

VIII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

Background

Over the past few years, governmental agencies have come to recognize the increasing importance of involving the public as they plan, organize, and implement transportation projects. Involving interested parties generally results in a more effective project overall. Taking time at the beginning to communicate with potentially affected parties, carefully explaining the proposal, and gathering input, can enhance the project and potentially reduce the time and effort for implementation.

The goals of public involvement are to ensure that:

- Residents are given the opportunity (through their respective community representative) to participate in the transportation planning process.
- The issues and concerns of residents are given consideration in the selection of transportation investments.
- Transportation investments do not disproportionately burden any population with adverse impacts.

This plan outlines the importance of, and specific guidelines for, involving community members, organizations, governments, transportation professionals and others in ongoing and future regional projects, plans, and programs. Included is information about the value of public participation, how it will be accomplished, and what will be done with the results.

It is important to note that a **Public Participation Plan (PPP)** needs to incorporate a broad array of interested parties. These include agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation and historical preservation. Involving all the potentially affected interests, including the traditionally underserved populations, can significantly increase a plan or project's efficiency and effectiveness. By following the process outlined in this plan, WACOG will be able to better ensure inclusive and meaningful public involvement.

Public Involvement Process

Public participation implies an open process. This means that anyone who is potentially affected, or is just interested in the process, is welcome to participate. Some of the reasons for encouraging this openness are:

- Project leaders may gain new information.
- Participants, who want a project to be completed, can provide additional resources in the form of assistance, goods, or services.
- Public participation can be a forum for dispute resolution.
- Progress can be made and implementation occur because:
- The project itself will be better designed with public input.
- The community better understands what the project is about.
- Input can be a warning mechanism for potential problems.

Participant comments help the project leaders understand areas where additional people may have concerns or misunderstandings. This can be used to provide better information to others who are not participating.

Just opening the process to the public is not enough. There are numerous populations that are not likely to get involved unless a special effort is made to reach out to them. In this Plan, groups that need a more focused effort to get involved are referred to as “underserved populations”. These include, but are not limited to:

- Minority (Hispanic and/or non-white) community members.
- Low-Income community members.
- Physically and mentally challenged community members.
- People who rely on alternative transportation.
- People with limited English proficiency.
- Aging populations.

By making a reasonable effort to include these populations, WACOG hopes to ensure that the interests and input of all residents are given equal consideration.

Guidelines

A. Techniques

There are numerous and varied techniques/activities to provide the opportunity for public involvement. Any combination and number of these may be used depending on the scope of the specific plan, program, or project. These techniques/activities are defined in detail in Table 1. As funding permits, WACOG will select from the various activities to provide the most effective public participation in each particular situation.

B. Welcoming Attitude

Public participation is welcomed and encouraged by WACOG. All questions and statements are valuable and will be treated as such. Participants will be treated with respect. Meetings will be conducted with basic ground rules that enforce civil discussion. Anyone who feels that these rules have not been followed should contact WACOG staff at (928)217-7142 (Human Resources Department)

C. Meeting Schedules and Locations

Meetings and hearings, which are open for public participation, will be scheduled to allow the best opportunity for attendance by the general public and other entities whenever possible. The meeting locations will be convenient and ADA accessible. In addition to general meetings, events and activities, reasonable efforts will be made to reach those who are particularly affected, the underserved or others who request WACOG come to them. These options are open to any group or individual and it is the policy of WACOG to go where people are whenever possible. Locations and meeting times for these activities will be designed according to the specific needs. Transportation meeting dates, times and locations are available on line at www.wacog.com, under transportation.

D. Notification

Notices will follow the general Open Meeting Law of the State of Arizona. Information about meetings, events and other opportunities for participation will be made in a timely manner. This is especially important for the physically and mentally challenged as extra time may be needed to arrange for accommodations to meet their needs. This notification will be easy to understand and provide adequate information or explain where the information can be obtained.

E. Presentation of Information

In order to help citizens better understand Transportation Planning and WACOG programs, efforts will be made to show how presented information specifically relates to the public in both the near future as well as long-term. Visualization enhancements such as color, animation, physical props, pictures, 3-D models, etc., will be incorporated as appropriate and as budgets allow.

F. Written and Personal Communications from WACOG

Technical and policy information from WACOG will be written so that it is clear and understandable to the public. All relevant information will be open for public consideration. Knowledgeable people will be available to answer questions at meetings and respond to phone questions in a timely manner.

