

Roanoke Valley – Alleghany Regional Commission and Roanoke Valley Area Metropolitan Planning Organization

Public Participation Plan - 2007

1. Introduction

On October 28, 1993, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) jointly issued a final rule on metropolitan and statewide transportation planning. The purpose of the rule is to identify what activities and products will be expected of State and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) as part of their federally mandated transportation planning process. These transportation-planning activities are required to enable States and urban areas to program and use federal funds for transportation projects and improvements.

One of the changes brought to transportation planning as a result of passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 is the requirement of an enhanced public involvement process for all MPO's. TEA-21, enacted in 1998, reiterated and reinforced requirements regarding stakeholder and public involvement.

Another more recent development has reemphasized the importance of public involvement in the operations of the Roanoke Valley – Alleghany Regional Commission (RVARC) and Roanoke Valley Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (RVAMPO). Executive Order 12898, issued by President Clinton in 1994, requires that federal agencies and other entities making use of federal funding avoid “disproportionately high and adverse” effects on minority and low-income populations and to seek involvement of the public toward the ends of ensuring environmental justice in governmental operations.

Most recently, on February 14, 2007, the FHWA and the FTA released their long-awaited Statewide and Metropolitan Planning Rule (72 Fed. Reg. 7224). The final rule revises planning regulations at 23 C.F.R. Part 450 and 49 C.F.R. Part 613 to reflect the many changes made by the *Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users* – SAFETEA-LU, which superceded TEA-21 in 2005. SAFETEA-LU reiterates and reinforces the requirement for an enhanced public involvement process in transportation planning.

2. Policy Statement

Thus, it is the policy of the RVARC and RVAMPO to facilitate public information, access and involvement under a collaborative planning process in which the interest of both public and private stakeholders are duly considered. To the extent permissible by law and budget constraints, the policy and technical processes will be made inclusive of and accessible to the

public as well as other regional stakeholders. The RVARC and RVAMPO recognize that certain organizations of state and local government also host important opportunities for public involvement. The RVARC and RVAMPO will seek to incorporate the comments and suggestions from these state and local government events into its planning products in addition to the comments recorded at events hosted by the RVARC or RVAMPO.

3. Purpose

The purpose of this Public Participation Plan is to identify a proactive public involvement process for the planning efforts of the RVAMPO and for the RVARC. This process includes but is not limited to adherence to state and federal regulations regarding public notices and public hearings, complete access to information barring legal or fiduciary restraints, input to key decisions, development of a demographic profile of the respective study areas of the RVARC and RVAMPO, and development and deployment of innovative public involvement strategies.

This plan also develops standard procedures for the development, adoption, and amendment of the Constrained Long Range Transportation Plan (CLRTP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and the Rural Long Range Transportation Plan (RLRP). Additionally, this manual specifies the following:

- I. MPO plans and projects will include a public involvement component.
- II. Legal requirements for public involvement will be met or exceeded by both the RVAMPO and RVARC.
- III. All official meetings of the RVARC will be followed by a brief period for comments made by the public.
- IV. A public comment period of 45 calendar days will be provided prior to the adoption of this public involvement process and/or any significant amendments to the process.
- V. The RVARC and RVAMPO will endeavor to coordinate these public involvement processes with local, state, and federal government agencies and initiatives wherever possible to enhance public involvement, promote the democratic process and reduce redundancies and costs through economies of scope and scale.

4. Ongoing Activities

The RVARC and RVAMPO Public Participation Plan will utilize and build upon the following activities, which are considered important elements in the efforts of the RVARC and the RVAMPO to include the public in the planning process.

The Regional Register, a quarterly publication of the Roanoke Valley – Alleghany Regional Commission, serves to inform the public in regards to its activities. It

also serves as an important means of keeping the public current on new developments on transportation plans and projects and other news related to the RVAMPO. The mailing list for the *Regional Register* includes various civic organizations, business leaders, press members, leaders in education, leaders in public transit, and other individuals. The newsletter is also published on the RVARC website (at <http://www.rvarc.org>), which is accessible via home computer or at almost any public library.

In 2007 RVARC staff developed a media newsletter for distribution to local and regional print and broadcast media. The goal of the media newsletter is to develop a relationship with media outlets to further increase opportunities for public communication and public relations concerning planning products.

The RVARC and RVAMPO staff is available on a full-time basis to respond to direct questions and inquiries from citizens concerning transportation plans, programs, and the transportation planning process for the region, as well as specific transportation projects. The staff is also available to field questions regarding any other regional project or program, examples of which include Community Development Block Grant applications and regional water studies. Additionally, the staff will make presentations at the request of local civic organizations as a part of its Speakers Bureau Program and routinely provides transportation and community development related information to the local print and electronic media.

