



PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

WATERTOWN-JEFFERSON COUNTY AREA TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL TRANSIT STUDY

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1 BACKGROUND

This report presents the Public Involvement Plan (PIP) for involving public and private stakeholders in the planning process for the Watertown-Jefferson County Area Transportation Council Transit Study, Contract #C037622. The New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) is initiating this process on behalf of the Watertown-Jefferson County Area Transportation Council (WJCATC). Public involvement will be a key element at every step of that process, and this plan defines the project's public involvement program.

The project was initiated to study the feasibility of providing transit services within the Watertown-Jefferson County urbanized MPO area and to identify the best organization to provide those services. This could include an outside transit provider or an existing transit provider, taking over transit operation along the MPO priority regional transportation corridors. Transit feasibility is based in large part upon density of need and destinations. Fort Drum and Watertown have a high density of residents, services, and jobs, yet there is no viable transit type option outside the city limits.

PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose and need for the Project have been established by NYSDOT in the Request for Proposals. The public involvement process and overall transit study will be guided by the following project goals and objectives:

1. Develop an overall transit evaluation criteria for each regional transportation corridor.
2. Prepare a preliminary visual representation of transit for each corridor.
3. Develop a corridor screening, ranking, and selection process to recommend corridors that will benefit from the implementation of a new transit system.
4. Analyze financial feasibility for operating costs associated with providing the transit service

The transit study public involvement process will maximize the opportunities for interested stakeholders to find out about the project, to follow its progress through the planning process, and to comment on issues of concern. The study will have a web-based value preference survey and establish hold regular meetings with a Project Advisory Committee comprised of key local officials, community and business group representatives, and other interested parties. A key part of the public involvement process will be the presentation of intermediate and draft final deliverables for public and agency review and comment, including a series of public meetings to obtain comments on the project and the conclusions presented in those documents.

This plan explains how these outreach procedures will be implemented and public participation will be achieved. Stakeholders to be included in the public involvement process will represent a broad cross-section of transportation and other agencies, elected and appointed officials, the business community, institutional and community-based organizations, residents, and other interested parties. In accordance with requirements of NYSDOT process, public participation will be a significant component of the transit study. NYSDOT is asking for public input early in the process and throughout the study to ensure that the project goals and objectives and the development of alternatives reflect the public's concerns.

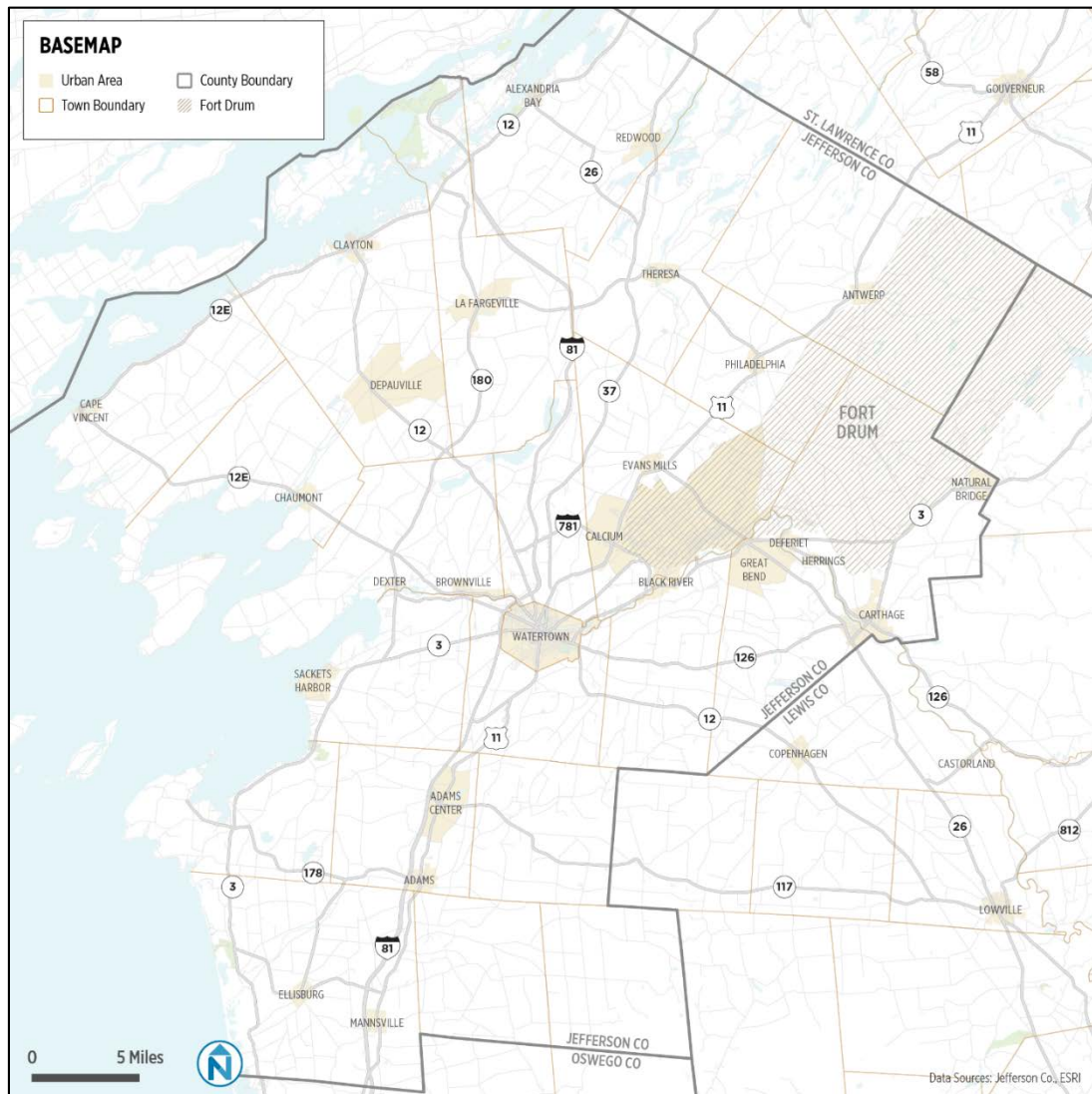
This plan is a working document that will be added to, revised, and updated, when appropriate, throughout the planning process, and is sufficiently flexible to accommodate contingencies. It will identify key participants and provide a forum for residents, businesses, officials, transportation agencies and other

