

## INTRODUCTION

The Tallahassee-Leon County MPO (MPO) has developed a proactive public involvement process in order to meet the need for better community involvement in the transportation planning process. Through the Public Involvement Plan (PIP), the MPO strives to provide a cooperative and collaborative transportation planning process that gives citizens a voice in shaping the area's future. The MPO's mission is to provide continuous, coordinated and comprehensive planning to guide the future growth and development of the Tallahassee-Leon County Urbanized Area.

The function of this document is to provide a foundation to ensure that effective communication with the public and strong citizen participation is used throughout all of the MPO's transportation planning activities. The document is also intended to define federal guidelines governing public involvement in the MPO transportation planning process, describe the existing MPO public participation process and committee structure, identify the mandated MPO work products and invite the public to comment and suggest ways in which to improve the existing process.

The overall intent of this document is to serve as a guide for how the MPO will conduct, encourage, improve, and report public involvement activities in the development of transportation plans and services for the Tallahassee-Leon County Urbanized Area. Without the involvement of the local citizenry, it is difficult to design a program that effectively meets the greater needs of the area. This document provides the framework for accomplishing this cooperative planning process by:

- Educating and informing the public about the urban transportation planning process,
- Devising methods to increase the public awareness of how transportation systems are planned and constructed, and to increase public input, interest and participation in transportation planning projects,
- Enhancing participation of various interest groups, the underserved population of the area and minority populations, and
- Maintaining the education/information level of committee members and the public so that informed decisions can be made.

## TALLAHASSEE-LEON COUNTY METROPOLITAN ORGANIZATION

An MPO is an area-wide, multi-jurisdictional agency mandated by federal and state law for urbanized areas of more than 50,000 people to provide a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive regional transportation planning process. An MPO is responsible for planning and programming, in cooperation with local transportation agencies and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), for the expenditure of federal and state transportation funds in an effort to enhance the statewide and regional multimodal transportation system. To achieve this objective, MPOs develop a 20-year Long-Range Transportation Plan to guide future transportation decision-making and a 5-year Transportation Improvement Program for Florida's metropolitan areas.

The Tallahassee-Leon County Transportation Study using input from government officials, technical experts, and private citizens – guides transportation planning in the Tallahassee-Leon County area. The Tallahassee Urban Area Transportation Study (TALUATS) was organized in 1965 as a joint undertaking between the City of Tallahassee, Leon County, and the State of Florida. The federal government participates through the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, Federal Aviation Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Consistent with guidelines developed by the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration, the Tallahassee Urban Area Transportation Study Policy Committee was reorganized into the Tallahassee-Leon County Metropolitan Planning Organization in early 1977, and was reconstituted on December 10, 1979, in conformance with Florida Statute 334.215. The Metropolitan Planning Organization is composed of the Leon County Board of County Commissioners, the Tallahassee City Commissioners, and a representative from the Leon County School Board.

In addition to citizen input, the MPO Board receives input from four standing committees. These committees, with the exception of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC), are mandated and created by state law. They are the:

- Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC);
- Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC);
- Transportation Disadvantaged Coordinating Board (TDCB); and
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC).

The **Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC)** is comprised of planners, engineers, and other technical personnel who advise the MPO and the other MPO committees on the technical feasibility of proposed projects. The TCC is instrumental in assigning priorities to projects.

The **Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC)** consists of a Metropolitan Planning Area representation of citizen volunteers who provide input to proposed transportation plans from a citizen's perspective to the MPO. Through an integration of land use and

transportation issues, the committee provides a meaningful discussion of the transportation planning process. Membership selections are from the general citizenry of Tallahassee-Leon County and are appointed by the Board Members.

The **Transportation Disadvantaged Coordinating Board (TDCB)** is a committee appointed by the MPO for each county in the urbanized area. The TDCB is responsible for identifying the needs of those who cannot secure their own means of transportation, bringing those needs to the attention of the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC), and monitoring the amount of Transportation Disadvantaged Funds being received locally.

The **Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC)** is charged with reviewing transportation projects and providing comment on these to the MPO for consideration. The BPAC reviews projects to ensure that they are designed and constructed to promote safe walking and cycling along and to destinations on the corridor. The BPAC provides comments on both recreational and non-recreational projects and seeks to provide connectivity between existing and planned projects. Membership selections are from the general citizenry of Tallahassee-Leon County.

## **THE MANDATED MPO WORK PRODUCTS**

Each year the MPO is required by federal law to produce certain documents. These documents include the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). In addition to these two documents the MPO is required to develop a Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) every five years. In exercising its authority to guide the expenditures of federal and state transportation funds, it is imperative that the MPO's public involvement processes provide complete information and appropriate public notification as well obtaining the involvement of the public in developing plans and programs that better enhance the public awareness of the transportation planning process. All of the documents listed below are available in alternative formats (i.e., Braille, compact disk, audio tape or other applicable sources for those people with limited English or physical abilities). Each of the documents is also available on the MPO web page located at:

<http://talgov.com/citytlh/planning/trans/mpo1.html> or  
<http://tlcmpo.org>

In the development of each of these mandated work products, the public is provided with an opportunity to make comments and recommendations at various times during the adoption stages of these documents.

