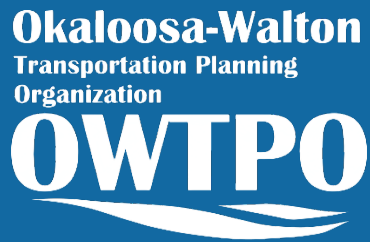


2050 LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN



Okaloosa Walton Transportation Planning Organization
staffed by the Emerald Coast Regional Council

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This document is posted online at www.ecrc.org.

Adopted: Nov 2025

This report was prepared as a cooperative effort of the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), and local governments, in fulfillment of requirements set forth in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR 450.316) and the Florida MPO Handbook. The contents of this report do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the U.S. Department of Transportation)

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Why is Public Involvement Important?

One of the elements of the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is public involvement. Engaging more citizens in the planning process leads to a stronger plan that better addresses the community's needs. Providing opportunities for public participation helps minimize challenges in later phases of the plan by identifying and addressing potential issues during the planning stage. The Okaloosa Walton Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) Public Participation Plan (PPP) provides a framework for the development of the Public Involvement Plan (PIP) specific to the Long Range Transportation Plan.

Long Range Transportation Plan

The Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is a federally required document, updated every five years, that addresses future transportation needs for at least a twenty-year horizon.

Public involvement strategies for each LRTP update should incorporate a variety of outreach activities designed to solicit feedback from stakeholders of all ages, communities, and interests throughout all stages of the planning process. Additionally, all outreach activities must adhere to the following procedures, strategies, and desired outcomes outlined in the Code of Federal Regulation (CFR 450.316) and the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Handbook. These strategies include:

- Provide reasonable public access to technical and policy information used in the development of the LRTP through the Transportation Planning Organization (TPO)/Emerald Coast Regional Council website;
- Provide adequate public notice of public involvement activities and sufficient time for public review and comment on key decisions, such as but not limited to the approval of the LRTP;
- Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received during the plan development process;
- Use visualization techniques to describe the LRTP;
- Hold public meetings at convenient times and accessible locations;
- Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including but not limited to low-income and minority households;
- Coordinate with the statewide transportation planning public involvement and consultation processes, as outlined under 23 C.F.R. Subpart B;
- Periodically review the effectiveness of the procedures and strategies contained in the participation plan;

- Incorporate a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of written and oral comments received on the draft LRTP, including the financial plan, as part of the final LRTP; and
- Provide additional opportunities for public comment if the final LRTP differs significantly from the draft version made available for public comment or if new material issues arise.
- Allow a 30-day formal comment period for major LRTP amendments. Public participation procedures may vary depending on the nature of the amendment.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders will include identified neighborhood associations, affordable housing organizations, community organizations, federally designated and non-federally recognized Native American Tribes, Federal Land Management Agency (FLMA), and major employers in the TPO area. Contact lists will be developed, containing stakeholder emails and phone numbers. These contact lists will be used to promote participation in the LRTP process, facilitate presentations, and help form a steering committee. The steering committee will review key components of the LRTP, including the kick-off meeting, Goals and Objectives, Needs Plan, and Cost Feasible Plan.

Citizens Advisory Committee

The Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) is composed of members of the public who have expressed an interest in transportation planning. The TPO board members appoint CAC membership. Citizens interested in learning more about the CAC can email marketing@ecrc.org for additional information.

Technical Coordinating Committee

The Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) comprises local government and transportation professionals. This committee plays a vital role in the planning process by providing technical advice to the TPO board on transportation-related issues.

Transportation Planning Organization Board

The Okaloosa Walton Transportation Planning Organization serves as this region's and Florida's local intergovernmental transportation policy board. The board is composed of local government officials who make transportation-related decisions at a regional level.

Other TPO Committees

Presentations will be made to other TPO committees and groups as needed to ensure broad engagement and feedback throughout the planning process.

Long Range Transportation Plan Study Area

The Study Area includes Okaloosa and Walton counties in Florida. To ensure that staff effectively reach the right communities and coordinate with agencies and stakeholders in the region, the Okaloosa Walton TPO Community Profile, created as part of the Okaloosa Walton TPO Title VI Plan, will be updated during the information phase of the Long Range Transportation Plan process.

