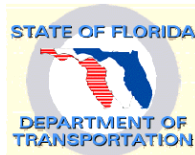


Assessing the Practice of Public Involvement in Florida

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The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the State of Florida Department of Transportation.

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| 16. Abstract This report presents findings of a comprehensive assessment of current public involvement practices and processes in Florida. MPO current public involvement practices were assessed using a survey instrument, whereas data on public involvement practices of FDOT were collected through personal on-site interviews with individuals across the various functional units. The assessment considers public involvement practices at all phases of transportation decision making and includes practices of FDOT Central Office, FDOT Districts, and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). The report addresses the variety of public involvement practices in the state, identifies best practices and continuing challenges, and distinguishes training needs for FDOT functional units and MPOs. The research also provides a baseline and suggestions for the future development of public involvement performance measures for the Florida Department of Transportation. | | | |
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides results of a comprehensive assessment of public involvement in Florida, which addressed public involvement issues and practices at all phases of transportation decision making. The study was designed to address the following specific research objectives:

- Document current public involvement practices of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and Florida's metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) during all phases of transportation decision making.
- Define best practices in the field of public involvement that can be shared with FDOT and MPO staff throughout the state.
- Identify training needs at the FDOT and MPO levels.
- Develop research recommendations for the future development of public involvement performance measures.

The assessment of public involvement was conducted in three phases. The first phase involved a detailed review of the literature to determine the state of the practice nationally, identify related research efforts, and determine legal requirements for public involvement in transportation decision making. The results were documented in a technical memorandum and provided a foundation for subsequent phases of the study. The next phase involved data collection on MPO and FDOT issues and practices. Finally, the team conducted a content analysis of the detailed findings and further synthesized these into broad themes and observations.

The following summary of general observations represents a synthesis of findings from the interviews with FDOT District and Central Office staff. Additional explanatory information is provided in the report.

- There is a clear and universal commitment to public involvement within FDOT and MPOs in Florida, as well as a recognition of its benefits.
- Although FDOT Districts and MPOs are doing a better job of public involvement than in the past, there is room for improvement.
- When Districts make extra efforts to involve the public, the results are generally, but not always, productive.
- FDOT Districts have a decentralized organizational structure for providing public involvement, with primary responsibility for public involvement resting with project managers.
- The actual and perceived roles of public information officers (PIOs) vary greatly across the Districts.
- The FDOT Central Office has a broad oversight role in statewide public involvement and a direct role in providing public involvement for the Florida Transportation Plan and the Strategic Intermodal System.
- District planning offices engage in public involvement primarily during development of the work program and serve as a liaison to MPOs, local governments, and other agencies. However, their role is increasing with the advent of environmental streamlining activities.
- The majority of District public involvement activities appear to occur during the project development and environment phase (PD&E). Later phases place somewhat more emphasis on public information, versus public involvement.

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- Districts are working to improve public involvement in design, but design still appears to be a weak link in the public involvement process.
 - Right-of-way staff are proactive in their efforts to reach out to the public early and often, beginning in the PD&E phase.
 - District construction staff are actively seeking to engage the public and to improve customer satisfaction. Nonetheless, issues occasionally fall through the cracks.
 - FDOT relies heavily on consultants for providing public involvement, although the role of consultants varies across Districts and project phases. A concern is whether staff cutbacks and resource constraints are impacting the role of FDOT project managers as lead contacts for the public.
 - Methods for documenting public input and activities vary by District, functional unit, and individual.
 - In the absence of a systematic method for passing off information of importance to the public, many respondents noted a lack of continuity in addressing public concerns or commitments from phase to phase.
 - Most Districts and MPOs feel they include traditionally underrepresented or special needs populations as part of their typical public involvement process; however, special efforts are made to reach out to certain populations where a need is made apparent through sociocultural effects screening or other means.
 - Limited coordination exists between FDOT and other agencies in public involvement efforts.
 - Districts do not conduct formal evaluations of the effectiveness of their public involvement efforts; however, the Construction Office conducts an annual public satisfaction survey. MPOs are required to periodically evaluate their public involvement efforts, but most seem to rely on informal feedback methods.
 - Key challenges faced when involving the public included balancing the needs and desires of all citizens, poor meeting attendance, managing the timing of public input, maintaining continuity of involvement in light of changing public expectations, and encouraging FDOT staff and the public to remain open-minded throughout the transportation decision making process.
 - Many thought that the effectiveness of public involvement efforts could be improved by creating formal public involvement evaluation methods, increased public education and outreach, and increased communication and coordination across functional units and agencies.
 - The level of public involvement training received by FDOT staff varied by District, but was generally limited. MPO training also varied, but tended to be somewhat more prevalent. Public speaking, dealing with angry or difficult people, evaluation techniques, lessons learned/case studies, and best practices were among the training topics of interest to FDOT and MPO staff.
 - There was a general sense that maintaining personal contact and “face time” is important in everything from general outreach to construction.
 - Although the lessons learned from their public involvement efforts varied by District and MPO, common lessons included “listen to the public,” “be considerate,” “remain calm,” and “always tell the truth.”
 - A key lesson mentioned was that “one size does not fit all;” it is important to tailor the approach to public involvement to the particular context.

It was clear from the review that FDOT and MPOs have made significant strides in their public involvement practices over the past several years and are committed to involving the public in a meaningful way. Most of those interviewed viewed public involvement as an integral part of their job, across the various functional units and Districts. There was evidence that methods other than formal meetings are being applied where needed to more effectively involve the public and to convey project information. It was also clear that there are several continuing challenges and training needs.

One continuing challenge was the difficulty of maintaining continuity in addressing public concerns as transportation projects move through the various planning and development phases to construction. Contributing to this challenge was the tendency for “the public” to change (as well as FDOT project staff) as projects progressed through the various phases. Providing adequate public involvement, particularly on larger or more controversial projects, was also something of a challenge in light of required staff reductions – a challenge being addressed by increasing reliance on consultant support. Other commonly identified challenges included inadequate public understanding of the transportation planning and development process (including construction), managing competing interests and difficult personalities, and inadequate intergovernmental coordination in public involvement.

Based on the comprehensive assessment of the public involvement practices of the FDOT and Florida’s MPOs, the following suggestions are offered to help address the identified issues in current practice. These suggestions are a combination of ideas conveyed by MPO and FDOT staff in the report, as well as observations of the research team.

Involvement and Outreach

- Maximize opportunities for one-on-one or small group dialogue.
- Create opportunities for staff to build relationships with the public and to provide education on transportation issues, both within and outside of project development.
- Provide opportunities other than public meetings for people to have input into project decision making.
- Look for ways to coordinate and communicate with other agencies on public involvement or outreach activities.

Continuity and Commitments

- Establish a process for passing project information on public concerns and comments from phase to phase.
- Increase communication between functional units within FDOT Districts on project development issues of importance to the public. Consider instituting regular cross-functional debriefing meetings and cross-functional area attendance at key project meetings.
- Consider a project management approach or a single point of contact for the public who has the necessary technical knowledge and would follow a project from planning or project development through to construction.

Training and Information Exchange

- Provide regular public involvement training and target the training, where appropriate, to specific topics of interest or concern and to specific functional units or responsibilities.
- Provide organized opportunities for FDOT Districts, as well as MPO staff, to share experiences, ideas and best practices in working with the public.

Performance Measures and Evaluation

- Develop a systematic method, based on defined performance measures, that can be used by the FDOT functional units and MPOs for evaluating the effectiveness of their public involvement process.
- Develop performance measures that focus on desired outcomes and that correspond with and advance the business plan of that functional unit.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Project Objectives..... | 2 |
| Methodology | 2 |
| Insights from the Literature | 4 |
| GENERAL OBSERVATIONS | 5 |
| BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED | 31 |
| CONCLUSIONS | 35 |
| Suggestions | 35 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 41 |
| APPENDIX A: MPO SURVEY INSTRUMENT | 45 |
| APPENDIX B: MPO SURVEY RESULTS | 51 |
| Staffing, Training and Resources..... | 51 |
| Coordination and Follow-Up | 51 |
| Techniques..... | 52 |
| Involving Specific Populations | 53 |
| Best Practices and Lessons Learned | 54 |
| Evaluating Effectiveness..... | 57 |
| Challenges and Benefits of Public Involvement..... | 57 |
| Training and Information Needs..... | 58 |
| APPENDIX C: FLORIDA PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT CASE EXAMPLES | 59 |
| APPENDIX D: NATIONAL STATE OF THE PRACTICE | 67 |
| APPENDIX E: OTHER STATE AND MPO PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ASSESSMENTS | 69 |



INTRODUCTION

Public involvement has long been a staple of the transportation decision making process of state transportation agencies and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). In the late 1960s, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) was one of many state transportation agencies that began providing more opportunities for public input in transportation decisions – primarily in response to 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.

During 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. 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 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In addition, various state statutes required the opportunity for public input during the transportation project development process and other transportation related decision making processes.

Today, Florida's new Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) initiative places increased emphasis on public involvement in the transportation decision making process, particularly during the planning and preliminary engineering phases. The initiative was intended to promote more timely decisions without compromising environmental quality, by screening for fatal flaws early in planning and involving regulatory agencies and the public earlier and throughout the decision making process. The process also requires MPOs to conduct a preliminary screening evaluation of the potential community impacts of transportation plans earlier in the long range transportation planning process – an effort that typically requires some level of public involvement.

To carry out the process, each FDOT District has designated an Environmental Technical Advisory Team (ETAT) comprising representatives from agencies responsible for issuing permits or consultations under NEPA. These individuals are responsible for interacting with FDOT and MPOs throughout the environmental review process. To carry out these functions, each District has designated an ETDM Coordinator with responsibility for coordinating environmental activities and interacting with ETAT representatives, and a Community Liaison Coordinator (CLCs) responsible for interacting with affected communities and maintaining open communication about project plans.

Although public involvement is now a routine part of transportation planning and project development, the current state of the practice is not well documented. In Florida, public involvement is carried out by FDOT Districts and MPOs based on each agency's internal guidelines, using a variety of techniques adapted to local conditions and project requirements. General guidance and limited training are provided by the FDOT Central Office. However, more information is needed on the current state of the practice in Florida, issues faced by transportation agencies when attempting to involve the public, and ongoing training needs of transportation practitioners.

To fill this information gap, FDOT contracted with the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) at the University of South Florida to conduct a comprehensive assessment of current public involvement practices and processes in Florida. The assessment addressed public involvement practices at all phases of transportation decision making and included MPOs, various divisions of the FDOT Central Office, and each FDOT District, including each functional unit within the District and its role in public involvement. This report conveys the results of the statewide assessment of current public involvement practices of the Florida Department of Transportation and Florida's 26 MPOs.

Project Objectives

The comprehensive assessment of public involvement in Florida addressed public involvement issues and practices at all phases of transportation decision making. The study was designed to address the following specific research objectives:

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

Methodology

The assessment of public involvement was conducted in three phases. The first phase involved a detailed review of the literature to determine the state of the practice nationally, identify related research efforts, and determine legal requirements for public involvement in transportation decision making. The results were documented in a technical memorandum and provided a foundation for subsequent phases of the study. Content from this technical memorandum is included in the appendices and a summary of the key conclusions is provided in the next section. The next phase involved data collection on MPO and FDOT issues and practices. Finally, the team conducted a content analysis of the detailed findings and further synthesized these into broad themes and observations. Below is a more detailed summary of the methodology for these various phases of the study.

Review of FDOT Practices

Upon completion of the literature review, a detailed assessment of public involvement practices within FDOT was conducted at both the District and Central Office levels. This was done through a combination of personal interviews and a review of agency documents. An interview guide for this purpose was prepared in coordination with the FDOT project manager. FDOT staff were selected to participate in the interviews based on their public involvement roles or responsibilities in transportation planning, project development or general information and outreach. The list of participating staff from each District and functional unit was prepared through coordination with the FDOT project manager and a knowledgeable contact in each District.

To obtain honest perceptions and reduce the potential influence from supervisors or colleagues, participants were asked, to the maximum extent feasible, to attend the interviews alone and were advised that all responses would be confidential. They were further advised that only those practices they identified as effective would be identified with any specific District or functional unit.

Interviews were conducted with staff from the following key positions or divisions within FDOT:

- Public Information Officer
- Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) Coordinator
- Community Liaison Coordinator (CLC)
- Title VI Coordinator
- MPO/Government Liaison Contact
- PD&E Public Involvement Coordinator
- Planning
- Environmental Management
- Design
- Right-of-Way
- Construction

A goal of the interviews was to determine the roles of various staff in public involvement and how staff interfaces with the public in the course of their work. Staff were asked to comment on how their District and functional unit were organized to provide public involvement, their role in public involvement, points of interface with the public, degree of coordination with other functional units on public involvement, documentation of public involvement activities and feedback, techniques for involving traditionally underrepresented groups, efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of public involvement activities, the degree of support from and coordination with other agencies, and training needs with regard to public involvement. Other questions addressed challenges they have faced in involving the public, lessons learned, and any best practices or techniques/strategies they feel have been particularly effective.

The results of the structured interviews were documented, and public involvement plans and related documents were collected from participants, as were organizational charts and other relevant items. Researchers then conducted a detailed content analysis to identify common themes or issues in current practice, as well as practices that participants felt worked particularly well and suggested areas for improvement. Follow-up inquiries were conducted as needed to clarify results.

Review of MPO Practices

The analysis of MPO public involvement practices focused on development and delivery of a survey instrument, as well as detailed review of MPO public involvement plans. Survey questions addressed the following subject areas:

- Staffing, budgeting and resources for public involvement
- Techniques used in long range planning, corridor planning, work programming, and general outreach
- Methods of involving special populations

- Perspectives on the effectiveness of public involvement efforts
- Methods of evaluating the effectiveness of public involvement
- Coordination with other agencies
- Ongoing challenges and benefits of current practices
- Best practices and lessons learned
- Training needs

The six-page survey instrument was distributed electronically to each of Florida's 26 MPOs. (See Appendix A for the complete survey instrument). Respondents had the option of answering electronically or by hand and submitting completed surveys via email, mail, or fax. Respondents were also advised that participation was voluntary and confidential and that survey responses, other than best practices, would not be associated with specific agencies or staff in the written report. In addition, respondents were informed that a summary of survey responses would be provided to each MPO.

