

# CATAWBA REGION

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## RURAL TRANSPORTATION PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### *Amendment*

A change to the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program such as the addition of a project not previously programmed or significant schedule or project cost changes. Amendments require formal action by the Metropolitan Planning Organization or Council of Governments.

### *Council of Governments (COG)*

Comprised of rural areas not within a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

### *Consultation Parties*

Local, state, regional, and federal agencies, transportation advocacy groups, environmental interest groups, and other entities that provide guidance and input in the planning process, identify critical transportation issues, and determine the goals and principles for implementation.

### *Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act – (FAST)*

On December 4, 2015, President Obama signed into law the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, or "FAST Act" - the first Federal law in over ten years to provide long-term funding certainty for surface transportation. The FAST Act authorizes \$305 billion over fiscal years 2016 through 2020 for the Department's highway, highway and motor vehicle safety, public transportation, motor carrier safety, hazardous materials safety, rail, and research, technology and statistics programs. In September, 2020, Congress passed a one-year extension set to expire on December 11, 2021

### *Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)*

The United States government agency that oversees the distribution of federal funds for and the activities pertaining to road systems in each state.

### *Geographical Information System (GIS)*

An electronic system for capturing, storing, analyzing, and managing data and associated attributes which are spatially referenced to the Earth.

### *Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (Map -21)*

The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act, was signed into law by President Obama on July 6, 2012. Funding surface transportation programs at over \$105 billion for fiscal years (FY) 2013 and 2014, MAP-21 is the first long-term highway authorization enacted since Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU).

*Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)*

Metropolitan Planning Organization. Comprised of county road commissions, cities, villages, townships, and transit agencies in an area having an urbanized population in excess of 50,000. At a minimum, the MPO boundaries shall encompass the entire existing urbanized area (as defined by the Bureau of the Census) plus the contiguous area expected to become urbanized within a 20-year forecast period for the metropolitan transportation plan. The MPO boundaries may be further expanded to encompass the entire metropolitan statistical area or combined statistical area, as defined by the Office of Management and Budget.

*Multimodal*

Trips involving multiple modes of transportation to include automobile, bus, train, boat, bicycle, pedestrian, and airplane.

*National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)*

A federal policy, enacted in 1970, that established National Environmental Policy and action-forcing provisions to ensure that agencies consider the National Environmental Policy in their decision-making process.

*SAFETEA-LU*

Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users. The Federal legislation authorizing the distribution of federal Highway Trust Funds to the states prior to the 2012 MAP-21 funding bill.

*South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT)*

The South Carolina Department of Transportation's (SCDOT) mission is to provide a safe and efficient transportation system for the state of South Carolina. This is accomplished through building and maintaining roads and bridges as well as providing intermodal and freight programs and services to the citizens of the state

*Stakeholders*

A person or group of people who affects or can be affected by transportation decisions or actions.

*Statewide Multimodal Plan*

A document that identifies statewide transportation needs, and sets investment priorities for a period of at least twenty years, and establishes goals and objectives for addressing transportation needs throughout the state.

*Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)*

Statewide Transportation Improvement Program. A document that lists specific transportation projects scheduled during a six-year period for the entire state.

*Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)*

A document that lists specific transportation projects scheduled during a six-year period within a metropolitan area or council of governments planning boundary.

*Title 23*

The United States Code is the codification by subject matter of the general and permanent laws of the United States. It is divided by broad subjects into 50 titles and published by the Office of the Law Revision Council of the U.S. House of Representatives. Title 23 covers highways.

*Transit*

A public mode of transportation such as bus or train service.

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## I INTRODUCTION

The Catawba Regional Council of Governments (CRCOG) Rural Transportation Advisory Committee's (TAC) policy is to support and encourage public participation and to adhere to the principles of the rural transportation planning process. The TAC's public participation policy is designed to ensure opportunities for the public to express its views on transportation issues and to actively participant in the decision-making process.

## II BACKGROUND

Although the ultimate responsibility of rural transportation planning in South Carolina lies with the SCDOT, each COG has responsibilities similar to that of the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), which are responsible for urban transportation planning. A portion of SCDOT's State, Planning, and Research (SPR) funding is allocated to the COGs to facilitate an ongoing rural transportation planning process. Each COG, in partnership with SCDOT, is responsible for implementing a transportation planning process that fully complies with the federal planning requirements established by the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act)/Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21). Each COG is required to submit a Rural Planning Work Program (RPWP) outlining the planning emphasis areas and planning projects for the year. Through this process, each COG establishes regional goals and objectives, identifies the current condition of the transportation system, provides research and data analysis, and identifies and prioritizes transportation needs for input to the Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan and State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

The CRCOG also maintains a Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) that includes the following elements: system upgrade, intersections, safety, maintenance/resurfacing, and bike and pedestrian facilities. Potential projects are ranked and recommended by the advisory committees to the COG board based on funding availability. The LRTP includes both constrained and unconstrained needs. The plan is updated every five years from the date of adoption, or as needed.

