

Economic Competitiveness:
Transit's High-Value in the Knowledge-Economy
Congressional Briefing

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Prepared Remarks
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Thank you, Carol, for the introduction, and thank you APTA for the invitation to speak today.

Thanks also to all of you for attending this event. There's a lot of competition for your time during infrastructure week, and we are thrilled that you chose to spend some of it here with us.

For those of you who are not familiar with NARC, we are a Washington-DC based association, representing Regional Councils and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (or MPOs) from across the US.

There are more than 500 such regional planning bodies in the US today.

Each is governed by a Board of Directors, comprised of the elected officials from their member city and county governments.

And all of them were formed to try to solve a challenge that is better handled regionally than as an individual city or county.

MPOs are a specific type of regional council, mandated by federal law for areas over 50,000 population, and designated every 10 years based on the census.

MPOs are required by Federal law to develop two Plans:

The Long-Range Transportation Plan, or LRTP:

- Which examines the region's transportation needs over the next 20+ years and provides a framework to address anticipated growth through systems and policies.
- It's a comprehensive statement of the region's future transportation needs as identified by local jurisdictions, the State and other planning and public stakeholders.
- The LRTP is often part of a larger regional vision – which incorporates other regional growth goals, like housing development, workforce, and how to accommodate aging populations.

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP):

- The TIP lists all regionally significant and federally-funded transportation projects and services in the MPO planning area.
- It includes projects for all modes - highways and streets, public transportation, and walking and bicycling.
- This is really important because any project that receives any federal funds – bus service for the elderly, a bike path, new pedestrian facilities, a new highway interchange, a bikesharing project – must be on the TIP to be eligible for those funds.

To develop these plans and programs, Regional Councils and MPOs build consensus through robust public participation.

In a lot of ways, Regional Councils and MPOs serve as conveners—bringing decision-makers and stakeholders together to agree on how to improve transportation, promote smart growth, protect the environment and enhance the economy.

KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

And the economy is changing.

My members – and by extension their member local governments, and their stakeholders - recognize that we are in the process of a major transformation in our economy.

We know that American job growth will be in knowledge-based industries.

And that the citizens we work to serve will need new skills to be able to get the jobs that will come with this changing economy.

This new workforce – the ones who are taking these knowledge-economy jobs – are often looking for different things from their transportation systems.

MILLENNIALS

Yes – I am talking about Millennials, adults 18 to 34, who have surpassed Generation X this year to become the largest share of the U.S. workforce, according to Pew data released Monday.

Other research shows that millennials are driving less than previous generations did at this stage of life, even when accounting for the state of the economy or for household income.¹

In fact, Zipcar’s annual survey shows that cars are the most prized piece of technology among every age group – except those under 35. Millennials would rather part with their cars than their computers or cell phones.

There has also been a marked decline in in the share of licensed drivers under age 35—down from 46 percent in 1981 to 30 percent in 2012.

In Virginia, about 70 percent of millennials regularly use some form of transportation other than driving, according to Virginia Secretary of Transportation Aubrey Layne.

TRANSIT & THE ECONOMY

To regions, what these statistics mean is that a transit-accessible location is particularly important for knowledge-economy businesses that are trying to recruit the millennial workforce, while continuing to serve the entire spectrum of transit users.

¹ See [University of California Transportation Center](#) and [McGill University](#).

A Virginia Tech analysis of 2011 U.S. census data found that 59 percent of the jobs in Northern Virginia are located within a quarter mile of a Metro or VRE station or a bus stop.

More than 90 percent of new office space in this region is within a half mile of a Metrorail station.

And in smaller regions, such as Lima-Allen County Regional Planning Commission's service area, transit plays a key role in connecting services to the elderly, disabled and underemployed in that community of roughly 100,000.

There, recent data shows that since 2012 the Allen County Regional Transit Authority has increased the total number of trips by 4.6% while increasing its employment-related trips by 60% - that's 83,000 trips employment-related trips in 2014.

This service has made Lima's jobs in the area's regionally supported industrial/commercial parks more accessible to the community, which has a poverty rate of 33.9%.

Through the planning process, regional councils across the United States are developing new bus rapid transit services, streetcars and light rail, bike paths, sidewalks, and reimagined "complete streets" networks and new highway capacity projects as well – all of which all help to support sustained job growth and provide the kinds of mobility options that citizens in these regions want.

TECHNOLOGY & PLANNING

In this knowledge-economy, technology is central to everything we do—and that includes the work we do in planning.

Technological innovation allows MPOs to provide access to planning documents, unique opportunities to participate in the process without attending a meeting.

Technology has made it possible to travel by car without owning - or even driving one - through car-sharing services like Zipcar and car2go, "rideshare" platforms like Uber and Lyft.

Technology also makes bike-sharing possible.

And there's every reason to think the influence of technology on transportation will only grow, regardless of what happens next with the economy.

What are the impacts of these new technologies on planning? As ridesharing spreads, can we reduce parking requirements for new apartment developments? What happens to our traffic and transit models if car ownership dramatically decreases as a result of these trends?

And there are other technologies coming down the pike as well, which raise other, interesting planning questions - like how should MPOs plan for expanded use of vehicle-to-vehicle technology?

The good news is that technology helps MPOs begin to address these questions too. Several Regional Councils use smartphone data to show how commuters move through regions, which can result in improved modeling - and better transportation projects.

REAUTHORIZATION

Regional Councils, MPOs and local governments depend on their partnership with the Federal government to plan for and build the types of transportation assets that attract this knowledge-economy workforce.

MAP-21 provides planning dollars to MPOs; without funding certainty, Regional Councils and MPOs cannot develop the plans that enable our regions to invest in critical, locally-selected projects.

These long term plans – which are fiscally constrained by law – need long-term funding certainty in order for them to make sense.

And as all of you know, Congress has already enacted the first extension of MAP-21 last fall. That extension ends May 31.

But if history is a guide, more extensions are likely

- One extension of ISTEA (1991) (6 months)
- 12 extensions of TEA-21 (1998) (22 months)
- 10 extensions of SAFETEA-LU (2005) (34 months)

This history makes us all nervous. Because without long-term federal commitments to planning and project funding, we cannot build the infrastructure that our regions need to be competitive in this knowledge-based, global economy.

NARC supports a long-term reauthorization of MAP-21 that puts more funding for transformational transportation projects into the hands of local governments.

We also support a variety of transportation-related funding options, including a gas tax increase, to get us there.

We stand ready to work with all of you to get a bill done so that we can continue to build great things.

Again, thank you for inviting me to today. I look forward to your questions.