

Participation Plan For Transportation Planning

**Recommended by the SMATS Transportation Planning Committee
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**Adopted by the Saginaw County Metropolitan Planning Commission
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**Saginaw Metropolitan Area Transportation Study
111 S. Michigan Ave.
Saginaw, Michigan 48602**

**Phone (989) 797-6800
Fax (989) 797-6809**

Participation Plan for Transportation Planning Saginaw Metropolitan Area Transportation Study

Overview

On August 10, 2005, the President signed into law the **Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users** (SAFETEA-LU). With guaranteed funding for highways, highway safety, and public transportation totaling \$244.1 billion, SAFETEA-LU represents the largest surface transportation investment in our Nation's history. The two landmark bills that brought surface transportation into the 21st century—the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21)—shaped the highway program to meet the Nation's changing transportation needs. SAFETEA-LU builds on this firm foundation, supplying the funds and refining the programmatic framework for investments needed to maintain and grow our vital transportation infrastructure.

SAFETEA-LU addresses the many challenges facing our transportation system today – challenges such as improving safety, reducing traffic congestion, improving efficiency in freight movement, increasing intermodal connectivity, and protecting the environment – as well as laying the groundwork for addressing future challenges. SAFETEA-LU promotes more efficient and effective Federal surface transportation programs by focusing on transportation issues of national significance, while giving State and local transportation decision makers more flexibility for solving transportation problems in their communities.

Furthermore, SAFETEA-LU encourages a decision-making process for transportation that is more responsive to local needs. The Saginaw Metropolitan Transportation Study (SMATS) has developed this **Participation Plan** to accomplish the following major objectives:

- Create a process that will improve and increase participation in the transportation planning process by all stakeholders.
- Provide for early involvement in the planning process by stakeholders to ensure there are ample opportunities to participate in key decisions.
- Facilitate access to the transportation planning process by populations that typically lack formal access, such as low income, elderly, minorities, and persons with disabilities.
- Encourage involvement in the planning process by non-traditional participants.
- Foster a process that will result in transportation plans and projects that reflect the values of the communities that SMATS serves.

The participation activities discussed in this document represent an ambitious program that is intended to gain as much input as possible for the transportation planning process. It is meant as a starting point to take the SMATS organization above and beyond the norm for community involvement in planning for transportation improvements.

Participation Procedures

Participation Plan

The components of this Participation Plan are included in the development, adoption, and amendment of SMATS Transportation plans and programs. The Participation Plan will be monitored and reviewed on a bi-annual basis to evaluate its effectiveness. The strategies identified in this plan are intended to result in well attended public meetings, local news coverage of programs, and more public interest in transportation issues within the region. A public comment period of 45 days will be provided prior to the adoption or amendment of the Participation Plan in accordance with federal guidelines. A graphic that illustrates the review and approval process is shown in Appendix 2 at the end of this document.

Open Meetings

All SMATS meetings are open for the public to attend. This includes the meetings of the following bodies:

- Saginaw County Metropolitan Planning Commission
- SMATS Transportation Planning Committee
- SMATS Technical Committee
- Other working committees as needed

Opportunities for public comment are included on each meeting agenda. Since issues often pass from the Transportation Planning Committee to the Saginaw County Metropolitan Planning Commission, there will often be two opportunities to comment on issues. The regular meetings of the transportation committees will be announced on a regular basis through a media press release.

Availability of Information

SMATS staff will make written materials provided to our committees available to the public upon request. When appropriate, a charge may be levied for copies of publications. The charge will cover the cost of producing and if applicable, mailing the materials. All such materials are available for viewing at SMATS office at no cost.

Public Notification and Participation Procedures

A variety of public notification and participation procedures will be used to encourage the early and continuous involvement of citizens, jurisdictions, communities, and other interests in the planning process and the decisions and actions of the SMATS Transportation Committees. They will include but not be limited to the following:

- Public notices will be used to inform the general public and media of upcoming input opportunities.
- SMATS will conduct a 30-day public comment period prior to the adoption of a new Long Range Transportation Plan or a new Transportation Improvement Program.
- The SMATS web page (www.saginawcounty.com), planning department link, will include information about SMATS transportation responsibilities, plans, programs, committees, and meetings.
- Meetings will be held in facilities that are accessible to persons with disabilities.

