

**SALISBURY/WICOMICO METROPOLITAN
PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

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**SALISBURY/WICOMICO METROPOLITAN PLANNING
ORGANIZATION DRAFT PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN**

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**SALISBURY/WICOMICO METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION
(S/W MPO)
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN**

I. INTRODUCTION

Established in 2003, the Salisbury/Wicomico Metropolitan Planning Organization (S/W MPO) is responsible for conducting transportation planning within its boundaries, which include portions of Wicomico County, Md., and Sussex County, De. In addition to unincorporated County lands, municipalities included within the MPO Area are Salisbury, Fruitland and Delmar, Md. and Delmar, De.

As part of its responsibility for regional transportation planning, the S/W MPO is committed to developing a process that provides ample opportunity for public input. To this end, the S/W MPO will ensure that timely public notice, complete information and a wide range of opportunities exist that allows the public to submit comments and to actively participate in the transportation planning process. The preparation of this Public Participation Plan outlines the steps the S/W MPO will take to achieve this goal.

II. OVERVIEW

As the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the region, the S/W MPO has the responsibility to implement the federal requirements relating to Metropolitan Planning as set forth in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The S/W MPO works to ensure that prevailing Federal transportation guidelines are followed and will work to establish regional consensus on the transportation planning, products, and programs.

Federal legislation requires an MPO to develop and implement a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive transportation planning process. The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU, Public Law 109-59, August 10, 2005) requires the MPO to prepare and use a Public Participation Plan that is developed in consultation with all interested parties and provides reasonable opportunities for all interested parties to comment on all aspects of the MPO transportation planning process. The purpose

of this Plan is to ensure broad public participation during the development, review and refinement of regional transportation programs and products, including all planning documents produced by the MPO.

S/W MPO Planning Documents

The planning documents produced by the MPO consist primarily of three separate items: The Unified Planning Work Program, the Transportation Improvement Program and the Long Range Transportation Plan.

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) is developed on an annual basis and includes the transportation activities being proposed for each fiscal year and the budget for performing these activities. The UPWP identifies the costs of each activity by funding source, and provides a narrative description of the activities undertaken each year.

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a staged multi-year program of federally-funded transportation improvement projects consistent with the transportation plan for the MPO Area, and shall cover no less than four years. It is a vital link between the plan development and implementation, wherein general transportation plans are converted into specific improvement projects. The TIP is developed and approved annually in cooperation with the Maryland and Delaware Departments of Transportation. Updates to the document are reviewed and approved by the MPO as they are needed.

The Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is the guide for transportation improvements in the S/W MPO region over the next twenty five (25) year period. This plan is multimodal in nature and is developed in conjunction with the Maryland and Delaware Departments of Transportation and according to the Federal Guidelines governing the development of transportation plans in metropolitan areas. The LRTP is required to be updated on a four (4) year cycle, with the next plan scheduled to be adopted by October 1, 2010.

III. WHO IS THE “PUBLIC”?

The public includes anyone who will be directly affected by transportation planning actions taken by the S/W MPO. This includes anyone who resides, has an interest, or does business in a given area that may potentially be affected by transportation decisions. To ensure compliance with SAFETEA-LU requirements and other federal and state mandates, the S/W MPO intends to target the following participants:

- Citizens, including property owners in the vicinity of a proposed project
- Affected public agencies

- Elected officials
- Providers and users of public transportation services
- Providers and users of private transportation services
- Freight shippers, providers and users of freight transportation services
- The business community (retail, services, aggregate industry, etc.)
- Advocacy groups, e.g., neighborhood groups, civic and public interest groups, including environmental groups, etc.
- Traditionally underserved communities such as persons with disabilities, children and youth, elderly, low-income, and racial and ethnic minorities
- Non-English speaking public
- Emergency service providers and users

These groups will be given an opportunity to participate at an early stage in the development of planning documents produced by the S/W MPO, including, in particular, the LRTP, the UPWP and the TIP. A representative group of these identified participants were also provided with a working copy of this Plan for comment and input, through either their inclusion on the S/W MPO's Technical Committee or through a direct mailing.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The following goal and objectives are designed to encourage participation and provide opportunities to comment on the development of the S/W MPO's Long-Range Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program and the Unified Planning Work Program, and any other products prepared by the MPO that statutorily require public participation, or for which the MPO Council determines is necessary.

