

2017

Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization Public Participation Plan



Prepared by

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Draft Revision 1/31/2017

4.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCEDURES FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Federal and state regulations require that each MPO document public involvement processes be proactive and provide complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and opportunities for early and continuing involvement; they leave the choice of methods for facilitating participation to the discretion of each MPO. The PVMPO principal mechanisms for public participation are frequent open public meetings, letters, emails and phone calls. For specific MPO documents, the MPO has tailored its outreach methods to achieve the most effective public participation.

4.1 Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan

The Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is the long-range transportation planning document that describes the region's current transportation system and how that system should be maintained and modified over the next 20 or more years. The

LRTP needs to be updated every four years by the Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning

Organization as required by MAP-21. It addresses each of the major modes of transportation within the Pioneer Valley region. It is considered both a multimodal and an intermodal document by providing an inventory of the major modes, identifies challenges and needs, and also provides a series of recommendations. Project-specific, and major transportation improvements need to be reflected in the RTP in order to be eligible for Federal-Aid funding through the region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

The most current RTP, included several public participation outreach methods. Staff used diverse approaches to educate and inform the public about the long-range transportation plan process and encourage interested parties to express their views and provide input on transportation issues in the Pioneer Valley region.

4.2 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The PVMPO Transportation Improvement Program, commonly referred to as the "TIP", is a federally required planning document that lists all highway, bridge, transit and intermodal projects in the Pioneer Valley planning region that are programmed to receive federal-

aid funding. Projects of regional & statewide significance, non-federal-aid (NFA), or state-funded projects, as well as projects that improve air quality and safety are also included in the TIP document. Cognizant of limited statewide transportation funding resources, the annual program of projects must demonstrate financial constraint within the federal-aid funding targets established for each of the state's MPOs by the Office of Transportation Planning.

The PVMPO TIP development process is designed to guarantee early involvement of local legislators, chief

local officials, stakeholders, individuals and other interested parties through the PVMPO's formal Public Participation Program (PPP) with full consideration of the principles of Environmental Justice, including special meetings such as community-targeted TIP information sessions. Moreover, the TIP document customarily includes a comprehensive overview of the proactive public outreach process used throughout the development of the TIP.

4.3 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

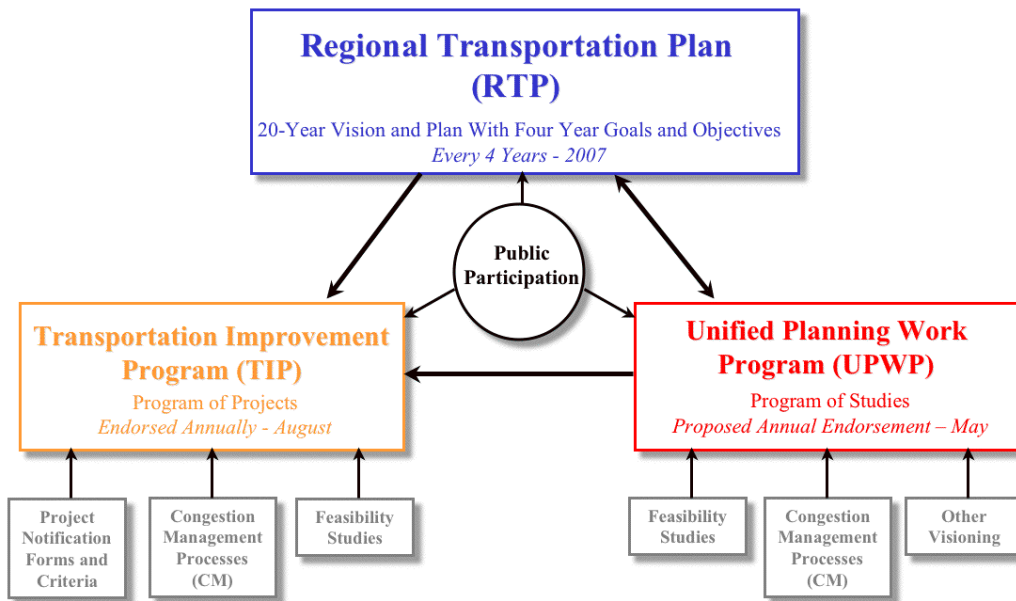
The PVMPO Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) is a project-by-project description of all transportation planning and transportation-related air quality planning activities anticipated within the region during the upcoming program year. It indicates who will perform the work, as well as anticipated available funding, the schedule for completion and the products that will be produced.

