

Mendocino Council of Governments

Public Participation Plan

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The Mendocino Council of Governments (MCOG), the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for the Mendocino County region, was established in 1972 by a Joint Powers Agreement between the County and the four incorporated cities (Ukiah, Willits, Fort Bragg, and Point Arena). The MCOG Board consists of seven members— two county supervisors, a public appointee, and one council member from each of the four incorporated cities.

Region

Mendocino County lies within the northern extension of California's coast mountain ranges. These mountains are characterized by a series of southeast to northwest ridges that are separated occasionally by narrow valleys. The coastline is also rugged and rocky, offering spectacular views of the ocean. Much of the land area is taken by State and National Forest lands, with the remainder used for agriculture, residential and other uses. Transportation routes tend to be located within valleys, and east-west travel is especially difficult, since parallel ridges must be traversed. The mountainous nature of the County tends to minimize ground transportation options throughout the region.

The 2020 California Department of Finance population estimates place Mendocino County's population at 88,388. This includes an unincorporated population of 59,330 and an incorporated population of 29,058. Four cities share the incorporated population: Ukiah (16,029), Fort Bragg (7,471), Willits (5,117), and Point Arena (441).

The bulk of the population in Mendocino County is concentrated in a few areas of the county. Ukiah, Talmage, Calpella, and Redwood Valley make up the largest single population concentration. Fort Bragg and the coastal area southward to the Navarro River is another population center. Willits, the surrounding Little Lake Valley, and the Brooktrails subdivision comprise the only other large settlement area in the county. Much of the rest of Mendocino County is rural and undeveloped.

Federal Transportation Bill Requirements

The 2005 federal transportation bill, Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), emphasized the importance of public participation as part of the transportation planning process. The bill established the requirement for a public participation plan to be used by Regional Transportation Planning Agencies in their planning processes. These requirements were included in the current federal transportation bill, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, passed in 2015.

Purpose of This Plan

MCOG recognizes the importance of public participation as well as interagency and intergovernmental participation. Without input and involvement from members of the public, affected agencies, community groups, and other interested parties it would be difficult to develop a transportation program that effectively meets the needs of the county and its communities.

This plan will provide a clear directive for the public participation activities of MCOG, particularly as they pertain to the agency's primary responsibilities, which include development and implementation of the following:

- Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)
- Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP)
- Annual Overall Work Program (OWP)
- Administration of Transit Development Act (TDA) funds
- Federal and state grant programs
- Coordinated Human Transportation Plan
- Transit studies
- Area transportation plans
- Special projects

ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Four standing committees aid MCOG in performing its transportation planning functions.

The **Policy Advisory Committee** (PAC) is composed of MCOG members and a Caltrans District 1 representative. At each MCOG Board meeting, the board members adjourn as the RTPA and reconvene as the PAC. Most items on the agenda are considered and voted on by the PAC, then ratified by MCOG. This allows Caltrans to participate in voting. The PAC typically meets once a month in conjunction with MCOG Board meetings.

The **Technical Advisory Committee** (TAC) is composed of planning and public works representatives from each of the Joint Powers entities, the Mendocino Transit Authority (MTA) General Manager, representatives from rail transportation and air quality, and a Caltrans transportation planner. The TAC considers and votes on matters of a technical nature. The TAC also makes recommendations to the MCOG Board on matters that will appear on their agendas. The TAC typically meets once a month.

The **Transit Productivity Committee** (TPC) is composed of two members from the MCOG Board of Directors, two members from Mendocino Transit Authority's Board of Directors, and one senior center representative selected by the senior

centers under MCOG's jurisdiction. The purpose of the TPC is to review transit performance and productivity issues in accordance with approved standards adopted by MCOG, including review of quarterly reports from MTA. The TPC will review and make recommendations to MCOG on the annual Transit Claim, and provide input on the "unmet transit needs" process, including findings of the SSTAC. Meetings will be held at least once annually, or quarterly if needed.

Senate Bill 498, approved in 1987, established the **Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC)** which represents interests of the elderly, disabled, and persons of limited means. The SSTAC membership consists of a potential transit user 60 years of age or older, a potential transit user who is disabled, two representatives from social services providers for seniors, two representatives from local social service providers for the disabled, one representative from a local social service provider for persons of limited means, and two representatives from the local Consolidated Transportation Service Agency (MTA). The SSTAC is typically involved in transit related projects and plans, including the annual unmet transit needs process, Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan and FTA grant programs. The SSTAC meets in the spring and fall.

Additional committees are formed on an as needed basis, typically to advise on a particular project or serve a specific function, such as a study advisory group.

PUBLIC & AGENCY PARTICIPATION GOALS & STRATEGIES

Goal 1: Provide all interested parties and agencies reasonable opportunities for involvement in the transportation planning process.

Strategy 1.1: Provide adequate public notice of public participation opportunities and activities and time for public review of regionally significant plans and documents.

