



**SCDOT**

# Public Involvement Policy

January 1, 2025

*This policy supersedes the Department's Public Involvement Policy for NEPA Compliance (2015), Public Participation Plan (2019 Update), Supplement for Virtual Public Involvement (2021), and all internal directives that relate to public involvement.*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION</b> .....   | <b>5</b>  |
| 1.1 Purpose and Background .....   | 5         |
| 1.2 State and Federal Requirements .....   | 6         |
| 1.3 Definitions.....   | 8         |
| <br><b>SECTION 2: OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT 10</b>                              |           |
| 2.1 Guiding Principles .....   | 10        |
| <br><b>SECTION 3: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES</b> .....                               | <b>11</b> |
| 3.1 Planning.....  | 12        |
| 3.2 Transit .....  | 12        |
| 3.3 Project Lead .....   | 12        |
| 3.4 Environmental Services .....   | 13        |
| 3.5 Public Engagement .....  | 14        |
| 3.6 Maintenance.....   | 15        |
| 3.7 District Offices.....  | 15        |
| 3.8 Governmental Affairs Office .....  | 15        |
| 3.9 Right of Way .....   | 15        |
| 3.10 Consultants .....   | 16        |
| 3.11 Local Public Agencies .....   | 16        |
| <br><b>SECTION 4: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLANNING BY PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PHASE</b> ..... | <b>16</b> |
| 4.1 Planning .....   | 16        |
| 4.2 Preliminary Engineering .....  | 20        |
| 4.3 Construction, Operations and Maintenance .....                                   | 20        |
| 4.4 Emergency Projects.....  | 23        |
| <br><b>SECTION 5: DEVELOPING A PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN</b> .....                     | <b>24</b> |
| 5.1 Elements for Public Involvement Planning .....                                   | 24        |
| 5.2 Developing a Project-Specific Public Involvement Plan.....                       | 27        |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>SECTION 6: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT DURING THE NEPA PROCESS</b> .....                 | <b>28</b> |
| <b>SECTION 7: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TOOLS AND STRATEGIES</b> .....                    | <b>29</b> |
| 7.1 Media Relations .....  | 30        |
| 7.2 Social Media .....   | 30        |
| 7.3 Visual Displays .....  | 30        |
| 7.4 Project Websites .....   | 31        |
| 7.5 Public Information Materials .....   | 31        |
| 7.6 Surveys .....  | 32        |
| 7.7 Activities for Reaching/Addressing Traditionally Underserved Communities ..... | 32        |
| 7.8 Other Outreach .....   | 33        |
| <b>SECTION 8: PUBLIC MEETING PROCEDURES</b> .....                                  | <b>33</b> |
| <b>SECTION 9: PUBLIC HEARING PROCEDURES</b> .....                                  | <b>35</b> |
| <b>SECTION 10: RESPONDING TO PUBLIC COMMENTS</b> .....                             | <b>36</b> |
| <b>SECTION 11: DOCUMENTATION</b> .....   | <b>37</b> |
| <b>SECTION 12: MEASURING SUCCESS</b> .....   | <b>37</b> |
| <b>APPENDIX</b> .....  | <b>39</b> |
| 1. Minimum Required Comment Periods for Projects and Programs.....                 | 39        |
| 2. Public Involvement Development Process .....                                    | 40        |
| 3. Project Specific Public Involvement Plan (In-House) .....                       | 41-42     |

**\*\*DISCLAIMER\*\***

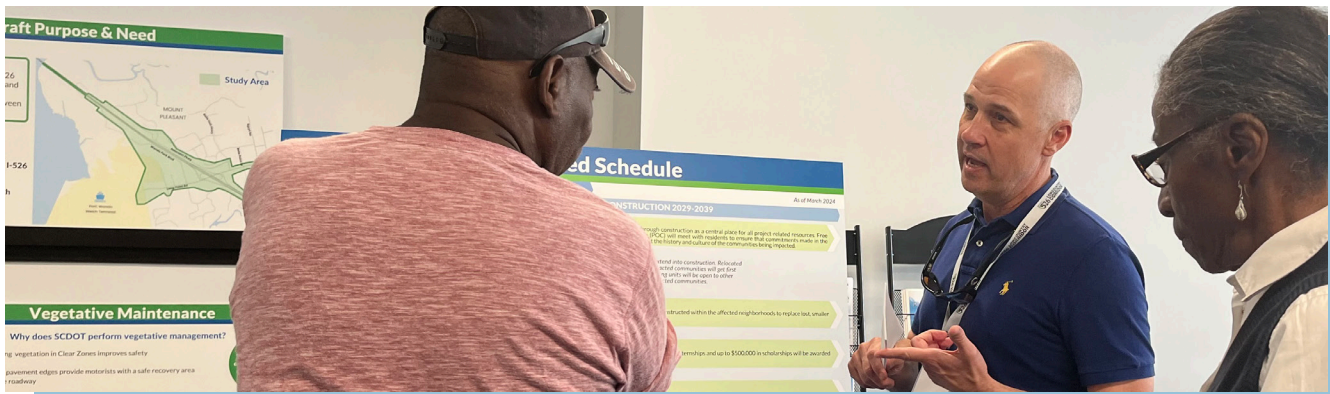
The South Carolina Department of Transportation maintains this printable document and is solely responsible for ensuring that it is equivalent to the approved Department guidelines. This document is not intended to establish policy within the Department, but to provide guidance in adhering to the policies of the Department. If, for any reason, any phrase, clause, sentence, paragraph, section, subsection, figure, table, or other part of this manual should be decided by a court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid or unconstitutional, such judgment shall not affect the validity of these guidelines as a whole, or any part thereof, other than the part so held to be invalid.

## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Purpose and Background

Transportation projects, by their very nature, greatly affect community members living in the areas where the project is located and the traveling public. Transportation decisions may significantly influence the economic and social conditions of a community and can lead to beneficial and/or adverse impacts where people live, work, and attend school. For these reasons and others, public involvement is a core element of the South Carolina Department of Transportation's decision-making process.

As a transportation agency, the South Carolina Department of Transportation is responsible for communicating with those who may be affected directly or indirectly by a transportation project, and developing a plan to effectively involve the public in the transportation decision-making process. SCDOT is committed to engaging a diverse cross-section of the public, ensuring that underrepresented groups have a voice in transportation decision-making.



Public involvement is an integral part of developing and implementing transportation solutions. Meaningful public involvement requires us to seek input early and often, especially at key points in the decision-making process. Impactful public involvement activities provide the opportunity for input that has real potential to help shape the final decisions or actions of the agency.

Public involvement efforts should be consistent with the magnitude and complexity of the project, the potential environmental impacts, and public interest. In addition, as the project progresses, public involvement approaches should be modified as needed in response to changing conditions. For federally funded projects, public involvement efforts should also conform to federal standards as set forth in National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

SCDOT considers the public stakeholders to be anyone outside of SCDOT and the immediate project team, including other state, local and federal governmental agencies, business owners, elected officials, residents, interest groups, tribes and the traveling public. SCDOT strives to implement the most appropriate and effective strategies that consider the variety of viewpoints and engage a variety of stakeholders.

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance for project teams to successfully plan and execute public involvement efforts. These efforts are intended to support collaborative decision-making while sustaining mutually beneficial community outcomes and addressing a broad range of interests throughout the life cycle of transportation projects.

Specifically, the Public Involvement Policy outlines the South Carolina Department of Transportation's plan to communicate and involve the public in the planning, development and implementation of transportation solutions. The policy offers direction to project teams. At a minimum, the project team will include the Project Lead and a representative from both the Office of Public Engagement and the Environmental Services Office.

This policy outlines the South Carolina Department of Transportation's plan to communicate and involve the public in the decision-making process throughout the life cycle of transportation projects. All projects where SCDOT and/or FHWA will be requested to sign the environmental document are required to follow this public involvement policy. All federally funded projects are required to follow this public involvement policy. Non federally-funded projects should adhere to this policy in the same manner as a federal-aid project.

This policy will be reviewed at least every five years and will be updated as needed. The policy was developed by the Environmental Services Office, the Office of Planning, the Preconstruction Division, and the Office of Public Engagement in coordination with FHWA. These departments should be involved in future reviews and updates.

## 1.2 State and Federal Requirements

Several laws and regulations require SCDOT to conduct public involvement during the statewide planning and project development process. While these laws help provide guidance for the timing of public involvement activities, each state is required to develop policies that outline the methods for carrying out public participation. The following section provides a brief overview of the laws, regulations, and executive orders that have shaped SCDOT's agency-wide policy for public involvement.

### Federal and state statutes

*This list is current as of the last publication date of this plan and any new, relevant legislation will be added at the date of the next required plan update.*

#### ➤ Federal non-discriminatory and environmental statutes

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- National Historic Preservation Act of 1966
- National Environmental Policy Act of 1970
- Clean Air Act of 1972
- Clean Water Act of 1972
- Age Discrimination Act of 1975
- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

#### ➤ Federal transportation laws and statutes

- Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991
- Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) of 2005
- Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21)
- Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act of 2015 (FAST)
- Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)/Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021

#### ➤ Federal regulations

- Title 23, United States Code (U.S.C.)
- Title 23-Highways, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)
- Title 40-Protection of Environment, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)

#### ➤ Federal executive orders

- Executive Order 12898 Environmental Justice - Federal Action to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations (1994)
- Executive Order 13166 Limited English Proficiency - Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency (2000)
- Executive Order 14008 Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad (Justice 40 Initiative 2021)

#### ➤ Relevant laws:

- Title 49 Subtitle B Other Regulations Relating to Transportation includes requirements for public involvement when developing the State Rail Plan and administering transportation grant programs through the Federal Transit Administration.

The federal regulations related to participation in statewide planning transportation decision making can be found in the **Code of Federal Regulations: Title 23; Chapter 1; Subchapter E; Part 450 (23 CFR 450.210); Subpart B-Statewide Transportation Planning**. These regulations require state public involvement policies to provide:

- Early and continuous opportunities for participation
- Public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times, as necessary
- Timely information on transportation issues, processes, and procedures
- Reasonable access to technical and policy information
- Electronically accessible and available public information via the web
- Adequate notice for participation at key decision points
- Methods for considering and responding to public input
- A course of action for seeking out and considering the needs of traditionally underserved groups
- Periodic review and evaluation of the participation process

**The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)** states that “no qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity.” Sites for participation activities, as well as the information presented, must be accessible to persons with disabilities. ADA requires specific participation – particularly for developing para-transit plans – such as:

- Outreach by developing contacts, mailing lists, and other means of notification
- Consultation with disabled individuals
- The opportunity for public comment
- Accessible formats in Public Hearings when appropriate
- Summaries of significant issues raised during the public comment period
- Ongoing efforts to involve persons with disabilities in planning

**The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA)** is the primary federal regulation that requires public disclosure and public participation during project development. An important component of NEPA is public disclosure. Regulations established by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), which implements NEPA, emphasize the importance of public participation in decision-making for many projects, both large and small. The level and extent of public involvement is commensurate with the potential for significant impacts, and in compliance with other applicable environmental laws and requirements. Generally, the higher the level of potential significant impacts, the more opportunities for public involvement are needed. The environmental analyses or studies outline the range of potential environmental impacts and benefits and may document commitments to the public and other federal and state agencies charged with protecting people, animals, and other environmental attributes such as water and air quality. Public involvement may also be required to comply with other environmental laws (e.g., Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Section 4(f) requirements).

