

# Planning Partnership

## INTRODUCTION

Iowa's transportation system is funded through federal, state, local, and private sources. Federal funds are managed through a unique transportation planning partnership involving nine Metropolitan Planning Organizations, 18 Regional Planning Affiliations, and the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT). This cooperative venture focuses on conducting transportation planning and programming for all areas of the state.

The Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Regional Planning Affiliations are associations of local governments established by federal and state law with the goals of strengthening local units of government and promoting intergovernmental cooperation. See Figure 1. They provide assistance to local member governments related to transportation planning, economic development, operation of transit systems, zoning, human services, housing, and environmental concerns.

As a result of this planning collaboration and because these organizations are unique in their own respect, the Iowa DOT decided to showcase them in the *Profiles of Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Regional Planning Affiliations*.

## METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS

A Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is an organization of primarily local elected officials who provide a forum for local decision-making on transportation issues of a regional nature. At least 75 percent of the local governments, including the central city or cities, must agree to the MPO designation by the Governor. Urban areas with population greater than 200,000 are classified as Transportation Management Areas (TMA).

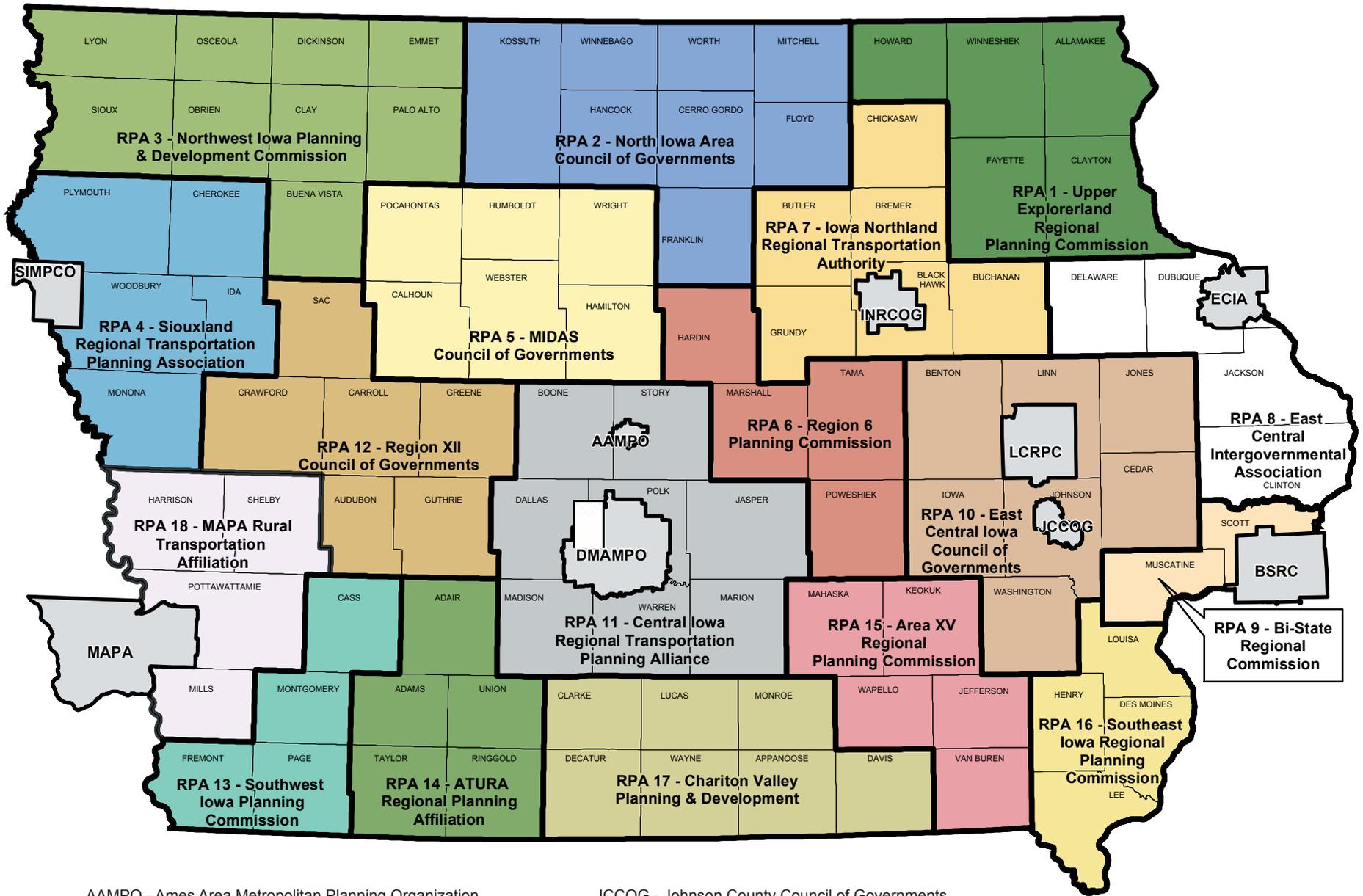
*Local Representation:* Each MPO has a policy board that is generally comprised of chief elected officials who represent different parts of the urban area served by the MPO. This board is advised by a technical committee (typically referred to as a Technical Advisory Committee, or TAC) that consists of planning and engineering staff from jurisdictions within each urban area. The TAC develops high-quality technical tools and analysis for the planning area, and advises the MPO policy board on technical and administrative issues related to metropolitan transportation planning. Some MPOs also utilize a citizen advisory committee and other specialized committees to advise the policy board.

