



Public Participation Plan

***Prepared by the:
Florence Area Metropolitan Planning Organization***

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Introduction

The Florence Area Transportation Study (FLATS) Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is responsible for establishing and maintaining a continuous, cooperative and comprehensive transportation planning process for the Florence study boundary area. While meeting the appropriate federal and state requirements, this process promotes the development of a safe, effective, efficient and environmentally sensitive multi-modal transportation system for moving people and goods in the FLATS area.

The FLATS urbanized area encompasses a population of 89,535, with the entire study area boundary encompassing a population of 124,316. The FLATS MPO study area boundary includes the City of Florence, Town of Quinby, City of Darlington, Town of Timmonsville and surrounding unincorporated areas of Florence and Darlington counties.

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962 established the requirement for transportation planning in urban areas throughout the country. The laws extending the federal requirement for transportation planning are the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), adopted in 1998, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy For Users (SAFETEA-LU), enacted on August 10, 2005, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), enacted on October 1, 2012 and the Fixing American's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act), signed into law on December 4, 2015 and effective immediately. The FAST Act is a five-year Surface Transportation Reauthorization.

This report documents the actions to be carried out by the FLATS MPO to ensure that opportunities exist for the public to be involved in transportation planning activities, pursuant to Title 23 CFR 450.316 of Statewide Planning; Metropolitan Planning and 40 CFR 51.402(e) Criteria and Procedures for Determining Conformity to State or Federal Implementation Plans of Transportation Plans, Programs and Projects and Section VI-A 2CCR604-2 Statewide Transportation Planning rules. The FLATS MPO promulgates the policy to support and encourage public participation and to adhere to the principles of Environmental Justice in the metropolitan planning process. The FLATS public participation plan is also designed to ensure adequate opportunities for the public to express its views on transportation issues and to become active participants in the decision-making process.

Federal land represented within the FLATS jurisdiction includes two locations: the Florence National Cemetery and the McMillan Federal Building. The 24.9 acre cemetery site is located at 803 East National Cemetery Road, about a quarter-mile east of South Irby Street in the City of Florence. The McMillan Building is found at 401 West Evans Street at the northwest corner with McQueen Street. The cemetery is managed by the Department of Veterans Affairs while the courthouse is managed by the Department of Justice.

Purpose

Mobility improvements in the study area will impact citizens along major corridors as well as in connecting corridors. A singular focus on transportation projects will limit local potential in attracting additional state and federal transportation funding. Conversely, a mixed strategy of large and small projects including pedestrian walkways and bikeways, bus enhancements, and roadway projects of all types and sizes will optimize the success of local officials attracting new monies. The purpose of FLATS public involvement is to canvass the communities within the study area in search of ideas that will have public support and improve mobility and travel safety. Additionally, the purpose is to promote and provide a variety of meaningful forums for FLATS stakeholders to communicate with FLATS staff and governing bodies. A list of known stakeholders and issues of interest is outlined to receive electronic notification of the FLATS MPO transportation process. The overall goal of public involvement will be that members of the general public will have access to information and opportunities to provide feedback regarding acceptable and effective ways to improve mobility and safety in the FLATS area.

Guiding Regulations

MAP-21

On July 6, 2012, President Barack Obama signed into law the transportation bill, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Act. With guaranteed funding for highways, highway safety, and public transportation totaling \$244.1 billion, MAP-21 represented the largest surface transportation investment in our nation's history. The bill authorized transportation programs and projects for the two year period of 2012-2014. Prior to MAP- 21, the three landmark bills that brought surface transportation into the 21st century – the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) and the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: a Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) shaped the highway program to meet the nation's changing transportation needs.

MAP-21 addressed the many challenges facing our transportation system today – challenges such as improving safety, reducing traffic congestion, improving efficiency in freight movement, increasing intermodal connectivity, and protecting the environment – as well as laying the groundwork for addressing future challenges.

A key feature of MAP-21 was the establishment of a performance- and outcome-based program (Performance Management). The objective of this program was for States to invest resources in projects that collectively will make progress toward the achievement of the national goals. The National Performance Goals established in MAP-21 are:

- 1) Safety;
- 2) Infrastructure Condition;

- 3) Congestion Reduction;
- 4) System Reliability;
- 5) Freight Movement and Economic Vitality;
- 6) Environmental Sustainability;
- 7) Reduced Project Delivery Delays.

