

# **Public Participation Plan**

for Regional Transportation Planning for the  
Rockingham Planning Commission  
Metropolitan Planning Organization

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**Public Participation in Regional Transportation Planning  
Rockingham Planning Commission MPO**

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ACS.....	American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau)
ADA.....	Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
CART .....	Greater Derry-Salem Cooperative Alliance for Regional Transportation
CFR.....	Code of Federal Regulations
COAST .....	Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation
EA.....	Environmental Assessment
EIS .....	Environmental Impact Statement
FAA.....	Federal Aeronautics Administration
FAST Act.....	Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act (2015)
FHWA.....	Federal Highway Administration
FRA.....	Federal Railroad Administration
FTA.....	Federal Transit Administration
GACIT .....	Governor’s Advisory Commission on Intermodal Transportation
LEP .....	Limited English Proficiency
LRTP .....	Long-Range Transportation Plan (also MTP)
MAP-21 .....	Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century (former
MOA.....	Memorandum of Agreement
MPO.....	Metropolitan Planning Organization
MTP.....	Metropolitan Transportation Plan (also LRTP)
NHDBEA .....	New Hampshire Department of Business and Economic Affairs
NHDES.....	New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services
NHDSHS.....	New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services
NHDNCR.....	New Hampshire Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
NHDOT .....	New Hampshire Department of Transportation
NNEPRA .....	Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority
OSI.....	New Hampshire Office of Strategic Initiatives
RCC.....	Regional Coordinating Council for Community Transportation
RPC.....	Rockingham Planning Commission
RSA.....	New Hampshire Revised Statutes Annotated (state law reference)
RTAP.....	Rural Technical Assistance Program
SAFETEA-LU .....	Safe, Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act (2005)
TAC.....	Technical Advisory Committee
TIP .....	Transportation Improvement Program
UNH .....	University of New Hampshire
USC .....	United States Code (federal law reference)
USDOT.....	United States Department of Transportation
UZA .....	Urbanized Area

## 1. Introduction

The ability to get where we need to go is central to living our lives with independence and dignity – to accessing employment, recreation, shopping, civic activities and medical care. It is central to the New Hampshire ideal of Live Free or Die. The Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is committed to meaningful public engagement throughout the long-range transportation planning process. Due to the far-reaching impacts inherent to transportation projects, soliciting advice and input from a wide range of stakeholders is critical to making sound transportation decisions.

Stakeholders can include both individuals and groups, whether citizens, business owners, environmental and civic organizations, agency partners, or advocacy groups that represent the needs of the traditionally underserved and underrepresented - including low income individuals, minorities, those with limited English proficiency, youth, the elderly and persons with disabilities. Each of these stakeholders offer a unique perspective on what it means to be mobile, and each also presents specific transportation needs and challenges. The diversity of these needs must be considered prior to the MPO rendering decisions on transportation projects.

Most of the important decisions regarding a transportation project are made years before a project reaches construction. Thus, it is extremely important to encourage engagement in the process early and often. Early and active participation allows stakeholders to wield greater influence over how public dollars get spent in our communities, and shape the future of our State, our region, and our communities.

The MPO is directly responsible under federal law for making sure that federal and state dollars spent on existing and future transportation projects and programs are based on a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive planning process.

Public participation includes the process, methods, and tools used by the MPO to inform and engage the public about transportation issues. A meaningful public participation plan is guided by more than just federal requirements; it is a valuable tool used by the MPO with the goal of making transportation investments meet the needs of the public and other stakeholders in both the present and future.

This Public Participation Plan (PPP) sets out the policies, goals and approaches for public participation as part of transportation planning activities and processes conducted by the Rockingham Planning Commission MPO. The following pages describe the MPO's obligations under Federal and New Hampshire laws and rules; and procedures, tools, and strategies for outreach and education on transportation issues.

## 2. Public Participation Policy and Goals

### Federal and State Mandates

Federal law and regulations related to the metropolitan transportation planning process contain specific requirements for public involvement in transportation planning and decision-making. These requirements are spelled out in Title 23 CFR 450.316 addressing Statewide Planning and Metropolitan Planning. State requirements for public access to information are contained in NH Revised Statutes (RSA) – Article 91-A (New Hampshire’s Right to Know law). The current federal transportation authorizing legislation, known as the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, was signed into law in 2015 and spells out requirements for programs funded by United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

The Rockingham Planning Commission is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) serving twenty-seven (27) communities in southeastern New Hampshire identified in *Figure 1*. The Rockingham Planning Commission MPO implements the FAST Act through plans and programs that consider all modes of transportation, and which are “continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive to the degree appropriate” [SEC. 1203(a)(4)]. In addition to the “3C” process listed above, the FAST Act emphasizes the broadening of public participation to include stakeholders who have not traditionally been involved. Transportation planning under the FAST Act must be performed in conjunction with state and local officials, transit operators and the public. Further, Metropolitan Planning Organizations are responsible for conducting the locally-developed public participation process as required by the Joint Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)/ Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Planning Rule (23 CFR part 450, 49 CFR part 613). The legislation requires that the metropolitan planning process must “include a proactive public participation process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and early and continuing participation of the public in developing plans” and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP) [23 CFR part 450.316(b)(1)]. Additional MPO public participation requirements and criteria are specified in *Appendix A*.

There are also public participation requirements at the state level. The public records law of New Hampshire states that all public records shall be open for inspection by any person at reasonable times (NH Revised Statutes RSA 91-A). Public records include all writings made, maintained or kept by the state or any agency, institution or political subdivision for use in the exercise of functions required or authorized by law or administrative rule or involving the receipt or expenditure of public funds.

The MPO’s procedures for distributing information in accordance with the public records law of New Hampshire are discussed in *Chapter 4: Documentation, Distribution and Notification*.

