



## FDM 6-10-1 Public Involvement Meetings (PIM)

September 19, 2014

### 1.1 Description

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.

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 threats, as well as the proposed alternatives. Using visuals such as PowerPoint may enhance understanding of the project. The person presenting should be comfortable answering questions following the presentation or be able to refer them to on-site staff. Presenting is a skill that not everyone has; be professional, engaging, and insightful when conducting a presentation.

Informal 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.

The region or the project consultant schedules meetings according to the Public Involvement Plan (see [FDM 6-5-10](#)).

### 1.2 Public Involvement Meeting(s) Needed

Some method to inform the public about a proposed project and allow the public to provide feedback should be included as part of the Public Involvement Plan for every project.

An internal WisDOT meeting prior to scoping is a good format to discuss whether there is a need to hold a PIM(s) or if another format is appropriate for gathering public input. Consider inviting local officials to this meeting to get their opinion on public involvement methods. The unit of government sponsoring the project should hold a meeting prior to scoping to make this determination when the project is part of the Local Roads Program.

It is the project manager's responsibility to ensure PIMs or other opportunities to gather public comment are included in the Public Involvement Plan as appropriate.

### 1.3 Number of Public Involvement Meeting(s) to be Held

There is no requirement to hold a specific number of PIMs. The appropriate timing of conducting PIMs depends on various factors. Holding PIMs at major project-development milestones is a good guideline for making this determination. If the project corridor is long and goes through multiple municipalities, consider holding multiple PIMs on separate nights.

#### 1.3.1 Project Scoping

A PIM at the earliest stage of project development is especially important on projects that:

- are controversial
- have a high degree of community/political opposition
- have the potential for substantial impacts on the socio-economic, natural, or physical environment
- require capacity improvements that will increase the footprint of the roadway
- projects in which concerns have been raised by the local officials or the community

PIMs held during public-level scoping activities of the Concept Definition Phase provide an opportunity to involve the public in an upcoming project at the earliest possible point in the design process. It lets the public discuss

issues and concerns about the project and the roadway itself, comment on project purpose and need, and allows designers to collect information from the public.

These meetings should take place before the project design plans start to prevent the public perception that project staff have already decided the course of action. This fosters trust and openness between the project staff and the public. The goal of these meetings is to reach concurrence with the public on project scope before entering the investigation phase of the design process.

### **1.3.2 Preliminary Alternative Screening**

If the project is complex and involves screening of multiple alternatives, another PIM should be held when preliminary alternatives are available for public review and comment. Displays with all alternatives being considered and those that have been eliminated from further consideration should be available for review.

Provide markers so the public can provide layouts of other alternatives they believe may meet the project purpose and need. Have notepads available so the public can include comments about specific alternatives and make notes of errors or omissions that may be found on the aerial.

### **1.3.3 Final Alternative Screening**

If the project included multiple preliminary alternatives that were narrowed down, another PIM should be considered to get public input on those alternatives remaining and the reasons for elimination of other alternatives. The reasons for those alternatives retained and those eliminated from further consideration should be clearly explained at this meeting.

Another primary focal point of this meeting should be a more detailed explanation of the potential impacts of the remaining alternatives. This will allow the public to provide specific comments on those impacts identified by the project team and assist the project team in ensuring all potential impacts have been evaluated.

Efforts made to avoid impacts and opportunities to minimize, mitigate, or compensate for potential avoidable impacts should be identified to the extent practicable.

### **1.3.4 Selected Alternative Screening**

When a final alternative has been selected and a public hearing on the decision is not required (see [FDM 6-15](#)), it may be appropriate to hold another PIM to inform the public of the decision.

### **1.3.5 Project Scope Change**

If a change in project scope is made after the last public involvement meeting, an additional public involvement meeting is required.

Changes in project scope that require an additional public involvement meeting include, but are not limited to:

- Change in the proposed WisDOT Project Classification
- Substantial addition to or reduction in the length of the project
- Substantial addition of work on a connecting roadway
- The addition of a new roadway to the proposed project
- Substantial increase to the context or intensity of project impacts.

Another public hearing may be required if the project scope change occurred after the public hearing on the draft environmental document.

### **1.3.6 Design Change**

Additional public involvement opportunities may be needed when there is a change in the proposed project design.

Changes in the proposed project design are typically modifications that don't result in a substantial increase to the context or intensity of project impacts. Some examples are: changing the intersection type, a minor addition to the length of the project, a minor addition of work on a connecting roadway, changing from a ditch cross-section to curb and gutter, minor changes to the roadway width, etc.

If a design change occurs to the proposed project after the last public involvement meeting or the public hearing, the project team must consult with the Environmental Process and Document Section Region Liaison to determine if additional public involvement is required. The Environmental Process and Document Section Region Liaison will determine if FHWA Wisconsin Division Office staff should be included in the decision making process.

