

3.0 Public Involvement

Since its inception in the mid 1970's, the Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization has recognized the importance of involving the public in the planning process. In order to put this belief into action, a document entitled *Public Involvement in the Planning Process* was adopted by the TAC in 1990. This document was amended in 2001 and 2005 to more adequately address specific planning efforts. This new version of the public involvement plan document is included in the Appendix.

MPO staff advertised and held a drop-in session at the Community Room of Citizen's Resource Center; 1303 Dallas-Cherryville Highway/NC 279; Dallas, NC 28034 to seek input on the update of the Long Range Transportation Plan. This meeting was advertised through a notice in the *Gaston Gazette* and publicized through press releases sent to local newspapers (*Charlotte Observer*, *Belmont Banner*, and *the Mount Holly News*). Advertisements were also posted on both the Government Channel and Community Channel for Gaston County and the City of Gastonia's website.

Beyond the public input session, MPO staff advertised revisions to the socioeconomic data, financial plan and Thoroughfare Plan map modifications and made the information available to the public. The draft forecasted data, as well as thematic maps of housing units and employment by Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ), were included in the City of Gastonia's website for viewing by the general public.

The last step in the public involvement process is a 30-day public comment period to be held following agency review. During this time frame, staff will receive comments and answer questions about the draft plan and conformity determination report. Comments received will be addressed as applicable.

Finally, it should be noted that outside of the effort undertaken as a part of this plan update, MPO staff receives and responds to a significant amount of informal public comments. This comes through phone calls, email, attendance at regularly scheduled MPO meetings and at other community events. A good example of this is the MPO's participation in meetings related to the Gaston County Comprehensive Plan. Throughout this process, citizens have made comments related to the need for increased public transportation, more sidewalks and bicycle facilities and the widening of some roads.

3.1 Contact Database

A contact database of Organizations within and contiguous to Gaston county was compiled by merging a variety of existing databases with new contacts. The contact database includes federal, state, county and city agencies, neighborhood and homeowners associations, environmental justice and traditionally underserved organizations, cultural and social groups,

faith-based and volunteer organizations, English and non-English speaking groups, advocacy groups, and interested citizens with no specific affiliation.

The database is intended to be as inclusive as possible in order to engage as many segments of the population as possible. The database will evolve and change as new issues and projects are addressed, and new groups and individuals are identified. Because of its ever-changing makeup, it was used not only in the LRTP update process but can also be used in subsequent GUAMPO activities and efforts.

3.2 Public Meetings

A public meeting was held in November 2004 for organizational leaders and MPO members, and the general public. The purpose of the meeting was to conduct a ranking survey of LRTP objectives and roadway, and transit projects. In addition, the meetings served to:

- Gather input on the Goals, Objectives and Policies of the LRTP;
- Present some of the projects under consideration for inclusion within the LRTP;
- Educate the public about GUAMPO, its activities and its role in the transportation planning process; and,
- Inform citizens on how they can get more involved and keep updated on GUAMPO activities.

More detailed information about the public meetings, the survey, and its responses can be found in the Appendix.

3.3 Gaston MPO Brochure

A full-color 8.5 X 14 quad-fold brochure was produced to serve several purposes including:

- Introduce the Gaston MPO, the MPO's Policy Board and the LRTP;
- Explain their functions;
- Describe opportunities for the public to participate in the LRTP update;
- Identify avenues to obtain additional information about Gaston MPO activities; and,
- Provide Gaston MPO contact information.

The brochure was mailed to those on the contact database, distributed to attendees at public meetings and small group sessions, and made available at the James B. Garland Governmental Service Center (City Hall Annex) and other town halls throughout the Gaston MPO area. A copy of the brochure can be found in the Appendices section.