

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT AREA STUDY

JOHNSON CITY MTPO

2021

This report was prepared in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, and the Tennessee Department of Transportation.



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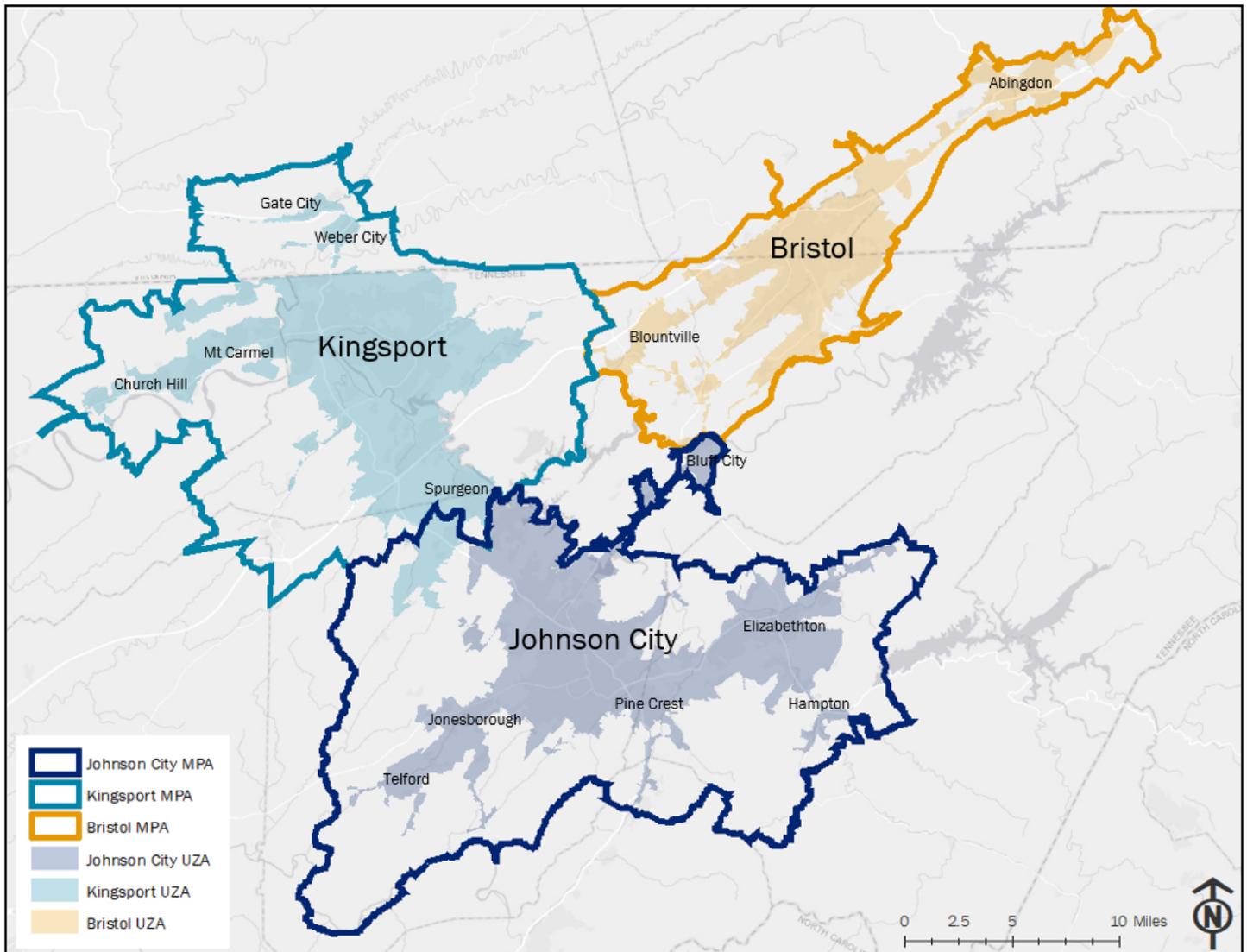
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INTRODUCTION

The Johnson City Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization (MTPO) was established in 1982 after Johnson City's Urbanized Area population passed the 50,000-person threshold and became a Urbanized Area (UZA), which is a Census Bureau designation that allows for the creation of Metropolitan Planning Organizations. The MTPO conducts regional transportation planning activities within the metropolitan planning area (MPA), which includes the UZA as well as areas within the region that may become urbanized areas in the next 20 years.

