

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Census 2020 Implications for Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Grant Programs and Planning Requirements

These FAQs do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies. Grantees and subgrantees should refer to FTA's statutes and regulations for applicable requirements.

Section 1: General 2020 Census Information:

- 1-1) Where can I find the U.S. Census Bureau's final criteria adopted for the 2020 delineation of urban areas? [published 11/21/2022]**

The U.S. Census Bureau issued a *Federal Register* notice on March 24, 2022, that explains the final urban area criteria for the 2020 Census. This *Federal Register* notice is accessible here: [Urban Area Criteria for the 2020 Census-Final Criteria](#).

- 1-2) What impact will the Census Bureau's use of commuting patterns to delineate adjoining urban areas have on urbanized area boundaries? [published 11/21/2022]**

The U.S. Census Bureau has changed the methods it will use to delineate separate urban area boundaries. The new methodology will be based on employment commuting relationships between or among the applicable urban areas. This new methodology will be used to determine where to delineate a pre-existing urban area into separate adjoining urban areas, where to combine pre-existing adjoining urban areas into a larger urban area, where to delineate a pre-existing urban area that adjoins another to make it larger, where to delineate a pre-existing urban area that adjoins another to make it smaller, and where there may be no change at all. These changes will likely contribute to changes in the size, location, and population of some urban areas relative to their pre-existing extent.

- 1-3) Will the U.S. Census Bureau's elimination of the distinction between urban clusters (urban areas with a population of less than 50,000) and urbanized areas (urban areas with a population of 50,000 or more) impact FTA's funding programs? [published 11/21/2022]**

No. Beginning with the delineation of urban areas that correspond to the 2020 Census, the U.S. Census Bureau will no longer categorize urban areas based on their population as either an urban cluster or an urbanized area. However, 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53, which is the set of federal statutes governing FTA's funding programs, still defines an *urbanized area* as an urban area encompassing a population of not less than 50,000 people. Further, 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53 still makes this distinction to prescribe FTA's distribution of formula grant funding to urbanized vs. non-urbanized areas.

- 1-4) Where can my agency find the GIS files for the newly delineated urban area boundaries? [published 11/21/2022]**

The geographic shapefiles for the newly delineated urban area boundaries will be available for download through the '[Census Mapping Files](#)' page on the U.S. Census Bureau website when the final boundaries are determined.

- 1-5) After urban area boundaries are released, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) allows states, in coordination with local and regional governmental entities, to smooth and adjust the extent of urban area boundaries where they are irregular for roadway classification purposes. Would FTA consider using these adjusted census urban boundaries (ACUBs) in lieu of the raw Census-delineated urban area boundaries for the applicability of FTA's funding programs or compliance with National Transit Database reporting? [published 11/21/2022]**

No. The ability to smooth and adjust the extent of urban area boundaries where they are irregular is given to states as a tool to avoid inconsistent urban/rural road segment classifications where roads would switch between urban and rural status many times along their length as a result of raw Census-delineated urban area boundaries often being irregular in shape. These adjustments do not have the effect of changing the population used for urban areas to determine funding allocations for FHWA and FTA funding programs. Further, for FTA's purposes, 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53 does not permit adjusted boundaries to be used in lieu of the raw Census-delineated boundaries to determine differences in eligibility of funding programs based on population or location of urban area boundaries.

- 1-6) Can any specifics on urban area boundary shifts or forecasting of associated impacts be provided by the FTA in advance of the U.S. Census Bureau's release of new urban area boundary delineations? [published 11/21/2022]**

No. The U.S. Census Bureau's delineation of urban areas following each decennial census is performed independently of other federal agencies, including FTA. FTA does not participate in the establishment of criteria for urban area delineation. Therefore, FTA will not know the outcome of the Census Bureau's urban area boundary delineation process and its impact on FTA grant programs until the Census Bureau releases the newly delineated urban areas.

- 1-7) When will census changes impact FTA formula funding apportionments and grant implementation? [published 11/21/2022]**

FTA will apportion FY 2024 funding based on the new census data. All formula funding from FY 2023 and prior can continue to be obligated and used according to the program and urbanized area size applicable at the time it was apportioned (pre-2020 Census).

