

Regional Planning Commission

for Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard & St. Tammany Parishes



Public Involvement Plan

Update 2010



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Introduction

The Regional Planning Commission (RPC) is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Greater New Orleans region, which includes the parishes of Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard and St. Tammany parishes. As the MPO, RPC is the federally mandated transportation-policy making organization for the region. It is the job of the RPC to ensure that transportation investments in projects and programs are made based on a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process (commonly known as the “3C” planning process).

The RPC provides a venue for collaboration between local, state, and federal agencies. The RPC board consists of a 26 voting member board, including three elected officials and two citizen members from each of the five parishes in addition to the State Secretary of Transportation. Representatives from the region’s transportation operators, such as the Louis Armstrong International Airport and the Regional Transit Authority also have seats on the Board, as non-voting members. The RPC policy-making board is supported by a staff.

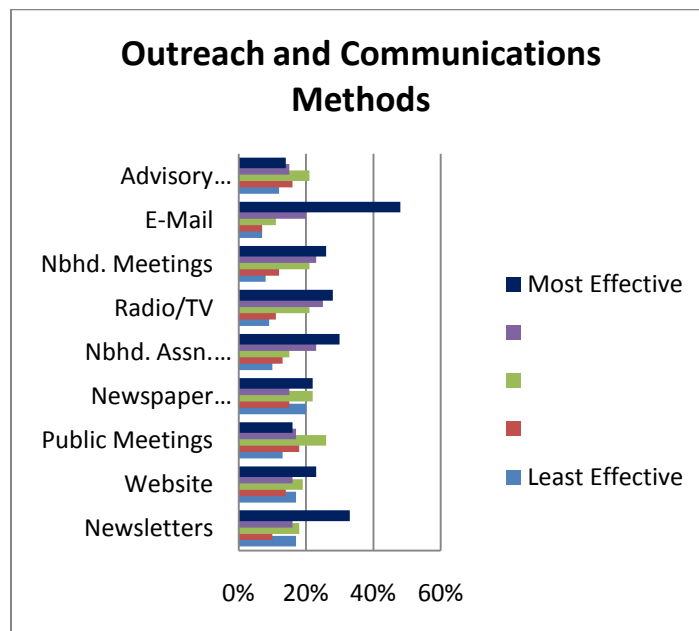
As specified in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act, commonly referred to as SAFETEA-LU, RPC provides opportunities for meaningful participation in the transportation planning process to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agencies, private providers of transportation, and other interested parties. RPC accomplishes this through a variety of ways including, the inclusion of citizens as voting members on the Board of Commissioners; convening Technical Advisory Councils (TACs); public meetings, etc. The RPC board meets the second Tuesday of the month, at the Regional Transportation Management Center (10 Veterans Memorial Boulevard). All board meetings are open to the public and provide an opportunity for public comment on projects.

The RPC board is advised by a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) that is comprised of public works directors, planning directors, and transit operators, as well as representatives from the port, bridges, airport, and railroads. The TAC meets on a quarterly basis to review proposed amendments to the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and hear recommendations from each of the TACs subcommittees. Subcommittees include: The Transit Advisory Council; Complete Streets Advisory Council; the Freight Advisory Council; and the Regional Liveability Advisory Council. Other advisory committees meet on an ad hoc basis as policy advisement and projects arise. These councils work collaboratively with RPC’s TAC. The TAC has quarterly meetings. At the quarterly meetings, the full TAC is advised of work taking place at the council level, and also is able to learn of proposed amendments to the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) and Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and provide counsel to the RPC policy-board when needed.

Public Involvement Plan Development

RPC’s public participation plan was developed with input from citizens throughout the region. Special attention was paid to soliciting input from low-income and minority communities that are traditionally underrepresented. To overcome the “post-Katrina planning fatigue,” and ensure that RPC received meaningful input to the development of the Public Involvement Plan, RPC went to the community to solicit input about how the public would best like to be engaged. In total RPC attended twenty existing community meetings in areas identified as being either low-income or minority communities, and garnered feedback through organizations such as LatinNOLA, Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Center, and other faith-based organizations. At meetings RPC presented information about the transportation planning process, and RPC’s programs. Citizens were given copies of the *Citizens’ Guide to Transportation Planning*, an RPC newsletter, and a survey that sought additional information about personal transportation, and the most effective channels of communication for RPC to engage the citizenry.

