

JEFFERSON-ORANGE-HARDIN REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION STUDY (JOHRTS) AREA

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

Prepared by the
South East Texas Regional Planning Commission
Metropolitan Planning Organization

In Conjunction with
The JOHRTS Technical Committee
And The Texas Department of Transportation

Adopted

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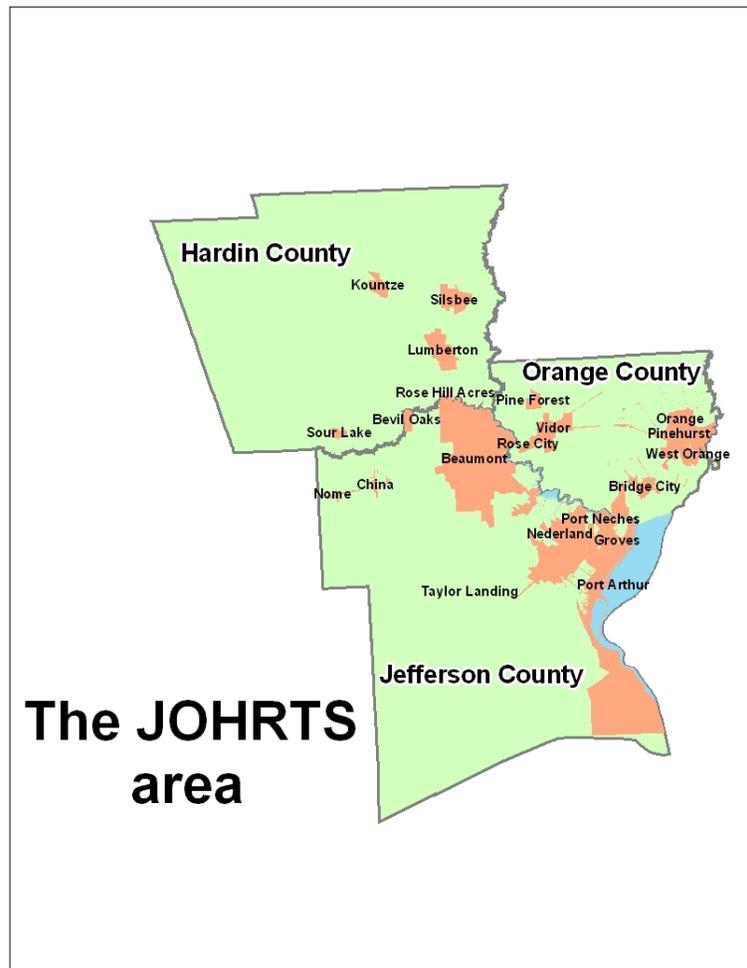
This document was prepared in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration



Public Participation Plan for the Jefferson-Orange-Hardin Regional Transportation Study (JOHRTS) Area

The South East Texas Regional Planning Commission (SETRPC) - Metropolitan Planning Organization (SETRPC-MPO) is the federally designated agency for the three-county area consisting of Jefferson, Orange and Hardin counties. The purpose of the MPO is to coordinate regional transportation planning among the State, counties, and cities within the JOHRTS area. Figure I shows the participating cities and counties in the JOHRTS area.

Figure I - JOHRTS Area



Certain legislation, such as the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), the Clean Air Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act have not only placed new demands on local governments, but have also given them new opportunities to engage the general public, public agencies and special interest groups in the regional transportation planning process.

In the spirit of these opportunities, the JOHRTS Public Participation Plan (PPP) contains the guidelines and expectations for public involvement during the transportation planning and development processes. In particular, this plan outlines the procedures, tools, techniques and expectations for outreach and education to the public on transportation issues.