interested parties to gather information, provide input, share their perspectives, and help resolve conflicts and reach consensus on a plan of action. The outreach activities presented in this plan are designed to (a) educate the public about the planning processes and the important issues it will address, and provide ways for citizens and other parties to gather information, provide input, share their perspectives, and reach a community consensus on ways to best develop the countywide transit system.

2 CONTEXT IDENTIFICATION

Effective public involvement requires awareness and understanding of the social, economic, physical and historic context of the project area. As can be seen on the map below, the transit study is envisioned to take not only the entirety of Jefferson County into account, but also nearby villages of Lowville, Lewis County and Gouverneur, Saint Lawrence County. The area is a mix of villages and rural towns anchored by the City of Watertown and the Fort Drum military installation. As the public involvement process evolves, the full context of the project will be identified.

Figure 1 WJCATC Transit Study Area



STAKEHOLDERS

A key part of the plan is to identify persons or organizations who would be or perceive they would be affected by the project, and invite them to be involved in the project development process. The following is a list that identifies those groups and interests, which were requested to be involved in the process for the transit study:

State and Federal Agencies

- NYSDOT – Region 7
- Fort Drum

City, County, and Regional Municipal Agencies

- Jefferson County
- City of Watertown

Transportation Providers

- Citibus
- Fort Drum On-Post Shuttle
- Lewis County Public Transportation
- St. Lawrence NYSARC
- Volunteer Transportation Center
- Jefferson Rehabilitation Center

Institutional Stakeholders

- Jefferson Community College?

Citizen Organizations

- Fort Drum Regional Liaison Organization
- Transit Advocacy Group?

Business Organizations

- Shopping centers?
- Other major destinations?

The list may be expanded as the project development process continues. How these stakeholders will be brought into the process is discussed in Chapter 4.

3 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT OBJECTIVES

This section presents the initial goals and objectives of the Public Involvement Plan. These goals and objectives will be modified, as appropriate during the early phases of the transit study, in consultation with the Project Advisory Committee. The public involvement activities during the transit study process will be guided by the following goals and objectives:

Create a framework to develop and evaluate options for the transit corridors.

- Coordinate input from all related agencies, institutional and business stakeholders, advocacy and citizen groups, service providers, and the general public.
- Establish a Project Advisory Committee to help guide the Project.

Develop, maintain, and actively involve the public and agencies in the development of a workable public involvement program.

- Initiate an open and proactive public involvement process, with public access to all information.
- Establish a broad array of involvement opportunities at different stages of the project.

Establish effective communication with the public.

- Utilize the stakeholder list, consisting of providers, institutions, businesses, and community groups, to focus on specific transportation-related issues and concerns.
- Ensure two-way communication with the public, through public meetings, stakeholder interviews, and the public survey.