Though the meaningful engagement of diverse interests may be challenging at times, transportation decisions are ultimately more responsive to local needs when a broader swathe of the public is engaged.

Figure 1 – RPC MPO



### Low-Income Communities and Minority Communities

Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority and Low-Income Populations, was signed by President Clinton on Feb. 11, 1994 and published in the Feb. 16, 1994 Federal Register, Vol. 59, No. 32. The Executive Order and accompanying memorandum reinforced the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that focus federal attention on the environmental and human health condition in minority and low-income communities. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act states that “no person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” [42 USC 2000d]. Together these two laws promote non-discrimination in federal programs affecting human health and the environment, and provide minority and low income communities access to public information and an opportunity to participate in matters relating to transportation and the environment.

The Executive Order is oriented not only toward project level decision-making in the engineering and design phases for projects, but also toward long-range and project programming activities. MPO self certification reviews conducted by the FHWA and FTA in metropolitan areas stress the public participation efforts with potential environmental justice communities. Through the regional planning process, the MPO and partner agencies will thoroughly analyze the three fundamental environmental justice principles. The principles are:

- To avoid, minimize or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects, including social and economic effects, of programs, policies and activities on minority populations and low-income populations;
- To ensure full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process; and
- To prevent the denial of, reduction of, or significant delay in the receipt of transportation benefits by minority and low-income populations.

The MPO’s public participation methods to address the full and fair participation of all populations are described in *Chapter 3: Opportunities for Public Participation*.

### Individuals with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) requires that persons with disabilities have equal opportunity to participate in the development and improvement of transportation services. Planners, engineers, and builders must provide access for the disabled at sidewalks and ramps, street crossings, and in parking or transit access facilities. Persons with disabilities must also be able to access the sites where public participation activities occur as well as the information presented. The MPO’s public



participation methods to address the Americans with Disabilities Act are described in *Chapter 3: Opportunities for Public Participation*.

## **Public Participation Policy**

Public participation is vital to the Rockingham Planning Commission MPO. It helps provide the MPO the broadest spectrum of relevant information available prior to its decision-making and offers the public an opportunity to raise concerns that can be considered along with technical, political and economic merit. The MPO welcomes the early and continued participation of the public in developing the agency's regional policies and plans. The MPO seeks to establish an atmosphere which encourages public reflection, reaction and discussion of the wide-ranging issues with which it is involved.

Particularly important in pursuing public participation is identifying audiences which would be affected by or have a business or other affinity with the issues under consideration. All views should be heard and their participation likewise encouraged. In this context, minority views include not only ethnic groups but also others whose perspectives may not be fully reflected by larger segments of the public.

It is the intent of the MPO to actively solicit the comments and engage the interests of the public through the participation process. It then is the responsibility of this body to balance the public's needs and desires with the MPO's responsibilities and visions for the future of the region.

In adopting this policy, staff are directed to incorporate appropriate activities to make public communications and outreach a part of the agency's overall planning activities. In addition to required public hearings, such activities might include: representative task forces or advisory committees; public meetings and workshops, presentations and discussions with special interest organizations, forums or conferences that provide information about issues and processes and the opportunity for input from the public; opinion polls, surveys, focus groups and interviews to acquire information; and use of the media and reports to disseminate information.

## **Public Participation Goals**

The fundamental goal of public participation is to assure that the decisions regarding a proposed plan or project are made only after the public is aware of, and has opportunity to comment on, the proposal. Transportation planning decision-makers must consider concerns of all parties who may be affected by a proposed project. Specific goals of the public participation process include the following:

### ***Goal 1: Educate and Present Information***

The MPO is responsible for providing information to the public. MPO staff will educate and present information about the regional planning process, including the sources of funding, data on transportation system performance, and impacts of regional planning decisions. MPO staff will inform

the public about the transportation planning process and the role of the Metropolitan Planning Organization. Staff will explain the specific tasks and goals of the MPO, as well as related tasks that are not in the MPO's authority to perform. This information will be presented in non-technical terms so the public can readily understand and process this information.

***Goal 2: Solicit Public Input***

The MPO will actively seek out input and participation from the broad range of individuals, groups and organizations affected by the transportation system to identify transportation related needs, desires, issues and concerns. Public participation will be sought continuously throughout transportation planning processes, though efforts will be specifically targeted at the beginning of planning efforts, at key decision points while there is opportunity to affect decisions, and when draft documents are issued. MPO Policy Committee and TAC members also have direct contact with the public in the communities they represent and should reflect their concerns to MPO staff. Staff will monitor public input received through project development efforts, corridor studies and other planning activities.

***Goal 3: Facilitate Information Flow between the Public and Decision-Makers***

MPO staff are responsible for compiling public issues, comments and concerns into complete and concise documents for presentation to the decision-makers. The MPO staff will also schedule and organize meetings where the public can present concerns to Staff or MPO Committees.

***Goal 4: Consider Public Concerns in Decision-Making***

The MPO will consider the public concerns that are presented to them by the staff as well as those presented to them by individual persons at public meetings. MPO staff will consider public concerns as they prepare draft planning documents.

