

# **Public Participation Panel Guidebook**



**Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission**



### **INTRODUCTION**

#### What are Public Participation Panels?

Involving the public in the regional planning processes is a priority for the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC). As a means of receiving valuable public input, SPC maintains Public Participation Panels (Panels) in each of the ten counties in its transportation planning region. Therefore, citizens do not need to travel outside their own county to address their concerns to SPC; SPC comes to them. All panel meetings are open to the public.

The Panels are a bit like focus groups: members are appointed to represent the population of their respective counties in regards to age, income, ethnicity, special needs, and special interests. Members are expected to "get the word out" about what they learn at meetings to the groups they represent. They also assist SPC by reaching out to involve the general public.

#### What is the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission?

SPC is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the ten-county metropolitan area and is responsible for regional transportation planning activities. SPC works with interested parties to ensure effective and innovative transportation planning process that is representative of, and responsive to, the needs of the entire region. To achieve this, SPC offers the public an active role in the development of transportation plans, programs, and projects, beginning in the early stages of planning.

#### Who Should I Contact if I Have Questions?

For more information on this Public Participation Panels or the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, please contact the SPC Public Involvement Specialist:

**Jared Bedekovich, Public Involvement Specialist**

**Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission**

Two Chatham Center, Suite 500

112 Washington Place

Pittsburgh, PA 15219-3451

Telephone: (412) 391-5590 ext. 343

Fax: (412) 391-9160

Email: [jbedekovich@spcregion.org](mailto:jbedekovich@spcregion.org)

Website: [www.spcregion.org](http://www.spcregion.org)

### OVERVIEW

## Role of the Public Participation Panel

The role of each Panel is to provide public comment on major transportation decisions of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission. This includes adoption or major amendment of the Long Range Plan, Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Air Quality Conformity Determination, and the Public Participation Plan. (For more information on these topics, please see our Glossary of Terms on page.)

In addition, the Panels may be asked to provide public input on various studies being conducted by SPC, with emphasis on transportation related topics.

The Panels will also advise SPC regarding ways to strengthen its public participation program, and that includes the organization and operations of the PPPs.

## General Guidance and Operation of the Panels

Each Panel operates independently, but some basic guidelines and procedures are helpful to maximize the operation and activities of the Panels.

- Panels reflect the interests of their members. Panel meetings can be held to request information regarding transportation projects, gain further insight regarding an SPC related project or program, or can meet to discuss matters specific to the Panel, such as structure, membership, or potential new initiatives undertaken by the Panel.
- Panels are NOT a forum for final decisions regarding regional planning. Panels are observant, informed, and concerned residents who act as liaisons and county ambassadors to SPC and its Commissioners and their related partners. Your input is important to the decision makers in your county and region as the representative voices of the people they serve.
- Participation and feedback are the key elements of the Panels. Members are encouraged to offer their input regarding the current issue(s) brought before them. In turn Panel members then provide feedback via public comment during formal public review periods.
- Panels are comprised of residents from all walks of life. You will all bring various skills and levels of knowledge regarding your community and the transportation planning process.



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SPC will inform you of upcoming meetings, and provide project information through various means. SPC will communicate directly with Panel members who utilize Email with helpful information to assist in the review process. For all members, information is made available at county planning offices and through our Regional Document Network

### Testimony, Input and Comments

As previously stated, the Panels provide opportunities to gather input from the public regarding SPC's transportation planning efforts in your region. Projects deemed to be regionally significant, (generally those that exceed a multi-million dollar threshold, or, pose a significant regional impact on connectivity or air quality), will be open to a public comment period 30 days in length. (Note: the Public Participation Plan has a 45 day public comment period.)

Formal Public Comment can be delivered in a variety of ways:

**Verbal Testimony:** Verbal comments can be delivered at Public Comment and Review meetings held within the counties. Presentations and related materials should be made available for public record, and presentations must be kept to 3 minutes. Verbal testimony may be recorded for post-meeting transcription.

**Written Testimony:** Testimony in written form can be submitted in the form of a letter with related support materials or documentation, and can be mailed or delivered in-person to SPC offices (Monday-Friday from 8:30 a.m to 4:00 pm) during a comment period at following address:

Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission  
Two Chatham Center  
112 Washington Place, Suite 500  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

(\*Please reference the project or program for which you are providing testimony)

**Email or FAX:** SPC also accepts electronic forms of testimony, via Email or FAX. You may Email your comments to [comments@spcregion.org](mailto:comments@spcregion.org) Email submissions should not exceed 5MB in size. FAX submissions can be sent to SPC to: (412) 391-9160.

