Regional Planning Affiliation

Public Participation Plan

Fiscal Years 2027-2031

Serving the Northeastern Iowa counties of:
Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, Howard, and Winneshiek

upper explorerland regional planning commission

Prepared by:
Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission

For:
Iowa Department of Transportation

[DATE], 2026

DRAFT

Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission
Regional Planning Affiliation 1 (RPA-1)

Public Participation Plan

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Submitted to the Iowa Department of Transportation
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Cover base image: Effigy Mounds National Monument, Allamakee County
(Credit: National Park Service)

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INTRODUCTION TO RPA-1

Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission (UERPC) serves as the Regional Planning Affiliation (RPA-1) for the counties of Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, Howard, and Winneshiek in Northeast Iowa. The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) provides documentation of the planned federal- and state-aid investments in transportation over the next four federal fiscal years in this region. The RPA-1 Transportation Policy Board serves as the decision-making body for RPA-1 and is committed to distributing transportation funding in a fiscally responsible manner. This document reflects a multimodal transportation system and includes funding for transit, walking, bicycling, and roadway projects.

A large portion of funding for transportation improvements comes from the federal government. Accurately estimating future federal funding levels is dependent on having a multiyear federal transportation funding authorization bill. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, was signed into law by President Biden on November 15, 2021. It brought welcome stability and predictability to our region's federal transportation funding through federal fiscal year 2026.

Significant uncertainty surrounds the stability and reliability of future funding for transportation infrastructure and planning amid a volatile national political climate heavily influenced by the disruptions and unpredictable policy shifts of the current presidential administration. The current transportation bill expires September 30th, 2026.

The five counties in RPA-1 cover an area of 3,313 square miles. There are 50 incorporated communities within the region. As of the 2020 census, five cities have populations over 2,500 and seven other communities have populations over 1,000. The 2020 population for the combined five counties is 80,152 persons, a decrease of 4.54% since the 2010 census. With a regional population density of approximately 24 persons per square mile, residents across the region may spend a considerable amount of time traveling for employment, healthcare, and shopping. As a corollary, a safe and efficient multimodal transportation system is essential to the residents of this largely rural, low-population-density region.

POLICY BOARD AND COMMITTEES

The RPA-1 **Transportation Policy Board** is comprised of representatives from each of the five counties and the two cities in the region with populations over 5,000—Decorah and Oelwein. The Policy Board exercises programming authority for Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) funding allocated to the region—including STBG funding which is swapped for state funding on some road and bridge projects, as well as set-aside funding used for transportation alternatives—in accordance with state and federal rules and regulations.

Supporting the Policy Board are committees whose memberships represent specific areas of expertise and/or interest. The **Technical Committee**, which consists of the five county engineers and representatives from Decorah and Oelwein, advises the Policy Board on matters of roadway maintenance and operations and recommends projects to receive funding. The **Enhancement Committee** consists of the five county conservation board directors and other regional stakeholders with interests in regional trails, walking and bicycling, and various tourism and economic development activities. The Enhancement Committee also recommends projects for funding, with a specific focus on building out the region's system of paved, multi-use trails. The

Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) advises the Policy Board on passenger transportation matters and works to provide a coordinated system that supports those who do not have access to personal transportation options or who choose not to drive or own a car. This group consists of local transit representatives, private transportation providers, human services providers, and others concerned with transportation for non-drivers.

REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Transportation Planning and Programming

Federal and state regulations require Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Regional Planning Affiliations (RPAs) to develop and use a documented public participation process that provides reasonable opportunities for public review and comment at key decision points. In accordance with 23 CFR § 450.316 and related guidance, this process includes, at a minimum:

- Developing and maintaining a Public Participation Plan (PPP) that defines procedures, strategies, and desired outcomes for public involvement.
- Providing adequate public notice of participation activities and sufficient time for public review and comment at key decision points. Notification methods and minimum timeframes will be clearly identified for each activity.
- Providing timely notice and reasonable access to information about transportation issues and planning processes, including access through electronic formats such as the agency website.
- Making public information (including technical information, planning documents, and meeting notices) available in electronically accessible formats and, where feasible, in alternative formats upon request.
- Holding public meetings at convenient times and accessible locations, including accommodations for persons with disabilities and, when feasible, access via public transit.
- Demonstrating explicit consideration and response to public input received during the development of transportation plans and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), including summarizing and addressing substantive comments in final documents.
- Seeking out and considering the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including low-income and minority populations, individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP), older adults, persons with disabilities, and other underserved groups.
- Providing an additional opportunity for public comment if the final version of the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) or TIP differs significantly from the version made available for public review and raises new material issues.
- Coordinating with the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT) and other agencies involved in statewide and regional transportation planning and consultation processes.
- Consulting, to the maximum extent practicable, with agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities within the region that are affected by transportation, including economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, freight movement, and human service transportation.

