



Metropolitan Planning Organization Public Participation Plan

*For Transportation Planning in the Columbia
Metropolitan Planning Area*

**CMCOG
Member Jurisdictions:**

Fairfield County
Lexington County
Newberry County
Richland County
Town of Winnsboro
Town of Batesburg-Leesville
City of Cayce
Town of Irmo
Town of Lexington
Town of Springdale
City of West Columbia
City of Newberry
City of Columbia
City of Forest Acres

**Prepared by:
CMCOG Staff**

**Date of Publication:
June 2007**

**Central Midlands Council of Governments
236 Stoneridge Drive
Columbia, SC 29210
Phone: (803)376-5390
Fax: (803)376-5394
www.centralmidlands.org**

**COLUMBIA AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

PUBLIC PARTICATION PLAN

FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

IN THE

COLUMBIA METROPOLITAN PLANNING AREA

**Approved by the Policy Committee of the
Columbia Area Transportation Study**

June 28, 2007

Updated March 25, 2010

The preparation of this report has been financed in part through grant(s) from the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, under the State Planning and Research Program, Section 505 [or Metropolitan Planning Program, Section 104(f)] of Title 23, U.S. Code.

The contents of this report do not necessarily reflect the official views or policy of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

INTRODUCTION 4

I. BACKGROUND 4

II. GOVERNMENTAL REQUIREMENTS 5

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS 6

A. General Guidelines 6

B. Public Participation Plan Vision, Goals & Objectives 8

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES (Current) 11

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES (Future) 19

VI. EVALUATION METHODS AND PERFORMANCE GOALS 21

VII. IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES 22

List of Acronyms

CMCOG	Central Midlands Council of Government	See page 4
COATS	Columbia Area Transportation Study	See page 4
MPO	Metropolitan Transportation Organization	See page 4
LRTP	Long Range Transportation Plan	See page 5
SAFETEA-LU	Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users	See page 5
SCDOT	South Carolina Department of Transportation	See page 5
TEA-21	Transportation Equity Act for the 21 st Century	See page 5
TIP	Transportation Improvement Program	See page 5
UPWP	Unified Planning Work Program	See page 5

INTRODUCTION

The Columbia Area Transportation Study (COATS) Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) policy is to support and encourage public participation and to adhere to the principles of Environmental Justice in the metropolitan planning process. The MPO's public participation policy is designed to ensure opportunities for the public to express its views on transportation issues and to become active participants in the decision-making process.

I. BACKGROUND

The Central Midlands Council of Governments (CMCOG) is a public agency created by the Counties of Fairfield, Lexington, Newberry and Richland, and the cities of Batesburg/Leesville, Cayce, Columbia, Forest Acres, Irmo, Lexington, Newberry, Springdale, West Columbia, and Winnsboro, as enabled by state planning law. The agency was organized in 1969 and has been providing planning, management and technical assistance to its member governments and local transit service providers since its inception. CMCOG has been charged with responsibility for area-wide transportation planning since its inception and serves as the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for transportation program/project purposes.

The CMCOG Board is comprised of citizens, business leaders, state and local elected officials representing the CMCOG member governments. This Board meets regularly to establish transportation policies and evaluate transportation needs for the region. Only officials who represent the member governments located in the MPO study area are eligible to vote on MPO activities.

In addition to its own technical staff, the MPO has four standing advisory committees:

- Transportation Subcommittee
- Technical Committee
- Rail Transit Committee
- Bicycle & Pedestrian Committee

The Transportation Subcommittee is responsible for making recommendations on all CMCOG transportation plans and programs to the CMCOG Board. The Subcommittee is comprised of elected officials from the CMCOG member governments within the MPO Boundary and members are appointed by the local governments and affirmed by the CMCOG Board Chair. The Technical Committee serves as an advisory group to the Transportation Subcommittee. The Technical Committee is made up of State, County and City planning and engineering staff, which provide technical expertise in the development of transportation plans and programs for the MPO area. The Rail Transit Committee is composed of elected officials and citizens that are responsible for providing recommendations on transit plans and projects. Rail Transit Committee members are recommended by their local government body and affirmed by the CMCOG Board Chair. The Bicycle & Pedestrian Committee is composed of citizens that are responsible for providing recommendations on regional bicycle and pedestrian plans and projects.

