Ohio Department of Transportation
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Rural consultation is the process by which the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) engages non-metropolitan area local elected officials in the development of the:

- Statewide long-range transportation plan
- Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)
- Other modal, corridor, or regional planning studies
- Project selection and funding processes.

Consultation with non-metropolitan area local officials ensures that ODOT’s transportation planning and project decisions reflect the needs of Ohio’s rural areas and contribute to the economic growth and quality of life in these regions.

Consultation also assists ODOT in achieving its mission of providing easy movement of people and goods from place to place. ODOT’s rural consultation process outlines the state’s long standing and emerging efforts...
1.1 Overview of Ohio’s Statewide Transportation Planning Products

Access Ohio is the state’s long-range transportation plan. The plan is developed to guide, inform, and support Ohio’s transportation policies, programs, and investments, looking at least 20 years into the future. The plan includes a comprehensive look at Ohio’s existing transportation and demographic conditions, and considers the issues that must be addressed to meet the transportation needs of Ohioans in the coming decades. The most recent update to Ohio’s long-range transportation plan, Access Ohio 2040, includes 11 recommendations to guide future transportation decisions.

The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) is the state’s four-year transportation planning document. It presents the fiscally balanced, multimodal program for the state’s transportation improvement projects scheduled for some phase of implementation within the four-year period. Projects identified in the STIP are selected in accordance to the investment strategies defined in Access Ohio. Project selection is performed by ODOT and Ohio’s seventeen Metropolitan Planning Organizations in coordination with Regional Transportation Planning Organizations, county engineers, local government project sponsors, and other public and private transportation stakeholders.

Other planning studies focused on transportation modes, corridors, or regions are conducted as a component of Ohio’s statewide transportation planning process. These studies provide ODOT and rural elected officials an opportunity to further examine or refine Access Ohio initiatives, or to address a specific local transportation issue such as public transportation, bicycle and pedestrian travel, or freight transport.

1.2 Ohio Transportation Network Overview

Of Ohio’s multimodal transportation system, ODOT owns and maintains approximately 15% of Ohio’s roads and 30% of Ohio’s bridges. The remaining transportation facilities are owned and maintained by a wide range of public and private entities, such as MORPC, etc. With such a diverse network of transportation facilities and owners, it is critical that ODOT actively engage local elected officials in statewide transportation planning processes.
1.3 ODOT Structure

ODOT planning and engineering staff are located throughout the state at 12 district offices and a central office. The central office is responsible for preparing the statewide long-range transportation plan and managing the statewide transportation improvement program (STIP). ODOT district staff work with local officials to develop the projects that evolve from the statewide planning process. Due to their intimate knowledge of local transportation issues and established working relationships with local elected officials, ODOT districts are the first point of contact for rural consultation.

2.0 Ohio’s Rural Transportation Planning Organizations

ODOT’s primary approach for coordinating with non-metropolitan area local officials is accomplished through their participation in Ohio’s Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) Program, which began as a pilot on July 1, 2013. The RTPO Program was developed as a means for Ohio’s five rural planning agencies to conduct regional transportation planning in non-metropolitan areas of the State. The original 5 agencies were formally designated as Regional Transportation Planning Organizations by the Governor in January 2016.

RTPOs provide the principal forum for facilitating rural consultation with local officials in the development and implementation of the statewide transportation planning process. Each RTPO includes committee structures, comprised of local elected officials and other regional transportation stakeholders, to direct and provide oversight for the region’s transportation planning process. RTPOs also include a technical staff to support the committees. Participation in the RTPO process provides non-metropolitan
3.0 LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIAL PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to coordinating with local elected officials through the RTPO planning process, ODOT provides numerous opportunities for participation in statewide planning efforts. While specific consultation opportunities vary by district, minimum participation opportunities can be found below.
3.1 **Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan**

ODOT periodically updates the state’s long-range transportation plan, called Access Ohio. ODOT takes the following steps to solicit local official involvement in updating the plan:

1) **Steering Committee:** A steering committee that includes representation from both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas and other public and private transportation stakeholders, is established to guide the statewide plan development. It also provides a forum for statewide transportation system users and operators to directly participate in the plan development and review the plan outcomes and recommendations.

2) **Host Early and Ongoing Steering Committee Meetings:** Early in the process of updating the statewide transportation plan, ODOT hosts a kickoff meeting with the steering committee to discuss the goals and objectives that will guide the plan update, and outline the steps that will be taken to update the plan. Feedback at this and other steering committee meetings is documented and included as part of the plan.

