



NASHVILLE AREA

**Metropolitan Planning Organization**



## KEY TERMS DEFINED

### Common Types of Regional Governance Organizations

#### Development District, Economic Development District

Development Districts (DD), sometimes known as Development Organizations (DOs), were generally created by state legislatures in the 1960s to provide a mechanism for regional cooperation and technical support for planning and economic development initiatives. States were incentivized to create DDs by the federal government in order to access federal grants for economic development, infrastructure, and social services.

Economic Development Districts (EDDs) are federally-designated organizations, often DDs, that are responsible for creating and maintaining a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS serves as a cornerstone of the U.S. Economic Development Administration's grant programs, as well as a means to engage community leaders, leverage the private sector, and establish a strategic blueprint for regional collaboration on economic development efforts.

**Statewide:** Nine DDs were established by the General Assembly under the Tennessee Development District Act of 1965.

**Middle Tennessee:** GNRC is the DD for 13 counties in Middle Tennessee including all Tennessee counties in the Clarksville Urbanized Area MPO and the Nashville Area MPO except for Maury County, which is served by the South Central Tennessee Development District. GNRC is the Economic Development District for 13 counties, as federally-designated by the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

#### Metropolitan Planning Organization

A Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is a public agency that carries out federally-required transportation planning process for its respective metropolitan planning area (MPA). The MPA includes, at a minimum, the Census-defined Urbanized Area (UZA) and adjacent areas expected to urbanize over the next twenty years, but an MPO may expand its area to better align with other regional geographies (e.g., development districts) or regional definitions (e.g., Metropolitan Statistical Area).

Initially required by The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962, the MPO serves as a forum for local elected officials to have input into the planning and implementation of federally-funded transportation improvements. It exists as an agency that is responsible for developing a fiscally-constrained long-range transportation plan, a regional transportation improvement program (TIP), and a unified planning work program. The TIP is the mechanism by which MPOs exercise their authority to program federal funds on roadway, transit and other types of transportation improvements.

Federal transportation legislation since the 1990s has strengthened the MPO's role in programming transportation projects by making MPOs responsible for approving significant expenditures of federal

dollars. In addition, MPOs have become a more significant actor in other areas of planning given the inherent relationship that exists between transportation and other regional issues such as economic development, land use, housing, environmental quality, and public health, among others.

**Nationally:** There are approximately 420 MPOs across the nation, with nearly half of them operating as part of a Regional Council or Council of Governments, usually serving the same general geography.

**Statewide:** There are 11 MPOs in Tennessee that serve the metropolitan areas around Bristol, Chattanooga, Clarksville, Cleveland, Jackson, Johnson City, Kingsport, Knoxville, Lakeway, Memphis, and Nashville. MPOs were not created by the Tennessee General Assembly, but exist as a result of a federal designation process that involves local governments and the Governor. MPOs in Tennessee are housed within another governmental agency as they lack independent contracting authority from the state.

**Middle Tennessee:** The Nashville Area MPO serves 7 counties including Davidson, Maury, Robertson, Rutherford, Sumner, Williamson, and Wilson. Its boundaries are much larger than required by law, allowing improved coordination among rural, suburban, and urban interests. It is administered by the Metropolitan Planning Commission of Nashville-Davidson County through an agreement with the MPO board. The Clarksville Urbanized Area MPO serves Montgomery County and portions of Christian County, KY. It is administered by the Clarksville-Montgomery County Regional Planning Commission.

### Rural Planning Organizations

Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs) serve as a forum for local elected leaders to assist the State in prioritizing transportation projects for funding. Unlike MPOs, they do not have the authority to program federal funds and are not required to produce a regional transportation plan. In Tennessee, most RPOs are administered by staff of the Development Districts, in cooperation with TDOT. The Middle Tennessee RPO has been administered by the Mid-Cumberland Human Resource Agency since 2009 after TDOT shifted the duties away from the Greater Nashville Regional Council.

## Regional Council of Governments

A regional council of governments (COG), or regional council or regional commission, is a multi-jurisdictional and multi-service entity that delivers a variety of federal, state, and local programs. COGs are typically involved in comprehensive planning, transportation planning, economic development, workforce development, environment quality, services for the elderly, and act as a research and data clearinghouse for its members.

Generally conceived in the 1960s, COGs are adept at consensus-building, creating partnerships, providing services, problem solving, and fiscal management. The role of the regional council has been shaped by the changing dynamics in federal, state, and local government relations, and the growing recognition that the region is the arena in which local governments must work together to resolve social and environmental challenges. These organizations have carved out a valuable niche for themselves as reliable agents and many more operate independent of federal funding.

**Nationally:** Of the 39,000 local, general purpose governments in the United States (counties, cities, townships, towns, villages, boroughs) a total of more than 35,000 are served by COGs.

**Statewide:** Two of Tennessee's nine development districts, the Greater Nashville Regional Council and the Memphis Area Association of Governments, have additional enabling legislation that expands its planning authority or responsibilities in a manner consistent with a COG form of organization. That said, given the broad definition of a COG, any one of the existing development districts may consider themselves as such.