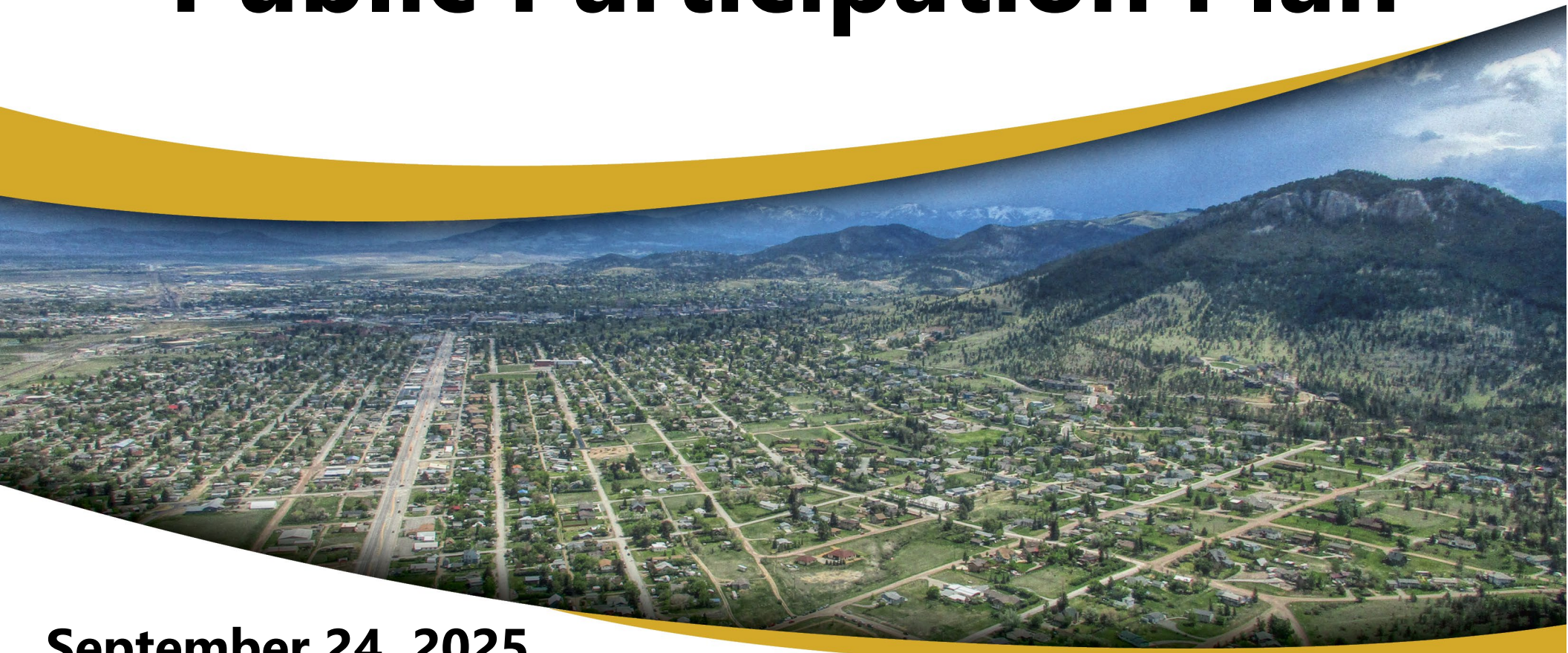




Public Participation Plan



September 24, 2025



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ACRONYMS

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
IAP2	International Association for Public Participation
LRTP	Long Range Transportation Plan
MDT	Montana Department of Transportation
MPA	Metropolitan Planning Area
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
PL	Planning Funds
PPP	Public Participation Plan
TIP	Transportation Improvement Plan
TPCC	Transportation Policy Coordinating Committee
TTAC	Transportation Technical Advisory Committee
UPWP	Unified Planning Work Program



Public Participation Plan

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Helena area was designated as a metropolitan area following the 2020 Census, when its population surpassed 50,000—triggering a federal requirement to establish a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). In response, a coalition of regional partners, including the City of Helena, City of East Helena, Lewis and Clark County, and the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), formed the Greater Helena MPO.

