



Chapter 2: Public Involvement Plan and Summary

Introduction

Chapter 2 documents the public involvement plan used for the development of the Lake~Sumter MPO 2025 Long Range Transportation Plan, as well as key highlights of the public comments received during the development of the plan.

The significance and impact of the Long Range Transportation Plan on all citizens of Lake and Sumter Counties makes it important that the public actively participate in its development. Thus, it was the intent of the Lake~Sumter MPO that the public be involved. To this end, a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) was developed to facilitate public participation which reflects procedures to be followed for compliance with requirements of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).

TEA-21, signed into law in June, 1998, and its predecessor, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), required proactive public involvement in transportation planning. The Lake~Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), in order to accomplish this proactive public involvement, provided complete information and timely public notice, and supported continued involvement of the public in the development of the transportation plan.

TEA-21 and ISTEA not only require opportunities for public input and "explicit consideration" of public comments, but also "response" to public input. The public must be assured that their inputs are valued and considered in decision making and that their time and energy expended are meaningful and worthwhile. Along these lines, the MPO shall maintain records of public involvement activities, including comments, concerns, responses, and requests for information. All public input was made available to elected leaders prior to all decisions.

SAFETEA-LU, the reauthorization of TEA-21, included several new requirements regarding public involvement. These specific requirements are discussed later in Chapter 2. Since adoption of the 2025 LRTP, the Lake~Sumter MPO has adopted a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) to provide guidance.

This Public Involvement Plan for the Lake~Sumter MPO 2025 Long Range Transportation Plan was developed to ensure maximum public participation and to build consensus in this important planning study. The plan summarizes the approach used to include public participation in the planning process, and places a particular emphasis on outreach to minorities and low-income groups, as well as intergovernmental coordination.

Because public concerns are often localized, and active participants do not always represent the concerns of the public as a whole, proactive steps were taken to ensure the public involvement process resulted in an accurate understanding of the public as a whole. Public involvement activities were varied by time, place, and method to simplify access to the decision making process. The following methods will be used continuously through the planning process:

- Public Workshops
- Public Meetings (MPO, TAC, and CAC Meetings)
- Educational Forums

Public availability of technical data and other information shall be guaranteed. Along with corresponding educational opportunities, citizens shall gain the information needed to provide input. Open access to the decision making process shall also be guaranteed.

The overall goal of the PIP is summarized below.

.....to achieve mutual understanding and build consensus among those involved in transportation planning in Lake and Sumter Counties, including individuals or groups potentially affected by transportation decisions in Lake and Sumter Counties.

Public Meetings and Interagency Coordination

The Lake~Sumter MPO used the public information, outreach and educational programs of other governmental entities, when feasible, to expand opportunities and reduce costs. Coordination efforts with adjacent governments to create regional travel opportunities were also employed. Attempts were made to recruit representatives from diverse backgrounds to represent the following public and private sector interests:

Public Sector Representation

- Technical Staff from Municipalities
- Public Officials from Municipalities
- Airports
- Community Coach
- Florida Department of Transportation
- Human Service Agencies
- Geographic Diversification
- Lake and Sumter Counties
- Others as Identified

Private Sector Representation

- Chamber of Commerce
- Major Employers
- Community Leaders
- Freight Industry
- Minority Community
- Elderly Community
- Low-Income Community
- Geographic Diversification
- Others as Identified



The PIP included meetings and public workshops during the course of this project that facilitated participation of the following boards and groups:

- *Lake~Sumter MPO Board* – The MPO Board is comprised of elected community leaders from Lake and Sumter Counties, as well as the fourteen municipalities in Lake County and the City of Wildwood in Sumter County (an Ex-Officio Member). The MPO Board typically meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month, at 2:00 p.m.
- *Lake~Sumter MPO Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)* - The TAC is comprised of planners and engineers from the various local governments comprising the MPO. The input provided by the TAC is of a very technical nature and may include making technical design recommendations and verifying that all documents conform to the appropriate standards. The TAC meets on the third Wednesday of each month, at 2:00 p.m.
- *Lake~Sumter MPO Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)* - The CAC is comprised of interested community members. This committee has a special advisory role to the MPO because it provides a necessary communication link between the MPO and the community it is serving. The input provided by the CAC ensures that the MPO planning process is actually meeting the needs of the community it is serving. The CAC meets on the third Wednesday of each month, at 4:00 p.m.
- *Lake County Transportation Disadvantaged Coordinating Board (TDCB)* - The purpose of the Coordinating Board is to provide direction to the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) on the coordination of services to be provided to the transportation disadvantaged within their local service area. The TDCB conducts their meetings quarterly, on the third Monday of every third month at 2:00 p.m.
- *The general public through Consensus Building Workshops*

SAFETEA-LU requires all public meetings be accessible. The Lake~Sumter MPO scheduled public meetings and workshops related to the 2025 LRTP development at various locations, and at different times of day, in an attempt to increase accessibility for all concerned and interested parties. Since adoption of the 2025 LRTP, the MPO has adopted a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) which addresses this issue of accessibility of public meetings.

Public Involvement Tools

A number of public relations tools were used to communicate with the public, provide information on the progress of the study, and generate public input into the project in an effort to develop consensus and direction in the plan update. These tools focus on notification and communication and include:



- Newsletters
- Direct mailing
- Media relations
- Internet Website

Further detail on each of these techniques and how they were intended for use as part of the public involvement process for the development of the Lake~Sumter MPO 2025 Long Range Transportation Plan is provided in the following sections.

SAFETEA-LU requires that the employment of visualization techniques to describe the LRTP. These can include maps, charts, graphs, diagrams and techniques such as scenario planning. The Lake~Sumter MPO utilizes maps, charts, graphs and diagrams throughout the 2025 LRTP. Since adoption of the LRTP, the MPO has entered into a contract with Lake County to share the services of a GIS Analyst. The MPO is currently building a GIS database.

Newsletters

Project newsletters were published during the study process to communicate information on study progress to the public at large, and to advertise upcoming public meetings and workshops. Newsletters were distributed to the mailing/contact list being developed by MPO staff.

Direct Mailings

MPO staff were responsible for developing a mailing/contact list to enable the distribution of project related information throughout the development of the LRTP. The mailing list was designed to reach diverse populations throughout Lake and Sumter Counties. Throughout the study process, correspondents and attendees at the public meetings were encouraged to provide their addresses and to be added to the mailing list. In this way, the mailing list was updated on an on-going basis throughout the study.

Media Relations

Media relation strategies and activities were planned and executed in an on-going manner for all types of media that were deemed an appropriate communications vehicle. These strategies were multi-cultural and sensitive to disabilities to ensure that two-way communication efforts penetrate all appropriate markets. The MPO strived to have transportation related issues featured in local newspapers and aired on local television on a frequent basis. The MPO utilized all appropriate forms of media to help generate interest in the project, elicit responses from the public, and provide feedback or response to public inquiries.



Formal press releases to announce workshops, public hearings, and planned development activities were sent to the following media sources:

- Orlando Sentinel
- Lake County News Section
- Daily Commercial
- South Lake Press
- Sumter Sun
- Sumter County Times
- North Lake Outpost
- The Reporter
- The Reporter in the Villages
- Village Media Group
- Mount Dora Topic
- The News Leader
- Tavares Citizen
- Village Daily Sun

Internet Website

Information and files were provided in electronic format on the Lake~Sumter MPO Website (www.LakeSumterMPO.com). The website for the LRTP provided general information about the plan and was updated periodically as planning activities took place and deliverables were produced.

SAFETEA-LU requires that public information be made available in electronically assessable formats, such as the World Wide Web. The Lake~Sumter MPO utilized its website, www.LakeSumterMPO.com, to disseminate information related to the development of the 2025 LRTP. Final documentation of the 2025 LRTP is available on the website.

