

BRISTOL METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

Bluff City, Tennessee ▪ Bristol, Tennessee ▪ Bristol, Virginia ▪ Sullivan County, Tennessee ▪ Washington County, Virginia

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

FOR THE

BRISTOL TENNESSEE-VIRGINIA METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AREA

*** DRAFT FOR REVIEW ***

*PROPOSED ADMENDMENT TO INCORPORATE LOCAL TRANSIT AGENCIES IN THE
PUBLIC PARTICIATION PROCESS TO COMPLY WITH THE PROGRAM OF PROJECTS
REQUIREMENT FOR FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTATION URBANIZED AREA FUNDS*

This document was prepared in cooperation with the U. S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, Tennessee Department of Transportation and the Virginia Department of Transportation.

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PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

BRISTOL METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

SECTION I – PURPOSE OF THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

The Bristol Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) encourages the distribution of information related to transportation decisions and plans throughout the region. The purpose of the Bristol MPO Public Participation Plan is to provide a process that ensures opportunities for the public to be involved in all phases of the MPO transportation process. This is accomplished through the following public participation goals and objectives:

- Providing complete information about MPO activities.
- Timely public notification.
- Full access to key decisions.
- Early and continuing involvement in the development of transportation plans and programs.
- Outreach programs to stakeholders.
- Addressing Title VI and Environmental Justice provisions.

It is the policy of the MPO to take all public comments into account in the development and adoption of plans and programs. The intent of the Public Participation Plan is to provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the metropolitan planning process. The processes outlined in this document shall form the basis for informing interested parties of transportation decisions and the adoption of components of the transportation planning program.

SECTION II – GENERAL GUIDELINES

A – Public Meetings

Regular and special business meetings of the MPO are conducted in an open public forum with prior notification. All notices of meetings, public hearings and public comment periods for regional plans and programs shall be published in the newspaper of largest circulation in the Urbanized Area. The official notice shall note the day, time and location of the meeting, and the topic(s) of the meeting. Unless otherwise provided for in this plan, all notices shall be published a minimum of 7-days prior to the meeting. If a special meeting is called for unusual circumstances or urgent situation, the notice shall be published a minimum of 3-days prior to the meeting. The purpose of the meeting shall be stated in the call.

All official meetings of the MPO will provide a period for public comments from the public. The public shall be afforded the opportunity to comment on current agenda items at meetings of the MPO as well as other items of interest. Reasonable time limits may be established for each presentation, considering time constraints and the complexity of an issue.

Public meetings will be conducted at convenient and accessible locations, at convenient times, and will employ visualization techniques, as appropriate, to describe plans. By request, special arrangements will be made to accommodate persons with disabilities, low literacy, and limited English proficiency.

B – MPO Meeting Locations and Times

Regular scheduled meetings of the MPO will be conducted at one of four facilities: the Bristol, Tennessee Community Development Offices; the Bristol, Tennessee Slater Community Center; the Bristol Tennessee/Virginia Public Library, or the Bristol, Virginia City Hall. All of these facilities are ADA compliant.

MPO meetings may be scheduled at other facilities (for general meetings or special projects) that present a neutral environment and encourage the greatest opportunity for those interested in the planning process. Although various facilities could be available for meetings, consideration will be given to ensure meeting locations are accessible, convenient, and safe.

To the extent practicable, public meetings will be held at convenient times to provide opportunities for participation from a broader group of individuals. Particularly with the development of the Long-Range Transportation Plan, this will include public input meetings scheduled at various times of the day to accommodate varying work and/or personal schedules.

C – Title VI and Environmental Justice

As part of the transportation planning process, the MPO shall strive to minimize disproportionately adverse effects on minority populations and low-income groups in the development and implementation of transportation projects. Under the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, “no person in the United States shall, on the grounds race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

Executive Order 12898 states “each federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing , as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low income populations”.

The Bristol MPO's efforts to ensure compliance with Title VI and Environmental Justice include:

- Title VI clauses included in all Request for Bid/Proposal documents.
- Posters displayed describing Title VI legislation and contact information.
- Links on the MPO website to Title VI and Civil Rights information sites.
- Information on the MPO website for Bristol Tennessee Transit.
- Maintenance of Census data to identify populations and geographic areas of traditionally under-represented groups.

D – Underserved Populations

At a minimum, the definition of underserved populations will include low income households, minority households, persons with disabilities, low literacy and persons with low English proficiency.

