



Public Participation Plan
Advancing Participation Through Outreach and Innovation
May 31, 2007

Introduction

Fort Smith Transit in conjunction with the Bi-State Metropolitan Planning Organization has developed a Public Participation Plan to assure that the transportation planning process complies with Federal requirements for public involvement and participation. This document presents the goals for public participation and involvement, as well as the public involvement procedures designed for various transportation planning activities. The purpose is to provide opportunities for all citizens to contribute ideas and opinions early and at every stage of the planning process.

Efforts will be made in the transportation planning and programming process to:

- Assure participation by traditionally underserved individuals, including elderly, low income and minority individuals, persons with disabilities, and persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP).
- Ascertain what Non-English languages and barriers exist to provide participation in the Fort Smith area.
- Provide public meeting notifications in a manner comprehensible to all populations in the service area.
- Provide transportation to public meetings free of charge.
- Apply any and all concerns received from all populations on an equal manner.

Identification of Stakeholders

Stakeholders are individuals either directly or indirectly affected by the plan or make recommendations to the plan. Those who may be affected or who may be unaware of the benefits of the plan's recommendation(s) are of particular interest in the identification of specific stakeholders. Stakeholders are broken down into several groups: general citizens, minority and low-income persons, public agencies, and private organizations and businesses.

Techniques, as listed in the section titled “Outreach Efforts to Enhance Public Participation and Involvement,” are used to engage all populations in traditional and non-traditional methods of involvement. These techniques are followed to gain input, either directly or indirectly, to engage the minority or LEP persons in the process and to establish focus groups to develop new insights and perspectives from others outside the typical transit environment.

General Citizens: There are 85,547 residents in the Fort Smith Transit service area (U.S. Census 2009). Over 77% of the population consider themselves to be solely of a white race. Over 90% of the households have someone over the age of 5 who speaks English with 75% speaking only English in the home.

Minorities: Minority populations make up a fairly small percentage of the Fort Smith service area (See Table 1). Black or African American make up the largest minority with nearly 8.6% of the total area population. Asian persons make up the second largest minority with approximately 4.7% of the population respectively. American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander, other and combined races make up 9% of the total population.

	Fort Smith city, Arkansas	
	Estimate	Margin of Error
Total:	84,057	+/-37
White alone	64,995	+/-843
Black or African American alone	7,196	+/-384
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	794	+/-243
Asian alone	3,982	+/-335
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	19	+/-40
Some other race alone	3,384	+/-644
Two or more races:	3,687	+/-740
Two races including Some other race	270	+/-162
Two races excluding Some other race, and three or more races	3,417	+/-731

Table 1.

Low-income: Low income households, considered under 150% of the local poverty level, account for over 25% of all households in the transit service area, while 19.7% were actually below poverty based on 2009 incomes.

Public Agencies, Private Organizations and Businesses: Public agencies, private organizations and businesses offer a number of perspectives that are valuable to the planning process. Fort Smith Transit has identified agencies receiving transit voucher assistance through the Transportation Assistance Program (TAP) as stakeholders. TAP agencies provide great insight into the transportation needs of their clients. These agencies have been and continue to be instrumental in overcoming barriers that may not be understood by officials more familiar with the provisions of transit services. Appendix B is a list of TAP agencies/stakeholders for the Fort Smith Transit Department.

Fort Smith Transit (FST) will, to the extent reasonable and practical, ensure that the Public Participation Plan will address the requirements for public involvement as identified in 23 CFR 450.316 Metropolitan Planning Process: Elements. A copy of these requirements is found in **Appendix A** of this document.

Federal Planning Requirements

As delineated in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), federal law and regulations require a planning process be conducted to consider projects, planning strategies, and implementation methods that will:

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 accessibility and mobility;
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;
7. Promote efficient system management and operation; and
8. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

Freedom of Information Act

In order to ensure adequate public notice and provision of timely information, all public meetings are subject to the provisions of the Arkansas Code Annotated, 25-19-101.

