

Chapter 2: Public Involvement

Introduction

The intent of public involvement is to create a better end product by (1) facilitating an open dialogue with the public, (2) organizing and recording comments, and (3) incorporating input in the planning process. Accordingly, this chapter outlines the APO's Public Involvement specific to the 2030 Plan update. It contains the agency goals, objectives, and methodologies used to foster public awareness, and solicit public input.

Goals

As a publicly funded agency, the APO is accountable to individual residents, organized civic groups, and businesses. It is governed by a Policy Board, which is comprised of eighteen (18) member jurisdictions, with forty-six (46) voting members. Eighty-three (83) percent are elected officials from local governing boards (city, county, and township). Non-elected persons representing planning and community interests hold the remaining seventeen (17) percent of the membership (refer to Chapter One Exhibit 1B for additional information on the APO's organizational structure). The APO strives to make transportation decisions that reflect the best interest of the entire St. Cloud Metro Area and are sustainable over time. Input was gathered & analyzed from each of the four groups shown in Exhibit 2A.

The APO's goal is to provide objective information, and build collaborative partnerships that foster consensus. As a governmental organization, the APO strives to be:

- *Public Service Oriented:* Providing accountability to constituents and exhibiting the highest standards of ethical conduct.
- *Creative Problem Solvers:* Anticipating potential challenges and developing creative solutions based on professional knowledge, public involvement, and collaboration with our partners.
- *Continuous Learners:* Constantly seeking new information, knowledge, and skills to better serve the St. Cloud Metro Area.

Code of Federal Regulations

23 Section 450.316 (b) of the Code of Federal Regulations for the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process describes the public involvement process as follows:

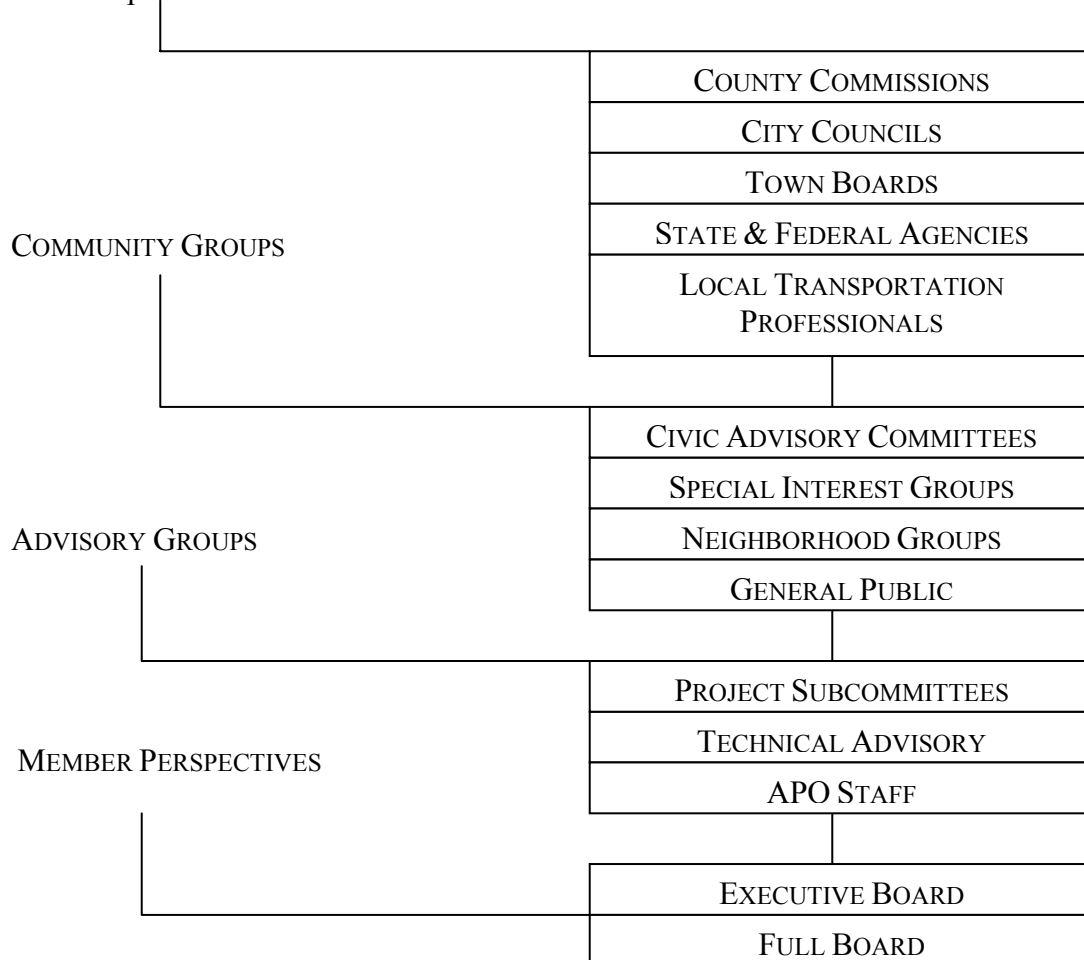
- Supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans.
- A proactive public involvement process provides complete information, timely public notice and full access to key decisions.
- Consistent with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Title VI assurance executed by each State under 23 U.S.C. 324 and 29 U.S.C. 794, which ensure that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, sex, national origin, or physical handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program receiving federal assistance from the U.S. Department of Transportation
- Identifies actions necessary to comply with the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Provides for the involvement of traffic, ridesharing, parking, transportation safety and enforcement agencies, commuter rail operators; airport and port authorities; toll authorities, appropriate private transportation providers and where appropriate city officials; and for the involvement of local, state and federal environmental, resource, and permit agencies as deemed appropriate.

