



Transportation Planning Capacity Building (TPCB) Peer Program

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission Peer Exchange

A TPCB Peer Exchange Event

Location: Portage, Indiana

Date: June 11-12, 2019

Host Agencies: Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission

Peer Agencies: Cynthia Lambert, MetroPlan Orlando
Randi Novakoff, Wilmington Area Planning Council

Federal Agencies: Federal Highway Administration
Federal Transit Administration



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration



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Executive Summary

This report summarizes noteworthy practices and discussions shared during a Transportation Planning Capacity Building (TPCB) peer exchange sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and hosted by the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) at its offices in Portage, IN, on June 11-12, 2019. FHWA and FTA sponsored the peer exchange through their joint [TPCB Peer Program](#), which aims to facilitate knowledge transfer and capacity building by connecting peers from different States and/or agencies to exchange best practices and innovative solutions to transportation planning challenges.

NIRPC is currently in the process of updating its Public Participation Plan (PPP) as a follow-up action from its most recent certification review and requested the peer exchange to hear from peers about how they develop and update their PPPs and involve the public and other stakeholders in metropolitan planning organization (MPO) activities.¹ Two MPO representatives participated in the peer exchange and served as the peers for the event:

- **Cynthia Lambert, APR**, Public Information Manager, MetroPlan Orlando (Orlando, FL); and
- **Randi Novakoff**, Outreach Manager, Wilmington Area Planning Council (Newark, DE).

Over the course of the 1.5-day peer exchange, participants shared information on PPP and public participation activities and techniques. Day One of the peer exchange included a mix of presentations and full group discussions, while Day Two focused primarily on roundtable discussions.

Key takeaways from the peer exchange were as follows:

- The PPP is not the only place that an MPO should reference public participation. Public participation elements should be integrated into the MPO's other planning products (e.g., Metropolitan Transportation Plan) and into the region's transportation planning process overall.
- As much as possible, streamline and simplify information so that ideas can easily be conveyed to an audience that may not be as familiar with transportation planning terms.
- One size does not fit all. Tailored messages will be needed when engaging with different subsets of a community.
- Orient new MPO Board and advisory committee members so that they understand their roles and the expectations for their involvement. Having internal standard operating procedures both for Board/committee members as well as MPO staff can ensure consistency when changes occur.
- Keep up with evolving tools and technologies to leverage innovative and interactive approaches. Social media tools can be relatively inexpensive ways to build awareness but should not be the only methods used to share information and collect input.
- Establishing performance measures can be an important way to track progress, but a balanced approach is needed to ensure that the most effective and right number of measures are used.

¹ The PPP was adopted by NIRPC's Commission on August 15, 2019. For additional information, see: <https://www.nirpc.org/2040-plan/people-and-leaders/public-participation/>.

Following the peer exchange, NIRPC released a draft of its updated PPP for public comment. The [final, updated PPP](#) was adopted by NIRPC's Commission on August 15, 2019.

Introduction

Federal Overview

Public involvement is an important part of the transportation planning process. The public and other stakeholders play a key role in providing input for transportation plans, projects, and other products. Federal requirements ensure that the public have a voice in this process.

Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are Federally required to develop Public Participation Plans (PPPs). States, likewise, are required to have documented public participation processes.

In accordance with [23 Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\) 450.316](#), MPOs must “develop and use a documented participation plan that defines a process for providing [stakeholders] with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the metropolitan transportation planning process.” MPOs use the PPP to support their outreach in connection with the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). MPOs must allow for a 45-day public review and comment period following the release of their draft PPPs.

Under the CFR requirement, MPOs must:

- Provide adequate public notice of public participation activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points;
- Provide timely notice and reasonable access to information about transportation issues and processes;
- Employ visualization techniques to describe MTPs and TIPs;
- Make public information available in electronically accessible formats;
- Hold public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and time;
- Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received during the development of the MTP and TIP;
- Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems;
- Provide additional opportunity for public comment, if the final MTP or TIP differs significantly from earlier versions;
- Coordinate with statewide transportation planning public involvement and consultation processes; and
- Periodically review the effectiveness of the procedures and strategies contained in the PPP.

Every four years, the U.S. Department of Transportation, through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA), certify that MPOs serving transportation management

areas are carrying out their duties in adherence with Federal requirements.² As part of this certification, FHWA and FTA review the MPO’s PPP to confirm it meets Federal statutes and regulations.³

NIRPC Overview

Background

The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), established in 1965, is a regional council of governments (COG) serving Northwest Indiana across three counties (Lake, Porter, and LaPorte). These three counties cover 1,520 square miles, include 41 cities and towns and 44 townships, and are home to more than 775,000 residents.

