

## 2.0 PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The process adopted for development of the 2040 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) sought to balance objective analysis of existing and projected future conditions with the expressed views and wishes of the public and interested stakeholders elicited through the citizen involvement effort and stakeholder outreach.

### 2.1 PERFORMANCE-BASED PLANNING APPROACH

The 2040 LRTP utilizes a performance-based planning approach that can be expanded in later updates when Federal guidance on national performance measures and monitoring requirements is made available. Performance-based planning and programming (PBPP) is the application of performance management to the long-range planning and programming process. Performance management is a strategic approach to decision-making based on the development, application and monitoring of performance data. PBPP uses data-derived indicators of current and desired transportation system performance to set strategic directions; to analyze how funds are invested and programmed; and to evaluate program outcomes.

The *Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act* (Public Law 112-141), signed into law in 2012, introduced requirements for performance-based planning in statewide and metropolitan planning. Commonly known by the acronym *MAP-21*, the law requires the U. S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) to establish performance measures that will enable states and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) to track their performance in addressing the national goals set forth in MAP-21. Once these performance measures are mandated by the promulgation of pending regulations, state transportation departments and MPOs will be required to adopt a target to be achieved by the implementation of each measure.

While Federal guidance on MAP-21 performance measures has not yet been issued, Gulf Regional Planning Commission (GRPC) already has extensive experience with outcome-based planning and programming activities related to the *Livability Principles* adopted by the Partnership for Sustainable Communities. The partnership is a joint effort by the U. S. Department of Transportation, U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to spearhead Federal efforts to embed the concept of *sustainability* in state and local decision-making processes. The formulation of performance measures was an integral part of the agency's collaborative involvement in development of the *Plan for Opportunity: Regional Sustainability Plan for the Mississippi Gulf Coast*. The general process outlined below illustrates how the 2040 Long-Range Transportation Plan incorporates an outcome-oriented, performance-based planning approach.

1. **Set Regional Vision** – A regional vision is derived from public and stakeholder input.
2. **Define Goals and Objectives** – Goals are developed that address desired outcomes consistent with the regional vision and national goals set forth in MAP-21. Then objectives that are specific and measurable are established to support achievement of the stated goals.
3. **Establish System Performance Measures** – Performance measures to monitor are selected that are consistent with the stated goals and objectives and with the Livability Principles and indicators. Monitoring these measures over time will allow the MPO to be responsive either to intended or to unforeseen changes.

4. **Assess Baseline System Performance** – Existing conditions of the transportation system were assessed from an asset inventory, applying technical analysis and input received from the public and stakeholders.
5. **Identify Desired System Performance** – Because state performance targets are not yet set and some necessary data are not yet available, the 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) solely focuses on the preferred overall trend of performance measures (i.e. the direction of results).
6. **Forecast Future Conditions and Needs** – Future growth in population and employment from 2013 to 2040 was forecast. The impacts of the forecast change in land use and demographic patterns were then modeled using the existing transportation system and committed projects. Future projects were then evaluated both individually and as part of larger packages of projects.
7. **Develop Implementation Strategy** – A prioritization methodology was developed for ranking future transportation projects in a manner consistent with stated goals and objectives as well as public and stakeholder input. The projects that most effectively balance future demand with these concerns are then selected to be included in the fiscally constrained project list, so long as there is no preliminary concern of significant environmental impact or disproportionately adverse effects on environmental justice populations.

## 2.2 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

As part of its ongoing transportation planning process, GRPC coordinates a public engagement program that is *cooperative, continuous and comprehensive* in accordance with the U. S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) metropolitan planning regulations. The 3 C's are reflected in the long-range plan update process in a number of ways. Both the general public and interested stakeholders were informed of the update process and afforded continuous opportunities to participate in plan development.

### Cooperative

Public participation activities throughout plan development were conducted cooperatively with the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) and other MPO agencies in Mississippi. Outreach messages and timelines were aligned to provide a consistent look for public display and coordinated opportunities for input from the community. GRPC also participated with MDOT and the other MPO agencies in a statewide online outreach effort. Managed by consultant staff, the *MindMixer* website was developed as a new communication tool. It afforded people who were unable or unwilling to attend the scheduled public meetings an equal opportunity to review materials and provide feedback. In addition to posting information for public viewing, the site allowed participants to enter questions, make comments and share their project suggestions with planning staff.



