

CHAPTER 2 - PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation in CMCOG’s transportation planning process, including planning for the LRTP, considers public involvement early in the planning process essential in order to fully assess all the social and natural environmental as well as economic impacts of transportation decisions. CMCOG believes it is of the utmost importance for the residents of the Midlands to be well-informed and to have adequate access to the decision-making processes. CMCOG also believes in a planning approach that reaches persons and groups that have been traditionally underserved by the transportation system. It accomplishes this by being proactive and open to participation by all segments of the population. CMCOG attempts to conduct a planning process that both encourages broad public participation and considers and responds to public input.

CMCOG’s approach to public involvement in the transportation planning process is based in part on the CMCOG *Public Participation Plan*, which was adopted by the CMCOG Board of Directors in July 2007. It outlines processes and procedures to be undertaken whenever significant planning efforts occur. As part of the 2035 plan development process, staff utilized several methods for engaging public participation, which included stakeholder interviews, visualization techniques, a survey instrument, public input meetings across the region, presentations to various civic and neighborhood groups, press releases and articles in several area newspapers and maintenance of an internet webpage dedicated to the 2035 LRTP.

2.1 LRTP Transportation Survey

The survey instrument examined how and where persons traveled throughout the Midlands region. The survey was distributed between February and March 2008 and answered via internet (on CMCOG’s website), on paper and submitted in person by mail, fax or e-mail. In total, the survey received over 900 respondents. Table 2.1 highlights some of its results.

The survey questions allowed citizens to assist transportation officials in identifying the most important transportation issues and what corridors had the most congestion in the region. The surveys were distributed to the public by means of the CMCOG web site, mass email distribution list, posted on the various municipal websites in the area, and via CMCOG committee meetings.

Table 2.1: Transportation Survey Results

How do you normally travel throughout the region?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car (97%) • Bus (2%) • Bike (1%)
What's your greatest travel problem?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel time (41%) • Cost of travel (24%) • Difficulty in getting to places of interest (14%) • Stress (11%) • No problems (10%)
What's the region's most important transportation issue?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congestion (46%) • Lack of transportation choices: bus, bike, SW (25%) • Lack of direct connections between points (14%) • Safety (11%)
Of the five choices, spending \$100 which would you support the most? <i>(Based on Average)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining & improving existing roads (\$33) • Adding lanes/building new roads (\$27) • Expanding/improving transit (\$20) • Expanding/improving biking-walking (\$15) • Improving movement of goods (freight) (\$5)
Roads Identified as Needing Most Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NE Richland: Hardscrabble, Clemson, Two Notch (US 1) • Irmo/Chapin: Dutch Fork (US 76), Columbia Ave, Amicks Ferry • Lexington: Sunset (US 378), Main/Augusta (US 1), S. Lake (SC 6) • Columbia: Elmwood, Harbison (mall), Blossom, Forest Dr, Millwood • SE Richland: Garners Ferry (US 76)
Issues Like To See Addressed in Future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More sidewalks in subdivisions • I-26 Bypass (Lexington-Blythewood Connector)—alt to "Malfunction Junction" • More public transit in NE Richland & Town of Lexington • More transportation services for seniors • Staggered work days/hours

- Commuter rail services
- More bike/walking facilities
- Better planned communities (lessen #curb cuts)
- Town of Lexington Bypass
- More travel choices in Lexington (bus, bike, etc)
- Timed traffic signals

The survey was also distributed to social and human services agencies by the United Way of the Midlands where it reached persons traditionally underserved by the transportation system (persons with disabilities, the elderly, minorities). Announcements of the survey were also posted on the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce distribution list as well as CMCOG's Walk/Bike Listserv, which is maintained and updated through the University of South Carolina and is a forum through which to communicate bicycle and pedestrian information and initiatives in the Central Midlands region of South Carolina (Richland, Lexington, Fairfield, and Newberry Counties). The Neighborhood Alliances of the City of Columbia and Richland County published information about the survey on their respective websites and invitations were sent out to each of its members. Articles also appeared in The State and CMCOG Transportation Staff spoke about the survey and updates about the LRTP at numerous meetings.

Overall, responses were related to identifying problem intersection and roadway corridors. Preliminary data developed for the long-range plan were presented to numerous groups, such as the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce, Lexington Chamber of Commerce, Greater Chapin Chamber of Commerce, Town of Elgin Centennial Committee, and neighborhood groups in the Columbia and Chapin areas. News articles about the survey as well as our public participation meetings were cited in area newspapers that included The State, Elgin News, Chapin News, Lexington County Chronicle, Irmo News, and West Wateree Chronicle. The State Newspaper discussed some of the data and also made the public aware of the survey through articles. CMCOG published the survey along with reminders about it in its quarterly newsletter.

2.2 LRTP Public Meetings

In addition to the survey, two rounds of public input meetings were held at various locations across the region. The responses to the

meetings served as helpful tools in the development of the plan. Table 2.2 below lists the dates and locations.

