



Testimony of

Ashby Johnson  
Deputy Director of Transportation at  
Houston-Galveston Area Council  
&  
Chairman, Policy Committee,  
Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations

Before the

United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure  
Subcommittee on Highways and Transit

Hearing on

Improving and Reforming the Nation's Surface  
Transportation Programs

Wednesday, March 30, 2011  
10:30 AM  
2167 Rayburn House Office Building

Chairman Duncan, Congressman DeFazio, members of the Subcommittee, my name is Ashby Johnson and I am the Deputy Director of the Houston-Galveston Area Council and the current Policy Committee Chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO).

AMPO is a non-profit, membership organization established in 1994 to serve the needs and interests of over 380 metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) nationwide. Metropolitan areas are the nation's economic engines. Almost three-quarters of U.S. citizens live and work in these regions, which drive the nation's economy and compete head-to-head with regional economies in other countries. In fact, of the 100 largest global economies, 37 of them are metro areas in the United States. Metropolitan areas account for 90% of the nation's GDP and produce 85% of the exports. The importance of metropolitan economies is not limited to large urban areas on the two coasts, however. Even in classically rural states like Idaho and the Dakotas, metro areas account for a majority of the economic output. To help facilitate effective regional transportation decisions during the transportation planning process, MPOs are designated by federal statute to carry out planning requirements mandated under federal law.

From the MPO perspective here are a few ideas that would improve project delivery and stretch federal resources:

1. Require states to reimburse MPOs by same-day electronic transfers if practicable, or no later than 10 days. Require USDOT to enforce this. Current law requires reimbursement in 30 days but states still fail to comply. Uncertainty with reimbursements delays project planning.
2. A modest increase in MPO planning funds will result in fewer construction dollars being used for planning. Many MPOs use STP and CMAQ funds for planning.
3. Increase the population threshold for MPO designation from 50,000 to 100,000. As the population of our country continues to grow, we are finding that more and more areas are

crossing the current threshold. In many states this has led to the creation of numerous MPOs that are directly adjacent to each other even though they share the same travel and air sheds. The result of too many MPOs in close proximity is a fracturing of regionalism, an inability to fully address mobility problems, and financial resources being spread too thin.

4. Provide MPOs with stronger project selection authority. Once consultation or cooperation is completed with the states, MPO's stronger authority to select projects for the TIP will result in less back and forth at later dates and decrease delays.
5. Encourage states to designate MPOs with a population over 200,000 as designated recipients of federal funding for smaller programs. Smaller federal programs can be executed through MPOs that demonstrate capability, which frees the state to use its employee resources more efficiently on larger programs.
6. Require USDOT to incorporate the results or decisions of multimodal, systems-level corridor or subarea transportation planning studies into NEPA documents. Current law is discretionary and allows NEPA lead agencies to consider the incorporation if there is agreement between the lead agencies. If the results are supported with appropriate documentation and data, and the process complies with law, this early work will shorten project delivery. Some case studies are currently duplicated at the federal level and by the state.
7. Require the implementation of statewide performance measures.
  - a. The first performance measures should be developed in a collaborative and transparent manner between USDOT, states, MPOs, local governments, public transportation providers, and other parties who may be responsible for implementing, measuring, monitoring, or reporting results and outcomes.

b. AMPO does not recommend requiring the establishment of performance measures or targets for 385 MPOs in addition to statewide measures and targets. MPOs and states should cooperate to achieve statewide targets that may or may not require the establishment of targets in MPO planning areas.

8. Conformity/Nonattainment. For MPOs in air quality non-attainment, they must follow the "conformity" process. When you also consider that a conformity determination is often triggered by a TIP or Plan amendment, or a state implementation plan (SIP) trigger, the reality is that a continuous conformity process is in place in many metro areas to account for even minor project changes. Many MPOs report that they budget for at least one conformity determination per year. While air quality is critical, the conformity *process* is not efficient. Each conformity determination requires significant MPO staff time to conduct the technical work, hold interagency consultation meetings and public hearings, and ensure the full engagement of MPO board members. MPOs must choose where to focus their limited planning resources, and elected MPO board members must choose where to focus their available time. A strengthened planning process could evolve when the concern about short-term, procedural deadlines for conformity is lessened.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the subcommittee with a few ideas from the MPO point of view. I will remain in the hearing room for follow-up questions.

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
Truth in Testimony Disclosure

(1) Name: Ashby Johnson

(2) Other than yourself, name of entity you are representing: **Houston-Galveston Area Council, Transportation Department**

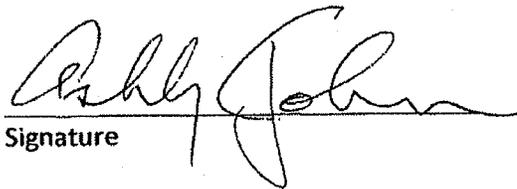
(3) Are you testifying on behalf of an entity other than a Government (federal, state, local) entity? **Yes, The Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO) (see attached curriculum vitae)**

(4) Please list the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous years by you or by the entity you are representing:

