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From winter 2022 through spring 2023, the new metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the Mat-Su Valley, MVP for Transportation, has been in the process of developing its Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) boundary, the area in which the new MPO will be able to spend federal transportation funds to improve the transportation network for the growing Mat-Su region. Local councils and assemblies are also in the process of reviewing and approving resolutions of support for their elected and appointed officials to serve on the governing body of the MPO, called the Policy Board, so that local governments will have a 'seat at the table' and have a say in how new funding will be spent. In the midst of MVP becoming 'real,' community interest in the MPO has grown. Some members of the community have raised concerns about the MPO's purpose, governance, and potential impact on the Mat-Su Valley region. The following frequently asked questions (FAQ) list attempts to address and answer some of these questions.

## **Questions and concerns we are hearing about the MPO in the community:**

### **1. Will the MPO cause the Mat-Su to become reliant on the federal government for transportation funding?**

**Answer:** No. By establishing the MPO for the urbanized area, the Mat-Su gains new access to Metropolitan Planning (PL) and capital improvement funds that are intended to help communities with populations of 50,000 or greater develop their transportation systems to meet growing needs locally. The MPO does not require one to rely on the federal government for transportation funding. It provides the local governments with an opportunity to receive federal transportation funding if the area wants to, and to prioritize and fund the area's transportation needs.

The fact is that transportation infrastructure is expensive. In the absence of these federal funds, communities in the Mat-Su would need to support transportation projects with other revenue, such as tax dollars. Currently, there is roughly \$190 million in federal transportation funding proposed to be spent in the Mat-Su this year and \$725 million is proposed to be spent over the next four years. For some context, 85% of Alaska DOT&PF's 2024 budget is federally funded. The entire State of Alaska government is 79% funded by federal money.

The MPO plans for and expends federal transportation funds for projects only within its metropolitan planning area (MPA), which is based on the Census-designated urbanized area plus the contiguous area expected to become urbanized within a 20-year forecast period. Areas of the Mat-Su outside of the MPA will still be eligible to receive transportation funding from existing sources such as the Community Transportation Program (CTP) and Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP).



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**2. Will the MPO push people to move into the urban area or promote urbanization or increased density?**

**Answer:** No. The MPO is a transportation planning organization and does not have the power or ability to promote urbanization, increase density, or tell people where to live. The MPO's purpose is to provide a mechanism for local officials to have a say in how federal transportation funds are spent in their community. The MPO does not influence or make decisions about housing or development beyond providing a transportation network to meet local needs based on local input.

Even with an MPO, only the local governments maintain the power to make land use decisions. How urban the Mat-Su and its cities become is up to the people of the Mat-Su through their local governments and elected officials. The MPO is a transportation planning organization and does not dictate land use. The MPO's focus on providing greater local control and facilitating coordination between jurisdictions in an urbanized area is due to the fact that transportation projects in these areas impact more people. There are also multiple local jurisdictions served by the transportation system in the Mat-Su, so coordination around local priorities is key.

**3. Will the MPO promote certain forms of transportation (private vehicles, public transit, biking, walking) over others? Will the MPO force residents to purchase electric vehicles?**

**Answer:** No. The MPO is a transportation planning organization and does not have the power or ability to force people to buy any type of vehicle or use any specific type of transportation. Formation of the MPO is intended to provide more local control over transportation decisions that involve federal funds. The MPO can elect to support any surface-based transportation improvements and modes (cars, bikes, pedestrians, transit, etc.) to make the transportation network more reliable and efficient for all users. The MPO cannot dictate how people choose to move.

**4. Who runs the MPO?**

**Answer:** Local government officials govern the MPO. The governing body of the MPO, called the Policy Board, is planned to be comprised of elected and appointed officials from the city of Wasilla (1 seat), city of Palmer (1 seat), Matanuska-Susitna Borough (2 seats), Chickaloon Village Traditional Council (1 seat), Knik Tribe (1 seat), and State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (1 seat). The MVP for Transportation Pre-MPO Policy Board (comprised of many of these same organizations) approved this membership in September 2022.



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## 5. Do we really have to form an MPO?

**Answer:** Yes. MPOs are federally required per [23 CFR § 450.310](#) – “Metropolitan planning organization designation and redesignation” to represent localities in all urban areas with populations over 50,000 as designated by the U.S. Census Bureau. MPOs provide a mechanism for local officials—instead of just the state or feds—to make decisions about how federal transportation funds are spent in the community. Federal surface transportation funds would not be spent within the urbanized area if an MPO is not formed.

MPOs are designated by agreement between the Governor and local governments that together represent at least 75 percent of the affected population. This includes the largest incorporated city based on population, in this case, Wasilla. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the City of Wasilla are federally required to participate. Other local governments within the Census-designated urbanized area, such as Palmer, are not required to participate. However, by not participating, these local governments will no longer have a vote on the MPO’s Policy Board and will have no official say in how federal transportation funds are spent in their area. They will also no longer be eligible for some other transportation funding sources such as the State of Alaska’s Community Transportation Program.