



## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION/INVOLVEMENT POLICY**

### **Purpose**

This policy establishes a process for obtaining input from and providing information to the public concerning agency programs, projects, and program funding in order to ensure the public is informed and has the opportunity to provide SANDAG with input so plans can reflect the public's desire. SANDAG will review and update this plan every three years. Various federal and state laws and regulations require that an agency such as SANDAG conduct public participation programs to ensure that the public is involved and that community concerns are addressed. For example, planning of mass transit capital projects, development of short range service policies and plans, and fare policy and structure changes to public transportation require public participation. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) also have public information components that require an agency such as SANDAG to conduct public participation programs to ensure that the public is involved and that community concerns are addressed. A significant component of the SANDAG mission is a strong commitment to public participation and involvement to include all residents and stakeholders in the regional planning process.

The public participation policy is consistent with the requirements of Public Utility Code Section 132360.1 established with the passage of Assembly Bill 361 which reads as follows:

*(c) The agency shall engage in a public collaborative planning process; recommendations from that process shall be made available and considered for integration into the plan. A procedure to carry out this process including a method of addressing and responding to recommendations from the public shall be adopted.*

### *Social Equity and Environmental Justice*

Ensuring the meaningful involvement of low income, minority, disabled, senior, and other traditionally underrepresented communities is a key component of SANDAG public participation activities. SANDAG policies, procedures, and programs are consistent with federal and state environmental justice laws, regulations, and requirements, Title VI, related nondiscrimination requirements, and reflect the principles of social equity and environmental justice. Social equity means ensuring that all people are treated fairly and are given equal opportunity to participate in the planning and decision-making process, with an emphasis on ensuring that traditionally disadvantaged groups are not left behind. Environmental justice means ensuring that plans, policies, and actions do not disproportionately affect low income and minority communities.

## Scope

The policy addresses public participation policies and public information efforts in the following areas:

- A. Overall Public Participation Process
- B. Short Range Program – Regional Transportation Improvement Program
- C. Development Planning
- D. Design and Construction
- E. Fare Changes
- F. Short Range Transit Planning
- G. Native American Consultation

**A. Overall Public Participation Process** -- *Unless otherwise noted or required, these are SANDAG general policies for public participation for major planning initiatives such as the Regional Transportation Plan, Regional Comprehensive Plan, Regional Short Range Transit Plan, and other planning and programming projects*

1. The SANDAG Public Participation/Involvement Program is designed to inform and involve the region's residents in the decision-making process on issues such as growth, transportation, environmental management, housing, open space, air quality, energy, fiscal management, economic development, and public safety.
2. The Public Participation/Involvement Program seeks to involve all citizens, including but not limited to low income households, limited English proficient individuals, Hispanic, African American, Asian, Native American, senior, and other communities, persons with disabilities, as well as community and civic organizations, public agencies, business groups and associations, environmental organizations, and other stakeholders.
3. SANDAG Board meetings provide the public forum and decision point for significant regional issues. SANDAG Directors usually hold one or two Board meetings each month: a Board Policy Meeting the second Friday of each month and a Board Business Meeting the fourth Friday of each month. Meetings held at the SANDAG office are accessible by public transit. During these meetings, Directors adopt plans, allocate transportation funds, approve transit construction plans, approve transit fare changes, and establish policies and develop programs that are used by local governments as well as other public and private organizations.
4. The SANDAG Public Participation/Involvement Program shall comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). SANDAG shall hold public meetings in buildings, rooms, or locations that are accessible to persons with disabilities. SANDAG shall provide public meeting information in alternate formats and shall provide special accommodations at public meetings with three business days notice.
5. The SANDAG Public Participation/Involvement Program is carried out as an integrated work element of the agency's Overall Work Program and Budget and as part of other programming, development, and implementation processes such as the Regional Transportation Plan, the Regional Comprehensive Plan, Regional Short

Range Transit Plan, Regional Transportation Improvement Program, Environmental Impact Reports, transit capital project development, project construction, transit fare changes, corridor studies, and other projects.

