

# **Public Participation Plan for Regional Transportation Planning for the Seacoast Metropolitan Planning Organization**

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Preparation of this report has been financed in part through grants from the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration and Federal Highway Administration.



# Public Participation in Regional Transportation Planning

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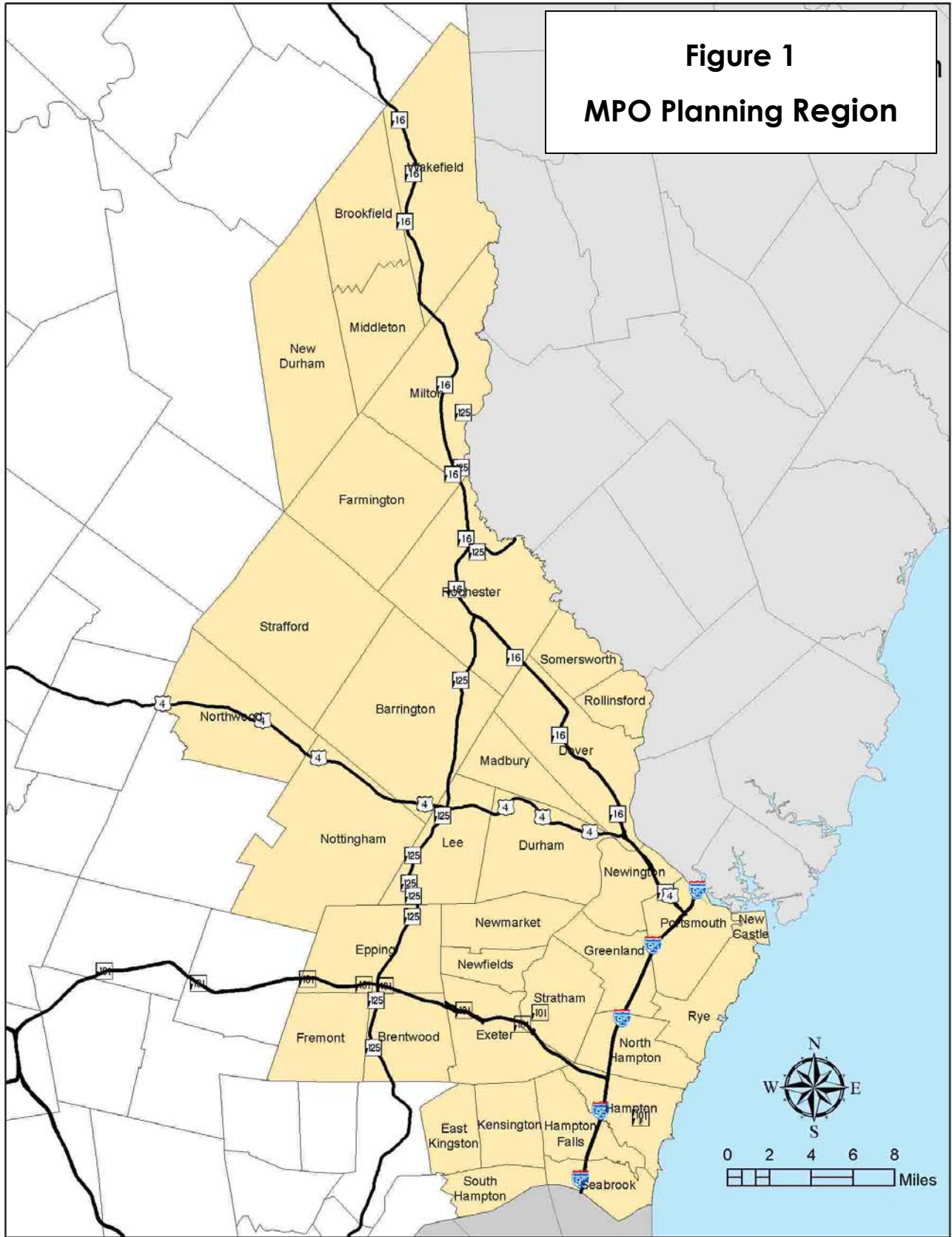
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**Figure 1**  
**MPO Planning Region**



## 1. Introduction

The Seacoast MPO is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the southeastern area of New Hampshire and includes 36 communities as identified in *Figure 1*.

This report documents the actions to be carried out by the Seacoast MPO to ensure that opportunities exist for the public to be involved in transportation planning activities, pursuant to Title 23 CFR 450.316 of Statewide Planning; Metropolitan Planning and Criteria and Procedures for Determining Conformity to State or Federal Implementation Plans of Transportation Plans, Programs, and Projects; and Statewide Transportation Planning Rules.

The report also serves as the statement of transportation public participation policies adopted by the Seacoast MPO. Participation of the public in transportation planning activities is vitally important to the MPO. The emphasis of the adopted policies in this report is on regional system planning products regularly produced in the transportation planning process. Specific project-level public participation procedures and practices are defined by implementing agencies. Only the relationship of regional participation processes to project planning is included here.

## 2. Public Participation Policy

### A. Federal Mandates

#### 1) General Requirements Under SAFETEA-LU

Federal regulations require a public participation component for the metropolitan transportation planning process. The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) was signed into law in 2005. The Seacoast MPO implements SAFETEA-LU through plans and programs that consider all modes of transportation, which are “Continuing, Cooperative, and Comprehensive to the degree appropriate.” [SEC. 1203(a)(4)].

In addition to the “3C” process listed above, SAFETEA-LU emphasizes the broadening of public participation to include stakeholders who have not been involved previously. Transportation planning under SAFETEA-LU must be performed in conjunction with state and local officials, transit operators and the public. Further, Metropolitan Planning Organizations are responsible for conducting a locally developed public participation process as required by the Joint Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)/ Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Planning Rule (23 CFR part 450, 49 CFR part 613). The metropolitan planning process must “include a proactive public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans” and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP) [23 CFR part 450.316(b)(1)].

Additional MPO public participation requirements and criteria are specified in *Appendix A, Federal Regulation on MPO Public Participation Process*.

