

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

FOR

**ROCK HILL – FORT MILL AREA
TRANSPORTATION STUDY**



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RFATS

Rock Hill-Fort Mill Area Transportation Study

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List of Acronyms

RFATS	Rock Hill-Fort Mill Area Transportation Study	See Page 3
LRTP	Long Range Transportation Plan	See Page 3
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization	See Page 3
SAFETEA-LU	Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy of Users	See Page 3
SCDOT	South Carolina Department of Transportation	See Page 3
TEA-21	Transportation Equity Act for the 21 st Century	See Page 3
TIP	Transportation Improvement Program	See Page 4
UPWP	Unified Planning Work Program	See Page 4
PPP	Public Participation Plan	See Page 11

INTRODUCTION

The RFATS Metropolitan Planning Organization is a federally mandated transportation planning program for the urbanized area of York County. In accordance with Federal and State regulations, RFATS' goal is to plan the most efficient, responsive and cost-effective transportation system for the movement of people and goods in the urbanized area. With this goal in mind, it is the policy of the MPO to support and encourage active public participation throughout the Metropolitan Planning Process. The MPO has therefore adopted this public participation policy in order to ensure that specific opportunities exist for the public to offer input and provide feedback as active participants in the decision-making process.

I. BACKGROUND

The Rock Hill-Fort Mill Area Transportation Study (RFATS) is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (designated by the Governor of South Carolina) responsible for coordinating the transportation planning process for the York County Urbanized Area. The membership of RFATS includes the Town of Fort Mill, the cities of Rock Hill and Tega Cay, the unincorporated urban areas of York County and the Catawba Indian Nation. The RFATS Policy Committee is comprised of eleven (11) voting members representing each of the RFATS communities, SCDOT Commission as well as legislative representatives from the South Carolina House and Senate.

II. GOVERNMENT REQUIREMENTS

With the passage of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) in 1998, the 15 metropolitan and 23 statewide planning factors from the old regulations were consolidated into seven factors. With the recent passage of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005, these factors were expanded to eight (8); namely safety and security were separated into separate planning factors. In addition, the planning factor on protect/enhance the environment was expanded to include "...promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns." The eight (8) planning factors of SAFETEA-LU are:

1. Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity and efficiency;
2. Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
3. Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
4. Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and for freight;
5. Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns;
6. Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight;
7. Promote efficient system management and operation, and;
8. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

Additionally, MPO's are required to develop and adopt a long-range transportation plan and transportation improvement program. In developing these documents, by Federal statute, a reasonable opportunity to comment must be provided to all interested parties.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

A. GENERAL GUIDELINES

The RFATS Public Participation Plan is designed to provide direction for public participation activities to be conducted throughout the MPO boundary area and contains the vision, objectives and techniques used by RFATS for public participation. Specifically, the Public Participation Plan will seek to accomplish the following:

1. Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agencies, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle facilities, representatives of the disabled as well as any other interested parties within the communities affected by the transportation plans, programs and/or projects undertaken by RFATS.
2. Provide public access to policy and technical information used during the evaluation and development of the LRTP, TIP and any other transportation related plans; additionally, open public meetings will be held where matters relevant to transportation planning and programs are being considered.
3. Provide adequate notice of public participation activities and allow time for public review and comments for the LRTP, TIP, UPWP and any other transportation plans, programs or activities occurring within the RFATS Study Area. It should be noted, that if a final draft of any transportation program or plan should contain substantive differences from an earlier version made available for public review, then an additional public comment period will be scheduled.
4. Respond to all applicable public input. When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft transportation plan as a result of the public participation process – a summary and analysis will be included as part of the final plan.
5. Reach out and/or otherwise "go to" those traditionally underserved by the existing transportation system, including but not limited to minorities, elderly, persons with disabilities or special needs, language barriers as well as disadvantaged residents.
6. Provide a public comment period of 45 calendar days prior to the adoption of the Public Participation Plan. Notice of the 45-day comment period will be advertised in newspapers of general circulation, minority community newspapers (if available) as well as on the RFATS' website.
7. Provide for a public comment period of not less than 30 calendar days prior to the adoption of the LRTP, TIP as well as any amendments and/or significant updates to existing transportation plans or projects.
8. Coordinate the Public Participation Process with statewide Public Participation Processes where opportunities exist to enhance public consideration of the issues, projects and plans under discussion or review.
9. Periodically review and update the Public Participation Process to ensure it provides open access and opportunity to all.

B. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION POPULATION

Virtually all of the residents, businesses and agencies of the RFATS Study Area are part of the affected citizens that make up the Public Participation population, including:

1. Daily work commuters to and from the York County urbanized area to Charlotte, NC.
2. Local work commuters within the York County urbanized area and its population centers.
3. Student populations from local colleges and universities.
4. Elderly, handicapped, minority, and disadvantaged residents.
5. Commercial/industrial enterprise activity; including freight.
6. All non-commuting travelers.

The type of transportation presently used by the majority of these populations is the single passenger automobile. Some smaller groups are currently served by commercial trucks, limited express bus service to and from Charlotte, demand response transit service, van pool arrangements and some bicycle/pedestrian facilities.

The rapid development of the Charlotte Metro Area is causing an even larger volume of traffic and transportation demand that threatens the future movement of people and goods. These challenges will impact every community in the RFATS Study Area. Future growth will require a substantial increase in local transportation costs AND will call for more diversity in the planning and funding of different types of transportation – or the alternative will be massive traffic jams, congestion and loss of quality of life and economic viability.

Since the quality of life and the cost of future travel of every citizen of every community in the RFATS Study Area will be impacted by transportation plans and decisions – active public participation in the planning and decision-making process is critical to RFATS' goals and mission.

C. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN: VISION, GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The vision for public participation is that the public will be provided information on transportation planning services and project development in a convenient and timely manner. To this end, the following goals and policies have been established.

Goal I: To actively engage the public in the transportation planning process according to the policies contained in Federal and State law as well as in this Public Participation Plan.

- A. RFATS will maintain a current database of contacts and/or interested parties:
- Federal, state and local agencies responsible for planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, freight movements, land use management, natural resources and historic preservation.
 - Elected Officials
 - Local Government Staff
 - Transportation Agencies (freight, port, airports, transit, etc.)
 - Organizations/agencies representing users of public transportation
 - Organizations/agencies representing those with special needs
 - Local Media
 - Homeowners' Associations
- B. RFATS will (when feasible), electronically send meeting notices to all interested parties (RFATS Contact List and/or Targeted Group Mailing, etc.).
- C. RFATS will employ visualization techniques to illustrate transportation plans/projects. Examples of visualization techniques include charts, graphs and maps.

Goal II: RFATS shall keep the public informed of on-going transportation related activities on a continuous basis.

- A. RFATS will make publications and work products available to the public.
- B. RFATS staff will be available to provide general and project specific information at a central location during normal business hours and after hours when deemed appropriate and with reasonable notice.
- C. RFATS will maintain accurate web pages on the City of Rock Hill website with current transportation planning and project activity descriptions/summaries.

Goal III: RFATS shall encourage the participation of all citizens in the transportation planning process.

- A. RFATS will utilize a "Public Participation Communications Venue" matrix (appendix – Exhibit I) which lists the stakeholder groups and communication mediums (both direct and indirect), to provide the greatest opportunity to influence the transportation/transit choices in the RFATS Study Area.

Goal IV: RFATS shall strive to improve public participation by continuously monitoring and evaluating the public participation techniques contained in this plan.

