

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the *Public Participation Plan*

The Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for all of Berks County and is responsible for regional transportation planning activities. RATS communicates with interested parties to ensure effective and innovative transportation planning that is representative of and responsive to the needs of the entire region. To achieve this goal, RATS provides the public with an active role in the development of transportation plans, programs, and projects, beginning in the early stages of and throughout the planning processes.

This *Public Participation Plan* (PPP) provides a framework to ensure that the RATS transportation planning process includes a proactive participation process and complies with federal participation plan requirements. This PPP identifies current and previous outreach efforts and outlines steps to be taken to improve.

1.2 Background

Public participation processes involve the timely notification of information to the public to provide input early in and throughout the planning and programming processes. RATS provides interested parties with opportunities to comment on those processes, including this *Public Participation Plan*. The *Public Participation Plan* ensures that the public involvement activities of RATS transportation planning processes comply with the proactive public involvement requirements of Title 23, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The requirements for public involvement are set forth primarily in 23 CFR Section 450.316(a)(1)(2)(3) and (b) which addresses elements of the metropolitan planning process. The requirements pertaining to the *Long Range Transportation Plan* (LRTP) (23 CFR 450.322) also include provisions addressing public outreach [450.322(f)(7), 450.322(g), 450.322(i), and 450.322(j)]. The process that addresses public involvement in the *Transportation Improvement Program* (TIP) (CFR 450.32) is described in Section 450.316(a). Additionally, regulations require an opportunity for at least one public meeting in air quality nonattainment Transportation Management Areas (TMA's) should be addressed through the PPP described in 450.316(a). A TMA is designated by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) as an urbanized area with a population greater than 200,000 as determined by the most recent Decennial Census.

The PPP details strategies and procedures RATS will use to achieve its long-standing commitment to participation in regional transportation planning efforts. The PPP applies to transportation planning activities for which participation by interested parties is a required component, and outlines RATS transportation planning activities that comply

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with Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and other applicable standards for collecting and addressing public comments.

1.3 Federal Certification Review Recommendations

Pursuant to 23 United States Code (USC) Section 134(k) and 49 USC 5303(k), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) must jointly certify the metropolitan transportation planning in Transportation Management Areas (TMA's) every four years. A TMA is an urbanized area, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, with a population of over 200,000. The latest Certification Review conducted for RATS occurred in November 2020, with the final report of that Review released on March 3, 2021. The review did not make any formal recommendations for improvements to this PPP. There were several subject areas within the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan where the MPO was encouraged to make improvements. Those areas will be addressed within that LEP Plan but are noted here for consistency.

1. The Review Team finds that RATS did not address the recommendations using the specific techniques identified in the 2017 report; however, the Team finds that the MPO addressed the intent of most of the recommendations. Specifically, the Review Team finds the MPO has made certain documents available to the region's largest LEP population in its native language; and, provided notices to that language group concerning the availability of language assistive services in its native language as a foreword to the document. Nonetheless, the Review Team finds that based on demographic data provided in the LEP Plan, the region has other LEP language groups that need to be made aware of the language assistive services the MPO provides. Accordingly, the Team encourages the MPO to add language Tag Lines for its current "front piece", relevant to its linguistic population, for inclusion in vital documents. Examples of language Tag Lines can be found in Pennsylvania's 2021 Transportation Program General and Procedural Guidance document.
2. The Review Team found that the recommendation concerning the website, although addressed in the MPOs LEP Plan, is not readily observable on the website. The Team found that the reason that changes have not been made to the website as indicated is that the website is not within the MPOs direct authority and control to address. During the virtual review discussion, the MPO revealed that the website is administered and maintained by Berks County. As a result, RATS is unable to unilaterally alter the website:
3. To improve the overall process, the Review Team encourages RATS to revisit the language in the LEP Plan, and anywhere else that it appears, concerning the availability of translation of the website. This information should be revised to accurately reflect how the MPO communicates information contained on its website to LEP language groups.

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1.4 RATS Contact Information

For more information on this *Public Participation Plan* or on RATS regional transportation planning activities, please contact us through the Berks County Planning Commission using the information shown on the front cover of the document.

Section 2: Public Participation Goals:

2.1 Overview

RATS recognizes the obligation to provide adequate information to persons regarding transportation plans and programs. It also seeks out and encourages participation in the development of these plans and programs as well as any substantial amendments to them. Therefore, RATS will ensure that adequate information is provided to individuals and groups to evaluate various proposals. RATS will also provide forums to obtain views on transportation planning and project related issues.

RATS recognizes that persons affected by public action should have a voice in policy formulation. Although the various transportation planning and programming activities are designed to have long term beneficial effects on the community, these activities may also have an adverse impact on some individuals. Therefore, it is important that everybody knows what is being planned and is given every opportunity to present their views.