## **2) Requirements Addressing Low-Income Communities and Minority Communities**

Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority and Low-Income Populations, was signed by President Clinton on Feb. 11, 1994 and published in the Feb. 16, 1994 Federal Register, Vol. 59, No. 32. The Executive Order (EO) and accompanying memorandum reinforced the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that focus federal attention on the environmental and human health condition in minority and low-income communities. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act states that “no person in the United States shall, on the grounds of 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” [42 USC 2000d]. Together these two laws promote non-discrimination in federal programs affecting human health and the environment, and provide minority and low income communities access to public information and an opportunity to participate in matters relating to transportation and the environment.

The EO is oriented not only toward project level decision-making in the engineering and design phases for projects, but also toward long-range and project programming activities. MPO self-certification reviews conducted by the FHWA and FTA in metropolitan areas stress the public participation efforts within potential environmental justice communities.

Through the regional planning process, the MPO and partner agencies will thoroughly analyze the three fundamental environmental justice principles. The principles are:

- To avoid, minimize or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects, including social and economic effects of programs, policies and activities on minority populations and low-income populations;
- To ensure full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process; and
- To prevent the denial of, reduction of, or significant delay in the receipt of transportation benefits by minority and low-income populations.

The MPO’s public participation methods to address the full and fair participation of all populations are described in *Chapter 3: Opportunities for Public Participation*.

## **3) Requirements Addressing Populations with Disabilities**

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) requires involving persons with disabilities in the development and improvement of transportation services. Planners, engineers, and builders must provide access for the disabled at sidewalks and ramps, street crossings, and in parking or transit access facilities. Persons with disabilities must also be able to access the sites where public participation activities occur as well as the information presented.

The MPO’s public participation methods to address the Americans with Disabilities Act are described in *Chapter 3: Opportunities for Public Participation*.

## **B. State Mandates**

There are public participation requirements at the State level. The public records law of New Hampshire states that all public records shall be open for inspection by any person at reasonable times (NH Revised Statutes RSA 91-A). Public records include all writings made, maintained or kept by the State or any agency, institution or political subdivision for use in the exercise of functions required or authorized by law or administrative rule or involving the receipt or expenditure of public funds.

The MPO procedures for distributing information in accordance with the public records law of New Hampshire are discussed in *Chapter 4: Documentation, Distribution and Notification*.

## **C. Seacoast MPO Public Participation Policy**

Though the meaningful engagement of diverse interests may be challenging at times, transportation decisions are ultimately more responsive to local needs as a result of the public participation process. Public participation is vital to the Seacoast MPO. It provides the MPO with the broadest spectrum of relevant, available information prior to its decision-making, and it provides the public an opportunity to raise concerns that can be considered with discussion of technical, political and economic issues. The MPO welcomes the early and continued participation of the public in developing the agency's regional policies and plans. The MPO seeks to establish a process that encourages public reflection, reaction and discussion of the wide-ranging issues with which the MPO and public are involved.

Of particular importance is the identification of audiences which would be affected by or have a business or other affinity with the issues under consideration. Inclusive participation and sharing of views and concerns is encouraged. In this context, minority views include those whose perspectives may not be fully reflected by larger segments of the public.

It is the intent of the MPO to actively solicit comments and engage the interests of the public through the participation process. It is the responsibility of the MPO to balance the public's needs and desires with the MPO's responsibilities and visions for the future of the region.

In adopting this policy, staff are directed to ensure that public communications and outreach are a part of the agency's overall planning activities. In addition to required public hearings, such activities might include: representative task forces or advisory committees; public meetings and workshops, presentations and discussions with special interest organizations, forums or conferences that provide information about issues and processes and the opportunity for input from the public; opinion polls, surveys, focus groups and interviews to acquire information; and use of the media and reports to disseminate information.

## **D. Seacoast MPO Public Participation Goals**

The fundamental goal of public participation is to assure that the decisions regarding a proposed plan or project are made only after the public is aware of and has had the opportunity to comment on the proposal. Transportation planning decision-makers must consider concerns of all the publics and users who may be affected by a proposed project. Specific goals of the public participation process are:

**Goal 1: Educate and Present Information**

The MPO is responsible for providing timely and adequate information to the public. MPO staff shall educate and present information about the regional planning process, including the sources of funding, data on transportation system performance, and impacts of regional planning decisions. MPO staff shall inform the public about the transportation planning process as well as the committee structure of the MPO. MPO staff shall explain the specific tasks and goals of the MPO, and indicate which related tasks that are not in the MPO's authority to perform. This information shall be presented in non-technical terms so the public can readily understand and process this information.

**Goal 2: Solicit Public Input**

The MPO shall actively seek out input and participation from a wide variety of individuals, groups and organizations affected by the transportation system to identify transportation related needs, desires, issues and concerns. Public participation will be sought continuously throughout transportation planning processes. Efforts will be specifically targeted at the beginning of planning efforts, at key decision points while there is ample opportunity to affect decisions, and when final product drafts are issued. MPO Policy Committee and Technical Advisory Committee members also have direct contact with the public via the community that they represent and should reflect their concerns to MPO staff. MPO staff will also monitor public input received through project development efforts, corridor studies and other planning activities.

**Goal 3: Facilitate Information Flow Between the Public and Decision-Makers**

MPO staff are responsible for compiling public issues, comments and concerns into complete and concise documents for presentation to the decision-makers. The MPO staff shall also schedule and organize meetings where the public can present concerns to the staff or MPO committees.

**Goal 4: Consider Public Concerns in Decision-Making**

The MPO Commissioners shall consider public concerns presented to them by the MPO staff and those presented by individual persons at public meetings. MPO staff shall consider public concerns as they prepare draft planning documents for review by the MPO Commissioners.

The desired outcome in implementing these goals will be transportation plans, programs and projects which reflect local, regional and State priorities and needs, and which consider a range of transportation options and the overall social, economic, energy and environmental effect of transportation decisions.