**The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)** - In keeping with Chapter 339.175, Florida Statutes, the UPWP defines the work tasks and anticipated funding requirements of the MPO. This document serves to inform public officials and agencies that contribute manpower and allocate funds to the transportation planning process for the proposed work program. In addition, the UPWP provides the basis for federal, state, and local funding of transportation planning activities identified in the document.

The UPWP is distributed to local governments, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), Florida Transit Authority (FTA), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for review as a draft document by April 1 of each year. Prior to its distribution as a draft, the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) and the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) review the UPWP and provide comment on its content and structure. During this phase of the UPWP's development, public comment will be received and will be reviewed through the CAC. The UPWP is adopted and distributed by May 15.

**The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)** - The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a planning document developed and adopted by the MPO in response to the transportation needs in an urbanized area. The TIP updates and advances a five-year implementation program for all modes of transportation. This document is important because it not only addresses long-range transportation needs (constructing a new bridge or road), but it also contains short-term transportation improvements (intersection improvements, etc.).

In order to ensure effective communication with the public and strong citizen participation concerning the TIP, a public meeting (which is held in a traditionally underserved population center) and a public hearing are held prior to its adoption for the purpose of receiving comments from the general public concerning the TIP. Staff is also looking into holding a community workshop that would help to explain the TIP process more effectively. The public meeting and public hearing are advertised in the local newspaper and publications serving minority communities or traditionally underserved populations to ensure there is notification of the upcoming TIP. All publications that are publicized are done in a manner such that they are advertised in the various publications at least one month prior to the TIP or adoption of the plan. Draft copies are made available prior to the meetings and are available for public inspection through the entire process before, during and after the adoption of the plan. The TIP is also available on our web page and is available in alternative formats (i.e., Braille, compact disk, audio tape or other applicable sources for those people with limited English or physical abilities).

**The Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)** - The LRTP is a twenty-year outlook for transportation improvements in an urbanized area. The LRTP is updated every three to five years. The LRTP provides this community with a plan that meets community objectives for land use and multiple modes of transportation. The LRTP goals and objectives exert a considerable, direct influence on future transportation improvements in the urbanized area.

The scope of services for the development of the LRTP includes a proactive public involvement program. This proactive approach is tailored to the project schedule to ensure that an open and thorough public involvement process is achieved. Public information workshops are scheduled throughout the study period for the LRTP. The plan consists of over twenty meetings and presentations during the critical junctures in the plan development process. The purpose of these meetings is to explain the issues, describe the potential solutions and the impacts associated with each and to receive input from the public. At least half of these meetings and presentation will be held in minority communities or near traditionally underserved populations to ensure there is an inclusive public involvement process being implemented. The purpose of these workshops is to receive public comment concerning how the plan should evolve and to reach the underserved populations of the community to get their input into the plan.

In keeping with the implementation of a proactive public involvement program, the public involvement coordinator commissions a fairly aggressive advertising campaign – in the local newspaper and publications serving minority communities or traditionally underserved populations to ensure there is notification of the upcoming meetings and presentations. Community workshops are also used to ensure that the community and underserved populations understand what the LRTP is and its function. Also, notifications of the upcoming meetings and presentations can be found on our web page.

Finally, a public hearing is held after the Cost Feasible portion of the Long Range Plan has been developed, but before it has been adopted by the MPO, in which affordable long-term, transportation improvements are identified. Draft copies are made available

prior to the meetings and are available for public inspection through the entire process before, during and after the adoption of the plan. The LRTP is also available on our web page and is available in alternative formats (i.e., Braille, compact disk, audio tape or other applicable sources for those people with limited English or physical abilities).

All MPO mandated work products have to go through an adoption and amendment process. Of these work products, two involve extensive public involvement, the TIP and the LRTP. Once these products go through the MPO's public involvement processes, which will provide complete information and appropriate public notification as well as obtaining the involvement of the public, the MPO begins its procedures for final adoption of its work product.

The adoption and amendment process for this PIP and the MPO's mandated work products (such as the TIP and the LRTP) require a public comment period of 30 and 45 days, respectively, for citizen review and input prior to adoption. Towards the end of the comment period, the MPO will hold advertised public meetings and hearings to review and obtain final comments from the public. The documents then are reviewed by the MPO committees for their final comments and are then recommended to the MPO for adoption at the next scheduled meeting.

As mentioned previously, all MPO mandated work products are available in alternative formats (i.e., Braille, audio tape or other applicable sources for those people with limited English or physical abilities).

