Federal Highway Administration

Rural Transportation Planning Workshops

Minnesota Workshop

Including

Illinois
Iowa
Michigan
Wisconsin

FINAL DRAFT

Summer 1999

Dye Management Group, Inc.

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Road mileage data included in this report is from the Federal Highway Administration, 1996, and can be accessed at www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/1996/section5.html.

Federal Highway Administration

Rural Transportation Planning Workshops

Minnesota Workshop

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Federal Highway Administration

Rural Transportation Planning Workshops

Minnesota Workshop

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1.0 Introduction

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), assisted by Dye Management Group, Inc., conducted a series of regional rural transportation planning workshops from October 1998 through July 1999. The Minnesota Department of Transportation hosted the ninth regional workshop on June 8-9, 1999, in Minneapolis/St. Paul.

These workshops were structured to allow the exchange of success stories and dialogue between neighboring states and their representatives on how to make rural transportation planning effective. In addition, the workshops were used to assemble information on how local elected officials are involved in the statewide transportation planning process. Officials from Illinois, Indiana[1], Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin, including planning representatives, district/county engineers, local elected officials, rural planning organizations, economic development agencies, tribal governments, departments of transportation, and rural transit operators were invited to attend. The information gathered at the Minnesota workshop is presented for each state individually. Overall workshop findings and conclusions follow the state summaries.

1.1 Objectives

The purpose of the workshops was to foster dialogue and the exchange of ideas, not formal presentations. The objectives of the workshops were to:

- Explore and promote effective ways to involve rural officials in the statewide transportation planning process.
- Enable participants to share experiences in rural transportation planning and programming.
- Build relationships among participants that can form the basis for future cooperation and coordination.

[1] Representatives from Indiana also attended the Lower East workshop, and information on Indiana's planning process can be found in the report on that workshop.

- Identify the most effective roles and responsibilities for rural transportation providers and users.

- Determine rural transportation needs and issues that are being addressed by planning and programming.

- Identify best practice planning techniques used in developing successful rural projects.

- Obtain information for a report to Congress on how responsive state transportation plans and the statewide transportation planning process are to rural concerns and how rural officials are involved in the planning process.

These objectives were achieved by working through an agenda of discussion topics. Workshop participants were asked to come prepared to provide input around specific questions that they were given in advance.

1.2 Discussion Topics

Five principal discussion topics were addressed in the workshop. Knowledgeable individuals from each state, from both the state department of transportation perspective and the local rural perspective, were asked to address these discussion topics. The topics were:

- **The Process and the Outcome: How Planning for Rural Areas Is Conducted**

  This topic covered the following questions:

  - How is planning for rural areas conducted?
  - How are rural transportation needs addressed in the development of the statewide transportation improvement program?
  - How are rural officials involved in decision making?
  - What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses in your state?

- **Jurisdictional Roles, Responsibilities, and Funding**

  This topic covered the following questions:

  - What are the jurisdictional roles and responsibilities in your state for planning, programming, and funding improvements in rural areas?
  - How are plan decisions funded?

- **Integration/Coordination with Other Plans**

  This topic covered the following questions:

- How are local/regional plans coordinated with other plans?
- How are local rural goals balanced against regional/statewide goals and objectives?

- **Success Stories**

  This topic covered the following question:

  - What success stories do you have of innovative programs and projects that address rural needs?

- **Other Issues**

  This topic covered the following question:

  - What are the major rural transportation issues facing rural areas in your state, for all modes?

1.3 Participants

State departments of transportation were solicited to host the rural transportation planning workshops. Based upon the response, host states were identified and nearby states were then invited to attend.

Knowledgeable individuals, from both the state department of transportation perspective and the local rural perspective, were invited to attend the workshops. The objective was to have approximately five people from each state, representing a variety of rural transportation stakeholders, actively participate in the workshop forum. Participants included local, state, and federal planning representatives; county engineers and commissioners; local elected officials; councils of governments; regional planning organizations; economic development agencies; tribal governments; and rural transit operators. National organizations represented at the workshops included the:

- Community Transportation Association of America.
- Federal Highway Administration.
- Federal Transit Administration.
- National Association of Counties.
- National Association of County Engineers.
- National Association of Development Organizations.

The local elected officials who participated in the workshops included rural mayors, county commissioners, judges/county executives, public works directors, trustees, and former state legislators.

1.4 Report Structure

The format of this report is based on the workshop objectives and topic areas, as follows:

- The Rural Planning Process.
- Programming and Funding for Rural Area Decisions.
- Major Planning Issues.
- Identified Strengths and Weaknesses.
- Success Stories.

Each of the participating states are addressed in turn. A list of workshop participants and maps of each of the states are included in the attachments.

2.0 Illinois

Illinois contains 287,275 lane miles of roads, 207,681 lane miles of which are rural, and 10,230 of these rural miles are on the National Highway System. Eighty-eight percent of rural roads are locally owned. Illinois' rural transportation planning process is considered to be top-down.

2.1 The Rural Planning Process

Illinois has six regional planning and development commissions. However, in rural regions, the commissions are not very involved in transportation planning issues.

Counties interact with Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) once a year to inform IDOT of local project prioritization programs. Counties are not required to produce plans, but they generally provide a three-year program of projects. The manner in which this is done varies by county, with some using a more formal process than others.

Principal Rural Planning Activities

- IDOT's statewide plan (Connecting Illinois) is policy driven. Little facility-based planning is done in rural areas.

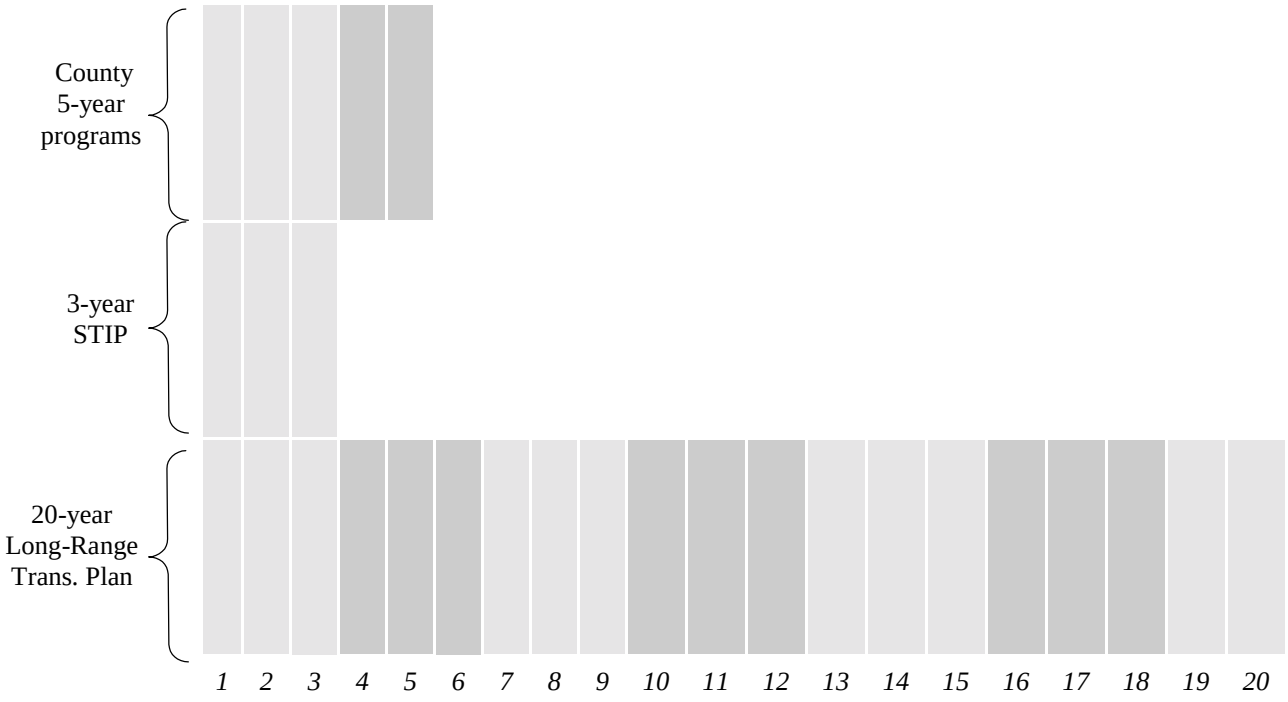
- At the county level the bulk of planning activity is actually programming done by county engineers with input from county boards. The counties work together within their districts, dealing with such issues as traffic volumes, economic development, existing conditions and pavement life, and public expectations.

- Counties have five-year programs, and work with IDOT to produce three-year programs that contribute to the statewide transportation improvement program (STIP).

