



The Greater Bridgeport and Valley
Metropolitan Planning Organization



Update of the Public Involvement Process for the Greater Bridgeport & Valley MPO

Prepared by

Greater Bridgeport Regional Planning Agency & Valley
Council of Governments

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for the
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The Greater Bridgeport and Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is a consolidated policy board that oversees the regional transportation planning process and capital improvement program for the ten-town area comprised of the Greater Bridgeport and Valley planning regions. It is authorized by federal regulations and designated by the Governor to conduct transportation planning and endorse the transportation improvement program for that portion of the Bridgeport-Stamford Urbanized Area covered by the two planning regions.

The membership of the **Greater Bridgeport and Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)** consists of the chief elected official of ten municipalities and the chairperson of four organizations:

Chief Elected Officials of:

Ansonia	Monroe
Bridgeport	Seymour
Derby	Shelton
Easton	Stratford
Fairfield	Trumbull

Chairperson of:

Greater Bridgeport Regional Planning Agency
(GBRPA)
Greater Bridgeport Transit Authority (GBTA)
Valley Council of Governments Regional
Planning Commission (VOC-RPC)
Valley Transit District (VTD)

The MPO is primarily responsible for providing policy direction on all aspects of the transportation planning process, as specified in federal transportation acts, including the ***Safe, Accountable, Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)***, and federal transportation policies and rules, including interim transportation planning guidelines. However, separate **transportation planning agencies** have been designated for the respective planning regions to conduct the transportation planning process. This includes developing and maintaining comprehensive and multi-modal regional long range transportation plans and preparing unified planning work programs. These agencies are:

- Greater Bridgeport Regional Planning Agency (GBRPA): Bridgeport, Easton, Fairfield, Monroe, Stratford and Trumbull.
- Valley Council of Governments (VCOG): Ansonia, Derby, Seymour and Shelton.

Although each agency operates separately and independently, efforts are made to coordinate transportation planning activities, while respecting each region's priorities and character. In addition, working cooperatively, the GBRPA and VCOG prepare and amend the short-range

transportation improvement program (TIP), which lists projects scheduled to receive federal financial assistance, and air quality conformity statement. The MPO, as the policy board for the area, is responsible for adopting the long range transportation plans, endorsing and amending the TIP, and ensuring the TIP and Plans are consistent with air quality goals and objectives.

Federal planning regulations and guidelines state that the MPO transportation planning process 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."* These requirements were strengthened in the ***Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA)*** and emphasis on public involvement was continued in the ***Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21)*** and ***SAFETEA-LU***.

In response to the provisions in ***ISTEA***, the MPO adopted, and has revised as necessary, a proactive public involvement program and policy that provides an opportunity for the public to review and comment on MPO plans, program and projects. The MPO public outreach entails efforts to inform the public about proposed transportation actions and provide opportunities for them to review the MPO's actions and offer comments. The intent is to foster early and meaningful discussions so that the public is made a partner in the decision-making process. The adopted public involvement process is intended to serve two principle functions:

1. Describe the procedures that the Greater Bridgeport and Valley MPO will follow to ensure timely and sufficient public notice of actions from the MPO's transportation planning process and provide an opportunity to participate in the development and implementation of transportation plans, programs and projects.
2. Provide an educational framework for the public that informs them of the MPO's responsibilities and requirements and makes them aware of their opportunities to influence and participate in important transportation decisions.

MPO actions requiring public review and comment include:

1. Major Investment Planning Study: As part of the annual unified planning work program the Greater Bridgeport Regional Planning Agency and Valley Council of Governments conduct or sponsor planning studies on critical transportation issues and concerns. In recent years, the GBRPA completed several congestion management system corridor studies and developed a regional Intelligent Transportation Systems architecture, and the VCOG has focused significant effort on assessing operational needs at interchanges along Route 8. The key element of the public involvement in major transportation studies is the formation of advisory committees that provide input and direction throughout the study phase.
2. Long Range Transportation Plan: The GBRPA and VCOG are responsible for developing long range transportation plans for their respective regions. To ensure the

transportation plans consider the needs and concerns of the regions and address principle regional issues, a meaningful public involvement process is required. Because of the long term nature of the Plan, an important aspect is to encourage public participation at the outset of the Plan development process to reach consensus on what the major transportation issues facing the region are and what the focus of possible improvements should be.

3. **Transportation Improvement Program.** The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) lists all of the transportation improvement projects programmed to receive federal financial assistance over the next five years. It is a short-term action program of projects that have already undergone substantial study and evaluation and have advanced to the construction phase. Projects are listed by federal funding category and the anticipated funding resources needed are provided. Federal regulations require the MPO to develop and endorse a phased TIP. Because the projects included in the TIP have been initiated and evaluated through the transportation planning process and come from the long range transportation plan, public review and comment focuses on providing information on the program to the public and making the proposed program available to public.
4. **Air Quality Conformity.** The Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA) require the Plan and TIP to be responsive to the goals of the State Implementation Plan for Air Quality (SIP), contribute to annual reductions in transportation-related emissions, and actively advance transportation control measures. To demonstrate conformity, the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) conducts a regional emissions assessment that estimates future emissions based on a future transportation network that includes proposed projects and compares them to a baseline year emissions. The results need to be made available to the public for review and information purposes.

