

# A/GFTC Public Participation Plan

## I. Introduction

The Adirondack / Glens Falls Transportation Council (A/GFTC) is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Warren County, 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 projects and activities eligible for funding through the Federal Highway and Federal Transit Administrations. The active participation of the public, in addition to area elected officials and municipal professionals, is necessary for the transportation planning process to be effective.

A/GFTC is committed to facilitating meaningful public participation. Although the MPO is based out of the Glens Falls urbanized area, much of the surrounding A/GFTC planning region is rural. As such, the scope of A/GFTC planning products varies widely based on context. Therefore, the success of this public participation plan cannot be measured simply by the number of meeting attendees or hits to a website. Instead, a successful public outreach effort will:

- Provide timely information to the community or region
- Actively target the participation and input of stakeholders
- Take equity into account at all levels of the process
- Utilize relevant communication techniques based on the context of the specific project
- Go above and beyond minimum requirements

With these measures of success in mind, the policies and procedures outlined herein are intended to provide a framework for successful public participation for A/GFTC products and projects.

### A. *Organizational Structure*

The Adirondack/Glens Falls Transportation Council consists of two principal committees and planning staff. Local and regional transportation issues are considered through the A/GFTC committee framework. Transportation policies, programs, and projects are developed and prioritized for the area's highway, bridge, and public transportation facilities. The Council provides opportunities for public involvement in this transportation decision-making process through public notices, publicly accessible meetings, and access to meeting minutes on a timely and continuous basis. See section III.7 for details on public meeting procedures.

## 1. Policy Committee

The Policy Committee is responsible for reviewing and approving all A/GFTC planning activities and documents, including the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), and the Long Range Plan (LRP). Policy Committee voting membership includes:

- Chairpersons of the Boards of Supervisors of Warren, Washington and Saratoga Counties
- Mayors of the City of Glens Falls and the Villages of South Glens Falls, Fort Edward, Hudson Falls, and Lake George
- Supervisors of the Towns of Moreau, Fort Edward, Kingsbury, Queensbury, and Lake George
- One rural supervisor from Warren County and one from Washington County
- The Chairman of the Lake Champlain/Lake George Regional Planning Board
- The Commissioner of The New York State Department of Transportation
- The Executive Director of the New York State Thruway Authority

In addition, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Greater Glens Falls Transit (GGFT) serve as advisory members to the Council.

Meetings of the Policy Committee are held twice a year, usually in February and October. Decisions by the Policy Committee are made on the basis of unanimity of affected parties. Quorum for the Policy Committee is achieved with the attendance of at least one elected county-level representative (or a designated alternate) from Warren, Washington, and Saratoga Counties as well as New York State Department of Transportation Region 1. If quorum is not attained, no votes will be held and a subsequent special meeting of the Policy Committee will be scheduled.

## 2. Planning Committee

The **Planning Committee** serves as the recommending body to the Policy Committee. It reviews all major documents and actions in advance of Policy Committee consideration and is responsible for oversight of ongoing staff activities. The Planning Committee is comprised of local highway superintendents, planning officials, other representatives from the municipalities that vote on the Policy Committee, and GGFT.

Meetings of the Planning Committee are held five to six times a year, usually in January, April, June, September, and December. Decisions by the Planning Committee are made on the basis of unanimity of affected parties. Quorum for the Planning Committee is achieved with the attendance of at least one representative (or a designated alternate) from Warren, Washington, and Saratoga Counties as well as New York State Department of Transportation Region 1. If quorum is not attained, no votes will be held and a subsequent special meeting of the Planning Committee will be scheduled.

### **3. A/GFTC Staff**

A/GFTC is staffed by a Transportation Planning Director and a Senior Transportation Planner. Staff members are available via email, phone, or in person (by appointment only) to discuss issues and concerns with members of the public. Response to public requests and inquiries is given a high priority. The A/GFTC office is located in downtown Glens Falls within the handicap-accessible Empire Theatre Plaza, which is accessible by public transit.

#### **B. Core Documents**

The core documents produced by A/GFTC that govern the Council's programs and policies 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 five years.
- 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.

## **II. Federal Requirements**

### **A. FAST Act**

The FAST Act contains requirements for public participation in MPO activities. These requirements are found in 23 USC Section 134 (i) and 23 CFR Part 450.316. The public participation plan must be developed in consultation with interested parties and must address the following elements:

- Provide adequate public notice of public participation activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points, including a reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposed LRP and the TIP;
- Provide timely notice and reasonable access to information about transportation issues and processes;
- Employ visualization techniques to describe the LRP and TIP;
- Make public information (technical information and meeting notices) available in electronically accessible formats

- Hold any public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times;
- Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received during the development of the LRP and the TIP;
- Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households, who may face challenges accessing employment and other services;
- Provide an additional opportunity for public comment, if the final LRP or TIP differs significantly from the version that was made available for public comment by the MPO and raises new material issues that interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen from the public involvement efforts;
- Coordinate with the statewide transportation planning public involvement and consultation processes; and
- Periodically review the effectiveness of the procedures and strategies contained in the participation plan to ensure a full and open participation process.

