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Public Participation & Title VI Activities



2016 Regional Transportation Plan

2 Public Participation Process

Federal transportation legislation requires that each metropolitan planning organization prepare a transportation plan every four years. The legislation also mandates that an inclusive participation process be completed as part of the plan's development. The latest iteration of the federal transportation legislation, MAP-21, has placed particular emphasis on the public participation process. Specifically, it calls for increased interagency consultation, the use of visualization techniques in the public participation process, and outreach to organizations and groups that are impacted by transportation issues. Attention was particularly paid to population classes protected by federal Title VI requirements (part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964). These groups include: race, color, national origin, age, sex, and disability. This chapter describes the public participation process that the FRCOG and the FCTPO used in the development of this RTP.

The Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization and the FRCOG's Continuing, Cooperative, and Comprehensive (3C) Transportation Planning Process

The Franklin Regional Council of Governments receives federal funds to conduct regional transportation planning on behalf of the Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization (FCTPO) and is therefore required by law to carry out a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive (3C) transportation planning process. This process depends on significant public involvement, and requires that all plans and programs consider all modes of transportation and support community development and social goals. The FCTPO is responsible for monitoring the progress of the regional transportation planning processes and making the final decision regarding any regionally significant projects to be included in the Regional Transportation Plan.

Public Participation Requirements of MAP-21

MAP-21 requires that the Regional Transportation Plan be developed in consultation with the State and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation. The legislation further states that consultations with these agencies should take into account plans, maps, and inventories of natural and/or historic resources as available and applicable. In addition, MAP-21 states that the planning process used by the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) should serve to promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns.

The legislation, MAP-21, notes that the public participation process associated with the development of the plan shall be developed in consultation with all interested parties and allow all interested parties a reasonable opportunity to comment on the contents of the transportation plan, and to the maximum extent practical, should include the following as a part of that task:

- Hold any public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times;
- Employ visualization techniques to describe the transportation plan;
- 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.

Public Outreach and Input during the Development of the Regional Transportation Plan

Public input is an essential component in the creation of the Franklin County Regional Transportation Plan. The input FRCOG received as part of its outreach efforts helped shape and inform the RTP's goals and

recommendations. The RTP

is a public document that was reviewed by all levels of government including: the FCTPO; the Franklin Regional Planning Board (FRPB); the local communities; representatives of regional, state, and federal agencies; and organizations and members of the public representing a wide array of interests. This section describes the public outreach and participation efforts conducted by the FRCOG staff.

Initial Public Outreach

At the beginning of the update process for the Regional Transportation Plan, the FRCOG developed a public participation strategy that sought to obtain public input from as many and diverse populations as possible. The strategy included hosting public forums, distributing a survey, and attending many stakeholder meetings. Two public forums were held between January and February of 2015. They were held at various times to facilitate



Public outreach during the 2014 Parking Day in Greenfield

attendance in the central location of Greenfield at the ADA accessible John W. Olver Transit Center. In addition to these two public forums, the FRCOG also held a public meeting with municipal officials during the day to gather input specifically from the municipal perspective. To further ensure that as many stakeholders as possible were provided the opportunity to comment on transportation in Franklin County, FRCOG staff also attended many meetings of various organizations throughout the region and made presentations regarding the update process and asked for project ideas and feedback. In addition, the FRCOG staff discussed the plan informally when meeting with town boards and local and regional organizations to solicit further input regarding the update or ideas for transportation projects in the county. The details for all of these meetings can be seen in Table 2-1.

At all of the public forums the update process was explained, examples of past Regional Transportation Plans were provided, and visual aids (PowerPoint presentation, pictures, and maps) were used to augment the discussion. The forums were announced several weeks prior with ads placed in all of the local newspapers, the FRCOG website, Facebook page, and Twitter feed. Public television ads were recorded and aired prior to the forums. In addition, personal invitations were sent to a wide array of stakeholders announcing the Regional Transportation Plan update and the dates of the forums (see Appendix A for a list of stakeholders that were contacted and for a summary of the public input that was received).

To augment the input received from the public forums, the FRCOG also created a survey about transportation issues within the county. The survey was geared towards a general audience and can be viewed, along with the results, in Appendix C. The survey was available both in an online format and in hardcopy. The general survey that the FRCOG distributed looked to capture several specific pieces of information. Namely, survey respondents were asked: to rate the state of the existing transportation infrastructure; to describe their current daily travel modes and routines; and what their top three recommendations and priorities would be for transportation improvements in the region. The FRCOG received 52 completed surveys from county residents and used the information provided in the surveys to help inform this RTP.

