



# THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

**2022 UPDATE**

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**Southeastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization**



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**Southeastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (SMMPO)**

**Title VI Coordinator**

**SRPEDD**

88 Broadway, Taunton, MA 02780

Phone: 508 824-1367 or dial 711 to use MassRelay

Email: [lcabral@srpedd.org](mailto:lcabral@srpedd.org)

**The MassDOT Title VI Specialist**

MassDOT Office of Diversity and Civil Rights

10 Park Plaza, Suite 3800, Boston, MA 02116

Phone: 857-368-8580 or 7-1-1 for Relay Service.

Email: [MassDOT.CivilRights@state.ma.us](mailto:MassDOT.CivilRights@state.ma.us)

**The MassDOT Office of Diversity and Civil Rights Investigations Unit**

Assistant Secretary of Diversity & Civil Rights, MassDOT

10 Park Plaza, Suite 3800, Boston, MA 02116

Email: [odcrcomplaints@dot.state.ma.us](mailto:odcrcomplaints@dot.state.ma.us)

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English: If this information is needed in another language, please contact SRPEDD's Title VI Coordinator by phone at (508) 824-1367.

Portuguese: Caso esta informação seja necessária em outra idioma, favor contar o coordenador em Título VI do SRPEDD pelo telephone (508) 824-1367 ext 235.

Spanish: Si necesita esta información en otro idioma, por favor contacte al coordinador de SRPEDD del Título VI al (508) 824-1367 ext 235.

Haitian / French Creole: Si yo bezwen enfòmasyon sa a nan yon lòt lang, tanpri kontakte Koòdonatè Tit VI SRPEDD a pa telefòn nan (508) 824-1367 ext 235.

Traditional Chinese: 如果需要使用其他語言瞭解資訊，請聯繫馬薩諸塞州東南部 大都會規劃組織《民權法案》第六章協調員，電話508-824-1367，轉235。

Simplified Chinese: 如果您需要其他语言的信息，请联系 马萨诸塞州东南部 都市规划组织《民权法案》第六章协调员，电话508-824-1367，转235。

Mon Khmer Cambodian: (Khmer):

ប្រសិនបើព័ត៌មាននេះត្រូវការជាភាសាផ្សេង សូមទាក់ទងអ្នកសម្របសម្រួល Title VI របស់ SRPEDD តាមទូរស័ព្ទនៅ (508) 824-1367 ផ្នែកបន្ថែម 235។

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## **Introduction**

In accordance with state and federal requirements and to ensure early, inclusive, accessible and continuous public participation and input to the planning process for transportation decision making, the Southeastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (SMMPO), in its role as the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) region, has developed this Public Participation Plan (PPP). The SRPEDD region consists of 27 communities; the cities of Attleboro, Fall River, New Bedford and Taunton and the towns of Acushnet, Berkley, Carver, Dartmouth, Dighton, Fairhaven, Freetown, Lakeville, Mansfield, Marion, Mattapoisett, Middleborough, North Attleborough, Norton, Plainville, Raynham, Rehoboth, Rochester, Seekonk, Somerset, Swansea, Wareham and Westport.

The Public Participation Plan (PPP) is developed with the ultimate goal of allowing every person in the region ample opportunities to become active participants in the Continuous, Cooperative and Comprehensive (3C) metropolitan planning and decision-making process guiding every issue, project, program or service. The PPP is adaptable and guides the SMMPO in its public participation efforts in creation of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and various transportation studies.

The PPP is an essential element with the distribution of Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Metropolitan Planning funding, and with Federal Transit Administration Section 5303 and Section 5307 grants to the regional transit agencies, Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority (GATRA) and Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (SRTA). In these public participation efforts, the SMMPO adheres to the principles of Environmental Justice and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act as part of the 3C metropolitan planning process as relating to transportation systems and facilities.

These efforts will, in no way, exclude persons who are low-income, minority, Limited English Proficient (LEP) or have a disability. The goal of the PPP is to ensure that all persons, regardless of race, color, national origin, age, gender, gender identity or expression, disability, religion, ancestry or ethnicity, sexual orientation or veteran's status have an equal opportunity to participate in the SMMPO's decision-making process.

This plan is designed, in part, to develop partnerships with, and enhance the participation in the transportation planning process, by groups and individuals of traditionally underrepresented populations. Staff activities include, but are not limited to, targeted communications with local media outlets; conducting meetings at times and locations that are convenient, accessible and on transit routes; the routine translations of public outreach materials, including meeting materials and surveys; and the availability of SMMPO documents in non-technical, web-based or other easily accessible

formats as necessary and appropriate for purposes of obtaining input and comment. To this end, the SMMPO also solicits, to the maximum extent possible, the input of all interested parties in the development of this Public Participation Plan.

This plan was designed to be fluid and adaptable and allow for constant change and improvement. Public engagement should be unique, both to the audience affected and to the issues, studies, projects, programs, and services involved. There may be circumstances and occasions that may not allow for absolute adherence with the protocols and policies contained here. In these instances, there may be departures and/or differences from this plan that are legitimate and reasonable, although every effort will be made to uphold the standards set here.