A total of 25 of the 26 MPOs in Florida responded to the survey, with one MPO abstaining because it had only recently been formed. The high response rate provided an opportunity to determine the current practices and perspectives of respondents. Descriptive statistics were used to create a snapshot of current public involvement practices and opinions of Florida's MPOs. A small number of answers were eliminated from these calculations due to omitted or multiple responses.

The sample was also divided into two sub-samples based on the size of the population served. Nine MPOs serving a population greater than 500,000 (larger MPOs) were placed in the first sample, and 16 MPOs serving a population below 500,000 (smaller MPOs) were placed in the second sample. For ease in summarizing and interpreting the results, these groups were referred to simply as "larger" and "smaller" MPOs. Statistical analysis was performed on the two sub-samples to determine if any statistically significant differences appeared between the two groups at the .05 level of significance.

Content Analysis

The final phase of the study methodology was to conduct a content analysis of findings from the FDOT District and Central Office interviews. Interview results were summarized, and findings from each functional unit were organized by question and by District. Using these master summaries, the research team conducted content analysis in brainstorming sessions to identify trends and highlights. This process involved several iterations. Findings were summarized in the final report under broad themes. Issues and challenges, as well as lessons learned or problems in current practice, were reported generally to protect confidentiality.

Insights from the Literature

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. The following is a summary of these key conclusions:

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- The literature review confirmed that the approach set forth in the scope of services was an appropriate first step in the assessment process. That approach involved 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 was a combination of document review, surveys, and structured interviews and meetings with those responsible for undertaking public involvement activities.
 - A variety of common themes emerged, many of which were identified by both 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 about 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.
 - 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).
 - 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.
 - 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.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The following summary of general observations represents a synthesis of findings from the interviews with FDOT District and Central Office staff. It also integrates findings from the survey of Florida MPOs, where appropriate; however, the representative comments below are those of the FDOT participants only. A complete summary of findings from the MPO survey is provided in Appendix B.

OVERVIEW OF GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

- There is a clear and universal commitment to public involvement within FDOT and MPOs in Florida, as well as a recognition of its benefits.
- Although Districts and MPOs are doing a better job of public involvement than in the past, there is room for improvement.
- When Districts make extra efforts to involve the public, the results are generally, but not always, productive.
- FDOT Districts have a decentralized organizational structure for providing public involvement, with primary responsibility for public involvement resting with project managers.
- The actual and perceived roles of public information officers (PIOs) vary greatly across the Districts.
- The FDOT Central Office has a broad oversight role in statewide public involvement and a direct role in providing public involvement for the Florida Transportation Plan and the Strategic Intermodal System.
- District planning offices engage in public involvement primarily during development of the work program and as a liaison to MPOs, local governments, and other agencies. However, their role is increasing with the advent of environmental streamlining activities.
- The majority of District public involvement activities appear to occur during the project development and environment phase (PD&E). Later phases place somewhat more emphasis on public information, versus public involvement.
- Districts are working to improve public involvement in design, but design still appears to be a weak link in the public involvement process.
- Right-of-way staff are proactive in their efforts to reach out to the public early and often, beginning in the PD&E phase.
- District construction staff actively seek to engage the public and improve customer satisfaction. Nonetheless, issues occasionally fall through the cracks.
- FDOT relies heavily on consultants for providing public involvement, although the role of consultants varies across Districts and project phases. A concern is whether staff cutbacks and resource constraints are impacting the role of FDOT project managers as lead contacts for the public.
- Methods for documenting public input and activities vary by District, functional unit, and individual.

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- In the absence of a systematic method for passing off information of importance to the public, many respondents noted a lack of continuity in addressing public concerns or commitments from phase to phase.
 - Most Districts and MPOs feel they include traditionally underrepresented or special needs populations as part of their typical public involvement process; however, special efforts are made to reach out to certain populations where a need is made apparent through sociocultural effects screening or other means.
 - Limited coordination exists between FDOT and other agencies in public involvement efforts.
 - Districts do not conduct formal evaluations of the effectiveness of their public involvement efforts; however, the the FDOT Construction Office conducts an annual public satisfaction survey. MPOs are required to periodically evaluate their public involvement efforts, but most seem to rely on informal feedback methods.
 - Key challenges faced when involving the public include balancing the needs and desires of all citizens, poor meeting attendance, managing the timing of public input, maintaining continuity of involvement in light of changing public expectations, and encouraging FDOT staff and the public to remain open-minded throughout the transportation decision making process.
 - Many thought that the effectiveness of public involvement efforts could be improved by creating formal public involvement evaluation methods, increasing public education and outreach, and increasing communication and coordination across functional units and agencies.
 - The level of public involvement training received by FDOT staff varied by District but was generally limited. MPO training also varied but tended to be somewhat more prevalent. Public speaking, dealing with angry or difficult people, evaluation techniques, lessons learned/case studies, and best practices were among the training topics of interest to FDOT and MPO staff.

- There is a clear and universal commitment to public involvement within FDOT and MPOs in Florida, as well as a recognition of its benefits.

It is clear that public involvement is universally perceived as important within FDOT. Many of those interviewed who had been with FDOT for many years described a changing organizational culture of increasing support for public involvement, in contrast to the “old days” of “design and defend.” FDOT Districts reported experiencing several benefits from their public involvement efforts as well. These benefits include improved relationships with the public, an increased likelihood of obtaining local information of importance to the project that may not have been known otherwise, and an improved ability to address controversial issues that might otherwise impede or derail a project.

Florida MPOs also demonstrate a strong commitment to public involvement, one that exceeds regulatory expectations. The survey of current practice revealed that MPOs in Florida are using a variety of techniques to inform and involve the public in transportation planning and programming. Some are forging new ground and developing innovative ways of both educating and engaging the public. Most acknowledge the benefits of involving the public in terms of better plans and better projects.

Representative Comments:

- “We’re slowly but surely getting better at public involvement... Most project managers now realize that the success of the project is predicated not only on doing a good job from an engineering perspective, but also in terms of public involvement.”
- “I think and I hope the public is getting a better product out of it. And it’s made our project managers and designers and engineers more sensitive to the fact that that we can be wrong.”
- “We don’t have angry mobs anymore. People are better informed and we are better able to address the issues early on.”
- “When I first came here we were still that good ole boy agency, and we didn’t want public input. Now the citizens don’t hate us as much and we do everything we can to involve them.”

■ **Although Districts and MPOs are doing a better job of public involvement than in the past, there is room for improvement.**

Most District staff feel they are doing a good job of public involvement and that a significant amount of outreach now occurs during, as well as outside of, project development. This opinion was supported by the many examples of public involvement activities conveyed in the interviews and described in this report. Many of those within and across Districts and functional units also acknowledged that their public involvement practices could be improved. Suggestions for improvement are discussed in detail later in the report.

Despite an overall sense from the Districts that public involvement has been improving, many also said that individual project managers varied in their attitudes toward public involvement and this tended to impact the effectiveness of the process. Differences were also observed in how individuals defined public involvement. For example, some considered public involvement to be synonymous with public information, whereas others saw “involvement” as also providing the public with an opportunity to provide input into projects and decisions. This latter group tended to be less satisfied overall with the state of current practice.

Some of those interviewed conveyed a strong desire for greater flexibility in designing and delivering public involvement programs. Public involvement activities in project development were sometimes characterized as being more perfunctory (“show and tell”) than meaningful and as basically adhering to minimum requirements or guidelines. A few respondents mentioned a lack of upper management support for “proactive” measures, such as stakeholder interviews, public outreach at malls or other gathering places, and project

presentations to community groups. This perceived lack of flexibility in communicating with the public and selecting appropriate public involvement techniques was viewed by some as hampering their effectiveness in identifying and addressing public needs.

Representative Comments:

- “We need somebody to say that public involvement is critical. Get over the fact that you don’t like to deal with the public and just do it. If someone said, ‘we’re going to put a lot of value on this’ then it wouldn’t be so different from District to District. There are people who are saying all you have to do is put up a kiosk and have the presentation run over and over and people can put in their comments, and then you don’t have to deal with people. We need an edict that says public involvement is the most important part of what we do.”

■ **When Districts make extra efforts to involve the public, the results are generally, but not always, productive.**

Districts tend to conduct more extensive or proactive public involvement activities primarily in the context of larger or more controversial projects. Examples of these “extra” activities included stakeholder interviews and briefings, more extensive community meetings, presentations to neighborhood or other stakeholder groups, preparation of newsletters and/or videos, and project-related internet sites.

Several examples were given of activities for smaller or less controversial projects that are not required but deemed important by respondents to maintain public awareness and involvement. Examples included briefing elected officials, delivering project information door-to-door, accommodating public requests for additional meetings, posting signs with a toll-free number, conducting special studies on controversial issues, notifying tenants in addition to owners, and one-on-one meetings with concerned parties.

Virtually all of those interviewed said that, when they do make extra efforts to involve the public, these efforts are productive and valuable to the project and the public. Public involvement was seen as particularly productive for larger or more controversial projects, or for projects in urban areas where, as one participant said, “We can only gain [from involving the public] and some of those projects would not fly [without public involvement].”

This recognition of the value of public involvement was tempered by concerns over the resources needed to conduct more extensive public involvement and the relative value of holding public meetings or hearings at certain times and in certain contexts. Some questioned, for example, whether additional public meetings for controversial projects were, in fact, productive, because members of the public or specific interest groups would often attend primarily to “vent” or grandstand, allowing little else to be accomplished. In addition, project managers noted that they sometimes received hundreds of e-mails on large or controversial projects, which is not always productive, particularly in the context of e-mail “campaigns” and anti-project websites.

Timing was also a big issue, both in terms of the continuity of involvement and the potential impacts of extra meetings or late public requests on project costs and production schedules. For example, most respondents felt it was desirable to involve the public as early as possible,

but not until there was sufficient project information to convey. Some added, however, that early public involvement tended to raise expectations that a project was imminent and that people would disengage when they realized the production timeline. Many also said that “the public” often changed over time, leading to changing expectations, and that people tended to become more active late in the process after the project was already defined, which made it difficult to be responsive and incorporate changes. Therefore, managing public expectations on project timing and clarifying the public’s role in decision making were seen as both problematic and critical to a productive outcome.

Representative Comments:

- “We want more people to show up. The point is to reduce adverse impacts, not to have the fewest people show up or do it with least controversy. You can overdo it if you leave expectations that aren’t realistic based on timing. That’s why we try to focus on meetings with elected officials. If you want other features [added to the project] the time to tell us is early on”
- “I think there can be the wrong kind of public involvement. Sometimes they schedule public workshops where instead you could try to address specific groups more directly.”
- “[Public involvement] takes a lot of time. We meet with a lot of groups individually, at night, on the weekends. This takes a lot more resources. Technology has really changed things and is one reason why we now do a lot more public outreach on projects, because people will create websites if they oppose a project and with one click of the button they can send form letters to all the legislators and to people across the country. It’s really easy to put information on the website that isn’t true.... So the level of ease and involvement of the public due to computer internet access is huge, and our public involvement efforts can help to counter that. We need to educate people and help them make an informed decision so that misinformation doesn’t hurt us.”
- “During the planning phase, we do master plans [and feasibility studies] way out in the future and we try to bring the public in. What I have found is that if you bring the public in early and then again in PD&E, it’s a whole new public. ...You’ve got to make sure your timing is right and your people are right. If you’re going to do a planning study, you need to do the PD&E study right after it, not two years later.”
- “There’s a cardinal rule that says, ‘Don’t have a meeting unless you have something to say.’ We should treat people’s time like you treat their money.”
- “If you have a 4-5 hour meeting letting all of the people vent when it won’t change the result, it is not productive. We try to do as much as we can within reason.”
- “I feel we did too much [on a project] when we went to [a community group] six times and had maybe two people at each meeting.”

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- **FDOT Districts have a decentralized organizational structure for providing public involvement, with primary responsibility for public involvement resting with project managers.**

FDOT Districts tend not to have a consistent organizational structure for providing public involvement. Primary responsibility for the oversight and implementation of public involvement activities generally rests with project managers in each project phase. An exception is planning, where the responsibility for public involvement typically rests with designated MPO liaisons, community liaisons, or ETDM coordinators.

In most cases, the first point of contact for public queries about a project is either a switchboard operator or District Public Information Officer (PIO). These individuals generally forward the call to the appropriate functional unit, which forwards the call to the appropriate person or project manager. However, whether a record or list of project managers is made available to the PIO or switchboard operator varies by District and by functional unit. Some PIOs handle public inquiries themselves, when possible, and PIOs were generally seen as providing support to the functional units in addressing public inquiries, although their actual and perceived roles varied across the Districts.

To clarify the primary point of contact, Districts include the name and contact information for the project manager on public hearing announcements, newsletters, brochures, fliers, fact sheets, or other project information. Many people recognized that this was only effective when the person calling or answering the call had that information in hand. In addition, some Districts try to assign project managers or staff to specific geographical areas within the District to help increase public familiarity with those individuals.

In District 7, for example, the Environmental Management Office (EMO) assigns project managers to corridors, not projects, and Community Liaison staff members are assigned to counties. This helps create familiarity with issues on the broader corridor or within a given county and provides a single point of contact for questions regarding that corridor or county. EMO maintains a chart that indicates which managers are assigned to each corridor, which help staff know how best to forward incoming calls. In addition, the project manager's name is included on fliers and other project information to inform the public on who to contact for further information about the project and how to get on a mailing list. The District also established a Public Involvement Technical Team (PITT Crew) to develop district-wide guidelines for public involvement activities, with input from different divisions.

District 2 established a unit explicitly responsible for certain aspects of public involvement. The primary role of this public involvement team is to handle public involvement for the planning and environmental management offices. However, the team also provides support to construction, design, and sometimes maintenance. The team works with project managers or consultants on developing informational materials and displays, putting together contact lists of impacted property owners, setting up meetings with the public and government agencies, and developing public involvement plans. The team also reviews the scope of services for the consultant contract, as it relates to public involvement.

Representative Comments:

- “There is not one person who oversees public involvement; it is pervasive throughout the District.”
- “Everyone in the FDOT has some interface with the public. The project managers get really involved with the public through workshops. Others only provide data, and others only get a phone call or sporadic contact.”

■ **The actual and perceived roles of public information officers (PIOs) vary greatly across the Districts.**

In response to a question as to who in the District handles public involvement, most people interviewed thought the District Public Information Officer was responsible for overseeing public involvement, which the PIOs themselves said was incorrect. This may relate to the fact that many of those interviewed in other functional units did not distinguish between information sharing and public involvement in their comments.

