



Transportation Decisionmaking: Information Tools for Tribal Governments

Public Involvement

This summary is based on the module “Public Involvement,” one of eight produced as part of the series *Transportation Decisionmaking Information Tools for Tribal Governments* written by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Office of Planning to educate Tribal planners and decisionmakers about the Tribal transportation planning process. The full module can be found on the FHWA web site at:

http://www.tribalplanning.fhwa.dot.gov/training_lrtp_module.aspx.

What is Public Involvement?

Public involvement provides Tribal members the opportunity to participate in the Tribe’s transportation planning process. Its goal is to help educate Tribal members and the general public about the transportation planning process and to provide them the opportunity to give their input on the Tribe’s future transportation system. Public involvement is also used to keep the public informed about decisions being made through the transportation planning process that will impact the community’s transportation system. Public involvement is usually ongoing throughout the transportation planning process.

Why is Public Involvement Important?

Public involvement is important because it:

- Helps Tribal leaders understand the transportation needs of the community;
- Gives Tribal members and the general public the opportunity to express their values and vision regarding their transportation network;
- Aids in building support for transportation projects by helping Tribal members understand the need for particular projects;
- Helps build consensus among the Tribal members and the Tribal leadership;
- Assures that Tribal transportation projects are consistent with the needs of the community; and
- Is required by the Federal government in some circumstances relative to the Indian Reservation Roads Program.

What are the Goals of Public Involvement?

The first step in developing a public involvement process is to set goals by asking, “What do we want to achieve

by involving Tribal members in the transportation planning process?” Goals might include:

- Identify transportation needs or problems;
- Inform and educate Tribal members and the general public;
- Formulate and document the collective community vision;
- Document community values;
- Exchange ideas and share information; and
- Build consensus.

To reach the widest possible audience, the Tribal government should distribute information and solicit comments in a variety of ways. These could include:

- **Public hearings** are formal events, held to present information to the public and solicit their comments.
- **Public notices** are announcements of upcoming public events where people will be able learn about the Tribe’s transportation plans and comment on them.
- **Public information materials** include advertisements, flyers, press releases, websites, and other material available to the public to share information about transportation planning.
- **Presentations** can be used to educate or inform the public about transportation options, provide status updates, or explain anticipated impacts.

What Does Success Look Like?

Successful public involvement considers the public’s comments and demonstrates how their input influences decisions. To determine “success,” Tribal leaders and transportation planners should decide early on how to define and measure it. Measures of success are evaluated after public involvement is completed for a particular project. The results are then used to improve the process for future public involvement opportunities.

Tribal planners should look at public involvement as a continuous activity, not a one-time event. A successful public involvement process means that the public is well informed and energized about the transportation planning and decisionmaking processes. The public wants to be both a useful partner and an ally in the transportation decisions that help shape their community. This relationship must be carefully nurtured and maintained with information routinely flowing between Tribal planning staff, Tribal leaders, and the public, beyond the end of any single public involvement event or effort.

What is the Transportation Decisionmaking Information Tools for Tribal Governments series?

The eight modules in the *Transportation Decisionmaking Information Tools for Tribal Governments* include:

1. Introduction to Planning
2. Developing a Long-Range Transportation Plan
3. Developing the Transportation Improvement Program
4. Tribal Transportation Funding Resources

5. Public Involvement
6. Data Collection and Use
7. Safety
8. Project Prioritization

Figure 1 shows each of the modules and how they relate to each other.

Figure 1: Modules in the *Transportation Decisionmaking Tools for Tribal Governments Series*



Additional Resources

Transportation Planning Capacity Building Website:
<http://www.planning.dot.gov/tribal.asp>

FHWA Tribal Transportation Planning
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/tribaltrans/index.htm>

FHWA Tribal Transportation Planning Points of Contact

Kenneth Petty, FHWA Office of Planning
 Phone: (202) 366-6654
 Email: kenneth.petty@dot.gov

Theresa Hutchins, FHWA Office of Planning
 Phone: (360) 753-9402
 Email: theresa.hutchins@dot.gov

Lorrie Lau, FHWA Office of Planning
 Phone: (415) 744-2628
 Email: lorrie.lau@dot.gov

Susan Grosser, FHWA Office of Planning
 Phone: (202) 366-2825
 Email: susan.grosser@dot.gov

Michelle Noch, FHWA Office of Planning
 Phone: (202) 366-9206
 Email: michelle.noch@dot.gov

Kyle Kitchel, FHWA Western Federal Lands
 High Division
 Phone: (360) 619-7951
 Email: kyle.kitchel@dot.gov

Ralph Rizzo, FHWA Resource Center
 Phone: (401) 528-4548
 Email: ralph.rizzo@dot.gov