

# Public Participation Plan 2022

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New Orleans RPC

10 VETRANS BLVD NEW ORLEANS LA 70124 |

# PPP 2022 DRAFT

## Introduction

### Purpose

This plan outlines the public participation goals and techniques to be used in the New Orleans eight parish region transportation planning and programming processes. This plan revises the previous plan, dated 2018. The revised plan reflects the RPC's ongoing commitment to actively evaluate and improve the public involvement process and to ensure compliance with updated Federal requirements.

### About the RPC

The Regional Planning Commission (RPC) provides a venue for collaboration between local, state, and federal agencies. The Commission includes three elected officials and two citizen members from each of the 8 parishes in addition to the State Secretary of Transportation. Representatives from the region's transportation operators, such as the Louis Armstrong International Airport, the Regional Transit Authority and Jefferson Transit, along with St. Charles and St. John the Baptist Parishes, also have seats on the Board as part of the Transportation Policy Committee. The Transportation Policy Committee acts as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) governing board and voting body. The Board is supported by a professional planning staff.

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 federal investments in projects and programs are made based on a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process (commonly known as the "3C" planning process).

### Core Planning Responsibilities

The RPC is responsible for four major transportation plans and programs, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), and the Public Participation Plan (PPP). In addition, the RPC is responsible for preparing or assisting with other special transportation plans and studies in addition to a multitude of programs including Safety, Emergency Preparedness, Economic Development, Brownfields, Clean City/Clean Fuel, Watershed, and more.

**Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP):** The Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is the chief legal document reflecting the objectives, resources, fundamental planning process, and project implementation schedule for the region over the next 30 years. It must be revised every five years so incoming or newly identified projects and priorities can be updated. The latest update describes the regional vision for transportation for the years 2019-2048. Projects in the plan are organized into three tiers:

- Tier I (FY 19-22): Covers projects expected to advance to construction in the next four years. These projects comprise the Transportation Improvement Program.
- Tier II (FY 23-31): Lays out projects currently in the planning and development phase that are expected to advance based on funding.
- Tier III (FY 32-48): Long-range projects that are more complex to implement due to funding availability or other factors. (23 C.F.R 450.324)

**Transportation Improvement Plans (TIP):** TIPs consist of priority lists of projects (both highway and transit) which are advancing towards construction over the five-year planning period of the MTP. Projects found in the TIPs evolve through the transportation planning process and are contained in the region's long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan.

The TIP and the State TIP (STIP) contain a common set of projects proposed for federal funding. TIPs and STIP are products of a consensus-building process carried out jointly by the RPC and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LADOTD). Both these documents are updated every two years. However, the TIPs are reviewed annually by the RPC and selected revisions are permitted, following formal amendment procedures.

Projects contained in the TIPs are derived from Phase I of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan. Projects are largely maintenance-oriented consisting of roadway rehabilitation, overlay, and traffic signalization. Bus transit and rail rehabilitation and extensions are also emphasized along with intermodal facilities development. (23 C.F.R. 450.326)

**Unified Planning work Program (UPWP):** The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) describes the federally funded planning activities the Regional Planning Commission will conduct and products to be created during the current fiscal year. The UPWP covers four Metropolitan Planning Areas (MPAs) in southeast Louisiana: New Orleans, South Tangipahoa, Slidell, and Covington- Mandeville.

The activities described in the document reflect one year of a multi-year program to implement the strategies and achieve the objectives of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). These strategies are derived from federal mandates, as codified in legislation, conducted in the context of a continuing, comprehensive, locally focused planning process. (23 C.F.R. 450.308)

**Public Participation Plan (PPP):** The PPP identifies the RPC's public participation methods, the strategies for public engagement and outreach, and state and federal regulations regarding public participation. The PPP is evaluated annually and updated every five (5) years. (23 C.F.R. 450.316)

The RPC also maintains a **Title VI Non-Discrimination Program and Language Assistance Plan**. Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (42 U.S.C. 2000d-1) prohibits discrimination on the basis of race or national origin under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance, while Executive Order 12898, issued in 1994, entitled "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice (EJ) in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations" further extends Title VI protections to low-income populations.

