Public Participation Plan
Lowcountry Area Transportation Study (LATS)
Metropolitan Planning Organization

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<tr>
<td>COG</td>
<td>Council of Government</td>
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<td>FAST ACT</td>
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<td>FHWA</td>
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<td>IIJA/BIL</td>
<td>Infrastructure Investment &amp; Jobs Act/Bipartisan Infrastructure Law</td>
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<td>LATS</td>
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<td>LRTA</td>
<td>Lowcountry Regional Transit Authority</td>
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<td>LRTP</td>
<td>Long Range Transportation Plan</td>
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<td>MPO</td>
<td>Metropolitan Planning Organization</td>
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<td>MAP-21</td>
<td>Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century</td>
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<td>NEPA</td>
<td>National Environmental Policy Act</td>
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<td>PPP</td>
<td>Public Participation Plan</td>
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<td>SCDOT</td>
<td>South Carolina Department of Transportation</td>
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<td>STIP</td>
<td>Statewide Transportation Improvement Program</td>
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<td>STBGP</td>
<td>Surface Transportation Block Grant Program</td>
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<td>TAMP</td>
<td>Transportation Asset Management Plan</td>
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<td>TAP</td>
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<td>USDOT</td>
<td>United States Department of Transportation</td>
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<td>UZA</td>
<td>Urbanized Area</td>
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Overview
This document establishes a set of policies and techniques through which the MPO can offer opportunities for the public to be involved in transportation planning activities. This policy statement is a tangible example of the MPO’s support of and encouragement for public participation as well as the MPO’s mandate to adhere to the principles of Environmental Justice in the metropolitan planning process. The Public Participation Plan (PPP) outlines a process to ensure adequate opportunities for members of the community to express their opinion on transportation issues and to become active participants in the decision-making process. Specifically, the PPP outlines tools and time limits for public involvement for the three other major plans required for completion by the MPO:

**Long Range transportation Plan (LRTP):** The LRTP must identify how the metropolitan area will manage and operate a multi-modal transportation system (including transit, highway, bicycle, pedestrian, and accessible transportation) to meet the region’s economic, transportation, development and sustainability goals among others for a 20+-year planning horizon, while remaining fiscally constrained. 23 C.F.R. 450.5303(i)

**Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP):** The TIP is a short-range priority list of projects (both highway and transit) which are advancing towards construction. Projects found in the TIP evolve through the transportation planning process and are contained in the region’s long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan (23 C.F.R. 450.326).

**Unified Planning work Program (UPWP):** The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) describes the federally funded planning activities LATS will conduct and products to be created during the current fiscal year. The activities described in the document reflect two years of a multi-year program to implement the strategies and achieve the objectives of the LRTP. These strategies are derived from federal mandates, as codified in legislation, conducted in the context of a continuing, comprehensive, locally focused planning process (23 C.F.R. 450.308).

Public involvement associated with LATS serves to actively solicit ideas from residents and stakeholders of the study area. Public involvement also seeks to provide meaningful ways for these residents and stakeholders to communicate with those making decisions regarding the allocation of transportation funds. Through the implementation of the PPP, residents and stakeholders will have access to information as well as established ways to provide feedback. The PPP fulfills requirements pursuant to Title 23 CFR 450.316 of Statewide Planning; Metropolitan Planning and 40 CFR 51.402(e) Criteria and Procedures for Determining Conformity to State or Federal Implementation Plans of Transportation Plans, Programs, and Projects rules. The regulations are a result of the passage of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) (Public Law 109-59, August 10, 2005) and more recently, the passage of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) (Public Law 112-141, July 6, 2012). IIJA was enacted on November 15th, 2021. This program also replaces the current Surface Transportation Program, but retains the same structure, goals and flexibility to allow states and metropolitan areas to invest in projects that fit their unique needs and priorities.
Figure 1: Lowcountry Area Transportation Study Boundary Map
Introduction and Background
Following the 2010 Decennial Census, the US Census Bureau designated the Bluffton - Hilton Head area as an Urbanized Area (UZA) having reached a population exceeding 50,000. Federal regulations require the formation of a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) once that threshold is reached. The MPO carries out a transportation planning process for urbanized areas with a population of 50,000 or more. As a result, the Lowcountry Area Transportation Study (LATS) was established as the MPO responsible for coordinating the transportation planning process for the urbanized area of Beaufort and Jasper Counties in South Carolina including the municipalities of Beaufort, Bluffton, Hardeeville, Hilton Head Island, and Port Royal. The MPO area includes land designated as urban by the US Census and other land expected to be urbanized within the next 20 years. The result of the 2020 census showed that the Bluffton – Hilton Head Urbanized area had grown to a population of 71,824. The Census also designated a new urban area, Beaufort – Port Royal, within the existing LATS MPO boundary with a population of 52,515. Both urbanized areas in addition to land expected to become urban in twenty years are included in the LATS MPO study boundary (Figure 1).