Public Notification and Participation

Public meeting notices will be provided to local newspapers of general circulation sufficiently in advance of a meeting to meet newspaper guidelines for publication during the week of and prior to the meeting. When, and if, non-English newspapers of general circulation are initiated in the region, staff will work with these newspapers to have the above meeting notices printed in the appropriate language in their publications. These notices do not need to be paid notices. The notice of public hearing will be published not less than 24 hours prior to the meeting date. A copy of paid newspaper publications shall be retained for a period of three years after the end of the fiscal year.

Official notification of public meetings, public hearings, and public review and comment periods will also be posted on the FST website and will be provided for posting at the following locations and other locations identified by FST staff in order to encourage minority and other underserved populations to participate in the process:

- Inside FST buses by means of electronic messaging signs
- FST website
- FST facilities
- Recorded transit information phone line

All public meetings are open forum and will be conducted in an accessible location that complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). A reasonable period of time is provided for comments from members of the public prior to the adjournment of said meetings.

Reasonable Public Access to Technical and Policy Information

The FST staff is available during normal business hours to discuss technical and policy information with citizens and other interested parties. The FST offices are located at 6821 Jenny Lind Road in Fort Smith, Arkansas. Staff is also available to meet with outside groups after normal business hours. Arrangements for staff to attend meetings after normal business hours must be made at least one (1) week in advance of the meeting. Copies of all available documents and other materials are available to the public.

Environmental Justice

Pursuant to Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, dated February 11, 1994, and the subsequent U.S. Department of Transportation Order 5680.3, issued April 15, 1997, FST promotes Environmental Justice in all aspects of the transportation process. These procedures augment and reaffirm the policy to adhere to and advance the principles of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (URA) as amended, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) as amended, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), and other statutes, regulations and guidance that address or affect infrastructure planning and decision making; social, economic, or environmental matters; public health; and public involvement. To these ends, notices of meetings and public hearings will be specifically provided in minority and ethnic gathering places to promote participation in the transportation planning process. Minority and ethnic communities will be monitored through census data to guarantee their inclusion in the process as populations fluctuate over time. Special accommodations (e.g. interpreter, sign language interpreter, large print copy, etc.) may be requested of FST during normal business hours at least five (5) business days prior to the meeting. FST will attempt to accommodate all such requests.

Transit Projects

The public involvement measures outlined in these procedures serve as the public participation process required for the development of transit projects as per FTA Circular 9030. FST will be assisted by the Bi-State Metropolitan Planning Organization (BSMPO) in their outreach programs to advance participation by transit users. FST will address the Program of Projects requirements as per Federal Transit Administration Circular 9030. Additionally, capital projects and operational costs are included in the BSMPO Transportation Improvement Program which is developed through a cooperative and collaborative process with interested parties and other private and public transportation providers.

Work Products:

Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)

The FST Director serves as a member of the Policy Board and the FST Superintendent serves on the Technical Committee of the BSMPO. Members of the board and committee adopt Federally-required documents including the Metropolitan Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Plan.

Major updates of the Long Range Transportation Plan will be conducted every five years. The BSMPO will host at least one (1) public meeting in each BSMPO member county to involve interested parties in the early stages of the plan development. Notices of public hearings for the MTP will be published and posted as stated in the public notification section in the BSMPO's Public Participation Plan. After a draft MTP has been developed, the BSMPO will host at least one (1) formal public meeting to solicit comments on the draft plan. The public comment period will be 15 working days. A final draft MTP will be presented to the Technical Committee and any appropriate focus group for review and comment prior to recommendation to the BSMPO Board for adoption. All public comments received will be made a part of the final adopted document. If the final MTP differs significantly from the draft presented to the public, then another opportunity for public review will be provided. The MTP will then be published, placed on the BSMPO website, and made available to the public.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The Transportation Improvement Program will be updated every four years and maintained annually. FST staff will work directly with the MPO and with the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation to identify proposed projects for inclusion in the Transportation Improvement Program. After all proposed project requests are identified, BSMPO staff will, in conjunction with the Technical Committee, prepare a draft Transportation Improvement Program for public review. Notices of

public review and comment period for the TIP will be published and posted as stated in the Public Notification and Participation section in the BSMPO Public Participation Plan. The public comment period for the draft Transportation Improvement Program will be 10 working days. Upon resolution of public comments, the Technical Committee will review the TIP and a recommendation to adopt will be made to the BSMPO Board. If no adverse public comments are received, recommendation may be adopted by mail-out, fax or e-mail ballot. Final TIP will be published and made available to the public.