### *Federal Public Participation Requirements*

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act), the federal surface transportation funding and authorization bill, was signed into law on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016, and continues to support previous federal public participation guidelines. The FAST Act, initially set to end in 2020, was recently extended for an additional year and is now set to expire in September 2021. MPOs are required to develop a public participation plan

identifying reasonable opportunities for the public and all interested stakeholders to be involved in and comment on the contents of the long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program. In addition to the MTP and TIP, this Public Participation Plan outlines public participation requirements and outreach methods for all the RPC's core planning processes.

The FAST Act also requires that MPOs identify a broad and inclusive list of stakeholders that must be provided the opportunity to comment and be involved in the planning process. These stakeholders, including the public, affected government agencies, transportation disadvantaged populations, providers of transportation and more. MPO's are also required to coordinate with the statewide transportation planning public participation and consultation processes.

Additionally, the FAST Act also requires that MPOs conduct public meetings at convenient and accessible locations at convenient times, use visualizations such as maps and charts to help describe plans, and make public information available in electronically accessible formats.

### **Public Involvement Goals**

To help achieve broader public understanding and consensus on transportation plans, programs, and projects, the following major goals are identified for the public participation efforts of the RPC.

**Inform-** Provide timely, objective information to keep the public informed about RPC's ongoing transportation planning and project programming processes throughout the region.

**Involve-** Create inclusive opportunities for the public to provide comments and feedback for consideration at key decision-making points in the planning and programming process, with an emphasis on actively seeking out input from traditionally underserved populations.

**Comprehend-** Broaden the mutual understanding of priorities and concerns of all involved and impacted by the RPC's planning and programming activities.

**Engage-** Collaborate with local communities and other stakeholders in an interactive process to develop plans and programs that are reflective of the values of the region.

**Improve-** Continuously seek ways to improve information, involvement, and engagement through annual evaluation of the public participation process.

### **Identification of Stakeholders**

**General Public** All residents within the RPC's planning area utilize and are affected by the region's transportation system daily. Persons representing special interest groups often make up a large proportion of those participating in public involvement activities. It is helpful to involve as many members of the public as possible to get a broader perspective of the "average citizen."

#### **Minority and Low-Income Populations (Map)**

According to 2015-2019 Census American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates, the minority population within the RPC's planning area is approximately 41.6% of the total population, while about 18% of households are classified as "low-income" (i.e., with incomes less than 150% of the federal poverty level), and 8% of households do not have access to a motor vehicle.

Minority and low-income populations are protected population groups under Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (42 U.S.C. 2000d-1), the President's Executive Order 12898, issued in 1994, entitled "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice (EJ) in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations", and a subsequent U.S. Department of Transportation order. Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race or national origin under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. The EJ Order further amplified Title VI and added low-income populations to the protected list. The MPO maintains a list of organizations representing or working with racial and ethnic minorities.

#### **Limited English Proficient (LEP) (Map)**

According to the 2014-2019 ACS five-year data, around 2.8% of the urban area's population report they speak or understand English less than "very well," and of those, over 40% speak Spanish. The RPC is developing a Language Assistance Plan to outline policies and procedures that will be used to address the needs of LEP persons.

Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and Executive Order 13166, "Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency", requires any agency receiving federal funds to establish a means of including Limited English Proficiency persons in the agency's decision-making processes and ensuring meaningful access to the information and services the agency provides. The Department of Justice issued guidelines to assist agencies in complying with this requirement. The steps required to ensure "meaningful access" depend upon a number of factors, including the number of LEP persons that may be impacted, the importance of the service provided, and the resources available to the agency.

#### **Elderly, Persons with a Disability, and the Transportation Disadvantaged (Map)**

U.S. Department of Transportation planning regulations require MPOs to "seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems." In this spirit, the MPO includes the elderly, persons with a disability, and those without access to an automobile as additional target population groups for inclusion in public involvement efforts and for transportation needs assessments. The RPC has a contact list of organizations representing the elderly and persons with disabilities as well as agency staff working with these groups.

According to 2014-2019 ACS five-year data, 15% of the region's population was aged 65 and over. The 2019 5-year ACS also estimated 14% non-institutionalized population experienced a disability; 29% of the population 65 or older experience a disability. The 2015-2019 ACS estimates over 7% of the region's population lives in a household without access to an automobile.

