



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN, 2015

www.gsats.org

This Public Participation Plan was prepared by the GSATS Policy Committee and partially funded by the Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments and its member governments. It was developed in cooperation with the North Carolina Department of Transportation and South Carolina Department of Transportation and financed in part through a grant(s) from the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, under the State Planning and Research Program, Section 505 [or Metropolitan Planning Program], Section 104(f) of Title 23, U.S. Code. The contents of this report do not necessarily reflect the official views or policy of the U.S. Department of Transportation.



RESOLUTION
of the
GRAND STRAND AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY POLICY COMMITTEE
Resolution No. 2015-03

SUMMARY:

This Resolution approves the *GSATS' Public Participation Plan, 2015*. Upon approval, this document replaces the public participation process adopted in 2007.

PREAMBLE:

WHEREAS, the Policy Committee of the Grand Strand Area Transportation Study is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Myrtle Beach – Socastee SC/NC Urbanized Area;

WHEREAS, 23 CFR 450.316 requires that each MPO develop a Public Participation Plan (PPP) to ensure that all stakeholders have a reasonable opportunity to be involved in the metropolitan transportation planning process;

WHEREAS, the *GSATS' Public Participation Process* was adopted in 2007; and

WHEREAS, it is necessary and beneficial to amend the PPP to incorporate information on the North Carolina portion of the study area and to reflect the latest transportation legislation (MAP-21) and applicable guidance;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GRAND STRAND AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY POLICY COMMITTEE:

The *GSATS' Public Participation Plan, 2015* as attached hereto is approved.

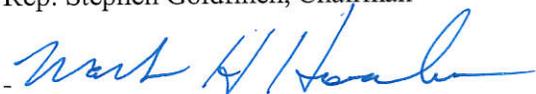
THIS RESOLUTION WAS APPROVED BY THE GRAND STRAND AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY POLICY COMMITTEE ON JUNE 26TH 2015.



Rep. Stephen Goldfinch, Chairman

3 SEPT. 2015
Date

Attested By:



Mark H. Hoeweler, GSATS MPO Director

9/3/15
Date

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
I. BACKGROUND	1
II. FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS	2
Planning Factors	2
Public Participation	3
Accessibility and Nondiscrimination	3
III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS	4
General Guidelines	4
Public Participation Plan Vision, Goals & Policies	5
IV. CURRENT PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES	8
Charrettes	8
Consultation	8
Display Ads	8
Direct Mailings	8
Email Announcements/Internet Message Boards	9
Legal Advertisements	9
MPO Master Database	9
MPO Website	9
Public Informational Meetings	10
Public Notices	10
Small Group Meetings	10
Title VI & Environmental Justice	10
Visualization	11
V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION POLICIES AND GUIDELINES	12
Public Document Review, Comment, and Approval Policies	12
Amendments – Public Document Review, Comment, and Approval Policies	12
Public Meeting Guidelines	12
VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION	13
Annual Newsletter	13
Comment Forms	14
Fact Sheets	14
Press Releases	14
Surveys	14
Project-Specific Websites	14
Project-Specific Newsletters	15
Other Newsletters	15
MPO Logo	15
Formal Public Hearings	15
Government Access Television	16
Posters and Fliers	16
VII. EVALUATION METHODS, PERFORMANCE GOALS, AND IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES	17
GLOSSARY OF TERMS	18

This Page Left Intentionally Blank

INTRODUCTION

The Grand Strand Area Transportation Study's (GSATS) policy is to support and encourage public participation and to adhere to the principles of Environmental Justice in the metropolitan planning process. GSATS' public participation policy is designed to ensure opportunities for the public to express its views on transportation issues and to become active participants in the decision-making process.

The processes and guidance provided by this plan are presented as the minimum activities/standards that GSATS will employ to facilitate public participation. Where warranted, the GSATS Policy Committee or the MPO Director may provide for additional measures, i.e. public meetings in excess of the minimum, extended comments periods, notifications, et cetera, when warranted to maximize opportunities for public involvement.

SECTION I. BACKGROUND

The Grand Strand Area Transportation Study was formed in 1985 to provide a forum for the coordination of regional transportation efforts in northeastern coastal South Carolina. In 1992, GSATS was designated as the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Myrtle Beach Urbanized Area (UZA). The UZA was later renamed the Myrtle Beach – Socastee SC/NC UZA and, in 2013, GSATS' Study Area was expanded to include portions of southern Brunswick County, North Carolina. Geographically, the study area now extends from the Lockwood Folly River in North Carolina to the City of Georgetown in South Carolina. From the Atlantic Ocean, the study area extends westward to include the US 701 corridor and City of Conway in South Carolina and the US 17 corridor and Town of Shallotte in North Carolina. The study area is illustrated on Map Exhibit 1-1.

