

GHMPO PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

I. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

With the completion of the 2000 Census, the Gainesville – Hall area was officially designated as an urbanized area. Essentially, this means that the City of Gainesville and the surrounding area attained a population in excess of 50,000 people within a concentrated geographical area, having a population density exceeding 1,000 people per square mile.

Under Federal law, this designation required the local governments to participate in a cooperative, comprehensive, and continuing transportation planning process, in order to receive Federal transportation funds. In February of 2003, the Hall County Planning Department was designated, as the by the Governor of Georgia, as host agency for the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Gainesville - Hall Area Transportation Study.

The Gainesville-Hall MPO (GHMPO) is responsible for the transportation planning activities within the urbanized area and for conducting comprehensive transportation planning. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century in 1998 has increased the responsibility of the MPO and the participating local governments in this arena, and expanded the range of transportation projects available for federal funding. More than ever before, citizens have a greater opportunity to decide what transportation options they desire most in the future.

Public involvement will play a critical role in both developing the process and building consensus between the public, interest groups, and transportation decision makers on issues, as well as strategies and actions to address the issues. Involvement from local groups and individuals impacted by the process results in a greater likelihood that the end products will meet the needs of the local community and be more widely supported.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

Public involvement is a cornerstone of the *Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA)* and the *Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century of 1998 (TEA21)*. Specifically, 23 CFR 450.316(b) states that, “*the metropolitan transportation planning process shall:*

Include a proactive public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans and Transportation

Improvement Programs (TIP) and meets the requirements and criteria specified as follows:

(i) Require a minimum public comment period of 45 days before the public involvement process in initially adopted or revised;

(ii) Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, private providers of transportation other interested parties and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs and projects (including but not limited to central city and other local jurisdiction concerns);

(iii) Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of plans and TIPs and open public meetings where matters related to the Federal-aid highway and transit programs are being considered;

(iv) Require adequate public notice of public involvement activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points, including, but not limited to, approval of plans and TIPs (in non attainment areas, classified as serious and above, the comment period shall be at least 30 days for the plan, TIP and major amendment(s));

(v) Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received during the planning and program development processes:

(vi) Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to low-income and minority households;

(vii) When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft transportation plan or TIP (including the financial plan) as a result of the public involvement process or the interagency consultation process required under the U.S. EPA's conformity regulations, a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments shall be made part of the final plan and TIP;

(viii) If the final transportation plan or TIP differs significantly from the one which was made available for public comment by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO, known locally as the Gainesville-Hall MPO) and raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen from the public involvement efforts, an additional opportunity for public comment on the revised plan or TIP shall be made available;

(ix) Public involvement processes shall be periodically reviewed by the MPO in terms of their effectiveness in assuring that the process provides full and open access to all;

(x) These procedures will be reviewed by the FHWA and the FTA during certification reviews for Transportation Management Areas (areas of population over 200,000), and

as otherwise necessary for all MPOs, to assure that full and open access is provided to MPO decision making processes;

(xi) Metropolitan public involvement processes shall be coordinated with statewide public involvement processes wherever possible to enhance public consideration of the issues, plans, and programs and reduce redundancies and costs;”

In addition to these proactive planning requirements, there is also the need to ensure that no one group is adversely impacted by federally funded transportation policies and in particular the consideration that projects or policies can have on minority and low-income populations as the next paragraph states.

(2) Be consistent with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Title VI assurance executed by each State under 23 U.S.C. 324 and 29 U.S.C. 794, which ensure that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, sex, national origin, or physical handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program receiving Federal assistance from the United States Department of Transportation;

This requirement will be addressed through the assurance that all of the tools that are discussed under the public involvement program will incorporate the needs of all members of the community. The GHMPO will identify, residential, employment and transportation patterns of low-income and minority populations so that their needs can be identified and addressed, and the benefits and burdens of transportation investments can be fairly distributed. When necessary, GHMPO staff will improve the process to eliminate participation barriers and engage minority and low-income populations in transportation decision-making. Development of the Long Range Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program, as well as all other public involvement efforts generated by the GHMPO will make a specific effort to identify and address high and adverse health or environmental effects that federally funded transportation programs and policies have on low-income populations. These negative impacts can range from air quality, safety, access to economic development opportunities, displacement and neighborhood cohesion.