Media interviews of GRPC staff and members of the community helped get the word out about plan development.

In support of the joint MDOT-MPO *MindMixer* effort, push cards were distributed to MPO membership, e-mails were sent to individuals on the statewide stakeholder list, and printed cards were handed out during the first round of public meetings. These cards “pushed” individuals to continue to follow the planning process and provide their feedback through the *MindMixer* forum. In short, the site afforded an additional opportunity for interested parties to participate in the planning process despite scheduling challenges or other barriers that kept them from attending on-site public meetings.

Another example of cooperation during the outreach process involved interaction with the local news media. Their attendance at the public meeting events, and subsequent help in disseminating information about the planning process to the community, had a far-reaching impact. This media coverage supplemented publication of ads in the *Sun Herald* newspaper announcing planning activities and meeting dates and soliciting public participation.

### Continuous

From the start of the planning process leading to development of the long-range transportation plan, GRPC staff have been in regular communication with their counterparts at the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and MDOT, as well as the other MPO agencies. Throughout each phase of the plan development process, information was posted on the GRPC website for public review and comment. A metropolitan transportation plan (MTP) update was included on the agenda for each Transportation Policy Committee (TPC) or Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) meeting in order to ensure the MPO membership, their advisors and other stakeholders were aware of and could contribute to the planning effort. This also allowed for discussion of study findings, led to project recommendations and alerted the membership when key milestones were being accomplished.

Midway through the planning process, the GRPC website was updated to a new format, allowing creation of a headline bar on the homepage for attracting attention to hot topics. The MTP had been a standing element of the home page on the old site but became even more visible to visitors following the upgrade. A visitor clicking on the MTP announcement on the new site would be taken to an entire page developed to share MTP planning information and to allow individuals to review materials and provide ‘single-click’ feedback straight to the GRPC planning staff.

## Comprehensive

The public engagement process began soliciting feedback by means of a statewide telephone survey. The information collected contributed to the initial drafting of long-range goals and objectives which were then made available for public comment. The top priority identified by respondents in both urban and rural areas, as well as statewide, was the need to maintain the existing transportation system (see Figure 2-1). Improving safety and reducing traffic congestion both ranked higher in the metropolitan areas than they did in either the non-urban areas or statewide. Expanding transit options was a higher priority among rural-area respondents than it was for those in urban areas or in the state as a whole.

Public meetings and membership presentations provided attendees with a comprehensive look at the planning process and how they could be involved in it. Informational materials were produced and presented by both MPO and MDOT planning staff at each public meeting. Separate meetings were held at locations in each of the three study area counties between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. The first round of meetings was conducted in February 2015, shortly after the start of the planning process. The second round was scheduled to take place during the 45-day public review period for the draft plan in November 2015 (see schedule below).

COUNTY	ROUND 1		ROUND 2	
	DATE/LOCATION	ATTENDANCE	DATE/LOCATION	ATTENDANCE
Hancock County	2.24.15 - Bay St Louis	32	11.19.15 - Bay St Louis	TBD
Harrison County	2.26.15 – Biloxi	42	11.18.15 – Biloxi	TBD
Jackson County	2.25.15 – Gautier	29	11.17.15 - Pascagoula	TBD

During the first round of meetings, visitors were invited upon arriving to watch a video that featured MDOT Executive Director Melinda McGrath. The MDOT director welcomed guests and briefly explained the purpose of the meeting and its role in the long-range planning process, encouraging participants to continue their involvement in the long-range plan development effort. Following the introductory video, attendees were able to view displays and talk with MDOT staff about the state’s overarching priorities for the future transportation system in Mississippi. Then they were invited to view displays and other materials relating to the GRPC plan development process and discuss regional transportation issues with MPO staff.

Several feedback-gathering activities were made available to visitors during the public meetings. Maps were laid out for individuals to mark, indicating where they would like to see improvements made in the future. There were also two surveys: The first asked attendees how they would spend available transportation improvement dollars; the second asked participants to rate the performance of the existing transportation system by mode (see figures 2-2 and 2-3).

