

Public Participation Plan

Bristol Tennessee/Virginia Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization

Section I – Introduction

It is the intent of the Bristol Tennessee/Virginia Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to provide every opportunity for the involvement of citizens, as well as elected officials and other interested parties, in the transportation planning process. The procedures outlined in this document ensure that the public is given reasonable access to transportation plans and project documents and has adequate opportunities to express their opinions and concerns about transportation issues.

Policy Statement

It is the policy of the MPO to take all public comments into account in the development and adoption of plans and programs. The intent of the Public Participation Plan is to provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the metropolitan planning process.

Public Participation Goals and Objectives

Goal: Identify a broad representation of the public for inclusion in the transportation planning process

- Maintain a database of MPO contacts.
- Target traditionally underserved populations including minority, low income, and senior citizen populations.
- Identify persons and groups with unique interests specific to individual MPO plans and studies.

Goal: Provide the public opportunities to participate in the transportation planning process.

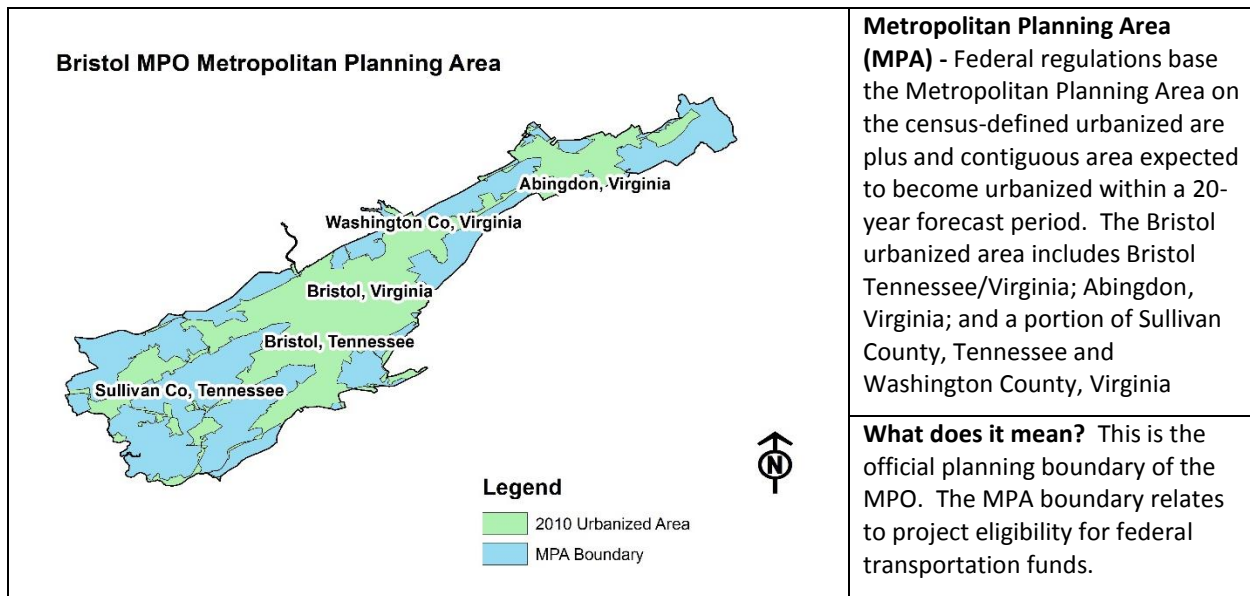
- Conduct public meetings at a site convenient to potentially affected citizens.
- Distribute electronic meeting announcements to the MPO contact list.
- Utilize social media for public outreach.

Goal: Keep the public informed of ongoing transportation-related activities.

- Maintain a website specific to MPO information.
- Publish electronic publications and work products online.
- Make hardcopies of general and project-specific information available at a central location(s).

Role of the MPO

Federal law requires that metropolitan areas of at least 50,000 population establish Metropolitan Planning Organizations to ensure that existing and future expenditures for transportation projects and programs are based on a continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative (3-C) planning process. The Bristol Tennessee/Virginia Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization was formed in 1982 to fulfill this federal requirement.