### **Transportation Providers**

These stakeholders include public agencies and private companies administering or providing passenger transportation (fixed-route bus, paratransit, shared-ride taxi, intercity bus) and freight transportation (rail, truck, air) services. Representatives of these agencies and companies are included in the RPC's contact lists, which are continually updated. A notice with the listing of transit projects in the draft TIP is sent out to representatives of these agencies and private transportation providers for comment each year in accordance with federal regulations.

### **Local Jurisdictions and Public Agencies**

Coordinating the RPC's transportation and other planning processes with local, parish, and state transportation planning and other planning activities affected by transportation is essential. Examples of activities affected by transportation include land use growth, economic development, safety/security operations, and environmental protection. Thus, local, parish, state, and federal officials and agency staff are important stakeholders. The FAST Act places an emphasis on consultation and coordination with these officials and staff.

**Private Businesses, Special Interest Groups, and Other Organizations** Special interest groups are stakeholders. Representatives of these organizations are helpful in the planning process by bringing perspectives and extensive knowledge of their issue areas. Examples of these groups include bicycle, pedestrian, and transit advocacy organizations; chambers of commerce; environmental organizations; neighborhood associations, social aid and pleasure clubs, etc. The RPC maintains contact lists of these organizations, which are updated periodically.

## Public Involvement Methods

**RPC Website:** [www.norpc.org](http://www.norpc.org)

The RPC website provides up-to-date information on the following:

- RPC/TPC Board meeting schedules, agenda, minutes, and other important notices
- Requests for qualifications
- Current and past plans, projects, and publications within the current MTP planning cycle
- GIS data and maps (obligated projects, demographics, traffic counts, etc.)
- Public comment and feedback forms

The website is used both as a communication tool and as platform to submit public comment during planning processes. There is a general comment form as well as contact information for RPC staff.

### **Email Notifications**

The RPC maintains a database of contacts which serves as the foundation for the mailing lists. Emails are generated using Constant Contact. Efforts will continue to build out and clean up current email lists to ensure adequate reach to as many people as possible, including underserved populations. Meeting sign-in sheets, phone call logs, and email correspondence will provide opportunities to expand email lists. In addition, for those seeking to be more involved in RPC planning efforts, they are able to add themselves using the *Get Involved* page on the website.

The e-mail lists are used to announce upcoming meetings, distribute public informational materials, provide information about the RPC's activities, and identify potential citizen advisory committee members. The lists may also be used for questionnaires/surveys and flyers. Program leads and project managers will develop and maintain mailing lists tailored to specific outreach needs.

### **Public Hearings – when vote required**

The RPC/TPC board and any other governing body required by law to establish quorum shall schedule and hold public hearings on all matters requiring an official vote on policy or implementation. Public hearings are meetings where the public is invited to provide on-the-record comments and testimony on an issue. Participants may also submit written comments as part of the public hearing process. *This includes but not exclusive the RPC/TPC board meetings held monthly on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday.*

Public hearing notices must be posted a minimum of seven (7) days before a meeting via website and newspaper. Meeting agendas, minutes, and other documents must also be posted concurrently.

### **Public Meetings**

Public meetings will be held throughout the eight-parish region at various stages of transportation planning and program development. Public meetings allow RPC staff to

present and illustrate information, alternatives, and recommendations and are a primary vehicle for receiving public comment.

Public meetings will be held at times and in areas convenient to potentially affected citizens. Convenient time generally means in the evening after typical work hours, but other times will be considered. Most meetings will be held in locations with convenient access by transit and bicycle as well as by car. However, in the interest of holding meetings throughout the regional planning area, this will not always be possible. The locations of all meetings will be in locations that are accessible by persons with disabilities.

### **Virtual meetings**

Virtual tools and platforms can efficiently be made accessible to communities, many at a lower cost than traditional public engagement methods. By removing significant barriers of transportation, access to childcare, and general time constraints virtual meetings allow for more participation in the planning process. Using GoToMeeting/GoToWebinar platforms the RPC will conduct virtual meetings that coincide with or supplement in person meetings.