In addition to these federal requirements, the GHMPO public outreach efforts will coordinate with significant other relevant state regulations and guidelines. Akin to many states, Georgia has an open meeting and open records laws which will be followed by giving appropriate notice of all GHMPO committee meetings, ensuring that all meetings are open to the public and allowing for all agendas, minutes and documents to be available to the public. The Georgia Department of Transportation has its own Public Involvement Plan, which outlines its strategies for gaining meaningful public input. The Gainesville – Hall MPO works in partner with GDOT in its transportation planning process and coordinates on the distribution of news material about GDOT projects

taking place within Hall County. There is a complimentary nature to these two plans as they further public outreach efforts on the statewide and MPO scale respectively.

PLAN OBJECTIVES

Meaningful public and stakeholder involvement is critical to the long-term success of the Gainesville-Hall Metropolitan Planning Organization. The objective of this public involvement plan is three-fold:

- Ensure that transportation planning requirements and public involvement goals, as identified in federal regulations and state and regional plans and policies, are met.
- Establish guidelines for public involvement that bridge statewide and metropolitan planning processes for current studies and future projects.
- Detail how public comment will be obtained, distributed, considered, documented, acted upon and evaluated in each study county.

Special attention will be given to encouraging participation from a wide array of stakeholders, including representation from low-income and minority communities.

This plan outlines a specific approach to public involvement for the Gainesville-Hall Metropolitan Planning Organization that takes into consideration local needs and conditions. The plan takes advantage of existing community resources to achieve the following public participation guiding principles:

- **Involve** the stakeholders with early opportunities for participating in the decision-making process, particularly minority and low-income persons.
- **Listen** to the concerns and issues of the stakeholders living in the community;
- **Inform** the stakeholders in a timely manner of progress and recommendations;
- **Learn** from the stakeholders ideas for solutions to transportation problems; and
- **Develop** an effective outreach process that includes an integrated feedback process for evaluation and improvement.

The Public Involvement Plan (PIP) is intended to include all area citizens in a transportation planning effort that is well structured, inclusive, and proactive. The PIP consolidates the concerns of a wide variety of involved parties into workable transportation plans and programs. It is designed to encourage and provide the greatest level of education of transportation issues, along with opportunities for citizens to contribute their ideas and voice their opinions early and often. The PIP provides opportunities for the public to participate in transportation planning efforts such as the Long Range Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program.

For the purpose of the PIP, those with an interest in transportation planning are identified as transportation stakeholders. Stakeholders represent wide and diverse groups of people. Stakeholders may be involved on an ongoing basis or as specific issues arise. The PIP recognizes that many different groups of people have interests in transportation

issues and it attempts to reach as many of these groups as possible through a variety of activities. Stakeholders may include representatives of special interest groups, public and private transportation providers, the business community, and individual citizens.

For the public involvement process to be successful, it is essential for concerned and interested citizens to participate in the transportation process through the various activities of the PIP. Stakeholders have many opportunities to play an important role in the transportation planning process, to create greater public awareness, and to gather input from other citizens through the major activities that are described in the following section.

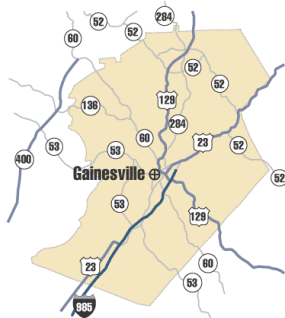
The PIP is not intended to be a static document. It is designed to be flexible and be modified as we learn through experience, which outreach and involvement activities work best. The MPO is committed to using the methods that work effectively and to periodically review the PIP structure.

HALL COUNTY CHARACTERISTICS

Hall County is located in northeast Georgia and is bordered by Lumpkin, Dawson, Forsyth, Gwinnett, Barrow, Jackson, Banks, Habersham, and White counties. Interstate 985/GA 365/US 23 bisects the county northeast to southwest. Municipalities include Clermont, Flowery Branch, Oakwood, Gillsville, Lula and Gainesville, the county seat, along with portions of Buford and Braselton.



Hall County includes portions of the Chattahoochee River and Lake Sidney Lanier. The U.S. Corps of Engineers created the 38,000-acre Lake Lanier in 1957 by construction of the Buford Dam. The lake has some 60 recreational areas, seven commercial marinas, and attracts several million visitors a year.