The level of additional public involvement needed can also vary based on the type and location of the proposed design change. Additional public involvement could include meeting with individual property owners, holding a

public involvement meeting for those members of the public directly impacted by the design change or holding another public involvement meeting for the entire public. The appropriate level of public involvement will be determined during the consultation process.

In rare cases, another public hearing may be required if the project scope change occurs after the public hearing on the draft environmental document.

### **1.3.7 Time Lapse Between the Last Public Involvement Meeting**

If there has been a time lapse of two (2) years or more between the last public involvement meeting and final environmental document approval, the project team must consult with the Environmental Process and Document Section Region Liaison to determine if additional public involvement is required. The Environmental Process and Document Section Region Liaison will determine if FHWA Wisconsin Division Office staff should be included in the decision making process.

### **1.3.8 Time Lapse Between Major Project Actions**

When each major project action occurs, following the approval of a draft or final environmental document, the document is re-evaluated to determine whether or not the environmental document is still valid. If the re-evaluation determines that there have been changes in the project scope, changes in project impacts, changes to the existing environment of the project area, changes in proposed mitigation measures or changes in laws that would result in the need to prepare a supplemental or new environmental document, additional public involvement will be required. Major actions include: final environmental document approval, PS&E approval, substantial acquisition of right-of-way, and construction.

Additionally, if it is determined that a substantial time lapse has occurred between major project actions, typically three (3) years or more, a written re-evaluation (see [FDM 20-40-10](#)) will likely be required.

If a written re-evaluation is required, the project team must consult with the Environmental Process and Document Section Region Liaison and FHWA Wisconsin Division Office staff to determine if additional public involvement is required and the appropriate level of public involvement.

### **1.3.9 Pre-construction and Construction**

Holding PIMs prior to the start of construction and during construction (as needed) allows the project manager and contractor to provide the affected public with timely updates regarding access closures, utility interruptions and location of work activity. It also gives the public an opportunity to ask questions about potential construction impacts and inform the construction team of any concerns related to those impacts.

### **1.3.10 Issue-Specific Project Development Actions**

There are other issue-specific project development actions that may require a separate public involvement meeting and other actions for which the project team could consider holding a separate public involvement meeting.

When noise barriers have been determined a feasible and reasonable method of noise abatement, a separate public involvement meeting must be held (See [FDM 23-35-20](#)).

If Community Sensitive Solutions will be incorporated in final design, the project team could consider conducting a separate public involvement meeting to receive input from the general public. This public involvement meeting would typically occur late in the project development process when a selected alternative has been identified.

## **1.4 Developing a Public Involvement Meeting**

The following guidelines may be used for developing an effective PIM:

1. Before the Meeting
  - A. Determine a time for the meeting that is convenient for most community members (not conflicting with local functions). Evening meetings are often more suitable for the public. Contact local officials to find out a time that is most convenient and the best location for the meeting.
  - B. Before booking a site, be sure the meeting place is accessible as required under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (see [FDM 6-5-20](#)). WisDOT or its consultants may not hold public meetings without providing wheelchair accessibility to the meeting.
  - C. Inform citizens and groups of the meeting's purpose, date, and time. Announce meeting two to three weeks in advance. Mailings and notices in local newspapers can be effective for this purpose. All notices should include information on how people who are deaf or hard of hearing or blind or have low vision can access services. This includes using TDD or the Wisconsin

Telecommunication Relay System (see [FDM 6-5-20.5](#)), as well as the option to request an interpreter at the meeting.

- D. For projects that may involve the acquisition of right-of-way interest, a notice of the PIM should be mailed to all property owners adjacent to the project.
- E. Assign tasks to specific people. A meeting checklist with timeline, task list, and task assignments is helpful and alleviates confusion.
- F. Schedule a "dry run" of the meeting to anticipate any problems with logistical or technology issues. Resolve all problems before the meeting begins.
- G. Determine staff who will be present and make sure they know what their role is so they are adequately prepared. Departmental staff working on the project should be there to respond to audience questions in their areas of expertise.
- H. Be sure one staff person is assigned to handle questions from the media. Let all staff working at the PIM know who has been assigned that role.
- I. All visual material shown at the meeting must be easy to see by everyone, use clear language, and be easy to understand.
- J. Arrive early to allow time for setting up exhibits, computers, displays, tables and chairs, and other needed logistics. Make sure to test all audio/visual equipment. If a project statement is used, clearly identify it so participants understand the different components.

## 2. During the Meeting

- A. Be warm and welcoming. Thank attendees for participating and ask them to put their name and address on the sign-in sheet so that they will be informed of future project developments.

Provide attendees with a Public Involvement comment form. Explain that the form can be filled out and submitted at the meeting or returned by the date specified on the form.

A handout providing proposed project details and project team contact information should be considered for use at the public involvement meetings.

These above-mentioned forms are on the environmental programs forms and tools website.

