

Appendix D. Citizen Participation Plan for the Metropolitan Council

Background

The Minnesota Legislature recognized the need for a forum where citizens could participate in the discussion and decisions of regional issues that shape the lives of citizens and the quality of life in the Twin Cities area. The Council recognizes this purpose as central to its legislative charge. In 1998, the Council adopted a Customer Relations and Outreach policy to provide timely and substantial opportunities for public participation, placing importance on easy access and meaningful communication.

The Metropolitan Council actively involves the public in its decision-making process at several levels. The Council's Communications Office serves as a liaison between the Council and citizens groups and local officials, interacting with the public on a daily basis and supporting the Council's community outreach and public hearing process. The Council has established a broad citizen participation and public education effort to build awareness and understanding of regional issues and to build consensus for solving regional issues.

Since former President Clinton issued the Executive Order on Environmental Justice in 1994, the federal government has highlighted the requirement that its programs and policies not adversely affect low-income and minority populations. In the transportation planning realm, environmental justice analysis involves investigating the relationship between those populations and the investments, plans, and programs in the transportation system. The opportunities that minority and low-income populations have to present their perspectives in the public participation process form a primary component of environmental justice analysis. New and enhanced methods of including the perspectives of traditionally underserved groups are being developed and employed by the Metropolitan Council.

The Metropolitan Council reaffirms its commitment to a pro-active, effective public participation process, using a variety of internal and external strategies including newsletters, telephone comment lines, e-mail, a Web site, online forum, media relations, community meetings, public hearings and public information campaigns.

Citizen Involvement

The community is a valuable source of information and experience. In planning, developing and implementing regional plans and policies, the Council has established an “open appointment” policy and program. The program recruits citizens to become associated with the Council’s planning responsibilities through its advisory committees, such as the Transportation Advisory Board, Transit Providers Advisory Committee, Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Advisory Committee on Transit. The Council advertises the positions in metropolitan newspapers, including eight to 10 minority-owned papers, and mails notices to community groups. Also, news releases and notices posted on the Council’s Web site (www.metrocouncil.org) help publicize and recruit citizen involvement.

The Council’s community involvement goals include:

- An ongoing citizen advisory process,
- Public information and education initiatives,
- Opportunities for public participation and comment,
- Extensive communications with local governments and stakeholder groups,
- Outreach activities using a variety of mediums to expand participants in regional policymaking, and
- Sound policy and service delivery decisions reflecting community sentiment and public opinion from broad outreach.

Citizen Advisory Groups

Standing advisory committees, as well as ad hoc task forces and focus groups, conduct studies, develop policy recommendations and advise the Council on major public policy matters. Appointments to most advisory committees are open to the general public. Some committee seats are specifically designated for local elected officials or professional representatives from the discipline. Vacancies may be announced in the Council’s regular public information materials, in news releases to newspapers, on the Council’s Web site, through legal notices when required by law, through special mailings or through recruitment by Council members.

Informal citizen review, forums (in person and online), community open houses or expert resource groups are also used to help sort out issues and to gather or provide information.

Public Information and Education Initiatives

Information on metropolitan issues is disseminated through the Council’s Data Center, Web site, staff sector representatives who serve as liaisons with communities, Council members and through other Council programs.

Public education and public/private media campaigns build awareness of specific issues and participation at community and online meetings/forums.

Policy Documents/Publications

Part of the Council's policy to inform and involve the public includes the distribution of policy documents that provide citizens with pertinent information about the planning and decision process. The Council's *Directions* newsletter is mailed bi-monthly to more than 4,000 local officials and interested citizens, another 800 receive E-Directions monthly and its presence on the Web site reaches thousands per day. It provides information about regional issues, Council program activities and decisions and other publications and events. Regional data on population, the economy, housing vacancies and construction, to name a few, are available to the public at no charge. *TakeOut*, a monthly newsletter available on all regional buses and trains, provides updates on upcoming meetings and decisions affecting the region's transit system. The agendas for Metropolitan Council meetings are issued weekly to news media, e-mailed to subscribers, posted on Web sites and publicized further as needed. The *Metro Digest*, published monthly, summarizes the actions of the Council, Metropolitan Airports Commission and Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission. Included are appointment vacancies to commissions and advisory committees. Mailings reach 600 local officials and legislators.

Other communications initiatives also build on the Council's organizational identity and include:

- An extensive and dynamic Web site that receives more than 200,000 visits each month,
- Customized letters from Council members to local officials, citizen activists and interest groups,
- The Council's annual report,
- Special-purpose brochures and fact sheets to keep local officials and interested groups aware of regional issues, and
- Collateral materials featuring the Data Center, Web site and Public Comment line

News Media Program

Information on regional issues is provided through the news media – daily and weekly newspapers, local TV and radio, cable TV, local magazines, and local media in Council members' districts. The Council utilizes regional cable channel 6 to highlight regional activities. Regular news briefings, news releases, editorial commentaries, and meetings with news media highlight regional issues, Council actions and public participation opportunities.

