Purpose
Through a variety of activities, MPOs shape the transportation systems of metropolitan regions. Built into these activities, sometimes explicitly but often implicitly, are the values and priorities of the MPO. Although the traditional concern of traffic congestion still dominates for many MPOs, others have begun to reorient their long-range plans and activities to address other concerns, particularly those related to non-driving modes and environmental impacts.

In this assignment, you will analyze and compare the activities of three selected (by you) MPOs as to the degree to which they address a chosen (by you) issue. The purpose of this exercise is to assess the degree to which MPOs are addressing the issue and to examine variation in the ways in which MPOs are and are not addressing the issue. Your work will help in identifying steps MPOs need to take to more effectively address the issue.

Products
Your one-page memo should do two things: 1. Name the issue you have selected and provide a brief discussion of it and how you anticipate or imagine MPOs in general might work to address it in their planning and project selection work (Task 1), 2. Name the MPOs you have selected and provide a little background about them (Task 2). You will then produce a paper of no more than 8-10 pages (not counting tables and figures) double-spaced with 12-point font and 1-inch margins. What goes into the paper is described below. The paper, including the memo, will be worth 30% of your final grade. I will grade based on both the thoughtfulness of the analysis and the clarity of the writing.

Process
Task 1. Select Issue
Select an issue that is relevant to MPOs and of interest to you. Possibilities for which I’ve posted relevant background articles include: accessibility vs. mobility, bicycle and walking, sustainability, and quality of life. You are not limited to this list! Other good possibilities include climate change, environmental justice, goods movement. Technology issues might not work well, given the limited role of MPOs in influencing technological innovation, though topics such as support for EVs or connected vehicles are starting to get attention from MPOs. If you’ve got another idea, you should email or come see me to discuss. Do a little background research on this issue and prepare a paragraph for your memo.

Task 2. Select MPOs
To assess how an MPO is doing on an issue, it is helpful to compare it to what other MPOs are doing. A set of 3 MPOs is a small sample but can yield interesting insights into the different approaches that MPOs take toward your issue. In selecting your MPOs, think about characteristics of the MPO that you might want to “hold constant” and those that you might want to vary. Characteristics to think about include size of the metropolitan region, geographic location, congestion levels, political orientation, or “progressiveness” on planning kinds of issues. Your issue might dictate your choices about controlling or varying these characteristics. You might start with a region of interest to you (for one reason or another) and then pick two other regions that make for an interesting comparison, either because of similarities or differences. Check MPO websites for information that will help you decide: http://www.ampo.org/about-us/mpo-directory/. Write a few sentences about each MPO for your memo.

Task 3. Develop Analysis Framework
The next step is to develop a framework for the evaluation. An example of an evaluation framework is the one I developed for “Planning for Accessibility.” The framework specifies what you will look for in the activities of the MPO and how you will categorize different aspects of those activities. For example, the framework in the article “Planning for Accessibility” specifies that if a goal “focuses on reducing congestion or improving travel times,” it should be classified as mobility-oriented, and if it “focuses on reducing the need for travel,” it should be classified as accessibility-oriented. It might also help to think in terms of criteria – e.g. what criteria would a plan have to meet to be considered sustainability oriented? Start by reviewing the document provided on the website for your issue (if you pick one of those issues). The
goal is to evaluate the MPOs’ activities, not just to describe them. How will you judge what is good/strong/high versus bad/weak/low? Go ahead to Task 4 and do some preliminary analysis of the plans to help you develop and refine your framework.

**Task 4. Analyze MPO Activities**

Now it’s time to use this framework to analyze the activities of your MPO. What activities are relevant to analyze depends on your issue. I would like you to consider analyzing the following activities (with suggestions on what about them to analyze):

1. **Long-range plan:**
   - a. Goals
   - b. Performance measures
   - c. Projects funded
2. **Project prioritization for TIP:**
   - a. Criteria used
   - b. Weights given to criteria
3. **Other activities:** Other things the MPO is doing that seem directly relevant for your issue, e.g. special studies, public involvement program, tailored grant programs, etc.
4. **Travel demand model:** only if you’ve had ECI251 and if sufficient documentation is available...
   - a. Modes included in model
   - b. Sensitivity to policy variables
   - c. Performance measures produced by model

You probably don’t want to look at all of these activities, given the limited time and pages for this paper. At a minimum, I expect you to look at the long-range plan. Pick at least one other activity that is relevant to your issue/problem. In other words, do #1 and one out of #2, #3, and #4.

For the LRP, develop a systematic approach to your “content analysis.” See the descriptions of methodology in the *Transport Policy* article. Having electronic documents helps tremendously, as you can make good use of the search function. But think carefully about your search terms, and be sure to scan the document as well. For some issues and activities, your analysis will focus on specific sections of documents, and you won’t have to worry about searching.

Your analysis will be largely qualitative but may involve some quantitative aspects. For example, you might count the number of projects or amount of funding that falls into different categories. Another approach is to create a table that lists items that fall into different categories, with a column for each of the MPOs (like the table in the “Planning for Accessibility” paper). Examples and quotes are useful in supporting your analysis.

**Task 5. Write-Up**

I suggest an outline for your paper something like this:
- Describe the issue, in the context of MPOs
- Explain the evaluation framework
- Provide a little background on the MPOs
- Present the analysis of the activities of the MPOs using the evaluation framework
- Discuss similarities and differences among the MPOs in their responses to this issue
- End with an overall assessment of the MPOs’ activities on this issue

Be sure to include citations for the documents you are citing and/or analyzing, and give page numbers when you refer to specific examples or use quotes. Think about summary tables – a useful way to convey information for a project like this. Write for an audience of transportation planners and others with a general knowledge of transportation planning – those who don’t have to be told what an LRP is but who are concerned (or should be concerned) about the effectiveness of LRPs. Think about how to organize the presentation of your analysis: do you want to organize it by MPO or by goals, measures, TIP, etc.?

**Task 6: In-Class Presentation**

You will have no more than 5 minutes to present your analysis. More instructions to follow.