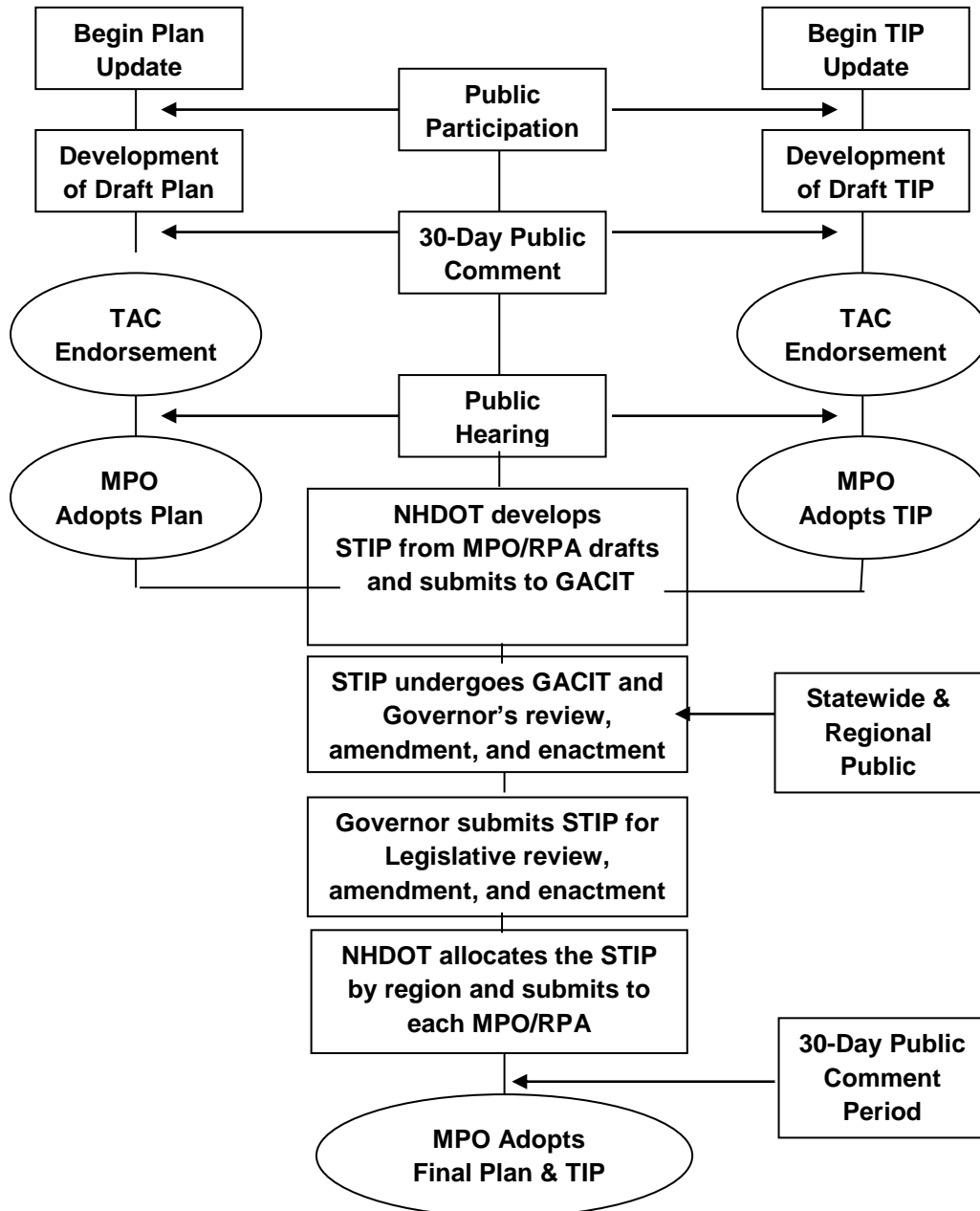
The desired outcome in implementing these goals will be transportation plans, programs and projects which reflect local, regional and state priorities and needs; and which consider a range of transportation options and the overall social, economic, energy and environmental effect of transportation decisions.

### **3. Opportunities for Public Participation**

#### **Planning Process**

The regional transportation planning process involves a range of activities including the preparation of regional plans, transportation improvement programs, corridor studies, and administrative documents. Public interest will vary considerably based on the intensity of the public feeling on the issue at hand. This variety suggests that the regional public participation process should recognize the differences and provide opportunities for participation to meet the diverse needs. The MPO typically follows the transportation planning process displayed in *Figure 2*. The process is applied to long-range regional plans, corridor and project studies and short-range transportation improvement programs.

**FIGURE 2  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRANSPORTATION PLAN &  
TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP)**



Acronym Glossary: MPO = Metropolitan Planning Organization;  
NHDOT = NH Department of Transportation; TAC = MPO Technical Advisory Committee;  
TIP = Transportation Improvement Program; STIP = State Transportation Improvement Program;  
GACIT = Governor's Advisory Commission on Intermodal Transportation;  
RPA = Regional Planning Agency

## MPO Committee Structure

The Metropolitan Planning Organization process in the Rockingham Planning Commission region has been established in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC), the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT), the Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation (COAST), the Cooperative Alliance for Regional Transportation (CART) and UNH Wildcat Transit. This MOA was executed in 2015 as an umbrella document approved by all four MPOs as well as all public transportation providers serving urbanized areas of the state.

### MPO Policy Committee

The Rockingham Planning Commission MPO Policy Committee is comprised of representatives from the MPO's nine member communities; state and federal agencies; and major regional organizations. Each community's Commissioners on the Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) serve on the MPO Policy Committee. Commissioners are appointed by their Board of Selectmen or City Council, and each holds one vote on behalf of their local community. Representation on the regional planning commission is defined under RSA 36:46, with each community entitled to between two and four representatives (and therefore votes) based on its population as listed in *Table 1*.