Section 2: Funding Implications of Urban Area Boundary Changes for FTA Programs

2-1) Which FTA grant programs may be impacted by the delineation of new urban areas by the U.S. Census Bureau? [published 11/21/2022]

The delineation of new urban areas and any resulting changes to pre-existing urban area boundaries will directly impact the funding distribution and eligibility of FTA's formula grant programs and some discretionary programs. The FTA formula grant programs that may be impacted include:

- **Section 5303:** Metropolitan Transportation Planning Formula Grants
- **Section 5304:** Statewide and Nonmetropolitan Transportation Planning Formula Grants
- **Section 5307:** Urbanized Area Formula Grants
- **Section 5310:** Formula Grants for the Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities
- **Section 5311:** Formula Grants for Rural Areas
- **Section 5311 (c)(1):** Public transportation on Indian Reservations
- **Section 5337:** State of Good Repair Grants
- **Section 5339(a):** Formula Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities
- **Section 5340:** Apportionments Based on Growing and High-Density States Formula Factors

2-2) How may amounts made available to recipients in impacted areas change as a result of urban area delineation and boundary changes? [published 11/21/2022]

Until the newly delineated urban areas are released by the U.S. Census Bureau, the impact on non-urbanized areas and urbanized area funding levels is unknown. FTA will apportion funding based on statutory formula factors.

For more information on how funding is made available under each FTA formula grant program, including the formula and specific variables driving the apportionments, visit FTA's 'Formula Flowcharts' webpage at: <https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/bipartisan-infrastructure-law-formula-flowcharts>.

For more information on the annual apportionment dollar values, or data unit values, of various formula factors for FTA formula grant programs for FY 2022, visit FTA's 'Fiscal Year 2022 Apportionment Tables' webpage at: [Current Apportionments | FTA \(dot.gov\)](#).

2-3) Will FTA "grandfather" the status or tier (e.g., non-urbanized, small urbanized, large urbanized) of any pre-existing urbanized areas or non-urbanized areas that may otherwise be changed to a different tier? [published 11/21/2022]

No. Under existing federal statute, FTA must distribute and administer formula grant funding in accordance with the most recent decennial census.

2-4) If two separate urbanized areas that are served by separate public transportation providers are merged into a single urbanized area, are the public transportation providers required to merge into a single provider? [published 11/21/2022]

No. There is no requirement that separate public transportation providers merge into a single provider if they previously served two separate urbanized areas that merge into a single urbanized area. The merged urbanized area would need to determine how to split funding among transit providers, as funding previously provided to two separate urbanized areas would now be provided to one.

2-5) If an area within which a transit system has been operating changes status from non-urbanized, small urban, or large urban to any of the other two designations, can the transit system continue to use funds apportioned in federal fiscal years prior to FY 2024? [published 11/21/2022]

Yes, the transit system may continue to make use of formula funds apportioned in years prior to FY 2024 that the transit system could have received based on its Census designation under the 2010 Census for activities eligible and under the requirements of the grant program prior to FY 2024. For example, if the system served an area that changed from non-urbanized to small urban, it could continue to use Section 5311 funds apportioned prior to FY 2024 for activities eligible under the Section 5311 program. If the system served an area that changed from small urban to large urban, it could continue to use Section 5307 funds apportioned prior to FY 2024 for operating expenses.

Section 3: Implications Related to FTA Planning Requirements

3-1) What is an MPO, and when must new MPOs be designated? [published 11/21/2022]

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are intergovernmental organizations with Policy Boards comprised of the chief officials of local units of government of the metropolitan area, as agreed upon by the Governor and local governments that together represent at least 75 percent of the affected population, including the largest incorporated city, based on population. Communities that lie within Census-designated urban areas with a population of 50,000 or more are required to form a MPO or join an existing MPO located adjacent to the area in order to receive capital or operating funds from the Federal transit and Federal-aid highway programs (see [49 U.S.C. 5303\(d\)](#)). Each urban area with a population of 50,000 should designate new MPOs within 12 months of the Census Bureau's Federal Register notice with the list of qualifying urban areas.