The principal responsibilities of the MPO include the development of a Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), and related planning studies and projects deemed necessary to address transportation issues in the study area. Local transportation needs are re-evaluated annually. Based on this evaluation, project priorities are established and made part of the GSATS TIP. This information is forwarded to the department of transportation for the applicable state for inclusion into the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

By federal law, all multi-modal transportation improvement projects must be included in and consistent (to the maximum extent feasible) with the LRTP in order to be eligible for federal funding. As such, the LRTP is the primary plan that guides all federally funded transportation improvements in the study area.

GSATS' primary decision making body is the Policy Committee. The committee consists of twenty-four members representing Myrtle Beach, North Myrtle Beach, Surfside Beach, Conway, Georgetown, Atlantic Beach, Briarcliffe Acres, Pawleys Island, Horry County, Georgetown County, the Horry County Legislative Delegation, the Georgetown County Legislative Delegation, the South Carolina Department of Transportation, the Waccamaw Regional Transportation Authority, Brunswick County, the North Carolina Transportation Advisory Committee (NCTAC), and the North Carolina Department of Transportation. This Board meets regularly to establish transportation policies and evaluate transportation needs for the region.

The work of the Policy Committee is supported by three standing committees: the GSATS South Carolina Study Team (Study Team), the GSATS North Carolina Technical Coordinating Committee (NCTCC), and the GSATS North Carolina Transportation Advisory Committee (NCTAC). The Study Team and NCTCC are made up of state, county and city planning, engineering, and administrative staff which provide technical expertise in the development of transportation plans and programs for the study area. The NCTAC is composed of primarily elected officials from the North Carolina member jurisdictions which provide guidance and make recommendations to the Policy Committee. For select issues impacting the North Carolina portion of the study area, the NCTAC may exercise decision making authority for the MPO. Each Committee may also appoint ad hoc committees (working groups) to oversee MPO planning projects or studies.

The Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments (WRCOG) is a public agency created by the counties of Horry, Georgetown, and Williamsburg as enabled by the South Carolina Code of Laws. The agency was organized in 1969 and has been providing planning, management and technical assistance to its member governments and local transit service providers since its inception. WRCOG serves as the lead planning and administrative agency for the MPO and provides necessary support staff. The MPO staff consists of a director, professional planners, and support personnel. Routinely, the committees, along with the MPO staff, provide recommendations to the Policy Committee regarding short and long range planning, implementation of projects, and related issues.

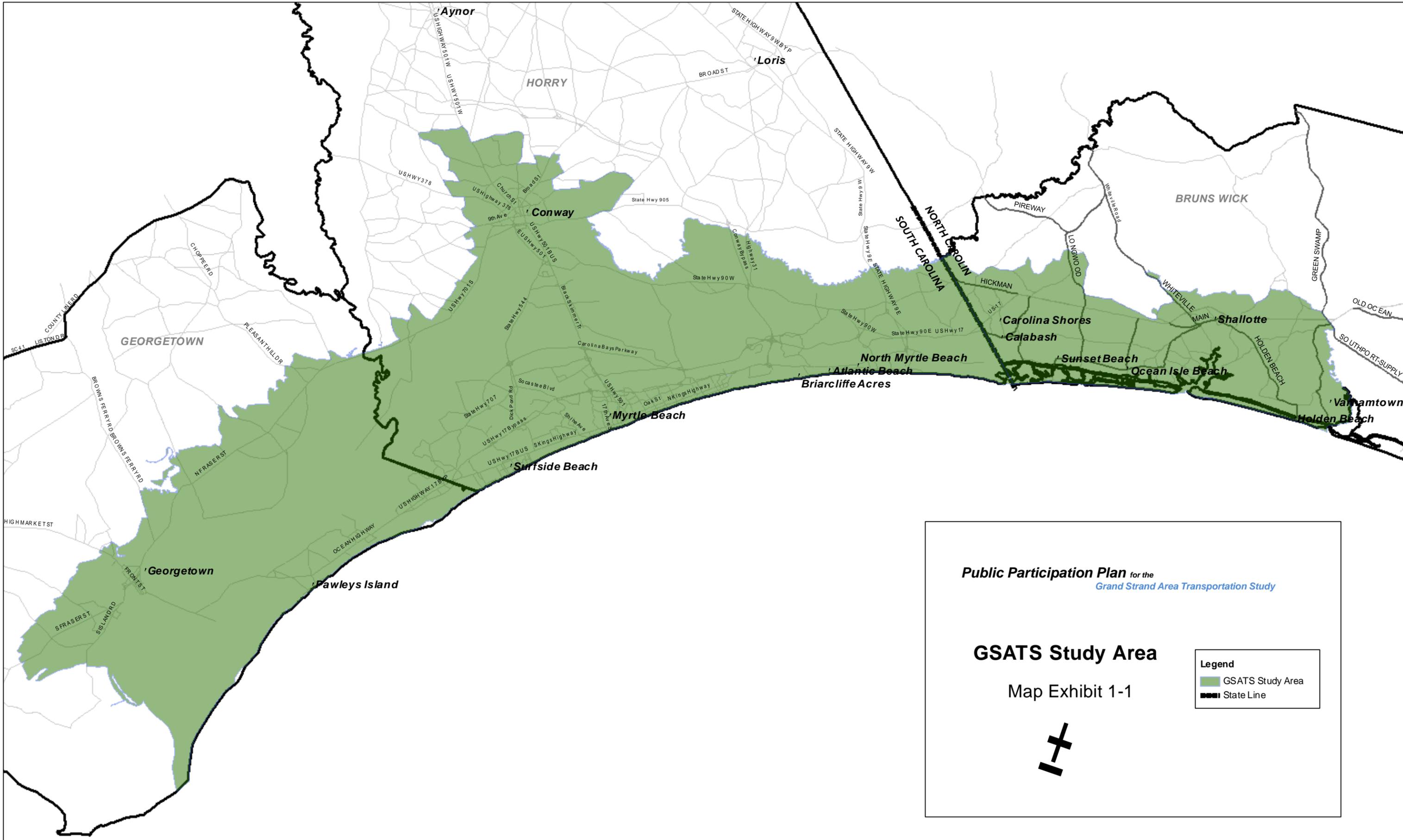
SECTION II. FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