An MPO is a federally required planning entity (49 U.S.C. 5303(d)) composed of local governments working collaboratively to coordinate transportation planning for a metropolitan region. While MPO status does not directly provide additional transportation funding, it can provide more direct access to federal funds and enhances regional coordination across jurisdictions and modes.

The Greater Helena MPO leads transportation planning efforts within the Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA), as shown in **Figure 1**. It connects local governments, transportation agencies, and the public to plan and prioritize projects that improve multimodal mobility, support economic vitality, increase safety and security of the transportation system, improve access, enhance quality of life, strengthen connectivity, increase system resiliency and reliability, promote efficiency, enhance travel and tourism, and preserve existing infrastructure.

2.0 PURPOSE

The purpose of this *Public Participation Plan* (PPP) is to outline the strategies and procedures the Greater Helena MPO will use to ensure that all stakeholders, including the public, partner agencies, service providers, and underserved communities, have meaningful opportunities to participate in the transportation planning process. This plan promotes effective engagement and transparency throughout all planning activities by encouraging broad public involvement and integrating diverse perspectives into decision-making. It also ensures that the Greater Helena MPO meets all applicable federal and state public participation requirements (23 CFR § 450.316). While this PPP governs public involvement during the MPO's transportation planning processes, the Greater Helena MPO defers to the public involvement procedures of the lead agency responsible for project development and construction phases to ensure compliance with applicable requirements during those stages.

The PPP provides a framework to:

- Encourage inclusive public involvement across a wide range of participants.
- Promote transparency and responsiveness in transportation decision-making.
- Ensure compliance with relevant federal and state regulations.



