

WEST CENTRAL OHIO RURAL PLANNING ORGANIZATION *PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN*

Adopted by the WORPO Committee
XXXX 2024



The development of and any changes to this plan have been approved and adopted by the WORPO Committee.

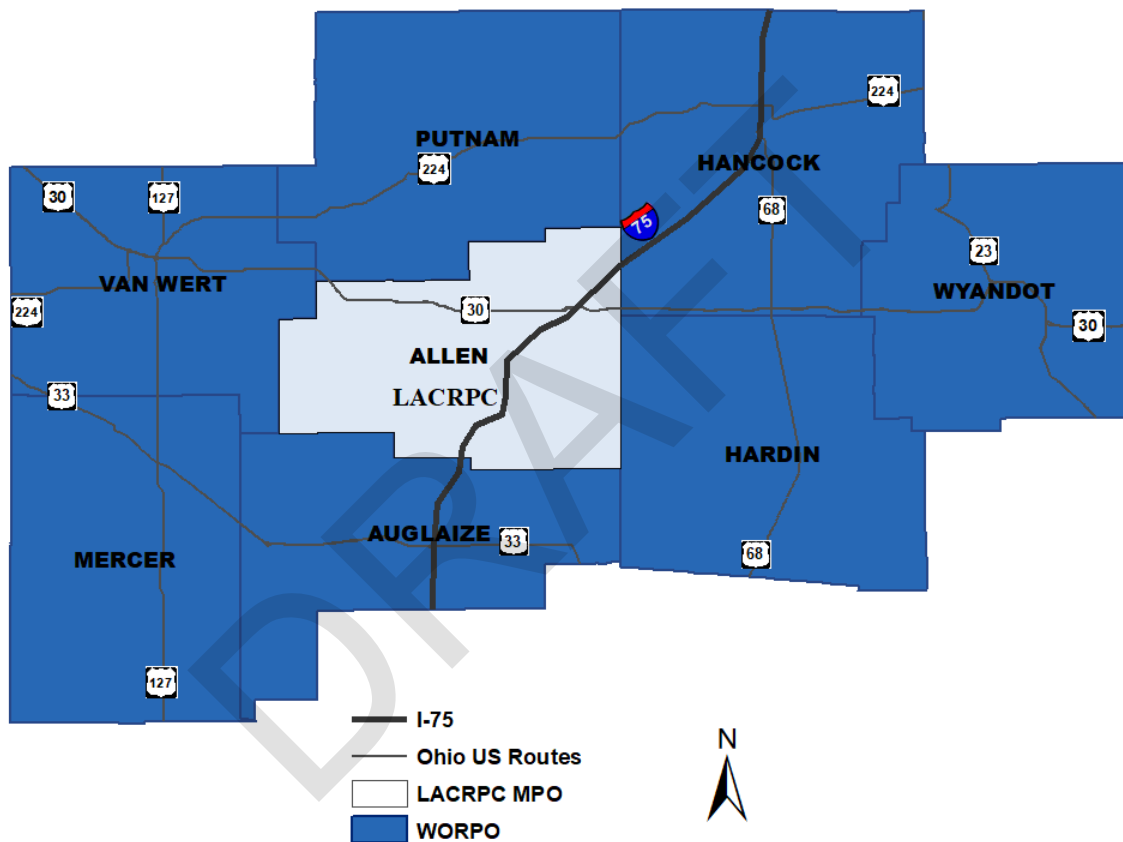
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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2021, the Lima Allen County Regional Planning Commission (LACRPC) began discussions with the Ohio Department of Transportation Districts 1 and 7 in Western Ohio about the opportunity to form a Rural Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO). Discussions continued in 2022 with county engineers and local elected officials in seven counties of interest; Auglaize, Hardin, Hancock, Mercer, Putnam, Van Wert, and Wyandot. WORPO was officially established December 10th 2023, with all 7 counties agreeing to join the RTPO.



WORPO is a committee of the Lima/Allen County Regional Planning Commission, which provides technical, administrative, and staffing support to WORPO's members via funding provided by the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). The purpose of this document is to outline the public participation process WORPO will adhere to when developing planning products.

OBJECTIVES

- Ensure a process with which the public is given the opportunity to become part of the West Central Ohio Rural Transportation planning process through a variety of methods.
- Promote the timely circulation of notices, planning issues and information regarding the planning process to the public.
- Provide transparency of all information and data gathered and developed during the transportation planning process.

