

Public Participation Plan

Adopted by the CMCOG Board of Directors

Adopted by the Columbia Area Transportation Study MPO Policy Committee

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**Central Midlands Council of Governments
Columbia Area Transportation Study
Metropolitan Planning Organization
(CMCOG-COATS MPO)**

Statement of Purpose

CMCOG – COATS MPO is a regional multi-county development agency, which, under the guidance of a public policy board, provides leadership, expertise, and services to communities, businesses, institutions, and residents. CMCOG – COATS MPO seeks to enhance growth opportunities in an environmentally sensitive manner while retaining the region’s urban and rural character. The organization is both a direct service provider and a link to other resources that can be applied to a wide range of community and economic needs. CMCOG – COATS MPO is also an advocate for the interests of its communities at the state and federal levels.

CMCOG – COATS MPO’s strengths include a public-based policy board representing public and private interests, a high level of staff expertise, a commitment to innovation, and the flexibility to respond to new opportunities and challenges.

CMCOG-COATS Metropolitan Planning Organization

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Central Midlands Council of Governments
Columbia Area Transportation Study
Metropolitan Planning Organization
Public Participation Plan

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1. Introduction

It is a goal of the Central Midlands Council of Government (CMCOG), as the Regional Planning Organization (RPO) for the Central Midlands rural area and the Columbia Area Transportation Study Metropolitan Planning Organization (COATS MPO), as the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Columbia urbanized metropolitan area, to provide citizens and interested parties with reasonable opportunities to participate in the metropolitan transportation planning process. Beyond efforts to provide information to the public, this goal encompasses a wide range of strategies and activities to enable public involvement in a meaningful way in the CMCOG - COATS MPO's decision-making process. Ultimately, efforts to bring more voices and wide-ranging interests to the table will yield better planning results.

The purpose of the Public Participation Plan is to provide all interested parties with reasonable opportunities to comment on the CMCOG - COATS MPO's plans, programs, and projects. The policies and practices described in the Public Participation Plan recognize the need for robust public involvement at all stages of regional planning. This plan is intended to encourage, facilitate, and follow through on public comments, concerns and suggestions by establishing procedures for providing full public access to information and decisions, timely public notices, and early and continuing public involvement in plan development.

The Public Participation Plan describes methods, strategies and desired outcomes for public participation. It addresses outreach to a broadly defined audience of interested parties and is a facet of the CMCOG - COATS MPO's role of providing the region with a continuing, cooperative and collaborative transportation planning process.

A. Consistency with Federal Requirements

Several Federal and State laws and regulations guide the public participation efforts of the CMCOG – COATS MPO and ensure that input into its various planning and programming activities is received. Laws and legislation relevant to Public Participation Plan include:

FIXING AMERICA'S SURFACE TRANSPORTATION (FAST) ACT

The FAST Act was signed into law on December 4, 2015. The Act reauthorized the federal-aid highway program through fiscal year 2020, while consolidating the number of federal programs to focus resources on key national goals and reduce duplicative programs. The Act also emphasizes expedited project delivery. The FAST Act continues the previous transportation act's commitment to public participation, directing Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) to have a public participation plan that provides people, "affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the transportation plan." The FAST Act directs MPO public participation plans to "be developed in consultation with all

interested parties,” and “provide that all interested parties have reasonable opportunities to comment on the contents of the transportation plan.” It further directs MPOs “to the maximum extent practicable” to “hold any public meetings (in-person/virtually) at convenient and accessible locations and times,” to “employ visualization techniques to describe plans,” and to “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.”

TITLE VI OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964

The Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that transportation planning and programming be nondiscriminatory on the basis of race, color, and national origin. The federal statute was further clarified and supplemented by the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 and a series of federal statutes enacted in the 1990s relating to the concept of environmental justice. The fundamental principles of environmental justice include:

- Avoiding, minimizing or mitigating disproportionately high and adverse health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations.
- Ensuring full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process.
- Preventing the denial, reduction or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority populations and low-income communities.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) stipulates involving the community, particularly those with disabilities, in the development and improvement of services. CMCOG - COATS MPO fully complies with these requirements through its ADA plan and policies by making meeting room facilities accessible with wheelchair ramps, and restrooms that are wheelchair accessible. CMCOG - COATS MPO facilitates public participation in transportation activities by people with disabilities using the following guidelines:

- Meetings, public hearings, and formal events are held in facilities accessible by persons with disabilities.
- Public notices of meetings and events include a notice of accommodations for individuals who are disabled. Such accommodations will be provided by request.

EXECUTIVE ORDERS

An Executive Order is an order given by the President to federal agencies. As a recipient of federal revenues, CMCOG - COATS MPO assists federal transportation agencies in complying with these orders.

I. Executive Order 12898 - Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations: In February 1994, President William Clinton signed

Executive Order 12898, which requires that disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations be identified and addressed to achieve environmental justice. Since the establishment of Title VI, Environmental Justice has been considered in local, state, and federal transportation projects. Section 42.104 of Title VI and related statutes require Federal agencies to ensure that no person is excluded from participation in, denied the benefit of, or subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance on the basis of race, color, and national origin.

II. Executive Order 13166 - Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP): Executive Order 13166 requires Federal agencies to examine the services they provide, identify any need for services to those with limited English proficiency (LEP), and develop and implement a system to provide those services so LEP persons can have meaningful access to them. The Executive Order also requires that the Federal agencies work to ensure that recipients of Federal financial assistance provide meaningful access to their LEP applicants and beneficiaries.

III. Executive Order 13175 - Consultation and Coordination with Tribal Governments: Executive Order 13175 states that “in formulating or implementing policies that have tribal implications, agencies shall establish regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration with tribal officials to reduce the imposition of unfunded mandates upon Indian tribes.”

To seek the participation of all interested parties in this plan update, the CMCOG - COATS MPO held virtual meetings and distributed copies of the draft plan and information about the plan. People were informed of plan development by email, it was advertised in regional newspapers, and the draft was placed on the CMCOG - COATS MPO web site.

The draft plan was available for public review and comment by all interested parties for 45 days, from January 6, 2021 to February 24, 2021. A subsequent notice inviting agency comments was sent on January 6, 2021.

