

**West Michigan Metropolitan Transportation
Planning Program
Participation and Consultation Plan**

West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission

August 2000
Revised June 2003
Revised July 2004
Revised May 2006
Revised April 2009

West Michigan Metropolitan Transportation Planning Program Participation Plan

Introduction

Participation in the West Michigan Metropolitan Transportation Planning Program (WestPlan) planning process is based on this participation plan. WestPlan considers participation early in the planning process essential in order to fully assess all the social, economic, energy, and environmental impacts of transportation decisions. The goals of the WestPlan Participation Plan are:

- Informed and involved residents and stakeholders have reasonable access to public records and the decision-making process, through any mean, paper or electronically.
- A planning approach that is proactive and open to participation by all, especially those persons and groups that have been traditionally under-served by the transportation system.
- A process that not only encourages broad participation, but also considers and responds to input by allowing all parties to comment.
- Ensure public meetings are effectively conducted at convenient and accessible locations at reasonable times and employ web and visual tools (maps, diagrams, drawings, 3D renderings, etc...) that shall be used to the maximum extent reasonable.

The WestPlan Participation Plan outlines a proactive procedure to be undertaken whenever significant transportation planning initiatives are undertaken, such as updates to WestPlan's Transportation Improvement Plan or Long-Range Transportation Plan. WestPlan utilizes several principal mechanisms to obtain this input:

- Press and information releases
- Newspaper articles
- Paid advertisements/Public notices
- Direct mailings of the "Commission Communications" newsletter
- Internet web page
- Annual Report
- Meetings of the WestPlan Technical and Policy Committees
- Special meetings
- Workshops
- Public meetings

A blend of these mechanisms forms the current WestPlan Participation Plan process. A description of each of the principal mechanisms, including how they are used and potential audience reached, is as follows:

Notification Mechanisms

WestPlan committees and the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC), which serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Muskegon County and northern Ottawa County, communicate with interested groups and residents within Muskegon County and northern Ottawa County through a variety of means. WestPlan, working as the MPO, programs all federally funded transportation projects in Muskegon and Northern Ottawa Counties.

- **Press Releases:** A press release is written by WMSRDC announcing each meeting of a WestPlan Technical and Policy Committee. Also, additional press releases will frequently be written by WMSRDC staff in order to call attention to significant MPO planning activities. These press releases are distributed to the Muskegon Chronicle, the Grand Haven Tribune, all other local newspapers, and all local television and radio stations. The extent to which these are reported has not been fully monitored, but follow up response from reporters indicates that this is an effective method of distributing information to all parties.
- **Information Releases:** An information release is written by WMSRDC announcing each meeting of a WestPlan Technical and Policy Committee. Also, additional information releases will frequently be written by WMSRDC staff in order to call attention to significant MPO planning activities. These information releases are distributed to all local governments and local libraries, along with a request that the releases be posted at a public place in the receiving location. The extent to which these are posted is monitored through local contacts and onsite visits.
- **Paid Advertisements/Public Notices:** When deemed necessary, paid advertisements and/or public notices will be purchased through the Muskegon Chronicle and Grand Haven Tribune to notify all interested parties of significant planning projects and/or meetings of the WestPlan committees.
- **Commission Communications Newsletter:** WestPlan related articles frequently appear in Commission Communications, the bi-monthly newsletter of WMSRDC. The newsletter has a circulation of nearly five hundred, including local government staff, local elected officials, special interest groups, and other organizations. The mailing list remains open and the participation process continues to solicit additional interested groups and individuals.

- **Internet Web Page:** An overall summary of transportation plans and programs is listed on the WMSRDC website at www.wmsrdc.org. Interested parties may also find contact information and directions to the WMSRDC office on the website.
- **WMSRDC Annual Report:** The WMSRDC annual report is a broad spectrum way of informing all interested parties about MPO activities. The annual report is published at the beginning of each calendar year and is distributed to the same mailing list as the Commission Communications newsletter. As with the newsletter, the mailing list remains open and the WestPlan Participation Plan process continues to solicit additional interested groups and individuals.
- **Other Mechanisms:** The Commission Communications newsletter, WMSRDC Annual Report, website, and press releases are the principal tools used to notify the all interested parties about transportation planning issues in Muskegon County and northern Ottawa County. The WMSRDC office, however, also has become a valuable information resource for citizens and local businesses. Through hundreds of annual requests, WMSRDC staff distributes local demographic information, transportation statistics, and background material on community development trends and proposals.