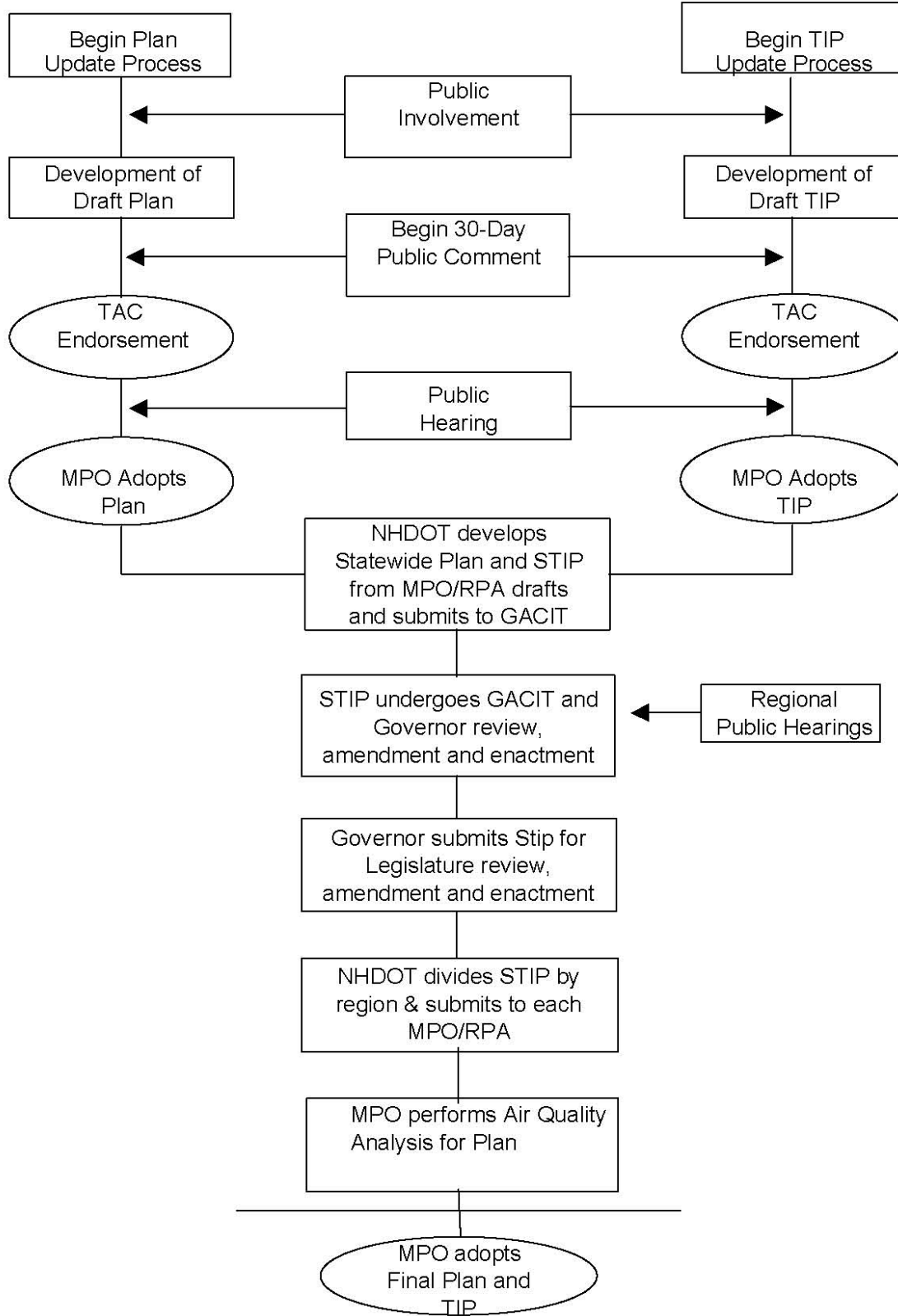
### **3. Opportunities for Public Participation**

#### **A. Planning Process**

The regional transportation planning process involves a number of activities including the preparation of regional plans, transportation improvement programs, corridor studies, and administrative documents. Public interest will vary considerably based on the intensity of the public feeling on particular issues. This varied response suggests that the regional public participation process should recognize the differences and provide diverse opportunities for participation. The MPO typically follows the transportation planning process displayed in *Figure 2*. The process is applied to the required MPO planning documents as well as corridor and project studies and short-range transportation improvement programs.



FIGURE 2  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRANSPORTATION PLAN & TRANSPORTATION  
IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP)



## B. MPO Committee Structure

The MPO process in the New Hampshire Seacoast Region has been established in the Memorandum of Agreement between the Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC), the Strafford Regional Planning Commission (SRPC), and the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT).

### 1) MPO Policy Committee

The Seacoast MPO Policy Committee is comprised of representatives from the MPO's 36 member communities, state and federal agencies, and several major regional organizations. Each community's Commissioners on their respective regional planning commission serve on the MPO Policy Committee. Commissioners are appointed by their Board of Selectmen or City/Town Council, and each hold one vote on behalf of their local community. Representation on the regional planning commissions is defined under RSA 36:46, with each community entitled to between two and four representatives based on its population as listed in *Table 1*.

**TABLE 1: MPO Community Representation**

Reps	Community	2000 Census Population	Reps	Community	2000 Census Pop
2	Barrington	7,475	2	Newmarket	8,027
2	Brentwood	3,197	2	North Hampton	4,259
2	Brookfield	604	2	Northwood	3,640
2	East Kingston	1,784	2	Nottingham	3,710
2	Epping	5,476	2	Rollinsford	2,684
2	Farmington	5,774	2	Rye	5,182
2	Fremont	3,510	2	Seabrook	7,934
2	Greenland	3,208	2	South Hampton	844
2	Hampton Falls	1,880	2	Strafford	3,626
2	Kensington	1,893	2	Stratham	6,355
2	Lee	4,145	2	Wakefield	4,252
2	Madbury	1,509	3	Durham	12,664
2	Middleton	1,440	3	Exeter	14,058
2	Milton	3,910	3	Hampton	14,937
2	New Castle	1,010	3	Somersworth	11,477
2	New Durham	2,220	4	Dover	26,884
2	Newfields	1,551	4	Portsmouth	20,784
2	Newington	775	4	Rochester	28,461