FAST Act

On December 4th, 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST) Act transportation bill, into law. The FAST Act provides long-term funding certainty for surface transportation investment as it authorizes \$305 billion for fiscal years 2016 through 2020 for highway, highway and motor vehicle safety, public transportation, motor carrier safety, hazardous materials safety, rail, and research, technology, and statistics programs. The FAST Act requires the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to consider planning strategies that will serve to advance ten (10) transportation-planning factors identified under the FAST Act:

- 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 options available to people and for freight;
- 5) Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, and improve quality of life;
- 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;
- 8) Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system;
- 9) Improve the resiliency and reliability of the transportation and reduce or mitigate storm water impacts of surface transportation; and
- 10) Enhance travel and tourism

The FAST Act continues MAP-21's overall performance management approach, within which States invest resources in projects that collectively will make progress toward national goals. Except as specified below, the FAST Act makes no changes to the performance management provisions established by MAP-21.

Freight Performance Measure

MAP-21 required DOT to establish performance measures in a number of areas, including the assessment of freight movement on the Interstate System. MAP-21 also required each State to set performance targets for these measures. The FAST Act now

requires that if the Administrator determines that a State has failed to meet (or to make significant progress toward meeting) its freight performance targets within two years after the establishment of the targets, the State must describe in its next performance report to DOT the actions it will take to achieve these targets. [FAST Act § 1116; 23 U.S.C. 167(j)]

Performance Period Adjustment

The FAST Act adjusts the timeframe for States and metropolitan planning organizations to make progress toward meeting their performance targets under the National Highway Performance Program and clarifies the significant progress timeline for the Highway Safety Improvement Program performance targets. [FAST Act § 1406(a)(1) and (b); 23 U.S.C. 119(e)(7) and 148(i)]

Interstate System Condition

Under MAP-21, if the condition of a State's Interstate pavements (excluding bridges) fell below a minimum condition level established by DOT, the State was required to dedicate certain funds for use on Interstate maintenance. To trigger this penalty, the condition needed to fall below the minimum level for two consecutive reporting periods. The FAST Act adjusts the timeframe for review for triggering the penalty by removing the requirement that this decline in condition level is shown during "2-consecutive reporting periods" to trigger the penalty. [FAST Act § 1406(a)(2); 23 U.S.C. 119(f)(1)(A)]

Objectives

- Disseminate information about the FLATS Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) or a FLATS special study project to the general public and directly affected communities.
- Improve the comment response rate of citizens who live, work, and travel in the outer areas of the planning area, in particular those within the rural communities of Florence County.
- Identify and actively solicit input from stakeholder groups most affected by and interested in possible "short-term" and "long-term" improvements.
- Provide a variety of opportunities for public participation and involvement throughout the planning process.
- Produce recommendations based on public comment consideration. Respond to issues raised by the area's residents, either by incorporation into the recommendations or as a separate summary of public issues that are not incorporated.

Principles Guiding the FLATS Public Interaction

FLATS recognizes and embraces the important role of public involvement in the transportation study process. Team members will be guided by the following principles when addressing people interested in and/or impacted by transportation plans or projects:

- Those groups likely to be most impacted will receive early identification and continuous communication regarding the project. A more personal, individual approach may be required for these groups to rectify misinformation (e.g., small group meetings lead by the local planning staff).
- Two-way communications (i.e., the free exchange of information, ideas, and values between staff and citizens/stakeholders) will be sought. A variety of communication methods (e.g. e-mail, phone, and mail) will be employed in order to reach the greatest number of people.
- Draft and final study findings will be communicated to all known stakeholders via public workshops, stakeholder interviews, and information (e.g., public flyers and agendas) provided to local newspapers, radio, and television stations as applicable.
- All reasonable input from the citizens and communities will be given consideration by the FLATS team. Evidence of such will be apparent in the form of technical documents as well as the public workshops.
- Citizen/public questions will be responded to within 2 business days. This quick action builds trust and confidence.
- A series of public outreach actions, both formal and informal, are necessary. Formal actions include the public workshops as well as small group meetings or stakeholder interviews. Informal actions encompass responses to citizen phone calls and e-mails. Team members will be mindful of technical jargon, cultural differences, language barriers, and the need for simple illustrations when possible.
- Opportunities for multiple forms of input will be illustrated from the beginning. Citizens will be provided points of contact for FLATS staff on all correspondence and information.

FLATS Organization

The FLATS MPO is composed of a voting and non-voting Policy Committee and a Study Team. Membership of each committee is a representative for the FLATS MPO area as prescribed by the FLATS Bylaws. The voting Policy Committee is the official decision making body that establishes policies for the overall conduct of the FLATS MPO, granting final approval of all plans, projects, programs, policies and funding. The non-voting Policy Committee serves as an advisory board for the voting Policy Committee if necessary. The FLATS Study Team provides recommendations to the Policy Committee

on technical methods, procedures and standards that are used in the development of transportation plans and programs.

