

## **Rides Mass Transit District Public Participation Plan**

MAP-21 mandates earlier and more extensive public involvement. The RMTD public engagement process is designed to meet these goals for several key planning and programming areas:

1. In developing a long range service plan (LRSP)
2. In developing the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).
3. In developing an annual Program of Projects (POP)

The following section describes procedures for providing public participation related to these activities, and provides general public involvement guidance for other RMTD activities.

### **1.1 Long Range Service Plan (LRSP)**

The Long Range Service Plan is a ten year (or more) transportation investment and transit policy document. It provides the RMTD Board with guidance in making regional transportation investment and is updated by one year during the annual TIP and POP processes. The following steps will be taken to afford the public the opportunity to engage in the development of the LRSP:

- Conduct key stakeholders meetings during the early stages of plan development to solicit input on transportation short- and long-term needs throughout the system, as well as other elements of the plan.
- Conduct public meetings/workshops during the early stages of plan development to solicit input on multi-modal transportation short- and long-term needs throughout the system, transportation goals and objectives, as well as other elements of the plan to ensure the transportation system facilitates the efficient movement of people throughout the region.
- RMTD will coordinate with the Illinois Department of Transportation's transportation planning public involvement efforts.
- RMTD will consult with agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities within the MPA and the regions that are affected by transportation in order to coordinate the planning process functions.
- RMTD will seek input from low income and minority populations, persons with disabilities, and persons with limited English proficiency (by special arrangement).
- A legal public notice will be published in various regional and local newspapers no fewer than 15 days nor more than 30 days in advance of the public comment period.
- In addition to the published notice for the public comment period, meetings will be publicized by way of the Rides Mass Transit District website at [www.ridesmtd.com](http://www.ridesmtd.com).
- Make available the Draft LRSP at all offices of Rides Mass Transit District, post it to the website at [www.ridesmtd.com](http://www.ridesmtd.com).
- Provide a 30-day review and comment period on the Draft LRSP, generally to end one week prior to tentative plan adoption.
- Provide a public comment summary memo to the RMTD Board prior to the plan adoption and to IDOT or FTA as required.
- Provide public notification not fewer than 15 days nor more than 30 days in advance of consideration of action by the RMTD Board on the LRSP.

- If comments received during the designated comment period affect a significant change to the content of the LRSP, RMTD will provide additional opportunity for public comment.

## **1.2 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) & Updates**

The TIP is a financially constrained three-year program covering the most immediate implementation priorities for transportation projects and strategies from the LRSP for the urban area. It is the District's way of allocating its limited transportation resources among the various capital and operating needs of the urban area, based on a clear set of short-term transportation priorities.

The three year TIP is updated annually with information for an additional year and submitted to the Southern Illinois Metropolitan Planning Organization (SIMPO). The annual submission and any updates are part of the regional multi-modal TIP. RMTD participates in and relies on the SIMPO public engagement process for any federal compliance requirements for the TIP process.

## **1.3 The Program of Projects (POP)**

The Program of Projects (POP) lists the transportation projects, operating and capital, which would be the basis of grants submitted to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Since the POP is essentially a fiscal year program pulled from the active TIP, it will be available for public comment during the SIMPO TIP process and available for comment at the annual RMTD service plan hearing held annually prior to grant submission.

## **2.1 Public Participation Plan (PPP) and Updates**

The Public Participation Plan outlines strategies, techniques, and methods utilized to engage the public in the transportation planning and programming process.