**TABLE 1 - RPC Community Representation**

Reps	Community	2015 ACS Est Population	Reps	Community	2015 ACS Est Population
2	Danville	4,446	2	Newton	4,752
2	Atkinson	6,796	2	North Hampton	4,361
2	Brentwood	4,649	2	Plaistow	7,601
2	East Kingston	2,575	2	Rye	5,341
2	Epping	6,666	2	Sandown	6,176
2	Fremont	4,441	2	Seabrook	8,771
2	Greenland	3,724	2	South Hampton	812
2	Hampstead	8,552	2	Stratham	7,320
2	Hampton Falls	2,313	3	Raymond	10,236
2	Kensington	2,021	3	Exeter	14,483
2	Kingston	6,077	3	Hampton	15,132
2	New Castle	974	4	Portsmouth	21,426
2	Newfields	1,618	4	Salem	28,853
2	Newington	737			

*Communities that are not dues paying members of the Rockingham Planning Commission are entitled to only one representative/vote on the MPO Policy Committee*

Other organizations described below are also represented on the MPO Policy Committee:

Additional MPO Policy Committee Voting Members:

- NH Department of Transportation – Planning Bureau or Commissioners Designee
- NH Department of Transportation – Rail & Transit Bureau or Commissioners Designee
- NH Department of Environmental Services – Air Resources Bureau
- Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation (COAST)
- Cooperative Alliance for Regional Transportation (CART)
- University of New Hampshire - Wildcat Transit
- Pease Development Authority

Non-Voting Members:

- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
- Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)
- NHDOT - Aeronautics Division
- NHDOT – District VI
- New Hampshire Office of Strategic Initiatives (formerly Office of Energy & Planning)
- Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA)
- Strafford Regional Planning Commission
- Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission
- Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
- Nashua Regional Planning Commission
- Southern NH Planning Commission
- Maine Department of Transportation
- Massachusetts Department of Transportation

The Policy Committee is assisted by the MPO Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), which reviews work of the transportation process and advises the Policy Committee on planning and implementation procedures. Ad hoc committees and work groups are also established for short durations to assist on specific planning tasks and functions. Examples of ad hoc committees and work groups include advisory committees established for review of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the widening of I-93, work on the New Hampshire Seacoast Greenway, or for work on updates to the MPO's Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The membership of these short-term committees typically includes representatives of affected municipalities and community groups, as well as experts on the relevant committee topic(s).

MPO Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

There are 36 voting members of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), plus a number of non-voting representatives of various stakeholder organizations. TAC membership is comprised as follows:

Voting Members (One voting member or designee from each of the following):

- a. Each Municipality in the MPO Planning Region that is a dues-paying member of the Rockingham Planning Commission (Currently 26 municipalities)
- b. New Hampshire Department of Transportation – Planning Bureau
- c. New Hampshire Department of Transportation – Maintenance District VI
- d. New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services - Air Resources Division
- e. Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC)
- f. Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation (COAST)
- g. Cooperative Alliance for Regional Transportation (CART)
- h. University of New Hampshire – Wildcat Transit
- i. Pease Development Authority

Non-Voting Members:

- a. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- b. Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
- c. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
- d. Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)
- e. New Hampshire Department of Transportation - Aeronautics Bureau
- f. New Hampshire Department of Transportation – Rail & Transit Bureau
- g. New Hampshire Office of Strategic Initiatives
- h. Strafford Regional Planning Commission
- i. Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission
- j. Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
- k. Nashua Regional Planning Commission
- l. Southern NH Planning Commission
- m. Maine Department of Transportation
- n. Massachusetts Department of Transportation
- o. Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA)
- p. Intercity Bus Operator (I-93 Corridor)
- q. Intercity Bus Operator (I-95 Corridor)
- r. Pan Am Rail Systems

The Committee may also authorize additional non-voting members.

The public is encouraged to attend committee meetings and/or contact their representatives with their comments and concerns. A public comment period is included in all meetings of the TAC and MPO Policy Committee. The RPC web site calendar ([www.rpc-nh.org](http://www.rpc-nh.org)) contains meeting dates.

### MPO Transportation Planning Process Meetings - Standing Times and Dates

- *Technical Advisory Committee – Monthly, typically 9:00 am the fourth Thursday of the month*
- *MPO Policy Committee – Quarterly, typically 7:00 pm on the second Wednesday of the months of January, April, July and October*

## **Policy Action Process and Agency Integration**

### Major Policy Action Process

The MPO policy action process has been designed to ensure the Policy Committee has ample opportunity to carefully consider the issue or action in question, and consider the views of the public before taking a major policy action. Such major actions are associated with:

- New or amended Regional Long-Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs);
- New Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs)

### Major policy actions include the following steps:

1. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), reviews work of the MPO staff, NHDOT, and other public input, and makes a recommendation to the Policy Committee on planning and implementation procedures.
2. The chair of the Policy Committee sets a public hearing date that allows at least a 10-day period for the public to review documents before the public hearing. The public comment period on core policy documents (adoption of LRTP, TIP) will remain open for at least 30 days in accordance with federal regulation.
3. After setting the public hearing date, a notice of the public hearing is published in the two major newspapers serving the MPO region – the Portsmouth Herald/ SeacoastOnline.com and the Lawrence Eagle-Tribune - at least 10 days in advance of the public hearing. Notices may also be published in other newspapers. The notice includes the time, date and location of the public hearing as well as how the subject document can be reviewed. The subject document is also made available on the RPC web site ([www.rpc-nh.org](http://www.rpc-nh.org)).
4. A formal public hearing is conducted. The views of the public as well as the recommendations of any applicable MPO ad hoc committees are heard at the hearing.
5. After considering all comments and recommendations in the public hearing, action on the policy is then taken by the Policy Committee at its next scheduled meeting. If public hearings are coupled with Policy Committee meetings on the same night, the Policy Committee may take action immediately following the hearing, unless the Committee votes that some aspect of the input received from the public requires further information or analysis to ensure a fully informed decision.

6. A summary of significant public comments and responses is included in the final published policy document or made available as a separate document.

#### Agency Integration

The regional transportation planning process, and its corresponding public participation process, is a coordinated approach among RPC, COAST, CART, UNH Wildcat Transit, NHDOT, the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) and the communities of the region. The Memorandum of Agreement outlining their roles and responsibilities as well as plans for coordination in transportation processes is found on the [MPO Website](#).

