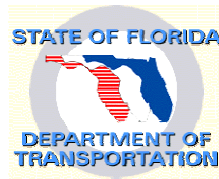


Assessing the Practice of Public Involvement in Florida

Technical Memorandum #1 Literature Review



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INTRODUCTION

This technical memorandum is the first phase of a comprehensive assessment of public involvement practices for the Florida Department of Transportation. The assessment addresses public involvement practices at all phases of transportation decision-making and includes FDOT Central Office, District Offices and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). The project involves the following research objectives:

- Document current public involvement practices in FDOT Central and District Offices and MPOs during all phases of transportation decision-making.
- Identify training needs at the FDOT and MPO level.
- Define best practices in the field of public involvement that can be shared with FDOT and MPO staff throughout the state.
- Develop research recommendations for the future development of public involvement performance measures.

The literature review was conducted to identify related research efforts, as well as Federal and State public involvement requirements in all phases of transportation decision-making and project development. The information will be used to guide the research methodology and focus the research results. The review will also ensure that the study builds upon, rather than duplicates, existing knowledge in this subject area. This technical memorandum details the results of the literature review.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement in transportation decision-making is legally required and supported by a host of federal and state regulations, statutes, policies, technical advisories and Executive Orders dating back to the 1960s. Key requirements are summarized below.

Federal Requirements

The key federal requirements for public involvement in transportation are:

- Regulations promulgated under the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) and other national transportation laws
- Regulations promulgated under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
- FHWA/FTA Interim Policy on Public Involvement
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and related Executive Orders regarding Environmental Justice
- 28 CFR 36 Americans with Disabilities Act
- Federal Environmental Policy Statements of 1990 & 1994

In the late 1960s, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) began the practice of providing opportunities for the public to offer input during the transportation decision-making process. At that time, FDOT public involvement activities primarily occurred during the Project Development and Environment (PD&E) phase of the project development process and then later during the construction phase. Public involvement practices were implemented primarily in response to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and a growing

emphasis in federal and state law to consider the effects of transportation actions on the human environment. In particular, 23 USC 128 established a requirement for public hearings on federal-aid projects during the project development process and for states to consider the economic and social effects of the project, its impact on the environment, and consistency of the project with the goals and objectives of community plans.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the process evolved to include public participation in the development of the State Transportation Plan and in the Annual Work Program process. In 1993, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) jointly issued regulations (23 CFR 450) that guided the development of statewide and metropolitan plans and programs and included significant public participation requirements. Those specific to state transportation agencies are provided below.

§450.212 Public involvement.

- a. Public involvement processes shall be proactive and provide complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and opportunities for early and continuing involvement. The processes shall provide for:
 1. Early and continuing public involvement opportunities throughout the transportation planning and programming process;
 2. Timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, private providers of transportation, other interested parties and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs, and projects;
 3. Reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of the plan and STIP;
 4. Adequate public notice of public involvement activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points, including but not limited to action on the plan and STIP;
 5. A process for demonstrating explicit consideration and response to public input during the planning and program development process;
 6. A process for seeking out and considering the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households which may face challenges accessing employment and other amenities;
 7. Periodic review of the effectiveness of the public involvement process to ensure that the process provides full and open access to all and revision of the process as necessary;
 8. Public involvement activities carried out in a metropolitan area in response to metropolitan planning requirements in §450.322(c) or §450.324(c) may by agreement of the State and the MPO satisfy the requirements of this section.
- b. During initial development and major revisions of the statewide transportation plan required under §450.214, the State shall provide citizens, affected public agencies and jurisdictions, employee representatives of transportation and other affected agencies, private and public providers of transportation, and other interested parties a reasonable

- opportunity to comment on the proposed plan. The proposed plan shall be published, with reasonable notification of its availability, or otherwise made readily available for public review and comment. Likewise, the official statewide transportation plan (see §450.214(d)) shall be published, with reasonable notification of its availability, or otherwise made readily available for public information.
- c. During development and major revision of the statewide transportation improvement program required under §450.216, the Governor shall provide citizens, affected public agencies and jurisdictions, employee representatives of transportation or other affected agencies, private providers of transportation, and other interested parties, a reasonable opportunity for review and comment on the proposed program. The proposed program shall be published, with reasonable notification of its availability, or otherwise made readily available for public review and comment. The approved program (see §450.220(c)) if it differs significantly from the proposed program, shall be published, with reasonable notification of its availability, or otherwise made readily available for public information.
 - d. The time provided for public review and comment for minor revisions to the statewide transportation plan or statewide transportation improvement program will be determined by the State and local officials based on the complexity of the revisions.
 - e. The State shall, as appropriate, provide for public comment on existing and proposed procedures for public involvement throughout the statewide transportation planning and programming process. As a minimum, the State shall publish procedures and allow 45 days for public review and written comment before the procedures and any major revisions to existing procedures are adopted.
 - f. The public involvement processes will be considered by the FHWA and the FTA as they make the planning finding required in §450.220(b) to assure that full and open access is provided to the decision making process.

The Federal Highway Administration Environmental Policy Statements of 1990 and 1994 require the “full involvement of our partners” and “complete integration of environmental concerns” in transportation actions involving federal funding. In particular, it established the following guiding principles for public involvement in transportation:

- Promoting an active role for the public in the development of transportation plans, programs and projects from the early stages of the planning process through detailed project development.
- Promoting the shared obligation of the public and decision makers to define goals and objectives for the State and/or metropolitan transportation system, to identify transportation and related problems, to develop alternatives to address the problems, and to evaluate the alternatives on the basis of collaboratively identified criteria.
- Ensuring that the public is actively involved in the development of public involvement procedures themselves in ways that go beyond commenting on drafts.
- Strongly encouraging the State departments of transportation, metropolitan planning organizations, and transportation providers to aggressively seek to identify and involve the affected and interested public, including those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems and facilities.

- Strongly encouraging planning and implementing agencies to use combinations of different public involvement techniques designed to meet the diverse needs of the general public.
- Sponsoring outreach, training, and technical assistance and providing information for Federal, State, regional, and local transportation agencies on effective public involvement procedures.
- Ensuring that statewide and metropolitan planning work programs provide for effective public involvement.
- Carefully evaluating public involvement processes and procedures to assess their success at meeting the performance requirements specified in the appropriate regulations during our joint certification reviews, metropolitan planning and conformity findings, State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) approvals and project oversight.

A number of other federal rules and regulations required public access to the transportation decision-making process, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provides that, "No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."

Executive Order 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-income Populations*, calls for strategies to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse health and environmental impacts of federal actions on low-income and minority populations. The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) subsequently issued USDOT Order 5610.2 (1997) establishing an environmental justice strategy for the NEPA process, Title VI, and other applicable statutes. The strategy promotes public involvement efforts targeted for minority and low-income groups, to facilitate access to general information and input into transportation and project decisions. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued FHWA Order 6640.23 on December 2, 1998 establishing policies and procedures for the FHWA to use in complying with the strategies established by Executive Order 12898 and USDOT Order 5610.2.

State Public Involvement Requirements

Various State statutes require the opportunity for public comment during transportation planning, project development, and related decision-making processes. Key among these are:

- Regulations promulgated under Florida transportation law (339.135, FS; 339.155, F.S., 339.175, F.S.; 341.051(2), F.S.; 335.02(1), F.S.)
- The Florida Sunshine Law (286.011, F.S.)
- Procedures and Manuals for specific program activities (e.g. Access Management, Scenic Highways, Transportation Design for Livable Communities, Cultural Resources, Roadway Design)

Florida transportation law specifically requires opportunities for public comment during the development of the Florida Transportation Plan and to hold public hearings during development of major transportation improvements and opportunities for hearings on project design (339.155, F.S.). Section 339.135 provides for public hearings and information exchange with MPOs prior

to finalizing district work programs. Section 335.02 requires FDOT to conduct public hearings in counties where it proposes to designate a facility as part of the State Highway System or to relocate an existing state highway.