The goals of the JOHRTS PPP are:

- ★ Identify affected public groups
- ★ Engage the community in the transportation planning process and incorporate public feedback in the decision making process
- ★ Employ a variety of public involvement approaches to garner the greatest amount of public participation
- ★ Be responsive to Environmental Justice policy and regulations
- ★ Expand consultation and stakeholder involvement
- ★ Employ Visualization Techniques

The desired outcome is a process that is both engaging and inclusive to the public. To provide the context for metropolitan transportation planning, this document includes an overview of the public participation plan which includes an overview of the public involvement process, environmental justice requirements, coordination methods, and safety planning associated with transportation projects in the JOHRTS area.

Public Participation Plan

The fundamental purpose of the public participation plan is to provide the methodology for an inclusive process that citizens (including business leaders and business groups, agency staff and leaders, environmental and civic organizations, elected/appointed officials, and any other stakeholder group) may participate in during the update and development of a comprehensive transportation plan. Improved public involvement fosters



an opportunity for better planning decisions and collective acceptance of the program.

The public involvement efforts associated with the public participation plan are designed to be proactive in engaging the JOHRTS community and encouraging public input. Efforts will be made to provide timely information, an understanding of the process, a number of venues to discuss issues and voice concerns, the ability to identify issues and contribute ideas, and the opportunity to review and comment on projects before key decisions are made.

SETRPC – MPO will ensure that during the public involvement process groups/households that have “historically” been under-served will be encouraged to participate in the transportation planning process. This includes persons from the minority, elderly, disabled, and low-income communities.

The components of the SETRPC – MPO’s public involvement process include:

- **Community Dialogue**
- **Formal Public Meetings**
- **Review and Comment**
- **Environmental Justice**
- **Coordination**
- **Safety Planning**

The public participation plan will be executed at all levels with an effective mix of opportunities, venues, and tools as noted below.

Public Involvement Components

I. Community Dialogue

SETRPC will utilize fundamental methods of enhancing and broadening community involvement in the planning process such as:

Mailing Database

A database of persons, groups, or agencies interested in notification of updated information public/community meetings is maintained by the MPO. SETRPC will utilize this database to distribute information on upcoming activities and meetings. All addressees remain in the database until removal is requested or the US Postal Service returns to the MPO as undeliverable. Email addresses are also maintained within this database for message notification via email.

Newsletter / Activity Updates

The MPO newsletter, On TARGET and timely Activity Updates are developed and sent to community residents, community organizations, health and human service agencies, transportation providers, elected officials, libraries and local media. These documents enhance the public's ability to review decisions affecting the transportation system and encourage participation in future transportation planning endeavors.



Both are available for download at no cost via the agency's web site at www.setrpc.org under the *Transportation and Environmental Resources* tab under the *Departments* menu.

MPO Internet Website

The MPO maintains a website (<http://www.setrpc.org>) that provides an overview of the agency, a listing of departments as well as a background on various programs. The web site provides easy access to transportation related documents, a calendar of agency events, the On TARGET Newsletter / Activity Updates, transportation surveys, a listing of transportation projects with images, GIS maps and a listing of advisory committee members and staff. Meeting agendas and minutes are also posted to the web site and the public can e-mail the MPO directly via the web site. The web site is updated on a regular basis.

Media

The MPO maintains a list of media contacts from the radio, television and print mediums. MPO staff facilitates regular communication with the local media regarding transportation issues and activities. They pursue opportunities to utilize these media outlets to keep the public engaged and apprised of agency activities. The SETRPC-MPO will prepare and send news releases as appropriate on transportation planning activities in the three-county region. Specialized media for specific cultural and language groups will be used when possible and appropriate.



Document Availability

Copies of transportation related documents, like the PPP, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), and the

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), are available for review at the MPO office, area libraries, and are downloadable via the MPO website.

Staff Presentations

The MPO staff is available to make presentations to neighborhood groups, civic organizations, government agencies, and other special interest groups to discuss transportation planning related topics. MPO staff will actively seek these opportunities as well as respond to speaker requests. Schedules and presentation content will be coordinated through the MPO staff office.

