

Humboldt County Association of Governments

Public Participation Plan Update

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Chapter 2. Federal and State Requirements	2
Chapter 3. Objectives & Policies	5
Chapter 4. Opportunities for Public Participation.....	6
Chapter 5. Public Involvement Practices	8
Table 1. HCAOG Public Outreach 2023-2025	17
Chapter 6. Public Participation Processes for Specific Plans	18

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Purpose of the Public Participation Plan

The HCAOG Public Participation Plan (PPP) is meant to inform the public and other stakeholders about HCAOG's public participation process. The PPP describes how HCAOG disseminates information and solicits public comment for development and review of HCAOG transportation programs and projects. HCAOG recognizes the importance of accessible public participation and diverse engagement, as well as interagency and intergovernmental participation, to effectively meet the transportation needs of Humboldt County.

The PPP serves as a directive to HCAOG staff in the course of daily work activities and when conducting public participation for plans including, but not limited to, the:

- Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)
- Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP)
- Annual Overall Work Program (OWP) & Budget
- Administration of Transit Development Act (TDA) funds
- Transportation Development Act Unmet Transit Needs Report of Findings
- Federal and State Grant Programs
- Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan
- Transit studies

The PPP is being updated to ensure that HCAOG's methods and practices are consistent with current best practices. In particular, HCAOG is interested in making sure that we have adequate procedures in place to engage low-income and disadvantaged groups.

HCAOG Duties

The Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG) was formed in 1968 under Government Code Section 6500, et seq., of the California Government Code (Title 1, Division 7, Chapter 5, Article 1) as Joint Powers Authority (JPA). Statewide, JPA's were formed recognizing that there are issues which transcend local boundaries and must be dealt with by local governments working together and planning a unified local response to regional concerns. HCAOG's JPA was signed by representatives from the eight local governments in the region. In its beginnings, the purpose of HCAOG was to "advise, plan for, and suggest solutions to common problems and qualify the local jurisdictions to receive allocation of state and federal funds".

In 1972, HCAOG was designated by the State of California as the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for the County of Humboldt. RTPAs were created as a result of the requirements of Section 29532 of the Government Code. In 1993, HCAOG was designated as the Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) for the region. In 2016, HCAOG was designated as the Local Transportation Authority by the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors.

As the RTPA, HCAOG provides a forum to plan, discuss, and study Humboldt County's transportation issues. HCAOG prepares and adopts a Regional Transportation Plan, among other documents and serves as the regional agency for local, state, and federal transportation programs and funding opportunities.

Humboldt County Population

Humboldt County is a geographically diverse region located in northwestern California. The County encompasses 3,500 square miles of forested mountains, river valleys, coastal terraces, agricultural lands and coastline. Humboldt County's 2025 population of 133,817, as estimated by the State Controller's Office is located as follows:

- Eureka (26,122)
- Arcata (19,001)
- Fortuna (12,198)
- Rio Dell (3,232)
- Ferndale (1,361)
- Blue Lake (1,136)
- Trinidad (296)
- Unincorporated areas (70,471)

Chapter 2. Federal and State Requirements

HCAOG has developed the PPP to comply with state and federal law. As a federal fund recipient, HCAOG is required to include this PPP as part of their Title VI Program. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) requires that each RTPA have a documented public involvement process consistent with Title 23 CFR 450.210(a). Public participation shall comply with PRC Section 5097.94 relating to authority of Native American Heritage Commission and PRC Section 21073 through 21084.3 regarding consultation with tribal governments and protection of tribal cultural resources (AB 52).

The Caltrans Regional Planning Handbook requires the Public Participation Involvement Plan to incorporate the following guiding principles:

- Be developed in consultation with all interested parties.
- Provide all interested parties with reasonable opportunities to comment on the contents of the transportation plan.
- Include people who have been traditionally underserved by the transportation system and services in the region.

The Public Participation Plan should take into consideration the transportation system as a whole in addition to seeking to understand the interplay and impact of transportation on other regional factors such as the economy, the environment, and quality of life.

In addition to the specific requirements outlined in the Caltrans Handbook, there are other laws that require transportation planning agencies to have public involvement programs. Certain federal and State statutes specifically require entities that receive public funds to carry out open, public processes. The laws direct agencies to make reasonable and proactive efforts to give all stakeholders an opportunity to voice their opinions. Most laws set general directives; some set specific requirements and/or offer guidelines.

The PPP was developed and is updated in accordance with guidelines established by Executive Orders or federal, state, or local regulations including those listed below:

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)

The federal transportation bill, IIJA was signed into law on November 6, 2021. Like the FAST Act that preceded it, public involvement remains a hallmark of the planning process and IIJA directs transportation planning agencies to outreach and consult with all interested parties throughout the agencies' planning process. The goal, and the direction, is that all interested parties have reasonable opportunities to comment on transportation plans and programs.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

The purpose of NEPA is to ensure that federal agencies consider environmental factors before deciding on discretionary policies, projects, and programs. California's multidisciplinary environmental law, CEQA, requires state and local agencies to identify the significant environmental impacts of their actions and to avoid or mitigate those impacts, if feasible. Both CEQA and NEPA require an agency such as HCAOG to conduct public participation programs to inform the public and identify community concerns. Under Assembly Bill 52, CEQA requires lead agencies to consult with tribes at the commencement of a project and to consider potential impacts to a tribal cultural resource.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 enacted legislation prohibiting discrimination by recipients of federal funds on the basis of race, color, and national origin, including matters related to language access for Limited English Proficient (LEP) person. The objectives of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 are:

1. To ensure FTA-assisted benefits and related services are equitably distributed without regard to race, color, or national origin.
2. To ensure that both the level and quality of transit services provide equal access and mobility for any person without regard to race, color, or national origin.
3. To ensure that access to the planning and decision-making process is open and without regard to race, color, or national origin.
4. To ensure that decisions on the location of transit facilities and services are made without regard to race, color, or national origin.

