



American Planning Association

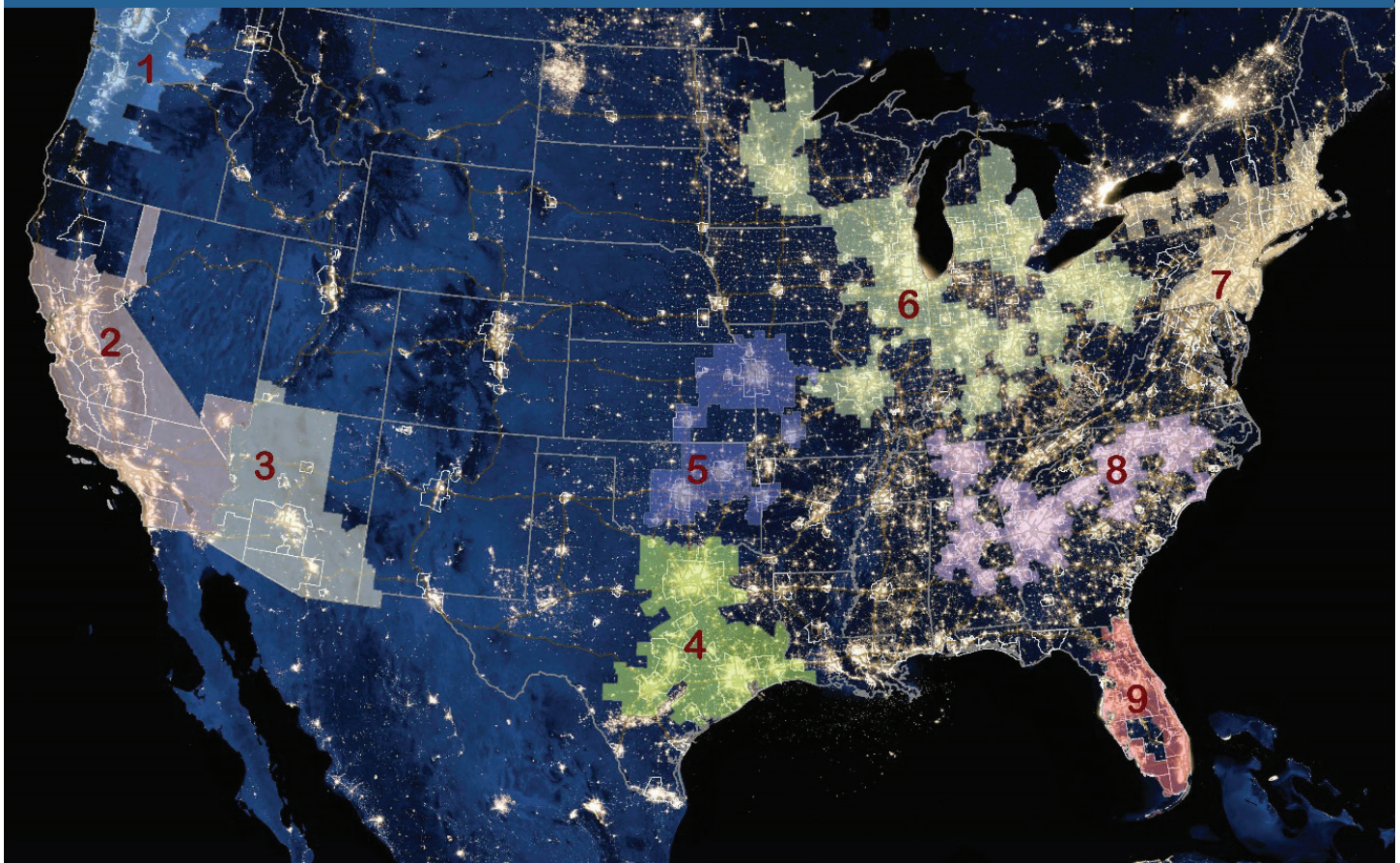
Making Great Communities Happen

# MULTIMODAL PLANNING AT THE MEGAREGIONAL SCALE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between June 2015 and May 2017 the American Planning Association (APA) and the Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development (CQGRD) at the Georgia Institute of Technology, with funding from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), examined the influence of the megaregions concept on local and regional long-range planning efforts and identified opportunities for and barriers to using local and regional long-range plans to advance megaregional goals. Through this effort, APA and CQGRD developed planning frameworks, highlighting opportunities for these local and regional agencies to address megaregional issues in their respective long-range plans.

Figure 1: Megaregions across the United States



<p>Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development</p>		1 Cascadia Megaregion		4 Texas Megaregion		7 Northeast Megaregion
		2 California Megaregion		5 Central Plains Megaregion		8 Piedmont Megaregion
		3 Arizona Megaregion		6 Midwest Megaregion		9 Florida Megaregion

The Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development at Georgia Tech identifies nine megaregions across the country (Ross et al. 2009).

### Megaregions and Planning Practice

To determine the state of megaregional planning, the project team used a two-phased approach consisting of a Literature Review and Case Study Research.

The Literature Review included the following steps: 1) reviewing existing literature and research on megaregions, intergovernmental cooperation, comprehensive planning, and state comprehensive planning enabling legislation for the 41 states located within CQGRD's defined megaregions; 2) identifying criteria for conducting a targeted scan of local and regional plans (to determine the extent of megaregional planning); and 3) conducting a scan of local and regional long-range plans from within megaregions to determine the extent to which local and regional planning agencies are addressing megaregional considerations in their planning.

The Case Study Research took a more in-depth look at two megaregions – Cascadia and the Texas Triangle. Within each megaregion, the project team reviewed the long-range transportation plan of the largest MPO (Puget Sound Regional Council and North Central Texas Council of Governments), the comprehensive plans of the most- and second-most-populous cities within the MPO's jurisdiction, and the comprehensive plan of a peripheral city located in a county that does not contain either the largest or second largest city. The project team also interviewed representatives from the MPOs and the cities. The literature review and case studies highlighted the following about the current state of practice:

- **Local and regional planning agencies are aware of the megaregional concept and their location within megaregions.** However, relatively few incorporate megaregional issues into their plans. Megaregions are more likely to be addressed in regional long-range transportation plans required by Federal statute (23 USC §134 & 49 USC §5303) than in local comprehensive plans, and the megaregional focus is most often on transportation systems and infrastructure.
- **Institutional support is a barrier to addressing the megaregional concept.** This includes both a lack of federal and state enabling legislation related to megaregional planning, as well as the lack of formal governance structures.
- **Local and regional planning agencies work on a broad range of issues within their jurisdictions,** which may make it difficult to look beyond jurisdictional boundaries and add megaregional considerations to the mix.
- **There is a lack of clear guidance for local and regional planning agencies on addressing megaregional issues in planning practice.** This includes both broad guidance on addressing megaregional context and trends, and specific guidance for issues such as transportation, economic development, or water quality.

### Regional and Local Long-Range Planning Frameworks

Following the case study research, the project team developed frameworks for incorporating megaregional considerations into regional long-range and local comprehensive plans. Megaregional considerations addressed through these frameworks include freight and supply chain management, multi-modal connections, economic interconnections, and environmental systems.

Federal regulations define the scope of the MPO planning process and provide a set of 10 planning factors for long-range transportation plans ([23 CFR 450.306](#)). The [Regional Long-Range Planning Framework](#) includes recommended practices to address megaregional issues that relate to one or more planning factors. Here are select practices, illustrating the breadth of these recommendations:

- Plan for high-speed passenger rail (where feasible) and interregional electric vehicle networks.
- Coordinate interregionally on intelligent transportation systems and travel demand management.
- Coordinate interregional transportation investments with job clusters.
- Plan for interregional transportation access for long distance-commuters.
- Coordinate interregionally to improve air quality.
- Plan for interregional green infrastructure networks.

