

I. Background

The Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council (PDCTC) serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Dutchess County, responsible for ensuring that federal transportation funds are committed through a locally driven, comprehensive planning process. Federal statutes require that urbanized areas with over 50,000 people be represented by a MPO. As an MPO, the PDCTC provides a forum for state and local officials to discuss transportation issues and, in turn, reach a consensus on transportation plans and various highway and transit projects in Dutchess County. The PDCTC has performed this task since 1982.

The roles and responsibilities of MPOs have been defined by a series of federal authorization acts, including the most recent, the *Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act - A Legacy for Users* (SAFETEA), which was signed on August 10, 2005. A key provision of SAFETEA requires all MPOs to develop a Public Participation Plan that provides reasonable opportunities for interested parties to comment on major PDCTC projects.

The PDCTC routinely develops three core products to guide the transportation planning process: a Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). The MTP outlines the transportation goals and policies of the PDCTC for the next twenty-five years. Updated every four years, the current MTP, *Connections 2025*, was adopted in October 2003 and is currently being updated. Updated every two years, the TIP serves as the five year capital program for federally funded transportation projects in Dutchess County. The last item, the UPWP, details the direction of PDCTC staff time and planning money over the course of each State Fiscal Year; the most recent 2007-2008 UPWP was adopted in March 2007 and is updated annually. The PDCTC may only receive federal highway and transit funds if they result from a comprehensive planning program that produces these documents.

A MPO is also required to consider eight planning factors in the development of transportation plans, policies, and projects for the region.

- 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 options available for people and for the movement of 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 both people and freight.
- Promote efficient transportation system management and operations.
- Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

Beyond traditional transportation laws, the PDCTC must also adhere to a separate set of Federal laws that apply to all programs that receive Federal funding. The following laws play an important part in the MPO process:

- **Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI):** Prescribes that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.
- **National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA):** Establishes a national policy to promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA):** Institutes enforceable standards to prevent discrimination against individuals with disabilities.
- **Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 (CAAA):** Mandates that transportation plans, programs, and projects conform to a State air quality implementation plan.
- **Environmental Justice (EJ):** Requires that all federally funded programs, including transportation, consider the effects of decisions on disadvantaged population groups.

II. Current Public Involvement Activities

The PDCTC developed its first formal Public Involvement Procedures in the mid-1990s to comply with the requirements of previous federal transportation law the *Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA)*. The procedures are part of the PDCTC Operating Procedures, which govern the Council's organization and decision making processes. In addition, the PDCTC develops specific public participation or community involvement plans as part of significant planning projects.

PDCTC seeks to increase public involvement in the transportation planning processes by educating the public about major transportation issues, soliciting information from a variety of interests, and providing citizens with a way to share their perspectives with policy makers in the region. Ultimately it is the responsibility of the PDCTC to set regional transportation policies and priorities.

General Activities

- A Public Information mailing list is maintained and updated regularly by PDCTC staff. Any person or agency requesting information or expressing an interest in transportation issues is automatically added to the list.
- Interested parties may receive information by standard mail or by email.
- PDCTC uses the mailing list to notify interested parties about meetings, available reports, and to disseminate the quarterly Transportation Update.

- PDCTC issues press releases to local and regional media organizations about upcoming meetings or other events.
- Notices about PDCTC meetings, major planning studies, and activities or programs sponsored by allied or member organizations appear regularly on the PDCTC web site, which is maintained by the primary host agency, Dutchess County.
- Notices are sent at least 14 days prior to an event, and the public comment period extends at least 7 days after a public information meeting.
- Documentation and summaries of public meetings are prepared and made available on the web site. Staff will also mail or make hard copy versions available on request.
- Major project reports and presentations are made available on the web site and will be provided in either electronic or hard copy upon request.
- Significant written or verbal comments presented at a public meeting or as part of a formal public review process are summarized, and accompanied by a response.
- There is time reserved on the agenda for both the Executive (Policy) Committee and Technical (Planning) Committee meetings for public comment. PDCTC has not found a need to limit the topics that may be addressed, and generally limits individual speakers to five minutes.

