



# **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PLAN**

**FOR THE**

## **SOUTHEAST WIREGRASS AREA METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

### **Introduction**

The Southeast Wiregrass Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is an organization designated by agreement between the Governor of the State of Alabama and units of general purpose local government in this area that together represent least 75 percent of the affected population (including the largest incorporated city (based on population) as named by the Bureau of the Census). Its purpose is to carry out a metropolitan transportation planning process as required by the federal government in order to facilitate the distribution of federal funds. An MPO is designated for each urbanized area with a population of more than 50,000 individuals.

The MPO is composed of local elected officials; officials of public agencies that administer operate major modes of transportation in the metropolitan area; and appropriate State officials.

The purpose of this participation plan is to outline the process which the Wiregrass MPO will use to involve the public in the transportation planning process. This plan shall provide for the consideration of projects and strategies that will:

- 1) support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
- 2) increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
- 3) increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
- 4) increase the accessibility and mobility of people and for 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, for people and freight;
- 7) promote efficient system management and operation; and
- 8) emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

## 1) Authority

- a) The SAFE, ACCOUNTABLE, FLEXIBLE, EFFICIENT, TRANSPORTATION EQUITY ACT: A LEGACY FOR USERS (SAFETEA-LU) was approved on August 10, 2005. It is codified under the Federal Highway Administration as 23 CFR 450.316 on February 17, 2007.
- b) SAFETEA-LU requires that the metropolitan transportation planning process be continuous, cooperative and comprehensive.
- c) SAFETEA-LU requires that metropolitan planning organizations provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, 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 with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the transportation plan.

## 2) As part of the transportation planning process, the Southeast Wiregrass Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) will:

- a) Provide opportunities for the public to participate in all aspects of transportation planning decision making process.
- b) Be inclusive of all citizens regardless of race, religion, color, sex, national origin or physical handicap.
- c) Provide access to information regarding the plans, programs, procedures, policies and data collected by the MPO
- d) Seek to insure that notice of all Wiregrass MPO activities are disseminated to the public in a timely manner
- e) Assure that no individual or group will experience disproportionately adverse impacts as a result of the transportation planning process or the implementation of any plans resulting from the transportation planning process.
- f) Consult as appropriate, with State and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation concerning the development of a long-range transportation plan.
- g) Coordinate public involvement activities with statewide transportation planning public involvement and consultations processes conducted by the Alabama Department of Transportation.

### 3) Participation by Interested Parties

- a) In General, SAFETEA-LU requires that each metropolitan planning organization provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight 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 with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the transportation plan.
- b) A participation plan shall be developed in consultation with all interested parties; and shall provide all interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the contents of the transportation plan. To the maximum extent practicable, methods available to achieve participation include:
  - i) Holding public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times;
  - ii) Apply visualization techniques to plans;
  - iii) Make revisions to public involvement plan available for public comment 45 calendar days shall before the initial or revised participation plan is adopted by the MPO;
  - iv) Transportation planning documents shall be made available in an electronically accessible format and means, such as the World Wide Web.

**4) Public Involvement Strategies.** The Wiregrass MPO distributes printed material to the primary mechanism to communicate to and involve the public in the transportation planning process. But since public involvement is a continuous process, several other means of communication will be used to encourage public participation including press releases, postings on the website and direct communication with the press.

#### a) Make Documents Available to the Public

- i) The following documents are available for public review during regular business hours, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm:
  - (1) Meeting agendas and minutes;
  - (2) Long Range Transportation Plan;
  - (3) Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP);
  - (4) Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP);
  - (5) Payment invoices;
  - (6) Semi-annual reports;

- (7) Maps;
- (8) Construction plans for approved projects;
- (9) Other documents related to MPO activities;
- (10) Records and documents are located in the office of the Department of Planning and Development, Room 305, Dothan Municipal Building, 126 North St. Andrews Street, Dothan AL 36303. Phone: (334) 615-4410. FAX: (334) 615-4419. Materials may be copied or duplicated for a nominal charge.

**b) Make MPO Staff Available to the Public.** The MPO staff is available during normal office hours to provide assistance in reviewing documents and answering questions about the transportation planning program. MPO staff is available to assist the public and media with contacting the Alabama Department of Transportation and the U. S. Department of Transportation.

- (1) The MPO staff is available to speak to interested civic, professional, and other groups about the transportation planning program.

**c) Communicate with the Media**

- i) The MPO staff will work with local mainstream and minority media to disseminate information about the transportation planning program and the activities of the MPO.
- ii) The MPO staff will provide local news media copies of MPO materials, including: meeting announcements, proposed plans and meeting agendas.
- iii) The local media will be encouraged to publicize MPO meetings and activities through public service announcements and news articles. The MPO staff will accommodate and assist the media in their efforts.

**d) Maintain an Internet Presence.** The Wiregrass MPO will post meeting announcements and key work products on the worldwide web. The City of Dothan provides staff support to the MPO which extends to the cities webpage at [www.dothan.org](http://www.dothan.org). Efforts are made to make navigation to posted information as easy as possible.

**e) Conduct Public Involvement Meetings.**

- i) Public involvement meetings will be held before the formal consideration of the following transportation planning activities:

- (1) Updates to the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The

Long Range Transportation Plan is the policy document adopted by the MPO outlining anticipated projects over a twenty year period.