The CRCOG receives local input on transportation projects from its regional rural transportation Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), which consists of representatives from local governments and transportation providers. The TAC also includes representatives from the SCDOT, RFATS MPO staff, CRCOG planning staff, municipal and county public works officials, and community leaders. This committee plays an important role in identifying, analyzing, and prioritizing transportation needs and goals for the CRCOG region and makes recommendations to the CRCOG Board of Directors, which is the policymaking body. Consequently, local governments are directly consulted and allowed to identify needs on the statewide transportation system. The TAC meets quarterly or, as needed, to review project status, evaluate proposed modifications to the TIP/STIP, update the LRTP and funding priorities, comment on rural functional classification changes, receive input on the rural work programs, and coordinate special studies.

### III GOVERNMENTAL REQUIREMENTS

The ten (10) planning factors of FAST Act/MAP-21 are:

1. Support the economic vitality of the United States, the States, nonmetropolitan areas, and metropolitan areas, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
2. Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and nonmotorized users;
3. Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and nonmotorized users;
4. Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and freight;
5. Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns;
6. Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes throughout the State, for people and freight;
7. Promote efficient system management and operation;
8. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system;
9. Improve the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate stormwater impacts of surface transportation; and
10. Enhance travel and tourism.

Public participation in the planning process is key to arriving at a consensus for future system improvements and allocation of transportation resources. CRCOG's Public Participation Plan has been developed with these eight goals in mind.

### IV PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

- A. General Guidelines: The CRCOG Rural Transportation Public Participation Plan is intended to provide direction for public participation activities to be conducted by the CRCOG regional TAC and contains the vision, goals, objectives, and techniques used by CRCOG for public participation. In its public participation process, CRCOG TAC will strive to:
1. Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, local governments, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agencies, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs, and projects.

2. Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of the LRTP, STIP/TIP, RPWP, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects, and conduct open public meetings where matters related to transportation programs are being considered.
  3. Give adequate public notice of public participation activities and allow time for public review and comment at key decision points, including but not limited to, the approval of the LRTP, STIP, RPWP, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects.
  4. Respond to all applicable public input. When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft transportation plan (including the financial plan) as a result of the public participation process, a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments shall be made part of the final plan.
  5. Provide a public comment period of not less than twenty-one (21) calendar days before an amendment of the TIP/STIP.
  6. Provide a public comment period of not less than thirty (30) calendar days before adoption, update, or amendment of the LRTP and RPWP.
  7. Provide a public Comment period of not less than forty-five (45) calendar days before adoption, update, or amendment of the Public Participation Plan.
  8. Coordinate its Public Participation Process with statewide Public Participation Processes wherever possible to enhance public consideration of the issues, plans, and programs, and to reduce redundancies and costs.
  9. Periodically review the Public Participation Process to ensure it provides full and open access to all. Portions of the process which are found not to meet the needs of the constituency will be revised.
- B. Public Participation Plan Vision, Goals & Policies: The vision for the public participation plan is that the public will be provided thorough information on transportation planning services and project development in a convenient and timely manner. The following goals and policies have been established:

**Goal 1:** To actively engage the public in the transportation planning process according to the policies contained in Federal and State law as well as in this Public Participation Plan.

- A. CRCOG shall maintain up to date contact information for, at a minimum, the following persons and/or organizations:
  - Federal (FHWA and FTA), state (SCDOT), and local agencies responsible for planned growth, economic development, land use management, and local transportation planning

- Municipal, County, State, and Federal Legislative Elected Officials
  - Local Government Staff – Chief Administrative Officers
  - Representatives of Public Transportation Organizations
  - Representatives of Organizations Serving Disabled Populations
  - Local Media
  - Chambers of Commerce and Downtown Associations
  - Special Interest Groups – (i.e. CRAFT - Charlotte Regional Alliance for Transportation, Centralina Council of Governments, NC, Charlotte Area Regional Transportation Planning Organization, Gaston Lincoln Cleveland MPO, etc.)
- B. CRCOG shall as appropriate, electronically send and/or mail meeting announcements (invitations) to portions or all of the CRCOG contact list and/or to targeted groups regarding upcoming activities.
- C. CRCOG shall employ visualization techniques to depict transportation plans. Examples of visualization techniques include charts, graphs, photo interpretation, Google Earth, maps, use of GIS, artist's renderings, physical models, and/or computer simulation.

