



Technical Memorandum
South Western Region “Best Practices” for Public Involvement
March 2011

By providing the public with numerous opportunities for participation and input in its studies, projects, and programs, the South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA) is committed to increasing public awareness and participation. The most widely used media outlet for disseminating information has become the internet. Project websites are developed for special studies, and information regarding work product and meetings is posted on a regular basis. Media releases and public meetings/workshops have also become widely used tools for sharing information on projects and studies. The Region’s public involvement program is constantly evolving as new and successful ways to circulate information are identified. SWRPA has made significant progress to ensure that information is easily accessible to stakeholders and members of the public, and is continually looking for new ways to inform and engage the public. This memorandum provides a list of effective “best practices” that have been incorporated into the Region’s public involvement program.

- **The Internet:** The SWRPA website is used as a means to provide 24/7 access to policy, planning and project activities.
 - All resources are posted online (www.swrpa.org).
 - Study websites are developed for special studies and projects (i.e. www.route7study.org), and include study Facebook and Twitter pages (i.e. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/US1-Greenwich-Stamford-Study/128248033860777>, <http://twitter.com/US1GS>).
 - Study Newsletters (i.e. http://www.swrpa.org/Uploads/US1GS_newsletter2_2010-10.pdf) and business cards are developed (i.e. Darien Route 1 Study).
 - An online [TIP Map](#) has been developed, and could translate into interactive online maps of projects and studies (i.e. <http://www.swrpa.org/Default.aspx?Transport=36>).
 - A portal to current corridor studies using the Google mash-up tool has been developed (<http://www.swrpa.org/Default.aspx?Transport=36>).
- **Media Releases:** SWRPA has instituted the practice of issuing media releases for meetings, workshops and public information sessions, which have proven more effective than legal notices
 - Media releases are distributed to SWRPA’s full media list including radio stations, print news papers (major and community publications) and online news sources (list updated and needed).
 - Media releases are issued at least 1 week prior to the event and wherever possible by the second Thursday of the month to accommodate the schedules of local weekly and monthly publications.
 - For the LRTP, media releases will be issued in Spanish to Spanish media outlets, to accommodate Spanish-speaking communities.
- **Public meetings/workshops:** Public involvement is a major component of the planning process. Meetings and workshops invite the public to comment, and are held at key points during a project’s tenure.

- All meetings are located at ADA compliant facilities, and at transit accessible locations whenever possible.
- All meetings are scheduled at times and locations to accommodate stakeholders' availability; multiple sessions may be held during regular business hours and in the evening to accommodate the schedule and geographic location of stakeholders.
- Notices to advertise public meetings are placed in public locations where appropriate (bulletin boards, transit facilities etc.)
- The ability to register for events on the SWRPA website is available.
- Charrettes and visioning workshops are used to engage the public and allow them to participate in the planning process.
- Personal invitations are sent out, when appropriate.
- Project "business" cards (i.e. http://www.darienroute1study.org/Final_business_card.bmp) are created.
- **Documents for Public Review:** All planning documents and studies are made available for public review and comment. During the public review period copies of the plan are available in multiple locations, in both hard-copy and digital formats. Media releases are used to
 - All documents are posted on the project website or webpage.
 - Draft documents are made available online, at the SWRPA offices during regular business hours, and at the main branch of local libraries.
 - Locations of draft documents are included in media releases announcing public review and public information sessions.
 - Executive summaries are provided for key documents, and are posted on the study website or webpage.
- **Public Involvement Plans** – are prepared for the SWRMPO public involvement process and specific special projects, and are dynamic and regularly evaluated and updated.
 - Project specific public involvement plans outline strategies to be used to garner public support and awareness, and outline strategies that should be developed and geared toward target audiences and project stakeholders (i.e. S:\MISCPROG\Darien Route 1 Study\Deliverables\Final Darien PIP_03-01-10.pdf).
 - The SWRMPO Public Participation Plan (2009) is evaluated and updated annually to reflect new programs and activities. Annual summaries are posted online <http://www.swrpa.org/Default.aspx?Involve=130>.
 - Quarterly and annual evaluations are prepared that outline public involvement activities, new websites, and other products that are developed (i.e. http://www.swrpa.org/Uploads/FY2010_PISummary_Final.pdf).

Future Public Involvement Activities:

The following public involvement initiatives are currently in development to further enhance the dissemination of information to the public, encourage participation and increase awareness:

- Development of an interactive map and clearinghouse for parking at South Western Region's nineteen (19) rail stations;
- Coordination with CTDOT regarding a website for the Stamford Transportation Center and an "app" for rail station parking;
- Development of a portal to commuter parking information with an interactive map;
- Enhancement of the SWRPA website to allow comments to be made directly online, for the agency and specific projects programs and studies;

- Development of an online TIP database to accompany the online map;
- Translation into Spanish of the Executive Summary for the 2011-2040 Long Range Transportation Plan.

Other Practices in the Region

The Region's municipalities have developed a number of strategies to engage members of their communities and to ensure information is easily accessible. Public meetings are recorded and broadcast in all eight municipalities either through local cable access channels or streaming on the municipal website. Additional "best practices" mechanisms in other parts of the Region and State are noted below:

- The City of Norwalk has created a website for the Traffic Management Plan currently underway, with links to provide comments and a Facebook page for the project.
<http://www.vhb.com/norwalktmp/>
- Town of Westport – created an on-line "Daily Construction Project Report and Impact Areas" during the 2010 paving season, which was posted on the Town website. Maps of the current active work area were updated daily along with a list of the sections of road affected
<http://www.westportct.gov/default.asp>.
- CTDOT has created a traffic portal using traffic cameras strategically placed on I95
(<http://www.ct.gov/dot/cwp/view.asp?a=2354&Q=290242&dotNav=1>)