The MTPO currently serves the municipalities of Bluff City, Elizabethton, Johnson City, Jonesborough, and portions of Unicoi, Carter, Sullivan, and Washington Counties. Both the Johnson City UZA and MPA boundaries currently abut those of the Kingsport MTPO and Bristol MPO, two neighboring urbanized areas as shown in Figure 1. Bristol, Johnson City, and Kingsport are independent municipalities; however, they are connected by proximity, housing, workforces, and amenities.

Figure 1 - Existing UZA and MPA Boundaries



TMA DESIGNATION SCENARIOS

To address the additional planning needs of larger areas, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) designates UZAs with populations of 200,000 people or more as Transportation Management Areas (TMAs). TMA designation triggers additional federal planning requirements, affects roadway and transit funding distributions, and can require changes to MPO staffing and board structures.

With the 2000 U.S. Census, Johnson City surpassed Kingsport to become the largest UZA in the region. While none of the UZAs currently meet the 200,000-person threshold to become a TMA, the 2020 Census could potentially result in a newly designated TMA in Tennessee. This is due to both increased population growth in parts of the region as well as the Census Bureau’s new methodology for delineating urban and rural areas.

HISTORIC URBANIZED AREA POPULATION			
1990	BRISTOL 52,563	KINGSFORT 87,403	JOHNSON CITY 82,382
2000	BRISTOL 58,472	KINGSFORT 95,766	JOHNSON CITY 102,456
2010	BRISTOL 69,501	KINGSFORT 106,571	JOHNSON CITY 120,415

There are multiple scenarios that could result in a TMA designation in the region as a result of the 2020 Census, including:

- Johnson City, Kingsport, and Bristol UZA boundaries remain the same or vary slightly but remain under the 200,000-person threshold for TMA designation.
- The boundary between the Kingsport and Johnson City UZAs is dissolved, resulting in a larger UZA with a population greater than 200,000 and a unified MPO.
- The boundary between the Bristol and Johnson City UZAs is dissolved, resulting in a larger UZA with a population greater than 200,000 and a unified MPO.
- The boundary between the Bristol, Kingsport, and Johnson City UZAs is dissolved, resulting in a larger UZA with a population greater than 200,000 and a unified MPO.
- The boundary between any two or more UZAs are dissolved, but the MPOs remain separate entities.
- The Johnson City UZA’s population passes the 200,000-person threshold and becomes a TMA.

If TMA designation occurs and a revised UZA boundary encompasses multiple existing MPO planning areas, the executive boards of the affected MPOs may choose to consolidate or revise their formal planning agreements to meet the additional requirements of TMA designation.

Consolidation options include:

- **Full Consolidation:** The affected MPOs agree to merge and become a single MPO responsible for all metropolitan planning responsibilities. In this situation, the new MPO would go through the designation/redesignation process, establish a new executive board and technical committee reflective of its member jurisdictions, and consolidate/add technical staff to accomplish federal and state planning requirements.
- **Multiple MPOs, Single TMA:** The affected MPOs agree to retain separate planning responsibilities for a single urbanized area as allowed by 23 CFR 450.310 (e) with approval from the Governor. In this situation, the executive boards of the affected MPOs would need to create or revise formal planning agreements to address shared planning responsibilities.

