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Public Involvement Policy Plan

FY 2024



DISCLAIMER #1

The preparation of this document was financed in part through a federal grant by the Federal Highway Administration under the provision of the 1962 Federal-Aid Highway Act, as amended

CAVEAT

The content of this document reflects information given to ECIA by the various implementing agencies named within. This document does not constitute a standard, specification, or regulation.

Regional Transit Authority 8

7600 Commerce Park, Dubuque, IA 52002

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PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT POLICY
REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY 8

Public participation in the regional transportation process for the Regional Transit Authority 8 (RTA 8) is guided by this Public Involvement Plan (PIP). The plan outlines recommended methods to engage the public during the decision-making process and informs members of the public how they can be involved.

Public participation is an integral part of the transit process. The information and perspectives provided through public participation assist decision-makers and lead to a more meaningful and comprehensive transit system. Good public participation techniques allow staff to identify issues and understand aspects of the transportation system that may be missed when considering a project from a purely technical or political point of view. Effective transit planning must include the participation of those whose everyday lives are affected by how they are able to get to work, home, school, stores, and services.

I. Purpose

RTA 8 *Public Involvement Policy (PIP)* was developed due to a need for proactive citizen involvement in the *Consolidated Funding Applications, Route and fare changes* and all other transit activities conducted by RTA 8.

This process is also being used to satisfy Section 5311 and 5339 program of projects requirement, all other Federal Transit Authority (FTA) funding programs, and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) flex funding programs.

The public involvement process will provide the following:

- Complete and accurate information to the public
- Timely notices of public hearings
- Complete access to all key decisions made at public hearings
- Continuing involvement of the public

This PIP is developed in hopes that it will promote and encourage citizen involvement in the decision-making process. It is the obligation and responsibility of RTA 8 to provide information and consider public input in decision making as prescribed by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).

In worst case scenarios, public participation does not occur until after the community becomes aware of an unpopular policy decision. In such a case citizen involvement mobilized to overturn or amend a decision that had already been made. Late citizen involvement prolongs the process and ultimately costs more in terms of resources and staff time. Public involvement in the decision-making process at an early stage makes such occurrences minimal or non-existent.

II. Guidelines for Public Participation

In keeping with the spirit of public involvement and participation, RTA 8 will follow a systematic approach that will allow the public to become involved in the transit planning process. RTA 8 will consistently adhere to established guidelines as a means of heightening public involvement. This includes the Title VI population, persons with a disability, the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) population, the Environmental Justice (EJ – low income or high minority) zone populations, and other traditionally underserved groups.

Utilizing various techniques to solicit public involvement has proven to be the most effective means by which to attract citizen involvement. The RTA 8 Area is a diverse area with distinct geographical, socioeconomic, and

cultural areas that it takes more than just one technique to capture the attention of citizens. RTA 8 remains committed to using a variety of resources to reach out to the public and attempt to engender public participation.

RTA 8 is committed to the concept of public participation and will work hard to ensure that the public plays an active role in transit planning. The hope is that public participation will reduce unfavorable public opinions of transit projects by incorporating public sentiment into the planning process.

Title VI Program Manual

The RTA 8's Title VI Program Manual states the RTA 8 complies with all civil rights laws and ensures that no person will — on the grounds of race, religion, age, gender, disability, national origin, or economic status — be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any RTA 8 program or activity.

The RTA 8 promotes the full and fair participation of all affected populations in the transit decision making process. Any RTA 8 information, educational materials, and transportation planning participation opportunities will be equally accessible to all people covered by Title VI. The Title VI Program Manual includes a complaint form and process for use by anyone who believes they have been discriminated against in the RTA 8 operations. All Title VI complaints will be reviewed by the RTA 8 Policy Board and used by RTA 8 staff to improve the region's transportation planning process.

