



3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

3.1 Introduction

Under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and continuing under the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), MPOs are required to have a proactive public involvement process for planning and programming, and to reach out to traditionally underserved and underrepresented communities. In an attempt to effectively communicate with the public and engage all citizens in MPO activities, the ECTC has adopted a Public Participation Policy. This policy creates guidelines to ensure, for example, sufficient notice for public meetings and adequate timeframes for document reviews. Beyond that, it also sets specific guidelines for documentation of public involvement in the long range planning process. The guiding principles set by the 2004 ECTC Public Participation Policy, which will be updated in parallel with this long range plan update, have been met through the development of this document. This chapter describes this outreach process in detail.

3.2 Outreach Approach

Public outreach for the Long Range Plan involved a multi-stage approach. With guidance and oversight from the project Steering Committee, the team began with one-on-one information-gathering interviews and progressed to group meetings with established stakeholder groups and larger, open public meetings.

Early on, the team developed public outreach materials, including a stakeholder database, a mailing list, a one-page brochure, a questionnaire and an informational PowerPoint presentation (Appendix A). The database included stakeholder contact information as well as their area of interest. The brochure outlined the role of the MPO and the purpose of the Long Range Plan. The questionnaire solicited input regarding issues impacting

the transportation system and local priorities. Working with the ECTC, the team developed a project web page on the ECTC site which included the same material and was available to interested parties electronically.

Five outreach groups were considered:

- Individuals
- Interest Groups
- General Public
- Low-income and moderate-income communities
- Minority communities



3.2.1 INDIVIDUALS

The first outreach group included municipal leaders and representatives from the private sector, non-profit organizations and social service agencies (Appendix A). These 55 individuals were people with direct knowledge about transportation issues in the region, a specific interest or need regarding transportation, or represented stakeholder organizations.

3.2.2 INTEREST GROUPS

The second group consisted of established interest groups, such as the Chemung County Chamber of Commerce and



Chemung County Office for the Aging. Throughout June and July, the team scheduled meetings with representatives of interest groups and requested an opportunity to speak at each group's regularly scheduled meetings. Each of these opportunities allowed the project team to advertise the planning process and solicit topic- and place-specific input. It also provided the opportunity to access existing mailing lists. As a result of outreach to interest groups, the project mailing list grew to over 500 names by June.

3.2.3 GENERAL PUBLIC

The third group was the general public, or anyone who had not been included in a prior category. To reach the general public, the project team sent out a press release regarding public meetings and invited interested individuals to sign up for the mailing list through the questionnaire and project web site.

3.2.4 LOW-INCOME AND MINORITY COMMUNITIES

In order to address the Environmental Justice Executive Order of 1997, the project team mapped the locations of low-income and minority populations in Chemung County using 2000 U.S. Census data and GIS technology.

Low income households were defined as households earning 30-50% of the area median income, or less than \$27,250 per year. Moderate income households were defined as households earning 50-80% of the area median income, or less than \$43,600 per year. Low income populations were identified in the city of Elmira and Veteran. Moderate income populations were identified in the city of Elmira, Veteran and Van Etten. The project team mapped census blocks with more than 25% non-white residents. The map identified small pockets of minority households in the city of Elmira, Big Flats, Catlin, Erin, Van Etten and Chemung.

The maps of low-income, moderate income and minority households did not indicate a concentration of these communities in Chemung County. Concentrations of low-income households were present in the city of Elmira and Veteran. Minority populations were sparse, with the east side of the city of Elmira having a higher concentration of non-white households. Two Census blocks showed abnormal concentrations of minority households, which were found to be the Elmira and Southport correctional facilities.

The project team focused outreach efforts in geographically-dispersed areas of the county and also focused efforts toward established organizations who advocate for minority and low-income communities. To reach low-and moderate-income households, the project team focused public meeting outreach at the YMCA and at low-income and senior housing complexes in Elmira. Public meetings were held in the city and also rural locations, such as Veteran and Wellsburg. The team also held meetings both during the day and at night, to accommodate second and third shift workers.

To reach the minority community, the project team met with leadership of Citizens Revitalizing Communities (CRC), a minority-based organization focused on urban revitalization. CRC and the Chemung County Commission on Human Relations, which the ECTC has a presence on, encouraged the project team to set up an outreach table at the 2004 Juneteenth celebration at Ernie Davis Park in Elmira. At this event, the team distributed flyers and questionnaires and answered questions about the long range planning process.

3.3 Three stages

Three stages of public outreach allowed the team to advertise the process and solicit input from hundreds of individuals over a three-month period. The staged outreach gathered input for the Long Range Plan and helped educate the public about the role of the MPO in the region. At each stage,



feedback was shared with the Steering Committee.

