



# Metropolitan Area Planning Forum: Enhancing Tri-State Planning

## Quick Information

**Organization(s):** New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC); North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA); Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (HVCEO); the South Western Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (SWRMPO); and the Greater Bridgeport/Valley MPO (GB/VMPO)

**Contact(s):** Gerry Bogacz, NYMTC

**Website:** [https://www.nymtc.org/about\\_NYMTC/nymtc\\_mpos.html](https://www.nymtc.org/about_NYMTC/nymtc_mpos.html)

**Cooperation Topic(s):** Congestion Management; Transit Planning

**Cooperation Practice(s):** Forums for Communication and Idea Sharing; Project Partnerships

**Cost Information:** NYMTC used Federal funds to develop the New York Best Practice Model; NYMTC and NJTPA shared the cost of implementing the 2010/2011 Regional Household Travel Survey.

The Metropolitan Area Planning (MAP) Forum enables metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in the New York City metropolitan area to address shared transportation challenges that stem from the region's unique scale and population density. The MAP Forum crosses the boundaries of New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania and officially includes eight primary MPOs that address multimodal transportation issues.

## Motivation for Establishing the Collaboration

The jurisdictions of New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC); North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA); Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (HVCEO); the South Western Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (SWRMPO); and the Greater Bridgeport/Valley MPO (GB/VMPO) were originally part of the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission, which was disbanded in 1982 after a decline in Federal funding to support regional councils. However, these areas continued to face the same issues that the commission addressed, as they are connected by shared commuter patterns and geography. As a result, the MPOs found new ways to informally cooperate across State lines. In January 2008, the five MPOs entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to create the MAP Forum in response to recommendations from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration Transportation Planning Certification Reviews to formalize the group's coordination on transportation planning documents as well as National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) attainment efforts. The Forum enabled the agencies to more formally continue their efforts to reduce duplication of effort, promote consistency, and respect the interests of each MPO within the region.

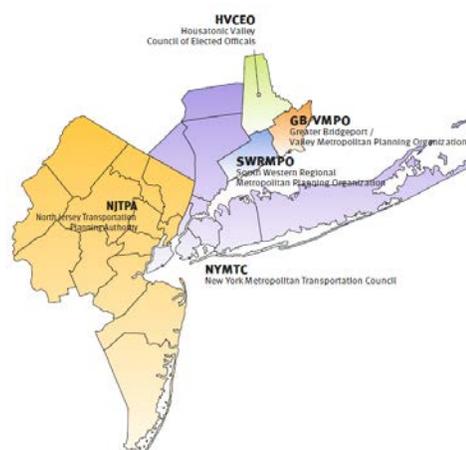


Figure 18. Metropolitan Area Planning Forum map. Source: MAP Forum

In December 2015, the members agreed to expand membership to three additional agencies: South Central Council of Governments (COG), South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO), and Orange County Transportation Council (OCTC).

## Collaboration Structure and Process

In the formal MOU, the MPOs agreed to collaborate on modeling, Unified Planning Work Programs (UPWPs), Long-Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs), Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs), and air quality State Implementation Plan conformity. However, the partners have successfully leveraged the established relationships to discuss a broad range of issues that arise and benefit from coordination across the metropolitan region. While all the MPOs contribute to the conversations and activities of the MAP Forum, NYMTC, and NJTPA have taken unofficial leadership roles, in part due to the fact that as large MPOs, they have more resources than some of the smaller MPOs. NYMTC in particular has contributed to ensuring the Forum's continuation by conducting necessary administration functions.

The MAP Forum collaborates in two ways: hosting biannual in-person meetings and holding conference calls every few months to organize future meetings and discuss issues that affect the region.

Executive directors, managers, and staff from each of these MPOs attend the meetings and calls, as do representatives from the three State DOTs, public transit agencies, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and other resource agencies. Which agencies attend any given meeting often depends on the agenda, and meetings are also open to the public. The MPOs advertise meetings through their own email lists to encourage public attendance.

The location of in-person meetings rotates in order to facilitate participation for the MAP Forum's geographically diverse membership, which stretches from New Haven to South Jersey. The members have found that hosting the meeting in a central location, such as New York City or Newark, facilitates participation. Members can also participate remotely using webinar software.

The MPOs talk through a list of issues on which to focus over the course of the meeting, which typically lasts from two to three hours. The MOU between the MPOs does not make provisions for actions, so members cannot formally vote on actions or make decisions at meetings. The MAP Forum functions more as a foundation for building relationships and identifying projects of mutual interest that the members can collaborate on. The group has found that participation, particularly from the public, is greater when meetings have clearly defined themes. Topics include transportation projects that cross

## Takeaways

- The MAP Forum enables the MPOs in the New York City metropolitan area—spanning New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania—to address shared transportation challenges that stem from the region's unique scale and population density.
- The MAP Forum was established in response to recommendations to formalize coordination on planning documents and NAAQS attainment efforts.
- The MAP Forum's MPOs typically meet in person at least twice a year and hold conference calls every few months.
- The MPOs collaborate on modeling, UPWPs, LRTPs, TIPs, and air quality State Implementation Plan conformity, as well as other initiatives.
- One of the MAP Forum's most significant accomplishments is its ongoing work in the wake of Hurricane Sandy.