To be successful and effective, the public involvement process needs to inform the public in a timely manner and provide an opportunity for an active role. To that end, the following concepts need to be incorporated in the policy:

1. **Public outreach needs to be effective.** Adequate notice must be provided to the public and targeted audiences. Proposed transportation actions need to be widely publicized and the appropriated media used.
2. **Public input needs to occur early in the transportation planning process.** The public needs time to assimilate information and background on a proposed transportation action. They need to be made a part of the decision-making process and not simply reacting to decisions already made. Early involvement will help identify concerns and issues and reduce expenditures on plans, programs and projects that have little public support.
3. **Adequate and accurate information.** In order for the public to fully comprehend a proposed transportation action and make an informed decision, the public needs to be

provided with enough background information and technical data on transportation deficiencies and how the proposed improvement will address identified problems. Technical data need to be provided in a form that can be easily understood by lay people.

4. Respond to public remarks and concerns. When the public offers comments on proposed transportation actions, it is important for a response to be made, otherwise there is a feeling that their concerns are being ignored.

The public involvement policy adopted by the MPO addressed these concepts and includes the following principle features:

1. Maintenance of a list of interested groups and individuals. Currently, the list includes a wide range of public and private representatives:
 - Municipal elected officials, such as mayors, first selectmen, council members, aldermen, and representative town meeting (RTM) members;
 - State-elected representatives – state representatives and State Senators;
 - Municipal staff – planners, engineers, economic development, emergency management, environmental compliance officials and historic commissions;
 - Transportation service providers – Metro-North Railroad, MetroPool, Inc., Bridgeport Port Authority, Sikorsky Memorial Airport, motor carriers and passenger ferry service,
 - Specialized transportation providers for the elderly and disabled – municipal senior centers and private, non-profit service providers;
 - Private environmental interest groups – Connecticut Fund for the Environment, 1000 Friends of Connecticut, and The Connecticut League of Conservation Voters, as examples;
 - Organizations representing non-motorized modes of transportation – bicycle and pedestrian groups;
 - Business community – chambers of commerce;
 - Neighborhood or community action groups.
2. Notification of MPO meetings and actions. Notices of pending MPO actions are sent directly to groups and persons of the list of interested organizations. These groups are invited to participate in the MPO meetings, development of the Plan and review of the
3. Establishment of a 30-day review and comment period. For major MPO actions (adoption of Plan and TIP), a 30-day review and comment period is provided. A notice of the review period is advertised and the public is encouraged to review proposed actions and offer comments. Comments are considered by the MPO before final adoption or approval.
4. Holding public information meetings. When deemed appropriate, information meetings are held to provide face-to-face opportunities for the public to discuss

proposed plans, programs and projects. The structure of the information meetings can vary depending on the purpose and target audience. At some meetings, formal presentations are made by staff, followed by question and comment periods. Other meetings are less formal and offer more one-on-one conversations without any staff presentations. Generally, information meetings will be held at an appropriate and convenient location, depending on purpose. Project-level information meetings will be held at a location in or close to the affected or impacted neighborhood. Actions of regional significance (Plan or TIP) will have meetings at a centralized location, generally at the offices of the respective regional planning organizations. The RPO offices are centrally located in their respective regions, offer access by public transportation and are accessible to persons with disabilities.

5. **Summaries.** Informational brochures, summaries or newsletter are prepared for the TIP, Plan and major projects and studies. The summaries include background information on and the purpose and need of the proposed action. These are provided at the public information as well as during the public review and comment period.
6. **Accessible format.** All information on a proposed action will be made available, upon request, in an accessible format for those with a visual or hearing impairment.
7. **Published notification of proposed MPO actions.** A range of media are used to publicize and notify the public about an impending action. A legal notice is prepared and published in the *Connecticut Post* newspaper. A news release is also written and sent to all news media, including print, radio and cable television. It is intended to provide information on the proposed action to news media in an effort to have an article written on the subject. In this way, more people will become aware and be informed of the proposed action. Persons and organizations on the list of interested parties are sent copies of the newsletter and legal notice directly.
8. **Responsiveness summary.** At the end of the public review and comment period, a summary of all comments received is prepared, incorporated into the TIP or Plan, and discussed by the MPO. In addition, staff responds to comments and it is explained how their comment was considered in the transportation planning process.
9. ***Environmental Justice.*** Efforts have also been made to ensure the transportation planning process is consistent with and conforms to executive and US Department of Transportation orders on ***Environmental Justice.***

Since the public involvement policy was adopted in 1997 and revised in 1997, the ability of the MPO to engage the public and involve them in the transportation planning process has had mixed results. In recent years, efforts to enhance public outreach have included:

1. Creating and maintaining websites that include posting of MPO meetings, summaries of the long range plan, TIP and other major planning studies, and notices of public information meetings.