B. Establishment and the Role of the CMCOG - COATS MPO

Federal law requires that metropolitan areas of at least 50,000 population form Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) to be responsible for planning regionally significant transportation projects to assure that long-range, multimodal transportation system needs are met. Additionally, MPOs must show that transportation plans meet Clean Air Act requirements. Following the 2010 Census, the greater Columbia urbanized area continued to expand and grow in population that exceed 650,000. To fulfill the federal planning obligation, the CMCOG - COATS MPO has been hosted by the Central Midlands Council of Governments (CMCOG) as the region’s MPO since 1969. Subsequently, the CMCOG Board of Directors delegated responsibility for the COATS MPO policy functions to the COATS MPO Policy Committee. CMCOG provides staff support for the COATS MPO.

2. Plan Overview

The Public Participation Plan is an adopted document of the Central Midlands Council of Governments and the Columbia Urbanized Area Transportation Study Metropolitan Planning Organization. It provides the policy framework for the role of the public in COATS MPO decision making and it describes activities through which public concerns and suggestions are solicited, how responses are formulated, and how final work products reflect public sentiments.

The plan recognizes four key aspects of a meaningful public participation program that must be supported.

- **Inform** – The public must be provided with ample opportunities to learn about activities, issues, and upcoming decision making.
- **Understand** – The public must be given adequate, relevant and understandable information about an issue, including competing values, technical underpinnings, applicable standards and likely decision options.
- **Participate** – Project scheduling must allow adequate time for the public to learn about an issue and prepare responses that can be incorporated into the decisionmaking process at a time when such comments can influence outcomes.
- **Respond** – Subsequent planning steps must clearly demonstrate how public input influenced the final product or provide some other response to input received.

The plan also recognizes that for any single project or planning activity there are likely to be several points at which the key activities described in this plan will need to be initiated. For example, providing up-to-date information should be ongoing throughout a project. And opportunities should be provided to periodically update the public, regardless of their level of familiarity with the project.

The goals and policies contained in the plan ensure that the public is provided with opportunities to become informed, gain an understanding, and provide comment. The CMCOG - COATS MPO intends for the public to have a say at all phases of rural & metropolitan planning— from identifying needs to evaluating and selecting projects. Through the goals, procedures and tools discussed in the plan, the CMCOG - COATS MPO intends to foster on-going, two-way communication between decision makers and the public so that decisions reflect and respond to public concerns, needs, and values.

Activities the CMCOG - COATS MPO undertakes to foster public participation—some regularly scheduled activities, others special events that coincide with project milestones—are described in the plan section *Public Role in Decision Making*. The section also describes the CMCOG - COATS MPO's decision-making authority and outlines its processes and procedures. The

organization's consistency with applicable regulations also is described, including its consistency with federal requirements for public participation contained in the FAST Act.

The *Public Participation Tools* section describes various methods the CMCOG - COATS MPO uses to engage the public, how various methods can be employed, and the outcomes that can be expected are described. Through the course of any single project, it is anticipated that more than one tool or activity will be used.

The *Public Participation Implementation Guidelines* describes how public participation tools and methodologies are used in the context of the CMCOG - COATS MPO's key tasks and responsibilities. This section also provides a snapshot of the basic duties of the MPO in fulfilling regional transportation planning obligations.

A list of commonly used transportation terms and acronyms relating to the metropolitan planning process is in *Appendix A*.

For the purposes of Federal Transit Administration (FTA) compliance regarding public participation, The Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority (The COMET) shall also follow the public participation process spelled out in this plan.

All public notices as it related to The COMET that is required from this plan will be posted at 3613 Lucius Road, Columbia, SC 29201 or available at www.CatchTheCOMET.org.

This plan is intended to provide the public with basic information about CMCOG - COATS MPO operations so that any interested parties can begin to consider how they may participate. Additionally, it is a tool for CMCOG - COATS MPO staff and can be a resource for member jurisdictions. It sets basic standards and procedures for the CMCOG - COATS MPO to assure that the public has opportunities to participate in metropolitan planning in a meaningful way. The plan describes numerous activities that may be undertaken to identify stakeholders, inform both the general public and targeted audiences, and elicit comments and ideas from the community. It is not anticipated that all strategies would be effective in every situation. Nor is a single activity or strategy likely to foster sufficient public awareness and participation. Instead, this plan provides a menu of activities that can be combined to create a public involvement plan tailored to the scope and expectations of a plan, program, or project. It also sets expectations for public participation in key CMCOG - COATS MPO activities.

3. Goals and Objectives

To meet the federal standards continued under the FAST Act and improve transportation planning, the CMCOG - COATS MPO set the following goals and policies for public participation.

Goal 1: Opportunities shall be created for all segments of the public to be informed and understand about issues under consideration by the CMCOG - COATS MPO.

Reasonable access to complete information about transportation planning issues and events will be provided.

Policy 1: A CMCOG - COATS MPO website will be maintained containing information on: schedules and agendas for upcoming meetings; various updates and news topics; plan, program, and study documents; and project applications and selection processes. Descriptions of program contact information and links to other organization's websites will also be available. E-mail will be utilized and encouraged to allow comments on transportation planning related matters, including plan, program, and project development. The CMCOG - COATS MPO website address will be included in printed materials.

Policy 2: All CMCOG - COATS MPO plans and documents shall be made available for the public to review at the CMCOG office and on the CMCOG - COATS MPO website (www.centralmidlands.org). Copies of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and other CMCOG - COATS MPO Plans shall be distributed by request. Copies of draft documents for public review and comment shall be provided to planning partners to allow public review of those documents at their offices.

Policy 3: A Citizen's Guide to Transportation Planning shall be created and periodically updated as a resource to the public. The Public Participation Plan outlines what strategies will be used by the CMCOG - COATS MPO to increase public participation, while the Citizen's Guide provides an overview of the region's transportation policies and strategies for becoming involved in the planning process.

Policy 4: The CMCOG - COATS MPO will distribute project specific progress reports on significant MPO & RPO projects. Progress reports will aid in keeping those citizens that have shown an interest involved.