The RVARC maintains an extensive library of transportation, environmental, demographic, planning, GIS, and community development materials that is available for use by the public during the normal workday. Commission staff is also available to provide technical assistance to area citizens and governments. The public can request this service by placing a phone call to the staff, by sending an email to the staff, by postal mail, or any other method of contact including an actual visit. Hearing impaired citizens or citizens who are visually impaired may reach the staff through the TTY/TTD line (711) or through the toll-free voice number (888-508-3737) published in all public notices of the RVARC and/or RVAMPO.

RVARC has hosted a Regional Citizens Planning Academy in which classes are held to explain key planning concepts and ideas. The Academy is open to anyone interested in learning more about regional planning and development. In fiscal year 2007 the Citizens Planning Academy has transformed into an "Online Regional Planning Academy" allowing citizens to learn about planning issues at their convenience. The Online Academy is located at:
<http://www.rvarc.org/academy/>

The Commission also maintains relationships with local academic institutions and hosts several internships annually. Due to the Commission's regional planning role and the variety of projects in which the staff is involved, there are many

opportunities to host student interns, and students from every discipline are welcomed.

The RVAMPO utilizes the assistance of a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) in its transportation planning activities. The CAC is composed of leaders from local civic organizations, economic development groups, arts organizations, and education groups, and members appointed by local governments within the RVAMPO and RVARC. This committee provides valuable public input into the planning process for the CLRTP and the RLRP. Specifically the CAC will produce draft “Goals and Objectives” for each CLRTP update. Additionally the CAC will review the “Goals and Objectives” for the RLRP. A member of the CAC, to be determined at a CAC meeting, will address the RVAMPO on an annual basis. Finally, the CAC will perform other roles and functions on an as needed basis.

The RVARC and RVAMPO will continue to seek the development of contacts with minority communities throughout the region and to continue to make other efforts to ensure more minority representation at public comment sessions and at meetings.

In addition, public notices, announcing public comment sessions or public meetings, are regularly placed in the various news outlets throughout the region. The Commission usually advertises such meetings in *The Roanoke Times*, a major regional newspaper with readership encompassing the Commission’s entire service area, and *The Roanoke Tribune*, a weekly newspaper which focuses on the minority population in the area.

According to the provisions of SAFETEA-LU a list of “interested parties” and “stakeholder organizations” will be maintained by RVARC staff. This list will include to the extent practicable, but is not limited to: private citizens, public agencies, providers of freight services, private providers of transportation, representatives of public transportation employees representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities and representatives of the disabled. The list is developed and maintained with consultation from VDOT staff and can be updated as necessary.

5. Goals and Objectives

Goals are used to describe the ultimate vision for the progress and accomplishments of the public involvement program. Objectives are the measurable short-term and interim steps used to measure progress towards reaching ultimate goals.

- Goal 1: Endeavor to exceed applicable public involvement provisions contained within federal and state statutes regarding the CLRTP, TIP, and all other projects of regional significance – the major projects of both the RVAMPO and RVARC planning processes.**
- Objective 1.1 All rules pertaining to advertising and holding public hearings as described in § 15.2-2204 of the Code of Virginia will be met or exceeded.
- Objective 1.2 For major revisions and/or amendments to the CLRTP, TIP or RLRP a minimum thirty (30) days public comment period will be advertised on at least one occasion. This minimum public comment period precedes and is in addition to the Public Hearing/ Public Meeting described in Objective 1.4. Comments received will be made available to the policymakers prior to the date that the decision is to be made.
- Objective 1.3 A formal public meeting will be held to discuss “Long Range” planning assumptions, at least once every long range planning cycle.
- Objective 1.4 At a minimum, for major amendments of the CLRTP, TIP or RLRP notice of intent to hold a public meeting shall be published in local newspapers, including minority-owned publications and publications targeted towards specific groups, and posted on the RVARC website at least fourteen (14) days, but no more than twenty-one (21) days, in advance of the proposed date of the meeting. A second notice shall be published seven (7) days prior to the proposed date of the meeting.
- Objective 1.5 Minor technical, spelling, grammatical, and similar routine corrections to the CLRTP, TIP, and/or other RVARC/MPO documents shall not be required to be advertised per Objectives 1.1-1.4. Interpretation of the term minor shall be made by the appropriate state/federal agency at the time that the correction is to be made. For TIP related “adjustments” Objective 1.5 is formalized in the “MPO TIP Adjustment Agreement” signed by VDOT, VDRPT and RVAMPO officials. The MPO Tip Adjustment Agreement was approved on August 25, 2005 and amended on August 24, 2006. The “MPO TIP Adjustment Agreement” shall be referred to in the interpretation of the term “minor” for TIP related “adjustments.”
- Objective 1.6 For the CLRTP a draft of a 5-year update to the CLRTP or a major amendment to the current CLRTP shall be circulated to the

aforementioned RVAMPO SAFETEA-LU “List of Interested Parties” for comment at least 30 days prior to any public hearing for said CLRTP update or major amendment. The “List of Interested Parties” will be developed jointly by RVAMPO and VDOT staff and updated as needed.

