

Chapter II Public Involvement

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) requires that the public have reasonable opportunity to comment on transportation plans and programs. A public involvement process must be explicitly set forth and adopted by the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) which receives federal transportation funds. Below is the actual approved GVMC Public Involvement Plan.

The Public Involvement Process for Transportation Planning Grand Valley Metropolitan Council

Introduction

A public involvement process for transportation planning must be explicitly set forth and adopted by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which receive transportation funds from the Federal Highway Administration and from the Federal Transit Administration. The actions and processes described in this document apply to transportation planning done by the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC) in conjunction with the work done by the transportation committees of the Council. The standards for this process are to be found in Title 23, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 450, Subpart C, especially Section 316(b)(1) and in Title 49, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 613, Subpart A, Section 100.

In general, the federal regulation cited above requires “a proactive public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans and TIPs (Transportation Improvement Programs) . . .”

To meet these standards this Public Involvement Process includes: outreach to public opinion and needs, especially to those who are underserved, by means of public forums and a survey; opportunity for public comment at all public meetings; making information available easily to the public; public notification of meetings both by public media and direct mail; appropriately scheduled public hearings; opportunity for public comment on key decisions; timely and forthright response to public comments; and regular review of the public involvement process itself.

The goals of this process are:

1. Involve the public early in the planning process.
2. Obtain understanding of transportation needs, especially of the underserved.
3. Make information available to the public.
4. Provide timely and adequate notice to the public about meetings and plans.

The emphasis of this process is on early involvement of the public in all processes, in order to obtain input and insight before decisions are made.

Regulatory Reference

TEA-21 (Public Law 105-178), the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, authorizes Federal transportation programs. Further, TEA-21 requires that GVMC as the MPO for the Grand Rapids area establish and periodically review the public involvement processes that are employed.

Section 450.316 of TEA-21 mandates that the metropolitan transportation planning process contain the following public involvement elements:

- Include a proactive public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans and TIPs and meets the requirements and criteria specified as follows:
 - Require a minimum public comment period of 45 days before the public involvement process is initially adopted or revised;
 - Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizen, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, private providers of transportation, other interested parties and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs, and projects;
 - Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of plans and TIPs and open public meetings where matters related to the Federal-aid highway and transit programs are being considered.
 - Require adequate public notice of public involvement activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points, including, but not limited to, approval of plans and TIPs;
 - Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received during the planning and program development processes;
 - Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including, but not limited to, low income and minority households;
 - When written and oral comments are received on the draft transportation plan or TIP as a result of the public involvement process, those comments will appear as an appendix of the plan or TIP;
 - If the final document differs significantly from the one which was made available for public comment due to circumstances that could not have been reasonably foreseen from the public involvement efforts, an additional public comment opportunity will be provided;
- Be consistent with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which ensure that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, sex, national origin, or physical handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program receiving Federal assistance from the United States Department of Transportation.

- Identify actions necessary to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Presidential Executive Order 12898, Environmental Justice.

Goals, Objectives, and Policies

The effectiveness of any policy plan depends on its ability to successfully meet the expectations of the public. As such, plans and policies need to be revisited and reviewed periodically to determine if the public's needs are being addressed in an effective and efficient manner. In order to ensure the effectiveness of this plan, the public must be kept informed of activities of the Transportation Division of the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council. The public must be given a meaningful opportunity to participate in the development and review of public policy through the use of presentations, press releases, mailings, public meetings, and other public outreach activities.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL: The public involvement process for transportation planning shall provide complete information, timely public notice, and full access to key decisions; and shall support early and continuing involvement of the public.

Objective 1-Public Access: The public shall be provided timely notice and reasonable access to information about transportation plans, issues, and processes.

Policy 1.1 All plans and documents shall be made available for the public to review at GVMC offices. Copies of the Long Range Transportation Plan will be distributed to all public libraries in the MPO area and to all members of the GVMC Transportation Committees. Copies of other plans or projects will be distributed to the GVMC Transportation Committees and notice of release for those plans or projects will appear in area media.

Policy 1.2 Notice and agenda of all GVMC Transportation Committee meetings shall be available to the public three days before they occur with the exception of emergency meetings when less time is allowed under the State of Michigan Open Meetings Act.