Planning Factors

Transportation planning at the statewide and MPO levels should incorporate or consider various factors or objectives. The most recent transportation act, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), retains the eight planning factors contained in the previous transportation act, SAFETEA-LU. These include:

- Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
- Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
- Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
- Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and for freight;
- Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns;
- Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight;
- Promote efficient system management and operation; and
- Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

As MPOs develop and adopt long-range transportation plans and other transportation documents, they must consider these planning factors.



Public Participation Plan for the
Grand Strand Area Transportation Study

GSATS Study Area

Map Exhibit 1-1

Legend

- GSATS Study Area
- State Line

GSAATS

The Grand Strand Area Transportation Study



Public Participation

Federal law also requires that metropolitan planning organizations develop and implement processes for encouraging public participation. These requirements are found in 23 CFR 450.316 and include:

- 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;
- Providing timely notice and reasonable access to information about transportation issues and processes;
- Employing visualization techniques to describe metropolitan transportation plans and TIPs;
- Making public information (technical information and meeting notices) available in electronically accessible formats and means, such as the World Wide Web;
- Holding any public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times;
- Demonstrating explicit consideration and response to public input received during the development of the metropolitan transportation plan and the TIP;
- 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;
- 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 involvement efforts;
- Coordinating with the statewide transportation planning public involvement and consultation processes; and
- Periodically reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures and strategies contained in the participation plan to ensure a full and open participation process.

Accessibility and Nondiscrimination

In addition to MAP-21 requirements, several laws and executive orders have a direct bearing on transportation planning and the need for a proactive public participation process. These include, but are not limited to:

The Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) provides that “no qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity.” MPOs must ensure that sites for public participation and related meetings are accessible.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, along with subsequent legislation, provides that “no person shall on the grounds of race, color, and national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal funds. The entire institution, whether educational, private or governmental must comply with Title VI and related federal civil rights laws, not just the program or activity receiving federal funds.”

Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, 1994, states that “each federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations.”

Executive Order 13155, Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency, 2000, requires that the recipients of federal financial aid must ensure that the programs and activities normally provided in English are accessible to persons with limited English proficiency.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

General Guidelines

This Public Participation Plan (PPP) is intended to provide direction for public participation activities to be conducted by GSATS. In general, it is intended by this process that GSATS will:

1. Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agencies, 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 and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs, and projects (including but not limited to local jurisdictional concerns).
2. Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of the LRTP, TIP, CMP, UPWP, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects, and conduct open public meetings where matters related to transportation programs are being considered. Such access would also include, if necessary, the conversion of the key planning documents into Spanish (or other language).
3. Give adequate public notice of public participation activities and allow time for public review and comment at key decision points, including but not limited to, the approval of the LRTP, TIP, CMP, UPWP, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects. If the final draft of any transportation plan differs significantly from the one available for public comment by GSATS and raises new material issues, which

interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen, there shall be an additional opportunity for public comment.

4. Respond in writing to all applicable public input. When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft transportation plan (including the financial plan) as a result of the public participation process, a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments shall be made part of the final plan.
5. Solicit the needs of those traditionally under-served by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to minorities, elderly, persons with disabilities, persons with limited English proficiency, and low-income households.
6. Provide a public comment period of 45 calendar days prior to the adoption of the GSATS Public Participation Plan and/or any amendments for the groups listed in Item 1 above. Notice of the 45-day comment period will be advertised in a newspaper of general circulation, minority community newspapers, and various other publications prior to the commencement of the 45-day comment period and on GSATS' website. Notice will also be mailed to the entire GSATS mailing list prior to the commencement of the 45-day comment period.
7. Provide a public comment period of not less than 30 calendar days prior to adoption of the LRTP, TIP, CMP UPWP, Transit Development Plans, any amendments or updates, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects.
8. Coordinate its Public Participation Plan with statewide public participation processes wherever possible to enhance public consideration of the issues, plans and programs, and reduce redundancies and costs.
9. Periodically review the Public Participation Plan to ensure it provides full and open access to all. Portions of the process which are found not to meet the needs of the constituency will be revised.

