

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
PROCESS FOR INVOLVING LOCAL OFFICIALS
IN RURAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING
2021

PURPOSE

Public participation is essential to sound transportation planning. Early and continuous dialogue with local officials and other stakeholders helps identify transportation needs when they arise and develop solutions that are more widely supported.

With increasing demand for mobility and system reliability, the need for communication between transportation users and decision-makers has never been greater, especially in an era of limited resources. The Michigan Department of Transportation's (MDOT) mission is "providing the highest quality integrated transportation services for economic benefit and improved quality of life." MDOT takes this mission very seriously and is constantly striving to do things better, faster, cheaper, safer, and smarter.

FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

As specified in United States Department of Transportation 23 CFR Part 450.210(b), "The State shall provide for non-metropolitan local official participation in the development of the long-range statewide transportation plan and the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The State shall have a documented process(es) for consulting with non-metropolitan local officials representing units of general-purpose local government and/or local officials with responsibility for transportation that is separate and discrete from the public involvement process [see 23 CFR Part 450.210(a)] and provides an opportunity for their participation in the development of the long-range statewide transportation plan and the STIP."

- The State Long-Range Transportation Plan (SLRTP) provides guidance for the development of transportation programs and establishes strategies and actions necessary to achieve transportation goals for a 20- to 25-year period.
- The STIP, a short-term program, lists all road, bridge and transit projects scheduled for design, right of way, and construction over a four-year period. It identifies available funds needed to implement those projects and explains the selection process MDOT followed to determine the prioritized list of projects.

These two primary planning processes are both formal and routine, with the STIP updated every three years and the SLRTP reviewed or updated every five years.

Since the 1990s, various federal transportation reauthorization acts have placed a high priority on integrating and coordinating transportation plans, programs,

and decision-making. The impetus for this was the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act that gave states flexibility to establish their own specific in-state planning/programming procedure. Over the 30 years since, federal code has evolved from initially requiring an overall public involvement process for statewide planning activities to the current requirement of a separate and discrete consultation process for non-metropolitan local officials.

This document describes MDOT's process for consulting with non-metropolitan local officials and tribal governments on the short-term (STIP) and long-term (SLRTP) statewide transportation plans.

OUTREACH

MDOT's project selection and development process relies on continuous opportunities for meaningful dialogue with local officials. The department's decentralized organizational structure is comprised of seven region offices. Within each region are two or more Transportation Service Centers (TSCs) responsible for smaller geographic areas.

MDOT region and TSC personnel responsible for creating and maintaining project lists are in the best position to know what is occurring locally. MDOT personnel interact with local officials by attending board meetings, responding to inquiries, meeting in person to discuss local needs and plans, to coordinate state and local projects to maximize efficiency and minimize any adverse impacts on the public. By partnering with local officials, MDOT is better able to serve the vast multimodal transportation needs of the entire state.

MDOT region planners and TSC personnel work with local communities to develop context-sensitive solutions for state projects and to involve the community in the design and development of projects in their areas.

MDOT Regional Consultation Process

Each MDOT region has a variation of an annual meeting to give local officials an opportunity to provide input on projects in the region. Some regions have one annual meeting at the region level, some have separate meetings in each TSC area, some have also opened the meetings to members of the public, and some are considering holding a virtual meeting to boost participation.

Regardless of the meeting variation, local officials are directly notified of meetings in their region in which rural transportation planning issues are discussed, including:

- Projected growth in the region,
- Economic development issues,
- Traffic flow patterns,
- Current transportation problems, and
- Alternative and multimodal transportation opportunities.

MDOT region representatives discuss the process by which MDOT selects projects and how multimodal opportunities are reviewed in the context of improving the transportation system. The information presented includes:

- Project selection process and goals,
- Coordination with other projects (state and local),
- Transportation Management System information (which is used to identify network condition, analyze usage patterns, and determine deficiencies), and
- Other data-driven planning processes.

At the conclusion of these region meetings, local officials are given the opportunity to share their feedback and their most pressing transportation needs with MDOT and regional planning agencies (RPAs). Local officials are also encouraged to continue their involvement and advocacy by staying informed through MDOT’s planning websites, communicating with region and TSC personnel, and playing an active role in transportation decision-making.

Local Consultation Process – Rural Task Forces (Local Projects)

The term “non-metropolitan local official” is defined as “the elected and appointed officials of local government, in non-metropolitan areas, with jurisdiction/responsibility for transportation.” This may include officials from counties, cities, towns, townships, and villages. The non-metropolitan planning process – known as the rural task force (RTF) process in Michigan – was developed by representatives from MDOT, the County Road Association (CRA), the Michigan Municipal League (MML), and the Michigan Transit Association (MTA). The RTF process was developed to ensure that all transportation modes were represented in rural planning processes and that the highest transportation needs and best solutions for each county are determined by the people closest to the county’s transportation system.

Of the eighty-three counties in Michigan, 78 are classified as rural. Local officials are sometimes already RTF committee members; local officials who are not members are considered stakeholders and are directly notified of all RTF meetings. RTFs are responsible for project selection and other transportation planning issues in non-metropolitan areas.

