

CMMPO PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

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Prepared in cooperation with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation and the U.S. Department of Transportation - the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration. The views and opinions of the Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation or the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Notice

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The CMMPO does not discriminate on the basis of disability in admission to its programs, services, or activities; in access to them; in treatment of individuals with disabilities; or in any aspect of their operations. The CMMPO also does not discriminate on the basis of disability in its hiring or employment practices.

This notice is provided as required by Title II of the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Translation

English: If this information is needed in another language, please contact the CMRPC/CMMPO Title VI Specialist at (508) 756-7717.

Spanish: Si necesita esta información en otro lenguaje, favor contactar al especialista de Título VI de CMRPC/CMMPO al (508) 756-7717.

French: Si vous avez besoin d'obtenir une copie de la présente dans une autre langue, veuillez contacter le spécialiste du Titre VI de CMRPC/CMMPO en composant le (508) 756-7717.

Portuguese: Caso esta informação seja necessária em outro idioma, favor contatar o Especialista em Título VI do CMRPC/CMMPO pelo fone (508) 756-7717.

Vietnamese: Nếu bạn cần thông tin bằng ngôn ngữ khác, xin vui lòng liên lạc với Tiêu đề VI Chuyên CMRPC/CMMPO tại (508) 756-7717.

Chinese: 如果用另一种语言需要的信息，请联系第六章专门CMRPC/CMMPO (508) 756-7717。

This document is available from the CMMPO in large print, on audio tape, and Braille upon request.

Complaints

Filing a Complaint

Individuals who feel they have been discriminated against in violation of **Title VI** or related Federal nondiscrimination laws, must file a complaint within 180 days of the alleged discriminatory conduct to:

Ms. Janet Pierce, Executive Director
Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission
1 Mercantile Street, Suite 520
Worcester, MA 01608
(508) 756-7717

To file a complaint alleging violation of the **State's Public Accommodation Law**, contact the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination within 300 days of the alleged discriminatory conduct at:

Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD)
One Ashburton Place, 6th floor
Boston, MA 02109
(617) 994-6000
TTY: (617) 994-6196

Questions, complaints, or requests for additional information regarding **ADA and Section 504** may be forwarded to:

Ms. Janet Pierce, Executive Director
Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission
1 Mercantile Street, Suite 520
Worcester, MA 01608
(508) 756-7717

Endorsement

Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization
Endorsement Sheet

2022 Program Year Public Participation Plan (PPP)

The Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMMPO) hereby endorses the 2022 Program Year Public Participation Plan (PPP) document. The PPP ensures early and continuing opportunities for the public to express their views on transportation issues and to become active participants in the transportation decision-making process of the CMMPO. The 2022 Program Year PPP document was endorsed at a meeting of the CMMPO on _____, 2021.

CMMPO Chairman

DATE: _____

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Purpose

The purpose of this Public Participation Plan (PPP) is to ensure early and continuing access and opportunities for the public to express their views, and critiques on transportation projects as well as promote active participation throughout the transportation decision-making process. In addition, this plan is designed to function as a guide for all CMMPO public participation planning activities.

Accordingly, this PPP has been developed with input from a wide variety of transportation stakeholders, including those interested in environmental, freight, transit, roadway, pedestrian, and bike concerns. Input on ways to improve outreach, communication, and feedback on transportation planning issues has been, and will continue to be, an on-going process. Valuable input that has been incorporated into this plan includes:



- **Maintain** - on-going dialogue with stakeholders so that information about transportation projects is provided early in the planning process when design recommendations and potential mitigation can be addressed most efficiently.
- **Incorporate** - stakeholder data and recommendations into the planning process at early stages of project development.
- **Communicate** - in easy to understand formats using visualizations to explain technical information while meeting accessibility requirements, including translations in languages other than English.
- **Provide** - meaningful, accessible and transparent information to all stakeholders, including information about benefits and burdens related to transportation projects.

Background

Title 23 Code of Federal Regulations Part 450 requires all metropolitan planning agencies to develop a Public Participation Plan "in consultation with all interested parties." Key requirements of the public participation process are: an all-inclusive decision making process and a proactive public involvement process that provide timely public notice, complete information, full access to decision making and support early consultation in the development of metropolitan transportation plans and transportation improvement programs.

