

**MERRIMACK VALLEY METROPOLITAN PLANNING
ORGANIZATION**

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

(As Amended through December 7, 2009)

Prepared by

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

On behalf of the

Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization

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Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization Public Participation Plan

On February 14, 2007, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) jointly released final rules governing the transportation planning process in metropolitan areas. Included in these rules are specific criteria that must be followed in developing and amending Regional Transportation Plans (RTPs), Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) and this document, the Public Participation Plan, in a manner “that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement.”

Public Participation Plan Strategy Overview

Many interested parties, specifically identified in Section 450.316 (“Interested parties, participation, and consultation”) of the final rules, must be included in the public participation process. The strategy to be employed by the Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO) in its Public Participation Plan (PPP) is to solicit ideas for, create, and maintain a list of agencies and citizens who would be considered to be parts of these groups. Direct notice, via e-mail, or mail, would then be provided to those on the list during key points in the development of the RTP, TIP and PPP.

In addition, notices, documents, and general transportation information will be posted on the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission’s website www.mvpc.org, as the Commission acts as the transportation planning staff for the Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO). Public Hearing Notices and Public Review Period Notices will also be published in the “Legals” section of three area newspapers, and sent as press releases to local newspapers and radio stations. In an effort to reach more traditionally underserved citizens, attempts will be made to have notices posted in transit centers, social security offices, and employment offices.

Public Participation Plan Procedures

The following specific procedures to provide adequate and timely public notice will be followed in developing the MVMPO RTP, the MVMPO TIP, and the MVMPO PPP.

Timing of Information Distribution

- (1) A notice will be sent to the stakeholder list organizations and interested parties announcing the commencement of work on the MVMPO RTP, TIP or the PPP. This will be accomplished via email or U.S. Mail, depending upon the preference of the individual or organization.
- (2) Any materials used in developing the document will be posted on the MVPC website or will be available at the MVPC offices.

- (3) Notice will be sent to all stakeholders stating the beginning and ending dates of the “Public Review and Comment Period” of the draft RTP, draft TIP, or draft Public Participation Plan.
- (4) Notice will be sent regarding Public Hearings to be held on the draft RTP draft TIP, or draft Public Participation Plan.

Public Hearing Notice and Public Review Period Notice Distribution

The Public Hearing Notices and Public Review Period Notices will be distributed as follows:

- (1) Notice will be published in the “Legals” section of three area newspapers, the *Lawrence Eagle Tribune*, the *Newburyport Daily News*, and the *Haverhill Gazette*. Press releases will also be prepared and sent to area newspapers and radio stations. These notices shall make clear how and where stakeholders may view and comment upon the draft documents or document amendments.
- (2) The people on the Public Participation Plan Stakeholders list shown at the end of this PPP will receive notices via mail or e-mail.
- (3) The MVMPO will provide notices that will be posted at the Haverhill and Lawrence transit centers and the Amesbury transit center, when it is completed.
- (4) The MVMPO will also provide notices that can be posted at the following locations, if the agencies/organizations identified allow such postings:
 - Social Security and employment offices
 - Libraries
 - Town Halls

These notices shall make clear how and where stakeholders may view the draft documents and by when comments must be received.

Procedures for Public Review Periods

There will be a 30 calendar day public review and comment period for draft RTPs and TIPs. However, under unusual time constraints, the MPO can establish an abbreviated review and comment period for these documents, and amendments, on a case-by-case basis.

The public review and comment period for adopting or amending the PPP will be 45 calendar days. Significant comments received will be noted and addressed in the final documents. If significant changes are made between the draft and final versions of the document then an additional 10-day public review and comment period will be provided.

Procedures for Public Hearings

Two public hearings will be held during the public review and comment period. One will be held during MVRTA public transit system operating hours so that those who need to use public transit have the opportunity to attend. The second public hearing will be held in the evening to accommodate those people who cannot attend daytime meetings. The Public Hearings will be held in an accessible location to accommodate disabled persons.

World Wide Web Procedures

The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) acts as the transportation planning staff for the Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO) and therefore all notices, all draft and final RTP, TIP, and PPP documents, as well as, general transportation information will be posted on the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission's website www.mvpc.org.

Visualization techniques will be employed to describe appropriate parts of the RTPs and TIPs. Examples of such techniques include the use of maps, aerial imagery, graphs, charts, PowerPoint presentations, animated traffic models and computer software that generates building perspectives.

Coordinating Procedures

Development of documents will be undertaken in coordination with statewide transportation planning public involvement and consultation processes.

Review PPP Procedures

The desired outcome of reaching as many interested citizens as possible should be achieved with the extensive direct mailing list included in this PPP, but the procedures will be reviewed periodically, and individuals and organizations will be added to the direct mailing list in an effort to maximize outreach.