Under federal regulations pertaining to the transportation planning process, the UPWP must be prepared and endorsed annually by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) prior to the start of the planning program period.

4.4 Schedule of Activities

- 1. ACTIVITIES SUBJECT TO PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.** PVMPO shall provide early and continuing public involvement opportunities throughout the transportation planning and programming process.
Transportation
 - A. Planning Activities. In accordance with Section 3 of this plan, special emphasis shall be given to engaging the public in planning studies that form the basis for later programming decisions. Planning activities include corridor studies and special regional studies, environmental assessment studies, and development of the Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan. These activities offer the public the earliest opportunity to participate in the development of project proposals that might eventually be programmed for funding. Thus, PVMPO shall involve the affected community through methods such as local advisory committees, public information meetings, consultation with stakeholders, newsletters and use a variety of other outreach method identified in this plan.
 - B. Programming Activities. Opportunities for the public to participate shall also be provided through the project selection, programming, and project development phases. These activities include the selection of projects, and the adoption or amendment of Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). PVMPO shall make an effort to involve the affected community through methods such as consultation with representatives to the Joint Transportation Committee, local advisory committees, public information meetings, consultation with stakeholders, and newsletters.

Relationship of PVMPO Transportation Plans and Programs



4.4.1 2. DEFINITION OF PUBLIC & STAKEHOLDERS.

PVMPO shall make an effort to inform and engage both the general public and stakeholders as appropriate.

- A. General Program. As part of its general planning and programming process, PVMPO will try to involve as broad a cross-section of the population and the region as possible. However, we recognize there are certain segments of the population and certain organizations that either have a special interest in transportation or that we have a special obligation to reach out to. In this regard, we will make a concerted effort to involve the following: the public, member municipalities, affected public agencies, public and private providers of transportation, providers of freight transportation services, public transportation advocates, users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, advocates of the community of individuals with disabilities, seniors, and other parties who have expressed an interest in the process.
- B. Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan or Transportation Improvement Plan. When developing a new or making a major modification to an existing Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan, or Transportation Improvement Plan the PVMPO will consult "as appropriate" with state and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation. This consultation will help PVMPO achieve its related goal of promoting consistency between planned transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns.
- C. Special Studies. For special studies and corridor studies that PVMPO conducts, it shall make an effort to identify and involve persons and groups that might be affected by potential changes to the particular transportation service or facility under review, in addition to those engaged through the general planning process. Examples include neighborhoods associations, residents and businesses in the area.

- D. Consultation and Discussion with Special Groups – Environmental Justice (EJ). PVMPO shall also make a special effort to seek out and consider the needs of groups or communities traditionally not well served by existing transportation systems. These include, but are not limited to low-income households and minority households. To assure adequate participation of these groups, PVMPO will be proactive in seeking representation from low-income or minority individuals, or representative low-income or minority groups and consult and discuss the PVMPO's transportation planning programs and products.

It is sometimes necessary to conduct an outreach effort to EJ communities, beyond that which is normally expended. At a minimum, PVMPO shall identify groups that it needs to involve, add them to the appropriate mailing lists, and define methods for engaging them in relevant programs or projects. This requirement for special outreach efforts shall apply to both sections A and B above.

PVMPO efforts in this regard shall be consistent with the Environmental Justice Executive Order (EO 12898) dated February 11, 1994, and other related guidance from the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration. This effort will also be consistent with the Environmental Justice Action Items identified in the Regional Transportation Plan (endorsed by the PVMPO February, 2007) The Environmental Justice recommendations of the RTP have been incorporated into this public participation plan and are included in Appendix A. Appendix A has been updated with this Public Participation Plan to reflect accomplishments in PVMPO's outreach to environmental justice communities.

