



Pasco County Metropolitan Planning Organization

Public Involvement Plan



December 2003

**PASCO COUNTY
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PASCO COUNTY METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

December 2003

PURPOSE

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) requires that the public have "full and open access" in the development of plans and programs under the metropolitan planning process. The transportation plans of the metropolitan area should reflect the needs of its citizens and enhancement of the community's assets. The Pasco County MPO's plan for public involvement is dynamic, innovative, and flexible. The plan can be modified in order to conform to various requirements for public involvement set by new regulations.

The Public Involvement Plan for Pasco County is created to reflect TEA-21 requirements and to give greater attention to the thoughts and ideas of the citizens who are affected by changes in the area's transportation system. The intent of the Pasco County MPO public involvement process is to achieve a greater public understanding for the process of transportation planning and more cohesive support for the ultimate decisions.

The MPO's goal is to develop a public participation process that provides information on projects and plans, and opportunities for continuous citizen input from the initial phases through final development of these plans and projects. A policy of the Pasco County MPO is that all persons regardless of race, sex, national origin, age, religion, or physical condition have full and complete access to the planning process. This public participation process and the strategies included herein are designed with consideration of that goal.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Pasco County is located in the central west region of Florida, along the Gulf of Mexico. According to 2000 population estimates, Pasco County is home to approximately 344,765 residents. Both Federal and local laws require the establishment of an MPO in all areas with an urbanized population over 50,000. The Pasco County MPO functions as the countywide transportation planning organization and provides a forum for cooperative decision making with regard to countywide transportation issues.

In order to implement a public involvement process that fulfills the intent of TEA-21, the MPO has reviewed the socioeconomic characteristics and demographics of the Pasco County metropolitan area to solicit participation from a broad spectrum of social and economic backgrounds and interests in transportation. Based on this review, a brief description of the population by ethnic group/race in Pasco County is as follows¹:

- 94.9 percent white,
- 2.3 percent black,
- 1.5 percent non-White, non-Black, and

¹ All Demographic Data Obtained From 2000 U.S. Census Bureau General Profile

- 5.7 percent Hispanic (may be of any race).

Pasco County has a lower percentage of racially oriented minorities than the State or the nation. It also has a higher percentage of female residents than male residents. The median household income in 1999 dollars was \$32,969.00. Approximately 11 percent of all persons in the County have incomes below the poverty level. Twenty-seven percent of the population is 65 years old or older.

REQUIREMENTS FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The importance of effectively involving the public in the transportation planning process was first established in 1991 with the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). Its successor, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), continues to stress the importance of public involvement. Section 450.316(b)(1) CFR defines the public involvement requirements for the metropolitan planning process as follows.

The metropolitan planning process shall:

1. Include a proactive public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) and meets the requirements and criteria specified below:
 - a. Require a minimum public comment period of 45 days before the public involvement process is initially adopted or revised;
 - b. Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, affected public agencies, representative of transportation agency employees, other interested parties, freight shippers, private providers of transportation, and the segment of the community affected by transportation plans, programs, and projects (including, but not limited to, central city and other local jurisdictions);
 - c. Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of plans, and TIPs, and open public meetings where matters related to the Federal-aid highway and transit programs are being considered;
 - d. Require adequate public notice of public involvement activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points including, but not limited to, approval of plans and TIPs;
 - e. Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received during the planning and program development processes;
 - f. Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems including, but not limited to, low-income and minority households in an effort to ensure that the requirements of Title VI and Environmental Justice have been met during the planning and project process;
 - g. When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft

Transportation Plan or TIP (including the financial plan) as a result of the public involvement process or the interagency consultation process required under the United States Environmental Protection Agency's conformity regulations, a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments shall be made part of the final plan and TIP;

