

Policy 5: Public Participation Plan

The following document constitutes the San Antonio-Bexar County Metropolitan Planning Organization's Public Participation Plan (PPP) as prescribed in SAFETEA-LU. This document has been issued for public comment for a period of not less than 45 days prior to formal adoption or revision by the Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Policy Board.

Guiding Principles for Public Participation

Federal transportation law states that an MPO will "... provide 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 disabled, and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the transportation plan." The MPO's public participation process must also adhere to the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Americans With Disabilities Act.

The following principles represent the core values of the MPO's public participation process:

1. People should have a say in transportation decisions that affect their lives.
2. The process should strive to reflect the interests and meet the process needs of participants.
3. The process will actively seek out and facilitate the participation of all those potentially affected.
4. The process will provide individuals with various options in how they wish to participate.
5. The process will provide usable information to permit the public's participation in a meaningful manner.

Given these principles, the MPO's Public Participation performance standards include:

1. Early, proactive and continuous public participation efforts;
2. Reasonable public access to understandable technical and other information;
3. Collaborative input on alternatives, evaluation criteria, and mitigation needs;
4. Open public meetings where matters related to transportation policies, programs, and projects are being considered;
5. Open access to the decision-making process prior to closure;
6. Commitment to seeking out and considering the needs of the traditionally underserved population(s)

Purpose of the Public Participation Plan

This Public Participation Plan (PPP) provides the guideline for public participation activities to be conducted by the San Antonio – Bexar County MPO. The PPP contains the goals and actions of the MPO for public participation in four areas:

1. Regular and special business meetings of the MPO and its advisory committees are conducted in an open public forum with prior notification and provisions for receiving

public comment according to Federal law and the Texas Open Meetings and Public Information Acts.

2. Development of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) include opportunities for public comment prior to adoption by the MPO.
3. Individual planning projects such as corridor studies have individual public participation components, including project-specific Public Participation Plans.
4. Ongoing updates of MPO activities are provided to the public in several ways, including a bi-weekly e-newsletter, a quarterly hardcopy newsletter and an Internet web site.

Public Participation Goals and Actions

Goal 1: The MPO will actively engage the public in the transportation planning process according to the goals and actions contained in this Public Participation Plan and State and Federal law.

1. The MPO will maintain a current database of contacts including at least the following:
 - a. Citizens expressing an interest in transportation planning activities.
 - b. Elected local, state and federal officials
 - c. Affected public agencies and staff
 - d. Representatives of public transportation employees
 - e. Providers of freight transportation services
 - f. Freight shippers
 - g. Private providers of transportation
 - h. Representatives of users of public transportation
 - i. Representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities
 - j. Representatives of the disabled
 - k. Local media outlets
 - l. Homeowner, neighborhood and resident associations
 - m. Civic and public interest groups
 - n. Business and trade organizations
 - o. City and academic libraries
 - p. Faith-based organizations
 - q. Community-based associations
 - r. Any other interested parties
2. The MPO will mail and/or e-mail meeting announcements and invitations to the MPO contact database or to other targeted groups for upcoming activities with reasonable lead time. For public meetings, announcements will also be placed in the local general circulation newspaper and media. Suitably sized announcements will be printed in both English and Spanish language publications.
3. All MPO meetings will be conducted in accordance with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) and are accessible to persons with disabilities. Arrangements for special assistance or an interpreter can be made by calling the Metropolitan Planning Organization office at (210)-227-8651, or Relay Texas at 1-800-735-2989 at least two (2) business days in advance. The meetings will also be within a reasonable distance of a VIA Metropolitan Transit route.

4. Public participation for a new Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) will include; opportunities for public comment at two Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings and two Transportation Policy Board (TPB) monthly meetings; three public listening sessions and posting the draft TIP for comment on the MPO website.
5. In conjunction with major updates of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), the MPO will host at least four (4) public meetings to involve interested parties in the early stages of the plan development. After a draft MTP has been developed and prior to Transportation Policy Board adoption, the MPO will host at least one (1) formal public meeting to solicit comments on the draft plan. A final draft MTP will be presented to the Transportation Policy Board with public comments received for consideration prior to adoption.
6. Routine amendments to the TIP occurring between annual updates require a two-step process. To permit adequate public review and comment, amendments to the TIP will be presented at a meeting of the Transportation Policy Board with action on the amendment occurring at the following Transportation Policy Board meeting (approximately 30 days after initial presentation). Amendments that delete or substantially change the scope of a project will be explicitly listed on both the presentation and action agendas for the Transportation Policy Board meetings.