Public Participation Plan and Adopted Documents Amendment Procedures

FST will maintain a progressive review of the Public Participation Plan and adopted documents, accepting comments from the public during routine public meetings. Staff will also review the plan and documents annually to include comments and suggestions derived from the progressive meetings.

Regional Transportation Improvement and Mobility Studies and Corridor Plans

Notices will be distributed to the citizens who live in the specific study areas in order to obtain the input of persons or interests who would be most likely to be affected by any proposed improvements. After consideration, FST will conduct and at least one public meeting at a location convenient to the affected citizens. Regional studies and corridor plans will be presented for adoption.

Public Transit/ Human Services Coordination Plan

The “Coordination Plan” must be updated every five years in concert with the Bi-State Metropolitan Transportation Plan. The procedures used in this update will build upon the procedures utilized in the development of the 2007 Coordinated Plan which included an expansive public outreach program. Existing public and private transit providers will be invited to coordination meetings at the Fort Smith Transit offices where needs will be discussed and actions to satisfy these needs identified. The River Valley Transportation Providers, an organization established in 2004 to coordinate transit services within the regional area, will be the driving force behind the “Coordinated Plan” update. The public outreach/involvement procedures of each organization as well as those of FST and the BSMPO will be utilized in preparing the update.

Outreach Efforts to Enhance Public Participation and Involvement

FST, in conjunction with the BSMPO will use the following activities and initiatives to seek viewpoints of minority, low income, LEP populations and all segments in the public

involvement and outreach programs. These same initiatives will assist in the overall planning process and MTP development.

1. **On-line Surveys.** As part of the annual work element in the Unified Planning Work Program an on-line survey will be conducted for planning activities of FST & BSMPO member jurisdictions. A reputable web-based survey vendor will host this service. “Hard copy” survey forms of the on-line surveys will be distributed to the appropriate and or affected populations.

2. **Visualization Techniques** In addition to the on-line surveys, FST in partnership with the BSMPO will incorporate numerous visualization techniques into the planning process and public involvement activities. These will include:
 - a. Short informative television commercials.
 - b. Utilization of the City of Fort Smith’s dedicated television channel.
 - c. A coordinated and comprehensive campaign to elevate the regional awareness of transportation planning activities and functions through the development of banners, billboards, speaker bureaus, transportation fairs, logo utilization in sponsored events, and articles of interest for local newspapers and regional magazines.
 - d. Increased circulation of products and proposed documents through the use of the Fort Smith Multi-Cultural Center, the Fort Smith Ministerial Alliance, and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
 - e. Annual productions of maps presenting the annual listing of projects.
 - f. The expanded use of digital photography and photographs in public meetings, advertisements, and publications.
 - g. An upgrade of the FST website to create a more user friendly and interactive experience for the visitor as well as to provide an improved platform for animations, digital presentations, and timely information regarding the performance of the region’s transportation network and proposed improvements to the region’s transportation network.
 - h. Other techniques will be examined to determine the best methods of involving all segments of the service area population in the planning process.

Appendix A: Public Involvement Federal Requirements, Excerpted from 23 CFR 450.316

- Include a proactive public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans and TIPs and meets the requirements and criteria specified as follows:
 - Require a minimum public comment period of 45 days before the public involvement process is initially adopted or revised;
 - Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, private providers of transportation, other interested parties and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs and projects (including but not limited to central city and other local jurisdiction concerns);
 - Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of plans and TIPs and open public meetings where matters related to the Federal-aid highway and transit programs are being considered;
 - Require adequate public notice of public involvement activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points, including, but not limited to, approval of plans and TIPs (in nonattainment areas, classified as serious and above, the comment period shall be at least 30 days for the plan, TIP and major amendment(s));
 - Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received during the planning and program development processes;
 - Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to low-income and minority households;
 - When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft transportation plan or TIP (including the financial plan) as a result of the public involvement process or the interagency consultation process required under the U.S. EPA's conformity regulations, a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments shall be made part of the final plan and TIP;
 - If the final transportation plan or TIP differs significantly from the one which 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, an additional opportunity for public comment on the revised plan or TIP shall be made available;
 - Public involvement processes shall be periodically reviewed by the MPO in terms of their effectiveness in assuring that the process provides full and open access to all;
 - These procedures will be reviewed by the FHWA and the FTA during certification reviews for TMA's, and as otherwise necessary for all MPO's, to assure that full and open access is provided to MPO decision making processes; and,
 - Metropolitan public involvement processes shall be coordinated with statewide public involvement processes wherever possible to enhance public consideration of the issues, plans, and programs and reduce redundancies and costs.

