



Polk Transportation
Planning Organization

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN



www.PolkTPO.com

Update Adopted August 24, 2023



YOU can make a DIFFERENCE

There are several ways for you to help shape the future of transportation:

How to submit your comments to the Polk Transportation Planning Organization Page 12

How to leave comments about a specific area or intersection on a map by using "Community Remarks" Page 14

Become a member of the Polk TPO's Adviser Network Page 18

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE POLK TPO PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN



4 **PURPOSE OF THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN**



5 **ABOUT US**



6 **OUR PARTNERS**



8 **POLICIES AND PRINCIPLES**



11 **HAVING YOUR SAY**



13 **GETTING INVOLVED**



16 **ACCESS FOR ALL**



18 **OUTREACH STRATEGIES**



21 **FEDERAL COMPLIANCE**



22 **ACRONYM GLOSSARY**



PURPOSE OF THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

The Polk TPO encourages early and continuing participation by residents in the planning and decision-making process. Public outreach efforts are designed to engage stakeholders from all segments of our diverse community.

The Public Participation Plan serves as a guidebook for the public as to how and when they can engage in the regional transportation planning and decision-making process.

The plan is organized into several sections:

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT POLICIES

This section outlines the process and procedures the Polk TPO will follow when conducting public involvement including:

- ◇ How the public can submit comments
- ◇ What the TPO will do with the comments it receives
- ◇ When public meetings or comment periods will be held
- ◇ How the public can find out how to get involved

OUTREACH STRATEGIES

The tools and opportunities to educate and engage the public in the regional transportation planning process.

EVALUATION

Measure both the quantity and quality of interactions with the public.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Information and links to more information on the planning process and federal regulations.



By the year 2045 Polk County is projected to be home to more than 1 million people. Residents of Polk County can shape tomorrow's roads, trails and transit by getting involved. Access and the ability to comment on: Priority Transportation Projects; Rail Studies and Plans; Bike/Pedestrian Plans; the Transit Development Plan; Transportation Improvement Program, and Unified Planning Work Programs can be found at <http://www.polktpo.com/plans.aspx>

ABOUT US

Established in 1977, the Polk Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) conducts planning for the entirety of Polk County. Considered the “crossroads of central Florida,” Polk is bounded by ten counties. It is the fourth largest county in the state of Florida at 2,011 square miles and the ninth most populous with more than 750,000 residents. Polk is one of five counties (Pinellas, Hillsborough, Polk, Osceola and Orange) in the emerging central Florida “mega-region” along the Interstate 4 corridor. This area is currently home to more than 4.8 million residents.



Polk County serves as an important freight and logistics center for the region and the state. It has the most rail miles (145) on Florida’s Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) and is home to Florida’s only Intermodal Logistics Center. Polk County has the second most highway centerline miles (190) on the SIS, and SIS highways include Interstate 4, State Road 570 (Polk Parkway), State Road 60, US 17, US 27, and US 98.

The Polk TPO is responsible for making sure that funding approved for transportation projects and programs is based on a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive planning process.

WHAT IS THE POLK TPO RESPONSIBLE FOR?

The Polk TPO is the lead transportation planning agency for Polk County. It employs a cooperative process to make decisions regarding the transportation investments needed to meet existing and future travel needs. To meet its mission, the Polk TPO develops:

Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) - A document resulting from regional or statewide collaboration and consensus on a region or state’s transportation system. With a scope of 25 years, the LRTP serves as the defining vision for the county’s transportation systems and services. In metropolitan areas, the plan indicates all of the transportation improvements scheduled for funding over the next 25 years.

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) identifies transportation projects and strategies that will be pursued over the next four years.

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) is a two-year plan that identifies funding sources for each project, the schedule of activities and the agency or consultant responsible for each task or study.

OUR PARTNERS

THE BOARD

The TPO Board has nineteen voting members including representatives from the county and fifteen of the seventeen municipalities in Polk County. The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is represented as a non-voting member, and several Board members also serve on the board of directors for local transit agencies.

THE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) includes representatives from all of the TPO's member jurisdictions, as well as transit agency and school board representatives. The smaller cities are often represented by the city manager while the larger cities appoint a planner or engineer. The TAC makes recommendations to the TPO Board on technical issues and other action items.

THE ADVISER NETWORK (TAN)

The TPO established the Adviser Network to serve as an alternate mechanism for citizen involvement to increase public involvement. The network provides a less formal, more extensive structure for soliciting public participation and comment. Members can participate in the planning process through different mediums. There are currently 390 members that represent a broad cross section of the county's population and include people of all ages, races and economic circumstances from all corners of the county. The TPO makes a concerted effort to recruit members who represent traditionally under served populations, minorities and persons with disabilities. When joining the Adviser Network, members are requested to include their demographic information, areas of interest and their desired method of communication.