Public Participation Plan Vision, Goals & Policies

The vision for the public participation plan is that the public will be provided thorough information on transportation planning services and project development in a convenient and timely manner. To this end, the Policy Committee has established the following goals.

Goal 1: To actively engage the public in the transportation planning process according to the policies contained in federal and state law as well as in this document.

- A. GSATS shall maintain an up-to-date database of contacts including at a minimum the following persons:
 - o Federal, state, local agencies responsible for planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, freight

movements, land use management, natural resources, and historic preservation;

- Elected officials;
- Local government staff;
- Transportation agencies (freight, port, airports, transit, etc.);
- Representatives of users of public transportation;
- Representatives of users of pedestrian and bicycle transportation;
- Representatives of the disabled;
- Local media;
- Homeowners' associations;
- Civic groups;
- Special interest groups;
- GSATS area public libraries (for public display); and
- Individuals expressing an interest in transportation planning activities.

B. GSATS shall, when feasible, electronically send and/or mail meeting announcements (invitations) to GSATS' contact list or to targeted groups upcoming activities.

C. GSATS shall employ visualization techniques to depict transportation plans. Examples of visualization techniques include: charts, graphs, photo interpretation, maps, use of GIS, artist's renderings, physical models, and/or computer simulation.

Goal 2: GSATS shall keep the public informed of on-going transportation related activities on a continuous basis.

A. GSATS shall make all publications and work products available to the public via internet, staff office, and employ visualization techniques to describe transportation actions as part of the LRTP.

B. Staff shall be available to provide general and project-specific information at a central location during normal business hours and after hours at the request of groups such as homeowners' associations with reasonable notice.

C. GSATS shall maintain a transportation section on the WRCOG website.

1. The website shall be updated and maintained to provide the most current information available.
2. The website shall, at a minimum, contain the following information:
 - Current MPO staff contact information (i.e. name, title, mailing address, phone, fax, and e-mail);
 - Meeting calendars and agendas;
 - Brief descriptions of current projects;
 - Work products and publications (TIP, LRTP, CMP, UPWP, Bylaws, PPP, ALOP);
 - Comment/Question form; and
 - Links to related agencies (e.g. NCDOT, SCDOT, and COAST).

Goal 3: GSATS shall encourage the participation of all citizens in the transportation planning process.

- A. Target audiences shall be identified for each planning study conducted by GSATS, including residents, businesses and property owners, and those traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations, including but not limited to low income and minority households within the study area.
- B. GSATS shall, whenever feasible, hold public meetings at a scheduled time, location, and building facility convenient to potentially affected citizens.
- C. GSATS will provide an additional opportunity for public comments if the final LRTP or TIP differs significantly from the version that was initially made available for public comment.

Goal 4: GSATS shall strive to continuously improve public participation.

- A. GSATS shall continuously evaluate public participation techniques according to the procedures contained in this Public Participation Plan.
- B. The Public Participation Plan shall be reviewed and adopted, with revisions if necessary, at least every three (3) years.

Goal 5: GSATS shall participate in public participation activities for individual transportation improvement projects from the planning phase through construction.

- A. GSATS shall actively assist NCDOT, SCDOT, local governments and transportation agencies in the development and implementation of public participation techniques for planning and other studies, including major investment studies and project development and environmental studies.

IV. CURRENT PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES

Furthering public participation is an ongoing activity of the MPO. An effective public participation process is characterized by techniques and procedures that enable citizens to become well informed and to have meaningful input in transportation planning and project development. This section contains descriptions of public participation tools which GSATS currently uses and anticipates using in the future. These tools include:

Charrettes

Description: Charrettes are typically intense, possibly multi-day meetings involving municipal officials, planning officials, and local residents. A charrette is instrumental in identifying key issues early, promotes joint ownership of the solution, and attempts to diffuse traditional confrontation between stakeholders.

Activities: Project specific meetings, corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, and workshops.

Consultation

Description: As part of MAP-21 regulations encouraging more cooperative planning, GSATS will consult, as appropriate, with agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities that are affected by transportation within GSATS' study area. To coordinate the planning function to the maximum extent practicable, such consultation will entail comparing LRTPs and TIPs as they are developed with the plans, maps, inventories, and planning documents developed by other agencies. This consultation will include, as appropriate, contact with the following groups: State, local, Indian Tribal, and private agencies responsible for planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, freight movements, land use management, natural resources consideration, and historic preservation. GSATS maintains an open consultation policy, whereby any private citizen or entity responsible for transportation in GSATS' study area may contact the MPO Director and be included in the consultation process.

Activities: Public hearings/meetings, copies of this plan on GSATS' website (for viewing/downloading purposes), meetings with GSATS' staff.

