

Transportation Participation Plan

I. Introduction and Purpose

Public participation is a critical part of the planning process. Without the involvement of local citizens, designing a program that effectively meets the needs of the public can be difficult. The Region 2 Planning Commission (R2PC), as the state designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Jackson County census-designated Urbanized Area, acting through the Jackson Area Comprehensive Transportation Study (JACTS), actively seeks to incorporate the involvement of the public in its planning efforts pursuant to the Public Participation Plan that is designed to accomplish the following goals:

- Comply with the public participation requirements of the *FAST ACT* federal transportation legislation.
- Provide opportunities for Jackson County residents and citizen-based organizations to identify priorities, discuss views and to provide input into plans, projects, or policies of the MPO.
- Listen, inform and educate citizens about the MPO's 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 it pertains to the MPO's primary responsibilities that include the development and implementation of the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), 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 to meet the requirements of the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). In 1998, ISTEA was succeeded by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). These federal acts required that MPOs develop and use 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 development metropolitan transportation plans and transportation improvement programs. 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, have public meetings at accessible locations and at convenient times, include visualization techniques in transportation plans and TIPS, and make plans available online. “Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century” (MAP-21) further emphasizes these requirements when it passed in 2012, and the FAST Act continues to stress the importance of public participation.

III. Description of Public Participation Activities

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

The three documents in the above paragraph will be published for a minimum of 30 days to receive 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:

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| 1. Notice of Meetings and Public Comment Periods | 5. Outreach |
| 2. Annual Report | 6. Visualization Techniques |
| 3. Public Hearings | 7. Environmental Justice |
| 4. Internet, Newspaper & Other Media | 8. Development and Analysis |
| | 9. Performance Measures |

1. NOTICE OF MEETINGS AND PUBLIC COMMENT PERIODS

JACTS maintains two standing committees to advise R2PC, the designated MPO for Jackson County. The JACTS Technical Advisory Committee members include engineers, planners, and other technical staff from the Jackson County Airport, transit agencies and local units of government within the metropolitan area boundary, representatives from the Michigan Department of Transportation, and the Federal Highway Administration. The Technical Advisory Committee reviews plans and programs, and makes technical recommendations to the JACTS Policy Committee.

The Policy Committee members are elected and appointed officials representing local units of government within the metropolitan area boundary. The Policy Committee

acts on recommendations from the Technical Advisory Committee, and recommends formal action to the R2PC.

The Region 2 Planning Commission is composed of the local units of government within the MPO/Jackson County, Hillsdale County and Lenawee County that contribute annually to operating costs of the commission. All members of the R2PC have representation on the R2PC Board, and final authority over all JACTS decisions. All meetings of JACTS and the 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 local newspaper (*Jackson Citizen Patriot*) and its digital presence www.mlive.com along with the R2PC website www.region2planning.com. Meeting notices are also mailed and/or emailed to each unit of government within the MPO boundary. Interested citizens may also have their name added to the agency mailing list to receive meeting notifications.

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 LRTP or developing the TIP, staff may conduct special meetings, workshops, or public meetings, and 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 JACTS Committees and the R2PC prior to any formal action to adopt or approve the plan, study, or project by the MPO. Copies of 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.

2. ANNUAL REPORT

The agency's annual report reviews and highlights the activities that the Commission has undertaken during the previous fiscal year, and is distributed to the R2PC membership and all governmental jurisdictions, agencies, committee members, and individuals included on the R2PC's general mailing list. The report is published and presented at the R2PC annual meeting held in November, and is available on the agency's website.

The report is a summary of the previous year's activities in transportation, community planning and traffic safety. Content includes updates on planning studies, completed and upcoming roadway construction projects, and other general information concerning the activities of the R2PC. The report also contains the names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of the staff members.

3. PUBLIC MEETINGS

Before approving any federally required document, JACTS will conduct a public meeting to solicit comments. Such meetings will take place during the regularly scheduled JACTS meeting, unless deemed otherwise by the JACTS Policy Committee. Notice of the opportunity for public comment will be administered in the same manner as notice of regularly scheduled meetings. To supplement the opportunity for public comment, JACTS may also engage in hosting public information/open house meetings in publicly convenient and accessible locations.

4. INTERNET, NEWSPAPER & OTHER MEDIA

Staff will use the internet and the newspaper to inform the public of the development of transportation planning processes and products, such as the LRTP and the TIP. The internet and email will be used as a regular part of the public participation notification process, as they have a broad public reach. Notices will also go out to the public by means of the newspaper, on the radio and at community institutions like libraries, churches and schools to help bridge the digital divide to reach the public without internet access when appropriate.

5. OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

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 minority populations, low-income populations, private transportation providers, and others. 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:

- public agencies
- private transportation providers
- law enforcement agencies
- providers of freight transportation
- railroad companies
- environmental organizations
- major employers
- chambers of commerce
- travel and 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.

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
- (3) at the request of a JACTS committee member.

6. VISUALIZATION TECHNIQUES

R2PC will utilize a variety of visualization activities to collect, inform and educate the public regarding transportation projects, plans, and programs. The activities may include mapping through Geographic Information Systems (GIS), computer model simulations, and photographs. As technology continues to change, visualization techniques will evolve to improve interaction with the public.

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 the development of the LRTP, TIP, and other JACTS projects. 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.

Staff will 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.

Staff will continue to evaluate and improve the Public Participation Plan to eliminate barriers to low-income and minority involvement. However, JACTS cannot do this alone. Agencies and individuals who are connected to these communities are welcomed to participate and facilitate public involvement, Only by the participation of these individuals and groups can JACTS/R2PC advance the letter, spirit, and intent of environmental justice in transportation.

8. DEVELOPMENT AND ANALYSIS

JACTS will continue to analyze and update the demographic profile of the transportation planning area that includes the location of minority and low-income populations as required by environmental justice legislation. Maps will be developed showing the proposed LRTP and TIP projects in relation to these area.

9. PERFORMANCE MEASURES

R2PC will determine the success of the Public Participation Plan by evaluating the number and diversity of citizens involved in the public involvement process.

IV. Conclusion

The R2PC Public Participation Plan will be reviewed and monitored on a regular basis to maintain its timeliness and effectiveness. Following the principles of the Public Participation Plan will ensure the opportunity for 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 Public Participation Plan should be directed to:

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