General Guidelines

This Public Participation Plan is intended to provide direction for public involvement activities to be conducted by the MPO and contains the policies, goals, objectives, and techniques used by the MPO for public involvement. In its public participation process, the MPO will:

1. Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agencies, private providers of transportation, other interested parties and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs and projects (including but not limited to local jurisdiction concerns).
2. Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of the Long Range Transportation Plans, the Transportation Improvement Program, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects, and conduct open public meetings where matters related to transportation programs are being considered.
3. Give adequate public notice of public participation activities and allow time for public review and comment at key decision points, including, but not limited to, approval of the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and other appropriate transportation plans and projects. If the final draft of any transportation plan differs significantly from the one available for public comment by the MPO and raises new material issues, which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen, an additional opportunity for public comment on the revised plan shall be made available.
4. To support Section 5307 grantees, this public participation plan is being used to satisfy the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Program of Projects public participation requirements.
5. Respond in writing, when applicable, to public input. When significant written and oral comments are received on the transportation plan drafts (including the financial plan for the TIP and Long-Range Transportation Plan developed in cooperation with the MPO Boards and Committees), as a result of the public participation process or the interagency consultation process required under MAP-21 and FAST Act, report on the disposition of comments shall be made part of the final plan.

6. Solicit the needs of those under-served by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to the transportation disadvantaged, minorities, elderly, persons with disabilities, and low-income households. MAP-21, in addition to FAST Act, requires that the MPO shall provide reasonable opportunities for 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 planning process.
7. Provide a public comment period of 45 calendar days prior to the adoption of the Public Participation Plan and/or any amendments. Notice of the comment period will be advertised in a newspaper of general circulation and various other publications prior to the commencement of the 45-day comment period. The participants on the FLATS MPO Contacts List will be notified electronically prior to the start of the 45-day comment period.
8. Provide a public comment period of not less than 30 calendar days prior to amending and/or adopting the Long Range Transportation Plan. Notice of the comment period will be advertised in a newspaper of general circulation.
9. Provide a public comment period of not less than 21 calendar days prior to the adoption of the Transportation Improvement Program, the Unified Planning Work Program, Transit Development Plans, any formal amendments or updates, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects. Notice of the comment period will be advertised in a newspaper of general circulation.
10. Coordinate the Public Participation Plan with statewide Public Participation Processes wherever possible to enhance public consideration of the issues, plans and programs, and reduce redundancies and costs.
11. The Consultation Process will allow many organizations and agencies to review and have the opportunity to comment on the LRTP and TIP process and product. The MPO will solicit the proper official and method of notification desired of all the groups in addition to other local government agencies and non-profits that receive federal funding from those U.S. departments other than DOT for transportation related functions (other than emergency assistance). This list will be kept updated. Agencies not wishing to be on the list will be required to send an official letter to the MPO requesting to be removed from the list and these letters will be kept for documentation. The ability for the agencies and groups to

effectively provide input and comment requires a reasonable time frame to respond. Agencies and organizations needing greater lead time than the normal public comment period for each document will be accommodated within reason.

Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Goal: To effectively interest, inform and involve the public in the regional transportation planning process, encouraging and accommodating their meaningful participation and input.

Objective 1

The MPO shall encourage the involvement of all area citizens in the transportation planning process.

Policy 1.1: The MPO will work to identify traditionally under-involved populations within the region, including minority, low income, and senior citizen populations.

Policy 1.2: Target audiences shall be identified for each planning study conducted by the MPO, including residents, business and property owners and those traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations, including but not limited to, low income and minority households within the study area.

Policy 1.3: The MPO shall, whenever feasible, hold public meetings at a site convenient to potentially affected citizens.

Objective 2

The MPO shall actively engage the public in the transportation planning process according to the policies contained in this Public Participation Plan and State and Federal Law.

Policy 2.1: The MPO shall maintain an up-to-date database of contacts including at a minimum the following persons to provide that all interested parties have reasonable opportunities to comment on the transportation planning process and products:

- a. Elected Officials
- b. Local Government Staff
- c. Transportation Agencies (Port, Airports, Transit, etc.)
- d. Local Media (Print)
- e. Civic Groups
- f. Special Interest Groups (Other Interested Parties)
- g. Libraries (For Public Display)
- h. Consultation with Federal, State and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation and historic preservation, and other environmental issues (see Appendix B)
- i. Consultation with parties that would have an interest in the planning and development of the transportation network including affected public agencies in the metropolitan planning area (see Appendix C)
- j. Native American Tribal Councils

- k. Private Freight Shippers
- l. Representatives of Public Transportation Employees
- m. Providers of Freight Transportation Services
- n. Private Providers of Transportation
- o. Representatives of Users of Public Transportation
- p. Representatives of Users of Pedestrian Walkways
- q. Representatives of Users of Bicycle Transportation Facilities
- r. Representatives of the Disabled

Policy 2.2: The MPO shall, when feasible, electronically mail meeting announcements to the MPO contact list or to targeted groups for upcoming activities.