- Goal 2: Develop a demographic profile of the RVAMPO and the RVARC area as a tool to assess, discuss, and benchmark public participation, and the possible positive and negative impacts of projects with respect to neighborhoods, communities, minorities, and concentrations of poverty.**
- Objective 2.1 Develop Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data layers pertaining to income, population, housing, age, and minority status for the RVAMPO and RVARC.
- Objective 2.2 Develop a plan for the management, cataloging, and incorporation of useful public involvement related data.
- Objective 2.3 Incorporate the demographic profile into the CLRTP, TIP, RLRP and other plans of regional significance as a framework with which to display and evaluate the various proposed projects and improvements.
- Objective 2.4 Identify any additional, reasonable accommodations that may be warranted, based on the analysis of the demographic profile. This applies especially to any Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations. The MPO will decide what accommodations are reasonable based on the demographics of the area.
- Goal 3: Inform the public about how transportation improvements are made, how the regional planning process works, and what roles are played by the RVARC and RVAMPO.**
- Objective 3.1 Provide regular public opportunities to explain and discuss plans and outline the planning process for the general public.
- Objective 3.2 The RVAMPO shall continue to work through a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) whose members are delegated the responsibility to inform stakeholders in their respective communities about the planning process.
- Objective 3.3 Test market innovative public information initiatives using the following 3 step framework:

I. Concept Development
II. Experiment/ Testing
III. Documentation, Evaluation, and Decision

Public information initiatives could include but not be limited to the following: electronic touch screen kiosk, web pages, web based forums, mailing lists, public events, and etc.

- Objective 3.4 Provide regular opportunities for early public input on planning products. This includes but is not limited to an annual public input “open house.”
- Objective 3.5 When possible use technology to aid in the visualization of potential planning projects and concepts. Visualization technology may include a wide variety of techniques that vary according to the situation.
- Goal 4: Raise the visibility of the RVARC and RVAMPO within their respective boundaries.**
- Objective 4.1 Utilize a variety of means to inform the public about the RVARC and RVAMPO including public notices, the RVARC web page participation in public affairs programs provided by the electronic media, *The Regional Register*, as well as those listed in Objective 3.3.
- Objective 4.2 Seek to cultivate a positive relationship with local print and broadcast media to establish an environment of goodwill and to achieve positive publicity whenever feasible.
- Objective 4.3 Develop relationships with member government planning staffs in order to cooperate and leverage the benefits of member government planning and public participation initiatives.
- Goal 5: Involve the public in planning, prioritization, and identification of long and short-range regional transportation needs.**
- Objective 5.1 Promote the role of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) in serving as a two-way communication mechanism between citizen representatives, RVAMPO, and RVARC staff by:
- Ensuring that CAC members have up-to-date information about RVAMPO plans to pass on to

organizations and individuals within the areas they represent.

- When appropriate, encourage CAC members to consult and collaborate with neighborhood, organizational, and local government leaders.

Goal 6: Obtain and incorporate public comments, reactions, and perceptions into plans and solutions where appropriate, and share such comments with governmental officials and other interested parties, where appropriate.

- Objective 6.1 Provide opportunities for the public to comment orally or in writing on any action being proposed by the RVARC or RVAMPO.
- Objective 6.2 Provide multiple means of response including but not limited to: mail in postcards, email, tape recordings, handwritten comments and/or voice-mail messages when feasible and/or appropriate.
- Objective 6.3 Communicate a summary of public comments routinely to the RVAMPO Policy Board and to the full body of the RVARC.
- Objective 6.4 Publish an annual summary of public comments to be shared with local, state, and federal government representatives.
- Objective 6.5 For the CLRTP and TIP summarize the manner in which, public comments and feedback are considered and incorporated in to the plans, with both specific illustrative examples and a general summary. Include this summary in the final version of the CLRTP and TIP. This objective does not apply to minor amendments and adjustments of the CLRTP or TIP.

Goal 7: Make it easier for low income, minority, and all citizens to get involved in the regional planning process.