Visualization Techniques

A number of visualization techniques will be utilized at public meetings to enhance the understanding of topic(s) add authenticity, help the speaker build credibility with the audience and leave lasting impressions of program initiatives. Visual techniques utilized may include the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to depict statewide and metropolitan transportation plans in the form of sketches, maps, graphs, charts, photographs, posters, models, audio-visual equipment, overhead projector slides, handouts, film and video footage, videotapes, audio tapes and electronic media.

Provision of Timely Information

Citizens, elected/appointed officials, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agencies, freight transportation providers, media outlets and other interested parties will receive timely information about transportation issues, meetings and processes by numerous methods including notice via US mail and email, phone calls, the distribution of flyers and posters, and newspaper advertisements.

Informal/ Open House Meetings

Meetings for presenting general information on transportation planning related issues and on formal programs/documents that have been adopted by the TPC are considered informal meetings. These meetings are open to the public with meeting information posted on the Internet website, flyer distribution to community groups and social service agencies, radio and TV news releases, notification in various community calendars and in some cases advertisement through local print media. A mail out with information on the meeting will be made to those persons/groups listed in the contact database discussed above.

SETRPC will seek creative opportunities to increase awareness of existing services as well as to receive input on how these services can be enhanced. Potential activities include:

Mobile Information / Promotional Activities

SETRPC will look for opportunities to bring information to the community by equipping a van/bus with a mobile exhibit and traveling around the three-county region. The van/bus will include materials such as flyers, brochures, comment forms, and visual aides that describe the transportation planning process and staff would encourage visitors of the van/bus to provide input on transportation needs. With permission, it can be stationed at nearly any location, including shopping malls, universities, or local public buildings as well as county fairs/festivals, parades, community events, school sporting events and neighborhood functions.

Event Planning

SETRPC will look for partnering opportunities with community and business groups and identify opportunities to participate in activities that will afford exposure of the transportation planning process and create an opportunity to receive comments and solicit input from the public. Displays or mini-meetings may be held in conjunction with career fairs, community festivals, bus trips, church bazaars, and health fairs.

Focus Groups

SETRPC will look for key opportunities to facilitate targeted focus groups that are inclusive of all demographics including race, age, socio-economic status, educational levels, etc. These focus groups will be facilitated in a way to develop an understanding of opinion regarding transportation, expectations, and needs. Focus groups will be facilitated as organized discussion to gain information about views and experiences related to transportation and gain insight into shared understanding and varying perspectives.

II. Formal Public Meetings

In addition to the informal public meetings noted above, the MPO will also hold formal public meetings. Unlike informal meetings where proceedings are not formally recorded and comments are captured in writing only, the proceedings of formal meetings are recorded, minutes transcribed, and the document is filed and made available to the public. Similar to informal meetings, the MPO staff will provide follow-up information to interested persons via phone, email, the MPO website and/or quarterly newsletters.

Public notification of formal meetings will be consistent with outlined public notification requirements and includes notice of the meeting and agenda to media outlets in all member and

associate member counties, and notice to elected/appointed officials. Public notification of all transportation planning meetings will be provided at least ten days prior to each meeting.

Table detailing formal public meetings component:

Public Involvement Meetings Component	Meeting Date	Comment Period
Development of Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)	At least 30 days prior to Transportation Planning Committee (TPC) approval	30 days
Development of Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)	At least 30 days prior to TPC approval	30 days
Development of Public Participation Plan	Every 3 years in conjunction with one of the meetings above, a minimum of 45 days prior to TPC approval	A minimum of 45 days
Major TIP Amendments	At least 30 days prior to TPC approval	30 days
Major MTP Amendments	At least 30 days prior to TPC approval	30 days
JOHRTS Transportation Planning Committee (TPC)	Regular meeting quarterly or as needed on third Thursday of month	N/A

TPC

Meetings of the JOHRTS TPC are considered formal meetings and are held in compliance with the Texas Open Meetings Act. Meeting notices are sent to TPC members and posted at the MPO offices. Additional meetings may be scheduled as necessary.

Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Transportation Improvement Program Meetings

During preparation of a new/draft Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) or a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), at least one formal meeting is held in each county of the JOHRTS area. Additional formal meetings may be held at locations that enhance the participation of minority and low-income neighborhoods/groups. The proceedings of these meetings will be recorded.

Major amendments to the MTP or the TIP also require a formal meeting. During the amendment process, at least one formal meeting is held in each county of the JOHRTS area. Additional formal meetings may be held at locations that enhance the participation of minority and low-income neighborhoods/groups. The proceedings of these meetings are recorded.

Public meeting notification of the MTP/TIP meetings are posted as notices in the area newspapers, on the Internet website, as radio and TV news releases, and in various

community calendars. A mail out with information on the meeting is made to those persons/groups listed in the contact database discussed in the previous section.

Major amendments shall include any addition or deletion of projects to or from these documents except those projects or project groupings that are specifically exempt from the public involvement process. A listing of the exempt projects and project groupings are found in Appendix B. Major amendments do not include minor revisions to document text or project descriptions.

Meeting Locations

All meetings of the MPO are open to the public. The MPO will host public meetings at appropriate times and locations within the JOHRTS area to present technical findings and solicit public input on the TIP, MTP and conformity determination on the MTP and other transportation planning issues.

For meetings scheduled by the MPO, every effort will be made to accommodate traditionally under-served audiences including low-income and minority households and persons with disabilities. Efforts will be made to host meetings at public buildings and other highly visible public areas such as shopping centers or health and human service agencies for increased public access.

All MPO meetings are accessible to persons with disabilities. Arrangements for special assistance or a language interpreter can be made by calling the MPO at least 48 hours in advance. All meeting notifications provide the appropriate contact name and number to facilitate these types of special requests. Every reasonable effort will be made to accommodate special needs requests.



III. Review and Comment

Effective public involvement requires open communication. Information should be readily available to the public and they should be free to comment and receive feedback on their comments.

Public Comment

The public is encouraged to provide comments on any transportation related issue that falls under the MPO area of responsibility. These comments may be made either by E-mail or in writing. Persons making the comments are encouraged to provide their name and contact information so the MPO staff may respond to their questions/comments. Comment and surveys are available at the public meetings hosted by the MPO.

Formally Adopted Programs/Documents

During the preparation of a new MTP, TIP or during a major amendment to the MTP and/or TIP, there is a thirty day comment period. This review and comment period is normally scheduled as early in the planning process as possible. Comments during the preparation of a new MTP and/or TIP are published in the document along with responses to the comments.

Corridor-Wide Feasibility Studies

Federal rules require that a corridor-wide feasibility study is conducted when the need for a major transportation investment is identified, and federal funds are potentially involved and/or air quality conformity might be affected. The MPO will normally be a participant in the study.

If the MPO is not the lead agency, then the MPO will work with the lead agency to ensure that the public involvement procedures used by the lead agency are at least as comprehensive as those of the MPO. All corridor-wide feasibility studies will present information to the public and the TPC at early and regular intervals during SETRPC-MPO TPC meetings including final approval by the TPC at a regular meeting.

Public Participation Plan

MPO staff will conduct a forty-five (45) day review and comment period on the Public Participation Plan, at least every three years. Comments received during this period and the responses to those comments will be presented to the TPC. Additionally, the PPP will be reviewed on an on-going basis.

IV. Environmental Justice

The PPP supports the three principles of Environmental Justice as defined in Federal Highway Administration/Federal Transit Administration publication FHWA-EP-00-013, “An Overview of Transportation and Environmental Justice.” Those principles are:

- To avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects on minority and low-income populations.
- To ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process.
- To prevent the denial of, reduction of, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations.

Using US Census Bureau data and federal government definitions, the MPO will identify those areas considered to be minority and/or low-income areas and will make special efforts to encourage participation in the transportation planning process by citizens in these areas. These areas will be reviewed on a continual basis and will be updated as new/additional information becomes available.