Public information officers primarily saw their role as handling notification of the public, typically through the media, and acting in a limited support role to other functional units (consultants handle many project-related public involvement support functions) relative to public involvement activities. Typical activities mentioned by those PIOs interviewed included developing and maintaining project mailing lists, reviewing project-related flyers and notices to be provided to the public, issuing public notices to parties impacted by a project, sending press releases, fielding media inquiries and questions from the public, and updating public information on the FDOT website.

In some Districts, the PIO often went beyond the typical public information duties to provide more extensive support to other functional units, especially to construction and maintenance. In District 5, for example, the PIO held kick-off meetings with the public at the beginning of large construction jobs and produced large pictures of plans, as well as flyers that were handed out along the corridor. The PIO also directly fielded calls from the public on those projects. In District 4, the PIO sometimes attended pre-construction meetings or “hand-off” meetings when the design project manager was not available to help communicate commitments made in design so they would be carried through into construction.

Representative Comments:

- “My role is primarily notification.”
- “I ensure that anyone who is not within the organization gets the information they need.”
- “We’re involved throughout the process and that helps us keep track of issues and commitments.... The media gets confused who to talk to about the project and they call us.”

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- **The FDOT Central Office has a broad oversight role in statewide public involvement and a direct role in providing public involvement for the Florida Transportation Plan and the Strategic Intermodal System.**

The general role of the FDOT Central Office in public involvement is to set policies and procedures for the Department and various functional units and to provide training on public involvement and technical assistance and quality assurance related to public involvement activities. Public-involvement-related guidance (policies, procedures, etc.) is provided as it relates to the PD&E process and the development of Community Awareness Plans (CAP) during later project development and implementation phases, primarily design and construction. Additional guidance is provided by the Central Office for managing the public information process during construction projects. The level of guidance provided by the FDOT Central Office varies by functional unit, with the most detailed guidance related to the PD&E and construction phases.

The FDOT Central Environmental Management Office (CEMO) provides the majority of public-involvement-related training opportunities in the state. The FDOT Office of Policy Planning developed an on-line public involvement training course. PD&E and the sociocultural effects training programs also provide additional public involvement related training on a statewide basis. Although the Central Office's involvement in direct, project-level public involvement is limited, the Office of Policy Planning directly oversees public involvement for the Florida Transportation Plan (FTP) and the Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) Plan.

Regarding the SIS, Central Office planning staff are responsible for coordinating policy decisions on the SIS with key statewide partners, whereas planning offices in FDOT Districts are responsible for building and strengthening partnerships with key regional and local partners. At the technical level, the SIS 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 coordinated primarily through FDOT's statewide modal planning offices, but also addressed through the Department's programming and financial development functions.

For each phase of SIS development, a Public and Partner Involvement Plan is developed to guide public involvement activities. In addition, an evaluation report is 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, some best practice strategies emerged for future public involvement in the SIS. These include issues such as shared Central Office and District responsibilities, innovative and transparent information-sharing and mapping tools, and greater emphasis on partner involvement and an open and inclusive process.

Regarding statewide planning, a variety of methods were used to involve the public in developing the 2025 Florida Transportation Plan (FTP). In addition to those illustrated in the case example below, FDOT established a Steering Committee of stakeholder group representatives to oversee the general development of FTP goals and policies. Members of the Steering Committee represented a variety of interests, including metropolitan planning organizations, local governments, environmental interests, business interests and modal

agency interests. A citizen was also appointed to the committee to represent the interests of the general public. This group met multiple times (both in working groups and as the whole committee) over the course of several months and provided extensive oversight to the FTP goals and policies development process.

Case Example - Public Involvement in the Florida Transportation Plan

The FDOT Central Office conducted extensive public involvement activities during development of the 2025 Florida Transportation Plan. Below are some key ways the public was engaged in the FTP, as indicated on the FTP website.

Get Involved

There are a variety of ways to get involved and provide input in the 2025 Florida Transportation Plan. Your input is encouraged and appreciated. Below are some of the ways you can be involved:

- Review and comment on the Draft 2025 Florida Transportation Plan.
- Take an Online Survey - View online Survey Results.
- Sign up for Email Updates about the Plan.
- Make a Public Comment about the Plan.
- Check the Resources available from this site which will include early drafts of the Plan.
- View the Schedule of Events (with links to all meeting materials).
- Participate in one or more of the events listed below:

Two Statewide Summits – Here large numbers of statewide transportation partners and stakeholders will gather to offer input towards the development of a scope for the planning process, and to review and comment on the draft 2025 FTP.

Fourteen Regional Forums - These forums were held in May, 2005 in each of Florida's economic regions - including Rural Areas of Critical Economic Concerns - to investigate and address region-wide trends, issues, projects, and plans.

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| <p>Please Join Us!</p> <p>The Florida Department of Transportation, District Seven, will be hosting a 2025 Florida Transportation Plan Update Regional Forum to get your ideas and concerns.</p> <p>The Regional Forum will be round table discussions with you and other community members regarding the future policies for the state transportation system.</p> | <p>What is the 2025 FTP?</p> <p>The Florida Transportation Plan (FTP) establishes long-range goals that will guide the investment of over \$100 billion in Florida's transportation system over the next 20 years. The Florida Department of Transportation is updating this Plan to respond to new trends and challenges to meet the future mobility needs of Florida's residents, visitors and businesses. The FTP is a plan for all of Florida - not just the</p> | <p>Florida Department of Transportation. Therefore, implementation of the FTP depends on the collective efforts of many entities. Though the Florida Department of Transportation has principal responsibility for statewide movement of people and goods, it also shares responsibility with other public and private interests in addressing system safety, preservation, and local and metropolitan area mobility needs.</p> |
|  | | |
| <p>Florida Transportation Plan Update Regional Forum in Tampa</p> <p>Where:</p> <p>Florida Department of Transportation District Seven District Auditorium 11201 N. McKinley Drive Tampa, FL</p> <p>When:</p> <p>May 12, 2005, from 5 to 8 p.m.</p> | <p>Who Can Participate?</p> <p>You and all residents, business owners, and transportation providers will have an opportunity to influence the development of the 2025 FTP. Opportunities for input and participation include FTP Statewide Summits and a series of FTP Regional Forums through out the State. Participate in identifying regional trends and issues as you help shape the future of our state transportation system.</p> <p>If you require special considerations under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, please contact Lee Royal, Community Liaison Administrator, at (813) 975-6427 or 1-800-226-7220. To better accommodate individual needs, we ask that such requests be made prior to the meeting.</p> | <p>Title VI and Title VIII Compliance</p> <p>This meeting complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, as amended. Public participation at this meeting is encouraged and solicited without regard to race, color, creed, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, or family status. Persons wishing to express their concerns relative to FDOT compliance with Title VI and/or Title VIII may do so by contacting the Florida Department of Transportation Equal Opportunity Office, 605 Suwannee Street, MS 65, Tallahassee, Florida, 32399. All Inquiries or complaints will be handled according to FDOT procedure and in an expeditious manner.</p> |

Representative Comments:

- “It’s difficult for the general public to wrap their arms around a 20-year statewide policy – they tend to be more concerned with local issues.”
 - “When we do these events, we have to have District people there from each area so that key questions can be answered.”
- **District planning offices engage in public involvement primarily during development of the work program and as a liaison to MPOs, local governments, and other agencies. However, their role is increasing with the advent of environmental streamlining activities.**

The primary role of District planning staff in public involvement is to coordinate with MPOs on long range transportation planning and programming issues, brief elected officials on planning and programming activities, provide opportunities for public involvement in the transportation work program, and work with Central Office planning on public involvement in statewide planning efforts. MPO liaisons are designated from each District and regularly attend MPO meetings. Various planning staff have responsibility for review of MPO public involvement plans. The District Secretaries and/or upper level management also tend to take an active role in attending MPO Board meetings and outreach to elected officials on planning issues and priorities.

Planning staff also conduct outreach to rural counties on transportation planning and work programming issues. Districts designate local government liaisons who meet with rural county commissions at least once a year for this purpose. In addition, some Districts engage in special studies in rural areas to obtain greater understanding of community characteristics. District 1, for example, conducted a pilot project in a rural county with the assistance of a consultant to collect sociocultural data (e.g., community boundaries, community leaders) through a focus group process.

With the reorganization of FDOT, the Planning and Environmental Management offices came under common management. Another change was that planning staff have become involved in early project screening activities under the ETDM process, although it appears that more of this activity now occurs during project development. At the time of this study, Districts were just beginning to operationalize the new roles and procedures. Nonetheless, the planning and programming screens appear to be causing the newly designated District ETDM Coordinators and Community Liaisons to get involved in public outreach and issue identification much earlier in planning than has historically been true at FDOT.

The Work Program public hearing is the primary forum for involvement in work programming. However, most people interviewed said that these hearings have been poorly attended by the general public and are most likely to be attended by consultants or agency staff. To help counter this trend, Districts have attempted to schedule the public hearing at a convenient time and to make the meeting format a blend of formal presentations and informal open house. A few suggested that the public needs to be better engaged during development of the work program and not after priorities have been established, because “by then, even if they did come and say anything, there’s nothing that can be done because it’s too late.”

Representative Comments:

- “I think we need to change the way we do business with the MPOs in terms of working with the 5 year work program...we should engage the public – are these the right projects, what are the priorities?”
- **The majority of District public involvement activities appear to occur during the project development and environment (PD&E) phase. Later phases place somewhat more emphasis on public information versus public involvement.**

The majority of District public involvement activities occur during project planning – known as the PD&E phase of a project. A public involvement plan is developed during this phase for each project in the work program, pursuant to guidelines in the FDOT PD&E Manual. The designated PD&E project manager oversees development of the public involvement plan for the project and, in most Districts, is the key point of public contact for questions and comments on transportation projects.

One area that some respondents said could be addressed further is the general lack of understanding and attention to sociocultural effects during the PD&E process. They believed that the availability of the environmental screening tool, which is part of the ETDM process, should go far in addressing this need. Several staff in PD&E said that MPOs should get more involved in sociocultural effects screening and would like MPOs to share more of their data with the District, as the MPO data tended to be more complete.

Case Example - Indian River Bridge Community Assessment Task Team

The Martin County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), in conjunction with FDOT District 4, proposed the development of a bridge over the St. Lucie River linking the cities of Stuart and Palm City. FDOT and the Martin County MPO proposed the Indian Street Bridge to ease congestion, improve access management and emergency operations, and increase capacity and system continuity in the county and region. The project corridor spans from the intersection of the Florida Turnpike and SR 714 in Palm City and the intersection of Indian Street and Willoughby Boulevard in Stuart. Once completed, the corridor will serve as an alternate to SR 714 and the Palm City Bridge.

Due to environmental justice concerns posed by the project, FDOT created a Community Assessment Task Team (CATT) to conduct extensive public involvement on the Indian Street Bridge project. The CATT met with project stakeholders, which included regulatory agencies, local governments, community and emergency services providers, religious and community associations, and other local groups. A variety of public involvement techniques were used to identify community issues and obtain public input, such as public meetings, workshops, and field reviews. Other techniques included surveys, public comment databases, quarterly newsletters, and a project website.

To reach low-income and minority populations, the CATT conducted a door-to-door campaign, hand delivering workshop fliers and project surveys with self-addressed stamped envelopes. Information was also posted in Spanish-language newspapers, and bilingual materials were available at workshops and the final public hearing.

Three public workshops were conducted for the Indian Street Bridge Project. During the first workshop, data collection was discussed with participants. The second workshop consisted of a presentation overview, interactive stations, and initial alternative and typical sections. Participants were given the opportunity to design their own alignment, prioritize concerns, select preferred typical sections, and make design suggestions based on preliminary plans. In addition, participants were asked to identify key community amenities and destinations.

Over 500 individuals participated in the final workshop, which focused on initial alternative development and analysis and included interactive stations, 3-D visualizations, and a community characteristics inventory. Attendance increased to 870 attendees for the public hearing, with over 1,600 comments received during the public comment period. As a result of CATT's efforts, a Final Environmental Impact Statement was developed that included commitments based on community comments. The public involvement process was viewed as critical to the success and public's acceptance of the project.

■ **Districts are working to improve public involvement in design, but design still appears to be a weak link in the public involvement process.**

Public involvement in design and construction is generally organized under a Community Awareness Plan (CAP) developed by the project manager for that phase. The CAP process was the result of a FDOT directive issued in 1998 that increased the role of the design office in public involvement, due to controversies over issues such as median opening closures and drainage ponds. Among other things, the CAP plan is used to determine the nature and extent of the public involvement activities, who in the community must be notified, whether elected officials should be briefed, and the level of media information required for a project.

The format of choice for public involvement in design is the open house meeting, often with a short presentation. Generally, one meeting may be held at 30%, 60%, or 90% design - although 60% design or later was viewed by some as being too late in the process to make changes. Additionally, design project managers in some Districts said that they go to public meetings during PD&E to become aware of commitments being made to the public or a design liaison designated for each PD&E project. When asked about the benefits of public involvement, several design engineers said that it sometimes provided them with new information of importance to design. Graphics have also improved over the years, making it easier for designers to work through project details with the public.

Despite advances in public involvement in design, the design phase was often mentioned by those interviewed as being a weak link in the public involvement process. Although the community awareness plan (CAP) process appears to be sensitizing project designers to the

importance of public involvement, some design project managers still appear to be resistant to engaging the public on design issues.

Managing public expectations for a project and addressing late requests for design changes and enhancements remain a concern. A related concern was the potential for public involvement in the PD&E phase to heighten public expectations about what can be delivered in light of project budgets. Another issue mentioned by designers is that local governments are informed of design submittals and often do not provide timely input and may claim they have not seen the design plans.

Several respondents in other functional units pointed to inconsistency with regard to whether issues or commitments identified as important to the public in project planning were addressed in the design phase. While the PD&E report contains commitments to the public that should guide design and construction activities, apparently some design projects are implemented without fulfilling the commitments made during previous project phases. A common response was that follow-through on issues of concern to the public tended to vary with the design project manager. Another concern was that public concerns regarding design issues sometimes surfaced in construction, when the impacts of specific design features could be more clearly seen.

Districts were taking a variety of steps to improve the continuity of addressing public concerns as projects entered the design process. One strategy mentioned was to invite design department heads to quarterly meetings with PD&E project managers where projects are discussed to make them aware of issues or commitments. Another strategy mentioned by a few Districts was to designate a design liaison to attend PD&E meetings or to work with construction, or to hold a “pass the torch” meeting between design and other phases. In addition, the planning and environmental management office has an opportunity to review design plans at various stages of design.

