



Public Involvement Handbook



and Resource Guide



2011 Edition



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WYDOT's Commitment to Public Involvement

The employees of the Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) appreciate that undertaking worthwhile, effective public involvement is one of the toughest challenges state agency personnel face. We also realize that public desire to share in the transportation decision-making process increased significantly in the past few years and continues to grow. So too has the call for additional transparency grown. We welcome public involvement and accountability and offer this handbook and resource guide as a means of facilitating increased participation and a “sunshine” process.

This revision is a result of WYDOT's constant effort to improve public involvement in the plans we produce, the decisions we make, and the operations we undertake. It reflects our commitment to perfect the interaction between the agency and its stakeholders. The issues facing the transportation sector cannot be solved without multiple disciplines helping ensure our system remains economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable. We strive to provide the opportunity for public input to add value to our products and services. This handbook promotes, to the greatest extent possible, the achievement of WYDOT's goals of safety and efficiency and an active, profitable engagement with the community.

As with so many of our endeavors, successful communication is vital to accomplishing WYDOT's public involvement process. Effective communication is the key to ensuring that information flows not only from the agency to customers and the general public in understandable formats but also back to the agency in applicable ways. Much of this handbook and resource guide, therefore, is devoted to detailing a variety of methods that we can use to enhance our communications abilities and capitalize on our dialogue with the public.

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Today, the public is increasingly interested in transportation planning, design, and construction decisions. The Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) welcomes and values what some observers have termed the “explosion of interest in public involvement” and embraces the guidelines found in this handbook.

WYDOT believes that well-designed, proactive public involvement activities, such as those found in this handbook, will benefit its planning and policy efforts and ultimately lead to better decisions and better projects. The transportation system must be designed to maximize long-term public benefits. These formulations require knowledge and skill beyond WYDOT. To fully create long-term, sustainable systems, WYDOT must embrace other skills and knowledge. This handbook seeks to draw forth these benefits from the public. Specific advantages of enhanced public involvement include the following:

- (1) **Increased public collaboration.** WYDOT believes that citizen collaboration on projects benefits the process as well as the end product. Therefore, WYDOT promotes efforts to increase public participation and remains committed to respectful, productive dialogue.
- (2) **Decisions that better reflect diverse interests.** WYDOT believes that consulting with as many interests as can be identified will help the Department better understand and reflect the full range of identifiable community values, with specific focus on community-defined livability standards.
- (3) **Efficient implementation of transportation decisions.** WYDOT believes that the improved early decision-making process fostered by public involvement will reduce costly project plan revision and project change orders.
- (4) **Enhanced agency credibility.** Increased public involvement results in more interaction between Department personnel

and customers. WYDOT believes that this interaction aids everyone; the Department comes to understand public concerns more fully, and customers gain a better appreciation of WYDOT and its responsibilities.



Categories of 'Public' in Public Involvement

In its broadest sense, the term “public” in this handbook means the citizens of Wyoming. By itself, this definition is too broad to be useful.



A survey of public involvement literature, though, provides further explanation. The Federal Highway Administration, for example, advocates viewing the public not as one undifferentiated mass but rather as a number of groups affected in different ways by a project or policy. These groups will likely be diverse, will require different types of information, and will best be reached by different types of media. Similarly, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency states that beyond individual citizens, “the public” can properly be thought of as representatives of a spectrum of groups having a particular interest in agency programs and decisions. A sampling of these interests includes consumer and environmental advocacy groups; indigenous, tribal, minority, and ethnic groups; business and industrial interests, including small business; elected and appointed public officials; and the media, civic and community organizations, and governmental agencies.

minority, and ethnic groups; business and industrial interests, including small business; elected and appointed public officials; and the media, civic and community organizations, and governmental agencies.

Experience has shown that all Wyoming residents, all users of the state’s transportation system, and all recipients of WYDOT services (our customers), can be affected by agency functions. However, a limited number of individuals and groups typically have a greater interest in those functions and wish to participate directly in agency activities. A common term for these individuals and groups is stakeholders, often defined as anyone with an interest in the outcome of a project. Stakeholders can include local government officials; government associations; resource, regulatory, or transportation agencies; minority populations; business people; civic organizations; and special interest groups or others.

Overview of WYDOT’s Public Involvement Goals and Policy

WYDOT Operating Policy 17-8, Public Involvement Policy, begins with this succinct statement of purpose:



The Wyoming Department of Transportation’s goal is to proactively involve the public in addressing transportation issues. The Department will communicate the agency’s mission and goals to the widest an audience possible and consider feedback received from outside organizations and the public.

Overview of WYDOT's Public Involvement Goals and Policy

The Department embraces several specific goals:

1. Incorporate public input into transportation decision making by providing for open and continuous communication designed to facilitate public involvement opportunities and to inform the public of planning, program functions, project activities, designs, and construction.
2. Implement a public involvement strategy to identify and use Department resources to inform the public of WYDOT's activities and receive public input. The strategy will establish levels (depending on the nature and complexity of the activity) for communicating with local governments, state and federal agencies, businesses, tribal governments, interest groups, and the public.
3. Consult with local governments in identifying transportation needs, coordinating projects, and selecting viable solutions.
4. Extend WYDOT's outreach efforts by consulting with and soliciting input from individuals and groups with interests related to transportation.
5. Provide opportunities for individuals and groups to provide input in the development of the State Long Range Transportation Plan and the State Transportation Improvement Program.
6. Respond in a timely and open manner to concerns expressed about WYDOT activities and conduct continuing efforts to educate the public about transportation programs and issues.
7. Review and update the public involvement strategy and process as needed, and continuously evaluate the effectiveness of public outreach activities and use the results to improve the program.
8. Foster internal communication and training to promote understanding and implementation of the public involvement process.