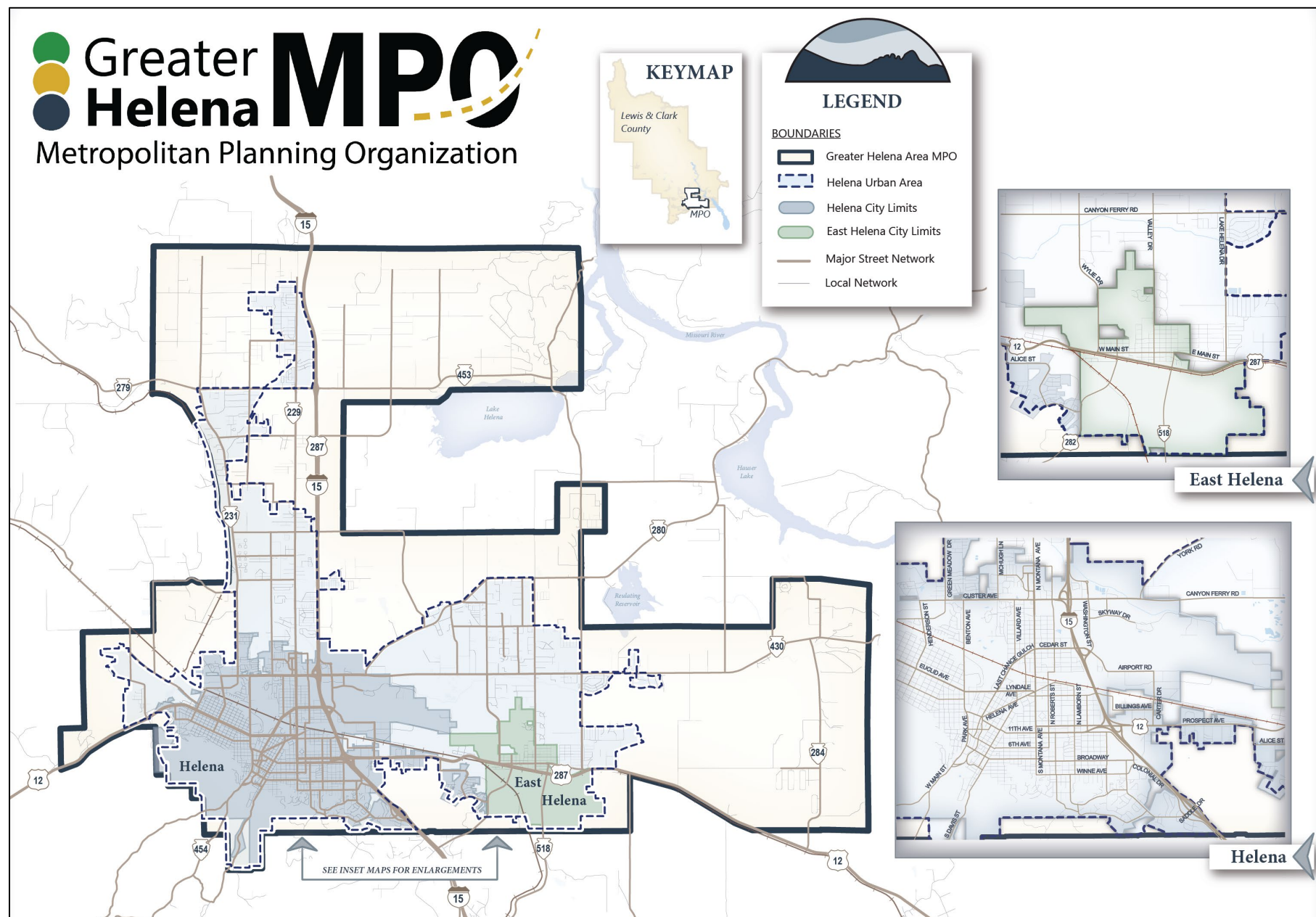


Figure 1: Greater Helena MPO Boundary

3.0 PARTNERSHIPS

The Greater Helena MPO builds and maintains collaborative relationships with federal, state, and local partners to support a coordinated, region-wide approach to transportation planning. These partnerships are formalized through the following agreements:

- An **Interlocal Agreement**¹ (2024) between the City of Helena, City of East Helena, and Lewis and Clark County, facilitates the creation of an MPO by outlining how the MPO will be funded and administered. The agreement outlines a framework for regional transportation planning and decision-making by detailing how the local entities will cooperate and coordinate their efforts.
- A **Memorandum of Agreement**² (2024), signed by the three local governments and MDT, formally establishing the Greater Helena MPO and its governance structure and roles. It also outlines the agency's commitment to carrying out the federally required continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative (3-Cs) transportation planning process.
- A **Memorandum of Agreement**³ (2024), signed by the three local governments and MDT, establishing the roles, responsibilities, and commitments from each entity for cooperatively developing and sharing information related to transportation performance measures and targets.
- An **Agreement**⁴ (2024) between all MPO entities provides for the distribution of Planning (PL) funds to the local agencies to conduct MPO planning processes as described in the MPO's annual work program, including a set aside for Complete Streets Planning Activities.

Together, these agreements ensure the Greater Helena MPO operates in alignment with federal and state planning requirements and supports transparent coordination across all member agencies.

4.0 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Greater Helena MPO is governed by a two-tiered committee structure designed to ensure both policy-level oversight and informed technical input. All committee meetings are open to the public, with agendas, minutes, and supporting materials posted on the MPO website.⁵

TRANSPORTATION POLICY COORDINATING COMMITTEE (TPCC)

The TPCC is the Greater Helena MPO's official decision-making body and manages the executive functions of the metropolitan transportation planning process. It provides policy guidance, approves major plans and programs, and ensures coordination across member agencies. The committee includes voting and non-voting members representing local, state, and federal transportation interests, as outlined in the TPCC bylaws.⁶

The TPCC meets on an as-needed basis, but no less than three times per year, typically on a quarterly schedule. Meetings are typically held in Conference Room 226 at the City/County Building and remotely via Zoom.



TRANSPORTATION TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TTAC)

The TTAC is the Greater Helena MPO's technical advisory body, composed of subject matter experts from local, state, and federal agencies. It supports the TPCC by providing technical guidance and recommendations to inform transportation planning decisions. Membership includes representatives from public works, planning, transit, education, emergency services, advocacy groups, and other relevant sectors, as defined in the TTAC bylaws.⁷

TTAC meetings are typically held monthly on the third Monday at 3:00 PM, in Conference Room 226 (City/County Building) and remotely via Zoom.

