



**SANTEE
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Regional Council *of* Governments

Transportation Public Participation Plan

Revised August 8, 2016

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INTRODUCTION

It is the policy of the Santee-Lynches Regional Council of Governments (SLRCOG) to support and encourage public participation and adhere to the principles of the transportation planning process. The SLRCOG public participation policy is designed to ensure opportunities for the public to express its views on transportation issues and to become active in the decision-making process.

I. Background

Although ultimate responsibility for transportation planning in South Carolina lies with the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), each Council of Governments has transportation planning responsibilities similar to those 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 COGs to facilitate ongoing transportation planning. Each COG, in partnership with the SCDOT, is responsible for implementing a transportation planning process that fully complies with the federal planning requirements. Each COG is required to submit a Planning Work Program (PWP) 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 Multi-modal Transportation Plan and State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

SLRCOG also maintains a Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). SLRCOG currently receives local input on transportation projects from its Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC). Fiscally constrained potential projects are rated and ranked in accordance with South Carolina Act 114 and are recommended by the RTAC to the Directors Economic and Community Sustainability (ECS) Committee of the Santee-Lynches Council of Governments for consideration and recommendation to the full Board of Directors. The Board is a regional policymaking body for the counties of Clarendon, Kershaw, Lee, and Sumter.

South Carolina Act 114 was passed in June 2007 and establishes a consistent process for identifying highway improvement projects. Act 114 documents criteria which must be evaluated, including: (1) financial viability including a life cycle analysis of estimated maintenance and repair costs over the expected life of the project; (2) public safety; (3) potential for economic development; (4) traffic volume and congestion; (5) truck traffic; (6) the pavement quality index; (7) environmental impact; (8) alternative transportation solutions; (9) consistency with local land use plans.

The LRTP includes both financially constrained (limited to available funding sources) and unconstrained needs. The LRTP is updated every five (5) years from the date of adoption, or as needed.

II. Legislation and Performance Measurements

On December 4, 2015, the President signed into law the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, or "FAST Act." It is the first law enacted in over ten years that provides long-term funding certainty for surface transportation, meaning States and local governments can move forward with critical transportation projects, like new highways and transit lines, with the confidence that they will have a Federal partner over the long term.

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. With its enactment, States and local governments may now move forward with critical transportation projects, like new highways and transit lines, with the confidence that they will have a Federal partner over the long term.

Additionally, performance measures will be identified by both the Federal and the State governments. The performance measures will link to the National Goals.

III. Public Participation Process

A. General Guidelines

The Santee-Lynches Transportation Public Participation Plan provides direction for public participation activities carried out by SLRCOG and its advisory and policy committees and contains the vision, goals, objectives, and techniques used by SLRCOG for inviting public participation.

Under this plan, SLRCOG will:

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, users of public transportation, users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, 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 Santee-Lynches Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), as well as other appropriate transportation plans and projects, and conduct public meetings where matters related to transportation programs are being considered.
3. Provide adequate public notice of public participation activities and allow adequate time for public review and comment at key decision points.
4. Respond to all applicable public input. When significant written and oral comments are received 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 30 calendar days prior to adoption of or any major project scope changes, amendments, or updates to the LRTP.

6. Coordinate the regional Public Participation Process with statewide Public Participation Processes wherever possible to enhance public consideration of the issues, plans and programs, and reduce redundancies and costs.
7. Periodically review the Public Participation Process to ensure it provides full and open access to all.

B. Public Participation - Vision, Goals, & Policies

Vision: The public will have access to information on transportation planning services and project development in order to participate in a convenient and timely manner. The following goals and policies have been established:

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

- A. SLRCOG shall maintain a database of contacts to include at a minimum the following:
 - Elected Officials
 - Local Government Staff
 - Key Planning Staff of SCDOT
 - Public Transit Agency(s)
 - Local Media
- B. SLRCOG shall, where feasible, electronically send and/or mail meeting notices to groups interested in transportation planning activities.
- C. SLRCOG shall employ visualization techniques where possible to depict transportation plans. Examples of visualization techniques include: charts, graphs, photographs, maps, artist renderings, physical models, and/or computer simulations.

Goal 2: SLRCOG shall keep the public informed of ongoing transportation related activities.

- A. SLRCOG shall make all publications and work products available to the public via its website and at its offices.
- B. SLRCOG staff will be available to provide general and project-specific information during normal business hours and after hours at the request of groups with reasonable notice.
- C. SLRCOG shall maintain a Transportation section on its website.
 1. The website shall be updated and maintained to provide current information.
 2. The website shall, at a minimum, contain the following information:
 - Calendar
 - Contact information
 - Transportation related work products and publications
 - Link to related agencies

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

- A. Target audiences shall be identified for each planning study conducted by SLRCOG, including residents, business and property owners and those traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations, including but limited to, low income and minority households, within the study area.

