



Public Participation Policy

northeastern connecticut transit district
nectd.org

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The Northeastern Connecticut Transit District (NECTD) is a rural transit district serving the towns of **Brooklyn, Killingly, Putnam, Thompson** and **Woodstock** with deviated fixed route service as a subrecipient of the Federal Transit Administration (Fta) Non-Urbanized Area Formula Program - Section 5311 Program and the towns of **Brooklyn, Canterbury, Eastford, Hampton, Plainfield, Pomfret, Putnam, Thompson, Union** and **Woodstock** with elderly/disabled door-to-door service through the Connecticut Municipal Grant Program. *NECTD understands that providing ample opportunities for the public to participate in decision making is essential to delivering transportation solutions that meet the needs of the region.*

This Public Participation Plan is a guide for NECTD's public participation activities and its purpose is to ensure NECTD utilizes effective means of providing information and receiving input on transportation decisions from the public, including low income, minority, and limited English proficient (LEP) populations, as required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that, in part, states **"no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."** In recognition of the importance of having an inclusive process, this plan has a special focus on reaching traditionally under-represented communities such as low-income, minority, and Limited English Proficient (LEP) populations.

As a recipient of federal funds and per Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations, FTA directs NECTD to:

- Ensure that the level and quality of public transportation service is provided in a nondiscriminatory manner;
- Promote full and fair participation in public transportation decision-making without regard to race, color, or national origin;
- Ensure meaningful access to transit-related programs and activities by persons with limited English proficiency.

It is the policy of the Northeastern Connecticut Transit District to provide public access and involvement in a true collaborative, accessible and inclusive process in which the interests of all of the stakeholders - public and private - are reflected and considered.

In 2012, the Federal Transit Authority (FTA) issued Circular 4702.1B, providing updated guidance on complying with Title VI, and Circular 4703.1, updating guidance on incorporating Environmental Justice principles into public transportation decisions. In addition to continuing the requirement that all direct and primary recipients document their compliance by submitting a Title VI Program to their FTA regional civil rights officer once every three years, Circular 4702.1B includes the specific requirement that a Public Participation Plan be prepared. Specifically, this requires that a “public participation plan that includes an outreach plan to engage minority and Limited English Proficient populations” be prepared. This plan has been prepared to meet both the unique requirements of NECTD and comply with FTA requirement.

Public Participation Goals and Objectives

The NECTD believes that public input into its operations and planning is fundamental to our mission and makes our services better. The District’s policies are intended to provide a two-way process of information and idea-sharing with the public, businesses, non-profits and directly affected communities and the region at large.

- ✓ **Raise the level of understanding of the District’s services throughout the region by:** *Seeking out under-involved populations within the region, including minority, low income, senior citizen and immobile populations and holding public meetings at sites convenient to potentially affected citizens and promoting meetings in a manner appropriate to the population groups from which feedback is desired.*

- ✓ **Maintain contact with “interested parties” and key stakeholders throughout the transportation planning process. Such a list will include:** Elected Officials & Local Government Staff; Transportation Agencies (public, non-profit, private); Local Media; Civic & Special Interest Groups; Social service transportation providers; Private Providers of Transportation; Representatives of Users of Public Transportation, Pedestrians, and Bicycle; Representatives of the Elderly, Disabled and Minorities.

- ✓ **Keeping the public informed of on-going District activities on a continuous basis, using a variety of written and graphic means.** *Post all meeting notices at town halls, in accordance with FOIA; Make all publications and work products available electronically to the public via the NECTD web site (NECTD.org) and at the NECTD offices; Web site will be compliant with Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act for disabled users; Web site shall be updated and maintained to provide the most current and accurate information available and Staff will be available during working hours to provide information and after hours at the request of community interest groups with reasonable notice. Notices will also be posted at town libraries, NECTD buses, senior centers and other public places as deemed appropriate.*

- ✓ Strive to continuously improve public participation and will revise this Plan and participation mechanisms as necessary to make them most effective. *Plan will be reviewed and adopted, with revisions if necessary, annually at the January Regular Meeting.*

Public Meetings/Hearings

These are formal public meetings used to solicit specific public comment on a project or issue being considered for adoption by NECTD. Hearings provide a formal setting for citizens to provide comments to decision-making bodies. Meeting minutes are taken and maintained and language assistance may be available, if requested.

Notice that draft plans/documents are available for review shall be sent to town clerks for posting, media, NECTD Board members and other interested persons. The media notified shall include at least the following: local newspaper, local radio and TV stations. Following the notice of availability, a public comment period of at least thirty (30) days shall be provided prior to adoption of any plan.

A public information meeting and/or public hearing shall be held prior to the adoption of the region's Long Range Transportation Plan and any other major transportation plan or study, for the purpose of both providing information and receiving public comment. At least ten (10) days, but no more than twenty (20) days in advance of any public information meeting or public hearing, a notice, including agenda, will be sent to the town clerk in each member municipality for posting, media, NECTD Board members and ConnDOT liaisons and other interested persons. In addition, a display advertisement shall be purchased " in a local newspaper of general circulation to appear at least seven (7) days in advance of the scheduled meeting.

The notice of a public information meeting shall include the date, time, place and subject of the meeting, and shall indicate where subject documents can be reviewed in advance of the meeting. Copies of the subject documents shall be made available at the NECTD offices, at the offices of the town clerk of each member municipality, and, if possible, through the NECTD website.