The PPP is a fluid document that changes and adapts according to the issues, projects, studies, programs, and services, as well as to the effectiveness of methods, and changes in technology and unforeseen events such as the COVID 19 pandemic. It is regularly reviewed and updated, usually in the same time frame as the RTP, but also when it is deemed necessary.

This plan will also change and adapt over time as necessary, based on ideas and feedback from the public and from our staff, as well as from occasions or circumstances for public participation that may arise. This plan will be evaluated and will consider characteristics of participation with an emphasis on the success obtained in engaging traditionally underrepresented populations.

## **THE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS**

### **What is SRPEDD?**

The Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) is a public regional planning agency established by state legislature, Chapter 40B, sections 9-19, serving four cities and twenty-three towns in southeastern Massachusetts. SRPEDD is governed by a Commission made up of the chief elected official or designee, and a Planning Board official or designee from each of the 27 municipalities in the region, plus six at-large members representing the interests of low-income and minority groups in the region.

SRPEDD has no legislative or regulatory authority, but has advisory powers and is authorized to prepare plans, conduct studies, and provide assistance to cities, towns and agencies and to make recommendations. SRPEDD also serves as technical and support staff to the Joint Transportation Planning Group (JTPG) and the Southeastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (SMMPO) for Southeastern Massachusetts.

## **What is the SMMPO?**

The Southeastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (SMMPO) is responsible for transportation policy and federal resource allocation decisions in the region. The SRPEDD Commission is one of thirteen signatories in the SMMPO. Other signatories include the mayors of each of the region's 4 cities (Attleboro, Fall River, New Bedford and Taunton), selectmen from four of the region's 23 towns, the Administrator of the Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (SRTA), the Administrator of the Greater Attleboro-Taunton Regional Transit Authority (GATRA), the Highway Administrator of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and the Transportation Secretary and CEO of MassDOT. The SMMPO meets when there are sufficient business items to warrant a meeting, but must meet a minimum of once a year. The SMMPO typically meets, on average, nine times per year at 1:00 PM on the third Tuesday of the month. As a public body, the SMMPO may replace any in-person meeting with a virtual/online meeting (all participants attending remotely) or a hybrid meeting (allowing both in-person or remote participation) provided that it is in accordance with current Massachusetts Open Meeting Law. During the declared state of emergency in Massachusetts due to COVID-19, meetings were held remotely or as hybrid meetings as necessary.

The principal responsibilities of the SMMPO include the development of a 25-year long range Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) for the southeastern Massachusetts region, including the cities of Attleboro, Fall River, Taunton, and New Bedford, that is financially constrained and within the projected federal funds available. They also oversee the planning process that includes the scope of planning activities and work tasks such as the five-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), tasks included in the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), and related planning studies and projects deemed necessary to address transportation issues in the area.

Local transportation needs are re-evaluated annually. Based on this evaluation and considering production schedules and funding constraints, project priorities are established and made part of the SMMPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). In addition, the TIP is forwarded to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) for inclusion into the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The Office of Transportation Planning (OTP) further programs these projects, in priority order. By Federal and State law, all regionally significant multi-modal transportation improvement projects (regardless of funding source) must be included in and be consistent (to the maximum extent feasible) with the SMMPO's TIP and long-range Regional Transportation Plan in order to be eligible for Federal-aid and State funding. Therefore, the SMMPO's Transportation Improvement Program is the primary plan that guides all state and federally funded transportation improvements in southeastern Massachusetts.

The SMMPO is the body that is responsible for Transportation Planning Program Development. This includes the following:

- Endorses the **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**—a fiscally constrained 5-year program of federal highway, state and transit funding that is prepared annually, and this includes amendments to the TIP;
- Endorses the **Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)**— the scope and cost of work tasks of the SRPEDD transportation staff for the coming fiscal year than runs from October 1 through September 30;
- Endorses the **Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)**—a 20-year financially constrained plan for the transportation system with a comprehensive inventory and assessment of the region's highway and transit resources and needs, including air quality conformity;
- Endorses the **Public Participation Plan (PPP)**;
- Certifies the planning process; and
- May endorse special studies conducted by SRPEDD when necessary.

### **What is the Joint Transportation Planning Group (JTPG)?**

The Joint Transportation Planning Group is the advisory committee to the SMMPO for all transportation related issues. Voting members of the JTPG include the chief elected officials from each SMMPO community in the region or their designees; and all at-large SMMPO Commissioners that represent low-income and minority persons and groups. Non-voting members include FHWA; FTA; MassDOT; SRTA; GATRA; transportation interest groups; neighborhood groups; any interested member of the public; and SMMPO transportation staff. The JTPG is a forum for public involvement in transportation plans and programs, including the TIP, the RTP and all transportation studies. SRPEDD acts as technical and support staff to the JTPG.

The JTPG responsibilities include:

- Prioritizing the list of projects within each TIP funding category;
- Advising the SMMPO regarding endorsements of the TIP, UPWP and RTP; and
- Voting to make adjustments to the TIP.