Efficient Transportation Decision Making

FDOT recently established an Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) initiative in response to the streamlining provisions of TEA-21 (1999). ETDM places increased emphasis on public involvement through each phase of the transportation decision-making process, beginning early in the planning process. The initiative builds upon the following federal streamlining objectives:

- Effective/timely decision making without compromising environmental quality
- Integrating review and permitting processes
- Early NEPA reviews and approvals
- Full and early participation
- Meaningful dispute resolution

Participating transportation planning and regulatory agencies involved in the new process also requested the following:

- Early and continuous agency involvement
- Good data upon which to base decisions
- Feedback about how agency participation resulted in better transportation decisions

Each FDOT District now has an “Environmental Technical Advisory Team” (ETAT) comprised of representatives from agencies with statutory responsibility for issuing permits or consultations under NEPA. The ETAT is responsible for interacting with FDOT and MPOs throughout the ETDM Process. In addition, each District and MPO has an ETDM Coordinator, who coordinates activities within the District and is responsible for interacting with agency ETAT representatives, and a Community Liaison Coordinator (CLCs), who is responsible for interacting with the affected communities and maintaining communication about project plans.

The new process calls for these agencies and the public to be involved in an early planning screen of potentially significant environmental and community impacts in conjunction with the development of cost feasible plans. The goal is to identify key agency and community issues during early phases of project planning and determine appropriate actions. The following activities occur during the Planning Screen:

ETAT

- Review purpose and need
- Review direct impacts
- Recommend avoidance/minimization
- Suggest mitigation strategies
- Provide Secondary and Cumulative Effects commentary
- Assess degree of effect
- Coordinate to reduce conflicts

Community Outreach

- Inventory community characteristics
- Conduct public outreach
- Conduct public meetings on LRTP
- Document community concerns
- Identify socio-cultural effects
- Make Summary Report available

Following the Planning Screen is a “Programming Screen,” which occurs before projects are considered for the FDOT Work Program and scope for the project. During this phase, agencies provide specific input of technical issues to be addressed during project development and the public provides further input on community issues and reactions to the project. The emphasis is on mutual understanding of the project concept and basis for design.

Strategic Intermodal System

In 2003, the Florida Department of Transportation was directed by the legislature to establish a Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) composed of transportation facilities and services of statewide and interregional significance. FDOT subsequently developed a Strategic Intermodal System Plan through an extensive public involvement and outreach process. In *Policy Guidance for Implementing the SIS Strategic Plan - Partner and Public Involvement*, (Florida Department of Transportation, DRAFT, 10-17-04), FDOT called for continuing this partnership. The *Policy* established a range of strategies and directions for future public involvement on the SIS aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- Strengthen key partnerships formed during SIS development and integrate these relationships with implementation of the SIS Strategic Plan, and
- Continue to sustain and grow the broader constituency for the SIS that was formed during SIS development so that it remains strong and enduring.

The FDOT central office is responsible for coordinating key policy decisions on the SIS with key statewide partners while FDOT Districts are responsible for building and strengthening partnerships with key regional and local partners. At the technical level, the Implementation Guidance calls for modal and transportation planning partners to be involved in issues such as identification of needs, prioritization of projects and formation of partnerships to fund and implement projects. These activities are to be coordinated primarily through the FDOT’s statewide modal planning offices, but also addressed through the agency’s programming and financial development functions.

Specifically, the Central Office is responsible for:

- Proactively building and maintaining relationships with key partners and ensure that information is shared appropriately;
- Identifying and maintaining a contact list of key statewide partners, including the Florida Transportation Commission, SITAC, MPOAC, DCA, DEP, Enterprise Florida and others;

- Regularly contacting and sharing information with key statewide partners;
- Seeking participation of key partners in appropriate meetings and activities;
- Assigning liaisons, as needed, to attend meetings of key partners to share and obtain information;
- Actively promoting knowledge of the SIS and the important function of partnerships to central office FDOT staff; and
- Updating and providing information-sharing tools to the Districts.

Each FDOT district and the Turnpike Enterprise are responsible for:

- Designating a District SIS Coordinator to proactively build and maintain relationships with key regional and local partners and ensure that information is shared appropriately;
- Identifying and maintaining a contact list of key regional and local partners, including modal partners, MPOs, RPCs, municipal and county governments, regional coalitions, chambers of commerce, economic development organization and others;
- Regularly contacting and sharing information with key regional and local partners;
- Seeking participation of key partners in appropriate meetings and activities;
- Assigning liaisons, as needed, to attend meetings of key partners to share and obtain information; and
- Actively promoting knowledge of the SIS and the important function of partnerships to District FDOT staff.

For each phase of SIS development, a Public and Partner Involvement Plan was developed to guide activities. In addition, an evaluation report was prepared at the conclusion of each phase to document execution and outcomes of the plans and to suggest future improvements. As a result of those assessments, the following emerged as best practice strategies for public involvement in the SIS:

- Emphasis on an open and inclusive process,
- Partner involvement as a continuous “24/7” process,
- Structured process combined with extensive one-on-one coordination with key partners,
- Shared central office and District responsibilities,
- A consistent SIS message,
- Innovative and transparent information-sharing and mapping tools,
- Enhanced coordination with specific partners (FTC, MPOAC, SITAC, economic development organizations, other state agencies, and rural partners),
- Targeted outreach to business and industry interests, and
- Consensus building around the SIS Strategic Plan.

Metropolitan Planning Requirements

Metropolitan planning organizations in Florida are also subject to public involvement requirements in TEA-21 and in state transportation law. Key requirements are set forth in:

- 23 USC 134(i)(5)(D), which requires public involvement in the certification review of MPOs in transportation management areas, which determines whether the planning process is being carried out in accordance with federal law;

- 23 CFR 450.316(b), which establishes that the metropolitan transportation planning process must include a proactive public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) and meets the following requirements and criteria.
 - Require a minimum public comment period of 45 days before the public involvement process is initially adopted or revised;
 - Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, private providers of transportation, other interested parties and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs and projects (including but not limited to central city and other local jurisdiction concerns);
 - Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of plans and TIPs and open public meetings where matters related to the Federal-aid highway and transit programs are being considered;
 - Require adequate public notice of public involvement activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points, including, but not limited to, approval of plans and TIPs (in nonattainment areas, classified as serious and above, the comment period shall be at least 30 days for the plan, TIP and major amendment(s));
 - Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received during the planning and program development processes;
 - Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to low-income and minority households;
 - When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft transportation plan or TIP (including the financial plan) as a result of the public involvement process or the interagency consultation process required under the U.S. EPA's conformity regulations, a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments shall be made part of the final plan and TIP;
 - If the final transportation plan or TIP differs significantly from the one which was made available for public comment by the MPO and raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen from the public involvement efforts, an additional opportunity for public comment on the revised plan or TIP shall be made available;
 - Public involvement processes shall be periodically reviewed by the MPO in terms of their effectiveness in assuring that the process provides full and open access to all;
 - These procedures will be reviewed by the FHWA and the FTA during certification reviews for TMAs, and as otherwise necessary for all MPOs, to assure that full and open access is provided to MPO decisionmaking processes;