5.0 REQUIRED PLANNING DOCUMENTS

The Greater Helena MPO is federally mandated to prepare the following transportation planning documents, in accordance with 49 U.S.C. 5303(c). Public input opportunities will be offered for each required document. The MPO values community feedback and will thoughtfully review all comments received. Depending on the nature of the comment, the Greater Helena MPO may respond through various means, including direct communication with the commenter, posting formal responses on the MPO website, incorporating comments and responses into the final document, or creating a dedicated webpage to address frequently asked questions.

In addition to the adoption of these core documents, the MPO may periodically amend or modify them to reflect changes in priorities, funding, project scope, or regulatory requirements. Amendments typically involve significant changes, such as adding new projects, altering funding amounts, or modifying the project schedule, and will include appropriate public notice, comment opportunities, and review by relevant committees. Administrative modifications, which are minor changes that do not significantly alter the intent or scope of a document, may be processed without a formal public comment period but will be documented and made publicly available for transparency purposes.

LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN (LRTP)

- **Purpose:** Provides a framework for future regional transportation, including identifying and prioritizing improvement projects.
- **Updates:** Every five years (four years for air quality nonattainment areas)
- **Time Horizon:** At least 20 years.
- **Public Review Period:** Minimum of 30 days prior to adoption by TPCC.

TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP)

- **Purpose:** Enables scheduling of federal funds for surface transportation projects, aligning them with short-term priorities for the area.
- **Updates:** Every four years.
- **Time Horizon:** Five years.
- **Public Review Period:** Minimum of 14 days prior to adoption by TPCC.



UNIFIED PLANNING WORK PROGRAM (UPWP)

- **Purpose:** Defines the annual transportation planning activities to be conducted within the MPA, including a funding summary.
- **Updates:** Every year.
- **Time Horizon:** One year.
- **Public Review Period:** Minimum of 14 days prior to adoption by TPCC.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN (PPP)

- **Purpose:** Establishes a framework for public engagement.
- **Updates:** As needed.
- **Time Horizon:** No expiration date.
- **Public Review Period:** Minimum of 45 days prior to adoption by TPCC.

ANNUAL LISTING OF OBLIGATED PROJECTS

The MPO will publish an annual list of transportation projects for which federal funds were obligated by MDT. This list includes all federally funded projects within the metropolitan planning area, including, but not limited to, roadway improvements, bridge repairs or replacements, public transit investments, safety enhancements, and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. This list is provided for informational purposes only and is not subject to a public review or commenting period requirement.



6.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

The Greater Helena MPO is dedicated to fostering meaningful public involvement in regional transportation planning through the PPP. This document establishes a framework and strategies for fostering effective engagement and ensuring transparency across all planning activities. By encouraging public participation, the PPP provides opportunities for all stakeholders to contribute, integrating diverse perspectives into the decision-making process. In special or unforeseen circumstances, such as expedited timelines, emergency actions, or procedural adjustments, the Greater Helena MPO will follow the public participation procedures outlined in the TTAC and TPCC bylaws to ensure appropriate and consistent engagement.

6.1. VALUES OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation is essential to meaningful and effective regional transportation planning. The Greater Helena MPO embraces the following core values to guide staff, consultants, and contractors in fostering inclusive, thoughtful, and transparent community engagement:

- **Purposeful Engagement:** Public participation brings thought and purpose to planning. Community input adds depth and meaning to transportation decisions and helps preserve the region's identity, values, and long-term prosperity.
- **Open Participation:** The Greater Helena MPO believes that the strength of a community lies in the variety of experiences and viewpoints its members bring. We are dedicated to fostering an environment where all individuals, regardless of background, language, ability, or identity, feel welcome to participate and have their voice heard.
- **Transparency and Trust:** The Greater Helena MPO is committed to open communication throughout the planning process. We provide clear, timely information and maintain public records of all participation activities to demonstrate how input influences decisions and to build lasting public trust.
- **Collaboration and Shared Knowledge:** Partnering with the community strengthens transportation planning by incorporating local insights, lived experience, and diverse expertise into the decision-making process.
- **Accountability and Responsiveness:** Public involvement aligns MPO actions with the community's priorities and strengthens decision-making. Early engagement helps identify potential issues early on and encourages innovative approaches to complex transportation challenges.
- **Adaptability and Innovation:** The Greater Helena MPO is dedicated to improving participation by evaluating public feedback and exploring new tools, platforms, and outreach strategies to keep engagement relevant, inclusive, and effective.



