



# **Policy Board Orientation Booklet**

Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan  
Council of Governments

Updated March 2025



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## Background

### Metro COG Mission

*Provide quality, proactive regional planning services for a changing society*

The Fargo Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments (Metro COG) functions as both the Council of Governments and Metropolitan Planning Organization for the greater Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area. Both types of agencies have different, but similar missions, and both look at planning at the regional level.

### What is a Council of Governments?

A Council of Governments (COG) is a multi-service entity with state and locally-defined boundaries that delivered a variety of Federal, state, and local programs while carrying out its function as a planning organization, provide technical assistance, and “visionary” to its member local governments. As such, COGs are accountable to local units of government, and effective partners for State and Federal governments.

Conceived in the early 1960s, COGs are stable, broad-based organizations adept at consensus building, creating partnerships, providing services, problem solving, and fiscal management. Comprehensive and transportation planning, economic and workforce development, environmental, services for disadvantaged groups, and clearinghouse functions are among the types of programs that may be managed by COGs. Of the total local, general-purpose governments in the United States (including counties, cities, townships, towns, villages, boroughs, etc.) a total of more than 85% are served by COGs.

There are many differences between a COG and local governments. In a COG, Policy Board officials are appointed or designated to serve, rather than elected directly by the people. They are intended to provide a forum for dealing with regional issues that require regional solutions. COGs are voluntary planning bodies formed by local governments; organizational structure is typically as a sub-state unit of government, nonprofit, or quasi-governmental form. Their responsibilities are primarily assigned by local government policy leaders, in addition to Federal, State, and Local legislation, regulations, or program funding requirements.

COGs traditionally do not have local government authority, such as taxation, zoning, and ordinance controls, or eminent domain powers. They must raise program and operations funding through Federal and State grants and aid, local government dues support, fee-for-services initiatives, business and community lending loan funds, and other means.

COGs often serve as advocates and intermediaries for local governments with Federal and State policy and program officials.

As the designated Council of Governments, Metro COG is also the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the greater Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan area.

## **What is a Metropolitan Planning Organization?**

A Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is an agency created by Federal law to provide local elected officials input into the planning and implementation of Federal transportation funds to metropolitan areas with populations of greater than 50,000. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962, which mandated the formation of MPOs, has implemented that MPOs must plan for regional transportation planning expenditures and is responsible for the Continuing, Cooperative, and Comprehensive (3C) transportation planning process for their urbanized area. Under Federal law established in the 1973 Highway Act and the Urban Mass Transit Act, organizations in urbanized areas are designated by their governors to perform significant planning and programming of federally funded highways and transit projects. The policy leadership, committees, professional staff, and consultants, combined with the administrative capability to support MPO planning processes, constitute the core elements of MPOs activities. Metro COG was jointly designated as the MPO for the Fargo-Moorhead area by the governors of Minnesota and North Dakota in 1973.

MPOs have become a more significant actor in regional transportation planning since they received additional resources and powers from the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and the ensuing Federal legislation, currently Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act of 2015 (FAST). The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has identified 420 MPOs as of the most recent census. Nearly half of MPOs operate as part of a Council of Governments serving the same general geography.

Similar to COGs, MPOs do not have authority to raise revenues such as levy taxes on their own; rather, they are designated to allow local officials to decide collaboratively how to spend available Federal and other governmental transportation funds in the region. The funding for the operations of the MPO comes from a combination of Federal transportation funds and required matching funds from state and local governments.

## **MPO Certification Process**

Federal law requires that the Federal government certify the MPO planning process every four years. In general, this process is a review of the various work products, policies and procedures. In addition, each year the NDDOT and the MPO must jointly certify the metropolitan planning process. Every three years, Metro COG certifies that it follows the rules, regulations and guidelines of the metropolitan planning process as defined in Federal legislation. An annual self-certification is included in the approval of the annual Transportation Improvement Program.

## **MPO Core Functions**

MPOs were created by Congress to allocate scarce Federal and other transportation funds appropriately and the planning efforts reflect the region's shared vision for its future. They provide a comprehensive examination of the region's future investments

alternatives and they facilitate a collaborative planning process between state DOT's, interested parties and residents in the planning process.

There are six (6) core functions of an MPO:

1. **Establish a Setting:** establish and manage a fair and impartial setting for effective regional decision-making in the metropolitan area.
2. **Evaluate Alternatives:** evaluate transportation alternatives, scaled to the size and complexity of the region, to the nature of its transportation issues, and to the realistically available options.
3. **Maintain a Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP):** develop and update a fiscally-constrained long-range transportation plan for the region covering a planning horizon of at least twenty years that fosters:
  - Mobility and access for people and goods;
  - Efficient system performance and preservation; and
  - Quality of life for residents.
4. **Develop a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP):** develop a fiscally-constrained program based on the long-range transportation plan and designed to serve the region's goals while using spending, regulating, operating, management and financial tools. This document programs Federal and local funds for projects over a four-year time frame.
5. **Involve the Public:** involve the general public and all the significantly affected sub-groups in the four essential functions listed above, planning studies and reports. The public involvement process is guided by the Metro COG Public Participation Plan (PPP).
6. **Protect Air Quality:** transportation plans, programs, and projects must conform to the air quality plan, known as the "state implementation plan" (SIP), for the state within which the region lies.

## Performance-Based Planning

Metro COG, as the designated MPO, is responsible for the establishment, use, and tracking of performance-based approach to transportation decision-making to support the national goals described in Federal legislation. State Departments of Transportation (DOTs), Metro COG, and local transit agencies will develop performance measures to track the progress toward attainment of critical outcomes for the MPO region.

