



GRAND STRAND AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

AND

WACCAMAW REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

REVISION NUMBER	RURAL TECHNICAL COMMITTEE	TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE	TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE	STUDY TEAM	BOARD OF DIRECTORS	POLICY COMMITTEE	PUBLIC REVIEW & COMMENT
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STAFF REVIEW
09/25/2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>PAGE</u>	<u>SECTION</u>
1	Table of Contents
2	Terms and Definitions
5	Introduction
5	GSATS
6	WRCOG
9	Governmental Requirements
9	Planning Factors
10	Accessibility and Nondiscrimination
11	Public Participation Process
11	General Guidelines
12	Public Participation Plan Vision, Goals & Policies
15	Current Public Participation Techniques
19	Public Participation Policies and Guidelines
19	Program Adoption Approval Policies
20	Program Amendment Approval Policies
21	Public Meeting Guidelines
22	Public Participation Techniques for Future Consideration
25	Evaluation Methods and Improvement Strategies
25	Statistical Analysis

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The terms used in this plan are defined below. Where terms are not defined, reference should be made to the definitions contained within the governing federal law or Department of Transportation (DOT) guidelines.

Administrative Modification - A correction or update to an MPO or RPO planning document 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. Reference should be made to the latest DOT guidance in determining whether a proposed change would constitute an amendment or correction. For TIP amendments or modifications (South Carolina), reference should be made to SCDOT guidance published on March 25, 2014 or the latest revision.

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.

Annual List of Obligated Projects (ALOP) –A list all transportation projects in the MPO region for which federal funds were obligated during federal fiscal year.

Congestion Management Process (CMP) - 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.

Department of Transportation (DOT) - 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 (EJ)- 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.

Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) - The transportation act that had included additional requirements to those set forth in MAP-21.

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

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

Grand Strand Area Transportation Study (GSATS) - 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.

Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) - A long range transportation plan 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 (20) years and provides both long-range and short-range strategies/actions that lead to the development of an integrated multimodal transportation system in the rural planning area.

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) - 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.

Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) - A long range transportation plan 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 (20) years and provides both long-range and short-range strategies/actions that lead to the development of an integrated multimodal transportation system in the urban planning area.

Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) - The transportation act that replaced SAFETEA-LU.

Policy Committee - GSATS' governing board which is made up of twenty-four (24) members with representation from area jurisdictions, NCDOT, SCDOT, and public transit providers.

Rural Policy Committee - RPO's governing board. The WRCOG Board of Directors serves as the Rural Policy Committee.

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

Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) - A document prepared by SCDOT in coordination with the RPO's and MPOs that lists projects to be funded with FHWA/FTA funds for the next seven (7) or more years.

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 urban study area is also called the Metropolitan Planning Area and the rural study area is called the Rural 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.

Rural Planning Organization (RPO) - A regional policy body, required in rural planning areas and designated by local officials and the governor(s) of the affected state(s). RPOs, in cooperation with state(s) and other transportation providers, are responsible for carrying out the long range transportation planning requirements of federal highway and transit legislation. The WRCOG serves as the RPO for the three-county region.

Rural Technical Committee (RTC) - A technical advisory committee that makes recommendations to the Rural Planning Area Policy Committee. The RTC is composed of planning directors, city administrators, and other non-elected officials from the rural planning study area.

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

Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) - 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.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) - A document prepared by the MPO in coordination with the state that lists projects in the urbanized area to be funded with FHWA/FTA funds for the next seven (7) or more years. A **Rural TIP** is prepared by rural planning to identify projects in the rural planning area.

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

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) - 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.

INTRODUCTION

GSATS

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 (EJ) in the metropolitan planning process. The Public Participation Policy (PPP) 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 and standards that GSATS will employ to facilitate public participation. Where warranted, the GSATS Policy Committee or the Metropolitan Planning Organization (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.

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 MPO for the Myrtle Beach Urbanized Area (UZA). The UZA was later renamed the Myrtle Beach – Socastee SC/NC UZA. 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.

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 (24) 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 (NCDOT). 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 (3) 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.

WRCOG

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. The MPO staff and committees provide recommendations to the Policy Committee regarding short and long range planning, implementation of projects, and related issues.

