ELEMENT 1

PROCESS FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

OKI seeks public involvement as a means of developing effective solutions that can be implemented to address regional issues and needs. To develop solutions that account for the region’s diversity, OKI seeks public involvement from the broad expanse of its geographic region and the many sectors of its population. To address Environmental Justice, OKI makes special efforts to involve Minority, Low Income; Elderly populations; People with Disabilities; and Zero-Car Households. Many of these special efforts are focused on Target Groups in areas where Environmental Justice population groups are most concentrated (terms are defined in Policy Element 2).

This policy element outlines OKI’s program for involving the public in regional planning and decision-making, with a focus on processes related to transportation planning. It is offered as a means of improving all levels of transportation decision-making and enabling decisions that best meet the needs of all people in the metropolitan area.

In response to federal directives, this policy accounts for the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 and the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), which was reauthorized in 1998 as the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), and new federal policies related to Environmental Justice. Together, these federal initiatives have greatly enhanced the role of public involvement in metropolitan-level planning in the past decade.

The success of efforts to involve the public in planning depends on the information provided to them and the opportunities for dialogue and comment. Other features that help determine the effectiveness of public involvement efforts include the following:

- Methods used to involve the public
- Timing of public involvement opportunities in terms of their frequency and their correlation to decision-making points
- Methods used to make the public aware of opportunities for involvement
- Access provided to information for education or comment
- Consideration given to public comments and discussion

This Policy Element 1 first summarizes OKI’s organizational structure for its provision for public involvement, then describes the focus of OKI’s public involvement program, and then presents the agency’s Public Involvement Policy.
OKI’S ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Independent of provisions in OKI’s Policy for Environmental Justice, the public is involved in OKI decision-making through provisions in the agency’s organizational structure. This structure is related to OKI’s establishment as a public, non-profit organization under the Ohio Revised Code. Agency structure, responsibilities, and authority are described in the OKI Articles of Agreement.

OKI structure includes three standing committees that involve public officials and others in the development of plans and programs and policy adoption. These major committees are the Board of Trustees, the Executive Committee, and the Intermodal Coordinating Committee (ICC). Additional opportunities for direct public involvement are provided by interim groups, such as task forces, stakeholder groups, or subcommittees, which are established for specific purposes of short duration.

As legally required, OKI’s policy-level committees are dominated by public officials that represent local governments and major transportation and planning agencies. Other public organizations, as well as individual citizens, also serve on these committees. The times and agendas of committee meetings are made available in advance by notification placed on OKI’s website, and all meetings are open to the public. Board and committee composition and major functions are summarized below.

- The **Board of Trustees** (105 members) governs OKI and is responsible for regional policy decision-making. Two thirds of the members are elected officials; the other third includes representatives of local planning agencies and individual citizens. The Board meets quarterly and the Executive Committee is drawn from its membership.

- The **Executive Committee** (32 members) serves the Board by developing consensus on area-wide or multi-jurisdictional transportation policy matters. The Executive Committee can establish policy, adopt plans, and resolve issues; it can establish additional committees for advisory purposes. Executive Committee members include an elected official from each member county’s governing body and a cross-section of local governments, and also representatives from state transportation agencies, regional planning commissions, and transit agencies. The Executive Committee meets monthly.

- The **Intermodal Coordinating Committee** (70 members) advises the Board of Trustees/Executive Committee on technical issues related to transportation planning. The ICC provides technical review and input to staff and the Executive Committee. Members include local traffic engineers and representatives of transit agencies, utilities, community and environmental groups, and state agencies. The ICC meets monthly, two days prior to
meetings of the Executive Committee.

For specific issues or projects, interim groups provide additional planning support. Members may include policy-makers, planning professionals, stakeholders, or individual citizens to provide policy and/or technical input to the transportation decision-making process. A group’s membership, mission, and duration are determined by the need it is addressing. Interim groups have provided planning support in areas such as corridor studies, long-range plan development, and bicycle planning.

**FOCUS OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT EFFORTS**

Entirely apart from the public’s participation or representation through OKI’s organizational structure, opportunities for public involvement are provided as part of OKI’s transportation planning program. These opportunities are the major focus of OKI policy provisions for public involvement and Environmental Justice.

Major opportunities for involvement in OKI’s transportation decision-making are provided through the scheduled updates of the long-range planning and short-range programming elements of the transportation planning process and the development of corridor or special studies.

- The **Long-Range Transportation Plan**, which is the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, developed through the long-range planning element of OKI’s transportation planning process, addresses the region’s transportation needs for a 20-30 year period. The public is provided opportunities for involvement in the update of the plan, which occurs every three years, and review and comment on modifications to the plan that may occur in the intervals between plan updates.