RATS recognizes the need to consult and coordinate with appropriate public and private agencies such as federal and state departments, local municipalities, county departments, and private organizations. It will also confer with social service agencies regarding the needs of their clients including the elderly, persons with disabilities, low income, and those of minority and/or Limited English Proficient groups.

To comply with the various requirements, RATS sets forth these Public Participation Goals, including:

- Ensure that interested parties in Berks County have an active and ongoing role in the regional transportation planning process
- Guarantee an established and dependable process with open meetings and public access to technical data and non-technical information
- Increase the level of understanding of the transportation planning process in the region and identify how interested parties can become more involved
- Provide interested parties with multiple opportunities for meaningful involvement in the regional transportation planning process
- Identify, seek out and engage minority populations, low-income populations, Limited English Proficient populations, persons with disabilities, and all groups and organizations listed in Section 4.1 as Interested Parties
- Employ effective techniques for outreach and communication

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- Serve as a guide to RATS / BCPC staff for outreach and participation activities and efforts for transportation and other planning activities
- Document what we learn from interested parties in a format for consideration and use by the MPO Board ('the Board'), Berks County Planning Commission (BCPC), BCPC staff, and others to improve our outreach and participation efforts.

Section 3: Outreach Techniques and Strategies

3.1 Overview

RATS uses a wide range of communication mechanisms and community engagement techniques to provide for meaningful participation from interested parties, including:

- Communication by mail, phone, fax, email, or person-to-person contact
- BCPC's website containing documents, meeting schedules, agendas and minutes, transportation-related announcements, and educational tools
- Input at public meetings, public hearings, and workshops that are held at convenient and accessible locations and times
- Partnering with community, civic, and business groups to produce forums and input sessions when requested
- Distribution of planning documents, brochures, fact sheets, and maps documenting planning efforts
- Distribution of public notices and press releases
- Internet and direct mailed surveys
- Using the BCPC's *eFlash* electronic notifications of important events
- Using the BCPC's Facebook page
- Exploring the creation of a separate RATS Facebook page, along with other social media
- Visualization techniques to help board members and the public understand potential outcomes of transportation plans and/or programs
- Consultation with agencies and officials responsible for planning activities within the county that are affected by transportation
- Ensuring that vital documents are translated into Spanish and made available digitally and in print
- Including notices on all documents and on the website that certain translated documents are available, and other translations are available on request
- Incorporating virtual public outreach and input

3.2 Contact Lists

RATS staff continually develops and maintains databases of stakeholders, media and interested organizations and parties. These lists are updated regularly to reflect current information. Contact lists expand throughout the transportation planning process as

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people, organizations and agencies become involved and offer their opinions or just want more information. To establish new contacts, RATS uses a range of strategies, such as:

- Mailing list registration is available at all public meetings / hearings
- Mailing list registration is available via the BCPC website or email
- Announcements of public meetings, public hearings, workshops, and other project-specific opportunities made available online, through news releases, email notification, targeted mailings, social media (Facebook), or announced at public meetings
- Working with existing stakeholders to suggest potential participants or encourage participation
- Working with professional, civic and community organizations to provide representatives, suggest participants, and encourage participation
- Making special efforts to engage social service providers who work with transportation-challenged clients

3.3 Visualization Techniques

RATS uses a wide range of accessible information resources to help participants understand different proposals, impacts and possible outcomes related to regional transportation programs and plans. Visualization techniques used to illustrate these concepts may include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following materials and practices:

- Printed small and large scale maps
- Aerial photographs, alone or with GIS mapping overlays
- Photographs, sketches, artist renderings, images, diagrams, charts, and other graphics
- Printed maps that allow comparison of proposals
- Scenario planning discussions
- Online maps
- Virtual public engagement that includes visual aids and voice descriptions
- Internet web based content that is:
 - Easy to read (sans serif fonts)
 - Does not require extensive page scrolling or multiple 'click-throughs'
 - No advertising
 - Documents available for download in standard software formats, i.e., Adobe .PDF, Microsoft products

3.4 Virtual Public Involvement

The COVID-19 Pandemic forced public meetings to go from in-person gatherings to virtual environments for many months. RATS staff adapted to these challenges and continues to improve where possible. Since all online processes are controlled by

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County of Berks Information Services Department policies and procedures, RATS staff uses the following products and techniques:

- Microsoft Teams Live, Facebook Live, and YouTube for live meeting broadcasts
- Incorporation of screen-shared agendas, attachments, documents, and presentations
- Ensuring the public is aware that meetings are recorded for transcription purposes
- Allowing for Public Comment at the beginning and end of all meetings
- Posting agendas and meeting links on the Berks County, Planning Commission, and RATS websites at least seven (7) days prior to the meeting
- Posting all meeting materials at least 48 hours prior to the meeting

Section 4: Consultation with Interested Parties

4.1 Overview

Federal guidance originally from SAFETEA-LU legislation dictates that:

“The MPO shall develop and use a documented participation plan that defines a process for providing citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the metropolitan planning process”. [§ 450.316(a) Interested parties, participation and consultation]

4.2 Consultation with Tribes and Federal Land Management Agencies

MPO’s must consult with federally recognized Tribes and Nations to provide opportunities for review and comment on key planning documents. PennDOT maintains their Tribal Consultation Guide which describes which Tribes and Nations have interests throughout the Commonwealth, specifies which are to be included in review activities and how they are to be addressed. Many Tribes and Nations accept electronic submissions however there are still some who require hardcopies of all draft documents.

