



# PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

## In the Transportation Planning Process

*Draft – July 2021*



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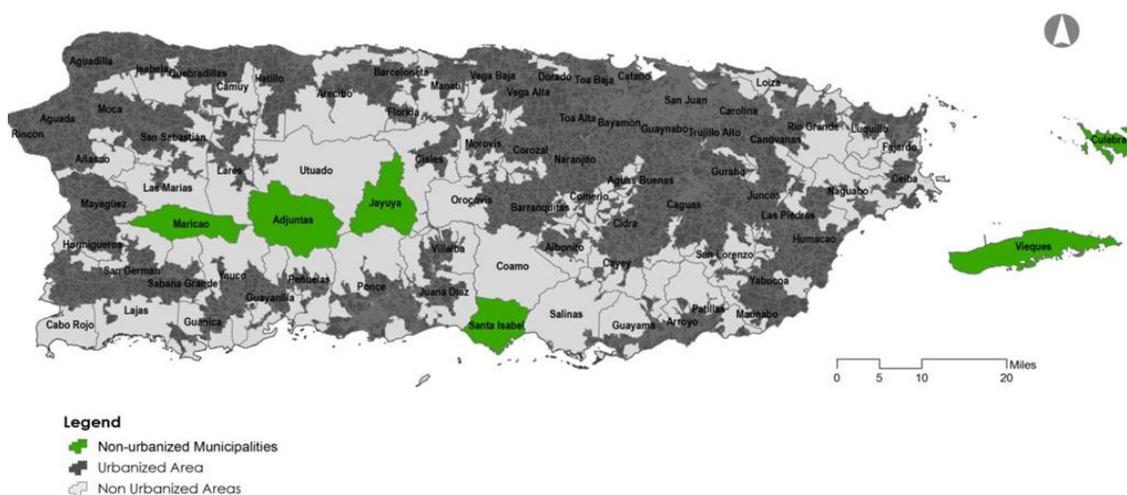
## NON-URBANIZED AREA CONSULTATION PROCESS

The Department of Transportation and Public Works (DTPW) and the Puerto Rico Highway and Transportation Authority (PRHTA) have developed the following procedures in compliance with the 23 CFR 450.210, regarding State consultation with non-urbanized areas local officials in the statewide transportation planning and programming process.

Participation in the planning process is provided to representatives from non-urbanized areas through outreach efforts and coordination activities with affected local officials with responsibility over transportation and the general public. PRHTA's staff annually carries out a series of regional orientation meetings to explain the planning and project programming process, provide information about the availability of funds and the petition preparation and evaluation processes. This forum is also utilized to receive input from the community on transportation-related problems and concerns.

### Background

In the 2000 Census, the urbanized area boundaries of Puerto Rico were significantly redefined, with some previously defined urban areas being subdivided while others were consolidated and expanded, and new ones were designated. One of the results of these changes is that only **6** municipalities, out of the **78** that comprise the Commonwealth, do not have within their geographical boundaries any part of the eleven (**11**) urbanized or metropolitan areas currently designated for Puerto Rico, and therefore do not participate in the technical and policy committees of the MPO, nor are they covered by above mentioned PIP. The 2010 Census did not present any significant change in the definition of the Urbanized and Non-Urbanized boundaries, remaining almost the same to the 2000 Census. These non-urbanized municipalities are: Adjuntas, Culebra, Jayuya, Maricao, Santa Isabel, and Vieques. The Census 2020 results were not available during the development of this plan.



## Public Involvement Plan in Transportation Planning Process

### *Non-Urbanized Area*

Recognizing that these rural or non-urbanized municipalities have the right to participate in the ongoing process of developing the planning and programming document, and in order to follow a logical planning process for Puerto Rico's transportation system, the DTPW/PRHTA developed a scheme that incorporates the six (6) non-urbanized municipalities within regional transportation plan of the urbanized areas, as follows:

- **Santa Isabel** was included in the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for the South Region, which will also incorporate the municipalities within the Yauco, Juana Díaz and Ponce Urbanized Areas.
- **Maricao** was included in the LRTP for the South-West Region, which will also incorporate the municipalities within the Mayagüez and San Germán – Cabo Rojo – Sabana Grande Urbanized Areas.
- **Culebra** and **Vieques** were included in the LRTP for the East Region, which will also incorporate the municipalities within the Fajardo Urbanized Area.
- **Adjuntas** and **Jayuya** were included in the LRTP for the North Region, which will also incorporate the municipalities within the Arecibo and Barceloneta Urbanized Area.

