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16. Abstract This report documents rural planning organization (RPO) workshops conducted throughout Texas. An RPO is a voluntary organization created and governed by locally elected officials responsible for transportation decisions at the local level. RPOs address rural transportation planning priorities and provide recommendations to TxDOT for areas outside the boundaries of a metropolitan planning organization (MPO). More than 145 community leaders participated in the workshops, including county judges, county commissioners, and mayors and representatives from TxDOT Districts, cities, MPOs, and councils of government. Since the RPO project was initiated, the number of RPOs in Texas has grown from four to 14. Additional RPOs are expected to organize and form in the next few years. The RPO workshops involved both new and existing RPOs throughout Texas.			
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TEXAS RPO WORKSHOP IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT SUMMARY

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DISCLAIMER

This research was performed in cooperation with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The contents of this report reflect the views of the authors, who are responsible for the facts and the accuracy of the data presented herein. The contents do not necessarily reflect the official view or policies of the FHWA or TxDOT. This report does not constitute a standard, specification, or regulation.

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TEXAS RPO WORKSHOP IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT SUMMARY

5-6483-01 RPO WORKSHOPS

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Summary

TTI researchers conducted RPO Workshops throughout Texas for this implementation project. A rural planning organization (RPO) is a voluntary organization created and governed by locally elected officials responsible for transportation decisions at the local level. RPOs address rural transportation planning priorities and provide recommendations to TxDOT for areas outside the boundaries of a metropolitan planning organization (MPO). TxDOT sponsored the RPO Workshops in cooperation with the Texas Association of Regional Councils (TARC). More than 145 community leaders participated in the workshops, including county judges, county commissioners, and mayors and representatives from TxDOT Districts, cities, MPOs, and councils of government (COG).

Since the RPO project was initiated, the number of RPOs in Texas has grown from four to 14. Additional RPOs are expected to organize and form in the next few years. The RPO workshops involved both new and existing RPOs throughout Texas. Currently, RPOs have established their boundaries based on either TxDOT District boundaries or a council of government boundaries (Figure 1).

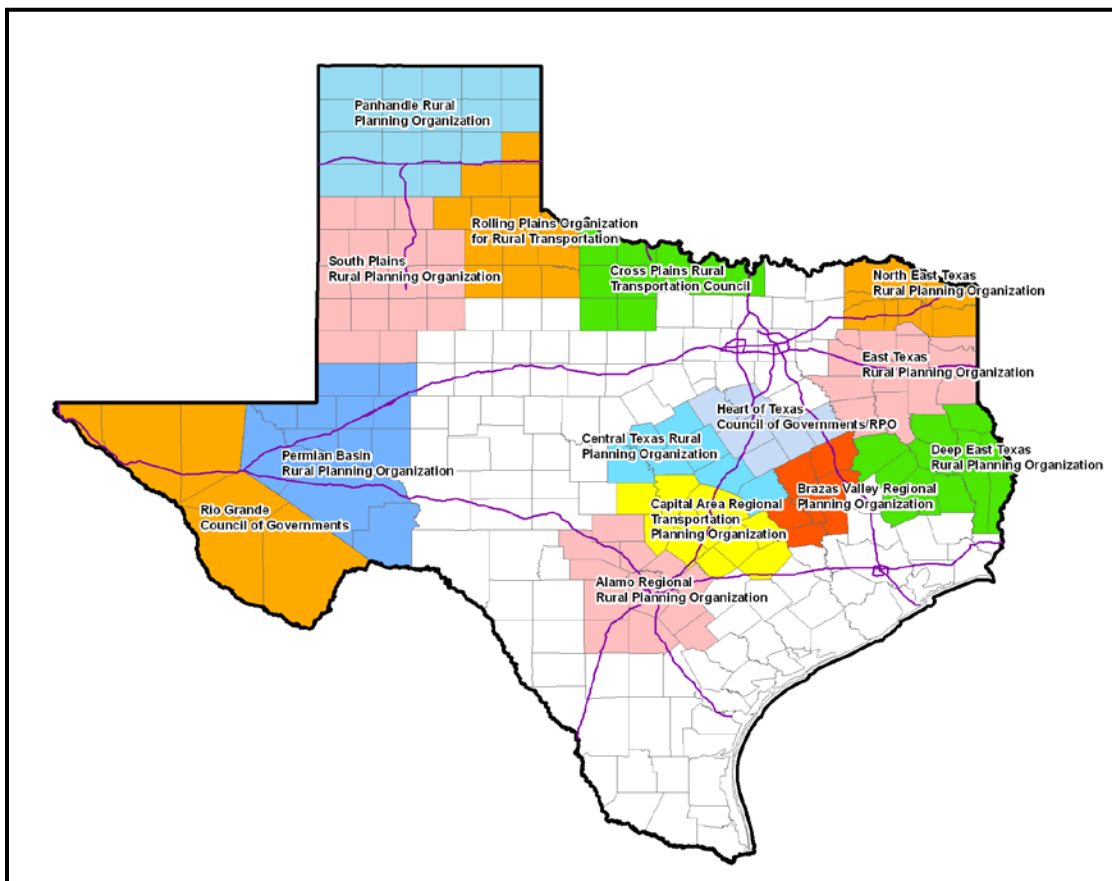


Figure 1. Texas RPOs.