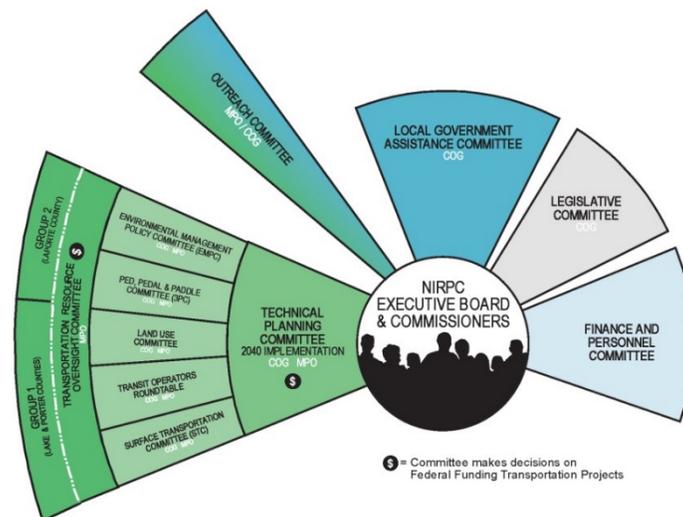
NIRPC also serves as Northwest Indiana’s MPO and the designated recipient for several public transit operators in the region. NIRPC’s mission focuses on its role to:

- Generate meaningful dialogue and cooperation on issues of common concern;
- Contribute to the development of a common vision pertaining to Northwest Indiana’s future;
- Provide a forum in which elected officials and other decisionmakers can develop and implement solutions to regional problems;
- Create opportunities for partnership between the public and private sectors; and
- Provide a common voice for Northwest Indiana in its communications with the State and Federal government.⁴

NIRPC is the only MPO in Indiana established through State enabling legislation. As a COG, NIRPC’s responsibilities go beyond transportation to include the environment and economic development.

NIRPC has 53 commission members, who oversee the agency’s activities. All members are local elected officials, appointed by peer elected officials, including one who must be appointed by the Governor. NIRPC also has multiple committees, including an Outreach Committee, which provides input to NIRPC on its PPP. Figure 1 shows the range of committees under NIRPC’s structure, including multiple technical committees on various topics (e.g., environmental management, land use, freight).

Figure 1: NIRPC Committee Organizational Structure.
Source: NIRPC



² Transportation management areas are urbanized areas with populations over 200,000 as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau or smaller urbanized areas on request by the Governor and MPO.

³ As part of their review, FHWA and FTA may issue “commendations” for MPO activities that go above and beyond the Federal requirements or “corrective actions” for areas of improvement. In the event a corrective action is issued, the MPO must address such action and pursue corresponding improvements in the interim years prior to the next certification review.

⁴ For additional information, see: <https://www.nirpc.org/about-nirpc/>.

Public Participation Activities

The peer exchange specifically focused on the development of PPPs and public participation in the transportation planning process, as NIRPC is currently updating its PPP, known as *Engage NWI*. The last update occurred in 2014. During NIRPC’s most recent certification review in 2017, FHWA and FTA issued a corrective action to NIRPC on public participation. The peer exchange served as an opportunity to share updates on NIRPC’s current efforts and the draft updated PPP as well as learn from the peers about how other MPOs develop their PPPs and engage the public and other stakeholders.

In addition to the PPP, NIRPC has been focused on the most recent update to its MTP, [NWI 2050 Plan](#) (Figure 2). Starting in April 2018, NIRPC held public meetings and began outreach activities to collect input. NIRPC used a “boots on the ground” strategy to engage stakeholders, host meetings with community leaders, and hold “out-and-about.” As part of this outreach, NIRPC strove to explain what it does as the MPO and how metropolitan planning impacts the region. NIRPC also used social media to promote its message. NIRPC is currently exploring new techniques and tools to continue to evolve its outreach methods, build new partnerships (e.g., with community-based groups, higher education institutions), and ensure that its events are accessible.

NIRPC used a similar approach for its [Coordinated Transit Plan](#), which involved three public meetings in August 2018 and established a steering committee to guide the plan’s development. The MPO also held a transit operators’ roundtable and conducted surveys, receiving 278 responses in print and digitally. One of the challenges NIRPC faced was limited meeting attendance; following the meetings, NIRPC adjusted its approach and conducted 93 on-site visits to human service agencies.

To address the corrective action on public participation, NIRPC activated its long-planned Outreach Committee, which has provided guidance to NIRPC staff in the PPP update. An outstanding item, and one discussed at the peer exchange, was whether the Committee should continue following the completion of the update. NIRPC has revised the PPP to have a more engaging and explanatory format, which it hopes will serve as a guide to the public and to staff on what is needed to fulfill the Federal requirements.

Coupled with the PPP update, NIRPC improved processes for scoping planning projects. NIRPC seeks specific participation goals to guide engagement for future planning projects as well as milestones, potential risks, and resources needed in order to complete the projects and the related outreach and engagement.

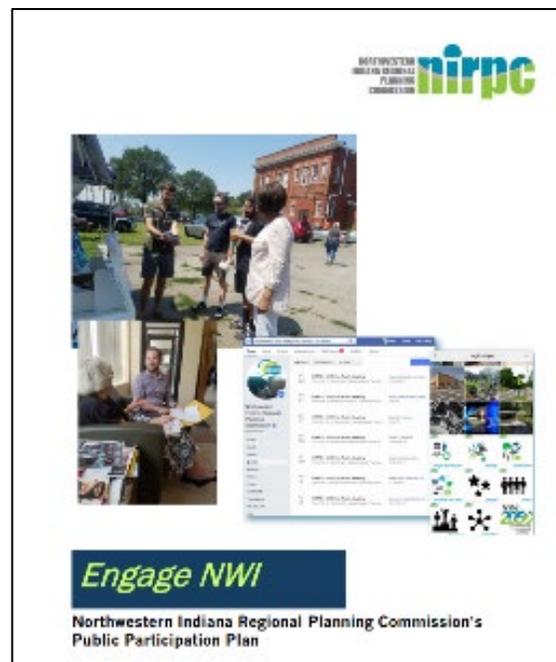


Figure 2: Cover of NIRPC’s updated PPP, *Engage NWI*.
Source: NIRPC

Overview of the Peer Exchange

Goals of the Peer Exchange

NIRPC requested the peer exchange through the FHWA-FTA Transportation Planning Capacity Building (TPCB) Program to learn how peers develop and update their PPPs and involve the public and other stakeholders in MPO activities.⁵ In light of its corrective action on the PPP, NIRPC sought to identify noteworthy practices that it could then integrate into its activities.

