



COMMONWEALTH OF  
PUERTO RICO  
Puerto Rico Highway and  
Transportation Authority

# Public Involvement Plan

## In the **Transportation Planning Process**



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Puerto Rico Department of Transportation and Public Works  
Puerto Rico Highway and Transportation Authority  
Non Urbanized Area



## Table of Contents

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Non Urbanized Areas Consultation Process	1 - 2
Introduction and Background	
Participants in the Planning Process	2 - 3
Initial Outreach Efforts	3
Orientation Meeting	3 - 4
Technical Orientation and Petition Review	4
Evaluation and Selection of STIP Projects	4
Draft Document	5
Final Document Preparation and Approval	5
STIP Amendments	5
Puerto Rico Long Range Transportation Plan	5 - 6
Evaluation	7
Appendices	8
Appendix 1: Acronyms	9

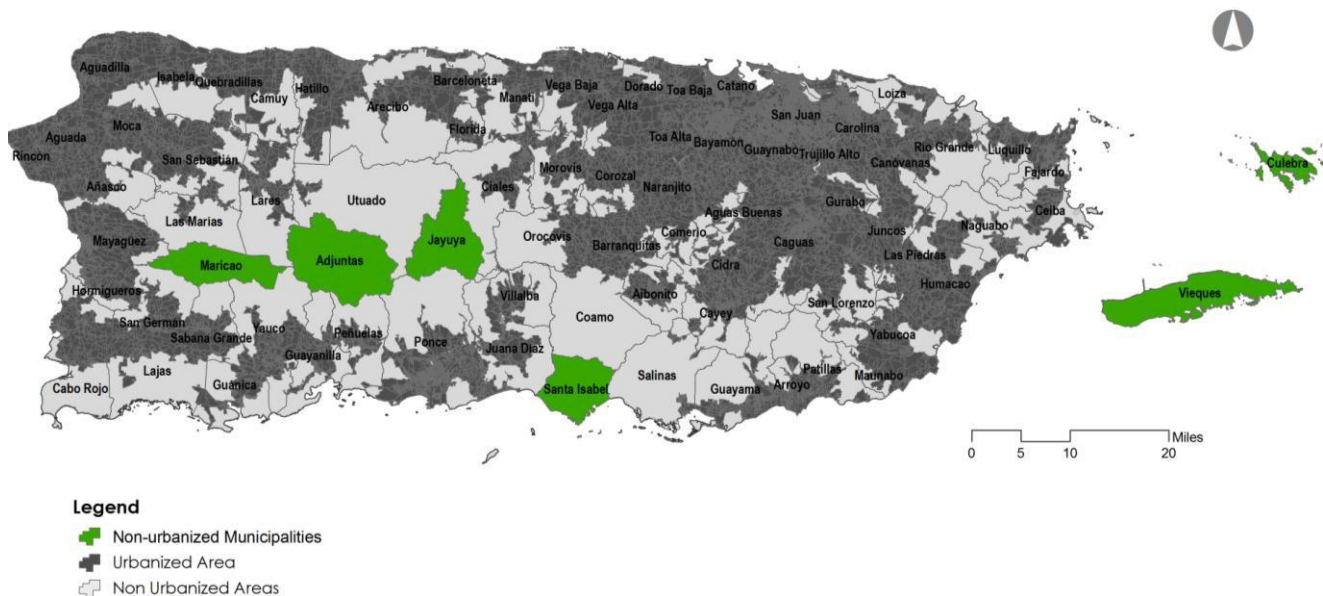
## NON-URBANIZED AREAS DTPW AND PRHTA CONSULTATION PROCESS

The Department of Transportation and Public Works and Puerto Rico Highway and Transportation Authority have developed the following procedures in compliance with the 23 CFR 450.210, regarding State consultation with non-urbanized areas (nonmetropolitan) 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 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, Mariaco, Santa Isabel, and Vieques.



Recognizing that these rural or non-urbanized municipalities have the right to participate in the ongoing process of developing a new PRLRTP, 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 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 German – 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, the public involvement meetings have been held and it will be 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.

Not with standing 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 Commonwealths transportation system. To this end, it was developed the following sections.

