

GREATER
HICKORY
METROPOLITAN
PLANNING
ORGANIZATION

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT POLICY

Adopted November 15, 2023

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TABLE OF CONTENTS
Adopted November 25, 2022

Introduction & Purpose.....	3
Objectives.....	3
Policy Elements.....	4
Regular Public Involvement & Standard Requirements.....	5
Public Involvement Additional Strategies.....	6
Planning Items with Specific Requirements.....	7
Introduction of Specific Planning Items.....	8
Transportation Improvement Program.....	9-10
Transportation Improvement Program Amendments and Modifications.....	11
Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Comprehensive	
Transportation Plan.....	12
Unified Planning Work Program.....	13
Air Quality Conformity Determination.....	14
Public Involvement Plan.....	15
Performance Measures.....	16
Virtual Public Involvement Opportunities.....	17
Title VI & EJ Statement.....	18
Example of Formal Amendments and Administrative Modifications.....	19

GREATER HICKORY METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

The Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization's (GHMPO) Public Involvement Policy is an umbrella policy, guiding the plans and programs of the planning 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 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 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), and the MPO's provisions for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The GHMPO will seek public input through a variety of techniques, including public notices, comment periods, workshops, charrettes, public hearings, newsletters, surveys, media relations, and the use of committees and work groups with the citizen representatives as appointed. The techniques implemented will vary, depending on the specific planning task. The MPO will hold a forty-five 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 Code of Federal Regulations, Title 23. Federal Code is updated to reflect the changes of individual federal transportation legislation.

Purpose

The purpose of the GHMPO 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 a comprehensive combination 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 planning information and other generally relevant 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, BIL, NEPA, and interim FTA/FHWA Guidance on Public Participation.

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Policy Elements

The public involvement policy is comprised of a number of sub-policies that address individual planning products. All planning programs and activities are required to go through the Transportation Technical Advisory Committee's public adoption 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 (CMP), the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), and the provisions for the Americans 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.

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REGULAR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT & STANDARD REQUIREMENTS

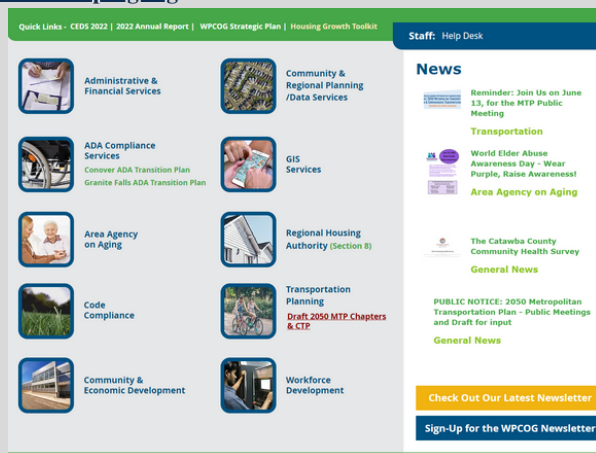
Standard Public Notice and Comment Periods

The MPO will provide adequate notice of upcoming meetings, as well as notice and length of public input and comment periods, in order to allow all affected and interested parties to review information and submit comments. MPO meetings are regularly occurring public involvement opportunities. The MPO will provide a minimum of seven (7) days notice for all upcoming public meetings, and the standard for public comment periods will be 30 days, however, comment periods can range from 15-45 days for differing planning products. Public comment periods of less or more than the standard 30 days will be noted for the specific planning product they pertain to. Public comments will be accepted via in-person meetings, mail, and by virtual means (email, call, etc.)

All public comments provided to the MPO will be reviewed by the MPO staff and conveyed to the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). Responses to public comments will typically be established as an appendix to the specific items. In some cases, TAC may direct MPO staff to provide direct written responses to the comment.