2. Expanding the list of interested groups and persons, identify neighborhood and community action groups and send out direct notices of MPO actions the group's president.
3. Translating legal notices into Spanish to meet the needs of persons with limited English proficiency.
4. Using various innovative techniques for major transportation studies or projects, such as, project/study websites, opportunity to comment on-line, direct mailing to abutting property owners.
5. Making plans, programs and project summaries available in an electronic format.

Despite these efforts, it has been difficult to achieve more meaningful interaction with the public and realize good attendance at meetings, especially those related to the Plan or TIP. Public outreach for specific projects or major studies that focus on a particular area has had greater success and more involvement with affected populations.

Over the years, attendance at public information meetings and participation in the update of the long range plans and TIPs has been low. For the update of the TIP in 2004, two public information meetings were held, one in each planning region. Less than 10 people attended the two meetings. When asked about possible reasons for the low attendance, several concerns were voiced, including the meeting location was inconvenient, insufficient understanding of the purpose of the meeting and a general disconnect between the proposed program and how it would impact the public. For the update of the Plan, a survey was sent out asking for people's opinions on transportation problems and possible solutions. Only about 15% of the surveys were returned.

These concerns and lack of participation underscore the basic challenges facing the MPO and its efforts to facilitate meaningful public involvement: The MPO needs to make a diligent effort to proactively include the public in the transportation planning process. It needs to be early and continuing throughout the process. The evaluation of current public outreach activities indicates past efforts have not been very successful in achieving these goals and suggests a need to re-think how the public is engaged. Therefore, the challenges facing the MPO are how to grab and hold people's interest, convince them that active involvement is worthwhile, and provide the means for them to have direct and meaningful impact on its decision.

**The Public Involvement
"Challenges"**

- How to grab & hold people's interest
- How to convince them active involvement is worthwhile
- How to provide direct & meaningful impact on decisions

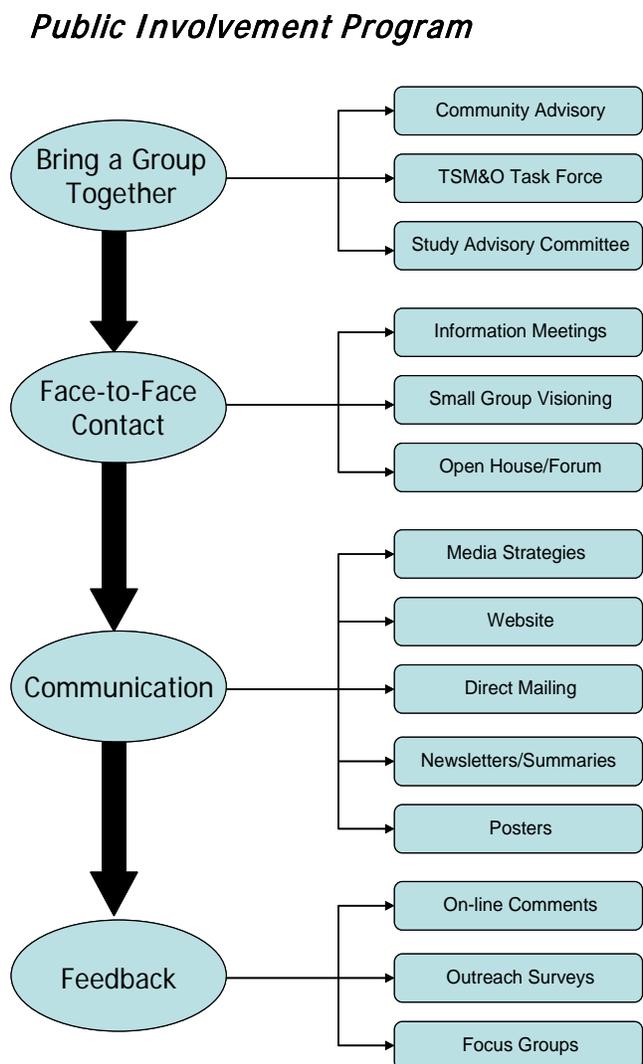


The first step in trying to determine a better way of engaging the public is to realize that involvement process flows down from the chief elected official of each member municipality (that is, MPO) through the various levels of local government – town councils, commissions and boards, municipal staff – to community and neighborhood leaders to individuals. It is vital for the MPO to actively accept and participate in the public involvement process and to encourage other municipal elected officials to become involved. Otherwise, it will not be successful in engaging the public.

As shown in the pyramid diagram, the CEOs would provide input to other elected officials. These elected officials would then make contact and provide information to the community and neighborhoods leaders whom they represent. The community leaders would then have direct contact with the local citizenry.