### ***Participants in the Planning Process***

The municipalities and the central Commonwealth Government 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 plans, but most municipalities, and particularly those of the non-urbanized and smaller urbanized areas, still 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 institute 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 a 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.

### **INITIAL OUTREACH EFFORTS**

1. Around October/November of each year, (depending on the release of the Federal appropriations notice) notices are 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 last work day of January of each year. Petition form can be requested from the PRHTA Central offices. The notice also advises the public to address their transportation-related problems or concerns of the Mayor's office and/or to the staff of the Federal Coordination Office of the PRHTA.

### **ORIENTATION MEETING**

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 rural 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 program of FTA and highway-related project funded from FHWA.
2. Communication with the public in non-metropolitan 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 carry 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**

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 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 for it are communicated in writing to the proponents.
3. Individual technical assistance 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**

1. PRHTA's highway projects selection process is in accordance with the Federal regulations (23 CFR Subpart 450.222). For the Non-Urbanized Areas, only projects included in the STIP are considered eligible for FHWA funding. A separate document prepared in Spanish and entitled "Selection and Administration of FHWA Program" has been prepared for the general public.
2. The petitions for FTA funds, the FCO prepares a Recommendation Report based in the process of interaction between the DTPW/PRHTA staff and the local officials of the Non-Urbanized Areas. Later, this Report is presented to the Secretary of 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 that they may communicate their reactions to the DTPW/PRHTA.

## **DRAFT DOCUMENT**

1. Considering the Non-Urbanized Areas projects and those in the urbanized areas' TIPs, 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 reactions and recommendations.
2. A notice is published in major local newspapers informing the public of Non-Urbanized Areas and urbanized areas about the opportunity to review and comment on the draft STIP. A **15-days response period is provided**. The notice states that copies of said documents are available for review at the various municipalities and the DTPW/PRHTA. Comments are received and considered by the FCO. 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**

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 STIP document is distributed to the non-urbanized and urbanized local governments and kept available to the general public in the FCO of the DTPW/PRHTA.
6. A notice is published in major local newspapers informing the public of the availability of the final version of the STIP.

## **STIP AMENDMENTS**

During its effectiveness, the STIP could only be amended by adding or deleting projects, but Non-Urbanized Areas local officials would be informed about any decision affecting their municipality and the reason for the change, so that they may react and recommend. A public notice is published informing to the general public about the proposed amendments and the opportunity to review and to send comments. A fifteen (15) days response period is provided. 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.

## **THE PUERTO RICO LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

- The PRLRTP is developed and update 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's officials to revised and comment the draft of the PRLRTP and their regional Long Range Transportation Plan. The comments received 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 for information.

➤ Other meeting and workshops:

The PRHTA contracted the services of a consulting firm to provide to the non-urbanized area assessment on how to comply with: Rural NTD Program, Title VI Program, Drug and Alcohol Program and ADA Program. In addition the FCO,

- Provide 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.
- Develop guidelines for project management and grant administration.
- Administrate, develop and implement an RTAP program to provide technical assistant to rural transit operators as well as conduct research and other support activities in rural transit.

## **EVALUATION**

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. A 60 calendar days will be provided for review and comments regarding the effectiveness of the consultation process and any proposed changes.

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# *Appendices*

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## Appendix 1: Acronyms

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Americans with Disabilities Act	ADA
Federal Coordination Office	FCO
Federal Highway Administration	FHWA
Federal Transit Administration	FTA
Long Range Transportation Plans	LRTP
Metropolitan Planning Organization	MPO
National Transit Database	NTD
Programming and Special Study Office	PSSO
Public Involvement Plan	PIP
Puerto Rico Department of Transportation and Public Works	DTPW
Puerto Rico Highway and Transportation Authority	PRHTA
Puerto Rico Long Range Transportation Plan	PRLRTP
Puerto Rico Metropolitan Planning Organization	PRMPO
Statewide Improvement Program	STIP

## PROCEDURE ADOPTION

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 status and regulations, in according to policy of the public participation in the planning and programming process. A copy of this document will be provided to the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration.

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Miguel A. Torres Díaz, P.E.  
Secretary  
Puerto Rico Department of Transportation  
and Public Works

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Carmen A. Villar Prados  
Executive Director  
Puerto Rico Highway and Transportation  
Authority

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date