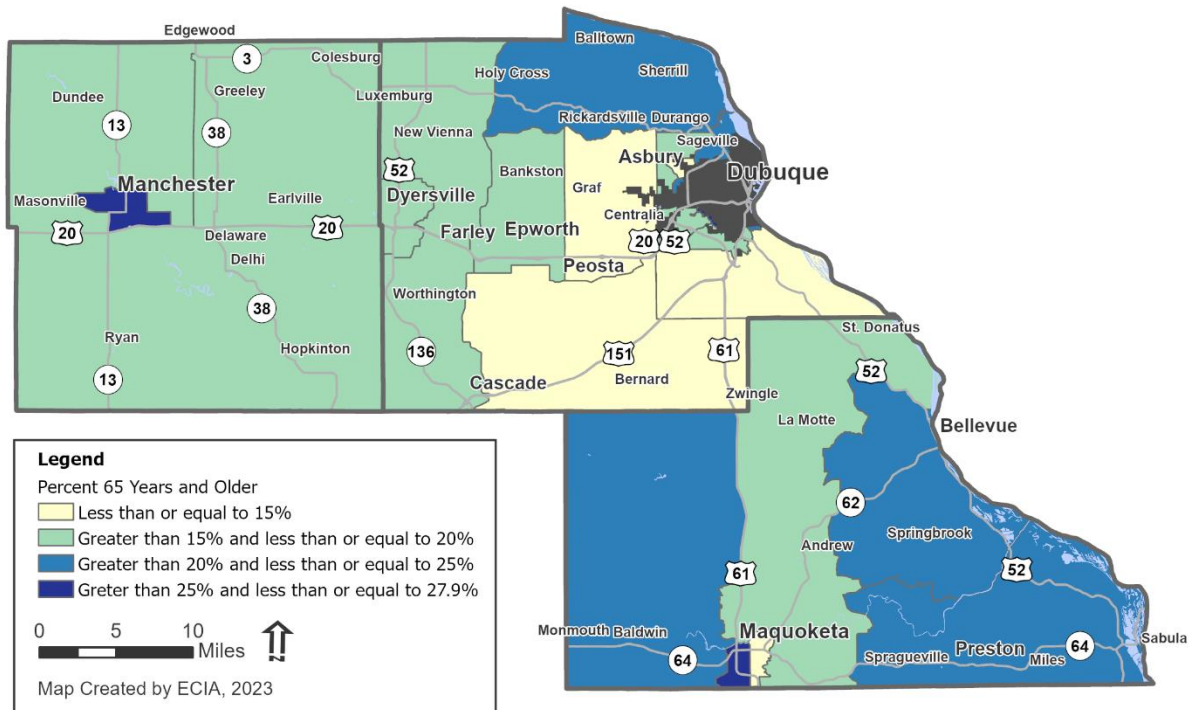
Persons with a Disability

No one should be excluded from participating in the transportation planning process. To ensure the location and setup of public meetings do not exclude people from participating, public meetings should be held in locations accessible by transit and in buildings compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Population Older Than 65

According to the AARP's Public Policy Institute, "more than 20 percent of Americans age 65 and older don't drive." Public transit can help older people get to meeting location. However, it is advised to have public meetings closer to locations with population older than 65 to get active participation. In the RTA 8 area, the highest concentrations of 65 and older population are found throughout the service area. Figure 1 is a map of the 65+ population in the RTA 8 area by census tract.

Figure 1: Percent Population 65 and Older in the RTA 8 Area.



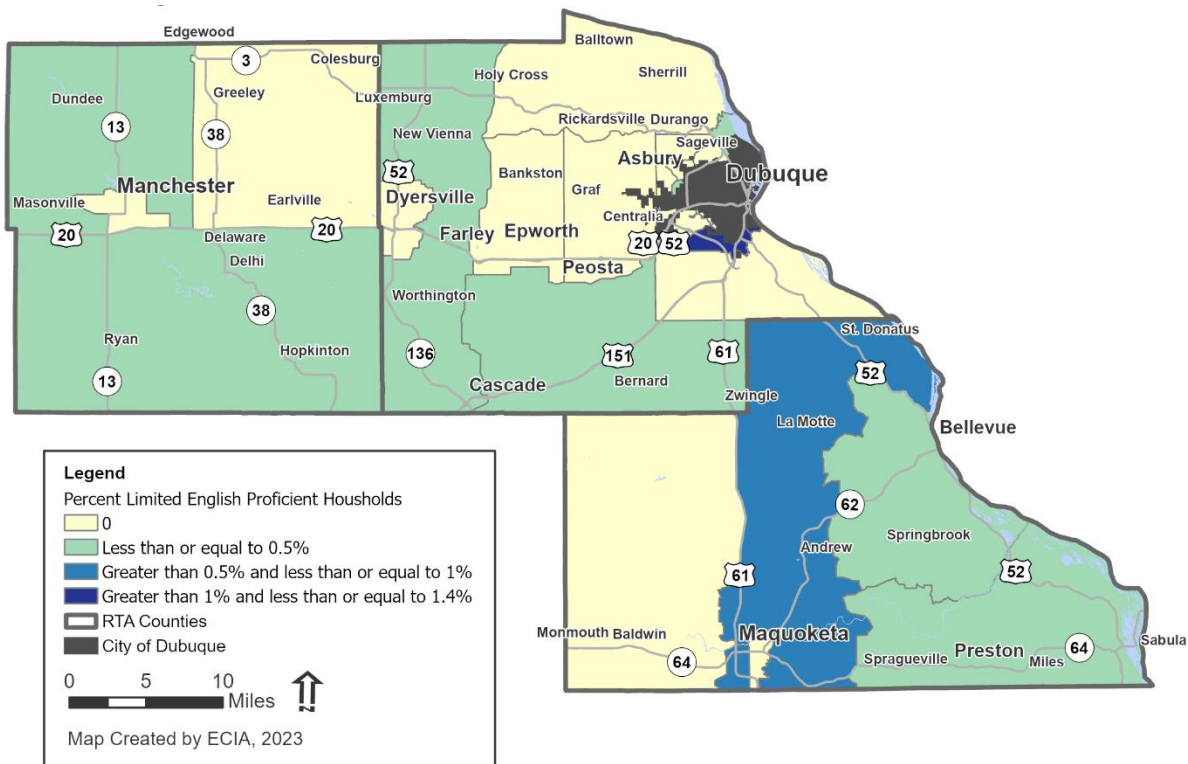
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2021 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021. Table S0101.
 Scale 1:700,000

