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Comparing MPOs

A Comparison of MetroPlan Orlando and Miami-Dade Transportation Planning Organization

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MetroPlan Orlando (MPO) and Miami-Dade Transportation Planning Organization (MDTPO) are both metropolitan planning organizations for large cities in the state of Florida. Through an evaluative framework analyzing MPO and MDTPO, this paper will compare these two organizations' complete streets plans and assess their effectiveness.

Complete streets is a critical issue for transportation planners because of the array of benefits associated with their construction. Complete streets have positive impacts on safety, efficiency, equity, public health, transportation costs, and community and economic development (MPO, 2016d; MDTPO, 2014).

On the topic of safety, complete streets improve the infrastructure of bicycle, pedestrian, transit, and motorist travel areas, making the street safer for everyone that uses it (MPO, 2016d; MDTPO, 2014). Cartway infrastructure changes from complete streets are also typically "traffic calming," which slows down vehicles, also improving safety (MDTPO, 2014). Complete streets can also lead to improved traffic flow for a wider number of people, improving roadway efficiency (MDTPO, 2014). Complete streets help support equity as well, by giving needed infrastructure to all travelers, whether they are drivers, transit riders, pedestrians, or cyclists (MPO, 2016d; MDTPO, 2014). Many people choose not to, or are not able to, drive and complete streets give them fair use of the road as well, not just automobiles (MPO, 2016d). Complete streets can improve public health by encouraging walking, which is a useful tool to fight the United States' obesity epidemic (MPO, 2016d; MDTPO, 2014). Transportation costs for individuals and families will often be lowered as a result of complete street construction by making non-car modes of travel safer and more convenient, meaning less money is going towards fuel costs (MPO, 2016d). Finally, the construction of complete streets often leads to increases in community and economic development along, and surrounding, those streets (MPO, 2016d; MDTPO, 2014).

Orlando and Miami, Florida were chosen for this comparison to see how metropolitan planning organization plans differ between cities that are located very close to each other and in very similar climates. These cities were also selected because of the author's familial connection to both cities. MPO covers the entire Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford (Greater Orlando) metropolitan statistical area, which includes four counties, whereas MDTPO only covers Miami-Dade County (MDC) itself. Table 1 shows some basic statistics about the areas covered by these two metropolitan planning organizations. MDC is more populous and denser, with a lower unemployment rate, higher poverty rate, and lower mean and median incomes than Greater Orlando.

Table 1
Source: US Census Bureau, 2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates

	MetroPlan Orlando	Miami-Dade TPO
Geography Covered	Greater Orlando	Miami-Dade County
Population	2,572,962	2,715,516
Population Density	641.32 persons/sq. mi	1,117.04 persons/sq. mi
Unemployment Rate	4.79%	3.45%
Poverty Rate	13.65%	15.57%
Median Household Income	$58,610	$52,205
Mean Household Income	$80,608	$79,418

Racial and ethnic demography is the category where these two geographies differ the most. Figure 1 shows the racial breakdown of Greater Orlando and Miami-Dade County. As Figure 1 shows, there are great differences between white and Hispanic populations of these two geographies. Greater Orlando is 46% white, compared to MDC's (USCB, 2018). Additionally, Greater Orlando is 31% Hispanic or Latino, while MDC is a staggering 68% Hispanic or Latino (USCB, 2018). A point of interest regarding Miami-Dade County is just how large the Cuban population is. Statistically, if you pick three random MDC residents, two will be Hispanic or Latino, and one of those two will be Cuban (USCB, 2018). With such similar geographies (except for demographics and population density) the author anticipates that little to no differences between the plans will be attributable to population, employment, or income.

