

# Public Participation Plan

Keeping The Public Engaged





The Lima Allen County Regional Planning Commission (LACRPC) is a voluntary association of local governments and the local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Allen County. MPOs are designated organizations with responsibility for transportation policy in urbanized areas with more than 50,000 people.

As a Regional Planning Commission, LACRPC has a unique and important leadership role in Allen County. Founded upon the principles of regional collaboration, cooperation, and consensus-building, LACRPC serves as the common ground where area partners come together to work toward a shared vision across the Region. Together, public and private partners develop and implement innovative and sustainable strategies that enhance the Region's quality of life and economic vitality.

LACRPC recognizes a public participation plan (PPP) provides methods, strategies, and desired outcomes for public involvement and is committed to meaningful and proactive public participation. This plan provides outreach to a broadly defined audience of affected parties to ensure projects and planning activities evolve from and address public needs. Providing a forum for public participation demonstrates that the Region recognizes citizens' rights to be heard. These forums, coupled with careful attention to feedback, will result in better, well-informed decision-making.

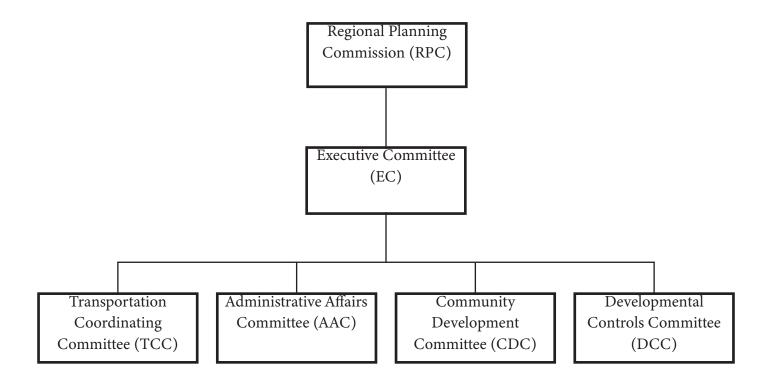
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LACRPC STRUCTURE	3
PURPOSE AND GOALS	5
LEGISLATED AUTHORITY, RULES, REGULATIONS AND REQUIRMENTS	5
REGULATORY FRAMEWORK	6
MAJOR LACRPC PRODUCTS	8
PUBLIC COMMENT STANDARDS	10
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MECHANISMS	10
SUMMARY	12
POLICY STATEMENT OF SUPPORT	13

#### LACRPC STRUCTURE

LACRPC was established in September 1964 and assumed the powers and duties of the Allen County Planning Commission created in 1954. The formation of the Regional Planning Commission was accomplished in conformance with Section 713.21 of the Ohio Revised Code and charged with the responsibilities of comprehensive planning and program implementation within Allen County and its various communities.

A 35-member Board of Directors assists the Commission by reviewing and recommending plans and strategies to develop and improve the region. The Board membership is distributed over a tiered committee structure designed to respond to local concerns. The Commission employs professional staff to aid and advise in carrying out responsibilities. To accomplish specific goals, the LACRPC also consults with other professionals, such as city and county engineers, city and county sanitary engineers, local health officials, the Allen Soil and Water Conservation District, and local utilities.



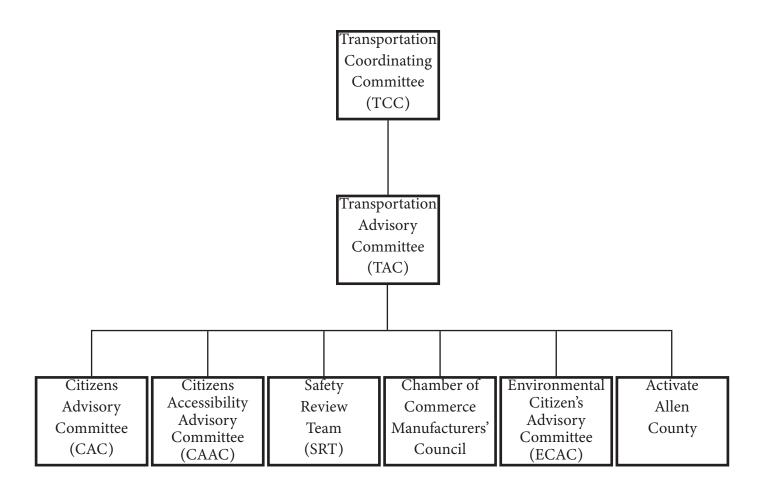
As the designated MPO for Allen County, LACRPC was established by federal law to carry out the "3C" (continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive) transportation planning process. This process is required for the area to continue to receive U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) funding. This process is important, as millions of dollars in USDOT funding are spent annually in Allen County for highway, transit, bikeway, and pedestrian improvements.