Display Ads

Description: These ads are used to promote meetings that are not regularly scheduled, such as corridor study workshops. They are published in the local section of the newspaper in order to reach a larger audience than those that typically read legal ads.

Activities: Project specific meetings, workshops, open houses or hearings.

Direct Mailings

Description: Direct Mailings are used to announce upcoming meetings or activities or to provide information to a targeted area, group of people, or the media. Direct

mailings are usually letters, but can be postcards or fliers. An area may be targeted for a direct mailing because of potential impacts from a project. Groups are targeted that may have an interest in a specific issue, for example avid cyclists and pedestrians may be targeted for pathways and trail projects.

Activities: Project specific meetings, workshops, open houses, corridor studies, small-area studies, other planning studies or major activities.

Email Announcements/Internet Message Boards

Description: Meeting announcements and MPO information are e-mailed to interested persons that have submitted their e-mail addresses to GSATS' staff. Interactive message boards can be used to facilitate discussion and solicit public comment regarding specific MPO projects or issues.

Activities: Corridor studies, small-area studies, other planning studies, regular meetings, public hearings, workshops, open houses, and other major MPO activities.

Legal Advertisements

Description: GSATS provides advanced notice of any public meeting where a decision could be made that would make a significant change to an existing plan or program (see Section V for noticing requirements). Ads are published to solicit public comment and review of the requested change or plan update. The ads provide a description of the meeting agenda, including contact information.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, project priority process, major TIP amendments, updates of the LRTP and UPWP, and other major MPO activities.

MPO Master Database

Description: Staff maintains a master database of all contacts, both business and public, on a continuous basis. The database includes committee membership, mailing information, phone numbers, fax numbers, and e-mail addresses. The database is used for maintaining up-to-date committee membership lists and lists of individual with a special interest in GSATS' activities including the media and public interest groups. Membership mailing lists generated using the database are provided to the public, municipalities and other agencies upon request. The database will be used to establish and maintain a list of e-mail contacts for electronic meeting notification and announcements.

Activities: The database is used to enhance other public participation activities.

MPO Website

Description: The MPO's website address is www.gsats.org. The site provides information on the MPO process, GSATS' members, and staff contact information. MPO publications and work products, such as the UPWP, TIP, LRTP, CMP, PPP, ALOP, recent Policy Committee minutes, agendas and meeting notices, and

interactive maps are available for downloading from the site. Also, citizens are able to submit comments and sign up to be added to GSATS' distribution lists. The site provides links to other transportation related sites from the local to the national level. The site is maintained and updated by WRCOG staff. A link to the MPO's website is also found within WRCOG's website, under "Transportation Planning." The website address is www.wrcog.org/transportation-planning/

Activities: The site is used to promote regular and special meetings, planning studies, publications and work products.

Public Informational Meetings

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

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, project priority process, certification review, LRTP update, and other major MPO activities.

Public Notices

Description: The MPO advertises public comment periods and notices all GSATS Policy Committee meetings.

Activities: Regular and special meetings and other public meetings.

Small Group Meetings

Description: During projects such as planning studies, meetings are held with small groups that have an interest in the project. Meetings could be with homeowners or neighborhood associations, civic groups, special interest groups, or other groups of affected or interested parties.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, and other MPO activities.

Title VI & Environmental Justice Review

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in federally assisted programs and activities on the basis of race, color, and national origin. In 1994, Presidential Executive Order 12898 directed every federal agency to make Environmental Justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing the effects of all programs, policies, and activities on "minority populations and low-income populations." In complying with the aforementioned federal laws and policies, the MPO's Environmental Justice initiatives will strive to involve the potentially affected public through a Public Outreach Program. This program consists of MPO staff activities designed to develop partnerships with, and enhance their participation in the transportation planning process, by groups and individuals of "traditionally underserved" communities. These communities include minorities, low income, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Staff activities include, but are not limited to, MPO staff participation in groups and coalitions serving within these communities, targeted communications with local media outlets,

conducting meetings at times and locations that are accessible to transit dependent or non-driving individuals when possible, and publication of MPO documents in non-technical, accessible formats when needed. The goal of the MPO's Public Outreach Program is to ensure that all citizens, regardless of race, color, religion, income status, national origin, age, gender, disability, marital status, or political affiliation, have an equal opportunity to participate in the MPO's decision-making process.

Description: GSATS will take reasonable steps to ensure that all persons, including those with a disability or language barrier, have meaningful opportunities to participate in the transportation planning and programming process, and will strive to address environmental justice issues at all stages of the planning process. This includes implementing the following strategies to reduce participation barriers for under-served groups and engage them in the decision-making process:

- Representatives of minority, disability, low-income and limited English proficiency groups will be identified and included in MPO mailings.
- Key planning documents will be translated and public notices broadcasted for Spanish-speaking populations upon request.
- Whenever possible, meetings will be held at locations accessible to persons with disabilities, bus riders, and bicyclists and that are convenient to neighborhoods with a concentration of minority and low-income persons.
- Where meeting facilitators are used, GSATS will seek to use persons that represent the diversity of the community and/or have expertise in working with under-served groups.
- Translators/interpreters will be provided for meetings, if requested.