Strategy 1.2: Utilize MCOG website as a means to alert the public and other agencies of the opportunity for public involvement in the transportation planning process when appropriate.

Strategy 1.3: Evaluate plans, programs, and projects to determine the most appropriate and effective tools and strategies for public and agency involvement and outreach.

Strategy 1.4: Provide the opportunity to comment on draft planning documents to affected local, state, federal and tribal agencies.

Strategy 1.5: Make transportation planning documents available for viewing on the MCOG website. Regionally significant documents, such as the RTP, shall also be made available at key locations throughout the

County including public libraries.

Strategy 1.6: In developing the RTP and other regionally significant plans, MCOG will consult with local, state, federal and tribal agencies and officials that may be affected by proposed planning activities, including planning, transportation, environmental, economic development, housing, private industry, and resource agencies, as appropriate.

Strategy 1.7: Prior to adoption, provide additional opportunity for public and agency review and comment if a regionally significant plan, including the RTP, differs significantly from the draft that was made available for public review and raises new material issues which could not reasonably have been foreseen from the public involvement efforts.

Strategy 1.8: During the transportation planning process, MCOG and its advisory bodies shall conduct open public meetings in accordance with the Brown Act (CGC Sec. 54950 et seq).

Strategy 1.9: Agendas for all MCOG board meetings and meetings of standing advisory bodies shall be posted a minimum of 72 hours prior to the meeting.

Goal 2: Increase public awareness and understanding of the transportation planning process in Mendocino County.

Strategy 2.1: Utilize MCOG's website to increase awareness of current transportation planning activities, and when appropriate, to communicate with the public about specific projects and plans in a non-technical, easily understood format.

Strategy 2.2: Employ visualization techniques as part of public involvement when appropriate.

Strategy 2.3: Provide information on regionally significant plans and projects to the local media for inclusion in their publications and/or reports.

Strategy 2.4: Maintain the MCOG website with current transportation planning activities, including reports and plans, as well as agendas and minutes for MCOG Board meetings.

Strategy 2.5: When appropriate, present information about specific plans and projects at public forums, such as City Council and Board of Supervisors meetings for increased public and governmental awareness.

Goal 3: Ensure accessibility to the transportation planning process and information for all members of the community.

Strategy 3.1: Hold public meetings at locations that are convenient and accessible to the public.

Strategy 3.2: When selecting meeting locations for community outreach activities, prioritize those locations that are accessible by means of public transit.

Strategy 3.3: When appropriate, incorporate tools that allow for alternate methods of participation.

Strategy 3.4: Make transportation planning documents available for viewing on the MCOG website. Regionally significant documents, such as the RTP, shall also be made available at key locations throughout the County including public libraries.

Strategy 3.5: Make every effort to accommodate requests for accessibility opportunities, including physical accessibility to public meetings as well as accessibility to information.

Goal 4: Maintain contact with interested individuals and agencies throughout the process of developing plans and projects.

Strategy 4.1: Encourage early involvement in the transportation planning process by providing timely notification and access to information regarding the development of plans and projects.

Strategy 4.2: Utilize citizen and/or agency advisory groups as a means of providing input to the transportation planning process. For some projects or plans, the TAC or SSTAC may serve this role.

Strategy 4.3: Maintain a contact list of agencies and individuals that may be interested in a specific project or plan.

Strategy 4.4: Identify key individuals and organizations, including small community organizations, that may be interested in or affected by a plan or program.

Strategy 4.5: Prior to adoption, provide additional opportunity for public and agency review and comment if a regionally significant plan, including the RTP, differs significantly from the draft that was made available for public review and raises new material issues which could not reasonably have been foreseen from the public involvement efforts.

Goal 5: Increase opportunities for those traditionally under-served, including the elderly, low income, disabled, and minority households, to participate in the transportation planning process.

Strategy 5.1: Utilize the Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC) as a means of obtaining input and recommendations for plans and programs impacting the elderly, disabled and low-income communities, including the RTP and Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan.

Strategy 5.2: Encourage representation on the SSTAC to be reflective of the underserved communities within Mendocino County.

Strategy 5.3: Offer key information, such as notices and announcements, in alternative languages when appropriate or requested.

Strategy 5.4: Provide the opportunity for alternative forms of public input (website, email, etc.) for individuals who are unable to attend public meetings or workshops.

Strategy 5.5: When appropriate, utilize alternative media outlets that may target minority or underserved segments of the community.

Goal 6: Consider public and agency input and comments as an integral part of MCOG's decision making process.

Strategy 6.1: Utilize citizen and/or agency advisory groups as a means of providing input to the transportation planning process. The TAC may serve in this function if appropriate.

Strategy 6.2: Conduct public opinion surveys to help identify the needs, interests and concerns of the population when appropriate.

Strategy 6.3: Consider the input of local, state, federal, and tribal agencies during the decision-making process.