Congress supplemented the 1964 statute with the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 and other statutes enacted in the 1990s relating to the concept of environmental justice. The general principles of environmental justice include:

- Avoiding, minimizing or mitigating disproportionately high and adverse health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations; and
- Ensuring full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process; and
- Preventing the denial, reduction, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority populations and low-income communities.

HCAOG's adopted Title VI Program provides practices, policies, and procedures to ensure compliance with the law.

Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) encourages the involvement of people with disabilities in the development and improvement of transportation paratransit plans and services. In accordance with ADA guidelines, all meetings conducted by HCAOG will take place in locations that are accessible to persons with mobility limitations and provide information in ways that people with disabilities can access.

Executive Orders

An Executive Order is an order given by the President to federal agencies. As a recipient of federal revenues, HCAOG assists transportation agencies to comply with these orders.

Executive Order 12898: Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations (1994)

Executive Order 12898 mandates that federal agencies make achieving environmental justice part of their missions. The order requires federal agencies, and other recipients of federal funds, to identify and address related actions and adverse health or environmental effects that do or would disproportionately affect minority and low-income populations.

Executive Order 13166: Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) (2000)

Executive Order 13166 requires federal agencies, recipients, and sub-recipients of federal financial assistance to ensure that people who speak limited English can access federally conducted and federally funded programs, and activities, and services.

Executive Order 13175: Consultation and Coordination with Native American Tribal Governments (2000)

Executive Order 13175 calls for federal agencies and federal fund recipients to consult and collaborate with tribal officials, regularly and meaningfully, when developing federal policies that have tribal implications. The order also directs such agencies to strengthen the government-to-government relationships with Native American tribes, and to reduce imposing unfunded mandates upon Native American tribes.

Executive Order 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government (2021)

Executive Order 13985 calls for federal agencies to pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity through a variety of methods, including by identifying methods to assess equity, allocating Federal resources to advance fairness and opportunity, promoting equitable delivery of government benefits, and establishing an Equitable Data Working Group.

Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

The FTA directs transportation planning agencies carry out a public participation process to provide all citizens with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the planning process. HCAOG adheres to FTA guidance in administering FTA transit funding programs.

The Ralph M. Brown Act (Brown Act)

The Ralph M. Brown Act governs the meetings and actions of governing boards of local public agencies and their created bodies. Brown Act requirements apply to any committee or other subsidiary body that such a governing board creates, whether permanent or temporary, decision-making or advisory. The Brown Act sets minimum standards for open public meetings, such as for access to the public, meeting locations, posting notices, distributing agendas, and accepting public

input. A public agency may adopt reasonable regulations to ensure the public's right to address the agency, including limiting the time allocated for public testimony.

Chapter 3. Objectives & Policies

Broad-based community participation is essential to good transportation planning because the best decisions are made with a fully informed and involved public. When we inform the public, and in turn the public informs us, it improves the agency's understanding of the subject. Ultimately, this helps the HCAOG Board understand how members of the community perceive or anticipate pros and cons of matters affecting transportation projects, plans, and funds. HCAOG provides for and encourages the public to participate in planning the region's multi-modal transportation system.

Public Participation Goal:

That interested parties will have a meaningful role in Humboldt County's transportation planning process, and that public participation helps clarify stakeholder sentiment and capture diverse opinions, including those of people historically disadvantaged/underserved by transportation investments.

Objective 1: Increase public awareness and understanding of the transportation planning process in Humboldt County.

- Policy 1.1 Clearly communicate HCAOG's authority, roles and responsibilities, and processes and timelines for carrying out regional transportation programs and plans.
- Policy 1.2 Provide agency reports that are clear, timely, and broadly distributed. Use visuals to help describe concepts and data; examples include photos, charts, graphs, maps, artist renderings, and computer simulations. Include alternate text description for images. Spell out acronyms and explain technical terms in common language.
- Policy 1.3 Provide timely and consistent public forums for interested parties and agencies to meaningfully participate in the transportation planning process. Provide timely notice of and reasonable access to HCAOG's public forums. When appropriate, HCAOG staff will take a "we'll come to you" approach and provide presentations to interested community groups or agency staff.
- Policy 1.4 Use multiple media and outlets to disseminate information on issues important to Humboldt County's transportation system.

Objective 2: Promote dialogue and partnership between HCAOG and Humboldt communities, including residents, property owners, business owners, students, people with disabilities, people with limited or no English proficiency, advocacy organizations, local and Native American governments, and public officials.

- Policy 2.1 Provide adequate time for the public to review and make recommendations on regionally significant plans and programs. Give participants feedback on how their input is considered.
- Policy 2.2 Provide varied opportunities for the public to review and offer input on policies, plans, and programs. Provide adequate public notice of public participation opportunities, encouraging active public participation at the initial stages and throughout the process. Opportunities include, but are not limited to, public meetings, workshops and events, webinars, surveys, newspaper articles and columns,

radio interviews, websites, social media, and printed materials. Proactively outreach to other committees, associations, and organizations by attending their meetings.

Policy 2.3 Foster relationships by participating in the planning and organizing processes of groups representing the above list, including attending meetings and actively engaging in events.

Objective 3: Sectors of the population who are traditionally underserved are aware of, and can easily access, opportunities to participate in regional transportation planning. Those traditionally underserved include youth, seniors, minorities, people with disabilities, people with limited or no English sufficiency, and households with low income(s).