3) **Conduct Customer Preference Survey:** ODOT conducts a statewide survey to understand how people perceive the transportation system and gain a fuller understanding of individuals’ transportation priorities. Surveys are administered to randomly selected residents.

4) **Publish Newsletters:** ODOT’s statewide planning office distributes periodic newsletters to its stakeholders, and to the Access Ohio steering committee, both of which include local officials. Other ODOT offices, such as the Local Technical Assistance Program Office distribute newsletters to a large group of local stakeholders throughout Ohio. During plan updates, newsletters will contain information regarding the status of the plan update and interim deliverables that can be viewed online.

5) **Maintain Transportation Plan Website:** ODOT maintains a long-range transportation plan web page (www.access.ohio.gov) where interim plan products are posted and participation opportunity announcements are made. Local elected officials can comment on website materials at any time by responding to the statewide plan e-mail account, or contacting ODOT staff.

3.2 **Statewide Transportation Improvement**

Ohio’s STIP is updated generally on a biennial basis. ODOT works with MPOs, RTPOs, and local officials...
in the development and finalization of the STIP document. The draft STIP is made available to all transportation stakeholders and the public during the STIP development period. ODOT collaborates with local officials in various ways.

1) Rural Consultation Meetings: ODOT Districts and RTPOs host Rural Consultation Meetings prior to every STIP development period. The meetings provide a forum to meet with local officials to collaborate on currently programmed projects and discuss regional transportation concerns. Various meetings are held during a six-week period at centralized locations across the state. Invites are sent to local stakeholders via email, letters, flyers, media releases, newsletters, and web sites.

2) Local Government Meetings: ODOT district staff participate in local government meetings including: city council meetings, regional planning commission meetings, economic development meetings, and county commissioner meetings. Attending the various local government meetings assists ODOT in maintaining communication with local officials to aid in the development of a program that addresses regional transportation needs.

3) Online Communication Efforts: ODOT maintains a STIP website with current, archived, and draft STIP data which may be accessed at http://www.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/Planning/STIP/Pages/default.aspx. Whether reviewing a current STIP or wanting to make a comment on the draft proposed STIP, the website provides a forum for local officials and the public to review the STIP data and provide comments or contact ODOT at any time.

3.3 Other Modal, Corridor, or Regional Transportation Planning Studies

While the statewide transportation plan and STIP are updated regularly, ODOT coordinates the development of many additional planning studies. Some of these include a state freight plan, highway corridor plans, transit plans, bicycle and pedestrian plans, and aviation plans. Opportunities for local official participation in the development of ODOT’s planning efforts depend on the scope of the plan. In general, opportunities for participation are similar to those that are provided during updates to the state’s long-range transportation plan, discussed in section 3.1. At a minimum, all planning efforts are documented on ODOT’s website, and local elected officials have the opportunity to contact ODOT staff at any time to comment on a given planning process.
3.4 COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT-HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Projects selected for Federal Transit Agency (FTA) funding must be “derived from a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services plan (coordinated plan).” These plans are developed through a process that provides local officials and other stakeholders the opportunity to participate. Participation opportunities are similar to those for the development of the statewide transportation plan, listed in section 3.1. Specific participation opportunities can be found on local transit agency websites. Furthermore, a coordinated plan is required in order to be eligible for federal 5310 funding (FAST Act).

4.0 ODOT PROGRAM FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

A principal outcome of the transportation planning process is project recommendations to address local transportation needs. Due to Ohio’s status as a Home Rule State, many project recommendations must be advanced by non-metropolitan area local government sponsors. To inform local officials of available funding opportunities, ODOT publishes a program resource guide at the following link. A list of several ODOT programs that rural communities are eligible to apply for can be found in Appendix B or online at http://www.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/Planning/LocalPrograms/Documents/ODOT%20Program%20Resource%20Guide.pdf.
5.0 EVALUATING OHIO’S RURAL CONSULTATION PROCESSES

To ensure that local officials and other stakeholders are being given ample opportunities to participate in the statewide planning process, ODOT will solicit feedback on the effectiveness of its consultation methods. At a minimum of every 5 years, ODOT sends a specific request for comments on the rural consultation process to the state association of counties, state municipal league, regional planning agencies, and, when possible, directly to non-metropolitan local officials. An open comment period of at least 60 days is provided. ODOT will provide individual responses to comments regarding the rural consultation process. Additionally, comments will be posted on ODOT’s rural consultation website, along with ODOT responses to individual comments. If a proposed modification or revision to the rural consultation process is not adopted by ODOT, an explanation of why will be provided.

