

# ***JACTS***

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## Public Participation Plan

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**I. Introduction and Purpose**

Meaningful and effective public participation is essential to the successful implementation of any public planning program or project. Without the involvement of local citizens, it becomes difficult to design a program that effectively meets the greater needs of the public. In addition, public involvement is necessary in order to gauge the effectiveness of an agency's planning activities. The Region 2 Planning Commission, as the state designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Jackson County, acting through the Jackson Area Comprehensive Transportation Study (JACTS), actively seeks to incorporate the involvement of the public in its planning efforts pursuant to its Public Participation Plan (PPP) that is designed to accomplish the following goals:

- Comply with the public participation requirements of *“Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”* (MAP-21) federal transportation legislation.
- Provide opportunities for Jackson County residents and citizen-based organizations to identify priorities, discuss views and to provide input on the subject areas addressed in the plans, projects, or policies of the MPO.
- Inform and educate citizens and other interested parties about the MPO's ongoing planning initiatives.
- Achieve participation and partnership among the public, the Region 2 Planning Commission, the Michigan Department of Transportation, and local governmental jurisdictions in the planning and execution of projects.

The purpose of this document is to provide a clear directive for the public participation activities undertaken by JACTS as they pertain to the MPO's primary responsibilities, which include the development and implementation of the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and the Annual Unified Work Program (UWP).

This is accomplished by adhering to the following principles:

- early and continuous involvement
- reasonable public availability of technical data and other information
- collaborative input on alternatives, evaluation criteria, and mitigation needs
- open meetings where matters related to transportation policies, programs, and projects are being considered
- open access to the decision-making process prior to closure

**II. Compliance with Federal Requirements**

The JACTS Public Participation Plan was originally adopted in 1994 in accordance with the requirements of the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA).

## Chapter 3

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In 1998, ISTEA was succeeded by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21). Both of these federal acts required that MPOs develop and utilize a proactive public participation process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement in developing metropolitan transportation plans and transportation improvement programs (TIPs) and meets the requirements as determined by federal regulations, specifically requiring a minimum public comment period of 45 days.

In 2006, the Safe, Affordable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) expanded public participation provisions requiring MPOs to develop enhanced participation plans. SAFETEA-LU, while retaining the previous public participation activities, placed additional emphasis on extensive stakeholder participation, specifically to:

- conduct public meetings at convenient times and accessible locations.
- Make transportation long range and improvement plans available in electronically accessible formats and means (i.e. the World Wide Web) as appropriate to afford reasonable opportunity for consideration of the information.
- implement visualization techniques to describe transportation plans and TIPs.

The newly passed “Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (MAP-21) further emphasizes these requirements.

### III. Description of Public Participation Activities

JACTS shall consult with governmental units within the MPO, local economic development organizations, freight related businesses, non-motorized transportation groups and clubs, local transportation providers, and other interested parties in the development of the Long Range Plan (LRP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and the Unified Work Program (UWP). JACTS will also conduct outreach, public comment periods, and public hearings as described in this plan.

The three publications noted in the above paragraph will be published for a minimum of 30 days to receive written public comment before adoption. For any amendments that are deemed necessary once any of the publications are adopted, JACTS shall publish at least one notice in a local news publication of general circulation within the Jackson Urbanized Area prior to approval of the amendment.

The JACTS Participation Plan consists of the following tools:

1. Notice of Meetings and Public Comment Periods
2. Annual Report
3. Public Hearings
4. Radio, TV, Newspaper, Internet (as appropriate)
5. Outreach
6. Visualization Techniques
7. Environmental Justice
8. Development and Analysis
9. Performance Measures

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**1. NOTICE OF MEETINGS AND PUBLIC COMMENT PERIODS**

The Jackson Area Comprehensive Transportation Study (JACTS) maintains two standing committees to conduct the business of the study area. The JACTS Technical Advisory Committee is comprised of appropriate staff from units of government and modal agencies (transit and airport) within the metropolitan area boundary, and includes representatives from the Michigan Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration. The Technical Advisory Committee reviews all plans and programs and makes technical recommendations to the JACTS Policy Committee.

