

Mendocino Council of Governments

Public Participation Plan

November 2008



Prepared by:

**Mendocino Council of Governments
367 N. State Street, Suite 206
Ukiah, CA 95482
707-463-1859**

INTRODUCTION

Background

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

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 2000 U.S. Census placed Mendocino County's population at 86,265. This includes a population of 58,195 within the unincorporated areas of the county. Four incorporated cities within the county share a population of 28,070: the City of Ukiah (15,497), City of Fort Bragg (7,026), City of Willits (5,073), City of Point Arena (474).

The bulk of the population in Mendocino County is concentrated in a few areas of the county. Ukiah, Talmage, and Redwood Valley make up the largest single population concentration in Mendocino County. 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 is the only other large settlement area in the county. Much of the rest of Mendocino County is rural and undeveloped.

SAFETEA-LU requirements

The federal transportation bill, Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), emphasizes 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.

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
- Blueprint planning
- Special projects

ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Three 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** 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.

Senate Bill 498, approved in 1987, established the **Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC)** which represents interests of the elderly, handicapped, 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 handicapped, two representatives from social services providers for seniors, two representatives from local social service providers for the handicapped, 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 annually for the Unmet Transit Needs Workshop. Other meetings are held throughout the year on an as needed basis.

Another standing advisory committee is the **Transit Productivity Committee**. Functions of this committee include making recommendations to the MCOG Board about transit planning. The committee is made up of two MCOG board members, two Mendocino Transit Authority board members, and one senior center representative.

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 newsletter 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 and federal 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 state, federal and local 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 newsletter 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: 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 3.4: 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.

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: Ensure that representation on the SSTAC is reflective of the underserved communities within Mendocino County.

Strategy 5.3: Attempt to 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 be physically present at 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.

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 federal, state and local 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 contains descriptions of public participation tools currently used by MCOG.

Most Common Public Participation Tools:

MCOG Website: MCOG's website, www.mendocinocog.org, provides information about MCOG contact information, public notices, meeting agendas and minutes. The site also includes transportation plans and programs, local transportation studies, and documents for public review and comment.

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 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.

MCOG Newsletter: MCOG produces a biannual newsletter that is mailed to other agencies, both within and outside of Mendocino County that are connected with MCOG. This has proven to be a very effective way of communicating with other agencies, particularly those that MCOG is not

in regular communication with. Development of the newsletter can be timed to correspond with an event or public review of a document to be most effective.

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 on 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 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.

Telephone Surveys: Telephone 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 & Interviews: Paid radio and television ads may be used to generate public interest and involvement. In addition to paid advertisements, MCOG staff has also been featured on community news radio programs providing information about transportation issues.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The strategies and goals contains 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:

Public Awareness:

- Number of newspaper ads, public notices
- Number of press releases, public service announcements, and new articles
- Number of newsletters

Opportunities for Public Participation:

- 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

Result of Public and Agency Input:

- Revisions to plans or projects based on citizen and agency input

REVIEW OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

As required by SAFETEA-LU, 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 367 N. State Street, Suite 206, Ukiah, California, 95482. Comments may also be submitted via email to barrettn@dow-associates.com, or by fax 707-463-2212. Oral comments may be provided at MCOG Board meetings or via telephone at 707-463-1859.