The survey tool which RPC utilized to solicit input for both the Long Range Transportation Plan and the Public Involvement Plan at neighborhood meetings was also posted on the RPC website. Cognizant of individuals with limited English proficiency, the survey was developed at a fourth grade reading level and translated into both Vietnamese and Spanish. The survey inquired about the most effective means of communication. RPC received a total of 322 survey responses. 223 survey responses were obtained from neighborhood meetings and distribution through community-based organizations and an additional 99 surveys were received through the RPC website.



Of the survey responses received, email communication was the most preferred method of communication with 48 percent of all respondents indicating it as the most effective way they would like to stay informed. Newsletters physically mailed to one's home was the second most preferred method of communication with 33% of all respondents citing it as a the most effective means of communication. Other requested methods of communication written in by respondents included signs and notification at work places, fliers distributed door-to-door, information distributed at school and community events, and social media communications, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Outreach Techniques

Strategies and techniques for public involvement are tailored based upon whether RPC is working on a conceptual plan, policy development, or buildable project. However, in order to actively involve the public in transportation planning, it is important to first identify the most stakeholders that will be most impacted based upon the task at hand. Once the audience has been identified, then the most effective means to inform the public can be determined. Below is a list of outreach techniques that the RPC employs to actively solicit public input in the transportation planning process.

Citizens' Guide to Transportation Planning

Educating citizens about transportation planning and the role of the MPO in transportation planning is essential to have meaningful discussions and truly engage the public in the planning process. *The Citizens' Guide to Transportation Planning* provides citizens with a description of how the planning process works in layman terms, so that non-planning professionals can easily understand how projects enter the planning process and move from an idea to construction. The citizens' guide also provides the public with an understanding of the purpose and function of the MTP, the TIP, and the UPWP. Finally, the document provides a synopsis of how citizens can become more actively engaged in the transportation planning process. The citizens' guides are distributed at public meetings, available at public facilities, such as libraries, community centers, and the Regional Transportation Management Center, as well as available on the RPC website.

Newsletters:

Quarterly newsletters are available in both print and e-formats. The public is invited to register for RPC newsletters both online at the RPC website as well as by detaching and mailing in the form on the rear cover of the *Citizens' Guide to Transportation Planning*. Newsletters provide the public and local government partners with progress updates on RPC studies, projects, programs, and initiatives. These newsletters provide a more frequent channel of information with the public and allow the public to stay informed.

News Media:

RPC will utilize the news media for projects and issues of special interest to the public. RPC maintains a database of contacts at local newspaper, radio, and television stations. Maintaining an active list of contacts, allows RPC to easily deploy press releases and public service announcements on an as needed basis.

Website:

A well organized and engaging website is a cornerstone of RPC's communication strategy. RPC's website accommodates a variety of users. RPC's redeveloped website offers a user-friendly structure and linguistic style understandable to lay people interested in the transportation planning process and projects. The website offers multi-media formats with Powerpoint presentations accompanied by audio on regionally significant topics. In addition, the web site was developed following the guidelines of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, so that it able to accommodate disabled users.

The revamped website offers the public the ability to communicate with RPC by offering interactive capabilities, with features such as an online comment form that allows the public to submit feedback and/or ideas for both the Long Range Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program. In addition, the website offers the ability to survey the public for specific purposes, as well as the ability to register for regular communication from the RPC, such as newsletters, public meeting notices, etc. The website also offers a calendar, where the general public can view all public meetings, events, and other important dates.

Finally, the website features a library, which provides public access to all technical studies, policies and transportation plans, such as the MTP (RPC's long range transportation plan), the Transportation Improvement Plans (TIPs), Unified Work Program (UPWP), as well as other feasibility and technical studies.

