

# Yuma Metropolitan Planning Organization:

## A Case Study for Transit Security

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**T**he Yuma Metropolitan Planning Organization (YMPO) represents the Yuma, Arizona, region and includes the cities of Yuma, San Luis and Somerton, the town of Wellton, Yuma County and the Cocopah Indian tribe. The mainly rural region covers 5,561 square miles and has a population of 203,779. The metropolitan region shares an international border with Mexico and is home to Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, which provides air combat training to both U.S. and NATO forces. Since YMPO's boundaries extend into California, it is considered a bi-state metropolitan planning organization (MPO) within the Arizona Department of Transportation (DOT) Yuma District.

**Y**MPO plans, coordinates and integrates all modes of transportation, roadways, transit, aviation and waterways for the Yuma region. The MPO strives to maintain a comprehensive, multi-agency transportation planning program as the coordinating agency for all federal highway, transit and surface transportation funds for the region and receives federal metropolitan planning funding through the Arizona DOT. In FY 2007, the YMPO continued cross-border transportation planning to maximize mobility; economic and lifestyle improvements through its continued support of the development of the new commercial port of entry (San Luis II) and the rehabilitation of San Luis I in San Luis; construction of the Area Service Highway; and the designation of U.S. 95 as the CANAMEX Western Passage.

**T**hree years after the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act - a Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) created a separate and distinct "security" planning factor, little is known about small and mid-sized MPOs successes and challenges in

integrating this planning factor into their transportation plans. YMPO recognizes the challenges of homeland security for the region, including the major concerns of earthquakes and the potential for flooding due to the nearby Hoover Dam. The MPO also participates in local Emergency Medical Services (EMS) coordination meetings and assists in planning for a new port of entry at the Mexican border. Although there are identified homeland security risks, no dedicated plans, programs or reports have been developed to combat these risks. YMPO reports that the lack of funding significantly inhibits planning activities in this area.

**Y**MPO currently serves as the region's transit authority. The MPO owns all of the transit vehicles and contracts with Yuma County Area Transit (YCAT), a contractor with a staff of 46, to operate the vehicles. YMPO's contract administrator oversees YCAT's daily operations, including insurance compliance and requirements, customer service and complaints. YMPO receives Surface Transportation Program flexible funds for its transit operations and maintains seven bus routes through YCAT, as well as demand-responsive service through the Dial-a-Ride program. YCAT serves approximately 33,000 people each month, with Dial-a-Ride serves approximately 3,500 additional passengers each month.

**Y**CAT contractors neither play an active role in the MPO planning process nor in coordinating with local EMS agencies. As YMPO is the organization responsible for conducting the planning, YMPO actively participates in the Local Emergency Management Planning Committee and coordinates with local EMS agencies. Through YMPO's participation on the emergency management planning committee and



directly as a result of its role as the lead transportation planning agency in Yuma, YMPO has the ability to direct YCAT's work and resources accordingly to meet the regions overall security planning needs.

In YMPO's 2007-2011 Transportation Improvement Plan, one transit security related project was prioritized. The project, scheduled for 2008, includes the purchasing of mobile surveillance equipment for the transit systems bus fleet. YMPO's centralized transit planning function also ensures that capital transit needs, related to security, will be prioritized through the MPO's standard process. Currently, YMPO recognizes that its current activities may not be sufficient in planning for and meeting all regional homeland security risks. Funding, staffing and local expertise have all been cited as necessary to significantly improve the MPO's



ability to engage in a more active role. Changes in staffing and funding, as well as an updated mission and authority would all be required for YMPO to more fully participate in the regional homeland security planning process. For instance, Arizona state law allows for a Regional Transportation Authority (RTA). The RTA is a public, political, tax-levying public improvement and taxing subdivision of the state and a municipal corporation established in a county with a population of between 400,000 and 1,200,000 persons. If YMPO were able to gain designation as an RTA (albeit the region's population would have to double), the MPO would have the opportunity to ask its citizens for additional revenue to fund transit security related activities. The MPO's lack of financial resources is cited as one of the major hurdles in integrating the security planning factor to a greater degree.

#### About SAFETEA-LU Regulations

The passage of the 2005 Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act - a Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) increased the number of federally required planning factors that Metropolitan Planning Organizations must include in their Transportation Improvement Programs. Whereas under the previous authorization of the Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century, MPOs were required to account for a "safety and security" planning factor, SAFETEA-LU broke apart this singular factor into "safety" and "security." The separation of this singular planning factor into two separate and distinct factors was an attempt to address concerns as to the lack of preparedness of localities to the attacks of September 11, 2001. One lesson learned from September 11th is that effective coordination and communication among the different operating agencies in a region is paramount. This type of coordination is needed to allow enforcement, security and safety responses to occur expeditiously, while concurrently permitting the transportation system to handle a potentially overwhelming public response to the incident, and providing the public with clear and concise information about the situation and any actions that should be taken.

#### About MPO Responsibilities

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are responsible for administering federal funds, though the duties performed vary by state law and other mandates as directed by their MPO board. The Metropolitan Transportation Plan or Long-Range Transportation Plan, which visualizes the MPO's region 20 years into the future, forms the basis of all activities. From this 20-year plan, a shorter term priority list of projects is maintained in the TIP, identifying projects of the greatest importance for construction, upgrade or maintenance. MPOs may also be required, depending on their region, to prepare plans for non-motorized transportation, public transit or air quality.

#### About the National Association of Regional Councils

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) serves as the national voice for regionalism by advocating for regional cooperation as the most effective way to address a variety of community planning and development opportunities and issues. NARC's member organizations are composed of multiple local governments that work together to serve American communities – large and small, urban and rural. In 2008, NARC launched the first of four public awareness campaigns – Green Regions, Mobile Regions, Build Regions and Secure Regions. For additional information, please visit [www.NARC.org](http://www.NARC.org).



#### About Yuma Metropolitan Planning Organization

The Yuma Metropolitan Planning Organization (YMPO) was formed in 1983 with the responsibility of transportation planning for the Yuma region. YMPO plans, coordinates and integrates activities necessary to maintain a comprehensive multi-agency transportation planning program. This planning includes all modes of transportation, roadways, transit, aviation and waterways. YMPO is the coordinating agency for Federal highway, transit and surface transportation funds. For additional information, please visit [www.YMPO.org](http://www.YMPO.org).



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