Representative Comments

- “It would be more cost effective if we listened more closely during design.”
- “Multiple meetings for large projects – 60%, 90%, 100% with staff and consultants and materials is expensive. The preliminary engineering process sometimes has a charette... ending up with a Cadillac rather than a Camry... you end up with a project that no one can afford.”

Case Example **FDOT/Local Government Coordination During Design & Construction**

The process consists of three phases: Pre-Design, Design, and Post-Design. In the Pre-Design phase, projects are assigned to project managers when funding is established. The design project manager, with the help of an internal multi-disciplinary team, determines the scope of the project and mails an initial contact letter to the city/county engineer, the city/county manager, the mayor, local homeowners associations, the Chamber of Commerce, and the District design engineer to inform them of project intent, scope, budget and schedule.

During the Design phase, the design project manager sends local agencies invitation letters requesting agency participation at meetings and describing the project schedule, budget, and local agency contributions and responsibilities. The Chamber of Commerce and local homeowners associations receive a similar letter, which discusses the project and requests input. However, these groups are asked to direct project-related special requests requiring a binding agreement to the local government. Phase reviews and letters with updated project schedules and critical deadlines are sent to the city/county engineer, the city/county manager, and the mayor.

In addition, the process requires that design feature deadline notification letters be sent to the city/county engineer, the city/county manager, the mayor, and the director of transportation development as notification when a design feature project has been eliminated due to a local agency's failure to meet commitment(s) by the scheduled date. The design project manager is encouraged to establish a monthly dialogue with local agencies to assure that agreements are signed and approved according to the project schedule to avoid the submitting a design feature deadline notification letter.

The Post-Design phase is the final step of the process. During this phase, the design project manager develops a list of individuals and groups contacted during the design phase, which include local officials, homeowners associations, and citizens. The construction project manager, in conjunction with design project manager, then attend meetings with local agencies to discuss the schedule and community impacts of the construction activities. After the meetings, the construction project manager provides periodic project updates to the local agencies and design project manager until the project has been completed.

Source: Alian, Morteza, P.E., "Guideline for Local Government Coordination during the Design & Construction Process," *Florida Department of Transportation District 4 Design Newsletter, Volume I, Issue 3*. December 2004.

■ **Right-of-way staff are proactive in their efforts to reach out to the public early and often, beginning in the PD&E phase.**

The role of right-of-way (ROW) staff in working with the public is to meet with property owners that have been impacted by a project and in cases where land may be needed for right-of-way. Staff informs them about the right-of-way process, negotiates a right-of-way taking for a project, and helps individuals (residents and business owners) with relocation assistance where necessary. Typically, the first meeting with a property owner occurs after a property has been appraised (initiation of negotiations) to tell them what their property is worth. This is generally done in person. If the property owner is out of the area or does not want to meet, the information is mailed to them. A basic package, including forms and brochures, is provided that tells them what part of the property is being taken.

Most District ROW managers also said that their agents go to public meetings and the early public hearings on projects where property owners are potentially going to be impacted by a project, so they can explain the process and provide informational handouts. ROW managers and agents interviewed stressed that, as a result of their efforts for early and

continuing public involvement, they have increased their ability to successfully negotiate settlements and cut project costs.

Early involvement of ROW agents has also helped to humanize the process. Some District ROW staff said that they do role playing with trainees to help them learn how to communicate with the public and to be more empathetic, recognizing that it is difficult for people to leave their home or business. New right-of-way agents may also be accompanied by a senior level agent or supervisor for the first few times.

Case Example A Right-of-way Success Story in District 7

In District 7, the Right-of-Way Office participates in field reviews that are conducted at 30% and 60% design, as well as the project public hearing(s). The ROW Office tries to have at least two people at each hearing to handle questions from concerned citizens. Although design project managers typically want to hold only one public hearing later in the design process, ROW prefers having two public hearings, with one earlier in design, to increase the ability to address reasonable public requests.

If possible, District 7 ROW agents will also attend PD&E public meetings to provide the public with a contact as early as possible who can address their ROW questions and concerns. For example, ROW agents representing both relocation and acquisition attended a PD&E workshop for the Sam Allen Road and Park Avenue project in Plant City even though the ROW phase for the project was 4-6 months out. The experience has been that the earlier ROW staff becomes involved, the more settlements can be achieved and the less likely an acquisition will need to be resolved in court.

The District 7 ROW Office also has agents assigned to cover specific geographic areas, often the area of the district in which the agent resides. The result is that agents have more familiarity with the area and can develop a rapport with the public in those areas as well as other agency staff and stakeholders. In the past, all notification was done through letters, but now notification packages are delivered to affected parties in person along with the agent's business card to facilitate communication. Agents have even gone as far as Jacksonville to personally deliver packages to affected property owners.

As a result of these strategies, the District 7 ROW Office achieved a 70%-80% settlement ratio in the last few years, which is one of the highest settlement ratios in the state. One ROW employee brought a project in at half of the allotted budget for ROW and received a 2nd place Davis Productivity Award in 2004. One reason for her success was the rapport she had developed with people in the area through civic association meetings and open house meetings that took place during the ROW phase of the project. Also, new agents are assigned to attend public hearings with seasoned agents to learn how to answer public questions.

Representative Comments:

- “You listen to the things that are important to [people], and give them things that may not affect the integrity of the design. An elderly woman really wanted to keep her vegetable garden, so we worked with the designer so we could avoid her garden.”
- “We encourage property owners to get their own appraisal reports. We will review their reports and if we can make offers based on those reports we do.... There’s a perception that it will be highly inflated and not useful, but they give us reports that are fair. There is nothing that makes the process more transparent than letting the property owner tell you what his property is worth.”

■ **District construction staff actively seek to engage the public and improve customer satisfaction. Nonetheless, issues occasionally fall through the cracks.**

District construction offices are engaging the public in an effort to reduce public concerns related to construction and to accommodate community needs. Issues commonly faced include the length of time to complete construction and last minute requests for changes to design of access. To address these issues, construction staff try to educate the public on the issues surrounding the changes or refer them to the design office if necessary. For example, District 1 prepared an award winning video “Behind the Barricades,” that other Districts are now using to educate the public on what happens during construction, why it takes so long, and who to ask for more information.

Construction staff also work closely with public information officers to notify the public of upcoming projects. In addition to the standard press release, some Districts send fliers to impacted parties regarding the construction schedule, who to contact, and other pertinent information. Fliers may also be translated into other languages (e.g., Spanish, Creole) depending upon the impacted populations. Open house meetings on the project, one-on-one meetings to work directly with impacted parties on addressing their concerns, and variable message signs were other ways construction was engaging the public.

A few Districts seemed to have more extensive public involvement programs related to the construction phase. Some Districts have created a full time staff position to coordinate public involvement activities and to provide support to individual construction project managers. District 6, for example, employs a Construction Public Information Project Manager who, along with two dedicated in-house public involvement consultants, oversees public involvement for construction projects.

District construction staff are also working to improve customer satisfaction through customer surveys and business plan targets. Surveys seek a variety of information, such as did you know who to contact, did you get a response, how do you think access was maintained during construction, and so on. For example, District 4 implemented the construction survey that is part of the statewide survey developed by the FDOT Central Office as part of its report card and has a goal of 70% customer satisfaction during construction.

Where problems were identified through the survey, District 4 has made improvements to its construction practices. Since implementing the surveys and making changes in response, the District has increased its customer satisfaction rate from 36% in 2002 to 51% in 2004. The District also has a pilot effort underway to test providing financial incentives to contractors who get higher customer satisfaction levels in their survey responses.

Nonetheless, issues do occasionally fall through the cracks. One commonly mentioned lapse was failure to notify the public information officer about lane closures with sufficient time to issue a press release.

Representative Comments:

- “We just need to get more man hours in the field talking to people and get with residents as to what their concerns are. Education is a big issue...We’d like to explain it to [the public]. Sometimes we finish projects early – we could tell a lot more success stories.”
- **FDOT relies heavily on consultants for providing public involvement, although the role of consultants varies across Districts and project phases. A concern is whether staff cutbacks and resource constraints are impacting the role of FDOT project managers as lead contacts for the public.**

Most of those interviewed said that at least half, and typically more, of all public involvement in the District is done by consultants, although occasionally there are in-house studies where the District conducts all of the public involvement using in-house staff. A consultant may also be designated as a public information officer for major construction projects or in heavily urban areas. For example, District 4 retained a consultant to act as the PIO in Palm Beach County due to the large amount of construction in the county, as well as a separate PIO for the I-95 mobility construction project. The Construction Office in District 6 retains two in-house, full-time consultants to assist the Construction Public Information Project Manager in overseeing public information/involvement activities for all construction projects in the District.

Consultant services used during the public involvement process are generally budgeted to in individual projects. Some boilerplate language might appear in contracts, but the language is typically modified to meet the perceived public involvement needs of the specific project(s). Project managers oversee these consultant activities, with some help from the PIOs or from others depending on the District. For example, in District 2, the Public Involvement Team helps project managers with oversight of consultant public involvement activities.

A concern expressed by some of those interviewed was the potential impact of the growing use of consultants on the ability of FDOT project managers to retain the lead role in the public involvement process. This concern was especially troublesome, given the 25% cutbacks in FDOT staff over the past several years combined with growing resource constraints across the Districts. Most felt it was critical for consultants to remain in a support role.

Representative Comments:

- “I feel very strongly that the DOT people need to be talking to the public [rather than consultants]...If there’s a public meeting, I’m going to run it, not the consultant.”

■ **Methods for documenting public input and activities vary by District, functional unit, and individual.**

When asked how they document public input and activities, most respondents said that they maintain a record of public involvement activities and contacts in their project files. In District 1, for example, the public involvement team keeps a project folder with copies of all checklists, public notices, letters, meeting transcripts, correspondence between the public and the District, and other pertinent information.

During project development, some project managers may also keep a meeting journal or book for all of their projects where they document comments, correspondence and activities and a database of emails and questions/answers that can be queried by other units or individuals to learn more about a particular issue. This was true for several Districts. Project documentation, such as preliminary engineering reports, also include information on project commitments for keeping subsequent project managers informed. Districts also have a court reporter at every public hearing and selected meetings to produce a verbatim transcript of what transpired.

As part of the ETDM process, District 5 is working on creating a project diary for each project. The project diary will centralize documentation of issues and information surrounding a project from planning through construction. District 5 has also has consultants prepare a public involvement summary report for each project during PD&E.

However, many people interviewed agreed that because most Districts do not provide detailed guidelines for public involvement documentation, it fell to the individual project manager to decide how and to what extent to document project-level public involvement activities. Therefore, the level and method of project documentation varied widely from District to District, project to project and phase to phase. Some project managers are conscientious about documenting project public involvement activities, while others are not. Some people interviewed felt that guidelines for documenting public involvement activities would standardize the level and method of public involvement reporting.

Representative Comments:

- “Each project gets a book that documents every action – engineering, environmental, public involvement. But on projects where public involvement is extremely important, we do special spreadsheets to document the public involvement activities.”
- “Public involvement is anytime you’re talking to the public, whether it’s a phone call, a meeting, an email, talking to the Rotary, and you should document it. You never know when it’s going to come back.”

- **In the absence of a systematic method for passing off information of importance to the public, many respondents noted a lack of continuity in addressing public concerns or commitments from phase to phase.**

Many respondents indicated that continuity of involvement and issue identification on projects is currently maintained largely through institutional knowledge and internal discussions. In the absence of a formal process for passing along public involvement documentation from phase to phase, many respondents acknowledge a lack of continuity and consistency in the public involvement process throughout the life of a project. Some also noted that it would be useful if District MPO liaisons attended project scoping meetings or otherwise passed on public concerns related to a project that had been raised during the metropolitan planning process, but that was not a common occurrence.

Many also indicated that commitments were not always communicated effectively from phase to phase, with most problems appearing to occur between project development and design. To improve commitment tracking, some Districts developed computerized systems for maintaining and providing staff access to project data on public issues and commitments. District 7, for example, developed a software system to track project commitments from PD&E through construction. District 3 also indicated it has a commitment tracking system, and project managers also obtain information on project commitments through internal meetings and discussions. District 2 holds once-a-year ACTION meetings – Awareness of Conditions and Trends in Our Neighborhoods – where public involvement activities are planned for the year and public involvement issues related to ongoing projects are discussed.

The transition from right-of-way to construction may require additional coordination among design, ROW and construction. For example, a property owner may ask the right-of-way agent to move a driveway or provide a median opening. These requests are coordinated with the design office and, if approved, the changes are identified as a ROW commitment and provided to Design and Construction with a list of commitments that were made just prior to construction. If not approved, however, the public may still demand the change from the construction contractor. To avoid this problem, one District said they are now providing contractors with a list of “requested-but-not-approved” items. In some cases, ROW agents may be asked to discuss the situation with a property owner to help resolve the dispute. For significant commitments, ROW staff may also need to attend a construction open house meeting on the project.

Representative Comments:

- “Most of the information that’s transferred is verbal.”
 - “It would help if I had something letting me know what the issues are.”
- **Most Districts and MPOs feel they include traditionally underrepresented or special needs populations as part of their typical public involvement process; however, special efforts are made to reach out to certain populations where a need is made apparent through sociocultural effects screening or other means.**

Most respondents said that traditionally underrepresented populations were included in the overall public involvement process, but that special efforts are made in some cases when

they become aware of the existence of a population that may require additional outreach. These activities included providing sign language interpreters for the deaf and language interpreters, additional meetings in minority neighborhoods, and translation of project materials for non-English speaking groups. Districts also indicated that design changes (e.g., street crossing technology) have been made to accommodate the special needs of blind and deaf individuals, persons with other disabilities, and the elderly.

In addition, special studies of the needs of certain groups are conducted when they are identified during project planning or as part of the early sociocultural screening that is occurring for the ETDM process. District 1, for example, conducted a study of “urban campers” who were identified as groups of homeless individuals residing in urban or suburban wooded areas that may be impacted by a project requiring their relocation. District 6 noted extensive efforts to include community leaders on project advisory groups in traditionally underrepresented communities such as the Overtown section of Miami.