Members have several options regarding their participation in the TPO planning process varying from interaction through social media and the viewing of videos to attendance at quarterly community forums. There is not a set limit or maximum membership for the Adviser Network. Members can participate on as-desired basis as time allows and their interest dictates.

TRANSIT PARTNERS

The Polk TPO, the Lakeland Area Mass Transit District (LAMTD) or Citrus Connection, the Polk County Board of County Commissioners (BoCC), and the Polk Transit Authority (PTA) coordinate closely to plan for public transit, with the Citrus Connection taking the lead in operational and short-range planning projects, and the Polk TPO leading long-range efforts, such as the Transit Development Plan and transit element of the Long Range Transportation Plan. Close coordination is also required for integrating transit services and facilities into the greater network of transportation infrastructure. The Citrus Connection participates in the transportation planning process in accordance with federal and state requirements, and it will rely on this PPP to satisfy the public participation requirements for the development of its Program of Projects – which includes proposed transit capital and operating projects.

The TPO Planning process will afford the Citrus Connection an opportunity to:

- ◇ Identify the community need for public transportation services including the needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults and people with low incomes
- ◇ Prepare strategies for meeting these local needs
- ◇ Prioritize public transportation services for funding and implementation

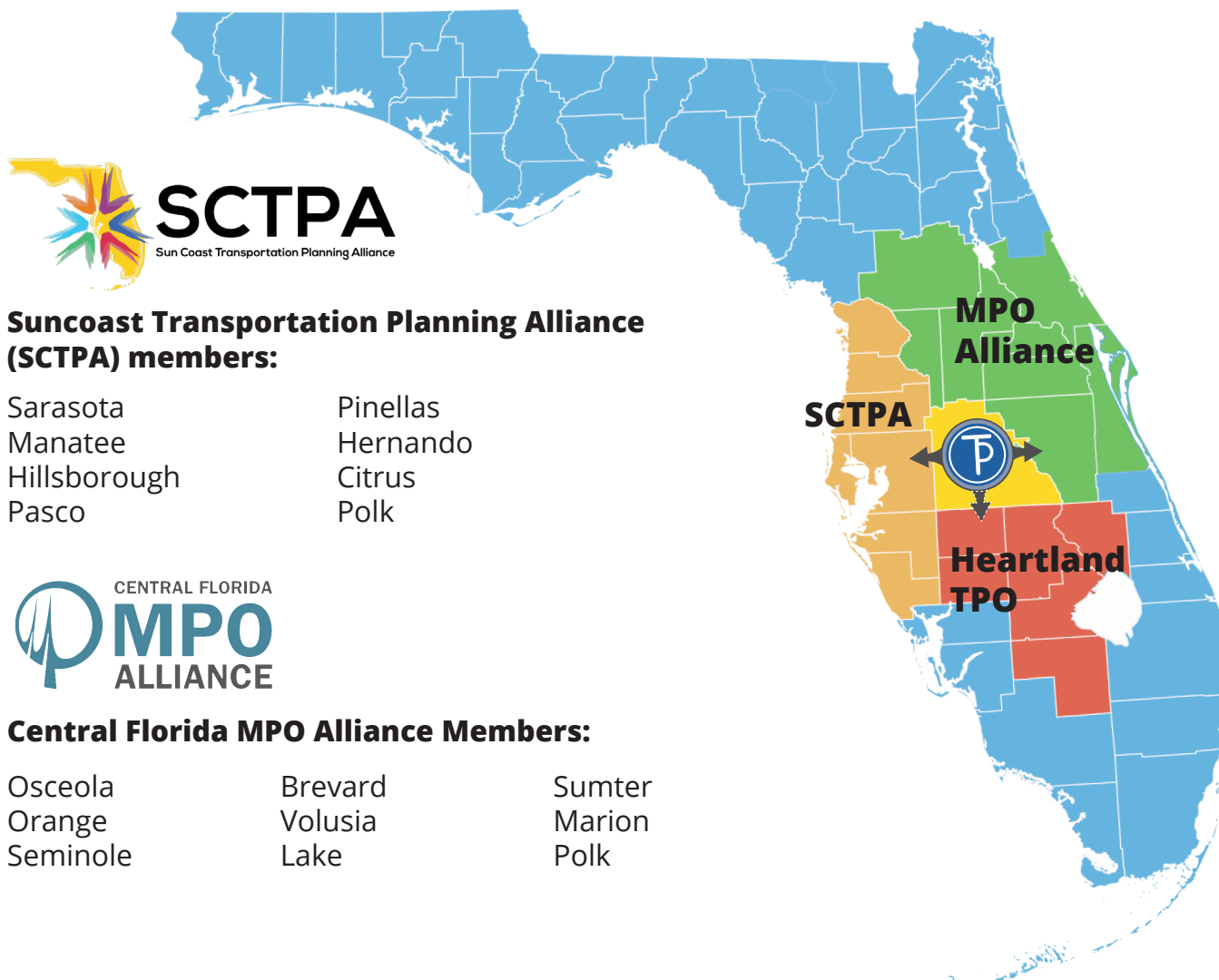
Numerous elected officials serve on both the Board of Directors for LAMTD/Citrus Connection and the Polk TPO Board. There is extensive cross representation between these two boards. The membership of the TPO's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) includes staff from the Citrus Connection, as well as city managers whose jurisdictions receive public transportation services. Additionally, the TPO will ensure that its Adviser Network continues to include members with a particular interest in public transportation and related topics.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

