INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI) is the regional planning and intergovernmental coordination agency for the Greater Cincinnati metropolitan area. OKI’s planning area includes nearly 200 units of local governments in a tri-state area comprised of Butler, Clermont, Hamilton, and Warren Counties in Ohio; Boone, Campbell, and Kenton Counties in Kentucky; and Dearborn County in Indiana. As the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Ohio and Kentucky counties in its region, OKI is responsible for the development of a long-range plan and a short-range programming document for transportation, as well as other planning initiatives. Environmental Justice issues apply to the broad pattern of transportation investments and impacts considered in metropolitan planning, as well as individual projects recommended by OKI.

In developing this Policy for Environmental Justice, OKI is replacing its former OKI Policy for Public Involvement (November 12, 1998). This new policy expands OKI’s efforts to involve the public in transportation decision-making and adds provisions for assessing the equity of transportation investments. The policy is focused on OKI’s transportation program, but it may also be applied to other programs at OKI or used by other agencies.

As a public agency that receives federal funds and makes recommendations on federal expenditures, OKI is affected by Environmental Justice requirements for ensuring that federal funds are used fairly and without discrimination. The basis for Environmental Justice is Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which states: No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

Environmental Justice has become a prominent issue for public agencies as the result of a series of federal orders that serve to amplify Title VI. These include:

- President Clinton’s Executive Order 12898 in 1994, which directed every federal agency to make Environmental Justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing the effects of all programs, policies, and activities on minority and low income populations
- U.S. Department of Transportation Order in 1997
- Federal Highway Administration Order in 1998

For agencies like OKI, the Orders issued by federal departments clarified the need to involve the potentially affected public in transportation decision-making processes and assess the equity of transportation investments. The target of
Environmental Justice is Minority and Low Income population, but parts of OKI’s efforts to address Environmental Justice also apply to the Elderly population, People with Disabilities, and Zero-Car Households.

This policy document contains the following four distinct but inter-related elements:

- **Element 1**: presents a process for public involvement including focused special efforts to involve Environmental Justice target populations
- **Element 2**: describes a process for defining the population groups and areas in the OKI region to be targeted for Environmental Justice processes
- **Element 3**: describes a process for assessing the equity of transportation investments on Environmental Justice target populations
- **Element 4**: lists the initiatives that OKI will undertake to support the implementation of this policy.