- E. Outreach to Special Groups – Persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). PVMPO shall also make a special effort to seek out and consider the needs of individuals or communities with Limited English Proficiency and in accordance with the PVMPO Language Access Plan.³

The PVMPO will engage persons with LEP with regard to regionwide planning activities such as the adoption of the Regional Transportation Plan, Unified Planning Work Program, transit studies, or an updated TIP, the PVMPO will make outreach to Spanish-speaking residents a more routine undertaking. Meeting notices will be available upon request in Spanish, with an opportunity to request translator services highlighted in the notice. Important reports will be summarized and translated into Spanish upon request.

With regard to special activities focused on a specific neighborhood or corridor, maps depicting the distribution of non-English speaking persons will be consulted at the beginning of any such project to determine what, if any, special outreach in any language other than English should be undertaken. If it is determined that a special outreach is warranted, PVMPO will consult with neighborhood groups such as ethnic and religious associations to determine the best method for reaching and involving those non-English speaking residents.

PVMPO efforts in this regard shall be consistent with the signed Executive Order 13166, "Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency" dated August 11, 2000, and other

³ Federal regulations define Persons with Limited English Proficiency as individuals with a primary or home language other than English who must, due to limited fluency in English, communicate in that primary or home language if the individuals are to have an equal opportunity to participate effectively in or benefit from any aid, service or benefit in federally funded programs and activities

related guidance from the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration.

4.5 ADEQUATE TIME FOR PUBLIC COMMENT.

PVMPO shall allow reasonable time for public review and comment at key decision points. These include, but are not limited to, action on the Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan, Unified Planning Work Program and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Minimum notification periods shall be as follows:

- Amendments to PVMPO’s Public Participation Plan – 45 days
- Adoption of the TIP & major TIP amendments – 21 days *
- Adoption of the UPWP & major UPWP amendments – 21 days
- Adoption of Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan & major amendment – 21 days
- Joint Transportation Committee, JTC Subcommittee, PVMPO meetings – 7 days

* While a minimum public comment period of 21 days has been established for the TIP, and major TIP amendments, the MPO may, at their discretion, vote to abbreviate the public comment period under what they (the MPO) consider to be extraordinary circumstances. Under no circumstances will this period be less than 15 days. All comments received during the abbreviated comment period will be taken into consideration by the MPO before making a recommendation.

The MPO may extend the public participation period and provide an additional opportunity for comment when the revised document differs substantially from the version that was made available to the public or when public comment raises new material issues which interested parties could not have reasonably foreseen. Under these circumstances the PVMPO has the sole discretion to determine justification for an extension. When the action to extend public comment on the TIP is approved, the MPO will re-advertised a public notice on the proposed TIP amendments and schedule an additional public meeting followed by an additional abbreviated 15 day comment period. Adjustments, defined as minor alterations to major documents, are not considered amendments and will not be re-advertised.

4.6 METHODS OF NOTIFYING THE PUBLIC

PVMPO shall use appropriate methods to notify the public of its activities and of opportunities for public involvement as outlined in Section 3 of this plan. Determination of which methods to use must be done for each individual planning project or study.

4.7 DOCUMENTATION OF PUBLIC COMMENT & RESPONSE

PVMPO shall document public comments received during the course of a study or an amendment of the Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan, UPWP, or TIP. PVMPO shall also document how it responded to public comments.

A. Comments Received. Documentation of comments may be accomplished in a manner appropriate to

the project and the nature of the comments. Documentation may consist of meeting minutes, a file of letters, or a special memo that summarizes the comments. A written summary is preferred at key points in the decision-making process: when members of the relevant study committee must decide to narrow the range of alternatives, select a preferred alternative, or make a decision of similar nature. The written summary of comments made at public information meetings shall be given to the committee members prior to any committee action.

