

# **Chapter 2**

## **Public Involvement**



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### **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

#### **Public Involvement in Transportation Planning**

The goal of OKI's public involvement policy is to secure an active and representative participation from all segments of the community in planning and decision making about regional issues, goals, problems, alternatives and solutions. To achieve this goal, OKI commits to:

- Recognize the importance of proactive citizen involvement to implementing planning recommendations
- Identify affected and interested publics, with special efforts to identify Environmental Justice target populations
- Tailor public involvement techniques as appropriate to the diverse needs of the public and the variety of planning elements
- Take all reasonable actions to secure participation and input from Environmental Justice target populations, including:
  - Disseminating information using means that are appropriate to the target audiences
  - Holding meetings in neighborhood-based ADA accessible locations near public transportation routes, when feasible
- Evaluate public involvement processes and procedures periodically so that adjustments can be made for maximum effectiveness

OKI has convened a task force composed of elected officials and representatives from organizations serving the elderly, disabled, low income, African-American and Hispanic communities in the Tri-State. The goal of the task force is to develop an Environmental Justice (EJ) policy for OKI, which will include a recommended process for informing and involving the above-mentioned populations. Until the policy is complete, OKI will make every reasonable effort to include Environmental Justice considerations in public outreach programs.

As described below, these public involvement efforts are integrated into all three of OKI's major transportation planning processes:

- The corridor or sub-regional planning addressed by corridor studies (previously called major investment studies) such as the I-71 Corridor Study, the Eastern Corridor Study, the Northwest Butler Transportation Study, the North/South Transportation Initiative and the Central Area Loop Study (see Chapter 13). OKI has found that this is a most effective approach to public involvement.
- The short range planning addressed by the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
- The long range planning addressed by this regional transportation plan

### **Corridor Level Planning**

Corridor studies are part of the long range transportation planning process. At the corridor and sub-regional levels, where regional transportation planning is conducted through major investment studies (or corridor studies), a relatively intense level of public involvement is provided through core advisory groups, small task force study groups and public meetings. In the corridor studies currently under way, advisory groups include about 75 individuals on the I-71 Oversight Committee, about 60 individuals on the Eastern Corridor Task Force, about 80 individuals on the North/South Transportation Initiative Advisory Committee, 42 individuals on the Central Area Loop Study Task Force and about 40 individuals on the Northwest Butler Transportation Study Advisory Committee.

OKI has conducted several corridor studies and has three currently under way. The population of the areas covered by these studies represents about 60 percent of the regional population. The land area covered by these studies represents about one-third of the regional land area.

Nearly all the identified EJ target minority and zero car household areas are/were covered by a corridor study. About three-fourths of the elderly zones, two-thirds of low income zones and about one-half of the disabled zones are/were covered by corridor studies. Please refer to Chapter 16: Community Impacts on the definition and identification of target zones.

The core advisory groups help design a public involvement process, develop study goals, identify problems and alternatives, and make recommendations to be acted upon by OKI's Board of Trustees. Members represent affected communities and interest groups, regional transportation organizations, and local, state, and federal transportation departments.

To address specific study needs for the I-71 Corridor Study, public involvement techniques were tailored to include a newsletter, information hotline, computer bulletin board service, "brown bag lunch chats" at OKI on a regular basis, and a videotape made available for loan at no cost to individuals and groups.

For the Eastern Corridor Study, the public involvement program was designed based on interviews with 60 community leaders and survey responses from an additional 126 community leaders and stakeholders. This outreach effort was used to develop a separate guide for the study's public involvement program. The recommended program emphasized a need for networking among existing community organizations as a means of spreading information and gathering input, in addition to utilizing newsletters and workshops.

The North/South Transportation Initiative brings together for the first time OKI and the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission (MVRPC), the Dayton area Metropolitan Planning Organization. Due to the sheer size of the study area of the North/South Transportation Initiative, special coordination between the two regions as well as throughout the entire study area is required. Public involvement efforts similar to those used in previous major investment studies are being used, such as key stakeholder interviews, newsletters (printed in English and Spanish), public involvement meetings, website postings and brochures. Presentations to communities and groups will be given to ensure an informed group of stakeholders. In addition, this is a key freight corridor of national significance and private sector freight interests are being actively sought.

The Central Area Loop Study involves studying ways to enhance the mobility in the most urbanized portion of the OKI region in the Cincinnati, Covington and Newport central business districts. A diverse group of interests requires substantial information sharing and public meetings to address the various needs of the resident, business, social and cultural interests in the study area.

The Northwest Butler Transportation Study incorporates approaches similar to the other studies. Key stakeholders were interviewed; special populations were identified and met with to identify their transportation needs. The project is still under way and an intense public involvement plan is being and will continue to be implemented to address the needs of this diverse study area.