#### **Key Planning Activities**

The framework described in *Table 2* identifies types of planning products, the most appropriate agency responsible for the public participation activity and the usual methods for obtaining public participation. Additional methods to obtain public input may also be used if needed.

#### Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)

The Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan is the Federally-mandated long-range, transportation plan for the Rockingham Planning Commission MPO region. It represents the vision for a multimodal transportation system that will serve the region out to a planning horizon of at least twenty years. It also identifies transportation improvement projects of various travel modes that are financially feasible for at least the next 20 years given expected levels of funding. The LRTP reflects proposals throughout the entire region. The FAST Act requires that the LRTP be updated at least every five years as the region is in Attainment with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Opportunities for public and resource agency participation are provided around key decision points in the planning process. The 2017 update to the plan included a regional survey as well as a series of regional visioning sessions and focus group meetings that were conducted as part of the recent update to the RPC Regional Master Plan, plus public hearings on the draft and final plan.



**Table 2 - Key Planning Activities and Public Participation Methods**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Update Frequency</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Methods</b>
Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan	Five Years	MPO/RPC	Staff outreach to communities and organizations using transportation forums; focus group meetings for key populations; non-random sample web-based surveys; random sample survey with UNH if budget allows; promotion via social media, web site, local CATV; Public interest forums at key points throughout the development process; 30 day public comment period; TAC review and recommendation; public hearing followed by Policy Committee adoption.
Coordinated Public Transit/ Human Service Transportation Plans	Five Years	MPO/RPC	Regional Coordinating Council guidance; surveys of municipal welfare directors, transportation provider agencies, riders, and non-profit human service agencies; RCC review and recommendation; 15-30 day public comment period; TAC review and recommendation; public hearing followed by Policy Committee adoption.
Transportation Improvement Program	Two Years	MPO/RPC, Local Governments, NHDOT	MPO staff meet with municipalities and agencies to identify priorities; project sponsor conducts public outreach in communities regarding specific projects; TAC committee review and recommendation; 30 day public comment period for TIP adoption; 10-30 day public comment period for amendment depending on scale and complexity; public hearing before adoption of new TIP or full TIP amendment.
Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)	Two Years	MPO/RPC, NHDOT	Transportation forum to identify key planning tasks; Review work plans with partner agencies; TAC committee review and recommendation; MPO Policy Committee approval; final review by FHWA/FTA.
Specialized Plan Elements	As Needed	MPO/RPC	Ad hoc committees or work groups; one or more public forums and or survey depending on project scope; TAC committee review and recommendation; solicitation of comments and input announced via web site and email notification. Policy Committee review and adoption.
Corridor/ Sub-area Studies	As Needed	NHDOT, MPO/RPC	Task forces/committees and/or public meetings in the corridor or sub-area at key decision points. Public advisory committee surveys and questionnaires. Meetings conducted in affected neighborhoods, community study office and community outreach efforts (e.g. newsletter, web site, Facebook, comment forms).
Project Development	As Needed	Implementing Jurisdiction	Task forces/committees and/or public meetings in the project locale at key decision points; public hearing. Public advisory committee surveys and questionnaires.

**Table 3 – MPO Public Participation Strategies and Typical Uses**

Strategy	Functions	Frequency of Use	Planning Processes
Email & Surface Mail Contact Database	General awareness, meeting announcements, solicit project specific or general input	Weekly	Universal
Electronic Newsletter	General awareness, meeting announcements, solicit input	Bi-Monthly	Universal
Traditional Media Strategies	General awareness, meeting announcements, soliciting input	Project specific, 4-6 per year	LRTP, Municipal Master Plans, Corridor Studies, Specialized Plans
Facebook & Twitter	General awareness, meeting announcements, soliciting input	Typically 3-5 posts per week	Universal
Strategies to Reach Underrepresented Populations	General awareness, meeting announcements, soliciting input	Accessibility functions routine, additional targeted outreach	LRTP, Coordination Plans,
Tabling at Community Events	General awareness, meeting announcements, soliciting input	Project specific, 2-4 per year	LRTP, Local Master Plans, Corridor Studies
Formal Public Comment Periods	Solicit project specific input	Project specific, 4-6 per year	LRTP, TIP, PPP
Public Hearings	Solicit project specific input	Project specific, 4-6 per year	LRTP, TIP, PPP
Municipal Official Meetings	Solicit general and project specific input	Target all 27 communities during two year solicitation cycle	LRTP, TIP, TYP, Corridor Studies, Specialized Plans
Public Forums/Meetings/ Workshops	Solicit project specific input	Project specific	LRTP, Municipal Master Plans, Corridor Studies, Specialized Plans
Surveys and Questionnaires	Solicit general and project specific input	Project specific - 3-4 per year	LRTP, Municipal Master Plans, Corridor Studies, Coordination Plans, Specialized Plans
Visualization Techniques	Illustrate processes and projects for easier understanding	Project specific, 2-3 times/month	Universal
Website	General awareness, meeting announcements, minutes	Updates at least weekly	Universal
Ad Hoc Committees and Working Groups	Solicit project specific input	Project specific, 3-5 active at any given time	Specialized Studies, RCCs, NHSG Advisory Committee
MPO Technical Advisory Committee & MPO Policy Committee	General awareness, solicit general and project specific input, local approval of MPO actions	TAC meets monthly, Policy Committee meets quarterly	Universal

## Specialized Plan Elements

Occasionally, specialized plan elements are prepared to further define the Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). Examples of this include the two Coordinated Public Transit/Human Services Transportation plans covering the MPO region. Upon adoption, specialized plan elements become part of the overall LRTP. Opportunities for public participation are provided through ad hoc committees or work groups, and comment periods during TAC and Policy Committee meetings. Additional public meetings may be held if further public input is desired prior to Policy Committee action.

## Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The TIP is a document that programs transportation improvements to be funded in the region over a four-year period. Local governments, NHDOT, the MPO, and other regional stakeholders propose projects to be included in the TIP. The MPO policy is that project priorities considered for the TIP must be identified in the Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan. Early public input should be obtained by sponsor agencies before submitting projects to be included in the TIP. The draft TIP document is the subject of a public hearing.

Modifications to the TIP are divided into two types based on scope, with varying levels of public participating applying to each. These two types of amendments include 1) Full Amendments; and 2) Administrative Modifications. Full amendments are subject to a formal public comment period and approval by the MPO Policy Committee. The length of the public comment period varies based on the scope and complexity of the proposed amendment, and is established collaboratively by the MPO, NHDOT, NHDES, FHWA, FTA and EPA through the Interagency Consultation process. Administrative Modifications may be adopted with the consent of the Executive Director of the Rockingham Planning Commission. These include two categories: Minor Revisions, which are typically sent to TAC and Policy Committee members to review for a three day period; and Information Only modifications. Information Only modifications cover very small adjustments to projects and may be approved by the Executive Director without additional review. Most Administrative Modifications are handled through a monthly Minor Revision process. Information Only items are rarely put forward.

The MPO planning and public participation process is also designed to satisfy Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requirements under 49 USC Section 5307 for public participation in the development of the Annual Program of Projects (POP) for CART, COAST, UNH Wildcat Transit and the NH Department of Transportation.

## Corridor / Sub-Area Studies

Corridor and sub-area studies are local in concern yet often have impacts on larger areas. Corridor studies may at times serve as Environmental Assessments (EAs) to lead toward environmental clearance actions. More commonly, though, corridor studies focus at a broad level, and are precursors to more

specific project-based Environmental Impact Statements (such as the NH Route 125 Corridor Study or the US Route 1 Corridor Study). Such studies normally have very extensive public outreach and input efforts that attract a significant number of participants. The agency charged with conducting the specific study is responsible for conducting public participation activities. MPO staff are actively involved and monitor the public participation activities in these studies to help identify broad issues, concerns, desires, etc. that may be relevant to regional planning. Opportunities to integrate MPO public outreach efforts with corridor studies are also pursued.

### Projects

The project sponsor, whether a municipality, NHDOT, transit agency or other entity, is responsible for involving the public in efforts during environmental planning and design phases for specific local transportation projects. MPO staff monitor studies for major projects.

### Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) describes all metropolitan transportation planning and transportation-related land use and air quality planning activities (regardless of funding source) addressing the planning priorities facing the MPO region for a two year planning period. The UPWP identifies tasks that will be accomplished using federal transportation planning funds. RPC and NHDOT participate in the activities of the biennial UPWP, which includes descriptions of planning tasks to be performed and identifies funding sources and descriptions of other major transportation planning activities by partner agencies and local governments.

## **Public Participation Methods**

Various techniques will selectively be used to provide information and solicit public comment. Some examples of public participation activities are briefly described below.

### Email & Surface Mail Contact Databases

The MPO's mailing list database help the agency organize and update its public communications. The database includes multiple categories including town administrators, professional planners, municipal board chairs, public works directors and road agents, economic development directors, human services directors, senior services directors, other public, private and non-profit organizations, and interested individuals who have asked to receive MPO communications. Entries typically include telephone numbers and/or email addresses to help contact the public. Most commonly the database is used for email communication, though in some circumstances continues to be used for surface mail.

Using mailing lists, the MPO reaches target audiences with announcements of upcoming events, meeting invitations, newsletters, summary reports and other information about its activities. The MPO

updates its mailing list at the start of a major planning process. The MPO may also create a targeted mailing list for a survey. The MPO master mailing list includes nearly 300 members of the public and organizations.

#### Electronic Newsletter

The Rockingham Planning Commission's E-Newsletter is sent monthly to 300+ recipients who have specifically requested to receive this communication. It provides an effective way to distribute planning news and information throughout the region and the state. Additional editions of the Newsletter are produced in a month based on timing to publicize specific events, or to highlight particular projects.

#### Traditional Media Strategies

Media strategies inform the public about projects and programs through newspapers, radio, television and videos, posters, mass mailings of brochures or postcards, and distribution of fliers. Briefing packets may be developed for reporters on a project or program to help prepare them to cover the topic in an accurate and objective manner. The MPO may prepare press releases and media packets at the 'kick off' of the planning process of such major endeavors as the Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan or other planning processes.

#### Social Media Strategies

The Rockingham Planning Commission maintains active Facebook and Twitter accounts as avenues for both disseminating information on planning commission and MPO activities, as well as related events from partner agencies. They are also an opportunity for soliciting public feedback. The RPC Facebook account has 119 follower, and staff post to the account typically 2-5 times per week. The RPC Twitter account has approximately 220 followers, and staff post information with similar frequency as the agency Facebook account.

#### Informational Brochures and Postcards

Informational brochures and postcards are at times developed by the MPO to encourage communication between the regional community and the program staff. This helps to ensure that information regarding current activities and news about the region is shared throughout the region. Brochures, flyers or postcards may be prepared for major plan updates to provide an overview and basic information to the public pointing them toward additional resources, including the RPC web site ([www.rpc-nh.org](http://www.rpc-nh.org)).

#### Strategies to Reach Underrepresented Populations

MPO staff are proactive regarding public outreach to underrepresented populations, including individuals with disabilities, elderly, low-income and minority residents and transit-dependent individuals. Methods used to date to obtain input include:

- speaking requests to organizations and interest groups;
- recruiting advocates to participate in planning processes;
- participation on corridor studies and compilation of local comments;
- contact with local government planners, staff and elected officials;
- targeted questionnaire distribution; and
- adding the Google Translate application to the MPO website to improve access for individuals with Limited English Proficiency

#### Tabling at Community Events

MPO staff from time to time set up public outreach displays and materials on specific planning projects at public meetings or other community events such as senior health fairs, farmers markets, or Old Home Days. It can be an effective strategy to seek people out where they are already congregated in addition to holding separate project-specific meetings. This strategy has been used to gather input for the Long-Range Transportation Plan, municipal master plans as well as specific studies.

