

The Saginaw Metropolitan Area Transportation Study



An Overview

Welcome to the MPO:

This document is intended for members of the Saginaw Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the public. Its purpose is to answer questions about what MPO is and what it does, what authority it has, what kinds of decisions it makes, and what the responsibilities are of the members of its committees. It is also intended to provide a brief introduction to the planning and funding of transportation projects in the Saginaw Metropolitan Planning Organization region.

What is the MPO?

What does the MPO do?

Value of the MPO.

How is the MPO organized?

Functional Responsibilities of Participating Agencies

Issues and Activities.

Funding for Highway, Transit and other Projects.

How is the Project included in the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)?

What is expected of me?

What other information is available?

What is the MPO?

Every metropolitan area with a population of more than 50,000 persons must have a designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for transportation to qualify for federal highway or transit assistance. The Saginaw County Metropolitan Planning Commission is the MPO for the Saginaw Urbanized area.

The United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) relies on the MPO to ensure that highway and transit projects that use federal funds are products of a credible planning process and meet local priorities. USDOT will not approve federal funding for urban highway and transit projects unless they are on the MPO's program. Thus, the MPO's role is to develop and maintain the necessary transportation plan for the area to assure that federal funds support these locally developed plans. The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) has greatly strengthened this responsibility by placing the MPO in a primary role for the programming of transportation projects to be carried out in any given year. The MPO has also been given the responsibility to involve the public in this process through expanded citizen participation efforts.

Since the MPO is made up of those agencies responsible for carrying out transportation programs in the region, the process puts all units into partnership with one another to carry out the programs. Any agency can, however, carry out its own transportation projects with its own funds independent of the MPO.

What does the MPO do?

The MPO carries out three major work activities to meet specific federal requirements. These are:

- The development and maintenance of the **Long Range Transportation Plan** (LRTP) through a "continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative (3C)" planning process.
- The biennial development of a three-year program for highway and transit improvements. This program is known as the **Transportation Improvement Program** or TIP.
- The annual adoption of a comprehensive one-year planning program: the **Unified Planning Work Program** or UPWP that describes and coordinates the individual transportation planning activities of all agencies in the area.

Without these products, the SMATS Metropolitan Planning Organization would lose its eligibility for federal transportation funds.

The MPO completed its Metropolitan Transportation Plan that was adopted in 2002. A computerized model was developed that can simulate traffic flows within this area under both existing and proposed future conditions. In this way, existing and future problems are identified, alternate solutions proposed and tested, and specific proposals selected for inclusion in the plan. Equally important, a realistic assessment of financial resources has been made so that the resulting plan reflects the capacity of the area to carry it out. Citizen involvement is an important ingredient in this process.

While the LRTP looks some twenty years into the future, the MPO also develops a biennial TIP that identifies those projects that will be carried out in the next three years. This process involves solicitation of projects' requests from those agencies responsible for providing transportation services and facilities, cooperatively ranking them into their merits, and selecting those highest priority projects that will fit into the estimated available funding.

The UPWP is similar to the TIP in that an annual solicitation of ideas is requested that are then ranked and fit into an estimated budget. The difference is that instead of specific transportation projects, the program consists of planning studies that are necessary to carry out the program. While most of the programs are carried out by the MPO's own staff, a portion is assigned to other participating agencies in accordance with their own skills and responsibilities. The UPWP is adopted in August for each new federal fiscal year (October 1 to September 30).

Value of the MPO:

The value of having the MPO involved in functions that go beyond transportation planning has long been recognized. As a county-wide organization, the MPO has produced current and forecasted demographic and employment data for the entire area. The MPO has also provided contractual assistance to local units of government for the completion of local ordinance and future land use development. These data are useful for other public and private entities for planning and forecasting their operations.

How is the MPO organized?