- Metropolitan public involvement processes shall be coordinated with statewide public involvement processes wherever possible to enhance public consideration of the issues, plans, and programs and reduce redundancies and costs;
 - Be consistent with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Title VI assurance executed by each State under 23 U.S.C. 324 and 29 U.S.C. 794, which ensure that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, sex, national origin, or physical handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program receiving Federal assistance from the United States Department of Transportation;
 - Identify actions necessary to comply with the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 (Pub. L. 101-336, 104 Stat. 327, as amended) and U.S. DOT regulations "Transportation for Individuals With Disabilities" (49 CFR parts 27, 37, and 38);
 - Provide for the involvement of traffic, ridesharing, parking, transportation safety and enforcement agencies; commuter rail operators; airport and port authorities; toll authorities; appropriate private transportation providers, and where appropriate city officials; and
 - Provide for the involvement of local, State, and Federal environment resource and permit agencies as appropriate.
- 450.318(b), which establishes the following requirement for Major Investment Studies:
 - When any of the implementing agencies or the MPO wish to initiate a major investment study, a meeting will be convened to determine the extent of the analyses and agency roles in a cooperative process which involves the MPO, the State department of transportation, public transit operators, environmental, resource and permit agencies, local officials, the FHWA and the FTA and where appropriate community development agencies, major governmental housing bodies, and such other related agencies as may be impacted by the proposed scope of analysis. A reasonable opportunity, consistent with §450.316(b)(1), shall be provided for citizens and interested parties including affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, and private providers of transportation to participate in the cooperative process. This cooperative process shall establish the range of alternatives to be studied, such as alternative modes and technologies (including intelligent vehicle and highway systems), general alignment, number of lanes, the degree of demand management, and operating characteristics.
 - 450.322(c) which establishes the following requirements for Metropolitan Transportation Plans.
 - There must be adequate opportunity for public official (including elected officials) and citizen involvement in the development of the transportation plan before it is approved by the MPO, in accordance with the requirements of §450.316(b)(1). Such procedures shall include opportunities for interested parties (including citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, and private providers of transportation) to be involved in the early stages of the plan development/update process. The procedures shall include

publication of the proposed plan or other methods to make it readily available for public review and comment and, in nonattainment TMAs, an opportunity for at least one formal public meeting annually to review planning assumptions and the plan development process with interested parties and the general public. The procedures also shall include publication of the approved plan or other methods to make it readily available for information purposes.

- 450.324(c) which establishes the following requirements during the development of Metropolitan TIPs.
 - There must be reasonable opportunity for public comment in accordance with the requirements of §450.316(b)(1) and, in nonattainment TMAs, an opportunity for at least one formal public meeting during the TIP development process. This public meeting may be combined with the public meeting required under §450.322(c). The proposed TIP shall be published or otherwise made readily available for review and comment. Similarly, the approved TIP shall be published or otherwise made readily available for information purposes.

In addition, Florida transportation law requires each MPO to appoint a citizens' advisory committee (CAC) to provide input into the transportation planning process. The committee is to represent a cross-section of the community (including minorities, elderly and disabled). In areas with no MPO, the Board of County Commissioners developed County priorities for transportation projects.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There are numerous resources and publications on the practice of public involvement. The key resources are identified in the bibliography. This review of the literature focused on research related to the assessment of public involvement in transportation and ongoing issues in the state of the practice. The objective was to explore the methods and findings of others, particularly as they relate to state transportation agencies and metropolitan planning organizations, as well as to identify potential performance measures. Highlights of those studies and publications determined to be most relevant to the project are summarized below.

State of the Practice

- **O'Connor, Rita, Marcy Schwartz, Joy Schaad, and David Boyd. *State of the Practice: White Paper on Public Involvement*. Transportation Research Board, Committee on Public Involvement (A1D04), not dated.**

In a review of the state of the practice, the TRB Committee on Public Involvement identified the following key benefits of effective public involvement:

- Public ownership of policies/sustainable and supportable decisions
- Decisions that reflect community values
- Efficient implementation of transportation decisions
- Enhanced agency credibility

Authors state that the objectives of good public involvement practice revolve around outcomes, not process. These outcomes relate to the benefits noted above and include supporting issues such as the extent the process builds consensus, informs citizens about transportation issues, and clearly incorporates citizen input. The white paper identifies several guiding principles of successful public involvement. These are:

1. Distinguish public relations and public information from public involvement.
2. Public involvement programs should be inclusive and involve as many decision-makers and interested stakeholders as possible and emphasize partnering on defining the problems and finding solutions.
3. Communication with participants should be respectful and practitioners need to listen and give opinions of others serious consideration.
4. Public involvement activities should begin early and be proactive and ongoing throughout the plan or project development.
5. The decision process should be defined, structured and transparent.
6. Agencies should provide appropriate leadership to public outreach efforts.

Continuing challenges to effective public involvement include institutional barriers, reaching a broader audience with improved communication tools, dealing with complexity, dealing effectively with timing issues, developing standards and tools for assessing public involvement efforts, and developing standards and training programs for the public involvement professional. The Committee is working to define performance measures for public involvement, building on those in the FTA/FHWA Interim Policy and Guidance on Public Involvement, and notes that such measures should relate to how well the expectations of participants were met, costs in relation to benefits, and effects on decision-making.

- ***Assessing the Effectiveness of Project-Based Public Involvement Processes: A Self-Assessment Tool for Practitioners.* Transportation Research Board, Committee on Public Involvement on Transportation (A1D04), January 1999.**

The TRB Committee on Public Involvement developed a self assessment tool to assist practitioners in evaluating their public involvement processes. The tool uses indicators and a score card format to provide a structured approach for evaluating project-based public involvement processes. It builds upon the concepts in D. Lach and P. Hixon, "Developing Indicators to Measure Values and Costs of Public Involvement Activities," *Interact*, Vol 2, No 1, 1996.

Fourteen indicators are used to measure public acceptability, accessibility, good decision-making, education and learning, time commitments, trust, and indirect costs of involvement. The first nine of these measures address values and outcomes, and the remaining measures address costs. The indicators are evaluated on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least effective and 5 the most effective. The results are translated onto score pages, which are summarized on a scorecard that is similar to a scattergram.

- **Public Participation and Accountability Subcommittee of the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council. *The Model Plan for Public Participation*, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Washington D.C., November 1996.**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed a model public involvement plan in 1996 that provides guidance on critical elements of public involvement plans, and establishes core values and guiding principles for the practice of public participation (below). It concludes with a checklist of considerations for effective involvement of low-income and minority populations.

Core Values and Guiding Principles for the Practice of Public Participation

Items 1-7 were adopted from *Interact: The Journal of Public Participation*, Volume 2, Number 1, Spring 1996. Items 8-14 are The Guiding Principles for Public Participation developed by the NEJAC's Public Participation/Accountability Workgroup to ensure the early involvement of the public.

- *1. People should have a say in decisions about actions which affect their lives.
 - *2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
 - *3. The public participation process communicates the interests and meets the process needs of all participants.
 - *4. The public participation process seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected.
 - *5. The public participation process involves participants in defining how they participate.
 - *6. The public participation process communicates to participants how their input was, or was not, utilized.
 - *7. The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
 - 8. Involve the public in decisions about actions which affect their lives.
 - 9. Maintain honesty and integrity throughout the process.
 - 10. Encourage early and active community participation.
 - 11. Recognize community knowledge.
 - 12. Use cross-cultural methods of communication.
 - 13. Institutionalize meaningful public participation by acknowledging and formalizing the process.
 - 14. Create mechanisms and measurements to ensure the effectiveness of public participation.
- **Szyliowicz, Joseph S. “Measuring the Effectiveness of Public Involvement Approaches,” *TR News 220*, Transportation Research Board, Washington DC, May-June 2002.**

Szyliowicz (2002) notes that few have attempted to measure the effectiveness of public involvement efforts in transportation. Any such evaluation requires a common understanding of public involvement, which he characterizes as “a partnership between the public and policy makers”. In his view, such a partnership is rarely achieved. It would require that planners, citizens, and officials each understand their responsibilities in the participatory process, which he summarizes as follows:

1. Planners – developing and implementing the necessary studies,
2. Citizens – identifying the goals and objective, defining the problem with the aid of the transportation agency’s staff, and developing and evaluating alternatives, and

3. Officials – decision-making, implementing, monitoring, providing feedback, and determining goals and objectives.

Szyliowicz identifies lack of organizational commitment to public involvement as an ongoing barrier. “An appropriate organizational culture and resources are necessary for any approach to public involvement to be effective and for any evaluation to be useful.” He notes that in the absence of such commitment, the decision-making process can readily be manipulated to limit participation.