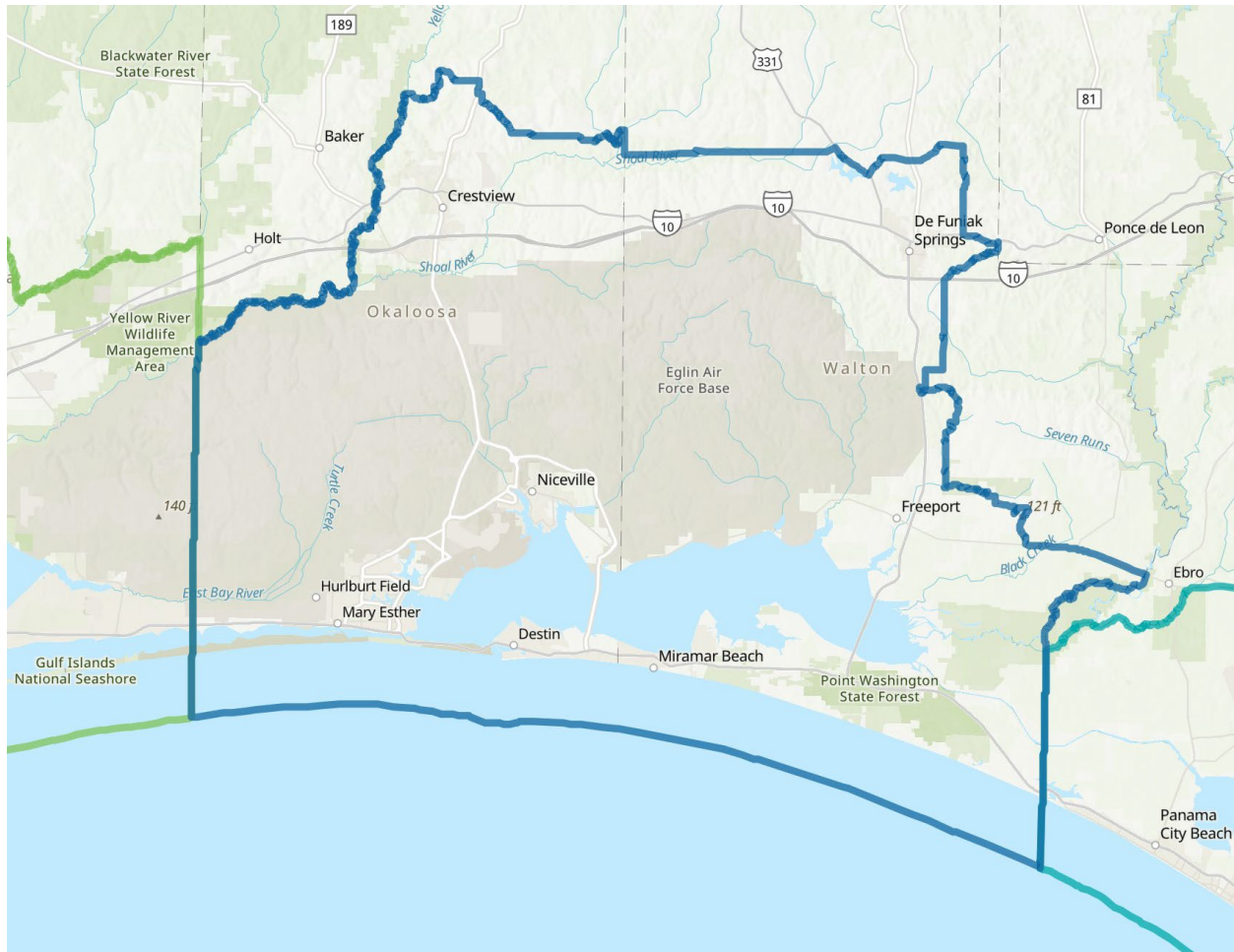


Figure 1: Map illustrating boundaries of the Okaloosa Walton TPO

Public Participation Goals

The Okaloosa Walton 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan incorporates four primary public participation and outreach goals, as outlined in the Okaloosa Walton Public Participation Plan (PPP). These goals are as follows:

Goal 1: Early and Consistent Involvement

Engage the public and stakeholder agencies early in the project and throughout each key phase of the planning process:

- Information Phase – Inform the public and stakeholders about the plan’s purpose, timeline, major milestones, and how they can stay involved and informed.
- Decision-making Phase – Identify specific opportunities for public and stakeholder input at key decision-making points that affect the development of the plan.
- Review Phase – Allow the public to review and provide input on a draft version of the completed plan.