Consequently, public involvement meetings are held in eight (8) locations throughout Puerto Rico, selected on the basis of being accessible from any municipality in every region, no matter if urbanized or non-urbanized.

Notwithstanding the above, the DTPW/PRHTA also recognize the need and obligation to define and implement better and ever-improving public involvement mechanisms to promote the effective involvement of the officials and general public of these six (6) municipalities in the transportation planning process and the programming of improvements to the Commonwealth's transportation system. To this end, it was developed the following sections.

## **PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLANNING PROCESS**

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The municipalities and the central Commonwealth Government's agencies and public corporations are the principal institutional participants in the transportation planning process. Each of the 78 municipalities has an elected Mayor and a Municipal Assembly, who are responsible for carrying out the planning, administrative and fiscal responsibilities of the town, each according to their resources. It should be noted, however, that the Commonwealth has historically followed a centralized planning process, including land use permits, under the responsibility and direction of the Puerto Rico Planning Board (PRPB) and coordinated with the various infrastructure agencies, such as the DTPW/PRHTA, which also undertake their own sectorial planning processes in accordance to the laws and regulations applicable in each case, such as the federal requirements for the transportation planning process, as further detailed in this document.

This centralized process started to change in 1991 with the approval of special legislation that provides, for each municipality, to adopt and administer, under the guidance of the PRPB their own land use plan, but most municipalities, and particularly those of the non-urbanized and smaller urbanized areas, still

## Public Involvement Plan in Transportation Planning Process

### *Non-Urbanized Area*

lack the human and fiscal resources to fully adopt these planning responsibilities. Furthermore, Puerto Rico does not have other types of statewide planning structures common in most states; such as: organizations of state associations of counties, regional planning commissions or State municipal leagues. Most of the planning activities, therefore, continue to occur at central Government agencies, such as: the DTPW/PRHTA, which then must establish mechanisms to incorporate local input in the planning process, while at the same time providing technical support to the municipalities that wish to advance studies and/or projects on their own.

In fact, since 1973, the DTPW has been designated as the PRMPO for all of Puerto Rico's urbanized areas, and since the PRMPO must act as the forum for cooperative policy and decision-making for transportation plans and programs, a number of work groups and committees have since then been established to achieve the needed participation. However, since the participation in the PRMPO activities is confined to those transportation stakeholders of the Urbanized and Metropolitan areas, the responsibility of promoting and involving the public of the Non-Urbanized Areas falls to the DTPW and PRHTA. The DTPW and PRHTA have developed a procedure to involve stakeholders of the non-urbanized areas in the planning and projects' programming process. The planning and projects' programming process to the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) is the following:

### Initial Outreach Efforts

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1. Around August/September in the third year of a four-year cycle a notice is published in newspapers of general circulation to:
  - a. Inform the general public about the availability of federal funds to develop transportation and highway related projects for non-urbanized, urbanized and small urban areas.
  - b. Provide information on the date and location of the regional technical assistance and planning meetings to be held with non-urbanized and urbanized area officials and the public.
  - c. Notify entities of the deadline to submit their petitions for projects utilizing FTA and/or FHWA funds. The deadline for submitting petitions is on or about the first workday of October of each year. Petition forms and brochures of programs can be found at <https://act.dtop.pr.gov/coordinacion-federal/> or may request at the PRHTA Central Office (Federal Coordination Office). The notice also advises the public to address their transportation-related problems or concerns to the Mayor's office and/or to the staff of the Federal Coordination Office of the PRHTA.

## **Orientation Meetings**

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1. Annual regional meetings are carried out to which the public and municipal elected and appointed officials from non-metropolitan areas have been invited to participate via a public notice and letters. These meetings directed to urbanized, small urban and non-urbanized areas request input on transportation issues as well as provide orientation on:
  - a. The transportation planning process.
  - b. The TIP and STIP programming process.
  - c. The petition process to request funds from the various programs of FTA and highway-related project funded from FHWA.
2. Communication with the public in non-urbanized areas is maintained throughout the planning process by the Federal Coordination Office and Programming and Special Study Office through phone calls and individual meetings held with officials and the public to clarify doubts, answer questions, etc.
3. Training seminars are carried out for local officials of Non-Urbanized Areas to assist in mass transportation planning as well as in the compliance of the federally required programs so that they may be able to better compete for federal funds.
4. Individual technical assistance is provided to Non-Urbanized Areas officials in developing plans for projects.

