

SECTION F

Public Participation Process

The MDOT's public participation process provides an opportunity for local governmental bodies and the public to review and comment on transportation projects. When deciding what level of public participation is appropriate, one should look at the National Environmental Policy Act (N.E.P.A.) and the Sensible Transportation Policy Act (STPA).

There are several different levels of public participation that may be used depending on the scope and complexity of each project. The public process is tailored accordingly. On all projects, the city/town official shall be contacted about the scope of the project for input. Whenever a project impacts property, the abutters shall be notified.

The following paragraphs describe the different levels of public participation.

I. Letter of Intent

A letter of intent to the city/town, county commissioner consists of a letter, and a map to officials of each local entity where the project is located. The letter and map should be prepared by the lead unit and sent 6 to 12 months prior to advertising. This letter should also alert officials of the 5 year moratorium on highway openings after the project is completed. The letter of intent is typically used on Pavement preservation projects and low end Collector Highway Improvement Projects.

II. Preliminary Public Meeting

The preliminary public meeting is held prior to any meaningful design work and is intended to solicit comments and concerns from the town or city involved, abutters and the general public. These comments and concerns can then be seriously considered and addressed as a part of the design process and also addressed at the public meeting to note for the records that they were considered. Preliminary public meetings are held when a project has been identified as having substantial public interest or the project manager has determined there is a need.

Normally a survey plan or aerial photograph is utilized without showing any proposed design. Required are public notices in local newspapers, letters and notices to town officials, state legislators and county representatives, abutters, MDOT PERSONNEL and the court reporter. The Public Notice is an important early step in notifying the public of our intention to improve a transportation

facility. If we can get their attention with this early notice and set a tone that encourages open communication, public and official involvement in project development will begin earlier and be more productive.

Begin planning the meeting by deciding and clearly stating the purpose for holding the meeting. Be prepared to explain what's been identified as the purpose and need for the project, what activities come next and what the time frames are. The public will want to know who makes the decision when there are alternatives, such as alignments or scope of work.

At the preliminary public meeting, MDOT or its designated representative will:

- (1) Outline the transportation deficiency and need in terms of safety, congestion, substandard infrastructure, or other appropriate measures.
- (2) Inform of the schedule and budget.
- (3) Describe available information concerning the social, economic, Energy, and environmental impacts of the project, including the range of mitigation measures and transportation enhancement measures which could minimize such impacts.
- (4) Solicit public comment on the project.
- (5) Invite ideas and/or specific features from the public.
- (6) Where appropriate, invite the town to form an advisory committee or invite existing town committees to meet regularly with MDOT.

III. Informational Public Meeting

This meeting is an intermediate public involvement process and its purpose is to share information and seek input on a project to make a decision and move forward. This type of meeting is held to provide preliminary information to the public on a proposed project or the status of a project. The preliminary design to date is usually presented and MDOT personnel are available to answer questions from the public at a prescribed time and place. They are usually used when a one on one meeting with the public might be helpful. The project would be substantial or have significant public interest. The type of project involved may be a CHIP project. Another instance may be a project that has a long time span or is controversial, so that informational meetings are held in addition to a public meeting.

IV. Informal Public Meeting

When a project requires a public meeting but does not impact a large group of people, an Informal Public Meeting may be held. The same project information in a public meeting, described below, is presented and public input is sought, but there is no formal presentation. The Project Manager will be present to answer questions and concerns as well as receiving input from the public on a one-on-one basis. Public notification will be the same as for a Public Meeting.

V. Public Meeting

Several options are available for a public meeting as follows:

A town council meeting may be used if a project necessitates more than just a letter to the town and public notice. They may be useful when there are a small number of butters involved or when there is expected to be little controversy. Examples of these may be bridge deck replacements or intersection improvements. The Project manager should contact the town to get on the council meeting agenda and put a notice in the local newspaper inviting the public. At the meeting the Project Manager will explain the scope of the project, the impacts of construction and any right of way issues. The Project Manager will then seek public input and respond to any questions.

A preliminary meeting with the city or town may be held to review the preliminary design with local officials to identify any concerns they may have prior to a public meeting. It should also address concerns and input from the preliminary public meeting. This meeting will be held separately, just prior to a public meeting on the same day or occasionally a phone call to the town manager describing the project has sufficed. On some projects a presentation may be made during a council meeting. Arrangements for the meeting are normally made by the Project Manager. He/she should be prepared with a specific list of things to cover. Discuss what is planned and listen carefully to the responses. Take good notes, either during or just following the meeting, so that the results of the small group discussion will be available in the broader, public meeting and will be open to public scrutiny. Documentation of these meetings should be part of the Project Development Report.

Public meetings to explain the preliminary design are held before the formal decisions on a project are made. They are most effective as part of an overall public involvement program in which they offer the public a final opportunity to comment just before decision making. The lead unit has responsibility for scheduling and carrying out these meetings. The lead unit will prepare and distribute a record consisting of a summary or transcript following the meeting.

When a reconstruction or a significant or substantial public interest transportation construction project has been determined to be the best solution to the designated transportation deficiency or need, MDOT will hold a public meeting at which it will:

- (1) Have a moderator who makes the opening statement and conducts the meeting.
- (2) Explain the scope of the project.
- (3) Explain how the selected alternative was decided upon or suggest various alternative solutions to the transportation deficiency or need. Explain how input from the preliminary meeting has been or not be incorporated.
- (4) Describe available information concerning projected life-cycle costs and operational costs of the alternatives.