Engineering Project Communication Process Guide

Introduction

Engineering's Project Communication Process is the exchange of project-specific information with MDT team/staff members, stakeholders, and the public at large. It's both an internal and external process that is a key factor contributing to the success of a project. To effectively manage project outreach, project managers and staff teams need information and tools to determine outreach needs and the methods to meet these needs and goals. The Project Communication Process (PCP) is such a resource.

The PCP is not a static process, throughout the life of the transportation project it will need to be continuously revisited and adjusted. The following pages outline a process and provide tools for analyzing and quantifying project outreach and communication needs, which will ultimately lead to appropriate and efficient outreach and communication management. *Many of these steps/guidelines are not new and have been used intermittently on different MDT projects. It is also similar to the Risk Management process with updates and considerations made throughout the life of the project.*

From the time a project is considered in concept to the stage when it is constructed, public and individual stakeholder's needs, concerns and questions must be considered and addressed to achieve the goals of accountability and transparency. The PCP is the responsibility of *everyone* on the project team. The Design Project Manager, however, is responsible for developing the Project Communication Plan, maintaining/keeping applicable public involvement (PI) files, and a Public Involvement Plan (if a **substantial impact project**) with the input from the Project Design Team, administrative staff, Public Information Officer (PIO), and Engineering PR Contract Manager. PI plans will also be developed on projects that have public involvement consultants assigned to them.

Background

While these steps/guidelines are not new and have previously been used on MDT's projects, public involvement requirements for substantial impact projects became formalized through 2017's Senate Bill 182, which went into effect July 1, 2017 (MCA 60-2-245). This bill requires MDT to notify and provide updates to the public concerning projects with significant impact. In 2019, House Bill 580 expanded the definition of a substantial impact project in the MCA to include the initial installation of rumble strips with 200 yards of a residential building.

One goal of this process and its related tools is to support staff in meeting the statutory requirements related to public involvement and communication for their projects.

Process Steps and Guidelines

Project Level of Impact (LOI): Determine Project Level of Impact for Public Involvement
***NOTE:** This is for projects nominated after July 1, 2017*
(Project Public Involvement Worksheets - A)
The Design Project Manager will fill this worksheet out prior to Preliminary Field Review (PFR) and reference the Planning Division's preliminary screening. If a project is designated as Substantial, it needs to be designated as such in EPS by checking the "Substantial PI" box.

Using best judgement and experience, highlight all applicable boxes in the table in cooperation with Project Design Team and sponsors. If the project has additional areas/issues not listed in the table - note those in the

"Rationale/Justification for decision" box. Using the columns and your discussions with the project sponsor and design team members determine the project's level of impact. Discuss substantial impact issues at project team meetings and use the table to guide team discussion during the PFR.

Low and Moderate Impact Projects

- Indicated by few or no selections in the substantial impact column.

Substantial Impact Projects

- Indicated by a prevalence of selections in the substantial and moderate impact columns.
- A designation of Substantial Impact by the Transportation Commission automatically classifies the project as having substantial impact.
- Planning Division completes a preliminary screening of all projects ***(this is for reference only).***

Remember to:

- ✓ Document the Project LOI in milestone reports (starting with the PFR), thereby getting concurrence from the sponsor, key project stakeholders and design team.
- ✓ Re-check the Project LOI table for any changes throughout project development, documenting changes to the LOI in milestone reports and obtain concurrence when needed.

TIP: Try not to over-analyze while filling out Worksheet A. This is a tool to assist, and LOI can change throughout project development.

Project Communication Matrix: Develop strategies to communicate throughout the project *(Project Public Involvement Worksheets- B)*

The purpose for developing a project communication matrix is to lay out strategies for staying in active and continuous communication with everyone associated with the project, including the Project Design team. This is a tool for the Design Project Manager, and they are responsible to ensure the communication strategies chosen are accomplished throughout the project.

Remember to:

- ✓ Place reminders on Outlook Calendar or other task lists to ensure these communications are done at the proposed times.

Public/Stakeholder Engagement Strategies: Customize ways to inform and gather input from stakeholders *(Project Public Involvement Worksheets- C)*

The Design Project Manager is responsible for the development and following through on these strategies. It's essentially planning the types of communication, involvement, and outreach.

Think about the purposes of the engagement (to educate and/or get input) when developing the public/stakeholder involvement for a project. Use the ala carte menu to generate ideas and customize the techniques and processes to use for public/stakeholder engagement. The Project Design team is involved with the development of these engagement strategies, and concurrence is needed from the Project Sponsor and Program Manager. The Design Project Manager is responsible for keeping the Public/Stakeholder Engagement Strategies current and documenting all public/stakeholder engagement throughout project development.

Remember to:

- ✓ Document all public engagement.
- ✓ Coordinate media releases with PIO when applicable.
- ✓ Revisit Public/Stakeholder Engagement Strategies periodically to evaluate if strategies are needed, if they seem to be working, and what works well. Make changes as needed.

