Peninsula Regional Transportation Planning Organization

# Public Participation Protocols

*Creating Opportunities for Public Involvement in Regional Transportation Planning*

## INTRODUCTION

This documents the protocols Peninsula Regional Transportation Planning Organization (PRTPO) follows in its public participation activities. The intent is to provide the public with timely access to useful information and create meaningful processes that allow interested members to participate fully in the regional transportation planning process.

Following is a brief overview of PRTPO and its responsibilities as a state-designated Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO). This important context is followed by public information and engagement protocols for the various activities in which PRTPO is involved.

### PRTPO Overview

PRTPO is a 27-member special-purpose planning organization of local, tribal, and state governments working together under a mutual Interlocal Agreement to address transportation issues and opportunities facing the Peninsula Region. Created in 1991 as authorized by Chapter 47.80 of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW), PRTPO was re-established as an independent entity on July 1, 2019 after almost 30 years of administration by the Olympic Region of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT).

The Peninsula Region encompasses all of Clallam, Jefferson, Kitsap, and Mason Counties. PRTPO members represent four counties, nine cities, five tribes, four transit agencies, four port districts, and WSDOT. This map highlights the geography and communities within the region.




PRTPO is responsible for fulfilling all requirements of a Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) outlined in Chapter 47.80 RCW and in Chapter 468-86 of the Washington Administration Code (WAC). PRTPO receives a biennial allocation of about $275,000 in state funds with which to do its work.

# PUBLIC INFORMATION AND ENGAGEMENT

PRTPO is committed to providing timely access to information and conducting its processes in ways that support broad public participation in regional transportation planning. PRTPO is a public entity. Its meetings and events comply with requirements of Washington's Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 42.30 RCW.

PRTPO covers a large region. It does so with limited resources. For that reason, PRTPO relies on electronic communications and technology as much as possible and works to support virtual engagement opportunities that enable participation without necessitating travel.

This is a highly rural region, though; many people do not yet have access to broadband internet that makes virtual participation possible. Technology itself is a barrier for others. These are on-going considerations in how PRTPO approaches communication and engagement for its various processes.

These protocols represent best practices PRTPO strives to maintain, but its work and the opportunities for community engagement are tightly constrained by budget and staff resources. While PRTPO strives to fully satisfy these protocols, failure to comply with any provision does not by itself constitute a failure of public process nor does it render any actions or decisions by the Executive Board invalid.

This next section describes the means by which PRTPO shares information with the general public. That is followed by the engagement protocols PRTPO practices in its core work program and other activities.

## Core Work Program Activities – Public Information Protocols

Following are the primary means by which PRTPO conveys information to the public.

### *PRTPO Website*

PRTPO maintains a website at PRTPO.org. PRTPO relies on the website as its primary information portal for members and the community. The website hosts meeting materials, documents, and other resources of value to PRTPO members and the traveling public. It includes contact links to PRTPO Coordinators who can answer questions and offer more information or provide documents in alternate formats.

### *Email Distribution Lists*

PRTPO maintains a distribution list of individuals and organizations wishing to be kept apprised of meetings and other regional planning activities. This is the primary means of distributing meeting agenda packets, direct notices of events or opportunities, emerging news on topical issues, and other kinds of information appropriate for broad dissemination. When appropriate, topic-specific lists are developed to support a particular planning process or specialized subject-matter topic.

A *Contact Us* link on PRTPO's website allows visitors to sign up for future notices, ask questions, or request further information. This is promoted heavily PRTPO Coordinators, whose contact information is prominently displayed on the website. People can also request to receive future information when they sign into in-person meetings or contact PRTPO staff or policymakers.

### *Legal Notices*

When PRTPO is contemplating an action that entails a public hearing it publishes a legal notice inviting public comment on the proposed action in the newspapers of public record. PRTPO recognizes the following as its official newspapers of public record:

- Shelton-Mason County Journal
- Kitsap Sun
- Port Townsend – Jefferson County Leader
- Sequim Gazette (Sound Publishing)
- Peninsula Daily News – Clallam & Jefferson County Editions (Sound Publishing)

### *PRTPO YouTube Channel*

Video offers an increasingly viable option for communicating with the public. The PRTPO YouTube channel hosts short videos that support program activities, with links from the PRTPO website.

All materials intended for general public information or to support any kind of engagement process will be clear and understandable for the audience and intended purpose. PRTPO works to incorporate visualization when possible, including traditional maps and multi-media story maps, infographics, and other means of translating technical information for a lay audience. While complete avoidance of technical terms and acronyms is not practical, unnecessary jargon is avoided.

## Core Program Activities – Public Engagement Protocols

Following are the primary opportunities for public engagement in PRTPO activities.