The MPO is governed by the Transportation Coordinating Committee (TCC) that includes members of the transportation planning area plus other members reflective of the function and geographic area of the MPO. Additional members of the TCC include representatives from the ODOT and the ACRTA. The TCC acts with the advisement of the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC).

The TAC is a technical committee that reviews the activities of the MPO and provides recommendations to the TCC. The TAC is comprised of transportation-oriented representatives, surrogates for both public and private concerns that presently include various transportation modes (transit, paratransit, freight), as well as local engineering, utilities, and environmental interests within the area.

Together these two committees review and provide technical assistance and make recommendations on transportation and transit-related projects and programs planned for the region. The MPO's responsibility, to further an integrated transportation plan for the region, is a difficult task that requires an informed decision-making process involving a diverse cross section of representatives from the community. These representatives review and approve the allocation of millions of dollars for needed capital improvements to the region's infrastructure.

The membership of the Lima Allen County Regional Planning Commission includes local jurisdictions from Allen County, as well as a number of non-governmental and quasi-governmental representatives. A complete listing is available on LACRPC's website www.lacrpc.com.



#### **Purpose and Goals**

LACRPC's Public Participation Policy is designed to secure active and representative involvement from all segments of the community in planning and decision-making about regional projects, investments, policies and other planning issues. In accordance with federal law MPOs are responsible for facilitating interaction with stakeholders and the public to provide information and to facilitate dialogue, record input received and incorporate the thoughts and concerns of the public into the development of major MPO planning documents and in various aspects of the MPO planning process.

To promote and develop an informed and involved citizenry regarding the transportation planning process within these communities, LACRPC commits to pursuing the following goals:

- Ensure the public is provided the opportunity to actively participate in the evaluation and decision-making of the transportation planning process.
- Provide the opportunity for local citizens to help shape the future of the region's transportation system through a public involvement process that provides the public with reasonable access to complete information about transportation planning issues and events.
- The public involvement process ensures the public is provided with timely notices of all transportation issues and events.
- Identify and involve traditionally underserved citizens/communities in the region's transportation planning process.
- Ensure the public is provided with various public involvement techniques that will meet the diverse needs of the general public.

In order to achieve the purpose and commitments outlined above, LACRPC will emphasize the following essential components of the public participation process:

- Provide early and continuous public involvement opportunities;
- Provide reasonable public access to technical data and policy information:
- Provide adequate notice of public involvement opportunities and time for public review and comment at key transportation planning development milestones;
- Conduct public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times;
- Employ visualization techniques to describe the planning process inputs and outcomes;
- To the maximum extent practicable, make public information available in electronically accessible format:
- Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received;
- Seek out and consider the needs and input of traditionally underserved populations, including low-income and minority households;
- Provide information for/to populations with limited English proficiency (LEP), as needed; and
- Enhance decision-making by integrating diverse interests and desires that identify community values and support transportation needs.

### LEGISLATED AUTHORITY, RULES, REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Federal laws and regulations require the formation and designation by the Governor of a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for each urbanized area with a population of more than 50,000 to coordinate a comprehensive and continuing transportation planning process.

The Lima Allen County Regional Planning Commission (LACRPC) is the designated MPO for all of Allen County, as well as, the section of the City of Delphos within Van Wert County, the portion of the Village of Bluffton in Hancock County, the Village of Cridersville and a portion of Douchquet Township, both located in Auglaize County. The MPO operates in accordance with its bylaws.

Much of the transportation planning work conducted by the MPO is directly related to implementing and updating the Region's Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). This work takes the form of studies, data collection and analysis, the use of management systems, forecasts of future travel patterns based on future land use, and prioritization of projects for funding and implementation.