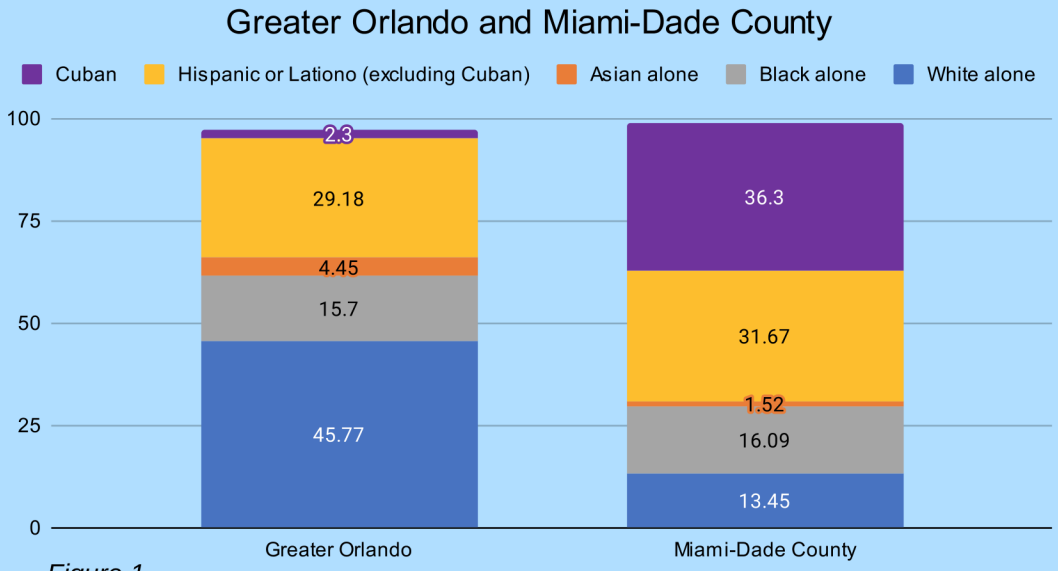

Figure 1
Source: US Census Bureau, 2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates

For the evaluation of these plans, a framework was created which asks a few questions of each plan. The last two questions are taken directly from Susan Handy's Transport Policy article.

1. How in depth/detailed is each plan?
2. Are the different sections of the plan well-connected to each other?
3. What goals have been chosen to guide the plans? (Handy, 2008)
4. What measures are used to track progress toward those goals? (Handy, 2008)

With question one, this paper will be analyzing the depth of the plans; are they superficial, or do they provide detailed information such as costs or specific engineering requirements. With question two, do the plans have consistent flow throughout, or is the plan disjointed? The final two questions, from Susan Handy, simply ask what the goals of the plans are and how they measure those goals.

Concerning question one, MDTPO's Complete Streets Manual is much more detailed than MPO's Draft Complete Streets Policy Report. MDTPO's plan is 191 pages, compared to MPO's 28 pages. That being said, MPO's plan is more of an overview plan. It discusses the main components of complete streets and is tailored more towards laymen than planning staff or civil engineers. It is more accessible to the general public and it is designed as a colorful booklet.

MDTPO's plan is more detailed because it serves a different purpose than MPO's plan. The Complete Streets Manual is a highly technical document and is not well suited for those outside of planning or civil engineering fields. Components of MDTPO's plan that do not have equivalent sections in MPO's plan include specific "regulations impacting the development of complete streets" (MDTPO, 2014), case studies, graphics showing lane usage on various street types, specific width measurements for different complete streets components, an evaluation of local incomplete streets to rank their need for complete streets, and mockups for fixing the streets that were ranked highly.

Regarding question two, MPO and MDTPO have differing levels of interconnectivity between the various sections of their plans. MPO's plan has five appendices, and each one is a separate file. To understand the entire context of MPO's plan, you need to have six different documents opened. In contrast, MDTPO's plan has only two appendices and they are located at the end of the document. MDTPO's plan is detailed enough that only one document is required to understand all components of the plan.