Workshop Learning Objectives

The workshops were intended for planning practitioners, policy makers, and stakeholders involved in rural transportation planning. At the end of the workshop, the participant should be able to:

- Identify the key transportation planning organizations in Texas.
- Describe key issues affecting RPOs.
- Explain how RPOs “fit” into the transportation planning process.
- Explain TxDOT Transportation Planning Rules on RPOs.

RPO Workshop Agenda/Topics

The RPO workshop was divided into three sessions and was available in either a three-hour or six-hour format:

Session 1–RPO Overview & Context. At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- Describe key findings about RPOs.
- Describe changes in Texas demographics.
- Identify metropolitan and rural boundaries.
- Define non-metropolitan.
- Identify the key transportation planning organizations in Texas.

Session 2–RPO Key Issues. At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- Identify RPO key issues.
- Describe programming and project prioritization.
- Define goals, objectives and performance measures.
- Describe how RPOs “fit” into the transportation planning process.
- Describe successful public involvement.

Session 3–Planning Rules. At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- Explain transportation planning rules.
- Describe who develops and who approves transportation planning products and document.

Workshop Locations and Dates

Workshops were held in Nacogdoches, Tulia, Midland, Mt. Pleasant, Bryan, Eagle Pass, Alpine, San Antonio, and Kilgore (Figure 2).

- Nacogdoches 6/29/11
- Tulia 7/7/11
- Midland 8/10/11
- Mt. Pleasant 8/11/11
- Bryan 8/18//11
- Eagle Pass 8/30/11
- Alpine 11/3/11
- San Antonio 1/18/12
- Kilgore 1/26/12

The pilot workshop was conducted on June 30, 2010, at the annual Texas Transportation Planning Conference in Bastrop, Texas. Additionally, a presentation was made at the Texas Association of Regional Councils quarterly meeting in Austin on July 21, 2011.

Workshop Participants

Workshop participants included approximately 54 elected officials (48 county judges, four county commissioners, and two mayors) and 95 participants from various COGs (11), TxDOT districts (15), cities (17), and MPOs (3). A list of attendees for each workshop is provided in the workshop summaries that follow. Figures 3 and 4 show the cities, COGs, and TxDOT districts that participated in the workshops.

Workshop Evaluations

Workshop evaluations were distributed to the participants at each delivery. Participants received 16 questions that asked them to rate the workshop (on a scale of 1 to 5) on various topics including prior interest in RPOs, the overall quality of the workshop, workshop materials, and instructors. The workshop summaries below report on a few key performance measures from the evaluations. Overall, the workshop evaluations were very positive. Of the total participants, 99 percent would recommend the workshop to others, and 97 percent indicated that the workshop met their expectations. Participants rated the overall quality of the workshop as 4.6 out of 5, and the instructors as 4.7 out of 5.