Bicycle & Pedestrian Committee members are appointed by their respective local governments. Each Committee may also appoint ad hoc committees (working groups) to oversee MPO planning projects. The MPO staff consists of a Director, two professional Planners, and an Administrative Secretary. On a regular basis the committees, along with the MPO staff, provide recommendations to the MPO Board regarding short and long range planning, implementation of projects and related issues. The CMCOG Board and each of its advisory committees operate under bylaws approved by the CMCOG Board.

The principal responsibilities of the MPO include the development of a Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), a Congestion Management Plan, a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), and related planning studies and projects deemed necessary to address transportation issues in the COATS area. Local transportation needs are re-evaluated annually. Based on this evaluation, project priorities are established and made part of the CMCOG's biennial Transportation Improvement Program. This information is forwarded to the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) for inclusion into the statewide Work Program.

By Federal law, all multi-modal transportation improvement projects must be included in and consistent (to the maximum extent feasible) with the MPO's LRTP in order to be eligible for Federal funding. Therefore, the MPO LRTP is the primary plan that guides all federally funded transportation improvements in the COATS area.

II. GOVERNMENTAL REQUIREMENTS

With the passage of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) in 1998, the 15 metropolitan and 23 statewide planning factors from the old regulations were consolidated into seven (7) factors. With the recent passage of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005, these factors were expanded to eight (8), namely safety and security were separated into separate planning factors. In addition, the planning factor on protect/enhance the environment was expanded to include "...promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns". The eight (8) planning factors of SAFETEA-LU are:

1. Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
2. Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
3. Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
4. Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and for freight;
5. Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns;
6. Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight;

7. Promote efficient system management and operation, and;
8. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

Additionally, MPOs are required to develop and adopt a long-range transportation plan and a transportation improvement program. In developing these documents, by federal statute, a reasonable opportunity to comment must be provided.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

A. General Guidelines

The *CMCOG Public Participation Plan* is intended to provide direction for public participation activities to be conducted by the COATS MPO and contains the vision, goals, objectives, and techniques used by CMCOG for public participation. As noted earlier, CMCOG has been designated by the federal government to serve as the regional MPO for the COATS Transportation Program. Therefore, in its public participation process, CMCOG will strive to:

1. Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agencies, 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 and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs and projects (including but not limited to local jurisdiction concerns).
2. Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of the LRTP, TIP, UPWP, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects, and conduct open public meetings where matters related to transportation programs are being considered. Such access would also include, if necessary, the conversion of the key planning documents into Spanish (or any other language).
3. Give adequate public notice of public participation activities and allow time for public review and comment at key decision points, including but not limited to, the approval of the LRTP, TIP, UPWP, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects. If the final draft of any transportation plan differs significantly from the one available for public comment by CMCOG and raises new material issues, which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen, an additional opportunity for public comment on the revised plan shall be made available.
4. Respond in writing to all applicable public input. When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft transportation plan (including the financial plan) as a result of the public participation process, a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments shall be made part of the final plan.

5. Solicit the needs of those traditionally under-served by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to minorities, elderly, persons with disabilities, persons with limited English proficiency, and low-income households.
6. Provide a public comment period of 45 calendar days prior to the adoption of the *CMCOG Public Participation Plan* and not less than 15 calendar days prior to any amendments or updates for the groups listed in Item 1 above. Notice of the 45-day comment period will be advertised in a newspaper of general circulation, minority community newspapers, and various other publications prior to the commencement of the 45-day comment period and on CMCOG's website. Notice will also be mailed to the entire CMCOG mailing list prior to the commencement of the 45-day comment period.
7. Provide a public comment period of not less than 30 calendar days prior to the adoption of the LRTP, TIP, UPWP, Transit Development Plans, and not less than 15 calendar days prior to the adoption of any amendments or updates, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects.
8. Coordinate its Public Participation Process with statewide Public Participation Processes wherever possible to enhance public consideration of the issues, plans and programs, and reduce redundancies and costs.
9. Periodically review the Public Participation Process to ensure it provides full and open access to all. Portions of the process which are found not to meet the needs of the constituency will be revised.

B. Public Participation Plan Vision, Goals & Policies

The vision for the public participation plan is that the public will be provided thorough information on transportation planning services and project development in a convenient and timely manner. To this end, the following goals and policies have been established.

Goal 1: To actively engage the public in the transportation planning process according to the policies contained in Federal and State law as well as in this Public Participation Plan.

