

2021

Public Participation Plan

Upper Coastal Plain RPO

Upper Coastal Plain RPO
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Purpose

Public involvement is a very important component of the rural planning organization input and decision-making processes. Public involvement is synonymous with the term “public participation.” It is specifically identified in the enabling state legislation (NCGS 136-212) as being among the core duties and responsibilities of rural planning organizations in North Carolina. It is also recognized as a necessary element of the transportation planning process in major federal surface transportation legislation and regulations. This federal legislation includes the 2012 Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990. Public involvement has also been recognized in a 1997 federal executive order pertaining to environmental justice assurances. These assurances protect low-income and minority populations from bearing disproportionate impacts resulting from transportation decisions. Effective public involvement will promote sound decision making and will support the achievement of desirable rural transportation planning goals.

The purpose of the Upper Coastal Plain Rural Transportation Planning Organization (RPO) Public Involvement Plan (Plan) is to provide guidance and policy in engaging the public in the transportation planning process. The Plan has the following objectives:

1. Create a well-informed public that contributes to transportation decision-making in a meaningful way
2. Engage the public early and continuously in the transportation planning process
3. Develop a public education program on Upper Coastal Plain RPO activities
4. Assist the Upper Coastal Plain RPO in developing specific transportation projects that reflect the interests and needs of the community
5. Gain the support and trust of the public
6. Satisfy the requirements of N.C.G.S. § 136-212 regarding duties of a RPO

The Plan is not intended to preempt any public involvement activities conducted by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) or any local governments within the Upper Coastal Plain RPO region.

Forms of Public Involvement

A. Public Outreach

Public Outreach is the process of informing the public about the transportation planning process, specific transportation projects, and activities of the Upper Coastal Plain RPO. Typical public outreach strategies include, but will not be limited to, the following: Open RTCC and RTAC meetings, development of an RPO web site, newsletters, press releases, open houses, and presentations to civic organizations and other interested groups.

One or more of the following specific measures will be used, as appropriate, to meet the needs of the public, the RPO, and NCDOT for a given transportation plan, project, or program:

Notification of Meetings

Notification of Upper Coastal Plain RPO meetings will be posted on the UCPRPO website and may be sent to news media in the region. These notifications will generally be made by electronic means, although other methods may be used as appropriate. UCPRPO staff will maintain an email list for this purpose and will add to the list any media outlet that requests addition. Additionally, UCPRPO staff will provide electronic notification to citizens/stakeholders who request to receive these notifications, or who provide contact information to UCPRPO.

Posting of Draft and final Planning Documents

Copies of draft and final versions of certain planning documents will be posted on the Upper Coastal Plain RPO's website, and may be distributed to Upper Coastal Plain RPO member governments for posting on individual county and town websites.

Copies of draft and final versions of certain planning documents will also be made available for public review on the Upper Coastal Plain RPO's website.

Press Releases

The Upper Coastal Plain RPO may issue press releases from time-to-time detailing significant actions of the RPO. These actions may include:

1. Adoption of Long-Range Regional Transportation Plan
2. Adoption of Highway Project Priority List
3. Adoption of Significant Planning Policies and/or Documents

Open Houses

Open houses may be held to provide information on transportation projects and Upper Coastal Plain RPO activities to the public in an informal setting. Open houses will have no fixed agendas or formal presentations. Planning documents, project maps, and other transportation-related information will be displayed. RPO staff and committee members will be available to provide details and answer questions.

Presentations to Civic Organizations

Presentations will be made to interested civic organizations on Upper Coastal Plain RPO activities, the transportation planning process in general, or specific transportation projects upon request. Presentations will be made by Upper Coastal Plain RPO staff and/or NCDOT staff.