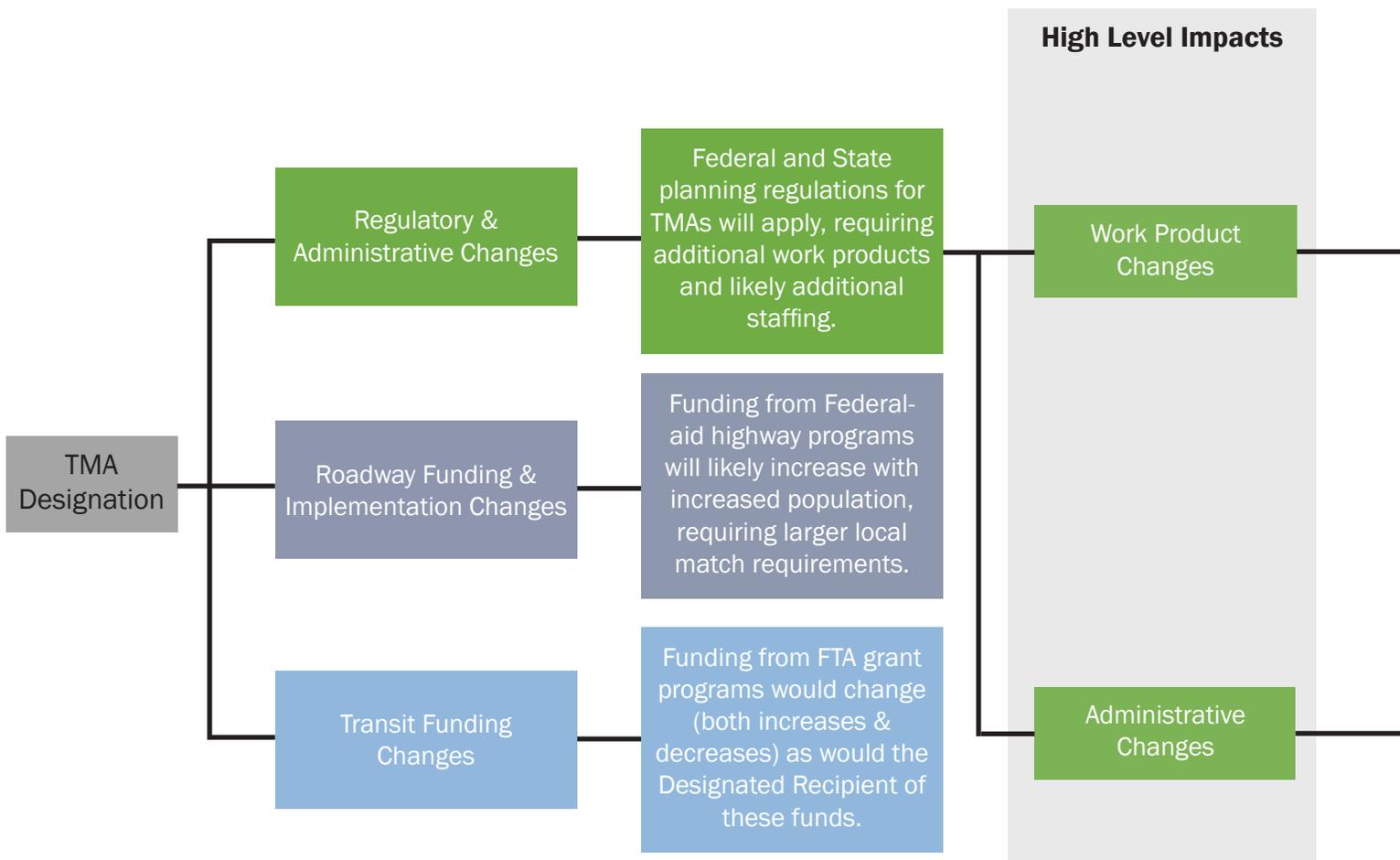
CURRENT PLANNING RESPONSIBILITIES

The cities of Bristol, Kingsport, and Johnson City are each served by an MPO that produces independent work products and conducts transportation planning activities. The Kingsport and Johnson City MTPOs have established a formal planning agreement in which the Johnson City MTPO plans for a small portion of the Kingsport Urbanized Area that is located within Johnson City MTPO’s metropolitan planning area.

Each MTPO is responsible for producing the following core work products:

- Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) – an annual or biannual statement of work describing the MPO’s planning activities, deliverables, schedules, funding sources, and responsibilities within the metropolitan planning area.
- Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) – a list of upcoming transportation projects covering a period of at least four years, developed in cooperation with the state and public transit providers.
- Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) – a fiscally constrained long-range plan that outlines how the MPO will manage its multimodal transportation network over a 20+ year planning horizon.

Each MTPO also produces additional required plans, such as the Public Participation Plan (PPP), the Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan (CPTHSTP), and the Regional ITS Architecture and Deployment Plan. Some MTPOs also complete other studies, such as a bicycle/pedestrian plan and a freight plan.



POTENTIAL CHANGES TO PLANNING RESPONSIBILITIES

The designation of a TMA in the region would likely require planning for a larger geographical area, potentially result in a bi-state urbanized area, and may require coordinating TMA responsibilities between multiple MPOs. The process for developing the MTP, TIP, and UPWP would largely remain unchanged by a TMA designation. However, the geographical area covered by those products would likely increase, as any expansion of the UZA would include an expansion of the area for which the MTPO is responsible for planning. Activities such as TIP amendments and modifications, tracking of UPWP activities, funding administration, coordination with stakeholders and municipalities in MTP development, increased data analysis for projects and plans, and other tasks would require additional effort by the MTPO. In addition, TMA designation would also require the MTPO to develop a Congestion Management Process (CMP) and to participate in additional Federal review processes. These changes could necessitate increases in administrative and technical staff to meet the demands of a larger planning area and additional responsibilities.

