

**Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization
Public Participation Plan
DRAFT AMENDMENT
January 20, 2010**

INTRODUCTION

This is a Plan for collecting public input on the Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization's (FCTPO) transportation planning efforts, documents, and projects. The Franklin Region has a long history of involving local residents, business owners, elected officials, and other stakeholders in its transportation planning work. Similarly, it has long been recognized that including a broad group of stakeholders improves both the planning process and the ultimate product, and improving ownership and buy-in from those involved. This document will formalize the process that has been followed successfully since the implementation of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act in 1991, while reflecting recent SAFETEA-LU requirements and restructuring changes in the Franklin Region that took place in 2006.

BACKGROUND

The Franklin Regional Council of Governments (referred to as the FRCOG) serves the towns of the Franklin County Region in the upper Connecticut River Valley in western Massachusetts. The FRCOG integrates regional and local planning, human service advocacy and coordination, and the provision of municipal services, such as cooperative purchasing, to advance the following regional goals:

- Balancing economic development with the protection of natural and cultural resources, and with the rural character and heritage of the region;
- Ensuring the most economical creation and delivery of public services in a rural region comprised of many political subdivisions; and
- Building healthier communities by developing and connecting broad-based coalitions, which raise the level of expectations for community achievement.

The FRCOG advocates on behalf of its member communities at the state and federal level to ensure that funding, programs, and policies are sensitive to and respond to the rural nature, economic strengths, and human and natural resources of the region.

Additionally, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments serves as one of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' thirteen (13) Regional Planning Agencies and provides staff to the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). (An MPO consists of a Committee of Signatories, who together makes decisions about transportation planning goals, projects, priorities, and funding.) In Franklin County, this group is referred to as the Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization (TPO). In its role as staff to the TPO, the FRCOG follows federal transportation planning regulations, including the establishment of a citizen advisory group to participate in transportation planning activities. The FRCOG staff is responsible for coordinating and working with the other TPO members to develop, implement portions of, and routinely update the Regional Transportation Plan, the

Transportation Improvement Program, and the Unified Planning Work Program for Franklin County, as well as performing a wide range of other planning services.

FCTPO MEMBERSHIP

During 2006, the Franklin County TPO was restructured with the goal of increasing the role of the 26 towns in Franklin County on this regional transportation decision-making body. As part of the restructuring process a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was executed. The MOU redefined the TPO's structure and how it will function. The FCTPO membership was expanded from five members to nine members and includes the following representatives:

- the Secretary of MassDOT (to act as the Chair of the FCTPO);
- the Administrator of the MassDOT Highway Division;
- the Chair of the Franklin Regional Council of Governments Executive Committee;
- the Chair of the Franklin Regional Transit Authority;
- the Franklin Regional Council of Governments Regionally Elected Official,
- the Mayor of Greenfield; and
- three Franklin County Sub-Regional Appointments (one from the West County, one from Central County and one from East County sections of Franklin County as defined in the MOU).

The MOU defines that the FCTPO shall have the responsibilities for developing, reviewing and adopting the region's annual transportation Unified Planning Work Program, the Regional Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program and air quality conformity determinations. The MOU further states that the FCTPO shall have the responsibility of meeting all of the provisions of the federal 3C (Continuing, Cooperative, Comprehensive) Transportation Planning Process including: the initiation of studies, evaluation and recommendation of transportation improvements and the programming of funds for transportation projects in the region for which funding is sought for implementation. The MOU also states that the FCTPO shall be the forum for cooperative decision-making by officials of local government, regional planning commission, regional transit authority and state officials representing state transportation agencies.

The MOU defines that the Franklin Regional Planning Board (FRPB) acts as an advisory board to the FRCOG in order to ensure that all decisions are considered within the context of comprehensive regional planning. The mission of the FRPB with regard to transportation planning is: to review all matters of policy affecting the conduct of the region's 3C transportation planning and programming process; to review recommendations of the FCTPO on such regional transportation work activities, plans, studies, project priorities and financial constraints as may be required for the effective operation of the FCTPO; and to provide maximum participation in the transportation planning and programming process by creating a forum and other opportunities to bring together officials of local government, public agencies, transportation providers, interest groups and residents for open dialogue and the exchange of views on current transportation issues. The composition of the FRPB includes a Select Board/Mayor and Planning Board member designee from each town as well as 18 at-large members.

The FRCOG is, by state designation and consistent with applicable federal transportation laws, the primary transportation planning staff for the FCTPO and also serves as the principal source of transportation planning for local and regional transportation projects.