There are two levels of RTF committees:

- The local RTF committee (at the county level), and
- The regional RTF committee, comprised of a geographically related group of counties that nests into the RPA boundaries

More information on the RTF program can be found here: [MDOT - Rural Task Force \(Michigan.gov\)](#).

Local RTF committee meetings provide local officials an opportunity to give early feedback on project selection. This is an effective way to incorporate community

land use planning objectives, environmental, and economic development factors, and provide coordination with other state and local projects to achieve consensus on transportation decisions within the county.

Projects approved by local RTF committees are brought to the regional RTF committee, which makes the selection decision of record for federally funded projects within the rural geographic area. MDOT contracts with RPAs to facilitate RTF committee meetings. As stakeholders in this process, local officials are given direct notice of local and regional RTF meetings by RPAs.

Tribal governments that have jurisdiction over tribal lands within the boundaries of the local and/or regional RTF are also notified of local and regional RTF committee meetings. Tribal officials are included in the process to advocate for their transportation needs throughout the RTF process.

Local Consultation Process – Small Urban Program (Local Projects)

The Small Urban Program provides funding to cities with a population between 5,000 and 50,000. The majority of these small urban cities receive federal funding through the Small Urban Program every other year; two areas with populations more than 40,000 receive funding every year.

During the Small Urban Program Call for Projects process, Small Urban Program committees meet to select projects for their communities. Each Small Urban Program committee consists of a representative from the city, a representative from the county road commission, and a representative from the local transit provider. Small Urban Program meetings are organized and scheduled by RPAs. Local officials are given direct notice of the Small Urban Program committee meetings in their area by the RPAs.

The voting members of the Small Urban Program committee discuss and select projects that will use the federal dollars available through the Small Urban Program. Small Urban Program committee meetings provide local elected officials an opportunity to give early feedback on project selection.

More information on the Small Urban program can be found here: [MDOT - Small Urban \(Michigan.gov\)](#)

State Long-Range Transportation Plan Consultation

Non-metropolitan local officials are given direct notice by MDOT (through RPAs) of the public participation opportunities during the SLRTP development. They are also invited to send comments directly to MDOT staff in response to these notices.

More information about the recent public engagement efforts during the development of the current SLRTP can be found on the [Home Page - Michigan Mobility 2045](#) website.

OTHER RURAL PLANNING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Consultation with Tribal Governments

MDOT considers the concerns of tribal governments that have jurisdiction over tribal lands within the state. The department provides meaningful and timely consultation with 12 federally recognized sovereign tribal governments on a regular basis and prior to certain types of department actions. MDOT's tribal affairs coordinator serves as a point of contact for tribal governments to facilitate transportation-related communication and problem resolution. Coordinating with tribal governments is an essential part of determining transportation needs as well as the environmental impacts and mitigation of proposed projects.

In addition to consulting tribal governments during the development of the SLRTP and STIP, MDOT is required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act to consult with tribal governments when proposed transportation infrastructure improvements may affect properties considered to have traditional religious and cultural significance. MDOT's staff archeologist is responsible for requesting tribal participation in these projects and coordinating involvement.

Tribal consultation is a very formal process that recognizes the sovereignty of each tribal government. It occurs government-to-government, meaning direct MDOT-to-tribe, not MDOT-hired consultant-to-tribe. More information about MDOT's intergovernmental communication on transportation matters is available at: [MDOT - Tribal Government \(Michigan.gov\)](http://MDOT-Tribal-Government(Michigan.gov))

UPDATING THE RURAL CONSULTATION PROCESS

Continuous improvement is one of MDOT's core values. Employees at all levels of the organization are encouraged to continuously evaluate the effectiveness of programs and adjust as needed to better serve their customers.

MDOT will continue to refine and improve the rural consultation process to ensure that it is meeting the expectations of local officials. Because this is a dynamic process, the rural consultation process will continue to be refined and improved as needed. MDOT and RPAs will work cooperatively to educate local officials about the process and ensure their input is used to make improvements.

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

MDOT strives to improve public engagement through improved communication.

MDOT has developed the [MI Transportation Program Portal \(arcgis.com\)](http://MI-Transportation-Program-Portal(arcgis.com)) that allows the public to view projects on a map, click on the projects to bring up information specific to that project, and submit comments on that project. This platform was very successful in collecting comments on the Five-Year

Transportation Program and will be used for collecting comments on the STIP projects.

MDOT also uses proprietary e-mail lists to disseminate news releases to media reporters and editors who sign up to receive such information. The Statewide Planning Section uses three e-mailing lists that are targeted to metropolitan planning organization (MPO), RTF, and small urban stakeholders.

In addition, CRA has established a website to communicate information concerning the RTF program to its members and to members of the RTF Program Advisory Board. The website can be viewed at: <https://michiganrtf.com/>.

MDOT has a growing social media following, with thousands of users opting in for instant communication about important transportation news, such as road closures and policy changes.

CONCLUSION

MDOT will continue to review and update the rural consultation process as needed. MDOT is committed to early and frequent communication with all our partners and stakeholders, and we welcome feedback. As stated earlier, public participation is essential to sound transportation planning. MDOT will continue to work closely with local partners to identify transportation needs and develop cost-effective solutions that move Michigan forward.