Select all definitions that in your opinion apply to Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) in Illinois.

RPOs are organizations that...

- Serve similar functions as MPOs for the rural areas of the state.
- Identify local transportation needs and assist local governments.
- Consult on the development of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program in the non-metropolitan areas of the state.
- Are multijurisdictional organizations of non-metropolitan local officials and representatives of local transportation systems.
- Provide a cooperative unified voice for rural entities to request projects and the funding needed for local and regional transportation projects.
- Provide a forum for public participation in non-metropolitan areas.
- Are responsible for transportation planning in areas with less than 50,000 people.
- Are responsible for transportation planning in areas with more than 50,000 people that are not part of a Metropolitan Planning Organization.
- Foster coordination of local planning, land use, and economic development plans with transportation plans and programs at the state, regional, and local levels.

Which of the following activities does your organization cover, with regard to rural areas planning? [select all that apply]

- Technical support for transit operators
- Technical support for local entities
- Funding support for transit operators
- Funding support for local entities
- Policy support for transit operators
- Policy support for local entities
- Data management and mapping services
- TIP review
- STIP review
- ADA policies assistance
- Public interest groups coordination
- Human Service Transportation Plan (HSTP) activities coordination
- Intermediation between local and state planning
- Economic, community, and workforce development
- Land use planning

- Environmental planning
- Social services
- Education
- Community services
- Other (please specify) _____

Does your organization include any of the following structures, concerning rural areas planning? [select all that apply]

- Transportation advisory committee
- Policy committee
- Technical advisory committee
- Transportation planning committee
- Other (please specify) _____

End of Block: Definition of Rural Planning Organization

Start of Block: Coordination between RPOs

Are you aware of the following networks of regional planning organizations? [select all that apply]

- Illinois Association of Regional Councils
- Illinois Metropolitan Planning Organization Advisory Council
- IDOT Fall Planning Conference
- Other formal network of RPOs (please specify)

- Other informal network of RPOs (please specify)

How often do you interact about rural transportation planning issues with the following organizations?

	Once a week	Once a month	Once a quarter	Once a year	Never
Rural Transportation Planning Organizations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Human Services Transportation Plan organizations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Metropolitan Planning Organizations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Regional Planning Councils	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
State officials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local officials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Illinois RPOs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other state DOTs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other entity (please specify)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What are the topics of such interactions with the following organizations? [Select all that apply]

	Planning	Policy	Funding	Data management or mapping services	Other
Rural Transportation Planning Organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Services Transportation Plan organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Metropolitan Planning Organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regional Planning Councils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
State officials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local officials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Illinois RPOs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other state DOTs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other entity (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



What is/are the usual means of communications with the following organizations? [Select all that apply]

	Phone	Email	In person meeting	Sector specific committee	Event	N/A
Rural Transportation Planning Organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Services Transportation Plan organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Metropolitan Planning Organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regional Planning Councils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
State officials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local officials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Illinois RPOs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other state DOTs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other entity (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

End of Block: Coordination between RPOs

Start of Block: Coordination with IDOT

How often do you interact on issues of rural transportation planning with IDOT?

- More often
 - Once a week
 - Once a month
 - Once a quarter
 - Once a year
 - Less often
 - Never
-

What are the topics of such interactions with IDOT?

- Planning
 - Policy
 - Funding
 - Data management or mapping services
 - Other _____
-

What is/are the usual means of communications with IDOT? [Select all that apply]

- Phone
 - Email
 - In person meeting
 - Sector specific committee
 - Event
 - N/A
-

Has the 2015 FAST Act affected the way in which you interact with IDOT?

[Select all that apply]

- No
- Yes, it has increased the frequency of communications with IDOT
- Yes, it has facilitated the creation of RPOs
- Yes, It has facilitated the interaction with IDOT by expanding the pool of representatives for the RPO
- Yes, it has strengthened my organization position in the interaction with IDOT
- Other (please specify) _____

Have you attended a recent IDOT Fall Planning conference?

- Yes
- No

Display This Question:

If Have you attended a recent IDOT Fall Planning conference? = Yes

About the last IDOT Fall Planning conference that you attended:

	Why did you attend?	Were you satisfied with the insights provided during the conference?		
	Select all that apply	Satisfied	Not satisfied	N/A
Understand funding sources available	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understand funding application process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participate in workshops or technical trainings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Explore statewide planning practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exchange with other IDOT members	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exchange with other local planning organizations members	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Display This Question:

If Have you attended a recent IDOT Fall Planning conference? = No

Why have you not attended the IDOT Fall Planning conference?