GOAL

The goal of the S/W MPO Public Participation Plan is to involve all appropriate parties of the community in the transportation planning process and to ensure that the public has adequate opportunity to provide input on the current transportation issues affecting the region.

OBJECTIVES

Objectives identified to achieve the Goal of the Public Participation Plan are:

- (1) Provide reasonable opportunities for all interested parties, including minorities, elderly, and low-income people, to participate in the development of the S/W MPO Long-Range Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program, the Unified Planning Work Program, and any other appropriate documents, by effectively providing information to increase their awareness of transportation issues, encourage

their involvement, and enable them to be informed of transportation decisions.

- (2) Ensure that all decisions made in the S/W MPO transportation planning process are made and documented clearly and in consultation with all interested parties involved, by identifying and initiating effective methods of obtaining public input.
- (3) Ensure that the planning process is proactive by providing full and open access to the S/W MPO transportation planning process, and by keeping residents of the S/W MPO Area informed and involved.
- (4) Make available to all interested parties who participate in the S/W MPO planning process, an opportunity to comment on the Public Participation Plan prior to its approval.
- (5) Regularly review the Public Participation Plan on a biennial basis to ensure that all measures are being pursued to achieve the Plan's Goal.

V. PARTICIPATION IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

The S/W MPO will seek public input through a variety of techniques to ensure that a broad and diverse public is being reached. The specific public outreach techniques utilized will vary depending on the particular planning task being pursued.

A. Process:

In order to have a proactive public involvement process, the S/W MPO will provide a public comment period of ~~45~~ 30 days prior to the adoption of the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), and 15 days prior to the adoption of the annual Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), or any amendments to the UPWP or TIP. This time period is in accordance with federal regulations. Plans and programs subject to this requirement would include the Long-Range Transportation Plan (~~LRTP~~), the Unified Planning Work Program (~~UPWP~~) and the Transportation Improvement Program (~~TIP~~), and any other products prepared by the MPO that statutorily require public participation, or for which the MPO Council determines is necessary.

The procedures will inform the public as to how, when and where they may participate. An outline of steps to be taken to encourage widespread community support and participation in developing the LRTP, the UPWP and the TIP is summarized below:

1. **Long-Range Transportation Plan**

- Hold discussions with identified stakeholders and any other interested parties to gather information and input.
- Conduct outreach activities, utilizing the S/W MPO Website and media releases to explain the planning process and list dates and times of public meetings.
- Conduct community presentations at a place and time convenient to the public in order to explain the planning process and gather information and input.
- Present the draft plan at an advertised public meeting of the Technical Committee and/or the MPO Council.
- Major amendments to the Plan will follow the steps listed above. Minor amendments will not be subject to the advertised public meeting requirement by the MPO Council, but the amendment(s) will be summarized on the MPO Website and the public will be provided an opportunity to comment at that time.

2. **Unified Planning Work Program**

- The draft Unified Planning Work Program is reviewed first by the Technical Advisory Committee. The draft document will be available on the MPO Website and the meeting date and agenda will be advertised on the Website also. A public comment period will be provided on the Technical Advisory Committee's agenda to hear any input and comments from the public before the Committee forwards a recommendation to the MPO Council.
- The Unified Planning Work Program will be considered by the MPO Council at an advertised Public Hearing. In addition to being advertised in the Salisbury Daily Times, the meeting and agenda will also be summarized on the Website, and the proposed Work Program will be available for download on the Website also. A public comment period will be provided on the Council's agenda to hear any input and comments from the public before the Council acts on the Work Program.