The JTPG generally meets on the second Wednesday of each month at the SRPEDD office. As a public body, the JTPG may replace any in-person meeting with a virtual/online (all participants attending remotely) or a hybrid meeting (allowing both in-person or remote participation) provided that it is in accordance with current Massachusetts Open Meeting Law. A reminder of all regular meetings may be sent out to all members and any other interested parties 2 weeks before the meeting. A meeting notice with an agenda and other meeting related attachments shall be mailed out to the mailing list of members and other interested parties a week prior to the meeting. Meetings are posted on the

SRPEDD website and may be posted on SRPEDD's social media platforms. Individuals may be placed on the contact list by request.

### **The Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs)**

The two regional transit authorities, SRTA and GATRA, each have an Advisory Board. The Boards are composed of the chief elected official from member communities or their designee. In addition, each transit authority has Consumer Advisory Committees (CAC) that serve as an open forum for consumer issues related to transit. GATRA's CACs meet on the third Thursday of the month in Attleboro or Taunton, the third Wednesday of the month in Plymouth and the last Wednesday of the month in Wareham. SRTA has a Demand Response CAC and a Fixed Route CAC. Each meets quarterly in either Fall River or New Bedford. All meetings are open to the public.

## **TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT**

**In order for the region to receive federal and state transportation funds, SRPEDD must complete and receive SMMPO endorsement of the following documents:**

**The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)** is the official programming document that lists all transportation projects in the region by federal funding category, including roads, bridges, transit and alternative projects such as bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. It is prepared annually and includes projects for a five-year period. All federally funded projects must be in the Annual Element of the TIP, with an assigned regional priority, before federal funds are authorized.

The project prioritization process combines an exchange of information and evaluation at meetings of the JTPG. The JTPG is a public body in addition to being an advisory group with all meetings open to the public. As a public body, the JTPG may replace any in-person meeting with a virtual meeting (all participants attending remotely) or a hybrid meeting (allowing both in-person or remote participation) provided that it is in accordance with current Massachusetts Open Meeting Law. Anyone can attend and offer feedback and comments on any of the projects or on any part of the process. Evaluation criteria for projects include: Community Impact & Support, Maintenance & Infrastructure, Safety & Security, Mobility / Congestion, Livability / Sustainable Development and Environmental & Climate Change.

The TIP is amended as necessary by the SMMPO with amendments requiring a public meeting, a 21-day public comment period and a process of public notification. The process of public notification can include various methods such as public postings via city and town clerks, postings on SRPEDD's

website, e-mail notifications, press releases, and social media postings. The in-person public comment meeting may be replaced a virtual meeting (all participants attending remotely) or a hybrid meeting (allowing both in-person or remote participation) provided that it is in accordance with current Massachusetts Open Meeting Law. The 21-day public comment period may be abbreviated by a vote of the SMMPO under what may be considered extraordinary circumstances such as an officially proclaimed State of Emergency in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, funding or construction restraints, or a natural disaster.

The TIP may also require adjustments and administrative modifications. Adjustments are revisions to the TIP that do not require a public process but are required to be included in a SMMPO TIP action with a demonstration of financial constraint for MassDOT and FHWA/FTA approval. Adjustments are also voted on and recommended to the SMMPO during the JTPG process. An adjustment requires a notice to be included in the mailed agenda of a JTPG meeting. Administrative Modifications are revisions to the TIP that are minor enough in nature to require neither a public process nor FHWA/FTA approval but do involve a notification to federal partners.

The annual TIP is recommended by the JTPG to the SMMPO for endorsement. Upon SMMPO approval, following a process of public notification, including a public comment period and public meeting, the TIP becomes part of the Statewide TIP (STIP), which must be approved by the FTA, FHWA and EPA before funds are obligated for TIP projects.

To comply with federal requirements, the process adopted by the SMMPO in the PPP for the development of the TIP satisfies the public hearing requirements pertaining to the development of the Program of Projects (POP) for Section 5307, Urbanized Area Formula Program for SRTA and GATRA.

**The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)** describes the scope and cost of work tasks of the SMMPO transportation staff for the upcoming fiscal year. All public participation for the UPWP is through regularly scheduled meetings of the JTPG and the SMMPO, including the invitation to communities to suggest needed planning studies.

**The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)** is a comprehensive review of all modes of transportation within the SMMPO's region, identifying all transportation facilities and including the needs for improvements. The RTP provides short-range and long-range guidance to local elected officials, the JTPG and state and federal implementing agencies. The RTP, which is updated every 4 years, also makes recommendations for transportation improvements for the next 25 years and contains air quality analyses and financial constraints. There is extensive public outreach conducted for the development of the RTP and a public notification process for the 21-day public comment period. The RTP is endorsed by the SMMPO following the comment period. This comment period may be

abbreviated by a vote of the SMMPO under what may be considered as extraordinary circumstances such as an officially proclaimed State of Emergency in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, funding or construction restraints, or a natural disaster.