There are two aspects of the MPO organization. First is the formal structure of the MPO as committees and the second is the arrangement between its staff and the staff of the participating agencies. The SMATS organization is structured with the Planning Commission as its Policy Committee. The Saginaw County Metropolitan Planning Commission meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. in the Saginaw County Courthouse. At these meetings current transportation issues are discussed and status reports on transportation studies and

projects are given. After these discussions are completed, policy actions are taken that include adoption of the TIP and UPWP, revision to these documents or the Long Range Transportation Plan, and adoption of resolutions related to current transportation issues.

The technical oversight of the MPO's work is delegated to the Transportation Planning Committee, a working group composed of professional staff members of the MPO's, the Chief Elected Official from each unit of local government in the SMATS Study Area, or their designated representative. It also includes officials from state and federal departments of transportation, representatives of local transportation agencies, such transportation interest groups as the Tri-City Cyclists, and private sector representatives from such enterprises as Consumers Energy, the local taxicab operator, a road construction company, a cement manufacturer, a local towing company, and a trucking company. Transportation Planning Committee meetings are generally convened on the second Thursday every month at 10:00 a.m. The meetings are hosted by Committee members at their offices. Call the SMATS office at 797-6800 for a specific meeting location. Most Transportation Planning Committee members are on the administrative staffs of local, State or Federal agencies. Roadway, air and public transit agencies are represented along with general purpose local government, state air quality regulators and several local companies with an interest in transportation planning. The Transportation Planning Committee reviews and critiques transportation planning documents prepared by SMATS staff and recommends actions to the Metropolitan Planning Commission. Transportation Planning Committee members also serve on task forces to accomplish specific items in the SMATS work program. There is always an opportunity for the public to address the Committee at their meetings.

Continuing technical support to the transportation planning program is provided by the MPO Staff and ad hoc committees composed of professional staff members of the MPO's organizations. It is at this level that the technical studies are reviewed in detail so that a relatively finished product is passed to the Transportation Planning Committee.

The MPO Staff is comprised of staff from the Saginaw County Metropolitan Planning Commission. The Staff conducts studies and oversees projects as directed by the Saginaw County Metropolitan Planning Commission. The Staff reports findings to the MPO Committees and participates in other community wide efforts. The combined work of the MPO Staff and the participating staff of other member organizations provides the information needed to make program and policy decisions.

During the course of its work, the Staff identifies transportation needs in the community. Normally these needs are addressed by member organizations. The staff works with other public, private, and academic organizations in the metropolitan area.

A third partner in the process is the general public. Considerable time is devoted to assure that the public is informed of the MPO's programs and activities and that interested citizens have an opportunity to participate in them.

Functional Responsibilities of Participating Agencies:

There are many agencies involved in transportation and most of them are public. Some are concerned with only one specific transportation activity while others have a broader interest. The agencies discussed below are involved in the actual construction, development, and operation of the transportation system in the Saginaw urban area.

Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT)

The Michigan Department of Transportation has a statewide multimodal responsibility and works to develop the modes of air, port, rail, highway transit and non-motorized. Statewide activity includes serving in conjunction with FHWA as the state agency to regulate the 3-C planning process. Local activity in regard to the state highways is handled at regional offices. The regional office is concerned only with state trunklines (i.e. I-75, I-675, M-84, M-81, M-57, M-47, M-46, and M-13).

Saginaw County Road Commission

Three persons appointed by the County Board of Commissioners constitute the policy body for control of all county roads outside of incorporated cities and villages in the County. The annual budget is derived mainly through state (Act 51) and federal-aid allocations, plus other programs. Although the Road Commission has complete program responsibility the townships often participate in specific construction programs.

City of Saginaw

The City has one of the most extensive and comprehensive roles in the development of the transportation system. The City pursues street, bridge, railroad (with railroad companies), and enhancement projects.