Federal transportation law (such as the FAST Act), requires that LACRPC produce and oversee a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the Region's document of short-range transportation improvement plan. The TIP prioritizes the Region's transportation-related projects within the constraints of federal, state, and local funding that the Region can reasonably expect to receive within the next four years. Projects that are included in the TIP must be selected from, or be consistent with, an approved LRTP. In order to develop plans that are derived from public sentiment, there must be adequate public participation in the development of both the LRTP and the TIP.

As a public agency that receives federal funds and makes recommendations on federal expenditures, LACRPC is bound by participation requirements for ensuring that federal funds are used fairly and without discrimination. Per Title 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53, LACRPC ensures that the requirements of its transportation planning processes are met for federally funded projects, including project selection requirements.

The basis for Environmental Justice (EJ) is Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which states: No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

Participation and civic engagement have become a prominent responsibility for public agencies as the result of a series of federal orders and state mandates that serve to amplify Title VI. The regulatory framework clarifies the need to involve the potentially affected public in transportation decision-making processes and to assess the equity of transportation investments.

#### REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

#### **Federal Requirements**

On December 4, 2015, the new federal surface transportation bill, the FAST Act, was signed into law. The new bill follows its predecessors, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act, a Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), and the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21). These Acts made important contributions to the metropolitan planning process. The metropolitan planning rules are described in 23 CFR part 450 and state that the planning process shall be continuous, cooperative, and comprehensive, and provide for consideration and implementation of projects, strategies, and services that will address the following planning factors:

- Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.
- Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.

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- Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and for freight.
- Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns.
- Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.
- Promote efficient system management and operation.
- Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.
- Improve the resilience and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate storm-water impacts of surface transportation.
- Enhance travel and tourism.

The cornerstone of MAP-21, continued in the FAST Act, was the transition to a performance and outcome-based program. As part of this program, recipients of Federal-aid highway funds would invest resources in projects to achieve individual targets that collectively would make progress toward national goals.

#### **State Requirements**

Section 121.22 of the Ohio Revised Code requires all public bodies to take official actions and to conduct all deliberations upon official business only in open meetings, unless specifically accepted by law.

The Ohio Department of Transportation's (ODOT) published guidance on Environmental Justice and methodology which were used in the development of the Community Impact Assessment section of LACRPC's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). This section of the LRTP will serve as a guide for determining targeted populations in close proximity to transportation projects that could affect local residents. LACRPC's LRTP is updated every five years. At that time, the Community Impact Assessment section and associated maps are revised based on the latest information and guidance available.

LACRPC will make every effort to demonstrate that the opinions, concerns, and input from traditionally underserved populations are valued and welcomed. To that end, the policies contained herein have been developed to ascertain meaningful input from all who wish to participate, making special efforts to ensure that traditionally underserved residents have an equal opportunity to be involved in the planning and decision-making process.

#### **Local Requirements**

LACRPC's Bylaws provide for public participation through the membership structure as well as the guiding principles of the organization. Official LACRPC policies and related actions are approved by the Board of Directors. The complete text of the LACRPC Constitution and Bylaws is available on LACRPC's website at www.lacrpc.com.

The Public Participation Policy enhances the opportunity for public input and satisfies Federal requirements for public participation. It is reviewed periodically by the Ohio Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration to ensure that full and open access is provided.

The public participation process described herein is used to satisfy the public participation process for the Program of Projects (POP) for:

Allen County Regional Transit Authority (ACRTA) – Allen County

#### MAJOR LACRPC PRODUCTS

The Plan recognizes that the MPO has, as two of its major responsibilities, the development and publication of the long-range transportation plan (LRTP) and the transportation improvement program (TIP). These documents come under special scrutiny as they are fiscally constrained and comprehensive in nature and scope. While the LRTP and TIP are supported by other strategic reports, plans, and/or programs, these support studies allow the MPO to conduct more detailed analyses and make informed recommendations. The MPO's four core documents include, not only the LRTP and TIP, but also the unified planning work program (UPWP), and public participation plan (PPP), for which the MPO conducts public involvement strategies.

#### **Long Range Transportation Plan**

The long-range transportation plan (LRTP), updated every four years, is a twenty year plan that identifies the MPO's recommendations regarding the region's transportation system. Multi-modal transportation projects and programs are identified, as well as systemwide demands/remedies. In addition, goals and policies are identified, including funding forecasts and action plans. The LRTP is intended to guide, inform, and support the MPO's recommended transportation policies, programs, and investments. Because the LRTP must be comprehensive in its analyses of future conditions, it considers financial, social, environmental, and economic factors as well.