- Representatives from counties are invited to hearings and make comments on how the corridor affects local issues. However, they are not formally asked to provide input on planning issues.

Exhibit 2a illustrates Illinois' transportation planning process.

Exhibit 2a: Rural Planning Integration in Illinois



Local Elected Official Involvement

Local elected officials may participate in the rural transportation planning process by joining their regional planning and development commission. They may also provide input on local needs to IDOT for use in developing the state long-range transportation plan and the STIP.

2.2 Programming and Funding for Rural Area Decisions

Some of the funds from the 19 cent per gallon gasoline tax are distributed at the county and township level. In addition, IDOT coordinates federal funding for programming at the county level.

2.3 Major Planning Issues

The following major rural planning issues in Illinois were identified during the workshop.

- There is a need for rural regional transit.

  Rural counties have no public transit services, and there is no group that does planning for that kind of transit.

- Growth management is becoming more of an issue in some areas, and the government has instituted a growth management plan.

  People in the rural area around Peoria are worried about population growth and rural preservation. On the other hand, small downstate communities welcome growth and see it as recovery from the loss of factory jobs in the 1980s.

  Nonprofits are discussing limiting growth with the state legislature, and growth management is a high priority for the governor.

2.4 Identified Strengths and Weaknesses

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during the workshop.

Strengths

- Counties work together on programming issues within districts.
- There is a lot of public input at the county level.
- IDOT facilitates community involvement through public hearings during corridor studies.

Weaknesses

- IDOT does not formally solicit comments from the counties on planning issues, and there is little actual planning done for the rural areas.
- There is no public transit in rural areas.

2.5 Success Stories

- The Midwest Rail Initiative has been established to bring passenger rail from Chicago to the Quad Cities and Omaha. This is a grassroots commission to reestablish passenger rail in these areas, under the direction of the Illinois and Iowa departments of transportation.
- McLean County is working on urban, rural, and alternate modes, and has formed committees to address these areas. This is an intergovernmental effort that has helped agencies work together and allowed planners to take "field trips" to work sites, where engineers explain the conditions and work being done on roads. This has fostered cooperation and improved the processes used by the different agencies to achieve their goals.

3.0 Iowa

Iowa contains 230,835 lane miles of roads, 209,493 lane miles of which are rural, and 7,454 of these rural miles are on the National Highway System. Ninety-one percent of rural roads are locally owned. Iowa's rural transportation planning process is considered to be bottom-up.

3.1 The Rural Planning Process

Iowa has six transportation regions containing eight metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and 18 regional planning affiliations. The regional planning affiliations were originally established through the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT) regions, in order to meet the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act's (ISTEA) requirement for more local involvement. In establishing the planning affiliations, Iowa DOT gave each county the option of staying with its existing affiliation (which had previously been primarily a grant-writing organization), joining an adjacent affiliation, or forming an additional affiliation solely to provide transportation planning services.

Each regional planning affiliation is made up of at least two counties, and includes county and city engineers, public officials, other transportation stakeholders, and representatives from Iowa DOT. The Iowa DOT representatives attend all affiliation meetings, but local officials may decide whether they will be voting or non-voting members. Regional planning affiliation members work together to prepare regional transportation planning and programming, and produce long-range regional plans and annual transportation improvement plans (TIPs). Iowa DOT has targeted funds to the regions to help develop their TIPs, which are then incorporated into the STIP.

Iowa DOT's regional district offices are now called transportation centers. They have a management team that brings input from the regions into planning decisions through weekly field services representative meetings. Each transportation center has at least one planner, who works at the same level as a development engineer and meets with people from the regions. Some of the planners work with two or three regions, depending on whether the areas in question are urban or rural.

Using extensive public input, Iowa DOT prepared the state's long-range transportation plan with the MPOs and an advisory committee. Regional planning affiliations also made recommendations concerning the direction of transportation investments.

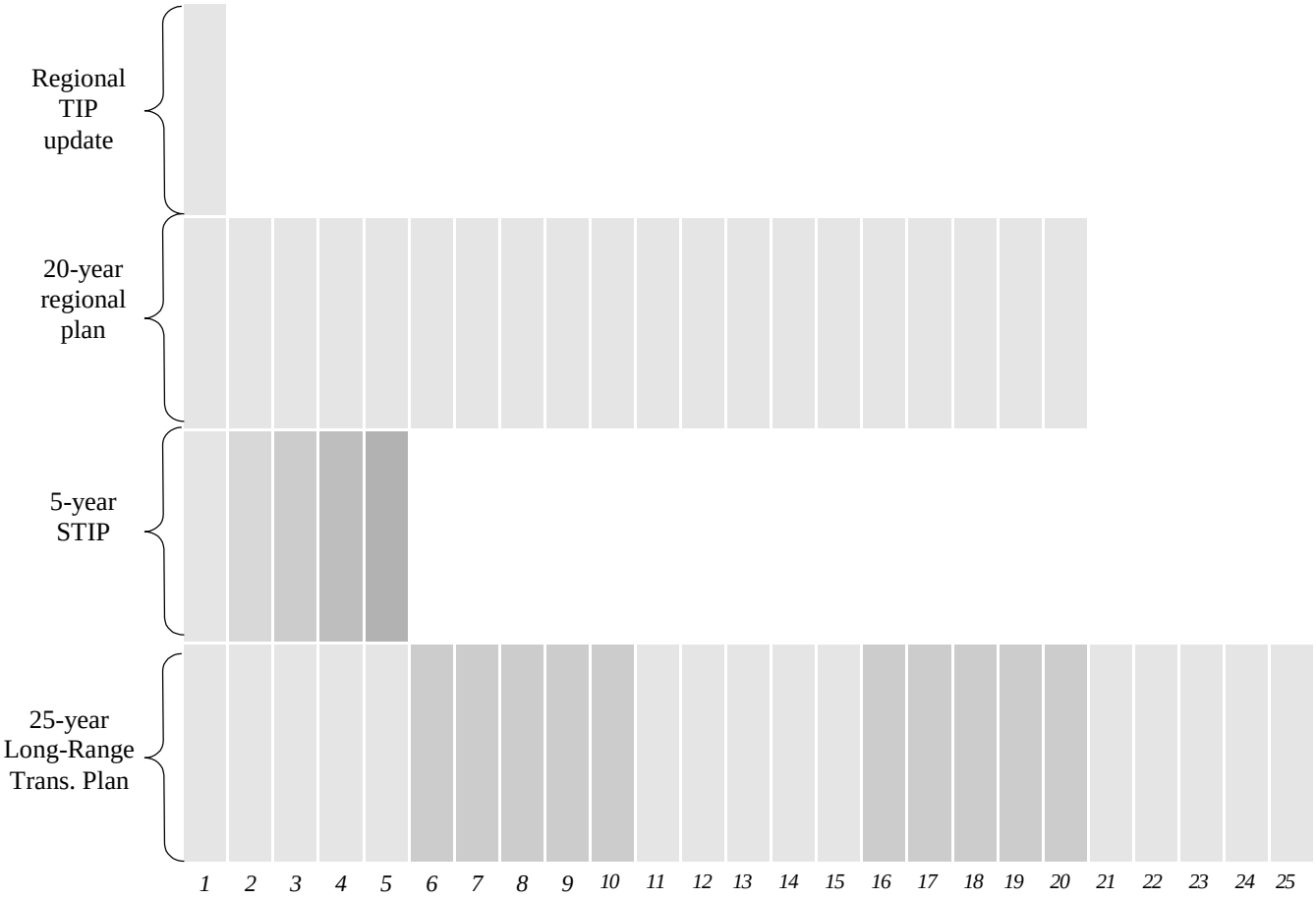
Iowa's statewide plan (Iowa in Motion) is more than a policy plan, and has established a performance measure program. Iowa DOT also has a pavement management system, indicated by five-year increments. Planning begins with analysis of high capacity needs on the network and improvement, then focuses on preservation.

Principal Rural Planning Activities

- The responsibilities of regional planning affiliations are as follows:
  - Producing annual TIPs.
  - Producing annual planning work programs listing the projects that will be undertaken in the next year.
  - Producing 20-year regional long-range transportation plans.
  - Facilitating extensive public involvement in the transportation planning process.
- Since Iowa DOT representatives to the regional planning affiliations are involved in producing the annual TIPs, incorporation into the STIP is a fairly informal process. Iowa DOT simply ensures that a given TIP is eligible, then incorporates it without the need for lengthy review.
- Similarly, Iowa DOT has no formal approval process for the 20-year regional long-range plans, as Iowa DOT representatives have already provided input into the plans at the regional planning affiliation level.

Exhibit 3a illustrates Iowa's rural planning organization participation process.