Metropolitan Transportation Plan

- The PDCTC Technical Committee and staff have primary responsibility for developing the Metropolitan Transportation Plan.
- There are at least two public information meetings held in different areas of the County to present information about current transportation issues and goals, discuss potential actions and recommendations, and solicit public comment. If the final MTP differs significantly from the one discussed in the open forums, an additional public meeting will be held prior to consideration and adoption by the Council.
- All significant written or verbal comments or questions, along with PDCTC responses, are summarized and included in the final MTP.

Transportation Improvement Program

- The TIP process is initiated with a public solicitation (or call letter) sent to participating agencies, municipalities, the Public Information mailing list, and other interested parties. The solicitation includes information on funding programs, project eligibility, a project application, and an anticipated schedule.
- The PDCTC Technical Committee reviews all project applications and works with staff to obtain any additional information or clarification from project sponsors or applicants.

- At least one public meeting is held to discuss the TIP process, and review the recommended project listings. Ideally, the air quality conformity determination is presented and discussed at the same meeting, but a second meeting is held if necessary.
- The public review period for the TIP is a minimum of 15 days. The review period for a required air quality conformity determination is a minimum of 30 days.
- All significant written or verbal comments or questions, along with PDCTC responses, are summarized and included in the final TIP.
- After the Executive Committee approves the TIP, it is made available to interested parties.
- Major TIP Amendments require Public Review and notice is sent to the parties on the Public Information mailing list. There is a minimum 15 day public comment period prior to Executive Committee approval. There is a minimum 30 day public comment period if a new air quality conformity determination is required.

Planning Projects

The annual Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) lists the major activities the Council will undertake each year. Most years there is at least one community, corridor, or special topic project on the work program. The PDCTC enlists the assistance of consultants for many of these projects, and the project descriptions include public outreach and community involvement procedures.

For each planning project, it has been PDCTC practice to establish a project Advisory Committee that includes representation from the involved agencies, municipalities, and other key stakeholders to assist in the review of information and data, assess alternatives, and develop recommendations. The projects typically include at least two public information meetings which allow interested parties to participate in identifying issues and alternatives, and review different phases of the projects.

III. Revised Public Participation Guidelines and Activities

The PDCTC Public Participation Plan has three main objectives:

1. Educate the public about major transportation issues in Dutchess County and the larger Hudson Valley region.
2. Solicit information from a wide variety of interests on major policy decisions and project studies.
3. Provide interested parties with an opportunity to share their perspectives with PDCTC policy makers before decisions are finalized.

The PDCTC believes the key to successful public participation is using a variety of techniques tailored to the project, the geographic area, and the target population(s). We will continue to rely on our members and partners to assist us in identifying, contacting, and involving affected and interested parties. The PDCTC will continue to use the outreach and information strategies that have been successful in the past, and work to improve processes and expand activities where possible.

Standard Activities

For most of its activities the PDCTC utilizes the following methods to ensure access to information about on-going activities, technical documents, and project summaries.

1. World Wide Web – use PDCTC website for project announcements and materials, and to solicit comment. Large items, especially those with significant graphics, are posted in multiple files to assist those who may have slower internet connections.
2. Visualization – use graphic elements, such as photos, charts and geographic information systems to improve clarity and add interest to documents.
3. Public Notices – send by standard mail or email to a list of interested parties announcing availability of documents, dates of public information meetings, and deadline for comments. The public comment period for major products will be a minimum of 30 days.
4. Press Releases – send information to local media, including those serving minority and low-income areas and populations, regarding availability of documents or dates for public meetings.
5. Project Documents – provide copies of full project documents in hardcopy or digital format upon request (printing and/or postage costs may be charged).
6. Language – use clear language that avoids jargon, spells acronyms and abbreviations, and defines terms that may be unfamiliar to the public.

Public Information Mailing List

The PDCTC staff at Dutchess County maintains a mailing list of over 500 individuals and organizations who have expressed an interest in PDCTC activities and projects. The PDCTC will continue to make a special effort to include agencies and organizations that serve the needs of and advocate for interests of people who are traditionally underserved.

- PDCTC will explore the possibility of tailoring the mailing list to the expressed interests of the individuals. Items of more general interest will be sent to the entire mailing list.