The TPO has an agreement with the Central Florida Regional Planning Council to ensure that planned transportation projects and services (Long Range Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program) are consistent with local government comprehensive plans.

REGIONAL COORDINATION

The Polk TPO is part of two regional transportation alliances that span 16 counties across central Florida. There are 12 MPO/TPOs representing the 16 counties. The Suncoast Transportation Planning Alliance (SCTPA) and the Central Florida MPO Alliance coordinate on regional transportation issues and projects. Both groups share current travel data and trends and adopt regional transportation plans and priorities for highway, public transportation and multi-use trail improvements.



POLICIES AND PRINCIPLES

Public participation is an essential part of a meaningful transportation planning process. The Polk TPO actively seeks the opinions of people and organizations using a variety of methods including:

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Polk TPO will inform the public, in a timely manner, of key upcoming decisions. This information will be provided in plain language to enable citizens to find, understand, and use information they need or are asked to review.

PUBLIC ACCESS

Meetings will be open to the public and include opportunities for public comment when applicable. Reasonable access to information necessary for meaningful participation in these meetings and decision-making processes will be provided.

ACCESS IN TIMES OF DECLARED EMERGENCIES AND PANDEMICS

If, due to a declared emergency, epidemic or pandemic, the TPO may be required to modify its public involvement procedures, particularly if in-person engagement opportunities are impacted. TPO staff will specify alternative public involvement strategies, including the adjustment of time periods for public comments, and TPO responses to comments. Adjusted strategies may include enhanced use of media and social media resources; additional legal advertisements in local newspapers; the use of Community Remarks (See Getting Involved section of this PPP); and increased communication to the TPO's Adviser Network by way of mailings or mass email distributions (e.g. eBlasts).

Additionally, the TPO may rely on its partners to help share information. Such enhanced partnerships may include requesting municipalities to post information on their websites; request community and non-profit partners to assist in disseminating information, particularly in under-served communities; and develop alternative communication strategies. Such strategies may include, but are not limited to, the development of a TPO newsletter; webinars, informative short videos to cover topics that normally would have been addressed in in-person meetings.

The TPO is committed to public engagement, in spite of emergency conditions. The TPO intends to be inclusive as possible and will comply with Federal, State or local emergency orders to protect health: If public involvement strategies are not sufficiently inclusive resulting from limitations due to public health and safety concerns, the TPO may consider holding additional public involvement activities on the actions taken after adoption, and after the emergency orders are lifted, to ensure that the public is informed and has the ability to request reconsiderations or amendments to TPO Board actions.

CONSIDERATION AND RESPONSE TO PUBLIC INPUT

It is essential to respect and seriously consider public input, not just collect it. Comments and opinions are gathered, analyzed, and considered as part of the decision-making process.

EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Informing and educating the public about transportation planning issues and the transportation planning process results in good quality public input. Polk TPO staff engages the public in a number of outreach campaigns on topics such as pedestrian and bicyclist safety, and clean commuting options such as biking to work, ride sharing and teleworking.

UNDER-REPRESENTED SEGMENTS OF THE CITIZENRY

The Polk TPO seeks the participation of those typically under-represented in transportation decision-making. The everyday lives of these individuals are critically affected by how they are going to get to work, home, school, stores, and services. Particular emphasis will be placed on involving persons and groups with special transportation needs, including people with disabilities, low-income, minority, and elderly populations.

RE-EVALUATION

Periodic evaluation of the public involvement process by both staff and the public will provide valuable feedback on the present and future success of the TPO's efforts.