*Planning Factors:* There are seven planning factors the MPOs are required to address in their planning efforts:

- 1) Effects of the economic vitality of the State;
- 2) Increase security;
- 3) Increase accessibility and mobility;
- 4) Protect and enhance the environment;
- 5) Connectivity within all modes of the transportation system;
- 6) Promote efficient system management; and
- 7) Preservation of the transportation system.

*Transportation Planning Elements:* While MPOs must incorporate the statewide transportation planning process as part of the local MPO process, federal code mandates additional elements be incorporated into MPO planning. These elements are:

- **Public Involvement** is an active and inclusive process that allows public input to the planning process.
- **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)** is a fiscally constrained document that includes a list of priority transportation, transit, and transportation enhancement projects that are consistent with the long-range transportation plan.



AAMPO - Ames Area Metropolitan Planning Organization  
 SBSRC - Bi-State Regional Commission  
 DMAMPO - Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization  
 ECIA - East Central Intergovernmental Association  
 INRCOG - Iowa Northland Regional Commission of Governments

JCCOG - Johnson County Council of Governments  
 LCRPC - Linn County Regional Planning Commission  
 MAPA - Metropolitan Area Planning Agency  
 SIMPCO - Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council

**Figure 1**  
 Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Regional Planning Affiliations

- **Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)** indicates a vision and policy structure, sets forth strategies, provides a framework for directing investment and identifies the financial resources to sustain the plan's vision. Plans are updated every five years.
- **Transportation Planning Work Program (TPWP)** is an annual document that describes transportation and transit activities the agency proposes to undertake in the next fiscal year.
- **Management Systems** assists agencies to identify potential transportation improvements.
- **Major Investment Studies** are a cooperative process to help determine the feasibility of a proposed project.

*Funding:* MPOs receive funding for planning and project development from different sources. The following funding reimbursement programs are available and managed by the MPOs:

- Surface Transportation Program (STP) provides funding for improvement of roads, bridges, transit capital projects, transportation enhancements, and can be used for planning activities. The Iowa DOT provides local STP allocation targets to the MPOs by fiscal year.
- STP Transportation Enhancement Program (TE) provides funding for pedestrian or bicycle facilities, acquisition of scenic easements or scenic historic sites, scenic or historic highway programs, landscaping and other scenic beautification, historic preservation, safety and educational activities for bicyclists and pedestrians, and transportation museums, among others.
- FHWA Planning Funds (PL) and FTA Planning Funds Section 5303 are used by MPOs to meet federal requirements for the LRTP, TIP, TPWP, and specific studies addressing area wide and local issues. The use of these funds is identified in the annual TPWP.

