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Public Participation Process

2011

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

2 Public Participation Process

Federal transportation legislation requires that each metropolitan planning organization prepare and/or update a transportation plan every four years. The legislation also mandates that an inclusive participation process be completed as part of the plan’s development. The latest iteration of the federal transportation legislation, SAFETEA-LU, has placed particular emphasis on the public participation process. Specifically, it calls for increased interagency consultation, the use of visualization techniques in the public participation process, and outreach to organizations and groups that are impacted by transportation issues. This chapter describes the public participation process that the FRCOG and the FCTPO used in the development of this RTP.

Public participation is a required component of the Regional Transportation Plan.

Public Participation Requirements of SAFETEA-LU

SAFETEA-LU requires that the Regional Transportation Plan be developed in consultation with the State and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation. The legislation further states that consultations with these agencies should take into account plans, maps, and inventories of natural and/or historic resources as available and applicable. In addition, SAFETEA-LU states that the planning process used by the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) should serve to promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns. The MPO for the Franklin County region is the Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization (FCTPO).

SAFETEA-LU also specifies that:

“...each MPO shall provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of the disabled and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the transportation plan.”

The legislation notes that the public participation process associated with the development of the plan shall be developed in consultation with all interested parties and allow all interested parties a reasonable opportunity to comment on the contents of the transportation plan, and to the maximum extent practical, should include the following as a part of that task:

- Hold any public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times;
- Employ visualization techniques to describe the transportation plan;
- Make public information available in electronically accessible format and means, such as the World Wide Web, as appropriate to afford reasonable opportunity for consideration of public information.

The Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization and the FRCOG’s Continuing, Cooperative, and Comprehensive (3C) Transportation Planning Process

The Franklin Regional Council of Governments receives federal funds to conduct regional transportation planning on behalf of the Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization (FCTPO) and is therefore required by law to carry out a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive (3C) transportation planning process. This process depends on significant public involvement, and requires that all plans and programs consider all modes of transportation and support community development and social goals.

The FCTPO is responsible for monitoring the progress of the regional transportation planning processes and making the final decision regarding

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any regionally significant projects to be included in the Regional Transportation Plan.

Public Outreach and Input during the Development of the Regional Transportation Plan

Public input is an essential component in the creation of the Franklin County Regional Transportation Plan. The input FRCOG received as part of its outreach efforts helped shape and inform the RTP's goals, priorities, and recommendations. The RTP is a public document that was reviewed throughout its development by all levels of government including: the FCTPO; the Franklin Regional Planning Board (FRPB); the local communities; representative of regional, state, and federal agencies; and organizations and members of the public representing a wide array of interests. This section describes the public outreach and participation efforts conducted by the FRCOG staff.

Initial Public Outreach

At the beginning of the update process for the Regional Transportation Plan, the FRCOG developed a public participation strategy that sought to obtain public input from as many and diverse populations as possible. The strategy included hosting public forums, distributing several surveys, and attending stakeholder meetings. Four public forums were held between January and March of 2010. The first three forums were held in the evening at locations throughout the county to facilitate public access to the meetings. The fourth public forum was held during the day in order to allow people who could not be present for the evening meetings to be able to attend and provide their input. The details for these meetings can be seen in Table 2-1.

At all of these forums the update process was explained, examples of past Regional Transportation Plans were provided, and visual aids (PowerPoint presentation, pictures, and maps) were used to augment the discussion. The forums were announced several weeks prior with ads placed in all of the local newspapers and the FRCOG newsletter and website. Radio ads were also aired prior to each forum (three times a day for four days prior to each forum). In addition, personal invitations were sent to a wide array of stakeholders announcing the

Regional Transportation Plan update and the dates of the forums (see Appendix A for a list of stakeholders that were contacted and those that attended). To further ensure that as many stakeholders as possible were provided the opportunity to comment on transportation in Franklin County, FRCOG staff also attended many meetings of various organizations throughout the region and made presentations regarding the update process and asked for project ideas and feedback. In addition, the FRCOG staff discussed the plan informally when meeting with town boards and local and regional organizations to solicit further input regarding the update or ideas for transportation projects in the county. The complete list of all meetings and their dates are listed in Table 2-1 below.

