

Gainesville Regional Transit System Rapid Transit Study

Public Involvement Plan

Prepared for:

Gainesville Regional Transit System

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PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

Several public involvement activities were selected for inclusion in the Rapid Transit Feasibility Study public involvement process to ensure the active participation of citizens in the community. Each of them is discussed in this section. The activities have been placed into two major categories: direct involvement activities and information distribution activities. Direct involvement activities refer to those that engage the public in “hands on” workshops and/or discussion about the project. The information distribution activities refer to public information materials that are used to inform the general public of project related topics and issues.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Several public involvement activities were selected to maximize the potential for active participation by citizens in the community. Each is briefly discussed in this section.

Direct Involvement Activities

Public involvement activities involving direct interaction with agencies, organizations, and/or citizens will be used throughout the study process. The direct involvement activities selected for the study include the following.

- Project Management Team
- Opinion Surveys
- Public Workshops
 - Open House Workshops
 - Consensus-Building Workshops
 - Priorities Workshops
- Stakeholder Interviews
- BRT Symposium
- Local Government Agency Participation
- MTPo Board and MTPo Advisory Committees Participation

The following section describes each direct involvement activity in detail. In addition, the number of times each activity is programmed to be performed is noted where appropriate.

- Project Management Team – A project management team (PMT) has been assembled to provide project oversight and technical feedback throughout the course of the study. A project kick-off meeting was held with the PMT on Thursday, May 22, 2008, to discuss the scope of work for the project and the preliminary project schedule. The PMT is scheduled to meet eight times throughout the course of the project and consists of representatives from the following agencies and organizations:

- Gainesville Regional Transit System (RTS)
 - City of Gainesville
 - Alachua County
 - Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)
 - Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU)
 - North Central Florida Regional Planning Council (MTPO)
 - University of Florida
 - Project Consultants
- Opinion Surveys – Two survey instruments will be prepared to gather public input and preferences on the proposed BRT service. Surveys will be distributed at various project workshops and survey results will be used to inform the decision-making and prioritization process. The first survey will be developed to identify a preliminary set of preferred BRT service elements and characteristics and will be disseminated at the Consensus-Building Workshops. Service elements and characteristics will include preferred service areas, span of service, and service frequencies. In addition, surveys will ask respondents about specific BRT service components, such as off-board vs. on-board fare collection, vehicle design, and station infrastructure and amenities. The second survey will ask respondents to prioritize among service alternatives to be developed as part of the study process. The second survey will be distributed at the Priorities Workshops.

Opinion surveys will also be made available to the MTPO Advisory Committees, the RTS Advisory Board, and other boards identified by the PMT.

- Public Workshops – Public workshops have proven to be an effective technique for obtaining substantive public participation in the planning process. Three types of workshops will be conducted as part of the study process: open house workshops, consensus-building workshops, and priorities workshops. Two workshops of each type will be held at appropriate times during the study process. The six public workshops will be scheduled and conducted in locations that will support to the maximum extent possible geographic coverage of the major areas in the project study area. The specific location of the workshops will be determined by the PMT.
 - Open House Workshops – Two open house workshops will be conducted in the initial phase to provide an opportunity for all citizens to participate in the study process. The open house workshops will serve as an informal opportunity for citizens to review information about the proposed BRT service, learn about BRT, and provide suggestions for BRT and other possible premium transit improvements in the study area. The workshops will include visual examples of existing BRT systems and their operating components. An open house is typically the most flexible public workshop that allows participants to tour staged

workshop stations at their own pace. Workshop stations will be designed to address separate issues.

- Consensus-Building Workshops – Two consensus-building workshops will be conducted in a later phase to identify a preliminary set of preferred BRT service elements and characteristics. In addition to disseminating a survey instrument, the consensus-building workshops will make use of workshop games and exercises, such as dot-polling. Such exercises afford participants the opportunity to provide individual input while at the same time encourage group decision-making.
- Prioritization Workshops – Two priorities workshops will be conducted in the final phase to gather public input on the final selection of priority BRT corridors. A survey instrument will be developed and disseminated at these workshops to facilitate the prioritization process.
- Stakeholder Interviews – Stakeholder interviews will be conducted to solicit ideas, concerns, and comments from key individuals/organizations and community leaders identified by RTS and the PMT to obtain their opinions and ideas regarding public transportation in the Gainesville area. The consultant team will make every attempt to conduct interviews face-to-face but will use telephone interviews as a back-up. A brief questionnaire will be developed to include several open-ended questions pertaining to their perceptions of existing transit services, as well as their opinions regarding the future of public transportation and BRT in the community.
- BRT Symposium – The public involvement plan includes the conduct of a BRT symposium. A symposium is a conference organized for the discussion of a specific subject. Educational and instructional presentations are given during the symposium where attendees are given the opportunity to ask questions and discuss specific session topics related to the larger symposium subject. The symposium is intended to educate the general public, elected officials, and other interested organizations about BRT service and the characteristics that distinguish it from traditional local bus service.