Appendix B: Transportation Assistance Program

The Transportation Assistance Program (TAP) was formed by the Transit Advisory Commission to provide local human service agencies with limited free transportation vouchers to assist their clients in obtaining public transportation to access basic services in emergency situations. The TAP program was developed following numerous requests from agencies and individuals indicating the base transportation fare presented a barrier in obtaining basic needs. Human service agencies may complete an application for commission consideration and must present information regarding their agency's needs and services. Each participating agency establishes select criteria for determining client eligibility. Approved agencies are issued an allotted quantity of tickets per month and are required to document the necessity of each passenger trip as it relates to the program purpose. Transportation vouchers will not be issued directly to individuals from the commission or Fort Smith Transit. Please contact the Transit Department at 783-6464 for more information pertaining to the program.

<p>Abilities Unlimited Kathy Newman 782-5925 au@IPA.net</p> <p>Arkansas Rehab Charley Montnegro 452-7131 charley.montnegro@arkansas.gov</p> <p>Hannah House Lydia Joseph or Angela Tilley 782-5683 hannah@treeoflifehealth.org</p> <p>Integrity Ministries Next Step Day Room <i>Serves the needs of the homeless</i> Gary Hays or Linda Gabriel 782-5433 integrity.gabriel@juno.com</p> <p>Pregnancy Help Center <i>Unplanned Pregnancy</i> 479-484-5244 fax 479-484-0234 angie_rams@yahoo.com</p> <p>Reynolds Cancer Research 479-782-6302 info@reynoldscancersupporthouse.org</p> <p>U.S Probation 783-8050 maaron@arwp.uscourts.gov</p> <p>Habitat for Humanity 782-8255 dirdev@mynewroads.com</p>	<p>Heart to Heart Pregnancy Support <i>Pregnancy Support</i> Patti Logan 479-452-2260 hearttoheart@mynewroads.com</p> <p>Arkansas Dept. of Community Corrections <i>Job Search, Assist and promote crime-free lifestyle</i> Kelly Bartholomay 479-785-2664 kelly.bartholomay@arkansas.gov</p> <p>Western Arkansas Red Cross <i>Disaster Relief</i> Patrick Knapp 479-782-1056 skrafft@redcrossnwa.org</p> <p>Neighbors United <i>Assist tenants at Allied Gardens</i> Jeffery Blassingame 479-782-3611 fax 479-782-7305 allgrdn5221@aol.com</p> <p>Fort Smith Regional Dialysis Elaine Brecher 479-709-7450 ebrecher.fsrdc@sbcglobal.net</p> <p>Allied Gardens Ladonna 782-3611 agactdr1@aol.com</p>	<p>Community Rescue Mission <i>Provide shelter for the homeless</i> Brian Hilts 479-782-1443 or 782-0147 mission.director@sbcglobal.net</p> <p>Community Services Clearinghouse <i>Assist the needy</i> Susan Ross 479-782-5074 rsg474@hotmail.com</p> <p>Salvation Army <i>Assist the needy</i> Vickie Serrano 479-783-6145 fax 783-4975 serrano.vickie@gmail.com</p> <p>Fountain of Youth 479-484-7782 sitedirector@foyardultdaycare.org</p> <p>Gospel Rescue Mission 479-474-4163 No email address</p> <p>Fort Smith Christian Women's Job Corps facwjc@yahoo.com</p> <p>Arc for the River Valley 783-5529 arcrivervalley@gmail.com</p> <p>Harbor House 785-4083 hhidco@hotmail.com</p>
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