

Cherokee County Comprehensive Transportation Plan Update

Public Involvement Plan



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Cherokee County Comprehensive Transportation Plan Public Involvement Plan

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

Safe, efficient and cost-effective transportation systems play a key role in building and maintaining a strong community. The Cherokee County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) Update will focus on bringing existing conditions and travel data to the current year, fully capturing any new developments since the last CTP, and extending future project projections to 2040. In addition, study efforts will explore new and innovative strategies to address deficiencies and expand travel opportunities county-wide where possible. In addition, the CTP will serve as a guide for the future of transportation investments in the County. Not only will the CTP allow the County to readdress the transportation needs identified in the current CTP, but it will also serve as a tool for reprioritizing projects and programs, and identifying funding, based on anticipated growth. The CTP will set the direction for County staff and County officials while supporting quality transportation and mobility.

Public participation is the foundation for any planning effort, and therefore variety in opportunities for involvement must exist to ensure active and widespread participation. This is especially true with transportation planning, which must take into account different types of users such as commuters, retirees, and young families in addition to different modes such as automobile, transit, pedestrian and bicycling. Transportation system-wide planning must also take care to provide service to all geographic areas of a county, from the rural areas to the more developed corridors.

Recognizing these important needs, the CTP process will utilize a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) that welcomes and seeks input from every aspect of the broad spectrum of users and interests. In addition, the public involvement team will make special efforts to engage those populations who are often underrepresented in the transportation planning process, including seniors, minorities, low-income households, non-English speaking populations, and people with disabilities. To that end, the team will use a variety of outreach methods proven in engaging the general public.

