

The Brownsville Metropolitan
Planning Organization

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
&
INVOLVEMENT POLICIES**

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BROWNSVILLE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION PUBLIC PARTICIPATION & INVOLVEMENT POLICIES

All urbanized areas in the United States with a population of 50,000 or more are required to have a designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The MPO makes both transportation plans and policies that affect how transportation dollars are allocated and how regional and local needs are addressed.

The Brownsville MPO area includes the cities of Brownsville, Los Fresnos and the Town of Rancho Viejo, as well as unincorporated areas in southern and southeastern portions of Cameron County. Located on the Texas border, north of Matamoros in the Republic of Mexico, the Brownsville MPO is organized into two committees, as follows:

MPO Policy Committee—The MPO Policy Committee approves all federal funding allocations, as well as transportation plans and policies for the Brownsville urbanized area. The Policy Committee takes action based on recommendations from the Technical Committee, and input received from coordination and consultation with other planning entities, interested parties, (eg. individuals or groups representing freight, bicycle, pedestrian, transit, the disabled) and the general public.

MPO Technical Committee—This advisory MPO Committee is comprised of transportation planners and other agency staff who are representatives of the same agencies which compose membership of the MPO Policy Committee. This MPO Committee provides technical support and makes recommendations to members of the MPO Policy Committee.

The purpose of the MPO is to provide continuous, cooperative and comprehensive transportation planning for the Brownsville urbanized area. Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users, SAFETEA-LU, the federal transportation bill signed into law in August 2005, emphasizes the importance of early, on-going public involvement in the transportation planning process.

It is the intent of the MPO to provide ample opportunities for the involvement of citizens, as well as interested parties and elected officials in the transportation planning process. Recognizing the importance of public participation, the Brownsville MPO has adopted the procedures outlined herein to insure:

- Early and reasonable involvement opportunities throughout the transportation planning and programming process;
- Timely information concerning transportation issues and processes is disseminated to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of

transportation agency employees, private providers of transportation, other interested parties and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs and projects;

- That the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households which may face challenges accessing employment and other amenities are sought out and considered.

Public participation shall generally be available through the following formats: public notification, public meetings, public review, public comment and public appearances.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION & THE MPO'S WEBSITE

The Brownsville MPO has established a website to make it easier for members of the public to learn more about MPO plans and policies. Also, the MPO's website helps to communicate about pending meeting dates, as well as explain about the process of adoption of new plans and/or revision of existing MPO plans and policies.

All MPO Policy Committee meetings shall be posted at least 72 hours prior to the meeting date and time, on the Official Bulletin Board at Brownsville City Hall. Notification of start of public review and comment periods regarding adoption of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, (MTP), the Transportation Improvement Program, (TIP), the MPO's Public Participation and Involvement Policies and/or revisions shall be placed at least 72 hours in advance of the review and comment period. Notices shall be placed at the following:

The Brownsville Herald

Brownsville City Hall (Official Bulletin Board)

Brownsville Cable Channel 12 *

The MPO website

* Note: City of Brownsville staff maintain the notices placed on Channel 12. MPO staff will provide City of Brownsville staff with MPO notice material well in advance of 72 hours, (to provide adequate time for posting). MPO staff cannot guarantee that the notices will appear on the Brownsville Cable Channel 12 at least 72 hours in advance of the MPO's review/comment period.

Notification of upcoming MPO Policy Committee meetings to consider the adoption and/or revision of the MTP or TIP is provided to the public via The Brownsville Herald at least 28 days prior to the Policy Committee meeting;

where said action will be considered. The MPO will also post these notices on the MPO's website.

Certification of posting on the official bulletin board and a copy of the newspaper publication shall be obtained and retained in the MPO files for a period of three years. MPO staff will post both notices of proposed TIP and MTP documents, (or summaries describing the proposed TIP/MTP revisions) on the MPO's website.

Also, the MPO's Public Participation and Involvement Policies will be posted on the website. One can access the MPO's website by visiting the official site of the City of Brownsville at <http://www.ci.brownsville.tx.us/>. Upon reaching this location, the next step is to click on "Brownsville MPO/Transportation Planning". MPO staff will take steps to set up links to the MPO's website from the two other municipalities in the study area: the Town of Rancho Viejo and the City of Los Fresnos.

The MPO shall maintain a list of interested groups, stakeholder agencies and individuals, including state, county and local government officials, news media, special interest groups, resource agencies (such as the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service), transportation providers, etc. The interested groups, individuals, etc. shall be provided with a written notice of significant MPO meetings. For example, MPO Policy Committee meetings for consideration of TIP and/or MTP adoption, or revision, constitute significant action by the MPO. Information packets on these significant issues will be mailed upon request.