The purpose of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is to carry out a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive (The 3Cs) multimodal transportation planning process that has a regional perspective (Figure 2). Metropolitan Planning Organizations are required to 1) develop a Long Range Transportation Plan, which is, at a minimum, a 20- year transportation vision for the planning area; 2) develop a financially constrained Transportation Improvement Program, which is the agreed upon list for which federal funds are programmed and all regionally significant project that may require federal action regardless of funding source; 3) develop a Unified Planning Work Program, which identifies in a single document the annual transportation planning activities that are to be undertaken in support of goals, objectives and actions established in the Long Range Transportation Plan and 4) develop and carry out a public involvement plan (Figure 3).
Structure
To facilitate and encourage interaction among stakeholder groups and the local community, the LATS is managed by the Lowcountry Council of Governments and has adopted a committee structure composed of a Policy Committee and Technical Committee. The functions of these two committees are detailed below.

Management
The Lowcountry Council of Governments has been identified as the “Designated Planning Agency” responsible for coordinating, developing, and preparing all required LATS plans and programs for submission to the Policy Committee after Study Team analysis and an appropriate citizen input process. The SCDOT Office of Planning, Office of Public Transit and the Intermodal and Freight Program Office provide technical support for LATS planning programs as well.

Committee Structure
The LATS MPO is currently directed by two committees—the Policy Committee and the Technical Committee.

Policy Committee
The LATS planning process is guided by a Policy Committee. The LATS Policy Committee is made up of eight voting members. The voting members of the Policy Committee include local elected officials from:

- Town of Hilton Head Island
- Town of Bluffton
- Town of Port Royal
- City of Beaufort
- City of Hardeeville
- Beaufort County
- Jasper County
- Chairman of the Lowcountry Regional Transportation Authority

The Beaufort County Legislative Delegation, Jasper County Legislative Delegation and SCDOT Highway Commissioners are non-voting Ex Officio members. Other agencies with interest and/or expertise in transportation participate in the process to provide additional input, advice, and coordination on transportation issues and programs. Other advisory committees or subcommittees may be formed on an as needed basis to address technical issues and to seek out and secure public input.

Technical Committee
The LATS Technical Committee advises and makes recommendations to the Policy Committee and includes staff from each of the municipalities and counties within the LATS Study Area, South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) as well as representatives of other agencies or special interest groups. The Committee provides transportation research and analysis and assists in prioritization and in the development of consensus recommendations for the Policy Committee. Technical Committee members will regularly brief their Policy Committee members to ensure that they fully understand the agenda items.

Federal Mandates and Legislation
The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), the federal surface transportation funding and authorization bill, was signed in 2022, and continues to support previous federal public participation guidelines. MPOs are required to develop a public participation plan identifying reasonable opportunities for the public and all interested stakeholders to be involved in and
comment on the contents of the Long Range Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program. In addition to the LRTP and TIP, this Public Participation Plan outlines public participation requirements and outreach methods for all of LATS core planning processes.

The BIL also requires that MPOs identify a broad and inclusive list of stakeholders that must be offered the opportunity to comment and be involved in the planning process. These stakeholders include the public, affected government agencies, transportation disadvantaged populations, providers of transportation and more. MPOs are also required to coordinate with the statewide transportation planning public participation and consultation processes. Additionally, the BIL also requires that MPOs conduct public meetings at convenient and accessible locations, use visualizations such as maps and charts to help describe plans, and make public information available in electronically accessible formats.

Planning Factors
Previous Federal legislation has set forth ten planning factors that agencies must consider when developing their plans. The planning factors listed in Figure 4 have remained mostly unchanged since the FAST Act. The BIL/IIJA carries the requirement forward with a minor modification to the Quality of Life planning factor adding a consideration for housing.
Figure 4: Planning Factors

**Economic Vitality:** Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.

**Safety:** Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.

**Security:** Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.

**Accessibility:** Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and for freight.

**Quality of Life:** Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth, housing, and economic development patterns.

**Connectivity:** Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.

**System Efficiency:** Promote efficient system management and operation.

**Preservation:** Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

**Resilience:** Improve the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate stormwater impacts of surface transportation; and

**Tourism:** Enhance travel and tourism.
Planning Emphasis Areas (PEAs)

In addition to federal legislation, the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration jointly issued planning Emphasis Areas (PEAs) in 2021 (Figure 5). PEAs are policy, procedural and technical topics that should be considered by all federal planning fund recipients when preparing work programs for metropolitan and statewide planning and research assistance programs. These emphasis areas have been taken into consideration during the process of developing the long-range transportation plan and programming the TIP.

**Figure 5: Planning Emphasis Areas in 2021**

- **Tackling the Climate Crisis – Transition to a clean energy, resilient future**: Ensure that our transportation plans and infrastructure investments help achieve the national greenhouse gas reduction goals of 50-52 percent below 2005 levels by 2030, and net-zero emissions by 2050, and increase resilience to extreme weather events and other disasters resulting from the increasing effects of climate change.

- **Complete Streets**: Develop, and operate streets and networks that prioritize safety, comfort, and access to destinations for people who use the street network, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, micro-mobility users, freight delivery services, and motorists.

- **Public Involvement**: Carry out early, effective, and continuous public involvement to ensure diverse viewpoints into the decision-making process.

- **Equity and Justice 40 in transportation planning**: Ensure public involvement in the planning process and that plans and strategies reflect various perspectives, concerns, and priorities from impacted areas.