Public Outreach activities will include efforts to involve traditionally underserved groups (i.e., minorities, elderly, low-income persons) in the transportation planning process. These efforts may include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Identifying areas in the Upper Coastal Plain RPO region with concentrations of minority, elderly, and low-income populations
2. Sending notification of meetings, public hearings, and open houses to County Health Departments, Senior Centers, and/or Community Centers for posting
3. Publishing notification of meetings, public hearings, and open houses in both English and Spanish when feasible

UCPRPO Website

UCPRPO will maintain a website to serve as a primary method for sharing information with the public. The website will contain, at minimum (but not limited to):

- RTCC & RTAC meeting agendas and minutes
- A roster of current RTCC & RTAC members
- Information on Comprehensive Transportation Plans
- Information on project selection and prioritization for the Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) process
- Contact information

The website (www.ucprpo.org) may also include other materials, as needed, to help the public understand the plans and activities underway by UCPRPO and its local/state partners.

B. Public Input

Public Input is the process of gathering the views, opinions, and ideas of interested individuals and groups in the transportation planning process. Opportunities for public input provided by the Upper Coastal Plain RPO may include, but are not limited to, the following:

Public Comment at Upper Coastal Plain RPO Meetings

Upper Coastal Plain RPO meetings are open to the public and provide opportunity for public comment. The UCPRPO will offer virtual meeting capabilities when available.

Public Hearings

Public hearings will be held by the Upper Coastal Plain RPO's Rural Advisory Committee (RTAC) prior to taking formal action on specific planning documents. These actions may include:

1. Endorsement of Long Range Regional Transportation Plan
2. Amendment to Long-Range Regional Transportation Plan
3. Adoption of TIP Candidate Highway Project Priority List

Open Houses

Open houses will be held to provide information on transportation projects to the public in an informal setting. The open houses also provide the public an opportunity to provide comments. Open houses will have no fixed agendas or formal presentations. Planning documents, project maps, and other transportation-related information will be displayed. RPO staff and committee members and/or NCDOT staff will be available to provide details and answer questions.

Surveys

Surveys may be developed to gauge citizen opinion on specific transportation planning issues and/or projects. Survey content, method of distribution, and geographic target area will be dependent on the specific transportation planning issue or project.

Workshops

Workshops will be in the form of small group discussions used to gather views and opinions on a single transportation topic or project. The workshops will provide detailed information on the specific issue and will allow for in-depth discussion by invited key stakeholders, local government officials, and citizens.

Schedule of Public Involvement

A. Regular Public Involvement Opportunities

Planning Documents

All documents, resolutions, meeting minutes, etc. adopted by the Upper Coastal Plain RPO are kept at the Upper Coastal Plain RPO office located within the Nash County office building at 120 W. Washington St. Suite 2110, Nashville, NC. These documents will be made available for public review upon request.

Meetings

Regular meetings of the Upper Coastal Plain RPO's Rural Transportation Coordinating Committee (RTCC) and Rural Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) are open to the public. A timely opportunity for public comment on the Draft STI Candidate Project Priority List and the Long Range Regional Transportation Plan will be made available at one RTCC and one RTAC meeting. Notification of the meetings will be posted on the UCRPO's website.

Public Hearings

Public hearings will be scheduled by the UCRPO RTAC and staff prior to taking formal action on certain planning documents. Notification of all public hearings held by the Upper Coastal Plain RPO may be sent to news media in the region and will be posted on the UCRPO website. Public hearings will typically be held at the beginning of a regular RTAC meeting but may also be held as standalone meetings if deemed appropriate by the RTAC. Public hearings will consist of a presentation followed by a period for formal public comments and questions. All comments and questions that are received will become public record and will be considered by the RTAC.

Press Releases

Press releases issued by Upper Coastal Plain RPO may be sent to news media within the region.