The MPO formulates and distributes the Brownsville Newsletter several times a year. This is another means of keeping citizens and interested parties advised of MPO plans, policies and opportunities to provide input.

The list of interested groups, individuals and stakeholder agencies will be updated on a periodic basis by the MPO. This list shall be made available upon request. Those agency staff and/or interested parties who wish to be added to this list should contact the MPO staff to submit or make their request.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

All meetings of the Brownsville MPO Policy Committee and other public meetings shall be held in compliance with the Texas Open Meetings Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The public shall be given a reasonable opportunity to participate at every public meeting. Public meetings shall be recorded and the records shall be retained by the MPO for a period of three years. Those attending public meetings will be asked to sign a roster. The roster shall be retained by the MPO for a period of three years. The MPO shall prepare minutes of the meeting documenting comments, speakers and other

pertinent information and shall make available the information to interested parties after final adoption by the Policy Board.

One or more public meetings will be held to present updates to the MTP and take comments, prior to MPO Policy Committee adoption. At least one of these meetings shall be held a minimum of 30 days prior to adoption of the plan.

One or more public meetings will be held to present amendments or updates to the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and take comments prior to MPO Policy Committee adoption. One of these MPO-sponsored meetings shall be held a minimum of 30 days prior to adoption of the TIP by the MPO Policy Committee.

The MPO shall hold at least one meeting every three months. This meeting shall be held for the purpose of:

1. Taking any actions necessary;
2. Informing the public of any plan and/or plan amendments in process;
3. Inviting public input;
4. Giving public status reports.

All MPO meetings will be held at convenient and accessible times and locations. Some of these meetings may be held in the evening. Evening MPO meetings are typically held to solicit comments on MTP updates, which affords convenience to citizens to attend the MPO meetings and make comments. And, when feasible, some meetings may be held at locations near to or in those areas being affected by Transportation Plans, Projects or Problems.

PUBLIC REVIEW

In order to afford the public an opportunity to review major plans in detail, a public review period shall be announced. For updates or major revisions to the MPO's Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), the public review period will last a minimum of 30 days before adoption. Similarly, prior to updates or major revisions of the Transportation Improvement Program, (TIP), the public will be afforded a public review period of a minimum of 30 days prior to adoption. During the public review period, the MPO shall make available at its offices a copy of the document(s) proposed for updates or major revisions. The public may review the document(s) at the MPO offices during normal working hours. In addition, staff will be available to discuss the document and answer questions. The public review period may run concurrently with the public comment period. The draft documents, such as MTP proposals and/or TIP information (including significant revisions) will be made available on the MPO's webpage to notify interested persons about the contents of these documents.

PUBLIC COMMENT

A public comment period lasting a minimum of 20 days prior to the adoption of an updated or amended TIP, MTP or the MPO Thoroughfare Plan shall be created to solicit public opinion. Any written comments received by the MPO during the comment period regarding Transportation Plans will be given due consideration by the MPO staff and the MPO Policy Committee. Written comments submitted to the MPO after the closing of the comment period may or may not be considered by the MPO staff and forwarded to the MPO Policy Committee for consideration.

Written comments received during the 20 day public comment period will be summarized and the summary shall be given to the Policy Committee prior to adoption of the program or plan. The summary shall be retained in the MPO files for a three-year period and copies sent to interested parties upon request. If requested, the MPO staff will provide written responses regarding any comment received.

Interested persons who wish to submit comments, after the MPO's written comment period has closed, should either attend the MPO Policy Committee meeting to offer verbal comments and/or (at their option) attend the meeting and furnish sufficient copies of written comments to the Policy Committee members for their review. The ability of interested persons to offer verbal comments on pending MTP/TIP issues to the Policy Committee members at the relevant MPO meeting(s); and the MPO's consideration of such verbal comments results in a verbal comment period of 30 days (or more) which may be concurrent with the MPO's Public Review period.

PERIODIC CONSULTATION

The Brownsville MPO staff routinely consult with state, county and other local officials responsible for a variety of planning activities, including but not limited to the following:

- airport operations;
- conservation of natural resources;
- economic development;
- environmental protection;
- freight issues;
- historic preservation;
- land use management and regulations;
- recreational planning;
- representatives of bicyclists and pedestrians;
- representatives of the disabled;

- representatives of public transportation employees, (should such persons or a person exist from time to time);
- safety and security agencies;
- providers of non-emergency transportation; and
- other groups or individuals interested in transportation planning issues.

The purpose of such consultation shall be to find areas of agreement and minimize conflict points, if possible. Further, MPO staff will consult and compare plans with interested parties and/or interested persons, when feasible and practical.

