

CHAPTER 5:

Public Involvement

DVRPC firmly believes that meaningful public participation results in better planning outcomes. Public participation is a process, not a single event. DVRPC provides multiple opportunities for a wide variety of stakeholders, including vulnerable and historically marginalized populations, public officials, and the private sector, to provide comments on and stay informed about transportation planning and programming decisions. By incorporating local information, residents' lived experiences, and subject matter expertise, plans are more implementable and sustainable, and more stakeholders are involved in the outcomes.

5.1 Public Comment Period

The public comment period for the Draft DVRPC FY2024 TIP for New Jersey opened on Monday, July 17, 2023, at 5:00 PM (local time) and extended through Friday, August 18, 2023, at 5:00 PM (local time). This comment period also served as an opportunity for the public to review and comment on the Draft Statewide TIP (STIP) for NJDOT and NJ TRANSIT. DVRPC invited interested members of the public to attend either or both an in-person meeting or the online public meeting. These meetings were held at different times, providing two opportunities to learn about the Draft TIP and Draft STIP and to submit written comments about these draft documents. These were held on the following dates and times:

IN PERSON

Monday, July 31, 2023, from 6:00 PM–7:00 PM:

Located at: Camden County Library System - Riletta L. Cream Ferry Ave Branch
852 Ferry Ave
Camden, NJ

ONLINE

Thursday, August 10, 2023, from 7:00 PM–8:00 PM:

Register at https://dvrpc.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_wlRWb11jRaqAP1C_aCNByg

Call-in information: 309 205 3325

Meeting ID: 841 3075 2310

Passcode: 7952pGtV

While not required, for the in-person meeting, those interested in joining the meeting were encouraged to RSVP by contacting 215-238-2929 or public_affairs@dvrpc.org. For the online meeting, registration information was available on DVRPC's events calendar at <https://www.dvrpc.org/calendar/2023/8>. While participants needed to register beforehand, they were approved automatically and could register and join the meeting up until the meeting ended. Additionally, people who wanted to participate but did not have internet access or smart phones could call in. Anyone who needed accommodations, such as closed captioning or interpretation for either meeting, were directed to contact DVRPC's Office of Communications & Engagement at public_affairs@dvrpc.org or 215-238-2929.

The meetings were conducted jointly with NJDOT, NJ TRANSIT, and the DRPA/PATCO. NJDOT, NJ TRANSIT and the DRPA/PATCO do not hold a separate public comment period or meeting for the Draft STIP and rely on DVRPC and other MPOs to serve as the vehicle for this federal requirement. Public comments on both the

Draft TIP and STIP documents were addressed to the MPO, which the MPO then coordinated with the agency that was in the best position to respond to such comments (MPO, NJDOT, NJ TRANSIT, DRPA/PATCO, county, city, or independent authorities). As in past years, a representative from NJDOT, NJ TRANSIT, and the DRPA/PATCO were available at the above-referenced public meetings on the draft documents.

DVRPC's website (www.dvrpc.org) is a vital tool in public outreach and serves a useful purpose during the TIP update cycle. The full Draft TIP and Draft STIP documents were available on the DVRPC website, including the date and location of the in-person and online public meetings and other general information. Individuals can also download or access current TIP materials at any time. The Draft STIP was also available at www.state.nj.us/transportation/capital. The best way for the public to submit comments was online by using DVRPC's web-based Draft TIP public comment application located at www.dvrpc.org/TIP/Draft. Users could click on the "Submit a Comment on the Draft TIP and/or STIP" button to make general and project-specific comments. DVRPC staff then gathered responses from appropriate agencies. Responses were provided only to comments that were submitted in writing during the public comment period by 5:00 PM (local time) on August 18, 2023. In addition, the public could submit comments via email (tip@dvrpc.org) during the public comment period, or mail written comments to:

TIP COMMENTS
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT
DELAWARE VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
190 N. INDEPENDENCE MALL WEST, 8TH FLOOR
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19106-1520

Comments received via mail had to be postmarked by August 18, 2023. If assistance was needed in providing a written comment, one had to contact the DVRPC Office of Communications and Engagement at 215-238-2929 or public_affairs@dvrpc.org. Legal notices explaining the public comment process were published by the following newspapers: the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Courier Post, Trenton Times, Al Dia, Philadelphia Tribune, South Jersey Times, and Burlington County Times. In addition, DVRPC frequently employed social media (Facebook, Twitter (now "X"), and Instagram) during the public comment period to garner the public's interest and attention. For example, DVRPC highlighted different projects and facts via social media posts. The public comment period was also included in DVRPC's monthly newsletter, which goes to over 14,000 individuals. For those without internet access, draft documents were available at the DVRPC office in the American College of Physicians Building in downtown Philadelphia, or they could request the DVRPC Office of Communications and Engagement to mail the draft documents to them by calling 215-592-1800. Hardcopies of the Draft TIP documents were also available at certain public libraries across the region that are listed in Table 36.

A total of 275 individuals from the public including those on behalf of advocacy groups submitted 295 written comments about the Draft TIP primarily through the web-based online commenting application, followed by email, and then airmail. Since some individuals stated more than one issue in their submitted comments, DVRPC assigned each issue an "Item #" that is used to track the responses provided by DVRPC and appropriate DVRPC regional planning partner agencies that are found in Appendix H (see Addendum #24003B). The 295 comments contained 57 issues. Listed below, these issues are categorized into six issue types.