## Proactive Public Participation

Since 1991, Federal transportation legislation has included requirements for a pro-active effort by the MPO to involve the public in the transportation planning process. Metro COG staff follows direction identified in the Metro COG Public Participation Plan when developing plans, reports and efforts. Public meetings are scheduled to allow public

input on documents, planning studies and other planning functions done at Metro COG. Additionally, all Policy Board meetings are open to the public. Provisions for public comment are established in the Policy Board Bylaws and Public Participation Plan.

## Planning Boundaries

There are three main boundaries that are important to Metro COG; the Urban Area Boundary (UZA), the revised Urban Area Boundary, and the Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) Boundary. The MPA boundary is shown in Figure 1.

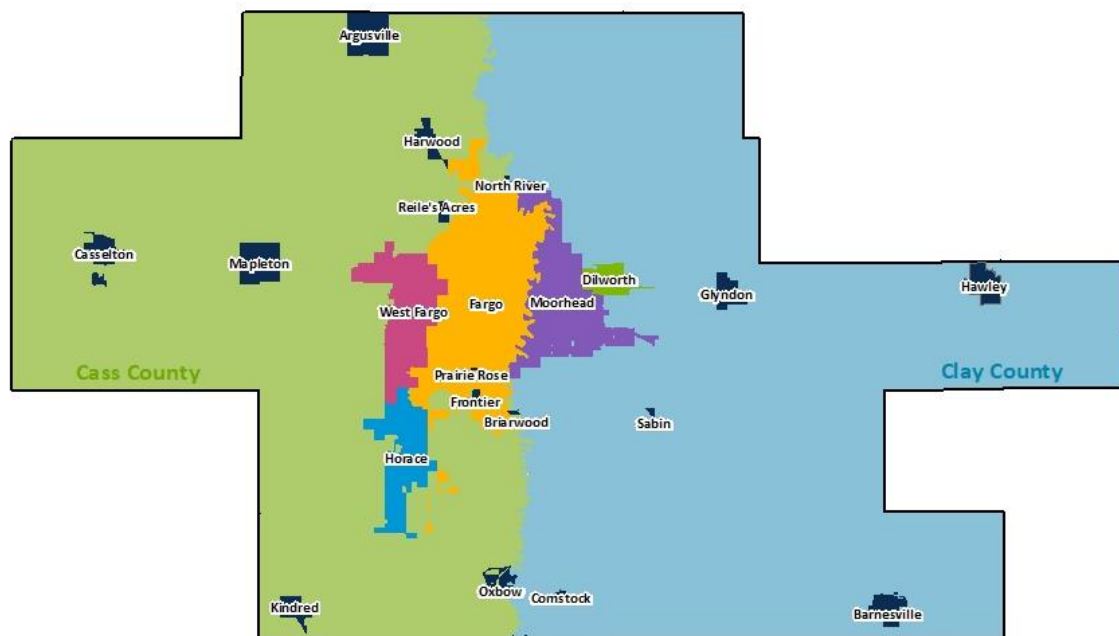


Figure 1: Metro COG Metropolitan Planning Agency Boundary

1. Urban Area Boundary (UZA): A Census-designated urban area with 50,000 residents or more. Every UZA must be represented by an MPO.
2. Adjusted UZA: A census-defined UZA boundary that has been adjusted by the MPO to include additional territory. Typically created to smooth out irregular UZA boundaries, the adjusted UZA must be submitted to the NDDOT and MnDOT for review and submitted by the DOTs to FHWA for approval.
3. Metropolitan Planning Area Boundary (MPA): Defines the area in which the metropolitan transportation planning process must be carried out. The MPA must encompass the UZA and the contiguous geographic area likely to become urbanized within the next 20 years. The MPA must be approved by the state DOTs.

The Metro COG planning area consists of 14 townships in North Dakota, and 16 in Minnesota. It is a subset of the Cass-Clay Metropolitan Statistical Area.



## Federal Legislation

An MPO is a creature of Federal legislation. Five terms you will encounter frequently are United States Code (USC), Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Public Law (PL), Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST), and Executive Orders (EO). Figure 2 provides a brief explanation of each term.

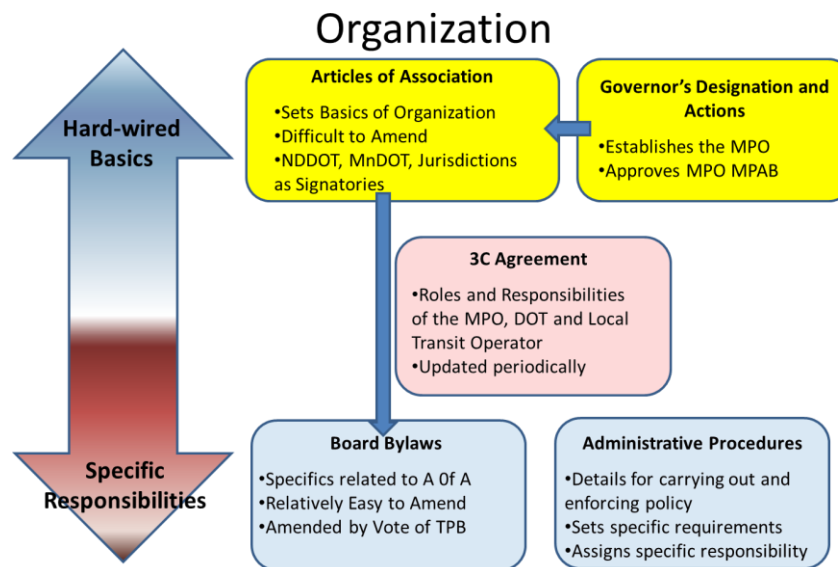
Figure 2: Governmental Terms Related to MPOs

USC	United States Code	It is the law. Specifically, 23 USC: Highways; and 49 USC: Transportation
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations	It is the regulations. Law through rulemaking. Specifically, 23CFR: Highways; and 49CFR: Transportation
PL	Public Law	Non-codified law (e.g. P.L. 112-141: To authorize funds for Federal-aid highways, highway safety programs, and transit programs, and for other purposes)
FAST	Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (approved 12/17/2015)	Past transportation bill. Replaced MAP-21 (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century)
IIJA or BIL	Infrastructure and Jobs Act, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law	Current transportation bill. Replaced FAST.
EO	Executive Orders	Presidential Orders (e.g., EO 12898 – Environmental Justice)

## Administrative Organization

Metro COG has its legal foundation in the Articles of Association, which allows for the creation of the COG, identifies Metro COG as the designated MPO, and provides for the development and maintenance of Policy Board Bylaws, Administrative and Personnel Procedures (figure 3).

