

**DRAFT**

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN**

### **Introduction**

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) guides investment in the transportation system of the Houston-Galveston metropolitan region over the next 20 years. It defines an overarching vision of the future of transportation in the region, establishes principles and policies that will lead to the achievement of that vision, and allocates projected revenue to transportation programs and projects that reflect those principles and policies. It also guides development of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which is a short-range program of transportation improvements expected to be implemented during the first four-year period. Throughout the development of the RTP, a comprehensive public involvement process is conducted to help develop and shape the Plan.

### **Purpose of Plan**

The purpose of this Public Involvement Plan (PIP) is to orchestrate a successful outreach effort to build public support for the RTP by enhancing the public's understanding and involvement in the transportation planning process. This document describes how H-GAC establishes core values for public participation and outlines

strategies for increasing public information and participation. In essence, the PIP describes the strategy on how to

- involve the general public in the transportation planning process, especially by coordinating with groups that have already expressed interest in transportation planning; and
- reach out to groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in transportation planning or bearing the consequences of transportation investments, e.g., minorities, poor, elderly, non-native English speakers, etc.

In both instances, the desire is to educate the audience and solicit feedback on the process and outcomes.

### **Transportation Planning**

Transportation planning is done by many entities in a region, including cities, counties, state departments of transportation, transit providers, etc. Federal law designates metropolitan areas with populations greater than 50,000 as a Transportation Management Area (TMA) and requires them to form a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) charging the MPO to coordinate the transportation planning for the region. One requirement is to afford the general public and targeted communities a reasonable opportunity to participate in and comment on transportation plans. This Plan is intended to fulfill these requirements.

As the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the eight-county Houston-Galveston region, H-GAC is responsible for carrying out the public participation during the development of the RTP. Federal regulations call for a participatory process "for providing citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transit, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties with

reasonable opportunities to be involved in the metropolitan transportation planning process” (CFR 450.316(a)). For the relevant text of federal regulations, please refer to Appendix A.

### **Goals for Public Involvement**

The overall goal of the RTP 2040 *Public Involvement Plan* is to support the planning process so that the regional transportation plan reflects the needs and concerns of the public. Consistent with the draft H-GAC *Public Participation Plan*, the RTP 2040 *Public Involvement Plan* goals:

- Provide adequate public notice of public participation activities with sufficient time for public review and comment on key decisions, including opportunities to comment on proposed adoption of the RTP and any necessary amendments.
- Provide timely notice and reasonable access to information about transportation issues and processes; provide opportunities for residents to help shape the region’s future through a public comment process that is open and accessible to the public, stakeholders, and policymakers.
- Employ visualization techniques to describe the RTP.
- Make public information (technical information and meeting notices) available in electronically accessible formats and means, such as the Internet; make information on transportation projects and programs available in a variety of formats, mediums and languages to reach a larger audience.
- Hold public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times.
- Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received during the development of the RTP.
- Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems such as low-

income and minorities, elderly/disabled, and limited English proficient communities who may face challenges accessing needed services; review projects to verify that the negative effects of the RTP are not disproportionately borne by minority or low-income populations, including but not limited to health, environmental, social and economic effects.

- Provide additional opportunity for public comments if the final RTP differs significantly from the version that was made available for public comment by H-GAC and raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen from the public involvement efforts.
- Coordinate with the statewide transportation planning involvement and consultation processes.
- Periodically review the effectiveness of the procedures and strategies contained in this PIP to ensure a full and open participation process.

### **Decision-Making Process**

There are several distinct entities that participate in the RTP decision-making process. The final decision-making body is the Transportation Policy Council, which is advised by the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The H-GAC Transportation Director and staff are responsible for implementing policies set by the TPC and also provide advisory support and recommendations to the TAC and TAC Subcommittees.

The Transportation Policy Council (TPC) provides policy guidance and overall coordination of the transportation planning activities within the region. The TPC consists of 28 members representing cities and counties, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County

(METRO) and three at-large members appointed by the H-GAC Board of Directors.

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) reviews and evaluates H-GAC's regional transportation plans and provides its recommendations to the TPC. The TAC is an appointed body, which is comprised of representatives of member governments and special citizen interest groups with expertise in transportation planning. TAC members are appointed by the TPC to assist with the coordination of the Transportation Improvement Program, Regional Transportation Plan and other transportation planning activities.