For particular planning issues (i.e., plan development & updates, studies, amendments to planning documents, etc.), the TAC will open a public comment period (15-45 days depending on the specific item). Public hearings, when required for a specific planning product, will be held during regular TAC meeting times. The notice for the public comment periods and public hearing are advertised using the following resource:

- WPCOG Website: <https://www.wpcog.org>



The notices will be located on the right hand side of the homepage, under the “News” tab, as presented above. The notices will include an announcement that states that persons with disabilities will be accommodated. Special provisions will be made if notified at least forty-eight (48) hours in advance. Examples of special provisions include having available large print documents, audio material, provisions for hearing and visual impairment, and translation, as requested. Both written and oral comments received are compiled by the planning staff and reviewed by the TAC.

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

- Hickory Daily Record
- Lenoir News Topics
- Morganton News Herald
- Newton Observer News Enterprise
- The Taylorsville Times
- The Paper (Morganton)

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Public Involvement Additional Strategies

Minimum required public involvement may not yield the public participation desired by GHMPO. The GHMPO commits to the following strategies, as appropriate, for effective public participation in transportation planning.

- **Newspapers:** The GHMPO will send news releases to the major newspapers listed on page five (5) at least seven (7) days in advance of any public meeting pertaining to the adoption of new planning documents., specifically the MTP or TIP.
- **Legal Advertisements/Notice of Public Meetings:** Once per year the GHMPO will advertise, in major newspaper of record for each of the four (4) counties, all TAC and TCC meeting dates (for the calendar year). This notice will include the WPCOG website address and physical location where agendas and meetings will be available.
- **Posting of Public Meetings for Major Planning Documents:** The GHMPO will distribute news releases, post on the GHMPO website, and email via the GHMPO email list.
- **Public Participation Email List:** The MPO will maintain an e-mail list of any interested person or organization who wishes to be made aware of upcoming meetings, and opportunities for public comments.
- **Translation of Public Notices:** The GHMPO will translate public notices for public meetings and public comment opportunities on major planning items.
- **Meeting Times and Locations:** The GHMPO will hold regularly scheduled TCC and TAC meetings at 1:00 p.m. and 2:30 p.m., respectively, at the Western Piedmont Council of Governments: 1880, 2nd Ave NW; Hickory, NC 28601. The GHMPO will attempt to hold public input meetings for specific planning items, i.e., the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, in government buildings which are ADA accessible in each of the four counties. The GHMPO will also attempt to hold these meetings at times that are generally convenient for the public to participate. Virtual options will be available upon request with 48 hour notice.
- **Title VI and Environmental Justice:** The GHMPO is committed to extensive outreach to documented Title VI and Environmental Justice communities, as outlined in the MPO Title VI plan.

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**PLANNING ITEMS WITH SPECIFIED PUBLIC
INVOLVEMENT REQUIREMENTS**

The following planning items have specified public involvement requirements and processes. The purpose of the remainder of this document is to outline the steps required to fulfill the specific public involvement requirements of each item.

1. Transportation Improvement
Program
2. Metropolitan Transportation Plan
3. Comprehensive Transportation Plan
4. Unified Planning Work Program
5. Public Involvement Policy
6. Performance Measures
7. Air Quality Conformity
Determination

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INTRODUCTION OF PLANNING ITEMS

Transportation Improvement Program -- The TIP is a multi-year capital improvement document which denotes the scheduling and funding of construction projects across the metropolitan area over a minimum 4-year time period as required by Federal law. Greater Hickory's TIP covers a 10-year period.

Metropolitan Transportation Plan -- Under federal law, all metropolitan areas with a population greater than 50,000 must have a long-range transportation plan in order to access federal funds. Long-range transportation planning allows the region to plan for the infrastructure needed to handle increases in population, employment and travel demand and to help mitigate congestion, air pollution and other associated issues.