Exhibit 3a: Rural Planning Integration in Iowa



Local Elected Official Involvement

Local elected officials may participate in the rural transportation planning process through membership in their regional planning affiliations' policy committees, which also include engineers, trucking agencies, environmental groups, citizens' groups, chambers of commerce, downtown associations, and transit groups. The committees are open to participation, and local officials are generally invited into membership.

3.2 Programming and Funding for Rural Area Decisions

Iowa DOT stresses that projects should be funded using state funds. To that end, 42½% of the state gas tax goes to the counties, to be used for their TIPs. These rural regional funds are distributed based on population. Through the regional TIPs, counties can indicate which state routes are important to them. The counties then put their own funds into these state roads, and Iowa DOT tries to program the identified projects.

The state also provides STIP funding that can be used for planning, a portion of which goes to local municipalities. Enhancement funds from the STIP are given to regions, and the remainder is administered by the state.

Off-system bridges are handled differently. The districts go through the counties for funding, with a 50/50 split between county and state.

3.3 Major Planning Issues

The following major rural planning issues were identified during the workshop.

- In rural areas, there is no growth and the population is declining. It has become difficult to find workers for Iowa businesses.

  Iowa DOT works with businesses at round table meetings to determine where growth may occur and where development is needed. They have found that good highways are essential, but that they do not have to be four-lane highways. "Super-2" highways, with two through lanes plus turning and passing lanes, are adequate.

- The funding for regional planning affiliations is not always adequate.

  Iowa DOT is trying to work together with the regions, and has been able to get highway funds for transit.

- The state is trying to negotiate the amount of funding to provide and the minimum amount needed, without dictating requirements to the regions.

  The process has been initiated with a great deal of flexibility, but the counties were not comfortable with the change. Iowa DOT does not want to lose the gains they have made in increased coordination with the regions and the public by making strict requirements of the regions.

- Regional plans only include county roads.

  Iowa DOT would like to see regional plans that include more than county roads, but is hesitant to require that and risk losing the entire process.

- There is some confusion among regional agencies concerning the difference between planning and programming. Some say they have been planning for 50 years, but they have actually been programming.

  Iowa DOT is trying to foster understanding of the difference between planning and programming.

3.4 Identified Strengths and Weaknesses

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during the workshop.

Strengths

- Iowa DOT is committed to encouraging regional and public involvement.
- The commercial industrial network is a good four-lane arterial system. It generally corresponds with the national highway system standards, and where it does not, it is an efficient Super-2 highway.
- The regional planning affiliations generally work well together to produce good regional plans.
- Iowa DOT holds a planning workshop with round table discussions for MPOs and regional planning agencies. Regions discuss what to do to share information and approaches.

Weaknesses

- There is some concern among county engineers that the combination of publications, subcommittees, pamphlets, and hearings has not yielded the predicted level of public input, despite Iowa DOT's commitment to public involvement.
- The level of air service is acceptable in rural areas, but the fares are too high.

3.5 Success Stories

ISTEA helped Iowa DOT find new partners in the planning process. There is a higher level of public involvement, and the groups involved are more diverse. With the establishment of regional planning affiliations, there is a clearer understanding of the entire transportation network, including transit, bike plans, etc. The various modes are recognized as part of a complete transportation system. The process has also brought issues into the open, such as urban sprawl and land use.

4.0 Michigan

Michigan contains 247,195 lane miles of roads, 182,262 lane miles of which are rural, and 8,889 of these rural miles are on the National Highway System. Ninety-one percent of rural roads are locally owned. Michigan's rural transportation planning process is considered to be a blend of top-down and bottom-up methods.

4.1 The Rural Planning Process

Michigan consists of 13 regional planning and development commissions, which were created in the early 1970s and are funded with state transportation dollars. The commissions provide a forum for addressing transportation issues and concerns as they relate to state and local governments, data collection, corridor studies, public transit coordination, and public involvement. Some are also MPOs, funded by dues-paying local governments, and by grants from Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Commerce Department. In addition, each rural county is part of a rural task force that makes decisions on transportation improvements within their region based on consultation with local elected officials.

MDOT has reorganized into seven regional offices with one or more Transportation Service Centers. The Transportation Service Centers conduct project selection on the local federal system, and are strategically located to provide public access – there is at least one center within an hour's drive of every Michigan citizen.

All transportation planning in Michigan is conducted within the framework of the state long-range plan. The plan is policy-oriented and guides transportation investment decisions and improvement strategies for both state and local transportation providers. Over 100 meetings are held across the state to ensure input from all levels of government, as well as from anyone with an interest in transportation issues. The state long-range plan provides a policy "umbrella" for guidance in developing project-specific urban and rural long-range plans. Long-range plans for urban areas are developed through the MPO process for that area. Sub-state plans are developed to address unique characteristics and to identify priorities in areas outside the MPO boundaries. Sub-state plans are consistent with the state long-range plan, but provide a more detailed focus on long-term needs and priorities outside urban areas. The state long-range plan also sets priorities regarding system preservation, new capacity, condition goals, etc. All transportation interests are solicited for input in developing the goals and objectives for the state long-range plan.

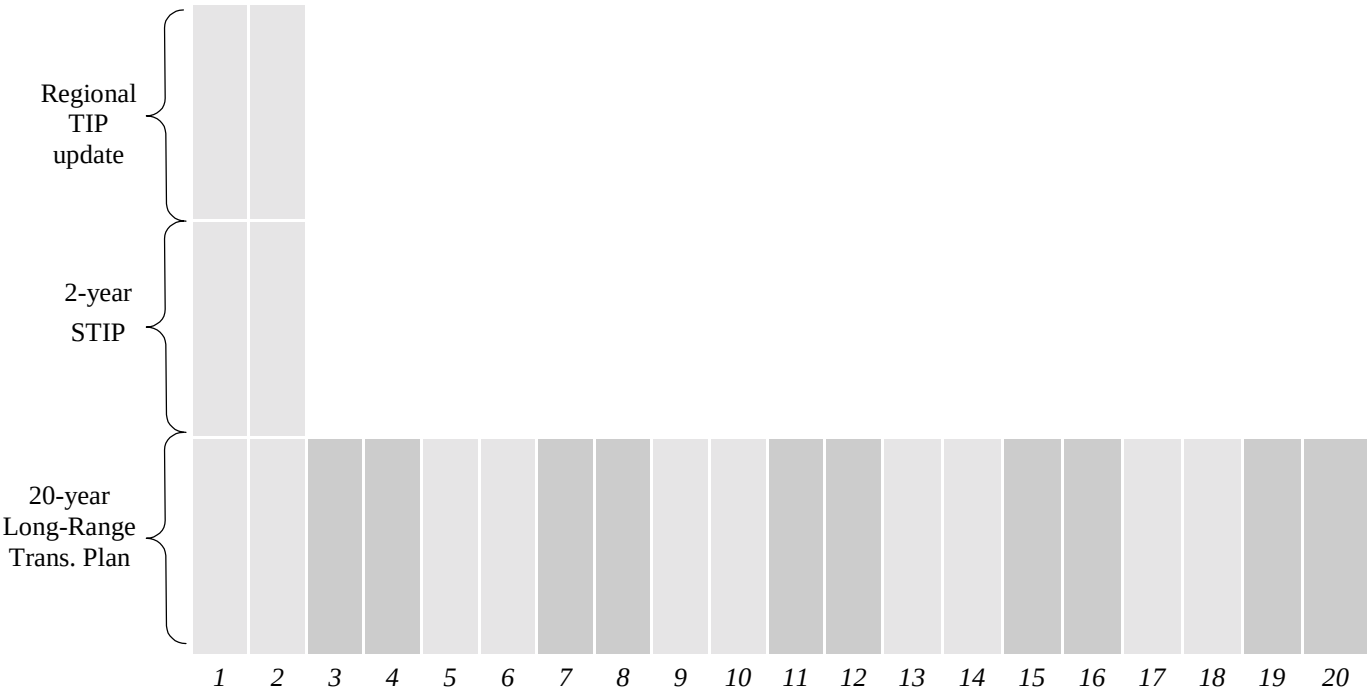
Principal Rural Planning Activities

- The STIP is produced every two years. Projects are selected in accordance with the state long-range plan.

- Transportation Service Centers begin a dialogue on local improvements early in the process.
- Transportation Service Center staff, county road engineers, city managers, and township officials meet continuously in order to identify and coordinate local transportation needs.
- Local rural task forces evaluate how transportation can improve their opportunities.
- Regional planning and development commissions serve as a link for townships, counties, and cities, and provide coordination between state and local projects.

Exhibit 4a illustrates Michigan's transportation planning process.

