



7-5-1 Initial Public Outreach Process

March 23, 2021

1.1 Originator

Region Communications Manager

1.2 Introduction

Public involvement and outreach are an important component of design and construction projects. PDS staff should work closely with the Region Communication Manager (RCM) on best practices and right-sizing for each project. Early and often communication with the public can help move the project through design and construction.

1.3 Process

One useful method of initial public notification is a typed letter and informational survey. The letter and survey form should be sent out to the property owners on the initial stakeholders list 1-2 months prior to field survey being started so that any special instructions or owners' concerns can be passed along to the surveyors. This process is low cost and useful for improvement projects of all sizes and scopes. See [SWIG 3-1-20](#) for more information on the Stakeholder List.

The first paragraph(s) of the letter should describe the scope of the project. There should be a paragraph stating when a public involvement meeting is planned and when construction is anticipated. (If the project is advanceable, state the earlier year of planned construction and note that this date is contingent on funding being available. You should still list the base construction year.) Inform the public of other investigations that will be happening during the design process. Reference the statute that allows WisDOT and its representatives to access private property for project purposes. In closing, state that WisDOT indeed does want to hear back from them. Finally, decide a main point of contact for the public and direct all correspondence through them; typically, this is the project manager. The [Initial Letter to Property Owners template](#) can be used when creating the letter. You will need to modify the template to use your property owner address list, preferably by using the mail merge feature of Microsoft Word®. See the reference section of this article for a link to videos on how to use mail merge in Microsoft Word®.

There are two versions of the survey form available for use depending on the type of project. These surveys are not mandatory; however, the survey feedback can help refine the scope and improvements. The [Property Owner Urban Survey](#) has questions tailored to an urban environment and the [Property Owner Rural Survey](#) has questions tailored to a rural environment. Pick the one suited to your project. The letter, survey form, and a business reply envelope are sent to each property owner on your stakeholder list. (You may also want to send one to the local municipality, so they are aware that these letters were sent out in case they receive questions about the project.)

When you receive responses, it is good practice to scan them and place them in Box under your project's Public Involvement folder. Also, place any emails or [phone conversation logs](#) from stakeholders in this folder as well to track your public input. Remember to update your stakeholder lists if you are notified of a different address to send future correspondence to or get a letter marked as return to sender. Comments are useful for further environmental process documentation and investigations. One method of filing for easy retrieval is placing all comments into one PDF file and using bookmarks to list the address and owner name can help you find comments quicker in the future as bookmarks can be arranged in order more easily than pages. Another option that works well is to place a hyperlink in your stakeholder list next to the property owner's name that points to the individual comment file saved in your "Public Involvement" folder.

All public involvement materials must follow the [WisDOT Style Guide](#). For example, IH 90/94 should be written as I-90/94; STH 23 should be written as WIS 23; and CTH J should be written as County J.

1.4 References

The public involvement process is described in a general manner in [FDM Chapter 6](#) and examples of public outreach techniques are described in [FDM 6-5-15](#).

[DOT Letterhead](#) (*link available to internal staff only*)

[Initial Letter to Property Owners template](#)

[Property Owner Rural Survey](#)

[Property Owner Urban Survey](#)

[Phone Conversation Log](#)

[Microsoft Word® Mail Merge Tutorial](#) (under advanced Word tutorials) - *link available to internal staff only*

You can also do a search for "mail merge" under Microsoft Office® help, or online using YouTube® for other instructions on using the mail merge feature.

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3/23/2021

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7-5-5 Public Involvement Plan

March 23, 2021

5.1 Originator

Region Communications Manager

5.2 Introduction

Every project must include some element of public involvement. WisDOT public involvement plans and activities are designed to effectively involve the public early and often in the process so that the project decisions made are in the best overall interest. Good public involvement is integral to good transportation planning. Without meaningful public participation, there is a risk of making poor decisions, or decisions that have unintended, negative consequences. With it, it is possible to make a lasting contribution to the quality of life. It is more than an agency requirement and fulfilling statutory obligations. It is central to good decision making.

The public includes individuals or organizations, groups, municipalities and businesses. Consider all avenues of the transportation industry such as rail, freight, transit, roads, or other modes. Include underserved or minority populations, all income levels, races, and cultures to represent the widest variety of input, opinions, and feedback.

5.3 Process

The Public Involvement Plan (PIP) should be developed for every project regardless of scope and location. The PIP should also be reviewed by the project team and RCM during the milestones of the 30%, 60%, and Pre-PS&E approval process. Slight changes may occur during these reviews based on discussions with the RCM, such as additional public/business outreach or consideration of another Public Involvement Meeting (PIM).