Policy 5: The CMCOG - COATS MPO will publish summaries of several important documents, including the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Planning Work Program (PWP), and Air Quality Conformity Analysis. These summaries will be short and will be presented in a non-technical way to make them more easily understood by the public.

Policy 6: The CMCOG - COATS MPO will work with local media on an ongoing basis to ensure proactive coverage of transportation planning activities. Press releases may be issued on current project and programs.

Policy 7: Whenever possible, CMCOG - COATS MPO will go directly to interested groups instead of asking people to come to public offices. Staff shall be available to

attend community meetings to discuss current planning initiatives and to provide an overview of the transportation planning process.

Policy 8: The CMCOG - COATS MPO will employ visualization techniques to convey plans, issues, and concerns. These techniques may include maps, photographs, aerial photography, interactive tools, artist renderings and models to help analyze options, impacts and potential outcomes.

Goal 2: The public shall be provided timely notice on all transportation issues and processes.

Policy 1: Advance notification will depend on the project and its timeline, but 30 days of notice will be given. The project work plan, with specific dates and timelines, will be published and sent to affected groups and interested citizens. Public notification will continue throughout the process, with emphasis on periods when input can have the greatest impact. The CMCOG - COATS MPO will provide adequate time for public review of draft documents prior to opportunities for comment or testimony. The length of comment period and review periods will vary based on the nature of the plan or program, but major plans or projects such as the RTP, TIP, PWP, and Air Quality Conformity will have at least a 30-day comment period, with amendments to these documents having at least a 21-day comment period.

Policy 2: Notice and agendas of all meetings of the CMCOG - COATS MPO committees shall be made available on the website at least seven days before they occur. Notifications will be easy to understand and provide adequate information or indicate how additional information can be obtained. Accommodations will be made for those individuals with disabilities upon request.

Policy 3: To the extent possible, notifications of citizen involvement opportunities will contain the following information: the purpose of a meeting or event, location and time, as well as information on public transit and a phone number where additional information can be obtained. The format for citizen involvement and the timeline for public comment on the project will also be included.

Goal 3: Provide the public with opportunities to participate in the transportation planning process.

Policy 1: The CMCOG - COATS MPO will provide frequent opportunities for general public, interest groups, providers of transportation and others to participate in the transportation planning process, especially in the early stages of plan and project development, when such comment can have the greatest effect.

Policy 2: The CMCOG - COATS MPO shall conduct public meeting and/or hearings prior to the adoption of each of the transportation plans and programs for which it is

responsible and shall hold public forums and public meetings related to transportation planning initiatives and projects at appropriate times in the planning process. Whenever practicable, the CMCOG - COATS MPO will work to improve the format of public meetings and hearings to better facilitate the public involvement process. An agenda item will be included in regularly scheduled CMCOG - COATS MPO meetings to allow an opportunity for public comment.

Policy 3: Public meetings and/or hearings will normally be held with individuals physically located at a designated location as determined by the CMCOG – COATS MPO, but when such a meeting is inappropriate or not prudent due to a natural disaster, pandemic, or other circumstance affecting public health and safety as determined by the CMCOG – COATS MPO, meetings and/or hearings maybe held through a virtual platform which allows the presence of the individuals attending and their participation in the discussion to be verified.

Policy 4: The CMCOG - COATS MPO will schedule meetings to allow the greatest opportunity for attendance by the public and interested groups, including evening, lunch, or weekend meetings when necessary.

Policy 5: Planning initiatives shall be reviewed to determine the appropriate public involvement techniques, outreach activities and communication strategies. These tools will be tailored to the affected groups and interested residents whenever possible.

Policy 6: Residents and other interested parties who have expressed interest in a particular topic, such as bicycle and pedestrian issues shall be included in the planning process. Task forces shall be convened at appropriate times in the planning process.

Policy 7: Scientific surveys shall be conducted at appropriate times to produce statistically valid results identifying the desires of the region. This will be considered a tool that could be used to determine the preferred outcome of a plan or project and used accordingly.

Policy 8: The CMCOG - COATS MPO shall continually work to identify new stakeholders interested in or affected by the transportation planning process. In accordance with the FAST Act, stakeholders shall include “citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transit, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of persons with disabilities, and other interested parties.”

Policy 9: The CMCOG - COATS MPO staff and committees will consider public input, which may result in revisions to draft plans and programs, as an integral part of

the planning process. Every attempt will be made to respond to public comment in a timely manner. Oral comments will be recorded at public meetings, and forms for written comments may be provided at all public meetings along with staff contact information. A link on the website will be provided for public comments.

Policy 10: A public involvement program may be prepared for each major transportation plan or project. Essential points in the plan will be identified and a proposed public involvement schedule will be shown. Major stakeholders for the plan will be identified and will be included in the public involvement process. Public involvement procedures for individual plans should follow the guidelines in this Public Participation Plan.

Goal 4: Identify and involve traditionally underserved communities, including communities of minority, low-income or elderly populations, in the transportation planning process.

Policy 1: The CMCOG - COATS MPO will work to identify traditionally underserved populations within the region, including minority, low income and senior citizen populations. Outreach activities will be developed to involve stakeholders from these communities in the transportation planning process.

Policy 2: Some meeting sites will be selected which are more easily accessible to traditionally underserved communities. Meeting announcements will be made on the website.

Policy 3: Assistance shall be provided upon request to the hearing and visually impaired, those not fluent in English, or others requiring special assistance at all MPO meetings, hearings and workshops with proper advance notice. Public notices of these events shall notify the public of this opportunity. Meetings shall be held in ADA-compliant venues.

Policy 4: Meeting locations served by transit or accessible by means other than the automobile will be chosen whenever possible.

Goal 5: Public comments and concerns shall be considered as projects and plans are developed.

Policy 1: The CMCOG - COATS MPO will gather and record public comment, making comments part of the permanent record for MPO & RPO projects and plans.

Policy 2: A summary analysis or report on comments received and their disposition will be made a part of all Regional Transportation Plans and Transportation Improvement Programs.

Policy 3: In instances when a final version of a Regional Transportation Plan or Transportation Improvement Program differs significantly from the draft version that was subject to public review, another opportunity for public comment will be provided.