Figure 3: Administrative Organization



## Articles of Association

Metro COG is a standalone quasi-governmental organization whose existence and organizational structure is enabled by the Articles of Association (Articles). The Articles were approved in 1968 when Metro COG was formed. The need for Metro COG's existence grew out of several years of "intergovernmental coordination" among local cities and counties.

The Articles also identify Metro COG as the designated MPO for the region. The designation is made by agreement of the governors of Minnesota and North Dakota and units of general purpose local government that together represent at least 75% of the affected population, including the largest incorporated city.

The Articles of Association were updated in 2018 to provide additional information and direction of Metro COG.

## 3C Agreement

Metro COG's mission is to provide a Comprehensive, Coordinated and Continuous (3C) transportation planning process for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods, consistent with the region's overall economic, social and environmental goals. The MPO places special emphasis on providing equal access to a variety of transportation choices and effective public involvement in the transportation planning process.

The MPO, state(s), and the providers of public transportation are to cooperatively determine their mutual responsibilities in carrying out the metropolitan transportation process. As such, Metro COG, along with the Minnesota and North Dakota DOTs and

MATBUS, cooperatively develop an agreement that defines the roles and responsibilities of each in the 3C planning process.

Federal legislation states that the MPO, state(s) and the providers of public transportation should periodically review and update the agreement, as appropriate, to reflect effective changes. Metro COG updated the 3C agreement in 2016, with the cooperation and approval of the state DOTs and MATBUS.

## Policy Board Bylaws

The Articles of Association provide for the development and implementation of a set of Policy Board Bylaws intended to identify procedures and responsibilities which will serve to organize and guide the proper function of the Metro COG Policy Board. The Policy Board Bylaws can be found on the Metro COG webpage ([www.fmmetrocog.org](http://www.fmmetrocog.org)) or hardcopies can be provided upon request.

## Administrative and Personnel Procedures

Administration regulations are detailed directions developed by the Policy Board to put policies into practice. They tell how, by whom, where, and when things are to be done. They assign detail needed to implement policy to staff, allowing the Board to focus on broad issues. They provide detailed requirements, procedures and prohibitions under which Metro COG and its employees will be operated. Many satisfy a state or Federal requirement or serve as a compliance indicator.

The Policy Board is also responsible for developing and amending the Metro COG Personnel Policies. These policies identify the benefits and restrictions related to employment at Metro COG.

## Organizational Structure

The Policy Board is the COG and the MPO. The Policy Board hires an Executive Director and professional staff to carry out the day-to-day activities of the COG and MPO (Figure 4 & 5).

Figure 4: Organizational Chart for Projects Carried out by Metro COG

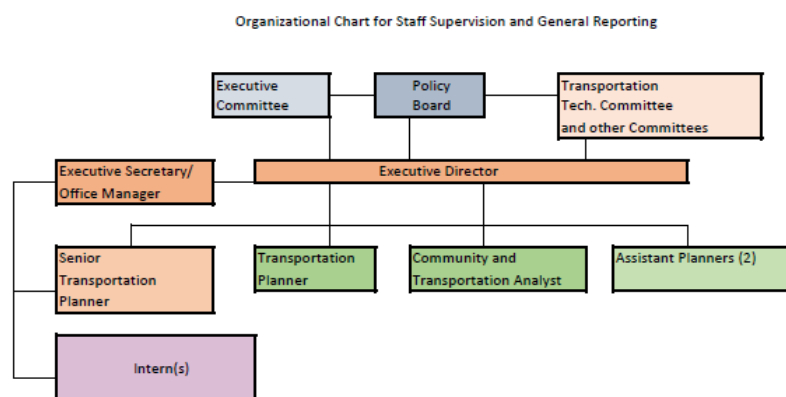
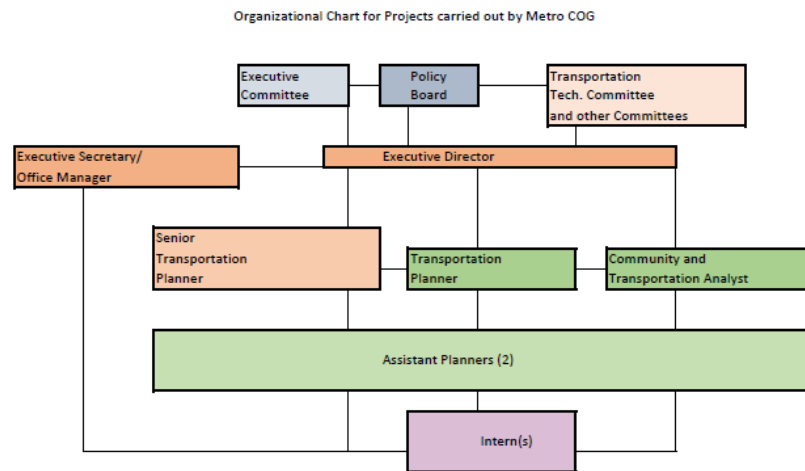


Figure 5: Organizational Chart for Staff Supervision and General Reporting



## Funding

Funding for the operations of Metro COG come from Federal, State, and Local sources. As an MPO, Metro COG receives funding identified in 23 USC and 49 USC.

