Chapter 10:

Public Participation

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INTRODUCTION

The Pasco County MPO, in accordance with the Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), is committed to a significant and ongoing public involvement program as part of all plans and programs developed by the MPO. Also documented in this chapter are the public involvement opportunities offered during the development of the 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan, and how the feedback received has been incorporated into the plan. The effectiveness of the PIP is evaluated at the end of the chapter, and recommendations are provided for enhancing the process.

The following section fulfills the Metropolitan Planning Organization's Program Management Handbook, Long Range Transportation Checklist, US Code Requirements B-12 and B-14as stated below:

B-12 "Was the public given a reasonable opportunity to comment on the plan, and did the MPO use their public participation plan developed under 23 C.F.R. 450.316(a)? [23 C.F.R. 450.322(i)]"
B-14 "Was technical information related to the plan made available to the public in electronic formats such as the World Wide Web? [23 C.F.R. 450.3 16(a)(1)(iv)]"
The sections immediately following describe the public comment period, public involvement plan, and how information on the LRTP was communicated .

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

The following workshops were held for participating residents of Pasco County to identify transportation priorities to be included in the LRTP:

- Needs Plan Workshops: April 21 and 23, 2009
- Environmental Justice Workshops: April 29 and 30, 2009
- Cost Affordable Plan Workshops: July 27 and 30, 2009
- LRTP Workshops (Public Comment Period): October 13 and 15, 2009
- 2 newsletters

Needs Plan Workshops

The 2035 Needs Workshops were held on April 21 and 23, 2009. The first workshop was held at the Hugh Embry Library in Dade City, Florida; the second was held at the West Pasco Government Center in New Port Richey, Florida. Both workshops were open to the public. The workshops were designed as open houses, allowing participants to view maps and ask questions. The participants also were given surveys to complete. The survey asked questions regarding roadway priorities, public transportation, pedestrian, bicycle, and trail facilities, and funding and revenue sources. The results of the workshop are summarized below. The complete handout given to participants can be found in the technical appendix.

Dade City

Roadway Priorities

In the survey, participants were asked to identify their top three desired roadway improvements. Improvements on SR 52 from Dade City to the Suncoast Parkway were a common concern, specifically the quality and safety of the roadway. Other priorities identified were the widening of major roads such as:

- CR 581
- I-75
- SR 54
- US 301

Public Transportation

Workshop participants were asked about public transportation. The placing of benches and covered shelters at bus stops was the predominant concern. Another priority mentioned often by participants was the addition of park-and-ride locations along popular bus routes. Residents also expressed a need for more stops throughout the county as the area grows.

Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Multi-Use Trail Facilities

The third issue addressed was trail, sidewalk, and bicycle facility improvements. Participants mentioned that many schools in Dade City

(especially along 17th Street) lack sidewalks. This poses a safety hazard for the children who walk to school. Also, the growing number of shopping areas in the city need sidewalks. Another popular improvement suggested was extending existing walking/biking trails and adding more paved bike lanes on roadways.

Funding by Mode and Other Revenues

Workshop participants were asked three questions on project funding and revenue sources. First, residents were asked what dollar amount in tolls they would be willing to pay to travel 10 miles if it would save 25 minutes of travel time on a recurring basis. The overwhelming majority stated that they would not be willing to pay any toll amount greater than what it would cost to take a bus an equal distance. Only 20 percent said they would be willing to pay $1.00, and 18 percent said they would be willing to pay $1.50.

The second question asked residents what proportion of transportation funds they would like to see spent on the following transportation modes:

- Automobile (roads)
- Public transportation
- Pedestrian
- Bicycle

On average, the respondents preferred that the largest portion of the County's transportation funds be spent on public transportation projects, followed by roadway projects. Following far behind were pedestrian and bicycle facility projects.

The third question asked participants to rank revenue sources from 0 to 3, with 0 being "least preferred" and 3 being "most preferred." The revenue source that was most preferred was grants, followed by impact fees. Least preferred was property tax through a Municipal Service Benefit Unit.

