

River to Sea TPO Connect 2045 COVID-19 Response

In consideration of the recent social distancing guidance and executive orders¹ issued in the wake of COVID-19 (Coronavirus), the River to Sea Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) is evaluating the impact to public input processes for the development of Connect 2045, the TPO's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

The inability to conduct and participate in face-to-face meetings during the declared state of emergency will require virtual/technology-based alternatives to the activities identified in the approved Connect 2045 Public Involvement Plan (PIP). These activities include, at a minimum, the Cost Feasible Plan Public Workshops, Environmental Justice Workshops, and Stakeholder Outreach activities which would include direct presentations to, and interactions with, the public and many partner organizations. Based upon the current schedule, these activities are to be primarily conducted through late May. State and federal social distancing directives are in place through April 30 and will possibly extend beyond that.

In lieu of face-to-face meetings, the above-referenced activities will be conducted through virtual/technology-based solutions. Virtual meetings and social media can be very effective tools of communication. But as a standalone approach, technology-based input methods can present major challenges. TPO staff has identified specific challenges including the potential impact to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance and receiving input from traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations who often do not possess convenient access to the internet and other technology that may be required for virtual public involvement.

The Florida MPO Advisory Council and FDOT have participated in recent meetings with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to determine if the adoption deadlines for TPO/MPO LRTPs can be extended to provide appropriate accommodations for impacts to public input and planning processes. Based upon the most recent guidance from FHWA, an extension is not expected.

In light of the above, the TPO is recommending the following:

- **Implement Interim Virtual Public Input:** Determine the appropriate virtual approaches for public input activities while social distancing directives are in place. Implement these alternative approaches and revise the PIP accordingly, noting the expected impact in contrast to the previously approved methods. TPO staff will bring the revised PIP back to the board for formal approval. Because of the compressed schedule over the next three

¹ On March 16, 2020, President Trump issued "15 Days to Slow the Spread" guidance advising individuals to socially distance and avoid groups larger than 10 people until March 31. On March 29, the timeframe for this guidance was extended to April 30 and formally updated on March 31, in coordination with the White House Coronavirus Task Force, as "30 Days to Slow the Spread". Florida Governor DeSantis issued a "Safer At Home" order (Executive Order 20-91) effective from April 3 through April 30.

months, some of these virtual alternatives may need to be noticed or underway before the revised PIP is formally approved, but TPO staff will communicate the nature of these alternatives as they are developed.

- **Adopt Plan on Schedule:** Continue with the current schedule for adopting Connect 2045 by the federally-established deadline in September 2020. Approve the plan with the understanding that limits on face-to-face meetings and interactions have constrained public input. This understanding will be documented in the plan.
- **Provide Opportunity for In-Person Public Input and Plan Refinement after Adoption:** Make accommodations at the appropriate time after plan adoption in September to “go out” to the public in the manner originally intended to provide for meaningful input. As part of this process, the TPO will ensure that underserved and underrepresented populations are afforded substantive opportunity to comment on the plan. These public comments will be considered for potential amendments to the adopted plan as appropriate.

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