### Federal Funding Process

Federal Funds are made available through a specific process:

**Authorizing Legislation:** Congress enacts legislation that establishes or continues the existing operation of a Federal program or agency, including the amount of money it anticipates to be available to spend or grant to States, MPOs, or Transit operators. Congress generally reauthorizes federal surface transportation programs over multiple years. The amount authorized, however, is not always the amount that ends up actually being available to spend.

**Appropriations:** Each year, congress decides on the Federal budget for the next fiscal year. As a result of the appropriation process, the amount appropriated to a Federal program is often less than the amount authorized for a given year, and is the actual amount available to Federal agencies to spend or grant.

**Apportionment:** The distribution of program funds among states and metropolitan areas (for most transit funds) using a formula provided in law, is called an apportionment. An apportionment is usually made of the first day of the Federal fiscal year (October 1), for which the funds are authorized. At that time, the funds are available for obligation, or spending, by a state, in accordance with an approved STIP. In many cases, the state is the designated recipient for Federal transportation funds; in some cases, transit operators are the recipient.

**Determining Eligibility:** Only certain projects and activities are eligible to receive Federal transportation funding. Criteria depend on the funding source.

**Match:** Most Federal transportation programs require a non-Federal match. State or local governments must contribute some portion of the project cost. This matching level is established by legislation. For many programs, the amount the state or local governments have to contribute is 20 percent of the capital cost for most highway and transit projects.

## **PL Funds**

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) metropolitan planning funds, also known as Public Law (PL) fund, are distributed to each state by an apportionment formula, prescribed by law. Currently, PL funds are apportioned to the states based on a ratio of urbanized population in individual states to the total nationwide urbanized area population. PL funds are intended to support activities undertaken by the MPOs for developing long-range regional transportation plans, transportation improvement programs, and the planning process in general as described in 23 USC § 134.

## **Section 5303**

These Federal Transit Administration (FTA) metropolitan transit planning funds are intended for multimodal transportation planning in MPO areas. Planning efforts should be cooperative, continuous, and comprehensive, resulting in long-range plans and short-range programs of transportation investment priorities.

5303 funds are apportioned to states by a formula that includes each state's urbanized area population in proportion to the total urbanized area population for the nation, as well as other factors. Similar to the PL funds, the 5303 funds are redistributed by state DOTs to MPOs by statewide formulas.

By agreement, the NDDOT is the lead agency in the distribution of CPG funds. CPG funds originating in Minnesota are administered by the NDDOT. These funds are reimbursable; Metro COG must provide a request each month to NDDOT to receive the eligible portion of costs related to the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).

## **Local Match**

For every 80¢ of CPG funds, Metro COG, through its member jurisdictions and planning partners, contribute 20¢. Together, these funds provide the total capital required to operate the MPO. Unspent local funds are held by Metro COG to account for times when more local funding is needed, which lessens the need to adjust the local dues structure. They also remain available as local match for local transportation contracted planning services. Metro COG also maintains a Savings and Money Market account comprised of unspent local match funds to be used to cover emergency situation, (e.g. frozen Federal transportation funding, or other such instances). Funding should be adequate to fund Metro COG operations for a sustained amount of time.

## **Local Dues**

Each voting member jurisdiction is assessed dues based on a structure that is approved annually by the Policy Board. The structure consists of a set percentage for which each jurisdiction is responsible. The formula for the assessments is updated every ten years, in conjunction with the decennial census. No single jurisdiction shall pay more than 50% of the total dues. Dues are paid annually in January of each calendar year. Only those jurisdictions who have voting members on the Policy Board pay annual dues.

Metro COG also collects annually from member jurisdictions additional funds for items that are universal in nature and are divided among the jurisdictions. Examples of this would be the Metropolitan Transportation Plan developed every five years, and the Metro COG agency remodel (completed 2019).

Metro COG also collects additional funding from jurisdictions for their participation in contracted planning activities. These funds are collected from individual jurisdictions (or collection of jurisdictions) for projects specific to those jurisdictions.

## **Other Revenue**

The MnDOT annually provides Metro COG funding from the State of Minnesota's general fund. Metro COG also received minimal income from conducting in-house studies for member and associate jurisdictions, not eligible for CPG funding (e.g. zoning and subdivision ordinance updates), and administering grants or programs. These funds, along with CPG, and related local match, provide the operating capital for Metro COG.

## **Policy Board Purpose, Membership, and Role**

The purpose of the Policy Board, is to provide an ongoing cooperative, collaborative, and comprehensive transportation planning process that meets Federal and State guidelines for the expenditure of Federal Transportation funds in the Metro COG region, as well as providing for local and regional non-transportation planning studies and efforts.

## **Membership**

The Policy Board consists of seventeen (17) elected and appointed officials. The Articles of Association state that no single jurisdiction shall have more than 50% of the votes on the Policy Board. The composition and status of each jurisdiction is as follows:

- Cass County – 1 voting member
- Clay County – 1 voting member
- City of Dilworth – 1 voting member
- City of Horace – 1 voting member
- City of Fargo – 7 voting members
- City of Moorhead – 3 voting members
- City of West Fargo – 2 voting members
- MATBUS – 1 voting member

Additionally, Metro Cog offers seven (7) Associate Memberships to the Policy Board. The Associate Members do not have voting privileges, and do not pay annual dues, but may participate in Policy Board discussions. Associate Members to the Policy Board include:

- City of Barnesville
- City of Casselton
- City of Glyndon
- City of Harwood
- City of Hawley
- City of Kindred
- City of Mapleton

Ex-Officio (non-voting) members

- Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT West Central District 4)
- North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT Fargo District)

### **Alternates**

Every appointed entity may also designate an alternate delegate to serve when its regular voting member is absent. The appointed alternate must be an elected official if representing an elected official and must serve the jurisdiction within all or part of the area that the regular member serves.

