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# CHAPTER 2 • PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT & PROJECT COMMUNICATION

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## 2.1 Introduction

Public involvement and communications activities are a mandated component of the environmental analysis and documentation processes as outlined by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. This process provides interested stakeholders with an opportunity to share information and feedback about project issues, as well as express their concerns, opinions and other pertinent ideas regarding the study. The information gathered from stakeholders during the public input process is then provided to sponsors. Comments and input received during the public input period are addressed as part of the preliminary project development and are documented as part of the project's reporting process – the completion of the environmental document.

The information in this section details strategies and activities that were utilized in extending the Initiative's public reach. The project team held Open House meetings and developed standard documents such as brochures and newsletters. Initiative efforts went above and beyond typical public involvement activities by seeking out community groups and organizations, building a roving project display and preparing written materials for placement in local publications. These activities ensured that an extended public reach for the Initiative was achieved.

## 2.2 Public Notice

The Federal Highway Administration published in the Federal Register on Thursday, June 1, 2000 a "notice to advise the public" that this undertaking – the North South Transportation Initiative, also known as the I-75 Major Investment Study (MIS), will serve as the formal public input process for the preparation of one or more environmental documents; either an Environmental Assessment (EA) and/or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Simply put, this means that the entire North South Transportation Initiative project – the I-75 MIS, will serve as the official public input process for the preparation of one or more environmental documents.

This published notice, also known as a Notice of Intent (NOI), served as just one mechanism to inform interested stakeholders that the sponsoring agencies were soliciting public and agency input on the North South Transportation Initiative.

In addition to the NOI, legal advertisement of the scoping meetings were published in various community newspapers across the study area, including the Cincinnati Enquirer, Cincinnati Post, Kentucky Post, Community Press, the Hamilton Journal News, the Middletown Journal, Franklin Chronicle, Dayton Daily News, Troy Daily News and Centerville Times. In addition, paid advertisements were placed in the Cincinnati Herald, Middletown Journal, Hamilton Journal News, Community Recorder, Tri-County Press, Dayton Daily News, Troy Daily News and Centerville-Bellbrook Times.

### [Task Force, Oversight Committee & Coalition Meetings](#)

The Initiative's corridor includes the major cities of Cincinnati, Middletown and Dayton as well as 6 counties, 22 other cities, 6 villages, and 14 townships, across two states – Kentucky and Ohio. Representatives of these communities are included in two task force groups, one for the OKI and one for the MVRPC jurisdictions, which have been established to help guide this Initiative.

Task Forces from OKI and MVRPC combined to form the North South Transportation Initiative Coalition. Two Coalition meetings were held at the direction of OKI and MVRPC.

The Task Force and Oversight Committee structure was designed to provide guidance on issues that are of significance to the respective regions they represent. They represent a cross section of many jurisdictions and interests. Similarly, the Coalition represents the

combined interests of both regions and serves to function as an over-arching advisory body to detail and discuss issues pertinent to both regions in a collective manner.

A list of Task Force and Oversight Committee participants and all meeting minutes are available in Appendix A – Public Involvement and Communications Program.

In addition to the Coalition, Oversight Committee and Task Forces, there were also a number of other technical committees charged with addressing very specific issues. These groups met on an as needed basis at the direction of the OKI Oversight Committee and the MVRPC North South Transportation Initiative Task Force. Details on the schedule and result of these meetings can be found in Appendix A – Public Involvement and Communications Program.

## Stakeholder Interviews

Nearly 100 individual stakeholder interviews were held during the scoping process to obtain feedback from leaders in the North South Transportation Initiative Corridor. These interviews were held either individually or in a group setting. Stakeholders included federal, state and local officials as well as prominent business and community leaders. In addition to personal interviews, approximately 100 stakeholders were asked to return completed mail-in surveys. Appendix A – Public Involvement and Communications Program provides a detailed summary of the results found in the Stakeholder Interview process.

## Surveys

The project team utilized surveys at various points of study development to gain important public feedback. Surveys were administered at Stakeholder Interviews, Open House meetings, through the web site and in special boxes stationed at various locations throughout the Initiative study area communities.

Survey results were tabulated and distributed among the project team members in report form so that this feedback could have an immediate impact on study considerations.

For more details on these studies and their results, please refer to Appendix A – Public Involvement and Communications Program.

## Open House Meetings

The Initiative Team scheduled and conducted three series of open house style meetings for the scoping process. These meetings were held at various appropriate times in project advancement and at various locations throughout the study area.