## **B. Other Requirements**

In addition to the FAST Act, there are a number of other requirements which relate to public participation, including:

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice)
- Executive Order 13166 (Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency)
- The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

To address these requirements, A/GFTC has enacted the following policies:

### **1. Translation/ASL Services.**

For in-person and online meetings, translation/interpretation services, including American Sign Language (ASL), or other auxiliary services are available upon request with notice to A/GFTC at least 10 days prior to the meeting. For meetings streamed online, closed-captioning services are also available directly through the streaming platform.

### **2. Access to meeting locations.**

All in-person meetings hosted by A/GFTC are held in locations that are accessible to persons with mobility limitations. Where feasible, locations with access to transit service provided by GGFT are given priority.

### **3. ADA Accessible Website**

A/GFTC makes every effort to utilize best practices for web design and document preparation to facilitate the use of screen reader technology.

### III. General and Ongoing Outreach

#### A. Public Outreach, Notice, and Comment Periods

##### 1. Core Documents

The LRP, TIP, and UPWP are developed in consultation with the public and affected local, State, and municipal planning, economic development, and environmental organizations. Once the draft documents are available, the following policies apply:

- **Public comment period duration:** Draft versions of all MPO core documents will be made available to the public for review and comment for a period of **at least thirty (30) days**.
- **Public Notice:** Legal notices will be posted in the paper of record for public comment periods for draft core documents. Notification will also be provided on the A/GFTC website and on social media accounts.
- **Access to Draft Documents:** Copies of documents will be made available to individuals by mail upon request. All draft documents are available on A/GFTC's website.
- **Comment procedure:** All public comments received according to the policies outlined in section III.B are documented and considered by A/GFTC staff and the Planning Committee for incorporation into each final document as is warranted and appropriate prior to the adoption of final documents by the Policy Committee. Major comments that generate significant revisions between publicly distributed draft documents and final documents will be summarized and included as appendices to those documents.

##### 2. Planning Projects

A/GFTC administers transportation planning projects, both to further the goals of the LRP and on behalf of our municipal partners. These projects may include corridor studies, bicycle/pedestrian projects, local or regional safety studies, traffic analyses, and more. For all standalone planning projects outlined in the UPWP, the following policies apply:

- **Project Outreach Plan:** In conjunction with the project steering committee and project consultant (if applicable), each planning project scope of work will include an outline of public and/or stakeholder outreach efforts, known as a Project Outreach Plan, which will set forth the format(s) of the input methods for that specific project. See section
- **Public comment period duration:** Draft versions of all MPO planning projects will be made available to the public for review and comment for a period of **at least fourteen (14) days**. In addition, for projects undertaken on behalf of a municipality, there may be an optional public comment period undertaken by the municipality itself, which may run prior to or concurrently with the A/GFTC public comment period.
- **Public Notice:** Notification of the public comment period will be provided on the A/GFTC website and on social media accounts, as well as on municipal websites and social media accounts as appropriate.

- Access to Draft Documents: Copies of documents will be made available to individuals by mail upon request. All draft documents are available on A/GFTC's website, as well as on municipal websites (if feasible).
- Comment procedure: All public comments received according to the policies outlined in section III.B are documented and considered by A/GFTC staff and the project steering committee for incorporation into each final document as is warranted and appropriate prior to the adoption of final documents by the Planning Committee. Major comments that generate significant revisions between publicly distributed draft documents and final documents will be summarized and included as appendices to those documents.

### **3. Technical Analysis and Planning and Engineering Assistance Projects**

A/GFTC provides staff and on-call transportation planning and engineering assistance to our municipal partners as outlined in the UPWP. These evaluations are intended to provide technical analysis to address specific transportation issues at one or more discrete locations. For these projects, the following public notice and comment policies apply:

- Public comment period duration: Draft versions of all technical analysis and planning and engineering assistance projects will be made available to the public for review and comment for a period of **at least fourteen (14) days**.
- Public Notice: Notification of the public comment period will be provided on the A/GFTC website and on social media accounts, as well as on municipal websites and social media accounts as appropriate.
- Access to Draft Documents: Copies of documents will be made available to individuals by mail upon request. All draft documents are available on A/GFTC's website, as well as on municipal websites (if feasible).
- Comment procedure: All public comments received according to the policies outlined in section III.B are documented and considered by A/GFTC staff and the project steering committee (if applicable) for incorporation into each final document as is warranted and appropriate; these technical analyses may be declared complete by the Planning Committee and/or the local municipality via staff, as appropriate.

