# **Livable Communities Regional Planning Forum**

## 8:30 – 5:00 pm, Friday, May 5, 2017

## The Ford Foundation, Times Square Meeting Room, 1440 Broadway, New York City, NY

**Forum Objectives:**

* Facilitate peer learning and networking among professional regional planners working in MPOs and regional planning agencies from across the country.
* Share details on livable communities program implementation and tangible ways these programs are influencing larger planning, performance measures and funding programs within regions
* Spotlight emerging practices on regional approaches to housing issues, with particular focus on how regional agencies are engaging in affordable housing, displacement and gentrification challenges

**8:30 – 9:00 am** **Continental Breakfast** **and Networking**

***9:00 – 9:45 am Welcome and Introductions***

**Mariia Zimmerman, MZ Strategies, LLC and Vice-Chair for Metropolitan Planning**, APA’s Regional and Intergovernmental Planning Division opened the Forum. She noted the RIPD accomplishments including PAS report. **Amy Cotter, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and Division Vice-Chair for Federal Planning**, outlined resources from her organization and thanked other Forum supporters were introduced. **Amy Kenyan from Ford Foundation** welcomed the Forum attendees.

**Fleming El-Amin, FHWA, USDOT and a member of the APA Board** outlined resources available including [www.transportation.gov](http://www.transportation.gov) MPO Leadership Academy; How to Guide for Environmental Justice; Contextual solutions webinars; and research on changing demographics/EJ.

Sixty people from 35 regions attended the Forum. Most persons are from MPOs and regions greater than 1 million population. Introductions occurred and regions represented include: WashCOG, RPA, NADO, LVPC, NJTPA, GPCOG, HGAC, PSRC, MTC, SACOG, DRCOG, WFRC, MARC, SANDAG, MAMPO, ARC, NWIRPC, MetCouncil, BMPO, DVRPC, Centralina MPO, CROG, MAPC, CMAP, PVPC, MMVP, DC Office of Planning, CAMPO. David Rouse and Jason Jordan of APA were also recognized.

***9:45 - 11:00 am Panel: New York Regional Transit-Oriented Development state of practice***

**Moses Gates and Kellan Cantrell of the Regional Planning Association (RPA)** outlined the current work program for the RPA. The 4th regional plan is under development. Developed a grid land use map for NY metro. Undertaking a policy program including job growth in areas outside Manhattan, housing, health, sea level rise and remove barriers to TOD. Increase densities but also disincentives for large residences where density should occur, legalize ADUs, reform short-term lettings, etc. Significant focus is happening on how to avoid displacement in growth areas, particularly through greater multifamily housing near rail stations.

**Jeff Perlman of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Agency (NJTPA)** outlined the planning framework for the region. The MPO has many diverse committees and local staff. Transportation system is very large with many daily trips on roads and transit. Currently implementing the 2040 Plan. NJTPA has sought to improve local policies for TOD. Currently developing the Plan 2045. Integrated land use and circulation around roadway typologies were developed for the Town of Morristown.

Questions were raised regarding local best practices in the region that demonstrate good implementation. The region has seen increased support and interest in TOD, especially in the suburbs, but local implementation requires connecting stations to density and permitting new density at stations. Cold weather and walking to transit can be an issue. Jeff Perlman stated new good examples of multi-family have occurred which helps provide models for other communities. RPA is seeking to engage individuals who are interested in urban development and living. Ty Warner asked about the “transit village” program that was noted. Jeff Perlman stated NJDOT will assist communities for transit village designation. Other questions included whether financial incentives exist for local governments or developers to support regional goals. Much of the financial incentives are state provided. PL funds are used for programs to support TOD work. TOD support is an implementation program of regional plan.

***11:15 – 12:15 pm Dialogue 1: Emerging Practices with Regional Livability Programs***

**Sandy Misiewicz outlined the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC)** MPO program which includes two metro areas: Albany - Schenectady & Saratoga Springs, NY. The Community Transportation and Transportation program has funded 86 studies, including examples of suburban mall retrofit to create mixed use town centers. (SGA/T4). Program fills a gap for pro-active planning. The MPO works closely with local governments to undertake the linkage plans with PL funds. Clifton Park is an example of a community that has developed a plan. The town center plan was adopted March 2015 including a form based code.

