

MONTACHUSETT METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

For the



MONTACHUSETT REGION MPO ENDORSED

June 13, 2007

**Amended
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Prepared by:

Montachusett Regional Planning Commission
R1472 Water Street
Fitchburg, MA 01420
(978) 345-7376 mrpc@mrpc.org

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Introduction

Public Planning Process

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) of 2005 requires metropolitan planning areas to have a Continuing, Comprehensive, and Coordinated (“3C”) transportation planning process that results in plans and programs that consider all transportation modes and supports metropolitan community development and social goals. These plans and programs shall lead to the development and operation of an integrated, Intermodal transportation system that facilitates the efficient, economic movement of people and goods.

The Act requires that Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) establish a “proactive public involvement process the provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement.”

Based upon requirements within the planning regulations, this Public Participation Program (PPP) was developed for the Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The PPP outlines the process for public involvement in the development of Regional Transportation Plans (RTP), Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP), Unified Planning Work Programs (UPWP) and other major Transportation Studies by the MPO.

The following section describes the process for the development and adoption of the PPP. These procedures will be followed for any major revision to the PPP.

1. The creation and availability of the PPP or amendments to the PPP will be announced through press releases in local newspapers, other media outlets and on Montachusett Regional Planning Commission’s website: www.mrpc.org.
2. The announcement will instruct the public as to how they may obtain copies of the PPP, proactively participate in the PPP and comment on the PPP. Announcements will also be sent to our Transportation Matrix (refer to the end of document). Anyone who so requests will be added to the Transportation Mailing list. Copies will also be made available through electronic means via the internet and email.
3. This mailing will be postmarked at least 48 days before it becomes official. Three days after the mailing occurs, a forty-five (45) day public comment period will commence.
4. At the end of this comment period, the document, as amended to include relevant comments, will become the official public participation process for RTP’s, TIPS and long range plans of the Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMPO). Printed Copies of the PPP will be available at the office of the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, R1427 Water Street, Fitchburg, MA 01420 (978) 345-7376 or via MRPC’s webpage mrpc.org.
5. Once the PPP is official, significant changes or amendments to the PPP including any additions or deletions of any procedures will require an additional 45 day public review and comment period as described above.
6. The MPO will periodically review the effectiveness of the procedures and strategies contained in the participation plan to ensure a full and open participation process.

Public Participation Process (PPP)

The following section describes the procedures for the PPP for the development or amendment of Regional Transportation Plans (RTPs), Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs), Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and long range plans requiring the endorsement of the MPO.

The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) will actively engage the public in the transportation planning process according to the policies contained in this public participation plan and state and federal law. The MRPC will seek input on plans from a wide variety of sources, including public/private groups, special interest groups, interested citizens and those typically groups identified as Environmental Justice communities.

Through the development process of RTPs, TIPs and other major transportation plans, the MRPC and the MPO will coordinate with the statewide transportation planning public involvement and consultation processes. In addition, the MPO “in developing metropolitan transportation plans and TIPs, will consult with agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities with the Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) that are affected by transportation (including State and local planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations or freight movements) or coordinate its planning process (to the maximum extent practicable) with such planning activities.”

MRPC will maintain an up-to-date database of contacts including at a minimum the following persons to provide that all interested parties have reasonable opportunities to comment on the transportation planning process and products. The database will include the following contacts:

Transportation Matrix

Public/Private Groups

Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC) Members
Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) Members
Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMPO) Members
Mayors
Boards of Selectmen
Planning Departments
Planning Boards
Town Administrators
Police Departments
Fire Departments
Public Work Departments
Conservation Commissions
Congressman
State Senators and Representatives
Local Media
Libraries
Councils on Aging
Private Transportation Providers
Regional Transit Authority
Chambers of Commerce
City Councilors
Environmental Protection Agency
Department of Environmental Management
Housing Authorities
School Districts
Hospitals and Medical Centers
Shopping Malls and Large Commercial Centers
Trail Advocacy Groups and Organizations
Community Development Corporations
Emergency Management Agencies and Directors

Special Interest Groups

Montachusett Opportunity Council
Local Transit Union
Cleghorn Neighborhood Center
Spanish American Center

MA Rehab Commission
Fitchburg Spanish Center
Local Community Development Corporations
Airport Managers

Interested Parties

In addition, any interested parties requesting to receive any mailings related to any transportation document, etc., will be maintained as part of the distribution list.