Public Involvement Process

The recommended Public Involvement Process for the Lake~Sumter MPO 2025 LRTP Update included major public involvement techniques recommended and described previously in this report. Major elements of the public involvement process for the LRTP are summarized as follows:

(1) Project Kick-off Meeting – Conducted initial meeting with the MPO staff and the TAC/CAC to review the project and the overall long range transportation planning process

(2) Consensus-Building Workshop Number One – Conducted first Consensus-Building Workshop to review goals, objectives, and 2025 Needs Plan

(3) Present Financial Resources and Needs Plan – Presented Financial Resources and unit cost data to be used for the plan to the MPO and TAC/CAC. Also discussed the recommended initial Needs Plan alternative

(4) Two Environmental Justice (EJ) Discussion Groups – Conducted Environmental Justice (EJ) Discussion Groups to review the positive and negative impacts of the proposed 2025 Needs Plan projects



(5) Consensus-Building Workshop Number Two – Conducted second Consensus-Building Workshop to review revenue sources, Alternatives, and Initial 2025 Cost Affordable Plan

(6) Review and Approve Final 2025 Needs Plan Network – Met with the MPO and TAC/CAC to review the performance of the 25N2 alternative and recommended the initial 2025 Cost Affordable Plan alternative for testing

(7) Review and Comment on Draft Chapter 7 – Met with the MPO and TAC/CAC to review the draft Chapter 7 documenting the Needs Plan and to select and recommend the initial 2025 Cost Affordable Plan alternative for testing

(8) Review and Approve Final 2015 and 2025 Cost Affordable Plan Networks – Met with the TAC/CAC and MPO Board to review and approve the Final 2025 Cost Affordable Plan and 2015 Interim Year Plan

(9) MPO Adoption Hearing – Documented for review by TAC, CAC and MPO staff all written comments received through the public involvement process. The critical and most relevant comments were highlighted. Public input was incorporated into the plan development process as appropriate according to the guidance provided by MPO staff.

Public Involvement Schedule

A summary schedule of public involvement activities used in the Public Involvement Plan is provided below:

- October 2004: Kickoff Meeting
- May 2005: Present Financial Resources and Needs Plan
- June 2005: Environmental Justice Discussion Groups
- June 2005: Consensus Building Workshop #1
- August 2005: Consensus Building Workshop #2
- September 2005: Review and Approve Needs Plan
- October 2005: Review and Comment on Financial Resources
- December 2005: Review and Approve Cost Affordable Plan

Public Comment Summary

Significant public comment was received throughout the development of the Long Range Transportation Plan. Many of the public comments were received as part of the MPO's routine committee meetings by the MPO Board, Citizens Advisory Committee, and Technical Advisory Committee. The two Consensus-Building Workshops and Environmental Justice Discussion Group Meetings resulted in significant public guidance on the content and direction of the plan. Public comments were also received by the MPO via e-mail and mail correspondence. Highlights of the public comments received are summarized in greater detail below.

MPO Board and Committee Meetings

MPO Board and Committee meetings are routinely conducted by the MPO as part of their ongoing planning process. These meetings presented the MPO the opportunity to inform the public as to the status of the plan and to also receive direction on major aspects of the plan's development including project prioritization and the approach used to fund the plan. Detailed summaries of these meetings and their influence on the plan can be found as noted below:

- MPO Board Meeting Minutes: Technical Appendix 2A
- Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes: Technical Appendix 2B
- Technical Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes: Technical Appendix 2C

Major highlights from these meetings included the opening of the Plan Public Hearing at the MPO Board Meeting on October 26, 2005 and the Plan Adoption that took place at the MPO Board Meeting on December 14, 2005. Significant discussion at these MPO Board Meetings and the Citizens Advisory Committee and Technical Advisory Committee meetings included discussion on appropriate funding sources for the plan, especially additional funding sources. Both the Technical and Citizens committee groups expressed nearly unanimous support for making use of all available "enhanced" revenue sources that included the following:

- Extension of the existing sales tax through the year 2025
- Adoption of the second 5 cent local option gasoline tax
- Increases in transportation impact fees over time

The MPO Board decided to adopt the extension on the existing sales tax and more aggressive increases in the transportation impact fees in lieu of making use of the second 5 cent local option gasoline tax. The results of this action to approve the use of "enhanced" revenues was to significantly increase the funds available to fund additional projects in the adopted plan.