3-2) What is the role of the transit provider in setting the Metropolitan Planning Area Boundary for the MPO? [published 11/21/2022]

After each decennial census, MPOs, States, and transit providers jointly review the Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) boundaries, and adjust as necessary, to maintain compliance with Federal law (see [23 CFR 450.312](#)). When an MPO is designated, expanded, or formally re-designated, transit providers should participate with local agencies, the MPO, and the State in determining the MPA, and ensure that transit service areas are appropriately considered. The MPA boundary determines what projects and services come under the purview of the MPO or the State.

3-3) How are MPA boundaries and urban area boundaries different, and what do those differences mean for FTA funding programs? [published 11/21/2022]

Urban areas are the foundation upon which MPAs are subsequently delineated. At a minimum, MPA boundaries must include the entirety of the corresponding urban area(s), as well as the contiguous area expected to become urbanized within a 20-year period. While MPOs are responsible for planning activities throughout the entirety of an MPA, territory encompassed by MPAs is often larger than territory encompassed by urban areas. However, FTA formula grant programs that are differentiated by UZA vs. non-UZA status still apply at the UZA vs. non-UZA level, regardless of how much territory is included within an MPA that might fall outside UZA-designated territory.

3-4) What is the role of the transit provider in preparing the Metropolitan Planning Agreement? [published 11/21/2022]

When an MPO is designated or re-designated, the Metropolitan Planning Agreement, which identifies their mutual responsibilities in carrying out the planning process, is prepared or modified cooperatively by the MPO, the State(s), and public transportation provider(s) (see [23 CFR 450.314](#)). Transit providers should review the Agreement to ensure they adequately represented both the

MPO's policy and technical work and by their participation/representation on policy and technical "advisory committees."

3-5) What is the role of the transit provider in preparing the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) of a new MPO? [published 11/21/2022]

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) is a program of work activities that augments and implements the transportation planning process within a metropolitan planning area during the next one- or two-year period. A UPWP includes a description of the planning work activities, identifying the resulting planning products, the agencies completing the work tasks, the schedules and timeframes, work task cost estimates, and the associated source(s) of funds (see [23 CFR 450.308](#)). Once the MPO is designated, transit providers should participate in the development of the UPWP. A full description of the UPWP, including a list of eligible planning activities, is provided in [FTA Circular 8100.1C](#).

3-6) What FTA funding can a transit operator use to support planning activities? [published 11/21/2022]

FTA provides formula funding to MPOs for multimodal planning, for which transit providers may propose transit-related activities to list in the UPWP (see [49 U.S.C. 5303\(d\)](#)). 'Planning' is also eligible under FTA's Urbanized Area Formula Program, and transit providers should consider using those funds to support their service and capital planning needs. Planning is also an eligible expense under the Section 5311 Formula Grants for Rural Areas program.

3-7) What is the role of transit providers in preparing the MTP and TIP? [published 11/21/2022]

Once an MPO is designated, it must develop its transportation planning process and prepare two key planning products: the metropolitan transportation plan (MTP) and the transportation improvement program (TIP).

- The MTP identifies the vision, goals, needs and strategies to implement the integrated regional multimodal transportation system (see [23 CFR 450.324](#)). This plan includes a fiscally constrained prioritized listing of strategies and projects covering a 20-year horizon.
- The TIP is a fiscally constrained short-range TIP program listing of transportation projects, minimally covering the upcoming 4-year period (see [23 CFR 450.326](#)).

All projects receiving FTA or FHWA funds must be included in the TIP and must be consistent with the MTP. Projects may range from long-range capital projects and transit re-investment to short-range operational and preventive maintenance efforts. Transit providers should share and coordinate their proposed project listing with the MPO and their local agencies during the development of the MTP and TIP. Transit providers should also participate in the MPO's technical and policy advisory committees in identifying and selecting projects and allocating project funding.