(NOTE: All electronic forms of media are subject to a variety of forms of internal & external software security protection, not to mention lost signals or transmissions. SPC works to ensure that all forms of electronic submissions are received, but these methods of submission remain somewhat volatile.)

### Frequency and Style of Meetings

Panels meet on an as-needed basis, not on a regular schedule. We respect the fact that panel members are busy people. When a meeting is called for, panel Chairs are consulted to schedule the specific date, time and place.

Some meetings (such as those where official testimony is taken on projects) are considered to be formal. Others are more informal and are meant for discussion. Style is somewhat at the discretion of the Chairs. Chairs may call meetings on topics of special interest to their members.

All meetings are open to the public. Some are advertised as official public meetings, hosted by the Panel. Others are considered to be workshop meetings (which are primarily for panel members, but the public is always welcome).

### Composition of the Panel

PPP members and Chairs are appointed by their County Commissioners for two-year (2 year) terms starting in odd-numbered years. (This corresponds to the TIP Development Cycle.)

The membership of the panel must reflect the diverse population and interest groups in the county, with special attention to representation for the concerns of senior citizens, low-income and disabled populations, and racial/ethnic minorities.

- Panel should consist of no less than 15 members. Typical size is 20-30, but no maximum limits are placed on the county roster size.
- Panels are assisted by Resource members. While not appointed members of the Panels, this group includes city, county, state, and federal transportation related staff, who attend Panel meetings, provide background information, and help SPC staff answer questions (see page 6 for Resource Members).

### Responsibilities of Chairpersons

Panel Chairpersons help to maintain their individual Panel's organization, sustain orderly procedure, and work to ensure that Panel member issues are addressed. Chairpersons work with SPC staff to organize formal input and inform the Commission of the Panel's comments. Chairpersons are nominated by recommendation from Commissioners and input from SPC and County planning staffs based on merit and service to the Panel, and are approved via majority vote by Panel members.

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Chairpersons will preside at the meeting. (Co-Chairs decide between them who presides.) SPC staff will attend and present portions of the agenda, but it is your panel. If conflicts develop among members, manage the meeting constructively.

The following is general guidance gathered to assist Panel Chairpersons:

- Panels will operate with respect to the resources available in each county. In some counties, the Chairpersons feel the panel will be most effective if it has a strong local presence. These Chairpersons send out the meeting notices to members. In other counties, where time and support could be limited, SPC drafts the correspondence for the Chairs, and distributes it on their behalf.
- Encourage members to be active on the panel. Promote the message that this is an important forum for advancing the interests of your county on the regional stage.
- Communicate effectively with SPC staff to plan and carry out PPP responsibilities. Let SPC staff know if you have ideas on how to improve panel effectiveness if there are topics you would like to schedule for special meetings.
- Report periodically to County Planning staff members regarding your panel's important concerns. They can help you reach those who represent you on the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission.
- Help to prepare and deliver testimony at joint hearings of the State Transportation Commission and Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, which meet in joint session in southwestern Pennsylvania once every two years.

## **Responsibilities of Panels and Members**

Attendance is the key to effective participation. SPC works to ensure that Panel activities maximize your time and commitment, and we plan accordingly to make meeting dates and times accessible to Panel members. Generally, one to three (1-3) meetings are scheduled each year, and most meetings last about two (2) hours.

- Think about how you as an individual represent a particular area of your city or county, a segment of the population, or specific transportation concern. If so, try to reflect that perspective on the panel. Even if you don't see yourself as a formal representative of a particular group or agency, think about your informal affiliations- through your neighborhood, religious community, civic associations, clubs, and other contacts.

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- Carry ideas and information to the community. Share by reporting what you learned at the PPP.
- If you cannot attend a meeting and if you represent a particular agency, organization or community, try to send someone to represent you. A substitute should sign in at the meeting on your behalf, so SPC knows that you were represented. Ask a substitute to give you feedback after the meeting.
- When the panel is hosting a meeting for the general public, help with the outreach by encouraging others to participate.

## Resource Members

Resource members are not officially appointed, but contribute pertinent knowledge, expertise, or connections to a larger network of citizens or groups. Resource members do not have direct input into Panel decisions, and membership may change frequently.

These individuals may be elected officials, members of SPC committees or boards, or staff members of city, county, state or federal agencies. Staff members of these agencies may serve as Panel members, but are appointed as citizens of their county/city.