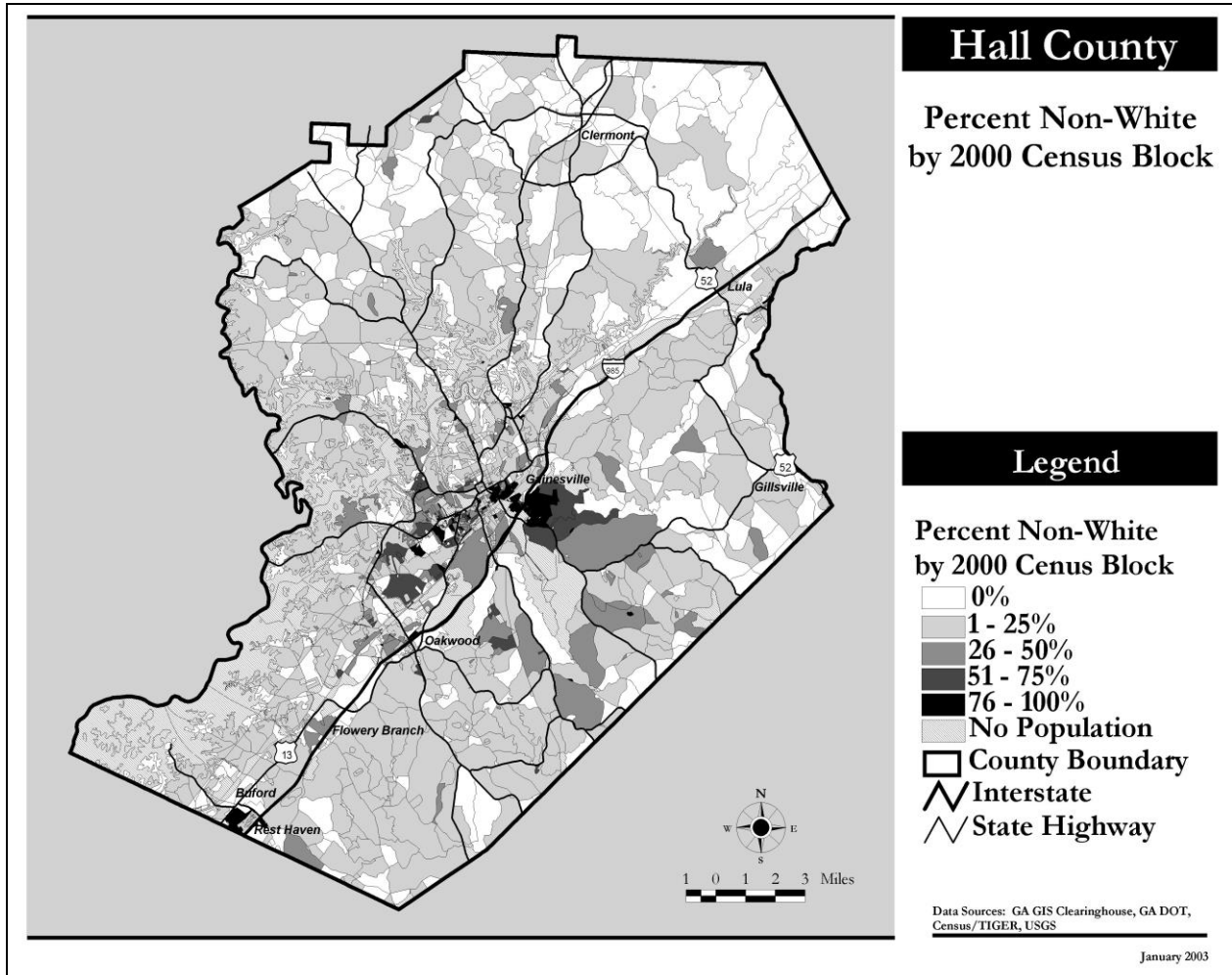


Hall County has been characterized by steady growth over the last decade. It experienced a 45.9 percent growth from the years 1990 to 2000, increasing in population from 96,053 to 139,277. This rate is comparable to that of other suburban counties in the exurbs of Atlanta.

Socio-economic characteristics that help define the population for public involvement include determining how many people are living in poverty, the number of elderly, and the racial and ethnic composition of the county. According to the 2000 Census, 80.8 percent of Hall County's residents were white and 7.3 percent were African American. Hispanics, which can be identified as any race, made up 19.6 percent of the county's

population. Persons reporting as other races made up 10.6 percent of the population. The 19.2 percent of the population that considers itself as non-white is fairly dispersed throughout the county, with a few areas of concentration in the central portion of the county, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Percent Non-White by 2000 Census Block



Hall County has a slightly lower percentage of its population living in poverty, 12.4 percent, as compared to the statewide percentage of 13 percent. The percentage of elderly population, persons over the age of 65, in Hall County is also slightly lower at 9.4 percent as compared to the statewide average of 9.6 percent.