Insofar as the four existing TMAs in Tennessee can serve as a guide, the Knoxville Regional TPO, Nashville Area MPO, Chattanooga-Hamilton County/North Georgia TPO, and the Memphis Urban Area MPO have staffing levels that range from 6 to 12 people. These MPO staff roles typically include a director, transportation planners, environmental planners, grant coordinators, technical staff including GIS, data, and modeling, and communications and administrative support staff. Within the region, financial resources, work products, areas of expertise, and other factors would affect the structure of an MPO serving a TMA.

Detailed Impacts

UPWP: TMA designation has no anticipated changes in the requirements for developing a UPWP based on current federal and state practices. Future updates to the UPWP would account for the revised UZA and planning area boundaries.

TIP: TMA designation has no anticipated impact on how the TIP is developed or how projects are selected for implementation from the TIP. Future updates to the TIP would account for the revised UZA and planning area boundaries.

MTP: TMA designation has no anticipated impact on how the MTP is developed or the required elements. Future updates to the TIP would account for the revised UZA and planning area boundaries.

CMP: As a new TMA, the MTPO would be required to implement a Congestion Management Process, which would eventually be incorporated into the MTP and would reflect the revised planning area.

Other Plans & Studies: The MTPO's PPP, CPTHSTP, the Regional ITS Architecture, and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan would likely be unaffected by the TMA designation. Future updates to the studies would account for the revised UZA and planning area boundaries.

MTPO Staffing: Expansion of the UZA and planning boundaries will result in increased burden to meet existing planning requirements. TMA designation would also entail some additional planning requirements not currently handled by existing MTPO staff.

Federal Review: As a TMA, the Johnson City MTPO would undergo a joint FHWA/FTA certification review every 4 years.

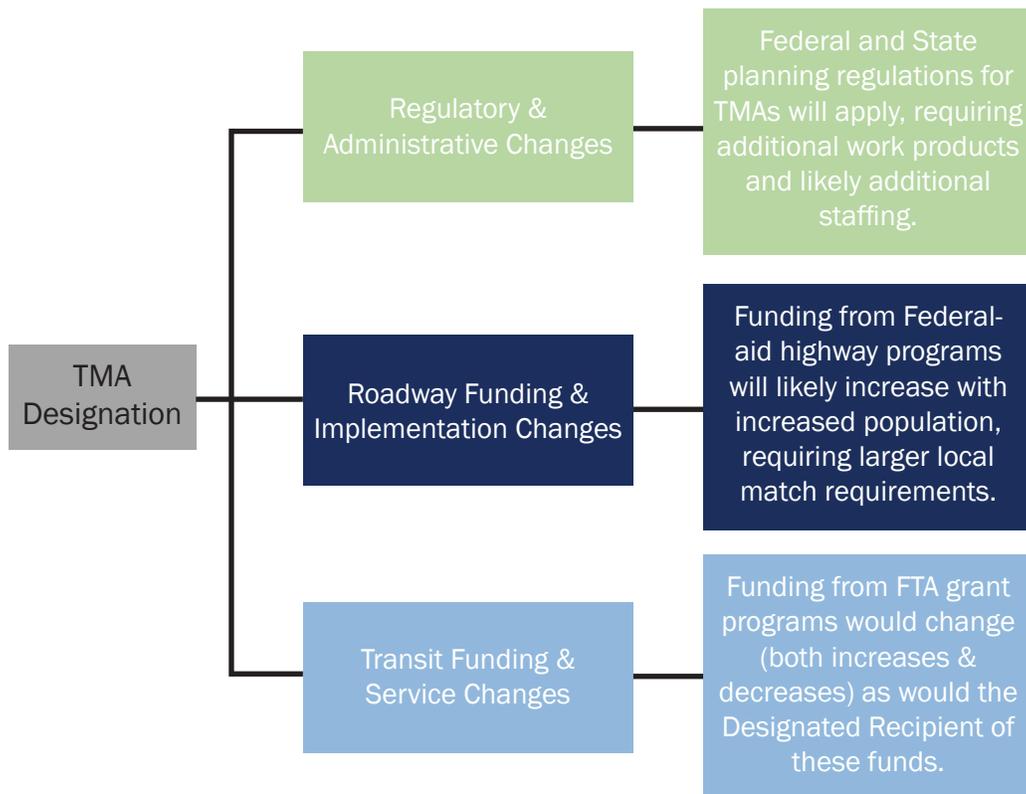
EXISTING CONTEXT OF PLANNING AND ROADWAY FUNDING

A variety of funding sources support MTPO activities in the region, including the FHWA Planning (PL) funds, the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) Program, and the Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program.