Access to Information

PDCTC regularly posts meeting notices, agenda, and project reports, and other significant work products on its web site. Copies are made available in paper or digital format upon request.

The PDCTC developed a public comment form that is made available at various public meetings and on the web site. People may use the form to request information, make a comment, and sign up for the Public Information Mailing List.

- PDCTC will reorganize and simplify access to information on its web site.
- PDCTC will develop a general “Guide to PDCTC” and make it available in both printed and electronic formats. The Guide will include clear explanations of the transportation planning and programming processes, and identify opportunities for public involvement and participation.
- PDCTC will explore options to give its web site a more distinctive character as suggested by Federal Certification Review in 2005.

Public Review for Key Products

The PDCTC provides the public with an opportunity to review and comment on its key planning and programming products, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program, and the Unified Planning Work Program.

PDCTC uses a quarterly Transportation Update, the website, and special notices to alert the Public Information mailing list about the status of major work items. Items are available on the website or by request for review.

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) – PDCTC will make the draft UPWP available for public review for at least 30 days prior to Executive (Policy) Committee approval.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Amendments – PDCTC provides widespread notice of the TIP process, project eligibility, and proposed schedule. Regular updates on the process are included in the Transportation Update newsletter and on the website. The draft Transportation Improvement Program will be available for public review for at least 30 days prior to Executive Committee approval. The formal public review process will usually coincide with the release of the Air Quality Conformity Determination for the Poughkeepsie (Mid-Hudson) Ozone Non-attainment Area.

In some years the Executive Committee may endorse the draft TIP Project Listings and Narrative prior to the completion of the Air Quality Conformity Determination, to permit public review of the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) to proceed on schedule. Final TIP

approval will occur after the required public review period for the Conformity Determination concludes.

- PDCTC will review and revise its TIP Amendment Procedures to clarify approval and public information requirements.

Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) - Development of the MTP calls for on-going and varied public involvement activities. Primary responsibility for the MTP rests with the staff and the Technical Committee. Major work items are posted web site and made available in paper or digital format upon request. The PDCTC will hold at least two public information meetings in different, accessible locations prior to Executive Committee action.

Planning Projects

Public involvement processes will continue to be developed for each planning project prior to the start, and will include the “Standard Activities” described previously.

Outreach Activities

The PDCTC staff regularly responds to requests to speak before community, business, and education groups on transportation issues. Staff also grants interviews to local media organizations about current projects and other items of interest.

- PDCTC will seek additional opportunities to speak with and engage organizations involved with traditionally underserved populations (e.g. minority, low-income, and senior citizens).

Consultation

As required by metropolitan planning requirements set forth in SAFETEA, the PDCTC will afford citizens, affected public agencies, private transportation providers, and other interested parties with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the planning process. This includes providing adequate public notice of meetings, reasonable access to MPO products, and the employment of visualization techniques and the internet to convey information.

Beyond its traditional constituents, the PDCTC will consult with other organizations whose planning activities may be affected by transportation projects or policies promoted by the PDCTC. This consultation is especially important in developing the Metropolitan Transportation Plan. For the Plan, the PDCTC will consult with State and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation; Federal land management, wildlife, and regulatory agencies will also be consulted as appropriate.

Responding to Comments

For its core products PDCTC will continue its practice of developing written summaries of comments received for consideration by the Technical Committee and Executive Committee prior to their review and final action. A summary of comments and the PDCTC Response will be included in the final documents.

Evaluating Effectiveness

The PDCTC will periodically review the public participation policy and related procedures at least every four years. This Policy will undergo a 45-day public review period, and any major amendments will also require public review. Among the evaluation measures we will use are meeting participants, comments received, web site activity, and geographic distribution of mailing list members.

IV. Conclusion

Public involvement is an important element of the PDCTC planning process. Early and on-going participation is sought on major products and studies, and the quarterly newsletter serves as a valuable tool to provide periodic updates. The PDCTC will continue to evaluate new public outreach and involvement techniques to improve the public’s understanding and confidence in transportation planning and programming process.

V. Contact Information

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