New Port Richey

Roadway Priorities

The most popular roadway priorities identified during the workshop in New Port Richey were along US 19. Other concerns included:

- Widening of US 19
- Synchronizing traffic lights to better accommodate the flow of traffic and giving pedestrians additional time to cross
- Adding turn lanes on roads that are becoming more congested such as:
  - County Line Rd.
  - Allyson St.
  - Montverde Dr.
  - Shady Hills Rd.

Public Transportation

Many participants stated that extending weekend services and adding routes would make the use of public transportation more feasible and convenient. There also was concern regarding the quality of the buses, citing that several buses have broken down and there is no backup equipment to take care of stranded patrons. Additionally, a connector route to Tampa was a popular recommendation.

Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Multi-use Trail Facilities

The third issue was trail, sidewalk, and bicycle facility improvements. Participants would like to see trails and sidewalks lead to parks because it would most likely promote the County's recreational facilities. US 19 was identified as the most in need of sidewalk and bicycle facilities. Sidewalk improvements are also needed along SR 52 and SR 54.

Funding by Mode and Other Revenues

Residents were asked what dollar amount in tolls they would be willing to pay to travel 10 miles if it would save 25 minutes of travel time on a reoccurring basis. A total of 23 percent of respondents said they would be willing to pay $1.00, while 23 percent would be willing to pay $2.00. Only 9 percent said that they would not be willing to pay any toll fees greater than what it would cost to take a bus an equal distance.

Similar to the Dade City workshop, the top two modes participants at the New Port Richey workshop preferred to spend most of the transportation monies on were improvements to automobile and public transportation modes, but the preference for automobiles was slightly higher. They also preferred that a much smaller portion be spent on pedestrian and bicycle facility improvements.

When asked which revenue sources are the most desirable, the New Port Richey respondents identified grants as the most desirable, followed by tolls. The least favorable revenue sources were tax increment financing and transfer tax.

Environmental Justice Workshops

Two public workshops were conducted as part of the 2035 LRTP update to obtain input from the citizens of Pasco County regarding environmental justice. Environmental justice is the fair treatment and consideration of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, income, or disabilities. The purpose of these workshops was to ensure that the improvements included in the LRTP would not further disadvantage the above-mentioned populations, but, instead, increase the mobility of the transportation disadvantaged populations, with the focus being mainly on transit service. The first workshop was held on April 29, 2009, at the Hugh Embry Library in Dade City. The second workshop was held on April 30, 2009, at Community Aging and Retirement Services in Port Richey. The environmental justice workshops were held in different locations to ensure that residents from both east and west Pasco County had the opportunity to provide input concerning environmental justice during the LRTP update. Both locations are accessible by bus service. Those attending the workshop were mostly representatives of transportation disadvantaged populations who were familiar with the current transit service in Pasco County.

At the beginning of each public workshop, a presentation was given providing an overview of the 2035 LRTP process and a general discussion of environmental justice. In addition, maps were presented to the participants to show demographic trends and to illustrate where potential transportation improvements are planned.

Following the presentation and the overview discussion, a survey was handed out to each participant. The survey included four exercises, which covered the following topics:

- Exercise 1: Identifying Traditionally Under-Represented and Under-Served Populations
- Exercise 2: Potential Transportation Improvements
- Exercise 3: Critical Transportation Improvements
- Exercise 4: Funding Prioritization

The results of the four exercises conducted at the environmental justice public workshops are summarized below.

Traditionally Under-Represented and Under-Served Populations

The first exercise included three components to identify traditionally under-represented and under-served populations in Pasco County. The first component asked participants to identify the type(s) of traditionally under-represented and/or under-served population they represent. Participants were allowed to circle as many descriptions as applicable. Based on the information provided, the most frequent descriptions of traditionally under-represented and under-served identified include disabled, low-income, and elderly.

