

STEP 2

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

The key to the success of a transportation plan is to obtain “buy-in” of its process and outcomes from all affected stakeholders. The principal goal of a public involvement program is to insure that stakeholders have meaningful opportunities to participate in the development of the plan, thereby making the results of the planning process credible and supported.

To accomplish this, the public involvement program should demonstrate that the planning process is open, accessible, and responsive to citizens’, businesses’ and others’ concerns. The public involvement program can take many forms, and many agencies have public participation guidelines that must be followed for projects that they fund. Contact GTC or NYSDOT for their guidelines or other examples.

Depending on the size of the community and scope of the plan, different public outreach program components can be developed. Two effective techniques which are discussed below are the use of a Steering Committee to guide the plan and public meetings to gather community input.

STEERING COMMITTEE

The Steering Committee should include municipal elected officials, their representatives and staff, as well as representatives from local and regional agencies. Representatives from the following should be considered as potential Steering Committee members:

- Town Supervisor/Village Mayor
- Town/Village Council
- Planning Board
- Zoning Board
- Conservation Group
- Municipal Highway/ Public Works Department
- Assessor’s Office
- County Planning Department
- County Highway Department
- Genesee Transportation Council (Metropolitan Planning Organization)
- NY State Department of Transportation

There may be other important organizations in the community that merit inclusion in the Steering Committee such as a special development committee, business organization (e.g., chamber of commerce), or the local law enforcement agency. The Steering Committee should be kept to a manageable size to insure that key decisions can be made in a timely manner.

The Steering Committee will lead the development and determine the direction of the plan until its completion, and may continue to meet following its adoption to monitor progress in implementing its recommendations.

Certain roles and responsibilities with respect to the development of the plan and its process should be defined by Steering Committee members. In particular, who will lead (or “chair”) the committee and who will serve as spokesperson for communicating information regarding the progress and status of the plan.

The Steering Committee should meet as necessary to review information, assess findings, and determine next steps. Typically four Steering Committee meetings should suffice for the development of a plan. The following are typical objectives for each meeting:

- First Meeting – scheduled at the beginning of the process to introduce the plan, solicit input regarding goals and objectives, present information and data collected to-date, and initiate discussion of issues and opportunities facing the community.
- Second Meeting – scheduled when draft versions of the Existing and Future Conditions tasks (Steps 3 and 4) have been completed to obtain feedback on issues and opportunities facing the community now and in the future and to discuss potential alternatives.
- Third Meeting – scheduled after an initial public meeting (discussed below) to review public input as well as develop and assess alternatives based on how well they meet the goals and objectives of the plan and determine a preferred set of alternatives for further review.
- Fourth Meeting – scheduled after a second public meeting (discussed below) to further review – based on public comment – the preferred alternatives by identifying and prioritizing those that will be included in the final plan as recommendations as well as develop a schedule for implementation that includes follow-on activities.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

The general public represents the stakeholders who use the system and pay in some part for most improvements to the system (usually through taxes). As such, everyone in the community is a local transportation user and has a unique viewpoint on how the system can be improved. Providing these stakeholders with the opportunity to comment on the plan, its process, and its findings is crucial to obtaining support for implementation of the plan.

In order to acquire these viewpoints, a public involvement program must reach as many people as reasonably feasible and provide opportunities for them to express their opinions. Whether or not the members of the public express their opinions is their choice, but they must recognize that they have that opportunity.

Public meetings tend to be the most successful means for obtaining information from the community regarding their views, impressions, and opinions on the transportation system.

Providing press releases to newspapers and radio stations and posting flyers in public buildings, community centers, and shopping areas should be done to advertise the meetings. In addition, a mailing list can be developed and maintained by the community to notify interested people about upcoming meetings and other opportunities for input on the plan.

Typically two public meetings should suffice for the development of a plan. The following are typical objectives for each meeting:

- First Meeting – scheduled after the second Steering Committee meeting to introduce the plan, solicit input regarding goals and objectives, present the findings of the existing and future conditions analyses, and initiate discussion of issues and opportunities facing the community.
- Second Meeting – scheduled after the third Steering Committee meeting to present the preferred alternatives and to gather input on those alternatives as well as others proposed by the public at this meeting.

OTHER TECHNIQUES

Depending on the size and available resources of a community, the use of surveys, comment forms, newsletters, web pages, and other public mediums should be considered to inform the community and gather additional information to supplement the input gathered at public meetings.

For example, surveys may be used to obtain general information on community issues and comment forms may be used to gather information on proposed alternatives at a greater level of detail than can be expressed verbally at a meeting. In addition, some stakeholders may feel more comfortable providing input in writing instead of speaking at a public meeting.