Specific symposium topics, a location, and a date will be determined by the PMT. Conceptually, the symposium will include presentations by representatives from transit agencies that currently operate or are in the process of developing BRT service. The consultant team will utilize the National Bus Rapid Transit Institute to coordinate participation by national experts.

- Presentations to Local Government Agencies – Presentations of the study will be made to the City of Gainesville City Council and the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners.

- Presentations to the MTPO Board and MTPO Advisory Committees – The public involvement program includes presentations to the MTPO Board and two of its advisory committees, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC).
 - *MTPO Technical Advisory Committee* – The TAC is composed of technically qualified representatives of agencies responsible for local planning and engineering activities throughout Alachua County. It is the responsibility of the TAC:
 - To coordinate transportation planning and programming activities;
 - To review transportation studies and reports;
 - To review work programs and transportation improvement programs; and
 - To provide technical recommendations to the MTPO on transportation issues.

Periodic updates to be provided to the MTPO throughout the course of the study include two presentations, one at the onset of the project and one to present the final report and recommendations, and two sets of interim informational materials which will be provided at two regularly scheduled MTPO meetings for the MTPO Board's consent agenda.

- *MTPO Citizens Advisory Committee* – The role of the CAC is to represent the views of Alachua's citizens in regards to transportation-related matters. The CAC is composed of citizens appointed by the MTPO Board.
- *MTPO Board* – The MTPO Board is composed of decision-makers responsible for regional transportation planning in the Gainesville area. Consequently, it is critical to keep them informed throughout the project and to obtain their input and guidance for the study.

Information Distribution Activities

The information distribution activities selected for the Rapid Transit Feasibility Study are listed and discussed below.

- Public Involvement Plan – The public involvement plan will be made available to RTS staff for placement on the RTS web site.
- Web-Blast Newsletter – Three electronic newsletters will be prepared to inform the general public regarding the project. Web-Blast newsletters will be distributed prior to each series of workshops and will inform the public on project workshop dates and

locations and related workshop topics (i.e., educational information, BRT service alternatives, and alternatives prioritization).

- Press Releases/Flyers for Public Workshops – Press releases and flyers will be prepared prior to each of the six public workshops to notify citizens and encourage participation. Flyers will be made available in a variety of formats and forums to be determined by the PMT and will be provided to RTS staff for distribution. In addition, the workshops and symposium will be noticed in the Gainesville Sun and the Gainesville Guardian by display ads. PMT members have requested that such ads be at least one-fifth of a page in size.
- Reports and Information for RTS Web Site – Technical reports, study and workshop materials, and other information will be provided to RTS staff for posting on the RTS web site.
- Notification of General Public – The general public will be notified of public meetings through a number of methods: legal advertisement, RTS website, flyers, and press releases.
- Mailing/Contact Lists – If available, the RTS mailing list will enable the distribution of project-related information throughout the development of the BRT study. Mailings will be designed to reach diverse populations throughout the City of Gainesville and the study area. Specifically, an effort will be made to reach local stakeholder groups with study materials. Such groups include the City of Gainesville Chamber of Commerce, the University of Florida Student Government, and the Gainesville Community Redevelopment Agency among others.
- Additional Presentation and Workshop Materials – Public involvement materials developed for the public involvement plan will be made available to RTS staff and PMT members for use at their discretion at other public involvement events and opportunities. Materials include presentations, presentation boards, surveys, and other tools and informational resources used to gather public input throughout the study process.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT SCHEDULE

A project schedule was developed for the public participation portions of the study. This project schedule is provided in Figure 1. Please note that the dates for specific meetings and public involvement activities are approximate and subject to change pending on guidance from RTS and the PMT.

Figure 1
Gainesville Regional Transit System
Rapid Transit Study - Public Involvement