B. Public Involvement for Specific Activities

Public involvement strategies will vary depending on the particular issue or project for which public comment is desired. Typical actions for specific activities of the Upper Coastal Plain RPO may include, but are not limited to:

Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP)

- Workshops
- Regular Meetings of RTCC and RTAC
- Public Hearing
- Posting of Draft and Final Document
- Presentations to Civic Organizations

Prioritization of Projects for Recommendation to North Carolina's Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)

- Regular Meetings of RTCC and RTAC
- Posting of Draft and Final Document on UCPRPO website

Specific Projects/ Issues

- Press Releases
- Workshops
- Regular Meetings of RTCC and RTAC
- Presentations to Civic Organizations
- Surveys

C. Outreach to Environmental Justice/Title VI Communities

Public outreach activities will also include efforts to involve traditionally-underserved groups—including minority, elderly, disabled, and low-income persons—in the transportation planning process. These efforts will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Identifying communities and other areas in the TARPO region with concentrations of underserved populations, based on the mapping of available Census and American Community Survey data including organizations that deal directly with underserved communities on project/plan stakeholder lists or email lists
- Posting notifications of meetings and events in the County Senior Citizen Centers ○ Ensuring that TARPO meetings are held in ADA-accessible facilities and that reasonable accommodations are made for hearing-impaired and visually impaired persons to participate in TARPO activities (with advance notice)
- Ensure that TARPO activities follow Title VI requirements with regard to Limited English Proficiency
- In addition, the UCPRPO will follow the public involvement guidelines in Appendix B.

Response to Public Input

Public involvement may be documented in a variety of ways. Comments received during a meeting of the Upper Coastal Plain RPO's RTCC or RTAC will be included in the meeting minutes. Also, any comments received during a public hearing held by the Upper Coastal Plain RPO's RTAC will be included in the meeting minutes. Written comments received during workshops, open houses, or presentations to civic organizations will be presented to the RTCC and RTAC, and kept on file. Results of surveys will be compiled, summarized, presented to the RTCC and RTAC, and kept on file.

Significant public comments may be included as appendices in formal documents or plans for which they were made.

Appendices

Appendix A: Key Stakeholders

Local Governments

County of Edgecombe
County of Johnston
County of Nash
County of Wilson
Town of Bailey
Town of Benson
Town of Black Creek
Town of Castalia
Town of Clayton
Town of Conetoe
Town of Dortches
Town of Elm City
Town of Four Oaks

Town of Kenly
Town of Leggett
Town of Lucama
Town of Macclesfield
Town of Micro
Town of Middlesex
Town of Momeyer
Town of Pine Level
Town of Pinetops
Town of Princeton
Town of Princeville
Town of Red Oak
Town of Saratoga

Town of Selma
Town of Sharpsburg
Town of Sims
Town of Smithfield
Town of Speed
Town of Spring Hope
Town of Stantonsburg
Town of Tarboro
Town of Whitakers
City of Wilson
Town of Wilson's Mills

Other Governmental

North Carolina Department of Transportation
Edgecombe County Transportation Needs Committee
Johnston County Transportation Advisory Committee
Nash County Transportation Committee
(Wilson County Transportation Committee - TBD)
Rocky Mount MPO
Capital Area MPO
Town of Nashville
City of Rocky Mount

Chambers of Commerce

Tarboro Edgecombe Chamber of Commerce

500 N Main St, Tarboro, NC 27856
Tarboro, NC 27886
Ph: 252-823-7241
Fax: 252-823-1499
<https://www.tarborochamber.com>

Carolina Gateways Partnership

427 Falls Road
Rocky Mount, NC 27804
Ph: 252-442-0114
Fax: 252-442-7315
<https://econdev.org>

Triangle East Chamber of Commerce

1115 Outlet Center Dr
Smithfield, NC 27577
Ph: 919-934-9166
Fax: 919-934-1337
<https://www.triangleeastchamber.com>

Kenly Area Chamber of Commerce

P.O. Box 190
Kenly, NC 27542
Ph: 919-284-5513
Fax: 919-284-1179
kacc@embargmail.com

Economic Development Commissions

Carolina Gateways Partnership

427 Falls Road
Rocky Mount, NC 27804
Ph: 252-442-0114
Fax: 252-442-7315
<https://econdev.org>

Johnston County Economic Development

P.O. Box 1179
Smithfield, NC 27577
Ph: 919-989-5001
Fax: 919-989-5178
<https://www.growwithjoco.com>

