



Mid-Ohio Regional
Planning Commission

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Secretary Elaine Chao
US Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590

Subject: Comments Regarding Rules and Regulations Creating Unnecessary Obstacles to Transportation Infrastructure Projects (Docket DOT-OST-2017-0057)

Dear Secretary Chao:

On behalf of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), I write in response to the US Department of Transportations' invitation to submit comments regarding policy statements, guidance documents, and regulations that create unnecessary barriers to complete needed infrastructure projects.

As the federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the Columbus, Ohio urbanized area, MORPC is comprised of more than 60 member local governments and regional organizations in a 15-county area. We welcome the tremendous economic benefits that a smooth, less burdensome process will bring to Central Ohio as we continue to build a world-class, multi-modal infrastructure system.

MORPC members understand the importance of policies to protect the environment and provide for sustainable communities. But our members also value the right balance to maintain efficient and supportive government processes. We are experienced with implementing process improvements for efficient government services and applaud your efforts to do the same by implementing process improvement techniques through this effort.

The following are MORPC-identified focus areas with opportunities for process improvement:

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Policies

- Many of our members express frustration that the application of regulations for 23CFR, Chapter I, Subpart G, Part 635 are more advantageous for large, interstate-type projects rather than less expensive corridor projects. Smaller projects are challenged when trying to justify the use of federal funding for said projects. This is specifically concerning when medium- and small-sized LPAs have a great need for federal funding to make significant projects happen in their community. A perfect example of a better process that has worked is one that the Ohio Department of Transportation and County Engineers Association of Ohio (CEAO) worked out for the typical, smaller projects with which county engineers are involved. A Federal/State Exchange Program shifted "state dollars" over for the "federal dollars" that CEAO would have to use on projects. It made a tremendous difference in CEAO efficiently selling and completing their projects on time.
- Central Ohio governments find the right-of-way acquisition process duplicative, as it requires that properties are professionally appraised and separately reviewed to establish the fair market value as part of the requirements and procedures under the The Uniform Act (Title III policy and requirements) and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act. This set of regulations should be more closely examined to limit unnecessary steps.

William Murdock, AICP
Executive Director

Matt Greeson
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Secretary

- MORPC members have shared that updates via interim rules to the federal Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) are not timely enough, causing communities to spend more time designing their own traffic control device guidelines and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodations. The MUTCD is published by FHWA under 23CFR, Part 655, Subpart F. With safety being of utmost importance, these standards must have updates and rule implementations more frequently to provide the proper guidance and to eliminate duplicative policies at the local level.

Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Policies

- We believe that Title VI of the Civil Rights Act is an important part of any project. However we previously have been discouraged by the lack of consistency when Title VI is applied across FHWA and FTA. MORPC staff and stakeholders would like to identify one USDOT opinion on this matter for consistency and less confusion.
- MORPC programs and regional transit agencies have had a challenging time certifying vehicles for purchase under FTA's Buy America requirements. We recently had to identify how much of a vehicle was actually made in the USA prior to purchase (part-by-part), which was very time consuming. While we recognize the need for such provisions, we request you take a closer look to ensure that these provisions are practical and are not beyond the abilities of local partners, thus causing project delays.
- Many MORPC staff and stakeholders use FTA's Transit Award Management System (TrAMS) reporting system to award and manage federal grants. Although the system is new and better than its predecessor, it is still rigid, hard to navigate, and can be duplicative. We look forward to FTA's commitment to improve the system as use of the system progresses.

Thank you for your focus on improving regulations and providing the opportunity to comment on regulatory barriers to infrastructure projects. We look forward to continuing our relationship with the USDOT, Ohio DOT, our local governments, and other stakeholders in Central Ohio to improve the process of quickly completing projects.

Kind regards,



William Murdock, AICP
Executive Director