



# Association of Texas Metropolitan Planning Organizations: Texas MPOs Share Information and Financial Modeling

## Quick Information

**Organization(s):** Association of Texas Metropolitan Planning Organizations (TEMPO); 25 Texas MPOs; Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)

**Contact(s):** Ashby Johnson, Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization

**Website:** <http://www.texasmpo.org/>

**Cooperation Topic(s):** Statewide Planning

**Cooperation Practice(s):** Forums for Communication and Idea Sharing, Data Sharing and Developing Common Modeling and Forecasting Tools

**Cost Information:** MPOs contribute staff time through participation; executive director provides staff time for meeting coordination; MPOs volunteer to host meetings.

Collaboration becomes especially valuable, as well as more challenging, in a State as large and diverse as Texas. The [Association of Texas Metropolitan Planning Organizations \(TEMPO\)](#) provides a forum for Texas' 25 MPOs to discuss shared challenges and collectively interact with Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). In addition to more efficient and effective communication and problem-solving, TEMPO has led to a shared financial forecasting model for the State.

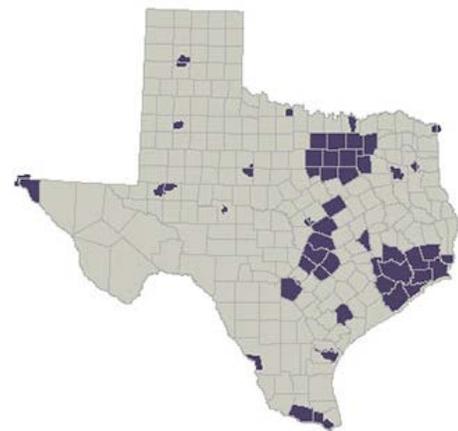


Figure 25. Map of MPOs and counties in Texas. Source: [TEMPO](#)

## Motivation for Establishing the Collaboration

In the early 1990s, the Texas MPOs began meeting as a way to share information and best practices. The meetings enabled the MPOs to capitalize on their diversity and collective knowledge. The group minimized the challenges associated with new regulations and staff turnover by acting as a forum in which agencies could brainstorm strategies for meeting any new requirements and novice staff could quickly learn the roles of and relationships between agencies within the State. While the group began with informal meetings, TxDOT and FHWA soon recognized the value of formally presenting information to all of the MPOs simultaneously as well as the value of introducing organizational structure. In response to encouragement from these State and Federal agencies, the Texas MPOs established bylaws for TEMPO in the late 1990s. These bylaws outline general guidelines of the organization—such as executive committee positions, membership, dues and meetings—but are not extensive and still allow for flexibility. When a TEMPO member identifies an

issue in the terms, the executive director and assistant executive director of the organization draft an amendment and present it to the organization body for review.

## Collaboration Structure

TEMPO holds quarterly meetings for representatives from the MPOs as well as the 25 TxDOT districts, FHWA, and other agencies that want to share information with the MPOs. Meeting agendas are developed from member suggestions, and agencies will send TEMPO items they want to brief MPOs on. For instance, staff from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) attended a TEMPO meeting to teach the MPOs how to use EPA's new Geographic Information System Screening Tool (GISST), while TxDOT presented ways to access and use data from its Crash Records Information System (CRIS). TEMPO also organizes subcommittees to address specific topics, such as strategies for meeting new Federal legislation requirements.

The MPOs each choose one official representative for any voting matters related to TEMPO, including selecting the executive director and executive committee members. The executive committee members hold two-year terms, but there is no official term limit, so some members have remained on the committee for several years and have been able to maintain substantial institutional knowledge. The executive committee determines the agenda for each meeting. Agendas include topics relevant to the MPOs and designated time for TxDOT and FHWA to present information. The MPOs also use the meetings as a forum to present challenges, ask questions, and identify other MPOs who have addressed similar problems.

The MPOs who volunteer to host the meetings seek to plan them around other events, which saves money and allows the group to tour new areas of the State and learn more about each MPO. Staff from the executive director's MPO provide services like coordinating room reservations and taking minutes at the meetings.

## Collaboration Accomplishments

One of TEMPO's most significant accomplishments was the development of a shared, statewide financial model. The MPOs worked with TxDOT to create the Transportation Revenue Estimator and Needs Determination System ([TRENDS](#)) in the mid-2000s. Since then, the web-based interface has enabled MPOs to enter their own data, such as population growth assumptions, to forecast future financial constraints and develop their Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) through a consistent method.

## Takeaways

- TEMPO provides a forum for Texas' 25 MPOs to discuss shared challenges and collectively interact with TxDOT and FHWA.
- Bylaws outline the general guidelines of the organization, such as executive committee positions, membership, dues and meetings, but are not extensive.
- MPOs and TxDOT created the Transportation Revenue Estimator and Needs Determination System (TRENDS) to forecast future financial constraints, develop their Transportation Improvement Programs, and communicate needs to the legislature.
- TEMPO plans to provide MPOs with a "MPO 101" class that will disseminate institutional knowledge to incoming MPO staff and may be extended to TxDOT district engineers.

By generating various revenue forecast scenarios that correspond to different legislative proposals, TRENDS also allows the MPOs to better communicate to the legislature the transportation benefits they could deliver with additional tax revenue. TEMPO and TxDOT continue to update the TRENDS model by working with Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) to reflect new information or regulations. For instance, TEMPO recently met with TTI to discuss updating the future trend-line for fuel efficiency, which impacts expected gas tax revenue. TxDOT also completes a new revenue plan each year to keep the model up to date.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

One of TEMPO's current challenges includes the lack of paid staff support. Currently, staff from the executive director's MPO is responsible for organizing TEMPO meetings, and smaller MPOs may not have the necessary resources to support TEMPO's staffing needs. While the larger MPOs have offered to volunteer their staff on a temporary basis if TEMPO elects an executive director from a small MPO, the organization has also considered using metropolitan planning (PL) funds to pay a staff person to organize meetings.

The sheer size of Texas also poses a challenge for TEMPO, as some MPOs regularly need to fly to the quarterly meetings. In addition to rotating the meeting location among MPOs, TEMPO tries to accommodate all members through webinars and conference calls. However, the organization seeks to maximize face-to-face meetings to facilitate conversations about shared challenges or ideas identified during the main discussion. TEMPO encourages attendance by combining its meetings with other statewide conferences, a strategy that also reduces the cost of room reservations.

In the future, TEMPO plans develop an "MPO 101" class that will disseminate institutional knowledge to incoming MPO staff and may also be extended to TxDOT district engineers. While the content and structure of this program has not yet been determined, the "MPO 101" program is meant to enrich the knowledge base of these agencies and foster stronger relationships between MPOs and TxDOT. Experienced leaders within TEMPO as well as TTI staff will serve as facilitators for these classes.

TEMPO is a volunteer organization, and all of Texas' 25 MPOs have chosen to participate. To maximize participation, the executive committee works to ensure that meeting topics are relevant to the MPOs by soliciting feedback from their colleagues after each meeting. Their efforts have led to 80 percent of the State's MPOs continuing to use TEMPO as a forum to discuss common interests and collectively communicate with TxDOT, FHWA, and other agencies.

By consistently meeting and sharing information across several levels of government and most of Texas' MPOs, TEMPO has enabled its members to more effectively address shared challenges and also improve the State's transportation planning by establishing a shared financial forecasting model.

### **Additional Resources**

- [TEMPO Website](#)
- [Transportation Revenue Estimator and Needs Determination System](#)