FHWA and FTA TPCB Program leads worked with NIRPC and a larger planning team, consisting of the FHWA Indiana and Illinois Divisions, FTA Region 5, the Indiana Department of Transportation, and the peers, to design the peer exchange. Appendix A lists the key FHWA, FTA, and NIRPC contacts involved in planning as well as the peers.

Selecting the Peers

In identifying possible peers, the peer exchange planning team sought to identify representatives from MPOs outside of the NIRPC region that had robust PPPs and public participation activities and similar planning areas and context to that of NIRPC. Ultimately, the team identified and invited the following individuals, who served as the peers for the event:

- **Cynthia Lambert, APR**, Public Information Manager, MetroPlan Orlando; and
- **Randi Novakoff**, Outreach Manager, Wilmington Area Planning Council (WILMAPCO).

Both Ms. Lambert and Ms. Novakoff had extensive public outreach experience and shared these experiences and their perspectives on next steps for NIRPC's PPP and public participation efforts throughout the peer exchange sessions.

Format of the Event

NIRPC hosted the 1.5-day peer exchange at its offices in Portage, IN, on June 11-12, 2019. The peer exchange was held prior to the release of NIRPC's draft PPP for public comment to provide an opportunity for initial feedback and suggestions from the peers and NIRPC's Outreach Committee.

Day One of the peer exchange included presentations from the peers on developing PPPs and involving the public in MPO activities and full group discussions on these topics. Members of the Outreach Committee participated in the afternoon of Day One to further discuss next steps for NIRPC's draft PPP.

Day Two of the peer exchange focused on roundtable discussions centered on fostering stakeholder relationships and measuring performance for public involvement.

Appendix B shows the final agenda used for the peer exchange. A list of peer exchange participants is included in Appendix C.

⁵ The TPCB Peer Program aims to facilitate knowledge transfer and capacity building by connecting peers from different States and/or agencies to exchange best practices and innovative solutions to transportation planning challenges. Additional information is available at: www.planning.dot.gov.

Presentation Highlights

Peer Approaches to Public Participation

The two peers—from MetroPlan Orlando and WILMAPCO—each shared their agencies’ experiences with public involvement and offered suggestions and insights to NIRPC in developing PPPs and engaging the public and other stakeholders (Figure 3). The following summarizes key points from these presentations.



Figure 3: Cynthia Lambert, APR, of MetroPlan Orlando shares tips for effective stakeholder outreach.
Source: FHWA

Peer Perspectives: Developing Public Participation Plans

Cynthia Lambert, APR

MetroPlan Orlando

Orlando, FL

MetroPlan Orlando is the MPO for Orange, Osceola, and Seminole counties in Central Florida. These counties represent a growing region in Florida, with about 2 million current residents and an additional 1 million anticipated in the next 20 years. Tourism plays a significant role in the region both in terms of visitors and the economy. In 2018, there were approximately 75 million visitors to the region. Approximately 41 percent of the region’s workforce works in the tourism industry. MetroPlan Orlando’s region is a diverse community and has become a majority-minority region in the past decade, with the percentage of the non-Hispanic white population under 50%. The region is additionally “young” in comparison to the rest of Florida; the region’s median age for residents is about 36.5 years old, as opposed to 41.8 for the State. In addition to race and age diversity, the region has diversity across populations with limited English proficiency, limited or no access to an automobile, disabilities, and household type. All of these factors feed into how MetroPlan Orlando approaches its public participation activities.

One aspect that MetroPlan Orlando promotes is its role as a regional transportation partnership. MetroPlan has a staff of 18, who coordinate closely with the agency’s partners, including the MPO’s Board and advisory committees; Federal, State, and local agencies; the business and non-profit sectors, and the public. Rather than focusing on its designation as the region’s MPO, the agency instead focuses on the partnership element of its programs and activities to encourage collaboration and a more approachable connection to transportation for stakeholders. This tagline—“A Regional Transportation Partnership”—features prominently on MetroPlan Orlando’s website (Figure 4).



Figure 4: MetroPlan Orlando’s tagline—“A Regional Transportation Partnership”—features prominently on its website.
Source: MetroPlan Orlando

MetroPlan Orlando adopted its Public Involvement Plan in 2016 and is currently in the process of updating it. As part of the updates, the MPO plans to adjust the name of the plan to “Public Participation Plan.” The PPP will also link to MetroPlan Orlando’s Nondiscrimination Plan, which addresses outreach efforts to Title VI and limited English proficiency populations. Ms. Lambert shared that, from her perspective, the Federal requirement for PPPs means that agencies must provide opportunities for people to be involved. Since the Federal requirements are broad, MPOs have flexibility in how they meet these requirements. MetroPlan Orlando aims to be proactive in its outreach and sees the PPP as a way to document its public participation approach and track its activities.