Policy 4: Summaries of responses to comments and any changes made as a result will be prepared and distributed at subsequent committee or public meetings and will be available on the CMCOG – COATS MPO website.

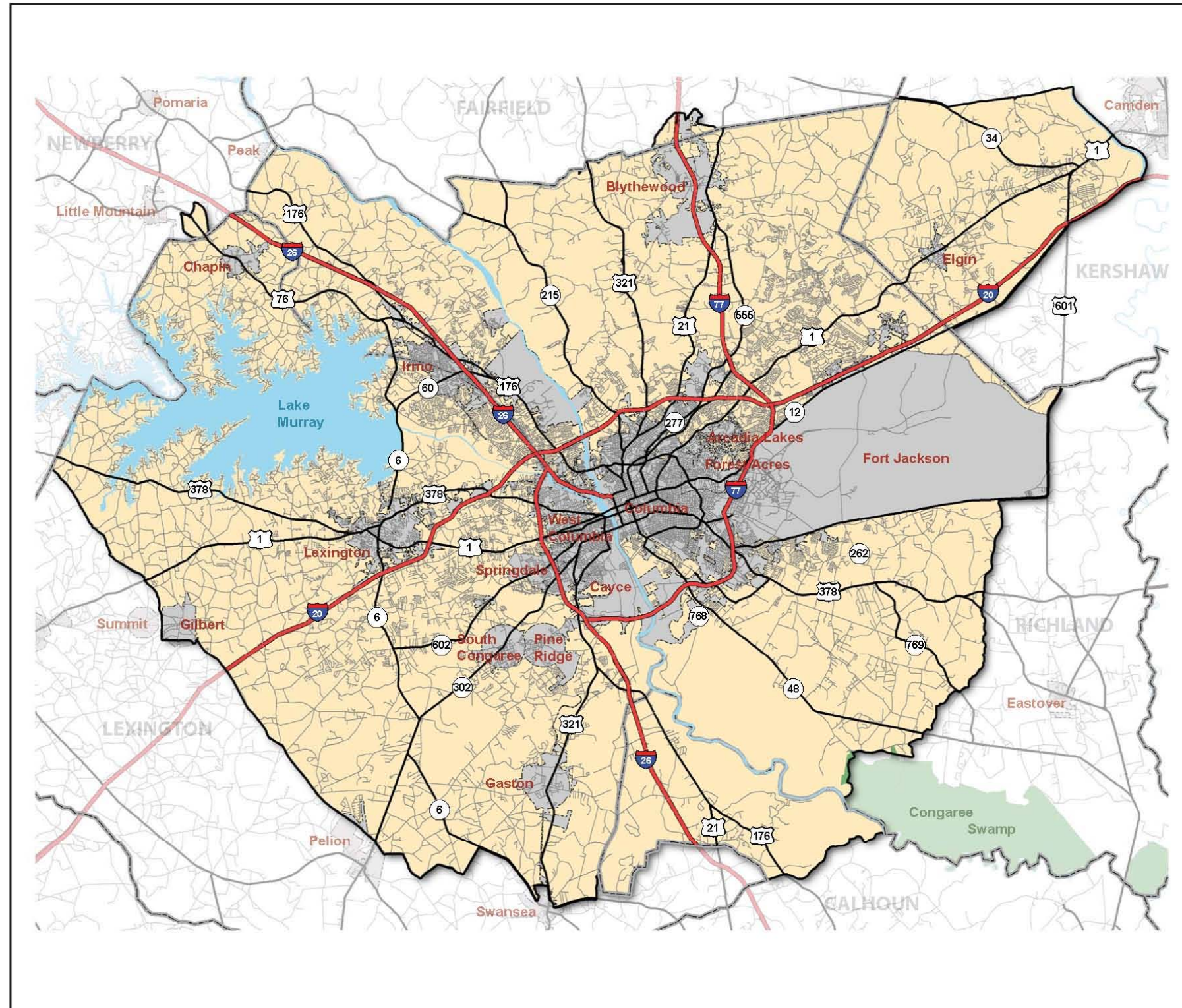
4. Public Role in Decision Making

A. CMCOG - COATS MPO Decision-Making Authority

In addition to the local government members, the South Carolina Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, and Federal Transit Administration also participate in the MPO & RPO process.

Federal and state transportation planning requirements of the CMCOG - COATS MPO can generally be summarized as follows:

- Develop and maintain a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) consistent with state and federal planning requirements.
- Perform regional air quality conformity analyses for carbon monoxide (CO) and particulate matter (PM_{2.5}).
- Review specific transportation and development proposals for consistency with the RTP.
- Coordinate transportation decisions among local jurisdictions, state agencies and area transit operators.
- Develop a bi-annual work program.



COATS
Columbia Area Transportation Study

- 2010 COATS MPO Boundary
- Municipal Boundary
- County Boundary

0 2.5 5 10 Miles

Central Midlands Council of Government disclaims responsibility for damage or liability associated with the use of this information. All reasonable efforts have been made to ensure accuracy.

B. COATS MPO Structure and Process

The Columbia Area Transportation Study (COATS) is organized to facilitate and encourage maximum interaction between local, State and Federal agencies involved in the transportation decision-making process. To accomplish this, a committee structure was adopted to include the following committees:

Policy Committee

The Policy Committee consists of the elected and appointed officials representing local and State governments and other organizations/agencies having an interest or responsibility in comprehensive transportation planning in the Columbia Metropolitan Area. The primary responsibility of the Policy Committee is to establish policies for the overall conduct of the COATS. Policy Committee meetings are conducted on a monthly basis.

Transportation Advisory Subcommittee

The Transportation Advisory Subcommittee is responsible for making recommendations to the full Policy Committee regarding project priorities to be funded by various Federal Aid Highway Programs and included in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Transportation Advisory Subcommittee meetings are scheduled on a monthly basis.

Technical Advisory Committee

The Technical Advisory Committee, which is established by the Policy Committee, is composed of the professional/technical representatives from the member governments and public agencies having direct or indirect responsibility for transportation planning and/or implementation. Their primary responsibility is to monitor all technical activities including the development of a draft UPWP and TIP for recommendation to the Transportation Advisory Subcommittee. They also review and consider for recommendation to the Transportation Advisory Subcommittee all major studies and planning activities. Technical Advisory Committee meetings are scheduled on a monthly basis.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is made up of Policy Committee members and provides oversight of transportation planning activities. Executive Committee meetings are conducted on a monthly basis.