PL funds are apportioned from FHWA to MPOs to support metropolitan transportation planning activities, including developing relevant transportation planning documents and improvement programs. TDOT suballocates PL funds to MPOs through a population-based formula as part of the Consolidated Planning Grant (CPG) program. Match ratios for CPG funds are 80% Federal, 5% state, and 15% local.

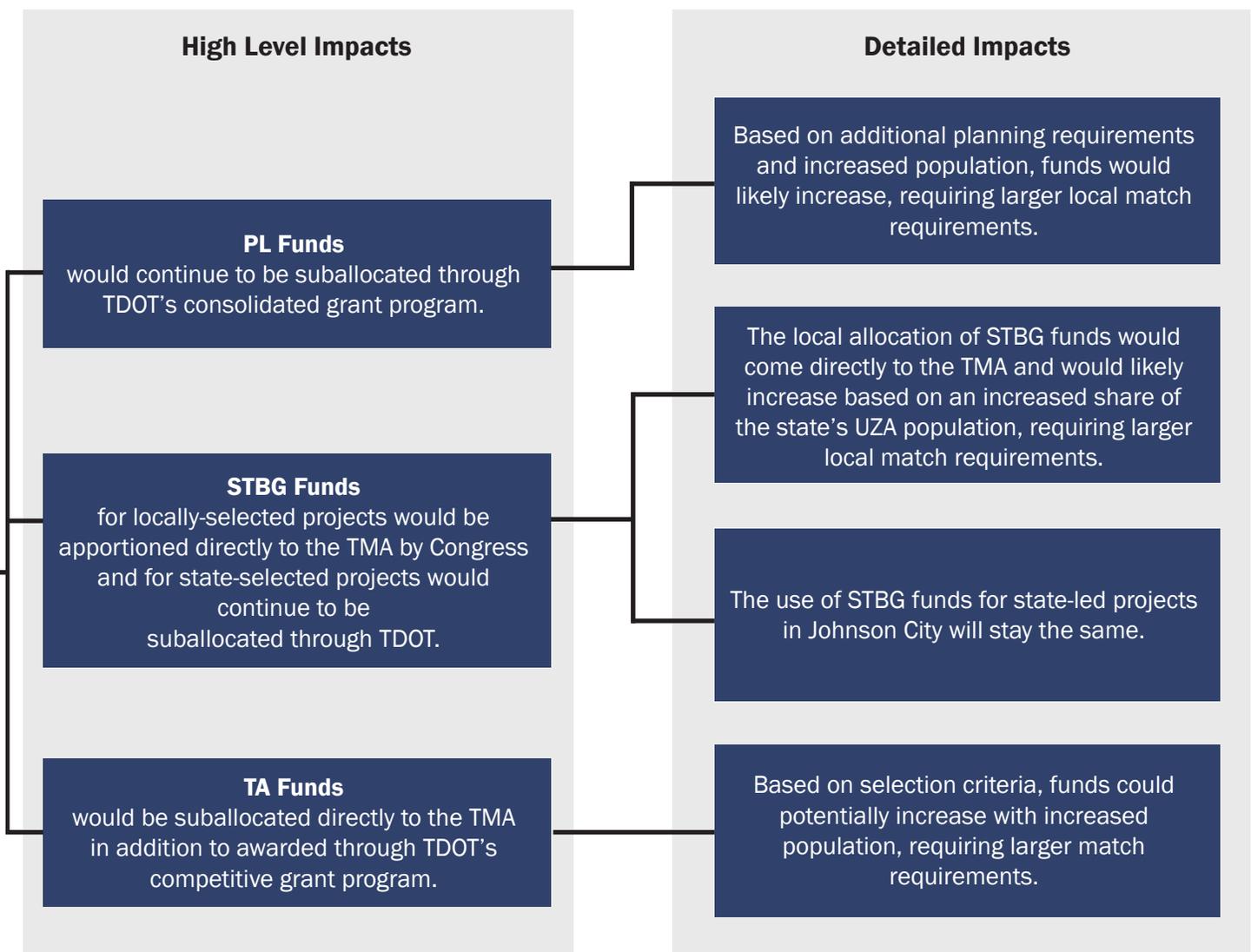
STBG funds are apportioned by FHWA for a variety of projects, including planning, design, construction, operation and capital improvements, safety projects, electric vehicle and natural gas infrastructure, data collection, and travel demand management programs. TDOT suballocates STBG funds to both small urban areas and non-urban areas. Large urban areas receive their apportionment directly from Congress. Match ratios for STBG funds are generally 80-100% Federal (depending on the project) and 0-20% non-Federal.