GSATS has developed a Title VI plan in addition to the public participation activities provided above; references should be made to GSATS' Title VI Plan to ensure compliance with applicable requirements and to enhance, to the greatest degree possible, the meaningful engagement of all stakeholders.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, LRTP update and other major MPO activities.

Visualization

Description: GSATS recognizes that an important element of public participation is to provide the public, when possible, visual as well as written descriptions of transportation projects. Through visual imagery, the complex features of proposed transportation plans, policies, and programs can be portrayed at appropriate scales—region, local, project architecture, etc.—and from different points of view. To this end, GSATS will utilize various visual and architectural design techniques; some of which may include: sketches, drawings, artist renderings, aerial photography, mapping, simulated photos, videos, computer modeled images, interactive geographical information system (GIS), GIS-based scenario planning tools, photo manipulation, and computer simulation.

Activities: Planning Studies, TIP amendments, and other MPO activities.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

In keeping with its public participation goals, GSATS is committed to providing the public and transportation stakeholders with ample opportunity to provide input in the planning process. The tables below provide a summary of GSATS' plan adoption and amendment, noticing, and meeting policies.

A. Public Document Review, Comment, and Approval Policies

Program Adoption	Public Meetings*	Comment Period	Accessibility
Long Range Transportation Plan	4 Meetings at various locations and times	30 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Transportation Improvement Program	4 Meetings at various locations and times	30 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Congestion Management Process	4 Meetings at various locations and times	30 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Unified Planning Work Program	As requested	30 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office
Public Participation Plan	As requested	45 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Other DOT Required Plans, Programs, or Processes where Policy Committee Approval is Needed	As requested	30 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Note: In cases where a plan, program, or process applies to the entirety of the study area (NC and SC), at least one of the required public meetings must be held in North Carolina.			

B. Amendments - Public Document Review, Comment, and Approval Policies

Program Amendment Adoption	Public Meetings	Comment Period	Accessibility
Long Range Transportation Plan	As requested	30 Days	Internet & WRCOG Office
Transportation Improvement Program*	As requested	30 Days	Internet & WRCOG Office
Congestion Management Process	As requested	30 Days	Internet & WRCOG Office
Unified Planning Work Program*	As requested	15 Days	Internet & WRCOG Office
Public Participation Plan	As requested	45 Days	Internet & WRCOG Office
Other DOT Required Plans, Programs, or Processes where Policy Committee Approval is Needed	As requested	30 Days	Internet & WRCOG Office
* Amendments only. Administrative corrections and non-guideshare modifications, with the concurrence of DOT and in accordance with established DOT policies, may be authorized by the MPO Director.			

C. Public Meeting Guidelines

Open Meetings	Location	Time*	Accessibility
Policy Committee	Surfside Town Hall -or- Other Regional Facility	10:00 AM Monday or Friday	ADA accessible building; translation and other special needs upon request
NC-Transportation Advisory Committee	Carolina Shores Town Hall -or- Other Regional Facility (NC)	10:00 AM Various days Monday to Friday	ADA accessible building; translation and other special needs upon request
SC-Study Team	Myrtle Beach City Hall -or- Other Regional Facility (SC) -or- Via Conference Call	10:30 AM Various days Monday to Friday	ADA accessible building; translation and other special needs upon request
NC-Technical Coordinating Committee	Carolina Shores Town Hall -or- Other Regional Facility (NC) -or- Via Conference Call	10:00 AM Various days Monday to Friday	ADA accessible building; translation and other special needs upon request
Ad Hoc Working Group	Various Regional Facility as decided by	Various times and days	ADA accessible building; translation and other special
* Meeting times may be modified by the committees when advance notice is provided.			

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

GSATS has periodically used additional techniques to enhance public participation. These techniques as well as others to be used and/or considered include:

Annual Newsletter

Description: GSATS' staff produces an annual newsletter that is distributed to citizens, municipalities, media and other agencies. Citizens are added to the distribution list by their own request.

Opportunities to request being added to the list occur during public meetings hosted by GSATS, on GSATS' web site, and when citizens contact GSATS' staff. Each issue of the newsletter includes staff contact information, upcoming meeting schedules, GSATS' web site address, project highlights, and current planning project status reports. When appropriate, information regarding

significant transportation issues, MPO awards, and other one-time activities are also included.

Activities: The newsletter is used to report planning studies, publications, and work products from the past year.

Comment Forms

Description: Comment forms are often used to solicit public input on specific issues being presented at a workshop or other public meeting. Comment forms can be very general in nature or can ask for very specific feedback. For example, a form may ask for comments on specific alignment alternatives being considered during a corridor study or may ask for a person's general feelings about any aspect of transportation. Comment forms can also be included in publications and on websites to solicit input regarding the subject of the publication and/or the format of the publication or website.

