

**Southwest Region University Transportation Center  
Project Proposal - FY 2012**

TITLE OF PROPOSED PROJECT: COOPERATION AND COMPETITION – REGIONAL  
TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND COMPETITIVE FEDERAL AWARDS.

STRATEGIC GOAL(S) ADDRESSED: LIVABLE COMMUNITIES.

CONSORTIUM MEMBER: UNO.

TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET: \$11,348.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: DR. CATHERINE LOWE  
PHONE NUMBER: (504) 280-6029  
EMAIL ADDRESS: Kate.Lowe@uno.edu

HAS THIS PROPOSAL BEEN SUBMITTED FOR FUNDING ELSEWHERE? N

DID THIS PROPOSAL RECEIVE FUNDING FROM ANOTHER SOURCE? N

DOES THIS PROPOSED RESEARCH INVOLVE THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS? Y

WILL THIS PROPOSED RESEARCH INVOLVE OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AS PARTNERS? N

PROJECT MONITOR NAME, ORGANIZATION, ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER:

**Awaiting confirmation:**

GIAN-CLAUDIA SCIARA  
ULTRANS  
C/O INSTITUTE OF TRANSPORTATION STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS  
2028 ACADEMIC SURGE  
ONE SHIELDS AVENUE  
DAVIS, CA 95616  
(530) 752-6548

ABSTRACT OF PROJECT:

Federal transportation funds play a critical role in shaping metropolitan transportation systems. For metropolitan regions to receive federal money, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) must lead continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative transportation planning. This research examines how the competitive and time-sensitive nature of the TIGER funding

program—especially the first year—interacted with regional planning processes. It will identify whether applicant projects were advanced by agencies primarily outside the coordinated regional planning process and under what conditions. Findings will help practitioners and policy makers understand how the design of funding programs and regional institutional context can present challenges for multi-agency decision-making.

## ***Cooperation and competition: Regional transportation planning and competitive federal awards***

### **PROJECT PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Federal transportation funds play a critical role in shaping metropolitan transportation systems. For metropolitan regions to receive federal money, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) must lead continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative transportation planning. Even as federal rules require it, the design of federal funding programs may create challenges for collaborative regional planning. This research examines how the time-sensitive and competitive features of a Department of Transportation program, Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER), relates to cooperative regional planning. Findings will help practitioners and policy makers understand how the design of funding programs and regional institutional context can present challenges for multi-agency decision-making.

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **Regional planning and federal funding**

Regional planning began early within the field of transportation. In fact, federal funding first became contingent on *continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative* regional planning in 1962. Soon after, metropolitan planning organizations were designated as the lead agencies for federally required planning (Zoller & Capizzano, 1997). The MPO model has been cited as an example of how federal directives could incentivize regional coordination, while still allowing local variability (Dreier et al., 2004).

Through a process involving numerous transportation agencies and the public, MPOs develop and approve long and short range transportation plans. Following the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Equity Act (ISTEA), these plans had to be fiscally constrained. With this legislation, MPOs also had increased responsibilities and funding influence. However, MPOs must navigate a complex institutional environment. Federal rules require coordination and cooperation but do not define the mechanics of such partnerships (Goldman & Deakin, 2000). In addition, MPOs face a fiscal paradox: their plans must be fiscally constrained but other agencies, such as state DOTs, municipalities, and transit providers, typically control the majority of the transportation dollars expended in each region (Sciara & Wachs, 2007). For example, a roadway agency that collects tolls typically decides how to spend toll revenue, and the MPO (unless there is special state legislation) cannot transfer toll funds to a locality for roadway traffic calming. The challenges for MPOs have prompted some cynicism about the influence of MPO planning (Goldman, 2007, p. 10) or whether ISTEA fostered regional collaboration (Innes & Gruber, 2005).

#### **TIGER program**

The Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) program originated in 2009's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Award of TIGER funds is competitive, based on evaluated on criteria defined by the DOT. Initially, as part of the stimulus bill, TIGER awards were for near term capital projects. The program has continued into a fourth round of awards, with support for planning and capital projects. Particularly for the first round, shovel-readiness could be more critical than regional plans in funds-seeking and ad hoc regional

decision making likely emerged. Furthermore, sponsor capacity can be critical in competitive federal programs (Manna & Ryan, 2011). Thus sponsor capacity, rather than regional priorities, could affect TIGER applications and success.

