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4.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

4.1 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

Purpose

New federal rules pertaining to the metropolitan planning requirements of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) contains specific minimum requirements for public involvement in transportation planning.

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

Objectives

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

- to actively seek out input and involvement from a wide variety of individuals, groups and organizations affected by the transportation system;
- to establish effective public involvement early in the planning process, before key decisions are made and while there is ample opportunity to affect decisions;
- to promote informed public input into decision making by providing timely access to needed information;
- to fully consider and respond to public input;
- to develop transportation plans, programs and projects which reflect local, regional and state priorities and consider a range of transportation options.

4.2 PERFORMANCE CRITERIA FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The federal rules governing metropolitan planning for transportation specify minimum standards which the NRPC's public involvement process must achieve (23 CFR 450.316). These requirements form the basis of the criteria that will guide the NRPC in carrying out its public involvement process. That process will comply with or exceed the following standards:

- Require a minimum public comment period of 45 days before the public involvement process is initially adopted or revised.
- Utilize the World Wide Web as a means to provide access to all applicable public information described in this plan.
- Provide timely 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.
- Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of the Transportation Plan and TIP and open public meetings where matters related to the federal-aid highway and transit programs are being considered.
- Require a minimum of 30 days public notice for public review and comment at key decision points, including, but not limited to, approval of the Transportation Plan and TIP.
- Employ visualization techniques to describe the content of the Long Range Transportation Plan and TIP.
- Provide timely notice of public involvement opportunities, including notification of the local news media and direct notification of interested parties identified in the process.

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- Seek out and consider the needs of those who are commonly underserved by existing transportation systems, including households with low income, minority and disabled individuals.
- 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 Long Range Transportation Plan 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. Include agencies responsible for other planning activities within the MPO that are affected by transportation (23 CFR 450.316(b)).
- 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.

4.3 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION METHODS AND OUTREACH

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

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.

Mailing Lists

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

NRPC-TV and other Media Outlets

NRPC actively develops informational and educational video through the NRPC-TV program. Videos are 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.

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 contact 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.

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;

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

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.

Public Workshop Meetings

Public meetings using a workshop format will 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.

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.

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.

Web Site

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.

4.4 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;
- planning boards, traffic committees, public works officials/road agents;
- public and private transportation providers;
- Traffic Safety and Enforcement Agencies
- human service agencies with low income, elderly and paratransit-eligible clients;
- representatives from adjacent MPO's;
- organizations concerned with economic development;
- members of the state legislature representing NRPC communities;

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- 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;
- 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.

4.5 LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN DEVELOPMENT

During the development or updating of the NRPC's Transportation Plan, the following elements and procedures shall be utilized as part of the public involvement process:

Public Notification of Transportation Plan Development

The NRPC shall provide notice to the public of the intent to develop or update the Long Range Transportation Plan at the start of the development process. This notice shall be published in at least one newspaper of general circulation in the region, posted in the Town or City Halls of each community in the region and sent to those interested groups and agencies included on the list of interested and affected parties. Other forms of public notice such as the World Wide Web, press releases and newspaper articles may also be used by the NRPC.

The notice shall include at least the following information: a brief description of the anticipated planning process and action to be taken; how the Transportation Plan may affect the region; a general schedule of the Transportation Plan development or amendment; an explanation of what opportunities there will be for public comment and participation and an NRPC contact for obtaining further information.

Public Informational/Discussion Meetings

During the development of the Transportation Plan the NRPC will hold at least one public informational meeting to discuss aspects of the Transportation Plan, including transportation system deficiencies, alternative solutions, project priorities and other issues.

Public notice for these meetings shall be published in at least one newspaper of general circulation in the region, posted in the Town or City Halls of each community in the region and sent to those on the list of interested and affected parties at least 10 days prior to the meeting.

Public Hearing on Draft Plan

Upon completion of the draft Transportation Plan, the NRPC shall schedule a public hearing on the document. Those identified on the list of interested and affected parties shall be notified and offered the opportunity to participate in and/or offer comment. The purpose of the hearing will be primarily for the NRPC to collect comments regarding the content of the Draft Plan.

A public notice of the hearing shall be published, posted and distributed in the manner noted above. The notice will encourage the submission of written comments by those unable to attend the hearing. A comment period of 30 days beginning from the date of the hearing notice shall be provided during which comments may be submitted for consideration. The draft Transportation Plan shall be made available for inspection at the time of the hearing notice. Copies of the Transportation Plan shall be made available at accessible locations including the NRPC office and up to four other publicized locations throughout the region. A copy of the Long Range Transportation Plan will also be made available on the World Wide Web.

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At the hearing, the NRPC shall present the information developed and receive comments regarding the contents of the draft Transportation Plan. A handout will be made available to all meeting attendees, summarizing the contents of the Draft Plan. A brief presentation will be given by the NRPC to explain the contents of the Plan. Comments will be solicited and NRPC staff will document all substantive comments received during the proceedings.

Preparation of Final Plan

Using the public input gained from the previous steps, the NRPC will prepare the final Transportation Plan. If substantive written or oral comments are received on the draft Transportation Plan, either through the public involvement process or through the interagency consultation process, a summary, analysis and reporting of the disposition of those comments shall be included in the final Transportation Plan.

If the final Plan contains substantive changes from the one which was made available for public comment, or raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen from the public involvement efforts, the NRPC shall provide for an additional duly noticed public comment period on the revised draft Plan of not less than 10 days.

