

GPATS

Public Participation Plan

DRAFT



Greenville-Pickens Area Transportation Study
Prepared by the Greenville County Planning Commission
Approved by GPATS Policy Committee _____, 2007

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Section 1: Purpose of the Public Participation Plan

The public participation plan for the Greenville Pickens Area Transportation Study (GPATS) establishes goals, policies and objectives to ensure accurate and timely public information and participation in transportation planning. The plan describes the transportation planning process, public involvement methods, and evaluation measures for public involvement activities.

Section 2: Overview of the GPATS Region

GPATS is a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) responsible for regional transportation planning in parts of five counties. The MPO planning area covers central Greenville, eastern Pickens, northeastern Anderson, northern Laurens, and western Spartanburg counties. Portions of three Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) are included within the GPATS region.

Greenville County is part of a three-county MSA that includes Pickens and Laurens counties, with a population of 559,940 according to the 2000 Census.

Census defines Anderson County as a separate MSA, and labels Oconee County as a “Micropolitan Statistical Area” with Seneca as its central city. These two statistical areas are joined with Greenville to create the Greenville-Anderson-Seneca Combined Statistical Area (CSA), which had a 2000 population of over 790,000 persons, and is forecast to approach 900,000 persons in 2010. Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Area boundaries are drawn to include whole counties, and are named according to the largest urban area; CSAs combine the boundaries and names of contiguous MSAs.

To the east of Greenville, the Spartanburg-Gaffney-Union CSA combines the Spartanburg MSA with Cherokee and Union counties, with a combined 2000 population of 336,209.

Urbanized Areas are the most densely-populated “core” of Metropolitan Statistical Areas. The 2000 Census expanded the Greenville Urbanized Area to include eastern Pickens County and northeastern Anderson Counties, as well as a part of western Spartanburg County. A separate Mauldin-Simpsonville Urbanized Area was created in 2000, and includes the City of Fountain Inn and part of northern Laurens County.

All Urbanized Areas must be included in a Metropolitan Planning Organization; GPATS serves as the MPO for both the Greenville Urbanized Area and the Mauldin-Simpsonville Urbanized Area.

Section 3: GPATS History and Organization

3.1 History

In the fall of 1964, county, city, and state governments created the Greenville Area Transportation Study (GRATS), to comply with the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1962, which required all urban areas of over 50,000 persons to initiate a continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative transportation planning process in order to receive Federal funds for highway projects in the area.

The first GRATS plan was published in November 1967, a two-volume report entitled *Continuing Transportation Plan for the Greenville, South Carolina, Urban Area*. The study identified many new highways designed to accommodate transportation needs in the urban area through the design year of 1985, and included brief reviews of mass transit services and land use patterns.

In late 1977, the Greenville County Planning Commission (GCPC), in conjunction with the SCDOT, began the first major update of the original GRATS Study. The purpose of the update was to evaluate the 1967 plan in light of the county's emerging development trends. As a part of this process, the plan's projections were extended 10 years to 1995, growth and traffic projections were taken into account, and, as a result, changes were made in the plan. Additional updates to the GRATS plan occurred in 1985, 1996, and 2002.

The expansion of the Greenville Urbanized Area resulting from the 2000 Census led to major changes in the MPO. Renamed Greenville-Pickens Area Transportation Study (GPATS), the Policy Committee and Study Team were expanded to provide representation for the new areas.

3.2 GPATS Committees

The purpose of the MPO Committees is to ensure input from citizens, technical and engineering staff, and policy makers. Three committees participate in the development of plans and policies for GPATS.

GPATS Policy Committee

The GPATS Policy Coordinating Committee is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Greenville urban area and is responsible for adopting the GPATS plan (20-Year Plan), and the GPATS Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP is a 5-year program of projects committed to preliminary engineering, right-of-way (ROW) purchase or construction within 5 years. The Policy Committee establishes priorities and approves changes to the recommended plan. The Policy Committee has the following specific responsibilities:

- To familiarize public and civic leaders within the study area with the progress of the planning process;
- To generate agreement on basic objectives, transportation service levels, and standards;
- To select, approve, and recommend projects for both short and long-range implementation; and
- To organize and appoint members of other committees.

In order to perform the tasks mentioned above, the Policy Committee includes official voting representatives of participating agencies as follows:

- County Councils;
- Legislative Delegations;
- Mayors of each of the municipalities in the GPATS area; and
- State Highway Commissioners representing districts in the GPATS area.

As the group most directly responsible for GPATS implementation, the Policy Committee must ensure that recommendations, plans, and programs are in keeping with the goals and objectives of the state and county. This committee meets on a called basis.

