



Public Participation and Consultation Process for Transportation Planning

SCCOG

Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments
5 Connecticut Avenue, Norwich, CT 06360
www.seccog.org

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Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments

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Alternates:

John Burt, Town Manager, Town of Groton
Timothy Sharkey, Senior Burgess, Borough of Jewett City
John Salomone, City Manager, City of Norwich
Jim Rivers, Town Manager, Town of Windham

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Staff Assisting in the Preparation of this Report

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Prepared in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway and Federal Transit Administrations, and the Connecticut Department of Transportation.

By agreement between the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) and the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CT DOT), the process outlined in this document, and adopted by SCCOG for development of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), will satisfy and act as the State's public participation and consultation process, as allowed under Section 450.212(b) of Title 23 of the Code of Federal Regulations. Also, CT DOT, acting as the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5307(c) applicant, has consulted with SCCOG and concurs that this public participation and consultation process adopted by SCCOG, acting as the MPO for the development of the STIP/TIP, satisfies the public hearing requirements that pertain to the development of the Program of Projects for regular Section 5307, Urbanized Area Formula Program grant applications, including the provision for public notices and the time established for public review and comment. However, for FTA projects that are not routine (e.g.: Section 5307 applications requiring an Environmental Assessment of Environmental Impact Statement), the public participation provided herein for STIP/TIP review is not sufficient. For those instances, public participation, as presented in the joint FHWA/FTA environmental regulations (23 CFR 771) will be required for grant approval.

Please direct any questions relating to the Public Participation and Consultation Process for Transportation Planning, to:

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Introduction

The Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) is a Regional Council of Governments, providing a basis for intergovernmental cooperation, aiding in the solution of regional issues, serving as a technical resource to its member municipalities, and providing a collective voice for the region. SCCOG has 22 member municipalities.

Intro. The Process

In addition to its duties as a Regional Council of Governments, SCCOG is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) responsible for transportation planning in southeastern Connecticut. SCCOG is committed to the process of informing, and seeking information from, the southeastern Connecticut community. This document sets forth the policies and practices that will guide SCCOG in seeking input from individuals and groups, and describes the specific opportunities for public participation in the planning process. These policies meet or exceed similar requirements prescribed in the Connecticut General Statutes and the Federal Transportation Act, Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act ("FAST Act").

The public participation and consultation process is an important component of transportation planning. Public participation and consultation occurs continually, allowing the public and governmental agencies to provide input into different stages of planning. This process also specifically aids in implementing Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act ("Title VI"), which prevents discrimination by governmental agencies. The goal of a strong public participation and consultation process is to ensure that programs and policies developed by elected and appointed officials are responsive to the objectives and values of the citizens affected by such programs and policies. *For more on the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments' Title VI and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) policies, please visit seccog.org/transportation.*





Southeast Area Transit, seatbus.com

Intro. Evaluation and Revisions

A 45-day public comment period will be required when revisions are proposed to the Public Participation and Consultation Process for Transportation Planning. The public comment period will commence upon publication of a legal notice.

This document will be **reassessed on a regular basis** by SCCOG staff. While reviewing the effectiveness of the plan, staff will consider the following:

- **Trends in communication.** SCCOG will remain informed regarding the usership and effectiveness of new communication platforms, including social media, and continually assess adopting those new platforms, with respect given to staff time, privacy, and costs.
- **Use of existing techniques.** The effectiveness of existing policies and practices will inform SCCOG about future priorities or the need to explore parallel avenues.
- **Website traffic.** SCCOG is able to monitor and analyze website traffic to seccog.org, receiving complex reports from its web host. Data gives staff an up-to-date look at the effectiveness of recent postings and site updates, including news related to transportation planning.
- **Public comments.** Feedback received at public hearings or informational meetings can give insight into effective techniques for improving public participation and access to information. This allows the public to have direct input not only into the planning process for a specific project, but also the processes employed for future projects. The public is also encouraged to contact staff and suggest additional outreach or information-sharing efforts outside of a formal public hearing, public comment period, or informational meeting.
- **Other considerations.** SCCOG will consider additional practices, as they become apparent, in order to improve the effectiveness of public participation and information-sharing efforts.

Annually, the procedures contained in this plan will be reviewed for their effectiveness in ensuring full and open public participation. SCCOG staff will then draft, and recommend for adoption, following a public comment period as noted above, amendments to this document as needed.

1. Information Availability and Transparency

Transparency should be ensured prior to the outset of any planning process. Once the planning process is initiated, all systems should be put in place to provide the public with information and data in a variety of formats. The Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) employs a number of proactive techniques to inform and involve the public.



1a. Special Studies

As part of a regular work program, SCCOG staff conduct special studies on a variety of transportation-related topics. Studies are distributed in draft format for the purpose of seeking comments from member towns and citizens. Comments submitted are then considered in development of the final study.

1b. Technical Assistance

In addition to working internally, with the SCCOG Board or another SCCOG Committees, staff regularly collaborate with committees and organizations within the region. This provides opportunities for interaction between staff and the public served. In addition, SCCOG has established special advisory committees on an as-needed basis. These committees are typically technical in nature, drawing outside resources into planning programs.

1c. Presentations and Lectures

SCCOG staff are available to agencies, organizations, and citizen groups to discuss subjects of topical concern. This provides an added avenue for public access into the planning process.