Goal 2: Opportunity

Ensure citizens and stakeholder agencies have meaningful opportunities to participate in all phases of the public involvement process. Special emphasis will be placed on engaging traditionally under-represented or under-served communities.

Goal 3: Information and Communication

Provide citizens and stakeholder agencies with clear, timely, and accurate information about the plan as it progresses, ensuring transparency and accessibility.

Goal 4: Range of Techniques

Implement a broad spectrum of outreach techniques to engage the diverse populations within the project area.

To achieve these goals, a range of public involvement and outreach methods will be proposed and utilized during the update of the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan.



Traditionally, Under-Represented and Under-Served Populations

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal funds. In addition to considering minority and low-income persons as required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the TPO identifies and addresses, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health impacts or economic constraints of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations within the Okaloosa Walton TPO Study Area.

The Project Team for the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan will integrate Title VI principles into the planning process as developed and implemented through an ongoing initiative. This effort aims to advance racial equity, support underserved and disadvantaged communities, and identify Economically Constrained Communities for consideration in the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan.

ZIP codes within Okaloosa and Walton Counties with higher concentrations of minority, transit-dependent, low-income, older adult, and Limited English Proficiency will be identified as Economically Constrained Communities.

Throughout the project, participants in public outreach activities will be asked to provide their residential ZIP codes. The Project Team will periodically analyze participation from these ZIP codes to assess engagement levels in Economically Constrained Communities compared to the broader study area. This analysis will determine the effectiveness of outreach activities in reaching individuals in EJ areas.

If participation from economically constrained communities is disproportionately low, the Project Team will implement targeted measures to improve engagement. For example:

- If a transit-dependent, economically constrained community shows significantly low participation, smaller community meetings or outreach events may be held within the immediate area to minimize travel barriers.
- The Project Team will collaborate with counties and municipalities to identify accessible meeting locations to enhance participation, particularly from priority groups.

These measures aim to ensure inclusive and equitable participation throughout the planning process.



Public Participation and Outreach Strategies

The following methods have proven effective in previous outreach efforts by the TPO and will guide future activities:

- Review previous assessments and LRTP activities to identify successful and unsuccessful public outreach approaches.
- Analyzing Community Profiles to understand the demographics of the TPO Study Area, including traditionally underserved communities, to guide outreach strategies.
- Develop a list of specific public involvement and outreach tasks to include in the draft scope of services.

Specific requirements and strategies for public involvement are outlined in the complete Okaloosa Walton TPO Public Participation Plan, available at www.ecrc.org/OWTPO.

Strategies used by the TPO may include:

Outreach

- Identifying stakeholders, organizations, traditionally underserved communities, tribal organizations, and media outlets.
- Utilizing Virtual Public Involvement (VPI) tools.
- Distributed news releases and conducted radio/TV interviews.
- Posting public notices.
- Creating and distributing surveys with at least a 30-day timeframe for public comment.
- Hosting public open houses, workshops, forums, and focus groups.
- Delivering presentations to civic and community groups.
- Providing comment cards.
- Using GIS maps and other technology tools.
- Developing and staffing a steering committee.

Awareness/Education

- Sending email notifications to stakeholders, organizations, underserved communities, tribal organizations, and media outlets.
- Creating social media posts, hosting events, and/or organizing Virtual Open Houses.
- Maintaining a dedicated section on the TPO website for updates and information.

Documentation

- Compiling survey results and comments.
- Mapping outreach locations using GIS tools.
- Documenting outreach events with photos.
- Tracking email open and click rates.
- Measuring social media engagement.
- Posting oral and written comments alongside draft documents on the TPO website.

Public Meetings

The TPO follows these procedures for public meetings:

1. Publishing a legal notice in the newspaper with the largest circulation within the TPO Study Area at least seven days before public meetings. *
2. Creating a social media event or post.
3. Issuing a news release or a reminder release. *
4. Listing the event on the website calendar.
5. Send email notifications to TPO/TCC/CAC members, interested parties, and city and county partners.

* In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), reasonable accommodations to access information, meetings, and services for individuals with Limited English Proficiency are available upon request. Individuals requiring special accommodations under the ADA or translation services should contact us toll-free at 1-800-226-8914, ext. 203, or use TTY-Florida at 1-800-995-8771 at least 48 hours in advance.

