

Greenville-Pickens Area Transportation Study

Public Participation Plan

Approved by GPATS Policy Committee September 2013

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Section 1: Purpose of the Public Participation Plan

The public participation plan for the Greenville-Pickens Area Transportation Study (GPATS) describes tools and strategies to ensure accurate and timely public information and participation in transportation planning. The plan describes the transportation planning process, public involvement methods, and evaluation measures for public involvement activities.

Section 2: GPATS Organization, History, and Committees

The Greenville-Pickens Area Transportation Study (GPATS) is the Metropolitan Planning Organization, or MPO, for the Greenville Urbanized Area. MPOs were created in the 1960s and required for any Census-defined Urbanized Area with a population of 50,000 or more. MPOs were created to ensure that transportation planning is carried out on the regional scale, in order to allocate federal and other transportation funding most efficiently.

There are 11 MPOs in the state of South Carolina, and GPATS is one of the largest in terms of funding and population. GPATS covers a significant portion of Greenville County and Pickens County, and smaller portions of Anderson, Laurens, and Spartanburg counties. It contains the municipalities of Central, Clemson, Easley, Fountain Inn,, Greer, Liberty, Mauldin, Norris, Pelzer, Pendleton, Pickens,, Travelers Rest, West Pelzer, and Williamston. It covers an area of 777 square miles and is home to more than 500,000 residents. GPATS is a separate entity from the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), which maintains and manages a large percentage of the roads within the state. Additionally, many of the municipalities and counties within GPATS manage their own transportation projects within their boundaries.

GPATS is responsible for conducting regional transportation planning and overseeing transportation investments. GPATS is involved in transportation projects that utilize federal funding within the boundary area.

GPATS works with road projects, safety projects, bicycle and pedestrian projects, and public transit. GPATS provides staff and technical assistance with a number of local plans, projects, and initiatives, and also provides funding to other agencies to carry out transportation-related studies.

The main source of funding for GPATS projects comes from Guideshare, which is known as Surface Transportation Program (STP) funding in other states. Guideshare money is federal funding that is funneled through the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) to the MPOs in the state. GPATS is the third-largest MPO in South Carolina, and receives \$14.8 million in Guideshare funding each year.

GPATS committees are intended to ensure input from citizens, technical staff, and policy makers. These three committees participate in the development of plans and policies for GPATS.

Policy Committee:

The GPATS Policy Coordinating Committee, comprising elected and appointed officials from around the region, approves the scheduling of projects, the allocation of funds, and helps to guide the development of the region's transportation infrastructure. This includes, but is not exclusive to, roads and highways, mass transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and freight. The Policy Committee meets a minimum of four times each year, and may hold additional called meetings as necessary.

Study Team:

The GPATS Study Team consists of planners, engineers, administrators, and other planning professionals representing the jurisdictions within GPATS. The Study Team is responsible for assisting in the development and evaluation of GPATS plans, projects, and other products, and they make recommendations to the Policy Committee. The GPATS Study Team meets approximately three weeks before each Policy Committee meeting.

Citizens Advisory Committee:

The existing GPATS Citizens Advisory Committee was established in 2011, and includes representatives from all areas of GPATS. The CAC is responsible for attending meetings and providing feedback to GPATS staff regarding plans, surveys, meetings, and any other requested items. The CAC meets four times each year, approximately two weeks before each Policy Committee meeting.

Section 3: Overview of GPATS plans

There are three especially important documents that guide GPATS's operations. They are the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).

The LRTP is a 25-year financially constrained, meaning that it looks at not only road projects but also transit and bicycle/pedestrian projects. It is developed in conjunction with local planning agencies within GPATS, the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), and significant public participation. After projects have been evaluated, they are included in order of priority in the LRTP. The "funded improvements" list includes all projects that GPATS will be able to fund in the next 25 years, assuming current funding levels. The LRTP also includes an "unfunded needs" list, in case additional funding becomes available. The LRTP will continue to be updated every five years, as long as GPATS continues to remain in Air Quality Attainment. If GPATS takes on Nonattainment status, the LRTP will be updated every four

years.

The TIP includes a list of projects that have been approved to receive funding over the next years. As projects are allocated funding, they are from the LRTP into the TIP, in order of priority. Once a project is in the TIP, the expenses are allocated by fiscal year (preliminary engineering, right-of-way acquisition, construction, etc.). The TIP is updated every two years.

The UPWP details the transportation planning activities carried out by GPATS each year. These activities include the Public Involvement Program, software and equipment purchases, staff education, multimodal planning, short and long-range planning, and special studies. The UPWP is updated every year.