Community organizations and their leaders are invaluable in building communication between the MPO and traditionally underserved populations. Community groups provide access to individuals and can serve as forums for participation. The MPO will maintain a database and notify organizations and community centers representing low income, minority, and disabled persons and request they provide their members with access to meeting notices and information. Literacy Councils will be utilized to provide assistance and outreach to low literacy and persons with low English proficiency. In addition, local health departments, human service organizations, and local housing authorities will be provided MPO public notifications for dissemination.

Underserved community contacts are incorporated in the MPO contact list of interested parties (Appendix A). This contact list will be expanded as additional organizations are identified or request information.

E – Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

All events held for programs or projects and open to the public must be made accessible to everyone, including the disabled community. Notices of Bristol MPO meetings will include an announcement that states persons with disabilities will be accommodated by request. For individuals without transportation or the disabled, the MPO will hold meetings, to the extent possible, during times when public transit and paratransit services are available. Special provisions (i.e. large print documents, audio materials, signing, and translator) will be provided upon request. All MPO meetings will be conducted at ADA accessible facilities and conducted at convenient times and locations.

F – Access to Information

The Bristol MPO will provide the public with reasonable and timely access to transportation plans and programs. Documents will be available for public inspection on the Bristol MPO website and at the office of MPO staff (City of Bristol Tennessee) located at 104 8th Street, Bristol, Tennessee, during normal working hours. Copies of draft plans and programs for public review will also be placed at the following locations:

- City of Bristol Virginia Department of Community Development and Planning, 300 Lee Street, Bristol, Virginia.
- Sullivan County Tennessee Department of Planning and Zoning, 3411 Highway 126, Blountville, Tennessee.
- Washington County Virginia Department of Planning and Zoning, 205 Academy Drive, Abingdon, Virginia.
- Bristol Tennessee/Virginia Public Library, 701 Goode Street, Bristol, Virginia.
- Community centers and agencies serving low income and minority areas.

G – Disposition of Public Comments/Input

The MPO makes every effort to consider and use all public comments in the planning process and in its interactions with MPO member agencies. The following methodology is used regarding receipt and use of public comments.

- All public comments are documented and considered by the MPO.
- If comments are related to another agency's facilities or programs, the MPO will forward the comments to the appropriate agency(s).
- When the MPO seeks comments during the planning process, staff will compile all comments for consideration and reference in the development of draft documents.
- A summary analysis and report on the disposition of comments will be made a part of final planning documents.

Responses to questions and comments from the public concerning the public participation process, draft transportation plans and MPO programs will be made directly to the individual at public meetings, or by letter, telephone, or e-mail.

SECTION III – PLAN SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

A – Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)

The Bristol Metropolitan Planning Organization is responsible for the development of the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for the Bristol Urban Area. The LRTP focuses on the development of a multimodal transportation system that includes transit, bicycle, pedestrian, and roadways, and provides recommended improvements as well as project costs and priorities for the planning period.

- (1) Reasonable opportunities for public participation and comment during the development of the LRTP will be provided to interested parties by utilizing public notification and outreach tools, as outlined in Section V, to gain early and continuing input and interaction with the public on transportation issues.
- (2) To provide opportunity for public comment from traditionally underserved groups, special effort will be made to provide MPO announcements and information to local social service agencies, neighborhood groups and minority organizations, as referenced in Appendix A.
- (3) Development of the LRTP shall include consultation, as referenced in Section IV, with interested parties, other related Federal, State, and local planning agencies affected by transportation including resource agencies responsible for natural resource management and historic preservation.
- (4) Public review and comment opportunities shall be provided when the plan is originally adopted, for amendments to the plan and during the five-year plan update cycle.
- (5) There shall be at least a 30-day comment period on the draft LRTP prior to adoption. The public comment period begins with public notice.
- (6) A summary of all comments received, either verbally or in writing, will be made available to the Executive Board prior to adoption, and incorporated into the final LRTP. Before approval by the Executive Board, the public shall be afforded the opportunity to comment on the draft LRTP.
- (7) After evaluation of comments received on the draft LRTP, the Executive Board may defer the adoption of the plan if there are significant unresolved comments. The MPO staff will prepare written response to the comments to be incorporated into the document, or suggest amendments to the draft document. Should the amendments be significant, another 30-day review period shall be afforded to the public.
- (8) Amendments to the Long-Range Transportation Plan must follow the same process with the exception of projects deemed to be generally local in nature and scale.

B – Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a four-year funding program that identifies which transportation projects will be implemented each year. The TIP must be financially constrained, which requires that each project have a secured source of funding. Additionally, the TIP must also be consistent with the Long-Range Transportation Plan.