Exhibit 4a: Rural Planning Integration in Michigan



Local Elected Official Involvement

Local elected officials participate in the rural transportation planning process through the development of the state long-range plan, the regional planning and development commissions, the rural task forces, and continuous dialogue with MDOT regional staff and Transportation Service Center staff.

4.2 Programming and Funding for Rural Area Decisions

Federal aid is split between state and local agencies at a ratio of 75% to the state and 25% to be split among the local eligible agencies. State-generated tax is allocated by formula, with 39.1% going to the state, 39.1% to the counties, and 28.2% to the cities.

All needs are identified and prioritized according to statewide goals and objectives. Road projects are programmed once funding sources are identified and preliminary design work is completed. This entire process is accomplished in cooperation with all affected parties. Project selection for local road improvements are made by the local rural task force, in consultation with local elected officials and MDOT.

4.3 Major Planning Issues

The following major rural planning issues were identified during the workshop.

- Coordination between transportation and land use/economic development is necessary, but can be difficult to accomplish.

  Transportation and development issues are related. However, transportation agencies have no control over land use and zoning decisions, which are generally driven by townships through land use permits. Some county-level transportation agencies are trying to coordinate these activities by developing cooperative relationships with their townships and educating them on the capabilities of transportation projects.

- County road commissions may not have the staff to pursue different projects and funding.

- Michigan is in a transition stage, working toward becoming more customer-oriented and providing planning capability within the regional offices.

4.4 Identified Strengths and Weaknesses

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during the workshop.

Strengths

- Michigan's planning process has become more decentralized to focus on maintaining contact with customers. This allows MDOT to be able to work cooperatively with local agencies to expedite projects and reduce disruption to local communities.

- The Transportation Service Centers were intended to expedite the development and delivery of MDOT's program. Decentralizing planning capabilities has been difficult

at times. MDOT has hired regional planners, whose roles are still being defined. Although the process is evolving, the effort has proven beneficial.

Weaknesses

- MDOT finds it difficult to maintain a focus on statewide planning issues because counties concentrate more on local issues.

4.5 Success Stories

- By state law, funding was provided to develop a secondary commercial network of roads that complements the state trunkline system. This network was identified through the rural task forces with input from MDOT.

- The Upper Peninsula has long requested a north/south route to enhance their ability to move traffic from Wisconsin. MDOT began a partnership with the Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Commission, which conducted public hearings on what the locals wanted. This effort translated the statewide goal of mobility into the local involvement process and an existing corridor was identified for improvement through this local effort.

- The decentralization process has helped MDOT build partnerships with local communities and change its public image. Before MDOT was re-organized into regions and Transportation Service Centers, a customer might have to travel several hours to get to the nearest MDOT office. Service centers are now located throughout the regions, within an hour's drive of every Michigan citizen and a half an hour of a high percentage of the population. It is now easier for citizens, elected officials, and others with a transportation issue to make contact with MDOT.

5.0 Minnesota

Minnesota contains 267,851 lane miles of roads, 233,751 lane miles of which are rural, and 9,471 of these rural miles are on the National Highway System. Eighty-eight percent of rural roads are locally owned. Minnesota's rural transportation planning process is considered to be a blend of bottom-up and top-down processes.

5.1 The Rural Planning Process

Minnesota's rural transportation planning process involves three groups: Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) planners in the central office, Mn/DOT planners in each of the seven greater Minnesota districts, and the nine regional development commissions. The Mn/DOT districts develop district long-range transportation plans, which the Mn/DOT central office uses to produce the statewide transportation plan.

Programming is done at the district level. Minnesota uses area transportation partnerships, which are sub-state, multi-county, geographically-based partnerships composed of representatives from cities, counties, planning organizations, and state agencies. Mn/DOT's central office provides broad guidelines for the area transportation partnerships to follow, allowing for flexibility in the way districts do their programming. Membership varies in size and representation, and can include engineers, planners, modal representatives, and local elected officials. The area transportation partnerships conduct their work with a target regional funding level that is a relative share of the federal highway funding that is available within the state. The partnerships integrate state and local transportation priorities, and recommend area-wide investments for the three-year STIP.

In response to ISTEA requirements, Mn/DOT is instituting a decentralized planning and programming process by building relationships between the central and district offices. In addition, the regional development centers serve as liaisons between the districts and local units of government to help the districts address local concerns in their plans. The centers' planners work closely with Mn/DOT district planners to carry out pre-arranged work programs. Regional development center responsibilities under these agreements generally include:

- Participating in the development and review of plans, policies, and studies impacting the region's transportation system.
- Providing communication between Mn/DOT, local governments, and the public.
- Providing customers with technical and/or professional assistance upon request.

Principal Rural Planning Activities

- Regional development commission transportation planners hold four meetings each year to discuss regional transportation issues and to share techniques and other information. A Mn/DOT representative is invited to attend these meetings.

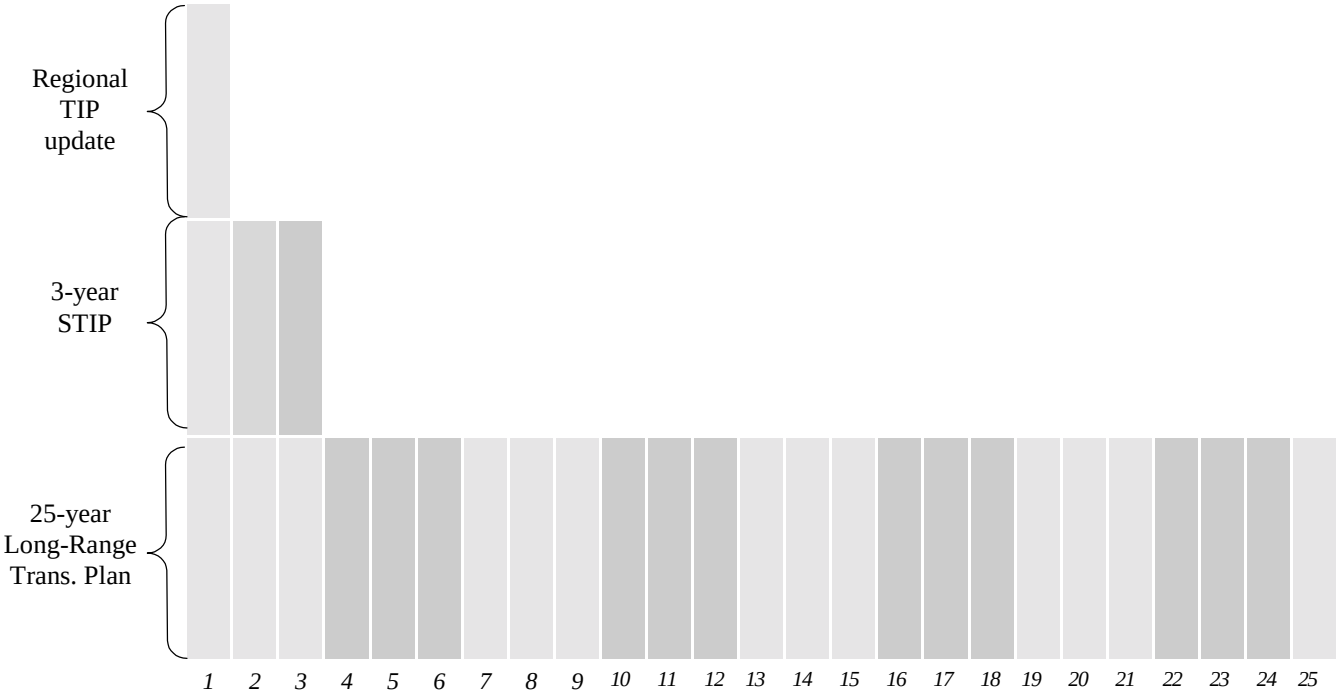
- A representative from each regional development commission is invited to attend meetings held by Mn/DOT transportation planners.

- As part of Minnesota's decentralization process, Mn/DOT districts produce district highway plans in a ten-month period. Some district plans are more project specific, while others set aside categories for corridor preservation, expansion, and improvement. A few plans also include transit.

- The district plans are incorporated into the update of the Statewide Transportation Plan. In the near future, the districts will update their plans to include modal elements, which will then be included in the next update of the Statewide Transportation Plan.

Exhibit 5a illustrates Minnesota's rural transportation planning and programming process.

Exhibit 5a: Rural Planning and Programming Integration in Minnesota



Local Elected Official Involvement

Local elected officials, such as county commissioners, city council members, and township representatives, participate in the rural transportation planning process through the regional development centers.

