

PUBLIC INTERACTION POLICY

POLICY STATEMENT

Public interaction is a federally mandated process of informing, educating and engaging stakeholders of MPO programs and the general public in the planning process activities for which the MPO is responsible. As a public agency which expends state and federal tax dollars, it shall be the policy of NOACA to proactively and conscientiously seek engagement with stakeholders to the transportation system planning process and the general public. The goal of public involvement engagements is to inform the public of the Agency activities and to facilitate their participation. Per this policy, NOACA will produce an annual plan which will describe the methods by which the Agency will engage, educate and inform stakeholders and the general public of the major programs, documented work products, decision processes and policies under consideration for the present year.

AUTHORITY

Federal Highway Administration Statutes - 23 CFR Parts 450 and 500

Federal Transit Authority Statutes – 49 CFR Part 613

United States Code, 49 CFR Part 21

PURPOSE

This Policy fulfills the federal mandate that requires an MPO to inform the public of its activities. To the greatest extent possible MPOs are to engage the public's input in the formation of major documents, programs, policies and decisions related to the planning activities. Through public education and engagement, the MPO can develop community consensus for the expenditure of public funds in support of managing the transportation system. Further the engagement process can be helpful in producing outcomes that are economically efficient and equitable.

CRITERIA

§ 450.316 Interested parties, participation, and consultation.

(a) The MPO shall develop and use a documented participation plan that defines a process for providing 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 reasonable opportunities to be involved in the metropolitan transportation planning process.

(1) The participation plan shall be developed by the MPO in consultation with all interested parties and shall, at a minimum, describe explicit procedures, strategies, and desired outcomes for:

(i) Providing adequate public notice of public participation activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points, including but not limited to a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposed metropolitan transportation plan and the TIP;

- (ii) Providing timely notice and reasonable access to information about transportation issues and processes;
- (iii) Employing visualization techniques to describe metropolitan transportation plans and TIPs;
- (iv) Making public information (technical information and meeting notices) available in electronically accessible formats and means, such as the World Wide Web;
- (v) Holding any public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times;
- (vi) Demonstrating explicit consideration and response to public input received during the development of the metropolitan transportation plan and the TIP;
- (vii) Seeking out and considering the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households, who may face challenges accessing employment and other services;
- (viii) Providing an additional opportunity for public comment, if the final metropolitan transportation plan or TIP differs significantly from the version that was made available for public comment by the MPO and raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen from the public involvement efforts;
- (ix) Coordinating with the statewide transportation planning public involvement and consultation processes under subpart B of this part; and
- (x) Periodically reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures and strategies contained in the participation plan to ensure a full and open participation process.

(2) When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft metropolitan transportation plan and TIP (including the financial plans) as a result of the participation process in this section or the interagency consultation process required under the EPA transportation conformity regulations (40 CFR part 93), a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments shall be made as part of the final metropolitan transportation plan and TIP.

(3) A minimum public comment period of 45 calendar days shall be provided before the initial or revised participation plan is adopted by the MPO. Copies of the approved participation plan shall be provided to the FHWA and the FTA for informational purposes and shall be posted on the World Wide Web, to the maximum extent practicable.

(b) In developing metropolitan transportation plans and TIPs, the MPO should consult with agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities within the MPA that are affected by transportation (including State and local planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, or freight movements) or coordinate its planning process (to the maximum extent practicable) with such planning activities. In addition, metropolitan transportation plans and TIPs shall be developed with due consideration of other related planning activities within the metropolitan area, and the process shall provide for the design and delivery of transportation services within the area that are provided by:

- (1) Recipients of assistance under title 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53;

(2) Governmental agencies and non-profit organizations (including representatives of the agencies and organizations) that receive Federal assistance from a source other than the U.S. Department of Transportation to provide non-emergency transportation services; and

(3) Recipients of assistance under 23 U.S.C. 204.

(c) When the MPA includes Indian Tribal lands, the MPO shall appropriately involve the Indian Tribal government(s) in the development of the metropolitan transportation plan and the TIP.

(d) When the MPA includes Federal public lands, the MPO shall appropriately involve the Federal land management agencies in the development of the metropolitan transportation plan and the TIP.