WHO WE SEEK TO CONSULT

Those whom the Polk TPO strive to consult and engage in the transportation planning process include:

- ◇ Public agencies
- ◇ Individuals
- ◇ Representatives of the disabled
- ◇ Freight shippers
- ◇ Providers of freight transportation services
- ◇ Limited English proficient persons
- ◇ Low-income communities
- ◇ Minority communities
- ◇ Representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities
- ◇ Private providers of transportation
- ◇ Representatives of users of public transportation
- ◇ Representatives of public transportation employees

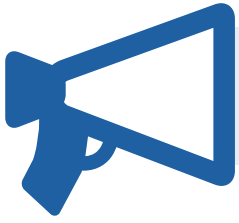
In order to achieve these goals, the Polk TPO includes the following groups in the transportation process when possible:

- ◇ Affordable housing groups
- ◇ Business groups
- ◇ Civic organizations
- ◇ Community & economic development organizations
- ◇ Commuters
- ◇ Elected officials
- ◇ Environmental groups
- ◇ Environmental justice organizations
- ◇ Higher education institutions
- ◇ Public health organizations
- ◇ Religious organizations
- ◇ Neighborhood/Homeowner Associations
- ◇ Organizations focused on aging
- ◇ Social service organizations
- ◇ Transit dependent persons
- ◇ Workforce development agencies
- ◇ Youth



The Polk TPO maintains a list of interested individuals and organizations who have expressed an interest in the TPO's transportation planning efforts. To be added to this list, please contact the TPO by telephone at 863-534-6486, by mailing Polk TPO at P.O. Box 9005, Drawer TS05, Bartow, FL 33831-9005; or by sending a message through the TPO Facebook Page.

HAVING YOUR SAY



The Polk TPO encourages public comments and provides the public with a variety of ways to voice their opinions and share their ideas.

EARLY COORDINATION

The Adviser Network has an opportunity to submit early comment and provide direction on the development of major work products to include the LRTP, priority projects, FDOT Work Program and TIP.

The Adviser Network receives copies of draft and final documents on a regular basis, accompanied by a simple summary that highlights its important points in “layman terms.” Adviser Network members will be asked to provide comments and suggest changes as needed, and these comments and suggestions will be forwarded to the TAC and TPO Board.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIODS

A key opportunity for the public to share their thoughts and ideas is during public review and comment periods. A review and comment period of at least 30 days will be held for the following plans and processes:

- ◇ Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) (a five-year development with several opportunities to comment on goals, projects, and priorities);
- ◇ Transit Development Plan (TDP) and Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan (TDSP) (short-range transit plans outlining transit service and capital needs);
- ◇ Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) (a five-year short-range plan that assigns available funding to specific projects). The public notice will include an explicit statement that the time established for the public review and comment on the TIP will satisfy the Program of Projects requirement;
- ◇ The Federal Certification Review (a four-year certification process); and
- ◇ Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) (developed Bi-annually to target goals and objectives. This program also serves to establish the annual budget.)

**Note: A review and comment period of at least 45 days will be held for the Public Participation Plan.*

The public is encouraged to consult with the Polk TPO and review all of the plans listed above when they require updating. Other, less formal documents will also be made available for public comment. Information released to the public for review will be readable, public-friendly material posted on our web site and/or in printable format, the Polk TPO will review all comments received before a Polk TPO Board vote on these items.

L RTP AND TIP REVISIONS – MODIFICATIONS AND AMENDMENTS

For the LRTP and TIP, federal regulations define two types of revisions: 1) Administrative Modifications (Minor Changes) and 2) Amendments (Major Changes)

Administrative Modifications to the LRTP and TIP

Administrative Modifications are minor revisions to the LRTP and TIP that include minor changes or revisions to a project/project phase costs, minor changes to funding sources or previously included projects, and minor changes to project/project phase initiation dates. An administrative modification, is one that does not require public review and comment, a re-demonstration of fiscal constraint, or a conformity determination according to 23 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) 450.104. These revisions are handled internally and approved by the TPO's Executive Director. As part of the TPO PPP, these changes are communicated to the public via a posting to the TPO's website.

Amendments to the LRTP and TIP

An amendment to the LRTP involves major changes to the project's cost; project or project phase initiation; addition or deletion of a project; or a major change in design concept or scope within the originally approved 20-year horizon.

An amendment to the TIP is a major revision to the program and it is typically initiated by FDOT. The TIP amendment may include additions or deletions of a project due to change in FDOT's Five-Year Work Program, and the FDOT is required to present the change to the TAC and TPO Board prior to requesting a review and approval by the TPO Board. A TIP amendment is necessary when one or more of the following criteria are met:

- ◇ The change adds a new individual project
- ◇ The change adversely impacts financial constraint
- ◇ The change results in major scope changes
- ◇ The change deletes an individually listed project from the TIP
- ◇ The change results in a cost increase greater than 20% and \$2 million

Amendments to the LRTP and TIP require TPO Board adoption by a recorded roll-call vote or hand-counted vote of the majority of the membership according to s.339.175 (13), Florida Statutes. The public is invited and encouraged to attend the meetings and provide comments on the proposed amendments. Therefore, these meetings will be advertised with a 30-day notice at a designated place and time on a published agenda.