## **2.2 Standard Public Involvement Items**

RMTD conducts regular Board meetings, maintains a website, and may periodically hold public meetings for planning and programming activities. The following measures will be taken to encourage public engagement:

- A meeting notice will be provided via email to local news media at least 48 hours prior to each regular RMTD Board meeting.
- Meeting agendas will be posted at RMTD Facilities prior to meetings.
- Active plans, programs, and policies along with other relevant public information will be available for public consumption on the RMTD website at [www.ridesmtd.com](http://www.ridesmtd.com)
- RMTD will utilize mapping and graphic displays as able to help convey plan and program information.
- Public meetings hosted by RMTD will be held at convenient locations and times

## **2.3 Outreach Methods**

### **2.3.1 General Population**

RMTD planning documents, information regarding past and future meetings, and RMTD activities in general, are available to the public through the RMTD website ([www.ridesmtd.com](http://www.ridesmtd.com)) or at the RMTD office (30 Veterans Dr. Harrisburg, IL 62946). The public may call, visit or email RMTD staff at any time to voice concerns, opinions, or ideas. A variety of outreach techniques will be used to proactively engage the general population and traditional stakeholders in the RMTD service area, according to the desired participation goal for the particular

activity. These techniques include traditional outreach techniques that RMTD has utilized in the past to engage the regional population. Efforts will be made to promote understanding and engagement in the transportation planning process. For example, public notices and releases will be drafted in a manner that minimizes the use of technical terminology and public meetings or workshops will be held in convenient locations that are accessible and common gathering places, such as convention centers, pavilions, or schools. The techniques and resources that RMTD will utilize in its general outreach activities may include, but will not be limited to the following:

- Websites (RMTD or MPO member communities), newsletters, or other displays (notices, articles, flyers)
- Public meetings/workshops
- Meetings
- Newspapers (legal notices, articles, community bulletin boards, interviews)
- Press releases to print media, radio, and television
- Email or written announcements to key stakeholders
- Questionnaires or opinion surveys
- Facebook
- Mailing list

### **2.3.2 Target or Focus Groups**

Much of the regional population can be informed of RMTD planning activities through general outreach methods. However, there are “traditionally underserved” segments of the population that may benefit from additional outreach efforts. The traditionally underserved in the general population have been defined by federal and state agencies to include those individuals who may have in the past been neglected in outreach activities or excluded during the planning process, such as the elderly; minorities; low-income households; persons with disabilities; and those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

In addition to the general outreach techniques and resources previously described, RMTD will utilize the following additional resources in its targeted outreach activities:

- Outreach to residents, businesses, and other affected groups within a focused area when the planning effort is specific to that area
- Timely notices by email or postal mail, and when reasonable by phone
- Flyers or other displays in high-volume locations including social activity centers, such as grocery stores, churches, community centers
- Festivals or other periodic events
- Outreach to specific organizations and interagency groups that aid or provide services to those who are:
  - Persons with disabilities
  - Low Income
  - Elderly
  - Minorities
  - Limited English Proficiency

### **2.3.3 Key Agencies, Stakeholders and Organizations**

Many local governments, organizations, agencies, and stakeholders that are, or may be, uniquely impacted by transportation decisions in the RMTD service area are represented on the Technical and/or Advisory Committees of SIMPO. SIMPO will be a key point of contact for all planning and programming. Efforts will be made to engage other key agencies, stakeholders and organizations, particularly those associated with human

service transportation planning (HSTP) or service provision in the region. Agencies that are involved with public safety and security, such as fire departments, will also be identified for outreach activities.

### **3.0 Public Involvement Tools and Techniques**

This section contains descriptions of the various public involvement tools and techniques that RMTD may use for outreach purposes.

#### **3.1 Electronic Media**

Electronic media such as the RMTD website, press releases, meeting minutes and electronic mailings will be utilized to engage and inform the public. RMTD's website is used as an informational/educational tool as well as to advertise opportunities for public involvement. The website contains background information about RMTD, meeting information, major planning documents or links to documents (TIP, POP, etc.), press releases, postings and active consulting services requests. RMTD will periodically utilize the website to host surveys or post comment forms. Formal press releases are normally e-mailed to local media including newspapers, radio stations, and local television outlets. They are used to announce upcoming public planning meetings and to provide information on specific issues related to ongoing planning efforts. Direct electronic mailings are routinely used for meeting notices and for meeting-related communications with committee members and other interested parties.