Routine amendments to the MTP occurring between major updates also require a two-step process. To permit adequate public review and comment, amendments to the MTP will be presented at a meeting of the Transportation Policy Board with action on the amendment occurring at the following Transportation Policy Board meeting (approximately 30 days after initial presentation). Amendments to both documents may be initiated concurrently.

Amendments to the TIP or MTP requiring quick action due to impending federal or state requirements or deadlines (or for other reasons deemed in the community's best interest) may be accomplished by a 75% vote of the Transportation Policy Board quorum present to waive the routine two-step process. In these cases, the Transportation Policy Board will hold a special public hearing within their normal meeting agenda to specifically solicit public comment on the proposed amendment(s). These actions will be emphasized on the meeting agenda which is mailed ten (10) days prior to the Transportation Policy Board meeting thus permitting special public attendance to comment on the action prior to adoption by the Policy Board. Amendments that delete or substantially change the scope of a project will be explicitly listed on both the presentation and action agendas for the Transportation Policy Board meetings.

7. The MPO or lead agency will host at least one (1) formal public meeting to solicit comments on all alternative strategies to be considered in the early stages of any significant transportation study. After draft study results are reported to the Transportation Policy Board, at least one (1) formal public meeting will be held to solicit comments on the draft results. The final report will then be presented to the Transportation Policy Board for action and any comments received from the final public meeting will be presented. The minimum requirements of this public involvement process will be in effect for all significant transportation studies regardless of the lead agency.
8. All public input received by the MPO at public meetings will be documented in meeting summaries. This documentation along with any written comments received will be forwarded to the Study Oversight Committee, Technical Advisory Committee and the Transportation

Policy Board for consideration and appropriate action. Actions taken will be documented in official meeting minutes. When significant written and/or oral comments are received from the public on the draft TIP, MTP or significant transportation study a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of such comments will be made a part of the final documents.

9. In the event the Transportation Policy Board adopts a plan, project, program or study that is "significantly" or "substantially" different in form, content or value from that presented at the last public meeting for the subject, members of the public may request in writing that the Transportation Policy Board hold another public meeting for comment on the adopted version of the plan, project or program. If an additional public meeting is deemed necessary by the Transportation Policy Board, comments from that meeting will be duly recorded and provided to the Transportation Policy Board for additional consideration and a final decision on the matter.

Goal 2: The MPO will keep the public informed of transportation related activities on a continuous basis.

1. The MPO will publish a bi-weekly electronic newsletter for distribution to an electronic contact list. The newsletter will include updates on current or recently completed projects, announcements of upcoming meetings, other items of transportation interest and contact information.
2. The MPO will also publish a quarterly hardcopy newsletter for distribution to the contact mailing list and to the electronic contact list.
3. The MPO will make significant transportation publications and work products readily available to the public via the Internet, the Library system and the MPO office staff.
4. MPO staff will be available to provide general and project-specific information at a central location during normal business hours and after hours at the request of individuals or groups with reasonable notice.
5. The MPO will maintain an Internet web site. The web site will be updated and maintained to provide the most current information available. Other transportation agencies, transportation related businesses, local governments, and interested groups will be encouraged to provide a link to the MPO web site on their organization's web site. The web site will, at a minimum, contain the following information:
 - a. Contact information (mailing address, phone, fax, and e-mail)
 - b. Current MPO and advisory committee memberships
 - c. Meeting agendas and package materials
 - d. Brief descriptions of current projects and studies
 - e. Completed work products and publications
 - f. Bicycle and pedestrian program information and event schedules
 - g. Links to related agencies
6. The MPO will provide information for publication and distribution with newsletters and other publications produced by various special interest groups including, but not limited to:
 - a. Citizens expressing an interest in transportation planning activities.

