

**Greater Hickory
Metropolitan Planning Organization**

Public Involvement Policy

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1. Introduction

Overview

The Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization's (GHMPO's) Public Involvement Policy is an umbrella policy, encompassing the plans and programs of the Urban Area's transportation planning process. Public involvement is an integral part of the GHMPO's planning efforts. The Public Involvement Policy is comprised of the public involvement programs for all the major planning activities, including the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the Air Quality Conformity Determination, the Congestion Management Plan (CMP), the Planning Work Program (PWP) and the MPO's provisions for the American with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The GHMPO will seek public input through a menu of techniques, including public notices, comment periods, workshops, charrettes, public hearings, newsletters, surveys, media relations, and the use of committees and work groups with citizen representatives as appointed. The techniques employed will vary, depending on the specific planning task. The MPO will hold a forty five (45) day public comment period for amendments to the Public Involvement Policy and will seek input and feedback on the MPO's public involvement efforts. The GHMPO's Public Involvement Policy will be consistent with the requirements of the following:

- Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST);
- Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA);
- Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21);
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) ;
- Interim FTA/FHWA Guidance on Public Participation.

Purpose

The purpose of the GHMPO and Public Involvement Policy is to create an open decision making process whereby citizens have the opportunity to be involved in all stages of the transportation planning process. This Policy is designed to ensure that transportation decisions will reflect public priorities.

Objectives

1. Bring a broad cross-section of the public into the public policy and transportation planning decision-making process.
2. Maintain public involvement from the early stages of the planning process through detailed project development.
3. Use different combinations of public involvement techniques to meet the diverse needs of the general public.
4. Determine the public's knowledge of the metropolitan transportation system and the public's values and attitudes concerning transportation.
5. Educate citizens and elected officials in order to increase general understanding of transportation issues.
6. Make technical and other information available to the public.
7. Establish a channel for an effective feedback process.
8. Evaluate the public involvement process and procedures to assess their success at meeting requirements specified in the ISTEA, TEA-21, Reauthorization of TEA-21, NEPA and the Interim FTA/FHWA Guidance on Public Participation.

Policy Elements

The Public Involvement Policy is comprised of a number of sub-policies. All planning programs and activities are required to go through the Transportation Advisory Committee's public process. In addition, the MPO will initiate public involvement programs for the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the Air Quality Conformity Determination (if needed), the Congestion Management Plan, the Planning Work Program (PWP) and the provisions for American with Disabilities Act (ADA). The final component of the Public Involvement Policy is the policy review element designed to ensure that the programs are meeting their goals.

Regular Public Involvement Opportunities

The TAC's regularly scheduled meetings are advertised on the WPCOG's Transportation Website. These meetings are open to members of the public and, upon request, anyone can be placed on the TAC e-mail distribution list. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, meetings have been streamed via the WPCOG Facebook page.

Public Involvement for Specific Planning Items

For particular planning issues (i.e. plan development & updates, studies, amendments to planning documents, etc.), the TAC will open a public comment period (3-6 weeks depending on the item) and hold a public hearing. The notice for the public comment period and the public hearing are advertised using the following resources:

- WPCOG Transportation Website: <http://trans.wpcog.org/>

The notices will include an announcement that states that persons with disabilities will be accommodated. Special provisions will be made if notified 48 hours in advance (i.e. having available large print documents, audio material, or other provisions as requested). Both written and oral comments received are compiled by the planning staff and reviewed by the TAC.

In addition, press releases will be provided to the following print media:

- Hickory Daily Record, Lenoir News Topics, Morganton News Herald, Newton Observer News Enterprise, and Taylorsville Times

The press releases will also be distributed to radio and television stations in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties.

Response to Public Comment

The TAC typically acknowledges public comments in one of the following two ways: The TAC may incorporate a summary of public comments and the MPO's response, as an appendix, into the specific planning document. Or depending on the number of comments, the TAC may instruct the planning staff to respond directly by letter. Acknowledging public comments is a way to let the public know that its comments are being addressed and is part of the public involvement feedback process.

2. Transportation Plan

Minimum Transportation Plan Public Involvement Procedure

The MPO will provide opportunity for meaningful public involvement in the development and update of a Metropolitan Transportation Plan. The public comment period will be for a minimum 30-day period, effective from the date of the public notice publication. Written comments will be received during the comment period and will be directed to the MPO. The MPO contact person, phone number and e-mail address will be included in the public notice. The MPO will assemble all comments and forward comments to the TAC. The TAC shall hold at least one public hearing for the Transportation Plan.

The availability of the Plan will be publicized using the resources listed in Section 1 Public Involvement for Specific Planning Items.