Revisions to the public involvement process are intended to enhance the flow of information between the MPO and the public and expand opportunities for the public to be more engaged in the transportation planning process. The enhanced public involvement program focuses on four general aspects:

- Bring a Group Together: Standing advisory groups that meet regularly to discuss transportation issues and concerns and provide input to the MPO.
- Face-to-face Contact: How the planners responsible for the transportation planning process interact with the public.
- Communication: How information is provided to the public.
- Feedback: How the public is provided an opportunity to comment on transportation plans, programs and projects. The public needs assurances that their comments will be taken seriously and given due consideration.



An important initial action for enhancing

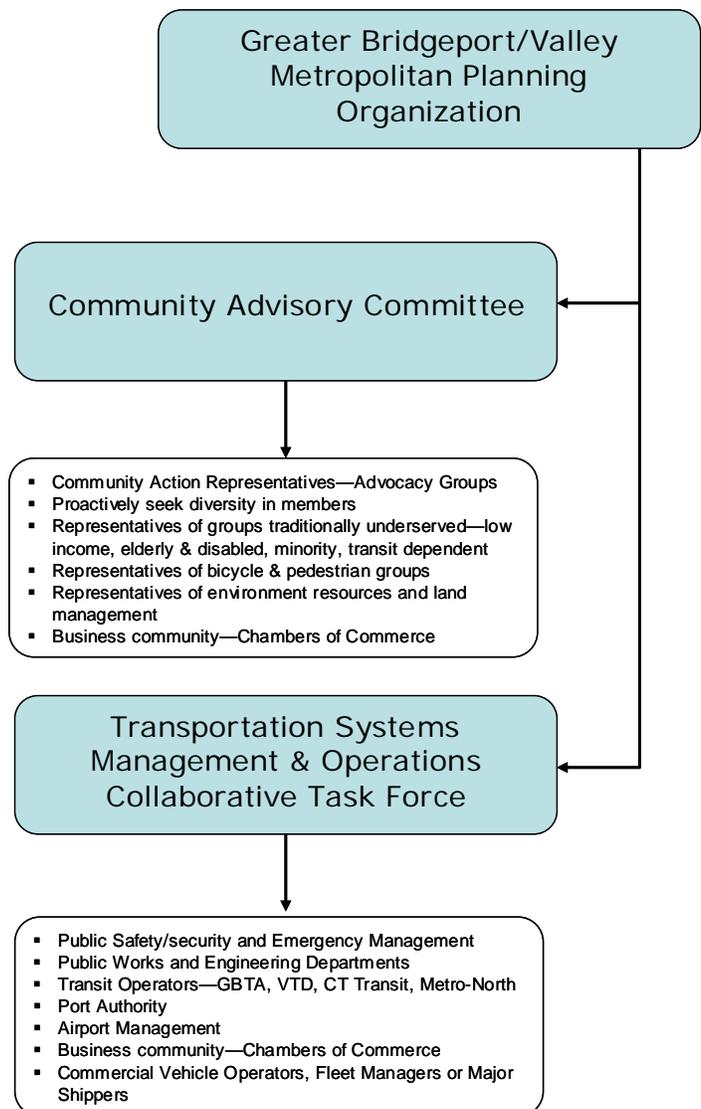
the public involvement process and providing an effective opportunity to participate in the transportation planning process is the use of advisory committees. The committees would serve as a critical way for information to flow between the MPO and the public. They would provide comment, guidance and direction on all aspects of the transportation planning process.

The MPO would convene and designate two advisory committees to provide input in the transportation planning process:

1. Community Advisory Committee
2. Transportation Systems Management and Operations Collaborative Task Force

A **Community Advisory Committee (CAC)** would be a **representative group** of stakeholders that would meet regularly to discuss issues of common concern. It would be a subcommittee of the MPO and would review transportation plans, programs and projects and provide advice to the MPO. The **CAC** would also be charged with reviewing the MPO’s public involvement process and suggesting ways to improve the process and make it more effective. Monitoring the compliance with **Environmental Justice** guidelines would also be under the **CAC’s** guidance. Representation on the **CAC** would serve as a means of interaction between local residents and the MPO on transportation issues and concerns.

The MPO would appoint members to the **CAC** after consultation with other elected officials and critical agencies of their respective municipality. However, it is critical to proactively seek diversity in membership and include persons from groups traditionally under-served by transportation, including low income, minority, elderly and disabled, and