The 2000 Census reports 51,046 total housing units in Hall County. Hall County has a higher owner occupied housing rate at 71.1 percent than the statewide average of 67.5 percent. Renter occupied housing units comprise 28.9 percent of the total housing units in Hall County. Of the total owner and renter occupied structures, 12.4 percent are multi-unit structures. Average household size is reported at 2.89 persons.

Employment opportunities in Hall County have increased with population growth. According to the Georgia Department of Labor Employment and Wages 2000 report, the total employment in the county increased from 43,145 in 1990 to 64,974 in 2000, and increase of 50.6 percent. The 2000 Georgia Area Labor Profile for Hall County identifies the five largest non-governmental employers in the Hall County Area to be ConAgra Poultry, Fieldale Farms Corp., Kutoba Manufacturing, Mar-Jac Poultry Inc., and Northeast Georgia Medical Center. In 2001, manufacturing; education, health, and social services; retail trade; and construction made up the largest employment sectors in the county. According to the 2000 Census, 78.1 percent work in Hall County and 28.6 percent of Hall County's workforce travel outside the county to work.

II. GHMPO PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT METHODS

PRIMARY TOOLS

The following tools are universally applicable to public involvement objectives. They are effective in addressing specific audiences and in accomplishing project-specific objectives. Effective programs can improve the outcome of the transportation plan by bridging the gaps between competing interests to create a plan that benefits the needs of the entire community. These tools can be utilized as a reference for methods of successful public outreach.

Stakeholder Groups

Stakeholders are individuals or organizations impacted by and/or interested in a project, plan or planning process. Stakeholder groups often are comprised of local officials, business leaders, research professionals, transportation planners, community leaders, neighborhood associations, residents of the community and members of other interest groups. However, stakeholder groups can also be used to give voice and inclusion to minority and low-income communities. Representation of agencies or county municipalities on the stakeholder group is highly desirable as a means of interaction between local residents and their government. Because it can be used either alone or in conjunction with other techniques, a stakeholder group is utilized to achieve a basic level of local input to transportation planning and development.

A stakeholder group has these basic features: interested parties from throughout the affected area are represented; meetings are held regularly, most productively at key project milestones; comments and points of view of participants are recorded; consensus on issues is sought through meeting facilitation, but consensus is not required; and the stakeholder group is assigned an advisory role in the process.

Common components of a stakeholder group process can include: definition of goals and objectives, identification of critical issues to be resolved; analysis of problems and evaluation of alternative approaches to solutions; assignment of small groups to clarify issues; use of staff to find supporting data; development of proposals to respond to issues; presentation and analysis of final proposal(s); and consensus regarding the findings or recommendations of a project or plan.

Media Relations And Public Information Strategies

Media strategies inform citizens about projects and plans through newspapers, radio, television and videos, billboards, posters and variable message signs, mass mailings of brochures or newsletters, and distribution of fliers. Working with the media, an organization takes an active role in disseminating information. Media strategies take a variety of forms and specific efforts will be made to reach the growing Hispanic population in Hall County.

Public information materials are an essential form of communication. The substance of the materials can be factual, present a point of view, or in some instances be legally required and thus need special drafting. A sample range of public information materials includes: advertisements -- display and legal notices, badges and buttons, billboards, brochures, display boards, electronic media, fact sheets, fliers, news articles, newsletters, newspaper inserts and articles, posters, press releases, public service announcements (paper, video, radio), videotapes, and web-sites.

Public information materials provide basic information about a process, transportation plan, or project document in a fast, concise, and clear manner. They often summarize the overall thrust of a process and provide information on how to respond, comment, get more involved, or get on a mailing list for a project or study. Public information materials are an easy way to periodically update people who aren't actively involved in an issue but who are curious or interested about its status. Often this is a very large group with fewer information needs than those who are intensely involved and need information in-depth frequently.

The simplest example of an effective media strategy based on public information materials is fliers, or fact sheets, about a project or plan. These can be left at libraries, county buildings, municipal offices, or information kiosks. Similarly, a plan brochure can be prepared and used in a direct mail campaign.