Relevant pieces of legislation applicable to the CMMPO public participation process

Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act)

- Current transportation enabling regulation
 - Emphasizes the importance of public involvement of all sectors and users of the transportation network in the transportation planning process.
-

American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

- States that "no qualified individual with a disability shall, by no reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of services, programs or activities of a public entity."
 - Locations for public participation and the information must be accessible to persons with disabilities.
-

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

- States that "no person in the United states shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."
-

FTA Circular 4702.1B (2012)

- The Circular recommends "to seek out and consider the needs and input of the general public, including interested parties and those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as minority and LEP persons, who may face challenges accessing employment and other services."
-

**Executive Order 12898 -
Environmental Justice
(1994)**

- Emphasizes in the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.
 - Directed federal agencies to develop environmental justice strategies to help address disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs on marginalized minorities and low income populations.
-

**Executive Order 13166 -
Limited English Proficiency
(2000)**

- Requires that federal agencies publish guidance to clarify LEP obligations for their recipients.
 - Prohibits conduct that has a disproportionate effect on LEP persons, meaning different treatment based upon an individual's inability to speak, read, write or understand English as it may constitute a type of national origin discrimination.
-

**Executive Order 13985 -
Racial Equity (2021)**

- Advances racial equity and support for marginalized and underserved communities by allocating resources to advance fairness and opportunity by promoting equitable delivery of government benefits and opportunities, including advancing meaningful engagement with all communities.
-

**US DOT Order 1000.12C
(2021)**

- Requires that "applicants and recipients are adequately informed about how programs or activities will potentially impact affected communities, and to ensure that diverse views are heard and considered throughout all stages of the consultation, planning, and decision-making process."
-

Values and Principles

The Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMMPO) public participation core values are included in the CMMPO Memorandum of Understanding (May 2021) as follows:

"The members of the MPO recognize that transportation planning and programming must be conducted as an integral part of and consistent with the regional planning and development process, and that the process must involve the fullest possible participation by state agencies, local governments, private institutions, other appropriate groups and the general public."

Moreover, the CMMPO recognizes the importance to operate in concert with MassDOT's values, goals and principles. As such, the CMMPO public participation principles are:

- **Promote respect**
- **Provide proactive and timely opportunities for involvement**
- **Offer authentic and meaningful participation**
- **Provide a clear, focused and predictable process**
- **Foster diversity and inclusiveness**
- **Be responsive to participants**
- **Record, share and respond to public comments**
- **Self-evaluation and plan modification**

Goals

How public engagement can be meaningful?

The CMMPO recognizes the importance of a robust public involvement process. The goals included in this section reflect the CMMPO values and principles, and are geared towards achieving a meaningful public engagement in the transportation planning process.

Increase diversity

Identify, engage and elevate new voices

Those who are encouraged to participate in public engagement processes should represent, as appropriate to a project or those impacted, a range of socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural perspectives and include people from low-income and minority neighborhoods, people with limited English proficiency, and other traditionally underserved populations.

Ensure accessibility

Staple in all that we do

Every effort should be made to ensure that participation opportunities are physically, geographically, temporally, linguistically and culturally accessible. That applies to all the communications, materials and locations.

Provide relevance

Work in pending issues and needs first

Issues should be framed clearly and simply such that the significance and potential effect may be understood by the greatest number of participants.

Foster participant satisfaction

Participants are co-creators in the process

The CMMPO should encourage the public to participate in project and initiative related discussions, recognizing that people who take the time to participate feel it is worth the effort to join the discussion and provide feedback. Moreover, focused outreach efforts should be made to those affected or potentially affected by the transportation planning process.

Clearly define potential for influence

Provide more opportunities to access the decision-making process

The CMMPO process should clearly identify and communicate where and how participants can have influence and direct impact on the decision-making process.

Establish and maintain partnerships

Multiple issues related to transportation, hence, multiple partners need to be part of the solution

The CMMPO develops and maintains partnerships with communities, community-based organizations, and key stakeholders through diverse methods. It strives to communicate regularly and develop trust with communities and all our partners, while helping build community capacity as it relates to transportation planning.

Assess, adapt and report

Provide multiple mechanisms for evaluation and document the process and outcomes

At a minimum, the CMMPO should record all engagement activities performed and the comments of the participants. The evaluation of the CMMPO engagement efforts should assess the methods used to engage with diverse communities, how the comments and perspectives were incorporated into the decision-making process and what were the results of such efforts. Every certification should include a report with a summary of the public outreach activities, an assessment of the tools and methods used, performance measures and lessons learned.

Tools

What are the CMMPO's proven tools?