LEGISLATIVE MANDATE

On August 10, 2005, President Bush signed the **Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)**. SAFETEA-LU requires the involvement of the public in transportation planning and investment activities. The purpose of the development of a Public Participation Plan is to ensure that the public is involved early in the transportation planning process by providing complete information, timely public notice, and full opportunity to participate in decision-making. The following Public Participation Plan is intended to provide for the continuing involvement of the public.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

This Public Participation Plan (PPP) provides the opportunity for interested parties to comment on the transportation planning that the FCTPO does for the region. The following are required by SAFETEA-LU:

- Make Regional Transportation Plans (RTP), Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP), Unified Planning Work Programs (UPWP), and other transportation studies available for public review in advance of board meetings where documents will be endorsed.
- The PPP shall provide opportunities for the public to offer commentary, and should be scheduled at convenient and accessible places and times.
- The PPP must use visualization techniques. These techniques may vary, but can include maps, transportation models, and animation.
- Provide the RTP, TIP, UPWP, and other transportation studies in electronic format on the internet. These will be provided on the FRCOG website (www.frcog.org).

Resource Documents

The following is a description of planning documents that will be required to adhere to the PPP.

Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

The RTP is required in the federal SAFETEA-LU law, and is a comprehensive report, updated every four years, that identifies existing conditions, needs & issues, and opportunities for improving Franklin County's transportation infrastructure. The infrastructure includes roadways, bridges, freight transport, public transportation, bike and pedestrian facilities, airports, tourist facilities such as scenic byways, sustainable energy opportunities, and intelligent transportation systems (ITS). The RTP also articulates the goals and objectives for future projects and programs to improve the system, and provides a 25-year fiscally constrained schedule for implementing the recommended improvements.

The draft RTP will be developed in consultation with state and local agencies responsible for all modes of transportation including roads and bridges, public transportation, freight transportation, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities; land use management; environmental justice (EJ); disability serving agencies; natural resources; environmental protection; conservation; and historic preservation. The draft will be made available for public review at least thirty days prior to the FCTPO endorsement. Copies will be made available at the FRCOG Planning office, as well as in an electronic format on the FRCOG website (www.frcog.org). At least one public meeting will be held before the endorsement to solicit public comments and questions, and visual aids such as maps, diagrams, photos, web-based survey techniques and powerpoint presentations will be used, as appropriate, to help convey information about the Regional Transportation Plan and Planning process. Efforts will also be made to attend stakeholder meetings and make presentations. Legal notices will be placed in local newspapers to notify area residents of documents available for public review and press releases will be sent to media outlets.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

This is the short-range transportation programming document covering 4 years that includes a prioritized listing of improvement projects (roads, bridges, bicycle and pedestrian, air quality improvement and transit projects) identified in the RTP that would utilize federal funding to implement. The TIP must be financially constrained and endorsed annually by the FCTPO.

The draft TIP will be developed in consultation with the members of the FCTPO, MassDOT, and the Federal Highway Administration. The draft will be made available for public review at least thirty days prior to the FCTPO endorsement unless extenuating circumstances necessitate a shorter timeframe. In such instances, the FCTPO may vote to confirm extenuating circumstances and shorten the public review time frame to fifteen days. Copies will be made available at the FRCOG Planning office, as well as in an electronic format on the FRCOG website (www.frcog.org). At least one public meeting will be held before the endorsement to solicit public comments and questions, and visual aids such as maps, diagrams, photos, and powerpoint presentations will be used, as appropriate, to help convey information about the Transportation Improvement Program and development process. Legal notices will be placed in local newspapers to notify area residents of documents available for public review, and press releases will be sent to media outlets.

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

The UPWP is a document that describes all of the transportation planning activities expected to be undertaken in the Franklin Region during the year. The UPWP is endorsed annually by the FCTPO, and is one of the federal requirements for a certified transportation planning process that is a prerequisite for the receipt of federal funding for transportation improvements for roads or transit in the region.

The draft UPWP is prepared with input from the members of the FCTPO, MassDOT and the Federal Highway Administration. The draft will be made available for public review at least thirty days prior to the FCTPO. Copies will be made available at the FRCOG Planning office, as well as in an electronic format on the FRCOG website (www.frcog.org). At least one public meeting will be held before the endorsement to

solicit public comments and questions, and visual aids such as maps, diagrams, photos, and powerpoint presentations will used, as appropriate, to help convey information about the Unified Planning Work Program and development process. Legal notices will be placed in local newspapers to notify area residents of documents available for public review, and press releases will be sent to media outlets.