Issues and Activities:

The MPO is particularly interested in issues involving long range transportation planning, development of intermodal connections, reducing reliance on automobile, and land use options to reduce trips. Current activities of the MPO include:

- Collecting and maintaining comprehensive data. The data includes demographic and employment information, travel time and delays, traffic counts and congestion, and land use information. The MPO is making a major effort to initiate Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to enhance the analysis.
- Working with various interest groups to deal with the full range of transportation issues.
- Carrying out the recommendations of the Long Range Transportation Plan.
- Maintaining working relationships with the municipal planning organizations to integrate the land use planning and development of the region with its necessary transportation planning and development.
- Developing intermodal planning activities.

Funding for Highway, Transit, and other projects:

Construction Funds

Nearly all major transportation projects in the MPO region involve some federal funding. TEA 21 has placed the MPO in a major partnership position with the transportation providers to determine how the federal funds should be allocated to the many competing projects. These federal funds are provided to the region under several program categories. In the highway area, funds are identified as Interstate, National Highway System (NHS), Surface Transportation Program (STP), Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation, and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ). Transit funds are provided through various sections of transit programs for operating and capital expenses for urban and rural needs.

Despite the specification of funds to a particular program area, there is considerable flexibility provided to the MPO in making final determination of the projects to be funded and the source of funding. Though some funds are specifically restricted for one particular type of project or another, a large portion of them may be transferred from one program to another, including the transfer of funds from highway to transit projects and vice-versa. This provides the MPO with significant latitude in shaping the programs to meet local priorities. Many transportation projects on city and county roads are financed through local funds. The Capital Improvement Projects (CIPs) of the cities and counties provide this information.

Planning Funds

The MPO uses planning funds to meet federal requirements for the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), and specific studies addressing area wide and local issues. These funds are obtained as PL (Planning) funds from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Section 5303 (MPO Planning) funds from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The use of these funds is identified in the annual UPWP.

How is a project included in the UPWP and TIP?

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

The UPWP lists all the studies to be undertaken during the coming year. These studies may involve any aspect of transportation including highways, transit, and the needs of the transportation disadvantaged. A study may be proposed by any participating entity of the MPO. Some studies are proposed in response to federal or state requirements while others are included responding to local needs. The list of proposed studies is reviewed by the Technical Advisory Committee. A selection is made of those studies to include in the coming year's UPWP based on the MPO priorities, the need to satisfy state and federal requirements, and funding constraints. The proposed UPWP is then submitted for approval of the SMATS Technical Committee. The draft is then reviewed by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The MPO staff incorporates the comments of the state and federal agencies and presents the final document to the SMATS Policy Committee for approval.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The TIP is required to list all transportation projects in the MPO region using federal funds. This includes highway and transit projects and other necessary enhancements such as bicycle and pedestrian projects. The MPO entities propose eligible projects. The MPO staff and the SMATS Technical Committee evaluate the proposed projects and rank them in accordance with a process.

The comments received during public meetings are made as part of the process. The ranking of the projects consistent with funding constraints and public comments are presented to the Transportation Policy Committee for final selection of projects for a TIP.

What is expected of me?

Whether you are a member of the MPO or a private citizen, you have a role to play with the MPO. SMATS makes difficult decisions in a cooperative manner. However, the SMATS Committee responsibilities do not begin and end with making decisions. Committee members are ultimately responsible to the residents of the region for the quality of transportation services and for the impact of transportation on their overall quality of life. This means the members share the responsibility for making sure that major transportation issues of today and tomorrow are dealt with fairly and properly. The citizens are encouraged to participate in the transportation planning process during the monthly meetings of the S and the Technical Committee.

What other information is available?

If you would like to learn more about the issues the MPO deals with and the services it provides, you may wish to visit the Saginaw County Metropolitan Planning Commission office. The Planning also maintains a library that contains several publications on transportation and related subjects. Visitors' may read any of the library's publications while at the office and may make copies at cost. However, most publications cannot be removed from the office. The MPO staff is also available to make presentations or to speak to organizations or group of citizens on any subject of mutual interest.