The MRPC shall, when feasible, electronically mail meeting announcements to the Transportation Matrix contacts for upcoming activities.

MRPC shall employ visualization techniques to describe metropolitan transportation plans and TIPs. Examples of visualization techniques could include charts, graphs, and maps, use of GIS systems or power point presentations.

The public shall be informed of ongoing transportation related activities. MRPC will make such publications as the Draft, and Adopted Public Participation Plan, Unified Planning Work Program, Transportation Improvement Program and Regional Transportation plan available electronically to the public via its web page. The public is able to submit comments on these plans as well as sign up to be added to the transportation matrix.

MRPC will produce a regional newsletter for distribution to the Transportation Matrix contacts. The newsletter shall be produced four times a year and sent out electronically or in print. The newsletter will contain at a minimum updates on projects, and announcements of upcoming meetings.

The MRPC website will be maintained and updated to provide the most current and accurate transportation planning information available.

The MRPC will hold public meetings at a site and time convenient to potentially affected citizens.

MRPC, through its public participation process, will solicit the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation system, such as low and minority households who may face challenges accessing employment and other services.

Procedures of Public Participation Process

Please note that when referring to mailing of information, this includes email as well as regular postal service.

- 1) Members of the MPO, including the MJTC, shall be informed at the beginning of the development or amendment of RTPs, TIPs, UPWPs and other plans/programs and shall have an opportunity to provide comments on the scope and ways to involve the public in the process. Notices of MJTC meetings where the plans, programs or studies will be discussed will be distributed to those parties contained on the MJTC mailing list, including but not limited to MRPC Commissioners, MART Advisory Board Members, Chief Elected Officials, planning departments/boards, city/town clerks, city councils, local departments of public works, airport managers, regional legislators, environmental organizations, other identified organizations that serve the need of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, private operators, public libraries and any other interested parties. Anyone who so requests will be added to the mailing list.
- 2) Notice of Availability, whereabouts, duration of the public participation period, instructions for submitting comments and the date, time, and location of the meeting where the issue will be discussed will be published in press releases/legal notices in local newspapers. Notices will also be sent those on the transportation matrix referred to above indicating the same information. In addition, the Notice of Availability and any actual documents will be posted on the MRPC Website (www.mrpc.org).

- 3) These mailings shall be postmarked at least thirty-three (33) days prior to an official MPO vote regarding the respective documents or amendment. Three days after the mailing occurs, the thirty (30) day public comment period will commence on the draft document or amendment. These notices shall make clear how and where the public can get copies or view these documents. The documents will be available for review at the MRPC Offices located at R1427 Water Street, Fitchburg, MA. Documents will also be available at the MRPC's website mrpc.org.
- 4) Actual copies of the draft document shall be mailed to each member municipalities' city/town hall, chief elected official, planning board/department and public library as well as the RTA and Regional legislators.
- 5) The MRPC may determine that public meetings may be appropriate for public information and participation. At least one public meeting will be required for certain transportation activities such as refinement and updates to the RTPs, TIPs, UPWPs and other plans/programs. These meetings notices will be distributed in the same manner as described in section (1). In addition, notices will be placed in local newspapers as well as other media outlets regarding special meetings. The MRPC, where appropriate, will hold public meetings at sites and times convenient to potentially affected citizens
- 6) To maximize input and to effectively distribute information at public meetings, the MRPC shall employ visualization techniques to describe aspects of any metropolitan transportation plan, RTP, TIP or UPWP.
- 7) If the responses to public comments results in the RTPs, TIPs, UPWPs and other plan/program documents or amendments being significantly different from the draft document which was sent out for public review, an additional 30 day public comment review period and public meeting may be held. An appendix of all significant oral and written comments and responses will be made part of the final document. Determination on the need for an additional comment period will be made by the MPO with input from the MJTC and MRPC.
- 8) Once the RTPs, TIPs, UPWPs or other plans/programs are approved and endorsed by the MPO any significant amendment will require an additional 30 day public comment and review period and one public meeting. Public Meetings will be held at the MRPC Offices, R1427 Water Street, Fitchburg, MA 01430 unless otherwise indicated.
- 9) Upon request, the MJTC shall be available to meet with local officials or any interested group to discuss or present the RTP, TIP, UPWP or other plan/program.
- 10) At their discretion, the Montachusett MPO may vote to abbreviate the public comment period for the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) or Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) for a period of not less than ten (10) days under what the MPO considers to be extraordinary circumstances. Any abbreviated comment period will follow the procedures and provisions outlined in the PPP. Adequate time will be incorporated into the abbreviated process in order to properly notify the public. All circumstances leading to the decision by the MPO to utilize an abbreviated comment period will be identified and documented in any and all notices disseminated to the public. In addition, the use of the abbreviated comment period will be highlighted in order to adequately inform the public of the comment period change. *Amended April 5, 2010*