## **TRANSPORTATION EQUITY ACT FOR THE 21st CENTURY (TEA-21) AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE GUIDELINES FOR MAINTAINING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN THE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS**

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) require a proactive public involvement process as an integral part of the transportation planning and project development process used by Metropolitan Planning Organizations. The public involvement process must provide complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and opportunities for early and continuing involvement. In addition, *Executive Order 12898: Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations* provides that “each federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies and activities on minority and low-income populations.”

### ISTEA/TEA-21

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) include the following requirements for Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) regarding public involvement:

- Provide timely information about transportation issues and procedures to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, private providers of transportation, other interested parties and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs and projects,
- Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of plans and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) and open public meetings where matters related to the federal-aid highway and transit programs are being considered, and
- Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including, but not limited to, low-income and minority households.

## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

### *Executive Order 12898: Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*

*Executive Order 12898* includes the following two fundamental principles of environmental justice:

- To ensure the public involvement includes low-income and minority groups in decision-making, and
- To prevent disproportionately high and adverse impacts of decisions on low income and minority groups.

In general, this means that for any program or activity for which any federal funds will be used, the agency receiving the federal funds (including states, cities and MPOs) must:

- Make a meaningful effort to involve low-income and minority populations in the processes established to make the decision about the use of the federal funds, and
- Evaluate the nature, extent, and incidence of adverse human health or environmental impacts of the program or activity upon minority or the underserved population areas in the County.

The MPO is committed to the development of equitable policies that avoid disproportionately negative effects on minority and/or low-income populations. The MPO works continuously to ensure the full participation of all affected communities in the transportation planning process. This plan identifies policies for engaging those traditionally underserved by the transportation planning process. Specifically Policies 4.1 through 4.4 are designed to achieve the objective of ensuring that “all citizens, including the ‘underserved’ citizens have an opportunity to provide input and that their concerns and ideas are fully considered” (see Objective 4, p.12).

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The review of the public involvement methods from the initial Public Involvement Plan adopted in May 1996 was a good indicator of the MPO's current public involvement status. The review also identified those areas that need to be focused on in this update of the MPO's public involvement plan. In review of this document, the MPO staff was seeking to determine if a cooperative and collaborative transportation planning process – one that gives citizens a voice in shaping the area's future – has been adequately implemented. In evaluating whether or not there was a process in place that could meet the need for better community involvement in the transportation planning process, staff found that certain areas were lacking and needed to be more effective and efficient. The purpose of this update is to fix the deficiencies that were found. Some examples of these deficiencies are the lack of public participation from the traditionally underserved communities and the visibility of the MPO in the Tallahassee-Leon County area.

Goals are used to define what the public involvement program is to achieve in the long run. Objectives are measurable steps that are used to evaluate our progression towards the goal. As staff reviews the goals and objectives, we must be prepared to reevaluate the goals and objectives to determine if they are obtainable. Therefore, it is important to redefine and defend the goals and objectives for public involvement as a necessary step in evaluating the MPO's existing procedures and any new strategies of informing the public.

The goals and objectives are the chief mechanisms used to involve the public in the transportation planning process. The MPO staff is committed to notifying the public about the MPO process early, often and in a variety of ways through communication and outreach activities. The materials the public will need to understand the information will be made easily accessible and available through pamphlets, newsletters, the Internet, and through a large contact list that will be continually updated. The development of this contact list is a key component to an effective public involvement plan. This list shall include community leaders from the various churches, neighborhoods and other organizations that are located within the traditionally underserved areas within the community, as well as other community leaders throughout the MPO's jurisdiction. As this list is developed and updated it will be a helpful tool in staffs efforts to develop a more effective community involvement plan.

Effective public involvement means more than just notifying people about the process, it means incorporating their opinions, values, and distinctive understanding of the local transportation needs through activities that encourage public input in the transportation planning process. Below are the goals and objectives that will be implemented so that this approach will be efficient and effective.

***Goal 1: Inform the public about how transportation improvements are made and describe the role the MPO plays in the process.***

- Objective 1.1: Provide frequent public opportunities to explain and discuss plans, how they are implemented and outline the transportation process for the general public.
- Objective 1.2: Establish a community profile database, which is a list of the community leaders from the various churches, neighborhoods, civic organizations, and service organizations for disabled or elderly and other organizations that are located within the traditionally underserved areas within the community, as well as community leaders throughout the MPO's jurisdiction by Fall 2003.
- Objective 1.3: In addition to the newspaper, make a conscious effort to distribute MPO materials and place MPO materials in areas such as libraries, grocery stores or community centers.
- Objective 1.4: Use the community profile database, maps and MPO mailing list for distribution of agendas; public notices and any other MPO related activities that are part of the outreach program.
- Objective 1.4: The Tallahassee-Leon County MPO will distribute a regular transportation-planning newsletter to help citizens keep current and gain a better understanding of the transportation planning process and related programs. The newsletter will be sent out to those on the community profile database mailing list and made available at libraries, grocery stores, meetings, the Internet and other various locations through the community. Ideally the newsletter would be published annually, with the possibility of increasing to a quarterly production if needed.
- Objective 1.5: On a yearly basis the community profile database will be reviewed to ensure that any new community leader or community groups will have a chance to be involved in the transportation planning process.
- Objective 1.6: Produce a pamphlet to be distributed in the spring of each year to inform the public about the MPO, and let them know how they can become involved. These pamphlets will be made available in several public buildings.

