

Transportation

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

Regional Planning Commission

Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard
and St. Tammany Parishes

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Regional Planning Commission

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Background

The Regional Planning Commission for Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, and St. Tammany Parishes (RPC) is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the greater New Orleans and Slidell/Mandeville/Covington urbanized areas. The Commission was created in 1962. Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Bernard parishes were the founding members.

In its role as the MPO, RPC functions as a regional planning agency as well as coordinating agency for the dissemination of various federal and state transportation funds. These funds are utilized in the planning and implementation of local and regional transportation projects. Today, the scope of activities and interests encompassed by RPC's members and staff is much broader than the role for which it was originally formed. The Commission performs a variety of planning, transportation, environmental, and economic endeavors. It provides a neutral venue for elected officials and citizen members to discuss regional issues. It is also a policy-making body where legally binding decisions regarding the development of the entire region are made.

As the MPO, the Commission is responsible for conducting a transportation planning process in a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive manner. It provides a direct link between the local, state and federal transportation agencies. This link facilitates coordination on the local level and provides direct access to state decision-making and funding processes that result in increased project efficiency and awareness of local issues. Throughout the planning process, it is the

responsibility of the RPC to provide opportunities for public participation and input into the decision-making process.

Congress has emphasized the importance of conducting comprehensive metropolitan planning activities in both the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). TEA-21, enacted in 1998, authorized the Federal surface transportation programs for highways, highway safety, and transit for the 6-year period 1998 through 2003. TEA-21 continued provisions concerning fiscal constraint, planning horizon, and public involvement, with modification to the list of named stakeholder groups to add freight shippers and public transit users. Other changes were included to further ensure the involvement of local officials; strengthen the financial aspects of the planning process; and improve coordination, cooperation, and public involvement.

As a result of the mandates for public participation, the RPC has developed a public involvement plan that addresses the issues stated in the legislation.

Of particular note in the fiscal year 2004 and fiscal year 2005 programs are the following illustrations of public involvement in the planning process:

- ❖ As a part of the Regional Transit System Integration Plan being conducted under the aegis of the Regional Planning Commission, public involvement will be garnered through two tasks that are specifically included in the work program. Focus groups consisting of existing transit riders will be interviewed as a part of the study. Participants are being selected to represent a cross section of public transit users and their input will be used in evaluating the potentials for integrating the transit systems in the metropolitan area. In addition, civic groups

throughout Orleans and Jefferson parishes are being invited to meet with the study team to discuss ways in which transit service may be improved.

- ❖ A series of charrettes is being conducted to evaluate problems within neighborhoods and suggest improvements that may be made to alleviate the conditions. Transportation issues are paramount in all of the neighborhoods selected for study. The Regional Planning Commission is sponsoring the charrettes in cooperation with the American Institute of Architects, the American Planning Association and the Urban Land Institute. Six neighborhoods were chosen for the charrette process. Residents and stakeholders from the neighborhoods will participate in the charrettes. A daylong seminar featuring nationally known speakers will precede the charrettes.
- ❖ Citizens are being involved in the Major Thoroughfare Plan and Housing Element of the Jefferson Parish Comprehensive Plan. These plans are being developed under a cooperative endeavor agreement between Jefferson and the RPC. A Citizens Advisory Committee meets periodically to review the progress being made in the development of the plans. The findings are also brought to the public in a series of public meetings that provide the opportunity for citizen input in the planning process.

Intent of the Transportation Public Involvement Plan

The Transportation Public Involvement Plan (TPIP) is a transportation planning process that is accessible, inclusive, and proactive. The plan encourages and provides for the greatest level of education on transportation issues. It provides opportunities for citizens to

contribute their ideas and voice their opinions. It seeks to establish trust and credibility among the citizenry for the transportation planning process by resolving conflicts and seeking consensus between citizen and professionals for policies and projects.

This document is designed to provide a framework for the public involvement process that will be applied to the development of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program, the Unified Work Program, transportation related air quality plans, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects.

Public Involvement Planning Goals

The following are the goals of the RPC Transportation Public Involvement Plan:

Education

- ❖ To develop informational materials supporting a cooperative planning process and explaining RPC transportation plans and activities in a concise and straightforward manner.
- ❖ To explain how transportation plans are affected by clean air mandates.

Outreach

- ❖ To increase awareness of and interest in transportation plans and the transportation planning process using innovative approaches.

Participation

- ❖ To provide frequent opportunities for interested parties from the private business community, public officials, neighborhood organizations, the physically challenged and other groups impacted by transportation plans to participate in the development of RPC transportation plans.

- ❖ To encourage public participation in transportation planning activities at every level.

