

APPENDIX A: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN



Hampton Roads Transit:
Public Participation Plan

Updated:
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Contents

1	HRT Commitment to Public Involvement and Non-Discrimination	1
2	The Purpose of the Public Participation Plan	2
2.1	Public Participation Plan Goals	2
2.2	Definitions	2
3	HRT’s Public Participation Process	5
3.1	Public Involvement on Fare and Service Changes	5
3.2	Public Notice on Program of Projects	6
3.3	Public Hearings for Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act	6
3.4	Public Notice on DBE Program and Goals	6
4	Target Audiences	8
4.1	HRT’s Stakeholders	8
4.2	Limited English Proficient Customers	9
5	Public Communication and Outreach Tools	10
5.1	Customer Feedback	10
5.2	Customer Alerts	11
5.3	Print and electronic media	11
5.4	Partnerships with Community-Based Organizations	11
5.5	Participation in local community events	11
5.6	School Outreach	11
5.7	Transit Riders Advisory and Paratransit Advisory Committees	12
5.8	Meet & Greet/ Open House	12
5.9	Surveys	12
5.10	Public Meetings and Hearings	13

1 HRT Commitment to Public Involvement and Non-Discrimination

HRT is committed to informing and involving the public in the planning and delivery of public transportation services in the region. HRT will diligently work to overcome obstacles that may hinder effective public involvement. Public information and experiences are consistently used to update its plans to improve public participation.

HRT takes public involvement seriously and will continuously work to add new components to all public involvement efforts in order to facilitate achieving public participation goals or to comply with amended laws or regulations relative to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 states that “no person in the United States shall, on the ground 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.”

Subsequent laws and Presidential Executive Orders further prohibit discrimination based on handicap, sex, age, or income status. In accordance with these laws and regulations, HRT assures that no person shall, on the basis of race, color, national origin, handicap, sex, age, or income status, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be otherwise subject to discrimination under any program or activity.

Pursuant to Federal Transportation Administration Title VI regulatory guidance Circular FTA C4702.1B, “Every Title VI program shall include an outreach plan to engage minority and limited English proficient populations, as well as a summary of outreach efforts made since the last Title VI Program submission. A recipient’s targeted public participation plan for minority populations may be part of efforts that extend more broadly to include other constituencies that are traditionally underserved, such as people with disabilities, low-income populations, and others”.

To meet these requirements, this public participation plan will provide detailed information how HRT complies with Title VI objectives listed as follows:

- Ensure the level and quality of public transportation service is provided in a nondiscriminatory manner.
- Promote full and fair participation in public transportation decision-making without regard to race, color, or national origin.
- Ensure meaningful access to transit-related programs and activities by persons with limited English proficiency.

2 The Purpose of the Public Participation Plan

The public participation plan describes the overall goals, public involvement strategy and outreach methods used to reach out to all members of the public. HRT also ensures meaningful outreach is extended for low-income, minority and LEP populations. HRT views public involvement as a significant factor when making transportation decisions. Public involvement provides an ample mix of perspectives and value to HRT's planning decisions. Some key benefits of an established and supported Public Participation policy are as follows:

- Improved public understanding of complex public policy decisions which increases the opportunity for public consensus on planning decisions.
- Encourages proactive community involvement with HRT's planning staff.
- Demonstrates transparency in HRT's planning decisions and policies.
- Establishes meaningful relationships with underserved populations.

2.1 Public Participation Plan Goals

- Inform the public about HRT services and initiatives.
- Maintain consistent and complete transparency with the public.
- Allow the plan to facilitate a responsive and accountable relationship with the ridership community.
- Increase public awareness and actively involve the public in transit service planning decisions and delivery.
- Proactively promote the open exchange of information to solicit public feedback that will identify how proposed changes to service will affect our customers in a way that may not be readily apparent to HRT staff.
- Comply with federal and state laws and regulations.

2.2 Definitions

The following definitions are used within the HRT Public Participation Plan.