**Goal 2: *Make an effort to ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to become involved and heard in the transportation planning process.***

Objective 2.1: Consider periodically changing the times of the MPO meetings to the early morning or early evening so those citizens who work can attend.

Objective 2.2: Hold public hearings and workshops in various locations throughout the Tallahassee-Leon County MPO boundaries to ensure that all/most communities are reached.

Objective 2.3: As part of the periodic update of the Public Involvement Process, update the community profile for the Tallahassee-Leon County Metropolitan Area.

Objective 2.4: As part of the periodic update of the Public Involvement Process, review the demographic composition of the MPO advisory boards to ensure that they reflect the composition of Tallahassee-Leon County Metropolitan Area.

**Goal 3: *Raise the visibility of the MPO within the Tallahassee-Leon County area as the countywide transportation-planning agency.***

Objective 3.1: Use a variety of means to inform, the public about the MPO, its function, plans and projects, including consideration of direct mail out, print and broadcast media and Internet.

Objective 3.2: Establish a website for the MPO. Post all MPO related meeting dates, advertisements of public hearings, meetings, or workshops related to transportation, as well as meeting notices or websites for other transportation related agencies. Internet E-mail will be utilized to allow comments on transportation planning materials. Provide feedback on questions. The web site address will be included in all printed materials. Make all draft and adopted MPO documents easy to download off the site. Include the description of programs, contact information and links to other organization's websites that coordinate with the MPO.

**Goal 4: *Identify and involve traditionally underserved communities, including communities of minority, low-income or elderly populations, in the transportation planning process.***

Objective 4.1: The Tallahassee-Leon County MPO will work to identify traditionally underserved populations within the area, including

minority, low income and elderly populations. The Census Block group map will be used as a foundation to identify the traditionally underserved populations within the area. Outreach activities will be developed to involve stakeholders from these communities in the transportation planning process. Besides the traditional use of mail to reach the underserved populations, staff will actively solicit input from these areas by conducting one-on-one interviews with community leaders to gain information and solicit their participation or recommendation for community representation.

Objective 4.2: Meeting sites will be selected which are more easily accessible to the traditionally underserved communities. Meeting announcements will be placed in publications serving minority communities to ensure there is notification of upcoming meetings to these populations.

Objective 4.3: Meeting locations served by transit or accessible by means other than the automobile will be chosen whenever possible.

Objective 4.4: An effort will be made to provide any MPO mail out information pertaining to public hearings/meetings in publications serving minority communities or traditionally underserved populations to ensure there is notification of the upcoming MPO event to these populations.

***Goal 5: Educate the public about the opportunities they have to determine transportation improvements for the future, and how transportation improvements can play a role in that future.***

Objective 5.1: Provide enough information to the audiences so that they will be able to make decisive future decisions for their communities. Ensure that all MPO documents are available prior to the meeting/workshop. Make sure all advertisement/notice material is easy to understand. Provide formal or informal training on the transportation planning process to the targeted audience.

Objective 5.2: Make use of a variety public of outreach techniques to target a wide range of audiences to generate and maintain interest and enthusiasm in the process. Ensure the proper techniques for increasing public involvement awareness (methods mentioned in next section) is used to determine the best way to disseminate the proper information to each particular group.

**Goal 6: *Obtain and incorporate public comments, reactions and perceptions into plans and solutions where appropriate, and share such comments with local, state and federal officials where appropriate.***

- Objective 6.1: Provide opportunities for the public to comment in writing or in person on any action being proposed by the Tallahassee-Leon County MPO. Ensure that comment cards are available at MPO related functions and that contact numbers are provided on distributed materials. Provide for response and feedback opportunities on the web page.
- Objective 6.2: Ensure that the public is provided multiple means of response including but not limited to: mail-in postcards, email, tape recordings, handwritten comments and /or voice-mail messages when feasible and/or appropriate.
- Objective 6.3: Communicate a summary of public comments routinely to the Tallahassee-Leon County MPO. Ensure that all items adopted by the MPO include a summary of the public comment as part of the documentation.
- Objective 6.4: Publish an annual summary of public comments to be shared with local, state and federal government representatives. Ensure that at the end of each year (December) a report is produced that describes the effectiveness of the public involvement strategies used throughout the year. This report should include a summary of all public comment to be shared with the MPO, local, state and federal government representatives.