For additional information regarding federal requirements for public involvement and guidance for ensuring compliance, please refer to U.S. Department of Transportation’s [Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making](#).

## 1.3 Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, roles are defined in the following way:

**Consultation Party:** Individuals or organizations with a demonstrated interest in the project, including a legal or economic interest, or who are concerned with the effects of the project on historic properties. Local, state, regional and federal agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, public ports, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation (including intercity bus operators, employer-based commuting programs, such as carpool program, vanpool program, transit benefit program, parking cash-out program, shuttle program, or telework program), representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, tribal governments including the Catawba Indian Nation, transportation advocacy groups, environmental interest groups and other entities that provide guidance and help identify critical transportation issues. Consulting party status entitles the participant to share their views, receive and review pertinent information, offer ideas, and consider possible solutions together with SCDOT and other consulting parties.

**Council of Governments (COG):** Organizations comprised of elected public officials from county and municipal governments in rural areas not within a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). COGs assist SCDOT in transportation planning for areas outside of designated MPOs.

**Federal Highway Administration (FHWA):** The United States Government agency that oversees the distribution of federal funds for and the activities pertaining to road systems in each state.

**Federally Recognized Tribes:** Federally recognized tribes are recognized as possessing inherent rights of self government and are entitle to receive certain federal benefits, services and protections because of their special relationship with the United States.

**Metropolitan Planning Organization:** Federally mandated and federally funded transportation policy-making organization comprised of local government and governmental transportation authorities in an area having a population greater than 50,000 in order to carry out the metropolitan transportation planning process.

**National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA):** A federal policy, enacted in 1970 that established National Environmental Policy and action-forcing provisions to ensure that agencies consider the National Environmental Policy in their decision-making process.

**Project Lead:** The Project Lead is the employee responsible for managing the project or program. This includes SCDOT employees that have a working title of Program Manager or Project Manager but are serving in any capacity as the lead on a project or initiative.

**Project Team:** The project team is a group of employees or other entities acting in a similar capacity that performs work on a project or program on behalf of the South Carolina Department of Transportation.

**Public Hearing (PH):** A PH is required for an Environmental Assessment (EA) and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). A PH is a meeting open to the public where project details such as potential impacts of the preferred alternative, proposed schedule and estimated costs are provided to educate the public. A PH is different from a Public Information Meeting (PIM) as a formal presentation is given and interested individuals have the opportunity to verbally express their views about the project. The public comments received are reviewed by the Project Team and modifications to the project are considered. SCDOT provides a written response to all substantive written or recorded comments received at the PH and associated comment period.

**Public Hearing Officer (PHO):** A PHO is in charge of the formal portion of the hearing. The PHO will be someone that is impartial to the project, capable of public speaking and controlling a large gathering of people. The PHO will be designated by the Office of Public Engagement. The PHO may also be used at a PIM to help facilitate the meeting and presentations.



**Public Information Meeting (PIM):** A PIM is an informal public gathering hosted by SCDOT for the express purpose of informing and soliciting input from interested individuals regarding transportation issues. Any public meeting that SCDOT is requested to conduct will be completed in accordance with the procedures outlined in this policy. A PIM is most commonly conducted during the alternative development phase, prior to the recommendation of a preferred alternative. The PIM serves as a forum for the public to be engaged early in the project development process. A brief presentation can be provided if needed. Maps and drawings of the proposed improvements should be made available, and attendees may ask questions and provide comments regarding the possible social, environmental and economic effects of the project. The public comments are reviewed and modifications to the project are considered. As requested, SCDOT will provide a response to substantive comments received at the PIM and associated comment period.

**Stakeholders:** SCDOT considers the public stakeholders to be anyone outside of SCDOT and the immediate project team, including other state, local and federal governmental agencies, business owners, elected officials, residents, interest groups and the traveling public.

**Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (MTP):** A document that identifies statewide transportation needs and sets investment priorities for a period of at least twenty years and establishes goals and objectives for addressing transportation needs throughout the state.

**Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP):** A document that lists specific transportation projects scheduled during a 10-year period and includes all state and local transportation projects which are using federal highway and/or federal transit funding as required by Title 23 United States Code.

**Transit:** A public mode of transportation such as bus or train service.



## SECTION 2: OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

### 2.1 Guiding Principles

The South Carolina Department of Transportation affirms the importance of meaningful public involvement and public participation in our decision-making processes. SCDOT is committed to maintaining transparency and access for members of the public.

SCDOT's goal, through this policy, is to provide the highest quality involvement and participation possible for transportation decision making. The following guiding principles should be considered by all members of the project team during the development of a public involvement plan:

- Public Involvement should seek to include those potentially affected by or interested in a decision and should provide those individuals with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
- Public Involvement should seek broad identification and representative involvement of stakeholders and users of all transportation modes.
- Transportation impacts everyone and project team members should provide accurate and timely information on how proposed projects or changes will affect all public stakeholders.
- Information should be provided in a clear, understandable and accessible manner.
- Public Involvement is ongoing and beneficial in all phases of the transportation decision-making process and the transportation solution life cycle.
- Public Involvement should involve open communication with participants throughout the transportation life cycle and should affirm how their input affected the decisions made.
- Solicitation, review, response, and documentation of comments and inquiries lets public stakeholders know that their concerns have been heard and supports an effective process in evaluating alternatives and determining transportation solutions.
- Public Involvement efforts should be continuously evaluated and improved.

The purpose of public involvement in the transportation decision-making process is to promote an understanding of transportation options and decisions by the potentially affected public and to gather public input that may influence the decision. Public involvement at SCDOT meets all state and federal requirements and strives to exceed those standards to earn public trust and provide essential information.

#### WHAT IS PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT?

According to the International Association for Public Participation, public participation (public involvement) means to:

- Involve those who are affected by a decision in the decision-making process;
- Promote sustainable decisions by providing participants with the information they need to be involved in a meaningful way; and
- Communicate to participants how their input affects the decision.

#### WHEN IS PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT NEEDED?

- When it is required by law.
- When public decisions have substantive impacts on communities and individuals.
- When the public has information, ideas, and/or concerns that should be considered by decision-makers who are serving as public representatives.

By engaging the public early and often in the transportation decision-making process, SCDOT makes public involvement more accessible, builds relationships with key community stakeholders, and gathers public input while satisfying federal and state requirements.

## SECTION 3: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### SCDOT's Approach to Public Involvement

The South Carolina Department of Transportation has developed a comprehensive approach to public involvement. The agency recognizes the critical importance of public involvement in ensuring projects are delivered on-time and in a manner that provides for the best possible community outcomes. All of the offices and divisions highlighted in this section provide a critical role in public involvement on behalf of the agency.

Transparency and access to information and responsiveness will ensure the public trust. The following general guidance applies to all SCDOT employees and any other people or entities acting in a similar capacity to facilitate public involvement activities on behalf of the agency:

- Proactively seek to inform and involve the public early in the process
- Seek ways to educate the public on why a project is being proposed, what those existing conditions are, the need for the solution or solutions, what are the expected benefits of a project and what would occur if nothing were done to address the need and purpose of a project
- Make inclusion and access the primary goal
- Research the project corridor to ensure consideration of the needs of the traditionally underserved and/or those with limited English proficiency, including minority groups and low-income populations
- Establish partnerships and communication with other agencies, local governments, private sector transportation entities, and others to facilitate increased communication and transparency
- Strive to eliminate barriers to participation when determining how to communicate, and deciding on meeting times and locations
- Provide accurate and full information in an easy-to-understand format
- Use infographics and pictures to convey project information and use clear, easy to read text in written materials
- Solicit, collect, review and respond to public comments
- Evaluate the use of virtual options to gather input



### 3.1 Planning

The South Carolina Department of Transportation Office of Planning is responsible for managing SCDOT's transportation planning efforts including developing and updating the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and the Multimodal Transportation Plan (MTP). These plans require significant statewide public involvement activities. Detailed public involvement requirements for each of these processes are outlined in Section 4.1. The Office of Planning builds and maintains relationships with the state's Councils of Government and Metropolitan Planning Organizations to support and inform their respective transportation decision-making processes. The Office of Planning also develops and conducts a broad range of surveys to gather information relevant to the transportation decision-making process.

- Evaluate the use of virtual options to gather input.

### 3.2 Transit

The Office of Intermodal and Freight Programs is required to develop the State Rail Plan every five years in accordance with the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 and other Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) regulations. The State Rail Plan is made available for public comment for a period of 21 days after approval by the SCDOT Commission. Guidance for developing these plans, including requirements for public involvement, is included in 49 CFR 265.15.

The Office of Public Transit (OPT) administers Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and state transportation grant programs and provides planning and technical assistance for transit systems in the state. Transit providers and subrecipients are required to develop a Community Transportation Service Plan (CTSP) every five years in order to qualify for federal and state grant programs. Public involvement is required through the developments of the CTSP. FTA NEPA procedures for transit projects are included in 23 CFR 771. The statewide freight plan will improve the ability of the state to meet the national multimodal freight policy goals described in Section 49 U.S.C. 4010(b) and the National Highway Freight Program goals described in 23 U.S.C. 167.

### 3.3 Project Lead

The Project Lead for a program or project is focused on the project's scope, schedule and budget while establishing stakeholder relationships.

In coordination with the project team and any consultant staff, the Project Lead is responsible for the following public involvement activities on SCDOT projects:

- Sharing the proposed project limits and the proposed right of way for use in public involvement materials.
- Providing information to the Office of Public Engagement that will be used to create the project fact sheet and other public materials including the project description, project background, project scope, proposed schedule, and any cost estimates.
- Developing and maintaining the Public Involvement Plan in coordination with the Office of Public Engagement and the Environmental Services Office.
- Participating in public meetings to communicate with stakeholders and explain the project and ensuring that public involvement activities are inclusive and accessible to all community members, including those with disabilities and limited English proficiency.
- Initiating the request for the project website and reviewing the website prior to publication.
- Assisting in the development of display materials that demonstrate project benefits and impacts.
- Coordinating participation from SCDOT local and district offices.
- Coordinating participation with local governments, metropolitan planning organizations, councils of government or other, similar groups.

- Providing comments received to NEPA coordinator during public comment period.
- Ensuring public involvement and project signs are requested and posted as appropriate.
- For consultant-led public involvement efforts, the Project Lead will provide an opportunity for the NEPA coordinators and the Office of Public Engagement to provide input prior to providing final approval for the Public Involvement Plan – certifying that the plan meets all requirements.