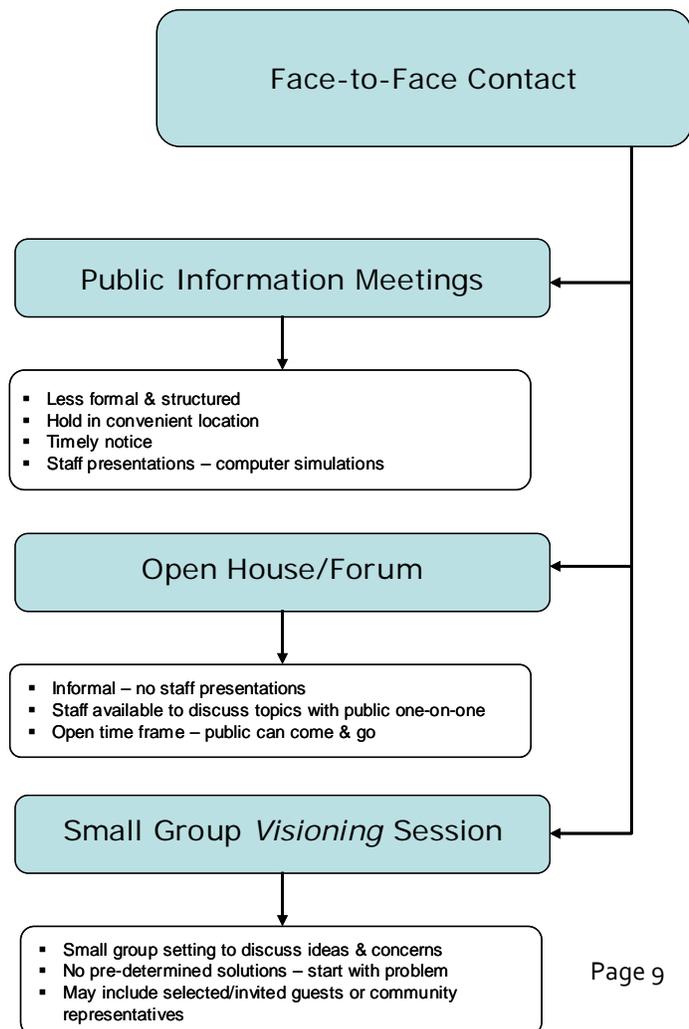


transit dependent residents. This would achieve a balanced representation and provide a forum for a full range of ideals and perspectives to be considered and discussed. Consultation with social service agencies and other non-traditional transportation groups, including bicycle and pedestrian, environmental, resource and land use management and others would occur through the **CAC**.

The second committee would be a reconfiguration of the existing transportation technical coordinating committees (**TCC**). The restructured **TCC** would become the **Transportation Systems Management and Operations Collaborative Task Force (TSMO)**. It would focus on the more technical aspects of the transportation systems, and members would collaborate on transportation systems management and operations needs, discuss plans, programs and projects, and provide advice to MPO. The objective is to promote efficient system management and operation through better linkages between transportation planning and transportation management and operations. This collaboration would lead to a better understanding of the transportation planning process and operator needs and provide improved communications between planners and operators. This would result in better transportation investment decisions by the MPO on short-term projects and long-term planning that reflect the best allocation of resources. The **TSMO** task force would be comprised of a combination of planners, engineers and operators. They would meet regularly to discuss and consider critical transportation issues and how to plan and program long term improvements, but there would also be an emphasis on linking day-to-day transportation systems operating needs to the transportation planning process.

In addition to these subcommittees of the MPO, technical advisory committees would be established for major transportation investment or corridor studies. The advisory committees would assist in identifying issues and developing strategies, as well as work toward developing a consensus on study recommendations and priorities. The composition of the advisory committee would vary and depend on study purposes and objectives. Representatives would be drawn from elected officials, municipal staff, and community interest groups.

The advisory committees provide a mechanism for information on the transportation planning process to flow from the MPO to the public. However,



the flow of information relies on committee representatives to make contact with and inform the public. Although this would be an effective way to exchange ideas and opinions on transportation problems and needs, it is equally important for the MPO to have face-to-face contact with the public, especially on major transportation actions.

The three basic techniques for face-to-face contact with the public are:

1. Public Information Meetings
2. Open House/Forum
3. Small Group *Visioning* (Brainstorming) Sessions

Public information meetings are the most common form of face-to-face contact with the public. These meetings are currently required for the update of the long range plans and TIP.

A public information meeting is less formal and structured than a public hearing. The purpose is to present information on a particular aspect of the transportation planning process and then provide an opportunity for general discussion and questions and answers. Staff presentations would include PowerPoint presentations, use of interactive maps and databases, and development of computer simulations to show before and after conditions. The computer-based presentations and displays would be posted on website to allow the public to review material after the meeting. Summaries of the meetings would be prepared and comments recorded, but a formal transcript would not be made. The intent is to provide an informal atmosphere at which to discuss a transportation issues and exchange ideas.

The key to a successful and well attended information meeting is holding the meeting in a convenient and appropriate location and at a time when most can attend. Past efforts have adhered to these concepts. Meetings on specific projects and corridor studies have generally been held in the evening and a location in the impacted neighborhood, if an adequate meeting place were available. Examples include holding public information meetings on the Seaview Avenue Corridor Project at Harding High School in Bridgeport and on the Route 58 CMS study at the Osborne Hill School in Fairfield; both locations were within the study areas. However, information meetings on general transportation topics, such as the long range plans and the TIP, have been held at the offices of the RPOs.

