

**METRA Transit System
Public Participation Process
Columbus, Georgia
2010**

Purpose

This document is prepared as required by Federal regulations provided in FTA Circular 9030.1A. The City's transit system, METRA, follows a defined policy for soliciting public participation and input when it comes to: fare and major service changes and the development and of the proposed and final annual Program of Projects (POP).

Definition

The major service reduction are defined as the reductions which decrease either service hours or service miles for a specific route by at least twenty percent (20%), or which change the service area of the transit system.

All fare changes are subject to the public participation and involvement process.

The Program of Projects is (POP) is the annual coordinated outline of proposed and final public transit service transportation plans and projects developed in consort with the Metropolitan Planning Organization (Columbus-Phenix City Metropolitan Planning Organization ((CPCMPO)) 3-C planning process and with input the public at large.

Fare or Service Change Process

1. A notice is to be placed in the general circulation newspaper and minority newspaper. The notice will briefly describe the proposed fare increase or major service reduction. The notice will advise of the upcoming date for a public meeting for the purpose of soliciting public comments. The notice will include the address where public comments can be sent to and a reasonable time period for receiving public comments. Also, information about the public meeting will be provided.

2. A public hearing is held as announced in the published notice.
3. All comments received will be considered in the final decision- making process. While the final plan may not necessarily be changed based on the public participation process, significant consideration is given to the comments made by the public and the proposed changes may very well be affected.
4. All the information, including the proposed changes, public announcements, comments received, public hearing transcripts/minutes, etc., will be documented for reference and review as needed.

Policy Statement

The Department of Transportation/METRA Transit System sets forth the following public involvement policy for the purpose of soliciting and receiving public input on public transportation plans and services. The Department of Transportation/METRA through the public involvement process seeks to allow all interested individuals the opportunity to comment on and to be actively engaged in provision of transit.

Intent

- The public involvement guideline will be used for all "major" changes in fares and services.
- Fare changes that affect all categories of ridership (i.e., student, regular, senior, and disabled) will be considered major.
- Service levels increases or decreases of 20% over existing miles or hours will be considered major.
- Changes in service area of the transit system are major.

Policy Guidelines

1. The public hearing notice for service and fare changes will be advertised 45 days before the scheduled change is to be implemented. Advertisements will appear at a minimum in the local citywide newspaper and minority newspaper, government access channel, on all route buses, and as a public service announcement on local radio and television. Documents outlining the proposed changes will be available for review at METRA, at the Government Center, at the Transfer Center, and on the buses. Customers also provide comments by placing cards into a locked comment box at the Transfer Center. Customers can phone in comments to the City's 311 Center. Disabled customer can access METRA through the TDD phone system or the Georgia Relay System. The annual POP is advertised in the local citywide newspaper and minority newspaper for public comment 45 days prior to final notice. If there are no comments, the first advertisement will state on the ad that this is the final comment. Each comment is recorded and response is provided (comments that have a name and address or phone number. The office is not able to respond to anonymous comments. If there are significant comments, a public meeting is scheduled to discuss the POP. Following the public meeting, the final POP will be advertised with revisions as fiscally feasible.

2. A public hearing will be held at METRA (or another larger accessible City venue, if the anticipated participation is over 80 people) in order to enable riders the opportunity to comment on the proposed fare or service change. The public hearing at METRA (or larger City venue) may last up to six hours in length to allow as many customers the opportunity to comment. Staff may be stationed at the Transfer Center to discuss the proposed change and to receive comments from customers. Staff may also travel on the bus for the purpose of receiving comments from customers.
3. Another public hearing may be held, if warranted, at a designated location outside of METRA (i.e., Plaza of Government Center, Health Department). The public hearing at this location may be held during the evening and last for two hours to allow comments from the general public.
4. All comments from the public will be responded to promptly. In the event there are significant comments against the proposed change, the proposed service change will be revisited by METRA management. A second round of advertisements and public hearings may be required if the service and fare changes are revised.
5. Fare and service changes will be presented to the Metropolitan Planning Organization at the monthly CAC, TCC, and PC meetings.
6. Final recommendations for fare and service changes will receive a citywide public hearing through the City Council public hearing process. All changes will be advertised by the City as part of the Council Agenda for public discussion during the "first reading." Within fourteen days of the "first reading" the fare and service change will go into a second reading. If there is no further discussion, a final vote by the City Council will approve the change. The City Council meetings are aired on the public access channel twice daily until the next regularly scheduled council meeting (7-14 days is typical).
7. Upon approval of Council, signed resolution authorizing the implementation of the recommended fare and service change will be sent to METRA. METRA will proceed to implement the approved changes by providing a minimum of two (2) weeks notification of the enacted change to all customers.