Policy 2.3: The MPO shall employ visualization techniques to depict transportation plans. Examples of visualization techniques include: charts, graphs, photo interpretation, maps, GIS, artist renderings, physical models, and/or computer simulation.

Objective 3

The MPO shall keep the public informed of on-going transportation related activities on a continuous basis.

Policy 3.1: The MPO shall make all publications and work products available electronically to the public via the Florence County web page, www.florenceco.org and the MPO office and employ visualization techniques to describe transportation actions as part of the Long-Range Plan.

Policy 3.2: MPO staff shall be available to provide general and project-specific information at a central location during normal business hours and after hours at the request of community interest groups with reasonable notice.

Policy 3.3: The MPO shall maintain an internet web site that will be compliant with Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act for disabled users.

Policy 3.3.1: The web site shall be updated and maintained to provide the most current and accurate transportation planning information available.

Policy 3.3.2: The web site shall, at a minimum, contain the following information:

- a. Contact information (mailing address, phone, fax, and e-mail)
- b. Current MPO committee membership
- c. Meeting calendars and agendas
- d. Work products and publications (Transportation Improvement Program, Long Range Transportation Plans, Unified Planning Work Program,
- e. Current By-Laws and Operating Procedures (including the Public Participation Plan and updates)

Policy 3.4: MPO staff will produce an annual newsletter.

Objective 4

The MPO shall strive to continuously improve public participation.

Policy 4.1: The MPO shall continuously evaluate public involvement techniques.

Policy 4.2: This Public Participation Plan shall be reviewed and adopted, with revisions if necessary, at least every three (3) years in order to improve the effectiveness of public involvement.

Objective 5

The MPO shall participate in public participation activities for individual transportation improvement projects from the planning phase through construction.

Policy 5.1: The MPO shall actively assist the South Carolina Department of Transportation, local governments and transportation agencies in the development and implementation of public involvement techniques for planning and other studies, including Major Corridor/Feasibility Studies, and Project Development and Environmental Studies or other documents to support planning.

Objective 6

The MPO shall maintain a Title VI Program including a complaint procedure to report unfair treatment of groups based on race, color, and national origin.

Policy 6.1: The MPO will maintain a log of Title VI complaints and forward to appropriate State and Federal agencies for review and guidance.

Title VI and Environmental Justice

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects persons from discrimination based on their race, color, or national origin in programs and activities that receive Federal financial assistance. FLATS is funded at the federal level, so all of our transportation planning processes must comply with this law. Environmental Justice stems from Title VI, focusing on including low-income and minority populations in federally funded programs. Environmental justice has three general principles:

- To avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority populations and low-income populations;
- To ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process;
- To prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations.

By providing the opportunity for everyone to participate in the transportation planning process, it is ensured that the needs of all people can be met and that their desires for how the whole community should function and develop will be considered. To accomplish this, FLATS staff will use Census data to determine where concentrations of the underserved or underrepresented reside. Using this data, staff will:

- Hold public meetings that are convenient to these geographic concentrations in terms of walk-ability and available transit options, which tend to be used more by low-income individuals than other forms of transportation;
- Make all draft documents available for public review via the techniques described above;
- Include all residents or organizations that express an interest by attending public meetings or notifying us by other means in the direct mailing list to receive information about future events and plan development;
- Continue to research create methods of reaching these populations with information, documents and invitations other than the techniques listed within this document;
- Seek out community leaders or representatives of these groups to participate in our planning processes as appropriate; and
- Meet and make presentation to organizations that represent these segments of the population as requested.

Language Assistance

A person who does not speak English as their primary language and who has a limited ability to read, write, speak or understand English may be a Limited English Proficient person and may be entitled to language assistance with respect to FLATS services. Language assistance can include interpretation, which means oral or spoken transfer of a message from one language into another language and/or translation, which means the written transfer of a message from one language into another language.

Executive Order 13166, titled ***Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency***, indicates that differing treatment based upon a person's inability to speak, read, write or comprehend English is a type of national origin discrimination. It directs each agency to public guidance for its respective recipients clarifying their obligation to ensure that such discrimination does not take place. This order applies to all state and local agencies which receive federal funds.

The FLATS MPO has developed a ***Title VI Binder*** to help identify reasonable steps for providing language assistance to persons with limited English proficiency (LEP) who wish to access services provided. This binder contains a complaint log, complaint procedures to follow to remain in compliance with both State and Federal regulations regarding federal programs, I Speak cards, demographic information on the limited English proficiency population within the FLATS area and State and Federal training information as FLATS staff attends.