5.2 Programming and Funding for Rural Area Decisions

Mn/DOT has provided financial assistance to regional development centers (except the Twin Cities metropolitan region) for transportation planning activities since the late 1970s. This funding is approved biennially by the state legislature and requires a 15% match, which the centers agree to provide as part of their work program agreements.

Sixty to 75% of federal funding goes to the state, with local authorities receiving a greater percentage than they did prior to the ISTEA and Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) legislation.

5.3 Major Planning Issues

The following rural planning issues facing Minnesota were some of those identified during the workshop.

- There is no growth in many rural areas because young people are moving to more urban areas.

  This is a key issue in rural Minnesota, where the main industries are farming, timber, and tourism. For example, one-third of the funding for District 2 must go to provide economic development.

- There has been some criticism of the level and type of local elected official representation in the are transportation partnership process.

  Some critics say that there is not enough involvement from local officials in the process. Others maintain that there is too much representation from certain types of elected officials. Mn/DOT and the area transportation partnerships recognize these concerns and are trying to address them as the partnership process evolves.

- The rural economy is losing short line rail in small communities, making progress toward intermodalism difficult.

  Changes in agricultural production and shipping, and the consolidation of elevators have resulted in the loss of branch rail lines. This is causing some rural areas to move away from intermodalism, even as they are trying to move toward it.

- There was concern over railroad crossing safety, as local officials were reporting deaths at some of the crossings.

  Mn/DOT held meetings with local citizens and the local road authority, and gained cooperation from Burlington Northern/Santa Fe Railroad, which had an objective to increase capacity to a two-track system with areas to sidetrack trains. Site inspections were conducted and two or three solutions were determined for each crossing. Some crossings were closed, while others were improved. This seemed to meet everyone's needs.

5.4 Identified Strengths and Weaknesses

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during the workshop.

Strengths

- For economic efficiency, Mn/DOT applies cost-benefit analysis to project planning decisions.

- Mn/DOT responds to the values and concerns of citizens through extensive public input efforts, including public meetings, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and periodic opportunities for public comment on the STIP. Information on Mn/DOT's activities is also available to the public in various forms, such as newsletters, newspaper articles, informational mailings, web sites, and press releases.

- The area transportation partnership process allows for more diverse ideas to be introduced into the process, and according to some, fosters trust among transportation stakeholders.

- The overlapping boundaries of organizations involved in planning force coordination and communication between organizations.

- Since regional development commission boundaries mirror district boundaries, planners from a given Mn/DOT region and its corresponding regional development commission share common constituents and can coordinate well with one another.

Weaknesses

- Rural route numbers change when they cross county borders, creating confusion.

5.5 Success Stories

- Mn/DOT has incorporated extensive public involvement into its programming activities. One district began by soliciting public opinion through focus groups, then prepared a draft list of projects. This list was later incorporated into the STIP. The district conducted a market research telephone survey across its counties with businesses and individuals. Public opinion on the division of funding, as measured in this survey, matched the allocations Mn/DOT had made in the STIP.

- Mn/DOT Sustainable Transportation Initiatives and Mn/DOT District 3 have used a process called the Transportation Action Model to facilitate community-based transportation planning within three District 3 towns. Citizens of each of these communities worked together to establish a local transportation vision, identify important local transportation issues, create greater consensus on the identified issues, and facilitate a process to act on the issues. The participating communities have been generally satisfied with the model's flexibility, focus, and outcomes. District 3 intends to continue the program, sponsoring its use in other rural communities.

- Local stakeholders in an area southwest of the Twin Cities worked with Mn/DOT to overcome a highway access problem and to promote economic growth for their area. A development corporation had a vision for growth in the area that included a new airport to serve the three communities located there. However, only one of the communities had year-round access to the freeway that would take them to the proposed airport. An ad hoc group then invited representatives from Mn/DOT districts to discuss the problem. Working together, local representatives and Mn/DOT district personnel determined that new construction would be prohibitively expensive, and the two affected counties agreed to update an existing county road instead. This updated county road provides the necessary year-round access and passes through the area where the proposed airport and industrial park will be located.

6.0 Wisconsin

Wisconsin contains 228,937 lane miles of roads, 193,673 lane miles of which are rural, and 8,866 of these rural miles are on the National Highway System. Eighty-eight percent of rural roads are locally owned. Wisconsin's rural transportation planning process is considered to be a blend of top-down and bottom-up methods.

6.1 The Rural Planning Process

Wisconsin has nine regional planning commissions, which are formed by executive order of the governor and directed by a board of commissioners typically appointed by county boards and the governor. The regional planning commissions provide intergovernmental planning and coordination for the physical, social, and economic development of a region. All but five counties are served by an planning commission, and five planning commissions also serve as MPOs.

Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) is centralized in terms of planning. Translinks 21, Wisconsin's multimodal 25-year long-range plan, was produced and controlled by WisDOT's central office. WisDOT also generates the STIP.

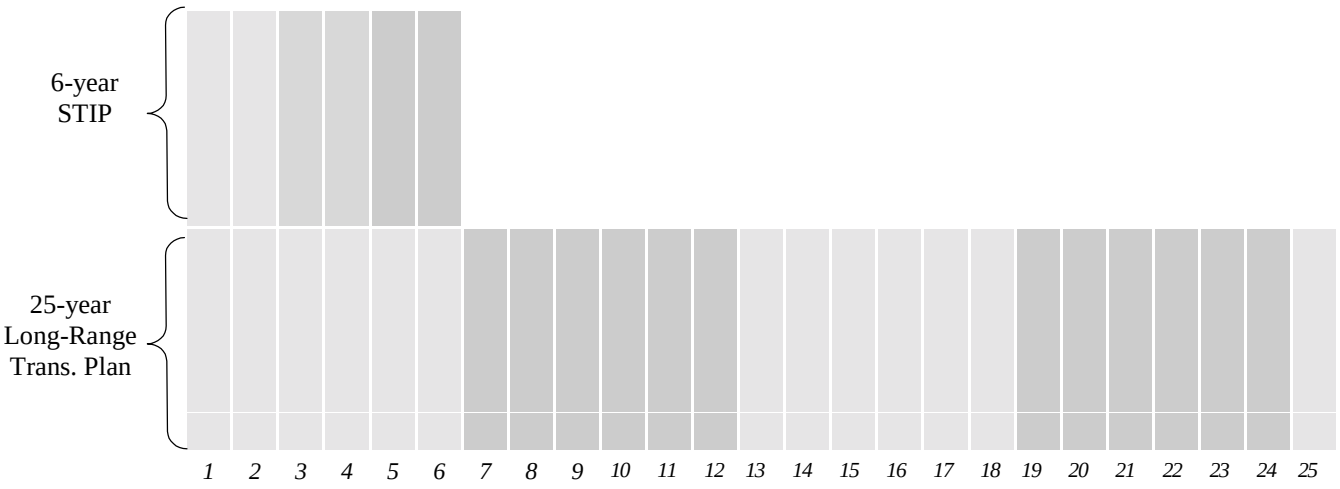
Regional planning commissions provide planning assistance on regional issues, assist local interests in responding to state and federal programs, act as coordinating agencies for programs and activities, and provide planning and development assistance to local governments. However, regional planning commissions and MPOs serving areas with populations of 200,000 or less are strictly advisory in nature. WisDOT works closely with the planning commissions to ensure a comprehensive, coordinated approach to local, regional, and state issues affecting transportation planning.

Principal Rural Planning Activities

- Unlike MPOs, which must produce TIPs every two years, regional planning commissions are strictly involved in providing technical assistance to local units of government, upon request for that assistance.

Exhibit 6a illustrates Wisconsin's rural transportation planning process.

Exhibit 6a: Rural Planning Integration in Wisconsin



Local Elected Official Involvement

Local elected officials are encouraged to participate in the rural transportation planning process by joining their regional planning commission.

6.2 Programming and Funding for Rural Area Decisions

Programming is more decentralized, but has never been completely so because nothing of significance can be done without state or federal funds. WisDOT has a six-year programming effort on the trunk highway system that uses a combination centralized/decentralized approach. Local aid funds go to local governments, but are programmed in the districts. Funding decisions for the interstate system, CMAQ, and high cost bridges are made centrally. These are administered by the central office and controlled by the legislature through the budget. The legislature uses a master contract letting schedule for federal and WisDOT funding, with a list of criteria to evaluate and submit projects.

6.3 Major Planning Issues

The following major rural planning issues were identified during the workshop.

- Better coordination is needed between local and regional jurisdictions.

  Wisconsin recently formed a Local Roads and Streets Council to facilitate coordination between local and regional groups in addressing issues concerning roads that are not included in the state highway system. Representatives from cities and towns, regional planning commissions, and MPOs work together to generate a

transportation aid formula that shows which areas are getting more and which are getting less. The council then makes recommendations for administrative changes at WisDOT and legislative changes.