- B. Response to Comments. PVMPO shall provide a descriptive summary of how it responded to significant public comments during the development of a plan or document such as the TIP. The summary may be produced as a separate report or included as a short section in the final plan or document. In instances where direct response is warranted the PVMPO will document this correspondence as prescribed under FTA/FHWA Policy guidance 79 FR 31214.

8. ADOPTION OF A “FINAL” TRANSPORTATION PLAN. The following describes the minimum public involvement program required during the review of a draft Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan, or a draft of a major amendment to the Plan. These steps must be taken before PVMPO acts to adopt the draft document as the final Plan.

- A. World Wide Web. The draft Transportation Plan itself (or draft major amendment) or a more lengthy notice if appropriate, will be made available on the PVMPO website a minimum of 21 days in advance of the final decision by the PVMPO. The final Plan will also be posted to the PVMPO website as soon as possible after the plan’s endorsement, and made available there at least until an updated or new Plan is adopted.
- B. Comment Period and Public Meeting. PVMPO shall allow a minimum of 21 days for public comments and shall hold a public information meeting prior to completion of the 21-day public comment period. Opportunity for public comment on the plan shall also be provided at every Joint Transportation Committee and PVMPO meeting during the comment period.

The MPO may extend the public participation period and provide an additional opportunity for comment when the revised document differs substantially from the version that was made available to the public or when public comment raises new material issues which interested parties could not have reasonably foreseen. Under these circumstances the PVMPO has the sole discretion to determine justification for an extension. When the action to extend public comment on the RTP is approved, the MPO will re-advertised a public notice on the proposed RTP changes and schedule an additional public meeting followed by an additional abbreviated 15 day comment period. Adjustments, defined as minor alterations to the document, are not considered amendments and will not be re-advertised.

- D. Summary & Disposition of Comments. A summary of significant comments and the disposition of the comments shall be provided in the final document.

9. ADOPTION OF A TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP) The following describes the minimum public involvement program required during the review of a draft Pioneer Valley TIP or the draft

of a major amendment to this document. These steps must be taken before PVMPO acts to adopt a draft document as the final or the official endorsed document.

- A. World Wide Web. The draft TIP (or draft major TIP amendment) and the notice, or a more lengthy notice if appropriate, will be made available on the PVMPO website a minimum of 21 days*. The final TIP and UPWP will also be posted to the PVMPO website as soon as possible after its adoption, and a current version made available there at least until a new TIP is adopted.
- B. Comment Period and Public Meeting. PVMPO shall allow a minimum of 21 days* for public comments and shall hold a public information meeting during the public comment period. Opportunity for public comment on the TIP shall also be provided at every Joint Transportation Committee and PVMPO meeting during the comment period.
- C. Summary & Disposition of Comments. A summary of significant comments and the disposition of the comments shall be provided in the final document.

* While a minimum public comment period of 21 days has been established for the TIP, and major TIP amendments, the MPO may, at their discretion, vote to abbreviate the public comment period under what they (the MPO) consider to be extraordinary circumstances. Under no circumstances will this period be less than 15 days. All comments received during the abbreviated comment period will be taken into consideration by the MPO before making a recommendation.

The MPO may extend the public participation period and provide an additional opportunity for comment when the revised document differs substantially from the version that was made available to the public or when public comment raises new material issues which interested parties could not have reasonably foreseen. Under these circumstances the PVMPO has the sole discretion to determine justification for an extension. When the action to extend public comment on the TIP is approved, the MPO will re-advertised a public notice on the proposed TIP amendments and schedule an additional public meeting followed by an additional abbreviated 15 day comment period. Adjustments, defined as minor alterations to major documents, are not considered amendments and will not be re-advertised.

Development of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a requirement of the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process as described in the Metropolitan Planning Final Rule 23 CFR 450 section 324. This regulation developed by the Federal Department of Transportation defines the Transportation Improvement Program as:

“A staged, multiyear, intermodal program of transportation projects which is consistent with the metropolitan transportation plan.”