3.3.1 STAGE ONE (APRIL/MAY)

Stage One of the public outreach effort had a threefold purpose. The group of 55 individuals representing public, private and non-profit sector were contacted by phone in early May to (1) inform them about the upcoming planning process, (2) solicit their input on issues and (3) ask for suggestions regarding public participation strategies. Additionally, the team met with several representatives from established groups, such as the Chemung County Office for the Aging and the Big Horn Velo Bicycle Club.

public meetings in mid-June in the Village of Wellsburg, the City of Elmira and the Town of Veteran. The meetings were geographically dispersed in an attempt to reach as many people as possible.

The agenda was identical at each of the four public meetings. First, the team gave a brief presentation, which included the background of the MPO, the reason for creating a long range plan, a review of the project schedule and the draft long range plan goals. The majority of each meeting was spent critiquing the draft LRP goals and discussing issues and ideas for the Long Range Plan. Detailed notes from each of the four public meetings are included in Appendix A.



3.3.2 STAGE TWO (MAY – JULY)

Throughout May, June and July, the project team held numerous meetings to review the transportation planning process, discuss the need for the long range transportation plan, review the project schedule, review the draft long range plan goals and, most importantly, discuss issues. These meetings included open public meetings, group meetings, and focus groups. The same PowerPoint presentation was used for each of these meetings, which ensured that a consistent message was presented to the public on each occasion.

3.3.2.1 Open Public Meetings

A press release, several news articles and over 500 postcards invited the public to four

3.3.2.2 Group Meetings

Group meetings were held throughout June and July to solicit input from interest groups and municipalities. Meetings took place at the Chemung Chamber of Commerce (5/20), City of Elmira City Council (6/25), Catharine Valley Trail Annual Meeting (6/5), Juneteenth Festival (6/19), Town of Big Flats Town Board and Planning Board (6/9 and 6/28), Village of Horseheads (7/6), and the Local Emergency Planning Committee (7/20). Meeting minutes and a list of participants are included in Appendix A.

3.3.2.3 Focus Groups

In early July, three issue-specific focus group conference calls were scheduled with invitations to stakeholders who had expressed interest in those areas:



- Bicycling, including local and state bike advocates;
- Transit, which included special attention to youth and senior citizen concerns;
- Freight transportation, with industry representatives

These focus groups provided the opportunity to discuss specific deficiencies by mode and brainstorm potential solutions.

3.3.3 STAGE THREE (FALL: TO BE COMPLETED IN FINAL DRAFT)

In September, the project team notified the public that the draft was ready for review. The Draft Plan was posted to the project web site, and the project team mailed copies to local municipalities and placed copies at libraries and the Elmira Transportation Center. The team also sent postcards notifying the mailing list of the review period. A press release notified the media about the draft. Public hearings were held on September 30th and October 5th and 7th in the City of Elmira, Village of Horseheads, Big Flats, Wellsburg, and Millport. Meeting minutes are included in Appendix A.

3.4 Outcomes

The extensive public outreach conducted for the long range planning process proved to be valuable for numerous reasons. First, input from the community about the draft long range plan goals and regional transportation issues provided insight into current problems and future priorities. Additionally, community members became more knowledgeable about regional transportation planning. Local elected leaders and residents were interested in discussing the transportation needs of the region as a whole, rather than just within their municipal boundaries.

Specific feedback from public outreach is summarized below:

- Chemung County is a multi-hub region

- Transit riders and drivers need better opportunities to provide input to the system
- NYSDOT should provide better communication regarding I-86 construction with the Southern Tier tourism industry
- Local residents and the private sector are both interested in expansion of Routes 13 and 14



- The bicycling community does not want bike lanes, but rather better maintenance of pavement & road shoulders
- The ECTC should provide public safety announcements and better signage for bicyclists and motorists
- The region's aging population will impact transit
- The airport should be more competitive with other airports
- Reliable freight services are essential to the well-being of the economy and to retaining jobs in the region
- The freight private sector can provide valuable input on future rail and highway investments
- More customer information and communication relating to transit service is needed
- More information related to construction is needed for travel and tourism



- Aging baby boomers will create increased transportation demands in Chemung County. Additional senior citizen drivers may necessitate larger text on road signs or increased transit service.
- There is a need to remove debris from pedestrian and bicycle circulation systems, especially during the winter and early spring.
- There should be coordination among adjacent municipalities regarding land use and corridor access management planning
- There is a need to create better bicycle routing information
- Transit should improve regional coordination
- The region should attempt to overcome the social stigma attached to transit utilization in order to encourage discretionary rider ship
- There is concern related to traffic growth on Routes 13/14
- There is flooding at Lowman Crossover
- There are conflicting goals and policies among different State agencies. For example, the Health Department is encouraging the development of rural health care facilities and rural/suburban housing, which conflicts with the Transportation and Social Service goal of providing transportation for the disadvantaged, and the Environmental goals of improving air quality and reducing energy consumption
- There are emerging traffic and safety problems in the County Route 64 corridor and on Chambers Road north of the I-86 interchange
- There are shared roadway situations where the traffic volumes and speeds seem to warrant off-road pedestrian accommodations
- There is concern about access to Horseheads Center
- Passenger Rail should be restored through the Southern Tier





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