**Goal 7: *Obtain and maintain the involvement of supporters of transportation improvements.***

- Objective 7.1: Provide assistance to community and special interest groups, such as training or other resources, on attaining community empowerment in public involvement activities, especially those related to transportation issues.
- Objective 7.2: Periodically evaluate the public involvement efforts for effectiveness. Adopt a flexible stance within the MPO that will enable it to be ready to modify participation strategies to respond to the needs of the communities and the area as a whole.

## **MPO METHODS FOR INCREASING CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION IN THE MPO TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS**

While it is clear that the current level of public involvement in the MPO Transportation Planning Process has been vital to the successes of the MPO, it is the intention of this document to stimulate an even greater level of citizen participation. This can be accomplished by examining some of the more obviously problematic areas in the transportation planning process. One such area is the channel of communication between the elected officials, the technical personnel, and the citizenry of Leon County. The ability of the public to have access and to understand the written material is an important aspect of the public involvement process. The MPO will provide an ongoing program, which provides adequate information for the public to make informed decisions on transportation issues through various channels. Public comments and suggestions for improving this process are welcomed, and will be evaluated and incorporated as appropriate into this section in future updates of this document.

Public involvement is an ongoing activity of the MPO, with several techniques occurring on a continuous basis. Public involvement is also an integral part of one-time activities such as corridor studies and regular repeated activities such as the annual TIP and LRTP updates. This section contains descriptions of public involvement tools currently used by the MPO and tools that may be applied in the future.

**Publication of MPO Meeting Agendas** - Currently the MPO staff produces the MPO meeting agendas to be placed on the Internet and sent out to the public and the various agencies a minimum of one week prior to the MPO meeting. Staff currently mails and emails agenda packets to interested individuals, organizations and to the media a minimum of one week prior to the MPO meeting. Besides the MPO meetings, staff regularly advertises the TCC, CAC and BPAC meetings. As of June 2003 staff has started to send out all agenda packets in Adobe PDF format. This type of format is accessible to most individuals who have access to a computer. The Adobe software can be downloaded from various sources on the Internet at no cost. This is a very effective tool for outreach purposes, even for those who do not have computer since they can access the Internet for free at a local library and then pull up the web page to read the agenda and all of its attachments.

**MPO Quarterly Newsletter (Under development for Fall 2003)** – The MPO staff will produce and distribute a quarterly newsletter concerning transportation issues throughout the MPO's jurisdiction, which will be distributed to citizens, municipalities, interested individuals, organizations, the media and other agencies. This newsletter will give the public an idea of what the MPO is working on and what other transportation related projects are going on in the area. It will have items such as transportation projects for Leon County Metropolitan Area; schedules of MPO sub-committees and other MPO related activities. The mailing list will be based on the community profile database, as well as maps that include those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems. The newsletter will be used to promote regular and special meetings, planning

studies, publications and work products. Feedback from the public and contact information will be included in each issue.

**Workshops/Transportation Fairs** - A workshop or Transportation Fair may help to alleviate some of the miscommunication that exists in the transportation planning process. One way to improve the public's awareness in this regard is to educate the citizenry concerning the planning process. The MPO will sponsor several public involvement workshops prior to decision-making points in the MPO process. These workshops will be informal meetings where the public can learn about the MPO process and upcoming projects. The object will be to provide a relaxed atmosphere in which individuals will feel less intimidated and thus able to participate more openly. The Transportation Fairs will offer a more family-oriented atmosphere in which to discuss transportation issues. This type of event would involve a variety of exhibits: maps, photos, models, slide shows, videos, and give-away items. At both the workshop and the fair, transportation personnel and elected officials would be on hand to answer citizens' questions. Workshops are planned to bring the public up-to-date on the details of the plan or program being presented at the workshop. A Transportation Fair should be planned to be held twice a year and in coordination with other transportation agencies.

**Plan/Reports**– These documents are published by the MPO at regular intervals and include the UPWP, TLCMPO PIP, LRTP, TIP and other plan/reports. MPO material will be placed in various locations such as libraries, grocery stores or community centers. In the development of each of these mandated work products, the public is provided with an opportunity to make comments and recommendations at various times during the adoption stages of these documents. All MPO mandated work products are available in alternative formats (i.e., Braille, audio tape or other applicable sources for those people with limited English or physical abilities) and are available on the web page.

**Alternative Media** –These tools offer additional ways (besides television, newspaper and radio) for the MPO to disseminate information. One such tool includes Internet web sites. Currently the MPO has a website which includes information such as meetings, applications, and reports. The availability of the web site will allow staff to place surveys and questionnaires concerning the effectiveness of the public involvement process. Also the web page would be a wonderful site for the MPO staff to provide reports and informational items to the public.

**Informational Pamphlets** – MPO staff will produce and distribute informational pamphlets regarding current transportation planning projects in Leon County and explaining the purpose of MPO. These pamphlets will be available to the public at various public locations and will be distributed to the public by various means, such as workshops, MPO meetings and other events held by MPO staff.