6.2. FRAMEWORK FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Greater Helena MPO uses the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Participation⁸ as the guiding framework for the PPP. The IAP2 Spectrum delineates five distinct levels of public participation—Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, and Empower—each representing a progressively greater influence the public has on decision-making. The appropriate level of participation is determined based on the nature, scale, and potential impact of a given project or planning effort. This framework promotes best practices in public participation, helping ensure that planning outcomes are better informed, more transparent, and aligned with community values.

INFORM

Goal: Provide stakeholders with balanced and objective information to enhance their understanding of transportation issues, alternatives, and solutions.

Promise to the Public: *"We will keep you informed."*

Application: Used when the goal is to provide the public with balanced, objective information to help them understand the issue, alternatives, or decisions. This level is appropriate for routine updates, data sharing, or when decisions are technical or time-sensitive with limited room for change.

Applicable Plans and Activities: Annual Listing of Obligated Projects, Final Versions of Required Planning Documents (e.g., LRTP, TIP, UPWP, PPP), Interim Technical Reports/Memoranda, Performance Measure Reporting, Public Notices and Meeting Announcements, Educational Materials (e.g., Fact Sheets, Website Content)

Example Tools and Processes:

- Website updates
- Newsletters/Fact sheets
- Press releases
- Media outreach
- Social media campaigns
- Email blasts

CONSULT

Goal: Obtain public feedback on analysis, issues, alternatives, and decisions.

Promise to the Public: *"We will listen to and acknowledge your concerns."*



Application: Appropriate when public feedback is sought to inform decision-making, such as during the development of draft plans or policies. While the final decision remains with the MPO, public input is actively considered.

Applicable Plans and Activities: Draft Versions of Required Planning Documents for Public Review (e.g., LRTP, TIP, UPWP, PPP), Draft Versions of Corridor/Subarea Studies, Non-Motorized Plans, Policies, etc., Surveys and Online Commenting Tools

Example Tools and Processes:

- Public comment periods
- Surveys and questionnaires
- Public meetings
- Interactive maps
- Feedback forms

INVOLVE

Goal: Work with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are considered and understood.

Promise to the Public: *"We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are reflected in the decisions made."*

Application: Appropriate when public input has a direct influence on the process. Stakeholders are engaged throughout the project to ensure their concerns and needs are consistently understood and considered.

Applicable Plans and Activities: Workshops/Open Houses During Early Plan Development Stages, Land Use Forecasting Workshops, Scenario Planning Workshops, Stakeholder Interviews or Focus Groups

Example Tools and Processes:

- Community advisory panels
- Public forums
- Town halls
- Open houses
- Focus groups/Workshops
- Stakeholder meetings
- Site visits
- Walking/biking tours or audits
- Online discussion boards



COLLABORATE

Goal: Partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including developing alternatives and identifying the preferred solution.

Promise to the Public: *"We will look to you for advice and innovation and will incorporate this in decisions as much as possible."*

Application: Employed when MPO partners with stakeholders in each aspect of the decision-making process, including developing alternatives and identifying preferred solutions. This level is appropriate for complex or controversial projects where shared decision-making leads to stronger outcomes and is especially useful when multiple jurisdictions or agencies have joint responsibility, requiring coordinated efforts and consensus-building.

Applicable Plans and Activities: LRTP Visioning and Goal Setting, Development of Regional Active Transportation Plans or Climate Action Plans, Interagency Coordination on TIP and UPWP Development, Advisory Committees (e.g., Bicycle/Pedestrian, Transit)

Example Tools and Processes:

- Joint planning committees
- Collaborative workshops
- Consensus-building activities
- Participatory decision-making
- Partnership agreements

EMPOWER

Goal: Place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

Promise: *"We will implement what you decide."*

Application: Used in rare cases when final decision-making is placed in the hands of the public, such as through referendums, community votes, or citizen advisory boards with the authority to make binding decisions on specific aspects of a project, such as determining how to allocate a portion of transportation funding.