Activities: Public workshops, open houses, hearings and other meetings, and general MPO activities.

Fact Sheets

Description: Fact sheets will be used to provide summary information regarding MPO policy, programs, and projects. Fact sheets can be distributed at public meetings, on GSATS' website, and in public places such as libraries and community centers. Individuals and special interest groups can request fact sheets directly from GSATS' staff.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub -area studies, other planning studies, project priorities process, updates to the LRTP, CMP and TIP, and other MPO activities.

Press Releases

Description: Formal press releases are sent to local media (newspaper, TV and radio) to announce upcoming special meetings and activities and to provide information on specific issues being considered by the MPO or their committees.

Activities: Specific corridor or other planning studies, workshops, open houses, public hearings, and other special MPO activities.

Surveys

Description: Surveys are used when very specific input from the public is desired. A survey can be used in place of comment cards to ask very specific questions such as whether a person supports a specific alignment in a corridor study. Surveys are also used to gather technical data during corridor and planning studies. For example, participants may be asked about their daily travel patterns.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, and other planning studies.

Project-specific Web Sites

Description: For individual projects, such as corridor studies, that are typically performed using consulting services, project-specific websites are often used. These sites are used when project information is too extensive to be included on GSATS' website. Project websites can contain study area maps, meeting announcements, descriptions of potential alternatives, comment forms, user surveys, and project team contact information.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, and major MPO projects.

Project-specific Newsletters

Description: For individual projects, such as corridor studies, that are typically performed using consulting services, newsletters are often used to address specific project issues. These newsletters are mailed to targeted residents, elected officials representing that area, businesses and property owners in the area that are expected to be impacted by a particular study. Information regarding upcoming project meetings, alternatives being proposed in the area, and other project news is reported in these newsletters.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies or major MPO activities.

Other Newsletters

Description: When project-specific newsletters are not used, articles may be prepared for publication in other newsletters produced by municipalities, homeowners' associations, church groups, civic groups, or others that may have an interest in the project. These articles are subject to the publication dates and space restrictions of the individual publishers.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, and other planning studies or major activities.

MPO Logo

Description: A logo representing the MPO is used to identify products and publications of the MPO. A logo helps the public become familiar with the different activities of the MPO by providing a means of recognizing MPO products.

Activities: A logo should be used on all MPO publications including those developed by consultants working on MPO sponsored projects.

Formal Public Hearings

Description: These are meetings used to solicit public comment on a project or issue being considered for adoption by the MPO. Hearings provide a formal setting for citizens to provide comments to the MPO or another decision-making body. The MPO maintains a roster of attendees and minutes of the hearing.

Activities: LRTP and TIP updates, corridor studies, project development & environmental studies, and other planning studies as needed for other MPO activities.

Government Access Television

Description: The local cable network provider, as part of basic cable service, maintains local channels of government and business advertisements. Government Access Television can broadcast rolling message scripts and regular and special meetings, both live and pre-recorded, as well as short informative programs about departmental activities or projects of interest to the entire population.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, and regular or special MPO activities.

Posters and Fliers

Description: Posters and fliers are used to announce meetings and events and are distributed to public places such as city halls, libraries, and community centers for display. The announcement may contain a brief description of the purpose of a meeting, the time(s) and location(s), and contact information. Posters and fliers may be used to reach a large audience that cannot be reached using direct mailings and/or newsletters.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, and regular or special MPO activities.

VII. EVALUATION METHODS, PERFORMANCE GOALS, AND IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

In order to determine the effectiveness of the public participation tools, they must be evaluated and compared to established performance goals. The typical methods for evaluating the effectiveness of public participation tools are surveys and quantitative statistical analysis. This section briefly describes evaluation methods to be used by GSATS. For each public participation tool, performance goals and methods for meeting those goals have been identified.

Surveys: Surveys typically consist of short, specific questions regarding public participation tools that are ongoing or that were used on a specific project. Surveys can be conducted in person, by phone, mail, or e-mail. Face-to-face and telephone surveys provide quick responses and can be used when a respondent's answer may lead to a follow-up question. For example, respondents may be asked if advertisements are an effective notification tool. If the response is no, the surveyor can ask the respondent why advertisements are not effective and also what other tools they would prefer. In person and telephone surveys can target specific areas or groups or can be random sampling. Mail surveys may be used to provide written record of a respondent's answers. Mail-back surveys can be distributed at meetings, inside other publications, or by mailing directly to potential respondents. Respondents can be a targeted group, such as members of special interest groups or residents of specific areas, or they can be randomly generated. Return postage for mail surveys typically can be pre-paid by the MPO, or can be the responsibility of the respondent. E-mail surveys, like mail surveys, provide a written record of responses. Unlike mail-back surveys, there is little to no reproduction or distribution cost to the MPO to send out the surveys and little to no cost to respondents to return a response. To use e-mail surveys, it is necessary to have e-mail addresses for the targeted respondents and random distribution is not really an option. Surveys will be used to evaluate citizens' responses on the effectiveness of the tools.