Other organizations listed below are represented on the MPO Policy Committee:

Voting Members:

New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT)  
New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES)  
Cooperative Alliance for Regional Transportation (COAST)  
Pease Development Authority/New Hampshire Port Authority (PDA)  
University of New Hampshire (UNH)

Affiliate Non-Voting Members:

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)  
Federal Transit Administration (FTA)  
New Hampshire Department of Transportation - Aeronautics Division (NHDOT-AD)  
New Hampshire Department of Transportation - Bureau of Rail & Transit (NHDOT-BRT)  
New Hampshire Office of Energy & Planning (NHOEP)  
Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission (SMRPC)  
Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC)  
Massachusetts Department of Transportation ((Mass Highways)  
New Hampshire Transit Association (NHTA)  
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

The Policy Committee is assisted by the MPO Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), which reviews work of the transportation process and advises the Policy Committee on planning and implementation procedures. Ad hoc committees and work groups are also established for short durations to assist on specific planning tasks and functions. Examples of ad hoc committees and work groups include the Newington-Dover Task Force and the MPO Prospectus Update Committee. The membership of these short-term committees typically includes representatives of affected municipalities and community groups, as well as experts on the relevant committee topic.

## **2) MPO Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)**

There are 43 voting members of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), plus a number of non-voting representatives of various stakeholder organizations. Membership is comprised as follows:

Voting Members (one voting member or designee from each of the following):

New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT)  
New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services-Air Resources Division (NHDES-ARD)  
Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation (COAST)  
University of New Hampshire (UNH) \*  
Pease Development Authority/New Hampshire Port Authority (PDA)  
Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC)  
Strafford Regional Planning Commission (SRPC)  
Each Community in the RPC/MPO Planning Region

*\*On April 3, 1997, UNH was approved as a new member of the Seacoast MPO, with voting representation on both the Policy and Technical Advisory Committees.*

### Affiliate Non-Voting Members:

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)  
Federal Transit Administration (FTA)  
New Hampshire Department of Transportation - Aeronautics Division (NH DOT-AD)  
New Hampshire Department of Transportation - Bureau of Rail and Transit (NH DOT-BRT)  
New Hampshire Office of Energy & Planning (NHOEP)  
Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission (SMRPC)  
Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC)  
Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT)  
Massachusetts Department of Transportation (Mass Highways)  
New Hampshire Transit Association (NHTA)  
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)  
Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA)  
Transportation Center/Park and Ride Terminal Operator  
Health & Human Service Transportation Representative  
Seacoast Area Bicycle Routes (SABR)  
New Hampshire Bike Walk Alliance (BWA-NH)  
Pan Am Rail Systems  
New Hampshire Motor Transport Association (NHMTA)  
Seacoast Commuter Options (SCO)

The Committee may also authorize additional affiliate, non-voting members.

The public is encouraged to attend committee meetings and/or contact their representatives with their comments and concerns. A public comment period is included in all meetings of the TAC and Commission/MPO Policy Committee.

The MPO web site ([www.seacoastmpo.org](http://www.seacoastmpo.org)) contains a calendar of meeting dates and associated agendas. Seacoast MPO Transportation Planning Process Meetings standing times and dates are:

- *Technical Advisory Committee – Bi-monthly, typically 9:00 am, first Thursday of the month*
- *MPO Policy Committee – Quarterly, typically 7:00 pm, last Thursday of the month*

## **C. Policy Action Process and Agency Integration**

### **1) Major Policy Action Process**

The MPO policy action process has been designed to ensure the Policy Committee has ample opportunity to carefully consider the issue or action in question, and consider the views of the public before taking a major policy action. Such major actions are associated with:

- New or amended Regional Transportation Plans (RTP),
- New Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) or amendments affecting air quality conformity, and
- Air quality conformity findings/documents.

Major policy actions include the following steps:

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) reviews work of the MPO staff, NHDOT, and other public input, and makes a recommendation to the Policy Committee on planning and implementation procedures.

The Policy Committee Chair sets a public hearing date that allows at least a 10-day period for the public to review documents before the public hearing. The public comment period on documents will remain open for at least 30 days in accordance with federal regulation. Public comment periods for Public Participation Plan reviews are 45 days in length.

After setting the public hearing date, a notice of the public hearing is published in the two major newspapers serving the MPO region – *Portsmouth Herald* and *Fosters Daily Democrat* - at least 10 days in advance of the public hearing, and at least 30 days prior to closing of the public comment period. Notices may also be published in other newspapers. The notice includes the time, date and location of the public hearing as well as how the subject document can be reviewed. The subject document is also made available on the MPO web site ([www.seacoastmpo.org](http://www.seacoastmpo.org)).

A formal public hearing is conducted. The views of the public as well as the recommendations of any applicable MPO ad hoc committees are heard at the public hearing.

After considering all comments and recommendations in the public hearing, action on the policy is then taken by the Policy Committee at its next scheduled meeting. If public hearings are coupled with Policy Committee meetings on the same night, the Policy Committee may take action immediately following the public hearing, unless the Committee votes that some aspect of the input received from the public requires further information or analysis to ensure a fully informed decision.

A summary of significant public comments and responses is included in the final published policy document or made available as a separate document.

## **2) Agency Integration**

The regional transportation planning process, and its corresponding public participation process, is a coordinated approach among Rockingham Planning Commission, Strafford Regional Planning Commission, COAST, and NHDOT. These agencies prepared a Memorandum of Agreement outlining their plans for communication, collaboration and coordination in transportation processes in 1995.

## **D. Key Planning Activities**

The framework described in *Table 2* identifies types of planning products, the most appropriate agency responsible for the public participation activity, and the methodologies for obtaining public participation. Additional methods for public input may also be used if needed.