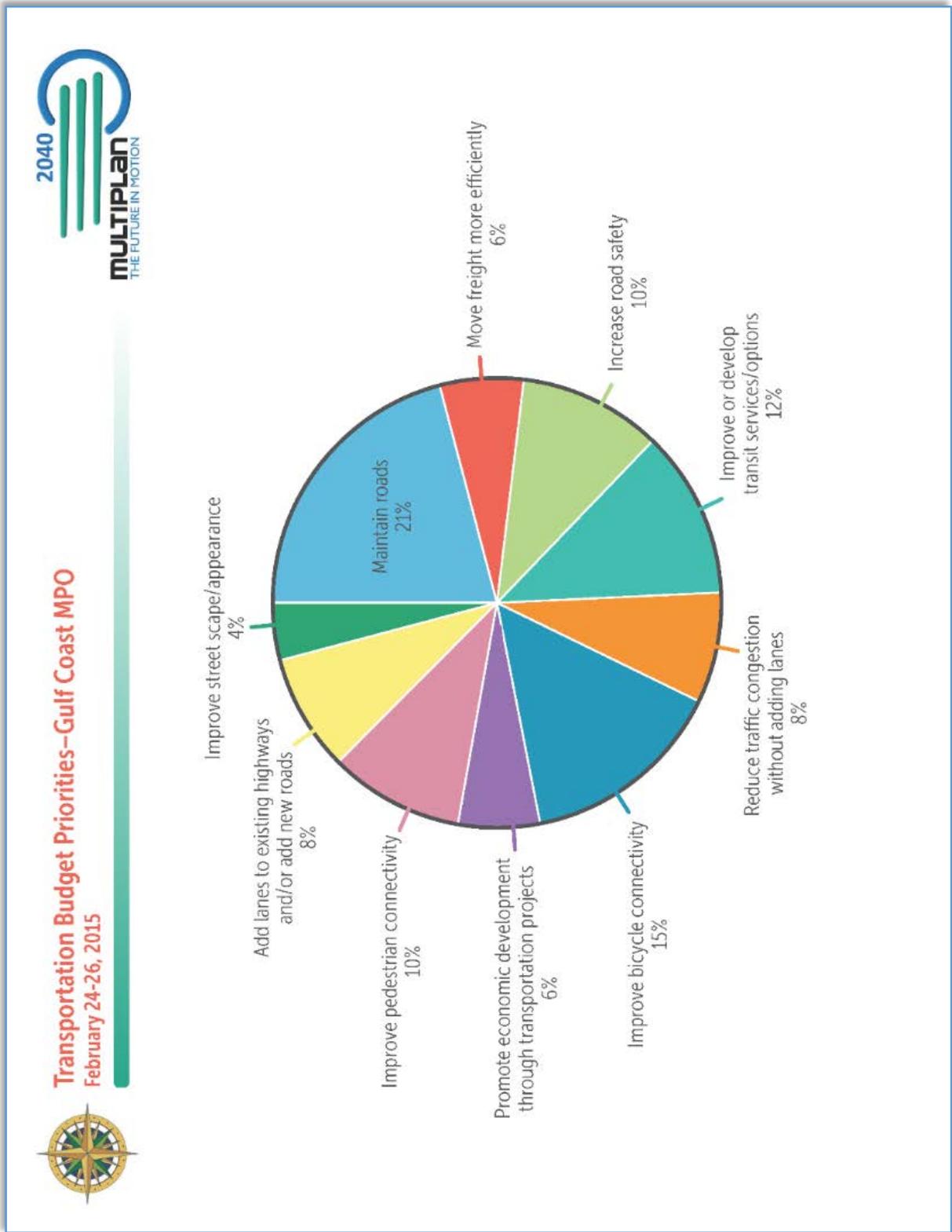
The second round of public meetings was scheduled for mid-November during the 45-day public review period so that the plan could be presented to the Transportation Planning Committee for adoption at the MPO Annual Meeting on December 10, 2015.