If no public involvement activities are planned, the Project Lead will document the reasons for not conducting public involvement activities and will provide justification to the Environmental Services Office (ESO) and the Office of Public Engagement. The ESO Director will be responsible for resolving any disagreements that arise over the need for public involvement. The ESO Director and FHWA will consult with the Project Lead and the Office of Public Engagement prior to issuing a decision.

For general information about the project development process, please visit <https://www.scdot.org/business/preconpdplanning.html>.

### 3.4 Environmental Services

The role of the Environmental Services Office in assisting Local Public Agencies Division with public engagement, as outlined in the MOU between the Federal Highway Administration-South Carolina and the South Carolina Department of Transportation on involvement in locally funded transportation projects, should also be detailed in this section.

The Environmental Services Office provides professional support and expertise to SCDOT project team members and any consultant staff regarding NEPA requirements and activities, permit acquisition and compliance. It is critical that the Environmental Services Office is involved early in the project development process. The Environmental Services Office works with SCDOT Program Managers and consultants throughout project development to guide them through the various state and federal regulatory processes.

The Environmental Services Office is responsible for ensuring NEPA requirements are satisfied during project development. Handled correctly, scoping and public participation in the NEPA process will improve acceptance of the decision and, at minimum, provide SCDOT with the best information possible for making a decision. It is very helpful to obtain public input on a range of topics including the following: project scope, purpose and need, alternatives development, effects analysis, preferred alternative selection, and project implementation.

During project development, NEPA Coordinators are responsible for assisting the Project Lead and the Office of Public Engagement with the development of the Public Involvement Plan (PIP). The amount and type of public involvement will vary depending on the complexity and degree of controversy involved in a project. As part of environmental scoping, NEPA Coordinators will complete a demographic profile of the communities that could be affected by a project. The demographic profile should be included in the PIP and should be used in addition to consideration of other potential impacts to guide opportunities for public involvement.

Projects that require an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) require more input and involvement from the Environmental Services Office and FHWA.

In coordination with the project team and any consultant staff, the Environmental Services Office is responsible for the following public involvement activities on SCDOT projects:

- Analyzing environmental impacts and advising project team and any consultant staff on the applicable environmental impacts that should be considered during the public involvement process and making the initial determination on the probable class of NEPA action.
- Assisting project managers and district personnel in making the decision on the need for a public information meeting or public hearing.
- Providing guidance on the environmental process to the project team and any consultant staff.

NEPA Coordinators have the following defined roles:

#### NEPA Compliance

- Ensure the public involvement requirements of NEPA are met during project development.
- Review all public hearing certifications.

#### Public Involvement Plans

- Work collaboratively with the Project Lead and Office of Public Engagement to develop the public involvement plan. The NEPA coordinator will provide final approval for all public involvement plans.
- Provide a demographic profile and any other relevant, environmental impacts for any public involvement plan developed by SCDOT.

#### Public Meetings

- Review all public meeting displays and materials.
- Coordinate FHWA review of public meeting displays and materials.
- Review meeting plans.
- Attend and participate in public meetings.

#### Public Announcements

- Review all postcards, public notices, project websites, and announcements.

#### Public Comment

- Responsible for maintaining the record of public involvement activities in project file.
- Assist the Project Lead with responses to public comments as appropriate.

The NEPA Division Manager is responsible for providing NEPA coordinators with guidance and training regarding public involvement, development of public involvement plans, and development of demographic profiles.

The ESO Director is responsible for approving all public hearing certifications and resolving any disputes that arise regarding public involvement activities conducted for NEPA Compliance.

### 3.5 Public Engagement

The South Carolina Department of Transportation Office of Public Engagement is responsible for the strategic communications, media relations, public involvement, photography, video production, public outreach, and event efforts both internally and externally in support of the agency's mission, programs, and projects. In coordination with other members of the project team, the Office of Public Engagement is responsible for the development and implementation of public involvement plans.

Ideally, the Office of Public Engagement is made aware of projects and programs early in the development phase. The office's capabilities include media relations, speeches and talking points, presentations, social media, publications and other printed materials. Public Engagement also works closely with the agency's Web Development Team on internet/intranet content. In addition, the Office of Public Engagement coordinates closely with public involvement consultants to ensure that the appropriate standards are achieved. The SCDOT Branding and Style Guide is [available here](#).

In coordination with the project team and any consultant staff, the Office of Public Engagement is responsible for the following public involvement activities on SCDOT projects:

- Notifying FHWA of upcoming public meetings.
- Coordinating with the project team and consultant staff to understand the project or program including any unique features or issues.

- Ensuring public involvement plans and materials appropriately address and engage all public stakeholders including strategies employed to mitigate any access, language or socio-economic barriers to their participation.
- Developing public involvement materials including public involvement plans, brochures, flyers, postcards, meeting displays and presentations.
- Arranging meeting locations, security, notifications, and logistics.
- Creating and distributing the official notification of public meetings, public hearings and opportunities for public comment.
- Participating in public information meetings and public hearings to ensure agency public involvement standards are met and the record of the meeting is documented.
- Posting accurate and timely information on SCDOT's social media platforms and website about upcoming public meetings, opportunities for public comment and project updates.
- Distributing press releases and responding to media questions regarding SCDOT projects and programs.
- Providing guidance on public involvement and community engagement strategies to the project team and any consultant staff.
- Coordinating and providing the public hearing officer as appropriate.
- Documenting public involvement activities and outcomes and providing that information for records retention to the Project Lead, NEPA coordinator and FHWA.
- Measuring the success of public involvement strategies, regularly assessing those strategies, and making recommendations for improvement.

### 3.6 Maintenance

- Providing timely updates regarding maintenance issues and upcoming work.

### 3.7 District Offices

In coordination with the project team and any consultant staff, the District Offices are responsible for the following public involvement activities on SCDOT projects:

- Coordinating with the project team and consultant staff to help identify locations in or near the proposed project corridors for public meeting sites.
- Serve as a resource as requested to provide recommendations on sign locations and assist with the installation of signs.
- Providing staff for public meetings that can address local issues and answer questions.

### 3.8 Governmental Affairs Office

The Governmental Affairs staff at SCDOT, including the Chief of Staff, are responsible for maintaining relationships with local, state and federal elected and public officials. The Governmental Affairs Office ensures that information, project updates and invitations shared with elected officials, when appropriate, are accurate and timely. In collaboration with the Office of Public Engagement, the Governmental Affairs Office maintains updated lists of elected and public officials that need to receive notices from SCDOT.

### 3.9 Right of Way

The SCDOT Right of Way Office is responsible for the acquisition of properties necessary for transportation projects. This includes plan design review and approval, appraisal, relocation assistance, condemnation, negotiation and property management. Both SCDOT acquisitions and local government acquisitions (if the local-let project includes state or federal funds) are monitored by this office. The right-of-way acquisition process can be daunting to the public. It is

incumbent upon SCDOT to provide the information the public needs and respond to questions and concerns during the process. SCDOT considers this important interaction with the public a form of public involvement.

### 3.10 Consultants

SCDOT works with many consultants in the process of taking a project from the planning stage to construction and then to operations and maintenance if needed. The Department works closely alongside our consultant partners to ensure they understand and implement the public involvement strategies recommended by SCDOT.

This policy document should be used as a framework for building and implementing public involvement plans on behalf of the South Carolina Department of Transportation. The South Carolina Department of Transportation serves as a resource for ensuring that all public involvement plans meet the standards outlined here.

### 3.11 Local Public Agencies

A Local Public Agency (LPA) is defined as a county, municipal corporation, state or local authority, board, commission, agency, department or political subdivision created under the authority of the state. LPA projects are defined as any transportation project funded through SCDOT using federal, state, or local funding. The LPA manages any phase of the project development process or construction activities through a contractual agreement with SCDOT and the defined procedures for LPA Project Administration.

LPA projects shall follow the Department's Public Involvement Policy for compliance with NEPA. Project sponsors should consult with the Department's LPA staff to determine SCDOT's requirements for public involvement activities.

## SECTION 4: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLANNING BY PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PHASE

### 4.1 Planning

The South Carolina Department of Transportation's Planning and Intermodal and Freight Divisions are responsible for managing SCDOT's transportation planning efforts including the developing and updating the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and the Multimodal Transportation Plan (MTP). These plans require significant statewide public involvement activities. The division builds and maintains relationships with the state's Councils of Government and Metropolitan Planning Organizations to support and inform their respective transportation decision-making processes. The Planning Division also develops and conducts a broad range of surveys to gather information relevant to the transportation decision-making process.

#### MTP – The Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan

The Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan is the federally required multimodal long-range transportation plan that maintains at least a 20-year planning horizon. The MTP assesses the current and future performance of all major transportation modes in the state and examines the linkages between modes. This plan provides SCDOT with technical and programmatic guidance needed to meet the transportation demands of the state.

When the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) was signed into law in 1991, there were provisions in the law that required each state to prepare a long-range statewide transportation plan, with a minimum 20-year forecast period, that provides for the development and implementation of the multimodal transportation system for the State. The long-range plan is required by South Carolina State law and it considers and includes, as applicable, elements and connections between public transportation, non-motorized modes, rail, commercial motor vehicle, waterway, and aviation facilities with an emphasis on early and continuous public involvement. These provisions were reemphasized and in some cases strengthened by successor



legislation, Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), and the current legislation Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act or the FAST Act.

### **Public Involvement for the Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan**

The Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (MTP) is a comprehensive evaluation of South Carolina's transportation system. The MTP evaluates various modes of transportation including: roadways, bridges, aviation, freight rail, passenger rail, water ports, inland port, mass transit, intercity bus, and bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. The plan is updated approximately every five years, while elements may be updated more frequently as needed. Stakeholders provide technical input, guidance, and feedback for specific elements of the plan.

**A 30-day comment period will be provided to receive comments from the public. The comment period will begin the first full day following the announcement of the plan or update to the plan.**

The following public involvement guidelines will be followed throughout the Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan development:

- The Stakeholder list should be regularly maintained and include the many diverse constituencies in South Carolina including minority communities, traditionally underserved communities, limited English proficiency communities, faith-based communities and others.
- Stakeholders will be provided with regular updates throughout the plan development and update process through website updates, press releases, direct notifications, social media updates, and other, similar engagement methods.
- In order to ensure the widest possible public participation, project activities, findings and conclusions, and public meeting schedules will be disseminated through the general media across the state, including traditional media outlets, social media and the SCDOT website.
- MPOs, COGs, CTCs, tribal governments, and other stakeholders will be encouraged to distribute and include materials on their own platforms, including websites and social media.
- Various techniques should be employed to ensure that language, culture, access and economic barriers are addressed when information about the MTP is shared, and public input is needed. Examples of these techniques might include:
  - ◇ Any website developed for the plan or planning process should include the capability to be translated. Other materials, including printed materials will be translated upon request.
  - ◇ Partnering with minority business associations and chambers of commerce.
  - ◇ Focus group meetings or online surveys inviting members of minority communities, especially traditionally underserved communities to give input and provide feedback.
  - ◇ Targeted focus on minority media outlets and inclusion of minority media in the paid advertising schedule.
  - ◇ Securing hired and/or volunteer translators to assist at project meetings or to translate documents upon request.
  - ◇ Consideration of meeting times, dates and locations to fit the work schedules and/or

cultural behaviors of the affected community. For example, be mindful of religious and other holidays.