**Table 2 - Key Planning Activities and Public Participation Methods**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Methods</b>
Regional Transportation Plan	MPO	Public interest forums at key points throughout the development process; MPO committee review and recommendation; public hearing before adoption. Staff outreach to communities and organizations using workshops, poster sessions, questionnaires, web site announcements, etc.
Specialized Plan Elements	MPO	Ad hoc committees or work groups; MPO committee review and recommendation; solicitation of comments and input announced via web site and email notification.
Transportation Improvement Program	MPO, NHDOT, Local Governments	Project sponsor conducts public outreach in communities regarding specific projects; MPO committee review and recommendation; public hearing before adoption of new TIP or a TIP amendment requiring conformity finding.
Corridor/ Sub-area Studies	NHDOT, MPO	Task forces/committees and/or public meetings in the corridor or sub-area at key decision points. Public advisory committee surveys and questionnaires. Meetings conducted in affected neighborhoods, community study office and community outreach efforts (e.g. newsletter, web site, comment forms).
Project Development	Implementing Jurisdiction	Task forces/committees and/or public meetings in the project locale at key decision points; public hearing. Public advisory committee surveys and questionnaires.
Conformity of the LRP and the TIP	MPO, NHDOT, NHDES	RPC committee review and recommendation; public hearing on draft conformity finding.
Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)	MPO, NHDOT	Transportation Forum to identify key planning tasks. Review work plans with partner agencies, MPO committee review and recommendation, and final review by FHWA/FTA.

**1) Regional Transportation Plan**

The Regional Transportation Plan is the federally mandated, 20 year transportation plan for the Seacoast MPO region. It represents the vision for a multimodal transportation system that will serve the region through the defined period. It also identifies transportation improvement projects of various travel modes in a plan that is financially constrained for the next 20 years given expected levels of funding. The Transportation Plan reflects proposals throughout the entire region. SAFETEA-LU requires that the Transportation Plan be updated at least every four years.

Opportunities for public and resource agency participation are provided around key decision points in the planning process. The 2002 update to the plan included a regional survey as well as a series of regional visioning sessions, plus public hearings on the draft and final plan. These results are summarized in the Transportation Plan’s appendix.

## **2) Specialized Plan Elements**

Specialized plan elements are prepared to further define the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). Such examples include the current development of a Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan for the Seacoast Region in accordance with the requirements of SAFETEA-LU. Upon adoption, specialized plan elements become part of the overall RTP. Opportunities for public participation are provided through ad hoc committees or work groups, and comment periods during TAC and Policy Committee meetings. Notifications to interested parties may be made. Additional public meetings may be held if further public input is desired prior to Policy Committee action.

## **3) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**

The TIP is a document that programs transportation improvements to be funded in the region over a four-year period. Local governments, NHDOT, the MPO, and other regional stakeholders propose projects to be included in the TIP. The MPO is in the process of shifting to a policy under which project priorities considered for the TIP must be identified in the Regional Transportation Plan. Early public input should be obtained by sponsor agencies before submitting projects for inclusion in the TIP.

The draft TIP document is the subject of a public hearing. Amendments to the TIP are divided into two types based on scope, with varying levels of public participating applying to each. These two types of amendments include 1) Full Amendments, and 2) Minor or Expedited Amendments. Full amendments are subject to a 30-day public comment period and approval by the MPO Policy Committee. Expedited amendments may be adopted with the joint consent of the Executive Directors of RPC and SRPC. Definitions of these amendment types and the procedures for each are detailed in *Appendix C*.

## **4) Corridor / Sub-Area Studies**

Corridor and sub-area studies are local in concern yet often have impacts on larger areas. Corridor studies may at times serve as Environmental Assessments (EAs) to lead toward environmental clearance actions. More commonly, though, corridor studies focus at a broad level, and are precursors to more specific project-based Environmental Impact Statements (such as the U.S. Route 1 Corridor Study). Such studies normally have very extensive public outreach and input efforts that attract a significant number of participants. The agency charged with conducting the specific study is responsible for conducting public participation activities. MPO staff are actively involved and monitor the public participation activities in these studies to help identify broad issues, concerns, desires, etc. that may be relevant to regional planning. Opportunities to integrate MPO public outreach efforts with corridor studies are also pursued.

## **5) Projects**

The project sponsor is responsible for involving the public in efforts during environmental planning and design phases for specific local transportation projects. MPO staff monitor studies for major projects.

## **6) Conformity**

The MPO must find conformity with the State Air Quality Implementation Plan (SIP) before it can adopt or amend the RTP or the TIP. Public participation is crucial to the conformity process, since this determination affects what types of projects can be included in the RTP and TIP.

## **7) Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)**

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) describes all metropolitan transportation planning and transportation-related land use and air quality planning activities facing the MPO region for a two year planning period. The UPWP identifies tasks that will be accomplished using federal transportation planning funds. RPC, SRPC, COAST, and NHDOT participate in the activities of the biennial UPWP, which includes descriptions of planning tasks to be performed and identifies funding sources and descriptions of other major transportation planning activities by partner agencies and local governments.

## **E. Public Participation Methods**

Various techniques will selectively be used to provide information and solicit public comment. Some examples of public participation activities are briefly described below.

### **Informational Brochures or Newsletters**

Informational brochures and newsletters are at times developed by the MPO to facilitate communication between the regional community and the program staff. This helps to ensure that information regarding current activities is shared in a timely and appropriate manner throughout the region.

### **Mailing Lists**

Mailing list databases help an agency organize and update its public communications. Lists may include telephone numbers, fax numbers and/or email addresses to help contact the public. Using mailing lists, the MPO reaches target audiences with announcements of upcoming events, meeting invitations, newsletters, summary reports and other information about its activities. The MPO updates its mailing list at the start of a major planning process. The MPO may also create a targeted mailing list for a survey. The MPO master mailing list includes nearly 1,500 members of the public and organizations. About 350 people and organizations receive specific transportation notifications.

### **Media Strategies**

Media strategies inform the public about projects and programs through newspapers, radio, television and videos, posters and variable message signs, mass mailings of brochures or newsletters, and distribution of fliers. Promotional brochures or fliers can be used in direct mail campaigns or through a full-size newspaper supplement explaining the Regional Long Range Transportation Plan. The MPO may prepare press releases and media packets at the ‘kick off’ of the planning process of such major endeavors as the Regional Long Range Transportation Plan or other planning processes.



