Chapter 2

Public Involvement
CHAPTER 2
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:

- Recognizing the importance of proactive citizen involvement to implementing planning recommendations
- Identifying affected and interested publics, with special efforts to communicate with Environmental Justice target populations
- Tailoring public involvement techniques as appropriate to the diverse needs of the public and the variety of planning elements
- Taking 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
- Evaluating public involvement processes and procedures periodically so that adjustments can be made for maximum effectiveness

OKI formed an Environmental Justice Advisory Committee composed of elected officials and representatives from organizations serving the elderly, disabled, low income, African-American and Hispanic communities in the Tri-State region. The advisory committee developed an Environmental Justice (EJ) policy for OKI, which includes a recommended process for informing and involving the above-mentioned populations. This policy was adopted by OKI’s Board of Trustees in April 2003. It is OKI’s mission to 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 recently completed Northwest Butler Transportation Study, the North/South Transportation Initiative and the Central Area Loop Study (see Chapter 14). OKI has found that this is a very 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. In fact, this plan contains many projects recommended from recently completed corridor studies. At the corridor and sub-regional levels, where transportation planning is conducted through major investment studies (or corridor studies), public involvement is provided primarily through core advisory groups, small task force study groups and public meetings.

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.

At key decision points, the corridor studies conduct public workshops for gaining insight into public perspectives on how to address travel demands of the future. These public involvement sessions are 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 make it possible to create databases involving thousands of individuals who have expressed interest in transportation issues.

Two corridor studies are currently underway -- Southwest Warren and Dixie Highway Corridor Transportation Studies. Both are in their initial stages, but each already has a website that features information as it is developed during the course of the study in addition to information about the study process and opportunities for public involvement. The website for the Dixie Highway Corridor study, which is unique for its focus on developing recommendations to improve traffic operations on a major arterial, offers live video coverage. Further, video images are being transmitted for a major intersection as part of an effort to collect information that will be useful for improving safety and traffic flow.

Included in the public involvement activities is an Environmental Justice component for each of the corridor studies, where appropriate. The Environmental Justice component is designed to involve EJ communities in a meaningful way. 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 purpose of these EJ efforts is to analyze the environmental and social effects of proposed actions on minority, low income, disabled, elderly populations and zero car households and to ensure that they have adequate access to public information relating to the locally preferred alternatives developed and are provided opportunities for participation in the process.

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.

**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 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 involved OKI working with members from its standing committees during plan formulation, hosting two rounds of interactive workshops, and conducting two surveys.

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, a draft of this document was placed on the OKI website for review and comment.

Staff met with 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, the Greater Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce, Butler County Transportation Improvement District, Butler County Land Use Commission, Alliance for Regional Transit and Citizens for Civic Renewal were given presentations on the highlights of the plan.

Staff presented key components of the plan on a monthly basis to the ICC and OKI Board or Executive Committee beginning in November 2003. The draft plan update was presented to the ICC and Board of Trustees in June 2004. 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
Public involvement also includes interactive workshops. Workshops are 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.

For this plan update, OKI hosted one round of interactive workshops near the beginning of the planning process and another near the end of the plan update’s preparation. The first round consisted of four public workshops and the second consisted of seven, one in each of the region’s Ohio and Kentucky counties. The workshops provided participants with opportunities to obtain and review information, ask questions, and express their opinions. These were recorded and reported to the ICC for their consideration and kept on file at OKI. Public comments included not only the statements made at the public meetings but also public comments transmitted to OKI, responses to 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.

The workshops featured information stations at which participants obtained information, talked with staff resource people, and offered comments, as well as a station at which participants were invited to complete a survey and make formal comments. The information stations focused on the overall planning process, regional growth patterns, travel characteristics, crash concentrations, planning for freight transport, regional bicycle and pedestrian facilities, motor vehicle impacts on air quality, and programmed and potential projects.

The first round of workshops, held in September-October 2003, was designed for exchanging information on base data and the alternatives to be considered in addressing year 2030 travel demand. Public perspectives on transportation issues provided direction for the plan’s development. Notice of the meetings was provided via OKI’s website, announcements at meetings including the ICC and Board of Trustees meetings, during meetings various civic groups as well as through press releases, telephone calls, etc.

The second round of workshops, held in April 2004, provided 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 also posted on OKI’s website for review. Once adopted, the final document will be made available on-line at www.oki.org.
Surveys
At each of the two rounds of public meetings, participants were asked to complete a survey. The surveys sought our customers' perceptions of the overall quality of the region’s transportation system, invited suggestions for specific road or transit improvements and asked respondents to rate the importance of various types of transportation improvements. Space was also provided for general comments.

Public Hearing
A public hearing was held at OKI on May 10, 2004. Both written and oral statements were accepted into the record. The statements received were relayed to the OKI Board of Trustees for their consideration. Comments received at the public hearing and each of the public meetings as well as through other methods are a matter of public record documented under separate cover and available for viewing during normal business hours or by special request.