Additional Committees

An important element in the operation of the Policy Committee is the effective utilization of both formal and ad-hoc advisory committees to review and evaluate detailed transportation issues and results of planning activities. The committee(s) function principally is to make recommendations to the Policy Committee on subjects directed to them by the Policy Committee which require extensive evaluation, which would be inefficient to resolve by the full committee. Additional advisory committee meetings are scheduled on an as needed basis.

All COATS MPO committee meetings are public and may be announced by way of newspaper advertising, direct notice to stakeholders via mail and email, and web site postings. Material for all committee meetings is posted on the web site (www.centralmidlands.org) and time for public comment is reserved for all committee meetings except the Policy Committee.

The three standing committees maintain a regular meeting schedule, as noted in Table 1 below.

Table 1: COATS MPO Meeting Schedule

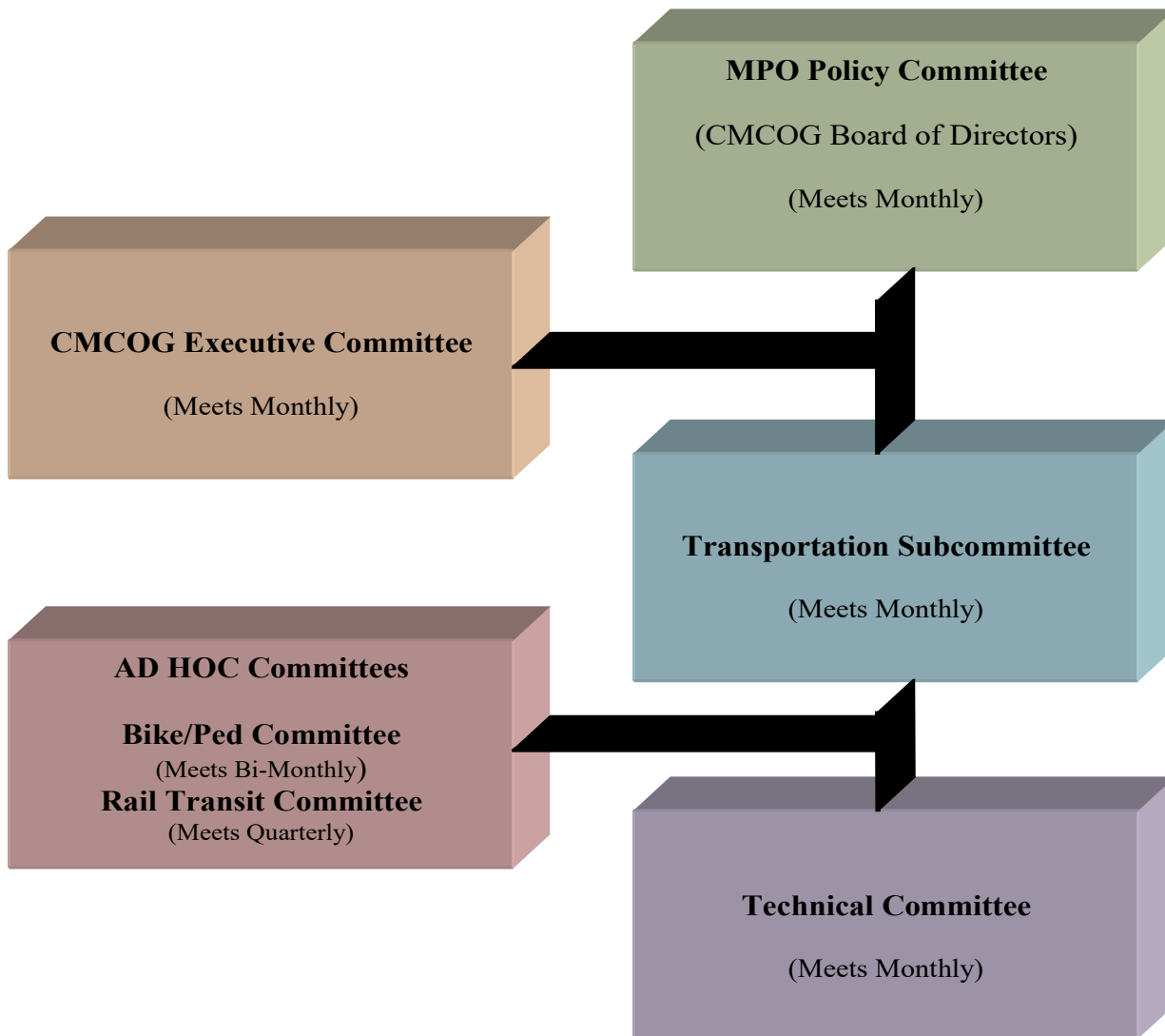
Committee	Meeting Day	Date
*Policy Committee	Fourth Thursday	Monthly
Transportation Advisory Subcommittee (TAS)	Second Thursday	Monthly
Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)	Fourth Tuesday	Monthly

*Please note that the Policy Committee does not meet in the months of July and November.

C. COATS MPO Committees, Committee Relationships

The COATS MPO's committee structure and its schedule of regular, public meetings help ensure that decision makers on the Policy Committee routinely hear from a broad base of stakeholders. The COATS MPO organizational structure chart, on the following page, illustrates how the public may participate in decision-making.

Table 2: COATS MPO Organizational Structure



Please be advised that all committees, except the Executive Committee, are open to the public. The Executive Committee and the Policy Committee are not open and available for public comment.