During the update of this Regional Transportation Plan, draft chapters were made available for review on the FRCOG website (www.frcog.org). In addition, information regarding the update was regularly posted on FRCOG's social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

Final Public Outreach and Approval Process

Once the FRCOG staff had completed a draft of the 2016 Regional Transportation Plan, public input was sought from a variety of stakeholders as well as those required by MAP-21

during a 30-day public review and comment period between June 25 and July 24, 2015. The draft RTP was made available for public review through a variety of means, including: press releases and legal notices to local media, mailings to stakeholders and interested individuals/ agencies/ organizations, notices on the FRCOG Facebook and Twitter accounts, and posting of the draft on the FRCOG website. In addition, two public meetings were held on July 15, 2015 in the centralized location of Greenfield to directly obtain public input regarding the draft RTP. One meeting was held at 11:30am to coincide with bus schedules and the other meeting was held at 5:30pm to allow people working during the day to attend the meeting. Visual aids, such as a PowerPoint presentation, maps, and photographs were used during this meeting to help attendees visualize the RTP and its recommendations.

As part of this outreach, the FRCOG received several comments on the draft RTP. Those comments that were received were reviewed and incorporated, as appropriate, into the RTP during its preparation (all comments received can be seen in Appendix B). Following the official FCTPO Public Participation Plan's requirements of a minimum thirty-day review period, the FCTPO endorsed the 2016 Regional Transportation Plan by vote, following an official report and discussion, at a meeting open to the public at large.

Environmental Justice and Title VI

In 1994, a Presidential Executive Order directed every federal agency to make Environmental Justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing the effects of all programs, policies, and activities on "minority populations and low-income populations." The U.S. Department of Transportation has addressed this directive by involving the potentially affected public in developing transportation projects that fit harmoniously within their communities without sacrificing safety and mobility. This initiative recognizes that effective transportation decision-making depends upon understanding and properly addressing the unique needs of different socioeconomic groups. Title VI is a section of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, national origin (including limited English proficiency), age, sex, and disability. All federally-financed programs must ensure that all people be able to participate fully in the public participation process.

The Franklin Regional Transportation Plan has identified a number of goals in support of Environmental Justice and Title VI. There is a commitment that planning and programming within the region be nondiscriminatory and that all segments of the Franklin County population are able to participate fully in regional transportation planning processes and to access transportation facilities and services.

Beginning in 2001, the Franklin Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) has had a specific task for Environmental Justice and Title VI-related activities. The work under this task has focused on the following:

- Analyzing and mapping U.S. Census Bureau data on income and race in order to identify Environmental Justice target areas that have the greatest concentration of minority populations and residents living below the poverty level;
- Conducting an Equity Analysis based on the recommended projects in the RTP and approved projects in the TIP. This analysis was updated for this RTP. Reviewing current transit routes and the level of service for the Franklin County region, especially in the identified Environmental Justice target areas, and working with the regional transit agencies to find ways to maintain and improve transportation services in the region, as funding allows;
- Conducting outreach to low-income and minority populations and community organizations to identify unmet transportation needs among these groups and develop strategies for addressing them; and
- Reviewing and strengthening current transportation planning and decision-making processes to increase the representation of low-income and minority residents.

For this update to the RTP, FRCOG staff used 2009-2013 Five Year Estimates from the U.S. Census data to identify 18 Environmental Justice areas.¹ They are listed in the following Table 2-1. After identifying the Environmental Justice areas, staff conducted a review of approved projects in the TIP and recommended projects from the previous 2012 RTP in order to determine if the Environmental Justice areas receive an equitable distribution of transportation funding compared to the region as a whole. It was determined that in many aspects, the populations within the Environmental Justice areas are better served by the existing transit system than Franklin County residents as a whole and that 78 percent of highway project spending and 58 percent of highway projects occur in the EJ areas.² The results of this analysis are summarized in FRCOG's *2015 Regional Transportation Equity Analysis* (completed in July 2015).

The Environmental Justice (EJ) areas have been the focus of the FCTPO's EJ initiatives and the FCTPO has worked to increase representation of these EJ populations in the public

¹ EJ Areas are defined as blockgroups where minorities comprise at least 9% of the population and at least 12% of the population is below the poverty level.

