

Eastern Carolina Rural Planning Organization Public Participation Plan

1. Purpose

The purpose of the Eastern Carolina Rural Transportation Planning Organization (EC-RPO) Public Participation Plan (Plan) is to provide guidance and policy in engaging the public in the transportation planning process. The Plan has the following objectives:

- Create a well-informed public that contributes to transportation decision-making in a meaningful way
- Engage the public early and continuously in the transportation planning process
- Develop a public education program on Eastern Carolina RPO activities
- Assist the Eastern Carolina RPO in developing specific transportation projects that reflect the interest and needs of the region
- Gain the support and trust of the public
- Satisfy the requirements of N.C.G.S. § 136 - 212 regarding duties of an RPO
- Satisfy the requirements of N.C.G.S. § 143 – Article 33C Meetings of Public Bodies

The Plan is not intended to preempt any public involvement activities conducted by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) or any local governments within the Mid East RPO region.

2. Forms of Public Outreach

Public outreach is the process of informing the public about the transportation planning process, specific transportation projects, and activities of the Eastern Carolina RPO. Typical public outreach strategies include, but will not be limited to, the following:

A. Identification of Stakeholders

A stakeholder is any person or group who is affected by a transportation plan, program, or project. Stakeholders may include:

- ◆ The general public
- ◆ Business/Industry organizations
- ◆ Environmental organizations
- ◆ Neighborhood/Community organizations
- ◆ Public agencies
- ◆ Civic organizations
- ◆ Transit providers
- ◆ Freight carriers (All modes)
- ◆ Taxicab companies
- ◆ Transportation organizations

Stakeholder groups will be identified and will be included on a mailing list for notices of public hearings, workshops, etc.

B. Press Releases

Eastern Carolina RPO will periodically issue press releases detailing significant actions of the RPO. These actions may include:

- ◆ Adoption of Annual Planning Work Program
- ◆ Adoption of Comprehensive Transportation Plan
- ◆ Selection of officers
- ◆ Adoption of Project Priority List

All public meetings will be announced at least ten days before the meeting date by one or more of the following means: media release, published advertisements in regional newspapers, flyers to mailing list participants, and other appropriate notification means. Additional efforts will be made when major plans, projects and/or events are scheduled. In compliance with the *Americans With Disabilities Act*, meetings will be held in wheelchair-accessible meeting rooms at facilities with accessible parking.

Press releases will include a newspaper of general circulation in each county that is a member of the Eastern Carolina RPO.

C. Posting of Draft and Final Planning Documents

Copies of draft and final versions of all planning documents will be made available at all public libraries the Eastern Carolina RPO Counties.

D. Presentation to Interested Organizations

Presentations will be made to interested organizations on Eastern Carolina RPO activities, the transportation planning process in general, or specific transportation projects. Eastern Carolina RPO staff and/or NCDOT staff will make presentations

E. Public Input

Public input is the process of gathering the views, opinions and ideas of interested individuals and groups in the transportation planning process. In addition to commenting at regular meetings, public hearings and other public meetings the public can also communicate to members of the Eastern Carolina RPO staff through phone calls, emails or office visits.

F. Public Comment at RPO Meetings

Eastern Carolina RPO meetings are open to the public and provide an opportunity for public comment.

G. Public Hearings

Prior to taking formal action on specific planning documents the Transportation Advisory Council (TAC) will hold public hearings. These actions may include:

- Adoption of annual Planning Work Program
- Adoption of Comprehensive Transportation Plan
- Amendment to Long-Range Transportation Plan
- Adoption of Highway Project Priority List

3. Schedule of Public Involvement Activities

A. Regular Public Involvement Opportunities

Regular Public Involvement Opportunities include documents, meeting and other opportunities for the public to be informed of Eastern Carolina RPO activities, functions and events that occur on a regular basis. These include:

- **Planning Documents** - All documents, resolutions, meeting minutes, etc. adopted by the Eastern Carolina RPO are kept at the Eastern Carolina Council office at 233 Middle Street, New Bern NC, Suite 300. These documents will be made available for public review upon request.
- **Meetings** - Regular meetings of the Eastern Carolina RPO Rural Transportation Coordinating Committee (TCC) and Rural Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) are open to the public, and will include opportunity for public comment. Notification of the meetings will be sent to news media in the region.
- **Public Hearings** - Notification of all public hearings held by the Eastern Carolina RPO will be sent to news media in the region at least three days before the meeting. In addition all laws regarding public notice and advertising of meetings and hearings shall be observed.
- **Press Releases** - All press releases issued by Eastern Carolina RPO will be sent to news media in the region.

B. Public Involvement for Specific Activities

Public involvement strategies will vary depending on the particular issue or project for which public comment is desired. Typical actions for specific activities of the Eastern Carolina RPO may include, but are not limited to:

- ◆ Comprehensive Transportation Plan
- ◆ Workshops

- ◆ Public Hearings
- ◆ Posting of Draft and Final Document
- ◆ Presentations to Civic Organizations
- ◆ Prioritization of Projects for Recommendation to State's TIP
- ◆ Specific Projects/issues
- ◆ Press Releases
- ◆ Regular Meetings of RTCC and RTAC
- ◆ Surveys

4. Response to Public Input

Public involvement may be documented in a variety of ways. Any public comments received during a meeting of the Eastern Carolina RPO Rural Transportation Coordinating Committee (TCC) will be included in the meeting minutes. In addition, any comments received during a public hearing held by the TAC will be included in the meeting minutes. Comments received during workshops, open houses, or presentations to any organization will be summarized, presented to the TCC and TAC, and kept on file. Results of any surveys will be compiled, summarized, presented to the TCC and TAC, and kept on file. Public comments may be included as appendices in formal documents or plans for which they were made. The TCC or TAC will direct Eastern Carolina RPO staff to respond directly to public comments via letter/email.