The RTP Subcommittee oversees the RTP's development and guides staff with technical recommendations and policy development. Staff and the RTP Subcommittee meet periodically and formulate recommendations for the TAC and TPC to consider.

The H-GAC Transportation Director and staff are responsible for the day-to-day activities associated with the RTP's development. H-GAC staff also facilitate RTP Subcommittee, TAC and TPC meetings.

### **H-GAC's Strategic Direction for Public Involvement**

In an effort to promote comprehensive planning in accordance with its mission, H-GAC will actively engage the public and the agency's planning partners. The RTP Subcommittee, the Transportation Policy Council (TPC), the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), and related subcommittees will be used to obtain input. The RTP Subcommittee, as the lead committee in this effort, is tasked with:

- Guidance in the development of the Draft RTP;
- Making recommendations regarding the RTP Public Implementation Plan; and
- Providing advisory input to the H-GAC Board on proposed regional plans and policies.

### **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Environmental Justice Overview**

Consideration of Environmental Justice in the transportation planning process stems from Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI sets forth the need for transportation agencies to disclose to the public the benefits and burdens of proposed projects on minority populations. As a governmental entity that receives federal funding, the H-GAC is responsible for implementing Title VI and conforming to federal Environmental Justice (EJ) principals, policies, and regulations. Specifically, the statute states that "No person in the United States shall, on the ground 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." Title VI not only prohibits intentional discrimination, but also unjustified disparate impact discrimination. While there is no evidence of intentional discriminatory actions or decisions, disparate impacts are those that result from policies and practices that are on the surface neutral, but have discriminatory effects on protected groups.<sup>1</sup>

### **H-GAC's Title VI Environmental Justice Policy**

The concept of Environmental Justice (EJ) is centered on fairness in the accessibility of a healthy living environment; it is an approach included in planning, to ensure that persons of racial or ethnic minority background, as well as disadvantaged backgrounds, are fairly included in the decision-making processes that will affect their quality of life. The goal of the H-GAC EJ process is, in essence, to make certain that the benefits and burdens of transportation projects (i.e., air pollution, noise, injuries, fatalities, division of

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<sup>1</sup> A protected group is a group of people qualified for special protection by a law, policy, or similar authority. Under federal law, people cannot be discriminated against based on the following characteristics: race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, familial status, disability, veteran status or genetic information.

communities) are distributed in a manner that will promote a just and equitable society. EJ is a concern when:

- Some communities benefit from improved access, faster trips, and congestion relief, while minority or low-income communities receive fewer of these benefits;
- Minority or low-income communities are disproportionately impacted by transportation projects in terms of social, economic, and environmental burdens; or
- Minority or low-income communities are less represented in decision making.

Specifically, it is H-GAC's role to ensure that when transportation decisions are made, low-income and minority communities have ample opportunity to participate in the decision-making process; and that they receive an equitable distribution of benefits and not a disproportionate share of burdens. EJ groups will be solicited for input at all three stages of the RTP development process. Specifically, H-GAC will ask EJ groups to provide:

- Initial input to craft the vision and goals of the document;
- Feedback on certain projects during the scenario development stage; and
- Comments on the draft versions of the final document.

Identified EJ communities include, but are not limited to:

- Hispanic, low-income;
- White, low-income;
- Other ethnic groups, low-income;
- Elderly Residents;
- Mobility Disability/Transit Dependent Populations.

With respect to demographics, the Houston-Galveston region is one of the most diverse regions in our country, becoming one of the first to see the total population of Hispanics exceed that of Non-Hispanic Whites. According to the 2010 census, 35 percent of residents identify themselves as Hispanic; 39 percent as white, non-Hispanic; 17 percent as black, non-Hispanic; and 6 percent as Asian, non-Hispanic (2010 Census).

#### **Limited English Proficient (LEP)**

The Houston-Galveston Area Council is required to take steps to ensure meaningful access to the benefits, services and information about our programs and activities are accessible to individuals with limited English proficiency. H-GAC has consulted with the USDOT LEP Guidance and, in accordance with the manual, will conduct a four-factor analysis of our contact with the public to determine the approximate mix of LEP services to offer.

LEP Analysis Steps:

- 1) The nature and importance of service provided by H-GAC;
- 2) The number or proportion of LEP persons in the service area;
- 3) The frequency with which LEP individuals come into contact with the service.  
Since the 2007 RTP, H-GAC has focused on ways to enhance participation within LEP communities; and
- 4) The resources available to the recipient of the federal funds to assure meaningful access to the service by LEP persons.