### **Strategies to Engage Under-represented Populations**

MPO staff are proactive regarding public outreach to potential low-income communities and minority communities. Previously used methods to obtain input include presentations, recruitment of advocates, participation on studies, targeted mailings and surveys.

### **Piggybacking on Other Efforts**

MPO staff from time to time set up public outreach displays and materials on specific planning projects at public meetings or other community events such as the Exeter River Alewife Festival, the Portsmouth Criterium, Bike/Walk to Work Day, Senior Health Fairs, or regional Realtors' round-table events.

### **Public Guide to Planning and Public Participation**

In 2002 the NHDOT produced a series of guides to public participation in the regional transportation planning process. The MPO has maintained a supply of these and makes them available both on the web and at certain public events. MPO staff has prepared other Fact Sheets, Guides, etc.

### **Public Hearings**

Public hearings are more formal than a public meeting and are based on legal requirements. Held prior to a decision point, a public hearing gathers community comments and positions from all interested parties for public record and input into decisions. The federal government for many transportation documents and projects requires public hearings. Additional hearings may be held during the transportation planning process at the discretion of the sponsoring organization. Public notices in a general circulation newspaper cite the time, date and place of a hearing. A minimum period of 10 days will be allowed between notice and hearing dates, while public comment periods will remain open for a minimum of 30 days to allow time for the public to prepare comments for submission to an agency. During this period, the agency accepts questions and provides clarification. Subject documents must be available to the public when notice of a hearing is given.

The MPO hosts public hearings before the adoption of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and their corresponding conformity statements, and other key planning documents. All MPO-hosted public hearings are wheelchair accessible.

### **Public Interest Forums / Meetings / Workshops**

Public forums and meetings disseminate information and provide a setting for public discussion, and gather feedback from the community. They are often hosted at more than one key point in the process to develop specific planning documents. They are often tailored to specific issues or community groups and may be informal or formal. Such forums may include the following: poster sessions, open houses / interactions periods, activities to engage public input, formal presentations, question and answer formats, brainstorming sessions, small break-out groups, and charettes.

The MPO will address the Americans with Disabilities Act by ensuring that all MPO-hosted public forums and meetings are wheelchair accessible.

### **Speakers Bureau**

MPO staff routinely accept invitations from local organizations and municipal boards to come and speak on regional planning issues or specific planning projects.

### **Surveys and Questionnaires**

The MPO uses surveys to gather information for major updates to the Regional Long Range Transportation Plan, biannual rider input for COAST, and for other planning projects, such as master plans for communities, transit coordination planning, bicycle route designation, etc. The method of data collection varies by project, but included in-person interviews, surveys, and web-based questionnaires.

### **Visualization Techniques**

This is a new requirement of SAFETEA-LU designed to better convey to the public, through visual media, information important in the transportation planning process. This might include regional maps showing modeled projections of how alternative land use policies scenarios will impact development and the transportation system in twenty years. It could also include simpler techniques such as renderings or photo simulations to show a widened roadway or bridge in context; flow charts to clearly depict the transportation planning process; or graphs depicting project funding distribution.

### **Web Site**

Improvements will be made continually to the MPO web site to keep the public informed about planning activities and to offer another way to provide comments. Materials will be consolidated on the MPO website to make it a comprehensive source including a calendar of meetings, agendas and meeting minutes, links to a range of regional demographic, economic, and traffic data and downloadable versions of planning documents, and GIS content.

### **Work Groups**

These groups are assigned a specific task, with a time limit for reaching a conclusion or producing a draft document, subject to ratification by official decision-makers. The membership of these groups often includes local people or representatives from interest groups, appointed by elected officials or agency executives.

## **4. Documentation, Distribution and Notification**

### **A. Documentation**

All documentation pertaining to transportation plans and programs is available for public review and comment. The MPO produces policy documents, such as adopted resolutions, technical reports, white papers, consultant reports and memorandums. These provide written documentation of the policies, plans, programs and planning activities of the transportation planning process.

Policy documents are prepared first in draft form and then published in final form after adoption by the MPO Policy Committee. The MPO will make drafts of policy documents available for public review at least 10 days prior to public hearings on the subject, and for a minimum public comment period of 30 days. Drafts of the Public Participation Plan will be available at least 45 days prior to a public hearing. Public comments received on updates to the Regional Transportation Plan will be summarized and included with the policy document along with responses and the disposition of the comments. MPO plans, reports, meetings, agendas and meeting summaries are available on the MPO web site.

The MPO may publish technical and other reports after acceptance by the Technical Advisory Committee or other committees, as appropriate. These reports will be available upon their completion. In addition to published reports, the MPO maintains unpublished technical information in support of its planning efforts.

Minutes are prepared for all meetings of the TAC and Policy Committee. These are available upon request from the planning commissions. The MPO will also provide documentation of key decision points in a planning process through the public outreach of that process.

For major updates to the Regional Transportation Plan, a separate summary document of public participation activities and input received is produced. It is available to decision-makers and the general public through the planning commission offices.

## **B. Distribution and Notification**

The public may request to view or receive all reports developed and compiled by MPO. MPO publications may be free of charge or cost a nominal fee. Most publications can also be downloaded and printed from the MPO web site. The public may also view unpublished technical information at the RPC and SRPC offices.

Draft policy documents are available at RPC and SRPC offices and on the MPO web site. Libraries in the region have access to the MPO web site for viewing or downloading documents.

The two planning commissions inform the public about their agencies' actions or activities through their respective newsletters. These newsletters are mailed to nearly 1,200 individuals and organizations. In addition to the newsletters, public hearings are advertised in at least the two major daily newspapers serving the region – the *Portsmouth Herald* and *Foster's Daily Democrat*. Where possible notices are also posted in widely read regional weeklies such as the *Carriage Town News*.