HOW TO SUBMIT COMMENTS TO THE POLK TPO

The Polk TPO prefers comments in writing in order to accurately respond to public concerns or comments. If assistance is needed to submit a written comment, please contact the Polk TPO at 863-534-6486.

Please send all comments in writing using one of the following methods:

- ◇ Mail: The Polk TPO, at P.O. Box 9005, Drawer TS05, Bartow, FL 33831-9005
- ◇ Email: polktpo@polk-county.net
- ◇ Social Media: www.facebook.com/PolkTPO or on Twitter at @PolkTPO

The public can also make comments in person at TAC, TPO Board, and Adviser Network meetings.

HOW YOUR COMMENTS WILL BE USED

The Polk TPO values public input and all comments received will be considered as part of the transportation decision-making process. Staff will document all comments and forward them to the TPO advisory committees and Board. All organizations/individuals who submit a comment with their contact information will receive a response to their comment. Every effort will be made to respond to comments before a final vote on an action item. Comments received using the methods detailed above are documented as part of the public record.

GETTING INVOLVED

The Polk TPO holds events throughout the year to address transportation issues and to deliberate on their strategies, projects, plans, and programs. These events include:



TPO BOARD MEETINGS

The TPO provides a forum for cooperative decision making regarding countywide transportation issues. Member governments include the Polk County Board of County Commissioners and the cities of Lakeland, Winter Haven, Auburndale, Bartow, Haines City, Lake Wales, Fort Meade, Mulberry, Frostproof, Lake Alfred, Dundee, Eagle Lake, Davenport, Polk City, and Lake Hamilton. The TPO is comprised of a policy board (local elected officials), advisory committees, and staff. Prior to making decisions, the Polk TPO Board receives recommendations from the citizens-driven Adviser Network and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

The TPO Board meets bi-monthly. A current calendar of these meetings can be found online at polktpo.com. Polk TPO Board meetings are advertised in the legal section of the newspaper no less than 14 calendar days prior to the meeting date. The meetings are held in the County Commission Board Room in Bartow which is convenient to public transit and accessible to persons with disabilities. Additional accommodations for people with disabilities will be provided on an as-needed basis, if requested five days in advance. These meetings are broadcast live on Polk County Government Television (PGTV). Translation services are also available to those with limited English proficiency, if requested 5 days in advance.

Special meetings or emergency meetings may be called by the Chairperson with a minimum notice of three calendar days and shall indicate the reason for the meeting in the notice.

ADVISER NETWORK PUBLIC FORUMS

The Adviser Network holds community forums on a quarterly basis to solicit public comments on the TPO's work products and issues of current interest. People can attend in person or participate online via an interactive webcast, when available. As part of this process, staff prepares a recap of the forum to document public comments and to share the comments and recommendations with the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the TPO Board.

COMMUNITY REMARKS

The Polk TPO features the Long Range Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Plan, and Bike/Ped initiatives on its' website for public viewing. Community Remarks is a program that allows the public to make place-based comments in real-time to foster collaborative solutions to issues in their community. GIS based maps and overlays of project boundaries allow residents to offer direct feedback about a project area. Citizens can leave comments or vote (thumbs up or down) certain aspects of the plans. **Target:** The TPO will garner 30 or more comments per year on Community Remarks.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

There are many community groups, neighborhood associations and civic organizations represented throughout Polk that are interested in hearing more about transportation plans and projects in their communities. In recent years, the TPO has attended many of these meetings and addressed various topics such as the Pledge to Slow Down Campaign or the Long Range Transportation Update. The TPO has found this approach as an effective way of educating the public about the TPO, as well as obtaining public comments on our plans and projects. Likewise, builds relationships and earns trust with groups and leaders in these communities. **Target:** The TPO will attend and provide presentations to four community/civic groups throughout the County per year.

PUBLIC MEETING SCHEDULES

To reach the widest audience and encourage participation among the diverse population in Polk County, the following procedures have been outlined for major planning activities:

- ◇ Long-range transportation plan (LRTP) - a layperson's version of the plan is produced and available online as well as distributed to libraries in the county. Multi-media presentations and graphic representations of the plan are displayed during informational outreach functions held throughout the county. Where and when these meetings will be held will be broadcast through emails to the Adviser Network and on Facebook and Twitter.
- ◇ Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) - The TIP is presented at a TPO Board Meeting and is posted on the TPO website.
- ◇ Amendments - Amendments to these plans are discussed during TPO Board Meetings. Notice of amendments are included in the legal ads posted prior to the board meetings and are posted on the website, as well as broadcast through email and social media.