Throughout the years the CMMPO has been consistently engaging with the region's stakeholders in the transportation planning and decision-making process. Nevertheless, the CMMPO is always working to expand the set of tools used for public outreach and engagement. The COVID-19 pandemic presented several challenges, and as a result, new tools were tested and incorporated in the decision-making process. The CMMPO uses three types of tools: Tools to relay information and tools to promote the planning process and tools to engage. A summary is included below.

Information

It is always important to provide information about the CMMPO planning activities. Even though the CMMPO has made major efforts in the past to engage with stakeholders and hard to reach populations, there's always a segment of the public that need the basic information to understand the transportation planning process as well as to understand why their participation in the process is important. It is a key piece in the overall capacity building of the CMMPO stakeholders. Some of the **Information** tools used by the CMMPO are:

Website

The CMMPO relies on the CMRPC website as the major outlet for information, www.cmrpc.org. The website has the major links to the transportation division, a direct link to the Mobility2040: The Update for 2020, as well as links to other transportation planning documents. New as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic a webpage with access to the CMMPO On-Demand was created. Here members of the public can find the recordings of the CMMPO meetings, meetings agendas and minutes.



Youtube Videos

The CMMPO has few videos available in YouTube as a tool to explain how the CMMPO works, the role and responsibilities. among the library of videos available, some portray aspects of the daily work of the transportation staff collecting data in the field, whether other videos are instructional or "how-to-videos". Most recently, videos from the CMMPO meetings and the CMMPO Advisory Committee meetings are available in the CMMPO On Demand webpage.



Brochures

Brochures are designed to disseminate information at events and also as a starter of one-on-one conversations. Some available brochures include Say Hello to the MPO, CMMPO Title VI Program, CMAQ Project Funding, among others.



Posters

Posters and large formats allow the display of maps, and data in more accessible way to participants at events or Open Houses. Posters are usually used as an ice-breaker at meetings to spark one-on-one conversations with attendees.



Table Displays

Similar to the posters, the table displays are "conversations starters". Each display can portray a specific topic, project or idea. This tool provides an opportunity for people interested in a particular topic to comment and ask questions.



Promotion and Outreach

The promotion of the planning process requires multiple points of communication. Community bulletin boards, flyers, social media, posts in cable access TV, major circulation newspapers as well as regional events or activities are among the the tools used by the CMMPO to promote the opportunities to participate in the planning process and to provide comments. These tools can also be used to announce subregional meetings and to promote online surveys. Some of the **Promotion and Outreach** tools used by the CMMPO are:

Press Release and Public Notice

Press releases and public notices are developed and sent to the region's media contacts. Typically, a press release includes a list of meetings, time and locations, contact information, website address and link to online surveys. Some of the regional newspapers that the CMMPO traditionally uses are: Spencer New Leader, Sturbridge Villager, Webster Times, Charlton Villager, Blackstone Enlightener. The press releases are also translated into Spanish and sent to El Vocero Hispano, the region's major Hispanic newspaper.



Flyers

Flyers are used to promote events, workshops and meetings. The flyers are sent and posted at the meeting places, shared on Facebook and sent by email to other interested parties within the subregion. Flyers are particularly useful in high traffic locations, public libraries and senior centers.



Emails

Email blasts are used as a tool to announce the start of a major planning outreach process, promote online surveys and to promote events, meetings and workshops. The CMMPO uses Constant Contact platform to send emails to already formatted lists, including the MPO members and Advisory Committee members, town planners, planning board members, selectmen, town administrators and town clerks, T Committee members, commissioners, town engineers, chambers of commerce, legislators and contacts from environmental organizations.

Community Bulletins and Cable Access TV

When information is sent to the CMMPO communities, more than often it is displayed in the community's online bulletin board. Announcements at the Cable Access TV, where available, are often used as an offline alternative.

E-Newsletter

Many organizations use newsletters to keep their client base informed. CMRPC has a monthly newsletter that reaches hundreds of email contacts.

Other organizations, like the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce, the Worcester Chamber of Commerce, the "Coalition Connection", the newsletter from the Coalition for a Greater Healthy Worcester County and the 495 Metrowest Partnership shared CMMPO outreach-related information in their newsletters.

Community Bulletin Board



Social Media

CMRPC has a strong presence in social media, with a base of thousands of followers in both Twitter and Facebook. Social media is used as a tool to share information, promote events and also as an opportunity to engage with the public. Survey links are also distributed via social media. Hootsuite is used to track and manage multiple social network channels.

A Content Planning Calendar is often used by the CMMPO in major outreach efforts. The calendar includes the contents, hashtags, images and links that are going to be used in each of the social media posts.