- (1) Reasonable opportunities for public participation and comment during the TIP development process will be provided to interested parties by utilizing public notification and outreach tools, as outlined in Section V.
- (2) To provide opportunity for public comment from traditionally underserved groups, special effort will be made to provide MPO announcements and information to local social service agencies, neighborhood groups and minority organizations, as referenced in Appendix A.
- (3) Development of the TIP shall include consultation, as referenced in Section IV, with interested parties and other related Federal, State, and local planning agencies affected by transportation.

- (4) There shall be at least a 10-day comment period on the draft TIP prior to adoption. The public comment period begins with public notification.
- (5) A summary of all comments received, either verbally or in writing, will be made available to the Executive Board prior to adoption, and incorporated into the final TIP. Before approval by the Executive Board, the public shall be afforded the opportunity to comment on the draft TIP.
- (6) In the event the Executive Board determines there are significant unresolved comments or issues on the TIP, it may defer the program until a subsequent meeting. The MPO staff will prepare written response to the comments to be incorporated into the document, or suggest amendments to the draft document. Should these amendments be significant, another 10-day comment period shall be afforded to the public.
- (7) The TIP can be amended as a result of changes in funding or need. Amendments to the TIP must follow the same process for public comment as outlined for the draft TIP. Administrative modifications to the TIP do not require a specific public participation process.

C – Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) is prepared annually by the MPO and describes planning activities to be undertaken on behalf of the MPO and its member governments. The UPWP establishes the framework within which transportation planning activities are to be accomplished by the MPO and participating agencies. The UPWP contains allocations of planning funds from the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, State agencies and local governments for the administration and implementation of the transportation planning program.

The UPWP is reviewed and discussed at regularly scheduled MPO meetings along with being made available on the website, or distributed to interested parties by request. Public comment on the UPWP is welcomed and documented. All comments received on the UPWP are presented to the Executive Board, prior to adoption.

D – Annual Listing of Federally Obligated Projects

The MPO shall annually make available to the public a listing of Federally funded projects for which funding was obligated in the previous year. An obligated project is one that has been approved by the federal government for reimbursement. The project listing will be consistent with the funding categories identified in the Transportation Improvement Program. The list will include the amount of funds programmed in the TIP, the amount obligated in the program year, and the amount of funds remaining and available for use in subsequent years. The annual listing will be completed and published within three months after the end of the program year (September 30) and will be made publicly available through a similar process as the TIP, with the exception of a draft document will not be distributed. The annual listing will be reviewed and discussed at a regular scheduled MPO public meeting and will be available on the MPO's web site and in hard copy for distribution.

E. – Public Transportation Program of Projects

Bristol Tennessee Transit (BTT) and Bristol Virginia Transit (BVT) will rely on coordination with the Bristol MPO public participation process to ensure public outreach of each agency's Program of Projects (POP). MPO public involvement activities, public notice, and public comment periods on the Transportation Improvement Program will satisfy the Program of Projects requirement of the Urbanized Area Formula Program (Section 5307) administered by the Federal Transit Administration.

Public notice of the TIP will state: *“public involvement activities and time established for public review and comment on the TIP will satisfy the Program of Projects requirements for the Federal Transit Administration Urbanized Area Formula Program.”*

SECTION IV – COORDINATION AND CONSULTATION

A – Coordination with State and Local Planning Efforts

The MPO public participation process will be coordinated with statewide, local jurisdictions and MPO participating agencies planning efforts and public involvement processes, whenever possible, to ensure consistency between plans, enhance public consideration of transportation related issues and programs, and to reduce redundancies. Such coordination will be achieved through a variety of mechanisms, including:

- MPO public participation processes shall be coordinated with statewide public involvement processes through review and communication wherever possible.
- Coordination of data collection and analysis to support statewide and local transportation planning and programming decisions.
- MPO staff assistance with public involvement activities for TDOT, VDOT, and MPO member jurisdictions.
- MPO staff monitoring and participation in state, local, and county planning commission's development of other regionally significant plans and studies.
- MPO staff comparison of the LRTP and TIP with plans, maps, and inventories developed by state, county, regional planning commissions.

B – Consultation with Interested Parties

The objective of the Public Participation Plan is to provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the metropolitan planning process.

The MPO staff will assemble and maintain a database of names and addresses of interested parties, which will serve as a direct mailing list for notification of meetings. Notification of meetings and availability of documents will be made in a timely manner, in order to provide adequate notice of public meetings and opportunities to comment on documents. The current list of interested parties is listed in Appendix A. To supplement the database of interested parties and MPO stakeholders, opportunities for additional agencies, organizations, and members of the public to be included on the MPO mailing list will be provided at public meetings, during personal contact with the MPO staff, and on the MPO web site.