### **Officers**

The Chair and Vice Chair rotate on an annual basis on a pre-approved schedule. The schedule may be revised by a majority of the Policy Board. The current rotation schedule is identified in Figure 6. The incoming Chair and Vice Chair take office at the January meeting, or first Policy Board meeting of the new year, whichever comes first.

### **Meeting/Quorum Requirements**

The Policy Board conducts their meetings on the third Thursday of each month at 4:00 PM at the Metro COG office: One 2<sup>nd</sup> Street N, Case Plaza, Suite 232, Fargo, North Dakota, 58102. Meetings are open to the public. A quorum is nine (9) voting members. Staff will contact each voting member in advance of the scheduled Policy Board meeting to ascertain whether a quorum will be available. Alternates may serve at any time, as requested by the primary member, or by request of Metro COG staff to meet quorum requirements.

Per direction of the NDDOT, all non-procedural votes on issues before the Policy Board must be conducted via roll call. Staff will solicit the action of each voting member present by roll call vote, and the results of that vote will be included as part of the official meeting minutes.

### **Policy Board Role**

As previously stated, the Policy Board **IS** the Council of Governments (COG) and **IS** the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The Policy Board approves all activities of

Metro COG. It hires an Executive Director to oversee a professional staff engaged in meeting the Federal, State, and Local responsibilities of a COG and MPO, as well as any and all requested activities as directed by the Policy Board.

Policy Board responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Approving a Budget and Unified Planning Work Program
- Approving area-wide plans and studies
- Hiring and Reviewing an Executive Director
- Rendering personnel decisions on staff and the Executive Director
- Reviewing, amending, and approving the Articles of Association, Administrative and Personnel documents, Policy Board and Transportation Technical Committee Bylaws
- Approving all contracts between and among Metro COG and its oversight agencies, contracted service providers, and local jurisdictions

## **Metro COG Executive Committee**

The purpose of the Executive Committee is to advise the Policy Board on matters of Personnel and Finance, as well as activities delegated by the Policy Board. Membership on the Executive Committee is one (1) member each from Policy Board voting members. The current Policy Board chair oversees the Executive Committee. Non-procedural votes shall be executed by roll call vote. Four (4) members constitute a quorum. Meetings are scheduled on an as-needed basis, usually falling on the first Wednesday of the month.

## **Other Committees and Boards**

### **Transportation Technical Committee**

The Transportation Technical Committee (TTC) is an advisory body to the Policy Board. The TTC evaluates the technical, operational, and implementation aspects of studies, grant proposals, and certain construction projects, and offers recommendations to the Policy Board. The TTC is composed of professional transportation planning and engineering staff from local governments, The Minnesota and North Dakota DOTs, and other local entities involved in area planning.

### **Membership**

Membership on the TTC is open to all member jurisdictions. It consists of voting and non-voting members. As stated in the approved TTC Bylaws, the membership of the TTC is as follows:

- One (1) Metro COG – Executive Director serves as the TTC Chair
- One (1) City of Dilworth
- One (1) City of Horace
- Two (2) City of Fargo (Engineering and Planning)
- Two (2) City of Moorhead (Engineering and Planning)
- Two (2) City of West Fargo (Planning, Engineering or Public Works)



- Two (2) Cass County (County Engineering and Planning Departments)
- Two (2) Clay County (County Engineering and Planning Departments)
- Two (2) MATBUS representatives
- One (1) Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT – District 4)
- One (1) North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT – Local Government Division)
- One (1) Freight Representative
- One (1) Bicycle/Pedestrian Representative
- Two (2) University/College Representatives (one each from Minnesota and North Dakota)
- One (1) Economic Development Representative (regional representative)

#### Ex-Officio Non-Voting Members

- One (1) Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Representative
- One (1) Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Representative
- One (1) representative for each Metro COG Associate Alternates

Each appointing authority may also designate one (1) alternate for each member serving on the TTC.

#### Officers

The Metro COG Executive Director is designated as the TTC chair. The TTC votes annually in December to appoint a Vice Chair for the committee to serve as Chair in the absence of the Executive Director.

Figure 6: Metro COG Policy Board Chair and Vice Chair Rotation Schedule

Year(s)	Chair Representative	Vice Chair Representative
2022, 2029, 2036, 2043	City of Fargo	City of Moorhead
2023, 2030, 2037, 2044	City of Moorhead	Cass County
2024, 2031, 2038, 2045	Cass County	Clay County
2025, 2032, 2039, 2046	Clay County	City of West Fargo
2026, 2033, 2040, 2047	City of West Fargo	City of Horace
2027, 2034, 2041, 2048	City of Horace	City of Dilworth
2028, 2035, 2042, 2049	City of Dilworth	City of Fargo

#### Meetings/Quorum

Meetings are general held on the second Thursday of each month at 10:00 a.m. at the Metro COG offices: 1 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Street North, Case Plaza Suite 232, Fargo, North Dakota, 58102. Meetings are open to the public. Quorum for the TTC will be no less than 34% of voting members.

## Other Committees and Subcommittees

### Metro Area Transit (MATBUS) Coordination Committee

**Purpose/Responsibilities:** Formed under the Joint Powers Agreement in 2004, the MAT Coordination Committee Board is tasked with making recommendations to the Policy Board, the City of Fargo, the City of Moorhead, and other cities/entities related to capital purchases, service areas, transit routes, transit rates/fares, budgets, marketing, long-term planning needs, etc. The current Coordination Committee was revised/restructured in late 2024.