As a result of the 2010 Census the Greater Hickory MPO was designated a Transportation Management Area (TMA), having surpassed an urbanized area of greater than 200,000. Subsequently, future renditions of the 'Long-Range Transportation Plan' will be known as the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

Comprehensive Transportation Plan -- Under state law, MPOs and municipalities are directed to develop a Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) in cooperation with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT). By comparison to the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), the CTP is not required to be fiscally constrained and no minimum horizon year or update timeframes are specified. The MTP is the fiscally constrained subset of the CTP. The collective MTP/CTP is based on the projected growth for the four-county region. As transportation needs throughout the state exceed available funding, it is imperative that the local planning area aggressively pursue funding for priority projects. Local governments may use the MTP/CTP to guide development and protect corridors for the recommended projects. It is critical that NCDOT and local governments coordinate on relevant land development reviews and all transportation projects to ensure proper implementation of the MTP/CTP. Local governments and the North Carolina Department of Transportation share the responsibility for access management and the planning, design and construction of the recommended projects.

Unified Planning Work Program -- The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) for the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) documents the transportation planning activities and related tasks to be accomplished during the federal fiscal year. The goal of the MPO is to ensure a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive ("3-C") approach for transportation planning for the metropolitan area, both short and long-range, with proper coordination among Local and regional MPO member governments and agencies, North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and, Federal Transit Administration (FTA) This document outlines metropolitan planning requirements and issues; then presents a work program of planning activities to address them during the fiscal year.

Public Involvement Policy -- The Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization's (GHMPO) Public Involvement Policy is an umbrella policy, guiding the plans and programs of the planning 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 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 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), and the MPO's provisions for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Performance Measures -- U.S. federal code creates a performance-based planning framework that applies to state Departments of Transportation (DOT) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO). The purpose of this performance-based planning framework is to directly link performance outcomes to investment decisions. This federal framework also creates a planning process that is designed to ensure collaboration among state DOT's, MPO's, and transit agencies, and also outlines the requirements of each entity. Under current federal regulation, State DOT's and MPO's are required to establish performance targets, and report on the progress made toward achieving each of these performance targets.

Air Quality Conformity Determination -- The North Carolina Department of Transportation 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 and is therefore covered by the conformity analysis.



TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

1

At the beginning of the prioritization process, GHMPO will compile a Draft Transportation Priority Needs Lists. This list will be representative of the Local Project Priorities of the MPO jurisdictions. Each MPO municipality and county will be responsible for providing their priorities for consideration through communication with GHMPO staff.



2

The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) will hold a public meeting on the draft Priority Needs List. This meeting can be conducted during a regularly scheduled TAC meeting. This meeting will be held at a location which is accessible to persons with disabilities.

3

Should the number of projects included in the Priority Needs List exceed the amount of project submittals allotted to the GHMPO, GHMPO staff will use a data-driven approach to select the final projects for the Priority Needs List.



4

Following the hearing of all public comments, the TAC will approve a final Transportation Priority Needs List. This list will guide MPO staff in using Prioritization software to submit each individual project to the State Prioritization Office.



5

The State shall produce a draft TIP and provide a subset of that program to the GHMPO.



TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

1

Upon receiving the draft TIP, TCC will review the document and if deemed appropriate, will recommend the document to TAC to be used as the draft TIP. Should TCC and TAC approve the document, it will become the draft TIP.



2

The Transportation Advisory Committee will publish the draft TIP for a 30-day public review and comment period. Each jurisdiction will have copies for review. At least one public hearing shall be held for the review of the TIP.

3

MPO staff shall receive, assemble, and present public comments to TCC and TAC during the public hearing outlined in step 2. Public comments will be addressed and considered in the TIP adoption. Written public comments will be published as an appendix to the TIP.



4

Following the hearing of all public comments, the TAC, the TIP may be approved at the discretion of the TAC by majority vote.





TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM AMENDMENTS AND MODIFICATIONS

1

Formal and Major amendments to the Transportation Improvement Program, defined additions or deletions of projects over \$2 million dollars, are subject to the following public involvement requirements.