Figure 2-1: Statewide Telephone Survey Results



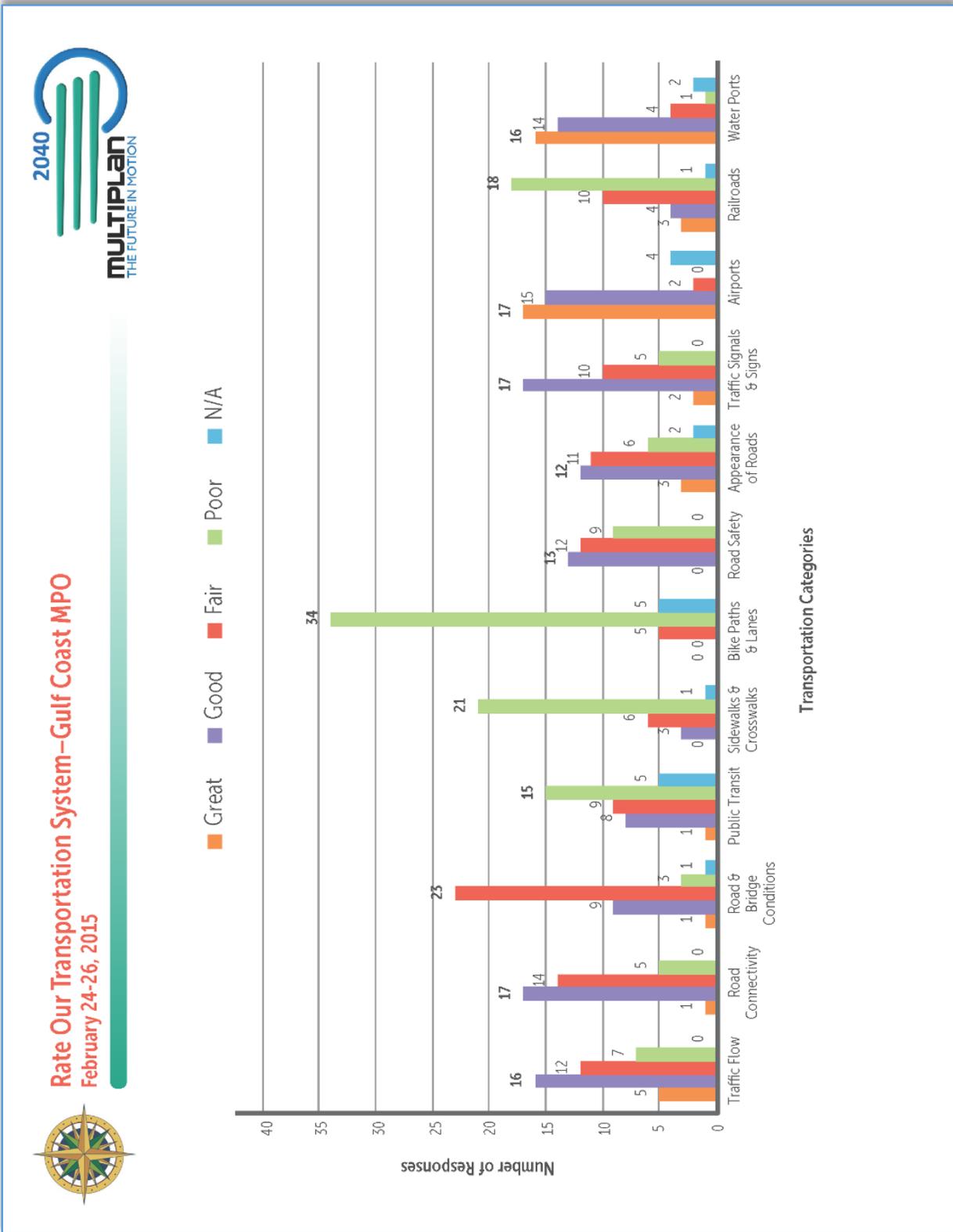
Source: Mississippi Department of Transportation, Gulf Regional Planning Commission, Neel-Schaffer, Inc.

Figure 2-2: Public Input Regarding Transportation Spending Priorities



Source: Mississippi Department of Transportation; Gulf Regional Planning Commission, Neel-Schaffer, Inc.

Figure 2-3: Public Input Regarding Performance of Existing Transportation System



Source: Mississippi Department of Transportation; Gulf Regional Planning Commission; Neel-Schaffer, Inc.



MDOT Executive Director Melinda McGrath welcomes public meeting participants via video (left); participants complete survey questionnaires (middle); participant marks map to register input (right).

