



# Connecticut

Department of Transportation

**DRAFT**

# PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT GUIDANCE MANUAL

REVISION OF 2007

Prepared By:



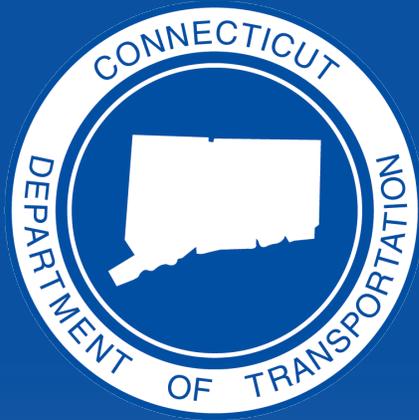
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# Table of Contents



# Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b>	IX
<b>Acronyms</b>	XV
<b>Chapter 1: Why Is Public Involvement Important?</b>	
<u>Who Is “The Public”?</u>	3
<u>Why Involve the Public?</u>	3
<u>How Do I Reach Out?</u>	7
<b>Chapter 2: When Is Public Involvement Required?</b>	
<u>Overview</u>	11
<u>Planning and Design</u>	12
<i>Figure 2.1: The Planning Process</i>	13
<i>Figure 2.2: State of Connecticut Regional &amp; Municipal         Planning Organizations</i>	14
<i>Figure 2.3: Project Flow Chart -         State of Connecticut Department of Transportation</i>	17
<i>Figure 2.4: Project Processing,         Public Involvement and Related Requirements</i>	18
<u>Construction, Operations and Maintenance</u>	21
<u>Documentation</u>	25
<u>Freedom of Information</u>	27

## **Chapter 3: Getting People Involved**

<a href="#"><u>Who Are the Stakeholders?</u></a>	31
<a href="#"><u>Why Input Should Be Actively Sought</u></a>	31
<a href="#"><u>Diversity Is Important</u></a>	32
<a href="#"><u>How Do I Go About Designing An Outreach Program?</u></a>	34
<a href="#"><u>Deciding Who To Reach Out To – A Checklist Of Possibilities</u></a>	37
<a href="#"><u>Deciding How To Reach Out - An Outreach “Toolbox”</u></a>	37
<i>Figure 3.1: Communication / Education Tools (Ways of Giving &amp; Receiving Information)</i>	38
<a href="#"><u>Communicating With Hearing Impaired and Non-English Speaking Populations</u></a>	58

## **Chapter 4: Successful Public Meetings**

<a href="#"><u>Public Information Meetings</u></a>	63
<a href="#"><u>Public Hearings</u></a>	67
<a href="#"><u>Staging A Successful Public Meeting</u></a>	68
<a href="#"><u>Choosing A Location</u></a>	70
<i>Figure 4.1: Meeting Room Checklist</i>	70

## **Chapter 5: Working With Groups**

<a href="#"><u>Types of Groups &amp; Meeting Techniques</u></a>	77
<i>Figure 5.1: Group and Meeting Techniques</i>	78
<a href="#"><u>Most Frequently Used Techniques</u></a>	80
<a href="#"><u>When You Are The Facilitator</u></a>	84

## **Chapter 6: Working With The Media**

<a href="#">Media Tools</a>	89
<a href="#">Understanding The Media</a>	89
<i>Figure 6.1: Media Tools</i>	90
<a href="#">Developing A Media Strategy</a>	91
<a href="#">Creating A Media Contact List</a>	92
<a href="#">Writing A Press Release</a>	92
<a href="#">Building A Relationship With The Media</a>	93

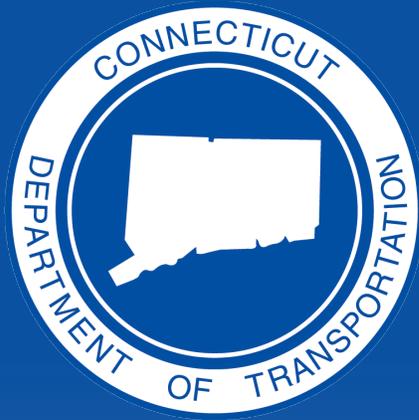
## **Chapter 7: Building Trust and Rapport: Creating A Win-Win Atmosphere**

<a href="#">Building Rapport With The Public</a>	97
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## **Chapter 8: How Do I Know It's Working?: Evaluating The Program**

<a href="#">Introduction</a>	107
<a href="#">Regulations &amp; Requirements</a>	107
<a href="#">Evaluation Methodology</a>	108
<a href="#">Performance Measures &amp; Performance Indicators</a>	109
<i>Figure 8.1: Performance Measures and Indicators</i>	110
<a href="#">Evaluation Methods &amp; Analysis</a>	110
<i>Figure 8.2: Qualitative Evaluation Form</i>	113
<a href="#">Improving The Public Involvement Program</a>	114
<i>Figure 8.3: Evaluation Timing</i>	114





# **preface**



# Preface

This Public Involvement Guidance Manual is an update of “A Guide for Public Outreach” prepared and distributed by the Connecticut Department of Transportation in November, 1995. The primary intent of this manual is to provide general guidance and specific tips to Connecticut Department of Transportation Project Managers and other Department staff as well as regional and municipal planning officials as they interact with the public on Department Projects.

This update of the 1995 guide was necessitated by a number of factors:

- Since the previous manual, many new requirements have become part of the project development process. Three specific examples of this are **context sensitive solutions** (CSS), described in Department Administrative Memo 24 which requires project development to carefully consider and be sensitive to the context into which the project is proposed, **work zone safety**, which requires the Department to develop a work zone safety and mobility policy, a process for implementing that policy, and project-level procedures to assess and manage work zone related traffic disruptions, and **environmental justice**, which requires that the Department not propose a solution which results in disproportional adverse impact to protected population groups and neighborhoods and further requires outreach efforts specifically directed toward those groups and neighborhoods.
- Federal FHWA/FTA and USDOT public outreach mandates have been strengthened and expanded since the previous manual, making it imperative that Department project managers be aware of new requirements and how to carry them out. In general, the mandates require:
  - **Early and continuing public involvement** opportunities throughout the planning and programming process;
  - **Timely information** about transportation issues and **processes to the community affected** by transportation plans, programs and projects;
  - **Reasonable public access to information** used in the development of the plans and projects;
  - **Adequate public notice** of public involvement activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points;

- A process for demonstrating explicit **consideration and response to public input**;
- A process for **seeking out and considering the needs of those traditionally underserved** by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households;
- **Periodic review** of the effectiveness of the public involvement process.

In addition to the development of this Guidance Manual, the Department has also developed a public involvement policy in response to this strengthened federal mandate.

The development of this manual was guided by a Steering Committee of Department staff and was developed with the vision of improving the Department's outreach efforts and the effectiveness of those efforts. It is also intended to increase the comfort level of Department staff in this interaction, thus, also making that interaction more effective for the benefit of the people and transportation systems of the State of Connecticut. The purpose of this effort is consistent with the mission statement adopted and approved by the Steering Committee:

*"With regard to public involvement, it is the mission of the Connecticut Department of Transportation to be an acknowledged leader among state Departments of Transportation in the development, communication and implementation of successful public outreach procedures".*

The chapters of this guidance manual are briefly described, as follows:

Chapter 1: ***Why Is Public Involvement Important?*** explains why public outreach is carried out along with the benefits of doing so.

Chapter 2: ***When Is Public Involvement Required?*** gives a broad overview of the regulatory requirements for public outreach.

Chapter 3: ***Getting People Involved*** explores various ways to encourage participation by reaching out in a variety of ways and to a variety of audiences.

Chapter 4: **Successful Public Meetings** offers specifics to help the Project Manager plan and carry out public meetings that are effective and useful.

Chapter 5: **Working with Groups** provides a summary of types of groups and the most frequently used group techniques.

Chapter 6: **Working with the Media** explains how to build a relationship with the media that is mutually supportive.

Chapter 7: **Building Trust and Rapport: Creating a Win-Win Atmosphere** explores attitudes and approaches that create positive interaction with the public.

Chapter 8: **How Do I Know It's Working: Evaluating the Program** proposes techniques to help the project manager understand which outreach methods are most effective so that this information can be shared within the Department.

As noted above, this Guidance Manual has been prepared to help the Department's project managers and others to understand more about the tools and techniques of public outreach so that they can be more effective and more comfortable dealing with the public. The overall goal is that by doing so, the Department's public outreach will be improved to the benefit of both the Department and its mission and the people of the State of Connecticut.

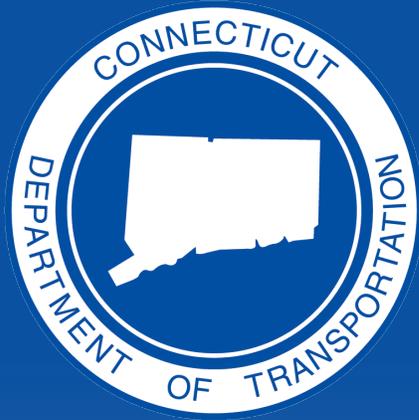
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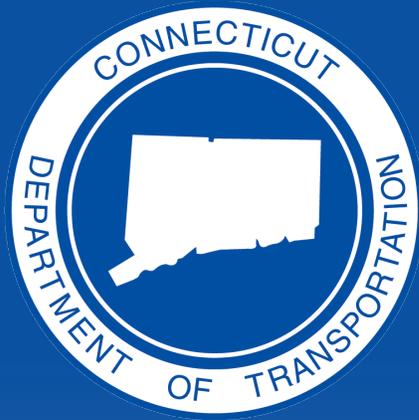
# Acronyms



# Acronyms

ADA:	Americans with Disabilities Act
CEPA:	Connecticut Environmental Policy Act
CFR:	Code of Federal Regulations
ConnDOT:	Connecticut Department of Transportation
CSS:	Context Sensitive Solutions
DEP:	Department of Environmental Protection
EA:	Environmental Assessment
EIE:	Environmental Impact Evaluation
EIS:	Environmental Impact Statement
EJ:	Environmental Justice
FHWA:	Federal Highway Administration
FOI:	Freedom of Information
FRA:	Federal Rail Administration
FTA:	Federal Transit Administration
HAR:	Highway Advisory Radio
LEP:	Limited English Proficiency
MPO:	Metropolitan Planning Organization
MTP:	Master Transportation Plan
NEPA:	National Environmental Policy Act
NOI:	Notice of Intent
PS&E:	Plans, Specifications and Estimates
ROW:	Right of Way
RPO:	Regional Planning Organization
SAFETEA-LU:	Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users
SHPO:	State Historic Preservation Office
STIP:	Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan
TMP:	Transportation Management Plan
TIP:	Transportation Improvement Program





# Chapter 1



# Chapter 1:

## Why Is Public Involvement Important?

### WHO IS “THE PUBLIC”?

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And just who do we mean by “the public”? Virtually every project the Department undertakes has a wide-range of interested parties or “**stakeholders**”. Some of these parties may also be co-sponsors of a project with the Department (e.g., a regional agency or municipality) while in other cases, those same parties may be outside the sponsorship of the project and have concerns regarding impact or consequences, such as the concerns of a nearby property owner.

Virtually every project the Department undertakes has a wide range of interested parties or “stakeholders”. Stakeholders may include officials at the federal, state or local level of government, abutting property owners, special interest groups such as developers, environmental groups, transit supporters, disability advocates, citizens and many others.

In “**Chapter 3: Getting People Involved**” this manual focuses on the identification of interested parties and how to reach out to them.

### WHY INVOLVE THE PUBLIC?

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Times have changed. In days gone by, transportation professionals may not have had to deal so frequently with members of the public. There was a perception that decision-making was likely to happen “behind closed doors,” and the public may have been less likely to question decisions that were made by governmental agencies, trusting that those decisions were made for the public good.

Clearly, we live in a different world today. Decisions made by governmental agencies are more of an open book—as they should be if they are being made for the right reasons—and the public is more likely to become involved. Skepticism of government, particularly by competing interest groups, is more the norm today, so a government agency often needs to overcome suspicion. This makes an open decision-making process, and transparency, even more critical.

Solving Connecticut’s transportation needs should be a collaborative process. Public involvement is a means to bring about that collaboration.

The public needs to be involved in projects for a variety of reasons:

- Because state facilities are owned in the public trust.
- Because transportation projects should fit into the context of the community.
- Because it leads to better decisions. Collaboration and consultation are aids, not detriments, to improved planning and project development.
- Because it is required by various laws and regulations.
- Because it WORKS!!! When carried out correctly, public involvement can save time, money and effort in the long run.

### **Because State Facilities Are Owned In The Public Trust**

State facilities are financed with public funds and belong to the public, and it is the obligation of the Department to manage and improve these facilities in the public interest. Clearly, this is a difficult and complex responsibility. While the Department has general policies and guidelines and a long-range plan, the implementation of each individual project has many alternatives. When it comes to project development, the expression “the devil is in the details” is applicable.

Quality of life is a highly subjective issue. Many of Connecticut’s roadways serve a dual function—as a state highway to move people and goods from one region to another, and also as a local main street, serving not only to carry local traffic and provide access to local land use, but also reflecting the character of the area. While the state of Connecticut owns these roads, the local community often cares a great deal about what happens there, since changes in the roadway can affect the quality of life as well as safety and local ambience.

Similarly, the State’s airports and public transportation services (buses, trains and ferries) also serve local and regional needs. Such facilities are meant to be assets to the communities they serve, therefore similar concerns with respect to quality of life and local ambience are appropriate.

Solutions for travel needs in Connecticut’s corridors should be a collaborative effort between the Department, acting for the State, and the regional and local community. Public involvement is the means to bring about that collaboration.

### **Because A Project Needs To Fit Into The Community**

In most cities and towns, people are increasingly aware of how natural and cultural features define their community. Any project that may diminish open space, remove old or architecturally significant buildings, or create new or wider roads, or new transportation facilities and corridors, may be seen as a threat to the fabric of the community or its sense of place. The Department’s context sensitive solutions approach recognizes that building roads is not just about transportation but also considers how a proposed project impacts a community and its values.

### **Because It Leads To Better Decisions**

Early and continuing outreach can lead to better solutions on difficult issues by bringing more minds to the table and increasing synergy. The Department has embraced the concept of context sensitive solutions, which seeks to deliver transportation services and facilities that are integrated with and compatible with the community they serve, including natural, human and visual environments. Public outreach is key to deciphering local context and issues. When these issues are better understood, and the Department and the local community can work as partners in meeting a transportation need while considering local desires, everyone wins.

**Public outreach is key to identifying and understanding local context and issues.  
This is what Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) is all about.**

### **Because It’s The Law**

One reason to involve the public is because it’s the law—built into the regulations and requirements that the Department must follow on virtually every project. Decision-making is a much more complex process than it was in the past. There are many more rules, regulations, policies and procedures that apply—and they are changing all the time. A very short

**sampling** of regulatory considerations which the Department must integrate into project development might include:

- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
- ADA requirements
- Clean Air Act
- Title VI
- Wetlands and floodplain regulations
- Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA)
- SAFETEA-LU
- ...and many more.

Some of these are federal requirements, some are Connecticut laws or regulations, and some are promulgated by the Department itself in the interest of quality and service to the public.

Every project is subject to a wide range of regulations which dictate how things need to happen.  
Some of these requirements call for public outreach.  
*Stay alert: these regulations are subject to change at any time!*

We may consider this long list of requirements to be the “regulatory framework” for any given project. It is an on-going challenge to understand the regulatory framework for every project and to ensure that all of the “i’s” are dotted and all of the “t’s” crossed from a regulatory point of view on any given project. **The Department’s project manager needs to be able to navigate all of the pertinent requirements in order to complete a project successfully.** Many of the regulations require some form of public outreach or public involvement.

### Because It Works!!!

When carried out through the application of good techniques and an openness to what the public has to say, public involvement can actually **shorten** a project time frame and **lower** overall project cost, by identifying “fatal flaws” in a project approach, plan, or design early in the process.

...public involvement can actually *shorten* a project time frame and lower overall project cost, by identifying “fatal flaws”...

Early outreach can help alleviate a broad range of project delays, additional expense, frustration and other unforeseen problems. Consensus cannot be reached unless people (a) have an opportunity to voice their concerns/opinions and (b) feel that they have been heard. Consensus does not mean that everyone agrees with a project decision (full agreement by everyone is just not possible in most cases), but it **does** mean that people have had a chance to voice their opinions and feel that they have been heard. Better decisions are in the best interests of both the Department and the people of the State of Connecticut.

What is “consensus” anyway? Consensus does not mean that everyone agrees with a project decision—this is *just not possible*—but it *does* mean that people have had a chance to voice their opinions and feel that they have been heard.

## HOW DO I REACH OUT?

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For many, the concept of public involvement conjures up images of large public meetings or hearings, frequently either under-attended or filled with angry project opponents. This need not be the case. Public involvement can take many different forms. Interactive public meetings, roundtable discussions with key stakeholders, project websites, newsletters, and participation with advisory committees are among the many techniques that can be used very effectively to inform, educate, and obtain input.

Technology has made it possible to provide project information to interested parties over the internet. Computer imaging and renderings can help people visualize a proposed project design. The Department’s Bureau of Engineering and Highway Operations has staff who can provide assistance with visualization. Many graphic techniques are available to help the public understand the impacts of a proposed plan on land use, the transportation system, and the environment. Newsletters, flyers, and other publications offer methods for providing a lot of detail about the status of a project.

...effective public involvement starts with an open mind...

The techniques listed above and many others are discussed in greater detail in later chapters of this manual. The Department project manager's goal is to identify the appropriate tools that will yield a constructive dialogue with project stakeholders. Most important is the understanding that effective public involvement starts with an open mind: a desire to reach out and a willingness to entertain the possibility that there may be ideas yet to explore that will enhance the project and make it more implementable. This can happen by creating a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach to project development and involving stakeholders at the earliest phase, to ensure that transportation projects are in harmony with communities and can preserve environmental, scenic, aesthetic, and historic resources while maintaining safety and mobility.