The five core functions of an MPO include:

Establish a setting: Establish and manage a fair and impartial setting for effective regional decision-making in the metropolitan area.

Identify alternatives: Use data and planning methods to generate and evaluate alternative transportation improvement options.

Maintain a Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP): Develop and maintain a transportation plan covering a planning horizon of at least twenty years that is multimodal, fiscally constrained, fosters mobility and access for people and goods, provides efficient system performance and preservation, and improves the quality of life.

Develop a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP): Develop a short-term (four-year) program of transportation investments based on the long-range transportation plan.

Involve the Public: Involve the general public and other interested parties in the essential MPO functions listed above.

Section II – Civil Rights Requirements

Title VI

As part of the transportation planning process, the MPO shall strive to minimize disproportionately adverse effects on minority populations and low-income groups in the development and implementation of transportation projects. Under the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, “no person in the United States shall, on the grounds race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

The Bristol MPO's efforts to ensure compliance with Title VI include:

- Posters displaying Title VI provisions and how to file a complaint.
- Title VI clauses included with all Request for Proposals.
- Title VI information on the MPO webpage.
- Limited English Proficiency Plan.

Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)

Executive Order 12898 reinforces the requirements of Title VI by focusing on the environmental and human health conditions in minority and low income communities. Compliance with Environmental Justice is guided by three defined principles of the Executive Order.

- To avoid, minimize or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority populations 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, reduction of or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The ADA requires coordinating with disabled communities in the development and improvement of transportation services. All events held for programs or projects and open to the public must be made accessible to everyone, including the disabled community. The Bristol MPO is committed to making reasonable modification to its policies, practices, and procedures to avoid discrimination and ensure programs and services are accessible to individuals with disabilities. Special provisions (i.e. large print documents, audio materials, signing, and translator) will be provided upon request. All MPO meetings will be conducted at ADA accessible facilities.

Section II – General Guidelines

Public Meetings

Regular and special business meetings of the MPO are conducted in an open public forum with prior notification. All notices of meetings, public hearings and public comment periods for regional plans and programs shall be published in the newspaper of largest circulation in the Urbanized Area and the MPO webpage (www.bristoltn.org/136/Metropolitan-Planning-Organization). The official notice shall note the day, time and location of the meeting, and the topic(s) of the meeting. Unless otherwise provided for in this plan, all notices shall be published a minimum of 7-days prior to the meeting. If a special meeting is called for unusual circumstances or urgent situation, the notice shall be published a minimum of 3-days prior to the meeting. The purpose of the meeting shall be stated in the call.

Public Comments: All official meetings of the MPO will provide a period for public comments from the public. The public shall be afforded the opportunity to comment on current agenda items at meetings of the MPO as well as other items of interest. Reasonable time limits may be established for each presentation, considering time constraints and the complexity of an issue.

Meeting Locations and Times: Public meetings will be conducted at convenient and accessible locations. As available, meetings will be located at facilities with access to public transportation. By request, special arrangements will be made to accommodate persons with disabilities, low literacy, and limited English proficiency. To the extent practicable, public meetings will be held at convenient times to provide opportunities for participation from a broader group of individuals. Particularly with the development of the Long-Range Transportation Plan, this will include public meetings scheduled at various times of day to accommodate varying work and/or personal schedules.

Public Notification

In addition to the requirements for publication of legal notices, as the MPO will also utilize the following outreach techniques to disseminate information to the public and interested parties:

- The MPO will provide meeting notices to organizations and community centers representing low income, minority, and disabled persons. Mailings will be sent to local public service agencies.
- Information regarding meetings and events as well as current document releases will be placed on the MPO web site (www.bristoltn.org/136/Metropolitan-Planning-Organization).
- Availability of documents in electronic accessible formats.
- Articles and press releases for the newspaper and other media opportunities.
- Mailings to select individuals, groups or organizations that have expressed interest or made comments at meetings or via comment forms, social media, etc.
- Distribution of MPO information flyers on public transit buses.
- Public service announcements on public access television (BTN-TV channel 16 and 192).

Access to Information

The Bristol MPO will provide the public with reasonable and timely access to transportation plans and programs. Documents will be available for public inspection on the Bristol MPO website and at the office of MPO staff (City of Bristol Tennessee) located at 104 8th Street, Bristol, Tennessee, during normal working hours.