- ◇ Consider a mixture of communications strategies, including low-tech strategies such as yard signs, mailings or canvassing.

### **STIP - The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program**

The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) is the agency's 10-year transportation improvement program. The STIP includes all state and local transportation projects which are using federal highway and/or federal transit funding as required per Title 23, United States Code. The STIP must also contain all regionally significant transportation projects that require an action by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) or the Federal Transit Authority (FTA), including projects funded through the State Transportation Infrastructure Bank and local option sales tax programs. The FHWA and FTA use the STIP document to approve federal funds for transportation projects in South Carolina.

Information contained within the STIP includes the cost, schedule, and funding sources for the identified projects. The STIP must be financially constrained by year and must indicate whether the transportation system is being adequately operated and maintained. The STIP must include sufficient financial information to demonstrate which projects are to be implemented using current revenues. If additional funding sources are proposed for some projects, strategies for ensuring the availability and likelihood of additional funding are necessary.

The Statewide Transportation Planning Process involves many stakeholders and produces several documents to guide statewide priorities. The SCDOT leadership team has incorporated the Strategic Plan, 2018-2027 10-Year Plan, and Asset Management Plan into a single document called the Strategic Ten-Year Asset Management Plan (STAMP) that reflects the current priorities, aligns the entire organization towards these priorities, and instills accountability for achieving mission critical goals. Goals identified in the Strategic Plan are consistent with the policy desires of the SCDOT Commission.

The STIP is a living document and requires modifications as project information changes.

**STIP amendments** are major updates that require both public participation and SCDOT Commission approval. Examples of STIP amendments may include updating funding categories, adding new projects, or changes in project budget and scope.

**STIP modifications** are defined as corrections and amendments. STIP corrections are minor updates that do not require public participation or SCDOT Commission approval, redemonstration of fiscal constraint or a conformity determination. An example of a correction would include typographical or punctuation errors and programming updates including shifting of schedules within the STIP window, or moderate cost increases.

### **Public Involvement for the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program**

Federal legislation requires development of a Statewide Transportation Improvement Program. The STIP lists projects proposed statewide for the next ten years and it is updated and approved at least every four years. Public involvement is crucial to developing the STIP.

**A 21-day comment period will be provided to receive comments from the public. The comment period will begin the first full day following the announcement of a program update or amendment.**

The STIP will include all approved MPO and COG Transportation Improvement Programs. The MPO or COG is responsible for ensuring that these plans are developed consistent with the MPO or COG public involvement process.

The following public involvement guidelines will be followed to support community engagement during program updates and amendments on the STIP:

- The STIP will be revised as program and project information changes. Ensure that updates are written in simple, easy-to-read language.
- Each STIP program update and amendment will be shared on the Public Involvement portal on the SCDOT website – the website provides the capability for translation and additionally, any related materials will be translated upon request.
- Stakeholder lists from each county in South Carolina should be regularly maintained and include the many diverse constituencies in South Carolina including minority communities, traditionally underserved communities, limited English proficiency communities, faith-based communities and others.
- Program updates and amendments will be shared following approval from the Commission and will include website updates, press releases, direct notifications, social media updates, and other, similar engagement methods.
- MPOs, COGs, CTCs, tribal governments and other stakeholders will be encouraged to distribute and include materials on their own platforms, including websites and social media.
- Various techniques should be employed to ensure that language, culture, access and economic barriers are addressed when information about the STIP is shared, and public input is needed.
- Access to copies of the proposed updates and amendments will be made available at each MPO and COG office and the seven SCDOT District Offices.
- Consider a mixture of communications strategies, including low-tech strategies such as yard signs, mailings or canvassing.

### **Responding to comments during the Public Involvement Process**

Comments will be solicited throughout the development of transportation plans, and the official comment period will begin when the draft plan or draft plan update is published. See Appendix 1 for the official comment periods based on the planning document.

Upon request, staff will provide written responses to substantive comments. Typically, SCDOT offers the public an opportunity to choose whether they would like to receive a response. In general, staff responses will include an acknowledgement of the comment, and, as appropriate, information addressing the specific concerns or questions. In addition, the response will include a statement indicating that the comment will be provided to the SCDOT Commission for consideration.

Comment periods can be found in [Appendix 1](#)



## 4.2 Preliminary Engineering

Once a project is defined and prioritized through the planning processes, it moves into the SCDOT project development process. From input received during the planning phase, projects advance through to the design phase of project delivery. The goal of the preliminary engineering phase of a project is to guide a project through preliminary design and authorization to proceed to the final design.

Meaningful public involvement is an important part of the project development process and should be considered for all projects administered by SCDOT that have the potential to affect the human and natural environment. Past experience has shown that the following types of projects should include some level of public involvement during the preliminary engineering phase of project development: bridge replacements, corridor improvements, sidewalk/multiuse paths, interchange improvements, interchanges at new locations, intersection improvements, safety improvements (roundabouts and reduced conflict intersections) and access control projects.

In the project development process, SCDOT's goals are to:

- Develop and implement practices that offer the public a better understanding of design related activities and further solicit public input into the transportation decision making processes.
- Enhance public awareness and transparency in the project development process.

SCDOT develops project-specific Public Involvement Plan (PIP) at the beginning of projects. During the project scoping, the Project Lead will develop a project-specific PIP in coordination with their respective NEPA coordinator, the Office of Public Engagement, and the FHWA if it is funded through the Federal-aid Highway Program.

The project-specific PIP takes into account the impact the proposed project would have and the potential effects on the community and the environment, and it outlines the best outreach for that specific project. The level of detail in the project-specific PIP should be commensurate with the project size, complexity, community composition and potential for controversy.

The scoping process determines the scope of issues to be addressed for a project and identifies significant issues related to the proposed project. Specifically, it calls for early and consistent coordination with appropriate agencies and the public. The scoping process also aids in determining the type of environmental review document, the level of analysis, and related environmental requirements.

### **Level of Public Involvement and identifying the appropriate type of plan**

The level of public involvement and the amount of detail required in any public involvement plan is dependent on a variety of factors including the overall scope of the project, the types of environmental impacts associated with a project, the communities affected by the project, and the anticipated amount of public controversy. It is important to note that public involvement plans should be considered flexible documents that allow for the project team to employ a variety of public involvement strategies during the development of a transportation project.

If no public involvement activities are planned, the Project Lead will document the reasons for not conducting public involvement activities and will provide justification to the Environmental Services Office and the Office of Public Engagement. The ESO Director will be responsible for resolving any disagreements that arise over the need for public involvement. The ESO Director will consult with the Project Lead and the Office of Public Engagement prior to issuing a decision.

## 4.3 Construction, Operations and Maintenance

There are no federal requirements for public involvement during the construction, operations, and maintenance phases of a project, but there are often carryover requirements from the NEPA process and project commitments that are implemented in the later phases of a project. Construction is the most visible part of the project to the public and is likely to directly impact

the highest number of people. In addition, the current high population growth rate in South Carolina means that people moving into an area will not have the same knowledge from the project development phase that others may have.

Communication with the public after final designs are complete (traditional construction: design, bid, then build) or during alternative delivery (design-build) can be critical to ensure that a project stays on schedule and on budget. Key public issues during construction may involve schedules that relate to the duration and intensity of community disruptions. Examples of these disruptions include temporary and permanent changes in property access, travel time, and alternate routes (detours). Public communication during these phases relies on the responsible office proactively providing information to the Office of Public Engagement so that it can be effectively shared with the public.

During these phases, public outreach may include media releases, social media, the SCDOT website, information signs, and direct notification. Depending on the project, a range of these tools may be needed to target local and/or regional travelers, affected property and business owners, and emergency services.

As in the construction phase, public involvement activities during the operation and maintenance phases are typically focused on informing affected travelers about lane closures, work zones, detours and temporary access impacts, if any. Some examples of operations activities include improvements to traffic signals, pavement markings and signage installation. Examples of maintenance activities are roadside mowing/landscaping, pavement repairs and drainage system upkeep. Depending upon the locations and typical traffic volumes of these activities, proactive public involvement strategies may be necessary to minimize motorist delays. This may include sending a press release or press alert to local media specifically or statewide depending on the scope of the project. Public involvement during operations and maintenance activities may be limited to the use of overhead roadway dynamic message boards or project websites. However, there may be times when the potential impacts are worthy of more extensive outreach to neighborhood associations, business groups and others in proximity.

**Ensuring these guidelines are met for the appropriate operations requires judgment and discretion. The District Engineering Administrator will be responsible for making those judgment calls when necessary.**

After contract award and before issuance of Notice to Proceed, the Resident Construction Engineer will likely hold a pre-construction meeting with the contractor to review utility relocations and gauge proposed work schedules and traffic impacts. With the contractor joining the Project Team, this meeting offers another opportunity to emphasize the Department's expectations for minimizing impacts to the public as much as possible while maintaining completion milestones and deadlines and project budgets.

There should also be a robust discussion on the need, timing and extent of public outreach on the project. Again, depending on the history of the project, the outreach component could include:

- Press releases/press briefings after award of the project.
- When appropriate, letters to property owners informing them of delay and impact of project.

After letting, some projects may require more impactful traffic interruptions than were needed during preconstruction. In addition, projects that attracted significant public interest in the preconstruction phase are also likely to continue to be of interest during construction. Based on public feedback and/or the likelihood of impactful lane closures in high-traffic areas, the project team should anticipate the need for proactive communications activities that will provide a service to the impacted residents and/or businesses and traveling public in general.

It is important that upcoming project milestones, traffic changes, new projects and other newsworthy items are communicated to the Office of Public Engagement and the Office of Governmental Affairs at least 15 days in advance to allow for proper public notice and coordination.

Unless there are extenuating circumstances, SCDOT does not provide press notices about routine lane closures that are not anticipated to impact traffic. SCDOT does issue media notices with project updates, traffic pattern changes, and any closure of a road or bridge that will impact traffic.

Additionally, routine public education efforts will help strengthen public involvement and outreach efforts. Ongoing public education campaigns include 511 for real-time traffic information and work zone safety awareness.

### **Road and Bridge Closures**

#### **Planned Road and Bridge Closures**

For projects involving a road or bridge closure, once a contract is awarded and construction schedule is determined, the District Engineering Administrator will prepare and sign a letter for each closed road or bridge per the guidelines listed below. Signature authority for the letter may not be delegated, with an exception for short term signature authority.