While comments to the MPO will always be accepted on this basis, it is not always feasible for MPO staff to grant extended staff time for detailed consultations. For example, available staff time is, upon occasion, limited when other appointments have been set or scheduled.

Also, it should be noted that the MPO staff and members of the MPO Committees typically accept and consider comments on MTP and TIP issues anytime of the year. Although amendments of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) typically occur once per quarter, the MPO staff and Committee members listen to comments on this topic, as well as MTP issues all months of the year. Past MTP Amendments have taken place due to comments and suggestions put forth to the MPO by interested parties.

PUBLIC APPEARANCES

The MPO will, to the extent possible, comply with requests from civic or professional groups, local organizations or communities to present or discuss information related to the work of the MPO, Transportation Improvement Program, Metropolitan Transportation Plan or MPO studies and programs. The organization should contact the MPO staff about upcoming meetings, and allow ample time for the MPO staff to make arrangements to attend.

The MPO staff will make serious efforts to respond to requests for presentations from affected community organizations in Brownsville, Los Fresnos and Rancho Viejo, so as to brief them and involve them in the planning process. MPO staff encourage such participation to help shape policies on Transportation Planning issues.

ANNUAL LISTING OF TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS

The Brownsville MPO, in cooperation with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and the Brownsville Urban System (BUS) shall publish, (and make available for distribution to interested persons), an annual listing of projects, including investments in pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, for which Federal funds have been obligated in the preceding year. These listed improvement projects shall be consistent with the categories identified in the MPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). In addition, this annual listing shall be posted on the MPO's website to make this information available to interested persons.

THE MPO'S USE OF VISUALIZATION TECHNIQUES

At a minimum, the MPO shall produce and make available for public inspection, maps which depict the location of proposed Metropolitan Transportation Plan improvement projects, TIP projects and activities and/or major revisions to MTP and TIP documents. Other visual techniques will be employed by the MPO staff at different times, depending on their effectiveness, such as the production of maps with graphic representation of varying congestion levels on area roadways under different improvement and/or development scenarios.

Also, the MPO staff periodically assemble map products to illustrate Environmental Justice (Title VI) issues, such as the location of low-income neighborhoods, major traffic generators and attractions, bus routes and the location of past and/or current (proposed) roadway improvements. These products will be made available to interested persons upon request.

ADOPTION & AMENDMENT OF THE MPO'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION & INVOLVEMENT POLICIES

A minimum public comment period of 45 calendar days shall be provided before this MPO participation plan is initially adopted or revised at a later date. A copy of the approved MPO participation plan shall be posted on the MPO's website.

**RESOLUTION
BROWNSVILLE MPO POLICY COMMITTEE**

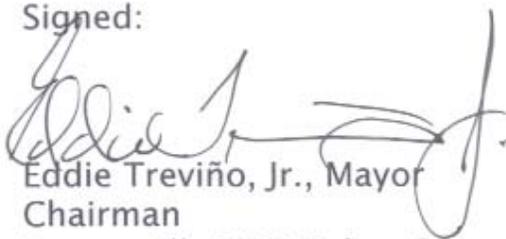
WHEREAS, the Policy Committee of the Brownsville Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has reviewed the recommendation of the MPO Technical Committee as concerns adoption of proposed revisions of the MPO Public Involvement Policies (Public Participation & Involvement Policies).

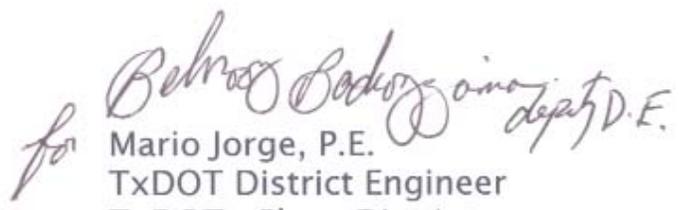
WHEREAS, the Policy Committee of the Brownsville MPO finds the proposed revisions will afford improvements to the Brownsville MPO's area transportation system that promote both the general welfare and economic development of the Brownsville MPO area; and

WHEREAS, the Brownsville MPO staff, MPO Policy & Technical Committee members will work in cooperation with TXDOT staff to implement future improvements to the existing transportation system in compliance with applicable state and federal guidelines.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the proposed revisions of the MPO Public Involvement Policies (Public Participation & Involvement Policies), dated May 9, 2007, is officially adopted by the Policy Committee of the Brownsville Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Signed:


Eddie Treviño, Jr., Mayor
Chairman
Brownsville MPO Policy Committee


for Mario Jorge, P.E.
TxDOT District Engineer
TxDOT—Pharr District

Dated:

5/09/07