Ms. Lambert discussed the content of MetroPlan Orlando’s PPP. Per Ms. Lambert, the overall goal is to “establish a comprehensive, inclusive process through various methods and create continuous opportunities to engage the public in transportation planning.” To achieve this goal, MetroPlan Orlando established multiple objectives:

1. Increase public involvement through outreach activities — at least two each month.
2. Increase website activity by five percent each year.
3. Provide opportunities for round-the-clock engagement through social media.
4. Integrate the adopted 2040 Long-Range Transportation Plan in outreach.
5. Keep interested citizens informed through email and increase the database contacts by 10 percent each year.
6. Increase media coverage about the planning process, achieving at least 10 print and 8 broadcast stories annually.
7. Meet all Federal and State requirements for public involvement.

For all of these objectives, Ms. Lambert noted that the goal is to go above and beyond. To track its progress, MetroPlan Orlando evaluates its PPP annually. The MPO uses an evaluation dashboard format, which allows the agency to know what it needs to adjust. MetroPlan Orlando also established a social media policy in its PPP to outline its approach for removing content/comments and posting content from other sources.

Ms. Lambert shared lessons learned that MetroPlan Orlando has found in developing its PPP and conducting its public involvement efforts, including:

- **Streamline and simplify as much as possible.** Ms. Lambert noted that “the simpler, the better.” MetroPlan Orlando works to have its PPP be concise and explain the transportation planning process as simply as possible.
- **Embrace checklists.** MetroPlan Orlando uses various checklists related to the MTP, TIP, and other planning products. Having these checklists help keep activities on track and provide consistency to staff.
- **Under promise and over deliver.** Ms. Lambert suggested that the PPP is a framework for how you give the public a voice in the planning process. The MPO’s community outreach process should be the avenue to provide opportunities for these voices to be heard.
- **Do not list specific tools that might change as technology and techniques evolve.** Since tools can rapidly change, Ms. Lambert recommended excluding this specific information to avoid having a plan become outdated too quickly. MetroPlan Orlando keeps its PPP as broad as possible so that the plan can remain flexible.
- **Have a purpose in mind.** Decide what is important to you, and use this to build a “roadmap” for how you can reach this desired outcome.
- **Measure in moderation.** A balanced approach is best for evaluation. Choose a few items to benchmark. Establish a baseline, and build on this over time.
- **One size does not fit all.** Tailor your message to different audiences.
- **Diversify your tools.** The more tools you have (e.g., video, digital, etc.), the more effective you can be in your outreach. Keep up with the industry for reaching people.
- **Evaluate and adjust.** If you are not evaluating, you will not know if you are being effective.

Randi Novakoff

WILMAPCO

Newark, DE

WILMAPCO is a bi-State MPO, serving one county in Delaware (New Castle County [426 square miles]) and one in Maryland (Cecil County [346 square miles]). The region’s population is just over 650,000 and growing, especially among the senior population. The region is majority white (63 percent), with approximately 20 percent African-American population, 9 percent Hispanic or Latino, and the remainder all other races. The vast majority of work commuters (81 percent) drive alone.

WILMAPCO has seven staff total—five planning staff, one public outreach representative, and its executive director. The MPO has two committees—its technical advisory committee that has several sub-committees and its public advisory committee (PAC). WILMAPCO also establishes specific working groups when needed (Figure 5).

WILMAPCO’s PAC has been a standing committee for more than two decades. The committee is

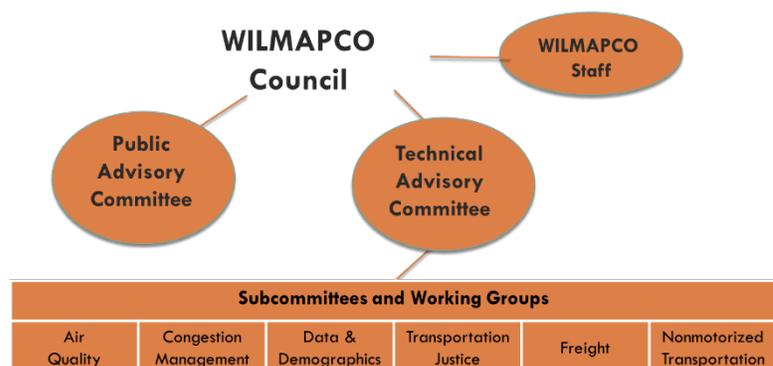


Figure 5: WILMAPCO’s organizational structure.

Source: WILMAPCO

primarily comprised of umbrella and civic organizations. The PAC provides recommendations for public outreach strategies to the WILMAPCO Council as well as reviews the PPP. Ms. Novakoff noted that WILMAPCO staff work closely with the PAC, inviting them to share information and suggestions for public involvement strategies.

Ms. Novakoff discussed WILMAPCO's overarching philosophy for public outreach:

- **Exceed Federal regulations.** For example, WILMAPCO has an air quality mascot, "Tropo," which provides awareness about the importance of air quality and reducing air pollution (Figure 6).
- **Go where the people are.** WILMAPCO does not solely rely on public meetings at its offices to collect input. Instead, the MPO goes to places where people already are (e.g., community centers, libraries) to share information and obtain feedback.
- **One size does not fit all.** WILMAPCO strives to make its communications meaningful, working in close coordination with the PAC to ensure the right message.
- **Create meaningful two-way communication.** WILMAPCO regularly looks for new ways to engage people and provide opportunities for information-sharing and collaboration.
- **Develop easily understood plans/reports.** The MPO works diligently to make sure the materials it releases are easy to read and approachable.
- **Utilize new and creative ways to engage the public.** For example, the MPO conducts a public opinion telephone survey every four years for its MTP update. The survey is statistically significant and representative of the public. The MPO has learned that there is no one way to collect information, so it often tries different methods to keep its practices innovative.