Regulations also require coordination with Federal Land Management agencies in the development of the TIP and LRTP. There are two (2) federal lands in Berks County: Hopewell Furnace National Historic Park, administered by the National Park Service, and Blue Marsh Lake, administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

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4.3 Consultation in Developing this *Public Participation Plan*

The Reading Area Transportation Study develops all plans and programs in consultation with the interested parties defined above. To develop this *Public Participation Plan*, RATS first assembled a draft list of participation strategies and ideas based on a review of the existing Public Involvement Process Resolution, past experiences, and guidance from federal transportation planning legislation. All activities undertaken during the Public Comment Period are documented in the Appendix.

Section 5: Title VI and Environmental Justice

5.1 Overview

RATS *Environmental Justice Summary* serves as a guide for RATS to use to identify concentrations of Title VI and Environmental Justice populations, including minorities and low-income populations. This Summary is updated with every TIP and LRTP update; at a minimum of every two (2) years. The foundation for these efforts is stated in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964:

“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program receiving Federal financial assistance.” --Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000)

The President’s 1994 Executive Order on Environmental Justice states:

“Each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations.” --Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, 1994

As concentrations of these groups are located, RATS will work with agencies and organizations that encompass these groups to ensure they are aware of draft Plans and Programs and have opportunities to provide input.

5.2 Target Outreach Areas

RATS uses its data collection and analysis capabilities within the *Environmental Justice Summary* process to support participation efforts and help ensure meaningful access to its public participation opportunities. RATS uses the *Environmental Justice Summary* to analyze the relationship between the region’s populations and its regional investments, plans and programs.

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Geographic analysis assists RATS to identify environmental justice communities and target outreach to these areas as necessary. Using the Environmental Justice Summary, RATS will specifically:

- Identify the locations of environmental justice communities throughout Berks County
- Where possible, host public meetings in accessible locations and times within these communities, and
- Identify one or more organizations that serve these communities and proactively share information with the organizations to disseminate throughout their respective networks and communication channels.

Additionally, staff will work with PennDOT officials to help guide their public outreach efforts when project-specific meetings are being planned. RATS will develop and maintain an updated listing of accessible locations that may be used for public meetings in environmental justice communities.

Section 6: Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

6.1 Overview

“Limited English Proficient” or “LEP” persons are those individuals who do not speak English as their primary language, and who also have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. The key commonality among LEP persons is their inability to communicate effectively in the English language, regardless of their native tongue. Persons who are multi-lingual, in that they speak one or more other languages in addition to being proficient in English, are not considered to be Limited English Proficient.

6.2 LEP Assessment

As a recipient of federal financial assistance, RATS has an obligation to reduce language barriers that can preclude meaningful access to RATS’ programs, information and services by LEP individuals. An integral part of this effort is the completion of a “Limited English Proficiency Self-Assessment” or LEP Assessment, which is designed to balance four factors:

1. The number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the program or service.
2. The frequency with which LEP individuals encounter the program and/or activities.
3. The nature and importance of the program, activity or service provided to people’s lives, and
4. The resources available to the federal financial recipient and costs.

This assessment along with detailed reviews of the latest Census data examines the most prevalent non-English speaking populations and their geographic dispersion

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throughout Berks County. That analysis is detailed in a separate Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan that accompanies this PPP. Presently, under LEP guidelines, translation of 'vital documents' is provided in Spanish only. However, the front piece of all RATS documents will include language taglines in over 30 different languages stating that assistance will be provided in those languages on request.

6.3 Meaningful Access for LEP Individuals

RATS will take reasonable steps to endure that LEP persons have meaningful access to key transportation planning decisions and have opportunities to become involved in the regional transportation planning processes. RATS will use one or more of the following tools to reasonably accommodate LEP individuals:

- Provide on request, with seven (7) days advanced notice (based on document size and complexity), translated copies of materials in Spanish as well as other languages if requested. RATS, through the County of Berks, has an active contract with a firm that provides translation services.
- Provide on request, with seven (7) days advanced notice, oral interpretation services for public meetings. RATS, through the County of Berks, has an active contract with a firm that provides interpretation services.
- To actively engage LEP persons, meeting announcements, press releases and public notices will be distributed to organizations that target these groups in appropriate languages.
- RATS will provide notices to local minority media outlets and community service organizations regarding the availability of language translation services. Those outlets and organizations currently include the Daniel Torres Hispanic Center, WFMZ-Spanish Edition (television), Rumba 92.3 (WRBW) FM (radio), WXAC 91.3 FM Albright College (radio), and Palo (monthly subscription print magazine).
- RATS' vital documents will include statements in Spanish, the most common non-English language identified by Census data, that translations are available free on request. RATS, through the County of Berks, has an active contract with a firm that provides translation services.
- The Berks County website, which hosts content for RATS, will continue to provide language translation software. That software provides translation between English and Spanish, as well as translation between multiple other languages. RATS will continually make efforts to develop points of contact with representatives of non-English speaking communities.
- RATS will make available vital documents and Executive Summaries, where appropriate, in Spanish.
- RATS will include notices on all documents and on the website that certain translated documents are available, and other translations are available on request.
- BCPC staff will undergo periodic training in products and procedures provided through Berks County contracts to be used to communicate with individuals needing language assistance.

6.4 'Vital' Documents

RATS considers vital documents to be those that convey critical information to the public or are required by law or federal regulation. Based on this definition, the MPO will consider vital documents to include, but not limited to, the following:

- Title VI Policy*
- Title VI Complaint Procedures*
- Title VI Complaint Forms*
- Annual Meeting Schedule*
- Notices for special Public Meetings*

Additionally, the following documents will be either condensed into 'Executive Summary' formats and will have those Executive summaries translated into Spanish, or will be translated in their entirety (based on document size and complexity):

- Long Range Transportation Plan*
- Transportation Improvement Program*
- Environmental Justice Summary*
- Public Participation Plan*
- Limited English Proficiency Plan*

These documents will be made available in print and online. Vital documents will be made available in alternative languages and formats, if requested. Other documents may also be made available in alternative languages and formats, if requested.

Section 7: Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

7.1 Overview

To ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), RATS' Public Meeting Notices and comment opportunities provide multiple input methods. Public meetings and hearings are always held at ADA-accessible locations on established public transportation routes. Anyone who requires an auxiliary aid or service for effective communication, or a modification of policies or procedures to participate in a program, service, or activity of RATS, or has complaints that a program, service, or activity of RATS is not accessible to persons with disabilities should call the ADA Point of Contact at (610) 478-6300 x6304, email planning@countyofberks.com, or visit our website at <https://www.countyofberks.com/departments/planning-commission/transportation-reading-mpo/reading-area-transportation-study-2023-meeting-schedule>

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7.2 Meaningful Access for Persons with Disabilities

RATS staff coordinates with local disability advocacy groups to ensure information is readily available to all. RATS may use one or more of the following tools to reasonably accommodate people with disabilities:

- Provide on request, with advanced notice, copies of materials in larger, sans-serif type
- Provide on request, with reasonable advanced notice (based on document size and complexity), Braille or raised-print notices and materials
- Provide on request, with advance notice, sign language interpreters
- Record materials to audio/visual media
- Verbalize information provided through visual presentations or written materials
- On request, structure seating to provide visibility for participants who lip-read or cannot adequately hear deliberations
- When necessary, mount microphones at wheelchair height
- When necessary, provide hand-held microphones to participants
- Ensure that persons who speak during virtual meetings can be heard
- Provide on request, with reasonable advanced notice, Closed Captioning services for virtual public meetings

7.3 Web Access for Persons with Disabilities

The County of Berks instituted web content for departments of county government. The County uses the same web content administration software provided by the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP). One of the many reasons behind that decision included the accessibility options within the software. Those options, along with countywide website design standards, include:

- Minimal use of images
- Those images that exist must have an “ALT-TEXT” option
- Image maps must have a text equivalent
- A ‘text-only’ web page browser option that removes all images
- No ‘roll-overs’
- Use of easily readable Sans-Serif fonts
- Pages and content designed for the least number of click-throughs
- Pages designed to minimize scrolling
- Documents designed for download are created in standard software packages i.e., Microsoft products and Adobe PDF; and

7.4 Notifications and Services

Representatives of the disabled have been included on our mailing lists and were forwarded surveys (Section 4.2) to garner their input. At all in-person meetings hosted

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by RATS, accommodations will be made for wheelchair access and, with four (4) days advanced notice, American Sign Language interpretation services. Documents in Braille or large print type and audio recordings can be made available with appropriate notice, depending on the size and complexity of the document. The availability of these services is detailed in Public Notices. Any questions, concerns, requests for accommodations or complaints should be made to the ADA Point of Contact listed in Section 7.1.

