

HERKIMER-ONEIDA COUNTIES TRANSPORTATION STUDY PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN – 2007 UPDATE

INTRODUCTION

As the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Herkimer and Oneida Counties, the Governmental Policy and Liaison Committee (GP&L) directs the regional transportation planning process as it relates to the use of Federal transportation funds. The transportation planning process is carried out through the Herkimer-Oneida Counties Transportation Study (HOCTS) under the direction of the Transportation Planning Committee (TPC), a body subsidiary of the GP&L committee. The voting membership of the GP&L is composed of local elected officials and non-elected officials that represent the interests of the citizens of Herkimer and Oneida Counties. However, recognizing that the public has a substantial interest in the planning of regional transportation policies and programs, the GP&L, TPC, and HOCTS have and will continue to strongly encourage public participation in the planning process.

Federal legislation requires MPOs to develop and implement a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process. In compliance with the ISTEA requirement, the GP&L resolved, by HOCTS resolution 1992-21, adopted a Public Participation Plan. The most current federal reauthorizing legislation, The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), continues and expands the requirement for public participation in the transportation planning process for MPOs. SAFETEA-LU requires MPOs to develop and utilize a Public Participation Plan that is developed in consultation with all interested parties and provides reasonable opportunities for all interested parties to comment on all aspects of the MPO transportation planning process.

The purpose of this updated HOCTS Public Participation Plan is to demonstrate complete compliance with the SAFETEA-LU legislation and all federal regulations concerning public participation in the transportation planning process.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal

The goal of the HOCTS Public Participation Plan is to involve all appropriate parties of the community in the transportation planning process and ensure that the public has equal opportunity to provide input and express their opinions on the current transportation issues affecting their environment.

Objectives

Objectives related to the HOCTS Public Participation Plan goal are:

- A. Provide reasonable opportunities for interested parties, including minorities, elderly, and low-income people, on the content of the HOCTS Long Range Transportation Plan, Transportation Implementation Plan (TIP), and Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), by effectively providing information to increase

their awareness of transportation issues, encourage their involvement, and enable them to be informed of transportation decisions.

- B. Ensure that all decisions made in the HOCTS transportation planning process and programs are made and documented clearly and in consultation with all interested parties involved, by identifying and initiating effective methods of obtaining public feedback.
- C. Ensure pro-activity by providing full and open access to the HOCTS transportation planning process and programs, by keeping Herkimer and Oneida Counties residents informed and involved.
- D. Make available to all interested parties who participate in the HOCTS planning process, an opportunity to comment on the public participation plan prior to its approval.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS

HOCTS is engaged in several transportation planning activities that solicits public comments and are enhanced by direct public participation.

The Long Range Transportation Plan

The purpose of this document is to provide a comprehensive transportation plan for Herkimer and Oneida Counties based on the anticipated transportation needs and recommendations for the next twenty (20) years.

- ◆ **Plan Development and Updating:** All activities related to the development and update of the Long Range Plan begins with a public outreach effort. This effort includes media notification and public meetings to provide information about the transportation issues at hand, the process which is used to address these issues, and a forum for public comment, both written and oral. The long range transportation plan draft and updates, are subject to public review and comment for at least thirty (30) calendar days prior to the adoption of the plan.
- ◆ **Draft Plan:** A Draft Transportation Plan is developed to reflect changing demographics, new planning requirements, forecasted traffic implications, and projected economic conditions. This Draft Transportation Plan is made available for public review. The public-involvement participants are notified by mail and the general public is notified through the media about the availability of the draft plan. A public meeting is held after an appropriate review period.
- ◆ **Final Plan:** Comments are addressed by HOCTS, and used to develop a Final Transportation Plan. If there are substantial changes from the draft plan, a new review period will be initiated.
- ◆ **Planning Committee and Policy Committee Approval:** The Final Long Range Transportation Plan is presented to both the TPC and the GP&L for approval.

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The TIP is a staged program of prioritized federally funded transportation improvement projects to be implemented within the two-county area that is consistent with the long range transportation plan, and includes first year project allocations.

- ◆ Notification: Public-involvement participants are notified at a minimum of two (2) weeks prior to the TPC meeting for their input on the TIP.
- ◆ Identification: With appropriate prior notification, the TPC meets to identify projects for possible inclusion in the TIP.
- ◆ Draft TIP: Subsequent to the project identification meeting, a draft TIP is prepared. The public and media are notified, copies of the draft TIP are made available with a two week review period provided.
- ◆ Final TIP: Comments received on the draft TIP are addressed by the TPC. If there are substantial changes to the draft TIP, a new review period is initiated.
- ◆ Planning Committee and Policy Committee Approval: The TIP is approved by the TPC and submitted to the GP&L for final action.
- ◆ TIP Amendments: When amendments to the TIP are required, the public is notified via a notice to the media, and relevant documents are made available. There is a two week review period preceding action by the GP&L.

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

The UPWP is an outline of various technical and administrative tasks which define the area's transportation planning activities for the identified fiscal year and serves as a guide for HOCTS activities over the state fiscal year.