- A. CMCOG shall maintain an up-to-date database of contacts including at a minimum the following persons:
 - Federal, state, local agencies responsible for planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, freight movements, land use management, natural resources, consideration, and historic preservation
 - Elected Officials
 - Local Government Staff
 - Transportation Agencies (freight, port, airports, transit, etc.)
 - Representatives of Users of Public Transportation
 - Representatives of Users of Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation
 - Representatives of the Disable
 - Local Media
 - Homeowners' Associations
 - Civic Groups
 - Special Interest Groups
 - COATS Area Public Libraries (for public display)
 - Individuals expressing an interest in transportation planning activities.

- B. CMCOG shall, when feasible, electronically send and/or mail meeting announcements (invitations) to CMCOG contact list or to targeted groups for upcoming activities.

- C. CMCOG shall employ visualization techniques to depict transportation plans. Examples of visualization techniques include: charts, graphs, photo interpretation, maps, use of GIS, artist renderings, physical models, and/or computer simulation.

Goal 2: CMCOG shall keep the public informed of on-going transportation related activities on a continuous basis.

- A. CMCOG shall make all publications and work products available to the public via internet, staff office, and employ visualization techniques to describe transportation actions as part of the LRTP.
- B. Staff shall be available to provide general and project-specific information at a central location during normal business hours and after hours at the request of groups such as homeowners' associations with reasonable notice.
- C. CMCOG shall maintain a COATS section on their website.
 1. The website shall be updated and maintained to provide the most current information available.
 2. The website shall, at a minimum, contain the following information:
 - Current MPO Staff contact information (i.e. name, title, mailing address, phone, fax, and e-mail)
 - Meeting calendars and agendas
 - Brief descriptions of current projects
 - Work products and publications (e.g. TIP, LRTP, UPWP)
 - Comment/Question form
 - Links to related agencies (e.g. SCDOT and the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority)

Goal 3: CMCOG shall encourage the participation of all citizens in the transportation planning process.

- A. Target audiences shall be identified for each planning study conducted by CMCOG, including residents, business and property owners and those traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations, including but not limited to, low income and minority households, within the study area.
- B. CMCOG shall, whenever feasible, hold public meetings at a scheduled time, location, and building facility convenient to potentially affected citizens.
- C. CMCOG will provide an additional opportunity for public comments, if the final LRTP or TIP differs significantly from the version that was initially made available for public comment.

Goal 4: CMCOG shall strive to continuously improve public participation.

- A. CMCOG shall continuously evaluate public participation techniques, according to the procedures contained in this Public Participation Plan.

- B. The Public Participation Plan shall be reviewed and adopted, with revisions if necessary, at least every three (3) years.

Goal 5: CMCOG shall participate in public participation activities for individual transportation improvement projects from the planning phase through construction.

- A. CMCOG shall actively assist SCDOT, local governments and transportation agencies in the development and implementation of public participation techniques for planning and other studies, including Major Investment Studies and Project Development and Environmental studies.

IV. CURRENT PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES

Public participation is an ongoing activity of the MPO. An effective public participation process is characterized by techniques and procedures that enable citizens to become well informed. This section contains descriptions of public participation tools of which CMCOG currently uses and proposes to use in the future. These tools are as follows:

- Annual Newsletters
- Charrettes
- Comment Forms
- Consultation
- Display Ads
- Direct Mailings
- E-mail Announcements/Internet Message Boards
- Fact Sheets
- Legal Advertisements
- MPO Master Database
- MPO Website
- Press Releases
- Public Information Meetings/Hearings
- Public Notices
- Small Group Meetings
- Surveys
- Title VI & Environmental Justice Review
- Visualization

Annual Newsletter

Description: MPO (CMCOG) staff produces an annual newsletter that is distributed to citizens, municipalities, media and other agencies. Citizens are added to the distribution list by their own request.

Opportunities to request being added to the list occur during public meetings hosted by CMCOG on the CMCOG web site and when citizens contact CMCOG staff. Each issue of the newsletter includes staff contact information, upcoming meeting schedules, the CMCOG web site address, project highlights, and current planning project status reports. When appropriate, information regarding significant transportation issues, MPO awards, and other one-time activities are also included.

Activities: The newsletter is used to report planning studies, publications and work products from the past year.

Charrette

Description: Charrettes are typically intense, possibly multi-day meetings involving municipal officials, planning officials and local residents. A charrette is instrumental in identifying key issues early, promotes joint ownership of the solution and attempts to diffuse traditional confrontation between stakeholders.

