



# **Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation**

## **Public Participation Plan**

**August 10, 2021**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The mission of the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) is to facilitate and improve the mobility of the citizens of Virginia and to promote the efficient transport of goods and people in a safe, reliable, and cost-effective manner.

We are the Commonwealth's advocate for promoting transportation options to the general public, businesses, and community decision makers. As an agency entrusted with public dollars, we seek the highest possible return on investment to maximize limited funding and strive to implement best practice management tools and techniques.

DRPT is a state agency that reports to the Secretary of Transportation. Our focus is the movement of people and goods throughout the Commonwealth, and our primary areas of activity are rail, public transportation, and commuter services. DRPT works with local, regional, state, and federal governments, as well as private entities to provide support for projects and programs by:

- Assessing feasibility and environmental impacts of new and expanding services
- Conducting statewide rail and public transportation studies
- Planning and programming new services and capital improvement projects
- Providing leadership, advocacy, technical assistance and funding

Rail transportation involves the movement of people and goods on railways owned and operated by private railroad companies. There are more than a dozen railroad companies and services in Virginia, including Norfolk Southern, CSX, Amtrak, VRE, and several shortline railroads. Freight rail programs help ensure the economic vitality of businesses and communities with a cost-effective, reliable way to bring goods to market. Our partnership with the Port of Virginia provides Virginia with a gateway to the global economy. Passenger rail programs relieve congestion on highways and offer travelers more transportation choices. We work with our partners to continue to expand access to passenger rail in the Commonwealth. DRPT supports both passenger and freight rail initiatives through funding options, expert advice, research, and advocacy. We represent the state's interests in interstate and national rail issues.

Public Transportation systems help manage traffic congestion and provide transportation choices while safely transporting people to destinations across the Commonwealth. Public transportation systems in Virginia range in size from two-bus programs in small towns to larger regional systems like WMATA (Metrorail) in Northern Virginia and HRT in Hampton Roads. Some systems are fee-based, while others provide free access for the elderly and disabled. By advising, supporting and funding public transportation programs statewide, DRPT helps provide safe, reliable transportation options for everyone.

In addition to supporting local public transportation programs, DRPT has also partnered with Dillon's Bus Service to begin operating the Virginia Breeze, an intercity bus service that links

Blacksburg and Washington, DC with intermediate stops in Christiansburg, Lexington, Staunton, Harrisonburg, Front Royal, Dulles Airport, and Arlington.

Commuter Services Programs work to promote carpools, vanpools, telework and other alternative modes of transportation to Virginia's commuters. These programs not only save people (and employers) time and money, they can also help manage traffic congestion and benefit the environment. DRPT partners with commuter service programs operating in the Commonwealth to provide people with information, business incentives, and ridematching services at no charge.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS**

### **General Guidelines**

The DRPT Public Participation Plan provides direction for public involvement activities conducted by the agency. It includes a set of goals, objectives, policies, and techniques used by the agency for public outreach initiatives. In its public participation process, DRPT will:

1. Provide timely information about transportation issues and processes to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agencies, private providers of transportation, other interested parties, and segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs, and projects.
2. Solicit meaningful feedback from the public to guide the vision of the Commonwealth and its planning activities, as well to identify, validate, and prioritize project and policy recommendations.
3. Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the grant application process, the development of the Six Year Improvement Plan (SYIP), and other appropriate transportation plans and projects.
4. Conduct open public hearings/meetings where matters related to transportation programs are being considered.
5. Involve a wide representation of the population segments in the Commonwealth through a combination of innovative approaches and time-tested outreach techniques.
6. Give adequate public notice of public participation activities and allow time for public review and comment at key decision points, including, but not limited to, fare or service changes on the Virginia Breeze, approval of the SYIP, and other appropriate transportation plans and projects. If the final draft of any transportation plan differs significantly from the one available for public comment by the agency and raises new material issues, which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen, an additional opportunity for public comment on the revised plan shall be made available.
7. Respond in writing, when applicable, to public input. When significant written and oral comments are received on transportation plan drafts as a result of the public participation process required by the Fixing America's Transportation (FAST) Act, a report on the disposition of comments shall be made part of the final plan.
8. Solicit the needs of those under-served by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to the transportation disadvantaged, minorities, elderly, persons with disabilities, and low-income households.

9. Provide a public comment period of at least 30 calendar days prior to adoption of the SYIP. Notice of the comment period will be advertised on our website (<http://www.drpt.virginia.gov/>).