WORPO's primary communication outlet for outreach to its members will be the WORPO Rural Planning Committee meetings, WORPO Rural Planning subcommittee meetings and any other related correspondence with members (see Committee Structure section on page 4). WORPO anticipates that its member counties will utilize their current public involvement methods for the circulation of general information, public meeting notices and plan documents to provide notice of public comment periods. Any other timely information regarding the transportation planning process will be included.

WORPO and/or its members may utilize numerous outlets to share information. These outlets may include but are not limited to emails, newsletters, public meetings, and websites. WORPO will also host WORPO Rural Planning Committee, Subcommittee, and special meetings or open houses as needed before any planning products are adopted.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE RULES, REGULATIONS, AND REQUIREMENTS

As a public agency that receives federal funds and makes recommendations on federal expenditures, WORPO, being a committee of the Lima/Allen County Regional Planning Commission, is bound by participation requirements for ensuring that federal funds are used fairly and without discrimination. Per Title 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53, LACRPC ensures that the requirements of its transportation planning processes are met for federally funded projects, including project selection requirements.

The basis for Environmental Justice (EJ) is Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which states: "No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

Participation and civic engagement have become a prominent responsibility for public agencies as the result of a series of federal orders and state mandates that serve to amplify Title VI. The regulatory framework clarifies the need to involve the potentially affected public in transportation decision-making processes and to assess the equity of transportation investments.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AREAS OF CONCERN

Some populations have historically been disproportionately impacted by changes made to the transportation system. As such, all RTPO planning processes are subject to analysis of the benefits and adverse impacts to Environmental Justice (EJ) populations from the projects and programs funded.

As part of the long-range transportation planning process, Environmental Justice populations in the WORPO region were identified. These populations include minority, elderly, and low-income population concentrations according to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) definition of Environmental Justice.

Definitions for each population are described below:

Minority Population: Any readily identifiable group or groups of minority persons who live in geographic proximity, and geographically dispersed or transient persons who will be similarly affected by a proposed DOT program, policy or activity. Minority includes persons who are American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander as identified in the U.S. DOT FTA Federal Guidance on Environmental Justice.

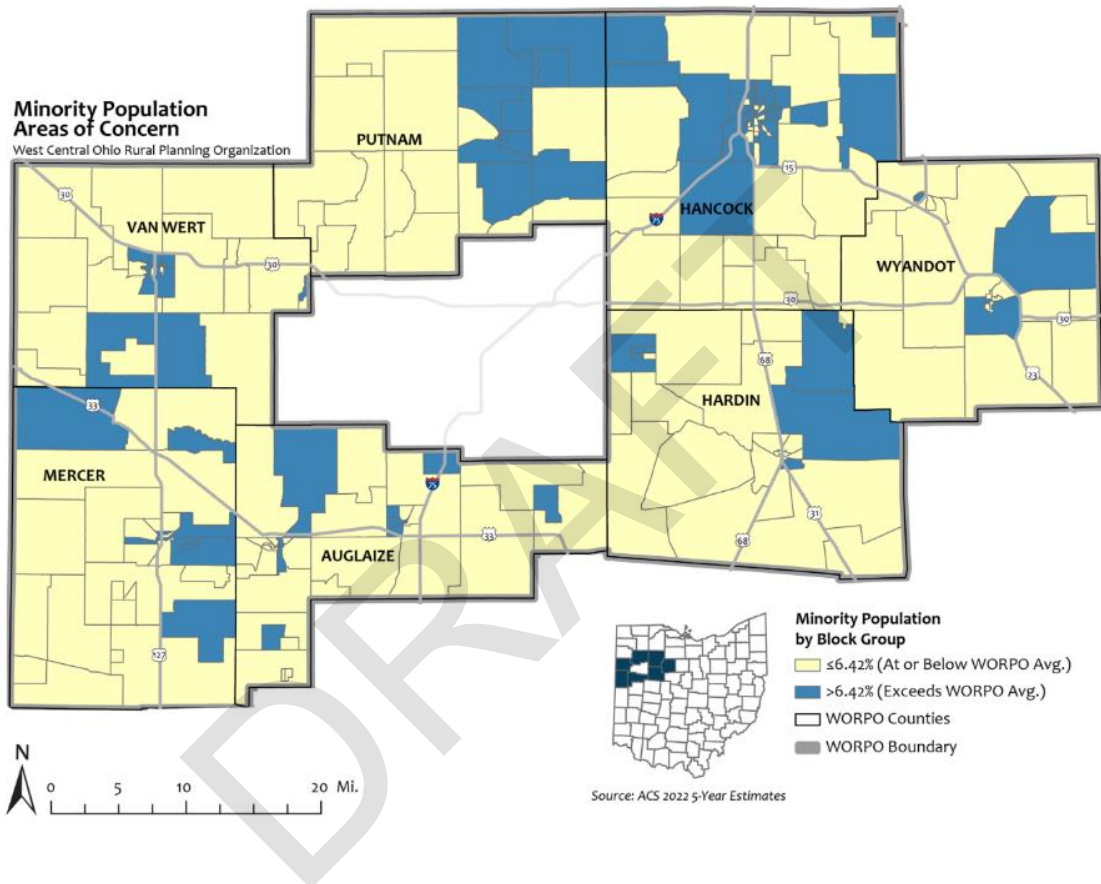
Elderly Population: Those age 65 or older.