**Newspaper, Television and Radio** - Another potentially effective method of reaching out to the public sector is through the use of multi-media technology. The MPO will make information available through news releases to area newspapers, television and radio stations. Also, the MPO will periodically include newspaper supplements

explaining the LRTP and TIP in the *Tallahassee Democrat* and the *Capitol Outlook*. The MPO will use every opportunity to utilize public-access television for the purpose of educating the public on transportation issues throughout the Leon County area.

**Tallahassee-Leon County MPO Web Site** - The Tallahassee-Leon County MPO is in the initial stages of developing a web site that will be separate from its current location:

<http://talgov.com/citytlh/planning/trans/mpo1.html>.

This web site will be a user-friendly tool used to provide the public with access to transportation information, which will increase public awareness of transportation planning activities in the area. This site will include information about the MPO process, upcoming meeting agenda's and other topics pertaining to the transportation planning process. Over the years the Internet has become a frequently used tool for sending and retrieving information; however, the MPO recognizes that traditional forms of public outreach will continue to be important for achieving meaningful participation. These traditional methods will be continually used by the MPO, but staff will continue its efforts to find the most efficient and effective ways to distribute information to citizens. Publications such as the TIP, the LRTP, the UPWP, the Bicycle Master Plan, and this document will be able to be downloaded directly from the site.

**Targeting Educational Institutions** - When speaking of long-term transportation improvements and public involvement in the planning of these improvements, it seems logical that provisions should be made to include young people in this undertaking. This can be most effectively accomplished through the school and university system. A series of presentations will be developed and maintained that will target various levels of the local student population, from elementary school through the university level. At the elementary school level, the program will emphasize transportation issues such as pedestrian and bicycle safety and the history of transportation planning. At the university level, the program will be geared towards raising public awareness through the implementation of courses – possibly sponsored or directed by the MPO – that deal specifically with transportation planning or urban and regional planning. In its efforts to continually outreach all segments of the community, the MPO staff plans on visiting various schools throughout the school year to talk about the transportation planning process.

**Outreach Services** - One aspect of public involvement that is sometimes overlooked is the need to include all segments of a community in the transportation planning process. This means that participation should be sought from the disabled, the elderly, the young, ethnic minorities, and any other segment of the community that might have unique transportation needs. To better reach out to the underserved populated areas, the MPO will make contact with these groups and determine what their needs are through the development of outreach services. Outreach services involve developing contacts, mailing lists, and other means of communication with a broader cross-section of the community. One way of developing communication with a representative collection of citizens is by holding "town-hall" meetings. Another way would be to target specific

groups, such as homeowners associations or the local chapter of the American Association for Retired Persons, and then set up informational meetings that would be geared towards that group's particular needs and concerns.

**Technical Memos** – For long-term projects (i.e. long range plan or roadway projects) the MPO staff and /or project consultants will prepare technical memoranda concerning the technical and policy information used in each of the project's steps. These documents provide background information regarding how a project/plan came to its present state and the next step to be taken in the process.

**Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC)**- One of the most scrutinized responsibilities assigned to Metropolitan Planning Organizations by both the federal and state government is ensuring a proactive public involvement approach is used in the transportation planning process. Within the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) subcommittee structure, the citizen advisory committee is a required MPO advisory committee. The CAC serves as the citizen advisory committee to the Tallahassee-Leon County MPO and is looked upon to provide a point of entry to the transportation decision making process to the traditionally underserved populations, including but not limited to low-income and minority households.

Annual certification of the Tallahassee-Leon County MPO by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) provides an opportunity for review of the public involvement in the MPO's transportation planning process. For the last three annual certification reviews (2000, 2001, and 2002) conducted by FDOT, concerns regarding the MPO's citizen advisory committee, the Transportation Planning Advisory Committee (TPAC), have been identified. Although MPO staff has worked with FDOT staff to address these concerns, based upon recent discussions with both FDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) a restructuring of the TPAC is now required. Such a restructuring will ensure that the committee more closely resembles the general make-up of the community and that all citizens, as well as the traditionally underserved populations have access to the transportation decision-making process.

As the above-mentioned techniques are implemented to enhance the public involvement process, periodic evaluations will be necessary to determine the effectiveness of these tools on the public involvement process. At a minimum, the MPO will assess the effectiveness of the PIP and make necessary updates on an annual basis. Over the next few years, as the PIP is refined and achieves its objectives, the length of time between reviews/updates may potentially be increased (i.e., every two or three years). The strategies to encourage participation from the traditionally underserved portions of the population will be adjusted as needed to best assure their access to the process.