- B. SLRCOG shall, wherever feasible, hold public meetings at a time, location, and facility convenient to potentially affected citizens.
- C. SLRCOG will provide additional opportunity for public comments if the final version of a plan differs significantly from that which was made available for public comment.

Goal 4: SLRCOG shall strive to continuously improve public participation.

- A. SLRCOG shall continuously evaluate public participation techniques, according to the procedures contained in this Public Participation Plan.
- B. The Public Participation Plan shall be reviewed periodically to ensure all pertinent state and federal guidelines are included.

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

- A. SLRCOG shall actively assist SCDOT, local governments and transportation agencies in the development and implementation of public participation techniques for planning and other studies.
- B. SLRCOG shall keep the SLRCOG Board of Directors and local elected officials apprised of projects in their jurisdictions and shall coordinate communication, as requested and/or as needed, between SCDOT and local governments through the various project stages.

IV. Current Public Participation Techniques

Public Participation is an ongoing activity of the SLRCOG. 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 of which SLRCOG currently uses and proposed to use in the future. These tools are as follows:

Consultation

Description: SLRCOG will consult, as appropriate, with agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities that are affected by transportation within the SLRCOG region. Coordination will entail comparing the LRTP, TIP, and any other planning products as they are developed with the plans, inventories, and documents previously developed by other agencies. This consultation will include contact with State, local, and private agencies responsible for economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, freight movements, land use planning, natural resources, and historic preservation. SLRCOG maintains an open consultation policy, whereby any private citizen or entity responsible for transportation in the SLRCOG region may contact SLRCOG and be included in the consultation process.

Activities: Public hearings/meetings, placement of this plan on the SLRCOG website, meetings with SLRCOG staff.

Display Advertisements

Description: Advertisements are used to promote meetings that are not regularly scheduled, such as corridor studies or Long Range Transportation Planning workshops. They are published

in the local section of the newspaper in order to reach a larger audience than those that typically read legal advertisements.

Activities: Project specific meetings, workshops, hearings or other appropriate meetings.

Direct Mailings and E-mails

Description: Direct Mailings and emails are used to announce upcoming meetings or activities or to provide information. Information can be directed to a targeted area, group of people, advocacy groups or the media as well as directed to the general public.

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

SLRCOG Database

Description: Staff maintains a database of contacts, both business and public. The database is used for maintaining committee membership lists and lists of individuals with a special interest in SLRCOG activities including the media and public interest groups.

Activities: The database is used to enhance other public participation activities.

Transportation Planning Website

Description: The Transportation planning website is found within SLRCOG website under the heading of “Transportation”. Various SLRCOG publications and work products are available for download from the site. The website also provides links to other transportation related sites from the local to the national level. The website address is www.santeelynychescog.org.

Activities: The website 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. 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, sub-area studies, other planning studies, project priority process, LRTP update, and other major SLRCOG activities.

Public Notices

Description: SLRCOG maintains a calendar of events and planned meetings on its website

Activities: Regular meetings, other public meetings.

Small Group Meetings

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

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

Visualization

Description: SLRCOG recognizes that an important element to public participation is to provide the public, when possible, 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 a better level of understanding, scale, and from different points of view. To this end, SLRCOG will try to utilize various visual design techniques; some of which may include: sketches, drawings, artist renderings, photography, aerial photography, mapping, simulated photos, videos, computer modeled images, interactive GIS-based scenario planning tools, photo manipulation and computer simulation.

Activities: Planning Studies, and other SLRCOG activities.

V. Guidelines and Summary of SLCOG Public Participation Policy

Public Document Development

Program Adoption	Public Meetings	Comment Period	Accessibility
Planning Work Program (PWP)	N/A	N/A	Internet, SLRCOG Office
Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)	As Requested	30 Days	Internet, SLRCOG Office
Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)	As Requested	21 Days	Internet, SLRCOG Office
Public Participation Plan	N/A	45 days	Internet, SLRCOG Office
Regional Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan	As Requested	30 Days	Internet, SLRCOG Office
Major Amendments	Public Meetings	Comment Period	Accessibility
Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)	N/A	30 Days	Internet, SLRCOG Office
Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)	N/A	21 Days	Internet, SLRCOG Office
Public Participation Plan	N/A	45 days	Internet, SLRCOG Office

Note: The comment period begins following the first full day after the announcement and expires after specified comment period, i.e., 15, 30 or 45 days.

VI. Evaluation Methods, Performance Goals and Improvement Strategies

Public participation in the transportation planning arena is important; and the effectiveness of public participation tools used will be evaluated and adjusted to ensure maximum notification and participation of the intended audience. Surveys are a typical tool employed electronically, in person, or by mail to capture and evaluate citizens' responses on how effective was the tool used to encourage public participation as well as gain further insight into possible new methods that can be used to garner increased public participation.