Low Income Population: Refers to people in households where the median income is at or below the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) poverty guidelines. The 2024 federal poverty line for a one-person household in the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia is \$15,060; the poverty guideline increases by \$5,380 for each additional household member. For WORPO's purposes, the poverty level for a family of four for the year 2024 was used as defined by the HHS: \$31,200

To identify Environmental Justice (EJ) areas of concern in the region, data from U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) 2018-2022 for minority, elderly (65 years of age or older), and median household income information were utilized.

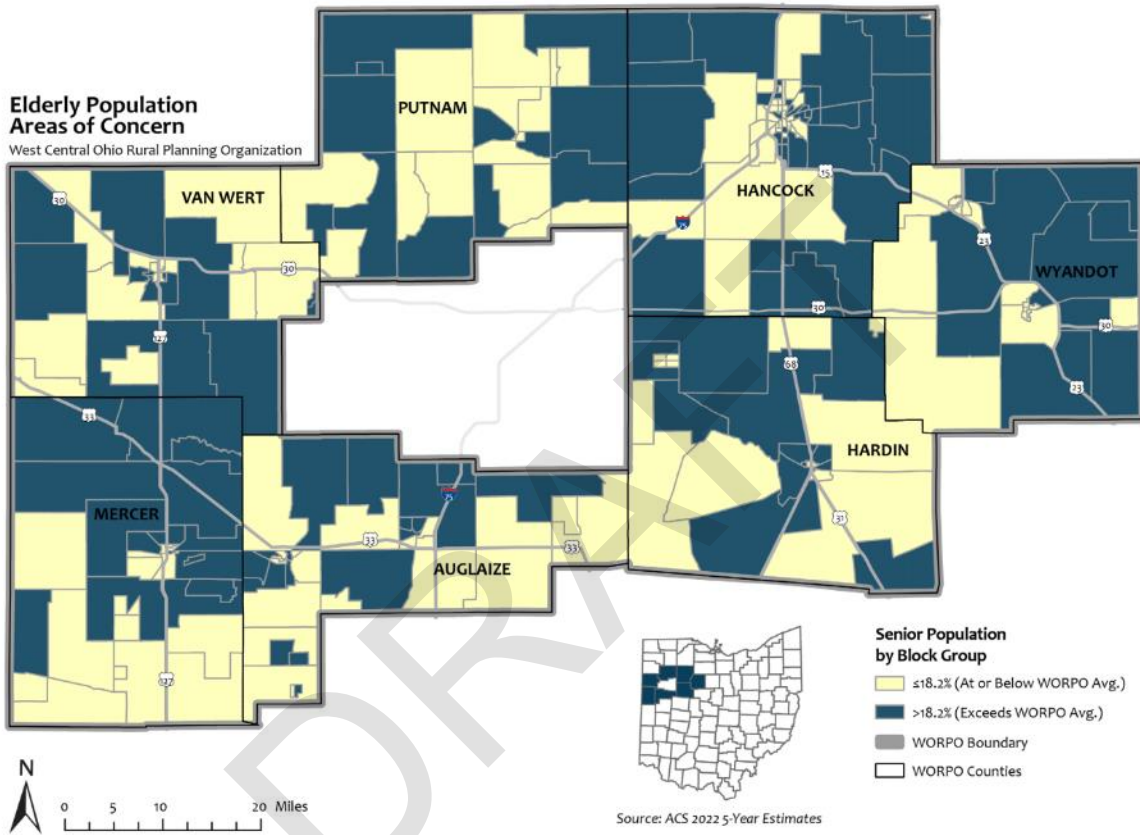
WORPO regional averages for minority and elderly populations were compared to the block groups which make up the region. The regional average (percentage) of minority populations was 6.42%. Thus, any block group with a minority population of greater than 6.42% was identified as a minority concentration area of concern. These block groups are illustrated on Map 1 – Minority Populations Areas of Concern.