Policy 3.1 Create and maintain opportunities for those traditionally underserved to participate in HCAOG's transportation planning processes. HCAOG will explore partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) to help ensure diverse and direct input from stakeholders in specific communities who traditionally may not have been involved in regional public policy planning processes. "Through competitive contracts, CBOs will be provided with resources to engage their communities and tasked with implementing outreach programs appropriate to their community context." (SANDAG)

Policy 3.2 Utilize the Social Service Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC) for outreach to seniors, minorities, people with disabilities, low-income households, and other stakeholder communities. Ensure that representation on the SSTAC is reflective of the underserved communities within Humboldt County.

Policy 3.3 Make key information such as notices and announcements (printed, website, and audio) accessible for disabled users and attempt to offer such information in alternative languages when appropriate or requested.

Policy 3.4 When appropriate, utilize alternative media outlets and social media that may reach minority, youth, or underserved segments of the community.

Chapter 4. Opportunities for Public Participation

HCAOG Committees

HCAOG has standing committees that assist in its planning and decision-making process. The committees help inform and advise the HCAOG Board and staff, as well as interested members of the public, on transportation issues in our region. HCAOG also facilitates ad-hoc committees as directed by the Board. The following HCAOG committees create consistent opportunities for the public to be involved:

- Social Service Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC) – Meets a minimum of three times per year and as needed.
- Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) – Meets monthly, and as needed.
- Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) – Meets monthly in conjunction with the HCAOG Board.

The following summarizes the composition and functions of each HCAOG committee and the HCAOG Board.

Social Service Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC)

The HCAOG SSTAC was established, as required by the Transportation Development Act, to ensure that unmet transit needs are identified within Humboldt County. The SSTAC is required to have a minimum of nine members serving as representatives of the transit community, including disabled and senior populations, social service providers, persons of limited means, and representatives of the Consolidated Transportation Service Agency. The Service Coordination Committee (SCC) merged with the SSTAC in 2019 in order to provide a more effective forum for transit operators, colleges, and Caltrans to participate in transit discussions.

It is the SSTAC's responsibility to identify and review unmet transit needs information and recommend to the HCAOG Board unmet transit needs within Humboldt County, as part of the annual unmet transit needs process. The SSTAC also participates in updates of the Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan and provides a forum to address other transportation issues facing disabled, seniors, and economically disadvantaged populations within the County.

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

The HCAOG TAC includes representatives from public works, planning, or engineering staff of each of the JPA members, Native American tribes and rancherias, transit managers, Caltrans, and the California Highway Patrol. The TAC provides technical expertise on transportation issues. The TAC leads in developing the Regional Transportation Improvement Program and assists in developing the Regional Transportation Plan and the Overall Work Program.

Policy Advisory Committee (PAC)

In accordance with an approved Memorandum of Understanding between Caltrans and HCAOG, the RTPA is required to include a Policy Advisory Committee (PAC). The PAC consists of all members of the HCAOG Board plus a Caltrans representative and a member of the Humboldt Transit Authority (HTA) Board. At each HCAOG Board meeting, the Board adjourns as the RTPA and meets as the PAC. The PAC recommends action to the HCAOG Board. The HCAOG Board ratifies PAC actions.

HCAOG Board

The HCAOG Board is comprised of one county supervisor and one city council member from each of Humboldt's seven incorporated cities. The Board is responsible for all policy decisions of HCAOG.

Chapter 5. Public Involvement Practices

I. HCAOG Public Meetings

HCAOG committees and the Board decide and conduct business on HCAOG matters at public meetings and public hearings (one exception is for confidential matters for which the Board must confer in closed session). HCAOG's public meetings are a consistent, on-going, and accessible way that interested members of the public (stakeholders) can be involved in HCAOG's planning, programs, and projects. Each meeting provides the opportunity for the public to provide comments or express concerns under a reasonable time constraint. HCAOG encourages the public to attend public meetings.

HCAOG generally holds three types of public meetings:

- ❖ Committee meetings
- ❖ Board meetings
- ❖ Public meetings on a single topic (e.g., a plan or project)

HCAOG has standard procedures for all public meetings and hearings and ensures that information on all meetings is routinely and easily available to the public.

Public meeting formats changed substantially in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Public meeting formats continue to offer virtual participation options in accordance with Government Code Section 54953, as amended by Assembly Bill 2449 (2022). Under these provisions, HCAOG may allow remote participation by Board and committee members under specific circumstances while maintaining public access and transparency. A quorum of members must participate in person from a publicly accessible location, and teleconferencing is permitted only under defined “just cause” or “emergency circumstances.” HCAOG Board meetings are held in person at Eureka City Hall Council Chambers, 531 K Street, Eureka. HCAOG Board meetings are televised and available on the Access Humboldt channel for public viewing. The Council Chambers have equipment that allows participants, including the public, to participate virtually via Zoom.

Committee meetings are held in person at the HCAOG office, 611 I Street, Suite B, Eureka. These meetings also allow for public participation virtually, in compliance with Government Code Section 54953, as amended by Assembly Bill 2449 (2022).

Instructions for where and how to join the meetings are included with the agenda in advance of all meetings.

