MPO Environmental Justice Responsibilities

Since the mid-1990s, a renewed emphasis on environmental justice has become an integral part of the transportation planning process for urban regions in the United States. Including Environmental justice considerations in the planning and decision making process is intended to:

- To avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority populations and low-income populations.
- To ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the planning decision-making process.
- To prevent the denial of, reduction in or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations. ¹

The concept of “environmental justice”, derived from Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other civil rights statutes, was emphasized as a national policy goal by presidential Executive Order 12898, issued in 1994, which directs "each federal agency to make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations.”²

In October of 1999 the FHWA and the FTA issued a joint memorandum reaffirming their commitment to Title VI and Environmental Justice in planning. MPOs were required to include EJ and Title VI components in their work programs and to self-certify their compliance with Title VI requirements.

¹ U.S. Department of Transportation brochure: “An Overview of Transportation and Environmental Justice”
² Executive Order 12898 and the DOT and FHWA Orders on Environmental Justice address persons belonging to any of the following groups:
  - **Black** - a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.
  - **Hispanic** - a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.
  - **Asian** - a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent.
  - **Low-Income** - a person whose household income (or in the case of a community or group, whose median household income) is at or below the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines.
  - **American Indian and Alaskan Native** - a person having origins in any of the original people of North America and who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition.
  - **Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander** - a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.
The memorandum directs that Metropolitan Planning Organizations must:

- Enhance their analytical capabilities to ensure compliance with environmental justice
- Identify residential, employment, and transportation patterns of minority and low income populations in order to identify needs and determine if the benefits and burdens of transportation investments are fairly distributed.
- Evaluate and, where necessary, improve public involvement processes to engage minority and low income populations in decision making.