Activities: Project specific meetings, corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies and workshops.

Comment Forms

Description: Comment forms are often used to solicit public comment on specific issues being presented at a workshop or other public meeting. Comment forms can be very general in nature, or can ask for very specific feedback. For example, a comment form may ask for comments on specific alignment alternatives being considered during a corridor study, or may ask for a person's general feelings about any aspect of transportation. Comment forms can also be included in publications and on websites to solicit input regarding the subject of the publication and/or the format of the publication or website.

Activities: Public workshops, open houses, hearings and other meetings, general MPO activities.

Consultation

Description: As part of SAFETEA-LU regulations in encouraging more cooperative planning, CMCOG will consult, as appropriate, with agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities that are affected by transportation within the COATS area. To coordinate the planning function to the maximum extent practicable, such consultation will entail comparing LRTPs and TIPs as they are developed with the plans, maps, inventories, and planning documents developed by other agencies. This consultation will include, as appropriate, contact with the following groups: State, local, Indian Tribal, and private agencies responsible for planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, freight movements, land use management, natural resources, consideration, and historic preservation. CMCOG maintains an open consultation policy, whereby any private citizen or entity responsible for transportation in the COATS area may contact CMCOG and be included in the consultation process.

Activities: Public hearings/meetings, copies of this plan on the CMCOG website (for viewing/downloading purposes), meetings with CMCOG Staff.

Display Ads

Description: These ads are used to promote meetings that are not regularly scheduled, such as corridor study workshops. They are published in the local section of the newspaper in order to reach a larger audience than those that typically read legal ads.

Activities: Project specific meetings, workshops, open houses or hearings.

Direct Mailings

Description: Direct Mailings are used to announce upcoming meetings or activities or to provide information to a targeted area or group of people. Direct mailings are usually post cards, but can be letters or fliers. An area may be targeted for a direct mailing because of potential impacts from a project. Groups are targeted that may have an interest in a specific issue, for example avid cyclists and pedestrians may be targeted for pathways and trail projects.

Activities: Project-specific meetings, workshops, open houses, corridor studies, small-area studies, other planning studies or major activities.

E-mail Announcements/Internet Message Boards

Description: Meeting announcements and MPO information would be e-mailed to interested persons that have submitted their e-mail addresses to CMCOG staff. Interactive message boards would be used to facilitate discussion and solicit public comment regarding specific MPO projects or issues.

Activities: Corridor studies, small-area studies, other planning studies, regular meetings, public hearings, workshops, open houses, and other major MPO activities.

Fact Sheets

Description: Fact Sheets will be used to provide summary information regarding MPO policy, programs and projects. Fact sheets can be distributed at public meetings, on the CMCOG website, and in public places such as libraries and community centers. Individuals and special interest groups can request fact sheets directly from the CMCOG staff office.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub -area studies, other planning studies, project priorities process, updates to the LRTP and TIP and other MPO activities.

Legal Advertisements

Description: SCDOT requires a minimum fifteen (15) day advertisement of any public meeting where a decision could be made that would make a significant change to an existing plan or program. Ads are published to solicit public comment and/or review of the requested change or plan update. The ads provide a description of the meeting agenda, including contact information.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, project priority process, major TIP amendments, updates of the LRTP and UPWP, and other major MPO activities.

MPO Master Database

Description: Staff maintains a master database of all contacts, both business and public, on a continuous basis. The database includes committee membership, mailing information, phone numbers, fax numbers, and e-mail addresses. The database is used for maintaining up-to-date committee membership lists, special interest groups and homeowner association contacts, and the newsletter mailing list. Membership lists generated using the database are provided to the public, municipalities and other agencies upon request. The database will be used to establish and maintain a list of e-mail contacts for electronic meeting notification and announcements.

Activities: The database is used to enhance other public participation activities.

MPO Website

Description: The MPO website is found within CMCOG's website, under the link "Transportation Planning". The site provides basic information about the services of CMCOG, the MPO process, its members, meeting times and committee and contact information. The site has been expanded recently to include information about specific projects undertaken by CMCOG and the MPO. MPO publications and work products, such as the UPWP, TIP, LRTP, and the Public Participation Plan, are available for downloading from the site. Also, citizens are able to submit comments and sign up to be added to the various distribution lists maintained by CMCOG. The site provides many links to other transportation related sites from the local to the national level. The site is maintained and updated by CMCOG staff.