*The policy also provides criteria for using different levels of public involvement for particular types of transportation initiatives. This four-level system allows WYDOT to focus public involvement efforts on its most regionally significant projects (using Levels C and D) while still accommodating input on other Department activities (using Levels A and B). **The specific public involvement elements for each level are described beginning on page 13.** Readers should keep in mind, though, that WYDOT, in the interests of maintaining necessary flexibility, may change a level designation once underway (moving from Level C to Level D, for instance) or combine requirements from different levels to match the unique needs of any particular Department project or activity.*

Public Involvement Starts with Advance Planning

WYDOT currently supports a number of planning activities that provide the public an opportunity for input. These activities include the following:

State Long Range Transportation Plan

In accordance with 23 United States Code 135, each state is required to develop a statewide transportation plan and a statewide transportation improvement program for all areas of the state. The statewide plan is to provide for the development, integrated management, and operation of transportation systems and facilities (including accessible pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities) functioning as an intermodal transportation system for the state and comprising an integral component of the United States intermodal transportation system. The Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is an ongoing effort to integrate highway assets needs with community and economic needs to ensure a holistic approach to the transportation network.

Wyoming's LRTP is the mechanism for the public to provide input in shaping the 20- to 30-year transportation network outlook. WYDOT uses asset management techniques to give indications of what the condition of the assets will be based on various funding scenarios. The plan outlines the actions necessary to fulfill WYDOT's mission of providing a safe, high-quality, and efficient transportation system.

To help facilitate the understanding of the impact of transportation, the WYDOT Planning Program studies road networks that make up transportation corridors. Because these are networks, all roads tying into the major roads receive consideration. These corridors meet the transportation requirements documented in a Corridor Vision.

The LRTP and Corridor Visions undergo updates approximately every five years. At this key decision point, needed functions of the transportation system get critical evaluations. WYDOT solicits input from a wide range of stakeholders, including the general public and specialty groups, during these updates. A Transportation Stakeholder Advisory Committee is usually formed, with invitations sent to the Wyoming Trucking Association, the Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Wyoming County Commissioners Association, Wyoming Association of Municipalities, tribes, legislative liaisons, economic development organizations, and other groups as appropriate. The committee will review and comment on the draft LRTP, assist in guiding the public review process, identify key issues, and analyze emerging trends. WYDOT also assesses the draft document with the public at large, using open houses, posting on electronic media, and other methods to facilitate constructive dialogue.

Corridor Plan

A list of modifications needed to maintain proper functionality is



Public Involvement Starts with Advance Planning

developed by inspecting roadway features and comparing these against the system baseline specified in the Corridor Vision, as prepared by the Planning Program. This analysis of needs is preserved in the Corridor Plan for that system and includes suggested projects from the management systems, including safety, pavement, and bridge. The need analysis document is available to the public and is the repository for input received through the STIP review or Corridor Vision and offers a comprehensive list of projects that need to be completed at some point in the future.

State Transportation Improvement Program

Current federal regulations require all states to develop a financially constrained State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). WYDOT uses a six-year STIP that is updated yearly. Developing the STIP involves matching high-priority needs, mostly from the Corridor Plan, to anticipated funding. The Department uses transportation management systems, geometric deficiencies, and the LRTP to help determine the scope for a particular project and its priority rating. WYDOT also considers public requests made through its field offices.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in Casper and Cheyenne also have public involvement processes for developing their transportation improvement program. These programs include a four-year listing of projects identified by the MPOs and are incorporated as adopted by the MPOs within the STIP.

Each urban area (population over 5,000 by the last census) is given an opportunity to form a Rural Planning Organization. In partnership with WYDOT, this group cooperatively identifies needed projects, facilitates public input, and involves diverse interests in the transportation decision-making for the STIP.



Once projects have been identified in the planning process and proposed for the STIP, the document is released for public review and comment. Public involvement activities inform the public and gather information about concerns and impacts a project may have on communities. This is a key decision point for the public. Based on this input, the Transportation Commission authorizes the design activities for a project to begin. Input from the public is used not only in the development of the project design but also once actual work has begun.

WYDOT will strive to review the proposed STIP with each county in the spring, often using open house style forums. After the initial input is received, a draft STIP is then available for public comment for at least 45 days, usually beginning in early July. The STIP is presented to the Transportation Commission, with the comments received, at its September meeting.

Public Involvement Starts with Advance Planning

The process of designing and building roads is a complex undertaking and delays, cost estimates, or unforeseen work may become priorities outside the normal cycle of STIP development. Operating Policy 17-8, Public Involvement Policy, defines regionally significant projects for this purpose.



A regionally non-significant project is limited primarily to maintenance work, such as chip seals, thin overlays, or bridge repairs. A regionally significant project moving into the STIP will be reviewed with the elected officials in the county or community affected and advertised for public comment by the Public Affairs Program for 30 days. The Commission then acts based on the priority and the nature of comments received. The regionally non-significant projects, cost changes to existing projects, fiscal projections, or construction year changes are administrative changes to the STIP and will be handled by the Commission monthly and documented in a quarterly STIP amendment. Regionally significant projects could enter the STIP outside the quarterly cycle.

National Environmental Policy Act

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies, such as the Federal Highway Administration, to encourage and facilitate public involvement in decisions affecting the quality of the environment. To avoid—or minimize—adverse environmental impacts, NEPA-related activities identify and assess reasonable alternatives to proposed actions. These NEPA procedures may be found in Title 40, Parts 1500-1508 of the Code of Federal Regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508).

Specific public involvement activities relating to highway projects using federal money are described in 23 CFR 771. These regulations provide for early and continual public participation opportunities to identify social,

economic, and environmental project impacts.

Public hearings occur for certain types of projects, often those processed with either an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement.

Federal guidelines require opportunities for public review and comment on both environmental assessment and environmental impact statement documents. Additional details concerning NEPA and other federal regulations follow in the next section of this handbook.



WYDOT's Environmental Services Program is responsible for undertaking, complying with, and documenting all NEPA-related activities.

Public Involvement Specific to Construction Projects

Developing the plan

Each transportation project directly supervised by WYDOT personnel requires a public involvement strategy tailored to the specifics of the project. When NEPA-required documentation and/or activities are anticipated, formulating a written strategy will be the joint responsibility of the district and the Environmental Services Program.

The level of public involvement necessary to address the goals of this policy should be discussed at the reconnaissance inspection, documented, and refined, if necessary, with help from the district and Environmental Services. Innovative ideas, including technological advances and social media usage, where appropriate, should always be considered as possible ways to increase the effectiveness of meeting the dynamic public needs.

