



Public Participation in Transportation Planning

Public involvement remains a hallmark of the transportation planning process. It has always been important for planners to understand the perspective of their constituents, listen to the voices of elected officials, advocates, and stakeholders as they devise transportation plans and programs. Doing so is a challenge in the rural regions of our country. State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) often find it difficult to get input from rural residents, especially if they rely on traditional public involvement techniques.

RTPOs provide DOTs with a unique opportunity for more effective public participation and collaboration, since they are closer to their rural constituency. Some RPOs also provide public involvement services for their local agency members. This Fact Sheet illustrates effective public participation planning at three regional agencies.



Boonslick Missouri Regional Planning Commission



**COMMUNITY
NEEDS/INPUT**



Public outreach in the Boonslick Regional Planning Commission (RPC) occurs during the creation of the comprehensive plans, economic development plans, as well as the strategic plan. The RPC specifically provides assistance by:

1. REACHING OUT TO LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS
2. ATTENDING COMMUNITY MEETINGS, AND
3. IDENTIFYING NEEDS GAPS.

Individual outreach is conducted with local community members. The RPC has 26 cities in three counties. The RPC acts as a liaison between local communities and the Missouri DOT (MoDOT) by staying in tune with the transportation issues in individual communities. To create this bridge, it is often the RPC attending public meetings of the local communities rather than the other way around. The RPC staff members make themselves available through attendance at these types of events, which plays a big role in communicating what individuals and businesses need and directly translates to recommendations of projects for consideration.

North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning & Development Commission

OFFICIAL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

Similar to an MPO, the North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission (NCRPDC) has an official Public Participation Plan, which includes a Limited English Proficiency Plan. Public input opportunities are offered via five to six meetings per year and periodic survey efforts.

“ENGAGE NORTH CENTRAL PA” ONLINE

COUNTY-LEVEL FOCUS

There are 167 municipalities within NCRPDC’s service area and most have small or non-existent staff and limited computer availability. Therefore, NCRPDC focuses its efforts on the county level, meeting with county planning offices on project status/schedule.

NCRPDC has an online portal entitled, *Engage North Central PA*, as part of the public involvement activities by identifying needs and hypothetically programming dollars to get a sense of fiscal constraint. Engage North Central PA has been running for over a year.

REGIONAL INPUT FOR STIP

When the Pennsylvania DOT develops its Statewide Transportation Plan and Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), they utilize the services of the RPO in publicizing public meetings in the region, and with other means to gather input.

Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission

Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) plays a critical role in coordinating the associated activities, people, and stakeholders in public hearings and input forums for the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans). VTrans provides an opportunity for RPCs throughout the State to be involved in development of the Strategic Highway Safety Plan. They facilitate public outreach and data collection efforts and have organized sub-State gatherings on this topic.

The TRORC is also involved in STIP hearings by facilitating local discussions on regional modal plans. VTrans works with the public to facilitate these conversations through the Council’s Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). VTrans representatives attend TAC meetings, which provides then an awareness of regional issues.

The TRORC helps to facilitate State programs, like the *Go Vermont* commuter challenge, at the regional level by collaborating with employers and conducting employer outreach to internally develop the program by encouraging employees. The ability of RPCs to reach out to their regions is critical to these efforts. There is only one staff person at VTrans who works on the program, making this a great example of how VTrans’ capacity is extended by their relationship with RPCs.

In the near-term all of Vermont’s RPCs will be required to have a formal public participation plan that complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and guides the organization beyond federal requirements and applies to all programs.

TRORC CONDUCTS PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT VIA:



Traditional Public Meetings/Hearings



Focus Group Sessions



Community Surveys



Information Distribution and Interaction at Community Events

AN EXTENSION OF VTRANS STAFF

TRORC considers itself to be an extension of VTrans staff that provides a quality relationship with the local areas. The existence of TRORC and the other RPCs saves VTrans both money and staff resources through its ability to get things done quickly and well at the local level which benefits both State-level agencies and constituents.