This Public Participation Plan was developed through consultation with an expanded list of known interested parties through direct mailings. A Public Participation Survey was distributed within the MPO region to specifically consider the transportation needs of interested parties. The survey requested information and input on the most effective methods to inform them about the MPO's transportation planning and programming activities and include them in the process. In addition, each agency/organization was requested to provide the level of participation they preferred. A summary of the comments and suggestions made is documented in the Summary Report on the Public Participation Plan and Consultation Process (Appendix B).

C – Consultation with Environmental and Other Public Agencies

In developing the Long-Range Transportation Plan and TIP the MPO will consult and coordinate, as appropriate, with agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities within the metropolitan planning area. Consultation and consideration of other related planning activities that are affected by transportation will include agencies and officials representing State and local planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, freight movements, recipients of Federal Transit Administration funds, government agencies, non-profit organizations that provide non-emergency transportation services, and recipients of assistance under 23 USC 204 (Department of Interior).

The MPO shall consult with other planning agencies, as referenced in Appendix A, in developing the metropolitan transportation plan and TIP as outlined in the following consultation process:

- (1) The MPO will review and document, to the extent practicable, available comprehensive plans and program elements or strategies of other planning agencies to coordinate and determine consistency of other planning activities in development of the metropolitan plan and TIP.
- (2) The MPO will provide affected agencies with draft plans and documents for review and comment prior to consideration by the Executive Board.
- (3) The MPO will request agency review and written comments within 10-days for the Transportation Improvement Program and 30-days for the Long-Range Transportation Plan.
- (4) The MPO will incorporate, as part of the final planning document, a summary analysis and report on the disposition of comments, suggested enhancements and/or modifications identified in the consultation process with other affected planning agencies.

An increased emphasis is placed on the Long-Range Transportation Plan consultation processes to include State and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation, to provide a comparison of the metropolitan transportation plan and appropriate conservation plans and inventories of natural or historic resources, if available.

In development of the Long-Range Transportation Plan, the MPO shall include consultation with affected agencies, as referenced in Appendix A, a process for comparing available plans, maps or inventories, to assess potential environmental impacts and develop potential environmental mitigation activities.

- (1) The MPO will obtain from listed agencies, directly or through the State Department of Transportation, available conservation plans, maps, and inventories of natural and historic resources.
- (2) The MPO will compare proposed transportation improvements to available conservation, natural and historic references identified to assess potential environmental impacts and develop strategies for potential mitigation areas or activities for project implementation.
- (3) The MPO will provide affected agencies with a draft of the Long-Range Transportation Plan for comment and review prior to consideration by the Executive Board.
- (4) The MPO will request agency review and written comments on the draft LRTP within 30-days in reference to identification of sensitive areas and potential mitigation activities.
- (5) The MPO will incorporate, as part of the final planning document, a summary analysis and report on the disposition of comments, suggested enhancements and/or modifications identified in the consultation process with other affected planning agencies.

SECTION V – PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND OUTREACH TOOLS

The type of public outreach efforts employed for a particular project will be determined based on the project's overall regional and local impact. Localized projects may require more specialized outreach within the project's area of influence while others may require extensive outreach efforts throughout all areas of the MPO region to assemble a broad cross-section of input, including traditionally underserved areas.

A – Public Notification

In addition to the requirements for publication of legal notices, as outlined in Section II, the MPO will also utilize the following outreach techniques to disseminate information to the public and interested parties:

- The MPO will notify organizations and community centers representing low income, minority, and disabled persons and request they provide their members with meeting notice and information.

- Information regarding meetings and events as well as current document releases will be placed on the MPO web site: www.bristoltn.org/planning/page6.htm.
- Availability of documents in electronic accessible formats.
- Mailings will be sent to public service agencies within the MPO area.
- Articles and press releases for the newspaper and other media opportunities.
- Mailings to select individuals, groups or organizations that have expressed interest or made comments at meetings including identified users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities.
- Distribution of information flyers on public transit buses.

The following table illustrates various public notification and participation techniques that will be utilized for the various transportation plans and programs that are reviewed and approved by the Bristol MPO. These techniques are discussed in the following section as well as other techniques that could be used to reach as many members of the general public as possible while maintaining a cost effective approach to planning.