TA funds are allocated as a set-aside of STBG funds and can be used for projects including pedestrian/bicycle facilities, recreational trails, safe routes to school projects, preservation, vegetation management, and stormwater and habitat connectivity projects. The majority of TA projects are funded through TDOT's competitive application process, and a portion of the State's TA funds are suballocated to urban areas based on population. Match ratios for TA funds are generally 80% Federal and 20% non-Federal.



POTENTIAL CHANGES TO PLANNING AND ROADWAY FUNDING

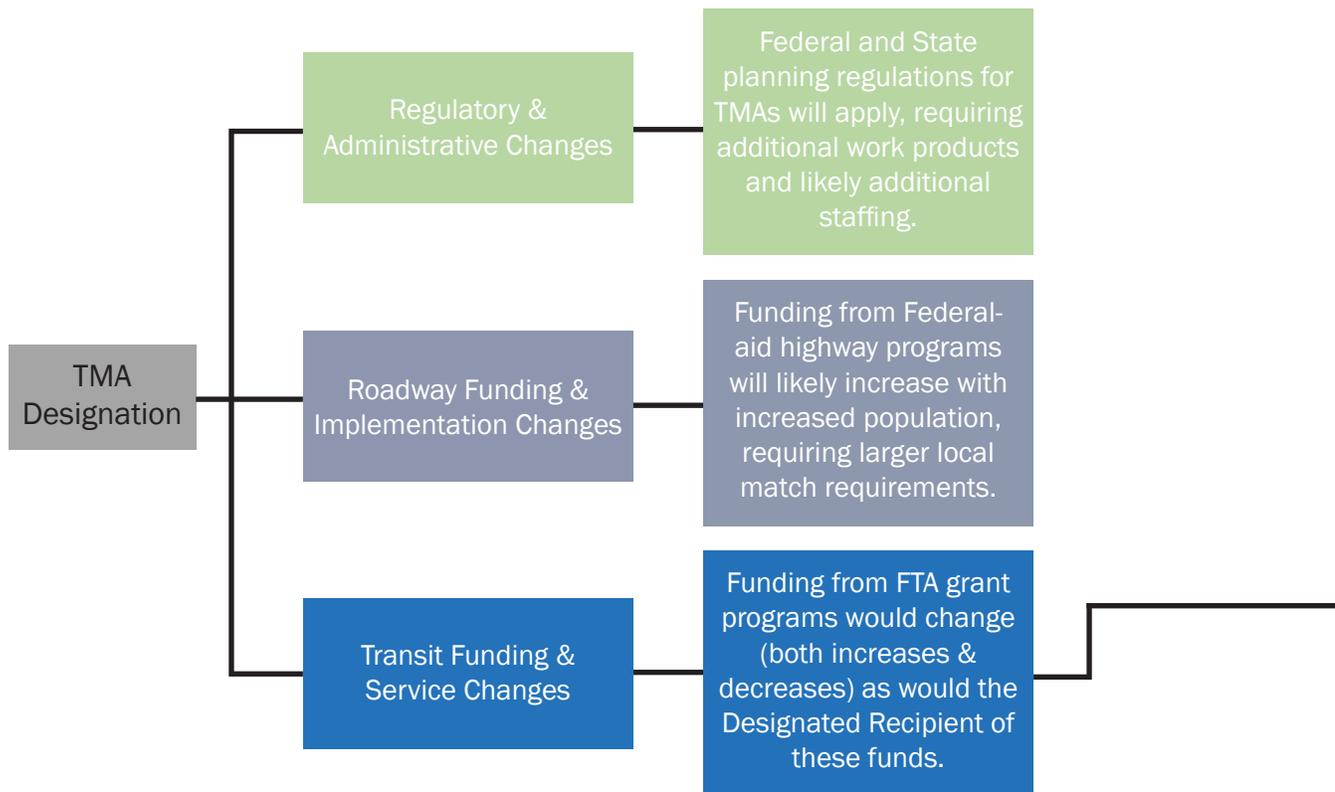
TMA designation would affect the sources and allocation process of funds that support roadway and planning projects, including PL funds, the STBG program, and the TA program. If a TMA is designated in the region, these funding sources would likely increase to cover the larger population and geographical area for which the MTPO(s) conduct planning. In addition, with TMA designation the Johnson City MTPO would receive a direct allocation of STBG funds from Congress, bypassing TDOT's current suballocation process for small urban areas. The Johnson City MTPO would also receive a suballocation of TA funds from TDOT for use on locally-selected projects. Any increase in federal roadway funding as a result of population increases or other factors would require larger local match requirements and potentially additional administrative and reporting burdens.