#### **B. Public Comment Format and Submission**

To promote a uniform, organized planning process, public comments must adhere to the following standards:

##### **1. Format**

- a. Comments collected during an official A/GFTC Public Comment Period must be submitted via mail, fax, email, through the A/GFTC website, or phone, and must be submitted directly to A/GFTC or its designee.
- b. Direct messages through social media will not be counted as official comments, as the format and archival process is dependent on third-

party platforms which may not meet relevant standards for file retention; however, A/GFTC staff will respond to advise individuals how to submit comments in an official manner.

- c. Per A/GFTC Social Media Policy as outlined in section III.C, comments on Facebook posts (page or “wall” posts) will be treated as public discussion and *not* as official comments; A/GFTC staff will respond to advise individuals how to submit comments in an official manner.
- d. Input received through a public outreach effort (such as stakeholder interviews, public meetings, or a survey) will be collected and/or summarized according to procedures relevant to the format. These may be included within the project file or integrated as an appendix to the final document, depending on the details of the Public Outreach Plan.

## **2. Submission deadlines**

- a. Deadlines for public comment will be clearly stated on the website and in any related social media post, as well as during any relevant meeting or event.
- b. Although there is no obligation to accept or respond to comments which do not conform to the correct format and time period, A/GFTC will still make a meaningful effort to take these comments into consideration.

## **3. Content**

Staff or project consultants will inform individuals if a comment does not conform to policy and will be invited to revise their comment accordingly. Comments which contain the following will not be accepted or considered:

- a. Comments in support of or opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures or that are politically biased
- b. Profane language or content
- c. Memes or satirical images
- d. Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability, or sexual orientation
- e. Sexual content
- f. Solicitations of commerce
- g. Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity
- h. Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of A/GFTC, the public, or public systems
- i. Threats of violence or harm against specific individuals
- j. Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party

## **C. Social Media Policy**

### **1. Purpose**

A/GFTC uses social media platforms to provide relevant, timely, and informative information to the public. Social media platforms that may be used include (but are not limited to): Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and blogs. Content posted by staff to the A/GFTC social media platforms should contain links directing users back to the A/GFTC website for in-depth information, forms, documents, mechanisms to submit official comment, or any other services necessary.

### **2. Content**

Any content posted to a social media platform will be timely, informative, and related to the tasks, programs, products, or events of A/GFTC. There may be instances where the sharing of articles, websites, or online information produced by outside sources is appropriate. This could include newspaper articles, municipal websites, other transportation and/or planning agencies or other informative, yet relevant, content from trusted sources. A/GFTC may share these items as “information only” and does not endorse, support, or take responsibility for their accuracy.

The use of social media platforms will follow all federal, state, and related laws and/or A/GFTC policies regarding the sharing of information, collection of data, and archiving. A/GFTC also reserves the right to disable the social media platforms at any time if it is determined they are not fulfilling the A/GFTC goals and objectives as detailed herein.

### **3. Social Media Comments and Discussion**

Social media platforms provide a variety of ways to communicate with the A/GFTC and fellow users of the platform. Some of these communication methods such as @replies on Twitter or wall postings on Facebook are publicly visible and it is not directly stated whether the comment is intended for A/GFTC or fellow users of the platform. As such, A/GFTC will treat these social media communication methods as discussion, not official comments directed at A/GFTC. Discussions on social media platforms may be summarized and shared with the A/GFTC Policy Committee, Planning Committee, or Project Steering Committees as appropriate.

User comments which contain any elements listed in section III.B.5 above will not be considered or accepted. If available, A/GFTC may also use a social media’s ‘blocking’ feature for repeat offenders of the content guidelines specified above.

A/GFTC reserves the right to reply or not reply to any and all comments posted on social media platforms. Replies from the A/GFTC should generally be used to correct erroneous information about A/GFTC projects that may be posted by other users. Replies from the A/GFTC should not be used to debate issues or attempt to sway the opinion of other users.

#### **4. Collection of Data**

A/GFTC will not collect or store the personal information (name, e-mail, location, gender, etc.) of social media users except when required by law. Social media sites may have their own privacy policies that may differ from A/GFTC.