- **Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET)/US Department of Defense Coordination**: Encourage cooperation and coordination with representatives from DOD in the transportation planning and project programming process on infrastructure and connectivity needs for STRAHNET routes and other public roads that connect to DOD facilities.
Title VI and Environmental Justice

Environmental justice has been a federal requirement since recipients of federal funds were required to certify nondiscrimination through Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. A 1994 Presidential Executive Order required all federal agencies to make environmental justice part of their missions. The law was enacted to avoid the use of federal funds for projects, programs, or other activities that generate disproportionate or discriminatory adverse impacts on minority or low-income populations. The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) promotes environmental justice as an integral part of the long-range transportation planning process as well as individual project planning and design.

Environmental justice requires the understanding and incorporation of the unique needs of distinct socioeconomic groups in order to create transportation projects that fit harmoniously within the framework of their communities without sacrificing safety or mobility. The environmental justice assessment incorporated in the planning process is based on three fundamental principles derived from guidance issued by the USDOT:
Avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority and low-income populations.

Ensure all potentially affected communities’ full and fair participation in the transportation decision-making process.

Prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations.

It is the policy of the Lowcountry Council of Governments (LCOG) to comply with all federal and state authorities requiring nondiscrimination, including but not limited to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice) and 13166 (Limited English Proficiency). LCOG (including LATS) does not and will not exclude from participation in; deny the benefits of; or subject anyone to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability or income.

Should LATS produce a document that LEP individuals may read or schedule an event that may have LEP individuals in attendance, or may have interest in, LATS shall have the documents, meeting notices or flyers, printed in an alternate language based on the known LEP population. An interpreter service will be available on an as needed basis.

All LATS planning practices must be consistent with federal Title VI requirements. The process by which new projects are identified and prioritized for inclusion in the regional plans must consider the equitable selection of projects in accordance with federal Title VI requirements. Title VI and Civil Right requirements are detailed in the Lowcountry Council of Governments Civil Right Policies and Procedures.

Joint Federal Highway Administration/ Federal Transit Administration Planning Rule
The Joint Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)/ Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Planning Rule (23 CFR part 450, 49 CFR part 613) also requires MPOs to conduct locally-developed public participation. This legislation requires “a proactive public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans,” [23 CFR part 450.316(b)(1)].

1 https://www.lowcountrycog.org/about/civil_rights.php

Lowcountry Area Transportation Study
Public Participation Process

General Guidelines
The LATS Public Participation Plan provides direction for public involvement activities conducted by the MPO. It includes a set of goals, objectives, policies, and techniques used by the MPO for public outreach initiatives. In its public participation process, the MPO will:

1. Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agencies, private providers of transportation, other interested parties, and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs and projects (including but not limited to local jurisdiction concerns).
2. Solicit meaningful feedback from the public to guide the vision of the MPO and its planning activities, as well as to identify, validate, and prioritize project and policy recommendations.
3. Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of the LRTP, TIP, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects, and conduct open public meetings where matters related to transportation programs are being considered.
4. Involve a wide representation of the population segments in the region through a combination of innovative approaches and time-tested outreach techniques.
5. Give adequate public notice of public participation activities and allow time for public review and comment at key decision points, including, but not limited to, approval of the LRTP, TIP, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects.
6. Respond in writing, when applicable, to public input. When significant written and oral comments are received on the transportation plan drafts as a result of the public participation process or the interagency consultation process required under federal regulations, report on the disposition of comments shall be made part of the final plan.
7. Solicit the needs of those under-served by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to the transportation disadvantaged, minorities, elderly, persons with disabilities, and low-income households.
8. Provide a public comment period of 45 calendar days prior to the adoption of the Public Participation Plan and 15 business days prior to program amendments. Notice of the comment period will be advertised in all newspapers of record and various other publications in the study area prior to the commencement of the 45-day comment period. Notice will also be mailed to the entire MPO mailing list prior to the start of the 45-day comment period.
9. Provide a public comment period of not less than 30 calendar days prior to adoption of the LRTP, TIP, or UPWP. Provide a public comment period of not less than 15 business days prior to any formal amendments or updates to these plans.
10. The statewide TIP (STIP) presents all projects within the State including statewide program projects and those adopted locally. As a partner agency to SCDOT, LATS will work with SCDOT to gather public input through the technique identified in the SCDOT’s Public Participation Plan (https://www.scdot.org/inside/pdfs/Public_Participation_Plan.pdf) to avoid having to re-advertise changes to the TIP regarding projects in the LATS area.

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https://www.scdot.org/inside/pdfs/Public_Participation_Plan.pdf
11. Coordinate the Public Participation Process with statewide Public Participation Processes wherever possible to enhance public consideration of the issues, plans and programs, and reduce redundancies and costs. Close coordination of these processes will ensure the public is presented with a participation program that satisfies federal, state, and local requirements and uses a familiar and efficient methodology.

12. Periodically review the Public Participation Process to ensure it provides full and open access to all.

Goals, Objectives, and Policies

The fundamental goal of public involvement is to provide a collaborative environment that gathers, processes, and applies a diversity of opinions during the development of a plan, program, policy, or project. To the extent feasible and prudent, public participation should make the public aware of and provide a means to comment. Transportation planning decision-makers, in turn, should consider the outcome of this process. Specific goals, objectives, and policies for the LATS Public Participation Plan include the following:

GOAL: Provide the public with appropriate information on transportation planning services and project development in a convenient and timely manner.

Objective 1: Identify a broad representation of the public for inclusion in the transportation planning process.

