



PLANNING DIVISION

Public Participation Process and Plan

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION PLANNING DIVISION

Public Participation Process and Plan

Background

The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) recognizes the importance of public participation in the planning process. Public participation on both the project and statewide level provides MDOT with a broad range of diverse and meaningful ideas and results in a better planned and implemented statewide transportation system. In coordination with the general public, Federal and State environmental and land management agencies, the eight federally recognized American Indian Tribes, the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and other groups with identifiable interests in Mississippi's transportation system, MDOT has developed this Public Participation Process and Plan.

This process will be used to obtain input from the public and other interested parties about proposed transportation improvements in those portions of the State outside the areas served by an MPO. Each MPO will conduct the public participation process for its metropolitan area in accordance with the MPO's Public Participation Plan. There are established MPOs for the metropolitan areas surrounding Jackson, Memphis, Hattiesburg, and the Gulf Coast. Each MPO has its own Public Participation Process and Plan.

The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) operates its programs and services in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, and related statutes and implementing authorities.

Purpose

This MDOT Public Participation Process and Plan is intended to establish methods to provide the general public and other interested parties with ongoing timely information about transportation issues and the transportation decision-making process. This will be accomplished by:

- Providing reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of the Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan and the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP);
- Providing adequate notice of public involvement activities and times for public review and comment at key decision points. This includes, but is not limited to, reasonable opportunities to comment on the proposed Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan and the more immediate STIP;

- Ensuring that, to the maximum extent practicable, public involvement events or opportunities are held at convenient and accessible locations and times;
- Using, to the maximum extent practicable, visualization techniques to describe proposed statewide transportation plans and supporting studies;
- Making, as appropriate, public information available in electronically accessible formats on the internet in order to afford reasonable opportunities for public comment;
- Demonstrating explicit consideration and response to public input during the development of the Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan and the STIP;
- Providing a process for seeking out and considering the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority household members who may face challenges accessing employment and other services;
- Undertaking periodic reviews no less frequently than every five years of the effectiveness of this public involvement process to ensure that the process provides full and open access to all interested parties; and
- Revising this process to assure continuing improvement.

Interested Parties

This Public Participation Process and Plan frequently refers to interested parties. Throughout this document, interested parties are the agencies, people, and groups MDOT will be consulting with as it develops or amends its Transportation Improvement Plans. These are the people MDOT coordinated with as they developed this Public Participation Process and Plan. These interested parties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The general public;
- Public transportation agencies;
- Non-metropolitan local elected officials;
- Federal and State environmental and land management agencies;
- Federally recognized American Indian Tribes;
- Agencies responsible for historic preservation;
- Representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities;
- Representatives of the disabled;
- Freight shippers;
- Providers of freight transportation services; and
- Representatives of minority, low income, and traditionally underserved groups.

A list of identified interested parties is available upon request.

Mississippi's Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)

Jackson Urbanized Area

Central Mississippi Planning and Development District
1020 Centre Pointe Boulevard
Pearl, Mississippi 39208
601-981-1511
<https://www.cmpdd.org/>

Gulf Coast Urbanized Area

Gulf Regional Planning Commission
1635 Popp's Ferry Road, Suite G
Biloxi, Mississippi 39532
228-864-1167
<https://www.grpc.com/>

Hattiesburg Urbanized Area

Hattiesburg-Petal-Lamar-Forrest MPO
P. O. Box 1898
Hattiesburg, Mississippi 39403
601-545-6259
<https://www.hattiesburgms.com/mpo/>

Mississippi portion of the Memphis Urbanized Area

Memphis Metropolitan Planning Organization
125 N. Main Street, Suite 450
Memphis, Tennessee 38103
901-636-7190
<https://memphismpo.org/>

Each of the MPOs is responsible for the planning functions in its metropolitan area. Each MPO has its own written Public Participation Plan. The MPOs and MDOT have coordinated the development of the public participation plans. These Public Participation Plans were developed through a public participation process similar to the one described here. The MPOs will conduct the public participation processes for all Federally funded transportation projects in their respective urban areas, and MDOT's process will be used for all Federally funded transportation projects in the non-urbanized parts of the State. The MPOs' plans address City, County, and MDOT sponsored projects inside the MPO boundaries. MDOT coordinates closely with the MPOs and is represented on each MPOs' Technical and Policy Committees.

Transportation Plans

The MPOs and MDOT conduct many planning studies. Most are to address specific transportation problems or needs. Some of these studies result in the identification of major needed projects, but the majority address specific localized problems such as how to improve operations along a particular corridor. The MPOs and MDOT involve the public and other interested parties in these studies to the extent that they have expertise and knowledge that would be helpful in identifying viable solutions to the identified transportation problems.

The two plans that address the overall transportation system at the state level and help develop priorities and allocate resources for Mississippi's future are MDOT's Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan and the STIP.

Long-Range Plans: Each MPO develops a Long-Range Transportation Plan for its urban area. This plan projects transportation needs, strategies, and goals for the coming 25 years. MDOT develops a long-range plan for the rest of the State and incorporates the concepts identified in the MPOs' plans into the Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan. The MPOs' Long-Range Transportation Plans must be updated at least every five years and can be modified or amended as needed. The MDOT Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan is updated as needed, but at least every five years. MDOT's Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan can only be developed or amended through the MDOT Public Participation Process and Plan described here.