The MPO will maintain a comprehensive mailing list of elected officials, public officials, special interest groups and others to ensure the widest possible distribution of documents. This list is used for newsletter mailings, and to inform interested parties of upcoming meetings and other events pertaining to the transportation planning process and products. Various planning commission email lists will be consolidated and expanded. The MPO's list of interested parties will include, but not be limited to, the following:

*Boards of Selectmen and City Councils from study area communities;*  
*Planning Boards, Traffic Safety Committees, Public Works Officials/Road Agents;*  
*Public and private transit and taxi operators, including demand responsive operators;*  
*Human Service agencies with low income, elderly and disabled clients;*  
*Representatives from adjoining MPOs;*  
*Traffic safety and enforcement agencies;*  
*Chambers of Commerce; economic development organizations;*  
*Members of the State legislature representing study area communities;*  
*Appropriate State and federal agencies, including the NHDOT, NHDES-Air Resources,*  
*DRED, Pease Development Authority, FHWA, FTA, FAA, EPA;*

*Individuals and groups with a demonstrated interest in transportation issues;*  
*Major businesses and business and industry associations;*  
*Schools and colleges;*  
*Transportation and highway user groups;*  
*Neighborhood associations;*  
*Those underserved by the transportation system; and*  
*Members of the MPO TAC and Policy Committee not otherwise listed.*  
*Print and broadcast media contacts.*

The MPO will also prepare a listing of public meetings scheduled under its auspices. This listing is posted at the RPC and SRPC offices and on the MPO web sites. These meetings are all open to the public. Public comment periods are provided for during meetings of MPO committees.

## **5. Review of Public Participation Process**

MPOs serving Census-defined Urbanized Areas with populations over 200,000 are required to undergo review and certification every four years by FHWA/ FTA to ensure compliance with Federal requirements. To date the Seacoast MPO has not been subject to this scheduled review as our Urbanized Area is below the 200,000 threshold. However, the Seacoast MPO does undertake a biennial self-certification review. The public participation processes of MPO are an important part of this review. As part of the self-certification, the MPO will biennially review the public participation process, considering the following items:

- What was the success of specific strategies in attracting the public and associated comments?
- What level of public input was received for various planning products?
- Was public input considered by decision-makers?
- Should any new strategies or adjustments be considered in the following year?
- Are any changes or amendments necessary to the Public Participation in Regional Transportation Planning document?

## APPENDIX A

### **TITLE 23 PART 450.316 Interested Parties, Participation, Participation, and Consultation**

(a) The MPO shall develop and use a documented participation plan that defines a process for providing 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 transportation planning process.

(1) The participation plan shall be developed by the MPO in consultation with all interested parties and shall, at a minimum, describe explicit procedures, strategies, and desired outcomes for:

- (i) Providing adequate public notice of public participation activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points, including but not limited to a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposed metropolitan transportation plan and the TIP;
- (ii) Providing timely notice and reasonable access to information about transportation issues and processes;
- (iii) Employing visualization techniques to describe metropolitan transportation plans and TIPs;
- (iv) Making public information (technical information and meeting notices) available in electronically accessible formats and means, such as the World Wide Web;
- (v) Holding any public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times;
- (vi) Demonstrating explicit consideration and response to public input received during the development of the metropolitan transportation plan and the TIP;
- (vii) Seeking out and considering the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households, who may face challenges accessing employment and other services;
- (viii) Providing an additional opportunity for public comment, if the final metropolitan transportation plan or TIP differs significantly from the version that was made available for public comment by the MPO and raises new material

issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen from the public participation efforts;

(ix) Coordinating with the statewide transportation planning public participation and consultation processes under subpart B of this part; and

(x) Periodically reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures and strategies contained in the participation plan to ensure a full and open participation process.

(2) When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft metropolitan transportation plan and TIP (including the financial plans) as a result of the participation process in this section or the interagency consultation process required under the EPA transportation conformity regulations (40 CFR part 93), a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments shall be made as part of the final metropolitan transportation plan and TIP.

(3) A minimum public comment period of 45 calendar days shall be provided before the initial or revised participation plan is adopted by the MPO. Copies of the approved participation plan shall be provided to the FHWA and the FTA for informational purposes and shall be posted on the World Wide Web, to the maximum extent practicable.

(b) In developing metropolitan transportation plans and TIPs, the MPO should consult with agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities within the MPA that are affected by transportation (including State and local planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, or freight movements) or coordinate its planning process (to the maximum extent practicable) with such planning activities. In addition, metropolitan transportation plans and TIPs shall be developed with due consideration of other related planning activities within the metropolitan area, and the process shall provide for the design and delivery of transportation services within the area that are provided by:

(1) Recipients of assistance under title 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53;

(2) Governmental agencies and non-profit organizations (including representatives of the agencies and organizations) that receive Federal assistance from a source other than the U.S. Department of Transportation to provide non-emergency transportation services; and

(3) Recipients of assistance under 23 U.S.C. 204.

(c) When the MPA includes Indian Tribal lands, the MPO shall appropriately involve the Indian Tribal government(s) in the development of the metropolitan transportation plan and the TIP.

(d) When the MPA includes Federal public lands, the MPO shall appropriately involve the Federal land management agencies in the development of the metropolitan transportation plan and the TIP.

(e) MPOs shall, to the extent practicable, develop a documented process(es) that outlines roles, responsibilities, and key decision points for consulting with other governments and agencies, as defined in paragraphs (b), (c), and (d) of this section, which may be included in the agreement(s) developed under §450.314.

## **TITLE 49 PART 613 Planning Assistance and Standards**

### **Subpart A—Metropolitan Transportation Planning and Programming**

613.100 Metropolitan transportation planning and programming.

The regulations in 23 CFR 450, subpart C, shall be followed in complying with the requirements of this subpart. The definitions in 23 CFR 450, subpart A, shall apply. [72 FR 7285, Feb. 14, 2007]

### **Subpart B—Statewide Transportation Planning and Programming**

613.200 Statewide transportation planning and programming.

The regulations in 23 CFR 450, subpart B, shall be followed in complying with the requirements of this subpart. The definitions in 23 CFR 450, subpart A, shall apply. [72 FR 7285, Feb. 14, 2007]

### **Subpart C—Coordination of Federal and Federally Assisted Programs and Projects**

613.300 Coordination of Federal and federally assisted programs and projects.

The coordination of Federal and federally assisted programs and projects implementing OMB revised Circular No. A-95, which are set forth in 23 CFR Part 420, subpart C, are incorporated into this subpart. [41 FR 33443, Aug. 9, 1976]

## **Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) SEC. 1203. Metropolitan Planning**

### **(a) General Requirements**

(4) PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT.—The process for developing the plans and programs shall provide for consideration of all modes of transportation and shall be continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive to the degree appropriate, based on the complexity of the transportation problems to be addressed.’’.