### *Executive Board Meetings*

The Executive Board is the decision-making body for PRTPO. The Executive Board meets bi-monthly on the third Friday from 10:00 – 12:00. Meetings are open to the public. Every regular meeting agenda includes time for public comments.

The schedule of regular meetings for each year is set at the Executive Board's final meeting of the calendar year and is posted on the *Meetings* page of PRTPO's website.

Executive Board meetings are conducted virtually during pandemics or other instances when in-person meetings are not feasible. When post-pandemic in-person meetings resume, PRTPO intends to retain virtual access to its meetings to support participation without the barrier of travel time and distance. The desired format will coordinate video conferencing and phone-in access with in-person attendance. Details of this hybrid in-person/virtual meeting format will be developed in compliance with all requirements of Washington's Open Public Meetings Act.

Agenda and meeting materials are released electronically one week before the meeting and include details on the date, time, location, and any login information needed to access the meeting. Agenda packets are posted on the *Meetings* page of PRTPO's website and distributed directly to those on PRTPO's notification list via email.

The Executive Board is advised by a Technical Advisory Committee, an Executive Committee, and various ad hoc subcommittees as warranted. PRTPO committees and subcommittees are advisory to the Executive Board, which retains all decision-making authority. The PRTPO may make meeting materials available online to support participation of committee members, and may encourage outside participation, but these internal advisory working groups are not subject to the same Open Public Meetings Act requirements as the Executive Board. PRTPO Coordinators can offer more information to those interested in the working activities of the various committees.

### *Community Meetings*

Community meetings provide important opportunities for policymakers and staff to talk with members of the public and representatives from different constituencies to hear how issues, plans, or policies affect the people directly involved. While community meetings are tailored to individual planning process needs, each is designed to ensure engagement is occurring during the formative stage(s) of each process.

PRTPO works to ensure that its in-person community meetings are geographically dispersed across the four-county region. This typically means a minimum of four events across the region for a single topic or planning process. Every effort is made to secure accessible event locations with convenient transit service, and to schedule events so that people have a window for participating at different times of day.

PRTPO will consider opportunities to conduct virtual community meetings in the future. This includes potential use of online surveys, comment tools, and other virtual engagement techniques that facilitate the sharing of information and collection of input and ideas from the public. As noted earlier, large parts of the region do not have broadband internet access. This means that if PRTPO hosts online virtual community engagement events it will also identify appropriate means of engaging the interests of those who are likely to be under-represented given the planning topic.

In addition to its own meetings, PRTPO staff and policymakers are available on request to meet with community groups to discuss regional planning topics of interest to the group.

### *Public Hearings*

PRTPO conducts public hearings before adopting or making changes to its long-range Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and its Human Services Transportation Plan (HSTP).

Public notices are posted a minimum of two weeks before the hearing, which is typically conducted as a part of the regularly scheduled PRTPO Executive Board meeting. Legal notices are posted in the newspapers of record and on the PRTPO website.

Public testimony may be made in person as well as in writing or via email. Comments received in writing or via email are presented to the Executive Board for consideration during its review of testimony. PRTPO acknowledges receipt of all comments received during public hearings, which become part of the public record for that activity or document.

### *Special Meetings*

At times PRTPO may convene a special meeting of the Executive Board. Every attempt will be made to announce such a meeting at least five days in advance though shorter notice may be necessary depending on the nature of the meeting. Public notices of special meetings are posted on the PRTPO website, distributed through PRTPO's notification list, and filed with local newspapers providing general circulation. Opportunity for public comment at special meetings is dependent on the situation necessitating such a meeting.

### *Major Plans and Studies*

PRTPO must undertake major updates to its core planning documents periodically. This includes amendments, updates, or new versions of the RTP and HSTP. These updates, and other major planning studies, are announced through PRTPO's website and its notification lists as well as press releases and other announcements appropriate to the work being done.

Major plans and studies often warrant an integrated public involvement strategy as a part of the process. Activities are scoped and implemented with an eye towards engaging the region's diverse community early and often in accordance with the overall planning effort and available resources.

Where appropriate PRTPO engages organizations that work with specific populations or interests. PRTPO recognizes the value of trusted representatives in gleaning critical insights about diverse population groups, such as those gained from transit and non-profit service providers working with the region's most vulnerable residents.

## Relationship to PRTPO's Title VI and Environmental Justice Responsibilities

PRTPO maintains a separate Title VI Plan that complies with federal requirements concerning non-discrimination in programs and activities. Nothing in these protocols contradicts those requirements.

## Revisions to Public Participation Protocols

PRTPO will periodically revisit these protocols and update them as warranted to accommodate evolving communications and information technologies and updates to the Open Public Meetings Act, with an aim to ensure timely and reasonable public access to PRTPO's regional transportation planning program.

# CONTACT

Questions on these protocols may be directed to the Lead Planning Agency:

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