

North Carolina Department of Transportation
Research and Development

Development of Performance Measures for the Assessment of
Rural Planning Organizations

Research Project No. FHWA/NC/2008-12

Final Report

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>In order for the Transportation Planning Board to provide oversight and assistance to the 20 RPOs in the state, they need effective evaluation criteria and performance measures. The existing measures, including the annual performance report, do not meet those needs. We developed measures they needed in order to fulfill their goals. We conducted an extensive review of published research and a search of RPO-related documents in each state in order to identify evaluation and performance 'best practices' in each state. We met with the TPB, NCARPO, and representatives of RPO constituents to determine concerns with existing measures and their needs and suggestions for the new performance measures. After developing the evaluation criteria and performance measures, the project team presented the plans to the various groups, and gathered feedback. The feedback was used to clarify any issues within the new performance measures. The development of the performance measures was driven by several principles: (1) The assessments developed, where possible, should be objective and quantifiable, (2) The evaluation criteria and performance measures should be developed with input from all of the parties involved, (3) The evaluation criteria and performance measures should facilitate the assessment of both short-term and long-term goals, and (4) measures should be practical and cost-efficient to implement.</p>		
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Executive Summary

For the Transportation Planning Branch to provide oversight and assistance to the North Carolina's 20 Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs), they need effective evaluation criteria and performance measures. The existing measures, including the annual performance report, did not meet their needs. We proposed to develop the measures they needed to fulfill their goals. An extensive review of published research, including a search of the Transportation Research Board databases and RPO-related documents in each state was conducted to identify evaluation and performance “best practices” in each state. The development of the performance measures was driven by several principles:

- The assessments developed, where possible, should be objective and quantifiable.
- The evaluation criteria and performance measures should be developed with input from all of the parties involved.
- The evaluation criteria and performance measures should facilitate the assessment of both short-term and long-term goals.
- The measures should be practical and cost-efficient to implement.

Background

Small towns face a number of disadvantages and unique problems when trying to address their transportation-related needs. Efforts, however, are underway to attempt to overcome those challenges. The federal Transportation Efficiency Act of the Twenty-First Century (TEA-21) called for the formal involvement of rural regions in the transportation planning process. The USDOT Rural Consultation Initiative, begun in 1999, provides grants and other resources to

enable rural communities to improve their research infrastructure and be better able to participate in the planning process. The most recent federal transportation legislation (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users, SAFETEA-LU) passed in 2005 increased the emphasis on rural communities, with a special focus on rural consultation and public participation.

In North Carolina, the legislature mandated in 1997/98 that NCDOT develop strategies to create RPOs. After a series of studies examining the possible structures and roles of RPOs, NCDOT chartered their first RPO in 2001 with the establishment of the Mid-Carolina RPO. There are currently 20 RPOs in the state, and they have recently formed the North Carolina Association of Rural Planning Organizations (NCARPO) to “provide a forum for transportation planning officials to exchange information and form consensus on transportation issues of regional, statewide, or national significance.” Former NCDOT Deputy Secretary Roger Sheats was quoted in the newsletter County News Online (Novak & Davenport, 2004) describing the “...North Carolina RPO effort (as) the largest and most complex network in the country.”

Problem Identification

The state legislature established the following as the major duties of the RPOs:

- Developing, in cooperation with NCDOT, long range local and regional multi-modal transportation plans.
- Providing a forum for public participation in the transportation planning process.
- Developing and prioritizing suggestions for transportation projects the organization believes should be included in the State's transportation plan.

- Providing transportation related information to local governments and other interested organizations and persons.

While all 20 RPOs have these same duties, they differ in their emphasis on each duty and some have chosen to take on additional ones. Each RPO is responsible for developing an annual work plan, that includes work plan deliverables, and providing an annual performance report. The plans differ between each RPO. The annual performance report consists of a written narrative describing progress in completing the annual work plan along with several scheduling, budget, and personnel issues. With this limited information, the Transportation Planning Branch (TPB) has found it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the 20 RPOs. According to the TPB, they have no way to measure the progress or effectiveness of each RPO.

Recent research funded by NCDOT has suggested that the RPOs may, at least in some ways, be falling short of their goals. In order to better understand how NCDOT was serving small, rural municipalities in the state, a mail survey was sent to mayors in small towns in eastern North Carolina (Bradshaw, Worthington, & Adams, 2006). When asked how well RPOs were serving their towns, 42% of the mayors had 'no opinion' about the services provided by the RPO, with an additional 10% having a negative opinion. The majority of the mayors knew little about the RPOs, reported few contacts with them, and did not see the RPO's activities as addressing the needs of their town.

The TPB is not unaware of these issues, and the current project reflects part of their efforts to address them. In addition, the TPB has cited a number of future challenges facing RPOs. These challenges include implementation of the RPO / MPO / NCDOT Collaboration

Project, enhanced coordination with the Interagency Leadership Team, and the need for increased public participation. A particular concern for the TPB is the need to be able to more clearly determine the training needs for the RPOs and their internal staff. The myriad of challenges the RPOs face can be dealt with most effectively if the personnel are provided the training necessary to meet those challenges. However, without effective evaluation criteria and performance measures, the TPB will not be able to accurately determine the training needs.

Method

The research stage of the project had two goals: (1) Gather the information necessary to develop the performance measures and, (2) Allow all of the parties involved to have input into the development of the measures. The research team accomplished these goals through a literature review of “best practices”, presentations at meetings of relevant organizations, participation in a training conference, conducting structured interviews and group discussions with RPO representatives, formal meetings with representatives of the TPB, and a variety of informal meetings and discussions with RPO members, the TPB, and other stakeholders.

The key component of the information gathering stage of the project was formal consultations with the RPOs. We formalized the consultations by determining exactly what information we needed and created a set of questions to gather that information. Interview questions addressed the following:

- Quantify (to the extent possible) what the RPOs are doing, including both the NCDOT-mandated goals and other activities (beyond their specific mandate) in which they are engaged.

- Assess both the short-term goals (the processes they are engaged in – like getting public input) and the long-term goals (the outcomes – the public input results in a “better” transportation system)
- Identify exemplary programs / activities and problems or obstacles that are preventing the RPOs from achieving their full potential (thereby providing 'actionable' information for NCDOT, the RPOs, and Councils of Government)
- Assess satisfaction with RPOs and the RPO structure – including the satisfaction of the RPOs themselves and satisfaction with NCDOT (what is sometimes referred to as 360 degree feedback).

Results

What have we learned from our many interactions with the RPOs, including both the open-ended group discussions and structured interviews?

The RPOs and TPB are both committed to the concept of RPOs and the role they are intended to play in transportation planning. We have been struck by the level of involvement, the sense of duty, commitment, and enthusiasm expressed by both the RPO and TPB personnel. Each person interviewed was committed to maximizing the effectiveness of their RPO and, almost invariably, was actively looking for strategies to achieve this end. While the RPOs and the TPB are all committed to the role of RPOs, the levels of support and commitment each perceives in the other varies between RPOs and within the TPB.

The RPOs perform many functions and activities that are not captured in the existing quarterly and annual reporting process. RPOs have an open-ended mandate to address the

problems or needs that arise in their region. As a result, they often perform functions and activities that are not recognized as important, by the TPB or the RPOs themselves, nor are they assessed in the quarterly and annual reports. For example, all of the RPOs reported frequently responding to questions from their members concerning transportation issues and either conducting research to answer the questions or directing the members to the appropriate NCDOT Division that could answer the questions. Almost no one, however, described a tracking process for these efforts and none reported including these activities in their annual reports. This reflects both limitations in the existing reporting structure, as well as a failure to more fully consider the importance of “deliverables” in that reporting structure.

The RPOs interact with many different partners in the normal course of fulfilling their role in transportation planning. The RPOs serve an important role as a go-between for many different partners, including towns, counties, the TPB, other divisions within NCDOT, and the general public. We will need to consider how these partners perceive the effectiveness of the RPOs. We cannot consider RPOs in isolation, instead we must examine them as part of a complex network of partners. A successful RPO can only be so if they have a successful network of partners.

The RPOs differ greatly between one another and these differences need to be considered when comparing their effectiveness. Each RPO has a defined region, and those regions reflect the diversity of the state itself. While some RPOs border MPOs in rapidly growing areas of the state with increasing levels of population, education, and income, other RPOs encompass regions with stagnant or shrinking populations where poverty and low levels of education are

commonplace. In some, the town and county officials are committed to the role of RPOs in transportation planning, while in others they are not. These regional differences will affect the activities of the RPOs and need to be taken into account when evaluating the RPOs.

With these findings in mind, and consistent with the goals of this project, we developed assessments that answered the following questions:

- How do the RPOs differ?
- What are the RPOs doing?
- How are the RPOs performing?
- How can the RPOs improve?

The assessment system that we have developed consists of six major assessments that are intended to be collected annually. One is a baseline measure completed by the evaluation team itself. Three of the measures are completed by the RPOs, and the other two are for the TPB and other RPO customers.

Measures in the Assessment System	
Evaluator RPO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● RPO Baseline Measure ● Activity Assessment / Deliverables Inventory Checklist ● Self-Assessment Questionnaire ● RPO-Initiated Data Collection
TPB and Customer Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Customer Experience Questionnaire ● Administrative Reporting Schedule

As proposed, the research resulted in the following research products:

- A set of evaluation criteria and performance measures that can be used to evaluate the progress and performance of each RPO.

- A set of evaluation criteria and performance measures that can be used to evaluate the status of the collaboration amongst the partners: RPOs, RTCC/RTAC, Counties and Towns, Transportation Planning Branch, and other Divisions of NCDOT.
- Estimates of the costs of collecting and analyzing the performance measures.
- A document describing how the various measures can be used in practice.
- A document compiling the “best practices” used in evaluating RPOs around the country.

Findings and Conclusions

Creation of the measures is only the first step. The ultimate success of this project will be determined by how the measures are implemented. To that end, we offer three recommendations.

Outside evaluator. While the performance measures have been developed by an outside organization, the question of who conducts the evaluation is an open one. We believe that it would be in the best interests of all parties involved for the evaluation to be conducted by an outside evaluator who is not a direct part of NCDOT or the TPB. There are a number of advantages to the use of an outside evaluator that will directly impact the effectiveness of the evaluation system. There are also the practical matters of cost and expertise. The NCDOT/TPB already has limited resources without the added burden of implementing a performance measurement system.

Web-based / electronic data collection. This project has created five new forms that need to be completed on an annual basis by a variety of different stakeholders around the state. While it would be possible to collect these measures through paper forms that are mail- or hand-

delivered, this would pose a significant burden on the organization arising from the costs of printing, shipping, handling, data entry, and storage of the forms. Printed forms also pose problems when the need to revise the forms arises.

Implementation as part of a process. Finally, a process will need to be developed to consider the results of the assessments. The measures will not have the desired effects if they are not implemented within an open and unbiased assessment system that correctly interprets the results, identifies weaknesses, makes changes, and assesses the effects of those changes. The measures are tools that will allow the TPB to better carry out their management responsibilities, but the measures cannot replace the necessity for skilled management by the TPB.

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North Carolina Department of Transportation
Research and Development

Development of Performance Measures for the Assessment of
Rural Planning Organizations

Research Project No. FHWA/NC/2008-12

Principal Investigators: Scott Bradshaw, Kwabena Boansi,
Jacqueline Huff, and Michael Worthington

The Transportation Planning Branch of the North Carolina Department of Transportation put out a call for proposals (Proposal #8206) to develop performance measures for the assessment of North Carolina's 20 Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs). According to the call for proposals, in order for the Transportation Planning Branch to provide oversight and assistance to the 20 RPOs, they need effective evaluation criteria and performance measures. The existing measures, including the annual performance report, do not meet their needs. We proposed to develop the measures they need in order to fulfill their goals.

Specifically, we conducted an extensive review of published research, including a search of the Transportation Research Board databases and a search of RPO-related documents in each state. The review was used to identify evaluation and performance “best practices” in each state. The project team met and consulted with the Transportation Planning Board, the 12 NCDOT RPO supervisors, the North Carolina Association of Rural Planning Organizations, representatives from the 20 RPOs, and representatives of the RPO constituents to determine concerns with existing measures and their needs and suggestions for the new performance measures. After the evaluation criteria and performance measures were developed, the project

team presented the plans to the various groups, and gathered feedback; the feedback was used to make revisions. The development of the performance measures was driven by several principles:

- The assessments developed, where possible, should be objective and quantifiable.
- The evaluation criteria and performance measures should be developed with input from all of the parties involved.
- The evaluation criteria and performance measures should facilitate the assessment of both short-term and long-term goals.
- The measures should be practical and cost-efficient to implement.

The research resulted in the following research products:

- A set of evaluation criteria and performance measures that can be used to evaluate the progress and performance of each RPO.
- A set of evaluation criteria and performance measures that can be used to evaluate the status of the collaboration amongst the partners: RPOs, RTAC/RTCC, Counties and Towns, Transportation Planning Branch, and other Divisions of NCDOT.
- Estimates of the costs of collecting and analyzing the performance measures.
- A document describing how the various measures can be used in practice.
- A document compiling the “best practices” used in evaluating RPOs around the country.

The products of this research, the evaluation criteria and performance measures, will allow the Transportation Planning Branch to more effectively supervise the operation of the RPOs in the state. The measures will allow the TPB to identify exceptional programs and develop strategies to maximize the performance of the RPOs, including the development of training needs for the members of the various RPOs. In this way, this project can help NCDOT facilitate RPOs fully achieving their goals.

Background

Many of the residents of rural regions of the state do not enjoy the same level of transportation services as residents of larger, more urban areas. These problems can include reduced access to public transportation, reduced access to medical and other emergency services, stymied economic development, and reduced highway safety. The transportation-related difficulties experienced by these communities are compounded when the communities experience sudden growth, such as retail or industrial development, or other changes. The problems can quickly overwhelm the abilities of the elected officials and other community leaders to cope.

Small towns face a number of disadvantages and unique problems when trying to address their transportation-related needs. For example, Isaacs and Wassall (1999) noted that there is a disconnect between transportation research and small town engineers. While large metropolitan regions will often have a staff of traffic engineers, small towns may make due with only one engineer or, often, no engineer at all. Essentially, small towns do not have easy access to the information they need to improve their road systems. Small towns can also often feel lost in the shuffle in the struggle for resources with larger towns, counties, and major metropolitan areas. The feelings of some of these small towns was summarized by Lockwood (2001) , a transportation planner in Florida, who discussed ways for small communities to work with, or “win”, in the struggle with one's state department of transportation. He notes that state departments of transportation are large organizations that like to address problems with common procedures, and those common procedures are time-consuming and may not fit the needs of a

specific community. Further, the state DOT may view the issues presented by a small town as an obstacle to a larger mission, and respond with either a brush-off (“We’ll get back to you.”) or by simply saying “No.” He advises small towns to be prepared for a long and sustained effort to get results and to not be afraid to question what they do not understand, to go up the chain of command, and to use political influence when necessary. While these strategies may be effective, it is hardly the ideal, or most efficient, environment for any small town or state department of transportation in which to operate.

Efforts are underway to attempt to overcome the challenges faced by rural communities. The federal Transportation Efficiency Act of the Twenty-First Century (TEA-21) called for the formal involvement of rural regions in the transportation planning process. The USDOT Rural Consultation Initiative, begun in 1999, provides grants and other resources to enable rural communities to improve their research infrastructure and be better able to participate in the planning process. The most recent federal transportation legislation (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users, SAFETEA-LU) passed in 2005 increased the emphasis on rural communities, with a special focus on rural consultation and public participation.

In North Carolina, the state legislature mandated in 1997/98 that NCDOT develop strategies to create RPOs in the state. After a number of studies examining the possible structures and roles of RPOs, NCDOT chartered the state's first RPO in 2001 with the establishment of the Mid-Carolina Rural Planning Organization. There are currently 20 RPOs in the state, and they have recently formed the North Carolina Association of Rural Planning

Organizations (NCARPO), as described in their mission statement, to “provide a forum for transportation planning officials to exchange information and form consensus on transportation issues of regional, statewide, or national significance.” Former NCDOT Deputy Secretary Roger Sheats was quoted in the newsletter County News Online (Novak & Davenport, 2004) describing the “...North Carolina RPO effort (as) the largest and most complex network in the country.” The current North Carolina RPO structure is described in more detail in Appendix A: The North Carolina RPO Program (NCDOT / Transportation Planning Branch, 2006).

Problem Identification

The state legislature established the following as the major duties of the RPOs:

- Developing, in cooperation with NCDOT, long range local and regional multi-modal transportation plans.
- Providing a forum for public participation in the transportation planning process.
- Developing and prioritizing suggestions for transportation projects the organization believes should be included in the State's transportation plan.
- Providing transportation related information to local governments and other interested organizations and persons.

While all 20 RPOs have these same duties, many of the RPOs differ in their emphasis on each duty and others have chosen to take on additional duties. Each RPO is responsible for developing an annual work plan, that includes work plan deliverables, and providing an annual performance report. These plans differ greatly between each RPO. The annual performance report consists of a written narrative describing progress in completing the annual work plan along with several scheduling, budget, and personnel issues. With this limited information, the Transportation Planning Branch has found it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the 20

RPOs. According to the TPB, they have no way to measure the progress or effectiveness of each RPO.

Recent research funded by NCDOT has suggested that the RPOs may, at least in some ways, be falling short of their goals. In order to better understand how NCDOT was serving small, rural municipalities in the state, a mail survey was sent to mayors in small towns in eastern North Carolina (Bradshaw, Worthington, & Adams, 2006). The surveys were followed by a series of regional and one-on-one meetings with the mayors to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences with NCDOT.

When asked how well RPOs were serving their towns, 42% of the mayors had 'no opinion' about the services provided by the RPO, with an additional 10% having a negative opinion. A stepwise regression revealed that mayors in towns with more appointed officials and towns with more commuters expressed less satisfaction with the RPO serving their town. When asked about contact with their RPO, over 1/3 of the mayors reported 'never' having contact with someone from the RPO that served their town – and an additional 18% had not had contact in over a year. Contact more than once or twice was reported by about 20% of the mayors, however, several of the mayors we met with were members of their RPO and would be expected to have frequent contacts.

In each regional meeting, the mayors were asked about their experiences with their RPO. The majority of the mayors knew little about the RPOs, reported few contacts with them, and did not see the RPO's activities as addressing the needs of their town. In a few instances, the representatives at the regional meetings were also representatives on the board of their RPO.

These representatives reported that their RPOs activities were centered on issues pertaining to the larger communities in the region and not responsive to their needs. Typically, according to these representatives, the RPO meetings had a set agenda that was provided to them and they had no input into what that agenda would be. As the situation existed, the mayors did not perceive the RPOs as part of the solution for their town's problems. Based on the responses of the mayors in these small towns with populations fewer than 1,100 residents in eastern North Carolina), it is clear that more needs to be done to fulfill the mandate of the RPOs.

The TPB is not unaware of these issues, and the current project reflects part of their efforts to address them. In addition, the TPB has cited a number of future challenges facing RPOs. These challenges include implementation of the RPO / MPO / NCDOT Collaboration Project, enhanced coordination with the Interagency Leadership Team, and the need for increased public participation. A particular concern for the TPB is the need to be able to more clearly determine the training needs for the RPOs and their internal staff. The myriad of challenges the RPOs face can be dealt with most effectively if the personnel are provided the training necessary to meet those challenges. However, without effective evaluation criteria and performance measures, the TPB will not be able to accurately determine the training needs.

In order for the TPB to provide oversight and assistance to the various RPOs in the state, they need effective evaluation and performance measures. The existing measures, including the annual performance report, do not meet those needs. In response to the call for proposals, we proposed to carry out the research requested by the TPB so as to develop the measures they need in order to fulfill their goals.

Research Objectives

The research resulted in the following research products:

- A set of evaluation criteria and performance measures that can be used to evaluate the progress and performance of each RPO.
- A set of evaluation criteria and performance measures that can be used to evaluate the status of the collaboration amongst the partners: RPOs, Lead Planning Agencies, RTCC/RTAC, Counties and Towns, Transportation Planning Branch, and other Divisions of NCDOT.
- Estimates of the costs of collecting and analyzing the performance measures.
- A document describing how the various measures can be used in practice.
- A document compiling the “best practices” used in evaluating RPOs around the country.

It should be noted that while these performance measures are primarily intended for the use of the TPB, they should also meet the needs of the RPOs themselves. In order to manage any group or organization, the leadership of those groups need accurate measures of their groups' performance. In this way, the measures will allow the TPB, along with the other RPO stakeholders (RTCC/RTAC, RPOs, Counties and Towns, and the other NCDOT divisions), to better manage the operation of the RPOs.

The development of the performance measures was driven by several principles that are described below.

The assessments developed, where possible, should be objective and quantifiable. The current Annual Performance Plan consists of a written narrative – a subjective and qualitative measure. With such measures, it is practically impossible to compare performance across the 20 RPOs or to evaluate yearly progress. Written narratives can provide useful insight into the

objective, quantitative measures, but they should not form the primary basis of performance measurement.

The performance measures should be developed with input from all of the parties involved. For the measures to be comprehensive and effective, they will need to be supported by the various RPO stakeholders and shaped by their input. The TPB has certain needs that are not being met with the current performance measures, and it is likely the same is true for the RPOs and those they are intended to serve. If the measures that emerge from this project are not seen by the RPOs and others as informative and fair, then the TPB will have difficulty implementing them. The development of the evaluation criteria and the performance measures needs to include the TPB, NCARPO, and representatives of the rural communities the RPOs are intended to serve.

