

**Written Testimony of:**

**Michael Morris, P.E.  
Director of Transportation  
North Central Texas Council of Governments  
616 Six Flags Drive  
Arlington, Texas 76011**

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**Before the:  
United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**

**Regarding:  
Recovery Act: 10-Week Progress Report for Transportation and Infrastructure  
Programs**

My name is Michael Morris and I am the Director of Transportation for the North Central Texas Council of Governments. I also serve as staff director for the Regional Transportation Council, the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area.

Good morning Chairman Oberstar, Ranking Member Mica, and Committee Members. Mr. Chairman, thank you for coming to our region earlier this month and Congressman Mica, thank you for joining Congressman Burgess for our annual transportation summits. Congresswoman Johnson, thank you for your transportation leadership and all of your commitment to transportation solutions in the Dallas-Fort Worth region.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee today. I am here today on behalf of the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, a national group representing nearly 400 MPOs across the country.

I am pleased to be here today to share the experience of Metropolitan Planning Organizations with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. We appreciate very much the inclusion of transportation funding as part of this legislation to jump-start the economy. Transportation investments not only create direct construction jobs, but they also create secondary, even a greater number of jobs due to economic multipliers. Regions that select capacity improvements have a third benefit of increased productivity leading to private sector job growth. I would like to share a few examples from across the country as well as specifically the Dallas-Fort Worth experience.

First, I wish to commend the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration for communicating guidance about the recovery funds as the information became available. Given the importance of moving quickly, everyone truly did the best we possibly could to make wise transportation investments. Since this is a very special circumstance, I suggest we take advantage of this momentum to continue to streamline project implementation.

## **National Examples**

On behalf of the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, I would like to highlight some common themes that metropolitan regions have noted. As the economic generators for the nation, metropolitan areas appreciate the opportunity to have funding directly allocated to MPOs. Supporting the principles established in ISTEA regarding transportation management areas is greatly appreciated. We fully support your efforts to make this funding completely transparent including public involvement and full reporting of expenditures and job creation. So far, the reporting by a single state agency has worked well and we anticipate that to continue.

Most metropolitan areas have found that this funding represents the completion of a funding package for projects that have been on hold. These projects may have had to wait another year or longer in order for funding to accumulate, but now they can proceed much more quickly. With construction cost inflation still a concern, any way to expedite projects helps keep costs reasonable.

For small metropolitan regions, this funding has provided a much-needed lifeline. Projects have stagnated because funding allocations are simply not keeping pace with needs. Economic recovery funds are doubling what these regions would have been able to build without this legislation.

Whether large or small, MPOs have been closely involved with the implementation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. We have reached out to partner organizations, reached out to the public, moved quickly, and are eager to report progress. We can meet the timelines and appreciate the opportunity to help the national economy recover.

## **The Dallas-Fort Worth Experience**

The Texas Department of Transportation has done an excellent job of informing all of the Metropolitan Planning Organizations in the state about deadlines, project eligibility, and reporting requirements. We have been holding weekly conference calls statewide for the last three months.

The experience in Dallas-Fort Worth tells a very interesting story of partnerships, leveraging, and innovation. Our MPO received a direct allocation of \$143 million for highway projects. We held a series of public meetings to get input on how best to allocate this money. The overwhelming opinion was to fund large-scale projects that would provide a legacy for our region. As a result, the Regional Transportation Council funded two projects which maximized employment opportunities in the short run as well as job creation over the long run. In addition, the Texas Transportation Commission adopted a similar approach statewide and agreed to fund one \$250 million project in our region to complete a design-build contract. This represents a \$393 million infusion of highway funding, but that is only part of the story.

A recent toll road agreement with the North Texas Tollway Authority provided \$3.2 billion to fund additional transportation improvements in the Dallas-Fort Worth region. Projects were selected from across our region to be expedited with these funds, but a confusion

of two state laws led to one of our counties being excluded from receiving the funds promised. In essence, millions of dollars have been held in reserve, but would never have been able to be spent. The Regional Transportation Council, after public involvement on this concept, decided to allocate the entire \$143 million of recovery funds to the excluded county. By doing this, the equivalent amount of toll road monies have been freed up and reallocated to other transportation projects in the eligible counties. So, not only did the economic recovery money help advance needed projects, but it solved a problem of funding projects promised to one of our counties.

In addition to innovative partnerships within our region, we are leveraging the economic recovery funds into much larger projects with many jobs being created. The \$143 million has been allocated to two interchanges between major highways and the long-awaited Southwest Parkway toll road project. These projects are under design, and will be let for construction starting this summer. In addition, a funding commitment was made to these interchanges which means that the North Texas Tollway Authority can proceed with the rest of this vital project.

The \$250 million allocation from TxDOT completes a funding package for the DFW Connector, a massive project to unclog the convergence of several major highways just north of the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport. The DFW Connector is underway, being developed as a design-build contract that will add highway lanes, frontage roads, and managed lanes to an extremely congested area.

We also greatly appreciate the transit funding provided by the economic recovery legislation. The Dallas-Fort Worth region received \$93 million through the Federal Transit Administration for our transit providers. For example, the region was able to provide needed funding to a Dallas Area Rapid Transit light rail project – in fact, it is the largest light-rail project in the entire country. That project has already received approvals and is quickly moving forward. In partnership with the regional office of the Federal Transit Administration, I signed the Section 1511 Certification to advance this initiative.

Finally, I would like to mention that because of the tight deadlines associated with getting these projects to construction, all of the partners have had to rearrange priorities and be extremely flexible. Existing partnerships, innovation, flexibility, and good communication have been critical to the success of this initiative.

The projects of MPOs are moving forward as specified in this legislation.

### **Future Considerations**

In the near-term, we are excited that these projects, that have been in the planning phase for many years, are finally moving to construction. We feel like team members helping the nation to reduce job loss and get unemployed families back to work. This effort will create better-paying jobs in the construction and supporting fields. Our regions will also get quality transportation assets put on the ground so when the economy is in full swing again people can more easily travel to and from work, school, and entertainment.

Metropolitan regions are also waiting for guidance on the \$8 billion in high-speed rail

funding as well as the \$1.5 billion in discretionary transportation funds. Both of these opportunities are important for MPOs to showcase regionally and nationally significant projects that display innovation and a commitment to transform our transportation system beyond what it is today.

These two initiatives will transition well into the upcoming surface transportation authorization. The country will be focused on large-scale transportation projects that can be implemented quickly. Why can't we incorporate these principles into the next transportation bill? Eliminating stovepipes, advancing multimodal investments, creating sustainable communities, and streamlining the review process while still protecting the environment would enhance our ability to reduce congestion, improve air quality, and use resources wisely.

As we look forward, we still need help from Congress. Expediting transportation projects using general funds at the same time as having to address rescissions from the Highway Trust Fund is a problematic future. Some projects are now skipping ahead of other projects that have previously been funded. Stabilizing the Trust Fund creates a more coherent program.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations stand ready to work with you on jump-starting the economy by implementing projects through the economic recovery bill and insisting on long-term solutions to transportation issues. It has been my pleasure to testify before your committee today, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.