

Best Practices



Summary of Key Findings and Best Practices



Basic Tenets of the MPO Process

- All MPOs must adhere to the same set of Federal laws and regulatory guidelines.
- Each MPO is responsible for a different geographic area with differing state and local governmental structures and different demographics.
- Each MPO has developed a slightly different approach to the way in which it satisfies the Federal regulations.



Focus of the Hampton Roads MPO Best Practices Study

- Identify best practices being used by other MPOs that could potentially be used to improve the metropolitan planning process in the Hampton Roads region.



Best Practices Summary

- Identify and Interview 37 Peer MPOs
- Discuss Organization Issues / Best Practices
 - Board Composition
 - Interaction of Boards with Committees
 - Weighted Voting Procedures / Proxy Voting
- Discuss Public Participation Best Practices
 - Notification and Outreach Formats
 - Reaching Underserved Communities
 - Performance Measures



Use of Auxiliary/Advisory Groups

- Standard practice – one or more focused committees report to a technical committee
- Wide variety of group focus
 - Citizens; Freight; Transit; Aesthetics; Sustainability; Legislative; Bicycle/Pedestrian; Environmental Justice; Mobility Limited



Use of Auxiliary/Advisory Groups

- **Best or Innovative practices:**
 - Advisory committee has voting or non-voting member on technical or policy boards
 - Wide open format for freight working group with major private sector involvement
 - Committees serviced by MPO staff with expertise or interest in the technical area (bike/ped, freight)



Weighted Voting

- The use of weighted voting is an independent decision made by each MPO (local preferences and desires dictate)
- A majority of the peer MPOs surveyed (70%) do not use weighted voting
- Several MPOs similar to HRMPO (e.g., those who are part of a larger PDC or COG) use weighted voting



Weighted Voting Practices

- No standard or best practices defined:
 - Every vote is a weighted vote
 - Weighted voting only on select issues
 - Weighted voting option allowed but seldom if ever used
 - Weighted voting can be requested by any voting member of the policy committee



Informal Board / Staff Interaction

- **Standard practices:**
 - Annual board/staff off-site retreat
 - Annual luncheon/dinner event
- **Innovative practices:**
 - Staff interaction with policy and technical boards on agendas, issue resolution, etc.
 - Small staff/board group luncheons
 - Orientation/training meeting for new board members



Performance Metrics for MPO

- No standard/consistent practice
- Metrics focused on LRTP performance measures such as VMT, congestion, etc.
- Reliance on State DOT or transit agency performance measures
- Emphasis on creating and adhering to time schedules and budgets for work products



Public Engagement Strategies

- Conformance by MPOs with Federal reviewer perspectives on the public participation process is becoming increasingly challenging
- Several (8-10) peer MPOs have received notices of recommended changes with respect to public participation activities following their most recent Federal recertification reviews
- Few (2-3) peer MPOs have received corrective action citations, typically only one or two CAs



Resources for Group Identification

- **Standard practices:**
 - U.S. Census data
 - InfoUSA and Woods & Poole employment data
 - State records on TANF and free/reduced price meal programs
 - Public information surveys



Resources for Group Identification

- **Best and innovative practices:**
 - Cooperative agreements with transit operators, municipal/county governments and other agencies
 - MPO as the “go-to” agency for spatial datasets
 - Solicit input from different non-technical stakeholders to obtain perspectives and ideas on projects and MPO direction



Standard Public Meeting Practices

- Advertised meetings with variable notification:
 - Three-week to 45 days for major meetings
 - 14 days for minor TIP actions
- Meetings at times and locations viewed as accessible, especially by transit modes
- Solicitation of written and oral comments and addresses for follow-up comments
- Notifications in local newspapers (including non-English periodicals), mass e-mail distribution, radio and TV advertisements



Best Public Meeting Practices

- Staggered meeting notices (at four weeks and again at two weeks)
- Translated materials
- Interpreters at every major meeting
- Track how participants heard about meeting
- Sharing of contact databases with other public agencies



Best Public Meeting Practices

- Dedicated outreach program for MPO staff to go to local public events
- Full-page ads in large circulation newspapers, mass postcard distributions to people in proximity (1/2 mile) of a project
- Reliance on member governments to participate in distribution of meeting notices



Best Public Meeting Practices

- Sign-in sheets to note where participant first heard about the meeting
- Multiple meeting series (time and place) to ensure geographic extent
- Televised meetings (with audience call-in)
- Selection of meeting venues with input from regional citizen's advisory committee



Public Engagement Strategies

- Increasing Cooperation with Member Agencies
- Increasing Interaction with Other “Non-Traditional” Agencies and Community Groups
- Key Concepts...
 - Increasing Use of Computer Technology
 - Topical Newsletters (Not “Here’s What We Did”)
 - Go to the People (Mall Displays, Events, Kiosks)
 - Go to where the People are



Standard Visualization Practices

- GIS mapping and cartographic tools to express data in spatial formats
- Dissemination of information using newsletters or web-based content
- Microsimulation packages
- Photographic renderings/montages



Visualization Best Practices

- Video compositions, webcasting, and streaming video; video “road show”
- Hands-on techniques such as the Strings-and-Ribbons game
- Three-dimensional renderings
- MPO “cookbook” format guidebook



Standard Outreach to Traditionally Underserved Populations

- Advertise in minority-oriented periodicals and newspapers
- Maintain e-mail databases of minority, elderly, low-income, and other groups
- Advertising in English-text publications
- Creating in-house newsletters



Innovative/Best Practice Outreach to Traditionally Underserved Populations

- Instant website translation to other languages
- “Public Involvement Corps” Speaker’s Bureau
- Paid participation in MPO focus groups
- EJ advisory committee input to MPO staff
- Hire outside Public Involvement specialist
- MPO staff hiring of one or more public information specialists



Characteristics of a Successful Public Participation Process

- Demonstrate a true commitment to involving all communities in the region in the process.
- Use of well-qualified staff with backgrounds in social work, community outreach, and other non-technical perspectives.
- Build a process both from the top down and from the bottom up.



Three Major “Best Practice” Public Involvement Strategies

- “...And Justice for All” – Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) (Philadelphia, PA)
- Community Characteristics Program – Miami-Dade MPO (Miami, FL)
- “Strings and Ribbons” – Volusia County MPO (Daytona Beach, FL)



MPO Core Functions

- Establish a setting where fair and impartial debate and discussion can take place
- Evaluate transportation alternatives in an unbiased and objective fashion
- Maintain a fiscally constrained, multimodal LRTP
- Develop a financially constrained TIP
- Involve the public – residents and key affected sub groups – in the regional planning process



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