The district provides insight and analysis regarding the various issues and politics surrounding a particular project to aid in determining the appropriate level of public involvement. This in-depth assessment should include the history of the project, reasons for the project, maintenance problems, landowner issues or problems, political climate of the area regarding the proposed project, previous studies in the area, environmental issues, previous public comments received, support of the governing bodies, future project plans, traffic problems, previous publicity, previous internal discussions, and any other issues or facts having an impact on the public process.



Who Does What? Responsibilities

Apart from fulfilling and documenting NEPA requirements, the district engineer has overall responsibility and final authority for this program.

The district public involvement specialist provides support services. The district will keep Environmental Services apprised of any public involvement activities it undertakes. This allows the coordination of public involvement activities and public hearings with the entire NEPA process, as required by federal regulation. Recommendations for adjustments in the level or extent of public involvement may be made by the district engineer or Environmental Services.

In situations where there is a need for an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS), Environmental Services will take the lead in the public involvement strategy. On CE (categorical exclusion from NEPA) projects, the district will take the lead on the public involvement plan. These meetings will maintain a customer service perspective in focus and scope.

Written documentation of all public involvement meetings must be kept regardless of the meeting attendance or scope of participation. Original copies of the documentation are sent to Environmental Services and its staff

Public Involvement Specific to Construction Projects



incorporates the information into the official record. The public involvement strategy and written result summations play an important role in satisfying the federal requirements of the environmental document.

Each program with public involvement responsibility must keep the district staff fully informed and involved in all public involvement activity. Maintaining clear and open communications among co-workers is as vital as those between the agency and the public. Constant effort and attention is necessary to keep all the participants informed.

Individuals with public involvement responsibilities must also become familiar with the requirements of 23 CFR 771, FHWA's regulations on environmental impact and related procedures for complying with NEPA.

For projects requiring an EA or EIS, public involvement in scoping, identifying alternatives, and determining the significant issues for full disclosure in the environmental document is a critical portion of the NEPA process and must be summarized and disclosed in the EA or EIS. Projects requiring scoping meetings entail distribution of all public comments to the pertinent programs for inclusion in the project development decision making process.

For consultant design projects, responsibilities must be spelled out in the design consultant contract. As much of the public involvement strategy as possible should be assigned to the design consultant. The consultant must document everything and keep the district engineer and Environmental Services informed

Four levels of involvement



Consider the following in selecting an appropriate level of public involvement:

Level A is intended for the simplest projects. Little or no public involvement is anticipated and decision-making will likely be clear-cut. *Level D* envisions complex projects utilizing a high degree of public involvement for successful project completion. The actual project-specific plan may include a combination of items from two levels.

It is important that WYDOT does not under-react and fail to anticipate the need for public involvement and information. It is also important that the Department does not overreact and build more into the process than is reasonably required to meet the goals of this policy.

Public Involvement Specific to Construction Projects

The strategy should remain flexible. At any point during project development, additional items may need to be added to keep the public informed and involved.

This is not intended to be a fail-safe process. Changes and fine-tuning will occur on some projects. It is very important to be proactive and not just reactive—to anticipate needs and provide for them in order to consider and address public concerns throughout the process.

Project Levels and Public Involvement Actions

Level A

Level A projects will include activities such as maintenance projects, contract maintenance projects, and projects with programmatic categorical exclusions. Level A public involvement will typically require the following:

1. A news release explaining the project, including a WYDOT contact.

Level B

Level B projects will include activities such as minor urban projects, projects with categorical exclusions, and reconstruction projects. Level B public involvement will typically require the following:

1. A news release explaining the project and including a WYDOT contact. Alternatively or additionally, contact with newspapers serving the area to develop a story and graphics that explain and illustrate the proposal may be used. Other applicable media, such as radio, television, or internet websites may be contacted as well.
2. Contacts with local government officials, interest groups, and other organizations;
3. Contacts with affected landowners explaining design and activities; and
4. Public notification of construction-related schedules, detours, and so forth.

Level C

Level C projects will include activities such as environmental assessments, corridor studies or improvements, and minor realignment projects. Level C public involvement will typically require the following:

1. A news release explaining the project and including a WYDOT contact. Contact will be made with newspapers serving the area to develop a story and graphics that explain and illustrate the proposal. Other applicable media (radio, television, internet) contacts will also be used;

Public Involvement Specific to Construction Projects

2. Personal contacts with adjacent landowners as determined by the district engineer or designee;



3. Contacts with local officials, interest groups, and other organizations;
4. A scoping meeting to present basic concepts or information and to seek input;
5. Distribution of the draft environmental document and a news release about the public meeting or hearing;
6. An opportunity to hold a public meeting to receive comments on the decisions; and
7. Before or during construction, applicable media should be used to disseminate information.

Level D

Level D projects will include activities such as environmental impact statements (EISs), major realignment, new highway corridor projects, and major urban projects. Level D public involvement will typically require the following:

1. A notice of intent and news release explaining the project, including a WYDOT contact. Contacts with newspapers serving the area will be scheduled to develop a story and graphics that explain and illustrate the proposal. Other applicable media contacts (radio, television, internet) will also be used;
2. Establishing an advisory committee of diverse stakeholders for the project;
3. Possibly establishing an interdisciplinary (ID) team of technical expertise for the project;
4. Personal contacts with adjacent landowners;
5. Contacts with local government officials, interest groups, and civic organizations;



6. Scoping meetings, to normally include:
 - a. A public meeting to determine the scope of the issues;
 - b. A public meeting to identify possible alternatives; and
 - c. Public meetings on findings and significant issues;
7. Contacts with landowners, government officials, and interest groups during EIS preparation;
8. Distribution of the draft environmental document and a news release about the public meeting;

Public Involvement Specific to Construction Projects

9. A public meeting;
10. Before or during construction, applicable media should be used to disseminate information; and
11. As determined, public meetings should be conducted.

Common Activities - Detailed Steps and Responsibilities

News Releases and News Coverage

News releases are a useful means for communicating information to the public throughout the design and construction of a transportation project. The Public Affairs Program and the district public involvement specialists maintain a list of media outlets, including newspapers, radio stations, television stations, and trade journals.

The district public involvement specialist prepares the draft news release and submits it to the district engineer or designee for review prior to distribution.