Moreover, paid social media advertisements allow to target a specific audience to meet set demographic criteria. These ads – although at an additional cost – can boost participation among the desired audience and engage certain populations who could otherwise be left out.

CMRPC implemented a Social Media Policy to guarantee a safe space for public interaction, including moderation and response to comments. Analytics are compiled for every major outreach effort as it relates to the overall performance of the CMMPO outreach activities.



Online Engagement Tools

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online engagement tools. Most of these tools are highly interactive and are available at no cost and others are part of a subscription package. Another positive aspect of these tools is that their usability allows for a better understanding of how the data is used to inform decisions, the potential tradeoffs, and quick visualizations. Some of the **Online Engagement** tools used by the CMMPO are:

Dashboards

As part of the many mapping tools available under the ESRI licensing agreement, the CMMPO staff is using dashboards as a visualization tool to support the planning process and decision-making. Dashboards are a new online interactive and intuitive tool that can be used by the public to access georeferenced data, maps and other information as it relates to a project or a plan. It is a visual way to offer participants a comprehensive overview of how data-driven decisions are made. The CMMPO has several dashboards available that are used as a clearinghouse of information, as a way to share information in prior to a public meeting, among other applications.

Whiteboards

Online whiteboards, such as Google Jamboard are an easy to use application, where participants can write "post-it" notes virtually. It works well during online meetings as it is shared live with all the participants. With Google Jamboards multiple slides can be prepared in advance and participants can toggle the slides and work on their own. Also, a link to the whiteboard can be shared in social media as a way to gather input either before or after a meeting. It is a great tool for brainstorming, visioning exercises, or to gather general input about a topic.

Visualizations

CMRPC staff uses StreetMix as a free visualization tool available online to quickly show how a Complete Streets approach could look like in any given road segment. Members of the public can also produce their own "mix" in any given streetscape. It is an easy and intuitive tool that quickly captures the essence of the benefits of a Complete Streets project.

Surveys

Online surveys are a way to gather information from the general public in a wide array of topics. Currently, CMRPC uses SurveyMonkey as the preferred survey tool. It allows for integration with multiple online platforms, quick dashboards related to survey response, as well as easy to download graphs and charts portraying survey results. Surveys are carefully crafted, and typically technical jargon is left out of the questions as a way to make accessible to the general public. The surveys can be shared in social media, with a QR code format or printed and distributed at in-person events. Other survey platforms used by the CMMPO are Survey 123 from ArcGIS (mostly used for data collection) and Typeform (include graphic components).

**WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!
PLEASE TAKE OUR QUICK SURVEY BELOW!**

Please choose your TOP 3 priorities.
Write #1 next to your top choice, #2 for your second choice,
and #3 for your last choice.
(Once finished, please rip off the survey from the brochure
and leave it in the box provided.)

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Roadway Maintenance Maintain condition of roadways, sidewalks and bridges | Safety Reduce crashes that result in injuries and fatalities | Congestion Reduce travel delays with intelligent transportation systems |
| Promoting Sustainability Reduce Green House Gases from transportation | Economic Vitality and Freight Speed shipping in the region | Pedestrian Network Improve pedestrian access to essential services |
| Travel and Tourism Enhance access to touring locations and facilities | Transit Network Expand transit network in the region | Stormwater Management Manage stormwater and flooding issues |
| Bicycle Network Expand the bicycle infrastructure in the region | Equitable Investment Address geographic & population disparity in the region | Emergency Management Enhance security preparedness and coordination |

Comments: _____

Online polling

Free polling services are also used during online meetings, the most commonly tool used is Poll Everywhere. With this application participants can text the answers to their questions and is shared live during the meeting.

Word Clouds

Word clouds are an easy way to share in a live meeting what the attendees are thinking. It can be a response to a survey question, ideas, among other uses. The higher the frequency of a given word the larger its text size in relation to other comments. There are multiple free word cloud builders available online. Many of these tools provide the option of a downloadable excel file or pdf file with the words included in the cloud.

Applications

The CMMPO looks forward to delve into mobile applications. Currently, MassDOT is developing a public engagement application that could potentially enhance the public's participation in the development of the region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the long-range transportation plan (LRTP).

Methods

What are the CMMPO's proven methods for public engagement?

There are several methods for engagement that are traditionally used by the CMMPO to actively include traditional and non-traditional stakeholders in the transportation planning process. Those methods are included in this section. The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges and opportunities to test new engagement methods with the public.