Section 4: Federal Agency Requirements for Public Participation

The policy of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is to support proactive public participation at all stages of planning and project development. State departments of transportation and MPOs are required to develop effective public participation processes. The performance standards for these proactive public involvement processes include:

- ◆ Early and continuous involvement
- ◆ Collaborative input on alternatives, evaluation criteria, and mitigation needs
- ◆ Open meetings where matters related to federal-aid highway and transit programs are being considered
- ◆ Open access to the decision-making process

Section 5: Consultation with Stakeholders

The current federal transportation legislation, MAP-21, continues to emphasize the importance of MPO coordination with interested parties during the development of products and documents. GPATS will involve the following: citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of bicycle and pedestrian facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties identified by GPATS in its outreach efforts.

GPATS has established, and will continue to maintain, a list of representatives for all stakeholders mentioned above. These stakeholders will be contacted directly and/or involved through meetings to solicit their input and involvement during the plan development process. GPATS will continue to actively coordinate its planning and public involvement efforts with planning-related agencies and representatives through a variety of forums, including Policy Committee meetings, Study Team meetings, Citizens Advisory Committee meetings, Greenville Transit Authority meetings, Chamber of Commerce meetings, Ten at the Top meetings, and

various local government agency meetings.

GPATS makes an effort to reach its minority and elderly communities, and those with limited English proficiency. GPATS will advertise meeting notices in the local Spanish-language newspaper, *Latino*. A staff member of the Greenville County Administration office is able to provide translation of materials into Spanish when needed, and has provided assistance with translation at meetings in the past.

GPATS holds meetings in a variety of formats and at a variety of times, in part to accommodate senior citizens and enable them to more easily attend meetings. All meetings held at Greenville County Square are ADA-accessible. The GPATS Citizens Advisory Committee has a representative from the Greenville County Disabilities and Special Needs Board. The Citizens Advisory Committee also has several members who are minorities.

Section 6: Comment Periods

The standard GPATS comment period will be 15 days, which will apply to all meetings, plans, updates, and corrections requiring advertisement. A longer comment period may be established by GPATS for specific plans. GPATS will offer comment periods for the following: development and updates of the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP); amendments to the LRTP, TIP, and UPWP as required by SCDOT; all public meetings; the development of corridor/area plans, the development of transit or bicycle/pedestrian plans, and the development of all other transportation-related plans.

At a minimum, the above-mentioned items will be advertised in local newspapers and through the GPATS website. Additional methods as detailed in Section 8 will be used depending on the type of product or document.

Section 7: Evaluation and Updates

The tools and strategies detailed in this Public Participation Plan will be evaluated annually, at the end of each GPATS fiscal year (June 30th). The Public Participation Plan will be updated every three years at a minimum, with the next update in 2016.

Section 8: Public Participation Strategies

8.1: GPATS Website

In early 2012, GPATS worked with a local web design firm to create a new website, www.gpats.org. The website offers a user-friendly format and gives the public and policy makers easy access to GPATS plans, projects, maps, meeting information, and more. The website

includes:

- an interactive Google map that provides details and termini for all scheduled road projects
- a list of GPATS Policy Committee members, Study Team, and staff, with contact information
- a Citizen's Guide to GPATS
- maps of the GPATS study area
- a calendar listing of all upcoming GPATS meetings, webinars, and other events
- UPWP, TIP, and LRTP documents
- information on Air Quality, Safe Routes to School, and other transportation-related programs
- information on local transit service and bicycle and pedestrian planning in the area
- reports from special studies
- traffic counts from SCDOT and Greenville County data
- news items regarding local meetings, projects, and other developments in transportation
- translation into several languages (including Spanish) through Google Translate

Staff tracks website visits and usage through a weekly report from Google Analytics, which highlights the number of visits and unique visitors, the average time spent on the site, and the bounce rate.

8.2: News Media

GPATS staff works with the Greenville County Governmental Affairs Coordinator to disseminate information to the local media. GPATS meeting information and project details have been covered in the local newspapers, on local television news stations, and on local radio. GPATS staff members make themselves available to reporters to be interviewed when there is interest in a story, and staff works through the Governmental Affairs Coordinator to keep reporters updated when there are developments in a previous story.

8.3: Legal Advertisements

GPATS advertises all comment periods and public meetings for the UPWP, TIP, and LRTP by legal advertisements in the Greenville News, the largest newspaper in the GPATS area. Scheduled GPATS Policy Committee and Study Team meetings are held at Greenville County Square; notices are posted on the GPATS website (www.gpats.org) and on a central bulletin board at the county office complex, in compliance with state law for advertising public meetings.

8.4: Webinars

Since 2011, GPATS has made it a priority to host several webinars each year on a variety of transportation topics. These events are open to the public and advertised through the website and through an e-mail list. The webinars purchased by GPATS are typically offered through the American Planning Association (APA) and the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle

Professionals (APBP).