Effective public involvement is attained through the implementation of various techniques designed to accomplish one or more of the following objectives:

1. Identify, inventory, and define key populations affected by a project.
2. Foster the public's trust by identifying key community plans, issues, priorities, and values.
3. Utilize a process to effectively capture the public's input.
4. Inform citizens of meetings or events and why they may want to participate.
5. Encourage citizens to participate and gain buy in for the proposed project using appropriate methods.
6. Analyze project alternatives and their impacts on the community and the environment.
7. Promote and conduct public interaction through direct and indirect methods.
8. Resolve differences and conflict in a professional and respectful manner.
9. Monitor impacts related to recently completed projects.
10. Document and evaluate the effectiveness of all public involvement activities.

Public involvement is a very important part of the overall communication plan for a project. Please refer to [FDM 2-20-5.8](#) - Communication Management and other references in FDM 2-20 for a discussion of communication from a project management perspective.

[Download the Public Involvement Plan \(PIP\) template](#). The completed PIP document should be included as an attachment within the Environmental Document.

5.4 References

View the [public involvement templates](#), and scroll to the bottom of the page under “Public involvement forms and templates”.

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7-5-10 Public Involvement Meeting (PIM)

March 23, 2021

10.1 Originator

Region Communications Manager

10.2 Introduction

A public involvement meeting (PIM) is used for WisDOT to disseminate information and to give the public an opportunity to voice their viewpoint about a particular plan, project, or alternative. This is only one of many possible techniques (see [FDM 6-5-15](#)) that could be used to involve the public and is one of the most effective tools to achieve that goal.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual public involvement components must be evaluated. Contact the Region Communication Manager (RCM) to determine the appropriate virtual public involvement strategy to implement for your project. You may also want to involve the Region Environmental Coordinator (REC) and Region Tribal Liaison as appropriate.

10.3 Process

Notifications to property and business owners about the PIM should involve a written letter detailing the project scope, anticipated schedule, meeting format (in-person or virtual) as well as project contact. A comment form should be included with the letter, and the recipient should be encouraged to submit feedback throughout the project. [Download the comment form template](#).

PIMs provide an opportunity for face-to-face communication between staff and interested citizens. The meetings are informal and held at various times depending upon the audiences' needs. Handouts, exhibits, and displays should be available to inform the public about proposed actions and facilitate questions in return. Project staff should be stationed at key locations in the meeting area to interact with those in attendance.

A formal presentation can be given to convey key information about a project. Often the project manager or a consultant will act as the presenter. He or she should have an in-depth understanding of the project, the challenges, opportunities, and risks, as well as the proposed alternatives. Using visuals such as PowerPoint may enhance understanding of the project.

[Download the WisDOT PowerPoint template](#).

The person presenting should be comfortable answering questions following the presentation or be able to refer them to on-site staff. Being able to present information to a group of people in an effective manner takes practice; be professional, engaging, and insightful when conducting a presentation.

Meetings are often held with legislators and local officials, preceding, and following those held with the general public. These meetings are an opportunity to give legislators and local officials a preview of what their constituents will be seeing or to tell them what we heard at the public involvement meeting. Briefing legislators and local officials before and after a public involvement meeting will prepare them to answer constituent questions and concerns about the project.

WisDOT staff should schedule. If consultant staff are hired for the project, this task is often delegated to them according to the Public Involvement Plan (see [FDM 6-5-10](#)).

Coordinate with an RCM about sending a news release to area media to announce the PIM. [Download the PIM templates](#). Typically, news releases are sent one to two weeks in advance of an in-person PIM. For virtual PIMs,

news releases are often sent shortly after the project website is up to date.

10.4 References

View [FDM 6-10 Public Involvement Meetings](#).

View the [interim policies for virtual public involvement](#) due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Region Environmental Coordinator - Jennifer Grimes, jennifer.grimes@dot.wi.gov

Region Environmental Coordinator - Brian Taylor, brian.taylor@dot.wi.gov

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7-5-11 Public Involvement Meeting (PIM) Video Presentation

Updated December 21, 2021

11.1 Originator

Region Communications Manager

11.2 Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual public involvement components must be evaluated. Contact the Region Communication Manager (RCM) to determine the appropriate virtual public involvement strategy to implement for your project. **For example, a resurfacing project would not need a narrated presentation while an intersection reconfiguration would benefit from a presentation video. If you are unsure if you need to create a narrated PowerPoint presentation, talk with an RCM to determine the best practices and right-sizing for your project.**

You may also want to involve the Region Environmental Coordinator (REC) and Region Tribal Liaison as appropriate.