### **OBJECTIVES OF STUDY**

This research examines how the competitive and time-sensitive nature of the TIGER funding program—especially the first year—interacted with regional planning processes. It will identify whether applicant projects were advanced by agencies primarily outside the coordinated regional planning process and under what conditions. Analysis will assist practitioners and policy makers understand institutional contexts and under what circumstances federal program design supports or undermines regional collaboration. For researchers, the study will illuminate institutional relationships within regions, across government levels, and whether federal funds enhance the influence of regional planning.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research will address three related questions: (1) What institutions and stakeholders led consensus building around TIGER applications? (2) How did these processes relate to MPO-planning? (3) What funding structure incentives in the TIGER format inhibited or supported regional planning? Analysis will utilize three data sources:

1. A summary analysis of TIGER applications

- a. Analysis of awards

Given the focus on interaction between MPO-led planning and TIGER awards, only projects within metropolitan areas will be examined. To narrow the focus of the analysis further, focus will be on transit, bicycle/pedestrian, and intermodal facilities. This document review will compare projects to the long range, fiscally constrained plans that were in place *prior* to TIGER applications. Though projects are supposed to be in such plans (and especially explicitly required to be in shorter range transportation improvement plans), this review will look for exceptions and whether the highest priority projects in plans were those for which funds were sought. In addition, this analysis will look at which agencies are proposing projects—municipalities, transit agencies, DOTs or other entities.

- b. As data is available, analysis of unfunded applicant projects

The DOT received approximately 1,400 applications for just the first round. Did some regions submit competing projects? Were some regions or sponsors more or less successful? Why?

2. Case studies (document review; in person and telephone interviews)

- a. Boston, where the state DOT withdrew an application for a bus-rapid transit project

- b. New Orleans, where the Regional Transit Authority successfully sought TIGER funds for the expansion of the streetcar system.
3. Survey of stakeholders in selected regions to learn about the process surround TIGER applications
- a. Target 10 sites with 5 participants each site
    - i. Survey participants will be identified from MPO committees, sponsoring agencies, other government entities. In addition, participants will include as representatives from advocacy and business organizations (minimum 1 participant from each stakeholder type in each site).
    - ii. Selected project sites will represent a cross-section of project types (e.g. BRT, LRT, pedestrian, etc.) and sponsors.
  - b. Survey administration
    - i. Instrument will combine closed and open ended questions
    - ii. Distributed via email with online survey instrument
    - iii. Follow up with calls and paper or email attachment instrument

**WORK PLAN**

| Task  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|
| 1. Literature review                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| 2. Data collection & analysis of TIGER (I) awards |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| 3. Case study interviews                          |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| 4. Survey   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| 5. Final analysis & report                        |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |

**Staffing Plan**

The project will be completed under the direction of Dr. Catherine Lowe. Dr. Lowe is an Assistant Professor in the Planning and Urban Studies Department at the University of New Orleans. Her mixed-methods research focuses on transportation policy and planning, as well as multi-level governance. Additionally, she is analyzing the links between policy and transit agency finance, while developing research on the accessibility and mobility patterns of low-income workers.

It is also anticipated that a graduate assistant will be completing primary work tasks that include analyzing data findings, conducting surveys and interviews, and creating spreadsheets.

### ***SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES AND DELIVERABLES***

1. Summary of TIGER projects and literature review on competitive federal funding (December 2012)
2. Case study profiles (May 2013)
3. Comprehensive report (August 2013)
4. Article for submission to academic journal, potential targets include *Transport Policy* and *Journal of Transport Geography* (Fall 2013)

### ***PURSUIT OF FUTURE FUNDING***

1) Actions that will be taken to extend the research effort:

Results will be shared with the GAO. Additional research could explore subsequent TIGER awards, the competitive awards granted by the HUD-DOT-EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities, or state-level competitive grants.

2) Potential sponsors for the additional research:

US DOT Offices of the Secretary; HUD-DOT-EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities; state DOTs; American Public Transportation Association.