For evaluating public involvement efforts, he suggests first establishing a framework that categorizes various activities in the planning process. Such a framework might be as follows:

1. Identify public involvement practices,
2. Develop criteria to evaluate the practices,
3. Develop a typology of transportation policies and project types and appropriate (public involvement) mechanisms,
4. Analyze the case material to ascertain relationships between policy and project types and appropriate mechanisms, and
5. Undertake additional research to fill the gaps.

Szyliowicz acknowledges the difficulty of establishing such a framework given the scarcity of past research on the subject. Rather, most evaluations represent conclusions of sponsors or their consultants, or they focus on the degree of success achieved by the public process in a given context. He concludes that evaluations of public involvement should “identify the most effective ways of minimizing conflict, enhancing the quality of transportation decisions, and restoring the public’s trust in government institutions.”

- **Bierle, T.C. *Using Social Goals to Evaluate Public Participation in Environmental Decisions*. Policy Studies Review, Vol. 16, No. 3-4, pp. 75-103, 1999.**

Bierle (1999) calls for using social goals to evaluate public participation in environmental decisions through a framework that links social goals to public participation mechanisms. The framework categorizes activities by the direction of information flow (agency or public), stakeholder interactions (e.g. citizen committees), types of representation, and the role afforded to the public. It looks at the extent each mechanism achieves certain social goals.

Bierle attributes an atmosphere of conflict and mistrust in public decision-making to a history of “decide, announce, defend” approaches to government decision-making. He notes that public participation must integrate other considerations more effectively, such as scientific evaluations, the regulatory context, and present conditions. Changing conditions and public priorities, many of which are complex and require long-term action from a variety of agencies and stakeholders, make the integration effort essential. He adds that, “public opposition is a symptom of the public’s legitimate mistrust of the willingness or ability of government and industry to manage risks appropriately.”

Bierle’s proposed framework focuses on evaluating participatory mechanisms used by government to involve the public in administrative decision-making on environmental issues. Despite its focus on the environment, the approach is also relevant to transportation decision-

making. The guiding objectives of the evaluation are to: a) identify strengths and weaknesses of different participatory mechanisms, b) to be objective and not take the perspective of any one party, and c) to measure tangible outcomes to the extent feasible.

Bierle criticizes the common approach of focusing primarily on process in an evaluation as it fails to evaluate outcomes or to compare the relative merits of different processes for different purposes. The other common evaluation approach, which is “interest-oriented,” cannot be regarded as objective because it takes the perspective of the various interests to a decision. He concludes that to meet each of the three guiding objectives for evaluation requires an approach that identifies “the problems public participation efforts are meant to help remedy and developing a set of goals that these programs are intended to achieve.”

For environmental decisions, he identifies several “systemic ailments” which public participation is intended to help cure, and from these suggests five social goals for an evaluative framework. A sixth goal, cost-effectiveness, is added to address the overriding goal of accomplishing the first five in the most efficient or least resource-intensive manner. The goals are as follows:

- educating the public
- incorporating public values, assumptions, and preferences into decision-making
- increasing the substantive quality of decisions
- fostering trust in institutions
- reducing conflict
- making decisions cost-effectively

Next, he considered the variety of mechanisms of public participation and how each mechanism relates to achieving each goal. To do so, he stratified the mechanisms as follows:

1. The direction of information flow (to or from agency or public),
2. The degree of interaction among potentially opposing interests,
3. The type of representation (e.g. citizens represent themselves, advisory committee, public interest group, etc), and
4. The decision-making role of the public (e.g. none, advisory, ratifying).

Bierle concludes that further research is needed to verify his hypotheses regarding the effectiveness of various public involvement mechanisms in achieving social goals. Such research might address how the various procedural factors affect the desired outcome, whether hypothesized relationships between goals and mechanisms are sound, and how the framework might apply to other decision-making contexts.

State DOT Public Involvement Assessments

This section begins with an overview of an evaluation by FDOT of their public involvement training needs in the 1990s. Four studies involved detailed assessments of public involvement by state transportation agencies, in Virginia Texas, Alaska and Minnesota. A third study involved an evaluation of FDOT public involvement practices for median projects and median opening decisions. These are reviewed below.

- **Florida DOT Case Study on Public Involvement, FHWA/FTA Transportation Planning Capacity Building Program, Process Evaluation. Not dated.**

This short summary reviews the experiences of the Florida Department of Transportation with its statewide public involvement effort for the development of the 2020 Florida Transportation Plan (FTP). Following enactment of more extensive public participation requirements in ISTEA, FDOT recognized the need to strengthen its public involvement program and more actively engage the public in transportation decision-making. Therefore, an extensive, statewide effort was launched for involving the public and key stakeholder groups in developing the plan.

During this extensive outreach process, it became apparent that central office and district staffs required further training on how to conduct effective public outreach activities. A statewide Design Team was convened in 1997 to oversee the work of a consultant and help in identifying needs and developing materials to guide future public involvement initiatives. The Design Team, comprised of senior level district and central office staff representing key disciplines, was tasked with developing a proactive public involvement plan for FDOT. As part of this effort, the Team developed FDOT's first formal public involvement policy calling for the integration of public involvement in all functional areas of the Department.

The Team also oversaw the development of a comprehensive public involvement training course and Public Involvement Toolkit for staff on how to develop, implement and assess the effectiveness of its public outreach activities. Prior to developing the toolkit, training needs were assessed through the following questions to Design Team members:

1. What public involvement activities or practices are required now?
2. What public involvement activities are planned for next year?
3. What public involvement or information materials are currently being distributed? (Design Team Members were asked to provide samples for discussion)
4. Who conducts public involvement activities and outreach efforts?
5. What public involvement manuals or guidelines are currently followed?
6. What public involvement techniques are currently in use?
7. Who is in charge of public involvement activities?
8. Describe the best examples of successful public involvement activities, techniques used, type of project or plan and who designed and implemented them.

Training was delivered to project managers and staff and a train-the-trainer manual was produced to aid public involvement coordinators. Participants were queried as to their training needs, as well as current activities and best practices. Each module of the Toolkit includes questions for assessing the effectiveness of specific activities. Specifically, four focus areas are identified for evaluating public involvement actions:

1. Identification of the appropriate stakeholders (effectiveness in reaching the right people),
2. Communication with stakeholders (effectiveness of conveying project information),
3. Ways to engage the public and solicit meaningful feedback, (gauging the effectiveness of public meetings), and

4. Processing of public comment (whether and how public input was incorporated into project decision-making).

[NOTE: *FDOT has since initiated its Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) program, described above under regulations, with corresponding points of interaction with the public. This initiative incorporates socio-cultural effects assessment.*]

- **Gilliland, C.W. *An Assessment of Public Involvement Strategies*. Texas Transportation Institute, College Station, TX, November 2000.**

The Texas Transportation Institute conducted an exploratory study of public involvement practices in the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and national best practices in the late 1990s. The primary objective of the study was to identify best practices and tools that:

- Respond to the public desire for increased participation,
- Meet federal and state regulatory requirements, and
- Provide planners and engineers “with information to be able to complete designs and execute construction projects that results in functional and appropriate facilities for the community.”