How to Talk About Transportation Investment

- *Conversations must be focused around the benefits WYDOT can add to people's daily experiences.*
- *Build WYDOT's case piece by piece, and start with a message that centers around what the people in the community find most important—not what WYDOT thinks are the priorities.*
- *Use all communication platforms. Opportunities abound.*
- *Repetition is key to making an impact.*

Preparing and distributing a news release is an important early step in notifying the public of WYDOT intentions to improve or maintain a transportation facility. Grabbing public attention with this initial notice sets a tone that encourages open communication. Public and official involvement in project development will begin earlier and be more productive.

The district public involvement specialist will assist in seeking news coverage before and after meetings and hearings.

The news coverage following a transportation project meeting or hearing is an important public informational tool. This coverage disseminates the highlights of the discussion and issues presented at the event. This may be accomplished through a news release, a discussion between the lead agent or district staff and a news reporter, or both. News accounts of meetings or hearings using appropriate media such as newspaper, television, radio, or online outlets help inform a broader section of interested people. The intended result is a widely available and accessible news account of the meeting or hearing.

More people are likely to read about or listen to the results of a meeting or hearing than usually attend those events. A news account covering the crucial details regarding project purpose helps ensure public opportunity to be informed and become involved.

Following formal Transportation Commission action, the Public Affairs program will prepare and distribute a news release announcing the decision.

Common Activities - Detailed Steps and Responsibilities

District public involvement specialists will provide follow-up if necessary.

In order to set a communication tone that encourages understanding and input:

- The news release needs to be written in a style that is less formal than usual government correspondence.
- Be concise, without eliminating necessary information. The correspondence must be easy to read and understand—write for a general, non-technical audience.
- Do not use abbreviations and acronyms. Do not use technical jargon.
- Be sure the letter and news release address the question “Why?” For instance, “WYDOT proposes to improve safety and replace the worn-out pavement by reconstructing and widening the roadway” or “WYDOT intends to make improvements in response to traffic congestion and safety issues.”

Please contact the Public Affairs Program for specific inquiries or further examples.

Advisory Committees



An advisory committee may be formed as another means to receive and disseminate information and is generally used on level C or D projects. The advisory committee is not a decision-making body, but it can provide an important two-way communication link between the Department and the public. Meetings with the advisory committee are an opportunity to openly discuss problems, in detail, with a small group of people representing diverse constituencies and interests. Committee members, in turn, talk to many others in the community. This can result in better public understanding of difficult issues. The committee can also provide a focal point for discussions and spearhead comment gathering in the community.

Advisory committees can provide significant benefits to the public process. Many times citizens feel more comfortable and trusting with someone they know personally. They are also more likely to give comments to someone who is not part of WYDOT. This also provides them a degree of anonymity not afforded in face-to-face or written comments that become part of the record. Committees can also critique presentations, exhibits, etc., ahead of public meetings from an independent, non-WYDOT perspective. This will allow valuable changes or additions to the information before formal presentation.

Advisory committees are established in the early stages of a project by the district engineer or designee in conjunction with the Environmental Services program. It is the district engineer's or designee's responsibility to outline the advisory committee's role so that everyone understands their function.

Common Activities - Detailed Steps and Responsibilities

Members should be local citizen volunteers representing constituent groups. (Makeup of the committee should be a broad representation of stakeholders while remaining a manageable-sized group.) These groups may include persons from the following:



- City/county governing bodies and area legislators
- Planning groups (such as MPOs or urban advisory committees)
- Tribal governments
- Landowners
- Groups opposing the project
- Neighborhood councils or homeowners groups
- Chambers of commerce/industry
- Fish or wildlife organizations and conservation or sporting organizations
- Environmental organizations or land use organizations
- Transportation user groups (trucking associations, bicycle groups, tourism, Wyoming Business Council)
- Other interest groups (including agriculture/industry representatives)

On some projects with unique problems or circumstances, it is advisable to invite local representatives of state and federal agencies to participate. Some agencies, particularly regulatory agencies, may have other formal procedures for participation, scoping, or approvals. An awareness of these requirements will expedite WYDOT proceedings.

Membership on the advisory committee should include a balanced group that will represent all sides of anticipated issues. Balance is extremely important. “Loading up” the committee with members from one point of view and failing to include broad, as well as specific interests, will likely prove counter-productive. A criticism leveled at WYDOT for trying to manipulate the process on one project may cast suspicion on subsequent endeavors and decisions.

Interdisciplinary teams

WYDOT uses a systematic interdisciplinary approach in planning, locating, and designing all transportation projects (reference Operating Policy 18-2). The interdisciplinary approach uses personnel trained in the appropriate natural, social, physical, environmental, and engineering sciences to study and evaluate the impact of proposed transportation improvements. The interdisciplinary team plays a critical role in analyzing and proposing methods for addressing public concerns.

General Guidance: Personal Contacts with Landowners, Government Officials, and Interest Groups

The district is in a unique position as they must respond to individuals long after a project is completed; therefore they must be considered the lead in these contacts. By WYDOT processes however, other programs make contact with affected people. Examples include the Photogrammetry and Survey Section permission to survey that is coordinated through the preliminary survey meeting or the Right of Way legal notification of landowners before negotiations begin.



Personal contact with affected agencies, landowners, legislators, and interest groups is a necessary and significant part of public involvement. There is no prescribed timetable or method for these contacts, but the charge is to find the issues, analyze them, and formulate answers before they become problems that consume much time and resources. These contacts should be made as early as possible to avoid misinformation and to foster supportive relationships and mutual trust and respect.

- Do not wait until the next scheduled meeting and give the issue a chance to become fraught with misinformation and speculation. Respond as quickly and concisely as possible to prevent continued dissemination of bad information or comment. Do not allow anyone to “fill in the blanks.” Instead, give them timely, accurate, and honest information.
- Do not discount ideas or suggestions out-of-hand. Listen carefully. If an idea is determined to be meritless, respond clearly and completely. If necessary, publish your response and reasoning by whatever means best achieves WYDOT objectives. Again, a newsletter as well as a web page can be a valuable tool to promote information flow. Accurate news releases issued prior to a public meeting may prove effective tools. A strategic phone call or meeting may also yield favorable results.

When people believe they are not being heard, they turn to other means outside the formal process to make themselves heard.