10. Provide a public comment period of at least 30 calendar days prior to the adoption of the Title VI Plan, Public Participation Plan (PPP), Language Assistance Plan (LAP), and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Plan. Notice of the comment period will be advertised on our website (<http://www.drpt.virginia.gov/>).

11. Coordinate the agency Public Participation Process with Virginia Department of Transportation's (VDOT) Public Participation Processes wherever possible to enhance public consideration of the issues, plans and programs, and reduce redundancies and costs. Close coordination of these processes will ensure the public is presented with a participation program that satisfies federal, state, and local requirements and uses a familiar and efficient methodology.

12. Periodically review the Public Participation Process to ensure it provides full and open access to all.

### **Goals, Objectives, and Policies**

The fundamental goal of public involvement is to provide a collaborative environment that gathers, processes, and applies a diversity of opinions during the development of a plan, program, policy, or project. To the extent feasible and prudent, public participation should make the public aware of and provide a means to comment. Specific goals, objectives, and policies for the DRPT's Public Participation Plan include the following:

**GOAL:** To provide the public with appropriate information on transportation planning services and project development in a convenient and timely manner.

**Objective 1:** Identify a broad representation of the public for inclusion in the transportation planning process.

**Policy 1.1:** Maintain a master list of contacts including but not limited to the following persons and agencies:

- Elected officials
- Local government staff
- Transportation agencies
- Federal, state, and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation and historic preservation, and other environmental issues

- Local media
- Civic groups
- Church groups
- Homeowner associations
- Homebuilder and realtor associations
- School districts
- Special interest groups
- Private freight operators
- Representatives of users and supporters of public transportation, pedestrian walkways, and bicycle facilities
- Representatives of the disabled population
- Representatives of the study area's military community

Policy 1.2: Target traditionally under-involved populations within the region, including minority, low income, and senior citizen populations.

Policy 1.3: Identify and engage persons and groups with unique interests specific to individual plans and studies conducted by DRPT.

Objective 2: Actively engage the public in the transportation process, by making it immediate and meaningful.

Policy 2.1: Post notices of public meetings/hearings on our website (<http://www.drpt.virginia.gov/>) and in local print media, as necessary. Where appropriate, post translated notices in languages other than English. Notices will include a statement on how to request translation and interpretive services and with advance notice, DRPT will fulfill requests to provide translators.

Policy 2.2: Distribute electronic meeting announcements to all persons listed in the contact database.

Policy 2.3: Utilize social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter).

Policy 2.4: Conduct public meetings at a site convenient to potentially affected citizens when feasible.

Objective 3: Keep the public informed of ongoing transportation-related activities.

Policy 3.1: Maintain a website with information specific to DRPT.

Policy 3.1.1: Update the website to ensure it displays current and accurate information.

Policy 3.1.2: Include the following information at a minimum:

- Contact information (mailing address, phone, fax, and e-mail)
- Current agency organization chart
- Meeting calendars and agendas
- Work products and publications, including the SYIP, and plans and studies related to the mission of DRPT

Policy 3.2: Publish electronic documents and work products online.

Objective 4: Identify ways to continuously improve public participation.

Policy 4.1: Evaluate public involvement techniques annually at a minimum.

Policy 4.2: Review the Public Participation Plan and adopt necessary revisions at least every three (3) years.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES**

Effective public participation requires a continuous and evolving process that utilizes multiple techniques. Public participation is an integral part of one-time activities such as corridor studies and regularly repeated activities such as the SYIP. This section contains descriptions of public participation tools and techniques that are or could be employed to enable citizens to become well informed to include:

- DRPT Website
- Master List of Contacts
- Legal Advertised Notices
- Other Media
- News Releases and Media Relations
- Display Ads
- Email Announcements
- Project Workshops
- Citizens Advisory Committees
- Small Group Meetings/Focus Groups
- Public Hearings
- Comment Forms/Complaint Procedure (including web-based)
- Surveys/Questionnaires
- Posters and Flyers

### **Overview of Tools and Techniques**

#### **DRPT Website**

The website will provide basic information about DRPT, an organizational chart, meeting times and contact information. Work products (draft and final) will be available on the site, including the SYIP, Title VI Plan, PPP, LAP, and DBE Plan. Citizens will be able to submit comments and sign up to be added to the various distribution lists maintained by DRPT. The website address is <http://www.drpt.virginia.gov/>. The web site will be maintained by DRPT staff.