The study begins with an assessment of official points of interaction with the public for TxDOT and then reviews examples of TxDOT public involvement activities. It proceeds to compare the more traditional TxDOT public hearing format with that of Georgia and other states that have implemented “open house” hearing formats and recommends similar approaches for TxDOT. It also reviews TxDOT training programs and manuals for public involvement and recommends enhancements. It concludes with suggestions on use of the internet and other technologies for public involvement.

- **O’Leary, Kyte, Arnold and Perfater. *An Assessment of the Virginia Department of Transportation Public Involvement Practices and the Development of a Public Involvement Toolkit*. Prepared for The Virginia Transportation Research Council. 2003.**

This study involved development of a public involvement toolkit for the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), as well as an assessment of VDOT public involvement practices. The assessment was conducted through:

1. Written “self evaluation” surveys of VDOT staff involved in public outreach.
2. The survey was administered to 194 staff in 9 functional areas, as well as to others suggested by the project task group. It was e-mailed as a pdf file and respondents could mail or FAX their responses. Respondents were invited to share the survey with others in their office. 139 responses were received.
3. Focus group discussions and interviews with VDOT technical and public affairs staff
4. These discussions were held with representatives of four technical divisions of VDOT and aimed to identify the responsibilities of the proposed new Outreach Section of the Office of Public Affairs. Results were content analyzed for similar and dissimilar themes.
5. Surveys of citizens attending VDOT project meetings and hearings.

6. A survey of 13 questions was mailed to samples of citizens who had attended several VDOT public hearings to obtain their views of the effectiveness of involvement and communication methods and to solicit suggestions. Attendance lists from hearings surrounding three major VDOT highway projects were the source of citizen samples.
7. Surveys of citizens attending VDOT's financial planning and programming meetings.
8. A two-page survey was mailed to citizens attending these meetings across 9 jurisdictions where the meetings were held.
9. Written surveys of MPO staff.
10. A survey similar to the VDOT self-evaluation survey was sent to staff of each of the nine MPOs.
11. Assessments of VDOT's public outreach by the Governor's Commission on Transportation Policy with assistance of a consultant.

An audit was conducted by VDOT's Office of Public Affairs of members of the Commonwealth Transportation Board, business leaders, legislators, local officials, and citizens. The purpose was to assess VDOT's public outreach and communication approaches. This was in response to findings of the Governor's Commission on Transportation Policy.

The study results converge on several points, including that both citizens and VDOT felt that the planning and project development processes are not well understood by the public. Both also felt that citizens need more feedback from VDOT on how their input is used. VDOT staff also identified a greater need for improved internal coordination of project communications with the public from the earliest planning stages to construction.

• **Williams, K. "Public Involvement in Median Projects," *Proceedings of the National Urban Street Symposium, Dallas, TX, June 28-30, 1999.***

In May of 1994, the Center for Urban Transportation Research conducted an evaluation of public involvement experiences of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) in carrying out its statewide median program. The study was initiated by the FDOT Systems Planning Office due to concerns regarding lack of consistency in access management decisions across the Districts, public opposition to median projects, and the need for more effective methods of public involvement. In response to these issues, the FDOT Systems Planning Office established a statewide median task team and initiated a research effort to assess current practices of FDOT District Offices related to median decisions and public involvement.

In addition to technical issues, the study evaluated public involvement practices related to median projects and citizen requests for median openings. A representative sample of District offices was selected for review based upon their experience in median opening decisions. Each office was provided a set of general questions related to technical, administrative, and public involvement considerations in median decisions. The research team then met with representatives in the Districts to discuss their experiences in more detail.

It was discovered that Districts varied widely on the level of public involvement provided for median projects. Some were proactive in addressing public concerns. Others relied primarily on public hearings or engaged in public involvement activities only after a project or median

opening decision had become particularly controversial. At that point, project managers were often faced with an irate public and some median projects suffered as a result.

It was also discovered that the decision making process for medians was not in sync with the typical public involvement process for a project. Although the project development and environmental (PD&E) public hearing is required for all new projects and road widenings (other than intersection widenings), median changes were not always addressed in detail during this hearing. In addition, some median changes were interpreted as a programmatic Categorical Exclusions (CE)—a category reserved for projects with minimal impacts, therefore requiring no public involvement. As a result, median changes occurred during various phases of project development without adequate public involvement or follow up—particularly during the design phase of production.

In summary, specific issues were:

- Project development (PD&E) involved the conceptual design hearing, and design was not usually addressed in detail.
- Years could lapse between the project public hearing and production and affected parties often changed, yet not every District provided for follow up with the public during design.
- Public hearings were often contentious and did not provide a constructive forum for addressing property owner concerns.
- Public involvement during design was required only for major design changes and was not automatic with median changes.
- Inconsistencies in applying median opening standards or overly strict interpretation of standards had reduced agency credibility in some cases and there was a need for clear guidelines regarding the appropriate level of flexibility.
- In some areas inadequate local government support for median projects and access management increased the difficulty of working with the public on these issues.

Although all Districts reported that median projects generated public controversy, some Districts had been more proactive in addressing these issues than others. Case studies were conducted of these Districts to identify public involvement practices that could be readily adapted by other Districts. This research found that *FDOT Districts with a proactive approach to public involvement in median design reported greater success in achieving access management objectives and fewer appeals to management or requests for administrative hearings on access issues, than Districts with a more reactive approach.* Each District attributed their success in implementing median projects and managing political appeals to their fair and open process for responding to public concerns. This included early public involvement in design decisions, as well as an open house meeting format to diffuse conflict and promote a more personal atmosphere.

In light of these findings, the study set forth the following overarching conclusions:

- Median decisions are controversial and should always include some level of public involvement.
- Public involvement related to median decisions should begin in planning and project development and occur again early in the design phase of production.

- Public hearings should not be the sole forum for public involvement in median decisions.

Drawing from these research findings, the FDOT median task team discussed various alternatives for improving current practices related to median opening decisions and public involvement for median projects. From these discussions, a new procedure was developed to improve consistency of median opening decisions and to promote more effective public involvement. The new procedure established a committee process and specific criteria for review of requests for deviation from median opening standards. It also called for initiating public involvement on median design during PD&E and carrying this through into production, with involvement to occur again by at least the 30% design phase.

A tiered public involvement program was recommended, with more extensive public involvement for complex or controversial projects. An open house meeting format was suggested for this purpose, as well as one-on-one briefings with elected officials, and meetings with civic associations and others as warranted. The need for clear graphics, adequate traffic engineering analysis prior to the public meeting, involvement of all those affected (including lease holders of businesses and neighbors or users of the corridor), and internal coordination were also emphasized.

In 1997, the procedure was supplemented with a Departmental Directive on Community Awareness Plans (CAP). The CAP Directive called for a documented public involvement strategy for access management, including median and access decisions, in planning, project development, design, right-of-way, and construction. Selected highlights of the directive include the following:

- A multidisciplinary team to follow the project from through construction comprised of representatives from environmental management, access management, design, right-of-way, legal, and construction.
 - Site visits in project scoping to identify access problems and impacts, and a full analysis of potential impacts.
 - Documentation of comments and results of public meetings.
 - Establishment of a single contact where feasible to minimize public confusion
 - Early public involvement and no last minute changes in design or ROW without public input.
 - Community informational meeting in phase two of project design.
 - Emphasis on importance of access and maintenance of traffic plans during construction.
- **“Alaska: Evaluation through Public Engagement,” Case Study, *FHWA/FTA Transportation Planning Capacity Building Process Evaluation*. (undated) <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/akpicase.htm>**

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT) began in 1996 to redefine the agency's relationship to the public. Through self-assessment, the ADOT determined that its communication was too oriented to public relations, resulting in a one-way flow of information to the public. They saw the requirement for proactive outreach to the

public in ISTEA as an opportunity to create a two-way communication process and better define the role of the public in agency decision-making.