Table 2.2: 2008 Public Input Meetings for the 2035 LRTP

Round 1

Date & Time	Location
Thursday, March 27 6pm – 8pm	Southeast Regional Branch Library 7421 Garners Ferry Rd., Columbia
Wednesday, April 2 6pm - 8pm	Sandhills Branch Library 1 Summit Pkwy at Clemson Rd, Columbia
Saturday, April 5 12pm – 2pm	Irmo Regional Branch Library 6251 St. Andrews Road, Columbia
Tuesday, April 8 6pm – 8pm	Lexington Main Branch Library 5440 Augusta Road, Lexington
Wednesday, April 9 6pm – 8pm	Crooked Creek Park Recreation Center 1098 Old Lexington Hwy, Chapin
Thursday, April 10 6pm – 8pm	Cayce - West Columbia Regional Branch Library 1500 Augusta Road, West Columbia

Round 2

Date & Time	Location
Tuesday, September 23 4pm – 7pm	Dreher High School 3319 Millwood Avenue, Columbia
Monday, September 29 4pm – 7pm	North Springs Community Center 1320 Clemson Road, Columbia
Tuesday, September 30 4pm – 7pm	Town of Lexington Town Hall 111 Maiden Lane, Lexington
Thursday, October 2 4pm – 7pm	Ballentine Community Center 1009 Bickley Road, Irmo
Saturday, October 4 11am – 1pm	Dutch Square Mall 421 Bush River Road, Columbia

Though these sites were heavily advertised weeks ahead, attendance varied between the two rounds of meetings. The purpose for the first round of meetings was to receive suggestions and feedback on where the most problem intersections and congested road segments were located. Attendance during the first round attendance was very low. Meetings that received the most attention were the ones held in smaller communities, such as the towns of Elgin and Chapin, where residents

voiced opinions on a particular congested roadway (US 1 and Columbia Avenue, respectively).

In preparation for the second round of meetings, which were intended to seek feedback on the LRTP's recommended policies, strategies, and funding projects, staff undertook more aggressive means for collecting public input. In addition to posting ads in the area newspapers and circulating notices throughout area civic and neighborhood groups, the following actions were successful and will be part of future public outreach efforts:

- Set meeting times for 3-hour segments during weeknight (4pm-7pm).
- Make it clear in the flyer and announcements the purpose and format of the meetings so people would know that the meetings are a drop-in format with scheduled presentations at certain times.
- Create flyers and send to area businesses and churches in proximity of the meeting locations.
- Schedule a meeting in a mall (major shopping area), during lunchtime on a Saturday, to capture more public response.
- Post signs along the roadway in proximity of the meeting site to notify commuters of the meeting date, time and location.

By implementing these five actions, the second round of meetings had greater public turnout than the first round of meetings. Average attendance at the second round was fifteen people compared to just three persons during the first round. As a result of the increased levels of participation during this second round of meetings, staff will continue employ such techniques in the future in an attempt to encourage more people to attend future project/plan meetings.

2.3 Use of Supplemental Plans

In addition to the public outreach tools mentioned above and for purposes of avoiding duplication of public outreach efforts, staff also incorporated public comments from various transportation studies and plans that were occurring the timeline the 2035 LRTP was being developed. Table 2.3 denotes the plans, agency responsible, and year adopted.

Table 2.3: Plans used to supplement LRTP Public Outreach Process

Plan	Governing Body	Year
Long Range Transit Plan,	CMRTA	2005
Chapin S-48 Subarea Plan	CMCOG	2005
Bike-Pedestrian Pathways Plan	CMCOG	2006
Commuter Rail Study	CMCOG	2006
Open Space Preservation Plan	CMCOG	2007
Lower Richland Subarea Plan	CMCOG	2008
White Knoll Subarea Plan	CMCOG	2008
Congestion Management Plan	CMCOG	2008
Motor Freight Study	CMCOG	2008
SCDOT Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan	SCDOT	2008
Richland on the Move Transportation Study*	Richland County	*2008

Each of these plans underwent a thorough and intense public involvement process. With each, as keeping with the aims of CMCOG’s Public Participation Plan, communication and public involvement were paramount to the overall success of the project. Input came from a wide cross-section of people who live, work, or otherwise care how the transportation needs of the Central Midlands region will be met. Outreach tools used were stakeholder interviews, public meetings (including visualization techniques), small group meetings and presentations to targeted focused groups.

Feedback from these plans, and ultimately the 2035 LRTP, came from various persons and groups representing:

- 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
- Public School Officials
- Transportation Agencies (freight, port, airports, transit, etc.)
- Users of Public Transportation
- Users of Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation
- Disable Community

- Homeowners' Associations
- Civic Groups
- Special Interest Groups

2.4 Objectives & Strategies

1. Actively engage public in the transportation planning process.

- Maintain a current database of contacts including at a minimum the following persons:
 - 1) 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
 - 2) Elected Officials
 - 3) Local Government Staff
 - 4) Local Public School Officials
 - 5) Transportation Agencies (freight, port, airports, transit, etc.)
 - 6) Representatives of Users of Public Transportation
 - 7) Representatives of Users of Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation
 - 8) Representatives of the Disable
 - 9) Local Media
 - 10) Homeowners' Associations / Civic Groups
 - 11) Special Interest Groups
 - 12) Area Public Libraries (for public display)
 - 13) Individuals expressing an interest in transportation planning activities.
- When feasible, electronically send and/or mail meeting announcements (invitations) to targeted groups/persons for upcoming activities.
- Employ visualization techniques to depict transportation plans.

2. Keep the public informed of on-going transportation related activities on a continuous basis.

- 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.

- 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.
- Maintain a COATS MPO section (highlighting project and staff contact information) on the CMCOG website.

3. Encourage the participation of all citizens in the transportation planning process.

- 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.
- Hold public meetings (whenever feasible) at a scheduled time, location, and building facility convenient to potentially affected citizens.
- Strive to continuously improve public participation by periodically evaluating public participation techniques, according to the procedures contained in the CMCOG Public Participation Plan.