Issue Types (Percentage of All Issues):

1. Combined requests for Circuit trail funding (CMAQ and TA Set-Aside), the inclusion of safety and bicycle/pedestrian elements in TIP projects, and support for certain TIP projects (90.5 percent)
2. Project concerns, questions, and/or suggestions (2.7 percent)
3. Supports project or other TIP related item (1.3 percent)
4. Requests for a new TIP project/line item/study (0.6 percent)
5. General concerns, questions, and/or suggestions (1.3 percent)
6. Opposes project or other TIP related item (3.6 percent)

Appendix H in the Addendum contains three reports that display the public comments received during the public comment period and responses to the comments: (1) Index of Comments (an abridged summary of comments); (2) Original Public Comments (displaying the full content of comments, including letters and/or supporting documents); and (3) Agency Responses to Comments.

5.2 Public Comment Guidance

To facilitate the public comment process, DVRPC offers some extended guidance. Listed below were some questions that DVRPC asked the public to consider during the review of the Draft TIP and Draft STIP documents.

- Are we meeting the needs of the region?
- Is the Draft STIP following the intent of the IJA/BIL? Such as, are we focusing on projects that address equity, sustainability, resilience, climate change, safety, and asset condition? Are we rebuilding and reinvesting in our railways and public transit infrastructure?
- Do the Draft TIP and STIP contain the appropriate mix of projects with regard to (a) the amount of investment in Highway projects versus the amount in Transit projects, or (b) the types of improvements, such as maintenance and reconstruction of the existing system versus new capacity-adding projects; non-traditional projects (such as pedestrian, bicycle, smart technology, TASA, CMAQ, or operational improvements); or freight improvements, versus the traditional Highway and Transit projects?
- Is this region getting its fair share of resources compared to other regions in the state or nation?
- Is the current transportation project development process, including environmental reviews and public input, effective?
- Given financial constraints, is this region investing money in the right types of projects?
- Are the Draft TIP and STIP documents easy to use? How can DVRPC, NJDOT, and NJ TRANSIT further improve their documents?

Of course, comments were not limited to these broader issues of concern. DVRPC, as always, welcomed opinions on specific projects contained in the TIP, the TIP development process, or any other topic of concern. However, we reminded those intending to recommend new projects for the TIP that to earn a place on the TIP, projects must first progress through the screening and planning processes described earlier. As a result, requests for new projects are generally referred to the appropriate agency for further investigation through their respective “pre-TIP” study efforts. These study efforts may lead to the project winning a place on the TIP in some future year. Additionally, a constructive, information-rich comment that is clearly communicated and supported with facts and local knowledge is more likely to have an impact on decision making. Below are a few tips adapted from “Tips for Submitting Effective Comments” from [Regulations.gov](#) for crafting effective public comments.

Tips for Crafting Effective Public Comments

- Read the description and understand the project you are commenting on. Is the project a study, operational improvement, enhancing a parking lot/bus stop, or creating a multi-use trail? What are its intended effects? For example, an operational improvement project, such as signal re-timing, may not be able to add another travel lane within its scope, but safety components like signage could be added to many kinds of projects.
- Be concise. Support your claims with sound reasoning, documented evidence, and/or how your community will be impacted. For example, have you observed the impacts of a new development on traffic patterns? Is there a study that supports your comment?
- Try to address trade-offs and opposing views.
- If you disagree with a project, suggest an alternative and include an explanation and/or analysis of how your alternative might meet the same objective or be more effective. A potential alternative is to not proceed with the project.
- Identify any credentials and experience that may distinguish your comment from others. If you are a resident of a community, or have relevant personal or professional experience, please state so.
- There is no minimum or maximum length for a comment to be effective.
- Are the Draft TIP and STIP documents easy to use? How can DVRPC, NJDOT, and NJ TRANSIT further improve their documents?

The public comment process is not a vote. One comment that is well-supported with facts and local knowledge can be more influential than a hundred comments. DVRPC and its planning partners want to fund the best projects for the region within financial constraints; when crafting a comment, it is important to explain the reasoning behind your position.

Table 36: Libraries Displaying the Draft TIP

BURLINGTON COUNTY		
Burlington County Library 5 Pioneer Boulevard Westampton, NJ 08060	Moorestown Library 111 West Second Street Moorestown, NJ 08057	Burlington County Library– Bordentown Branch 18 East Union Street Bordentown, NJ 08505
CAMDEN COUNTY		
Camden County Library – M. Allan Vogelsson Regional Branch 203 Laurel Road Voorhees, NJ 08043	Camden County Library– Gloucester Twp.-Blackwood Rotary Branch 15 South Blackhorse Pike Blackwood, NJ 08012	Camden County Library– Rutgers-Camden Branch 300 North 5th Street Camden, NJ 08102
Haddonfield Public Library 60 Haddon Avenue Haddonfield, NJ 08033	Cherry Hill Free Public Library 1100 Kings Highway North Cherry Hill, NJ 08034	Camden County Library– Riletta L. Cream Ferry Avenue Branch 852 Ferry Ave. Camden, NJ 08104
GLOUCESTER COUNTY		
Monroe Township Public Library 713 Marsha Avenue Williamstown, NJ 08094	Gloucester County Library System 389 Wolfert Station Road Mullica Hill, NJ 08062	Woodbury Public Library 33 Delaware Street Woodbury, NJ 08096
MERCER COUNTY		
Mercer County Library– Lawrence Branch 2751 Brunswick Pike, U.S. Route 1 Lawrenceville, NJ 08648	Trenton Public Library 120 Academy Street Trenton, NJ 08638	
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA		
Free Library of Philadelphia 1901 Vine Street Philadelphia, PA 19103	Library for the Blind & Physically Handicapped of Philadelphia 919 Walnut Street Philadelphia, PA 19107	

Source: DVRPC, 2023