The final Plan shall include documentation and support for its comments, a summary of all public comments received and NRPC responses and the public involvement process implemented in its development. The final Plan must be made available to the public for review. The NRPC shall provide one copy of the final Plan to each town/city hall and each public library in the region and maintain a library of additional copies for lending to interested parties. A public notice of availability shall be distributed to the organizations on the list of interested and affected parties.

4.6 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCEDURE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TIP

General

When developing the TIP, the NRPC shall follow the same public involvement procedures as described for the Transportation Plan, except that the following additional steps pertaining to project selection criteria shall apply whenever changes in the criteria are proposed.

Development of Project Selection Criteria

The development or substantive change in the NRPC's project selection criteria shall be subject to the public participation process. Whenever a change in the selection criteria is proposed, it should be accomplished early in the TIP development process. Project selection criteria, which define the process, procedures and criteria which will be used to select projects for the TIP, shall be developed in consultation with the TTAC, the NHDOT, NHDES Air Resources Division and other agencies and organizations as deemed appropriate. Prior to adoption of new or revised project selection criteria, it shall be subject to public review and comment through the public hearing process and carried out in the manner prescribed by that process.

Concurrent Plan and TIP Development

At its discretion, the NRPC may choose to develop the TIP concurrently with the Plan. If developed concurrently, no separate public involvement procedures shall be required for the TIP, except as specified under Project Selection Criteria.

4.7 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS FOR AMENDING PLANS AND TIPS

Public Notice and Public Hearing on Amended Plans and TIPS

The NRPC shall schedule a public hearing on any amendment to the Plan or Full Amendment to the TIP meeting the criteria described in appendix C of this document. Individuals and organizations identified on

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the list of interested and affected parties shall be notified and offered the opportunity to participate and offer comments.

A public notice of the hearing shall be published, posted and distributed in the manner previously described. The notice shall include at least the following information notice to the public of the intent to amend the Plan or TIP; a brief description or summary of the amendment(s) proposed and actions to be taken; why the amendment is being proposed; an explanation of what opportunities there will be to receive public comment, details of the hearing itself including date, time and location; and an NRPC contact for obtaining further information.

A comment period of 30 days beginning from the date of the hearing notice shall be provided during which comments may be submitted for consideration. The draft Transportation Plan or TIP amendments shall be made available for inspection at the time of the hearing notice. Copies of the TIP or Transportation Plan amendments shall be made available at accessible locations including the NRPC office and up to four other publicized locations throughout the NRPC area. A .copy of the proposed amendment will be placed on the World Wide Web.

At the hearing, the NRPC shall present the amendment(s) and receive comments regarding them. A handout will be made available to all meeting attendees summarizing and explaining the amendment(s). NRPC staff will document all substantive comments received during the proceedings. All substantive written comments received will be acknowledged and responded to in the document.

Changes to the TIP and plan that meet the criteria in appendix C for Administrative or Informational Amendments may move forward without a public participation process.

Preparation of Final Transportation Plan or TIP Amendments

If substantive written or oral comments are received on the proposed amendments, either through the public involvement process or through the interagency coordination process, a summary, analysis and reporting of the disposition of those comments shall be included in the final amendment to the Transportation Plan or TIP.

If the final amendment will contain substantive changes from the one which was made available for public comment, or raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen, the MPO shall determine if another opportunity for public comment should be provided.

The final amendments to the Transportation Plan or TIP shall include a summary of all public comments received and NRPC responses. The final amendments to the Transportation Plan or TIP shall be made available to the public. The NRPC shall post the final TIP and Long Range Transportation Plan on the World Wide Web. A public notice of availability shall be published and distributed to the individuals and organizations on the list of interested and affected parties.

The table below provides a quick reference for the minimum public participation requirements in the transportation planning process.

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PLANNING DOCUMENT OR ACTIVITY	PUBLIC PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS
Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ NRPC must publish a Notice of Intent to update the LRTP ○ Copies of the draft LRTP will be made available ○ Public notice of comment period and Public Hearing through local newspaper, the NRPC website and electronic mailing to interested parties list. ○ Public Informational Meeting (TTAC) ○ 30 Day Public Comment Period ○ Public Hearing at the NRPC Commission Meeting
Transportation Improvement Program Adoption	<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 and electronic mailing to interested parties list. ○ Public Informational Meeting (TTAC) ○ 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 LRTP, The Air Quality Conformity Determination will be noticed through local newspaper, the NRPC website and electronic mailing to interested parties.
TIP AND LRTP AMENDMENTS	
Full Amendments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Copies of the proposed amendment will be made available according to the NRPC PPP. ○ Public notice of comment period and Public Hearing through local newspaper, the NRPC website and electronic mailing to interested parties. ○ Public Informational Meeting via TTAC ○ 30 Day Public Comment Period ○ Public Hearing and adoption at the NRPC Commission Meeting
Administrative Modifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public Informational Meeting via TTAC ○ Public Comment Period Not Required ○ Public Hearing Not Required
Informational Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public Informational Meeting via TTAC ○ Public Comment Period Not Required ○ Public Hearing Not Required
OTHER PLANNING DOCUMENTS	
Specialized Plan Elements (Safety, Freight, Transit, Bike Pedestrian, Roads & Highways)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public Notice of Comment Period and Hearing ○ Public Information Meeting via TTAC ○ 30 Day Public Comment Period ○ Public Hearing and adoption at the NRPC Commission Meeting
Technical Corridor Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public Informational Meeting via TTAC ○ Public Comment Period Not Required ○ Public Hearing Not Required
UPWP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public Informational Meeting via TTAC ○ Public Comment Period Not Required ○ Public Hearing Not Required ○ Adoption via NRPC Commission Meeting
Public Participation Plan	<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