- Lack of knowledge about the conference
- Lack of time and/or staff
- Not interested in the topics discussed
- Other (please specify) _____

Please indicate the level to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Transportation planning coordination allows/would allow my organization to serve more people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coordination improves/would improve the quality of the transportation planning services offered by my organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coordination improves/would improve the cost effectiveness of the transportation planning services offered by my organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organization uses technology to facilitate transportation planning coordination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organization is incentivized to coordinate with other organizations on transportation planning services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what degree do you believe the following factors impact your organization’s ability to coordinate transportation planning services with other organizations?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Lack of time and/or staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Complexity of reporting or other administrative requirements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Federal laws, regulations, and/or guidance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
State laws, regulations, and/or guidance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of knowledge of stakeholders in the State	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Coordination with IDOT

Start of Block: Funding and financing of rural transportation planning

What was the annual budget of your organization for FY2019?

- Less than \$500K
- Between \$500K and \$1M
- Between \$1M and \$2M
- Between \$2M and \$5M
- More than \$5M

What was the amount spent on rural transportation planning in FY2019?

- Budgeted amount _____
 - Spent amount _____
-

What are the main funding sources identified for rural transportation projects?

	Funding sources (Select all that apply)	What percentage of the total funding? (Specify a number between 0 and 100)
FTA Section 5304 - Metropolitan & Statewide Planning and Nonmetropolitan Transportation Planning		
FTA Section 5311 - Formula Grants for Rural Areas		
FHWA Statewide Planning and Research (SP&R)		
FHWA Surface Transportation Program		
State funding programs (specify)		
Other (specify)		

What was the main rural transportation project implemented in FY2019?

	Budget for the project (Thousand of \$)	Main funding source
Name of the project		

What are the main challenges regarding rural transportation planning projects? [Select all that apply]

- Lack of funding sources
- Lack of funding information
- Securing local match
- Lack of capacity (personnel, expertise, or other)
- Technology limitations (hardware or software)
- Lack of coordination (with IDOT / local officials / local communities / other entities: please specify)

- Complying with federal requirements (please specify)

- Other challenge (please specify) _____

What would be the most critical needs regarding rural transportation planning?

- Increased funding support from IDOT
- Increased policy support from IDOT
- Increased technical support from IDOT
- Increased expertise (in planning / policy / technology)
- Increased coordination with other organizations (with IDOT / local officials / local communities / other entities: please specify) _____
- Other (please specify) _____

End of Block: Funding and financing of rural transportation planning

Start of Block: IDOT Rural Planning Funds program

IDOT Rural Planning Funds program.

IDOT, at its discretion, is making \$500,000 available for Rural Planning Organizations to apply for funding to support transportation planning in their local regions. Since 2018 and every two years, IDOT requires interested Rural Planning Groups to apply for project grant funding. Previously, the program funds were distributed partly proportionally among all RPOs, and partly based on a formula allocation process based on population.

What is your perception of the change of approach for the IDOT Rural Planning Funds Program allocation process?

- I was not aware of the program
- I was not aware of the change
- Nor positive or negative
- Positive – Why? _____
- Negative – Why? _____
- Other opinion (please specify) _____

Did you apply for IDOT Rural Planning Funds in FY2019?

- Yes
- No

Display This Question:
If Did you apply for IDOT Rural Planning Funds in FY2019? = Yes

Regarding your application for IDOT Rural Planning Funds in FY2019:

	Was the application approved?		Was the project supported by the Rural Planning Funds?		What amount did you apply for? Thousand of \$
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Name of the project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Name of the project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

Display This Question:
If Did you apply for IDOT Rural Planning Funds in FY2019? = No

Why did you not apply for the funds?

- Lack of knowledge about the program
- There is no transportation project that would have qualified for the funds
- Lack of staff to fill in the application
- Complexity of the application process
- Other reason (please specify) _____

Display This Question:

If Did you apply for IDOT Rural Planning Funds in FY2019? = Yes

Will you apply again next year if the program is continued?

- Yes
- No

End of Block: IDOT Rural Planning Funds program

7.3.2. Appendix C2. State DOT Surveys

Start of Block: Informed Consent

Departments of Transportation and Regional Rural Transportation Planning.

You are being asked to participate in the research conducted by UTC Director Dr. P. S. Sriraj, or by students of staff under the supervision of Dr. Sriraj.

Informed Consent

You understand that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that you can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. **The research team will exclude your name from any reports and will maintain your privacy** whether you choose to participate in the study or not. You understand that your name and email address has been obtained for recruitment purposes and that they will be destroyed after the data collection phase. You understand that your answers to this survey will be recorded for the purposes of research and that they will eventually be destroyed after the aggregation process.

