Statewide Planning Public Involvement Process

For the Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan (SLRTP) and the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)

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Introduction

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) has developed this public involvement process (process) for the Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan (SLRTP) and the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 23 CFR 450.210(a). This process details how TxDOT meets the federal public involvement requirements related to these statewide planning and programming documents.

The federal public involvement requirements emphasize:

- Practicing early and continuous public involvement, that is timely and widely accessible.
- Demonstrating consideration and responsiveness for public comments, including traditionally underserved groups and individuals.
- Utilizing various outreach and communication techniques and formats, including electronic and digital tools, to afford reasonable opportunity for access and consideration of statewide planning information.

TxDOT's public involvement process for statewide planning is periodically reviewed for effectiveness to ensure that the process provides full and open access to all interested parties and is revised, as appropriate. TxDOT posts a notice in the Texas Register and provides 45 calendar days for public review and written comment prior to adoption of any major revisions to the statewide public involvement process.

Technical and policy information used in the development of the SLRTP and STIP is available to the public on the TxDOT website at TxDOT - SLRTP and TxDOT - STIP and on the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) website at TAC §16.54 (SLRTP) and TAC §16.103 (STIP).

SLRTP Public Involvement Process

The SLRTP is a federally mandated statewide transportation plan covering a period of 24 years that contains all modes of transportation, including highways and turnpikes, aviation, mass transportation, railroads and high-speed railroads, and water traffic. The plan must contain specific and clearly defined transportation

system strategies, long-term transportation goals for the state and measurable targets for each goal, and other related performance measures. The plan must also identify priority corridors, projects, or areas of the state that are of particular concern to the department in meeting the established goals. The SLRTP must also include a participation plan specifying methods for obtaining formal input on the goals and priorities identified.

The requirements for the SLRTP public involvement process in Texas are specified in 43 TAC 16.54. In addition, TxDOT follows applicable best practices found in TxDOT's Strategic Public Engagement Guidance. TxDOT uses visualization techniques, including maps and graphics, to describe the proposed SLRTP and supporting studies. TxDOT may use the following outreach and engagement methods to meet the requirements and allow for early and continuous public involvement opportunities over the 24-month development cycle:

- **Statewide Surveys:** TxDOT may conduct a statistically valid statewide survey to understand how the public views the TxDOT transportation system and identifies needs and priorities.
- **Social Media:** Social media is used to notify the public of open houses, surveys, and progress of the plan. Social media videos are posted online and on various TxDOT social media channels to educate the community.
- **Traveling Roadshows:** TxDOT may staff informational tables at community events, public libraries, and applicable planning conferences throughout Texas, providing the public the opportunity to complete surveys in real time and have questions answered in person.
- **Public Meetings:** In-person open houses covering each TxDOT District may be held during the development of the SLRTP, along with a statewide virtual public meeting. A notice is published prior to each meeting to maximize attendance. The location and times of the open houses are carefully considered so that they are accessible and convenient for the public.
- **Statewide Virtual Public Hearing**: The hearing is held prior to final adoption of the SLRTP by the Texas Transportation Commission. A notice of public hearing is published in the Texas Register a minimum of 15 days prior, including information on how comments may be submitted. The comment

period lasts for a minimum of 30 days after the notice appears in the Texas Register. The notice and draft SLRTP are posted on the TxDOT website and the draft SLRTP is also made available for public review online and at each TxDOT District office and at the TxDOT Transportation Planning and Programming Division (TPP) office in Austin.

- **Public Comment Log:** Comments received during the development of the SLRTP, along with TxDOT's responses, are included as an appendix to the final SLRTP and are available for viewing on the TxDOT website.
- **Email Blasts:** TxDOT uses email blasts to provide timely information about the development of the SLRTP and opportunities for engagement.
- **Stakeholder Meetings:** May be used to establish early and continuous public involvement opportunities that provide timely information about transportation issues and decision making processes to individuals, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, public ports, freight shippers, private providers of transportation (including intercity bus operators), representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, providers of freight transportation services, and other interested parties.
- **Internal District and Division Meetings:** Additional communication and coordination with the TxDOT Administration, Texas Transportation Commission, TxDOT Divisions, and TxDOT Advisory Committees and Task Forces, occurs during the development of the SLRTP, as applicable.