6. SANDAG shall proactively seek and promote public participation in SANDAG workshops and public hearings, as well as participation and attendance at committees, working groups, and task forces. SANDAG shall follow local, state, and federal guidelines for posting public meeting and hearing notices. Depending upon the specific project, SANDAG shall endeavor to hold meetings at times that can attract as many participants as possible, including evenings and weekends and at locations in communities throughout the region. SANDAG shall endeavor to hold these meetings in locations that are accessible by public transit.
7. SANDAG shall inform the public in a timely manner about regional issues, actions, and pending decisions through a number of efforts. As needed or required, SANDAG shall post public notices in newspapers of general circulation for publication of legal notices. Other publication and distribution efforts can include mail distribution to residents, agencies, and city/county governments, the SANDAG Web site, e-mail lists, and rEgion – the SANDAG monthly electronic newsletter. As needed, SANDAG also shall distribute press releases and media alerts to local, regional, and Mexico border area print and broadcast media.
8. SANDAG shall regularly inform local print and broadcast media about SANDAG decisions, events, research, and other issues. SANDAG shall regularly distribute press releases to County News Service, Daily Transcript, East County Californian, El Latino, La Prensa, Los Angeles Times, North County Times, San Diego Business Journal, San Diego Metropolitan, San Diego Union-Tribune, San Diego Voice & Viewpoint, The Star News, and numerous community newspapers. SANDAG shall also distribute information to local and Mexico radio and television stations.
9. SANDAG shall use its Web site to provide the public with useful and timely information including meeting schedules and agendas; plans and environmental documents; reports and other publications; demographic profiles and data downloads; and interactive database and mapping applications.
10. As appropriate and as required by local, state, and federal guidelines, SANDAG shall translate into Spanish, and other languages, publications, announcements, and Web content. In addition, numerous staff members are bilingual Spanish-English speakers and participate in public outreach and conduct presentations in Spanish. Translators shall be hired as needed and as required by local, state, and federal guidelines to provide services in Spanish and other languages as appropriate.
11. SANDAG conducts periodic public opinion surveys as part of the outreach and citizen participation component of the SANDAG work program. These surveys shall be designed to include the San Diego region's residents in the regional planning process and to keep SANDAG officials aware of issues that are of concern to the people who live here.

12. SANDAG will endeavor to respond to general comments received by phone, fax, letter, or e-mail within five (5) business days of receipt. Comments shall be routed to the SANDAG staff person who is responsible for that issue. Comments may be responded to in writing (e-mail or letter) or may be resolved with the initial phone call. Some comments may need to be resolved by another agency or jurisdiction so the customer is referred to the appropriate entity. When a comment is submitted as part of a public review process (e.g., a plan or environmental report) the comment and response is logged into a database. Comments, concerns, and responses received as part of a public review process shall be included in the final plan or report.

**B. Short Range Program – Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) –** *document updated every two years outlining major transportation projects to be implemented during a five-year period.*

1. SANDAG shall follow the latest federal and state regulations regarding participation by interested parties.
2. As the document that implements the long range plan, the RTIP shall be incorporated as part of the Board adopted public involvement process established for the Regional Transportation Plan (October 27, 2006) including participating in public outreach efforts, providing adequate public notice (legal notice publications), employing visualization techniques, holding public meetings at convenient and accessible locations.
3. SANDAG shall respond to any significant public input or comment received during the development of the biennial update and/or during the amendment cycle as part of its report to the Board or Transportation Committee (as appropriate).
4. The biennial RTIP update will be noticed in newspapers of general circulation including in alternate languages and a public hearing shall be held prior to final adoption by the Board of Directors.
5. During the amendment cycle, SANDAG will provide a draft of the amendment to all interested parties for a 15-day comment period.

**C. Development Planning –** *Planning, environmental, preliminary engineering activities on major capital projects.*

1. SANDAG shall follow current federal and state regulations regarding public involvement processes and procedures. SANDAG shall develop public involvement programs tailored to meet specific project needs which address the unique challenges presented by each project. Programs shall be developed using the joint Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration (FHWA/FTA) guidelines titled “Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making.”
2. The public involvement program shall set objectives, identify people to be reached, develop public involvement strategy, and define specific outreach techniques.