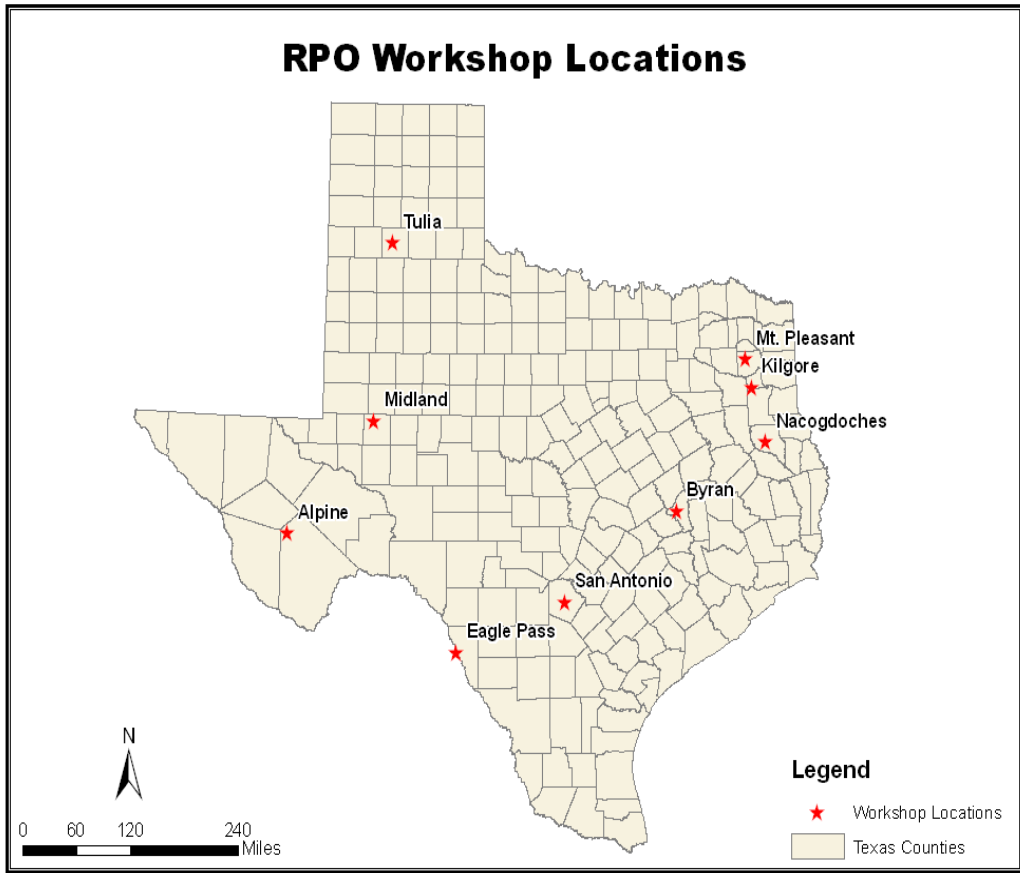


Figure 2. Texas RPO Workshop Locations.

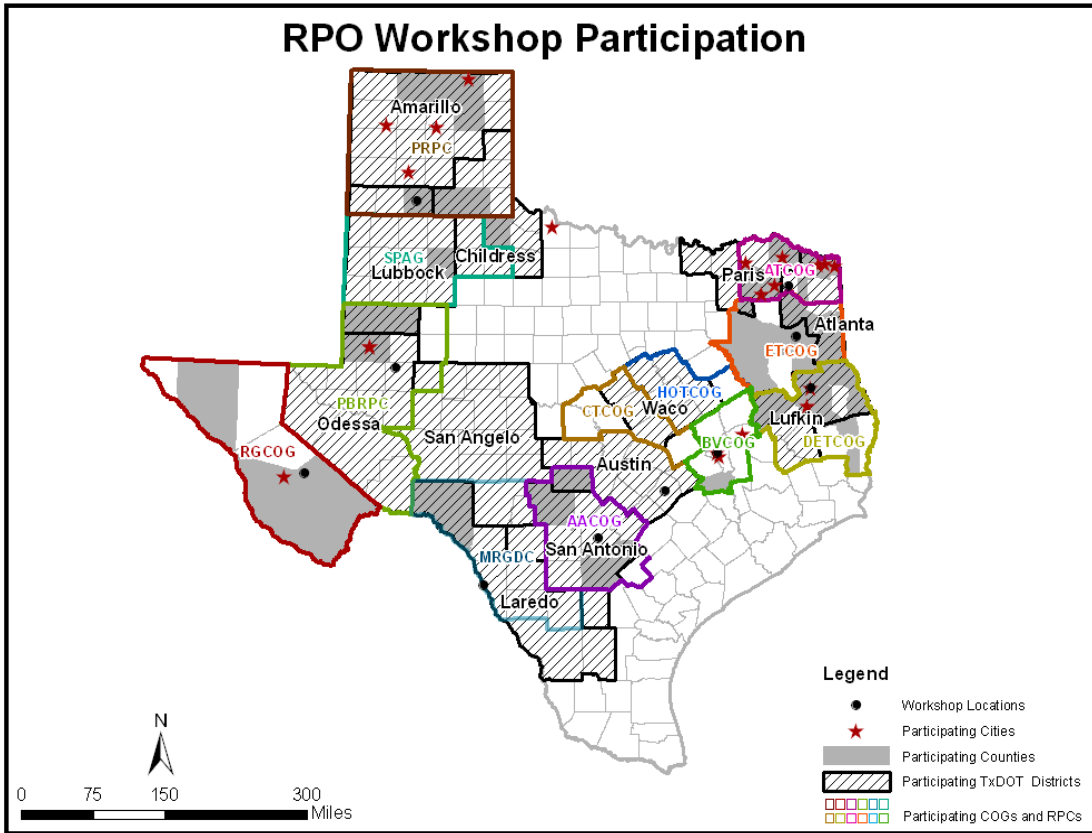


Figure 3. Workshop Participation Coverage.