- Periodically reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures and strategies contained in this PPP, including both quantitative and qualitative measures, to ensure a full, open, and meaningful participation process.
- Documenting significant written and oral comments received on draft transportation plans and the TIP, and preparing a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments as part of the final documents.
- Providing a public comment period of no less than 45 calendar days prior to adoption of the PPP.
- Providing copies of the approved PPP to the Iowa DOT, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for informational purposes, and posting the document on the agency's website to the maximum extent practicable.

Other Applicable Federal Laws

RPA-1 has developed a Title VI plan in compliance with Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ensures that no person is excluded from participation in, denied the benefit of, or subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, disability, or religion.

This Public Participation Plan is also subject to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), a civil rights law that protects individuals from discrimination based on disabilities; and Executive Order 12898: *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*. The executive order states that programs, policies, and activities that affect human health or the environment should identify and avoid disproportionately high and adverse effects on minority and low-income populations. Environmental Justice laws exist to ensure that no racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group bears a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences resulting from governmental programs and policies.

Finally, RPA-1 will observe Executive Order 13166: *Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency*. This executive order states that efforts should be taken to evaluate all services provided by a federal agency, to ensure that persons with limited English proficiency are able to meaningfully access the services provided, without unduly burdening the fundamental mission of the agency.

State Regulations

Chapters 21 and 22 of the Iowa Code—commonly referred to as the Open Meetings Law and Public Records Law—are intended to ensure that governmental bodies operate in a transparent and accountable manner. These laws apply to governmental bodies created by statute, executive order, or formal agreement, including regional planning affiliations organized under Iowa Code Chapter 28E.

In accordance with Iowa Code Chapter 21, RPA-1 provides public notice of meetings that includes the time, date, location, and a tentative agenda. Meetings are held in locations that are reasonably accessible to the public and at times that are convenient to the public, to the extent practicable. All meetings are open to the public unless a closed session is permitted under Iowa law.

RPA-1 maintains minutes of all meetings, which include the date, time, and place of the meeting, members present, and actions taken. Meeting minutes are public records and are made available for public review in accordance with Iowa Code Chapter 22.

When meetings are conducted electronically, RPA-1 ensures that the public is able to access the meeting in accordance with Iowa Code requirements. Opportunities for public comment are provided at designated times as appropriate.

RPA-1 operates in accordance with these open meetings and public records requirements and encourages public attendance and participation in its meetings and decision-making processes.

ABOUT THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

The Public Participation Plan is developed and used to define a process for providing the public with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the transportation planning process. This plan defines the procedures, strategies, and desired outcomes for public participation activities. This includes anyone who lives, works, has an interest in, or does business in the five-county region and could potentially be affected by transportation decisions. This plan will consider how to engage people and groups who are traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, including minority and low-income populations, individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP), older adults, individuals with disabilities, and other underserved groups. RPA-1 values public input as a rich source of ideas from people who are familiar with the region's transportation issues and challenges and are invested in seeing short- and long-term improvements come to fruition.

RPA-1 solicits public comments on the documents governing its policies and operations throughout the development of these documents, including early stages, draft review, and prior to adoption or amendment. Each document includes details on public engagement opportunities, including how and when the public can provide input. These documents include:

- The **Transportation Planning Work Program** (TPWP) contains the budgetary information and details of the transportation planning and technical assistance activities that RPA-1 will carry out in support of a safe multimodal transportation system in the region. The TPWP identifies specific work elements that will occur in a fiscal year as they pertain to administration, transportation improvement programming, long- and short-range planning, and transportation technical assistance.
- The **Transportation Improvement Program** (TIP) describes the state- and federally-funded transportation projects and activities that are planned for the RPA-1 region over a four-year period. The projects identified within the document may receive federal funding from a number of different sources. The document reflects a multimodal transportation system by the inclusion of investments in transit, walking and bicycling infrastructure, streets, highways, and bridges. The TIP is developed in compliance with the provisions of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and applicable federal planning regulations (23 CFR Part 450), and is required to maintain a fiscally responsible program.
- The **Long-Range Transportation Plan** (LRTP) encourages and promotes the development of a regional transportation system that safely and equitably serves all users of the transportation system, providing safe, efficient, and economical movement of people and freight. The LRTP plays an important role in the region’s vision for its future. The plan includes a description of the region’s existing conditions; forecasts future population and potential growth corridors; identifies current and projected future transportation needs; and identifies various strategies to address those needs. In addition, the LRTP discusses the funding necessary for implementation of the plan. The information and data included in the LRTP are also a resource for regional leaders and elected officials, economic developers, and transportation project developers.
- The **Passenger Transportation Plan** (PTP) outlines the region’s plans for establishing an efficient and effective passenger transportation network. Developed with input from transportation providers, human service providers, economic development organizations, and workforce agencies, as well as the general public, the plan identifies strengths and issues in

the region's passenger transportation network and lays out strategies for improvement over the life of the plan.

- The **Public Participation Plan** (PPP) specifies procedures, strategies, and methods for public involvement in the transportation planning process in the RPA-1 region.

Periodically, the RPA may engage in initiatives or produce documents beyond the plans and programs listed above. As appropriate and necessary, public participation will be encouraged and solicited as laid out in this Public Participation Plan.

GOALS OF THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

The Public Participation Plan focuses on two broad goals. The first goal is to **distribute information about the transportation planning process to as many interested members of the general public as possible**. The second goal is to **actively seek input from the region regarding transportation problems, priorities, and potential solutions**.

The RPA has identified several tactics and techniques that can be used to ensure broad dissemination of information and ease of access for members of the public in offering input into the transportation planning process.

TACTICS AND TECHNIQUES

RPA-1 is responsible for numerous tasks in any given year. These include the development of several transportation planning work products; selection of regional projects to receive federal Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) funds and Transportation Alternatives Set-aside Program (TA Set-aside) funds; administering modifications to projects in the Transportation Improvement Program; and participating in special projects as they occur. Seeking public input varies by task, but generally, input is needed for ideas *prior* to any action, opinions *during* any action and feedback *after* any action.

Information Distribution

RPA-1 utilizes several methods for distributing information throughout the region. The information that needs to be distributed includes the dates, locations, and minutes of public hearings and transportation meetings, the availability of applications for STBG and TA Set-aside funds, and planning projects. As appropriate, the RPA will use the following methods to distribute information:

Dates, Locations, and Minutes of Meetings:

- Agendas posted at Upper Explorerland's Decorah offices typically at least one week in advance and no less than 24 hours in advance in accordance with Iowa Code Chapter 21
- Agendas posted on the Upper Explorerland website typically at least one week in advance and no less than 24 hours in advance in accordance with Iowa Code Chapter 21
- Agendas e-mailed to Transportation Policy Board, committees and/or other stakeholders[1] typically at least one week in advance and no less than 24 hours in advance in accordance with Iowa Code Chapter 21
- Approved minutes posted on the Upper Explorerland transportation webpage following approval

Dates, Locations, and Minutes of Public Hearings:

- Public hearing notices published in at least one local newspaper
- Notices posted at the Decorah offices of Upper Explorerland typically at least one week in advance and no less than 24 hours in advance in accordance with Iowa Code Chapter 21
- Notices posted on the Upper Explorerland's website typically at least one week in advance and no less than 24 hours in advance in accordance with Iowa Code Chapter 21

[1] Other stakeholders may include local governing bodies; neighborhood or community members directly affected by proposals or projects; groups formed to address various transportation issues such as SRTS Coalitions and parent groups; clients of TAG agencies; Upper Explorerland housing clients; other nonprofit agencies and clients

- Notices e-mailed to Transportation Policy Board, committees and/or other stakeholders typically at least one week in advance and no less than 24 hours in advance in accordance with Iowa Code Chapter 21
- Approved minutes posted on the Upper Explorerland transportation webpage following approval