Figure 6: WILMAPCO's air quality mascot, "Tropo."
Source: WILMAPCO

Ms. Novakoff then transitioned to discuss WILMAPCO's approach for developing its PPP. The MPO initially created the PPP in 2008 and updated it in 2010. In 2014, WILMAPCO conducted an extensive evaluation process for its PPP. WILMAPCO's MTP includes a goal for public outreach, and the agency also integrated the PPP into its regional progress report, which it updates every other year.

In developing the PPP, WILMAPCO used several outreach methods to collect information from stakeholders, including a public opinion telephone survey, public participation online survey, and a workshop for PAC and Council members, before releasing the draft PPP for public comment. WILMAPCO also held a public workshop on the PPP, TIP, and the State's Consolidated Transportation Program, combining these topics into one meeting so that stakeholders could get information about each planning product without having to attend multiple meetings. In preparing its PPP, WILMAPCO had three goals:

1. Widely disseminate clear, complete, and timely information to residents, affected agencies, and interested parties;
2. Create an open and ongoing two-way involvement process that ensures full resident, agency, and interested party participation in, and input into, regional transportation planning; and

3. Promote early and continuous involvement of the public in the development of plans, projects, and programs.

Ms. Novakoff also shared information about WILMAPCO’s public outreach efforts for Civil Rights/Environmental Justice (EJ)/Title VI. WILMAPCO alternatively uses the term, “Transportation Justice.” WILMAPCO has an ad hoc Transportation Justice Working Group that is currently finalizing a [2019 Transportation Justice Plan](#), which identifies social inequities in the WILMAPCO region and corresponding recommendations to address these inequities. Since 2003, WILMAPCO has released regular transportation justice studies for the region.

In closing her presentation, Ms. Novakoff offered lessons learned based on her experiences at WILMAPCO. These lessons learned included recommendations for consideration at the agency, regional, and local levels, as well as considerations for hosting effective public meetings.

Lessons Learned

- Invite civic leaders to all meetings.
- Support comprehension of the plan.
- Define roles of committee members.
- Invest in trust building.

Recommendations

<i>Agency Level</i>	<i>Regional Level</i>	<i>Local Level</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop practices that integrate cultural groups of all ages. • Participate in Title VI and EJ training and cultural competency training. • Advocate with, and on behalf of, people of color. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to diversify outreach methods. • Have equitable representation of minorities on the PAC. • Pursue equitable public feedback in studies, by race and class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in relationship building. • Encourage residents to participate in decisionmaking on committees. • Empower residents to conduct surveys, facilitate meetings, and provide explanation.

Public Meeting Considerations

- Avoid unfamiliar locations (go where the people are).
- Provide childcare.
- Work with others to provide snacks/food.
- Venue must be bus-accessible.
- Work with community to choose best time and meeting promotion.
- Tag onto existing events.

Peer Perspectives: Involving the Public in MPO Activities

Cynthia Lambert, APR

MetroPlan Orlando

Orlando, FL

In her second presentation, Ms. Lambert emphasized MetroPlan Orlando's focus on partnerships and coordination with its stakeholders. She shared that MPOs often face challenges in engaging the public, given the long-term nature of transportation planning. MetroPlan Orlando recognizes the importance of explaining to stakeholders why they should care so that their voices are heard throughout the process. Ms. Lambert also discussed the MetroPlan Orlando's Board structure and how the MPO uses its advisory committees to provide input to the Board.

MetroPlan Orlando's Board is mostly elected officials. There are currently 20 voting members and 5 non-voting members. Voting membership is capped at 25. Board members include representatives from counties and cities in the region, as well as transportation operating agencies. Ms. Lambert noted that about a quarter of Board members turned over in the last election cycle. MetroPlan Orlando staff worked closely with these new individuals to provide an orientation to them on roles and expectations.

MetroPlan Orlando has several advisory committees that report to the Board, including a Community Advisory Committee (CAC), Technical Advisory Committee, Transportation Systems Management and Operations Advisory Committee, and Municipal Advisory Committee. The chairman of each advisory committee sits on the Board as a non-voting member. The CAC, an all-volunteer committee, has about 33 representatives at the present time. About half of the CAC members are appointed by local governments, and the remaining half are appointed by the Board. The CAC has specific seats for different interests (e.g., business community, underserved populations, different modes, etc.) to ensure it has a balanced membership.

MetroPlan Orlando approaches relationship-building by taking the first step. The agency works to share as much as possible with its partners and to make it easy for others to share its messages. For example, for project-specific activities, MetroPlan Orlando will prepare toolkits for its partners (e.g., pre-written newsletters articles, social media posts, and graphics) and ask them to share the information. The MPO also leverages Public Information Officer networks in Florida to build relationships with other outreach communicators.