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Population

According to FTA Circular C 4702.1B, “Limited English Proficient (LEP) persons refers to persons for whom English is not their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the LEP population in the RTA 8 area. RTA 8 does not have a defined LEP population above the Department of Justice’s Safe Harbor threshold. The Department of Justice defines the Safe Harbor threshold as 1,000 persons OR 5% of the total population for a particular language, whichever is less, requiring vital document translation. The highest concentration of LEP people in the RTA 8 area is in the west of Dubuque county where 1.01% to 1.4% percent of the tract’s total population are LEP. However, RTA 8 will make reasonable attempts to provide translations when requested. The RTA 8 local social services agencies like Lantern Center and Loras College in Dubuque for LEP services when requested by the public.

Figure 2: Percent Limited English Proficient Population



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2021 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021. Table S1602.
 Scale 1:700,000

Environmental Justice Population

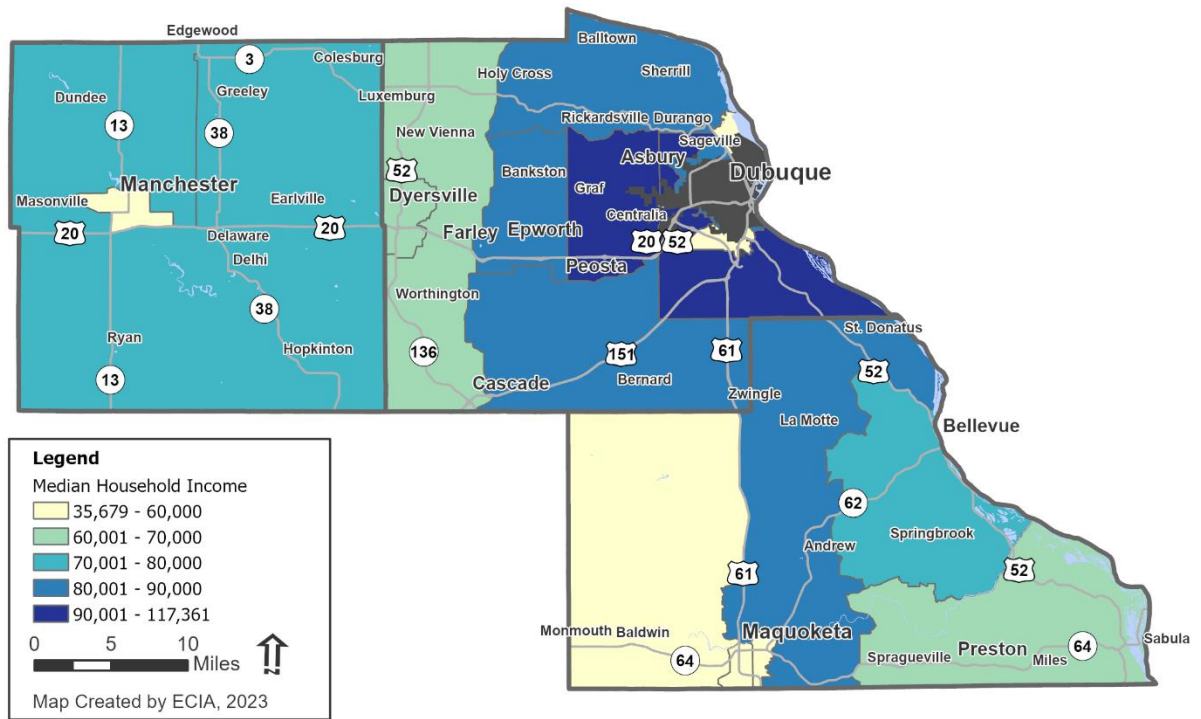
Environmental Justice (EJ) is a federal term that was created in 1994 when President Clinton signed Executive Order 12898. EJ involves the need to ensure that low-income and minority population groups are not disproportionately affected by the transportation planning process. Historically, such groups are under-represented in the planning process and EJ is designed to ensure that the public involvement process makes every attempt to solicit their input.

