

Memorandum

DATE: January 11, 2017
FROM: Lyle Wray
TO: Policy Board, Transportation Committee
RE: Metropolitan Planning Organization Coordination and Planning Area Reform Final Rule

As you may recall, this past summer, the US Department of Transportation (DOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) proposed a new rule regarding Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) coordination and Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) requirements.

CRCOG vigorously opposed the rule for a number of reasons. The final US DOT rule was released on December 15, 2016. Although there are broad implications for CRCOG, staff recommends taking a “wait and see” attitude as the implementation timeline has been pushed back until after the next census in 2022 to the year 2024.

The rule requires the following:

- Requires MPOs to encompass the entire Urbanized Area (UZA) as defined by census. If there are currently multiple MPO’s they are encouraged to combine or reorganize to encompass the entire urbanized area.
- Regardless of whether the MPOs combine or not, the MPOs must jointly produce unified planning documents (Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)
- The rule allows for exceptions if all the MPOs and all the governors agree that it is too complex to combine or produce the planning documents and are granted permission by FHWA, FTA and US DOT.

As a note, under the current Census, CRCOG encompasses two UZAs: the Hartford UZA which extends across three other COGs and the Springfield UZA.

- The rule delays implementation until after the next census and the next determination of the UZAs which is anticipated to be completed in 2022. The MPOs then have 2 years to implement the rule in their region.

CRCOG staff believes this rule will result in significantly larger planning regions that dilute local influence over transportation planning and the programming of federal transportation funds. TIP amendments, for example, will have to be approved by both governors of Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Given the long implementation timeframe, however, staff believes that there are many motivated parties outside of Connecticut, who will work to have this rule changed during the next administration.

CRCOG staff, however, is concerned about Connecticut's response to this rule. Specifically, the state could move to make changes in the near term that could adversely affect the planning processes, TIPs and COGs.