Policy 1.1: Maintain a master database of contacts including but not limited to the following persons and agencies:

- Elected officials
- Local government staff
- Transportation agencies
- Federal, State, and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation and historic preservation, and other environmental issues
- Local media
- Civic groups
- Homebuilder and realtor associations
- School Districts
- Special interest groups
- Private freight operators
- Representatives of users and supporters of public transportation, pedestrian walkways, and bicycle facilities
- Representatives of the disabled population
- Representatives of the study area’s military community

Policy 1.2: Target traditionally under-involved populations within the region, including minority, low income, and senior citizen populations.

Policy 1.3: Identify and engage persons and groups with unique interests specific to individual plans and studies conducted by the MPO.
Objective 2: Actively engage the public in the transportation planning process, by making it immediate and meaningful.

Policy 2.1: Conduct public meetings at a site convenient to potentially affected citizens when feasible.

Policy 2.2: Distribute electronic meeting announcements to the MPO contact list.

Policy 2.3: Employ visualization techniques (including those described in the PPP) to depict transportation plans.

Policy 2.4: Utilize social media, which the area has responded to effectively.

Objective 3: Keep the public informed of ongoing transportation-related activities.

Policy 3.1: Maintain a website with information specific to the MPO.

Policy 3.1.1: Update the website to ensure it displays current and accurate information.

Policy 3.1.2: Include the following information at a minimum:
- Contact information (mailing address, phone, fax, and e-mail)
- Current MPO committee membership
- Meeting calendars and agendas
- Work products and publications, including the LRTP, TIP, UPWP, and plans and studies related to the mission of the MPO
- By-Laws and operating procedures
- The Public Participation Plan

Policy 3.2: Publish electronic publications and work products online.

Policy 3.3: Make hardcopies of general and project-specific information available upon request at a central location during normal business hours and after hours at the request of community interest groups with reasonable notice.

Policy 3.4: Produce an annual newsletter or provide information for other regular newsletters.

Objective 4: Identify ways to continuously improve public participation.

Policy 4.1: Evaluate public involvement techniques annually at a minimum.

Policy 4.2: Review the Public Participation Plan and adopt necessary revisions at least every five (5) years.
**Objective 5: Initiate public participation activities for individual transportation improvement projects from the planning phase through construction.**

**Policy 5.1:** Assist SCDOT, local governments, and transportation agencies in the development and implementation of public involvement techniques for planning and other studies.

**Objective 6: Establish a Title VI program including a complaint procedure to report unfair treatment of groups based on race, color, and national origin.**

**Policy 6.1:** Ensure that LATS planning practices are consistent with federal Title VI requirements. Title VI and Civil Right requirements are detailed in the [Lowcountry Council of Governments Civil Right Policies and Procedures](https://www.lowcountrycog.org/about/civil_rights.php).

**Policy 6.2:** Maintain a log of Title VI complaints and forward to appropriate State and Federal agencies for review and guidance.

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4 [https://www.lowcountrycog.org/about/civil_rights.php](https://www.lowcountrycog.org/about/civil_rights.php)
Public Participation Plan

Public Participation Tools and Techniques

Effective public participation requires a continuous and evolving process that utilizes multiple techniques. Public participation is an integral part of one-time activities such as corridor studies and regularly repeated activities such as the TIP and LRTP. This section contains descriptions of public participation tools and techniques that are or may be employed to enable citizens to become well informed. The techniques offered may vary by project and plan.

Overview of Tools and Techniques

MPO Website

**Description:** The website will provide basic information about the MPO process, members, meeting times and contact information. Work products will be available on the site, including the Public Participation Plan, Unified Planning Work Program, Transportation Improvement Program and Long Range Transportation Plan. Links will be provided to other websites relevant to the MPO and its partners. The website address is [www.lowcountrycog.org](http://www.lowcountrycog.org) The website will be maintained by LATS MPO staff.
Activities: The website will provide background information and promote regular and special meetings, planning studies, publications, and work products.

MPO Master Contact List
Description: MPO staff will maintain a master database of contacts from individuals, businesses, and federal, state and local agencies. The database will be used to establish and maintain a list of e-mail contacts for electronic meeting notification and announcements.

Activities: The database will provide the foundation for the distribution of MPO information and will be used to enhance public involvement activities.

MPO Logo
Description: A logo representing the MPO will be developed and used to brand products and publications of the MPO. A logo will help the public become familiar with the different activities of the MPO by providing a means of recognizing MPO products.

Activities: The MPO logo will be available for use on all MPO publications, including those developed by consultants working on MPO sponsored projects to create a community awareness of the MPO deliverables. Feedback will be solicited from the Technical Committee and the general public in the creation and application of this logo.

Legal Advertised Notices
Description: All notices of meetings and hearings of the MPO Transportation Policy Committee will be posted a minimum of seven days prior to the meeting. The mailing and/or e-mailing of notices and press releases should be timed to be received locally within five days of the meeting. When official public hearings and public comment periods for regional plans and programs are provided, said meeting notices will be published a minimum of the required days (see Table 1) in the primary newspaper of record in the study area. The MPO Transportation Policy Committee may consider hosting special meetings to consider non-routine item that necessitates action but falls between regularly scheduled meetings. If a special meeting is called, the notice will be published a minimum of three days prior to the meeting.