The first step of the self-assessment was to ask the public how they wanted to be involved. This was accomplished through distribution of a brochure with a mail back post card and was followed by a simple five-question survey in a newsletter mailed to over 2000 Alaskans in the summer of 1996. Another technique was the creation of a large advisory committee, the Public Review Group (PRG). Membership was offered to anyone interested in participating in the PIP process, and subsequent planning and programming efforts. The PRG membership grew to over 500 individuals by the time the PIP was adopted. All public feedback from the PRG and surveys was posted on the ADOT web site.

The analysis of input from these activities formed the basis of a draft public involvement plan (PIP), which was widely distributed. Procedures and techniques were tailored in response to the comments received. The draft PIP proposed five objectives for involvement in planning activities:

1. Promote an early role for the public,
2. Engage the public in developing the PIP,
3. Identify and involve those traditionally underserved,
4. Use a combination of involvement techniques to meet the diverse needs of the public, and
5. Provide explicit consideration and response to public input.

Lessons learned through the self-assessment included that public input is a key tool for evaluating public involvement, the public will help improve ADOT processes if they think the agency is responsive, and people want to know what other people think. In response to the input received to date, the Design and Engineering Services Division of ADOT has started posting more project information on the Department web site. ADOT has also made a commitment to training staff in public involvement, including project engineers.

- **Minnesota DOT Case Study, FHWA/FTA Transportation Planning Capacity Building Program, Process Evaluation. Not dated**
<http://www.planning.dot.gov/Documents/Rural/MNDOT.htm>

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) launched a study in 1995 to examine ways to enhance the involvement of those traditionally under represented in the transportation decision-making process. The study, called the Non-Traditional Transportation Stakeholder Dialogue Project, was aimed at helping these groups better understand their ability to influence transportation decision-making. MnDOT initiated a series of “dialogue meetings” on public involvement with representatives from formally recognized district councils in St. Paul, community councils in Minneapolis, community-based institutions, and neighborhood groups throughout the metropolitan area. One hundred and forty-one (141) people participated in these meetings.

New ideas for outreach and communication included printing meeting notices in languages appropriate to the target audience, using brochures instead of reports to communicate

summary information, use of visual preference surveys to test alternatives, and providing child care and meals to encourage meeting attendance. These and other suggested methods are documented in a handbook for MnDOT Planning and Project Development entitled *Methods and Approaches to Enhance Involvement in Non-Traditional Transportation Stakeholder Communities and Neighborhoods*.

MnDOT also launched a second initiative to solicit advice on how the public would like to be involved in the transportation decision-making process - information used in the development of the public involvement plan (PIP). A Public Involvement Task Force was established in 1997 composed of MnDOT Planning and Project Development staff, and charged with developing a proactive and internally coordinated public involvement plan. As part of this effort, MnDOT undertook an internal and external evaluation of its public involvement activities.

Internally, employees were queried on prior experiences in conducting public involvement efforts. A questionnaire in the form of a "Technique Template" was distributed to all project managers, communicators, functional group and office directors, district engineers, planners and select consultants that queried them on why they used a particular technique, how it contributed to the decision or project outcome, what if any, the particular drawbacks of using the technique were and what they would do differently. These Templates are included in the PIP as examples of the application and effectiveness of a given tool or technique within the scope of a plan or project. Four case studies were also included in the PIP that documented all outreach activities employed during a project.

Externally, two focus groups were held in each of four major cities to assist MnDOT in identifying ways to improve the effectiveness of its current outreach activities. The groups were comprised of randomly selected participants and averaged 9 to 10 persons for a total of approximately 75 to 90 respondents. The following conclusions emerged from these groups: "people respond to being addressed personally and politely; it works best to provide a forum where everyone is listened to, and just as importantly, afforded a response; people want to be given a real chance to affect decisions that affect their lives; and finally, people want to not only be given a choice, but to be given information to help make a reasoned decision."

For a broader sample of public opinion a statewide telephone survey was conducted of households randomly selected from all Minnesota telephone exchanges by the University of Minnesota's Center for Survey Research in 1997/98. The response rate for 800 telephone surveys was sixty-five percent (65%). Three questions were included in the survey to gauge public satisfaction with current involvement opportunities in transportation project decisions. Most indicated they were very to somewhat satisfied and indicated that television, radio and newspaper articles were the best way to inform them, followed by public notices, public meetings and the internet. Regional differences in the level of interest in becoming more involved in project decisions were also observed.

The MnDOT public involvement plan (PIP), called *Hear Every Voice*, incorporated public ideas and suggestions into a single resource and was adopted in 1999. It also provides guidance on the evaluation of public involvement activities. Specifically, it includes detailed matrices of techniques and accompanying "Technique Templates," designed to correlate with a set of public involvement objectives. A resource matrix is also included that identifies tools/techniques and ranks them according to the level of resources (time, money, staff) required.

The PIP also includes a draft public involvement “family of measures” developed by the Task Force. Outcomes include building the agency’s credibility, making public involvement accessible to all segments of the public, involving group representative from the study area, responsiveness to the input provided and the development of plans/projects that support community values. Measures include timing, meeting convenience, documenting the demographics of participants, integration of concerns and support of community interests and affected units of government.

MPO Public Involvement Assessments

- ***FHWA/FTA Transportation Planning Capacity Building Program Peer Exchanges, Best practices for Small and Medium Sized Metropolitan Planning Organizations, April 2004.***

In April of 2004, the FHWA/FTA Transportation Planning Capacity Building Program held a peer exchange roundtable for the purpose of identifying best practices for small and medium sized metropolitan planning organizations. Public involvement was one of many issues discussed. Because it is concise and informative, the summary of the public involvement findings is reproduced in its entirety below:

“The participants emphasized the importance of public participation in the planning process. All expressed frustration with the limited public involvement that occurs in their planning areas. They feel this is due to the lack of interest on the public’s part, rather than by any obstacles the process itself imposes.”

“Many feel the biggest problem is that the public has little understanding of the planning process, and therefore has little motivation to participate. The obvious response, stated participants, is to devote additional effort to explaining and promoting the public’s role in the process to increase knowledge and subsequent participation. MPOs need to convey the significance of what is being done and how it affects the community and peoples’ lives. Some of the attendees have held meetings to present critical findings of identified needs, both to educate and encourage public feedback.”

“Another comment was that the people who attend public meetings are not necessarily representative of the public at large. Particular viewpoints are often over-represented by special interest groups, sometimes preventing an equitable debate of an issue.”

“Recommendations:

- **“Focus on specific topics.** MPOs should structure opportunities for public involvement around specific projects and issues, rather than general topics. People are typically more motivated to address specific topics directly related to them and are not motivated to address things such as broader regional studies. One participant described how the State of Massachusetts has engendered public interest in its Transportation Plans by structuring them as a series of corridor studies targeted on specific geographic areas.”
- **“Use controversial topics to the MPO’s advantage.** An MPO can use controversial topics to generate greater public reaction and subsequent participation. These also typically generate more media attention than routine projects.”

