

Policy Update

2/25/2021

## Congress

**T&I Hearing** – The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee held a hearing this week titled - “Examining Equity in Transportation Safety Enforcement.” The hearing examined the equity implications of the most prevalent methods to enforce traffic safety laws. Chairman DeFazio wants to raise awareness of the need to improve accountability in transportation safety enforcement and taking the first steps to ensure that Federal transportation safety funds elevate safety while maintaining the rights of every American. H.R. 2 the Moving Forward Act passed by the House last year included several provisions aimed at addressing disparities and increasing transparency in traffic safety enforcement. The bill reauthorized and made improvements to the Section 1906 grant program to provide grants to States for collecting data on racial profiling during traffic stops. Twenty-three states have applied for and received these funds since the program’s inception in 2006. Further, H.R. 2 included an implicit bias research and training grant program which would provide funds to universities for research and training of law enforcement to identify implicit bias during traffic stops. Witnesses included Larry Sandigo, Community Advisory Board - Maricopa County, Arizona; Lorraine Martin President, CEO of the National Safety Council; Michelle Ramsey Hawkins, Mothers Against Drunk Driving; Ken Barone, Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy Central Connecticut State University; Rashawn Ray, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology, University of Maryland.

**EPW Hearing** – The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee held a hearing titled – “Building Back Better: Investing in Transportation while Addressing Climate Change, Improving Equity, and Fostering Economic Growth and Innovation.” This hearing covered a broad number of surface transportation issues the Committee will address at it work towards the next multi-year surface transportation bill. Chairman Carper (DE) would like to move a bipartisan bill before Memorial Day. Witnesses included - The Honorable Gretchen Whitmer, Governor of The State of Michigan; The Honorable Larry Hogan; Governor of The State of Maryland; The Honorable Michael Hancock, Mayor of Denver, Colorado; Victoria Sheehan, President of American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

Denver Mayor Hancock’s presentation addressed many issues consistent with AMPO policy recommendations and is a strong advocate of increasing federal funds to local governments as well as giving more control over how those funds are allocated. He emphasized some of the 1991 surface transportation bill’s (ISTEA) key provisions – *“commitment to local decision-making and planning – at the metropolitan and regional level – whereby city, county, and other local government leaders join together to plan and decide collectively how federal funds are invested, subject to fiscally-constrained investment plans.”* He pointed out that over the years many of the important local government programs and authorities have been weakened at the urging of State DOTs. The Mayor’s top priority is - **“The allocation of all Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) resources to local areas – specifically, by raising the “local share” from 55 percent to 100 percent (while preserving current law set aside for Off-System bridges).”**

The US Conference of Mayors is part of the LOT coalition and AMPO works closely with our local government partners.

**COVID-19 Response** – House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer announced that the House will vote Friday on the \$1.9T coronavirus relief bill. The Senate is not as far along as the House. In the Senate, many of the provisions being discussed must pass a test established that determined if a provision is “germane” to the bill. If the Senate parliamentarian rules against a provision it must be dropped from the bill. The minimum wage increase and several other items will face this test. Congress hopes to have the bill on the President’s desk by mid-March.

**Nomination Hearing** - The Senate Commerce Committee will hold a hearing on the nomination of Polly Trottenberg to be deputy secretary of Transportation on March 3. Prior to her nomination she served as undersecretary for policy in President Barack Obama’s DOT and then served seven years as the head of the New York City DOT.

**Infrastructure/Stimulus** – After Congress passes the \$1.9T COVID-19 response bill it may move on to a broad infrastructure bill that could include a surface transportation bill. The decisions on the timing of a bill, what is included, and how it will be paid for are all decisions that Congressional leadership and the President are now debating.

## **Administration**

### **Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census**

On February 19<sup>th</sup> the Bureau of the Census proposed criteria for defining urban areas based on the results of the 2020 Decennial Census. It also provides a description of the changes from the final criteria used for the 2010 Census. The Bureau is seeking comments before May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Notice can be found [here](#)

### **Proposed Changes for the 2020 Urban Areas**

**Adoption of a Housing Unit Density Threshold for Qualification of Census Blocks** - The Census Bureau proposes adopting a housing unit density threshold of 385 housing units per square mile as the primary criterion for determining whether a census block qualifies for inclusion in an urban area, replacing the use of population density. Housing unit density provides a more direct measure of the densely developed landscape than population density. Housing unit counts are invariant and will reflect the number of housing units enumerated in each block, and thus are a more consistent measure.

**Qualify Urban Areas Based on a Minimum Threshold of 4,000 Housing Units or 10,000 Persons Instead of a Minimum Threshold of 2,500 Persons** -

The Census Bureau proposes that an area will qualify as urban if it contains at least 4,000 housing units or has a population of at least 10,000. The proposed increase in the minimum population responds to calls for the Census Bureau to increase its minimum threshold for defining urban areas from the 2,500-person minimum established in 1910.

### **Cease Distinguishing Different Types of Urban Areas -**

The Census Bureau would identify urban areas of 4,000 or more housing units or 10,000 or more persons without distinguishing types of urban areas. The 50,000-person threshold that has been used to distinguish between urbanized areas and smaller urban areas (whether urban places outside urbanized areas or urban clusters) no longer has the same meaning as when it was adopted in 1950 and, therefore, should no longer be used to distinguish types of urban areas.

### **Maximum Distances of Jumps -**

Jumps (and the shorter distance hops) recognize that urban development is not always a continuous and contiguous process across the landscape and facilitate the inclusion of noncontiguous densely developed territory that is considered part of the nearby urban area. The Census Bureau proposes reducing the maximum jump distance to 1.5 miles, returning to the maximum distance employed in urban area delineation from the 1950 Census through the 1990 Census. Data users, analysts, and some urban geographers expressed concern that the 2.5-mile maximum jump distance adopted for the 2000 Census was too generous in some situations and resulted in overextension of urban area territory.