1. Open and Accessible Meetings. HCAOG’s public meetings and meeting procedures adhere to the Brown Act, the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), and other applicable laws. All meeting locations are ADA accessible. HCAOG will accommodate, to the best of its ability, people who may need special assistance to attend or participate in a meeting. All HCAOG agendas/meeting notices will display this message in English and in Spanish:

Persons who require special accommodations, accessible seating, or documentation in alternative formats under the Americans with Disabilities Act, or persons who require interpretation services (free of charge) should contact the HCAOG office at (707) 444-8208 at least two days prior to the meeting. HCAOG Board meeting agenda enclosures are available on HCAOG’s website at <https://www.hcaog.net/committee/board-directors>. HCAOG Board meetings are recorded and televised by Access Humboldt and can be viewed on the Access Humboldt or HCAOG websites. Board Members are required to attend in person unless attending via teleconference in accordance with AB 2449.

Las personas que requieren alojamiento especial de acuerdo con el Americans with Disabilities Act, o personas que requieren servicios de interpretación (libre de cargo) deben comunicarse con HCAOG (707) 444-8208 al menos dos días antes de la reunión.

Los documentos adjuntos para esta reunión están disponibles en el sitio web del HCAOG: www.hcaog.net/committee/board-directors. Los miembros de la Junta del HCAOG deben asistir en persona a menos que asistan por teleconferencia de conformidad con Proyecto de Ley de la Asamblea (AB 2449). Reuniones de la Junta HCAOG se registran y se televisa por Acceso Humboldt, y se pueden ver en los sitios web de Acceso Humboldt o HCAOG.

HCAOG will make arrangements for languages other than English translators upon request including, but not limited to: Spanish, American Sign Language, Hmong, and Chinese.

Meetings are held near transit routes whenever possible. HCAOG also strives to set workshop times to coordinate with bus schedules, including bus routes that run less frequently (e.g., 60+ minute headways), such as in Willow Creek, Garberville/Redway or Trinidad.

2. Meeting Notices & Packets. HCAOG posts all committee and board meeting notices for hybrid and in-person meetings in a public place. As required in the Brown Act Section 54954.2(a)(1), “the agenda shall specify the time and location of the regular meeting and shall be posted in a location that is freely accessible to members of the public.” HCAOG posts meeting notices (including meeting cancellation notices) at the HCAOG office. Notice of HCAOG Board meetings are also posted at Eureka City Hall, 531 K Street, Eureka, when meetings are held there. Notices are posted at additional places as warranted.

The meeting notice typically consists of the meeting agenda, with day, time, and place of the meeting. Notices for regularly scheduled meetings are posted at least 72 hours in advance; agendas for special meetings are posted at least 24 hours in advance.

For all committee and board meetings, HCAOG makes the meeting agenda and packets available (1) on the HCAOG website (www.hcaog.net); (2) via e-mail to any person who has requested to be on the e-mail list; and (3) via USPS to any person who has requested to be mailed an agenda or packet.

3. Meeting Records. Draft meeting records are included in meeting packets, and approved meeting records are posted on the HCAOG website. The public can read meeting records to learn what decisions committees and the board made at previous meetings.

4. Agendized Public Participation. Each public meeting is designed to solicit and receive public comments. Every committee and board agenda includes a stand-alone “Public Participation” agenda item, which states, “This agenda item is reserved for matters that are not on the agenda that may be presented by the public.” In addition, the Chair (or Vice Chair) at the meeting allows public comment on each action item on the agenda.

5. Auxiliary Aids and Alternative Formats. HCAOG will provide auxiliary aids and services, such as sign language interpreters, real-time captioning, large print materials, Braille, audio recordings, or accessible electronic formats, upon request to ensure effective communication with individuals with disabilities. While not all listed aids or services may be provided in every instance, HCAOG will offer the option that effectively meets the individual’s communication needs and is the most reasonable and cost-effective under the circumstances. To request an auxiliary aid or alternative format, please contact HCAOG at (707) 444-8208 or by dialing 7-1-1 for the California Relay Service, or email info@hcaog.net at least 72 hours before the meeting or event.

II. Public Involvement in Plans & Studies

When HCAOG develops a special plan or study, or updates a long-range plan, staff implements public involvement practices that are more customized to the project at hand than the routine practices described above. The following describes HCAOG’s public involvement practices for non-routine plans, studies, or projects. In Chapter 6, we describe the public involvement processes and practices that HCAOG has established.

It's important for the public to understand how their input will be considered in the outcome or final product of a plan. Being clear about how public participation can or should impact a particular planning process will help avoid frustration for both staff and members of the public. To facilitate better understanding of how public involvement impacts a process, HCAOG will use the “Levels of Participation” model. HCAOG will consider the most appropriate level of engagement based on the scope of the activity and ability of the public and/or other partners to have meaningful impact or influence. Staff will make an effort to make it clear throughout the public outreach what level of participation is offered, acknowledging that these levels vary throughout the planning process. The levels are as follows:

The **Inform** level of public participation provides the public with the information they need to understand the agency’s decision-making process. This level is typically applied when there is negligible community impact or if there is little if any opportunity to change the outcome.

The **Consult** level of public participation represents the basic minimum opportunity for public input to a decision. Consult simply means to ask for the public’s opinions and consider any input received. Input is generally asked for at set points or project milestones.

At the **Collaborate** level, the public is directly engaged in decision-making. Possible actions or solutions are typically generated by the public and there is an explicit attempt to find consensus. Conducting a collaboration-level program is time-consuming and resource intensive.