MAP 1- Minority Populations Areas of Concern



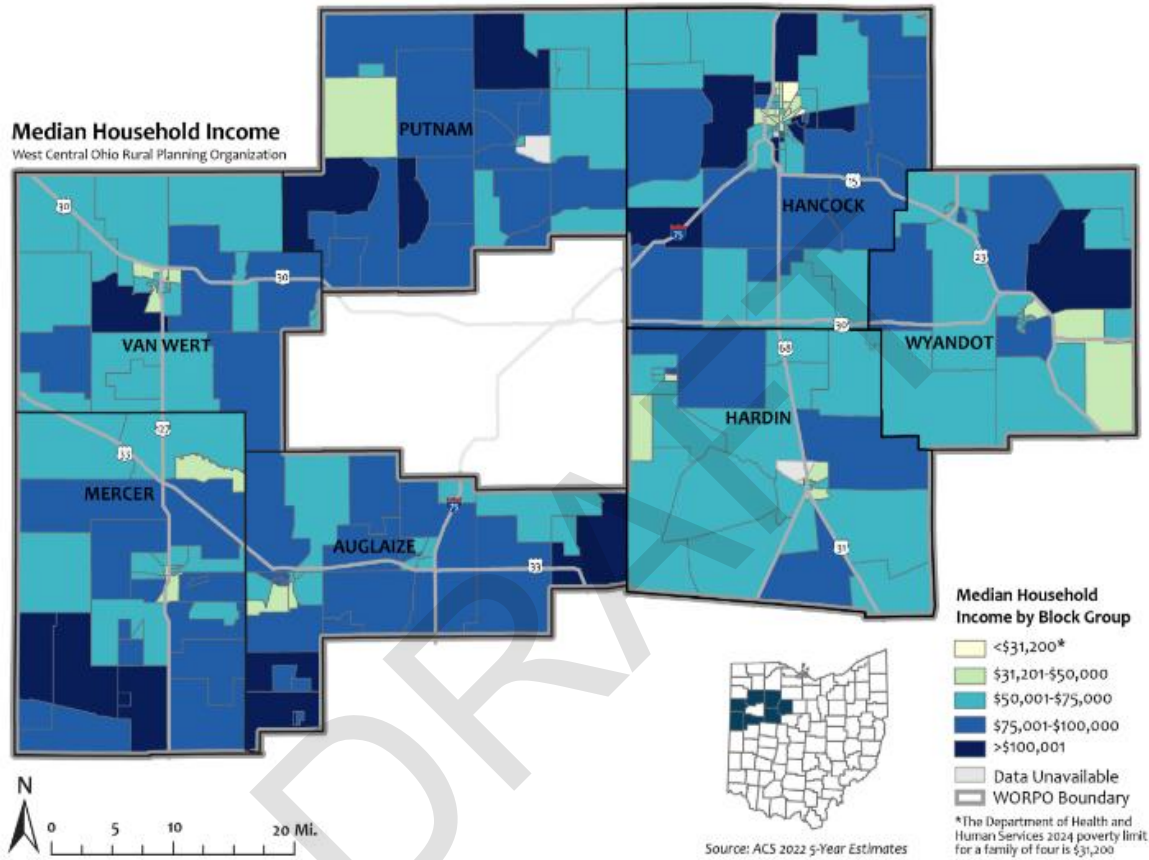
The regional average (percentage) of elderly populations (over 65 years old) was 18.2%. Thus, any block group with an elderly population of greater than 18.2% was identified as an elderly concentration area of concern. These block groups are illustrated on Map 2 – Elderly Population Areas of Concern.