Applicable Plans and Activities: Very rarely used by MPOs, potentially for community-led planning grants, mini-grant programs, or adoption of community-generated project concepts through competitive selection.

Example Tools and Processes:

- Ballot measures
- Citizen-led initiatives



6.3. ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

The Greater Helena MPO employs a variety of tools and methods to inform, involve, and engage the public throughout the transportation planning process. Each strategy is designed to increase accessibility, transparency, and inclusivity:

- **Website:** Provides access to meeting notices, planning documents, project updates, and information about MPO activities through the MPO website.
- **Email Lists:** Sends regular updates directly to interested stakeholders, maintaining consistent communication throughout planning processes.
- **Social Media:** Shares updates, engagement opportunities, and events via platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X, and YouTube; partners may be asked to share content to expand reach.
- **Visuals:** Uses maps, infographics, and other visualization tools to present complex information in a clear and engaging format.
- **Surveys and Questionnaires:** Collects public input on transportation needs and priorities through web-based surveys.
- **Technology-Driven Tools:** Leverages tools such as crowdsourcing platforms and interactive maps to increase participation and gather location-specific feedback.
- **News and Notifications:** Sends alerts and updates about upcoming meetings, events, and opportunities for public involvement through multiple channels including print (newspaper), television, and radio.
- **Public Meetings:** Hosts in-person and virtual meetings in accessible, ADA-compliant venues to encourage broad participation.
- **Workshops and Charrettes:** Facilitates small-group or hands-on activities that allow participants to engage more deeply with planning concepts and contribute detailed feedback.
- **Targeted Outreach:** Conducts focused engagement efforts with community members and stakeholders, including minority groups.
- **Embedded Involvement:** Attends existing community meetings or events to present updates and gather feedback in familiar, established settings.
- **Advisory Panels/Groups:** Convenes temporary, project-specific groups to provide input at key milestones for major plans and studies, such as the LRTP.



6.4. PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND ACCESS

The Greater Helena MPO is committed to providing timely, accessible, and inclusive information to ensure that all community members—regardless of location, language, or ability—have meaningful opportunities to participate in the transportation planning process.

- **Public Notices:** Public participation opportunities, including meetings, comment periods, and special events, are announced at least 48 hours in advance (excluding weekends and Federal holidays) via the MPO website. When possible, the Greater Helena MPO aims to provide more than the minimum required notice, particularly for high-profile plans or decisions. Notices include relevant dates, times, locations (or virtual links), agendas, and information on how the public can participate or submit comments.
- **Online and In-Person Meetings:** Greater Helena MPO committee meetings are held in-person with a remote, online option available to increase accessibility for individuals who may face transportation, scheduling, or geographic barriers. Occasional in-person meetings are also held at ADA-compliant facilities to maintain a hybrid approach that supports flexibility and inclusion. All meetings are open to the public, and members of the community are encouraged to attend, observe, and provide input.
- **ADA and Disability Access:** Greater Helena MPO ensures that public meetings, materials, and online engagement platforms comply with the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. Meeting locations are ADA-accessible, and accommodations or alternative formats are available upon request. Online content follows best practices for screen reader compatibility and digital accessibility as appropriate.
- **Broad Access:** Greater Helena MPO makes special efforts to reach individuals and communities who may face barriers to participation, including rural residents, seniors, youth, transit-dependent individuals, and historically underserved populations. By employing multiple notification formats, Greater Helena MPO ensures that information is distributed widely across the region.



7.0 COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL REGULATIONS

This PPP complies with the requirements outlined in 23 CFR 450.316, ensuring that all interested parties have reasonable opportunities to be involved in the metropolitan transportation planning process. This includes providing adequate public notice, timely access to information, employing visualization techniques, holding public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times, and seeking out and considering the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems.