11.3 Process

Attached are the instructions for adding narration to the PowerPoint presentation.

[How to Create PIM PowerPoint Video with Audio](#)

To ensure consistency with WisDOT Style Guide and department messaging, please coordinate with the RCM to review the PowerPoint slides and associated notes/script prior to narration. You need to allow at least three business days for RCM review of the presentation prior to recording. Once approved, follow the above instructions to create the PowerPoint video with narration. You will need to send the following information to the RCM (via Box link is preferred):

- PowerPoint presentation exported as a video file (i.e., mp4)
- Closed captioning file as a Word document (based off notes/script)
- Short title and description of the project; see below example
 - **Title:** Public involvement for US 18/151 and County F intersection project near Blue Mounds, Dane County
 - **Description:** WisDOT is proposing improvements to the US 18/151 and County F intersection near the Village of Blue Mounds in Dane County, which is scheduled for construction in 2025. This public involvement presentation provides an overview on the project and proposed alternatives. More information on the US 18/151 and County F intersection project can be found at <https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/projects/by-region/sw/us18-bluemounds/default.aspx>.

View [examples of past PIM videos on YouTube](#).

The RCM will coordinate directly with the Office of Public Affairs for posting on the WisDOT YouTube Channel.

Allow at least three business days for this process. Once uploaded, the RCM will send the project manager a link to the video which can be added to the project website and other project materials.

11.4 References

[How to Create PIM PowerPoint Video with Audio](#)

[Examples of past PIM videos on YouTube](#)

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7-5-15 Project Websites

Updated February 7, 2022

15.1 Originator

Region Communications Manager

15.2 Introduction

Project websites provide a valuable service to stakeholders living or working in the vicinity of a WisDOT project as well as the traveling public. Websites can serve as a critical part of the public outreach process during the design phase, especially for projects with moderate and high levels of business and/or property impacts. In addition to providing this expected service among our customers, ultimately websites can improve efficiency to respond to inquiries from the public and stakeholders, including the media and legislative offices.

Websites for local program projects will not be created by WisDOT. Instead, they should be the responsibility of the local sponsor.

15.3 Process

Outlined below is a process to list specific projects on the WisDOT website. It is important to include multiple forms of communication with WisDOT staff. For example, websites should include a comment form ([download the template](#)) for standard mail; as well as email address and phone number of the project manager and RCM.

Download the [WisDOT Website Request Form](#) and send to the RCMs once completed.

Projects in design: Most projects, unless agreed by management as unnecessary due to scope and/or limited impacts of the project, requires a website in advance of the construction year. Websites should be developed prior to a Public Involvement Meeting (PIM), if one is warranted, even if the project scope or final alternatives have not yet been established. At a minimum, basic information such as the need for the project, project limits, traffic impacts, schedule and project contacts should be included.

In general, the greater the number of businesses, property owners and highway users impacted by construction, the earlier the need to establish a website.

With any reconstruction project, WisDOT recognizes that businesses located in or near construction zones face unique challenges. WisDOT's [In This Together](#) webpage is designed for businesses facing road construction in their community. The link should be shared with businesses in your work zone.

WisDOT has launched a new business coordination guide as part of the In This Together program. We ask all staff who conduct public and business outreach to review the new guide and begin to incorporate it as part of your outreach materials. The new guide and a one-page quick guide can be found at wisconsindot.gov/together. We want to be as proactive and effective as possible in working with business owners impacted by upcoming construction.

Please connect with the Region Communications Manager (RCM) on any questions on how to transition to the

new guide. Your RCM can also direct you to presentation materials to incorporate in your outreach.

All staff engaged in business outreach are asked to work with their RCM to document successes, challenges and lessons learned on select projects (not an exhaustive list).

Projects in construction: The region best practice is to establish a website by the beginning of the calendar year in which construction projects are scheduled to start. The essential information needed is:

Project description - one paragraph or bullet points (project ID not needed)

Map - please provide highway number and the project limits (to be used for a Google map)

Expected schedule - general time frame is adequate

Traffic impacts - detours, traffic staging information

Contact person - DOT project manager

The information can be forwarded by email or Word document to the Region Communications Manager.

Additional information can be added as needed. However, the goal is to provide a brief overview with the basic information most commonly sought by the public, along with a WisDOT contact name for additional assistance.

Project websites are moved to the [511 Construction Projects website](#) when construction begins.

News releases and traffic advisories are distributed to area media outlets in advance of the construction start and major traffic impacts. Coordinate with the RCM to determine the appropriate timeline to announce the construction work.