Americans with Disabilities Act

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) required State and local governments to make their programs and services accessible to persons with disabilities. This requirement extends not only to physical access at government facilities, programs and events, but also to policy changes that governmental entities must make to ensure that all people with disabilities can take part in and benefit from the programs and services of State and local governments. In addition, governmental entities must ensure effective communication, including the provision of necessary auxiliary aids and services so that individuals with disabilities can participate in civic life.

Public Participation Techniques

Public participation is an ongoing activity of the MPO. Public participation is also an integral part of one-time activities such as corridor studies and regularly repeated activities such as the annual Transportation Improvement Program process and Long Range Transportation Plan updates.

This section contains descriptions of public participation tools currently being used and others by the MPO:

MPO Web Site

Description: The web site is established to provide basic information about the MPO process, members, meeting times and contact information. Work products, such as the drafted, and adopted Public Participation Plan, Unified Planning Work Program, Transportation Improvement Program and Long Range Transportation Plan are available on the site.

The website address is www.florenceco.org. The web site will be maintained by the Florence County MPO staff and regularly updated.

Activities: The web site is used to list current and topical information on regular and special meetings, planning studies, publications, related public events and work products.

MPO Master Database

Description: MPO staff maintains a master database of business, federal, state and local agencies and interested public. The database includes committee membership, mailing information, phone numbers, fax numbers, e-mail addresses and web sites. The database is used for maintaining up-to-date committee membership lists, special interest groups and homeowner association contacts, and is the foundation in providing the public of any transportation related documents. The database will be used to establish and maintain a list of e-mail contacts for electronic meeting notification and announcements.

Activities: The database is used to enhance public involvement activities.

Legal Advertised Notices

Description: All notices of meetings and hearings of the MPO Transportation Policy Committee shall be posted pursuant to the *South Carolina Open Public Meetings Act*. Notices shall be published a minimum of seven (7) days prior to the meeting. The mailing and/or e-mailing of notices and press releases should be timed to be received locally within five (5) days of the meeting.

When official public hearings and public comment periods for regional plans and programs are provided, said meeting notices shall be published a minimum of ten (10) days prior to adoption in *The Morning News*. All notices of sub-regional plans and programs funded by the MPO shall be made in the newspaper of greatest circulation in the study area (see Table 1).

The FLATS Policy Committee, or another MPO committee, shall consider hosting special meetings when needed to consider a special non-routine item that necessitates action but falls between regularly scheduled meetings. If a special meeting is called, the notice shall be published a minimum of three (3) days prior the meeting.

Activities: Regular and other meetings seeking public input are posted ten (10) days prior to the meeting.

Display Ads

Description: The MPO may publish ads that are used to promote meetings that are not regularly scheduled, such as corridor study workshops. They are published in selected newspapers in order to reach a larger audience than those that typically read legal notices.

Activities: Public awareness of project specific meetings, workshops, or open houses.

Other Media

Description: Opportunities are sought for articles in other newsletters produced by municipalities, homeowners' associations, church groups, civic groups, or others that may have an interest in the MPO. Opportunities are also sought to present to civic and social agencies, participate on radio talk shows, and provide television news highlights and to utilize public service notices to create community awareness of planning activities.

Activities: Increased opportunities to make public aware of corridor studies, small-area studies, other planning studies or major activities.

Direct Mailings

Description: Used to announce upcoming meetings or activities or to provide information to a targeted area or group of people. Direct mailings are usually letters,

but can be postcards or flyers. An area may be targeted for a direct mailing because of potential impacts from a project. Groups are targeted that may have an interest in a specific issue, for example avid cyclists and pedestrians may be targeted for pathways and trail projects.

Activities: Project-specific meetings, workshops, open houses, corridor studies, small area studies, other planning studies or major activities.

Press Releases

Description: Formal press releases are sent to *The Morning News* to announce upcoming meetings and activities and to provide information on specific issues being considered by the MPO or their committees. When specific communities are affected by transportation plans, then local newsletters and media will be sought to communicate the project status.

Activities: Corridor or other planning studies, workshops, open houses, public hearings, and other MPO activities.

Description: These are targeted public meetings that are generally open and informal, with project team members interacting with the public on a one-on-one basis. Short presentations may be given at these meetings. The purpose of project-specific meetings is to provide project information to the public and to solicit public comment and a sense of public priorities.

Activities: Long-range planning studies, corridor studies, and other major MPO activities.

E-mail Announcements/Internet Websites

Description: Meeting announcements and MPO information are e-mailed to interested persons that have submitted their e-mail addresses to MPO staff.

Activities: Long-range planning studies, corridor studies, small-area studies, other planning studies, regular meetings, public hearings, workshops, open houses, and other major MPO activities.