Four Oaks Chamber of Commerce

202 N Main St
Four Oaks, NC 27524
Ph: 919-963-4004
Fax: N/A
<https://fouroakschamber.com>

Benson Area Chamber of Commerce

122 E Main St
Benson, NC 27504
Ph: 919-894-3825
Fax: 919-894-1052
<https://www.benson-chamber.com>

Wilson Chamber of Commerce

200 West Nash St.
Wilson, NC 27894
Ph: 252-237-0165
Fax: 252-243-7931
<https://www.wilsonncchamber.com>

Clayton Chamber of Commerce

301 East Main St.
Clayton, NC 27520
Ph: 919-553-6352
Fax: 919-553-1758
chamber@claytonchamber.com

Wilson County Economic Development Council

126 West Nash St.
Wilson, NC 27894
Ph: 252-237-1115
Fax: 252-237-1116
<https://www.wilsonedc.com>

Nash County Economic Development

120 W Washington St
Nashville, NC 27856
Ph: 252-462-2021
<https://selectnashnc.com>

Regional Organizations

Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments

121 Nash St N
Wilson, NC 27893
Ph: 252-234-5952
Fax: 252-234-5971

<https://www.ucpcog.org>

Triangle J Council of Governments

4307 Emperor Blvd, Suite 110
Durham, NC 27703
Ph: 919-549-0551
Fax: 919-549-9390

<https://www.tjcog.org>

Public Transportation Providers

Tar River Transit

100 Coastline St #315
Rocky Mount, NC 27804
Ph: 252-972-1174
Fax: N/A

<https://www.tarrivertransit.org>

Johnston County Area Transit

1363 W. Market St.
Smithfield, NC 27577
Ph: 919-202-5030
Fax: 919-202-5032
info@jcats.org

Wilson County Transit

2201 Miller Rd. South
Wilson, NC 27893
Ph: 252-399-2817
Fax: 252-399-2770

<https://www.wilson-co.com/departments/transportation>

Wilson Transit System - RIDE

320 E. Nash St.
Wilson, NC 27893
Ph: 252-291-2850
Fax: N/A

<https://www.wilsonnc.org/residents/all-departments/public-works/wilson-transit-ride-wilson-industrial-air-center/ride>

Rocky Mount – Wilson Regional Airport

7265 Air Terminal Dr.
Elm City, NC 27822
Ph: 252-446-7057
Fax: 252-985-3728

<https://krwiairport.com>

Wilson Industrial Air Center

4545 Airport Dr.
Wilson, NC 27896
PO Box 10
Wilson, NC 27894
Ph: 252-291-8810 (Airport)
Ph: 252-399-2488 (office)

<https://www.wilsonnc.org/residents/all-departments/public-works/wilson-transit-wilson-industrial-air-center/wilson-industrial-air-center>

Appendix B: Title VI Public Involvement

Effective public involvement is a key element in addressing Title VI in decision-making. This **Public Participation Plan** describes how Upper Coastal Plain Rural Planning Organization (UCPRPO) will disseminate vital agency information and engage the public. We will seek out and consider the input and needs of interested parties and groups traditionally underserved by transportation systems who may face challenges accessing our services, such as minority and limited English proficient (LEP) persons. Underlying these efforts is our commitment to determining the most effective outreach methods for a given project or population.