Section 8: Public Participation in Meetings

8.1 Overview

RATS welcomes comments and ideas related to regional issues from interested parties from the Berks County area as well as adjacent counties/MPO's as applicable. There are many opportunities and levels of involvement for persons related to the regional planning process, and for those who wish to address the Board directly. Except for those meetings that are appropriate Executive Sessions, all meetings of the Reading Area Transportation Study Technical and Coordinating committees are open to interested parties and include opportunities to comment on both agenda and non-agenda items.

8.2 Public Comments at Board Meetings

All those in attendance will be asked to sign-in at the meeting location or, if virtual, to announce their presence for the record. Those wishing to comment will be asked to indicate those wishes at their signature or in the Chat feature. Individuals may be requested to limit the length of their comments, and individuals may also be requested not to duplicate like or similar comments of others preceding them.

Proceedings of meetings of the Boards are made available as meeting minutes or meeting summaries, which are posted on the Berks County Planning Commission's website at <https://www.countyofberks.com/departments/planning-commission/transportation-reading-mpo>, and also for review at the Berks County Planning Commission's offices. Please call the BCPC at 610-478-6300 for more information.

8.3 RATS Committees

RATS has several committees that meet on an as-needed basis in which citizens, advocates, private sector representatives and others can obtain the same information given to the representatives of the professional planning and transportation agencies involved in RATS activities. Committee meetings give interested parties an opportunity to learn the pertinent facts surrounding an issue. All committee meetings are advertised and open to the public.

Section 9: Public Notices

9.1 Overview

To ensure that the public has ample opportunity to take part in the regional planning process, RATS is committed to providing timely notification, complete information, and full public access to key decisions. This section describes the procedures that RATS will use for all public notices.

9.2 Public Notice Requirements

RATS uses public notices to announce the following types of events and participation opportunities:

- The Boards' annual meeting schedules – advertised annually through the Berks County Commissioners and on the RATS website
- Special, rescheduled, or cancelled Board meetings – advertised according to PA Sunshine Law requirements
- Comment Periods – advertised at least 30 days prior to the date the Board is scheduled to take formal action on any major decisions (45 days for the PPP, see Section 10); and
- Meetings related to Comment Periods – advertised at least seven (7) days in advance (see Section 10.2).

Public Notices for these events and participation opportunities will be:

- Advertised in the form of paid legal advertisements. One paid advertisement will be placed in a newspaper of general circulation in the region (*Reading Eagle*) and, if available, one in a newspaper with circulation targeted to minority communities
- Public notices for special public meetings or major forums may be advertised in the form of paid display advertisements
- Distributed to other media outlets or organizations that serve targeted outreach groups identified in this document
- Posted on the agency's web pages at <https://www.countyofberks.com/departments/planning-commission/transportation-reading-mpo>;
- Sent electronically through the BCPC's eFlash electronic mail system
- Posted on the BCPC's Facebook page
- Sent to libraries with a request for posting
- Sent to SCTA/BARTA (transit provider) with a request for posting

Public Notices will provide the following information (where applicable):

- Type or name of meeting/participation event/activity/public comment period
- Subject of meeting/participation event/activity/public comment period
- The date, time, and location of meeting/participation event/activity
- The web link for a virtual meeting

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- Start and end dates for public comment periods
- Contact information (Address, Telephone Number, E-mail address and/or website)
- ADA Point of Contact information
- Brief summary of the proposed action, plan, program or amendment
- Where to obtain copies of the plan or materials
- How to provide formal public comments
- If formal action on a major decision will be taken by the Board, the date, time and location of the meeting where that action will be taken
- Offer to provide accommodations for people with Limited English Proficiency; and
- Offer to provide accommodations for people with disabilities; and
- Directions on how to file complaints under Title VI and other nondiscrimination statutes

Section 10: Public Review and Comment Periods at Key Decision Points

10.1 Overview

RATS values the efforts stakeholders and the public make to participate in the regional planning process. RATS will provide at least 30 days for public review and comment before taking formal action on any major decisions (45 days for PPP). This *Public Participation Plan* defines a major decision as the official adoption of:

- the *Regional Long Range Transportation Plan* (LRTP)
- the *Transportation Improvement Program* (TIP)
- *Air Quality Conformity Determination*
- *Public Participation Plan* (PPP)
- A Major Amendment to the regional plan or TIP

10.2 Public Comment and Review Period Requirements

RATS will inform the public and interested parties of Public Comment Periods, using the Public Notice procedures described above, at least 30 days prior to the date scheduled for Board adoption or major amendment of a Regional LRTP, TIP, *Air Quality Conformity Determination*, or major amendment (45 days for PPP).

Documents and information on which public comments are being sought will be made available to stakeholders, other interested parties, and the public at locations throughout the County. These locations include BARTA offices, BCPC offices, PennDOT District 5-0 offices, and the BCPC website <https://www.countyofberks.com/departments/planning-commission/transportation-reading-mpo>. Information on where and how to access public comment documents will be included in the Public Notice.