G. Ongoing Communications

WACOG will use mailings, media, and electronic technology such as e-mail and web sites to have ongoing communication with the public and other entities. Members of the staff are also available via the phone for questions, concerns, and suggestions.

H. Other Entities

The needs and interests of other public and governmental entities will be solicited as appropriate. Coordination, cooperation, and teamwork among all the agencies are vital to the success of any plan, program, or project.

I. Transportation Interests

WACOG will solicit input from transportation-related groups such as freight interests, private providers of transportation, chambers of commerce, and others.

J. Opportunities for Input

Opportunities for input will vary depending on the project, program, or plan. For larger projects, such as a regional transportation plan, there could be several rounds of public participation. There will be the opportunity for initial comments on what projects citizens would like their transportation system to include, prior to the start of any work. Comments on the first draft would be collected and incorporated as appropriate in the final draft. Finally, if there were significant changes to the final draft, there could be another call for input. In each of these stages a variety of techniques would be used to involve all the stakeholders. This will be determined by the extent and nature of the project and available funds to do so.

K. Use of Public Comments

A complete record of public comments will be retained for public review. In specific cases, identified by federal regulations, the public comments could be a part of the final document. Additionally, individual questions will receive a response in a timely manner.

L. Decision Making

All final transportation decisions (other than those requiring a vote of the people) are made by one or more groups of elected or appointed officials. Public meetings allow comments to be collected and may identify a consensus. The final decision, however, will be up to the elected and/or appointed officials based on a consideration of all related information. Prior to each key decision point, ample opportunity will be offered for input and that input will be shared with the decision-makers.

Evaluating Public Involvement Activities

A continuing focus on evaluation and enhancement of the public participation process should help to improve the outcome of each new WACOG plan, project, or program. Evaluating public participation is a multi-dimensional task. First, there is the quantitative aspect which uses measurements such as the number of activities held, the number of notices sent, and/or the number of people who participated. While valid and important, these factors may not show the complete picture.

Second, it is important to evaluate the qualitative aspects relating to perceptions, attitudes, and effectiveness. Did the people who participated feel they were heard? Were all the potentially affected interests (including the underserved) actually represented? Were the materials provided easy to understand? Were announcements received in a timely manner?

Third, is the question of how the public input was used? This information needs to be recorded and made available. It also needs to be considered in the decision-making process. Fourth, is the need to evaluate the reason something happened. Understanding why there was good (or poor) participation is important to assessing effectiveness.

The ultimate point to consider in an evaluation is the existence of respect and trust. It is not possible to please everyone, but it should be possible to proceed forward with an atmosphere of respect and trust and WACOG intends to earn this by being fair and open with everyone at all times.

Development, Adoption, and Revision of the Public Participation Plan

This PPP, and the associated Title VI Implementation Plan has gone through several stages during its development:

- Preparation of a preliminary draft plan.
- Evaluation of this plan to ensure compliance with all federal regulations.
- Review of the plan by WACOG's Technical Advisory Committee.
- Review of the plan by stakeholders including the general public, governmental entities, and transportation professionals/businesses.
- Revision of the plan based on the above reviews.
- Completion of a final draft plan.

- Circulation of the draft plan for at least 45 calendar days. This includes notice to all potentially affected interests that this final draft plan is available for review, including placement at public libraries throughout the region.
- Review and evaluation of any further recommended changes.
- Adoption of the plan by the WACOG TAC, WACOG Executive Board.
- Ongoing implementation of the plan by WACOG.
- Availability of alternative formats i.e. large prints, Braille, audio/video cassettes (as appropriate) upon request for individuals who are blind or individuals with hearing/vision impairments. Due to the time and expense required to develop such materials, this will only be done upon request and a minimum of two weeks' notice must be provided to ensure timely preparation of such materials.

WACOG will review the plan annually and make changes if necessary. All efforts to involve the public and other organizations will follow the steps outlined in the current plan.

Other periodic revisions may occur, as new and better approaches are determined. Each time any significant content revisions are made (other than technical or grammatical revisions) the public will be given a 45-calendar day review and comment period prior to implementing the changes. WACOG will update the plan annually and submit an annual accomplishment report to ADOT.

WACOG Commitment

This plan contains background material, guidelines, and commitments that WACOG is undertaking to incorporate an effective public process into future plans, projects, and programs.

