

Public Participation Procedures
for the Bryan/College Station Metropolitan Planning Organization

A guidebook to actively encourage stakeholder input into the transportation planning process for Brazos County.

in cooperation with

- The Federal Highway Administration
- The Federal Transit Administration
- The Texas Department of Transportation
- Brazos County
- The City of Bryan
- The City of College Station
- Texas A&M University
- The District

Approved by the Policy Committee: (Final) _____ January 11, 2006

Amended by the Policy Committee: _____

A public comment period of 45 days was required before this document, the Public Participation Procedures (PPP), could be adopted. At the July 13, 2005 Policy Committee meeting, the Policy Committee released the *draft* PPP for review and public comment. The draft PPP public comment period was in effect from July 13, 2005 through August 29, 2005. Submittal of comments regarding these procedures could be made in writing, in person, by phone, fax or email. MPO staff received and responded to two requests for copies of the draft PPP. No comments were received.

During this time the new transportation reauthorization bill, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), was passed and became law in August 2005. MPO Staff waited for interim guidance from Federal Highway and the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations in order to complete the document and thus the reason for the five month interval from public review to adoption.

The final version of the PPP was approved and adopted by the MPO Policy Committee at a regularly scheduled meeting on January 11, 2006, by Resolution # 2006-04.

Contact information:

Bryan/College Station Metropolitan Planning Organization
3608 E. 29th Street, Suite 113
Bryan, TX 77802

Phone: (979) 260-5298
Fax: (979) 260-5225
Email: info@bcsmmpo.org
Website: www.bcsmmpo.org

Public Participation Procedures (PPP)

Introduction

The Bryan/College Station Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is the regional transportation planning agency for the urbanized areas of Bryan and College Station, Texas and all of Brazos County. Federal regulations require the designation of an MPO to carry out a coordinated, continuing and comprehensive transportation planning process.

The Intent of the PPP

This policy is intended to ensure that public participation is an integral and effective part of the MPO activities and that decisions are made with the benefit and consideration of important public perspectives. This policy provides a mechanism for bringing a broad range of diverse viewpoints and values into the MPO decision-making process. Early public involvement enables the MPO to make more informed decisions, improve quality through collaborative efforts, build mutual understanding and trust between the MPO and the public it serves. The PPP outlines various tools and time limits for public involvement in the development various planning documents, such as the:

- ◆ **Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP):** A long range transportation planning document, which is updated every five years;
- ◆ **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP):** A short range transportation planning document, which is updated every two years;
- ◆ **Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP):** An outline of the activities that will be conducted by or overseen by the MPO staff over the course of one year.

Organization of the MPO

Representatives from the Texas Department of Transportation, Brazos County, Cities of Bryan and College Station, Texas A&M University, The District, and the public are represented on various committees that are a part of the MPO.

- ◆ **Policy Committee (PC)**
This is the governing body for the MPO and provides a forum for cooperative decision making and policy guidance.
- ◆ **Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)**
This group is composed of technical staff of key transportation planning agencies in the area. Meetings are held to discuss transportation-related issues and to provide technical analysis of planning activities for the Policy Committee.
- ◆ **Citizens Advisory Committee**
The Citizens Advisory Committee is an ad-hoc committee that meets when specific issues arise.

MPO Staff

The MPO staff is responsible for performing the administrative and technical services necessary to operate the MPO.

Supporting Legislation

The following key pieces of legislation address specific requirements for conducting transportation planning in an open process that supports early and continued involvement, provides complete information, timely public notice and full public access to key decisions. See Appendix A for more information on the requirements sets forth in Title 23, CFR 450.316 (b) (1).

- ◆ **Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)**
- ◆ **The Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21)**
- ◆ **The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA)**
- ◆ **Texas Open Meetings Act**
- ◆ **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Environmental Justice (EJ)**
- ◆ **National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA)**
- ◆ **The American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)**

Outreach Tools

In order to fulfill the objectives set forth in the federal mandates, the MPO uses a range of strategies designed to enhance and support public outreach and education in the transportation planning process. Depending on the nature of the project, these may include:

(1) Committee Meetings

The MPO Policy Committee meeting is generally held the first Wednesday of each month, unless otherwise indicated. Agendas are mailed out, approximately one week in advance of the scheduled meeting date, to all individuals that have requested to be on the mailing list. A notice of meetings, which includes the date, time and subject matter of the meetings, will be posted at the Brazos County Courthouse and city halls of Bryan and College Station a minimum of seventy-two (72) hours in advance. Formal advertisement will be placed in The Eagle newspaper, the preceding Sunday to the meeting. The meetings are also posted on the MPO website. Persons with disabilities needing auxiliary aids or services are requested to contact the MPO office 48 hours in advance of meeting to make appropriate arrangements for their attendance of a meeting.