#### Public Hearings

Public hearings are more formal events than a public meeting and are based on legal requirements. Held prior to a decision point, a public hearing gathers community comments and positions from all interested parties for public record and input into decisions. Public hearings are required by the federal government for many transportation documents and projects. The MPO hosts public hearings before the adoption of the Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and other key planning documents. Additional hearings may be held during the transportation planning process at the discretion of the sponsoring organization. Public notices in a general circulation newspaper cite the time, date and place of a hearing. A minimum period of 10 days will be allowed between notice and hearing dates. The length of public comment periods in advance of public hearings varies based on the action. Adoption of the Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) require a full 30 day public comment period. For TIP amendments the length of the public comment period is determined through the Interagency Consultation process, involving the four MPOs, NHDOT, NHDES, FHWA, FTA and EPA. Comment periods on full amendments to the TIP range typically from 10 to 30 days based on the magnitude and complexity of the proposed amendment. During public comment periods the agency accepts questions and provides clarification. Subject documents will be available to the public when a hearing is noticed.

All MPO-hosted public hearings are wheelchair accessible. Also, the MPO will accommodate and provide services for persons with other disabilities or Limited English Proficiency (LEP) when provided notice before the forum or meeting.

### Public Interest Forums / Meetings / Workshops

Public forums and meetings disseminate information, provide a setting for public discussion, and gather feedback from the community. They are often hosted at more than one key point in the process to develop specific planning documents.

Forums are often tailored to specific issues or community groups and may be informal or formal. Such forums may include the following:

- open houses / interactions periods;
- formal presentations;
- question and answer periods;
- brainstorming sessions; and
- small break-out groups
- charrettes

All MPO-hosted public hearings are wheelchair accessible. Also, the MPO will accommodate and provide services for persons with other disabilities or with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) when provided adequate notice before the hearing.

### Municipal and Community Presentations

MPO staff routinely accept invitations from local organizations and municipal boards to come and speak on regional planning issues or specific planning projects.

### Surveys and Questionnaires

The MPO uses surveys to gather information for major updates to the Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan, corridor studies, rider input for CART, and from time to time for other planning projects, such as master plan updates for member communities, transit coordination planning, bicycle route designation, etc. The method of data collection varies by project, but included in-person interviews, paper survey mailouts, and web-based questionnaires. For the past two major updates to the Long-Range Transportation Plan funding was prioritized to contract with the UNH Survey Center to conduct a random sample household telephone survey.

### Visualization Techniques

The MPO strives to use visual media to better convey to the public information important in the transportation planning process. This might include regional maps showing modeled projections of how alternative land use policies scenarios will impact development and the transportation system in twenty years. It could also include simpler techniques such as renderings or photo simulations to show a widened roadway or bridge in context; flow charts to clearly depict the transportation planning process; or graphs related to distribution of project funding.

#### Web Site

The MPO website ([www.rpc-nh.org](http://www.rpc-nh.org)) has been wholly redesigned during 2016-2017 to keep the public informed about planning activities and to offer another way to provide comments. The RPC/MPO website is designed to be a comprehensive source including a calendar of meetings, agendas and meeting minutes; links to regional demographic, economic, and traffic data; downloadable versions of planning documents, and extensive Geographic Information System (GIS)/mapping content.

#### Ad Hoc Committees and Work Groups

These groups are assigned a specific task, with a time limit for reaching a conclusion or producing a draft document, subject to ratification by the TAC or MPO Policy Committee. The membership of these groups often includes local people or representatives from interest groups, appointed by elected officials or agency executives.

#### Meetings with Municipal Officials

To generate a more comprehensive picture of transportation project need in the region, staff intend to implement a new policy of meeting with municipal officials from each of the 27 MPO communities at least once every two years. In recent LRTP and Ten Year Plan project solicitation cycles more than half of the communities in the region have not submitted project needs. Meetings will be scheduled over the course of the year with interested staff and municipal board members in each community, typically including planning and select board members, planners, town administrators/managers, public works directors/road agents, police, and members of other local committees.

#### GACIT Hearings on the NHDOT Ten Year Transportation Plan

As part of the biennial development of the State Ten Year Transportation Plan, NHDOT and the members of the Governor's Advisory Commission on Intermodal Transportation (GACIT) hold a series of twenty or more hearings around the state. Typically there are 3-5 hearings in the MPO region or in adjacent communities. MPO staff participate in these hearings to present the regional project prioritization process and make both project specific and general comments on the draft Ten Year Plan. While these hearings are organized by NHDOT, the MPO assists with meeting publicity and the meetings represent an excellent opportunity to get public input on specific project needs and broad spending priorities.

## **4. Documentation, Distribution and Notification**

All documentation pertaining to transportation plans and programs is available for public review and comment. This chapter describes the types of documents available and how they are distributed. It also identifies procedures the MPO follows to notify the public of the documents, meetings and other information.



## **Documentation**

The MPO produces policy documents via adopting resolutions, technical reports, white papers, consultant reports and popular reports. These provide written documentation of the policies, plans, programs and planning activities of the transportation planning process.

Policy documents are prepared first in draft form and then published in final form after adoption by the MPO Policy Committee. The MPO will make drafts of policy documents available for public review at least 10 days prior to public hearings on the subject. Core policy documents including the Long-Range Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program undergo a minimum public comment period of 30 days. Drafts of the Public Participation Plan will be available at least 45 days prior to a public hearing. Public comments received on updates to the Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan will be summarized and included with the policy document along with responses and the disposition of the comments. MPO plans, reports, meetings, agendas and meeting summaries are available on the Rockingham Planning Commission web site at [www.rpc-nh.org](http://www.rpc-nh.org).