Ms. Lambert noted that there are many stakeholders to consider when conducting an outreach process (Figure 7). Stakeholders come from many different levels of government and the community. With limited resources, MetroPlan Orlando works strategically to target the people who have a direct stake in its work. Ms. Lambert recommended the [ALICE Report](#), produced by the United Way, which provides information on **A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed households in various States across the country. She noted that the underserved stakeholders identified in the ALICE report are ones that MPOs need to support.



In her final remarks, Ms. Lambert shared suggestions on how the MPO and its partners can work together to build relationships. These suggestions included:

- **Communicate your needs to partners** so that they know what is important to your organization. What are the goals partners are trying to accomplish, and how can the MPO help them? Partners can help amplify the MPO’s message. The MPO should be supportive and spread good information.
- **Encourage your networks to get involved.** Everyone has a network, so it is important to provide content that everyone can share.
- **Tell your story in a relatable way.** Transportation can be complicated, so it is best to explain information in a simple fashion. MetroPlan Orlando is increasingly using a digital outreach approach, including infographics and visualizations, to present information as clearly and concisely as possible.



Figure 8: Randi Novakoff, WILMAPCO Outreach Manager, presents to peer exchange participants.
Source: FHWA

Randi Novakoff
WILMAPCO
Newark, DE

Ms. Novakoff focused on WILMAPCO’s stakeholder engagement efforts in her second presentation, particularly the agency’s digital and innovative practices.

WILMAPCO heavily uses its [website](#) to promote its efforts. Agency newsletters and events are posted to the website. WILMAPCO monitors web statistics to track usage. WILMAPCO also works to make its website interactive and most recently added a [map of TIP projects](#) where web users can click on a particular project and view its attributes.

For WILMAPCO’s public opinion telephone survey, the MPO hired a private consultant to help. Ms. Novakoff noted that the MPO uses this statistically significant survey to help gauge the goals and strategies of the MTP, support for the TIP, and support for WILMAPCO’s efforts overall.

Other innovative activities that WILMAPCO has been pursuing include:

- **Youth engagement.** WILMAPCO coordinates with schoolchildren primarily through its “Safe Routes to School” efforts. The MPO has developed a “[Going from Here to There](#)” school curriculum for students in grades 6-8. WILMAPCO’s “Tropo” air quality mascot has also been well-received in getting students and others excited and more involved in the transportation planning process.
- **Visualization tools.** WILMAPCO has tested various visualization and stakeholder engagement tools, including MetroQuest and SurveyMonkey, to promote web-based feedback.⁶
- **Pop-up workshops.** WILMAPCO has planned “pop-up”-style workshops at libraries, grocery stores, and other public venues as part of its strategy to “go where the people are.”

⁶ References to these tools are not meant to endorse such tools or any particular tools. FHWA and FTA recognize that many tools are available and encourages agencies to use the tools that work best for them.

- **Walkable community workshops.** WILMAPCO has held walkable workshops across the region, where a tour is part of the meeting agenda. This style of workshops has been highly successful for WILMAPCO and has helped the MPO build relationships with the local community.
- **Social media advertising.** WILMAPCO previously invested in radio advertising but transitioned to social media advertising to increase participation rates and lower its costs. The MPO has seen a significant increase in workshop attendance as a result of this advertising.
- **Focus groups.** WILMAPCO often uses focus groups, consisting of smaller groups of stakeholders, when conducting studies or other specialized activities. Engaging these stakeholders through focus groups allows for more targeted partnerships and information-sharing.

Discussion Highlights

During the peer exchange, attendees participated in several discussions to answer questions, share ideas, and offer suggestions to NIRPC on its draft PPP. The following summarizes key themes from these discussions.

Day One Discussions

Next Steps for NIRPC's Public Participation Plan

In the afternoon of Day One, members of NIRPC's Outreach Committee participated in discussions to share input on the agency's draft PPP, *Engage NWI*. NIRPC shared drafts of the document with participants for review and feedback. In the following days, NIRPC would finalize the proposed draft before releasing it for a 45-day public comment period on June 21, 2019.

During the discussion, NIRPC first presented an overview of *Engage NWI*, noting that the document serves as "standard operating procedures" for the agency's public participation activities and addresses the "who, what, where, and why" for public participation. As part of the feedback received from the 2017 certification review, NIRPC received input that the existing PPP was too aspirational and lengthy. In designing *Engage NWI*, NIRPC sought to streamline the document so that it would be more concise and better align with Federal requirements.

Participants reviewed the draft PPP page-by-page, providing specific and overarching feedback. Comments provided during the peer exchange included:

- Add references to the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.
- Identify public engagement opportunities in other planning products (e.g., MTP, TIP) and not solely in the PPP.
- Focus on the frequency of opportunities to be involved, rather than the frequency of amending plans.
- Remove references to specific years so that document lasts as long as possible.
- Define EJ populations, and identify the strategies that will be used to reach out to these communities.
- Share how decisions will be determined.
- Demonstrate the "how" for how the public will be invited to participate.

- Have outcome-based performance measures, and consider not having a specific number for a target measure (e.g., an *increase* in meetings rather than X number of meetings).
- Ensure that new commissioners/members/staff receive copies of amendment and modification procedures as well as any other internal operating procedures.
- Discuss the process for addressing public comments in the PPP.

Overall, the participating Committee members liked the draft PPP, noting that it was much shorter than the earlier version and a helpful guide for how to participate in the planning process. NIRPC shared that it is also considering a toolkit supplement to better demonstrate how the public and other stakeholders can participate.