Discrimination: Refers to any action or inaction, whether intentional or unintentional, in any program or activity of a Federal aid recipient, sub-recipient, or contractor that results in disparate treatment, disparate impact or perpetuating the effects of prior discrimination based on race, color, or national origin.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) Population: Refers to persons for whom English is not their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English. It includes people who reported to the U.S. Census that they speak English less than very well, not well, or not at all.

Low-Income Population: Refers to any readily identifiable group of low-income persons who live in geographic proximity, and, if circumstances warrant, geographically dispersed/transient persons (such as migrant workers or Native Americans) who will be similarly affected by a proposed FTA program, policy or activity.

Minority Persons include the following:

- American Indian and Alaska Native, which refers to people having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintain tribal affiliation or community attachment.
- Asian, which refers to people having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- Black or African American, which refers to people having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.
- Hispanic or Latino, which includes persons of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, which refers to people having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

Minority Population: Means any readily identifiable group of minority persons who live in geographic proximity and, if circumstances warrant, geographically dispersed/transient populations (such as migrant workers or Native Americans) who will be similarly affected by a proposed DOT program, policy, or activity.

Outreach: An effort by an organization to educate, inform, to engage and seek input from other organizations, groups, specific audiences or the general public.

Outreach Methods: Methods that identify and invite target audiences and stakeholders to participate in a public participation opportunity.

Provider of Fixed Route/Guideway Public Transportation (or “Transit Provider”): Means any entity that operates public transportation service and includes States, local and regional entities, and public and private entities.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN
JANUARY 2017

Public Transportation: Means regular, continuing shared-ride surface transportation services that are open to the general public or open to a segment of the general public defined by age, disability, or low income: and does not include Amtrak, intercity bus service, charter bus service, school bus service, sightseeing service, courtesy shuttle service for patrons for one or more specific establishments, or intra-terminal or intra-facility shuttle. Public transportation includes buses, subways, light rail commuter rail, monorail, passenger ferry boats, trolleys, inclined railways, people movers, and vans. Public transportation can be either fixed route or demand response service.

Public Input: Participation methods that seek community feedback on a policy, project, program or activity. A response is required from the public.

Public Participation: Any process that seeks to involve the public in decision-making processes. Public participation is an umbrella term that describes methods including: public information, education, outreach, input, involvement, collaboration and engagement.

Public Participation Plan: A tailored plan that describes how HRT achieves public involvement, information, education, participation and/or outreach methods.

Service Area: Refers either to the geographic area in which a transit agency is authorized by its charter to provide service to the public, or to the planning area of a State Department of Transportation or Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Target Audience: Low income, minority and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations.

Title VI Program: Refers to a document developed by a FTA recipient (in this instance, HRT) to demonstrate how the recipient is complying with Title VI requirements. Direct and primary recipients must submit their Title VI Programs to FTA every three years. The Title VI Program must be approved by the recipient's board of directors or appropriate governing entity or official(s) responsible for policy decisions prior to submission to FTA. For State DOTs, the appropriate governing entity is the State's Secretary of Transportation or equivalent.

3 HRT's Public Participation Process

HRT adheres to a proactive public participation process. All public involvement activities must be functional for HRT decisions and must be meaningful to the public. HRT benefits from public involvement by engaging the public at the earliest project stages from the development of the purpose and need through project implementation. HRT's public involvement activities increases public awareness and give the public an active voice in planning decisions. HRT's public participation process includes the following steps:

- Step 1** ➔ Outline a public participation plan at the beginning of key HRT planning projects.
- Step 2** ➔ Previously established mailing and email lists are identified.
- Step 3** ➔ Update existing mailing and email lists; new lists are created.
- Step 4** ➔ All final project documentation is archived with HRT's records management department throughout the life of the project.
- Step 5** ➔ Based on a project's milestones and requirements, a public involvement timeline is created.
 - The public involvement timeline outlines each activity of the project's outreach efforts.
- Step 6** ➔ The effectiveness of the public participation plan is periodically assessed throughout the life of the project, to determine if the public involvement objectives were achieved.
 - The public participation strategy is assessed at different stages of a project to determine if the practices were effective in reaching each of the expected populations and, equally important, whether the events created opportunities for meaningful involvement.
 - HRT will change the public participation strategy to improve future performance in response to the assessment.