RTA 8 is committed to ensuring that low-income and minority population groups, as well as all citizens in the Regional Planning Area, have sufficient access to the transportation planning process and are given every opportunity to voice their opinions at RTA 8 meetings.

RTA 8 staff will continue to use US Census Bureau data and GIS technology to identify concentrations of minority and low-income populations in the RTA 8 area. This information will continue to be used to determine if proposed transportation projects will adversely affect these populations. Staff will make additional efforts to engage minority and low-income residents in public participation.

Figure 3 provides the location of low-income households and Figure 4 provides the location of minority population. It is a RTA 8 priority to communicate with these traditionally underrepresented and underserved groups and incorporate them into the planning process.

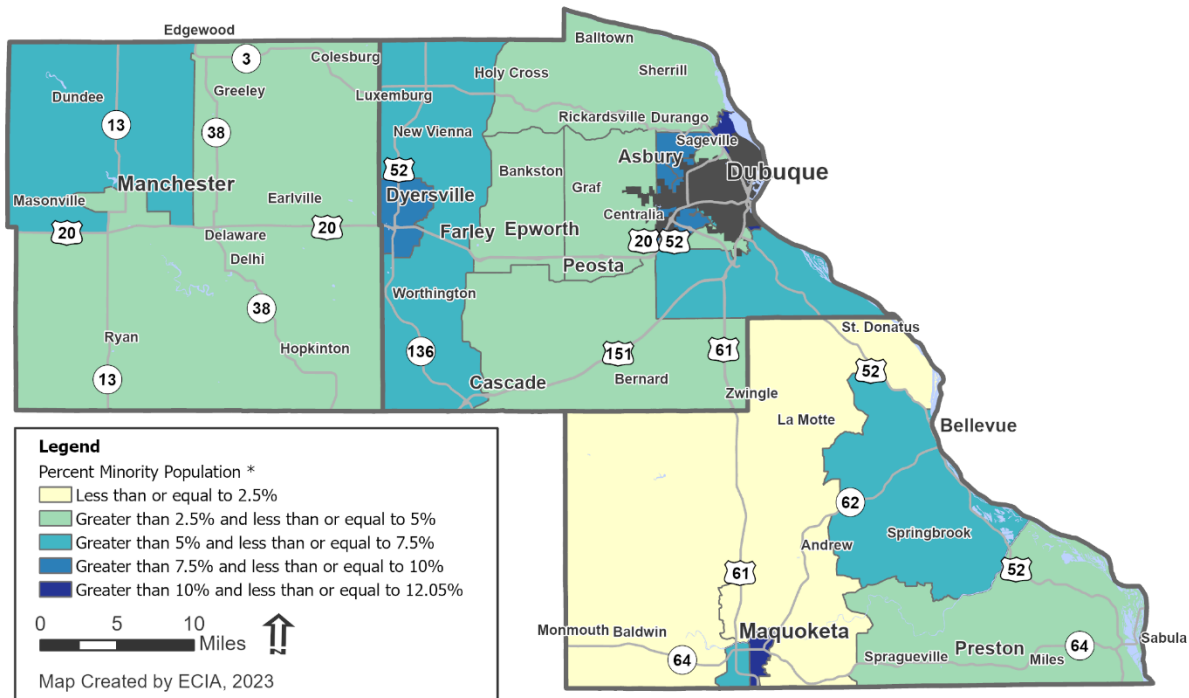
Figure 3: Median Household Income



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2021 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021. Table B19013.