**Membership:** Elected and appointed members from the community. Chair is elected by the Coordination Committee.

**Meeting Frequency:** Meets every month (generally the third Wednesday at 9:00 AM).

**Number of Member Seats:** Committee comprised of 12 voting members (quorum of 7).

**Typical Meeting Location:** Metro COG Office: 1 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Street North, Case Plaza Suite 232, Fargo, North Dakota, 58102.

### Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee

**Purpose/Responsibilities:** Discuss, coordinate, and recommend to the TTC and Policy Board bicycle and pedestrian matters around the FM metro area.

**Membership:** Technical staff from local units of government and DOTs, health and social service agencies, and citizens.

**Meeting Frequency:** Quarterly.

**Number of Member Seats:** 17 (quorum of 9)

**Typical Meeting Location:** Metro COG Office: 1 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Street North, Case Plaza Suite 232, Fargo, North Dakota, 58102.

### Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Committee

**Purpose/Responsibilities:** To provide and outlet for GIS users and managers in the Fargo-Moorhead community to discuss GIS initiatives, coordinate, and share planning-related data among agencies in the Metropolitan area.

**Membership:** Technical and GIS management staff from the cities and counties in the Metro COG region.

**Meeting Frequency:** Quarterly.

**Number of Member Seats:** There is not a defined number of seats or a defined quorum.

**Typical Meeting Location:** Varies.

## Policy Board Principles and Responsibilities

### Board Principles

Metro COG is, by definition and mission, a regional planning organization. The whole of the region is more than just the sum of its individual jurisdictions. The principles on which

the Policy Board is based are designed to be regional in nature, and to put the needs of the region first. Metro COG is also a service agency and an avenue for the public and other concerned stakeholders to actively participate in the regional planning process. It is expected that:

- On all matters, Metro COG shall endeavor to first consider what is good and right for the region as a whole, when evaluating requests from specific groups or local governments. The visions of the member governments should be incorporated into a cohesive area-wide approach;
- The Policy Board should always strive to be courteous to its citizens, and allow each person ample opportunity to express their concern in the public forum. This courtesy should also be extended to other members of the Policy Board and Metro COG staff; and,
- Policy Board Members, staff, and others attending the meeting are encouraged to maintain an appropriate meeting decorum.

It is assumed that each Policy Board member has agreed to represent their respective jurisdiction, and has been appointed to the position to represent the interests of the region, and not just on matters related to their respective organizations. Metro COG does not impose any responsibilities on the Policy Board members, but asks only for a commitment to participate on Board activities, and to prepare accordingly to be informed and able to intelligently vote on matters before the Policy Board. It is recommended that Policy Board members:

- Study the agenda package, and contact the Executive Director, or Executive Assistant, as needed to become familiar with each item;
- Be prepared with the necessary facts and background to intelligently discuss and decide each issue;
- To ask questions and express concerns on matters before the Board;
- To use Policy Board meetings to update all members on information relative to any outside committees or boards that pertain to Metro COG;
- To bring back to the Policy Board information about local board activities;
- To arrange their schedules to keep the third Thursday afternoon of each month open for Policy Board meetings;
- To keep discussion limited to issues before the Policy Board. Meetings will be in duration as long as needed to conduct business before the board. The Chair will strive to adjourn the meetings within one hour; and,
- To schedule their time so that each meeting may start on time. A Board member who is unable to attend a scheduled meeting is asked to advise the Executive Director or Executive Assistant 24 hours prior to the meeting to assure that a quorum will be present. Absent board members are responsible for contacting their alternate member representative and advising them that they need to attend in their absence.

### **Major Responsibilities of the Policy Board**

As the COG and the MPO for the greater Fargo-Moorhead area, Metro COG is required to develop and maintain various plans and programs, as mandated by Federal legislation. Failure to do so would mean the loss of CPG funding. The major planning programs include, but is not limited to the following:

### **Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)**

The Metropolitan Transportation Plan, previously known as the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), is updated every five years to cover a planning horizon of at least 20 years. The plan must be fiscally constrained and identify the goals and objectives of the metropolitan area, as well as transportation goals and projects to be accomplished over the defined planning horizon, to meet those goals and objectives.

The Metro GROW: 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan was completed in 2019. The Metro 2050: Transportation Moving Ahead MTP is available at [www.fmmetrocog.org](http://www.fmmetrocog.org).

### **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**

The Transportation Improvement Program is a staged, capital improvement plan that is used to program Federal transportation projects in a four-year time frame. All projects contained in the TIP must come from the MTP. Federal funds attributed to the region, as administered through the MnDOT and NDDOT, are assigned and prioritized to projects in the TIP.

### **Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)**

The Unified Planning Work Program contains information on planning studies, technical support projects, and ongoing planning activities that are being conducted on behalf of the Metro COG transportation agencies, and the municipalities that are in the MPO region. The UPWP also lists the Federal, State, and/or Local funding sources for each planning project and provides detailed budget information for each project.

Metro COG utilizes a two-year UPWP and amends it as necessary.

### **Public Participation Plan (PPP)**

The Public Participation Plan identifies all the policies and procedures that Metro COG employs in its public outreach efforts. The MTP, TIP, UPWP, and other documents and studies require proactive public input. The PPP is updated every few years, as necessary.

### **Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI)**

As a recipient of Federal funds, Metro COG is required to conform to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI) and all related statutes, regulations, and directives, which provide that no person shall be excluded from participation in, denied benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) on the grounds of race, color, or national origin.

The purpose of Title VI is to eliminate discrimination in federally funded programs and activities and to ensure the equitable distribution of public funds for public benefit. Metro COG incorporates into its planning process various elements of Title VI requirements, Environmental Justice (EJ), Limited English Proficiency (LEP), Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE), and report annually to the NDDOT on the Title VI issues in the region. Metro COG includes in all contracts Title VI requirements for all contractors, subcontractors, and sub-recipients. All public participation efforts are

designed to be non-discriminatory and to reach out to all members of the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area.