- h. If the final transportation plan or TIP differs significantly from the one which was made available for public comment by MPO and raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have been foreseen from the public involvement efforts, an additional opportunity for public comment on the revised plan or TIP shall be made available;
- i. Public involvement processes shall be periodically reviewed by the MPO in terms of their effectiveness in ensuring that the process provides full and open access to all;
- j. These procedures will be reviewed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) during certification reviews for Transportation Management Areas (TMAs), and as otherwise necessary for all MPOs, to ensure that full and open access is provided to the MPO decision-making processes;
- k. Metropolitan public involvement processes shall be coordinated with Statewide and regional public involvement processes wherever possible to enhance public consideration of the issues, plans, and programs and reduce redundancies and costs.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES AND STRATEGIES

In order to comply with the various requirements for public involvement described above, the Pasco County MPO used a two-step process to develop their Public Involvement Plan. The first step included defining the major transportation planning activities that require public involvement. The second step defined the specific strategies used to involve the public in the transportation planning activities. These steps are further discussed below.

Transportation Planning Activities

The Pasco County MPO public involvement process includes the seven primary transportation planning activities listed below and described in the following text:

1. Transportation Improvement Program,
2. Unified Planning Work Program,
3. Long Range Transportation Plan and subsequent amendments,
4. Efficient Transportation Decision-Making Process,
5. Mobility Management System,

6. Transit Development Plan,
7. Special Projects, and
8. Triennial Certification.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Annually, MPO staff develops a Countywide Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The current TIP includes the funded Capital Improvement Plans (CIP) for the jurisdictions within Pasco County and the Work Program for the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). Efforts will be made to enhance the format of the TIP to make it more "user friendly." This will include the use of maps and graphics for simplified public review. Additionally, public involvement will be encouraged early in the TIP development process through a public workshop. The Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC), the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), and FDOT will also review the TIP. Finally, the MPO Board will hold an advertised public hearing on the TIP at a designated regularly scheduled MPO Board meeting.

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

Each year, MPO staff develops a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) that identifies the projects and activities to be undertaken by the MPO. The UPWP also provides information about the objective, previous work, methodology, responsible agency, and funding source for each work task. Based on comments received from the CAC, and for the benefit of the general public, a summary page describing the UPWP in simple, non-technical text will be included in the UPWP document.

The UPWP will also be reviewed by the CAC, TAC, and FDOT. The MPO Board will hold an advertised public hearing on the UPWP at a designated regularly scheduled MPO Board meeting.

Long Range Transportation Plan

The Long Range Transportation Plan forms the blueprint to guide development of the future transportation system in Pasco County. The plan addresses requirements of TEA-21 and includes both short- and long-range, multimodal transportation improvement strategies.

The public will be encouraged to participate early on in the Long Range Transportation Plan development process. Such participation will be through CAC meetings, public workshops and hearings. A Transportation Plan schedule depicting key milestones will be maintained by the MPO and made available to interested parties.

If requested by local communities, MPO staff will conduct additional workshops on the Transportation Plan Update. The workshops will provide an opportunity to review the plan for requested jurisdictions and geographic areas of the County. This effort will ensure coordination with local needs as reflected in local comprehensive plans.

Efficient Transportation Decision Marking (ETDM) Process

The ETDM Process improves the effectiveness of transportation planning by integrating ecosystem preservation with land use planning and social considerations earlier in the transportation planning process. Resource agencies and the public are provided access to project plans and information about potential effects of transportation projects on Florida's natural and human environments. The public can review project data over the internet and provide input to MPOs and to FDOT through public involvement events.

Mobility Management System (MMS)

The purpose of the MMS is to provide information on the transportation system performance and alternative strategies to enhance the mobility of persons and goods. One of the products of the MMS will be a list of prioritized short-range transportation improvements that might be incorporated into the local governments' CIP and State TIP. The list of priority projects will be updated annually, and the performance of the implemented projects will be monitored on a regular basis.

Public involvement in Pasco County will be achieved through workshops, CAC, TAC, the MPO Board, and surveys. Public workshops may include presentations to various municipalities upon their request. It is anticipated that most of the public involvement activities will be conducted during the identification and evaluation of the mobility management strategies; however, the public is encouraged to participate at any time during the MMS development process.