The second component asked participants to identify on a map of Pasco County where the population segments identified in the first component live. While a few participants identified specific areas in the county, the majority of participants circled the entire east and west areas of the county, with a few participants indicating that traditionally under-represented and under-served populations live throughout the entire county. The third component asked participants to identify any specific neighborhoods or communities where the population segments identified in the first component live. The majority of participants did not identify specific neighborhoods or communities, rather choosing to identify larger areas of the county. The only response indicating a specific neighborhood or community was the area north of SR 52 between the Suncoast Parkway and US 19.

Potential Transportation Improvements

The second exercise included two components to identify potential transportation improvements. The first component asked participants to identify locations in the county where they would like to see public transportation improvements. The primary area indicated is east Pasco County, with a few participants indicating that public transportation improvements connecting east and west Pasco County would be beneficial. The second component asked participants where they would like to see bicycle and pedestrian improvements that support public transportation. The

majority of participants did not specifically identify areas for potential supporting bicycle and pedestrian improvements, but the responses that were received mirrored the responses received to the first component of this exercise. In addition, it was mentioned that more transit infrastructure, such as bicycle racks, benches, and shelters, is needed throughout Pasco County.

Critical Transportation Improvements

The third exercise asked participants to identify transportation improvements in the preliminary Needs Plan that have a significant impact (either positive or negative) on any of the traditionally under-represented and/or under-served communities identified in the previous exercises. A number of participants identified east-west connector and north-south connector roads as improvements from the preliminary Needs Plan that will have a positive impact on traditionally underserved communities. One participant indicated that an additional road between Land O' Lakes and Zephyrhills should be added to the Needs Plan. Another participant indicated that increased paratransit service should be added to the Needs Plan. A third participant indicated that a transfer hub tied to future transit service in Land O' Lakes at US 41 and SR 54 may provide a positive impact.

Funding Prioritization

The fourth exercise included two components. The first component asked participants to prioritize the following types of transit service improvements based on which would be most beneficial:

A. Increasing frequency of service on existing bus routes
B. Increasing the daily span of service on existing bus routes to start earlier in the morning
C. Increasing the daily span of service on existing bus routes to later in the evening/night
D. Providing new bus service to areas without service
E. Improving bus stops on existing routes

While several participants selected more than one of these service improvements as the most beneficial, based on the responses received, providing new public transportation service to areas currently without service was the highest priority. The lowest priority was increasing the daily span of service on existing routes to start earlier in the morning.

The second component asked participants to allocate $10 million to the same set of improvements listed above. Based on the responses received, the funding allocation matched the priorities identified in the first component of this exercise. The highest amount of funding was allocated to providing new public transportation service to areas currently without service, while the lowest amount of funding was allocated to increasing the daily span of service on existing routes to start earlier in the morning.

Chapter 12 of this report further evaluates the socio-cultural effects and environmental justice in this LRTP.

Cost Affordable Plan Workshops

The 2035 Cost Affordable Workshops were held on July 27 and 30, 2009. The first workshop was held at the Grove Park Community Center in New Port Richey. The second was held at the New River Branch Library in Zephyrhills. Both workshops were open to the public. The workshops were designed as an open house, allowing participants to view maps and ask questions. The participants also were given surveys to fill out. The survey asked questions regarding roadway priorities, public transportation, and pedestrian facilities. The results of the workshop are summarized below. The complete handout given to participants can be found in the technical appendix.