RPO Workshop Participation

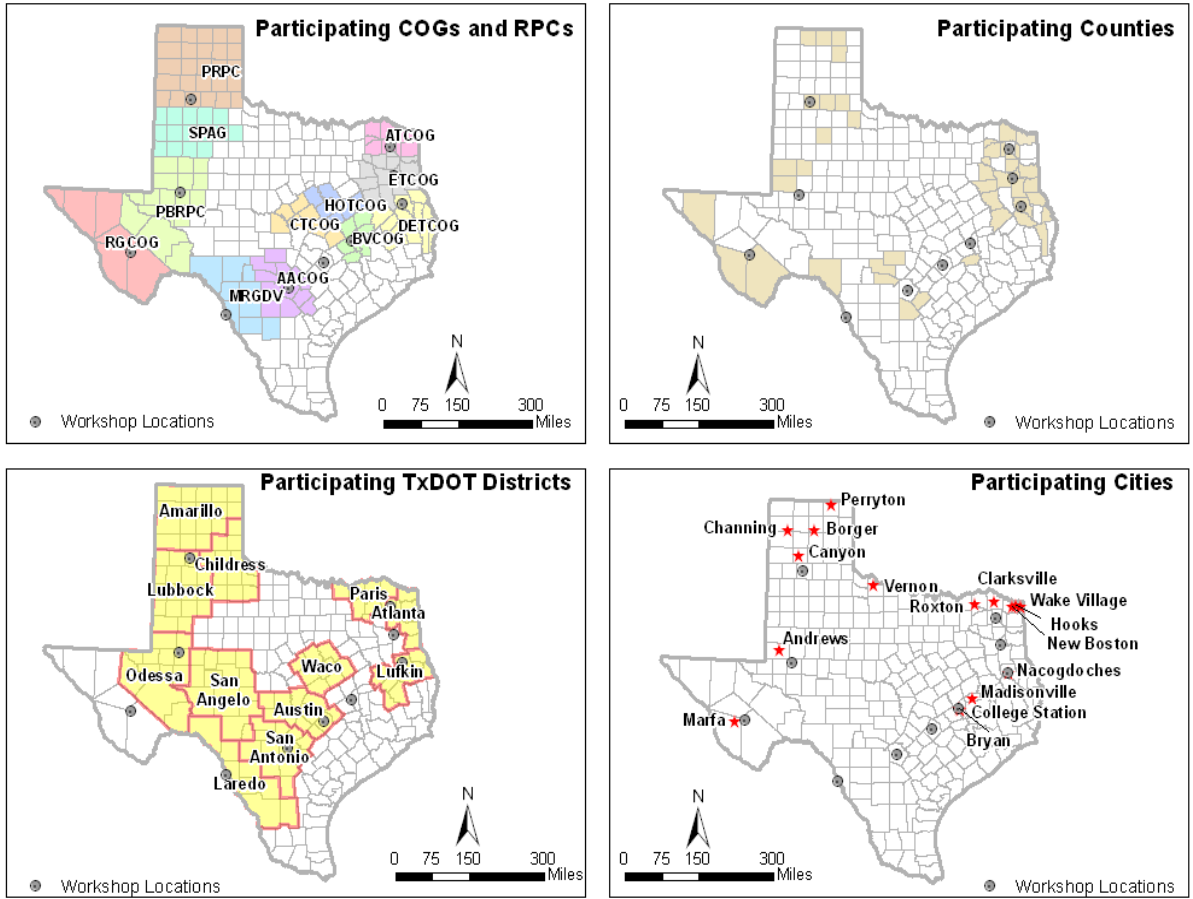


Figure 4. Workshop Participation Detail

EAST TEXAS RPO WORKSHOP–NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS, JUNE 29, 2011

Workshop Participants

Twenty-one participants attended the Nacogdoches RPO workshop delivery, including:

- Hon. Wes Suiter, Angelina County.
- Hon. Thomas Cravey, Camp County.
- Hon. Lonnie Hunt, Houston County.
- Hon. Mark Allen, Jasper County.
- Comm. Charles S. Shofner, Jasper County.
- Mayor Jack Gordon, City of Lufkin.
- Comm. Jim Elder, Nacogdoches County.
- Hon. Wayne Wolfe, Rains County.
- Hon. Joel Hale, Rusk County.
- Comm. Keith Clark, Sabine County.
- Hon. Rick L. Campbell, Shelby County.
- Hon. Joel Baker, Smith County.
- Hon. Joe English, Nacogdoches County.
- Comm. Elton Milstead, Nacogdoches County.
- Rea Donna Jones, TxDOT-ATL.
- Sam Skrehot, TxDOT-LUF.
- Jim Jeffers, City of Nacogdoches.
- Walter Diggles, Jr., DETCOG.
- Jeff Reed, DETCOG.
- John Hendrick, ETCOG.
- David Cleveland, ETCOG.