3. The public involvement program shall be developed so that critical community concerns and technical issues are identified in the study. The issues need to address the engineering, environmental, economic, and financial analyses that respond effectively to community needs and preferences and satisfy local, state, and federal environmental clearance requirements.
4. To facilitate community participation, lists of individuals, agencies, and organizations shall be developed for distribution of agency materials. These lists will include persons who have indicated an interest in transportation planning projects during previous public information efforts and/or focused on the specific project. Project information would be distributed to the persons on this list in conjunction with public meetings and workshops, to solicit comments and recommendations.
5. Environmental documents shall be prepared in accordance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as appropriate, and in coordination and consultation with various federal, state, and local agencies, and with elected officials, community leaders, organizations, and other individuals from the neighborhoods and communities potentially affected by the proposed action. Coordination and public involvement shall be achieved through a variety of means, such as formal public hearings and meetings, circulation of draft documents, mailings, focus group meetings, workshops, and individual/group contacts.
6. Formal scoping meetings, public hearings, and/or other meetings during the comment period and environmental document certification shall be held in accordance with the requisite environmental document. As required, meetings shall be announced in the Federal Register, local publications, and on the SANDAG Web site. Persons and organizations on the project mailing list also will be notified. SANDAG shall endeavor to hold public meetings in locations accessible by public transit.
7. SANDAG shall prepare and distribute appropriate notices and communications to comply with CEQA and NEPA requirements.
8. A public information program shall be developed to inform the community of factors related to the project. The information program may include briefings for the news media, informational meetings, presentations to include community and professional associations and educational institutions, business groups and associations, environmental organizations, and other public forums.
9. A project working group may be organized to review and comment on the project to build understanding and identify support for feasible alternatives. This group may consist of various elected officials/staff, community and neighborhood organizations, business organizations, property owners, and other stakeholders and interested parties. This group would be formed to provide comment and guidance regarding technical issues, review study alternatives and evaluation results, and provide community input regarding the alternatives. This iterative process would allow for identified issues and concerns to receive follow-up responses. Meeting summaries of project working group activities shall be produced. Meeting notices, agendas, and/or other information shall be posted to the SANDAG Web site.

10. Other public input opportunities include SANDAG Board of Directors meetings and meetings of SANDAG policy committees: Executive, Transportation, Regional Planning, Borders, and Public Safety. Other opportunities for public participation are at working group meetings, general public meetings, and presentations to planning and community groups.

**D. Design and Construction – *Design and construction of capital projects.***

1. For all capital improvement projects with significant community impacts, SANDAG shall provide opportunities for members of the public to provide input and express concerns. SANDAG also shall implement a program designed to inform the public of progress, as well as safety and community impacts in the event of construction.
2. SANDAG shall hold publicly noticed meetings at key stages of project development and implementation in the area(s) being impacted. The location of the meetings shall depend upon the geographic location of the project. Meetings concerning projects exclusively within the North County Transit District (NCTD) service area shall be held in North County locations, and if appropriate, at SANDAG offices. Meetings concerning projects exclusively within the Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) service area shall be held in MTS service areas affected, and if appropriate, at SANDAG offices. Meetings concerning all other projects shall be held at SANDAG offices or other locations specified in SANDAG agendas. SANDAG, MTS, and NCTD offices are accessible by public transit. SANDAG shall endeavor to hold off-site public meetings at locations accessible by public transit.
3. SANDAG shall solicit input from the representatives of interest groups of the local population, such as community groups, planning groups, business groups and associations, business improvement districts, environmental organizations, neighborhood associations, and senior and disabled riders. These stakeholders will be consulted during the design and construction of capital projects.
4. SANDAG shall work to advise the public regarding actual and perceived disruption during construction of capital projects by distributing informational, educational, and public information materials, and by using other traditional community relations tools.
5. SANDAG shall endeavor to meet citizen concerns as they arise and attempt to resolve those concerns.
6. For all projects requiring environmental review under CEQA and NEPA, such as major capital improvement projects, SANDAG shall provide opportunities for members of the public to provide input and comply with all related legal requirements.
  - 6.1 SANDAG shall solicit input from the representatives of interest groups of the local population, such as community groups, planning groups, business groups and associations, and neighborhood associations.
  - 6.2 SANDAG shall incorporate public input into project planning and development where practical and feasible.

- 6.3 SANDAG shall hold a public hearing to seek public comment whenever required under CEQA and/or NEPA.
  - 6.3.1 Published notifications for such hearings shall be published in newspapers of general circulation for publication of legal notices. Notices also may be published in regional, community, or Spanish-language newspapers to reach the affected area.
  - 6.3.2 Any item subject to a public hearing will be listed and described in the Board's published agenda, which shall be posted at least 72 hours in advance of the meeting at the Board's meeting place and on the SANDAG Web site.
  - 6.3.3 Public hearings shall be conducted by SANDAG at the published date, time, and place. The public hearing will allow for interested parties to be heard. The Board also will consider any written comments that were forwarded to the Board prior to the hearing.