Policy 1.3 All meetings and workshops of GVMC Transportation Committees will be open to the public except as allowed by the State of Michigan Open Meetings Act.

Policy 1.4 In compliance with the American with Disabilities Act, individuals needing special accommodations to participate in meetings should contact GVMC Transportation Staff at least three working days prior to the scheduled meeting.

Objective 2-Public Outreach: Opportunities shall be created for the public to be informed about issues, plans, and projects under consideration by the GVMC Transportation Division, particularly those who can expect to be directly affected by the outcome or those with special needs that may not be well served by the existing transportation system.

Policy 2.1 Information pertaining to the adoption, revision, or amendment of all GVMC Transportation plans shall be available three days prior to the date of the final action with the exception of emergency meetings when less time is allowed under the State of Michigan Open Meetings Act.

Policy 2.2 GVMC Transportation Staff shall inform the public about issues and proposals under their consideration through public meetings, presentations, mailings, press releases, or other techniques during the development of each of the transportation plans, programs, or projects for which GVMC is responsible for.

Policy 2.3 GVMC Transportation Staff will continue to develop and maintain a list of interested citizens and agencies for the purpose of disseminating information about transportation plans, policies, and activities. The list, while all inclusive, will be especially geared to reach those low-income and minority populations that have traditionally been underserved in the transportation planning process.

Policy 2.4 GVMC Transportation Staff shall review the Public Involvement Process as part of the Transportation Improvement Program development which is done on a biannual basis.

Objective 3-Public Input: The solicitation, compilation, and consideration of public input shall be in integral part of the GVMC Transportation decision-making process.

Policy 3.1 GVMC Transportation Staff shall conduct public hearings prior to the adoption of the transportation plan or program for which it is responsible, including the Long Range Transportation Plan, Transportation Improvement Program, or substantive amendments thereof. Notices of such hearings will be distributed through the Interested Citizens/Agencies list as well as the area media.

Policy 3.2 Those plans and program that require extended review periods will allow for written comments to be submitted including the Long Range Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program, the Public Involvement Plan, and any other plan with extended review periods. All comments will appear as an appendix to the applicable plan or program. GVMC Transportation Staff will notify the public of extended review periods that are required by State or Federal guidelines and specifics regarding how to comment on those plans or programs.

Policy 3.3 Those members of the public wishing to address comments to any GVMC Transportation Committee will be given the opportunity to comment at the regular public meetings of those committees.

Public Involvement Procedures

Public Involvement Plan

The development, adoption, and amendment of GVMC Transportation plans and programs shall be subject to the public involvement plan. The public involvement plan will be monitored and reviewed on a bi-annual basis to evaluate effectiveness. It is hoped that the directives of this plan will result in well attended public meetings, local news coverage of programs, and more public interest in transportation issues within the region. A public comment period of 45 days shall be provided prior to the adoption or amendment of the PIP per federal guidelines.

Outreach

Notices of meetings, descriptions of products, invitation to public hearings will be routinely sent to the following groups:

- Private providers of transportation services
- Traffic agencies
- Ridesharing agencies
- Parking agencies
- Transportation safety agencies
- Traffic enforcement agencies
- Commuter rail operators
- Airport and port authorities
- Freight companies
- Railroad companies
- Environmental organizations
- Neighborhood associations
- Interested citizens

Organizations representing the interests of:

- The elderly
- Minorities
- Transportation agency employees
- Users of various modes of transportations
- The handicapped
- Economically disadvantaged
- Others underserved by the transportation system

This notification list will be continually examined for inclusiveness and usefulness. A calendar of the regular meeting times will be sent to the organizations on this list as well as to news and media organizations.

Representatives of the Kent County Department of Aeronautics, local units of government, the Interurban Transit Partnership, the Ottawa County Road Commission,

the Kent County Road Commission, and the Michigan Department of Transportation serve on the Technical and Policy Committees.