The contents of the letter shall be as follows:

- County name
- Route description and local road name
- Description of crossing and approximate location
- Whether or not traffic will be maintained at the site (explain if traffic will be maintained by off-alignment, detour bridge, or staging)
- Detour route and length (if applicable)
- Anticipated start and end dates for construction

Distribution of the letter shall be as follows:

- State Senator(s) and Representative(s)
- COG and MPO Representatives
- Chairman of the County Council
- County Administrator/Manager
- City Mayor (as appropriate)
- City Manager (as appropriate)
- Emergency Response Personnel
- School District
- Post Office
- Trucking Industry Representative

The following individuals shall receive courtesy copies:

- SCDOT District Commissioner
- Deputy Secretary for Engineering
- Chief of Staff

The following individuals shall receive courtesy copies:

- SCDOT Commissioner for the District where closure takes place
- Deputy Secretary for Engineering

- Deputy Secretary for Finance and Administration
- Deputy Secretary for Intermodal and Freight Programs
- Deputy Secretary for Planning
- Chief of Staff
- Chief Engineer for Project Delivery
- Chief Engineer for Operations
- Chief Engineer for Construction and Alternative Delivery
- Director of Preconstruction
- Director of Alternative Delivery (as appropriate)
- Director of Construction
- Director of Maintenance
- Director of Bridge Management
- Director of Public Engagement
- Resident Construction Engineer
- Director of State Governmental Affairs
- Director of Federal Governmental Affairs

Once the preconstruction conference is held and the construction start date has been determined, the District Engineering Administrator (DEA) shall issue (through the Office of Public Engagement) a press release specifying the anticipated construction schedule and any other relevant information for drivers including detours and anticipated traffic delays. The DEA will make the determination if notification is necessary for minor or short-term closures. The Office of Public Engagement will distribute the press release to local media outlets and local stakeholder lists.

Fifteen days prior to closing the road or bridge structure, a sign stating the date of the proposed closure shall be placed at each end of the project site.

#### Emergency Road and Bridge Closures

When the Department closes a road or bridge in an emergency situation, the responsible party should immediately notify the Chief Engineer for Operations and the Office of Public Engagement. The Office of Public Engagement will be responsible for distributing a press release to local media outlets and local stakeholder lists.

In addition, the DEA shall prepare and sign letters to the appropriate elected officials at the time the decision to close is made. Signature authority for the letters may not be delegated, with an exception for short term signature authority. For bridge closures, a copy of the letter should be sent to the Director of Bridge Management along with a work start letter, prior to commencement of any work.

Please refer to [Bridge Management Guideline 1](#) for more information about the emergency bridge project development process.

In addition to written notifications, the DEA shall notify all affected area representatives, senators, and commissioners as soon as possible when an emergency road or bridge closure is required. The following information shall be included in the notification:

- County, route, and crossing
- Local road name and/or local bridge name
- Whether the bridge is to be closed or if traffic will be maintained during construction (explain if traffic will be maintained by off-alignment, detour bridge, or staging)
- Detour route and length if traffic will be detoured
- Businesses that may be affected by closure (for inclusion in letter but not news release)
- Date of expected closure
- Approximate length of closure and/or completion date

## 4.4 Emergency Projects

There are occasions where the agency must rapidly develop and begin construction for a transportation project, for example, emergency bridge replacements or rehabilitations. In these cases, the negative impacts to the traveling public would increase without rapid project delivery.

In the aftermath of a disaster, public engagement and awareness is typically heightened, and public involvement efforts can benefit from this increase in public attention. Public education measures before a disaster can help impacted community members better understand the agency's approach to recovery.

SCDOT is prepared to respond to, and provide public awareness/involvement activities for emergency/disaster events and other major roadway traffic impacts, including:

- Natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, snow/ice storms, etc. that may require evacuations, clearing road debris, etc.
- Any significant, multi-jurisdictional roadway response and recovery effort

Strategies to inform the public about these emergencies may include:

- Focused media relations, including phone calls, emails and advisories to convey the emergency to the public
- Information pieces, including publications, presentations and flyers on preparedness for weather-related emergencies, distributed to local government and civic groups
- Email blasts to partner state agencies, legislators, county and city elected officials
- Social media campaigns
- Web announcements



## SECTION 5: DEVELOPING A PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

### 5.1 Elements for Public Involvement Planning

SCDOT considers the need for public involvement for each project during the project planning stage. SCDOT recognizes that each project is unique and is committed to assessing individual projects to determine the best public involvement approach. Early in the project development process, the Project Lead, NEPA coordinator, and the Office of Public Engagement and FHWA work together to determine the appropriate level of public involvement considering the project-specific conditions.



## **Identify the Level of Public Involvement**

The scope of public involvement differs with each project and is determined based on the project type, scope, location, and complexity; community composition; community interest; and likely impacts of the project.

Some of those considerations include:

- Type of project and work to be done
- The area that would be potentially affected
- Annual daily traffic
- ROW requirements
- Wetland mitigation
- Potential changes in access
- Historic properties
- Possible Section 4(f) properties
- Construction impacts and schedule
- Potential detour requirements
- Environmental Justice(EJ) and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations
- Proposed NEPA class of action

Additionally, factors related to a project's context and intensity may warrant additional consideration in the public involvement process. These include:

- Permanent ROW acquisitions
- Acquisition of homes, businesses or structures
- Traffic detours
- Temporary or permanent access restrictions or closures
- Projects that would construct a new interchange or roadway on new alignment or would add capacity
- Construction involving nighttime work near a residential area
- Projects that have the potential to adversely impact a vulnerable or underserved population
- Projects adding additional capacity to an existing roadway

Based on these and other project-specific factors, the public involvement efforts should identify and outline goals – these are outlined in the project-specific public involvement plan.

## **Identify Key Stakeholders**

Public involvement activities should be inclusive of and accessible to anyone who may have an interest in the project, regardless of race, age, income and education levels, language or physical disability.

Each project-specific public involvement plan will identify stakeholders and the NEPA coordinator will assist the Project Lead in determining if there are traditionally underserved communities that may be impacted by a specific project.

Common stakeholders include:

- Emergency responders, law enforcement and hospitals
- Residential and business property owners in proximity to the project
- County and city officials
- Users of the corridor – drivers, freight traffic, etc.
- Any impacted person or community, including traditionally underserved communities including minorities, LEP, and EJ communities
- SCDOT Commission members
- Media

- The public involvement should also include other stakeholder agencies and organizations:
- State and federal agencies or organizations (US Corps of Engineers, US Environmental Protection Agency, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, South Carolina Department of Commerce, etc.)
  - Tribal Governments
  - Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Councils of Government
  - County Transportation Committees
  - Bike and Pedestrian Organizations
  - Local Chambers of Commerce

Figure 1

### NEPA Public Involvement Requirements for Transportation Projects

| Public Involvement   | Categorical Exclusion (CE) / Minimum Criteria Determination Checklist (MCDC) | Environmental Assessment (EA) | Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)     |
|--|--|-------------------------------|--|
| Notice of Intent   | NA   | NA                            | ■  |
| Letter of Intent   | NA   | ■                             | NA                                       |
| Property Owner Notification  | ▲  | ▲                             | ▲  |
| Postcard   | ▲  | ■                             | ■  |
| Public Information Meeting   | ▲  | ■                             | ■  |
| Public Website(s)  | ▲  | ■                             | ■  |
| Newsletter   | ▲  | ▲                             | ▲  |
| Public Hearing   | ▲  | ■                             | ■  |
| Availability of Environmental Document for Review/<br>Notice of Availability | ▲  | ■<br>(30 days)                | ■<br>(Draft: 45 days;<br>Final: 30 days) |

Note: \*The public comment period for a Draft EIS is 45 days with an option for 60 days or longer, if needed.

#### SYMBOLS

■ Required

▲ Optional

NA Not Applicable

## 5.2 Developing a Project-Specific Public Involvement Plan

All projects have initial opportunities for public input at the program level before they reach the environmental phase because they are included in the STIP, and public input opportunities are associated with the planning processes used to develop the STIP.

For most projects, a project-specific public involvement plan is required. While SCDOT strives to exceed the minimum required public involvement measures, the minimum public involvement activities required are identified in Figure 2.

Figure 2

| Minimum Public Involvement Activities Recommended for Most Projects: |                 |               |                                   |
|--|-----------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| Postcard mailing   | Project Website | Press Release | Notification of elected Officials |

A project-specific PIP outlines the outreach that will be undertaken for a specific project, who will be responsible for each outreach component, and the expected date of delivery for each action item. The project-specific PIP takes into account the impact that the proposed project would have and the potential effects on the community and environment, and it outlines the best outreach for that specific project. The level of detail in the project-specific PIP should be commensurate with the project size, complexity, community composition, and level of impacts. Identify achievable goals to either inform and educate; reach consensus or participate in decision-making process.

An example of a project-specific public involvement plan is included in the Appendix. In addition, the form-fillable template for an in-house project-specific public involvement plan is available [here](#).

The project-specific public involvement plan should include the following:

- A description of the project, including the purpose and need.
- A description of the goals and objectives for outreach on the project.
- Outline the requirements for public involvement .
- Identify key stakeholders and communities impacted by the project.
- Identify additional interested or impacted groups, including Environmental Justice, Title VI, LEP, and other special populations.
- Identify the public involvement tools and strategies that will be used (see Section 7 for information on public involvement tools and strategies).
- Identify potential issues and any additional targeted outreach to address these issues.
- Assign responsibility for implementation.
- Outline the schedule of implementation.

The project-specific public involvement plan is a living document and is modified, as needed, as new information emerges, and the public involvement needs of the project evolve. The Project Lead is responsible for updating and maintaining the project-specific public involvement plan.

In addition to the resources and guidance provided within this policy, the Office of Environmental Service Office and the Office of Public Engagement are available to assist with the development of project-specific public involvement plans.

## SECTION 6: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT DURING THE NEPA PROCESS

This section outlines the legally required public involvement activities for each NEPA class of action. SCDOT typically conducts additional outreach beyond what is legally required.

Federal projects subject to NEPA are evaluated in one of the following three types of documents:

**Categorical Exclusion (CE):** Prepared for actions that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the environment. If a CE is found, neither an EA nor an EIS is required. As a result, there are no federal public involvement requirements for a CE. However, coordination with stakeholders and the public may be beneficial, as it will inform the public and allow the project team to obtain insight into key issues.

In some situations where a CE is processed, compliance with other applicable regulations (e.g. Section 4(f) and/or Executive Orders) may require public involvement. Public Involvement should be undertaken commensurate with project type, scope, location, and complexity; community composition; community interest; and project impacts. If a CE project is located near an Environmental Justice (EJ) or Limited English Proficiency (LEP) population or has some level of controversy, project-specific public involvement may be required by SCDOT. A project-specific PIP is prepared for any CE project for which public involvement is planned.