- b. Elected local, state and federal officials
- c. Affected public agencies and staff
- d. Representatives of public transportation employees
- e. Providers of freight transportation services
- f. Freight shippers
- g. Private providers of transportation
- h. Representatives of users of public transportation
- i. Representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities
- j. Representatives of the disabled
- k. Local media outlets
- l. Homeowner, neighborhood and resident associations
- m. Civic and public interest groups
- n. Business and trade organizations
- o. City and academic libraries
- p. Faith-based organizations
- q. Community-based associations
- r. Traditionally underserved populations
- s. Any other interested parties

- 7. The MPO will produce an Annual Report for FHWA, FTA and TxDOT to report on activities completed each fiscal year and to document revenues and expenditures of the MPO.
- 8. Copies of materials are available at reproduction and postage costs consistent with the State of Texas Comptroller's policy. Copies of final documents and major updates of the Unified Planning Work Program, Transportation Improvement Program, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan and other major planning studies are posted on the MPO's website for public review.

Goal 3: The MPO will encourage the participation of all its study area residents, including those defined by FHWA as "traditionally underserved", in the transportation planning process and strive to ensure full and fair participation in the transportation decision making process by all potentially affected communities.

- 1. Target audiences will be identified for each planning study conducted by the MPO, including but not limited to:
 - a. Study area residents including "traditionally underserved" populations
 - b. Elected local, state and federal officials
 - c. Affected public agencies and staff
 - d. Representatives of public transportation employees
 - e. Providers of freight transportation services
 - f. Freight shippers
 - g. Private providers of transportation
 - h. Representatives of users of public transportation
 - i. Representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities
 - j. Representatives of the disabled
 - k. Local media outlets
 - l. Homeowner, neighborhood and resident associations

- m. Civic and public interest groups
 - n. Business and trade organizations
 - o. City and academic libraries
 - p. Faith-based organizations
 - q. Community-based associations
 - r. Any other interested parties
2. The MPO will attempt to hold public meetings at sites and times reasonably available and convenient to potentially affected citizens.
 3. The MPO will use mapping technology in conjunction with census data to identify areas with a concentration of minority or low-income populations. A concentration will be defined as:
 - a. A percentage of the population at the *census block group level* that exceeds 50% for all minority groups.
 - b. An average income at the *census block group level* that is at or below current Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines.
 4. The MPO will participate in meetings held in traditionally underserved areas.

Goal 4: The MPO will continuously strive to improve public participation.

1. The MPO will continuously evaluate public participation techniques.
2. This PPP will be reviewed and adopted, with revisions if necessary, at least every three (3) years.

Goal 5: The MPO will participate in the public participation efforts of other transportation agencies and organizations.

1. The MPO will actively assist local governments and transportation agencies in the development and implementation of public participation techniques for transportation planning and other related studies.
2. MPO staff will attempt to attend and participate in as many transportation partner public participation activities as is feasible to enhance public consideration of transportation issues, plans, and programs and to reduce redundancies and costs.

Public Participation Techniques

Public participation is an on-going activity of the MPO with numerous techniques occurring on a continuous basis. Public participation is also an integral part of one-time activities such as corridor studies and recurring activities such as the TIP process and Metropolitan Transportation Plan updates. This section contains descriptions of public participation tools currently used by the MPO. Additional tools used by other agencies are included to present a more complete picture of available techniques.

MPO Web Site

The site was established in 1998 with basic information about the MPO process, members, meeting times and contact information. The site has been expanded to include information about specific projects undertaken by the MPO. Bicycle, pedestrian and trails information and event schedules are also included. Work products such as the UPWP, TIP and MTP are available from the website. The site provides many links to other transportation related sites from the local to national level. The site is continually maintained and updated by MPO staff and is used to promote regular and special meetings, planning studies, bicycle and pedestrian events, publications and work products.

MPO Contact Database

MPO staff maintains a database of all contacts, both business and public, on a continuous basis. The database includes committee membership, mailing information, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail and internet addresses. The database is used for maintaining current committee membership lists, special interest groups and homeowners association contacts and the newsletter mailing list. Membership lists generated using the database are provided to the public, municipalities and other agencies on request. The database will be used to establish and maintain a list of e-mail contacts for electronic meeting notification and announcements.

Meeting Notices

The Texas Open Meetings Act requires notice of any public meeting where a decision could be made or that may be attended by more than one elected official. The MPO regularly posts MPO Transportation Policy Board (TPB), Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), Bicycle Mobility Advisory Committee (BMAC) and Pedestrian Mobility Advisory Committee (PMAC) meetings in the Texas Register and at the Bexar County Courthouse Bulletin Board and with Comal and Guadalupe counties.

