

Evaluation of Fiscal Year 2013
Unified Planning and Work Program
Public Involvement Activities



BANNOCK

Transportation Planning

O R G A N I Z A T I O N

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Introduction

Bannock Transportation Planning Organization (BTPO) serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Pocatello/Chubbuck urbanized area. MPOs are organizations created by Federal legislation with the requirement to plan for the long range transportation needs of their region. As an MPO we are required in 23 Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) §450.316 to develop a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) which outlines how BTPO will conduct public involvement for transportation projects and programs within the urban area. The PIP not only provides the how public involvement will be conducted it also provides information on how public comment is incorporated into the project or program review and approval process.

Public involvement is a very complex process especially when addressing such complex topics as the twenty-year plan for the transportation system of the urban area or for simple tasks of identifying projects which will be constructed over the next four years. The PIP recognizes the challenges of public involvement and requires an annual evaluation of what processes were used in the last year and how effective those processes were in involving the public in the planning process. This review is specifically address the public involvement for the projects within the BTPO 2013 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).

This evaluation will provide a review of the projects where public involvement occurred and provide a qualitative evaluation of the effectiveness of the involvement. The last part of the evaluation is a review of possible improvements and changes which can occur in the upcoming year. This review is not intended as an evaluation of the public involvement legal requirements; it is designed to assist BTPO staff and committees in evaluating the public involvement and how to learn from those past efforts.

Project Descriptions and Evaluation

The Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Functional Classification Map, Coordinated Public Transportation Human Service plan, and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) were the projects where public involvement occurred in FY 2013.

Long Range Transportation Plan

The LRTP is being completed by David Evans Associates. The project has a separate PIP for the implementation of the project, which is consistent with the BTPO PIP. The LRTP is a twenty-year comprehensive evaluation and plan for future transportation projects and programs for the BTPO planning area.

During the year a community values and futures workshops were held. The community values workshop was conducted via three workshops located in different parts of the community. Two of the events were held in the afternoon and one at night. The workshops were three hours in length. The workshops were advertised in the local newspaper, BTPO Website, Project Website, e-mail public outreach list, and BTPO's Facebook page.

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The attendance at the workshops was very low to the point that an additional on-line survey was conducted to try and increase the responses. The input received at the workshop was very good, but the attendance did not provide enough input for the consultant team of staff to feel comfortable that it represented the community.

In evaluating the possible reasons for the low turnout, the following were suggested:

- The workshop format and length of time commitment was a problem.
- The location at ISU did prove to be a problem in parking but also in knowledge of the location by the general population.
- None of the workshops were in the evening hours which could have led to a low turnout

Functional Classification Map

The Functional Classification and Urban Boundaries map is an identification of the federal roadway classification for all roads within the BTPO urbanized area. The urbanized area boundary was also updated based on the U.S. Census urban area. The Census boundary was smoothed to and moved to logical boundaries such as roads.

There was public hearing on the map. Public outreach was completed through notice in local newspaper, and e-mail public involvement lists. The information was available on the BTPO website. The attendance to the hearing was very low and there were no comments on the map. The map had been seen by the public during the 2010 Long Range Transportation Plan update and this could have led to a low number of comments. The location of the event was in the evening at Pocatello City Hall, which is centrally located and on a transit line.

In evaluating the possible reasons for the lack of comments, the following were suggested:

- Public did not understand what the Functional Classification Map was or why it was important
- Prior public outreach could have addressed the public concerns

Coordinated Public Transportation Human Service Plan

The Coordinated Plan is a comprehensive evaluation of the transportation needs for the senior, low-income, and disabled populations within the urban area. The plan was developed using a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) comprised of agencies representing the targeted populations.

The public outreach included a needs survey and a public open house on the draft plan. The needs survey was distributed online and through mailing list of BTPO and agencies on the PAC. The on-line survey did not get many responses but the mailed survey did return over 110 surveys. The public open house on the plan was held at BTPO's office on the late afternoon and evening. The event was advertised in the local paper, on the website, and through e-mail list. There were no comments on the plan and no one turned out for the public meeting.

In evaluating the possible reasons for the lack of comments or turn out for public meeting, the following were suggested:

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- The newspaper was not the best place to reach the targeted population
- The information on line provided enough information that people did not attend public meeting.
- The event occurred in late August during a heavy vacation and return of Idaho State University which could have impacted the turn out.

Transportation Improvement Program

The TIP is an annual document which lists the federal project which will be completed during the next four-years. The FY 2014 TIP public involvement and conformity has a public comment period and was approved, but due to issues with a project the decision was made not to update the TIP for 2014 -2017. Instead the FY 2013 -2016 TIP was updated.

Two changes were made to the TIP and both used the public notices in the newspaper, web site, and e-mail list to announce the 30 day public comment period. No public comments were received on either announcement.

In evaluating the possible reasons for the lack of comments, the following were suggested:

- Annual listing of projects which do not carry the public interest as other public outreach events.
- Notice was not specifically sent to agencies or economic development groups.

Public Involvement Evaluation

The PIP includes a matrix which provides five questions which were intended to ensure the public involvement process of BTPO meet the federal requirements. The evaluation was established as a matrix, but will be shown in this report as questions and answers. Additionally, there is evaluation of the potential improvements to the PIP for FY 2014.

Did the planning process allow citizens opportunity for participation in planning activities defined in the Unified planning Work Program? Yes, for all work tasks which required a public outreach the public was provide opportunity to comment.

Was information to the public complete, accurate, and timely? Yes, to the best of our ability the information provided was correct and provide within the established guidelines.

Were citizens provided the opportunity to participate in plan development and decision-making? Yes, the public involvement occurred during time when decisions were being made and comments could have altered those decisions.

Were there opportunities for continuous involvement? Yes, both the LRTP and Coordinated Plan had many opportunities for public involvement during the development of the plan. The LRTP is a multi-year project and there will be more opportunities for the public to be involved in the planning process.

Did the Process comply with Title VI Civil Rights of 1964? Yes, to the knowledge of the staff all public involvement activities which occurred during the year were in compliance with Title VI.

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Potential Improvements for FY 2014

Public involvement is a critical in the effort to keep the transportation planning and programming as open and transparent as possible. To public comments usually come from people who are engaged in the process, but sadly people do not participate in many events including Government agency public meetings. Our PIP tried to explore ways to increase public awareness and involvement but for FY 2013 these efforts were not successful.

One thing which was successful is building awareness through the website. The BTPO web receives 35 returning views each week this is higher than most public events. BTPO should continue to use the website, Facebook, and e-mail list to continue to build awareness of what is happening and to ensure people are aware of the activities and opportunities for involvement. In a recent TIP public involvement e-mail notification, 29 people open the link to the website. While no comments were received 29 people had seen the information. Building the website traffic and increasing number of people on email list and friends on Facebook should be a priority.

While people use e-mail, tradition postal mail is another way of communicating with the public, BTPO's mailing list maintenance needs some work. The effort in maintaining the list is time consuming but needed. These traditional mailing lists are a way to get agencies and other interested parties who are not fully engaged in electronic media or social networking sites.

Take advantage of existing locations where information is accessed including the Pocatello and Chubbuck city halls. Additional location should be identified and utilized.

Potential improvement for FY 2014:

- Continue to improve and provide frequent updates of website information even if that information is not directly BTPO
- Use social media more
- Update BTPO's physical mailing list
- Develop a mailing list for agencies serving senior, disabled, and low-income populations
- Try to increase presence in new sources other than the newspaper
- Provide information at entrance to Pocatello and Chubbuck City halls.