Open Meetings

The meetings listed under the heading “Regular Meetings” are open for the public to attend. In addition, the meetings of the following committees-

- GVMC Transportation Technical Committee
- GVMC Transportation Policy Committee
- Board of the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council

will provide an opportunity for the public to comment on the items listed in the meeting agenda. Since issues often pass from the Technical Committee to the Policy Committee, there will often be two opportunities to comment on issues. In addition, the Technical Committee has non-voting representation from a regional environmental advocacy group and from the area Chamber of Commerce. The regular meetings of the transportation committees will be announced on an annual basis through a media press release and will be posted on the GVMC Transportation website.

GVMC Transportation Committee meetings usually occur as follows:

Technical Committee 1st Wednesday of the Month 9:30 AM

Policy Committee 3rd Wednesday of the Month 9:30 AM

Grand Valley Metropolitan Board 1st Thursday of the Month 8:30 AM

As stated previously, all meetings are open to the public and provide opportunities for public comment.

Public Involvement in Planning Projects

As particular planning or programming projects arise, a specific public involvement process will be developed by the performing entity that is appropriate for the project. Examples of such projects are: the Long Range Transportation Plan, substantial amendments to that plan, corridor studies, the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and major metropolitan transportation investment studies. The public involvement processes for planning or programming projects will include the following specific measures as well as other actions.

A formal public meeting will be held well in advance of the adoption of transportation plans and before the adoption of the TIP. A reasonable period of time will be set aside before the adoption of a plan or the TIP during which the public may comment verbally at the public meeting or in writing to the GVMC offices.

Federal regulations require an investment study of proposed major transportation projects. Before a “Major Transportation Investment Study” is begun, a meeting of relevant public agencies will be held to determine the extent of analysis and agency roles. This meeting or meetings will be open to the public and the public will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed scope of the study.

Public Input and Comment on Important Decisions

Should any of the following groups:

- GVMC Transportation Technical Committee
- GVMC Transportation Policy Committee
- Board of the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council

be about to adopt a major transportation policy or adopt what they consider to be a significant amendment to the Long Range Transportation Plan or the Transportation Improvement Program; than it shall be identified as such and public review and comment will be sought during one of the meetings of the above listed bodies. In some cases, public review and comment may be sought during the transportation forums described above. The record of the public comments and responses will be reviewed by all of the groups which subsequently consider it.

As part of the transportation forums mentioned above, issues facing the committees will be described and comments sought as to the importance of decisions which will be made.

Response to Public Comments

Public comments on plans, on the Transportation Improvement Program, on significant amendments to the Transportation Improvement Program, on proposed Major Transportation Investment Studies, and on key decisions will be summarized and responses will be written by the group receiving the comments. Comments and responses will be kept on file, available for public review and will be made part of the plan, program, or other document as adopted. Summaries of comments and responses will also be given to groups who are required to subsequently review the matter commented on. Responses to comments will be made before decisions are made or plans or programs are adopted. Responses will be made in a timely manner, so that they can be considered during the next phase of the plan or program development.

Availability of Information

GVMC Transportation Staff will make written materials provided to our committees available to the public upon request. When appropriate, a charge may be levied for copies of publications. The charge will cover the cost of producing and if applicable, mailing the materials. All such materials are available for viewing at GVMC offices at no cost.

Public Notification and Participation Procedures

A variety of public notification and participation procedures will be used to encourage the early and continuous involvement of citizens, jurisdictions, communities, and other interests in the planning process and the decisions and actions of the GVMC Transportation Committees. They will include but not be limited to the following:

- Public notices will be used to inform the general public and media of upcoming input opportunities.
- Unless otherwise required by statute, GVMC will publish one paid public notice in a general circulation newspaper citing the details of the meeting at least 7 days prior to that meeting.
- The GVMC Transportation webpage (www.gvmc.org) will include information about GVMC Transportation responsibilities, plans, programs, committees, and meetings. New information is being added to the website continuously.
- Meetings will be held in facilities that are accessible to persons with disabilities.

Staff Presentations

Staff will make presentations to requesting organizations about transportation issues and activities. GVMC will publish and distribute an outline of how the transportation planning process works, listing relevant committees and government bodies.

Accessibility for Disabled Persons

The transportation needs and opinions of those with disabilities will be sought out and the planning process will be made accessible to such persons as per the regulation provided by the American with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Contact GVMC Transportation Division

Those seeking more information can contact GVMC Transportation Division

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