

Public Involvement Plan

Triangle Area Rural Planning Organization



August 2015

I. Purpose

Public involvement is a very important component of the rural planning organization input and decision-making processes. Public involvement is synonymous with the term “public participation.” It is specifically identified in the enabling state legislation (NCGS 136-212) as being among the core duties and responsibilities of rural planning organizations in North Carolina. It is also recognized as a necessary element of the transportation planning process in major federal surface transportation legislation and regulations. This federal legislation includes the 2012 Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990. Public involvement has also been recognized in a 1997 federal executive order pertaining to environmental justice assurances. These assurances protect low-income and minority populations from bearing disproportionate impacts resulting from transportation decisions. Effective public involvement will promote sound decision making and will support the achievement of desirable rural transportation planning goals.

The purpose of the Triangle Area Rural Planning Organization (TARPO) Public Involvement Plan is to provide policy and guidance for engaging the public in the rural transportation planning process. The plan has the following objectives:

- Create a well-informed public that contributes to transportation decision making in a timely and meaningful way;
- Gain the support and trust of the public;
- Engage the public early and continuously in the rural transportation planning process;
- Develop a public education program for increased public awareness of TARPO activities;
- Fulfill the specific requirements of NCGS 136-212 relative to information dissemination and public participation; and
- Assist the TARPO staff in developing specific transportation projects that reflect the needs and interests of the member organizations and communities.

The plan is not intended to preempt any public involvement and participation activities of the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) or those of any local governments within the TARPO region.

II. Elements of Public Involvement

II-A. Public Outreach

Public Outreach is the process of informing the public about the rural transportation planning process, specific transportation projects, and the activities and special events of TARPO. Typical public outreach strategies may include:

- Identification of Stakeholders

A stakeholder is any formal organization, group, or individual who is affected by a rural transportation plan, program, or project. Stakeholders represent diverse interests and may include:

- The general public
- Local governments
- Business or industry organizations, such as Chambers of Commerce
- Economic Development Corporations/Commissions
- Environmental organizations or groups
- Conservation organizations
- Historic preservation organizations
- County transportation committees
- Neighborhood organizations or groups
- Civic organizations
- Public agencies
- Public transit providers
- Private transportation providers (e.g. taxi services)
- Transit users
- Motor freight carriers
- Bicycle and pedestrian groups
- Community organizations that work with disadvantaged populations (elderly, disabled, minority, low-income)

Stakeholder groups will be identified as needed to suit the purposes of specific projects or plans, for example in developing project steering committees. TARPO staff will also maintain an email list of any citizens or stakeholder groups who request to receive information on meetings, public hearings, public comment periods, and the publication of major planning documents.

- Press Releases

TARPO may periodically issue press releases announcing significant actions or events. These actions and events may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Adoption of Planning Work Programs
- Adoption/endorsement of Comprehensive Transportation Plans

- Adoption of Project Prioritization (Strategic Transportation Investments – STI) items, such as project submittal lists or local input point assignments
- Election of RTCC and RTAC officers
- Adoption of Annual RTCC and RTAC meeting calendar
- Adoption of other plans, policies, or resolutions, as appropriate

All press releases will be reviewed by the chair or vice-chair of the TARPO RTAC prior to issuance. TARPO staff will maintain an email list of media contacts in the area, including print, radio, and television outlets.

- Open Houses

Open houses may be held to provide information on transportation plans and projects, or to provide information to the public on other TARPO technical activities. Open houses are typically conducted in an informal setting without fixed agendas or formal presentations. Planning documents, project maps, and other transportation related information would be displayed. TARPO staff and RTCC/RTAC members would be available during the open houses to provide details and to answer questions.

- Posting of Planning Documents

There are certain planning documents that represent key products, milestones, and decisions for TARPO and its member organizations. These planning documents include Comprehensive Transportation Plans, Planning Work Programs, Locally Coordinated Human Service Transit Plans, Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans, Project Prioritization Policies or Methodologies, and Project Lists/Point Assignments related to the Strategic Transportation Investments process. Copies of the draft (when available) and final versions of these documents will be posted on the TARPO website (or linked, when posted by another organization such as NCDOT or a local government). The documents may also be posted by TARPO member governments on their individual websites. Upon request, hard copies will be made available for posting in public libraries or other public locations.

- Notification of Meetings

Notification of TARPO RTAC and RTCC meetings will be sent to local news media (print, radio, television, cable) and County Public Information Officers where applicable in the region. These notifications will generally be made by electronic means, although other methods may be used as appropriate. TARPO staff will maintain an email list for this purpose, and will add to the list any media outlet that requests addition. Additionally, TARPO staff will provide electronic notification to citizens/stakeholders who request to receive these notifications, or who provide contact information to TARPO.

