



Florida Department of Transportation Research

2018 Assessment of the Practice of Public Involvement in Florida

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Current Situation

An important part of the planning and decision-making processes for transportation agencies is the involvement of the general public, who are transportation's ultimate users and funders. Public engagement is promoted through websites, announcements, press releases, and other informational efforts, but equally vital is direct public involvement through public meetings, hearings, workshops, charrettes, and other forums. The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has a long history of robust public involvement in all phases of planning.

Research Objectives

University of South Florida researchers documented the state of practice of public involvement in transportation decision-making and provided an update to the 2006 report documenting public involvement in Florida.



FDOT planners discuss proposed road work with residents using large maps that show how each one will be affected.

Project Activities

A literature review revealed that public engagement practice has evolved considerably since the 2006 study (FDOT Project BD544-15). It also showed that guidance from the 2006 study has been widely implemented in efforts such as enhanced training, early and continuing involvement, personalized and contextualized involvement activities, and alternatives to traditional meeting places.

Surveys and interviews were conducted with metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and FDOT districts. A synthesis of the information gained from the responding agencies indicated significant improvements in engaging the public when compared to 2006. For example, agencies were found to be using a wider range of techniques, including nontraditional ones, and agencies were interested in being trained to help use these techniques effectively. The researchers found a high level of commitment to reaching underserved populations and new audiences.

The researchers also found that challenges remain. At a time when more engagement is desired by agencies and expected by the public, budgets to support outreach programs are limited. Similarly, budget and staff limitations reduce the ability to measure effectiveness, generally measuring outputs rather than outcomes.

The researchers offered several suggestions for improvements to the public involvement process. For example, more information and education to help the public understand the transportation planning and project development process would enable them to communicate more precisely and more effectively.

Project Benefits

A higher degree of public engagement can lead to more successful projects and more public understanding and satisfaction with the transportation planning process.

For more information, please see www.fdot.gov/research/.