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2025 TAM Peer Working Group for **Metropolitan Planning Organizations**

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration

Overview

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Transit Asset Management (TAM) Program organizes peer program opportunities to support professional capacity building for TAM professionals in public service. The peer working group brings together a small group of professionals to engage virtually on topics of both compliance with and how to expand upon the requirements in the TAM Rule (49 CFR 625).

The 2025 TAM Peer Working Group met monthly over the course of the year to discuss TAM considerations for Regional and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). Participants were MPO or other regional planning organization staff who manage TAM targets or otherwise contribute to TAM planning and related practices. The goals of this working group were to:

1. Promote peer-to-peer education and collaboration around effective practices in coordinating TAM efforts with transit agencies;
2. Support MPOs in understanding how TAM can support broader regional goals; and
3. Support MPOs in aligning their TAM goals with transit agency goals beyond traditional TAM planning.

This document highlights successes and challenges in coordinating TAM efforts at the regional level as described by participants and summarizes perspectives shared by participants during the facilitated discussions. The information provided is intended to be general summary information and does not constitute guidance or official recommendations from the Federal Transit Administration.

Introduction

Throughout the 2025 TAM Peer Working Group, MPOs discussed their roles, influence, and support for transit agencies in their regions related to TAM. Each MPO's regional context is unique, and their TAM processes are not uniform. Some MPOs in the group coordinate targets for one transit agency while some coordinate for many agencies.

MPOs may also:

- Prioritize regional projects,
- Manage discretionary funds,
- Oversee performance targets and planning,
- Set TAM targets,
- Sponsor the group TAM plan, which includes preparing consolidated National Transit Database (NTD) reports and providing guidelines for future updates,
- Offer technical assistance for transit agencies in their group plan,
- Engage in regional TAM strategic planning,
- Establish funding policies,
- Facilitate data sharing, and
- Develop regional standards and best practices.

No matter the extent of TAM responsibilities, effective communication and coordination are essential for interaction between MPOs and their local transit agencies.

Data

For any TAM program, the collection of complete, accurate data is essential to assessing the State of Good Repair (SGR) of an agency's or region's transit assets. It is also critical when assisting agencies with demonstrating specific funding needs. However, different transit agencies within the same MPO region may track asset data in different ways, making it difficult for MPOs to compile and assess the data as needed. Participants identified a common data framework across agencies as a critical tool for enabling easier regional coordination.

Throughout the peer working group, several methods were discussed to help MPOs encourage transit agencies towards consistent data structures and reporting standards:

- When implementing a standardized data system, MPOs might try to make it easier for operators to enter data once and use it for multiple purposes, such as NTD reporting.
- Data-sharing agreements for the region may improve coordination and keep all parties informed of new information. When agencies agree to present the data in a specific format, it not only can make their own asset management easier, but it facilitates use at a higher level such as needs assessments across agencies and inclusion in long range planning.
- A Memorandum of Agreement was one suggested method that can help achieve agency buy-in and set practices for data-sharing. It outlines what is needed from both sides (transit agency and MPO).
- Some MPOs have a portal where agencies input their TAM information into a database. This inventory database helps inform target-setting and forecasting. These systems may

be supported and managed by contractors, or they can be as simple as an Excel-based tool.

- One MPO aims to update their asset inventory database on an annual basis. In this instance, operators submit their data into a database, the MPO screens and uploads the data. The agencies can also download their own past data.
- A data dashboard can be a useful tool for reporting and communication. This would be something an MPO develops to share data across the region. When developing a dashboard, participants suggested considering who the audience is that the organization wants to communicate with (e.g., agencies or the public).

Investment Planning/Target Setting

MPOs are tasked with setting regional goals and targets, which may be different from the goals and targets set by individual transit agencies or group plan sponsors, both in terms of the goals themselves as well as the planning horizon. Progress toward achieving the goals of the MPO is often supported through the MPO's own relationships and initiatives, since there is no penalty for not meeting the set goals. MPO performance targets are most effective when based on the agencies they represent, and MPOs take a variety of approaches towards assisting agencies with achieving MPO goals and working towards an acceptable level of SGR:

- One MPO coordinates extensively with agencies on setting, incorporating and tracking TAM targets. They organize targeted transit operator meetings, either one-on-ones or workshops, to build capacity, orient operators and support data collection. They include the agency targets and feedback in their plans.
- Smaller MPOs, or MPOs which support smaller agencies with limited staff capacity, may find it beneficial to focus the conversation with the agency on how the MPO can support the agency in improving SGR overall, rather than focusing on calculating customized TAM targets.
- Some MPOs may find it difficult to maintain conversations with transit agencies about TAM. Outlining processes and procedures and getting agency buy-in may help these efforts.
- MPOs may find that the transit agencies they support calculate their targets using methodology that varies by agency. This can lead to problems for the MPO, since the method of calculation needs to be consistent at the MPO level for each agency. One MPO deals with this issue by setting targets using NTD data for consistency, while ensuring that the agency goals are still reflected in the target.
- One MPO links highway asset condition and transit asset condition targets in the same conversation as a way to bring more focus to the topic of overall asset management.