Email notifications must be sent out at least one week in advance of regularly-scheduled RTCC and RTAC meetings, and two weeks in advance of non-regularly-scheduled meetings.

In addition, upcoming meeting dates must be posted on the TARPO website, and meeting agendas should be posted to the website once available.

- Presentations to Civic Organizations and Local Transportation Committees

Occasionally, presentations may be made to interested civic organizations on TARPO activities and special events, the rural transportation process, or specific transportation projects. These presentations would be made by TARPO staff, NCDOT staff, or other transportation professionals, and would be informational in nature.

At minimum, bi-annual presentations or discussions will be held with the County Transportation Committees within each county, to receive input on the important elements and products of the transportation planning process. These will focus on the long-range planning efforts of TARPO, including Comprehensive Transportation Plans, STI project prioritization, Planning Work Programs, and other planning efforts, and will serve as a sounding board for new ideas, plans, and procedures.

- Outreach to Environmental Justice/Title VI Communities

Public outreach activities will also include efforts to involve traditionally-underserved groups—including minority, elderly, disabled, and low-income persons—in the transportation planning process. These efforts will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Identifying communities and other areas in the TARPO region with concentrations of underserved populations, based on the mapping of available Census and American Community Survey data
- Including organizations that deal directly with underserved communities on project/plan stakeholder lists or email lists
- Posting notifications of meetings and events in the County Senior Citizen Centers
- Ensuring that TARPO meetings are held in ADA-accessible facilities and that reasonable accommodations are made for hearing-impaired and visually-impaired persons to participate in TARPO activities (with advance notice)
- Ensure that TARPO activities follow Title VI requirements with regard to Limited English Proficiency

- TARPO Website

TARPO will maintain a website to serve as a primary method for sharing information with the public. The website will contain, at minimum (but not limited to):

- RTCC & RTAC meeting agendas and minutes
- A roster of current RTCC & RTAC members
- Information on Comprehensive Transportation Plans

- Information on project selection and prioritization for the Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) process
- Contact information

The website should also include other materials, as needed, to help the public understand the plans and activities underway by TARPO and its local/state partners.

II-B Public Input

Public input is the process of gathering the views, opinions, and ideas of stakeholders and other interested citizens, formal organizations, and groups in the rural transportation planning process. Opportunities for public involvement provided by TARPO include the following:

- Public Comment at TARPO RTAC and RTCC Meetings

The TARPO RTAC and RTCC hold regular meetings in which all formal business is discussed. These meetings are open to the public. At each meeting, the public is given an opportunity to address the RTAC or the RTCC on any issue related to the rural transportation planning process. Anyone wishing to speak may indicate so during the time for public comments on the regular meeting agenda, or may also contact the TARPO staff prior to a specific meeting in order to arrange a more formal opportunity to speak. Individual comments will be limited to approximately three minutes.

- Public Hearings

Public hearings will be scheduled by the TARPO RTAC and staff prior to taking formal action on the following major documents or decisions:

- Adoption of Annual Planning Work Programs
- Endorsement of Comprehensive Transportation Plans
- Approval of Project Submittals in the STI Process
- Approval of Local Input Point Assignments in the STI Process
- Adoption of STI Prioritization Methodology
- Amendment of RTAC or RTCC Bylaws
- Amendment of Public Involvement Plan
- Other items as deemed appropriate by the RTAC

Public hearings will typically be held at the beginning of a regular RTAC meeting, but may also be held as standalone meetings if deemed appropriate by the RTAC. Public hearings will consist of a presentation followed by a period for formal public comments and questions. All comments and questions that are received will become public record and will be considered by the RTAC.

- Surveys

Surveys may be developed and used to gather citizen opinions, perceptions, preferences, and practices. Survey results and findings may impact specific transportation projects and planning issues. Survey content, method of distribution (email, mail, website), geographic target area, and level of expense incurred will be dependent on the specific transportation planning project or issue being considered.

- Workshops

Informal workshops may also be scheduled for public input. Workshops will generally be in the form of small group discussions and the objective will be to gather opinions on a single transportation topic or project. Workshops will provide detailed information on the specific topic or project and will allow for in-depth discussion by stakeholders, local government officials, organizational representatives, or citizens.