² The very large percentage of highway spending inside the EJ areas can be attributed to several large projects, primarily the rehabilitation of the Gill-Montague Bridge, which has a cost of \$40.7 million.

participation and transportation planning processes. In addition, the FRCOG has also worked to increase its outreach and representation of Title VI/Nondiscrimination populations. The primary method that has been used to contact these populations has been through outreach to social service agencies and organizations that serve Franklin County. Just recently, the FRCOG transportation staff was invited to participate in the Franklin County Resource Network (FCRN), which is a large network of social service providers who serve a range of populations throughout Franklin County and the larger region. The FRCOG staff is successfully continuing to work steadily to make new contacts that reach underrepresented populations.

Table 2-1: Environmental Justice Areas in Franklin County

Environmental Justice Area 2015	Which Criteria Met?	
	Poverty Criteria	Minority Criteria
Colrain, eastern portion		X
Deerfield, northern portion		X
Erving, western portion		X
Gill, entire town		X
Greenfield, Cheapside area		X
Greenfield, town center and surrounding areas	X	X
Greenfield, west of I-91/Leyden Woods	X	X
Monroe/Rowe/Charlemont	X	
Montague, Millers Falls	X	
Montague, non-urban area		X
Montague, Turners Falls	X	X
Northfield, northern portion	X	
Orange, town center and surrounding areas	X	
Shelburne, Shelburne Falls	X	
Shutesbury/Leverett		X
Sunderland, entire town		X
Warwick/east Erving	X	
Wendell, entire town	X	X

Access to Essential Services

The FRCOG is aware of the critical role of transportation in community access to essential services. The FRCOG staff is currently working on a project focusing on the health impacts of transportation access region wide. The study is looking at access by various modes of transportation, including fixed route transit services, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities. This project applies a “health lens” by creating and examining travel scenarios for different sectors of the population across the region in order to understand how increased transportation options can improve health outcomes. The scenarios will look at travel options for getting to specific destinations/services such as: grocery stores, sources of fresh foods, health care facilities, and recreational facilities. This analysis will identify potential transportation improvement projects and gaps in regional transportation services. This work will be completed shortly by June 30, 2015.

Consideration of Environmental and Land Use Issues

During the update to the 2016 Regional Transportation Plan, the FRCOG considered a wide range of issues and incorporated these factors throughout the RTP and its recommendations. These issues included: environmental, land use, historic preservation issues, and local and regional priorities and concerns. To ensure that the draft RTP is compatible with other land use/resource protection plans, the FRCOG contacted representatives of state and local agencies responsible for land use management, historic and natural resources, and environmental protection with the goal of having a meeting to discuss the draft RTP. These representatives included: regional land conservation trusts, the Massachusetts Historic Commission, the MA DEP, MA DCR, MA EOEEA, and others. Unfortunately, due to scheduling conflicts and winter weather this meeting could not be held. However, FRCOG staff sought input from these representatives outside of a formal gathering and included the information received in the drafting of the RTP.

In addition, when preparing the RTP the FRCOG considered land use and environmental issues and the consistency between transportation planning and other planning activities, through its dual role as the staff for the Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) and as the Regional Planning Agency (RPA) for the Franklin County region. As the RPA for the Franklin County, the FRCOG has statutory responsibility for the coordinated and orderly development of the region, including regional growth planning and transportation planning. The RPA staff overlaps with the TPO staff, with most FRCOG transportation staff involved in planning activities beyond transportation. The RPA works with towns, regional organizations, and State agencies on land use, open space, and natural resource planning, and assists towns with zoning revisions and redevelopment projects. For example, the FRCOG has been the lead consultant for Community Development Plans for fourteen of the twenty-six towns in Franklin County and assisted with seven other towns in the county. The FRCOG has also worked on a number of municipal Master Plans, Open Space and Recreation Plans, watershed assessment plans, scenic byway corridor management plans, regional economic development plans, among others. The FRCOG has also assisted a number of towns with zoning revisions to support smart growth development patterns. In 2013, the FRCOG completed *Sustainable Franklin County: A Regional Plan for Sustainable Development*. Through an intensive public outreach effort, this plan identified proposed Priority Development Areas and Emerging Development Areas for Franklin County.

Critical Linkages

A new tool has been developed through a collaboration between the Nature Conservancy, UMass Amherst, and MassDOT to model the impacts on habitat connections from transportation and development projects. This model identifies critical habitat linkages in

the Commonwealth and can be used by planners and local communities to see how a specific transportation project, such as a culvert or guardrail replacement, could potentially impact forest and river habitat. The FRCOG staff is currently updating a bridge and culvert inventory for Franklin County. This inventory will combine the information from the Critical Linkages model so that the towns will have a better understanding of how their local infrastructure could impact the environment and mitigate potential harmful effects.