The performance measures should assess both short-term and long-term goals. RPOs were created with both short-term goals (participation of local officials in the planning process) and long-term goals (improving transportation development and planning within the region). The performance measures need to consider both the processes used by the RPOs and their intended outcomes.

It should be practical and cost-efficient to implement. The performance measures that are developed must be able to be collected and analyzed without placing an undue burden on either the RPOs or the TPB. Whenever possible, the assessment system should utilize data and measures that are already being collected or are otherwise readily available.

Review of Literature

This was not intended to be an exhaustive review of RPO evaluation practices around the country. Rather, the goal was to identify some practices currently in use that could be applied directly, or serve as a model, for evaluation of the RPO operations in North Carolina. The review was conducted by exploring the various databases of the Transportation Research Board (TRB; <http://trb.org>), including both the Transportation Research Information Services (TRIS Online) and the Transportation Research in Progress (TRiP) databases. The search terms used in reviewing the TRB databases included the following: evaluation, quality assurance, program quality, program evaluation, rural planning organization, and rural planning. We also reviewed the extensive resources of the National Association of Development Organization (NADO; <http://www.nado.org>), including both the resources devoted to rural transportation in general (<http://www.ruraltransportation.org>) and to rural planning organizations specifically (<http://www.ruraltransportation.org/RPO-America/RPO-America>). The review of the NADO resources included exploring the websites of state department's of transportation in states utilizing some form of rural planning organization and personal communication with Matthew Chase, Executive Director of NADO and the NADO Research Foundation.

The personal communication with Mr. Chase serves as an excellent introduction to this review with regard to expectations and outcomes pertaining to the topic at hand. Prior to conducting the literature review and prior to communicating with Mr. Chase, it suspected that other states had developed reliable and effective evaluation practices for their RPOs that allowed

them to maximize their operations. Instead, according to our discussions with Mr. Chase, the other state DOTs are in a similar position as NCDOT in regards to their evaluation practices. We were directed to several specific examples of isolated measures in use (e.g. a customer satisfaction survey from Kentucky and a self-assessment survey developed by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) but no comprehensive evaluation systems. In fact, we were recently contacted by NADO to find out if we had completed our project, as they believe it would be useful for a project on which they are currently working. Therefore, the review did not identify a ready-made solution to the need for a comprehensive assessment system for the RPOs in North Carolina. The assessment-related problems that gave rise to the current project are common around the country and at all levels of transportation.

What did the literature review reveal? We found that over the past 15 years there has been a nationwide change occurring in how organizations are evaluated, and that this process is affecting departments of transportation (Hall, 2007). Many of the state DOTs have been wrestling with this change, but efforts have only recently begun to address planning. We were able to identify some useful examples of existing measures, but they will have limited use in evaluating North Carolina RPOs. However, we have identified a number of principles for the development of sound evaluation systems in transportation that will guide the performance measures developed for this project.

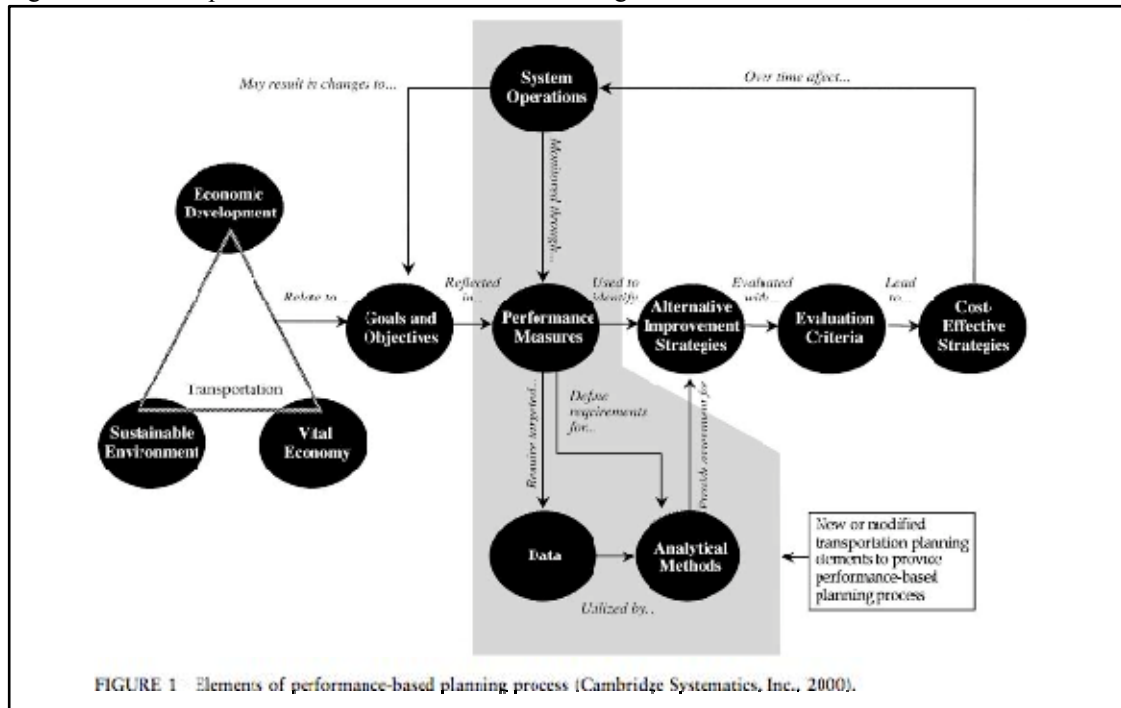
The Changing Nature of Assessment and Evaluation

The management and evaluation of work within organizations, and the effectiveness of those organizations, has been undergoing radical change in recent decades. Traditionally,

organizational effectiveness was determined by documenting the processes within the organization. Projects were assigned to divisions within an organization, the division followed a set process in completing the assignment, and they delivered some outcome or deliverable as a completed project. The organization, when questioned about its effectiveness or usefulness, could point to the processes that it followed (i.e. quarterly reports were generated) and the deliverables that were produced (i.e. a final report). This traditional method did not consider the usefulness of the deliverable nor did it consider whether or not the organization was satisfying its customers.

Increasingly, organizations have moved toward some form of performance-based management. For example, the organization identifies a series of specific goals and objectives for which objective performance measures are developed. The project or organization is then tracked using those performance measures to determine success in meeting those goals and objectives. In these systems, while tracking processes are important, it is far more important to consider the evaluation of the outcomes themselves. Performance-based management systems often incorporate features of what has been termed 360 degree feedback, wherein the various parties involved are given an opportunity to evaluate the organization or project. The parties would include management, the staff members who completed the project, and those who will use the product. An example of a performance-based management system as applied to transportation systems (Cambridge Systematics, 2000) is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. An Example of the Performance-Based Planning Process



It is hard to overstate the significance of the changes that have occurred as the result of the implementation of performance-based management systems. The performance-based management approach is designed to identify the weaknesses in outcomes and the processes used to generate them. As a result of the objective performance assessments, the organization is constantly under pressure to change how it operates. Prior to the implementation of performance assessments, organizations, particularly those in non-profit or public sectors, could develop a process for doing something and then simply repeat that process over and over again without paying much attention to other factors that might be impinge upon project viability and/or effectiveness.

The increased use of performance measures resulted in the Committee for the Conference on Performance Measures to Improve Transportation Systems and Agency Operations organizing

a conference on the topic in 2000. According to the authors of the conference summary report (Committee for the Conference on Performance Measures to Improve Transportation Systems and Agency Operations, 2001), the objective of the conference was “...to address:

- Organizational approaches to implementing and using performance measures in transportation systems, including the connection between measures and decision making;
- Implementation experience regarding the state of the practice as well as lessons and guidelines for moving forward;
- Customer perspectives of transportation system performance;
- Applications of multimodal measures in the planning process and the assessment of system performance; and
- Technical issues involving data, number and type of measures, and trade-off analysis (page 5).”

While the conference certainly covered many relevant topics, the focus of performance measurement as discussed was on the delivery of services (i.e. travel time, construction project) not on the effectiveness of planning agencies. The reference to measures in the planning process referred to the inclusion of traffic counts and other objective data in planning, not to assessing the operations of the planning sections themselves. For our purposes, the conference proceedings were most useful for identifying a number of general principles that need to be applied when developing performance measures. The performance measurement system must be developed around clearly defined goals and objectives and integrated into the decision-making processes of the organization. In other words, all parties involved must have “buy-in” in the assessment system, understand the analysis of the results of the assessments, and use those results to make changes in the functioning of the organization. The assessment system should

utilize pre-existing data or data that can be easily obtained, but that the system must include more than simply customer satisfaction data. The assessments developed should be as stable as possible to facilitate comparison across time, but should also be revised as necessary to reflect changes in the organization or in the environment in which the organization operates.

These issues have also been pointed out by others. Dull and Lebowhl (2003) examined the use of customer satisfaction surveys in state DOTs and found their use, in many cases, to be lacking. The surveys had not been developed in conjunction with those for whom the results were intended, so the questions had little connection to specific activities of the division. Further, the majority of DOTs did not employ personnel with the expertise to analyze the data from the surveys. As a result, the “analysis” was typically limited to an endless series of frequency tables that failed to fully realize the information available and left the users more confused than informed. The surveys, rather than serving as a catalyst for organizational improvement, had become simply a matter of routine. For any assessment system to be effective, the data it produces must be analyzed in a way to understand the complex relationships involved (often requiring advanced statistical techniques) and reported to the users in a clear and concise way that recognizes their unique needs.

Poister (2007) reported that constituents impacted by transportation departments served, in part, as the impetus behind a movement toward product improvement and accountability. With constituents having a hand in transportation concerns, listening to stakeholders has become increasingly important given the changing needs (i.e., conservation, quality of life, economic development) of communities. Additionally, with changing socioenvironmental conditions

within communities, state transportation departments cannot conduct business in the same manner in which business was conducted 15, 20 or 30 years ago. Lockwood (1998, 2000; cf., Poister, 2007) stated that “...sea changes in the environment in which transportation agencies function require strategic thinking to plot new courses of action and then measure success in implementing them” (p. 485).

In order to take into account socioenvironmental factors and constituent needs, departments of transportation have realized the benefits of having tools to measure how projects impact regional and local economies, regional and local natural resources as well as regional and local human factors such as quality of life. Additionally, having the ability to assess the impact of transportation development on state, local and regional levels will afford transportation departments the ability to improve the manner in which business is conducted within and outside the departments.

Poister (1997; cf. Poister 2007) indicated that the “ ‘new’ generation of performance measures tracked by DOTs were significantly more outcome oriented, tied to strategic goals and objectives and focused more on service quality and customer service” (p. 486). Given that newer performance measures are outcome based and more closely associated with agency goals and objectives, it is important to understand the different typologies of performance measures. Poister (2007) stated that performance measures may fall within three areas within his transportation logic model: agency performance (i.e., problems /improvements, project status-complete or incomplete), system performance (i.e., transportation safety, efficiency of roadways), and impacts (i.e., quality of life). Because transportation concerns are not one-

dimensional, many agencies incorporate a variety of measures within the aforementioned areas. Although transportation departments may not incorporate all the varieties of measures within their performance evaluations, they may incorporate more than one strategy or measure to examine inter-agency and intra-agency performance. Poister (2007) lists/describes the following classifications of performance measures: effectiveness measures, quality measures, customer satisfaction measures, cost effectiveness measures and benefit-cost measures. “Effectiveness measures are tied to outcomes oriented objectives for improving transportation system performance and generating positive impacts. Quality measures relate both to service outputs as well as outcomes, and customer satisfaction measures similarly reflect satisfaction with outputs but even more so with transportation outcomes” (Poister, 2007, p. 487). Cost-effectiveness and benefit-cost measures assess the project’s impact on resources.

Performance Measures to Improve Transportation Planning Practice

Performance Measures to Improve Transportation Planning Practice was the title of a Transportation Research Board Performance Measurement Committee peer exchange held in Charleston, South Carolina in 2004 (Barolsky, 2005). The participants included representatives from state departments of transportation from around the country (Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Washington, and Wisconsin) and, according to the author, “...the discussion...was wide-ranging.”

Many of the participants noted concerns with funding for performance measurement efforts, particularly with regards to planning. While they recognized the importance of such

measures, not all of the officials that controlled funding for the various DOTs saw either the importance of the measures or of the planning bureaus themselves. The importance of receiving input from these stakeholders, therefore, became especially important. A number of strategies for encouraging participation and evaluating the participation were discussed. We will consider several of these later in this review.

One topic that was discussed was how to assess the effectiveness of long-range planning. Certainly, this is relevant to the effectiveness of RPOs in the state. A common suggestion that was offered was to use the connection between the long-range plan and actual project development. Did the plan influence the actual projects? While this measure likely has applications in regards to project-specific situations and for evaluations of NCDOT, or the NCDOT Transportation Planning Branch, as a whole, its not clear how applicable this measure would be to the RPOs. While some component of this might be useful, the distance between the RPOs' facilitation of the TIPs and the implementation of the TIPs is far too greate to allow this to be a fair evaluation of the effectiveness of the RPO.

Given the time spent on long-range planning, and the doubts that many have about its usefulness, it is important to assess the extent to which elements of the long-range planning are actually utilized in business practices. While RPOs in North Carolina are not allowed to actually develop transportation plans, we can take this concept and apply it to the products that the various RPOs produce. How often are RPO-generated products utilized by local officials and other offices of NCDOT?

The participants also identified a particularly important result that needed to be assessed, but for which there were not measures readily available. Specifically, how can one assess the problems that are avoided as a result of planning? This is a particular problem for RPOs. By bringing different partners together, increasing public input, and educating their regions about transportation-related issues, the RPO is almost certainly reducing workload for various other branches of NCDOT and avoiding costly problems in the future. Unfortunately, it is not immediately clear how to measure the wide variety of activities of the RPOs.

Selected Examples of Assessments in Use in Other States

Our search for “best practices” did not reveal a complete RPO evaluation system that could be taken from another state and applied to North Carolina. Simply put, there does not appear to be a comprehensive RPO evaluation system in place that is fundamentally different than the existing NCDOT approach. However, we did find a number of individual measures and other resources that could be applied in the development of our evaluation system. We will now discuss a number of these measures.

AASHTO

The first example we discuss is not actually from a state DOT, but the Self-Assessment Guide from the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (2006). It is also likely the best assessment we found. Created to primarily provide a self-assessment for state DOTs to determine how well their rural consultation process was working, as the developers noted, it can also be modified for other users to include RPOs.

The self-assessment allows users to evaluate their rural consultation process around the components of COMMITMENT, PARTICIPATION, EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION, OUTCOME, and EVALUATION. For each component, the developers have provided several specific questions addressing a specific goal of that component, along with clear criteria for the behaviors or actions necessary to satisfy that goal. Respondents rate the effectiveness of their agency using 4-point response scale: NEEDS TO BEGIN, NEEDS SUBSTANTIAL ACTION, NEEDS SOME ACTION, DONE WELL. Respondents are also given substantial space to provide written responses to expand upon their rating, to include identifying specific problems or issues that need to be addressed. A portion of the self-assessment addressing the PARTICIPATION component is shown on the next page.

Table 1. Sample from the Self-Assessment Guide from the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (2006)

Table 1. Sample from the Self-Assessment Guide from the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (2006)

Section 2: Participation

Driving Factor: The primary purpose of the non-metropolitan local consultation process is to engender active involvement by local elected and appointed officials in providing meaningful input that will affect state transportation decisions on plans, projects, policies, and programs that have an impact on the areas and constituents that they serve.

Question A: Has the state transportation agency provided meaningful opportunities for all appropriate officials from local governments to participate in the non-metropolitan local consultation process?

Self-Assessment Criteria:

- The state transportation agency has established guidelines and/or criteria to define which non- metropolitan elected and appointed local officials should participate in the local consultation process.
- The state transportation agency has identified all appropriate local officials and has established an outreach program for the local consultation process.
- A tracking mechanism is in place to monitor turnover of local officials, to ensure that newly elected or appointed local officials are included in the outreach program.
- Periodic meetings are regularly held to provide information to local officials about the process and to give them an opportunity to provide input.

Performance Rating (circle one rating that best describes your process)

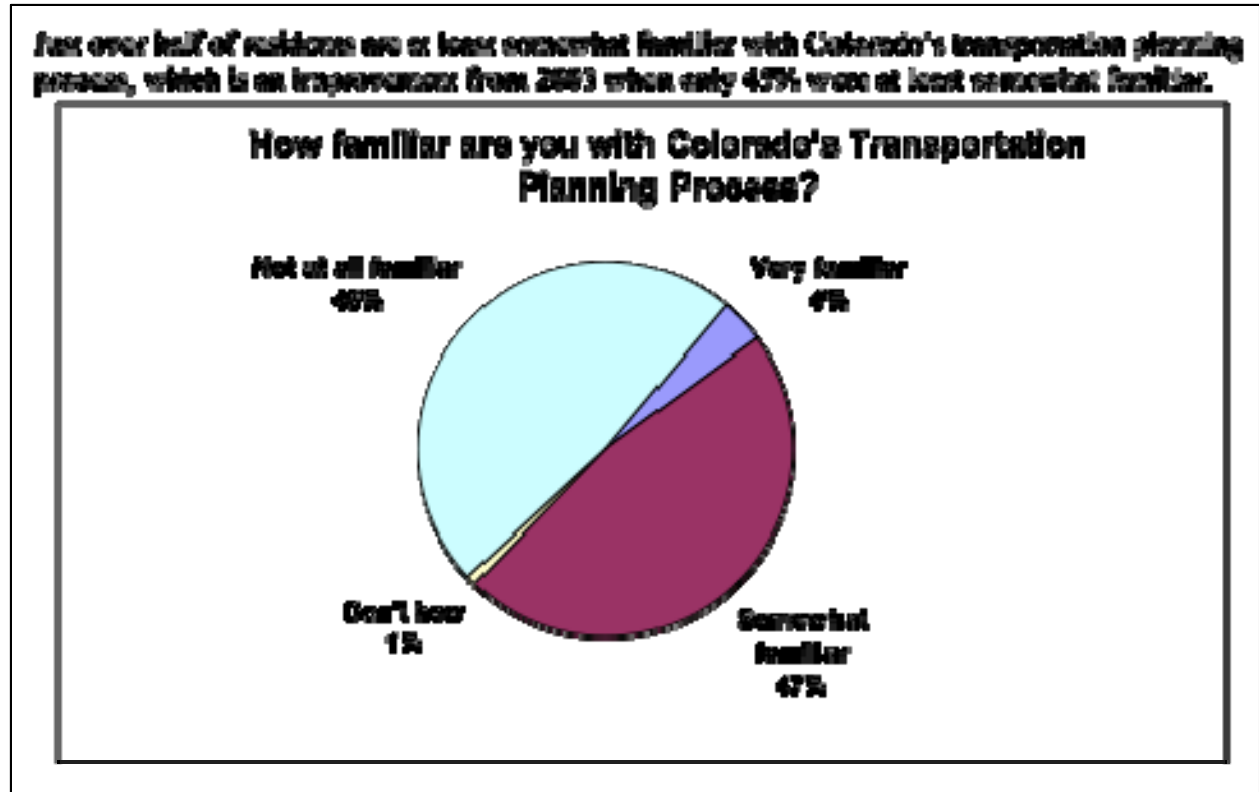
1. Needs to Begin
2. Needs Substantial Action
3. Needs Some Action
4. Done Well

The Self-Assessment Guide has a number of advantages as an assessment. The questions are tied to specific behaviors of the organization and the criteria for judgment are clearly defined. The performance rating scale summaries lead directly to goal-setting and prioritizing for agency improvements. While no assessment system that is dependent entirely upon self-assessments is a complete one, the final performance measures developed will contain some aspects of the Self-Assessment Guide.

Colorado

The Colorado Department of Transportation has an extensive public involvement and customer satisfaction survey program that includes surveys of both the general public and elected officials (CoDOT, 2005; 2006). Figure 2 below is an example of a question included in the annual survey conducted with the general public:

Figure 2. Colorado DOT Customer Satisfaction Survey Example

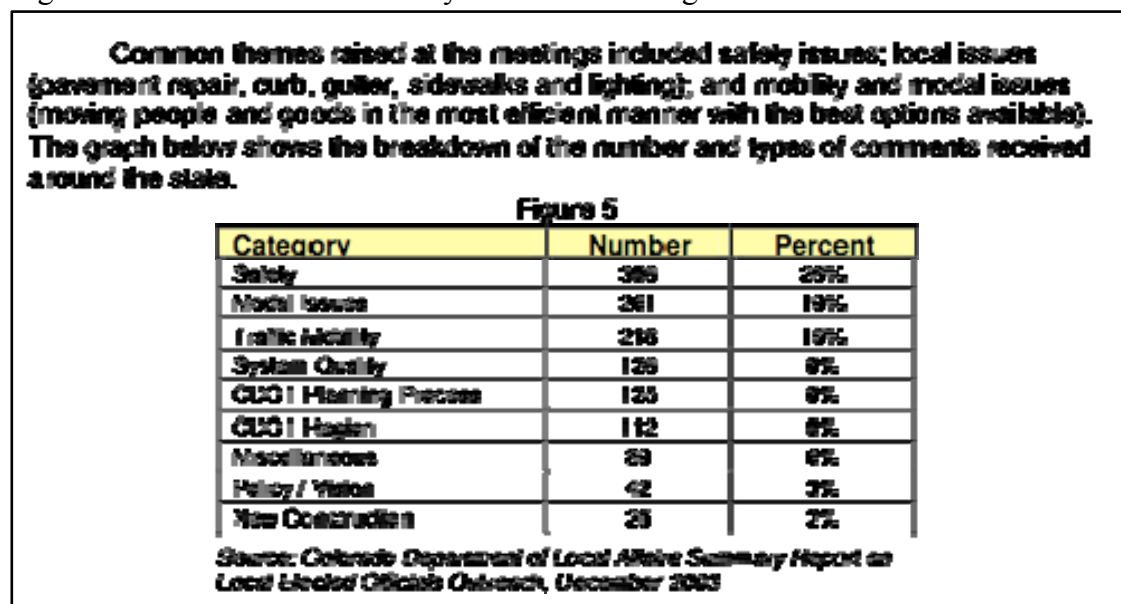


Of course, one of the difficulties of evaluating the effectiveness of transportation planning via general public surveys is that the general public has little understanding of, or exposure to, the planning process. Essentially, they do not have much insight beyond being able to report whether or not they understand the process and how much involvement they feel they have in that process. The surveys of the elected officials are more extensive, but also more labor intensive.