Visualization Techniques

SMATS will strive to maximize its use of various visualization techniques to help inform the public and convey pertinent information concerning transportation plans, projects, and programs. Appropriate methods include, but are not limited to, static maps, interactive GIS demonstrations, computer model simulations, photographs, and artist renderings. For each plan, project, or program, SMATS will use the best techniques available to inform the public.

Response to Public Comments

Public comments on the Long Range Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program, on significant amendments to the Transportation Improvement Program and on all other plans and key decisions will be summarized and responses will be written by the group receiving the comments. Comments and responses will be kept on file, available for public review and will be made part of the plan, program, or other document as adopted. Responses to comments will be made before decisions are made or plans or programs are adopted. Responses will be made in a timely manner, so that they can be considered during the next phase of the plan or program development.

Specific Participation Strategies

The Saginaw Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (SMATS), as Saginaw County's Metropolitan Planning Organization, intends to maximize the public's comment and input in the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process.

For the purpose of discussion, our target of stakeholders and public would include the following:

- Local Elected Officials
- People who use, pay for or are impacted by Transportation Investments
- Residents and Property Owners

- Users of Public Transit
- Business Community
- Interest Groups
- Freight Shippers and Carriers
- State and Federal Elected and Appointed Officials
- News Media
- Any Other Interested Parties

The activities described in this document will be used together or separately to incorporate public involvement in all the SMATS transportation planning processes, including the development of the Long Range Transportation Plan update and Transportation Improvement Program. The activities are designed to inform the public regarding opportunities to provide input and expand the public’s perception of transportation needs or deficiencies. This plan represents an emerging and ambitious effort of public inclusion, outreach and engagement and is consistent with the expectations of public involvement and participation per SAFETEA-LU.

The two major categories of public involvement activities are (1) information and (2) involvement/education. These categories and their individual components are discussed separately below:

Information

There are two major areas in this category that apply to the processes of developing the various SMATS plans and other transportation-related documents.

A. Website:

Our current website includes a separate section addressing the SMATS transportation planning activities. The proposed plan will add the following items to the website that are geared to measurable public input. The added line will address public participation in three ways.

1. Online Survey
2. Online display reservation (Tabletop) form under the title “Host a Display” SMATS encourages communities, libraries, educational institutions, chamber of commerce, and other organizations to host the display for a day or special events. This will include options to submit reservation request form or to print a hard copy that can be mailed.

The following section will also be added to the SMATS web page:

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Your feedback is important to us:

- Did you find what you needed?

yes no

If no, please explain _____

- Do you have any ideas on how we can improve this web site?

yes no

If yes, tell us how: _____

B. Media

SMATS will, to the extent feasible, work to develop and maintain a strong relationship with the print and broadcast media. SMATS recognizes the media as a valuable link to promote and motivate public involvement in the transportation planning process.

Specifically, SMATS will provide meeting information to local print as well as radio/TV providers. This activity will be based upon business content, spur a certain amount of visibility and coverage regarding SMATS business.

The office will attempt to gain several opportunities per fiscal cycle to join as “In Studio” program guests. The office has identified possible opportunities to begin this practice. We believe this will represent a productive “outreach” strategy. Also as opportunities and topics present that are “news worthy” we will aggressively seek to gain public awareness by writing letters to the editor; this is an additional avenue for transportation to gain exposure, and public awareness.

Involvement and Education

The community involvement and education components will work together to achieve the following results: (1) Wide recognition of SMATS and its mission in the community and (2) Community awareness that an open door exists to participate in the transportation planning process. SMATS has identified three (3) major subsets of this agenda to address its goals.