3. **Transportation Improvement Program**

- Obtain input to prepare the draft document by notifying identified stakeholders and any other interested parties, and providing them with a list of proposed projects as prepared by MDOT and DeIDOT.
- Provide the list of proposed projects on the S/W MPO Website and invite comment from the public.
- Provide notice of the Technical Committee meeting on the S/W MPO Website, at which time the public will be invited to provide comment and input.
- Advertise the S/W MPO Council meeting in the Salisbury Daily Times, and the Council meeting will also be advertised on the S/W MPO Website. The public will be invited to comment at the Council's Public Hearing meeting.
- Major amendments to the Transportation Improvement Program will follow the steps listed above. Minor amendments will not be subject to the advertised public meeting requirement by the MPO Council, but the amendment(s) will be summarized on the MPO Website and the public will be provided an opportunity to comment at that time.

B. Open Meetings:

All S/W MPO meetings are open for the public to attend. This includes the meetings of the following bodies:

- The S/W MPO Technical Advisory Committee (TAC);
- The S/W MPO Council; and
- Any other working committees that are established.

Opportunities for public comment will be included on each meeting agenda. Since issues are often first reviewed by the TAC and then referred to the Council with a recommendation, there will typically be two opportunities for the public to comment on issues. Requirements of Maryland's "open meeting law" will be followed for all meetings.

At a minimum, meeting dates of the MPO Council, with time and location, will be advertised on the MPOs website (www.swmpo.org), the Salisbury Daily Times, and on the local government cable channel (PAC 14) fourteen (14) days prior to the meeting date. ~~In addition to newspaper ads, meeting notifications will be posted to the MPO's website at www.swmpo.org and advertised on the local government cable channel, PAC 14.~~ The agenda will also be posted on the

MPOs website, as well as the bulletin board in the lobby of the Government Office Building in Salisbury, which is where the meetings are usually held.

Although the Technical Committee meetings (and the meetings of any other working committees) will not be advertised in the Salisbury Daily Times, a notice of these meetings will be sent to the local newspaper for possible inclusion in a community events calendar that the newspaper runs free of charge. These meetings will also be advertised on the MPO's website ~~and on PAC 14~~ and the agendas will be posted on the bulletin board of the Government Office Building.

C. Availability of Information:

Any written materials provided to the MPO's committees will also be provided to the public upon request. In addition, during the public comment review period, draft documents will be available for the public's review at the offices of the MPO Staff and at the Wicomico County Free Library in Salisbury.

Information will also be available at the MPO website at www.swmpo.org. Agendas for upcoming meetings, meeting minutes, adopted plans and special studies, such as the Corridor Studies, are some of the documents that will be available to be downloaded. E-mail addresses of MPO staff will also be posted on the site so that the public can contact staff for information.

D. Public Notification:

A variety of public notification and participation procedures will be used to encourage the early and continuous involvement of citizens, jurisdictions, communities, and other interests in the planning process and the decisions and actions of the S/W MPO. In addition to the items discussed in the "Open Meetings" section above, they will include but not be limited to the following:

- Public notices will be used to inform the general public and media of upcoming input opportunities.
- The S/W MPO will conduct a public comment period prior to the adoption of the Long Range Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program and the Unified Planning Work Program.
- The S/W MPO web page (www.swmpo.org), will include information about S/W MPO transportation responsibilities, plans, programs, ongoing studies, committees, and meetings.
- Meetings will be held in facilities that are accessible to persons with disabilities.

The S/W MPO will also increase its efforts to develop and maintain a strong relationship with the media, which can provide an important link to promote public involvement in the transportation planning process.

The S/W MPO staff will provide meeting information material to the local media for the purpose of increasing visibility and coverage of the MPO. In addition, staff will offer to meet with the media (in particular, the print media) regarding specific activities that the MPO is undertaking, such as the Corridor Studies that are ongoing in hopes that feature stories on a particular topic may appear in print.