General public involvement practices will include:

- Expanding traditional outreach methods. Think outside the box: Go to hair salons, barbershops, street fairs, etc.
- Providing for early, frequent and continuous engagement by the public.
- Use of social media and other resources as a way to gain public involvement.
- Coordinating with community- and faith-based organizations such as the Hispanic Liaison, educational institutions, and other entities to implement public engagement strategies that reach out specifically to members of affected minority and/or LEP communities.
- Providing opportunities for public participation through means other than written communication, such as personal interviews or use of audio or video recording devices to capture oral comments.
- Considering radio, television, or newspaper ads on stations and in publications that serve LEP populations. Outreach to LEP persons could also include audio programming available on podcasts.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

We will inform people of their rights under Title VI and related authorities with regard to our program. The primary means of achieving this will be posting and disseminating the policy statement and notice. Additional measures may include verbally announcing our obligations and the public's rights at meetings, placing flyers at places frequented by targeted populations, and an equal opportunity tag-on at the end of radio announcements. The method of notification will be determined through an initial screening of the area.

DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

Information on Title VI and other programs will be crafted and disseminated to employees, contractors and subrecipients, stakeholders, and the general public. Public dissemination efforts may vary depending on factors present, but will generally include: posting public statements setting forth our nondiscrimination policy in eye-catching designs and locations; placing brochures in public places, such as government offices, transit facilities, and libraries; having nondiscrimination language within contracts; including nondiscrimination notices in meeting announcements and handouts; and displaying our Notice of Nondiscrimination at all our public meetings.

At a minimum, nondiscrimination information will be disseminated on our website and on posters in conspicuous areas at our office(s). Project-related information and our most current Title VI-related information will be maintained online.

MEETINGS AND OUTREACH

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to public involvement. A variety of comprehensive and targeted public participation methods will be used to facilitate meaningful public involvement. Methods for engaging stakeholders and target audiences, including traditionally underserved and excluded populations (i.e., minorities, youth, low-income, the disabled, etc.) will include the following:

Public Relations and Outreach

Public relations and outreach (PRO) strategies aim to conduct well-planned, inclusive, and meaningful public participation events that foster good relations and mutual trust through shared decision-making with the communities we serve.

- We will seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected.
- Public events will aim to be collaborative, fun, and educational for all, rather than confrontational and prescriptive.
- Media plans will typically involve multiple channels of communication like mailings, radio, TV, and newspaper ads.
- Abstract objectives will be avoided in meeting announcements. Specific “attention-grabbing” reasons to attend will be used, such as “Help us figure out how to relieve congestion on [corridor name]” or “How much should it cost to ride the bus? Let us know on [date].”
- Efforts will be made to show how the input of participants can, or did, influence final decisions.
- We will do our best to form decision-making committees that look like and relate to the populations we serve.
- We will seek out and identify community contacts and partner with local community- and faith-based organizations that can represent, and help us disseminate information to, target constituencies.
- Demographic data will be requested during public meetings, surveys, and from community contacts and committee members.

Public Meetings

“Public meeting” refers to any meeting open to the public, such as hearings, charrettes, open house and board meetings.

- Public meetings will be conducted at times, locations, and facilities that are convenient and accessible.
- Meeting materials will be available in a variety of predetermined formats to serve diverse audiences.
- An assortment of advertising means may be employed to inform the community of public meetings.

- Assistance to persons with disabilities or limited English proficiency will be provided, as required.

Small Group Meetings

A small group meeting is a targeted measure where a meeting is held with a specific group, usually at their request or consent. These are often closed meetings, as they will typically occur on private property at the owner's request.

- If it is determined that a targeted group has not been afforded adequate opportunities to participate, the group will be contacted to inquire about possible participation methods, including a group meeting with them individually.
- Unless unusual circumstances or safety concerns exist, hold the meeting at a location of the target group's choosing.
- Share facilitation duties or relinquish them to members of the target group.
- Small group discussion formats may be integrated into larger group public meetings and workshops. When this occurs, the smaller groups will be as diverse as the participants in the room.

Community Surveying

- Opinion surveys will occasionally be used to obtain input from targeted groups or the general public on their transportation needs, the quality or costs of our services, and feedback on our public outreach efforts.
- Surveys may be conducted via telephone, door-to-door canvassing, at community fairs, by placing drop boxes in ideal locations, or with assistance from other local agencies like social services.
- Surveys will be translated into languages other than English, when appropriate.