III. Schedule of Public Involvement

III-A Routine Public Involvement Activities

- Official Planning Document Files – All documents, resolutions, meeting notes, etc. adopted by TARPO will be kept at the Triangle J Council of Governments offices, located at 4307 Emperor Boulevard, Suite 110, Durham, NC 27703. These documents will be made available for public review upon request.
- Meetings – Regularly-scheduled meetings of the TARPO RTAC and RTCC will be open to the public and will include opportunities for public comment. Notification of these meetings will be sent to news media in the four-county TARPO area, as well as others who have requested inclusion on the email distribution list for meeting notifications.
- Public Hearings – Notification of all public hearings held by TARPO will also be sent to the news media in the region and citizens on the email distribution list for meeting notifications. When the public hearing will be held as part of a regularly-scheduled meeting, the notifications may be combined. Paid advertisement of hearings is not required, but may be appropriate in certain circumstances at the discretion of the RTAC.
- Email Notification Lists – These will be maintained by staff, and will be used to announce RTAC and RTCC meetings, public hearings, open houses, and special meetings/presentations.
- Press Releases – All press releases issued by TARPO will be sent to the news media in the region.
- TARPO Website – This will provide a general source of information on RTAC and RTCC meeting agendas and summaries, TARPO organizational bylaw provisions, technical presentations, and other information.

III-B Special Public Involvement Activities

Some public involvement strategies and actions will vary depending on the specific program activity or project for which public input is desired. Typical actions for specific activities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Comprehensive Transportation Plans
 - Email notifications of workshops/hearings
 - Staff participation in leading workshops, hearings, and meetings—typically in partnership with NCDOT and the local government(s)
 - Identification and engagement with Title VI and Environmental Justice communities, in partnership with NCDOT
 - Collect comments from public through email and/or website, as well as in-person
 - Posting of draft and final maps/documents online and in the TARPO official file
 - Public hearing before endorsement by TARPO RTAC
 - Press release following plan endorsement
- STI Project Lists and Local Points
 - Email notifications of workshops/hearings
 - Conduct at least one public workshop/hearing that is not part of an RTCC/RTAC meeting to gather public input
 - Collect comments from public through email and/or website, as well as in-person
 - Posting of draft and final project lists and local point assignments online and in the TARPO official file
 - Public hearing at RTAC meeting before approval by TARPO RTAC
 - Meetings/presentations with local governments and local transportation committees, upon request
- Planning Work Programs
 - Email notifications of hearings
 - Collect comments from public through email and/or website, as well as in-person
 - Posting of draft and final documents online and in the TARPO official file
 - Public hearing at RTAC meeting before adoption by TARPO RTAC
- Policies and Procedures (e.g. Prioritization Policy, Committee Bylaws, Public Involvement Plan, etc.)
 - Email notifications of hearings
 - Collect comments from public through email and/or website, as well as in-person
 - Posting of draft and final documents online and in the TARPO official file
 - Public hearing at RTAC meeting before adoption by TARPO RTAC
- Other Special Projects (e.g. Regional Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan, Locally Coordinated Transit Plan, etc.)
 - Email notifications of workshops/hearings
 - Conduct appropriate workshops and public meetings, as determined by RTAC
 - Identification and engagement with Title VI and Environmental Justice communities
 - Collect comments from public through email and/or website, as well as in-person

- Posting of draft and final documents online and in the TARPO official file
- Public hearing before adoption by TARPO RTAC
- Press release following plan adoption
- Meetings/presentations with local governments and local transportation committees, upon request

IV. Response to Public Input

Public involvement in TARPO's transportation planning activities may be documented in a variety of ways. Any comments received during a meeting of the TARPO RTAC or RTCC will be included in the official meeting notes. Any comments received during a public hearing held by TARPO's RTAC will be in the official hearing records (which may be included in the meeting minutes, if conducted as part of a regular meeting). Comments received during workshops, open houses, or presentations to civic organizations and public interest groups will be summarized, presented to the RTCC and RTAC, and kept on official file. Results of surveys conducted will be compiled, summarized, presented to the RTAC and RTCC, distributed as directed by the RTAC, and kept on official file.

As appropriate, public comments may be included as appendices in formal planning documents for which they are addressed. The TARPO RTAC may direct the staff to respond to public comments directly by letter or email.

V. Adoption

This Public Involvement Plan, having been put forward for approval by Commissioner Cheek and seconded by Commissioner Hales, is hereby adopted by the Triangle Area Rural Planning Organization on August 13, 2015, and supersedes any previous public involvement policies of this body.

Renee Price, RTAC Chair

Matthew Day, RTAC Secretary