Most Districts reported having experienced few, if any, Title VI complaints. Unlike project screening, which is a proactive process for identifying special populations that should be considered in project planning, Title VI compliance activities are more reactive than proactive. Current practice is to respond to concerns or questions that come in from the public. Concerns regarding discrimination are referred to the the FDOT Central Office Title VI Program staff who address each specific concern directly.

MPOs indicated that they make a special effort to reach out to traditionally underrepresented or special needs populations. Most MPOs indicated that their Citizen’s Advisory Committee (CAC) was their foremost means of including traditionally underserved populations. Some MPOs even have requirements that their CAC be reflective of the demographic they serve. Most MPOs also made special efforts to attend community events or neighborhood meetings in minority or low-income areas. Other outreach methods noted by MPOs include conducting interviews with community leaders and focus groups and representation of underserved populations on a steering committee or task force.

Representative Comments:

- “When it’s brought to our attention, we’ll make special efforts to reach out to those groups.”
- “We try to treat everybody the same, but really often react more to the vocal citizens. Underrepresented groups often feel they won’t be listened to and don’t share their concerns.”

■ **Limited coordination exists between FDOT and other agencies in public involvement efforts.**

Although District staff said that representatives from local governments or MPOs attended their meetings, they also said that their public involvement efforts were not coordinated with those of other agencies. In general, both Districts and MPOs conveyed a sense that neither agency attended the other’s public involvement and project activities unless specifically requested to do so.

Another finding was that staff from local governments, MPOs, or other interested agencies were characterized by the Districts as “part of our public. They sit in the audience and watch what happens.” However, some people interviewed said that they coordinate to the extent that they attempt to avoid holding meetings in conflict with other agency meetings. A few people also added that they contact MPOs or local governments to get input on likely candidates to include on a project-related citizen or business advisory committee.

Representative Comments:

- “Not a great deal. Don’t know how they could do more.”
 - “Other than giving them notification of upcoming public involvement milestones, we don’t. We could try to have some joint meetings, and probably have better attendance.”
- **Districts do not conduct formal evaluations of the effectiveness of their public involvement efforts; however, the the FDOT Construction Office conducts an annual public satisfaction survey. MPOs are required to periodically evaluate their public involvement efforts, but most seem to rely on informal feedback methods.**

With the exception of Construction, Districts said that they have not formally evaluated the effectiveness of their public involvement activities. A few mentioned conducting informal, internal debriefings activities and meetings to assess public involvement activities. Some also indicated that surveys and/or comment cards are issued at public meetings, with results are tracked and adjustments made as needed. However, these evaluation activities tended to focus more on process issues (e.g., the time, location, and how they found out about the meeting) than on outcomes (e.g., were concerns adequately addressed, were project changes made, etc.).

The Central Construction Office requires each District to conduct customer satisfaction surveys on two completed projects and two active projects each year. These questionnaires are returned to the Central Construction Office, which summarizes the information in a report. This self-assessment tool is used to evaluate public satisfaction with the construction process and with FDOT staff and contractors. It is then used to make adjustments in the work plan both in the District and statewide and to define best practices for Districts to implement. A meeting is held three times a year with each District construction manager to discuss the results and how to improve scores. This activity was characterized as resulting in a “healthy competition” between Districts on customer service issues and improvements in construction practices across the state.

Federal regulations require MPOs to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of their public involvement efforts. Most MPOs evaluated their effectiveness through informal feedback methods. MPOs also used evaluation forms at meetings and conducted internal debriefings after events. A few also used public opinion surveys to evaluate the effectiveness of their public involvement practices.

Representative Comments:

- “I think a debriefing would be a good idea. We don’t have anyone who really cares. Once a project is done and we have a locally preferred alternative, we’re done.”
- “I’d like to see a more visible public involvement document from the department – each District should have its own plan. A plan that can be evaluated – has objectives and dedicated staff to evaluate it and revise the objectives as needed.”

- **Key challenges faced when involving the public includes balancing the needs and desires of all citizens, poor meeting attendance, managing the timing of public input, maintaining continuity of involvement in light of changing public expectations, and encouraging FDOT staff and the public to remain open-minded throughout the transportation decision making process.**

When asked about the challenges they face in involving the public, the Districts and functional units were remarkably consistent in their responses. A frequently-mentioned challenge, both for the Districts and MPOs, was the difficulty of getting people to come to meetings. This was a greater challenge for the planning phase than for project development, because people often are not interested enough to attend a meeting unless it relates to a project that may be imminent or directly impact them. A related challenge mentioned by some District staff and MPOs was how to reach potential project “supporters” or “customers” who commute on the roadway but do not live in the area adjacent to the proposed project. In addition, many said that the public tends to feel that “FDOT has already made up its mind” and that their participation will not matter. This public perception may result in less attendance at meetings or participation in the process.

Another set of challenges related to the timing of input. A common concern is that people seem to want input only when a decision is imminent, and, at that point, it is often too late to change things in a cost-effective manner. Project plans are provided to local government staff and elected officials, but Districts commonly receive concerns late in the process and complaints from elected officials that they were not aware of the project. Most felt the best way to handle this issue was to document when project information was conveyed to elected officials and staff so concerned parties can be made aware that they did have an opportunity to comment at a time when those comments could have been more readily addressed.

The time lags between public involvement in project planning, design and construction were also seen as challenges. Another challenge mentioned in this context was the view that project development staff sometimes raised public expectations that could not be carried out in design, primarily due to cost. An underlying issue was variation in attitudes toward the value of public involvement within the Districts. It appears that the pressures of delivering projects on time and within increasing constrained budgets do not always mesh well with public demands for higher quality projects.

Intergovernmental issues were also noted as challenges. PD&E project managers expressed some frustration that the public often viewed projects as arising from FDOT rather than from their own elected officials and MPO. There was a related perception in the Districts that the MPOs had often not effectively involved the public in their planning and programming activities. At the same time, the MPOs indicated similar frustrations to the

Districts about how difficult it was to engage the public in long range planning activities and to get people to attend public meetings.

Respondents also noted the challenges associated with competing interests and difficult personalities. Efforts to accommodate the needs or interests of some citizens can create issues of concern for other groups. This sensitive balancing act was mentioned by many as a difficult challenge in the public involvement process – one made more difficult by the challenges of dealing with rude, stubborn, or closed-minded individuals. Highly diverse communities in urban areas, as well as hidden agendas, added to these complications, as did language barriers.

Another theme was the challenge of educating the public about the complexities of transportation plans and projects. Education was mentioned as important to every area, from explaining the roles of various agencies, to demystifying technical terms and jargon, to explaining how the intricacies of the construction process impact construction schedules.

MPOs faced similar challenges to those of the Districts with regard to planning. Florida MPOs felt the greatest challenges they faced in the public involvement process included poor attendance at meetings, lack of adequate resources (i.e., staff or funding), lack of public understanding of the transportation planning process, and difficulty involving people early in the long-range transportation planning process. Other challenges included a lack of continuity with the public involvement efforts of implementing agencies, difficulty identifying affected populations and interested stakeholders, and an antagonistic atmosphere that impedes meaningful dialogue.

Representative Comments:

- “The big challenge is getting people with positive input to come out. We’re always trying to find ways to tap them and find out what they would like the project to be. We use a lot of techniques to get the word out so that works pretty well.”
- “Educating the public about what to expect from a construction project and getting them to understand the various intricacies of the pipes we have to put in, why that takes a long time, why it has to be planned years in advance.”
- “The biggest struggle is that people only seem to want input when something is imminent. At that point it’s often too late to change things in a cost effective manner.”
- “Most people think that FDOT has already made up its mind and their participation will not matter. The challenge is winning the public’s trust and confidence that we’re here to provide assistance and improve the community.”
- “We have to be advocates for the people who aren’t going to come to a meeting because they expect us to do the right thing.”
- “The public involvement for PD&E may be too early, particularly if design isn’t even funded yet. This can raise public expectations too early in the process and people can become frustrated when nothing seems to happen.”

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- Many thought that the effectiveness of public involvement efforts could be improved by creating formal public involvement evaluation methods, increasing public education and outreach, and increasing communication and coordination across functional units and agencies.

Methods to improve public involvement efforts varied across divisions and Districts. Despite these variations, many thought public involvement efforts could be improved through general public outreach on transportation issues, creating formal evaluation methods, targeted training, and increasing communication within and across Districts and with other agencies. Public education and outreach activities are a theme in several Districts. Many individuals recommended the use of electronic communication, particularly websites, to increase information dissemination to the public. However, several individuals said that the FDOT website was difficult to navigate and not user-friendly. Using simulation software to help the public visualize potential changes in the appearance of an area, before and after a project, was also recommended.

Developing department- and District-wide evaluation methods was also encouraged. Although few cited specific performance measures to be used in evaluations, many believed their District's public involvement efforts could benefit from performance measures and follow-up. Conducting surveys after public meetings was a technique recommended for District-wide or functional unit evaluation efforts. Some respondents thought it would be a good idea to conduct a survey similar to those in construction after other project phases.

Communication between divisions throughout FDOT and between FDOT Districts and other agencies such as MPOs and local governments was also emphasized. Many thought representatives from other divisions should be present at public meetings during other phases to assist in answering questions. Division presence throughout a project cycle was encouraged as a means to ensure consistent communication with the public on issues presented during public meetings and to improve coordination between functional units in the District. Holding internal debriefings after public meetings was also presented as a way to improve communication between divisions.

Representative Comments:

- “We should take the time to measure performance and follow up [and] do a QA process to make sure the public involvement stuff has gone from Planning to PDE to Design to Construction. We need to do follow-up input from those we work with.”
- “FDOT’s website is not user friendly and it’s not easy to find the different project websites. It’s an area we can improve upon.”
- “Document the great things we do in public involvement; recognize the value of it and get over the naysaying. One way to get that is to quantify the value of public involvement. For example, now that we’re reaching out during construction we get fewer calls and complaints from the public.”

- **The level of public involvement training received by FDOT staff varied by District, but was generally limited. MPO training also varied, but tended to be somewhat more prevalent. Public speaking, dealing with angry or difficult people, evaluation techniques, lessons learned/case studies, and best practices were among the training topics of interest to FDOT and MPO staff.**

Based on the interview responses, participation in the public-involvement-related training opportunities provided by the FDOT Central Office appears to be relatively limited but varied by District and functional unit. District Design, ROW and Construction staff were the least likely to say they had attended training. Environmental management staff tended to have attended more training than most other divisions. For example, almost all District PD&E staff had attended PD&E Manual training, which includes public involvement training (Chapter 8) and many said that they had participated in training on the Public Involvement Toolkit that had been produced for FDOT a few years ago. Several also said that they attended training on sociocultural effects and Title VI training.

Other training received was through targeted courses, such as “Citizen Contact and Dealing with the Media.” During these courses, individuals participated in role-playing exercises; however, some felt role playing did not adequately prepare them for the “real world.” Several believed the most beneficial training was on-the-job experience, either their own experience or that of others. Some also said it was difficult to find time to attend training and that travel restrictions sometimes were a factor.

The need and desire for public involvement training was expressed across functional units and Districts, with few individuals stating that additional training was unnecessary. Specific suggested training topics included public speaking, media relations, conflict resolution/crowd management skills, strategies for working with angry or upset people, ideas for running public meetings, techniques for reaching more people, evaluation methods, and case studies or best practices for engaging the public in the various project phases or in relation to a specific issue (e.g., context sensitive design, medians, special populations).

Most people interviewed believed that more targeted training opportunities would be helpful, and many thought they could benefit by learning from the experiences of others. Additionally, more than one person suggested that a statewide information exchange workshop or conference that focused on specific case examples on a variety of public-involvement related issues would be of great value to those responsible for carrying out public-involvement activities at the project level.

Most MPO staff receive some level of public involvement training. The majority participate in training provided by state or federal transportation agencies. Additional sources of training include other government agencies and professional associations. MPOs identified several topics for additional training including survey techniques, market research, visualization tools, and evaluation techniques.

Representative Comments:

- “How do you identify a community? Not the 300 feet from the centerline.”
- “I like case histories. Typical concerns from the public and how they are addressed.”
- “...it would be helpful to have training in best practices. Break down a construction project into DVDs that you could show a customer (why those pipes, what are we going to do about your driveway and why is it complicated, why does it take two days to harden).”
- “[We received] very little. Learn by actually getting out there.”

BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

- There was a general sense that maintaining personal contact and “face time” is important in everything from general outreach to construction.
- Although the lessons learned from their public involvement efforts varied by District and MPO, common lessons included “listen to the public,” “be considerate,” “remain calm,” and “always tell the truth”.
- A key lesson mentioned was that “one size does not fit all;” it is important to tailor the approach to public involvement to the particular context.

Participants in the FDOT interviews and MPO survey were asked to indicate which techniques, in their experience, had been the most effective or that they would characterize as a best practice. A related question was “What lessons have you learned in your public involvement efforts that you would pass on to others?” These responses are summarized below and supplemented with the case examples. As with general observations, the representative comments below are those of the FDOT participants only.

- There was a general sense that maintaining personal contact and “face time” is important in everything from general outreach to construction.

One-on-one meetings with affected property owners, hand delivering project/meeting fliers or ROW packages, individual briefings of elected officials or local government commissions, and assigning staff to specific geographic areas or corridors were some of the ways the Districts and MPOs were working to develop and maintain relationships with the public. Business advisory groups or teams, in addition to citizen advisory groups and project advisory teams, were being used to identify issues of importance to the public from project development to construction.

Most respondents felt informal, small group and one-on-one interactions were the most effective techniques for establishing a two-way dialogue with the public. Several

respondents said that opportunities for more personal interaction with the members of the public, such as open house meetings or individual briefings, tended to reduce the level of hostility, improving communication and often rendering more useful project information. District 5, for example, said for controversial environmental permitting issues, meeting with concerned neighbors at one of their homes provides a more personal atmosphere that is more conducive to discussing the issues. Alternatively, many Districts felt that larger or more formal meetings tended to create more of an adversarial or emotional climate that interfered with effective dialogue on project impacts and solutions.

The informal open house meeting, where individuals may come and go at their convenience, was frequently mentioned as being more effective than more formal meetings and hearings. Many said that the public seemed to appreciate the individual attention and that people tended to be less emotional than in large public meetings where they must speak into a microphone. The Districts are combining this method with periodic presentations to convey project information. Some said that providing the public with background about the project and a chance to ask questions can also reduce the potential for misinformation.

Attending regular meetings of civic, religious, or other community organizations was also mentioned as an effective and efficient way for Districts to reach the most stakeholders. In addition, they provided forums for a two-way exchange on specific subjects important to that group.