Roadway Priorities

In the survey, participants were asked to identify the roadways where they most desired improvements. The most common roadways identified were:

- Ridge Rd.
- I-75 at SR 56
- SR 54/SR 56
- SR 52

Public Transportation

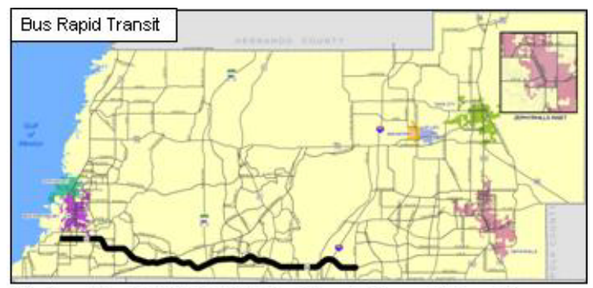
Workshop participants were also asked about public transportation. They were asked to rank four different public transportation options from 1 to 10, with 1 being least important and 10 being the most important. The participants indicated that a Bus Rapid Transit Route along SR 54/SR 56 is the most desired new service route. The options are shown in **Map 10-1**, and the table beside the map shows the average rank each option received.

Pedestrian Facilities

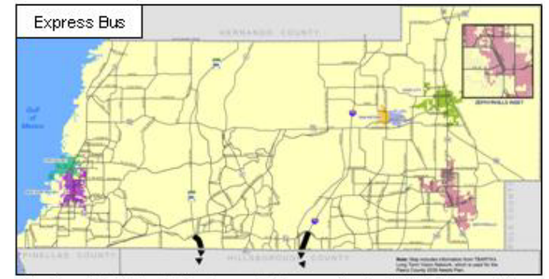
The third issue addressed pedestrian facility improvements. Participants were asked to identify there most desired pedestrian facilities. A variety of responses were given but the most common was US 19. Other responses include:

- Ridge Rd.
- Little Rd.
- Trouble Creek Rd.
- Hicks Rd.
- Congress
- Jasmine Blvd.
- Denton Ave.
- Massachusetts Ave.

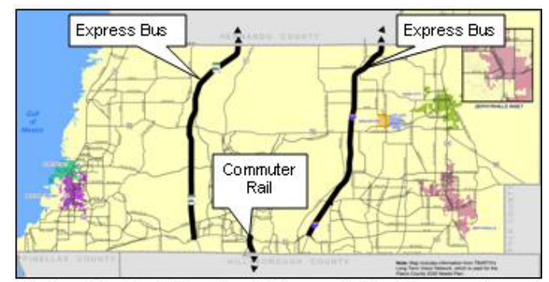
Option 1: Remaining TDP enhancements



Option 2: SR 54/SR 56 Bus Rapid Transit Corridor



Option 3: Tier I Regional Connectivity (I-75/Bruce B Downs to Hillsborough, and Suncoast to Hillsborough)



Option 4: Tier II Regional Connectivity (Suncoast and I-75 to Hernando, US 41 to Hillsborough)

Transit Option	Average Rank
Option 1	5
Option 2	8
Option 3	6
Option 4	6

LRTP Public Comment Period

On October 8, 2009, the MPO Board voted to open a public hearing on the 2035 LRTP. As a result of this action, two workshops were held to encourage public review of the plan. These workshops were held on October 13 and 15, 2009. The first workshop took place in the lobby of the Pasco County Government Center's lobby. The second workshop was conducted at the Land O' Lakes Community Center on Land O' Lakes Blvd. Both of these workshops were an open house format; a series of maps was displayed and the participants were invited to review them and provide comments on a sheet provided. MPO, County, and consultant staff members were available to answer questions from participants.

The project receiving the most significant comments during this period was an improvement proposed for access to the proposed Lacoochee Business and Manufacturing Park. Residents from Mickler Rd. showed concern for the possible increase of truck traffic on the road.

The following section fulfills the Metropolitan Planning Organization's Program Management Handbook, Long Range Transportation Checklist, US Code Requirements B-15 and B-14as stated below:

"Does the plan demonstrate explicit consideration of and response to public input? [23 C.F.R. 450.316(a)(1)(vi)]"

The section immediately following describes how public input was incorporated into the LRTP.

