

Chapter 7: Refining the Public Participation Process

Periodic public involvement process surveys and citizen service feedback

In the past, the MPO has conducted periodic public involvement process surveys with its committees. Although the agency did not conduct any surveys of this nature in the 2018-2019 cycle, it continued to solicit general feedback from the public in situations where staff provided assistance in answering questions. In 2016-17, MPO staff received 13 citizen evaluations with the great majority (85%) rating the MPO's overall quality of service with respect to other agencies and businesses as "excellent".

In 2019, staff surveyed and received positive feedback overall from the Citizens Advisory Committee members. Questions included if they found the efforts engaging, whether their time was valued, if they understood the goal and their role, and whether they felt their contribution was reflected in the final project. Among other findings, it showed that over three quarters of the members felt that the time they volunteer to serve on the CAC is worthwhile.

Federal certification review

The Hillsborough MPO last participated in its quadrennial federal certification review in April 2017. The review of metropolitan planning procedures, including public engagement, ensures that the county remains eligible for federal funding for transportation improvements. The review, which was conducted by officials at the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration and FDOT, positively cited the MPO for several "noteworthy practices":

- Vision Zero plan
- Unique MPO activities in the Unified Planning Work Program
- Outreach and participation opportunities for the underserved
- Performance-based scenario planning in the LRTP
- Performance measures in the congestion management process
- Development of a planning information map for the TIP
- A screening tool for TIP priority projects in the TIP
- Leveraging resources, transportation goals and objectives in TMA regional coordination

The MPO did not receive any corrective actions in this review. Recommendations to improve public participation included: evaluating the participation process to determine when a public meeting versus public hearing is necessary; adding an interactive planning acronym list to the Public Participation Plan; and updating the Title VI Inclusivity Plan.

All of these have been implemented. The MPO reviewed its PPP and PlanHillsborough.org website to ensure that the differences between public hearings and meetings are expressed correctly and clarified those differences more explicitly in the 2018 PPP update. The MPO also now has an online [glossary of transportation acronyms](#) and terms, and the website features pop-up definitions when users scroll over key terms and acronyms. The MPO's updated Title VI/Nondiscrimination Plan was approved March of 2018. This document contains an evaluation of recent efforts undertaken to ensure representation and diversity among MPO committees and equity in the planning process. Examples include county-wide mapping of environmental justice areas and disadvantaged demographics, as well as the designation of at-large seats on the Citizens Advisory Committee to represent racial, ethnic, age, and gender-based minority groups.

New and ongoing regional participation opportunities

Tampa Bay Transportation Management Area Leadership Group (TMA)

The TMA Leadership Group is an advisory group comprising three members of the Hillsborough, Pasco, and Pinellas MPO boards as voting members, along with non-voting advisors from FDOT and TBARTA. The purpose of the Leadership Group is to develop regional consensus priorities for the TMA, including the allocation of federal and state funds. This group meets every few months to discuss conditions in major cross-county transportation markets and to ensure the Tampa Bay metropolitan area speaks with one voice on regional transportation prioritization issues and the use of financial resources. The TMA Leadership Group recommends regional priority projects on a recurring basis. All TMA meetings are open to the public and invite public comment. During this period, the group focused on the Regional Transit Feasibility Plan Study and every other month meetings increased. In 2019, the MPO reviewed its agreement with five other MPOs for regional transportation planning and coordination, reestablishing the MPO Chairs Coordinating Committee (CCC) to lead multi-modal priority setting and formalizing the tri-county TMA leadership group as a committee of the CCC. This group met six times in 2018 and five times in 2019 regional coordination.

MPO Chairs' Coordinating Committee for West Central Florida

The CCC began meeting in 1993, and was established in Florida Statute in 2001, to coordinate regionally significant projects and decisions and establish a conflict resolution process. The CCC Board includes the Chairs of the area's five MPOs and one TPO, who are voting members, and non-voting members from FDOT Districts 1 and 7, the Florida Turnpike Enterprise, TBARTA, and the Central Florida, Tampa Bay, and Southwest Florida Regional Planning Councils. The CCC meets twice a year and approves current and future regional priority projects on an annual basis.

In 2019, the MPOs and TPO revised their interlocal agreement with TBARTA to recognize TBARTA's mission had changed due to recent state legislation making it a regional transit operator. Therefore, the MPO's agreed to resume providing staff support to the CCC.

The MPO and the CCC, along with the TMA Leadership Group, worked together to secure \$1.4 billion in state and federal funding for the Westshore Interchange. This was a result of consistent regional messaging about the importance of this project.

The CCC priorities for a multi-county network of trails and greenways were also updated during this cycle. The CCC met twice in both 2018 and 2019 on regional coordination initiatives.

