

Piedmont Triad Rural Transportation Planning Organization Public Involvement Policy (PIP)

Adopted August 10, 2005

Introduction

Effective public involvement promotes sound decision making by grounding policy in the community's values and priorities. Public participation in the transportation planning process is identified as one of the core duties of a Rural Planning Organization (RPO) in the state enabling legislation (NCGS 136-212), as well as a major component of federal transportation legislation.

The purpose of this document is to outline policies and guidelines for engaging the public in the transportation planning process in a consistent, comprehensive manner that meets or exceeds state and federal requirements. The policy is intended to meet the following objectives:

- Create opportunities for the public to be well informed about the transportation planning process and the RPO;
- Provide the public with ample, appropriate and meaningful opportunities to engage in the transportation decision making process;
- Increase the transparency and visibility of Piedmont Triad Rural Planning Organization (PTRPO) activities; and
- Satisfy the requirements of NCGS 136-212 and federal transportation legislation.

The actions, techniques and procedures outlined in this plan are intended to enhance, not preempt, the public involvement efforts of the North Carolina Department of Transportation or those of any local jurisdiction within the PTRPO.

Elements

Outreach and Education

An array of techniques and strategies have been identified by which the PTRPO may actively educate stakeholders and keep the public informed about the transportation planning process, specific transportation projects and the activities of the PTRPO. Acceptable public outreach strategies include, but are not limited to those described below.

- Notification of Meetings
Notice of all regular and special meetings of the PTRPO will be provided to PTRPO members, media outlets and upon request, to members of the public. Meeting dates, times and locations will be provided for inclusion on locally published community calendars, and posted on the PTRPO website.
- Newsletters
A newsletter apprising stakeholders of current issues related to the transportation planning process, PTRPO activities and NCDOT projects will be published and distributed twice a year, and posted on the PTRPO website.
- Publications
A variety of publications about the RPO, transportation planning or other special topics will be prepared by PTRPO staff as needed. Publications will be distributed to RPO members, stakeholders and the public, and posted on the PTRPO website.

- Website
The PTRPO will maintain a website to provide members, stakeholders and the public continual access to documents, publications, data and official PTRPO records.
- Press Releases and Media Alerts
Press releases and media alerts will be distributed to appropriate media outlets to notify the public of opportunities to participate in the transportation planning process, promote new publications, or inform the media of upcoming meetings.
- Partnerships with Local Jurisdictions
Working with the local jurisdictions within the PTRPO, presentations and materials may be tailored to meet specific local needs, and capitalize on opportunities for sharing information.
- Posting Official Documents in Public Locations
All official documents will be provided to applicable jurisdictions for posting in governmental buildings and public libraries. Additional locations may be identified based on local preferences and project scope.
- Open Houses
Open houses may be held from time to time to provide information on transportation projects or other PTRPO activities to the public in an informal setting. Rather than a fixed agenda and formal presentation, staff and PTRPO members will interact with the public in reviewing and explaining documents, maps and other transportation related materials.
- Speaker's Bureau
Presentations and other supporting materials for will be developed by PTRPO staff for use by members in speaking to civic groups and community organizations about the activities of the PTRPO, transportation planning, or specific projects upon request.

Opportunities for Input

The process for gathering input requires the provision of regular opportunities for identifying the views, opinions and ideas of individual stakeholders and groups served by the transportation planning process. Numerous opportunities are provided to the public to comment on the transportation planning process, specific transportation projects and the activities of the PTRPO, and described below.

- Public Meetings
All regular and special meetings of the PTRPO are open to the public, and time on each agenda will be provided for public comment.
- Public Hearings
A public hearing may be held by the PTRPO prior to taking formal action on certain planning documents.
- Surveys
Survey tools will be developed and deployed from time to time to gauge stakeholder opinions on specific transportation planning issues and projects. Survey content, distribution method and target population will depend on the specific survey goals.
- Workshops
Workshops may be held from time to time to permit small groups of stakeholders, local officials and PTRPO members to participate in facilitated discussions or charettes to provide feedback on specific topics or transportation issues.

- Focus Groups
Focus Groups may be convened from time to time to permit a small group of stakeholders to provide detailed feedback on a specific topic or transportation issue.

Implementation

The process of implementing appropriate methods for public involvement will require a range of staff time and resources. The procedures outlined below will guide PTRPO staff in identifying appropriate public involvement strategies based on the specific opportunity, special considerations and local needs.

Procedures

- Stakeholders and Special Populations

A stakeholder is any person or group who may potentially be impacted by a transportation planning process, program or project. These include:

- *The general public*
- *Local governments and other public agencies, including economic development commissions and regional organizations*
- *Business and industry organizations, including Chambers of Commerce*
- *Environmental organizations*
- *Neighborhood and community organizations*
- *Civic organizations*
- *Transit providers*
- *Freight carriers*
- *Taxicab providers*
- *Rail providers*

Stakeholder groups will be identified and included in outreach and input opportunities when appropriate. Special efforts will be made to involve traditionally under-represented groups in the transportation planning process. These efforts will include:

- *Identifying areas in the PTRPO with concentrations of elderly, low income or minority populations*
- *Distribution of notifications for meetings, open houses, public hearings and workshops to County health departments, senior centers and community centers*
- *Publication of documents in alternative languages when feasible*
- *Coordination with the Piedmont Triad Area Agency on Aging*

- Public Meetings

Notice of all regular and special meetings of the PTRPO will be provided to PTRPO members, media outlets and upon request, to members of the public. Meeting dates, times and locations will be provided for inclusion on locally published community calendars, and posted on the PTRPO website. Meeting agendas will include time for public comments.

- Public Hearings

Notice of public hearings will be provided according to state law, and provided to appropriate media outlets according to the scope of the hearing's subject matter.

- Document Review Period

Notice of official document review periods will be provided according to federal law, and provided to appropriate media outlets according to the scope of the document's subject matter. The notice will identify locations where the document may be viewed, and a contact for submitting written comments.

- Consideration of Input

Comments received from all public involvement activities will be documented and provided to the PTRPO for consideration. Input may be used to guide the Planning Work Program, Transportation Improvement Program priorities, and transportation planning activities. Input may also be provided to other transportation planning partners for their consideration in transportation projects and planning activities.

Documentation

Documentation of the public involvement process is required to demonstrate compliance with state and federal law, as well as to capture valuable input for use in the transportation planning process.

- Official records

The official records of the PTRPO, including meeting minutes, policies and procedures will be maintained at the offices of the Lead Planning Agency, and made available to the public for review during regular business hours. Where feasible, these records will be provided on the PTRPO website.

- Official files

The official files of the PTRPO, including public input summaries, presentations, publications and supporting materials will be maintained at the offices of the Lead Planning Agency, and made available to the public for review during regular business hours. Where feasible, these files will be provided on the PTRPO website.