Transit Development Plan

Florida State law requires a major update of the Transit Development Plan (TDP) every three years for systems receiving State funding for public transportation. This update results in a five-year plan for transit and mobility needs, cost and revenue projections, and community transit goals and objectives.

Special Projects

Some of the projects undertaken by the MPO are projects of significant community importance. Examples of these types of projects might include corridor action plans, access management studies, a major road widening project, or a corridor alignment study for a new road.

The public will be involved early in special projects through public workshops and other mechanisms to obtain public input and from the CAC. These workshops will be designed to solicit public input at an early enough stage of the project so that input can be considered and reflected in the planning study.

Triennial Certification

FHWA and FTA conduct a triennial certification of the metropolitan planning process for MPOs. During the on-site element of the Metropolitan Certification Review, the public involvement process should make a special effort to engage and involve representatives of minority and low-income groups to hear their views regarding changes to and performance of the planning process.

Public Involvement Strategies

The MPO reviewed a number of strategies designed to encourage public involvement in the Pasco County transportation planning process. Described below are the current strategies utilized by the MPO to solicit and encourage public involvement in the transportation planning process. These strategies are summarized in Table 1.

**TABLE 1
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES**

Public Involvement Strategies	Purpose	Elements
Public Workshops and Transportation Fairs	Inform the general public of the nature of regular transportation activities and to solicit public feedback of current county processes and procedures.	An informal meeting held to educate the public why specific projects are undertaken and how these projects will benefit the Pasco County citizens and the community at large.
Public Hearings	Allow, through public participation, early and continuing public involvement; formally present the plan or project to the public.	Generally held by the MPO Board prior to the adoption of an MPO transportation related work product; public input used to develop finalized documents.
MPO Board	MPO Board meetings, open to the public, provide a forum for discussion of transportation plans and programs.	The MPO Board meets on a monthly basis on the second Thursday of each month at 10:00 a.m.
Citizens' Advisory Committee	The CAC is comprised of a diverse group of individuals representing varied communities in the area in order to encourage a wide range of views and ideas on plans and projects; early involvement in development of the TIP, UPWP and the Long Range Transportation Plan.	The CAC meets on the Wednesday before the regularly scheduled MPO Board meeting at 9:30 a.m.; a CAC subcommittee was formed for the purpose of transportation plan development.
Technical Advisory Committee	Appointed by the MPO Board, the TAC consists of professional and technical planners, engineers and other disciplines; created to provide interagency coordination between the MPO, FDOT, County, and local governments; reviews and makes recommendations concerning transportation plans and programs.	The TAC meets on the Monday prior to the MPO Board meeting at 1:30 p.m.; a TAC subcommittee was formed for the purpose of transportation plan development.
Public Involvement Process Mailing List	Serves to inform the community of various transportation planning activities undertaken by the MPO, such as the Long Range Transportation Plan; CAC, TAC and MPO Board meetings; and future public workshops and hearings.	List includes civic associations, clubs and organizations, municipal governments, newspapers and concerned citizens.
MPO Publications	Documents used to inform the general public about the transportation planning activities and projects being accomplished by the MPO.	Includes summary information, newsletters and brochures; also includes an executive summary of the Long Range Transportation Plan, highlighting the development process.
Public Media Coverage	Inform all members of the public, including those traditionally underserved, so that they are aware of hearings and workshops and can provide input on transportation planning issues and the Long Range Transportation Plan.	Includes use of public access cable TV, advertising in major and local newspapers and direct mailings.
Public Surveys / Comment Forms	To solicit citizen input on various topics concerning the transportation planning process.	Sent to random members of the public and those traditionally underserved
County Website	To provide fast and efficient updates on projects or transportation plans and to provide documents or other information out to the general public for their input.	Provides information on MPO activities, meetings and members; downloadable plans; interactive maps of transportation projects; and opportunities to provide feedback on transportation issues.
Special Efforts for Underserved/ Underrepresented	Measures taken to involve population segments that are traditionally underserved/ underrepresented in Pasco County, as recommended by the U.S. Department of Transportation's order on environmental justice (Title VI requirements).	Focus on geographic locations with a high concentration of underserved and underrepresented.
Efficient Transportation Decision-Making Process	To provide the public access to project plans and information regarding potential effects of transportation projects on natural and human environments.	Internet application provides access to project information so the public can formulate commentary about potential sociocultural effects.