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Exhibit 2A

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PARTNERS

Local Implementers



Several community-based agencies have expressed an interest in transportation issues relative to the St. Cloud Metro Area. The APO developed a list of well-established, ongoing community-based interest groups (Appendix B).

Objectives and Methodologies

The following section outlines the APO objectives for public involvement and the methodologies incorporated into the development of the 2030 Plan.

A. Early, continuous, and proactive agency and non-agency involvement

Objective

Public comments are solicited at the start of development process for policies, programs, and corridor studies. At this time community values, goals, objectives, and concerns are identified.

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Methodology

Staff developed a schedule identifying plan components and milestones for public input throughout the planning process from local implementers, community groups and advisory groups.

B. Identify potential stakeholders

Objective

A stakeholder is identified as any person, business, interest group, or other body that sees itself as being affected by a transportation issue or proposed policy. Although the APO may not be aware of every stakeholder until issues are made known, it is important to attempt to identify all “potential” stakeholders in an effort to adequately disseminate information and solicit active participation.

Methodology

Accordingly, when developing strategies for soliciting input, the following issues were considered (no particular order).

- What decisions need to be made?
- Who will make the decisions?
- What issues are being addressed and in what geographical area?
- What constituents may benefit or be impacted?
- What key concerns may exist?
- What needs to be done to help stakeholders understand the decision-making process?
- What techniques should be used to engage the community?
- Which stakeholders have been under-represented thus far?

C. Accommodate the traditionally underserved

Objective

The APO continues to strive for a process that assures the active participation of all affected transportation agencies, as well as other groups and individuals, with a perceived stake in the provision of transportation facilities and services. Accordingly, the APO has traditionally made a point of being aware of populations that are referred to in TEA-21 as the “traditionally underserved,” e.g., ethnic minority, low-income groups, and Americans with disabilities. For additional information on “traditionally underserved populations”, refer to Chapter 12: Environmental Justice.

Methodology

The APO looked for opportunities for all segments of the public to learn and become informed about issues and proposals under consideration in the planning process. Staff presented at various community groups to gather input.

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D. Access to timely and complete information

Objective

Provide access to planning documents and effectively communicate the issue(s) at hand.

Methodology

The following mediums were used to disseminate information to the public at each stage (milestone) of the plan development process.

- APO's website (www.stcloudapo.org)
- Local newsletters
- Public access channel (cable)
- Newspapers
- Radio
- All planning documents, including technical reports, are maintained on file in the APO office available for public inspection (copies are furnished upon request).

Appendix B contains a list of media contacts used.

E. Adequate opportunity for public comment

Objective

Discussing issues with the public can be addressed in a number of ways. Regardless of the format, the APO strives to conduct a forum in which an open exchange of information exists, where ideas are encouraged, and participant input is valued.

Methodology

The following list identifies the two formats used to solicit feedback from the public:

- **Public Informational Meeting:** Meeting held to inform the public about an issue and explain plan components (see Appendix B for dates).
 - Public informational meetings began with a presentation on the planning process and status of the plan components being considered. After identifying relevant issues, time was set aside to allow an exchange of ideas and comments from the public.
 - Comment cards and contact information was made available to solicit input.

Public Meetings

- Public informational meetings were conducted early and often.
- Staff selected accessible meeting locations & times.
- Meetings were well publicized.
- Established a practical meeting format.
- Displayed good visuals.
- Provided adequate and continuous information about the process.
- Maintained and publicized records of all proceedings.

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- **Public Advisory Committee:** Group of stakeholders providing public input.
 - A Bikeways and Pedestrian Advisory Committee was developed to take a holistic approach in reviewing existing and potential facilities for both bicyclists and pedestrians in the St. Cloud Metro Area (see Chapter 9: Bikeway and Pedestrian Plan).

F. Timely agency response to and incorporation of ideas

Objective

The APO maintains a commitment to considering public involvement and incorporating suggestions, whenever feasible.

Methodology

The APO maintains a public record of all significant written and oral comments received from citizens and/or planning partners. Comments were summarized and brought before the APO Policy Board for review and discussion prior to approving the final 2030 Transportation Plan document. A summary of the feedback received can be found in Appendix B.

Conclusion

Involving the community in the deliberation over major transportation investments creates a means of exchanging information and viewpoints in an effort to identify issues, outline potential alternatives, and assess impacts prior to determining the final course of action. Accordingly, public involvement does not stop with the development of the Transportation Plan, participation and input will continue as specific projects, policies, and programs evolve.