The Pioneer Valley TIP is a four-year schedule of projects identified by year and location complete with funding source and cost. The TIP is developed annually and is available for amendment and adjustment at any time. Each program year of the TIP coincides with the Federal Fiscal Year calendar, October 1 through September 30. All TIPs and amendments are consistent with the goals and objectives of the Regional Transportation Plan for the Pioneer Valley Region.

The voting members of the Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization consist of the following

officials or their designee or alternate:

- the Secretary of the Mass DOT
- the Administrator of the Mass DOT Highway Division
- the Chairman of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
- the Chairman of the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority Advisory Board
- the Mayors of two of the following three (3) urban core cities within the Pioneer Valley region:

Holyoke

Chicopee

Springfield

- the Mayor or a Selectman of one of the following four (4) cities and towns outside of the three core cities within the Pioneer Valley region:

Agawam
West

Southwick

Westfield

- the Mayor or a Selectman of one of the following five (5) cities and towns within the Pioneer Valley region:

Amherst
Northampton

Easthampton
South Hadley

Hadley

- a Selectman of one of the following fourteen (14) suburban and rural towns within the Pioneer Valley region:

Belchertown
Granby
Longmeadow
Palmer
Ware

Brimfield
Hampden
Ludlow
Pelham
Wilbraham

East Longmeadow
Holland
Monson
Wales

- a Selectman of one of the following seventeen (17) suburban and rural towns within the Pioneer Valley duly elected as prescribed under the provisions of this MOU document:

Blandford
Cummington
Hatfield
Montgomery
Southampton
Williamsburg

Chester
Goshen
Huntington
Plainfield
Tolland
Worthington

Chesterfield
Granville
Middlefield
Russell
Westhampton

In addition, the Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) Chairman, and one representative each from the

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Chair of the Infrastructure Committee of the Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council (EDC), the five (5) alternate community MPO representatives, and one representative each from both the MassDOT Highway Division District One and District Two Offices shall be considered ex-officio, non-voting members of the Pioneer Valley MPO. Alternate members shall be additional chief elected officials from each of the above-cited categories of communities and he/she shall be eligible to attend, participate and vote at MPO meetings in the event that the primary member cannot attend.

As the lead planning agency for the MPO, the PVPC accepts the responsibility for developing the TIP and UPWP in a cooperative process with other members of the MPO and the general public. The final TIP and UPWP is voted on for endorsement at a formal meeting of the MPO. The endorsed TIP project listing is included in the State Transportation Improvement Program verbatim and requires endorsement by the Secretary of Transportation and Public Works.

The MPO relies on a transportation advisory committee (JTC) to carry out the cooperative process during TIP development. The Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) is a group of community appointed officials, MPO member representatives, public and private transportation providers, the interested parties, and special interest groups and agencies. The JTC establishes and recommends to the MPO procedures for submitting, prioritizing and selecting projects for the TIP. PVPC staff provides the technical support to conduct the TIP development activities for the JTC.

Below is a general outline of steps taken during the TIP development process.

1. Project proponents (communities, MPO members, agencies) submit projects through the process outlined in Chapter 2 of the Massachusetts Project Development & Design Guidebook (2006)
2. Projects are prioritized based on an evaluation criteria by MPO staff, JTC representatives, and MassDOT Highway Division District staff, and MassDOT staff at a posted meeting open to all.
3. The State (thru MassDOT) provides funding targets for the Pioneer Valley Region.
4. JTC reviews and recommends project priorities on the TIP to the MPO
5. Draft TIP project listings are prepared by the MPO staff are distributed for review and comment to MPO members
6. MPO meets to make final decisions on the composition of the TIP and to recommend the Draft TIP for general public release for no less than a 21 day review period
7. Final Draft TIP is distributed for review, consultation and comment in accordance with the adopted Public Participation Plan
8. Public meetings and news releases are conducted to promote public involvement and consultation.
9. Comments are compiled and addressed where appropriate
10. Final TIP developed for the JTC's consideration and their recommendation to MPO
11. MPO meets to vote on endorsement of the TIP
12. Endorsed Regional TIPs are compiled by MASSDOT to create the State TIP (STIP)

13. Secretary of MASSDOT endorses the STIP (on behalf of the Governor) and submits the STIP to federal agencies for review and approval
14. Federally approved STIP is ready for state implementation (project advertisement)
15. Amendments and adjustments to the TIP are made on an as needed basis with the additional public review and input for formal amendments only.