Public Workshops and Transportation Fairs

Since the general public is not aware of the nature of regular transportation activities, the MPO will hold public workshops to inform the public about why specific projects are undertaken and how these projects will benefit the citizens and the community at large. Additionally, public workshops will occur during the Long Range Transportation Plan development process. These will be identified in the Transportation Plan Milestone Schedule (when the Transportation Plan is being developed). The MPO will establish dates and times of the workshops so that the majority of citizens interested in transportation issues can participate. At a minimum, these workshops shall be given public notice according to Zoning Administration Procedures, Article 300, Land Development Code, Section 303.2, Paragraph B. Additionally, information about scheduled public workshops and summary agendas are posted in County government buildings, including the Government Centers. Meeting notices and agenda summaries are also distributed to public libraries, municipal governments, recreation centers, community centers, newspapers and public buses within Pasco County. Information regarding transportation workshops can also be found on the MPO's website at www.pascompo.com. Transportation fairs are very similar to public workshops except they are conducted in a more informal setting and populated areas like shopping malls.

Public Hearings

Public hearings are generally held by the MPO Board prior to taking action on any plans or programs. The MPO will hold hearings, at early stages of MPO projects and plans. Such hearings will allow for early and continuing public involvement. These hearings will occur during the development of activities, such as the TIP, UPWP, Long Range Transportation Plan, and for special projects as determined necessary and appropriate by the MPO Board. At a minimum, all public hearings shall be given public notice according to Zoning Administration Procedures, Article 300, Land Development Code, Section 303.2, Paragraph B. Additionally, information about scheduled public hearings and summary agendas are posted in County government buildings, including the Government Centers. Meeting notices and agenda summaries are also distributed to public libraries, municipal governments and newspapers within Pasco County. Information based on public hearings will also be provided on the county's website, www.pascompo.com.

MPO Board

The MPO Board is comprised of governmental officials who have approval responsibility for the UPWP, Long Range Transportation Plan, and other planning activities and projects. The MPO Board approves membership on the TAC and CAC.

The MPO Board meets on a monthly basis on the second Thursday of each month at 10:00 a.m. Meeting notifications are provided to local newspapers through the County's public information department and are open to the public. Additionally, information about scheduled MPO Board meetings and summary agendas are posted in County government buildings, including the Government Centers. Meeting notices and agenda summaries are also distributed to public libraries and municipal governments within Pasco County as well as to public access cable TV for public viewing. Information pertaining to MPO Board meetings is accessible via the County's website at www.pascompo.com.

Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC)

The CAC is comprised of a cross section of representatives of the community including representation for the elderly, females, minorities, and Americans with disabilities. A CAC subcommittee was specifically formed for the purpose of transportation plan development. The CAC will be involved throughout the development of the TIP, UPWP, Long Range Transportation Plan, and other transportation plans and studies. The committee will usually meet at a fixed time on a fixed day. These meetings are currently held on the Wednesday before the regularly scheduled MPO Board meeting at 9:30 a.m., or at a designated time during the evening. The CAC meetings will be open to the general public to encourage a wide range of views and ideas on plans and projects from a variety of people. Information regarding the CAC meetings shall be made available to local newspapers through the County's information department. Additionally, information about scheduled CAC meetings and summary agendas is posted in County government buildings, including the Government Centers. Meeting notices and agenda summaries are also distributed to public libraries and municipal governments within Pasco County as well as to public access cable TV for public viewing. Information pertaining to CAC meetings is accessible via the County's website at www.pascompo.com.