Instead of an annual survey, the elected officials were last questioned in 2003 through a series of “outreach” presentations around the state. These meetings led to a realization that more

needed to be done to reach the elected officials, especially those in small (population less than 5,000) communities. As a result, they conducted some 150 meetings in order to meet with approximately 200 officials of those small communities. They documented the questions and comments they received and organized them into common themes (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Colorado DOT Summary of Public Meeting Comments



Documentation of questions and issues raised would be a useful one to incorporate into our assessment measures (for example, number of questions of a specific type directed to the RPOs in a given year). The survey approach used with elected officials in this particular state, however, is obviously much too labor intensive to be useful. Much more useful for our purposes is a common reporting format used in documenting the outcomes of public meetings. Two such examples are shown below in Table 2 for two of Colorado’s Transportation Planning Regions (their RPO equivalents):

Table 2. Colorado DOT Format to Summarize Meeting Outcomes

Eastern – TPR #6	
Location:	<i>Limon Community Center Limon, CO</i>
Date:	<i>September 13, 2004</i>
Meeting Summary	
Several local elected officials attended the open house, as well as one State Representative, Greg Brophy. Storyboards were provided for both the Statewide and Regional Transportation Plans. There was discussion on the financial picture for the state. Questions were asked regarding whether COOT funding has been "historically" declining and whether the funding that is received is equitably distributed.	
Overall the attendees felt that the 2030 Statewide Transportation Plan does a good job addressing transportation need and balancing the investments appropriately.	
Location:	<i>Washington County Event Center Alton, CO</i>
Date:	<i>September 14, 2004</i>
Meeting Summary	
In general, this open house was well attended by both the public and local elected officials. Storyboards were provided for both the Statewide and Regional Transportation Plans. Participants were guided through the storyboards and presented with the financial picture for the entire state over the 20 year planning period. Participants did not seem surprised by the financial outlook; they all seemed well aware of the funding gap.	
Overall, attendees felt that the corridor visions matched what was important to citizens in the Eastern TPR. After reviewing the storyboards, most participants felt that they had a better understanding of the planning process.	
Public Comments and Responses	
There were a few comments centered on minor corrections to the placement of projects with the Eastern RTP maps. Also, the TPR's consultant was asked to correct the primary investment categories for US-267 and US-385; they will be changed from system quality to mobility (US-267) and from mobility to safety (US-385).	
Comments were made that new sources of funding need to be found. There were also comments which stressed maintaining the statewide transportation system and balancing the funding on a statewide level as well.	
Corrections were made at the TPR level with regard to the maps.	

This common documentation procedure, especially if some additional data was included, could prove useful in our assessment system.

Florida

Improving public involvement is a common desire for state departments of transportation. The Florida Department of Transportation developed a handbook aimed at increasing public involvement that provides both general suggestions and specific procedures to do so (FDOT, 2003). Most important for our purposes, the Handbook also provides specific procedures for documenting public involvement efforts and evaluating their effectiveness.

In regards to documentation, the Handbook describes the use of a project diary. The authors describe the diary as follows:

“The diary should contain all the project components presented to agencies, elected officials and the public. It should contain the project purpose and need statement, the public involvement plan, contact lists, schedule of activities, materials, maps, invitations, flyers, and photos of any community interaction relating to the proposed project from planning to construction. A project diary documents data gathered at public involvement activities and provides a repository for meaningful information that accurately assesses the issues and concerns of a community.”

In addition to describing the use of the project diary, they also describe an eight step process for documenting and handling the public comments that result from the public involvement efforts:

(1) Collection, (2) Documentation, (3) Analysis, (4) Acknowledgment, (5) Distribution and Tracking, (6) Incorporation, (7) Response, and (8) Sharing. As noted by the authors, this data serves several purposes to include providing evidence for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the public involvement efforts themselves.

The Handbook provides a number of examples of procedures in place around the state for evaluating public involvement. The most useful survey example they provided, however, was an internal debriefing form. Essentially, the internal debriefing survey allows the staff to consider the effectiveness of the public outreach and suggests possible strategies to improve. The specific questions the Handbook provides along with possible improvement strategies are shown below:

- **Is a significant portion of the entire project community participating in the public involvement activities?** If there are obvious segments of the community that are not attending the public involvement activities, this may indicate that the timing and/or locations are inappropriate for the audience. Or, the notifications may not be reaching the audience.
- **Is there continuity among participants?** If people do not participate in the process after one or two activities, there may be a lack of understanding of the process.
- **Are the adequate and appropriate communications techniques being employed?** If participation is not meeting expectations, the audience may not understand the project information. Or, they may not believe their comments are important or will be considered.
- **Are the comments received from the community relevant to the project? Are they realistic and appropriate to the project phase?** If the comments are irrelevant to the project, this indicates people do not understand the project scope or what information/input is being sought. The public may have unrealistic expectations about how they can influence the project, their role in the decision-making process, or the type of decisions being made during the current phase of project development.
- **Are there significant unresolved issues on the project?** If significant opposition to the project remains, the indication is that all relevant issues have not been identified and resolved to the satisfaction of the community. Continued dialogue is needed to develop acceptable solutions.

The staff debriefing can be useful for many different reasons, but most especially because it focuses the staff on the idea of constant improvement. Some components of the debriefing model will be incorporated into our performance measures.

Kentucky

The Kentucky evaluation report (Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, Division of Planning, 2006) was noted by the NARDO executive director and discussed by NCARPO participants as an example of good performance assessment in use. The evaluation was conducted to satisfy federal guidelines that required the state to assess the effectiveness of the consulting process by February 2006. Kentucky originally established a rural transportation consultation process in 1995 that was integrated into their existing Area Development Districts.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of their RPOs, they developed a rather straightforward satisfaction survey that was sent to 142 local officials in non-metropolitan counties and urban areas. For each item, respondents were limited to YES, NO, or NOT SURE responses, but were given an opportunity to make comments or suggest changes for each item.

Sample items from the survey are shown below:

- Do you believe that you have been given an adequate opportunity to participate in the Regional Transportation Planning Program?
- Do you believe the Regional Transportation Planning Program is properly presenting your project priorities to the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet?
- Do you believe the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet is properly communicating to you decisions made with respect to the Six-Year Highway Plan?

We would agree that surveying the local officials concerning the effectiveness of their RPO is an idea worthy of duplication. However, the response scale (Yes, No, Not Sure) does not allow for detecting differences in degree of effectiveness. An RPO that was near-perfect would merit a “Yes” response, as would an RPO that was barely acceptable. Nevertheless, the

development of a “customer” survey will play a significant role in the assessment system that is developed.

Minnesota: Customer Satisfaction

A good assessment system will provide not only information about how the organization is doing now, but also suggest ways to improve the organization. If all one learns from a customer satisfaction survey is that the customers are not satisfied, then there is little direction provided for how to alter that assessment. Randy Halvorson (2005) of the Minnesota Department of Transportation described a useful technique for addressing this problem that they apply in their customer satisfaction surveys. The presentation was a part of the TRB’s second national conference on Performance Measures to Improve Transportation Systems (Turnbull, 2005).

Whenever using customer satisfaction measures, they first ask the customers to rate how important each service is and then have them report their satisfaction with each. The resulting feedback allows them to make decisions about what services to maintain (high importance, high satisfaction), what services to limit or reduce (low importance), and where to focus or increase efforts (high importance, low satisfaction). They did not discuss the use of these measures in regards to RPOs.

In our specific case, one could imagine that the extent to which different services are viewed as important will vary greatly between both the RPO regions and between the towns and counties within the RPO regions. The efforts of an RPO to facilitate sidewalk surveys in their region may be viewed as satisfactory by two towns, but the towns may rate the importance of the

surveys differently. As a result, one town may be satisfied overall with the RPO, while the other is dissatisfied (e.g. “They spend too much time on unimportant matters.”). We will definitely look to assess service importance along with service satisfaction in our assessment system.

Missouri: Planning Framework

Growing out of concerns with the inequity of funding decisions, MoDOT developed a planning process that would stress objectivity and transparency in that process (Missouri Department of Transportation, 2004) . The planning framework that resulted clearly defined the each step of the process, the role of each participant (local officials, public, etc.), and an objective process for prioritizing potential projects. Central to our concerns in this report, the planning framework includes a system of checks and balances to assess the effectiveness of the process.

It should be noted that there are significant differences in the MoDOT system that prevent it from being directly adopted by NCDOT. The most obvious of these differences is that the MoDOT “...state road fund can only be used for roadways and bridges...” with no allowance for multimodal projects. The rural planning organizations, called Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs), have responsibilities that extend beyond transportation to include economic development and emergency planning. As such, they are more similar in function to Councils of Government within North Carolina.

According to MoDOT documents, the task of quality assurance is the responsibility of the MoDOT Transportation Planning office and the documents list the following as the goals of the quality assurance / quality control plan:

- “Ensure communication between all planning partners and MoDOT”
- “Ensure consistency in planning activities both on a regional and statewide basis”
- “Ensure planning partners’ understanding of the decision-making process”
- “Ensure involvement of planning partners in the decision-making process”
- “Ensure programming decisions are documented”
- “Ensure ongoing flexibility in the planning and decision-making process”

Key to the quality assurance / quality control process is the requirement of documentary evidence to verify that each goal was met. A particular strong point of this assessment approach is a listing detailing the types of evidence that is acceptable. The following is taken directly from MoDOT documents:

“MoDOT staff will document planning activities that demonstrate the appropriate involvement of planning partners. This documentation may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Information shared with partners
- Meeting minutes
- Correspondence
- District transportation improvement programs coordinated with partners
- Documentation of programming decisions
- Changes in prioritization processes
- Language demonstrating how each of the above goals are met”

The RPCs’ documentation and other evidences are included in activity reports that are reviewed by the Transportation Planning office. Obviously, this is very similar to the system currently in place in North Carolina. It is not clear that this is an improvement. What we can take from the MoDOT system is the advantage of clearly defining the goals and objectives we are trying to assess and the need to specify the types of documentation, data, or other evidence that is acceptable in the evaluation process.

Missouri: Tracker

The North Carolina Department of Transportation is currently working with a consulting firm on the development of a performance dashboard that will be used to track the performance of NCDOT as a whole (North Carolina Department of Transportation Transformation Management Team, 2007). Similar performance measure summaries that report assessment data on a regular basis are being generated in other states. The Missouri Department of Transportation has a particularly extensive report that they publish quarterly (Missouri Department of Transportation, 2007) that they call the Tracker.

Their evaluation system was designed to assess their effectiveness in achieving a series of what they term “Tangible Results” which are presented below:

- Uninterrupted traffic flow
- Smooth and unrestricted roads and bridges
- Safe transportation system
- Roadway visibility
- Personal, fast, courteous and understandable response to customer requests
- Partner with others to deliver transportation services
- Leverage transportation to advance economic development
- Innovative transportation solutions
- Fast projects that are of great value
- Environmentally responsible
- Efficient movement of goods
- Easily accessible modal choices
- Customer involvement in transportation decision-making
- Convenient, clean and safe roadside accommodations
- Best value for every dollar spent
- Attractive roadsides
- Advocate for transportation issues
- Accurate, timely, understandable and proactive transportation information

For each of these “Tangible Results,” they monitor several measures of that result. For example, “Customer involvement in transportation decision-making” is assessed with the following measures:

- Number of customers who attend transportation-related meetings
- Percent of customers who are satisfied with feedback they receive from MoDOT after offering comments
- Percent of customers who feel MoDOT includes them in transportation decision-making process
- Percent of positive feedback responses from planning partners regarding involvement in transportation decision-making

There are a number of elements of the MoDOT system that we can learn from and apply to the system that we develop. First, regularly tracking and reporting these objective measures over time provides a valuable information resource for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. For example, tracking the number of customers who attended transportation-related meetings from 2006 to 2007 revealed a 27% increase in attendance that coincided with increased publicity efforts. Second, several of the specific measures that they utilized would be beneficial for our assessment of RPOs, including attendance at public meetings, customer satisfaction with feedback, customer perceived involvement with decision-making, and number of visitors to their website. Third, the report incorporates a discussion for each measure of why the measure is included, how it is gathered, and who is primarily responsible for gathering that measure. Finally, the measure can also point out a possible risk of an assessment system. Namely, that the measures become too numerous to comprehend and exist outside of a meaningful context. While the report provides much valuable information, it can be

overwhelming and there does not appear to be a cohesive summary of what the findings mean or social, economic, or political factors that may be affecting those findings.

Elected Officials

The last example we will discuss is not technically a specific evaluation tool. Rather, it provides information that will prove invaluable in developing questionnaires for the elected officials the RPOs serve. Mason (2005), in a report prepared for the FHWA, attempted to provide planning and other transportation officials with a guide to how to communicate with elected officials by understanding the kinds of information the officials need.

Elected officials, as pointed out in the report, are typically part-time employees with numerous other commitments, and transportation is seldom a high priority. The officials have little time, or inclination, to understand the intricacies of the transportation planning process or the jargon that accompanies it. Further, the elected officials need to generate results during their terms in order to justify reelection - and this time span is often shorter than that required for a significant transportation project. It is incumbent on the RPOs to adjust their outreach to elected officials to reflect these concerns. It is likely that the RPOs that do will be evaluated more highly by their elected officials.

Method

The research stage of the project had two goals: (1) Gather the information necessary to develop the performance measures and, (2) Allow all of the parties involved to have input into the development of the measures. The research team accomplished these goals through a literature review of “best practices”, presentations at meetings of relevant organizations, participation in a training conference, conducting structured interviews and group discussions with RPO representatives, formal meetings with representatives of the Transportation Planning Branch, and a variety of informal meetings and discussions with RPO members, the Transportation Planning Branch, and other stakeholders.

Review of Literature

As discussed previously, this was not intended to be an exhaustive review of RPO evaluation practices around the country. Rather, the goal was to identify practices currently in use that could be applied directly, or serve as a model, for evaluation of the RPO operations in North Carolina. The table below summarizes the databases and search terms used.

Table 3. Literature Review Process

Databases and Websites:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Transportation Research Information Services (TRIS Online)· Transportation Research in Progress (TRiP)· FHWA and DOT· State DOT websites· NCDOT RPO-related documents | <ul style="list-style-type: none">· National Association of Development Organizations (NADO): http://www.nado.org· Rural Transportation: http://www.ruraltransportation.org· RPO America: http://www.ruraltransportation.org/RPO-America/RPO-America· Google search engine |
|---|---|

Search Terms: evaluation, quality assurance, program quality , program evaluation, rural planning organization, and rural planning

Structured Interviews and Group Discussions

Formal consultations with the RPOs were key components of the information gathering stage. For the consultations to provide us with the information we needed to complete the project, we had to formalize the consultations by determining exactly what information we needed and then establish a set of questions to gather that information.

We had to remember the goals we were trying to reach: a set of evaluation criteria and performance measures that can be used to evaluate the progress of performance of each RPO. The assessment system should facilitate the collection of evidence to establish the efficacy of the program, provide evidence to determine how well the various RPOs are performing, identify role models for low and average performing RPOs to aspire to, and suggest answers to how to improve under-performing RPOs. With these goals in mind, interview questions were written that would address the following:

- **Quantify** (to the extent possible) what the RPOs are doing, including both the NCDOT-mandated goals and other activities (beyond their specific mandate) in which they are engaged.
- Assess both the **short-term goals** (the processes they are engaged in – like getting public input) and the **long-term goals** (the outcomes – the public input results in a “better” transportation system)
- Identify **exemplary programs / activities** and **problems or obstacles** that are preventing the RPOs from achieving their full potential (thereby providing 'actionable' information for NCDOT, the RPOs, and Councils of Government)
- **Assess satisfaction** with RPOs and the RPO structure – including the satisfaction of the RPOs themselves and satisfaction with NCDOT (what is sometimes referred to as 360 degree feedback).

The complete structured interview that was developed is shown in Appendix B. Sample items for each topic area are shown below:

- **Quantify**
 - For each major duty established by the state legislature, what broad tasks or activities does the RPO typically perform?
 - Undoubtedly, your RPO provides many benefits to your region. Are there services or benefits that your RPO provides that you believe are underappreciated or unrealized?

- **Short-Term and Long-Term Goals**
 - Can you think of any ways to objectively measure long-term changes / improvements in your region caused by RPO activities?
 - If your RPO is effective, what changes / improvements would you expect to see in your region in 5 years?

- **Exemplary Programs / Activities**
 - What do you think your RPO does best?
 - How would you characterize or describe the effectiveness of your RPO?

- **Problems or Obstacles**
 - What supports (other than funding) do you need that you (RPOs) are not currently receiving?
 - What are the obstacles that your RPO faces?

- **Assessing Satisfaction**
 - One issue that is important for us to measure, is customer satisfaction with the RPOs. What groups, specifically, do you see as your customers?
 - Who (what groups or individuals) does your RPO typically interact with?

After NCDOT approval of the interview questions, we began the process of scheduling and conducting the interviews. Throughout the interview process, we stressed to the RPOs that their responses to the questions would be confidential and would not be linked to them by name. The individual responses would be combined and summarized, and would not be reported individually. Respondents are more likely to speak candidly when they trust the interviewer and believe their responses will be confidential.

The final interview questions were presented to the RPOs in January 2008 during the NCARPO training conference. Subsequently, each RPO was sent an electronic copy of the

interview and given the opportunity to participate in one of a series of structured interviews / group discussions. The RPOs were assembled in discussion groups based upon geography:

- Northeast (Albemarle, Peanut Belt / Upper Coastal Plain, Mid-East)
- Southeast (Cape Fear, Lumber River, Mid-Carolina, Down East / Eastern Carolina)
- Triangle (Kerr-Tar, Triangle)
- Triad (Northwest Piedmont, Piedmont Triad)
- Metrolina (Rocky River, Lake Norman)
- Mountains (Unifour, Southwestern, High Country, Land-of-Sky, Isothermal)

The group discussions, involving one or more RPOs and members of the research team, typically lasted two hours. While the meetings generally followed the structured interview questions, the group discussions were open-ended where follow-up questions or further discussion depended upon comments made by group members. By conducting the discussions in a group, rather than individual format, group members' were more at ease, more willing to talk about serious issues, and often had their memories refreshed by the comments of others. This allowed us to gather significantly more information than we would have in an individual format.

RPOs were given the option of submitting written comments before or after the group discussions. In one case, the RPO was unable to attend the group discussion but submitted written responses instead. The research team either met with or received written responses from all of the RPOs.

Transportation Planning Branch

The research team met with representatives of the Transportation Planning Branch (Travis Marshall and Elina Zlotchenko) prior to the submission of the full proposal to discuss background information on the need for the project, the history of RPOs in North Carolina, and general requirements for the performance measures. At this meeting, the research team was also provided with a number of NCDOT documents related to the RPOs, including data establishing the effectiveness of the program, the RPO program description (Appendix A), and the RPO manual. Additional information was gained during the project kick-off meeting that followed.

Later in the research process, at the conclusion of the review of literature and structured interviews, the research team met with Travis Marshall, Elina Zlotchenko and a group of TPB/RPO Coordinators. During the meeting, the research team made a presentation summarizing the results of the structured interviews and describing the structure of the developing performance measures. In a format similar to that used during the structured interview discussion process with the RPOs, the meeting then turned to an open-ended group discussion led by the research team on the topic of “What would a good RPO look like?” The discussion, while addressing the specific topic, was allowed to move to other issues or concerns raised by the TPB/RPO Coordinators. The discussion was spirited and had to be cut short because of time constraints.

Presentations, Conference Attendance, and Informal Meetings

The two goals of the research stage of the project (Gathering the information necessary to develop the performance measures and allowing all of the parties involved to have input into the development of the measures) were also addressed through a variety of other formal and

informal interactions with RPO officials, county and town officials, and other important stakeholders.

The research team attended and made a presentation introducing the project to the RPOs at the July 2007 NCARPO meeting in Fayetteville. Travis Marshall and the research team both made presentations describing the project at the North Carolina Regional Councils of Government Directors' meeting in Elizabeth City in October 2007. The research team also presented an update on the project and gathered some initial feedback from the RPO coordinators during the NCARPO meeting held prior to the start of the October 2007 North Carolina Metropolitan Planning Organizations conference in Greensboro. The research team also joined the NCARPO e-mail listserv to identify common issues and problems discussed by the group.