**The Public Participation Plan (PPP)** is designed to ensure early, inclusive, accessible and continuous public participation and input to the planning process for transportation decision making, with the ultimate goal of allowing every person in the region ample opportunities to participate in the planning process guiding every issue, project, program or service. Special efforts are made to reach the traditionally underserved, including LEP, minority and low-income persons. A process of public notification, including a mandatory 45-day public comment period is required for the PPP. This process includes a wide distribution of the draft document and posting on our website with a request for comments and feedback.

**Federal Transit Administration Section 5303 Grants** is a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) based formula grant program for urbanized areas providing funds to Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) to carry out the transportation planning process; SRPEDD is the recipient of Section 5303 funds as the regional planning agency providing staff assistance to the Southeastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (SMMPO).

In accordance with USC 49 Section 5303, paragraph i, subsection 6, the SMMPO has prepared a public participation plan that complies with the requirements set forth in that the public is provided an opportunity to comment on the development of transportation plans; public meetings are held at accessible locations at times that are convenient to the public; visualization techniques are used to describe the plan; and all materials are made public through an electronically accessible format.

**Federal Transit Administration Section 5307 Grants** is a formula grant program for urbanized areas providing capital, operating, and planning assistance for mass transportation. Both SRTA and GATRA receive Section 5307 funds. Prior to the Regional Transit Authorities preparing and forwarding grant applications to the FTA and to the state, details of the anticipated grant are published in the TIP. The public process for Section 5307 grants is included with the process completed for the TIP, including adjustments, amendments and public comment.

In accordance with the Planning Rule and Circular C 9030 1E, dated January 16, 2014, which streamlined the Public Hearing Requirements for FTA Section 5307 grants, the public involvement process for the development of the TIP satisfies the public hearing requirements for SRTA and GATRA's routine 5307 grants. For FTA projects that are not routine, i.e. Section 5307 applications that require an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), additional

public involvement as presented in the joint FHWA/FTA environmental regulations, 23 C.F.R. part 771, will be required by FTA for grant approval.

**Major Transportation Studies** are conducted to address an issue or need, at the request of a community or as a result of prior planning completed by SRPEDD staff, such as the 100 Most Dangerous Crash Locations. Transportation studies address safety, congestion or other issues. Transit studies address ridership, fares and related issues. Major studies customarily involve comprehensive outreach efforts, including door-to-door contact, Constant Contact e-mail blasts and social media, as well as public meetings. All of these efforts disseminate information, provide a setting for public discussion and comment, and also garner support or consider objections from the neighborhood and community. A second public meeting is often held to present the draft study. (Transit data analysis studies do not require initial public meetings.)

Public comments are incorporated into documents and presented to the SMMPO for acceptance. Substantive changes to the RTP or TIP, as a result of comments received, shall cause a revised document and additional comment period that follows the same procedure as the initial comment period. The SMMPO, at their discretion, may vote to abbreviate the standard 21-day comment period for the RTP, TIP and major amendments under what they consider to be extraordinary circumstances. This includes an officially proclaimed State of Emergency in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, a natural disaster or a funding opportunity with a grant application deadline of fewer than 21 days, such as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Federal legislation states that any modification (including an amendment) to this Public Participation Plan requires a comment period of not less than 45 days.

## **FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION LEGISLATION**

### **ISTEA - 1991**

The 1991 federal legislation known as the **Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA)** required States and MPOs to significantly expand opportunities for the public to become involved in the metropolitan and statewide transportation planning processes. The Final Rule on Statewide Planning and Metropolitan Planning for ISTEA states: "The metropolitan transportation planning process shall include a proactive public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans and TIPs."

In addition, the Rule states that any modification to this public participation plan requires a comment period of not less than 45 days. A 21-day public comment period must be provided prior to the approval or revision of any plan. In addition, MPOs must seek out and consider the needs of those individuals and groups that have been traditionally underserved by transportation systems.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations must establish and periodically review and update public involvement processes. The process should assure early and continued public awareness of, and access to, the transportation decision-making process.

#### **TEA-21 - 1998**

**The Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21)** enacted in 1998 reaffirms the requirement for public involvement opportunities and additionally requires that:

"before approving a long-range transportation plan [or the annual TIP], each metropolitan planning organization shall provide 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, and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the long-range transportation plan [or the TIP]."

#### **SAFETEA-LU – August 10, 2005**

**The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)** authorizes the Federal surface transportation programs for highways, highway safety, and transit for the 5-year period 2005-2009. President Obama extended the funding for SAFETEA-LU through September 30, 2010 by signing the HIRE (Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment) Act on March 18, 2010. In March 2010 Congress extended the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) through the end of fiscal-year 2011, freezing funding at 2010 levels for transit and other programs through Sept. 30, 2011 and extended again to March 2012.

#### **MAP-21 - July 6, 2012**

**MAP-21, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act** (P.L. 112-141), was signed into law by President Obama on July 6, 2012. Notable changes included a performance-based planning process.