These practices will continue under the revise public involvement program, with some minor adjustments. Public information meetings will be held for the following transportation actions:

- Development of the long range transportation plan – To reach and involve a larger audience, more than one public information meeting should be held and at various sites throughout the respective regions. This recognizes the fact that not everyone would be disposed to attend a meeting at a central location if that location were not convenient to their home or in their home municipality. Also, additional meetings would be held at the request of a community group who is willing to host the event.

- Development of the Transportation Improvement Program – More than one public information meeting in the TIP should be held. Again, the sites of the information meetings would be spread throughout the region to reach a larger target audience. Community or neighborhood meetings would be held at the request of interested group.
- Conduct of a major investment study – Planning studies on a proposed major transportation investment would require holding public information meetings throughout the study, not just at the end of the study. The public needs to be informed at the start of the study and continually updated about its progress. At a minimum, information meetings should be held at major milestones in the study. This affords the public to influence and guide the study as opposed to merely reacting to a set of recommendations at the end. The need for additional meetings depends on the initial level of interest expressed by the affected population and the importance of the study.
- Projects – Transportation improvement projects typically are first identified through the transportation planning process in the long range plans. Before a project is added to the TIP, it needs to go through a project concept review process. This process involves determining the scope of the project and estimating costs. It also provides an opportunity for the public to be informed about the project and offer support or opposition. A public information meeting is required before the project is initiated. In this way, a project can be cancelled if there is substantial opposition to the project at the earliest phase with little or no public expenditures. Once initiated and in the design phase, information meetings need to be held at various stages of design completion, typically at 30%, 70% and at the end of the design phase. These intermediate information meeting allow the public to continue to influence the project even after it has been initiated.

Although public information meetings are intended to be informal, there still remains a defined structure between the presenter and the audience that may intimidate some and prevent them from participating fully. An "Open House/Forum" tries to eliminate all barriers between staff and the public by providing a more open and comfortable environment where the public can discuss their concerns and issues one-on-one with MPO staff. Typically, there are no staff presentations; or if there is a presentation, it is brief and is intended to provide background to the forum. Staff is available to talk one-on-one, typically at displays. These types of meetings have an open time frame and the public can come and go as they please.

Open forums are most appropriate at the start of the transportation planning process before any possible solutions are formulated that may overly influence the direction of discussion. The intent is to foster a dialogue between the MPO and the public on transportation issues and concerns and allow the public an opportunity to freely discuss their ideas. A good opportunity for holding an open forum is for the update and development of the long range transportation plan. This would allow those interested in the transportation planning process to become active and offer their opinions regarding the condition of the transportation systems at the

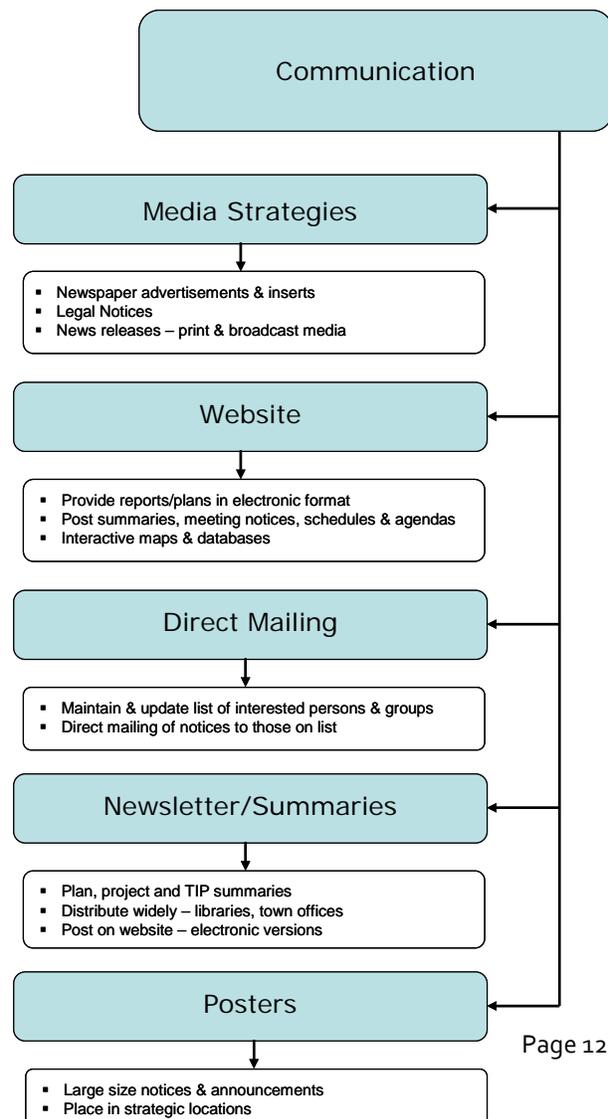
earliest possible time. Their concerns and issues would guide the direction of the plan and become the framework for identifying possible improvement actions.