~~Prior to formal action by the Board on the adoption of a regional LRTP, TIP, *Air Quality*~~

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Conformity Determination, Public Participation Plan, or major amendment, at least one public meeting will be held for the purpose of providing information to and obtaining comment from the public. The public meeting may be held as part of a regular meeting of the Board or held as a separate public meeting. Public Notice for this meeting can be combined with the Public Notice issued for the related Public Comment Period described in Section 10.2.

10.3 Additional Public Review and Comment Periods

If the draft regional LRTP, TIP, *Air Quality Conformity Determination*, or major amendment 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 initial public involvement effort, an additional 15-day Public Comment period will be offered.

If the draft *Public Participation Plan* changes appreciably during the review and comment period, an additional 30-day public review and comment period is provided prior to the Board taking formal action.

Additional Public Review and Comment periods will be conducted in accordance with procedures for regular Public Review and Comment periods listed in Section 11.2.

10.4 The Regional Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)

The regional LRTP is a long range (20+ years) strategy and capital improvement program developed to guide the effective investment of public funds in multi-modal transportation facilities in the context of the regional vision. The regional plan provides the context from which the region's *Transportation Improvement Program* (TIP), a short-range capital improvement program for implementing transportation projects, is drawn. The LRTP is updated every four years in consultation with interested parties.

RATS' early and ongoing public participation process in developing the LRTP will follow these steps:

- Step 1: Public Participation Surveys, through the internet and targeted mailing, will be used to gather initial input (when update cycles correspond, this can occur in concert with the TIP update). When available, staff will also use input gathered as part of any of PennDOT's public input processes
- Step 2: At the same time, Public Officials Surveys sent to local officials and the legislative delegation, will be used to gather governmental input.
- Step 3: Initial input, including at least one (1) Public Meeting/Workshop, will be compiled, and used in the design of the next phase of outreach and participation, such as workshops and other public meetings. This Public Meeting/Workshop may be held in conjunction with a regularly scheduled RATS MPO Technical or Coordinating Committee meeting.

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- Step 4: Ongoing input will be used to develop draft regional plan materials in consultation with interested parties.
- Step 5: Draft regional plan materials will be presented for review and comment by the public and interested parties using the Public Review and Comment procedures for a 30-day public comment period. Draft materials will be made available during the 30-day public comment period on the BCPC website at <https://www.countyofberks.com/departments/planning-commission/transportation-reading-mpo>, BCPC's offices, BARTA's offices, and PennDOT District 5-0's offices, and local libraries. Information on where and how to access public comment documents will be included in the Public Notice with Information to be included that details how to access documents electronically or in printed form. Vital draft regional plan documents will be made available in Spanish and alternative formats on request in accordance with the procedures for accommodating Limited English Proficient persons and persons with disabilities contained in this *Public Participation Plan*. During this stage, two (2) Public Meetings will be held. These generally include one during the day in a hybrid format that includes both in-person and electronic access in a downtown Reading location, and a second meeting held in the evening in a rural location that is generally in-person only. Staff strives to accommodate requests for presentations at other meetings.
- Step 6: All comments received will be considered and the response to comments will be documented and provided to the Board prior to taking action on the draft regional plan materials
- Step 7: The Board takes formal action on the regional plan
- Step 8: A Public Participation Report for the regional plan will be developed. The Report will document all comments received and the response to comments and will also document all public participation and outreach activities. This Report may take the form of a Chapter or Appendix in the L RTP
- Step 9: Adopted final regional plan materials will be made available on the BCPC website at <https://www.countyofberks.com/departments/planning-commission/transportation-reading-mpo>, BCPC's offices, BARTA's offices, PennDOT District 5-0's offices. Vital regional plan documents will be made available in Spanish and alternative formats on request in accordance with the procedures for accommodating Limited English Proficient persons and persons with disabilities contained in this *Public Participation Plan*. Information will be included that details how to access documents electronically or in printed form.

10.5 The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The regional *Transportation Improvement Program* (TIP) identifies the region's highest priority transportation projects, develops a multi-year program of implementation, and identifies available federal and non-federal funding sources for the identified projects. The TIP covers a four-year period of investment and is updated every two years through

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a cooperative effort of local, state and federal agencies including participation by the general public and consultation with interested parties. Transportation projects included on the TIP are to be consistent with the regional LRTP. The entire range of projects included in the TIP must conform to federal air quality standards.