#### **FAST Act – December 4, 2015**

**FAST Act, Fixing America's Surface Transportation** (P.L. No. 114-94) was signed into law by President Obama on December 4, 2015. The SAFETEA-LU Act required the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) to provide for consideration of projects and strategies that will serve to advance transportation planning factors. These factors were unchanged with the passage of MAP-21 but two factors were added with the FAST Act legislation, bringing the planning factors from eight to ten and are as follows:

1. Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
2. Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
3. Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
4. Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and for freight;
5. Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns;
6. Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight;
7. Promote efficient system management and operation; and
8. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.
9. Improve the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate storm water impacts of surface transportation; and
10. Improve the transportation system to enhance travel and tourism.

#### **BIL - November 15, 2021**

**BIL, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law** P.L. No. 117-58 (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) was signed into law by President Biden on November 15, 2021. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is the largest long-term investment in infrastructure and economy in our Nation's history.

In addition to the planning factors above, BIL also includes Planning Emphasis Areas. FHWA and FTA jointly issued updated Planning Emphasis Areas for use in the development of the metropolitan and statewide planning and research work programs. It encourages States and MPOs to focus on climate and clean energy, equity, complete streets, public involvement, Department of Defense coordination, Federal Land Management Agency coordination, planning and environmental linkages, and data

sharing in the transportation planning process. These Planning Emphasis Areas will be applied to the transportation planning process all while keeping the 10 factors in place.

## **GENERAL PROTOCOLS FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

The SMMPO's Public Participation Plan is designed with the ultimate goal of keeping the public informed and allowing every member of the public ample and varied opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. This includes all on-going transportation related activities, including issues, projects, programs and services, on a continuous basis.

A first important step in public outreach is identifying the communities, populations or neighborhoods affected by the issue, project, program or service involved and then attempt to identify any Title VI and Environmental Justice components including minority, Limited English Proficiency (LEP) or low-income populations in the study or service area. This will assist in developing a strategy to effectively reach all affected stakeholders.

As part of this first step, SRPEDD staff has developed both a Scoping Process and a Public Engagement Resource to assist with the public engagement process. The Scoping Process guides public outreach by confirming stakeholders, identifying vulnerable and significant populations, as well as populations and neighborhoods where languages other than English are spoken, to inform public engagement practices at the start of a project.

The Public Engagement Resource addresses common barriers to engagement such as language, transportation access, limited income, work schedules and childcare, physical access and accessibility, (dis)comfort with technology, and safe/habitual spaces for Minority/BIPOC populations. It utilizes an engagement plan matrix to identify and reach underserved populations and languages. Additional efforts also include making all documents, publications and work products, as well as announcements and meeting notices available electronically via SRPEDD's website, on SRPEDD's various social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram, by the distribution of the SRPEDD newsletter, and by utilizing the list of nearly 700 e-mail contacts as needed, as well as other avenues of public outreach as the situation dictates.

SRPEDD also holds regular JTPG, as well as other public meetings concerning studies, projects, TIP amendments and other transportation and transit issues, that provide opportunity for participation from any and all interested parties. Staff will be available to provide general and project specific information during normal business hours and after hours at the request of community interest groups with reasonable notice. Staff has been trained in the use of Language Line for callers who are

Limited English Proficient and trained in taking calls from MassRelay, the service which makes calls from the hearing impaired possible through relay operators. The SRPEDD website will be maintained in compliance with the ADA requirements for users with disabilities, as well as for users with Limited English Proficiency.

Public participation is an ongoing activity and an integral part of every planning effort, including one-time activities, such as intersection and corridor studies, and transit studies, and regularly repeated activities, such as the annual Transportation Improvement Program process and long-range Regional Transportation Plan updates. A public outreach effort is initiated before the start of any new project to solicit feedback, garner support or consider objections. Any number of public participation techniques are utilized to disseminate information and to seek feedback from the public and can be adapted depending on the situation.

Each project, issue, program, and service is unique and the same methods cannot necessarily be applied in the same way for each of them. It is best to choose methods for dissemination best suited for a particular issue, project, program or service and to use multiple and varied outreach methods and approaches to reach as many members of the public as possible. Some of these techniques include in-person, virtual or hybrid public meetings, open houses, media ads, mailings (both paper and electronic), press releases, the SRPEDD newsletter, flyers, brochures, surveys (both paper and electronic), informational posters, as well as the SRPEDD website and social media accounts.

If an issue, project, program or service is confined to a neighborhood, going door-to-door to inform residents and businesses is a personal and effective tool to inform and engage. It is also encouraged to ask stakeholders, partners and other related and/or concerned groups to share information, by posting on their websites or social media to reach a wider audience. It is beneficial to attend local and community events, including neighborhood fairs, civic group meetings, faith-based events, job fairs and business expos, to speak to participants and to distribute public outreach materials.

Additional techniques utilized include interviews and articles in local newspapers and magazines, and press releases, including news outlets serving minority, low-income and LEP populations, such as free and foreign language publications. Informational and outreach brochures and flyers are regularly translated for distribution among LEP populations and regularly printed in larger font for distribution to Councils on Aging for older adults and persons requesting it. These techniques are used concurrently or individually as the situation dictates.