3.1 Public Involvement on Fare and Service Changes

Federal Transit Administration, (FTA) regulations requires, "a locally developed process to consider public comment before raising a fare or carrying out a major reduction in transportation service"¹ as defined by HRT's Title VI Policy.

HRT uses a broad range of outreach tools documented in this plan to serve this requirement, including newsletters, on-board notices and announcements, social media (ex. Facebook posts,

¹ See U.S. Department of Transportation Circular FTA C4702.1B (2012) Chapter III-6.

Twitter), website comment forms, and open public meetings in an effort to gain public review and comment. All public comments become part of the official record.

3.2 Public Notice on Program of Projects

Each year HRT is also required to provide public notice and an opportunity for holding public hearings on the agency's proposed Program of Projects. These are projects HRT intend to use federal grant funds (Section 5307) (49 U.S.C. 5323(b)). The purpose of the public notice is to give citizens, private transportation operators, and local officials an opportunity to examine the contents of the proposed program, ensure equity, and to allow comments on the proposed program.

Each year, the Grants Administration Officer at HRT complies with this requirement through the publishing of the Program of Projects in local newspapers. A formal public hearing is held and announced in a public notice if written requests are received within 30 days of the publishing of the Program of Projects.

3.3 Public Hearings for Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act

HRT will complete a full public involvement process for major capital projects requiring review and analysis under the national Environmental Policy Act. This shall include all Environmental Impacts Statements (EIS), and it may include Environmental Assessments and Categorical Exclusions in situations of public controversy or sensitivity. Each program will have an individually defined public participation plan tailored to the project needs and requirements.

3.4 Public Notice on DBE Program and Goals

The Transportation District Commission of Hampton Roads (TDCHR), the public transportation system serving the Hampton Roads metropolitan area establishes a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) utilization goal on Federal Transit Administration funded projects for each Federal Fiscal year's (FFY). The goal is derived using Virginia Department of Minority and Business Enterprise's Unified Certification program Directory, previous Fiscal year achievement, Vendor's List, and current area business consultations.

In accordance with 49 CFR Part 26.45 (g), TDCHR invites maximum public participation and solicits comments regarding the proposed goal. Further, TDCHR invites the submission of evidence and information that may support the use of mixed components of race-conscious and race-neutral measures to achieve the overall goal.

A complete description of the proposed goal is made available for public inspection for 45 days from the date of the initial notification online at www.gohrt.com. It is also made available at

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN
JANUARY 2017**

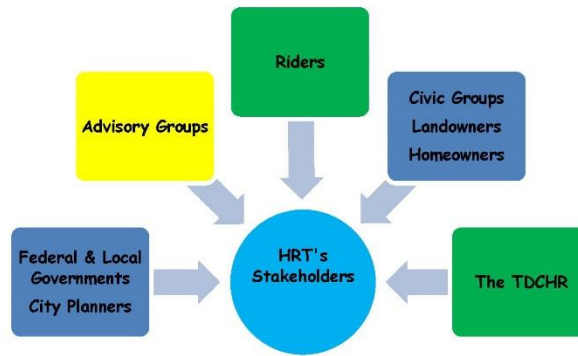
the reception desk at HRT Headquarters at 3400 Victoria Boulevard, Hampton, VA 23661 or 509 East 18th Street, Norfolk, VA 23504.

Comments on the proposed program goal are accepted after the publication of the notice. The public is advised to send all comments to the DBE/Contract Compliance Office or by email to db@hrtransit.org.