(Adapted from the Shasta Regional Transportation Planning Agency Public Participation Plan)

To create an effective public process, staff should identify who the audience will be. HCAOG’s audience ranges from the public to agencies and elected officials. The list below is illustrative, not exhaustive. (Adapted from Sacramento Area COG Public Participation Plan)

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ General Public | ☐ BIPOC communities |
| ☐ Community- and Faith- based orgs | ☐ LGBTQ+ communities |
| ☐ Air districts | ☐ Low-income people |
| ☐ Member jurisdiction staff | ☐ People with disabilities |
| ☐ Business community | ☐ Unhoused people |
| ☐ Elected officials | ☐ Youth |
| ☐ Tribal nations | ☐ Utility providers |
| ☐ Goods movement/freight operators | ☐ Development community |
| ☐ Transit operators | ☐ Advocate |

A) Public Meetings on a Single Topic (e.g. a specific plan or project)

HCAOG holds focused public meetings to expand opportunities for HCAOG staff, committee members, and the Board to converse with the public and better understand stakeholders’ perspectives on the subject matter. When HCAOG schedules a public meeting, the location and time should be accessible by transit. Public meeting formats for a single topic include workshops, charrettes (in which participants collaboratively design a project), and open houses with exhibits.

Holding hybrid meetings where individuals can participate in person, by phone, or via internet, is often preferred, offering the public multiple ways to participate in the meeting. Alternatively separate meetings conducted in different formats can be considered.

B) Attend External Meetings & Events

Upon request and with reasonable notice, HCAOG staff members are available to provide general and project-specific information to community interest groups. For example, staff will attend other organizations' meetings. Staff may also attend public community events to "table" for a particular plan or project, providing informational materials and visualization tools.

C) Public Notices

When HCAOG is engaging the public to participate on a particular plan, staff will use additional means to notify the general public and stakeholder groups. Beyond the standard practices described above (e.g., posting meeting notices at buildings and on websites), staff will use newspapers and radio to broadcast public notices.

- General Circulation Newspaper: HCAOG prints public notices in broad circulation newspapers, either dailies or weeklies. HCAOG sends press releases and/or PSAs to newspaper outlets and follows up by phone to encourage coverage or printing of the notice.
- Organization Newsletters: HCAOG will have a PSA or article printed in organizations' newsletters, if available.
- Radio: HCAOG sends press releases and/or PSAs to radio stations and is available to follow up by phone or in person. Radio stations might post the PSA on their website and/or read it on the air; local stations might report the item in a news story. HCAOG can also do radio interviews; two of the best opportunities are KMUD and KINS local news shows including KMUD's "EcoNews Report" and KINS's "Talk Shop."
- Television: Public notices often result in local news stories. HCAOG staff, committee members and Board members may participate. Public notices also remind the public that HCAOG Board meetings are televised and available on the HCAOG website after each HCAOG Board meeting.

Public Notice Opportunities in the Media

	General Circulation Newspaper	Organizations' Newsletters	Radio
PAID	• Classified notices. • Advertisement in the main body or a specified section.	• Advertisement (depends on organization's policy).	• Advertisement
FREE	• Press releases. • Calendar item.	• Public notice reprinted or article printed (depends on organization's policy). • Calendar item.	• Press releases. • Public service announcement (PSA) • Calendar item. • Interviews

- Direct Mail: Budget allowing, HCAOG may mail printed notices directly to known stakeholders to notify them of an upcoming meeting(s) or hearing(s). Mailers would be

mailed to those known to reside or have a business in a subject area (e.g., a neighborhood, adjacent to a bus route, within a limited radius of an intersection, etc.), or those known to be interested in the subject matter (e.g., transit service, freight/goods movement, trails, etc.). HCAOG gathers addresses through our internal master contact database, and/or through a targeted mailing list from the local planning department. The mailer may be produced as a postcard, flyer, or another format, and may include supplemental information. It is cost prohibitive to use this method for mass outreach in the region.

Public notices will include the following statement in both English and Spanish.

Public participation is solicited without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability or family status. Persons who require special accommodations under the American with Disabilities Act or persons who require translation services (free of charge) should contact HCAOG at least two days prior to the meeting.

La participación pública es solicitada sin distinción de raza, color, origen nacional, edad, sexo, religión, discapacidad o su estado familiar. Las personas que requieren alojamiento especial de acuerdo con el American with Disabilities Act, o personas que requieren servicios de traducción (libre de cargo) deben comunicarse con HCAOG al menos dos días antes de la reunión.

D) Public Review & Comment Periods

Larger planning efforts—beyond routine duties—generally warrant a set public review and comment period. Such instances include, for example, updating the Regional Transportation Plan or the Regional Bike Plan, and the annual Unmet Transit Needs Public Participation Process. HCAOG complies with mandated public review periods, such as those required by the California Environmental Quality Act. If not otherwise required, HCAOG’s practice is to allow 30 or more days for any public review and comment period, except when extenuating circumstances prohibit it.

Public Drafts: Draft planning documents are available on-line and in hard copy. Additionally, during formal public comment periods, draft planning documents are available at regional libraries and local government offices (see section V. Access to HCAOG Documents.)

Submitting Comments: HCAOG strives to accommodate all basic means of communicating comments and encourages the public (or agencies) to submit comments in the manner that best suits them. That said, written comments are often preferred for their benefit of recording a commenter’s remarks just as he or she intended them to be.

As standard practice, HCAOG accepts comments:

- by phone {call HCAOG at (707) 444-8208. Callers can leave voicemail messages, too}.
- by fax {fax HCAOG at (707) 444-8319}
- by e-mail {to info@hcaog.net, or as otherwise noted}
- by post or hand-delivery {HCAOG, 611 I Street, Suite B, Eureka, CA 95501}
- by verbal testimony (public comment) at an HCAOG committee or Board meeting, hearing, or other HCAOG public meeting.

For some plans or studies, HCAOG develops and distributes pre-made comment forms. Comments are never required to be submitted on comment forms. All comments can be submitted by mail, by hand, by fax, or by e-mail.