Susan Handy's questions concern the goals and performance measures of these two complete streets plans. The goals of MPO's Draft Complete Streets Policy Report are to 1) "create a connected network of streets, roads, and trails for everyone" (MPO, 2016d), 2) "provide safe and comfortable transportation options for vulnerable users of all ages and abilities" (MPO, 2016d), 3) "support the redevelopment of and connectivity to activity centers" (MPO, 2016d), and 4) "provide safe, comfortable, and effective access to transit for pedestrians and bicyclists" (MPO, 2016d). These goals are broad and superficial, and do not show specific actions that would be taken. However, the performance measures (page A-3) are specific and do show what complete streets elements MPO would like implemented.

MDTPO's Complete Streets Manual goals are more specific and are (superficially) more measurable. The Manual contains numerous goals, broken down into immediate, mid-term, and long-term goals. The full list of goals is displayed in Table 3, on page A-4. As for performance measures, the Manual gives suggestions about what measures would likely be helpful instead of a specific list of measures that MDTPO plans to use.

While both plans are well done, the plans still have areas in which they can improve. The first suggestion for MPO's Draft Complete Streets Policy Report is to consist of one full document instead of six. Having the plan split up into multiple sections makes it more difficult to fully understand the plan and presented difficulties for this paper's analysis of the plan as well. A second suggestion for the Draft is to present goals that are more specific and pertain to specific elements of complete streets that should be implemented.

The first suggestion for MDTPO's Complete Streets Manual is to list the specific performance measures that the organization plans to use to track the progress of their complete streets construction campaign. Another suggestion for the Manual is to number their pages traditionally, instead of having the chapter number precede the actual page number.

MetroPlan Orlando's Draft Complete Streets Policy Report and Appendix A-E, and Miami-Dade Transportation Planning Organization's Complete Streets Manual are both well done complete streets plans that serve differing purposes. MPO's plan is meant to inform residents/laymen about the concept of complete streets and how they are an improvement to the community, and the plan is a shorter, visually appealing booklet. MDTPO's plan is an instruction manual aimed at planners and civil engineers, instead of laymen. This is a substantial plan numbering over 190 pages with specific measurements for the width of transit, pedestrian, bicyclist, and vehicular infrastructure elements.

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Appendix

Table 2
Source: US Census Bureau, 2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Race	Greater Orlando		Miami-Dade County	
	Estimate	Percentage of Total	Estimate	Percentage of Total
Total Population	2,572,962		2,715,516	
White alone	1,177,581	45.77%	365,131	13.45%
Black alone	403,976	15.70%	436,864	16.09%
American Indian/Alaskan Native alone	4,244	0.16%	2,321	0.09%
Asian alone	114,511	4.45%	41,372	1.52%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander alone	1,983	0.08%	590	0.02%
Two or More Races alone	55,440	2.15%	16,222	0.60%
Other alone	17,986	0.70%	7,370	0.27%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	809,852	31.48%	1,845,646	67.97%
Cuban	59,179	2.30%	985,704	36.30%

MetroPlan Orlando's Complete Streets Policy Goals

1. Create a connected network of streets, roads, and trails for everyone.
2. Provide safe and comfortable transportation options for vulnerable users of all ages and abilities.
3. Support redevelopment of and connectivity to activity centers
4. Provide safe, comfortable, and effective access to transit through walking and bicycling

Questions to tailor vision and goals:

- *Are there specific safety concerns that are being addressed?*
- *Has the community recently invested in, or do they have plans to invest in, trails, public transit or other transportation infrastructure whose efficiency and reach would benefit from a system of complete streets?*
- *Does the community have a designated transportation exception area or language in the comprehensive plans supporting multimodal travel?*
- *Is there an underrepresented community that tends to rely on alternative modes of transportation, such as the elderly, youth, households with income under the poverty line, or households without access to an automobile?*
- *Do the communities economic development plans include high density mixed use development, investments in historic commercial centers, or other land use patterns that would be supportive [*sic*] by a multimodal transportation network?*
- *Are their local organizations or interest groups that support investments in walking, biking and transit?*

Source: MetroPlan Orlando's Appendix D: Complete Streets Framework for Local Partners in Central Florida, 2016. Pages 1-2