4 Target Audiences

HRT’s target audience for public involvement is its stakeholders. HRT’s stakeholders include HRT system riders, the public, area businesses, the TDCHR, and federal, state, and local governments. The public is defined as citizen advisory committees, advocacy groups, civic groups, homeowners, business owners and landowners; all whom who may be impacted by transit planning decisions. HRT works closely with the target audience on key projects and planning decisions to ensure transparent decision-making and meaningful input and consideration of public input.

In addition to broad public involvement, HRT takes care to ensure meaningful involvement among groups of people traditionally disenfranchised from the public process. This includes minority groups based on race, ethnicity, and national origin as well as low-income populations. HRT uses on-board rider surveys to identify characteristics of system riders and U.S. Census Bureau data to identify low income, minority and LEP populations in the six cities served by HRT. Through these data sources, we can more effectively target these regions and riders.



4.1 HRT’s Stakeholders

HRT stakeholder list includes but is not limited to:

- Statewide and Local Agencies and Governments
- Advocacy groups
- Community development organizations
- Civic Leagues



- Local elected officials and staff
- Business Owners
- State and local land-use planners
- Architects, archeologists, landscape architects, architectural historians, etc.
- General public
- Minorities and ethnic groups
- Low-Income groups
- Educational institutions, museums
- Historic district commissions
- The TDCHR

4.2 Limited English Proficient Customers

Pursuant to FTA guidelines “recipients shall take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to benefits, services, information, and other important portions of their programs and activities for individuals who are limited-English-proficient (LEP).”² LEP customers may reach HRT and receive route assistance by calling 757-222-6000 during business hours in their desired language. HRT uses a translation service called Certified Language Services with US based translators. The service supports 180 languages.

When there is a LEP request for a public meeting, HRT will ensure all meeting content is available for LEP customers in both print and online. LEP customers may also use the Google Translate function on gohrt.com which translates the website into their desired language. Google Translate is a web-based service provided by Google Inc. to translate written text from one language into another. The link to this site is available on www.gohrt.com.

² See U.S. Department of Transportation Circular FTA C4702.1B (2012) Chapter III-6.

5 Public Communication and Outreach Tools

Different public involvement strategies, tools, and activities are applicable in different areas. HRT may use traditional and non-traditional outreach methods. Traditional outreach may involve a public meeting or hearing. Non-traditional outreach may involve social media, pop-up meetings, interactive web-based tools, or community partnerships. Public participation efforts may also vary depending on the information offered. HRT is familiar with its service community and makes every effort to know key demographic aspects about where they work, live, what venues they may frequent, what languages they speak, and how they get their information.

For example, public involvement requirements are different in the case of a route change compared to a long-range transit planning study. The most common areas include the following:

- Daily operations
- Fare changes
- Service changes (including schedules and route changes)
- Transit development plans, corridor studies
- Capital projects
- Marketing (including advertising, public service announcements, and safety campaigns)
- Human services transportation (including transit planning for persons with disabilities, seniors, and low-income populations)

HRT uses various public involvement methods. These different outreach methods provide a broader window of opportunity for HRT to provide meaningful public input in everyday operations and activities as well as proposed changes in service, operations, or fare. Outreach methods were designed to be aligned with the public involvement goals ensuring public awareness, education and an opportunity for meaningful interactions, and public input on key planning decisions. These methods are also used to ensure compliance with Federal Transit Administration guidelines under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

5.1 Customer Feedback

HRT encourages public comment and suggestions (formal and informal). Public comments are accepted via customer service, gohrt.com, Facebook and Twitter. HRT's customer contact center receives about 75,000 calls each month. All customer feedback is entered into the customer assistance database for follow up within seven business days. HRT has a dedicated customer advocacy team for this purpose.

5.2 Customer Alerts

Customer Alerts inform the public of significant agency events such as a change in hours, route schedules, public hearings, meetings, special events, safety messages and other important information. Customer Alerts are posted at transfer centers, distributed on routes, on gohrt.com and through social media (ex. Facebook and Twitter).