Smart Cities Alliance

The Regional Big Data Working Group (RBDWG), organized by the Hillsborough MPO in 2017, consisted of 10-15 analysts from different transportation agencies in Hillsborough, Pinellas and Pasco. The group provided input on data and analytics. Later, the Smart Cities Alliance was created and the RBDWG was dissolved because of its similarities with the Alliance. The Alliance was initiated by the City of Tampa, the Florida Department of Transportation District 7, and the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida. The group has taken on a broader vision to focus on cutting edge technologies that cut across multiple disciplines, including transportation, energy infrastructure, health, and more for the region. The Smart Cities

Alliance meets on an ad hoc basis and has approximately one meeting each quarter. So far, the group has helped create the data & analytics portal, is completing a ramp-metering feasibility study, completing an 'innovative intersection' study, and developing a mobile fare payment system for all transportation modes.

Follow-up on recommendations from the last Measures of Effectiveness report

The previous MPO Measures of Effectiveness report covered the period of January 1, 2016 through December 31, 2017. Below are the recommendations from that report and their status.

1. **Seek feedback that is immediate and project specific**, by asking questions such as “was this informative and helpful to you?” at the conclusion of every survey or public meeting sponsored by the MPO. This would be in lieu of conducting periodic polls on the effectiveness of public engagement.

Two of the MPO’s most well-attended public meetings during this review period were the TIP Hearings in June 2018 and June 2019. While most public feedback concerned transportation improvements, some comments were about the provision of information and ease of public participation. After both meetings, staff conducted an internal de-brief session to clarify what worked, what did not, and what could be improved upon in future outreach efforts.

2. **Utilize new technology to inform** both a broader and more targeted range of participants about a plan, study or initiative taking place in their area.

The agency has created user-friendly website project page templates to enhance how users view and interact with content digitally. The information will be clearly separated for better readability of project overviews, scopes, public engagement opportunities, future steps, and supporting documentation. The page will also provide an email sign up form, Google Maps, social media links, and project specific calendar events.

In order to assure people with disabilities can access information on our website, ongoing efforts and staff trainings are taking place to make documents on our website compliant with standards established by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

3. **Promote a unified message for responding to citizen questions and concerns** about the LRTP, Regional Transit Feasibility Plan (RTFP), and Tampa Bay Next.

These major initiatives, led by the MPOs, TBARTA, and FDOT respectively, were all integrated in the joint tri-county public outreach survey of 2018, “It’s TIME Tampa Bay.” More than 10,000 responses shaped the vision of future growth, highway expansion, and regional rapid transit.

4. **Coordinate data products** with FDOT and other agencies.

During this period, the MPO consulted with its partner agencies, designed and began to build a shared data and analytics portal. The portal will allow agencies to share traffic management and safety data in real time, and analyze hot spots for strategic investments and prioritization. Over the next two years, a data feed to the MPO website will be created so that members of the public too can track our community’s transportation performance metrics.

In addition, the PIMA Mapping Tool hosted on the Plan Hillsborough website contains many of the same projects as FDOT District 7's own mapping tool for projects in their five-year work program, although PIMA also includes local projects.

5. Provide a glossary of acronyms and reduce acronym use for major planning documents and in presentations.

To improve readability, the MPO has made an effort to decrease the use of acronyms in documents and/or provide a link to a glossary explaining these terms in every major planning document. The MPO may also consider phasing out the use of acronyms in documents intended for the public.

6. Empower individuals from the community through training and/or one-on-one sessions.

During this cycle, MPO staff conducted a Summer Camp at Tampa Heights Junior Civic Association and Dowdell Middle School education elementary, middle, and a few high school students (approximately 60 students) informing them the importance of walking and bicycle safety. In 2019, staff trained volunteers for the Vision Zero Speaker's Bureau. The volunteers had opportunities to organize mural paintings and schedule a Vision Zero presentation with interested groups or organizations in an effort to spread the word throughout the community on the Vision Zero initiative. These initiatives have formed community relationships and opportunities for repeat invites for community events.

Also during this period, staff conducted an orientation for members of the newly formed Independent Oversight Committee.

To improve communication with the public regarding MPO processes and as a means of relationship-building, the MPO might consider offering additional training, orientations, and one-on-one learning opportunities. In the MPO staff's volunteer activities, such as their yearly participation in the Women Build project, staff may consider drawing from a volunteer list of public participants to engage in fun and meaningful community-building activities.

7. Routinely research best practices on how to engage and empower the community, craft program messaging, conducting meeting in a way that makes individuals feel valued, and solicit feedback to incorporate best practices into current practices.

The MPO contacted over 100 community leaders and asked how to best reach their community. With this step, the MPO's Communities of Concern were engaged during the 2045 LRTP update process when staff invested time and resources to solicit input from these residents. Communities of Concern are areas that have two or more characteristics significantly above the county's median (e.g. minorities, zero-car households, elderly, children, income, disability status, limited English proficiency). Residents of these areas face unique and sometimes overwhelming obstacles to transportation and engagement. Rather than expecting people to come to us, we went out to the Communities of Concern and met people at community events, neighborhood meetings, and on HART bus rides. Staff also hosted seven pop-up events at major transit transfer centers and local malls. Results of these efforts doubled minority representation when compared to the 2040 Plan update.

8. Continue utilizing and seek new avenues for the use of social media, including Facebook and Twitter.