Committees

There are many ways in which the public can be part of the decision making process; participating in committees provides a meaningful engagement experience. Some of the Committees that support the CMMPO are:

Central Massachusetts Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee performs in an advisory capacity and provides recommendations and comments on documents requiring MPO endorsement. Recommendations made by the Committee are presented by CMRPC staff to the CMMPO.

Elderly and Disabled Technical Task Force

This group acts primarily in an advisory capacity to the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA). The Task Force provides a forum for addressing service related issues that impact the WRTA's elderly and disabled transit users. Representation on the Task Force is broadly based, including elderly and disabled service users, human service agencies, the WRTA's service providers, the WRTA Administrator and representatives from the CMRPC who are staff to the Task Force. Its regular monthly meetings are held the third Wednesday at the WRTA. The meetings are advertised and open to all who wish to attend.

Corridor Planning Study Technical Task Force

This group is ad-hoc in nature and are established for each corridor planning study (CPS) performed by CMRPC staff for the CMMPO. The purpose of these task forces is to provide early input on transportation issues affecting the particular corridor, to review work performed by staff and to provide recommendations as to which alternatives, if any, should proceed toward project development. The membership of these task forces varies but generally includes 3 to 4 members from each of the affected communities as well as technical, legislative and Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) representatives. CPS Task Force meetings are generally held monthly with CMRPC providing total staff support. The meetings are advertised and open to all who wish to attend.

Other CMMPO related Technical Task Forces

These groups are formed on an as-needed basis. The purpose of these task forces or modal steering committees, is to provide early input on issues related to the particular subject, to review work performed by staff or study consultants, and to provide advisory recommendations on courses of action. Membership on these task forces varies but is generally made up of those with technical expertise on the subject.

Non-CMMPO Committees and Workgroups

CMRPC staff participates actively in many committees and workgroups. Through these partnerships, staff has the opportunity to engage with committee members in topics related to transportation planning. Some of the Committees and workgroups that staff actively participate are: the city of Worcester Transportation Advisory Group, Healthy Aging Designation Committee, the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) Policy Committee, among others.

In-person meetings

In-person meetings have been used as a traditional method for engagement with the public. The CMMPO meets regularly on the third Wednesday of every month at 4:00 PM. The meetings are open to the public. The Advisory Committee meets on a monthly basis as well, on the fourth Wednesday at 3:00 PM. The CMMPO staff also meets regularly with diverse array of stakeholders across the region, the state and bordering MPO's in topics related to transportation planning.

As part of the process to conduct an in-person meeting the CMMPO has to provide adequate and timely public notice about the meeting, and the meetings need to be held at accessible locations and convenient times. It is recommended to meet the public or targeted population at meetings and spaces where they already congregate, including senior centers, ESL classes and neighborhood meetings.

Virtual meetings

As a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic virtual meeting formats were added as new methods for engagement with the CMMPO. The virtual meetings are a convenient option for public participation. To ensure the continuity of operations, CMRPC staff have utilized tools such as GoToMeeting, and Zoom, in order to conduct all meetings virtually.

Online meeting platform Zoom offers both a “meeting” and a “webinar” option. The meeting option provides great two-way communication opportunities as it allows attendees to unmute themselves and participate. The webinar option gives the presenters or panelist full control over the event. This is best used to share information and take in feedback as it allows only the host to approve other types of participation.

Like in a regular in-person meeting, virtual meetings require careful planning and preparation in advance, including developing materials, talking points and multiple engagement methods. It requires prior testing to check that all the video and audio functions work correctly.

Hybrid meetings

Hybrid meetings can be defined as a in-person meeting with the opportunity for some participants to participate remotely. In order to be able to conduct hybrid meetings, CMRPC acquired the Meeting Owl Pro, a premium 360-degree camera, mic, and speaker combined into one easy-to-use device. It creates the experience of in-person participation for hybrid teams and integrates with the conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, Slack, GoToMeeting, and more. It is WIFI-enabled and incorporates automatic zoom that responds to who's speaking. The Owl has a 18-foot audio pickup radius.

Open Houses

Open Houses are a great way to portray all the work performed by the CMMPO. It is an opportunity for members to the public to have a close interaction with members of the CMMPO and the CMRPC staff, ask questions, inquire about transportation projects and learn more about the decision-making process.

Pop-Up Events

Oftentimes the CMRPC staff has an opportunity to participate in public events that are suitable for the installation of Pop-Up, or a table and a tent. At these events general information about the CMMPO and the transportation process is often shared. It is a great opportunity to engage with individuals that have been traditionally underrepresented. Also, it provides the perfect setting for collecting input, whether it is qualitative or through a survey.