- A. The Public Participation Plan will be reviewed at least every three (3) years.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES

Public Participation is an ongoing activity of the MPO. An effective public participation process is characterized by techniques and procedures that enable citizens to become well informed. This section contains descriptions of public participation tools that RFATS currently uses and proposes to use in the future:

- Citizens Advisory Committee
- Community Town Hall Meetings
- Consultation
- Legal Advertisements and Display Ads
- Brochure
- Surveys
- Direct Mailings / Postcards
- Email Notifications / Announcements
- Comment Forms
- MPO & Local Government Website(s)
- Media/Press Releases
- Small Group / Public Meetings
- Personal Interviews
- Community Based Public Events / SC Visitors Center
- Title VI & Environmental Justice
- Visualization

Citizens Advisory Committee

Description: This is a standing advisory committee established to ensure that meaningful public participation is organizationally incorporated into the formal transportation planning process. Specifically, this committee reviews and provides input on the development of programs and projects within the RFATS communities, including the Public Participation Plan. Additionally, this committee considers the needs of those traditionally underserved by the existing transportation system.

Activities: Core work products of the MPO to include the UPWP, LRTP, TIP, PPP and grant programs as well as all other major MPO activities.

Community Town Hall Meetings

Description: These are public meetings that are generally open and informal with RFATS staff members interacting with the public. Short presentations may be given at these meetings. Fundamentally, the primary purpose of Community Town Hall Meetings is to provide the forum to share project/planning information to the public and solicit input.

Activities: Corridor studies, LRTP update, certification review and other major MPO activities

Consultation

Description: As part of SAFETEA-LU regulations in encouraging more cooperative planning, RFATS will consult, as appropriate, with agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities

that are affected by transportation within the RFATS Study Area. To coordinate the planning function to the maximum extent practicable, such consultation will involve comparing LRTP's and TIP's as they are developed with the plans, maps, inventories and planning documents developed by other agencies. This consultation will include, as appropriate, contact with the following groups: State, local, Tribal and private /public agencies (Interagency Consultations & Charlotte Regional Alliance For Transportation) responsible for planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations and historic preservation. It should also be noted that RFATS will also consult with these groups, as appropriate, during the transportation conformity process – in order to ensure that transportation planning activities are ultimately consistent with the air quality goals for the RFATS Study Area.

Activities: Public hearings/meetings, copies of this plan on the RFATS website, meetings between RFATS staff and state / federal and Charlotte Regional agency personnel.

Legal Advertisements / Display Ads

Description: SCDOT requires a minimum of thirty (30) day advertisement regarding consideration of any significant changes to an existing plan or program. Ads are therefore published to solicit public comment and/or review of the requested change or plan update. The ads provide a description of the proposed change, including contact information.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, major TIP amendments, updates of the LRTP and UPWP as well as other major MPO activities.

LRTP Brochure

Description RFATS utilizes a color brochure that describes the history of the MPO; the structure and purpose of the Long Range Transportation Plan; the role of public participation in the planning process as well as a contact list of elected officials who serve on the Policy Committee.

Activities LRTP, TIP and other MPO activities.

Surveys

Description Surveys may be used where specific input from the public is desired. A survey can be used in place of comment cards to ask very specific questions such as whether person supports a particular transportation / transit alignment. Surveys may also be utilized to gather technical data during planning studies.

Activities Sub-area studies, LRTP, planning studies and other MPO activities.

Direct Mailings / Postcards

Description Direct mailings are used to announce upcoming meetings and activities or to provide information to a targeted area. Direct mailings are usually post cards, but could include letters and/or fliers. An area may be selected for a mailing because of the potential impact from a particular project.

Activities Project specific meetings, open houses, workshops and other MPO activities.

Email Notifications / Announcements

Description Meeting announcements and MPO information will be e-mailed to interested persons that have submitted their e-mail addresses to RFATS staff.

Activities Public meetings, workshops, and other major MPO activities.

Comment Forms

Description: Comment forms are often used to solicit public comment on specific issues being presented at a workshop or other public meeting. Comment forms (Exhibit II) can be very general in nature or can ask for very specific feedback. For example, a comment form may ask for comments on specific alignment alternatives being considered during a corridor study or may ask for a person's general feelings about any aspect of transportation planning and services.

Activities: Public Workshops, open houses, hearings and other meetings, general MPO activities.