Background

Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

The Montachusett MPO is the forum for cooperative decision-making by principal elected officials in the Region and is also responsible for planning and programming financial resources for a multi-modal transportation system for the Region.

The voting members of the Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization is comprised of the following officials or their designees:

- the Secretary and CEO of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) (formerly the Executive Office of Transportation (EOT))
- the Administrator of the Highway Division of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) (formerly the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Highway Department (MassHighway))
- the Chairman of the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC)
- the Chairman of the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART)
- the Mayor of the City of Fitchburg
- the Mayor of the City of Leominster
- the Mayor of the City of Gardner
- Four Selectmen/women representing four groups of towns in the MRPC region on a sub-regional basis

Functions of the Montachusett MPO

The MPO performs all functions as required in federal or state law including endorsement and/or certification of:

- the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and its Amendments - a program of federal highway and transit funding;
- the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) - the budget and task listing for “3C” Transportation Planning activities for the MRPC;
- the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) - a comprehensive inventory and assessment of the region's highway and transit resources and needs;
- the Public Participation Program (PPP);
- air quality conformity determinations for the TIP and RTP; and
- certifies the “3C” planning process in the Montachusett Region.

In order to provide for accomplishments of the objectives of the “3C” Process, the MPO recognizes a special advisory group committee known as the Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC). The MPO seeks and considers the advice of the MJTC in resolution of basic regional transportation policy.

Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC)

The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) was created under Chapter 40B of the General Laws of Massachusetts. MRPC is one of thirteen regional planning agencies in the State.

The MRPC is composed of 22 communities including: Ashburnham, Ashby, Ayer, Athol, Clinton, Fitchburg, Gardner, Groton, Harvard, Hubbardston, Lancaster, Leominster, Lunenburg, Royalston, Petersham, Phillipston, Shirley, Sterling, Templeton, Townsend, Westminster, Winchendon.

Membership in the MRPC consists of local planning boards’ members and alternates appointed by the chief elected officials of MRPC’s member communities. The transportation advisory committee of the MRPC is the Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC).

Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC)

The Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC) is a transportation planning advisory group to the Montachusett MPO, established under agreements amongst its co-sponsoring agencies; MRPC, MassDOT Highway Division (formerly Mass Highway), and MassDOT (formerly EOT). Membership in the MJTC consists of two representatives from each community; one appointed by Mayor or Selectmen, the other by the planning board. Organization members such as representatives from private and public institutions also serve on the MJTC. Ex-

Officio members consist of representatives from MassDOT Highway Division (formerly Mass Highway), MassDOT (formerly EOT), MRPC and MART.

The MJTC meets monthly on the third Wednesday of the month. All meetings are open to the public and interested parties are encouraged to attend. Representatives to the group have an opportunity to express their expectations and concerns about transportation and the regional planning process.

Responsibilities of the MJTC

The principal mission of the MJTC as an advisory body to the Montachusett MPO is to foster broad and robust participation in the transportation planning process by maintaining a forum that brings together representative of cities and towns, citizens concerned with the transportation planning process, other public agencies, and transportation providers thereby facilitating the consistency of transportation plans and programs for the Region with policies, priorities, and plans of affected state and regional agencies, local communities, private groups and individuals within the region.

The MJTC participates in all Montachusett MPO meetings to advise and comment on matters being discussed.

MJTC provides the mechanism for an open and broadly participatory intermodal transportation planning process with involvement on the part of local communities, officials and citizenry. This leads to a program implementing the recommendations of the MJTC toward an eventual transportation system that will provide for the most efficient movement of people and goods at a minimum cost.