TIP Development Day

Traditionally, every year the CMRPC staff conducts a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Development Day where the status of eligible TIP projects are reviewed with the intention to support the CMMPO programming efforts.

Environmental Consultation

The Environmental Consultation is an annual forum about environmental topics as it relates to the transportation projects and planning. It is an opportunity to receive public comment about potential initiatives that the CMMPO should work on or pursue. It also provides an outlet to evaluate and identify potential environmental concerns at an early stage of the planning process.

Focus Groups and Workshops

Focus groups and workshops provide the opportunity for a "hands-on" experience centered in public discussion. They are typically used in specific projects and research activities. In these types of setting, participants are able to interact with each other and share experiences.

Strategies to Engage Underrepresented Populations

A tailored outreach approach oftentimes requires to reach populations that have been underrepresented in the transportation planning process, or underserved by transportation improvements, either projects or services. The CMMPO has continuous relationships with non-traditional stakeholders and the following strategies supported a meaningful engagement in the past and should be included in future CMMPO outreach processes.



STAKEHOLDERS AS
PARTNERS



PROVEN TECHNIQUES



“MEET THEM WHERE
THEY ARE”



MANAGE
EXPECTATIONS



PROVIDE FAIR
COMPENSATION



LEVERAGE OTHER
RESOURCES



KNOW THE HISTORY



CONTINUE DIALOGUE
AND COLLABORATION

Accessibility

The CMMPO strives to make all public outreach initiatives all accessible to all members of the public, regardless of their transportation alternatives, mobility limitations, or language skills. For instance, providing accessible and ADA-compliant options for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, and visually impaired is central as well as language translation and interpretation will ensure that qualified individuals shall not be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any of its programs, services, or activities as provided by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA.

MassDOT recommends the following three best practices to ensure equal access:

Best Practices from the MassDOT Three-Legged Stool of Equal Access

Title VI Diversity

- Beyond the usual stakeholders
 - Virtual platforms and tools make it possible to identify and connect with new and diverse populations
-

ADA Accessibility

- Remove barriers to access
 - Share accessible information and solicit participation through accessible platforms to promote equal access
-

Technology

- Recognize audiences have different internet, devices and broadband capabilities. Plan for phone calls and mailing options to reach populations with non-compatible devices and lack broadband
-

CMMPO's Guide to Accessibility in the Public Participation Process

Prior to the meeting or outreach activity

- Public meetings should be planned and publicized as early as possible — ideally, at least 21 calendar days, but no less than 14 days in advance.
- Meeting notices should include a date by which attendees should request reasonable accommodations — typically ten days before the meeting.
- Reasonable accommodations can be made for people with visual or hearing impairments or other disabilities.
- Provide the contact information of the team members that will take care of all reasonable accommodations requests.
- When a participant requests a reasonable accommodation and/or a language access, respond with an acknowledgement and indicate that the request will be processed in a timely manner.
- If you receive a request you do not know how to fulfill, contact System-Wide Accessibility or the Office for Diversity & Civil Rights for technical support.
- If no third-party service providers are available on the requested date, consider: rescheduling the meeting, holding another meeting session when services are available, working with the requestor to identify other accommodations that may still facilitate their participation.
- Log and keep track of the requests and services provided.
- Review the MassDOT Accessible Meeting Policy for more information. Available online here: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/attachment-14-accessible-meeting-policy/download>

Accessible meeting locations and virtual meetings

- If the meeting or event is in-person, make sure that the facility is barrier-free and accessible and listed in the Accessible Meeting Location spreadsheet. If the facility is not yet included in the list make sure it complies with all the requirements and add the location to the master list.
- Use convenient times based in local input and preferences.
- Always provide a call-in number for your online meeting.
- Have a longer public comment period after the meeting if needed.
- If In person or hybrid, all public meetings shall be within 1/4 mile of an accessible bus stop or rail station, where feasible.
- If public feedback is necessary during a meeting (surveys, polls, weighing different options, etc.), consider making these feedback mechanisms available for a number of days before and/or after the meeting to give ample time for responses.

Video captioning

- Provide close captioning services in all virtual meetings and videos.
- Create a transcript that can be used as a starting point for closed-captioning.
- Closed-captioning companies can also provide this service for relatively low cost.
- Microsoft Teams and YouTube Live include this functionality and can be used for virtual public meetings.
 - To use, open meeting controls and select More Options > Turn on live captions.
- Zoom include two options, including an auto-captioning tool and a live professional captioner.
 - If using an auto-captioning tool in Zoom, keep the Chat functionality open, if possible, to post clarifications and to allow participants relying on the captions to ask questions in they have trouble understanding due to auto-caption errors.