  The long-range plan is significant for establishing the federal funding eligibility of transportation projects, which must be included in an adopted plan as a requirement for federal funding. The plan’s adoption by OKI’s Board of Trustees is the final step in the update process. Plan recommendations focus on improving the function and integration of major roadway, transit, bicycle and pedestrian, and intermodal facilities. The recommendations are developed to address current transportation problems, future travel conditions (based on projections of travel demand), and federal requirements for mitigating congestion, meeting financial constraints, and addressing air quality and other environmental, social, and financial issues.

- The **Transportation Improvement Program**, or **TIP**, which is the short-range programming element of OKI’s transportation planning process, schedules transportation projects for funding and implementation over a four-
year period. The opportunity for public involvement is provided when the TIP is updated, which is every two years.

The TIP includes a variety of projects, but capacity-expansion projects recommended in the long-range plan must be included in the TIP in order to be eligible for federal funding. These projects are selected and prioritized in coordination with local governments and the Intermodal Coordinating Committee. Prioritization is based on criteria that include project contribution to reducing congestion and expanding mode choice.

- **Corridor and Special Studies** focus on specific areas within the region or specific transportation issues; they are not conducted on a scheduled basis. The study recommendations are reviewed and adopted by the Board of Trustees and incorporated into the long-range transportation plan. Opportunities for public involvement are provided during the study development and during the process of updating or amending the long-range plan to incorporate the new recommendations.

Corridor and Special Studies are conducted for problems that need detailed study. For Corridor Studies, the public involvement process is geared toward developing consensus for a solution among those who are most affected. For Special Studies, public involvement is most often designed to obtain technical or specialized input (such as the bike plan or freight study). The public involvement opportunities provided during these studies tend to generate greater numbers of participants and more intense interest than other transportation planning processes, but the participants tend to be drawn from a relatively small geographic area or interest group.

**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT POLICY**

**Goals for Involving the Public**

OKI’s public involvement program is designed to secure active and representative participation from all segments of the community in planning and decision-making about regional transportation issues, goals, problems, alternatives, and solutions. To accomplish this purpose, OKI commits to the following goals:

- **Enable an early and active role for the public in the development of transportation plans and programs**
- **Identify affected and interested publics, with special efforts to identify Environmental Justice population groups**
• Tailor public involvement techniques to meet the diverse needs of the public and the variety of planning activities

• Make special efforts to secure participation and input from Environmental Justice target groups, including the use of facilities and outreach methods that facilitate their involvement

• Consult the public about involvement methods as well as transportation planning issues

• Evaluate public involvement processes and procedures periodically so that adjustments can be made for maximum effectiveness

**Provisions for Public Meetings**

Public meetings will be convened as forums for interactive discussion on the update of the long-range transportation plan, which occurs every three years, and may also be convened for other planning issues. Comments from public meetings will be recorded and subsequently reviewed for consideration by the staff and, for the long-range transportation plan, also by the Board.

To encourage meaningful participation by the public, OKI arrangements for public meetings will provide for the following:

• Timing so that public comment can be considered as part of the planning process prior to final decision-making

• Advertising to reach a broad and diverse public

• Location in a facility that is accessible to people with physical disabilities and in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

• Design that promotes attendance and facilitates discussion by providing relevant information for public review and a viable opportunity for public comment and discussion

As standard design for OKI public meetings, the information or proposals for which public comment is sought will be presented on display boards and may also be presented in handouts and/or in a slide, video, or personal presentation. OKI will present information in a form and style to be generally understood by the public; terms commonly used only in transportation planning will be avoided or explained. Staff will be available for discussing the information and/or proposals and for answering questions from the public. The meetings will include a question-and-answer session and/or a survey form for those attending.

For public meetings designed to provide an opportunity for comment from Environmental Justice target groups, the meeting facilities will be near a public transit route. Additional detail of OKI policy for public meetings is provided below.
Schedule and Scope of Public Meetings for the Long-Range Plan

For the long-range plan, OKI will hold an initial round of public meetings at the beginning of the update process and a second round of public meetings at the end of the process. Each round will include at least ten meetings geographically distributed so there is at least one meeting per county and no fewer than three meetings in EJ target areas. The first round of public meetings will provide information and an opportunity to comment on the planning process and transportation problems, base data and assumptions, and alternative solutions. The second round of public meetings will seek comment on recommendations presented in the draft plan. Both rounds will also include the project list from the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