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

The TAC is appointed by the MPO Board and consists of professional and technical planners, engineers, and other appropriate disciplines. Interagency coordination is accomplished through the MPO, FDOT, County, and local governments, all of which are represented on the TAC. A TAC subcommittee was specifically formed for the purpose of transportation plan development. The TAC reviews and makes recommendations concerning transportation studies, the TIP, UPWP, and the Transportation Plan. The TAC includes both voting and nonvoting members. The committee meets on the Monday prior to the MPO Board meeting at 1:30 p.m. Information regarding the meetings shall be provided to local newspapers through the County's public information department. Additionally, information about scheduled TAC meetings and summary agendas is posted in County government buildings, including the Government Centers. Meeting notices and agenda summaries are also distributed to public libraries and municipal governments within Pasco County as well as public access cable TV for public viewing. Information pertaining to TAC meetings is accessible via the County's website at www.pascompo.com

Public Involvement Process Mailing List

The MPO staff maintains and updates a mailing list for the purpose of informing the community about various transportation planning activities undertaken by the MPO. The mailing list includes civic associations, clubs and organizations, municipal governments, newspapers, and concerned citizens. As major transportation planning activities are initiated, such as the Long Range Transportation Plan, the mailing list will be used to inform the community about scheduled CAC, TAC, and MPO Board meetings; future public workshops and hearings; and to provide brief updates concerning the status and progress of ongoing transportation planning activities and projects. To be placed on the Public Involvement Process Mailing List, please call the MPO at (727) 847-8140 or email at www.pascompo.com

MPO Publications

The MPO periodically publishes summary information, newsletters, and brochures about the transportation planning activities and projects being accomplished. These include the CIP, UPWP, and special projects of community importance. Additionally, an executive summary of the Long Range Transportation Plan will be produced to briefly describe, illustrate, and highlight the transportation plan development process. Information about currently available publications can be obtained by calling the MPO at (727) 847-8140 or by visiting their website at www.pascompo.com.

Public Media Coverage

The Pasco County Public Transportation Division has an ongoing program to inform the public of the opportunities available for assessing transportation alternatives. The MPO will coordinate its public media program with the Public Transportation Division.

The MPO uses public access cable TV, radio talk shows and advertising, newspapers (both major and local), and direct mailings through utility bills to inform the public about various transportation projects, the TIP, UPWP, and Transportation Plan, where practical. This will include production of videos for selected major programs and/or plans and public service announcements on cable-access television concerning scheduled CAC, TAC, and MPO Board meetings; public workshops; and public hearings. Broadcasts of MPO meetings will be aired on cable access Television, where practical. The MPO will also encourage newspaper coverage of these meetings, and MPO staff will be available to assist reporters in their understanding of agenda items and topics. The goal of using this type of media coverage is to inform all members of the public, including those traditionally underserved, so that they are aware of the hearings and workshops and can provide input on transportation planning issues and the Long Range Transportation Plan.

Public Surveys/Comment Forms

The MPO utilizes surveys and comment forms, as determined to be appropriate, to solicit citizen input on various topics concerning the transportation planning process. Such surveys and comment forms will be sent to those random members of the public and members of the public traditionally underserved so that their input can be considered in the transportation planning process. Surveys and comment forms will also be available on the County's website at www.pascompo.com.

Pasco County Website

The MPO maintains an internet site providing a forum for the most current information on activities and projects, meetings, public hearings and Board Members; downloadable plans for easy citizen review; interactive maps of transportation projects; links to related sites; and several opportunities to provide commentary to the MPO regarding their plans and programs. Archived videos of MPO and other public meetings will be provided on the website, where practical. The website can be accessed at www.pascompo.com.

Special Efforts to Involve Traditionally Underserved and Underrepresented (Title VI Requirements)

The transportation underserved are those that have greater difficulty getting to places in their community, such as jobs, schools, recreation and shopping than the population at large. Examples of the traditionally underserved include persons with disabilities and low incomes, minority groups, and the elderly. Transportation barriers make it difficult for them to be aware of transportation planning issues in their communities. Therefore, it is important to identify and implement specific strategies that enable these citizens to participate in the public involvement process.