The Polk TPO will consider significant civil, religious, and cultural holidays and do its best to refrain from holding meetings at these times.

NOTIFICATION OF PUBLIC COMMENT PERIODS

To ensure that the public has easy access to information and timely notice about the transportation planning process, comment periods are announced in a variety of ways, including:

- ◇ The Polk TPO website – Documents released for public review are available online at www.PolkTPO.com or available by request;
- ◇ Press Releases are sent to the local newspaper and press release subscribers, as well as posted to TPO website;
- ◇ Announcements are sent through social media networks and e-blasts to the Adviser Network. Upon request, the public may request print notifications via U.S. mail; and
- ◇ Print Documents – Copies of the plans are available in print at local libraries. Comment forms are provided also.

ACCESS FOR ALL

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY PLAN DOCUMENT

The goal of the TPO's Limited English Proficiency (LEP) plan is to provide meaningful access to the TPO for people with limited or no ability to speak, read, write or understand English.

NONDISCRIMINATION PLAN DOCUMENT

The Polk TPO believes that transportation systems should not only be safe and efficient, but also represent their unique, diverse and vibrant community. As such, the Polk TPO does not tolerate discrimination in any form in its programs, service or activities. The subject plan outlines how the Polk TPO will consider the transportation needs of everyone in Polk County and conduct substantial outreach to ensure broad input from the community.

The Polk TPO values the diversity within Polk and encourages full and fair participation in the transportation decision-making process by everyone, including those individuals and groups who are traditionally under served. To ensure the public is aware of the TPO's commitment to ensuring access for all, the following notice is placed in all Polk TPO agendas and on the website:

The TPO planning process is conducted in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Related Statutes. Any person or beneficiary who believes they have been discriminated against because of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, or family status may file a complaint in writing with the TPO's Title VI Specialist at the address above.

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, persons with disabilities needing special accommodations to participate in this proceeding should contact the Board of County Commissioners, Communications Office located at 330 W. Church Street, Bartow by telephone (863) 534-6090 not later than four days prior to the proceeding. If hearing impaired call: (TDD) (863) 534-7777 or 1-800-955-8771 or Voice impaired call: 1-800-955-8770, via Florida Relay Service.

Un traductor del idioma español estará disponible.

Further information concerning Title VI of the Civil Rights Act prohibiting discrimination based upon race, color or national origin can be found by visiting <https://www.justice.gov/crt/fcs/TitleVI>. The law states that "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."

OUTREACH TO UNDER SERVED POPULATIONS

The Polk TPO uses census data to identify vulnerable populations in the region: People in poverty, Hispanic/Latino, Non-Hispanic and Non-White Minorities, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), People with disabilities, the elderly, and households without cars. This data was added to maps and scaled so that concentrations of vulnerable populations in the region could be identified. This tool helps us to identify valuable community partners, individuals, organizations, and communities representative of these vulnerable populations in Polk County. These include neighborhood and main street associations, community-based organizations, faith-based institutions, housing associations, nonprofits, etc. This information allows staff to reach out to these groups and help to ensure these individuals can participate in the regional planning process. Staff intentionally seeks out and works to build relationships with residents, community elders and other leaders in traditionally under served communities throughout the region. Techniques to do this include:

- ◇ Person-to-person outreach at locations such as transit stations, grocery and discount stores, flea and farmers markets, laundromats, local food gatherings (ex: volunteer fire department breakfasts, church suppers), community concerts, and cultural festivals.
- ◇ Coordinate with government agencies to conduct outreach at health care centers, food banks and food stamp offices, schools, offices on aging, etc.
- ◇ Form alliances with faith-based institutions, cultural centers, community-based organizations that work with immigrants, etc.
- ◇ Conduct surveys and focus groups with individuals within organizations/agencies that work with traditionally under served individuals.



**Making
Your
Voice
Heard!**



Target: The TPO will annually participate in at least two community meetings held by groups representing vulnerable, or traditionally under served populations.



Questions? If you have questions about the transportation planning process, this plan, or would like more information about joining the Adviser Network, please contact the Polk TPO at 863-534-6486.

¿Preguntas? Si usted tiene preguntas sobre nuestro proceso de planificación de transporte, o este plan, o si desea más información sobre nuestro Adviser Network, por favor contáctenos al 863-534-6486.