Public Involvement Policy

The RPC Transportation Policy Committee will pursue active involvement of key individuals and groups with an interest in transportation planning projects in the review, design, and development of its plans. It will develop transportation plans that reflect the needs of the region while meeting federal air quality standards. Groups targeted for participation include private alternative transportation providers, transportation enforcement agencies, local port authorities, local toll authorities, community and neighborhood organizations, local elected officials, transportation and environmental interest groups and representatives of the elderly and disabled. To these ends, the RPC will undertake the following responsibilities:

- ❖ To conduct public meetings for the development and review of the Transportation Improvement Program, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, Unified Work Program and any other significant transportation plans developed through RPC.
- ❖ To provide a forum for the review and discussion of significant amendments to adopted plans and actively solicit input from the public in the design and the development of its plans.
- ❖ To provide adequate notice and publicity of public meetings that will develop and amend its transportation and related air quality plans.
- ❖ To involve key individuals and groups with an interest in transportation and related air quality issues in the development and review of its plans.

- ❖ To solicit the participation of and establish a dialogue with groups which have traditionally had limited involvement, such as civic and neighborhood organizations.
- ❖ To increase availability of and access to planning documents and RPC informational materials.
- ❖ To periodically evaluate the transportation needs of the community through scoping meetings or surveys.
- ❖ To continue to develop educational materials for the general public regarding transportation planning and related air quality, energy conservation, and transportation safety (esp. bike and pedestrian) issues.
- ❖ To support Smart Growth policies and practices through integration of land use and transportation plans at the regional and local level.

Public Outreach Activities

RPC utilizes a variety of mechanisms selected as appropriate for the scope, needs and allocated resources of the various plans to be created. Examples of primary public participation efforts include:

- ❖ Placing ads and legal notices in regional newspapers of general circulation at least ten days prior to public meetings to review plans.
- ❖ Writing and distributing the RPC annual reports detailing transportation activities and trends.
- ❖ Developing, writing and distributing newsletters containing information regarding the Transportation Improvement Program, Metro-

politan Transportation Plan and other transportation, air quality and environmental issues.

- ❖ Placing copies of the RPC annual reports and executive summaries of plans in public libraries and on RPC's website (www.norpc.org).
- ❖ Mailing copies of the annual reports, RPC transportation and related newsletters to elected officials, environmental groups, private transportation providers and civic organizations.
- ❖ Issuing news releases to newspapers, the electronic media, public housing, and community newsletters and magazines interested in health, energy conservation and air quality issues in the MPO region regarding regional planning activities, meeting dates and the Transportation Improvement Program.
- ❖ Responses to written public comments on the Transportation Improvement Program, the Unified Work Program, and the Metropolitan Transportation Plan will be included as appendices to these documents.
- ❖ Establishing and maintaining mailing lists for civic organizations, transportation providers, the business community, advocacy groups, neighborhood associations, the news media, and public libraries.

The following are examples of activities which will be considered for use in encouraging participation on future transportation plans as work plans and resources are developed:

- ❖ Soliciting public comments and participation via the internet e-mail computer network.
- ❖ Developing cooperative educational projects with the educational system.

Public Meetings

Public meetings to receive public comments are held prior to the adoption of any major plan or Transportation Improvement Program. A record of significant comments and responses received is kept and printed in the final document. Where feasible, public meetings of similar issues, plans and programs will be coordinated with the statewide public involvement process to reduce redundancies.

- ❖ A legal notice is published in regional newspapers and the Louisiana Register (for joint state agencies projects) at least ten days prior to the public meetings for adoption or amendments of regional plans, the Unified Work Program and the Transportation Improvement Program.
- ❖ A 30-day public comment period is observed prior to the adoption or amendments of the Transportation Improvement Program, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, the Unified Work Program and any other significant regional transportation plans. If the final plan differs significantly from the draft, an additional 10-day comment period is advertised for additional comments and review.
- ❖ All public meetings are held in locations accessible to the disabled and near bus routes in parishes with mass transit.
- ❖ A yearly schedule of RPC's Transportation Policy Committee meeting dates and the Transportation Improvement Program development schedule are published on RPC's website.
- ❖ RPC holds an annual public meeting to review the planning development process with the general public with notification in the regional newspapers.

Public Involvement Procedures

Review and Notice of Non-Discrimination

The public involvement procedures are reviewed and amended periodically. A 45-day public comment period will be observed prior to the adoption of amendments to this plan. A public meeting will be advertised and held during the public comment period to solicit input on the public involvement procedures.

The procedural review will ensure that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, sex, national origin, or physical handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits or, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program operated and maintained by the RPC.

Citizen Advisory Committee Work Plan

This work plan has been prepared to introduce the staff and community to some of the specific processes to be undertaken as part of the Transportation Public Involvement Plan (TPIP).