MPO Committee Structure Involvement

WestPlan consists of a Policy Committee and a Technical Committee. The Technical Committee reports directly to the Policy Committee. The Policy Committee communicates its determinations to the WMSRDC for comment. All meetings are held at convenient and accessible locations during normal business hours, with the exception of special meetings, which may be held during evening hours.

- **Technical Committee:** Technical Committee meetings are generally held on the first Thursday of each month, if necessary agenda items are determined. At a minimum, the Technical Committee should meet not less than six times per year. The meetings, which are hosted by a committee member at their office, are always open to all interested parties and a comment period is regularly scheduled on the agenda. Announcements for all Technical Committee meetings are made through the press and information release procedure detailed in the previous section. The Technical Committee reviews all plans and programs and makes technical recommendations to the Policy Committee and WMSRDC staff. The Technical Committee is comprised of local engineers, public works staff/directors, or planners from each local road agency, including transit, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

- Policy Committee:** Policy Committee meetings are generally held on the third Wednesday of every month if a Technical Committee meeting took place. At a minimum, the Policy Committee should meet not less than quarterly, or on call of the Chair. The meetings, which are hosted by a committee member at their office, are always open to all interested parties and a comment period is regularly scheduled on the agenda. Announcements for all Policy Committee meetings are made through the press and information release procedure detailed in the previous section. The Policy Committee is responsible for all final decisions regarding transportation. The Technical Committee is comprised of local elected officials from each local road agency. The Committee also includes representatives from MDOT and FHWA.

Special Meetings, Workshops, and Public Meetings

Much of the MPO's business can be conducted at regularly scheduled meetings. At times during the long-range transportation planning process, the development of a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), or corridor study development, WMSRDC staff will call special meetings, workshops, or public meetings as written in the 2035 WestPlan Long Range Transportation Plan Participation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) Participation Plan, and the Corridor Study Participation Plan. All interested parties are given a 30-day comment period to review these and similar plans before adoption by the MPO.

The TIP and the LRP are developed in a cooperative effort between federal, state, and local officials and serves as a link in the transportation planning process. The primary purpose of these documents is to identify transportation programs and projects to be funded with federal aid in accordance with federal law and regulations. This TIP is an outline of the transportation needs of Muskegon and Northern Ottawa County for the next four years while the LRP outlines the needs for the next two decades.

- Special Meetings:** Special meetings are occasionally called by WMSRDC staff in order to cover an important subject, such as air quality, or to obtain MPO support for a specific action. For example, a special meeting would be called to present and discuss recommendations of a corridor study. Please refer to the WestPlan Long Range Transportation Plan (LRP) Participation Plan in Appendix A for details regarding the development of the LRP. Please refer to the WestPlan Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) Participation Plan in Appendix B for details regarding the development of the TIP. Please refer to the WestPlan Corridor Study Participation Plan in Appendix C for details regarding corridor studies.
- Public Workshops:** Public workshops or regional forums, as they have been called in the past, are also convened at times to get input from and disseminate information to local government staff, elected officials, special interest groups, and private citizens. A good example of this is a workshop

focussing on Muskegon County's air quality designation. Please refer to the WestPlan Long Range Transportation Plan (LRP) Participation Plan in Appendix A for details regarding the development of the LRP. Please refer to the WestPlan Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) Participation Plan in Appendix B for details regarding the development of the TIP. Please refer to the WestPlan Corridor Study Participation Plan in Appendix C for details regarding corridor studies.

- **Public Meetings:** Public meetings must be called when public documents such as TIP, Air Quality conformity, and the LRP are adopted by WMSRDC. Public meetings are generally held in conjunction with Technical Committee meetings. These meetings are advertised in the Muskegon Chronicle and notices are posted at the WMSRDC office, local government offices, and libraries following the information release procedure detailed in a previous section. Please refer to the WestPlan Long Range Transportation Plan (LRP) Participation Plan in Appendix A for details regarding the development of the LRP. Please refer to the WestPlan Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) Participation Plan in Appendix B for details regarding the development of the TIP. Please refer to the WestPlan Corridor Study Participation Plan in Appendix C for details regarding corridor studies.

Conclusion

These actions ensure maximum participation in the WestPlan planning process. They also serve to open other facets of the MPO planning activities to all interested parties for review. This increased access for local citizens to transportation planning will help to cement a customer orientation within the planning and program development effort. This will be helpful for the continuous improvement of WestPlan plans and programs to serve the Muskegon County and northern Ottawa County MPO. As with most plans and documents, the WestPlan Participation Plan will be updated when deemed necessary by WMSRDC and the WestPlan Policy Committee.