The Polk TPO Adviser Network holds community forums on a quarterly basis to solicit public comments on the TPO's work products and issues of current interest. People can attend in person or, when available, participate online via an interactive webcast. As part of this process, staff prepares a recap of the forum to document public comments and to share the comments and recommendations with the TAC and TPO Board.

Forums have been held to date on: Priority Transportation Projects; Transit and Aging in Place; FDOT Draft Work Program; Passenger Rail Service; Multi-Use Trails; Freight Mobility; Automated Vehicles; Bike/Pedestrian Safety and the LRTP.

The public is invited to join the Adviser Network at all public meetings and events. They can also join at www.PolkTPO.com.

OUTREACH STRATEGIES

These strategies can enhance public involvement for a specific activity or assist the Polk TPO in meeting specific public involvement goals. Staff review and modify these strategies on an ongoing basis. Those that best increase outreach, education, and involvement are continued. Those that do not, are changed or discontinued.

WWW.POLKTPO.COM

The core tool used by the Polk TPO to disseminate information is their website. This website includes information on the transportation planning process as well as public meeting and involvement opportunities. The site also includes a calendar of events, links to agendas, minutes, and draft documents under review. Opportunities for the public comment are available in the form of staff email and phone number listings as well as the Constant Contact format.

VISUALIZATION TECHNIQUES

Information published by the TPO incorporate images, photos, graphics and video as a strategy for promoting public understanding of the material being presented. **Target:** Annually, the TPO will develop and publish four short informational videos or graphics on key transportation topics and issues.

E-BLASTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

E-blasts are sent to members of the Adviser Network and other interested parties to provide readers with helpful information on transportation planning, public meetings, events and opportunities for involvement. The purpose is to encourage awareness and participation at the regional, state and local levels. Subjects include bicycle/pedestrian, transit, environment and the long-range transportation planning process. This information is also shared on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

ADDITIONAL OUTREACH STRATEGIES

- ◇ The Polk TPO produces and distributes print documents such as white papers, and fact sheets to include timely information on targeted topics related to transportation planning and public participation activities. These publications are available online and distributed at outreach events.
- ◇ Maintains contact lists to include current and potential stakeholders.
- ◇ Produces some materials targeting non-traditional participants.
- ◇ Create and maintain partnerships with a wide range of outreach professionals, community groups, jurisdictions, and agencies. Utilize these resources to publicize activities and events to reach a broader audience and/or take leadership role in public participation efforts in their area. The purpose is to build relationships and earn trust with groups and leaders as well as identify strategies to bring traditional non-participants into the planning process.
- ◇ Hold meetings in accessible locations at various geographic locations at which the targeted populations congregate including community centers, fairs and festivals, churches, and libraries. Most meetings are located on transit lines to ensure accessibility.
- ◇ The interactive and informational Transportation School workshop uses interactive activities, games, tours, and other techniques to illustrate and discuss transportation issues, projects, and needs. It provides opportunity for comment through interactive discussions, comment sheets, and/or verbal comments.
- ◇ Hold public meetings to provide an opportunity for formal public comment or discussion at various steps in the planning process. These meetings are held at various locations throughout the county at various times, including evenings and weekends to maximize participation by a wide range of stakeholders, including those traditionally under served.
- ◇ Sponsor webcasts of meetings and provide links for re-broadcast for those who cannot travel or work during meeting hours.
- ◇ Share online videos on various topics to interested stakeholders
- ◇ Gather information on people's perceptions, preferences, and practices via surveys and small group discussions in order to gather perspectives, insights, and opinions from the public on a single topic.



EVALUATION

The Polk TPO periodically reviews the effectiveness of its public participation program and techniques. Performance dashboards, measuring both the quantity and quality of interactions with the public, are used to modify methods as appropriate in order to maximize effectiveness. The TPO also researches new modes of communication and evaluates the effectiveness of adding these technologies to the Public Participation Plan.

SURVEYS, POLLS, & PUBLIC COMMENTS

Surveys, polls and public comments provide important feedback on a variety of topics, including the readability of information distributed; usefulness of public meetings or events; usefulness of techniques utilized, etc. Materials and opportunities for comment are developed to evaluate the effectiveness of TPO plans, processes, and the goals for public involvement.



Examples of the types of surveys that can be utilized are listed below:

- ◇ During comment periods, calls and emails are gathered by staff. Comments can be made on the website via Community Remarks to provide the public an easy way to submit comments or register support/opposition to a plan or project. Polling questions and surveys are handed out at public meetings to determine if questions were answered adequately.
- ◇ After a major planning activity, staff ask for comments/questions from those who attended a meeting. This helps the TPO to judge how the information provided was accepted and to identify any barriers to participation or any opportunities for improvement.