At key decision points, the corridor studies have made or will make extensive use of public workshops for gaining insight into public perspectives on how to address travel demands of the future. In all four studies, these public involvement sessions have been used for narrowing the wide field of alternative transportation choices to a small number for in-depth analysis. At the same

time, these study processes have made it possible to create databases involving thousands of individuals who have expressed interest in transportation issues.

Included in the public involvement activities is the Environmental Justice Action Plan developed for each of the corridor studies underway. The Environmental Justice Action Plan is designed to involve EJ communities in a meaningful way. For each of the studies, consultant services are retained to assist in the development and implementation of the public involvement activities related to the study area, including EJ efforts.

The primary tasks are as follows. EJ communities within the study corridor and any other groups outside the corridor which could be affected by the actions of the study are identified and met with in order to understand and involve these groups. This research includes the population served and/or affected by race, color, national origin and/or income level. An effort is also made to identify households without automobiles, and the elderly and disabled who may have special transportation needs.

The purpose of these efforts is to analyze the environmental and social effects of proposed actions on minority and low income communities and to ensure that these communities have adequate access to public information relating to the locally preferred alternatives developed and are provided opportunities for participation in the process.

Identification of potential EJ communities is done for each corridor study by contacting numerous public agencies, social service groups, and church and community leaders. Within the project study area, geographic areas are identified for more engaged public involvement efforts. Surveys are sent to agencies that have a link to these communities. Telephone follow-ups to the surveys are conducted to identify special needs of the various communities.

Outreach efforts are, by design, more intense in these areas in an attempt to attract input from the residents of EJ communities. Outreach to target (EJ) populations have included the following:

- Working with advisers who are familiar and active in the EJ community and familiar with effective methods for engaging the EJ community
- Contacting relevant civic and professional organizations that represent the EJ community to solicit their help in actively engaging their constituents
- Distributing information in the form of flyers, brochures, newsletters, notices at grocery and popular retail locations where the EJ community lives and works

- Publicizing meeting times and locations via paid advertising and non-paid coverage in local media that reach the EJ community
- Providing meetings at locations in close proximity to public transit service and that are ADA accessible. When possible, meetings are scheduled which coincide with other events that reach the EJ community.

Consideration of the physical and social impacts of alternatives are performed in such a way that adverse impacts are minimized to the extent possible.

Outreach related to transportation issues in the OKI region has also benefited by the recently completed MetroMoves, a plan for the future of transit in Greater Cincinnati developed by Metro, the region's largest transit provider. OKI participated on the advisory committee for the initiative and this *OKI 2030 Regional Transportation Plan* fully supports MetroMoves. The recommendations from MetroMoves, which provides the framework for improved transit, are incorporated into the recommendations of this plan as stated in Chapter 11. More importantly, however, is the extent of the outreach program MetroMoves used to acquire input from local officials, stakeholder groups, transit agencies, and the general public. Three regional forums, held to engage stakeholders, attracted over 700 participants. Metro also hosted a Virtual Forum on its website, using a mix of on-line surveys, "paper" survey cards and a telephone hot-line to solicit input. Nearly 10,000 people have participated in the MetroMoves Virtual Forum. Metro also met regularly with a wide array of organizations and communities throughout the development of the plan. These included several agencies which serve the low income and minority populations in Hamilton County.

### **Short Range and Long Range Continuous Planning**

As a designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) with a variety of responsibilities for transportation planning and programming, OKI is governed by a Board of Trustees, which meets on a quarterly basis. The Board chooses an Executive Committee that meets on a monthly basis to discuss agency programs, establish policies, adopt plans, and resolve issues. The Executive Committee has established an Intermodal Coordinating Committee (ICC) to provide technical advice on transportation issues.

Just as the corridor advisory groups make recommendations to the OKI Executive Committee regarding the major investment studies, the ICC makes recommendations to the Executive Committee and/or the Board of Trustees on the continuous transportation planning process. As a standing committee, the ICC advises on technical issues related to both short range and long range transportation planning, i.e., the TIP and the regional transportation plan.

The ICC has approximately 70 members. Members represent federal, state and local transportation agencies; county planning commissions and other major planning organizations; and a spectrum of business, civic, environmental and utility interests from both the public and private sectors.

### **Public Participation in the Plan Update Process**

To support public involvement in the plan update process, OKI has made a concentrated, ongoing effort to:

- Identify deficiencies in the existing transportation system's ability to meet year 2030 travel demand
- Present the range of issues and concerns to be addressed through transportation planning
- Introduce potential transportation improvement strategies and projects for public review and debate
- Provide adequate opportunities for public discussion of the plan's financial implications
- Integrate public preferences into the transportation plan update

To meet these objectives, OKI has applied a combination of techniques to provide information and obtain input from both transportation stakeholders and the general public. The key elements of the public participation program for the plan update have involved OKI working with members from its standing committees during plan formulation, hosting two rounds of interactive workshops, and conducting two preference surveys. In addition, special efforts were made to identify and address the transportation needs of low income and minority populations.