- (2) Amendments to the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The Transportation Improvement Program is a listing of the projects advanced by MPO members for funding through a variety of programs
  - (3) Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). The Unified Planning Work Program is an annual document identifying transportation planning activities, schedule and budget to for the coming year.
  - (4) Public Involvement Plan (PIP). The Public Involvement Plan outlines the steps the MPO takes to ensure the public has an opportunity to participate in the decision making process.
  - (5) Additional opportunities for public comment will be provided if a long-range transportation plan or Transportation Improvement Program varies significantly from the version that was initially made available for public comment.
  - (6) Other major transportation planning activities. The purpose of these meetings is to provide the public the opportunity to ask questions about a transportation planning issue.
- ii) Location: Public involvement meetings will be held in City of Dothan Commission Chambers unless otherwise advertised at times convenient to the public at large.
  - iii) Format: Public involvement meetings will generally have an open house format. The MPO staff will be available to answer questions from attendees. Attendees will be able to make oral or written comments. The MPO staff will make available materials to assist the public in understanding and evaluating the transportation planning program. On occasion, more formal formats may be used for public involvement meetings. The meeting time, date and location shall be publicized two (2) weeks in advance.
  - iv) Publicity: Public meetings will be advertised in The Dothan Eagle in the legal section and as a display ad. Public notices will be posted at the Dothan Civic Center and the Houston-Love Memorial Library. Public notices will be sent to MPO member governments and requested to post the notice in a public place. Local media will be encouraged to publicize meetings in articles, news reports and public service announcements.

**f) Provide Support to Standing Committees.** Meetings of MPO standing committees will be open to the public and media in accordance with the Alabama Open Meetings Act No 2005-40. Meetings shall be held at least quarterly.

i) Policy Board: Members of the Policy Board are the chief elected officials (Mayor's and County Commission Chairman) of the following local government jurisdictions and as such, represent their constituents in the process. Member of the MPO Policy Board are:

- (1) Town of Ashford
- (2) City of Dothan
- (3) Town of Grimes
- (4) Town of Headland
- (5) Town of Kinsey
- (6) Town of Midland City
- (7) Town of Napier Field
- (8) Town of Pickard
- (9) Town of Taylor
- (10) Town of Webb
- (11) Dale County
- (12) Henry County
- (13) Houston County
- (14) ALDOT Division Engineer
- (15) ALDOT Transportation Planning Engineer (nv)
- (16) Division Administrator, FHWA (nv)
- (17) Exec. Director, Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (nv)

(nv – non voting)

ii) Technical Advisory Committee: Members of the Technical Advisory Committee are non-elected officials developing transportation infrastructure or operating transportation dependent businesses. Members of the TAC are:

- (1) Mr. Mark Nall, AAA Cab Co.
- (2) Mr. Jimmy Barkley, AAA Cooper Transportation Co.
- (3) Mr. Mark Pool, Houston County Engineer
- (4) Mr. Myer Holloway, Houston County Roads and Bridge Department
- (5) Mr. Justin Barfield, Houston County Roads and Bridge Department
- (6) Mr. Jerry Corbin, Public Works Director, City of Dothan
- (7) Mr. Charles Metzger, Traffic Engineer, City of Dothan
- (8) Mr. Ernest Stokes, Chief Civil Engineer, City of Dothan

- (9) Mr. Alan Kramer, Engineering Services Manager, City of Dothan
  - (10) Mr. Robert Cox, Assistant Traffic Engineer.
  - (11) Mr. Todd McDonald, Planning Director, City of Dothan
  - (12) Ms. Nicole Spivey, Transportation Planner, City of Dothan
  - (13) Mr. Derek Brewer, Dale County Engineering Department
  - (14) Mr. Chris Champion, Henry County Engineer
  - (15) Chair of the Citizen's Advisory Committee
  - (16) Mr. Art Morris, Dothan-Houston County Airport Authority
  - (17) Mr. David Harris, Planning Programs Mgr., Federal Highway Administration
  - (18) Mr. Kenneth Whaley, Alabama Department of Transportation
  - (19) Mr. Tim Hornsby, Pre-Construction Engineer, Alabama Department of Transportation
  - (20) Mr. Bill Couch, Transportation Planning Bureau, Alabama Department of Transportation
  - (21) Mr. Will Adams, Design Bureau, Alabama Department of Transportation
  - (22) Mr. Jim Doolin, Metropolitan Planning Division, Alabama Department of Transportation
  - (23) Ms. Kathy Bolling, Metropolitan Planning Division, Alabama Department of Transportation
  - (24) Mr. Wiley Brooks, Sr. Transportation Planner, Multimodal Bureau, Alabama Department of Transportation
  - (25) Mr. Scott Farmer, Southeast Regional Planning and Development Commission
  - (26) Mr. John Sorrell, Wiregrass Transit Authority
  - (27) Mr. Charles Peters, Peters Municipal Associates
  - (28) Mr. Matt *Parker*, *Dothan Area Chamber of Commerce*
- iii) Citizens Advisory Committee: The Southeast Wiregrass MPO resolved on June 14, 1993 to establish a Citizen Advisory Committee to provide input into the public involvement process. Each MPO member is charged with appointing 1 representative each with exception of Houston County and the City of Dothan which each have two. The MPO staff provides technical and administrative support and has the authority to make recommendations to the MPO. The chair of the Citizens Advisory Committee is a non-voting member of the technical Advisory Committee.

## **5) Review of Effectiveness.**

- i) On-going Evaluation. As mandated in Executive Order 12898, the Wiregrass MPO will evaluate the effectiveness of its Public Involvement and Environmental Justices strategies and practices on an on-going basis to ensure that low income and minority population classes are not adversely impacted by the implementation of

transportation plans or programs. As part of this evaluation process, the MPO will solicit comments and suggestions from the public on the effectiveness of those strategies and practices and how they could be improved or supplemented by other methods.

- ii) Revisions and Amendments. At least every two years, the Public Participation and Environmental Justice Plan will be reviewed to ensure that appropriate changes are being made. This shall not preclude the MPO from making changes prior to the biennial review if it is determined that changes are needed to improve the effectiveness of the Plan.