- Local Match funds are required by recipients of federal funds. The local match varies by funding source.

Local governments can apply to other funding programs administered by the Iowa DOT such as: Statewide STP TE programs, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality, Federal Recreational Trails, State Recreational Trails, Revitalize Iowa's Sound Economy, Bridge Replacement Programs, Safety Funding Programs and Modal Funding Programs, among others. The MPOs, if desired, may submit letters of support for eligible projects, but the local governments are responsible for administering them.

## REGIONAL PLANNING AFFILIATIONS

In 1968, Iowa officially recognized the concept of regional oriented planning for non-urban areas through the delineation of 16 rural transit planning regions, also called Councils of Government (COG). These regions were designated to address existing and future needs for planning; coordination and administration of state services; common issues, goals and opportunities; and a base for better allocation of resources.

In 1991, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) required states to establish a transportation planning process to serve areas outside the MPOs and TMAs. Iowa adopted a process where non-metropolitan transportation planning, project prioritization and funding are undertaken primarily by local governments through a regional planning agency. As a starting point for creating a state/regional partnership, the Iowa Transportation Commission designated the 16 existing rural transit planning regions as a basis for local consultation. Local members were given the opportunity to stay with an existing rural transit agency, join an adjacent COG, or form a new regional affiliation. As a result, Iowa has 18 regional planning affiliations to implement transportation planning and programming in non-metropolitan areas.

In 1993, the Iowa Transportation Commission (Commission) adopted a new planning process patterned after the MPOs that

created the regional planning affiliations (RPAs). In 1997 with the passage of TEA-21, the Commission reaffirmed its commitment to this regional transportation planning and programming process.

*Local Representation:* Each RPA has established a technical advisory committee and a policy board for guiding the planning and programming process in the region. The technical committee offers technical input to the policy board that is responsible for approving the planning and programming efforts in the region.

*RPA Planning Elements:* The Iowa DOT requires each RPA to prepare four main planning elements for their region. These elements are:

- **Public Involvement** is an active and inclusive process that allows public input to the planning process.
- **Transportation Improvement Program** is a four-year programming document that incorporates projects from the LRTP.
- **Long-Range Transportation Plan** includes a vision and policy structure, sets forth strategies, provides a framework for directing investment and identifies the financial resources to sustain the plan's vision, usually 25 years.
- **Transportation Planning Work Program** describes the work activities each RPA will accomplish during a particular fiscal year.

*Funding:* During ISTEA and TEA-21, the Iowa Association of Counties, the Iowa County Engineers Association and the Iowa DOT met and determined how the STP and TE funding distribution would occur. This process was then presented to, and approved by, the Commission. This consultation process is currently underway concerning SAFETEA-LU. Although the RPA staff is involved in other planning activities such as housing and economic development, STP and TE funding sources are only for transportation planning and programming.

**How is the Profiles of Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Regional Planning Affiliations organized?**

### *Profiles Sections*

- **General Information** includes contact information for the MPO or RPA.
- **Planning Activities** describes the planning activities and documents each MPO or RPA has produced.
- **Planning Goals** includes goals approved by the organization as part of their long range transportation plan.
- **Map** shows the transportation system in the area.
- **Demographic and Economic Information** includes population and employment information such as: regional population, population by age, minority population, employment by industry, per capita income, median house hold income, employment and unemployment figures.
- **Travel Trend Information** includes commuting and freight patterns.
- **Transportation Facilities** shows airport, public transit, rail, roadway and trail facilities.

### *Geographic Boundaries*

The information presented in the *Profiles of Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Regional Planning Affiliations* follow different geographic boundaries due to the availability of data.

**MPO Boundaries** - Three boundaries were used when gathering the information for the MPOs: planning boundary, urban area boundary and study area boundary.

- *Urban Area Boundary* - covers the urbanized areas and contiguous areas likely to become urbanized within the next 5 years. See Figure 2.