A variation of this strategy is preparation of a full-page newspaper supplement, or insert, explaining the transportation plan and soliciting feedback. Preparation of a newspaper insert is particularly appropriate for presenting plan findings. Oftentimes, a local newspaper will assist with this process, preparing the insert layout or subsidizing the effort by charging only a minimal printing charge. Another way to use the newspaper media as a public involvement tool is to brief reporters and editorial boards to give them an in-depth background on a project or transportation plan. This extra attention often prepares reporters to more fully analyze an organization's approach and report on aspects of an issue in an even-handed way. In addition to large papers, community reviews may also be used to inform the public.

Briefings can also be undertaken with the broadcast media. By using briefings as a tool, an organization proactively frames the message rather than allowing the media to do it. Framing the message takes thought and attention about all aspects of a transportation project or planning process. Media strategies are routinely incorporated into projects that need public focus, consensus, and understanding in order to move forward.

Mailing Lists

Computer technology has revolutionized the process of compiling and updating mailing lists -- a foundation of most public involvement programs. Mailing lists are used throughout planning and project development to keep a finger on the pulse of the

community. Lists include addresses but may also include telephone, e-mail addresses, fax numbers or other information to aid in contacting people in a variety of ways. Using mailing lists, audiences can be reached with announcements of upcoming events, meeting invitations, newsletters, summary reports, and other information about activities. A large mailing list assists in documenting outreach efforts by demonstrating that an organization has reached out to many people.

Public Meetings

Public community meetings can take several forms, depending on the objective of the meeting and the preference of the community. In some communities, community dialogue sessions are not well attended; in others, they work quite well. Several different formats for these meetings include: public information meetings, community dialogue sessions, public hearings, targeted neighborhood meetings, focus groups, visioning workshops or design charrettes.

Public community meetings, sessions and hearings have these basic features:

- Anyone may attend, as either an individual or a representative of specific interests;
- Meetings may be held at appropriate intervals or milestones in the transportation planning process; hearings are formal and are often held near the end of a process or project before a decision is officially made;
- Hearings require an official hearing officer; meetings do not;
- Hearings usually have a time period during which written comments may be received; and
- Community comments received at meetings are recorded in written form as input to an organization.

Community Meetings

Community meetings present information to the public and obtain informal input from community residents. Held throughout the planning process, they are tailored to specific issues or community groups and are either informal or formal. Public meetings have been used for many years to disseminate information, provide a setting for public discussion, and get feedback from the community. Several formats for public community meetings exist, including an open house format and a town hall meeting (often needs to be facilitated and is used to encourage questions and answers).

Community Dialogue Sessions

Community dialogue sessions are open house meetings that permit one-on-one dialogue between the public and the planners. These sessions begin in the early afternoon and extend until after the dinner hour to ensure it is convenient for those wishing to attend. There are usually multiple community dialogue sessions during the planning process. The first can be held to discuss goals, needs, and potential solutions, and the last to finalize transportation plan elements. Comment cards to be completed on-site or mailed afterward can be used to gain further input from the public.

Public Hearings

A public hearing is a more formal event than a public meeting. Held prior to a decision point in the plan or project, a public hearing gathers community comments and positions from all interested parties for public record and input into decisions. The Federal government requires public hearings for environmental impact statements and environmental assessments of transportation projects. In transportation planning, they are held at the discretion of the sponsoring organization. Public notices in a general circulation newspaper cite the time, date, and place of a hearing. The period between notice and hearing dates provides time for preparing comments for submission to an organization. During this period, the organization accepts questions and provides clarification.

Visioning Workshops

A visioning workshop is often helpful in the early stages of a planning project. It can lead to a goals statement or a vision of the future. Typically, it is most appropriate for development of a long-range plan. With a 20- or 30-year horizon, visioning also sets a strategy for achieving the goals. It looks for common ground among participants in exploring and advocating strategies for the future. It brings in often-overlooked issues about quality of life. It helps formulate policy direction on public investments and government programs.

SUPPLEMENTAL TOOLS

Supplemental tools can be utilized to enhance a public involvement strategy. These tools are quite effective when used to address specific audiences or to accomplish project specific objectives.