Community meetings were held at locations easily accessible for target populations. Press releases were sent to Hispanic and African-American newspapers. Draft documents were placed in public libraries throughout the region, Ohio and Kentucky district highway offices, and at OKI for public review and comment. In addition, for the first time, a draft of this document was placed on the OKI website for review and comment.

Staff met with television and print media in an effort to publicize the plan and prompt comment from residents and the business community. Interested groups such as the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce were given presentations on the highlights of the plan.

### **OKI Committees**

As the long range plan update got under way, OKI's ICC formed a subcommittee to review staff progress and provide coordination on technical

issues. This ICC subcommittee, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan Advisory Committee (MTPAC) convened 13 meetings over the course of 14 months. The MTPAC membership was selected in such a way as to have balance geographically as well as by professional/interest group. The subcommittee was provided information on key elements of the groundwork for updating the metropolitan transportation plan through a series of draft reports accompanied by staff presentations. The subcommittee discussed the issues and, in turn, provided staff with information.

Once the draft plan was completed, it was presented to the ICC and Executive Committee. At this meeting, each member received a draft executive summary of the plan for review purposes. Copies of the full plan were provided to members upon request.

### **Interactive Workshops**

OKI hosted two rounds of interactive workshops, one near the beginning and one near the end of the plan update's preparation. Each round consisted of seven public workshops, with one in each of the region's Ohio and Kentucky counties. Workshops were used to communicate with the region's residents about regional transportation issues and also issues of special concern in particular geographic corridors within the region.

The workshops provided participants with opportunities to obtain and review information, ask questions, and express their opinions. These were recorded and forwarded to the ICC for their consideration and kept on file at OKI. Public comments include not only the statements made at the public meetings but also public comments transmitted to OKI, responses to preference surveys that were distributed at both rounds of public meetings (described below), and comments from agency reviews of the draft plan. Public comments from the first round of workshops were considered in drafting the plan. Public comments from the second round of workshops were considered by the ICC for incorporation into the final plan presented to OKI's Board of Trustees for adoption.

For the first round of workshops, held in May 2000, key features were as follows.

This round was designed for exchanging information on base data and the alternatives to be considered in addressing year 2030 travel demand. Public perspectives on transportation modes provided direction for the plan's development.

Each of the workshops featured seven separate information stations at which participants could obtain information, talk with staff resource people, and offer comments, and an eighth station at which participants were invited to complete

a survey and make formal comments. The seven information stations focused on overall planning process, regional growth patterns, travel characteristics, alternatives under consideration in the corridor studies, planning for freight transport, regional bicycle and pedestrian facilities, motor vehicle impacts on air quality, and programmed projects.

Notice of the meetings was provided via OKI's website, announcements at meetings including ICC, Board of Trustees meeting, during a meeting with a minority chamber of commerce as well as through press releases, telephone calls, etc.

The second round of workshops were held in June and July 2001 to provide the region's residents with information and an opportunity to provide comment on the draft plan. This round of meetings was publicized through announcements in daily and weekly newspapers; local elected officials; posting on OKI's website; direct mailings, and local libraries (which were provided copies of the draft plan). The draft plan was posted on OKI's website for review. Once adopted, the final document will be made available on-line at [www.oki.org](http://www.oki.org).

### **Preference Surveys**

At each of the two rounds of public meetings, participants were asked to complete a preference survey. The first survey, which was designed to provide direction for drafting the plan recommendations, focused on the challenge of meeting air quality and financial constraints. Its questions sought public reaction to the use of alternatives to single-occupant vehicle travel and to preferences among local funding options. The survey was distributed to workshop participants. Unfortunately, because of light attendance the results are not statistically sound, but most respondents favored a more compact development approach, technological improvements and alternatives to auto use as well as expansion of alternative modes of transport.

The second survey focused on getting input on the presented draft plan to "fine tune" the recommendations and to get a general impression of our customers' perceptions of the overall quality of the region's transportation system. Comment sheets were distributed to attendees of the public meetings and other small group meetings as well as by direct mail to various advisory group members. The comments were very diverse indicating support for increased transit by some and more highway improvements by others. It is clear that a balanced transport system is highly desired by residents of the region. The following chapters present the details of a balanced regional transportation plan.

**Public Hearing**

A public hearing was held at OKI on August 2, 2001, 7:00 p.m. Both written and oral statements were accepted into the record. Much of the testimony focused on specific highway improvements while a few testimonies were supportive of light rail and improved freight movement planning. The statements received were relayed to the Executive Committee of OKI for their consideration.