The meetings were held at various times, predominantly in the early evening hours to afford maximum participation. In addition, some lunch-time meetings were held in Downtown Cincinnati and Downtown Dayton to give an opportunity for stakeholders to participate at an alternative time. Overall, 29 Open House style public meetings were held throughout the study process. A specific listing of the dates, times and locations of these meetings can be found in Appendix A – Public Involvement and Communications Program.

In addition to these meetings, the project team went out to the regularly scheduled meetings of numerous community groups and civic organizations. Specifically-tailored presentations were given to these groups with the intent of engaging their membership in project-related dialogue. A specific listing of these meetings can be found in Appendix A – Public Involvement and Communications Program.



All together, nearly 500 individuals participated in at least one of these meetings.

## Newsletters

Over the course of the project, three newsletters were developed to provide specific project information. Volume I was released in spring 2001, and included details about sub-corridors and work group areas as well as information on preliminary alternatives.

Volume II was released in winter 2002, and detailed some of the refined alternatives including the Downtown Dayton Sub-corridor as well as some specific highway and transit alternatives.

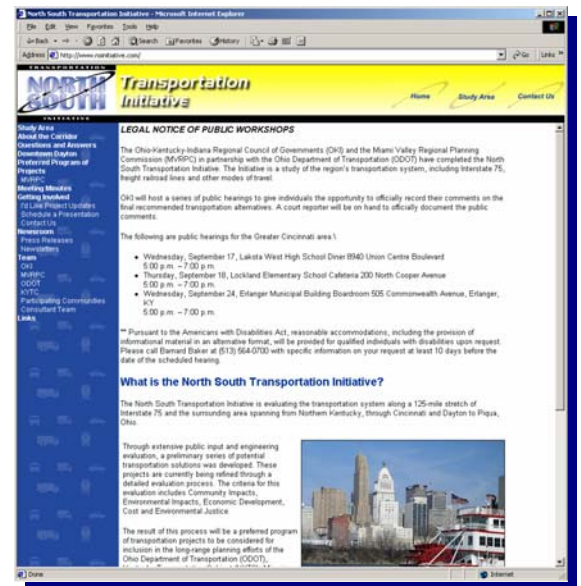
Volume III of the newsletter contained the final program of preferred projects and information on the alternative evaluation process. It was released in summer 2003.

All three volumes were widely distributed to OKI and MVRPC mailing lists as well as those developed over the course of the Initiative. In total, nearly 25,000 brochures were distributed during the Initiative.

## Website

The North South Transportation Initiative also employed a project website ([www.nsinitiative.com](http://www.nsinitiative.com)). This site contained updated project information relative to study process, highway and transit alternatives and the Downtown Dayton Sub-corridor.

The site also provided interactive opportunities to ask questions or make comments about the Initiative and provided an opportunity to request additional information or a project presentation. Reports from all OKI Oversight Committee, the MVRPC North South Transportation Initiative Task Force and full Coalition meetings were also available.



## Roving Project Display

A roving project display was also employed as a means to extend the Initiative's public reach. The display appeared at a number of major office buildings, employment centers and public facilities on a rotating basis. Information on the display was continually updated to stay in touch with current Initiative events. Appendix A – Public Involvement and Communications Program contains more details on this display, including a list of sites visited.

## Brochure

A project brochure was developed in the very early stages of the Initiative. The purpose of this brochure was to provide basic information relative to the Initiative as well as its process and goals. More than 10,000 brochures were distributed throughout the course of the study to individual mailing lists for OKI and MVRPC; at survey box and roving display locations and at Open House meetings.

A copy of this brochure is available in Appendix A – Public Involvement and Communications Program.

2.3  
Public/Agency  
Comment &  
Response

Throughout the study process, the project team responded to letters, e-mails phone calls and other forms of communication from the general public. A record of each piece of correspondence is included in Appendix A – Public Involvement and Communications Program.

On July 12, 2000, the Federal Highway Administration – Ohio Division sent a letter of invitation asking for interest in the study and soliciting participation in a special scoping meeting designed for all Federal and State permitting agencies having jurisdiction in the North South Transportation Initiative study area.

The letter sought to inform the agencies about the Initiative and to solicit from them how they would like to be involved and receive project information. It also asked for them to provide feedback as to their possible participation in an Agency Input Meeting.

This list of invited agencies included the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the United States Department of the Interior, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Kentucky Department for Environmental Protection and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Natural Resources. To date, responses have been received from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife. Based on the few responses received, an Agency Scoping Meeting was not scheduled.