



# MPO Board Member Training on Congestion Reduction

Jeff Kramer, Taylor Dinehart, Tia Boyd  
University of South Florida

For more information,  
contact: Jeff Kramer  
Email: Kramer@usf.edu

## BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Traffic congestion happens when travel demand (i.e., the number of travelers using a roadway at a given moment) exceeds capacity, resulting in travel speed that is lower than normal. Multimodal traffic congestion is real a problem for communities across the United States and beyond because traffic results in negative externalities that range from mild frustration to major economic, public health, and environmental concerns (e.g., pollution, crashes, delayed shipment of goods, and delayed emergency response times). While there is a wide array of solutions to address congestion and the negative externalities it causes, there is often a disconnect between that knowledge base and people in the position to affect positive change. One such group of people are those who sit on the board of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs).

An MPO is a transportation policy-making body mandated by federal law that is responsible for overseeing the development of transportation planning and programming for all urban areas in the United States with more than 50,000 residents. MPO board members are responsible for establishing a long-range transportation vision for their metropolitan area and for making a variety of other significant transportation planning and programming decisions, particularly as it relates to how federal and sometimes state funds should be used on projects and plans for their region. These decisions have noteworthy and long-lasting impacts on the character of their communities, including the impact on system-wide and corridor-level multimodal congestion. Yet, most individuals sitting on the MPO governing board come to this position without any background in transportation system development or understanding of the nature of congestion.

MPO board members are typically locally elected officials of general-purpose local government, officials representing modal agencies (public transportation, seaport, airport, expressway, etc.), and appropriate state representatives. They might also include other officials such as representatives of planning agencies, military installations, universities, and tribal governments. Most of the elected officials ran for a seat on their county commission, city council, or to be mayor of their jurisdiction. Many of these individuals did not run for these positions with the express intent to sit on a regional transportation planning board, and some may have not been aware of the MPO's existence, purpose, or importance prior to accepting their positions. Once on the MPO governing board, members often view their role through a narrow lens of getting a particular project funded, unaware of the potential of the MPO to systematically address a wide range of transportation issues in their region, including the issue of multimodal congestion. This is even true of some modal agency representatives and state officials who sit on local MPO boards.

The goal of this project is to change that paradigm by developing a training program that educates MPO board members on the potential for enacting system-wide and corridor-level congestion management and reduction strategies through the federally required metropolitan transportation planning process. More specific goals of this project include aiding MPO board members in recognizing:

- The responsibilities of their MPO under federal regulations.
- Their role in the MPO decision-making process as members of the MPO governing board and as transportation decision-makers outside of the MPO process.
- The definition of "congestion" as it relates to transportation networks, the root causes of congestion, and the pros and cons associated with congestion.
- Approaches to managing and reducing congestion at a system-wide and corridor level.
- How to apply what they learn about MPOs and their role as MPO board members to address system-wide and corridor level congestion through the MPO decision-making process.

The target audience for this training program is MPO board members in all 50 states (420 MPOs nationwide as of the 2020 Census) as well as MPO staff who can use this material to train others.

## PROJECT RESULTS

This training program, funded by the National Institute for Congestion Reduction (NICR) and created under the guidance of the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO), the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), and the Florida MPO Advisory Council (MPOAC), is designed to educate MPO board members on the basics of traffic congestion, techniques for reducing congestion, fundamental details about the processes and functions of an MPO, and tips for how MPO board members can improve their community through the MPO decision-making process.

The training is divided into five modules that follow a systematic structure. The first three videos provide background necessary to understand the role and responsibility of the MPO and the last two videos focus on the nature of congestion, techniques for reducing or mitigating congestion, and the MPO role in managing multimodal congestion. Modules are presented as podcast-style YouTube videos and are supplemented by an in-depth training guide that offers suggestions and guidance for implementing the training.

All training material are free and publicly available at the following links:

YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@mpocongestionreductiontraining>

Training Manual: [https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cutr\\_nicr\\_tm/6/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cutr_nicr_tm/6/)

To ensure this training material reaches the intended audience, AMPO, NARC, and the MPOAC host information about the training as well as links to the NICR MPO Congestion Reduction Training YouTube Channel on their respective websites. To further assist AMPO, NARC, and the MPOAC with marketing the training, the research team created marketing content for suitable social media, email, and in-person communications.

## POLICY AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that all MPO board members, both newly appointed and experienced in the position, watch all five training modules. At the conclusion of the proposed training program, MPO board members will be able to:

- Describe the responsibilities of MPOs under federal regulations and appreciate their own roles in the MPO decision-making process as members of the MPO board and as transportation decision-makers outside of the MPO process (as a locally elected official, a modal agency board member or chief executive, etc.), including having direct authority over such planning and programming activities as:
  - Developing and approving required MPO products including the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), Congestion Management Process (CMP), and Public Participation Plan (PPP).
  - Overseeing an open forum for transportation decision-making in the metropolitan planning area by maintaining a federally required “3C” (continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive) metropolitan planning process.
  - Funding and conducting studies, collecting and analyzing data, defining policies, organizing public education experiences, and engaging in a wide variety of activities that support the federally required work of the MPO.
- Define the term “congestion” as it relates to transportation networks, identify the root causes of congestion, and appreciate the pros and cons associated with congestion.
- Recognize various policy and physical approaches to managing and reducing congestion at a system-wide and corridor level.
- Apply what they learn about the role and responsibilities of MPOs and their role as MPO board members to plan, implement, and advocate for appropriate policies and physical approaches to address system-wide and corridor-level congestion through the MPO decision-making process.

This training serves to empower MPO board members with the knowledge, skills, and understanding necessary to fulfill their roles effectively, comply with federal regulations, and make informed decisions that positively impact transportation planning and management within their metropolitan areas.

*This publication was produced by the National Institute for Congestion Reduction. The contents of this brief reflect the views of the authors, who are responsible for the facts and accuracy of the information presented herein. This document is disseminated under the program management of USDOT, Office of Research and Innovative Technology Administration in the interest of information exchange. The U.S. Government assumes no liability for the contents or use thereof.*

For more information on this project, download the entire report at [nicr.usf.edu](http://nicr.usf.edu) or contact [nicr@usf.edu](mailto:nicr@usf.edu)



[facebook.com/NationalInstituteforCongestionReduction](https://facebook.com/NationalInstituteforCongestionReduction)