

# PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

RATS supports and encourages active public participation throughout the transportation planning process. Our public participation policy, updated in 2023, ensures that specific opportunities exist for the public to offer input and provide feedback as active participants in the decision-making process. Public participation takes many forms, and RATS uses a wide range of methods and media to enhance the public's participation in the process.

As part of the FFY 2027-2050 Long Range Transportation Plan, RATS took a number of steps to ensure consideration of the public's views, including using the public participation plan, developing and contacting a comprehensive listing of stakeholders, utilizing a variety of methods to involve the public, and considering public comments in developing the list of transportation projects. The overall goal of the LRTP is to develop plans and strategies that promote an efficient and effective transportation system for Berks County.

The MPO's Public Participation Plan Update (2023) contains specific and explicit procedures that RATS will use to identify, seek out and engage all populations, including minorities and below poverty populations. The foundation for these efforts is stated in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964:

“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program receiving Federal financial assistance.” – Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (43 U.S.C. 2000)

RATS uses its data collection and analysis capabilities to support participation efforts and help ensure meaningful access to its public participation opportunities. RATS carefully analyzes the relationship between the region's populations and its regional investments, plans and programs. Geographic analysis assists RATS to identify demographic communities and target outreach to these areas. Specifically, RATS will use its geographic analysis of target outreach areas to ensure that public meetings are held at accessible locations within these communities, and to identify, where they exist, organizations that target these communities and disseminate information to them to help reach these communities.

The Public Participation Plan Update (2023) procedures for the development of the Long Range Transportation Plan, Transportation Improvement Program and Air Quality Conformity Analysis are provided here.

## The Regional Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)

The regional LRTP is a long range (20+ years) strategy and capital improvement program developed to guide the effective investment of public funds in multi-modal transportation facilities in the context of the regional vision. The regional plan provides the context from which the region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), a short-range capital improvement program for implementing transportation projects, is drawn. The LRTP is updated every four years in consultation with interested parties.

RATS' early and ongoing public participation process in developing the LRTP will follow these steps:

- Step 1: Public Participation Surveys, through the internet and targeted mailing, will be used to gather initial input (when update cycles correspond, this can occur in concert with the TIP update). When available, staff will also use input gathered as part of any of PennDOT's public input processes.
- Step 2: At the same time, Public Officials Surveys sent to local officials and the legislative delegation, will be used to gather governmental input.
- Step 3: Initial input, including at least one (1) Public Meeting/Workshop, will be compiled, and used in the design of the next phase of outreach and participation, such as workshops and other public meetings. This Public Meeting/Workshop may be held in conjunction with a regularly scheduled RATS MPO Technical or Coordinating Committee meeting.
- Step 4: Ongoing input will be used to develop draft regional plan materials in consultation with interested parties.
- Step 5: Draft regional plan materials will be presented for review and comment by the public and interested parties using the Public Review and Comment procedures for a 30-day public comment period. Draft materials will be made available during the 30-day public comment period on the BCPC website at <https://www.berkspa.gov/departments/planning-commission>, BCPC offices, BARTA's offices, and PennDOT District 5-0's offices, and local libraries. Information on where and how to access public comment documents will be included in the Public Notice with information to be included that details how to access documents electronically or in printed form. Vital draft regional plan documents will be made available in Spanish and alternative formats on request in accordance with the procedures for accommodating Limited English Proficient persons and persons with disabilities contained in this *Public Participation Plan*. During this stage, two (2) Public Meetings will be held. These generally include one during the day in a hybrid format that includes both in-person and electronic access in a downtown Reading location, and a second meeting held in the evening in a rural location that is generally in-person only. Staff strives to accommodate requests for presentations at other meetings.
- Step 6: All comments received will be considered and the response to comments will be documented and provided to the Board prior to taking action on the draft regional plan materials.
- Step 7: The Board takes formal action on the regional plan.
- Step 8: A Public Participation Report for the regional plan will be developed. The Report will document all comments received and the response to comments and will also document all public participation and outreach activities. This Report may take the form of a Chapter or Appendix in the LRTP.