Principal tasks of the MJTC is the review and the provision of local input into:

- the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and its Amendments;
- the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP);
- the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP); and
- the MRPC and the MPO.

Transportation Planning Activities

Montachusett Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The Montachusett Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is the product of a comprehensive, continuing and cooperative effort to improve the regional transportation system by local officials, the Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC), the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART), the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC), the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) (formerly the Executive Office of Transportation (EOT)) and the Highway Division of MassDOT (formerly the Massachusetts Highway Department (MassHighway)). Federal regulations state the “the MPO, in cooperation with the State and any affected public transportation operator(s) shall develop a TIP for the metropolitan planning area. The TIP shall cover a period of no less than four years, be updated at least every four years, and be approved by the MPO and the Governor. The TIP may be updated more frequently, but the cycle for updating the TIP must be compatible with the State TIP (STIP) development and approval process. The TIP expires when the FHWA/FTA approval of the STIP expires.” Within the Commonwealth the current practice is to develop an annual TIP/STIP. The TIP is a prioritized listing of transportation projects proposed for implementation over a four year time period.

The MRPC develops the TIP project listing from various sources. Sources used include the MassDOT’s Project Information System, MassDOT Highway Division Districts 2 and 3, local officials, the Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee, the Long and Short Range Elements (LRE and SRE, respectively) of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), and Transportation Control Measures (TCMs) identified in the Transportation Element of the State Implementation Plan (TESIP).

In conformance with the Public Participation Program (PPP), the draft TIP is distributed for a federally mandated 30 day public review and comment period. Following completion of the 30 day review period, any comments or issues received are addressed and reflected in the final TIP. This document is then reviewed by the MJTC/MRPC and is recommended for endorsement by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) at a subsequent MPO meeting.

The fully endorsed TIP is then distributed to Federal, State and local agencies and groups, including FTA, FHWA, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) as well as local housing authorities, local school districts, local hospitals/medical centers, local shopping malls, local trail advocacy groups, local community development corporations, local transit union, local minority groups, local airports, local disabled groups, local economically disadvantaged agencies and other members of the MRPC distribution list(s), again in conformance with the PPP.

Montachusett Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) for the Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is a financial programming tool developed annually as part of the federally certified transportation planning process. This document contains task descriptions of the transportation planning program of the MPO, with associated budget information and funding sources for the current program year.

The purpose of the UPWP is to ensure a comprehensive, cooperative, and continuing (3C) transportation planning process in the Leominster-Fitchburg Urbanized Area and the Montachusett Region. In addition, this document provides for the coordination of planning efforts between communities in the Montachusett Region.

Although not required, in conformance with the PPP, the draft UPWP is also distributed for a 30 day public review and comment period. Following completion of the 30 day review period, any comments or issues received are addressed and reflected in the final UPWP. This document is then reviewed by the MJTC/MRPC and is recommended for endorsement by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) at a subsequent MPO meeting.

The fully endorsed UPWP is then distributed to Federal, State and local agencies as well as local housing authorities, local school districts, local hospitals/medical centers, local shopping malls, local trail advocacy groups, local community development corporations, local transit union, local minority groups, local airports, local disabled groups, local economically disadvantaged agencies, FTA, FHWA and other members of the MRPC distribution list(s), again in conformance with the PPP.

Montachusett Regional Transportation Plan

The Regional Transportation Plan for the Montachusett Region provides a beneficial guide and a decision-making framework for local, regional and state officials by identifying both the short and long range transportation and air quality improvements that should be implemented in the region, and to comply with the requirements of Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). It presents alternatives and makes recommendations that are designed to reinforce the region's stated goals and objectives for regional development. Updates occur every four years.

In conformance with the PPP, the draft RTP is distributed for a federally mandated 30 day public review and comment period. Following completion of the 30 day review period, any comments or issues received are addressed and reflected in the final RTP. This document is then reviewed by the MJTC/MRPC and is recommended for endorsement by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) at a subsequent MPO meeting.

The fully endorsed RTP is then distributed to Federal, State and local agencies as well as local housing authorities, local school districts, local hospitals/medical centers, local shopping malls, local trail advocacy groups, local community development corporations, local transit union, local minority groups, local airports, local disabled groups, local economically disadvantaged agencies, FTA, FHWA and other members of the MRPC distribution list(s), again in conformance with the PPP.