Strategy 6.4: As appropriate, incorporate concerns, issues, and suggestions of the public and agencies when developing plans and projects.

Goal 7: Consult with tribal governments within Mendocino County and provide opportunities for tribal government input into the transportation planning process.

Strategy 7.1: Provide early notice of the development of transportation plans and programs to all tribal governments within Mendocino County.

Strategy 7.2: Provide the opportunity for direct consultation with tribal councils and/or administrators as part of the transportation planning process.

Strategy 7.3: Provide the opportunity for tribal governments and the tribal community to review significant plans and programs, including the Regional Transportation Plan and the Regional Transportation Improvement Program.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TOOLS

This section describes the public participation tools used by MCOG.

Most Common Public Participation Tools:

MCOG Website: MCOG's website, www.mendocinocog.org, provides MCOG's contact information, public notices, and meeting agendas and minutes. The site also includes transportation plans and programs, local transportation studies, and documents for public review and comment. The site allows visitors to subscribe to mailing lists to receive email updates on Board Agendas, news, and other topics.

Contact Lists: MCOG staff maintains a master list of all contacts, including public agencies, businesses, community groups, and members of the public. The list is used to establish and maintain a list of e-mail and regular mail contacts for general communications, electronic meeting notifications, and announcements.

Legal Advertisements: Legal notices are required to be published in a newspaper of countywide circulation. MCOG typically publishes notices in the Ukiah Daily Journal. Notices for items that may be of greater regional concern may also be published in the Fort Bragg Advocate, Independent Coast Observer, or Willits News. Notices may advertise meetings, agendas, or public comment periods on proposed plans, programs, or documents. The timeframe required for publication of legal notices varies depending on the type of project or plan being considered.

Project Workshops/Open-Houses: Public and agency workshops are often held during development of various transportation plans. Workshops may be held at the initial stage of plan development and later in the process to allow the public opportunity to comment on a draft plan or project concept. These are typically casual, open meeting formats. Notices of workshops may be advertised in the newspaper and on the website and often promoted through direct mailings or emails as well.

Small Group Meetings: These types of meetings would typically be with study or project advisory groups convened for specific projects. Meetings of these groups would take place during project development and for project or plan review.

Public Hearings: Public hearings are used to solicit public comments on a project or issue being considered by MCOG. Hearings provide a formal setting for citizens to provide comments to MCOG or another decision-making body. The requirement for a formal public hearing is usually statutorily established as is the need to publish a legal notice for the public hearing.

Press Releases: Press releases are sent to local media (newspaper, television, and radio) to announce upcoming meetings and activities and to provide information on specific issues being considered by MCOG or its committees.

Availability of Plans and Documents: Documents at all stages will be available for review by the public at the MCOG office and on the MCOG website. A copy of key regional draft documents, such as the RTP, may also be made available at other locations throughout the County, such as the public libraries.

Other Possible Tools for Public Outreach

Display Ads: Display ads in newspapers or on websites may be used to promote meetings that are not regularly scheduled or agenda items that may be of wide public interest. They are used to reach a larger audience than those that typically read legal ads. Display ads may also be used to advertise public comment periods on proposed plans, programs, or documents.

Direct Mailings: Letters or announcements may be mailed to lists of individuals or agencies regarding a specific project. Typically, the mailing list will be customized for a specific project.

Posters and Flyers: This tool would typically be used to promote a public workshop or meeting. The posters and flyers would be distributed at public places, such as city halls, libraries, and community centers for display. The announcement may contain a brief description of the purpose of the meeting/event, 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.

Surveys: Surveys may be used to gauge public opinion on certain issues. This tool has been used in the past to measure public support of a sales tax measure for transportation.

Radio and Television Ads: Paid radio and television ads may be used to generate public interest and involvement.

Member/Project Partner Agencies: MCOG may ask that member agencies (County and cities) or project partner agencies (such as Caltrans) share information about projects, events, or public engagement opportunities on their websites, social media accounts, or by other commonly used means.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The strategies and goals contained in this plan will be reviewed periodically to analyze their effectiveness and determine if modification to this plan is necessary. Strategies may be modified and additional strategies may be added to improve the public participation process.

The following indicators may be used in reviewing and determining the effectiveness of this plan:

- Number of public meetings and workshops
- Number and origin of participants at public meetings and workshops
- Number of hits to the MCOG website
- Number of comments received during the public comment period for projects and programs
- Revisions to plans or projects based on citizen and agency input

REVIEW OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

Per the federal transportation bill, this public participation plan will be made available for public review and comment for 45 days prior to adoption at a public hearing. Comments on the plan may be submitted to the MCOG offices by mail at 525 S. Main Street, Suite B, Ukiah, California, 95482. Comments may also be submitted via email to info@mendocinocog.org. Oral comments may be provided at MCOG Board meetings or via telephone at 707-463-1859.