A 21-day comment period will be conducted. Public participation strategies may include convening the MPO's advisory committees to discuss the LRTP over several meetings. Public meetings, as required, will be advertised in the newspaper, on the MPO website, and communicated to stakeholders. The draft LRTP may be posted on the MPO website. When possible, staff may conduct outreach, including community presentations. A record of comments received will be kept on file, reported to committees, and incorporated into the final plan. Periodically, State or local officials request that the approved Plan be modified, or that a project recommendation be added or dropped. Such requests shall also be provided a similar 21-day public comment period.

#### **Transportation Improvement Program**

The transportation improvement program (TIP), adopted every two years, is the short-range (four-year) listing of financially constrained transportation projects to be undertaken by local project sponsors within the MPO planning area. Projects in the local TIP are incorporated into the statewide transportation improvement program (STIP). Transportation projects must be listed in the TIP/STIP to be eligible for federal funding.

The MPO will conduct a 21-day comment period. Public participation strategies during the TIP development process is the same as, and conducted concurrently with, the STIP. As available, staff may also conduct community outreach, including community presentations. The draft TIP will be made available to committee members and posted to the MPO website. The MPO may host an open house, in partnership with ODOT District One. The STIP/TIP open house will be advertised as a legal notice in The Lima News, on the MPO website and social media.

Open house notifications may be mailed using the U.S. Postal Service or emailed to individuals and/or organizations on the stakeholders' list. A record of comments received will be kept on file with responses, reported to committees, and incorporated into the draft TIP.

Periodically, State or local officials request that the approved TIP be modified, or that a project recommendation be added or dropped. Such requests shall also be provided a similar 21-day public comment period. A record of comments received is kept on file with responses, reported to committees, and incorporated into the amended plan.

#### **Unified Planning Work Program**

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), produced annually, provides a comprehensive list of the various planning and surveillance activities, programs, and plans the MPO will undertake during the fiscal year. Through participation of member political subdivisions, the MPO determines planning priorities and policies for the region.

A 21-day public participation process will be conducted to include various public participation strategies. Standing committees may identify/discuss local needs and work toward prioritizing planning tasks. Committee meeting notices may be emailed to members and posted on the MPO website. Requests may also be emailed to The Lima News for the publication of meetings dates/times. Staff may conduct additional consultation with agencies and interested parties as necessary. The MPO committee structure will adopt the final UPWP after the 21-day comment period. A record of comments received will be kept on file with responses, reported to committees, and may be incorporated into the final UPWP document.

#### **Public Participation Plan**

The LACRPC Public Participation Plan (PPP) describes a formal process, in compliance with Federal requirements, to integrate public participation and input into not only the transportation planning process, but the development of all long- and short-range transportation plans. The PPP identifies stakeholders, goals, strategies, and mechanisms for increasing citizen participation. A 21-day comment period will be conducted. Public participation strategies may include convening the MPO's advisory committees to discuss the PPP over several meetings. A record of comments received will be kept on file, reported to committees, and may be incorporated into the final plan.

#### Other Programs, Plans & Services

The MPO recognizes that many of its on-going planning, surveillance, and modeling activities affect the community, its businesses, and local citizenry. The MPO commits to keep such activities in the public light and to keep local stakeholders appraised of on-going and current activities through the use of the media, newsletters, committee meetings, and the MPO website. Should local concerns generate MPO activities that develop new programs, plans, and/or services, the MPO will respond with the same public involvement process, including review and comment periods as previously identified.

Potential changes affecting the delivery, service, or fares of public transportation may also generate requisite public awareness/education processes, public meeting(s), and required comment period. Such activities will be coordinated with the ACRTA and ODOT as requested. The MPO's public participation process will serve as the public participation process for the Allen County Regional Transit Authority's program of projects, meeting the requirements of Section 5307 (b) as prescribed in FTA C 9030.1E DATE 1/16/2014.

#### **Public Participation Policy Update**

The Public Participation Policy outlines the strategies utilized to provide and receive information from the public on transportation planning and programming process including funding for projects, studies, plans, and committee actions.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT STANDARDS

The public will have opportunities to convey their comments in person, online, by phone or via email. In some cases, mail, phone or web-based questionnaires may be used to gather information.