The Policy Committee includes elected and appointed officials representing units of government within the metropolitan area boundary. The Policy Committee acts on recommendations from the Technical Advisory Committee, and recommends formal action to be taken by the Region 2 Planning Commission, as the state-designated MPO. All regularly scheduled meetings of JACTS and the Region 2 Planning Commission (MPO) are open to the public and held at locations which comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations. Individuals with disabilities may request aids/services within a reasonable time period to participate in the meeting.

A public comment item is included on all agendas for any person wishing to address committee members. Meeting notifications including date, location, and agenda are published in the Jackson area general circulation newspaper (*Jackson Citizen Patriot*). Meeting notices are also mailed to each unit of government within the JACTS metropolitan area boundary.

Interested citizens may also have their name added to the agency mailing list in order to receive meeting notifications. A list of the regularly scheduled JACTS and R2PC meeting dates, times, and locations is posted at the Jackson County Tower Building and distributed to each member unit of government for posting. This listing is also posted on the R2PC web site.

**a. Special Meetings, Workshops, and Public Meetings**

Although the majority of the MPO's business can be conducted at regularly scheduled meetings, when significant planning initiatives including updating the LRP or developing the TIP, staff may conduct special meetings, workshops, or public meetings. These meetings may be hosted in publicly convenient and accessible locations such as, but not limited to, public meeting rooms such as commission/council chambers, public libraries, schools, or township halls. Notices of public meetings will be administered in the same manner as regularly scheduled meetings.

When public comments are received on plans, programs, or other MPO activities, they are summarized and forwarded to the Policy Committee prior to any formal action to adopt or approve the plan, study, or project. Copies of all comments are kept on file and are available for public review. Comments requesting a formal response are answered in a timely manner (within 30 days).

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**2. ANNUAL REPORT**

The Region 2 Planning Commission's annual report, published at the beginning of each calendar year, reviews and highlights the activities of the Commission undertaken during the previous fiscal year. The report is distributed to the R2PC and is mailed to all governmental jurisdictions, agencies, committee members, and individuals included on the R2PC's general mailing list.

This multi-modal report is a summary of the previous year's activities in not only transportation, but also community planning and traffic safety. It includes updates on planning studies, completed and upcoming roadway construction projects, and other general information concerning the activities of the Region 2 Planning Commission. The report also provides the names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of the staff member any citizen may contact regarding any R2PC activities.

**3. PUBLIC MEETINGS**

Before approving any federally required document, JACTS will conduct a public meeting to solicit comments. Such meetings shall take place during the regularly scheduled JACTS meeting, unless deemed otherwise by the JACTS Policy Committee. Notice of public hearings will be administered in the same manner as notice of regularly scheduled meetings. To supplement the public hearing process, JACTS may also engage in hosting public information/open house meetings in publicly convenient and accessible locations, such as public libraries, schools, shopping malls, or township halls. During the public hearing, JACTS will utilize various visualization techniques, as described below, to assist in conveying transportation plans and programs most effectively.

**4. RADIO, TV, NEWSPAPER, INTERNET**

To the extent feasible, JACTS staff will utilize the opportunities provided through local radio, television, local cable television, newspaper, and the internet to inform the public of the development of transportation planning products, such as the LRP and the TIP. This would include news releases, bulletin board formats, public service announcements, and interview opportunities that may be available. Citizens with internet access can go to the R2PC home page at [www.region2planning.com](http://www.region2planning.com).

The internet is being utilized more often to notify a wider range of participants. Websites are reviewed regularly to ensure the correct person and e-mail address is being used. Notifications are sent out electronically as often as possible. If an electronic address is not available, hard copies are distributed via U.S. mail. The World Wide Web provides up-to-date information on people and groups that should be involved in the planning process. The Region 2 Planning Commission website is continuously updated so that interested parties can find the necessary material or be able to contact a staff member for any questions.

Social media is being explored to encourage a wider audience. R2PC has a Facebook page that is still in its infancy stage and Twitter is being contemplated.

