

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN
FOR THE METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION
PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING PROCESS**

**RICHMOND AREA MPO
April 12, 2007**

Introduction:

This Public Participation Plan has been developed in consultation with interested parties as required by federal rules and regulations. Prior to its adoption, this Public Participation Plan was the subject of a public notification process and comment period (minimum 45 days) and the resulting public input has been addressed and incorporated as appropriate into this plan.

Intent:

The intent of the Public Participation Plan is to provide meaningful citizen input for the metropolitan transportation planning and programming process through effective citizen involvement activities, open and accessible information, and opportunities for participation. As such, this requires a process for providing reasonable opportunities for involvement by the following:

- citizens
- affected public agencies
- representatives of public transportation employees
- freight shippers
- providers of freight transportation services
- private providers of transportation
- representatives of users of public transportation
- representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities
- representatives of the elderly and disabled
- agencies or entities responsible for safety/security operations
- providers of non-emergency transportation services receiving financial assistance from a source other than title 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53
- other interested parties

Background:

The Richmond Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) maintains a public participation process for the development of plans and programs. These procedures for public participation have been formally enacted, reviewed and certified as being in compliance with all applicable federal rules and regulations.

Notwithstanding former procedures, changes to certain aspects of public participation in the metropolitan planning process emanate from federal rules following the passage of federal legislation in 2005 (i.e., SAFETEA-LU) reauthorizing the federal-aid transportation program. The mandated changes in the public participation process place an increased emphasis on particular elements. For instance, an increased emphasis is placed on consultation with resource agencies responsible for natural resource management and historic preservation. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has assisted in identifying the resource management agencies to be consulted. Formal coordination with these agencies will help to identify effective mitigation strategies for potential impacts of projects included in the MPO's Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

Other elements of this Public Participation Plan address methods for coordinating the LRTP with interested parties (e.g., elderly and disabled). Even though this type of outreach always has been an essential aspect of the planning process, new federal rules emphasize making documents available electronically, ensuring that public meetings are held in a convenient and accessible manner, and that visualization techniques are employed to convey information.

This updated Public Participation Plan builds upon proven components of the MPO's public participation process and incorporates new procedures and activities to address newly emphasized areas set forth in the rules developed to implement SAFETEA-LU.

MPO Public Participation Plan Elements

A. Primary Public Participation Elements

1. Elected officials from each MPO area local government shall serve as policy board members on the MPO. These local elected officials are directly accountable to citizens from their various districts and they serve as the primary means of citizen input for the MPO. These local elected officials are authorized to act on behalf of their governing bodies on MPO plans, programs, studies, and other matters related to the MPO planning and programming process.
2. The chairmen for the MPO's Citizen Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC) and Elderly and Disabled Advisory Committee (EDAC) serve as nonvoting members on the MPO. In addition, the MPO chairman may appoint up to two (2) citizens to serve as nonvoting MPO members. While the CTAC and EDAC chairmen and the MPO chairman's citizen appointees are nonvoting MPO members, they are vested with all other rights and responsibilities of MPO membership and thereby provide direct citizen input for all matters addressed and discussed by the MPO board.