Consistent with the U.S. Department of Transportation's order on environmental justice, special efforts are undertaken to involve population segments that are traditionally underserved and/or underrepresented in Pasco County. These requirements, based on Title VI of the 1964 Civil Right's Act, ISTEA and NEPA, are designed to ensure the interests of minority and low income populations are considered and addressed in all transportation decision making. These efforts may include the following:

- Identify geographic locations with a high concentration of the traditionally underserved and underrepresented;
- Host traditional workshops convenient to these geographic locations;
- Invite community leaders from these geographic locations to participate on the CAC;
- Distribute information regarding the transportation planning process and opportunities for public involvement by providing information on public buses;
- Meet with and make presentations to organizations that represent this segment of the population.

Efficient Transportation Decision Making Process

Florida's new Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) Process provides the public access to project plans and information through an internet application. This information allows the public to provide input about potential effects on the community.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS SUMMARY

Based on transportation planning activities and public involvement strategies previously discussed, Table 2, Public Involvement Process, presents a matrix of the public involvement strategies applicable to each transportation planning activity.

The matrix indicates whether the public involvement strategy is required or optional for each transportation planning activity.

The Pasco County MPO's public involvement process will be reviewed periodically to determine its effectiveness in involving the public in the transportation planning process. Adjustments to the strategies will be made as determined appropriate.

**TABLE 2
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS**

Public Involvement Strategies	Transportation Planning Activities						Triennial Certification Process
	TIP	UPWP	Transportation Plan Development and Amendment Process	MMS	TDP	Special Projects	
Public Workshops and Transportation Fairs	R	O	R	R	R	O	O
Public Hearings	R	R	R	N/A	R	O	R
MPO Board	R	R	R	R	R	O	R
CAC	R	R	R	R	R	O	R
TAC	R	R	R	R	R	O	R
Public Involvement Process Mailing List	O	O	R	R	R	O	O
MPO Publications	R	R	R	O	R	O	O
Public Media Coverage	O	O	R	O	O	O	O
Public Surveys/Comment Forms	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Special Efforts for Underserved/ Underrepresented	R	R	R	R	R	O	R
County Website	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Efficient Transportation Decision Making Process	R	N/A	R	O	O	O	O

R = Required.

O = Optional.

N/A = Not Applicable.

EVALUATION OF THE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

Goal, Objectives, and Performance Measures

Goal: To effectively involve the public in all of the Pasco County MPO transportation planning activities.

Objective 1. Promote proactive and early public involvement; provide diverse opportunities for public participation.

Performance Measures

- MPO public forums, workshops, or meetings sponsored
- Public given notices early and at key points within the schedule of all planning activities
- Diverse opportunities provided including workshops, public hearings, website, newspaper articles, CAC meetings, survey

Objective 2. Provide full and easy access to complete information and key decisions; increase public awareness.

Performance Measures

- MPO newsletters during key planning activities
- Newspaper advertisements and public notices published
- Public meetings broadcast on Pasco County Television
- Public visits to the Pasco County MPO website
- Public meetings held where public transit is available
- Information provided to the public in an easy to understand format
- Project information provided to public over the internet through ETDM Process
- Information available in libraries and other public places

Objective 3. Effectively involve the transportation underserved and underrepresented.

Performance Measures

- Organizations representing the underserved/underrepresented are included on mailing list for MPO planning activities
- Public workshops and forums held in areas with high concentrations of transportation underserved
- Transportation services for the transportation underserved provided to and from workshops
- Publicly posted announcements in free media for transportation underserved

Objective 4. Include public input in transportation decision-making.

Performance Measures

- Public comments for MPO plans and programs are provided, considered, and documented
- Documented revisions to plans based on citizen input

Objective 5. Continuously monitor and improve the public involvement process.

Performance Measures

- Federal rules and regulations concerning public involvement reviewed on a regular basis
- Updates to the MPO's Public Involvement Plan at least every five years
- New ideas and public input used to improve the public involvement process