RPO Purpose

The workshop participants drafted the following RPO Purpose statement: “To set priorities that provide the safest, economical, transportation projects based on current and future needs to support regional transportation, economic development, quality of life, and the environment.”

RPO Goals

The workshop participants listed the following goals for the RPO:

- Set priorities.
- Educate stakeholders.
- Pursue funding sources.
- Identify future needs.
- Allocate resources.
- Economic Development.
- Provide input on UTP.

RPO Transportation Issues

The most important rural transportation planning issues that the workshop participants in Nacogdoches cited includes:

- Providing transportation for seniors.
- Finishing the Loop.
- Providing input on UTP.
- Pursuing funding sources.
- Balancing the need for more capacity and providing maintenance.

Nacogdoches Workshop Evaluations

Total number of evaluations received for Nacogdoches was 10, and John Overman was the instructor. The table here summarizes the performance measures ranked on a scale of 1 to 5.

Nacogdoches Workshop Evaluations	
Prior interest in subject	4.2
Overall workshop quality	4.3
Overall instructor quality	4.4
Quality of workshop materials	4.5
Usefulness of discussions	4.6
Relevance to your job	4.25
Knowledge gained	4.5



PANHANDLE AREA RPO WORKSHOP: TULIA, TEXAS, JULY 7, 2011

Panhandle Workshop Participants

There were 25 participants at the Tulia RPO workshop delivery, including:

- Hon. Allen Wells, Dawson County.
- Hon. Benny Wilson, Hansford County.
- Hon. David Wigely, Crosby County.
- Hon. Earl McKinley, Ochiltree County.
- Hon. D. N. Gregory, Cottle County.
- Hon. Lance T. Celander, Gaines County.
- Hon. Harold Keeter, Swisher County.
- Hon. Ray Powell, Hall County.
- Hon. Terri Beth Cantor, Sherman County.
- Hon. Vernon H. Cook, Roberts County.
- Hon. Wayne Nance, Briscoe County.
- Hon. Lance T. Celander, Gaines County.
- David Miller, TxDOT Amarillo.
- Tracy Cain, TxDOT Amarillo.
- Steve Warren, TxDOT Lubbock.
- Marty Smith, TxDOT Childress.
- Elena Quintanilla, SPAG.
- Tim Pierce, SPAG.
- H. David Clones, Lubbock MPO.
- Jennifer Foster, Senator Duncan.
- Mike Little, Rep. Hardcastle.
- Kelly Garrison, City of Channing.
- Ted B. Dodd, City of Borger.
- Jim Powell, City of Perryton.
- Dan Reese, City of Canyon.



RPO Purpose

The workshop participants drafted the following RPO Purpose statement:

“The Purpose of the RPO is to garner increased input from rural officials into TxDOT District making process, and:

- Establish priorities.
- Expand relationships with TxDOT officials.
- Establish a balance between mobility, safety, and economic development.
- Improve public involvement.”

RPO Goals

The participants described the goals of RPO would be to:

- Seek funding.
- Obtain project information.
- Provide project input.
- Help counties develop transportation plans.
- Establish priorities.
- Maintain roads and manage snow/fire events.
- Coordinate needs of the region.
- Be a forum for decision making.

RPO Transportation Issues

The most important rural transportation planning issues cited by the workshop participants in Nacogdoches included:

- Mowing responsibilities.
- Snow and fire event management.
- Repair and maintain bridges.
- Overweight trucks.
- Oversize permits and routes.
- Municipal maintenance contracts.
- RAP material coordination.
- Coordinate and Identify trends (dairy, ethanol plants).

Tulia Workshop Evaluations

Total number of evaluations received for Tulia was 17, and John Overman was the instructor.

Tulia Workshop Evaluations	
Prior interest in subject	3.9
Overall workshop quality	4.2
Overall instructor quality	4.4
Quality of workshop materials	4.5
Usefulness of discussions	4.1
Relevance to your job	4.0
Knowledge gained	3.8



PERMIAN BASIN RPO WORKSHOP–MIDLAND, TEXAS, AUGUST 10, 2011

Permian Basin Workshop Participants

Thirteen participants attended the Midland RPO workshop delivery, including:

- Hon. Richard Dolgener, Andrews County Judge.
- Mayor Robert Zap, City of Andrews.
- Scott Wallace, Dir. Public Works, City of Andrews.
- Hon. Allen Wells, Dawson County Judge.
- Cheryl Keith, Permian Basin RPC.
- Terri Moore, Permian Basin RPC.
- Tom Schlegel, Permian Basin RPC.
- Gene Powell, Jr., Odessa District.
- Matt Carr, Odessa District.
- Kristen Hereford, San Angelo District.
- Blair Haynie, Abilene District.
- John DeWitt, San Angelo District.
- Joe Clark, West Regional Service Center.