NCARPO, recognizing a need for training amongst the member RPOs, organized a training conference on Rural Transportation Planning Techniques over several days in Greensboro. At the request of Moy Biswas (NCDOT Research Branch), a member of the research team attended the training conference (Note: Consistent with the terms of the research contract, no project funds were used to pay for the conference). The three-day conference covered many aspects of RPO operation and development and provided an opportunity for the research team member to participate in numerous informal discussions with the RPO coordinators. The major topics of the training sessions are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Rural Transportation Planning Techniques Conference: Topics

Table 4. Rural Transportation Planning Techniques Conference: Topics

Introduction to RPOs	CTPs: Roles, Process, and Outcomes	Transportation and land use linkages	Public Outreach Techniques
GIS in the RPO	Roadway Analysis Data and Techniques	RPO Administrative Procedures	Safe Routes to School Implementation
Rail Issues	Transit Issues	TIP Funding Issues	Air Quality
Data Collection	RPO and Aging Population Partnerships	Local Walkability Workshops	Mediation Techniques

The research team, at the invitation of the Ann Whitley (Peanut Belt RPO Coordinator), attended the November 2007 meeting of the Peanut Belt RTAC. A number of topics were discussed, including the 2008 CTP Study Needs list, problems getting participation of all county representatives, the Peanut Belt RPO's Annual Report, and the upcoming PWP.

Throughout the data gathering, the various partners have been able to shape the form and nature of the assessments being developed. The resulting measures were also reviewed by representatives of those partners, through the project steering committee, and revised by the research team as necessary. As such, the process used in the preparation of the Final Draft Report and, ultimately, the Final Report were integral parts of the methodology of this project.

Results

What have we learned from our many interactions with the RPOs, including both the open-ended group discussions and structured interviews? We can summarize our findings in the following main points:

- **The RPOs and TPB are both committed to the concept of RPOs and the role they are intended to play in transportation planning.** In all of our interactions, we have been struck by the level of involvement, the sense of duty, commitment, and enthusiasm expressed by both the RPO and TPB personnel. Each person we interviewed was committed to maximizing the effectiveness of their RPO and, almost invariably, was actively looking for strategies to achieve this end. An excellent example of this initiative can be seen in the efforts of the North Carolina Association of Rural Planning Organizations (NCARPO). While the RPOs and the TPB are all committed to the role of RPOs, the levels of support and commitment each perceives in the other varies between RPOs and within the TPBs.
- **The RPOs perform many functions and activities that are not captured in the existing quarterly and annual reporting process.** By their nature, RPOs have an open-ended mandate to address whatever problems or needs that arise in their region. As a result, the RPOs often perform functions and activities that are not recognized as important, by the TPB or the RPOs themselves, nor are they assessed in the quarterly and annual reports. For example, all of the RPOs reported frequently responding to questions from their members concerning transportation issues and either answering their questions, conducting research to answer the questions, or correctly directing the members to the appropriate NCDOT Division that could answer the questions. Almost none of the RPOs, however, described a tracking process for these efforts and none reported including these key activities in their annual reports. This reflects both limitations in the existing reporting structure, as well as a failure to more fully consider the importance of “deliverables” in that reporting structure.
- **The RPOs interact with many different partners in the normal course of fulfilling their role in transportation planning.** The RPOs serve as an important role as a go-between for many different partners, including towns, counties, the TPB, other divisions within NCDOT, and the general public. When considering the effectiveness of RPOs, we will need to consider how the key partners perceive the effectiveness of the RPOs. Further, we cannot consider RPOs in isolation, but, instead, must examine them as part of a complex network of different partners. A successful RPO can only be so in a successful network of partners.

- **The RPOs differ greatly between one another and these differences need to be considered when comparing the their effectiveness.** Each RPO has a defined region, and those regions reflect the diversity of the state itself. While some RPOs border MPOs in rapidly growing areas of the state with increasing levels of population, education, and income, other RPOs encompass regions with stagnant or shrinking populations where poverty and low levels of education are commonplace. In some cases the town and county officials are committed to the role of RPOs in transportation planning, in others the officials are committed to the use of political influence and connections to further transportation projects, and, in still others, the officials are satisfied with the existing transportation system and do not perceive a need to transportation planning. These regional differences will affect the activities of the RPOs and need to be taken into account when evaluating the RPOs.

With these findings in mind, and consistent with the goals of this project, we need to develop assessments that answer the following questions.

- **How do the RPOs differ?** We need to develop quantitative measures of the regional and organizational differences.
- **What are the RPOs doing?** We need to develop quantitative measures that assess the myriad of activities in which the RPOs are involved.
- **How we are the RPOs performing?** We need to develop measures that provide a qualitative evaluation of the RPOs activities and a qualitative evaluation of the RPOs interactions with their partners.
- **How can the RPOs improve?** We need to provide within the measures we develop a way to identify problems within the RPO system and for potential solutions to be identified or suggested.

The assessment system that we have developed consists of six major assessments. One measure is a baseline measure completed by the team performing the evaluation itself. Three of the measures are intended for the RPOs themselves, while the other two are for the TPB and/or other RPO customers (Table 5).

Table 5. Measures in the Assessment System

Evaluator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● RPO Baseline Measure
RPO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Activity Assessment / Deliverables Inventory Checklist ● Self-Assessment Questionnaire ● RPO-Initiated Data Collection
TPB and Customer Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Customer Experience Questionnaire ● Administrative Reporting Schedule

We will now discuss each measure in some detail, beginning with the RPO assessments.

RPO Baseline Measure

The RPO Baseline Measure quantifies the pre-existing differences between the RPOs, including regional and organizational differences. Any comparisons made between the effectiveness of the different RPOs needs to include a consideration of these differences. By summarizing these differences in one place, it makes it easier for any potential audience to utilize this information. The RPO Baseline Measure data would be assembled by the group conducting the actual RPO evaluations with the majority of the information derived from U.S. Census data.

The data recommended for inclusion in the RPO Baseline Measure is listed below:

- Number of counties included in the RPO region
- Number of towns included in the RPO region
- Do the municipalities have membership on the RPO committees?
- Geographic size of the RPO region
- Population of the RPO region, including measures of density and change
- Does the RPO border or surround a MPO?
- Percentage of towns in the RPO region that employ staff other than a Mayor / Commissioner, such as a Planning Director or Transportation Director.
- Percentage of School-age children
- Percentage of Senior Citizens
- Percentage of citizens commuting to work
- Average time of commute
- Median income of residents in the region

Appendix C presents a sample comparison using the variables above between two RPO regions (one bordering an MPO and one not).

RPOs: Activity Assessment / Deliverables Inventory Checklist

The intent of this form is to capture, on one checklist, the major activities that an RPO could be involved in during any given year. This form would be completed and submitted along with the current narrative annual report. Essentially, each RPO would check off on the 'checklist' the different projects and activities they completed in the past year, and then describe those activities in more detail in the annual report narrative. For each activity, it would be expected that the RPO would have some deliverable (or evidence) for that activity (i.e. Minutes from a meeting; certificate of training, copy of the report, etc.) if it was requested by the TPB. A sample item from the Checklist is shown below, while the complete Checklist is in Appendix D.

Table 6. Activity Assessment / Deliverables Inventory Checklist Example

<p>Public Comment / Informational Meetings</p> <p>___ # attended</p> <p>___ # participated in</p> <p>___ # presented at</p> <p>___ # organized</p> <p>[count all such meetings, including CTIP & special project meetings]</p>
--

The Checklist has a number of potential benefits:

- By providing a near-comprehensive listing of activities an RPO could engage in, it can serve as a reminder / aid to the RPO coordinator in preparing the annual report (i.e. I forgot I attended that environmental justice training session).
- Because it provides, in one place, a listing of possible RPO activities, it can serve to create in the RPOs an awareness of the activities that they are NOT currently performing. Through the Checklist, the TPB can make the RPOs aware of activities that they would like them to begin to perform.

- The Checklist organizes the content of the annual report narrative, thereby making it easier for the TPB and others to recognize the content of the annual report narrative.
- The Checklist facilitates the use of the annual report narrative for evaluation of the RPO system as a whole (i.e. RPOs submitted 25 grant proposals this past year worth 2 million dollars. Of those, 10 were funded in 8 different regions for a total of 1 million dollars) and for comparisons between RPOs.

RPOs: Self-Assessment Questionnaire

This document provides an opportunity for the RPOs to report major successes, problems encountered, and suggestions for improvements. Also, it allows them to report how well they believe their RPO is doing and their beliefs concerning support from their various partners. The assessment reflects lessons learned from the AASHTO Self-Assessment Guide (AASHTO, 2006) that was created to primarily provide a self-assessment for state DOTs to determine how well their rural consultation process was working.

Each RPO will be asked to rate the effectiveness of their RPO and indicate how effective they believe their key partners (RTCC/RTAC, counties, TPB, etc.) would rate them. They are asked to provide similar ratings concerning their own and partners commitment to the role of RPOs. As noted previously, we cannot consider RPOs in isolation, but, instead, must examine them as part of a complex network of different partners. A successful RPO can only be so in a successful network of partners. These questions will allow one to begin to understand the network. Similarly, we will ask each RPO to broadly evaluate the quality of their relationships with their partners. Special emphasis will be placed on the relationship with the most important partner, the TPB.

Drawing from the AASHTO measure, the RPOs will be asked to evaluate the partnership with the NCDOT/TPB across the factors of Commitment, Participation, Education, Communication, and Outcomes. Members of the TPB will be asked to complete the same items. Ultimately, these measures will allow us to determine the health of the partnerships.

Sample items from the RPO Self-Assessment Questionnaire are shown in Table 7 and the complete measure can be seen in Appendix E.

Table 7. Samples Items from the Self-Assessment Questionnaire

How would YOU characterize or describe the effectiveness of your RPO?				
(1) Our RPO needs assistance in meeting our core tasks	(2) Effective in some of the core tasks – not so in others	(3) Effective in the core tasks – but not beyond	(4) Effective in the core tasks and in many of the things we do beyond the core tasks	(5) We have gone well beyond the core tasks and are Very Effective in everything we do.
The state transportation agency gives consideration to input from local officials regarding improvements in or the need for transportation programs or policies.				
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well

RPOs: RPO-Initiated Data Collection

There are a number of problems or shortcomings that can reduce or limit the effectiveness of the measures in an assessment system. They can lose their effectiveness if they are not modified to be kept up-to-date to reflect changes in the organization and its activities. The assessments, while being made broad enough to encompass all aspects of a complex organization, may fail to capture small, but important, aspects of a part of that organization. The assessment system itself may become too complex and time-consuming to use. It is important for any assessment system to balance the benefits of the assessments with the costs. While some

data may be useful to gather, the effort required to gather it may outweigh the benefits of doing so. Ultimately, it becomes a value judgment by the organization itself: Is this data worth it?

What we are terming RPO-Initiated Data Collection is our attempt to balance these issues. Essentially, we are encouraging the RPOs to be active within the assessment system and look for ways to quantify or evaluate their own activities. These, of course, would change to reflect changes within the organization or unique events that affect a region. As we learned during our data collection process, many of them are actively working to assess their activities. For example, some of the RPOs have already conducted surveys looking at customer satisfaction. Another RPO generates weekly status reports that detail for their lead planning agency and others exactly what they have been doing during that particular week, as well as providing longer-term updates. These activities should be encouraged. The common assessment system should not cause the individual RPOs to stop looking for ways to improve their effectiveness through assessment.

Are we recommending that all of the RPOs generate weekly status reports? No. Each RPO is different with a different set of problems and a different level of resources. The weekly status report has been found to be useful by one RPO, but would likely place too much of a burden on the other RPOs. The problem would become one of having to spend more time reporting on one's activities than one could spend actually performing one's activities. While there are some common activities that each RPO should record or track, the method of doing so should be what works best for each specific RPO.

What are those common activities that each RPO should be recording or tracking themselves? We would recommend the following:

- **Telephone Assistance**. The RPOs should each track the calls for assistance they receive each month, who called, the nature of the call, and the outcome. Again, this needs to be done in a way that does not place an excessive burden on the RPO.
- **Website Activity**. The RPOs should each have a website and should each track the activity on their website, including the number of hits, downloads, and questions or requests received. These variables are relatively easy to track if the RPO has the staff with the expertise in website development and maintenance.
- **Meeting Attendance and Comments**. This refers to meetings involving the general public. While the typical RTAC / RTCC meetings do not draw large crowds, there are other meetings where the RPO staff makes presentations that are aimed at the general public. In those kinds of situations, the RPOs should track the number of attendees and any questions or comments they offer.

These variables all reflect important services provided by the RPOs that are typically not measured and, therefore, not reported. By assessing and reporting these activities, the RPOs will be better able to inform others of the service they provide. Meanwhile, the RPOs will also learn more about their region and enable them to better meet their needs. For example, if they are contacted by three different towns in their region with the same question concerning some aspect of NCDOT policy, it might be beneficial to post on the website an FAQ for that policy.

TPB and Other Customers: Customer Experience Questionnaire

Ultimately, whether or not RPOs are considered successful will depend largely on whether or not their primary customers believe they are successful. The Customer Experience Questionnaire is intended to address this issue. Different versions of the questionnaire have been created for different customers: TPB, RTAC/RTCC, towns and counties, and other NCDOT Divisions. The TPB version of the questionnaire (Appendix F) is intended to be completed by

the Director of the RPO program, the Senior TPB/RPO Coordinator, and the TPB/RPO Coordinators. The RTAC/RTCC questionnaire (Appendix G) is intended for the Rural Technical Coordinating Committee and Rural Transportation Advisory Committee members. The Town and County questionnaire (Appendix H) is intended for relevant county and town officials within the region. The NCDOT Divisions version of the questionnaire (Appendix I) is intended to be completed by other members of NCDOT who may interact with RPOs. The specific individuals to receive the questionnaires would be determined when the measures are implemented.

In each questionnaire, the customers are asked to report the extent to which they have interacted with their respective RPO, utilized products from the RPO, and asked to rate the usefulness of specific services provided by RPOs. The questionnaires are written in such a way as to educate the persons completing the measures, especially in the case of county and town officials, about the role of RPOs in transportation planning. In keeping with this theme, a reviewer of this report suggested the following: “When Appendix G is distributed to the intended recipients, it would be helpful to include one-page summaries of the core RPO responsibilities, the local consultation process, and the general framework of the transportation planning process as convenient ready references for these reviewers. This will ensure that better, more constructive feedback will be received.”

The customers are also asked to respond to a series of items concerning RPO effectiveness, their support for RPOs, and the working relationship they have with their RPO, that mirror questions on the RPO Self-Assessment Questionnaire. These items will allow us to

examine the quality of the partnerships. For example, each customer will be asked to rate the overall effectiveness of their RPO using the rating scale shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Effectiveness Rating Scale from the Self-Assessment Questionnaire
5 = We have gone well beyond the core tasks and are very effective in everything we do.
4 = Effective in the core tasks and in many of the things we do beyond the core tasks
3 = Effective in the core tasks – but not beyond
2 = Effective in some of the core tasks – not so in others
1 = The RPO needs assistance in meeting the core tasks

By asking each customer this question, as well as each RPO, we are able to compare the responses and look for agreements and disagreements. Table 9 provides an example of the data that can be generated from this one question (Note: it is shown in black-and-white, but would be color-coded in actual use). The data presented is for demonstration purposes only and does not reflect any actual assessments.

Table 9. Sample Results from the Self-Assessment and Customer Experience Questionnaires

RPO	Self-Evaluation	NCDOT / TPB	NCDOT/ Other Divisions	RTAC / RTCC	Counties & Towns
Albemarle	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Peanut Belt	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Mid-East	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Down East	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

As previously discussed, drawing from the AASHTO measure, the RPOs will be asked to evaluate the partnership with the NCDOT/TPB across the factors of Commitment, Participation,

Education, Communication, and Outcomes. Members of the TPB will be asked to complete the same items.

TPB: Administrative Reporting Schedule

There are numerous reporting requirements for each RPO. While this is not the deciding factor in determining the effectiveness of the RPO, it does reflect a component of the duties of the RPO. The Administrative Reporting Schedule provides a report on the timeliness with which each RPO completes and submits the various documentation required by the NCDOT/TPB. This would include the Planning Work Program (PWP), Five-year planning calendar, Quarterly Progress Reports, and Annual Performance Report. With the implementation of the assessment measures discussed in this report, they would also be included. The Administrative Reporting Schedule would detail the timely receipt of the documents, their date of acceptance, and dates of any revisions requested. A sample is shown in Appendix J.

Summary of Measures

The measures developed reflect both quantitative and subjective assessments and, wherever possible, feature multiple assessments of the same variable. This approach allows for a more complete, nuanced view of the operation and effectiveness of the RPOs, including the perceptions of key stake-holders. Tables 10 and 11 below summarize the measures by type and source of variable information.

Table 10. Summary of Assessments by Purpose and Type of Data Collected

Assessment	Description / Purpose	Type of Data	Variables Collected
Activity Assessment / Deliverables Inventory Checklist	Provides a quantitative summary of the major activities that an RPO could be involved in during any given year; tool for managing RPOs and provides data supportive of the continued funding of RPOs	Quantitative	Activities across 6 dimensions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Planning (Core Duty 1) •Participation (Core Duty 2) •Project Prioritization & Development (Core Duty 3) •Information Exchange (Core Duty 4) •Education & System Development •Policy & Compliance
RPO Self-Assessment Questionnaire	Provides an opportunity for the RPO to report their successes, problems encountered, and suggestions for improvements. Also, their judgments concerning the status of their RPO and their partnerships.	Subjective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Self-rating of RPO effectiveness •Judgments concerning how other partners perceive the RPO •Judgments concerning commitment from their partners •Judgements concerning the status of their partnerships •ASHTO Scales for COMMITMENT, PARTICIPATION, EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION, & OUTCOMES •Open-ended comments regarding successes, obstacles, & suggestions for improvements
TPB: Customer Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)	Provides an opportunity for the customer to report judgments concerning the status of the RPOs they have worked with and the RPO partnerships; estimates of the utilization of RPO products;	Subjective & Quantitative (estimated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Judgments of RPO effectiveness •Judgments concerning commitment from the partners •Judgments concerning the status of the partnerships •ASHTO Scales for COMMITMENT, PARTICIPATION, EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION, & OUTCOMES •Frequency & type of interactions with each RPO •Quantitative estimate of the utilization of deliverables from each RPO •Open-ended comments regarding successes, obstacles, & suggestions for improvements

Assessment	Description / Purpose	Type of Data	Variables Collected
RTAC/RTCC: CEQ	Judgments concerning the status of their RPO and the partnerships	Subjective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Judgments of RPO effectiveness •Judgments concerning commitment from the partners •Judgments concerning the status of the partnerships •ASHTO Scales for COMMITMENT, PARTICIPATION, EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION, & OUTCOMES •Open-ended comments regarding successes, obstacles, & suggestions for improvements
Counties and Towns: CEQ	Judgments concerning the status of their RPO and the partnerships; knowledge of the RPO and needs / utilization of RPO services	Subjective & Quantitative (estimated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Judgments of RPO effectiveness •Judgments concerning commitment from the partners •Judgments concerning the status of the partnerships •Frequency & type of interactions with each RPO •Quantitative estimate of the utilization of deliverables from each RPO •Estimated needs for RPO services in coming year •ASHTO Scales for COMMITMENT, PARTICIPATION, EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION & OUTCOMES •Open-ended comments regarding suggestions for improvements
NCDOT Divisions: CEQ	Estimates of the frequency of utilizing RPO products, judgments of the quality of those products, and judgments concerning the status of the RPO partnerships	Subjective & Quantitative (estimated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Judgments of RPO effectiveness •Judgments concerning commitment from the partners •Judgments concerning the status of the partnerships •Frequency & type of interactions with each RPO •Quantitative estimate of the utilization of deliverables from each RPO •Open-ended comments regarding suggestions for improvements

Table 11. Summary of Variables Collected by Type and Source

Variables	Type	Activity Assessment / Deliverables Inventory Checklist	RPO Self-Assessment	TPB - CEQ	RTAC / RTCC - CEQ	Counties and Towns - CEQ	NCDOT Divisions - CEQ
Activities across 6 dimensions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Planning (Core Duty 1) •Participation (Core Duty 2) •Project Prioritization & Development (Core Duty 3) •Information Exchange (Core Duty 4) •Education & System Development •Policy & Compliance 	Quantitative	xxxx					
Estimate of the frequency & type of interaction with RPO	Quantitative (estimated)			xxxx		xxxx	xxxx
Quantitative estimate of the utilization of RPO deliverables	Quantitative (estimated)			xxxx		xxxx	xxxx
Estimated need for RPO services in the next year	Quantitative (estimated)					xxxx	
Judgments of RPO effectiveness	Subjective		xxxx	xxxx	xxxx	xxxx	xxxx
Judgments concerning the commitment of the partners	Subjective		xxxx	xxxx	xxxx	xxxx	xxxx
Judgments concerning the status of the partnerships	Subjective		xxxx	xxxx	xxxx	xxxx	xxxx