To augment the input received from the public forums, the FRCOG also created two surveys about transportation issues within the county. The first survey was geared towards a general audience, while the second survey was distributed to all of the major employers within the county to understand better the freight and commercial aspect of transportation in the region. The surveys can be viewed in Appendix B. The surveys were advertized in all of the local newspapers, town newsletters, on the FRCOG website, the FRCOG newsletter, and through personalized letters to many organizations representing major stakeholders in the county. The surveys were available both in an online format and in hardcopy. Hardcopies of the survey were distributed to all town halls in the county, were placed on all of the FRTA buses, and were available upon request.

The general survey that the FRCOG distributed looked to capture several specific pieces of information. Namely, survey respondents were asked: to rate the state of the existing transportation infrastructure; whether they used park & ride lots; to describe their current daily travel modes and routines; and what their top three recommendations would be for transportation improvements in the region over the next five to ten years. The FRCOG received 98 completed surveys from county residents

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and used the information provided in the surveys throughout this RTP.

The FRCOG created the Major Employer Survey with the intent of better understanding the commercial aspect of transportation in the county – specifically freight transport and commuting of employees. With the assistance of the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, this survey was distributed to all of the major employers or manufacturers in Franklin County and several just outside of the county that were significant employers of county residents. The survey looked to determine: how these companies transported their goods; if they were interested in utilizing rail transport, if possible; whether employees were able to carpool or use public transit; and what recommendations the companies might have for transportation projects over the next five to ten years. FRCOG received 23 completed surveys and used the information in several chapters of this RTP.

Throughout the update of this Regional Transportation Plan, draft chapters were made available for review on the FRCOG website (www.frcog.org) under “Publications” and “Transportation Planning.” In addition, information regarding the update was regularly posted in the FRCOG newsletter, which is mailed to town departments (Selectboards, Town Administrators, Highway Superintendents, Town Clerks, Planning Boards, Police Chiefs, Health Agents), legislators, and other regional agencies.

Final Public Outreach and Approval Process

Once the FRCOG staff had completed a draft of the 2011 Regional Transportation Plan, public input was sought from a variety of stakeholders as well as those required by SAFETEA-LU. The draft RTP was made available for public review through a variety of means, including: press releases and legal notices to local media, mailings to stakeholders and interested individuals/agencies/organizations, notices in the FRCOG newsletter, posting of the draft on the FRCOG website, and placement of the draft in hardcopy format at all town halls. In addition, a public meeting was held in the centralized location of Greenfield to directly obtain public input regarding the draft RTP. Visual aids, such as a

PowerPoint presentation, maps, and photographs were used during this meeting to help attendees visualize the RTP and its recommendations.

As part of this outreach, the FRCOG received few substantial comments on the draft RTP. Those comments that were received were reviewed and incorporated, as appropriate, into the RTP during its preparation. Following the official FCTPO Public Participation Plan’s requirements of a minimum thirty-day review period, the FCTPO endorsed the 2011 Regional Transportation Plan by vote, following an official report and discussion, at a meeting open to the public at large.

Environmental Justice and Title VI

In 1994, a Presidential Executive Order directed every federal agency to make Environmental Justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing the effects of all programs, policies, and activities on “minority populations and low-income populations.” The U.S. Department of Transportation has addressed this directive by involving the potentially affected public in developing transportation projects that fit harmoniously within their communities without sacrificing safety and mobility. This initiative recognizes that effective transportation decision-making depends upon understanding and properly addressing the unique needs of different socioeconomic groups. Title VI is a section of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. All federally-financed programs must ensure that people of all race, color and ethnicities be able to participate fully in the public participation process.