**Environmental Assessment (EA):** Prepared for actions in which the significance of the environmental impact is not clearly established. If analysis determines the project will have no significant impact of the quality of the environment, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is issued. An EA is used when the significance of the potential impact is uncertain. The EA process is complete when a decision is made to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project or a formal FONSI is made.

The project-specific PIP should include notice through various traditional media outlets, newsletters, and virtual public involvement techniques. The project-specific PIP should include identification of and outreach to traditionally underserved groups, including minorities, low-income populations, and LEP populations.

For projects requiring an EA, public involvement requirements are defined in the following regulations: 23 CFR 771.119 (Environmental Assessments), 23 CFR 771.121 (Findings of No Significant Impact) and [23. U.S.C. 139](#).

It is SCDOT's policy to hold public hearings for all Environmental Assessments approved by FHWA. When a public hearing is held as part of the environmental review process for an action, the EA must be available at the public hearing and for a minimum of 15 days in advance of the public hearing. The applicant must publish a notice of the public hearing in local newspapers that announces the availability of the EA and where it may be obtained or reviewed. Any comments must be submitted in writing to the applicant or the Administration during the 30-day availability period of the EA unless the Administration determines, for good cause, that a different period is warranted.

**Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):** Prepared for projects where it is known that the action will have a significant effect on the environment. Projects that will have significant environmental impacts, such as large projects, projects on a new location, or projects involving substantial controversy, are generally evaluated in an EIS.

Per Section 6002 of SAFETEA-LU, Environmental Impact Statements require the development of a plan for coordinating public participation. The coordination plan should outline (1) how the lead agencies have divided the responsibilities for compliance with the various aspects of the environmental review process, such as the issuance of invitations to participating agencies, and (2) how the lead agencies will provide the opportunities for input from the public and other agencies, in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and policies. The plan should be developed within 90 days of the publication of the Notice of Intent (NOI) and should identify coordination points, such as:

- NOI publication and scoping activities.
- Development of purpose and need.
- Identification of the range of alternatives.
- Collaboration on methodologies.
- Completion of the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).
- Identification of the preferred alternative and the level of design detail.
- Completion of the final environmental impact statement (FEIS).
- Completion of the ROD.
- Completion of permits, licenses, or approvals after the ROD.

Specific Requirements of the (DEIS), (FEIS), and (ROD):

The DEIS must be circulated and made available to the public for review and comment no later than the time the document is filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

It is SCDOT's policy to hold public hearings on the draft EIS. The draft EIS must be available at the public hearing and for a minimum of 15 days in advance of the hearing. The availability of the draft EIS must be mentioned, and public comments requested, in any public hearing notice and at any public hearing presentation.

The Federal Register public availability notice (40 CFR 1505.10) must establish a period of not fewer than 45 days nor more than 60 days for the return of comments on the draft EIS unless a different period is established in accordance with 23 U.S.C. 139(g)(2)(A). The notice and the draft EIS transmittal letter must identify where comments are to be sent.

The FEIS must be transmitted to any persons, organizations, or agencies that made substantive comments on the draft EIS or requested a copy, no later than the time the document is filed with the EPA. In the case of lengthy documents, the agency may provide alternative circulation processes in accordance with 40 CFR 1502.19. The applicant must also publish a notice of availability in local newspapers and make the final EIS available through the mechanism established pursuant to USDOT Order 4600.13, which implements Executive Order 12372. When filed with the EPA, the final EIS must be available for public review at the applicant's offices and at appropriate Administration offices. A copy should also be made available for public review at institutions such as local government offices, libraries, and schools, as appropriate.

Upon issuance of the ROD, SCDOT must make hard copies of the EIS/ROD available at its Headquarters Office and respective District Office for public review. A copy should also be made available online.

**Reevaluations** - A reevaluation is a review conducted of any proposed change in an action, affected environment, anticipated impact, applicable requirements, or mitigation measure as they relate to the environmental document or decision. The purpose of a reevaluation is to determine whether an environmental document or decision remains valid for Agency decision-making. A reevaluation is a continuation of the project development process, though it does not necessarily reopen the NEPA decision. Public involvement needs must also be reconsidered during the reevaluation phase of a project if substantial time has elapsed since the last outreach effort and/or if project changes during final design warrant additional outreach. Project Leads should evaluate the need for additional public involvement in coordination with their respective NEPA Coordinator and FHWA when a reevaluation is being prepared.

## SECTION 7: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

SCDOT has developed a list of public involvement tools and strategies that can be implemented to further the department's goal of meaningful public involvement. For most projects, this involves more than one of these tools and strategies and should include virtual public involvement tools. The following are provided as suggested tools and techniques to support public involvement activities for the South Carolina Department of Transportation. The Office of Public Engagement serves as a resource for developing and implementing an effective public involvement strategy based on the project or program.

## 7.1 Media Relations

The Office of Public Engagement serves as the primary media liaison for the South Carolina Department of Transportation. Depending on the type of project and the phase of the project, different media relations strategies can support effective public involvement. The Office of Public Engagement is responsible for maintaining a database of relevant media members and sharing timely, accurate information.

Media releases may be used to provide notice of public involvement activities, such as meetings or hearings, and also to distribute project information and meeting details to local, regional, and other press or media services (for example, newspapers, radio stations, television stations, and news websites) in the project vicinity. All media releases are distributed by the SCDOT Office of Public Engagement.

Media releases are sent prior to a public meeting/event. They provide an overview of the project and the time, date and location of upcoming meetings.

Press conferences should be considered for projects that will have regional or statewide impacts. For example, a project that will include the closure of a portion of the interstate or a major primary route. In general, a press conference should occur 1-2 weeks prior to the start of potential travel impacts.

Depending on the level of interest and in coordination with the Project Lead, the Office of Public Engagement will attend public meetings as needed to facilitate media interviews and provide information to reporters.

## 7.2 Social Media

The South Carolina Department of Transportation has a presence on a number of statewide social media platforms including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, YouTube, and NextDoor. The Office of Public Engagement serves as the primary manager of the department's social media presence.

Posting information on social media platforms can be an effective tool to share information about upcoming public involvement activities or to direct community members to a project website or online survey. Often, these activities are most successful if they include a call to action. As a matter of policy, SCDOT does not respond to comments on any of our social media platforms.

Depending on the size and scope of the project, paid social media placements may be appropriate for reaching a larger audience.

## 7.3 Visual Displays

The production of visual or graphic depictions are helpful to provide public understanding of complex and/or innovative projects. These may include:

- Animations or simulations
- Display boards
- Table-top displays
- Maps
- Videos
- PowerPoint presentations

All printed visual displays should follow the brand guidelines outlined in the department's brand and style guide, [available here](#). All printed visual displays should include the SCDOT logo.

## 7.4 Project Websites

For project-specific websites, the Project Lead initiates the request for the website and reviews the website prior to publication. At a minimum, a project website should be developed and advertised for each project that is open for public comment. The website should include the following components:

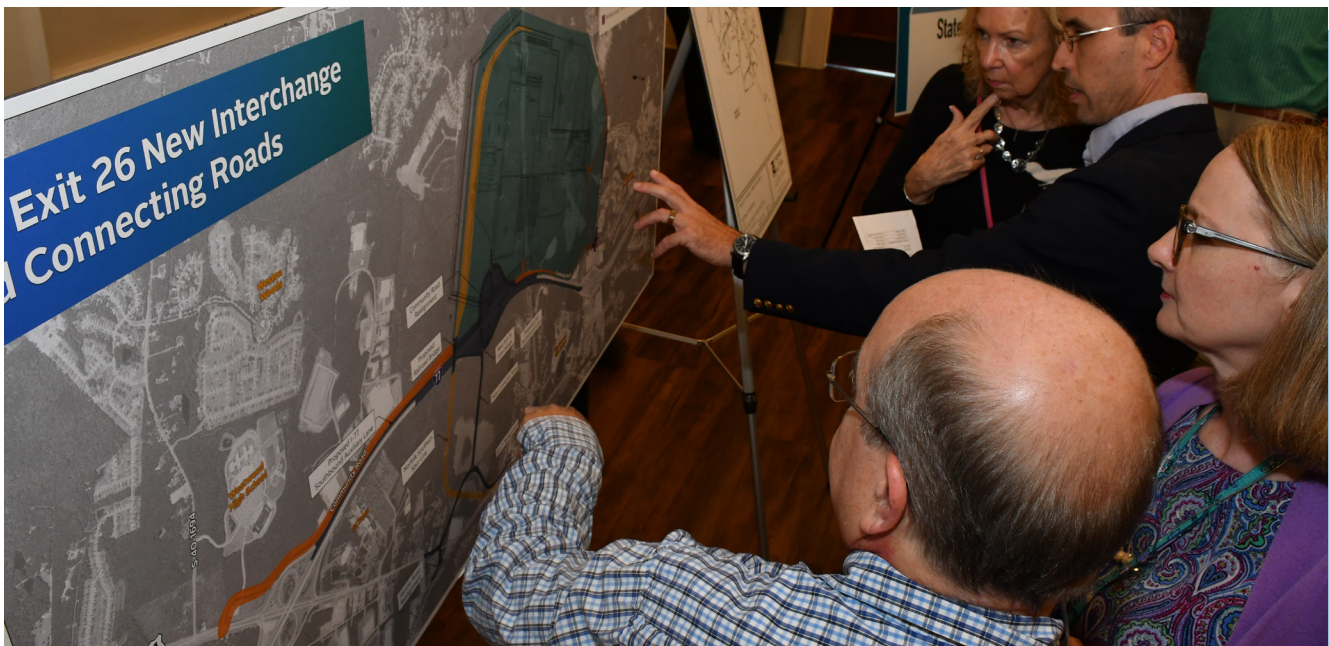
- Project description
- Purpose and need
- Schedule
- Funding information
- A map or other visualization aid
- Any materials presented at a public meeting
- An opportunity for public comment
- Contact information

While other offices may support in the content management for SCDOT project websites, the Information Technology (IT) Department at the South Carolina Department of Transportation is responsible for all websites associated with the department. It is important that IT is included in the development of websites, and they must approve any website developed by a consultant or outside entity on behalf of SCDOT.

## 7.5 Public Information Materials

Public information materials may be developed to share project information as well as to gather input from the public. These materials may include:

- Brochures and flyers
- Door hangers
- Fact sheets
- Newsletters
- Posters or other displays
- Presentations
- Surveys or comment forms



These materials should be developed using clear, easy to read language and avoid jargon or technical descriptions. The Office of Public Engagement should review public information materials prior to publication.

In addition, the Office of Public Engagement maintains the department's electronic newsletter platform and regularly distributes updates to key stakeholders. Anyone can sign up to receive notifications and the contact lists are segmented by geographical region. This platform is used to share information with stakeholders about upcoming public involvement activities including upcoming meetings and events.