E) Record of Comments & Responses

Record of Comments: HCAOG makes a record of public comments in one of two ways, generally:

- 1) HCAOG staff reproduces, in the plan, original comment letters (including e-mails) and telephone transcripts (usually in an appendix). Staff deletes (or blacks out) the commenter's address (physical and electronic) and phone number.
- 2) HCAOG staff summarizes the disposition (or general viewpoint) of comments and publishes the summary in the plan or study. HCAOG keeps the original letters on file in-house, which are available to view upon request.

Response to Comments: Staff reviews public comments and forwards them, as needed, to be considered by HCAOG committee members, Board members, or other agencies. HCAOG gives appropriate feedback to the individual/group who commented. Feedback might be given verbally, during discussions at the committee or Board meetings, and the meeting minutes serve as the primary record. Feedback might also be shown directly in the subject plan or study, where staff has added, revised, corrected, or deleted information, as directed and/or approved by HCAOG committee(s) and/or the Board. HCAOG staff might also contact a commenter directly to give him or her feedback on his or her comment(s).

III. Contact Database/Mailing List of Interested Parties

HCAOG maintains a master contact database. HCAOG uses the database to generate mailing list(s) for disseminating timely information to interested parties, and to notify them of opportunities to review and provide comments. Mailings are sent via post and/or e-mail.

IV. Internet Access

HCAOG Website

The HCAOG website (www.hcaog.net) is continually updated to offer the public independent, "self-service" access to regional transportation planning information (internet access is available, for free, at most Humboldt County libraries.) HCAOG designs the website pages to be as user-friendly and understandable as possible, and maintains website content to be timely, consistent, and comprehensive.

Web Accessibility Policy: HCAOG is committed to maintaining a website that is accessible to individuals with visual, motor, or other disabilities, in accordance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as well as Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as interpreted by the U.S. Department of Justice. HCAOG references the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) and follows the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), which are based on four guiding principles: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. HCAOG's website includes a feature to translate pages into languages other than English.

The HCAOG website includes the following information:

- ☐ Contact information (physical address, phone, fax, e-mail)
- ☐ Regular business hours
- ☐ Current board members with affiliations

- ☐ Current committee members with affiliations
- ☐ Meeting notices and agendas (current and archived to January 2024)
- ☐ Meeting calendar
- ☐ HCAOG adopted plans
- ☐ HCAOG projects
- ☐ Project-specific public surveys and/or comment forms (e.g., annual Unmet Transit Needs process).
- ☐ Other transportation planning documents and forms
- ☐ Social media link (Facebook and Instagram)
- ☐ Local transportation-related events

Social Media

HCAOG makes an effort to post transportation-related news, events, legislation, technologies, practices, or fun facts on social media. However, social media is not used as a means for collecting public comments.

Interactive Online Applications

HCAOG may use online (web) applications to increase the ways that the public can see, review, discuss, brainstorm, critique and comment on specific projects and plans. For example, HCAOG used the web application Crowdbrite to engage the public in developing the regional blueprint plan, “*imagine humboldt!*” These types of “crowdsourcing” applications are customized for each project, give information in various visual forms (e.g., photos, videos, maps, text), are interactive, and can show comments (and replies, and revisions) updated in real-time.

Web-based technology allows people to engage in a project when and where it is convenient to them. The web applications are free for the public to download and use.

Mobile Applications

HCAOG prints a Quick Response (QR) code, as appropriate, on flyers, posters, and public announcements. For example, HCAOG uses QR codes on posters to conveniently link mobile-device users to an on-line survey or website, such as the Online Bicycle and Trail Map.



QR code

Electronic Mail (Email)

HCAOG utilizes email to disseminate information to agencies, stakeholder groups, and interested members of the public. This information includes meeting notices, project-specific notices, technical memos, plan drafts, and other updates regarding transportation planning (e.g. legislation, funding, grant applications, etc.). HCAOG maintains a list of contact email addresses and periodically uses the Mailchimp web service to send information. Agencies and members of the public are added to this email list upon request.

HCAOG may also imbed an e-mail feature directly into a project’s webpage (on HCAOG’s website). That way, for added convenience, people can send a comment directly from the webpage of the project they are interested in.

V. Access to HCAOG Documents

The public can view final publications of planning documents (plans, programs, studies, audits, etc.) at the HCAOG office and/or electronically via the HCAOG website (www.hcaog.net).

Hard copies on-site (at HCAOG)

The HCAOG library holds past and current planning documents prepared for and by HCAOG. The library also has transportation plans and studies from other jurisdictions, as well as from federal and state agencies. At the front desk, HCAOG keeps a public copy of the meeting packet(s) for upcoming committee or board meeting(s). Public review drafts of HCAOG plans are made available at the front desk during the public review and comment period.

Hard copies off-site

During the public review and comment period for HCAOG plans, HCAOG can, upon request, deliver hard copies of public drafts to other public agencies around the county, where members of the public can review them. HCAOG hopes this makes the documents easier to access for more people. HCAOG may deliver public drafts to:

- Humboldt County Library (multiple branches)
- City Halls
- County Board of Supervisors
- Native American tribal offices
- Humboldt Transit Authority office
- College of the Redwoods Library
- Cal Poly Humboldt Library
- Social Service Agencies
- Project-specific agencies and venues

Take-home copies

The public may request copies of HCAOG public drafts and final documents (other than legally confidential data). Requests are handled as follows:

- Reports and technical information that are part of a meeting packet are available free of charge. The public can receive a document(s) via post, or pick it up at the HCAOG office, or get it during the public meeting.
- The public can request hard copies of relevant reports and technical information not distributed during a public meeting.
- The HCAOG website also holds electronic copies of many recent plans in digital files. HCAOG can provide copies of files to the public upon request.