The Franklin Regional Transportation Plan has identified a number of goals in support of Environmental Justice and Title VI. There is a commitment that transit planning and programming within the region are nondiscriminatory and that all segments of the Franklin County population are able to participate fully in regional transportation planning processes and to access transportation

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Date	Type of Meeting	Audience	Location
January 6, 2010	Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization	Representatives of MassDOT Transportation Planning, MassDOT Highway Division, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments Executive Committee, the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA), and the Franklin Regional Planning Board (FRPB), other persons and representatives with an interest in transportation issues.	Greenfield
January 19, 2010	Regional Transportation Plan Public Forum	Attendees included representatives from: FRTA, Community Transit Services, Greening Greenfield, and others interested in transportation issues.	Greenfield
January 26, 2010	Regional Transportation Plan Public Forum	Attendees included representatives from: FRTA, the rail freight industry, Shelburne Council of Aging, and others interested in transportation issues.	Shelburne
February 4, 2010	Greater Franklin County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee	CEDS Committee Members (Each town in Franklin County has a town-appointed representative on the Committee. Also serving on the Committee are appointees of the FRCOG Executive Committee, the Franklin County Selectmen's Association, and North Quabbin Chambers of Commerce, the Franklin County Community Development Corporation (CDC), and the FRPB.	Greenfield
February 11, 2010	Regional Transportation Plan Public Forum	Attendees included representatives from: Ridebuzz.org, FRTA, Montague Catholic Social Ministries, and others interested in transportation issues.	Erving
March 17, 2010	Regional Transportation Plan Public Forum	Attendees included: town administrators, town highway superintendents, MassDOT, FRTA, Franklin Land Trust, Franklin County CDC, Franklin County Resource Network	Greenfield
March 25, 2010	Franklin Regional Planning Board	Attendees included Franklin Regional Planning Board members, local officials, and members of the general public	Greenfield
April 22, 2010	Franklin Regional Planning Board	Attendees included: Franklin Regional Planning Board members, local officials, and members of the general public	Greenfield
April 29, 2010	Franklin County Chamber of Commerce	Attendees included: Chamber Board members, local businesses, and local officials	Greenfield
April 29, 2010	FRCOG Regional Council	Attendees included: Council members that represent all 26 towns in Franklin County	Greenfield
April 29, 2010	Franklin County Selectmen's Association	Attendees included: current and former town officials from Franklin County towns	Greenfield
June 22, 2010	Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization	Representatives of MassDOT Transportation Planning, MassDOT Highway Division, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments Executive Committee, the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA), and the Franklin Regional Planning Board (FRPB), other persons and representatives with an interest in transportation issues.	Greenfield

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facilities and services, including transit facilities and services.

Beginning in 2001, the Franklin Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) has had a specific task for Environmental Justice and Title VI-related activities. The work under this task has focused on the following:

- Analyzing and mapping U.S. Census Bureau data on income and race in order to identify Environmental Justice target areas that have the greatest concentration of minority populations and residents living below the poverty level;
- Reviewing current transit routes and the level of service for the Franklin County region, especially in the identified Environmental Justice target areas, and working with the regional transit agencies to find ways to maintain and improve transportation services in the region, as funding allows;
- Conducting outreach to low-income and minority populations and community organizations to identify unmet transportation needs among these groups and develop strategies for addressing them; and
- Reviewing and strengthening current transportation planning and decision-making processes to increase the representation of low-income and minority residents.

Using 2000 U.S. Census data, FRCOG staff identified 10 Environmental Justice target areas. They are: Greenfield (town center), Greenfield (Leyden Road and Plain Road areas), Greenfield (area south of Main Street), Montague (Millers Falls), Montague (downtown Turners Falls), Orange (towns center), Orange (area west of Route 122 and near the airport), Shelburne Falls (Shelburne side), Sunderland (entire town), and Wendell (entire town).

After identifying the Environmental Justice target areas, staff conducted a review of the current transit services in the region to determine if the Environmental Justice target areas have a higher or lower level of transit service compared to the region as a whole. It was determined that in many aspects, the populations within the Environmental justice target areas are better served by the existing transit system than Franklin County residents as a whole.

However, while the Environmental Justice target areas have some of the best transit access in the region, the level of service is still in need of improvement. For example, there is no evening or weekend fixed-route transit service to any of the target areas, and the Environmental Justice target area that covers the town of Wendell currently has no fixed-route transit service at all.