Speakers Bureau

Speakers bureaus are often called for when there is widespread interest and numerous groups or communities may be impacted by the plan or project. These small group meetings can be used to target neighborhoods, groups, organizations, and/or communities with specific interest in the project. Speakers bureaus can be arranged for organizations such as:

- County chambers of commerce
- Government meetings
- Local civic clubs
- Neighborhood associations
- Environmental justice communities
- Building industry associations
- Churches
- Political clubs
- The regional transportation association

- Professional engineering society
- Real estate firms
- Other groups with an interest in the project.

Speakers bureaus expand the opportunities for community participation. Speaking to community groups at a place of their choice and soliciting specific feedback increases the number of participants in a planning process. Local groups involve people on their own terms and allow for a specific perspective to be heard from. Groups such as neighborhood associations, business organizations or professional associations welcome community issues to the table at their own meetings, where they focus on specific issues and concerns relevant to their membership.

Project Web Sites

Project web sites offer an even greater opportunity to post information to the public. It is an efficient way of communicating information without utilizing very much staff time. Therefore, it is also a cost effective method of public outreach. In addition, it can serve as a vehicle for collecting comments. Documents, fact sheets, maps and other plan or project material can be put on the web site. Comment forms can solicit input. One drawback of using project web sites is that the audience is limited to persons with Internet access. The Gainesville-Hall MPO is in the process of developing a website that will detail information on the MPO structure, as well as, its major documents such as the Long Range Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program. The Public Involvement Plan and the Unified Planning Work Program will be available on this site. There will also be an opportunity to comment on the website and its content.

Local Access Station

TV 18 is the local access station for Hall County and is an official news source for information on local government affairs. The GHMPO staff will utilize TV 18 to relay information on key MPO plans and projects such as but not exclusive to the Long Range Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program and the Public Involvement Plan. In addition, when appropriate GHMPO staff will discuss the organization's activities on Hall County Connection, a TV 18 show that presents government issues and topics that are of interest to the public through interviews with department staff and elected officials.

III. GHMPO PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN GOALS AND ACTIVITIES

The previous section detailed the types of potential programs that can be use for engaging the public. Building off the objectives listed earlier in this plan, below are specific goals along with the techniques used to achieve this goal. Included is which GHMPO product (Public Involvement Plan, Long Range Transportation Plan, Transportation Improvement Program, etc.) will specifically use these techniques. As this is a newly formed MPO and we have yet to commence a public outreach effort, we will be learning as we go in the determining the best techniques for Hall County and its jurisdictions. This is not an exhaustive list, there are may be other productive public outreach techniques designed for the future but rather a starting point for engaging the public and an understanding of the resources currently available to the GHMPO.

Goal -Attract as many individuals as into the transportation planning process

- Media Relations – The GHMPO staff will inform local newspapers of plans, meetings and updates.
 - Long Range Transportation Plan
 - Transportation Improvement Program
 - Amendments to the Transportation Improvement Program
 - Public Involvement Plan
- Mailing List – A complete list of GHMPO Committee Members, elected officials, business leaders, neighborhood associations will be used by GHMPO staff
 - Long Range Transportation Plan
 - Transportation Improvement Program
 - Amendments to the Transportation Improvement Program
 - Public Involvement Plan
- Visioning Workshops – A technique used early in the planning process to determine common goals
 - Long Range Transportation Plan
 - Transportation Improvement Program

Goal - Create opportunities for individuals to be involved in the transportation planning process

- Citizen Advisory Committee – The CAC will review all plans and is an essential conduit to the jurisdictions that appointed these individuals
 - Long Range Transportation Plan
 - Transportation Improvement Program
 - Amendments to the Transportation Improvement Program
 - Public Involvement Plan

- Community Meetings and Community Dialogue Sessions – These meetings are tailored to the specific needs of the community and will include time to speak one-on-one with the GHMPO staff.
 - Long Range Transportation Plan
 - Transportation Improvement Program
- Public Hearings – a more formal public meeting that will present the overall goals of a plan or program
 - Long Range Transportation Plan
 - Transportation Improvement Program

Goal - Increase the public's understanding of transportation

- Stakeholder Groups – Impacted groups or organizations of a project or plan will be identified by GHMPO staff
 - Long Range Transportation Plan
 - Transportation Improvement Program
- Local Access Station – Using the Local government TV to broadcast information
 - Long Range Transportation Plan
 - Transportation Improvement Program
 - Amendments to the Transportation Improvement Program
 - Public Involvement Plan
- Project Web Site - the GHMPO plans to release a website with all relevant MPO information in 2004.
 - Long Range Transportation Plan
 - Transportation Improvement Program
 - Amendments to the Transportation Improvement Program
 - Public Involvement Plan
- Speakers Bureau – Small group meetings with targeted neighborhood groups or organizations.
 - Long Range Transportation Plan
 - Transportation Improvement Program