**Ryan Noles outlined programs undertaken by** [**Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency**](http://www.noaca.org/) **(NOACA)**, the MPO for greater Cleveland. The region received a federal HUD Sustainable Communities Planning grant in 2011. The goal from that is to increase economic growth and redevelopment in the core. A Transportation for Livable Communities Initiative was undertaken which has funded trails and other infrastructure. Transportation for Livable Communities Initiative at NOACA has evolved from planning grants to implementation. Approximately $16 million has been allocated during the past 10 years. Three-quarters of their $2 million annual TLCI budget is now spent on small implementation projects. Cleveland planning and implementation plans used to fund implementation of LCI plan and its recommendations. (SGA/T4)

**Lamont Cobb** provided an overview of the Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments regional planning work. The COG supports the MPO – National Capital Region Transportation Board. The TLC program provides technical assistance to local governments. Transportation Alternatives set aside also exists to support plans. Broad group of organizations helps select projects. Priority criteria includes regional plan goals, cross-jurisdictional collaboration, diversity and equity. Transportation projects included 19th street sidewalks, Central Avenue trail and Reston Bikeshare. Over 100 projects have been funded and a peer exchange network continues dialogue.

**Becky Bradley of the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission**, a two-county planning commission and MPO for Allentown, PA region provided gave an overview of rapid growth happening in the “New Inland Empire” since Super Storm Sandy. Over 23 million new square feet of construction has happened in just 2 years. This is creating workforce and housing issues, with the region at 100% employment. Livability is a core goal for the region. A HUD SCI grant allowed the region to create a set of policies not previously considered such as climate, public health, etc. Automobile transport is the primary mode encouraged, and their long-range transportation plan intentionally shied away from recommendations in favor of fixed-guideway transit to instead focus on bus and shared use mobility. The region undertakes work for their communities by undertaking urban design projects.

**Bill Swiatek discussed the programs underway for the Wilmington Metropolitan Area Planning Council** (WILMAPCO), a bi-state MPO in a small region. Region’s work is intertwined with local governments plans. The Route 9 corridor master plan is an example of a livable planning strategy. Another example is the Elkton Pedestrian plan which was funded by WILMPACO to provide a community design outline to meet ADA requirements and other related goals.

During the discussion, participants asked about the source of funds, who does work and how do each of the MPOs contract for this work. Panelists described a mix of funding sources from PL funds, to toll funds and local funds used. Participants also discussed a mix of communication best practices to share results within the region and raise awareness and public support for these programs. Newsletters, websites, peer exchange networks, forums, webinars, workshops and a local government academy are used to disseminate information.

Another participant asked for advice to those communities that did not receive a Sustainable Communities grant to do this kind of livability work. In the Cleveland region, the realization that building large highways and suburban sprawl created economic reasons to focus on needs of existing communities. The new Emerging Trends in Regional Planning, a PAS report produced by the RIPD and Transportation for America’s Innovative MPO report provide additional best practices.

Several regions are experimenting with how to provide technical assistance including design and engineering capacity to support local communities. Many participants provide this through consultants but one innovative technique employed by NCTOG in Dallas-Fort Worth is to hire part-time engineers. This has provided tremendous technical capacity to the agency, and this expertise can also be provided to communities they are directing supporting. For several regions, there is a growing need to track return on investment and the financial aspects of grants. This can be challenging as many participants noted that often the most impactful long-term outcomes of these grants are things harder to evaluate like improved regional cooperation and partnerships. ARC and NOAOA both undertake surveys of local participants, and NCTOG asks grantees to provide baseline information, including photographs of focus areas and then follow this up with five year reports. The agency is currently considering adding a 10-year evaluation to this work as well.

***1:00 – 2:15 pm Dialogue 2: Evolution of Regional Livability Programs: Evaluation and Communications***

**Ken Kirkey, of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission** in the San Francisco Bay Area, began the discussion on evaluation and communications of established livable programs. Three regions provided a snapshot of the work they are doing on livable communities and performance metrics.