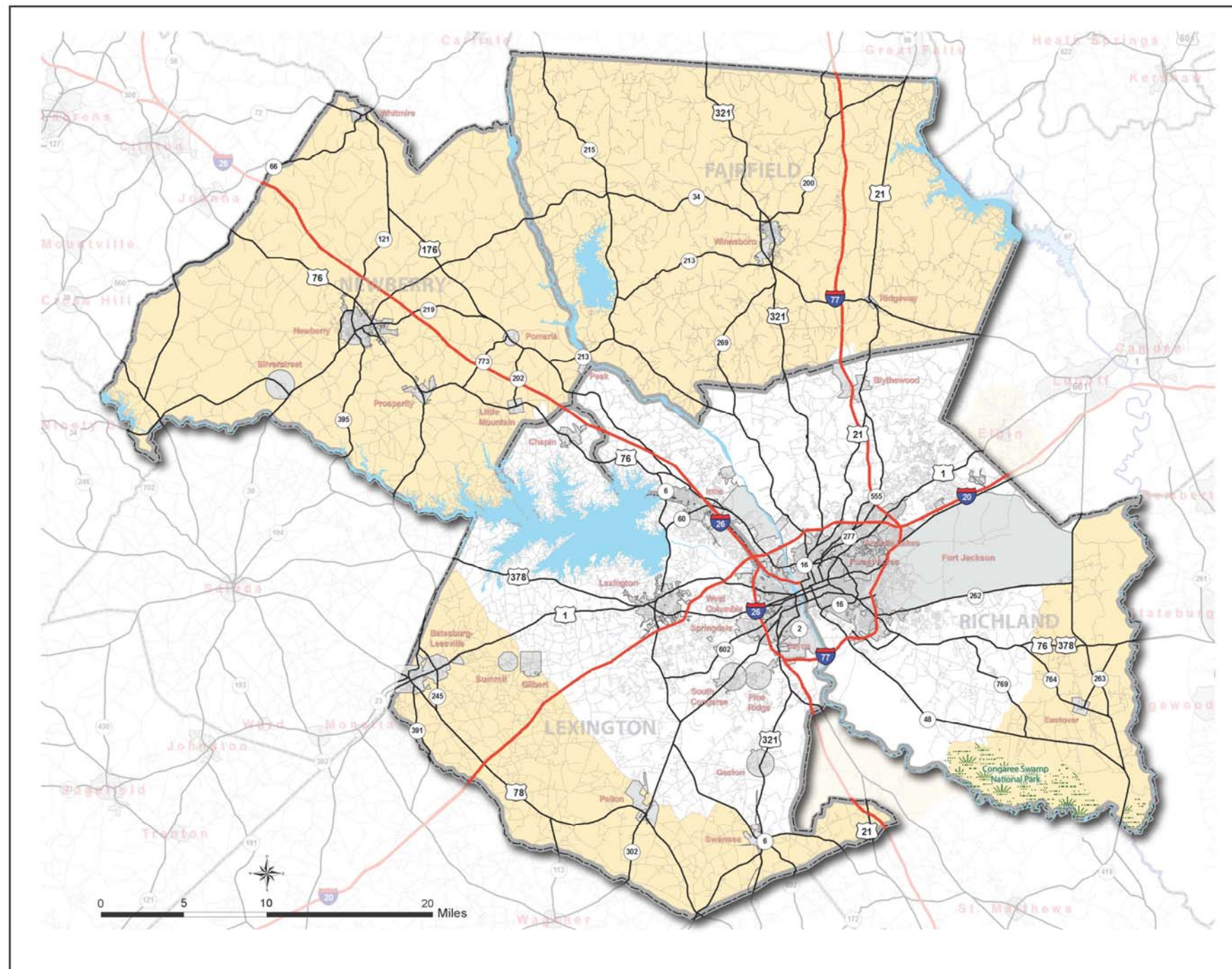
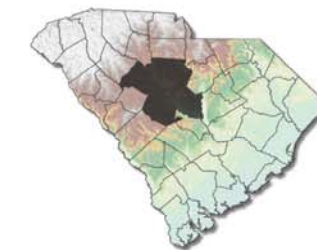

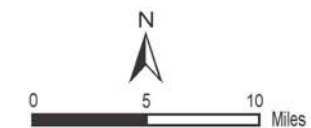


Figure 1

Central Midlands Council of Governments



 Rural Planning Area



Central Midlands Council of Governments

Prepared on: May 16, 2013

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D. CMCOG Structure and Process

The Central Midlands Council of Governments (CMCOG) is organized to facilitate and encourage maximum interaction between local, State and Federal agencies involved in the transportation decision-making process. To accomplish this, a committee structure was adopted to include the following committees:

Board of Directors

The Board of Directors consists of the elected and appointed officials representing local and State governments and other organizations/agencies having an interest or responsibility in comprehensive transportation planning in the Central Midlands region. The primary responsibility of the Board of Directors is to establish policies for the overall conduct of the CMCOG. Board of Directors meetings are conducted on a monthly basis.

Rural Transportation Advisory Committee

The Rural Transportation Advisory Committee is responsible for making recommendations to the full CMCOG Board of Directors regarding project priorities to be funded by various Federal and State Aid Highway Programs and included in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Rural Transportation Advisory Committee meetings are scheduled on an as needed basis.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is made up of Board of Directors members and provides oversight of transportation planning activities. Executive Committee meetings are conducted on a monthly basis.

All CMCOG committee meetings are public and may be announced by way of newspaper advertising, direct notice to stakeholders via mail and email, and web site postings. Materials for all committee meetings are posted on the web site (www.centralmidlands.org) and time for public comment is reserved for all committee meetings except the Board of Directors.

The two standing committees maintain a regular meeting schedule, as noted in Table 1 below.

Table 1: CMCOG Meeting Schedule

Committee	Meeting Day	Date
*CMCOG Board of Directors	Fourth Thursday	Monthly
Rural Transportation Advisory Committee	Minimum twice a year	As Needed

*Please note that the Board of Directors does not meet in the months of July and November.

E. Compliance with Guidelines

The Public Participation Plan and the goals and policies that form its foundation are intended to ensure that the CMCOG - COATS MPO provides the public with opportunity to influence Policy Committee decisions. The plan acknowledges that much of the CMCOG - COATS MPO's decision making is based on policies and decisions made at the jurisdictional level. Therefore, the CMCOG - COATS MPO supports local efforts to encourage public participation in local decision making. In some instances, project planning at the regional level may be based in part on demonstration of local support. Local governments, in their transportation planning activities, are encouraged to be consistent with the CMCOG - COATS MPO Public Participation Implementation Guidelines in Section 6.