- ◆ The UPWP is developed through HOCTS ongoing involvement with the general public, and the joint efforts of the committees and staff of HOCTS.
- ◆ Development of the UPWP begins by soliciting project ideas from members of the TPC and the GP&L at a minimum of forty-five (45) days prior to action.
- ◆ These ideas are combined with the continuing activities from the previous UPWP and with suggestions from the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT). In addition, elements from the State's call letter, FTA and FHWA emphasis areas and SAFETEA-LU legislation are incorporated.
- ◆ The TPC and the general public are provided a two (2) week period to review the draft report. The staff makes revisions based on the committee's comments and a final report is reviewed, discussed and adopted by the GP&L, following a two week review period.
- ◆ The approved report is sent to NYSDOT for processing and submission to FTA and FHWA.

Public Participation Plan

- ◆ The public will be notified through the media of the development of the Public Participation Plan.
- ◆ According to federal regulations, MPOs are required to have a minimum public comment period of 45 days before the public involvement process is initially adopted or revised. Therefore, this document will be available for review for a 45 day period. Comments will be addressed prior the adoption or revision of this Public Participation Plan.

GP&L and TPC Meetings

The Governmental Policy and Liaison (GP&L) Committee designated by the governor of New York, continues as the MPO for the Oneida-Herkimer Counties area. As the MPO,

the GP&L continues to be responsible, in cooperation with the State and transit operators, for carrying out the transportation process as it relates to the use of Federal Funds in the Utica urbanized area. The Transportation Planning Committee continues as a technical advisory committee to the GP&L. The GP&L has delegated to the TPC the responsibility of overseeing the progress of work tasks, of reviewing reports and documents on transportation issues, and providing the GP&L with recommendations and sound technical advice on transportation related subjects.

- ◆ The public-involvement participants and the media will be notified at least two weeks in advance of all meetings.
- ◆ Meetings will be held in facilities that are accessible to persons with disabilities, and at locations accessible by public transportation.
- ◆ The public will be provided the opportunity to comment on issues relevant to the meeting agenda.

IMPLEMENTATION

HOCTS uses a variety of public involvement techniques to provide opportunities to the public for participation in the transportation process and projects. HOCTS will expand its public involvement techniques to comply with the SAFETEA-LU requirement “of a plan that is developed in consultation with all interested parties and provides reasonable opportunities for all interested parties to comment on all aspects of the MPO transportation planning process”.

SAFETEA-LU adds representatives of the disabled and representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities to its definition of “Interested Parties”, which includes the following: citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of freight transportation services, and other interested parties.

ONGOING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Contact List

HOCTS maintains a central contact list of public involvement participants, elected government and public officials, and advisory groups. The list is used to provide information and opportunities for public input on activities related to the transportation planning process and projects.

HOCTS will revise the contact list, as appropriate, and include representatives of interested parties as defined by SAFETEA-LU and will be posted on its website.

Website

HOCTS will continue to regularly update its website (www.hocts.org) to provide the public with timely information on the status of ongoing projects, completed projects, and upcoming projects and meetings. The website information includes MPO background and contact information; Transportation Planning Process documents, including LRTP, TIP, and UPWP; current Transportation Studies; Program Planning Area, including

Transit, Roads, Bicycle/Pedestrian, and Rail; Traffic Counts; Construction Delays; Maps/GIS/Modeling; Meetings; and Related Links.

Public Meetings, Public Hearings, and Public Workshops

HOCTS ensures all meetings are open to the public and are held at convenient times and locations, and accessible to elderly, low income and minority individuals. As needed, HOCTS conducts Transportation Planning Committee (TPC) meetings, Governmental Policy and Liaison (GP&L) meetings, and Advisory Committee meetings. Other public meetings, public hearings, and public workshops are project driven and are held as necessary to facilitate public involvement and participation in the transportation planning process.

HOCTS, when planning for public meetings, will consider all appropriate groups of interested parties as defined by SAFETEA-LU.

Media Notification

HOCTS will maintain a news media list to be contacted via Press Releases and Public Notices to announce and promote all planning and Plan meetings, and to publicize, as appropriate, special meetings related to transportation planning.

Media notification for public involvement is at a minimum of one (1) week prior to a scheduled public involvement activity and includes meeting information as to date, time, location, and description of activity.

Annual Report

Major transportation planning activities carried out by HOCTS are described in an Annual Report produced by the Oneida County's Planning Department and distributed to municipalities, elected officials, other interested agencies, and made is available to the general public annually in June.

Visualization Techniques

SAFTEA-LU requires HOCTS to maintain its use of visualization techniques in transportation planning. Visualization can provide the public and decision makers a clearer idea of the proposed policies, plans and Transportation Improvement Programs and the impacts to the human and natural environment. The new technology has made it possible to communicate what proposals may look like when implemented and helps to make complex technical information more clearly understood about project's potential effects. Examples of visualization techniques include sketches, drawings, artist renderings, physical models and maps, simulated photos, videos, computer modeled images, interactive GIS systems, GIS based scenario planning tools, photo manipulation and computer simulation.

HOCTS utilizes powerpoint presentations, digital photos, and GIS in Modeling and Mapping of many transportation planning projects. As new technology evolves, HOCTS will continue to use more visualization techniques, as appropriate, in the transportation planning process and require consultants to use visualization techniques.

REVIEW AND EVALUATION

The Public Participation Plan will be reviewed, as part of the continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process, to determine its effectiveness in meeting the stated goals and objectives, and regulations; and will be revised as requirements, legislation, and/or technology changes. The Plan will be reviewed in connection with the MPO certification process, and the Plan will be coordinated with the ongoing statewide public involvement process.

HOCTS will review and evaluate the Public Participation Plan every two (2) years and when new transportation legislation is enacted to determine and address public needs and to adhere to regulation updates.