MPO & Local Government Website(s)

Description: The RFATS website provides basic information about the services of the MPO, the decision-making process and purpose, membership, meeting schedule as well as committee and contact information. MPO work products such as the UPWP, TIP, LRTP and Public Participation Plan are available for downloading from the site. Additionally, residents are able to submit comments and request inclusion on the distribution lists maintained by RFATS. This website is maintained and frequently updated by RFATS staff as appropriate. The official website address for RFATS is the www.cityofrockhill.com. Additional RFATS information is available from the Town of Fort Mill, York County and the City of Tega Cay.

Activities: Website utilized to advertise regular and special meetings, planning studies, and MPO work products.

Media & Press Releases

Description: Formal press releases are sent out to local media (newspapers, etc.) to announce upcoming special meetings and activities and to provide information on specific issues being considered by the MPO.

Activities: Specific corridor studies, workshops, open houses, public hearings and other special MPO activities.

Small Group / Public Meetings

Description: Periodically, meetings will be held with small groups that have an interest in a particular project. Representative meetings and/or hearings would include homeowners and/or neighborhood associations, civic groups as well as other groups of affected or interested parties.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, transit service plans and other major MPO activities.

Personal Interviews

Description: Personal interviews with key community leaders and senior staff of stakeholder organizations can serve a useful purpose during the information gathering stage of the transportation planning process. Therefore, RFATS will conduct one-on-one interviews with so-called "key individuals" in an effort to gather critical, constructive input in a candid, meaningful way on specific topics and regional planning issues.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, transit service plans and other special MPO activities.

Community Based Public Events / SC Visitors Center

Description: Surveys may be used at large public events in the RFATS Study Area. One such event is the annual "Come See Me" Festival in the City of Rock Hill which attracts from 75,000 to 100,000 attendees over a ten-day period. Additional events include the Piedmont Medical Center Health Fair.

Activities: Project specific meetings, workshops, open houses, corridor studies and other major MPO activities.

Title VI & Environmental Justice

Description: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in federally assisted programs and activities. In 1994, Presidential Order 12898 directed every Federal agency to make environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing the effects of programs, policies and activities on "minority populations and low-income populations."

In complying with Federal law, RFATS will proactively reach out to those who either cannot or are unlikely to attend traditional meetings due to a lack of transportation or for other reasons such as a disability or language barrier – so as to ensure that meaningful opportunities to participate are realized.

Additionally, RFATS will maintain an established complaint processing procedure (Exhibit IV) and will designate an MPO staff member to serve as the lead person and/or liaison with the RFATS Policy Committee and SCDOT regarding the documentation, compliance and reporting requirements of Title VI.

Activities: LRTP update and other major MPO activities.

Visualization

Description: RFATS recognizes that an important element of public participation is to provide the public, when possible, visual as well as written descriptions of transportation planning efforts and/or projects. Through visual imagery, the complex features of proposed transportation plans, policies and programs can be portrayed at appropriate scales (regional, local, etc.) and from different perspectives. With this understanding in mind, RFATS will utilize various visual and design approaches (GIS, sketches, mapping, etc.) to usefully illustrate transportation planning projects and ideas under review and/or consideration by the MPO.

Activities: Planning studies and other major MPO activities.

V. EVALUATION METHODS AND EFFECTIVENESS

In order to determine the effectiveness of various public participation tools and techniques, they must be evaluated on a regular basis. Therefore, after our communication venues are utilized, a PPP Consensus Report (Exhibit III) will be prepared. Additionally, the Citizens Advisory Committee and Technical Advisory Team will be utilized to evaluate public participation tools and techniques and provide input on improvements.

VI. IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES / EFFORTS

RFATS continually strives to achieve improved public participation in all major areas of MPO management. Indeed, because the decisions made by RFATS affect the entire population within the MPO boundary area, (for both residents and visitors alike), seeking and securing public input is viewed as an integral part of achieving success as a planning organization. Therefore, each time a public participation evaluation is performed, improvement strategies may be generated. If improvements are needed for an ongoing public participation task, a reasonable completion date should be established. If improvements are needed for one-time activities such as corridor studies, the improvements should be implemented where appropriate on future activities.