#### **Master List of Contacts**

DRPT staff will maintain a master list of contacts from individuals, businesses, and federal, state and local agencies. Information will include mailing information, phone numbers, e-mail addresses and websites. The master list of contacts will be used to maintain up to date special interest group lists, etc. The master list will also be used to establish and maintain a list of e-mail contacts for electronic meeting notification and announcements.

#### **Legal Advertised Notices**

All notices of DRPT hearings/meetings will be posted pursuant to the Virginia Open Meetings law which is included in the Virginia Freedom of Information Act. DRPT will strive to publish

notices 30 days prior to all hearings and 15 days prior to all meetings, but at a minimum three days prior to comply with Virginia open meetings laws. Notices will be published in all newspapers of record in the study area, as necessary. Where appropriate, published notices will be translated into languages other than English. Notices will include a statement on how to request translation and interpretive services and with advance notice, DRPT will fulfill requests to provide translators. DRPT may consider hosting special meetings to consider non-routine items. If a special meeting is called, the notice will be published a minimum of three days prior to the meeting.

#### Other Media

Opportunities will be pursued for publication in other newsletters produced by municipalities, homeowners' associations, civic groups, or others that may have an interest in DRPT projects. Opportunities also will be pursued to present to civic and social agencies, participate on radio talk shows, provide television news highlights, and utilize public service notices to create community awareness of DRPT activities.

#### News Releases and Media Relations

Formal press releases will be sent to a media distribution list contained in the DRPT master list of contacts to announce hearings/meetings/activities and to provide information on specific issues being considered by DRPT. When specific communities are affected by transportation plans, media outreach will be employed to communicate the project status.

#### Display Ads

DRPT may publish ads to promote meetings that are not regularly scheduled, such as citizen advisory committees. The ads will be published in selected newspapers to reach a larger audience than typical of legal notices. Where appropriate, published notices will be translated into languages other than English. Notices will include a statement on how to request translation and interpretive services and with advance notice, DRPT will fulfill requests to provide translators.

#### Email Announcements

Hearing/meeting announcements and DRPT information will be e-mailed to interested persons that have submitted their e-mail addresses to DRPT staff and are included in the DRPT master list of contacts.

#### Project Workshops

Targeted public meetings will be a part of major plans and studies. These meetings generally will be open and informal, with project team members interacting with the public on a one-on-one basis. Short presentations may be given at these meetings. The purpose of project-specific meetings is to provide project information to the public and to solicit public comment and a sense of public priorities. Project workshops will be conducted in a manner that actively solicits feedback from attendees as well as providing information about project activities.

### Citizens Advisory Committees

Citizens Advisory Committees may be established for additional public outreach for certain plans and studies. The intent of these committees is to ensure that meaningful public participation is regularly and intentionally incorporated into the formal transportation planning process. These committees can review and provide input on the development of programs and projects. Additionally, these committees consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by the existing transportation system.

### Small Group Meetings/Focus Groups

For some plans and studies, meetings will be held with small groups that have an interest in the project. Meetings could be with homeowners or neighborhood associations, civic groups, special interest groups, or other groups of affected or interested parties.

### Public Hearings/Meetings

These public events will be used to solicit public comment on a project or issue being considered for adoption by DRPT. Public hearings will provide a formal setting for citizens to provide comments to DRPT or another decision-making body. To assist in the preparation of a public hearing/meeting, the DRPT developed checklist should be followed (see Appendix A). A sign-in sheet or survey is to be utilized to determine the demographic and frequency of participation (see Appendix B). Meeting minutes will be recorded. Public hearings are more formal than public workshops and are less interactive, with citizens being asked to respond to a project-specific deliverable or set of recommendations.

In order to reach the highest number of minority and/or low-income people when planning public meetings, DRPT shall attempt to hold meetings near bus lines or other modes of public transportation or in neighborhoods identified as having a high percentage of minority/low-income population. These locations will be given highest priority depending on availability of meeting space and/or cost of facility. Public SYIP meetings are held in the spring of each year and are held in nine regions across the state (Lynchburg, Bristol, Fredericksburg, Hampton Roads, Northern Virginia, Salem, Staunton, Culpeper, and Richmond). The Commonwealth Fall Transportation Meetings are held in the fall of each year and are also held in the same nine regions. The meetings begin at 4:00 pm after the regular workday, with the exception of the Northern Virginia meetings which begin at 5:30 pm due to the high volume of traffic in the Northern Virginia area. In coordination with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), DRPT plans and arranges these meetings for the Transportation Secretariat agencies, including DRPT. These meetings are also advertised by VDOT. However, DRPT ensures that requirements are met to notify and accommodate Title VI populations.

