

EASTGATE'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

1. Introduction

1.1 Strategy

Eastgate Regional Council of Governments (Eastgate) remains committed to a proactive transportation planning and public involvement process. Eastgate supports early and ongoing public involvement in developing the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and all other 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 public can comment on all transportation plans and programs.

The goal of the Public Participation Process is to ***provide a fully engaged public forum between those decision-making entities from state and local agencies, public officials, and citizens concerning transportation 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 an active dialogue regarding Eastgate's planning process and plan developments. The Public Participation Process 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 Process will recognize participants who are interested in or affected by the activities linked to Eastgate's plans and programs. To achieve active public participation, Eastgate uses a variety of outreach combinations through direct contact with the public through universal methods such as press releases and other mass media associated activities, social media, electronic formats, to the maximum extent possible.

Eastgate used several outreach efforts outlined in the Public Participation Process throughout the development of the MTP. The MTP is a comprehensive transportation plan 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, and 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 news outlets and advertisements may be placed on social media.

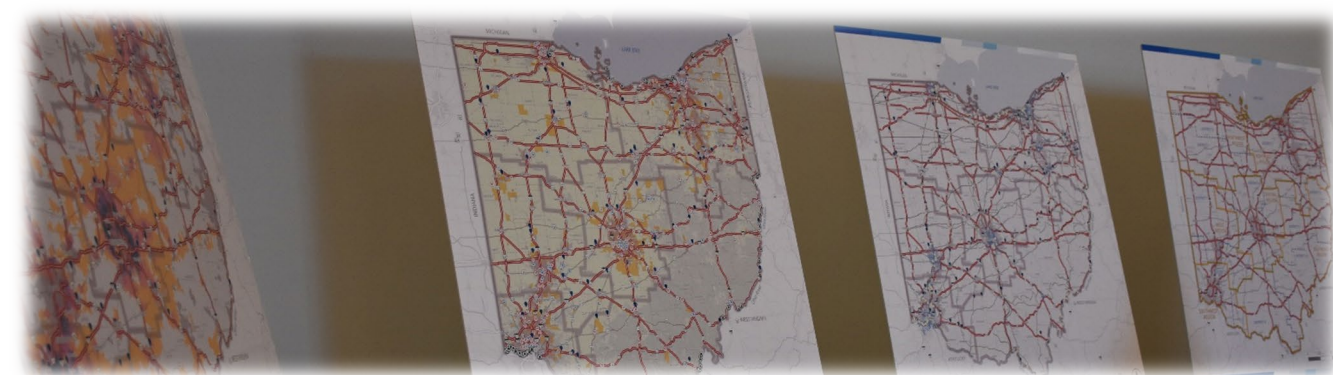
The TIP is a comprehensive listing of specific transportation improvement projects scheduled for implementation over a four-year time span. The projects included in the TIP are first included in the MTP. The TIP is updated every two years, and the public will be provided the opportunity to comment and be involved in the decision-making process leading to the adoption of the TIP. This review is used by the Western Reserve Transit Authority and Trumbull County Transit Board to satisfy the Program of Projects

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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; 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 Process 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. The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) was signed on December 4, 2015. The FAST Act explicitly adds public ports and certain private providers of transportation, including intercity bus operators and employer-based commuting programs to the list of interested parties that an MPO must provide with reasonable opportunity to comment on the transportation plan. [23 U.S.C. 134(l)(6)(A)]. Eastgate updated its participation plan with FAST Act's public participation requirements. Eastgate's Public Participation Process was reviewed and revised in 2018 to coincide with updates of our MTP and Title VI Programs. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), enacted as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) became public law on November 15, 2021. The BIL expanded the use of technology, explicitly allowing the use of social media to encourage public participation and to solicit public feedback during the transportation planning process. Eastgate's Public Participation Process was updated in May 2024 to reflect its compliance with the BIL's public participation requirements.

2. Achievement Strategies

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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,
- To maintain meaningful public participation from the initial stages of the planning process,
- To utilize combinations of public participation and visualization techniques to meet the needs of the public, and
- To provide ongoing outreach to traditionally underserved communities, including but not limited to, low income, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and minority populations to ensure environmental justice issues are addressed.

2.2 Public Participation Core Components

To achieve the objectives outlined above, several core components must be included in the participation process. These include:

- The confirmation that stakeholders, interest groups, and the public can comment on transportation plans and programs,
- The ongoing early involvement of key stakeholders throughout the planning process,
- Personalizing public participation meetings and activities to obtain productive input,
- Expand visualization techniques to present transportation plans and programs,
- Publicize transportation plans and programs in electronic formats, alternative formats upon request, and on the agency's web site,
- To continue to develop relationships with local media, and
- To utilize social media to inform the public of the process.

2.3 Stakeholders

The previously approved Public Participation Program, now known as the Public Participation Process, 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, and
- Public ports and certain private providers of transportation, including intercity bus operators and employer-based commuting programs in the project area.

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3. Public Participation Tools

The Public Participation Process 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 through:

- Newsletters
- Press releases
- Advertisements
- Webpage
- Community events
- Office open-houses
- Citizens Advisory Board
- Public opinion surveys
- Social media

3.1 Objectives and Procedures Involving Public Participation Tools

Newsletters

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

Procedures: Using e-mail and when requested direct 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 website.

Press Releases

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

Procedures: Distribute news releases to newspapers and radio stations.

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Advertisements

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

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

Web Page

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

Procedures: Information regarding upcoming public meetings will be posted on the agency's website; agency programs and plans will be placed on the website; the public can also comment on plans throughout the public review process using e-mail, paper format, and/or any accessible format. The agency's website maintains compliance with the ADA in an effort to allow every member of the public the opportunity to access the information being disseminated.

Community Events

Objectives: To provide the public with the opportunity to review, comment, and provide feedback on transportation plans, 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 House

Objectives: To provide the 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

Objectives: To inform specific and general audiences through the focused distribution of pertinent information; to encourage involvement through promotion of opportunities for the 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 public and encourage response.

Public Opinion Surveys

Objectives: 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 public.

Social Media

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

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Procedures: Using social media such as Facebook and Twitter to provide information.

3.2 Consideration of Public Comments

Public comments from the various sources will be organized and analyzed, where appropriate, so that the suggestions and comments 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 to demonstrate the results of their involvement through e-mail, newsletters, webpage, and news releases. All comments and responses will be placed on Eastgate's webpage.

4. Evaluating the Program

Eastgate will review the Public Participation Process at the end of each state fiscal year to determine if the objectives of the program were fulfilled.



The Public Participation Process is available for download on Eastgate's website:

www.eastgategog.org