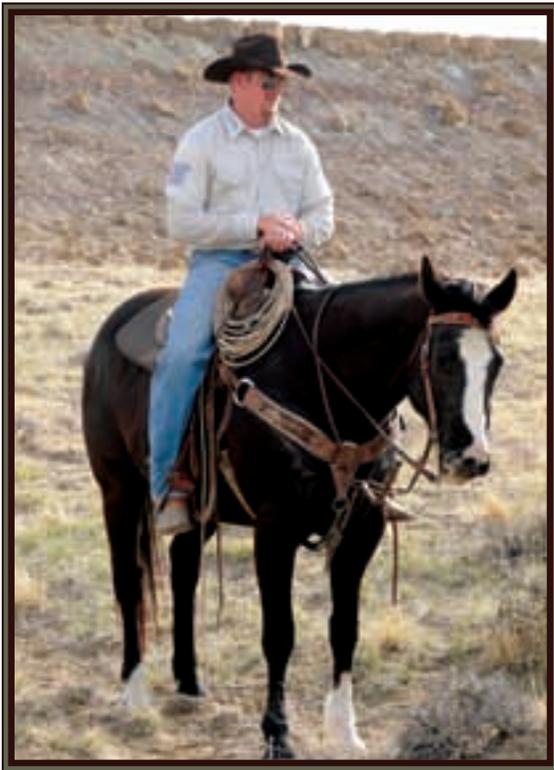
Each issue, even if it is the same issue for the tenth time, must be dealt with fairly and promptly. This is the challenge, and this is what comprises public involvement.

When issues emerge that require the attention of someone with expertise and/or authority in a given field, that person may be asked to make the necessary contacts to resolve the issue. Or the interdisciplinary team may form a subcommittee to work on specific issues.

*As stated earlier, it is important to actively seek out those individuals, groups and agencies that may be concerned about or opposed to the project. They must be a part of the process and must be heard. **When people believe they are not being heard, they turn to other means outside the formal process to make themselves heard.** This process is intended to be “inclusive” and proactive so that issues and concerns can lead to solutions.*

General Guidance: Personal Contacts with Landowners, Government Officials, and Interest Groups

Be prepared to encounter powerful emotional reactions or strong feelings when working with the public. While WYDOT may see a road headed toward structural or capacity failure, unable to meet the needed functions of the system in 20 years, many in the public see only the current road functions and, therefore, cannot recognize the presented “need,” especially when this involves taking property or a perceived impact to the environment. If people feel angry or defensive, they will not be listening, even though they may think they need to know what is trying to be communicated. Many people will say, “I have not been heard,” when they do not agree with the decision. WYDOT strongly encourages empathetic listening, which means the listener truly understands public concerns. This is not the same as sympathy, which is a form of agreement; it is the full understanding of the person, emotionally as well as intellectually. This does not imply WYDOT agrees with their opinions. After the frame of reference is fully understood, then the logic can be firmly, honestly, and politely explained.



Guidance Specific to Personal Contacts with Landowners

Personal contact is one of the most important keys to a successful public involvement program. Early in project development and before any field work is done, each individual landowner should be contacted in person by someone knowledgeable to explain the purpose and need for the project and the project development process.

The district will make these contacts, with assistance from Environmental Services, Right-of-Way, and Design, as necessary. Transportation commissioners can be a valuable resource in assisting landowner contacts, especially with difficult discussions or issues.

There are significant positive advantages to personal contacts with individual landowners. However, it is imperative that they are involved in the project as early as possible in the public involvement process. This gives them an opportunity to express individual issues, problems, and concerns. These contacts also assist in assessing the opposition or support for the project and provide insight on various right-of-way issues and design problems that must be addressed to garner support from the landowners. If their issues are addressed early, then there will be a significant reduction in adverse emotional reactions from sympathetic citizens. The impact of this emotional element during the entire process should not be dismissed nor underestimated. It is important to listen to landowner concerns completely, while at the same time being honest, respectful, and thorough in discussing their issues, even if their particular issue cannot be accommodated. Most reasonable people recognize that all their needs cannot be accommodated, and WYDOT must not disrespect their position in asking.

General Guidance: Personal Contacts with Landowners, Government Officials, and Interest Groups



Personal contacts can be made in person or by telephone, but the offer should be made to meet one-on-one if so requested. In the event that a consultant is hired to make the initial landowner contacts, the district should provide a letter of authorization and introduction on Department letterhead to be presented to the landowner at that first contact. It is not recommended that the initial landowner contact be done simply by letter. If this is the chosen method, then the letter should indicate a future individual follow-up will be done within a short time. The initial contact with landowners could also be done in a group meeting format to more efficiently use time instead of repeating the preliminary project information at many individual meetings. However, it is necessary

to make it very clear that this group landowner meeting will be followed, as needed, with individual meetings as requested.

Thorough county record research produces the formulation of the first mailing list of landowners. Extreme care should be taken to obtain the latest addresses, correct name spellings, multiple landowners for one piece of property, and contract-for-deed landowners. There are instances where

deeds, especially for contract-for-deed or non-lending institution transactions are not filed at the county records. It is recommended that at minimum, initial correspondence should be made by certified letter (return receipt requested), especially since the cost is minimal compared to the positive impact to the overall project. If the letter is returned or when the return receipt is returned, it affords a good opportunity to correct addresses and to verify if landowners have changed. Certified letters also provide rebuttals to assertions that people were not contacted, which is a good protection against adverse emotions during public meetings or in ensuing publicity.



Adjacent landowners bear the greatest impact from a project. It is imperative that they receive additional attention and service. This will promote a good project commencement. The old adage is very appropriate in these situations, “You only get one chance to make a first impression!” This is the one chance to begin the process with mutual respect. In some situations, preparing and distributing a newsletter in addition to the invitation to the public meeting can further enhance information flow and foster better relationships.

The district is responsible for these contacts.

Again, personal contacts are an essential key to meaningful public involvement. As a rule, less formal meetings are more productive than more formal ones—the most important thing is to share information and receive ideas and comments. **Document everything.**

Consider informal meetings with local officials, legislators, or interest groups on neutral territory. Or arrange to attend a regularly-scheduled meeting of their group or organization. Transportation commissioners should also be invited to attend and assist as they usually have significant and influential contacts. Be sure to schedule presentations to governing officials prior to any public meetings, since they will be the recipient of many constituent questions. This opportunity will give them confidence and knowledge of the issues and will foster critical support for the success of the public involvement strategy.