Appendices

Appendix A

2035 WestPlan Long Range Transportation Plan Participation Plan

Task	Date(s)	Method
Kickoff Process	October 2008	Distribute news and information regarding the beginning of this activity notifying stakeholders of how they can get involved.
Public Involvement Process and 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan Participation Plan Public Comment Period	April-July 2010	Make plan available for public comment. Review comments and revise as necessary.
WestPlan stakeholder list review and update	Ongoing	Review and update stakeholder mailing list as necessary.
Review environmental mitigation and justice analysis area	Feb-May 2010	Meet with staff from social service agencies to confirm accuracy of environmental justice area. Update as necessary. Discuss strategies for gaining input from their constituencies.
Consultation with other agencies/organizations impacted by transportation plan	May-June 2010	Consult with federal, state, and local agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities affected by transportation. This may include, but is not limited to, agencies responsible for economic growth, environmental protection, airport operation, freight movement, natural resources, and historic preservation.
Review Long Range Transportation Plan future deficiencies	July 2010	If necessary, a select "package" of network solutions will be developed once transportation system deficiencies and potential solutions to those deficiencies have been selected and tested. At a WestPlan Technical Committee Meeting this package of network solutions will be presented for public comment.
Air quality conformity public comment period	July-August 2010	Public comment on air quality analysis
Long Range Plan Public Meeting	August-September 2010	This is the formal public meeting on the draft LRP. Press releases and newsletter articles will be distributed regarding this meeting.
Posting on the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission website	Throughout entire process	As the plan is being developed, various documents will be posted on the WMSRDC website. These posting will also invite the public to comment on what they see.
Input at WestPlan Policy and Technical Committee Meetings	Throughout entire process	All WestPlan regularly scheduled Technical and Policy Committee meetings have time reserved for public comment.

Appendix B

2010-2013 WestPlan Transportation Improvement Plan Participation Plan

Task	Date(s)	Method
Kickoff Process	December 2008-February 2009	Distribute news and information regarding the beginning of this activity notifying stakeholders of how they can get involved.
WestPlan Participation and Consultation Plan Public Review Period	July 2009	Make plan available for public comment. Review comments and revise as necessary.
WestPlan stakeholder list review and update	Ongoing	Review and update stakeholder mailing list as necessary.
Consultation with other agencies/organizations impacted by the TIP and select and review TIP projects	April-June 2009	Consult with federal, state, and local agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities affected by transportation. This may include, but is not limited to, agencies responsible for economic growth, environmental protection, airport operation, freight movement, natural resources, and historic preservation.
Review environmental mitigation and justice analysis area and air quality conformity	April-June 2009	Meet with staff from social service agencies to confirm accuracy of environmental justice area. Update as necessary. Discuss strategies for gaining input from their constituencies.
Air quality conformity public comment period	June 2009	Public comment on air quality analysis
TIP Public Meeting	July 2007	This is the formal public meeting on the draft TIP. Press releases and newsletter articles will be distributed regarding this meeting.
Posting on the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission website	Throughout entire process	As the plan is being developed, various documents will be posted on the WMSRDC website. These posting will also invite the public to comment on what they see.
Input at WestPlan Policy and Technical Committee Meetings	Throughout entire process	All WestPlan regularly scheduled Technical and Policy Committee meetings have time reserved for public comment.

Appendix C

WestPlan Corridor Study Participation Plan

Task	Date(s)	Method
Kickoff Process	Beginning	Distribute news and information release regarding the beginning of this activity notifying stakeholders of how they can get involved.
Study Advisory Committee Formation	Beginning	Formulate a study advisory committee consisting of interested and/or affected parties.
Corridor Study stakeholder list review and update	Beginning	Review and update stakeholder mailing list as necessary.
Consultation with other agencies/organizations impacted by the Corridor Study	Throughout entire process	Consult with federal, state, and local agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities affected by the corridor study. This may include, but is not limited to, agencies responsible for economic growth, environmental protection, airport operation, freight movement, natural resources, and historic preservation.
Corridor Study Public Meeting	End	This is the formal public meeting on the draft Corridor Study. Press releases and newsletter articles will be distributed regarding this meeting. Comments will be incorporated into the final document.
Posting on the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission website	Throughout entire process	As the plan is being developed, various documents will be posted on the WMSRDC website. These posting will also invite the public to comment on what they see.
Input at Corridor Study Advisory Committee Meeting	Throughout entire process	All meetings have time reserved for public comment.