

**BYLAWS
FOR THE SOUTHEAST TENNESSEE RURAL
PLANNING ORGANIZATION (RPO)**

NAME AND PURPOSE

1.1 The name of this organization is the Southeast Tennessee Rural Planning Organization (RPO).

1.2 Consultation Process for Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs)

The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) works with local officials in rural areas to ensure they have a voice in transportation planning for non-metropolitan regions. This process gives officials within the RPO the chance to participate in developing transportation plans through a structured consultation process.

Consultation means that TDOT collaborates with identified parties based on a clear and established process. The goal of the RPO is to promote quality, expertise, and fairness in transportation planning and projects across the non-metropolitan counties of Bledsoe, parts of Bradley, Grundy, McMinn, Marion, Meigs, Polk, Rhea, and Sequatchie, as well as their incorporated municipalities.

This ongoing, collaborative planning and programming process will follow these key principles:

- a. The RPO, in collaboration with the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), will focus on long-term local and regional transportation needs across multiple modes of travel. Together, they will assess and prioritize these needs with the following goals in mind:
 1. Support the economic vitality of the area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.
 2. Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
 3. Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
 4. Increase accessibility and mobility of people and freight.
 5. Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns.
 6. Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.
 7. Promote efficient system management and operation.
 8. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.
 9. Improve the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate stormwater impacts of surface transportation.
 10. Enhance travel and tourism.
- b. Provide and ensure a forum for public participation in the transportation planning process.
- c. Develop and provide project priorities that the RPO believes should be considered for funding by TDOT and included in the State's Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

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- d. To conduct transportation-related studies and surveys and to provide transportation-related information to local governments and other interested organizations and persons.
- e. Undertake mutually agreed upon transportation-related tasks to enhance transportation system development, coordination, and efficiency.

THE SOUTHEAST TENNESSEE RURAL PLANNING ORGANIZATION

- 2.1 The Southeast Tennessee Rural Planning Organization is hereby established with the responsibility for serving as a forum for multimodal transportation decision making and recommendations for the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT). The Rural Planning Organization shall have the responsibility for keeping the member governmental entities informed of the status and requirements of the transportation planning process, project prioritization, and helping to ensure meaningful public participation in the transportation planning process.
- 2.2 The Rural Planning Organization will be responsible for carrying out the following:
 - a. Establishment of the goals, priorities, and objectives for the transportation planning process.
 - b. Develop and provide project priorities for multimodal transportation projects which the RPO believes should be funded by TDOT and included in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).
 - c. Review and approval of changes to identified long-range transportation needs and recommendations.
 - d. Review and approval of documents such as the by-laws, memoranda of understanding/agreement, prospectus, and work programs governing the operation and procedure of this organization.
 - e. Review and approval of projects recommended for funding to TDOT which support and enhance rural transportation locally and regionally.
 - f. Provide and ensure a forum for public participation in the rural transportation planning process.
 - g. Make recommendations to the respective local and state governmental agencies regarding any necessary actions relating to the continuing transportation planning process.
 - h. Be responsible for the completion of all required transportation studies, plans, and programming recommendations required under state and federal law.
 - i. Provide transportation-related information to local governments and other interested organizations and persons to undertake mutually agreed upon transportation related tasks to enhance transportation system development, coordination, and efficiency.

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- j. Coordinate the review and scoring of grant applications for various TDOT grant programs.

SOUTHEAST TENNESSEE RURAL PLANNING ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIP & VOTING

3.1 The RPO is comprised of elected representatives from local governments as follows:

a. Voting members:

Elected Officials

1. The County Representation will be the County Mayor/Executive or their designee who will serve coterminous with their elected position.
2. The Municipal Representation will be a City Mayor from each County as selected by each county's Mayor/Executive, who shall serve coterminously with their elected or appointed term up to a maximum of 4 years at which point they can be reappointed or replaced by the County Mayor. A municipal mayor who is appointed in the middle of their elected or appointed term shall only be appointed for the remainder of their term, and then if re-elected may be reaffirmed for a 4-year term or replaced by the County Mayor. The County Mayor has the option to delegate the selection of this representative to the Municipal Mayors with the same term stipulations as mentioned above.
3. Any City Mayor of a municipality with a population equal to or greater than the population of the smallest county represented in the RPO.
4. Two State Legislative members or their designee (one Senator and one Representative) whose area include some portion of the rural area (not an MPO area) as chosen by the Development District Executive Committee, for a 4-year term, unless the selected representative vacates their position before the end of the 4-year term.
5. County Highway Superintendent (ex-officio) or their designee (one from each county) who will serve coterminous with their elected positions.