Words That Build Support for Transportation Funding

Mobility

Technology and modernization

Long-term local planning

Accountable spending

Jobs and economic development

Be prepared with a specific list of topics to be covered. Discuss what is planned, and listen carefully to the responses. Take good notes, either during or just following the meeting, so that the results of the small group discussion will be available in the broader, public discussion and will be open to public scrutiny. Documentation of these meetings **must** be part of the environmental report.

Of course, more formal meetings are required at times. But again, try to keep presentations or discussions as informal as conditions allow. Give plenty of opportunity for the people attending the meeting to ask questions. Listen carefully to all ideas, evaluate them for merit, and give commendation, if appropriate. Even ideas that cannot work deserve a clear, complete response. If these ideas keep recurring, put a response in writing and make sure it is disseminated to the public.

It is important to actively seek out those individuals and groups opposing the action. Listen diligently to these people, and respond in a way that furthers understanding on both sides and seeks to resolve conflicts.

Consider a session with a trained facilitator if meetings are becoming volatile and unproductive. Facilitators are well worth the time and effort when disputes, mistrust, or confrontation are likely or have previously occurred.

If opposition is not heard and involved, any discord between agencies or between the agency and the public can effectively slow or stop projects. It is one goal of this program to be proactive. Ideally, issues between government agencies will be mutually resolved before the public is involved.

Issues not dealt with or left until the last minute can “blow up” and cause delays or backtracking in the process.

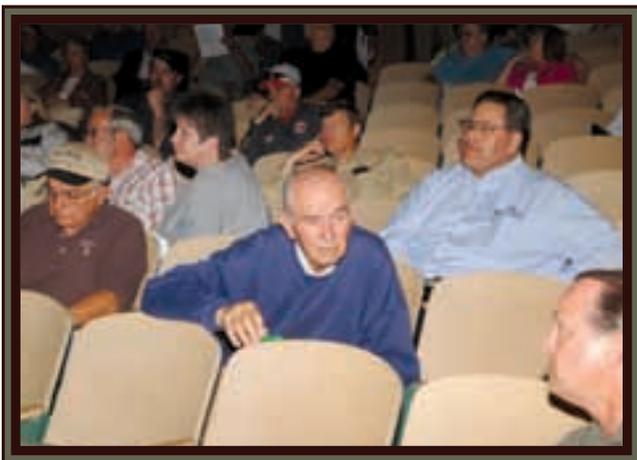
Public meetings are useful to convey information or seek input on a project. They are recommended on all but the simplest projects.

The district engineer or designee is responsible for initiating public information meetings and, with support from the district public involvement specialist, determining a suitable and effective format.

Meeting Formats

The program outlined in this handbook is aimed, in part, at shifting focus from a formal public meeting to the following:

- Less-formal meetings with small or medium-sized groups,
- One-to-one communication, and
- Effective, productive use of traditional news media outlets and also technological advances, including social media and the Internet.



This shift will help WYDOT better deliver messages to the public and gather information and good ideas.

There will always be a place for the public meeting. In some instances, they are required, and the dynamics of bringing the community together to discuss issues of importance to the whole community can be positive and productive.

Relying solely on a formal meeting or hearing for meaningful public involvement simply will not work. If they are held at the end of the process and are not accompanied by any other opportunities to participate, citizens will feel their concerns cannot be addressed because they are heard too late.

Even if they are held at an appropriate time in the course of developing a project, it is difficult to get all interested parties to a meeting. Unless there is a tremendous controversy or a great deal of local support, poor attendance is always going to be a problem. So, careful planning and clever ideas remain necessities.

State the Meeting’s Purpose

Begin planning a meeting by clearly noting the end goal. This is the reason for holding the meeting. Be specific. Discuss this goal(s) among the project team so that everyone is aware of the purpose and is on board. Write it down—this will promote clarity of thought and focus and guide preparations for the meeting.

An early informational meeting may be intended to explain to the public what the agency is doing or proposing to do and why. It is also to find out what the public thinks of the proposal and what related issues should be considered.

Early explanatory meetings require knowledgeable (including project specific knowledge) people on hand to present to the public and answer questions. These people must answer questions, even if the answer is, “We do not currently know, but we intend to find out.”

Be prepared to explain what has been identified as the purpose and need for the project, what activities will follow, and the estimated time frame. People will want to know who makes the final decision when alternatives exist, such as routing or scope of work.

But, in order to find out what the public thinks, attendance at meetings must remain a priority. To get the highest meeting turnout possible, keep in mind the following:

- Notices need to be prominent and clearly state what is going on.
- Date, location, and time must be convenient. The location should be in the vicinity of the project. Careful selection of the time period should be made considering several factors: work schedules—try to get people on their way home from work; meal times—try for before or after meal times; and not too late in the day—try to avoid post “happy hour” problems, and try to get people before they settle at home for the evening. Durations of two hours are probably the minimum, but four hours may be too long depending on the project and the political climate in the community.
- More than one session may be necessary. Consider alternatives such as personal meetings or telephone calls with individuals who cannot attend for some reason. Be aware of legalities, and document personal visits extensively.

- Key participants should be contacted personally. If they cannot attend, someone should arrange to talk to them individually. If it is important that they attend the meeting, consider changing the meeting to accommodate their schedule, or arrange to have a designee present on their behalf.

Consider offering refreshments. It makes people feel more at ease.

If the meeting is required, for instance a scoping meeting prior to developing environmental documentation, then certain requirements need to be met on the amount of lead time for the notice, etc.



Concepts, proposals, and decisions must be translated into lay terms for effective communication. The moderator must be responsible for enforcing this directive. If an engineer, planner, or other spokesperson or specialist forgets the audience and begins using technical language or jargon, the moderator needs to restate the message in simple terms. The usual “engineering presentation” is no exception. If the presentation is not made in “plain English” and in a way that everyone can understand, it could be difficult for WYDOT to achieve its goals, could cause significant delays, or could jeopardize the project all together.