The procedures outlined in this plan establish minimum standards for public participation. However, failure to exactly comply with the procedures contained in the plan shall not, in and of itself, render invalid any CMCOG - COATS MPO decisions or actions. Any dispute arising from this plan will be resolved with a focus on the degree of compliance and the extent to which the CMCOG - COATS MPO's actions met the intent of the goals and policies. If it is determined that the spirit of the goals is not met, the CMCOG - COATS MPO may conduct additional public involvement to ensure adequate public review.

5. Public Participation Tools

Through the course of any single project, it is anticipated that more than one tool or activity may be used.

Web Site. The CMCOG - COATS MPO web site, www.centralmidlands.org, is the organization's principal means of communicating all its work to the public. All meeting schedules and materials, including meeting minutes, are posted, as are drafts of all reports, research findings and publications, including the regional plan, TIP and work plan. A tool on the site enables readers to directly contact staff. Surveys, such as RTP planning process, are conducted on the web. Staff continues to expand this site.

Fact Sheets, Brochures. These are typically single topic communication pieces that address a subject in depth for deeper public understanding. They are often used at Open House sessions to provide participants with background for discussion and comment, and available in the public information display in the CMCOG lobby.

Feedback Forms. Simple, one-page questionnaires can elicit public attitudes about a variety of subjects. These forms should be designed to include guided comments (direct questions to which the CMCOG - COATS MPO seeks comments) and open-end questions that encourage respondents to describe their concerns.

Visualization Techniques. As much as possible the CMCOG - COATS MPO should use maps, charts, photographs, aerial photography and interactive tools to engage the public. Visual cues may tell the story more quickly than paragraphs of information, and can be used with written material to give the public a more thorough picture of an issue or debate. Visualization techniques should be incorporated into other tools listed in this section whenever possible, i.e. photographic posters at open houses illustrating smart growth concepts, plan maps printed as fact sheets, and diagrams of possible improvements.

Open Houses (Public Meetings/Virtual Meetings). These informal sessions use visualization techniques to foster discussion and elicit comment from all segments of the community including agency staff, public and elected officials. Open houses are held in conjunction with major planning studies. They are widely advertised.

Committee Meetings. Efforts are made to schedule meetings of the three standing committees and ad hoc committees at convenient times and locations as determined in consultation with committee members. Meetings may be advertised in newspaper display ads and agendas are mailed to an interested-parties list. Meeting materials are posted on the web site.

Comment Periods. Legal Advertising. Formal public comment periods are initiated for draft PWP, RTP, TIP and Air Quality Conformity Determination (AQCD), Public Participation Plan and major funding decisions. All comment periods are 30 days, except for the Public Participation Plan's 45-day review period, and 21-day review period for amendments to adopted plans and programs. Public hearings and initiation of comment periods may be advertised in the Legal Notices section of the newspaper of record. Additional advertising may be purchased. All comments received are retained in the project record.

Public Hearings. The CMCOG - COATS MPO conducts public hearings for plan and program updates and other key funding decisions. These hearing are conducted by request.

Press Releases. Project milestones and key opportunities for public input may be described in press releases sent to all news media in the region (print, radio, and television).

Display Advertising. Meetings and other key events can be announced in newspaper ads. The CMCOG - COATS MPO attempts to obtain prominent placement in Sunday and other editions.

Other tools. Radio spots may be used to announce special events and opportunities for public participation

Social Media. The CMCOG - COATS MPO may utilize social media to increase engagement, promote public events, and build new relationships.

6. Public Participation Implementation & Documentation

The CMCOG - COATS MPO is responsible for coordinating a collaborative transportation planning process for the region. All interested parties must be included, including those who are traditionally underserved by the transportation system and services. This section of the plan addresses the core metropolitan & rural planning activities and responsibilities, focusing on how the public participates in their production.

A. MPO & RPO Work Products and Public Participation

There are four core work products that an MPO & RPO is responsible for producing and keeping up to date on a regular schedule. Those products and the public participation in each are discussed below.

- 1) **Urban/Rural Planning Work Programs (PWP).** Produced bi-annually, the PWP lists all planning tasks and studies the MPO will undertake during the year. Both CMCOG - COATS MPO standing committees discuss and propose planning tasks. Staff conducts additional consultation with agencies and interested parties, as necessary. The CMCOG - COATS MPO will hold a public hearing, by request, on the draft PWP after a 30-day comment period. Fact sheets and other information may be produced by staff, as necessary. A record of comments received, and responses is kept on file, reported to committees, posted on the web site, and may be incorporated into the final plan.
- 2) **Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).** Updated every four years, the RTP is a long-range (minimum 20-year) plan that contains the region's goals and policies, projects, funding forecasts, strategies, and projected demands on the transportation system. Advisory committees discuss the plan update over several meetings. The CMCOG - COATS MPO will host open house sessions, a 30-day comment period and public hearing by request. Comments received will be responded to and included in the final document. The draft RTP, and supporting White Papers and other research, as needed, is posted on the website and mailed to interested parties. Open house meetings are advertised in the newspaper, on the website and by mailing to individuals and organizations on transportation mail lists. Staff conducts outreach including

community presentation. The RTP and all major amendments are subject to a comment period (30-day for program adoption, 21-day for major amendments)

- 3) **Urban/Rural Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).** Updated every four years, the TIP is the short-range listing of financially constrained (funded) projects to be undertaken in the coming four years. Projects in the TIP are incorporated into the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Public process for the TIP is the same as, and conducted concurrently with, the RTP update. The TIP and all major amendments are subject to a comment period (30-day for program adoption, 21-day for major amendments). A record of comments received is kept on file with responses, reported to committees, posted on the website, and may be incorporated into the final plan.
- 4) **Air Quality Conformity Determination (AQCD).** The CMCOG - COATS MPO is required to show through the AQCD that both the RTP and the TIP conform to federal Clean Air Act standards. The determination process is technical in nature, but the findings are subject to public review during the activities described above for the RTP and TIP. A record of comments received will be kept on file with responses, reported to committees, posted on the website, and may be incorporated into the final plan.