## **Technical Orientation and Petition Review**

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1. When meeting with the officials from Non-Urbanized Areas to discuss transportation related problems, resources of the PRHTA staff provide technical advice and discuss with the interested parties any specific project proposal including possible environmental issues.
2. After further technical review, including site visits if necessary by the DTPW/PRHTA officials determine whether the proposed transportation projects will be included in the STIP and/or Construction Investment Program (CIP), according with expected availability of federal and Commonwealth resources and priorities, or recommended for further study. The decision and the reasons are communicated in writing to the proponents.

3. Individual technical assistance is also provided to Non-Urbanized Areas officials in developing plans for projects under Sections 5310 and 5311 of FTA.

## Evaluation and Selection of STIP Projects

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1. PRHTA's projects selection process is in accordance with the Federal regulations (23 CFR Subpart 450.220 and 49 CFR part 613). For the Non-Urbanized Areas, only projects included in the STIP are considered eligible for FTA and FHWA funding. A separate document Titled Project Evaluation and Selection Criteria Process has been prepared for the general public.
2. The Federal Coordination Office prepares a Report of the recommended petitions based in the process of interaction between the DTPW/PRHTA staff and the local officials of the Non-Urbanized Areas. This Report is then presented to the Secretary of the DTPW. This report lists and explains the projects recommended for inclusion in the STIP under FTA's 5310 and 5311 programs. Decisions are informed to the applicants, so they may express their opinions or doubts to the DTPW/PRHTA.

## Draft Document

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1. With the project list from the Non-Urbanized Areas and those in the urbanized areas' TIP, the preliminary draft of the STIP is prepared and circulated to all the municipalities by the DTPW/PRHTA staff, who then collects and considers local c o m m e n t s and recommendations.
2. A notice is published in a major local newspaper informing the general public of Non-Urbanized Areas and urbanized areas about the opportunity to review and comment on the STIP's draft. A **15-days response period is provided**. The notice states that copies of said documents are available for review at the various municipalities and in the DTPW/PRHTA website. Comments are received and considered by the Federal Coordination Office. Any comments received are available for review by the public, upon request. The PRHTA answers all significant comments received from the public.

## **Final Document Preparation and Approval**

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1. Based on the comments received, the DTPW determines if there is a need for public hearings. If so, adequate prior notice will be provided to the public.
2. The final version of the STIP is prepared taking into consideration comments received from the public and local officials.
3. The final STIP is sent to FHWA and FTA for their joint approval.
4. Once the comments of FTA and FHWA are incorporated to the document, the final version of the STIP is prepared.
5. The final version of the STIP is distributed to the non-urbanized and urbanized local governments and kept available to the general public in the Federal Coordination Office and at DTPW/PRHTA's website.
6. A notice is published in a major local newspaper informing the public of the availability of the final version of the STIP.

## **STIP Amendments**

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During its effectiveness, the STIP could only be amended by adding or deleting projects. Non-Urbanized Areas local officials would be informed about any decision affecting their municipalities and the reason for the change, so that they may comment and recommend. A notice is published informing the general public about the proposed amendments and the opportunity to review and to send comments. A fifteen (15) day response period is provided. A letter is sent to all non-urbanized local officials advising the STIP amendment and the period for comments. Based on the comments received, if any, the DTPW determines if there is a need for a public hearing. If so, adequate prior notice will be provided to the public.