Scale 1:700,000

Figure 4: Percent Minority Population



* Percent minority population is calculated for each tract by dividing the population that identifies as a race other than "White alone" or as "Hispanic or Latino" by the total population of the tract.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2021 5-Year Estimates 2017-2021. Table B03002.

Scale 1:700,000

III. How Can the Public Provide Input?

RTA 8 has always provided citizens with the opportunity to voice their opinions on transportation issues during the RTA 8 Board meetings. When transportation issues are being decided upon by the RTA 8 Policy Board, the RTA 8 Policy Board Chair calls for any public input or comments. This process is followed for any consolidated funding, budget approval, route and fare changes that are put before the Board for final consideration and a vote.

There are a variety of ways the public can participate in the transportation planning process. Figure 6 will provide different methods the public can use to participate in the transportation planning process.

TAG Groups: the RTA 8 uses its Transit Action Group (TAG) to inform all interested parties, including public and private agencies that provide transit services, about the public comment period and changes to the RTA 8 system.

Online Presence: The RTA 8 website – accessible at <https://www.rta8.org/> – provides an overview of upcoming meetings along with agendas, committee representatives, staff information, news, maps, route information etc. produced by the RTA 8. Relevant links are included on the website, too. Beyond the website, the RTA 8 maintains an online presence through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The RTA 8 regularly updates these sites to engage residents and to build a better understanding of the RTA 8 and the projects the organization takes on.

Figure 6: Ways to Participate



Public Meetings

Attend and contribute at open public meetings



Call us

Call us at 1-800-839-5005

8:00 am – 5:00 pm Monday - Friday



Write to us

Regional Transit Authority 8

7600 Commerce Park, IA 52002



Review Documents

Regional Transit Authority 8

7600 Commerce Park, IA 52002



Email us

cravada@ecia.org twagner@ecia.org

sscott@ecia.org gkuhle@ecia.org



Visit our Website

<https://www.rta8.org/index.cfm>



Visit us on Social Media

Twitter.com/RTA__8 Facebook.com/RTA
RTA

IV. RTA 8 STRUCTURE

The RTA was formed in 1982 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization for the purpose of connecting the elderly, disabled, youth and low-income citizens in Delaware, Dubuque and Jackson counties to critical services like healthcare, counseling, nutrition, childcare, education, employment, and social venues. The RTA Corporate Board is comprised of all of the County Supervisors from Dubuque, Delaware, and Jackson Counties. The Board meets every month to review the RTA's budget and general operating policies.

RTA 8 Policy Board

The RTA 8 Policy Board is responsible for establishing overall policy, making decisions related to transit funding priorities and programming. The policy committee is the final decision-maker in the RTA 8 process. It has the authority to approve the RTA 8 transit vision (included in the RTA 8's goal setting) and then prioritize and choose projects (included in the Consolidated funding application) to implement that vision.

The RTA 8 policy committee typically meets on the 1st Wednesday of each month at 9:00 a.m. at East Central Intergovernmental Association, 7600 Commerce Park, Dubuque.

The RTA 8 is governed by a Board of nine elected officials from the three counties within the service area.

Voting Members:

- Three votes for each County (Delaware co, Dubuque Co, Jackson Co) Board of Supervisors

Non-Voting Members:

- East Central Intergovernmental Association, Federal Transit Authority (FTA), and Iowa DOT

Transit Action Group (TAG)

The RTA 8 does not have a Technical Advisory Committee to advise RTA 8 Policy Board. After a couple of work session and input process, the RTA 8 Policy Board expanded the roles and responsibilities of the existing TAG and made them the official advisory committee for RTA 8 Policy Board.

The TAG committee will be responsible for the following activities:

- Provide input on existing services
- Design new services
- Discussions on:
 - Policy (i.e. MCO's)
 - County level issues
 - County level events
 - Marketing strategies
- Collect ridership numbers on a quarterly basis to assess performance
- Help Mobility Coordinator with Transit Assessment Plan
- Assist in design of grant applications & provide approval to submit
- Work with RTA on all Technical Projects

Each county has one TAG committee where they meet quarterly. The fourth quarterly meeting is held with all three TAG committees and the RTA 8 Policy Board.

Each TAG committee is made up of Human Services, County supervisors, Hospitals, Economic Development, Schools, and other transit providers.

RTA 8 staff works with a wide variety of partners and community groups to accomplish our goals.