**Karla Weaver of the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG)**, a complex region larger than the state of CT, described how the MPO’s unified work plan feeds into the MTP and the TIP. For years, they’ve wanted to tie the TIP to livability goals. Recent changes include creating sub-categories for funding and a stronger focus on safety. The agency is no longer doing a call for projects, but instead an “open call for projects.” Over the next 4 years, the agency will put $400 million in sustainable development Phase 4 funding which will allow cities to take roads off of the DOT system and make upgrades; invest in the transit program, planning and other studies. Changes are intended to more closely align TIP programming tied to programs re: land use, housing, other agency/regional priorities. Performance measures in the LRTP relate to how projects are selected and scored. Access is a big performance issue for us to ensure that the Dallas-Fort Worth region every modal choice is as accessible and safe as the others. PM’s are helpful to put more money into areas where we are not scoring well, i.e. pedestrian safety.

**Beth Dawson with the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC)** described how livability is structured into the MPO, which is also the regional planning agency. They have established a Livable Communities Policy Committee that feeds into the Total Transportation Planning Committee. Selection criteria looks at a host of issues. Vibrant, connected and green are the buckets of work that are funded. Between 2017 and 2019, the number of projects receiving funding fell but the amount funded for implementation went up. Mobility hub projects are the focus for current station area planning work that has revamped how programs are evaluated for capital programming. MARC scores applications to make sure that they are meeting at least 30% of the 7 principles, and to get full 100% points you have to meet all 7 principles. All PM’s are tied back to 9 goals. The agency has an extensive list of scoring criteria, including recent addition describing impact to watershed. Equity is another new goal and funding is being evaluated against environmental justice impacts. Safety and other traditional transportation goals are included, but new emphasis is intended to take the region to the next step in understanding what a proposed project is really going to achieve and its impacts.

The **Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)** is another agency that serves as both the MPO and COG, as of 2005. Bob Dean described the region’s efforts to implement its long-range regional plan and vision, Goto2040. LTAP program is the main way to implement the plan through local planning support. Since 2011, over 140 plans have been completed and 40 more are underway. Average plan is about $100,000 in size. CMAQ program supports projects, but not as specific implementation of these plans. The agency is working to engage with housing and environmental programs to better link up these sources of funds (CDBG, CMAP, LIHTC, etc). The agency does not have set-aside programs within CMAQ to support livability projects, and is considering whether to give overall priority for these kinds of projects in entire CMAQ pot of funding. CMAP is doing a lot of work on PMs. They program CMAQ and TAP funds directly, STP is sub-allocated to local government and they make those decisions. On the planning side, it has been hard to use quantitative metrics to judge the value of a planning project. The degree of local commitment is the hardest thing to quantify, but also the most important measure of success. Less about scoring community plans, but gauging how serious they are to do what they are proposing and its alignment with the regional goals.

**James Corless with the Sacramento Council of Governments** noted the demographic and geographic diversity of the region. The organization’s board size increased with the passage of its Blueprint plan several years ago growing from 9 electives to 31. The Blueprint plan guides transportation investments. The region has an ambitious rural-urban connections strategy. They are trying to push the envelope to connect transportation and land use with capital funds. In thinking about performance measures, new federal requirements are seen as “the report card” providing categories in which to grade ourselves. The regional process is analogous to the “college admissions process” where a multitude of good projects are scored and selected to receive a limited set of funding. Blueprint principles are used to score projects for funding. The agency is looking ahead to requiring a cost/benefit analysis for projects. So for livability, it will be critical to determine how to quantify these benefits. Another challenge is sorting through how livability projects, which often tend to be smaller in scale, can be funded individually or bundled.

In the open discussion, one of the first questions posed was how an MPO or regional agency can do anything substantive regarding land use since this is a local issue. Experiences varied but all regions are focused on working with the coalition of the willing, rather than imposing strict requirements. COGs are an information resource and convener, often bringing people together who work across issues. At MARC and SACOG, both agencies have a land use committee that focuses on how projects support regional land use and sustainability goals.