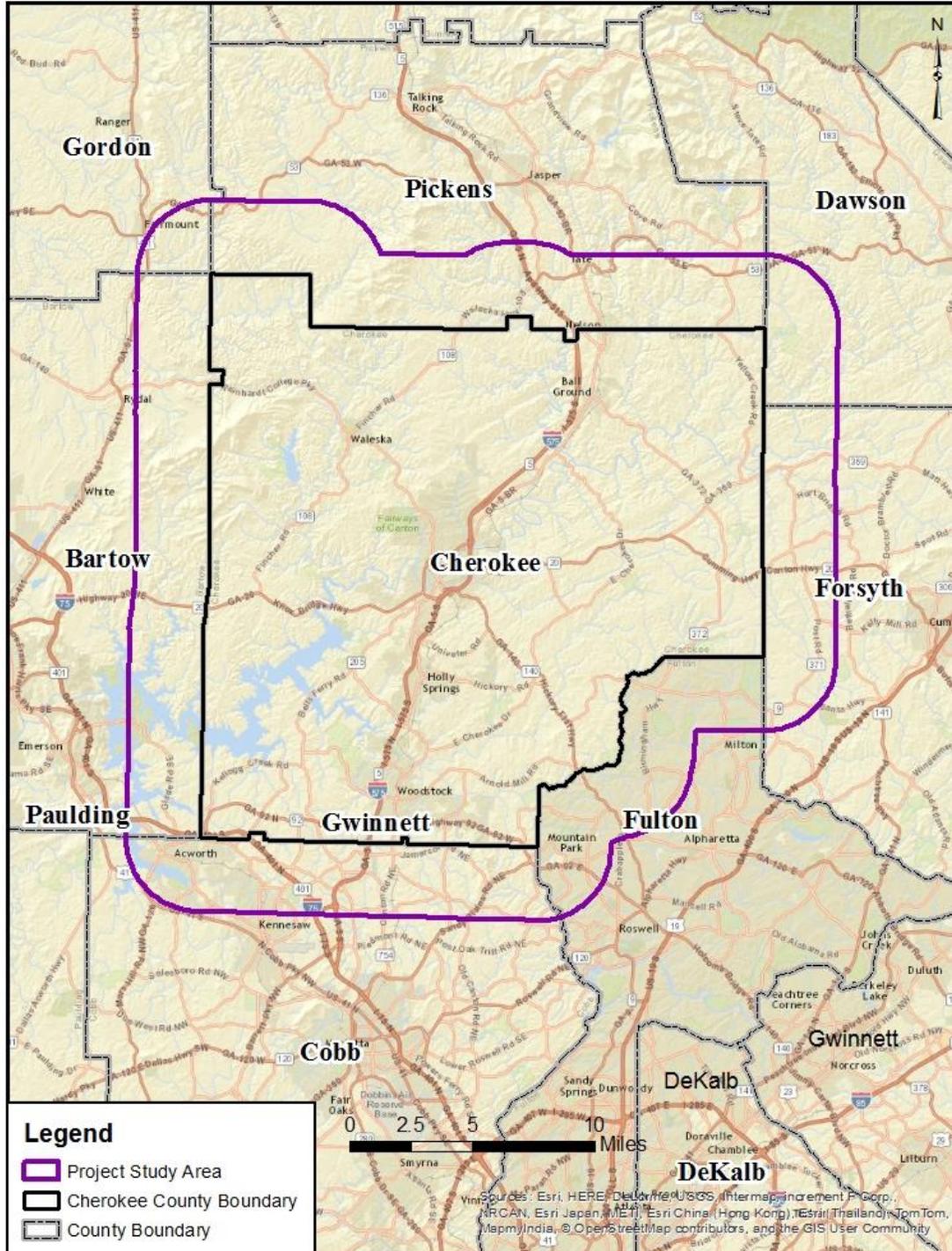
PROJECT AREA OVERVIEW

The CTP Update includes all of Cherokee County, as well as an area three miles outside of the County boundary into adjacent counties, including Fulton, Cobb, Bartow, Dawson, Pickens and Forsyth counties, to promote coordinated long range transportation planning efforts. Figure 1.1 on the following page represents the CTP Update study area.



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Figure 1.1 - PROJECT STUDY AREA





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PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT OBJECTIVES

Public involvement (PI) is an essential component of the CTP Update and will occur throughout the project. Outreach efforts will educate, inform and involve the public as to the purpose and progress of the project by highlighting local issues, technical considerations, and potential impacts. Outreach techniques are designed to encourage participation in the public process and to generate meaningful feedback. The PIP provides tools for both disseminating project-related information and gathering public input that reflects community concerns and interests.

The primary goals of the public involvement for this project are:

- **To consult with local officials and staff to gather their ideas for transportation solutions.** This process will rely heavily upon the knowledge and experience of local officials and staff. It is recognized that these individuals who interact with the community on a regular basis will be key sources of information and insight.
- **To consult with community stakeholders and gather their ideas for issue identification and the creation of solutions.** This process is an opportunity for the community to voice their concerns and opinions about the current state of transportation, the future of Cherokee County, and how the CTP Update can bring about positive change. Coordination with County leaders and residents will provide invaluable insight to this process.
- **To inform and involve the public throughout the process.** Public involvement tools will be utilized to: 1) educate, 2) listen to, and 3) learn from the public early and often throughout the project schedule. The success of this planning process depends on the cooperation and support of the public. It is our goal to ensure that anyone affected by transportation in Cherokee County have an opportunity to provide input at key technical milestones during the Plan's development.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE OBJECTIVES

Historically, minority and low-income populations have been underrepresented in the decision-making process. Where necessary, a targeted outreach plan may be developed to improve communication with and involvement of stakeholders with concentrated environmental justice (EJ) factors.

The US Census identifies low-income populations as being below the poverty line based on household size and income. The percentage of households residing below the poverty line will be determined for the County using census data at the tract level. Where a census tract's percentage of residents living below the poverty line exceeds the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) 18-County region's percentage of low-income households, it will be recognized as an environmental justice community.



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Racial and ethnic minorities include non-white residents (African American, Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander) as well as persons of Hispanic or Latino origin. Census tracts where the percentage of racial and ethnic minorities exceeds the ARC 18-County region's percentage of racial and ethnic minorities will be recognized as environmental justice communities.

The PI team will also utilize the expertise and knowledge of the Technical and Stakeholder Advisory Committees to identify the existence of EJ populations and to assist in determining the most appropriate outreach techniques to be used for the communities.

At a minimum, the PI approach will include:

- Coordination with organizations representing the interests of environmental justice populations of concern, including churches, neighborhood and advocacy groups.
- Distribution of study information via public libraries, school superintendents, and social and community organizations as they express interest or are identified through the stakeholder process.
- Translation services, as needed, to ensure suitable communication.
- Distribution of notification of public involvement opportunities to EJ media outlets.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TECHNIQUES

The PIP approach will provide ongoing information dissemination to the public by way of a variety of meetings, workshops, and coordination. It is anticipated that these strategies, described as follows, will comprise the ongoing public involvement process.

Stakeholder Advisory Committee

A Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) will be formed to help guide the project, provide input, and represent the larger community. The SAC will meet three times during the CTP Update. The purpose of the SAC is multi-faceted:

- Allows the County to build partnerships and share information with its major stakeholders. The SAC provides a continuing forum for direct input into the planning process and is a known opportunity for people to participate. It is a forum of education, exchange, understanding, questioning and clarification.
- Acts at the punctuation points of the technical planning process. By meeting at key project milestones, SAC meetings will serve as a check and balance on plan development in terms of political consensus and meeting the diverse needs of a broad-based constituency.

Prior to each committee meeting, a detailed agenda will be developed as part of a working facilitation plan. Meetings will emphasize consensus building during the development of system alternatives and the evaluation phase.