TIP: Is the purpose to just make stakeholders aware? Is the purpose to inform the stakeholders of decisions and why? Is the purpose to involve them in decisions? Who are you trying to reach and what is the best means of connecting with them? For help in coming up with ideas look at Developing a PI Plan.

Contact List / E-list: Develop and maintain list throughout the life of the project
(Project Public Involvement Worksheets- D or your own)
The Design Project Manager will develop this contact/e-list and make sure that it is up to date. Start the contact list from Planning's mail list database using Jasper Reports. Also look for existing contact lists or public involvement lists from existing corridor studies or environmental impact documents and/or transportation plans.

Section 2(a)(iv) of MCA 60-2-245- Construction projects -- Project impacts – Notice, requires MDT to develop and maintain an electronic notification list (e-list) for specific entities and organizations when a project is determined to have a "substantial impact on the public".

Determination of the initial e-list should be made in the early stages of project development. Review and modification of the list should also be included at each major milestone during project development.

The contact list/e-list is determined on a project by project basis. The link below contains a detailed step by step process for obtaining contact information for the entities on the notification list using the MDT Jasper Report Process. The contact information obtained from the mailing list database should be exported to a spreadsheet and saved on the appropriate project drive. When individuals/entities request to be added or removed from the project-specific e-list, update accordingly.
Contact List and Jasper Report Instructions (MDT internal use only)

Remember to:
- ✓ Look for existing lists from previous studies.
- ✓ Keep list up-to-date. Add or remove names as requests are received, not just at milestone events.
- ✓ Pass on to Engineering Project Manager when project is let for construction.
- ✓ Include local State representatives and Senators in the project area

TIP: Consider making contact/e-list available to all on the Project Design Team, so that everyone can contribute to it and add updates. For example, surveyors are often the first to contact the landowners.

Communication Log: Develop and maintain log throughout the life of the project
(Project Public Involvement Worksheets- E or your own)
It is critical to log all non-MDT communications and helpful if done in conjunction with the Contact / E List. The project manager (both Design and Construction) is responsible for developing and making sure it is up to date during preconstruction. The engineering project manager is responsible for maintaining and keeping up to date during construction.

Project development and construction often requires coordination with one or more State and Federal resource agencies, as well as, stakeholders and public at large.

Remember to:
- ✓ Ensure all incoming communications are responded to within 3 days and are resolved in a timely manner.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN ENGAGING PUBLIC/STAKEHOLDERS

- ✓ Be pro-active
- ✓ Clearly define your purpose and objectives:
  - Is it to educate? Be ready to describe more than just the technical issues of a project
  - Is it to gather input? Be clear on what can be decided and have plan to follow-up on what input was used or not and why
- ✓ Realize this is not a static process- it should be re-evaluated and evolve as needed
- ✓ Use a variety of tools, techniques, and times to delivery information, educate or gather input
- ✓ Try to avoid jargon and acronyms
- ✓ Use local landmarks when possible instead of reference posts

✓ Pass on to Engineering Construction Project Manager when project is let for construction.

TIP: Consider making communication log available to all on the Project Design Team, so that everyone can contribute to it and add interactions. For example, surveyors are often the first to contact the landowners and get immediate early input on the project.

Public Involvement (PI) Plan: Document and customize activities and ways to inform and gather input from public/stakeholders and record in a written document.
NOTE: *This is for projects nominated after July 1, 2017 and projects determined as a Substantial Impact Project*
A PI Plan is required for all projects with substantial impact and recommended on all other projects. The Design Project Manager (with assistance/input from the Sponsor, design team, and PI firm, if applicable) is responsible for developing the PI Plan. Document the PI Plan in a narrative format; however, it doesn't have to be a separate word document. It can be a spreadsheet or part of another project report. ***Approval from the Sponsor is required-this doesn't mean they have to literally sign the documentation. They need to be aware of it and approve its content.***

Use experience, the ala carte menu on Engagement Strategies (Public Involvement Worksheet C), the 2-page Developing a PI Plan cheat sheet, and MDT's Public Involvement Plan (pages 15-17 and Appendix C) for ideas and guidance.

Remember to:
✓ Revisit the PI Plan periodically to evaluate. Look to see if the activities seem to be working, and what works well or doesn't. Make changes as needed.
✓ Have PIO approval before proceeding with PI plan.
✓ Coordinate media releases with PIO when applicable.
✓ Approval by the PIO/Communication team is needed for any material released outside of MDT.

TIP: Keep the end users (the communities & stakeholders impacted by the project) in mind as you develop the public involvement plan.