If an answer is not available or is not entirely clear, someone needs to commit to obtaining the answer and responding accordingly. That answer should be included in the summary and released for news coverage following the meeting.

*The meeting must be arranged so people feel comfortable commenting. **WYDOT representatives must come prepared to listen.** If there is a stage, do not use it. Having agency personnel separated from the public or looking down on them fosters an “us versus them” tone. This aggravated mood gets in the way of productive communication. The FHWA and other federal agencies have concluded that the formal public hearing is a very risky public involvement strategy. **An Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant open house style meeting or method is a more effectual strategy and is approved for wide usage by FHWA. The open house is the WYDOT preference.***

Two Types and Some Combinations

For convenience, try thinking of meeting types in two categories: the traditional format and the open house, which might include walk-in sessions or other “open-forum” formats. Combinations of the two have been successful in some cases, but they must be planned and instituted.

The traditional meeting or hearing is appropriate at times since some people are very comfortable with this arrangement. Key to making this style of meeting effective is keeping the session informal—pay attention to the setting of the room, keep presentations short and informative, ask questions early, and try to get some give-and-take going during the initial response

period. A break often offers a fine opportunity for individual questions. When the group reconvenes, it may be a good idea to recap issues that came up and field additional questions. The presentation is an important facet, but it is the give-and-take where the most passionate issues people care about begin to emerge, both in project criticism as well as constructive comments. “Stage fright” is the most formidable obstacle to overcome in these types of meetings. Many people simply do not feel comfortable speaking in front of a large group, especially if their comments are unpopular. Embarrassment and intimidation are hurdles that discourage valuable input from some participants.





The open house style, which includes informal walk-in sessions, and the more elaborate “open format hearing” have become common and well-liked. They promote an informal climate and provide a range of involvement options. Department staff remain available for an extended time period, so people can choose when to attend. The informality makes communication easier—people feel more at ease asking questions, offering comments, making measured criticisms (since there is no audience, just a one-on-one informal chat), and seeking conflict resolution.

Ensure all comments are accurately recorded and made part of the project record. Taking detailed notes during conversations is highly recommended. If questioned, an appropriate answer might alleviate concerns by expressing the desire to accurately reflect the speaker’s concerns during later review.

Consider that the open forum meeting/hearing can improve the quality of input WYDOT receives, especially when there are more than just a few issues and when the public is expected to have many questions and concerns. This type of meeting/hearing is useful to identify the breadth of issues people are concerned about. They are especially helpful on high-visibility projects since it is likely many people will be interested enough to attend. There may be rumors to answer and many more questions to take than can reasonably be handled in a traditional setting. Further, some people are not comfortable standing up to a microphone and addressing a group. These people need to contribute, and the open forum format is meant to accommodate them by easing discussion through small group sessions or one-on-one sessions with project staff.

A variation of the open-house format that can work well is to combine it with a short informative 10 to 15 minute presentation of general interest information, or provide information that would answer anticipated or reoccurring questions. After the presentation, the meeting would break back into the pure open house style of meeting.

The open forum format is characterized by a floor plan that both accommodates the meeting as legally defined and fulfills the need to exchange information and understanding in a practical, productive way. An open forum meeting is arranged much like an open house. It is intended to give those who work shifts or are not otherwise able to attend during “regular” hours a better opportunity to attend. It also allows those worried about speaking in front of a group a chance to comment and ask questions in a more friendly setting. After meetings, written comments may be submitted and accepted for a pre-determined length of time.

There are numerous issues and needs to consider in determining a meeting



style. Guides and materials are available and counsel and assistance is available from the district public involvement specialist. Before utilizing a combination of styles, or planning an open forum format meeting, consult with the specialist. Careful planning and some extra input will be required to ensure WYDOT meets both internal goals and obligations mandated by law.

Did the meeting measure up?

Debriefing or recapping the results of a meeting sometime soon after completion will help WYDOT evaluate efforts. As part of the post-meeting review, answer the following questions:

- Did the meeting accomplish the intended goals? For instance, does the public know now what WYDOT is doing? How did the public respond? How will their involvement influence the upcoming project process?
- Did the audience represent individuals and groups expected to have an interest? If not, who still needs to be contacted to form a varied representation of stakeholders?
- What are the Department's feelings about the meeting? How the public feels about it? These feelings are bound to affect the development of the project, and it is best to start working now on "unease," whether on the public's part or WYDOT's.

Public Involvement Activities Specific to Environmental Assessments and Impact Statements

Notice of Intent

On projects requiring an environmental impact statement, federal Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations and Title 23 require that a Notice of Intent is published in the Federal Register as soon as practicable after the decision is made to prepare an EIS and before the scoping process.

The Notice of Intent is filed by the Federal Highway Administration. Information on preparing the notice is found in the FHWA Technical Advisory T 6640.8A.

Scoping

Scoping is a formal information exchange that is an essential part of the process on projects requiring an EA or EIS. Scoping must begin early in the project development process as it is required by federal regulation. To better serve the public, scoping may also be used on projects processed with Categorical Exclusions. (Scoping is described in 40 CFR Section 1501.7, CEQ Regulations and 23 CFR 771.)

Public Involvement Activities Specific to Environmental Assessments and Impact Statements

Environmental Services is responsible for scheduling and carrying out scoping for EAs and EISs. The district will make meeting arrangements, and the district public involvement specialist may assist in preparing public notices and conducting meetings.

Cooperating agencies should be asked to participate in scoping. Therefore, the first cooperating agency meeting must precede the scoping process.

Public scoping is an ongoing process during the preparation of the draft environmental document consisting of the following three parts:

- **Public comment on the scope of issues.** The objective is involvement from the public; federal, state, and local governments; and Indian tribes in the initial planning for the preparation of a draft environmental document for a project, determining the scope of the issues to be considered for the specific project areas, and formulating the depth of analysis required in the environmental document.
- **Public comment on alternatives.** The objective is public participation in identifying alternatives or the various ways the purpose and need for a project can be met. If a range of alternatives has already been identified, they should be presented for public comment. Alternatives may include various alignments or options and features, other means of transportation, or reducing the demand or need for a project.



