

EXPANDING DIVERSITY IN PLANNING

FAMPO is committed to reaching out to all members of the community for their input, and embraces the fact that all people and communities should receive equal protection under environmental, health, employment, housing, transportation and civil rights laws. As the agency responsible for coordinating the regional transportation planning process, FAMPO makes sure that all segments of the population are given the opportunity to become involved with the planning process. These groups are a rich source of ideas and can improve transportation not only for themselves, but also for the entire community. In order to improve opportunities to reach all segments of the population, greater outreach emphasis will be given to low income, minority, elderly, disabled, low literacy, limited English proficiency and non-English speaking individuals, and the organizations that advocate and/or provide services on their behalf.

Virginia's Fastest Growing Region

The George Washington Regional Commission (GWRC) has been Virginia's fastest growing region for six consecutive years, with a 2006 population of 310,000 people and is one of the four largest metropolitan/urbanized areas in Virginia, with a forecast population in 2035 of at least 540,000 people. Of the current population, approximately 75% is Caucasian, 20% is African American and about 5% is Hispanic, Asian-American or other minority. Senior citizens comprise about 10% of the total population. Because of the growing number of minority groups, casting a diverse net through public involvement efforts is a vital element to transportation planning.

To read more about legislation affecting public outreach and transportation planning: Environmental Justice, Americans with Disabilities Act, and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and others, please refer to the section on Public Involvement Regulations and Policies in the Appendix.

STRATEGIES TO BROADEN OUTREACH

Effective planning requires that diverse socioeconomic groups be included early in the planning effort and that their concerns be understood and addressed. A few ways FAMPO is expanding diversity through public involvement include:

- Examining the location and service area of each of its transportation improvements to ensure that its transportation system adequately and appropriately benefits all groups of the region's population;
- Using census and mapping data to identify areas with large concentrations of seniors, minority and ethnic populations, and use this information to broaden FAMPO's master contact database mailing list;
- Providing direct notice of public meetings and public input periods to identified groups of stakeholders as is practicable;

- Holding public information meetings in facilities that are centrally located and accessible by persons with disabilities and by as many transportation modes as possible;
- Writing all documents so they are easy to read
- Making all informational materials easy to access
- Providing documents and other pertinent materials to other public and private agencies and advocates to extend FAMPO resources for outreach
- Using the Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) to improve, evaluate and enhance communication with minority and low income audiences
- Providing “how to request special assistance” notices on all promotional information including the website
- Maximizing the accessibility of the FAMPO website for visually impaired individuals per Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Evaluating and, where necessary, improving the public involvement process to encourage a diverse group of people to take part in transportation decision-making

Defining Diversity

Minority groups are those persons who are African American, Hispanic, Asian American, American Indian or Alaskan Native. These minority populations are those that are readily identifiable groups who will be affected by a proposed FAMPO program, policy, or activity.

Low-Income populations are those groups whose household income is at or below the Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines and who will be affected by a proposed FAMPO program, policy, or activity. (Ref: DOT Order on Environmental Justice)

Assessing Diversity Efforts:

Most MPOs agree that assessing the success of diversity goals can be challenging. Because receiving input from a broad range of stakeholders is vitally important to the planning process, FAMPO will establish a plan to regularly review and evaluate the public involvement program to determine its effectiveness in providing feedback from diverse audiences. As an example, during meetings, attendees may be asked to fill out a simple survey asking them their income level, ethnic background, education level, etc. A similar survey could be used when the public accesses the FAMPO website for information and comments. The TAG will review, assessment and future recommendations of these efforts for action by the Policy Committee.