**Goal 2:** CRCOG shall keep the public informed of ongoing transportation-related activities.

- A. CRCOG shall make all publications and work products available to the public via the internet, staff office, and employment of visualization techniques to describe transportation actions as part of the LRTP.
- B. Staff shall be available to provide general and project specific information at a central location during normal business hours and after hours at the request of groups with reasonable notice.
- C. CRCOG shall maintain a Transportation section on the CRCOG website and maintain transportation-related maps on the CRCOG mapping website.
1. The website shall be updated and maintained to provide the most current information available.
  2. The website shall, at a minimum, contain the following information:
    - Current CRCOG general contact information (i.e. mailing address, phone, and fax, and email);
    - Meeting announcements;
    - Brief descriptions of current projects – TIP via the STIP;
    - Work products and publications (TIP, LRTP, RPWP, and PPP);
    - Public response via the email link on CRCOG website links to related agencies (e.g. SCDOT and RFATS); and,
    - Transportation traffic count maps.

**Goal 3:** CRCOG shall encourage the participation of all citizens in the transportation planning process.

- A. Target audiences and stakeholders shall be identified for each transportation planning study conducted by CRCOG, including residents, business and property owners, governmental representatives, and traditionally underrepresented populations.
- B. CRCOG shall, whenever feasible, hold public meetings at a scheduled time, at a specific on-site location or building facility convenient to potentially affected citizens. or virtually through live broadcast by an easily accessible web based medium/phone,
- C. CRCOG will provide an additional opportunity for public comments if the final LRTP or STIP differs significantly from the version that was initially made available for public comment.

**Goal 4:** CRCOG shall strive to continuously improve public participation.

- A. CRCOG shall continuously evaluate public participation techniques, according to the procedures contained in this Public Participation Plan.
- B. The Public Participation Plan shall be reviewed and adopted, with revisions if necessary, at least every five (5) years, corresponding to revisions and updates to the LRTP.

**Goal 5:** CRCOG shall participate in public participation activities for individual transportation improvement projects from the planning phase through construction.

- A. CRCOG shall actively assist SCDOT, local governments, and transportation agencies in the development and implementation of public participation techniques for planning and other studies.
- B. CRCOG shall keep local elected officials apprised of projects in their jurisdictions and will help coordinate communication between SCDOT and local governments.

## V CURRENT PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES

Public participation is an ongoing activity of the CRCOG TAC. An effective public participation plan is characterized by techniques and procedures that enable citizens to become well informed. This section contains descriptions of public participation tools that the CRCOG uses. These tools are as follows:

### *Charrettes*

Description: Charrettes are typically intense, possibly multi day meetings involving municipal officials, planning officials, and residents. A charrette is instrumental in identifying key issues early, promotes joint ownership of the solution, and attempts to diffuse traditional confrontation between stakeholders.

Activities: Project specific meetings, corridor studies, subarea studies, other planning studies, and workshops.

### ***Consultation***

Description: CRCOG consults, as appropriate, with agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities that are affected by transportation within the CRCOG region. Coordinate the planning function to the maximum extent practicable, such consultation entails comparing LRTPs and TIPs as they are developed with the plans, maps, inventories, and planning documents developed by other agencies. This consultation includes, as appropriate, contact with the following groups: state, local, MPO, and private agencies responsible for planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, freight movements, land use management, natural resources, and historic preservation. CRCOG maintains an open consultation policy, whereby any private citizen or entity responsible for transportation in the CRCOG region may contact CRCOG and be included in the consultation process.

Activities: Live in person or virtual Public hearings/meetings, copies of this plan on the CRCOG website (for viewing/downloading purposes), live or virtual meetings with CRCOG Staff.

### ***Display Ads***

Description: These ads are used to promote meetings that are not regularly scheduled, such as corridor study workshops. They are published the legal notice section of the newspaper.

Activities: Project-specific meetings, workshops, open houses, or hearings.

### ***Direct and Electronic Mailings***

Description: Direct Mailings are used to announce upcoming meetings or activities or to provide information to a targeted area, a group of people, or the media. Direct mailings are usually written letters but can be postcards, fliers, or email notifications. An area may be targeted for a direct mailing because of potential impacts from a project. Groups are targeted that may have an interest in a specific issue; for example, avid cyclists/cycling clubs and pedestrians may be targeted for pathways and trail projects.

Activities: Project specific meetings, workshops, open houses, corridor studies, small area studies, other planning studies, or major activities.

***Legal Advertisements***

Description: SCDOT requires advertisement of any public meeting where a decision could be made that would make a significant change to an existing plan or program. Ads are published to solicit public comment and/or review of the requested change or plan update. The ads describe the meeting agenda, including contact information.