RATS early and ongoing public participation process in developing the TIP will follow these steps:

- Step 1: Public Participation Surveys, through the internet and targeted mailing, will be used to gather initial input. When update cycles correspond, this can occur in concert with the regional LRTP update and /or any PennDOT public input processes
- Step 2: At the same time, Public Officials Surveys sent to local officials and the legislative delegation, will be used to gather governmental input
- Step 3: Initial input will be compiled and used in the design of the next phase of outreach and participation, such as workshops and other public meetings
- Step 4: Ongoing input will be used to develop draft TIP materials in consultation with interested parties
- Step 5: Draft TIP materials will be presented for review and comment by the public and interested parties using the Public Review and Comment procedures for a 30-day public comment period. Draft materials will be made available during the 30-day public comment period on the BCPC website at <https://www.countyofberks.com/departments/planning-commission/transportation-reading-mpo>, BCPC's offices, BARTA's offices, PennDOT District 5-0's offices, and local libraries. Information on where and how to access public comment documents will be included in the Public Notice with information included that details how to access documents electronically or in printed form. Vital draft regional plan documents will be made available in Spanish and alternative formats on request in accordance with the procedures for accommodating Limited English Proficient persons and persons with disabilities contained in this *Public Participation Plan*. Information will be included that details how to access documents electronically or in printed form. During this stage, two (2) Public Meetings will be held. These generally include one during the day in a hybrid format that includes both in-person and electronic access in a downtown Reading location, and a second meeting held in the evening in a rural location that is generally in-person only. Staff strives to accommodate requests for presentations at other meetings.
- Step 6: All comments received will be considered and the response to comments will be documented and provided to the Board prior to taking action on the draft TIP materials
- Step 7: The Board takes formal action on the TIP
- Step 8: A Public Participation Report for the TIP will be developed. The Report will document all comments received and the response to comments, and will also document all public participation and outreach activities
- Step 9: Adopted final regional plan materials will be made available on the

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BCPC website at <https://www.countyofberks.com/departments/planning-commission/transportation-reading-mpo>, BCPC's offices, BARTA's offices, and PennDOT District 5-0's offices. Vital regional plan documents will be made available in Spanish and alternative formats on request in accordance with the procedures for accommodating Limited English Proficient persons and persons with disabilities contained in this *Public Participation Plan*. Information will be included that details how to access documents electronically or in printed form.

10.6 Major Amendments to the Regional LRTP or TIP

Once a TIP or LRTP has been developed and approved the program is subject to revisions as the budgeted transportation program experiences changes in project scheduling and estimated costs. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will only authorize projects and approve grants for projects where the total cost is programmed in the current approved TIP. RATS must modify the TIP or regional LRTP to adjust to the changing cost and schedule if a planning partner or the Commonwealth would like to continue to advance the project.

The definition of a major amendment varies by the type and/or cost of program to be amended. Definitions and procedures for regional LRTP and TIP major amendments are included in the respective regional LRTP and TIP documents and are available on the BCPC's website at <https://www.countyofberks.com/departments/planning-commission/transportation-reading-mpo>. **If a proposed revision to the TIP or regional LRTP adds a project, deletes a project, or impacts the schedule or scope of work to an air quality significant project, RATS will review the proposal and determine if a new *Air Quality Conformity Determination* is required prior to formal approval of the change. If the revision requires that a new *Air Quality Conformity Determination* is necessary, an amendment to the regional LRTP shall also be developed.**

RATS' public participation and comment for major amendments to the regional LRTP or TIP will follow these steps:

- Step 1: RATS will inform the public and interested parties of the comment period for the proposed major amendment using the Public Notice procedures described in Section 10.2, at least 30 days prior to the date scheduled for Board action on the proposed major amendment
- Step 2: Proposed major amendment information will be presented for review and comment by the public and interested parties using the Public Review and Comment procedures for a 30-day Public Comment Period described in Section 10.2. Proposed major amendment information will be made available during the 30-day public comment period on the BCPC website, at the BCPC offices, BARTA's offices, and PennDOT District 5-0's offices. Information on where and how to access public comment documents will be included in the public notice

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- Step 3: All comments received and the response to comments will be documented and provided to the Board prior to taking action on the proposed major amendment
- Step 4: The Board takes action on the major amendment
- Step 5: After federal and state approval of the requested changes, RATS will update the appropriate TIP or regional LRTP documents on the BCPC website. Updated documents will also be available at the BCPC offices, BARTA offices, and PennDOT District 5-0 offices.

10.7 Air Quality Conformity Determination Report

The *Air Quality Conformity Determination* report is a companion document to the regional LRTP and to the TIP. The *Air Quality Conformity Determination* report documents the process used by RATS for making the transportation-related conformity determination for the regional LRTP and TIP for ground-level ozone and fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}). The Conformity Determination is required by the federal Clean Air Act. RATS conformity finding is based on criteria and procedures in EPA's Transportation Conformity Rule (40 CFR Part 93) and satisfies all applicable conformity requirements. The *Air Quality Conformity Determination* report is developed as part of the regional LRTP or TIP update, in which case public participation and public comment procedures for the regional LRTP or TIP update will be followed as described in Sections 10.4 and 10.5, respectively. The *Air Quality Conformity Determination* report is also updated as required by certain amendments to the TIP or regional LRTP, in which case public participation and comment procedures for major amendments to the regional LRTP or TIP will be followed as described in Section 10.6.