In addition, all upcoming meetings of the MPO Council are advertised in the Salisbury Daily Times. The advertisement summarizes the agenda of the Council's meeting and lists the date, time and place of the meeting in order to encourage citizen attendance and participation.

In order to increase public participation, public awareness of what the S/W MPO is and how the transportation planning process operates must be increased as well. The community involvement and education components will work together to achieve the following goals: (1) Wide recognition of the S/W MPO and its mission in the community; and (2) Community awareness that opportunities exist to participate in the transportation planning process. The S/W MPO has identified three (3) major subsets of this agenda to address its goals.

- Community Organizations
- Outreach Activity
- Collaboration

1. Community Organizations

The S/W MPO staff will identify key organizations that will be kept apprised of the activities of the MPO. Where possible, the MPO will partner with these organizations, and in particular will seek organizations representing groups that are typically considered "underserved" to ensure that their views and needs are considered.

2. Outreach Activity

This activity refers to being more visible in the community, to gain additional input by attending meetings of other organizations as appropriate and to be available to give presentations to various groups. The MPO Staff will be available to make presentations as requested by citizen groups, public agencies and local governmental bodies, and, when possible, will participate at various trade shows by maintaining an informational booth. By increasing opportunities to do these presentations, the S/W MPO should greatly expand knowledge of and input in the transportation planning process within the region.

3. Collaboration

Collaboration is another necessary and important aspect of the Public Participation Plan. The S/W MPO plans to work with other local groups and member groups of the MPO to increase its visibility and to share data that may assist in shaping future transportation planning efforts. The MPO Staff will attend public meetings sponsored by MPO member jurisdictions as deemed necessary and appropriate by those jurisdictions and their staff.

E. Visualization Techniques

The S/W MPO will strive to maximize use of various visualization techniques to help inform the public and convey pertinent information concerning transportation plans, projects and programs. Visualization can provide the public and decision-makers a clearer idea of the impacts of proposed policies and plans on the human and natural environment. Appropriate methods may include, but are not limited to, sketches, drawings, computer model simulations, photographs, and artist renderings. For each plan, project, or program, the S/W MPO will endeavor to utilize the best techniques available to inform the public. In addition, the MPO Staff will prepare an educational brochure for distribution at public offices, agencies, libraries and other suitable locations.

F. Response to Public Comments

Public comments on the Long Range Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program and the Unified Planning Work Program, as well as on any other plans and decisions will be summarized and written responses will be provided. Comments and responses will be kept on file, available for public review and will be made part of the plan, program, or other document as adopted. Responses to comments will be made before decisions are made or plans or programs are adopted. Responses will be made in a timely manner, so that they can be considered during the next phase of the plan or program development.

VI. EVALUATION PROCEDURES

This Plan establishes the basic techniques for disseminating information to the public and encouraging participation in the transportation planning process. Of equal importance is the establishment of evaluation measures that assess the effectiveness of these public involvement activities. An evaluation process can provide information to improve the public participation process, by discontinuing activities that are ineffective, modifying existing activities, and adding new activities. The Plan will be reviewed on a biennial basis with particular attention paid to the evaluation measures discussed below.

Public Involvement Tool	Evaluation Measurement	Performance Goal	Method(s) to Meet Goal
MPO Website	Number of Website visits (“hits”)	Increase number of hits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include Website address on all organization products • Link Website to partner organizations
Newspaper Ads	Number of meeting attendees who saw the ad	Increase the number of attendees at meetings who saw the ad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure ads are placed in prominent locations in the newspaper • Utilize newspaper that has high circulation • If appropriate, advertise more frequently and/or increase size of ad
Educational Brochure	Number of brochures distributed	Increase the number of brochures distributed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of locations where brochures are available • Monitor usage at locations to ensure brochures are always available
Interested Party Notification	Number of persons on distribution list	Increase number of subscribers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure notification list is current • Continue to identify parties that can be added to the notification list