Resource members will receive communications regarding public meetings and events, and information, similar to the Panel members.

## Communication with the Panels

SPC's goal is to foster significant and ongoing two-way communication with our region's citizens. Education and public outreach are essential parts of our responsibility to inform the public about the transportation planning process.

- Sign-in sheets are provided at each meeting. Please sign-in, and provide your most up-to-date contact information. Remember, keeping you informed is the first step in the process. SPC updates its Panel rosters with the county planning agencies at the end of each calendar year. Please continue to provide your most current contact information.
- Panels are comprised of citizens from all walks of life. You will all bring varying levels of knowledge regarding your community and the transportation planning process. SPC will inform you of upcoming meetings, provide project information using our website at [www.spcregion.org](http://www.spcregion.org) plus, at city, county, and the SPC offices, and via our regional documentation network.



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- SPC provide information to Panel members who utilize Internet and Email with pertinent web-based content regarding SPC Public Review materials.
- If you cannot attend a meeting and if you represent a particular agency, organization or community, try to send someone to represent you. A substitute should sign in at the meeting on your behalf, so SPC knows that you were represented. Ask a substitute to give you feedback after the meeting.
- When the panel is hosting a meeting for the general public, help with the outreach by encouraging others to participate.



### Glossary of Terms

**Air quality conformity determination:** A process in which transportation plans and programs are reviewed to ensure that they comply with federal clean air requirements. Changes to the transportation system collectively must not worsen air quality; in areas where air quality does not meet federal standards, transportation plans and programs are expected to improve the air quality.

**Interested Parties:** Interested parties include citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties.

**Long-range transportation plan:** A transportation plan addressing at least a twenty-year planning horizon, including both long-range and short-range strategies/actions of an integrated, intermodal transportation system that facilitates the efficient movement of people and goods and meets Federal requirements (23CFR Part 450.322).

**Major amendment:** Any amendment to a long-range transportation plan or Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) that does not qualify as a minor amendment or an amendment that meets the criteria for a minor amendment but is treated as a major amendment because of controversy or high visibility. Procedures for TIP modifications and amendments are provided in the TIP document.

**Major decision:** The adoption or major amendment of the long-range transportation plan, Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), air quality conformity determination, or other significant transportation plan or program.

**Metropolitan Transportation Organization (MPO):** Federally designated planning agencies which are responsible for planning and prioritizing the use of all state and federal transportation funds allocated to a specific area or region. The MPO has the authority and responsibility to make decisions affecting its service area region.

**Minor TIP or long-range transportation plan amendment:** Correction of clerical errors; changes that are air quality neutral (projects and project types which are not required to be included in regional air quality conformity assessments for transportation plans and programs as listed in Sections 126 and 127 of EPA's Transportation Conformity Rule, 40CFR Part 93). Procedures for TIP modifications and amendments are provided in the TIP document.



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**Public Comment and Review Period:** A required period of public review for a transportation program or project which is deemed regionally significant. These periods are advertised in media of general circulation, and usually offer at least 30 days of public review and comment (45 days for Public Participation Plan)

**Public Participation Panels:** Similar to focus groups, Panels are appointed citizens which represent the population of their respective counties in regards to age, income, ethnicity, special needs, and special interests.

**Public Participation Plan (PPP or Panels):** Provides a framework to ensure that SPC's transportation planning processes include a proactive participation process and complies with federal requirements. The Public Participation Plan identifies strategies and tools to help ensure effective participation in SPC's transportation planning activities.

**Resource Members/Panels:** Individuals who contribute knowledge, expertise, or connections to a larger network of citizens or groups. These may include elected officials, members of SPC committees or boards, or staff members of city, county, state or federal agencies. Resource members do not have direct input into Panel decisions, and their membership may change frequently.

**Transportation Improvement Program (TIP):** A staged, multiyear, fiscally-constrained, intermodal program of transportation projects which is consistent with the long-range transportation plan. The TIP develops a prioritized program of projects and its financing plan based of estimated funding available. The TIP covers a four-year period and is updated every two years.

**Workshops:** The format may include, but is not limited to, open houses, workshops or discussions with maps of projects, presentations, and surveys. SPC staff will be available to facilitate questions from the public or partner agencies. These forums or workshops are informal, and allow the public to engage subject matter in a relaxed format.