RPO Purpose

The workshop participants indicated that the purpose of the RPO is to: “Discuss transportation needs quarterly. The objective is to schedule quarterly Meeting Performance Measures: Attendance.”

RPO Goals

The participants described the following goals of the RPO:

- Promote transportation.
- Improve safety.
- Improve efficiency.
- Promote economic development.
- Bring together decision makers.
- Reduce congestion.

RPO Transportation Issues

The participants in Midland described the issues facing RPOs in their region.

1. PRO-Active planning.
 - Unified voice/plan.
 - Awareness within region.
 - Education regarding agencies.
2. Lack of funding/dollars.
 - Priorities.
 - Distances.
 - Economic development.
 - Maintaining existing roads.
3. Duplication of effort.

The participants believed the RPOs should:

- Improve public participation (at least by RPO members).
- Articulate why and how money is spent.
- Address “thru-traffic.”
- Help define TxDOT’s role.
- Help define COG’s role.
- How to facilitate input from members.
- Better understanding of what is available from TxDOT.
- Improve project coordination.

Midland Workshop Evaluations

Total number of evaluations received for Midland was 10, and Bill Frawley was the instructor.

Midland Workshop Evaluations	
Prior interest in subject	3.9
Overall workshop quality	4.8
Overall instructor quality	4.9
Quality of workshop materials	4.3
Usefulness of discussions	4.4
Relevance to your job	4.5
Knowledge gained	4.4



ARK-TEX AREA RPO WORKSHOP: MOUNT PLEASANT, TEXAS, AUGUST 11, 2011

Mount Pleasant Workshop Participants Northeast Texas RPO (NETRPO)

Seventeen participants attended the Mount Pleasant RPO workshop delivery, including:

- Hon. Herb Brookshire, Delta County Judge.
- Hon. Paul Lovier, Franklin County Judge.
- Hon. Chris Brown, Hopkins County Judge.
- Hon. Lynda Munkres, Morris County Judge.
- Hon. Morris Harville, Red River County Judge.
- Mayor Jerry Radney, City of Como.
- Mayor Pro Tem Sandra Dunn,
City of Mt. Vernon.
- Wayne Dial, City Manager, City of Clarksville.
- Mike Burke, City Administrator,
City of Wake Village.
- Janet Wheeler, City Secretary, City of Roxton.
- L.D. Williamson, ATCOG.
- Sharon Pipes, ATCOG.
- Randy Mayfield, Bowie County.
- Michael C. Weston, City of Hooks.
- July Brown, City of New Boston.
- Bobby Littlefield, TxDOT-Paris District.
- Ricky Mackey, TxDOT-Paris District.



RPO Purpose

“The purpose of the NETRPO is to work together to select transportation projects that benefit the region as a whole and prioritize transportation needs for rural NET through collaboration with TxDOT.”

- Work collectively within NETRPO instead of competing among the region’s cities and counties.
- Unite people in the COG region to have a single voice.
- Non-IH20/IH30, e.g.; SH82.
- Promote economic development.
- Support Rail, airport, highway, transit.
- Loss of young people.
- Improve transportation.
- Access to colleges.

RPO Goals

The workshop participants indicated that the goals of the RPO are to:

- Identify transportation needs.
- Improve rural transportation system.
- Identify funding sources/resources to advance projects (e.g., ROW, in-kind).
- Public involvement policy statement.

RPO Transportation Issues

The Mount Pleasant workshop participants identified the following transportation issues:

- Utility coordination and accommodation.
- Agricultural egress.
 - Log trucks.
 - Grain trucks.
- Elderly transportation.
- Safety.
- Speed on rural roads.
- Public transportation.
- Widen Hwy 82 to four lanes and resurface.
- I-30: improve interchanges and add lanes.
- Economic development -Recruit industry.
- Truck Traffic 40 percent on I-30.
- Bowie County Corridor Parkway
- Medical service access.
- Economic Development.
- Bowie County - Lone Star base closure.
- Emergency service and response.
- New Corridor/ROW.
- Regional jails instead of in every city.
- Roadway maintenance.
- Agriculture egress.
- Pass-Through Finance.
- Conflicts at railroad and highway at-grade crossings.