Planning studies: Consult with the RCM to determine website needs for planning studies.

15.4 References

[WisDOT Website Request Form](#)

<https://projects.511wi.gov/>

[WisDOT's "In This Together" Website](#)

[Southwest Region Highway Projects and Studies](#)

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7-5-20 Media Contacts

Updated March 23, 2021

20.1 Originator

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20.2 Introduction

With program responsibility that affects virtually every citizen in the state, WisDOT employees are called upon to answer questions from the public, local officials, the legislature, and news media. Most of these public contacts are routine.

WisDOT maintains an open-door policy with the media. Each story contributes to the perception the public has about the department. A media interview is an opportunity to promote our organization and our transportation projects. We welcome and invite this visibility. Project manager contact information is listed on web pages, news releases, newsletters and other public information materials, making it likely that you will receive media questions and interview requests.

Media requests for local program projects are the responsibility of the locals.

20.3 Process

When a reporter calls you directly:

Get a clear understanding of what the story is about and the topics to be discussed. Then, there are two routes you can take:

- If it appears to be a routine interview (i.e. an update on project schedule, construction details, or traffic impacts) you can set up a time to conduct the interview or provide the information at the time of the call. The media generally expect same-day responses, so responding must be a priority. Radio and newspaper interviews can be conducted over the phone. On-camera television interviews will need to be scheduled for a time and location, usually on the same day you receive the call.
- If it appears to be a sensitive issue, hot topic, or an issue you are not prepared to discuss, make note of the reporter's contact information and deadline, and respond that somebody will be getting back to him or her. Bring the request to your supervisor and the regional communications manager.

Conducting the interview

Schedule the interview so you have time to prepare your messages and become mentally prepared. Develop three or four primary messages using simple, positive statements.

With proper preparation and a clear message, you will be more comfortable with the interview and your chances for success are greatly enhanced. Treat the reporter as you would any other professional. Provide handouts such as copies of web pages, newsletters, or PIM presentations for background.

The Region Communications Manager can assist with message development and interview preparation if you desire. Talk with the RCM on best practices and mock interviews, if interested.

Here are basic tips for conducting interviews:

- Speak concisely using language that anyone can understand. Don't use technical jargon or complicated words.
- Repeat, repeat, repeat your key messages. The media will use only a fraction of your comments. Repeating your main messages makes it more likely that one or more will be used in the story.
- When answering a question, provide one of your key messages first and then elaborate if necessary.
- Have notes handy for reference.
- Keep statistics to a minimum.
- Never give "no comment" as an answer. Explain that this is not your area of expertise and will be happy to get back to them with the information.
- Don't feel rushed. Answer each question completely. Pause after the question is asked in order to gather your thoughts.
- Have the interviewer clarify questions you don't understand.

For television interviews, in addition to the points above:

- Look at the reporter, not at the camera.
- Gesture as you would in normal conversation.
- Ignore silence. Do not feel like you need to start talking. Pause to formulate your response.

20.4 References

[Public Involvement Guidance for Transportation Projects](#)

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7-5-25 Local Officials Meeting

March 23, 2021

25.1 Originator

Region Communications Manager

25.2 Introduction

Similar to a Public Involvement Meeting, a Local Officials Meeting is an opportunity for local officials (i.e., mayor, administrators, board of directors, etc.) to learn more about the project. Staff can talk with an RCM on best practices on timing of a local officials meeting; it is often a case-by-case basis. For urban projects, it is recommended to host a separate local officials meeting.

25.3 Process

Follow the Public Involvement Meeting process with the exception to only include the local officials. You can also coordinate with the RCM on best practices for conducting a Local Officials Meeting.

Typically, a Local Officials Meeting is held prior to the Public Involvement Meeting for more personalized dialogue and partnership discussion.

25.4 References

View the [FDM 6-10 Public Involvement Meetings](#).

View the [interim policies for virtual public involvement](#) due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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7-5-30 Local Business Coordination/Meeting

March 23, 2021

30.1 Originator

Region Communications Manager

30.2 Introduction

A Local Business Coordination meeting is held prior to the start of construction. It is an opportunity for the project team to share the latest information on the project schedule, construction staging, access and project website. Business coordination meetings should be considered during the design phase for urban projects.

30.3 Process

Work with the RCM to identify the best practice to conduct a Local Business Coordination meeting. These meetings should be considered for urban projects. Another recommendation is to involve the local chamber of commerce, municipality and/or economic development group to help engage the businesses impacted by the construction project.

Business meetings may be held monthly throughout the construction project, or through routine construction updates via email.

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