MAP 2- Elderly Population Areas of Concern



Block groups throughout the WORPO region were analyzed by median household income at or below the 2024 poverty line for a family of four (\$31,200). Block groups below the 2024 poverty line were identified as a low-income area of concern and are highlighted in light yellow. These block groups are illustrated on Map 3 – Low Income Areas of Concern.

MAP 3- Low Income Areas of Concern



PARTICIPATION IN THE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS

This document outlines the structure by which member counties, local elected officials, businesses, organizations, private citizens, and any other interested parties from across the region may participate in the WORPO transportation planning process. The participation of WORPO members, subcommittees, partner agencies, regional stakeholders, and the general public is key to the success of WORPO and vital to fostering inclusive local government and coordinated decision making. Establishing an open and flexible public participation process will stimulate collaboration between member counties, stakeholders, and the public.

The primary products developed by WORPO are the:

- **WORPO Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP):**
The long-range transportation plan, updated every five years, is a twenty-year plan that identifies the RTPO's recommendations regarding the region's transportation system. Multi-modal transportation projects and programs are identified, as well as systemwide demands/remedies. In addition, goals and policies are identified, including funding forecasts and action plans. The LRTP is intended to guide, inform, and support the RTPO's recommended transportation policies, programs, and investments. Because the LRTP must be comprehensive in its analyses of future conditions, it considers financial, social, environmental, and economic factors as well. A 21-day comment period will be conducted. Public participation strategies may include convening the RTPO's advisory committees to discuss the LRTP over several meetings. Public meetings, as required, will be advertised in the newspaper, on the RTPO website, and communicated to stakeholders. The draft LRTP may be posted on the RTPO website. When possible, staff may conduct outreach, including community presentations. A record of comments received will be kept on file, reported to committees, and incorporated into the final plan. Periodically, State or local officials request that the approved Plan be modified, or that a project recommendation be added or dropped. Such requests shall also be provided a similar 21-day public comment period.
- **WORPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP / RTIP):**
The transportation improvement program (TIP), adopted every two years, is the short-range (four-year) listing of financially constrained transportation projects to be undertaken by local project sponsors within the RTPO planning area. Projects in the local TIP are incorporated into the statewide transportation improvement program (STIP). Transportation projects must be listed in the TIP/STIP to be eligible for federal funding. The RTPO will conduct a 21-day comment period. Public participation strategies during the TIP development process are the same as, and conducted concurrently with, the STIP. As available, staff may also conduct community outreach, including community presentations. The draft TIP will be made available to committee members and posted to the RTPO website.

The RTPPO may host an open house, in partnership with ODOT District One. The STIP/TIP open house will be advertised as a legal notice in The Lima News, on the RTPPO website and social media. Open house notifications may be mailed using the U.S. Postal Service or emailed to individuals and/or organizations on the stakeholders' list. A record of comments received will be kept on file with responses, reported to committees, and incorporated into the draft TIP. Periodically, State or local officials request that the approved TIP be modified, or that a project recommendation be added or dropped. Such requests shall also be provided a similar 21-day public comment period. A record of comments received is kept on file with responses, reported to committees, and incorporated into the amended plan.

- **Unified Planning Work Program The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP):** Produced annually, provides a comprehensive list of the various planning and surveillance activities, programs, and plans the RTPPO will undertake during the fiscal year. Through participation of member political subdivisions, the RTPPO determines planning priorities and policies for the region. A 21-day public participation process will be conducted to include various public participation strategies. Standing committees may identify/discuss local needs and work toward prioritizing planning tasks. Committee meeting notices may be emailed to members and posted on the RTPPO website. Requests may also be emailed to The Lima News for the publication of meetings dates/times. Staff may conduct additional consultation with agencies and interested parties as necessary. The RTPPO committee structure will adopt the final UPWP after the 21-day comment period. A record of comments received will be kept on file with responses, reported to committees, and may be incorporated into the final UPWP document.
- **Public Participation Plan:** The WORPO Public Participation Plan (PPP) describes a formal process, in compliance with Federal requirements, to integrate public participation and input into not only the transportation planning process, but the development of all long- and short-range transportation plans. The PPP identifies stakeholders, goals, strategies, and mechanisms for increasing citizen participation. A 21-day comment period will be conducted. Public participation strategies may include convening the RTPPO's advisory committees to discuss the PPP over several meetings. A record of comments received will be kept on file, reported to committees, and may be incorporated into the final plan.
- **Other Programs, Plans & Services:** The RTPPO recognizes that many of its on-going planning, surveillance, and modeling activities affect the community, its businesses, and local citizenry. The RTPPO commits to keep such activities in the public light and to keep local stakeholders apprised of on-going and current activities through the use of the

media, newsletters, committee meetings, and the RTPO website. Should local concerns generate RTPO activities that develop new programs, plans, and/or services, the RTPO will respond with the same public involvement process, including review and comment periods as previously identified.