4-Year Term Appointed Members

1. County Representatives (one from each county) – A representative from each county as chosen by the respective Highway Superintendent, for a 4-year term, or until another appointment is made at the current Highway Superintendent's discretion. This representative will be a planner, engineer, or others interested in transportation issues.
2. Municipal Representatives (one from each county) – A representative from one of the incorporated municipalities in the county as chosen by the City Mayor serving on the RPO (not in an MPO) in each county, serving on a 4-year rotating basis. This representative shall be a municipal resident of the same county as the appointing municipal Mayor, but does not have to be of the same municipality. The appointed member may be another elected official, but shall not be a County Mayor/Executive or City Mayor. This representative will be a planner, engineer, or others interested in transportation issues.

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Ex-Officio Appointed Members

1. Southeast Tennessee Development District Executive Director or designee.
2. The Executive Director of the Southeast Tennessee Human Resource Agency (SETHRA) or their Public Transit Director or designee.
3. A representative of the Cleveland Municipal Planning Organization (MPO), which may be the MPO Coordinator or a member of their Executive Board or Technical Committee. The Cleveland MPO shall select their representative.
4. A representative of the Chattanooga Municipal Planning Organization (MPO), which may be a named staff representative or a member of their Executive Board or Technical Committee. The Chattanooga MPO shall select their representative.

Special-Interest Members

1. Aviation Representative – One person for the whole region with current responsibilities and/or expertise in aviation management and/or operation in the area; selected by the Development District Executive Board.
2. Bike/Pedestrian Representative – One person for the whole region with interest and involvement in biking and/or walking (hiking), or a recognized area advocate for biking and walking for recreation, as well as transportation; selected by the Development District Executive Board.
3. Environmental Representative – One person for the whole region with current responsibilities and/or expertise in environmental law, preservation and protections of natural areas and wildlife, etc; selected by the Development District Executive Board.
4. Freight/Trucking Representative – One person for the whole region with current responsibilities and/or expertise in freight/trucking management and/or operation in the area; selected by the Development District Executive Board.
5. Greenways/Trails Representative – One person for the whole region with current responsibilities and/or expertise in trail development, parks and recreation, or a similar area; selected by the Development District Executive Board.
6. Water (Port Authority) Representative, if applicable – One person for the whole region with current responsibilities and/or expertise in significant commercial water transportation management and/or operation in the area; selected by the Development District Executive Board.
7. Rail Representative – One person for the whole region with current responsibilities and/or expertise in rail management and/or operation in the area; selected by the Development District Executive Board.
8. Citizen Representative – One person representing an organization primarily serving the underserved citizens of the area; selected by the Development District Executive Board.

b. Non-voting members: (including but not limited to)

1. Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) Regional Director (or their designee).
2. TDOT Transit, Rail, Bike/Pedestrian and Water Division representative.
3. TDOT Office of Community Transportation Planning Manager (or their designee).

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4. TDOT Director of Project Management
5. FHWA Division Administrator (or their designee).
6. RPO Coordinator (ex-officio) from the represented Development District.
7. Regional & Community Planners representing areas served by the RPO.

3.2 Membership Term:

- a. Ex-officio members serve as long as they are in office, typically 4 years, or longer for non-elected representatives. Others serve subject to the appointing authority and are to be re-confirmed or appointed every 4 years by that body or at the next election cycle for elected members of the RPO, whichever comes first. Upon the expiration of a member's term, said member may continue to serve as a voting member until the appropriate appointing authority has reconfirmed or appointed a different member.