H-GAC currently provides some materials in Spanish such as factsheets and web content. H-GAC also has several experienced staff members who are fluent in both Spanish and English.

### **LEP Implementation Plan**

H-GAC recognizes the need to continue providing language services throughout the region. The H-GAC plans to include:

- Spanish speaking translators available upon request for meetings and workshops.
- Selected RTP materials available in English and Spanish languages.
- RTP Executive Summary available in Spanish and English on the RTP website.

H-GAC will contact the community organizations that serve LEP persons, as well LEP persons themselves, and perform a four-factor analysis every four years to identify what, if any, additional information or activities might better improve our communication to their communities. From this information, H-GAC will evaluate the projected financial and personnel needed to provide the requested services and assess which elements can be provided cost effectively.

### **Public Involvement Strategies**

To demonstrate H-GAC's commitment to informing, educating and involving the public, H-GAC plans to review the International Association for Public Participation guidelines, federal and state agency guidelines and consult with its partners regarding our approach. As we move forward, our guiding principles are as follows:

- The public should have input in decisions about actions that affect their lives.

- Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will be considered in the decision-making process.
- The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

### **Target Groups**

In an effort to adequately address the needs of the stakeholders associated with the RTP, public involvement will target specific groups. Potential target groups will be identified as follows:

- Environmental Justice Groups
- Citizen Groups
- Professional Organizations
- Business Leaders
- Elected Officials/Project Sponsors

### **Public Meetings**

During RTP 2040 outreach efforts, public meetings will be conducted to include daytime and evening meetings throughout the eight-county region. The project team will organize and attend stakeholder meetings with individuals and groups from minority and limited English proficiency (LEP) communities, neighborhood groups, churches, civic groups, school districts, elected officials, local governments, resource agencies and professional associations. Public meetings will be conducted in English but will accommodate LEP populations as appropriate. Public meeting announcements will be posted on the H-GAC Public information webpage.

### **Stakeholder Outreach**

The project team will also leverage relationships with area partners such as professional associations, business management districts, community based organizations, chambers of commerce and others to engage their memberships and constituency. These

organizations provide a direct conduit to their membership and allow the project team to effectively expand the depth and breadth of outreach efforts. It is anticipated that conducting stakeholder outreach activities will help improve the feedback received during the planning process.

### **Website**

H-GAC's website will deliver timely, easily-understood information and actively solicit/gather stakeholder input. This website will allow the casual user to access basic information while providing navigable paths to more detailed information. The website will be presented in English and Spanish.

The following features may be included on the website to improve information access, better clarify program messages, promote user interactivity, and facilitate stakeholder input:

- RTP-related documents;
- RTP-related meeting materials and meeting summaries;
- Public Commenting capabilities;
- Social Media links;
- Online Survey;
- Streaming Media/Video Library;

### **Project Logo**

The H-GAC 2040 RTP logo is a representation of a new and unique planning approach. A project logo was developed to help convey a new identity for the RTP development process. The project logo helps to individualize and market the study effort and project a sense of purpose and change. The RTP update project logo is shown here:



### **Motion Graphics Video**

Communication of the RTP project vision and objectives will be a key factor in building consensus on recommendations. A motion graphics video supporting the RTP may help (a) explain the long-range transportation planning process; (b) present current mobility, economic and environmental challenges; (c) describe the opportunities for public participation; and (d) once the plan is drafted, illustrate the results of the RTP. Motion graphics video is one way to facilitate delivery of a message in a visually-appealing "movie" format that evokes strong emotion and can be used to elicit a "call to action". Motion graphics selectively combines live video, text and graphical animation, design visualization stills and animations, graphics, photography, narration, sound effects and music to deliver a compelling message in a "story" format. The use of motion graphics differs from 'Video Production' in that the former specializes in the integration of textual and graphical animation, special effects, compositing, narration, music and use of 3D visualizations.

### **RTP Toll-Free Public Comment Telephone Line**

An RTP toll-free public comment telephone line can be initiated to allow anyone with access to a telephone an opportunity to provide comment or ask questions regarding the RTP. Responses received at the telephone line will allow the project team to identify recurring issues or questions that can be used to adjust the outreach program and improve general understanding of these issues. The project team will coordinate prompt responses to

messages that require follow-up. All comments will become a part of the project comment database.