You understand that your participation in this research will not pose any physical risks to you personally and that you can skip any questions you are not comfortable answering. You understand that you will not directly benefit from participating in the research, but that the research may be of benefit to the efficiency of the transportation planning process in the state of Illinois.

Agreement to Participate in Research

I understand that in accepting this consent form, I am agreeing to participate in the research and give Dr. Sriraj, and his associates, permission to present this work in written and oral form, without further permission from me.

If you have any questions about this study, feel free to ask them now or anytime throughout the study by contacting:

Dr. P.S. Sriraj, Director of the Urban Transportation Center
Urban Transportation Center
University of Illinois at Chicago
Phone: (312) 413-7568
E-mail: sriraj@uic.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may write or call OPRS at the following address:

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)

1737, W. Polk Street, M/C 672

203 Administrative Office Building

Chicago, Illinois – 60612. Phone: (312) 996 1711 or toll free: 866-789-6215

Email: uicirb@uic.edu

Do you agree to participate in the study?

- I agree to participate in the study and take the questionnaire
 - I do not agree and I do not want to participate in the study
-

Display This Question:

If Do you agree to participate in the study? = I do not agree and I do not want to participate in the study

We thank you for your time.

Could you share with us the contact information of someone within your organization who might be more appropriate to respond to the survey?

- Name _____
- Position _____
- Email address _____

Skip To: End of Survey If Condition: Name Is Not Equal to . Skip To: End of Survey.

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: Introduction

Which state DOT are you representing?

[List of states]

What is your role/position in the DOT?

Is there a department, bureau, division, or office in the DOT dedicated to rural transportation planning efforts?

- Yes
 - No
-

Display This Question:

If Is there a department, bureau, division, or office in the DOT dedicated to rural transportation p... = Yes

What is the rural planning portion referred to as?

Display This Question:

If Is there a department, bureau, division, or office in the DOT dedicated to rural transportation p... = Yes

Are there goals or a vision statement for the rural planning area separate from the entire DOT?

- Yes
 - No
-

Display This Question:

If Are there goals or a vision statement for the rural planning area separate from the entire DOT? = Yes

What is the vision or goals statement for the rural planning portion?

End of Block: Introduction

Start of Block: Definition of Rural Planning Organization

What are the criteria used to define urban and rural areas in your state?

Select all definitions and functions that in your opinion apply to Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) in your state.

RPOs are organizations that...

- Serve similar functions as MPOs for the rural areas of the state.
 - Identify local transportation needs and assist local governments.
 - Consult on the development of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program in the non-metropolitan areas of the state.
 - Provide a cooperative unified voice for rural entities to request projects and the funding needed for local and regional transportation projects.
 - Provide a forum for public participation in non-metropolitan areas.
 - Are responsible for transportation planning in areas with less than 50,000 people.
 - Are responsible for transportation planning in areas with more than 50,000 people that are not part of a Metropolitan Planning Organization.
 - Foster coordination of local planning, land use, and economic development plans with transportation plans and programs at the state, regional, and local levels.
 - Are multijurisdictional organizations of non-metropolitan local officials and representatives of local transportation systems.
-

Which of the following organizations are responsible for rural transportation planning?

- Rural Transportation Planning Organizations
- Human Services Transportation Plan organizations
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations
- Regional Planning Councils
- County Governments
- Municipalities
- Other entity (please specify) _____

How many Rural Planning Organizations are there in your state? (If not known, please specify "I do not know")

Which of the following activities does your organization cover, with regard to rural areas planning? [select all that apply]

- Technical support for transit operators
- Technical support for local entities
- Funding support for transit operators
- Funding support for local entities
- Policy support for transit operators
- Policy support for local entities
- Data management and mapping services
- TIP review
- STIP review
- ADA policies assistance
- Public interest groups coordination
- Human Service Transportation Plan (HSTP) activities coordination
- Intermediation between local and state planning
- Economic, community, and workforce development
- Land use planning
- Environmental planning
- Social services
- Education
- Community Services
- Other (please specify) _____

End of Block: Definition of Rural Planning Organization

Start of Block: Coordination between RPOs and the DOT

Are you aware of any networks of Rural Planning Organizations?

Formal network of RPOs (please specify) _____

Informal networks of RPOs (please specify) _____

How often do you interact about rural transportation planning issues with the following organizations?