Public Meetings:

RPC both hosts its own public meetings to discuss topics/projects of interest with the public and makes presentations as requested at civic meetings and to other public agencies. When hosting public meetings RPC provides adequate notice to the public when hosting public meetings, and follows all federally prescribed guidelines regarding public comment periods for documents such as the MTP and TIP. RPC will work through a variety of means to ensure that a good faith effort has been made to notify the general public, such as posting in work places when appropriate and hosting meetings at times that are convenient for those most impacted by the plan or project at hand. At meetings RPC will utilize visualization aides, such as powerpoints, maps or 3-D models to assist the public in understanding the situation.

Surveys:

Depending upon the scope of a project, RPC utilizes surveys for public input to projects. When surveys are developed, formats and distribution strategies are created based upon the unique needs of the community from which input is being sought. RPC will share the findings from its surveys

Public Outreach Liaisons:

Trust is a critical component to gaining input, particularly from minority and traditionally underserved communities. In order to help build relationships with these communities and attract input, RPC works with trusted leaders in traditionally underserved communities to learn of needs, concerns and solicit

input to the planning process. In addition, Public Outreach Liaisons assist RPC by alerting the public about public meetings and providing advice as to the most appropriate times to schedule meetings and events. In addition, public outreach liaisons assist RPC in identifying the most appropriate places to hold meetings, and place materials.

Advisory Councils:

RPC provides opportunities for citizen involvement through standing advisory councils, such as the Complete Streets and Regional Livability Advisory Councils, as well as seats on project level TACs. Advisory Councils work closely with members of RPC's TAC to ensure a collaborative and informed process. There are a total of four advisory councils where citizens are invited to actively participate in the transportation planning process these include: the transit advisory council, complete streets advisory council, freight advisory council and regional livability advisory council.

Goal, Objectives, and Strategies

RPC's public involvement plan has a single comprehensive goal: **to allow the public opportunities throughout the planning process to influence decisions.** In order to meet this goal the RPC has established the following objectives and strategies:

Objective 1: Identify the most appropriate methods for reaching the public

Strategies:

- A. RPC will keep a database of neighborhood organizations, homeowner associations, environmental organizations, school organizations, faith-based organizations as well as other non-profit and for-profit entities
- B. In addition to the databases of formally organized associations RPC allows the public the opportunity to self-identify through its website, and "request for information" form in the rear of the *RPC Citizen Involvement Guide*
- C. RPC will work directly with leaders in traditionally underserved populations to determine the most appropriate channels of communication to reach individuals

Objective 2: Keep the public informed through effective channels of communication

Strategies:

- A. RPC will distribute quarterly newsletters that are available in both hard-copy and electronic formats
- B. The agency will utilize its website as an interactive means of communication and offer multi-media capabilities
- C. RPC will publicize information about projects and programs of significant interest through the use of media (radio, TV, and print)
- D. Copies of the MTP, TIP, and other significant plans are made available in public libraries

- E. RPC will work with leaders of minority and underserved populations to determine that the most effective mediums of communication are employed

Objective 3: Work to actively involve the public in programs, policy-making and projects

Strategies:

- A. Educate the public as to the general purpose and function of the RPC in its role as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and how the transportation planning process works
- B. Be sensitive to locations of meetings and times of meetings based upon the culture and needs of populations
- C. Provide opportunities for citizen participation on advisory councils, the commission, and project level technical advisory committees

Objective 4: Ensure that the RPC's public involvement program is dynamic and responsive

Strategies:

- A. RPC will work with the community to tailor outreach techniques based upon the diverse and unique needs of the public
- B. RPC provides for two-way communication, and is responsive to all comments and inquiries
- C. RPC's public involvement plan is a living document that evolves based upon changes in communication technology and needs of the public