<https://wisconsin.gov/Pages/doing-business/eng-consultants/cnslt-rsrcs/environment/formsandtools.aspx>

- B. All staff attending the PIM should also add their name to the sign-in sheet. It may be important to prove you attended later.
- C. If there are legislators in the attendance, ask them before the meeting if they would like to be introduced. Make a special effort to talk to the legislators to determine if there is any additional information they require about the proposed project.
- D. When responding to audience questions, do not dominate the discussion with lengthy comments. Keep answers short and speak in non-technical language. Give direct responses, but if you do not know an answer, find a staff member that can help.
- E. Use an informal or semi-formal structure that encourages citizen input and responses. A group presentation with an optional question and answer can be a valuable tool in getting additional public input for the proposed project and should be strongly considered for incorporation in the PIP. If a group presentation is made, the public will typically expect an opportunity to ask question and get answers.
- F. Use simple visual aids, photo-log, etc., to clarify the project and have enough information so people are well informed.
- G. Be receptive to citizen input even if it is emotional; note their reactions and suggestions and ask them why they feel that way. Be professional and objective when comments or criticisms are directed at the project design. Maintain a calm demeanor, but do not let one or two people take over the meeting with continued negativity.
- H. Present all viable alternatives at the meeting. Alternatives can be presented using maps, renderings, hypothetical examples or case studies, photographs of sites, project overlays, etc. Clearly explain the advantages and disadvantages using qualitative or quantitative methods in clear, understandable terms. It is important that all participants understand the alternatives presented and that their input and viewpoint is important.

- I. Also include an exhibit of all alternatives previously analyzed that have been eliminated from further consideration.
  - J. Remember that you are representing the Department. Assume every statement you make about the proposed action could be cited by another source.
  - K. Staff may choose to record individual comments or group presentations. If individual comments will be recorded, staff should first get verbal permission from the person. If a group presentation will be recorded (either by video, audio, or both), the presentation facilitator should announce that the entire presentation, including public comments and questions, will be recorded. The recordings must be made part of the administrative record and retained similar to other items included as part of the administrative record.
3. After the Meeting
- A. Be sure to respond to unanswered questions in a timely fashion if a response was requested by a member of the public or a legislator.
  - B. Retain notes of individual or group discussions in the project file.
  - C. Consider holding a debriefing session after the PIM so everyone has a chance to hear what you heard. This technique is especially valuable when the PIM is held in multiple rooms or on multiple days.

### **1.5 Standardized Public Involvement Meeting Sign-In Sheet and Comment Form**

The Public Involvement Meeting Sign-in Sheet and the Public Involvement Meeting Comment Form are the only form formats that should be used at PIMs. The reverse side of the Public Involvement Meeting Comment Form should include a mailing label and pre-paid postage. These forms are on the environmental programs forms and tools website.

<https://wisconsin.gov/Pages/doing-business/eng-consultants/cnsit-rsrcs/environment/formsandtools.aspx>

### **1.6 Public Involvement Meeting and Section 4(f) *De Minimis* Findings**

Be sure to provide the public with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the impacts of the proposed project as they relate to Section 4(f) resources. This is particularly important if a Section 4(f) *De Minimis* finding could be applicable to any of the proposed actions.

Displays at the PIM should be clearly labeled to identify all Section 4(f) resources. For example, an exhibit should identify the boundaries of a park or parkway including appropriate labels to indicate the name of the resource and other important features. The proposed build alternative(s) displays should clearly show the impacts that will occur throughout the project as well as those impacts on the 4(f) resource. If handouts are provided, include a description of the 4(f) resources and a brief discussion of the potential impact(s). There is no requirement to use the words "Section 4(f)" or "*De Minimis* finding".

### **1.7 Facilitating Public Events and Meetings**

Facilitating meetings, hearings, or other events is critical and used to gain valuable information to move forward. A facilitator should know the audience, anticipate questions, acknowledge behaviors, and be able to negotiate skillfully. Understand what facilitation tools can be used and how to use them. Not only will the meeting run smoother but better outcomes will likely result.

### **1.8 Local Unit of Government Board and Committee Meetings**

Providing a presentation during a local unit of government board meeting or other regularly scheduled committee meeting is a method for satisfying PIM requirements for some types of low-impact projects such as roadway resurfacing. When this method is used, the project team should ensure that the project is included in the governmental board or committee's agenda.

Written notification of the project team presentation should be mailed to property owners who use the roadway to access their property or depend on the roadway for customer access to their business.

A separate news release, indicating that the project team will be making this presentation at the board or committee meeting, should also be issued in the local newspaper encouraging attendance by those persons interested in the project.

Prior to issuing the news release, the project team should determine what level of public input will be allowed by the board or committee. If no public input is allowed, the project team should make arrangements to stay after their presentation to answer questions in another location of the building. If project controversy is anticipated, other methods of public involvement should also be incorporated into the Public Involvement Plan.