“goAlerts” is a free email and text subscription service. Customers are encouraged to sign up for “goAlerts” on HRT’s homepage at www.gohrt.com. Subscribers receive real time updates on service changes and events through automated emails or text messages.

5.3 Print and electronic media

Print and electronic advertisements are used to inform the public of various changes, events and services. We use these methods mainly on buses, transfer centers, transit centers.

5.4 Partnerships with Community-Based Organizations

HRT fosters strong community partnerships by regularly engaging community based organizations for its public involvement initiatives. Civic leagues and other community based organizations can be helpful in clarifying the best outreach strategies for their constituent community. These partnerships result in increased public participation, better meeting locations and overall better meetings. HRT purposefully seeks community based organizations that serve diverse groups and have proven to be helpful in gaining public participation.

5.5 Participation in local community events

To insure community engagement, HRT actively participates in city sponsored community events. HRT collaborates in a consistent and planned manner with the region’s city planning, communications and safety offices. During these events, HRT’s public outreach team will advocate on behalf of and educate the public on the importance of public transportation. HRT distributes transit materials relative to the location during every community event.

5.6 School Outreach

The public outreach team regularly visits the region’s schools to teach and engage students about public-transportation. Students are encouraged to participate in discussions, lessons and facility tours. The topics reviewed during school outreach sessions include; how to use public transportation, the importance of transportation safety and the different modes of public transportation. An HRT bus and driver may be staged at the school. This allows the students to have an interactive experience.

5.7 Transit Riders Advisory and Paratransit Advisory Committees

The Transit Riders Advisory Committee and Paratransit Advisory Committee are subcommittees of the TDCHR Executive Committee and report to the Chair of the Executive Committee. The Paratransit Advisory Committee and the Transit Riders Advisory Committee both meet bi-monthly. The Paratransit Advisory Committee members include persons with disabilities who use regular public transportation or Paratransit services. The Transit Riders Advisory Committee members include customers who ride public transportation on a daily and/or weekly basis. Participants on both committees serve on a voluntarily basis.

Contact information for HRT staff liaisons for these committees as well meeting dates, times, and locations are listed on HRT's website at www.gohrt.com/about/governing. Meeting agendas are posted to the HRT website prior to the meeting; and meeting minutes are posted to the HRT website within two weeks after the meeting. All TRAC and PAC meetings are open to the public and visitors are invited to comment as noted on the meeting agenda.

5.8 Meet & Greet/ Open House

Meet and Greet or Open House programs allow our customers to speak with the staff face to face. The public involvement team regularly hold meet and greet sessions at transit and transfer centers, area colleges and businesses.

The Open House session provides an interactive forum for public involvement. Open House sessions can be helpful in major planning projects because it allows an opportunity for the public to review visual aids and speak one on one with HRT representatives about the project. The Virginia Beach Transit Extension open house is a good example of a successful Open House session would be). The public was able to ask specific questions tailored to their personal experiences or concerns. Participants also had an opportunity to discuss the project with HRT staff and have their questions answered quickly. The Open House session enabled HRT to inform the public on the project's status.

5.9 Surveys

HRT conducts surveys on a regular basis. The purpose of the survey is to help the agency understand ridership demographics, trip characteristics, and quality of service it delivers. The survey information also helps us determine where improvements or changes are required. Surveys are conducted on-line, on-board HRT services, and at HRT transit centers.

5.10 Public Meetings and Hearings

A public meeting is an event organized by the agency at a specific date, time, and location. The public meeting provides a structured environment for the public to learn about upcoming changes, personally interact with the agency, and give input on the proposed changes. Public meetings may include, but are not limited to, traditional settings, open houses, workshops, charettes, small group meetings, or citizen advisory committee meetings.

A public hearing is a formalized public meeting where the public's input may be included in the decision-making process.

HRT uses the "Hampton Roads Transit Policies and Procedures - Public Hearings and Meetings" PD-107, adopted 8-23-2013 for all public meetings and public hearings.

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