Consensus Building Workshops

The Lake-Sumter MPO conducted two Consensus-Building Workshops to actively engage the public in the decision making process for the Long Range Transportation Plan. These Consensus-Building Workshops were conducted on the following dates:

Consensus-Building Workshop 1

June 15, 2005 – Lake-Sumter Community College, Leesburg Campus

Consensus-Building Workshop 2

August 19, 2005 – Lake-Sumter Community College, Leesburg Campus

These two workshops were day-long sessions that consisted of the following format:

- Introduction and Education Session on the Plan
- Review of Workshop Objectives
- Focused Questions regarding elements of the plan answered by the public in breakout group sessions
- Presentation by the public of group answers
- Resolution of differences between the groups

The format resulted in specific guidance from the public on the prioritization of projects, new projects for consideration, potential project impact issues and the need for roadway realignments, funding for non-automobile transportation modes, and appropriate funding considerations.

Significant highlights of the public guidance received at the two workshops included:

- General support for the implementation of the Wekiva Parkway
- Development of a northern east-west corridor, generally along the alignment of CR 44, that crosses Lake Griffin; this roadway should be a toll facility
- Adoption of the plan to implement the recommendations of the current Transit Development Plan and provision of additional transit service to the public
- Caution on the alignment of a new North-South Corridor west of US 27, from CR 470 to SR 44, due to environmental and community impact concerns

- Use of “Enhanced” revenue options to include extension of the existing sales tax for transportation, use of the second 5 cent local option gasoline tax, and incremental increases over time in the transportation impact fee
- Desire for increased integration of the transportation planning efforts in all of Sumter County – including those areas of Sumter County outside the MPO’s planning area

Each of these public comments resulted in changes or enhancements to the resulting plan that were adopted by the MPO Board.

A detailed summary of Consensus-Building Workshop 1 is provided for in Technical Appendix 2D and for Consensus-Building Workshop 2 in Technical Appendix 2E.

Environmental Justice Discussion Groups

Two Environmental Justice Discussion Group meetings were conducted on June 17, 2005. The first workshop took place in Minneola – South Lake, and the second workshop was conducted in Leesburg. The purpose of these two workshops was to reach out to traditionally underserved members of the population, such as minorities or individuals with impairments. To ensure the success of these workshops, the meeting format was brief and focused on key areas of concern. Specific minority leaders and service providers were invited to the workshops to ensure that the issues of these communities would be identified.

Highlights on the feedback received included:

- Overall, most community transportation needs for minorities and the transportation disadvantaged are being accommodated by the Transportation Disadvantaged Program, non-profit community organizations or other community volunteers. This is creating a burden for these groups as transportation is not one of their key functions.
- Fixed Route Public Transportation needs to be provided throughout the community, especially service to medical facilities/offices and shopping opportunities.
- The services provided by the existing Transportation Disadvantaged provider need to be improved. It is noted that the service provider was changed prior to the adoption of the plan.
- Transportation services are needed to transport individuals to DUI classes and other court-ordered activities.



Summaries of the two Environmental Justice Discussion Group meetings are provided for in Technical Appendix 2F.

Other Public Comments

A limited number of relevant public comments were received during the public comment period that occurred between the public hearing opened on October 26, 2005 and the adoption of the Long Range Transportation Plan by the MPO Board on December 14, 2005. These public comments are summarized in Technical Appendix 2G.

Legal Notices

Appropriate Legal Notices were provided during the plan in fulfillment of the Federal and state requirements for the development and adoption of the Long Range Transportation Plan. Copies of these legal notices are provided in Technical Appendix 2H.