Transportation Planning Studies

These studies are routinely undertaken by the FCTPO to address the goals and objectives stated in the RTP, and to provide required information and potential recommendations for the TIP. Funding for these studies can originate from the UPWP, but can also be provided through other sources, such as other grants.

A draft study will be developed with input from identified stakeholders. The draft will be made available for public review at least thirty days prior to the FCTPO endorsement. Copies will be made available at the FRCOG Planning office, as well as in an electronic format on the FRCOG website (www.frcog.org). At least one public meeting will be held before the endorsement to solicit public comments and questions, and visual aids such as maps, diagrams, photos, and powerpoint presentations will used, as appropriate, to help convey information about the specific transportation planning study and process.

NOTIFICATION

The FCTPO will be informed by the FRCOG Planning Office staff at the beginning of the development of, or amendment to, the Regional Transportation Plan, TIP, UPWP, or transportation planning study, and will have an opportunity to provide comments on the scope and ways to involve the public in the process. At the time of notification, the FCTPO should discuss and approve the scheduling of future public meetings required as part of the public participation process.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Notices of meetings where these plans, programs and studies will be discussed will be made 10 days but not less than 48-hours in advance through the FRCOG Planning office, and posted on the FRCOG's website (www.frcog.org). In addition, legal notices will be placed in local newspapers announcing formal public review and comments periods as identified and required for documents.

The notice of meetings shall also be sent to all interested parties listed in the FCTPO's and the FRPB's mailing lists (contained at the bottom of this document).

ADVERTISEMENT

Advertisements announcing the thirty-day, or an approved shortened public review period as defined above, of draft copies of the RTP, TIP, UPWP, or transportation planning study, and the opportunity to review and comment on the document will be published in *The Recorder* local newspaper in Greenfield and the *Athol Daily News* in Athol.

Public notice of the approved public review period and availability of draft documents shall also be made on the FRCOG's website (www.frcog.org).

REVIEW OF DRAFTS

There will be a thirty-day public review period prior to the endorsement of the final TIP unless extenuating circumstances necessitate a shorter timeframe. In such instances, the FCTPO may vote to confirm extenuating circumstances and shorten the public review timeframe to fifteen days. In some instances, a longer timeframe may be required, such as is the case with the Public Participation Plan that requires 45 days.

The members of FCTPO and FRPB shall receive electronic copies of the draft documents, or notice of the availability of the document for download. Hard copies will also be available upon request on a case by case basis, or by making a standing request to the FCTPO staff (FRCOG) to always receive hard copies due to technology limitations or preference.

Copies of the drafts shall also be readily available to the general public at the FRCOG Planning office or by request via telephone (413-774-1194 ext. 100), email (planning@frcog.org), or fax (413-774-1195).

An electronic version of the draft will be made available on the FRCOG website (www.frcog.org) during the public review period.

At least one public meeting will be held when developing or amending the RTP, TIP, UPWP, or transportation planning study. The number of public meetings will be in proportion to the significance of the item under consideration.

If the public comments or interagency comments result in significant changes to the draft document, then a new thirty-day public review period will be announced. Written comments and a summary of changes to a draft document resulting from these comments will be made part of the final RTP, TIP, UPWP, or major transportation planning study, and presented to the FCTPO.

The FRCOG staff is available to meet with local officials or any other interested citizens to discuss or receive written comments on the RTP, TIP, UPWP or major transportation planning study.

MAILING LIST

This list contains the following interested parties:

- Representatives of Franklin County in Congress and the State Legislature,
- MassDOT, Secretary
- MassDOT, Office of Transportation Planning
- MassDOT Highway Division Administrator
- MassDOT Highway Division Districts 1 and 2 Directors
- TPO Subregional appointed representatives
- Selectboards of 25 Franklin County towns,
- Planning Boards of 26 Franklin County towns,

- Mayor of Greenfield,
- Franklin Regional Transit Authority,
- Regionally elected representative to the Franklin Regional Council of Governments,
- Franklin Regional Housing Authority
- Franklin County Resource Network,
- *The Recorder* newspaper,
- *The Republican* newspaper,
- *The Shelburne Independent* newspaper,
- *The Athol Daily News*, newspaper,
- Franklin Regional Planning Board
- WHMP
- WRSI
- Franklin County Chamber of Commerce
- North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Greenfield Community College Administration
- And various members of the general public.

Anyone can be added to the mailing list upon written request to the FRCOG Planning Office.