MPO Website

The Bristol MPO will continue to maintain and update the MPO website with the intent of making the planning process as transparent as possible and providing more information online as well as the ability to submit comments online. The Bristol MPO website is hosted by the City of Bristol Tennessee Department of Community Relations.

Social Media

The needs and lifestyles of the public are continuously changing. As a result the MPO has embraced the use of social media as a tool to reach citizens. Social media provides the MPO a means of communication to provide as well as receive information from the public. All social media activities for the MPO are coordinated through the City of Bristol Tennessee Department of Community Relations.

Use of Visualization Techniques

Visualization makes it possible to more clearly understand complex technical information. To the extent possible, visualization techniques will be utilized to describe MPO plans and programs. This may include PowerPoint presentations, charts and graphs, and mapping tools such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), artist's renderings, aerial photography, and photographs.

Public Outreach Tools

The following lists provides methods and tool the MPO considers to provide information and solicit input from the public.

Information Tools

- Community TV
- Direct Mailings
- Posters and Flyers
- Legal Advertisements
- Paid Advertisements
- Press Releases
- Social Media
- MPO Website

Participation Tools

- Comment Forms/Cards
- Identified Contact Person
- Public Comment Period
- Surveys
- Advisory Committee
- Symposiums
- Public Hearings
- Public Meetings

Section III – Plan Specific Guidelines

Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)

The Bristol Metropolitan Planning Organization is responsible for the development of the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for the Bristol Urban Area. The LRTP focuses on the development of a multimodal transportation system that includes transit, bicycle, pedestrian, and roadways, and provides recommended improvements as well as project costs and priorities for the planning period.

Draft Document	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Available on the MPO website and at the MPO office.
Comment Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ At public meetings (specific to the LRTP).▪ At MPO Executive Board and Technical Staff meetings.▪ Electronic formats (email, webpage, online comments).▪ Mail or web-based surveys.
Comment Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Minimum of 30-days prior to adoption.▪ The public comment period begins with public notice.
Comments Received	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ A summary of all comments received will be made available to the Executive Board prior to adoption.▪ A summary of all comments with be incorporated into the final LRTP document.
Adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Executive Board may defer the adoption of the plan if there are significant unresolved comments.▪ The public will be afforded the opportunity to comment on the draft LRTP prior to final adoption.▪ The final LRTP will be published on the MPO webpage and available at the office of MPO staff.
Amendments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Amendments to the LRTP must follow the same process with the exception of projects deemed to be generally local in nature and scale

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a four-year funding program that identifies which transportation projects will be implemented each year. The TIP must be financially constrained, which requires that each project have a secured source of funding. Additionally, the TIP must also be consistent with the Long-Range Transportation Plan.

Draft Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Available on the MPO website and at the MPO office.
Comment Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ At public meetings.▪ At MPO Executive Board and Technical Staff meetings.▪ Electronic formats (email, webpage, online comments).
Comment Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Minimum of 10-days prior to adoption.▪ The public comment period begins with public notice.
Comments Received	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ A summary of all comments received will be made available to the Executive Board prior to adoption.▪ A summary of all comments will be incorporated into the final TIP document.
Adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Executive Board may defer the adoption of the TIP if there are significant unresolved comments.▪ The public will be afforded the opportunity to comment on the draft TIP prior to final adoption.▪ The final TIP will be published on the MPO webpage and available at the office of MPO staff.
Amendments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Amendments to the TIP must follow the same public comment process.▪ Administrative modifications to the TIP do not require a specific public participation process.

Public Participation Plan

The Public Participation Plan outlines strategies and processes used to provide and receive information from the public on transportation planning including plans, studies, and funding for projects.

Draft Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Available on the MPO website and at the MPO office.
Comment Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ At public meetings.▪ At MPO Executive Board and Technical Staff meetings.▪ Electronic formats (email, webpage, online comments).
Comment Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Minimum of 45-days prior to adoption.▪ The public comment period begins with public notice.
Comments Received	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ A summary of all comments received will be made available to the Executive Board prior to adoption.▪ A summary of all comments will be incorporated into the final document.