The [Local Comprehensive Planning Framework](#) includes recommended practices to address megaregional issues, grouped under the Principles, Processes, and Attributes of APA's preexisting [Comprehensive Plan Standards for Sustaining Places](#). Here are select practices, illustrating the breadth of these recommendations:

- Plan for the mitigation of interregional natural hazards.
- Protect and manage interregional water resources
- Support interregional economies.
- Promote interregional access to parks and recreation facilities.
- Incorporate interregional considerations into assessments of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
- Coordinate with interregional planning efforts.

The megaregions concept is playing a growing role in planning practice. However, institutional barriers, such as a lack of enabling legislation and formal governance mechanisms, limit local and regional efforts to incorporate megaregional considerations into long-range plans. Additionally, local and regional planning agencies also work on a wide range of issues, which can make it difficult for megaregional issues to rise to the top as a priority. Finally, state boundaries and the differences in state regulatory structures can create a barrier for operationalizing megaregional initiatives that cross state borders.

While there are barriers to addressing megaregions in planning practice, there are also opportunities. These include a growing awareness among local and regional planning agencies of the megaregions concept, and of their respective locations within defined megaregions. Planning agencies also recognize the potential of harnessing megaregional trends to gain a competitive economic advantage within the megaregion. Additionally, local and regional entities are collaborating around issues related to air and water quality and resiliency—issues that lend themselves to cross-boundary collaboration.

In order to fully leverage these opportunities, there is a need for more practical planning guidance on the concept of megaregions. The framework developed for this project takes a first step toward addressing this need, providing frameworks for incorporating megaregional and interregional considerations into regional and local long-range plans. Additional practical guidance is needed around specific topics such as transportation, the environment, and the economy, as well as on developing successful megaregional partnerships and governance and institutional support structures.

### KEY TERMS

**Regional**—Pertaining to a single metropolitan area or multijurisdictional planning agency.

**Interregional**—Pertaining to two or more overlapping, adjacent, or proximate metropolitan areas.

**Megaregional**—Pertaining to a network of overlapping, adjacent, or proximate metropolitan areas that share economic, environmental, and cultural features, as well as infrastructure and geographic connections.

**Long-Range Plan**—An adopted statement of policy intended to guide collective decisions related to the growth and change of human settlements over at least a 20-year time horizon. The two most common, and influential, types of long-range plans in the U.S. are the local comprehensive plan and the regional long-range transportation plan. Every state in the U.S. has local planning enabling statutes that either authorize or require general-purpose local governments (i.e., counties, municipalities, and townships) to prepare comprehensive plans. Meanwhile, federal law requires all metropolitan planning agencies to prepare long-range transportation plans.

**Local Comprehensive Plan**—The foundational policy document for a general-purpose local government (i.e., county, municipality, or township), which establishes a framework to guide public and private decisions about future growth, preservation, and change within a local jurisdiction over the next 20 to 30 years. The comprehensive plan covers a wide range of topics of community importance, including land use, transportation, housing, economic development, the environment, and intergovernmental coordination. It may also be called the general plan or the master plan.

**Regional Long-Range Plan**—Refers to long-range plans prepared by metropolitan planning organizations (MPO) required under [23 CFR 450.324\(a\)](#) or regional planning agencies, including the long-range transportation plan (LRTP) and regional comprehensive plans. The LRTP is prepared by the MPO and has a time frame of at least 20 years and addresses transportation goals for the region. It includes both short-term and long-term strategies that consider how system intermodal transportation system components interact to efficiently move both goods and people and is updated on either a four- or five-year schedule depending on a region's air quality attainment. Regional Comprehensive Plans, which address issues such as land use, transportation, housing, and economic development at the regional scale and can be used to guide the preparation of local comprehensive plans within the region.