

Terre Haute Competes Project Recommendation Form

The purpose of this Project Recommendation Form is to provide a summary of our research regarding a specific cost savings or service improvement project and to recommend next steps, if any.

1. Cost Savings or Service Improvement Project Name

Metropolitan Planning Organization

2. Study Team Members

Chair

Tom Dinkel

Other Team Members

Pat Carney, Greg Gibson, Greg Goode, Rachel Leslie, Dave Pluckebaum, Bill Thomas, and Steve Witt

Project Support Lead

Nick Weber and Skip Stitt

3. Brief Description of the Project

The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is a federally required, local entity that serves as the central transportation planning body for the Metropolitan Planning Area (currently defined as all of Vigo County and a portion of Clay County). The MPO uses a mixture of federal and local funds to undertake planning activities and allocates additional federal funds for area transportation projects.

The MPO resides within the West Central Indiana Economic Development District (WCIEDD), an organization that also serves as the federal Economic Development Administration's regional Economic Development District as well as the region's Agency on Aging.

Terre Haute Competes included the MPO as a study topic because of concern within segments of the community about the intensity of the MPO's engagement on both transportation-specific issues and broader community discussions that touch transportation issues. There was also interest in analyzing whether the MPO's placement inside the much-larger WCIEDD may temper its effectiveness. Finally, there was interest in better

understanding the role the MPO plays in leveraging funding for the region's transportation needs.

The project involved discussing current MPO operations with MPO and WCIEDD staff and working with INDOT to identify best-in-class operating models for Indiana MPOs.

4. **Key Research Findings**

Local jurisdictions that sit inside urbanized areas with more than 50,000 people must collaborate with each other on regional transportation planning expenditures. However, states have a good deal of flexibility in how these MPOs are structured and how they operate and function. Indiana has relatively informal rules compared to other states.

The MPO has been part of the WCIEDD since 1974. It is operated as a separate entity and has 4.5 FTEs. The leadership consists of an MPO Director (Jeremy Weir) who is managed by the Executive Director of WCIEDD (Ron Hinsenkamp). However, decisions regarding MPO activities and projects are made by the MPO Policy Committee, not WCIEDD or its Board.

There are 14 MPOs in Indiana. Two are considered "free standing" (Evansville and Indianapolis), while the other 12 are all part of larger organizations (e.g., council of governments, regional planning entities). Therefore, the MPO/WCIEDD arrangement is very much in the norm for Indiana.

WCIEDD has indicated that recent INDOT and USDOT reviews of its operation have resulted in satisfactory performance scores. The MPO indicated that in terms of leveraging other, non-MPO funds, it has played a supportive, rather than lead, role. Leading such efforts is not part of the defined role of MPOs; however, providing notice of funding availability and necessary data for applications, and in some cases, signing off on the application, is a function it performs.

According to INDOT, the "home" where the MPO resides is far less important than the leadership of the organization. Personnel often "make the MPO," especially when the organization's role is not well-understood. An engaged MPO leader, with a strong community presence and broad appeal, can greatly aid the work of the MPO.

Additionally, when MPO leadership carries the imprimatur of local civic and political leaders, they have an opportunity to be a regional convener – both around core transportation areas and in other related areas as well. Strong MPOs, with both the capability and the gravitas to convene key stakeholders, can serve this function for communities.

5. **Recommendation**

Following a review of the collected data and a discussion among Study Team members, the consensus of the Study Team was that the only way to dramatically change the MPO would be by relocating it from WCIEDD and moving it to the Terre Haute Economic Development

Corporation (THEDC). While the feedback suggests the MPO's affiliation with another entity is not the driving factor for success or failure, the Study Team believed that the only way to make the MPO a best-in-class organization was to remove it from WCIEDD. Additionally, the MPO will receive the same federal formula funding regardless of its organizational structure.

In conjunction with a move, the MPO should review its current Policy Committee makeup to determine if a smaller membership might be more effective. One possible path forward would have smaller communities sit on the Policy Committee on a rotating basis. Additionally, the Transportation Advisory Committee of the MPO could be bolstered to have more community leadership included, and the 11-year old Public Participation Plan should be updated. However, the relocation of the MPO from WCIEDD to THEDC does not require any changes to the Policy Committee or Transportation Advisory Committee membership.

Structural changes to the MPO will require the consent of Governor Holcomb.

6. Next Steps

While the Governor makes determinations regarding the structure of MPOs, we expect that he will look to INDOT for advice and counsel. Therefore, if the Steering Committee endorses the Study Team's recommendation, the first step should be to informally engage with INDOT and identify at the outset any concerns regarding a move away from WCIEDD.

With a future home of the MPO identified at the THEDC, it is important to engage in a vetting process to ensure THEDC is capable of managing the MPO staff. Additionally, issues such as providing necessary seed funding and meeting federal requirements concerning the management and audit of federal funds, need to be examined and addressed.

Once outstanding issues are addressed, the Policy Committee, INDOT and the Governor will need to be formally engaged with the proposition to move the MPO from WCIEDD to the THEDC.

If all parties agree, a move can commence.

7. Timeline

An analysis to evaluate possible obstacles to THEDC becoming the new home for the MPO could take 60-90 days following an engagement. While it is believed Governor Holcomb has not been asked about the prospect of approving alterations to the MPO, past support from Governor Daniels and (assumed) support from INDOT suggest he would not be a barrier to the process.

Once the approvals are secured, the move becomes an operational issue with staffing implications to address. It is realistic that a move could occur by the end of calendar year 2017.

8. Other Issues

N/A