

MTPO 2023 Title VI Annual Report

Purpose & Background

The mission of the MTPO's Title VI program is to implement compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This Act ensures that no person is excluded from participation in; denied the benefits of; or is subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Transportation. The MTPO will provide leadership and guidance to promote and engage the participation of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability or socioeconomic status. The reporting period for this report is from September of 2022 through August of 2023. These public participation and outreach techniques are also in accordance with the MTPO's current Public Participation Plan (PPP).

As outlined in the MTPO's PPP, the MTPO encourages the public to participate in the transportation planning process through a variety of public participation techniques. One of the roles of the MTPO is to provide information to the public and to facilitate active participation in the transportation decision-making process. The MTPO utilizes maps that depict areas of the MTPO Planning Area that have higher concentrations of persons that may fall under the protections of Title VI. The map depicts areas of socioeconomic characteristics indicative of those described through Environmental Justice (EJ). Transportation project distributions are then analyzed with respect to their proximity to these EJ Areas.

Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice (EJ) is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. On April 15, 1997, USDOT issued its Final Order to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low Income Populations. Among other provisions, the Order requires programming and planning activities to:

- Include explicit consideration of the effects of transportation decisions on minority and low-income populations.
- Provide meaningful opportunities for public involvement by members of minority and low-income populations.
- Gather, where relevant, appropriate and practical, demographic information (race, color, national origin, and income level) on the populations served or affected by transportation decisions.
- Minimize or mitigate any adverse impact on minority or low-income populations.

2023 Title VI Compliance Activities and Current MTPO Projects

During this reporting period, the MTPO, with the assistance of consultants, embarked on two new studies, an update to Bikeways Master Plan, and a Multi-school Safe-Routes-to School (SRTS) Plan. As part of the outreach and information gathering process for the SRTS Plan, hundreds of surveys/questionnaires were distributed to the parents, teachers, principals and students of all 14 elementary schools included in the SRTS Plan. The information gathered through these surveys was

paramount to the success of achieving the objectives of the SRTS Plan, which is to ultimately provide resources, technical assistance, and project funding to encourage and enable students in grades K-12 to walk, ride or roll to school. A comprehensive approach to SRTS includes both infrastructure and non-infrastructure countermeasures and programs. This Plan is the first phase of the process, which will identify barriers to the safe and secure routes to school, from the home to the front door of the school. Many of these schools are located in areas defined as “Environmental justice (EJ)” areas, as defined by the MTPO. Throughout the process, the MTPO staff and partners, along with the grass roots Complete Street Advisory Committee (CSAC) acting as the Steering Committee, were kept abreast of the plan development progress. The document is on schedule to be completed prior to the end of 2023.

The Bikeways Master Plan (BWMP) Update, branded “Phase V” is also an MTPO sponsored Plan which is currently underway for the MTPO Planning Area. This is a Plan to construct or mark new bikeways infrastructure focused in the Downtown and central portions of the City. These new routes are almost entirely in the EJ Areas of the MTPO Planning Area. Again, the CSAC which includes membership from various community multi-modal and health groups are acting as the steering committee. Other outreach includes solicitation of public opinion at community events such as food truck vendor, Downtown outdoor concerts and “First Fridays” were also visited, seeking input on the Bikeway route selections. In addition, these plans are also mentioned on our Facebook and Twitter social media sites.

There were also three (3) amendments to the 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), an Update to the Title VI Plan, both the hard copy and the website, and the approval of the 2023 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). Activities associated with the approval processes included both in-person and virtual meetings, with notices directly emailed, posted online, advertised on the City’s Television network, and printed in the Official City newspaper. In addition to all meeting materials, direct mailings also included a ZOOM meeting information, when applicable, and information on accessibility accommodations if desired.

All Neighborhood Improvement Associations (NIA’s) are also included via association president of all public notifications released by the MTPO. Disadvantaged socioeconomic status as described by the department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for the purpose of distribution of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, are those individuals or families making less than 80% of the Area median income, or “Low-Moderate Income (LMI) households. All NIAs, meet this income qualification guideline. Therefore, for EJ and Title VI compliance purposes, all NIA’s are within our EJ target area.

Other groups included on our contact list include the Topeka Independent Living Resource Center (TILRC), an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) organization; Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority (TMTA) and Paratransit organizations; Kansas American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today (ADAPT); the Topeka Branch NAACP; and the Topeka Justice Unity and Ministry Project (JUMP). Social media outlets utilized to reach Title VI groups included Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and NextDoor. The MTPO has representatives from all of the afore mentioned targeted populations and they are listed on its direct mailing list for all public notices for document updates and associated activities.

2023 Annual Bike Counts

Utilizing volunteers from the community, the MTPO gathered bike/pedestrian data from 20 locations throughout the MTPO Area, for the purpose of bikeways and trail usage. This data serves as a useful tool when determining where and which routes may need to be added or improved.

Heartland Healthy Neighborhoods (HHN)

MTPO staff attended, via ZOOM, monthly meetings of the Heartland Healthy Neighborhood and Heartland Visioning meetings. Persons representing various interests among the City including business, education, recreation, health and transportation attend these meetings. These meetings provide a platform to espouse transportation and healthy lifestyle issues and in turn gives the MTPO an opportunity to gather opinions and concerns from a broad and diverse representation of the community. Many of the persons in these groups also serve on MTPO transportation committees. (ongoing)

Respectfully Submitted,

Carlton Scroggins AICP, MTPO Manager