**No Longer Include the Low-Density Hop or Jump “Corridor” in the Urban Area** - The Census Bureau proposes to no longer include within an urban area the low-density territory intervening between the main body of the urban area and the outlying qualifying territory that is the destination of a hop or a jump or exempted territory that has been separated from the urban area core by water or wetlands.

**No Longer Include Low-Density Territory Located Within Indentations Formed During the Urban Area Delineation Process** -The Census Bureau proposes to cease including low-density territory within indentations that are formed during the delineation process when densely developed, qualifying territory surrounds low-density territory on three sides.

### **Splitting of Large Agglomerations of Densely Settled Territory -**

The question of when and how to merge adjacent urban areas or split large agglomerations has existed since the delineation of urban areas for the 1960 Census. Past criteria relied upon metropolitan statistical area or primary metropolitan statistical area definitions to determine whether to merge adjacent urban areas or, as was the case in the 2010 Census criteria, split agglomerations based on the previous decade’s urbanized areas. Neither of these approaches relied upon objective measures consistent with the same time frame as the measures used in the delineation process. For the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau proposes using worker flow data (i.e., commuting flows) from the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) Program to identify whether the

agglomeration represents a single functionally integrated region or whether commuting patterns indicate the presence of distinct urban areas within the larger agglomeration.

### **Proposed Urban Area Criteria for the 2020 Census**

The Census Bureau proposes the following criteria and characteristics for use in identifying the areas that will qualify for designation as urban areas for use in tabulating data from the 2020 Census, the American Community Survey (ACS), the Puerto Rico Community Survey, and potentially other Census Bureau censuses and surveys.

#### **2020 Census Urban Area Definitions -**

For the 2020 Census, an urban area will comprise a densely developed core of census blocks that meet minimum housing unit density requirements, along with adjacent territory containing non-residential urban land uses as well as other lower density territory included to link outlying densely settled territory with the densely settled core. To qualify as an urban area, the territory identified according to the proposed criteria must encompass at least 4,000 housing units or at least 10,000 persons. All calculations of housing unit density include only land; the areas of water contained within census blocks are not used in density calculations. Housing unit, population, and worker flow data used in the urban area delineation process will be those published by the Census Bureau for all public and official uses.

#### **Proposed Urban Area Delineation Criteria -**

The Census Bureau proposes to define urban areas primarily on the basis of housing unit density measured at the census block level of geography.

- **Identification of Initial Urban Area Cores** - The Census Bureau proposes to begin the delineation process by identifying and aggregating contiguous census blocks each having a housing unit density of at least 385 housing units per square mile. This aggregation of contiguous census blocks would be known as the "initial urban area core." The initial urban area core must encompass at least 385 housing units (consistent with the requirement for at least 1,000 people in the 2010 criteria). After the initial urban area core is identified, additional census blocks would be included if it is adjacent to other qualifying territory and if it meets additional criteria.
- **Inclusion of Group Quarters** - Census blocks containing institutional and non-institutional group quarters that are adjacent to census blocks qualifying based on the criteria outlined in step 1 above ("1. Identification of Initial Urban Area Cores") will be included in the urban area. This criterion accounts for the fact that group quarters, such as college dormitories, are not considered housing units by the Census Bureau, but generally are part of the urban landscape.
- **Inclusion of Noncontiguous Territory via Hops and Jumps** - Noncontiguous territory that meets the proposed housing density criteria specified above but is separated from an initial urban area core of 385 housing units or more, maybe added via a hop along a road connection of no more than 0.5 miles. Multiple hops may be made along a single road

connection, thus accounting for the nature of contemporary urban development, which often encompasses alternating patterns of residential and non-residential uses.

- **Inclusion of Noncontiguous Territory Separated by Exempted Territory** - The Census Bureau proposes to identify and exempt territory in which residential development is substantially constrained or not possible due to either topographical or land use conditions. The Census Bureau proposes the following to be exempted territory: Bodies of water; and Wetlands (belonging to one of eight wetlands class definitions). Noncontiguous qualifying territory would be added to a core via a hop or jump when separated by exempted territory, provided that it meets specified criteria:
  - The road connection across the exempted territory (located on both sides of the road) is no greater than five miles, and
  - The total length of the road connection between the initial urban area core and the noncontiguous territory, including the exempt distance and non-exempt hop or jump distances, is also no greater than five miles.
- **Inclusion of Enclaves** - The Census Bureau will add enclaves (that is, a nonqualifying area completely surrounded by area already qualified for inclusion as urban) within the urban area, provided that they are surrounded only by the land area that qualified for inclusion in the urban area based on housing unit density criteria, and at least one additional condition.
- **Inclusion of Airports** - After all territory has been added to the urban area core via hop and jump connections, and enclaves, the Census Bureau will then add whole census blocks that approximate the territory of airports, provided at least one of the blocks that represent the airport is within a distance of 0.5 miles of the edge of qualifying urban territory.
- **Additional Nonresidential Urban Territory** - The Census Bureau will identify additional nonresidential urban-related territory that is noncontiguous, yet near the urban area.
- **Splitting Large Agglomerations and Merging Individual Urban Areas** - For the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau proposes using worker flow data (i.e., commuting flows) from the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) Program to identify whether the agglomeration represents a single functionally integrated region or whether commuting patterns indicate the presence of distinct urban areas within the larger agglomeration.
- **Assigning Urban Area Titles** - The Census Bureau proposes specific criteria to determine the title of an urban area.