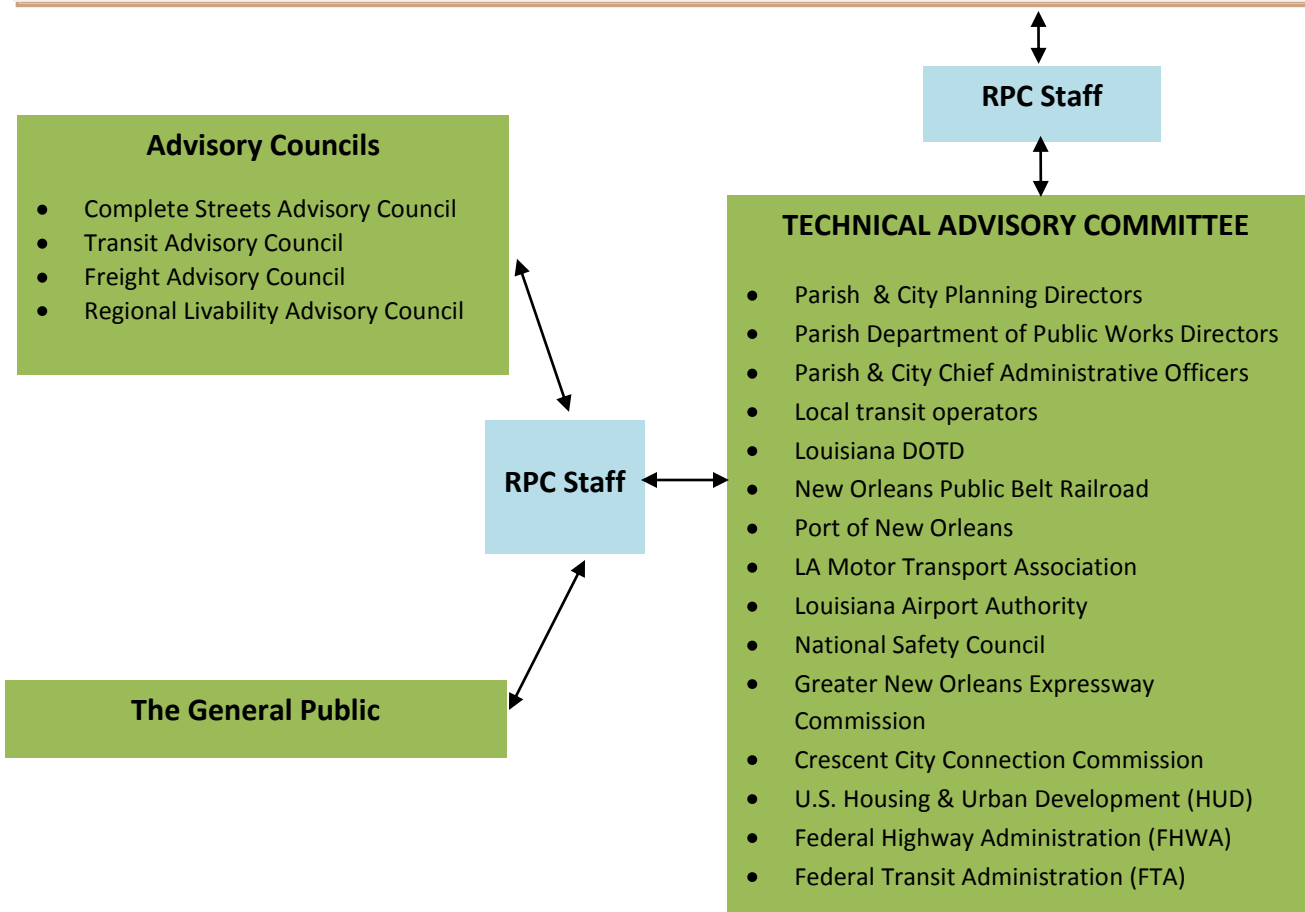
How the Decision-making Process Works

The RPC receives ideas for how to improve mobility through a variety of means. Concerns, comments, and ideas to improve the region's existing transportation network come from local parish and municipal agencies, advisory councils, and the general public as well as other organizations with interests in transportation. As needs are introduced to the RPC, the agency works with stakeholders to prioritize, study, and implement solutions to address our region's needs.

The diagram below provides an illustration of how the RPC's planning process works. The Transportation Policy Committee is the ultimate decision-maker in which policies and projects move forward, but their decisions are influenced by advice of the technical advisory committee. RPC staff works with the general public and advisory councils to ensure that policies and projects take into consideration the needs of all transportation users and those affected by the decision-making process.