## **23 USC 135 Statewide Transportation Planning**

### **(e) Long-Range Transportation Plan.—**

(3) Participation by interested parties.— In developing the long-range transportation plan, the State shall—

(A) provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, freight shippers, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transit, providers of freight transportation services, and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposed plan; and

### **(f) State Transportation Improvement Program.—**

#### **(1) Development.—**

(C) Participation by interested parties.— In developing the program, the Governor shall provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, freight shippers, private providers of transportation, providers of freight transportation services, representatives of users of public transit, and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposed program.

## **42 USC 2000d -Prohibition against exclusion from participation in, denial of benefits of, and discrimination under federally assisted programs on ground of race, color, or national origin.**

No person in the United States shall, on the ground of 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.

## **23 USC 134 Metropolitan Planning**

### **(g) Development of Long-Range Transportation Plan.—**

(4) Participation by interested parties.— Before approving a long-range transportation plan, each metropolitan planning organization shall provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transit, and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to



comment on the long-range transportation plan, in a manner that the Secretary deems appropriate

(h) Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program.—

(1) Development.—

(B) Opportunity for comment.— In developing the program, the metropolitan planning organization, in cooperation with the State and any affected public transit operator, shall provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transit, and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposed program.

(4) Notice and comment.— Before approving a transportation improvement program, a metropolitan planning organization shall, in cooperation with the State and any affected public transit operator, provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transit, and other interested parties with reasonable notice of and an opportunity to comment on the proposed program.

## APPENDIX B

### SAFETEA-LU Defined "INTERESTED PARTIES" By Type of Plan

This table shows that the *Long Range Statewide Transportation Plan*, the *STIP*, and the *Metropolitan Transportation Plan* each list the same interested parties, but in a different order. The *Metropolitan TIP* does not list the interested parties, but refers back to the *Metropolitan Transportation Plan* in 23 U.S.C. 134(g).

<b>23 U.S.C. 135 Statewide Transportation Planning</b>		<b>23 U.S.C. 134 Metropolitan Transportation Planning</b>	
<b>(e) LONG-RANGE STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION PLAN</b>	<b>(f) STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM</b>	<b>(g) DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSPORTATION PLAN</b>	<b>(h) METROPOLITAN TIP</b>
Citizens	Citizens	Citizens	Interested parties... in accordance with subsection (g)(4)
Affected public agencies	Affected public agencies	Affected public agencies	
Representatives of public transportation employees	Representatives of public transportation employees	Representatives of public transportation employees	
Freight shippers	Freight shippers	Freight shippers	
Private providers of transportation	Private providers of transportation	Providers of freight transportation services	
Representatives of users of public transportation.	Providers of freight transportation services	Private providers of transportation	
Representatives of users of pedestrian walkways & bicycle transportation. facilities	Representatives of users of public transportation.	Representatives of users of public transportation.	
Representatives of the disabled	Representatives of users of pedestrian walkways & bicycle transportation. facilities	Representatives of users of pedestrian walkways & bicycle transportation. facilities	
Providers of freight transportation services	Representatives of the disabled	Representatives of the disabled	
Other interested parties	Other interested parties	Other interested parties	

## APPENDIX C

### TIP/STIP Amendment Categories from Seacoast MPO Prospectus

*Certain amendments under the following general categories may, upon written request and at the discretion of the MPO, be made to the TIP without requiring a public participation process. Such projects shall include only ones which are exempt from air quality conformity determination under provisions of the Clean Air Act Amendment of 1990 and 40 CFR 93.134 and which are otherwise minor in nature, both in terms of scope and potential negative impact.*

#### Safety

- *Railroad/highway crossing.*
- *Hazard elimination project.*
- *Shoulder improvements.*
- *Increasing sight distance.*
- *Traffic control devices and operating assistance other than signalization projects.*
- *Railroad/highway crossing warning devices.*
- *Guardrails, median barriers on divided highways, crash cushions.*
- *Pavement resurfacing and/or rehabilitation.*
- *Pavement marking.*
- *Emergency relief.*
- *Fencing.*
- *Skid treatments.*
- *Truck climbing lanes outside the urbanized area.*
- *Lighting improvements.*
- *Widening narrow pavements or reconstructing bridges (no additional travel lanes).*
- *Emergency truck pullovers.*

#### Other

- *Specific activities which do not involve or lead directly to construction, such as: 1) planning and technical activities; 2) grants for training and research programs; and 3) federal-aid systems revisions.*
- *Engineering to assess social, economic and environmental effects of the proposed action or alternatives to that action.*

**APPENDIX D**

**ADOPTING RESOLUTION**

**RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN FOR THE SEACOAST METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

WHEREAS, the urban transportation planning process is required to have a PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN which delineates currently valid organizational responsibilities, operating procedures, and a summary of the planning program; and

WHEREAS, the PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN establishes the multi-year framework within which the Unified Planning Work Program for transportation planning in the Seacoast MPO Study Area is accomplished; and

WHEREAS, the responsibilities for cooperatively carrying out the urban transportation planning process are clearly defined in the PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN and via executed agreements or memorandum of understanding attached to the PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The Strafford Regional and Rockingham Planning Commissions adopt the PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN dated \_\_\_\_\_, 2007.

The undersigned duly qualified Chairpersons of the Rockingham Planning Commission and Strafford Regional Planning Commission hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of a resolution, adopted at legally convened meeting of the Seacoast MPO Policy Committee held on the following date:

For Rockingham Planning Commission

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

For Strafford Regional Planning Commission

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