IMPACT OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

Roadway Projects

During the Needs Workshop in Dade City and the Cost Affordable Workshops, participants' main roadway concern was the safety and improvement of SR 52 from Suncoast Parkway to Dade City. The LRTP includes improvements of SR 52 from 2 undivided lanes to 4 divided lanes and 6 divided lanes between the Suncoast Parkway and US 41.

At the New Port Richey Needs workshop, the top roadway priorities were all along US 19. Improvements to US 19 in the LRTP include adding a continuous right-turn lane from SR 52 to the Hernando Countyline and a new grade separated intersection at US 19 and Ridge Rd.

As a result of the Mickler Rd. concern that arose during the public comment period, the map was changed so that no exact project was identified. A note has been made that the exact access to the site has not yet been determined. However, because having a project identified in the LRTP will help secure funding for the project, it was kept in the plan.

Transit Projects

Generally, the desired transit improvements mentioned during the workshops involved enhancing the existing transit service and adding new service. The LRTP includes projects that extend the hours of existing routes and the addition of park-and-ride facilities to make routes more accessible. New premium and local routes are included as well.

During the Cost Affordable workshops, participants were asked to choose from a series of new transit route options. The majority of the responses were that the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor along SR 54/SR 56 is the most desired. This coincides with a comment made at the Cost Affordable workshops pertaining to desired roadway improvements on this corridor. Included in the LRTP is a managed lane component on this corridor, which includes the possibility of BRT (pending further studies by FDOT). (For more information on managed lanes, refer to Chapter 7.) By adding some variety of managed lanes, the roadway is improved and more capacity is added.

PLAN ADOPTION

The final 2035 LRTP update was presented at the TAC, CAC, and MPO Board meetings in December 2009. Following endorsement by the TAC and CAC, the 2035 LRTP update was formally adopted by the MPO Board on December 10, 2009.

EVALUATION OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Pasco County PIP includes a Goal, Objectives, and Performance Measures for the purpose of evaluating the public involvement process, which is listed below. The Performance Measures listed here are evaluated in Table 10-1.

Goal, Objectives, and Performance Measures

Goal: To effectively involve the public in all of the Pasco County MPO transportation planning activities.

Objective 1. Promote proactive and early public involvement; provide diverse opportunities for public participation.

Performance Measures

- MPO public forums, workshops, or meetings sponsored.
- Presentations made to community groups.
- Public notices provided early and at key points within the schedule of all planning activities.
- Publications made available via the MPO website (LRTP, Unified Planning Work Program, and Transportation Improvements Plan).
- Diverse opportunities provided, including workshops, public hearings, website, newspaper articles, CAC meetings, survey, and media organizations on mailing list.
- One-on-one briefings with new members of the MPO Board, CAC, and TAC provided.
- Current planning documents provided to new Board members on an ongoing basis.

Objective 2. Provide full and easy access to complete information and key decisions; increase public awareness.

Performance Measures

- MPO newsletters during key planning activities.
- Newspaper advertisements and public notices published.
- Public meetings broadcast on Pasco County television.
- Public visits to the Pasco County MPO website.
- Public meetings held where public transit is available.
- Information provided to the public in an easy to understand format.
- Project information provided to public over the internet through the ETDM Process.
- Information available in libraries and other public places.
- Special brochures or newsletters during key planning activities
- Transportation planning data and documents are available for website visitors.

Objective 3. Effectively involve the transportation underserved and underrepresented.

Performance Measures

- Organizations representing the underserved/underrepresented included on mailing list for MPO planning activities.
- Public workshops and forums held in areas with high concentrations of the transportation underserved.
- Log of community groups visited established, including location, number of attendees, and the groups' general interests.
- Transportation services for the transportation underserved provided to and from workshops.
- Public announcements posted in free media for the transportation underserved.
- Opportunities provided for the public to access plans and programs for those who do not speak or read English proficiently.

Objective 4. Include public input in transportation decision making.

Performance Measures

- Public comments for MPO plans and programs provided, considered, and documented.
- Revisions to plans based on citizen input documented.