**AMPO:**

12-16	FTA Sustainability	DC-26-1027 (2009)	\$105,000
12-17	FHWA M & O Workgroup	DTFH61-08-P-00035 (2009)	\$20,000
12-18	FHWA Modeling Research	(2008)	\$100,000
12-19	FHWA Air Quality Workgroup	DTFH-61-09-C-00030 (2009)	\$98,327
12-20	FHWA Climate Change	(2011)	\$99,966
12-21	FHWA Livability/Sustainability	(2010)	\$59,878

Signature



Date

03.28.11

**Ashby Johnson**

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**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

**Houston-Galveston Area Council**

Transportation Department

*Deputy MPO Director*

10/2005 – Present

RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS INCLUDE:

- Serves as the back up to the MPO Director in all matters;
- Direct supervision of five (5) staff; In-depth interaction with entire MPO staff of 60+ individuals;
- Assists the MPO Director in helping the Transportation Policy Council set regional transportation priorities and activities;
- Serves as H-GAC staff lead to the Technical Advisory Committee;
- Serves as a liaison to local, state, and federal officials and the regional public;
- Serves as the Chair of the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations' (AMPO) Policy Committee;
- Serves as Vice-Chair of the Texas Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (TEMPO);
- Serves on a TxDOT committee ("TRENDS") on financial forecasting methodologies and rescissions;
- Serves as a member of several national research committees related to metropolitan and statewide transportation planning through the Transportation Research Board (TRB);
- Sets and implements training and career development priorities for staff;
- Advises staff on the direction and development of the long-range transportation plan, the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).

**Houston-Galveston Area Council**

Transportation Department

*Program Manager for Transportation Policy*

05/2003 – 09/2005

RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS INCLUDE:

- Serving as a liaison to state and federal elected officials;
- Serving as a liaison to local elected officials (county and city levels), neighborhood groups, and associations for the Houston eight-county transportation planning region;
- Assisting in the development of the 2025 long-range transportation plan;
- Serving as a liaison to the Texas Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Federal Transit Administration;
- Conducting public meetings and hearings on the metropolitan transportation planning process;
- Conducting workshops on transportation planning for local elected officials and the general public;
- Developing the Texas Metropolitan Mobility Plan (a long-term needs analysis in major corridors).

**Federal Highway Administration**  
Office of Metropolitan Planning and Programs  
*Manager, Transportation and Land Use*  
08/1999 – 04/2003

RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS INCLUDE:

- Developing speeches, and briefing materials for senior management;
- Providing technical assistance on metropolitan transportation planning issues for internal and external customers;
- Developing and delivering workshops on metropolitan transportation issues for MPO board members across the country;
- Developing the “Introduction to Metropolitan Transportation Planning” course;
- Acting as the FHWA lead on transportation and land use;
- Developing, implementing, and managing the Metropolitan Capacity Building Program;
- Developing new regulatory processes on surface transportation planning and airports;
- Developing and teaching an interdisciplinary course with the FHWA Office of Civil Rights on Title VI and Environmental Justice.

**Federal Transit Administration**  
Office of Planning, Innovations and Analysis  
*Community Planner*  
09/1998 – 08/1999

RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS INCLUDE:

- Headquarters representative on New Starts projects for FTA Regions 6 and 7;
- Planning lead for national program on bus rapid transit;
- Planning lead for High-Occupancy-Vehicle (HOV) and transit.

**Federal Highway Administration**  
Metropolitan Planning Division  
*Community Planner*  
02/1995 – 09/1998

RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS INCLUDE:

- Assisting the American Planning Association in their “Growing Smart” initiative;
- Providing technical assistance to FTA and policy development on the newly created Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) Program;
- Providing technical assistance to the Vice-President’s Office on Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities;
- Assisting in the “Study of Beneficial Effects of Intermodal Freight Centers in the Delta Region” for former USDOT Secretary Slater.

**Texas Department of Transportation**  
Planning and Design Divisions  
*Legislative Liaison, Statewide and Intermodal Planner*  
06/1993 – 02/1995

RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS INCLUDE:

- Providing technical assistance to the Texas Metropolitan Planning Organizations;
- Identifying major intermodal freight terminals and corridors in Texas and building awareness of the importance of freight issues in Texas metropolitan planning organizations;
- Acting as the liaison to the Class A railroads and large trucking companies in Texas;
- Acting as the liaison to the Texas State Legislature;
- Acting as the liaison to the Texas High Speed Rail Authority;
- Analyzing proposed legislation for possible effects on departmental operations.

**EDUCATION**

The University of Texas at Austin  
*Bachelor of Arts, Government, 1991*

The University of Texas at Austin  
*Masters of Science, Community and Regional Planning, 1993*  
*Specialization: Transportation Engineering*  
*Post Graduate Work in Dispute Resolution, Facilitation, and Conflict Management*

**AWARDS**

The USDOT's Secretary's "Partnering for Excellence Award," for development and delivery of a program to improve the technical capabilities of metropolitan planning organizations, November 2001.

The FHWA Administrator's "Planning Excellence Award," November 2001.

The Secretary's "Find the Good and Praise It" Award for transit New Starts - December 13, 1999

The Secretary's "Find the Good and Praise It" Award for efforts on Access-to-Jobs - March 1, 1999

**PUBLICATIONS**

Public Roads Magazine, Vol. 65, No. 2. "Strengthening the Connection Between Transportation and Land Use." September 2001.