The website address is www.centralmidlands.org/transplan.asp.

Activities: The site is used to promote regular and special meetings, planning studies, publications and work products.

Press Releases

- Description: Formal press releases are sent to local media (newspaper, TV and radio) to announce upcoming special meetings and activities and to provide information on specific issues being considered by the MPO or their committees.
- Activities: Specific corridor or other planning studies, workshops, open houses, public hearings, and other special MPO activities

Public Informational Meetings

- Description: These are public meetings that are generally open and informal, with project team members interacting with the public on a one-on-one basis. Short presentations may be given at these meetings. The purpose of public informational meetings is to provide project information to the public and to solicit public comment.
- Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, project priority process, certification review, LRTP update, and other major MPO activities.

Public Notices

- Description: The MPO regularly advertises the CMCOG Board, the Transportation Subcommittee, the Technical Committee, the Rail Transit Committee and the Bicycle & Pedestrian Committee meetings.
- Activities: Regular monthly meetings, other public meetings.

Small Group Meetings

- Description: During projects such as planning studies, meetings are held with small groups that have an interest in the project. Meetings could be with homeowners or neighborhood associations, civic groups, special interest groups, or other groups of affected or interested parties.
- Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, and other MPO activities.

Surveys

Description: Surveys are used when very specific input from the public is desired. A survey can be used in place of comment cards to ask very specific questions such as whether a person supports a specific alignment in a corridor study. Surveys are also used to gather technical data during corridor and planning studies. For example, participants may be asked about their daily travel patterns.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies and other planning studies.

Title VI & Environmental Justice Review

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in federally assisted programs and activities on the basis of race, color, and national origin. Then in 1994, Presidential Executive Order 12898 directed every Federal agency to make Environmental Justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing the effects of all programs, policies, and activities on "minority populations and low-income populations." In complying with the aforementioned federal laws and policies, the MPO's Environmental Justice initiatives will strive to involve the potentially affected public through a Public Outreach Program. This program consists of MPO staff activities designed to develop partnerships with, and enhance their participation in the transportation planning process, by groups and individuals of "traditionally underserved" communities. These communities include minorities, low income, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Staff activities include, but are not limited to, MPO staff participation in groups and coalitions serving within these communities, targeted communications with local media outlets, conducting meetings at times and locations that are accessible to transit dependant or non-driving individuals when possible, and publication of MPO documents in non-technical, accessible formats when needed. The goal of the MPO's Public Outreach Program is to ensure that all citizens, regardless of race, color, religion, income status, national origin, age, gender, disability, marital status, or political affiliation, have an equal opportunity to participate in the MPO's decision-making process.

Description: CMCOG will take reasonable steps to ensure that all persons, including those with a disability or language barrier, have meaningful opportunities to participate in the transportation planning and programming process, and will strive to address environmental justice issues at all stages of the planning process. This includes implementing the following strategies to reduce participation barriers for under-served groups and engage them in the decision-making process:

- Representatives of minority, disability, low-income and limited English proficiency groups will be identified and included in MPO mailings.
- Key planning documents will be translated and public notices broadcasted for Spanish-speaking populations.
- Whenever possible, meetings will be held at locations accessible to persons with disability, bus riders, and bicyclist and that are convenient to neighborhoods with a concentration of minority and low-income persons.

- Where meeting facilitators are used, CMCOG will seek to use persons that represent the diversity of the community and/or have expertise in working with under-served groups.
- Translators/interpreters will be provided for meetings, if requested.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, LRTP update and other major MPO activities.

Visualization

Description: CMCOG recognizes that an important element to public participation is to provide the public, when possible, visual as well as written descriptions of transportation projects. Through visual imagery, the complex features of proposed transportation plans, policies, and programs can be portrayed at appropriate scales—region, local, project architecture, etc.—and from different points of view. To this end, CMCOG will utilize various visual and architectural design techniques; some of which may include: sketches, drawings, artist renderings, aerial photography, mapping, simulated photos, videos, computer modeled images, interactive geographical information system (GIS), GIS-based scenario planning tools, photo manipulation and computer simulation.

Activities: Planning studies, TIP amendments, and other MPO activities.