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

Public participation is an opportunity for the public to positively influence transportation decision making. WORPO will, through its committees, staff, representatives, members, and other partners, work to ensure that the needs of all segments of the population are represented in the transportation planning process. Stakeholder interest in this process can be public, private, or professional, and representative of any transportation mode.

WORPO RURAL PLANNING COMMITTEE The WORPO Rural Planning Committee, a committee of LACRPC, provides representation from elected officials and other stakeholders from WORPO-member counties to develop a rural transportation plan. WORPO Rural Planning Committee meetings are open to the public and meeting dates, agendas, and minutes will be displayed on the LACRPC website as well as emailed to all WORPO members for circulation.

WORPO RURAL PLANNING COUNTY SUBCOMMITTEES County subcommittees are composed of representatives from diverse backgrounds. These include local municipalities, transportation agencies, transit services providers, mobility managers, public utilities, economic development organizations, the private sector, academia, and others. The subcommittees advise and guide WORPO in the development of all elements of the transportation plan as well as carry out most of the public involvement in this process. It is intended that the member counties will be the driving force in this process.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

To facilitate collaboration in developing multi-modal transportation planning products, it is the responsibility of the County subcommittees to provide government, industry, and residents with the information needed to understand what the problems are, what actions are proposed, what the effects will be, and when each element of the program will be ready for public use and/or input. The WORPO Rural Planning County Subcommittees, will be the primary means of involving transportation stakeholders and the public in the planning process. However, WORPO staff will assist in the planning and facilitation of public meetings, events, and media announcements when and where appropriate. The public participation plan and process is designed to give members, stakeholders, and the public an opportunity to participate in, review, and comment on the transportation planning process and other related activities. Although, much of the public participation process will be administered at the county level via each County Subcommittee, WORPO staff will also provide the public with a chance to review and

comment on the planning products before adoption by the WORPO Rural Planning Committee. As WORPO staff develops its transportation planning projects, with county subcommittees, the WORPO Rural Planning Committee and staff will work to incorporate the input of the county subcommittees into the development of transportation planning products. WORPO will utilize the LACRPC facilities and website for public involvement in the transportation planning process. WORPO Rural Planning Committee meetings and, when appropriate, stakeholder and public engagement events including open houses, will be held at LACRPC's office. A page for WORPO activities is available on the LACRPC website which includes information presented at meetings and other events as well as links to virtual meetings, newsletters, and other documents in a digital format. The public involvement process will also include the cooperation and collaboration of local governments and sub-committees via email, social media, newsletter, meetings, and special events. The Subcommittees are expected to facilitate public involvement at the county level by utilizing their own structures and meeting spaces in their respective counties. These various methods will be utilized for public participation before the adoption of planning products by the WORPO Rural Planning Committee.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MECHANISMS

To support public involvement procedures, the RTPO expects that in the course of developing any single program, project, or service one or more of the following mechanisms may be utilized as tools in the public involvement process. Each will be reviewed to assess effectiveness, to inform the public or encourage the public to comment, attend a meeting, or in some other way participate in the decision or issue at hand. The following listing presents a summary of the individual mechanisms that may be used by the RTPO in furthering the goals of the PPP.

- **Website** - The RTPO's website is the principal means of communicating with the general public. The website allows 24-hour 7-day a week access to meeting schedules, notices, and materials, including meeting minutes, as well as draft/final program/project plans. The website makes available to internet users, the LRTP, TIP, UPWP, and PPP, as well as RTPO newsletters, summary reports, transportation surveys, etc.
- **Visualization Techniques** - As much as possible, the RTPO may use maps, graphs, illustrations, charts, photographs, and/or interactive tools to engage the public. Visual techniques may be more effective for some than paragraphs or written documentation. The RTPO will, as is fiscally feasible, continue to develop and integrate visualization in conjunction with other tools in order to convey specific information about transportation related programs, projects, and services.
- **Summary Sheets** - Summary sheets may be developed by the RTPO to explain in non-technical jargon summaries of the LRTP, TIP, UPWP, and PPP or other products as deemed appropriate. Summary sheets may be made available during the required formal public involvement process and be posted to the RTPO website.