Speakers Bureau

An active speakers program provides opportunities for Council members and staff to exchange information and views on Council issues from local officials, professionals, community organizations and the public.

Public Information Initiatives

The Council regularly conducts major public information and marketing campaigns to support critical regional projects with the goal of heightening public awareness of the issue and the

Council's position and soliciting feedback from the public. These efforts are coordinated with other government and community organizations with information being distributed through special public information meetings or through the media.

Public Hearing and Referral Process

Public participation is also evident through the public hearing process and the referral, or review, process. Public hearings are publicized in local and regional papers and held both in the Council offices and in communities and neighborhoods when major policy decisions significantly affect those areas. Public hearings are conducted when the adoption or amendment of any regional policy plan is being considered. Options to provide comments for the public record include an online forum, e-mail, voice mail, fax or written comment cards. In the event that responses to the public comments result in significant changes to the *Transportation Policy Plan* and the *Transportation Improvement Program*, the Council will determine if an additional opportunity for public comment will be provided.

The referral process is used to coordinate the implementation of transportation facilities with regional development policies through notices sent to interested persons, groups and other affected parties. For each surface transportation referral, notices are sent to appropriate minority organizations based on a proposed facility location or its service area.

Local Government Participation

A key vehicle for involving local government in regional transportation decisions is the Council's Transportation Advisory Board (TAB). The TAB is an advisory body to the Metropolitan Council on transportation planning and programming issues, but is responsible for assigning funding priorities and adopting programs.

The 34-member TAB consists of 10 municipal elected officials, 7 county commissioners, 4 representatives of state and regional agencies (Minnesota Department of Transportation, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Metropolitan Airports Commission, and the Metropolitan Council), 8 citizen representatives, 4 transportation mode representatives, and 1 chair.

The Council also seeks comments from local and county governments informally and early in the decision-making process to solicit their perspective on developing regional policies concerning day-to-day regional issues, concerns and needs. These comments are obtained through informal discussion meetings and forums, stakeholder focus groups, surveys and ongoing updates.

Nontraditional Participants

In accordance with the Executive Order on Environmental Justice, the Council actively recruits the involvement of citizens groups whose perspectives traditionally have been underrepresented in regional policymaking. Special outreach efforts are made to minority, low-income, elderly and disabled populations. This is accomplished, in part, by increasing the visibility of particular issues and cosponsoring events that help to develop new relationships, as well as online forums, mailers and advertising public involvement opportunities in minority-based media. Other

examples include holding public meetings at locations easily accessible for public transit users, and providing interpreters and alternative print formats of the Council's written materials. In addition, persons with disabilities serve on Council advisory committees such as the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee, Hiawatha Community Advisory Committee and others.

Communications Plans

The Council prepares comprehensive communications plans to identify key stakeholders, key messages, and what outreach tools should be used to elicit substantive and meaningful participation on major planning initiatives. Online planning tools help staff develop public involvement activities.

Council/Staff Assistance

Metropolitan Council members and staff appear at city council meetings to explain Council policy and to hear local concerns. Meetings with civic leaders in business, education and nonprofit foundations are frequently convened to discuss Council priorities, regional competitiveness and opportunities for public/private nonprofit cooperation. Technical planning assistance (including staff workshops for communities) is provided in the local comprehensive planning process so that major metropolitan area issues can be better coordinated.

Electronic and Data Center Info

The Council has a major Internet presence at www.metrocouncil.org, a Metro Information Line, a Public Comment Line and e-mail address at data.center@metc.state.mn.us for current information and feedback opportunities on specific topics. The Council's Data Center also uses targeted mailings and e-mails for disseminating information. As needed, information is translated into other languages or formats.

Federal Metropolitan Transportation Planning and EPA Conformity

The latest revisions to the Citizen Participation Plan bring it into full compliance with the public involvement process as defined in 23 CFR 450.316(b) and the most current revisions to the EPA conformity rules. The following is the current status of the Council's public involvement efforts relative to the 23 CFR 450.316(b) provisions.