A clear message from the survey of Florida MPOs was that most MPOs felt that public meetings and hearings were not the most effective ways of engaging the public. Most said that more effective methods involved reaching out to specific groups through small targeted meetings and community events attending meetings held by others, and so on. Most MPOs also make a special effort to involve business and industry groups through targeted outreach, focus groups, and representation on steering committees or citizen's advisory committees.

Representative Comments:

- “The traditional settings of workshops and hearings separate people into us and them.”
- “Going to where the people are and engaging them is a more effective way to do it. I have noticed if you stay behind the table, they won’t come up to the table.”
- “In the past, when we’ve sat down informally with homeowners associations, we got more out of it than a large setting [because] it doesn’t create an environment where people don’t feel comfortable asking questions.”
- “People like a lot of one-on-ones. Instead of major huge group meetings, people like smaller group meetings. In the huge meetings, we can’t address each issue and we can lose control. We like to address each group individually as much as we can.”
- “We have an open house meeting in the afternoon and the morning after and that gives them time to browse. We take them and escort them to their location on the corridor so they can focus on their problems and they don’t worry about everybody else....”

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- “When I started, I thought of public involvement as something you do at a specific time. Now I realize you do it starting at day one; you’re doing it throughout the project.”
 - “You’d better be ready for surprises...when you go to the public, there’s no way you can anticipate some of the questions you might get.... The worst thing you can do is lose your cool.”

- **Although the lessons learned from their public involvement efforts varied by District and MPO, common lessons included “listen to the public,” “be considerate,” “remain calm,” and “always tell the truth.”**

Many of the lessons conveyed by those interviewed involved communication skills and managing emotions. Several respondents said one of the more important lessons they had learned was to be a good listener. Other common suggestions were to be polite and remain calm, and to avoid the human tendency to overreact to complaints or accusations. Those with experience in public involvement said that most people will calm down when they realize you are listening to their concerns. Other advice was to avoid making commitments, other than looking into the matter and following up.

Representative Comments:

- “Everyone deserves a right to be heard and they wouldn’t be angry if it wasn’t impacting them in some way. Just take the time to listen and explain and meet with them if possible.”
- “Being honest with the people and being proactive will gain you more than anything else. We may disagree, but at least people know the basis by which we are making decisions.”
- “Be more ears than mouth. Listen to people and really hear what they say.”
- “Listen before you answer. Say ‘I’ll look into it’ and don’t just give them a no right away. Listen, listen, listen...[and] always follow through and get them an answer.”
- “You need to be able to diffuse highly charged situations and be adept at dealing with that. It comes with time and experience.”
- “Don’t overreact. Try to do what’s in the best interest for the mass of people rather than the individual.”
- “Sometimes just talking to people one on one is the most effective. They may not be happy but appreciate you taking the time to discuss it with them.”
- “You need to go through the process as painful as it is. Don’t take it personally. Sometimes people are just venting about government.”

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- **A key lesson mentioned was that “one size does not fit all;” it is important to tailor the approach to public involvement to the particular context.**

A general sentiment was the importance of being strategic and not always relying on public meetings for reaching the desired audience or for diagnosing and addressing public concerns or needs. Several respondents also indicated a desire to do more public outreach “on the good things we do” and to make more effective use of the internet for public involvement. Districts and MPOs said they have used the internet successfully to communicate about major projects, particularly in more affluent areas, by having consultants establish project websites.

E-mail also provides an opportunity to develop mailing lists and easily disseminate project information that can be forwarded again by other groups, such as the Chamber of Commerce or neighborhood associations, to their members. On the downside, the advent of e-mail has also placed increasing demands on project managers, who said that they may receive hundreds of e-mail comments or inquiries on a major project.

Many said that the earlier an issue is identified, such as a change in access, the more can be done to accommodate a change. District 4, for example, said it sometimes uses AutoCAD to reconfigure the driveways for a property owner so they can get in and out more easily or so driveways can feed more directly into a median opening. However, if a property owner gets involved too late in the process, the District may be unable to make even minor changes.

Another suggestion was not to underestimate the turnout for a major project that is controversial. Districts said that they may base the room size decision on how many people show up at the workshops and the level of interest conveyed in the project via calls and e-mail. A PowerPoint presentation was also seen as helpful for large crowds, rather than only relying only on displays, as there may not be sufficient staff to address the public inquiries at each display.

Representative Comments:

- “Do not be afraid of going beyond the minimum in your involvement efforts. In doing so it is important to strategically target certain groups or individuals; you can get more information and more valuable input than at public meetings. A lot of people won’t attend public meetings, but the majority of resources are focused on that activity. We need to ask ourselves – have we spent that money wisely?”
- “Don’t make the assumption that the general PI guidelines that we are currently working from are applicable to each project.”
- “Web sites have worked really well for us. We’re lucky that a lot of people have access to computers; they’re an easy way to disseminate information, collect names for mailing lists, do a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) Web page. The project consultant hosts the Web site. We publicize the web site by putting it on every piece of material, in all our emails, and in brochures that talk about our web site. We keep track of how many people visit the Web site.”

CONCLUSIONS

The literature and current practice review provided insight into the “state of the practice” of public involvement in Florida. It was clear from the review that FDOT and MPOs have made significant strides in their public involvement practices over the past several years and are committed to involving the public in a meaningful way. Most of those interviewed viewed public involvement as an integral part of their job, across the various functional units and Districts. There was evidence that methods other than formal meetings are being applied where needed to more effectively involve the public and to convey project information. It was also clear that there are several continuing challenges and training needs.

One continuing challenge was the difficulty of maintaining continuity in addressing public concerns as transportation projects move through the various planning and development phases to construction. Contributing to this challenge was the tendency for the public to change as projects progressed and for last minute requests for changes or “add-ons” as a project became more imminent. Other commonly identified challenges included inadequate public understanding of the transportation planning and development process (including construction), managing competing interests and difficult personalities, resource constraints, and inadequate intergovernmental coordination in public involvement.

Suggestions

- Maximize opportunities for one-on-one or small group dialogue.
- Create opportunities for staff to build relationships with the public and to provide education on transportation issues, both within and outside of project development.
- Provide opportunities other than public meetings for people to have input into project decision making.
- Look for ways to coordinate and communicate with other agencies on public involvement or outreach activities.
- Establish a process for passing project information on public concerns and comments from phase to phase.
- Increase communication between functional units within FDOT Districts on project development issues of importance to the public. Consider instituting regular cross-functional debriefing meetings and cross-functional area attendance at key project meetings.
- Consider a project management approach or a single point of contact for the public who has the necessary technical knowledge and would follow a project from planning or project development through to construction.
- Provide regular public involvement training and target the training, where appropriate, to specific topics of interest or concern and to specific functional units or responsibilities.

- Provide organized opportunities for FDOT Districts and MPO staff to share experiences, ideas and best practices in working with the public.
- Develop a systematic method, based on defined performance measures, for FDOT functional units and MPOs to evaluate the effectiveness of their public involvement process.
- Develop performance measures that focus on desired outcomes and that correspond with and advance the business plan of that functional unit.

Based on the comprehensive assessment of the public involvement practices of the FDOT and Florida's MPOs, the following suggestions are offered to help address the identified issues in current practice. These suggestions are a combination of ideas conveyed by MPO and FDOT staff in the report, as well as observations of the research team.

Involvement and Outreach

- Maximize opportunities for one-on-one or small group dialogue.

Informal, small group, and one-on-one interactions were viewed as the most effective techniques for establishing a two-way dialogue with the public. Open house meetings or individual briefings were clearly seen as helping to reduce hostility, improve communication, and render more useful project information.

- Create opportunities for staff to build relationships with the public and to provide education on transportation issues, both within and outside of project development.

Study participants clearly felt that personal contact and "face time" was important to their effectiveness. Building relationships with community leaders and the public and generally getting to know people helps to build a climate of trust that can be critical to improved communication with the public on transportation projects. Designating MPO and community liaisons and assigning staff to particular corridors or geographic areas are among the ways that some Districts are building relationships with the public.

It is also helpful to conduct general outreach and education activities that are not directly related to a project or function (e.g., outreach at community events, transportation fairs, outreach presentations to community groups, etc.). Educational outreach can help build relationships with the public while informing citizens about transportation topics of importance, as well as the complexities of the process (e.g., MPO role, design trade-offs, construction issues, etc.). For example, Construction staff suggested it would be beneficial to provide outreach to the public on what happens during construction to help them understand why it takes as long as it does. The award winning video "Behind the Barricades" was developed by FDOT for this purpose and could be more widely disseminated.

Outreach activities are particularly important if there are indicators that a community or population does not trust the agency as being open to public input or does not understand a

particular policy or practice. Negative attitudes toward an agency or practice, if allowed to linger, can disrupt or impede the transportation decision making process in a variety of ways.

- **Provide opportunities other than public meetings for people to have input into project decision making.**

Today's busy society has made it much less attractive or feasible for people to spend time in public meetings. Many prefer to spend evenings with their families or have obligations that make it difficult to attend project meetings. The problem of low meeting attendance expressed both by Districts and MPOs is a clear indicator of this trend. In addition to the typical open house meetings, consider setting up a booth on the project at a local grocery store or popular gathering place, with a comment box to capture public comments. Project newsletters or newspaper inserts with information on who to contact with specific concerns or ideas and project websites that convey information and updates and allow e-mail comments are other ways that Districts and MPOs can engage the public outside of formal meetings. Document input received through these venues so it can be integrated into the process in a visible way to maintain public trust.

Several of those interviewed commented on the need to improve the FDOT website so information of importance to the public can be more easily located by citizens.

- **Look for ways to coordinate and communicate with other agencies on public involvement or outreach activities.**

A surprising finding is that, despite the overlap of transportation responsibilities, there is a general lack of coordination and resource sharing among MPOs, local governments, and FDOT on public involvement activities. Although each agency engages the public in different ways and through different forums, each should look for ways to coordinate its public involvement activities with that of other agencies. For example, local governments and MPOs could notify an appropriate contact in the District as to upcoming public involvement activities, and District project managers could look for opportunities to “piggy-back” outreach efforts or project meetings within those venues.

Continuity and Commitments

- **Establish a process for passing project information on public concerns and comments from phase to phase.**

A standard process for passing on important public involvement information from phase to phase would help reduce misunderstandings and improve the continuity of communication with the public. Some Districts are in the process or have recently established a commitment tracking system that would allow project managers to easily access information regarding project commitments. Such systems could be designed to also include key highlights from previous public involvement activities of importance to subsequent project phases, including any ongoing controversies or concerns. In addition to computerized tracking systems, debriefing meetings should be held subsequent to public involvement activities and as projects are passed to another phase. A simple form could also be created to document key issues, ongoing controversies, and commitments. The form could be completed by each functional unit and passed on to the project manager responsible for the subsequent phase.

- **Increase communication between functional units within FDOT Districts on project development issues of importance to the public. Consider instituting regular cross-functional debriefing meetings and cross-functional area attendance at key project meetings.**

Many felt that representatives from all functional units should be present at public meetings during other project phases to assist in answering questions. Holding internal “cross functional” debriefings after public meetings was another way participants felt that communication could be improved between functional units. In addition to improved internal coordination, these were seen as important ways to ensure consistent communication with the public on issues presented during public meetings.

- **Consider a project management approach or a single point of contact for the public who has the necessary technical knowledge and would follow a project from planning or project development through to construction.**

One of the key challenges noted by FDOT District personnel was the difficulty they face in managing the timing of public input. Alternatively, citizens often complain about having difficulty determining who in the agency could address their concern and knowing when their concern can actually be considered. Establishing a single knowledgeable individual to track a project from beginning to end could be helpful in dealing with changing publics and/or issues and requests surrounding a project. This would create institutional knowledge on a project that could be used to communicate how and why various decisions were made. It could also create an internal agency advocate for the project and the public who could determine whether and how late requests for project modifications could be addressed.

Training and Information Exchange

- **Provide regular public involvement training and target the training, where appropriate, to specific topics of interest or concern and to specific functional units or responsibilities.**

Many FDOT District personnel and MPO staff said they would benefit from additional public involvement training, both in terms of general training and in the context of their functional responsibilities, challenges or concerns. Frequently-requested training topics included public speaking, conflict resolution/crowd management skills, strategies for working with angry or upset people, ideas for running public meetings, techniques for reaching more people, evaluation methods, and case studies or best practices for engaging the public in the various project phases or in relation to a specific issue (e.g., context sensitive design, medians/access management, special populations). Do’s and don’ts when working with the media were also mentioned as a topic of interest by individuals across the functional areas.

- **Provide organized opportunities for FDOT Districts and MPO staff to share experiences, ideas and best practices in working with the public.**

In addition to conventional training, many of those interviewed said that they would appreciate organized opportunities to share information on best practices or issues of concern and to learn from the experiences of others. Options could include net meetings on specific topics and public involvement seminars at statewide meetings and conferences. A

statewide public involvement workshop or conference where project managers in the various functional units could exchange information on public involvement techniques that appear to be working well would be of great value.

Performance Measures and Evaluation

- **Develop a systematic method, based on defined performance measures, for FDOT functional units and MPOs to evaluate the effectiveness of their public involvement process.**

A systematic method for identifying public perceptions of the various transportation decision making activities would provide important feedback for improving the quality of public involvement activities. Such a method should be based on defined performance measures and involve obtaining both staff and public perceptions of the effectiveness of the process and techniques used.

- **Develop performance measures that focus on desired outcomes and that correspond with and advance the business plan of that functional unit.**

Performance measures for public involvement need to be developed as a basis for evaluation and should focus on desired outcomes for each activity (e.g., customer satisfaction measures), rather than process measures (e.g., number of meetings or attendees). For FDOT, they should also correspond with functional unit business plans. For example, the practice of surveying the public following construction and modifying future construction activities to address problem areas and advance the business plan was seen by those involved as highly beneficial. Benefits included improved agency credibility, better public relations, and fewer construction delays. These benefits translated into better projects and more efficient project delivery – the bottom line for most transportation agencies.



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APPENDIX A: MPO SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Survey of MPOs: Page One

Assessing the Practice of Public Involvement in Florida

Survey of MPOs

FDOT Research Project Contract: BD544; RPWO:15

Public Involvement has been defined as:

“...the process of two-way communication between citizens and government by which transportation agencies and other officials give notice and information to the public and use public input as a factor in decision making” (*TRB Committee on Public Involvement*).