All comments received are considered public comments, and therefore are subject to disclosure under Ohio's Public Records Act. All public comments received are reviewed for consideration and if appropriate, shared with relevant stakeholders, other agencies or incorporated into the final document. Responses are included in the public participation summary booklet. Comments made on social media platforms will be recorded and included in the summary booklet.

#### **Evaluating Public Participation Techniques Used**

Federal regulations require that MPO's review the Public Participation Policy periodically to determine if the objectives of the process are achieved and if adjustments are necessary to make it more effective.

Several methods will be used to gauge the effectiveness of LACRPC's public participation methods, including input from citizens, public officials and other planning professionals. Techniques used to collect feedback may include formal surveys (online and in person), public comment cards, verbal comments at public meetings, and even face-to-face conversations held between staff/consultants and citizens/public officials/planning professionals about the Public Participation Policy.

#### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MECHANISMS

To support public involvement procedures, the MPO expects that in the course of developing any single program, project, or service one or more of the following mechanisms may be utilized as tools in the public involvement process. Each will be reviewed to assess effectiveness, to inform the public or encourage the public to comment, attend a meeting, or in some other way participate in the decision or issue at hand. The following listing presents a summary of the individual mechanisms that may be used by the MPO in furthering the goals of the PPP.

- Website The MPO's website (www.lacrpc.com) is the principal means of communicating with the general public. The website allows 24-hour 7-day a week access to meeting schedules, notices, and materials, including meeting minutes, as well as draft/final program/project plans. The website makes available to internet users, the LRTP, TIP, UPWP, and PPP, as well as MPO newsletters, summary reports, transportation surveys, etc.
- Visualization Techniques As much as possible, the MPO may use maps, graphs, illustrations, charts, photographs, and/or interactive tools to engage the public. Visual techniques may be more effective for some than paragraphs or written documentation. The MPO will, as is fiscally feasible. continue to develop and integrate visualization in conjunction with other tools in order to convey specific information about transportation related programs, projects, and services.

- Summary Sheets Summary sheets may be developed by the MPO to explain in non-technical jargon summaries of the LRTP, TIP, UPWP, and PPP or other products as deemed appropriate. Summary sheets may be made available during the required formal public involvement process and be posted to the MPO website.
- Public Service Announcements The MPO may prepare transportation-related public service announcements (PSAs), formatted for television, radio, or social media, as an effective mechanism to address certain specific issues, locations and/or populations.
- Placard Placard postings may be an effective, low cost mechanism to support public involvement in those communities disadvantaged and underserved by transportation. Placards, small lightweight paperboard, can be printed in any language and size relatively quickly and inexpensively. Placards may be placed in social/human service agencies, at meeting locations, and on public transit vehicles to support notification of public involvement events.
- Open House The MPO may host/facilitate open houses, when necessary, to promote informal discussion of transportation-related programs, projects, or services. Open house events are open to the general public and project sponsors use various public involvement mechanisms to promote discussion and elicit comment from the community.
- Newsletter The MPO produces a quarterly newsletter to inform the general public and stakeholders of important events and opportunities for participation.
- Press Release Succinct announcements of MPO events may be prepared and released to the local electronic and written media outlets as deemed appropriate and necessary.
- Media Event To solicit more public acceptance and recognition of traffic and transportation-related issues, MPO staff may solicit and support special media attention on specific issues/events at specific times/locations.
- **Information Booth** The MPO may choose to use informational booths at local events in order to increase public awareness of transportation-related issues and solicit public comment on specific projects, programs, or services.
- Fact Sheets Fact sheets may be developed by the MPO, and/or local project sponsor, to address a single project, program, or service. The fact sheets, intended to provide the reader with essential subject matter to further public understanding of a single topic, may be used to provide participants with background for discussion and comment.
- Stakeholder Meetings Efforts are made to schedule stakeholder meetings with neighborhood associations, member political subdivisions, internal and advisory committees, as well as other groups, as appropriate at convenient times and locations.
- Stakeholder List A stakeholder list may be maintained by the MPO to include specific contact information for those affected parties and agencies within the community, who should be provided early and continuous access to the planning process. General categories of stakeholders as identified in Federal guidelines were previously referenced in this PPP as "Public Involvement Stakeholders".
- **Public Meeting** The MPO is sometimes required to hold a public meeting. The purpose of a public meeting is to obtain public input on decisions regarding matters of plan adoption, amendment, and other key funding decisions. Public meetings may be conducted whenever the MPO is reviewing policies, programs, or services that affect a wide range of citizens.
- Comment Period Formal public comment periods are initiated for review of the MPO's draft LRTP, TIP, UPWP, and PPP as well as other products as appropriate. All comment periods are 21 days and comments received are retained. Said comments may be published in final documents as required.