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**5. OUTREACH ACTIVITIES**

JACTS staff will attempt to identify and contact special interest groups in the community to assure their opportunity to have input and to encourage the involvement of persons who have traditionally been under-served. This would include organizations such as citizen district councils, minority populations, low-income populations, private transportation providers, and others as they are identified. These groups will receive a direct mailing which describes the transportation planning process and their opportunity for input. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- conventional/unconventional transit providers
- public agencies
- private transportation providers
- law enforcement agencies
- providers of freight transportation
- railroad companies
- environmental organizations
- major employers
- chambers of commerce/tourism offices
- human service agencies
- interested citizens
- agencies & organizations that represent:
  - the elderly
  - the disabled
  - non-motorized users
  - minority groups
  - low-income populations

This list will be continuously updated and groups may be added at any time by the JACTS Policy Committee.

Some, or all, of these groups may be notified when: (1) a particular agenda item directly impacts an agency or their clientele, (2) planning and development of a major project such as an update of the Long Range Transportation Plan or TIP, or (3) at the request of a JACTS committee member.

**6. VISUALIZATION TECHNIQUES**

JACTS will utilize a variety of visualization activities to better inform and educate the public regarding transportation projects, plans, and programs. These activities may include static and interactive mapping through Geographic Information Systems (GIS), computer model simulations, and photo manipulation to artist renderings. JACTS will identify and implement the most appropriate visualization technique to educate and inform the public for each individual plan or project. As technology continues to change, the visualization activities will also evolve and afford the MPO additional opportunities to optimize the public's understanding of transportation issues and concepts.

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**7. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

In April 1997, the U. S. Department of Transportation (DOT) issued the environmental justice order to address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low Income Populations (DOT Order 5610.2). The order describes the process for incorporating environmental justice principles into all DOT programs, policies, and activities.

Environmental justice (EJ) is an important part of the planning process and must be considered in all phases of planning. This includes all plans and activities, the development of the LRP, TIP, and other documents or studies adopted by JACTS. Specifically, JACTS will consider EJ concerns within their established procedures. There are three fundamental principles of environmental justice:

- 1) To avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority and low-income populations;
- 2) To ensure the full and a fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process; and
- 3) To prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of, benefits by minority and low-income populations.

JACTS will continue to work to identify residential, employment, and transportation patterns of low-income and minority populations so that their needs can be identified and addressed and the benefits and burdens of transportation are fairly distributed.

JACTS will also continue to evaluate and improve the Public Participation Plan to eliminate barriers to low-income and minority involvement. However, JACTS cannot do this alone. It is imperative that active participation of well-informed, empowered individuals, community groups, and other non-governmental organizations be a major component of this effort. Only by the participation of these individuals and groups can JACTS advance the letter, spirit, and intent of environmental justice in transportation.

**8. DEVELOPMENT AND ANALYSIS**

JACTS will continue to analyze and update a demographic profile of the transportation planning area that includes the location of minority and low-income populations as required by environmental justice legislation. Maps of these populations will be developed showing the proposed TIP projects in relation to these areas. These maps will provide a visual analysis of potential impacts to these populations.

**9. PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

JACTS will determine the success of the PPP by evaluating the number and diversity of citizens involved in the public involvement process. This information will be compiled based on voluntary information requested from participants. MDOT Forms 5400, 5401, 5402, and 5403 will be available at public meetings and participants will be encouraged to provide the requested information.

**IV. Conclusion**

The JACTS Public Participation Plan will be reviewed and monitored on a regular basis in order to maintain its effectiveness. The intent of the Plan is twofold: (1) improving the participatory role of the public in the MPO's planning activities, and (2) providing the information that the public needs to facilitate that participation.

Following the principles of this Public Participation Plan will ensure maximum access by the public and encourage proactive public participation in all aspects of the transportation planning process. This increased access for local citizens and other groups will help foster the continuous improvement of JACTS plans and programs to best serve the citizens of Jackson County.

**Comments or questions concerning the Participation Plan should be directed to:**

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