(e) MPOs shall, to the extent practicable, develop a documented process(es) that outlines roles, responsibilities, and key decision points for consulting with other governments and agencies, as defined in paragraphs (b), (c), and (d) of this section, which may be included in the agreement(s) developed under §450.314.

RESPONDING TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

- As a matter of record keeping for responding to public comments, NOACA will maintain a Public Information Request (PIR) Log maintained by Public Affairs. All public information requests, comments and hotline phone calls are transcribed and compiled in a daily communication log by project or interest.
- NOACA will respond to each question via email, phone call or U.S. Mail as it was requested via public comment.
- A Project Public Comment Log will be maintained by Public Affairs and sent to the Project Manager or appropriate parties for a response. Respondents are notified via email and/or U.S. mail that comments are logged for review. NOACA will continue with follow-up discussions until a common ground is reached toward decision making. All matters related to the feedback and comments are posted on the central website along with how to reach NOACA via staff email and phone number for a direct response and follow-up.
- Questions, comments and responses are placed on the public comment log and posted online after the comment period ends; all comments are placed in the project folder for retention record filing.

POLICY PRINCIPLES

- **Proactive Dissemination of Information**
NOACA will generally provide information in sufficient time such that general and targeted stakeholders will always have reasonable opportunity to consider information and provide feedback in time to be considered in the policy formation process
- **Timely Provision of Information to Facilitate Engagement**
NOACA will create a stakeholder engagement plan consisting of specific communication channels useful for NOACA to engage stakeholders in active and iterative communication process
- **Transparency**
NOACA will facilitate the clear understanding of programs, processes and decisions by all stakeholders through both general and specific means. The goal is the provision of

information such that an interested stakeholder can understand NOACA's work at their desired level of detail

- **Engagement of Stakeholders**
NOACA will seek the engagement of stakeholders and facilitate their engagement by creating consistent channels of information flow and engagement activity such that stakeholders will be afforded multiple opportunities to learn, discuss, comment and otherwise participate in the development of NOACA's work
- **Information Provided in Context**
NOACA's work often facilitates other activities, especially land use development. In order to provide a full and complete understanding, NOACA must communicate on the associated and potential outcomes of its planning efforts
- **Accessibility**
NOACA will structure and communicate information in ways that are easily understandable and consumable and therefore accessible to the widest possible audience. NOACA will also create communication channels to specific groups of stakeholders whose judgements and discretion should be considered in the formation and implementation of policies

POLICIES

NOACA will create an annual participation plan to engage its stakeholders and other interested parties in the metropolitan transportation planning process. The participation plan will include various communication channels to ensure that stakeholders have multiple opportunities to learn, discuss, comment and otherwise participate in the development of NOACA's work.

NOACA's goal is to provide information so that stakeholders and interested parties can understand NOACA's work at their desired level of detail. Therefore, NOACA will structure and communicate information in ways that are easily understandable and therefore accessible to the widest possible audience.

NOACA will use Census data and mapping to identify and include those who are traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including individuals with limited English proficiency. NOACA will also make every effort to arrange for translation, sign language or other special assistance at meetings for individuals with limited English proficiency or other special needs.

NOACA will also use various communication techniques, including visualization, to facilitate the clear understanding by stakeholders and other interested parties of its programs, processes, projects, major planning documents and decisions. NOACA will use a variety of communications methods, such as the internet, social media, print, etc., to disseminate information.

NOACA will provide information in sufficient time so that stakeholders and other interested parties will have reasonable opportunity to consider information and provide feedback in time to be considered in policy formation and the development of projects and major planning documents.

NOACA will ensure that any public meetings, open houses, etc., it holds are at convenient times and in locations that are ADA-accessible.

NOACA will consider the public input it receives regarding its policies and major planning documents. NOACA will respond to the person who provided the input if he/she provides contact information. When significant comments are received on major planning documents, such as the long-range transportation plan and TIP, a summary of the disposition of the comments will be included in the final document.

NOACA posts draft documents to its website for public review and comment. If the final version of the long-range transportation plan or Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) changes significantly from the draft version, the proposed final version will be posted to the website for public review and comment.

NOACA will seek public comment on its participation plan for at least 45 calendar days before adopting it. Copies of the final, approved plan will be posted on its website and sent to the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration.

NOACA coordinates its planning efforts with other planning organizations, such as the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) and communities within its jurisdiction, following its Project Planning Review, intergovernmental review and consultation, and public involvement processes.