Mount Pleasant Workshop Evaluations

Total number of evaluations received for MqwpvPleasant was 15, and John Overman was the instructor.

Mount Pleasant Workshop Evaluations	
Prior interest in subject	3.7
Overall workshop quality	4.3
Overall instructor quality	4.7
Quality of workshop materials	4.4
Usefulness of discussions	4.3
Relevance to your job	4.1
Knowledge gained	4.3

BRAZOS VALLEY RPO WORKSHOP–BRYAN, TEXAS, AUGUST 18, 2011

Brazos Valley Workshop Participants

Sixteen participants attended the Brazos Valley RPO workshop delivery, including:

- Hon. John Brieden, Washington County Judge.
- Comm. Joy Fuchs, Washington County.
- Linda LaSut, BCS MPO.
- Bart A. Benthul, BCS MPO.
- Shannon Andrews, Bryan resident.
- Shannon Waddell, BVCOG.
- Cameron Muhic, BVCOG.
- Joe Guerra, City of College Station.
- Annette Shepherd, CTCOG/RPO.
- Alisha Edgar, HOTCOG.
- Gary Rushing, HOTCOG.
- Sandra Webb, HOTCOG.
- Roger Johnson, City of Madisonville.
- Sandra Haywood, MHMR Brazos Valley.
- John Happ, TAMU Easterwood Airport.
- Ed Kabobel, TxDOT-Waco District.
- Jorge Gonzalez, United Way.



RPO Purpose

The Brazos Valley participants described the purpose of their RPO:

- Bring stakeholders together and communicate.
- Prioritize transportation Investments and projects
- Communicate with TxDOT, region, and citizens.
- Identify priority corridors.

RPO Goals

The Brazos Valley participants identified the following goals:

- Prepare a Rural long-range plan.
- Prepare a Rural Planning Work Program.
- Prioritize projects.

RPO Transportation Issues

The Brazos Valley participants identified the following transportation issues:

- Get legislature to preserve corridors.
- County-level land use control/planning and zoning.
- Influencing thoroughfare plan (TDP).
- Multimodal.
- Funding for planning.

Brazos Valley Evaluations

Total number of evaluations received for the Brazos Valley was 16, and John Overman was the instructor.

Brazos Valley Workshop Evaluations	
Prior interest in subject	4.2
Overall workshop quality	4.3
Overall instructor quality	4.6
Quality of workshop materials	4.3
Usefulness of discussions	4.5
Relevance to your job	4.1
Knowledge gained	3.9



SOUTH TEXAS RPO WORKSHOP–EAGLE PASS, TEXAS, AUGUST 30, 2011

South Texas Workshop Participants

- Hon. Laura Allen, Val Verde County Judge.
- Candy Bynum, Admin. Asst., Val Verde County Judge.
- Robert Eads, City of Del Rio City Manager.
- Ryan Rapelye, City of Del Rio Asst. City Manager.
- John Burns, City of Del Rio Transportation Manager.
- Brian Shea, City of Eagle Pass Planning Director.
- Daniel Tijerina, City of Eagle Pass Asst. Planning Director.
- Gregory Howard, City of Eagle Pass City Engineer.
- Marga López, City of Eagle Pass Director, Bridge Dept.
- Jesús Sanchez, Superintendent Pro Tem, EPISD.
- Humberto Araiza, President, EPISD.
- John Ruiz, Jr., MRGDC.
- Cynthia Rodriguez, Commissioner’s Council, SWT, Inc. (CC SWTI).
- Richard Juarez, CC SWTI.
- Ruben Lopez, CC SWTI.
- Sarah Cook, CC SWTI.
- Omar Cantu, TxDOT.
- Randy Aguilar, TxDOT.
- Alberto Ramirez, TxDOT-Laredo District.
- Melisa Montemayor, TxDOT-Laredo District.

RPO Purpose

The South Texas workshop participants defined the RPO’s purpose as to “Identify needs and issues, and plan and prioritize projects.”

RPO Goals

The participants described the following goals of the RPO:

- Create a rural transportation plan.
- Prioritize transportation needs.

RPO Transportation Issues

The issues identified during the South Texas workshop were:

- Quality of roadway pavement/surface with increasing truck traffic.
- Needs assessment.
- Coordination/agreement on prioritization of needs and projects.
- Multimodal needs/bike routes.



South Texas Evaluations

Total number of evaluations received for Eagle Pass was 18, and John Overman was the instructor.