The WRCOG Rural Planning Organization's (RPO) policy is to support and encourage public participation and to adhere to the principles of EJ in the rural planning process. The PPP describes how WRCOG will disseminate information regarding the rural transportation program. The RPO's 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.

Background

WRCOG is a regional public agency created by Horry, Georgetown, and Williamsburg counties, as enabled by state planning law. The agency provides planning, management, and technical assistance to its member governments and local transit service providers. South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) has designated WRCOG to serve as the RPO for the three-county region. The RPO is responsible for managing the area-wide transportation planning organization.

WRCOG's primary decision making body is the Board of Directors, which also serves as the Policy Committee for the RPO. The Board is comprised of twenty-five (25) members representing the local governments in the WRCOG region. This Board meets regularly to establish policies and evaluate the needs for the region. The rural transportation program work of the Board is supported

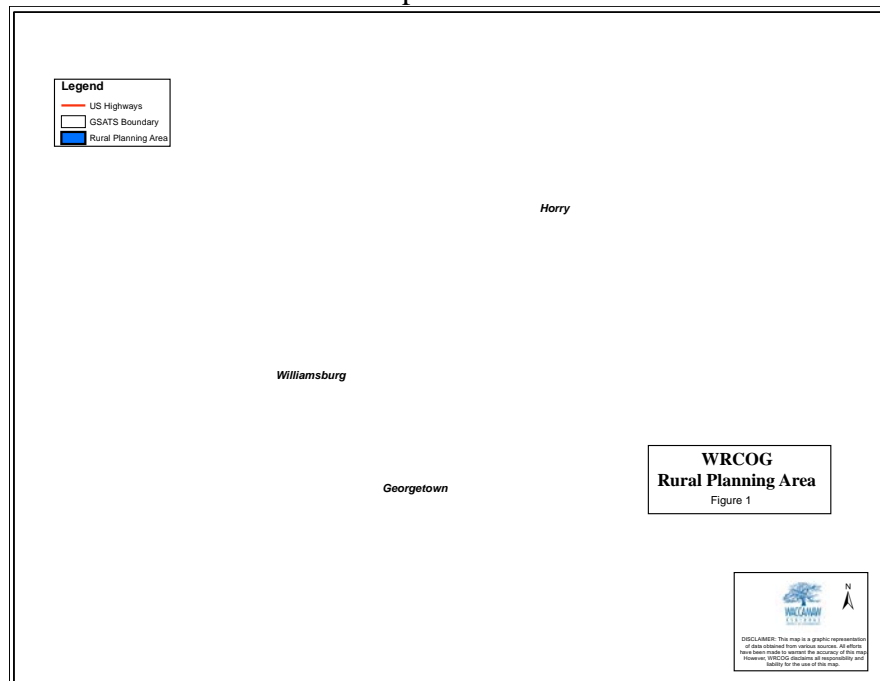
by RPO technical staff and the standing advisory committee referred to as the Rural Technical Committee (RTC).

The RPO technical staff consists of professional planners and administrative staff. The RTC is made up of state, county, and city planning and engineering staff, which provide technical expertise in the development of transportation plans and programs for the rural area. On an ongoing basis the RPO staff and RTC provide recommendations to the Board regarding short and long range planning, implementation of projects, and related issues. The Board may also appoint ad hoc committees (working groups) to oversee rural planning projects or studies. The Board and RTC operate under RPO bylaws approved by the Board.

The rural area is defined by the three-county region which is not contained within the GSATS boundary. The rural portion includes Southern and Western Georgetown County, Western Horry County and all of Williamsburg County. The local governments that fall into the rural area are: Andrews, Aynor, Greeleyville, Hemingway, Kingstree, Lane, Loris, and Stuckey. The study area is illustrated on Map Exhibit 2.

