

Chapter 1: Introduction & History

Every other year since 1998, the Hillsborough County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has updated its *Public Involvement Plan* (PIP). The PIP identifies a proactive public participation process for the transportation planning products of the MPO. This process includes timely public notices, full access and input to key decisions, and support of early and continuing community involvement. Coinciding with the biennial update to the PIP, the MPO also assesses its effectiveness in implementing the participation plan.

The MPO has four major categories for measuring the effectiveness of public participation. These include:

- **Visibility & Productivity:** Visibility corresponds to the efforts and products the MPO produces to increase the agency’s engagement with the public. Productivity is the output of the MPO’s tasks.
- **Participation Opportunities:** Participation opportunities are the full extent of options the public has to interact with the MPO. These opportunities span in-person and virtual opportunities. The MPO measures the effectiveness of its participation opportunities not just in availability, but in whether the opportunities its produces and events it holds are accessible, time-sensitive, and understandable.
- **Public Interest & Feedback:** Public interest and feedback is collected through surveys, comment cards, emails, phonecalls, walk-ins, and other forms intended to provide a range of options for inclusion. To seize new opportunities to receive public input, the MPO has begun engaging with the public over social media and in event-specific chatrooms.
- **Input Results:** Input results are the direct and indirect impacts that public feedback has on the MPO’s reports, plans, and other activities.

Furthermore, the MPO measures its public participation with minorities, low-income individuals, and the transportation disadvantaged. These measures are often woven into the four major categories, such as tracking the number of notices published in non-English newspapers, distribution of the 2017 Ride Guide, and recording the number of events held in Environmental Justice areas.

Table 1 below shows the major categories and corresponding metrics from the 2018 Title VI/Nondiscrimination Plan.

Table 1: Measures of Effectiveness for the Public Participation Plan (2016)

Metrics		
Measuring Visibility and Productivity	Number of MPO publications produced	Number of MPO newsletters and brochures distributed, such as Bicycle Suitability Maps, Ride Guides and Citizens Guide to Transportation Planning
	Number of newspaper advertisements and public notices placed in publications with minority audiences	Media inventory of newspaper articles, television and radio coverage
	Number of West Central Florida MPO Chairs Coordinating Committee brochures distributed	Number of MPO sponsored maps distributed, as well as any other sponsorship or advertisement opportunity
	Number of meetings broadcast on Hillsborough County Television	Number of publications available on the MPO website, at a minimum to include the LRTP, TIP, and an annual list of obligated projects

Metrics		
Measuring Participation Opportunities	Number of MPO public forums, workshops and community meetings at which displays, presentations, discussions, and feedback occurred	Number and origin of participants at such public forums, workshops, and community meetings
	Number of participants at public forums, workshops and community meetings held in historically underserved areas or with such populations	Number of participation opportunities offered to American Indian entities, such as the Seminole Tribe of Florida
	Number and origin of participants at monthly MPO and committee meetings	Number of persons on the MPO mailing list receiving regular agendas
	Number of draft plans, reports, other preliminary documents or surveys posted to MPO website for public comment	
Increasing Public Participation Efforts with Minorities, Low-Income Individuals, & Transportation Disadvantaged	Ensuring the MOE report details representative public involvement	Developing maps with updated, community-specific demographic and socioeconomic data within the MPO's geographic boundaries at the census tract, block group, or zip code level
	Listing all MPO committee members' demographic data, including race, ethnicity, age, and whether or not they are disabled	
Measuring Public Interest & Feedback	Number of returned comment cards distributed with Newsletters and other MPO publications	Number of verbal comments received at open forum discussions, public hearings, and at any other opportunities for public interaction
	Number of phone, fax, mail, and email inquiries or comments cards received	Number of visitors to the MPO website
Measuring Input Results	Seeking feedback that is immediate and project specific	
	Number of issues identified through public input and responded to by the MPO	Documented revisions to plans based on citizen input
Refining PPP Process	Periodic public involvement process surveys	Update the PPP in conjunction with, and at the outset of, each LRTP update
	Recommendations to enhance the PPP	

History

In 1999, several evaluation measures were adopted by the MPO in response to the Federal Highway Administration's requirement that the MPO develop a mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness of the PIP.

In 2005, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) was enacted, carrying forward a strong federal emphasis on public participation programs. SAFETEA-LU included a number of major modifications, including conducting convenient and accessible public meetings, employing visualization techniques to describe plans, and making public information accessible in electronic formats. With regard to the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), SAFETEA-LU also requires participation among users of pedestrian walkways, bicycle transportation facilities, and those with disabilities. The PIP was further amended and renamed the *Public Participation Plan* (PPP) in 2006.

In 2010, the MPO updated the PPP to more clearly define procedures for notification and public participation, including an extensive review of requirements, transportation terms and acronyms,

an expanded toolbox, and a new Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan. The 2010 PPP was amended in 2012 to incorporate new public involvement techniques and procedural requirements, and was adopted by the MPO along with an updated LEP Plan.

In 2014, the MPO amended its PPP to incorporate recommendations of its 2013 federal certification review, which called for simplifying the document and adding new tools. Revisions include the consolidation of the PlanHillsborough.org agency website, the expansion of MPO committees, the streamlined downloading of the PPP document from the PlanHillsborough.org website, and clarification of the public notice process for TIP amendments.

The passage of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act in 2015 has led to requirements for the solicitation of comments from public ports, tourism interests, and certain private transportation providers.

Also in 2015, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) updated its MPO Program Management Handbook to fully incorporate principles of Environmental Justice (EJ) in programs and policies. This update came with two requirements for MPOs:

- Ensure and document early, continuous and meaningful opportunities for involvement by minority and low income communities; and
- Scrutinize demographic data to ensure that planning activities will not have disproportionately high or adverse impacts on underserved communities, and where impacts are unavoidable, that documented steps are taken to avoid, minimize or mitigate impacts.

Refining the Public Participation Plan

The MPO most recently updated its Public Participation Plan (PPP) in August 2016. This plan clarified the requirements, notices, procedures and strategies that the MPO undertakes in its public participation efforts. To refine the PPP process, the MPO recommended implementing periodic public involvement process surveys, updating the PPP at the outset of each Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) update, and enhancing the PPP.

A recommendation from the previous MOE report was that the PPP be updated in conjunction with, and at the outset of, each LRTP update. The PPP is in the process of being updated as of Spring 2018, and consultant tasks have been authorized to engage the public in the 2045 LRTP update at both the regional and countywide level.