State and Local Resource Agencies

RTA 8 staff Coordinate with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Iowa Department of Transportation (IADOT) on transit issues within the region.

V. History of RTA 8 Public Involvement

Since the inception of RTA 8 as the transit provider for Delaware, Dubuque and Jackson County area, public participation and input has always been one of the priorities in the transit services planning process. RTA 8 shares some of the same historical perspectives in citizen involvement that many transit agencies across the country have experienced. RTA 8 opened their Policy Board meetings to the public from day one.

VI. Public Participation Goals, Objectives, and Policies

RTA 8 strongly supports a public participation process that effectively engages citizens in regional transit activities. RTA 8 believes regional transit planning cannot, and should not, be based simply upon technical analysis. The qualitative information derived from public participation is essential to good decision making. RTA 8 will ensure that the public has opportunities to be informed and involved early in the development of plans and projects; that their issues and concerns are heard; and that their concerns are considered prior to any final decision by the RTA 8 Policy Board.

Public Participation Goal

Alert the public to transit planning activities and encourage them to provide their opinions and comments.

Objective 1: Public Access

RTA 8 will provide timely notice and reasonable access to the public information on transit issues and processes.

Public Access Policies

- **Documents**

RTA 8 shall make all plans and documents available to the public for review at the RTA 8 office. RTA 8 shall provide copies of current RTA 8 plans and documents to citizens upon request.

RTA 8 shall make all plans and documents available online.

- **Notices**

RTA 8 shall provide to the media any notices and agendas of any board or committee meetings that have been scheduled. RTA 8 will provide such notification within (4-20) days prior to when

meetings are scheduled to occur.

- Access

RTA 8 will make every effort possible to provide reasonable access to technical and policy information.

- Assistance:

RTA 8 will make every effort to provide assistance upon request to any and all citizens who require some special assistance to attend any RTA 8 meeting. The request should be at least three days before the meeting.

- Meeting Locations:

All RTA 8 meetings and workshops and all of its advisory committees shall be held in Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant locations.

Objective 2: Public Outreach

RTA 8 recognizes the need for opportunities for all segments of the general public to access information and learn about issues and proposals under consideration by the RTA 8 Policy Board. Especially important to RTA 8, is the need to reach out to citizens who will be directly affected by a project under consideration and citizens who are underserved by the transit system.

Public Outreach Policies

- Informing the Public

RTA 8 will attempt to inform the public about all issues under consideration through public workshops, newsletters, exhibits, or other techniques during the development of each of its transit plans, studies, and projects.

- Public Notification Lists

RTA 8 will develop and maintain a list of civic and public service organizations and interested or potentially interested persons for the purpose of distributing information about its transit activities. Efforts will be made to include members of potentially underserved groups.

- Biennial Review

RTA 8 will conduct a two-year review of its public involvement procedures to gauge the effectiveness of soliciting public input and citizen participation at public meetings. Of particular importance in this review will be an examination of the public participation process to determine if underserved citizen groups have been reached and given the opportunity to participate in the public involvement process.

- Public Hearings

RTA 8 will conduct public hearings as herein outlined prior to the adoption, substantive amendment, or update of each of the plans and programs for which it is responsible, including the Consolidated Funding Application, raising fares or implementing a Major Service Reduction.

- Previously Received Public Comments

RTA 8 will, upon request, provide previously received public comments relating to all transit plans.

- Public Comment during Public Meetings

RTA 8 will provide an opportunity for the public to comment during any public meetings and the input will be considered and included in the documents.

VII. Transit Program Elements

Consolidated Funding Application

Iowa's Consolidated Transit Funding Application is used by RTA 8 to apply for state and, in some cases, federal transit funding. All of Iowa's public transit agencies use the application to apply for STA. Regional transit systems, along with the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority (DART), the provider for rural Polk County, use this process to apply for state administered FTA Section 5311 funding. Any system applying for statewide FTA Section 5339 capital funds must include its request in the consolidated application. Any individual earmarks for capital projects for all transit systems should also be included.

The Consolidated Transit Funding Application requires the transit agency to hold a public hearing to explain the state and federal funding requests. Public hearings **MUST** take place in an accessible building. Comments from the public regarding the need for the project will be recorded. A notice of the public hearing must be published in a newspaper of general circulation in the vicinity of the proposed project(s) approximately 30 days in advance of the hearing. The notice must describe the project(s) in sufficient detail to allow the public to be aware of the projects and funding sources. Vehicles must be broken out by category and listed with other major capital items with separate estimates of costs.

