

MTPO 2021 Title VI Annual Report

Purpose & Background

The mission of the MTPO's Title VI program is to implement compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This Act ensures that no person is excluded from participation in; denied the benefits of; or is subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Transportation. The MTPO will provide leadership and guidance to promote and engage the participation of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability or socioeconomic status. The reporting period for this report is from September of 2020 through August of 2021. These public participation and outreach techniques are also in accordance with the MTPO's current Public Participation Plan (PPP).

As outlined in the MTPO's PPP, the MTPO encourages the public to participate in the transportation planning process through a variety of public participation techniques. One of the roles of the MTPO is to provide information to the public and to facilitate active participation in the transportation decision-making process. The MTPO utilizes maps that depict areas of the MTPO Planning Area that have higher concentrations of persons that may fall under the protections of Title VI. The map depicts areas of socioeconomic characteristics indicative of those described through Environmental Justice (EJ). Transportation project distributions are then analyzed with respect to their proximity to these EJ Areas.

Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. On April 15, 1997, USDOT issued its Final Order to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low Income Populations. Among other provisions, the Order requires programming and planning activities to:

- Include explicit consideration of the effects of transportation decisions on minority and low-income populations.
- Provide meaningful opportunities for public involvement by members of minority and low-income populations.
- Gather, where relevant, appropriate and practical, demographic information (race, color, national origin, and income level) on the populations served or affected by transportation decisions.
- Minimize or mitigate any adverse impact on minority or low-income populations.

Public Involvement and advertising for MTPO Outlets and Partners

While there were no new major Plans or Updates to those plans (the last major plan update was the Pedestrian Plan adopted in August of 2020 and the Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update is just getting underway.) the MTPO staff did participate in public outreach opportunities for the required updates of core documents. Due to the on-going pandemic, all public meetings were virtual. Links for notices, agendas, and meeting materials for all meetings were placed on the MTPO and the City's multiple websites; in the official city newspaper; on the city's television station; and through invitation by direct email to all persons or groups on our Notification list. In addition to all meeting materials, direct mailings also included a ZOOM meeting information to allow public access to the meetings.

Disadvantaged socioeconomic status as described by the department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for the purpose of distribution of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, are those individuals or families making less than 80% of the Area median income, or "Low-Moderate Income (LMI) households. All Neighborhood Improvement Associations, by definition, meet this income qualification guideline. Therefore, for

EJ and Title VI compliance purposes, all NIA's are targeted. This is achieved through correspondence with their respective NIA presidents, all of which are on our email distribution list.

Other groups contacted include the Topeka Independent Living Resource Center(TILRC), an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) organization; Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority (TMTA) and Paratransit organizations; Kansas American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today (ADAPT); the NAACP; and the Topeka Justice Unity and Ministry Project (JUMP). Social media outlets utilized to reach Title VI groups included Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and NextDoor.

2021 MTPO Projects and Activities Pertaining to Title VI Objectives

This year, in addition to public notices being advertised through the aforementioned avenues for the Updated 2021-2024 TIP and four TIP Amendments, the 2021 UPWP and two UPWP amendments, and one Futures 2040 MTP amendment, the following Title VI related projects and activities were completed:

- 1) Prepared documents and materials for TA grants and presented this information to community groups including the KAW Valley Bike Club and Neighborhood Improvement groups (via Zoom). Input was solicited on the TA grants from these groups before the final submission of the Grant application. All projects submitted for Transportation grants regardless of source are shared on social media sites maintained by the MTPO. The TA projects submitted for TA Grants this year included:
 - An Extension of the Robinson Trail that will serve to expand the County's network of multi-use recreational trails, promoting active and healthy lifestyles in neighborhoods identified as Environmental Justice (EJ) Areas.
 - Phase IV of the Topeka Bikeways Master Plan. The primary purpose of the Bikeways Master Plan is to connect Topeka's citizens and neighborhoods across a network of facilities in a safe, pleasant, and comfortable manner. The main focus of this project is equitable connections. It will also help to increase resident's connections to downtown and the NOTO District, as well as to the Trail systems by way of the City's Bikeways Network. This project will provide options for alternate modes of transportation for underserved neighborhoods to access essential community resources.

