



Wisconsin Department of Transportation
Division of Transportation System Development
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Memorandum

Date: March 27, 2020

To: Project Development Chiefs
Technical Services Chiefs
Systems Planning Chiefs
Region Communication Managers
Region Environmental Coordinators

From: Jay Waldschmidt, P.E., Section Chief 
Environmental Process and Documentation Section

Subject: Interim policy on project-level public involvement

As Secretary Thompson has reminded us, transportation is an essential element of our communities. During the COVID-19 public health emergency, we are as committed as ever to continuing our important work.

This memo provides guidance on how we can continue to involve the public in the project decision-making process, while following the current state Safer at Home order (DHS EO#12).

Our goal is to establish consistency across the Department as it relates to project-level public involvement. During these fast-changing times, we need consistency in our messages.

This interim policy applies to all DTSD project-level public involvement identified in existing Public Involvement Plans, Coordination Plans and other planned public involvement activities including:

- Public Involvement Meetings (PIMs) including construction public updates
- Local Officials Meetings (LOMs)
- Project presentations to local units of government
- Project presentations to community associations and other interested groups

This interim policy **does not** apply to public hearings for projects. Public hearings have statutory, code and FDM citations that require evaluation to ensure compliance. Additional guidance will be forthcoming related to conducting public hearings.

The Department will continue to monitor crisis conditions and in-person contact restrictions. Follow-up emails will be distributed as changes to public contact restrictions occur.

Finally, it is also desired that other bureaus outside DTSD accept this interim policy for their project-level public involvement activities.

Projects without in-person public involvement activities planned for the project

- No changes are required.

Projects with in-person public involvement activities planned for the project

If there are in-person public involvement activities planned for the project:

- Consider postponing the public involvement activity until in-person meetings are allowed, provided the delay does not impact the project schedule.
- If the public involvement activity can't be delayed:
 - Contact the Region Communication Manager (RCM) to determine the appropriate virtual public involvement strategy to implement for your project.
 - Involve the Region Environmental Coordinator (REC) and Region Tribal Liaison as appropriate.

Virtual public involvement strategies available

There are many virtual public involvement strategies available. The Department selected four (4) options that have proven successful for the Department during other public involvement efforts. The four methods are:

- A PowerPoint presentation available without narration
- A PowerPoint presentation available with narration
- A YouTube Live presentation
- Conference calls and Skype may be used for Local Officials Meetings and other small group meetings as an alternative. An agenda should be provided for these meeting types.

Located on a project website, each of the first three methods would allow the public to provide comment on the project. The first two would provide for email, phone and mailed comments. The third would also allow for a real-time comment and answer process.

The selection of the method will be determined between the project team and the RCM. The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) is available to assist with the audio narration portion of a PowerPoint presentation and will be needed to conduct a YouTube Live presentation. Project teams may also contact OPA to discuss technological and hardware requirements and constraints of each option. Please include the RCM in the discussions as needed.

Any new PowerPoint presentation must follow the WisDOT PowerPoint template, which can be downloaded at <https://wigov.sharepoint.com/sites/dot/forms-docs/Pages/CommTemp.aspx>.

Alternate methods to participate in the public involvement process

Notices (news releases, postcards, newsletters, website postings, etc.) are required to include the name, phone number and email address of a project team contact. This ensures that individuals who don't have access to virtual media, or don't want to use virtual media, or don't know how to use virtual media, are afforded an opportunity to be involved in the project decision-making process.

Environmental Justice considerations and projects on lands of tribal interest

Along with providing alternative methods of participation, project teams should work with the RECs and Region Tribal Liaisons, as appropriate, to determine if public involvement materials should be written in languages other than English. This includes notices and presentations. Project teams should also evaluate opportunities for posting meeting notices in locations frequented by EJ populations. Consideration of other special outreach efforts also should be given to projects on lands of tribal interest.

If you have questions related to this interim policy, please contact Jay Waldschmidt at 608-267-9806 or by email at jay.waldschmidt@dot.wi.gov.

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