

Nashua Regional Planning Commission Metropolitan Planning Organization

Public Involvement Process For Transportation Planning



NASHUA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

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PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

1.0 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 PURPOSE

Federal rules pertaining to the metropolitan transportation planning requirements contain specific minimum requirements for public involvement in transportation planning. Every Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) must develop, adopt and implement formalized procedures for effective community participation to be used during the development or updating of a Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) or Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The following process is intended to ensure effective public involvement in the NRPC's transportation planning activities and to comply with applicable federal rules.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

The principal objectives of the NRPC's public involvement processes are:

- to seek input from a wide variety of individuals, groups and organizations affected by the transportation system;
- to establish public involvement early in the planning process, before key decisions are made; and
- to develop transportation plans, programs and projects which reflect local, regional and state priorities and consider a range of transportation options
- to satisfy the Nashua Transit System public participation process for the program of projects.

2.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT STANDARDS

The federal rules governing metropolitan planning for transportation specify minimum standards which the NRPC's public involvement process must strive to achieve (23 CFR 450.316(b) (i-xi)). These standards form the basis of the criteria that will guide the NRPC in carrying out its public involvement process.

- Require a minimum public comment period of 45 days before the public involvement process is initially adopted or revised.
- Provide information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, affected public agencies, private providers of transportation and other interested parties and segments of the communities affected by transportation plans, programs and projects.
- Require up to 30 days public notice for public review and comment at key decision points, including, but not limited to, amendments to, and approval of the MTP and TIP.
- Consider the needs of those who are commonly underserved by existing transportation systems, including households with low income, minority and disabled individuals when applicable.
- Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to the public input received during the planning and program development public hearing processes.

- Provide the opportunity for additional public comment, prior to adoption, whenever substantive changes are made to a proposed draft MTP or TIP after it is released for public comment.
- Coordinate the MPO public involvement process with the statewide public involvement process wherever possible to enhance public consideration and understanding of the issues, plans and programs.
- Review and self-certify that this public involvement process is being followed and is effective in meeting the purpose, objectives and criteria set forth herein.
- Ensure that all meetings concerning MPO business be open to the public and held in accessible locations that can accommodate the needs of the disabled and that the provisions of RSA 91-A (Access to Public Records and Meetings) are followed.

2.1 OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Various techniques will selectively be used to provide information and solicit public comment. Some examples of public participation methods are briefly described below.

2.1.1 Informational Brochures or Newsletters

Informational brochures, postcards and newsletters may be used by the NRPC to convey information regarding current planning activities and news about the region. Brochures, flyers or postcards may be prepared for plan or program updates and to provide an overview of planning activities.

2.1.2 Electronic Mailing Lists

NRPC actively maintains an electronic mailing list database to facilitate communication with members and interested parties. Using mailing lists, NRPC reaches target audiences with announcements of upcoming events, meeting information, newsletters, summary reports and other information about agency activities.

2.1.3 Video and Other Media Outlets

Videos may be produced and distributed to local cable access channels and made available on the NRPC web site. Other media strategies include the use of press releases, legal ads, newspaper articles and, when feasible, television and radio outlets may be used.

2.1.4 Targeted Neighborhood Meetings

NRPC uses targeted neighborhood meetings to provide a greater level of detail to specific neighborhoods that may be acutely impacted by a plan or project. Residents of a specific neighborhood may be contacted by mail, email, phone or hand delivered fliers to notify them of a meeting. While the targeted neighborhood meetings are open to the public, a broad based advertisement may not be used.

2.2 STRATEGIES TO REACH UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS

NRPC is proactive regarding public outreach to underrepresented populations, including minority and low-income residents and transit-dependent individuals. Methods include:

- Participating in special interest groups such as Transit Matters;
- targeted neighborhood meetings;

- providing translation services;
- recruiting advocates to participate in planning processes;
- contact with local government planners, staff and elected officials; and
- targeted mailings and bilingual questionnaire distribution.

2.2.1 Partnering with other agencies and events

NRPC may partner with other community organizations to set up public outreach displays and materials on specific planning projects at public meetings or other community events.

2.2.2 Public Workshop Meetings

Public meetings using a workshop format may be used to disseminate information, provide a setting for public discussion, and gather feedback from the community. The meetings will be structured in an open house format allowing participants to interact with project or planning staff one on one or in small groups. Plan or project exhibits will be displayed and available for review by the public. The open house session may be preceded or followed by a formal presentation by project or plan staff. Workshops will be held at key points in the planning or project development process. They may be tailored to specific issues or community groups and may be informal or formal.