HCAOG can and does supply most take-home copies free of charge. However, HCAOG does reserve the right to supply such copies at \$.50 per page for documents more than 10 pages long. The charge would include the cost of staff time spent reproducing the document and/or the cost of reproduction materials.

Online copies

The public can access electronic copies of draft documents, adopted documents, and meeting packets on the HCAOG website (www.hcaog.net).

VI. General Outreach to Traditionally Underserved Citizens

HCAOG has developed the following strategies for considering the needs of, and reaching out to, traditionally underserved citizens. The goal of this is to encourage and solicit the involvement of these groups. Underserved groups of people include older adults, persons who have limited proficiency in English, persons with disabilities, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

(BIPOC) and people with low incomes. This strategy incorporates public involvement practices for Title VI Nondiscrimination and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) efforts.

Information & Outreach at Target-Community Events: HCAOG staff may bring informational materials and visualization tools to community events where the target community is likely to attend. Examples include fairs coordinated by the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services which may target Spanish speakers or communities with low incomes, Senior Lunches at local community centers, and the North Coast Veterans Stand Down for military veterans.

Partnering Activities: HCAOG coordinates outreach efforts with social service and other agencies that can help disseminate information and facilitate contacts and publicity for traditionally underserved groups. Groups include, but are not limited to, older adult residents, people with low income/low-income households, BIPOC groups, and people with limited English proficiency.

Targeted Posting: Flyers may be posted at locations where the target population is likely to visit, shop, pass by, or otherwise frequent.

Newspaper Press Releases & Advertisements: Newspaper advertisements may be translated into Spanish and placed in local and regional newspapers for public comment periods, public meetings and public hearing notices. Press releases will be distributed to Spanish speaking media outlets as needed.

Access for Persons with Disabilities: Public meetings are held at ADA-accessible locations and both print and electronic advertisements/notifications include information for those who may need special assistance to attend (see I.1. Open and Accessible Meetings). The HCAOG website is designed for formats for ADA access (see V. Internet Access, Web Accessibility Policy).

Outreach Activities: Table 1 below summarizes some of HCAOG's public outreach activities for the period 2022-2025.

Table 1. HCAOG Public Outreach 2022-2025

Plan/Location	Date	Other Information
UTN: Flyers posted on HCAOG website, public transit buses, numerous community bulletin boards, social service agencies throughout Humboldt County.	Annually September-December	Unmet Transit Needs flyers posting schedule of public hearings at city council meetings to receive comment on unmet transit needs in the region. Flyers available in English and Spanish.
UTN: City Council Meetings: Arcata, Blue Lake, Ferndale, Fortuna, Rio Dell, Trinidad, County of Humboldt, Humboldt Transit Authority	Annually October-December	HCAOG staff and SSTAC members attended city council meetings to provide information on the region's Unmet Transit Needs process and take public comments on unmet transit needs.
Bike Month Humboldt: Dedicated webpage on HCAOG website, event calendars and flyers posted at	Annually April-May	Bike Month Flyer. Flyers available in English and Spanish when possible. Community Fair and Kids Bike Rodeo.

numerous businesses and public locations in Humboldt; social media posts		
Sustainability Mixer at Cal Poly Humboldt	Annually, Fall Semester	Tabling. Providing project and program information. Bilingual flyers in Spanish and English.
Tri-County Independent Living Expo	Annually, August/September	Tabling. Providing information on technologies and services for people with disabilities and seniors. Bilingual information.
Community Health Fair: Festejando Nuestra Comunidad (Celebrating our Community)	September 2022 and 2023	Tabling. Provided transportation related information and kids activities in Spanish and English.
Transit Development Plan 2023-2028	Adopted October 2023	Online bilingual survey, onboard surveys, community and stakeholder group meetings.
Dan Burden Walkability Audits and Presentations	July 2023	Community walk audits and presentations
The Keys Campaign	June 2024	Educational social media campaign, printable housing advocate guide in both English and Spanish.
Transit Marketing for Humboldt Transit Authority	July 2024 – July 2025	Table at North Country Fair. Social media and radio advertisements, flyers and electronic announcements in English and Spanish.
Safe Routes to School Pilot Project with City of Arcata and Fuente Nueva Charter School	January – April 2025	Community walk audit and workshops, flyers posted and emailed, news press release, Walk-to-School event and safety demonstration project
Vision Zero Action Plan Community Workshop	July 2025	Scheduled community meetings, provided flyers, outreach, and community engagement materials in English and Spanish. Developed an online survey in English and Spanish.

Chapter 6. Public Participation Processes for Specific Plans

Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Regional Transportation Improvement Plan (RTIP)

To fulfill its RTPA duties, HCAOG must develop a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and update it every four years.¹ An RTPA must have an adopted RTP in order to qualify for and receive federal transportation funding. Caltrans Regional Planning Handbook 2017 states:

¹ Required by federal law (Title 23 CFR 450.300, Subpart C) and by state law (Government Code section 65080 et seq).

“The RTP is a comprehensive, 20+ year vision of a balanced, multimodal transportation system. It identifies regional issues and problems, includes population and traffic growth projections for the region, and suggests mobility solutions to accommodate future transportation needs. The RTP includes a list of proposed projects that lead to development of the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP). The RTIP is designed to implement the vision and goals of the RTP”.