### **Transit Development Plan (TDP)**

The Transit Development Plan (TDP) is a five-year planning document that identifies the needs, strategies, and opportunities for public and private transit in the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area. Metro COG works with MATBUS in the development of the TDP, usually through a consultant hired to produce the document. It documents the existing conditions, identifies system performance issues, underserved areas, and established preferred alternatives to implement future transit needs. The TDP also serves as the Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan (CHSTP).

### **Other Major Activities**

*Intelligent Transportation System Regional Architecture* – Identifies the physical and logical connections and data flows of information between and among ITS field elements and control centers.

*Traffic Counts* – Metro COG collects and processes traffic count data for both vehicular and bicycle/pedestrian traffic. The results of these counts are provided to local jurisdictions, state DOTs, and the general public.

*Planning Studies and Other Contracts* – The Policy Board approves all Requests for Proposals (RFP) and contracts for all planning studies and contracted services funded by Metro COG.

*Travel Demand Model (TDM)* – Metro COG is required to use a travel demand model to assist in the development of future traffic needs. The TDM is currently maintained by the Advanced Traffic Analysis Center (ATAC), but is supplemented with work done during the Metropolitan Transportation Plan.

## **Budget**

The Metro COG budget consists of two parts: 1) Operations, and 2) Contract Planning Services. Revenues generated by local jurisdictions, Federal CPG funds, state funding assistance from the Minnesota Department of Transportation, and funds from local jurisdictions for planning studies make up the revenue stream. Operation expenses include staff salary and benefits, overhead and local-only expenses not covered under Federal legislation. Funding for planning studies is assessed to each member jurisdiction participating in the study are billed only after the contract for such services are approved by the Metro COG Policy Board.

The Policy Board approves the budget and all budget amendments. The Federal Highway Administration and the North Dakota Department of Transportation, as oversight agencies, also review and approved the budget and budget amendments to assure Federal compliance.

## Unified Planning Work Program

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) identifies the activities and projects the agency will undertake on a yearly basis, and covers a two-year period. The Metro COG UPWP is usually approved in the third quarter prior to the operating year. The UPWP must satisfy the requirements of 23 CFR 450.308, and will formally identify the planning priorities for the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan area.

Pursuant to 23 CFR 450.314, the development of the UPWP is done in cooperation with the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT), the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), Metro Area Transit (MATBUS), and Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area member units of government.

The UPWP establishes work activities that ensure the maintenance and implementation of the Metro 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

The UPWP is constructed specifically to implement certain activities as set forth within previously adopted plans, programs, and policies. These approved plans, programs, and policies are relative to the overarching Metropolitan Planning Program (MPP) as approved by the Metro COG Policy Board. The UPWP proposes work activities that address needs identified through previously adopted plans and programs.

The UPWP includes several work activities to further recommendations outline within the Metro 2050 MTP. Most significantly, the UPWP includes the development of a more detailed performance-based approach to transportation planning as required by Federal transportation legislation.

## Orientation

The Executive Director is available to hold an orientation to familiarize new and existing Policy Board members with current projects and give a general overview of how the organization works, and a review of the contents of this document.

## Briefings

The Executive Director is also available to provide individual briefings prior to Policy Board meetings, to answer questions related to specific projects, or any general agency questions/concerns.

## Staff

Metro COG is staffed with eight (8) Full Time Employees (FTE). Metro COG usually employs one transportation planning intern throughout the calendar year.

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## Useful Acronyms

Metro COG uses quite a few acronyms in everyday conversation and documents. A list of useful acronyms is found in [Appendix A](#). While this list is somewhat extensive, it is not completely inclusive. This list should provide a basis for most acronyms used by Metro COG. If you do not understand the context, please do not hesitate to ask for clarification.



## **Metro COG Principles**

### **Principle 1: Develop Exceptional Staff**

- Hire the best people
- Challenge staff to continuously improve
- Grow effective leaders who follow the COG philosophy
- Encourage creativity; think outside the box

### **Principle 2: Share the Burden**

- Level the workload through cross-training and team approach

### **Principle 3: Prevent Inefficiencies**

- Use all resources (time, labor, capital) efficiently

### **Principle 4: Maintain Credibility**

- Resolve issues proactively, before they become problems
- Make objective planning recommendations
- Use the best available information
- Use proven analytical tools
- Choose long-term benefits over short-term considerations

### **Principle 5: Build Consensus**

- Listen Listen Listen
- Ask the right questions
- Take the time to plan carefully
- Serve as an honest broker to resolve conflicts
- Educate and achieve consensus
- Keep the public involved and informed
- Implement quickly

### **Principle 6: Remain Flexible**

- Be responsive to your community's changing needs

### **Principle 7: Help Partners**

- Maintain effective working relationships with public and private partners
- Encourage continuous improvement

### **Principle 8: Be the Best**

- Be the standard by which other MPOs are judged
- Do it right the first time
- Do not cut corners
- Be action-oriented



## Appendix A. Useful Acronyms

Metro COG uses quite a few acronyms in everyday conversation and documents. While this list is somewhat extensive, it is not completely inclusive. This list should provide a basis for most acronyms used by Metro COG. If you don't understand the context, please do not hesitate to ask for clarification!