Day Two Discussions

Day Two of the peer exchange centered on two roundtable discussions, focused on the topics of fostering stakeholder relationships and measuring performance for public involvement. During the roundtable discussions, participants shared tips and best practices for NIRPC's consideration.

Fostering Stakeholder Relationships

In the first discussion on fostering stakeholder relationships, participants raised questions and discussed perspectives on these questions.

How do we foster the relationships we have already built?

- WILMAPCO has used monitoring committees as a way to bring stakeholders in closer. The MPO offers itself as a resource for civic organizations, freely sharing its data and printing materials for others. WILMAPCO also works to tap into activities others are doing in an effort to show that transportation planning affects every walk of life and in many different ways.
- MetroPlan Orlando noted that sustaining existing or building new relationships takes time. Being patient can be important throughout this process.

How do you involve stakeholders when updating your PPP?

- WILMAPCO provides about 40 presentations to civic organizations, municipalities, and other stakeholders. The agency would “go on the road” to different meeting forums and provide presentations about its activities. WILMAPCO would document all of the questions it received, provide a response, and include this feedback in the plan.
- MetroPlan Orlando varies its involvement with stakeholders depending on the plan being updated. The MPO then makes sure there is extensive content available through newsletters, social media, and other formats.

How do you balance social media tools with other outreach?

- MetroPlan Orlando uses Sprout Social software to monitor all of its social media channels.⁷ The software allows the MPO to schedule social media posts automatically and provides analytics capabilities.

⁷ Reference to this tool is not meant to endorse such tool or any particular tools. FHWA and FTA recognize that many tools are available and encourages agencies to use the tools that work best for them.

- WILMAPCO creates social media posts for upcoming events and monitors the comments received to gauge how the meeting might be received or potential topics of interest. This pre-work has helped the agency prepare for later workshops and meetings.
- Both MetroPlan Orlando and WILMAPCO recommended against using social media “influencers.” This would be a reflection on the agency, so they recommended proceeding with caution. However, it is important to recognize when people have influenced a project. This type of story could be shared on social media or in meetings, so that the public knows they made a difference.

How do you engage committee members or work with your committees?

- MetroPlan Orlando has a staff member assigned as a liaison for each of its advisory committees. The staff member is responsible for onboarding new committee members and ensuring all understand their roles and the expectations for the committee.
- MetroPlan Orlando’s Board appoints half of the CAC, with the other half appointed by local governments. The two requirements for the committee are that individuals cannot be an elected official and cannot work in the transportation industry.
- WILMAPCO’s Council appoints the organizations that serve as members for the PAC. WILMAPCO shares an information packet prior to each committee meeting, so that committee members are aware and prepared for meeting discussions.

Measuring Performance for Public Involvement

In the second roundtable discussion, participants shared thoughts on ways to measure performance for public involvement activities.

How do you measure performance, and how do you know if you are successful?

- NIRPC uses Google Analytics to track website use as well as analytics information from Bit.ly links. The MPO also tracks attendance at committee meetings. NIRPC typically prepares a “year in review,” which is more narrative-based and less data-driven, to share information about the past year’s activities.
- WILMAPCO tracks any mention of itself on social media. The MPO counts attendance at meetings but does not use this as a formal measure. MetroPlan Orlando, likewise, estimates the number of people at meetings but does not use this measure formally.
- MetroPlan Orlando has conducted satisfaction surveys of its Board and committee members annually in the past to track how responses changed year to year. Performing this exercise has helped the MPO improve its processes for how it serves its members and customers.
- Both peers discussed the importance of telling the performance story as often as possible. Demonstrating how inputs will be used can be helpful in showing stakeholders how their voice is heard.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The FHWA-FTA TPCB peer exchange, hosted by NIRPC, provided an opportunity for NIRPC to learn from peer MPOs about noteworthy practices for developing PPPs and engaging the public and other stakeholders in the transportation planning process. Participants had opportunities to ask questions and share input, particularly on the draft PPP, *Engage NWI*, presented by NIRPC during the peer exchange. Overall, participants indicated that they found the peer exchange useful in NIRPC's steps toward strengthening its public participation approaches.

Following the peer exchange, NIRPC released a draft of its updated PPP, *Engage NWI*, for public comment. The final, updated PPP was adopted by the NIRPC Commission on August 15, 2019.

Engage NWI now serves as the agency's updated PPP and, barring future updates, will be part of the agency's planning products provided at its next certification review. NIRPC also plans to consider the future of the Outreach Committee and whether such a committee, in its existing or an updated form, could benefit MPO activities moving forward.