The principal responsibilities of the RPO include the development and maintenance of a Rural Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), a Rural Transportation Improvement Program (Rural TIP), a Rural Planning Work Program (RPWP), and related planning studies and projects deemed necessary to address transportation issues in the RPO area. Local transportation needs in the rural area are re-evaluated annually. Project priorities are established and made part of the Rural TIP based on this evaluation. This information is forwarded to SCDOT for inclusion into the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

Map Exhibit 2



By federal law, all multi-modal transportation improvement projects must be included in and be consistent with (to the maximum extent feasible) the RPO's RL RTP in order to be eligible for federal funding. Therefore, the Rural LRTP is the primary plan that guides all federally funded transportation improvements in the rural area.

GOVERNMENTAL REQUIREMENTS

PLANNING FACTORS

Based on federal guidance, transportation planning at the statewide level should incorporate or consider various factors or objectives. The most recent transportation act, Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, retains the eight (8) planning factors contained in the previous MAP 21 transportation act and has added two (2) factors to consider. These include:

1. Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
2. Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
3. Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
4. Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and for freight;
5. 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;
6. Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight;
7. Promote efficient system management and operation;
8. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system;
9. Improve resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate stormwater impacts on surface transportation; and
10. Enhance travel and tourism.

In addition to pursuing the ten (10) planning factors, PROs and MPOs are required to develop and adopt a long-range transportation plan, a transportation improvement program, and performance measures for safety and bridge/road conditions. In developing these documents, by federal statute, a reasonable opportunity for the public to comment must be provided.

Federal law also requires that MPOs and RPOs 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 long range 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 long range transportation plan or TIP differs significantly from the version that was made available for public comment by the MPO or RPO or raises new material issues for 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

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 Disabilities Act of 1990: 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 and RPO’s 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 (EJ) in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, 1994, states that “each federal agency shall make achieving EJ 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.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

GENERAL GUIDELINES

The GSATS/WRCOG PPP is intended to provide direction for public participation activities to be conducted by the MPO and RPO. The PPP contains the vision, goals, objectives, and techniques used by GSATS and WRCOG for public participation. GSATS and WRCOG will strive to:

- 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);
- Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of the long range transportation plans, TIPs, planning work programs, 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 languages);
- Provide 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 long range transportation plans, TIPs, planning work programs, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects. If the final draft of any transportation plan differs significantly or raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen, there shall be an additional opportunity for public comment;
- 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;
- 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;
- Provide a public comment period of forty-five (45) calendar days prior to the adoption of the Public Participation Plan for the groups listed in Item 1 above. Notice of the 45-day comment period will be advertised on the GSATS and WRCOG websites, at the public libraries, in a newspaper of general circulation, minority community publications, or radio announcement prior to the commencement of the 45-day comment period. Notice will also be sent to the MPO and RPO mailing lists prior to the commencement of the 45-day comment period;

- Provide a public comment period of not less than thirty (30) calendar days prior to final adoption of the long range transportation plans, TIPs, planning work programs, Transit Development Plans, any amendments or updates, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects;
- Coordinate the MPO and RPO public participation process with statewide public participation processes wherever possible to enhance public consideration of the issues, plans and programs, and reduce redundancies and costs;
- Periodically review the public participation process 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; and,

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 following goals and policies have been established.

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 Public Participation Plan.

- A. GSATS and WRCOG shall maintain a database of contacts including, at a minimum, the following persons:
 - a. Federal, state, and local agencies responsible for planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, freight movements, land use management, natural resources, and historic preservation;
 - b. Elected officials;
 - c. Local government staff;
 - d. Transportation agencies (freight, port, airports, transit, etc.);
 - e. Representatives of users of public transportation;
 - f. Representatives of users of pedestrian and bicycle transportation;
 - g. Representatives of the disabled;
 - h. Local media;
 - i. Home owners associations;
 - j. Civic groups;
 - k. Special interest groups;
 - l. GSATS and WRCOG area public libraries (for public display); and
 - m. Individuals expressing an interest in transportation planning activities.
- B. GSATS and WRCOG shall electronically send and/or mail meeting announcements (invitations) to the MPO or RPO mailing list or to targeted groups notifying them of upcoming activities.
- C. GSATS and WRCOG may 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 and WRCOG shall keep the public informed of on-going transportation related activities through the following methods:

- A. GSATS and WRCOG shall make all information and publications relating to the transportation program available to the public via the MPO or RPO website.
- 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 interested groups, with reasonable notice.
- C. GSATS and WRCOG shall maintain a transportation section on the GSATS and WRCOG websites.
 - a. The website shall be updated and maintained to provide the most current information available.
 - b. The website shall, at a minimum, contain the following information:
 - Current Technical 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, long range transportation plans, planning work program, Title VI Plan, EJ Plan, Bylaws, and PPP); and
 - Links to related agencies (e.g. SCDOT, NCDOT, Transit Operators).