MPO Logo

Description: A logo representing the MPO will be used to identify products and publications of the MPO. A logo helps the public become familiar with the different activities of the MPO by providing a means of recognizing MPO products.

Activities: A logo may be used on all MPO publications; including those developed by consultants working on MPO sponsored projects to create a community awareness of the MPO deliverables.

Public Hearings

Description: These are public meetings used to solicit public comment on a project or issue being considered for adoption by the MPO. Hearings provide a formal setting for citizens to provide comments to the MPO or another decision-making body. Meeting minutes are taken and maintained. In addition, staff members may be made available who communicate in additional languages as required.

The MPO may also choose to hold public hearings in the form of a virtual meeting. In the event that a public hearing is held in this format, along with the standard meeting requirements, additional effort should be made to ensure that members of the public and committee members are able to readily access the meeting. These efforts should include, but are not limited to, the following steps:

- 1) All public announcements for the meeting should include that the meeting will be held virtually, and a link to where people can register and/or join the meeting.
- 2) A link to register and/or join the meeting should be accessible on the FLATS webpage.
- 3) A phone number should also be made available on the FLATS webpage for citizens to call if they experience problems while attempting to log into the meeting. This phone line should be manned by someone who can assist them with joining the meeting.
- 4) Staff should make themselves available prior to the meeting date for members of the public and committee members, who may require a walk-thru/test meeting on how to join the meeting and for those who wish to ensure the electronic device they plan to join the meeting with is compatible.
- 5) When a virtual meeting is being conducted, a call in number must also be available for those who request to participate in the meeting but do not have access to internet.

The goal of a virtual meeting should be to make the meeting process not only more convenient, but to also make the meeting process more readily available and practical for members of the public, and committee members to participate.

Activities: Long Range Transportation Plans, Transportation Improvement Program, corridor studies, Project Development & Environmental studies, and other planning studies as needed for other MPO activities.

Comment Forms/ Complaint Procedure

Description: Comment forms are often used to solicit public comment on specific issues being presented at a workshop, other public meetings or accompany documents made available for public review. Comment forms can be very general in nature, or can ask for very specific feedback. For example, a comment form may ask for comments on specific alignment alternatives being considered during a corridor study, or may ask for a

person's general feelings about any aspect of transportation. Comment forms can also be included in publications and on web sites to solicit input regarding the subject of the publication and/or the format of the publication or web site.

In alignment with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, these comment opportunities allow for complaints associated with minority groups as described in Title VI of the U.S. Code (42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq.). Such complaints will be logged in at the MPO office, reviewed according to the Department of Justice's investigation procedures manual then forwarded to SCDOT and FHWA for further review and direction. Title VI complaints may be e-mailed, mailed by post or communicated directly by calling or visiting the MPO office. This information is shown on the cover of this document.

Activities: Public workshops, open houses, hearings and other meetings, accompany MPO documents on public display, general MPO activities.

Surveys

Description: Surveys are used when very specific input from the public is desired. A survey can be used in place of comment cards to ask very specific questions such as whether a person supports a specific alignment in a corridor study. Surveys are also used to gather technical data during corridor and planning studies. For example, participants may be asked about their daily travel patterns.

Activities: Conduct on-line surveys on issues and needs to provide input into the plans.

Posters and Flyers

Description: Posters and flyers are used to announce meetings and events and are distributed to public places such as City/Town Halls, libraries and community centers for display. The announcement may contain a brief description of the purpose of a meeting, the time(s) and location(s), and contact information. Posters and flyers may be used to reach a large audience that cannot be reached using direct mailings and/or newsletters.

Activities: Corridor studies, small-area studies, other planning studies, regular and special MPO activities.

Distribution Sites

Description: All MPO documents released for public review and comment are disseminated to the Florence County Libraries and located at the Florence County Planning and Building Inspections Department to afford the public the opportunity to review the documents. The documents are currently available in English. Spanish language documentation will be explored if necessary.

Activities: Documents for review made available to the public.

Partner Agencies

Description: The MPO is dependent upon Federal and State guidelines for planning transportation projects. Continued interaction and communication enables the MPO to remain up-to-date on policies and project status. The following table lists those agencies which it consults for transportation plans:

- South Carolina Department of Transportation
- South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control
- U.S. Department of Transportation
 - Federal Highway Administration
 - Federal Transit Administration
- Pee Dee Regional Transportation Authority
- Senior Citizens Association of Florence
- Darlington County Council on Aging
- Florence DSN Board
- Florence County
- Florence County Municipalities
- Pee Dee Council of Governments
- U.S. Department of the Interior
 - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Activities: Consultation with partner agencies about day-to-day operations as necessary.