EXISTING CONTEXT OF TRANSIT FUNDING

TMA designation may alter the existing transit systems in the region and affect how transit-related funds are allocated. Current service providers include Johnson City Transit (JCT), which provides fixed route and demand response services within the Johnson City limits, as well as fixed route shuttle service on the East Tennessee State University Campus, paratransit, and a Job Access program. For the eight counties that are outside the JCT service area (including Carter, Greene, Hancock, Hawkins, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi, and Washington counties), NET Trans provides on-demand transit services. Within the city of Kingsport, Kingsport Area Transit Service (KATS), provides six fixed routes and additional on-demand response services. FTA and TDOT transit funding allocations are based on several factors, including population, population density, ridership, and lane miles. Funding programs include the following FTA and TDOT sources:

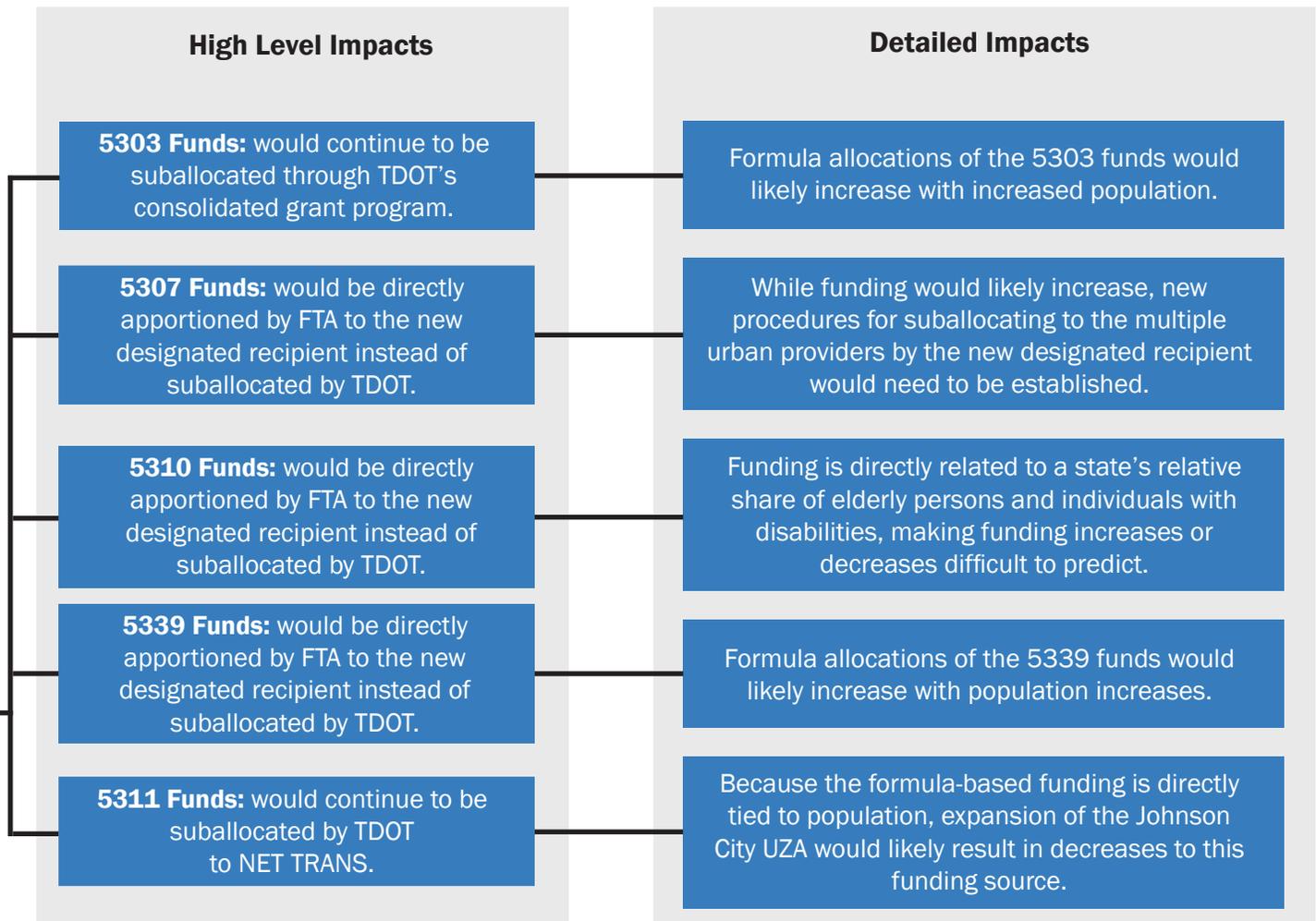
- 5303 – Metropolitan Transportation Planning
- 5307 – Urbanized Area Formula Grant
- 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities Program
- 5311 – Rural Area Formula Grant
- 5339 – Buses and Bus Facilities
- TDOT Urban Operating Assistance Program (UROP)
- TDOT Critical Trips (CRIT) Program
- IMPROVE Act Transit Capital Investment Grant Program