2

TIP Amendments shall be made public and are subject to a 15 day public comment period.

3

Following the 15 day public comment period, amendments will be subject to TAC approval.



4

Any public comments received in reference to amendments shall be published in the TIP as an appendix.



5

Administrative modifications do not require documentation of public review or comment, re-demonstration of fiscal constraint, or a transportation conformity determination. Examples of administrative modifications can be found on page 17.



METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN & COMPREHENSIVE TRANSPORTATION PLAN

1

The Metropolitan Transportation will at minimum be subject to a 30-day public comment period, and require at least one public hearing for the plan. Comments will be received by the MPO contact person, whose phone number and email address will be included in the public comment notice. Comments will be compiled and presented to TCC and TAC.



2

To further encourage public involvement, MPO staff shall hold four (4) public outreach meetings. One meeting will take place in each county within the planning area (Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba).

3

To the extent feasible, these public meetings will be held at locations accessible to individuals with disabilities and along transit service routes.



4

Comprehensive Transportation Plan:
Typically, the GHMPO has elected to update the Comprehensive Transportation Plan in unison with the Metropolitan Transportation Plan.



5

When updated in unison with the MTP, the CTP shall be subject to all public involvement requirements applicable to the MTP.



UNIFIED PLANNING WORK PROGRAM

1

At the beginning of Planning Work Program Process, MPO staff will assess FHWA and Section 508 funding anticipated, and create a draft Planning Work Program in consultation with local jurisdictions.



2

The draft PWP will be made publicly available 7 days prior to the opening of a public comment period in the TCC agenda. The draft Planning Work Program will be reviewed by the TCC. TCC meetings are open to the public. If deemed appropriate, TCC will approve the document and forward to TAC.

3

The draft PWP will be reviewed by the TAC. Public comments may be provided at this time. If approved by TAC, the draft PWP is sent to the Public Transportation Division for comments.



4

The Final PWP comes back again to the TAC for final approval. Upon TAC approval, the PWP is then forwarded on to the State and FHWA/FTA





PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1

Public Involvement Plan:

At minimum, any amendment or update to the PIP is subject to a 45-day public comment period, and a public meeting, per (23 CFR 450.316 (3))



2

Performance Measures:

The MPO will seek public input via a 30-day public comment period when initially adopting performance measures. Subsequent amendments will be announced via the TCC and Board agenda packets seven (7) days prior to a meeting.





AIR QUALITY CONFORMITY DETERMINATION

1

The GHMPO, in conjunction with NCDOT will prepare an air quality conformity analysis for the GHMPO.

2

The GHMPO Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) 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 the draft Conformity report will be distributed to TAC members. Each jurisdiction will also have copies available for public review. Notices regarding the Air Quality Conformity Report will be publicized using the resources listed under "Regular Public Involvement & Standard Requirements". 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 download. This notification will be ADA compliant and will state that special provisions will be provided if 48 hours advance notice is given.

4

The public review period will be for a minimum of 21 days, effective from the date of public notice publication. Written comment will be received during the public comment period, and will be directed to the GHMPO. The GHMPO contact person, phone number, and email address will be included in the public notice.

5

The public comments will be assembled and presented to the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The TAC will hold at least 1 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. Should the final Conformity Report differ significantly from the draft report, i.e., new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen, the GHMPO will provide additional public comment opportunities.

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VIRTUAL PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization is committed to providing ample and convenient opportunity for stakeholders and the public to participate in the Transportation Planning process. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the GHMPO learned to implement flexible and technologically advanced methods to ensure public participation. The GHMPO is committed to the ongoing implementation of methods that increase public involvement.

The use of the virtual meeting software Zoom is the GHMPO's most commonly implemented tool. Virtual meetings allow elected officials, planning staff, and the public to participate conveniently. GHMPO will continue to use Zoom to enable virtual participation in large, formal meetings, i.e. monthly Technical Coordinating Committee and Transportation Advisory Committee meetings, and public hearings.

