

§ 136-211. Department authorized to establish Rural Transportation Planning Organizations.

(a) Authorization. – The Department of Transportation is authorized to form Rural Transportation Planning Organizations.

(b) Area Represented. – Rural Transportation Planning Organizations shall include representatives from contiguous areas in three to fifteen counties, or a total population of the entire area represented of at least 50,000 persons according to the latest population estimate of the Office of State Budget and Management. Noncontiguous counties adjacent to the same Metropolitan Planning Organization may form a Rural Transportation Planning Organization. Areas already included in a Metropolitan Planning Organization shall not be included in the area represented by a Rural Transportation Planning Organization.

(c) Membership. – The Rural Transportation Planning Organization shall consist of local elected officials or their designees and representatives of local transportation systems in the area as agreed to by all parties in a memorandum of understanding.

(d) Formation; Memorandum of Understanding. – The Department shall notify local elected officials and representatives of local transportation systems around the State of the opportunity to form Rural Transportation Planning Organizations. The Department shall work cooperatively with interested local elected officials, their designees, and representatives of local transportation systems to develop a proposed area, membership, functions, and responsibilities of a Rural Transportation Planning Organization. The agreement of all parties shall be included in a memorandum of understanding approved by the membership of a proposed Rural Transportation Planning Organization and the Secretary of the Department of Transportation.

(e) Repealed by Session Laws 2013-156, s. 2(a), effective June 19, 2013.

(f) Ethics Provisions. – All individuals with voting authority serving on a rural transportation planning organization who are not members of the Board of Transportation shall do all of the following:

- (1) Except as permitted under this subdivision, no rural transportation planning organization member acting in that capacity shall participate in an action of the rural transportation planning organization if the rural transportation planning organization member knows the rural transportation planning organization member, the rural transportation planning organization member's extended family, or any business with which the rural transportation planning organization member is associated may incur a reasonably foreseeable financial benefit from the matter under consideration, which financial benefit would impair the rural transportation planning organization member's independence of judgment or from which it could reasonably be inferred that the financial benefit would influence the rural transportation planning organization member's participation in the action of the rural transportation planning organization. [A member may participate in an action of the rural transportation planning organization under any of the following circumstances:]
 - a. When action is ministerial only and does not require the exercise of discretion.
 - b. When the committee records in its minutes that it cannot obtain a quorum in order to take the action because the rural transportation planning organization member is disqualified from acting, the rural transportation planning organization member may be counted for purposes of a quorum but shall otherwise abstain from taking any further action.

- (2) A rural transportation planning organization member shall have an affirmative duty to promptly disclose in writing to the rural transportation planning organization any conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest under subdivision (1) of this subsection. All written disclosures shall be a public record under Chapter 132 of the General Statutes and attached to the minutes of the meeting in which any discussion or vote was taken by the rural transportation planning organization related to that disclosure.
- (3) File a statement of economic interest with the State Ethics Commission in accordance with Article 3 of Chapter 138A of the General Statutes for which the State Ethics Commission shall prepare a written evaluation relative to conflicts of interest and potential conflicts of interest and provide a copy of that evaluation to the rural transportation planning organization member. All statements of economic interest and all written evaluations by the Commission of those statements are public records as provided in G.S. 138A-23. The penalties for failure to file shall be as set forth in G.S. 138A-25(a) and (b).
- (4) File, with and in the same manner as the statement of economic interest filed under subdivision (3) of this subsection, an additional disclosure of a list of all real estate owned wholly or in part by the rural transportation planning organization member, the rural transportation planning organization member's extended family, or a business with which the rural transportation planning organization member is associated within the jurisdiction of the rural transportation planning organization on which the rural transportation planning organization member is serving. All additional disclosures of real estate filed by members are public records under Chapter 132 of the General Statutes. The penalties for failure to file shall be as set forth in G.S. 138A-25(d).

(g) Confidential Information. – A rural transportation planning organization member shall not use or disclose any nonpublic information gained in the course of or by reason of serving as a member of the rural transportation planning organization in a way that would affect a personal financial interest of the rural transportation planning organization member, the rural transportation planning organization member's extended family, or a business with which the rural transportation planning organization member is associated.

(h) Reserved.

(i) Definitions. – For purposes of this section, "extended family" shall have the same meaning as in G.S. 138A-3(25), "business with which associated" shall have the same meaning as in G.S. 138A-3(7), and "financial benefit" shall mean a direct pecuniary gain or loss or a direct pecuniary loss to a business competitor.

(j) Violations. – A violation of subdivision (1) of subsection (f) of this section shall be a Class 1 misdemeanor. A rural transportation planning organization member who knowingly conceals or knowingly fails to disclose information that is required to be disclosed on a required filing under subdivisions (3) or (4) of subsection (f) of this section shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor. A rural transportation planning organization member who provides false information on a required filing under subdivisions (3) or (4) of subsection (f) of this section knowing that the information is false is guilty of a Class H felony. If the State Ethics Commission receives written allegations of violations of this section, the Commission shall report such violations to the Director of the State Bureau of Investigation for investigation and referral to the District Attorney for possible prosecution. All written allegations or related documents are confidential and are not matters of public record.

(k) All individuals with voting authority serving on a rural transportation planning organization who are members of the Board of Transportation shall comply with Chapter 138A of the General Statutes and G.S. 143B-350 while serving on the rural transportation planning organization. (2000-123, s. 2; 2002-170, s. 2; 2012-44, s. 1; 2012-142, s. 24.16(b); 2013-156, s. 2(a), (b); 2014-58, s. 12(b); 2014-115, s. 56.6A(b); 2015-264, s. 72(b); 2017-6, s. 3; 2018-146, ss. 3.1(a), (b), 6.1.)