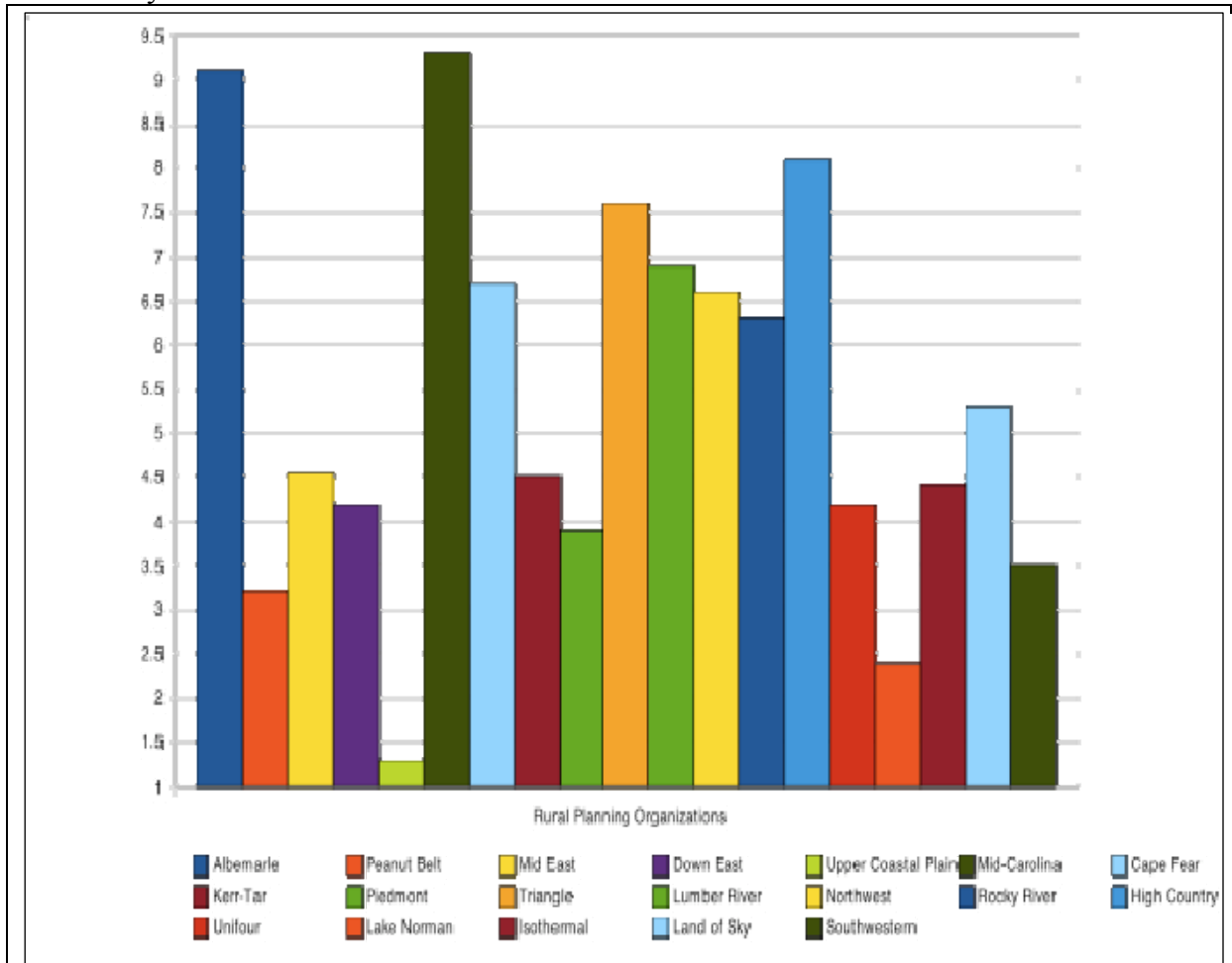
Variables	Type	Activity Assessment / Deliverables Inventory Checklist	RPO Self-Assessment	TPB - CEQ	RTAC / RTCC - CEQ	Counties and Towns - CEQ	NCDOT Divisions - CEQ
ASHTO scales: •Commitment •Participation •Education •Communication •Outcomes	Subjective		xxxx	xxxx	xxxx	xxxx	
Open-ended comments: successes, obstacles, & suggestions	Subjective		xxxx	xxxx	xxxx	xxxx	xxxx

Use of the Measures

The measures are intended to supplement, not supplant, the management and oversight of the RPOs by the TPB. Many of the questions concerning the effectiveness of the RPOs reflect issues of the overall mission of RPOs and their key goals. The determination of their mission and their key goals are the responsibility of NCDOT and, more specifically, the TPB. These measures will aid the TPB in determining whether the RPOs have achieved the mission and goals set for the RPOs, but only the TPB can set those goals.

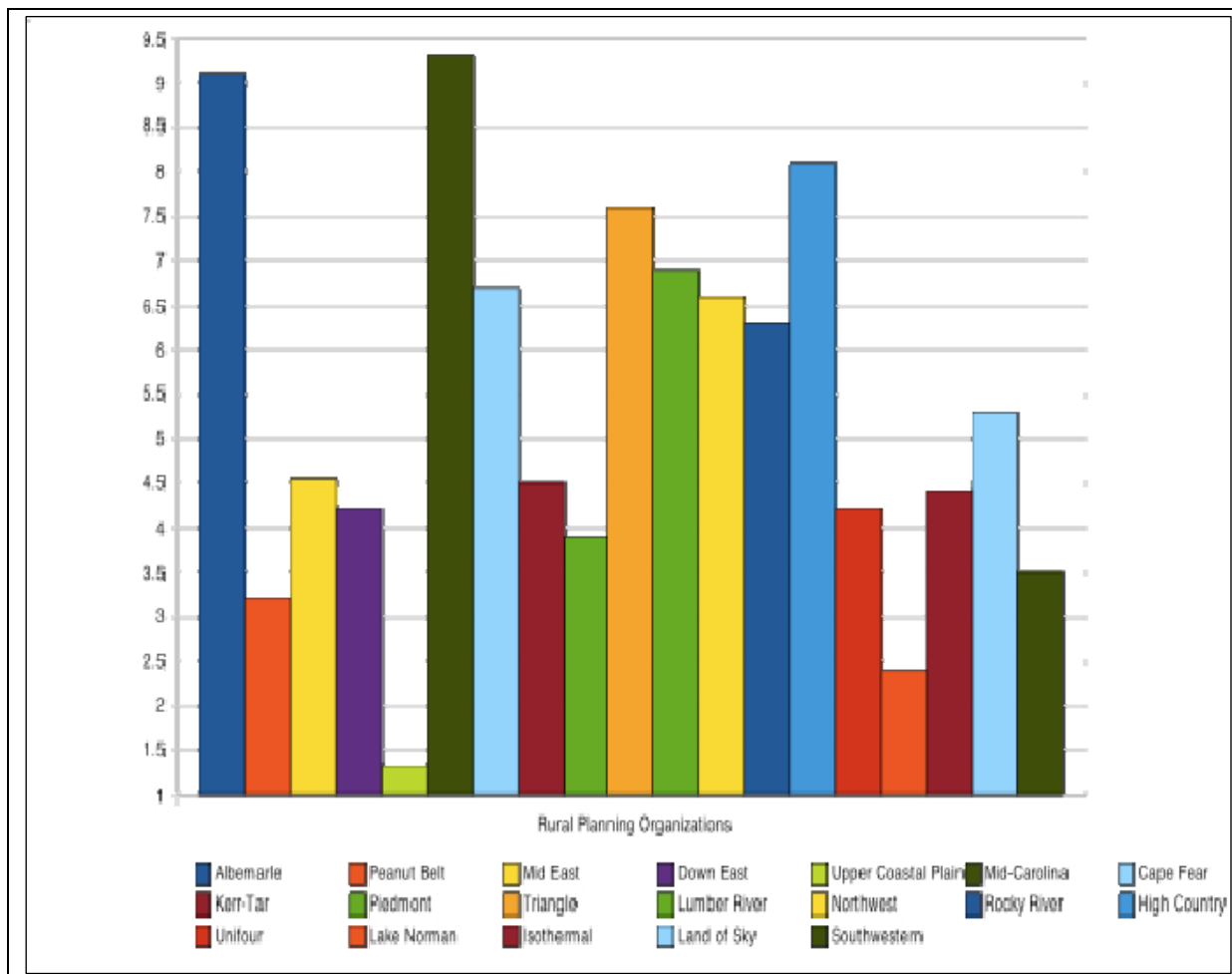
How can the measures be put to use to quantify and enhance the effectiveness of the RPOs? We will now provide some selected examples derived from the Activity Assessment / Deliverables Inventory Checklist. All data shown is hypothetical. As shown in Figure 4 below, combining all of the activities reflected in the “Checklist” would produce a measure of overall productivity. The TPB could utilize this data to summarize the average performance level or to set a target level of performance.

Figure 4. Example of Activity Assessment / Deliverables Inventory Checklist: Overall Productivity



The “Checklist” activities could also be examined by considering the activities by each category. Figure 5 shows an example combining just the Project Development-related items (e.g. grants, products, etc.) from the “Checklist.” This assessment would allow the TPB to focus on specific aspects of RPO activities and, potentially, set relevant goals for each RPO.

Figure 5. Example of Activity Assessment / Deliverables Inventory Checklist: Project Development



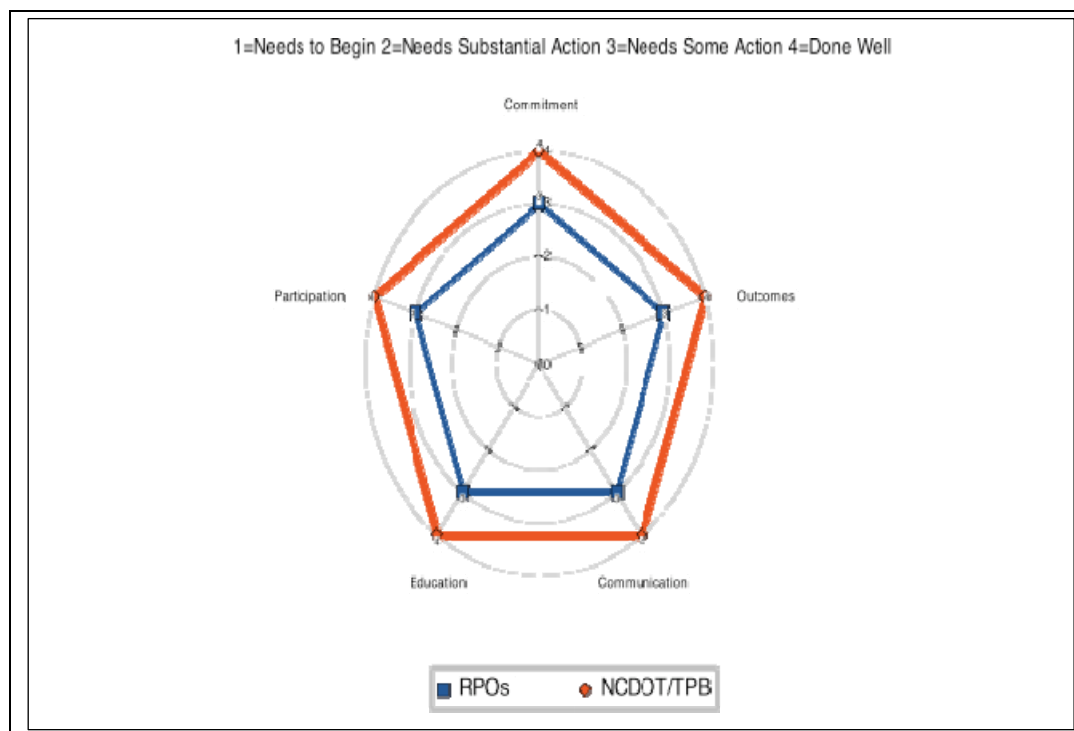
Moving forward, the “Checklist” data could be used to produce a focus on specific activities by a specific RPO over time, and to, hopefully, track improvement by the RPO. Also, the data can be combined across RPOs to demonstrate the effectiveness of the RPOs as a group. Figure 6 below provides an example of what this might produce for grant writing activity.

Figure 6. Example of Grant Funding Obtained by RPOs Over Time



Customer satisfaction is a major component of determining the effectiveness of RPOs. While there are quantitative measures that can be related to this, and are assessed with the measures developed (i.e. # of projects initiated, # of public meetings, etc.), it is ultimately a subjective judgment. The RPO Self-Assessment Questionnaire and the Customer Experience Questionnaires provide, in a part, a way to compare the beliefs of the RPOs and their various customers. In analyzing these questionnaires, the Commitment, Participation, Education, Communication, and Outcome items would be combined and compared to evaluate the quality of the partnership. This subjective data is especially important to ensuring a strong working relationship between the groups. In the hypothetical example shown in Figure 7, the RPO perceptions are compared with those of the TPB and, in this case, the results suggest that the RPOs believe that there are problems in the partnership that “need some action”, while the TPB believes everything is “fine” in the relationship.

Figure 7. Example of RPO and NCDOT/TPB Subjective Assessments



These are just a few of the examples of how the assessments can be utilized. It is expected that the analyses will expand as data is collected over time.

Findings and Conclusions

RPOs have made numerous positive impacts on the state since their establishment in 2001. According to the TPB, the RPOs have served as a “link” between NCDOT and the communities resulting in partnerships with other divisions within NCDOT, such as the Public Transportation Division and Project Development and Environmental Analysis Branch. The RPOs have played a major role in working with the Geographic Information Systems Unit. The RPOs have also greatly facilitated public involvement and aided project planning and project development. However, it was clear that more could be done, creating the impetus for the present project.

The goals of the current project were to develop a set of evaluation criteria and performance measures that could be used to evaluate the progress and performance of each RPO and to evaluate the status of the collaboration amongst the partners. As a result, we have developed a series of six measures (RPO Baseline Measure, Activity Assessment / Deliverables Inventory Checklist, Self-Assessment Questionnaire, RPO-Initiated Data Collection, Customer Experience Questionnaire, and Administrative Reporting Schedule) that meet these goals. The performance measures were developed to be objective and quantifiable, with input from all of the parties involved, and to assess both short-term and long-term goals. Additionally, the measures were created so as to be practical and cost-efficient to implement.

It is expected that the TPB will be able to use this report and the measures contained herein as a way to set up consistent and uniform criteria to evaluate each individual RPO and to identify ways in which the RPOs can be more effective planning partners. By having the performance measures, the TPB will be able to evaluate each RPO and identify areas of focus for future improvements, such as identifying training needs. In addition, the product will aid the TPB in assessing the effectiveness of the RPOs and obtaining senior management support for continuing the program.

The creation of the measures, however, is only the first step. We will now turn to issues surrounding how the performance measures are implemented.

Recommendations

The ultimate success of this project will be determined by how the measures are implemented. To that end, we offer three recommendations.

Web-based / electronic data collection. This project has created five new forms that need to be completed on an annual basis by a variety of different stakeholders around the state. While it would be possible to collect these measures through paper forms that are mail- or hand-delivered, this would pose a significant burden on the organization arising from the costs of printing, shipping, handling, data entry, and storage of the forms. Printed forms also pose problems when the need to revise the forms arise.

It would greatly benefit the organization to establish a web-based system for administering and collecting the data. Such a system would largely avoid the costs of paper forms, facilitate ease of access to the data for analysis and reporting purposes, practically eliminate the problem of lost forms, and allow for tailoring of the forms to specific audiences or in response to specific needs. For example, if a special issue arose affecting RPOs and counties in a given region of the state, questions could be easily added to an electronic version of the form that would only be presented to stakeholders in that region.

Outside evaluator. While the performance measures have been developed by an outside organization, the question of who conducts the evaluation is an open one. We believe that it would be in the best interests of all parties involved for the evaluation to be conducted by an outside evaluator who was not a direct part of NCDOT or the Transportation Planning Branch.

There are a number of advantages to the use of an outside evaluator that will directly impact the effectiveness of the evaluation system.

Respondents are more likely to trust an outside evaluator, to view them as objective, and more likely to report problems with less fear of reprisals. Similarly, constituents are also more likely to view an outside evaluator as objective. As a result, the results of the evaluation will typically carry more weight with those constituents.

There are also the practical matters of cost and expertise. The NCDOT/TPB already has limited resources without the added burden of implementing a performance measurement system. The performance measurement system will carry with it the need to devote time, effort, and funds to collecting the data, analyzing the results, interpreting and reporting the findings, and revisions to the assessments themselves. These tasks could be handled more efficiently by an outside evaluator with the necessary expertise and resources.

Implementation as part of a process. Finally, a process will need to be developed to consider the results of the assessments. The measures will not have the desired effects if they are not implemented within an open and unbiased assessment system that correctly interprets the results, identifies weaknesses, makes changes, and assesses the effects of those changes. If there is a problem identified, resources, such as training, will need to be provided in order to address those problems. Resistance to the performance measures will develop quickly if problems are identified in particular RPOs, but resources are not provided to aid in correcting them. The measures are tools that will allow the TPB to better carry out their management responsibilities, but the measures cannot replace the necessity for skilled management by the TPB.

Implementation and Technology Transfer Plan

There are several issues that will need to be considered in regards to the implementation of the performance measures. First, the TPB will need to decide whether the collection and analysis of the performance measures will be handled “in house” or whether it should be contracted to an outside evaluator. The performance measures were developed with a eye towards minimizing the cost and effort involved, but there will still be additional costs and time involved.

Second, initiatives will need to be put in place to address the issue of training in the use of the assessment system. Regardless of who conducts the evaluation, training in the collection and interpretation of the results will be necessary for the affected NCDOT personnel and the RPO personnel.

What form will the data collection take? Previously we indicated our recommendation that the data be collected through an electronic or web-based system. If that recommendation is followed, then, obviously, such a system will need to be implemented. The Elizabeth City State University Center for Research and Evaluation has access to a web-based system, SAS / Data Acquisition Portal, that was designed for similar large scale data collection projects. The performance measures would be presented, and the data collected, entirely through a standard web-browser. All data would be secure, transmitted through standard encryption protocols, and access would be limited, through username and password access, to authorized users. The data collected is automatically entered into a SAS dataset for analysis, or authorized users could view

the data online and download the data in Excel-format spreadsheets. The SAS / Data Acquisition Portal would also allow the measures to be revised or modified as needed.

Finally, as noted before, a process will need to be developed to consider the results of the assessments. If there is a problem identified, resources, such as training, will need to be provided in order to address those problems. Resistance to the performance measures will develop quickly if problems are identified in particular RPOs, but resources are not provided to aid in correcting them. Implementation of the performance measures will require a procedure for sharing the results of the evaluation with the Transportation Planning Branch, the RPOs, Lead Planning Agencies, and other important stakeholders, including elected officials.

Based upon research on effective evaluation systems, as well as recommendations by RPO officials, this process should include a presentation of the results to a joint gathering of RPO and TPB representatives. This presentation session should allow for a free and open discussion of the results, with the goal of identifying the causes of the problems, and developing potential solutions.

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Appendix A

Description of the North Carolina RPO Program authored by the NCDOT Transportation Planning Branch in September 2006

Introduction

The following report provides background information on North Carolina's Rural Transportation Planning Organization (RPOs) program and highlights its success over the past five years. Its purpose is to ensure the future of the RPO program by securing continued support of the RPO program by senior management and providing for its continued funding. By highlighting the successes and showing the progress over the past five years, this report will show how the RPOs have become a valuable partner with NCDOT in the areas of Transportation Planning, Programming, and Project Development.

Establishment of RPOs

Federal Legislation

In the past ten years, rural planning and consultation has become a major issue in the transportation planning field. Effective rural transportation planning improves the overall transportation system and helps to ensure that the quality of life and economy in rural America is maintained and enhanced. Good rural transportation plans consider a wide range of investment, operational, and technology options that can meet the transportation needs of transportation system users. Most importantly, effective rural transportation planning provides the users and stakeholders of the transportation system with ample opportunity to participate in the entire planning process, thus ensuring maximum input into transportation system investments.

TEA-21

Congress began emphasizing better rural transportation with the Transportation Efficiency Act of the Twenty-first Century (TEA-21) by describing how States would need to begin working with rural officials and regional planning organizations. The following are the key points of that legislation:

- (e) "...the long-range transportation plan shall be developed in consultation with affected local officials with responsibility for transportation."
- (f) "...the State Transportation Improvement Program shall be developed in consultation with affected local officials with responsibility for transportation."
- (i) "The Secretary shall conduct a study on the effectiveness of the participation of local elected officials in transportation planning and programming. In conducting the study, the Secretary shall consider the degree of cooperation between each State, local officials in rural areas in the State, and regional planning and development organizations in the State."

USDOT Rural Consultation Initiative

In May 1999, the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) announced the Rural Transportation Initiative to ensure that non-metropolitan communities share in the mobility, economic, and social benefits that many USDOT programs provide. The initiative aims to increase the capacity of rural America to play a more integral role in the planning and decision-making that shape transportation systems. It also provided an array of technical assistance and grant programs to enable communities to plan, develop and improve air, surface, and water transportation infrastructure.

SAFETEA-LU

In 2006, SAFETEA-LU continued the rural initiatives that were part of TEA-21. With this legislation, additional emphasis has been placed on rural consultation and public participation. It's intended to emphasize the cooperation between local officials, environmental agencies, FHWA, and DOT. SAFETEA-LU also impacts rural planning by placing an increased emphasis on public participation plans. These plans will be more dynamic and more involved than previously required. Their intent is to get more stakeholders involved in the planning process for better transportation solutions in the area.

State Legislation*House Bill 1304, Section 5*

The 1997-98 Session of the North Carolina General Assembly ratified the Board of Transportation Reform Bill (House Bill 1304) mandating that the North Carolina Board of Transportation (the BOT) develop a plan to establish Rural Transportation Planning Organizations (RPOs) "...as a counterpart to the existing Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)...." A one-year study was authorized to determine how RPOs could be developed in North Carolina. With the completion of the study, a unanimous consensus emerged that RPOs should be formed to provide a cooperative unified voice for rural entities to advocate for their funding and project needs, and to be meaningfully involved in an integrated comprehensive transportation planning, programming and project development process. The study suggested that formation of RPOs should be voluntary, not mandated, and encouraged by incentives within general guidelines, and that the RPOs should serve in an advisory role rather than decision-making.

Senate Bill 1195 (Ratified as GS 136-210-213)

In July 2000, Senate Bill 1195 became part of Article 17 General Statute 136-210 through 213. It charged NCDOT with developing a plan to establish RPOs as a counterpart to the existing MPOs. The purpose of the RPOs are to work cooperatively with the Department to plan rural transportation systems in the areas outside of MPOs and to advise the Department on rural transportation policy.