3. The MPO shall maintain and provide for CTAC. The purpose of CTAC is to advise the MPO on plans and other matters necessary and appropriate for providing viable and reasonable citizen input. Resolutions approved by CTAC shall be presented to the MPO. The MPO's response to these resolutions shall be reported to CTAC.
4. The MPO shall maintain and provide for EDAC. The purpose of EDAC is to advise the MPO on plans and other matters concerning the MPO's urban transportation planning process responsibility to conduct special efforts to plan public transportation facilities and services that can be effectively utilized by the elderly and disabled. Resolutions approved by EDAC shall be presented to the MPO. The MPO's response to these resolutions shall be reported to EDAC.
5. The MPO shall establish joint technical and citizen special purpose committees as appropriate to review, advise and recommend work conducted in development of the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and other plans and studies. Such joint technical/citizen committees shall provide for ongoing citizen involvement.
6. The MPO shall annually conduct a series of meetings to obtain public comments for consideration in developing the LRTP, Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and Unified Work Program (UWP). Such meetings shall also provide an update to the public on the region's air quality status and shall be held at various locations throughout the region. At least one-quarter of these meetings shall be held in minority and/or low income areas.
7. Information meetings on MPO plans and programs will be conducted in response to requests from business and civic groups, organizations, and state and local elected officials. Outreach activities will be conducted to inform minority and low-income groups and limited English-speaking groups of availability of this service.
8. The Richmond Regional Planning District Commission (RRPDC) shall produce and distribute to interested area groups and organizations, state and local elected officials and others a periodic newsletter that includes articles and other information of interest on MPO plans, programs, and studies.
9. The RRPDC shall maintain a website which shall include information on MPO plans, programs, meetings, and other appropriate information. The staff shall post on the RRPDC web site draft documents that are subject to the MPO's public review process for public review and comment. Staff will also use the RRPDC web site to solicit public input on draft plans and programs.

10. Visualization techniques shall be utilized to enhance the public's understanding of MPO plans and programs. Such techniques shall be used in an appropriate manner when presenting and describing MPO plans and programs.
11. Whenever possible, the public involvement process shall coordinate with the statewide public involvement processes in order to enhance public consideration of issues, plans, and programs, to reduce redundancies and costs, and to maximize citizen involvement.
12. The MPO shall assess the distribution of impacts on low-income and minority groups for investments identified in the LRTP.

B. Periodic Review and Adoption of Public Participation Plan

1. The "Public Participation Plan for the Metropolitan Transportation Planning and Programming Process; Richmond Area MPO" (i.e., MPO Public Participation Plan) replaces the MPO's previously adopted "Richmond Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Guidelines for Public Participation," first adopted on July 14, 1994 and revised on October 9, 1997 and July 21, 2004.
2. A minimum of 45 days shall be provided for public review and comment before the initial adoption or revision of elements in the MPO Public Participation Plan.
3. The MPO shall periodically review the overall effectiveness of the public involvement process in order to ensure that the process is providing meaningful citizen input. Mechanisms shall be in place to gauge the effectiveness of certain participation activities and results of such review shall be reported to the MPO.

C. Public Notice, Review, and Open Access

1. Public notice shall be provided to the local news media of each MPO meeting at least one week in advance, and for MPO committee meetings, at least three days in advance. A calendar year schedule for regularly scheduled MPO and MPO committee meetings is posted and maintained (updated) on the RRPDC web site.
2. A public notice shall be provided to the local news media in order to solicit comments on draft LRTPs and TIPs under consideration by the MPO.
3. At least two weeks notice shall be provided for public review meetings with notice provided in at least one local newspaper of general circulation and in at least one local newspaper serving area minority populations.

Consideration shall also be given to providing notice for such meetings in area local newspapers and on public radio. Such notice shall be prominently displayed as paid advertisements in these newspapers. Citizens may submit comments following a public review meeting with consideration and staff response given to written comments that are received within one week (i.e., seven calendar days) after such meetings. Such written comments with staff's response shall be submitted for MPO consideration.

4. Notice of all regularly scheduled and special called MPO and MPO committee meetings shall be posted on the RRPDC web site.
5. Copies of final draft LRTPs and TIPs shall be made available at various locations throughout the region for public review and comment two weeks in advance of the deadline for submission of comments. Copies of such final draft plans and programs shall also be posted on the RRPDC web site.
6. There shall be opportunity for public input during each MPO and MPO committee meeting to gather timely information about transportation issues and processes from interested citizens, groups and organizations. The MPO shall consider and respond in a timely fashion and appropriate manner to resolutions submitted to the MPO by CTAC and EDAC.
7. MPO and MPO committee meetings and public review meetings shall be held at a location and time that is convenient and accessible. When there are a series of public review meetings being held throughout the region on a certain plan or program, at least one-quarter of these meetings shall be held at a time and location that is accessible by public transportation.
8. The MPO will make reasonable efforts to address identified language barriers in order to provide meaningful access to information on its plans and programs.