IV. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

An essential component of the PIP is the two-way exchange of information. The MPO staff assumes the role of compiling this information. Staff also is responsible for synthesizing all information received. While many of these activities operate independently of each other, MPO staff act as a conduit for information and recommendations, ensuring that citizens at all levels are aware of all PIP activities. Additionally, the MPO ensures that information obtained through PIP activities is directed to the appropriate existing GHMPO committee. The PIP will also be coordinated with the statewide public involvement process, when applicable. Below are activities and structures that guarantee this implementation and coordination with the MPO structure.

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) consists of individuals that provide a broad representation of the community. The function of this committee is to inform and advise the community of the process, recommendations and results of the GHMPO and to offer any suggestions, which would benefit the area. The CAC also advises the MPO and Policy Committee on matters of public opinion from individual citizens and citizen groups regarding transportation plans and programs. The CAC will be utilized to the fullest extent possible in the outreach activities of informing their counterparts of any transportation plans, programs, and projects. Under the Process Review section on page 20, the meeting times, dates and location for the Citizen Advisory Committee, as well as the other Technical Coordinating Committee and the Policy Committee are listed.

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Appropriate transportation planning documents are made available at central locations such as public libraries, chambers of commerce, city and county departments of planning, Georgia Department of Transportation field offices, and/or Regional Development Centers. Typically, these documents include draft plans or programs, which are to be reviewed by the public prior to the Policy Committee's final adoption. A similar procedure is used to make final plans or programs, or amendments thereto, available for information purposes. Additionally, copies of draft and final plans or programs will be mailed directly to individuals upon request.

Non-English Speaking Communities

For major GHMPO products – such as the Long Range Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program – staff will coordinate with local media resources – i.e. a local Spanish newspaper, Mexico Lindo - to gain access to these communities and garner their input to these plans. This is of particular import to this MPO, as Hall County has experienced explosive growth in its Hispanic population in the last 20 years. As stated earlier in this document, at the 2000 census the Hispanic population was 20 percent and school age children goes as high as 70% in some of the school districts. On request, any of the GHMPO documents will be translated into Spanish and a translator can be provided at any of the public meetings.

PUBLIC NOTICE/REVIEW PERIOD GUIDELINES

Public notices are placed in local newspapers, prior to all public review periods for the Long Range Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program. Public review periods for draft plans and programs run at least 30 days. If the Policy Committee determines that the final plan or program differs significantly from the one which was made available for public comment, and raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen from the public involvement efforts, an additional 15 days for public comment on the revised plan or program shall be made available.

If the Policy Committee determines it necessary to amend the final plan or program, the Policy Committee may approve the proposed amendment(s) subject to a an additional public review and comment period. For a major amendment, those changes that are controversial and/or regionally significant in nature and would affect the conformity determination of a Long Range Transportation Plan or a Transportation Improvement Program, there would be a 30 day public review and comment period. For a minor amendment, those that could be controversial in nature but would not affect the conformity determination or the financial constraint of a plan, an advertised 15 day public review and comment period will be held. If no significant comments are received, the amendment(s) will stand as approved with no further action required by the Policy Committee. Results of the public review and comment period will be provided to the Policy Committee, for their information, at the next regularly scheduled meeting. If comments are received which the MPO staff considers as potentially significant, the comments will be presented to the Policy Committee for consideration and appropriate action.

PROCESS CONCLUSION

When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft transportation plan or program, as a result of the public involvement process, a summary, analysis or report on the content of comments and the MPO responses, is prepared and made part of the final document, which is available at central locations. This summary report is then distributed throughout the established network of committees and the individual commenters.

Plan and/or program amendments and the resulting public comments, will be made part of the Policy Committee minutes and will be kept on file in the MPO office. Amendments and comments also will be incorporated into copies of the affected plans and programs, made available at central locations.

PROCESS REVIEW

Currently, transportation planning documents and items to be considered for adoption by the Policy Committee, are first reviewed by the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) and then by the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). The full Policy Committee (PC) is the policy making body of the Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Chairman of the

CAC is also a member of the PC. A citizen may at any time attend and participate in the TCC, CAC or PC meetings.