Availability of STBG and TA Set-aside Applications:
- Electronic distribution by e-mail to Transportation Policy Board and committees; city and county clerks, administrators, and elected officials; regional trail groups; conservation groups; and other eligible applicants within the region
- Announcement included in the Upper Explorerland monthly e-newsletter, website newsfeed, and the periodic "Funding Announcement" e-mails
- Announcement made through Upper Explorerland's social media networks

Transportation Planning Projects:
- Electronic distribution by e-mail to targeted audiences within the region
- Press releases sent to appropriate local newspapers within the region based on applicable geographic areas
- Announcement included in the Upper Explorerland monthly e-newsletter
- Announcement made through Upper Explorerland's social media networks

Collecting Input

RPA-1 collects input on a variety of plans and activities. Feedback from the public is sought when there are changes being made to projects supported by federal aid and when future transportation policies, goals, and strategies are being developed within the region.

Project Changes[2]:
- The public is invited to make comments on proposed changes by attending the designated public hearing or meeting
- Proposed changes may be reviewed on the Upper Explorerland website
- Comments may be submitted through email, phone, mail, or in-person to the RPA-1 Transportation Planner or any Transportation Policy Board or Committee member prior to the date of the decision

Transportation Planning Projects:
- The public is invited to offer input by attending Transportation Policy Board and committee meetings
- Online and/or in-person surveys may be utilized for some topics
- Public forums may be hosted within the targeted geographic area
- Focus groups or stakeholder groups may be convened to provide input
- The Upper Explorerland website contact form may be used to submit feedback on draft documents

[2] See TIP Revision Process on page 14 for more details on project changes

Outreach

To assist the public in understanding the responsibilities and activities of RPA-1, the following methods of outreach are utilized:

- Presentations to groups and organizations (public officials, human service providers, planning and zoning boards, conservation boards, economic development boards, etc.)
- A comprehensive website that offers access to all plans, agendas, and minutes documenting the work of RPA-1
- Periodic news stories submitted to local newspapers and through the Upper Explorerland newsletter and social media networks

Marginalized and/or Disadvantaged Populations

RPA-1 recognizes the importance of engaging individuals and groups who may be traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems or face barriers to participation due to language, income, age, disability, or other factors. To provide meaningful access to the transportation planning process, RPA-1 employs the following practices to reduce barriers and encourage participation:

- Meetings and public hearings will be held in locations that are accessible to individuals with disabilities
- When appropriate, meetings and public hearings will be held at times and locations that are convenient and accessible to the populations being engaged, including in areas most affected by proposed plans or activities when possible
- Language assistance services are available for individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) to ensure meaningful access to information and participation opportunities
- Information distributed electronically or in paper form can be made available in alternative formats, such as large print, upon request
- Communication assistance for individuals with hearing impairments is available through Relay Iowa 711 or other appropriate services
- RPA-1 maintains a Title VI Program, including a nondiscrimination policy and complaint procedures, to ensure that no person is excluded from participation in or denied the benefits of its programs and activities
- Outreach strategies may include targeted engagement with community organizations, human service providers, and other partners that serve traditionally underserved populations
- Visualization techniques and tools are used, when appropriate, to present information in a clear and understandable format to support informed participation

Summary Table of Document Development and Public Participation

Plan:	Scheduled:	Draft:	Public Engagement:	Public Comment Period:	Adoption:	Public Access to Document:
Transportation Planning Work Program (TPWP)	Annually	Developed by RPA Staff with input from all Transportation Committees and Transit Agency	Draft presented at Policy Board and all Trans. Committee meetings, posted on UERPC website and available upon request	Available at least 15 days prior to adoption	Resolution at Policy Board meeting	UERPC Website and offices
Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)	Annually	Developed by RPA Staff with input from all Transportation Committees and Transit Agency	Draft presented at Policy Board, Tech and Enhancement Committee meetings, posted on UERPC website and available upon request	Available at least 15 days prior to adoption	Public Hearing and Resolution at Policy Board meeting	UERPC Website and offices
Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)	Updated every 5 years	Developed by RPA Staff with input from all Transportation Committees and Transit Agency	Public Input sessions conducted in each county, posted on UERPC website, PR in newspapers, and community and targeted stakeholder input surveys	Available at least 15 days prior to adoption	Public Hearing and Resolution at Policy Board meeting	UERPC Website and offices
Passenger Transportation Plan (PTP)	Updated every 5 years	Developed by RPA Staff with input from Transportation Policy Board, Transportation Advisory Group, and Transit Agency	Community and targeted stakeholder input surveys; draft presented at Policy Board and TAG meetings	Available at least 15 days prior to adoption	Public Hearing and Resolution at Policy Board meeting	UERPC Website and offices
Public Participation Plan	Updated every 5 years	Developed by RPA Staff with input from all Transportation Committees	Draft presented at Policy Board and all Trans. Committee meetings, posted on UERPC website and available upon request	Available at least 45 days prior to adoption	Public Hearing and Resolution at Policy Board meeting	UERPC Website and offices