GPATS Study Team

The GPATS Study Team is composed of representatives of the local planners, engineers, and public works officials from Greenville, Pickens, and Anderson counties; SCDOT Office of Planning representatives; Federal Highway Administration officials; the SCDOT District Traffic Engineer, and a representative of the Greenville Transit Authority (GTA). The Study Team evaluates and makes recommendations to the GPATS Policy Committee prior to any GPATS plan adoption or modifications. Specifically, it is the responsibility of the GPATS Study Team to:

- Provide technical direction to the planning process;
- Evaluate alternatives;
- Recommend plans and programs to the Policy Committee;
- Assimilate and take into consideration public input;
- Prepare the necessary reports and documents as required in the transportation planning process;
- Provide administration support to the Policy Committee; and
- Serve as a link between the Policy Committee and other agencies having a responsibility in the transportation planning process.

Citizens Advisory Committee

An ad-hoc Transportation Plan Advisory Committee, composed of 21 local residents, was created in January 2006 to provide input for the 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan. A Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) will be formed as a result of the adoption of this Public Participation Plan.

Section 4: Federal Agency Requirements for Public Participation

The policy of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is to aggressively support proactive public participation at all stages of planning and project development. State departments of transportation and MPOs are required to develop effective public participation processes. The performance standards for these proactive public involvement processes include:

- Early and continuous involvement.
- Collaborative input on alternatives, evaluation criteria, and mitigation needs.
- Open meetings where matters related to federal-aid highway and transit programs are being considered.
- Open access to the decision-making process.

Section 5: GPATS Public Participation Goal, Policies and Objectives

GOAL: Provide the public with clear, relevant, timely, and accurate information about transportation plans, policies, and projects in readily accessible formats.

Policy 1: GPATS will continuously and actively seek public comment and provide meaningful opportunities for the public to participate in the development of transportation plans.

Objective 1.1: GPATS shall develop and maintain an up-to-date database of contacts, including but not limited to the following:

- Elected Officials
- Federal, state, and local government staff
- Transportation agencies, including transit operators, airports, and railroads
- Homeowner's Associations
- Civic groups
- Organized bicycle and pedestrian advocacy groups
- Disability advocacy groups and agencies
- Representatives of low-income, elderly, and minority groups and agencies which serve these groups
- Local print and broadcast media
- Individuals who request information about GPATS plans and activities.

Objective 1.2: GPATS shall provide mail and/or e-mail distribution of notices of public participation opportunities to all persons on the contact list described in Objective 1.1.

Objective 1.3: GPATS shall conduct all meetings of the MPO and its advisory committees in an open public forum, with prior notification of agenda, time and place of meetings, in accordance with South Carolina law.

Policy 2: GPATS shall provide clear, accurate, relevant public information about transportation activities on a continuous basis.

Objective 2.1 GPATS shall make all publications available to the public on the internet and in printed form at the Greenville County Planning Department office.

Objective 2.2: GPATS staff shall be available by telephone, e-mail, and in person (within reasonable limits) to answer questions from the public, and shall be available by request to make presentations to civic groups, other governmental agencies, and other organized groups within the GPATS area.

Objective 2.3: A newsletter will produced on an approximately quarterly basis to provide information on proposed, on-going, and completed projects; schedules for public meetings; and status of planning initiatives.

Objective 2.4: A GPATS web site shall be maintained, which will provide general information about the organization and membership of GPATS; copies of the current LRTP, TIP, and UPWP; copies of special studies; comment forms; contact information for key staff; and links to other useful transportation websites.

Policy 3: GPATS shall support and encourage full participation in the transportation planning process by all residents and stakeholders, making special efforts to identify and consult with traditionally under-represented groups.

Objective 3.1: GPATS staff shall use Census data and other resources to identify low-income and minority neighborhoods and actively seek participation from these groups.

Objective 3.2: GPATS, to the greatest extent feasible, will hold public meetings in locations that are readily accessible and convenient to the individuals and stakeholders affected by the issues to be addressed by the public meeting.

Objective 3.3: GPATS shall hold all public meetings in facilities that are handicapped accessible, and to the greatest extent practicable will hold meetings at locations served by accessible sidewalks and public transportation; however, much of the region has very limited pedestrian facilities and no public transportation services.

Policy 4: GPATS shall be involved in public participation activities for transportation projects from the planning phase through implementation.

Objective 4.1: GPATS staff shall actively assist SCDOT in development and implementation of public involvement processes for transportation improvement projects in the GPATS area.

Policy 5: GPATS shall continuously work to refine and improve public participation in the planning process.

Objective 5.1: GPATS staff will conduct an evaluation of each public participation strategy that is implemented at appropriate intervals.

Objective 5.2: GPATS staff shall develop and implement standardized procedures for evaluating the public participation program.

Section 6: Public Participation Strategies

This section describes each strategy that GPATS will use to implement this Public Participation Plan.