- If MPOs have the data, they can run analysis using the Transit Economic Requirements Model (TERM Lite). TERM Lite is a Microsoft Access application analysis tool built by FTA that is designed to help transit agencies assess their State of Good Repair and estimate an agency's transit capital investment needs over an extended time horizon. Some agencies may use TERM Lite, if this is the case an MPO can ask to have that data shared with them. The MPO can then run their own TERM Lite analysis to assess regional needs related to transit. This information can be used to inform the long-range plan.

Understanding the different planning horizons for MPOs, transit agencies, and group plan sponsors is critical to managing effective TAM performance targets. For MPOs, the long-range regional plan presents a key opportunity to integrate conversations about TAM targets. Many MPOs noted that the short-term targets set by transit agencies were less useful for their purposes. Mid-term or long-term targets are more productive for MPOs. There are several additional strategies an MPO may take when considering different planning horizon lengths:

- Some transit agencies focus on sharing the short-term goals and targets. MPOs can then work with them to share long-term goals.
- To manage the complex and tedious task of creating long-term planning goals, one MPO recommended to immediately think ahead about what is next once a planning horizon has been completed. They also suggest engaging in extensive modeling.
- One agency's financial plan is built on a 30-year horizon. The MPO works with them to align the targets based on the financial plan.
- One MPO sets the regional TAM targets annually but meets with each transit agency twice a year. The mid-year check-in serves as a way to assess if they are making progress towards their targets, and the end of year check-in helps the agency review their goals and what they achieved.
- Regarding the Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP), MPOs can create a set of questions to get more context from the transit agencies about their data and to aid in setting targets. To be effective, participants noted MPOs should carefully consider the data they are seeking from the transit agencies, and word the questions accordingly. It was suggested to make the questions optional, so it does not discourage agencies from entering the required data.

MPOs may also take different approaches when setting performance targets and monitoring agency performance measures:

- To analyze when specific targets have been met, one MPO looks at the percentage of assets past ULB using the agency asset information from NTD.

- One MPO invites transit agencies to provide a short, 5–10-minute presentation at a committee meeting about their targets and process towards those targets. This allows the MPO to hear directly from agencies about the state of their assets and operations. It also helps the agency think about their targets and SGR process.
- One MPO suggested using TAM target setting to discuss key performance indicators (e.g. miles between breakdowns, morning pullout rate, etc.) as a way to highlight the usefulness of TAM, how it impacts the agency, and inspire motivation to improve SGR.
- Several MPOs showed an interest in coordinating TAM and safety targets but were uncertain about the process that could be used to coordinate those two elements.
- For interacting with new agencies, one MPO suggested working with them to understand their funding situation, where their capital funding is coming from, if they intend to expand service, etc. This could help MPOs understand how to tailor their technical assistance and investment planning strategies to fit the agency's situation.

Funding

Transit providers are constantly faced with changing and evolving capital needs. To address these needs, transit providers may raise awareness about capital needs through data and TAM plans. They can also work with their MPO to advocate for additional resources.

There may be a disconnect between how agencies approach TAM as a federal requirement and how TAM may be used to connect the condition of assets to the goal of additional funding. To improve the efficacy of TAM, participants shared that agencies could work to build upon the TAM requirement, and asset managers can help leadership understand how TAM connects to planning or performance strategies. MPOs might assist with this process by considering how agency TAM information can be related to MPO goals and the MPO planning process.

The level of control MPOs have over transit-related funding can vary. Some MPOs are designated recipients and may manage local funding. Others may not manage the funding, which means that MPOs do not have enforceable power with transit agencies.

This can make it difficult to maintain compliance and collaboration in the planning space. Even when MPOs are distributing funding, they may not have universal control over the funds. There may be additional control held by legislature or external agreements. To compensate for the lack of direct power over funding, it was suggested MPOs could assist transit agencies with clear and consistent lines of communication and technical assistance regarding TAM. Additional ways the MPOs in the peer working group guided funding decisions are as follows:

- One region has a shared agreement under which Urbanized Area Funding (UZA) funding is shared based on the level of need for each provider, rather than a set percentage for each provider. Overall, the goal is to fund transit projects essential to the region, which are designated as basic capital requirements. Some of the top priorities for this program are vehicles and fixed guideways. The needs of the providers tend to greatly exceed revenue in most years. To address this issue, many big projects are funded over multiple years. They also implemented caps on the amount available for fixed guideway funding so as not to allow one provider to use all funding available.

