

## Chapter 2

# Skagit Metropolitan Planning Organization and Transportation Plan

### Introduction

This plan combines two planning efforts, one required by Federal statute and the other by state statute. The first is a metropolitan transportation plan (MTP) and the second a sub-regional transportation plan.

The Federal Surface Transportation Act of 1973 required the formation of a metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for any urbanized area with a population greater than 50,000 (The Metropolitan Planning Process: Key Issues, US DOT, Nov. 2001). The Skagit Metropolitan Planning Organization (SMPO) came into being in 2003 as a result of the population of the contiguous urban area comprising Mt. Vernon, Burlington, Sedro Woolley and adjacent urbanizing areas exceeding 50,000 in population in the 2000 census. Local leaders met and chose the Skagit Council of Governments to be the lead agency for the new entity.

### Skagit Metropolitan Planning Organization

Although the formation of metropolitan planning organizations is voluntary, urban areas meeting the population requirement may not receive Federal transportation funds if they do not form an MPO. Thus it makes more sense to refer to the formation as a de facto Federal requirement rather than a local decision.

Designation of the urbanized area, however, does not result in a metropolitan planning organization. A formation process must be followed and approved, with the key approval coming from the governor. Figure 1 shows the steps that have to be gone through for full designation.

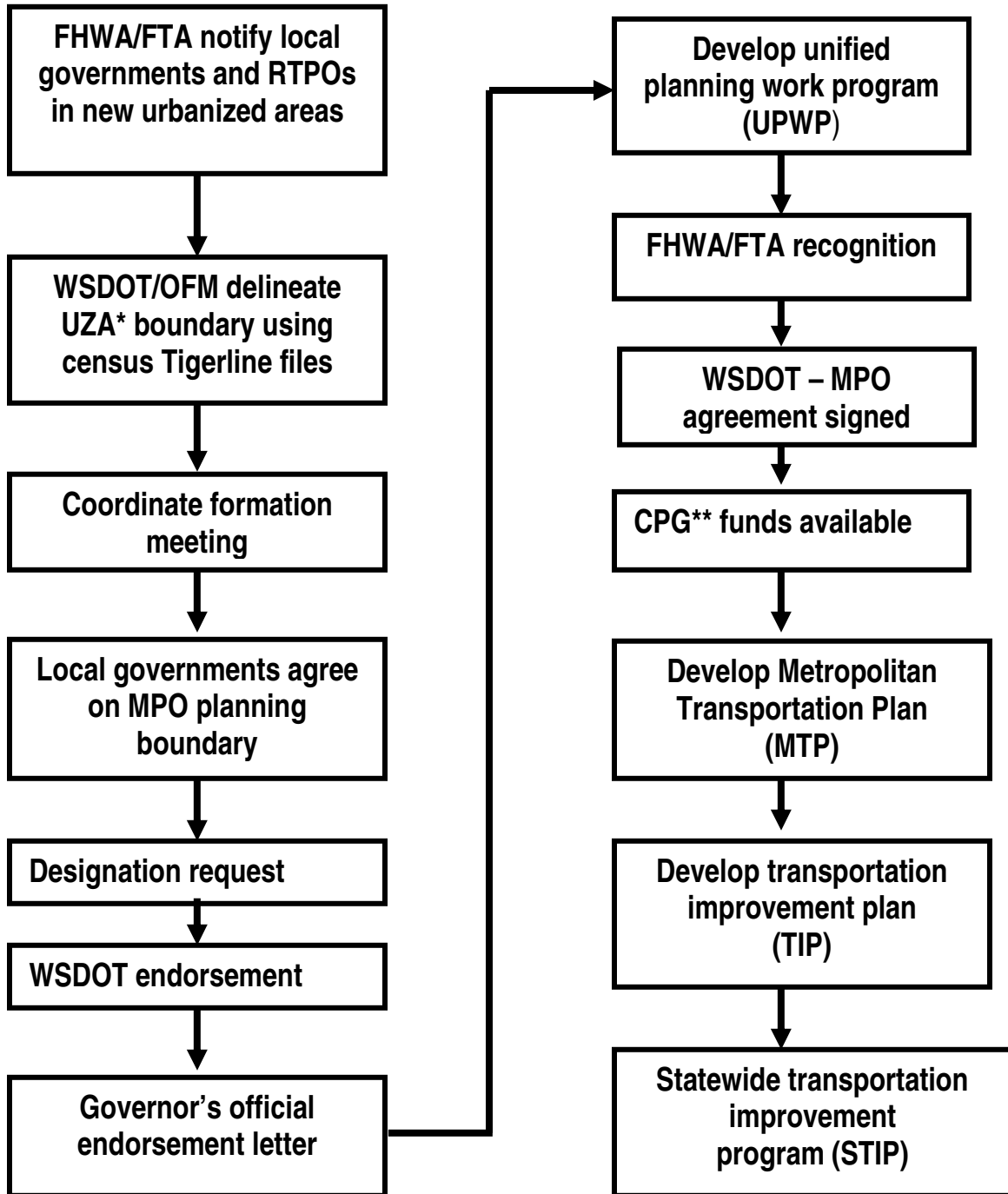
### Function of the MPO

According to “The Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process: Key Issues, published by the Federal Highway Administration” there are five core functions for MPOs. They are:

- Establish a setting: Establish and manage a fair and impartial setting for effective regional decision-making in the metropolitan area.
- 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.

Figure 1

## MOUNT VERNON METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION DESIGNATION PROCESS



\* UZA = Urbanized area; CPG = Consolidated planning grants

- Maintain a long-range transportation plan (MTP): Develop and update a long-range transportation plan for the metropolitan area covering a planning horizon of at least twenty years that fosters (1) mobility and
- access for people and goods, (2) efficient system performance and preservation, and (3) quality of life.
- Develop a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP): Develop a program based on the long-range transportation plan and designed to serve the area's goals, using spending, regulating, operating, management, and financial tools.
- Involve the public: Involve the general public and all the significantly affected sub-groups in the four essential functions listed above.
  
- This plan meets the requirements of the third item on this list, maintaining a long-range transportation plan, referred to as the metropolitan transportation plan (MTP). The Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21) identifies seven planning principles that guide the MPOs. These are as follows:
  - Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
  - Increase the safety and security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
  - Increase the accessibility and mobility options available to people and for freight;
  - Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, and improve quality of life;
  - Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight;
  - Promote efficient system management and operation; and
  - Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.
  
- The metropolitan transportation plan (MTP) needs to meet the following requirements:
  - Covers a period of at least 20 years
  - Identifies facility needs for:
    - Major roadways
    - Inter-modal facilities
    - Transit
    - Other (non-motorized, school, etc)
  - Provides for coordination with:
    - Transit operators

- Regional airports
- Maritime operators
- Rail-freight operators
- Others
- Financially constrained, including, by mode:
  - New facilities
  - Maintenance
  - Preservation
  - Rehabilitation
- Illustrative list (important projects not on the financially constrained list)
- Include Non-USDOT service grant recipients, such as paratransit
- Public Involvement
- Agency coordination

The urbanized area previously referred to is shown in Figure 2. The MPO also has an area called the metropolitan planning area. This area includes land that is expected to meet the requirements for urbanized area within the 20-year planning period. At its discretion and the approval of FHWA the MPO can include lands besides the 20-year growth forecast if there is good reason to do so.

Many MPOs are asked, by local elected officials, to also assume other responsibilities for regional planning, depending upon needs.

**Figure 2**  
**Metropolitan Urbanized Area**