(2) Workshops and Forums

The MPO staff and other stakeholders participate in transportation planning workshops and forums to obtain or exchange information. In particular, forums were held for the 2005-2030 MTP update. The forums were held in locations that were dispersed through the MPO area and were accessible to the broadest sector of citizens. Notices of such meetings were distributed through media and electronic outlets, including Spanish language newspapers.

(3) Transportation Focus Groups

Transportation focus groups are scheduled to discuss special transportation needs of communities such as environmental justice, regional mobility authorities, or other special projects.

(4) Mailing list

A diverse mailing list of organizations, public agencies, elected and appointed officials, transportation providers, neighborhood interest groups, radio stations, television stations, newspapers, special interest groups, civic organizations, advocacy groups, and individuals interested in transportation issues, and others have been developed. Efforts to expand relationships with non-traditional

stakeholders will continue, as well as increasing communication with under-served communities such as people with disabilities, low-income, and racial and ethnic minorities. See Appendix B.

The mailing list is periodically updated to keep the list current. All organizations/ individuals will remain in the database until either they request to be removed, or the U.S. Postal Service returns a notification to the MPO office as undeliverable. Every two years, the MPO will send out a request that requires a response from those organizations/ individuals wanting to be maintained on the lists.

(5) Newsletter

A newsletter is periodically printed to provide information on transportation planning activities. The newsletter is distributed to the addresses on the mailing list and through the MPO's website: www.bcsmpo.org.

(6) Educational Materials

The pamphlets and brochures published by the MPO provide information on the MPO composition, transportation planning process, and major documents and data produced by the MPO. On request the material is mailed or distributed during the MPO meetings, workshops, and forums.

(7) MPO Website

The MPO commits to providing a dynamic web site with current, related MPO information, to include agendas, newsletters, primary planning documents, links to outside agencies and other appropriate transportation-related information.

(8) MPO Speakers

The MPO provides speakers to civic organizations, clubs, schools, neighborhood associations, and other organizations who like to know the transportation planning activities of the MPO. The speakers provide information on the purpose, process, and products of the MPO and seek continued participation and comments from the public.

(9) Static Display

The static display used at meetings will be updated periodically for special purposes, to depict transportation information, statistics and/or maps. This, and other visualization tools, will be used to convey information to the public.

(10) Targeting Activities for Traditionally Under-Served Populations

Contacts with traditionally under-served communities are very important. The MPO contacts minorities, disabled and other traditionally under-served communities to exchange information regarding transportation planning. All public hearings and open houses are held at wheelchair accessible locations. Upon request, the MPO will make every effort to provide auxiliary aids and services, such as interpreters for the deaf and hearing impaired, to those who qualify as a disabled individual under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The MPO office must receive notification by mail, telephone, or RELAY TEXAS (1-800-735-2989) for such services at least 48 hours prior to the meeting. Requests may be made by calling the MPO office in Bryan, Texas at (979) 260-5298. Additionally, Spanish translators may be requested, for meetings, with prior notification of 48 hours.

(11) Advisory Groups

The MPO will stay involved and participate in other groups involved with transportation-related issues, both in the community, as well as at the state and national levels.

(12) Press Releases

The MPO will work closely with the local media as a tool to inform the public of significant transportation activities and issues. As warranted, the MPO will write press releases, conduct interviews and submit articles to the news media.

Review of Draft Materials

Copies of the *draft* Plan Updates for the MTP and TIP documents are placed at both City libraries and city offices. The public is given 30 days from the time when the notice is posted to review documents and call, mail, fax, or e-mail their comments. 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 MPO is mandated by federal legislation to produce various primary planning documents, such as the long range plan, short range plan, staff work plan and public participation procedures. The following chart describes the various timelines associated with public comment periods for all the planning documents of the MPO.

DOCUMENT UPDATES	PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD	ADDITIONAL NOTES
Metropolitan Transportation Plan <i>"the long range plan"</i> <u>Plan Updates</u> <u>Amendments</u>	<u>30 days, from date of posted notice*</u> <u>7 days, from date of posted notice*</u>	<u>Updated every five years</u> <u>Updated, as needed</u>
Transportation Improvement Program <i>"the short range plan"</i> <u>Plan Updates</u> <u>Amendments</u>	<u>30 days, from date of posted notice*</u> <u>7 days, from date of posted notice*</u>	<u>Updated every two years</u> <u>Updated, as needed</u>
Unified Planning Work Program <i>"staff work plan"</i> <u>Plan Updates</u> <u>Amendments</u>	<u>30 days, from date of posted notice*</u> <u>7 days, from date of posted notice*</u>	<u>Updated every year</u> <u>Updated, as needed</u>
Public Participation Procedures	<u>45 days, from date of posted notice **</u>	<u>Updated as needed</u>