6.0 CONCLUSION

ODOT is committed to early and ongoing collaboration with transportation planning partners and stakeholders. Local officials in non-metropolitan areas of Ohio are encouraged to participate in statewide transportation planning using the processes discussed above, and through informal communication with ODOT District staff. Working together with local officials in rural Ohio, FTA, FHWA, Ohio’s MPOs, rural local governments and other regional and state government organizations, the citizens and businesses of Ohio will continue to be provided with a safe, efficient, and accessible...
APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Definitions taken directly from 23 CFR 450.104 and 470.103,

Consultation means one or more parties confer with other identified parties in accordance with an established process and, prior to taking action(s), considers the views of the other parties and periodically informs them about the action(s) taken.

Cooperation means that parties involved in carrying out the transportation planning and programming processes work together to achieve a common goal or objective.

Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan means a locally developed, coordinated transportation plan that identifies the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes, provides strategies for meeting those local needs, and prioritizes transportation services for funding and implementation.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) provides stewardship over the construction, maintenance and preservation of the Nation’s highways, bridges and tunnels. FHWA also conducts research and provides technical assistance to state and local agencies in an effort to improve safety, mobility, and livability, and to encourage innovation.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is an agency within the United States Department of Transportation (DOT) that provides financial and technical assistance to local public transit systems.

Long-Range Statewide Transportation Plan means the official, statewide, multimodal, transportation plan covering a period of no less than twenty years developed through the statewide transportation planning process.

Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) means the geographic area determined by agreement between the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the area and the Governor, in which the metropolitan transportation planning process is carried out.
APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) means the policy board of an organization created and designated to carry out the metropolitan transportation planning process.

Non-Metropolitan Area means a geographic area outside a designated metropolitan planning area. Also referred to as rural area.

Non-Metropolitan Local Officials means elected and appointed officials of general purpose local government in non-metropolitan areas with responsibility for transportation.

Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) means a statewide prioritized listing/program of transportation projects covering a period of four years that is consistent with the long-range statewide transportation plan, metropolitan transportation plans, and TIPs; required for projects to be eligible for funding under title 23 U.S.C. and title 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53.

The Highway Safety Improvement Program provides federal funds for improving the safety of the existing state highway system. State and locally sponsored projects compete together for funding.

The Transportation Alternatives Program provides federal funds to rural local governments for projects that focus on non-motorized modes of transportation, community improving activities, environmental mitigation activities, and construction of turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas.

The Small Cities Program provides federal funds to cities with populations of 5,000 to 25,000 that are not located within a Metropolitan Planning Organization. This program may be used for any road, safety, or signal project on the Federal-Aid system.

The Municipal Bridge Program provides federal funds to municipal corporations and Regional Transit Authorities for bridge replacement or bridge rehabilitation projects. Currently, there are about 1,300 bridges that have a Municipal owner and meet the Federal bridge definition.
APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The Safe Routes to School Program provides funds to encourage and enable children in grades k-8 to bicycle or walk to school safely. Funds can be used for both infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects and may be up to 100% federally funded. Over 60 communities have developed School Travel Plans which allow them to apply for further funding.

The Appalachia Local Access Road (LAR) Program provides $1 million annually for roads which improve access to industrial parks, businesses, educational centers, and recreational areas in Ohio's 32 Appalachian counties.

The Township Sign Safety Program provides $1 million annually in ODOT Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funds to upgrade safety signage on Ohio's township roadways. ODOT provides funds to the County Engineers Association of Ohio (CEAO) for county funded programs. The CEAO serves as program manager and is responsible for project selection, funding criteria, and program priorities.

The Urban Paving Program funds eligible surface treatment and resurfacing projects on state and U.S. routes within municipal corporations.

Ohio’s Bridge Partnership Program is designed to help reduce the excess of deficient county bridges. ODOT works cooperatively with County and City Engineers to replace bridges in need of repair and/or replacement.

The Transportation Improvement Districts (TIDs) Program promotes intergovernmental and public-private cooperation by coordinating resources in transportation and funding for: preliminary engineering, detailed design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction.