

# SKAGIT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

## Public Participation Plan

August 2017



**ADOPTING  
RESOLUTION  
HERE**

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# Introduction

The mission of the Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG) is to provide visionary leadership on regional plans, policies and issues. A critical element toward realizing this is public participation. Effective public participation builds awareness and understanding of key issues, provides a forum for addressing regional challenges and results in more informed decisions.

Through its Public Participation Plan (Plan), the Skagit Council of Governments seeks to:

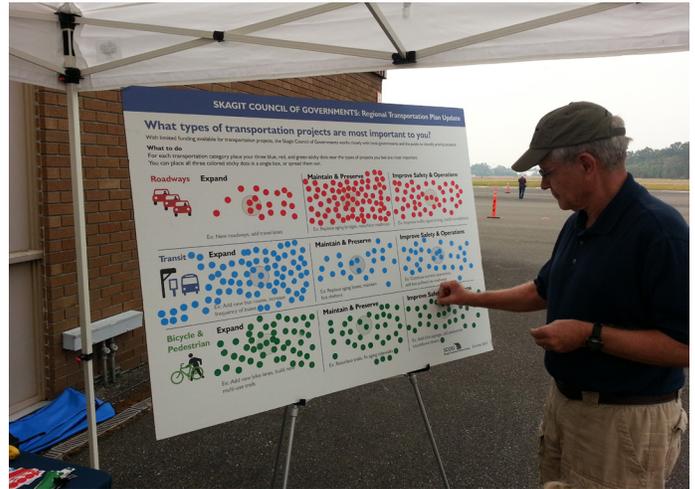
- Create opportunity for appropriate broad-based, early, continuous and meaningful public participation in all plans, programs and projects
- Provide a forum for discussion of regional issues
- Foster an open exchange of information and ideas
- Engage the public in decision-making processes through a constructive community dialogue

The following topics are addressed in the Public Participation Plan:

- Information on SCOG and its role in planning for the future of the Skagit County region
- SCOG’s strategy for engaging the public
- The process to update the Plan and the key federal guidelines that help inform the Plan
- Public participation procedures
- Public participation tools
- Evaluation

The Plan is the result of public outreach conducted in fall 2014 to gauge public awareness and understanding of SCOG, and to help identify effective tools for sharing information and engaging the public in SCOG’s work.

Moving forward, SCOG will continue to review and evaluate the Plan on an ongoing basis to ensure that it remains an effective tool for guiding and supporting implementation of meaningful public participation.







## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!!!

Below are some comments we’ve received over the past couple months as we work on a transportation plan for special needs persons (called a “coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan”). Tell us if you **agree** or **disagree** with these comments by marking the following quotes with\*:

✓ Agree (only one per quote please)  
✗ Disagree (only one per quote please)

**Specific Paratransit or Dial-a-ride Quotes**

- ✓ We need “more service on the weekends, more buses and longer hours” ✓✓✓✓✓
- ✓ For paratransit, “I love the drivers. They are so helpful. I am so grateful” ✓✓✓✓✓
- ✓ What I like best about paratransit is “the convenience of being able to get to and from where I need to” ✓✓✓✓✓
- ✓ What I like best about paratransit is “being able to go to work” ✓✓✓✓✓
- ✓ Not having paratransit would “impact meeting my medical and social needs” ✓✓✓✓✓
- ✓ “I have less anxiety about riding paratransit, then fixed route” ✓✓✓✓✓
- ✗ “Paratransit is a wonderful service. Thank you” ✓✓✓✓✓

**General Quotes**

- ✓ Persons with developmental disabilities “have to have some means of transportation, it has to be reliable and consistent” ✓✓✓✓✓
- ✓ “Timely [transit] connections are important; someone could spend the entire day getting to where they need to be” ✓✓✓✓✓
- ✗ “Bus service ends too early” ✓✓✓✓✓
- ✓ Persons with developmental disabilities work hard to get jobs “and then they can’t get there” due to transportation ✓✓✓✓✓
- ✓ “Evening events are difficult for persons with disabilities who use public transportation because the bus schedule ends too early for night return” ✓✓✓✓✓
- ✓ “It would be nice if more transportation systems work together. All of the Sound counties have the Orca Card which helps people go from one county to another” ✓✓✓✓✓
- ✓ “They do a great job at Skagit Transit” ✓✓✓✓✓

\*Note: leave blank if you neither agree nor disagree

# Engagement Strategy

This Plan serves various purposes, providing guidance to different audiences about how SCOG engages the public and how the public can get involved with SCOG.

## Key Audiences of the Plan

### For the Public

The Plan provides context for all SCOG activities, describes the committees SCOG uses to advise governing bodies, and explains how to get involved with different processes, and provides an expectation of how input will be used. For example, public comment periods are available at governing board meetings where input can be provided on the activities of SCOG. The comment period is a way for the public to speak directly to governing board members at Board meeting and ensure their input is included in the meeting minutes – the official record of proceedings.

While public comment is a great way to provide input, before final decisions are made, there are other ways to participate in SCOG activities, where input can be considered earlier in the process, which may be more effective in impacting how plans, project selection and programs are shaped.

### For Community Organizations

The Plan provides an overview of SCOG to help explain what SCOG does, and why it may benefit an organization to get involved with SCOG activities. SCOG often reaches out to local organizations to participate in planning processes and projects. Input from organizations can help shape transportation plans and inform which projects receive funding, including projects for those with special transportation needs. SCOG also works to inform organizations of available funding opportunities and to raise awareness of what other agencies and jurisdictions are doing to improve the regional transportation network and enhance mobility.

### For SCOG Member Jurisdictions

The Plan explains SCOG’s role in engaging the public, provides an expectation of what SCOG will do to seek public input, and describes what public participation considerations are outside of SCOG’s authority. For example, SCOG acts as a regional forum to assist in prioritizing projects across Skagit County for transportation funding. In its role, SCOG solicits input as part of project selection processes, documents input received and uses the input received to inform project selection. Project selection is ultimately determined by decision-making bodies such as the Transportation Policy Board.

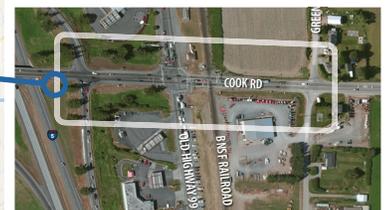
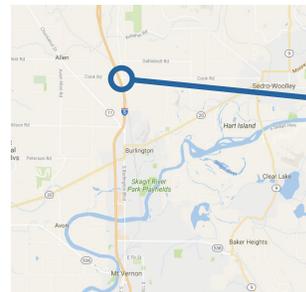


## NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING

### WHAT:

- 1 Learn about the Cook Road Corridor Project to address congestion and delay at the railroad crossing near the I-5 interchange, Old Highway 99, and Cook Road
- 2 Provide your input on existing challenges and potential solutions
- 3 Learn about next steps for the project

**WHEN & WHERE:** Allen Elementary School Library  
17145 Cook Rd, Bow, WA 98232  
Feb 7, 6:00-7:30 PM



SCOG has an important role in building awareness, sharing information with the public and providing a forum for involvement. However, there are other local processes that member organizations can use to help determine which project(s) organization elect to champion for consideration as part of the regional process. The Plan defines SCOG’s role in the public engagement process while also directing the public to provide input to the appropriate decision-making bodies, through public participation processes conducted by local jurisdictions.

### For SCOG Staff

The Plan explains the procedures that SCOG will use to involve the public in its actions. For example, if SCOG is updating the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), the Plan makes clear that a specific public involvement plan needs to be developed as part of that planning process, in addition to what is included within the Plan relating to public comment and review periods.

As such, the Plan provides both standard public involvement procedures that will always occur as part of SCOG processes, but also notes the importance of creating more specific public involvement plans for major transportation planning activities, such as the RTP. The Plan also provides a menu of various tools and activities for SCOG to utilize in engaging the public, monitoring the effectiveness of public involvement activities and reporting how SCOG is involving the public in its work.

### Transparency at SCOG

SCOG is committed to providing transparency in how it operates, above and beyond what is required by state and federal law. As a regional planning organization, it is imperative that SCOG shows the region what it is up to and why it is important.

Beyond the requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act and Public Records Act, the Plan provides for additional opportunities for public access to SCOG. For example, most advisory committee meetings are open for the public to attend and observe the regular business of SCOG, on a monthly basis. Public comment and

testimony are not permitted at these meetings, due to state and local requirements, but members of the public are invited to review agendas, meeting minutes, meeting materials and attend meetings. Additionally, SCOG provides most documents it generates free of charge to the public.

### Getting Results

The final section of the Plan includes a number of outreach tools and techniques, as well as evaluation metrics that SCOG uses to assess how well these tools are working. There is also an explanation of why certain tools are utilized, detail on when and why a particular method may be preferred over another and what results SCOG should consider when evaluating the effectiveness of various outreach tools and techniques.

SCOG is interested in outcomes. If one tool is working, and is the right tool for the job, SCOG wants to know that and better understand what about the tool made it effective. If a tool is not working, SCOG can use evaluation methods to help determine what about the tool seems to be ineffective and if there are better tools to utilize in the future in order to improve public engagement.

The Plan provides the flexibility for SCOG to utilize appropriate public involvement tools based on changing circumstances and the effectiveness of the tool. SCOG has a responsibility to the public to keep them well-informed and to make it clear how public input will be used as part of the decision-making process.



## Approach to Engaging the Public

SCOG uses a multi-pronged approach to public involvement. This is in response to the desire for people to get information in different ways, get involved with SCOG activities and have their input utilized at the right time, in the right way, with a clear understanding of how their input will be used. This approach is described in the following three columns, which provides the spectrum through which SCOG makes itself available to the public, involves the public and actively seeks participation, and monitors results to evaluate how well methods are working.

### We are here for you and will keep you

**informed** of what SCOG is doing. We consider this the minimum level of engagement, but extremely important in making SCOG available to the public.

#### Examples:

- SCOG will make presentations about SCOG activities to your organization if you inquire
- SCOG will make documents available for your review
- SCOG will post information on SCOG's website
- SCOG will have meetings you can attend
- SCOG will provide regular updates to your email about subjects that matter to you
- SCOG will limit the use of jargon and provide clear explanations of commonly used terms

### We want you to be

**involved**, hear from you, and make sure you understand what SCOG is doing and why you should care.

#### Examples:

- SCOG will translate key documents into Spanish for non-English speakers
- SCOG will have public comment periods at governing board meetings and summarize comments in meeting minutes
- SCOG will tailor different planning processes to address specific community needs
- SCOG will have meetings in different geographic settings to better ensure we are in your area
- SCOG will send a survey to your home or email, if warranted
- SCOG will study demographic information in Skagit County to better target communities and populations

### We will monitor

**how we are doing** to understand what is working and what we should change to ensure engagement is effective and meaningful.

#### Examples:

- SCOG will monitor meeting participation and report attendance regularly
- SCOG will track website visits to see how people are interacting with SCOG webpages and downloads
- SCOG will evaluate how effective certain methods are in engaging the public and change them if they are not working
- SCOG will track participants that speak Spanish, as well as racial and ethnic self-reporting to see who we are reaching through our engagement

## Background Information on SCOG

The Skagit Council of Governments is an organization of local governments whose purpose is to foster collaboration and cooperation in the development of plans and policies for the Skagit-County region. SCOG is organized as a regional agency under state law, pursuant to [RCW 36.64.080](#).

SCOG has three key areas of focus:

### Transportation

SCOG is the state-designated **Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO)** for Skagit County. Regional Transportation Planning Organizations were authorized in 1990, pursuant to [RCW 47.80.020](#), as part of the state Growth Management Act (GMA) to ensure local and regional coordination of transportation plans.

Some primary examples of what RTPOs are responsible for include:

1. Preparing a Regional Transportation Plan
2. Certifying that countywide planning policies and the transportation element of local comprehensive plans are consistent with the Regional Transportation Plan
3. Developing and maintaining a six-year Regional Transportation Improvement Program

As the RTPO for Skagit County, SCOG develops and maintains the Regional Transportation Plan and the Regional Transportation Improvement Program.

- **What is the Regional Transportation Plan?**  
The Skagit 2040 Regional Transportation Plan is a multimodal plan that establishes a long-range strategic framework for meeting the Skagit region's existing and future transportation needs. The RTP also provides a collaborative process to identify high-priority transportation projects and programs for regional funding and implementation over a twenty year period.

- **What is the Regional Transportation Improvement Program?**  
The Regional Transportation Improvement Program is a financial plan that identifies and prioritizes federally funded and regionally significant transportation projects to be carried out in Skagit County over a six-year period. All projects in the Regional Transportation Improvement Program must be consistent with the Regional Transportation Plan.

SCOG is also the federally designated **Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)** for Skagit County and was designated pursuant to [23 CFR 450.310](#). An MPO is an organization of local governments in urbanized regions with 50,000 or more population. The exterior boundaries for the MPO is the Skagit County line and there are many local jurisdictions that participate in the metropolitan transportation planning process.

MPOs provide a forum for local decision-making on transportation issues of a regional nature and promote consistency between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns. MPOs also prepare plans to guide development of transportation facilities, including pedestrian, bicycle and intermodal facilities.

As an MPO, SCOG promotes consistency between transportation improvements and regional growth and economic development patterns. SCOG also works to prioritize transportation projects and to determine which projects receive funding.

The Transportation Policy Board is the governing body that oversees work related to SCOG's role as an MPO.

In its role as an MPO and RTPO, SCOG helps facilitate intergovernmental coordination on transportation planning issues through education and advocacy, technical and professional expertise, public engagement, and coordination of grants and other funding opportunities. SCOG works closely with local, state and federal elected officials to build awareness and understanding of funding needs for transportation projects and programs in Skagit County. In addition, SCOG facilitates collaboration between local jurisdictions to guide future development and inform decisions related to land use and connections to the transportation system, in a manner that reflects regional values.

## Economic Development

SCOG administers the Revolving Loan Fund, which assists new and existing businesses in Skagit County in creating and retaining jobs. Funding for the program is provided by the U.S. Economic Development Administration and the state Community Development Block Grant program. SCOG also maintains the Skagit County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, which is a plan for countywide economic development.

## Regional Planning

SCOG provides a forum for jurisdictions within Skagit County to discuss and address issues of regional importance, and to engage the public and community stakeholders in key decision-making processes.

SCOG is also a lead agency for the North Sound Connecting Communities Project, also known as the “Farmhouse Gang.” The Farmhouse Gang is a regional group of five North Puget Sound counties (Whatcom, Island, Skagit, San Juan, Snohomish). The Farmhouse Gang works to identify and implement solutions to transportation challenges in the greater North Sound

region.

## SCOG Governing Bodies

SCOG has two governing bodies: the Board of Directors and the Transportation Policy Board.

Meetings of the Board of Directors and the Transportation Policy Board are open to the public, and public comments can be submitted to the governing boards verbally at meetings, or in writing.

- **Board of Directors**

The Board of Directors (BOD) is comprised of elected officials from member jurisdictions. The BOD meets on a monthly basis to discuss regional issues and provide administrative oversight for SCOG.

- **Transportation Policy Board**

The Transportation Policy Board (TPB) is comprised of officials from member jurisdictions and is the governing body of the MPO and RTPO. The TPB is charged with review and approval of key transportation policies and plans, such as Regional Transportation Plan and Human Services Transportation Plan.

## SCOG Membership

SCOG is comprised of the following member jurisdictions:

**City of Anacortes**

**City of Burlington**

**City of Mount Vernon**

**City of Sedro-Woolley**

**Port of Anacortes**

**Port of Skagit**

**Samish Indian Nation**

**Swinomish Indian Tribal Community**

**Skagit County**

**Skagit PUD**

**Skagit Transit**

**Town of Concrete**

**Town of Hamilton**

**Town of La Conner**

**Town of Lyman**

## SCOG Advisory Committees

SCOG governing bodies may create advisory committees at their discretion in accordance with SCOG’s bylaws. These can be standing advisory committees, which are a permanent part of SCOG, or ad hoc advisory committees, which are temporary. Advisory committees may also have their own bylaws if adopted by the appropriate governing body. Periodic reviews of advisory committee effectiveness ensure that each committee continues to meet the needs of SCOG’s governing bodies and the public.

The committees listed below provide technical advice and guidance to SCOG’s governing boards on specific issues related to transportation. These committees are advisory in nature, and cannot take formal action on behalf of SCOG’s governing boards nor do they perform functions of a governing body as defined by state Open Public Meetings Act.

Advisory committee meetings are generally open to the public, but cannot take public testimony or comment, act on behalf of the governing body (Board of Directors or Transportation Policy Board), or conduct hearings.

- **Technical Advisory Committee**

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) consists of public works and planning staff from member jurisdictions, and provides technical input to

support the work of the Transportation Policy Board. TAC meetings are open to the public. The TAC has bylaws that were updated in 2014 by the TPB.

- **Non-Motorized Advisory Committee**  
The Non-Motorized Advisory Committee (NMAC) advises the TAC on the use of non-motorized transportation in Skagit County and serves as a technical resource on issues related to non-motorized transportation. The NMAC also works to build awareness of best practices in non-motorized transportation. NMAC meetings are open to the public. NMAC bylaws were approved by the TAC in 2016.

### Other Related Committee

- **Revolving Loan Fund Committee**  
The Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) Committee is an advisory committee to the Board of Directors that provides oversight for SCOG's Revolving Loan Fund economic development program.

As the RLF Committee reviews sensitive financial information from RLF applicants, meetings of the RLF Committee are not open to the public, however, Committee documentation and records can be obtained via a public records request.

### Ad Hoc Advisory Committees

As needed, SCOG governing boards will convene special advisory committees to provide guidance on a specific issue, or in support of a particular project.



### Growth Management Act Committees

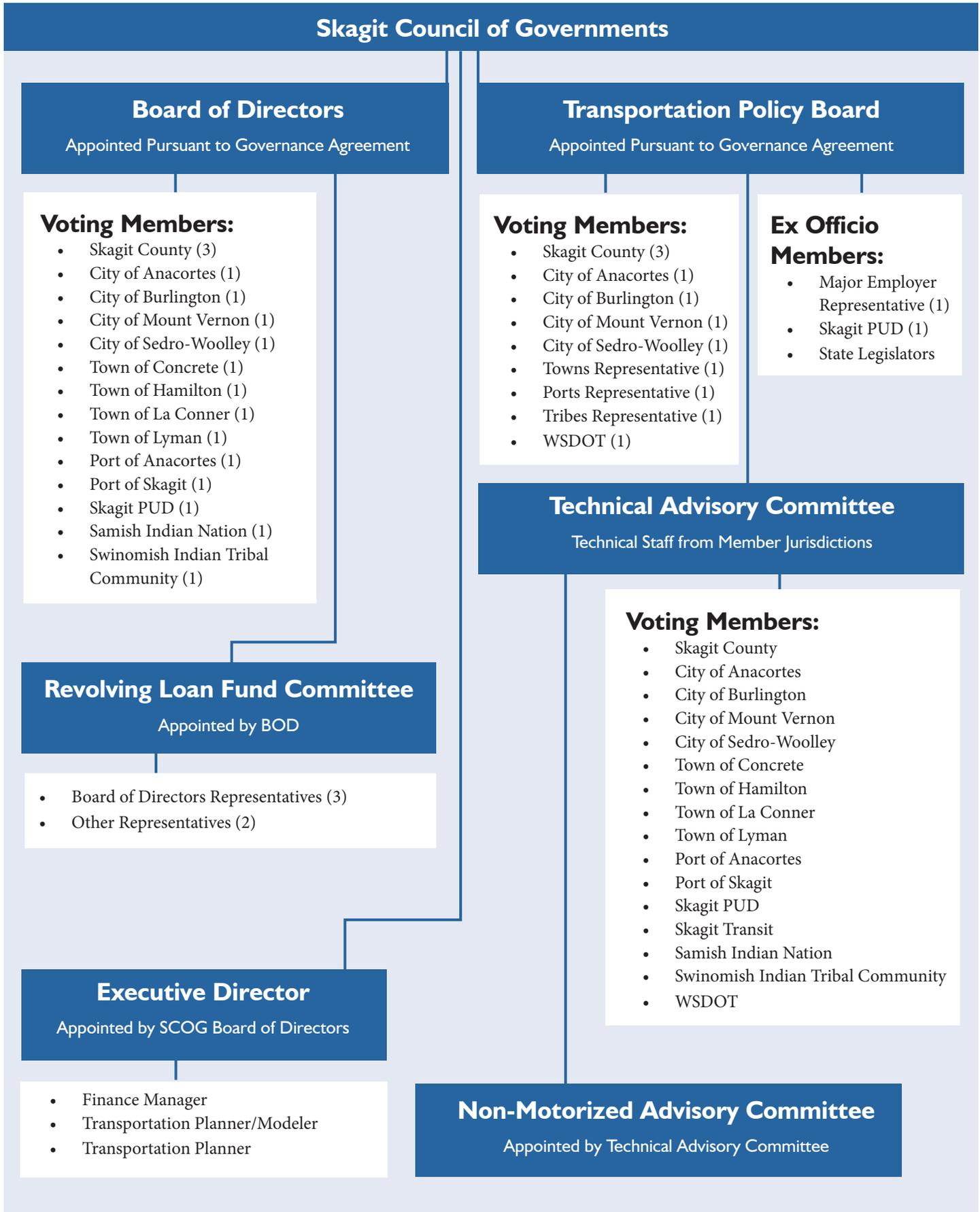
SCOG provides administrative support to state Growth Management Act (GMA) coordination activities in Skagit County. There are two GMA committees in Skagit County.

- **Growth Management Act Steering Committee**  
The Growth Management Act Steering Committee (GMASC) is composed of elected officials from Skagit County, and the cities and towns within the county, except Lyman and Concrete which have not executed the 2002 Framework Agreement that created this committee. This committee serves a role in the creation and modification of countywide planning policies, urban growth areas and allocation of population-employment growth in the county.
- **Growth Management Act Technical Advisory Committee**  
The Growth Management Act Technical Advisory Committee (GMATAC) is composed of planning directors and other staff planners from GMASC member jurisdictions. The GMATAC provides advice and technical support to the GMASC.

With respect to public participation, the work of these two committees is not intended to replace individual jurisdiction public participation processes, per the 2002 Framework Agreement.



# Skagit Council of Governments Structure



## Development of the Public Participation Plan

The Plan provides a broad overview of public participation at SCOG, as well as general guidelines for sharing information, engaging the public and seeking input on SCOG activities.

### Review and Assessment

In fall 2014, SCOG began a formal review and assessment of the existing Plan to determine its effectiveness in promoting public engagement and to ensure a full and open participation process.

As part of the assessment process, interviews were conducted with key stakeholders representing local community organizations and advocacy groups, social service organizations, agencies and jurisdictions, and SCOG staff.

Interview questions sought to gather information on public awareness of SCOG, hear perspectives on key regional issues, and identify best practices for engaging the community on the issues that are important to them.

### What We Heard

Comments received through the stakeholder interviews were recorded and summarized. The full summary of comments received was included as part of the [Assessment and Recommendations Memo](#), which was provided to SCOG governing boards, staff, and interested parties for review and consideration.

Comments received through the stakeholder interviews were also reviewed to spot common themes. These common themes helped identify strengths of SCOG's current approach to public participation, as well as opportunities for improvement.

### Recommendations for Updating the Plan

Based on the input received through the assessment process, the following recommendations were made:

- The Plan should describe how SCOG engages the public and provides opportunities for public input and dialogue.
- The Plan should include procedures for soliciting public input and reporting how public input was considered.
- The Plan should include tools and strategies for building public awareness of SCOG, and further engaging the broader public.

These recommendations have helped guide development of the updated Plan.

### Public Review of the Plan

Following the review and assessment process, a draft updated Plan was distributed in February 2015 for a 50-day public review and comment period. The public comment period for the draft updated Plan began on February 13, 2015 and ended on April 3, 2015.

The draft updated Plan was distributed for public review and comment in the following ways:

- Provided to TPB members at their February 11, 2015 regular meeting.
- Distributed to relevant email lists and interested parties.
- Posted on SCOG's website.
- Published notice in the Skagit Valley Herald.

### Minor 2017 Plan Update

Minor changes to the Plan were identified in 2017 to reflect changes at SCOG and federal law over the past two years. The public comment period for the minor update to the Plan began on June 22, 2017 and ended on August 7, 2017. Notice of the public comment period was posted on SCOG's website and in the Skagit Valley Herald. Proposed changes to the Plan were provided to TPB members at their June 21, 2017 meeting.



## Guidelines for Public Participation

SCOG's Public Participation Plan is informed by numerous state and federal regulations designed to ensure effective and inclusive public participation in all plans, policies and projects.

### Federal Public Participation Guidelines for MPOs

As an MPO, SCOG must comply with specific federal requirements for public participation. These requirements are described below, and guide development and implementation of the Public Participation Plan.

- Provide adequate public notice of public participation activities and time for public review and comment.
- Provide timely notice and reasonable access to information about transportation issues and processes.
- Employ visualization techniques, utilizing maps, pictures and graphics to clearly convey information.
- Make public information available in electronically accessible formats.
- Hold any public meeting at convenient and accessible locations and times.
- Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received.
- Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally under-served by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households, who may face challenges accessing employment and other services.
- Periodically review the effectiveness of the procedures and strategies contained in the participation plan to ensure a full and open participation process.
- Coordinate with statewide transportation planning public involvement and consultation processes.

### Open Public Meetings Act

Passed in 1971, the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) ensures that meetings of governing boards are open and accessible to the public from beginning to end. This sunshine law allows any member of the public to view the decision-making process. In some cases, committee meetings must be open to the public as well, under the OPMA, such as when committees take public comment or testimony, conduct hearings or act on behalf of the governing body. The OPMA applies to meetings of SCOG, including meetings of the two governing bodies – the Board of Directors and the Transportation Policy Board.

As of July 1, 2014, all members of governing bodies must complete training on the OPMA within 90 days of taking office and take a refresher course at least every four years after that while in office. A summary of the OPMA, related court decisions and other publications can be found at the website of the Municipal Resource Service Center of Washington.

### Visualization Techniques

People process information differently and visual depictions of information can be extremely effective in clearly conveying information. SCOG regularly uses maps, charts, tables, diagrams, timelines and other visual techniques to interact with the public in a useful way.

## Limited English Proficiency

Through his signature in 2000, President Clinton authorized Executive Order 13166 improving the access to services for those with limited English proficiency (LEP). The basis for this nondiscrimination order was in the prohibition of discrimination based on national origin, from Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. If federal funds are received, providing meaningful access for certain LEP individuals – to information, programs, services and activities – is required of recipients.

Through a demographic analysis of Skagit County, SCOG has identified a significant number of Spanish-speaking individuals that have LEP. Because SCOG receives federal funds, LEP requirements apply to SCOG, and SCOG incorporates LEP requirements into its Title VI program by translating some documents into Spanish and providing interpreters upon request, among other responsibilities. For more information on how SCOG provides services to LEP individuals, see the Language Assistance Program in SCOG's [Title VI Plan](#), on pages 17-19.

## The Civil Rights Act of 1964

Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, SCOG assures that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, national origin, or sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any SCOG-sponsored program or activity. SCOG must further assure every effort will be made to ensure non-discrimination in all of its programs and activities, whether those programs and activities are federally funded or not.

Community outreach is a key component of the Title VI provision, and requires SCOG to consider the viewpoints of minority and low-income populations in its planning and decision-making processes, as well as its outreach activities.

SCOG first developed a Title VI Plan in October 2004, and the Plan was most recently amended in May 2017. The [Title VI Plan](#) is available on SCOG's website.



## Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice principles protect minority and low-income populations from disproportionately adverse effects of programs, policies and activities funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). In accordance with Executive Order 12898, which was issued in 1994, as a recipient of federal funds through DOT, SCOG must incorporate Environmental Justice into its programs, policies and activities.

Environmental Justice principles help assure that impacts to minority and low-income populations are identified and addressed before decisions are made for programs, policies and activities that use federal transportation funds, and that adverse impacts to human health are not disproportionately borne by these populations.

To identify minority, low-income and limited English proficient populations in Skagit County, SCOG analyzed available data, and prepared a demographic profile in 2017. The [demographic profile](#) is available on SCOG's website.



## Applicable Laws

SCOG complies with all applicable state and federal laws and other requirements related to public participation, including, but not limited to:

### State Laws

- [Open Public Meetings Act, RCW 42.30](#)
- [Growth Management Act, RCW 36.70A](#)
- [Public Records Act, RCW 42.56](#)
- [State Environmental Policy Act, RCW 43.21c](#)

### Federal Laws

- [Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, PL 110-325](#)
- [Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, PL 114-94](#)
- [Title VI of Civil Rights Act of 1964, PL 88-352](#)
- [Federal Aid Highway Act of 1973, PL 93-87, 23 USC 324](#)
- [Rehabilitation Act of 1973, PL 93-112, Section 504](#)
- [Age Discrimination Act of 1975, PL 94-135](#)
- [Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, PL 100-259](#)

### Presidential Executive Orders

- [Executive Order 12898](#) – Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations
- [Executive Order 13166](#) – Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency

# Public Participation Procedures

## Board of Directors and Transportation Policy Board Meetings

The following public participation procedures were informed by public feedback received through the assessment process. These procedures describe how SCOG governing bodies (Board of Directors and Transportation Policy Board) engage the public and provide opportunities for public input and dialogue, explain how public input is solicited and identify tools and strategies for building public awareness of SCOG.

General Information	How to Provide Input	How Input Will Be Considered and Reflected
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All SCOG governing body meetings are open to the public, except as allowed under the state Open Public Meetings Act.</li> <li>SCOG governing body meetings are generally held on the third Wednesday of each month, in the afternoon.</li> <li>Meetings take place at locations throughout the Skagit County region, at venues that are accessible to persons with disabilities, and those who rely on public transportation.</li> </ul> <p><b>Notification</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The date, time and location of SCOG governing body meetings are posted on SCOG’s website (<a href="http://www.scog.net">www.scog.net</a>) one month prior to the meeting date.</li> <li>Governing body meeting agendas include the date, time and location of the next scheduled meeting.</li> <li>In certain circumstances, public notification may also take the form of a press release, email to media outlets, paid legal notice or advertisement, or may use non-traditional methods to reach key audiences and interested parties.</li> <li>SCOG meeting agendas and materials are generally posted on SCOG’s website seven calendar days prior to the meeting date.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public comments can be submitted at or prior to all SCOG governing body meetings.</li> <li>Comments can be submitted through verbal testimony during the public comment period, or in writing.</li> <li>All SCOG governing body meetings include a formal public comment period.</li> <li>Verbal comments shall be limited to three (3) minutes in length or as determined by board chairpersons.</li> <li>Comments should focus on items on which action will be taken at that particular meeting, or on discussion items appearing on the agenda.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Written comments submitted in advance of meetings are preferred, particularly for public comment periods, and will be provided to board members for review and consideration.</li> <li>In order for written comments to be provided to board members, they should generally be submitted to SCOG no less than seven calendar days prior to the meeting.</li> <li>Meeting minutes will include summaries of all verbal comments received at the meeting, including the name of the commenter.</li> <li>Final meeting minutes will be posted on SCOG’s website.</li> <li>In certain circumstances, the comments may be incorporated into plans, programs or studies, either in total or in summary.</li> <li>Audio recordings of SCOG governing body meetings will be posted on SCOG’s website.</li> <li>Written comments received within a week of governing board meetings will be distributed to board members as practicable.</li> </ul>

## Committee Meetings

The following public participation procedures were informed by public feedback received through the assessment process. These procedures show how SCOG committees engage the public and provide opportunities for public input and dialogue, describe how public input is solicited and identify tools and strategies for building public awareness of SCOG.

General Information	How to Provide Input
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All SCOG advisory committee meetings are open to the public, except as allowed under the state Open Public Meetings Act.</li> <li>• Technical Advisory Committee meetings are generally held on the first Thursday of each month, in the afternoon, at SCOG's offices.</li> <li>• Non-Motorized Advisory Committee meetings are generally held on the fourth Tuesday of each month, in the afternoon, at SCOG's offices.</li> <li>• Revolving Loan Fund committee meetings are generally held the second Tuesday of each month, in the afternoon, at SCOG's offices – but are not open for the public to attend.</li> </ul> <p><b>Notification</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The date, time and location of SCOG committee meetings are generally posted on SCOG's website (<a href="http://www.scog.net">www.scog.net</a>) the month prior to the meeting date.</li> <li>• In certain circumstances, public notification may also take the form of a press release, email to media outlets, paid legal notice or advertisement, or may use non-traditional methods to reach key audiences and interested parties.</li> <li>• SCOG committee meeting agendas and materials are generally posted on SCOG's website seven calendar days prior to the meeting date.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Per SCOG bylaws, committees created by the TPB may not take public comment or testimony.</li> <li>• Public comments on issues being discussed by SCOG committees can be submitted at SCOG governing body meetings.</li> </ul>

## Planning Processes

The following public participation procedures were informed by public feedback received through the assessment process. These procedures describe how SCOG engages the public as part of formal planning processes and provides opportunities for public input and dialogue, explain how public input is solicited and reflected, and identify tools and strategies for building public awareness of SCOG.

How the Public Will Be Notified	How to Provide Input and How Input Will Be Reflected	SCOG Outreach Implementation Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Notification of public engagement opportunities (e.g. comment periods, public meetings, etc.) associated with major planning processes shall generally be provided a minimum of 14 days in advance.</li> <li>Notification methods could include, but are not limited to, legal notices, display advertisements, online advertisements, web content, flyers, mailings, email updates and briefings.</li> <li>All public information materials associated with major planning processes shall be posted on SCOG's website, when appropriate.</li> <li>A full list of potential notification tools and techniques is provided on page 20 of the Plan.</li> <li>As appropriate, SCOG planning documents shall be made available for public review at the SCOG office (204 West Montgomery St., Mount Vernon, WA).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A public review and comment period of at least 14 days will be provided on SCOG plans included on page 17-19 of the Plan, although public review and comment periods may be extended, if needed.</li> <li>Comments can be submitted in a variety of ways, including verbally, and in writing.</li> <li>When appropriate, a "public participation" element should be added to project materials detailing how the public was engaged, the types of feedback received, and how public feedback was considered.</li> <li>In certain circumstances, comments received may be incorporated into plans, programs or studies, either in total or in summary.</li> <li>A full list of potential tools and techniques for soliciting and providing comment is provided on page 20 of the Plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make planning process information easily accessible, and distribute information through a variety of means.</li> <li>Make it easy for the public to provide feedback about the planning process, and provide multiple ways to submit feedback.</li> <li>Clearly communicate any planning process changes to the public and key stakeholders.</li> <li>Loop back with key stakeholders and the public at key planning process milestones, and as needed, so that they are up to date on the latest project information.</li> <li>Describe public comments received and explain how public comments have been considered and addressed.</li> <li>Share information about feedback received with decision makers throughout the process.</li> <li>Adjust outreach plans as needed, based on public feedback, and potential changes to the planning process.</li> <li>Provide information about the planning process that is tailored to specific audiences (e.g. translated materials, etc.)</li> <li>Have interpretive staff at planning process outreach activities, when needed.</li> <li>As appropriate, provide Title VI forms at outreach activities, in both English and Spanish.</li> </ul>

## Planning for Public Participation

When planning public participation for key SCOG planning processes, such as development of the Regional Transportation Plan, the following procedures will be considered and incorporated, as appropriate:

- Public involvement plans for these types of efforts will vary, based upon the unique nature of the project, key audiences and specific outreach needs.
- Confirm internally the goals and objectives for public participation (e.g. to inform the public, to receive feedback on a key issue, etc.).
- Confirm appropriate level of public participation.
- Confirm what types of public input is needed to inform or advance the process, and when that input is needed. Clearly communicate this information in public materials.
- Confirm when key planning process information will be ready to share with the public.
- Confirm key audiences and contact information for potential representatives.
- Confirm traditionally underrepresented populations in the project area (minority, low-income, limited English proficiency) and identify appropriate key stakeholders who can support planning process efforts to reach out to and engage these populations.
- Confirm translation and interpretation needs.

## Public Participation Procedures for Major Work Items

SCOG prepares a variety of documents and plans relating to transportation planning, project selection and prioritization, demographics and public participation. These include the Regional Transportation Plan, Regional Transportation Improvement Program and Regionally Managed Project Selection, among others. The table below provides information on the timing, review and public notification and comment process for each of these documents.

Federal transit law and joint Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)/Federal Transit Administration (FTA) planning regulations governing the metropolitan planning process require a locality to include the public and solicit comment when the locality develops its metropolitan long-range transportation plan and its metropolitan TIP. FTA has determined that when a recipient follows the procedures of the public involvement process outlined in the FHWA/FTA planning regulations, the recipient satisfies the public participation requirements associated with development of the Program of Projects (POP) that recipients of Section 5307 funds must meet. This Public Participation Plan follows the procedures for public involvement associated with TIP development and therefore satisfies public participation requirement for the POP. All public notices of public involvement activities and times established for public review and comment on the TIP state that they satisfy the POP requirements of the Section 5307 Program.

<b>Regional Transportation Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review periodically</li> <li>• Update at least every five years</li> <li>• Create public involvement plan for major plan updates</li> <li>• Draft document posted on SCOG’S website</li> <li>• Minimum 14-day public comment period prior to consideration for action</li> <li>• Notice of public comment period posted in the Skagit Valley Herald and on SCOG’s website</li> <li>• Written public comments distributed to governing body one-week before consideration for action</li> <li>• Opportunities for public comment are provided at all governing body meetings</li> <li>• Document approved by governing body</li> <li>• Document posted on SCOG’s website</li> </ul>
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## Public Participation Procedures for Major Work Items, continued

<p><b>Human Services Transportation Plan</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review periodically</li> <li>• Update at least every four years</li> <li>• Create public involvement plan for major plan updates</li> <li>• Draft document posted on SCOG’S website</li> <li>• Minimum 14-day public comment period prior to consideration for action</li> <li>• Notice of public comment period posted in the Skagit Valley Herald and on SCOG’s website</li> <li>• Written public comments distributed to governing body one-week before consideration for action</li> <li>• Opportunities for public comment are provided at all governing body meetings</li> <li>• Document approved by governing body</li> <li>• Document posted on SCOG’s website</li> </ul>
<p><b>Public Participation Plan</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review annually and revise as necessary</li> <li>• Create public involvement plan for major plan updates</li> <li>• Draft document posted on SCOG’s website</li> <li>• Minimum 45-day public comment period prior to consideration for action</li> <li>• Notice of public comment period posted in the Skagit Valley Herald and on SCOG’s website</li> <li>• Written public comments distributed to governing body one-week before consideration for action</li> <li>• Opportunities for public comment are provided at all governing body meetings</li> <li>• Document approved by governing body</li> <li>• Document posted on SCOG’s website</li> </ul>
<p><b>Title VI Plan</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review annually and revise as necessary</li> <li>• Create public involvement plan for major plan updates</li> <li>• Draft document posted on SCOG’s website</li> <li>• Minimum 14-day public comment period prior to consideration for action</li> <li>• Notice of public comment period posted in the Skagit Valley Herald and on SCOG’s website</li> <li>• Written comments distributed to governing body one-week before consideration for action</li> <li>• Opportunities for public comment are provided at all governing body meetings</li> <li>• Document approved by governing body</li> <li>• Document posted on SCOG’s website</li> </ul>
<p><b>Regional Transportation Improvement Program</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update at least every two years</li> <li>• Draft document posted on SCOG’s website</li> <li>• Minimum 14-day public comment period prior to consideration for action</li> <li>• Notice of public comment period posted in the Skagit Valley Herald and on SCOG’s website</li> <li>• Written public comments distributed to governing body one-week before consideration for action</li> <li>• Opportunities for public comment are provided at all governing body meetings</li> <li>• Document approved by governing body</li> <li>• Document posted on SCOG’s website</li> </ul>

## Public Participation Procedures for Major Work Items, continued

<p><b>Regional Transportation Improvement Program Amendments</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amendments to RTIP typically occur from January to October of each year</li> <li>• Minimum seven-day public comment period prior to consideration for action</li> <li>• Draft amendment and notice of public comment period posted on SCOG'S website</li> <li>• Written comments distributed to governing body one-week before consideration for action</li> <li>• Opportunities for public comment are provided at all governing body meetings</li> <li>• Amendment approved by governing body</li> <li>• Amended RTIP posted on SCOG's website</li> </ul>
<p><b>Regionally Managed Project Selection<sup>1</sup></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update at least every two years</li> <li>• Minimum seven-day public comment period prior to potential approval of regional project evaluation process</li> <li>• Draft regional project evaluation process and notice of public comment period posted on SCOG's website</li> <li>• Written comments distributed to governing body one-week before consideration for action of regional project evaluation process</li> <li>• Opportunities for public comment are provided at all governing body meetings</li> <li>• Regional project evaluation process approved by governing body</li> <li>• Call for projects issued</li> <li>• Minimum seven-day comment period prior to potential regional project selection approval by governing body</li> <li>• Draft regional project selection and notice of public comment period posted on SCOG's website</li> <li>• Written comments distributed to governing body one-week before consideration for action</li> <li>• Opportunities for public comment are provided at all governing body meetings</li> <li>• Regional projects selected by governing body</li> <li>• Selected regional projects posted on SCOG's website</li> <li>• Selected regional projects incorporated into RTIP, as applicable</li> </ul>

### Discussion before Action

It is the general practice of SCOG's Transportation Policy Board to have discussion at a governing body on the above plans, programs and project selections prior to action the following month. This practice allows for consideration of an action prior to the governing body meeting and provides an additional opportunity for public review and comment prior to an action being taken.

<sup>1</sup>SCOG manages project selection processes, but applicants determine which project they submit to be considered for selection. SCOG also manages the distribution of regional transportation funds for the federal Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP). For the state consolidated grant program, regional priorities for human services transportation projects (HSTP) are determined through a regional project selection process and then are submitted to WSDOT to inform the statewide competitive process. STBGP and HSTP project selection processes are included in the Regionally Managed Project Selection category.

# Public Participation Tools and Techniques

The following is a list of tools and techniques that could be used in support of public outreach activities for SCOG projects and processes. Specific potential tools and techniques would be selected during planning processes, based on the unique nature of the process, key audiences and specific outreach needs.

## Notify the Public

### Potential Tools and Activities:

- Printed display advertisements
- Online advertisements
- Legal notices
- Mailings (letters, postcards)
- Posters
- Informational briefings and presentations to stakeholder organizations and other groups
- Fliers
- Press releases
- Web content
- Email updates
- Stakeholder and public mail and email lists

## Get Public Feedback and Generate Discussion

### Potential Tools and Activities:

- Public meetings or open houses
- Community forums (topic-based)
- Informational briefings and presentations to stakeholder organizations and other groups
- Fairs and festivals
- Comment forms
- Surveys
- Stakeholder interviews
- Public hearings
- Charettes
- Workshops/work sessions
- Advisory groups
- Focus groups

## Share Information with the Public

### Potential Tools and Activities:

- Public meetings or open houses
- Information kiosks and traveling information displays
- Listservs and email updates
- Fact sheets
- Newsletters
- Annual reports
- Fairs and festivals
- Stakeholder and public mail and email lists
- Informational briefings and presentations to stakeholder organizations and other groups
- Technical reports
- Maps
- Infographics
- Illustrations
- Photos
- Charts and tables
- Letters
- Display boards

## Engage Traditionally-underrepresented Populations

(minority, low-income and limited English proficiency)

### Potential Tools and Activities:

- Translated materials
- Interpreters at project outreach activities
- Focus groups
- Stakeholder interviews
- Reach out to local community organizations and community leaders (e.g. Community Action of Skagit County, Center for Independence North Sound, Skagit Valley College, school districts, churches)
- Targeted notifications and outreach (e.g. local businesses, schools, churches)
- Engaging ethnic media outlets
- Provide information on how to obtain translated materials/interpretive services

## Evaluation

Tracking and regular evaluation of public involvement tools and activities helps identify effective public participation strategies, informs planning for future engagement efforts, and supports continued refinement and improvement.

As part of the ongoing evaluation process, regular updates will be provided to SCOG governing bodies on public engagement activities to date, and their effectiveness in reaching target audiences and generating public feedback. Opportunities will also be explored to periodically survey the public to learn more about their preferences on public participation best practices (e.g. “What works for you?”) and to solicit general feedback on how SCOG engages the public.

The table below outlines evaluation methods for outreach tools and activities, and how information can be used. Through the regular collection of evaluation metric data, SCOG will be able to establish baselines and later compare that baseline data to future results. Changes over time may indicate the effectiveness of tools utilized and lead to the identification of best practices in public participation at SCOG. Information obtained from evaluation metrics can be shared in a variety of ways, including: reporting to governing bodies; planning documents and reports; public information materials; web content; public involvement summary documents; and in the SCOG Annual Report.

Outreach Tool or Activity	Evaluation Metric	How Information Is Used
<b>Governing body and committee meetings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of attendees</li> <li>• Number/key themes of comments received</li> <li>• Day/time of day meetings are held</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This information can be an indication of the effectiveness of meeting notification methods, levels of interest in certain topics, and key themes of comments submitted by meeting attendees.</li> </ul>
<b>Special public meetings and events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of attendees</li> <li>• Number/key themes of comments received</li> <li>• Title VI information of attendees</li> <li>• Where attendees live</li> <li>• Day/time of day meetings are held</li> <li>• Evaluation information provided by attendees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This information can be used to help better understand the effectiveness of notification methods and distribution strategies, the level of interest in certain topics, and provide information on who is engaging in SCOG activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Public notification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notification methods (e.g. email listserv, posters, display advertisements, press releases)</li> <li>• Timing of notification efforts</li> <li>• Geographic distribution of notifications</li> <li>• How attendees indicate that they heard about a meeting or event</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This information can be used in SCOG planning documents and reports to demonstrate efforts undertaken to notify the public of SCOG processes and projects.</li> </ul>

Outreach Tool or Activity	Evaluation Metric	How Information Is Used
<b>Interaction with community organizations and stakeholder groups (e.g. meetings, briefings, coffees, etc.)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number/type of organizations</li> <li>• Number of attendees (incl. demographic information)</li> <li>• Number of presentations delivered by SCOG</li> <li>• Contact information for local organizations and their constituents</li> <li>• Number of contacts to other organizations and level of interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This information can be used to engage local community organizations, maintain local contacts and institutional knowledge of SCOG, and assist in reaching minority, low-income, or limited English-proficient populations that come into contact with these other organizations.</li> </ul>
<b>Surveys (print or online)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of respondents</li> <li>• Percent of survey completed and/or number of questions completed</li> <li>• Response rate, if identifiable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey data can be reported in a variety of formats and can provide useful feedback to inform decision-making processes. Survey data can also indicate public awareness, interest in a process and validity of survey responses received.</li> </ul>
<b>Website</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of site visits (monthly, and during public engagement periods)</li> <li>• Analytics tracking specific pages visited</li> <li>• Number of subscribers</li> <li>• Number of comments posted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website tracking data can help illustrate what topics people are most interested in, how people use the website to find information, and the website’s overall effectiveness as an information-sharing tool.</li> </ul>

### **Regular Review and Assessment of the Public Participation Plan**

The Public Participation Plan will continue to be reviewed and updated, as needed, to account for regional demographic changes and new tools and opportunities for public engagement. SCOG is committed to ensuring a full and open public participation process.

Based upon staff review and direction by the TPB, minor updates may be made to the Plan on an as-needed basis, with a process for more substantive review and revisions taking place every several years.