

## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Strategy**

Eastgate Regional Council of Governments remains committed to a transportation planning process that includes a proactive public involvement process which provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and all on-going program activities.

It is Eastgate's objective to reaffirm this commitment through a specific plan of action designed to provide maximum opportunity for public involvement in consultation with all interested parties who participate in the transportation planning process. In conjunction with public involvement, this process will include, as appropriate, consultation with those representatives from State and local agencies, and public officials responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation. This process is intended to guide and facilitate meaningful discussion throughout the transportation planning process, as well as confirm that stakeholders, interest groups, and the general public have the opportunity to comment on all transportation plans and programs.

The goals of the Public Participation Program are to provide a fully engaged public forum between those decision making entities from State and local agencies, public officials, and citizens concerning transportation planning issues and the participation process. The participation process provides reasonable opportunities for interested parties to comment on the content of plans and provides the opportunity for public input. Citizens and interested parties contribute to the public review and are encouraged to enter into an active dialogue regarding plan development. The Public Participation Program is designed to educate the public on the process and issues involved in transportation planning and the associated activities and mandated federal requirements prior to approval.

#### **1.2 Identification of Interested Parties and Participation Issues**

The Public Participation Program will recognize participants interested in or affected by the activities linked to plans and programs. This is achieved through direct mailings to interested parties, as well as utilizing indirect contact with the public through universal methods such as advertisements and notices in newspapers, press releases and other mass media associated activities, and to the maximum extent possible, in electronic format.

The MTP is a comprehensive transportation plan compiled for Mahoning and Trumbull Counties. This plan is to serve as the blueprint where federal funding is to be used for highway, transit, non-motorized, and multimodal systems within Eastgate's planning area. Due to the significance and complexity of the MTP, sufficient notification, adequate information, opportunities for resolution of conflicts must be made available. Public

participation insures that project and planning activities evolve from and address public needs. Once the draft Plan has been completed, at least two public meetings will be held; news releases will be sent to newspapers, radio and television stations; and advertisements may be placed in local newspapers.

The TIP is a comprehensive listing of specific transportation improvement projects scheduled for implementation over a four year time span. The projects included in the TIP are first included in the MTP. The TIP is updated every two years, and the public will be provided the opportunity to comment and be involved in the decision-making process leading to the adoption of the TIP. This review is being used by the Western Reserve Transit Authority and Trumbull County Transit Board to satisfy the Program of Projects requirements as established by the Federal Transit Administration pursuant to 49 U.S.C. Section 5307 (c). Once the draft TIP has been completed, a public meeting will be held during the two week public comment period; advertisements will be placed in local newspapers; news releases will be sent to area newspapers, radio and television stations; and copies of the draft TIP will be made available at disclosed locations in our planning area.

### **1.3 Information and Education**

One of the purposes of the Public Participation Program is to inform and educate the public regarding the purpose and development of the MTP and the TIP. Information disseminated must be clear, concise, and represent a solid foundation that allows for the public to provide their input to recommendations that will result from the planning process conducted by Eastgate. To enhance this effort, Eastgate proposes to expand various visualization techniques to be more “user friendly” for those participants not traditionally involved in developing/reviewing the transportation planning process, enabling complex concepts to be easily understood.

### **1.4 Federal and State Guidelines and Requirements**

In accordance with federal guidelines, the Eastgate Regional Council of Governments is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for Mahoning and Trumbull Counties. Eastgate’s previous “Public Participation Plan” was revised to meet the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA LU) legislation, and was approved by the General Policy Board in April 2007. The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) was signed into law on July 6, 2012, and became effective on October 1, 2012. MAP-21 retained all of the SAFETEA LU Metropolitan Planning Regulations, in which transportation planning requirements became effective immediately; Eastgate remains in compliance with MAP-21 planning provisions. In October 2013, Eastgate updated our Public Participation Program to reference MAP-21.

## **2. Achievement Strategies**

### **2.1 Objectives**

The primary objectives of this policy are to:

- Bring a diverse cross-section of the public into the public policy decision making process
- Maintain meaningful public participation from the early stages of the planning process
- Utilizing combinations of public participation and visualization techniques to meet the needs of the general public
- Reach out to traditionally underserved communities, including low income, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and minority populations to ensure environmental justice issues are addressed

### **2.2 Public Participation Core Components**

In order to achieve the objectives outlined above, several core components must be included in the participation process including:

- Confirm that stakeholders, interest groups, and the general public have the opportunity to comment on public involvement plans and transportation plans and programs
- Involve key stakeholders early and throughout the planning process
- Personalize public participation meetings and activities to obtain productive input
- Expand visualization techniques to present transportation plans and programs
- When practical, publish transportation plans and programs in electronic format, such as on the agency web site
- Develop relationships with local media

### **2.3 Stakeholders**

The previously approved Public Involvement Program identified possible stakeholders linked to the MTP and TIP. Stakeholders are individuals and/or groups who have a direct interest, involvement, or are generally affected by projects, programs, or plans. Identifying “interested parties” outside of the formal organizational structure of Eastgate is necessary to obtain adequate public input. Stakeholders commonly include but are not limited to:

- People who live in a project area
- Businesses in a project area
- Civic and community associations
- Environmental or special interest groups
- State and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, conservation, and historic preservation groups as appropriate

### 3. Public Participation Tools

The Public Participation Program exhibits the importance of effective public participation as a component to a project or plan's success, therefore, various techniques are needed to engage the public in the decision making process. As appropriate, new techniques will be incorporated as they become available and are shown to be successful.

Below is a list of outreach activities, followed by a discussion of the technique including the specific objective of each and procedures to be used in implementation. Eastgate will use all or a combination of the following techniques, dependent on available resources, to involve the public in the transportation planning process:

- Direct mailings
- Newsletters
- Press releases
- Advertisements
- Web page
- Community events
- Office open-houses
- Citizens Advisory Board
- Public opinion surveys

#### 3.1 Objectives and Procedures Involving Public Participation Tools

- **Direct Mailings**

*Objective:* To inform specific audiences through the distribution of pertinent information.

*Procedures:* Using mailing lists, disseminate letters, newsletters, plan information, etc. to inform the general public and encourage response.

- **Newsletters**

*Objective:* To inform specific audiences through the distribution of pertinent information; to encourage involvement through promotion of opportunities for the general public to become active in the process.

*Procedures:* Using the mailing list, Eastgate will continue to distribute the quarterly agency newsletter as well as any pertinent special edition newsletters published by Eastgate. Newsletters are also made available on the agency web site.

- **Press Releases**

*Objective:* To inform the general public through a wide-ranging distribution of pertinent information; to encourage involvement through promotion of opportunities for the general public to become active in the process.

*Procedures:* Distribute news releases to major regional and minority newspapers

and radio stations, in addition to local university radio stations.

### **Advertisements**

*Objective:* To inform the general public of information available for review and/or public meetings to be held.

*Procedures:* Whenever possible and appropriate, advertisements will be placed in minority and ethnic newspapers, in addition to major regional newspapers. Radio announcements will also be aired when possible and appropriate.

### **Web Page**

*Objective:* To provide access to the latest public information, upcoming events and meetings 24-hours a day; to allow the general public to provide comments and feedback on projects and plans.

*Procedures:* Information regarding upcoming public meetings will be posted on the agency web site; agency programs and plans will be placed on the web site, the general public can also comment on plans throughout the public review process using e-mail.

### **Community Events**

*Objective:* To provide the general public with the opportunity to review, comment, and provide feedback on transportation plans, reports, and activities by setting up displays at public events and places.

*Procedures:* Set up displays featuring pertinent information and relevant transportation plans and reports available for review.

### **Office Open-Houses**

*Objective:* To provide the general public with the opportunity to tour agency offices and observe the tools and equipment used in the transportation planning process as well as review, comment, and provide feedback on transportation plans, reports, and activities.

*Procedures:* Hold periodic office open-houses and have relevant plans and reports available for review.

### **Citizens Advisory Board**

*Objective:* To inform specific and general audiences through the focused distribution of pertinent information; to encourage involvement through promotion of opportunities for the general public to become active in the process.

*Procedures:* At each monthly meeting of the Eastgate Citizens Advisory Board, provide details on transportation projects and related issues to inform the general public and encourage response.

## **Public Opinion Surveys**

*Objective:* To access widespread public opinion on various transportation plans and reports, activities, and miscellaneous issues in the area.

*Procedures:* Distribute public opinion surveys to members of the general public.

### **3.2 Consideration of Public Comments**

Public comments from the various sources will be organized and analyzed, where appropriate, so that the suggestions may be considered by Eastgate staff and decision makers.

Summaries will be prepared and disseminated to Eastgate Committees and the General Policy Board.

When possible, Eastgate staff will respond to those who participated in order to demonstrate the results of their involvement. This will be done via direct mailings, e-mail, newsletters, and news releases.

## **4. Evaluating the Program**

At the end of each fiscal year, Eastgate will review the Public Participation Program to determine if the objectives of the program were fulfilled.