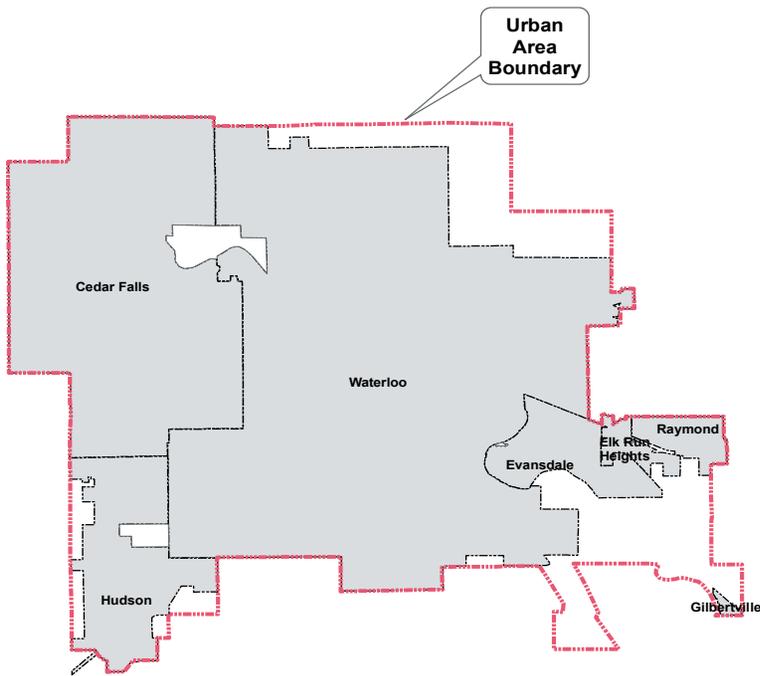


Figure 2  
Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments  
Urban Area Boundary

- *Planning Area Boundary* - covers the urbanized areas and contiguous areas likely to become urbanized within the next 20 years. See Figure 3.

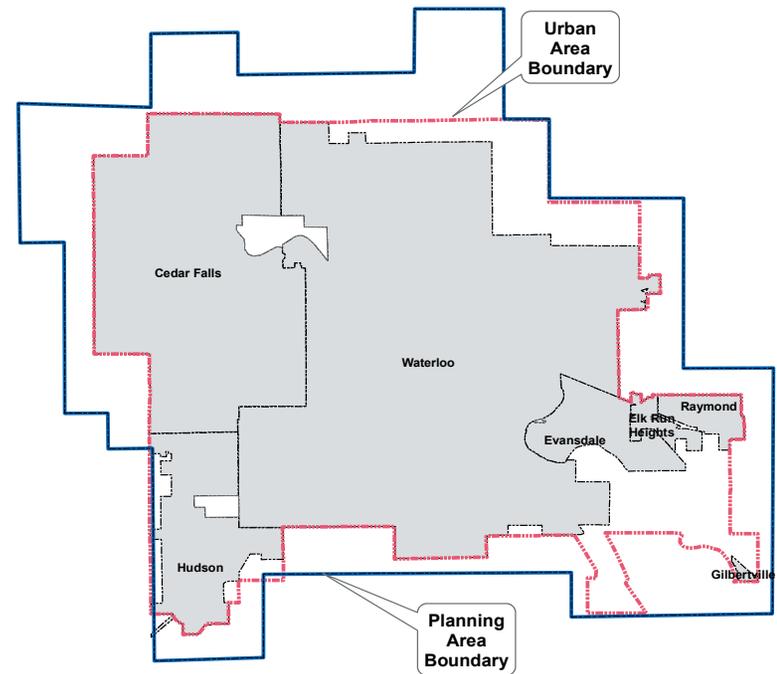
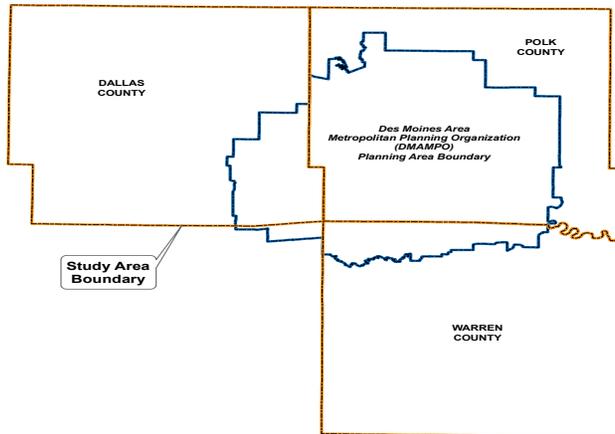