- **Public Service Announcements** - The RTPO may prepare transportation-related public service announcements (PSAs), formatted for television, radio, or social media, as an effective mechanism to address certain specific issues, locations and/or populations.
- **Placard** - Placard postings may be an effective, low-cost mechanism to support public involvement in those communities disadvantaged and underserved by transportation. Placards, small lightweight paperboard, can be printed in any language and size relatively quickly and inexpensively. Placards may be placed in social/human service agencies, at meeting locations, and on public transit vehicles to support notification of public involvement events.
- **Open House** - The RTPO may host/facilitate open houses, when necessary, to promote informal discussion of transportation-related programs, projects, or services. Open house events are open to the general public and project sponsors use various public involvement mechanisms to promote discussion and elicit comment from the community.
- **Newsletter** - The RTPO produces a quarterly newsletter to inform the general public and stakeholders of important events and opportunities for participation.
- **Press Release** - Succinct announcements of RTPO events may be prepared and released to the local electronic and written media outlets as deemed appropriate and necessary.
- **Media Event** - To solicit more public acceptance and recognition of traffic and transportation-related issues, RTPO staff may solicit and support special media attention on specific issues/events at specific times/locations.
- **Information Booth** - The RTPO may choose to use informational booths at local events in order to increase public awareness of transportation-related issues and solicit public comment on specific projects, programs, or services.
- **Fact Sheets** - Fact sheets may be developed by the RTPO, and/or local project sponsor, to address a single project, program, or service. The fact sheets, intended to provide the reader with essential subject matter to further public understanding of a single topic, may be used to provide participants with background for discussion and comment.
- **Stakeholder Meetings** - Efforts are made to schedule stakeholder meetings with neighborhood associations, member political subdivisions, internal and advisory committees, as well as other groups, as appropriate at convenient times and locations.
- **Stakeholder List** – A stakeholder list may be maintained by the RTPO to include specific contact information for those affected parties and agencies within the community, who should be provided early and continuous access to the planning process. General categories of stakeholders as identified in Federal guidelines were previously referenced in this PPP as “Public Involvement Stakeholders”.
- **Public Meeting** - The RTPO is sometimes required to hold a public meeting. The purpose of a public meeting is to obtain public input on decisions regarding matters of plan adoption,

amendment, and other key funding decisions. Public meetings may be conducted whenever the RTPO is reviewing policies, programs, or services that affect a wide range of citizens.

- **Comment Period** - Formal public comment periods are initiated for review of the RTPO's draft LRTP, TIP, UPWP, and PPP as well as other products as appropriate. All comment periods are 21 days and comments received are retained. Said comments may be published in final documents as required.

CHANGES TO THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

Reviews of the Public Participation Plan are performed at least once every 5 years and WORPO staff is given the authority to make minor changes to wording within this Public Participation Plan to ensure the information is current and directed toward relevant and accurate supplementary sources. Significant changes or amendments to the plan must be made available to the public for at least a 45-day comment period prior to approval. The updated plan or amendment is brought before the WORPO Rural Planning Committee for approval. The most up-to-date version of the plan will be made available in a web-friendly format that includes a link to the printable PDF version. Printed copies are available upon request.

REFINEMENT OF PROCESS

Federal regulations require that RTPO's review the Public Participation Policy periodically to determine if the objectives of the process are achieved and if adjustments are necessary to make it more effective.

WORPO staff will periodically review the effectiveness of the procedures and strategies contained in the Public Participation Plan with regard to technology, people, and strategies in an effort to ensure a full and open participation process

Several methods will be used to gauge the effectiveness of WORPO's public participation methods, including input from citizens, public officials and other planning professionals. Techniques used to collect feedback may include formal surveys (online and in person), public comment cards, verbal comments at public meetings, and even face-to-face conversations held between staff/consultants and citizens/public officials/planning professionals about the Public Participation Policy.