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

- A. Target audiences shall be identified for each planning study conducted by the MPO or RPO. The target audience includes:
 - Residents
 - Business owners
 - Property ownersTarget Audience also includes traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations within the study area including:
 - Low-income households
 - Minority households
- B. GSATS and WRCOG shall, whenever feasible, hold public meetings at a scheduled time, location, and building facility convenient to potentially affected citizens.
- C. GSATS and WRCOG will provide an additional opportunity for public comments if the final long range transportation plans or TIPs differs significantly from the version that was initially made available for public comment.

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

- A. GSATS and WRCOG 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, revised if necessary, at least every three (3) years.

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

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

CURRENT PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES

Public participation is an ongoing activity of the MPO and RPO. An effective public participation process is characterized by techniques and procedures that enable citizens to become well informed. This section contains descriptions of public participation tools of which GSATS and WRCOG currently uses and may use in the future. These tools are as follows:

Public Informational Meetings

Description: Public meetings 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 informational meetings is to provide project information to the public and to solicit public comment.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, project priority process, certification review, long range plan updates, and other major MPO or RPO activities.

Charrettes

Description: Charrettes are typically intense, possibly multi-day meetings involving local government 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.

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 or RPO activities.

Consultation

Description: Consistent with FAST Act regulations, consultation encourages more cooperative planning between GSATS or WRCOG and appropriate agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities that are affected by transportation within the MPO or RPO areas. To coordinate the planning function to the maximum extent practicable, such consultation will entail comparing long range transportation plans 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. Other citizens, representatives, or agencies interested in being included in the consultation may contact GSATS or WRCOG.

Activities: Public hearings/meetings, copies of this plan on the GSATS or WRCOG websites (for viewing/downloading purposes), and meetings with staff.

Website

Description: The **MPO** website address is www.gsats.org. The site provides basic information about the MPO process, GSATS' members, transportation planning process, and contact information. MPO publications and work products (UPWP, TIP, MTP, CMP, PPP, Title VI Plan, EJ Plan, and ALOP) are available for downloading from this site. Recent Policy Committee minutes, agendas, meeting notices, and interactive maps are also available for downloading. On certain projects, citizens are able to submit comments. A link to the GSATS website can also be found on the WRCOG website under "Transportation Planning". The website address is www.wrcog.org/transportation-planning/.

The **RPO** website is found within WRCOG's website, under the drop down menu "Planning" then "Transportation." The site provides basic information about the RPO process, transportation planning process, and contact information. RPO publications and work products (RPWP, Rural TIP, RL RTP, PPP, Title VI Plan, EJ Plan, and ALOP) are available for downloading from this site. On certain projects, citizens are able to submit comments. The site is maintained and updated by WRCOG staff. The website address is www.wrcog.org/transportation-planning/rpo.org.

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

Master Database

Description: Staff maintains an ongoing master database with committee membership lists and lists of individuals with a special interest in WRCOG and GSTAS activities. The database includes names, mailing information, phone numbers, and email addresses.

Activities: The database generates distribution lists used to inform the public about public participation opportunities.

Direct Mailings/Email Announcements/Interactive Message Boards

Description: Direct Mailings (letters, postcards, fliers, etc.) are used to announce upcoming meetings or activities or to provide information to a targeted area, group of people, or the media. An area may be identified for a direct mailing because of potential impacts from a project. Groups that have an interest in a specific issue, such as cyclists and pedestrians may be targeted for pathways and trail projects.

Meeting announcements and MPO or RPO information are also emailed to interested persons that have submitted their email addresses to staff. Interactive message boards may be used to facilitate discussion and solicit public comment regarding specific transportation issues.