D. Outreach Activities

1. The MPO shall conduct activities to inform and seek comments from minority and low-income groups and limited English-speaking population groups.
2. The MPO shall annually conduct a series of meetings to obtain public comments for consideration in developing the LRTP, TIP, and UWP (see item A.6 above).
3. Informational meetings on MPO plans and programs will be conducted in response to requests from business and civic groups, organizations, and state and local elected officials (see item A.7 above).

4. The MPO shall maintain and make readily available documentation of its Public Participation Plan.
5. The RRPDC shall produce and distribute a periodic newsletter (see item A.8 above).
6. The RRPDC shall maintain a web site (see item A.9 above).
7. The MPO shall maintain and provide for CTAC (see item A.3 above).
8. The MPO shall maintain and provide for EDAC (see item A.4 above).

E. Disposition of Significant Comments

1. When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft LRTP (including the financial plan and the air quality conformity analysis) or draft TIP as a result of the public involvement process or the interagency consultation process required under the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's conformity regulations, a summary, analysis and report on the disposition of comments shall be made part of the final LRTP/TIP.
2. If there are significant changes to the final draft LRTP or TIP from the one made available for public comment, an additional opportunity will be provided for public comment on the revised changes. The MPO chairman shall determine when changes are significant and warrant additional opportunity for public comments.

F. Consultation with Interested Parties

1. The MPO shall maintain and provide for CTAC and EDAC. Representation on CTAC includes at-large member organizations with recognized transportation planning concerns (e.g., environmental stewardship, bicycle and pedestrian travel, rail passenger services, etc.). Representation on EDAC includes groups, organizations, and/or individuals representing the elderly, disabled, and low-income. (See items A.3 and A.4 above).
2. For LRTP updates, the MPO shall establish a joint technical citizen special purpose committee to review, advise, and recommend work conducted in its development. Such joint technical/citizen special purpose committees may also be established for other MPO plans and studies. (See item A.5 above).
3. Amendments to the LRTP or TIP requiring an air quality conformity analysis (e.g., addition of a regionally significant project) shall require consultation with interested parties and other appropriate public review activities.

4. The MPO will provide notice of upcoming public review meetings or review periods being held/conducted on the draft LRTP and the draft TIP. Notice will be provided to known interested parties that include representatives for the following groups/organizations:

- public transportation employees
- freight shippers
- providers of freight transportation services
- private providers of transportation
- users of public transportation
- users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle facilities
- disabled
- elderly
- low-income
- limited English-speaking populations
- providers of non-emergency transportation services receiving financial assistance from a source other than title 49, U.S.C., Chapter 53.

G. Consultation with Federal, State and Local Agencies

1. In developing the LRTP and TIP, the MPO shall consult, as appropriate, with agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities within the Richmond area that are affected by transportation. To coordinate the planning functions to the maximum extent practicable, such consultation shall compare the LRTP and TIP as they are being developed, with the plans, maps, inventories, and planning documents developed by other agencies. This consultation shall include, as appropriate, contacts with state, local, and private agencies responsible for planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, freight movements, land-use management, natural resources, conservation, and historic preservation.
2. The LRTP and TIP shall be developed with due consideration of other related planning activities within the Richmond area, including consideration given for the design and delivery of transportation services within the area that are provided by:
 - recipients of assistance under title 49, U.S.C., Chapter 53;
 - governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations (including representatives of the agencies and organizations) that receive federal assistance from a source other than the U.S. Department of Transportation to provide non-emergency transportation service; and
 - recipients of assistance under 23 U.S.C. 204.
3. The MPO shall involve federal land management agencies in the development of the LRTP and TIP.

4. To the extent possible, a documented process that outlines roles, responsibilities, and key decision points for consulting with other governmental agencies should be developed early in the LRTP and TIP development process.

Schedule for MPO Review and Adoption

- February 8, 2007 – Draft MPO Public Participation Plan to be presented to MPO and authorized for 45-day public review period.
- April 12, 2007 – MPO review and action to adopt final Draft MPO Public Participation Plan.

Prepared by RRPDC
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