An early open forum would also be beneficial in the scoping of specific transportation improvement projects. Typically, communities identify a problem and then develop a proposed project before engaging the public. The concern is that the concept for correcting or addressing the problem has already been identified and the public feels it is merely reacting to the information being presented instead of being made a partner in the discussions. As an alternative, an open forum focuses on the transportation deficiency and not on the preconceived recommendation on how to fix the problem. By holding an open forum early in the process, the public has a better sense that their involvement is worthwhile and meaningful and that they will have a direct impact on decisions. An ongoing open process would involve working closely and interactively with the affected community on identifying the best possible solutions. This approach is a key underlying feature of the concept of *Context Sensitive Solutions*. The scoping of a project begins with the identification of a problem or deficiency and the public is engaged to determine appropriate corrective measures that are sensitive to and in context with the surrounding area.

For certain transportation planning activities, it may be appropriate to hold small group meetings to discuss a wide range of ideas. The difference from the open forum concept is that these meetings may involve selected or invited leaders of the community, as opposed to the general public. Similar to the open forum concept, small group meetings are intended to provide an atmosphere for open discussion, with no pre-determined solutions. Presentations by staff would be minimal and would be used only to provide background on the transportation issues being discussed. Participants would be encouraged to express their views openly and candidly. The result of a small group meeting would be a "vision" of what the transportation facility or system would be like in the future.

As with public information meetings, open forums or small group meetings need to be held at convenient locations and times to attract as many participants as practical.

The key to successfully grabbing and holding the public's interest in the transportation planning process and convincing them that



their concerns matter is good, continuous and easily accessible communication. This involves timely notice of MPO meetings and actions, non-technical and understandable summaries of plans, projects and programs, and ensuring information is readily available. Good communication with the public revolves around five activities:

1. Media strategies for notifying the public about MPO actions
2. Website
3. Direct mailing of notices
4. Newsletters, information brochures and summaries
5. Posters

Notice of public information meetings and open forums needs to be broad and timely, otherwise few people will attend. The process includes a general notice of a meeting date, time, location and purpose. Contact information also needs to be included in the notice. At a minimum, notice is by a legal notice. However, this method may not reach a large proportion of the general public. A better approach would be to prepare an advertisement for publication in the area and regional newspapers. The display ad would provide the same information as a legal notice but in less structured and complicated form. The information would be presented in plain and easy to understand layout, so that the date, time, location and purpose of the meetings would be clearly displayed. The advertisement would be inserted into the newspaper in a more popular section. In this way, a much larger proportion of the target audience would more likely see the ad and be informed about the upcoming public meeting. For either method, sufficient notice for meetings needs to be provided. However, it cannot be given too far in advance or people will forget about it. A good practice is to provide one-to-two weeks advance notice with follow-up reminders as the meeting date approaches.

Print media is not the only medium available for notifying the public about MPO actions and meeting. Therefore, it is important to also prepare a news release on important MPO plans and projects and distribute it to media outlets, including radio and television.

The Internet has changed the way data and information are transmitted and provided. It is becoming a valuable tool in disseminating information about transportation plans, project and plans to the public and providing an easily accessible repository of transportation documents. To expand the flow of information to the public, MPO activities and plans need to be converted to an electronic format and posted on the RPO websites. Items that should be posted include:

- Study reports and plans.
- Transportation Improvement Program – list and description of federally funded projects.

- Notices of MPO and public information meetings, including date, time, place, purpose and agenda.
- Minutes of MPO, advisory committee and project-level meetings.
- Interactive maps and accessible databases.
- Updated summaries of planned and active transportation improvement projects.

On-line posting of reports, plans and summaries is intended to supplement making and providing hard copies. This recognizes the fact that not everyone has access to the Internet or is familiar on how to use it. Therefore, hard copies of plans, reports and summaries will continue to be made and provided.

The MPO needs to develop and maintain a list of interest persons and groups. This should include not only elected officials (mayors, first selectmen, state representatives and councilmen), but professional municipal staff, other providers of transportation services (both public and private), environmental and non-traditional transportation advocacy groups, trade and business organizations, and community/neighborhood action committees. These representatives would be sent notices of MPO public information meetings and proposed actions. Direct mailing of notices would be in addition to publishing legal notices and advertisements. For instances involving a information meeting on a specific project or corridor study, abutting property owners of the affected neighborhood would also be sent direct mailings of meeting notices.

Transportation planning activities often result in long and highly technical plans and reports that may not be appropriate or useful to the general public. They may not have the time or inclination to read and assimilate the analyses and findings discussed in the technical reports. An important job of MPO staff is to ensure study findings are understandable to a non-technical public. To that end, newsletters, briefings, and brochures would be prepared. These summaries would concisely describe the purposes and needs for the plans or studies and the proposed project scopes. They would also be widely distributed, including limited direct mailings to interested and affected groups, libraries, and municipal offices. Electronic versions would be created and posted on the MPO websites.