- Objective 7.1 Consider scheduling public hearings and workshops in the late afternoon and early evening so those citizens that work can attend.
- Objective 7.2 Endeavor to publish notices and advertisements in publications aimed at minorities and low-income individuals.
- Objective 7.3 Use the demographic profile described in Goal 2 to ensure that initiatives and outreach efforts are adequately targeted to low income and minority concentrations.

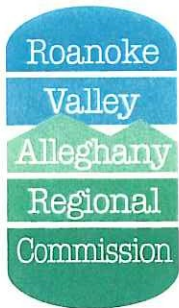
- Objective 7.4 Take advantage of opportunities to coordinate with agencies serving low income and minority populations in their public involvement and public information efforts.
- Goal 8:** *Encourage timely implementation of recommendations found in regional plans and studies.*
- Objective 8.1 Include a “progress tracking” or annual review process in Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) projects where practical. For example, progress tracking for Greenway and Bicycle Plan implementation.
- Objective 8.2 Report concerns about timely implementation of projects to member local governments, VDOT and RVAMPO on an as needed basis.

6. Nondiscrimination Policy

The Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission and the Roanoke Valley Area Metropolitan Planning Organization ensure non-discrimination in all programs, services and activities in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other nondiscrimination authorities.

If you feel you have been excluded from participation in, denied benefits of, or subjected to discrimination regarding the RVARC's or RVAMPO's programs, services and/or activities on the basis of your race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability, you may contact:

John Hull, Designated Officer for Civil Rights Complaints
Roanoke Valley – Alleghany Regional Commission
PO BOX 2569
Roanoke, VA 24010
540-343-4417
804-786-2935, TTY/TDD statewide 711
Toll Free Voice (888) 508-3737.



Roanoke Valley Area
Metropolitan Planning Organization

313 Luck Avenue, SW / PO Box 2569 / Roanoke, Virginia 24010
TEL: 540.343.4417 / FAX: 540.343.4416 / www.rvarc.org / rvarc@rvarc.org

The 28th day of June, 2007

**A RESOLUTION ADOPTING A PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN UPDATE
FOR THE ROANOKE VALLEY AREA METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

WHEREAS, the Roanoke Valley Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is the regional transportation planning agency for the Roanoke Valley Area and is the federally designated metropolitan planning organization for the Roanoke Valley Area; and

WHEREAS, the Roanoke Valley Area MPO seeks to involve citizens, public agencies and officials, private providers of transportation, and other interested parties in the development of transportation plans and programs, in a manner consistent with the federal Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU); and,

WHEREAS, the Roanoke Valley Area MPO intends to adopt revised public involvement procedures, in furtherance of its commitment to provide citizens with access to the decision-making process, and pursuant to requirements of the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration that metropolitan planning organizations adopt and periodically update public involvement procedures; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Roanoke Valley Area MPO adopts the Public Involvement Procedures contained within the "PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN 2007" attached hereto; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that the "PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN 2007" may be revised periodically by the Roanoke Valley Area MPO as part of its ongoing assessment of efforts to include Roanoke Valley Area citizens in its decision-making process; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Executive Director of the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission is authorized to implement and administer the Roanoke Valley Area MPO's public involvement procedures on behalf of the Roanoke Valley Area MPO; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that the Designated Officer for Civil Rights Complaints shall submit a copy of this resolution to the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration, and other agencies as appropriate.

Don Davis
Chairman



The Regional Commission

313 Luck Avenue, SW / PO Box 2569 / Roanoke, Virginia 24010

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The 28th day of June, 2007

A RESOLUTION ADOPTING A PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN UPDATE FOR THE ROANOKE VALLEY-ALLEGHANY REGIONAL COMMISSION

WHEREAS, the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission (RVARC) is the regional planning and review agency for member local governments in its service area; and

WHEREAS, the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission (RVARC) is the lead staffing agency to the Roanoke Valley Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO); and

WHEREAS, the RVARC seeks to involve citizens, public agencies and officials, private providers of transportation, and other interested parties in the development of transportation plans and programs, in a manner consistent with the federal Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU); and,

WHEREAS, the RVARC intends to adopt revised public involvement procedures, in furtherance of its commitment to provide citizens with access to the decision-making process;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the RVARC adopts the public involvement procedures contained within the "*Public Participation Plan 2007*" attached hereto, and that the "*Public Participation Plan 2007*" may be revised periodically by the RVARC and/or the Roanoke Valley Area MPO as part of its ongoing assessment of efforts to include Roanoke Valley area citizens in its decision-making process;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Executive Director of the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission is authorized to implement and administer the Public Participation Plan procedures on behalf of the RVARC.

Bradley E. Gose
Chairman