Notification Process for Public Meetings

The general public, elected officials, and representatives of agencies and organizations will use a variety of methods to promote attendance at public meetings. At a minimum, these methods will include: 1) legal notices placed in the major newspapers and major minority newspaper(s) at least 14 days in advance of the meetings; 2) press releases to major newspapers and community papers; 3) notice on OKI’s website; 4) notice to OKI committee members; and 5) notice to Environmental Justice organizations (i.e., agencies and organizations that serve or represent EJ population groups) and selected media targeting Environmental Justice population groups. The notification process will, at a minimum: 1) provide information on the public meeting subject, time, and location; 2) describe locations where documents are available for review (if applicable); and 3) invite participation in the public meeting. Particular efforts will be made to promote the meetings to Environmental Justice population groups for those meetings scheduled in EJ target areas.

Availability of Documents for Comment

Documents subject to review and comment at the public meetings will be made available at least 14 days prior to the meeting, which coincides with the placement of the legal notice. Copies of draft documents will be placed, at a minimum, in each county’s main public library and OKI offices. Copies may be requested from OKI.

Process for Public Comment and Response

Comments from public meetings will be recorded, reviewed, and summarized in a document that includes staff responses. For the long-range plan, the summary document of comments and responses will be presented to the OKI Board for their consideration prior to the plan’s adoption and subsequently included, along with any Board modifications, as an appendix to the plan or as a separate document. For comments on the TIP, OKI will maintain a separate record of comments for subsequent incorporation into the summary of comments prepared in conjunction with the public hearing on the TIP. If the plan or TIP is changed
significantly from the initial document made available for public comment and raises new issues, then OKI will provide additional opportunity for public comment on the revised document.

**Provisions for Public Hearings**

Public hearings will be convened to provide formal documentation of public comments on the major outcomes of OKI’s planning process prior to their presentation to the Board for adoption: the draft of the long-range plan update, the draft of the TIP update, and amendments to the long-range plan in intervals between updates (these would be needed for TIP amendments including capacity expansion projects).

OKI is required to conduct formal hearings on a biennial basis for its transportation planning process. As an extension, the public involvement process resulting in public meetings will augment formal hearings, to promote open dialogue between OKI and the citizens it represents. Unlike the public hearings, which will be held at OKI, the public meeting forum will be held in the community where the plan will impact the community.

Public hearings will include a brief overview of the draft plan, amendments, or TIP before the floor is open for comments. At the hearing, citizens will be able to comment orally or submit written comments. Thirty days before and after the public hearing, comments may be submitted to OKI in writing or by e-mail. Public hearings will be held at OKI offices, which are accessible by transit and accessible to people with disabilities, as specified in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

**Notification Process for Public Hearings**

Public hearings will be publicized by: 1) legal ads placed in the largest circulation metropolitan daily newspaper and major minority newspaper(s) at least 30 days in advance of the hearing; 2) press releases to major newspapers and community papers; 3) notice on OKI’s website; 4) notice to OKI committee members; and 5) notice to Environmental Justice organizations (i.e., agencies and organizations that serve or represent EJ population groups) and selected media targeting Environmental Justice population groups. The notification process will, at a minimum: 1) provide information on the public hearing topic, time, and location; 2) describe locations where the document is available for review; and 3) invite participation in and describe the process for review and comment of the document subject to the hearing.

**Availability of Documents for Review and Comment**

Documents subject to review and comment at a public hearing will be made available at least 30 days prior to the public meetings, which coincides with the placement of a legal notice. Copies of draft documents will be placed, at a
minimum, in each county’s main public library and OKI offices. Copies may be requested from OKI.

Process for Public Comment and Response
Comments on documents subject to public hearings may be made orally or in writing at the public hearing or transmitted by mail, fax, or e-mail for thirty days before or after the hearing. Comments presented orally at the public hearings will be recorded by a court reporter and documented in a transcript. All comments submitted within the 60-day review-and-comment period, or submitted on the TIP at an earlier public meeting (on the long-range plan), will be reviewed and summarized in a document that includes staff responses. Staff responses will be made available to those who provided comment. The summary public involvement document will be presented to the OKI Board for their consideration prior to the plan or TIP adoption and subsequently included, along with any Board modifications, as an appendix to the plan or TIP or as a separate document. If the plan or TIP is changed significantly from the initial document made available for public comment and raises new issues, then OKI will provide additional opportunity for public comment on the revised document.