Accessible materials and formats

- Hardcopy materials still serve an important purpose in-person and in the virtual setting.
- Check accessibility of all materials, presentations, and documents.
- The Microsoft Office and Adobe software suites include accessibility check functionalities to improve your files so they can be better understood by everyone.
- In all Microsoft office programs including Word and PowerPoint, under the “Review” tab you will find a Check Accessibility option, which automatically checks your file for common accessibility issues, indicates areas to review and update, and provides tips on recommended fixes.
- Keep text at a minimum: follow accessibility best practices (e.g. provide alternative text for images and charts/tables, use headings, and embed hyperlinks).
- Use plain language and clear graphics to convey project information.
- Presentations and videos must be closed-captioned before being posted to the web.
- Speak clearly, slowly, and directly in the microphone.
- Use the Web Content Accessibility Tool to test the site’s accessibility and offers recommended fixes.
- If requests for additional alternative formats are made in advance of the meeting, these formats must be available at the start of the meeting.
- If requests for alternative formats are made at or following the meeting, the alternative format must be provided within seven days of the request.
- Offer to mail hard copies of the materials being presented.

**Translation and
interpretation services**

- The Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) provides accessible communication, education, and advocacy to consumers and private and public entities so that programs, services, and opportunities throughout Massachusetts are fully accessible to persons who are deaf and hard of hearing.
- Complete and submit an on-line request for interpreting and CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) and other accommodation services through the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing's (MCDHH) website
 - Go to <http://mass.gov/mcdhh>
 - For interpreter/CART requests are being processed online, visit <https://www.mcdhh.net/request/> to submit your request.
- For meetings that are anticipated to last more than 75 minutes, two interpreters must be provided. In most situations, one CART provider is sufficient if the meeting is no longer than three hours.
- If the meeting is cancelled or rescheduled, interpreter requests must be cancelled at least 48 hours in advance in order to avoid being billed for the service. CART providers must be cancelled no later than 72 hours in advance of the event.

Planning Documents

Federal and state regulations require that each MPO document public involvement processes, be proactive and provide complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and opportunities for early and continuing involvement; they leave the choice of methods for facilitating participation to the discretion of each MPO. All the major CMMPO planning documents and programs require some type of public engagement which are tailored to achieve the most effective public participation. The major CMMPO planning documents and programs are summarized below.

Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)

- Updated every 4 years
- 20-year planning scope
- Include major infrastructure projects

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

- Updated annually
- Program of FHWA and FTA funded projects
- Performance Measures Management System

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

- Updated annually
- List of planning activities and products.
- Include anticipated available funding in the region

Modal Plans and Corridor Profile Studies

- Derived from the needs and priorities of the region
- Identify opportunities for potential projects

Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)

The Central Massachusetts Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is the long-range transportation planning document that describes the region's current transportation system and how that system should be maintained and modified over the next 20 or more years. The LRTP needs to be updated every four years by the Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization as required by the FAST Act. It addresses each of the major modes of transportation within the Central Massachusetts region and it is considered both a multimodal and an intermodal document. The plan provides an inventory of the major modes, identifies challenges and needs, and also provides a series of recommendations.

Project-specific, and major transportation improvements need to be reflected in the LRTP in order to be eligible for Federal-Aid funding through the region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The most current LRTP, **Mobility2040, the Update for 2020**, included several public participation outreach methods, including a targeted approach to non-traditional stakeholders. Staff used diverse approaches to educate and inform the public about the long-range transportation plan process and encourage interested parties to express their views and provide input on transportation issues in the Central Massachusetts region.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The CMMPO Transportation Improvement Program, commonly referred to as the “TIP”, is a federally required planning document that lists all highway, bridge, transit and intermodal projects in the Central Massachusetts planning region that are programmed to receive federal-aid funding. Projects of regional & statewide significance, non-federal-aid (NFA), or state-funded projects, as well as projects that improve air quality and safety are also included in the TIP document.

Cognizant of limited statewide transportation funding resources, the annual program of projects must demonstrate financial constraint within the federal-aid funding targets established for each of the state’s MPOs by the Office of Transportation Planning.

The CMMPO TIP development process is designed to guarantee early involvement of local legislators, chief local officials, stakeholders, individuals and other interested parties with full consideration of the principles of Environmental Justice, including special meetings such as community-targeted TIP information sessions. Moreover, the TIP document includes a comprehensive overview of the proactive public outreach process used throughout the development of the TIP.