Where possible, hearings will be held in places that are convenient to alternate transportation modes. Special assistance, if required, will be made available upon request at least ten (10) calendar days prior to the event. All public hearing notices and advertisements shall state the following, *"If you require special assistance to attend or participate in this meeting or need additional information please contact a NECTD representative noted below ten days prior to the meeting event so that the special assistance can be accommodated."*

NECTD will include language in its public notices and advertisements relating to nondiscrimination and avenues of redress if an individual feels they have been discriminated against. All public meeting notices and advertisements shall state the following, *"Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. If you feel you have been denied participation in, denied benefits of, been subject to*

discrimination in regard to this project development, or otherwise discriminated against because of race, ethnic or socio economic status you may contact: Executive Director, Northeastern Connecticut Transit District."

Public Participation Techniques

NECTD uses a variety of methods to inform, increase awareness, and engage the public during the development of plans and programs. The medium used and the degree to which the public is encouraged to be involved varies depending on the planning activity. NECTD commonly uses the following methods and techniques.

- ▶ **Website:** staff updates the site at nectd.org as needed with agendas and minutes from meetings, as well as draft and final plans and programs. Our plans and programs are available for quick viewing and download. The website also serves as a medium by which the public can submit comments and requests. Specifically, it includes schedules, route maps, policies, application forms and information as to how to use the District's services. The web site is maintained by NECTD and regularly updated and is compliant with Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act for disabled users.
- ▶ **News Media** (Norwich Bulletin, Villager, Hartford Courant, WINY Radio)
- ▶ **Legal Advertised Notices**
- ▶ **Board Meetings:** The Board of Directors meets the fourth Friday of each month at 9:00 a.m. at NECTD Offices located at 125 Putnam Pike in Dayville. These are posted in accordance with FOIA at the NECTD Office and with each member town town clerk - meetings are open to the public and include an opportunity for the public to comment on any item relating to transit.
- ▶ **Public Meetings/Hearings:** These activities provide opportunities for public input throughout the planning process. The results and comments obtained at these meetings are incorporated into the appropriate planning documents and meeting minutes. NECTD strives to provide widespread access to these forums by conducting them at accessible times and locations. In addition, presentations at partner agency meetings are scheduled to inform and engage. Supplemental materials such as questionnaires, surveys, and handouts of presentation materials may be distributed to the planning partners, interested parties, and posted on the website to accommodate those unable to participate in person. "Accessible" locations are those that fall within the service areas of NECTD and have accommodations for persons with disabilities. Notification of all meetings, both regular and special, conform to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act (CGS Section 1-21). NECTD will, for all notices of public hearings and meetings include the following statement: *"Whenever NECTD holds a public hearing/meeting, the legal notice regarding*

the hearing/meeting will indicate that Limited English Speaking Persons requiring language assistance may make reasonable requests to NECTD within the time period provided and NECTD will accommodate all timely and reasonable requests at no cost to the requester.”

- ▶ **Contacts Lists** (continually updated by NECTD): NECTD Board, NECCOG Board, Human Service Organizations, Chamber of Commerces, Business Associations, State Agencies, Federal Agencies, Senior Groups
- ▶ **Partner Agencies:** CONNDOT, CMPPC, SECOG, CRCOG, SEAT, WRTD, WRTA (MA), RIPTA (RI)
- ▶ **Surveys:** Surveys, (which may be project-specific) which are conducted twice each calendar year, are used during the updates of plans for data gathering. The survey process and the survey results are incorporated into their respective planning documents.
- ▶ **Press Releases:** NECTD may issue press releases on our projects and programs to the media, and often, those projects are in the news. Press releases will be sent to the Norwich Bulletin, WINY, Hartford Courant and Willimantic Chronicle to announce upcoming meetings and activities and to provide information on specific issues being considered by NECTD.
- ▶ **Direct Mailings:** NECTD will often send information directly to persons (electronically and written) whom we have a direct means to communicate with. The District will maintain a master database of business, federal, state and local agencies, public bodies and interested individuals related to the operations of the District. The database includes mailing information, phone numbers, fax numbers, e-mail addresses and web sites. The database is used to maintain a list of email contacts for electronic meeting notification and announcements. The database is used to enhance any or all public involvement activities.
- ▶ **Comment and Complaint:** Comment forms are often used to solicit public comment on specific issues - such as schedule or route changes. They could also accompany documents made available for public review. Comment forms can be very general in nature, or can ask for very specific feedback. Comment forms can also be included in publications and on web sites to solicit input regarding the subject of the publication and/or the format of the publication or web site. In compliance with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, these comment opportunities also allow for complaints associated with minority groups as described in Title VI of the U.S. Code (42 U.S.C. §2000d et seq.). Such complaints will be formally logged in at the District offices and, then forwarded to CONNDOT and FHWA for further review and direction. Title VI complaints may be e-mailed, mailed by post or communicated directly by calling or visiting the District.
- ▶ **Paid Advertisements:** To promote its services or collect public comments, the Agency may place paid advertisements in local printed or online publications or websites.

- ▶ **Community Outreach Booths:** Occasionally, NECTD staffs tables or booths at community events and public gathering spaces to raise awareness of our services and/or promote ridership.

In using one or more of these techniques, the intent is to expose and engage the public in general or even target certain population groups or neighborhoods and communities to issues and proposals being considered, including, but not limited to: Age, Gender, Special Needs, Education, Income and Race/Ethnic-specific issues and Neighborhoods

Ideal public participation involves two-way communications, with NECTD receiving information, comments, and advice, as well as circulating information by using possible approaches, analyses, and decisions. This goal can be accomplished through careful identification of target audiences and aggressive community outreach beyond the traditional forms.

For questions, please contact:

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