Table 1. Summary Public Participation Policy Table

Program Adoption	Public Meetings	Comment Period	Public Participation Techniques		Remarks
			Required	Proactive	
Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)	Initial Meeting, Public Meeting on Draft by FLATS Study Team, and FLATS Policy Committee	30 Days	Legal Notice in Print Media	Web Site Comment Forms	Updated every five (5) years. Comments received included in LRTP
Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)	Public Meeting on Draft by FLATS Study Team, and FLATS Policy Committee	21 Days	Legal Notice in Print Media	Web Site Comment Forms	Updated every six (6) years. Comments received provided to FLATS Study Team and FLATS Policy Committee
Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)	Public Meeting on Draft by FLATS Study Team, and FLATS Policy	21 Days	Legal Notice in Print Media	Web Site Comment Forms	Updated every year (reflecting a two-year time period)

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	Committee				
Public Participation Plan	Public Meeting on Draft by FLATS Study Team, and FLATS Policy Committee	45 Days	Legal Notice in Print Media	Web Site Comment Forms	Updated every 3 years. Comments received provided to FLATS Study Team and FLATS Policy Committee
Program Amendments					
Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)	Public Meeting on Draft by FLATS Study Team, and FLATS Policy Committee	30 Days	Legal Notice in Print Media	Web Site Comment Forms	As Needed
Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)	Public Meeting on Draft by FLATS Study Team, and FLATS Policy Committee	21 Days	Legal Notice in Print Media	Web Site Comment Forms	As Needed
Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)	NA	21 Days	Legal Notice in Print Media	Web Site Comment Forms	As Needed
Public Participation Plan (PPP)	Public Meeting on Draft by FLATS Study Team, and FLATS Policy Committee	45 Days	Legal Notice in Print Media	Web Site Comment Forms	As Needed

Table 2. Summary of Other Public Participation Tools

Program Adoption	Public Meetings	Comment Period	Required Legal & Proactive Public Participation Techniques		Remarks
Open Committee & Board Meetings	Scheduled as Needed	Dependent upon agenda items	Legal Notice in Print Media	Website	Includes a public comment period
Annual Calendar	NA	NA	Last Meeting of Year		Maintained and updated regularly
Newsletter	NA	NA	Posted on FLATS website, notification of posting to Master Database and distributed at various local venues		Produced annually
Website	NA	NA	NA		Updated Regularly

Staff Presentations	NA	NA	NA	Upon Request
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Evaluation Methods and Performance Goals

In order to determine the effectiveness of the public involvement tools, they must be evaluated and compared to established performance goals. The typical methods for evaluating the effectiveness of public involvement tools are surveys and quantitative statistical analysis. This section briefly describes evaluation methods used by the MPO. For each public involvement tool, performance goals and methods for meeting those goals have been identified.

Surveys

Surveys typically consist of short, specific questions regarding public involvement tools that are ongoing or that were used on a specific project. Surveys can be conducted in person, by phone, mail or e-mail. Face-to-face and telephone surveys provide quick responses and can be used when a respondent's answer may lead to a follow-up question. For example, respondents may be asked if advertisements are an effective notification tool. If the response is no, the surveyor can ask the respondent why advertisements are not effective and also what other tools they would prefer. In person and telephone surveys can target specific areas or groups or can be random sampling. Mail surveys may be used to provide written record of respondent's answers. Mail-back surveys can be distributed at meetings, inside other publications, or by mailing directly to potential respondents. Respondents can be a targeted group, such as members of special interest groups or residents of specific areas, or they can be randomly generated. Return postage for mail surveys typically can be pre-paid by the MPO, or can be the responsibility of the respondent. E-mail surveys, like mail surveys, provide a written record of responses. Unlike mail-back surveys, there is little to no reproduction or distribution cost to the MPO to send out the surveys, and little to no cost to respondents to return a response. To use e-mail surveys, it is necessary to have e-mail addresses for the targeted respondents, and random distribution rarely an option.

Statistical Analysis

Statistics can be used to determine the "return on the investment" of producing public involvement tools. For example, the number of persons attending an activity can be compared to the number of persons that were notified of the activity. This type of evaluation can be an indicator of whether or not the tools used for public involvement are actually reaching the intended audience, or which tools had a greater response rate. Statistical analysis is used to evaluate survey responses and the results of the analysis are compared to the evaluation measures to determine the rate of success of public involvement tools.

Improvement Strategies

The MPO continually strives for improved public involvement. Improvements should be made to increase public awareness and to improve the quantity and quality of information provided to the public. The decisions made by the MPO affect the entire population, both residents and visitors, of Florence County. Therefore, seeking public input on those decisions is vital to the success of the MPO as the agency responsible for transportation planning. Each time a public involvement evaluation is performed, a list of improvement strategies needed should be identified for implementation. If improvement is needed for an ongoing public involvement task, such as the MPO web site, a reasonable completion date should be established. If improvement is needed for one-time activities, such as corridor studies, the improvement should be implemented where appropriate on future activities.