## SPC Contact Directory

For questions about <b>Public Participation Panels</b> , contact:	<b>Jared Bedekovich</b> (412) 391-5590 x343 <a href="mailto:jbedekovich@spcregion.org">jbedekovich@spcregion.org</a>
For general questions about <b>the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission</b> , contact:	<b>Shannon O'Connell</b> (412) 391-5590 x334 <a href="mailto:soconnell@spcregion.org">soconnell@spcregion.org</a>

## Transportation Planning

For questions about SPC's <b>Transportation Department regarding Operations and Administration</b>	<b>Andy Waple</b> (412) 391-5590 x310 <a href="mailto:awaple@spcregion.org">awaple@spcregion.org</a>
For development and process questions related the <b>Long Range Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program</b>	<b>Andy Waple</b> (412) 391-5590 x310 <a href="mailto:awaple@spcregion.org">awaple@spcregion.org</a>
For <b>highway/bridge-related</b> questions about the <b>Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)</b> , contact:	<b>Ryan Gordon</b> (412) 391-5590 x333 <a href="mailto:rgordon@spcregion.org">rgordon@spcregion.org</a>
For questions about the <b>Transportation Improvement Program</b> , related to <b>Transit and Multimodal initiatives</b> contact:	<b>Tom Klevan</b> (412) 391-5590 x316 <a href="mailto:tklevan@spcregion.org">tklevan@spcregion.org</a>
For questions about the <b>Air Quality and Data Services</b> , contact:	<b>Chuck Imbrogno</b> (412) 391-5590 x319 <a href="mailto:imbrogno@spcregion.org">imbrogno@spcregion.org</a>
For questions about <b>CommuterInfo, Ridesharing, Vanpooling, and Bikepooling</b> , contact:	<b>Anthony Hickton</b> (412) 391-5590 x375 <a href="mailto:ahickton@spcregion.org">ahickton@spcregion.org</a>
For questions about <b>Operations &amp; Safety</b> , contact:	<b>Domenic D'Andrea</b> (412) 391-5590 x341 <a href="mailto:ddandrea@spcregion.org">ddandrea@spcregion.org</a>
For questions about the <b>Freight Program</b> , contact:	<b>Sara Walfoort</b> (412) 391-5590 x339 <a href="mailto:swalfoort@spcregion.org">swalfoort@spcregion.org</a>
For questions about the <b>Highway Performance Monitoring System</b> , contact:	<b>Cort McCombs</b> (412) 391-5590 x330 <a href="mailto:cmcombs@spcregion.org">cmcombs@spcregion.org</a>
For questions about the <b>Pedestrian &amp; Bicycle Program</b> , contact:	<b>Tom Klevan</b> (412) 391-5590 x316 <a href="mailto:swalfoort@spcregion.org">swalfoort@spcregion.org</a>
For questions about <b>Congestion Management</b> , contact:	<b>Dom D'Andrea</b> (412) 391-5590 x341 <a href="mailto:ddandrea@spcregion.org">ddandrea@spcregion.org</a>



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### Planning & Development

For questions about <b><u>Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy</u></b> , contact:	<b>Jennifer Lasser</b> (412) 391-5590 x302 <a href="mailto:jlasser@spreregion.org">jlasser@spreregion.org</a>
For questions about the <b><u>Appalachian Region Commission Area Development Program</u></b> , contact:	<b>Ryan Falcone</b> (412) 391-5590 x309 <a href="mailto:rfalcone@spreregion.org">rfalcone@spreregion.org</a>
For questions about the <b><u>Small Business Finance Program</u></b> , contact:	<b>Ed Nemeth</b> (412) 391-5590 x322 <a href="mailto:enemeth@spreregion.org">enemeth@spreregion.org</a>
For questions about the <b><u>Community Assistance Program</u></b> , contact:	<b>Ryan Falcone</b> (412) 391-5590 x309 <a href="mailto:rfalcone@spreregion.org">rfalcone@spreregion.org</a>
For questions about the <b><u>Government Procurement Program</u></b> , contact:	<b>Steve Meredith</b> (412) 391-5590 x325 <a href="mailto:smeredith@spreregion.org">smeredith@spreregion.org</a>
For questions about <b><u>Export Development</u></b> , contact:	<b>Rena Liu-Belshe</b> (412) 391-5590 x320 <a href="mailto:rbelshe@spreregion.org">rbelshe@spreregion.org</a>
For questions about <b><u>Keystone Opportunity Zones</u></b> , contact:	<b>Ryan Falcone</b> (412) 391-5590 x309 <a href="mailto:rfalcone@spreregion.org">rfalcone@spreregion.org</a>