



**FAIRBANKS
METROPOLITAN AREA
TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM**

Public Participation Plan

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Chapter I

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to set procedures that the Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System (FMATS) will use to comply with the public involvement requirements of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), and Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice.

ISTEA and TEA-21 required a proactive public involvement process as an integral part of the transportation planning and project development process used by Metropolitan Planning Organizations. SAFETEA-LU established additional requirements for proactive public participation. The public participation process must provide timely public notice, complete information, and opportunities for early and continuing involvement. Employing visualization techniques and making information available in an electronically accessible format is also required.

In addition, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Order (DOT 5610.2) Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-income Populations established policies and procedures to use in complying with Executive Order (EO) 12898: Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations. EO 12898 requires “each federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies and activities on minority and low-income populations”.

The public involvement process is part of the development of the FMATS Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and other reports that are needed to complete transportation planning process.

As required by 23 CFR 450.316 (a) (3) this document will have a 45-day public comment period.

Chapter II

Federal Public Involvement Requirements

The following is a summary of Federal requirements for public participation in transportation planning as presented in ISTEA, TEA-21, SAFETEA-LU and Executive Order 12898.

ISTEA/TEA-21

ISTEA and TEA-21 include the following requirements for Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO's) regarding public involvement:

1. Provide timely information about transportation issues and procedures to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agencies, private providers of transportation, other interested parties and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs and projects.
2. Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of plans and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP's) and open public meetings where matters related to the Federal-aid highway and transit programs are being considered.
3. Consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including, but not limited to low-income and minority households.

SAFETEA-LU

SAFETEA-LU added the following requirements Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO's) regarding public participation:

1. Holding public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times.
2. Making public information available in electronically accessible formats and means, such as the World Wide Web.
3. Demonstrating explicit consideration and response to public input received during the development of the LRTP and TIP.
4. Providing an additional opportunity for public comment, if the final LRTP or TIP differs significantly from the version that was made available for public comment by the MPO and raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen from the public involvement efforts.
5. Coordinating with the statewide transportation planning public involvement and consultation process.
6. Periodically reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures and strategies contained in the participation plan to ensure a full and open participation process.

Executive Order 12898: Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations

Executive Order 12898 includes the following two principles of environmental justice:

1. Ensure the public involvement of low-income and minority groups in decision making.
2. Prevent disproportionately high and adverse impacts of decisions on low-income and minority groups.

It is FHWA mandated (DOT 5610.2) for any program or activity, in which any federal funds will be used, the agency receiving the federal funds (including states, cities, and MPO's) must address both of these issues.

Chapter III

General Public Access to the Planning Process

The Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System, also referred to as FMATS, was established in May 2002 when the Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census released the Federal Register of Qualifying Urban Areas for Census 2000 that identified Fairbanks as a newly urbanized area. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) require establishment of an MPO in designated urbanized areas. The Code of Federal Regulations (23 CFR) and the U.S. Codes (Title 23) require FMATS to meet regulations to continue receiving Federal funding.

The FMATS Policy Committee is responsible for developing regional transportation policies, plans and programs and directing the continuing, comprehensive and cooperative transportation planning process in the Fairbanks and North Pole areas. The committee is composed of the Mayor of the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB), the Mayor of the City of Fairbanks, the Mayor of the City of North Pole, the Regional Director of the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) Northern Region, the Director of the Department of Environmental (DEC) Conservation Air Quality Division, a representative of the FNSB Assembly and a representative of the Fairbanks City Council. Assisting the Policy Committee is the FMATS Technical Committee.

The FMATS Technical Committee advises the Policy Committee on matters relating to policy, plans and programs. It is made up of city engineers, planners, transit operators, and regional and state agency representatives.

FMATS Policy Committee Meetings

Scheduled Policy Committee meetings are typically held monthly on the 3rd Wednesday although additional meetings can be scheduled at the discretion of the Policy Committee Chairman. Two Public Comment Periods are included as agenda items at each meeting. The following guidelines shall apply to public comment presented to the FMATS Policy Committee.

1. A sign-in sheet will be available prior to the meeting. Members of the public will be encouraged to sign in so that they may be able to receive notifications of future meetings.
2. Public comment will be limited to three minutes. Additional time allotted will be at the discretion of the FMATS Policy Committee Chairman.
3. Each member of the public is encouraged to provide concise comments.
4. Groups wishing to address the FMATS Policy Committee should select a representative to present the group's position to the committee.
5. The opportunity for public comment at the FMATS Policy Committee is not intended nor should members of the public expect to initiate debate with the committee, an individual member or presenter, or members of the FMATS Technical Committee. Likewise, members of the public should not expect immediate responses to any questions, concerns or comments provided.
6. It should be noted that items listed on the agenda may be voted on, action may be deferred, tabled or referred back to the committee for further consideration at the Policy committee's discretion. The official position on all matters will be adopted at the appropriate time by a majority of the members.
7. Those members of the public who would like to present written comments to the committee, but do not wish to address the committee may submit their comments at any time prior to the committee meeting.
8. Policy Committee meeting notices will be published in the Fairbanks Daily Newsminer and broadcast on radio. The City of Fairbanks, City of North Pole, Fairbanks North Star Borough and the State of Alaska will post meeting notices on their websites and utilize the State's Online Public Notice system for all meetings. The advertisement will include date, time, meeting place and anticipated agenda items.