The MPO may publish technical and other reports after acceptance by the TAC or other committees, as appropriate. These reports will be available upon their completion. In addition to published reports, the MPO maintains unpublished technical information in support of its planning efforts.

Minutes are prepared for all meetings of the TAC and Policy Committee. These are available upon request from the planning commission. The MPO will also provide documentation of key decision points in a planning process through the public outreach of that process.

For major updates to the Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan, a separate summary document of public participation activities and input received is produced. It is available to decision-makers and the general public through the planning commission offices.

## **Distribution and Notification**

The public may request to obtain or view all reports developed and compiled by MPO. MPO publications may be free of charge or cost a nominal fee. Most publications can also be downloaded and printed from the RPC web site. The public may also view unpublished technical information at the RPC offices.

Draft policy documents are available at RPC offices and on the RPC web site. Libraries in the region have access to the RPC web site for viewing or downloading documents. The RPC informs the public about transportation-related projects and actions through its electronic newsletter, which is emailed to nearly 300 individuals and organizations. In addition to the newsletter, public hearings for major policy actions (adoption of the Long Range Transportation Plan or Transportation Improvement Program) are advertised in one or both of the major daily newspaper chains serving the region: 1) SeacoastOnline, which includes the Portsmouth Herald, the Exeter News-Letter and the Hampton Union; or 2) the

Lawrence Eagle-Tribune. Selection of the appropriate outlet depends on project location, as distribution for Seacoast Online is primarily in the eastern half of the MPO region, and the Eagle Tribune in the western half.

The MPO also maintains a comprehensive mailing list of elected officials, public officials, special interest groups and others to ensure the widest possible distribution of documents. This list is used for newsletter mailings, and to inform interested parties of upcoming meetings and other events pertaining to the transportation planning process and products. The MPO's list of interested parties will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- *Boards of selectmen and city councils from study area communities;*
- *Planning boards, traffic safety committees, public works officials/road agents;*
- *Economic Development Committees*
- *Conservation Commissions*
- *Public and private transit and livery operators, including demand responsive operators;*
- *Human service agencies with low income, elderly and disabled clients;*
- *Representatives from adjoining MPOs;*
- *Traffic safety and enforcement agencies;*
- *Chambers of commerce; economic development organizations;*
- *Members of the State Legislature representing study area communities;*
- *Appropriate state and federal agencies, including the NHDOT, NHDES, DNCR, DBEA, OSI, FHWA, FTA, FAA, EPA;*
- *Individuals and groups with a demonstrated interest in transportation issues;*
- *Major businesses and business and industry associations;*
- *Transportation user groups;*
- *Those underserved by the transportation system; and*
- *Print and broadcast media contacts.*

The MPO will also prepare a listing of public meetings scheduled under its auspices. This listing is posted at the RPC offices and on the RPC website. These meetings are all open to the public. Public comment periods are provided for during meetings of MPO committees.

## **5. Review of Public Participation Process**

MPOs serving Census-defined Urbanized Areas with populations over 200,000 are required to undergo review and certification every four years by FHWA/FTA to ensure compliance with Federal requirements. The Rockingham Planning Commission MPO has had two such reviews in January 2009 and January 2013, and a third is scheduled for late 2017.

However, the MPO does undertake a biennial self-certification review. The public participation processes of the MPO are an element of this review. As part of the self-certification, the MPO will biennially review the public participation process, considering the following items:

- What was the success of specific strategies in attracting public comments?
- What level of public input was received for various planning products?
- Was public input considered by decision-makers?
- Should any new strategies or adjustments be considered in the following year?
- Are any changes or amendments necessary to the Public Participation in Regional Transportation Planning document?

###

## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A – Federal Regulations addressing MPO Public Participation Process**

**Appendix B – Adopting Resolution**

**Appendix A**  
**Excerpt from Federal Metropolitan Planning Rules**  
**on MPO Public Participation Process**

**23 CFR 450.316: Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process: Elements.**

(b) In addition, the metropolitan transportation planning process shall:

- (1) 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:
  - (i) Require a minimum public comment period of 45 days before the public involvement process is initially adopted or revised;
  - (ii) 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);
  - (iii) 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;
  - (iv) 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));
  - (v) Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received during the planning and program development processes;
  - (vi) Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to low-income and minority households;
  - (vii) 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;

- (viii) 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;
- (ix) 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;
- (x) These procedures will be reviewed by the FHWA and the FTA during certification reviews for TMAs, and as otherwise necessary for all MPOs, to assure that full and open access is provided to MPO decisionmaking processes;
- (xi) 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**

### **Adopting Resolution**

#### RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN FOR THE

#### ROCKINGHAM PLANNING COMMISSION METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

WHEREAS, the urban transportation planning process is required to have a PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN which delineates currently valid organizational responsibilities, operating procedures, and a summary of the planning program; and

WHEREAS, the PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN establishes the multi-year framework within which the Unified Planning Work Program for transportation planning in the Rockingham Planning Commission MPO Study Area is accomplished; and

WHEREAS, the responsibilities for cooperatively carrying out the urban transportation planning process are clearly defined in the PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN and via executed agreements or memoranda of understanding referenced in the PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The Rockingham Planning Commission Metropolitan Planning Organization adopts the PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN dated \_\_\_\_\_, 2018.

The undersigned duly qualified Chairperson of the Rockingham Planning Commission MPO Policy Committee hereby certifies that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of a resolution, adopted at legally convened meeting of the Rockingham Planning Commission MPO Policy Committee held on the following date:

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Philip Wilson, Chairman

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Date

Rockingham Planning Commission MPO Policy Committee

