



Public Participation Plan

The Adirondack / Glens Falls Transportation Council (A/GFTC) is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Planning and Programming Area that includes all of Warren County, all of Washington County, and the Town of Moreau and Village of South Glens Falls in northern Saratoga County. A/GFTC is responsible for facilitating a regional transportation planning and programming process that is continuing, cooperative and comprehensive for all area projects and activities eligible for funding through the Federal Highway and Federal Transit Administrations. The active participation of the public and community as a whole, in addition to area elected officials and municipal professionals, is necessary in order for the transportation planning process to be effective.

A/GFTC is committed to facilitating meaningful public participation. This document will outline a standard policy for encouraging public input and ensuring access to major A/GFTC activities and products.

A. Meetings, Appearances and Access to Staff

A/GFTC holds meetings that allow frequent access to the planning process, including Technical Advisory Committee meetings (generally every six to eight weeks) and two to three Policy Committee meetings annually. These meetings are open to the public and always held in accessible locations. Hearing- or sight-impaired or limited English-speaking individuals will be provided with assistance if A/GFTC is given timely advance notification. All meetings are announced at least one week prior to the event and are open to the public. Time is allotted on all Technical Advisory and Policy Committee meeting agendas for visitors issues. Although rare, any special meetings of these committees outside of those that are regularly scheduled will be advertised and conducted under the same set of procedures.

Aside from regular committee meetings, the Council periodically engages in specific planning studies that require involvement of individuals that may have a direct personal or professional stake in the outcome of the study. Public input is critical during these studies to ensure that a wide variety of issues and alternatives are identified and addressed. Outreach efforts need to be appropriately tailored to community interests in order to generate involvement. In the past, A/GFTC has advertised local planning initiatives in smaller local print publications and by posting notices at community gathering points such as banks, churches, restaurants, stores, and recreational facilities. The Council also strives to hold public meetings at locations and times that are accessible and convenient to local stakeholders, often in conjunction with recurring

municipal meetings to maximize outreach. Non-traditional meeting venues will also be considered provided that those locations are universally accessible.

Public appearances do not necessarily have to be tied to a specific project or initiative. A/GFTC staff has been and will continue to be present at different locations throughout the year such as local commercial centers, recreational areas, libraries, community expos and other locations or functions that could generate interaction between staff and the public. Informational materials, draft documents and comment forms are provided to encourage feedback and to communicate the significance of local involvement in the planning process. Public appearances are announced in advance with information on dates, times, and locations.

The A/GFTC office is located in downtown Glens Falls within the handicap-accessible Empire Theater Plaza, near many other services and destinations and accessible by public transit. Staff members are available to discuss issues and concerns with members of the public. Response to public requests and inquiries is given a high priority.