Eagle Pass Workshop Evaluations	
Prior interest in subject	4.4
Overall workshop quality	4.8
Overall instructor quality	4.8
Quality of workshop materials	4.8
Usefulness of discussions	4.7
Relevance to your job	4.6
Knowledge gained	4.3

RIO GRANDE RPO WORKSHOP–ALPINE, TEXAS, NOVEMBER 3, 2011

Rio Grande Workshop Participants

- Hon. Val Beard, Brewster County Judge.
- Hon. Becky Dean-Walker, Hudspeth County Judge.
- Hon. Paul Hunt, Presidio County Judge.
- Jim Mustard, Administrator, City of Marfa.
- Kelly Guadalupe, Asst., Hudspeth County Judge.
- Annette Gutierrez, RGCOG.
- John Blackmon, TxDOT.

RPO Purpose

The workshop participants drafted the following statement: “The purpose of the RPO is to elevate public safety, environmental issues, and appropriate economical development from consulting to cooperation, and Improve mobility.”

RPO Goals

The Rio Grande workshop participants identified the following priorities:

- Promote economic development:
 - North-south corridors in addition to east-west.
 - Emergency services challenges (difficult with long distances and remote areas).
 - Port of Entry–North and South.
 - Coordinated effort for seeking funds.
 - Eco-tourism and access to parks.
- Streamline decision making.
- Reduce average speed on I-10.
- Big Bend Railroad on UTP.
- Reduce fatalities on I-10.
- Improve port efficiency.
- Foster a good dialogue with state.
- Establish an RPO.
- Promote consensus on goals, objectives, etc.
- Access to parks, tourism, Net.

Transportation Issues

The Rio Grande participants identified the following transportation issues:

- Slow down I-10.
- Law enforcement and emergency services are challenged due to resources and distances.
- Environmental concerns and sustainability.
 - Capacity vs. impact.
 - Heavy truck traffic.
 - Sensitive areas/receptors.
 - Archaeology/endangered species.
 - Olympia Canyon.
 - Footprints and effects.



Rio Grande Evaluations

Total number of evaluations received for Rio Grande was seven, and John Overman was the instructor.

Rio Grande Workshop Evaluations	
Prior interest in subject	3.7
Overall workshop quality	4.9
Overall instructor quality	5.0
Quality of workshop materials	4.6
Usefulness of discussions	4.7
Relevance to your job	4.4
Knowledge gained	4.8

ALAMO AREA RPO WORKSHOP–SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, JANUARY 18, 2012

RPO Purpose

The Alamo Area identified the RPO’s purpose as to: “Coordinate development of transportation planning projects with MPO/TxDOT,” to seek funding for projects, be an advocate for rural transportation, and identify needs.

RPO Goals

The primary goal of the Alamo Area RPO is to improve rural project prioritization and inter-agency coordination with MPO and TxDOT.



RPO Transportation Issues

Funding for transportation (and supporting legislation) is the biggest, most important issue to the Alamo Area RPO.

Alamo Area Evaluations

Total number of evaluations received from the Alamo Area was seven, and John Overman was the instructor.

Alamo Area Workshop Evaluations	
Prior interest in subject	4.1
Overall workshop quality	4.6
Overall instructor quality	4.7
Quality of workshop materials	4.6
Usefulness of discussions	4.5
Relevance to your job	3.9
Knowledge gained	4.3



EAST TEXAS RPO WORKSHOP: KILGORE, TEXAS, JANUARY 26, 2012

East Texas Workshop Participants

- Hon. Robert Johnston, Anderson County Judge.
- Hon. Bill Stoudt, Gregg County Judge.
- Hon. Hugh Taylor, Harrison County Judge.
- Hon. Richard Sanders, Henderson County Judge.
- Hon. David Anderson, Panola County Judge.
- Hon. Wayne Wolfe, Rains County Judge.
- Hon. Dean Fowler, Upshur County Judge.
- Hon. Rhita Koches, Van Zandt County Judge.
- Barbara Holly, Tyler Area MPO.
- David Cleveland, ETCOG.



RPO Purpose

The East Texas participants explained that the RPO's purpose was to be a decision-making forum for the rural counties (RPO) and the Regional Mobility Authority (RMA).

RPO Goals

The East Texas RPO goals are to:

- Communicate issues and needs.
- Coordinate planning.
- Prioritize projects.
- Coordinate the counties.

RPO Transportation Issues

The most important issue was identified as obtaining funding to increase capacity and expansion in order to accommodate growth and economic development.

East Texas Evaluations

Total number of evaluations received from Kilgore was nine, and John Overman was the instructor.

East Texas Workshop Evaluations	
Prior interest in subject	4.2
Overall workshop quality	4.8
Overall instructor quality	4.9
Quality of workshop materials	4.9
Usefulness of discussions	4.6
Relevance to your job	4.5
Knowledge gained	4.3