Traditional techniques are not always effective with low-income, minority, LEP and other traditionally underserved persons. As stated in our Language Access Plan (LAP), informational and educational materials, as well as surveys, are a valid means in which to make contact with, and engage with

traditionally underserved populations, especially persons with Limited English Proficiency. This practice also informs, as well as invites participation with populations that are often intimidated by any type of bureaucracy and would not otherwise seek out this information.

Staff members should actively cultivate regular contacts with reporters and be available for newspaper and radio interviews on public projects. SRPEDD staff is available to speak at group meetings about any transportation issue upon request with reasonable notice. Staff will adapt public outreach toward specific audiences, such as distributing coloring books concerning bicycle safety designed by the staff at bicycle events for children. Staff has also reached out to the local Councils on Aging, distributing posters and large-font brochures on pedestrian safety for older adults. Staff has also conducted presentations concerning pedestrian safety tips specifically adapted toward older adults at housing centers for seniors.

In addition, SRPEDD maintains and strives to continually add to a comprehensive mailing list that includes Environmental Justice contacts, such as social service agencies, community groups and liaisons and transportation providers. The current e-mail list contains nearly 500 contacts and can be sorted in any number of ways to reach those affected and interested. The e-mail service, Constant Contact, is often utilized as an effective and simple way to send a meeting notice or flyer to both targeted groups or to a wider audience.

Virtual Public Involvement (VPI) is the use of digital technology to engage individuals and/or to visualize projects and plans. VPI has presented new opportunities for public involvement and information sharing and supports our ongoing efforts to engage the public more effectively by expanding the more traditional face-to-face information sharing with technology methods. Virtual tools can offer opportunities to those who do not participate in traditional approaches to public involvement.

As well as utilizing the SRPEDD website and social media platforms, VPI methods such as online videos, webinars, interactive maps, and other similar forums can be used for a greater number of people to receive information and provide input. Among the broad range of VPI methods available are online meetings, survey tools, mobile apps, real-time polling, mapping tools, and story maps.

## **PUBLIC MEETING PROTOCOLS FOR IN-PERSON, VIRTUAL & HYBRID MEETINGS**

Public meetings, listening sessions, workshops, and webinars, whether they be in-person, virtual or hybrid, are regularly held and used to disseminate information, provide a setting for public discussion

and also to solicit feedback, garner support or consider objections from the general public and the communities we serve. Meetings provide an opportunity for personal contact and direct and open dialogue. All public meetings must adhere to the Open Meeting Law, including any amendments made for remote participation. These include the following:

- At the start of the meeting, the chair must announce the name of the member or members who are participating remotely; such information must also be recorded in the meeting minutes.
- All votes must be taken by roll call.
- Members of the public body must be clearly audible to each other and to members of the public at all times.

### **Meeting Notices**

A Meeting Notice with the date, time, location or meeting link (if the meeting is virtual), and a listing of topics that is reasonably anticipated to be discussed at the meeting, as well the agenda and other pertinent documents attached, may be posted on the SRPEDD website at least seven (7) days in advance of the meeting to give ample notice for attendance or a quorum, but shall be sent out and posted at least 48 hours prior to the meeting, excluding Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays. In an emergency, staff shall post notice as soon as reasonably possible prior to the meeting.

Regional meeting notices (SMMPO, JTPG etc.) shall also be sent to each city or town clerk within the region and posted in a manner conspicuously visible to the public at all hours in the municipal building in which the clerk's office is located.

Meeting notices and other meeting materials should be made as accessible as possible for all users. They should have large, sans serif font (a minimum of 14-point font but 16-point to 18-point font is preferred) and light and dark color contrasts for the best visibility. Off-white non-glossy paper is best for printed reading materials. Columns and centered text should be avoided. Notices for social media postings should adhere to social media platform guidelines for optimal viewing.

Meeting notices should include a Notice of Nondiscrimination; availability of language services and an offer of reasonable accommodation with contact information; transit route information if applicable; the universal Accessibility Symbol (shown below on the bottom left) to indicate that the in-person, physical meeting location is accessible for all users; and a choice of contact information for the opportunity to comment or obtain more information if attendance at the meeting is not possible.



Allow ample time when sending out meeting notices to prepare and to arrange for any requested accommodation, if necessary. Sending a public notice out at least 2 weeks in advance of a meeting is a good rule, since ten (10) business days is the accepted minimum time for reasonable notice of accommodation, such as translators, assistive listening devices, American Sign Language interpretation, captioning, etc. as well as “I speak” cards and a tablet equipped with Google Translate to assist LEP persons during public in-person meetings.

To provide accessibility for virtual and hybrid meetings, SRPEDD staff can utilize Otter.ai software for live auto captioning for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and Wordly.ai software for translations for persons who are Limited English Proficient, as requested and needed. The SRPEDD office conference room is equipped with a Meeting Owl camera, with a 360° camera that captures a panoramic view of the conference room, as well as a microphone and speakers. During a hybrid meeting, this allows the remote participants to see and hear all the participants attending in-person during a meeting.