## 7.6 Surveys

The Office of Public Engagement serves as the primary liaison for the department's digital survey platform. Surveys can be developed and shared online or in-person and in a digital or paper format. Surveys provide an additional tool to gauge public sentiment and address specific issues.

For projects with a large number of stakeholders, consider the use of a survey tool. For example, the Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan.

Survey records should be provided to the Project Lead and stored with the project records.

## 7.7 Activities for Reaching/Addressing Traditionally Underserved Communities

Engaging traditionally underserved communities including minority, limited English proficiency, disabled, low-income and environmental justice communities is very important. Project teams must be aware of various techniques to ensure that language, culture, access and economic barriers are addressed when project information is shared, and public input is needed. These activities might include:

- Building relationships with key community influencers that may be willing to partner in outreach efforts
- Partnering with minority organizations/associations, including Chambers of Commerce
- Distributing media releases to minority media outlets, ensuring they receive information in a timely manner and will cover project activities. If a paid advertising schedule is developed, include minority media outlets.
- Develop a database of traditionally underserved groups and minority media groups in specific communities. The Office of Public Engagement maintains stakeholder databases.
- As needed, provide hired or volunteer translators to assist at project meetings
- SCDOT websites include technology that allows information to be translated into a variety of languages. As requested, other public information materials should be translated.
- Adjust meeting dates, times and locations to fit the work schedules and/or cultural behaviors of the affected community. For example, be mindful of religious holidays.
- Find meeting locations that won't hinder attendance, including neighborhood shopping centers, community sporting venues, or other areas residents frequently visit.
- Use a mix of high and low technology to communicate. For example, yard signs may help reach elderly or low-income individuals with limited access to technology or internet. In rural areas, consider the broadband capacity and employ other communications tools.
- Consider that project teams may have to overcome a lack of trust – and even fear – as it relates to government representatives. Regard for cultural differences and communication in the appropriate language will help in these difficult situations.

The NEPA coordinator will assist the Project Lead in identifying traditionally underserved communities that may be impacted by a project using resources such as census data and the environmental justice screening tool.



## 7.8 Other Outreach

There are a number of other outreach tools that may be effective to facilitate successful public involvement. The Environmental Services Office and the Office of Public Engagement can help make determinations about what other outreach tools may be helpful.

Some examples include:

- Mailings, including postcard distribution
- Neighborhood canvassing
- Speaking engagements with local community groups
- Attending community events, such as fairs or farmers markets

## SECTION 8: PUBLIC MEETING PROCEDURES

Depending on a proposed project's unique environmental challenges and opportunities, the public involvement activities may include public meetings. Projects requiring an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) require public meetings, and in some instances public hearings.

Unless required, the Project Lead will decide if a public involvement meeting is needed on a project-by-project basis with input from the NEPA coordinator and the Office of Public Engagement. The Director of the Environmental Services Office is responsible for resolving any disputes that arise regarding public involvement activities conducted for NEPA compliance.

For large, statewide programs or initiatives such as the Statewide Multimodal Plan or the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Formula Program Plan, hosting public meetings may be considered, but virtual tools or presentations at existing meetings may also serve the public involvement needs for those initiatives to ensure the department reaches a broad and inclusive audience.

The majority of public meetings hosted by SCDOT are informal, drop-in style meetings that allow members of the public to learn more about the project and interact directly with the project team to have questions answered and share concerns.

### **General Guidelines for project-specific Public Meetings:**

- The Project Lead will determine the date after offering potential dates to the Environmental Services Office and the Office of Public Engagement.
- Public meetings are typically two hours long and held on a date and time chosen with consideration to the affected community.
- The Project Lead and the NEPA coordinator will identify any community groups, churches, neighborhood associations or other affected/interested groups and identify a point of contact.
- The meeting location should be close to the proposed project.
- Documentation, including areas of discussion, input received, and decisions and commitments made is placed in the project file.
- Interpreters and translated materials should be made available as needed or requested.
- The public should be made aware of upcoming meetings at a minimum of 15 days in advance of the meeting. Notification of upcoming meetings may occur through various methods including postcards, physical signs, project websites, social media, and newspaper advertisements.

For public meetings that will be handled in-house, the Environmental Services Office (ESO) and the Office of Public Engagement will assist the Project Lead in developing and implementing a public meeting plan. For consultant-led public involvement efforts, the consultant will develop a public meeting plan that is submitted to the Project Lead for approval. The Project Lead will ensure the plan is reviewed by the Environmental Services Office and the Office of Public Engagement and FHWA prior to approval and implementation prior to approval and implementation. An example of a public meeting plan is available in the appendix.

### **For In-House Meetings**

#### **Responsibilities of the Project Lead:**

- Provide information about the project including the project description, project background, purpose and need, proposed schedule and estimated costs to assist in the development of printed materials.
- Coordinate the staff when applicable to include sign-in table staff, program manager and RPG/traffic personnel, FHWA representatives, ESO representatives, District Personnel, Right of Way agents, Office of Public Engagement representatives, and consultant staff.
- Provide information about staff attendance to the Office of Public Engagement for nametags.
- Provide key talking points for the representatives that will be attending and staffing each station.
- Maintain a record of the meeting to be kept in the project file.

#### **Responsibilities of the Environmental Services Office:**

- Making an initial determination, in coordination with the Project Lead, about the need for a Public Information Meeting.
- Reviewing display materials to be provided at the public meeting and, as appropriate, coordinating with FHWA to provide them an opportunity to review the proposed displays a minimum of 7 days prior to the Public Involvement meeting.

#### **Responsibilities of the Office of Public Engagement:**

- Determining and securing a facility for the meeting.
- Obtain Security for the meeting.
- Obtaining a Certificate of Insurance for the facility from the Legal Office.
- Public notification of the location, date and time of the meeting.
- Notifying elected officials in the project area in coordination with Governmental Affairs staff.
- Coordinating the placement of physical signs announcing the meeting.
- Reviewing public information materials, including displays.
- Coordinating and distributing mailings, including postcard mailings.
- Coordinating the installation of directional signage for parking and the identification of the entrance.
- Creating other necessary materials such as nametags, sign-in sheets, comment forms, and handouts.
- Materials should be reviewed and approved by Project Lead prior to distribution.

### **Facility Requirements**

Any facility used for a public meeting should meet the following requirements:

- Americans with Disabilities Act accessible.
- Ample parking in close proximity to the facility.
- Audio/Visual capabilities.
- Adequate availability of tables and appropriate seating.

## SECTION 9: PUBLIC HEARING PROCEDURES

Public hearings are a formal, official process for gathering input. Environmental documentation that may require formal public hearings include Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Statements. Public hearings may also be scheduled as a part of a project that includes high levels of controversy or substantial design changes. The Environmental Services Office (ESO) Director is responsible for approving all public hearing certifications and resolving any disputes that arise regarding public involvement activities conducted for NEPA compliance.

Specific state and federal requirements must be adhered to during the public hearing. The public hearing gives the public an opportunity to provide both oral and written comments.

The public hearing will adhere to the same guidance and responsibilities of the public meeting. A public hearing does require a formal presentation and an opportunity for the public to provide verbal comments.

### **General Guidelines for project-specific Public Hearings:**

- A court reporter will be required to record the formal portion of the meeting.
- A microphone should be provided for the public hearing officer and for formal verbal comments.
- The formal portion of the public hearing should be no less than one hour in duration, a timekeeper will be present to keep the speakers on schedule.
- All speakers who signed up in advance should be provided with an opportunity for formal verbal comment.
- The time limit for each formal verbal comment is two minutes, and the time is not transferrable.
- Sign-up for formal verbal comments will be open until five minutes prior to the beginning of the formal portion.
- The formal presentation will still take place, even if no one signed up to provide formal verbal comments.

### **General Guidelines for the Public Hearing Format:**

- The Public Hearing Officer (PHO) will start the formal portion on time.
- Introduce him/herself as the PHO. Inform the audience that this is not a question-and-answer session and that this portion is being recorded for inclusion in the public comments record along with any other written or recorded comments.
- Introduce and allow any government elected officials who desire to speak to make a brief statement about the project. If they do not wish to speak, ask if they would like to be recognized.
- Introduce the Project Lead and have them give a brief overview of the project (no more than 10 minutes).
- Inform the audience and remind the speakers of the following ground rules that they agreed to abide by:
  - ◇ The formal portion is being recorded.
  - ◇ Understanding of two-minute time limit.
  - ◇ No profanity or personal attacks.
  - ◇ State their name, address, and any group affiliation.
  - ◇ The time is not transferrable.
  - ◇ If a citizen agrees with a previous formal verbal comment, they may forfeit their time by simply recognizing their agreement with the previous citizen.
  - ◇ Only those citizens who previously signed up will be allowed to speak.

- After the last speaker has finished, the PHO will thank the speakers and the audience for their participation.
- Remind the audience of the other opportunities to provide comments. Explain that these verbal comments will not be responded to, but if they would like to receive a written response, they MUST submit a written comment either at the PH or during the comment period.
- If time allows, advise the public that they may return to the displays, etc. and ask questions about the project to SCDOT representatives.

### **Public Hearing Certification Package**

The Public Hearing Certification Package is signed by the Director of the Environmental Services Office. The certification package should include:

- Summary of the Public Hearing (PH) attendance and comments.
- A transcript of the formal portion of the PH.
- Sign-in sheets.
- Comments received.
- Handout.
- Responses to Comments.

## **SECTION 10: RESPONDING TO PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Public input in the form of comments is the primary goal of public involvement activities and provides important feedback that can be used in the decision-making process for transportation projects. Specifically, public input allows the project team to understand community issues, concerns, and needs. Accurate records of public input must be kept. Responding to public comments appropriately is critical to the success of a project. Right of way cannot be authorized without documentation of public comment responses.

Comments received about a project during an official comment period will be transmitted to the Project Lead for consideration in further development of the project. SCDOT provides responses to all substantive comments received during the official comment period and provides detailed responses to comments that include project-specific questions.

The Project Lead is responsible for responding to all comments provided during the official comment period. The SCDOT Office of Public Engagement offers support in reviewing and editing draft responses. The SCDOT Environmental Services Office ensures that all substantive comments have been identified and adequately addressed. The Project Lead is responsible for maintaining a record of all comments received and the responses provided – these documents are kept in the project file.

Comments received from social networking sites, or other sites not directly hosted by SCDOT will not be included in the official project record and will not receive a response from SCDOT. If a social media site is used for public involvement efforts, a disclaimer will be clearly provided, and the site will also provide a link or directions on how to leave a formal comment.

A table outlining the required comment periods can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

## SECTION 11: DOCUMENTATION

It is critical to the success of any project that current and detailed project records are maintained and staff can efficiently access important documents. In addition, accurate project records may be needed to address litigation and/or auditing if it occurs at any point during or after the completion of a project. Transportation projects often develop over many years and personnel assigned to a project could change throughout the lifetime of the project. The Project Lead is responsible for ensuring a complete record is maintained and that appropriate staff are provided with access to this documentation.