Specific Monitoring and Evaluation

FLATS staff will monitor the amount of public participation resulting from each public outreach activity. This will be done through various means, including:

- Take attendance at public outreach meetings using a sign-sheet, to include the FLATS Policy Committee meetings;
- Keeping a log of contacts with the public, via phone, mail, email, fax, in-person meetings, or other means, which resulted from a public outreach activity;
- Keeping a record of attendance and involvement at events which are attended by FLATS staff and include a public outreach component for FLATS;
- Tracking the number of completed surveys or comment cards received from a public outreach event;
- Tracking distribution of public information materials, including brochures, newsletters and other publications;
- Tracking number of email and mailing addresses on the FLATS Distribution list; and
- Other means appropriate for the type of public outreach used.

Table 3. Public Participation Tools Evaluation Table

Public Participation Tool	Evaluation Criteria	Performance Goal(s)	Methods to Meet Goal(s)
Public Participation Process	No Measure/PPP should reflect the practices of the MPO	N/A	Update at least every 3 years to incorporate the improvement strategies from public involvement evaluations.
MPO Web Site	Number of Hits	Minutes of Hits	Use other public involvement tools to increase advertisement of the web site

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MPO Master Database	Number of returned items	Max. of 2% return rate per mailing	Make immediate corrections when items are returned
Public Notices	No Measure/This tool is required by Statue	NA	NA
Annual News Letter	Calls, letters, etc. Number of returns	N/A. Return rate is addressed under MPO Master Database	Continue items that receive favorable comments and address items that receive negative comments
Other Media (newspaper, electronic media)	Calls, letters, etc.; number of persons contacted	Reference in project area community newsletters, presence on electronic news shows quarterly and public service announcement for public meetings associated with L RTP	Provide information to the publishers of these newsletters in a timely fashion. Investigate all possible newsletters that may reach an affected area.
Direct Mailing	Calls, Letters, etc.; Number of persons contacted	Min. of 15% of meeting attendees/survey respondents indicated that they received the mailing. – OR – Reaches a min of 85% of persons affected by a project	Increase/Decrease mailing list to more accurately target affected areas. Use the most up-to-date information for Florence County Assessor's Office.
Press Releases	Calls, Letters, etc	No Standard. Format may be modified based on specific comments received	Encourage publication of press releases and general articles by keeping the media informed
Project Specific Website	Calls, letters, etc.; Number of hits	Min of 30 hits/ month. Increase of at least 10% over the life of the project. Expectations may be higher depending on the size of the study area	Use other public involvement tools to increase advertisement of the web site
Project Specific Meetings/ Workshops	Calls, letters, etc.; Attendance	3%-5% of affected population (based on study area) in attendance	Schedule at convenient times and locations; hold multiple workshops; use multiple tools to increase awareness.
Email Announcements	Calls, letters, etc.; Number of persons contacted	Min. of 5% of meeting attendees/survey respondents indicated that they saw the announcement	Increase email list by advertising the availability of email announcements using other public involvement tools.
MPO Logo	Calls, letters, etc.; Number of persons contracted	Recognition of the logo	The MPO logo should be used on all MPO products and publications, and on materials for all MPO sponsored activities
Surveys	Calls, letters, etc.; Number of respondents	60% of contacted persons participate in the survey –OR– 20% mail recipients return the survey	Encourage response by explaining the importance of receiving feedback to improve the planning process

The Florence Area Transportation Study (FLATS) has been a cooperative transportation planning effort of the City of Florence, Town of Quincy, County of Florence and the South Carolina Department of Highways and Public Transportation in cooperation with the United States Department of Transportation since November 26, 1969.

The Florence area became an urbanized area of over 50,000 persons according to the 1980 Census and as a result required to comply with Federal-Aid Highway Acts (23 USC 101 et seq) and the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964), as amended.

In 1982, pursuant to section 450.106(a) of 23 CFR 450, Richard W. Riley, Governor of South Carolina, agreed with the units of general purpose local government in the Florence urbanized area in their designation of the Florence Area Transportation Study Policy Committee as the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the urbanized area.

The City of Florence Planning was the Administrator for the FLATS MPO beginning in 1997. Due to the unavailability of past records, it is not certain when the original Public Participation Plan was adopted or the amendment dates. The dates below reflect the Plan since 2008.

- Adoption: July 1, 2008
- Amended: June 6, 2011
- Amended: June 10, 2013
- Amended: June 27, 2016
- Amended: June 24, 2019
- Amended: May 18, 2020