Activities: Regular and other meetings seeking public input will be posted seven days prior to the meeting.

Other Media
Description: Opportunities will be pursued for publication in other newsletters produced by municipalities, civic groups, or others that may have an interest in the MPO. Opportunities also will be pursued to present to civic and social agencies, provide television news highlights, and utilize public service notices to create community awareness of planning activities.

Activities: Increased opportunities to make public aware of corridor studies, small area studies, other planning studies or major activities. Direct outreach to local interest groups and other organizations targets local residents and employees that can be especially beneficial when focusing on nearby corridor or area plans.

News Releases and Media Relations
Description: Formal press releases will be sent to a media distribution list contained in the MPO master database to announce meetings/activities and to provide information on specific issues being considered by the MPO.
When specific communities are affected by transportation studies, local newsletters and media outreach may be employed to communicate the project status.

**Activities:** Corridor or other planning studies, workshops, open houses, public hearings, and other MPO activities, and announcements about the interactive map, etc.

**Display Ads**

**Description:** The MPO may publish ads to promote meetings that are not regularly scheduled, such as corridor study workshops. The ads will be published in selected newspapers to reach a larger audience than typical legal notices.

**Activities:** Public awareness of project specific meetings, workshops, or open houses.

**E-mail Announcements/Internet Websites**

**Description:** Meeting announcements and MPO information will be e-mailed to interested persons that have submitted their e-mail addresses to MPO staff and are included in the MPO master database.

**Activities:** Long-range planning studies, corridor studies, small area studies, other planning studies, regular meetings, public hearings, workshops, open houses, and other major MPO activities.

**Interactive Regional Data Dashboard**

**Description:** An easy-to-use interactive data dashboard displaying regional demographic, economic and statistical data will be available and updated regularly to share data with member agencies and the public to keep them informed of the region’s socioeconomic indicators.

**Activities:** The Community Indicators dashboard developed in partnership with the Community Foundation of the Lowcountry.  
https://www.lowcountrycommunityindicators.org/

**Small Group Meetings/Focus Groups**

**Description:** For some plans and studies, meetings will be held with small groups that have an interest in the project. Meetings could be with homeowners or neighborhood associations, civic groups, special interest groups, or other groups of affected or interested parties.

**Activities:** Corridor studies, small area studies, other planning studies, and other MPO activities.
Public Hearings

Description: These public meetings will be used to solicit public comment on a project or issue being considered for adoption by the MPO. Public hearings will provide a formal setting for citizens to provide comments to the MPO or another decision-making body. Meeting minutes will be recorded. Public hearings are more formal than public workshops and are less interactive, with citizens being asked to respond to a project-specific deliverable or set of recommendations.

Activities: Public hearings are offered for the adoption of the Long Range Transportation Plans, Transportation Improvement Program, and Public Participation Plan and other planning studies as needed for other MPO activities.

Comment Forms/Complaint Procedure

Description: Comment forms often are used to solicit public comment on specific issues being presented at a workshop, other public meetings, or via reports available for public review. Comment forms can be very general in nature or can ask for very specific feedback. For example, a comment form may ask for comments on specific alignment alternatives being considered during a corridor study or may ask for a person's general feelings about any aspect of transportation. Comment forms can be included in publications and on websites to solicit input regarding the subject of the publication and/or the format of the publication or website. In accordance with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, these comment opportunities allow for complaints associated with minority groups as described in Title VI of the U.S. Code (42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq.). Such complaints will be logged in at the MPO office, reviewed according to the Department of Justice’s investigation procedures manual, and forwarded to SCDOT and FHWA for further review and direction. Title VI complaints may be e-mailed, mailed by post or communicated directly by calling or visiting the MPO office.

Activities: Public workshops, open houses, hearings and other meetings, accompany MPO documents on public display, general MPO activities.

Online Interactive Map

Description: An online web-based map that is updated with current information and projects will be available to the public to showcase current and planned projects that may be occurring around the region. This map will display location, project scope, and further details about each project LATS may have a hand in.

Activities: A GIS map consistently updated to provide real time updates on LATS projects within the LATS study area.

Surveys/Questionnaires

Description: Surveys or questionnaires (print, online, or both) will be used when very specific input from the public is desired. A survey can be used in place of comment cards to ask very specific questions and/or to gather technical data during corridor and planning studies.

Activities: Conduct surveys or questionnaires on issues and needs to provide input into the plans.
Posters and Flyers
Description: Posters and flyers will be used to announce meetings and events. These documents will be distributed electronically and displayed at public places such as City/Town Halls, libraries, and community centers. The announcement may contain a brief description of the purpose of a meeting, the time(s) and location(s) and contact information. Posters and flyers may be used to reach a large audience that cannot be reached using direct mailings and/or newsletters.

Activities: Corridor studies, small area studies, other planning studies, regular and special MPO activities.

Library Distribution Sites
Description: All MPO documents released for public review and comment can be made available at local libraries for public review and comment.

Activities: Documents for review may be made available to the public.

Direct Mailings
Description: Direct mailings may be used if feasible to announce upcoming meetings or activities or to provide information to a targeted area or group of people. Direct mailings typically will include letters but also can include postcards or flyers. An area may be targeted for direct mailing because of potential impacts from a project. Groups that may have an interest in a specific issue may be targeted.