MPO Newsletter

1. The MPO publishes an electronic newsletter on a bi-weekly basis and distributes it according to the database e-mail list. Citizens are added to the distribution list at their own request. Opportunities to be added to the list occur during public meetings hosted by the MPO, on the MPO web site, and when citizens contact MPO staff. Each issue of the newsletter includes staff contact information, upcoming meeting schedules, the MPO web site address, project highlights, and current planning project status reports. Information regarding significant transportation issues, MPO awards, and other one-time activities are also included.
2. The MPO also publishes a quarterly hardcopy newsletter that is mailed to the contact mailing list and e-mailed to the electronic contact list. Included are feature stories about the transportation planning process as well as ongoing studies, projects and issues.

Display Ads

These ads are used to promote meetings that are not regularly scheduled, such as corridor or subarea workshops, project specific meetings, open houses or hearings. They are published in the "Metro" section of the major circulation newspaper as well as in newspapers serving predominantly minority populations in order to reach a larger audience than those that typically read legal ads.

Project Newsletters

For individual projects, such as corridor or subarea studies, that are typically performed using consulting services, newsletters are often used to address specific project issues. These newsletters are mailed to targeted residents, businesses and property owners in the area affected by a particular

study. Information regarding upcoming project meetings, alternatives being proposed in the area, and other project news is reported in these newsletters.

Other Newsletters

When project-specific newsletters are not used, articles may be prepared for publication in other newsletters produced by municipalities, homeowner associations, church groups, civic groups, or others that may have an interest in the project. These articles are subject to the publication dates and space restrictions of the individual publishers.

Direct Mailings

These are used to announce upcoming meetings or activities or to provide information to a targeted area or group of people. Direct mailings are usually post cards (5 ½" x 8"), but can also be letters or flyers. An area may be targeted for a direct mailing because of potential impacts from a project. Groups are targeted that may have an interest in a specific issue.

Press Releases

Formal press releases are sent to local media (newspaper, TV and radio) to announce upcoming meetings and activities and to provide information on specific issues being considered by the MPO or their committees.

TV Message Board Scripts

Information about regular MPO Transportation Policy Board meetings, project-specific meetings, workshops, open houses, public hearings and other MPO events or activities meetings is provided to the government access cable channels.

Project-specific Web Sites

For individual projects, such as corridor studies, that are typically performed using consulting services, project-specific web sites may be used. These sites are used when project information is too extensive to be included on the MPO site. Project web sites can contain study area maps, meeting announcements, descriptions of potential alternatives, comment forms, user surveys and project team contact information. Links to project sites are provided on the MPO site.

Project Workshops/Open-Houses

These are public meetings that are generally open and informal, with project team members interacting with the public on a one-on-one basis. Short presentations may be given at these meetings. The purpose of project-specific meetings is to provide project information to the public and to solicit public comment.

Small Group Meetings

During projects such as planning studies, meetings are held with small groups that have an interest in the project. Meetings could be with homeowners or neighborhood associations, civic groups, special interest groups, or other groups of affected or interested parties.

E-mail Announcements/Internet Message Boards

Meeting announcements and MPO information is e-mailed to interested persons that have submitted their e-mail addresses to MPO staff. Interactive message boards may be used to facilitate discussion and solicit public comment regarding specific MPO projects or issues.

Citizen's Advisory Committees

Citizen Working Groups are formed for various MPO planning activities to provide input from citizens representing potentially affected areas or special interest groups. Individual members are normally appointed by elected officials in the study area. Neighborhoods and traditionally underserved groups with vested interests are also encouraged to join these committees. Typically, these groups meet several times throughout a study with the consultants, MPO and agency staff.

Fact Sheets

These are used to provide summary information regarding MPO policy, programs and projects. Fact sheets can be distributed at public meetings, posted on the MPO web site, and displayed in public places such as libraries and community centers. Individuals and special interest groups can also request fact sheets directly from the MPO staff office.

MPO Logo

A logo representing the MPO is used to identify products and publications of the MPO. The logo helps the public become familiar with the different activities of the MPO by providing a means of recognizing MPO products. The logo will be used on all MPO publications, including those developed by consultants working on MPO sponsored projects.

Revisions and Amendments

This Public Participation Plan reflects the current policies of the San Antonio-Bexar County MPO. At a minimum, these policies will be reviewed, revised if necessary and adopted every three (3) years.

Adopted: January 28, 2008