SRPEDD has assistive listening devices and a Public Address System (P.A. System) with wireless microphones available for in-person public meetings. The intent of this is to provide all participants attending an in-person public meeting an opportunity to speak, hear, and be heard by all participants. Meeting attendees with disabilities who are unable to hold a microphone independently will be accommodated. In these situations, allowing an attendee use of a microphone, with a stand adjusted to their height is preferable, however, staff will be available to accommodate and hold the microphone for any attendee if necessary. Alternatively, and particularly for larger meetings, staff with a floating microphone would be preferable to facilitate communication.

Every effort will be made to provide reasonable and timely requests for accommodations, including interpreters and materials in alternate formats. These efforts are taken to provide the greatest opportunity for participation by interested parties.

A QR reader for Smart phones can be used on meeting notices, posters and information cards, for a direct link to websites, surveys and informational web pages.

Public meetings are posted on the SRPEDD website calendar and public meeting notices are mailed to relevant recipients, including our communities' City and Town Clerks for posting. Meeting notices are sometimes posted in a community's library, or in the regional bus terminals. Public meetings for TIP amendments and other changes, especially those that require a public comment period, are announced and advertised using a myriad of sources including public distribution and postings, electronic mailings, posting on the SRPEDD website and social media accounts, as well as other techniques.

Meeting notices should be sent to additional and appropriate contacts, including neighborhood groups, organizations and individuals, ensuring that those representing Title VI populations are included. Consider mailing notices directly to residents and businesses in a project area or going door to door, when warranted and feasible, to distribute meeting notices and speak to those directly affected.

### **LEP Efforts**

Meeting notices and other meeting materials, such as comment sheets and cards, surveys, display items, posters, maps and especially signage, should be translated into Portuguese, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, and Mon Khmer Cambodian, especially when the issue, program or project is located in or near an LEP area or upon request.

The SMMPO has developed a Language Access Plan (LAP) to help identify reasonable steps to provide language assistance for LEP persons seeking meaningful access to SMMPO programs, benefits, services and information as required by Executive Order 13166. These reasonable steps are based on the analysis of four factors. The first factor is the number or proportion of LEP persons meeting the U.S. DOT definition of LEP "Safe Harbor" thresholds (5% or 1,000 individuals, whichever is less) in the eligible service population or the SRPEDD/ SMMPO region.

According to the 2015-2019 ACS data the total number of LEP persons in the SMMPO region is 43,495 which represents 7.28% of the region's population. The LEP populations meeting this "Safe Harbor" threshold are Portuguese or Portuguese Creole at 23,417 (3.98%), Spanish or Spanish Creole at 10,813 (1.84%) French (Haitian) Creole at 1,812 (0.31%), Chinese at 1,225 (0.21%), and Mon Khmer Cambodian at 1,006 (0.17%).

As well as the other materials that are translated, public surveys are also translated. The surveys are distributed throughout the study area via social media and via notices that include links and QR readers that link to the survey. These are made available to all stakeholders and other interested parties prior to the meeting, during the meeting and after the meeting. This offers the opportunity to

comment without the requirement of attending the meeting. These translated surveys are a useful tool to garner feedback, as well as to provide the opportunity to participate.

The practice of translating printed materials and offering ways to participate without direct contact is important in traditionally underserved populations. This practice informs, as well as invites participation with populations that are often intimidated by any type of bureaucracy and would not otherwise seek out this information.

Press releases and/or meeting notices should be sent to appropriate non-English media outlets when the project, program or service is located in or near an LEP area. In the SRPEDD region this includes O Jornal and the Portuguese Times.

### **Meeting Materials**

All materials should be composed in a clear and simple manner, avoiding technical and industry jargon and acronyms to be easily understood by a wide number of varying backgrounds and educational levels. Consider creating a summary document of the issue, project, program or service to present highly technical and complex information simply and clearly.

Visualization techniques, such as posters, maps, photos, charts and graphs, as well as use of GIS systems, computer simulation and artist's renderings and physical models can be used. These techniques may be used concurrently or individually as the situation dictates. Ensure that posters and other display materials are placed at a location and height (considering persons who use wheelchairs and others) that are visible and accessible to all. Ensure that electronic documents, such as meeting notices and other relevant materials are accessible.

### **In-Person, Virtual and Hybrid Public Meeting Sites & Protocols**

If possible, for an in-person meeting, choose a meeting site that is within or near the area where the relevant issue, project, program or service is located, if applicable. Choose a site that is on or near public transportation and during hours of transit service, typically 4-6 pm. For in-person, virtual and hybrid meetings, choose a date and time that is convenient for the largest number of people, for instance, after common work hours.