V. SUMMARY TABLE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION POLICIES

Program Adoption	Public Meetings	Comment Period	Notes
Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)	2 meetings prior to CMCOG Board approval	30 days	A summary of all oral or written comments will be provided to the CMCOG Board and made available for public review.
Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)	2 meetings prior to CMCOG Board approval	30 days	
Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)	N/A	30 days	
Public Participation Plan (PPP)	N/A	45 days	Will be held for updates of the PPP as needed
Amendments			
Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)	1 meeting if requested prior to CMCOG Board approval. A public meeting will be held on major amendments	15 days	
Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)	1 meeting if requested prior to CMCOG Board approval. A public meeting will be held on major amendments	15 days	
Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)	N/A	15 days	
Public Participation Plan (PPP)	N/A	15 days	
Open Meetings			
CMCOG Board	Regular meetings held the Fourth Thursday of every month		
Transportation Subcommittee	Monthly Meeting are scheduled for the Second Thursday		
Technical Committee	Monthly Meeting are scheduled for the Fourth Tuesday		

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

Other techniques used for future consideration include:

Project-specific Web Sites

Description: For individual projects, such as corridor studies, that are typically performed using consulting services, project-specific web sites are often used. These sites are used when project information is too extensive to be included on the CMCOG site. Project web sites can contain study area maps, meeting announcements, descriptions of potential alternatives, comment forms, user surveys and project team contact information.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub -area studies, other planning studies and major MPO projects.

Project-specific Newsletters

Description: For individual projects, such as corridor studies, that are typically performed using consulting services, newsletters are often used to address specific project issues. These newsletters are mailed to targeted residents, elected officials representing that area, businesses and property owners in the area that are expected to be impacted by a particular study. Information regarding upcoming project meetings, alternatives being proposed in the area, and other project news is reported in these newsletters.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub -area studies, other planning studies or major activities.

Other Newsletters

Description: When project-specific newsletters are not used, articles may be prepared for publication in other newsletters produced by municipalities, homeowners' associations, church groups, civic groups, or others that may have an interest in the project. These articles are subject to the publication dates and space restrictions of the individual publishers.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub -area studies, other planning studies or major activities.

MPO Logo

- Description:** A logo representing the MPO is used to identify products and publications of the MPO. A logo helps the public become familiar with the different activities of the MPO by providing a means of recognizing MPO products.
- Activities:** A logo should be used on all MPO publications, including those developed by consultants working on MPO sponsored projects.

Formal Public Hearings

- Description:** These are public meetings used to solicit public comment on a project or issue being considered for adoption by the MPO. Hearings provide a formal setting for citizens to provide comments to the MPO or another decision-making body. They are recorded and transcribed for the record.
- Activities:** LRTP and TIP updates, corridor studies, project development & environmental studies, and other planning studies as needed for other MPO activities.

Government Access Television

- Description:** The local cable network provider as part of basic cable service maintains local channels of government and business advertisements. Government Access Television can broadcast rolling message scripts and regular and special meetings; both live and pre-recorded, as well as short informative programs about departmental activities or projects of interest to the entire population.
- Activities:** Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, regular and special MPO activities.

Posters and Fliers

- Description:** Posters and fliers are used to announce meetings and events and are distributed to public places such as city halls, libraries and community centers for display. The announcement may contain a brief description of the purpose of a meeting, the time(s) and location(s), and contact information. Posters and fliers may be used to reach a large audience that cannot be reached using direct mailings and/or newsletters.
- Activities:** Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, regular and special MPO activities.

VI. EVALUATION METHODS AND PERFORMANCE GOALS

In order to determine the effectiveness of the public participation tools, they must be evaluated and compared to established performance goals. The typical methods for evaluating the effectiveness of public participation tools are surveys and quantitative statistical analysis. This section briefly describes evaluation methods to be used by CMCOG. For each public participation tool, performance goals and methods for meeting those goals have been identified.

Surveys

Surveys typically consist of short, specific questions regarding public participation tools that are ongoing or that were used on a specific project. Surveys can be conducted in person, by phone, mail or e-mail. Face-to-face and telephone surveys provide quick responses and can be used when a respondent's answer may lead to a follow-up question. For example, respondents may be asked if advertisements are an effective notification tool. If the response is no, the surveyor can ask the respondent why advertisements are not effective and also what other tools they would prefer. In person and telephone surveys can target specific areas or groups or can be random sampling. Mail surveys may be used to provide written record of respondent's answers. Mail-back surveys can be distributed at meetings, inside other publications, or by mailing directly to potential respondents. Respondents can be a targeted group, such as members of special interest groups or residents of specific areas, or they can be randomly generated. Return postage for mail surveys typically can be pre-paid by the MPO, or can be the responsibility of the respondent. E-mail surveys, like mail surveys, provide a written record of responses. Unlike mail-back surveys, there is little to no reproduction or distribution cost to the MPO to send out the surveys, and little to no cost to respondents to return a response. To use e-mail surveys, it is necessary to have e-mail addresses for the targeted respondents, and random distribution is not really an option. Surveys will be used to evaluate citizens' responses on the effectiveness of the public participation tools.

