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A.O.

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A.0 Public Involvement Plan

Public Involvement Plan

The Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (GUAMPO) recognizes that the success of any community improvement is dependent upon a meaningful public outreach effort. As such, it is committed to conducting a proactive public involvement program that focuses on soliciting local government and community interaction throughout the study process. It is believed that the positive value of implementing a strong public involvement effort will result in public awareness of and support for the study.

The Public Involvement Plan will be updated and amended throughout the study process. The plan indicates the public involvement approach to be taken with the project and lists generally the contact persons, agencies and media officials and the means used to involve them in the process. GUAMPO will prepare responses to public inquiries as a result of the public involvement process. Collection of public input will occur throughout the duration of the study.

The GUAMPO Freight Planning process is committed to providing broad based and continuous opportunities for public involvement throughout the process. The process is designed to be responsive to citizen participants, is committed to utilizing the knowledge and understanding of citizens to address important issues, and offers multiple opportunities for engagement – at varying levels of involvement. The purpose of this Public Involvement Plan is to define how citizens and other stakeholders will be involved throughout the entire freight planning effort and how communities are provided opportunities to comment on the plan, element(s) or amendments, and have adequate access to the process of defining the community’s vision, values, goals, policies, priorities, and implementation strategies.

GUAMPO must implement a program to provide for and encourage public involvement and participation during the preparation of: (1) the Freight Plan; (2) amendments to the Long Range Transportation Plan; and (3) updates to the Short-Term Work Program portion of the Plan. In addition, the Plan is intended to serve as a format to be followed in making future public planning related decisions.

Public Participation Program

The MPO will guide the citizen participation and coordination efforts associated with the plan. A series of meetings will be facilitated to build consensus through a collaborative planning process that serves to create an open, inclusive, and interactive forum. These meetings will be County-wide (including all of the Gaston Urban Area).

The purpose of these meetings will be to inform and educate the citizens of the Gaston Urban Area about the project; solicit their input and comments about the project based on the five (5) elements of the Freight Plan:

- Identify the Gaston Urban Area’s freight network
- Determine the freight impact on existing infrastructure
- Assess the communities perception of freight
- Identify existing transportation projects with freight impact
- Create a freight planning strategy

The plan will involve input from Private Freight Carriers, Airports, Planning, Public Works, Community, and the Chamber of Commerce.

Committee Membership

Freight Working Group – Shall consist of selected members of the public and private community interested in transportation related issues, and will work closely with consultants to provide techniques, tools and strategies needed to inform and educate the citizens regarding the plan.

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Steering Committee Meetings – The MPO's Technical Coordinating Committee will serve as the Steering Committee and will provide guidance and feedback throughout the planning process. Meetings will be scheduled at appropriate benchmarks to coincide with project deliverables and in advance of public meetings.

Public Participation & Involvement Plan Tasks

The Citizen Participation and Involvement Plan tasks are derived from the essential need to educate the public regarding the Freight Plan. The following tasks aid the planning, assessment, evaluation and implementation of the public participation and involvement plan:

Kick-Off Public Meeting – GUAMPO hosted a kick-off meeting on March 21, 2001 to officially announce the planning process to the citizens and other stakeholders. Gaston Urban Area officials were invited to introduce the process and the community participated in viewing presentations covering the project purpose and general plan approach. Initial opinion surveys, comment and volunteer sign up forms were made available at this meeting.

Public Involvement Plan (PIP) - In consultation with staff and the Freight Working Group a public involvement plan has been developed and focuses on two-way communication and involvement with the community.

Stakeholder Interviews - The GUAMPO staff and Working Group identified stakeholders to be interviewed. These stakeholders have knowledge of and a vested interest in the

plan, and are affiliated with the specific geographic areas. The purpose of stakeholder interviews is to identify major issues and develop a complete understanding of the public opinions, comments, and concerns, including potential sources of conflict, and anticipated barriers impeding effective implementation. The stakeholders included leaders from:

- the Cramerton, Bessemer City, Gastonia, and Gaston County Departments of Planning;
- the Belmont, Cramerton, Dallas, Gastonia, and Mt. Holly City Manager's Offices;
- County-wide public decision-making boards, such as the Gaston County School Board and the Gastonia Planning Board;
- Local private manufacturers and service providers, such as Pharr Yarns and the Sun Drop Corporation;
- Civic and advocacy organizations, such as the NAACP;
- Freight companies that operate in the area, such as Wix Corporation and National Gypsum.

The team used prepared survey questions. The results were incorporated into the development of the Plan and used to illustrate the impact that the feedback has had on the progress of the Plan. The interview responses are included in Appendix B.

Public Outreach Program – A series of communication outlets were used to inform citizens of the process and to solicit public participation. The following are tools that were used to ensure communities were informed of the planning process:

Stakeholder database development and maintenance – Consultants worked with staff and Freight Working Group to compile and maintain a mailing list of stakeholders consisting of major employers, transportation-related industries, elected officials and interested individuals.

Public Outreach Plan – The consultant coordinated with MPO staff to identify the best media outlets to publicize the meetings. The following approach was used to inform the citizens and media about the plan progress.

Public Information Materials – Outreach materials were created and used to help the public understand the Freight Plan. These materials were distributed at public meetings, and other geographical locations to establish visible, continuous public feedback (for example: fact sheets, comment forms, newsletters, displays, flyers, press releases, notices, stakeholder database, signs, and other outreach methods).

Conduct Two (2) Community Workshops – The first workshop was an informational meeting held at the Westfield Shopping Town Mall. Over 25 people received infor-

mation on the project, including the purpose and goals. The public was given the opportunity to provide comments on their understanding of the freight issues in the Gaston Urban Area.

The second interactive workshop was held in Cramerton on June 28, 2007. The findings and recommendations of the study were presented to the community.

Open House – Final public meeting and open house presentation of the Draft Freight Plan is scheduled for September 11, 2007.

Monthly Staff/Freight Working Group Meeting - Monthly meetings were scheduled and held to maintain the desired timelines, benchmarks and overall direction of the plan process.

Scheduled Public Involvement

- March 21 Project Team meeting - kick-off meeting
- April 13 Develop freight work group
- April 20 Document public outreach process
- May 17 Stakeholder & Community meeting - needs assessment presentation
- June 28 Work group & Community meeting – Findings and Recommendations