B. Access to Planning Documents

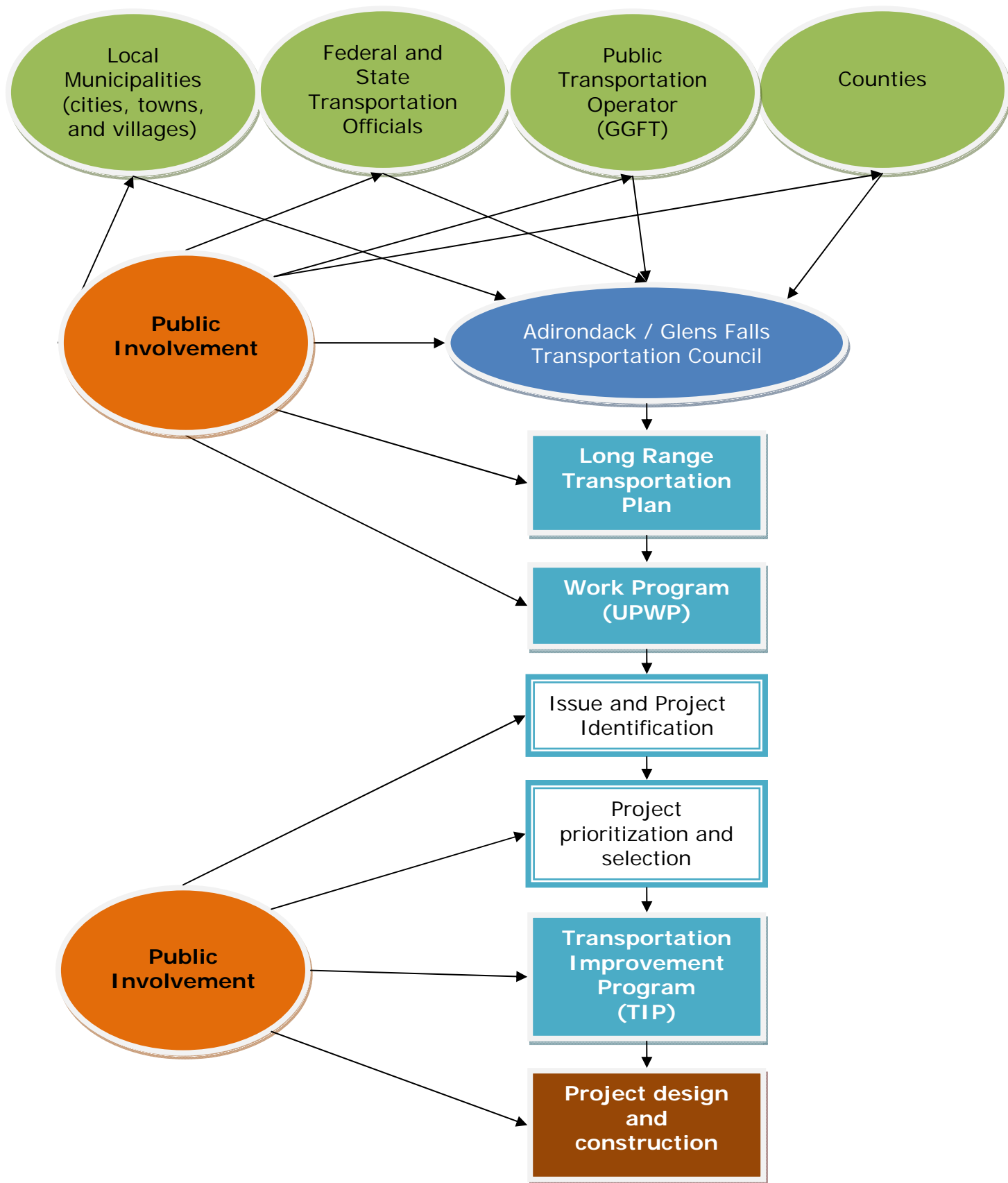
The core documents produced by A/GFTC that serve to govern the Council's programs and policies in accordance with the Final Metropolitan Planning Rule are the *Long Range Plan*, the *Transportation Improvement Program*, and the *Unified Planning Work Program*.

- The *Long Range Plan* (LRP) establishes a program of both short- and long-term goals and recommendations for a planning horizon of 20-25 years, and is designed to facilitate the development of an integrated and efficient intermodal transportation system. The LRP is updated once every four years; the current LRP for A/GFTC is *2035 Ahead*.
- The *Transportation Improvement Program* (TIP) is a listing of capital surface transportation projects that are selected and programmed to receive federal funding. The TIP is updated every two years and represents a prioritized listing of projects intended to address the challenges and opportunities listed in the LRP.
- The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) is the annual work program that identifies the transportation planning and programming activities that are to be undertaken by the staff in support of the Council during the current State Fiscal Year(s). The UPWP coordinates annual tasks that the MPO hopes to accomplish in support of the LRP through the use of FHWA and FTA funding in addition to local and state contributions.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the major products of the MPO process and the development of capital projects, as well as the numerous opportunities for public involvement that are available throughout that process.