## **E. Fare Changes**

- 1. SANDAG has adopted Board Policy No. 029 to provide policy guidance for fare changes. This section of this policy is designed to inform and involve public transit riders, stakeholders, and the general public about proposed changes in transit fares. It is not intended to apply to transit route changes within the purview of the transit operators.
  - 1.1 Consistent with Board Policy No. 004, SANDAG staff shall hold one or more public meetings to provide the public an opportunity to comment on proposed fare changes. A minimum of two public meetings shall be held prior to the first reading of any proposed fare change that affects services operating in both the MTS and NCTD service areas. At least one public meeting shall be held in the MTS service area, and at least one public meeting shall be held in the NCTD service area. If one or more public meetings are conducted by a public meeting officer pursuant to Board Policy No. 004, at least one of the public meetings shall be held with a starting time no earlier than 6:00 p.m. A public meeting for proposed fare changes that do not affect the entire region may be held exclusively within the general geographic area that is being affected by the fare change. Such public meeting shall be held at a time convenient for users and potential users of the affected service. Public meetings at which formal public testimony will be taken shall be held at locations that are accessible by users of public transit. An official transcriber or other means of recording all public input received shall be utilized at all public hearings, meetings, workshops or open-houses at which formal public testimony is taken. A record of the input received shall be provided to the Transportation Committee or Board of Directors at the time of the first and second readings of amendments to the fare ordinance for the purpose of adjusting fare prices.

- 1.2 Public comments on proposed fare changes also shall be accepted at the SANDAG Board or Transportation Committee meeting before any final action is taken.
  - 1.3 *Take One*, Rider Alerts, or other public notices in both English and Spanish will be posted on all affected public transit vehicles within the affected area at least 15 calendar days prior to the public hearing and will include a description of the proposed fare change, the date, time, intent and location of the public meeting, and the deadline for written, e-mail and phone comments from the public. The notices will be posted to the SANDAG and Transit Agency Web site(s).
  - 1.4 Print notice of public meetings at which formal public testimony will be taken will be provided at least 15 calendar days prior to the public meeting date in newspapers of general circulation in the affected area(s), including appropriate minority and community publications. Public notices will be printed in Spanish in Spanish-language newspapers. Such public meeting notices will include a description of proposed fare changes, the date, time, intent, and location of the public meeting(s), and the deadline for written, e-mail, and phone comments from the public.
  - 1.5 An open phone line will be made available to take public comments at least 15 calendar days prior to adoption of fare changes.
  - 1.6 A Transportation Committee and/or Board report (as appropriate) will be completed and available for public review at least 72 hours prior to the public meeting at which the fare changes are proposed for adoption and posted to the SANDAG Web site(s).
2. After a fare change is approved by SANDAG:
    - 2.1. The public will be notified via news release(s)
    - 2.2. *Take One*, Rider Alerts, or other public notices in both English and Spanish will be posted on all affected transit vehicles at least 15 calendar days prior to changes going into effect and posted to the SANDAG and Transit Agency Web site(s).
3. SANDAG shall follow federal Title VI and environmental justice requirements when implementing transit fare changes.
    - 3.1. Residential, employment, and transportation patterns of low-income and minority populations shall be identified so that their needs can be identified and addressed, and the benefits and burdens of transportation investments can be fairly distributed. SANDAG shall endeavor to involve the affected communities in evaluating the benefits and burdens of transportation investments.



- 3.2. SANDAG shall evaluate and - where necessary - improve the public involvement processes to eliminate participation barriers and engage minority and low-income populations in transportation decision making.

**F. Short Range Transit Planning**

1. Public information and involvement programs for the Regional Short Range Transit Plan and the Coordinated Human Resources and Public Transit Transportation Plan shall be the responsibility of SANDAG.
2. Public information and involvement programs for transit service changes will fall under adopted policies of MTS and NCTD.

**G. Native American Consultation**

1. SANDAG shall establish and adhere to government-to-government relationships when interacting with Tribal Governments, acknowledging these tribes as unique and separate governments within the United States.
2. SANDAG shall recognize and respect important California Native American rights, sites, traditions, and practices.
3. SANDAG engages in "consultation" with Tribal Governments prior to making decisions, taking actions, or implementing programs that may impact their communities.
4. To facilitate effective consultation with Tribal Governments, SANDAG has established a Tribal Government Liaison. The Liaison shall serve as an initial contact for Tribal Governments and communicates with tribal governments regarding SANDAG activities.
  - 4.1. "Consultation" is the active, affirmative process of: (1) identifying and seeking input from appropriate American Indian government bodies, community groups, and individuals; and (2) considering their interests as a necessary and integral part of the decision-making process.

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