10.8 The Public Participation Plan

This *Public Participation Plan* describes the various objectives, strategies, and tools to engage the public and encourage participation in the development of transportation plans and programs. RATS will periodically update the *Public Participation Plan*. This may be due to new official planning regulations and procedures, or after any public or Board evaluations of the Plan's effectiveness.

RATS' public participation and public comment process for updating the *Public Participation Plan* will follow these steps:

- Step 1: Revisions to the *Public Participation Plan* are developed in consultation with interested parties before the draft document is submitted for the public review and comment process
- Step 2: The draft *Public Participation Plan* will be presented for review and comment by the public and interested parties using the Public Review and Comment procedures for a 45-day Public Comment Period described in Section 10.2. The draft *Public Participation Plan* will be made available during the 45-day public comment period on the BCPC website at <https://www.countyofberks.com/departments/planning->

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[commission/transportation-reading-mpo](https://www.countyofberks.com/departments/planning-commission/transportation-reading-mpo), at the BCPC offices, BARTA's offices, and PennDOT District 5-0's offices. Information on where and how to access public comment documents will be included in the public notice. The draft *Public Participation Plan* will be made available in Spanish and alternative formats on request in accordance with the procedures for accommodating Limited English Proficient persons and persons with disabilities contained in this *Public Participation Plan*

- Step 3: All comments received and the response to comments will be documented and provided to the Board prior to taking action on the draft *Public Participation Plan*
- Step 4: The Board acts on the draft *Public Participation Plan*
- Step 5: A *Public Participation Plan* will be produced and made available on the BCPC website at <https://www.countyofberks.com/departments/planning-commission/transportation-reading-mpo>, at the BCPC offices, BARTA's offices, and PennDOT District 5-0's offices. The *Public Participation Plan* will be made available in and alternative formats on request in accordance with the procedures for accommodating Limited English Proficient persons and persons with disabilities contained in this *Public Participation Plan*.
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Section 11: Access to Information

11.1 Overview

RATS will provide reasonable access to public information, including technical information and meeting notices:

- In electronically accessible formats on the BCPC website at <https://www.countyofberks.com/departments/planning-commission/transportation-reading-mpo>;
- Links to the website will be provided on the BCPC Facebook page
- Links will also be advertised digitally through the BCPC eFlash service
- In print at the Berks County Planning Commission office in the Berks County Services Center, 633 Court St., 14th Floor, Reading, PA 19601; and
- BARTA's offices located at 1700 N. 11th St., Reading, PA 19604; and
- at PennDOT District 5-0 offices located at 1002 Hamilton St, Allentown, PA 18101.

11.2 Response to Special Request

To facilitate public involvement while also using limited staff resources efficiently, RATS will make information available to interested parties on a regular basis through the various processes and activities outlined in this *Public Participation Plan*.

When RATS receives special requests to perform an analysis that is not considered as part of the planning process, or other special data or information, the agency will

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determine the reasonableness of the request. Parameters for determining the reasonableness (as used in this document) will evolve around the preparation time and costs to respond, as well as the relevancy to the transportation planning process and the agency mission. RATS will determine reasonableness of and respond to all requests on an individual basis.

Section 12: Evaluation of *Public Participation Plan* and Public Meetings

- The Board will review and revise the *Public Participation Plan* and processes based on input from the public, interested parties, and the Document Review Network in terms of their effectiveness in providing full and open access to all.
- Public Meetings, Public Hearings and special workshops scheduled for the public and interested parties will include a means of providing feedback on the effectiveness of the process of communication and meeting format.
- The *Public Participation Plan* will be reviewed at a minimum every two years, in the year prior to a TIP update, to ensure effectiveness and completeness.

Section 13: Applicability

This *Public Participation Plan* and any subsequent amendments shall be effective immediately upon the adoption by the Reading Area Transportation Study Coordinating Committee (the Board). This *Public Participation Plan* replaces any previously adopted Public Involvement Process resolutions.

Section 14: Future Efforts

14.1 Overview

RATS recognizes the need to continuously enhance our outreach efforts and periodically update this Public Participation Process. The following activities will take place to fulfill these goals:

- Further identify and consult with interested parties (ongoing)
- Continue to seek out EJ/LEP organizations, resources, and points of contact in the various communities (ongoing)
- Review and evaluate the effectiveness of the *Public Participation Plan* (every two years in year prior to updating TIP)
- Continue to review and, if necessary, update Limited English Proficiency Assessment every two years consistent with the *Public Participation Plan* evaluation
- Conduct review of ADA accessibility features of meeting spaces and the website (annually)
- Continue working with disability advocates to continuously make online materials easier to access using electronic methods.

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- Consider the formation of a Public Participation Panel or Subcommittee, with appointment opportunities extended to the public and interested parties (on adoption of this Process).