Public Participation Plan Continued

Adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Executive Board may defer the adoption of the plan if there are significant unresolved comments.▪ The public will be afforded the opportunity to comment on the draft plan prior to final adoption.▪ The final plan will be published on the MPO webpage and available at the office of MPO staff.
Amendments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Amendments to the Public Participation Plan will follow the same comment process including a minimum comment period of 45-days.

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) is prepared annually by the MPO and describes planning activities to be undertaken on behalf of the MPO and its member governments. The UPWP contains allocations of planning funds from the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, State agencies and local governments for the administration and implementation of the transportation planning program.

The UPWP is reviewed and discussed at regularly scheduled MPO meetings along with being made available on the website, or distributed to interested parties by request. Public comment on the UPWP is welcomed and documented. All comments received on the UPWP are presented to the Executive Board, prior to adoption.

Annual Listing of Federally Obligated Projects

The MPO shall annually make available to the public a listing of federally funded projects for which funding was obligated in the previous year. The annual listing will be completed and published within 90-days after the end of the program year (September 30) and will be made publicly available through a similar process as the TIP, with the exception of a draft document will not be distributed. The annual listing will be reviewed and discussed at a regular scheduled MPO public meeting and will be available on the MPO's web site and in hard copy for distribution by request.

Public Transportation Program of Projects

Providers of public transportation for the urbanized area include Bristol Tennessee Transit (BTT), Bristol Virginia Transit (BVT), NET Trans and Mountain Lynx Transit. The agencies will rely on the Bristol MPO public participation process to ensure public outreach of each agency's Program of Projects (POP).

Public notice of the TIP will state: *"public involvement activities and time established for public review and comment on the TIP will satisfy the Program of Projects requirements for the Federal Transit Administration Urbanized Area Formula Program."*

Section IV – Interested Parties, Participation and Consultation

Coordination with State and Other Public Agencies

The MPO public participation process will be coordinated with statewide, local jurisdictions and MPO participating agencies planning efforts and public involvement processes, whenever possible, to ensure consistency between plans, enhance public consideration of transportation related issues and programs, and to reduce redundancies. Coordination will include:

- MPO public participation processes shall be coordinated with statewide public involvement processes through review and communication wherever possible.
- Coordination of data collection and analysis to support statewide and local transportation planning and programming decisions.
- MPO staff assistance with public involvement activities for TDOT, VDOT, and MPO member jurisdictions.

In developing the Long-Range Transportation Plan and TIP the MPO will consult and coordinate, as appropriate, with agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities within the metropolitan planning area. Consultation and consideration of other related planning activities that are affected by transportation will include agencies and officials representing State and local planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, freight movements, recipients of Federal Transit Administration funds, government agencies, non-profit organizations that provide non-emergency transportation services, and recipients of assistance under 23 USC 204 (Department of Interior).

Consultation with other planning agencies in developing the metropolitan transportation plan and TIP will include:

- The MPO will review and document, to the extent practicable, available comprehensive plans and program elements or strategies of other planning agencies to coordinate and determine consistency of other planning activities in development of the metropolitan plan and TIP.
- The MPO will provide affected agencies with draft plans and documents for review and comment prior to consideration by the Executive Board.
- The MPO will incorporate, as part of the final planning document, a summary analysis and report on the disposition of comments, suggested enhancements and/or modifications identified in the consultation process with other affected planning agencies.

Consultation with Environmental Agencies

An increased emphasis is placed on the Long-Range Transportation Plan consultation processes to include State and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation, to provide a comparison of the metropolitan transportation plan and appropriate conservation plans and inventories of natural or historic resources, if available.

In development of the Long-Range Transportation Plan, the MPO will include a process for comparing available plans, maps or inventories, to assess potential environmental impacts and develop potential environmental mitigation activities.

- The MPO will obtain from referenced environmental agencies, directly or through the State Department of Transportation, available conservation plans, maps, and inventories of natural and historic resources.
- The MPO will compare proposed transportation improvements to available conservation, natural and historic references identified to assess potential environmental impacts and develop strategies for potential mitigation areas or activities for project implementation.