**At a minimum, the following documents related to public involvement should be kept in the project file:**

- Public involvement plan
- Documents gathered in the development of the public involvement plan related to environmental impacts, including social impacts
- Record of compliance with all requirements including ADA, LEP and Title VI requirements
- Written comments or written records of substantive verbal comments
- A meeting plan if a public meeting or public hearing is held
- If a public hearing is held, the agenda, minutes and transcript from the hearing
- Materials provided during the public involvement process related to the project including flyers, fact sheets, postcards, and displays
- Stakeholder lists or contact information collected during the process
- Dates, times and locations of any public meetings or public hearings
- Photo or video content collected during the public involvement process

## SECTION 12: MEASURING SUCCESS

The South Carolina Department of Transportation recognizes the importance of measuring and evaluating its public involvement efforts in order to continually refine and improve our relationships with our public stakeholders and develop better public decision making. This means that members of the public are informed, engaged and have opportunities to provide meaningful input through all stages of a transportation project.

SCDOT uses both quantitative and qualitative measures to evaluate the effectiveness of public involvement activities associated with a particular plan, program or project. Appropriate measures for evaluating public involvement activities are currently limited, but SCDOT will continue to research and work with experts in this area to develop better evaluation techniques and incorporate new measures.

Any assessment should also take into account the fact that the public may choose to limit or forgo participation because they agree with the project, have been provided sufficient information to answer their questions, or for other unknown reasons.

**Here are some key questions to help determine the effectiveness of public involvement activities:**

- Is the entire project community represented in the public involvement activities?
- Are the comments received relevant and well informed?
- Are there significant unresolved issues concerning the project?

Indicators for success begin with meeting legal and procedural requirements, but real success goes beyond basic compliance and a lack of litigation over the public process. It includes a reasonable level of community engagement, a demonstrated ability to have listened to public

input, and some level of positive influence exerted on the process that would otherwise not have occurred and made for a better decision or decisions.

#### Quantitative Measures

- Attendance numbers for public meetings and hearings
- Demographic information provided by participants
  - ◊ Surveys include an option to self-identify, but SCDOT does not require participants to provide any demographic or personal information
- Subscribers to the mailing list or e-newsletter
- Calls to the Project Lead or customer service center
- Project website views
- Social media engagements and reach
- Media coverage
- QR Code tracking on materials including signs and flyers
- Project team's responsiveness to public input

#### Qualitative Measures

- Survey participants on their preferences and suggestions for improvement
- Participants and public stakeholders indicate trust, understanding and satisfaction
- Anecdotal information provided by staff engaged in the process

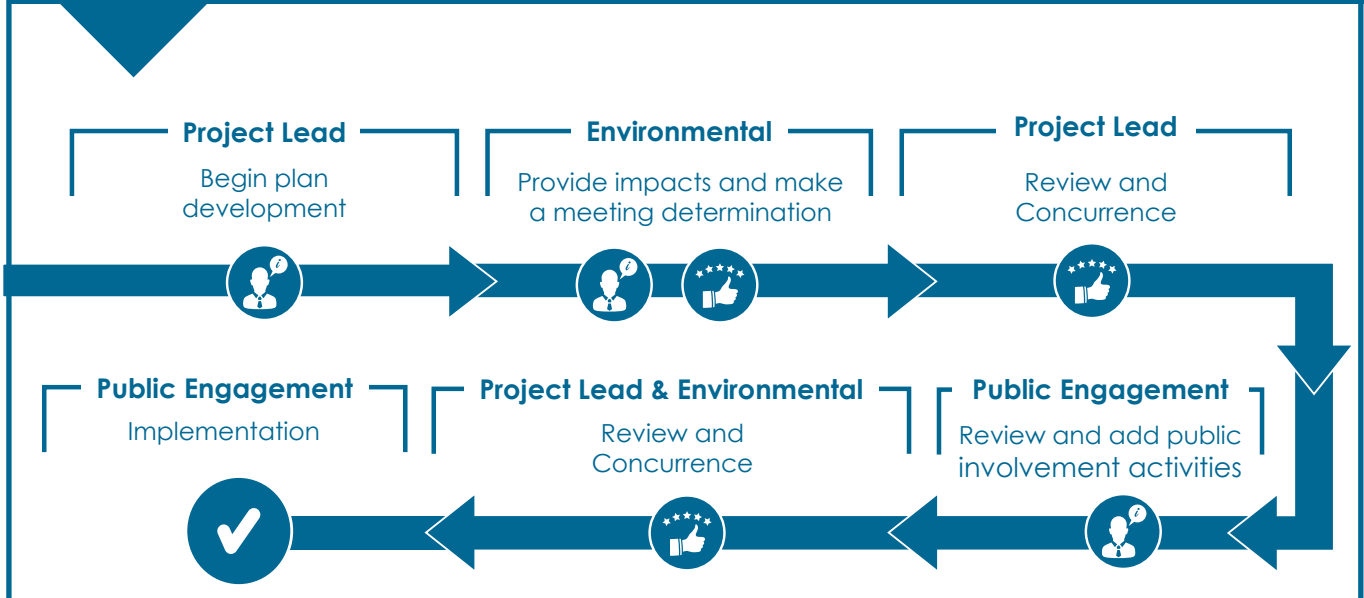
At least every five years, the South Carolina Department of Transportation will solicit comments from non-metropolitan local officials and other interested parties. This process is managed by the Office of Planning.

SCDOT will continuously measure the success of all public involvement efforts and will make changes as needed to improve public involvement and engagement. These measures will be considered when this plan is updated every five years.

## APPENDIX

| Minimum Required Comment Periods for Projects and Programs | Comment Period               |
|--|------------------------------|
| Statewide Transportation Improvement Program               | 21 Days                      |
| Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan                   | 30 Days                      |
| Draft Environmental Impact Study or FEIS if one is held    | 45 Days                      |
| Public Meeting or Public Hearing                           | 30 Days                      |
| Proposed Projects in Preconstruction                       | 30 Days                      |
| Public Involvement Policy                                  | 45 Days                      |
| Strategic Highway Safety Plan                              | 30 Days                      |
| Environmental Assessments                                  | 30 days per 23 CFR § 771.119 |

# PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



## PROJECT LEAD

The Project Lead is responsible for coordinating the project kickoff meeting that includes the members of the interdisciplinary project team. The Project Lead is also responsible for the final approval of the public involvement plan, developed in coordination with the project team, and maintaining all related records.

## ENVIRONMENTAL

The environmental services office serves an oversight function and ensures all applicable regulatory standards are met in the development of the public involvement plan. The environmental services office also provides data on social and environmental impacts to help inform the development and execution of the public involvement plan. The environmental services office will make the determination about whether or not a public meeting is necessary in collaboration with the Project Lead and the office of public engagement.

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Office of Public Engagement is responsible for providing recommendations for the development and execution of public involvement outreach strategies and tactics. The Office of Public Engagement is also responsible for executing the plan. Based on the information provided by the Project Lead the environmental services office, the Office of Public Engagement will make recommendations for additional outreach tactics to ensure the public involvement process is equitable, inclusive and provides access for disadvantaged communities.



Guidance



Review



Implementation



### **Project Specific Public Involvement Plan**

A project specific public involvement plan is developed by the Project Lead after the initial project team meeting that includes representatives from the Environmental Services Office and the Office of Public Engagement.

The public involvement plan should be created, approved and provided to the Office of Public Engagement at least 60 days in advance of any public involvement activities.

### ***To be completed by the Project Lead***

**Name :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Information:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Project Name:** *(Example- SC 9 at Parris Bridge Road & SC 9 at Sloan Garden Extension.)*

**Description:** *(Example - The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) proposes to improve the intersections of SC 9 and Parris Bridge Road and SC 9 and Sloan Garden Road.)*

**Purpose and Need:** *(Example - SC 9 and S-43 (Parris Bridge Road): The purpose and need of the project is to increase the operational efficiency and add capacity at the intersection of SC 9 and Parris Bridge Road.)*

**Proposed Schedule:** *(Example - Right of Way Acquisition Spring 2025, Construction Spring 2026)*

**Estimated Cost and Funding Source:**



**Impacts to Consider:** (Example - Includes closures, detours, noise impacts, right of way, length of detour/closure, duration of detour/closure, impacts to businesses, AADT, 4(f) property, historical property, and change in access or travel pattern.)

**To be completed by the NEPA Coordinator**

**Name :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Information:** \_\_\_\_\_

**NEPA Class of Action:**

PCE                       CE                       EA                       EIS                       N/A

**Community Demographics, Social and Environmental Analysis:** Provide an analysis of the environmental and social considerations and the tools used to support the decision.

**Public meeting recommended**

Yes                       No

**Recommended date and time**

Date:                      Time:

**Public hearing recommended**

Yes                       No

**Recommended date and time:**

Date:                      Time:



# Planned Public Involvement Activities

## *To be completed by Public Engagement*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

Project: \_\_\_\_\_

Project Lead: \_\_\_\_\_

NEPA Coordinator: \_\_\_\_\_

Public Meeting:      Yes                              No

Date of Public Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Required Public Involvement Activities**

**Mailings**      Postcard within the project corridor - Distribution date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Project website**      Website request form submitted - Date for website launch: \_\_\_\_\_

**Press release**      Distributed to media and local stakeholder groups - Distribution date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Notification to elected officials**      Press release shared with the Chief of Staff Office

### **Additional Recommended Public Involvement Activities**

*These activities are in addition to all of the above activities and are required on projects with a public meeting or public hearing*

**Social Media Post**      Social media post to include the date and location of the meeting  
Distribution date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Social media platforms**      Facebook      X      LinkedIn      NextDoor

**Project Signs**      Sign request form submitted at least 45 days in advance  
Date of request: \_\_\_\_\_

## Additional Public Involvement Activities to Consider

*These activities are in addition to all of the above activities and should be considered for projects that are controversial, have significant community impacts or disproportionately impact traditionally underserved communities*

### **Flyers**

- Distributed to local businesses, public places and faith based organizations within the project corridor

Distribution date: \_\_\_\_\_

- List of distribution sites provided to the Project Lead to include in the project file

### **Yard Signs**

- Placed strategically in high traffic areas within the project corridor

Distribution date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Newspaper Advertisement**

- Provided to newspapers that are distributed within the project area

Date of advertisement: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Participation at other local meetings, festivals, or public gatherings**

- SCDOT booth with information about upcoming projects that have an impact in the area

Description of event including date, time and location: \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Paid social media advertising**

- Paid social media campaigns to promote a project or public meeting
- Schedule and cost attached to the public involvement plan

### **Property Owner Letters**

Distribution date: \_\_\_\_\_



# Workback Roadmap