- **“Establish focus groups.** The St. Joseph MPO uses focus groups to gain equitable representation, stronger attendance, and maintain consistency among participants. This has proven to be a successful throughout the planning process. One attendee suggested modifying this approach to create focus groups targeted at specific issues (e.g., freight, environmental justice, pedestrian travel), because people are motivated to address specific topics and to provide an appropriate forum for special interest groups.”
- **“Implement a two-way process.** Public involvement should be a two-way process, in which MPOs both share and solicit information. The Jonesboro MPO has used newsletters and subscription-based e-mails to disseminate information to the public and to promote the MPO. The MPO also holds regularly scheduled meetings, which have increased its media coverage.”
- **“Treat public involvement as a marketing strategy.** One participant emphasized that MPOs must approach public involvement as a marketing strategy. They need to strengthen their "product" – the services they perform – by developing better projects and plans, to make their work more significant to people. A better product will ultimately attract more public participation.”
- **“Use workplace surveys to collect data.** Surveys distributed through local employers often have a high response rate because they are a targeted effort aided by the companies’ management.”
- **“Provide multiple opportunities for public participation.** Provide as many chances as possible for people to give their comments and feedback. These opportunities can assume the same format every time (e.g. monthly meetings) or be different formats, such as meetings and online surveys.”
- **“Offer compensation to participants.** The St. Joseph MPO has found that offering formal compensation to focus group members and providing food at public meetings, has increased the level of public participation. Many participants, while agreeing with this approach, said that funding regulations prevent them from spending money in this manner.”
- **FHWA/FDOT, *Public Involvement in the Development of the Long Range Transportation Plan: Benchmarking Study Report, October 2001.*** [See also Byrd, Lori and David, Sabrina, “Public Involvement in Long-Range Transportation Planning: Benchmarking Study Identifies Best Practices,” *TR News No. 220*, Transportation Research Board, May-June 2002, pp. 6-7.]

The Federal Highway Administration, in cooperation with the Florida Department of Transportation, sponsored a benchmarking study of public involvement in the development of long range transportation plans by Florida metropolitan planning organizations. The study was aimed at addressing concerns raised by Florida MPOs about the difficulty of engaging the public in long range transportation planning decisions. Rather, most participation has occurred in response to project-level decisions.

The study was aimed at identifying exemplary public involvement techniques and best practices for MPOs to address this issue. The methodology involved a technique of the American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC) called “benchmarking” - a four phase approach to identify best practices through *planning, collecting, analyzing* and *adapting*

information from the study team and partner organizations. The “planning” phase involved validating the research topic and identifying “best-practice organizations” that could serve as benchmarks. The “collecting” phase involved site visits to identify successful strategies and lessons learned.

The “analyzing” stage involved compiling information from the site visits with a report on trends and innovative techniques. In this phase, the study team reviewed the findings and was able to identify certain themes or overarching principles for effective public involvement in long range planning, as well as techniques for communication with the public, innovative involvement techniques and technology’s role in the process. These principles, some of which could also serve as performance measures, are:

- Educate the public continuously.
- Involve key stakeholders early and throughout the process.
- Develop partnerships with the media.
- Collaborate to maximize resources for public involvement.
- Personalize public involvement activities.
- Provide incentives to increase participation.
- Provide alternatives to traditional meeting places.
- Use innovative techniques to define communities and traditionally underserved populations.
- Evaluate public involvement activities continuously.

The “adapting” phase involved bringing the “best practice” organizations together with the benchmarking partners for a knowledge transfer session. The final report includes numerous strategies for engaging the public in long range transportation planning. For example, the community impact assessment process was identified as providing effective strategies for defining the affected community (e.g. community profile) and conducting outreach. It did not provide best practices or techniques for continuously evaluating the effectiveness of the public involvement process.

- **“Public Involvement Evaluation: Brevard Metropolitan Planning Organization (Viera, FL); Understanding the Purpose Upfront.” *FHWA/FTA Transportation Planning Capacity Building Program, Process Evaluation, Not dated.***
www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/brevard.htm

The Brevard Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) adopted a new Public Involvement Plan (PIP) and Evaluation Handbook in November 2000. The PIP provides the policy to support evaluation and details the full complement of public involvement techniques and their application. The Evaluation Handbook delineates evaluation criteria, performance goals and methods to meet each goal for all techniques in the PIP. The result is an effective framework to simultaneously conduct, evaluate, and refine public involvement policy and techniques.

Performance goals and methods for meeting those goals are identified for each public involvement tool. For example, for public meetings, the performance goal is for at least 3%-5% of the affected population in the study area to be in attendance. Methods identified to

accomplish the goal are to schedule meetings at convenient times and locations, hold multiple workshops, and use other tools to increase awareness.

The project to update public involvement planning grew out of project-related public involvement. During a second round of outreach on a controversial project, MPO staff decided to conduct an external and internal evaluation of the public involvement process. A five-minute telephone survey was conducted with 1500 participants in the first round of public involvement for the project. Internal stakeholders were sent a written survey that asked them to identify areas for improvement and lessons for the future.

For internal evaluations, the MPO developed a general evaluation form to be completed by agency staff and consultants for public involvement efforts. It addresses type of study, point at which the evaluation was conducted, public involvement tools employed, target audience and type of evaluation conducted. A similar form was developed for project specific evaluations. In addition, an Improvement Strategies Form was developed for practitioners to recommend potential improvements to the public involvement effort. These results are reviewed by MPO staff and forwarded to FDOT, where applicable. The results are also provided to the technical advisory committee and the citizen's advisory committee.

For external evaluations, a workshop evaluation form was developed that is administered to meeting participants. It asks how participants found out about the meeting, whether they felt the information provided was clear and informative, what their best source of information has been, and how they would rate the public involvement process.

The MPO uses the information collected to budget for public involvement activities with better knowledge as to what works, what doesn't, and the general cost of these activities. Paying for enhancements to the process is a continuing challenge. Another key challenge is identifying concerns and issues of those that have not traditionally participated in the process. The Public Involvement Plan and Evaluation Handbook are on the web at <http://www.brevardmpo.com/publications/PIP.htm>.

- **Graves and Casey, *Public Involvement in Transportation Planning in the Washington, DC Region: Report on an Assessment*, Transportation Research Board; Washington, DC; 2000.**

In 1998, ICF Consulting conducted an assessment of the public involvement program for transportation planning of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) – the metropolitan planning organization for the Washington DC region. The assessment was conducted in three phases. The first phase was to document public involvement opportunities provided by TPB. This was conducted by searching documents and the internet, as well as interviews with various agency staff.

Next, the study team identified other metropolitan areas for comparative purposes based on two criteria – generally similar size and multi-state areas. The Albany NY MPO was added to the list as a baseline check on the difference in public involvement between relatively smaller and larger MPOs. The team found that “local context is a critical and limiting factor on assessing the transferability of any particular public involvement technique or program.”

The next phase of the project involved stakeholder interviews. These were structured around a dozen open-ended questions aimed at confirming the level of stakeholder knowledge about TBP's public involvement activities, their opinions about those activities, and suggestions for improvements. About 90 stakeholders were interviewed. The stakeholders fell into three distinct categories - citizen/advocates, transportation professionals, and elected officials. Individuals within each category were identified through attendance lists from TBP and CAC meetings, vision planning participant lists, civic and environmental organizations, representatives of underserved populations, CAC recommendations, and referrals from stakeholders and staff.

The last phase of the study was to summarize findings and determine recommendations. These were organized under four themes:

- Strengthen Outreach to Stakeholders/Public;
- Enhance Access to Information;
- Improve the Public's Understanding of TBP Responsibilities; and
- Either Discontinue or Enhance the CAC.

The report offered numerous findings on key issues surrounding public involvement by the region and suggestions for improving TBP's public involvement process. Of particular note, is a detailed look at the workings of the CAC and how its activities and structure might be changed to address identified problems with the public involvement process.