To address the needs of the TPIP, a “community-based” strategic-comprehensive planning approach is recommended. For our needs, community planning is defined as “a cooperative planning process in which the RPC, elected officials and citizens who live in the community work in true partnership to create a vision for our community’s future, build consensus in the community for that future, and develop specific plans and projects to make that future happen.” The strategic-comprehensive approach is a process that is intended to facilitate the identification of broad-based issues and then quickly focuses on those issues with implementation potential.

The RPC uses such an approach that includes the following steps: establishing a conceptual framework, identifying issues, developing a community vision, re-

fining/prioritizing the issues, developing strategies that address the highest priorities, examining the strategies to determine their implementation potential, and allowing appropriate time for adoption, implementation and feedback. To complete these steps, the RPC uses the following community-based planning techniques:

The basic foundation of the TPIP will be a Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC). The CAC is a representative group of stakeholders that will meet regularly to discuss issues of common concern. The CAC provides a forum whereby the RPC and its associated agencies present goals and propose program. It provides a continuing forum for bringing citizens' ideas directly into the process and a known opportunity for citizens to participate. The CAC is democratic and representative of opposing views with equal status for each participant in presenting and deliberating views and being heard. The CAC is a place where citizens can become educated on technical issues. Further, it gives a better understanding of the effort and milestones of RPC progress.

The CAC provides on-going opportunities for citizen input. As an established institution within the RPC framework, the CAC expands basic concepts by giving citizens periodic opportunities to comment on a process of transportation planning and programming. By providing multiple opportunities to be heard, the CAC requires consideration of conflicting stances - in a democratic process of give-and-take.

As intended, the CAC is made up of representatives from the stakeholder groups identified below and the general citizenry. Members of the CAC will focus on specific aspects of transportation planning and assist the RPC in the development of specific and measurable goals, objectives, and strategies to address major transportation issues within their respective functional areas examples of which include:

Bicycle Paths	Public Transit
Pedestrian Paths	Intermodalism
Infrastructure	Smart Growth
Mobility	Safety and Security Concerns
Social & Environmental Concerns	

CAC meetings are scheduled by RPC staff and in a manner to accommodate the schedules of members wherever feasible. Some meetings are held during regular working hours (9:00 am - 5:00 pm) while others are scheduled for the evenings. All meetings are open to the public and held in locations accessible to the disabled and near bus routes in parishes with mass transit. The RPC staff facilitate and record all of the meetings. The staff provides agendas, action summaries, reading materials, and other information as requested by CAC members.

In order to ensure the success of this type of citizen participation, members of the CAC must have a clear understanding of the RPC and its role in the community. To this end, education is a key component of this work plan. The mission of this component is to provide:

1. training on how the CAC functions; and
2. education on RPC transportation planning and recent developments in the transportation sector.

The following process is used to identify potential stakeholders in the CAC.

Staff of the RPC identify all neighborhood/business/citizen/interest groups (stakeholders) in the region. This was done through existing networks and minority umbrella organizations. (This process is continual and on-going.)

As part of this identification process, the staff developed an organizational inventory which will:

1. identify the organization,
2. its purpose,
3. a contact,
4. an address/telephone number, and
5. its primary interest regarding transportation issues.

The staff developed and maintained a computerized database of this information so that specific project information may be channeled, where appropriate, to specific organizations.

The CAC is challenged to find ways to get persons who traditionally have not been involved in the planning process to participate in the process, particularly economic and socially disadvantaged citizens. The second challenge is to develop ways of involving the public other than through meetings.

In conclusion, the Regional Planning Commission and its staff are committed to the public planning process. We are acutely aware of the need for partnering and the holistic role of the transportation system in the fabric of the community. As the Metropolitan Planning Organization, we are working very hard to be a “good partner.” We bring all that we have to offer to the relationship. By being honest and by working to resolve differences, even if it means compromise, we are working towards a more proactive and effective planning process.

Other Public Involvement

Disadvantaged Contractor Element

The RPC actively pursues a disadvantaged contractor element in its Transportation Public Involvement Plan (TPIP).

The RPC staff will recognize disadvantaged contractors pursuant to qualification/certification by LaDOTD.

These contractors will be utilized to assure disadvantaged contractors full integration into the work plan. African-American, Native American, women, Hispanic, Asian-Pacific and other disadvantaged groups will comprise the disadvantaged contractor elements of this work plan.

Each organization and/or individual disadvantaged contractor will have its pertinent information documented (purpose, address and telephone number, interest, etc). This will allow these groups and/or individuals to participate in one or more of the nine transportation planning groups.

As an additional component of the Regional Planning Commission's work plan, emphasis will be focused on assisting disadvantaged business enterprises in securing contracts.

RPC will encourage disadvantaged contractors to work with LaDOTD in the certification process.

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