- A. Community Organizations
- B. Outreach Activity
- C. Collaboration

A. Community Organizations

The office has identified numerous key organizations that we need to keep “in the loop” regarding activities. We propose to where possible, partner with outside organizations, and will seek organizations representing the under served to ensure their views and needs are considered. The office has identified several key organizations and will begin to open the lines of communication, gain desired input and participation. Appendix 1 of this document contains a proposed list that can be updated on a continuous basis.

B. Outreach Activity

This activity simply means being more visible in the community, to gain additional input by spreading the message to be a participant in activities such as local business expo’s, be available to give presentations to groups of leaders and citizens. By looking to do these presentations, the office should greatly expand input opportunity in the Saginaw County community.

C. Collaboration

This is another desirable part of the Participation Plan. SMATS proposes to make an effort within a local team (i.e. Spirit Hockey) to expand our number of transportation opinion surveys by working a game event (or other community event) and offering some sort of reward to individuals to participate in survey work.

Participation Processes for Major Transportation Planning Documents

Public comment periods of 30 days will be provided prior to the adoption of major SMATS transportation planning documents, specifically the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

All comments will be printed as an appendix to the appropriate document.

At least one public hearing will be conducted prior to the adoption of the Long Range Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program, and any other major planning documents that are developed as part of the metropolitan transportation planning process.

Attempts will be made to employ appropriate visualization techniques to describe the plans. This could include any combination of maps, photographs, project descriptions, charts or diagrams that are presented at public meetings, provided on web sites, or that are used as part of displays and any other efforts directed at informing stakeholders and the public about SMATS plans and projects.

An outline of the specific processes that will be used to develop the LRP and the TIP is provided below:

Participation Process for Long Range Plan Development

- Phase I: Meetings and consultation with stakeholders identified in Appendix 1 and other interested parties. Summaries of the meetings and consultations will be included in the plan document.
- Phase II: Outreach activities, with information posted on the SMATS website and media releases distributed to announce public meetings and the plan development schedule.
- Phase III: Conduct community forums convenient times and places to present the plan process and obtain input.
- Phase IV: Present the draft plan at advertised open house, and describe the plan approval process and timeline.

Participation Process for Transportation Improvement Program Development

1. Meeting #1

- A. Notice to involvement mailing list, website, and papers.
- B. Draft project list and other relevant background information made available prior to meeting on website and elsewhere.
- C. Comment opportunities available on website and at meeting.
- D. Open house style meeting with brief staff presentation.

2. Meeting # 2

- A. Notice to same mailing list as for Meeting #1.
- B. Project list being considered is presented along with results of ranking process and other appropriate information.
- C. Environmental justice information and analysis is presented.
- D. Open house style meeting with brief staff presentation.

Participation Process for Amendments to the Long Range Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program

At least one public hearing will be held prior to the adoption of an amendment to the LRP, the TIP, and any other major SMATS transportation planning document. Notice of a proposed amendment and the public hearing shall be given by at least one published notice. No specific comment period is required for an amendment, but a comment period for an amendment may be established by the SMATS Policy Body (Metropolitan Planning Commission) with the recommendation of the SMATS Transportation Planning Committee.

Appendix 1

This is an initial listing of organizations that should be contacted for involvement and general consultation in the transportation planning process.

- Saginaw Human Services Collaborative Body
- Saginaw Valley State University
- Delta College
- Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce
- UAW Regional office
- ISD (All County School Districts)
- Libraries of Saginaw
- CAC (Community Action Committee)
- SVRC (Saginaw Valley Rehabilitation Center)
- Saginaw Future
- MBS International Airport
- Railroads
- Go21 (Rail industry advocacy group)
- Saginaw River shippers/businesses
- Tri-City Cyclists
- Michigan Trails & Greenways Alliance
- Saginaw County Parks and Recreation
- Saginaw County Public Works Commission
- Saginaw County Emergency Management & Homeland Security
- Michigan State Police
- Saginaw County Sheriff Department
- Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge
- Michigan Dept. of Environmental Quality (Saginaw Bay District)
- Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources (Saginaw Bay District)
- Historical Society of Saginaw County