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

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.

Legal Advertisements

Description: SCDOT requires a minimum thirty (30) day advertisement of any public meeting where a decision could be made that would make a significant change to an existing plan or program. Ads are published to solicit public comment and/or 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 long range plans, planning work programs, and other major MPO or RPO activities.

Public Notices

Description: The MPO advertises public comment periods and notices for all GSATS Policy Committee meetings. The WRCOG Board of Directors meeting schedule is published on an annual basis.

Activities: Regular monthly meetings and other public meetings.

Visualization

Description: GSATS and WRCOG recognize that an important element to 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 and WRCOG 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 or RPO 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 (EJ) 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 EJ initiatives will strive to involve the potentially affected public. This effort develops partnerships and enhances the participation with groups and individuals of "traditionally underserved" communities in the transportation planning process. These communities include

minorities and low-income. Staff activities include, but are not limited to, 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 and RPO documents in non-technical, accessible formats when needed. The goal of the RPO's is to ensure that all citizens, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income status, have an equal opportunity to participate in the decision-making process.

Description: GSATS and WRCOG will take reasonable steps to ensure that all persons, including those encountering a language barrier, have meaningful opportunities to participate in the transportation planning and programming process, and will strive to address EJ 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:

- MPO and RPO will make efforts to identify representatives of minority, low-income, and limited English proficiency groups to include in notifications.
- Key planning documents will be translated and public notices broadcasted for non-English speaking populations upon request.
- Whenever possible, meetings will be held at locations accessible to pedestrian, 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 and WRCOG 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.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, long range plan updates, Title VI Plan and EJ Plan review and updates, and other major MPO or MPO activities.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

PROGRAM ADOPTION APPROVAL POLICIES

GSATS/WRCOG

Program Adoption	Public Meetings	Comment Period	Accessibility
Title VI Plan	1 Meeting for each county at various locations and times	30 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Public Participation Plan (PPP)	As requested	45 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Other DOT/FTA Required Plans, Programs, or Processes where Policy Committee Approval is Needed	As requested	21 Days	Internet & WRCOG Office

GSATS

Program Adoption	Public Meetings	Comment Period	Accessibility
Long Range Transportation Plan (MTP)	4 Meetings at various locations and times	21 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)	4 Meetings at various locations and times	21 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Congestion Management Process (CMP)	4 Meetings at various locations and times	21 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)	As requested	21 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries

WRCOG

Program Adoption	Public Meetings	Comment Period	Accessibility
Rural Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)	3 Meetings at various locations and times	21 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Rural Transportation Improvement Program	3 Meetings at various locations and times	21 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Rural Planning Work Program (RPWP)	As requested	21 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries

PROGRAM AMENDMENT APPROVAL POLICIES

GSATS/WRCOG

Program Amendment	Comment Period	Accessibility
Title VI Plan	30 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Public Participation Plan (PPP)	45 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Other DOT/FTA Required Plans, Programs, or Processes where Policy Committee Approval is Needed	21 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries

GSATS

Program Amendment	Comment Period	Accessibility
Long Range Transportation Plan (MTP)	21 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)	21 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Congestion Management Process (CMP)	21 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)	21 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries

WRCOG

Program Amendment	Comment Period	Accessibility
Rural Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)	21 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Rural Transportation Improvement Program	21 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries
Rural Planning Work Program (RPWP)	21 Days	Internet, WRCOG Office, Public Libraries

PUBLIC MEETING GUIDELINES

Open Meetings	Location	Time	Accessibility
Policy Committee	Surfside Beach Town Hall -or- Other Regional Facility	10:00 AM Monday or Friday	ADA accessible building; Translation; and other special needs upon request
Transportation Advisory Committee (NC)	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
Study Team (SC)	Myrtle Beach City Hall -or- Other Regional Facility (SC) -or- Via Tele-conference	10:00 AM Various days Monday to Friday	ADA accessible building; Translation; and other special needs upon request
Technical Coordinating Committee (NC)	Carolina Shores Town Hall -or- Other Regional Facility (NC) -or- Via Tele-conference	10:00 AM Various days Monday to Friday	ADA accessible building; Translation; and other special needs upon request
WRCOG Board of Directors	WRCOG Office -or- Other Regional Facility	6:00 PM Monday	ADA accessible building; Translation; and other special needs upon request
Rural Technical Committee	WRCOG Office -or- Other Regional Facility -or- Via Tele-conference	10:00 AM Wednesday	ADA accessible building; other special needs upon request
Ad Hoc Working Group	Various Regional Facility as decided by the Group	Various times and days	ADA accessible building; Translation; and other special needs upon request