FMATS Technical Committee Meetings

Scheduled Technical Committee meetings are typically held monthly on the 1st Wednesday although additional meetings can be scheduled at the discretion of the Policy Committee or the Technical Committee Chairman. A Public Comment Period is included as an agenda item at each meeting. The following guidelines shall apply to public comment presented to the FMATS Technical Committee.

1. A sign-in sheet will be available prior to the meeting. Members of the public will be encouraged to sign in so that they may be able to receive notifications of future meetings.
2. Public comment will be limited to three minutes. Additional time allotted will be at the discretion of the FMATS Technical Committee Chairman.
3. Each member of the public is encouraged to provide concise comments.
4. Groups wishing to address the FMATS Technical Committee should select a representative to present the group's position to the committee.
5. The opportunity for public comment at the FMATS Technical Committee is not intended nor should members of the public expect to initiate debate with the committee. Likewise, members of the public should not expect immediate responses to any questions, concerns or comments provided.
6. Those members of the public who would like to present written comments to the committee, but do not wish to address the committee may submit their comments at any time prior to the committee meeting.
7. Technical Committee meeting notices will be published in the Fairbanks Daily Newsminer and broadcast on radio. The City of Fairbanks, City of North Pole, Fairbanks North Star Borough and the State of Alaska will post meeting notices on their websites and utilize the State's Online Public Notice system for all meetings. The advertisement will include date, time, meeting place and anticipated agenda items.
8. Special meetings of the subcommittees of the Technical Committee may be held to address specific tasks outside of a regularly scheduled meeting. The work of all subcommittees will be presented to the Technical Committee at a regularly scheduled meeting. Notice of subcommittee meetings will follow the methods described in #7 above, when possible.

Chapter IV

Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System Plan

A primary responsibility of FMATS is to prepare and maintain a Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) which meets the travel needs of the Fairbanks and North Pole areas. The LRTP insures that transportation improvements proposed for the area are coordinated and support area-wide goals and objectives. This plan addresses projected socio-economic development and traffic forecast for at least 20 years with proposed transportation improvements that will support the development of the area. The Plan is updated or reviewed every four years.

FHWA requires the LRTP to act as a guide to local officials in implementing transportation improvements with Federal funds. A project must be included in the LRTP in order to qualify for funding assistance from the FHWA or the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

The LRTP is basically broken down into three steps:

1. Identify transportation problems and determine possible solutions.
2. Develop a series of recommendations (Draft Plan).
3. Adopt the list of recommendations (Plan).

FMATS will conduct a public participation process in the development and decision-making process leading to the publication of the LRTP.

Update of the FMATS Long Range Transportation Plan

FMATS shall review and update the LRTP at least every four years (with a 20-year planning horizon) to confirm the transportation plans validity and consistency with current and forecasted transportation and land use conditions and trends. The development of the LRTP will be coordinated with the process for development of air quality transportation control measures in the State Implementation Plan. During development of the LRTP, a public meeting will be held and an opportunity for public comments will be provided to comment on local and regional transportation problems and offer alternatives for solving the problems. A public meeting will be publicized by the following actions:

1. FMATS will place an advertisement in the Fairbanks Daily Newspaper to announce a public meeting.
2. Notification of the public meeting will be posted on several websites. (DOT&PF, Fairbanks North Star Borough, City of Fairbanks, and City of North Pole), including the State's Online Public Notice System.
3. Notification will be sent to all citizens that request notification of the public meeting.

4. Comments received from this process will be documented so that the Policy Committee may consider all comments.

The public will be provided the opportunity to express their opinion on the Draft LRTP document. This document will have a 30 day public review period. This will be accomplished in the same manner as listed above. All comments received from this process will be presented to the Policy Committee for consideration in the development of the final Plan.

If the final LRTP differs significantly from the one made available for public comment and raises new material issues, which the FMATS Policy Committee could not reasonably have foreseen from the public involvement efforts, FMATS will provide an additional opportunity for public comment on the revised LRTP. A public meeting will be publicized and held as necessary.

Notification of the Policy Committee action on the final Plan will take place at a scheduled FMATS meeting.

The LRTP may be viewed during normal working hours at the MPO Coordinator's Office, DOT&PF Planning Department, the FNSB Planning Department, Fairbanks City Hall and at North Pole City Hall. The LRTP will also be available on the FMATS Website during all public comment periods and upon final approval.

Periodically, the FMATS Policy Committee may request that the approved LRTP be modified, or that a project be dropped or added. Such requests will be identified as either an Amendment or Administrative Modification.