- Legal Notices Legal notices advertising availability of MPO documents and/or public meetings are posted in The Lima News newspaper; similar legal notices may be purchased in other local publications as deemed necessary. Other additional non-legal advertising may also be purchased.
- **Comment Forms** Simple, 1-page forms may be used to solicit public perception and attitudes about various transportation-related subjects. In addition, visitors to the MPO website may use the site's "Comments" function to make such comments.
- Alternative Accessible Formats The MPO will work to provide limited English proficiency (LEP)
  persons in the community with appropriate translation services, in compliance with LEP requirements, within the confines of federal Safe Harbor provisions.

#### SUMMARY

Federal regulation, taken collectively, calls for a transportation system that supports a just distribution of benefits across racial and socioeconomic lines; a system that is as friendly to commerce and the disadvantaged residing within a community as it is to the natural environment. Federally financed infrastructure must support mobility, economic development, and global competition, while furthering increased quality of life for the entire community. Such improvements must be well planned to further long-term community sustainability while protecting the future. The MPO commits to five public participation goals to provide the public with opportunities to participate in the MPO's decision-making process. The PPP is intended to provide goals and strategies that result in the desired outcome for public involvement and participation. The PPP will be subjected to ongoing, as well as, periodic reviews, and maintained to meet Federal requirements for public involvement in metropolitan planning.

#### **Lima-Allen County Regional Planning Commission**

Policy Statement Supporting Adoption of Public Participation Plan Pursuant to the Metropolitan Planning Regulations specified in Section 23 U.S.C. 134.

The Lima-Allen County Regional Planning Commission (LACRPC) is charged with the authority and responsibilities of a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) by order of the Governor of the State of Ohio. And as the MPO for the Lima Urbanized Area, the agency is required to undertake and maintain the 3C planning, including continuing, cooperative, and communication processes. The MPO's goal is to place the people first in all its local transportation planning endeavors. Consistent with this goal, it is the policy of the MPO to support proactive public involvement at all stages of planning and project development. To develop effective public involvement processes that are custom-tailored to local conditions, the MPO will work with Federal, State and local stakeholders, including citizens, elected officials, affected public agencies, freight shippers and providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, as well as representatives of employees and users of public transportation, users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, in addition to the disabled, minority, and low income populations, and other interested parties. The performance standards for these proactive public involvement processes include early and continuous involvement; reasonable public availability of technical and other information; collaborative input on alternatives, evaluation criteria, and mitigation needs; open public meetings where matters related to federal-aid highway and transit programs are being considered; and open access to the decision-making process prior to closure.

To achieve these objectives, the LACRPC, as the MPO, commits to:

- Promote an active role for the public in the development of transportation plans, programs, and projects from the early stages of the planning process through detailed project development;
- Promote the shared obligation of the public and decision makers to define goals and objectives for the metropolitan transportation system, to identify transportation and related problems, to develop alternatives to address the problems, and to evaluate the alternatives on the basis of collaboratively identified criteria;
- Ensure that the public is actively involved in the development of public involvement procedures themselves in ways that go beyond commenting on drafts;
- Encourage local units of government and transportation service providers to seek to identify
  and involve the affected and interested public, including those traditionally underserved by
  existing transportation systems and facilities; and
- Evaluate public involvement processes and procedures to assess their success at meeting
  the performance requirements specified in the appropriate regulations during Long Range
  Transportation Plan certification reviews, metropolitan planning and conformity findings,
  transportation improvement program (TIP) approvals and project oversight.

ADOPTED this 22<sup>nd</sup> DAY OF APRIL, 2021

Steve Ewing, Chair, Transportation Coordinating Committee, MPO

Lima-Alien County Regional Planning Commission

Attest: Brion Rhodes, President

Lima- Allen County Regional Planning Commission





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