Notification and Participation Techniques	Unified Planning Work Program	Transportation Improvement Program	Long-Range Transportation Plan	Other Major Plans and Programs
MPO Web Site	√	√	√	√
Newspaper Advertisements	√	√	√	√
Press Releases			√	√
Newspaper Articles		√	√	√
Mailings to Special Interest Groups and Social Services	√	√	√	√
Comment Sheets		√	√	√
Public Comment Periods		√	√	
Visualization Techniques to Present Information		√	√	√
Electronically Accessible Formats	√	√	√	√
Public Information Meetings			√	√
Flyers on Transit Buses		√	√	

B – Use of Visualization Techniques

Visualization makes it possible to more clearly understand complex technical information. To the extent possible, visualization techniques will be utilized to describe MPO plans and programs. This may include PowerPoint presentations, charts and graphs, and mapping tools such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), artist's renderings, aerial photography, and photographs.

In many instances, the information available for public review and input is in the early stages of project development, incomplete, or conceptual in design. In these situations, the best available information will be utilized with the qualification that the visualizations represent preliminary project information and may be subject to change.

C – Public Outreach Tools

This section contains descriptions of various public outreach techniques and tools used by the MPO in the development of transportation plans and programs.

MPO Website

The MPO website is hosted on the City of Bristol Tennessee internet site and provides basic information about the MPO. Work products, such as the TIP and LRTP, are available for downloading from the site. The site also includes information about specific projects undertaken by the MPO and provides links to other transportation related sites. The site is used to promote regular and special meetings, planning studies, publications and work products.

Public Comments

These are public meetings used to solicit public comment on projects or planning studies being considered by the MPO. Public hearings provide a formal setting for citizens to provide comments to the MPO or another decision-making body.

Comment Forms

Comment forms are often used to solicit public comment on specific issues presented at workshops or public meetings and can also be included in documents on the MPO website to solicit input regarding the subject of a publication. Comment forms can be very general in nature, or can ask for very specific feedback.

Direct Mailings

Direct mailings may be used to announce upcoming meetings or activities or to provide information to a targeted area or group of people. An area may be targeted for a direct mailing because of potential impacts from a specific project or a group that may have an interest in a specific issue.

Press Releases

Formal press releases are sent to local media to announce upcoming meetings or activities on specific issues being considered by the MPO and to provide information on upcoming workshops, public hearings, or other planning studies.

Project Workshops

These are public meetings that are generally open and informal, with project team members interacting with the public on a one-on-one basis to provide project-specific information and to solicit public comment. Short presentations may be given at these meetings.

Fact Sheets, Posters, and Flyers

Fact sheets are used to provide summary information regarding MPO programs and projects and can be distributed at public meetings, on the MPO web site, and in public places such as libraries and community centers. Posters and flyers may be used to reach a large audience that cannot be reached using direct mailings to announce meetings or events.

Advisory Committees

Although not identified for any specific MPO planning documents, advisory committees may be established for MPO planning studies to provide input from citizens, public agencies, private entities, and other interested parties. Members of advisory committees are typically appointed by elected officials in the study area.

SECTION VI – PUBLIC NOTICE AND COMMENT ON THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

The following public notice and comment process will be used for the adoption of the Public Participation Plan:

- A public notice will be distributed via mail and e-mail to local units of government and the MPO contact list of interested parties (Appendix A).
- A legal notice concerning availability of the draft Public Participation Plan will be published.
- There shall be a minimum 45-day comment period on the draft Public Participation Plan prior to adoption. The public comment period begins with public notice.
- The public notice and a copy of the draft Public Participation Plan will be posted on the MPO's Web site.
- The public will be afforded the opportunity to comment on the draft plan before the MPO Executive Board at the end of the comment period. Comments received on the plan prior to the meeting of the MPO Executive Board and any proposed revisions based on the comments will be communicated to the Board. Any comments received at the meeting of the Executive Board will be recorded in the minutes.
- The final Public Participation Plan will be adopted, published and distributed, and posted on the MPO's Web site after taking into account all of the comments received.

SECTION VII – AMENDMENTS TO THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

Amendments to the Public Participation Plan shall be by majority vote of the Executive Board of the MPO. A minimum comment period of 45-days will be provided before the Public Participation Plan is revised. The comment period shall follow the process outlined in Section VI – Public Notice and Comment on the Public Participation Plan.

SECTION VIII – EVALUATION OF THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

The Public Participation Plan shall be assessed periodically based on changes in local, state, or Federal legislation and to evaluate the effectiveness of public participation techniques that are being used by the Metropolitan Planning Organization. In order to gauge the effectiveness of the Public Participation Plan and to identify opportunities for improvement, the following list of activities will be utilized to quantify public input in the transportation planning process.

- Attendance and input at public information meetings and public hearings.
- Number of organizations and groups to which mailings are sent.
- Communications received from the public by mail, email, or comment at public meetings.

In addition to these reporting efforts, the MPO will continue to research new and innovative ways to further involve the public in the MPO transportation planning process.