MPO and State boundaries, common challenges facing the agencies, and long-range planning efforts that, due to the region's integrated nature, strongly benefit from all members' input. When collaborating on long-range planning, the members consult each other on principles, scenarios, strategies, major project assumptions, and key issues addressed in their LRTPs. They also share draft copies of the plans.

The MPOs also host conference calls every few months to plan for the in-person meetings and discuss other cross jurisdictional issues. These informal calls ensure that the conference will address relevant topics and provide a space for the agencies to continue developing strong relationships and collaborate in an ongoing fashion.

## Collaboration Accomplishments

One of the MAP Forum's most significant accomplishments was its ongoing work on the Hurricane Sandy Follow-up and Transportation Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Analysis. After Hurricanes Sandy and Irene, the MAP Forum's three State DOTs and four of its MPOs secured FHWA funding to identify vulnerabilities in the region's transportation system and determine how to best address them. The MPOs contributed staff resources to manage the project and conduct the study. The partners identified 10 representative transportation assets—including the New Haven Line of the MTA Metro-North Railroad, the NJ 37 East Bound Barnegat Bay Bridge, and the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel—and worked to develop adaptation options for each asset.

NYMTC used Federal funding to develop the [New York Best Practice Model](#) (NYBPM) over the course of 10 years. With the help of a consultant, NYMTC completed the modeling tool in 2005, and as its data covers 28 counties in the tristate area, the other MPOs in the MAP Forum can access the tool for their own planning studies and environmental assessments. Due to the complexity of travel in the region, the model requires substantial maintenance, including staff and contractor time as well as the funds needed to collect survey responses that are input into the model. The modeling tool conforms to Environmental Protection Agency standards.

In 2015, NYMTC completed analyzing the results of a [2010/2011 Regional Household Travel Survey](#), which was co-funded by NJTPA. The survey was conducted to inform the NYBPM, which is used by many MPOs of the MAP Forum. Each MAP Forum MPO contributed relevant information to help inform the survey, including data from their own household travel surveys, socioeconomic and census data, and border traffic volumes. This type of survey can be very expensive to carry out, so sharing resources across MPOs was essential to effectively conducting the survey. Due to the high cost, the MPOs will only conduct the survey every 10 years.

NYMTC and NJTPA have also closely coordinated on the development of the socioeconomic/demographic (SED) forecasts for their Regional Transportation Plans (RTPs). For the 2013 RTP forecasts, NYMTC and

NJTPA used essentially the same county-level forecasts. For the current 2050 SED forecasts under development, NJTPA is working closely with NYMTC to ensure that the forecasts for the two MPOs are consistent. The MPOs in southwestern Connecticut were also included in the development of the forecasts.

The MAP Forum is developing additional megaregional content that can be included in future UPWPs to provide an overview for addressing projects that cross agency boundaries, which often includes freight projects. There is a continuous effort within the MAP Forum to practically evaluate the projects along jurisdictional boundaries that would benefit most from increased coordination. One such project is the recent reconstruction of the I-287 corridor near the Tappan Zee Bridge in New York. The bridge provides vital links to regional and national transportation networks. The partners also work to incorporate boundary activities into future TIPs to better address issues across the region.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

One of the challenges the MAP Forum has faced is the inherent complexity of the larger Northeast region, particularly as it relates to planning topics such as freight and air quality. Although multi-state, multi-jurisdictional forums, including the I-95 Corridor Coalition, do facilitate collaboration in this region, the MAP Forum complements such institutions by addressing issues from the unique perspective of the greater New York City metropolitan area.

While an MOU formalized the relationship, the MAP Forum maintains flexibility in the issues it addresses, which proves a benefit at times and a constraint at others. For example, the original MOU does not make provisions for actions, so members cannot formally vote on actions at the biannual meetings on behalf of their MPOs and COGs. The MPOs retain the ability to discuss any project or challenge that arises, which allows the partnership to adapt to changes in the larger Northeast Corridor megaregion. This flexibility also helps the partners address the many challenges involved in planning for a multimodal system across multiple States. To ensure the effectiveness of this strategy, the MPOs acknowledge that some issues are outside their control and focus instead on goals they can realistically achieve through their partnership.

Another challenge is that the MAP Forum is effectively spread out over four States and a number of service areas with different cultures and interests. Staff across the region's MPOs are often facing different issues and have limited time to participate in collaborative efforts due to resource constraints. However, the agencies are always encouraged participation on projects and initiatives of mutual interest.

The MAP Forum hopes to grow in order to be more effective at addressing regional issues, and its leadership is working to add additional agencies to the group.

In order for ongoing coordination of MAP Forum activities to run smoothly, it is essential for one agency to serve as a champion of sorts and catalyze broader group efforts; NYMTC has served in this role. Because interagency activities are not the highest priorities of most members and because groups like this do not often coalesce organically, it is essential for one agency to take the lead.

Overall, the MAP Forum presents an impressive model of collaboration in one of the largest and most densely populated metropolitan areas in the U.S. Efforts such as sharing data and models, coordinating on cross-jurisdictional projects, and regularly discussing current issues have allowed the MAP Forum members to be effective in improving transportation planning on a regional level.

### **Additional Resources**

- [MAP Forum Memorandum of Understanding](#)
- [New York Best Practice Model 2010/2011 Regional Household Travel Survey](#)
- [2015 Annual MAP Forum Meeting Agenda](#)