

SOUTH JERSEY TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ORGANIZATION

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT POLICY

As Revised July 26, 1999

This statement describes the public involvement process for the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO), as required by the Federal Metropolitan Planning Rules (23 CFR 450.300 et seq.) under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and the Transportation Equity Act of the Twenty First Century (TEA-21) of 1998.

SJTPO BACKGROUND

Under Federal Law, transportation planning and decision-making for urbanized areas is carried out through Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO's). Effective July 1, 1993 SJTPO was redesignated the MPO for the southern New Jersey Counties of Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, and Salem. SJTPO replaced three small MPO's and also incorporated the areas not previously served.

MPO's coordinate the planning activities of participating agencies and provide a forum for cooperative decision-making among responsible state and local officials, public and private transit operators, and the general public. Core activities are the formulation of a Regional Transportation Plan and an annually updated multi-year Transportation Improvement Program. MPO's promote transportation improvements needed in the region and support project development initiatives. In meeting the Federal requirements, MPO's maintain the eligibility of their member agencies for Federal transportation funds for planning, capital improvements, and operations.

The formation of the SJTPO allowed for a stronger regional approach to solving transportation problems and brought new opportunities to southern New Jersey, in accordance with the intent of ISTEA. Under this landmark legislation, MPO's were entrusted with an expanded role in transportation planning and capital programming. They became partners with state government in making decisions about how Federal transportation tax dollars are spent, thus bringing decisions closer to those served. Accompanying this new authority, however, were new detailed standards, including requirements for conformity with the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990. The new standards also put increased emphasis on public involvement and required development of this policy. TEA-21 basically reaffirmed and retained the structure of the planning process under ISTEA.

The governing body of the SJTPO is the Policy Board, which consists of eleven voting members - one elected official from each county government, one municipal elected official from each county, specifically including the Mayors of Atlantic City and Vineland, and one representative each from the New Jersey Department of Transportation, New Jersey Transit, and the South Jersey Transportation Authority.

A fifteen member Technical Advisory Committee provides input to the Policy Board, and consists of staff of each Policy Board member, as well as representatives of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, the New Jersey Highway Authority, and the Delaware River and Bay Authority, along with the chairperson of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). A wide variety of other agencies are also invited to participate in the Technical Advisory Committee.

With thirty-five members currently, the Citizens Advisory Committee represents a broad cross-section of interests, and others are added to the CAC mailing list upon request. The CAC was established as part of SJTPO's initial structure in recognition of the importance of public involvement to the organization. SJTPO also forms ad hoc advisory committees as needed to address specific issues.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT GOALS

In accordance with the Federal Rules, the intent of this Policy is to insure that SJTPO has a proactive and meaningful public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access by all segments of the population to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing Regional Transportation Plans and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP's). In addition, the Policy responds to the inherent need of the organization to develop public understanding and support of its activities. To accomplish this, SJTPO will maintain procedures encompassing the following major strategies:

- thorough dissemination of information;
- active outreach; and
- ample opportunity for the interested public to participate.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCEDURES

While the means by which the above goals are achieved will be reviewed and revised periodically to ensure their effectiveness, the SJTPO will follow the steps below under this Public Involvement Policy revision:

A. Ongoing Advisory Committees and Public Relations

1. Staff will continue to support the operation of a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) involving a wide variety of interests, including civic, business, environmental, provider, and user representatives. The CAC will be provided early and continuing information on major SJTPO activities, especially development of Regional Transportation Plans, TIP's, major amendments, and Public Involvement Policy revisions, and will have opportunity to comment. Attendance at CAC meetings will be open to the general public. Interested parties will be added to the CAC mailing list upon request.
2. Staff will continue to support ad hoc committees to address specific issues, such as the Shore Connection Committee and public involvement committees for SJTPO-funded studies.

3. A variety of public agencies affected by transportation issues and processes will continue to receive Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) mailings and will have the opportunity to participate in the TAC meetings.
4. Staff will conduct public relations activities, such as issuing newsletters, annual reports, a video brochure, and press releases, to generate awareness of SJTPO's activities and key responsibilities. Staff will also regularly brief civic, business, and other public interest organizations and will work to establish a World Wide Web home page.
5. All final SJTPO reports and previously released drafts will, at a minimum, be available for examination at SJTPO offices by appointment. Where practical, copies may be provided free to the public on a first come basis, but a fair fee to cover reproduction costs may be required. Major documents may also be made available for review through the major public libraries and the offices of key participating agencies. Where practical, summary information may also be distributed through mailed bulletins and press releases.