Specifically WACOG is committed to:

- Inclusive and meaningful public involvement.
- Open and honest communications with all individuals and entities.
- Timely public notice.
- Full public access to information and key decisions.
- Creating a sense of shared responsibility and ownership for regional transportation/congestion problems and a shared sense of pride in the development of solutions to those problems.
- Helping form partnerships between member entities, and the private and public sectors to plan and implement transportation/congestion solutions.
- Establishing policies and prioritizing needs based on valid data and using objective, fair, and consistent processes.
- Providing information and gathering input so that decision makers will be able to make informed decisions.

Environmental Justice

In 1994, Executive Order (EO) 12898 Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations was issued. EO 12898 emphasized the responsibility to make Environmental Justice a goal by identifying and addressing the effects of programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations. WACOG considers Environmental Justice as an integral part of its planning activities and its commitment to involve and assist the underrepresented and underserved. WACOG makes every effort to hold public meetings in facilities that are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant, and arrange for reasonable accessibility and accommodation to persons with disabilities. Upon request, WACOG provides communication assistance to persons who are hearing or visually impaired or to individuals with limited English proficiency, to enable them to actively participate in the planning process. Staff will provide Spanish translators and document translation, where feasible and upon request. Seniors or non-vehicle households who are unable to attend meetings may request information from the WACOG office and have the requested materials delivered to their residence. WACOG staff, coordinating availability, is willing to go speak to groups in an effort to eliminate participation barriers and involve citizens in the transportation process.

Table 1 – Public Participation Toolbox

Activity	Description	Comments
Brochure	Written material to distribute generally contains more information than a flyer. It is often folded to create a small piece for distribution.	
Charrette	An intensive brainstorming session using visual methods to define alternatives.	These can last anywhere from a few hours to a few days.
Conference	A meeting with two or more people where the participants confer and discuss. (This can also be a series of meetings and/or events focused on a unifying subject.)	
Contact lists	Created contact lists for interested parties.	
Display	Information and materials are displayed in an informal setting where people are free to move about and consider whatever is of interest to them.	These are typically held at malls, city halls, banks, etc.
E-mail	Using the Internet to contact people with electronic mail addresses.	This is very inexpensive and a quick way to contact people. It is, however, important to find other ways to communicate with people who do not have access to computers.
Flyer	A written communication piece that provides the most basic information.	Multiple flyers can be produced for one event, plan or project with each flyer designed to communicate with different groups. These can be produced in various languages when resources are available to do so.
Focus Group	A small carefully selected group of individuals who meet together to give feedback to the organizer on a specific topic.	Because this is a selected group, people who are not selected may be suspicious of the information gathered.

Activity	Description	Comments
Forum	A public meeting that is designed to help attendants better understand a subject by hearing different points of view. Usually several people with differing opinions, each make a short presentation and then answer questions. It is not designed for decision making.	It is most helpful if a disinterested party moderates. It also might be helpful, especially in some communities, if some of the “experts” were local and trusted by the community. If a forum is used, it would need to be in Spanish for the Spanish speaking community members.
Games and Contests	These include a wide variety of activities including such things as board games, role playing, computer simulations, etc.	Use of these is an unusual and creative way to actively involve people.
Grocery Store	Contacting people at the grocery store, either by printing information on a grocery bag, dropping information into a grocery bag, staffed information tables, or by displaying flyers or posters in the store.	This is a way to reach a larger and possibly diverse group of people, but it will also require availability of the necessary level of resources.
Information Booths	Place an information exhibit at fair-type events.	
Key Person Interview	This question and answer session is with a specifically targeted person who has been identified as someone with whom it would be particularly important or useful to speak.	This may be useful as a first step in reaching minority or other interest groups.
Meetings	These are opportunities for larger groups of people to get together for a multitude of purposes. The general intent is to allow people to interact on a person-to-person basis. Meetings can be held for a wide variety of reasons from working on an issue to making a presentation	To be most effective, a meeting should inform the participant prior to coming: what type of meeting it will be, what their role will be, and the expected outcome of the meeting.
Modeling	Computer and/or physical modeling can be used to help people better visualize or better understand a	