3C	Continuous – Comprehensive – Cooperative
AADT	Average Annual Daily Traffic
AASHTO	American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
ACS	American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau)
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
ADT	Average Daily Traffic
AIP	Area Improvement Program
AMPO	Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (national)
APO	Area Planning Organization
ASC	Automated Stability Control
ATAC	Advanced Traffic Analysis Center (at NDSU)
ATIP	Area Transportation Improvement Program
ATP	Area Transportation Partnership
ATR	Automatic Traffic Recorder
AV	Autonomous Vehicles
BIL	Bipartisan Infrastructure Law
BNSF	Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway
BRT	Bus Rapid Transit
CAV	Connected and Autonomous Vehicle
CE	Categorical Exclusions
CE/CM	Cost Estimating / Cost Management
CIP	Capital Improvement Program
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CMAQ	Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality
CMP	Congestion Management Process
CN	Canadian National Railway
CO	Central Office
COG	Council of Governments
CRP	Carbon Reduction Program
CPG	Consolidated Planning Grant
CPKC	Canadian Pacific Kansas City Railroad
CR	Continuing Resolution
CS	Complete Streets (now called: "Safe and Accessible Transportation Options")
CSAH	Minnesota County State Aid Highway

CSAP	Community Safety Action Plan
CSS	Context Sensitive Solutions
CV	Connected Vehicle
DNR	Department of Natural Resources
DOT	Department of Transportation
DTA	Dynamic Traffic Assignment
E+C	Existing-plus-Committed
EA	Environmental Assessment
EAW	Environmental Assessment Worksheet
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EJ	Environmental Justice
EO	Executive Order
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EV	Electric Vehicles
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FAST Act	Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act
FAUA	Federal Aid Urbanized Area or UZA
FCI	Facilities Condition Index
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FIRST	Freeway Incident Response Safety Teams
FRA	Federal Railroad Administration
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
FY	Fiscal Year
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System
HIN	High-Injury Network
HIP	Highway Improvement Plan
HOT	High Occupancy Toll
HOV	High Occupancy Vehicle
HPMS	Highway Performance Monitoring System
HSIP	Highway Safety Improvement Plan
HSOP	Highway Safety Operation Plan
HSS	U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services
HUD	U.S. Dept. of Housing & Urban Development
IJA	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021
ICE	Intersection Control Evaluation
IRC	Interregional Corridor
ITS	Intelligent Transportation System
LCV	Long Combination Vehicle
LGD	Local Government Division (NDDOT)
LOS	Level of Service
LOTTR	Level of Travel Time Reliability
LPR	Legal Permanent Resident
LRTP	Long-Range Transportation Plan

LRT	Light Rail Transit
LWCF	Land and Water Conservation Fund
MaaS	Mobility as a Service
MATBUS	Metro Area Transit of the Fargo-Moorhead region
Metro COG	Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments
MnDOT	Minnesota Department of Transportation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPA	Metropolitan Planning Area
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
MSA	Metropolitan Statistical Area (includes all of Cass and Clay Counties)
MTP	Metropolitan Transportation Plan
MSCTC	Minnesota State Community and Technical College
MSUM	Minnesota State University – Moorhead
MUTCD	Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices
MVMT	Million Vehicle Miles Traveled
MVST	Motor Vehicle Sales Tax
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standard
NAICS	North American Industry Classification System
NBI	National Bridge Inventory
NDSU	North Dakota State University
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHI	National Highway Institute
NHPP	National Highway Performance Program
NHS	National Highway System
NDDOT	North Dakota Department of Transportation
NDSU	North Dakota State University
NTN	National Truck Network
NPMRDS	National Performance Management Research Data Set
NTSB	National Transportation Safety Board
NWI	National Wetlands Inventory
O&M	Operations and Maintenance
PBP	Performance-Based Planning
PCI	Pavement Condition Index
PHED	Peak Hour Excessive Delay
PL (Funds)	Planning Funds
PL	Public Law
PM	Performance Management
PM1	Performance Measure Rule 1 – Safety
PM2	Performance Measure Rule 2 – Pavement and Bridge Conditions
PM3	Performance Measure Rule 3 – System Performance, Freight, and CMAQ
PPP	Public Participation Plan

PSR	Present Serviceability Rating
RDC	Regional Development Commission
RQI	Ride Quality Index
RSL	Remaining Service Life
RTAP	Rural Transit Assistance Program
RTC	Regional Trade Center
RTMC	Regional Transportation Management Center
RTP	Recreational Trails Program
SFY	State Fiscal Year
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
SHSO	State Highway Safety Office
SHSP	Strategic Highway Safety Plan
SMART	Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation
SME	Subject Matter Expert
SOV	Single-Occupancy Vehicle
SS4A	Safe Streets and Roads For All
SRTS	Safe Routes to Schools
STBG	Surface Transportation Block Grant
STIP	State Transportation Improvement Program
STSAC	Surface Transportation Security Advisory Committee
TA	Transportation Alternatives Program
TAM	Transit Asset Management
TAMP	Transit Asset Management Plan
TAZ	Traffic Analysis Zone
TDM	Travel Demand Model or Travel Demand Management
TDP	Transit Development Plan
TH	Minnesota Trunk Highway
TIM	Traffic Incident Management
TIP	Transportation Improvement Program
TMA	Transportation Management Area
TMC	Transportation Management Center
TMO	Transportation Management Organization
TNC	Transportation Network Company
TSMO	Transportation System Management and Operations
TTC	Transportation Technical Committee
TOC	Traffic Operation Center
TOCC	Transportation Operation and Communication Center
TPA	Transportation Performance Management
TRB	Transportation Research Board
TTI	Travel Time Index
TTTR	Truck Travel Time Reliability
TZD	Toward Zero Deaths
UGA	Urban Growth Area
UGP	Urban Grant Program

UGPTI	Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute (at NDSU)
UP	Union Pacific Railroad
UPA	Urban Partnership Agreement
UPWP	Unified Planning Work Program
USACE	United States Corps of Engineers
USC	United States Code
USDOT	United States Department of Transportation
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
UZA	Urbanized Area or FAUA (Federal Aid Urbanized Area)
V2I	Vehicle-to-Infrastructure
V2V	Vehicle-to-Vehicle
VHT	Vehicle Hours Traveled
VMT	Vehicle Miles Traveled
VSS	Valley Senior Services
VZ	Vision Zero
VZN	Vision Zero Network