B. Policy Board Meeting Notice and Comment Opportunity

1. Annual notice of the regular schedule of meetings of the SJTPO Policy Board will be submitted in accordance with the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Law to the daily newspaper for each member county designated as having the greatest likelihood of informing the public with a request that each meeting be published in their listings of governmental meetings, as well as being submitted to the county clerk of each county and posted on the bulletin board in Vineland City Hall. Notice of additional meetings will be similarly submitted a minimum of 48 hours prior to the meeting. Annual notices will also be distributed to SJTPO participants at all levels.
2. Interested parties will be added to the mailing lists to receive the annual notice of Policy Board meetings, individual meeting agendas, minutes, and the package of materials distributed to Policy Board members upon request, but a fair fee to cover costs may be required.
3. A comment period for the public will be provided at all regular Policy Board meetings. Upon request, an opportunity to comment will be provided before any action, but the Board may establish reasonable limits. Subject to the specific exceptions permitted by Federal and State Law, Policy Board meetings will be open to the public.

C. Special Public Review and Comment Procedures

1. A public comment period of at least 30 days will be provided on all Regional Transportation Plans, TIP's, or major amendments (see E. Definitions) prior to the Policy Board's final action. A legal notice or display ad will be placed in the designated newspapers to open the comment period. It will

briefly summarize the document or amendments and indicate where copies for review can be obtained, and where to send comments. In addition, the news offices of the designated newspapers will be notified of the same information in any press release under C. 2 below. Regional Transportation Plans, TIP's, or major amendments will, at a minimum, be made available for review at major public libraries, the offices of key participating agencies, and SJTPO offices. Public comment will also be solicited in the same manner on any revision to this Public Involvement Policy, but the comment period will be at least 45 days.

2. Prior to the adoption of Regional Transportation Plans, TIP's, or major amendments, and after review copies are made available and the opening of the comment period under C. 1 above, at least one formal public meeting to receive public comment will be held. A legal notice or display ad announcing such meetings will be placed in the designated newspapers at least 7 days prior to the meeting, either in combination with the notice or ad under C. 1 above or separately. In addition, a press release will be submitted at least 5 days prior to the meeting. Additional public involvement procedures for development of Regional Transportation Plans may be detailed in separate documents.
3. For minor TIP amendments (see E. Definitions), notice with information on how to comment will be sent to the CAC mailing list at least 7 days prior to final action by the Policy Board. In addition, a specific opportunity for public comment on the amendments will be provided on the meeting agenda.
4. For TIP modifications (see E. Definitions) that move projects from year one to year two or three, notice with information on how to comment will be sent to the CAC mailing list at least 7 days prior to final action.
5. All public comments will be appropriately considered by SJTPO staff. A written summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of all significant comments received on Regional Transportation Plans, TIP's, or major amendments will be provided as a part of the final document.
6. If a final Regional Transportation Plan, TIP, major amendment, or Public Involvement Policy revision differs substantially from the one which was made available for public comment and raises new material issues, an additional period for public comment of at least 10 days will be made available.
7. SJTPO will hold an annual public meeting to review planning assumptions and the plan development process with interested parties and the general public.

D. Overall Procedures

1. In conducting the planning process, SJTPO will make special efforts to seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems,

including low income and minority households and persons with disabilities.

2. The SJTPO public involvement process will be coordinated with statewide public involvement processes wherever possible to increase effectiveness and minimize duplication of effort. Specifically, SJTPO public involvement procedures related to the SJTPO TIP will also serve as the public participation procedures for the SJTPO region for the State TIP.

E. Definitions

1. Amendments - Amendments generally will be defined as TIP amendments are defined in a Memorandum of Understanding between SJTPO, the New Jersey Department of Transportation, and the New Jersey Transit Corporation, as amended and supplemented. At this writing a TIP amendment is required when adding a new project (or program), deleting a project (or program), there is a major change to project design concept or scope that would require a new air quality conformity analysis, and when a project (or program) is being moved forward from the fourth or fifth years of the TIP into the first year.
2. Major Amendments - SJTPO will define major amendments as those amendments requiring a new air quality conformity analysis or adding or deleting a single item of \$10 million or more, or multiple items totalling \$20 million or more, from the SJTPO portion of the TIP (excludes the Statewide programs).
3. Minor Amendments - All amendments not defined above as major amendments will be minor amendments.
4. TIP Modifications - These are changes to the TIP as defined in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between SJTPO, the NJ Department of Transportation, and the NJ Transit Corporation, as amended and supplemented, that are of less significance than an amendment. Under the MOU, they are usually processed administratively by the SJTPO Executive Director upon consultation with the counties.
5. Other Terms - In the event any other term or terms used in this policy require interpretation, their meaning shall be as determined by the SJTPO Policy Board.