- There is no mechanism to adjust the WisDOT database for local changes.

  Technological advances in linking data offer opportunities to keep the information updated. WisDOT is looking at other state agencies to tap into shared information, and undertaking a major overhaul of its system.

- Some question the wisdom of upgrading rural roads for economic, rather than traffic reasons.

  The state provides transportation economic assistance grants that match federal grant money aimed at "piggybacking" more economic development in rural areas. This allowed Highway 53 to be upgraded from two to four lanes through a local initiative, although it is not warranted by traffic volume. Several small communities along the route are anticipating economic growth and planning business parks.

- Counties and regions are struggling with growth management and land use issues that affect transportation planning.

  St. Croix County is experiencing the highest level of growth in Wisconsin, so WisDOT worked with the county to develop a growth management plan, including land use and transportation systems. However, implementation may be difficult, as there is an economic struggle to determine where new development will be located. Zoning will not guarantee that the growth management plan will be enforced.

  The region containing some of Wisconsin's best lakes is growing, due to its proximity to the Twin Cities in Minnesota. As a result, local jurisdictions are facing shoreline development issues, such as where growth is going and how to deal with antiquated land use practices. These issues are being addressed on a largely piecemeal basis, since all but one of the counties require acceptance by all of the affected townships to enact countywide zoning. WisDOT is working town by town, trying to integrate a more complete transportation system on a countywide basis by bringing back the use of growth projections.

- Better coordination between agencies is needed to provide a good rural transit system.

  WisDOT uses countywide coordination studies to assist rural Section 5311 programs in reviewing applications for rural public transit. However, each of these agencies serves different client needs (aging, poverty, etc.), and it is difficult to get them to pool their funds for a coordinated transit system.

- There are benefits and drawbacks associated with WisDOT's practice of contracting out all maintenance to the county level.

WisDOT established this practice in order to strengthen their ties to municipalities. It provides a more coordinated approach to maintenance through associations of municipalities, counties and townships. Project generation goes back and forth between the state and municipalities. However, jurisdictional roles for funding and project selection are at the regional level.

6.4 Identified Strengths and Weaknesses

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during the workshop.

Strengths

- Programming is more decentralized now than it used to be, which allows for more local involvement and outreach.
- WisDOT is able to provide better customer service through an extensive public input process.

Weaknesses

- Local governments are extremely dependent on the state for funding.
- Improvements on the trunk system are only addressed when the areas to be improved are in very bad shape.
- The Corridors 2020 plan for the connector system is highly politicized with most of the legislators and some of the public.
- Because the state administers high cost bridge programs, counties often do not maintain bridges. It is more advantageous for them to go to the state to obtain the money for this.

6.5 Success Stories

WisDOT is moving toward more decentralization and public involvement. They have gone to great lengths to address public concerns and gain public input. In developing Translinks 21, WisDOT held over 100 public meetings and supplemented the information gained from these by commissioning a random statewide survey conducted independently by the University of Wisconsin – Parkside. WisDOT also gains a local perspective by working with communities through an implementation action process.

7.0 Workshop Findings and Conclusions

7.1 Similarities

Consensus was reached by the Minnesota workshop participants in many areas, most notably regarding public involvement, project development, and funding. These agreements are listed below.

- Clear definitions of planning versus programming are needed, as there is confusion at the local level about the difference between the two.
- State departments of transportation are committed to providing opportunities for public involvement and for regional input.
- States are moving toward decentralization and working to coordinate the efforts of local jurisdictions within their regions.
- There is a need for consistent, coordinated rural transit.
- Land use is strongly linked to transportation planning, but transportation agencies rarely have any control over land use.
- Communities crave the benefits of economic development which affects their planning policies, yet strive to maintain local character.

7.2 Differences

Differences between the states were also noted, which tended to center on governmental organization, regulations, and the programming process. These differences are listed below:

- States vary from taking a top-down approach to rural planning – like Michigan, which controls funding and makes final project decisions – to states that have a more bottom-up approach, such as Iowa.
- Some rural planning organizations struggle to find planning funds, while others are provided with more extensive resources.
- Some rural planning organizations have a purely advisory role, while others actively develop, plan, and program their transportation projects.
- There is wide variation in the extent to which the rural plans affect the prioritization and selection of projects.

Attachment A. Participants

Minnesota Workshop

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Wes Judkins
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Region 9 Development Commission, MN

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West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

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Indiana Department of Transportation

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Michigan Department of Transportation

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Donn Winckler
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NACE State Director, MI

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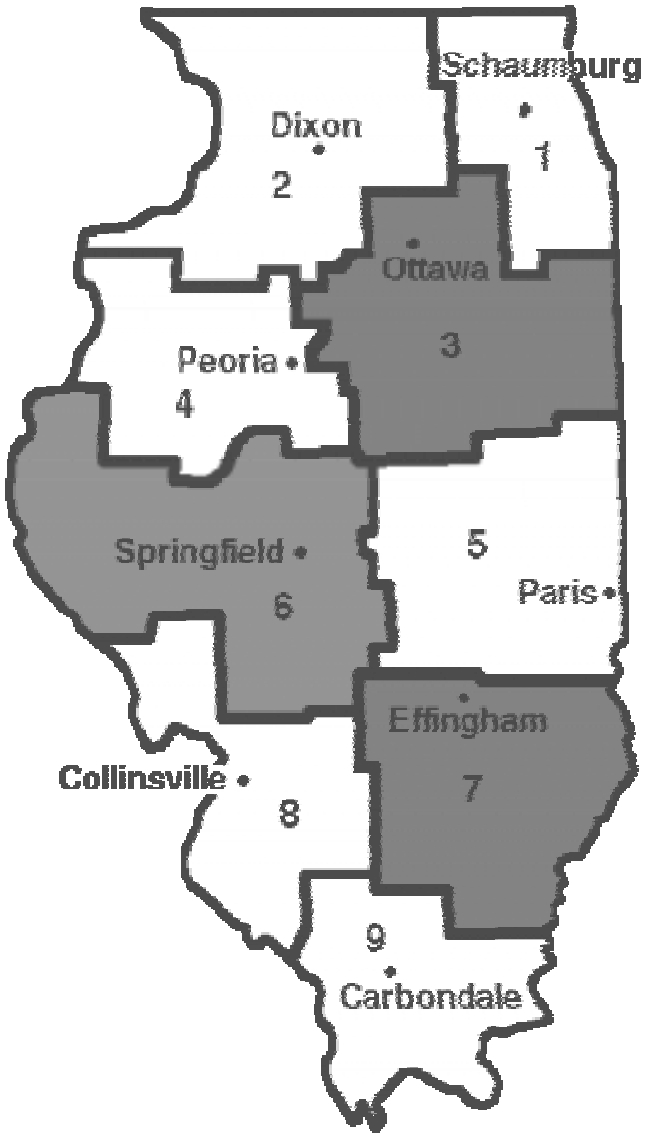
Planning Director, Office of Investment Management
Minnesota Department of Transportation