MetroPlan Orlando's Performance Measures

- Miles of bicycle lanes, routes, or trails built / dedicated by width and type
- Number of bicycle parking facilities installed
- Number of traffic calming facilities built / installed
- Number of traffic control signs/signals installed upgrades
- Linear feet of pedestrian accommodations built or repaired
- Number of crosswalks built or improved
- Number of ADA accommodations built / installed
- Number of transit accessibility improvements built
- Number of street trees planted
- Maintenance activities of existing Complete Streets facilities.
- Number of exceptions approved
- User data – bicycle, pedestrian, transit and traffic counts
- Bicycle and pedestrian accident data
- Total dollar amount spent on Complete Streets improvements
- Number of Complete Streets planning studies and projects in process

Questions to tailor monitoring efforts:

- *Timeline: How often should data be collected and reported?*
- *Data: What kind of data is available to staff?*
- *Targets: should the municipality consider setting targets for mode split; multimodal LOS standards, rate of children walking or bicycling to school, access to bicycle facilities or sidewalks from residential areas or in proximity to schools; transit ridership?*
- *Should you include outreach and awareness measures?*

Source: MetroPlan Orlando's Appendix D: Complete Streets Framework for Local Partners in Central Florida, 2016. Pages 1-2

Table 3
Source: Miami-Dade TPO Complete Streets Manual, 2014. Page 8-107

Best Practice	Goal
Create and Adopt New Policies and Regulations	**Immediate**: Allow for greater design flexibility for roadway guidelines.
	Mid/Long-Term: Adopt new Development Regulations and Zoning Code to include Complete Streets Guidelines.
Clearly Defined Street Planning Process	**Immediate**: Outline the current street planning process.
	Mid/Long-Term: Create and adopt a transparent planning process for all County funded-projects.
Provide Training for Engineers, Staff and Planners	**Immediate**: Provide training through local and National Complete Streets seminars.
	Mid-Term: Continue to provide on-going training, and conduct orientation sessions.
	Long-Term: Have new hires attend Complete Streets seminars and training.
Project Prioritization	**Immediate**: Focus prioritization of improvements on access to schools, major activity centers, ADA accessibility in conjunction with safety and congestion.
	Mid/Long-Term: Appropriately link future projects with Transportation Element of CDMP, CIP, and TIP.
Secure Funding Sources	**Immediate**: Apply for Transportation Enhancement and Safe Routes to School Funding.
	Mid-Term: Amend zoning codes to provide incentives to developers that include bike lanes and public sidewalks in new projects.
	Long-Term: Regularly update what funding will be available after any new federal transportation-related legislation is adopted.
Inter-Departmental Coordination	**Immediate**: Evaluate what current projects can be consolidated and where road diets can be made on current RRR projects.
	Mid-Term: Determine where sidewalk and bike lanes can be installed in conjunction with storm water, sewer, or utility projects.
	Long-Term: Continue coordination and outreach efforts so that projects can be combined.
Performance Evaluation	**Immediate**: Require bicycle and pedestrian counts before sidewalk/bike lane improvements or road dieting.
	Mid-Term: Conduct bicycle and pedestrian counts after major maintenance, construction, or road diets. Measure miles of sidewalk and bike lanes to track the growth of the non-motorized network. Measure transit ridership and land use changes along streets where improvements are made.
	Long-Term: Analyze data from previous bicycle/pedestrian counts and crash data to determine the effectiveness of improvements and make adjustments where necessary.

Miami-Dade TPO's Complete Streets Manual Suggested Performance Measures

- Routinely measure total miles of on-street bicycle routes
- Routinely measure linear feet of new pedestrian accommodations
- Routinely measure the number of street trees
- Take note of transit ridership changes
- Take note of land use changes
- Perform pedestrian count before and after implementation of any Complete Streets improvement
- Perform bicycle count before and after implementation of any Complete Streets improvement
- Record volumes, speeds, and number of crashes for vehicular traffic before and after the improvements

Source: Miami-Date TPO's Complete Streets Manual, 2014. Pages 8-107