1d. Public Records

As a public agency, SCCOG prepares agendas and minutes for all public meetings, and provides access to all public records, as required under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

1e. Website and Social Media

SCCOG maintains a website (www.seccog.org). Agendas, meeting minutes, reports, hearing notices, documents and publications, as well as news, are regularly posted to the site. The website, therefore, is the centerpiece of public participation. The incorporation of social media, presently Facebook and LinkedIn, allow additional information sharing and discussion regarding SCCOG activities. Both formats allow non-English-speaking persons to participate.

1f. Other Information

SCCOG keeps and collects historic and current data from a number of sources; this includes plans and studies, tabular data such as Census counts, transportation-related related data such as traffic and crash data, data in spatial formats, and other information created by SCCOG staff.

1g. Meetings with Staff

SCCOG has staff available to meet with the public Monday through Friday, during normal business hours. If a member of the public wishes to meet for an extended period of time, an appointment is preferred.

2. Consultation with Other Agencies

In partnership, SCCOG, the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CT DOT), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) are responsible for transportation planning in the southeastern Connecticut region. It is SCCOG's mission to represent the broad transportation interests of region using local knowledge of challenges and opportunities.



Harvey Barrison, flickr.com

2a. Affiliate and Liaison Members

Two federally recognized Tribal Nations, Mohegan Tribe and Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, are affiliates of SCCOG; and two important military institutions, the United States Coast Guard Academy and the United States Naval Submarine Base New London, appoint regional liaisons to attend meetings of the SCCOG Board. SCCOG benefits greatly from its affiliate members and liaisons. Consultation with tribal affiliates and military liaisons reaches well beyond transportation planning, into matters related to housing, economic development, and natural resource planning.

2b. Other Consultation

SCCOG has created consultative linkages with state agencies, local organizations, and neighboring Regional Councils of Governments. These entities include: Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development; Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection; Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection; Connecticut Department of Labor; Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services; Connecticut Department of Social Services; Connecticut Office of Policy and Management; Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board; Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region; Southeastern Connecticut Transit District; Windham Regional Transit District; Northeastern Connecticut Transit District; 9 Town Transit; Thames Valley Council for Community Action; Eastern Connecticut Transportation Consortium; Area Agency on Aging; Capitol Region Council of Governments; Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments; Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments.

3. Public Hearings and Informational Meetings

Public hearings are a segment of a formal decision-making process intended specifically to solicit public input and support public awareness. Informational meetings are less formal, but still valuable, forums for communicating a topic and providing a stage for public comment. SCCOG uses public hearings and informational meetings throughout its planning processes.



Doug Kerr, flickr.com

3a. Opportunity for Public Comment

Opportunities for public comment, whether using informational meetings, public hearings, or public comment periods, will be used for the benefit of a plan, program, or policy.

A 30-day public comment period will be afforded for the Long-range Transportation Plan, the State and regional Transportation Improvement Program (STIP/TIP), and the Air Quality Conformity Statement. A public hearing will be held during the public comment period.

3b. Location of the Meeting

Public hearings and informational meetings are held at a location and time considered to be convenient to the public, so as to optimize participation. Location accessibility is also of special concern; all buildings must be handicap-accessible. Locations for public hearings and informational meetings are chosen carefully, based on the potential size of the audience and the issue being discussed; certain topics affect certain groups or regions more than others, so locations must be sensitive to the context of the meeting

or hearing. In all cases, SCCOG staff ensure that accommodations are made for elderly and disabled persons. Likewise, people with English-language deficiencies are afforded an opportunity to request translation assistance.

3c. Timing of the Meeting

The open dialogue afforded at public hearings and informational meetings is crucial to the planning process. The planning process, however, is also time-constrained; therefore, great effort is taken to allow for informal and formal comment periods to influence transportation planning. Also, in order to encourage additional opportunity for public participation, time for public comment is set aside at all regular SCCOG meetings.

3d. Meeting Notification

It is the SCCOG policy to seek the opinion of all interested parties and persons who wish to participate in the transportation planning process. Notification of all agency meetings will conform to the requirements of the FOIA. Further, special notification will be directly made to consulting agencies, as well as individuals and groups requesting such notification.

Legal notices of public hearings will be made in at least one newspaper with distribution throughout southeastern Connecticut, and posted to the SCCOG webpage and Facebook page, no fewer than five days prior to the hearing. Such notice will contain the time, date, location, and subject of the public hearing, and will make reference to the location of meeting materials.

3e. Content of the Meeting

Public hearings and informational meetings will provide for an opportunity to educate the public on a proposal. Meeting materials and the content of the meeting, prior to receiving any public comment, will be programmed in a practical manner. If any final documents differ significantly from a version made available for public review, or if new issues were raised that were not foreseeable at the time, an additional opportunity for public comment will be made.

3f. Presentation and Visualization

Where and when appropriate, SCCOG will provide presentations and other materials, such as maps, charts, and handouts, in order to assist the public in understanding and interpreting information.

3g. Response to Comments

When significant comments are received by SCCOG as part of the formal transportation planning process, every effort will be made to respond to the comments and, if pertinent, incorporate the input into the subject proposal. Responses to comments will detail the manner in which they were considered or incorporated.