Short Range Plans: Each MPO develops a project specific and fiscally constrained Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) detailing the projects and project phases for which the MPO intends to apply for Federal funding over the next four years. This includes MDOT projects in urbanized areas. MDOT develops a Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) that incorporates the projects in the MPOs' TIPs plus all projects outside the urbanized areas. Only projects in the approved STIP can be Federally funded. Certain types of projects that are categorically excluded from detailed environmental analysis can be grouped rather than listed individually in the TIPs and the STIP. Federal regulations require the TIPs and the STIP to be updated at least every four years, but they may be updated, amended, or modified more frequently. The TIPs and the STIP, as well as amendments to them, can only be developed through the MPOs' and MDOT's Public Participation Processes and Plans.

Please note that the MPOs and MDOT are permitted to make minor administrative modifications to the TIPs and the STIP without initiating a Public Participation Process, (PPP). However, these modifications must not involve substantial changes such as:

- Adding or removing projects.
- Altering the scope of a project to the extent that it changes the required environmental documentation.
- Adjusting funding in a way that compromises fiscal constraint of the TIP or STIP.

- Making any changes that trigger a new regional air quality conformity determination (including changes to grouped projects).

Administrative modifications typically include minor cost adjustments or changes to the year a project phase is initiated.

The thresholds used to determine whether a project change qualifies as an amendment or administrative modification are outlined below:

PROJECT COST CHANGE THRESHOLDS:

For project cost changes, a sliding scale is used to determine the appropriate category of revision. All cost evaluations are based on the most recently approved STIP/TIP or its corresponding amendment or administrative adjustment, ensuring that incremental changes are accurately accounted for.

Total project cost of all phases shown within the approved TIP	Amendment	Administrative Adjustment
Up to \$2 million	≥75%	< 75%
\$2 million to \$15 million	≥50%	< 50%
\$15 million to \$75 million	≥40%	<40%
\$75 million and above	≥30%	<30%

In urbanized areas, a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) may either adopt MDOT’s Public Participation Plan (PPP) or rely on its own, provided that short- and long-range plans—and any amendments—have undergone public and stakeholder coordination as outlined in the MPO’s PPP. This requirement applies to both locally sponsored and MDOT-sponsored projects.

Once the MPO’s Public Participation Process is complete and a plan, amendment, or administrative modification is formally approved, the MPO will submit the change to MDOT for inclusion in the Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan or the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), without requiring additional public involvement. MDOT will then forward the approved change to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for review. Upon federal approval, the plan or amendment becomes effective. Administrative modifications are submitted to FHWA for informational purposes only.

MDOT'S Public Participation Process and Plan

Outside the MPO urbanized areas, MDOT will conduct the Public Participation Process and Plan. The process will be used for new Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plans and amendments, as well as development of a new STIP, and amendments to the non-urbanized portions of the STIP. The process is as follows:

1. MDOT will make any proposed new Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan or proposed new STIP available on the MDOT website for public review and comment for a period of not less than 30 days. Proposed amendments to the Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan or to the STIP will be available for review for 10 days. In addition, the availability of the proposed plans or amendments will be advertised at <https://mdot.ms.gov/portal/news>, on MDOT's social media, in email blasts, and/or or via another platform. This will inform the public of the availability of the plans or amendments for review and comment and will also notify the public of any scheduled public involvement events or opportunities. Reviewers will be able to make comments through the website, by email, by mail, or via another platform.
2. Public involvement events or opportunities will be held for review and comment on draft Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plans, the draft STIP, the Public Participation Process and Plan, and other plans or programs as deemed necessary by MDOT. If a physical meeting is held, each location will comply with all mandates established in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Individuals with questions or special needs may contact the MDOT Planning Division Public Participation Process and Plan coordinator at (601) 359-7685 at least seven days prior to the meeting.
3. When the proposed plans or amendments are made available on the website for public review, all interested parties will be contacted by email or letter and asked to comment within the 30- or 10-day review period. Interested parties will be requested to participate in any scheduled public involvement events or opportunities.
4. For new STIPs and new Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plans, MDOT will hold public involvement events or opportunities to receive additional comments from the public. These events or opportunities will allow MDOT to receive comments and suggestions that could impact the development of transportation projects in the state. The events or opportunities will be held not less than 14 days from the first advertisement. MDOT will ensure that all public involvement events or opportunities will be held at convenient and accessible locations and times. When public involvement events or opportunities are held, MDOT will normally schedule at least one meeting in each of the three Transportation Commission districts.

5. MDOT will use maps, charts, and/or other visualization techniques, to the extent possible, to graphically demonstrate plans or proposed amendments. MDOT will provide any technical and policy information used in the development of the STIP.
6. All comments received will be considered, and MDOT will respond to each commenter and explain its proposed action on the comment.
7. Any comments concerning an amendment can be expressed at a regularly scheduled Commission Meeting. These meetings are open to the public.
8. If applicable and/or required, new plans or amendments will be submitted to the Transportation Commission for approval. Upon approval, MDOT will submit the approved plan or amendment to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for review and/or approval.
9. With the approval of FHWA and FTA, the plan or amendment becomes official.

Future Changes in the Public Participation Process and Plan

MDOT will continually monitor the effectiveness of this Public Participation Process and Plan. It may be modified from time to time to expand its usefulness as a tool to encourage public and interested party input into the Transportation Planning Process. The process will be formally reviewed every five years. At that time the Process Plan itself will go through the same public involvement process described for new plans in steps one through nine above, with interested parties having at least 45 days to comment.

Any comments or suggestions you have about this plan can be directed to:

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