Activities: Project-specific meetings, workshops, open houses, corridor studies, small area studies, other planning studies or major activities.

Visualization
Description: A critical component of public participation is to provide the public visual as well as written descriptions of transportation projects. Through visual imagery, the complex features of proposed transportation plans, policies, and programs can be portrayed at appropriate scales (e.g. regional, local, project architecture, etc.) and from different points of view. The MPO will utilize various visual design techniques when appropriate. Some techniques may include: sketches, drawings, artist renderings, aerial photography, mapping, simulated photos, videos, computer modeled images, interactive geographical information system (GIS), GIS-based scenario planning tools, photo manipulation and computer simulation. Visualization techniques also will include charts and graphs.

Activities: Planning studies, TIP amendments, and other MPO activities contain various forms of visualization.

Lowcountry Council of Governments Newsletter
Description: LCOG publishes a monthly newsletter that is distributed electronically through email and social media to member agencies and the public.

Activities: Relevant articles will be published in the LCOG newsletter periodically related to topics of interest or project specific to nature.
Virtual Meeting Format
Description: LCOG and LATS will offer a virtual meeting format if an in person meeting is not a feasible option. Meetings can be hybrid in nature with both in person and virtual attendance. This could apply to regular committee meetings at the direction of the Chair and or public meetings related to capturing public comment.

Activities: Provide a virtual or hybrid meeting format.

Regularly Scheduled Committee Meetings
Description: All LATS Policy Committee offer an opportunity for public comment prior to the close of each meeting.

Activities: Provide an opportunity on the agenda for public comment at each regularly scheduled meeting. This is currently done at the end of the meeting.

Project Specific Open House Meetings and Workshops
Description: Targeted public meetings will be a part of major plans and studies. These meetings generally will be open and informal, with project team members interacting with the public on a one-on-one basis. Short presentations may be given at these meetings. The purpose of project-specific meetings is to provide project information to the public and to solicit public comment and a sense of public priorities. Project workshops will be conducted in an inviting manner that actively solicits feedback from attendees as well as providing information about project activities.

Activities: Long-range planning studies, corridor studies, and other major MPO activities.

Social Media
Description: LATS will utilize its social media presence to keep the community up to date with projects, decisions, and any other process that may involve the public or be of interest to the public. The MPO will use social media to inform the public of important dates and information. The MPO will further use social media as a platform to facilitate communication and engagement with all interested parties and to distribute surveys, questionnaires, handouts, posters, videos, and any other tool for engagement as needed.

Activities: Publications and presence on social media platforms.
Share Information Through Members
Description: LATS and LCOG will coordinate with our partner agencies’ public information officers to share information regarding meetings, projects, surveys, and other special announcements. Many members have a weekly email distribution in addition to their websites and social media that can share information.

Activities: Publications and meeting notices may be shared through member agencies newsletters, website and email distributes announcements.

Title VI & Environmental Justice Review
Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in federally assisted programs and activities on the basis of race, color, and national origin. In 1994, Presidential Executive Order 12898 directed every Federal agency to make Environmental Justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing the effects of all programs, policies, and activities on “minority populations and low-income populations.” In complying with the aforementioned federal laws and policies, the MPO’s Environmental Justice initiatives will strive to involve the potentially affected public through a Public Outreach Program. This program consists of MPO staff activities designed to develop partnerships with, and enhance their participation in the transportation planning process, by groups and individuals of “traditionally underserved” communities. These communities include minorities, low income, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Staff activities may include MPO staff participation in groups and coalitions serving within these communities, targeted communications with local media outlets, conducting meetings at times and locations that are accessible to transit dependent or non-driving individuals when possible, and publication of MPO documents in non-technical, accessible formats when needed. The goal of the MPO’s Public Outreach Program is to ensure that all citizens, regardless of race, color, religion, income status, national origin, age, gender, disability, marital status, or political affiliation, have an equal opportunity to participate in the MPO’s decision-making process.

Description: The MPO will take reasonable steps to ensure that all persons, including those with a disability or language barrier, have meaningful opportunities to participate in the transportation planning and programming process. The MPO also will strive to address environmental justice issues at all stages of the planning process, including implementing the following strategies to reduce participation barriers for under-served groups and engage them in the decision-making process:

- Representatives of minority, disability, low-income and limited English proficiency groups will be identified and included in MPO mailings.
- If needed, documents will be translated, and public notices broadcast for any alternate language based on the known LEP (Limited English Proficiency) population.

When possible, meetings will be held at locations accessible to persons with disability, bus riders, and bicyclists and that are convenient to neighborhoods with a concentration of minority and low-income persons.

Activities: Corridor studies, small area studies, other planning studies, regular and special MPO activities.

Citizens Advisory Committee
Description: A Citizens Advisory Committee may be established either as a standing advisory committee for all MPO activities or as an additional outreach group for certain plans and studies. The intent of this committee is to ensure that meaningful public participation is regularly and intentionally incorporated into the formal transportation planning process. This committee can review and provide input on the development of programs and projects within the LATS communities. Additionally, this committee considers the needs of those traditionally underserved by the existing transportation system.
**Public Participation Plan**

**Activities:** Core work products of the MPO that can include the UPWP, LRTP, TIP, PPP, grant programs, and other activities.

**Providing LATS Updates at Regional Meetings**

**Description:** There are several regional and local planning committees that hold meetings which LCOG staff monitors and participates in as appropriate.

