



Division of Planning / Statewide and Regional Planning

2020 Census: Urban Area Boundary Adjustments

Background:

Urban Areas are densely populated developed areas which are defined by the U.S. Census Bureau defines urban areas as territories that encompass at least 2,000 housing units or 5,000 minimum population. The Census Bureau revises the urban areas every ten years with release of the decennial census. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) provide state DOTs with the opportunity to adjust and revise the boundaries to provide more consistency with their transportation planning needs. FHWA also recommends that states review, and revise as necessary, their roadway system functional classification following the adoption of the adjusted Urban Areas Boundaries (UABs).

There is no federal requirement for states to adjust UABs. 23 U.S.C. 101(a)(35) authorizes state and local officials to cooperatively adjust Urban Area boundaries after the release of each decennial Census if they choose to do so. The authority to approve adjusted UABs is carried out by Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Division Administrators under FHWA Order M1100.1A.

The following section describes the benefits, affected federal programs, methodology and coordination efforts undertaken for the purpose of adjusting the Urban Area Boundaries by the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs).

Adjusted UAB Benefits

- Provides more accurate depiction of urban areas.
- Serves as a critical input for reviewing and revising roadway functional classification.
- Improves state eligibility accuracy of related Federal transportation programs.

Federal/State Programs Impacted by UABs

Urban Area Boundaries play a critical role in numerous federal transportation funding programs and serve as an input in determining Federal Aid eligibility for roadways, bridge, and transit project funding.

- [Surface Transportation Block Grant Program \(STBG\), formerly STP](#) – Suballocation - 55% of a State’s STBG apportionment (after the set-aside for Transportation Alternatives) is obligated using urban area boundaries and population.
 - [Urbanized areas with population greater than 200,000:](#)
Portion is divided among those areas based on their relative share of population.
 - [Urbanized areas with population of at least 50,000 but no more than 200,000:](#)
State establishes a process to consult with MPOs for determining how funds will be allocated equitably.
 - [Urban areas with population of at least 5,000 but no more than 49,999:](#)
State consults with regional transportation planning organizations prior to obligating funds for projects in these areas.
 - [Areas with population of less than 5,000:](#)
State consults with regional transportation planning organizations prior to obligating funds for projects in these areas.
 - Remaining 45% of the State’s STBG apportionment may be obligated in any area of the State.

- [Federal Transit Administration \(FTA\) Apportionments](#) – FTA annual apportionments are based on U.S. Census data and associated urban and rural boundaries. Adjusted urban areas are not, however, allowed to be used in place of original census urban areas for the purposes of determining eligibility of FTA funding.

- [Highway Functional Classification](#) - The highway functional classification system distinguishes both by type of roadway facility and whether that road is located in an urban or rural area. A specific type of roadway facility may have different design criteria depending on whether it is in a rural or urban area, but highway design criteria are not applied strictly according to an urban versus rural boundary designation.

- [HPMS Reporting](#) - FHWA's Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS) requests States to report annual highway statistics (i.e., lane and centerline miles, Vehicle Miles Travelled, etc.) by highway functional classification, including urban versus rural. Several tables in FHWA's annual Highway Statistics Report also summarize information by urban versus rural classifications.

- [Metropolitan Planning Organizations \(MPOs\)](#) – An MPO is required in all urbanized areas with populations over 50,000 as determined by the U.S. Census. An urbanized area with a population over 200,000 is designated as a Transportation Management Area (TMA).

Methodology

The following datasets and process were used by DeIDOT to adjust the urban areas in cooperation with each of the MPOs:

Datasets

- Census blocks
- Satellite imagery
- Municipal Boundaries – entirety of any municipality intersecting with Census Urban Area minus protected lands and areas identified as “out of play” in Governor Carney’s Executive Order 42, 2020 Delaware Strategies for State Policies and Spending.
- Traffic generators - industrial areas, airports, large subdivisions, athletic complexes.
- Major Capital Transportation Projects (CTP).
- Functional Classification (FC) – reduce FC inconsistencies within UABs.

Process

- Boundaries must encompass entire Census Bureau urban area.
- Boundaries should be contiguous.
- Boundaries should be simple and without major irregularities.
- Boundaries, where possible, should follow municipal boundaries and other physical features.
- Boundaries should capture existing development and established developing areas. Process is not used to estimate or forecast future development of the urban areas.

Coordination

DeIDOT has engaged with both internal and external partners in the development of the adjusted urban areas. Internal coordination included DeIDOT’s HPMS/Road Inventory program administrators and the Division of Transportation Solutions. External coordination included the Wilmington Area Planning Council (WILMAPCO), Dover/Kent MPO, Salisbury-Wicomico MPO, and FHWA. A summary of comments received can be found below:

MPO	Comments	Action
WILMAPCO	<p>Philosophical issue with adding all Municipal lands regardless of land use protections. Granted it is allowable as a consideration to adding Municipality boundaries, but not simply just to include them outright. Seeing several spots that in all 3 counties that, while they are in Municipalities are part of large tracts of land that are in full Agriculture preservation districts or shown in the DE State Strategies as "out of play". Two examples in Middletown and Lewes. In short, my thoughts lie in the 4 reasons for adjustments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligning with existing planning boundaries • Incorporating local knowledge of urban landscape • Addressing irregularities in boundary shapes • Consistency with highway functional classifications By just add Municipal land simply because they are in an incorporated area seems to skip over the first two reasons for adjustment. 	Removed protected lands and "out of play" areas from adjusted Urban Area boundaries.
Dover/Kent MPO	<p>1. It appears the smoothing process has considered keeping municipalities "intact". We support this approach. 2) Regarding urban area islands, we would suggest reviewing future land use and other relevant plans to determine if development around and/or between islands is likely to occur in the near future. If so, for the purpose of defining urban areas, these islands should be treated as if they were contiguous. 3) We are still unclear as to the treatment of water, particularly smaller bodies of water that often appear to separate designated urban areas. It appears that in many instances the body of water is in fact part of the community adjacent to the water body as opposed to a natural separation between urban areas. We believe consideration should be given to this circumstance and water bodies should not automatically be used to separate urban areas.</p>	<p>(1) Entirety of municipality included unless area was clearly demarcated as a preservation area or some other designation that disallows development. (2) FHWA disallows the creation of combination of two smaller urban areas into one.</p>
SWMPO	<p>Recommends reviewing adopted comp and water & sewer plans to consider including future growth areas.</p>	<p>Boundary adjustments should encompass developments and developing area with existing urban characteristics. Functional Classification review might be inaccurate in areas deemed urban but not yet urban in reality.</p>

Timeline