OUTREACH TOOLS

Likes, shares, and click-through dashboards for social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube will be utilized in order to measure performance of these tools and their effectiveness.

The number of attendees for meetings will be tracked, as well as the surveys results of the percent of those who found the meeting helpful.

A database of members of the Adviser Network (containing census data) will allow us to ensure that group membership continues to reflect the diversity of the community.

STAFF DEBRIEFINGS

All events shall be reviewed and suggestions made as to new strategies or improvements to the process and tools used.

FEDERAL COMPLIANCE

The Polk TPO complies with the following federal laws:

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) is landmark civil rights legislation ensuring equal opportunity for people with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, transportation, state and local government services and communications. The ADA requires coordinating with disabled communities in the development and improvement of transportation services. Individuals with disabilities must also be able to access the sites where public involvement activities occur as well as the information presented. www.ada.gov

TITLE VI OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based upon race, color or national origin. Specifically, 42 U.S.C. §2000d states that “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.” www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/coord/titlevi.php

EXECUTIVE ORDER 12898 - ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Executive Order (EO) 12898: Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority and Low Income Populations – The EO reinforced the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and focused federal attention on the environmental and human health conditions in minority and low income communities. Further, recent guidance issued by FHWA and FTA emphasizes the importance of considering and addressing environmental justice in all phases of the transportation planning process. Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income. Along the same lines, transportation equity seeks to ensure that the needs of all communities, particularly low-income and minority communities are addressed in transportation policy and the transportation planning process. Additionally, transportation investments should work to ensure that both the benefits and impacts are distributed fairly. www.archives.gov/federal-register/executive-orders/1994.html#12898

EXECUTIVE ORDER 13166 - LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

People with limited English proficiency are those with a primary or home language other than English. Due to their limited English skills, they must communicate in that primary language if they are to have an equal opportunity to participate effectively in or benefit from any aid, service, or benefit in federally funded programs and activities. EO 13166 requires any agency that receives federal funds to make their activities accessible to non-English speaking individuals.

Polk County is a diverse community that includes a wide array of ethnic communities and people, some with limited English proficiency. The Polk TPO has a plan for outreach and involvement with LEP individuals. This plan includes an analysis to determine language needs of the targeted population. It also includes strategies for announcing meetings, document translation, oral communication, and other communication needs during the regional transportation planning process. www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/13166.php

ACRONYM GLOSSARY

AADT	Annual Average Daily Traffic
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADT	Average Daily Traffic
ATMS	Advanced Traffic Management System
AZBA	Airport Zoning Board of Adjustment
BACS	Bay Area Commuter Choices
BEBR	Bureau of Economic & Business Research
CAA	Clean Air Act
CAC	Citizen's Advisory Committee
CFRPC	Central Florida Regional Planning Council
CIA	Community Impact Assessment
CIP	Capital Improvement Program
CMAQ	Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality
CMS	Congestion Management System
CRA	Community Redevelopment Agencies
CRMPOA	Central Florida Metropolitan Planning Organization Alliance
CTC	Community Transportation Coordinator
CTD	Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged
CUTR	Center for Urban Transportation Research
CUTS	Consolidated Urban Transportation Systems
DO	Development Order
DRI	Development of Regional Impact
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ETDM	Efficient Transportation Decision Making
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FDOT	Florida Department of Transportation
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FSUTMS	Florida Standard Urban Transportation Model Structure
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
FY	Fiscal Year
GIS	Geographic Information System
GOP	Goals, Objectives, & Policies
GPS	Global Positioning System
ITE	Institute of Transportation Engineers
ITS	Intelligent Transportation System
JPA	Joint Participation Agreement
JAZB	Joint Airport Zoning Board
LAMTD	Lakeland Area Mass Transit District

ACRONYM GLOSSARY, Continued

LCB	Local Coordinating Board
LOS	Level of Service
L RTP	Long Range Transportation Plan
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
MPOAC	Metropolitan Planning Organization Advisory Council
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHS	National Highway System
PD&E	Project Development & Environmental Study
PE	Preliminary Engineering
ROW	Right-of-Way
RTO	Regional Transportation Organization
SAP	Selected Area Plan
SCTPA	Sun Coast Transportation Planning Alliance
SIS	Strategic Intermodal System
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee
TAZ	Traffic Analysis Zone
TD	Transportation Disadvantaged
TDP	Transit Development Plan
TDSP	Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
TPO	Transportation Planning Organization
TMA	Transportation Management Area
TIP	Transportation Improvement Plan
UPWP	Unified Planning Work Program
WHAT	Winter Haven Area Transit





Polk Transportation Planning Organization

330 W. Church St, Drawer TS05 • Bartow, Florida 33830

(863) 534-6486

www.PolkTPO.com