## PUERTO RICO LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN

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- The PRLRTP is developed and updated in consultation with the non-urbanized areas by:
  - Promoting early and continuous consultation with the Non-urbanized local officials.
  - Inviting representatives from each non-urbanized area to participate on technical and policy advisory committees.
  - Consulting with local officials when planning public meetings and workshops, and when conducting focus groups, open houses, or surveys within their jurisdiction.
  - Seeking guidance from non-urbanized officials on transportation issues on their areas.
  - Inviting the general public and the local officials to revise and comment the draft of the PRLRTP and their regional Long-Range Transportation Plan. The received comments are addressed by the Strategic Planning Office of the PRHTA.
  - A public notice is published to announce that the final PRLRTP and the regional LRTP are available.
- Other meetings and workshops

The PRHTA also assist the non-urbanized area in how to comply with Rural NTD Program, Title VI Program, Drug and Alcohol Program and ADA Program. In addition, the Federal Coordination Office,

- provides training and technical assistance to eligible recipients through seminars, workshops and meetings in areas such as: project planning, proposal preparation, administrative procedures, compliance with Federal and State statutes and regulations.
- develops guidelines for project management and grant administration.
- administrates, develops and implements a Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) to provide technical assistant to rural transit operators as well as conduct research and other support activities in rural transit.

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TOOLS

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Public involvement is a critical component in the transportation decision-making process. The public has useful opinions, insights, and observations on the performance and needs of the transportation or on specific projects and should be noted. Virtual Public Involvement (VPI) is a method for stakeholder outreach, input and inclusion. Virtual meeting should be used during an emergency (as declared by President of the United State of America and/o Governor). However, PRHTA may use VPI as part of the planning process. VPI support PRHTA efforts to engage the public more effectively by supplementing face to face information sharing with technology.

### Online Tools

- Pre-recorded voiceover presentation
- Virtual meeting using internet-based communication (WebEx, Google, Microsoft Teams, Zoom etc.)
- Distribution of newsletter via email
- Social media

### Print Tools

- Newspaper notice
- Brochure
- Billboards
- Yard signs

### In-person Tools

- Public meeting
- Public Hearing
- Workshops
- Distribute print materials
- In person interaction by making an appointment

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN – EVALUATION**

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The PRHTA will periodically evaluate the public involvement efforts presented in this document to determine its effectiveness in reaching the public and local officials of Non-Urbanized Areas and assure their full and open access to the planning and programming decision-making processes. As part of these efforts, at least once every two (2) years the DTPW will survey local officials from these areas, and pertinent PRHTA offices (such as Environmental Studies, Strategic Planning, Programming) to provide feedback about the PIP procedures, and make recommendations for improvements.

Every five years, PRHTA will review the Plan in accordance with 23 CFR 450.210 (b) (1). Notice is published in a newspaper to advertise the opportunity to comment on the proposed plan. Sixty (60) calendar days will be provided for review and comments regarding the effectiveness of the consultation process and any proposed changes. A notification letter is sent to nonurbanized local officials to solicit comment and inform the due date to send recommendations. This Plan and public notice are posted on DTPW/PRHTA website.

**PROCEDURE ADOPTION CERTIFICATION**

The Non-Urbanized Areas DTPW and PRHTA Consultation Process was adopted in \_\_\_\_\_  
by the Puerto Rico Department of Transportation and Public Works and the Puerto Rico Highway and  
Transportation Authority, in compliance with federal statute and regulations, in accordance with the policy of  
the public participation in the planning and programming process. Copy of this document will be provided  
to the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Eileen M. Velez Vega, P.E.  
Secretary  
Puerto Rico Department of Transportation  
and Public Works

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Edwin E. González Montalvo, PE  
Executive Director  
Puerto Rico Highway and Transportation Authority

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX

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### ACRONYMS

Americans with Disabilities Act	ADA
Puerto Rico Highway and Transportation Authority	PRHTA
Department of Transportation and Public Works	DTPW
<i>Federal Highway Administration</i>	FHWA
<i>Federal Transit Administration</i>	FTA
Long Range Transportation Plan	LRTP
<i>Metropolitan Planning Organization</i>	MPO
<i>National Transit Database</i>	NTD
Federal Coordination Office	FCO
Public Involvement Plan	PIP
Puerto Rico Long Range Transportation Plan	PRLRTP
<i>Rural Transit Assistance Program</i>	RTAP
<i>Statewide Transportation Improvement Program</i>	STIP
<i>Transportation Improvement Program</i>	TIP

## **Public Involvement Plan for the Environmental Process**

The Environmental Studies Office of PRHTA has a Public Involvement Plan for the environmental processes that explains how the public is involved and consulted before the development of a construction project. The Plan was endorsed by the Federal Highway Administration on May 2019. The Plan is available at the Agency's website <https://act.dtop.pr.gov/estudios-ambientales/>.