SUMMARY

Federal regulation, taken collectively, calls for a transportation system that supports a just distribution of benefits across racial and socioeconomic lines; a system that is as friendly to commerce and the disadvantaged residing within a community as it is to the natural environment. Federally financed infrastructure must support mobility, economic development, and global competition, while furthering increased quality of life for the entire community. Such improvements must be well planned to further long-term community sustainability while protecting the future. The RTPO commits to five public participation goals to provide the public with opportunities to participate in the RTPO's decision-making process. The PPP is intended to provide goals and strategies that result in the desired outcome for public involvement and participation. The PPP will be subjected to ongoing, as well as, periodic reviews, and maintained to meet Federal requirements for public involvement in metropolitan planning.

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Appendix A

MEDIA NOTIFICATIONS

Public Participation – WORPO

Media Contacts:

The Lima News

David Trinko, Editor

dtrinko@limanews.com

info@limanews.com

205 W. Market St., Suite #100A, Lima, OH, 45801

Phone: 419-223-1010 Fax: 419-229-2926

Hometown Stations

Jeff Fitzgerald, News Director

fitz@wllo.com

newsrelease@wllo.com

1424 Rice Ave. Lima, OH 45805

Phone: 419-228-8835 Fax: 419-225-6109

Woof Boom Radio

listenup@woofboom.com

57 Town Square, Lima, OH 45801

419-331-1600

The Delphos Herald

Nancy Spencer, News Editor

nspencer@cherryroad.com

405 N. Main St. Delphos, OH 45833

419-695-0015 Ext. 2146

Hancock and Putnam Counties

The Courier

news@thecourier.com

701 W. Sandusky St.

Findlay, OH 45840

Phone: 419-422-5151

The Bluffton News

news@blufftonnews.com

111 Vine St.

Bluffton, OH 45817

Phone: 419-204-4165

WFIN/WKXA/the Fox radio stations

mattdemczyk@wfin.com

P.O. Box 1507

551 Lake Cascades Parkway

Findlay, OH 45839

Phone: 419-422-4545

The Review Times

rtnews@reviewtimes.com

322 N. Main St.

Fostoria, OH 44830

Phone: 419-435-6641

Putnam County Sentinel

legals@putnamsentinel.com

1502 N. Perry St.

Ottawa, OH 45875

Phone: 785-992-0001

Auglaize County

Wapak Daily News

520 Industrial Drive
Wapakoneta, OH 45895
Phone: 419-738-2128
marketing@wapakwdn.com

The Evening Leader

102 E. Spring St.
Saint Marys, Ohio 45885
Phone: 419-394-7414
editor@theeveningleader.com

Hardin County

Kenton Times

(419) 674-4066
ktprod@kentontimes.com

Mercer County

Daily Standard

newsdept@dailystandard.com

WCSM Radio

kevinsandler@wcsmradio.com

Wyandot County

Daily Chief Union

Brian Hemminger
DCUeditor@DailyChiefUnion.com

Van Wert County

Times Bulletin

1167 Westwood Drive
Van Wert, OH 45891
419-238-2285
news@timesbulletin.com



130 W. North St. Lima, Ohio 45801
419-228-1836
www.lacrpc.com

For immediate release:

Contact: Colleen Barry, RTPO Manager
Lima-Allen County Regional Planning Commission
cbarry@lacrpc.com
419-228-1836 ext. 4707

Heading/Title
Subheading if needed

First paragraph introducing topic and most-relevant information.

Second paragraph should have important information and possibly quotes.

Other paragraphs could have additional supporting details that might be less pertinent to the story.

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WORPO is a committee of the Lima/Allen County Regional Planning Commission, which provides technical, administrative, and staffing support to WORPO's members via funding provided by the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT).



Notice of Public Meeting

(Type of Meeting)

Name _____

Topic _____

Date _____

Time _____

Location _____

(Description of Project or Plan)

Individuals in need of specific accommodations should contact
Lima-Allen County Regional Planning Commission at 419-228-1836.

COMMENT SHEET

West Central Ohio Rural Planning Organization

Please use this sheet to record your comments regarding any WORPO documents during the public comment period.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Date: _____

Telephone: _____

If you have additional questions or comments, the LACRPC office hours and telephone number follows:

Address: LACRPC, 130 W. North Street, Lima, OH 45801
 Office hours: Monday through Friday; 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
 Telephone: 419-228-1836 (voice); 419-228-3891 (fax)
 Website: www.lacrpc.com