Optional Public Involvement Techniques (Metropolitan Transportation Plan)

As a method for increasing public involvement and participation in the process, the public involvement for the MTP may also include any or all of the following techniques:

1. Information dissemination, notification of meeting, publication of proposed plans will be integral elements of the public involvement process.
2. The Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) will initiate a major MTP update process as required by federal regulations (as a minimum, once every five years for air quality attainment areas). Elements of the Plan, and/or amendments will meet all current Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) requirements. A work program and schedule for the MTP update process will be developed by the TCC and provided to the TAC for approval. It will be made available to the public for their information. The work program will detail the strategy for the Plan update process including work elements and a tentative schedule. The TCC and TAC may elect to receive public comment and involvement on the work program.
3. Proactive participation techniques may be employed to involve citizens and provide fuller access to information and technical data on the Transportation Plan. The technique may include, but not be limited to; public meetings/hearings, surveys, focus groups, newsletters, public service announcements, charrette, transportation advisory group, mass media, etc.
4. Public meeting's may be held to: formulate a vision for the Transportation Plan development; provide the public background information on the metropolitan transportation system and other issues as well as the proposed framework of the Transportation Plan update process; and to receive citizen input.
5. Public meetings (forums) designed to solicit public comment may be held at various locations around the metropolitan area to encourage the greatest public participation. Public meetings will be held at a location, which is accessible to persons with disabilities and preferably located on a transit route.
6. Copies of the draft Transportation Plan will be distributed to the member jurisdictions, citizen groups and agencies, and will also be placed in the local libraries. Notification of

the draft Transportation Plan may be provided via resources listed in Section 1 Public Involvement for Specific Planning Items.

The notification will inform the public of the availability of the draft Metropolitan Transportation Plan for review and comment where to send written comments, and addresses and phone numbers of contact persons. The notices also will include an announcement that states that persons with disabilities will be accommodated. Special provisions will be made if notified 48 hours in advance (i.e. having available large print documents, audio material, or other provisions as requested).

7. The public comment period will be for a minimum 30-day period, effective from the date of the public notice publication. Written comments will be received during the comment period and will be directed to the MPO. The MPO's contact person, phone number and e-mail address will be included in the public notice.
8. Any significant revisions to the Metropolitan Transportation Plan will also be subject to public comment process as described in this policy.
9. Involvement of the public as key decision points may be desirable. Decision points are those stages where the TAC may consider endorsement of the work in progress or take action on particular work elements. These may include some of the following:
 - Formulation of vision, goals and objectives
 - Review of multi-modal goals and elements
 - Review and approval of socio-economic and demographic projections
 - Review and determination of transportation deficiencies
 - Evaluation of alternatives and selection of preferred option

3. Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Introduction

The TIP and STIP are on a two-year cycle. In the first year, the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (GHMPO) will prepare a Transportation Projects Priority Needs List (PNL) which lays out the projects desired to be included in the last years of the program. Further, should the MPO desire to consider a change in the schedule or scope of a project, this should be clearly communicated at this time. As the TIP and STIP are fiscally constrained documents, any moving forward of, or increases in current projects must identify a corresponding desired delay in projects also within the area.

The Transportation Projects Priority Needs List shall be provided to the State for consideration in inclusion in the draft STIP. The GHMPO shall coordinate with the State as to project changes and additions desired by the MPO. Upon development of the draft STIP, the State shall provide a subset of the STIP which covers the GHMPO area to the MPO. It is anticipated that the resulting document be appropriate to be released as the draft TIP for public input.

Should there be substantial problems with the draft STIP in the eyes of GHMPO, the MPO shall immediately open discussions with the State on the discrepancies. The TCC shall recommend to the TAC what should be used for the TIP, and the public involvement process.

Public Involvement Process

1. The GHMPO TCC will develop a draft Transportation Priority Needs List from the Local Project Priorities of the MPO jurisdictions. Each MPO municipality and county should provide to the MPO their priorities for consideration. These may be developed as each governing agency sees fit (from example, they may come from staff, the elected boards, or the elected boards with public involvement). Local priorities should be developed and coordinated with local public involvement policies.
2. The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) will hold a public meeting on the draft Priority Needs List. The public meeting will be held at a location which is accessible to persons with disabilities. The TAC will approve a final Transportation Priority List after considering the public comments received. The Priority Needs List shall be submitted to the NCDOT at or before the NCDOT public hearings for input into the STIP. The TAC may elect to open a dialogue with the State on the priorities.
3. The State shall produce a draft STIP and provide a subset of that document to GHRMPO. TCC will develop review the document and recommend to the TAC if it is appropriate to be used as the draft TIP. Should the TCC and TAC approve the document, it will become the draft TIP.
4. The Transportation Advisory Committee will publish the draft TIP for public review and comment. Copies of a draft TIP will be distributed to TCC and TAC members. Each jurisdiction will also have copies available for public review. The draft TIP will follow the same notification procedures as outlined above for the Regional Priority List, excepting that the minimum public comment period shall be 30 days (though reduced to 15 days if an amendment), and that the TAC shall hold at least one public hearing for the TIP.
5. The public comments will be assembled and presented to the GHMPO, TCC and TAC. The TAC will hold a public hearing on the draft TIP. The public hearing will be held at a location which is accessible to persons with disabilities. Public comments will be addressed and considered in the adoption of the TIP.
6. Amendments to TIP will be available for public review and comment, if they make a substantial change to the TIP. A substantial change is classified as the addition or deletion of a project with an implementation cost exceeding \$2 million. Public comment on project additions or deletions of less than \$2 million may be sought at the discretion of the TAC by majority vote. As long as a project's description, scope or expected environmental impact have not materially changed, the TAC may approve changes to project funding without a separate public meeting.
7. Written public comments and their responses will be published as an appendix to the final TIP.