#### **3.2 Print Media**

Print media such as legal advertisements or notices; direct mailings; announcements/flyers; public opinion surveys; and comment forms are useful tools to engage and inform the general public. RMTD uses legal notices to announce pending major actions and, in certain cases, may use public hearings. Major actions may include a scheduled or proposed plan update (TIP, LRSP, POP). Legal notices are also used occasionally to advertise other activities. Flyers and other announcements are used to promote meetings and activities that are not regularly scheduled, such as workshops and public meetings. They may be posted at public meeting sites such as libraries and municipal offices, and in neighborhood activity centers such as grocery stores and churches, in priority focus areas for targeted outreach. Print questionnaires or surveys are sometimes used when specific input from the public is desired, although electronic surveys are more desirable and easier to manage. Surveys may be distributed at meetings, left for later collection in public places or actively distributed and collected, or they may be mailed. Likewise, comment forms are sometimes used when specific input from the public is desired, particularly concerning plan development or adoption.

#### **3.3 Meetings and Other Public Forums**

RMTD anticipates using a variety of meeting and forum types to provide opportunities for the public to engage in the planning process, such as open houses, workshops, small group meetings and public hearings, as well as the monthly Board meetings. RMTD utilizes this variety of meeting types to achieve different public outreach objectives. Typically, meetings will be held, with either a workshop or an open-house type of orientation, to solicit input from the public during plan development and adoption stages. Efforts are made to hold public meetings at convenient times and at locations that are accessible to all community members. Multiple visualization tools may be employed to facilitate meeting discussion, such as graphic displays, aerials, internet-available mapping, and Geographic Information Systems portals.

Occasionally RMTD may host federally required hearings on certain transportation planning efforts. These will be legally advertised meetings in which a formal, structured procedure is used to take public comment. The proceedings are recorded and transcribed for the record. The RMTD Board meetings are open to the public and notifications of meeting times are provided to local media outlets each month. Meeting agendas are posted at RMTD facilities prior to each meeting and on the RMTD website as soon after meetings as possible.

### **4.0 Use of Public Input**

RMTD staff will provide a report on public outreach engagements with information such as, levels of participation, general points of discussion, and other relevant feedback from the public at monthly meetings of the RMTD Board. The RMTD staff will consider public input and attempt to integrate that input into the decision-making process in the most appropriate way. For processes that require a public comment period the RMTD staff (or consultant) will create a memo listing all the comments received during the official comment period and deliver that to the RMTD Board prior to their taking action on the plan or program.

#### **4.1 Public Participation Tracking**

Also, in order to improve upon the participation process as a whole, and to improve upon the use of public input, the RMTD staff will track public involvement activities. The tracking information, (Relevant data collected below), captures key meeting information, notification methods, general summary of gathered information, follow up steps, and an assessment of ways to improve the engagement process. The data will help RMTD evaluate how chosen participation efforts have worked as well as allow them to continuously improve public outreach efforts.

#### **RMTD Participation Tracking Relevant Data Collected:**

1. Event
  - a. Date
  - b. Conducted by
  - c. Number of attendees
2. How were participants notified of the event?
3. Summary of public comments/concerns/interests
4. How is information to be used?
5. Is there follow-up with the public?
  - a. Specific contact necessary, who, by whom?
  - b. Additional meetings?
  - c. Will plans, documents, follow-up information be made available to the public, where and when?
6. Process suggestions
  - a. What worked well in this public participation activity?
  - b. What would I change next time?
  - c. Feedback from participants on ways to improve the process

#### **5.0 Updating and Evaluation of the Public Participation Plan**

The RMTD Public Participation Plan will be updated periodically, concurrent with the update of the Long Range Service Plan (LRSP), or sooner if it is determined necessary by RMTD. Evaluation of the plan will occur as a first step when the LRSP is being updated. The plan will be evaluated against performance on the three major objectives, established in Section One. Additionally, the staff will seek to identify specific areas for improving public involvement, based on:

- Participation tracking performance
- Participant's assessments and suggestions
- Technical, Advisory and Policy Committee expectations