III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

TMACOG’s transportation planning philosophy is to “plan with, not for, the public.” The public is broadly defined to encompass everyone from individual residents to local governments, transportation providers and area organizations and institutions.

“On the Move: 2007-2035 Transportation Plan” (2035 Plan) was developed in compliance with the public participation requirements of the 2005 federal transportation law (SAFETEA-LU) and the guidelines of the “TMACOG Public Involvement Policy for Transportation.” Once federal rules were published for SAFETEA-LU (February 2007), the TMACOG public involvement policy was updated to be in compliance with SAFETEA-LU.

1. Participation Strategies

Throughout the plan process, public input was sought from a broad base of the public. The first step was to create an inclusive plan task force so that a diversity of stakeholders could participate directly in shaping the plan. In addition, TMACOG standing transportation committees (including Freight, Passenger Rail, Pedestrian & Bikeways committees), representing a broad spectrum of interests, provided input to the plan.

An outreach subcommittee of the On the Move task force developed a plan logo that was used on plan materials throughout the process for increased public recognition. The subcommittee identified four major sectors—the general public (including youth and the elderly), government, institutions and service agencies, and the private sector—and developed strategies to engage each sector.

The 36 public libraries (see Figure 3) were the focal points for an innovative campaign of engaging the general public. At three stages of plan development, staff placed informational displays and handouts, survey forms, and comment boxes in the libraries. Two rounds of public meetings were held primarily in libraries as well: 12 “needs meetings” (early input on problems and opportunities) and six draft plan review meetings provided for participation throughout the region. (See photos on page 22.)
TMACOG sent direct mailings to units of local government and major institutions to solicit plan input and comment. Two major universities and one high school—at TMACOG’s request—conducted student surveys on transportation needs. Business, economic development, and

Above: Public libraries were the focal point of the public involvement process, with a series of displays, surveys, and public input meetings.

Below: Business, government and economic development leaders helped identify areas of future growth.
planning agency representatives were invited to special meetings early in the plan process to help identify expected growth and development in the region. (See photos).

The TMACOG website was employed extensively. Surveys and other comment could be submitted on line. All task force meeting materials were posted. The draft lists of proposed projects, policies and initiatives and a request for comment were prominently displayed on the website for several months. Frequent articles in the TMACOG newsletter, distributed monthly to 2,500 local governments, agencies and individuals, highlighted plan progress and input opportunities and referred readers to the website for more information. Use of public media included news releases and resulting news articles, interviews aired on radio and TV, and paid advertisements.

2. Visualization

Federal rules call for use of “visualization” techniques in communicating with the public. Visualization techniques are defined as methods of explaining the draft plan and related information “in a clear and easily accessible format such as maps, pictures, and/or displays, to promote improved understanding…..” TMACOG employed visual images and information throughout the plan process, beginning with the first displays in the public libraries (maps of existing and projected population and employment growth) and ending with information pages on plan projects (including photos and locational maps) on the TMACOG website (See sample informational Web page on Project C-9, also see Figure 4, Level of Service Illustrations.)

At the public input meetings on needs, numerous display boards depicted existing transportation systems and regional analysis (population projections, non-transit areas with transit-supportive population densities, freight flows, etc.). At the final public meetings, the draft plan was presented using illustrated slides, display boards with photos and maps, and video clips illustrating proposed innovations (roundabouts and high speed rail system).
Figure 2: Sample Informational Page:
Example of an informational page on the TMACOG website, using maps and photos to describe a plan project.
3. Environmental Justice

Environmental involvement of minority and low income populations (“environmental justice” or EJ target areas) and other underserved citizens was a plan goal and requirement. The plan task force and goal work groups included representatives of minority and low-income neighborhoods and agencies serving those populations, plus representatives of disabled and senior citizen agencies. A high school student was recruited to the task force, and student surveys were completed (two universities, one high school) to provide input from the younger generation.

As shown on the accompanying map (Figure 3), eight of the public meeting and/or public display sites were in environmental justice areas, with four or five additional sites immediately adjoining these areas. The majority of public meeting sites were accessible by public transit, and all were accessible to the disabled.

4. Involvement Phases

The following table outlines the major phases of public involvement of the “On the Move: 2007-2035 Transportation Plan”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step in Plan Process</th>
<th>Main Public Involvement Components</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Develop plan process</td>
<td>Create plan task force and public outreach subcommittee Create plan logo and Web page (on TMACOG website)</td>
<td>Broad-based, representing wide spectrum of public and private stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Set plan vision and goals</td>
<td>Input at annual transportation summit; draft goals set by task force; draft goals revisited after “needs meetings”</td>
<td>About 100-150 summit attendees include public and private transportation stakeholders and community leaders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Predict future conditions (population and land use for 2035)</td>
<td>Two regional meetings on current development and future growth. Invitees represented economic development, business and planning agencies Consultation with local governments and local government planning departments on population and employment projections – direct mailing. Display 1 and informational bookmarks in local libraries, with survey form asking for comments on expected patterns of growth.</td>
<td>Comments received were considered, and projections modified as appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step in Plan Process</td>
<td>Main Public Involvement Components</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Identify current and future transportation needs and opportunities</td>
<td>12 public meetings (co-sponsored by local civic groups to increase participation) with about 200 total participants, plus a few presentations to civic organizations. Display 2 in public libraries with survey form on transportation needs, and public meeting fliers. Input from TMACOG transportation committees Survey form posted on-line Student surveys on needs completed at University of Toledo, Bowling Green State University, and Bowling Green High School. Needs surveys mailed to major institutions. Hold needs input session at annual transportation summit Reviewed technical analysis on needs with task force.</td>
<td>Prepared needs input summary. Produced popular summary on needs, “Building the Case” (distributed to public libraries) Task force identified additional analysis needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Develop and prioritize solutions to needs statements</td>
<td>Mailing to local governments requesting project suggestions “Goal groups” (task force members plus additional experts) brainstormed and prioritized solutions (projects, initiatives, and policies) Technical analysis and ranking of projects; ranking of initiatives and policies (staff and task force)</td>
<td>Concluded with a goals group summit—groups presented recommendations and caucused to resolve differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Public comment on draft plan</td>
<td>6 public meetings Display 3 at public libraries, with draft plan and comment form Comment form and draft plan posted on website Direct mailing (comment form, draft plan) to units of local government Direct mailing (comment form, draft plan) to environmental agencies, In fulfillment of environmental consultation requirements</td>
<td>Task force review of comments and modification of plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, there was a substantial public involvement process for development of the plan. For more information, see Chapter IV, Needs Assessment. Also see related materials in the Appendix B (Public Involvement Process).
Figure 3

Public Meetings & Display Locations - Environmental Justice Target Areas

Legend
- Public Meeting & Display Locations
- Public Meeting Locations
- Public Display Locations
- Environmental Justice Target Areas*
- Interstate Highways
- US and State Routes
- Local Roads
- Railroads

*Concentration of minority and/or low income population. Source: US Census, 2000

Map date: 4/2/07

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