

MIDSTATE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT POLICY

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Midstate Regional Planning Agency, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the region, has a proactive public involvement policy. This policy provides opportunities for early and continuing public input in the transportation planning process, and also pursues involvement from communities affected by particular plans or projects. The goal of this policy is to assure the development of plans and programs are completed with ample opportunities for the public and affected communities to participate in their development.

The primary actions subject to this policy include planning activities such as the development of the long range transportation plan, corridor studies, and other special studies. These actions provide the basis for the programming activities such as the adoption and amendment of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and the programming of STP-Urban, Enhancement, and other federally funded projects.

1. Agency Meetings

- a. All meetings are held at 100 DeKoven Drive in Middletown, unless otherwise specified. The office is accessible to the disabled and equipped with a ramp on DeKoven Drive, and is also accessible by public transportation.
- b. All meeting notices and agenda are sent to municipal clerks, local newspapers, and interested parties. A yearly schedule of all regular meetings is filed with the Secretary of State.
- c. An opportunity to comment at each meeting is provided to the public.
- d. An interpreter for the hearing impaired can be made available if requested at least five working days prior to the meeting.
- e. An interpreter for Spanish, Italian, Polish, and French speaking persons can be made available if requested at least five working days prior to the meeting.
- f. Interested individuals or organizations may be added to the mailing list to receive copies of meeting notices and agenda. Interested parties may include but not limited to; government agencies, municipal officials, public interest organizations, neighborhood/community interest groups and traditionally underserved citizens. Additional information on the relationship of Environmental Justice (EJ) outreach and its relationship to MRPA's plans and programs is discussed in MRPA's Environmental Justice Program, dated October 2002.
- g. MRPA provides a meeting calendar and posts meeting agenda and minutes on its website.

2. Long Range Transportation Plan, Transportation Improvement Program, and Special Studies (Corridor Studies)

- a. A legal notice or display advertisement will be printed in local newspapers of general circulation advising that the draft plans are available for public review at MRPA office, local libraries, or at any of the eight member municipalities. The notice will include a statement that interpretations services are available with advanced notification. The advertisement will also be published in Spanish for draft plans and TIPs and for special studies when applicable.
- b. Notification of the LRP and TIP update process will be sent to interested parties and other parties on the expanded EJ mailing lists.
- c. A thirty-day public comment period will be given to receive comments regarding the draft plans and TIPs. The draft plans and TIPs shall be noticed with one public information meeting prior to adoption by the Agency. Written comments, and comments over the phone, are accepted at any time during the thirty-day public comment period. Comments received are logged, and responded with a phone call, or in writing. MRPA welcomes public input on all its plans and programs.
- d. If the final plans and TIPs differ significantly from the document which was made available for public comment by MRPA and raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen, then an additional opportunity for public comment will be made. All final plans and TIPs will have a section dedicated to a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments gathered during the public information meeting and comment period. This section will be shown as an appendix in the final document.
- e. Amendments to plans and TIPs are noted on meeting agendas and endorsed by the agency board. An opportunity to comment is provided is provided to the public at each meeting.
- f. Administrative Actions to the TIP involve a change to an approved project, such as a cost revision or change in funding year. Since the project is already approved, the action is brought to the attention of the involved party for comment when applicable, and endorsed by appropriate MRPA planning staff.
- g. The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) includes all the MPO's TIPs without modification and includes all transportation projects in non-metropolitan areas. MRPA makes available the draft STIP for public inspection and comment. MRPA also includes in its TIP public information meeting notice that an opportunity will be provided to discuss the draft STIP, with representatives of ConnDOT, at the public information meeting for the draft TIP.
- h. An annual list of projects for which federal funds have been obligated or placed under grant in the preceding year is made available for public review. The list shows regional, multi-regional, district, and statewide projects consistent with funding categories shown in the TIP/STIP. The list is noticed on the agenda of a regularly scheduled meeting of

MRPA's agency board.

3. Corridor Studies

- a. The advisory committee and public input is often key to obtaining the broadest view of citizens with a variety of concerns. The exchange of information between all involved parties (i.e., MRPA, consultant and advisory committee) and the public helps to initiate support for the study and its products. The public involvement activities provide a continuous information flow between all interested parties regarding the status and findings of the various tasks performed during the studies.
- b. MRPA will form an advisory committee composed of representatives of each town involved in the corridor. Each town will appoint its own representatives, and will be encouraged to allow representation from the following: board of selectmen or town council, planning & zoning, municipal staff, abutting property owners and local businesses.
- c. Additional efforts will be made to include a representative of minority and/or low income organization or affected community as a representative (s) on the advisory committee. Using cooperative methods agreed upon by all involved parties, the committee will work specifically with the minority and/or low income populations directly affected by the study.
- d. The advisory committee will meet regularly throughout the study to provide guidance on the development of alternatives, evaluation of alternatives, and the selection of the preferred alternative. Meeting notices will be sent to any person who requests that they be notified of advisory committee meetings.
- e. Public information meetings will be held at several stages during the study. Meeting notices will be sent to all persons on the corridor mailing list. The timing of meetings will vary with each study and will be held to allow early public input in the decision making process. Suggested meeting schedule:

Public information meeting 1: Existing conditions

Public information meeting 2: Review of alternatives

Public information meeting 3: Draft plan and preliminary recommendations

- f. Newsletters are published at each major stage of the study to keep the public informed of the status of the study. The mailing list will include the following:
 - Anyone who requests to have their name added
 - Abutting property owners
 - Planning and zoning commission
 - Board of selectmen or town council
 - Town planner and engineer
 - Economic development commission

- Inland wetlands commission
- MRPA agency board

4. Public Meeting Requirements for Section 5307 Grants

- a. The Middletown Transit District (MTD), the FTA Section 5307c applicant, has consulted with MRPA, and concurs that the public involvement process adopted by the MPO for the development of the TIP satisfies the public hearing requirements that pertain to the development of the Program of Projects for regular Section 5307, Urbanized Area Formula Program, grant applications including the provision for public notice and the time established for public review and comment.
- b. For FTA projects that are not routine, i.e. Section 5307 applications that require an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) the public involvement provided for herein for TIP review is not sufficient. Additional public involvement, as presented in the joint FHWA/FTA environmental regulations, 23 C.F.R. part 771 will be required by FTA for grant approval.

5. Public Information Meetings

- a. A legal notice or display advertisement, including agenda, of the public information meeting shall be sent to the municipal clerk in each municipality in the region for posting. This notice shall be sent at least 10-15 days prior to the meeting.
- b. Efforts are made to schedule public information meetings in locations accessible by public transportation.
- c. Public information meetings are held before adoption of the Long Range Transportation Plan, Transportation Improvement Program, and Special Studies.
- d. There shall be a thirty-day public comment period prior to making key decisions in the transportation planning process including, but not limited to approval of Final Plans and TIPs.
- e. A forty-five day public comment period shall be required when revisions are made to this policy; the public policy will be reviewed annually. In addition, the effectiveness of the process is reviewed after each meeting and methods to improve the process are discussed between involved parties.

6. Public and Stakeholder Outreach

- a. As part of the general planning and programming process MRPA attempts to involve the public, member municipalities affected public agencies, public transportation provides and other interested parties.

- b. As part of special studies MRPA attempts to involve those listed in section 6.a. of this document as well as persons, groups, and organizations potentially affected by the study
- c. Environmental Justice Outreach - As part of its Environmental Justice (EJ) program, MRPA attempts to involve and consider the needs of minority and low income households. Since these groups make up a small part of the region's population as can be noted in the MRPA's Minority and Low Income Populations document dated April 2003, there is no formal EJ Committee but one may be formed when EJ populations are affected by special studies or specific projects.
- d. Limited English Proficiency - As part of its Limited English Proficiency (LEP) program, MRPA attempts to involve and consider the needs of persons with LEP. The Linguistic Analysis of the Midstate Region document, dated October 2005, shows that only 1.5% of the regions population is affected but there is a small Spanish and Italian speaking population, and also some Polish and French speakers. MRPA provides meeting notices for the LRP, TIP and special studies in Spanish. Interpreters can also be available provided sufficient notice is given. Additional outreach may occur when LRP populations are affected by special studies or specific projects.

7. Federal Programs

- a. MRPA is responsible for selecting projects that receive funding from the STP-Urban program. These projects are reviewed and prioritized by the Agency Board. It is the responsibility of the project sponsor to submit a resolution in support of the project. A Project Selection Process and Ranking Criteria document is sent out with the application package and is used by the board to review and rank the projects. The board then prioritizes the projects and they are submitted to ConnDOT where preliminary design and cost estimates are begun. Once this is complete the sponsoring municipality holds a public informational meeting and thereafter the TIP is amended to add the project to the regions federal funded program.
- b. The STP-Enhancement program and FTA 5310 program goes through a similar process, where three projects or applications are reviewed and prioritized by the Agency Board based on a Project Selection Process and Ranking Criteria that is used by the board to review and rank the projects prior to submittal to ConnDOT.

8. Information Availability

- a. MRPA has staff available to the public Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM. All documents and meeting records are available to interested persons. The in-house library has a wide assortment of historical and current documents ranging from housing and land use to transportation and environmental. The planning agency is a designated Census Data Affiliate and has available hardcopy material from the 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2000 Census. The 1990 and 2000 Census is available on CD-ROM and customized reports can be produced on request. MRPA also maintains an extensive Geographic

Information System (GIS) database including land use, wetlands, zoning and soils.

- b. General information about transportation plans and programs is available on MRPA's website. The website also shows meeting dates, current publications, and links to other organizations and agencies. The website can be visited at www.midstaterpa.org.

9. Public Involvement Policy Revisions

- a. This policy is reviewed annually by MRPA in an effort to continually improve on its effectiveness, and to ensure the full access to all persons.