- The MPO will provide affected agencies with a draft of the Long-Range Transportation Plan for comment and review prior to consideration by the Executive Board.
- The MPO will incorporate, as part of the final planning document, a summary analysis and report on the disposition of comments, suggested enhancements and/or modifications identified in the consultation process with other affected planning agencies.

Consultation with Interested Parties

The objective of the Public Participation Plan is to provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the metropolitan planning process.

The MPO staff will maintain a database of names and addresses of interested parties, which will serve as a direct mailing and/or electronic communication list for notification of meetings. The database will also include community groups and organizations representing traditionally underserved populations such as low income, minority, and disabled persons. In addition, local health departments, human service organizations and local housing authorities will be provided MPO announcements.

Section V – Outreach Tools

This section contains descriptions of various public outreach techniques and tools that can be used by the MPO in the development of transportation plans and programs. It is not intended to imply that every project or plan will require all of these tools or that the MPO presently uses all of these methods. The type of public outreach efforts employed for a particular project will be determined based on the project's overall regional and local impact. Localized projects may require more specialized outreach within the project's area of influence while others may require extensive outreach efforts throughout all areas of the MPO region to assemble a broad cross-section of input, including traditionally underserved areas.

MPO Website

The MPO website is hosted on the City of Bristol Tennessee internet site and provides basic information about the MPO. Work products, such as the TIP and LRTP, are available for downloading from the site. The site also includes information about specific projects undertaken by the MPO and provides links to other transportation related sites. The site is used to conduct surveys, promote regular and special meetings, planning studies, publications and work products.

Public Comments

These are public meetings used to solicit public comment on projects or planning studies being considered by the MPO. Public hearings provide a formal setting for citizens to provide comments to the MPO or another decision-making body.

Comment Forms

Comment forms are often used to solicit public comment on specific issues presented at workshops or public meetings and can also be included in documents on the MPO website to solicit input regarding the subject of a publication. Comment forms can be very general in nature, or can ask for very specific feedback.

Direct Mailings

Direct mailings may be used to announce upcoming meetings or activities or to provide information to a targeted area or group of people. An area may be targeted for a direct mailing because of potential impacts from a specific project or a group that may have an interest in a specific issue.

Press Releases

Formal press releases are sent to local media to announce upcoming meetings or activities on specific issues being considered by the MPO and to provide information on upcoming workshops, public hearings, or other planning studies.

Project Workshops

These are public meetings that are generally open and informal, with project team members interacting with the public on a one-on-one basis to provide project-specific information and to solicit public comment. Short presentations may be given at these meetings.

Fact Sheets, Posters, and Flyers

Fact sheets are used to provide summary information regarding MPO programs and projects and can be distributed at public meetings, on the MPO web site, and in public places such as libraries and community centers. Posters and flyers may be used to reach a large audience that cannot be reached using direct mailings to announce meetings or events.

Advisory Committees

Although not identified for any specific MPO planning documents, advisory committees may be established for MPO planning studies to provide input from citizens, public agencies, private entities, and other interested parties. Members of advisory committees are typically appointed by elected officials in the study area.

Community TV

The City of Bristol Tennessee operates a public access channel (BTN-TV) that broadcasts select meetings, disseminates public announcements, and features interviews on special projects or programs available to the community. BTN-TV can be utilized as an information tool for the MPO transportation planning process.

Social Media

Social media has become a major medium by which the public receives and processes information. The MPO will continue to utilize these tools as applicable to post and receive information from the public. All social media activities for the MPO are coordinated through the City of Bristol Tennessee Department of Community Relations.

Section VI – Evaluation of the Public Participation Plan

The Public Participation Plan will be assessed periodically based on changes in local, state, or federal legislation and to evaluate the effectiveness of the public participation techniques that are being used by the MPO. In order to gauge the effectiveness of the Public Participation Plan and to identify opportunities for improvement, the following list of activities will be utilized to quantify public input in the transportation planning process.

- Attendance at public information meetings and public hearings.
- Number of organizations and groups provided the opportunity to participate.
- Communications received from the public by mail, email, or comment at public meetings.

In addition to these reporting efforts, the MPO will continue to research new and innovative ways to further involve the public in the MPO transportation planning process.