6.1: GPATS Website

GPATS documents and information are made available on the Greenville County Planning Department website under the transportation planning area, at

http://www.greenvilleplanning.com/transportation_planning/index.html

The website includes:

- a Citizen's Guide, with general information in a downloadable PDF brochure format
- history of GRATS and GPATS
- contact information for current GPATS Policy Committee members and staff
- maps of the GPATS study area
- current projects map
- copies of current and recent newsletters
- UPWP, TIP, and LRTP documents
- Reports from special studies
- Selected presentations
- Other special interest items such as bike routes and traffic count data

6.2: Contact List

A GPATS contact list is maintained and updated as several separate lists using Microsoft Outlook. Information may be sent to individual lists or to the entire list, depending on the specific communication. Individual citizens are added to the list upon request; due to the size of the list relatively little U.S. mail is sent to the entire list. Well over 95 percent of persons requesting to be added to the GPATS contact list have access to electronic mail, and notices of public meetings, special events, and newsletters are sent electronically to the entire list.

6.3: Legal Advertisements

GPATS advertises all comment periods and public meetings for the UPWP, TIP, and LRTP by legal advertisements in the Greenville News, the largest newspaper in the GPATS area. Scheduled GPATS Policy Committee and Study Team meetings are held at Greenville County Offices; notices are posted on the Greenville County website (<http://www.greenvillegov.org>) and on a central bulletin board at the county office complex, in compliance with state law for advertising public meetings.

6.4: GPATS Newsletter

A newsletter with updates on transportation planning activities and current issues is published approximately quarterly, and sent to the entire GPATS contact list electronically, and made available in paper copies at the GPATS staff offices.

6.5: Press Releases

Public involvement meetings, pending adoption of the TIP or LRTP, and releases of special studies are announced in press releases to local print and broadcast media. Press releases are coordinated by Greenville County's public information officer, and are sent to print media outlets in Pickens County as well.

6.6: Public Presentations, Workshops and Open Houses

Depending on the specific issues and needs involved, staff conducts various types of public meetings to communicate information and receive input and comments.

Presentations are structured to allow for question and answer sessions, followed by an open-house format breakout session where one-on-one interaction with staff is encouraged.

Workshops generally provide the public with an opportunity to provide direct input to the planning process, usually through exercises that involve marking up maps to identify problems, issues, and suggested actions and/or listing issues and desired improvements to the transportation system.

Open houses are held to provide opportunities for the public to review and offer comments on proposed plans. These are generally used for special studies and the LRTP.

6.7: Small Group Meetings and Presentations

By advance request, GPATS staff will meet with and make presentations to community groups and other governmental organizations. GPATS staff periodically make presentations to homeowners associations, civic groups, city and county councils, university classes, continuing education classes, church groups, and professional

associations. Comment forms and surveys are distributed to these groups to document public involvement and comments.

6.8: Fact Sheets

Fact sheets summarize information about plans and programs in a very brief (generally one-page) document. Fact sheets are used for special studies and to summarize the UPWP. Fact sheets will be developed for the TIP and LRTP as well.

6.9: Flyers

Flyers are developed to announce public input meetings for corridor studies, special studies, and the long range plan. These flyers are distributed electronically to the GPATS contact list, and paper copies are posted on a limited basis in public buildings and, where possible, in businesses within the affected areas of corridor studies and special studies.

6.10: Comment Forms

A standard GPATS comment form is made available at public presentations and meetings, and are available electronically on the web. Comment forms are reviewed and summarized for the LRTP and special studies.

6.11: Surveys

A survey was distributed at all public meetings for the current LRTP, and summarized in the LRTP document. While surveys are not based on a scientific random sample, they do provide a good picture of the ideas and opinions of persons who are interested in and aware of the transportation planning activities in the region.

Section 7: Evaluation Methods and Improvement Strategies

The effectiveness of the public participation process will be evaluated annually following the adoption of the UPWP and following the adoption or amendment of the LRTP.

The effectiveness of each of the strategies implemented will be evaluated as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Public Participation Evaluation Criteria

Strategy	Evaluation Criteria	Methods to Improve Effectiveness
GPATS Website	Number of hits; accuracy of posted information	Advertise website in with other public involvement strategies, encourage links on other sites; check and update site monthly
Contact List	Number of Returned Items on U.S. mail and e-mail	Continually update contact information based on undeliverable e-mail and U.S. mail returns
Legal Advertisements	Advertise all required comment periods and public input meetings	n/a
GPATS Newsletter	Number of requests for copies of newsletters, number of inquiries generated by newsletter	Continue to build contact list; seek distribution to managers of other e-mail distribution lists
Press Releases	Number of newspaper articles and broadcast stories generated	Provide information in a "ready to print or broadcast" format
Public Presentations, Workshops and Open Houses	Number of attendees	Track responses to "How did you hear about this meeting" on sign-in sheets
Small Group Meetings and Presentations	Number of persons attending meetings annually	Advertise availability of "speaker's bureau" through other public participation tools
Fact Sheets	Number of fact sheets distributed	Post on website, distribute to contact list, provide at all public meetings
Flyers	Number of attendees at public meetings who saw flyers about the meeting	Improve electronic distribution of flyers
Comment Forms	Number of responses	Post prominently on website, mention in newsletter, make available at public meetings
Surveys	Number of responses	Post prominently on website, mention in newsletter, make available at public meetings