Activity	Description	Comments
	particular concept or project.	
Newspaper Advertisement	Information that a newspaper prints in their paper that is not part of the news. The person/group placing the advertisement has control of the content.	These are generally purchased, and are used to announce meetings, events, etc.
Newsletter	A regular communication for a predetermined group of individuals/groups.	These can be mailed or sent electronically. This is a standard way to keep interested individuals and entities informed on a regular basis.
Open House	Information and materials are displayed in an informal setting where people are free to move about and consider whatever is of interest to them. Informed people are available to answer questions and take comments and suggestions.	This is a commonly used tool which has now been expanded to locations such as the local mall, in addition to places such as the lobby at city hall.
Organization Contact	Contact with an organization could take the form of a presentation, question & answer session, brainstorming, etc.	
Postcard Notices	A postcard mailed to a predetermined mailing list to announce an event or activity or provide other specific information.	
Posters	A large written announcement posted in a public place.	These can be placed at numerous locations and designed to appeal to different groups or underserved populations. Posters must be displayed in conspicuous and accessible locations.
Presentation Meetings	These meetings allow the organizer to provide information and answer questions for a large group at once.	The presenter generally does not present any side of the issue other than their own. (If possible the style of the meeting should be adapted to the audience. For

Activity	Description	Comments
		example certain audiences may prefer posters to a PowerPoint presentation.)
Press Releases	This official release tells the press there is news they might be interested in reporting. It generally follows a specific format and includes who, what when, where and a contact for more information.	Information that is reported as "news" gets more attention and credibility than paid advertising.
Public Hearings	This is a legal meeting that is often required to make sure there is some opportunity for public comment. It is normally done with elected officials sitting at the front and allowing community members very specific conditions to speak under.	These are a poor setting for getting input as they are generally late in the process and can easily erupt into confrontation.
Public Notice	These are official notices posted prior to meetings.	These are required for meetings where a quorum of elected officials from the same governing body will be present.
Public Service Announcements	These are short announcements usually on radio or television, for which there is no charge and announce something important for the public to know.	
Radio Talk Show	A longer discussion, on the radio, of a particular subject. It usually involves a talk show host and one or more additional people. Sometimes there is an opportunity for people to call in questions.	This is an opportunity for providing more in-depth information on a certain topic.
School Presentations	In order to reach the youth, presentations can be made at the schools, including presentations to clubs, student council, and specific classes.	Suggested classes would be: civics, economics (or other senior level classes), and transportation classes. (Whatever is presented to the students needs to be short and to the point with a source of additional information such as a

Activity	Description	Comments
		web site.)
School TV/News Stations	Some schools have a local school TV station for sharing information with the students. This could be used to reach a larger spectrum of youth.	Whatever is presented to the students needs to be short and to the point with a source of additional information such as a web site.
Speakers' Bureau	This is an organized effort to provide speakers to various groups and events on one or more specific subjects. This generally consists of several speakers who are used as needed.	This allows more flexibility and a broader outreach.
Survey – General	This type of survey is open to anyone who wants to participate. (This can be in traditional or electronic formats).	While the information is useful and important, it cannot be stated as representing a larger group. To be representative the survey must be statistically valid. (Surveys should be offered in Spanish as well as English.)
Survey - Statistically Valid	This is a survey that collects information from specific people who have been chosen on a random basis according to a specific formula. With this type of survey the results can be stated as representing the group from which the random sample was taken.	These are very expensive but can be useful in certain circumstances. (Any survey should be offered in Spanish as well as English.)
Town Meeting	This is usually a semi-formal meeting designed to be open to everyone in a community. It often includes both the public and elected officials with an opportunity for comments back and forth.	
TV Advertisements	These are usually 30 or 60 second spots on TV during breaks in a regular show.	These would only be utilized if sufficient resources were available to do so.

Activity	Description	Comments
Web Site	A series of "pages" on the Internet that relate to a specific subject. They can be reached by anyone who has access to the Internet by typing a particular address or by doing a search.	This is an easy and inexpensive place to keep the most recently updated information and it is becoming an increasingly popular way to communicate.
Working Meetings	Generally these are meetings designed to work through issues when there can be give and take among all the participants.	
Workshop	Meetings to inform and solicit input on specific issues, plans, or projects.	These usually allow a smaller group of people to participate more intensively.

Transportation Planning is relevant to all people. Maintaining public interest as decisions are made is critical to gathering effective public input. Therefore:

- With each contact, efforts will be made to present information that is relevant and show how this information relates to the public in both the near future as well as long-term.
- As any of the above tools are used, WACOG will keep in mind the importance of making whatever the subject matter is as interesting as possible. Color, animation, physical props, pictures, visualization, 3-D models, etc. will be incorporated, as budget allows, enhancing the experience for the public.
- Public notices must include reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities with special needs, e.g. sign language interpreters. WACOG will include point of contact person, telephone number, e-mail address, and timeframe for response from those with special needs.
- When the scope of a proposed project or plan has the potential to significantly impact individuals with special needs, pertinent materials will be available in alternative formats, i.e. large print, Braille, audio/video.