Fliers will be used to announce upcoming meetings for programs and projects. The fliers will be produced in a digital format and distributed via e-mail to the specified e-mail lists. The meeting flyer will generally contain a brief description of the purpose of the meeting(s), the time(s) and location(s), and contact information and the website address where additional information can be obtained.

The format of the meetings whether virtual or in person will vary, but will typically include “open houses,” small group discussion, and large group question/answer or comment sessions.

### **Fact Sheets and Informational Brochures**

Fact sheets and other informational brochures will be used to provide easily digestible formats, including but not limited to the use of graphics or other visualization techniques. Fact sheets can be distributed at meetings, on the RPC website, social media accounts, and through other avenues.

### **Social Media**

The RPC maintains project specific Facebook pages used to post announcements, meeting notices, and general internet posts to foster more engagement with the public.

RPC social media accounts are used to:

- Keep public informed about upcoming meetings and events; also allowing for registration
- Raise awareness and engage
- Solicit general input
- Inform and educate the public
- Livestream public meetings

The RPC will continue to work on developing more strategies to increase its reach and following on social media to further efforts in planning.



### **Newsletter**

Quarterly newsletters will be published to the RPC website and distributed via email using Constant Contact. These newsletters will contain information about current transportation planning initiatives, ongoing programs, upcoming meetings, and general RPC news.

### **Media Outreach**

Various media strategies will be employed to generate public interest and disseminate information as widely as possible. These may include press releases to local media (newspaper, television, radio), editorial board meetings, public service announcements (PSAs), social media, and possibly videotaping of some meetings. Daily and weekly newspapers may be solicited for publishing supplements with information about projects. Placement of ads or other announcements in minority publications in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese will also be considered.

### **Focus Groups and Workshops**

Focus groups are small groups of stakeholders brought together for a facilitated discussion to provide more in-depth feedback on a topic or plan and gather user specific comments and concerns. Focus groups may also participate in workshops using small group exercise and discussion questions. These methods are helpful to engage targeted stakeholder groups such as environmental justice populations and vulnerable roadway users to ensure that all voices are part of the planning process.

### **Surveys**

Surveys will be considered when specific input from the public is desired. Surveys can be used to assist in making decisions that reflect the values, priorities, and desires of area citizens. These will typically be online surveys, but paper surveys, phone surveys, and other methods may be used as needed or requested.

### **Presentations to Civic Groups, Local Transportation Committees, and Other Associations**

Presentations will be given to, or meetings held with organizational groups and associations, upon request. Depending upon the nature of the request, these presentations may focus on specific planning initiatives, or be more general and educational in nature. In addition, those groups and associations that have newsletters will be identified, and announcements and information sent to them to expand the reach of the RPCs communication efforts

### **Community Event/Tabling**

Throughout the region there are numerous festivals, markets, and community events hosted year-round. These events are great opportunities to interact with the public allowing team members to go to them instead of asking them to come to meetings. Along with events RPC and team members can develop strategies to table at specified points known for high levels of foot traffic to reach constituents. Ex: Bus stops, libraries, schools, etc. Materials presented at tabling events may include infographics, surveys, and other interactive exhibits.

## Inclusive Participation: Title VI and Environmental Justice

The RPC is committed to ensuring that all persons, including minority and low-income populations and those with disability or language barriers, have meaningful opportunities to participate in RPC planning and programming processes. The RPC will strive to address environmental justice issues at all stages of the planning process. This includes implementing the following strategies to identify and mitigate potential barriers faced by traditionally under-served groups and engage them in the decision-making process.

### Step 1: Identification

During the RPC project scoping process, management and staff determine the Project Limits for the study. The scope and project limit geographic file will be forwarded to the GIS staff and the Title VI coordinator to establish the Area of Interest (AOI), i.e., the areas adjacent to the project limits that have populations that may be impacted by a project. The area of interest will necessarily be coterminous with existing census boundaries. Geographically referenced data will be used to provide:

- A demographic profile for Title VI study area based on federal guidelines
- an Environmental Justice profile for Title VI study area based on federal guidelines
- a determination of socially vulnerable communities within the Title VI study area using the internal SVI model as needed