Figure 3  
Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments Planning Area Boundary

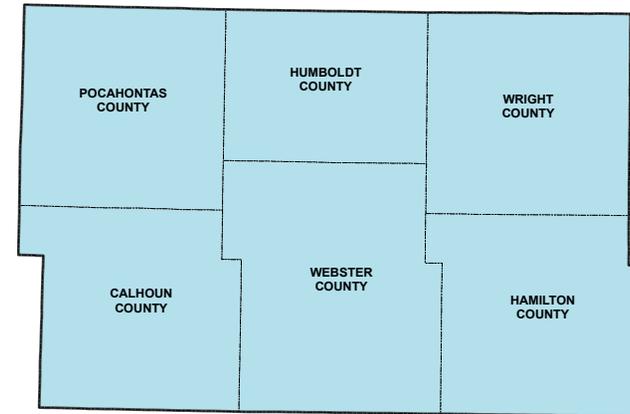
- **Study Area Boundary** - The study area boundary refers to a county or combination of counties related to an MPO. See Figure 4 . The study area boundary counties in each MPO area are as follows:

- Ames Area Metropolitan Planning Organization - Story County in Iowa.
- Bi-State Regional Commission - Scott County in Iowa and Rock Island County in Illinois.
- Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization - Polk, Dallas and Warren Counties in Iowa.
- East Central Intergovernmental Association - Dubuque County in Iowa, JoDaviess County in Illinois, and Grant County in Wisconsin.
- Iowa Northland Council of Governments - Black Hawk County in Iowa.
- Johnson County Council of Governments - Johnson County in Iowa.
- Linn County Regional Planning Commission - Linn County in Iowa.
- Metropolitan Area Planning Agency - Pottawattamie County in Iowa, Sarpy and Douglas Counties in Nebraska.
- Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council - Woodbury County in Iowa, Dakota County in Nebraska, and Union County in South Dakota.



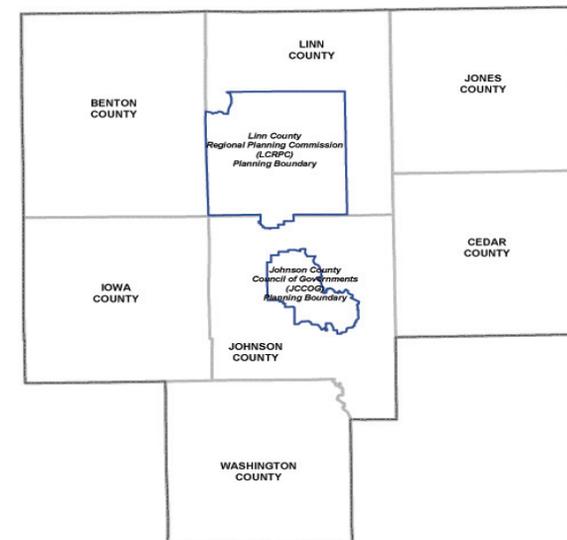
**Figure 4**  
Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization  
Study Area Boundary

**RPA Boundaries** - The RPAs, for most part, are grouping of counties. See Figure 5.



**Figure 5**  
RPA 5 - MIDAS Council of Governments

Some RPAs may include an MPO(s) within their boundaries. However, RPA responsibilities do not include those within the MPO boundaries. See Figure 6.



**Figure 6**  
East Central Iowa Council of Governments, Johnson County Council of  
Governments and Linn County Regional Planning Commission Boundaries