V. Coordination

The MPO makes every effort to include Federal, State, and local agencies in the coordination of its PPP. While decisions made during the transportation planning process affect current JOHRTS citizens, as well as future citizens, it is imperative that the public participates in the process. Agencies and resources utilized in the consultation and coordination process include:

Title	Company
Director	Orange County Transportation
	Silsbee ISD Transportation
Port Director & CEO	Port of Orange
City of Port Arthur	Planning Department
Fleet Manager	City of Beaumont
Director	Dept. of Public Safety
Railroad Commission of Texas	East Texas Marketing Coordinator
Transportation Director	Little Cypress-Mauriceville ISD
Transportation Director	HFISD c/o Durham Transportation
Transportation Director	Port Neches ISD

Title	Company
Port Director	Port of Beaumont
Fleet Supervisor	Jefferson County
	Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept.
Local Government Liaison	Texas General Land Office
Port Director	Port of Port Arthur
Transportation Director	Port Arthur ISD
Transportation Director	Vidor ISD
Transportation Director	Orangefield ISD
	Dept. of Aging & Disability
Director	Orange Community Action Assoc.
Superintendent	Big Thicket National Preserve
Transit Manager	Port Arthur Transit
District Manager	US Dept. of Agriculture
Director	Environmental Protection Agency
Secretary	US Department of Transportation
Assistant Director	Orange County Transportation
President/CEO	Beaumont Transit System
Director	Nutrition and Services for Seniors
Executive Director	Council of State Governments
Director of Public Works	City of Port Neches
	Dept. of Housing Services
Transportation Director	Lumberton ISD
Transportation Director	Hardin-Jefferson ISD
Transportation Director	Nederland ISD
Regional Director	TCEQ
Transportation Director	Sabine Pass ISD
Maintenance Manager	City of Orange Parks and Fleets
Project Engineer	US Corps of Engineers
Public Works Director	City of Orange

*Also included is Homeland Security Representatives (See Safety Planning Section below).

VI. Safety Planning

The SETRPC – MPO is aware of the importance of safety throughout all its transportation planning activities; therefore the Division includes information regarding safety in a number of planning documents, as well as, emergency related organizations in the area.

The Division calls upon contacts within the SETRPC's Homeland Security Division. A list of area emergency contacts is as follows:

American Red Cross
Beaumont Emergency Medical Services
Beaumont Fire Department
Beaumont Fire Dept.
Beaumont Fire/Rescue
Beaumont Police Dept.
Bridge City Fire & Rescue
Bridge City Police Department
City of Beaumont Fire Department
City of Beaumont Public Health Dept.
City of Port Arthur Health Dept.
Department of Public Safety
Department of Public Safety-Emergen
Management Services
U.S. Corps of Engineers
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Goldstar EMS
Groves Fire Department
Hardin County EMC
Hardin County Sheriff's Department
Hardin County Sheriff's Dept.
Jefferson County Sheriff's Office
Jefferson County Emg. Mgmt.
Kountze Volunteer Fire Dept.
Lumberton Emergency Med. Serv., Inc
Lumberton Police Department
Lumberton VFD
National Guard
Orange Police Department
Pinehurst Volunteer Fire Dept.
Port Arthur Police Department
Port Neches Fire Department
Priority One EMS
Southeast Texas Regional Airport
Stat Care EMS



Texas Army National Guard
Texas Department of Public Safety
Texas Department of Transportation
United States Coast Guard
Vidor Police Department
West Jefferson County Volunteer EMS
West Orange Volunteer Fire Dept.

APPENDIX A SELECTED REGULATIONS STATING METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

23 CFR Part 450

Statewide Planning; Metropolitan Planning Rule

§ 450.326 Transportation Improvement Program: Modification.