Although public involvement is a staple of transportation decision-making, there is little information on current public involvement practices of Florida’s transportation agencies; nor is there a repository of information on best practices in public involvement, based on actual experiences throughout the state. The Center for Urban Transportation Research has received a grant from the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to help address these information needs. The study objectives are as follows:

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

This survey is part of an effort to document current public involvement practices of MPOs in Florida, and to determine best practices and training needs. The results of this review will be included in a research report on public involvement issues and practices of Florida transportation agencies. Please note that survey participation is voluntary, but strongly encouraged; responses are confidential. Individual survey responses, other than best practices, *will not* be associated with specific agencies or staff. In addition, a summary of survey responses will be provided to each MPO.

If you have questions or concerns about the survey or report, or would like to discuss your practices directly with the researcher, please contact: Jeff Kramer, AICP, Center for Urban Transportation Research, University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Ave., CUT100, Tampa, FL 33620-5375. E-mail: kramer@cutr.usf.edu, Fax 813/974-5168.

**Please take a few minutes to answer the following survey questions.
Forward your response to kramer@cutr.usf.edu by April 29, 2005.
Thank You!**

● ● ● ● ● 1

Survey of MPOs: Page Two

NOTE: The researchers have obtained public involvement plans and other internet documents regarding public involvement from your MPO. Feel free to refer to those documents in your replies. **If you have other relevant documents that have not been published to your website or that were published only recently, please mail or e-mail a copy to kramer@cutr.usf.edu.**

Contact:

MPO:

Telephone:

E-mail:

-
1. Does your MPO have one or more public involvement specialist(s) on staff?

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Yes | No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
 2. Have you or your staff received training in public involvement?

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Yes | No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
 3. If yes, who provided the training?
 - Florida Department of Transportation
 - Federal Highway Administration/Federal Transit Administration
 - MPO (internal training)
 - Other Government Agency (name of agency)
 - Other (name of provider)
 4. About what percentage of your MPO's total annual budget would you say goes to public involvement (including project-specific public involvement activities)?
 - >50%
 - 25-50%
 - 10-24%
 - <10%
 - Not sure
 5. On what planning activity do you focus the majority of your public involvement resources?
 - Long range transportation planning
 - Transportation improvement programming
 - Corridor studies and plans
 - Other planning activities (*please explain*)



Survey of MPOs: Page Three

6. Which of the following techniques has your MPO used in its public involvement and outreach efforts? (Check all that apply)

| Techniques | LRTP | TIP | Corridor or special studies | General outreach/ education |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Advisory Committee (other than CAC)/Task Force | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Booth at Public Event | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Brochures | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Charette | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Facilitator/Facilitated Meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Focus Groups | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Games (please explain) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Individual/Small Group Briefings | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Interviews | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Kiosks/Interactive Displays | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Multilingual Translations | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Newsletters | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Newspaper Ad (general newspaper) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Newspaper Ad (targeted newspaper) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Open House Meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Press Release | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Public Meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Radio/Television | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Simulation of Project Alternatives | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sociocultural Effects Evaluation | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Speaker's Bureau | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Special Transportation to Meetings (for elderly, disabled) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Survey, Internet/E-mail | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Survey, Mail | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Survey, Telephone | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Telephone Hotlines | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Transportation Fair | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Videos | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Visioning/Scenario Building | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Visual preference survey | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Web page (general pub. inv. site) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Web page (project specific) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Survey of MPOs: Page Four

7. Of the techniques your MPO has used for public involvement, which technique(s) would you say have been the most effective?

Why?

8. Of the techniques your MPO has used for public involvement, which technique(s) would you say have been the least effective?

Why?

9. 23 CFR 450.316(b) requires MPOs to “Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to low-income and minority households.” How does your MPO involve traditionally underserved populations in transportation decision-making? *(Check all that apply)*

- Representation on steering committee or task force
- Representation on citizens advisory committee
- Representation on other MPO committees *(name of committee)*
- Focus groups
- Neighborhood meetings
- Interviews with community leaders
- Attending community events
- Other *(please explain)*

10. Does your MPO make a special effort to involve businesses and industry in transportation decision-making? **Yes** **No**

11. If yes, how does your MPO involve businesses and industry? *(Check all that apply)*

- Representation on steering committee or task force
- Representation on citizens advisory committee
- Representation on other MPO committees *(name of committee)*
- Targeted outreach (presentations to Chamber and/or industry trade groups)
- Focus groups
- Other *(please explain)*



Survey of MPOs: Page Five

12. When citizens participate in your public involvement process, do you have a method of showing them how their input was addressed? **Yes** **No**

Please explain:

13. 23 CFR 450.316(b) states that “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.” How have you evaluated the effectiveness of your public involvement efforts? (Check all that apply) *(please forward examples of reports or materials that illustrate your evaluation activities)*

- Public opinion surveys
- Evaluation forms at meetings
- Informal feedback
- Citizen committee or focus group
- Internal debriefing after event/technique
- Other *(please explain)*

14. Overall, how would you rate the public’s response to your MPO’s public involvement process?

- Very favorable
- Favorable
- Fair
- Not so favorable
- Unfavorable

Comments:

15. Do you follow up with implementing agencies (e.g. County, City, FDOT, Expressway Authority) to make them aware of issues and commitments regarding planned projects that arose from your public involvement efforts? **Yes** **No**

16. If you answered yes to question 15, how do you typically follow up with implementing agencies? *(check all that apply)*

- Provide the agency with written documentation of public issues and commitments regarding MPO projects.
- Participate in the agency’s public hearings and meetings on MPO projects.
- Participate in internal meeting(s) of the agency on MPO projects (e.g. scoping meeting, etc.).
- Other *(please explain)*



Survey of MPOs: Page Six

17. Below are some typical challenges of involving the public in transportation decision-making. Please identify which of these are the greatest challenges for your agency. (*check all that apply*)

- Lack of adequate resources (staff or funding)
- Poor attendance at meetings
- Public gets involved too late; difficulty involving people in early planning
- Lack of public understanding of the transportation planning process
- Difficulty maintaining continuous involvement (changing public, changing issues, etc.)
- Lack of continuity with public involvement efforts of implementing agencies
- Difficulty maintaining two-way communication with interested parties
- Difficulty identifying affected populations and interested stakeholders
- Lack of public trust (e.g. perception that agency has already made up its mind)
- Lack of effective ways to address controversy or conflicts that arise
- Antagonistic atmosphere that impedes meaningful dialogue
- Other (*please explain*)

18. Below are some typical benefits of meaningful public involvement in transportation decision-making. Please identify which of these your agency has clearly experienced from its public involvement efforts. (*check all that apply*)

- Better projects/more effective transportation solutions
- Fewer adverse impacts on the community or the environment
- Improved public trust/credibility of the agency
- Fewer irate citizens or angry appeals to elected officials
- Improved public understanding of the transportation planning process
- Less public opposition late in the process
- More cost effective transportation plans and projects
- Improved relationships with affected citizens and interested parties
- Other (*please explain*)

19. What lessons have you learned in your public involvement efforts that you would pass on to other agencies?

20. What topics or techniques (if any) would you like to learn more about with regard to public involvement?

Thank you for your time and assistance!

Send as E-mail Attachment

(Macros must be enabled.)



APPENDIX B: MPO SURVEY RESULTS

Staffing, Training and Resources

More than half (56%, 14 of 25) of the respondents have one or more public involvement specialists on staff. As might be expected, given their greater resources, most of the larger MPOs (89%, 8 of 9) reported having one or more public involvement specialists on staff, whereas only 38 percent (6 out of 16) of the smaller MPOs had a public involvement specialist.

Most respondents (88%, 22 of 25) stated their staff received public involvement training. Responses differed between larger and smaller MPOs; 100 percent (9 of 9) of the larger MPOs receiving public involvement training, and 81.3 percent, or 13 of 16 the smaller MPOs, received public involvement training. Despite having almost a 20 percent difference between smaller/larger MPOs, the difference was not statistically significant.

Sources of public involvement training for MPOs included FDOT (86%, 19 of 22), FHWA/FTA (73%, 16 of 22), internal sources (32%, 7 of 22), other government agencies (18%, 4 of 22) (i.e., CUTR, Planning Commission), and other sources (18%, 4 of 22), such as professional associations and organizations.

MPOs vary greatly on the amount of funding allocated to public involvement activities annually. Over half (52%, 13 of 25) of MPOs spend between 10-24 percent of their total annual budget on public involvement, yet only 12 percent (3 of 25) spend between 25-50 percent. Of the larger MPOs, most (77%, 7 of 9) spent between 10-24 percent of their total annual budget on public involvement. This is in sharp contrast to the expenditures of smaller MPOs, where only 38 percent, or 6 of 16, spent between 10-24 percent of their total annual budget on public involvement.

Another difference observed by population size of MPOs was that, although 19 percent or 3 of 16, of the smaller MPOs spent between 25-50 percent annually on public involvement, none of the larger MPOs spent between 25-50 percent of their annual budget on public involvement. The differences in funding allocations might be attributed to the overall budget size of the organization. For MPOs with larger annual budgets, a smaller percentage may be required; MPOs with smaller annual budget may need a higher percentage to accomplish the same tasks and activities.

Coordination and Follow-Up

All of the respondents (100%, 25 of 25) said their MPO followed up with implementing agencies, such as FDOT, to inform the agency of issues arising from public involvement efforts regarding planned projects and any commitments made by the MPO. Typical follow-up methods of MPOs included:

- providing the implementing agency with written documentation of public issues and commitments regarding MPO projects (68%, 17 of 25)
- participating in internal meeting(s) of the implementing agency on MPO projects (68%, 17 of 25)
- participating in the implementing agency's public hearings and meetings on MPO projects (64%, 16 of 25)

MPOs also follow up with implementing agencies in other ways, including participation in the Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) process for streamlining environmental decision making, continuous communication via phone calls and email, and inviting implementing agencies to participate in MPO workshops and/or advisory committees.

Techniques

Public involvement techniques used by metropolitan planning organizations varied significantly by activity type, number of people reached, number of techniques used by an MPO, and the most/least commonly used techniques. In the public involvement survey, MPOs were asked to indicate techniques used for general education and outreach purposes and/or in the development of long-range transportation plans (LRTPs), transportation improvement programs (TIPs), corridor studies and plans.

On average, MPOs draw upon approximately 20 different public involvement techniques for any given activity, with the lowest number of techniques used by an MPO being 11 and the highest being 30. The most/least popular techniques varied significantly depending on the type of activity (refer to Table 1). Overall, the most commonly employed techniques included: newsletters (96%, 24 of 25), public meetings (96%, 24 of 25), brochures (92%, 23 of 25), individual/small group briefings (92%, 23 of 25), newspaper advertisements in general circulation publications (92%, 23 of 25), press releases (84%, 21 of 25), and general purpose web pages (84%, 21 of 25). The least commonly employed techniques overall included transportation-based games (16%, 4 of 25), videos (16%, 4 of 25), telephone hotlines (20%, 5 of 25), simulation of project alternatives (28%, 7 of 25), and visual preference surveys (28%, 7 of 25).

The actual number of public involvement techniques used fluctuated greatly depending on the activity itself. For example, only 8 percent of MPOs used facilitated meetings as a public involvement technique for transportation improvement programming activities; however, 52 percent of MPOs used facilitated meetings when developing LRTPs.

MPOs used a variety of techniques to reach the public during the development of LRTPs. On average, a single MPO employed 16 different public involvement techniques. The MPO using the fewest number of techniques still used 7 different approaches for acquiring public input, while another MPO used as many as 25 different techniques. The more popular techniques applied during long-range transportation planning included public meetings (96%, 24 of 25), newspaper advertisement in general circulation publications (92%, 23 of 25), newsletters (88%, 22 of 25), general purpose web pages (88%, 22 of 25); and press releases (76%, 19 of 25). The least popular techniques were transportation-based games (12%, 3 of 25), videos (8%, 2 of 25), and telephone hotlines (0%, 0 of 25).

The number of techniques used during TIP development was notably lower than the number used for the LRTP. The average number of different techniques used for TIP development was 7 per MPO. One MPO used only 1 technique for TIP development, while two MPOs used as many as 15 different techniques. Public meetings (80%, 20 of 25), newspaper advertisements in general circulation publications (72%, 18 of 25), and general purpose web pages (68%, 17 of 25) were the most commonly used public involvement techniques for the TIP process. In contrast, only 4 percent of all MPOs in Florida used simulation of project alternatives, visioning/scenario building, telephone surveys, or videos as a public involvement technique for their transportation

improvement plan. None of the respondents used charettes, focus groups, transportation-based games, or telephone hotlines during the development of their TIP.

MPOs varied significantly in the number and types of public involvement techniques administered in corridor studies and plans. Three respondents used over 20 different techniques for corridor studies and plans, while four respondents used 5 or less. The most common public involvement techniques used by respondents for corridor studies and plans were public meetings (92%, 23 of 25), advisory committees (other than CAC) and press releases (72%, 18 of 25), individual/small group briefing (68%, 17 of 25) and newspaper advertisements in general circulation publications (68%, 17 of 25). The least common public involvement techniques applied to corridor studies and plans were kiosks/interactive displays, telephone hotlines, and visual preference surveys (12%, 3 of 25), videos (8%, 2 of 25), and transportation-based games (4%, 1 of 25).

The number of public involvement techniques MPOs used for general education and outreach purposes differed greatly by organization. One respondent did not indicate using any techniques, while other respondents listed using over 20 different techniques. The more popularly applied techniques for education and outreach were newsletters (84%, 21 of 25), general purpose websites (80%, 20 of 25), and brochures (76%, 19 of 25). Charettes (4%, 1 of 25), transportation-based games (4%, 1 of 25), visioning/scenario building (4%, 1 of 25), and simulation of project alternatives (0%, 0 of 25) were among the least popular techniques used for general education and outreach purposes.

The survey item on techniques did not specifically differentiate between techniques used purely for public information and those used for public involvement, other than to inquire which techniques were used primarily for education and general outreach. Clearly, however, public involvement implies a two-way dialogue and requires the agency both to solicit and address public input to improve the transportation decision making process. To obtain insight on this issue, MPOs were asked “When citizens participate in your public involvement process, do you have a method of showing them how their input was addressed?” Those responding affirmatively were asked to describe that method.