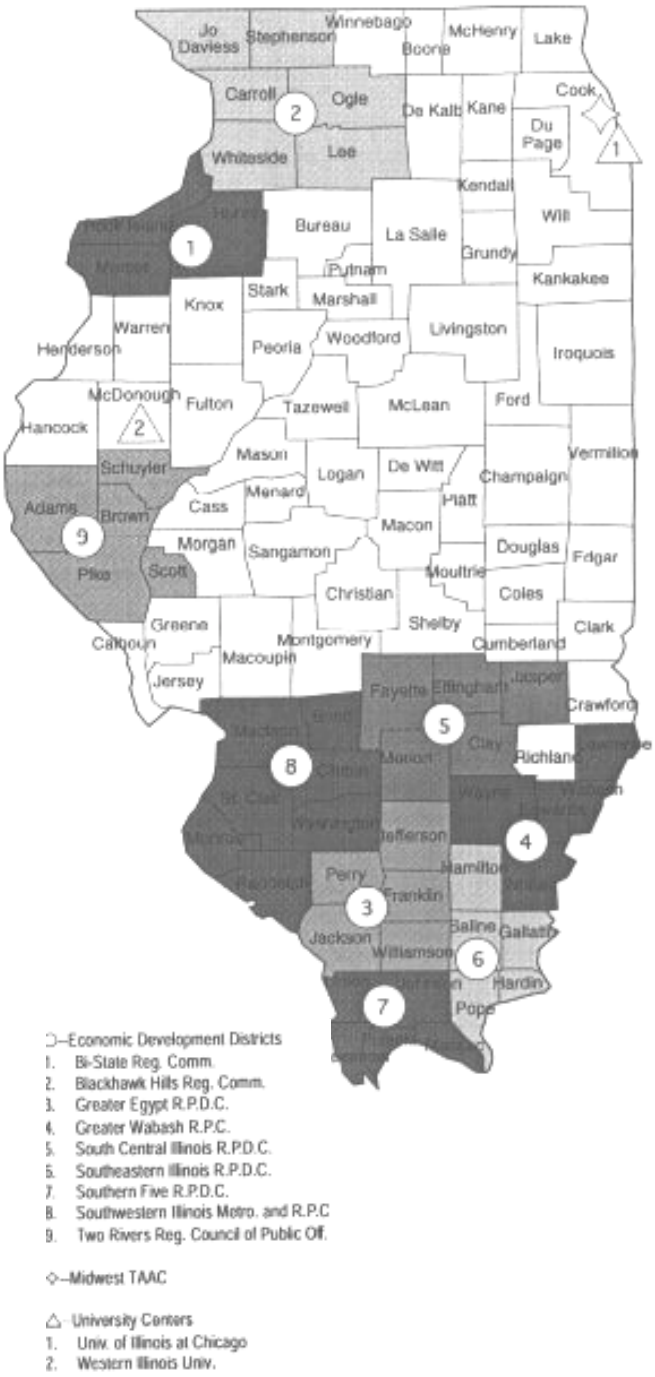
Attachment B. Maps

Illinois

DOT districts

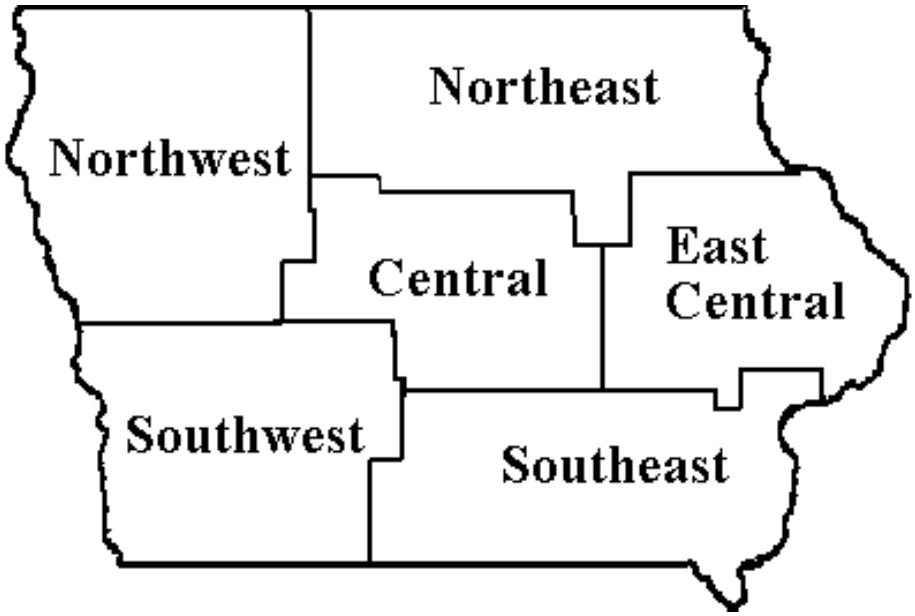


Regional planning and development commissions

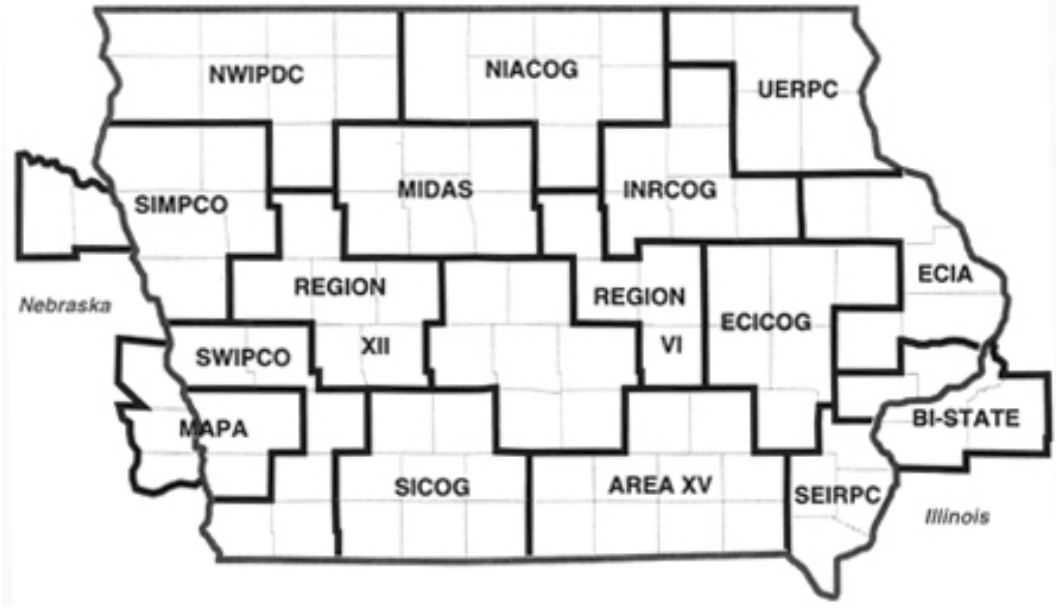


Iowa

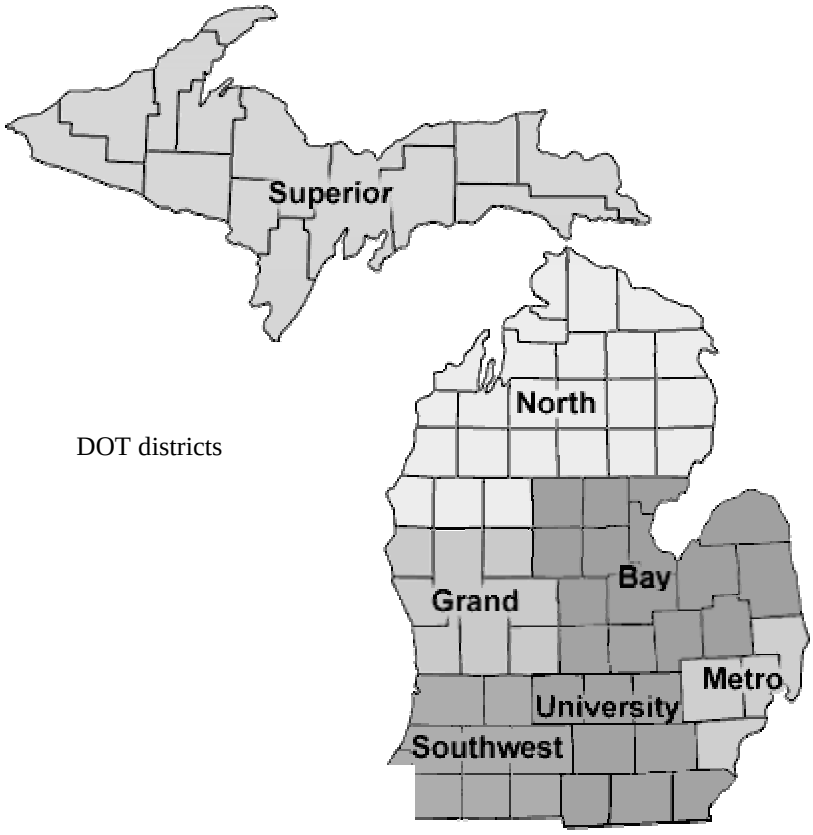
DOT districts



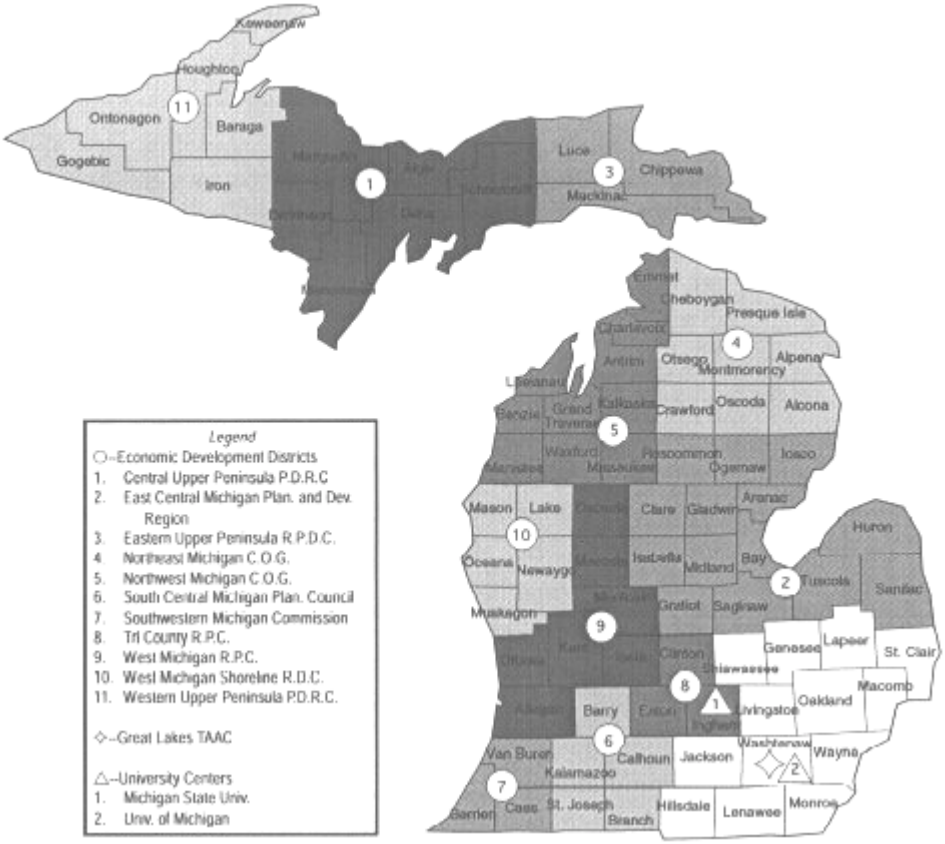
Regional planning affiliations