**Activities:** LCOG staff serve on the Lowcountry Regional Transit Authority Board and provide updates on LATS activities at each meeting. LCOG staff also attend the County Transportation Committee, Southern Lowcountry Regional Board (SoLoCo) and the Northern Beaufort Regional Plan Implementation Committee meeting and provide information as requested.

**Summary of Public Participation Policies**

Table 1 provides a summary of the four documents required of the LATS MPO. For each document, the required notifications, comment period, and required update schedule are included. Duration of comment periods varies based on whether the document is undergoing a major update or a minor amendment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Table 1 – Public Participation Policy Summary Table</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program or Plan</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Program Adoption</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Participation Plan (PPP)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Program Amendments</strong></td>
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<td>Public Participation Plan (PPP)</td>
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Summary of Public Participation Techniques by Document

Table 2 summarizes the public participation techniques for each of the four documents required of the LATS MPO. Each technique listed may not be necessary during a given adoption or program amendment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program or Plan</th>
<th>Available Public Participation Techniques</th>
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</table>
| Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)  | - Information posted on MPO website  
- Information delivered in electronic newsletter  
- Legal advertisements  
- Email announcements  
- Posters and flyers (meeting announcements)  
- Public workshops  
- Small group meetings  
- Public hearings (adoption process)  
- Comment forms (public meetings and online)  
- Online interactive map  
- Surveys/questionnaires  
- Visualization of plan recommendations |
| Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)  | - Information posted on MPO website  
- Information delivered in electronic newsletter  
- Legal advertisements  
- Email announcements  
- Small group meetings  
- Public hearings (adoption process)  
- Comment forms (online)  
- Online interactive map |
| Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)   | - Information posted on MPO website  
- Information delivered in electronic newsletter  
- Legal advertisements  
- Email announcements  
- Public hearings (adoption process) |
| Public Participation Plan (PPP)        | - Information posted on MPO website  
- Information delivered in electronic newsletter  
- Legal advertisements  
- Email announcements  
- Posters and flyers (meeting announcements)  
- Public workshop  
- Small group meetings  
- Public hearings (adoption process)  
- Comment forms (public meetings and online) |

Monitoring and Evaluation

As designated LATS staff will monitor the amount of public participation resulting from each public outreach activity. This will be done through various means, including:

- Taking attendance at public outreach meetings using a sign-in sheet;
- Keeping a log of contacts with the public, via phone, mail, email, fax, in-person meetings, or other means, which resulted from a public outreach activity;
- Keeping a record of attendance and involvement at MPO events;
- Tracking the number of completed surveys or comment cards received from a public outreach event;
• Monitoring daily and weekly traffic to the LATS website and number of page views;
• Tracking distribution of public information materials, including brochures, newsletters, and other publications;
• Tracking number of addresses on mailing lists; and
• Other means appropriate for the type of public outreach used.

This monitoring will identify any special circumstances which may have contributed to an unusually high or low attendance. It will also identify the nature of the notification process for the public outreach activity, including press releases, paid advertising, mailed notices, emails, phone calls, and other means.

On an annual basis, the information collected through monitoring public outreach will be compiled and evaluated to assess the effectiveness of each type of outreach activity. This will include both a quantitative assessment of the number of participants, as well as a qualitative assessment of the level of interaction and information exchanged. The assessment will note the public involvement techniques used, the public’s response, the public involvement objectives that were met by the meeting, and any change to how the activity should be conducted in the future.

This monitoring and evaluation process will be used to determine the effectiveness of existing public involvement techniques (Table 3). Each time a public involvement evaluation is performed, a list of improvement strategies needed should be identified for implementation. If improvement is needed for an ongoing public involvement task, such as the MPO web site, a reasonable completion date should be established. If improvements are needed for one-time activities such as corridor studies, the improvements should be implemented where appropriate on future activities. Records of the monitoring and evaluation process will be kept on file at the LATS office.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3 – Measures of Effectiveness</th>
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<tr>
<td>Outcomes Measured</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of people attending public outreach meetings at MPO events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of completed surveys from outreach events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily and weekly traffic to the LATS website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of public comments received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of addresses on mailing lists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people of Title VI populations (as voluntarily categorized) submitting comments or surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number (and status) of Title VI complaints received</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Consultation
Consultation with agency partners and interested parties will utilize many of the Public Participation Tools and Techniques, including electronic communication (email and web-based), electronic newsletters, project workshops, small group meetings/focus groups, public hearings, comment forms, online interactive map, surveys/questionnaires, and direct mailings. Consultation with agencies in review and comment of programs and plans administered by LATS will be subject to the comment period stated previously, at a minimum.

Federal, State, and Local Agencies
In developing the LRTP and TIP, LATS staff will consult with local and regional agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities within the LATS study area. This consultation may include local, regional, and/or private agencies responsible for planned growth, economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, freight movements, land use management, natural resources, conservation, and historic preservation. Ongoing coordination with these agencies will help identify effective mitigation strategies for potential impacts of projects included in the LRTP. The LRTP, TIP, and UPWP may be developed with due consideration of other related planning activities within the LATS study area, including the design and delivery of transportation services within the area that are provided by:

- Recipients of assistance under title 49, U.S.C., Chapter 53;
- Governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations (including representatives of the agencies and organizations) that receive federal assistance from a source other than the U.S. Department of Transportation to provide non-emergency transportation service; and
- Recipients of assistance under 23 U.S.C. 204.