## EVALUATION OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

Federal regulations require that MPO's review the Public Involvement Process periodically to determine if the objectives of the process are achieved and if adjustments are necessary to make it more effective. By continuously evaluating public involvement activities, it is possible to discontinue activities that are ineffective and to improve or add new public involvement activities to the MPO program. These methods can include meeting evaluation forms, public comments, surveys, and other forms of public feedback. It is important that a specific public involvement process be prepared for each plan, program, or project developed by the Tallahassee-Leon County MPO.

1. In determining the effectiveness of the Public Involvement Process, staff will hold quarterly meetings. These meetings will serve as benchmarks to the effectiveness of our public involvement techniques. The quarterly assessments will help determine the effectiveness of the public involvement techniques being used. The objective of these meetings is to improve public participation and to make efficient use of the time and money allocated to the public involvement process. During this assessment staff will determine if they have met the following public involvement objectives: (1) informing the public about MPO activities, (2) educating the public, (3) involving the public, and (4) reaching the underserved populations of the area. This evaluation process will demonstrate the relative effectiveness of the current public involvement techniques. Additionally, this process will also point out any deficiencies in the current program and possibly identify methods of improving the program. Each of the objectives listed above will be evaluated in the following ways:
  - 1) Informing the public about MPO activities:
    - a. Types of media used to contact participants,
    - b. Meeting convenience (time, place, accessibility), and
    - c. Documentation of demographics of participants making sure that a representative group of the community in the planning area is involved.
  - 2) Educating the public:
    - a. Effectiveness of communication tools,
    - b. Types of techniques used, and
    - c. Whether input received from citizens has provided decision-makers and funding agencies with reliable and useful information.
  - 3) Involving the public:
    - a. Documentation of how public input affected decisions,
    - b. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the public involvement program from participants' perspective (feedback); public input, and
    - c. Involvement process tailored to specific community needs and accessible to all segments of the public.

- 4) Reaching the underserved populations of the area:
  - a. Presence of strategies for engaging minority and low-income populations in the decision-making process,
  - b. Utilization of media targeted to low-income and minority populations,
  - c. Reduction of participation barriers for non-traditional transportation stakeholders,
  - d. Feedback from minority and low-income participants, and
  - e. Consideration and documentation of their concerns and input in the decision-making process.

Periodically it is necessary to determine the effectiveness of the public involvement process. Are we reaching the underserved populations of the community? Are the documents effectively reaching and informing the community? Questions such as these can be answered through an evaluation process. The answers to these questions will provide information as to when new strategies and techniques should be developed to better reach the public and improve the overall performance of the public involvement process. If a lack of participation is deemed the result of flaws within the Public Involvement Process, then necessary adjustments will be implemented in order to upgrade the process.

Several methods may be used to gauge the effectiveness of the MPO public involvement procedures. Valuable information may be gathered using techniques such as surveys, comment forms, and public comments at meeting, workshops or forums. As the MPOs PIP is implemented and various public involvement techniques are utilized over the next year, information concerning public comment patterns and trends will be collected. The evaluation performed at that time will form the basis of performance standards and measures for subsequent updates to the PIP. The evaluation process established by staff will provide information as to when new strategies and techniques should be developed to better reach the public and improve the overall performance of the public involvement process

The Tallahassee-Leon County Public Involvement Plan will be reviewed periodically for effectiveness to assure that the process provides full and open access to all citizens. At a minimum, the MPO will assess the effectiveness of the PIP and make any necessary adjustments on an annual basis. Eventually, over the next few years, as the PIP is perfected and achieves its objectives, the length of time between reviews and updates may increase to a review period of every other year. The Public Involvement Process is dynamic and must remain so to address the needs of the community in the context of a truly participating public. As techniques are proven to be effective and efficient, the process will evolve to reflect these improvements. Participating stakeholders and MPO staff will immediately assess the effectiveness of every public involvement activity. Revisions to the process will be promptly incorporated.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT PROCESS**

The MPO encourages you to provide written or verbal comments as often as you wish. Public comment is an important part of the public involvement process and provides informative feedback to the MPO on plans and programs. Below are ways for the public to comment on transportation issues.

The public is encouraged to provide written and verbal comments at any of the MPO workshops, public hearings, or events regarding the transportation issues. A portion of all agendas at all regularly scheduled MPO meeting are reserved for public comment, and at all MPO sponsored events, public comment forms are available.

The public is encouraged to provide written or verbal comment on any transportation issue being considered by the MPO through the MPO office. The public is also encouraged to send comments to our web page located at

<http://talgov.com/citytlh/planning/trans/mpo1.html>.

MPO staff is currently in the process of establishing its own web page.