Michigan



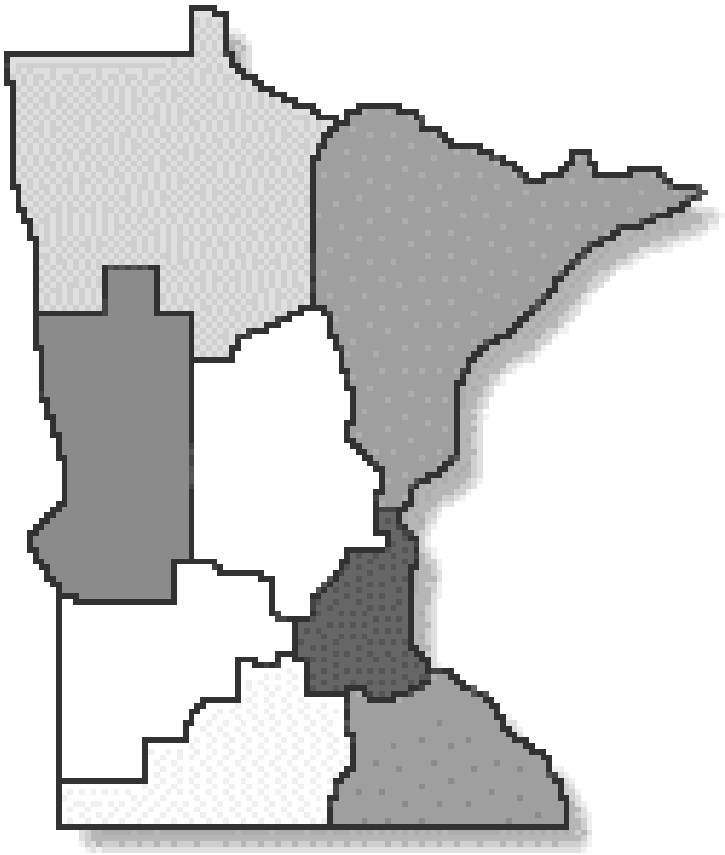
DOT districts



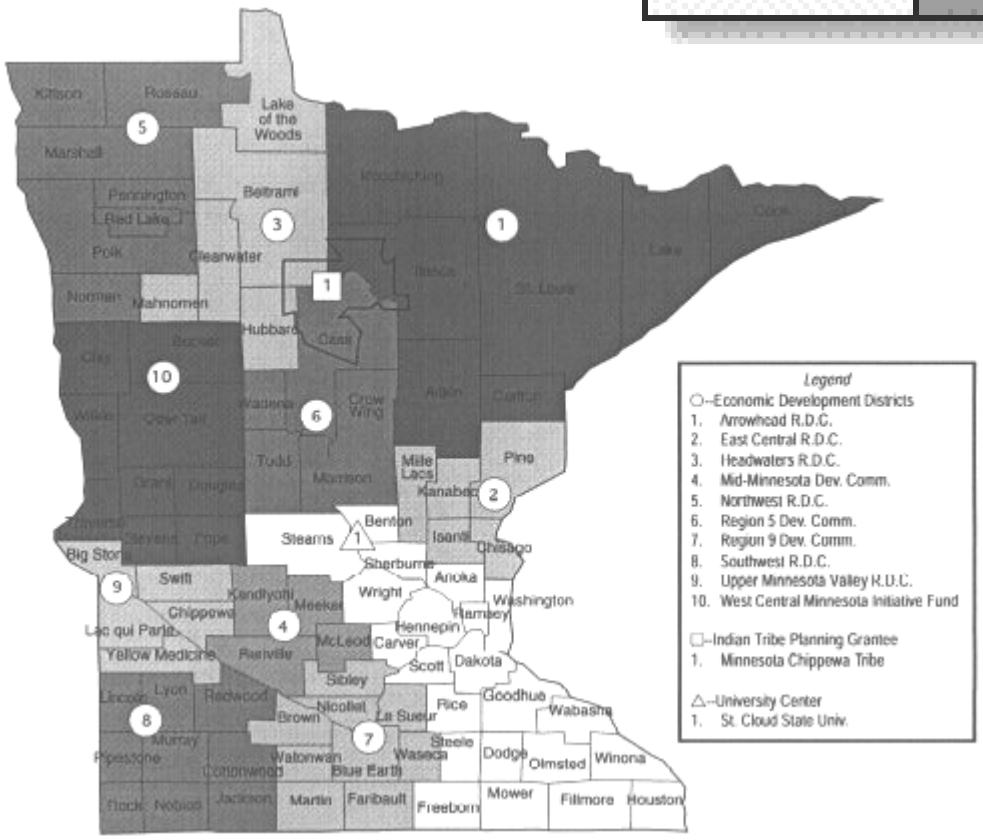
Regional planning and development commissions

Minnesota

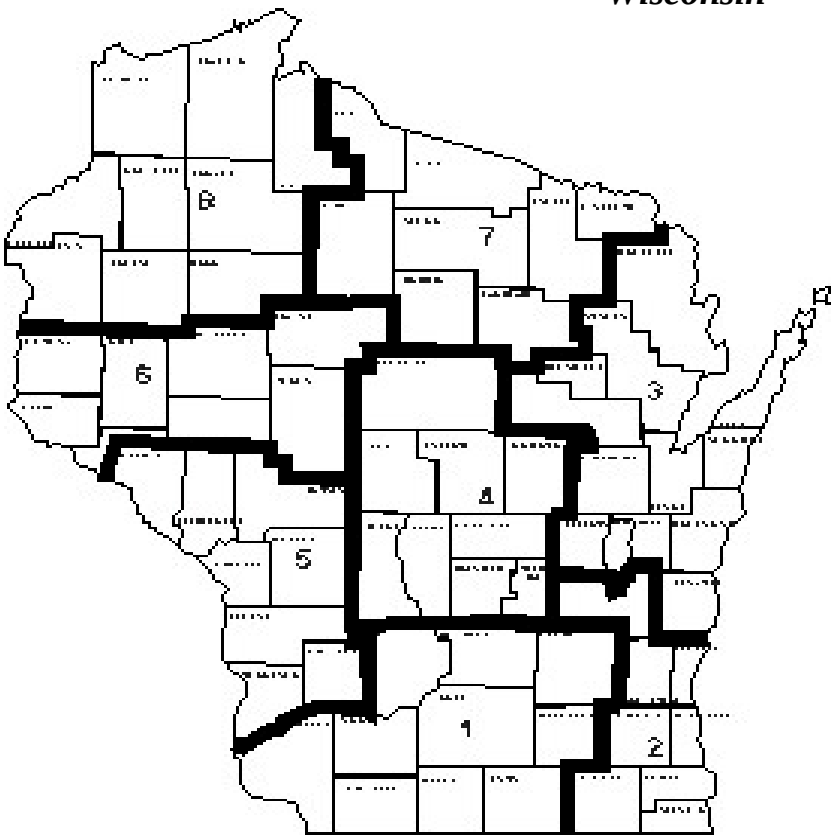
DOT districts and
area transportation partnerships



Regional
development
commissions



Wisconsin



DOT districts

Regional planning commissions