

## **Introduction to Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation**

NEICAC serves as Region 1 Public Transportation Provider for the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT), comprised of Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, Howard, and Winneshiek counties in northeast Iowa. NEICAC is one of the 16 designated Regional Public Transportation Providers for the Iowa Department of Transportation.

NEICAC is responsible for the planning, programming, and administering state- and federally-funded public transportation services and projects within the five-county region. The Board of Directors serves as the governing body for NEICAC and is committed to transparency as it develops and implements plans, programs, and projects within the region.

This Public Participation Plan is documentation of the planned efforts to engage and inform the public in and of the decisions and activities of the Region 1 transportation provider. NEICAC is responsible for programming and administering federal transportation funds and some state transportation funds; completing required Iowa DOT planning processes and work products; and managing Region 1 projects in Iowa DOT's online programming system (TPMS). In addition, NEICAC maintains regional transportation data and reports to the IDOT quarterly and year-end. The NEICAC Board comprises a representative from the public (county supervisor), private, and low-income sectors from each of the five counties.

The five counties in NEICAC have an area of 3,313 square miles, the equivalent of 2,120,320 acres. There are 52 incorporated communities within the region, with only four cities having populations over 2,500 and eight other communities with populations over 1,000. The U.S. Census Bureau counts the total 2020 population for the five counties as 80,379 persons, a decrease of 4.4% since the 2010 census. On average, there are just over 25 people per square mile, less than half the statewide average of 54.5. As a result, engaging residents from across this large, rural region can present challenges. By implementing the public outreach activities outlined in this document, NEICAC believes it will reach and offer all residents ample participation opportunities in the region's transportation public participation process.

## **REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS**

Transportation Planning and Programming Federal and state regulations require Regional Transportation Providers to develop and use a documented public involvement process that provides opportunities for public review and comment at key decision points. At a minimum, this includes:

- Developing the Public Participation Plan.
- Providing adequate public notice of public participation activities and time for public review and comment on key decision points.
- Providing timely notice and reasonable access to information about transportation issues and processes.
- Making public information (technical information, meeting notices, etc.) available in electronically accessible formats and means.
- Holding all public meetings at accessible locations.
- Demonstrating explicit consideration and response to public input received during the development of transportation plans and the Transportation Improvement Program.

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- Considering the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households, who may face challenges accessing employment and other services.
- Provide an additional opportunity for public comment if final public transportation plans differ significantly from the version previously made available for public comment or raise new material issues that interested parties could not have reasonably foreseen from the initial public involvement efforts.
- Coordinating with the Iowa DOT's public involvement and consultation processes for DOT-sponsored statewide and regional projects.
- Periodically reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures and strategies contained in this Public Participation Plan to ensure an open and effective public participation process.
- When significant written and oral comments are received on draft transportation plans, the final document(s) will include a summary of comments.
- Providing a public comment period for a minimum of 45 days before the Public Participation Plan is adopted.
- Providing copies of the approved Public Participation Plan to the Iowa DOT and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and posting it on the agency's website.
- In developing transportation plans, consulting with agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities within the region affected by transportation, such as those involved with economic development, environmental protection, airport operations, and freight movement. To the maximum extent practicable, coordinate the planning process with such activities.

### **Other Applicable Federal Laws**

NEICAC 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, NEICAC 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.

### **Goals**

- Transparency:

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- The process will identify and communicate where and how participants can have influence and directly impact decision-making.
- Solicit, accept, and expend funds for the purpose set forth above and in accordance with the organization's 28E agreements.
- Identify and assess local and regional public transportation needs and changing conditions and provide a forum for those changes.
- Provide and promote transportation for elderly, disabled, low-income individuals, LEP, commuters, and the general public in Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, Howard, and Winneshiek Counties.
- Participation: NEICAC customers and the general public will have opportunities to participate in key decisions, such as having multiple options for receiving critical information and sharing feedback.
- Accessibility: Every effort is made to ensure that participation opportunities are physically, geographically, and linguistically accessible.
- Diversity of input: Participants represent a range of socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural perspectives, with representative participants including residents from low-income neighborhoods, ethnic communities, residents with limited English proficiency, and other traditionally underserved people.
- Public Transportation Advisory Group

**Principals**

- Proactive and Timely - Participation methods will be ongoing and proactive so participants can influence decisions.
- Tailored - Every effort will be made to match local and cultural preferences.
- Communication of Results – NEICAC will communicate the factors in the decision-making to those giving input. In addition, staff will communicate the results of the public's input regarding the impact on decisions at a broad summary level of the decisions reached and the rationale for those decisions.

**Public Involvement**

Public Participation is an open process that seeks out and encourages early and continuous public involvement throughout the development of transportation plans and projects as part of the transportation planning process. NEICAC encourages citizen input.

The Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission (UERPC) is committed to the availability of timely, complete information to the notification of and public access to the decision-making process and ongoing public involvement throughout the transportation planning process, including, but not limited to, the development of the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). UERPC aims to identify methods for obtaining public input and encouraging public involvement in transportation planning. The TIP is the responsibility of UERPC.

**Public Input**

The methods described in the Public Participation Plan cover a range of ways in which NEICAC engages with its customers and the general public. NEICAC understands that decisions about

budgets as well as reduction in services or increase in fares are of particular importance, and therefore NEICAC has the following guidelines when considering such changes:

- **Major Service Changes and Fare Changes**

NEICAC will solicit public input on major service reductions and fare changes. A major service reduction is defined as decreases that represent a net loss of fifty percent (50%) or more of total service miles or fifty percent (50%) or more of transit hours of operation for any individual service. Major service reductions and fare changes will meet the following public input requirements:

- Changes will be published for public review and comment no less than 45 days before the proposed changes.
- A minimum of one public meeting(s) will be held to gather comments within 45 days of the published notice.
- Public comment is always welcome at regularly scheduled NEICAC Board meetings.
- Notice of the final changes will be posted within 15 days of implementation.
- NEICAC Board of Directors will be given a verbal and/or written summary of public input and must approve all significant changes.

- **Annual Consolidated Transit Application**

A public hearing must be held for the annual consolidated transit funding application.

Iowa's Consolidated Transit Funding Application is used by all transit agencies to apply for State funds and Federal 5310, 5311, and 5339 funds. Any system applying for statewide 5339 capital funds must include its request in the consolidated application.

### **Objectives**

- Inform the public of opportunities available and document opportunities region-wide.
- Provide sufficient information for the public to participate effectively and develop ways for the public to provide input and comment.

### **Actions**

- Identify potential interested parties.
- Contact private organizations/groups with an interest or stake in the result.
- Keep elected officials well informed.
- Present facts behind recommendations, i.e. criteria for TIP
- Allow the public to respond to alternatives and state preferences.
- Allow for open and productive group discussions.

### **Direct Communication Methods**

The Public Participation Plan identifies a menu of available methods for providing information to NEICAC customers and the general public. While these communication methods are broadcast widely, they are important tools in reaching people of color and LEP populations. These include:

- NEICAC's Website: [www.neicac.org](http://www.neicac.org) is one of our primary sources of information.

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- On-board fliers: Placed in highly visible areas of all our buses, they communicate directly with NEICAC's riders.
- Emails to partner agencies may include notices and/or letters to key staff members at partner agency locations and other announcements and/or promotional materials for them to distribute to their email lists. United Way and other Human Service agencies that serve diverse populations. This also includes local Public Health Departments, which operate programs such as WIC, Family Planning, Immunization clinics, and other health services, making them a key partner in assisting NEICAC in spreading important information.
- **Press Releases:** These aim to generate news coverage of NEICAC changes, meetings, etc. They are distributed via email to the NEICAC media contact list, including a local newspaper in each county and local radio stations. It is also posted on the News section of NEICAC's Website. Staff will follow up to inquire about receipt and potential coverage of the press release.
- **Partner's Websites:** NEICAC provides information to partner agencies, including our region's County and City websites frequented by NEICAC riders and the public. This distribution ensures we reach the diversity of populations in each county we serve.
- **Public Notices:** These are published in the county papers, the NEICAC website, and NEICAC's main office.
- **Targeted Markets:** Examples include, but are not limited to, churches, especially those that serve large groups of people of color communities—ethnic services such as Refugee Services and services to marginalized individuals.
- **NEICAC's Facebook Page:** This social media platform informs and interacts with transit customers. Customers can contact us via Facebook and will receive a response from staff within one business day.
- **Transportation Advisory Group (TAG):** NEICAC partners with UERPC and utilizes the already formed TAG, a group of community stakeholders and business representatives interested in advancing and improving public transportation. The TAG is a liaison between local communities, business representatives, agency representatives, and NEICAC. The TAG provides local and regional input regarding transportation issues important to the region.
- **Questions and comments can be directed to the Transportation Director at 563-387-4928.**

### In Summary

The Public Participation Plan will direct the notification of the public, elected officials, committee members, state agencies, and interested parties of the opportunity to provide and receive information and participate in dialogue concerning transportation in NEICAC Region 1.

NEICAC may modify public participation methods over time based on customer and general public feedback. This Participation Plan is a living document updated periodically to reflect communication and outreach methods.

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Approved By

*Les Askelson*

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NEICAC Board of Directors Chair

09 / 27 / 2023

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Date

# Signature Certificate

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**Les Askelson**

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