In addition to the core documents, A/GFTC will typically engage in 1-3 individual projects per year that are listed in that year's UPWP as distinct tasks. The reports that result from the execution of those tasks are considered to be major planning studies.

Figure 1- Public Involvement Opportunities in the MPO Process



The following requirements have been established by A/GFTC and will be followed during the production of the Long Range Plan, TIP, UPWP, and major planning studies:

1. Core documents and major planning studies are developed in consultation with the public and affected local, State, and municipal planning, economic development, and environmental organizations.
2. Draft versions of all MPO core documents and major planning studies will be made available to the public for review and comment for a period of at least thirty days.
3. Legal notices will accompany public comment periods for draft core documents. Copies of those draft core documents are to be made available at local municipal offices and public libraries. Those locations are listed on the A/GFTC website when the documents are distributed.
4. Copies of documents will be made available to individuals with disabilities upon request by mail or direct consultation by appointment as is reasonable and warranted.
5. All draft documents are available on A/GFTC's website. The site features links to comment modules for each document.
6. All public comments received are documented and considered by A/GFTC staff and the TAC for incorporation into each final document as is warranted and appropriate prior to the adoption of final documents by the Policy Committee.
7. Major comments that generate significant revisions between publically-distributed draft documents and final documents will be summarized and included as appendices to those documents.

Throughout any given program year, A/GFTC staff utilizes consultant contracts to facilitate smaller-scale planning and engineering assistance to participating member municipalities. These efforts are typically less time intensive than conventional planning studies and are targeted towards addressing a local, rather than a regional issue, transportation issue. The resulting reports are generally not adopted by Policy Committee. A process similar to the one noted above for core documents and major planning studies will be followed for these technical assistance contracts and other A/GFTC activities that result in a written report, hereby referenced collectively as technical reports.

1. Technical reports are developed in consultation with the public and affected local, State, and municipal planning, economic development, and environmental organizations.
2. Prior to finalizing the documents, draft versions of technical reports will be posted online at the A/GFTC website for public review for a period of fourteen days.
3. Copies of draft documents will be made available to individuals with disabilities upon request by mail or direct consultation by appointment as is reasonable and warranted.
4. All public comments received are documented and considered by A/GFTC staff and the TAC for incorporation into each final document as is warranted and appropriate.

5. Major comments that generate significant revisions between publically-distributed draft documents and final documents will be summarized and included as appendices to those documents.

C. Communications

A/GFTC Website

The A/GFTC website (www.agftc.org) was developed in 2001 with the goal of facilitating public involvement as a high priority. Draft documents, final publications, meeting announcements, agendas and meeting minutes are all available for review and comment. A/GFTC requires consultants to provide electronic copies of all documents produced for the Council to facilitate online viewing by and email distribution to interested parties. A separate link to contact staff directly is easily accessed from the home page, and all draft documents include an electronic comment form that generates an e-mail message to A/GFTC staff at the request of the user (the site also contains phone, fax, and mailing contact information for A/GFTC staff). The website has become the principal mode for the sharing and distribution of documents. Although the site is an effective tool for posting news on recent staff activities and publishing documents and announcements, utilization of the site by the public to submit comments and suggestions is infrequent.

Social Media

A/GFTC has a dedicated organizational Facebook page and Twitter account that can be used to distribute project development updates and meeting announcements and to post draft documents. The inherent advantages of these platforms is that they allow for immediate public interaction and entail minimal staff effort. However, the effective range is limited to enrollees and their online connections. Staff will continue to use these platforms as a supplement to the website, monitor emerging online interaction platform trends and adjust outreach activities accordingly.

Conventional media (mailing, print, radio, and television)

Given the widespread availability and usage of online information and social interaction sites, A/GFTC has become less reliant upon conventional media. Staff has determined that mass circulation of printed materials is generally costly, consumptive, and inefficient. Printed materials are still deployed on a limited basis and are individually available upon request. A/GFTC periodically conducts targeted mailings and surveys via conventional mail, and mail remains the primary means to communicate funding and programming opportunities to A/GFTC member municipalities.