Amendments involve transportation projects that are not consistent with the existing transportation plan or that have a measurable impact on air quality. Amendments qualify as regionally significant for public participation purposes.

If the Policy Committee agrees that the proposed amendment is regionally significant, then a 30-day public involvement process will be initiated. Comments received from the public will be presented to the Policy Committee for consideration.

Administrative modifications are minor revisions that involve minor changes to transportation projects that are air-quality neutral and are consistent with the adopted transportation plan. Administrative modifications do not qualify as regionally significant and a simplified public participation process will be initiated. An administrative modification is a revision that does not require public review and comment, redemonstration of fiscal constraint or a conformity determination. The administrative modification will be added to the agenda of the Policy Committee meeting. Comments can be presented to the Policy Committee for consideration.

Chapter V

Transportation Improvement Program

A key publication resulting from FMATS transportation planning and project development activities is the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP is updated on a triennial basis and is a comprehensive listing of specific transportation improvement projects over a four-year time span. FHWA specifically requires a proactive public involvement process in the development and decision-making process leading to the publication of the TIP.

During development of the TIP, a comment period of 30 days will be provided for comments to be received addressing the draft TIP criteria document, a 30-day public comment period will be provided for the draft TIP, and after comments are considered by the Policy Committee, another 30-day comment period may be considered for the final draft TIP. A public meeting will be publicized by the following actions:

1. FMATS will place an advertisement in the Fairbanks Daily Newspaper to announce a public meeting.
2. Notification of the public meeting will be posted on several websites: DOT&PF, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Fairbanks, and North Pole, as well as on the State's Online Public Notice System.
3. Notification will be sent to all citizens that request notification of the public meeting.
4. Comments received from this process will be documented so that the Policy Committee may consider all comments.

FMATS will develop and maintain a mailing list of active members of the general public, environmental interest groups, neighborhood and community groups and other public and private agencies who have express interest in transportation planning for use in announcing TIP public involvement activities. Comments received from this process will be documented so that they may be considered by the Policy Committee.

The TIP may be viewed during normal working hours at the MPO Coordinator's Office, DOT&PF Planning Department, the FNSB Planning Department, Fairbanks City Hall and at North Pole City Hall. The TIP will also be available on the FMATS Website during all public comment periods and upon final approval.

Comments generated during the TIP review process will be presented to the Policy Committee for consideration in the development of the final TIP.

Periodically, the FMATS Policy Committee may request that the approved TIP be modified by adding a project or dropping a project. Such requests will be identified as either an Amendment or Administrative Modification.

Amendments involve a major change to a transportation project that are not consistent with the existing transportation plan or that have a measurable impact on air quality. Amendments qualify as regionally significant for public participation purposes and a 30-day public involvement process will be initiated. Comments received from the public will be presented to the Policy Committee for consideration.

Administrative modifications are minor revisions that involve minor changes to transportation projects that are air-quality neutral and are consistent with the adopted transportation plan. Administrative modifications do not qualify as regionally significant and a simplified public participation process will be initiated. An administrative modification is a revision that does not require public review and comment, redemonstration of fiscal constraint or a conformity determination. The administrative modification will be added to the agenda of the Policy Committee meeting. Comments can be presented to the Policy Committee for consideration.

The TIP development process will satisfy the public hearing requirements of 49 U.S.C. Sec. 5307(c). The public notice of public involvement activities and time established for public review and comment on the TIP will satisfy the program-of-projects requirements of the Urbanized Area Formula Program. See 23 C.F.R. Part 450 and 49 C.F.R. Part 613 (specifically Subpart B, "Statewide Transportation Planning," and Subpart C, "Metropolitan Transportation Planning and Programming"). The public participation process is described at 23 C.F.R. Section 450.316.

Chapter VI

Other Reports

In addition to the LRTP and the TIP, FMATS may produce other reports as part of the continuing transportation planning process. One example is the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). The public will be provided a 30 day comment period on the draft UPWP. Amendments may be made from time to time but will not require a 30 day comment period.

Other reports will be presented at scheduled Technical Committee meetings for comments, but do not require advance public notice prior to Policy Committee actions. All comments will be forwarded to the Policy Committee for consideration.

Chapter VII

Summary

The Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System is committed to providing early and continuing opportunities for full public access to the transportation decision-making process, consistent with SAFETEA-LU and Executive Order 12898. Accordingly, the preceding public involvement procedures were developed. Public participation procedures are specified for the Long Range Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program. Special efforts to involve minority and low-income populations are included in these procedures, in support of Environmental Justice requirements.

Whenever possible visualization techniques will be employed to describe plans and the TIP. All documents available for public review will incorporate maps and drawings detailing project information.

This public participation process is only the first step in an open-ended and evolving public involvement process that will be refined and revised as public comments and further regulatory guidance is received. This public participation process will be periodically reviewed to determine its effectiveness in assuring that the process provides full and open access to everyone.