2.2.3 Surveys and Questionnaires

NRPC may use surveys to gather information for major updates to planning documents and projects. The method of data collection varies by project, but may include in-person interviews, paper survey mailings, professionally administered surveys and web-based questionnaires.

2.2.4 Visualization Techniques

NRPC will implement visualization techniques designed to convey to the public, through visual media, information important in the transportation planning process. This might include regional maps showing project location and anticipated changes to the transportation system. It could also include simpler techniques such as renderings or photo simulations to show a widened roadway or bridge in context; flow charts to clearly depict the transportation planning process; or graphs related to distribution of project funding. Visualization can be made available through direct mail, presentations at public meetings or via the World Wide Web.

2.2.5 Web Site and Social Media

Improvements will be made continually to the NRPC web site (www.nashuarpc.org) to keep the public informed about planning activities and to offer another way to provide comments. The NRPC website includes a calendar of meetings, agendas and meeting minutes; links to regional demographic, and traffic data; downloadable versions of planning documents, and extensive GIS/mapping content. Social Media will be phased in as the technology becomes more mainstream and reliable.

2.3 LIST OF INTERESTED AND AFFECTED PARTIES

The NRPC shall develop and maintain a list of interested and affected parties whose input will be actively sought in the Plan development process. This list will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- boards of Selectmen and Aldermen and Town Council;

- planning boards, traffic committees, public works officials/road agents;
- public and private transportation providers;
- human service agencies with paratransit-eligible clients;
- representatives from adjacent MPO's;
- organizations concerned with economic development;
- members of the state legislature representing NRPC communities;
- appropriate state and federal agencies, including the NHDOT, NHDES- Air Resources Division, FHWA, FTA, FAA and EPA;
- organizations and interest groups within the region with a demonstrated interest in transportation issues;
- existing members of the MPO Transportation Technical Advisory Committee not included in the above list; and
- contacts from the local news media.

This list will be used to keep organizations, groups and agencies informed about the development of the Transportation Plan and to notify them about specific opportunities for public involvement.

2.4 PUBLIC REVIEW OF PLANNING DOCUMENTS:

Copies of the draft plan updates for the MTP and TIP documents are made available electronically through the NRPC website. Links to the document will be distributed through email to the list of interested parties. Paper copies will be available upon request or may be reviewed at the NRPC office, City of Nashua Library and Town of Milford Library.

2.5 PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

The MPO will determine the length of the public comment period through an interagency consultation process. For each amendment the MPO will recommend a length for the public comment period between 10 and 30 days.

For the update that is processed on a two year cycle concurrent with New Hampshire's Ten Year Plan update cycle, the public comment period will be 30 days at a minimum.

For amendments, the recommendation will be based on various factors including the magnitude of the changes being proposed, the relative sensitivity of the projects included, and any factors that require timely actions, e.g. emergencies, federal lapses, etc. After the public comment period ends, the draft documents along with the summary of comments are presented to the Technical Advisory Committee and Policy Committee for the final adoption process.

The table below provides public participation requirements for the adoption or amendment of the listed transportation planning documents.

Planning Document or Activity	Public Participation Requirements
Metropolitan Transportation Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Publish a Notice of Intent to update the LRTP ○ Copies of the draft MTP will be made available ○ Public notice of comment period and Public Hearing through local newspaper, the NRPC website, social media and electronic mailing to interested parties list. ○ Public Informational Meeting (TTAC) ○ Up to a 30 Day Public Comment Period ○ Public Hearing at the NRPC Commission Meeting
Transportation Improvement Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Copies of the Draft TIP will be made available ○ Public notice of comment period and Public Hearing through local newspaper, the NRPC website, social media and electronic mailing to interested parties list. ○ Public Informational Meeting (TTAC) ○ Up to a 30 Day Public Comment Period ○ Public Hearing at the NRPC Commission Meeting
Air Quality Conformity Determinations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Concurrent with the adoption or amendment of the TIP and MTP, The Air Quality Conformity Determination will be noticed through local newspaper, the NRPC website, social media and electronic mailing to interested parties
Public Participation Plan Adoption or Modification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public Notice of Comment Period and Hearing ○ Public Information Meeting via TTAC ○ 45 Day Public Comment Period ○ Public Hearing and adoption at the NRPC Commission Meeting

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