The California Transportation Commission (CTC) develops RTP guidelines to help transportation planning agencies statewide prepare consistent and comprehensive plans. The guidelines direct transportation planning agencies to carry out proactive public participation processes to coordinate and consult with interested parties. Interested parties include, but are not limited to, the business community, community groups, walking and bicycling representatives, public health departments, and public health non-governmental organizations, environmental organizations, Native American tribal governments and communities, neighboring Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)/RTPAs, transportation providers, facility operators such as airports, appropriate federal, state, and local agencies (including local elected officials), environmental resource and permit agencies, and air districts, in addition to the general public. The guidelines also direct transportation planning agencies on considering and addressing social equity and environmental justice issues in the RTP and public processes.

The guidelines advise what RTPAs “shall” and “should” do to coordinate and consult with stakeholders. Briefly, the guidelines state:

In summary, the consultation process shall:

1. Provide adequate public notice and the opportunity to comment on proposed RTPs and public participation plans;
2. To the maximum extent practicable, employ visualization techniques to describe the RTP;
3. To the maximum extent practicable, make the RTP electronically accessible, such as placing it on the internet;
4. To the maximum extent practicable, hold public hearings at convenient and accessible locations and times;
5. Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input on the RTP (documentation);
6. Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low income and minority households;
7. Provide additional opportunities to comment on the RTP and the Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP), if the final version differs due to additional comments;
8. Coordinate with the state transportation planning and public involvement processes; and,
9. Periodically review the intended RTP outcomes, products and/or services.

All RTPs must also be accompanied by an environmental review document pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). CEQA is primarily a mandated public information process. Therefore, agencies carry out specific public involvement activities to comply with CEQA.

Unmet Transit Needs Report of Findings

As the RTPA, HCAOG is responsible for administering the Transportation Development Act (TDA) funds received for the Humboldt region. The TDA establishes local funding to develop and support public transportation needs in California. Each year, per the requirements of the TDA, HCAOG must conduct an unmet transit needs (UTN) process to identify and assess any unmet public transit need that may exist in Humboldt County. The purpose of the Unmet Transit Needs process is to ensure that all unmet transit needs that are reasonable to meet are met before funds are expended for non-transit uses, such as streets and roads.

HCAOG conducts an extensive public participation process for the UTN cycle. HCAOG's SSTAC leads the process to solicit broad input from the public.

The following summarizes the Unmet Transit Needs public participation process.

- Notify member entities and Native American tribal governments of upcoming UTN cycle, distribute information on the UTN public participation process, and request dates of public hearings to be held by member entities and Native American tribal governments.
- Prepare a press release and publish a minimum 30-day notice of the UTN public hearing(s) schedule in local newspaper(s) and distribute to local radio stations.
- Post the public hearing schedule on the HCAOG website.
- Distribute the UTN public hearing schedule to HCAOG member entities, Native American tribes, libraries, College of the Redwoods, Cal Poly Humboldt, transit facilities (to be provided on transit buses), the HCAOG SSTAC, social service agencies, and any member of the public or agency that has requested the information. The SSTAC also distributes the schedule through agency newsletters and posts the schedule throughout the county on various community bulletin boards.
- Create an online survey and post to HCAOG website and social media.
- Public Hearings
 - As the RTPA, HCAOG conducts the statutorily required public hearing to receive public input on unmet transit needs.
 - Following HCAOG policy, HCAOG member entities also conduct their own public hearings on unmet transit needs and provide public comment to HCAOG. Eight additional public hearings are held annually by HCAOG member entities (Arcata, Blue Lake, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, Rio Dell, Trinidad, and the County of Humboldt) for unmet transit needs. These city and county hearings are in addition to HCAOG's required public hearing and expand the level of public input. They provide local elected officials with an opportunity to hear and respond directly to the expressed needs of their constituents.
 - HCAOG staff and SSTAC members attend as many member entity public hearings as possible.
- HCAOG may also attend various social service agency meetings as invited to provide information on the unmet transit needs process.
- The SSTAC evaluates and determines the best method to receive public input and as needed develops transit surveys to gather input from the public. Surveys are developed and posted on HCAOG's website in both English and Spanish. Surveys are distributed widely throughout the county including all local transit facilities, on transit buses, city halls, libraries, social service agencies, and various other points throughout the County.

- Preparation of the Unmet Transit Needs (UTN) Report of Findings (ROF). Concluding all public input, a draft UTN ROF is prepared which includes all public comment and any survey results regarding unmet transit needs.
- At SSTAC meetings, which are open to the public, the SSTAC reviews the Draft UTN ROF data with HCAOG approved UTN definitions and criteria and makes a recommendation to the HCAOG Board on unmet transit needs for the region.
- The HCAOG committees (SSTAC and TAC) review public comments, evaluate requests against HCAOG's criteria for determining if an unmet transit need is reasonable to meet, and make a recommendation to the HCAOG Board.
- After considering all available information compiled pursuant to the Unmet Transit Needs public participation process the HCAOG Board must adopt, by resolution, one of the following findings:
 - (1) there are no unmet transit needs;
 - (2) there are no unmet transit needs that are reasonable to meet; or
 - (3) there are unmet transit needs, including needs that are reasonable to meet.

The Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG) is committed to ensuring that all community members, especially those who are traditionally underserved or underrepresented, have meaningful opportunities to participate in the transportation planning process. Through the implementation of diverse outreach strategies, language access services, and ongoing public engagement efforts, HCAOG seeks to foster transparency, inclusion, and equitable decision-making.

This Public Participation Plan will continue to evolve in response to community needs, federal and state guidance, and best practices. HCAOG welcomes public input not only during plan updates, but as an ongoing partnership with the community.

For more information or to provide feedback, please contact HCAOG at (707) 444-8208 or visit www.hcaog.net.