23CFR 450.316(B) PROVISIONS

COMMENT

<p>(i) <i>Require a minimum public comment period of 45 days before the public involvement process is initially adopted or revised;</i></p>	<p>The Council's administrative procedures for adopting and amending policy plans require a minimum of 45 days public comment period on drafts of the <i>Transportation Policy Plan</i> and the <i>Transportation Improvement Program</i> prior to their initial adoption or revisions. The public involvement process is also submitted for public comment during the 45 days comment period on the policy plan.</p>
<p>(ii) <i>Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, agencies, providers, interested parties and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs and projects;</i></p>	<p>The Council maintains an extensive communication network and applies its resources that are dedicated to its public involvement efforts. The direction and resources for public involvement are determined by the Council in its annual work and budget programs and in the Unified Planning Work Program for the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The Communications Department maintains an extensive mailing list of identified stakeholders and public interest groups. These lists are used for the timely distribution of transportation information.</p>
<p>(iii) <i>Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of the Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) and open public meetings.....;</i></p>	<p>As part of the announcements of public comment periods, information is provided as to where draft documents, technical and policy materials can be obtained and public inquiries directed. Goals and strategies to solicit public comments are in the Citizen Participation Plan. Public comment drafts of the <i>Transportation Improvement Plan</i> and <i>Transportation Policy Plan</i> also include a comment letter from the MPCA on fulfillment of EPA air quality conformity requirements.</p>
<p>(iv) <i>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 TIP s...;</i></p>	<p>The Council and the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) have established committees and advisory groups to assist in the development of regional policies, plans and programs. All the Council and TAB meetings are announced and open to the public. The public is encouraged to attend, offer comments, or respond to the materials provided to these committees, which are also available through requests or by committee mailing lists. Prior to undertaking any plan preparation or revision process, a schedule is announced and adopted by the Council and the TAB.</p>
<p>(v) <i>Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received during the planning and program development process;</i></p>	<p>All comments received are explicitly considered and responded to as part of the public hearing record.</p>
<p>(vi) <i>Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to low-income and minority households;</i></p>	<p>The Council's Communications and Diversity Departments work together to broaden public participation by those traditionally underserved by transportation systems, including racial or ethnic minority populations. The public outreach strategies of the Citizen Participation Plan also target public information to the region's minority news media and community-based newsletters and newspapers to communicate regional issues and strengthen involvement in regional policymaking by the region's communities of color and neighborhood organizations.</p>

<p>(vii) <i>When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft transportation plan or TIP (including the financial plan) as a result of the public involvement process or interagency consultation required under the U.S. EPA's conformity regulations, a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments shall be made part of the final plan and TIP;</i></p>	<p>See response to (v) above.</p>
<p>(viii) <i>If the final transportation plan or TIP differs significantly from the one which was made available for public comment by the MPO and raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen from the public involvement efforts, an additional opportunity for public comment on the revised plan or TIP shall be made available;</i></p>	<p>Prior to taking action for final adoption of the <i>Transportation Policy Plan</i> or <i>Transportation Improvement Program</i>, the Council makes a determination as to the adequacy of the public involvement process to solicit comments. In the event responses to the public comments result in significant changes to the policy plan or improvement program, an additional opportunity for public comment will be provided.</p>
<p>(ix) <i>Public involvement processes shall be periodically reviewed by the MPOs in terms of their effectiveness in assuring that the process provides full and open process to all;</i></p>	<p>The Council periodically reviews its public involvement process. The process for reviews was reviewed as part of this update to the Citizen Participation Plan.</p>
<p>(x) <i>These procedures will be reviewed by the FHWA and FTA during certification reviews for TMA s and as otherwise necessary for all MPOs to assure full and open access is provided to MPO decision-making processes;</i></p>	<p>Upon the adoption of this revised <i>Transportation Policy Plan</i>, the updated Citizen Participation Plan will be forwarded to the FHWA and FTA for their review.</p>
<p>(xi) <i>Metropolitan public involvement processes shall be coordinated with statewide public involvement processes wherever possible to enhance public consideration of the issues, plans and programs and reduce redundancies and costs;....</i></p>	<p>The Council carries out an extensive interagency consultative process in the development of its <i>Transportation Policy Plan</i>, <i>Transportation Improvement Program</i> and other programs. The Council coordinates public involvement processes wherever possible with other state agencies, such as Mn/DOT's planning and programming documents. A network of advisory committees, such as the Transportation Advisory Board, provides assistance to the Council in its decision-making. This board consists of local elected officials, citizens, and representatives of government agencies with transportation responsibilities.</p>

In addition, the Council continues to develop, refine and test public involvement tools and techniques as part of extensive and ongoing public involvement activities that provide information, timely notices and full public access to key decisions. The Council supports early and continuing public involvement in the development of plans and programs such as the Transportation Policy Plan and the *Transportation Improvement Program*. For example, in the preparation of the 2004 Transportation Policy Plan, a variety of formats, including open houses, comment mail-in cards, e-mails, letters, and voice messages will be used to attract participation and solicit public comments. Likewise, in partnership with other local governmental units and Mn/DOT, the Council adopted a communication plan with a strong emphasis on ongoing neighborhood outreach and involvement in specific transitway corridors where rail transit is to be constructed, such as the Hiawatha Light Rail Transit Corridor.

The *Transportation Policy Plan* and *Transportation Improvement Program* are adopted after extensive public involvement in its review. A public hearing is held by the Council on the policy plan and the improvement program with a 45-day public comment period provided. During the comment period, copies of the draft policy plan and improvement program are available at more than 20 public libraries throughout the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The draft documents for public comment and technical information are available online and at no charge to the public through mailing lists and requests to the Council's Data Center. The Data Center serves approximately 12,000 clients annually.