For meetings that DRPT plans, locations, facilities, and meeting times that are convenient and accessible to minority and low-income communities will be used. As an example, in June 2015 DRPT planned a group of public meetings for the Washington, DC to Richmond Southeast High Speed Rail (DC2RVA) project. DRPT choose these locations for accessibility to public transportation which included a Community Center and public meeting spaces. Meetings were held after work hours which allowed a greater number of people to attend. Where technology

exists, DRPT will strive to have meetings recorded and have the audio posted to our website for access by a larger percentage of the population. Also, where technology exists, DRPT can also stream meetings live to provide more widespread access to the public.

#### Comment Forms/Complaints

Comment forms often are used to solicit public comment on specific issues being presented at a workshop, other public meetings, or via reports available for public review. Comment forms can be very general in nature or can ask for very specific feedback. For example, a comment form may ask for comments on specific study or project, or may ask for a person's general feelings about any aspect of transportation. Comment forms can be included in publications and on websites to solicit input regarding the subject of the publication and/or the format of the publication or website. In accordance with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, these comment opportunities allow for complaints associated with minority groups as described in Title VI of the U.S. Code (42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq.). Such complaints will be logged in at DRPT, investigated, and forwarded to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for further review and direction. Title VI complaints may be emailed, mailed by post or communicated directly by calling or visiting the DRPT office.

#### Surveys/Questionnaires

Surveys or questionnaires (print, online, or both) will be used when very specific input from the public is desired. A survey can be used in place of comment cards to ask very specific questions and/or to gather technical data during corridor and planning studies.

#### Posters and Flyers

Posters and flyers may be used to announce meetings and events. These documents will be distributed electronically and displayed at public places such as City/Town Halls, libraries, and community centers. The announcement may contain a brief description of the purpose of a meeting, the time(s) and location(s), and contact information. Posters and flyers may be used to reach a large audience that cannot be reached using direct mailings and/or newsletters. Where appropriate, the posters and flyers will be translated into languages other than English.

## Summary of Public Participation Policies

Table 1 provides a summary of the documents required of DRPT. For each document, the required notifications, comment period, and required update schedule are included.

<b>Table 1 – Public Participation Policy Summary Table</b>			
<b>Program or Plan</b>	<b>Required Notifications</b>	<b>Comment Period</b>	<b>Required Updates</b>
<b>Six Year Improvement Plan (SYIP)</b>	Public hearing notices – advertised 30 days prior	30 calendar days	Every year
<b>Title VI Plan, Public Participation Plan (PPP), Language Assistance Plan (LAP), Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Plan</b>	Advertised at a minimum 3 days prior to comply with Virginia open meetings laws, but strive for 30 days prior	30 calendar days	Every 3 years

## Summary of Public Participation Techniques by Document

Table 2 summarizes the public participation techniques for each of the six documents required of DRPT.

<b>Table 2 – Public Participation Policy Summary Table</b>	
<b>Program or Plan</b>	<b>Public Participation Techniques</b>
<b>Six Year Improvement Plan (SYIP)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information posted on DRPT website</li> <li>• Email announcements</li> <li>• Comment forms (public meetings and online)</li> </ul>
<b>Title VI Plan, Public Participation Plan (PPP), Language Assistance Plan (LAP), Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Plan and Goal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information posted on DRPT website</li> <li>• Email announcements</li> <li>• Comment forms (online)</li> </ul>

## Summary of Public Meetings

Table 3 lists the annual public meetings attended by DRPT staff.

<b>Table 3 – Annual Public Meetings</b>		
<b>Meeting</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Where</b>
<b>Six Year Improvement Plan (SYIP) Meetings</b>	Spring of each year	Lynchburg, Bristol, Fredericksburg, Hampton Roads, Northern Virginia, Salem, Staunton, Culpeper, and Richmond
<b>Fall Transportation Meetings</b>	Fall of each year	Lynchburg, Bristol, Fredericksburg, Hampton Roads, Northern Virginia, Salem, Staunton, Culpeper, and Richmond

## **MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

DRPT will monitor the amount of public participation resulting from each public outreach activity. This will be done through various means, including:

- Taking attendance at public outreach meetings using a sign-in sheet
- Keeping a log of contacts with the public, via phone, mail, email, fax, in-person meetings, or other means, which resulted from a public outreach activity
- Tracking the number of completed comment cards received from a public outreach event
- Tracking distribution of public information materials, including brochures and other publications
- Tracking number of addresses on mailing lists

This monitoring will identify any special circumstances, which may have contributed to an unusually high or low attendance. It will also identify the nature of the notification process for the public outreach activity, including press releases, paid advertising, mailed notices, emails, phone calls, and other means.