RPC Transportation Policy Committee

- Parish Presidents from Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard and St. Tammany, St. Charles and St. John Parishes and the Mayor of the City of Slidell
- 2 elected officials from each of the five parishes: Jefferson,
- Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, and St. Tammany Parishes
- 2 citizen members from each of the five parishes: Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, and
- Regional Transit Authority
- Jefferson Parish Transit
- Port of New Orleans
- Louisiana Airport Authority
- New Orleans Public Belt Railroad
- Greater New Orleans Expressway Commission
- Louisiana Motor Transport Association
- Armstrong New Orleans International



Equitable Inclusion

RPC employs strategies and tactics to make certain all members of our community are included in the transportation planning process. The agency makes certain that in its plans no one geographic area or population be forced to bear an unfair burden of adverse impacts from a project, with few receiving

benefit. In addition, the RPC works with a diverse group of stakeholders and employs a variety of outreach techniques to ensure fair distribution in the benefits of investments.

Environmental Justice

In accordance with Executive Order 12898, as RPC conducts the planning process, it follows the three fundamental environmental justice principles, which include: the avoidance, minimization or mitigation of disproportionately burdensome or adverse effects of its programs, policies or activities on minority and low-income populations; to actively work to ensure full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation planning process; ensuring a fair distribution of resources amongst minority and low-income populations.

When reaching out to minority, low-income, and other underserved populations, the RPC is cognizant to employ additional outreach strategies to encourage participation by these communities. RPC works closely with leaders in these communities to identify the most appropriate channels of communication, as well as to learn about cultural sensitivities that should be considered when working with these communities.

RPC's full environmental justice policy can be found in the agency's *Title VI Plan*.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

An individual who is deemed to be of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) could be either someone whose primary language is not English, or an individual who has a limited ability to read, write, speak or understand English. At the direction of Executive Order 13166, the RPC actively works to accommodate LEP persons. The RPC utilizes information from the U.S. Census to identify communities whose primary language is other than English. When either RPC anticipates that it will be working with a LEP population or the agency receives a request for translations services, it will provide translators and/or have documents and meeting notices available in the native language of the population it is engaging. RPC maintains a database of interpreters and translators in the Greater New Orleans area for this purpose for Spanish, Vietnamese and sign-language.

In a proactive measure to reach out to LEP populations, RPC has translated documents, such as the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to both Spanish and Vietnamese, so that the agency can more actively engage these communities in the planning process. RPC is currently working with public outreach liaisons, to further solicit guidance and assistance in engaging these populations.

Recognizing that a LEP person is not necessarily someone who speaks another language other than English as his or her primary language, but some who has difficulty reading, writing, speaking, or understanding English, RPC employs additional measures to serve these individuals. RPC actively educates staff on how to identify a LEP individual at public meetings and what steps should be taken to accommodate this individual. In addition, when RPC produces documents whose audience is the general public it is conscientious to write the document in a manner that is easily understood, avoids jargon and is in layman's terms.

For RPC's full plan on how it interacts with LEP populations refer to the agency's *Title VI Plan*, which is available for download on the RPC website or in person at the Regional Transportation Management Center.

Performance Methods & Measures for Evaluation

On an annual basis, the RPC undertakes an internal review of its public involvement plan's effectiveness of engaging the public, by examining criteria, such as:

- Records of invitations to speak at civic engagements, such as event programs, email correspondence, etc.,
- Records of responses to citizen emails,
- Sign-in sheets of event participants,
- Records of press releases, and new stories.

Annually, staff is asked to provide comments as to how the public involvement may be improved to increase public participation in the planning process. In addition, RPC solicits input from the general public on an on-going basis to further refine and bolster its public outreach and engagement in the transportation planning process.

In addition, RPC actively solicits input to the public involvement plan and the most effective means of communication by working directly with communities to discuss the most appropriate means of disseminating information and garnering input to the process. RPC also provides the general public with a comment period of 45 days prior to adoption of its revised public involvement plan. All comments received will be taken into consideration and implemented when plausible. It is RPC's goal to respond to directly to all comments.