Both projects were awarded TA Grants in 2021.

- 2) The MTPO in conjunction with the City of Topeka applied for two KDOT Cost-Share grants for multi-modal projects within the EJ Area. Projects submitted included the following:
 - A project that extended sidewalks and pedestrian crossings along Topeka Blvd. between 29th and 37th Streets. This is a commercial corridor through Central Topeka, which will facilitate pedestrian, and bicyclist mobility for work as well as for recreation. This project will help support efforts already underway for this corridor, which began using "leftover" annual allocations of Complete Street and sidewalk funds. This was the third Cost-Share application submitted for this particular project. However, once again this project was not selected for the grant. This project will be revised and resubmitted at a future date.
 - Eighth Street Bikeways improvement between Topeka Blvd. and Madison Street. This project was part of the Bikeways phase IV TA Grant submission awarded previously. It includes bike lanes, a road diet, and signalization modifications. This project was awarded a Cost-Share Grant.
- 3) Began the process of updating the Futures 2040 MTP. This included analyzing and updating the current socioeconomic data for the MTPO Area. Environmental Justice Areas were updated as necessary based on current Low-Mod-Income (LMI) guidelines and the estimated Census data for 2020. This data was utilized to create base year model runs for the MTP update.

The MTPO and partners prepared an RFP. They then conducted consultant interviews and selected a consultant firm to assist in the preparation of the MTP update.

The MTPO staff is currently working with the selected consulting firm, JEO on the preparation of Story Maps, which will be used as part of the public participation and outreach for the initial tasks of the MTP update process. These Story Maps will be presented on the MTPO and the City of Topeka websites. They will also be distributed via NextDoor, an application designed specifically for sharing information amongst all neighborhoods throughout the City.

- 4) MTPO staff worked with City Engineers to update and expand the current GIS map layer depicting the existing conditions of sidewalks as well as the areas near residential areas and commercial districts where sidewalks are lacking. This allows for a more efficient tool for prioritizing where to construct new sidewalks and which damaged sidewalks should be repaired first. More often than not, these priority sidewalk placements are in EJ areas.
- 5) MTPO staff worked with the City of Topeka on Safe-Routes-to-School maps for several schools in the Topeka Area. The City received a grant to support the development of SRTS projects for several schools throughout Topeka. This included assisting with creating “preferred route maps” and potential sidewalk improvements needed. This was done as part of the application submission process for phase II of the SRTS process. Many of these schools are in EJ Areas.
- 6) The TMTA continued to perform outreach via meetings and surveys available on buses and online pertaining to bus stop placements and possible rerouting of buses.

Heartland Healthy Neighborhoods (HHN)

MTPO staff attended, via ZOOM, monthly meetings of the Heartland Healthy Neighborhood and Heartland Visioning meetings. Persons representing various interests among the City including business, education, recreation, health and transportation attend these meetings. These meetings provide a platform to espouse transportation and healthy lifestyle issues and in turn gives the MTPO an opportunity to gather opinions and concerns from a broad and diverse representation of the community. Many of the persons in these groups also serve on MTPO transportation committees.

Training/presentations

- 1) MTPO and Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority (TMTA) staff participated on a Sustainability Zoom panel sponsored by Washburn University. A transportation themed panel that included representatives from other communities in Kansas. The panel session was affiliated with a class at the University. Ideas were shared on Complete Street design elements utilized that enhance mobility and access to all users. The MTPO staff presented an overview of the recently adopted Complete Streets Design Guidelines document, as well as the current modifications pending on the redesign of 12th Street.
- 2) MTPO staff attended public involvement and Title VI related sessions included at the 2021 National American Planning Association (APA) online conference.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carlton Scroggins AICP, MTPO Manager