### **Newsletters**

Newsletters will be used to provide the public with detailed information about the RTP, to announce opportunities for public input, and to chronicle project related milestones, feedback and activities. The newsletters will contain up-to-date project information in order to assist the reader in understanding how decisions are made. The newsletters will be written in a clear, concise, and user-friendly language and will be widely distributed to the agency mailing list and posted on the project website. The newsletters will contain information on how to respond, comment, get more involved, or get on the mailing list for H-GAC's RTP. The target audience of the newsletters is the broader public and goes beyond those who regularly attend meetings at H-GAC and are involved in the transportation community. Ultimately, the newsletters will demonstrate that H-GAC understands and values communication with the public. The project team will produce newsletters at quarterly intervals with content input and approval from H-GAC leadership and project team staff. Newsletters will be produced in both English and Spanish languages.

### **Brochures, Fact Sheets and Other Collateral Materials**

A series of concise and precise brochures and fact sheets will be prepared that address specific project issues. These materials will be produced in both English and Spanish. The fact sheets will be distributed both as a package (for inclusion in the Media Kit) and individually, as appropriate. Fact sheet topics may include: Frequently Asked Questions, description of the RTP effort; and opportunities for the public to get involved.

Other collateral materials will be developed to continue the messaging and graphic themes represented in the branding of the

RTP. Consistency in the look and feel of these pieces will promote the project identity and increase market recognition among members of the general public and stakeholders. These materials include PowerPoint templates, letterhead, e-blast formats, and postcards.

### **New Media**

Social networking websites such as Facebook are increasingly playing a role in agency projects as stakeholders initiate informal discussions about what's happening in their "world" view. A Facebook page may be established for the RTP and will serve as a forum to educate the public on the RTP process, to announce public meetings and project milestones, and to solicit input and public comment. Similarly, a YouTube page can be created to post informational and educational videos about the RTP and the public involvement and participation process.

### **Open Door Policy**

The public is invited to call H-GAC staff involved with the RTP's development at (713) 627-3200 to discuss and/or comment on the RTP 2040 process at anytime during normal business hours, Monday through Friday, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. H-GAC staff will discuss with the public any issue they feel needs to be considered during the RTP development process. Also, H-GAC staff will arrange meetings with the public at H-GAC, 3555 Timmons Lane, Houston, TX, if requested.

### **Public Involvement Plan Schedule**

An RTP update schedule has been prepared and is updated periodically to keep the Public and key stakeholders informed of progress. The RTP schedule is located on the RTP 2040 project web site at the following address:

[www.h-gac.com/taq/plan/default.aspx](http://www.h-gac.com/taq/plan/default.aspx).

## Appendix A

### Federal legislation guiding public outreach

H-GAC's Public Participation Plan must comply with the following requirements provided under 23 U.S.C. 134, subsections (i)(5), and (j)(1)(B) which are summarized as follows:

- 1) H-GAC shall provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the RTP.
- 2) The participation plan shall be developed in consultation with all interested parties, and shall provide that all interested parties have reasonable opportunities to comment on the contents of the transportation plan.
- 3) In carrying out the participation process, H-GAC must, to the maximum extent practicable--
  - (i) hold any public meetings at convenient times and accessible locations throughout the region;
  - (ii) employ visualization techniques to describe plans; and
  - (iii) make public information available in electronically accessible format and means, such as the World Wide Web, as appropriate, to afford reasonable opportunity for consideration of public information under paragraph 1 above.
- 4) The RTP shall be published or otherwise made readily available by the metropolitan planning organization for public review, including (to the maximum extent practicable) in electronically accessible formats and means, such as the World Wide Web, approved by the metropolitan planning organization and submitted for information purposes to the Governor at such times and in such manner as the Secretary shall establish.
- 5) In developing the RTP and before approving the RTP, H-GAC, in cooperation with the State and any affected public transportation operator, shall provide an opportunity for participation by interested parties in the development of the program, in accordance with the same requirements described above.
- 6) The Public Participation Plan further incorporates the requirements of the applicable regulations, 23 CFR 450.316 (a) (See 72 FR 7273; February 14, 2007), as follows:
  - (a) The MPO shall develop and use a documented participation plan that defines a process for providing citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the metropolitan transportation planning process.