#### **D. Website**

The A/GFTC website ([www.agftc.org](http://www.agftc.org)) was re-launched in 2017 with the goal of facilitating public involvement and the dissemination of information in an accessible format. Draft documents, final publications, meeting announcements, agendas, and meeting minutes are all available for review, comment, and download (if appropriate). 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 contact link accessed from the home page generates an e-mail message to A/GFTC staff; the site also contains phone, fax, and mailing contact information for A/GFTC staff. The website is the principal mode for the sharing and distribution of documents.

##### **1. Posting and updates**

Staff will regularly maintain and update the website to the following standards:

- a. Announcements for regularly scheduled Policy or Planning Committee meetings and public input events held as part of a Public Outreach Plan will be posted on the home page at least fourteen (14) days prior to the event. Announcements for special meetings of the Policy or Planning Committees will be posted on the home page at least seven (7) days prior to the meeting.
- b. Announcements for the availability of draft documents will be posted on the home page no later than the first day of the public comment period. These announcements will include details regarding format, deadlines, submission procedure, and a link to the relevant materials.
- c. Solicitations for grant programs or TIP/UPWP projects will be posted on the home page as soon as the information is available. These announcements will include details regarding format, deadlines, submission procedure, and a link to the relevant materials.
- d. Final/adopted documents will be posted on the home page within one (1) week of adoption or acceptance by the relevant committee or agency.
- e. Draft meeting minutes will be posted on the home page no later than two (2) weeks after the meeting took place.
- f. General web content such as maps will be updated as needed.
- g. Links to time-sensitive information, such as items listed in a-c above, will be removed from the home page once the deadline has passed. However, the information from those posts will still be available on the website on <https://agftc.org/blog/>.

- h. Documents on the “Publications” page will be posted both in .pdf and plain text format to accommodate screen-reader technology to the maximum extent feasible.

## **E. Other Media Outreach**

### **1. Direct Mail**

Given the widespread availability and usage of online information, A/GFTC has become less reliant upon direct mailing and disbursement of printed materials, as it is generally costly, consumptive, and inefficient. Printed materials are deployed on a limited basis and are individually available upon request.

### **2. Newspaper**

Print media coverage of A/GFTC activities from daily and weekly publications has historically grown less consistent over time. 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 send out press releases regarding ongoing planning efforts and related public workshops on an as-needed basis.

### **3. Radio**

Utilization of local radio stations has yielded 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 and will only be deployed on a limited basis if called for in a Public Outreach Plan.

### **4. Television**

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 sporadic, with occasional responses to press releases resulting in on-air interview opportunities as well as televised meeting reports. Press releases may be sent to TV news outlets on a case-by-case basis.

## **IV. Public Meeting Procedures**

This update to the Public Participation Plan takes into account recent advances in the deployment of virtual meeting technology. The use of virtual meeting platforms has in many cases allowed for greater participation, both in terms of A/GFTC committee meetings and public presentations. Virtual meetings allow participation without having to leave home or office, which saves on time, travel costs, and in the case of some meetings, childcare. However, many parts of the A/GFTC region also lack reliable internet access. In addition, certain types of meeting formats, such as a design charrette or open house, are best experienced in-person. As such, the policies outlined herein are

intended to strike a balance between a variety of virtual and in-person approaches to public participation.

## **A. Policy and Planning Committee**

### **1. Format**

Meetings of the Policy and Planning Committees may be held in-person or via videoconferencing (“online” meetings). Participation by videoconferencing shall constitute presence in person and counted for quorum purposes. In-person meetings will be held in locations accessible to the public; ideally, these locations will be accessible via public transit as well. Online meetings will be streamed live over the internet; the web address and login instructions will be included in the meeting announcement.

### **2. Public Participation**

Members of the public may attend, listen, and observe online and in-person meetings. Direct participation will be limited to specific times on the agenda or during Q&A following specific topics.

### **3. Notification**

Announcements for regularly scheduled Policy or Planning Committee meetings will be posted on the website at least fourteen (14) days prior to the event. Announcements for special meetings of the Policy or Planning Committees will be posted on the home page at least seven (7) days prior to the meeting.

## **B. Other Public Outreach Meetings**

During the development of core documents and planning studies, public outreach meetings may be held to gather input on specific projects or topics. The input methods should be selected to maximize meaningful participation according to the needs of the target community. As new technologies expand the capabilities of public outreach, the input methods should adapt to take advantage of emerging opportunities.

### **1. Format**

Public outreach formats may include, but are not limited to, public charettes, open houses, information booths, meetings, presentations, stakeholder interviews, online or mail-in surveys, meeting-in-a-box, and/or online participation methods.

### **2. Notification**

For standalone public outreach meetings conducted and hosted by A/GFTC, the meetings will be posted to the A/GFTC website at least 14 days prior to the time of the event. Additional notice may be posted on municipal websites and social media, as called for in a Public Outreach Plan for a specific project.