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

Fact Sheets

Description: Fact Sheets can be used to provide summary information regarding policy, programs, and projects. Fact sheets could be distributed at public meetings, on the GSATS or WRCOG websites, public places such as libraries and community centers, and can be requested from the staff office.

Activities: Corridor studies, sub-area studies, other planning studies, project priorities process, updates to long range plans, and TIPs, and other MPO or RPO activities.

Logo

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

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

Newsletter

Description: Staff could produce a periodic newsletter that is distributed to citizens, local governments, media, and other agencies. Citizens would be added to the distribution list by their own request. Opportunities to request being added to the list could occur during public meetings hosted by GSATS or WRCOG on the GSATS or WRCOG websites, and when citizens contact staff.

Each issue of the newsletter would include staff contact information, upcoming meeting schedules, the GSATS or WRCOG website address, project highlights, current planning project status reports, and/or other one-time activities are also included. Citizens will be able to sign up for the newsletter, as well as other MPO or RPO information, via the website.

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

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 can be posted on the GSATS or WRCOG websites. Email notifications would be sent to the distribution list from the master database. Newsletters could also be 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 or RPO activities.

Project-specific Websites

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 the GSATS or WRCOG websites. 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 or RPO projects.

Comment Forms

Description: Comment forms can be used to solicit public comment on both specific issues being presented at a workshop or other public meeting or general in nature. For example, a comment 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 could be included in publications and on websites to solicit input regarding the available information or format of the publication or website.

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

Surveys

Description: Surveys can be used for gathering specific input from the public such as whether a person supports a specific alignment in a corridor study. Surveys can also be used to gather technical data during corridor and planning studies such as daily travel patterns.

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

Formal Public Hearings

Description: Formal public hearings are meetings used to solicit public comment on a project or issue being considered for adoption by the MPO or RPO. Hearings provide a formal setting for citizens to provide comments to the MPO, RPO, or another decision-making body.

Activities: Long range plans, TIPs updates, corridor studies, project development, environmental studies, and other planning studies as needed for other MPO or RPO activities.

Posters and Fliers

Description: Posters and fliers can be 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 RPO activities.

News and Media

Description: Formal press releases could be 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, RPO, or their committees.

News articles may be prepared for publication in other newsletters produced by local governments, 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: Specific corridor or other planning studies, sub area studies, workshops, open houses, public hearings, and other major or special MPO or RPO 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 MPO or RPO activities.

EVALUATION METHODS AND IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

GSATS (MPO) and WRCOG (RPO) continually strive for improved public participation. Improvements should be made to increase public awareness and to improve the quantity and quality of information provided to the public. The decisions made by GSATS and WRCOG affect both residents and visitors. Therefore, seeking public input on those decisions is vital to the success of rural transportation planning. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the public participation tools, both a quantitative assessment of the number of participants, as well as a qualitative assessment of the level of interaction and information exchanged are necessary.

GSATS/WRCOG will monitor public participation through various means, including:

- Keeping a log of contacts with the public, including phone, mail, email, and in-person meetings;
- Tracking number of addresses on mailing lists;
- Taking attendance at public outreach meetings using a sign-in sheet;
- Maintaining a record of all comments received from a public meeting or comment period;
- Monitoring traffic on the GSATS and WRCOG websites/social media; and
- Other means appropriate for the type of public outreach used.

GSATS/WRCOG will evaluate public participation through various means, including:

- Identifying special circumstances which may have contributed to an unusually high or low attendance.
- Identifying any improvements for future public meetings including meeting space, meeting location, and time of day; and,
- Identifying new or more effective means of public outreach activity based on feedback from the public.