Objective 5. Continuously monitor and improve the public involvement process.

Performance Measures

- Federal rules and regulations concerning public involvement reviewed on a regular basis.
- MPO's Public Involvement Plan updated at least every five years.
- New ideas and public input used to improve the public involvement process.

CONCLUSION

The public involvement activities conducted for this LRTP resulted in positive feedback and support for the plan. Through this process, residents of Pasco County were able to share concerns and ideas, resulting in a more cohesive plan. While much feedback was received, the county should continue to strive for even more participants to ensure substantial feedback.

Table 10-1: Public Involvement Evaluation

Goal: To effectively involve the public in all of the Pasco County MPO transportation planning activities			
Objectives	**Performance Measures**	**Evaluation** *1 Not* *5 Moderately Successful* *10 Very*	**Comments/Recommendations**
Objective 1: Promote proactive and early public involvement; provide diverse opportunities for public participation	MPO public forums, workshops, or meetings sponsored	6	Four Public workshops were held in addition to the monthly TAC, CAC, MPO Board meetings. A total of 87 people attended these four workshops.
	Presentations made to community groups	N/A	Members of Community groups were included in mailing lists sent out to advertise for the workshops.
	Public notices provided early and at key points within the schedule of all planning activities	10	
	Publications made available via the MPO website (LRTP, Unified Planning Work Program, and Transportation improvements Plan).	10	All LRTP documents were posted on the MPO Website
	Diverse opportunities provided, inlcuding workshops, public hearings, Website, newspapter articles, CAC meetings, survey, and media organizations on mailing list.	10	
	One-on-one briefings with new members of the MPO Board, CAC, and TAC provided.	8	
	Current planning documents provided to new Board members on an ongoing basis.	9	
Objective 2: Provide full and easy access to complete information and key decisions; increase public awareness.	MPO newsletters during key planning activities.	10	
	Newspaper advertisements and public notices published.	10	
	Public meetings broadcast on Pasco County television.	10	MPO Board meetings are broadcast throughout the month, but no other workshops are shown.
	Public visits to the Pasco County MPO website.	N/A	There is currently no view tracking method in place.
	Public meetings held where public transit is available.	10	
	Information provided to the public in an easy to understand format.	10	
	Project information provided to public over the internet through the ETDM Process.	N/A	There is a link to ETDM provided on MPO Website, but ETDM did not occur during the developemnt of the LRTP.
	Information available in libraries and other public places.	7	Information was provided at City Halls, Civic Associations, etc. but not available at libraries in all cases.
	Special brochures or newsletters during key planning activities	10	
	Transportation planning data and documents are available for Website visitors.	10	
Objective 3: Effectively involve the transportation underserved and underrepresented.	Organizations representing the underserved/underrepresented included on mailing list for MPO planning activities.	10	
	Public workshops and forums held in areas with high concentrations of the transportation underserved.	10	
	Log of community groups visited established, including location, number of attendees, and the groups' general interests.	9	
	Transportation services for the transportation underserved provided to and from workshops.	10	
	Public announcements posted in free media for the transportation underserved.	5	Legal Notices contained contact information for those requiring special accomodations at the meetings.
	Opportunities provided for the public to access plans and programs for those who do not speak or read English proficiently.	7	Workshops were advertised in the Spanish newpaper, Gaceta Latina, and the Legal Notice contained information on those needing a translator.
Objective 4: Include public input in transportation decision making	Public comments for MPO plans and programs provided, considered, and documented.	10	
	Revisions to plans based on citizen input documented.	10	
Objective 5: Continuously monitor and improve the public involvement process	Federal rules and regulations concerning public involvement reviewed on a regular basis.	10	
	MPO's Public Involvement Plan updated at least every five years.	N/A	Not applicable to the LRTP, however, the PIP was revised during that time frame.
	New ideas and public input used to improve the public involvement process.	8	