For smaller and less formal meetings, the GHMPO will accommodate virtual requests if provided a 48-hour notice.

To allow voting members of the Technical Coordinating Committee and Technical Advisory Committee, the GHMPO has implemented a standard approval process for each meeting, in which each committee approves virtual participation at the committee's discretion.

To ensure access to virtual meetings, the GHMPO will provide the Zoom meeting's online link to planning staff, elected officials, and those who wish to participate via recurring email. For public hearings and other meetings where virtual software is implemented, the link will be included in the Public Notice.

At this time, the GHMPO will not receive public comment through the "Chat" feature offered by Zoom meetings. Public comments should be submitted through the appropriate contact channels as listed on the public notice (email, phone, letter).

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PLANNING
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TITLE VI & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE STATEMENT

It is the policy of GHMPO, as a federal funding recipient, to ensure that no person shall, on the ground of race, color, national origin, Limited English Proficiency, sex, age, or disability, and low-income, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any of our programs and activities, as provided by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Orders 12898 and 13166, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, and other pertinent nondiscrimination authorities.

If you feel you have been subjected to discrimination, you may file a complaint. Allegations of discrimination should be promptly reported to our Title VI Coordinator. **Averi Ritchie,**
1880 2nd Ave NW, Hickory NC
averi.ritchie@wpcog.org
828.485.4248

The GHMPO Title VI Program Plan can be accessed at <https://www.wpcog.org/title-6> To respond to the ever-changing demographics of our population we must use a range of methods to reach all populations. The end goal is to involve minority, low-income and limited English proficiency populations in the transportation decision-making process. To accomplish this, we must solicit adequate, effective, and meaningful participation by understanding unique needs, cultural perspectives and financial limitations of different socioeconomic groups. The MPO will attempt to increase participation of these groups by translating public input documents into multiple languages and by holding multiple meetings as requested.

Additionally, 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 public comment period and public hearings will be advertised using the resources listed in “Regular Public Involvement & Standard Requirements”.

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Examples of Formal Amendments and Administrative Modifications

Formal Amendments

- **Change in a unique project phase cost beyond a predetermined threshold; increases in highway projects that exceed \$2 million of the original cost and may affect fiscal constraint and changes in transit projects that exceed \$1 million or 25% of the original project cost;**
- **Any addition or deletion of a federally funded project to the first four (4) years of the Program;**
- **Addition or deletion of any regionally significant project into the first four (4) years of the Program;**
- **Change in project design or scope that significantly changes the termini or project type, purpose or number of through lanes on a non-exempt (for transportation purposes) project;**
- **Any addition, deletion or significant modification of non-traditional funding source to a project (traditional sources of revenue include federal, state, or local government tax revenues. Non-traditional sources include state bonding and/or private participation);**
- **Project schedule shifts that move ROW, major capital acquisitions, or construction authorization dates either into or out of the first four (4) year STIP time window.**

Administrative Modifications

- **Any Change to Projects in years five (5) or later of the STIP;**
- **Minor change to project descriptions, scopes, sponsor funding;**
- **Minor cost increases in highway projects that do not exceed both \$2 million and 25% of the original project cost**
- **Addition or deletion of a state funded project that is determined to not be regionally significant**
- **An existing project or project segment (project break) is sub-divided into two (2) or more sub-segments without changing the overall scope or description and both pieces remain in the first four (4) year period of the approved STIP**
- **Schedule changes that move project authorization dates within the first four (4) year STIP time window and do not affect local air quality conformity findings;**
- **Funding source changes between traditional funding sources (i.e. substituting available Congestion Mitigation Air Quality funds for FTA Section 5307 formula transit funds);**
- **Projects approved for Emergency Relief funds do not generally have to be included in the STIP, so any changes made for emergency projects may be considered minor modifications.**