Statistical Analysis

Statistics can be used to determine the "return on the investment" of producing public participation tools. For example, the number of persons attending an activity can be compared to the number of persons that were notified of the activity. This type of evaluation can be an indicator of whether or not the tools used for public participation are actually reaching the intended audience, or which tools had a greater response rate. Statistical analysis will be used to evaluate survey responses and the results of the analysis will be compared to the evaluation measures to determine the rate of success of the public participation tools.

VII. IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

CMCOG (MPO) continually strives for improved public participation. Improvements should be made to increase public awareness and to improve the quantity and quality of information provided to the public. The decisions made by CMCOG affect the entire population, both residents and visitors. Therefore, seeking public input on those decisions is vital to the success of CMCOG as the organization responsible for transportation planning. Within one month after the completion of an activity or at milestones during an activity, evaluation of public participation tool should occur. For ongoing activities, evaluation should occur at least quarterly. Each time a public participation evaluation is performed, a list of improvement strategies should be identified for implementation. If improvement is needed for an ongoing public participation task, a reasonable completion date should be established. If improvement is needed for one-time activities, such as corridor studies, the improvement should be implemented where appropriate on future activities.

Summary Table for Evaluation Public Participation Tools

Public Participation Tool	Evaluation Criteria	Performance Goals	Methods to Meet Goals
MPO Web Site	Number of Hits	Min. of 50 hits per month, 5 % increase in hits per quarter	Use other public involvement tools to increase advertisement of the web site.
MPO Master Database	Number of returned items	Max. of 2% return rate per mailing	Make immediate corrections when items are returned.
Legal Advertisements	No Measure / Required by South Carolina Statutes	N/A	N/A
Annual Newsletter	Calls, letters, etc.; Number of returns	N/A. Return rate is addressed under MPO Master Database	Continue items that receive favorable comments and correct or improve mistakes or items that receive negative comments.
Display Ad	Calls, letters, etc.; Number of persons contacted	Min. of 15% of meeting attendees/survey respondents indicated that they saw the ad. Ad formats may be modified based on specific comments received	Pursue publication in a prominent location in the paper. Increase the size or modify the layout to make ads more visible.
Direct Mailings	Calls, letters, etc.; Number of persons contacted	Min. of 15% of meeting attendees/survey respondents indicated that they received the mailing. -OR- Reaches a min. of 85% of persons that <i>are affected by a project.</i>	Increase/Decrease mailing list to more accurately target affected areas. Use the most up-to-date information from the respective county's Property Accessor's Office to maintain the mailing list.
Press Releases	Calls, letters, etc.	No standard. Format may be modified based on specific comments received.	Encourage publication of press releases by keeping the media informed.
Small Group Meetings	Calls, letters, etc.; Met the expectations of the group	N/A. These meetings are held at the request of affected groups.	MPO staff and any consulting staff should be available in a timely manner to hold small group meetings regarding any MPO activity or issue. The meeting should be formatted to provide specific information requested by the group and should highlight issues that are of interest to the group.

E-mail Announcements/ Internet Message Boards	Calls, letters, etc.; Number of persons reached	Min. of 5% of meeting attendees/survey respondents indicated that they saw the announcement.	Increase e-mail list by advertising the availability of email announcements using other public involvement tools.
Public Hearings	Calls, letters, etc.	3%-5% of affected population (based on study area) in attendance.	Schedule hearings at convenient and accessible times and locations. Use other public involvement tools to increase awareness of hearings.
Comment Forms	Calls, letters, etc.; Number of persons contacted	45% of meeting attendees filled out form- OR- 2% of visitors to a web site submitted a form -OR- 15% of mail recipients return the form.	Encourage responses by explaining the importance of receiving comments in order to improve the planning process
Surveys	Calls, letters, etc.; Number of responses	45% of contacted persons participate in the survey -OR- 15% of mail recipients return the survey	Encourage responses by explaining the importance of receiving feedback to improve the planning process.