### **Written Comments**

- 1) Type or write legibly, type or print your name under your signature.
- 2) Include your complete address.
- 3) Be brief and to the point.
- 4) Be courteous, but firm.
- 5) Keep a copy for your records.
- 6) Send written comments to:

Tallahassee-Leon County MPO  
Tallahassee/Leon County Planning Department  
City Hall  
300 South Adams Street  
Tallahassee, Florida 32301  
(850) 891-8734 – Fax Number

### **Verbal Comments**

- 1) Have your information ready before calling.
- 2) Have a pencil and paper ready for taking notes.
- 3) Identify yourself, speak slowly and clearly.
- 4) Present your views in a clear, concise, and polite manner.
- 5) Ask for the name of the person taking the call for future reference.

## **Attend Public Meetings**

**Public Involvement Workshops/Meetings** - Workshops are used to bring citizens up-to-date on the details of the plan or program being presented at the workshop. Citizens are also provided with details regarding the next steps to be taken prior to the next workshop or public hearing. Citizens are expected to provide meaningful comments regarding the plan or program being presented. Public involvement workshops will be held prior to crucial decision-making points in the MPO process. Watch the local newspaper for public workshop announcements, or contact the Planning Department for information on upcoming workshops.

**Public Hearings** – These meetings are mandated by law, and are held by the MPO to consider the adoption of the plan or program being presented at the hearing. Watch the local newspaper for public hearing announcements, or contact the Planning Department for information on upcoming public hearings.

The MPO meets on a regular basis, usually the **third Monday** of the month (generally six times a year) each month. The meetings usually begin at **3:00 p.m.** in the City or County Commission Chambers, in City Hall or the Leon County Courthouse, respectively. The MPO can elect to call special meetings at any time deemed necessary. These meetings are advertised in the local media.

### **Contact**

**To learn more on how you can become involved in the MPO process, please contact**

**James C. Johnson, Senior Planner**

**Transportation Planning**

**City Hall, 4th Floor**

**300 South Adams**

**Tallahassee, FL 32301**

**(850) 891-8600**

**Email: [johnsoja@talgov.com](mailto:johnsoja@talgov.com)**

## DEFINITIONS / ACRONYMS

**Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC)** – Currently a MPO, City, County appointed body that advises the MPO on bicycle and pedestrian issues.

**Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC)** - Responsible for coordinating transportation services for disadvantaged individuals. For Tallahassee and Leon County, TalTran is currently the CTC.

**Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)** - Representatives of the community who provide and gauge public reaction to planning proposals and provide recommendations to the MPO regarding transportation needs of the community

**Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)** - An administration within the USDOT responsible for federal guidance and funding of aviation issues.

**Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)** - The state agency granted the legislative authority to develop and maintain state transportation facilities and services.

**Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)** - An administration within the USDOT responsible for federal guidance and funding for federal and state highway facilities.

**Federal Transit Administration (FTA)** - An administration within the USDOT responsible for federal guidance and funding for public transportation facilities.

**Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA)** - The federal transportation appropriation bill established to develop a national intermodal transportation system that is economically efficient and environmentally sound, encourages citizen participation, provides the foundation for the nation to compete in a global economy, and moves people and goods in an energy efficient manner.

**Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)** - A federally mandated 20 - 25 year transportation plan, which provides guidance in the development of an efficient, multimodal transportation system.

**Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)** - An agency created under federal and state law to provide a forum for cooperative decision-making with regard to regional transportation issues. Membership includes elected and appointed officials representing local jurisdictions and transportation agencies.

**Multi-modal Transportation System** - A comprehensive transportation system which includes options for auto, bus, truck, airplane, motorcycle, bicycle, pedestrian, and transit modes of travel.

**Project Development & Environmental Study (PD&E)** - A study performed to determine the feasibility of a road improvement by identifying possible alternatives and evaluating the social, economic, and environmental impacts associated with each alternative. Also called a Corridor Study.

**Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC)** - A county-wide representation of local and state planners, engineers, and transit operators who provide technical input regarding transportation plans and programs and makes recommendations to the MPO.

**Transit Development Plan (TDP)** - A short-range plan which profiles existing and future demand for transit (bus) service, analyzes current bus routes and establishes a five-year plan for bus service. A current and up-to-date TDP is required for the receipt of federal and state financial assistance.

**Transportation Disadvantaged** - Refers to those persons who because of physical or mental disability, income stature, or age or who for other reasons are unable to transport themselves or to purchase transportation. Therefore, they are dependent upon others to obtain access to health care, employment, education, shopping, social activities, or other life-sustaining activities, or children who are handicapped or high-risk.

**Transportation Disadvantaged Coordinating Board (TDCB)** - TDCB is responsible for identifying the needs of those who cannot secure their own means of transportation, bringing those needs to the attention of the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC), and monitoring the amount of Transportation Disadvantaged Funds being received locally.

**Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)** - Incorporates, and coordinates the transportation capital budgets of the FDOT, Leon County, and City of Tallahassee, delineating project activity, location, estimated costs, and proposed funding sources.

**Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)** - A federally mandated report that documents the planning and resource activities of the MPO.

**United States Department of Transportation (USDOT)** - The federal department responsible for guidance and funding for all federally supported transportation activities.