- **Kramer, Jeff and Ed Mierzejewski, *The 2002 Review of Florida's 25 Long Range Transportation Plans*, Center for Urban Transportation Research, 2002.**

Public involvement practices of Florida metropolitan planning organizations were reviewed in 2002, as part of a larger review of long range transportation plans. The study involved review of the planning documents and structured interviews with MPO staff and a comparison of 2002 findings with those of a similar review conducted in 1997. In both studies, many of the MPOs cited a general inability to interest the public in long-range transportation planning issues. They attributed that, in part, to a lack of resources to undertake more ambitious public involvement efforts.

The 2002 review found that public involvement efforts varied greatly among MPOs, but had generally improved since 1997. A few MPOs had not changed their public involvement strategies (holding a few public meetings and one public hearing during the middle of the day at a government facility) from 1997 and the results (little attendance and low citizen input) reflected that. Other MPOs had dramatically improved their public involvement strategies by increasing the frequency, timing and location of public meetings, sending newsletters devoted to plan update issues to a wide audience, developing interactive displays for placement at local activity centers, placing relevant plan information on a dedicated web site and similar techniques. These MPOs found that despite the difficulty of engaging citizens in long range transportation planning, public participation did increase and issues that the community felt strongly about were identified that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

In addition, MPO public involvement efforts were generally more creative, more varied and more effective than in previous long range plan development processes. Public involvement

techniques included such standard techniques as public workshops, press releases and newsletters. More innovative techniques used around the state included focus group research in Pensacola, a visual preference survey in Hillsborough County, simulation games in Charlotte County, a regional survey in Orlando in cooperation with corporate partners in the region, a random telephone poll in Hillsborough County, and a visioning charette in Gainesville, to name a few. Also, there was an increased effort made to reach out to traditionally underrepresented populations through targeted public involvement activities by several MPOs around the state. The application of these varied public involvement techniques resulted in higher levels of public participation than has previously been the case.

There was also an increase in the consideration of potential social and community impacts in the long range transportation planning process and thoughtful inclusion of community concerns. Considerations around the state included the preservation of the natural environment, the avoidance and mitigation of community impacts (cut-through traffic and division of a cohesive neighborhood, etc.), the level of community support, and the potential impact to community aesthetics, and cultural and historic resources. Several MPOs also considered the potential impact of projects, both individually and as a whole, on minority and low-income populations. The most common mechanism for considering potential social and community impacts was to integrate them into the project prioritization process.

For example, the Panama City MPO considered the level of community support as a qualitative factor for including candidate projects in the cost feasible plan. The first screen of the Polk TPO three-tier screening process was an assessment of potential significant negative impacts to the natural and human environment. Other MPOs took different approaches to considering potential social and community impacts. The Miami-Dade County MPO established a Transportation Aesthetics Review Committee that evaluated candidate projects. In Panama City, projects were added to the cost feasible plan to address neighborhood cut-through traffic issues and to provide community gateways. The Spring Hill/Hernando County MPO mapped historic community locations for further consideration in the planning process. The Pinellas County MPO took into account municipal concerns over potential community impacts, particularly in a few communities near the US 19 corridor where roadway improvements were contemplated on parallel facilities that ran through downtown commercial districts.

Only a few MPOs integrated a strong visioning process or strategic planning principles into their long range transportation planning process. Only a few of Florida's MPOs integrated a strong visioning process or otherwise employed strategic planning principles to guide the development of their long range transportation plan. The most notable example was that of the Gainesville MPO, which evaluated four alternative land use scenarios with considerable community input and involvement, and from these developed one land use vision for the region. Needs and Cost Feasible Plan projects were then selected and tested in support of that land use vision. The result is a plan driven by a vision of what the stakeholders of the region want their community to look like in the future and strives to provide the necessary mix of transportation facilities to support that vision.

Among the recommendations for future practice was support for incorporating a strong visioning process and principles of strategic planning into the long range transportation planning process. The result will be a planning process that is grounded in a consensus view of what the community should look like in the future, identifies challenges faced in achieving that vision

and fosters the development of strategies for addressing those challenges. The report also recommended further integrating consideration of community impacts in the long range transportation planning process as a means of streamlining project development and improving public acceptance of the plan.

- **Rathbone, D., ed. "Public Participation in Transportation," *The Urban Transportation Monitor*, March 27 & April 10, 1998.**

In early 1998, the *Urban Transportation Monitor* conducted a national survey of metropolitan planning organizations to obtain information and opinions on public participation in transportation. Sixty-eight responses were received for a 30% response rate. The survey was an effort to assess how MPOs had changed their public involvement practices in light of ISTEA and corresponding federal planning regulations addressing public involvement (23 CFR 450).

The vast majority (76%) indicated that the regulations have increase the representation of broad public opinion in transportation planning and that the amount of resources allocated to public participation had also increased (92%). However, most indicated that the level of satisfaction of the public with transportation plans is about the same (58%). Sixty percent said they had no public involvement specialist on the planning staff. The majority (63%) said they had embarked on a vision (strategic) planning effort within the past 3-4 years prior to the survey. Wide variations were observed in the techniques used most frequently by MPOs.

Most (75%) said that they had reviewed their public involvement policy within the past 3-4 years, but 58% said they have not tried to measure the success of their public participation process in any way. Those who did indicated they used the following techniques (actual responses):

- Monitor attendance rates at meetings and number of calls on ads and surveys.
- Relative response to previous efforts.
- Follow-up letters to participants.
- Convened a public involvement review committee of citizens and interest group members to review our process.
- On a comparative basis with previous goals in terms of comments provided.
- Self certification.
- Survey in newsletter and evaluation forms filled out by participants after a public forum,
- Number of participants mixed by geographic areas
- Subcommittee of board met for self examination of current public involvement elements.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The review of the literature provided insight into the state of the practice of public involvement, continuing challenges for public involvement in transportation, and potential performance measures. In addition, the literature provided insight into approaches for conducting the statewide assessment of public involvement practices in Florida. Below is a summary of these key conclusions:

1. The literature review confirmed that the approach set forth in the scope of services is an appropriate first step in the assessment process. That approach involves an exploratory study

to identify and document official points of interaction with the public by FDOT and MPOs, current practices for each FDOT District, issues in current practice, best practices and case examples, and training needs. A typical methodology for such exploratory assessments is a combination of document review, surveys and structured interviews and meetings with those responsible for undertaking public involvement activities.

2. A variety of common themes emerged, many of which were identified both by the public and agency staff. A key theme was a lack of continuity in addressing public concerns as transportation projects move through the various planning and development phases to construction. Other commonly identified themes included inadequate public understanding of the transportation planning and public involvement processes, confusion over transportation agency responsibilities versus those of other agencies and the public, a desire for methods other than meetings to convey comments and project information, lack of public interest in long-range planning, and the need to better identify how public input is being applied.
3. When establishing performance measures for public involvement, it is important to reflect desired outcomes of the public involvement process. Efforts to systematically evaluate specific public involvement programs or activities should focus on these outcomes (e.g. project reflects community values, etc.) as opposed to process issues (e.g. number of meetings held, etc). It is also important to involve both internal and external stakeholders in the evaluation (e.g. citizens, elected officials, participating agencies, agency staff).
4. Public involvement is context-driven and any evaluation must consider the context. What is or is not an effective strategy or approach varies according to the particular context in which it was conducted, including available resources.
5. Most agencies find it difficult to maintain a systematic public involvement evaluation and feedback process for planning and project outreach activities, due to competing priorities and limited resources. Some state transportation agencies and MPOs have nonetheless initiated such a process in an effort to improve the quality of their efforts and to better budget for needed activities.

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