Activities:

Activity	Notice Requirement
Corridor studies, subarea studies, other planning studies funded with federal or state transportation funds	15-day
TIP Amendment	21-day
LRTP, Major TIP Amendment, RPWP	30-day
Public Participation Plan	45-day

***CRCOG Databases***

Description: Staff continuously maintains a database of all contacts, both business and public. The database includes committee membership, mailing information, phone numbers, fax numbers, and email addresses. The database is used for maintaining up to date committee membership lists and lists of individuals with a special interest in CRCOG activities, including the media and public interest groups. Membership mailing lists generated using the database may be provided to the public, municipalities, and other agencies upon request or as appropriate. The databases are used to establish and maintain a list of email contacts for electronic meeting notification and announcements.

Activities: The databases are used to enhance other public participation activities.

***Transportation Planning Website***

Description: The transportation planning website is found within CRCOG’s website, under the link “Transportation.” The site provides basic information about CRCOG, the transportation planning process, and staff contact information. CRCOG publications and work products, such as the RPWP, TIP, and TAP, are available for downloading from the site. Also, as a part of the general CRCOG website, citizens can submit comments via email and may request to be added to the distribution lists and databases maintained by CRCOG. The site is maintained and updated by the CRCOG staff. The website address is [www.catawbacog.org](http://www.catawbacog.org). Transportation traffic count maps and other pertinent data (Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies {CEDS}) can also be found on the CRCOG website.

Activities: The site is used to promote regular and special meetings, planning studies, publications, and work products.

***Public Informational Meetings***

Description: These are public meetings that are generally open and informal, with project team members interacting with the public on a one on one basis or live virtual meetings. Short presentations may be given at these meetings. The purpose of public informational meetings is to provide project information to the public and to solicit public comment.

Activities: Corridor studies, subarea studies, other planning studies, project priority process, certification review, LRTP update, and other major CRCOG TAC activities.

### ***Public Notices***

Description: The CRCOG regularly advertises the COG Board of Directors meetings.

Activities: Regular meetings, other public meetings.

### ***Small-Group Transportation or Transit Planning Meetings***

Description: During projects such as planning studies, meetings are held with small groups that have an interest in the project. Meetings could be with homeowners or neighborhood associations, civic groups, special interest groups, or other groups of affected or interested parties.

Activities: Corridor studies, subarea studies, other planning studies, and other CRCOG activities.

### ***Surveys***

Description: Surveys are used when very specific input from the public is desired. A survey can be used in place of comment cards to ask very specific questions such as whether a person supports a specific alignment in a corridor study. Surveys are also used to gather technical data during corridor and planning studies. For example, participants may be asked about their daily travel patterns.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, and other planning studies.

### ***Visualization***

Description: CRCOG recognizes that an important element to public participation is to provide the public, when possible, with visual as well as written descriptions of transportation projects. Through visual imagery, the complex features of proposed transportation plans, policies, and programs can be portrayed at appropriate scales—region, local, project architecture, etc.—and from different points of view. To this end, CRCOG will utilize various visual design techniques; some of which may include: sketches, drawings, artist renderings, photography, aerial photography, Google Earth, mapping, simulated photos, videos, computer-modeled images, geographical information system (GIS), GIS based scenario planning tools, photo manipulation, and computer simulation.

Activities: Planning Studies, STIP amendments, and other CRCOG TAC activities.

## VI EVALUATION METHODS, PERFORMANCE GOALS, AND IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

To determine the effectiveness of the public participation tools, they must be evaluated and compared to established performance goals and/or desired outcomes. The typical methods for evaluating the effectiveness of public participation tools are surveys and quantitative statistical analysis.

### *Surveys*

Surveys typically consist of short, specific questions regarding public participation tools that are ongoing or that were used on a specific project. Surveys can be conducted in person, by phone, by mail, or through email or other digital interface/program. Face to face and telephone surveys provide quick responses and can be used when a respondent's answer may lead to a follow up question. Mail and e-mail surveys may be used to provide a written record of the respondent's answers. Mail back surveys are distributed at meetings, inside other publications, or by mailing directly to potential respondents. Surveys are used to evaluate citizens' responses to the effectiveness of the tools.

### *Statistical Analysis*

Statistics can be used to determine the "return on the investment" or outcomes of public participation tools. This type of evaluation is an indicator of whether or not the tools used for public participation are reaching the intended audience or which tools have a greater response rate. Statistical analysis is used to evaluate survey responses and most tools' rates of success that are compared with evaluation measures.

CRCOG TAC continually strives for improved public participation. Improvements should be made to increase public awareness and to improve the quantity and quality of the information provided to the public. The decisions made by CRCOG affect the entire population, both residents and visitors. Therefore, seeking public input on those decisions is vital to the success of CRCOG as the organization responsible for rural transportation planning in the Catawba Region of South Carolina.