- Step 9: Adopted final regional plan materials will be made available on the BCPC website at <https://www.berkspa.gov/departments/planning-commission/transportation-reading-mpo>, BCPC's offices, BARTA's offices, and PennDOT District 5-0's offices. Vital regional plan documents will be made available in Spanish and alternative formats on request in accordance with the procedures for accommodating Limited English Proficient persons and persons with disabilities contained in this *Public Participation Plan*. Information will be included that details how to access documents electronically or in printed form.

### The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) identifies the region's highest priority transportation projects, develops a multi-year program of implementation, and identifies available federal and non-federal funding sources for the identified projects. The TIP covers a four-year period of investment and is updated every two years through a cooperative effort of local, state and federal agencies including participation by the general public and consultation with interested parties. Transportation projects included on the TIP are to be consistent with the regional LRTP. The entire range of projects included in the TIP must conform to federal air quality standards.

RATS early and ongoing public participation process in developing the TIP will follow these steps:

- Step 1: Public Participation Surveys, through the internet and targeted mailing, will be used to gather initial input. When update cycles correspond, this can occur in concert with the regional LRTP update and/or any PennDOT public input processes.
- Step 2: At the same time Public Officials Surveys sent to local officials and the legislative delegation, will be used to gather governmental input.
- Step 3: Initial input will be compiled and used in the design of the next phase of outreach and participation, such as workshops and other public meetings.
- Step 4: Ongoing input will be used to develop draft TIP materials in consultation with interested parties.
- Step 5: Draft TIP materials, including the Air Quality Conformity Report, Air Quality Resolution, and Community Demographic Assessment, will be presented for review and comment by the public and interested parties using the Public Review and Comment procedures for a 30-day public comment period. Draft materials will be made available during the 30-day public comment period on the BCPC website at <https://www.berkspa.gov/departments/planning-commission>, BCPC's offices, BARTA's offices, PennDOT district 5-0's offices, and local libraries. Information on where and how to access public comment documents will be included in the Public Notice with information included that details how to access documents electronically or in printed form. Vital draft regional plan documents will be made available in Spanish and alternative formats on request in accordance with the procedures for accommodating Limited English Proficient persons and persons with disabilities contained in this *Public Participation Plan*. Information will be included that details how to access documents electronically or in printed form. During this stage, two (2) Public Meetings will be held. These generally include one during the day in a hybrid format that includes both in-person and electronic access in a downtown Reading location, and a second meeting held in the evening in a rural location that is generally in-person only. Staff strives to accommodate requests for presentations at other meetings.

- Step 6: All comments received will be considered and the response to comments will be documented and provided to the Board prior to taking action on the draft TIP materials.
- Step 7: The Board takes formal action on the TIP and the associated Air Quality Conformity documents and Community Demographic Assessment.
- Step 8: A Public Participation Report for the TIP will be developed. The Report will document all comments received and the response to comments and will also document all public participation and outreach activities.
- Step 9: Adopted final regional plan materials will be made available on the BCPC website at <https://www.berkspa.gov/departments/planning/transportation-reading-mpo>, BCPC's offices, BARTA's offices, and PennDOT District 5-0's offices. Vital regional plan documents will be made available in Spanish and alternative formats on request in accordance with the procedures for accommodating Limited English Proficient persons and persons with disabilities contain in this *Public Participation Plan*. Information will be included that details how to access documents electronically or in printed form.

### Air Quality Conformity Determination Report

The *Air Quality Conformity Determination* report is a companion document to the regional LRTP and the TIP. The *Air Quality Conformity Determination* report documents the process used by RATS for making the transportation-related conformity determination for the regional LRTP and TIP for ground-level ozone. The Conformity Determination is required by the federal Clean Air Act. RATS conformity finding is based on criteria and procedures in EPA's Transportation Conformity Rule (40 CFR Part 93) and satisfies all applicable conformity requirements.

The *Air Quality Conformity Determination* report is developed as part of the regional LRTP or TIP update, in which case public participation and public comment procedures for the regional LRTP or TIP update will be followed as described in Sections 10.4 and 10.5, respectively of RATS *Public Participation Plan*. The *Air Quality Conformity Determination* report is also updated as required by certain amendments to the TIP or regional LRTP, in which case public participation and comment procedures for major amendments to the regional LRTP or TIP will be followed as described in Section 10.6 of the RATS *Public Participation Plan*.