Interagency Consultation

Coordination with Local Agencies

The FRCOG provides technical assistance to the Franklin County towns and works as partners with many local organizations and agencies. This work ranges from performing traffic counts, to identifying and preparing local grant applications, to creating a wide assortment of planning documents. The local agencies and committees that were consulted in the update of this Plan include:

- All twenty-six municipalities in Franklin County
- Franklin Regional Transit Authority
- Franklin Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority
- Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust
- Franklin Land Trust
- Franklin County Community Development Corporation
- Franklin County Resource Network
- Franklin County Home Care Corporation
- Councils on Aging
- Community Action
- Franklin County Chamber of Commerce
- Greenfield Community College
- Franklin Regional Planning Board

Coordination with State and Federal Agencies

As part of its routine work, the FRCOG also works with a number of state and federal agencies. This is especially true since the vast majority of Franklin County's transportation (and other) projects are funded by the state and federal government. The state and federal agencies that were consulted in the update of this RTP include:

- Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)
- Massachusetts Historical Commission
- MassDOT, Highway District 1 and 2 and Office of Transportation Planning

- MassDOT Rail Division and MassDOT Transit Division
- Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)
- Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA)
- Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)
- Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP)
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Coordination with Other Local MPOs

In addition to coordinating transportation planning with local and state agencies, the FRCOG also works closely with its neighboring MPOs. It has a long standing relationship with the other western Massachusetts MPOs of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC). Recently, the FRCOG has also begun working more closely with its Vermont and New Hampshire counterparts, specifically the Southwestern Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC) and the Windham Regional Commission (WRC). The FRCOG has partnered with all of these MPOs on many cross-regional contracts, but particularly on Scenic Byway projects. In November of 2014, the SWRPC, WRC, and the FRCOG met to discuss many tristate issues, including transportation.



Participants at the 2015 Bike Breakfast at the John W. Olver Transit Center

Table 2-1: RTP Public Participation Outreach Schedule

Date	Type of Meeting	Audience	Location
May 12, 2014	FRTA Community Conversation on Transit	The Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) and members of the public and representatives with an interest in transit issues.	Turners Falls
May 14, 2014	FRTA Community Conversation	The Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) and members of the public and representatives with an interest in transit issues.	Greenfield
May 19, 2014	FRTA Community Conversation	The Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) and members of the public and representatives with an interest in transit issues.	Shelburne
May 20, 2014	FRTA Community Conversation	The Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) and members of the public and representatives with an interest in transit issues.	Orange
August 26, 2014	FRTA Community Conversation	The Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) and members of the public and representatives with an interest in transit issues.	Greenfield (Farmer's Market)
September 4, 2014	Franklin County Energy Committees	Attendees included: FRTA, members of municipal Energy Committees, Greening Greenfield, and others interested in transit and transportation issues.	Greenfield
September 19, 2010	PARK(ing) Day community event	Attendees included members of the general public, Greening Greenfield, Town of Greenfield Master Plan Implementation Committee, and the Greenfield Business Association.	Greenfield
January 8 2015	FRTA Transit Advisory Committee/ Regional Coordinating Committee	Attendees included: FRTA, members of the FRTA TAC and RCC, MassMobility, Community Action, Montague Catholic Social Ministries, MassRIDES, Transportation Justice for Franklin County, Greenfield Town Council representatives, and members of the public.	Greenfield
January 21, 2015	Franklin County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Meeting	CEDS Committee Members (Each town in Franklin County has a town-appointed representative on the Committee. Also serving on the Committee are appointees of the FRCOG Executive Committee, the Franklin County Selectmen's Association, and North Quabbin Chambers of Commerce, the Franklin County Community Development Corporation (CDC), and the FRPB.	Greenfield
January 22, 2015	Franklin Regional Planning Board	Attendees included: Franklin Regional Planning Board members, local officials, and members of the general public	Greenfield
January 27, 2015	RTP Public Forum	Attendees included: municipal representatives and FRTA.	Greenfield
February 4, 2015	RTP Public Forum	Attendees included: FRTA, Transportation Justice for Franklin County, MassDOT, and members of the public with an interest in transportation issues.	Greenfield
February 5, 2015	Franklin County Resource Network	Attendees included: representatives from social service organizations in the greater Franklin County region	Greenfield
February 12, 2015	RTP Public Forum	Attendees included: FRTA, Montague Energy Committee, Greenfield High School, Greenfield DPW, Greenfield Planning Board, MassDOT, Greening Greenfield, Franklin County Home Care Corp., and members of the public with an interest in transportation issues.	Greenfield