STIP Public Involvement Process

The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) is the federally mandated four-year capital improvement program for the state. The STIP includes projects, programs, and services identified by TxDOT, the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and partner agencies that are within four years of being constructed or implemented to address a variety of passenger and freight transportation needs statewide.

The requirements for the STIP public involvement process in Texas are specified in 43 TAC 16.103. The STIP is comprised of the Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) developed by each MPO and Rural TIPs developed by the TxDOT Districts for the non-metropolitan areas. A non-metropolitan area includes all areas of the state located outside the boundaries of Texas's MPOs.

In accordance with federal regulations, MPOs are responsible for conducting public involvement activities at the local level prior to adoption of their TIPs based on their established public involvement process (43 TAC 16.101). A TxDOT District is responsible for conducting public involvement at the local level prior to submitting Rural TIPs for inclusion in the STIP (43 TAC 16.102). TxDOT Districts coordinate with RPOs, where established, in the development of their TIPs and associated public involvement. Documentation of TxDOT District public involvement processes are included in the STIP.

Early public involvement opportunities are provided during the development of each MPO and Rural TIP, which may include:

- E-mail blasts
- Social media posts
- Stakeholder meetings with local officials, regional planning organizations, and community leaders
- In person and/or virtual public meetings

These opportunities provide timely information about transportation issues and decision-making processes to individuals, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, public ports, freight shippers, private providers of transportation (including intercity bus operators), representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, providers of freight transportation services, and other interested parties.

Once the MPOs and Districts have completed their TIPs, the project information is compiled electronically in the electronic STIP (eSTIP) to create the Draft STIP. The opportunity for public involvement continues during this phase, during which TxDOT

holds a public hearing to solicit input on the Draft STIP prior to approval by the TxDOT Executive Director.

The development of the STIP includes seeking out and considering 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. As discussed above, much of the outreach occurs during the production of MPO and Rural TIPs.

At the statewide level, a STIP public hearing notice is published in the Texas Register at least 15 days prior to the meeting being held, starting the 30-day public comment period. The public hearing notice includes methods for submitting written comments and speaking during the hearing and instructions on requesting special communication or other accommodations. The notice and Draft STIP are posted on the TxDOT website and the Draft STIP is also made available for public review online at each TxDOT District office and at the TxDOT TPP office in Austin.

The STIP public hearing is held virtually and allows for registered speakers to provide verbal comments on the STIP. Following the meeting, TxDOT TPP addresses any public comments received on the Draft STIP. The approved STIP is then made available for public review online at each TxDOT District office, the TxDOT TPP office in Austin and on the TxDOT website. Documentation of the STIP public hearing, including notices, comments, and responses (if applicable) are included in the STIP document.

STIP Revision Public Involvement Process

The STIP is updated periodically through either an amendment for major changes or through administrative modifications for minor changes. The public involvement process for STIP Revisions is the same as the process used for the initial STIP development as described above. Administrative modifications do not require public review or comment.

Public Comment Documentation and Response Procedures

TxDOT documents, manages, and retains all public comments received during the public involvement process. The public may submit comments verbally during public hearings or in writing via mail or email. All comments are recorded, reviewed, and maintained in accordance with the State of Texas Records Retention Schedule. The following procedures are used to manage documentation and response to public comments:

- TxDOT records public hearing meetings and maintains transcripts of all verbal comments. All records are stored in accordance with applicable records management requirements.
- Comments received via mail are scanned and retained in electronic format in accordance with applicable records retention policies.
- Comments received via email are retained electronically in accordance with applicable records retention policies.
- For general comments that do not require additional action, TxDOT TPP documents and retains the comments in accordance with applicable records retention schedule.
- For comments related to specific projects or geographic areas, TxDOT TPP forwards the comments to the appropriate TxDOT District. Both TxDOT TPP and the respective District retain copies of the comments in accordance with applicable records retention policies. The TxDOT District reviews the comments and determines whether coordination with the applicable MPO is necessary. For comments received during the STIP public hearing process, the TxDOT TPP STIP Team evaluates and considers potential impacts to specific projects and coordinates with the applicable TxDOT District and/or MPO.
- Comments received during the public hearing and the 30-day public comment period are compiled and published in an appendix to the final document.
- TxDOT provides responses to each comment received during the public hearing and the 30-day public comment period.