Fare and Service Changes

FTA requires that each large urban transit operator have a locally developed process to solicit and consider public comment before raising a fare or carrying out a major reduction of transit service. (FTA Circular 9030.1E) OPT has the same requirement for small urban and regional transit systems. The public comment opportunity requirement is in effect even if the fare is increasing only \$0.01. However, the definition of 'major reduction of transit service' is one to be made locally.

The transit system is expected to have a written policy that describes the public comment process on increases in the basic fare structure and on major service reductions. The policy should provide an opportunity for a public hearing or public meeting for any fare increase or major service reduction, should describe how such meetings will be conducted, and how the results of such meetings will be considered in the process of changing fares and service. A public meeting is not mandatory; however, an opportunity for a public meeting in order to solicit comments must be given. While the requirement is limited to fare increases and major service reductions, it is good public policy to receive public input for any significant fare or service changes.

Upon determination of the applicability of this procedure, the process for soliciting and considering public comment before raising fares or implementing a major service reduction by RTA 8 are as follows:

1. Public transportation passengers will be notified of a proposed fare increase or major service reduction not less than forty-five (45) days before such changes are scheduled to take place. Such notification will take place by display of information on each bus on a posting of at least 8½" x 11". The posting will include the proposed change, the proposed date of the change, and will

provide passengers with the opportunity to provide written comment and/or to request a public hearing. The address to which written comment can be sent and the deadline for the comment and/or request for public hearing will be included in the posting. Finally, the posting will include the date, time and location, at which the RTA will consider the proposed fare increase or major schedule reduction, inviting the public to attend.

2. A public notice will be placed in a local newspaper of general circulation, in the community in which the fare increase and/or service reduction is being considered, not less than forty-five (45) days before such changes are scheduled to take place. Such notification will include the proposed change, the proposed date of the change, and will provide the public with the opportunity to comment and/or to request a public hearing. The public notice will include the address at which written comment or request for public hearing will be received, and a deadline for receipt of such written request. In addition, the public will be invited to attend the meeting when the proposed fare increase or major service reduction is considered.
3. Upon completion of the public comment period, RTA will:
 - a. Determine whether a request for a public hearing has been made;
 - b. Compile all correspondence received regarding the proposed fare increase and/or major service reduction.

If a written request for public hearing is received, the RTA will schedule a public hearing at the earliest possible date, but not less than seven (7) calendar days from when request received.

Copies of any written comments regarding the fare increase and/or major service reduction will be prepared and

- a. Given to the East Central Intergovernmental Association (ECIA) Executive Director, for review, comment and distribution to the RTA 8 Policy Board.
- b. Made available at the date and time stated in public notices as described above, along with specific information regarding the proposed fare increase and/or proposed major service reduction.

If no request for public hearing has been received, the RTA may implement the fare increase and/or major service reduction.

4. RTA will review and consider written comment regarding the proposed fare increase and/or major service. RTA will also offer the opportunity for public comment.
5. Upon receipt of all public comment and all written comment, RTA will be asked to approve or reject the proposed fare increase or major service reduction. All public comment, whether in writing or verbal, shall be considered by the RTA in their decision.

VIII. Public Involvement Procedures

Public Hearings

RTA 8 will hold a public hearing prior to approval of the Consolidated Funding application and Fare and Service changes. These public hearings may be held as part of a regularly scheduled RTA 8 meeting.

Substantive Public Comments

When substantive public written and oral comments are received on the Consolidated Funding Application and Fare and Service changes as a result of the public involvement process, a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments shall be prepared and made available upon request.

Notification of Documents to Interested Parties

The following describes the notification process for the materials that shall be made available, the process of documenting the input received, public hearings conducted as part of the development, updates, and amendment processes for the Consolidated Funding Application and Fare and Service changes.

Public Notice

A public notice announcing a scheduled public hearing shall be published in a newspaper of general circulation in the RTA 8 service area. These notices will be printed 4-20 days before the scheduled meeting.

Press Releases

Press releases announcing scheduled public hearings shall be provided to community newspapers and local broadcasters throughout the service area.

Printed – Graphical Material

Any printed or graphical material that is available shall be provided by either RTA 8 staff or the appropriate agency upon request.

Public Comments

Copies of all public comments received prior to the hearing shall be provided by either the RTA 8 staff at or before the public hearing. A summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of the comments received shall be prepared and made available upon request.