- One MPO suggested using investment planning and TAM target setting as tools for advocating for additional funding. By doing that planning work, MPOs and agencies can develop a narrative to explain the data in a way that is easily understandable and communicable.

TAM as a Broader Organization Policy

In recognizing that TAM benefits many transit agency efforts, participant MPOs suggested leveraging the connection of TAM targets to strengthen their relationships with the transit agencies. This connection can be used to enhance collaboration between stakeholders. It is critical for boards and committees to care about and understand TAM targets, as well as the implications of not meeting the targets. Targets can influence planning and programming decisions.

To support and address TAM needs, there is a need for broader organization policy focused on supporting and improving a state of good repair. To achieve this, MPOs and transit agencies could be more deliberate and purposeful when discussing TAM with decision makers. For example, one MPO has a regional transit advisory committee that includes all agencies in the region to help facilitate communication of the TAM process. Another MPO consistently meets with new agency staff, including contractors, to introduce the MPO, the MPO’s role in TAM, as well as expectations from the agency.

Planning Integration

It is important for agency TAM plans to be integrated with the MPO’s broader transportation plans. MPOs should be familiar with the plans that their partner agencies have written and should strive to incorporate some of their efforts into regional planning documents. As per 49 CFR 625.45(e), “To the maximum extent practicable, a provider and Sponsor must coordinate with States and Metropolitan Planning Organizations in the selection of State and Metropolitan Planning Organization performance targets.” MPOs should work to ensure that TAM Plan goals are integrated into the Regional Transportation Plans (RTPs) and the Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP). It is important for the MPOs to see the level of investment needed in each region for each performance measure based on agency goals.

Integration of the TAM Plan is also important for safety and financial planning. MPOs can assist with this process by looking at the agency's process and making suggestions about how to incorporate TAM into other plans. The MPO might serve as a resource for how to do this strategically, rather than letting the agency figure it out themselves. The MPOs can also send reminders near the NTD submission deadline to ask for shared TAM targets and NTD worksheets if agencies are able. MPOs can also pull this information from NTD website once it is published.

There may be additional state and local planning considerations that MPOs should take into account, such as zero emission bus rollouts. MPOs may also have to consider supply chain challenges, COVID-19 setbacks, and other factors that influence how agencies implement TAM.

Technical Assistance

MPOs may also be able to provide technical assistance regarding TAM, especially for smaller agencies with limited staff capacity. Several practices highlighted by staff in the peer working group included:

- One MPO convened a summit with the transit agencies when TAM was first implemented.
- MPOs can support transit efforts through regional corridor studies. Their role supporting regional partnerships lends itself well with developing partnerships on planning studies. MPOs may also be able to assist transit agencies with a streamlined procurement process.
- One MPO meets twice per year with transit agencies to set up the TAM goals. As the program has matured, the agencies have collected better data, which helps the process.
- One MPO supports a community-based planning program for transit agencies. They assist with hyperlocal and very specific matters.
- Through a regional work group, one MPO is working with smaller and rural agencies to help them understand how larger agencies approach TAM. They are being trained as they participate. This process was a follow-up to the recommendations of the coordinated transit plan. It serves to keep everyone informed of what each transit agency is doing. Through these interactions they can better understand each other's issues and see the results of increased involvement.
- A regularly scheduled (monthly or quarterly) working group or committee could be useful to ensure communication occurs between the MPO and the transit agencies.

These meetings can serve as a platform to provide updates and discuss a variety of topics in addition to TAM including transit safety, funding, and other relevant issues. MPOs could also incorporate TAM coordination efforts into their existing mechanisms.

- One MPO suggested working with agencies to understand their plans for purchasing capital vehicles. Developing four-or five-year plans for making vehicle purchases can help agency leadership prepare for the local match.

Conclusion

In summary, the peer working group participants were able to gather insights that highlight the importance of coordinating and incorporating TAM at the regional level. TAM provides data that informs important decision-making and contributes to effective asset management. Agencies are able to enhance their coordinated planning efforts to ensure that TAM goals and targets accurately reflect regional and agency-specific patterns and unique local impacts. To make data more comprehensive, participants concluded that MPOs are well-positioned to lead efforts to expand upon and organize current data collection to better inform their specific needs. Additionally, MPOs could work with transit agencies to tie regional long-term planning goals to SGR targets. This coordination can assist with securing funding for future projects and long-term goals that transit agencies seek to implement. MPOs may also consider providing technical assistance on TAM to transit agencies, especially smaller ones with limited staff capacity. Implementing continuous improvements will further enhance the efficacy of MPO TAM planning framework.

Related Resources

Metropolitan Planning Organization Responsibilities for the Transit Asset Management Rule FAQs

TAM Roles & Responsibilities Fact Sheet

2018 TAM MPO Coordination Webinar

2018 System Performance Report: MPO Targets

TAM Performance Management Web Page

2024 TAM Performance Tool