Interagency agreements may be maintained between LATS and other local and regional agencies such as Palmetto Breeze. The agreements will describe LATS’ role and responsibility in relation to the other agencies’ work.

Interested Parties
LATS will provide notice of public review meetings or review periods being held on the draft and final documents of the LRTP, TIP, UPWP, and PPP. Notice will be provided to known interested parties but not limited to:

- Public transportation providers
- Users of public transportation
- Users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle facilities
- Freight shippers
- Providers of freight transportation services
- Military installations
- Private providers of transportation
- Disabled, Elderly, Low-income, and Limited English-speaking populations
- Land management agencies
- Providers of non-emergency transportation services receiving financial assistance from a source other than title 49, U.S.C., Chapter 53.
Get Involved

- **Call us:** Call us with any questions at 843-473-3958. Office hours are from 9am-5pm Monday through Friday.
- **Email us:** Email us with any questions at srossi@lowcountrycog.org.
- **Write us:** P.O Box 98 – 634 Campground Rd, Yemassee, SC 29945
- **Attend our meetings:** Attend one of our many meetings open to the public to get involved with LCOG officials as well as other officials representing the many municipalities within the LATS study area. Meeting dates and locations will always be published prior to every meeting open to the public. Reach out to a staff member, check LCOG’s website, or check social media for upcoming dates and times. If you would like to attend but require special accommodations please contact us so that we may best tailor to your needs.
- **Follow us on social media:** Follow us on social media to keep up to date with the latest MPO news and to easily access information available to the public.
Appendix A: Public Comment

***Notice of Public Comment Period for the Lowcountry Area Transportation Study (LATS) Public Participation Plan ***

Opportunity for Public Review and Comment
45 – Day Public Notice

The Lowcountry Area Transportation Study (LATS) currently have the final draft Public Participation Plan (PPP) available for public review and comment.

The PPP identifies a set of policies and techniques through which the MPO can ensure opportunities exist for the public to be involved in transportation planning activities. It outlines a process to ensure adequate opportunities for members of the community to express their opinion on transportation issues and to become active participants in the decision-making process.

The document can be found on our website at www.lowcountrycog.org. It can be viewed at the Lowcountry Council of Governments, 834 Campground Road, Point South, Yemassee, SC. Written comments can be emailed to mgagliardi@lowcountrycog.org or sent to PO. Box 98, Yemassee, SC 29945. Written comments will be accepted until August 1st, 2024.

Please contact Michael Gagliardi at 843-473-3993 or at the email address above if you have any questions.

All written comments received shall, as applicable, be made a part of the records of public input.
W00000000
Publication Dates
The Lowcountry Area Transportation Study (LATS) currently has the final draft of the Public Participation Plan (PPP) available for public review and comment.

The PPP identifies a set of policies and techniques through which the MPO can ensure opportunities exist for the public to be involved in transportation planning activities. It outlines a process to ensure adequate opportunities for members of the community to express their opinion on transportation issues and to become active participants in the decision-making process.

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Please contact Michael Gagliardi at 843-473-3993 or at the email address above if you have any questions.

All written comments received shall, as applicable, be made a part of the records of public input.
Appendix B: Consultation Agencies

Department of Agriculture
1200 Senate St
Columbia, South Carolina 29201
803-734-2210

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
1000 Assembly St
Columbia, South Carolina 29201
803-734-4400
webmaster@dnr.sc.gov

South Carolina Office of Economic Opportunity
1205 Pendleton St
Columbia, South Carolina 29201
803-734-0662

South Carolina Emergency Management Division
2779 Fish Hatchery Road
West Columbia, South Carolina 29172
803-737-8500

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control
2600 Bull St
Columbia, South Carolina
803-898-3432
808-898-3301

South Carolina Forestry Commission
5500 Broad River Rd
Columbia, South Carolina 29212
803-896-8800
scfc@scfc.gov

South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism
1205 Pendleton St
Columbia, South Carolina 29201
803-734-1700

South Carolina Department of Transportation
955 Park St
P.O. Box 191
Columbia, South Carolina 29201
803-737-1200
South Carolina Office of Resilience
632 Rosewood Dr
Columbia, South Carolina 29201
803-896-4215
resilience@scor.sc.gov

Savannah Coast Refuges Complex
Headquarters and Visitor Center
694 Beech Hill Lane
Hardeeville, SC 29927
843-784-9911
savannahcoastal@fws.gov

South Carolina Coastal Conservation League
131 Spring Street
Charleston, SC 29403
843-723-8035
action@scccl.org

East Coast Greenway
5826 Fayetteville Road
Suite 210
Durham, NC 27713
919-797-0619
info@greenway.org

Spanish Moss Trail
P.O. Box 401
Beaufort SC 29901
info@spanishmosstrail.com

Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission
info@gullahgeecheecorridor.org

Gullah Geechee Nation Headquarters
P.O. Box 1109
St Helena Island, SC 29902
843-838-1171
gullgeeco@aol.com

Penn Center
National Historic Landmark District
16 Penn Center Circle west
St. Helena Island, SC 29920
843-838-2432
info@penncenter.com