The duties of the RPOs shall include, but not be limited to:

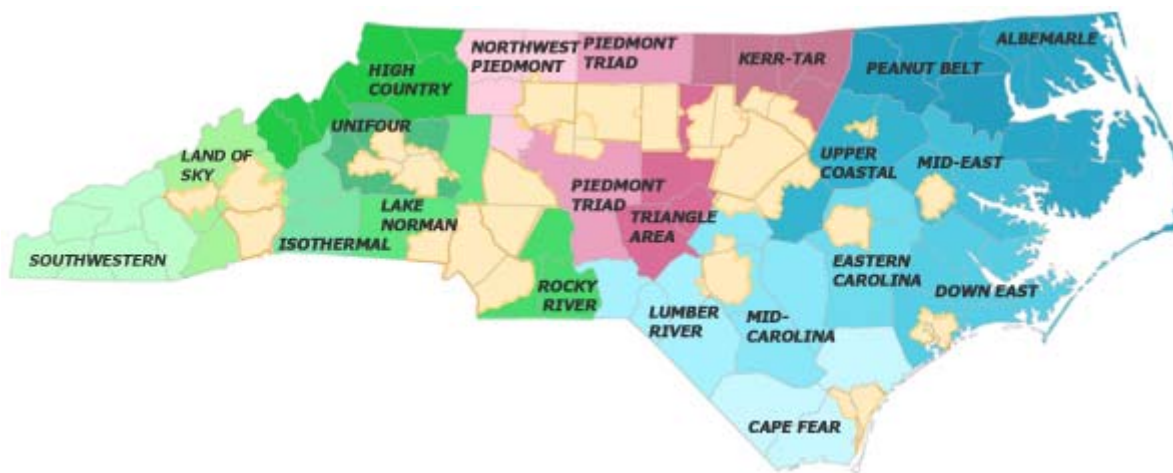
1. Developing, in cooperation with the Department, long range local and regional multi-modal transportation plans.
2. Providing a forum for public participation in the transportation planning process.
3. Developing and prioritizing suggestions for transportation projects the organization believes should be included in the State's TIP.
4. Providing transportation related information to local governments and other interested organizations and persons.

What Makes an RPO

As a minimum, RPOs must consist of a minimum of three contiguous counties and have at least 50,000 population according to Office of State Planning. MPO areas shall not be included, and not all municipalities in an RPO must join the organization, however, each county must be a member of the RPO.

By the end 2001, DOT had chartered six RPOs. The remaining 14 RPOs were chartered in 2002 and 2003.

<i>Year 2001</i>	<i>Year 2002</i>	<i>Year 2003</i>
Mid Carolina RPO	Isothermal RPO	Land-of-Sky RPO
Unifour RPO	High Country RPO	
Cape Fear RPO	Lake Norman RPO	
Kerr-Tar RPO	Upper Coastal Plain RPO	
Albemarle RPO	Rocky River RPO	
Southwestern RPO	Piedmont Triad RPO	
	Triangle Area RPO	
	Mid-East RPO	
	Peanut Belt RPO	
	Lumber River RPO	
	Northwest Piedmont RPO	
	Eastern Carolina RPO	
	Down East RPO	



RPO Organizational Structure

RPOs typically include three bodies: a Rural Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC), a Rural Technical Coordinating Committee (RTCC), and a Lead Planning Agency (LPA).

RTAC

The RTAC is made up of elected and appointed local, state and/or federal officials and is the policy and decision making body of the RPO. The committee's responsibilities include but are not limited to: establishing of goals, priorities and objectives in the planning process; reviewing and recommending changes to adopted transportation plans; reviewing and adopting a prospectus and a work program for the transportation planning process; and reviewing and recommending suggestions for TIP projects.

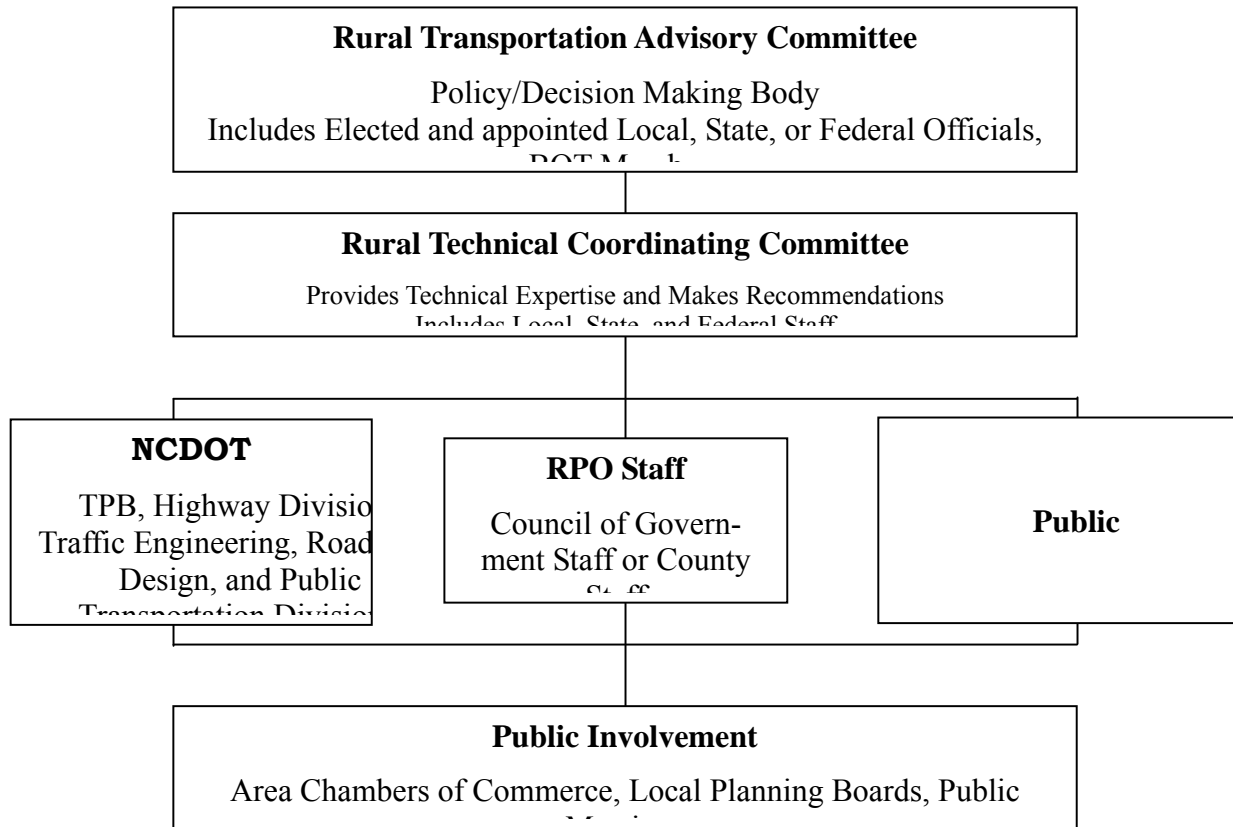
RTCC

The RTCC is made up of local, state and federal staff which includes counties and municipalities (managers, planners, transit staff), NCDOT, county economic development organizations, and Federal Highway Administration. The RTCC provides technical expertise and is responsible for making recommendations to the RTAC for approval. The RTCC is responsible for development, review, and recommendation for approval of the following items: Prospectus for Transportation Planning, the Planning Work Program (PWP), and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). In addition, the RTCC is responsible for general review, guidance, and coordination of the transportation planning process and making recommendations as necessary in the planning process.

LPA

The LPA, selected by the RPO, with concurrence from NCDOT, is the administrative entity of the RPO. The LPA is the staff of the RPO and is a member of the RTCC of the RPO. The LPA receives funds on behalf of the RPO, coordinates transportation and land use plans and policies, serves as a liaison between NCDOT and the RPO, and assists in the development of Comprehensive Transportation Plans (CTP) in their areas.

RPO Organizational Structure



Benefits of a Rural Planning Organization

Over the past four years, RPOs have evolved and adapted to the needs of the area that they serve. A key benefit is that RPOs serve as a link to an ongoing relationship with NCDOT. The RPOs have made many inroads with the Department, not only with the Transportation Planning Branch, but with other units such as the Public Transportation Division, the Project Development and Environmental Analysis Branch, the Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation, and the Programming and TIP Branch. The RPOs are also working with the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Unit to coordinate data sharing and collection. NCDOT Division Offices are involved with the RPOs and regularly attend TCC and TAC meetings. At these meetings, the Division Office usually gives an update on projects that are in the RPO and field any questions that the committees have regarding transportation issues. The Division staff attending these meetings has helped build a stronger relationship with the RPOs. Other Branches within the Department have used the RPOs as forum to give presentations and disseminate information.

Public involvement is an important component of the RPOs work plan. All twenty RPOs have adopted a public involvement plan to help the Department and the RPOs encourage citizens to participate in the transportation planning process. These plans lay out the how, what and when public involvement is needed. The Department has utilized the RPOs in getting citizens involved in several projects across the State. As part of this partnership, the Department and the RPOs have worked to develop the Rural Consultation process that was required by TEA-21. The process helped outline the techniques the Department will use when working with rural elected officials and citizens in developing common goals and objectives for rural North Carolina. The process allows for rural communities to present a unified voice in transportation decision making process for the TIP, CTPs, and project development, through the RPOs. RPOs serve as a conduit by providing information to their constituencies regarding transportation issues in their area. SAFETEA-LU has reinforced many of the requirements of TEA-21

Since the initiation of the RPO program, the RPOs have provided a number of services that have aided the Department in both project planning and project development. These include the prioritization of projects for the TIP, prioritization of CTP studies, public and elected officials' education. Many of these activities have brought both national and local recognition for the program. In these efforts, the RPOs have saved the Department time and resources by reducing the number of requests and complaints. The RPOs, by providing services, have gained a positive reputation for helping rural North Carolina in planning its transportation future and providing another voice for NCDOT in the rural areas. Other initiatives where the RPOs have been able to assist the Department include:

Review, coordinate and endorse CMAQ Projects

The RPOs worked with local planners and officials in determining CMAQ (Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality) eligible projects. This eliminated time and effort for NCDOT staff and made for a better process. RPOs continue to work with the Department on CMAQ projects and serve in an endorsement role.

Participation in the NEPA/Merger 01 process

Several RPOs have begun actively participating in NEPA/Merger'01 process. Allowing them to serve in an advisory role on the merger teams has brought better input from their areas. This has also given the RPOs an opportunity to gain more support in their local communities for NCDOT projects. Another positive is the relationship that is being built between the RPOs and the environmental resource agencies. These relationships improve the planning process for transportation projects by creating trust and a collaborative working relationship on NEPA documents.

Integration Project

An ongoing environmental streamlining project is underway to integrate the transportation planning and project development processes. Its purpose is to define those products of the planning process that can be used in the project development process and to determine how best to link them. The RPOs have played an important role in this project and it has led to a stronger understanding of the overall planning process.

Assisting PTD in consolidation of rural public transportation systems

In an effort to reduce the number of transit providers in North Carolina, the RPOs were given GIS grants (up to \$16,000) to assist PTD in putting together data to support the consolidation of rural transit systems. The RPOs used these grants to develop better GIS systems that could be utilized to show existing transit routes and providers. This effort has provided information to the local transit providers and was used to show overlaps and deficiencies in the regional transit systems. This initiative has begun a dialogue among the transit authorities on how to consolidate their efforts in order to achieve seamless public transportation systems and better serve their communities. This has helped in a few areas, like Kerr-Tarr, Unifour, Eastern Carolina, and Mid-East RPOs, by providing data and information that is leading to consolidation and a better transit systems, and connecting riders and systems together throughout a region.

Development of the MPO/RPO collaboration process

Over the past couple of years, the Department has led an effort with our planning partners to develop a seamless transportation planning system in the state of North Carolina. NCDOT, the RPOs and the MPOs have been working on the development of a collaborative process that identifies common goals that will result in an improved transportation system for the citizens of the state. The final report (*Achieving a Seamless Transportation System for North Carolina: A Framework for*

Collaboration) was developed in fall of 2005 and presented at the 2005 MPO conference. It outlined six goals for 2006:

1. Charting Current and Future Collaboration
2. Training for Partners
3. Educate New Officials
4. Boundary Issue Discussions
5. Clear, consistent
6. Coordination and Sharing of Data

Coordination with the Safe Routes to School Coordinator

The Safe Routes to School Program is a new initiative by FHWA. The Department has identified *Safe Routes to School Coordinator*, which has been coordinating with the RPOs. As part of this coordination, a presentation was made to the RPOs in June 2006. The goal was to get the RPOs on board and to assist this program to get started. Since that time, the coordinator has met with several RPOs individually to discuss the program in more details.

The RPOs will be a key player in this effort, representing rural and small urban areas in looking at ways to coordinate with local schools in this initiative.

Review and Endorse Enhancement Projects

Over the past year, the Enhancement Unit has been looking into means to involve RPOs in new ways that could help save the Department resources and efforts in the program. The Enhancement Unit has asked RPOs to assist in the screening process for projects and in the development of new projects. This will help identify better, more implementable projects.

The RPOs' mission in this task will be to review, assess, assist, and endorse these projects prior to submission to the Enhancement Unit. This process will eliminate the committee and staff from requesting additional information and cut down on inaccuracies.

The Enhancement Unit will find numerous benefits from this process and more projects will be completed in a timely manner.

Bike and Pedestrian Plans

Since 2004, the RPOs have been working with the Bike and Pedestrian Planning Division of NCDOT to develop bike and pedestrian plans for communities across the state. This has enhanced the Bike and Pedestrian Division by allowing locals to work with RPOs to develop Bike and Pedestrian Plans that communities feel are important to their citizens.

Thus far, several plans have been completed across the state that have given the communities and opportunity to consider alternative modes of transportation. In the future, these plans can be used by the local governments and the Department to

better plan for these types of facilities when considering other major projects that could include schools, parks, community centers, and other infrastructure.

Funding

RPOs currently receive their funding from the Highway Trust Fund Administration Account. The Secretary approved these funds for a five-year period beginning in FY 2002, and they allow for a three- percent increase each year. Unlike the MPOs, no federal funding currently exists for the RPOs. The yearly grant for each RPO is estimated to be between \$90,000 and \$112,000, depending on the number of counties and the population within each RPO. The total budgeted amount for the twenty RPOs for FY 2007 is \$1,942,958, with each RPO providing a 20% match. This level of funding is intended to be sufficient to provide one or two staff positions per RPO. In addition to the grants, NCDOT also provides assistance with the match for RPOs that contain Tier I or II counties.

RPO funds are also used to pay for NCDOT staff within the Transportation Planning Branch to support the RPOs. This provides for one staff person for every two RPOs. These funds also come from the Highway Trust Fund Admin account and total about \$175,000 annually.

Supplemental funding for the RPOs was provided in 2003 when the General Assembly provided an additional \$750,000 in grants to assist in the startup costs for any needed resources other than personnel. Each RPO submitted work plan requests for up to \$37,500 to provide planning services and equipment needed to perform their core functions. These funds were provided on an 80/20 split with the RPOs providing the \$9,375 in local match. These funds were used for wide variety of activities from buying GIS equipment and software to doing special studies that assisted the RPOs.

		FY					
		01-02	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07
RPO Grant	State	\$600,840	\$1,399,570	\$1,589,459	\$1,759,276	\$1,779,056*	\$1,942,958*
	Local Match	\$111,962	\$305,368	\$393,920	\$439,819	\$444,764 *	\$485,739*
	Tier I/II	\$65,000	\$62,500	\$60,000	\$65,000	\$65,000	\$65,000
GIS Grant	State			\$290,509			
	Local Match			\$72,627			
General Assembly Grant	State			\$502,073			
	Local Match			\$125,518			

* Estimated

Future Challenges

There are several ongoing issues that the RPOs are facing. These include:

Implementation of the RPO/MPO/NCDOT Collaboration Project

The MPO/RPO/NCDOT collaboration project will continue to be used to guide the development of an improved planning process. The RPOs, MPOs and TPB will continue to work to implement some of the findings from the report. These efforts by the RPOs are intended to provide a solid foundation for the Integration Project. As the Department moves forward with its integration project, the RPOs will be looked at to provide coordination between the Department and local areas. This could include getting local input on projects and plans that will affect local areas and a region. In many cases, the RPOs will provide the voice for the local communities and will work with the resource agencies and other NCDOT departments to improve projects. The RPOs will also become a clearinghouse for data and planning efforts in the regions and will assist in the development of Comprehensive Transportation Plans (CTP).

Merger '01

Over the next several years, the RPOs will need to become more engaged in the Merger '01 process. With this, comes the challenge of educating and informing their local partners. The RPOs will need to know their respective regions, not only environmentally, but also politically, because they will be representing these areas at the merger meetings. The RPOs will need to know their role and its impact to project planning and land use planning. This is important because it will determine facility types and their intended usage.

Public Participation

A major challenge for the RPOs is helping the Department with public participation, which is one of their core duties. In the future, the RPOs will be looked at as a way to get more and different people involved in the transportation planning process. The RPOs will need to explore different ways and techniques for engaging the public for both project development and planning. They will also be able to provide assistance to the Department in Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) and Community Impact Assessments (CIA) as more federal requirements are outlined in the future.

TIP Development

The RPOs' role in the TIP process is to make suggestions on transportation projects. In the future, the RPOs may be expected to play a stronger role in the development of priorities for the areas as a whole.

Disconnect between RPO Boundaries and Division Boundaries

Currently, RPO boundaries do not match NCDOT Division boundaries. This creates challenges for Division Engineers and BOT members as they try to participate effectively in the RPO process.

Coordination with ILT

The Interagency Leadership Team (ILT) has goals that will need RPOs' support as they seek to accomplish a better regional planning effort. The RPOs' role in this effort thus far has not been determined. However, the RPOs will be a critical part in the success of the ILT's goals. The role will need to be defined and appropriate training will need to be provided that will allow the RPOs to assist the local officials and citizens to buy in to the process.

Board of Transportation Recognition

An ongoing challenge is attendance of BOT members at the TAC meetings. The BOT member is a member of the TAC and helps determine the focus for the RPO. In the beginning, BOT Members were designated by the Secretary to represent the Department on these committees in regards to transportation issues. Attendance has spotty in the past. This has led to the inability of the RPOs to meet quorums for the RPO to discuss business. Also, since the BOT Member represents the Department at these meetings, their attendance is important. This creates the perception at the local level that the Department does not think the RPOs are a valued partner and further leads to local elected officials not participating in the RPO.

Training

Since the beginning, the Department has provided training for the RPOs and internal staff. However, in this constantly changing environment, there are always opportunities for improvement and advancement. The Department needs to look into ways to provide more training opportunities for internal staff, local planners and elected officials. Each year, the Department evaluates training needs for this program and tries to use scheduled meetings and other means to provide training and education. The TPB has compiled a list of future training needs from the surveying of our customers and internal staff. Also each year, TPB staff assesses the RPO program and the twenty individual RPOs' performances. This evaluation is used to help identify needed training. Also, this assessment is used by the RPOs to improve their future operations and make the RPO more efficient and productive to their customers and NCDOT.

Recommendations

The RPO is in its infancy and has accomplished several important initiatives for the State, the Department, and the Regions that they serve. This program has been nationally recognized and is a leader in the rural transportation efforts around the country. Other States and national organizations have noted or used the North Carolina RPO program as a model to set up their own programs.

There are many benefits of having a strong RPO planning program and it is recommended that the Department continue to support this program at its current funding level of \$2.25 million/year. This includes \$2.0 million for the RPO grants, \$65,000 for the Tier I/II local match assistance, and \$185,000 for NCDOT staff. By supporting this program in the future, the Department is meeting its obligation of rural consultation, while bridging the gap between rural interests and the Department.

Appendix B

Structured Interview Questions for the Rural Planning Organizations

1. For each major duty established by the state legislature, what broad tasks or activities does the RPO typically perform:
 - Duty #1: “Developing, in cooperation with NCDOT, long range local and regional multi-modal transportation plans”

 - Duty #2: “Providing a forum for public participation in the transportation planning process”

 - Duty #3: “Developing and prioritizing suggestions for transportation projects the organization believes should be included in the State's transportation plans”

 - Duty #4: “Providing transportation related information to local governments and other interested organizations and persons”

2. What does your RPO see as the most important tasks for your RPO?

3. Are there duties that your RPO has taken on that go beyond the four duties given by the state legislature?

If yes , what are they and why were they added?

4. Are there any problems / issues in your region that your RPO is not currently addressing that you think your RPO should work to address?

5. Undoubtedly, your RPO provides many benefits to your region. Are there services or benefits that your RPO provides that you believe are under-appreciated or unrecognized (i.e. People outside of the RPO do not realize that we do.....)?

6. Does your RPO have any existing measures or techniques that you use to determine whether or not your RPO is effective (including satisfaction measures)? If so, please provide a copy of the measure or a description of the the technique.

7. Does your RPO keep track of any of the following:
 - ▣ Track the number of people who attend public meetings?
 - ▣ Track the number and type of questions people ask at public meetings?
 - ▣ Track the number of requests for information the RPO receives
 - ▣ Track the number & content of feedback the RPO receives

Do you think it would be useful to track this information?