Public Participation Plan Stakeholder List

Listed below are the interested individuals, organizations and other stakeholders that have been identified by the Merrimack Valley MPO for inclusion in the PPP. They are defined based on the individual groups mentioned in SAFETEA-LU and the existing transportation planning regulations developed by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The MPO will continue to add individuals, organizations or other stakeholders to this list and their addition will not be considered an act requiring the formal amendment of the PPP. Similarly, any of the individuals or organizations identified below may request to be removed from the mailing list and such action will not necessitate a formal PPP amendment.

An important consideration (component) of the Merrimack Valley MPO is to make the region's "3C" transportation planning process accessible to the region's low-income and minority populations. The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission will therefore take steps to ensure that the Public Participation Plan meets the requirements contained in Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice), Executive Order 13166 (Limited English Proficiency) and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Citizens:

- Interested Citizens
- Merrimack Valley Transportation Committee
- Libraries
- City/Town Clerks
- Area Congressional Delegation
- Area Legislative Delegation

Affected public agencies:

- MassDOT
- Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority
- Federal Transit Administration
- Federal Highway Administration
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection
- MBTA Commuter Rail Officials
- Chief Elected Officials
- Boards of Selectmen/ City Councils
- Rockingham Planning Commission
- Greater Derry-Salem Cooperative Alliance for Regional Transportation (CART)
- Northern Middlesex Council of Governments
- Metropolitan Area Planning Council
- Nashua Regional Planning Commission
- MassRides
- Local Departments of Public Works

- Local Police Departments
- Local Traffic and Safety Committees
- City and Town Engineers

Representatives of public transportation employees:

- Truck Driver's Union Local #170

Freight shippers:

- PJ Murphy Transportation
- JB Hunt
- Estes Express
- Shaheen Brothers
- ABF Freight

Providers of freight transportation services:

- United Parcel Service
- Federal Express

Private providers of transportation:

- Local Taxi Companies
- C&J Trailways
- The Coach Company
- TransCare
- EMT Corp.
- Assist Incorporated
- Central Wheelchair and Van Trans.
- Other Transportation Providers Identified in the Regional Transportation Plan

Representatives of users of public transportation:

- Elder Services of the Merrimack Valley
- Local Senior Centers
- Northeast Independent Living Program
- Office of Employment Services
- American Training, Inc.
- Merrimack Valley Hospice
- Northern Essex Community College

Representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities:

- Merrimack Valley Off-Road Trails Committee
- Coastal Trail Coalition
- Essex National Heritage Commission
- Bay Circuit Alliance
- MassBike
- Essex County Trail Assoc.
- Andover Trails Committee

Representatives for the disabled:

- Northeast Independent Living Program
- Department of Mental Health
- Mass Commission for the Blind
- Area Nursing Homes
- United Cerebral Palsy
- CLASS Inc.
- Fidelity House
- Association of Retarded Persons (ARC)

Traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, low-income and minority households who may face challenges accessing employment and other services:

- MVRTA Transit Centers in Amesbury, Haverhill and Lawrence (post notices)
- Social Security Offices (post notices)
- Employment Offices (post notices)
- Merrimack Valley Goodwill
- Area Hospitals
- Salvation Army
- Groundwork Lawrence
- Lawrence Community Works
- United Way of the Merrimack Valley
- Methuen Arlington Neighborhood, Inc.

Agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities within the MPA that are affected by transportation:

a. State and local planned growth:

- Area Planning Boards
- Mass Development
- Merrimack Valley Transportation Management Association
- The Junction Transportation Management Organization

b. Economic development:

- Merrimack Valley Economic Development Council

- Local Community Development Directors
- Chambers of Commerce
- Economic Development Administration

c. Environmental agencies and federal lands:

- National Park Service
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Local Conservation Commissions
- MassRiverways
- Merrimack River Watershed Council
- Shawsheen River Watershed Association
- Powow River Watershed Association
- Parker River Clean Water Association
- Essex County Greenbelt Association
- Trustees of Reservations
- Andover Village Improvement Society (AVIS)

d. Airport operations:

- Lawrence Airport Commission

Development of the 2007 Public Participation Plan

In developing the draft 2007 Public Participation Plan for the Merrimack Valley MPO, MVPC transportation planning staff contacted eight freight shippers via phone along with selected members of the Merrimack Valley Transportation Committee. This group includes community planners, local legislators, community public works directors, transportation consultants and other parties interested in transportation planning in the Valley. Information on both the existing Public Involvement Process and the draft Public Participation Plan was also provided to the members of the Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission and the content of the document was discussed at meetings of these groups that were held in the spring of 2007. Notices of the availability of the draft Merrimack Valley MPO 2007 Public Participation Plan were sent to chief local officials, area legislators, MPO members, Merrimack Valley Transportation Committee members, local planning board chairmen, and the members of the MVRTA Advisory Board. A public meeting on the document was held at the MVPC offices on June 24, 2007.

Background Information

Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization

Under federal transportation legislation, MPOs are assigned the important task of completing the planning and programming of all federally funded transportation projects and programs in their respective planning area.