Project Priority Criteria and Selection. The MASSDOT developed a process and set of criteria to evaluate and prioritize the region's TIP projects which was modified and endorsed by the MPO. All projects included in the TIP are evaluated and assigned a priority value or rating. This process is used as a management tool to identify projects of regional priority and program them accordingly in the TIP based on their level of design readiness.

Program Amendments to the TIP. For the purposes of project selection and programming, amendment to the TIP can be conducted at any time. Amendments require formal MPO action. An amendment to the TIP is defined any change that differs significantly from the version that was made available for public comment by the MPO and raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen from the public involvement efforts.

The public involvement requirements for amendments shall be satisfied by following the standard 21 day procedure* for MPO and JTC Committee meetings. So long as the proposed amendment is listed on the respective Joint Transportation Committee and PVMPO agendas, and those agendas have been sent to the town clerks and respective committee mailing lists and posted on the PVMPO website seven days in advance of the meeting the public involvement requirements for the amendment shall be satisfied.

* While a minimum public comment period of 21 days has been established for the TIP, and major TIP amendments, the MPO may, at their discretion, vote to abbreviate the public comment period under what they (the MPO) consider to be extraordinary circumstances. Under no circumstances will this period be less than 15 days. All comments received during the abbreviated comment period will be taken into consideration by the MPO before making a recommendation.

Program Adjustments to the TIP. Program adjustments can be conducted without formal MPO action. Minor adjustments may include such actions as moving projects between Year 1 and Year 2, and minor fluctuations in project description, costs and funding source. This action can be accomplished through an agreed upon administrative action.

Annual Listing of Projects. 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 shall be made available on the PVMPO website. The listing is developed by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation and will be consistent with the categories identified in the TIP.

9. **PUBLIC INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS FOR THE UNIFIED PLANNING WORK PROGRAM (UPWP)** The following describes the minimum public involvement program required during the review of a draft Pioneer Valley UPWP. These steps must be taken before PVMPO acts to adopt a draft document as the final or official endorsed document.

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- A. World Wide Web. The draft UPWP will be made available on the PVMPO website a minimum of 21 days in advance of the final decision by the PVMPO. The final TIP and UPWP will also be posted to the PVMPO website as soon as possible after its adoption, and a current version made available there at least until a new TIP and UPWP are adopted.
 - B. Comment Period and Public Meeting. PVMPO shall allow a minimum of 21 days for public comments and shall hold a public information meeting during the public comment period. Opportunity for public comment on the UPWP shall also be provided at every Joint Transportation Committee and PVMPO meeting during the comment period.
 - C. Summary & Disposition of Comments. A summary of significant comments and the disposition of the comments shall be provided in the final document.

10. PUBLIC INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS FOR SECTION 5307 GRANTS. The public involvement process adopted by PVMPO for its TIP shall also serve to satisfy the public involvement requirements of the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) as applicant for regular Section 5307 (FTA Transit Capital) funds. This applies to the PVTA's annual purchase of replacement vehicles for programs and other major capital purchases. This does not apply to non-routine capital projects that require an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. For major projects the PVTA shall conduct its own separate public involvement process.

11. ACCESS TO TECHNICAL INFORMATION. PVMPO shall provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of the Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and related studies, plans, and programs

4.8 REASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

PVMPO shall conduct a review of the effectiveness of the public participation process once every two years to ensure that the process provides full and open access to all. This task will include a review of public participation efforts undertaken, assessing both what worked and what might be improved, and recommendations for future efforts, if appropriate.

5.0 Appendices

5.1 Title VI Outreach Checklist

5.2 Comments Received on Draft

5.3 PVMPO Signed Endorsement