For more information or to provide feedback, please contact the MPO Manager, Ty Weingartner, at:

- **Mail:** 316 N Park Ave, Helena, MT 59623
- **Phone:** (406) 447-8406
- **Email:** tweingartner@helenamt.gov
- **Website:** www.greaterhelenampo.com

By adhering to these principles and strategies, Greater Helena MPO aims to foster inclusive, transparent, and meaningful public involvement in shaping the region's transportation future.

8.0 EVALUATION

The Greater Helena MPO periodically reviews the PPP to monitor the effectiveness of the procedures outlined in this document. Following evaluation of the outputs and outcomes of the PPP, the MPO may revise these procedures to incorporate new and innovative ways to involve the public and ensure a full and open participation process.



REFERENCES

- ¹ Lewis and Clark County, City of Helena, City of East Helena, Interlocal Agreement for Transportation Planning Services, June 18, 2024, https://www.helenamt.gov/files/assets/helena/v/1/government/departments/transportation/mpo/documents/interlocal-agreement_final_signed_ghampo-1.pdf
- ² Lewis and Clark County, City of Helena, City of East Helena, Montana Department of Transportation, Memorandum of Agreement for the Greater Helena Area Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process, June 20, 2024, https://www.helenamt.gov/files/assets/helena/v/1/government/departments/transportation/mpo/documents/3-c-agreement_ghampo_signed-1.pdf
- ³ Lewis and Clark County, City of Helena, City of East Helena, Montana Department of Transportation, Memorandum of Agreement for Cooperative Performance Based Planning Measures and Targets, June 20, 2024, https://www.helenamt.gov/files/assets/helena/v/1/government/departments/transportation/mpo/documents/performance-agreement_ghampo_signed-1.pdf
- ⁴ Lewis and Clark County, City of Helena, City of East Helena, Montana Department of Transportation, Agreement for the Distribution of Metropolitan Planning (PL) Funds, June 20, 2024, https://www.helenamt.gov/files/assets/helena/v/1/government/departments/transportation/mpo/documents/pl-agreement_ghampo_signed-1.pdf
- ⁵ City of Helena, Metropolitan Planning Organization, 2025, <https://www.helenamt.gov/Departments/Transportation-Systems/Metropolitan-Planning-Organization>
- ⁶ Lewis and Clark County, City of Helena, City of East Helena, Montana Department of Transportation, Bylaws of the Greater Helena Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Policy Coordinating Committee, July 16, 2024, https://www.helenamt.gov/files/assets/helena/v/1/government/city-commission/boards-and-committees/mpo/tpcc/ghampo_tpcc-bylaws.pdf
- ⁷ Lewis and Clark County, City of Helena, City of East Helena, Montana Department of Transportation, Bylaws of the Greater Helena Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Technical Advisory Committee, July 16, 2024, https://www.helenamt.gov/files/assets/helena/v/1/government/city-commission/boards-and-committees/mpo/ttac/ghampo_ttac-bylaws.pdf





⁸ IAP2, Spectrum of Public Participation, 2024, https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/iap2_spectrum_2024.pdf





Lewis and Clark County, the City of Helena, and the City of East Helena are committed to providing access to persons with disabilities for their meetings, in compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Montana Human Rights Act. The County and Cities will not exclude persons with disabilities from participation at their meetings or otherwise deny them the County or Cities' services, programs, or activities.

Persons with disabilities requiring accommodations to participate in the County or Cities' meetings, services, programs, or activities should contact the jurisdiction, as soon as possible to allow sufficient time to arrange for the requested accommodation, at any of the following:

LEWIS AND CLARK COUNTY

Keni Grose

(406) 447-8316

TTY Relay Service 1-800-253-4091 or 711

kgrose@lccountymt.com

316 N Park Avenue, Room 303

Helena, MT 59623

CITY OF HELENA

ADA Coordinator

(406) 447-8490

TTY Relay Service 1-800-253-4091 or 711

citycommunitydevelopment@helenamt.gov

316 N Park Avenue

Helena, MT 59623

CITY OF EAST HELENA

City Clerk

(406) 227-5321

TTY Relay Service 1-800-253-4091 or 711

cityclerk@easthelenamt.us

306 East Main Street, P.O. Box 1170

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