POTENTIAL CHANGES TO TRANSIT FUNDING

TMA designation would likely affect future funding sources for transit providers in the region because of population changes and/or changes to the urbanized area boundary. In general, funding for urban transit services is formula-based and would be expected to increase with population growth within the region. However, it is unlikely that any population-related funding increase would be sufficient to support significant expansion of urban transit services across the existing or future UZA. Similar to highway funding, increased federal transit funding will require increased local match contributions to be fully utilized. At the State level, some funding sources are competitive, would not be affected by population changes in the UZA, or have budgets that are approved annually by the Legislature, which makes it difficult to predict future fluctuations in award amounts to the region.

In addition to funding changes, it is important to note that TMA designation can also affect the way transit agencies receive their funding allocations. With TMA designation, a new designated recipient for some FTA funds would be chosen for the region based on coordination between the Governor, responsible local officials, and publicly owned operators of public transportation. The new designated recipient would then have the responsibility to suballocate 5307, 5310, and 5339 funds to the multiple service providers in the region, a process that would take significant time and coordination to complete.



CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the 2020 Census, the UZA boundaries within the region will be revised based on population changes as well as a new methodology employed by the Census Bureau for classifying areas as 'urban'. These changes to the UZAs in the region may result in the designation of a new TMA by FHWA. There are three main areas of transportation planning that would be affected by potential TMA designation, including:

- Planning responsibilities,
- Roadway planning and funding, and
- Transit funding.

Planning Responsibilities

TMA designation would affect the MTPO's administrative structures and staffing levels in response to increased planning responsibilities and expansion of the area for which the MTPO is responsible for planning. Significant impacts of TMA designation would include:

- Tracking of additional UPWP activities as well as TIP amendments and modifications;
- Administration of increased funding programs;
- Development of a Congestion Management Process;
- Participation in additional Federal review processes;
- Coordination with additional stakeholders and municipalities; and
- Need for additional MTPO staff.



Roadway Planning and Funding

TMA designation would affect the sources and allocation process of funds that support roadway planning and projects, including FHWA's Planning (PL) funds, the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) program and the Transportation Alternatives (TA) program. Significant impacts of TMA designation would include:

- Receipt of a direct STBG allocation from Congress for locally-selected projects;
- Receipt of a suballocation of TA funds from TDOT for locally-selected projects;
- Development of processes for prioritizing and selecting STBG and TA projects within the region; and
- Increased local match requirements to fully utilize STBG, TA, and PL funding.

Transit Funding

TMA designation would affect eligibility, award amounts, and administration of FTA's transit funding in the region. Significant impacts of TMA designation would include:

- Increase in 5303, 5307, and 5339 formula funds proportional to increase in UZA population;
- Decrease in 5311 formula funds proportional to any decrease in rural population;
- Identification of a new designated recipient for FTA funds; and
- Development of new processes for suballocating 5307, 5310, and 5339 funds to multiple urban service providers in the region.

Future TMA designation in the region has the potential to affect federal planning requirements, funding distributions for roadways and transit, and MTPO staffing and board structures for affected MPOs and their partners as documented in the TMA Study. These changes will require continued coordination to plan for the future of transportation in the region.





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