Tools/Guides/References

Project Public Involvement Worksheets A-E
Developing a PI Plan
MDT Communication Guidelines
Project Specific Contact/E-List and Jasper Report Instructions (MDT internal use only)
MDT Public Involvement Plan
Frequently Asked Questions

Approved PI Examples use same link name on web page (MDT internal use only)

Definitions

Communication Log- developed for all projects; a log of all non-MDT communication. It is the responsibility of all design team members to keep it up to date. The log will be maintained throughout the life of the project (including construction).

Contact/E- List- developed for all projects; if a project is determined as a Substantial Impact Project, an electronic notification list (e-list) must be developed and maintained throughout the life of the project. Contacts on this list must receive project updates of major milestones and **at least once a year** throughout the life of the project (including construction).

Project Communication Matrix- a tool or guide with action items (format, frequency, distribution audience) created by and for the Design Project Manager for each project to stay active with communication strategies with the design team and stakeholders.

Project Design Team- MDT staff that are involved with the development of a transportation construction project. It includes all staff members that are typically included on the distribution list of project milestone reports.

Project Level of Impact (LOI)- established for all projects with the Project Sponsor to determine if a project is Low Impact (Level A*), Moderate Impact (Levels B & C*) or Substantial Impact (Level C & D*). Needs to be kept up to date and re-evaluated throughout the development of the project and listed in all milestone reports.
**Levels of public involvement as defined by MDT's Public Involvement Plan (page 15).*

Project Sponsor-the District Administrator is often the primary project sponsor for MDT projects, but can also be the Chief Engineer or Rail, Transit & Planning Administrator. It can be a combination depending on the funding for the project.

Public Involvement Plan- a Public Involvement Plan is required for projects with substantial impacts and is documentation that is developed with the assistance of the Project Design Team, Engineering PR Contract Manager, PIO, and Project Sponsor. The documentation of a well thought out plan provides a systematic approach that shows the resources and PI activities to be used as the project is developed and constructed. The plan will identify the purpose of the project and the PI goals to be achieved, as well as what criteria will be used to measure how those goals are achieved. It doesn't need to be elaborate or complicated and can be adjustable to fit the project's size and needs.

Stakeholders- individuals and organizations who are affected by or interested in the transportation project, can include business owners, road users, government officials, transportation professionals, tribal governments, and resource and land management agencies.

Substantial Impact Project- designated as such by the Transportation Commission, and by judgement and experience of the design team when completing project level of impact worksheet. A project with an environmental document greater than a categorical exclusion (EA or EIS) and/or any new rumble strip installation within 200 yards of a residential building will be a substantial impact project.

Roles

Design Project Manager-the lead unit designer (District, Road Design, Traffic, Bridge, Consultant Design, etc.) and is responsible for developing, documenting, maintaining/filing PI files for project, and updating the project public/stakeholder engagement actions. ***If the project is designated as Substantial-check the "Substantial PI" box in EPS***. The lead unit works with the Project Sponsor to formulate these actions.

Engineering Construction Project Manager- the manager of activities associated with the administration of a contract for specified construction services and physical infrastructure, including maintenance of the Communication Log and Contact List during the construction of the project.

Engineering PR Contract Manager- manages consultants hired to carry out project public involvement plans; assist Project Design Teams with selecting public involvement consultants and their scope of work, the Project Communication Process, and assists with developing project Public Involvement Plans.

Project Design Team Members- MDT staff that contributes to the design of a transportation project and are responsible for assisting in determining Project Level of Impact, determining Public/Stakeholder Engagement Strategies, developing a formal Public Involvement Plan (if needed), and maintaining the project Communication Log.

Public Information Officer (PIO)- acts as the Director's spokesperson and coordinates marketing activities; manages media contacts; approves all public outreach and public involvement plans; and assists staff when media issues arise.

Sample PI Plan Outline

This outline can be followed to create a public involvement plan. If you address each of these categories using the public involvement worksheets, you should be able to successfully obtain your outreach and communications needs and requirements.

Project Name-

Project Description-

Introduction/Background- Have any concerns been raised about the project? Are there any innovative or interesting features? Is there inter-agency coordination, night work, unique educational opportunities, etc.…?

Objectives- What do you want to do and why the PI for the project? Do you want to inform, educate or to gather feedback?

Stakeholders/Audience- The stakeholders, groups, public you want to reach. This is the project contact/e-list.

Messages/Information- The key points/information you want to convey. If gathering feedback be sure to specify what you are gathering for, what decision, and how you will inform after the decision.

Stakeholder Engagement Strategies- This is the tactics and tools you are going to use and when. What are you going to do? Open house, survey, one-on-one meetings, meetings, focus groups, press release, fact page, brochure, post cards, etc. (look at Worksheet C). Remember, if gathering feedback, have a way to convey the information gathered back to the stakeholders and the decisions made from the feedback, as well as, reason you made the decision.

Evaluation/re-evaluation- How and what will you look at to see if PI efforts are working? Are you getting similar questions/concern multiple time? Are you getting feedback?