	Once a week	Once a month	Once a quarter	Occasionally	Never
Rural Transportation Planning Organizations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Human Services Transportation Plan organizations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Metropolitan Planning Organizations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Regional Planning Councils	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
State officials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local officials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other state DOTs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other RPOs in your state	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other entity (please specify)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What are the topics of such interactions with the following organizations? [Select all that apply]

	Planning	Policy	Funding	Data management or mapping services	Other
Rural Transportation Planning Organizations					
Human Services Transportation Plan organizations					
Metropolitan Planning Organizations					
Regional Planning Councils					
State officials					
Local officials					
Other state DOTs					
Other RPOs in your state					
Other entity (please specify)					



What is/are the usual means of communications with the following organizations? [Select all that apply]

	Phone	Email	In person meeting	Sector specific committee	Event	N/A
Rural Transportation Planning Organizations						
Human Services Transportation Plan organizations						
Metropolitan Planning Organizations						
Regional Planning Councils						
State officials						
Local officials						
Other state DOTs						
Other RPOs in your state						
Other entity (please specify)						

Do you feel that rural transportation planning is well integrated in your agency? Why or why not?

- Yes _____
- No _____

What is the role of the DOT in coordinating Rural Planning Organizations in the state? [Select all that apply]

- The DOT promotes a formal network of RPOs to serve as the recognized organization representing regional planning agencies at the state and national levels.
- The DOT actively promotes the establishment of RPOs in order to facilitate local consultation and rural transportation planning needs identification.
- The DOT ensures federal and state legislation, policies, and priorities are met.
- The DOT identifies RPOs expectations and needs through a consultation process.
- The DOT provides technical training to RPOs.
- The DOT provides funding assistance to RPOs.
- The DOT provides policy assistance to RPOs.
- Other (please specify). _____

Please indicate the level to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about the relationship between the DOT and Rural Planning Organizations:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Transportation planning coordination allows/would allow my organization to serve more people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coordination improves/would improve the quality of the transportation planning services offered by my organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coordination improves/would improve the cost effectiveness of the transportation planning services offered by my organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organization uses technology to facilitate transportation planning coordination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organization is incentivized to coordinate with other organizations on transportation planning services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what degree do you believe the following factors impact your organization’s ability to coordinate transportation planning services with other organizations?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Lack of time and/or staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Complexity of reporting or other administrative requirements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Federal laws, regulations, and/or guidance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
State laws, regulations, and/or guidance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of knowledge of stakeholders in the State	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Coordination between RPOs and the DOT

Start of Block: Funding and financing of rural transportation planning

What was the amount spent on rural transportation planning in FY2019?

- Budgeted amount _____
 - Spent amount _____
-

Indicate the level of human resource commitment for rural transportation planning:

- Number of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Employees with rural planning functionalities

- Number of employees with rural planning functionalities

Has the 2015 FAST Act affected the way in which you interact with Rural Planning Organizations? [Select all that apply]

- No
 - Yes, it has increased the frequency of communications with RPOs
 - Yes, it has facilitated the creation of RPOs
 - Yes, It has facilitated the interaction with the RPOs by expanding their pool of representatives
 - Yes, it has strengthened the RPOs position in the interaction with the DOT
 - Other (please specify) _____
-

What sources of funding are available to the Rural Planning Organizations for rural transportation planning in your state?

	Funding sources (Select all that apply)	Roughly to what percentage of the total funding do these sources amount to? (Specify a number between 0 and 100)
FTA Section 5304 - Metropolitan & Statewide Planning and Nonmetropolitan Transportation Planning		
FTA Section 5311 - Formula Grants for Rural Areas		
FHWA Statewide Planning and Research (SP&R)		
FHWA Surface Transportation Program		
State funding programs (specify)		
Other (specify)		

Does your state assist regional planning organization to secure funding for rural transportation projects?

- Yes
- No

Does the State provide local match funding for rural transportation projects?

- Yes
- No

Does the state provide any dedicated stream of funding to support rural transportation planning?

- Yes
- No

Display This Question:

If Does the state provide any dedicated stream of funding to support rural transportation planning? = Yes

Could you briefly describe the program?

- Name of the program _____
- Annual amount allocated _____
- Number of beneficiaries _____
- Allocation formula criteria _____
- Other details _____

What are the main challenges regarding rural transportation planning projects? [Select all that apply]

- Lack of funding sources
- Lack of funding information
- Securing local match
- Lack of personnel
- Lack of expertise
- Technology limitations (hardware or software)
- Lack of coordination (between RPOs and the DOT / local officials / local communities / other entities: please specify) _____
- Complying with federal requirements (please specify) _____
- Other challenge (please specify) _____

What would be the most critical needs for Rural Planning Organizations regarding rural transportation planning?

- Increased funding support
- Increased policy support
- Increased technical support
- Increased availability of personnel
- Increased expertise (in planning / policy / technology)
- Increased coordination with other organizations (between RPOs and the IDOT / local officials / local communities / other entities: please specify)

- _____
- Other (please specify) _____

End of Block: Funding and financing of rural transportation planning