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

The CMMPO Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) is a project-by-project description of all transportation planning and transportation-related air quality planning activities anticipated within the region during the upcoming program year. It indicates who will perform the work, as well as anticipated available funding, the schedule for completion and the products that will be produced.

Under federal regulations pertaining to the transportation planning process, the UPWP must be prepared and endorsed annually by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) prior to the start of the planning program period.

Modal Plans and Corridor Profile Studies

The CMMPO prepares several modal plans including freight plans, bicycle and pedestrian plans, as well as corridor profile studies, and Congestion Mitigation Process (CMP) document for the CMMPO region. All these studies and planning documents require tailored public participation efforts. These studies and plans provide the opportunity to directly work with stakeholders in potential solutions related to the topic at hand, which are then incorporated in the Long Range Transportation Plan.

Performance Measures

How to measure meaningful engagement?

Public participation and outreach activities are often the most direct contact the public has with the CMMPO. The evaluation of the CMMPO engagement efforts is key to continue improving and expanding the opportunities the public has to engage with the CMMPO and actively contribute to the transportation planning process in the region.

Recognizing that public participation is a process in itself, the metrics used to assess the effectiveness of any meaningful engagement should reflect each stage of that process. Hence, the metrics included in this section are grouped in three main areas that are geared to different stages of the process, from the initial step to inform the public to the multiple opportunities for involvement throughout the planning process.

01

Observe

Metrics that quantify the number and types of outreach efforts, the number of participants, among others; and tracks the response methods, including the response times.

02

Interact

Metrics to assess the delivery, understanding and clarity of the information shared during an interaction with the public, and gather information related to the sentiment towards their engagement experience.

03

Incorporate

Quantitative or qualitative assessment to determine how the active participation affected or changed the way things are done, the budget is allocated or the priorities are established throughout the transportation planning process.

Observe

Outreach

- Number and type of events
 - Online and in-person events
- Costs
 - All associated costs, including hours of labor, print materials, public notice, online engagement platforms, subscriptions, stipends, gift cards, equipment (hardware & software), mileage, etc.
- Number and type of documents/media to distribute information to the public
 - Press releases, emails, flyers, letters, newsletters, brochures, videos, etc

Participation

- Number of participants at each event
 - Online and in-person events
- Number of organizations, towns, agencies represented at each event
 - Traditional and non-traditional stakeholders, organizations participating for the first time

Response

- Number of public comments received
 - Positive and negative comments, via which mode - social media, email, survey, etc.
- Number of website hits
- Average response time to comments and inquiries

Demographic information

- The purpose is to collect demographic information to know if the outreach and engagement methods are representative of the region's population.

Main reference from the Texas A&M Transportation Institute: *Performance Measures for Public Participation Methods* (2018)

Convenience

- Was the event held at a convenient time?
- Was the event held at a convenient place?
- Did you experience any issues accessing the venue (in-person/online)?
- Did you receive advance notification of the meeting/event/forum?
- Where you provided with a contact information for individuals that would address any questions you had prior to the meeting?
 - If you had any questions prior to the meeting, were they adequately addressed?

Participation

- Were you given an adequate opportunity to participate?
- Do you feel like your input will affect the ultimate decision that is made with regard to the information/projects presented?
- Do you feel like your input was accurately captured?
- Do you feel like the feedback you received was adequate/timely?
- Do you feel like your participation made you more involved in the transportation planning process?

Clarity of information

- Was the information beneficial in understanding the process/project?
- Was the information presented clearly?

Overall satisfaction

- How satisfied are you with the options / solutions presented to you?
- Do you feel like what was discussed offer a good solution to the problem?

Public input

- Which public input tools/methods were used throughout the process?
- Which tools/methods were more successful than others?
 - Is there a differentiation/preference of tools/methods used by demographic distribution?
- Did the agency shared the public input received with the public (transparency)?
- Did the agency report back to the public about how their input was used (accountability)?
- Are there any changes in the budget allocation as a result of the input received from the public?

Public engagement

- Was demographic data collected from participants at public engagement events to help identify populations who were / were not engaged?
- How this data will be used to help guide the planning of future engagement activities?
- Did the information gathered from the public engagement process result in modifications to a transportation process, plan or project?
- Have public engagement experiences over time affected policies or strategies?
- Is there a plan to continue engaging with the participants? Capacity building opportunities?

Operations

- Does the agency has sufficient resources dedicated to public engagement? (i.e. budget, tools, staff, etc.)
- What are the lessons learned and what should be improved moving forward?