The Environmental Justice (EJ) target areas have been the focus of the FCTPO's EJ initiatives and the FCTPO has worked to increase representation of these EJ populations in the public participation and transportation planning processes. The primary method that has been used to contact these populations has been through outreach to social service agencies and organizations that serve low-income and/or minority residents within Franklin County.

Since 2001, FRCOG staff has conducted several studies, surveys, and outreach efforts as a means to determine information about EJ populations in the county and their needs. The FRCOG has also worked with the local towns and Councils on Aging to assess and address the transportation needs of elderly residents. As part of public outreach for this update, FRCOG staff made special efforts to ensure that social service agencies, Councils on Aging, and other representatives of the EJ populations were contacted and participated in the update process (see Appendix A for a list of organizations that took part in the update).

Consideration of Environmental and Land Use Issues

During the update to the 2011 Regional Transportation Plan, the FRCOG considered a wide range of issues and incorporated these factors throughout the RTP and its recommendations. These issues included: environmental, land use, historic preservation issues, and local and regional priorities and concerns. For all of the public forums and meetings that the FRCOG held regarding the Plan update, the FRCOG staff sent personal invitations to organizations representing these various interests to ensure that their input was included. Invitees included: regional land conservation trusts, watershed protection groups,

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the Massachusetts Historic Commission, the Franklin County Development Corporation, and others.

In addition, when preparing the RTP the FRCOG considered land use and environmental issues and the consistency between transportation planning and other planning activities, through its dual role as the staff for the Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) and as the Regional Planning Agency (RPA) for the Franklin County Region. As the RPA for the Franklin Region, the FRCOG has statutory responsibility for the coordinated and orderly development of the region, including regional growth planning and transportation planning. The RPA staff overlap with the TPO staff, with most FRCOG transportation staff involved in planning activities beyond transportation. The RPA works with towns, regional organizations, and State agencies on land use, open space, and natural resource planning, and assists towns with zoning revisions and redevelopment projects. For example, the FRCOG has been the lead consultant for Community Development Plans for fourteen of the twenty-six towns in Franklin County and assisted with seven other towns in the county. The FRCOG has also worked on four municipal Master Plans, fourteen open space and recreation plans, the Deerfield River Watershed Open Space Plan, the Franklin County Regional Water Supply Study, watershed assessment plans, scenic byway corridor management plans, regional economic development plans, and the Pioneer Valley Clean Energy Plan, among others. The FRCOG has also assisted a number of towns with zoning revisions to support smart growth development patterns. These activities all influence the FRCOG's transportation planning processes and the FRCOG works to ensure consistency between its transportation planning and other planning activities.

Interagency Consultation

As part of SAFETEA-LU requirements, this RTP was updated in consultation with local and state agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation. In addition, the twenty-six municipalities in Franklin County were consulted at many stages of the update process. Personalized invitations were sent to the following agencies and organizations for the initial public outreach and the

draft RTP was made available for review and comment.

Coordination with Local Agencies

The FRCOG works with many local agencies routinely not only for transportation issues, but also on land use, environmental, and economic development issues. The FRCOG provides technical assistance to the Franklin County towns and works as partners with many local organizations and agencies. This work ranges from performing traffic counts, to identifying and preparing local grant applications, to creating a wide assortment of planning documents (as mentioned in the last section). The local agencies that were consulted in the update of this Plan include:

- All twenty-six municipalities in Franklin County
- Franklin Regional Transit Authority
- Franklin Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority
- Community Transit Services
- Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust
- Franklin Land Trust
- Franklin County Community Development Corporation
- Franklin County Resource Network
- Connecticut River Watershed Council
- Councils on Aging

Coordination with State and Federal Agencies

As part of its routine work, the FRCOG also works with a number of state and federal agencies. This is especially true since the vast majority of Franklin County's transportation (and other) projects are funded by the state and federal government.

The state and federal agencies that were consulted in the update of this RTP include:

- Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
- Massachusetts Historic Commission
- MassDOT, Highway District 1 and 2 and Office of Transportation Planning
- MassDOT Rail Division and MassDOT Transit Division
- Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)
- Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA)

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- Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
- Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)
- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)