Appendices

Appendix A: Key Contacts

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Appendix B: Peer Exchange Agenda



TRANSPORTATION PLANNING CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM (TPCB)

*Sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and
Federal Transit Administration (FTA)*

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) Peer Exchange Agenda

Dates: June 11-12, 2019

Location: NIRPC Offices
6100 Southport Road
Portage, IN 46368

Tuesday, June 11, 2019 - MORNING

Time	Session	Speaker(s)
8:30 – 9:00 am	Registration and Check-in	
9:00 – 9:05	Opening and Introductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Barry GIS Specialist/Transportation Planner, FHWA Office of Planning • Trey Wadsworth Director of Transportation, NIRPC
9:05 – 9:15	Welcome and Remarks from Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kathy Luther Chief of Staff, NIRPC • Joyce Newland Planning & Environmental Specialist, FHWA Indiana Division • Susan Weber Community Planner, FTA Region 5
9:15 – 9:30	Overview of and Goals for Peer Exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Betsy Tracy Transportation Planning Specialist, FHWA Illinois Division
9:30 – 10:00	Overview of NIRPC Public Participation Plan and Public Involvement Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kathy Luther Chief of Staff, NIRPC • Trey Wadsworth Director of Transportation, NIRPC • Dominique Edwards Public Participation Planner, NIRPC

Time	Session	Speaker(s)
10:00 – 10:15	<i>Break</i>	
10:15 – 11:30	Peer Perspectives: <i>Developing Public Participation Plans</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cynthia Lambert, APR Public Information Manager, MetroPlan Orlando • Randi Novakoff Outreach Manager, Wilmington Area Planning Council
11:30 am – 12:00 pm	Full Group Discussion: <i>Developing Public Participation Plans</i> <i>Session facilitated by: Betsy Tracy, FHWA Illinois Division</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Exchange Participants
12:00 – 1:00 pm	<i>Lunch</i>	

Tuesday, June 11, 2019 - AFTERNOON

Time	Session	Speaker(s)
1:00 – 1:15 pm	Registration and Check-in	
1:15 - 1:30	Opening and Introductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Betsy Tracy Transportation Planning Specialist, FHWA Illinois Division • George Topoll Vice Chair, NIRPC Outreach Committee
1:30 – 1:45	Updates on NIRPC Public Participation Plan Efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominique Edwards Public Participation Planner, NIRPC
1:45 - 3:00	Peer Perspectives: <i>Involving the Public in MPO Activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cynthia Lambert, APR Public Information Manager, MetroPlan Orlando • Randi Novakoff Outreach Manager, Wilmington Area Planning Council
3:00 – 3:15	<i>Break</i>	
3:15 – 4:15	Full Group Discussion: <i>Next Steps for NIRPC's Public Participation Plan</i> <i>Session facilitated by: Dominique Edwards, NIRPC</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Exchange Participants
4:15 – 4:30	Wrap-up and Concluding Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mike Barry GIS Specialist/Transportation Planner, FHWA Office of Planning • Dominique Edwards Public Participation Planner, NIRPC
4:30 pm	Adjourn	

Wednesday, June 12, 2019

Time	Session	Speaker(s)
8:30 – 9:00 am	Registration and Check-in	
9:00 – 9:30	Review of Day One / Debrief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mike Barry GIS Specialist/Transportation Planner, FHWA Office of Planning
9:30 – 10:30	Round Table Discussion #1: <i>Fostering Stakeholder Relationships</i> <i>Session facilitated by: Rachel Strauss McBrien, U.S. DOT Volpe Center</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Exchange Participants
10:30 – 10:45	Break	
10:45 – 11:45	Round Table Discussion #2: <i>Measuring Performance for Public Involvement</i> <i>Session facilitated by: Betsy Tracy, FHWA Illinois Division</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Exchange Participants
11:45 am – 12:00 pm	Wrap-up and Conclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Betsy Tracy Transportation Planning Specialist, FHWA Illinois Division
12:00 pm	Adjourn	

Appendix C: List of Participants

Day One – Morning (June 11, 2019)

Name	Agency
Michael Barry	FHWA Office of Planning
Stephanie Blech	Indiana DOT
Dominique Edwards	NIRPC
Cynthia Lambert	MetroPlan Orlando
Kathy Luther	NIRPC
Joyce Newland	FHWA Indiana Division
Randi Novakoff	WILMAPCO
Rachel Strauss McBrien	U.S. DOT Volpe National Transportation Systems Center
Betsy Tracy	FHWA Illinois Division
Trey Wadsworth	NIRPC
Susan Weber	FTA Region 5

Day One – Afternoon (June 11, 2019)

Name	Agency
Zully JF Alvarado	Causes for Change
Michael Barry	FHWA Office of Planning
Gabrielle Biciunas	NIRPC
Stephanie Blech	Indiana DOT
Dominique Edwards	NIRPC
Lauri Keagle	South Shore Clean Cities
Cynthia Lambert	MetroPlan Orlando
Kathy Luther	NIRPC
Joyce Newland	FHWA Indiana Division
Randi Novakoff	WILMAPCO
Rachel Strauss McBrien	U.S. DOT Volpe National Transportation Systems Center
George Topoll	Union Township – Porter County
Betsy Tracy	FHWA Illinois Division
Terry Velligan	Cline Avenue Bridge
Trey Wadsworth	NIRPC
Scott Weber	NIRPC
Susan Weber	FTA Region 5
James Winters	NIRPC

Day Two (June 12, 2019)

Name	Agency
Michael Barry	FHWA Office of Planning
Stephanie Blech	Indiana DOT
Jay Ciavarella	FTA Region 5
Dominique Edwards	NIRPC
Cynthia Lambert	MetroPlan Orlando
Kathy Luther	NIRPC
Joyce Newland	FHWA Indiana Division
Randi Novakoff	WILMAPCO
Rachel Strauss McBrien	U.S. DOT Volpe National Transportation Systems Center
Betsy Tracy	FHWA Illinois Division
Trey Wadsworth	NIRPC