Present complete information to the public

- Promote understanding of and interest in the project, and participation in the study process.
- Provide periodic updates to the public concerning the progress and findings of the study.
- Help the public to understand the technical aspects of the study.

Determine public sentiment.

- Allow the public the opportunity to present their concerns, including how they view the current and potential transit system and service.
- Ensure interim and final decisions reflect serious consideration of public input.

Conform to NYSDOT Requirements for Public Involvement.

- Provide timely public notice: The public will be given adequate time to attend meetings, and sufficient opportunity to read and review materials and key decision documents.
- Reach out to diverse individuals, groups, transportation agencies, and businesses potentially interested in or affected by the project. These include those traditionally underserved by current transportation systems, especially low-income, minority, elderly, handicapped, and disabled.
- The selection of meeting and information distribution sites will emphasize diverse geographic locations that are readily accessible to disabled and elderly members of the public.

Build local community support.

- Educate the public on the need for the project and the projected benefits of its implementation.
- Identify local issues/concerns and reflect them in project choices to the greatest extent possible.
- Review access challenges and get input on potential solutions.

4 COMMUNICATION METHODS, ACTIONS, AND PRODUCTS

Achieving the goals of the public involvement plan is central to the development of the proposed transit system. The plan will include the following elements, each of which is discussed in greater detail in this chapter.

- A number of targeted meetings with community-based organizations, interest groups, and individual members of the public.
- An on-line survey related to initial project proposals will be created and linked to the NYSDOT website.
- A media strategy, including press releases, which will be coordinated through and approved by NYSDOT.

The following specific actions will be accomplished:

PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Project Advisory Committee consists of key involved agencies and departments, select community groups, appointed officials, and other local government representatives. A detailed list of members is included in the Project Management and Coordination Plan, previously supplied to NYSDOT.

The committee is a working group requiring active participation by members at a number of in-person meetings and teleconferences. Most importantly, members will be assured that the group's collective position on the project inform project procedure.

To maintain the group's effectiveness, the committee's membership should be limited to a number requested by NYSDOT. It is not possible to have every individual community group included on the committee. Most will be able to represent themselves in the public involvement process during focused interviews and public events.

With the assistance of the consultant, NYSDOT will direct the compilation and continual updating of committee membership and contact information. The committee initially consists of individuals from the stakeholder groups previously noted. Other individuals will be added to the group upon request and approval by NYSDOT.

Project Advisory Committee meetings will be formal meetings facilitated by the consultant to guide discussions around a prepared agenda. These meetings will clarify topics and issues and aid decision-making and consensus building regarding specific work tasks, event scheduling, and the advancement of the study. These meetings also allow for input solicitation on draft deliverable so that recommendations and next steps can be refined. The consultant will produce minutes of each meeting.

Currently, four in-person advisory committee meetings are anticipated, coinciding with other stakeholder and public events. All members of the advisory committee will be invited to an additional number of teleconferences coinciding with, or for the purpose of delivering progress reports. Date ranges for each meeting/teleconference are provided in the Public Involvement Schedule included in Chapter 5 of this document.

MEDIA STRATEGY

Communication with the public will also be maintained via press releases to regional media. Press releases will be used to announce meeting schedules, agendas, times, and places. Press releases can also be used to announce completion of project tasks based on community interaction. Should local media attend public events, the consultant will be entrusted with speaking as a primary representative of the project.

PUBLIC MEETINGS/WORKSHOPS

At certain project milestones, corresponding with the delivery of the technical memo describing potential corridors and their screening/ranking process as well as the delivery of the draft final report, open public information meetings will be conducted. Each meeting will have an announced focus, which will be related to the corresponding phase of the project scope. Multiple public information meetings at multiple locations may be planned on multiple days corresponding with those project milestones. For example, the project team may conduct a morning meeting at a senior facility with a comparable event scheduled at a local library during the afternoon.

The first set of public meetings is planned for the last week of June, 2018 to discuss the results of the preliminary screening of potential transit corridors and actions. The evaluation and screening process will be identified and the results presented.

The second set of public meetings is planned for the last week of September, 2018. At these sessions, the proposal included in the Draft Final Report will be presented and vetted by the public.

At each public involvement session, participants will have an opportunity to provide feedback via written comments as well as through activities where they prioritize and signal preference for certain proposed courses of action.