Public notices are distributed, at a minimum, through the agency website and may also be distributed through local newspapers, radio, email lists, and social media, as appropriate.

TIP Revision Process

The Transportation Improvement Program may require revisions between annual updates. There are two types of revisions: amendments (major revisions) and administrative modifications (minor revisions). RPA-1 utilizes the following definitions and thresholds to determine whether a change is considered an amendment or an administrative modification:

1) An **amendment** is a revision to the TIP that involves a major change to any project within the TIP. This includes an addition or deletion of a project, a major change in project cost, additional federal funding for a project (or a change from state to federal funding), or a major change in design concept or scope (e.g. changing project termini or the number of through lanes). If the change to the TIP is an amendment, there are two primary procedural requirements: that the amendment follow the agency's public participation process, and that it be approved by the Transportation Policy Board. In addition, when the TIP is amended, the RPA is required to re-demonstrate fiscal constraint of the TIP/STIP. Changes to projects that are included for illustrative purposes only do not require an amendment.

2) An **administrative modification** is a revision to the TIP that involves minor changes such as project phase costs that do not constitute a "major" change, scheduling changes to projects within the four years of the TIP and minor changes to the project scope. An administrative modification is a revision that does not require public review and comment.

The parameters for determining whether a revision constitutes an amendment or an administrative modification are as follows:

1) **Project costs** - Determination will be made based on the percentage change or dollar amount of change in federal-aid. Projects in which the federal-aid has been changed by more than 30% or total federal-aid increases by $2.0 million or more will require an amendment. Anything less can be processed with an administrative modification. When funding changes from state to federal (i.e. the project is "federalized"), an amendment is required.
2) **Schedule changes** - Changes in schedules to projects which are included in the first four years of the TIP/STIP will be considered administrative modifications. Projects which are added or deleted from the TIP/STIP will be processed as amendments.
3) **Funding sources** - Additional federal funding sources to a project will require an amendment. Changes to funding from one source to another will require an administrative modification (unless the change is from state to federal, as per number 1 above).
4) **Scope changes** - Changing project termini or changing the amount of through traffic lanes will be processed as an amendment. Other examples of changes that require amendment are changing the type of work from an overlay to reconstruction or changing a project to include widening of the roadway.

RPA-1 processes amendments through a documented public hearing and subsequent Policy Board approval (see public participation process for public hearing). Administrative modifications requested by the project sponsor are processed by UERPC transportation planning staff by seeking the approval of a review committee consisting of both the Chair of the Technical Committee and the Chair of the Policy Board. The Policy Board is updated and informed of any administrative modifications at each meeting of the board. Upon approval for either amendments or

administrative modifications, UERPC transportation planning staff update the project in IDOT's online project programming database.

DOCUMENTATION AND EVALUATION

RPA-1 is committed to considering all input from the public and incorporating it into the decision-making process when appropriate. To ensure that public input is documented and considered, Upper Explorerland maintains records of public involvement activities, including comments, input, and issues identified by the public. When significant written or oral comments are received, RPA-1 will summarize, analyze, and document the disposition of those comments as part of the final planning documents, as appropriate. The RPA will reply to requests for written documentation or published information within a reasonable time frame and, where feasible, will respond to input received during the public participation process.

To ensure that the strategies outlined in this Public Participation Plan are effective, ongoing evaluation will occur. Evaluation efforts may include both quantitative measures (such as attendance, number of comments received, and participation levels) and qualitative measures (such as feedback on the effectiveness of engagement activities and whether participants felt their input was considered). At public meetings or events, attendance may be recorded and participants may be asked how they learned about the opportunity.

Public engagement strategies will be reviewed periodically and adjusted as necessary to improve effectiveness and reduce barriers to participation. The Public Participation Plan will be updated at least every five years and, at a minimum, one year prior to the update of the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).