CMCOG - COATS MPO Public Participation Plan

The Public Participation Plan is subject to periodic review, evaluation and updating. The plan is maintained to meet federal requirements for public involvement in rural and metropolitan planning. Furthermore, the CMCOG - COATS MPO covers a growing region where the public has demonstrated an interest in the state of transportation facilities and services. CMCOG - COATS MPO staff shall periodically review the Public Participation Plan with an eye toward augmenting tools and procedures.

Evaluation is an integral part of public involvement and is discussed in the section *Evaluating Public Participation Plan & Activities*. Updates that follow an evaluation will be posted on the web site, review by the TAC, and publicly discussed to encourage both comments on proposed amendments and suggestions for additional amendments. There will be a 45-day comment period prior to a final review by the Policy Committee (CMCOG Board of Directors). Comments received will be responded to and included in the final document.

7. Evaluating Public Participation Plan & Activities

Federal Metropolitan Planning guidelines require a periodic review of the effectiveness of public involvement processes. CMCOG - COATS MPO will review the public involvement process and activities to ensure that all interested parties, including transportation stakeholders and traditionally underserved groups, have opportunity to provide input.

Evaluation is key to any plan update. The evaluation should fit the activity. It can be a debriefing at the staff level, identifying elements that worked well and developing improvements. Evaluation questions

should be incorporated into public comment forms distributed at events. Also, surveys can be conducted to solicit input. Surveys, like feedback forms, are a way to get evaluation feedback on either an event or an ongoing program from a targeted or randomly selected group. Surveys can be conducted using a statistically valid method or can be more informal questions posed to gather a sounding from the public. Surveys may be conducted in person, online, by phone, by mail or email.

A variety of sources may be used for evaluation, including:

- Telephone comments;
- Citizen letters;
- Internet E-mail;
- Newsletter questionnaires;
- Questions and comments made in meetings, workshops and displays;
- Focus group comments; and
- Comments from advisory committees.

Responses will be tracked demographically and geographically by zip code to ensure that target audiences are being contacted. If certain areas are found to be underserved, CMCOG - COATS MPO will target these areas for increased outreach to provide those citizens with opportunity to participate. In addition, periodic surveys will provide a mechanism for measuring the effectiveness of the public involvement process.

Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary, Acronyms and Some Common Transportation Terms

ADA	American Disabilities Act of 1990
AQCD	Air Quality Conformity Determination: Finding based on analysis showing that plans, programs and projects comply with Clean Air Act standards.
CMAQ	Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality: The program is a federally funded program for surface transportation improvements designed to improve air quality and mitigate congestion.
CO	Carbon Monoxide: A common air pollutant associated with gasoline internal combustion engines
FAST ACT	Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization: Required by federal law in urban areas over 50,000 population, and designated by the governor, MPOs consist of local jurisdictions that collaborate to fulfill federal requirements for long- and short-range, regional, multimodal transportation planning.
SCDOT	South Carolina Department of Transportation
PC	Policy Committee: The COATS MPO’s decision making body; made up of member jurisdiction representatives.
PM10	Particulate Matter 10: Air Pollution (usually road dust or smoke) that is of a size of 10 microns or less
PM2.5	Particulate Matter 2.5: Air Pollution (much smaller than road dust or smoke and often the result of internal combustion engines and) that is of a size of 2.5 microns or less

PPP	Public Participation Plan
RTP	Regional Transportation Plan: Long range, multimodal plan for regional transportation needs.
STBG	Surface Transportation Block Grant Program: Provides flexible funding for surface transportation needs.
STIP	State Transportation Improvement Program: the statewide short-range, multi-modal list of all the State’s projects (including all of those associated with MPOs) for the upcoming four-year cycle
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee: COATS MPO committee of member jurisdictions’ planning and public works representatives; makes recommendations to the Transportation Subcommittee.
TAS	Transportation Advisory Subcommittee: COATS MPO committee of member jurisdictions’ representing a subset of the urbanized area; makes recommendations to the Policy Committee.
TIP	Transportation Improvement Program: Federally required, short-range multi-modal list of the region’s projects for the coming four years.
TSP	Transportation System Plan: A state-required long-range plan for municipal multimodal transportation networks generally incorporated into comprehensive land use plans; must be consistent with the RTP and TIP.
PWP	Planning Work Program: Federally required plan for projects and studies to be undertaken by the MPO for the year.
UZA	Urbanized Area: An area determined by the Bureau of Census to contain a population of at least 50,000

About this Document

The Public Participation Plan was adopted by the CMCOG Board of Directors/COATS MPO Policy Committee at their meeting on February 25, 2021, to meet requirements of the federal transportation act, Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act). The COATS MPO's Transportation Subcommittee and Technical Advisory Committee recommended adoption after review of draft plans and suggesting changes. This Plan incorporates suggested changes from staff, TAS, and TAC, and was open for a minimum 45-day comment period, which is required by federal law for plans of this type of decision.

Regarding specific policies required by FAST Act, the COATS MPO staff prepared the plan to comply with FAST Act. After review by the Technical Advisory Committee on January 26, 2021, staff updated the draft plan, which was open to public comment from January 6, 2021, to February 24, 2021. No additional public comments were received. The public hearing was available to permit notification of affected agencies, which was emailed on January 6, 2021. Only one (1) comment was received from the notified agencies.

In addition to review by COATS MPO committees, special outreach was initiated during the comment period for interested parties including citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transit, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of persons with disabilities, agencies or entities responsible for safety/security operations, providers of non-emergency transportation services receiving financial assistance from a source other than title 49, U.S.C. Chapter 53, and other interested parties. Outreach activities included:

- Legal Notice of 45-day public comment period January 6, 2021 to February 24, 2021, published on January 6, 2021. Agency Notice provided on January 6, 2021 and draft posted on COATS MPO web site January 6, 2021.
- Transportation Advisory Subcommittee – presentation and discussion on January 14, 2021.
- Technical Advisory Committee – presentation and discussion on January 26, 2021.
- MPO Policy Committee – first reading presentation and discussion on January 28, 2021.
- MPO Policy Committee – final reading presentation and discussion on February 25, 2021.