This monitoring and evaluation process will be used to determine the effectiveness of existing public involvement techniques. Each time a public involvement evaluation is performed, a list of improvement strategies needed should be identified for implementation. If improvement is needed for an ongoing public involvement task, such as the DRPT website, a reasonable completion date should be established. If improvements are needed for one-time activities such as studies, the improvements should be implemented where appropriate on future activities. Records of the monitoring and evaluation process will be kept on file at the DRPT office.

## **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR SUBRECIPIENTS**

Subrecipients must put procedures into place to involve minority, low-income, and limited English proficiency populations in its public involvement activities. These procedures must be in compliance with FTA regulations. Subrecipients must submit their procedures to DRPT with their Title VI plan. Eligibility for funding through DRPT is contingent on each subrecipient participating in the Federal Title VI program and ensuring that they are in compliance with FTA regulations.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

Title VI and Environmental Justice Public involvement must also consider Presidential Executive Order 12898, Environmental Justice. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines Environmental Justice as the “fair treatment of people of all races, cultures and income with respect to development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, programs and policies”. Fair treatment means that no racial, ethnic or socioeconomic group should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from the operation of industrial, municipal and commercial enterprises or from the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal programs and policies. The guiding Environmental Justice principles followed by DOT and the FTA are summarized:

- To avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority populations and low-income populations
- To ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process
- To prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations

DRPT considers these goals of environmental justice throughout its planning and project development as well as through its public outreach and participation efforts.

## **APPENDIX A: PUBLIC HEARINGS/MEETINGS CHECKLIST**

### Location

- Is the meeting being held near bus lines or other modes of public transportation?
- Is the meeting being held in neighborhoods identified as having a high percentage of minority/low-income population?
- Is the meeting being held in an accessible location?

### Time

- Is the meeting time convenient to minority/low-income communities (4:00 pm with the exception of the Northern Virginia meetings which begin at 5:30 pm due to the high volume of traffic in the Northern Virginia area)?

### Notice

- Is the notice being published at least 30 days in advance for hearings and 15 days in advance for meetings?
- Does the notice state that foreign language and hearing impaired interpreter services will be provided with seven days advance notice? (if needed, DRPT will provide translated text also).
- Does the notice include the following statement:  
*“DRPT is committed to ensuring that no person is excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of its services on the basis of race, color or national origin as protected by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. DRPT will also provide reasonable accommodations and interpretive services for persons who require special assistance to participate in this public involvement opportunity as required by the ADA. For accommodations, additional information or to file a complaint, please contact our Title VI Compliance Officer at 804.786.4440, 600 E. Main Street, Suite 2102, Richmond, VA 23219 or visit our website at [www.drpt.virginia.gov](http://www.drpt.virginia.gov)”*
- Is the notice being translated into different languages depending on the meeting location and available census data?
- Have fliers announcing these meetings been placed in locations such as DMV field offices, local libraries, and with local citizen groups?

### Meeting

- Is a sign-in sheet available to determine the demographic and frequency of participation?
- Will the meeting be streamed live through our website to provide more widespread access to the public?
- Will the meeting be recorded and have the audio posted to our website for access by a larger percentage of the population?

## **APPENDIX B: PUBLIC SIGN-IN SHEET/SURVEY**

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires DRPT to gather statistical data on participants and beneficiaries of the agency's federal aid highway programs and activities. DRPT collects information on race, color, national origin and gender of the attendees to this public meeting to ensure the inclusion of all segments of the population affected by a proposed project.

DRPT wishes to clarify that this information gathering process is completely voluntary and that you are not required to disclose the statistical data requested in order to participate in this meeting.

The completed forms will be held on file in DRPT's offices. For further information regarding this process, please contact the Title VI Coordinator by phone at 804.786.4440 or email at [drptpr@drpt.virginia.gov](mailto:drptpr@drpt.virginia.gov).

Please respond to the following questions:

Project Name	Date
Meeting Location	

Name (please print)	Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
General ethnic identification categories (check one): <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic American <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian/Alaskan Native <input type="checkbox"/> African American <input type="checkbox"/> Asian/Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	
Language Spoken at Home	National Origin

After you complete this form, please fold it and place it inside the designated box on the registration table.

Thank you for your cooperation!