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Representatives from the following entities will be included on the SAC:

- Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce
- Cherokee County Office of Economic Development
- Northside Hospital Cherokee
- Cherokee County Historical Society
- Citizen representative from each County Commission district, recommended by the Commissioner.
- Citizen representative from each municipality, recommended by the Mayor.

Technical Advisory Committee

A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) representing key transportation planning agencies will convene independently as necessary to provide input and guidance on the technical aspects of the project. The TAC will meet a minimum of three times. Representatives from the following entities will be included on the TAC:

- Cherokee County Engineer
- Cherokee County Assistant County Engineer
- Cherokee County Director of Planning and Land Use
- Cherokee County Principal Planner
- Cherokee County Director of Roads and Bridges
- CATS Operations Manager
- Cherokee County Schools Director of Planning and Forecasting
- City of Ball Ground City Manager
- City of Canton Director of Planning and Zoning
- City of Holly Springs Community Development Director
- City of Waleska City Manager
- City of Woodstock Director of Community Development
- Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC)
- Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT)
- Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA)
- Planners from surrounding counties and Cities

Public Open Houses

Two public meetings are proposed: a hands-on workshop during the Needs Assessment phase, and an Open House presentation of the draft Recommendations Report. The initial Open House during the Needs Assessment phase will serve as the public project kick off and



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will seek to assist with confirmation of study goals and objectives and to generate excitement and interest in the plan's development. The workshop will also seek feedback on the assessment and to solicit input on potential roadway, transit, bicycle and pedestrian facility improvements. The final public meeting will present the draft Recommendations Report for comment.

In addition to the traditional workshop/Open House, the CTP Update will also include a virtual public information Open House (PIOH) for each of the traditional meetings to allow for more widespread information dissemination and ease of comment for local residents and interested individuals who may not be able to attend the Open House. The Virtual PIOH will mirror information presented at the Open House and will be hosted on the County's website. It will be developed in Flash so that no additional software will be required to view the presentation. Finally, a survey tool will be developed and embedded at the end of the presentation to gather general comments and responses to specific questions of interest.

Community Engagement Network (CEN) Coordination

Due to the high volume of public outreach activity in the Atlanta Metropolitan region, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) has formed a Community Engagement Network to ensure that public outreach activities do not conflict, and that they coordinate, when possible. The study team will provide ARC with a calendar of public outreach activities one month before scheduling each outreach activity for CEN review. The information will be submitted to the Comprehensive Planning Community Outreach Manager at the ARC.

Project Website

The project team will work with the County to ensure that CTP Update related materials are uploaded to the County website (<http://www.Cherokeega.com>). The CTP Update page will announce public meetings, house study information, and provide instructions for commenting on the CTP Update.

Stakeholder Database

For a project of this size, a significant amount of time, energy and budget could be expended to build a project specific stakeholder database for communicating with the public. To create greater efficiency, this project will rely upon established contact databases from previous and current Cherokee County Planning projects and standing committees. Members of the Stakeholder and Technical Advisory Committees will also be asked to share any existing databases. These databases will be compiled to create a master record of names, addresses, affiliations, phone numbers, and email addresses. This list will assist Cherokee County in readily contacting people with announcements of upcoming events, meeting invitations, and other important project information and will demonstrate that the County is attempting to reach, involve and communicate with many impacted by the project. The list will be updated throughout the course of the project.



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Documentation

Documentation of the input and public involvement activities is a key component of the PIP. A standard format for this documentation will be developed and will summarize each activity's purpose, venue, participation/numbers, and key issues heard. Each public comment form received will be assigned a comment number and the responses will be entered into a database. After all comments are recorded, the frequency of responses can be determined and conclusions can be drawn from the public's feedback.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN EVALUATION

Evaluation of the effectiveness of public involvement efforts is a key aspect of developing an effective public involvement plan. Spurred by federal interest, regional planning organizations and other agencies have started evaluating all public involvement efforts in order to determine which public involvement tools are effective for specific uses and under what circumstances they are not. Evaluation measures are also important in documenting the level of public involvement achieved.

The primary method for determining the effectiveness of an input opportunity is to ask the participants themselves. Evaluation forms will be distributed at each public workshop. This form asks for input on every aspect of the workshop, including notification methods, the quality of the event, and strategies for improving future public input opportunities. Additional measures of public involvement effectiveness include:

- Ease of understanding/interpreting displays/information
- Extent to which staff was helpful in answering questions and hearing the public's concerns
- Extent to which a greater understanding of the project/process was achieved
- Extent to which the public feels they are given an opportunity to provide input

An evaluation summary will be submitted with each outreach event summary that is prepared. Based on evaluation form feedback and the additional outreach measures listed above, communication and outreach techniques may be modified and new techniques added to ensure plan success.