beyond commenting on draft procedures.

4. Strongly encouraging the State departments of transportation, metropolitan planning organizations, and transportation providers to aggressively seek to identify and involve the affected and interested public, including those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems and facilities.

5. Strongly encouraging planning and implementing agencies to use combinations of different public involvement techniques designed to meet the diverse needs of the broad

public.

6. Sponsoring outreach, training and technical assistance, and providing information for Federal, State, regional, and local transportation agencies on effective public involvement procedures.

7. Ensuring that statewide and metropolitan planning work programs provide for effective public

involvement.

8. Carefully evaluating public involvement processes and procedures to assess their success at meeting the performance requirements specified in the appropriate regulations during our joint certification reviews, metropolitan planning and conformity findings, State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) approvals and project oversight. Gordon J. Linton, Administrator,

Federal Transit Administration Rodney E. Slater, Administrator, Federal Highway Administration

FHWA/FTA Questions and Answers on Public Involvement in Transportation Decisionmaking

This guidance responds to questions raised during the eight regional FHWA/FTA outreach meetings on the planning regulations (23 CFR 450) as well as at other meetings where the planning regulations have been discussed.

1. Why are changes in public involvement needed under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and related policies and regulations?

Public involvement in transportation investment decisionmaking is central to accomplishing the vision of the ISTEA. The legislation recognizes that transportation investment decisions have far-reaching effects and thus it requires that metropolitan and statewide transportation decisions consider a wide array of factors including land use impacts and "the overall social, economic, energy, and environmental effects of transportation decisions" (23 U.S.C. 134(f) and 135(c)). Many of these factors reflect community values and are

not easily quantifiable. Public input is essential in adequately considering

The legislation also recognizes the diversity of views on transportation problems and investment options. The ISTEA states that, prior to adopting plans or programs, the MPO or State DOT "shall provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agency employees, private providers of transportation, other affected employee representatives, and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment" (23 U.S.C. 134 and 135). Federal DOT policy and FHWA and FTA regulations build on these principles by requiring MPOs and State DOTs to establish their own continuing public involvement processes which actively seek involvement throughout transportation decisionmaking, from the earliest planning stages, including the identification of the purpose and need, through the development of the range of potential solutions, up to and including the decision to implement specific solutions. These regulations provide a basic set of performance standards indicating what the FHWA and FTA expect public involvement for plans, programs, major transportation investments, and transportation projects to achieve. In sum, the ISTEA and its implementing regulations envision an open decisionmaking process eliciting the input and active involvement of all affected individuals, groups, and communities, and addressing the full range of effects that the transportation investments may have on our communities and our lives.

2. What are some of the key considerations in planning for effective

public involvement?

An effective public involvement process provides for an open exchange of information and ideas between the public and transportation decisionmakers. The overall objective of an area's public involvement process is that it be proactive, provide complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and opportunities for early and continuing involvement (23 CFR 450.212(a) and 450.316(b)(1)). It also provides mechanisms for the agency or agencies to solicit public comments and ideas, identify circumstances and impacts which may not have been known or anticipated by public agencies, and, by doing so, to build support among the public who are stakeholders in transportation investments which impact their communities.

Six useful key elements in planning for effective public involvement are: (1)

Clearly-defined purpose and objectives for initiating a public dialogue on transportation plans, programs, and projects, (2) Identification of specifically who the affected public and other stakeholder groups are with respect to the plan(s), program(s), and project(s) under development, (3) Identification of techniques for engaging the public in the process, (4) Notification procedures which effectively target affected groups, (5) Education and assistance techniques which result in an accurate and full public understanding of the transportation problem, potential solutions, and obstacles and opportunities within various solutions to the problem, and, (6) Follow through by public agencies demonstrating that decisionmakers seriously considered public input.

3. What are the indicators of an effective public involvement process?

A good indicator of an effective public involvement process is a well informed public which feels it has opportunities to contribute input into transportation decisionmaking processes through a broad array of involvement opportunities at all stages of decisionmaking. In contrast, an ineffective process is one that relies on one or two public meetings or hearings to obtain input immediately prior to decisionmaking on developed draft plans and programs. Public meetings that are well attended, frequent news coverage on transportation issues, public forums where a broad representation of diverse interests is in attendance, and plans, TIPs, MIS alternatives, and project designs which reflect an understanding and consideration of public input are all indicators that the public involvement process is effective.

4. When should an agency update its public involvement process?

The planning regulations do not specify a schedule for updating public involvement processes. Rather, an existing process should be updated whenever conditions indicate that it is ineffective. The enhanced focus on public involvement in the ISTEA and the need for more proactive outreach than has been the case in the past, however, necessitate an evolutionary approach. The public involvement process should be an integral part of an agency's activities and its adequacy should be explicitly considered each time an agency makes major program changes, initiates new studies to identify solutions to transportation problems, and updates its plans.

5. How does the State DOT and/or MPO involve the public in developing or revising the public involvement process?