Print media coverage of A/GFTC activities from daily and weekly publications has been poor. Press releases often do not generate the desired responses; many A/GFTC planning activities, regardless of scale, go largely unreported. Advertising in print media has also been determined by staff to be of high cost and low yield. A/GFTC will continue to purchase legal notices to announce public comment periods for draft core documents. Staff will also continue to send out press releases regarding ongoing planning efforts and related public workshops

Utilization of local radio stations has proven to yield mixed results for A/GFTC. Targeted communications to local stations regarding specific ongoing planning studies have generated favorable responses and occasional on-air interview opportunities. However, radio advertising has not proven to be a cost-effective means of notification regarding A/GFTC activities.

Television coverage opportunities for A/GFTC are limited. The A/GFTC area is generally considered to be part of the larger Albany-Schenectady-Troy media market; most network coverage is centered around the greater Capital District. Coverage from Look TV, an independent station, and YNN, a 24-hour cable local news network, has been fair, with occasional responses to press releases resulting in on-air interview opportunities as well as televised meeting reports. Staff has invested no money directed towards TV advertising, but will continue to notify TV stations of ongoing events via press release.

D. Summary of Action Items

Public involvement is critical to the transportation planning process for several reasons, including broadening the array of issues that can be identified to maximize responsiveness to public issues and concerns, increasing the sense of ownership and influence on a project or initiative, facilitating public consensus, and enhanced public awareness. Providing avenues for public access to the planning process at every practical opportunity is essential, but the participating public must also know their comments and suggestions will be taken seriously. A/GFTC will continue to implement the following procedures to maximize meaningful and ongoing public participation:

Meetings, Appearances and Access to Staff

- A. All A/GFTC Technical Advisory Committee and Policy Committee meetings are open to the public and held in accessible locations.
- B. Advance notification will be given for planned public appearances.
- C. A/GFTC will continue to staff a professional office in an accessible location.
- D. Staff is available to the public during office hours or by appointment if necessary.
- E. Responsiveness to public inquiries will be given top priority.

Access to Planning Documents

- A. Core documents and major planning studies will be:
 1. produced in consultation with the public as well as affected public and regional agencies.
 2. made available in draft form online and individually upon request for a public comment period of no less than 30 days, with public comment periods advertised in local media. Copies of draft core documents will also be made available at local municipal offices and libraries during the public comment periods.
 3. finalized via adoption by the Policy Committee after consideration and documentation of any substantive public comments submitted and received during the public comment periods.

- B. Technical reports will be:
 - 1. produced in consultation with the public as well as affected public and regional agencies.
 - 2. made available in draft form online for a period of 14 days.
 - 3. finalized by the Technical Advisory Committee after consideration and documentation of any substantive public comments submitted and received during the public comment periods.

Communications

- A. The A/GFTC website will be the primary means of outgoing communication. Draft and final documents, meeting announcements and updates of ongoing staff and consultant activities will continue to be posted.
- B. Social media sites will be maintained and used to supplement website postings. Postings on these sites are to:
 - 1. provide public notification of scheduled meetings and appearances.
 - 2. provide public notification of the availability of draft documents and public comment periods.
 - 3. provide alternative means for public comment and questions.
- C. Legal notices will be purchased to announce public comment periods for and the availability of draft core documents.
- D. Press releases will be used to announce:
 - 1. public meetings associated with major planning studies.
 - 2. public comment periods for and the availability of draft core documents.
- E. Targeted surveys, mailings, and public postings will be used to publicize and generate public comment on ongoing major planning studies and technical reports as is warranted by the scale of the effort.

A/GFTC will continue to monitor meeting attendance, public comments, web inquiries, and general feedback as a means of improving the Council's outreach efforts.