3-8) What is the role of a transit agency serving an urban area that was designated as a transportation management area (TMA)? [published 11/21/2022]

After the decennial census, FTA and FHWA designate urbanized areas with populations over 200,000 people as Transportation Management Areas (TMAs) (see [49 U.S.C. 5303\(k\)](#)). The list of TMAs based on the 2020 Census will be published in a Federal Register notice to be released by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Transit providers serving communities in TMAs are affected in the following three ways:

- 1) TMA's Authority to Set Implementation Priorities in the TIP – MPOs serving TMAs select TIP projects for implementation (see [23 CFR 450.332](#)), and transit providers should work with the MPOs in TMAs to identify TIP project selections – across modes – that may best align with the transit's operational needs.
- 2) Congestion Management Process (CMP) - A Congestion Management Process (CMP) identifies travel demand reduction and operational management strategies to effectively manage new and existing transportation facilities. MPOs in new TMAs must implement a CMP within 18 months of designation (see [23 CFR 450.340](#)).
- 3) Transit Representation on the MPO Policy Boards – Federal public transportation law requires that MPOs serving TMAs include transit provider representation (see [49 U.S.C. 5303\(d\)\(2\)\(b\)](#)).

3-9) What are the respective roles of the MPO and designated recipient in setting transit investment priorities for funding in a large UZA? [published 11/21/2022]

Designated recipients are responsible for receiving and apportioning FTA formula funds (i.e., Section 5307, 5339(a), and Section 5310) among transit providers within a transportation management area (TMA). While the MPO develops and adopts the TIP, the designated recipient develops the program of projects for spending the formula funds apportioned to the UZA. Because formula funds can be spent only on projects in the TIP, the MPO and designated recipient must work in close coordination. FTA Circulars [9030.1](#), [5100.1](#), and [9070.1](#) each provide detailed descriptions of designated recipients, their selection, and their roles for Section 5307, Section 5339a, and Section 5310 funds, respectively.

3-10) What planning-related technical assistance is available for transit providers? [published 11/21/2022]

A comprehensive review of strategies for effective transit participation in metropolitan planning, along with potential benefits and illustrative case studies, is described in FTA's "[Transit at the Table](#)" report series. Of particular interest to transit providers new to metropolitan planning is "[Transit at the Table II](#)," which provides transit-MPO case studies from the 2000 Census. Further information is available on metropolitan planning and the involvement of transit providers through the joint [FTA-FHWA Transportation Planning Capacity-Building program](#). There are also several transit planning resources and training opportunities offered through the [National Transit Institute](#).

FTA is committed to providing technical assistance and support to our transit provider partners. Please contact your [regional office](#) if you need any assistance. FTA is available to provide training and technical support to help form and sustain productive planning partnerships between the transit providers, local agencies, MPOs and the States.

Section 4: National Transit Database

4-1) I do not see my FFA-10 Form(s) available in my NTD Report Package. How can I fill them out? [published 11/21/2022]

The FFA-10 form(s) will be unavailable for data entry in the 2022 Report Year Packages. Once the Census Bureau releases the 2020 census data (anticipated December 2022), your agency will receive a task to complete the Demographic and Federal Funding Allocation data based on the updated census data. The task will pre-populate the source data for the FFA-10 from your completed 2022 report forms, such as operating expenses and service data. Please note the FFA-10 forms only apply to Urban and Tribal Reporters.

4-2) How do I fill out my B-10 Identification Form for Report Year 2022? [published 11/21/2022]

You should complete the B-10 sections for Organization Type and any applicable Auxiliary sections, but you do not have to update the Demographic Information. You will complete the Demographic Information Section (Primary and Secondary Urbanized Areas (UZAs)) in the census task, which will be released after the 2020 census data is released. Please note the Demographic section of the B-10 only applies to Urban and Tribal Reporters.

4-3) When will I be able to complete the 2020 Census Task? [published 11/21/2022]

The Census Bureau anticipates the release of the Urban Area data in December 2022. Shortly after it is released, the NTD Team will notify all reporters once the task is available in the NTD Reporting System to complete the applicable B-10 and FFA-10 data. You must have your 2022 NTD report forms completed with the source data (financial and service) before completing the census task.

4-4) Can I complete my 2022 NTD Report as normal? [published 11/21/2022]

Yes, all other NTD forms in the report packages should be completed as normal. The NTD report will still be due on the published due dates according to your agency's fiscal year end.

4-5) I am a State DOT – How will I notify NTD of subrecipients that are affected by Census Area changes? [published 11/21/2022]

State DOTs will receive a census task in the NTD Reporting System and will be able to indicate which of their subrecipients are now operating in Urbanized Areas with the new Census Area designations. State DOTs will then be required to provide demographic data, such as Primary and Secondary UZAs, and federal funding allocation data for any affected subrecipients.