The Gainesville-Hall MPO Committees each meet four times a year, as long as there are sufficient items to discuss and act on by the members. The Technical Coordinating Committee meets on the third Wednesday of February, April, July and October at 3 pm. The Citizen Advisory Committee meets on the last Thursday of February, April, July and October at 4 pm. The Policy Committee meets at 10 am on the Second Tuesday of March, May, August and November at 10 am. The committees meet in the Development Services Center in conference rooms B & C. For directions or any other information on the committee meetings, interested parties should contact John McHenry, lead staff to the Gainesville-Hall MPO by phone at (770) 531-6809 x286 or by email at jmchenry@hallcounty.org.

V. EVALUATION OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT EFFORTS

Periodic review of public involvement program activities to evaluate program effectiveness is required by federal regulations (23 CFR 450.212(a)(7)). Overall evaluation of public involvement efforts on a regular basis helps answer whether the program is meeting the key public involvement program objectives. Specific evaluation measures can be used to quantify the level of public involvement. This can help to determine under what circumstances public involvement tools are effective or not. Through the evaluation process, a public involvement program can be refined and improved.

The evaluation of the GHMPO public involvement programs will focus on an assessment of each program’s overall success and effectiveness in achieving its public participation goals. Strong participation numbers and inclusion of a broad range of interests is of particular concern to the GHMPO staff. Criteria have been established to accurately measure the effectiveness of each of the recommended public involvement tools in accomplishing these specific goals. Table 1 outlines the evaluation criteria, both qualitative and quantitative, that will be used to monitor each tool in the program and evaluate the effectiveness of the actual public involvement activities undertaken throughout the process. Feedback will be solicited from public involvement participants.

Table 1 - Evaluation Criteria

PIP Tool	Evaluation Criteria	
	Quantitative	Qualitative
Stakeholder Group	Attendance Diversity of Representation Quantity of Feedback Received	Was Input Used in Planning Process? Meeting Convenience: Time, Place, and Accessibility Effectiveness of Meeting Format
Media Relations	Extent and Quantity of Media Coverage Number of Avenues Used to Reach Environmental Justice Audiences	Effectiveness of Notification and Communication Tools How and How Often Contact is Made
Mailing List/Newsletter	Number of Additions to a Mailing List Diversity of Representation Quantity of Educational Materials Distributed	Concise and Clear Information Portrayed Effectiveness of Newsletter Format
Community Dialogue	Number of Events/Opportunities for	Effectiveness of Meeting Format

Sessions	Public Involvement	Public Understanding of Process
	Number of Comments Received	Quality of Feedback Obtained
	Number of Participants	Timing of Public Involvement
	Number of Avenues Used to Reach Environmental Justice Audiences	Meeting Convenience: Time, Place, and Accessibility
	Diversity of Attendees	Was Public's Input Used in Developing the Plan?
Small Group Meeting	Number of Comments Received	Effectiveness of Meeting Format
	Number of Participants	Public Understanding of Process
	Number of Avenues Used to Reach Environmental Justice Audiences	Quality of Feedback Obtained
	Diversity of Attendees	Was Public's Input Used in Developing the Plan?

Public Involvement Plan Evaluation

The Public Involvement Plan shall be formally reviewed every five years and updated as necessary by the MPO to assure that is promoting an effective process, which provides full and open access to all persons. After changes have been implemented the revised Public Involvement Plan will go through the Gainesville-Hall MPO Committees – Technical Coordinating, Citizen and Policy – followed by a 45 day comment period before official adoption. The Public Involvement Plan's 45 day comment period will be advertised in a local newspaper – the Gainesville Times. The document will be available for review and pick up at the Hall County Planning Department. All comments received will be reviewed, considered, and incorporated, as appropriate into the PIP. A report documenting the public involvement and review process, including comments received, will be made part of the final PIP document, which will be available at the GHMPO's office. Once the final PIP is adopted, a forty-five day public review and comment period will be required for any future revisions proposed for the PIP.

Furthermore, FHWA and FTA will review the Public Involvement Plan during their certification process. As stated earlier in the document, the Public Involvement Plan is intended to be a living document, which can incorporate revisions and edits from the public. It is also designed to be flexible and offer a number of varied techniques for public involvement. As the GHMPO evolves and tests these methods, staff will determine which strategies work best and build on these successes.