

Section 3. Public Involvement Activities

3.1 Polk TPO Activities

The Polk TPO utilizes extensive public outreach including efforts targeted at traditionally underserved areas. In 2004 the TPO adopted and began implementing a marketing plan that was intended to increase awareness of the TPO, its long-range transportation plan, the development of the Consolidated Transit Development plan, and planning efforts for the entire county.

This marketing plan included the following elements:

- Publication of the *Polk County Transportation Timeline* poster;
- Sponsorship of an Annual “Future of Transportation” Poster Contest (4th Grade Students);
- Speaker’s Bureau; and
- Publication of a TPO Newsletter, TRIP Brochure, and a Regional Transit brochure.

The *Polk County Transportation Timeline* poster was distributed at numerous venues during the plan update process, and used as an educational tool as part of the “Future of Transportation” Poster Contest. This poster contest was conducted countywide at public and private schools, with more than two thousand students participating in the event.



Student rendering of the future of transportation.

Staff’s outreach efforts included over twenty presentations to various community and civic groups as part of the referenced Speaker’s Bureau. These presentations were used a means to solicit public comment on the draft plan including the different investment options up for consideration.

Numerous public workshops and hearings were held during the development and adoption of the 2030 TRIP. Several of those public meetings, including the plan adoption hearings, were broadcast live on Polk County Government Television (PGTV). Also, TPO staff participated in a live call-in show on PGTV to discuss the 2030 TRIP and to solicit public comments. The adopted 2030 TRIP contains transit service improvements and other transit related information which are included in this Consolidated TDP.

The Polk TPO sponsored two public workshops during the month of August, 2007, to solicit public comments on the development of the Polk Consolidated TDP and the proposed transit improvements. As stated previously, public comments received through these public meetings confirmed the need for more service, an extension of service to new areas of Polk County, and more improvements to make the service more accessible and attractive for all passengers. This is consistent with the dialogue that is occurring in the community today; many residents, groups, and elected representatives are calling for more transit options to address the serious transportation, mobility, and quality of life issues facing Polk County today. The service improvements listed in this Consolidated TDP include these expanded needs.

Staff from the transit agencies participated in several programs broadcast on PGTV, the local government television station. On “Issues and Answers,” which is a 30-minute program where the viewers can call in and ask questions, staff participated in three separate programs. One program was to discuss the Polk Transit Authority (PTA) legislation and efforts to consolidate transit services discussed in this TDP. Another program was directed at available paratransit services such as ADA, Transportation Disadvantaged, and Medicaid reform. And finally, one episode was conducted solely in Spanish and covered the available fixed-route services and how to access and ride the system.

Additionally, the Polk TPO’s outreach efforts specific to transit issues includes actively seeking public feedback at the respective Board meetings of the three current transit providers: Lakeland Area Mass Transit District, Winter Haven Area Transit, the Polk County Board of County Commissioners, and the Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordination Board. All of these Boards meet frequently and offer numerous opportunities to involve citizens in the decision-making process concerning

the transit issues facing the community.

3.2 Title VI – Environmental Justice

Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (42 U.S.C. 2000D-1) states that, “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.”

The President’s Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice further amplifies Title VI by providing that “each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations.” It is primarily about fairness toward the disadvantaged and often addresses the elimination of racial and ethnic minorities from decision-making.

To parents living in a neighborhood with a lot of bus service, environmental justice might mean converting buses from diesel to natural gas, reducing their children’s exposure to air pollution, Environmental justice to a non-English speaking neighborhood might mean having bilingual staff and community leaders running a public meeting. To low-income workers relying on bus service in downtown, environmental justice might mean that a city increases the frequency of bus service.

Environmental justice is more than a set of legal and regulatory obligations. Properly implemented, environmental justice principles and procedures improve all levels of transportation decision-making. This approach will:

- Make better transportation decisions that meet the needs of all people.
- Design transportation facilities that fit into unique communities.
- Enhance the public involvement process.
- Provide minority and low-income populations with opportunities to learn about transportation.

3.3 Identifying Traditionally Underserved Areas

Demographic data was analyzed to allow the Polk TPO to respond appropriately to federal direction on racial and income discrimination during development of the adopted 2030 TRIP. The results of the demographic analysis were used to identify geographic areas in the county with high minority and low-income populations so that their needs can be addressed, and the benefits and burdens of transportation investments can be fairly distributed. With this information, we can better evaluate and improve our public involvement process to eliminate communication barriers and engage minority and low-income populations. For the purposes of this analysis, traditionally underserved areas are defined as:

- Areas with minority populations, which exceed 50% of the Census Block Group; and
- Areas with an annual median household income less than or equal to \$28,829 (80% of the Polk County median income).

As part of our public outreach program, the Polk TPO has been actively targeting the “traditionally underserved” populations.

3.4 Winter Haven Area Transit Terminal Project – Public Art

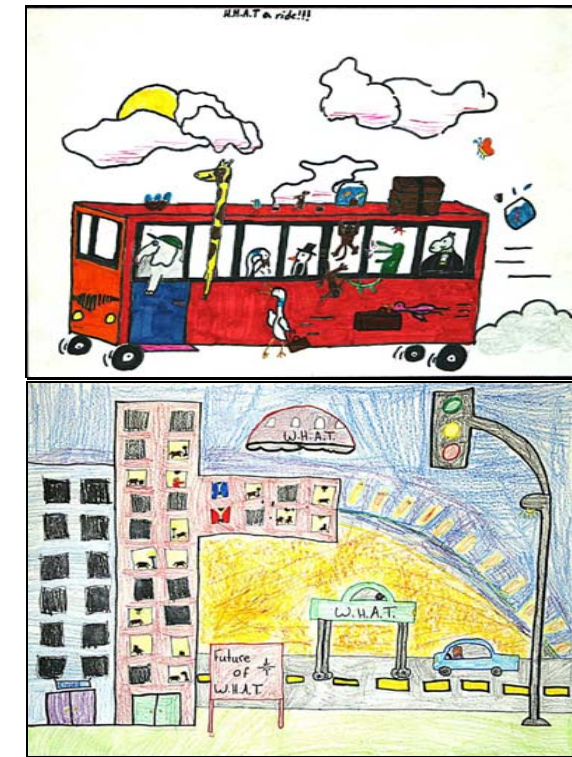
As part of the terminal construction project in Winter Haven, an extensive public involvement process was held to fulfill the public art component of the federally funded project. Through the competitive bid process, Arts Ensemble International was selected to head the project.



Mosaic tile artwork representing economic development, sports and recreation, tourism, agriculture, and local wildlife, will be placed at the base of the tower (see rendering of terminal and artwork above), and under the windows around the terminal.

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All of the public and private schools in Polk County were invited to compete in a countywide art competition, with the winning student’s artwork to be transformed into 4’ x 4’ mosaic tiles and permanently placed under the new terminal’s windows. Grade levels 3rd through 6th were selected to participate in this competition. Over 425 entries were submitted challenging judges to select four first-place recipients.



Displayed above is the winning artwork from the third grade and fifth grade students respectively, depicting their interpretation of the theme for this competition, “Transportation in Polk County, Present & Future.” The winning students also received commemorative ribbons and art scholarship awards to Arts Ensemble International. Participating schools received art supply awards to purchase needed art supplies.