The public information meetings will be publicized in the media, through press releases, in advance of the meetings, in an attempt to reach the largest and most diverse population segments, especially those traditionally under-represented. Public information meetings will be held in suitable facilities that are located throughout the study area, accessible to the physically challenged, and can be reached via mass transit. Such meetings will better accommodate community members or groups who are often underserved or unintentionally circumvented by the planning process. For these reasons, the following strategies will be implemented to aid in public involvement:

- To the extent possible, venues with good public transit accessibility will be selected.
- The venues will be accessible to the physically challenged in accordance with ADA requirements.
- Signing for the hearing impaired will be provided upon request.
- Meeting notifications will be sent to everyone on the project mailing list.
- Meeting notifications will be used to announce and highlight the major themes for each of the public meetings.
- Reminder correspondence to local officials and organization leaders will be made just prior to the public meetings as a follow-up to the meeting notifications.

AGENCY AND STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

In order to adequately engage stakeholder groups not included on the Project Advisory Committee, a series of small group interviews with representatives of those groups will be conducted. The interviews will focus on specific concerns and needs of members of those larger groups.

Stakeholder interview sessions on the topic of existing operations and operational challenges are tentatively scheduled concurrently with the first in-person Project Advisory Committee meeting. This input is important to acquire early in the project so that it may be included in reporting on the existing transit system and market. If it is not feasible to arrange stakeholder interviews in this short timeframe, they may be rescheduled to a later date.

The Public Involvement Plan provides for coordination with other affected government bodies and transportation providers. In addition to those agencies serving on the Project Advisory Committee, the project sponsors will coordinate with other agencies and seek their active involvement throughout the process. Periodic meetings with such agencies, in one-on-one informal meetings, may be necessary in order to obtain relevant technical information and data important to the study and to coordinate the involvement of these agencies in planning and decision-making.

VALUE PREFERENCE SURVEY

The transit study intends to supplement in-person public outreach with a more broadly distributed online user survey. Information collected from the survey will be used to identify use patterns, perceptions of the transit system, and the potential willingness to accept changes.

PUBLIC PRESENTATION MATERIALS

The consultant will assist NYSDOT in preparing public presentation materials, in user-friendly formats that the public easily understands. These public presentation materials will help to explain transit corridor performance and operations in simple terms. The consultant will discuss/review handouts and graphic displays with NYSDOT prior to the public meetings/workshops.

The consultant will assist NYSDOT in preparing and distributing announcements of the public meetings as directed by the NYSDOT. The consultant will be responsible for preparing informational materials, including meeting agenda, graphic presentation boards, and visual aids, as directed by NYSDOT. The consultant will be responsible for manning display boards and answering questions from the public.

The consultant will attend the public meetings, at which the consultant will assist NYSDOT with installing, managing, and dismantling informational displays and other visual aids, and shall facilitate and present a technical discussion of the issues, as requested by NYSDOT.

The consultant will coordinate with the Project Advisory Committee to make necessary arrangements for meeting logistics (e.g. site, time, room, layout of tables and chairs, equipment, etc.), as appropriate, for each public meeting, the location of which shall be approved by the NYSDOT.

5 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT SCHEDULE

Below is a schedule of anticipated dates for each of the major elements of the Public Involvement Plan:

Project Advisory Committee In-Person Meetings	
February 12-16, 2018	First Project Advisory Committee Meeting
April 30-May 4, 2018	Review corridor identification report
August 27-30, 2018	Steer corridor recommendation and selections
November 5-9, 2018	Review recommendation and selection report
Project Advisory Committee Teleconferences	
January 18, 2018	Project Get Start Meeting
March 26-30, 2018	Progress Report/Public Meeting Coordination
June 4-8, 2018	Progress Report
July 16-20, 2018	Progress Report/Stakeholder Meeting Coordination
October 1-4, 2018	Progress Report/Public Meeting Coordination
December 3-7, 2018	Progress Report on final deliverable
Stakeholder Interviews	
February 12-16, 2018	Initial Stakeholder Interviews (Tentative)
August 27-30, 2018	Supplemental interviews to test and steer corridor recommendation and selections
Public Information Meetings	
April 30-May 4, 2018	Review corridor identification work. Gather feedback, including additional corridors of public concern, to augment the screening and ranking process
November 5-9, 2018	Review and test final corridor selections ahead of creating the final report
Public Survey	
March 12 – May 11, 2018	Open Survey, Collect Responses

6 UPDATING AND DOCUMENTATION

This Public Involvement Plan will be updated as the project development process proceeds. For example, project goals and members of the Project Advisory Committee may need to be changed. Additionally, the schedule of activities will be modified as needed.

The results of the public involvement process will be documented in minutes of meetings (taken by the consultant) and summaries to be included in the final deliverable package.