IX. Electronic Meetings

The RTA 8 may conduct a meeting by electronic means only in circumstances where such a meeting in person is impossible or impractical and RTA 8 will comply with all of the following:

- a. RTA 8 will provide public access to the conversation of the meeting to the extent reasonably possible.
- b. RTA 8 complies with Iowa Open Meetings Law, Section 21.8, Code of Iowa. For the purpose of this paragraph, the place of the meeting is the place from which the communication originates or where public access is provided to the conversation.
- c. Minutes are kept of the meeting. The minutes shall include a statement explaining why a meeting in person was impossible or impractical.

1. A meeting conducted in compliance with this section shall not be considered in violation of this chapter.
2. A meeting by electronic means may be conducted without complying with paragraph “a” of subsection 1 if conducted in accordance with all of the requirements for a closed session contained in section 21.5. Code of Iowa.

Example from IA DOT:

STATEMENT OF WHY MEETING OF THE IOWA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION IN PERSON ON MARCH 30, 2010, IS IMPRACTICAL PURSUANT TO IOWA CODE SECTION 21.8(1)(C).

The members of the Iowa Transportation Commission are holding this session by electronic means pursuant to the provisions of the Iowa Open Meetings Law, Section 21.8, Code of Iowa.

Due to the limited agenda for this meeting and the relatively short period of time that this meeting is expected to be held, the expense of transporting the Commission members in person is impractical. The meeting is being held by conference call originating from the Iowa DOT complex in Ames. It is open to the public and those in attendance can hear the proceedings. Public notice of the meeting has been issued in accordance with Iowa Code Section 21.4.

X. Public Information Activities

Public Information Workshops

Public information workshops shall be announced through a press release, which will be transmitted to newspapers and broadcasters throughout the RTA 8 Area one week prior to the date of that workshop. Notices of these workshops shall be mailed to the standing mailing list and other interested parties.

A public workshop or exhibit shall be conducted prior to the Fare and Service changes. These workshops or exhibits shall be held in locations that are easily accessible to a broad cross-section of RTA 8 residents. A public exhibit or workshop shall be held in the community affected by a transit improvement currently under consideration as part of a special study of a specific corridor being undertaken by RTA 8.

Transit Presentations

RTA 8 will give presentations on a regular basis to the community as a means of providing information to the public on transit issues. The presentation to community groups will encompass wide representation of the community and single identity groups.

Meetings & Location

Meeting notices and agendas shall be mailed to everyone who requests them. They shall also be available to the public at the RTA 8 office during business hours. **Meetings, public hearings, and RTA 8 formal events are held in facilities that are accessible by persons with disabilities.** Public notices of RTA 8 meetings and events include a notice of location for the public. Individuals with disabilities will be provided with accommodations to attend the meetings on request with a minimum of a week notice. Individuals requiring special material or presentation formats will be asked to contact the staff at least three days before the meeting.

XI. Appendix A – Interested Parties

Agencies, Governments & Interested Groups (All Government and Land Management/Resource Agencies listed below are provided the opportunity to participate in Stakeholder Interviews/Direct Agency Consultation during development of different Transit Plans.)

Delaware County
Regional Medical Center /Public Health
Community Services/MHDS
ITP
Unlimited Services/Public Relations
Soc Services at Penn Center
Unlimited Services
Delaware County Board of Supervisors
CNO Regional Medical Center
Penn Center
Economic Development
RMC/Public Health
Department of Human Services
Easter Iowa Regional Housing Authority

Jackson County
Imagine The possibilities, Inc.
Imagine The possibilities, Inc.
Imagine The possibilities, Inc.
Jackson County Economic Alliance
Department of Human Services
Jackson County Conservation
Easter Iowa Regional Housing Authority
Jackson County Board of Supervisors
Imagine The possibilities, Inc.
Operation New View
Clover Ridge place
Jackson County Economic Alliance
General Public
City of Bellevue

Dubuque County
Crescent Community Health center
General Public
Opening Doors
RTA 8
Sunnycrest Manor
Greater Dubuque Development Corporation
Dubuque county supervisor
Unified Therapy
Northeast Iowa Area Agency on Aging
Jule Transit
Easter Iowa Regional Housing Authority
Hills & Dales
Department of Human Services
Dubuque schools
Goodwill Industries
Easter Iowa Regional Housing Authority
Hills & Dales
Dubuque United Way
Area Residential Care
Jule Transit
Imagine The possibilities, Inc.
Department of Human Services