* *Posted Notice is defined as from the date the notice is posted at the Brazos County Courthouse and city halls of Bryan and College Station.*

** *The Texas Open Meetings Act mandates a minimum 45-day public review period for a PPP update.*

Texas Open Meetings & Records Procedures

- ◆ The MPO adheres to the requirements for open meetings and notices of meetings. All meetings where public business is conducted, which have a quorum, are open to the public. Notice of meeting is given no less than 72 hours beforehand through posting the agenda at city halls and county courts.
- ◆ All open meetings will be sound recorded, and the maintained for a minimum of two (2) years. A summary of proceedings (Minutes), including a roster of those who attended, will be made available at the MPO office usually within 30 days of the meeting. Minutes are made available to the public upon request in accordance with the Texas Open Meetings Law.
- ◆ Meetings may go into executive session following the rules of the Texas Open Meetings Law.
- ◆ All MPO meetings are held in barrier-free sites. Accommodation will be made for those with special needs if request is given at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting.
- ◆ The MPO adheres to the requirements of the Texas Open Records Act. Records, as defined by the law, are made accessible to the public. Upon receiving a written request for a record, the MPO responds to the request in the most appropriate manner. Minimal copying (less than 25 pages) will be provided free of charge. Beyond that, a \$0.25 per page fee is charged for photocopies. Other reproduction has a fee based on the actual cost. Access to records may be denied in those rare instances permitted by law, such as confidential personnel matters or negotiations.

Appendix A

Federal Regulations

Specifically, Title 23, CFR 450.316 (b) (1), of the Metropolitan Planning Process, requires eleven elements be addressed. Each requirement and the method in which it is met, is listed below.

1. **Development of a public involvement process.**
A period of at least 45 days, from date of posted notice, for public comments will be provided prior to its adoption. Comments may be made in writing, in person, by phone, fax or email. All comments are addressed and taken back through the Technical Advisory Committee for oversight, then put before the Policy Committee to request final approval.
2. **Provide timely information on transportation issues.**
Information is disseminated through a variety of measures, including a newsletter, information bulletins, email, press releases, forums, website, public meetings, mailings, and a static board.
3. **Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of plans.**
The MPO provides this access through public, open and accessible committee meetings and public review periods.
4. **Facilitate public involvement in developing the TIP and MTP.**
The various outreach tools will be employed in encouraging input into the development of these planning documents.
5. **Public comments to be considered as an integral part of the planning process.**
The public has an opportunity to comment on all plans released by the MPO. Comments may be made in writing, in person, by phone, fax or email. All the comments are reviewed and documents are amended, if necessary.
6. **Seek out and consider needs of historically under-served.**
A comprehensive public notification list is maintained and includes groups that outreach to these under-served populations. Spanish translators are made available, if requested. Additionally, special arrangements can be requested for the physically disabled, hearing or visually impaired.
7. **For areas of non-attainment, significant public comments will be part of the final TIP & MTP.**
Even though the MPO is in attainment, public comments received on the TIP and MTP are addressed and included in the documentation.
8. **Revisions to the TIP and MTP based on public comments will be made available to the public.**
These types of revisions will be subject to the same, open meeting requirements.
9. **Periodic Reviews of the PPP.**
MPO and the TAC reviews the PPP as needed.
10. **FHWA & FTA review of the PPP.**
The PPP will be forwarded to the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration, in accordance with these federal mandates.
11. **Coordination with statewide public involvement processes.**
The MPO coordinates its activities with the Texas Department of Transportation.

Appendix B

Mailing List

The MPO staff maintains and regularly updates the mailing list used for meeting notifications, newsletters and various other mailings. This list includes a wide variety of stakeholders, such as the following:

- MPO Policy Committee
- MPO Technical Advisory Committee
- Brazos County
- City of Bryan
- City of College Station
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Texas A&M University
- The District (transit)
- Blinn College
- Texas Transportation Institute
- Public Libraries
- Citizens
- Chamber of Commerce
- Research Valley Partnership
- Downtown Bryan Economic Development Association
- Area Newspapers & Publications
- Radio Stations
- Television Stations
- Legislators
- Bryan ISD
- College Station ISD
- Neighborhood Interest Groups
- Historical Preservation Groups
- Business & Civic Groups
- Bicycle Interest Groups
- Council of Governments
- Social Service Organizations
- Consultants
- Other Agencies
- Other MPOs