### 2.3 REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

The GRPC *Public Participation Plan* (PPP) is consistent with the requirements set forth in Chapter 23 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) Section 450.316 (“Interested parties, participation, and consultation”). The plan defines how the agency ensures that ordinary citizens, affected parties, transportation providers and their employees, advocates and other interested individuals have access to the regional planning process. The PPP places emphasis on identifying, for the stakeholder communication roster, those individuals who belong to or represent traditionally underserved populations located in the Mississippi Gulf Coast Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA). The plan applies to all activities, services and programs implemented by the MPO and is available for review at [www.grpc.com](http://www.grpc.com).

In compliance with the cited regulation, GRPC staff have ensured that timely notice was provided at key decision-points throughout the long-range planning process leading to adoption of the MTP. Information was provided in written and visual formats, viewable by means of various mediums; and public feedback was collected through a variety of strategies, including electronic submission. To ensure that the requirement that meetings be scheduled at convenient times and locations was met, three public meetings were held, one in each coastal county, between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. The first round of meetings helped to identify community priorities and helped to define regional goals and objectives and spending priorities for future transportation investment. The second round of meetings was scheduled to allow all interested parties the opportunity to review the draft plan and provide comments prior to publication. The 45-day review period was scheduled from October 26<sup>th</sup> to December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

The regulation cited above (23 CFR §450.316) defines the core components of MPO compliance in conducting its planning and outreach programs, but there are several additional rules and regulations that also apply. The PPP is also compliant with 23 CFR §450.322 (“Development and content of the metropolitan transportation plan”) which reiterates the MPO’s responsibility to involve the public in the decision-making process and stipulates that the draft and final documents must be made available in electronically accessible formats. Title II §35.149 (“Discrimination Prohibited”) of the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (Public Law 101-336, 104 Stat. 327) states that “no qualified individual with a disability

shall, because a public entity's facilities are inaccessible to or unusable by individuals with disabilities, be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any public entity." In addition, 23 CFR §450.210 ("Interested Parties, Public Involvement and Consultation") requires an agency to "ensure that public meetings are held at convenient and accessible locations and times." In order to be fully compliant with the regulation, GRPC public meetings are routinely held at locations that are fully accessible, with at least one in every three meetings located on a fixed-route transit line.

Other legislation--such as 23 USC 128 ("Public Hearings") and 23 USC 139 ("Efficient Environmental Reviews for Project Decisionmaking")--and regulations such as 23 CFR 771.111 ("Early coordination, public involvement, and project development")--add to the core components of participation outlined above. They require that the participation process be established early and be carried on continuously throughout the plan development process. This was accomplished by building a comprehensive stakeholder e-mail list early in the process for distribution of all plan announcements and updates. It was also satisfied by means of ongoing communication channeled through the *MindMixer* website and [www.grpc.com](http://www.grpc.com).

In providing access to planning materials, the MPO offered translations of the draft plan for distribution to the Spanish-speaking community through advocacy organizations. This was done to comply with Executive Order #13166 ("Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency"), which requires agencies to ensure a meaningful opportunity for individuals with *limited English proficiency* (LEP) to participate in the planning process. Translated documents were prepared for distribution at public meetings as well as on the agency website.

Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 "prohibits exclusion from participation in, denial of benefits of, and discrimination under federally assisted programs on grounds of race, color, or national origin." Other non-discrimination statutes include Section 162 (a) of the *Federal-Aid Highway Act* of 1973 (23 USC 324) which bars discrimination on the basis of sex; the *Age Discrimination Act* of 1975 (42 USC 6101-6107) which bans discrimination on the basis of age; and Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act* of 1973 (Public Law 93-112, 87 Stat. 355) and the previously cited *Americans with Disabilities Act* of 1990 which ban discrimination on the basis of disability. Taken altogether, these requirements define an overarching Title VI-based nondiscrimination program incorporated within the GRPC PPP.

Executive Order 12898 ("Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations") provides guidance on how the MPO is to achieve the equitable distribution of both costs and benefits associated with transportation improvements, programs and services. This policy establishes the intent to ". . . make achieving environmental justice part of our mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations. . . ." These considerations were included in the outreach process as we selected meeting locations and made planning materials available in multiple formats, but also in development of the plan itself as a core factor in project selection and the prioritization process for future transportation improvements.