3.3 Voting:

- a. Each voting member has one vote. A quorum is one-third (1/3) of the total voting membership. Any action requiring a vote will require a majority vote of voting members present at the meeting. Proxies will be accepted if presented in writing by the time of the vote prior to the start of the official meeting; however, an individual may not serve as a proxy for more than one absent voting member.
- b. Virtual or electronic meetings may be held by the RPO provided notification of the meeting has been provided to all members at least seven (7) days in advance of the planned meeting. Electronic voting may be permitted for items requiring a vote that is not held during a regular called meeting. In such cases, the RPO Coordinator shall be responsible for ensuring that every member has been contacted at least seven (7) days prior and afforded an opportunity to vote. Voting may be done by email, online submission forms, websites, or other form of electronic media prepared by the RPO Coordinator for the specific vote. The RPO Coordinator shall keep an official record of all electronic votes received and shall transmit the results back to all members via a signed document by the Chairman and the RPO Coordinator showing tallied results. However, an electronic vote by a non-present member shall not be an acceptable form of voting for items appearing on an agenda of an official called in-person meeting if the item is to be voted on during the called meeting. Votes held during called meetings must be made in person or by a designated proxy as provided for in these bylaws.

ATTENDANCE

- 4.1 Any member missing three consecutive meetings may be replaced by the appointing authority. Members who anticipate being absent from a meeting may send a representative with the understanding of that person having full voting authority in writing as stated in 3.3.

OFFICERS

- 5.1 Officers will be elected by majority vote of those in attendance at a meeting for which a quorum is established. The election will take place at the Spring meeting in every even year, but the first election shall take place at the first Spring meeting following adoption of these bylaws. Officers shall consist of a Chair and a Vice-Chair serving a 2-year term. The Chair

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will be elected from the Mayors (city and county) and the Vice-Chair will be elected from the Highway Superintendents. These positions shall rotate every 2 years between Mayors and Highway Superintendents.

5.2 Duties of Officers

- a. The Chairperson shall call meetings of the Rural Planning Organization to order and shall act as Chairperson of such meetings. The Chairperson will:
 1. Sign all official documents and correspondence of the RPO.
 2. Preside at all meetings of the RPO.
 3. Decide all points of order or procedure.
 4. Approve meeting agendas.
- b. The Vice-Chairperson shall conduct the duties of the Chairperson in the event of the Chairperson's absence.

MEETINGS

- 6.1 Meetings will be held as necessary to conduct business of the RPO. Special meetings may be called by the Chair or a majority of the members to address specific issues, or a meeting may be called by the RPO Coordinator to conduct business of the RPO as it arises. Meetings will be held at locations decided upon by the RPO Coordinator.
- 6.2 Every meeting will be open to the public and time will be allotted on the agenda for public comment. Comments from the public will be limited to five (5) minutes per individual, and the Chairperson will set the maximum allotted time during the meeting for public comments.
- 6.3 Meeting notices and materials will be distributed to Board members and relevant persons at least seven (7) business days prior to the meeting.
- 6.4 Meetings shall be properly advertised in accordance with Chapter 442, Tennessee Public Act of 1974, "The Sunshine Law".

STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

- 7.1 The administrative coordination for the Organization shall be performed by the SE TN Development District under grant contract with TDOT. The Transportation Planner / RPO Coordinator assigned will work with TDOT Planners and staff to comply with the Contract, Federal Law and Regulations regarding RPO's, and these Bylaws in completing the following duties (see contract Scope of Work for details):
 - a. Coordinate regular and special meetings of the organization's various bodies in a timely manner, as well as public meetings, and document all meetings.
 - b. Coordinate the collection of data and performance of analysis in a timely manner on multimodal transportation projects presented for consideration. Work closely with TDOT staff, local officials, and others in this regard.
 - c. Coordinate the preparation and update of comprehensive reports and plans for long-term multimodal transportation needs for the area on a regular basis.


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- d. Keep minutes of the RPO's meetings in proper form for approval at its next regular meeting.
- e. Mail (or email) notices of regular meetings of the RPO with copies of the agenda in accordance with the prospectus.
- f. Give notice of special meetings called in accordance with Tennessee's open meetings law.
- g. Maintain files, records, and correspondence of the Southeast Rural Planning Organization.
- h. Work closely with other organizations involved in various aspects of comprehensive planning to determine transportation needs assessments related to community goals such as economic development, health care, education, employment centers, etc.
- i. Other duties and responsibilities described in the TDOT Contract or these Bylaws.

BYLAWS AMENDMENT

- 8.1 These Bylaws can be amended by majority vote of the RPO at a meeting for which a quorum has been established.

These bylaws are hereby adopted by the Southeast Tennessee Rural Planning Organization (RPO) on this day 12/19/2024, and shall be the guiding document for the operation of said organization. These bylaws shall become affective January, 1, 2025.


Southeast Tennessee Rural
Planning Organization Chairman

12/19/2024
Date