

January 4, 2010

Commissioner Vance Smith
Georgia Department of Transportation
600 West Peachtree Street, 22nd Floor
Atlanta, GA 30308

Mr. Todd Long, Planning Director
Georgia Department of Transportation
600 West Peachtree Street, 22nd Floor
Atlanta, GA 30308

Dear Messrs. Smith and Long:

Subject: Matching of Federal PL Funds

We, the members of the Georgia Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (GAMPO), are writing to express our concern regarding GDOT's decision to stop providing State funds for half of the required match for Metropolitan Planning (PL) funds for the Georgia Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) beginning in 2011. GAMPO represents all 15 Georgia MPOs which includes three bi-state MPOs (Augusta, Columbus and Chattanooga). Many of our member MPOs have written to the Department earlier in the year expressing opposition to the Department's decision. We understand the Department's funding issues and realize that you are taking unprecedented actions to fill the shortfall. This PL match is extremely important to us. We and our member governments are experiencing serious funding issues too.

For FY 2009, the PL allocation for the State was approximately \$7,500,000. Under the current policy, for the required 20% match, GDOT will provide approximately \$937,500 and the MPO's will provide \$937,500. If GDOT discontinues providing its share of these matching funds, the MPOs will not be able to make up this shortfall which will mean that we will not be able to fully match all available federal PL dollars. Assuming we kept the dollar amount of our match constant, the State would have to forego approximately \$3,750,000 in federal funds. We, the MPOs, would be forced to severely curtail our transportation planning program by reducing staff and consultant support. In other words, this would cause us to have to cut our planning program in half.

The MPOs play a vital role in transportation planning. Much of the work that we would be forced to cut would still have to be done. We must then assume this work we are unable to do would be done by GDOT resulting in increased costs to the Department.

Recently, the national Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO) conducted a survey of its members to determine how PL funds were matched nation-wide. The results of that survey show that many states provide all or a portion of the PL matching funds. Some of the states provide cash match, as GDOT does, and some states such as Texas and Florida provide 100% of the PL match (all 20%) using in-kind or soft match. It is our understanding that Texas DOT has used the cost of their planning staffs at both their headquarters and in their Districts as in-kind match for the MPO PL funds and that Florida DOT uses toll credits as soft match for their entire PL allocation. Perhaps GDOT could find a way to do this here in Georgia by identifying work currently being done by the Department that is related to the planning process and that is funded with state dollars. A soft match could be phased in over

two to three years, which would immediately reduce the cash-funding provided by GDOT and give MPOs time to reduce budgets to accommodate the soft match. Under a soft match scenario we would still take a hit but it certainly would not be as severe as eliminating the state match altogether.

In summary, the loss of the States matching funds to MPOs will severely impact all of our planning programs. In the current economy, our member governments cannot make up this shortfall. The relatively small amount of money that GDOT would save by eliminating its contribution would have a profound effect on transportation planning in the State and we believe it could harm our ability to comply with federal planning requirements for many years to come. Given the current transportation funding crisis in Georgia, it does not make any sense to forego any available federal dollars that might be lost due to an inability to provide matching funds.

We strongly recommend that GDOT continue to provide half of the required match as it has done for many years. If that is not possible then we recommend that you explore an in-kind or soft match scenario or consider a less drastic reduction of the state share. We do not believe that the decision to stop matching a portion of planning funds is in the best interest of the Department, MPOs in Georgia or the entire State of Georgia. The consequences of this decision will have long lasting impact on transportation planning and ultimately project delivery.

Sincerely,

The Georgia Association of MPOs

Albany (DARTS)



Howard Brown, Director
Albany-Dougherty Planning & Development
Services

Athens (MACORTS)



Brad Griffin, Director
Athens-Clarke County Planning Commission

Atlanta (ARC)



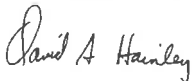
Chick Krautler, Director
Atlanta Regional Commission

Augusta (ARTS)



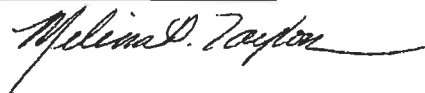
George A. Patty, Executive Director
Augusta-Richmond County Planning Commission

Brunswick (BATS)



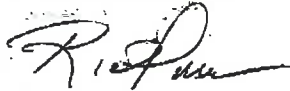
David Hainley, Director
Glynn County Community Development

Chattanooga (CUATS)



Melissa Taylor, Director of Transportation Planning
Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning
Agency

Columbus (CPCTS)



Rick Jones, Director
Columbus Department of Planning

Dalton



Bob McLeod, County Administrator
Whitfield County

Gainesville (GHMPO)



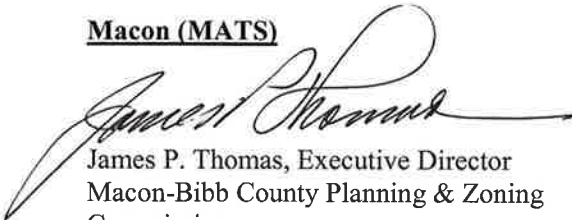
Randy Knighton, Director
Hall County Department of Planning

Hinesville (HAMPO)



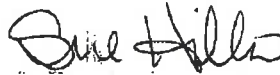
H. E. "Sonny" Timmerman, Executive Director
Liberty Consolidated Planning Commission

Macon (MATS)



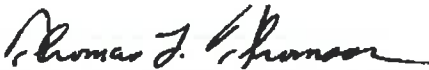
James P. Thomas, Executive Director
Macon-Bibb County Planning & Zoning
Commission

Rome (FRUTS)



Sue Hiller, Planning Director
Rome-Floyd County Planning Commission

Savannah (CORE)



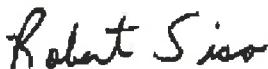
Thomas L. Thomson, Executive Director
Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan
Planning Commission

Valdosta (VLMPO)



John Leonard, Executive Director
South Georgia Regional Commission

Warner Robins (WRATS)



Robert Sisa, Director
Warner Robins – Department of City
Development