Another question raised was how state policies on federal funds impact the use of livability funds. In New York, the state DOT is holding up more of the federal funds rather than sub-allocating to fund basic maintenance. The state’s Complete Streets law explicitly prohibits use of state funds for maintenance. In Texas, state officials think TX DOT should fund maintenance with state resources whereas federal money sub-allocated to regions should go to more interesting kinds of projects. CMAP considers what may be the best use of funds for a project. For instance, the recent IL “Safe Roads” amendment restricts state transportation funds to only transportation. The legislation was written badly, and may actually exclude many things people had been historically funding. CMAP grounds all of its work in local benefit. They address climate change because its locally important, and are working on fair housing, not because of federal requirements, but because the region is facing severe economic disparities between communities. Every community should provide housing choices for people regardless of income. Local ownership is key to keeping these issues alive.

Agencies were asked if they are tying the forecast to dollars to meet projected population forecasts and densification of centers per regional plans. Participants noted that most regions are underproviding housing, and don’t do a good job of reporting to their boards on achievements of these programs. For instance, MARC is facing insufficient funding to maintain new development on fringes. Kansas City does not have enough housing, and the AFFH analysis is informing the region to look at transportation and broader issues not just housing solution. MARC’s livable communities grantees are regularly required to personally report on the impact of a livability project on their community. People are encouraged to tell their story, and in their own words. So far, this has been well received and reinforces the impact on different type of communities and lifts-up local voices. James Corless challenged the group to broaden and update the definition of livability. Previously, livability work was slow to include housing and equity. Going forward it must include technology and data if it wants to remain relevant.

***2:30 – 3:30 pm Dialogue 3: Evolution of Regional Livability Programs: Gentrification***

Housing productivity and preservation are a big issue. **Ralph Willmer, Executive Director of MAPC,**  described efforts in the Boston region to manage neighborhood change through a regional toolkit created by MAPC. On the local level there is frequent opposition to change re: traffic, school kids, density, design. Groups typically in favor of affordable housing and density are coming out in opposition to projects that don’t support enough affordable housing, i.e. transit. Equitable TOD projects have become important way to fund these kinds of projects and grow public support. MAPC issues a State of Equity Report, last updated in 2017. For the discussion, the following definition of gentrification was proposed: “condition in which higher-income households occupy an increasing supply of neighborhood housing stock while supply of lower-income households decline, changing the nature and dynamics of neighborhoods.”

**Carolina Ilic of the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG)** presented a different side of the issue. The region is growing at less than 1% per year but is still an expensive place to live. Only 54% of population owns a home. Only 35% of those who earn median income can afford to buy a home. SANDAG’s board views housing as a state and regional issue, and does not track gentrification and displacement but rather considers it from a policy perspective. State law requires local jurisdictions to consider affordable housing needs. REHNA (regional housing needs allocation over 10-year planning cycle), or Policy 33, is the agency’s only tool to address affordable housing and gentrification. In 2008, the state passed sustainable communities and climate protection bill (SB375) requiring plans to reduce GHG through regional transportation plans (RTP). Regions must update their Sustainable Communities Strategy + RTP every four years, while the REHNA is updated every 8 years.

**Barry Seymour with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC)** noted the significant shift in population between the City of Philly and its suburbs. For decades, the city lost population (750,000 people moved to the suburbs). Since 2005, almost all of region’s growth has been back in the central city. DVRPC created a Transportation and Community Development Initiative in 1999 with a focus to revitalize older communities. They established “8 degrees of disadvantage” and analyzed census tracts against these, with funding targeted to those with greatest need. Since then, over 230 grants have been made, totaling over $16 million and leveraging over $200 million in private investment. The Pew Foundation released a recent study on gentrification over the last 15 years. The results were interesting and contrary to what many perceived. Half of census tracts stayed the same, while income levels declined in nearly half. Only 4% of census tracts gentrified under their definition. Segregation and economic disparities were much greater challenge than gentrification.