4. Air Quality Conformity Determination

Introduction

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) assists the MPO in making a conformity determination by performing a systems level conformity analysis on the highway portion of the Financial Element of the MPO's Transportation Plan. The Transportation Improvement Program is a subset of the Transportation Plan and is therefore covered by the conformity analysis.

Public Involvement Procedure for the Air Quality Determination

1. The GHMPO in conjunction and cooperation with the North Carolina Department of Transportation will prepare an air quality conformity analysis for the GHMPO.
2. The GHMPO Technical Coordinating Committee will receive the draft Conformity Report from NCDOT, review it, and forward it to the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). The Transportation Advisory Committee will then publish the draft Conformity Report for public review and comment.
3. Copies of a draft Conformity Report will be distributed to TAC members. Each jurisdiction will also have copies available for public review. Notices regarding the draft Air Quality Conformity Report will be publicized using the resources listed in Section 1 Public Involvement for Specific Planning Items.

The notice will inform the public that a draft Conformity Report has been published by the GHMPO and that copies are available for review at the Western Piedmont Council of Governments' offices and available in a PDF format for downloading from the WPCOG Transportation Website. The notices will include an announcement that states that persons with disabilities will be accommodated. Special provisions will be made if notified 48 hours in advance (i.e. having available large print documents, audio material, or other provisions as requested).

4. The public review period will be for a minimum three week (21-day) period, effective from the date of public notice publication. Written comment will be received during the public review period, and will be directed to the GHMPO. The GHMPO contact person, phone number and e-mail will be included in the public notice.
5. The public comments will be assembled and presented to the GHMPO TAC. The TAC will hold a public hearing on the draft Air Quality Conformity Report. The public hearing will be held at a location which is accessible to persons with disabilities and which is located on a transit route. Public comments will be addressed and considered in the Air Quality Conformity Determination.
6. The GHMPO will provide additional opportunity for public comment on any revisions to the draft Conformity Report (if the final Conformity Report is significantly different than the one which was made available for public comment by the MPO, and raises new material issues, which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen for the public review notifications).

7. The Air Quality Determination is valid for three years, unless changes are made to the Transportation Improvement Plan (or TIP) that would have an impact on the air quality analysis. If such changes are made a new analysis needs to be conducted, including the public involvement procedure outlined above.

5. Planning Work Program

Introduction

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) requires that each Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) prepare an annual work program known as the Planning Work Program (PWP). The PWP must identify the MPO planning tasks to be undertaken with the use of federal transportation funds, including highway and transit.

Purpose

The purpose of public involvement in the PWP process is to keep the public apprised of and to receive input on the planning activities to be undertaken by the Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Public Involvement Process

1. FTA Section 5303 (Formerly Section 8) and FHWA Planning Funds for the appropriate federal fiscal year are submitted to the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) for approval. The TAC meetings are open to the public and comments on the Distribution Formula may be received at this time.
2. The local jurisdictions will assist in preparing a list of tasks and funding for the federal fiscal year. These lists are submitted to the MPO for compilation into a draft Planning Work Program
3. The draft Planning Work Program is reviewed by the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC). The TCC meetings are open to the public. The TCC then endorses a draft PWP and forwards the document to the TAC.
4. The draft PWP is then reviewed by the TAC. Public comments may be provided at this time. The draft is sent to the Public Transportation Division for comments.
5. The final PWP comes back again to the TAC for approval. Upon TAC approval, the PWP is then forwarded on to the State and FHWA/FTA.

6. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Provisions

All notices for planning activities of the Metropolitan Planning Organization will include an announcement that states that persons with disabilities will be accommodated. Special provisions will be made if notified 48 hours in advance (i.e. having available large print documents, audio material, someone proficient in sign language, a translator or other provisions requested).

Notices for the public comment period and the public hearing will be advertised using the resources listed in Section 1 Public Involvement for Specific Planning Items. Public meetings will be held in locations accessible to persons with disabilities and will be located near or on a transit route if possible.