8. Can you think of similar kinds of measures of RPO activities that could be easily tracked?
9. What changes / improvements would you expect to see in your region as a result of your RPO operations in 5 years? 10 years?
 - Looking here for any number of changes
 - ▣ physical changes: more road construction projects, environmental improvements
 - ▣ economic changes: more jobs, more commercial development / economic activity
 - ▣ other quantitative changes: fewer traffic fatalities; etc.
 - ▣ qualitative changes: increased satisfaction with NCDOT
10. Can you think of any ways to objectively measure long-term changes / improvements in your region caused by RPO activities?
11. What kinds of supports do you feel you receive from NCDOT (other than funding)?
12. Are the supports that RPOs are provided from NCDOT effective or useful?
13. What kinds of supports do you feel you receive from other groups or organizations (other than funding)?
14. Are those supports effective or useful?
15. What supports (other than funding) do you need that you (RPOs) are not currently receiving?
16. What are the obstacles to success that your RPO faces?
 - For example, do you feel any of the following are obstacles?:
 - ▣ Funding?
 - ▣ Lack of support [if so, from whom]?
 - ▣ In-fighting? [lack of group cohesion]
 - ▣ lack of participation (from who?)
 - ▣ lack of training in how to do what we need to do
 - ▣ lack of specific skills (i.e. GIS, web-building, etc.)
 - ▣ Other obstacles?
17. What do you think your RPO does best?
18. Are there particular activities or projects that your RPO has engaged in (or is currently engaged in) that you believe could serve as a model to the other RPOs?

19. One issue that is important for us to measure is customer satisfaction with the RPOs. What groups, specifically, do you see as your customers? In other words, if we were going to send questionnaires to determine satisfaction with RPOs – who should we send the questionnaires to?
20. Do you believe it would be useful to conduct regular RPO satisfaction surveys with the general public in your region?
21. Who (what groups or individuals) does your RPO typically interact with?
22. If you were designing the performance measures for the RPOs, what would you make certain that it included?
23. How would you characterize or describe the effectiveness of your RPO?
Choices:
- very effective in everything we do
 - effective in most things that we do
 - effective in the core tasks – but not beyond
 - effective in some areas – not so in others
- 23(b) Describe the area(s) in which your RPO is doing an effective job.
24. My RPO needs assistance in _____ area(s). Please describe. _____

Appendix C

RPO Baseline Measure Sample

The two RPOs below were selected to illustrate the differences between the RPO regions. The Northwest Piedmont RPO borders a MPO and is located in a growing area of the state. The Peanut Belt RPO does not border a MPO and is located in a region that is, for the most part, losing population. As a result of these differences, expectations for the number and types of activities of these RPOs will differ.

Measure	Northwest Piedmont RPO	Peanut Belt RPO
Land area of region (in square miles)	1589.09	2314.29
Persons Per Square Mile, 2000	117.8	53.15
Population (percent change), by county	Davie County: 14.9% Stokes County: 3.3% Surry County: 2.0% Yadkin County: 4.7% Growth in 4 of 4 counties	Bertie County: -3.4% Halifax County: -3.2% Hertford County: 2.6% Northampton County: -3.8% Growth in 1 of 4 counties
Number of Counties	Four: Davie, Stokes, Surry, and Yadkin	Four: Hertford, Northampton, Bertie, Halifax
Number of Incorporated Towns in Region	14	30
Borders a MPO?	Yes	No

Appendix D

Activity Assessment / Deliverables Inventory Checklist

The Checklist catalogs the common activities of the various RPOs and accompanies the narrative annual report. Users (each RPO) would check (√) the activities they have completed or performed during the previous year. The activities themselves should be described in more detail in the narrative annual report. For each activity, it is expected that the RPO would have some deliverable or evidence for that activity (i.e. Minutes from a meeting; certificate of training, copy of the report, etc.).

The Checklist covers 36 categories and approximately 150 specific activities.

CTP and Other Planning Related Activities		
<p>CTP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Began ● Continued ● Completed <p>[Note the county or region]</p> <p>Priority Needs List</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · # Began · # Revised · # Developed <p>[Note the regions]</p>	<p>Types of CTP Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Data gathering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ highway plan capacity review analysis ○ crash rate analysis ○ highway functional classification analysis ● Information distribution ● Coordinated public involvement ● Advertising activities ● Distribution of draft copies ● Distribution of final copies ● Facilitating local adoption <p>CTP Support: Comprehensive Land Use Plans</p> <p>Participation in the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review of ● Development of ● Revision of <p>[Note the county or counties]</p>	<p>Status of Transportation Plans (II-A-2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developed inventory of current transportation plans in region ● Revised inventory of current transportation plans in region ● Created a digital thoroughfare map ● Revised a digital thoroughfare map

L RTP and Related Activities		
<p>L RTP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Coordinated with # agencies on elements of the L RTP. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specify agencies ● Coordinated / developed projects in the following areas of the L RTP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ highway ○ transit ○ bicycle/pedestrian ○ airport/air travel ○ capacity / deficiency analysis ○ rail, or other mode ○ air quality planning / conformity ○ congestion management strategies ○ collector street element 	<p>Air Quality Planning / Conformity Analysis (II-B-17)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developed an Air Quality Non-Attainment Plan ● Revised an Air Quality Non-Attainment Plan ● Participated in an Air Quality Non-Attainment Plan ● Developed # project(s) for CMAQ funding ● Assisted in # implementation of CMAQ / SIP project(s) ● Assisted NCDENR in developing mobile source emission inventories ● Assisted NCDENR in maintaining mobile source emission inventories ● Assisted in planning for SIP ● Participated in # activities as part of SIP ● Participated in # SICM Conference calls 	<p>Collection of Network Data (II-B-2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collected the following data for travel model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ speed limit ○ width/lanes ○ segment length ○ traffic signal locations ○ other ● Collected data for travel model in # areas

<p>Community Goals and Objectives (II-B-5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developed method to assess community goals and objectives ● Conducted assessment of community goals and objectives 		
<p>Surveillance of Inventory Data</p>		
<p>Traffic Volume Counts (II-A-1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conducted # traffic counts on # roads. ● Identified and requested # new traffic count locations ● Developed # new ADT maps ● Revised existing set of ADT maps ● Provided count data to # public officials / groups ● Provided count data to # NCDOT ● Provided count data to # other agencies 	<p>Street System Inventory (II-A-3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developed inventory of current street system ● Revised inventory of current street system ● Coordinated with NCDOT to map # state-maintained roads ● Coordinated with NCDOT to revise inventory of # roads 	<p>Traffic Accidents (II-A-4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Requested accident data for # local governments concerning # roads ● Generated # accident reports/presentations for RTAC / RTCC. ● Established criteria for digital data layers related to crash analysis in # areas ● Maintained / revised digital data layers related to crash analysis in # areas ● Worked with # local governments on accident data interpretation

<p>Transit System Data (II-A-5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Coordinated with local transportation agencies to CREATE inventory of transit services in # regions ● Coordinated with local transportation agencies to REVISE inventory of transit services in # regions ● Analyzed # regional transit services to determine potential expansion ● Collected transit-related data on # regions for customers ● Analyzed transit-related data on # regions for customers 	<p>Dwelling Unit, Population, and Employment Changes (II-A-6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developed database of relevant data for the region ● Revised / updated database of data for the region ● Generated # reports on changes in the region ● Provided reports to following outside agencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ specify 	
Project Development		
<p>Project Development: Grants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Worked on # grant proposal(s). · Submitted # grant proposal(s). · Received funding for # grant proposal(s). Amount of funding? · Conducted information workshop on grant development · Provided information on grant development 	<p>Project Development: Products</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developed # products for use by customers ● Updated # products for use by customers ● Significantly revised # products for use by customers <p>[would describe the products in the narrative]</p>	<p>Project Development: Pedestrian / Bicycle Plans and Inventory (II-A-11, II-B-10)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Development of # pedestrian plans · Revised # existing pedestrian plans · Conducted # sidewalk survey(s) in # areas · Developed # bike / pedestrian route map(s) in # areas · Revised # bike / pedestrian route map(s) in # areas

<p>Special Projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Describe: <hr style="width: 80%; margin-left: 20px;"/> <p style="text-align: center;">-</p>	<p>Special Projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Describe: <hr style="width: 80%; margin-left: 20px;"/> <p style="text-align: center;">-</p>	<p>Special Projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Describe: <hr style="width: 80%; margin-left: 20px;"/> <p style="text-align: center;">-</p>
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Civil Rights and Other Regulatory Requirements

<p>Civil Rights Compliance (III-C-1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Coordinated with NCDOT to develop Civil Rights statistics report to FTA ● Coordinated with NCDOT to revise / update Civil Rights statistics report to FTA 	<p>Environmental Justice (III-C-2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attended # training sessions concerning environmental justice ● Conducted # training / informational sessions concerning environmental justice ● Developed database of information concerning environmental justice in the region ● Revised database of information concerning environmental justice in the region ● Generated # reports concerning environmental justice 	<p>Other Areas of Civil Rights Compliance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Coordinated with # agencies on elements of civil rights compliance ● Coordinated / developed projects in the following areas of civil rights compliance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Indirect and cumulative impact analysis ○ Minority business enterprise planning ○ Planning for the Elderly and Disabled ○ Public involvement ○ Private sector participation
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Outreach Activities

<p>Website</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · created · updated · significantly revised 	<p>Newsletter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Created and distributed a newsletter (new): Schedule for release? (monthly, quarterly, etc.) · Distributed regular newsletter · Distributed a significantly redesigned newsletter 	<p>Types of outreach activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Creating awareness of RPO · Shopping of new or enhanced service · Meeting about town / counties needs or concerns
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<p>Outreach activity (not part of regularly scheduled meetings, etc.):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · met with ___ (#) of town officials · met with ___ (#) of county officials · met with ___ (#) of MPO officials <p>[# should indicate towns or organizations, not headcount]</p>	<p>Public Comment / Informational Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · # attended · # participated · # presented · # organized <p>[count all such meetings, including CTP & special project meetings]</p>	<p>Media outreach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Distributed transportation-related information to media outlets (do not include advertising of public meetings) · Advertised public meetings through media outlets · Responded to inquiries for transportation-related information from media outlets
<p>Communication, Problem Solving, and Collaboration</p>		
<p>Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Collaborated with a MPO on a project(s) · Collaborated with another RPO on a project(s) · Collaborated with NCDOT on a project(s) · Collaborated with other government agency on a project(s) · Facilitated collaboration between towns and/or between agencies <p>Inquiries from Towns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Directed officials to source for help · Provided requested data · Acted as go-between for town with NCDOT headquarters · Acted as go-between for town with NCDOT Division Office 	<p>Contact Lists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · For General Public <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · developed, updated/revised · Of County/Town Officials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · developed, updated/revised · Of NCDOT Officials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · developed, updated/revised · Other _____ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · developed, updated/revised <p>State and National Conferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Attended · Participated · Presented · Organized · Hosted <p>[for each, indicate # and whether state or national]</p>	<p>Inquiries from NCDOT Division Office</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Directed officials to source for help · Provided requested data · Acted as go-between for NCDOT Division office with town

RPO System Enhancement		
<p>NCARPO Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● attended ● participated ● presented ● organized ● hosted 	<p>NCAMPO Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● attended ● participated ● presented ● organized ● hosted 	<p>Other Professional Association Meeting(s) (specify):</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● attended ● participated ● presented ● organized ● incorporated ideas from
<p>Training and Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attended # training session(s) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ provider and type ● Conducted # training session ● Developed # training materials ● Revised training materials 	<p>RPO Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of resolutions adopted ● # of plans endorsed ● # of grant applications endorsed 	
Other Activities		
<p>Other Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Describe: _____ 	<p>Other Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Describe: _____ 	<p>Other Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Describe: _____

Appendix E

RPO Self-Assessment Questionnaire

The RPO Self-Assessment Questionnaire consists of 35 items. It is intended to be completed by the RPO Coordinator.

Effectiveness of your RPO				
1. How would <u>YOU</u> characterize or describe the effectiveness of your RPO?				
(1) Our RPO needs assistance in meeting our core tasks	(2) Effective in some of the core tasks – not so in others	(3) Effective in the core tasks – but not beyond	(4) Effective in the core tasks and in many of the things we do beyond the core tasks	(5) We have gone well beyond the core tasks and are very effective in everything we do.
2. How do you believe your <u>RTCC and RTAC</u> would characterize or describe the effectiveness of your RPO?				
(1) Our RPO needs assistance in meeting our core tasks	(2) Effective in some of the core tasks – not so in others	(3) Effective in the core tasks – but not beyond	(4) Effective in the core tasks and in many of the things we do beyond the core tasks	(5) We have gone well beyond the core tasks and are very effective in everything we do.
3. How do you believe the <u>majority of the Towns and Counties</u> in your region would characterize or describe the effectiveness of your RPO?				
(1) Our RPO needs assistance in meeting our core tasks	(2) Effective in some of the core tasks – not so in others	(3) Effective in the core tasks – but not beyond	(4) Effective in the core tasks and in many of the things we do beyond the core tasks	(5) We have gone well beyond the core tasks and are very effective in everything we do.
4. How do you believe the <u>NCDOT/Transportation Planning Branch</u> would characterize or describe the effectiveness of your RPO?				
(1) Our RPO needs assistance in meeting our core tasks	(2) Effective in some of the core tasks – not so in others	(3) Effective in the core tasks – but not beyond	(4) Effective in the core tasks and in many of the things we do beyond the core tasks	(5) We have gone well beyond the core tasks and are very effective in everything we do.
5. How do you believe the <u>majority of the NCDOT Branches and Divisions</u> (not including the TPB) you typically interact with would characterize or describe the effectiveness of your RPO?				
(1) Our RPO needs assistance in meeting our core tasks	(2) Effective in some of the core tasks – not so in others	(3) Effective in the core tasks – but not beyond	(4) Effective in the core tasks and in many of the things we do beyond the core tasks	(5) We have gone well beyond the core tasks and are very effective in everything we do.
Commitment to the role of RPOs in the Transportation Planning Process				
6. My RPO's Lead Planning Agency is committed to the role of RPOs in the transportation planning process.				

	1 – not at all, they largely do not feel RPOs are useful	2 – they are somewhat committed to the role of RPOs, but offer little actual support and often ignore the RPO in practice	3 – they are generally committed to the role of RPOs, they offer some support but do not always work through the RPO	4 – they are fully committed to the role of RPOs; offering much support; almost always working through the RPO	
7. My RPO's RTCC and RTAC members are committed to the role of RPOs in the transportation planning process.					
	1 – not at all, they largely do not feel RPOs are useful	2 – they are somewhat committed to the role of RPOs, but offer little actual support and often ignore the RPO in practice	3 – they are generally committed to the role of RPOs, they offer some support but do not always work through the RPO	4 – they are fully committed to the role of RPOs; offering much support; almost always working through the RPO	
8. I believe the NCDOT Transportation Planning Branch is committed to the role of RPO's in the transportation planning process.					
	1 – not at all, they largely do not feel RPOs are useful	2 – they are somewhat committed to the role of RPOs, but offer little actual support and often ignore the RPO in practice	3 – they are generally committed to the role of RPOs, they offer some support but do not always work through the RPO	4 – they are fully committed to the role of RPOs; offering much support; almost always working through the RPO	
9. I believe the majority of the NCDOT Branches and Divisions are committed to the role of RPO's in the transportation planning process.					
	1 – not at all, they largely do not feel RPOs are useful	2 – they are somewhat committed to the role of RPOs, but offer little actual support and often ignore the RPO in practice	3 – they are generally committed to the role of RPOs, they offer some support but do not always work through the RPO	4 – they are fully committed to the role of RPOs; offering much support; almost always working through the RPO	
Relationship with Partners					
10. My RPO has a good working relationship with our Lead Planning Agency.					
	1 – Not at all	2	3	4 – Very Much	

11. My RPO has a good working relationship with our RTCC and RTAC.					
	1 – Not at all	2	3	4 – Very Much	
12. My RPO has a good working relationship with the towns and counties in my region.					
	1 – Not at all	2	3	4 – Very Much	
13. The towns and counties within my RPO's region try to be involved in the transportation consultation process.					
	1 – Not at all	2	3	4 – Very Much	
14. The TPB RPO Coordinators provide clear and consistent support and guidance to my RPO.					
	1 – Not at all	2	3	4 – Very Much	
15. I find it easy to have my questions and concerns answered by the RPO Coordinators and other TPB officials.					
	1 – Not at all	2	3	4 – Very Much	
Evaluation of the Partnership between Your RPO and the NCDOT/TPB					
Commitment					
16. NCDOT/TPB has provided sufficient financial and staff resources to support the non-metropolitan local consultation process.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
17. Through the RPO process, NCDOT is open to considering and using local input in the decision-making process for transportation planning, project selection, and the development of projects, programs, and policies.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
18. Support for the process from NCDOT, TPB, and local officials continues to grow and/or remains strong over time.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
Participation					
19. A large majority of key local officials have attended meetings related to the local consultation process.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
20. A large majority of key local officials have received information or provided meaningful input to NCDOT, either directly or through the RPO or the appropriate chief executive officer of the local government or agency.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
21. Input received from local officials has been constructive and helpful to NCDOT's decision-making process.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
Education					

22. Through training, state and local staff members have become well-informed and more technically competent to better carry out the local consultation process.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
23. Through educational programs and information-sharing, most local officials have become well-informed about the RPO process, state transportation decision-making process, transportation programs, and related policies.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
24. The education program has resulted in better local input that is more useful to NCDOT and other key state decision-makers.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
Communication				
25. NCDOT provides timely responses to any input received, which indicates what actions are taken in response to the input and why those actions were taken.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
26. Lines of communication are open, and this has helped encourage or sustain active and positive participation by local officials in the process.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
Outcomes				
27. The NCDOT statewide transportation planning process gives serious consideration to all input received through the RPO process on project identification and prioritization.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
28. Input from the RPO process is successful in identifying almost all needs in the non-metropolitan areas of the state, so that previously unknown, genuine needs identified through the legislative or executive decision-making process, or from other sources, are rare.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
29. NCDOT considers all input from the RPO process in making decisions on project selection and programming.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
30. NCDOT also gives consideration to input from local officials regarding improvements in or the need for transportation programs or policies.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
Summary Comments				

31. What major obstacles to your RPO's mission did you encounter this year, as it relates to the areas discussed above?
Comments:
32. What is the ONE major accomplishment this year that you are most proud of?
Comments:
33. Based upon your experiences the past year and your expectations for the future, what kinds of training do you believe would be helpful to YOU in the coming year?
Comments:
34. What suggestions for improvements to the RPO process would you like to offer?
Comments:

Appendix F

TPB: Customer Experience Questionnaire

The TPB: Customer Experience Questionnaire is intended to be completed by the head of the RPO program, the Transportation Planning Branch RPO Coordinators and Senior RPO Coordinator. The questionnaire consists of 104 total items, but only 28 unique ones. Four of the questions are asked for each of the twenty RPOs.

RPO	Effectiveness of the Rural Planning Organizations					
	(1) The RPO needs assistance in meeting their core tasks	(2) Effective in some of the core tasks – not so in others	(3) Effective in the core tasks – but not beyond	(4) Effective in the core tasks and in many of the things they do beyond the core tasks	(5) They have gone well beyond the core tasks and are very effective in everything they do.	(0) Not enough information to decide
Albemarle						
Peanut Belt	1	2	3	4	5	0
Mid-East	1	2	3	4	5	0
Down East	1	2	3	4	5	0
Upper Coastal Plain	1	2	3	4	5	0
Eastern Carolina	1	2	3	4	5	0
Mid-Carolina	1	2	3	4	5	0
Cape Fear	1	2	3	4	5	0
Kerr-Tar	1	2	3	4	5	0
Piedmont Triad	1	2	3	4	5	0
Triangle Area	1	2	3	4	5	0
Lumber River	1	2	3	4	5	0
Rocky River	1	2	3	4	5	0
Northwest Piedmont	1	2	3	4	5	0
High Country	1	2	3	4	5	0
Unifour	1	2	3	4	5	0
Lake Norman	1	2	3	4	5	0
Isothermal	1	2	3	4	5	0
Land of Sky	1	2	3	4	5	0
Southwestern	1	2	3	4	5	0

RPO	How frequently have you interacted with each of the following RPOs in the past year?				Circle the types of interactions you have had with each RPO in the past year [circle all that apply]				Indicate how often in the past year you have used deliverables from each of the RPOs			
	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisor y	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No
Albemarle	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisor y	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No
Peanut Belt	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisor y	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No
Mid-East	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisor y	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No
Down East	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisor y	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No
Upper Coastal Plain	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisor y	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No
Eastern Carolina	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisor y	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No
Mid-Carolina	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisor y	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No
Cape Fear	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisor y	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No
Kerr-Tar	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisor y	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No
Piedmont Triad	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisor y	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No
Triangle Area	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisor y	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No
Lumber River	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisor y	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No
Rocky River	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisor y	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No

Northwest Piedmont	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisory	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No Don't Know
High Country	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisory	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No Don't Know
Unifour	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisory	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No Don't Know
Lake Norman	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisory	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No Don't Know
Isothermal	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisory	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No Don't Know
Land of Sky	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisory	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No Don't Know
Southwestern	12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	Supervisory	Project related	Data gathering	Q & A	Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	No Don't Know

Commitment to the role of RPOs in the Transportation Planning Process						
1. The majority of the Lead Planning Agencies are committed to the role of RPOs in the transportation planning process.						
	1 – not at all, they largely do not feel RPOs are useful	2 – they are somewhat committed to the role of RPOs, but offer little actual support and often ignore the RPO in practice	3 – they are generally committed to the role of RPOs, they offer some support but do not always work through the RPO	4 – they are fully committed to the role of RPOs; offering much support; almost always working through the RPO		
2. I believe the NCDOT Transportation Planning Branch is committed to the role of RPO's in the transportation planning process.						