Amendments to the TIP and Long-Range Plan
In the intervals between updates, modifications to the TIP will be documented in a Resolution presented to OKI’s Intermodal Coordinating Committee for consideration and then to the OKI Board for approval. If a TIP modification is a capacity expansion project, it must be incorporated into the long-range plan in order to be eligible for federal funding, which involves either a plan update or plan amendment. Public involvement is thus provided through either a series of public meetings and a public hearing related to the plan update or, if the TIP amendment for a capacity expansion project occurs in the interval between plan updates, through a public hearing to amend the long-range plan.

Corridor and Special Studies
Corridor Studies
Because their localized impacts usually generate intensive public interest, corridor studies are a major focus of OKI’s public involvement efforts. For each corridor study, OKI will design a unique public involvement process to obtain optimal participation from the area’s key stakeholders, a diversity of community and special interest groups, and the general public. To address Environmental Justice issues, each corridor plan will include an EJ Action Plan for public involvement. At a minimum, each corridor study will have its own core advisory group that oversees the study process and is involved in designing the public involvement process, study goals, problem definition, alternative solutions, and selection of preferred alternatives. In addition, each study may apply any number of other methods to provide public outreach or obtain public input.
Public involvement is important for developing consensus so that recommendations will advance to implementation.

**Special Studies**
For special studies that focus on specific transportation issues (such as a bike plan or a freight study), OKI will tailor an individual public involvement program based on project scope, funding, and purpose. Efforts to involve the public may involve developing a separate committee for the study duration as well as a combination of efforts to provide outreach and obtain input from affected organizations and the general public. Study recommendations incorporated into the long-range transportation plan are subject to the public involvement efforts conducted as part of the plan update process.

**Other Provisions for Involving the Public**

**OKI Website**
To increase public awareness and understanding of OKI planning efforts and opportunities for involvement, OKI will maintain a website ([www.oki.org](http://www.oki.org)) with information on the agency, its planning activities, and special opportunities for public involvement. Information will be updated periodically.

**Networking**
Networking involves OKI’s presenting information and opportunities for discussion to groups with a special interest in transportation planning. OKI will offer networking opportunities during the update of the long-range plan and in the intervals between plan updates. A networking session may feature an explanation of the planning process, plan recommendations, or a planning issue and will include a question-and-answer session. OKI may distribute handouts, a survey form, or use other methods to provide information or obtain input. OKI will be available for networking in response to requests; OKI will promote its availability to Environmental Justice communities and organizations.

**Other Public Outreach Methods**
Independent of efforts to involve the public as described in preceding sections, OKI may make additional outreach efforts at any time. The outreach method and timing will be determined based on the need for education, the nature of the planning effort, and the audience to be reached. Methods for increasing public awareness of transportation issues or involvement opportunities include but are not limited to press releases, public service announcements, media briefings, newspaper advertisements, and coordination with EJ communities or organizations. Methods to provide for public education include but are not limited to newsletters, information displays, fact sheets, brochures, a speaker’s bureau, and information for distribution by Environmental Justice communities or organizations.
Other Methods for Obtaining Public Input
In addition to obtaining public input through public meetings, public hearings, networking, and special committees as described in preceding sections, OKI may offer other opportunities in conjunction with or independent of these methods. Methods for obtaining public input includes but is not limited to telephone hotlines, surveys, focus groups, advisory panels and committees, and facilitated public workshops. OKI will select and tailor its method for obtaining public input based on the type and extent of information needed. To obtain input from Environmental Justice population groups, OKI will use resources developed to target communication with these groups.

Additional Public Involvement of EJ Population Groups
In addition to the efforts to involve EJ population groups in OKI transportation planning as provided in the preceding sections, and in addition to the resources to improve communication with EJ population groups as discussed in Policy Element 4, there may be occasions in which public comment is needed from one or more EJ population groups or, perhaps for a corridor study, at a level more localized than OKI is traditionally involved in. In that case, OKI will seek to coordinate with the public and private organizations that represent or serve these special populations. This coordination would involve working with agencies/organizations willing to present information to the people they serve or represent, provide space in their newsletters, allow meetings in their facilities, or otherwise serve as intermediaries. These agencies/organizations may include but are not necessarily limited to major churches (especially appropriate for Minority groups), schools, neighborhood centers, housing associations, adult education centers, and sponsors of special events.

Availability of Data
In addition to drafts of the long-range plan and the TIP available for review and comment, these and other documents and technical information will be available to the public in response to requests. Reproduction costs of more than ten pages will be borne by the party making the request.

Statement of Non-Discrimination
In carrying out this policy to involve the public in transportation plans and programs, discrimination against any person because of political or religious opinion or affiliation or because of race, creed, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability is hereby prohibited.