8.5: Social Media

GPATS and Greenville County are beginning to explore the use of social media tools in communicating with the public and gaining feedback on plans and projects. GPATS aims to begin using tools such as Twitter, Facebook, and live chat by early 2014 to better reach stakeholders. GPATS has begun using “virtual meeting” capabilities, and will use this tool in the development of a pedestrian/bicycle plan in 2013 and 2014.

8.6: Public Meetings

Depending on the specific issues and needs involved, staff conducts various types of public meetings to communicate information and receive input and comments. GPATS Policy Committee meetings are held at least four times each year, and the public is made aware of the meetings through the website and through legal advertisements as noted in 7.3. Meetings are held in ADA-accessible locations within Greenville County Square.

Meetings and workshops that tie in with specific projects, such as an update of the Long Range Transportation Plan or a corridor study, are advertised to the public through local media, the GPATS website, and through legal advertisements.

These meetings are held in a variety of locations and at a variety of times to make it feasible for a larger number of people to attend. GPATS has experimented with various meeting formats, and has typically found “drop-in” style meetings to be more successful in terms of attendance. At these meetings, GPATS staff may give a short presentation, and then are available to speak with attendees, answer questions, and gather input and ideas from the public regarding their transportation concerns.

8.7: Presentations and Workshops

The Greenville County Planning Department developed a “speakers bureau” in 2011, and GPATS staff members have spoken to various groups through this effort, including the young Rotarians group, local developers, local surveyors, and others.

GPATS staff periodically makes presentations to undergraduate and/or graduate students, community groups, civic groups, and other organizations as requested. Through these presentations, attendees are encouraged to become involved in the local transportation planning process.

Workshops provide the public with an opportunity to provide direct input to the planning process, usually through exercises that involve marking up maps to identify problems, issues, and suggested actions and/or listing issues and desired improvements to the transportation system.

8.8: Flyers

Flyers are developed to announce public meetings and other events. These flyers are distributed electronically to the GPATS contact list, and paper copies are posted in public buildings and, where possible, in businesses within the affected areas of corridor studies and special studies.

8.9: Comment Forms

Comment forms are available through the GPATS website and at public meetings held by GPATS. Staff takes the appropriate action depending on the nature of the comments. Most comments received through the GPATS website are seeking information regarding a specific project, and staff responds directly to these requests. Comment forms received through meetings are addressed by the appropriate agency.

8.10: Surveys

GPATS develops both scientific surveys and non-scientific surveys. As part of the recent Long Range Transportation Plan update, GPATS created a scientific survey that was sent to 2,000 households within the GPATS area. This survey provided valuable feedback on transportation priorities, and also will serve as a baseline for another survey to be conducted in 2015. GPATS develops online and print surveys for various projects, and distributes them through meetings and through the GPATS website.

All public notices that advertise the program of projects (POP) will include the following language:

This Proposed Program of Projects (POP) will be the final program unless amended. This public notice of public involvement activities and time established for public review and comments on the TIP satisfies FTA Program of Project requirements.

This public participation process satisfies GPATS' and GTA's public participation process for the POP.

Section 9: Evaluation Matrix

STRATEGY	EVALUATION CRITERIA	PERFORMANCE GOAL	STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE
GPATS Website	Number of website visits, as tracked by Google Analytics on a weekly basis	30 unique website visits per week	Request a link from other websites when appropriate; make meeting attendees aware of website
News Media	Percentage of public meeting attendees who learn of meeting through this method	10 percent or more of meeting attendees learn of event through news media	Seek opportunities for follow-up stories, improve and maintain relationships with reporters
Legal Advertisements	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Webinars	Percentage of attendees not seeking CE credits through the webinar	20 percent or more of meeting attendees are not seeking CE credit through webinar	Continue to build distribution list
Social Media	Percentage of meeting attendees who learn of meeting through this method	10 percent or more of meeting attendees learn of event through social media	Post items more frequently; link from GPATS website to social media and vice versa
Public Meetings	Number of attendees	Depends on purpose of meeting and format of meeting	Offer variety of meeting formats; ask attendees how they learned of meeting to determine best methods

Presentations	Whether the information met the needs of the group	Meet informational needs of the group that requested presentation	Improve communication in advance to determine needs
Flyers	Percentage of meeting attendees who learn of meeting through this method	10 percent or more of meeting attendees learn of event through flyers	Distribute flyers at businesses near the location of meeting
Comment Forms	Number of responses from meeting attendees	25 percent or more of meeting attendees complete comment forms	Suggest attendees submit comment form through website if more convenient
Surveys	Number of responses or response rate, depending on type of survey	For scientific surveys, a response rate of 20 percent or more. For non-scientific surveys, the goal varies depending on the size of the audience surveyed	Link all surveys to GPATS website; distribute current survey(s) at all GPATS public meetings