Participants broke into small group discussion at their tables. During the report out, reflections shared on how regions quantify success for anti-gentrification tools and think about gentrification with an equity lens. These included:

* Mix of affordability near transit essential for reducing VMT (Austin MPO)
* How agencies can direct planning resources to areas that need it the most – criteria for who can apply or priorities for lower-income communities, sliding scale of match requirement
* Challenge of suburbanization of poverty is increasing – need first mile/last mile connections
* The challenge of developing affordable housing transcends regional boundaries, and can’t just be treated as a jurisdictional issue
* Housing is an imperfect market within a capitalist system, hard to make major change without owning land or imposing massive market controls (rent control or inclusionary), we need to figure out what works – funds to buy property and convert it to affordability?
* Land bank, property tax abatement, inclusionary, are all tools that influence the market but can only have limited impact

***3:40 – 4:40 pm Panel: Evolving National Context for Regional Planning***

**Jason Jordan, Policy Director for APA**, provided a post election snapshot of the work and issues that APA and its members are engaging and tracking.

* Much more engagement in policy: more than 1000 people signed up for the grassroots program since inauguration
* APA reorienting policy and advocacy to focus on three items: invest wisely in infrastructure, advance social equity with a focus on inclusiveness and access to opportunity, and to protect and preserve the data that’s essential to good planning
* Identified proactively what principles should guide federal investment in infrastructure – came up with 9 of them
* Need to build partnerships with other organizations that are aligned
* Response to budget proposal with complete opposition and grassroots engagement
* Developing 3 policy guides: housing, social equity, healthy communities

**Joe McKinney, Executive Director of the National Association of Development Organizations** gave a similar report on the issues and ways that NADO’s 540 members are engaging at the federal level.

* NADO represents small metro and rural regions with advocacy and research, but expanding their reach into larger areas – 520 members currently
* Challenging times for planning at the federal level

**Mariia Zimmerman, Principal of MZ Strategies, LLC** is part of the cross-disciplinary team involved in the newly launched Strong, Prosperous and Resilient Communities (SPARCC) challenge supported by the Natural Resources Defense Council, Enterprise Community Partners, the Low-Income Investment Fund and the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. SPARCC is funded by several national philanthropic organizations, including the Ford Foundation. SPARCC is working directly with six regions (Los Angeles, Atlanta, Denver, San Francisco Bay Area, Memphis and Chicago) on place-based work with communities. Over $90 million in capital funding and technical assistance is being provided to these regions to integrate racial equity, climate resiliency, public health and community development through advancing policy change and a pipeline of projects.

A wide-ranging discussion between panelists and the audience covered a number of topics, most notably severe proposed budget cuts by the Trump administration, outcomes of the FY2017 omnibus spending bill recently passed by Congress, and the potential of a major infrastructure bill and tax reform. APA is also concerned about attacks of federal data, and efforts to undermine and underfund the US Census. Planning is heavily reliant above quality data provided through open government in an accessible format. Increasingly, the private sector is also dependent upon government data. For those wanting to track federal efforts in real-time, APA provides an on-line policy blog and advocacy update while NADO sends out a weekly electronic newsletter and provides a number of excellent research publications on its website.

**4:40 – 5:00 Wrap Up** **and Next Steps for the Division**.

**Mark Vander Schaaf, the RIPD Chair** noted that going forward, RIPD intends to focus on three core areas of work: emerging trends in regional planning, implementation partnerships such as the Livable Communities Forum and state planning. Participants were asked throughout the day, and in their post-session evaluation to share thoughts on future topics and venues for how the Division can best support regional planning. The following ideas were shared as part of that feedback:

* Intersection between regional freight planning and livability
* Using creative graphics to communicate with the public (InfoGraphics)
* Terminology transfers
* Integration and breaking silos within agencies
* Working with local government officials (overcoming hostilities)
* Break-outs or targeted sessions for similar size regions, or with regional agencies/MPOs with similar structures or geography-specific small group peer exchanges
* People are interested in more opportunities for shared learning during the year through quarterly webinars or podcasts, the Division newsletter and on social media (note: The Division is developing or expanding use of these in coming year)
* Many would like to be involved with the Division, but are not APA members (often citing cost)