Since public involvement is intended to determine alternatives, caution must be exercised in determining the extent of exhibits or materials provided and the perception they will give to the audience. With limited materials, people might say, “We cannot comment unless we have something to comment on.” An overabundance of materials induces people to view the exhibits as proof, “WYDOT has already chosen an alternative and is just going through the motions of obtaining public comment.” It is probably better to err on the side of caution and provide limited display exhibits.

This prevents the negative impacts of public conclusions that denigrate the value WYDOT places on public comment.

- **Public comment on findings and significant issues.** The objective is to have public comment on, and seek consensus on, which issues and alternatives are significant enough to warrant full discussion or analysis in the EA or EIS. The results serve to focus analyses, including revising scopes of work as necessary, on the most important issues, finding answers or solutions to the most pressing problems, or identifying mitigating measures for impacts that cannot be avoided.



Public hearings must meet certain legal requirements. The requirements are primarily to ensure people are notified and given a good opportunity to comment. They must meet the requirements of 23 CFR 771.111(h)(1) and (h)(2), 23 CFR 771.119(e), 23 CFR 771.123(h) and (i), and 40 CFR 1506.6

Public hearings or opportunity for a public hearing are held after the release of the draft environmental document and before the formal decisions on a project EA or EIS are made. They are most effective as part of an overall public involvement program. Public hearings offer a final opportunity for public comment right before decision-making.

Environmental Services is responsible for scheduling, advertising, and carrying out these meetings. Assistance may be sought from the district public involvement specialist in preparing additional public notices and conducting the hearing.

The district public involvement specialist can use any combination of notices, news releases, technology (including social media), and mailings to encourage interested parties to participate in the hearing. The hearing should be conducted using a participation-friendly format.

Project Delays

Priorities change and sometimes projects are set aside while others of higher priority are pursued. Inactivity causes the public and landowners affected by the project to wonder what is going on. Landowners have a special stake in the outcome of transportation decisions since they may want to make improvements or sell or purchase property.



Everyone affected should be kept informed about project development status. When a considerable amount of time has passed since the last public involvement effort, distribute a status report to keep people informed. When projects have been placed “on the shelf” or otherwise delayed, or when there has been a change in scope of work, an informational meeting may be warranted.

The Right-of-Way Program makes these contacts as they start the appraisal and acquisition process. They should obtain assistance from the district staff as necessary.

At this time, the agent contacts the landowner in writing and arranges for a meeting to discuss the plans, scheduling, and construction features of the project. The agent often accompanies the landowner on a tour of the property where impacts are likely.

Construction Information

Special provisions made part of the contract may include requirements for a specific construction notification and information plan by the contractor, mostly on urban or sensitive projects. Simple projects can be handled by the resident engineer and/or contractor through or with the assistance of the district public involvement specialist.

The plan may include a combination of the following features:

- a) Weekly (or regular) meetings with affected businesses and landowners.
- b) Posters, brochures, or other handouts (with a simple map) to distribute in the project area.
- c) Variable or dynamic message signs.
- d) Highway advisory radio—low wattage public information radio stations.
- e) Weekly (or regular) news releases or paid advertisements to newspaper, radio, and TV.
- f) Appropriate usage of new technologies and/or social media.





WYDOT’s Aeronautics Division not only adheres to all WYDOT public involvement provisions but also is subject to additional Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requirements. The FAA actively encourages community involvement in its sponsored programs. A legal mandate for community involvement is found in Public Law 94-54, which states that, “[n]o airport development project may be approved... unless... fair consideration has been given to the interest of the communities in or near which the project is located.”

Aeronautics’ role in aviation system development differs from that of other WYDOT divisions involved in infrastructure improvement, mainly because airports in the state are owned by the local community or county, and it is those authorities—not WYDOT—who directly supervise improvement work. However, Aeronautics participates in and facilitates airport planning and development involving the public. Aeronautics also develops a state system plan and other documents that require community involvement. Other activities are designed to promote exchange of information with the public, including the following:

Joint Planning Conferences

At least once every five years, Aeronautics conducts joint planning conferences at all general aviation airports to gather public input concerning upcoming airport improvements. Notices advertising these meetings are placed in local newspapers, with airport users and community leaders specifically targeted for participation. The meetings result in a revised Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for individual airports. The CIP is the primary input to federal and state funds programming, and through it, the public directly influences the airport improvement process.



Special Studies, Publications and Guides to Aviation Activities and News

On request, Aeronautics distributes publications regarding land use planning, airports, and the economic benefits of aviation. Aeronautics also dispenses special planning studies to appropriate individuals and agencies, such as city and county planning groups, airport board members, city councils, and county commissions. In addition, the division develops and distributes aeronautical publications for use in Wyoming, including aeronautical charts, airport directories, tips on mountain flying, and others.

Public Meetings – Aeronautics Commission and Local Airport Planning

Aeronautics facilitates semi-annual meetings of the Wyoming Aeronautics Commission. The Commission considers airport improvement grants, and Aeronautics staff members present information on pertinent topics to the aviation community. In addition, Aeronautics holds monthly conference calls with the Commission, and to encourage public participation, public notices about the meetings are placed in regional newspapers.

Besides sponsoring its own public meetings, Aeronautics personnel also participate in local airport planning efforts by attending public planning and construction meetings conducted by the local airport sponsor and the FAA.

References

WYDOT Operating Policy 17-8, Public Involvement Policy

WYDOT Operating Policy 18-2, Interdisciplinary Approach to Developing a Highway Project

WYDOT Operating Policy 19-6, Property Acquisition

Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 23 Part 771

Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 40 Part 1500-1508

WYDOT Contact List

Following is a summary organization list; contact the Public Affairs Office at (307) 777-4437 for additional contacts.

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Divisions

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Engineering & Planning..... (307) 777-4484
Environmental Services (307) 777-4417
Planning (307) 777-4412
Operations (307) 777-4484
Support Services (307) 777-4484
Highway Patrol (307) 777-4301
Aeronautics (307) 777-3952

District 1

3411 S. 3rd St., Ste. 1
Laramie, WY 82070
(307) 745-2100

District 2

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Casper, WY 82601
(307) 473-3200

District 3

3200 Elk Street
Rock Springs, WY 82901
(307) 352-3000

District 4

10 East Brundage Lane
Sheridan, WY 82801
(307) 674-2300

District 5

218 West C, Box 461
Basin, WY 82410
(307) 568-3400