Participation is encouraged without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability, or family status. Individuals who believe they have experienced discrimination based on any of these conditions may file a complaint with Leandra Meredith, Title VI Coordinator, at leandra.meredith@ecrc.org or call 850-332-7976, ext. 203.

Se solicita la participación del público sin importar la raza, el color, la nacionalidad, la edad, el género, la religión, la discapacidad o la situación familiar. Las personas que requieran acomodaciones especiales conforme a la Ley de Americanos con Discapacidades o las personas que requieran servicios de traducción deben comunicarse con Ada Clark al 850-332-7976, ext. 278 or ada.clark@ecrc.org al menos 48 hours de anticipación. Las personas con deficiencias auditivas deben llamar al 1-800-955-8771 (TTY).

Special accommodation request forms are available at www.ecrc.org/OWPublicInvolvement.

Public Workshops

Public workshops follow the same procedures as public meetings and may also include:

1. Emailing flyers to committees, interested parties, public transit providers, and community facilities.
2. Posting event details on community event calendars, such as those for libraries and community centers.
3. Developing tailored presentations as needed.

Presentations to Groups and Organizations

For presentations to groups and organizations, the following steps will be taken:

1. Creating tailored presentation materials as needed.
2. Sending a follow-up note of thanks and providing a summary of questions and comments to the meeting coordinator.

Outreach activities will be regularly assessed to evaluate their effectiveness. Adjustments will be made as needed to improve public engagement and ensure inclusivity.

Public Participation Schedule

To ensure the implementation of effective strategies, the public involvement team will provide a public participation schedule as part of the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan Scope of Work. This schedule will align with the overall LRTP update process and outline specific public outreach strategies for key phases, including kick-off meeting, Goals and Objectives, Needs Plan, and Cost Feasible Plan.

The schedule is available online at www.ecrc.org/OW2050LRTP.

Assessment of Public Participation Strategies

The Okaloosa Walton TPO is committed to evaluating the effectiveness of its public participation strategies to ensure that time and resources are used efficiently and that public participation activities achieve their intended goals. As a standard practice, the TPO evaluates public outreach activities quarterly for all projects and initiatives.

If an assessment indicates that the public participation goals are not being met, strategies may be modified or replaced to improve effectiveness.

The effectiveness of the TPO's public participation activities is measured using the following metrics:

- Number and quality of outreach opportunities.
- Number and reach of social media posts.
- Number of eblasts sent.
- Number of news release subscribers (media, groups, and organizations) and news releases distributed.
- Number of attendees at public workshops and the number of comments received.
- Number of completed surveys.

Regular assessments help the TPO identify areas for improvement and ensure meaningful public engagement in the LRTP process.

RESOLUTION O-W 25-07

A RESOLUTION OF THE OKALOOSA WALTON TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ORGANIZATION ADOPTING THE 2050 LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

WHEREAS, the Okaloosa Walton Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) is the organization designated by the governor of Florida as being responsible, for carrying out the continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process for the Okaloosa Walton TPO planning area; and

WHEREAS, 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 450, Subpart C, Section 316 (e) states the metropolitan planning process shall, "develop a documented process(es) that outlines roles, responsibilities, and key decision points for consulting with other governments and agencies;" and

WHEREAS, in general, federal legislation built upon previous transportation legislation (ISTEA, TEA-21, and SAFETEA-LU) to provide states and metropolitan planning organizations with specific direction in conducting and promoting broad-based public participation activities; and

WHEREAS, federal legislation requires metropolitan planning organizations to provide citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the transportation plan;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE OKALOOSA WALTON TRANSPORTATION
PLANNING ORGANIZATION THAT:**

- 1) The TPO has reviewed its public involvement procedures, hereafter referred to as the Public Participation Plan, to ensure that full and open access to the LRTP planning and TPO decision-making process is provided for all citizens and finds the document to comply with the Code of Federal Regulation (CFR 450.316) and the Florida Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Handbook.
- 2) The TPO adopts the Long Range Transportation 2050 Public Participation Plan.

Passed and duly adopted by the Okaloosa Walton Transportation Planning Organization on this 20th day of November 2025.

**OKALOOSA WALTON TRANSPORTATION
PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

ATTEST: _____

BY: _____

Bobby Wagner, Chair