Many (72%, 18 of 25) MPOs responded affirmatively to this item. Eleven respondents said they posted results in MPO publications such as newsletters, plan documents, and on the MPO website. Other methods of addressing input included responding directly to the individual and posting public opinion survey results.

Involving Specific Populations

MPOs have long been required to involve the general public in the transportation decision making process. However, in the past few decades, special emphasis has also been placed on the need for more concerted efforts to involve those populations traditionally underrepresented in the transportation decision making process. The survey indicated that citizen’s advisory committees (CAC), required by Florida Transportation Law (F.S. 339.175), tend to be the foremost method to include traditionally underserved populations (88%, 22 of 25). Some MPOs have requirements that their CACs are reflective of the demographic they serve. Usually, this is achieved by altering the composition of the CAC’s membership to approximate the composition of the urbanized area.

Aside from using the CAC to include the traditionally underserved populations, most MPOs attended community events (76%, 19 of 25) or neighborhood meetings (68%, 17 of 25) in an effort to reach out to the public. Other methods were interviews with community leaders (64%, 16 of 25), focus groups (48%, 12 of 25), and representation of underserved populations on a steering committee/task force (44%, 11 of 25). Less commonly used methods indicated in the “other” category by respondents included representation on other MPO committees, translating materials (surveys and brochures), and targeted outreach efforts through media, mail outs, and surveys.

Overall, there was little difference in sources of methods to include traditionally underserved populations in relation to general population size served by the MPO, with one exception. More MPOs serving populations of greater than 500,000 (89%, 8 of 9) attended community events than MPOs serving populations of less than 500,000 (69%, 11 of 16). This might be attributed to the fact that most (89%, 8 of 9) MPOs serving larger populations have one or more public involvement specialists on staff, making outreach efforts at the community level more feasible.

Although not specifically required by legislation, most (92%, 22 of 24; one respondent abstained from answering) MPOs in Florida made a special effort to involve business and industry in the transportation decision making process. MPOs facilitated this through targeted outreach, such as presentations to Chambers of Commerce and/or industry trade groups (75%, 18 of 24), focus groups (50%, 12 of 24), representation on a steering committee/task force (42%, 10 of 24), or representation on the citizen’s advisory committee (38%, 9 of 24). Although most MPOs made a special effort to involve business and industry, others deliberately avoided making a concerted effort. For example, one respondent commented that his/her organization does not make a special effort to reach out to business and industry “because we do not want to be accused of supplying one business with information and not providing it to all businesses.”

Efforts to include business and industry in the transportation decision making process resulted in the greatest divergence between MPOs serving populations greater than/less than 500,000. Larger MPOs had a statistically significant higher rate of involving business and industry in the decision making process. Representation of business and industry on citizen advisory committees occurred in more than half of the MPOs serving larger populations (56%, 5 of 9), where representation only occurred in some of the MPOs serving smaller populations (27%, 4 of 15). Similarly, representation of business and industry in other MPO committees occurred in some of the larger MPOs (33%, 3 of 9), whereas few of the smaller MPOs (7%, 1 of 15) included business and industry on other MPO committees.

The most significant difference between MPO involvement of business and industry in the two sub-samples pertains to targeted outreach efforts. All respondents that served a population in excess of 500,000 (100%, 9 of 9) performed targeted outreach to business and industry; however, only a little more than half of MPOs serving a population below 500,000 (60%, 9 of 15) performed targeted outreach towards business and industry.

Best Practices and Lessons Learned

Following the survey item on techniques used, respondents were asked to indicate which techniques, in their experience, had been the most effective or that they would characterize as a best practice and which they considered least effective in involving the public in transportation

decisions. A related question was “What lessons have you learned in your public involvement efforts that you would pass on to other agencies?” Responses are summarized below.

Although public meetings were among the most widely used technique, many MPOs reported that large public meetings, and particularly public hearings, were the least effective public involvement technique used by their organization. Comments included the following:

- “Even a large turnout (50-100 people) is extremely un-representative of 1.5 million people ... and hearings are very labor intensive”
- “Lack of attendance and too rigid format”
- “Seniors not interested in long time frames or sitting and listening”

Despite the high percentage of MPOs using web sites in their public involvement efforts, opinions about their effectiveness varied widely. One respondent praised the effectiveness of web sites, stating they were convenient and specific; whereas, another respondent voiced concerns about the need to generate more hits on the web site from the public.

MPOs also appeared divided on the effectiveness of surveys, especially telephone surveys, as a method of involvement the public in the transportation decision making process. A few respondents deemed surveys ineffective due to low response rates and cost; meanwhile, other respondents praised the ability of surveys to obtain a larger, more representative response whose results could be generalized to the entire population.

Although several of the MPOs indicated using newspaper advertisements as a public involvement technique, some respondents believed advertisements were ineffective citing the expense associated with placing an advertisement and/or the low percentage of the population reading the newspaper. Other respondents considered press releases to be among the most effective public techniques employed by their organizations. One respondent attributed the success of press releases to their ability to provide a direct avenue to media outlets, which exposes issues to a greater population.

Other comments on best practices and lessons learned reveal that many MPOs felt that community events/group meetings and small group presentations or focus groups were far more effective ways of engaging the public than were large public meetings. A general theme was the importance of going to the public, rather than asking people to come to a regional meeting venue. As one respondent noted, “You have to go to the people, not make them come to you.” When asked to elaborate, respondents supplied the following responses:

- “Public involvement is most effective when there is opportunity for exchange of ideas (two-way dialogue), and while time-consuming, I find community/neighborhood level engagement to be most productive.”
- “Going to the people instead of asking them to come to you is much more effective and keeps them in their comfort zone.”
- “Small groups and/or focus groups provide more opportunity to engage participants and have a meaningful dialogue.”
- “Better interaction, closer relationship building [from smaller or more targeted venues].”
- “Generally, I find the public is more responsive to outreach at the community level as compared to a countywide or region wide events.”

- “‘Going to the people,’ setting up information booths at festivals and community groups is a great way to interact with the public. It gives the public an opportunity to meet staff.”
- “Take your information/message to people where they gather...don't just invite people to your meetings.”
- “Identify key community leaders. If you keep in contact with them, they get the word out to the rest of the community.”

Another theme was the importance of making a special effort to maintain continuous and open lines of communication with interested parties and that communication is a “two-way street”. Such communication also included the need to keep policy makers up to date on citizen issues or concerns. Specific comments related to communication included:

- “Keep at it by using all communication avenues possible to the public and stakeholders. Develop a strategic communications plan that is evaluated annually for effectiveness.”
- “Some key points: open communication with public and a Web site that is interactive and details projects.”
- “Make sure that you involve the public and not lecture the public. Also make sure that you are addressing a specific (project or issue) and ask that comments be specific.”
- “Expand the focus of individual project (corridor or other specific project) meetings to a regional focus to overcome NIMBYism.”
- “All public comments must be taken in a timely manner to policy-makers during development of a plan and/or program.”
- “Capture feedback in a form easily reported back to decision-makers.”
- “Include public in processes early.”

Some respondents advised others to reach beyond their comfort zone and try new strategies when the conventional techniques did not work. Related advice was the importance of talking to staff regularly about what has worked and what has not and tailoring public involvement activities to the audience and the objective. Comments on this theme included:

- “Don't just continue to use PI techniques because you've always done them. Be willing to try new things appropriate to the project/topic. Be willing to adjust your PI efforts if the techniques you thought would be successful are not. When you have a captive audience (at a meeting, etc.) ask their opinion of your PI efforts—nobody can measure the success or failure of PI better than the public.”
- “A boilerplate public involvement procedure doesn't work in every case. Communities are different and they should be approached differently.”
- “Set aside time with MPO staff regularly to discuss public involvement.”

In addition to the responses above, a few respondents praised the merits of using games as an innovative and entertaining way to engage and educate the public. Specifically, the game “Strings and Ribbons” was mentioned because the game engaged the public and allowed citizens “to tell elected officials and staff what they want.” “Strings and Ribbons” is a role-playing exercise whereby citizens make decisions on transportation improvements while visualizing the funding limitations. Each player is given a set amount of play money to spend on transportation improvements, which are represented by strings and ribbons.

Evaluating Effectiveness

Federal regulation, 23 CFR 450.316(b), requires a periodic review of public involvement practices by MPOs to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts. Survey responses indicated that MPOs ascertained the effectiveness of their public involvement efforts through informal feedback (76%, 19 of 25), evaluation forms at meetings (56%, 14 of 25), internal debriefings after events (48%, 12 of 25), and public opinion surveys (28%, 7 of 25). In addition, some respondents indicated using performance evaluations on a quarterly or annual basis to determine if efforts are in-line with their public involvement plan.

When asked based on their evaluations how they would rate the public's response to their organization's public involvement process, the majority of respondents (54%, 13 of 24) indicated they would rate the public's response as favorable or better, but a large percentage (46%, 11 of 24) said they would rate the public's response to their process as fair. (Note: One respondent marked two responses for this question; therefore, the response(s) from that MPO were not included in these calculations.) None of the respondents felt the public would rate their process as less than fair.

Challenges and Benefits of Public Involvement

Reaping the benefits of public involvement often requires organizations to overcome several challenges. Florida MPOs felt the greatest challenges they faced in the public involvement process included poor attendance at meetings (60%, 15 of 25), lack of adequate resources (i.e., staff or funding) (56%, 14 of 25), lack of public understanding of the transportation planning process (48%, 12 of 25), and difficulty involving people in early planning process (44%, 11 of 25).

Other challenges faced were the lack of continuity with the public involvement efforts of implementing agencies, difficulty identifying affected populations and interested stakeholders, and an antagonistic atmosphere that impedes meaningful dialogue (16%, 4 of 25). Other challenges noted by respondents included:

- “The public’s perception that transportation agencies have ‘already made up their mind or ignore the comments/concerns of the public’”
- “NIMBYism (the concerns of a small group of immediately affected citizens winning out over the collective needs of the community)”
- “It’s difficult to communicate how long-range projects will affect residents and their community—why they should take an interest.”
- “Reducing massive amounts of information to an understandable level”
- “MPO staff has been exposed to many different techniques through FDOT training, FHWA peer exchanges, etc. unfortunately, we don't have the resources (staff or budget) to implement some of the techniques that we would like to try”
- “Getting public involved with limited staff and funding resources”

Despite such challenges, MPOs responding to the survey acknowledged the benefits of an effective public involvement process to the transportation decision making process. As succinctly stated by one respondent, “better public involvement, better projects.” Among the benefits of their public involvement efforts noted by MPOs were improved relationships with affected citizens and interested parties (76%, 19 of 25), improved public understanding of the transportation planning process (76%, 19 of 25), improved public trust/credibility of the agency

(60%, 15 of 25), better projects/more effective transportation solutions (48%, 12 of 25), and fewer adverse impacts on the community or the environment (44%, 11 of 25).

Training and Information Needs

The public involvement process continues to evolve from information obtained through surveys, MPO experiences, and legislation that shape the process. In their efforts to address new legislative requirements and improve their public involvement capabilities, MPOs listed the following topics or techniques they would like to receive information or advice about:

- “Specific federal expectations on effectiveness of our public education and involvement techniques”
- “Curriculum of public involvement training”
- “Training & implementation kits based on best practices”
- “Benefits/Negative aspects of telephone surveys”
- “More visual tools like 3-D modeling and statistically verifiable surveying techniques”
- “Market research (telephone survey, focus groups)”
- “Evaluation techniques and how to evaluate the effectiveness of our public involvement process for specific tasks (i.e., LRTP)”
- “Soliciting volunteers”
- “How to get minorities to volunteer to serve on the Citizens Advisory Committee”
- “How to educate the public regarding the transportation planning process when the public doesn't want to be ‘educated’”
- “Building a relationship with the media”

APPENDIX C: FLORIDA PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT CASE EXAMPLES

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 FDOT staff 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 units 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),

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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 sociocultural effects assessment.]

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

In May 1994, the USF Center for Urban Transportation Research conducted an evaluation of public involvement experiences of the 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 Districts 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), 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 its success in implementing median projects and managing political appeals to its 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 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 leaseholders 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 comprising representatives from planning, 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.

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 FHWA, in cooperation with FDOT, sponsored a benchmarking study of public involvement in the development of long range transportation plans by the MPOs. 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 identified certain themes or 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 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 outlines 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 percent 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 external and internal evaluations of the public involvement process. A

five-minute telephone survey was conducted with 1,500 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 does not, 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>.

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 MPOs 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.

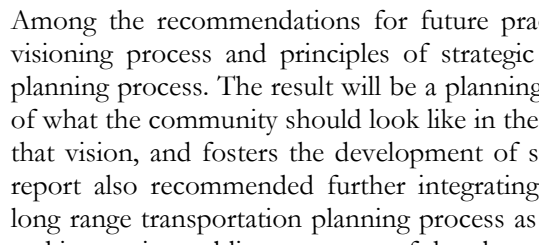
The 2002 review found that public involvement efforts varied greatly among MPOs, but had generally improved since 1997. A few MPOs had not changed their public involvement strategies (holding a few public meetings and one public hearing during the middle of the day at a government facility) from 1997, 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 increased, 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 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 that 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.

APPENDIX D: NATIONAL 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. This white paper identifies several guiding principles of successful public involvement:

1. Public relations and public information should be distinguished 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.

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 that 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 that 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.

APPENDIX E: OTHER STATE AND MPO PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ASSESSMENTS

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.
- 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, Amy, Cherie Kyte, Eugene Arnold and Michael 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. 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.
2. Focus group discussions and interviews with VDOT technical and public affairs staff. 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.
3. Surveys of citizens attending VDOT project meetings and hearings. 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.

4. Surveys of citizens attending VDOT's financial planning and programming meetings. A two-page survey was mailed to citizens attending these meetings across 9 jurisdictions where the meetings were held.
5. Written surveys of MPO staff. A survey similar to the VDOT self-evaluation survey was sent to staff of each of the nine MPOs.
6. 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.

**“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, 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:

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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.
 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. A total of 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 comprised 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 65 percent. 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.

Graves, S., and S. 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 MPO 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 TPB Responsibilities.
- Either Discontinue or Enhance the CAC.

The report offered numerous findings on key issues surrounding public involvement by the region and suggestions for improving TPBs 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.

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 percent 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 percent 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):

- Monitoring of attendance rates at meetings and number of calls on ads and surveys.
- Relative response to previous efforts.
- Follow-up letters to participants.
- Convening of 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.
- Meetings of a board subcommittee for self examination of current public involvement elements.