

ISSUE BRIEF: Transportation Safety

National Responsibility, Regional Solutions

Safety is paramount in establishing, maintaining and improving an efficient multi-modal transportation network. Goods, services, companies and people rely on, for both business and pleasure, roads, rail, transit, air and waterways to efficiently and safely work together to move our nation's greatest assets. Over the years, policymakers have taken note and made great strides to ensure our transportation system is user-friendly and safe. Despite this, there are over 40,000 fatalities, approximately 2/3 of which occur on rural roads, and nearly 3 million injuries a year related to motor vehicle accidents. These statistics continue to remain unchanged, emphasizing the unnecessary and inexcusable human and economic losses to society. The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) believes that Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Councils of Government (COGs) and Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs), large and small, urban and rural, play an integral role in transportation safety planning activities and promotes advancing programs and policies that support the responsibility regional governments in these efforts.

NARC, together with its member driven safety committee, has been working on a full spectrum of transportation safety planning issues. Recent efforts include conducting a nationwide safety scan targeting rural regions and small COGs/MPOs and judging the federal "Planning It Safe," excellence awards. NARC is an active member in the Transportation Safety Planning Working Group (TSPWG), which is comprised of federal officials and professional associations, and represents the interests of regional planning agencies on transportation safety planning issues.

The importance of safety is recognized in national transportation policy as evidenced by the elevation of the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) to a core funding category in SAFETEA-LU, the surface transportation reauthorization bill. As part of HSIP, the High Risk Rural Roads program was established to provide money to states to improve safety on rural roads, state departments of transportation are required to develop Strategic Highway

Safety Plans (SHSPs), and COGs/MPOs are expected to factor safety into their transportation planning process. NARC is supportive of these programs and the national priority being placed on transportation safety.

In practice, some regional planning agencies are actively involved, partnering with their state departments of transportation on safety issues. However, many rural, small and mid-size agencies are not being included in the process. Without the involvement of all COGs/MPOs/RPOs, access to essential data for roads, both in and out of the state highway system, and the unique understanding of regional transportation dynamics and the associated safety implications will be lost. This potentially deficient information will hinder the coordination of statewide transportation safety planning and reduce the positive impacts of the SHSPs.

To improve transportation safety throughout the nation, NARC calls for policy and program changes that reduce the COG/MPO inconsistencies in safety planning and better incorporates regional transportation interests into safety planning programs carried out at the state level. Specifically, NARC encourages the following actions:

- Define the role for COG/MPO input and involvement in the statewide safety planning processes and related programs.
- Require states to consider regional data and statistics when making decisions on funding specifically as it pertains to High Risk Rural Road programming funds.
- Standardize the process by which states reach out to, involve and gather information from COGs/MPOs.
- Increase the authority for COGs/MPOs to make decisions about safety planning for roads within their particular region.
- Standardize processes and procedures for collecting, utilizing and sharing data in safety transportation planning.

For more information, please contact Megan Zadecky at megan@narc.org or 202.986.1032, x. 212.



NARC
Building Regional Communities

1666 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 300 · Washington, DC 20009

Tel: 202/986-1032 – Fax: 202/986-1038

www.narc.org