	1 – not at all, they largely do not feel RPOs are useful	2 – they are somewhat committed to the role of RPOs, but offer little actual support and often ignore the RPO in practice	3 – they are generally committed to the role of RPOs, they offer some support but do not always work through the RPO	4 – they are fully committed to the role of RPOs; offering much support; almost always working through the RPO	
3. I believe the majority of the NCDOT Branches and Divisions are committed to the role of RPO's in the transportation planning process.					
	1 – not at all, they largely do not feel RPOs are useful	2 – they are somewhat committed to the role of RPOs, but offer little actual support and often ignore the RPO in practice	3 – they are generally committed to the role of RPOs, they offer some support but do not always work through the RPO	4 – they are fully committed to the role of RPOs; offering much support; almost always working through the RPO	
Relationship with Partners					
4. The TPB RPO Coordinators provide clear and consistent support and guidance to my RPO.					
	1 – Not at all	2	3	4 – Very Much	
5. The RPO Coordinators and other TPB officials quickly and easily answer any questions and concerns raised by the RPOs.					
	1 – Not at all	2	3	4 – Very Much	
Evaluation of the Partnership between Your RPO and the NCDOT/TPB					
Commitment					
6. NCDOT/TPB has provided sufficient financial and staff resources to support the non-metropolitan local consultation process.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
7. Through the RPO process, NCDOT is open to considering and using local input in the decision-making process for transportation planning, project selection, and the development of projects, programs, and policies.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
8. Support for the process from NCDOT, TPB, and local officials continues to grow and/or remains strong over time.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
Participation					
9. Across the different RPOs, a large majority of key local officials have attended meetings related to the local consultation process.					

	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
10. A large majority of key local officials have received information or provided meaningful input to NCDOT, either directly or through the RPO or the appropriate chief executive officer of the local government or agency.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
11. Input received from local officials has been constructive and helpful to NCDOT's decision-making process.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
Education					
12. Through training, state and local staff members have become well-informed and more technically competent to better carry out the local consultation process.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
13. Through educational programs and information-sharing, most local officials have become well-informed about the RPO process, state transportation decision-making process, transportation programs, and related policies.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
14. The education program has resulted in better local input that is more useful to NCDOT and other key state decision-makers.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
Communication					
15. NCDOT provides timely responses to any input received, which indicates what actions are taken in response to the input and why those actions were taken.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
16. Lines of communication are open, and this has helped encourage or sustain active and positive participation by local officials in the process.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
Outcomes					
17. The NCDOT statewide transportation planning process gives serious consideration to all input received through the RPO process on project identification and prioritization.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
18. Input from the RPO process is successful in identifying almost all needs in the non-metropolitan areas of the state, so that previously unknown, genuine needs identified through the legislative or executive decision-making process, or from other sources, are rare.					

	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
19. NCDOT considers all input from the RPO process in making decisions on project selection and programming.				
20. NCDOT also gives consideration to input from local officials regarding improvements in or the need for transportation programs or policies.				
Summary Comments				
21. What major obstacles to the RPO mission did you encounter this year, as it relates to the areas discussed above?				
Comments:				
22. What is the ONE major RPO-related accomplishment this year that you are most proud of?				
Comments:				
23. Based upon your experiences in the past year and your expectations for the future, what kinds of training do you believe would be helpful to YOU or the RPOs in the coming year?				
Comments:				
24. What suggestions for improvements to the RPO process would you like to offer?				
Comments:				

Appendix G

RTAC / RTCC: Customer Experience Questionnaire

The RTAC / RTCC: Customer Experience Questionnaire is intended to be completed by the individual committee members, but not as a committee. According to the NCDOT document shown in Appendix A: “The RTAC is made up of elected and appointed local, state and/or federal officials and is the policy and decision making body of the RPO. The RTCC is made up of local, state and federal staff which includes counties and municipalities (managers, planners, transit staff), NCDOT, county economic development organizations, and Federal Highway Administration.” There are 36 items on this measure.

Basic Information						
1. Name of RPO:						
2. I am a member of the: RTAC RTCC						
3. What position do you hold (elected official, county planner, etc.) that qualifies you for inclusion on the RTAC or RTCC?						
Effectiveness of your RPO						
4. How would YOU characterize or describe the effectiveness of your RPO?						
(1) The RPO needs assistance in meeting their core tasks	(2) Effective in some of the core tasks – not so in others	(3) Effective in the core tasks – but not beyond	(4) Effective in the core tasks and in many of the things they do beyond the core tasks	(5) They have gone well beyond the core tasks and are very effective in everything they do.		
5. How do you believe the other members of the RTAC and RTCC will describe the effectiveness of your RPO?						
(1) The RPO needs assistance in meeting their core tasks	(2) Effective in some of the core tasks – not so in others	(3) Effective in the core tasks – but not beyond	(4) Effective in the core tasks and in many of the things they do beyond the core tasks	(5) They have gone well beyond the core tasks and are very effective in everything they do.		
Commitment to the role of RPOs in the Transportation Planning Process						
6. My RPO's Lead Planning Agency is committed to the role of RPOs in the transportation planning process.						
	1 – not at all, they largely do not feel RPOs are useful	2 – they are somewhat committed to the role of RPOs, but offer little actual support and often ignore the RPO in practice	3 – they are generally committed to the role of RPOs, they offer some support but do not always work through the RPO	4 – they are fully committed to the role of RPOs; offering much support; almost always working through the RPO		
7. My fellow RTCC and RTAC members are committed to the role of RPOs in the transportation planning process.						

	1 – not at all, they largely do not feel RPOs are useful	2 – they are somewhat committed to the role of RPOs, but offer little actual support and often ignore the RPO in practice	3 – they are generally committed to the role of RPOs, they offer some support but do not always work through the RPO	4 – they are fully committed to the role of RPOs; offering much support; almost always working through the RPO	
8. The majority of towns and counties within my RPO's region are committed to the role of RPO's in the transportation planning process.					
	1 – not at all, they largely do not feel RPOs are useful	2 – they are somewhat committed to the role of RPOs, but offer little actual support and often ignore the RPO in practice	3 – they are generally committed to the role of RPOs, they offer some support but do not always work through the RPO	4 – they are fully committed to the role of RPOs; offering much support; almost always working through the RPO	
9. I believe the NCDOT Transportation Planning Branch is committed to the role of RPO's in the transportation planning process.					
	1 – not at all, they largely do not feel RPOs are useful	2 – they are somewhat committed to the role of RPOs, but offer little actual support and often ignore the RPO in practice	3 – they are generally committed to the role of RPOs, they offer some support but do not always work through the RPO	4 – they are fully committed to the role of RPOs; offering much support; almost always working through the RPO	
10. I believe the majority of the NCDOT Branches and Divisions are committed to the role of RPO's in the transportation planning process.					
	1 – not at all, they largely do not feel RPOs are useful	2 – they are somewhat committed to the role of RPOs, but offer little actual support and often ignore the RPO in practice	3 – they are generally committed to the role of RPOs, they offer some support but do not always work through the RPO	4 – they are fully committed to the role of RPOs; offering much support; almost always working through the RPO	

Relationship with Partners					
11. The RPO has a good working relationship with our RTCC and RTAC.					
	1 – Not at all	2	3	4 – Very Much	
12. The RPO has a good working relationship with the towns and counties in my region.					
	1 – Not at all	2	3	4 – Very Much	
13. The towns and counties within my RPO's region try to be involved in the transportation consultation process.					
	1 – Not at all	2	3	4 – Very Much	
14. The TPB RPO Coordinators provide clear and consistent support and guidance to the RPO.					
	1 – Not at all	2	3	4 – Very Much	
15. I find it easy to have my questions and concerns answered by the RPO.					
	1 – Not at all	2	3	4 – Very Much	
16. The RPO is proactive, looking for new ways to help and working to prevent problems before they occur, rather than reactive, only acting when they have to.					
	1 – Almost always reactive	2 – tend to be reactive	3 – tend to be proactive	4 – Almost always proactive	
17. How useful do you feel RPOs are in the transportation planning process?					
	1 – not at all, I largely feel RPOs are not useful	2 – they are somewhat useful, but significant improvements need to be made in the process	3 – they are generally useful, but some improvements in the process are needed.	4 – they are very useful and very few, if any, changes are needed.	
Evaluation of the Partnership between Your RPO and the NCDOT/TPB					
Commitment					
18. NCDOT/TPB has provided sufficient financial and staff resources to support the non-metropolitan local consultation process.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
19. Through the RPO process, NCDOT is open to considering and using local input in the decision-making process for transportation planning, project selection, and the development of projects, programs, and policies.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
20. Support for the process from NCDOT, TPB, and local officials continues to grow and/or remains strong over time.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
Participation					
21. A large majority of key local officials have attended meetings related to the local consultation process.					

	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
22. A large majority of key local officials have received information or provided meaningful input to NCDOT, either directly or through the RPO or the appropriate chief executive officer of the local government or agency.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
23. Input received from local officials has been constructive and helpful to NCDOT's decision-making process.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
Education				
24. Through training, state and local staff members have become well-informed and more technically competent to better carry out the local consultation process.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
25. Through educational programs and information-sharing, most local officials have become well-informed about the RPO process, state transportation decision-making process, transportation programs, and related policies.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
26. The education program has resulted in better local input that is more useful to NCDOT and other key state decision-makers.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
Communication				
27. NCDOT provides timely responses to any input received, which indicates what actions are taken in response to the input and why those actions were taken.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
28. Lines of communication are open, and this has helped encourage or sustain active and positive participation by local officials in the process.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
Outcomes				
29. The NCDOT statewide transportation planning process gives serious consideration to all input received through the RPO process on project identification and prioritization.	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
30. Input from the RPO process is successful in identifying almost all needs in the non-metropolitan areas of the state, so that previously unknown, genuine needs identified through the legislative or executive decision-making process, or from other sources, are rare.				

	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well
31. NCDOT considers all input from the RPO process in making decisions on project selection and programming.				
32. NCDOT also gives consideration to input from local officials regarding improvements in or the need for transportation programs or policies.				
Summary Comments				
33. In your opinion, what major obstacles to their mission did your RPO encounter this year, as it relates to the areas discussed above?				
Comments:				
34. What is the ONE major accomplishment of the RPO this year that you feel is the most important?				
Comments:				
35. Based upon your experiences the past year and your expectations for the future, what kinds of training do you believe would be helpful to YOU, the RTAC/RTCC, or the RPO in the coming year?				
Comments:				
36. What suggestions for improvements to the RPO process would you like to offer?				
Comments:				

Appendix H

Counties and Towns: Customer Experience Questionnaire

This questionnaire is intended to be completed by at least one representative from each town and county in the RPOs region. The exact person or persons to complete the questionnaire is a detail that would need to be decided upon when the questionnaire was distributed. Ideally, it would at least be completed by the Mayor, Town Manager, County Manager, and/or County Commissioner. There are 48 items on the questionnaire.

1. How familiar are you with the role of RPOs in the transportation planning process?					
	(1) Not at all familiar	(2) Somewhat familiar	(3) Familiar	(4) Very familiar	
2. How many times in the PAST YEAR have you talked to, called, or met with someone from the Rural Planning Organization that serves your County / Town?					
More than 6 times	Several times (3 – 6)	Once or twice	None in the past, but have in previous years	I have never interacted with the RPO	Don't Know
3. In the past year, did you use any products or data generated by your RPO?					
Yes, Frequently	Yes, Occasionally	Yes, Once or Twice	No	Don't Know	
4. How would you evaluate the quality of the RPO products or data you've used in the past year? [skip if did not use any RPO products or data]					
	(1) Poor	(2) Many flaws, but somewhat useful	(3) Useful, but with some flaws	(4) Excellent work	

5. Below are some common services that your RPO may be able to provide for you. Please let us know, in your opinion, how useful these services would be for your town / county?										
Service	How important or useful is this service to your town / county?				Has your town or county used this service in the past year?		How likely is your town or county to use this service in the coming year?			
	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not at all Useful	Yes	No	Very Likely	Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not at all Likely
Working with the town / county to develop, in cooperation with NCDOT and others, long range local and regional multi-modal transportation plans.										

Providing a forum for public participation in the transportation planning process.	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not at all Useful	Yes	No	Very Likely	Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not at all Likely
Providing transportation related information to local governments	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not at all Useful	Yes	No	Very Likely	Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not at all Likely
Identifying and prioritizing needed transportation improvements in your town / county	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not at all Useful	Yes	No	Very Likely	Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not at all Likely
Acting as a liaison between your town / county and NCDOT (to address problems, questions, etc.)	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not at all Useful	Yes	No	Very Likely	Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not at all Likely
Facilitating collaboration on projects between your town/county and other towns / counties	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not at all Useful	Yes	No	Very Likely	Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not at all Likely
Assisting in the development of Pedestrian / Bicycle Plans	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not at all Useful	Yes	No	Very Likely	Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not at all Likely
Providing traffic count data	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not at all Useful	Yes	No	Very Likely	Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not at all Likely
Conducting sidewalk surveys	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not at all Useful	Yes	No	Very Likely	Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not at all Likely
Map creation	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not at all Useful	Yes	No	Very Likely	Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not at all Likely

Transportation-related grant writing	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not at all Useful	Yes	No	Very Likely	Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not at all Likely
Assistance in identifying possible funding sources for transportation-related projects	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not at all Useful	Yes	No	Very Likely	Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not at all Likely

6. How useful do you feel RPOs are in the transportation planning process?

	1 – not at all, I largely feel RPOs are not useful	2 – they are somewhat useful, but significant improvements need to be made in the process	3 – they are generally useful, but some improvements in the process are needed.	4 – they are very useful and very few, if any, changes are needed.
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7. I believe the NCDOT is committed to the role of RPO's in the transportation planning process.

	1 – not at all, they largely do not feel RPOs are useful	2 – they are somewhat committed to the role of RPOs, but offer little actual support and often ignore the RPO in practice	3 – they are generally committed to the role of RPOs, they offer some support but do not always work through the RPO	4 – they are fully committed to the role of RPOs; offering much support; almost always working through the RPO
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8. How would YOU (your town/county) characterize or describe the effectiveness of your RPO?

(1) The RPO needs assistance in meeting their core tasks	(2) Effective in some of the core tasks – not so in others	(3) Effective in the core tasks – but not beyond	(4) Effective in the core tasks and in many of the things they do beyond the core tasks	(5) They have gone well beyond the core tasks and are Very Effective in everything they do.
--	--	--	---	--

9. Our RPO is proactive, looking for new ways to help and working to prevent problems before they occur, rather than reactive, only acting when they have to.

	1 – Almost always reactive	2 – tend to be reactive	3 – tend to be proactive	4 – Almost always proactive
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10. Through educational programs and information-sharing, most local officials have become well-informed about the RPO process, state transportation decision-making process, transportation programs, and related policies.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
11. NCDOT provides timely responses to any input received, which indicates what actions are taken in response to the input and why those actions were taken.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
12. NCDOT gives consideration to input from local officials regarding improvements in or the need for transportation programs or policies.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
13. What suggestions for improvements to the RPO process would you like to offer?					
Comments:					

Appendix I

NCDOT Divisions: Customer Experience Questionnaire

The NCDOT Divisions: Customer Experience Questionnaire would be completed by a variety of NCDOT personnel across the organization. Essentially, anyone who would be expected to likely have had contact with RPOs in the past year would be the questionnaire population. It would not be necessary for everyone to complete the questionnaire, rather, the population could be sampled.

Because of the diversity of the study sample, the questionnaire utilizes branching where responses to one question determine the next question one is asked. As a result, the length of the questionnaire will depend on who is completing the questionnaire. There are a total of 19 unique questions.

If you interacted with or used products / deliverables from specific RPOs, then select RPOs interacted with / used deliverables from:

1. Rural Planning Organizations: Check each RPO you interacted with or used deliverables from				
<input type="checkbox"/> Albemarle	<input type="checkbox"/> Upper Coastal Plain	<input type="checkbox"/> Kerr-Tar	<input type="checkbox"/> Rocky River	<input type="checkbox"/> Lake Norman
<input type="checkbox"/> Peanut Belt	<input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Carolina	<input type="checkbox"/> Piedmont Triad	<input type="checkbox"/> Northwest Piedmont	<input type="checkbox"/> Isothermal
<input type="checkbox"/> Mid-East	<input type="checkbox"/> Mid-Carolina	<input type="checkbox"/> Triangle Area	<input type="checkbox"/> High Country	<input type="checkbox"/> Land of Sky
<input type="checkbox"/> Down East	<input type="checkbox"/> Cape Fear	<input type="checkbox"/> Lumber River	<input type="checkbox"/> Unifour	<input type="checkbox"/> Southwestern

For each of the RPOs selected:

2. How frequently have you interacted with the [BLANK] RPO in the past year?				
12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None	
3. Check the types of interactions you have had with the [BLANK] RPO in the past year.				
<input type="checkbox"/> Supervisory	<input type="checkbox"/> Project related	<input type="checkbox"/> Data gathering	<input type="checkbox"/> Q & A	
4. Indicate how often in the past year you have used deliverables from the [BLANK] RPO?				
Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	Never	
5. How would you evaluate the quality of the RPO products or data you've used in the past year? [skip if did not use any RPO products or data]				
	(1) Poor	(2) Many flaws, but somewhat useful	(3) Useful, but with some flaws	(4) Excellent work
6. How would <u>YOU</u> characterize or describe the effectiveness of the [BLANK] RPO?				
(1) The RPO needs assistance in meeting their core tasks	(2) Effective in some of the core tasks – not so in others	(3) Effective in the core tasks – but not beyond	(4) Effective in the core tasks and in many of the things they do beyond the core tasks	(5) They have gone well beyond the core tasks and are very effective in everything they do.

If you interacted with or used products / deliverables from a(n) RPO(s), but do not know which specific one(s), then answer these questions:

7. How frequently have you interacted with RPOs in the past year?					
12 or more	6 – 11 times	1 – 5 times	None		
8. Check the types of interactions you have had with the RPOs in the past year.					
<input type="checkbox"/> Supervisory	<input type="checkbox"/> Project related	<input type="checkbox"/> Data gathering	<input type="checkbox"/> Q & A		
9. Indicate how often in the past year you have used deliverables from RPOs?					
Frequent	Occasional	Once or Twice	Never		
10. How would you evaluate the quality of the RPO products or data you've used in the past year? [skip if did not use any RPO products or data]					
	(1) Poor	(2) Many flaws, but somewhat useful	(3) Useful, but with some flaws	(4) Excellent work	
11. Generally speaking, how would <u>YOU</u> characterize or describe the effectiveness of the RPOs?					
(1) The RPOs need assistance in meeting their core tasks	(2) Effective in some of the core tasks – not so in others	(3) Effective in the core tasks – but not beyond	(4) Effective in the core tasks and in many of the things they do beyond the core tasks	(5) They have gone well beyond the core tasks and are very effective in everything they do.	

All Users + If you did not interact with or use products / deliverables from RPOs (to the best of your knowledge), then answer these questions:

12. How familiar are you with the role of RPOs in the transportation planning process?					
	(1) Not at all familiar	(2) Somewhat familiar	(3) Familiar	(4) Very familiar	
13. How useful do you feel RPOs are in the transportation planning process?					
	1 – not at all, I largely feel RPOs are not useful	2 – they are somewhat useful, but significant improvements need to be made in the process	3 – they are generally useful, but some improvements in the process are needed.	4 – they are very useful and very few, if any, changes are needed.	
14. I believe the NCDOT is committed to the role of RPO's in the transportation planning process.					

	1 – not at all, they largely do not feel RPOs are useful	2 – they are somewhat committed to the role of RPOs, but offer little actual support and often ignore the RPO in practice	3 – they are generally committed to the role of RPOs, they offer some support but do not always work through the RPO	4 – they are fully committed to the role of RPOs; offering much support; almost always working through the RPO	
15. Through educational programs and information-sharing, most local officials have become well-informed about the RPO process, state transportation decision-making process, transportation programs, and related policies.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
16. NCDOT provides timely responses to any input received, which indicates what actions are taken in response to the input and why those actions were taken.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
17. NCDOT gives consideration to input from local officials regarding improvements in or the need for transportation programs or policies.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
18. Input received from local officials has been constructive and helpful to NCDOT’s decision-making process.					
	Needs to Begin	Needs Substantial Action	Needs Some Action	Done Well	
19. Do you have any QUESTIONS, COMMENTS or SUGGESTIONS concerning Rural Planning Organizations? Questions, Comments, or Suggestions:					

Appendix J

Administrative Reporting Schedule

The Administrative Reporting Schedule would be completed by the various TPB/RPO Coordinators. This form is patterned after one currently in use by the Kentucky Department of Transportation.

Document	Due Date	Cape Fear			Southwestern			Continues..
Planning Work Program		Received / Revision / Accepted			Received / Revision / Accepted			
Draft PWP	01/31/10	01/26/10		02/05/10	02/10/10		02/12/10	
Final PWP	03/01/10	03/01/10	04/03/10	04/10/10	pending			
Revisions	04/30/10							
5-year planning calendar	03/01/10							
TIP priority list	????							
Public Participation Plan	????							
Transportation Plan Study Needs	12/31/09							
Regional CTP	????							
Compilation of land use plans	????							
Inventory	????							
Audits	12/01/09							
Quarterly Progress Reports								
First	11/01/09							
Second	02/01/10							
Third	05/01/10							
Fourth	07/31/10							
Quarterly Reimbursement Package								
First	11/01/09							
Second	02/01/10							
Third	05/01/10							
Final	07/31/10							
Annual Performance Report	07/31/10							
Assessment Measures								
Self-Assessment	08/31/10							
Deliverables Inventory Checklist	07/31/10							

???? = Dates not provided in the RPO Manual