Statistical Analysis: Statistics can be used to determine the "return on the investment" of producing public participation tools. For example, the number of persons attending an activity can be compared to the number of persons that were notified of the activity. This type of evaluation can be an indicator of whether or not the tools used for public participation are actually reaching the intended audience, or which tools had a greater response rate. Statistical analysis will be used to evaluate survey responses and most tools' rates of success will be compared with evaluation measures.

GSATS continually strives for improved public participation. Improvements should be made to increase public awareness and to enhance the quantity and quality of information provided to the public. The decisions made by GSATS affect the entire population, both residents and visitors. Therefore, seeking public input on those decisions is vital to the success of GSATS as the organization responsible for transportation planning. Within one month after the completion of an activity or at milestones during an activity, evaluation of public participation tool should occur. For ongoing activities, evaluation should occur at least quarterly. Each time a public participation evaluation is performed, a list of improvement strategies should be identified for implementation. If improvement is needed for an ongoing public participation task, a reasonable completion date should be established. If improvement is needed for one-time activities, such as corridor studies, the improvement should be implemented where appropriate on future activities.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The terms used in this plan have the meanings as prescribed below. Where terms are not defined, reference should be made to the definitions contained within the governing federal law or DOT guidelines.

Amendment- A significant change to the adopted Public Participation Plan, Long Range Transportation Plan, Transportation Improvement Program, Congestion Management Process, or Unified Planning Work Program. Amendments require additional opportunities for public involvement and approval by the Policy Committee.

Administrative

Modification- A correction or update to the Transportation Improvement Program or other MPO planning process that does not require Policy Committee approval or additional public involvement. Corrections do not include the addition or removal of projects, significant changes in project scope, or significant changes in cost. In determining whether a proposed change would constitute an amendment or correction, reference should be made to the latest DOT guidance. For TIP amendments or modifications (South Carolina), reference should be made to SCDOT guidance published on March 25, 2014 or the latest revision.

CMP- Congestion Management Process. A planning process required for Transportation Management Areas (TMAs) that seeks to locally define and assess the significance of congestion, formulates management strategies, and develops multimodal performance measures..

DOT- Department of Transportation. This term includes the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT), the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), and all agencies and divisions thereof.

Environmental

Justice- A federal policy that protects minority and low income populations from experiencing disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of federally-funded programs, policies, and activities.

FHWA- Federal Highway Administration. The USDOT agency that oversees the distribution of federal funds for the activities pertaining to road systems in each state.

FTA- Federal Transit Administration. The USDOT agency that oversees the distribution of federal funds for transit activities in each state.

GSATS- Grand Strand Area Transportation Study. The GSATS Policy Committee is the MPO for portions of Horry and Georgetown counties in South Carolina and the southeastern portion of Brunswick County in North Carolina.

LRTP- Long Range Transportation Plan (also called a Metropolitan Transportation Plan or MTP). A document resulting from collaboration and consensus that

serves as the defining vision for the area's transportation system. The plan indicates the transportation improvements scheduled for funding over the next twenty years and provides both long-range and short-range strategies/actions that lead to the development of an integrated multimodal transportation system.

MAP 21- Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21). This is the most recent transportation act. MAP-21 replaced SAFETEA-LU.

MPO- Metropolitan Planning Organization. A regional policy body, required in urbanized areas with populations over 50,000, and designated by local officials and the governor(s) of the affected state(s). MPOs, in cooperation with state(s) and other transportation providers, are responsible for carrying out the metropolitan transportation planning requirements of federal highway and transit legislation.

NCTAC- North Carolina Transportation Advisory Committee. An advisory committee consisting of elected and appointed officials that makes recommendations to the Policy Committee on issues impacting the North Carolina portion of the study area.

NCTCC- North Carolina Technical Coordinating Committee. A technical advisory committee that makes recommendations to the NCTAC. The NCTCC is composed of planning directors, town administrators, and other non-elected officials from the North Carolina portion of the study area.

Policy Committee- GSATS' governing board which is made up of twenty-four members with representation from area jurisdictions, NCDOT, SCDOT, and public transit providers.

Study Area- The geographic area in which the metropolitan planning process required by 23 U.S.C. 134 and section 8 of the Federal Transit Act (49 U.S.C. app. 1607) must be carried out. The study area is also called the Metropolitan Planning Area.

Study Team - A technical advisory committee that makes recommendations to the GSATS Policy Committee. The Study Team is composed of planning directors, city administrators, and other non-elected officials from the South Carolina portion of the study area.

TIP- Transportation Improvement Program. A document prepared by the MPO in coordination with the state that lists projects to be funded with FHWA/FTA funds for the next four or more years.

Title VI- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This act prohibits discrimination in any program receiving federal assistance.

UPWP- Unified Planning Work Program. The UPWP is the management plan for the MPO. It provides a description of tasks and required coordination activities to be undertaken by the transportation planning program.

This Page Left Intentionally Blank