Ensure that the in-person meeting site is accessible for all users, including LEP persons, and persons with disabilities. A list of ADA accessible meeting locations on transit routes is maintained in-house and continuously updated. Public libraries are always a good place to start when locating an acceptable in-person meeting site. Use a checklist, such as the one found below, to ensure that the in-person meeting site is accessible for all users before the start of the meeting.

- Is there an accessible entrance, accessible parking and are there accessible rest rooms?
- Is there clear and directional signage for these accommodations, as well as for rest rooms, emergency exits, etc.?
- Are entrances, travel paths and aisles at least 3-feet wide and clear of obstacles?
- Is there seating available for any attendees who have requested an accommodation?
- Are there assistive listening devices or wireless microphones available? (SRPEDD has these available for meetings.)
- Is there an interpreter available for any attendees who have requested one?
- Have your meeting materials been translated to reflect the LEP population or users affected?

It might be difficult to find an in-person meeting site in the desired area or neighborhood that is on a transit route and fully accessible, and that may indicate having to forego fulfilling all of the items on the checklist. However, making a physical location as accessible as possible may be accomplished by physically moving tables, chairs and other obstacles or by printing signs to post at the location. Another alternative may be to choose to hold a virtual or hybrid meeting to encourage and accommodate more participants. Virtual meetings can eliminate the usual barriers in attending an in-person meeting including lack of accessibility and/or transportation, lack of child care, and participants with non-traditional working hours.

Before the start of an in-person, virtual or hybrid meeting, allow ample time to complete any necessary tasks. For virtual or hybrid meetings, this may include ensuring that staff members are assigned responsibilities that could include facilitation, allowing attendees into the meeting, recording the meeting, calling the roll, monitoring chat comments and questions, testing audio and video, etc. For in-person and hybrid meetings, this may include: posting signage; rearranging tables and chairs to clear travel paths; setting up assistive listening devices; having “I Speak” cards available; setting out sign-in sheets, comment sheets and other relevant handouts and meeting materials; posting the Title VI / Nondiscrimination Notice in a prominent location; and placing all posters, maps and other display items at heights and locations that are visible and accessible to all attendees, including persons using wheelchairs.

Any conversations held and comments received during the meeting should be transcribed by staff following the meeting. Virtual or hybrid meetings should be recorded to keep a record of any comments. Comments cards containing contact information should be displayed and/or distributed prior to the meeting and shared during the meeting for the opportunity for later comment, especially for those unable or unwilling to speak at a virtual or hybrid meeting or attend an in-person meeting.

## **Additional Opportunities for Public Engagement and Comments**

Comments on issues, studies, projects, programs, services, TIP amendments or any transportation or transit issues may be received anytime by phone, fax, mail, email, as well as verbally or in writing at public meetings and on SRPEDD's social media outlets. There are several bilingual staff members on the SRPEDD staff and interpreters, or reasonable accommodations are made available for meetings upon request. For a meeting being held in a neighborhood identified as containing an LEP population, a bilingual staff member should be present regardless of a formal or prior request for an interpreter. 'I Speak' cards are available at meetings, as well as a tablet equipped with Google Translate as needed. The SRPEDD website offers a translate feature that allows translations into eleven (11) languages/dialects including Arabic, Chinese (both Simplified and Traditional) French, German, Haitian Creole, Italian, Mon Khmer Cambodian, Portuguese, and Spanish, and there are also multi-lingual announcements on social media, as well as full documents available in Portuguese, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, and Mon Khmer Cambodian in addition to English, on the SRPEDD website.

### **The SRPEDD Website and Social and Public Media**

The SRPEDD website is ADA compliant, offers a translate feature into eleven (11) languages/dialects and includes a static link at the bottom of each page directly connecting to the page containing all Title VI related information and documents, including translated versions. All draft documents and final documents are posted on the SRPEDD website. All vital documents, including the Notice of Nondiscrimination Rights and the Title VI Complaint Process and Complaint Forms are posted on the website in three Safe Harbor languages, in addition to English. The start of all comment periods is posted on the website, along with an invitation for comments and questions with any relevant draft documents.

The website's vast resource library includes all final documents. The SRPEDD website also features a COVID-19 resource list containing nearly 100 points of contacts to agencies, organizations, churches, and schools offering food, health services, housing assistance and other support for those in need that can be found here: <https://srpedd.org/covid-19-resources/>

The website also features an up-to-date meeting calendar, as well as a feature to contact us with comments, found here: <https://srpedd.org/contact-us/>. SRPEDD maintains a Facebook page, a presence on Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and a YouTube page with over 50 videos including public meetings and workshops, an instructional video on how to safely navigate a roundabout, and informative webinars.

Comments may be offered by e-mail ([lcabral@srpedd.org](mailto:lcabral@srpedd.org)), phone (508 824-1367) fax (508 823-1803) or on our Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/SRPEDD](https://www.facebook.com/SRPEDD)), as well as in person at our offices located at 88 Broadway, Taunton, MA 02780.

For further information please visit our website at [www.srpedd.org](http://www.srpedd.org). Also, on our website are details about SRPEDD, current projects, the planning services we provide, as well as an extensive resource library.