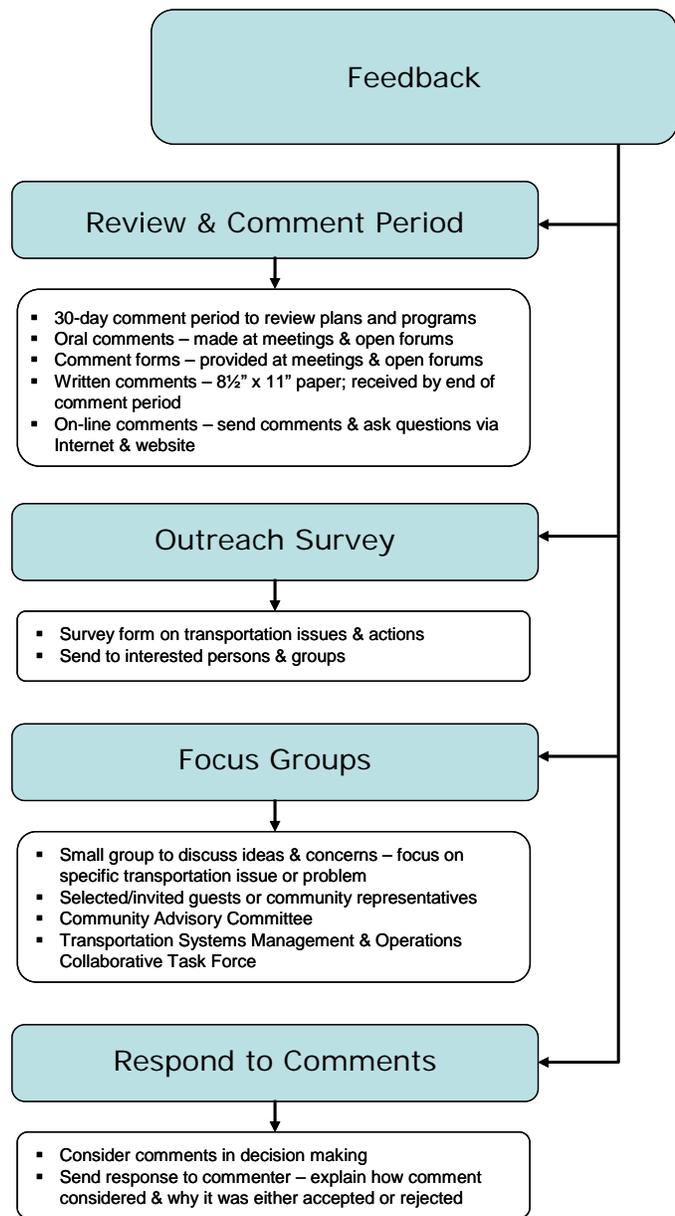
A final way to effectively advertise MPO activities is to create large-size posters that describe the key aspects of a project or plan or announce a planned information meeting or open forum. The posters would be placed at strategic locations throughout the MPO area, including libraries, municipal offices and possibly shopping centers and malls.

Getting feedback from the public on various MPO actions is the primary purpose of the public involvement process, convening citizen advisory committees, holding public meetings, and communicating with the public provides the opportunity for the public to become involved in the transportation planning process, but getting feedback from the public is the main challenge facing the MPO.

For the update of the long range plan and development of the TIP, the MPO provides a 30-day period for public review and comment. Efforts are made to notify the public about the proposed actions and encourage feedback. The revised public involvement process retains this 30-day review requirement; however, the enhanced efforts at notifying and communicating with the public are expected to reach more of the affected population and attract more to become involved.

The 30-day review period is designed to provide sufficient time for the public to be notified of a proposed MPO action, to learn more about the action and to make comments. Comments can be made orally at public information meetings or in writing. Written comments need to be received by the end of the review period and be legibly written on 8½" x 11" paper. Comments can also be transmitted via the Internet. Email addresses for the RPOs are provided in public notices and can be used to send comments. RPO websites will also have an on-line link for making comments.

Some people who are interested in a transportation action are not comfortable making an oral comment at a public meeting or unable to send written comments. To facilitate feedback, comment forms and outreach surveys would be provided at public information meetings and open forms and sent-out to interested groups and organizations. Electronic versions of the outreach surveys would be available so that responders would be able to send back their opinions via the Internet.



The revised public involvement process envisions the creation of *Citizen Advisory Committee* and a reconfigured transportation technical coordinating committee (*Task Force*). In addition, opportunities may arise when small focus group meetings are held to discuss a specific aspect of the transportation planning process. These committees and focus groups would involve selected community representatives and invited guests. The primary purpose of these small group meetings is for participants to make substantive comments on the transportation planning process and provide feedback on the direction of transportation plans, programs and projects.

It is one thing to provide the public an opportunity to review and comment on various aspects of the MPO's transportation planning process, but it is imperative that comments are taken seriously and considered before final action is taken. People often feel their comments are not seriously considered. It is critical for the MPO to respond and be receptive to comments offered by the public. The MPO needs to clearly explain why comments were either considered or not and how they were considered or incorporated in the decision-making process. Without this response to comments, the public will have no way of knowing whether or not their involvement was worthwhile and meaningful.