The TIP may be modified at any time consistent with the procedures established in this part for its development and approval. In nonattainment or maintenance areas for transportation related pollutants if the TIP is amended by adding or deleting projects which contribute to and/or reduce transportation related emissions or replaced with a new TIP, new conformity determinations by the MPO and the FHWA and the FTA will be necessary. Public participation procedures consistent with § 450.316 (b) (1) shall be utilized in amending the TIP, except that these procedures are not required for TIP amendments that only involve projects of the type covered in § 450.324 (i).

§ 450.324 (i)

Projects proposed for FHWA and/or FTA funding that are not considered by the State and MPO to be of appropriate scale for individual identification in a given program year may be grouped by function, geographic area, and work type using applicable classifications under 23 CFR 771.117 (c) and (d). In nonattainment and maintenance areas, classifications must be consistent with the exempt project classifications contained in the U.S. EPA conformity requirements (40 CFR Part 51).

APPENDIX B

SELECTED REGULATIONS REGARDING EXEMPT PROJECTS

40 CFR Part 93

Transportation Conformity Rule

§ 93.126 Exempt Projects.

Notwithstanding the other requirements of this subpart, highway and transit projects of the types listed in Table 2 are exempt from the requirement to determine conformity. Such projects may proceed toward implementation even in the absence of a conforming transportation plan and TIP. A particular action of the type listed in Table 2 is not exempt if the MPO in consultation with other agencies (see § 93.105 (c) (1) (iii)), the EPA, and the FHWA (in the case of a highway project) or the FTA (in case of a transit project) concur that it has potentially adverse emissions impacts for any reason. States and MPOs must ensure that exempt projects do not interfere with TCM implementation.

Table 2. Exempt Projects

SAFETY

Railroad/highway crossing

Hazard elimination program

Safer non-Federal-aid system roads

Shoulder improvements

Increasing sight distance

Safety improvement program

Traffic control devices and operating assistance other than signalization projects

Railroad/highway crossing warning devices

Guardrails, median barriers, crash cushions

Pavement resurfacing and/or rehabilitation

Pavement marking demonstration

Emergency relief (23 U.S.C. 125)

Fencing

Skid treatments

Safety roadside rest areas

Adding medians

Truck climbing lanes outside the urbanized area
Lighting improvements
Widening narrow pavements or reconstructing bridges (no additional travel lanes)
Emergency truck pullovers

MASS TRANSIT

Operating assistance to transit agencies
Purchase of support vehicles
Rehabilitation of transit vehicles¹
Purchase of office, shop, and operating equipment for existing facilities
Purchase of operating equipment for vehicles (e.g., radios, fireboxes, lifts, etc.)
Construction or renovation of power, signal, and communications systems
Construction of small passenger shelters and information kiosks
Reconstruction or renovation of transit buildings and structures (e.g., rail or bus buildings, storage and maintenance facilities, stations, terminals, and ancillary structures)
Rehabilitation or reconstruction of track structures, track, and trackbed in existing rights-of-way

Purchase of new buses and rail cars to replace existing vehicles or for minor expansions of the fleet¹
Construction of new bus or rail storage/maintenance facilities categorically excluded in 23 CFR part 771

AIR QUALITY

Continuation of ride-sharing and vanpooling promotion activities at current levels
Bicycle and pedestrian facilities

OTHER

Specific activities which do not involve or lead directly to construction, such as:

- Planning and technical studies
- Grants for training and research programs
- Planning activities conducted pursuant to titles 23 and 49 U.S.C.
- Federal-aid systems revisions

Engineering to assess social, economic, and environmental effects of the proposed action or alternatives to the action
Noise attenuation
Emergency or hardship advance land acquisition (23 CFR 712.204(d))
Acquisition of scenic easements
Plantings, landscaping, etc.

Sign removal

Directional and informational signs

Transportation enhancement activities (except rehabilitation and operation of historic transportation buildings, structures, or facilities)

Repair of damage caused by natural disasters, civil unrest, or terrorist acts, except projects involving substantial functional, locational or capacity changes

¹In PM10 nonattainment or maintenance areas, such projects are exempt only if they are in compliance with control measures in the applicable implementation plan.