To determine the AOI, GIS staff will use RPC templates to create a buffer zone for the project limits based upon the project limits file and the scope. Generally, for bike and pedestrian projects this may be a one-and-a-half-mile buffer of the project limits. For more auto, truck, freight studies the buffer zone may be three miles or more. A draft buffer zone will be used to intersect and select Census geography joined to demographic data for initial consideration. Demographic layers including but not limited to Environmental Justice Awareness block groups (RPC layer designation following federal guidelines), minority populations, Hispanic/Latino populations, limited English proficiency households, population in poverty, families in poverty, households in poverty, populations under 18 years of age, elderly populations, and median household income will be used to provide initial AOI data. Several iterations may be necessary to determine the proper project area to best cover populations that may be affected by the study and determine if Environmental Justice Awareness areas closely adjacent need also be included.

This draft will be reviewed internally at RPC in map and data format with management and the project manager. Once this draft AOI and data are established, the AOI map and basic data layers will be shared in the initial project team meeting. Further editing of the area and/or demographic themes may be required post project team meeting. Upon completion of the AOI, the project manager and Title VI coordinator will work together to determine what measures are to be taken to ensure compliance and equitable representation. These measures will be used to guide internal work and external work via consultants.

## **Step 2: Mitigation**

After identifying communities within a planning area that may face barriers in the participation processes the RPC will in “Good Faith Effort” deploy the following strategies to ensure equitable representation:

- Seek representatives of minority, disability, and low-income groups will be identified and an effort will be made to include them on the board and advisory committees and in RPC mailings.
- Whenever possible, meetings will be held at locations accessible to persons with a disability, bus riders, and bicyclists, and that are convenient to neighborhoods with a concentration of minority and low-income persons.
- Translators/interpreters will be provided for meetings, if requested.
- A statement is included at the bottom of all meeting notices in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese indicating that an interpreter, materials in alternate formats, or other accommodations will be made available, if requested at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.
- Information, including meeting notices and press releases, will be provided to minority news media.
- Meeting materials relevant to ensure equal participation will be translated based on LEP assessment for given project areas
- Vital documents, as identified by the Title VI plan per request

### *Plan Evaluation and Tracking*

The RPC will routinely evaluate the effectiveness of its public engagement methods in order to optimize outreach strategies, identify opportunities to expand or improve outreach and engagement methods, and refine or replace outreach strategies that are ineffective.

The RPC will complete an evaluation form for all public information meetings, hearings, open houses, and other public engagement activities it hosts or participates in. Information that will be tracked will include method(s) used, number of participants, stakeholder groups in attendance, how the event was advertised, comments that were received and any general notes on what could be improved for future events. Meeting attendees will also be provided with comment forms to evaluate meeting content, methods, and other general feedback. This information will be summarized annually, as well as additional measures including number of website hits, social media reach, and media coverage as available. The RPC will also conduct a more detailed evaluation of the public participation plan at least every three years and make changes or additions in the components or strategies, as deemed necessary.

### **Annual Transit Program of Projects**

The Program of Projects is the annual distribution of FTA 5307 and 5339 funds among the region's transit grantees, and a description of the transit projects funded by those programs that will be included in the Transportation Improvement Program. The projects that are listed therein are

prepared primarily through each transit grantee's consultative transit planning process, in coordination with RPC's own consultative TIP development public participation process as described in this guide.

Transit grantees are responsible, through their own consultative public process, for providing ample opportunity to private enterprises, social services, and the general public to participate in the development of their agency's program of projects before submittal to the RPC. RPC maintains its own process for TIP development through its Technical Advisory Committee and is also responsible for publishing a public notice in the local newspaper showing the region's entire transit Program of Projects (POP). This notice provides at least 30 days for all interested private or public entities another opportunity to provide comments, either by mail, phone, or at next RPC meeting.

The public notice for the TIP will state that public notice of public involvement activities and time established for public review and comments on the TIP will satisfy the POP requirements. This process satisfies the grantee's public participation requirements for the Program of Projects for the following recipients:

Jefferson Parish Transit  
Plaquemines Parish  
Regional Transit Authority - Ferry Operations  
River Parishes Transit Authority (St. John and St. Charles Parishes)  
St. Bernard Urban Rapid Transit  
St. Tammany Parish  
Tangipahoa Parish