The Merrimack Valley MPO covers the same 15-community geographic area that defines the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission and the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority. These communities are:

Amesbury	Methuen
Andover	Newbury
Boxford	Newburyport
Georgetown	North Andover
Groveland	Rowley
Haverhill	Salisbury
Lawrence	West Newbury
Merrimac	

There are 10 voting members of the Merrimack Valley MPO. Six members serve permanently while the other four positions are filled by cities and towns that serve on a rotating basis. Membership of the Merrimack Valley MPO is as follows:

- Massachusetts Highway Department; Permanent Member
- Merrimack Valley Planning Commission; Permanent Member
- Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority; Permanent Member
- Executive Office of Transportation and Public Works; Permanent Member
- Mayor of Lawrence (or his/her designee); Permanent Member
- Mayor of Haverhill (or his/her designee); Permanent Member
- One selectman, Mayor or his/her designee from each of the following subregions:

Region 1: Amesbury, Newburyport and Salisbury

Region 2: Newbury, Rowley and West Newbury

Region 3: Boxford Georgetown, Groveland and Merrimac

Region 4: Andover, Methuen and North Andover

The MPO is responsible for performing a number of federally mandated transportation planning activities including the development and adoption of the Unified Planning Work Program, RTP, TIP, and the Public Participation Plan. In addition, it is responsible for making air quality conformity determinations for the RTP and the TIP and must certify that the MPO is adhering to the transportation planning requirements outlined in the “3C” planning process.

Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

Under federal transportation planning regulations, the Regional Transportation Plan serves as the foundation of the transportation planning process in each MPO. The Plan serves a number of important purposes within this role. The Plan must document and

evaluate the overall status and performance of the existing regional transportation system and consider all the major modes of transportation available in the region including highways, mass transit, freight, rail, bicycle, pedestrian, air transportation, and port facilities. This evaluation considers how these individual modes either do or should combine to provide the best-coordinated or *intermodal* transportation system available. It must also assess how that system affects the region's other important resources such as its economic base, environmentally sensitive areas, cultural and historic heritage, and social fabric.

Evaluation of the region's existing transportation system is accomplished in a number of ways. Traffic volume data measures demand on the region's roadways. Traffic studies also provide valuable information on the transportation system, such as Level of Service Analyses, which provide a measure of congestion for specific roadways and intersections. Crash data provided by the MassHighway Department allows us to identify where safety problems exist. The region's Congestion Management System (CMS) uses traffic volume and roadway capacity information to identify congested areas. Ridership and boarding data obtained from the MVRTA, MBTA and local transit operators allow us to monitor usage of the region's transit services.

Once the region's existing transportation system has been evaluated and its future transportation demands have been estimated, the Plan must identify what actions are necessary to correct any of the existing deficiencies in the system and to address any of the existing or projected problem areas. These may include recommendations to conduct transportation studies along congested corridors or to implement projects or services that have already entered the project development process. These identified actions should also include an estimate of when they are to be implemented and how much it will cost to complete them.

Federal planning regulations call for the MPO to consult with agencies and officials who are responsible for other planning activities in the region in developing the RTP. These should include those responsible for state and local planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport and freight movements. These agencies in the Merrimack Valley region are identified on Page 6 under Agencies and Officials responsible for other planning activities within the MPA that are affected by transportation.

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) describes the transportation planning activities that are to be carried out by a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) over the coming year. The UPWP for the Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO) briefly describes and provides budgetary information for the transportation planning tasks and activities that are to be conducted in the region during the coming program year (October 1 – September 30). The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) typically undertakes most of these activities in its capacity as the transportation planning staff of the MVMPO. However, this document also includes those significant transportation planning and engineering studies that will be completed by other government entities and organizations.

U.S. Department of Transportation planning regulations mandate that the UPWP be prepared and endorsed annually by the MPO prior to the start of the planning program period before federal money may be spent on any transportation planning studies and activities in the region.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The Merrimack Valley MPO TIP is a prioritized list of transportation projects proposed to be funded in the region over the next four years. Any transportation project funded through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) or the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) must be listed in the region's TIP. Without such a listing, federal highway funds cannot be expended by MassHighway on local or State projects. Similarly the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVRTA) can only receive federal funds for projects listed in the TIP.

For each TIP year, gross estimates of project costs are listed in the federal fiscal year of proposed advertising. Federal fiscal years begin on October 1 and run through September 30. The advertising dates shown for roadway projects are largely determined by the Capital Expenditure and Program Office within MassHighway and the MassHighway District 4 Office. The Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority determines advertising dates for transit projects.

A critical requirement in developing the TIP is that an MPO may not program more spending on roadway, bridge and transit projects than is expected to be available. MPO members must therefore work cooperatively in evaluating potential projects given the transportation needs of the region.

Similar to the Regional Transportation Plan, federal planning regulations call for the MPO to consult with agencies and officials who are responsible for other planning activities in the region in developing the Transportation Improvement Program. These agencies and officials should include those responsible for state and local planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, and airport and freight movements. These agencies in the Merrimack Valley region are identified on Page 6 under Agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities within the MPA that are affected by transportation.

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